



GORDON BERNSTEIN

I LEARNED ABOUT MIT'S *DESCIENCE* PROJECT THROUGH ONE OF THE ORGANIZERS, Claire Jarvis. The contest intrigued me because it was to be collaboration between scientists and designers. Inspired by the scientist's work, the designer would create a garment that transformed the scientist's ideas into a new and wearable form, resulting in a fashion show.

This four-part contest came at a time when I was beginning to feel the need to stretch my ideas and myself in my business, B. Felt. The first part of the application process involved choosing three scientists I would want to work with. The second part is public online voting, which will result in an award—the people's choice—of \$500. The third will be the live, and simulcast, runway show, and lastly the final voting, with the top prize being \$1500 each for the scientist and the designer. There are fifty scientists with projects ranging from the virtual to the biological and everything in between. Having made it through the first part I am collaborating with Amanda James of California, who is documenting the loss of the Southern California Coastal Sage Scrub plant community and the destructive power of some Mediterranean species such as Summer Mustard and Red Brome. Her project excited me for a number of reasons.

In 2011 I collaborated with my son, Ian Poole, on a similar project, which we titled *Invasive Species/Unintended Consequences*, and which resulted in a large installation at the Bromfield Gallery in Boston, Massachusetts. Another reason this project excited me, is that my mother, an amateur gardener, inadvertently grew Purple Vetch (an invasive species), not just in our yard, but also throughout the area, much to the chagrin of our neighbors.

Having been chosen from over 250 entries, and partnered with my first-choice scientist, I was eager to launch this project. Right from the start we were of one mind—a garment that transformed from the golden yellow flowers that used to cover the California landscape to the invasive species now seen across the California landscape. Amanda loved the idea of recycling the title, *Invasive Species/Unintended Consequences*, from my show as she felt it truly embraced her beliefs.

I started with drawings of how I envisioned the garment. The model would walk onto and down the runway with a towering headdress of spikey vines and beautiful yellow flowers. Her garment's bodice and skirt would be festooned with yellow and orange



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flowers and, peaking out from the skirt and trailing behind, would be long spikey vines with a few flowers clinging tenaciously. At the end of the runway she would remove the flowered skirt and, with a flourish, turn it over and cloak herself in spikey vines. Only the headdress and the train would retain a precious few of the flowers.

The many components of the garment presented an engineering challenge. I fashioned a scaled version to work out structural problems. I then scaled my pattern up and created the components. I hand dyed the silk for the garment using Arashi, a modified Shibori technique. All the flowers and vines were individually created using merino wool. I then bound and dyed the flowers and vines twice, once for the dark and the second time for the lighter shades.

It soon became apparent that my design, when scaled to size,

was not going to function as intended. My original plan was for the model to lift her skirt, slide her arms through holes, and drawstring it closed, thereby covering the flowered bodice and exposing the vined underskirt. The weight of the finished skirt had me scuttling that idea. My assistant, Monika Pilioplyte, and I brainstormed and the eureka moment came when we put the skirt over the mannequin's head and it was stopped at the shoulders; we turned to each other and said "Cape."

After 3 weeks, countless hours, 15 pounds of merino wool, 6 yards of silk, 4 spools of thread, 5 machine needles, and 2 days of dyeing, I am ready to return to the making of garments for my company, B. Felt. Whatever the outcome, *Descience* has been an experience that has pushed me to expand my lexicon and to seek out unlikely sources for inspiration



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INVASIVE SPECIES/ UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES Part Deux, Descience

BY BARBARA POOLE

in my future work. For more information about the *Descience* project and fashion show visit the website at www.fashiondescience.com.

Barbara Poole has been creating felted garments, felt accessories and teaching felt making techniques in the Boston area since 2003. Barbara has a Masters in Art Education from the Mass College of Art, and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Tufts University and the Museum School of Fine Arts. Her work can be seen in galleries, museum shops, and on her web site, www.bfelt.com.

OPPOSITE PAGE
TOP LEFT: **Every Sunset I Have Ever Seen (reversible coat)**; 2014; hand felted, merino wool, hand dyed vintage silk velvet, hand painted silk organza; Monika Pilioplyte (model).
BOTTOM RIGHT: **Invasive Dress (front)**; 2014; hand felted merino wool, knotted and dyed merino wool, shibori dye silk chiffon free motion embroidery, steel, copper wire; Monika Pilioplyte (model).

THIS PAGE
TOP LEFT: Studio view of front of scale model of **Invasive Dress** and dyed and tied vines with Barbara Poole.
LEFT: **Invasive Dress (back)**.
ABOVE: **Penny Lane (dress and jacket)**; hand felted, merino wool, Teeswater and Wensleydale locks, hand painted silk organza, hand dyed and printed silk charmeuse, vintage silk chiffon, tussah silk; Monika Pilioplyte (model)