

March 22 2010

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A head turner on the 22nd July 2009

The beginning...

In May 2009, Sheena Matheiken and Eliza Starbuck embraced the "philosophy of serious play, where doing what you love and making a difference are never mutually exclusive" to create The Uniform Project (UP). The fuss-free website massacred 'never repeat a dress' rule of the thumb (just like what installation artist Andrea Zittel in early '90s or artist Alex Martin did in 2005). The UP also took charity to an unparalleled fashion plane. So what started as a sustainable activity, metamorphosed into a stylish fundraising event.



Another radical look on the 20th December 2009

Its truism

What's celebratory was the UP's ability to 'hug' virtual world-lovers (read you). It became a lethal, out-of-the-ordinary and altruistic story on the blogosphere with a utilitarian approach. The theory revolved around quirkily restyling a reversible, black cotton tunic and wearing it for 365 days. The challenge: Using ONLY handmade, recycled and donated accessories- hip vintage tights, colourful hats, belts, paper reused as accessories and what have you! Amusingly, Sheena was initially clueless about stitching so Eliza made seven identical black tunics for the project to roll on.

Social 'niceworking'

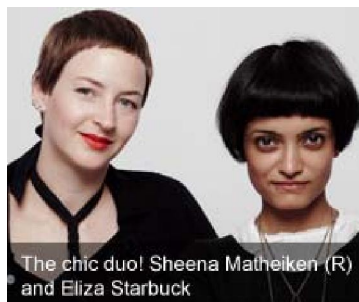
The word-of-mouth advertising caused a social 'niceworking' wave. Innumerable browsers are nudged for donations to Akanksha Foundation (a non-profit educational mission, which educates Indian slum kids). Writers also chum out dough for this worthy cause. Apparently, the UP made over "\$ 30,000 in 6 months" and is still counting (current statistics: "\$ 53,197 = 147 kids in school"). Staggeringly, "within just 3 months of the official launch, the site received over half a million hits, of which over 75% were new visits." Now, they "have a reach of over 100,000 Twitter and Facebook users along with regular audience...."

'Eco-chic-ness'

The Uniform Project certainly makes words like 'recycle', 'eco-friendly' or 'save' roll deliciously on our tongues. It takes the trend (err... 'movement') of 'eco-chic-ness' to another level. After all, it's a 'wannabe green' world, where high-end brands and leading design schools (Nottingham Trent University, Central Saint Martin's or London College of Fashion) are pushing the boundaries of eco-fashion. Global fashion weeks (London Fashion Week's 'Esthetica', Berlin' Premium Show's Green Area' or Sao Paulo's E Fabrics exhibition) are turning 'greener' by the year.

The fashionably benevolent duo

As a team they are super-experienced. Sheena, MFA in Design and Technology from Parsons School of Design, New York and BFA in Art from Stella Maris College, Chennai (India), works as creative director at an interactive ad agency in NYC. Eliza, on the other hand, is a New York-based design consultant armed with a BFA in fashion design from Parsons.



The chic duo! Sheena Matheiken (R) and Eliza Starbuck

1 dress, 365 days?

By fashion.teamfemina, Mar 03, 2010 - 11:59 AM

Utterly and bitterly impossible in this era of 'muchness'! Well, The Uniform Project by Sheena Matheiken and Eliza Starbuck did just that. Their year-long performance, with seven identical black dresses and recycled accessories, dishes up proceeds for India's Akanksha Foundation. Fashion communication consultant P S Bhavana explores this chic benevolence

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Sheena says, "Fashion is such a visual and subjective medium, it offered an intrinsic draw. I consider style very much a part of self-expression and wanted to take the daily act of dressing up-a routine everyone relates to" and make it a part of something bigger, something more consequential. The repetitive model of a 365 day project makes it addictive and brings viewers back on a regular basis, which made it a great platform for fundraising."

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The Uniform Project's equation

Your role?

1. Follower? Take cues off their cult put-togethers (<http://www.uniformproject.com>) and cobble your own. Each look Sheena flaunts is a treat to the eyes. They have names and allow you to rate them or suggest options. Trust us, after following their rocking jig, repeating a lone silhouette suddenly seems as modish as donning Marni or slipping into a pair of Jimmy Choos!

2. Philanthropist? Donate bucks to the Website or flush out your old accessories. A must-watch: Their short film <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOJY348PyhE>

3. Consumer? Less was always more in silhouettes, but the UP trickles this cliché to consumerism, which means reduced buying is smartness. In one of the articles, the Guardian (UK) said, "Scientists have already found the part of the brain that we use when we want to buy something new... So could The Uniform Project be the way around buying less but still stimulating our cortex?" So rethink and rework your wardrobe as stuffing it with extra clothes is passé!

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Posted by akshara 2010 03 05

Never thought fashion could have a philanthropic angle as well. Brilliant story!

Posted by jennifer 2010 03 05

Lovely. Great equation, great idea. Quite inspirational indeed!

Posted by ena 2010 03 11

more such projects should be undertaken with a sustainable angle in mind...

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