

THE MELBOURNE REVIEW

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IDEAS, QUESTIONS, IDEAS
Patrick McCaughey looks back on the Melbourne
Festival of Ideas

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Fashion

MELBOURNE SPRING FASHION WEEK

We look back on some outstanding RMIT School of Fashion designers

Tullia Jack

RMIT School of fashion graduates consistently push the horizons of fashion, and this was evident at the recent RMIT student runway, the culmination of Melbourne Spring Fashion Week. Proud matriarchs Karen Webster and Robin Healy, co-directors of Fashion, are excited by their latest charges, praising the individuality shown by the current cohort. Displaying an intelligent approach to design, the students question accepted fashion norms and think of their clothes operating in an alternative fashion system. Here is some of the inspiration driving the creativity.

Molly Herben

Questioning gender polarisation, Molly Herben's collection uses subversive silhouettes to obscure gender revealing forms. Inspired by Eduardo Pico's exploration of the "third eye the sublime" Herben translates this concept to dressing and gender. Her fashion design practise privileges a third gender, celebrating the unique beauty of an androgynous body. Concealing the body, but revealing the eyes, Herben intentionally focuses attention on the windows to our soul; they are one of our only features not governed by gender. All other body parts she obscures with her engineered garments. Her construction techniques use triangulated shapes, one of the most structurally sound, building geometrically around the body to create a kaleidoscopic silhouette. Continuing her exploration of the

third eye the sublime, Herben worked with a local glass blower to create glass eyes that she has nestled into her textured fabric, eerily yet beautifully peeping out from unexpected places. She also works with the tension between the inner and the outer. Questioning industry norms of focussing only on the outside Herben lavishly finishes the insides of her garments with sumptuously tactile fabrics.

Sophie Jacobs

A fountain of effervescence, Sophie Jacobs subscribes to the philosophy that fashion design has no limits. Her exuberant collection testifies to her recent internship at Romance Was Born, including unfettered use of embellishment, frothy fabrics and runaway silhouettes. The collection is informed by the shapes and colours of children's crystal salt gardens. Jacobs has worked across mediums including digital printing, hand beading, and fringing layer upon layer of sorbet coloured tulle to build up the volume of her silhouette, while shearing back on other garments to utilise a reveal aesthetic with cool whites and sheer fabrics. Jacobs hopes her fantastically whimsy'd clothing will evoke happiness for her wearers.

Anthony Tandiyono

Anthony Tandiyono uses human skin as inspiration. He is fascinated by the way skin hides internal organs, presenting the body as sanitised and standardised, but emotions transcend skin and are apparent in the tiniest

flickers of muscles buried deep below the surface. He uses his dresses to reflect the interlacing of emotions throughout the layers of skin. Furthering this theme, Tandiyono works with suede, crafting dramatic gowns with continuous sinuous silhouettes. The luxurious quality of his material of choice has inspired the designer to use a zero waste approach. He arduously cuts each piece of leather by hand, using every last scrap of leather. Snowflake pieces of waste are used to emulate shedding skin, as embellishments on neck and hemlines, while silver hardware zips and clasps hint at surgical tools.

Jon Cordiano

Jon Cordiano became fascinated with BDSM, Bondage Discipline Sadism and Masochism, a continuum of erotic practice involving the use of restraint and stimulation. Intrigued by the idea of restricting the body in order to free the mind, Cordiano started researching at the Melbourne Leather Pride Festival, attending workshops and immersing in the culture of bondage and fetish-wear. Compiling his experience with the Felix Ruckert quote, "I tie you up to let you fly", the designer uses ropes, knotting and heavy macramé, juxtaposing these techniques with an ephemeral butterfly aesthetic to explore the "restricted freedom" duality. Cordiano's dramatic knotted dresses rise, buoy-like, in a series of contorted loops contrasting his hand painted sheer flitting frocks that perch as butterflies on the body.



INFORMATION

These students join the ranks of luminous RMIT graduates including Arnsdorf, Dhini, Material-ByProduct, Sarah Schofield and Toni Maticovski whose garments were also on display at the RMIT Alumni Exhibition during Melbourne Spring Fashion Week.

Red Carpet Ambush

Georgia McCorkill brings a new dynamic to the red carpet.

Tullia Jack

Georgia McCorkill is traversing fashion's new frontier. The inclusively critical designer is using her haute couture skills to ignite discussion and awareness of environmental issues facing the fashion industry in the aspirational setting of the red carpet. Using the medium of occasion wear, the forward thinking designer includes a wide audience in her message, facilitating the spread of environmentally sustainable ideals in fashion, and fostering ideas about alternative fashion production methods. She parades concepts such as low impact materials, recycling, zero waste and low impact colouring. McCorkill describes it perfectly: "The project is based on the premise that a gown is an engaging exemplar that can be used to speak more generally about questions of waste, consumption and life cycle thinking."

These ideals of sustainable fashion have been floating around on the margins of the fashion world, but McCorkill is one of the first to present these ideas to a wide audience in a palatable format. She has forged relationships with celebrities, stylists and publicists to ensure her dresses grace many major red carpet events throughout Australia. McCorkill works one on one with each red carpet attendee and tailors a dress to their personal style using one or more of her many design for sustainability approaches. The starlet is involved throughout the process, thus gaining insight into sustainable fashion issues, and on the evening is able to discuss environmental issues facing the fashion industry with the media, and hopefully in this way bring these ideas into the homes of thousands of Australians.

To further strengthen the impact of her ideas, McCorkill makes garments in an alternative aesthetic to the "Pretty Princess" model subscribed to by Ms WAG et al, and her fabulously unusual creations are accordingly divisive. At the Logies in 2011 her dress for Winners and Losers' star Zoe Tuckwell-Smith made several best dressed lists, and also The Herald Sun's worst dressed. Designers who can cause such a stir are assured of discussion around their designs and the fallout is the interest and involvement of the wider community, who McCorkill aims to include in discussion of sustainable fashion ideas.

So what is sustainable fashion, how does McCorkill approach it and what does it mean to the wider community? Sustainable fashion has been described as an oxymoron: how can something at the pinnacle of consumer driven growth with

deeply entrenched "planned obsolescence" ever be thought of as sustainable?

In McCorkill's design practice she experiments with different approaches to fashion design for sustainability. Just as there are many definitions of sustainability incorporating the three pillars of people, planet and profit, so there are also a plethora of approaches. Some of the best recognised include organic, non-toxic dyeing, recycling, local and fair trade. McCorkill experiments with all of these ideas in her design practice, using her individual approach to make each tool relevant to her studio and client.

One technique she has become well recognised for is her up-cycling of fabric remnants, drawing attention to the fabric waste that occurs as a by-product of conventional manufacturing techniques. Couture houses generate large remnants in the production of their one-off bridal gowns. While this barely touches the volumes of waste sent to landfill by the mass market sector, these high quality off-cuts represent a valuable resource to her non-commercial design practice. McCorkill has developed an approach to utilising these unorthodox resources. Collecting donations she works with the fabric directly onto cork board on the walls of her studio where she visualises how each individual scrap will work with the next, until in her mind an aesthetically and structurally perfect garment is created. She then drapes, pins and sews the garment, and works with the client to ensure fitting and style reflects the personality of the wearer. This is the technique she used to dress Zoe Tuckwell-Smith.

Another method she uses is natural plant dyeing, experimenting with eucalyptus leaves and vegetables. These produce lovely marbled effects, but McCorkill finds that each batch varies by colour intensity depending on the plant, temperature, and length of time the fabric is immersed. McCorkill is the first to admit that these techniques may not have a mass application, as commercial fashion production often requires stringent colour standards. She also struggles with the idea of using food for 'superficial' surface design in a world where food resources are becoming ever more stretched, and thoughtful colouration remains a journey for the designer.

Perhaps her most innovative and radical approach to sustainable fashion is a technique she developed to acknowledge that her creations are not eternal. In a humble step for a fashion designer, often caught in the mindset that their masterpieces should be treasured for generations,



McCorkill has created a conceptual framework for occasion dressing for disassembly. Keeping the fabric uncut, the designer drapes and folds beautiful hand stitching in feature threads as a decorative aspect to create the garment. McCorkill also uses smaller bits of fabric offcuts to twist decorative cording which is used to highlight a shoulder or waist. Because of the free form nature of these eye-catching creations, it is easy for a stylist or wearer to drape and tie the dress in different ways, creating personal interpretations. This happened to McCorkill's *Spirit of the Black Dress* entry where the dress was interpreted three different ways for the photoshoot, media launch and runway parade. At first confronted that the dress wasn't worn as she intended, on further reflection McCorkill found this event to be inspiring in her mission to make innovative

and individualistic garments, and she aims to make each garment easily customisable. Once the wearer tires of the current incarnation or worn to the specific occasion, it is able to be disassembled into its original pieces of fabric, then fashioned once more into a new form.

These different approaches to sustainable fashion, along with McCorkill's inclusion of the wearer in her design process, have led to many interesting and thought-provoking discussions in her studio, the media and wider community. Her spirit of activism, bringing moments of clarity and interest to the living rooms of everyday people through events such as the Logies and the Brownlow Medal, along with her honesty and hope for a better fashion future, should see many more discussions arise, bringing the wider fashion systems towards sustainability.

Spring Racing

Richard Nylon: a dandified larrikin

When it comes to Spring Racing, this Melbourne milliner is in the thick of it, and is forging a reputation well beyond our shores.

Tullia Jack

Richard Nylon's hats are the new icons of Australian design sensibility, bold and perfectly executed. He is currently enjoying a groundswell of national and international acclaim including exhibitions at the Sydney Powerhouse Museum and the Queensland Art Gallery, and placing as a finalist in the Hat Designer of the Year in 'Premiere Classe' in Paris.

The popular milliner prepares for Spring Racing Carnival in a fluster of activity, sewing madly until all hours to fill orders for the likes of Kate Bosworth, Jennifer Hawkins and Jessica Hart. His meteoric popularity is no accident; Nylon has been dedicated to his craft, furiously creating knockout headpieces since the 1980s. With hats comes a natural affinity for Spring Racing Carnival, and this season is one of the busiest that the hatting maestro has seen. Judging Fashions on the Field and a

“The best accessory is a smile, it's all about having fun and not taking yourself too seriously.”

swathe of invitations to the most glamorous marquees belie the hard work that goes into creating a business from the ephemeral yet glamorous world of hat couture.

Dedication is something that Nylon has in spades. I caught him in the moments between trips showcasing his handiwork throughout the region. He has recently travelled to Shanghai where he exhibited with fellow Australian milliner

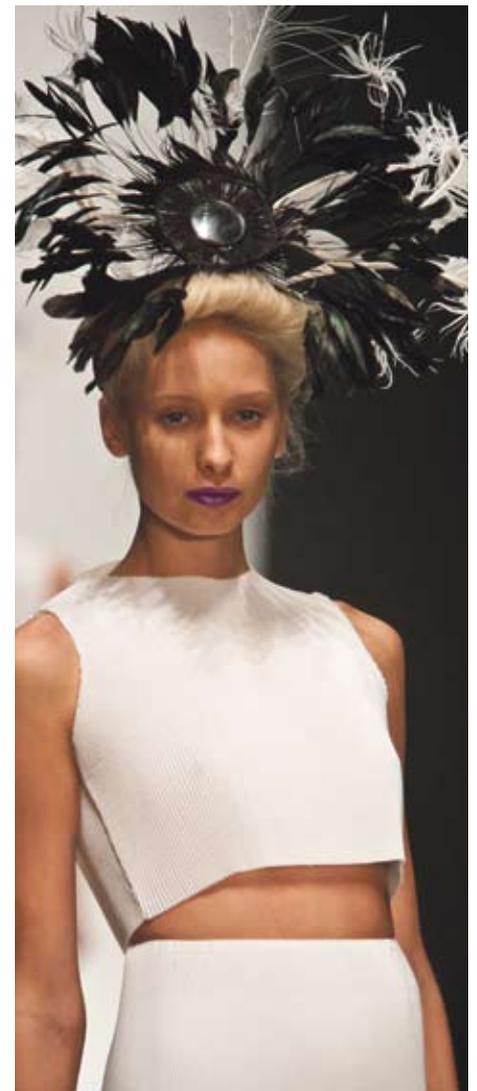
Kim Fletcher and he has just arrived back from Auckland where he helped the Victoria Racing Club to promote The Melbourne Cup Business Network to our antipodean cousins.

Nylon embraces Spring Racing as an opportunity to extend the horizons of head wear possibility. It's his time to shine, providing him the opportunity to create inspirational pieces for the myriad of fashion doyennes who grace his studio.

Nylon loves the challenge of working within the personal style of each of his clients, creating his fantastical pieces against the existing backdrop of each outfit and personality. "Hats are generally made after the international collections, and this is an opportunity to work with existing trends, but then push it further through amazing head gear." Nylon is also famous for his collaborations with Australian designers, most notably Fitzroy couturier, Gwendolynne Burkin. The pair have been sharing inspiration, and red carpets, since 2000.

Speaking about the upcoming race season, Nylon is excited about the exuberant colour blocking that is staring to appear track-side. "The big news is bright colours; clashing lime and red or aqua and orange," although he cautions against more than three colours at a time.

When I ask him his tips for a perfect race day he laughs. "The best accessory is a smile, it's all about having fun and not taking yourself too seriously," then adds mischievously, "and don't drink too much!"



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