Columbia and the Chicago Fashion Incubator Announce New Partnership

Tuesday 12 December, 2023

Related Sectors:

Retail & Fashion ::

Scan Me:

The Chicago Fashion Incubator will transition its operations to a new speaker series at Columbia College Chicago.

Columbia College Chicago is pleased to announce the introduction of the Chicago Fashion Incubator (CFI) Series, an annual program featuring lectures and workshops with topics focusing on design, manufacturing and entrepreneurship for an audience of aspiring and established local designers as well as those who have an affinity for fashion. The series is made possible thanks to CFI's generous gift to Columbia. CFI, a nonprofit organization, was founded in 2008 to make meaningful economic impact in Chicago by providing designers technical product development, business tools and training to create collections and launch competitive businesses based in Chicago. As a result, it helped build an active community of locally based fashion designers and those who support them. Currently housed at Macy's on State Street, the CFI will transition its operations at the end of December and gift Columbia College Chicago with an endowment to continue the mission.

"The decision to re-envision the CFI and bring it to Columbia College Chicago as a gift will ensure that CFI's original mission of supporting Chicago-based designers continues," said Andrea Schwartz, Chicago Fashion Incubator board president. "And since Columbia was a supporter of the incubator from the start, choosing Columbia College Chicago as CFI's new home really speaks to the mission and vision of our organization. It is a perfect fit."

Paying homage to the CFI mission, the new Chicago Fashion Incubator Series (The Incubator) will be operated by Columbia's Fashion Department, which has been a strong partner of the CFI since its inception 15 years ago. This public series will support Fashion students while bringing together Chicago area fashion designers as they develop successful businesses in today's global economy. Additional funds from the endowment will support new acquisitions for Columbia's Fashion Study Collection, an archive of significant fashion artifacts.

"The Chicago Fashion Incubator gift will be transformative for the department of Fashion Studies. It will allow us to bring extraordinary fashion industry changemakers of a national and international caliber to Chicago and Columbia each year," said Colbey Reid, chair of Fashion Studies at Columbia. "To do this at exactly the moment when fashion stakeholders in Chicago are coming together to carve out our identity as a fashion city will be galvanizing for this community. It will also elevate our programs at Columbia in ways that align with other achievements that have positioned us as a nexus of emerging thought, business and design leadership in fashion."

The first Chicago Fashion Incubator Series event is planned for 2024. The annual series will include workshops for students and Chicago-area fashion designers as well as conferences and lectures by industry-leading designers, scholars, and fashion business experts on subjects ranging from construction, product development, sustainability, and diversity, equity and inclusion in the field. To provide a much-needed community of support for fashion students and local designers, each event will be free and open to the public.

The Chicago Fashion Incubator is a product of former Mayor Richard M. Daley's Fashion Initiative. Realizing the significant impact fashion had on the local economy in 2005, he envisioned fashion as a driver for job creation, cultural growth, trade development, and tourism. Melissa Gamble, currently an assistant professor in Fashion Studies at Columbia, served as the Director of Fashion Arts and Events for the City of Chicago at the time and was instrumental in launching the CFI.

"At the time, we had four fashion design programs in the city, and we knew that a majority of graduates were leaving Chicago to work in other markets," said Gamble. "Because of the lack of fashion-related corporate headquarters in Chicago, fashion designers that chose to stay here started their own businesses. Fashion designers came out of school knowing how to design a garment but not knowing how to run a business. That was the space we sought to fill to support local startup fashion businesses."

Turning the CFI from vision to reality involved research and collaboration, with Gamble forming a committee to begin the work with key partners from Macy's and the Chicagoland Entrepreneurial Center, among others. As part of their work, the committee commissioned a feasibility study. Seeing a real-world market research opportunity for their students, Fashion Studies Faculty Members Dana Connell

(currently an associate professor at Columbia) and her then-colleague Dianne Erpenbach (now Faculty Emeritus) presented the idea of students conducting a survey of fashion-related businesses, including manufacturers and contractors in the city.

That student work helped inform the final product, and in 2008 the Chicago Fashion Incubator at Macy's on State Street launched. Since then, the CFI has provided emerging Chicago-based designers with a "designer-in-residence" program which included workspace, mentoring, and workshops to help grow their careers in fashion. To date, more than 60 fashion designers have gone through this program with many successfully building their fashion businesses, according to Schwartz.

# # #

About Columbia College Chicago

Located in the heart of downtown Chicago's Cultural Mile, Columbia College Chicago is a private, nonprofit college offering a distinctive curriculum that blends creative and media arts, liberal arts, and business for nearly 6,700 students in more than 60 undergraduate and graduate degree programs. Dedicated to academic excellence and long-term career success, Columbia College Chicago creates a dynamic, challenging, and collaborative space for students who see the world through a creative lens.

About the Chicago Fashion Incubator

The Chicago Fashion Incubator (CFI) at Macy's on State Street provides emerging Chicago-based designers in residence with the resources, business acumen, and mentoring to launch their careers in Fashion.

The Chicago Fashion Incubator at Macy's on State Street is a recognized 501(c)3 not-for-profit established in August 2008. Its mission is to provide Chicago-based designers with the resources, business acumen and mentoring to launch and/or scale their careers in the fashion industry.

The scope of services includes the Designer-in-Residency program; public seminars, workshops, panels and labs; informational tours; partnerships with other educational organizations; and the Richard H. Driehaus Entrepreneurial Center, a business resource center with state-of-the-art technology, available to the Designers-in-Residence (DIR) as well as open to the public by appointment.

MEDIA INQUIRIES

Jill Goldberg
Communications Manager
jgoldberg@colum.edu

Company Contact:

_

Pressat Wire

E. support[@]pressat.co.uk

View Online

Newsroom: Visit our Newsroom for all the latest stories:
https://www.wire.pressat.co.uk