

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

## New York's FIT president on offending accessories at Fashion Design MFA show

February 24, 2020



Junkai Huang's FIT MFA runway show Feb. 7 in New York. The accessories used have caused widespread offense. Image credit: MaxTree

By LUXURY DAILY NEWS SERVICE

The Fashion Institute of Technology issued a new statement Friday, Feb. 21, addressing the controversy over alumnus Junkai Huang's collection as part of his MFA runway presentation during New York Fashion Week.

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The Feb. 7 collection included accessories such as giant plastic ears and exaggerated lips to highlight the "ugly features of the body." Those accessories offended model Amy Lefavre, who refused to don them, but others walked down the runway wearing those looks despite objections in the preceding days.

The resultant uproar from the modeling, fashion and media communities put New York-based FIT on the defensive. After initial comments from the academic, FIT president Joyce F. Brown put out a fresh statement addressing the controversy.

*Here is the statement in its entirety:*

New statement from FIT president, Dr. Joyce F Brown, regarding the Feb. 7, Fashion Design MFA Show

NEW YORK, NY [02/21/20] This evening, Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) president, Dr. Joyce F. Brown, released the following message to the FIT community:

Today I am writing to update you on the preliminary steps we have taken and are continuing to take in response to the fallout of the MFA Fashion show on February 7<sup>th</sup>. This moment, in our minds, is not about closing a chapter and letting wounds heal. It is the beginning of accountability. And we cannot expect our community to trust us without a full examination of how this came about.

First and foremost, we have commissioned an independent investigation of ourselves. Bond, Schoeneck & King, an external law firm, will immediately conduct a thorough and objective probe into the incident, including what led up to the show and what followed.

Second, we are urging a pause and a request for context around the role of Junkai Huang, the young FIT alumnus whose collection at the runway show is at the center of this controversy. Junkai has said, and his thesis notes and

sketches support, that the collection he designed and produced was not aimed at invoking or provoking racial implications.

It also appears based upon information available that the styling and accessorizing used in the show were provided to him rather than chosen at his discretion. To us, this indicates that those in charge of and responsible for overseeing the show failed to recognize or anticipate the racist references and cultural insensitivities that were obvious to almost everybody else. That's inexcusable and irresponsible but also why we are commissioning an independent investigation.

With this in mind, as the investigation unfolds, we would ask the community to hold us rather than Junkai accountable.

As a result, we are announcing today that the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and the Chair of the MFA Fashion Design Department have been placed on administrative leave, pending the conclusion and outcome of the investigation.

Finally, we are doing the following:

- I am sending a personal letter of apology on behalf of myself and FIT to model Amy LeFevre for what she experienced at the show.
- I am sending similar letters of apology to all the models who were part of the same collection.
- My cabinet has already held multiple meetings with faculty and students to begin a deep and serious dialogue about the immediate, long-term, and systemic implications of the MFA-FIT runway show.
- On Monday [Feb. 24], I am meeting with the college's Diversity Council, and then later that day, with the executive committee of the Faculty Senate. Then on Tuesday, I have scheduled a meeting with student leaders to discuss how to prepare for a Town Hall meeting with all FIT students. More such meetings with students, faculty and staff will follow.

These are just first steps. I remain personally committed and determined, with your help, to resolve and reconcile these issues in our community.

Sincerely,

Dr. Joyce F. Brown

President

Fashion Institute of Technology

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