

Avoiding “Bad” Design in the Age of DEI  
Chloe Zarafshar  
April 19, 2023

Summary by Gianna Santelli

Chloe Zarafshar’s insightful presentation focused on the crucial topic of avoiding “bad” design in the current era of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. One of the most pressing issues in this area is cultural appropriation, which occurs when designers adopt customs, practices, or ideas from a particular culture without giving proper credit or acknowledgment to its creators. It is essential to differentiate between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation, where designers can integrate elements from different cultures into their designs while respecting their origins and meaning.

Chloe highlighted several examples of designers, fashion shows, and runways that have been accused of cultural appropriation. For instance, Marc Jacobs faced criticism in 2016 when Gigi and Bella Hadid appeared on his runway wearing colorful dreadlocks, which were considered inappropriate adoption of black culture. Similarly, in 2015, Dakota Johnson faced backlash for not representing appropriately the theme "China Through the Looking Glass" at the Met Gala. More recently, Gucci's Indy Full Turban, selling for \$790 on Nordstrom, was criticized for its disrespectful use of a sacred element of faith.

The presentation also mentioned how brands like Kim Kardashian's Skims and Victoria's Secret have faced criticism for cultural appropriation, despite having diverse models. For instance, Victoria's Secret's 2010 "Wild Things Runway" featured models wearing tribal prints on bras and underwear while half-naked men danced around them. In 2016, Kendall Jenner wore a dragon on her back, which was also considered inappropriate use of Chinese culture.

Chloe emphasized the importance of discussing and implementing strategies to avoid cultural appropriation in the fashion industry, with a focus on promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. Such efforts can help designers appreciate different cultures and connect with a broader audience while acknowledging the origins and significance of these elements.