

2019 Fashion Scholarship Fund

Design & Product Development

This collection explores a collaboration between Soft Gallery childrenswear and artist Esther Ruiz, as a shoppable, travelling art exhibit and expands the Denmark brand into the American market.

Fashion itself is an international business. Trends, markets, fabrics, customers, and factories all impact fashion on a global level. Sometimes brands are able to use these global influences to target other markets, and expand from their own, but international expansion does not always mean international success. There are a multitude of factors determining the outcome of expansion. Some companies find they stand better within an international market than they did in their original market, and others have steady success within multiple platforms. Regardless, expansion of this nature can be of great value if properly executed. Two retailers who have tested the international market are Cos and J.Crew. The retailers have used different means to achieve successful international expansion.

Cos, which stands for Collection of Style, is a retail brand with a focus on modern, functional, considered designs with a minimalist aesthetic. The label opened its first store on Regent Street in London in 2007, following its first show at the Royal Academy. Two years later they opened their second store in France. Today the brand has over 230 stores internationally, with nineteen in the United States (Store Locator & Opening Hours - COS., 2018). Cos is a sister brand to the well known H&M group, an enormous retailer in the fast fashion business. “That gives them [H&M Group] the chance to gain clearer insights into how that market works ... They are able to set up supply and distribution logistics — and then they go in with other brands, such as Cos (Abnett, 2015).”

H&M plays a vital part in the expansion of Cos. H&M was able to use its current establishments in international markets to test how well products from a Cos design aesthetic and price point would work in a particular location. Cos also tested out different markets through collaborations before establishing a store. The brand focuses on smaller, more unique

collaborations that are specifically appealing to their target customer. In late 2015, the minimalist retailer tested the downtown Los Angeles market with a pop-up shop in collaboration with the design firm Snarkitecture. The collaboration featured a curated space, with cut-outs of Cos garment silhouettes on painted wood panels. It took the essence of Cos and turned it into a shoppable art installation. Overall, it proved to be very successful (Hamanaka, 2017).

Cos, so far, has been successful selecting their market and customer. Their customer has a specific look, but not necessarily specific to a location, and that is one of the reasons Cos is expanding into new markets so quickly. Last year alone they opened 37 new stores including stores in Malaysia, Slovenia and Qatar. The brand is firmly established in London, Scandinavia, Hong Kong and the United States (Morency, 2018). The expansion of Cos has worked because of its thoughtful progression, its ability to test the market through H&M group logistics, and its carefully selected, unique collaborations that appealed to their target customer. Cos is a young brand with proven capability to be international, but due to their age and inexperience, they may run into unforeseen issues.

J.Crew is a well known brand recognized for their traditional American look with an emphasis on classics and heritage. J.Crew was established in 1947. Prior to what is known today as J.Crew they were Popular Merchandise Inc., a low priced women's clothing business selling merchandise door to door in New York City. Over time the business expanded and modified, and in 1989 the name changed to J.Crew Inc. The first store was opened in downtown Manhattan. J.Crew's success was primarily due to the popularity of their catalogue.

In 1991, to test other markets, they mailed 75,000 J.Crew catalogues, and 60,000 Clifford & Wills catalogues, another branch of J.Crew, to potential customers in Ontario, Canada. J.Crew

found the return response was slightly lower than in the United States, but each order placed in Canada was of a slightly higher value (*J. Crew Group, Inc.*). The collected data was useful, so J.Crew employed the same tactic in overseas locations. Despite good feedback, international orders, and growth within the United States, J.Crew Inc. did not open a physical international retail store until 2011 in Toronto, Ontario. To continue their retail expansion they hired professionals with experience in international markets, and used their insight to further expand physical stores into Asia and the U.K. J.Crew uses data from their international ecommerce customers to analyze whether a physical location would succeed in those areas.

J.Crew has had its highs and lows. They have had periods of success with their catalogues in the 80's, their creative direction under Jenna Lyons, and their established heritage iconicism. Unfortunately, they have been slow with adapting to technology and holding appeal to their established customer. J.Crew has made investments in relaunches and new products, but innovation and success have been slow. Due to its specific American heritage look, J.Crew has always been most successful in the American market, regardless of their international expansion and ecommerce.

Both Cos and J.Crew have approached international expansion as a progression, which can be very successful. Testing the market through curated collaborations and analyzing customer data along with understanding the different needs across markets, can weigh heavily in the outcome for success. The parameters of each brands' expansion differ in time period and outcome.

Soft Gallery is a unique childrenswear brand based in Denmark that will benefit from international expansion. They only have physical stores in Denmark, but offer shipping to select

countries. They have child friendly, unique and age appropriate designs and fabrics. Soft Gallery works on a seasonal basis and with each season they release a new line inspired by a lighthearted theme. In the past they have had themes such as “The Artisan”, “Rise and Shine”, and “Magic Parade”(Archive • Soft Gallery). Each line features a new color palette and playful prints, but the silhouettes remain fairly consistent.

Soft Gallery will benefit from international expansion because their original product will fit into the American childrenswear market gap. “As consumer interest and spending in kidswear has risen — the result of demographic shifts, a rising US birth rate, older, richer parents with higher disposable incomes and the digital accessibility of the Internet — the childrenswear retail market has become increasingly competitive and crowded” (Menendez, 2016). The childrenswear market is undoubtedly growing and has outdone both the women’s and men’s market by two percent. Currently, there is a need for appealing, quality, and original childrenswear with functionality for children, but offering an attractive look without the trendiness of mini-me dressing or luxury childrenswear.

For the American debut of Soft Gallery into the childrenswear market, the brand will collaborate with the artist Esther Ruiz to create a travelling exhibition featuring garments inspired by her art. Esther Ruiz is a digital and sculptural artist. Ruiz’s art is a compilation of neon light sculptures, small cement and fluorescent sculptures (pictured in the inspiration board), and some minimalist digital drawings of her sculptures. Her work is very playful, and embodies a childlike presence that serves as an excellent source of design, print and color inspiration for Soft Gallery (*Selected Works*, 2018).

The main goal of the exhibition is to showcase Soft Gallery childrenswear in an artistic

setting to attract the attention of parents and children, but also to collect data about different markets as the exhibition travels. The exhibition will provide a visual environment for Soft Gallery's inspiration. The merchandise will be sold in the museums' gift shop. Like Cos and their collaboration with Snarkitecture, the purpose of the exhibit is to draw in potential customers, but also test the market before committing to a physical store. Soft Gallery will use the sales from the museum gift shop, and the foot traffic, to identify possible store locations. With the exponential growth of the childrenswear market, a creative platform such as this would allow Soft Gallery to stand out among other children's brands.

Museums selected for the collaboration will be specific and well-researched to ensure Soft Gallery has the highest probability for targeting the correct customer. One museum on the list is the Taubman Museum of Art in Roanoke, Virginia, which offers children's and family programs throughout the year. The museum also has areas dedicated specifically to children. The museum puts effort into attracting families with children to generate the next generation of museum goers through exhibit curation and class offerings ("Find Programs and Events", 2018). From September 2017 to February 2018, the Taubman had an exhibition titled *Play: Toys Reimagined as Art*, it featured a variety of artists who used

toys and playful objects in their work with site-specific installations. Pictured on the right is artist Billie Grace Lynn's interactive inflatable elephant installation in the Taubman during *Play*. Amy Moorefield, deputy director of exhibitions and collections said, "With its highly interactive and engaging artworks and related activities created



especially for families, *Play* focuses on the similarities between how children and adults experience various playful habits of invention, such as curiosity, imagination and problem solving,”(Nelson, 2017). It proves to be a great spot for families who often interact within their community, a familiar concept to the Taubman. The Rubin, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Mint, Yale University Art Gallery, and a few other museums on the eastern side of the United States have similar qualities to the Taubman with strong potential for housing the collaboration (Berman, 2009).

Soft Gallery customers, the child and the parent, are active people who enjoy art and exploring their city. Soft Gallery embodies the child that likes to be bold, creative, and original. It appeals to the parents who support these attributes in their children. A creative childrenswear exhibit will capture the attention of both parent and child. Marketing to families usually involves a common ground of appeal, and then branches off to more specific aspects directed at moms, kids, etc. Both the museum and the brand are able to target families, and have done so before.

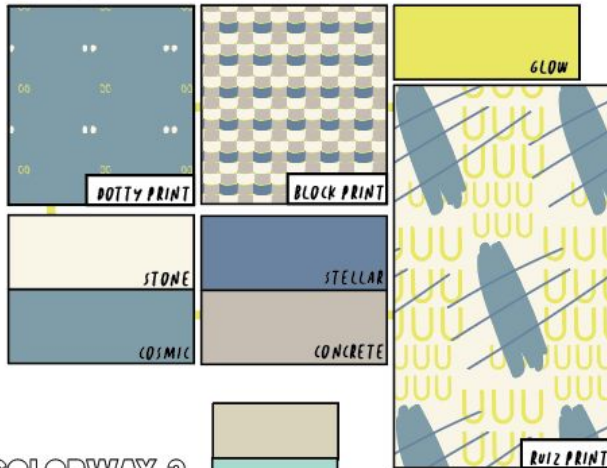




# soft gallery × ESTHER RUIZ

## COLOR AND PRINT

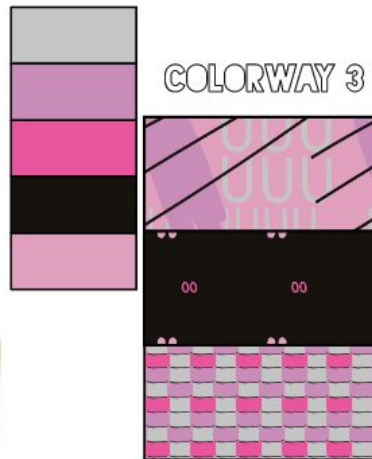
### COLORWAY 1



### COLORWAY 2



### COLORWAY 3



## FABRIC



ORGANIC COTTON SWEATSHIRT  
100 COTTON



ORGANIC COTTON JERSEY  
100 COTTON

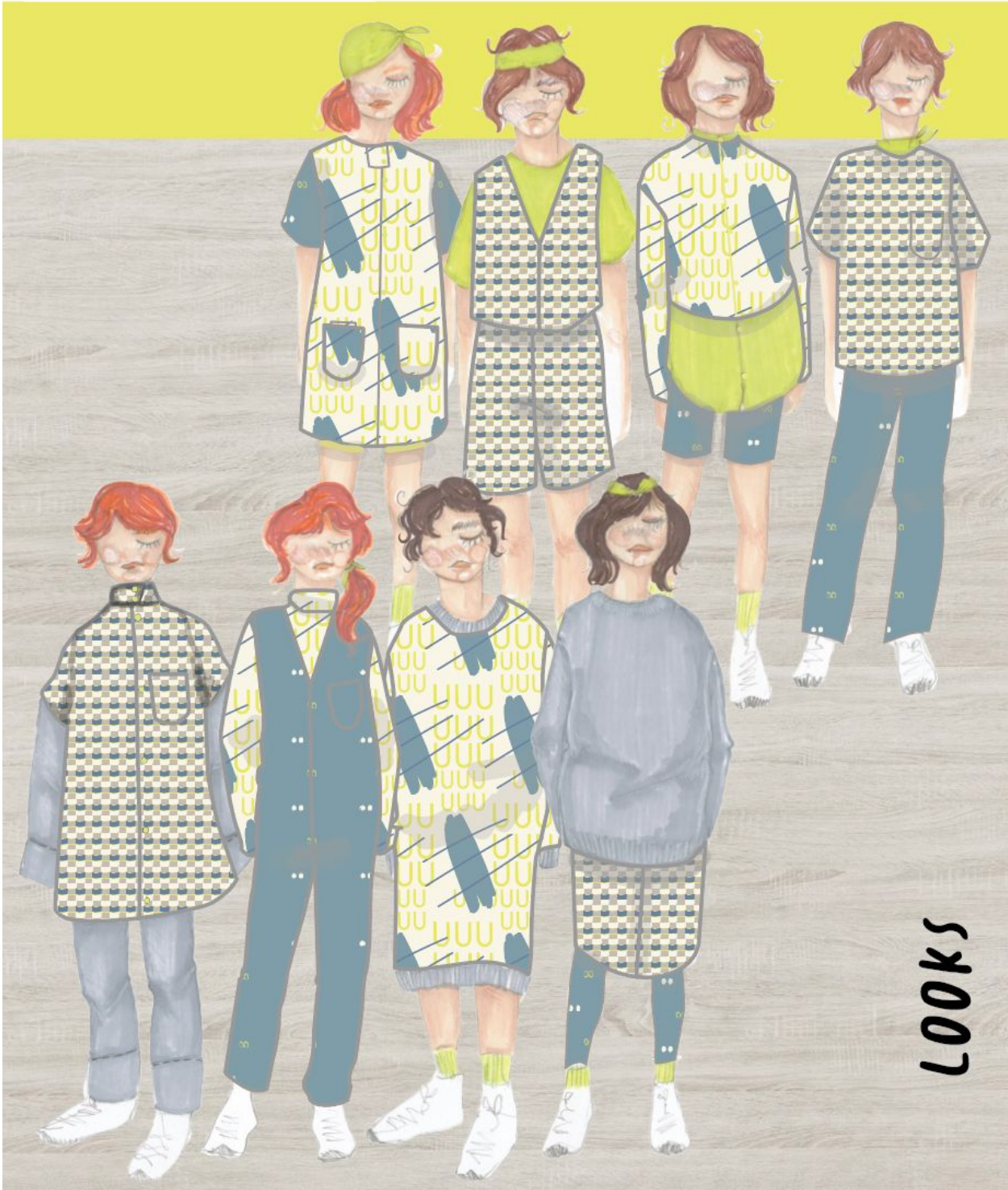


ORGANIC COTTON SATEEN  
WITH ADDED STRETCH  
99 COTTON  
1 ELASTANE



ORGANIC COTTON TWILL  
100 COTTON

# soft gallery × ESTHER RUIZ



# soft gallery × ESTHER RUIZ

1

EASY TO USE  
SNAP CLOSURE

NOTE: SPECS ARE CURATED FOR  
A CHILD SIZE 6

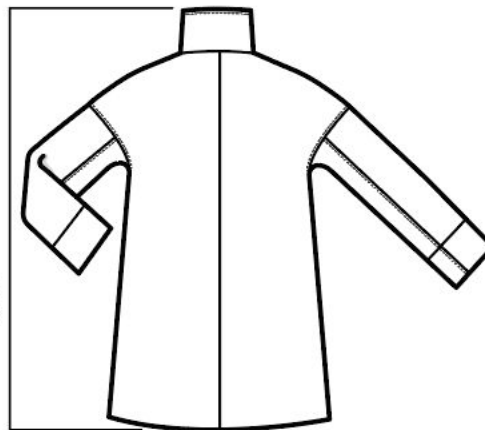
17 1/2" SLEEVE LENGTH  
WITH ROLLABLE CUFF

2 1/2" COLLAR HEIGHT  
COMES SLIGHTLY  
ABOVE THE CHIN  
WHEN CLOSED



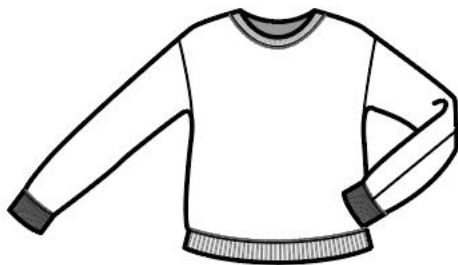
DROP SHOULDER ADVENTURE COAT:  
ORGANIC COTTON TWILL  
DROP SHOULDER AND  
OVERSIZED FIT

28" BACK LENGTH  
FROM NECK TO HEM

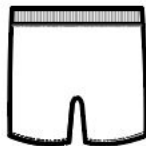


SOFT GALLERY'S  
SIGNATURE SWEATSHIRT  
IN ORGANIC COTTON  
AVAILABLE IN ALL COLORS AND PRINTS

2



3



ADVENTURE SHORT: ORGANIC COTTON JERSEY  
PURPOSEFUL CROTCH SEAMING  
FOR OPTIMAL COMFORT  
AND A UNIQUE FIT



The inspiration board acts as the initial idea and playful visual for how the Soft Gallery and Esther Ruiz collaboration will be represented in the gallery. The background, and the three sculptures in the front are some of Ruiz's work, and the two children behind the picture frame are looks from Soft Gallery's most recent season. The frame is representative of Soft Gallery being displayed in a museum surrounded by Ruiz's work. The designs were created with the wearer in mind and silhouettes were designed similarly to Soft Gallery's usual fits and shapes. They understand their customer is a child who does not want to be limited by what they have on, so they select silhouettes allowing for movement, comfort, and function. Most of the looks are layered to provide a variety of mix and match options. This allows for transition from school to playground, home to a museum, and from the fair to an art class. Fabrics selected for the looks are organic, soft, high quality, and most importantly, washable. Soft Gallery has used similar fabrics, all organic, in past seasons.

As for the colorways and prints, each was designed with a specific piece of Esther Ruiz's art as inspiration. Her art has a focus on fluorescents, so incorporating a pop of color throughout each colorway is important. Colorway one was derived from *A Place in My Mind* (2012), colorway two from *Pale Summer* (2018), and colorway three from *Well XI* (2017). All of these sculptures are shown beside their inspired colorway above. Each print created was designed to capture the shapes and playfulness of her sculptures. The Ruiz print specifically was created using the "U" motif that is often represented in her sculptures. The Ruiz print is also a mix of hard geometric shapes and soft organic shapes like her work with geodes and her neon wall hangings. The Block print is a repeat of the shape that mimics the cement bases of her sculptures. Lastly, the Dotty print is a pairing of dots that represent the way her neon wall

hangings look paired together in the gallery. Overall, the collection was designed in favor of Soft Gallery's usual style, but with the appreciation and theme of Esther Ruiz's playful art.



The Soft Gallery and Esther Ruiz collaboration would be set up in an open gallery space. A visual mockup is provided above. The garments will be placed on children's mannequins, and the art work displayed in a surrounding area on shelves, walls, and pedestals. The art and clothes would be separated by colorways. In the example above, colorway three is represented on the left with color coordinating artwork, and colorway one on the right. Additional visuals will include Soft Gallery promotional videos projected onto the gallery walls, and interviews between Ruiz and the Soft Gallery design team. Informational displays about the collaboration will be aesthetically placed on the walls. All of the visuals, in relationship to the garments, will convey the essence of Soft Gallery to potential customers in the American childrenswear market.

Activities will be offered in the gallery space to increase engagement during the visit. The children will be excited to see clothes they wear displayed like art, and then be able to create and take something home to match the tee their parents bought them in the gift shop. Coloring sheets, modeling clay, and collaging paper, all reflective of the collaboration, will be offered at craft tables within the space. For parents, there will cards containing QR codes that they can scan with their smartphones and take them directly to Soft Gallery's website. It will allow for parents to make a purchase instantly online, or to check out other merchandise not sold in the gift shop. The idea of children creating art with family is memorable and builds family relations, and the garments bought will have sentimental value. Soft Gallery will use this platform to build a customer base and successfully expand into the American childrenswear market.

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