

Siki Im

Urban Renewal

For my fall/winter 2015 collection, I explored the current and past landscape of the Lower East Side with its changes and challenges. During this exploration and research, I came across Clayton.

I was immediately sucked into his work, especially the embroideries he and his partner Elsa Rensaa had created. The strong and vivid motifs of these artisanal chain-stitch embroideries told stories about the life and culture of the LES. They represented to me a truly modern-day folk art of NYC.

I grew up listening to American hardcore and post-punk music from New York and played in hardcore bands. Bands such as Gorilla Biscuit, Sick of It All, and Warzone were the soundtrack of my youth in Germany. The fact that Clayton knew them and photographed them was very special to me. I felt that we connected right away. He would tell me stories of the old days, passing them down to the next generation.

Like any dynamic neighborhood, the LES eventually saw gentrification. Hence, a shift of metropolitan community lifestyle and a population migration have occurred; the closing of community-run parks and venues, the dismantling of old buildings, and ever-increasing rents. In exchange, the LES has more glassy structures, cleaner streets and a reduction of crime. The socio-cultural and economic changes have led to many challenges in this community. Just walk down Bowery and not only can you see the change but you can feel it.

Having lived in NYC for 14 years, I tried to have an unbiased observation. NYC is always in motion: people, mayors, drug dealers, artists, buildings come and go. Sometimes it is good and sometimes it is super boring. With this collection, I attempted to keep it honest and genuine but also raise questions about urban renewal. Some things we just need to let go in the hope that something special and fresh will bloom instead. But other things we must keep and do anything we can to retain their spirit.

Even when pushing boundaries with my designs, I always respect and embrace the history and tradition

of the themes I study and explore. The references and symbols of this subculture on the LES have been implemented in my collection, with memories from my youth and a modern sensibility in deep respect for the hardcore movement. My black clothes, which are all made in NYC, became a canvas for Clayton's artwork and his message, with an attempt to look toward a new future. It was truly an honor to have worked with Clayton.