

# WOORYOUNGMI PARIS

Spring-Summer 2024

With their natural instinct for style, the female haenyeo divers of Jeju are recurring references on the international fashion map. Since the 17th Century, matriarchal snorkelers – up to eighty years of age as – have provided for their families by diving for seafood off the black rocks of the volcanic South Korean island. They layer their wetsuits with garments repurposed from a distinctly feminine wardrobe, strap them in with utilitarian diving belts, and adorn themselves with necessary goggles and masks, diving bags and nets. As the world intensifies its focus on South Korea, Madame Woo – whose practice traditionally gravitated towards domains foreign to her own – continues recent seasons' explorations of her own culture and the global fascination it inspires.

The Wooyoungmi Spring-Summer 2024 Collection makes Jeju its island muse. From a South Korean perspective, it prompts a premise of contrasts: Jeju, the raw and rocky coastal environment of the laborious haenyeo divers; versus Jeju, the sunny party island adored by the nation's holidaying youth. The juxtaposition is expressed in an oscillating silhouette that clenches and releases from the skin. Scuba gilets, girdles, trousers and tops cut a body-conscious line contrasted by the relaxed fit of lightweight tailoring with little waistcoats founded in a 1980s' summertime sensibility – a loose-fitting boyish spirit cemented in pyjama elements. Asymmetrically-tied, second-skin tops nod at bojagi – the art of wrapping with cloth – but materialise in beach-centric expressions evocative of swimsuit constructions.

For Madame Woo, who observes the connections between her own culture and her brand's adopted European soil, the historical meeting between South Korea and the West underpins the season narrative. In 1628, thirty-nine Dutchmen shipwrecked on Jeju and became the second group of Westerners to lay eyes upon The Land of the Morning Calm. During his time on the island – known to him as *Quelpart* – Hendrik Hamel wrote the first account of the kingdom, published in Europe in 1668. The image of the Dutchmen marooned on Joseon-era Jeju infuses the collection with hints to the Renaissance: ruffles and ruches are imbued within the fronts and sleeves of transparent coats, jackets and shirts – and echoed in the cascading flares of techno trousers – while Dutch seaman's hats find parallel expression in scuba.

Imagining the nature of Jeju through Renaissance eyes, old-world scientific illustrations of the Nomura's jellyfish native to the waters of the island adorn shirts, tops and the skin of models. The motifs are contemporised in neon graphics on draped dresses and tops – some with embroidered tentacles – created in the image of the glow-in-the-dark graphics of rave culture. They feed into a techno island party sensibility reflected in oversized tech workwear and warped acidized denim pieces. The feeling is cemented in shiny, glasslike or translucent materials employed in outerwear, tops, trousers and skirts, and in glass jewellery featuring abstractions of jellyfish on necklaces, earrings and ear cuffs, as well as sea glass pendants. The palette is founded in the black, brown, navy, slate, light blue and sunset reds and pinks of the Jeju landscape, but invigorated with electric hits of neon colours.

The collection features a technological trainer created in collaboration with the Italian shoemaker RAL7000STUDIO. Morphing the grammar of aqua shoes with that of techno, the trainers are forged using 3D modelling software and AI generating, and appear in black, navy and beige. They feature alongside sneaker hybrids of diving boots and sandals with the slightest hints of Renaissance clogs. Leather and nylon bags inspired by those carried by the haenyeo divers materialise in the ball shapes of their characteristic floating devices, or in the silhouettes of half-moon nets, some veiled in tulle overlays for aquatic effect. Pochettes, bum-bags, small leather goods and belts draw on the utilitarian accessories traditionally attached to the waistbands of the haenyeo.

“The worldwide fascination with my country is thrilling to me. As a South Korean designer, I was always interested in cultures and history different to my own: Parisian mentality, the Belle Époque, British literature. Now, I want to portray my own culture to the rest of the world, from a South Korean perspective. It's a way for me to reflect on our traditions through the contemporary reality of the youth and pop cultures so distinct to our mentality. I do it in a way that stays true to my premise: by layering it with historical elements that bind together South Korea and my passion for European studies. This season, that impulse comes to life in the image of Jeju Island, with its 17th Century Dutch seafarers, its fabled female divers, and present-day partygoers.” –Madame Woo, Paris, June 2023.

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## STYLING

Jack Borkett

## PRODUCTION

Eyesight Production

## VIDEO PRODUCTION

IDI Production

## CASTING

Angus Munro

## MUSIC

Frédéric Sanchez at Intrepid London

## MAKEUP

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## HAIR

Gary Gill at Streeters

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## BACKSTAGE PHOTOGRAPHY

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## GLASSWORK

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