ARTS

"Commitment separates those who live their dreams from those who live their lives regretting the opportunities they have squandered."
BILL RUSSELL FORMER BASKETBALL PLAYER

REVIEW

MAISON show brings memory to life with clothes made of shells and PVC

BY KAMINI PURUSHOT
STAFF REPORTER

Performing for a crowd of fashion enthusiasts in the Omni New Haven Hotel, the a cappella group Shades of Yale sang "Wanting Memories" by Sweet Honey in the Rock, a lyric from which defined the showcase to follow: "I am sitting here wanting memories to teach me to see the beauty in the world through my own eyes."

On Friday, attendees of the student fashion group MAISON's 2026 show, "The Architecture of Memory," saw the world's beauty through 22 distinct collections inspired by personal and historical legacies.

Like any other nostalgia-loving attendee, I was tantalized by the exploration of "the function of clothing as an archive" promised by MAISON co-President Josh Chen '27 in his opening speech. Throughout the show, designers made good on that promise with garments that bridged macro- and micro-histories.

Fashion Institute of Technology graduate Mehar Kohli's collection evoked the princesses and mermaids of girlhood: Flowers sprouted from one model's fishnet tights like she herself was in bloom, and another model seemed to emerge from the depths of the ocean as she strode across the stage in a turquoise and black dress whose train cascaded behind her like waves.

Hezi Xuan, a student at New York University, was attuned to the architectural side of the show's theme, manipulating wire and cloth into structured grooves and twisting wrinkles. Another collection that alluded to the architectural qualities of cloth came from Aerin Chen. Chen's designs fused the historical and contemporary. One of her gowns featured an underbust corset and a four-tiered skirt that bubbled like seafoam. Draped upon another dress was iridescent cloth that evoked the bioluminescence and form of a jellyfish. Chen's most daring piece was a sheer, periwinkle dress with a conical, 3D poncho and navy blue hood.

Parsons School of Design graduate Soomin Oh's "Monument to the Disposable" was particularly innovative. In an examination of the contemporary world, she salvaged polyvinyl chloride, or PVC, and polyurethane, or PU, two of the most common synthetic materials, to make entirely new garments.

Oh's designs invited viewers to imagine the life of these man-made fibers from their initial purpose to their reconstructed looks on the runway. Though not all the garments were perfectly tailored to their models, all was forgiven when I saw Oh's standout design, a pair of pastel pink balloon pants paired with a gray double-breasted jacket. The two elements contrasted wonderfully, encapsulating humanity's rigid imposition on nature's softness.

Another designer, Caroline Solomon ENV '26, brought that sense of innovation to the runway experience itself with her final piece, which was transformed from a shirt into shorts by the last pair of models. The former helped the latter don the modified garment, echoing architectural principles of renovation and sustainability. The transition lasted a beat too long, but Solomon's creativity was worth the wait. I found myself wondering where I could acquire such a garment for myself.

Other highlights from the show included Bella Kim's Edwardian-inspired womenswear, Rosie Ding's synthesis of cloth with seashell-like ceramic fragments, Chloe Hong's '25 ode to the year of the horse in the Chinese lunisolar calendar and Campbell Bas' '29 quirky manipulation of bows.

Perhaps the most thematic collection from the show was designed by Guilherme Vieira de Moraes Lacerda, a Brazilian artist who graduated from Parsons. With "Liminality," Lacerda used conversations with relatives, family photographs and his own experiences to craft a deeply personal archive. Lacerda's most compelling piece was more memory-collage than garment, synthesizing discoveries like a capsized boat he saw in his father's home city and footage of his mother's samba performances.

New Havener Tea Montgomery honored the designer-wearer relationship with garments beautifully tailored to his models. Many of his models repped the name of his clothing brand, Threads by Tea, and his most unique look featured carefully pleated and sewn pants that defied the traditional menswear mold.

Connecticut-based Nancy Walker presented vibrantly colored mudcloth garments and fashioned cowrie shells — a currency often used by European traders to purchase enslaved West Africans, according to a collection description in the show's program — into belts and hair accessories. One of the only designers to explicitly recall an oppressive history, Walker's vibrant reimaginings felt uniquely empowering. Although dwarfed in height by her models, Walker stole the show when she followed them on stage.

This year, MAISON also introduced the work of its fashion design team, which was formed in 2025. The team of 14 students designed and sewed a series of garments, with four of those members also presenting independent work.

The fashion show's greatest strengths came from its inclusion of a diverse cohort of students and professionals across various stages of their careers. Simultaneously, MAISON's collaboration with local designers kept the showcase rooted in New Haven.

Of course, "The Architecture of Memory" was not without its flaws.

The narrow stairs leading on and off the runway made for a few awkward maneuvers and the occasional mishap, especially for those models dressed in particularly voluminous pieces. Though MAISON had previously indicated that each model would be limited to one look per show to maximize the number of interested students that could walk the runway, a handful of models reappeared in different looks.

As the show concluded, I couldn't help but feel that, while memory had remained at its forefront, architecture had receded into the background and sometimes disappeared entirely from the designs on display. The show's choice of a title is perhaps a convenient one: Its main sponsor, Vitruvius, is named for the famed Roman architect.

MAISON also had a plethora of additional sponsors, including Tony's Chocolonely and beauty brands like COSRX, Flower Knows, KIKO Milano and Yepoda. Attendees could assemble their own gift bags with items from these companies while supplies lasted, while VIP ticket-holders received all the products. My most selfish critique is that none of these pastel makeup products suited — or in some cases, appeared at all on — my deep skin tone, a surprising oversight for a club that has faced controversies around inclusivity and diversity.

Still, "The Architecture of Memory" took me on an eclectic tour of past, present and future to which I'm glad I opened the door. With its 2026 show, MAISON has laid the foundations for a fashion hub spanning geographies across the world and bridging campus and city.

"MAISON is still a relatively young organization, but we have a lot of hopes for what is going to grow in the next few years," co-President Audrey Bae '28 said in her opening speech. For what it's worth, so do I.

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YULIN ZHEN / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
The runway fashion show at the Omni New Haven Hotel highlighted up-and-coming designers from across the country, under the themes of nostalgia and innovation.

'Sheffield Scientific' brings immersive theater to church's basement

BY KIVA BANK
STAFF REPORTER

Seats were not filled at any of the performances of "Sheffield Scientific" over the weekend — because there were no seats. Instead, audiences were led in guided immersive tours through the dark basement of Trinity Lutheran Church.

From bulkhead doors to bowling alleys filled with flowers, the space was transformed into a 1950s landscape for the one-hour-and-40-minute show that followed a professor, played by Abram Knott '27, who believed he had found a way to save humanity in the midst of nuclear fallout.

"The way this show is run, you truly have to experience it to understand it," Alex Gross '29, the show's director, said in an interview.

Gross said the production team was inspired by the history of Yale's Sheffield Scientific School, and they wanted to create their own version of the institution, set during the Cold War "on a night of nuclear armageddon."

"The audience is invited on a tour of the institution on its final night," Gross said. "Through that, they're asked to think about their own relationship to memories and dreams and whether we should choose to remember and what we should choose to forget."

He did not clarify the specific date, but Eason Rytter '27, a producer and actor, said participants would have been able to determine the timeframe if they looked closely at the set.

"Every single person will have a different experience simply because of where they choose to look," Rytter, who plays the Agent, said in an interview before the production opened.

He compared the eyes of participants to the perspective of cameras in cinematography.

"The idea is that everything you see and look at is curated," Rytter said. "We want people to feel as though they can't tell the difference between their eyes and the idea of watching a movie on a screen."

After audience members entered the basement, they were allowed to explore the main candlelit area, which was filled with lockers, desks, typewriters and scattered typed correspondence to clue participants into the context of the story.

"If you see something that's incongruous and doesn't make sense, it's likely because you didn't get to see something in another part of the show," Rytter said.

Attendees toured the basement in groups of around 10, and they were led by the actors. Some participants, including this reporter, were pulled aside for one-on-ones with the actors. The Agent pulled this reporter into a dark boiler room and quoted lyrics from a song in "Einstein on the Beach," an opera about Einstein's theory of relativity.

Gross founded Valley Road Theatre Company in 2022 in Larchmont, New York. The company has put on seven productions before "Sheffield Scientific," which is the first Valley Road production to come to New Haven. Gross said he was excited to introduce his company to a Yale audience that has not witnessed an immersive show before.

According to Rytter, all the performances sold out in under two hours. Gross said his company and the production were not affiliated with Yale.

Gross added that the immersive shows are "site specific" and would not be possible within the current spaces available on campus.

"A show is never complete without the location it's performed in," Gross said. "You are at all times, one foot inside the Sheffield Scientific Institute and one foot in the church."

Jordan Mincy '26, who played Docent 2, an assistant to the professor, said the production was his 15th show at Yale, but "Sheffield Scientific" was Mincy's first time acting in an immersive theater experience. He said that, since the show had limited dialogue, he learned to express himself through movements.

"Immersive theater is so much more physical," he said in an interview before the production opened. "I'm focusing much more on physicality, the way I move my body, the way I dance, and how my dancing reflects my character's motivation."

Jennifer Rayman '29 and Remy Strichartz '29 saw the show when it opened on Thursday night.

"After coming to see this production, I don't think I would have ever expected how in-depth they went with the immersion," Rayman said.

"I could not have anticipated or expected anything that I saw tonight," Strichartz added.

Rayman said that a character whispered something to her, which she declined to share.

"I think it's really interesting that every person who watches the show will have a different interpretation and experience of it, especially considering how tied it is to memory," Rayman said.

Trinity Lutheran Church is located at 292 Orange Street.

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COURTESY OF SAM CHEESEMAN
The Valley Road Theatre Company presented "Sheffield Scientific," an immersive theater production set in the 1950s.