



**WEAVING
EXPERIENCE
INTO MEMORY**

WEAVING EXPERIENCE INTO MEMORY

Dr. Nina Yiu Lai Lei
Patrick S. Ford



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PARASOL

The parasol features two contrasting scales of the D7 print and is designed according to a zero-waste concept, promoting fashion & design sustainability in Vietnam.

FOREWORD



Professor Rick Bennett
Executive Dean (Academic & Students)
RMIT University - Vietnam

Weaving Experience Into Memory

This is a wonderful collaborative project, not least because it shows the clear interdependence between art and design practice and the importance of having a sound conceptual basis to form a successful body of creative work. The way Patrick [Ford] and Nina [Yiu] have woven their own thoughts, experiences, and skills together into this final outcome is exactly the kind of creative process we encourage through all our design programs at RMIT University in Vietnam.

It is what I term the “cleverness” of an idea or what some may term the intellectualization of the creative process. Whatever it's called, it's all too rare these days in Design and Fashion projects and we are blessed that both Nina and Patrick are able to share their processes with our young Vietnamese designers at RMIT Vietnam. So often in art practice and design production only the end results are available to the viewer, and hence can undoubtedly cause confusion and misinterpretation. What is so vital to be aware of are the thinking and working processes, and how final ideas are arrived at. In this exhibition, we see how two very different and even, perhaps, opposing forces have come together beautifully and are entwined to present some most engaging and subtle outcomes.

From drawings of northern English dales, fascination with the structure of simple children's games, and observation of colour palettes from urban Vietnamese cities, to highly competent knowledge of Fashion production and technical skills, materials development, and application across a range of products, Patrick and Nina have not only successfully embraced each other's skill sets but additionally formed an interesting intersection where they can advise and debate into each other's area of expertise. To me this is the most important and exciting part of their collaborative weaving.

FOREWORD



Professor Julia Gaimster
Dean of School
School of Communication & Design (SCD)
School of Science & Technology (SST)
RMIT University - Vietnam

Two of the main objectives of the School of Communication & Design are to encourage interdisciplinary working and the integration of traditional and new technologies. In this Project Nina and Patrick have achieved these two objectives. They come from different backgrounds in fashion and fine art however, through this project they have found a way to take the tensions that exist between these two disciplines and combine them in a way that recognizes the strengths of both.

At RMIT we recognize that that there are strengths and limitations in both analogue and digital processes and that some of the best outcomes draw upon both traditional methods and new technologies. Weaving, embroidery, and printing are crafts that have been given new life through the introduction of CAD, enabling fast prototyping multiple iterations of an idea and visualization in 3D without using precious resources.

What started as an artistic journey has developed into a range of commercially viable products that demonstrate the possibilities of joint endeavour as well as combining analogue and digital processes. I hope you enjoy the exhibition.

WEAVING EXPERIENCE INTO MEMORY



Dr. Nina Yiu Lai Lei
Patrick S. Ford

RMIT University - Vietnam
www.rmit.edu.vn
Vietnam Festival of Creativity & Design

PREFACE

The exhibition, part of the Vietnam Festival of Creativity & Design, 'Weaving Experience Into Memory' presents the current stage of a research project that began with the creation of a single garment and subsequently grew into a collection. In the past, artists and designers have been wrestling with similar elements and with similar sensibilities but it appears that most of the time there has been a focus on their differences rather than their similarities. Artists have taken great pride in their ability to give birth to and develop concepts, often in isolation while designers are quite often required to work in teams collaboratively towards a common goal.

This exhibition presents the current status of a project conducted collaboratively by an artist and a fashion designer. The project is possible because the team has focused on 'similarities' rather than 'differences'. In order to work collaboratively it is necessary to be open to the opinion of others, to gain an understanding of the ideas of others and to work with them.

As the essence of this project is the merging of art and fashion design, this booklet has chosen to include photographs that emphasize this convergence rather than to simply list the products as presented in the exhibition.

THANK YOU

We would like to thank RMIT University, the School of Communication and Design, Vietnam Festival of Creativity & Design 2020 (VFCD) and all industry partners for supporting this project.

INTRODUCTION

The exhibition 'Weaving Experience Into Memory' presented here comprises a collection of related artefacts that have been created in response to daily life in Ho Chi Minh City / Vietnam. The project began with the initial creation of a digital art print and this subsequently provided a thread or line of investigation that influenced our ideas, thought processes and decision-making. The development of the initial print work eventually necessitated experiments with different materials and techniques, each of which, in turn, influenced the direction and nature of the overall approach and direction of the work. We consciously allowed this working process to run its course.

The digital print entitled 'District 7 Strata' (see page 15) is the latest in an ongoing series of works investigating our immediate environment and our perception of it. Previous works had been concerned solely with formulating a visual language in an abstract sense without reference to any specific location. 'District 7 Strata' on the other hand took a block of the local neighbourhood as the focus for the application of the previous visual language. Taking cues from psychogeography, design development was initially driven via the physical act of walking through an environment while recording impressions, experiences, discoveries and archiving interesting observations.

This peripatetic approach incorporated the elements of time and movement as a rhythmic substrate upon which ideas could be woven. This was how the initial design of the District 7 digital print was created, by literally walking up and down the local streets of District 7 mimicking the action of a weaving shuttle. This metaphor became increasingly more prescient as the project progressed.

It was decided to isolate different types of information within separate layers that could later be added one by one thereby gradually constructing a rich and complex study of the locale. The print is actually only the first layer of this process, looking at ambient colours at each intersection during the many walking trips. The colours were collected via an app developed specifically to collect environmental colour samples and these were then placed onto a drawn grid of the area. The print, therefore, is actually a map of the local streets and the control over the choice of the colours was relinquished and handed over to technology. The adoption of these 'systems' to introduce unexpected elements into the creative mix has become a familiar aspect of contemporary art and provided a good basis for the decision making that was to come during the next stage of the project.

ART and FASHION COLLABORATION

The first fashion item to be completed during this project was the Ao Dai. Once the digital print had been expanded upon and printed onto fabric, it was decided that the Ao Dai dress would be the most appropriate to try out first, being a signature of the local culture in Vietnam. Considering that the print pattern arose from a conceptual map, it seemed fitting that wearing the Ao Dai would be to symbolically wrap oneself in the local environment.

Following the realization of the Ao Dai, the scope was widened to include other items of clothing, both casual and formal. Different tests were

conducted during this stage of the design process, examination of various fabrics including cotton, silk, polyester and also investigations into techniques such as digital fabric printing, hand and digital embroidery, weaving and silk colour dyeing.

When an idea or approach transfers from one medium or technique to another, certain adjustments or modifications naturally need to be made. In order to keep pace with these decisions it is necessary to be aware of new, often unexpected possibilities. It is very easy to remain fixated on the original idea and ignore these new

possibilities even when they may lead to a much more rewarding outcome.

Given that the original concept came from the development of an artwork, a balance had to be established between conceptual attitudes and those of a more practical nature necessitated by different materials and techniques in order to arrive at a satisfactory resolution within the work.

The design of the clothing focuses on clean silhouettes, neckline cutting, armhole movement, a cut & sewn approach with details such as pleating, racerback detail, hidden pockets, wrapping elements and draping all featuring the 'D7' print design. The underlying consideration is an interweaving of different print scales, how the fabric grainline is to be centered and how the direction and interaction of the print pattern activates the colours, vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines. Each of the scales plays a metaphoric role in the interpretation of the walking map, adopting a panoramic or more detailed view of the neighbourhood.

CREATIVE COMMERCE IN VIETNAM

The 'Weaving Experience Into Memory' project generated an exploration of the local creative industry that has led to a better understanding of issues such as the availability of raw materials and the accessibility of skills and services, both traditional and digital. It seemed logical that the first garment to be considered in the project would be the Ao Dai dress but it also seemed essential to reflect the optimistic attitude to be found across Vietnam within the creative industries.

As subsequent designs were developed and applied to other garments, the idea of a collection came to the fore, which in turn stimulated the

consideration of an expanded range of products such as scarves, footwear, bags and even a parasol. Experiments were conducted along these lines and prototypes were designed and constructed.

Of course, it is not expected that anyone would choose to wear a top, dress, skirt, high heels, wrap espadrilles, bag or parasol treated with the same print design all at the same time. On the contrary, the collection presents a range of garments and accessories to be selected from according to specific needs. The range aims to explore different potential tastes and so, in accordance with this aim, the garments were tailored using three different scales of the 'D7' print design. The 'regular scale', when seen from a distance, could be taken for a traditional check pattern while the details of the fabric design in this case are only appreciated at close distance. By comparison, other garments employ the 'medium' and 'large scale' thereby presenting a bolder, more fragmented version of the design. Each of these options could appeal to diverse tastes and the choice would be driven by the wearers' own personality.

Despite the project not being conceived as a commercial operation (it was actually a collaborative research project), it was necessary to follow the logic inherent in the process by reflecting upon the national market in a hypothetical manner with regard for the customer's preference, creating easy-carry styles and asking questions such as 'What would be a reasonable price?', 'How could a fashion brand be communicated satisfactorily here?', 'how could these products be generated for sale in the market here?'.

WORKING WITH FASHION RETAIL, COMMUNITY AND INDUSTRY

When commencing this project there were naturally aspects of the production that needed support from outside the team. The design development and initial prototyping was done in-house, pattern making, cutting, sewing and other skills needed for fabrication were completed before moving to the next stage of the project.

In order to transfer the 'District 7 Strata' design (referred to simply as 'D7') onto garments, an international digital printing company was consulted and an initial length of fabric (polyester, as recommended) was created using a digital transfer process. This was then cut and made into the first sample dress, the Ao Dai, which provided the basis for subsequent decision making and the overall direction of the collection.

2D/3D Computer software was employed to virtually illustrate potential merchandise, in multiple combinations thereby saving time and resources in making fitting samples. The software also enabled the construction of virtual settings in which computerized avatars walked within locally captured environments in order to gauge the visual impact of the designs. The ability of the software to recreate the natural draping of the fabric (presenting the scale and direction of the 'D7' pattern), and helping to reduce fabric consumption was particularly useful. Toile samples were used to test the fit and the cut.

Further lengths of fabric were then printed in the three scales, gradually adjusting the size of the print. The varying scales were then assembled in mix and match configurations on the garments as they were designed, with the variations in the print pattern being used to emphasise aspects of the garment construction. Following the Ao Dai test sample, all subsequent garments were made in-house including all pattern making, cutting and garment construction.

The merchandise now formed a collection that could be assembled and presented to the public. Further tests and samples were made towards this end including fashion accessories.

In order to progress these designs a national company specializing in footwear production for the international market was consulted and prototypes were constructed using the 'D7' design pattern. The samples included high heels and wrap-espadrilles.

The collection naturally needed to be displayed and it was thought logical and highly appropriate that the merchandise should be first displayed in the neighborhood where the 'D7' print pattern was created. An ideal venue was located within District 7 that could provide a sympathetic environment for the exhibition. A mixed retail / F&B establishment representing a fashionable lifestyle brand within Saigon that proved receptive to hosting this presentation of art and fashion collection.

CONCLUSION

As a research project, 'Weaving Experience Into Memory' has been enlightening. The transformation from art to design and from conceptualisation to realisation, has taken the project team on a creative journey that has proved to be an invaluable learning experience. The availability of different fabrics in the local market, the presence of local and international manufacturing industries open to collaboration and providing support, companies employing digital printing and visualization software is valuable knowledge that can be passed on to our students, designers and local enterprises. As local creative industries grow and develop they will drive the demand for well-designed and well-made products and at the same time will drive the growth of the industry overall.

It is hoped that this project may also illustrate how creative ideas can arrive from a variety of sources, not always from conventional ones. Sometimes, our personal experience of a particular place can be the catalyst for ideas that merely need the space to develop, if we allow them to.

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ART - FASHION



*'District 7 Strata', Digital Print (Edition of 30)
This print was the basis for the exhibited collection.
The Living Maps Review journal published an article
detailing how it was created during a series of local
walks influenced by psychogeography.*



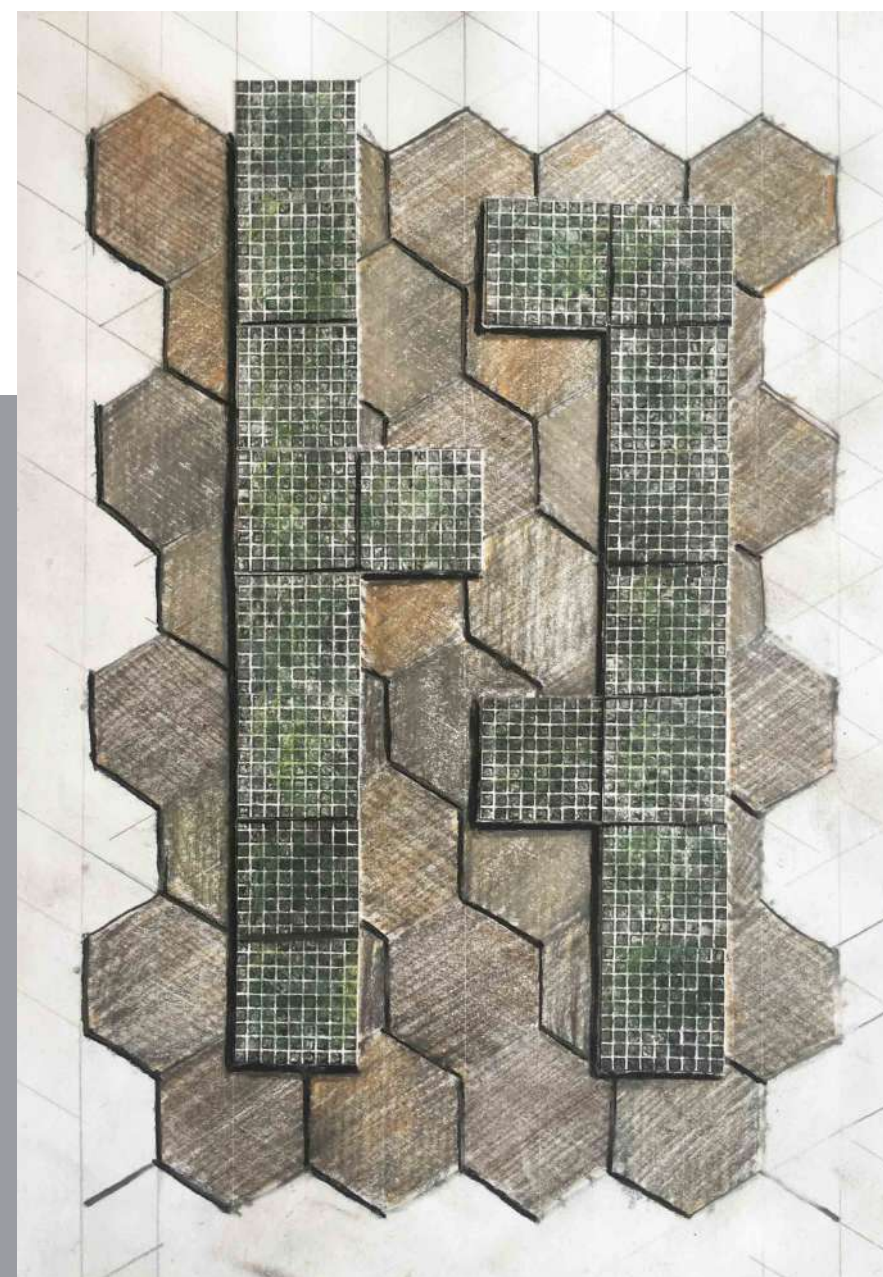
RAGLAN TOP
& WRAP SKIRT



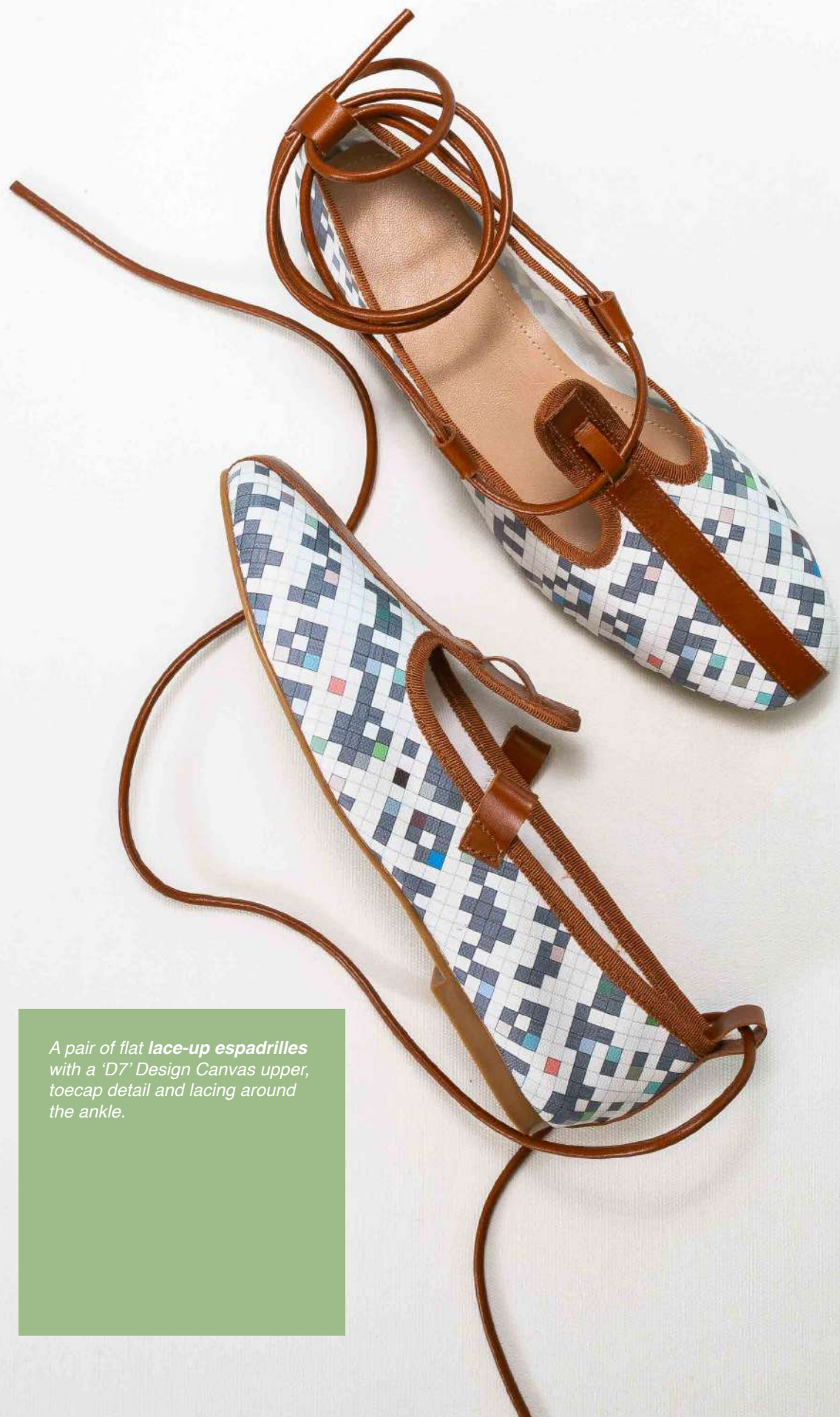
SUMMER
DRESS



The **M Dress** takes a simple day-wear concept, adds a symmetrical V-shape neckline, an inverted pleat and sloped shoulders. The sleeve openings with underneath gussets fit comfortably with the 'D7' medium scale textile print.



Notebook drawing exploring the relationship between the surface and subterranean layers of the landscape. The square grid represents the man-made surface layer while the hexagons allude to the natural layer below.



A pair of flat **lace-up espadrilles** with a 'D7' Design Canvas upper, toecap detail and lacing around the ankle.



'Excavation', Sculpture
Exhibited: 10 Chancery Lane Gallery, Chai Wan Annexe, Hong Kong, 2011
This sculpture explored the layered visual language by physically separating them within a 3D structure. The title of the work suggests that the layers have been exposed in a manner similar to the way archeologists work.



Green Top - with a relaxing wide crew neck, drop shoulder and wide hem fit, every line and seam seems simple and approachable with the 'D7' textile print.

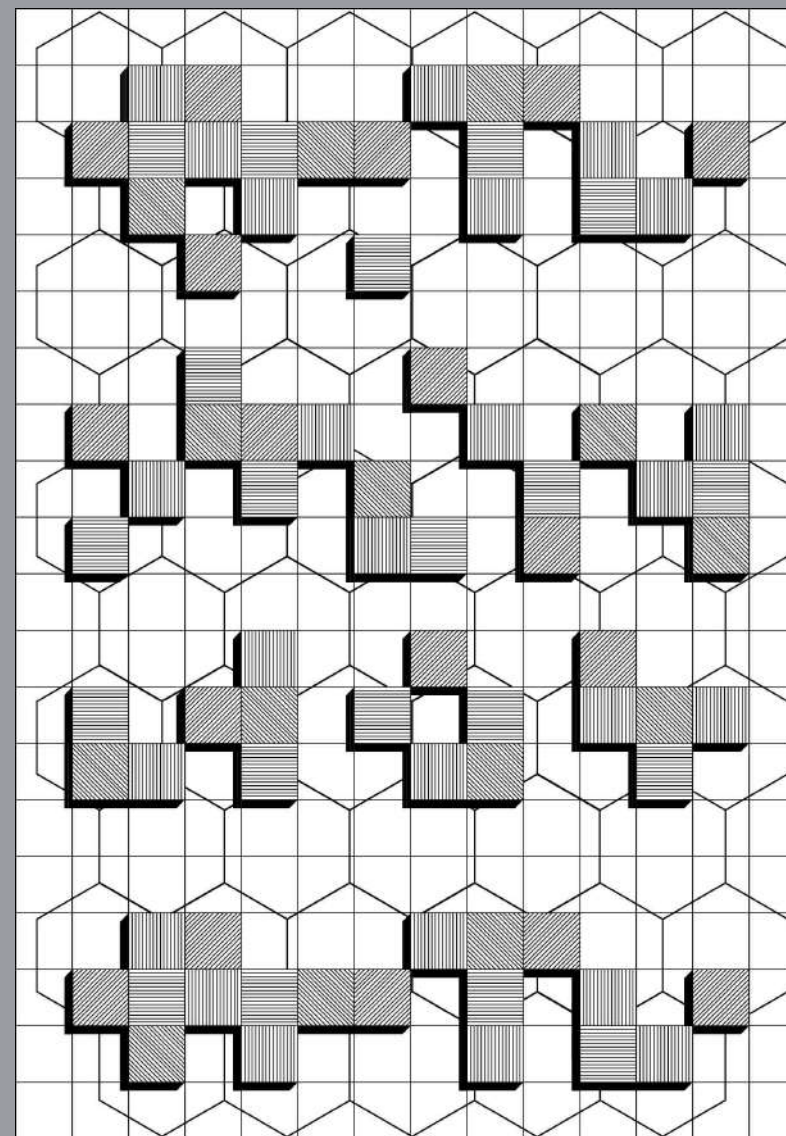
Notebook drawing exploring fissures within an imagined landscape and how the surface grid interacts with the subterranean layer, represented by hexagons.

'D7' printed white high-heel, toecap with asymmetrical design, pointed toe and 10 cm height. The high heels have been placed one above the other as if stepping from one level in the landscape down to the other.





'D7' textile print chiffon scarf is semi-transparent and blowing in the wind.



*'Strata 2', Digital Print (Edition of 30)
Exhibited: International Print Triennial, Krakow,
Poland, 2015
This print played with the visual language used in
the 'Excavation' sculpture and which was also
later used in the 'District 7 Strata' print.*





Summer dress is designed in a racerback sport style wherein the join between the armhole band and neckband is covered on the inside facing. The racerback yoke is pleated to fit round the dress back and add fullness. Seven pleats at the front of the curve neckband serve to give fullness. The dress front includes a tapered triangular panel and is joined to the single side slit.



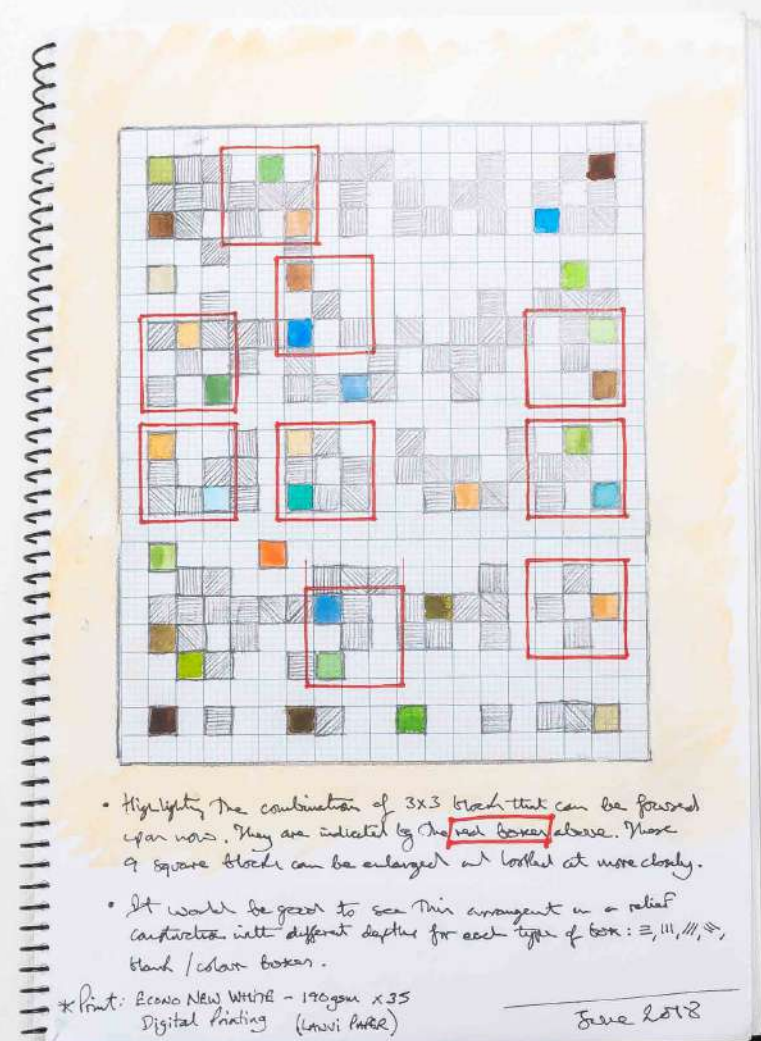
Notebook page showing ambient color collection map along with app references for each of the collected colours. The map shows more of the locale in which the path of the local river is echoed in the profile of the 'D7' high heels, arranged into a heart shape.





The Ao Dai is a symbol of Vietnamese feminine beauty. The 'D7' Dancing Ao Dai flows naturally with a raglan long sleeve, fitted waist line, darts, long tunic dress, long slit and long trousers. Ao Dai makes the natural beauty of women exposed.

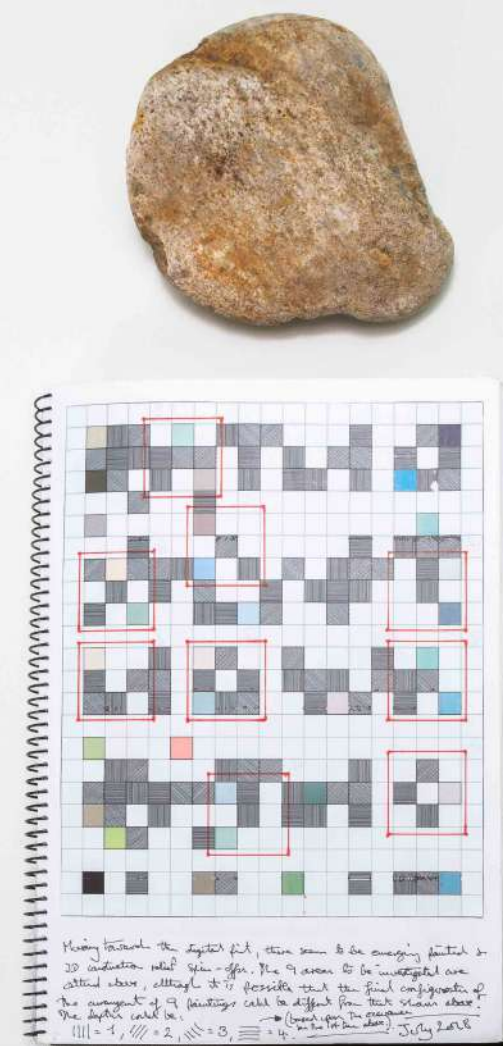
Notebook page showing the 3 x 3 blocks chosen for further attention. The nine chosen zones were to be further developed at a larger scale. The page is offset by reels of embroidery thread that echo the ambient colours in the District 7 map.



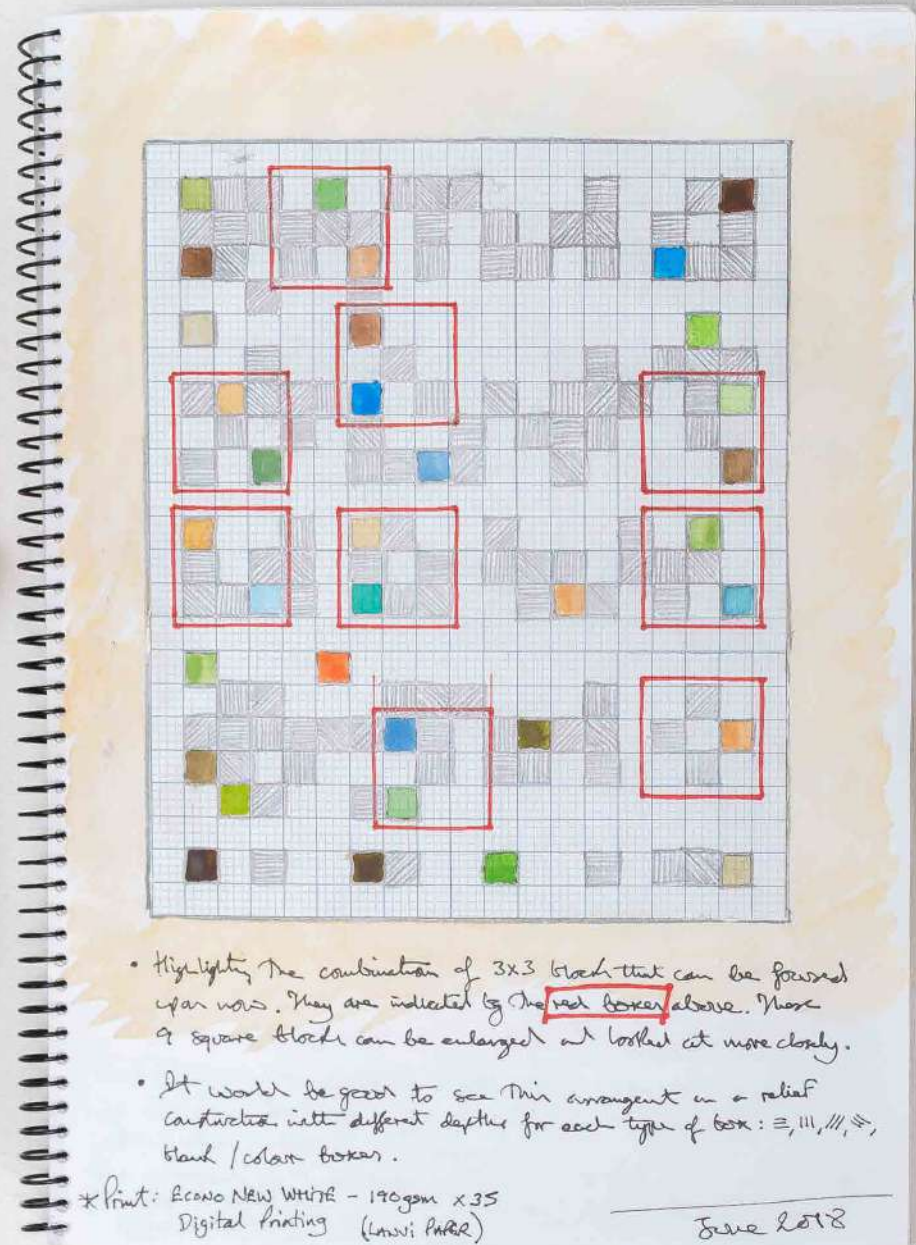


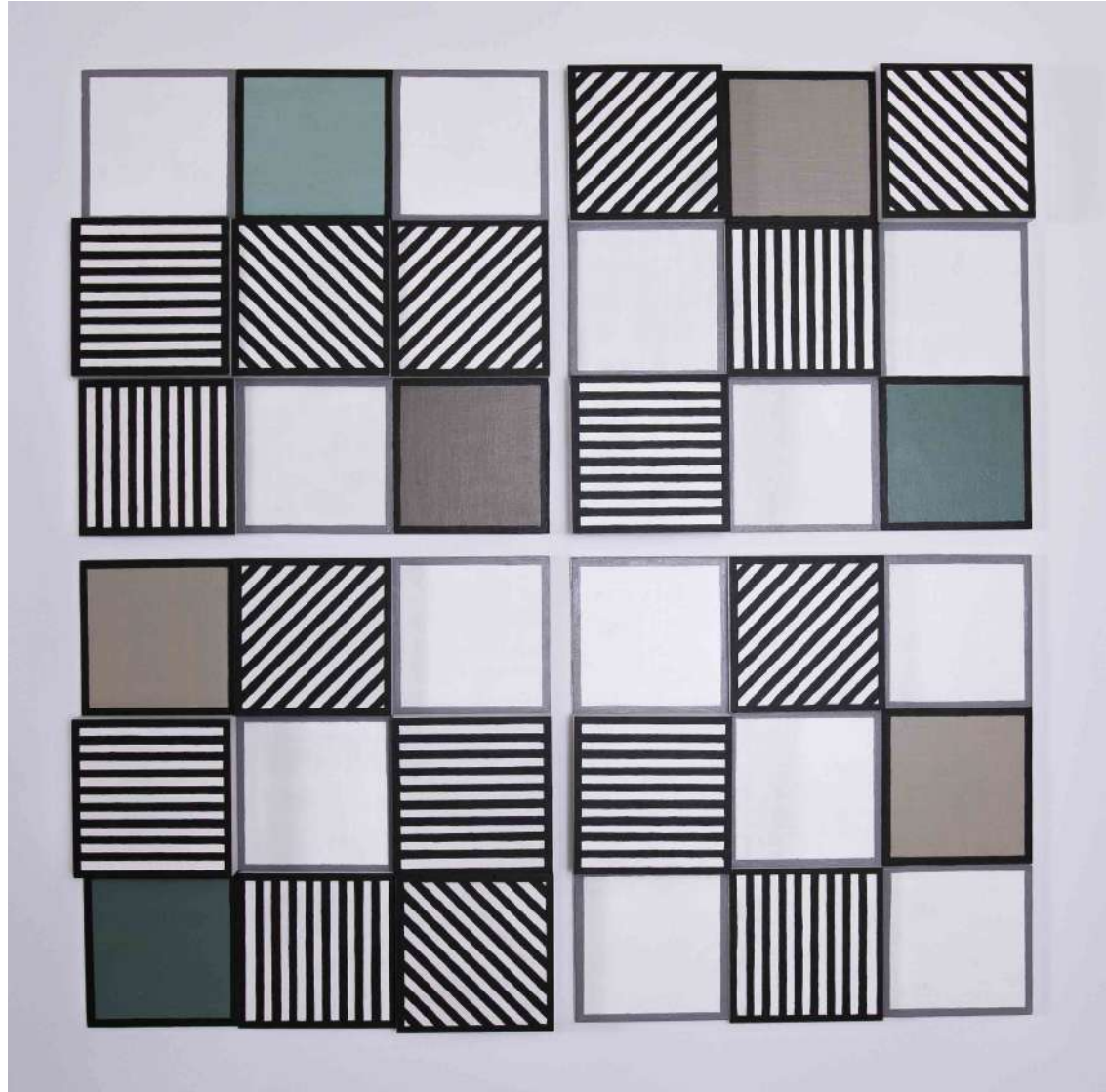
Wrap skirt is reassembled with reference to the structure of 'Pleats Please' Diagonal Pleats, reshaping a new characteristic silhouette through the overlapping of 'D7' design's varying scales and pattern cut shapes. The junction between the main body of the skirt, seven gores, folded waistband, string-tie and the hidden pocket, bear a strong resemblance to the 'D7' design living map.

The scales of the textile design and the cut line add a touch of freedom and suggest a variety of impressions.



Notebook page explaining the formula for determining the relative heights of the black and white, cross-hatched tiles. Four different heights were decided upon for each of the four directions of the cross-hatching. The two stones found locally make visual connections to the print and the lines.





'2x2', Sculpture, 2020

*A focus on four specific zones chosen earlier within the District 7 Strata map.
The four wooden relief tiles remain separate but form a single piece of work.*

Dr. Nina Yiu Lai Lei



Dr. Nina Yiu is the Program Manager of the Bachelor of Fashion (Enterprise) of the School of Communication & Design at RMIT University, Vietnam. She gained a BA (Hons) Degree in Fashion Textile / Fashion Design at Manchester Metropolitan University (UK), a Master of Business Administration (Fashion Business) at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and gained her Doctorate in Education (Educational Psychology) at the Chinese University of Hong Kong with her research focusing on Flipped Learning.

For more than 10 years Nina worked as a designer, merchandiser and buyer in industry/retail for international brands in the Asia – Pacific Region, USA and Europe. She also spent 5 years working in marketing and communication on issues of sustainability with the NGO - Business Environment Council in Hong Kong before entering Higher Education where she taught for more than 10 years before moving to Vietnam.

At RMIT Nina has also lead industry projects in collaboration with international brands - INDITEX, WOOLMARK, H&M, COTTON ON and has also worked with national brands - MAISON, TAKASHIMAYA and the VIETNAM WOMEN'S MUSEUM.

Nina's research interests include craftsmanship, fashion technology, fashion sustainability, creative work and the flipped classroom.

Patrick S. Ford



Patrick S. Ford is currently living and working in HCMC, teaching at RMIT University.

His art education began at Leeds Arts University (UK) – Foundation Course 'Merit', at Northumbria University (UK) – BA (Hons) Fine Art degree, and at RMIT (Australia) – Master of Fine Art degree.

He has exhibited his work in solo and group shows in Europe and Asia participating in over 100 exhibitions and art projects. His work is held in several public collections in Europe and Asia and in numerous private collections.

Patrick has taught a wide range of subjects as well as leading workshops and conducting tutorial visits to Universities such as Kyoto Saga University of Arts, Japan and Birmingham City University in the UK. He lead a Fine Art degree program, working on its development, validation, accreditation and then successfully led the initial cohort to graduation before moving to Vietnam.

Originally trained in sculpture, Patrick has also worked in printmaking and is currently pursuing projects involving the development of an approach to drawing methodology and performance, especially that related to Walking Art. His practice often seeks to take art-making out into the environment to encourage observation, reflection and response, and just as often focuses on the border between disciplines.

More details of Patrick's research interests can be found at www.patricksford.com

