

BUILDING AN INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED FASHION HOUSE



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Victorian Government/ISS Institute Student Fellowship

Fellowship funded by the Victorian Government



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Executive Summary

The Australian Textile, Clothing and Footwear (TCF) sector draws on skills including trade, technical, design, manufacturing, logistics, sales, marketing and general management. Shulman and Wearne address these skills and identify the skill deficiencies the Australian TCF industry has within the areas mentioned above. Because skill requirements are changing as the sector moves towards higher value products, the following report addresses themes including the skills, knowledge and understandings required to build an internationally renowned fashion house from ready to wear to haute couture, context and concept development, theme selection and research and design and more specifically the design process at Renato Balestra's studio in Rome. Other sectors observed during the Fellowship addressed gaps Australia has in the manufacturing process including hand embellishing, draping, the collaboration process between designers and manufacturers, and fashion illustration. Shulman and Wearne discovered that each of these skills is critical to ensuring the success of a fashion-based business.

The collaboration processes between designers and manufacturers in Italy needs to be observed – there is not enough dialogue in Australia between designers and manufacturers and because of this neither of the two areas are getting the best out of one another. Italian fashion houses understand, for example - the value of fabric is the same as the value of the designer, without quality in both areas the final product will ultimately be bad quality. We have the ability to produce innovative, quality apparel, designed and made in Australia with a quick turnaround, we just need to know how to communicate and value one another's skills in the same way that it is done abroad.

Shulman and Wearne found their visit to Balestra's studio addressed many of the practical and promotional based information they sought from the Fellowship opportunity, while Milan Polytechnic and its staff provided valuable insight into a unique design based education system.

The Australian TCF industry cannot compete with the low wage industries in countries such as China in the area of mass production so we need a fresh approach. The information contained in the following report provides a valuable contribution to dialogue regarding the development of a competitive Australian TCF industry. Through seminars, the practical information learnt by Shulman and Wearne during their Fellowship will be passed on to those in the industry who may benefit from such information; namely students and educational facilities. It is also anticipated that this document may provide a useful reference for theoretical based information, which in conjunction with practical application and seminars, will contribute to the development of a new approach to business and education training for the Fashion Industry.

Table of Contents

<i>i</i>	<i>Abbreviations and Acronyms</i>
1	Acknowledgments
1	Awarding Body - International Specialised Skills Institute (ISS Institute)
3	Fellowship Sponsors
3	Fellowship Supporters
3	Peak Organisations and Key Representatives Impacted by the Industry and Fellowship Opportunity
4	About the Fellows
4	Liora Shulman
4	Jaye Wearne
5	The Fellowship Program
5	Aim of the Fellowship
5	The Skills / Knowledge Gaps
6	The Australian Context
8	Identifying the Skills Gap/s
8	The Skills / Knowledge Gaps
10	International Context
10	Program Content
10	Renato Balestra's Studio
20	Milan Polytechnic
23	CP Company
25	Luisa Fazio
25	Findings: Key Issues
27	Options
28	Applying the Outcomes
29	Recommendations
29	Government
29	Industry
29	Business
31	Professional Associations
32	Education and Training
33	Community
34	How ISS Institute can be involved
34	Further Skill Gaps
35	References
35	Websites
35	Primary Resources
35	The Stylists (Designers/Illustrators)
35	The Dress-Makers
36	Secondary Resources
37	Attachments

Abbreviations and Acronyms

BAS	Bachelor of Arts and Science
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific & Industrial Research Organisation (Australia)
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
DIP	Diploma
ISSI	International Specialised Skills Institute
MDFI	The Melbourne Design & Fashion Incubator
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TCF	Textile, Clothing and Footwear

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the following individuals and organisations that generously gave their time and their expertise to assist, advise and guide the Fellowship program.

Awarding Body - International Specialised Skills Institute (ISS Institute)

We know that Australia's economic future is reliant upon high level skills and knowledge, underpinned by design and innovation.

The International Specialised Skills Institute Inc (ISS Institute) is an independent, national organisation, which has a record of nearly twenty years of working with Australian industry and commerce to gain best-in-the-world skills and experience in traditional and leading-edge technology, design, innovation and management. The Institute has worked extensively with Government and non-Government organisations, firms, industry bodies, professional associations and education and training institutions.

The Patron in Chief is Sir James Gobbo AC, CVO. The ISS Institute Board of Management is Chaired by Noel Waite AO. The Board comprises Franco Fiorentini, John Iacovangelo, Lady Primrose Potter AC and David Wittner.

Through its CEO, Carolynne Bourne AM, the ISS Institute identifies and researches skill deficiencies and then meets the deficiency needs through its *Overseas Skill Acquisition Plan (Fellowship Program)*, its education and training activities, professional development events and consultancy services.

Under the Overseas Skill Acquisition Plan (Fellowship Program) Australians travel overseas or international experts travel to Australia. Participants then pass on what they have learnt through reports, education and training activities such as workshops, conferences, lectures, forums, seminars and events, therein ensuring that for each Fellowship undertaken many benefit.

As an outcome of its work, ISS Institute has gained a deep understanding of the nature and scope of a number of issues. Four clearly defined economic forces have emerged out of our nearly twenty years of research. The drivers have arisen out of research that has been induced rather than deduced and innovative, practical solutions created - it is about thinking and working differently.

A Global Perspective. 'Skills Deficiencies' + 'Skills Shortages'

Skill deficiencies address future needs. Skill shortages replicate the past and are focused on immediate needs.

Skill deficiency is where a demand for labour has not been recognised and where accredited courses are not available through Australian higher education institutions. This demand is met where skills and knowledge are acquired on-the-job, gleaned from published material, or from working and/or study overseas. This is the focus of the work of ISS Institute.

There may be individuals or firms that have these capabilities. However, individuals in the main do not share their capabilities, but rather keep the IP to themselves; and over time they retire and pass way. Firms likewise come and go. If Australia is to create, build and sustain Industries, knowledge/skills/understandings must be accessible trans-generationally through nationally accredited courses and not be reliant on individuals.

Our international competitors have these capabilities as well as the education and training infrastructure to underpin them.

Addressing skill shortages, however, is merely delivering more of what we already know and can do to meet current market demands. Australia needs to address the **dual** challenge – skill deficiencies and skill shortages.

Acknowledgments

Identifying and closing skills deficiencies is vital to long-term economic prospects in order to sustain sectors that are at risk of disappearing, not being developed or leaving our shores to be taken up by our competitors. The only prudent option is to achieve a high skill, high value-added economy in order to build a significant future in the local and international marketplace.

The Trades

The ISS Institute views the trades as the backbone of our economy. Yet, they are often unseen and, in the main, have no direct voice as to issues which are in their domain of expertise. The trades are equal, but different to professions.

The ISS Institute has the way forward through its 'Master Artisan Framework for Excellence. A New Model for Skilling the Trades', December 2004. The Federal Government, DEEWR commissioned ISS Institute to write an Australian Master Artisan School, Feasibility Plan.

In 2006, ISS Institute Inc. set up a new ISS advisory body, the **Trades Advisory Council**. Members are Ivan Deveson AO; Martin Ferguson AM, MP, Federal Labor Member for Batman; Geoff Masters, CEO, Australian Council of Educational Research; Simon McKeon, Executive Chairman, Macquarie Bank, Melbourne Office; Richard Pratt, Chairman, Visy Industries and Julius Roe, National President Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union.

Think and Work in an Holistic Approach along the Supply Chain - Collaboration and Communication

Our experience has shown that most perceive that lack of skills is the principal factor related to quality and productivity. We believe that attitudes are often the constraint to turning ideas into product and a successful business; the ability to think laterally, to work and communicate across disciplines and industry sectors, to be able to take risks and think outside the familiar, to share – to turn competitors into partners.

Australia needs to change to thinking and working holistically along the entire Supply Chain; to collaborate and communicate across industries and occupations - designers with master artisans, trades men and women, Government agencies, manufacturers, engineers, farmers, retailers, suppliers to name a few in the Chain.

'Design' has to be seen as more than 'Art' discipline – it is a fundamental economic and business tool for the 21st Century

Design is crucial to the economic future of our nation. Australia needs to understand and learn the value of design, the benefits of good design and for it to become part of everyday language, decision making and choice.

Design is as important to the child exploring the possibilities of the world, as it is to the architect developing new concepts, and as it is to the electrician placing power points or the furniture designer working with a cabinet-maker and manufacturer. As such, design is vested in every member of our community and touches every aspect of our lives.

Our holistic approach takes us to working across occupations and industry sectors and building bridges along the way. The result has been highly effective in the creation of new business, the development of existing business and the return of lost skills and knowledge to our workforce, thus creating jobs - whereby individuals gain; industry and business gain; the Australian community gains economically, educationally and culturally.

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Fellowship Sponsors

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Fellowship Supporters

Carolynne Bourne AM; Jeanette McWhinney; ISS Fellows, Tina Guglielmino, Mandy Penton and Rosanna Giacomini; Jo Haddow, Sharon Koenig, Mary Mirt, Glenys Higgins, Diane Hagquist and Patricia Hynes.

The Fellows would also like to offer specific thanks to Renato Balestra, Federika Balestra, Elizabeth Reily (Sales), Sabrina Baldi (Media and PR), the stylists (designers/illustrators): Marisa Principi, Anna Ferri, Milena Meloni (Trainee), the dress-makers: Rosalba Gaggioli, Anna Landolfi, Angela Fauzza, Benita Barbas, Annamaria Leugio and Adriana Gagliardini for their guidance and support during our stay in Rome.

Peak Organisations and Key Representatives Impacted by the Industry and Fellowship Opportunity

It is anticipated that the Australian Fashion Industry and local educational institutions will benefit directly from this Fellowship.

Wearne is a graduate of Box Hill Institute and Shulman has recently completed her studies as a student of RMIT University (TAFE). Both Fellows plan to conduct a workshop at their respective institutions with both staff and students to share and demonstrate newly acquired knowledge.

The report will be made available through ISS Institute to local industry and firms for example couturiers, tailors, small boutiques and breakthrough designers who are seeking to keep manufacturing in Australia.

Specific organisations include:

Box Hill Institute of TAFE Box Hill, Victoria

RMIT TAFE Brunswick, Victoria

Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE Morwell, Victoria

Gordon Institute of TAFE Geelong, Victoria

Kangan Batman Institute of TAFE Somerton, Victoria

Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE Preston, Victoria

Twin Images Braeside, Victoria

Sabrina Moda Mornington, Victoria

About the Fellows

Liora Shulman, DIP, BAS

Qualifications: - Diploma of Clothing and Footwear, RMIT TAFE, 2005,
- Bachelor of Applied Science, Fashion Technology, RMIT, 2006.

As a recent graduate of RMIT, Liora Shulman has the world at her feet. She has achieved significant success throughout her academic career, notably having been awarded Runner up Dux of Year 12, and the recipient of numerous subject awards. She had her first international exposure in 2001 when she represented Perth in an 'International World Peace Poster Competition'. In her first year at RMIT she was the only student in her year group to be presented with an award, and was presented with a Certificate of Merit. She completed 1st and 2nd year with a high distinction average and in 3rd year, graduated with Distinction. She has participated in RMIT Union Art's annual event three years running, in which she created winning outfits in the themes of Stretch, Plastic Intelligence and Light Fantastic.

Her proudest achievement to date has been the Fellowship award to Italy by the ISS Institute and Victorian Government, which Shulman hopes will facilitate many opportunities within the industry and serve as a launch pad to her career.

Shulman has also studied Fine Art and Ceramics, and as such, has a broad understanding of the applications of Art and Design. As a young and talented designer she expects to make a name for herself in her chosen profession.

Shulman currently works as a graphic artist with a clothing manufacturer.

Away from this, Shulman enjoys modern jive, painting, live music, singing and experiencing the vast array of art and culture that Melbourne has to offer.

Jaye Wearne

Qualifications: - Diploma of Clothing and Footwear, Box Hill TAFE.

Jaye Wearne has fulfilled a life long dream and has become a valued member of a very successful team at Sabrina Moda where she has gained valuable skills working as an assistant designer specialising in bridal wear. Her duties include designing, pattern making, cutting, machining, fitting and the preparation of alterations. In addition, she works in the boutique section of the shop gaining valuable customer service and retail skills. Currently she enjoys the position of business manager, with added responsibilities including decision making, some book keeping duties and overseas travel.

During her studies Wearne competed in many competitions against both students and professionals gaining much success, she has been selected as a finalist three times, as a student in the Australian Gown of the Year Awards across a broad range of sections and has also received a Judges Commendation for the student section of the competition in 2005. Her highlight other than winning the ISS Institute Fellowship Award, came this year after being named most Outstanding Student at Box Hill TAFE for 2005, a competition that included all 35,000 students enrolled for the year.

Wearne built her reputation on hard work, persistence and the willingness to give anything a go. She knew from a young age that she wanted to become a designer, and set about working towards it.

In addition to her success she has been invited to speak at TAFE open days, high school career days and her graduation amongst others. Although not one to enjoy public speaking she gained much confidence and valued the experience.

Away from this, Wearne enjoys travel, snow-boarding, vegetable gardening, camping and going to the beach.

The Fellowship Program

The purpose of the Fellowship was to undertake an overseas study program with Renato Balestra in Rome, to gain a comprehensive understanding in the field of haute couture production and preparation, design and sewing techniques, marketing and distribution and to synergise that experience with our understandings of modern techniques and education.

Aim of the Fellowship

To undertake an overseas study program to gain an understanding of the Italian Fashion Design Industry including:

- Skills and knowledge required to build an internationally renowned fashion house from ready to wear to haute couture.
- Context and concept development.
- Theme selection and research.
- Garment construction.
- Design and the design process at Renato Balestra's studio in Rome.

The Fellows aimed to learn as much as possible about specialised garment construction, and to acquire skills that will contribute to Australia being recognised on an international level. The Fellows aimed to learn traditional hand refining techniques from the best Italian artisans while immersing themselves in the richness of the Italian culture. Communication techniques were also to be explored, including marketing and distribution and how these factors affect the success of a business.

The Skills / Knowledge Gaps

Skill deficiencies to be observed included:

- Gaps in specialised garment construction techniques for couture design, such as hand embellishing, draping, and other fabric manipulation.
- Collaboration processes between designers and manufacturers – there is not enough dialogue in Australia between designers and manufacturers.
- Fashion illustration – Balestra remarked at the rigid quality of Australian students' illustrations. Therefore, the Fellows were very interested in looking at how fashion illustrations are produced in his studio, and what materials and techniques were employed to execute them.
- Global Marketing – including if and how to promote a label internationally.

The Australian Context

The Australian TCF sector draws on a wide range of skills including trade, technical, design, manufacturing, logistics, sales, marketing and general management skills. Skill requirements are changing as the sector moves towards higher value products. To the detriment of the industry, demand for traditional trade skills has declined in favour of sales, marketing, information technology and e-commerce skills. (*Review of TCF Assistance, Inquiry Report No. 26, 31 July 2003 p173*).

Basic as well as high level specialised skills are needed if Australia's TCF is to compete in an international arena. We cannot compete with the low wage industries in countries such as China in the area of mass production, so our selling point has to be high quality in design, construction, and composition. Since Australia cut quotas on imported clothing in the late 1980's, the TCF has shed 43,000 jobs, which is 42% of the workforce. Almost three quarters of Australian TCF is manufactured in China, at one twentieth of the local labor costs (*Bita N, Enquirer, The Australian 'Rags to Far Reaches', 26/2/05*).

'Made in China' tags used to conjure perceptions of poor quality, and buying imported goods was thought of as unpatriotic. Times have changed, and most consumers accept that a lot of our clothing is manufactured overseas. Competitive prices, design features and production speed are valued above place of production. Not only is offshore production a great deal cheaper than local production, but when dealing offshore, designers only have to deal with one person, as opposed to locally, where fabric, manufacturing, printing and swing ticketing are all sourced separately. According to Gemma Hornett, former editor of Ragtrader magazine, countries such as China are now able to produce exceptional garments at a competitive price and speed. "*The Chinese have become really savvy, and their quality is getting a lot better.*" Hornet states that all the big houses in Australia have factories in Asia, while those who still manufacture in Australia "*are the niche players; top-end designers who need to keep control because their designs are very intricate. They need to be on hand to make sure there are no defects.*" (*Fashion Victims, Emerald Hill Weekly, November 23-29, 2005, p10*)

Ashley Van Kneken, Chief Executive of the Council of Textile and Fashion industries states: "*We need to compete on quality, product differentiation and brand names. To compete on price is crazy.*" Once tariffs fall further, local industry will be restricted to high fashion. Sydney based designer Akira Isogawa manufactures his exquisitely crafted garments in Australia, and exports three quarters to Europe and the Middle East. "*What I do is exclusive and the uniqueness of the design is the point of sale rather than how cheap we can go.*" Craftsmanship, as opposed to cost cutting is his motive and philosophy. Isogawa manufactures in Australia because it is easier for him to monitor quality, however traditional handcraft skills in Australia are becoming harder to come by, which is why it is sourced overseas.

Despite this trend, some Australian designers are making a concerted effort to keep their garments Australian. Sass and Bide manufacture 60% of their lines in Australia, but unfortunately more and more go offshore. Until recently "*Tasmanian boot company Blundstone used Australian leather tanned by the company as its selling point*" (*Bita N, Enquirer, The Australian 'Rags to Far Reaches', 26/2/05*). Sadly this has now changed, and Blundstone has now re-located offshore.

There is a growing emphasis on innovation, which requires an appropriately skilled workforce and supportive education and training infrastructure. Much skill development in the TCF sector occurs in the workplace and not in Higher Education; therefore, the ideal environment to acquire new skills is in the industry itself. The Fellowship to Italy provided an exciting opportunity for the Fellows to acquire skills currently absent from the Australian TCF. (*Review of TCF Assistance, Inquiry Report No. 26, 31 July 2003 p173*).

The Australian Context

In the Australian Fashion Industry there are skill shortages of designers, sewing machinists, textile production workers, tanners and fabric cutters. There is also a decline in apprenticeships, which decreases the availability of necessary trade skills. The departure of experienced human resources poses a challenge for the industry. Unfortunately, with the exception of clothing design, the TCF industry is an unpopular career choice for young people (*Review of TCF Assistance, p174*).

Jenny Bannister believes that you can't claim to be a designer unless you can cut, sew and understand how fabrics and textiles work. It astonishes her that many young industry players lack these skills. *"I sew a lot of my dresses myself these days, and I still make patterns myself,"* Bannister says. *"I mean, designers have got to be able to show people how to make the end of a tie, or how they want a dart. If you don't get it right, who will buy it?"* A major concern for Bannister is the state of the Australian fashion manufacturing industry, which she feels is *"going down the drain very quickly"* due to rigid union regulations, cheap imports and changing consumer priorities. *"I think a lot of Australians have got into quantity not quality,"* she says. *"We've got all the Chinese imports coming; the market is flooded with cheap, nasty dresses. People think, 'Oh it's cheap, I'll buy three of these instead of one quality dress made in Australia.'"* Bannister prefers to keep her business at its current level as past experiences have deterred her from wholesaling. Department stores expect so many discounts, *"it's not worth the effort; you don't make any money."*

This way of working is an anti-paradigm to the way Balestra works. In his view, each person in the industry Supply Chain recognises his/her expertise and passion, then spends a lifetime developing that ability and building a team through which the other parts of the chain are delivered. In this model each contributor whether it is a stylist, textile designer, pattern cutter, machinist, graphic communicator (marketing/branding), to retailer develops their capabilities to the highest level. Therein, quality is paramount whether it is for a one-off garment or for mass production.

Designer Lisa Barron is passionate about the Australian Manufacturing Industry and is determined to work with local makers as long as they exist. *"I don't see why the manufacturing industry has to die – I hope it can be rekindled."* (*Designer Genes, Melbourne Weekly Magazine, March 15-21, 2006, p14*)

The Australian TCF sector is developing a number of important strengths. The Australian economy provides a stable platform with good infrastructure and education systems and domestic access to raw materials. To compete against overseas suppliers the TCF sector is adapting products and processes to meet market requirements. There is a focus on identifying and meeting the needs of customers, quick turnaround on orders, branding, innovation (such as developing niche products), and a dedication to enhancing productivity and quality. (*Review of TCF Assistance, p28*) Gemma Hornett feels that despite the decline of the local manufacturing industry, Australian designers are managing to gain international respect. *"We're not strong on clothing manufacturing any more, but we're strong on designs and marketing,"* she says. (*Fashion Victims, Emerald Hill Weekly, November 23-29, 2005, p10*)

The Fellowship is aimed at providing an insight into one of the biggest forces in global fashion. It is up to us - governments, teaching institutes, students, businesses, employees and consumers, whether we choose to create a new direction for the Australian TCF industry with the knowledge that is gained. If we don't aim to at least improve the outlook of the current TCF industry the concept of Australian designed and made apparel will be a thing of great rarity. It is essential that we address these problems today, as this decline in Australian manufactured apparel is only set to continue. As ISS Institute states, *"It is about change and working and thinking in new ways"*.

Identifying the Skills Gap/s

As established previously, within the context of this report, skill deficiencies are defined as follows:

Skill deficiency is where a demand for labour has not been recognised and where accredited courses are not available through Australian higher education institutions. This demand is met where skills and knowledge are acquired on-the job, gleaned from published material, or from working and/or study overseas (this is the key area targeted by ISS Institute).

The Skills / Knowledge Gaps

Specialist gaps include:

There are skill deficiencies in specialised garment construction techniques for couture and specialised design in Australia. Training institutes can only spend a certain amount of time teaching these techniques eg. hand embellishing can be created using whatever the imagination may inspire. Although there are many different ways to achieve a similar effect, having the best knowledge of materials, tools, and methods will ultimately create a better outcome in the end. This is the difference between something that has been beautifully embellished and something that is just 'knocked together'. Fashion courses have to cover a wide range of subjects in a short time and because some techniques only apply to specific areas in fashion, the best knowledge isn't always covered in detail.

Draping, and other fabric manipulation methods aren't applied to all labels designed in Australia, but those who want to improve their knowledge don't have enough practical opportunities to develop their skills further. This Fellowship provided an opportunity to directly observe some much guarded hand worked techniques used by the master artisan Renato Balestra and his dedicated team. These techniques start at the marking out of the pattern to fabric, through to the final press. They include such things as outlining patterns in thread as opposed to tailor's chalk, marking beading guidelines with thread, tacking seams before machining, mounting fabric to interfacing by hand, draping as opposed to pattern making, fitting, pressing and much more.

Balestra noted on his visit to Australia at the rigid quality of the students' illustrations. Therefore, it is important to look at how fashion illustrations are produced in his studio; why are they so different to the Australian students? How do they create fluidity in a fashion sketch and what techniques are employed to execute this? Is it the initial sketch that needs development by our students? Or is it the application of render that lets them down? Students could benefit from such knowledge as fashion illustration is the best way to communicate concepts, ideas, themes and moods before items are brought to production.

The collaboration processes between designers and manufacturers in Italy also needs to be observed – there is not enough dialogue in Australia between designers and manufacturers and because of this neither of the two areas are getting the best out of one another. Italian fashion houses understand, for example - the value of fabric is the same as the value of the designer, without quality in both areas the final product will ultimately be bad quality. We have the ability to produce innovative, quality apparel, designed and made in Australia with a quick turnaround, we just need to know how to communicate and value one another's skills in the same way that it is done abroad.

But what is the point of learning more about improving these areas in order to make a great product if nobody knows about it? It is essential that the Australian fashion industry maximises opportunities to better understand the role that local and global marketing plays in establishing the desirability of a product in order to better capitalise on our talent. Learning how to promote upcoming talent on a professional and public level will benefit

Identifying the Skills Gap/s

people whose talent may take years to be recognised. Some of the most marketable work in fashion comes from students because they are in touch with what's new. If there is a way that these students are able to get their work into the public eye, it would be advantageous for the Australian community to know about it. Discussion should also not be limited to a local market; we have to acquire knowledge on how to promote Australian labels in a way that entices an international market away from 'their comfort zone'. Italy promotes Italian fashion as something to be desired simply because it's Italian. Australian labels will benefit from positioning themselves alongside their overseas counterparts like Italy with quality, yet could set themselves apart with innovative design. There is a current need to identify where Australian fashion is positioned on a global scheme, so the Australian TCF industry can best identify how to better promote itself within that market.

All the above skill deficiencies need to be targeted in order to create the best outcome for all sectors of the industry. While some of the issues explored through the Fellowship relate to specific areas of fashion, understanding great marketing and communication techniques will see benefits across the board. The Fellowship to Italy looked at best practices within all these areas in a hope to improve the current outcome for the Australian TCF Industry.

International Context

The overseas program was purposefully designed to explore the identified skills and knowledge gaps and obtain the information necessary for the Fellows to return to Australia equipped with the knowledge and ideas to enable them to advise, instruct, promote and improve the fashion industry in this country.

Program Content

During the course of the Fellowship Program, visits were made to several establishments and individuals involved in the fashion and design industries in Italy. The activities were planned prior to departure, however, upon arrival in Italy these contacts provided valuable information that led to other significant opportunities.

The following site visits and meetings proved to be the most significant in providing information and inspiration.

Renato Balestra's Studio

Italian designer Renato Balestra designs and markets about thirty different ranges that include haute couture and ready-to-wear collections, a complete line of menswear and a wide range of accessories. He has designed for queens, first ladies, Saudi Arabian princesses and leading celebrities. Balestra was born in Trieste into a family of architects and engineers. During his last year of studying civil engineering, his friends sent a fashion sketch he had done as part of a bet to Milan. He was promptly invited to participate in the creation of a collection for the haute couture fashion shows, thrusting him headfirst into the world of High Fashion. Balestra's designs are dominated by luxury and sumptuousness. They are seductive, glamorous and sophisticated. He favours lively colours and unusual, sparkling colour combinations.



From left to right: Liora Shulman, Renato Balestra and Jaye Wearne



From left to right: Liora Shulman, Federika Balestra (Balestra's daughter) Jaye Wearne and Sabrina Baldi (Media and PR)

Balestra welcomed the Fellows to his studio. He was more than pleased to give Shulman and Wearne access to the great staff he employs at one of the busiest times for the company: the lead up to their 2006 show.

Federika and Sabrina introduced Shulman and Wearne to the design and tailoring teams. It was decided the Fellows would divide their time between these two areas. During the time spent at Balestra's, Federika and Sabrina monitored them, and generously accommodated their requests for information.

International Context



Shulman and Wearne with dressmaking staff



The daily card game over coffee break is an example of the friendship between the staff



Rosalba Gaggioli demonstrates to Shulman the process of tacking a garment together. This is done before any machining work is carried out to ensure the seams are a perfect fit.



Shulman hand-tacking sleeves



Example of Shulman's work on the garment



The final product at Balestra's 2006 show

International Context

The Sequin Embellishment Process

The process of creating the stunning sequined designs is a long and arduous one. Since tailor's chalk is not used at Balestra's studio, the designs are painstakingly mapped out by hand tacking, as seen in the following examples.



Pictured above is the base fabric with darts and seam-lines already tacked. Shape well is used around the pieces to stabilise the fabric so it can be moved when needed.



Next comes the pattern for the sequence design, this is marked out on thin paper so it can be pinned to the base shown in the previous photo.



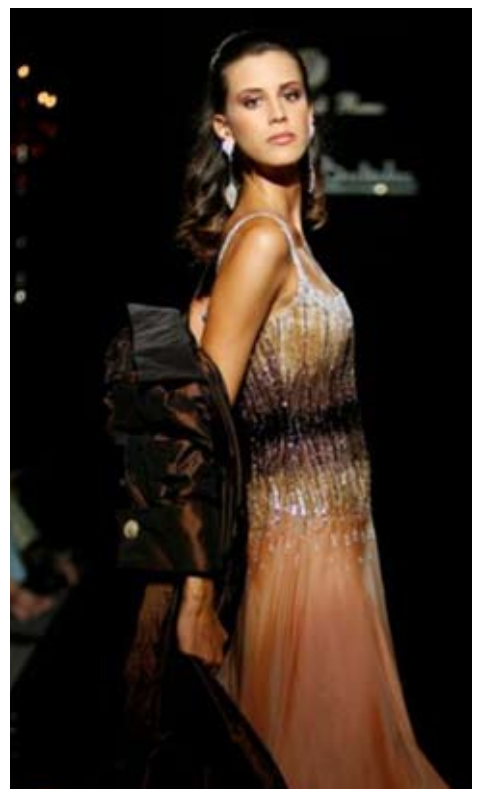
Once the pattern is mounted underneath the base the outer layer of fabric is added by placing the fabric on top of the base and tacking the pattern through both layers.



Above is a sample of the final product Wearne was given to clearly convey the task she was assigned



Wearne working on the process



The final product at Balestra's 2006 show

International Context



Jaye Wearne with dressmaker Anna Landolfi



Dressmaker Anna Landolfi working in the fitting process



Wearne assisted with the construction of this beautiful silk gown. Firstly a piece of fabric was placed on the table with the pattern laid on top. It was roughly cut to the size of each pattern piece needed, there was about 50cm of wastage around the edge of the pattern. The fabric grain was firstly tacked by the tailors. This meant if the pattern was moved it could easily be returned to the correct position. This practice also helped identify, once the gown had been constructed, if the pieces were falling in the propped direction. The seams and darts were then tacked into each piece. Once this was complete the seam allowance was then cut down to approximately 5cm, this allows for any adjustments that may be needed in the fitting process. The seams were then tacked together and the gown started to take shape. It was placed on a mannequin and the tailors went about properly fitting the gown. They check for fit, grain line direction, positioning of special features eg. sequencing and hem length and then make their adjustments by re-tacking the seams and pattern in the new position.



Silk gown after the fitting process



Silk gown after the hem has been marked with thread

After these processes were completed to the best standards it was time for the machining work to be done before more hand work could commence. Due to time restraints unfortunately this area was unable to be observed.

International Context



Sample embroidery, outsourced from India



The final product at Balestra's 2006 show



A jacket featuring beautiful draping around the collar and cuffs. This effect was achieved using more extensive tacking techniques and it should be noted that there were no pins used in the process.



The final product at Balestra's 2006 show

International Context

Step by Step Illustration at Balestra's Studio, as Taught by Marisa Principi, Examples by Liora Shulman

As Balestra remarked upon the rigid quality Australian students' illustrations it was important the Fellows were introduced to how fashion illustrations are produced in his studio. Students will benefit from the following step by step guide to fashion illustration observed at Balestra's studio when developing their own design style.

It should be noted however these techniques are similar to those taught in Australia.



Liora Shulman with stylist Marisa Principi



1. Pencil sketch of a figure, very elongated and highly stylised



2. Addition of garment sketch to illustration



3. Base flesh colour filled in with Pantone marker



4. Darker flesh tones created with a darker Pantone marker



5. Garment is coloured in using gauche paints, and highlighted with glitter

International Context



Sales representative Elizabeth Reily (left) was kind enough to give the Fellows a tour of Balestra's show room, where the cream of society peruses his collections. The store is a fantastic example of how effective visual merchandising can be. Right - Balestra's office



Outfits, including matching accessories, in Balestra's showroom.

During the course of the Fellowship Shulman and Wearne were fortunate enough to be able to attend Balestra's 2006 fashion show. The event was extraordinary, the experience unforgettable.



The catwalk before the show



Backstage before the show

International Context



Left to right: Liora Shulman, work experience staff member, Marisa Principi, Renato Balestra, a Balestra model, three work experience staff members



Jaye Wearne with Rosalba Gaggioli and her sisters



A few highlights from the show

International Context

The time spent at Balestra's was extremely brief considering the topics that needed to be observed ranged from hand sewing techniques to global marketing. Shulman and Wearne made the best of their time while also trying to overcome the language barrier. They were able to acquire some interesting knowledge that the Australian TCF industry will find of assistance.

It was clear when Shulman and Wearne first walked through the door that lead to Balestra's studio they had walked in on one big family, or at least that's how it felt. All the staff were gathered around the espresso machine talking, while eating the most divine and sometimes strange looking pastries. The energy was completely different to that of many workplaces in Australia that Shulman and Wearne had experienced; it was warm and inviting. This positive environment didn't stop once work commenced, the attitude of the staff was outstanding, because it wasn't just about getting the job done. All sections of Balestra's staff liaise with one another in order to create the best outcome for the final product, each member of staff equally proud at the final result. Balestra is aware that everyone's part in his business is crucial to its success and he clearly understands the need for ensuring that he has the best person for each role. This attitude has led to the positive working environment at Balestra's as witnessed by Shulman and Wearne. Because Balestra's work ethic develops mutual respect between his colleagues, there is no blame shifting or miss-communication, his practices promote a 'want to work attitude.' In Australia some company hierarchies lead to reduced productivity because time is wasted through miss-communication and sometimes bad attitudes between differing levels of staff. This is a significant area for improvement.

As displayed in the previous photographs Shulman and Wearne were tutored on hand sewing and drawing techniques during their time at Balestra's. They observed the methodology behind Balestra's striking illustrations, (refer to page 15) however learned that although his style came relatively easy to him, it takes development and training for his staff to produce work in the same style. It's one thing to illustrate and design in your own style but it's a completely different thing to do it in someone else's. This was evident with the trainee stylist Milena Meloni. Meloni had not been with the design team long and although her illustration and designs were always extremely beautiful they would sometimes need tweaking by the head stylist Marisa Principi in order to bring them into line with the rest of Balestra's collection.

With a little and understandable hesitation Balestra's tailoring team entrusted Shulman and Wearne with the responsibility of working on some pieces for the upcoming collection. They were asked to perform a few small tasks such as tacking. This gave the tailors, including Rosalba Gaggioli and Anna Landolfi, an idea of their capabilities. Fortunately the staff were impressed by their abilities and introduced them to the techniques shown on pages 11 to 14. Time restraints and the language barrier made this area the hardest to obtain information on. Tailoring techniques can be extremely intricate, they need precise instruction, both visual and verbal. Unfortunately for Shulman and Wearne the staff in this area had very limited English skills. Because of these difficulties Shulman and Wearne were only able to observe the techniques being used for the garments in the upcoming collection and were unable to develop an understanding of techniques beyond those already mentioned. The lead up to a show is always hectic so it was an important time for the Fellows to be present. It also meant they had to respect the work that needed to be completed and not interfere with that process. Rosalba Gaggioli and Anna Landolfi took the Fellows 'under their wing' during this time, clearly both ladies' skills with a needle and thread were outstanding. It was a thrill for Wearne every time she proclaimed 'finito' (meaning finished in Italian) upon completion of a task and after close inspection, they would reply 'brava' with great enthusiasm – meaning a job well done.

International Context

At Balestra's, Shulman and Wearne learnt Australian fashion is seen by the global market the same way Australia is, known for our relaxed lifestyle and sporting prowess. This reputation inevitably has a flow-on effect. Elizabeth Reily from Balestra's ready-to-wear department states, *"You know in Australia you are much more athletic, much more sporty, you know, in the way they dress, they are casual. You know in Europe they still dress up."* This comment was echoed by many and is a clear reflection on the way Australia promotes itself in general terms. Many Italians perceive that Australians don't dress for style but for comfort, and although this may be true in some situations the influences on Australian fashion extend beyond that of sport and leisure. It can be argued that if Australian fashion was promoted to a global market as strongly as our country's sporting achievements our talented designers could slowly develop a reputation of quality and innovation in design which are our main strengths. Shulman and Wearne discovered the current perception is that we may be able to create the most comfortable pair of 'trackies' on the planet, but we are in no position to design couture garments that will compete with the leading fashion houses because we would prefer to be wearing those 'trackies' and not the painstakingly hand made gown.

Australia needs to demonstrate to the world it has many faces, but not by ceasing to promote our relaxed and sporty lifestyle. The aim is for the other great industries in Australia, including specialised fashion to be just as strong – this is where cross promotion is essential. Events like the Melbourne Racing Carnival are becoming as much about fashion as the racing itself; such an event promotes Australia's strengths to the world at once. It takes years to build a strong reputation and even longer to change an existing one, however in an interview conducted by Shulman and Wearne, Reily notes: *"You know the dress is not important in Australia, they are much more natural and nearer nature which at the end I think is better - Europe is a little more conservative still, you know they stick to ..."*

Shulman: *"Traditions?"*

Reily: *"Traditions yeah. In Australia there is a completely different mentality. But we are changing here as well. Now it's more commercial, ok?"*

Reily goes on to state: *"In the eighties we had wonderful customers and then it started to change with the politics."*

Reily's comments demonstrate that Australia is one of many countries including Italy (whose reputation in fashion both past and present is leading the world) needing to embrace change in order to grow with an ever-changing global market, whilst retaining their current reputation that is held so dear.

Reily also commented on the importance promotion has on ones reputation and emphasised that one must be patient and wait for that reputation to develop. The Fellows believe Australia is like generation Y – we are so young yet we expect all the luxuries that come with age. Balestra's reputation wasn't built overnight, but was moulded over many years with great consideration placed upon creating the specific image he wanted for his company; this is the same for all the major fashion houses. When asked about Balestra's advertising Reily says, *"Well they love him now because he's a biggie, ... he's on television now, they call him and he's on television in the mornings, sometimes more on television than here."*

Shulman adds *"Yeah he seemed to really enjoy that when he came over to Australia."*

Reily: *"So now he's done his bit so they like him now."* She then goes on to say, *"It takes years and years and then suddenly everybody wants it!"*

International Context

Although some Australian designers have developed a reputation abroad such as Collette Dinnigan, (who's been invited to appear at Paris fashion since 1995), others whose talents are arguably as strong have not. Creating a 'buzz' about Australian designers through use of strong promotional techniques will aid the desirability of their products both locally and abroad. Shulman and Wearne believe this is occurring to a certain extent already with brands such as Sass and Bide thriving in the local and overseas markets, but this is what Australian needs for it's entire industry not just a select few labels.

The Australian TCF industry can benefit from both Balestra and Italy's 'family' approach to work and their profound knowledge of technique, history, design, promotion, business and much more. The knowledge gained from Balestra's role in the Fellowship program is a valuable resource for those who want to use it to improve the industry.

Milan Polytechnic

Professor Arturo Dell'Acqua Bellavitis, Head of Design, Milan Polytechnic and an ISS Institute Fellow arranged interviews with the staff at Milan Polytechnic and each one added an insight into their field. Milan Polytechnic is an excellent example of what, in an ideal world, every training facility should be. The outstanding environment, infrastructure and facilities complement the learning process beautifully. While their courses are very structured they emphasise the importance of individual flare. All teaching staff are extremely sensitive to the needs of 'the individual student'. They designate specific projects and topics to students in order to challenge them, which is exceptional, considering the volume of students that attend the school.



Professor Susan Kreuzer, Fashion Design, and Professor Marco Turinetto, Industrial Design



Professor Alba Cappellieri, Jewellery Design (see further in report)



Professor Paola Bertola, Design Research (see further in report)



Professor Raffaella Mangiarotti

International Context

Throughout the course, the students are in direct contact with the Italian Fashion Industry through design practitioners teaching and industry based projects.

Professor Raffaella Mangiarotti works at Milan Polytechnic as a researcher. She has been teaching and designing since 1991. She did her PhD on ecological issues in Italy at Milan Polytechnic, but unfortunately found that few companies were interested in investing in environmentally sustainable technology.

Milan Polytechnic is originally an architecture and industrial design university, and has only recently diversified into fashion. For this reason, the Polytechnic approach to teaching fashion design is highly influenced by an industrial design background. In this way, the university distinguishes itself from others through its preparation and theoretical approach. The Polytechnic's approach is radically different from that of any other school. They focus on the innovation of material, and have different production technology from that of the field of textile manufacturing because of that deeper focus upon technical preparation. It can be difficult to determine whether certain items should be classified as industrial design or fashion design. Sunglasses, for example, are very technical in construction, as are some shoes. In her course, Mangiarotti uses this teaching method which she refers to as border-line, and in doing so provides her students with a different form of design education. Mangiarotti believes that this approach is quite contemporary, as many fashion brands are now moving in this field. It would be of great benefit to Australian educational institutions to introduce a similar methodology and encourage students from different fields to collaborate.

As a designer, Mangiarotti is influenced by current trends. She 'mentions' trends in her work, but does not copy them. This is a good example for contemporary Australian designers, who may tend to copy trends, rather than be inspired by them. Mangiarotti regards herself as a hybrid and is often requested to design future scenarios for companies. For example she has designed a washing machine for Whirlpool that is planned to be released in 2010. The prototype washing machine communicates a sense of care and uses centripetal forces rather than centrifugal ones. In association with Whirlpool engineers, Mangiarotti designed and engineered a machine that pushes on garments, rather than spinning them.

In order to design competently, Mangiarotti believes that a designer has to know everything about the technology and material of a product. Only after this preparation can one truly create something new, starting with a white piece of paper. Mangiarotti refers to this approach as 'Tabula Rasa', a Latin term meaning empty table, empty paper. This practice of research and preparation is already encouraged in Australia, but the Fellows believe it could be further developed. It is important to communicate a sense of personal history and a feeling of the past when designing something for the present. This can be difficult because life is always changing, and it is a challenge to capture the present.

Mangiarotti suggests design in Italy, for the most part, is trapped in the Golden Age of the past. While other European countries such as Holland and France are pushing the boundaries of design, unafraid to take risks, Italy remains in its comfort zone. She believes there is not enough support for young designers. Graduates do not have the same opportunities as those in, say, France or England. In England, the British Council supports the most talented graduates of industrial and fashion design. France also has a program that promotes young designers, providing them with opportunities to break into very competitive markets. In Italy, graduates have no support, and unless they are born into money, have little chance of starting up. Australia supports young designers to an extent, offering grants to a select few, but the industry is not valued as highly against exports let alone as an export opportunity in its own right.

International Context

Traditional companies in Italy aren't interested in innovation; a problem that relates to the fact that approximately 90% of the economic field is composed of small companies. These companies are rapidly decreasing due to competition from the East, and those that remain are not willing to risk anything that may jeopardise their survival. For example, in 2005, Mangiarotti worked for a medium sized shoe company specialising in slippers. Mangiarotti proposed the concept of a fashion slipper that one could wear indoors while entertaining company. She and a young Italian designer worked on a collection of slippers, and hoped to collaborate with Philippe Starck. The concept was rejected by the company as being too risky.

Mangiarotti has found it difficult to find companies confident enough to embrace her ideas. For example, she has designed a revolutionary hair dryer that is, from an industrial point of view, both stylish and extraordinary. In appearance it is an unfamiliar object, as Mangiarotti has designed the object around how it is used. As far as she knows, Mangiarotti is the only woman to design a hair dryer for women. The result is a fantastic prototype used by Mangiarotti herself, yet at the time of the interview no company had been identified who was willing to take the risk on such an innovative product. A recent follow-up revealed that Mangiarotti did find a manufacturer; a company by the name of Elchim, and is marketing the product as the 'Il Futuro'.



The Fellows strongly recommend that Australia continues on the path of innovation in the fields of engineering and design, as this is clearly a selling point. A milestone in Italy's fashion history occurred during the 1950's. There were not only very talented designers, but also talented entrepreneurs and risk-taking industrialists. This combination of ideas and sponsorship contributed to making Italian fashion what it is today. It's possible for Australia to experience this type of revolution. It has the talent and the ideas, and all it needs is the support.

Mangiarotti commented that if you introduce something innovative into the market, people look at you in a more interesting way, but finding people who are interested in investing in that product is not so easy.

International Context

CP Company



Above: Sabina Rivetti, CP Company, Milan, Italy. Sabina Rivetti is the owner of the CP Company in partnership with her husband and his family. She is responsible for all image and communication aspects of the company.

Left: The CP Company Warehouse, where sample garments are shown to buyers and promotional events such as fashion shows take place.

CP Company was started in the 1970's by a graphic designer who first had the idea of bringing pieces from army wear and uniforms and work wear into every day life. The second area researched extensively by the company was in finishes. This was in terms of garment dyeing – giving colour to a garment once it has been constructed. It is apparent that their early success was due to risk-taking and innovation.

The company invests in extensive research in fabric construction and blending different materials, manipulating fibres so that they take the colour in a specific way. CP Company often has up to 8 different fabrics or materials on one piece because they know once the piece is dyed, it will produce the desired colour palette. It is quite a complicated procedure, and requires a lot of entering and exiting the factory. Rivetti refers to this company structure as a star construction because the company is the centre, with pieces going out and then in again in a few ways. This makes production expensive, but also makes it very special. CP Company is unique, and is unmatched by any other company in the world. This is a good business model for Australian companies to consider adopting; the concept of creating value added products that are unique and special.

CP Company has a base of fabrics but is known in the industry as an innovator, and is constantly researching materials, often looking at products that have not been used in the fashion industry before. For example, they may work with non-woven fabric or a net that is treated in a certain way to make it cut-able and sew-able. The company has used nylon mono-filaments to construct knits without seams, and polyurethane net doubled with nylon and given a polyurethane coating so that it can be cut and sewn. They are not fazed by exploring the unknown, but rather thrive on it. This is a point of reference for Australian textile researchers and designers.

The company focuses on studying the world in order to be contemporary, rather than study trends. They observe the way people walk, investigate technological revolutions that change the way we behave and explore the evolution of fit.

International Context

Australia is moving in the right direction with opportunities such as those provided by ISS Institute. The Victorian winner of the 'National ISS Institute Overseas Fellowship' sponsored by DEST, Commonwealth of Australia and clothing designer, Kate Kennedy, has travelled to the USA and Germany in order to study technology related to three-dimensional body data.

The concept of standardised fitting was first introduced in Italy in the aftermath of WWII. It was during this time that Carlo Rivetti's family imported the knowledge from the US of how to create garments on a theoretical scale of sizes. Prior to this, garments could only be bought tailor made. Due to the changes in body type over the years, it is now necessary to overhaul the sizing standards in Australia. According to the Managing Director of SHARP Dummies, Ms Daisy Veitch: *"The industry survey found that based on the current Australian Standard size 12 bust of 85cm, women's waist and hip sizes had increased to between sizes 14 and 16, that is to 72cm and 97cm respectively. This means that the survey has shown that women are at least one size, if not two sizes, larger than they think they are"*, said Veitch.

According to the University of Adelaide's Professor of Anthropological and Comparative Anatomy, Maciej Henneberg: *"We surveyed more than 1400 volunteer participants of both sexes measured by a number of anthropometric crews from the University of Western Australia, the Australian National University, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, the University of Western Sydney, the University of Queensland and several TAFE colleges. The survey has also shown that the average height of women has increased by 1 percent and weight by 10-20 percent since 1926,"* said Henneberg. *"These data indicate that average Australian women have changed size and shape differently to women in other countries and this is one of the reasons it is necessary to conduct a wider national survey."*

Once Rivetti's father had mastered this sizing concept, he learnt how to manufacture garments out of factories. Upon his return to Italy, he measured Italians in order to generate a scale of sizes which would fit Italians. In terms of formal wear, he created a plan of 110 sizes including variations of size and height. And so, anthropometric sizing was born. It was a huge success. They created a retail system to sell their product, and by the 1960's and early 1970's they were selling about 4,000 pieces of a blue suit each Saturday in one shop in Torino.

In 1975, Italy was faced with the first oil shock, which resulted in a major economic crisis. Rivetti's family realised that in order to survive, they had to come up with something different. They had to add something to the 'blue suit'. It was then that they started producing women's wear on the same scale. It was understood that the recipe for success could be fashion. They introduced 'fashion', meaning designers, into ready-to-wear. This marked a great change because it was then that 'Made In Italy' was born. At the same time, the French government decided that the apparel industry was not strategic for their growth, and so they shut it down. The French could not produce in France any longer, but they could in Italy. It was also at this time that today's biggest names had their beginning. Valentino, Armani, Versace, these designers blossomed with the support of the industry behind them, while the French had no industry support. If they wanted to produce clothes, they had to come to Italy. And so Carlo Rivetti's company, at the time known as GFT, became the biggest licensee of fashion brands, producing Armani, Valentino, Emanuel Ungaro and other big names of the fashion world. What makes Italy unique is that it has the entire chain of production, from creativity to materials, to material companies, to production plans.

About 80% of CP Company's garments are made in Italy. As the company grows, however, more and more production will be outsourced to other countries. The established countries

International Context

in Europe are losing interest in production. The cost of labour is very high, and the fabric industry is also threatened by imports from the Far East. Eastern Europe provides CP Company with cheaper labour, as do some Asian countries. Australia faces a similar phenomenon, to the detriment of the Australian TCF Industry. CP Company's success is due to reputation and longevity. In the ever changing world of fashion, CP Company maintains their standards and point of view, maintaining its integrity as a label.

Sabina Rivetti commented that she knows very little about what is coming out of Australia. In order to reach customers on a global scale, she believes that Australia needs to stop looking to Europe for inspiration. Australia needs to look elsewhere, to Asia for example, and to itself. Australian designers need to invent a look that is uniquely Australian.

It is very important to control all levels of communication. This means being clear on your identity, what you do, your history and to always bear in mind the final consumer. You have to be very careful to carry your message to the final consumer. To build a label as large and successful as George Armani for example, you would have to have an extensive organisation behind it.

Luisa Fazio

Luisa Fazio, ISS Institute/Victorian Government (Design) Fellow, has been working with Gucci in accessory design since completing a course at RMIT and is currently sub-contracting to Gucci and other Italian labels. She believes in 100% Made in Italy, stating *"Because I want to work on high quality product and the Italian industry has not only the know-how, but also an aesthetic sensitivity that I believe is hard to imitate. In saying this, the industry is under a lot of pressure from cheaper offshore production and counterfeits and the quality standards from these countries are slowly getting better."*



Luisa Fazio, Florence, Italy.

Australia has also been under pressure from offshore production and as stated earlier in the report almost three quarters of Australian TCF is manufactured in China alone. Fazio believes that *"...on a design level Australia has many interesting and innovative small designers who have the courage to set their own style without following the European/US designers. They are very few and need the support of the overseas market to survive. In general the industry does not really value the role of a designer as they do in the European market because fashion isn't such a strong industry economically (nor been a strong part of the culture) therefore not taken so seriously by the general public, other than the surf wear industry."* This comment about surf and sports wear was a recurring point made by many of the people interviewed. Australia has a great reputation in the leisure wear department and if we want to develop a global strength in fashion we should aim it towards what makes us different and not continue to imitate overseas counterparts. Fazio goes on to say that she thinks this is a global trend, and is not just something particular to Australia.

Findings: Key Issues

The main objective of the Fellowship was to gain an understanding of how to establish a world-renowned fashion label. The Fellows learned that the secret to success is reputation and longevity. The majority of Italy's current big brands originated in the 1950's, when the Italian government recognised the Fashion Industry as a major economic force.

The Australian Fashion Industry continues to undergo significant restructuring. In this climate we have the opportunity to provide innovative solutions along the Value Chain towards positioning the Industry for import replacement and export potential. The following findings outline where such opportunities arise.

International Context

Balestra

The experience at Balestra exposed Shulman and Wearne to a very traditional, highly exclusive manner of production. Traditional construction techniques that were observed may be appropriate for Balestra, but are not necessarily applicable to a modern Australian label. One of the major problems facing high-end fashion in Australia is the lack of a market in part due to population size and lifestyle. Australia offers few occasions for clients to wear these types of garments.

The designers at Balestra are referred to as stylists. Rather than follow trends, the stylists have developed a 'Balestra style' that they adhere to, and have done so for over twenty years. Within the company there is very little multi-tasking, whereas in Australia, people are encouraged to diversify their skills, preventing the development of specialised skills. The employees at Balestra, however, specialise in certain areas, allowing for the development and refinement of skills leading to the achievement of master status in individual fields.

Specialists in their field are sourced and come together in a collaborative approach – quality along the entire Value Chain is achieved.

Milan Polytechnic

Upon their arrival in Milan, Shulman and Wearne met with Arturo Dell'Acqua Bellavitis, Vice Director of the Triennale Museum Milan and Deputy Head of the Faculty of Design at Milan Polytechnic. He referred the Fellows to some excellent contacts; mostly design staff at Milan Polytechnic.

The following observations were made during the Fellows' meetings:

- The Polytechnic is very proud of its unique design program, which integrates different design disciplines – for example, the professors in charge of the new fashion school were from an industrial design background.
- Businesses in Italy are family orientated, which facilitates networking.
- Jewellery is a status symbol; traditionally it goes beyond fashion, but with new markets arising, designers are seeing the benefits of complementing fashion trends with jewellery trends. In Balestra's view fashion embraces the garments, hair treatments, underclothing including stockings, make up and accessories.
- Australia's selling point is innovation and new technologies. These innovative ideas should be invested in so that they can achieve their greatest potential. Australia should avoid trying to emulate the Made in Italy brand, and rather, identify a new angle to attract global attention. For example, nanotechnology, new fibres and laser technology.
- Students at the Polytechnic enjoy outstanding facilities. Their photography studio is of a professional standard and features state of the art technology. There is also a purpose-built foyer area that was created for student presentations and parades. This kind of investment in education is highly encouraging and beneficial for students, and gives them grounding like no other.
- Australian manufacturing has reduced dramatically in recent years, but it seems the grass is greener in Italy, as manufacturing slowly moves overseas to countries such as China. Italy's skilled population is aging, and traditional skills aren't being passed on to the next generation. Valuable knowledge is being lost.

Options

The gap in specialised garment construction techniques for couture design, such as hand embellishing, draping, and other fabric manipulation can be filled by increasing the availability of apprenticeships. The most effective way to learn a specialised skill is in a one-on-one situation. If young people are not encouraged to learn from the masters, their skills will die with the masters as they retire and pass away.

There is not enough dialogue in Australia between designers and manufacturers. Collaboration between designers and manufacturers needs to be encouraged to enable both to maximise their potential. Rather, there is actually dissonance between the two, as they often struggle to compromise and find common ground. Australian firms need to develop strategies to position their businesses within in a global market. Advanced technology and communications are already pushing Australia in the right direction, but Australia needs a point of difference to distinguish it from the rest of the world. Italy, for example, has its reputation for quality and craftsmanship. Australia has not been around long enough to establish this kind of reputation, and should rather explore avenues of innovation and new technologies in order to gain the world's attention.

Applying the Outcomes

The outcomes are written from the authors' perspective being two recently graduated TAFE students who are now entering the Industry.

Some of the broader subjects covered in this report can be applied to all areas of the TCF Industry. Information regarding Italy's business model is discussed thoroughly in this report. It is proffered that learnings from this model can add value to those working in the Australian TCF industry as they stand to benefit from such information. This report provides a valuable resource and can be used across various sectors within the TCF Industry.

Furthermore, this report can provide a resource to the education sector, including secondary college teachers. Such a report can introduce students interested in a career in fashion to some of the difficulties the Australian TCF Industry is experiencing as well as identifying where Australia is leading the world.

With regard to education, it would be appropriate for students interested in fashion as a career path to be able to stream their final years of secondary education towards building a comprehensive knowledge of the industry they wish to pursue by selecting subjects other than just design. It is important to encourage an awareness in students of how their knowledge can be applied within fashion by giving them the opportunity to study reports such as this one. Some students may have never considered applying their talents to fashion. For example, chemistry-based knowledge may not appear to have much to do with fashion but the information provided by Sabina Rivetti, CP Company, Milan, Italy suggests otherwise. Secondary students will see there are many avenues to pursue within the field.

In relation to the further education system, demonstrations and workshops are the best way to pass this valuable information on. As stated in the earlier part of the report, the practical based skills observed by Shulman and Wearne require intricate visual and verbal instruction as well as the proper facilities and materials. Educational institutes are the perfect environment to conduct these activities as they are already designed for such events.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations to Government, Industry, and the Business sector, Professional Associations, Education and Training Providers, our Community, and the ISS Institute

Government

The Australian Fashion Industry would benefit from the Federal and State governments' continuing interest and support. The Fellows learnt from Professor Paola Bertola, Design researcher at Milan Polytechnic, that the university wouldn't exist without public support. Thanks to government subsidies, student fees are very low. This support is augmented by the Polytechnic working with companies and other institutions.

The Italian government is concerned with protecting the industry from fraud labelling. For example, garments made in China that are finished in Italy can legally have the 'Made in Italy' label.

Industry

Susanne Kruezer, Professor of Fashion Design at Milan Polytechnic, encourages her students to make industry contacts. In the view of Wearne and Shulman, Australian Industry should take more interest in the education system, as this is where their future employees are trained.

Luisa Fazio, an Australian designer who moved to Italy ten years ago, commented that the Italian industry is under a lot of pressure from cheaper offshore production and counterfeits. This threat is increasing as the standards of quality from these countries slowly improves. Fazio manufactures all her designs in Italy, as she wants to work with a high quality product; one that the Italian industry has the know-how and aesthetic sensitivity to produce. She believes that on a design level, Australia has many interesting and innovative small designers who have the courage to set their own style without following the Europeans/USA designers; these designers need the support of overseas markets to survive. In general, Fazio doesn't think Australia truly values the role of the designer as they do in Europe, because fashion isn't as strong an industry economically, nor a strong part of the culture. Therefore, it is not taken seriously by the general public, with the exception of the surf-wear industry, which has made a name for itself by way of innovation and its philosophy of a relaxed lifestyle. Furthermore, Fazio believes that there is an overall lack of quality in materials and make/manufacture.

Unfortunately in Australia, designers are still imitating overseas counterparts and have become too homogeneous, which Fazio believes is a global trend, and not just something particular to Australia. To avoid this, Australian industry should further develop its own Australian designs. Australia will then have new ranges to show the global market rather than merely regurgitating last season's European trends.

Business

Professor Alba Cappellieri, Jewellery Design teacher at Milan Polytechnic, was interviewed about the Italian Business Model from a Jeweller's perspective. Cappellieri stated that jewellery is at the forefront of Italian expertise. The 'Made in Italy' system is based on the family system, meaning that everything is handled and managed by a family and not by a group or hired management. Cappellieri commented that this is a risky model. In Italy they are called small or medium enterprises. The small family company is very sceptical about accepting outside consultants. In terms of relating jewellery to fashion, the first fashion label to introduce jewellery as an accessory line was Versace, around 1998. Unfortunately, it was not a very successful operation due to a problem of positioning, in a sense that traditionally,

Recommendations

a jewel is not an accessory, but a status symbol. A piece of jewellery is an investment that is created to last, while fashion is transient and has a cursory life cycle. Versace's mistake was to create fashion jewellery using precious materials.

A few years later, Tom Ford for Gucci realised that jewellery could be a very important component in accessorising fashion. The family run jewellery companies were small and lacked the budget for distribution and retail, but fashion brands held a huge power in communication and distribution.

Australia may leverage off these experiences and work towards creating a total fashion statement combining garments with accessories.

From the interviews Shulman and Wearne conducted it was clear that the perception we have of our industry and the reality of it is quite far apart. The brand Rip Curl appeared in many conversations but when quizzed about one of our most respected designers who is considered successful and who has a high profile, many interviewees were unfamiliar with who she was. This may be because businesses such as Rip Curl place an extremely strong emphasis on the branding of the label. From an Australian's point of view it appears we are doing something right, the outstanding success of Rip Curl is a perfect example of this. However, there is opportunity for more improvement.

It was also discovered that Australia is building a name for itself in the area of new fashion technologies, for example CSIRO's development of the finest and strongest fibre was mentioned. It appears that in order to compete on an international level we need to promote an Australian identity, gear the market towards creating desirable products by focusing on all the strengths we have to offer. The Australian identity in fashion should be based on the values of innovation. When Cappellieri thinks of Australia she thinks freedom, she thinks of space, and thinks of a very natural and wealthy life, while in contrast Italy sells history, tradition, and monuments.

In Italy human relationships are more highly valued than business. The 'Made in Italy' fashion system began in the 1950's. This creates a generational problem for Italy today as it faces the problem of an aging population. The Italian industry cannot compete on strength of numbers, but can on quality.

In Cappellieri's opinion, the family model should be mixed with a business model.

Balestra's studio was a perfect example of how successful combining the two can be, with Federika Balestra, Renato's daughter, being a dedicated member of the team.

The reputation of the 'Made in Italy' brand is built on quality. Cappellieri stated *"The 'Made in Italy' brand should insist on quality because we have a heritage in quality not related to fashion, but related to a quality of life"*. Cappellieri also said *"Australia has a high standard in recreation and leisure. In this case, Italy's fashion identity is based on excellence and luxury while I imagine that Australia's fashion identity should be based on the latest fashion technology available."* We have to stop trying to recreate the image of existing fashion icons and develop our own unique image using the best business practices in conjunction with innovative design.

Recommendations

Professional Associations

As Mangiarotti suggests, European countries such as France and England whose reputation in fashion is on par with that of Italy's, place great significance on their young designers. Italy did this back in the 1950's and are currently witnessing the benefits.

Some of those interviewed believe there is a lessening of support for the Fashion Industry in Italy. Many graduates have no support and often turn to family for startup assistance (and not all families have the resources to assist). Talented, English graduates of industrial and fashion design however, are aided by the British Council, with similar systems in place in France. Australia is doing a lot to support young designers, offering some grants, but it is clear more existing associations need to do more, also a nation-wide scheme which provides business grants to up-and-comers would nurture the young talent of Australia. It is very difficult getting the money to begin a business when one has years of experience let alone when the candidate is in their early 20's and only a recent graduate. There are some organisations including 'The Melbourne Design & Fashion Incubator' addressing this as stated on the following website: <https://www.businessmelbourne.com.au/info.cfm?top=295&pg=2824>

The MDFI's specific objectives are three fold:

- To create a self-sustaining and perpetuating process to ensure the graduation of successful members, and obtain industry recognition for this.
- To create a base on which to build long-term financial sustainability.
- To incubate and hatch viable design businesses and concepts.

The MDFI is a not-for-profit organisation situated in Melbourne Central. The MDFI was set up to provide the opportunity and resources to emerging designers to develop their creative ideas into physical products and create sustainable and successful small business enterprises.

It is governed by an independent board of management. Both the current management team and board are made up of volunteers.

The MDFI provides incubation services for both tenants (those occupying incubator space on the premises in Melbourne's CBD) and outreach members (those operating from their own space in a separate location). Outreach membership consists of all services available to tenant members excluding the rental space.

From 2nd January 2000 the MDFI commenced its operations in allocated space within the Melbourne Central shopping complex located in Melbourne's CBD. The Melbourne Central management recognised the concept of the Incubator as innovative, exciting and unique. It also saw the MDFI's potential as a draw card and tourist attraction to the shopping complex. The future objective of the MDFI is to become a self-funding and self-sustaining organisation recognised by Industry as a creative breeding ground for Australian design talent. It is important Australia continues to encourage such associations so our young talent can break into the fashion industry sooner rather than later.

Recommendations

Education and Training

One of the biggest challenges facing new graduates in Australia isn't starting a job, but getting one in the first place. This dilemma exists for a number of reasons. Industry is often looking to fill positions with experienced staff, ruling out graduates from the start. In addition to this, more and more manufacturing is being outsourced overseas, which means that there are fewer jobs available for the technically trained.

Milan Polytechnic appears to be addressing the first problem well; placing a lot of value in on and off the job training throughout the duration of their courses. The Polytechnic collaborates with industry on many projects. Students are given tasks by various companies. For example, one of the biggest uniform companies in Italy asked the students to work in groups and design uniforms for the different sections of hotel staff. They were able to choose their own inspiration and saw the project through from beginning to end, including design, sourcing, manufacturing, and promotion processes. The school has a professional studio for the designs to be photographed in, and the designs were presented at a final show called 'Grand Hotel Polytechnic', which was attended by companies and the media. Australia's training programs would benefit greatly by designing more training packages to include extensive industry involvement. This will direct students towards employment opportunities once they complete their studies and would allow them to gain valuable access to equipment during their course they may otherwise not be exposed to.



The main foyer at Milan Polytechnic

Exhibition of work from the Hotel Project:



Recommendations



Another way in which the entire education system (not just fashion) could benefit is with more collaboration between different training sectors. For example it would be ideal to encourage photography students (who have access to professional equipment) to photograph fashion students' work. The benefits of such an initiative would be two way, with photography students being offered an opportunity to gain experience dealing with clients with specific needs whilst developing their folios, and fashion students being provided with valuable images of their work (again beneficial for their folio development). Education and training institutions in Australia could assist the fashion industry by encouraging exchange programs. Susanne Kruezer discussed the importance of broadening experience when starting to design. Travel promotes influences from other cultures, introducing different ideas about how to live, how to think, and enables designers to learn from others. Kruezer stated, *"It's very important to have a global idea about things"*. She believes that students should be pushed outside of their comfort zone so that they challenge themselves and realise their greater potential.

Kruezer also commented how important it is to encourage individuality. For example, she believes that the Chinese have a good, classical art hand in design. But she feels that they have difficulty expressing themselves because they come from a system that subjugates individuality. Kruezer feels that Italy should look to the Chinese and vice versa. The future of design is the fusion of global ideas. Luisa Fazio believes that the education and training sector needs to provide students with more opportunities to become specialised and to develop an expertise in a specific TCF area. She feels that education in the Australian TCF is focusing mostly on design areas and is failing to develop the technical skills that the industry needs and is lacking. She also notes that there is little or no support for designers to enter the industry once they finish their degrees/studies, at least this was the case when she graduated in 1997.

Community

In recent years much has been done to raise public awareness about the Australian Fashion Industry. Melbourne Fashion Week, Sydney Fashion Week, international trade fairs, and the Spring Racing Carnival all contribute to building a strong image for the industry. Publications are an opportunity to promote local designers in a marketplace that has strong international brands and exposure.

Recommendations

How ISS Institute can be involved

The ISS Institute can make a significant difference by creating opportunities for Australian students/professionals to study at Milan Polytechnic. So much could be learned from the staff there, and coupled with the facilities and networks available, opportunities would truly be opened up. This would be an ideal Fellowship program for filling skill gaps within the fashion education system. ISS also continues to assist by running collaborative workshops across industry sectors to raise the awareness of not only the problems that exist, but also of the possibilities.

Further Skill Gaps

- The major frustration within the Australian Fashion Industry is its sizing system. This is already being addressed by ISS in the form of clothing designer Kate Kennedy's Fellowship to study technology related to three dimensional body data.
- Australia would benefit from further scientific research into the field of nanotechnology and fibre manipulation. The CSIRO is currently undertaking work in this area.

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Primary Resources

David Medwin

TL Wood

Renato Balestra

Federika Balestra

Sabrina Baldi (Media and PR), Balestra Studio

Elizabeth Reily (Sales)

The Stylists (Designers/Illustrators)

Marisa Principi

Anna Ferri

Milena Meloni (Trainee)

The Dress-Makers

Rosalba Gaggioli

Anna Landolfi

Angela Fauzza

Benita Barbas

Annamaria Leugio

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Adriana Gagliardini
Professor Arturo Dell'Acqua Bellavitis
Professor Marco Turinetti
Professor Susan Kreuzer
Professor Alba Cappellieri
Professor Paola Bertola
Professor Raffaella Mangiarotti
Luisa Fazio
Sabina Rivetti

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Attachments

ISS Institute is holding in its library the following publications:

'Academic Programs at the Faculty of Design', Politecnico di Milano

'Lusso Versus Design', Celaschi, Cappellieri, Vasile

'Ricerca, design e sperimentazione per l'innovazione di prodotto nel settore dell'accessorio moda' Bertola and others

'CP Company 2007 Presentations' CD rom