

# THE FUTURE OF RESPONSIBLE FASHION

From a young age, Dr. Haeun (Grace) Bang loved fashion. While pursuing her interest in college and later as an assistant professor, she learned about another aspect of the field: how clothing and textile waste can harm the environment. This revelation helped her to see her creative outlet in a whole new way.

“Now I believe sustainability is no longer just a design trend,” says Bang, an assistant professor of Consumer, Apparel, and Retail Studies in the Bryan School of Business and Economics. “It is a strategic responsibility.”

With that inspiration, she created a unique garment design out of natural fibers that was recently recognized with one of the highest honors in her field: the Sandra Hutton Award for Excellence in Fiber Arts. Bang received the prize at the International Textile and Apparel Association’s (ITAA) annual conference in November 2024.

Her hand-knitted garment called “Entangled Echoes” highlights the issue of waste in the world’s oceans. Using tangled fiber scraps, the garment mimics the look of fish netting and layered ocean waste through its silhouette, colors, and texture. “It is both a wearable artwork and a commentary on sustainability in fashion,” Bang says.

She created the sustainable design after watching a documentary on oceanic waste and its effect on marine life. One scene showed a necropsy on a baby whale, which had ingested a cup lid, pieces of fishing net, and tangled fishing lines. The sight had a profound effect on her.

“It pushed me to think more critically about the long-term impact of textile waste and how design could be used to raise awareness,” Bang says. She hopes her project helps people reconsider their fashion choices and the associated impact on the environment.

“My goal is to spark dialogue about responsible consumption and to inspire designers, educators, and consumers alike to choose materials and methods that honor a garment’s entire lifecycle.”

She also strives to make these lessons relevant in her classroom, incorporating sustainability as a key requirement in student projects. Two of her undergraduate students, Gina Pham and Thre Sar, had designs selected for submission at the ITAA conference as well.

“Fashion is not just about aesthetics,” Bang says. “It is also a powerful medium for activism, innovation, and social change. I want to empower my students not only to become better designers, but also to become thoughtful stewards of the future.”

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**DR. HAEUN (GRACE) BANG**  
Assistant Professor

