

Internship Essay Midterm Exam

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The Museum of Fashion Institute of Technology currently showcases an exhibit titled *Reinvention and Relentlessness: Fashion of the Nineties*, and touches on concepts that are definitive of 1990s fashion. Grunge is one of the few concepts that was conclusive of 1990s fashion, and uneasily consisted of trends, fashion designers, and popular culture. Designer Anna Sui distinctively adapted the grunge look to fashion runways, as noted in her Spring/Summer 1993 Rainbow Grunge ensemble. *Dress* is significant to the concept of understanding reinvention of grunge, as its style was based upon “tattered, mismatched, layered, tatty clothing associated with the music scene in the Pacific Northwest” The grunge look was popularized by designers, however it was short lived on fashion runways, and later faded “into fashion oblivion.” This paper aims to discuss the significance of *dress* to understanding the concept of reinvention, encompassing the grunge theme. Also with discussion, the paper will explain the significance of color of Anna Suis’ performance garment by using elements of design and applying them within the composition image of nineties grunge. The texture and the appearance/the texture of the garment will be referenced with use of a Textile Swatch Kit. Lastly, this paper will examine how the nineties zeitgeist is a reflection of *dress* and mirrors/influences life,

Color is one of the basic design elements used in art and fashion design to create aesthetic appeal and communicate a message both visually and psychologically. Color is significant to Anna Suis’ Spring/Summer 1993 performance garment, as it uses “colorful, hippie-inspired details” to showcase the performance garments’ individuality. The most predominant color on the garment is olive green, and is followed by silver ankle boots, and rainbow accents throughout. The quality of the olive green is more of a lighter, cool tone, while the more brighter colors on the performance garment such as pink and yellow provide a sense of warmth in its tone. The shades of darker colors are visible in the shorts belt, shorts, and cropped utility vest.

Starting from the mannequins crochet cap down to the mannequins platform wingtip boots, the shading in the performance ultimately varies. The cropped utility vest, hippie capri shorts, and wingtip platform boots also have a light value to it, as they shine against the museum's light. In particular aspects of the garment, the values are lighter, as noted in the rainbow accents.

Similarly, the value in the olive green cropped utility jacket and capri shorts are also light.

The element of design, line is important to Anna Suis' performance garment, as it helps capture the essence of the garment. "Line is a direction - a major part of composition- the way they are arranged determines the effectiveness of presentation." The garments' horizontal lines are very distinctive and visible in the crocheted cap, in the matching separate sleeves, in the platform soles of the mannequins boots, and on the flowers on the shorts belt. The garments' vertical lines are present along the buttons of the mannequin's top, specifically along the buttons, and on the patch on the bottom left of the top. The shorts butterfly applique patches have a vertical aspect as well, as they are layered on one semi straight or staggered line. The buttons on the cropped utility vest also lined in a horizontal fashion. The cropped utility vest has diagonal lines visible within the butterfly applique.

Rhythm is defined as the "self-contained movement from element to element. Rhythm is used within the performance garment because the coordination of colors and patterns are respective to one another, yet they contrast, in a unique and distinctive manner. One may think that the rhythm of the performance garment is jagged and unseemingly flows from one aspect of the performance garment to the other. For example, when one looks at the top of the garment, they see a mix of rainbow horizontal and vertical stripes. However, when one moves their eyes to the matching sleeves, the stripes are horizontal and create confusion on the eye. Ultimately, the rhythm in the garment is random, yet it flows seamlessly well together.

Form is defined by how a shape or physical structure occupies space. Rather than creating a structure through three-dimensional physical shape, designers use the presentation of the structure on a level surface form on a flat surface by using light, shadow, the appearance of an item's forms, negative space, and the encompassing ideals around the topic (Masterclass, 2021). In light of Anna Suis' ensemble, one would say that the garment is merely two-dimensional and doesn't have much depth. However, Anna Sui uses lighter, cooler tones that reflect light off the garment's surfaces. The form of the garment is relatively flat, but the mannequin gives the garment a sense of depth and individuality.

Balance can be defined as symmetrical or formal balance, known as a mirror image. Balance can also be asymmetrical or informal, where both sides are of equal weight but aren't exactly alike. One would say that the garment is asymmetrical because in a visual sense, the left of the garment isn't a mirror image of the right. If an imaginary line was placed down the middle of the visual display, both sides wouldn't equate to a mirror image. The performance garment is symmetrical in the crocheted cap and platform boots, as they are a perfect reflection of one another.

Contrast is known as a "sharp difference" and "juxtaposition of different forms, or lines." Contrasting colors refer to a difference between light and dark. For example, the dark hued olive green is vastly different to the flowers, butterflies, and rainbow stripes on the garment. Contrast and juxtaposition have a tendency to be used interchangeably. However, they are vastly different. Juxtaposition is defined as placing two or more things side-by-side, to compare and contrast its features (South, 2021). With reference to Ana Suis' performance garment. For example, the garment's hippie aesthetic is infused with grunge elements to create optimistic sensibility towards both the hipster and grunge era. The flowers on the shorts belt, and the butterfly

applique are merely different. While one may think the olive green aspects of the garment are rather masculine, the butterfly applique on the garments gives the ensemble a sense of femininity.

Dominance is defined as “some element should be dominant, often the mannequin.” Dominance otherwise refers to a distinct focal point that is enlarged or varies greatly from the other aspects of design that it dominates (Rustamwng, 2019). One may believe that the focal point or places of dominance in Anna Suis’ garment is the top, arm sleeves, and cap. Given that these particular pieces are so vibrant, it may cause one’s eye to draw attention to it. Not only are the rainbow stripes the focal point, but they can guide one's attention from one part of the performance garment to another. Some may believe that the garment isn’t dominant because the elements of the garment are relatively the same size/form, causing no variation.

Proportion is defined as ‘relationship size, scale, weight among elements.’ In comparison to Anna Suis’ garment, one may believe that the small cropped vest is considered unproportionate to the garment's rather large shorts. The platform boots are also large in comparison to the vest of the performance garment. It is also possible for the weight of the boots to be more than the other aspects of the garment combined. One may note that shapes in the garment's design are proportioned, are easy on the eyes, and composes a sense of harmony in the garment.

Repetition is defined as “repeating or reiterating an idea or motif.” In relation to Anna Suis’ garment, the amount of repetition prevalent is very low, only noted in the striped hippie pattern of the garment. Although the garment has various elements, the colors in the garment are repeatedly seen in the head piece, choker, top, arm warmers, on the belts flowers, on the butterfly applique, and on the sole of the boots. Other than the dominant colors of the garment being

repeated, one may claim that the performance garment is non uniform and is distinctive from other fashions of the 1990s.

Texture is defined as “the surface treatment or feel.” Based upon one's visual of Ana Suis' performance garment, the cropped utility vest and the shorts have a smooth finish and reflect well off of the museum's lighting. The platform boots also have a smooth texture. The mannequins' crocheted cap and necklace have a rough appearance, absorbs light, and seems heavier than other aspects of the garment. Visually, the ribbed knit in the garments top and arm sleeves appears rough, however it absorbs light, and appears heavier than other aspects of the garment. Texture can also be suggestive, using the olive green soft silk which are translates of femininity. Additionally, the texture of the garment uses acrylic knit, which translates a sense of scale.

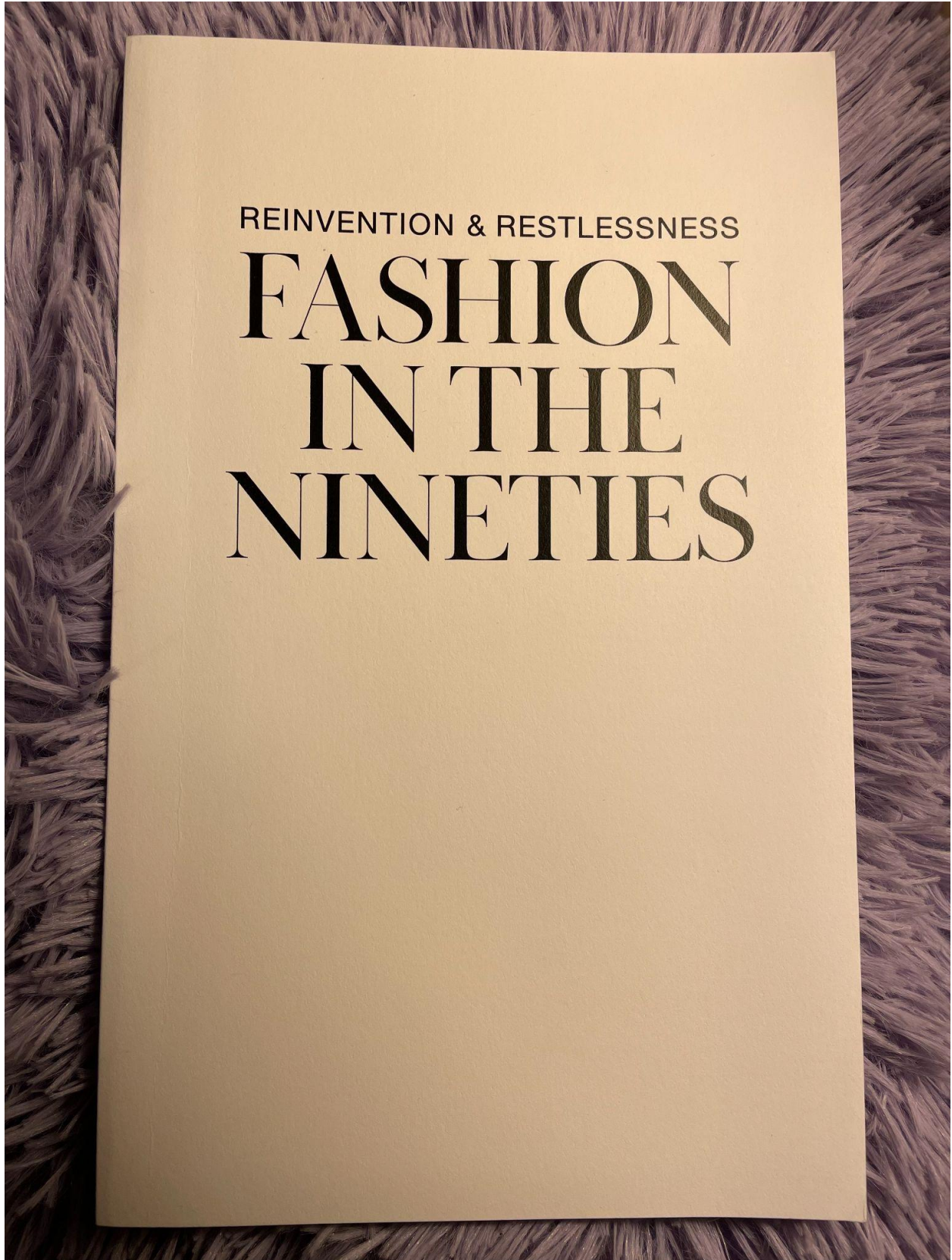
The most dominant fabrics on Ana Suis' performance garment are acrylic ribbed knit, silk, cotton, leather and rubber. With reference to the Textile Swatch Kit, acrylic is found in sample number N35 and is the fabric of the performance garments top and matching separate sleeves. Silk is found on sample 17 of the Textile Swatch Kit, and is found in the olive green cropped vest and shorts. Felt is located under sample 163 of the Textile Swatch Kit, and is present in the flowers. Cotton is in sample N1 of the Textile Swatch Kit and is present in the garments crochet cap. Leather is located in sample N53 of the Textile Swatch Kit, and is featured on the ankle boots of the mannequin (Textile Kit, 2022).

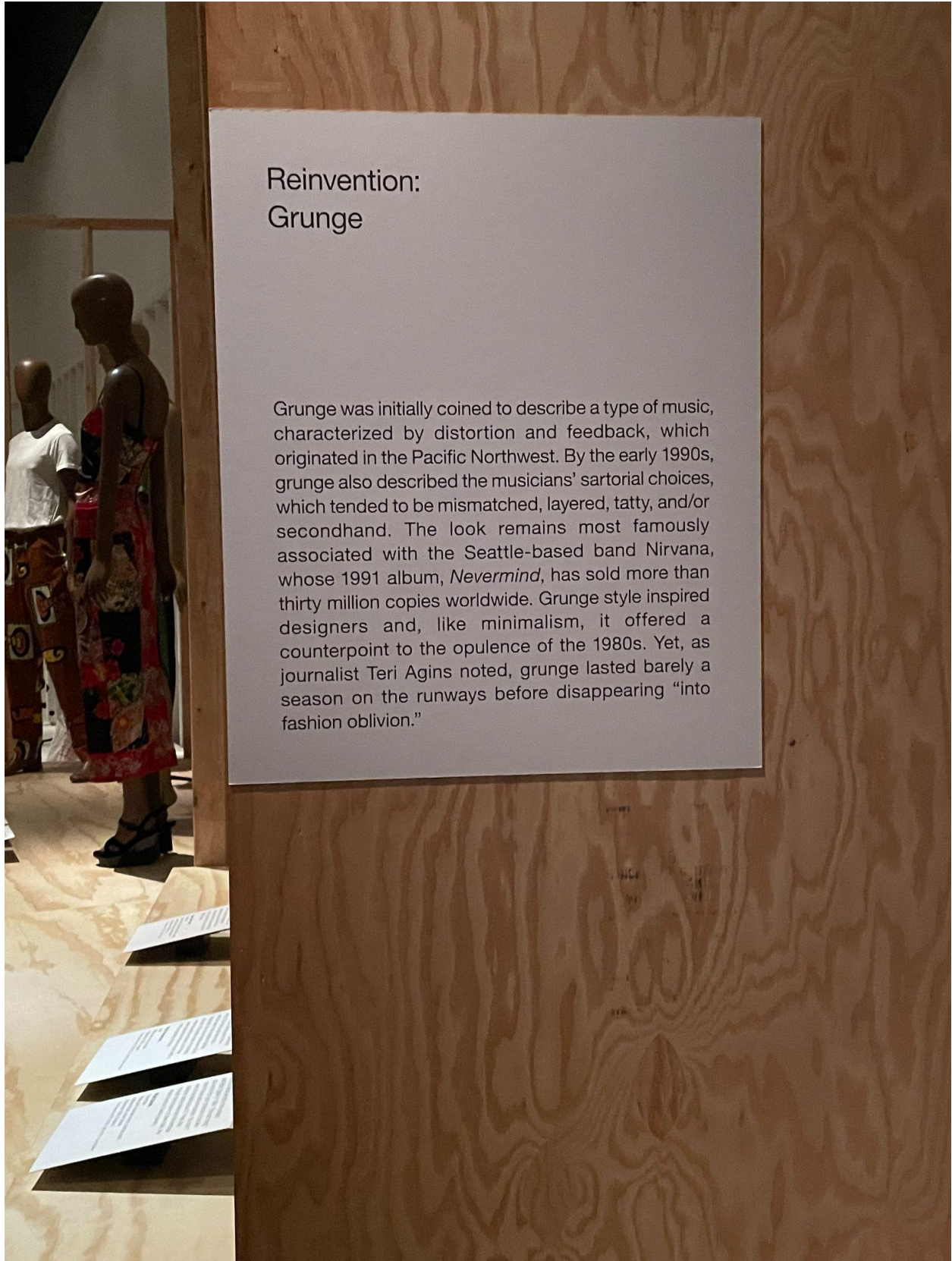
In summation, the nineties zeitgeist is a reflection of *dress* and influences life because “Grunge style inspired designers, and, like minimalism, it offered a counterpoint to the opulence of the 1980s.”. Grunge was originally coined to represent music of the Pacific Northwest, but the look became widely adapted by musicians and later translated into high fashion (Collections

eMuseum, n.d.). As seen in Anna Sui's Rainbow Grunge ensemble, she uses the grunge aesthetic with hippie elements, to emulate a sense of optimism to the world. With regard to societal issues in music of the 1990s, the economy endured a boom in the stock market, increase in productivity, fall in unemployment, and the Gross Domestic Product rose 40% (Hampson, 2014). However, working wages were low, and the gaps in societal classes grew. In relation to Anna Sui's performance garment, she uses the grunge theme to bring light to optimism of the 1990s. Anna Sui was definitive of the 1990s decade as her fashions were engaging and represented the 1990s in an efficient manner. Although the nineties marked the end of a century, fashion conclusively captured the zeitgeist of the times. What's your take on Anna Sui's Rainbow ensemble, do you believe she truly captured the essence of the nineties?

Images

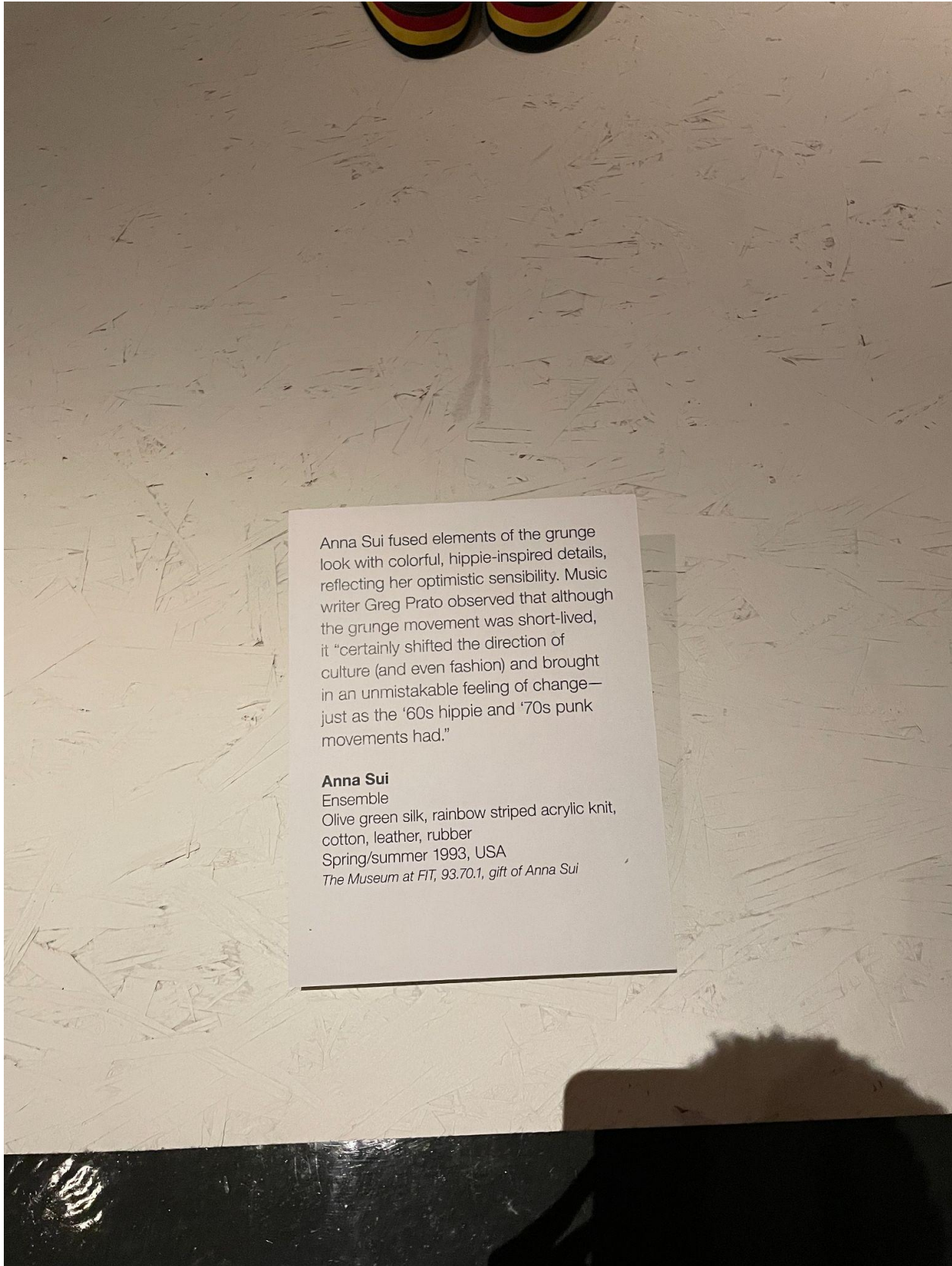






Reinvention: Grunge

Grunge was initially coined to describe a type of music, characterized by distortion and feedback, which originated in the Pacific Northwest. By the early 1990s, grunge also described the musicians' sartorial choices, which tended to be mismatched, layered, tatty, and/or secondhand. The look remains most famously associated with the Seattle-based band Nirvana, whose 1991 album, *Nevermind*, has sold more than thirty million copies worldwide. Grunge style inspired designers and, like minimalism, it offered a counterpoint to the opulence of the 1980s. Yet, as journalist Teri Agins noted, grunge lasted barely a season on the runways before disappearing "into fashion oblivion."



Anna Sui fused elements of the grunge look with colorful, hippie-inspired details, reflecting her optimistic sensibility. Music writer Greg Prato observed that although the grunge movement was short-lived, it “certainly shifted the direction of culture (and even fashion) and brought in an unmistakable feeling of change—just as the ‘60s hippie and ‘70s punk movements had.”

Anna Sui

Ensemble
Olive green silk, rainbow striped acrylic knit,
cotton, leather, rubber
Spring/summer 1993, USA
The Museum at FIT, 93.70.1, gift of Anna Sui

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Visual Merchandising Powerpoint, 2022