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# Class of 2021 poised to make their mark

Singapore's graduating fashion designers stand out with their fearlessness and sophistication in addressing socio-cultural or deeply personal issues

Jeffrey Yan

This is usually the time of the year when the nation's brightest fashion design students take to the runways to showcase their collections – the culmination of months of research and hard work.

They are part of the next generation to carry the design torch forth and their work forms a snapshot of what the future of fashion could look like.

While runway shows in front of a live audience might not be possible this year, the message that these designers want to get across is no less diminished. Amid restrictions and challenges, these graduates assert that creativity, resilience and self-reliance can flourish. For them, fashion is a vehicle through which they can explore issues pertaining to identity, society, heritage and multi-culturalism. These, of course, have always been issues at the heart of Singapore's identity as a nation. They are, however, even more pertinent today, making for rich fodder when it comes to creative authorship.

Ms Jackie Yoong, fashion and textiles curator at the Asian Civilisations Museum, which is currently staging #FashionFest, finds that the concept of contemporary Singaporean fashion – beliefs that local fashion occupies a unique position in Asian culture –

"As a cosmopolitan port city open to migrants and ideas over the past two centuries, Singaporean style has always been characterised by a creative, national style. Singaporean fashion embraces designs, silhouettes and materials from Asia and beyond – reflecting our location in South-east Asia, our colonial past and our ancestral cultures, especially from China, India and the West."

She sees this spirit as something that "continues to manifest itself in contemporary Singaporean fashion", and the thing that excites her most about the landscape today is the coming together of its many voices.

Veteran fashion designer Goh Lai Chan, who has 30 years of experience under his belt, also notes this new-found solidarity in the industry that he believes is propelling it forward.

"Today, we see established designers standing shoulder to shoulder with a new generation, Singaporean brands collaborating with businesses in Asia, and the Government lending its support," he says.

As a result, he finds that young Singaporean designers today are talented, fearless, and equipped with knowledge, contacts and support systems. He adds: "With the right support, I am confident that they will succeed."

The 57-year-old himself plays a key part in moving the industry forward. For several years now, Goh has served as one of the mentors of the Harper's Bazaar Asia NewGen Fashion Award, alongside the magazine's editors and other industry insiders, helping young talent to hone their skills, refine their craftsmanship and translate their work on a commercial level. The awards were established in 2013 to nurture the region's emerging talents in all aspects of the fashion industry.

Last year, at the height of the pandemic, Harper's Bazaar partnered with Singapore's Textiles and Fashion Federation (TaFF) on A New Slate – an initiative to support previous local NewGen winners Silvia Teh and Rena Kok with a commercial platform. The exclusive designs that these women created were given a big media boost by the publication and retail support by TaFF's online marketplace One Orchard Store (One Orchard store) and Design Orchard.

Ms Semeon Ho, TaFF's chief executive, thinks that the industry is on the verge of entering its next chapter.

"I believe that the Singaporean fashion industry has reached a high point in the past decade," she says.

"With families being more affluent, parents are more supportive of younger Singaporeans pursuing fashion. We also see more Singaporeans willing to support local labels. This could be a result of social media, which enables young brands to expand their outreach quickly."

What excites her the most about this younger wave of brands and designers is their "passion and willingness to experiment".

"I'm also inspired by their willingness to collaborate," she adds. "We've seen many brands pairing up to complement each other with products that are interesting to their joint market segments, such as the partnership between local fashion brand VENI VIDI VICI (fashion label) and Pinksalt (fashion label) The Missing Piece."

The elements of community and collaboration noted by Ms Ho, Ms Yoong and Goh are indeed present in the works of many of this year's graduating designers, who while real, stand out are also their fearlessness and originality in addressing socio-cultural or deeply personal issues.

In a reflection of a changing, more conscious world, many are also championing slow fashion and more sustainable ways of creating.

Here, some of Singapore's best new design talents talk about their graduate collections. For a more comprehensive list, go to [harpersbazaar.com.sg](http://harpersbazaar.com.sg).



NGUYEN LE HUONG GIANG, 19,  
RAFFLES DESIGN INSTITUTE  
SINGAPORE

"The collection is based on maximalism and the concept of 'more is more'. I wanted it to be over the top, visually exciting and individualistic. She is patchworking from the Baroque era and the starting point was colour play."

I was also contemplating the idea of maximalism because sometimes I feel people need to have fantasy; they need to dream. Colour and whimsy can help elevate the mood."

The main technique I've used here is patchworking, to juxtapose different fabrics and colours."

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ANADIER ONG SOO TENG, 24, NANYANG ACADEMY  
OF FINE ARTS

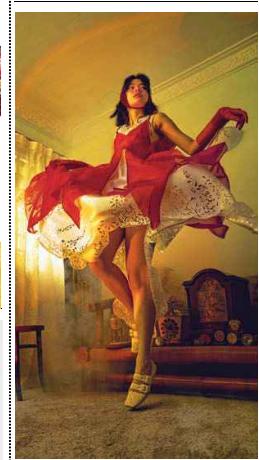


"The collection is called The Marketplace, inspired by the building culture of Singapore and their diversity of unique ethnic cultures and heritage. I drew from this 'organised chaos' of randomly stacked baskets filled with fruits and produce in their colourful packaging, plastic nettings, bags and containers."

I also wanted to incorporate discarded dry-food packaging such as gummywacks and rice bags, alongside deadstock materials, to create a sustainable collection – to express a visual story through the reuse of discarded items to show how fashion can play a role in reducing carbon footprint."

I used modular fastenings such as drawstrings and snap buttons as well, which allow the designs to be convertible – a skirt can become a bag, or a pair of trousers can be turned into a skirt."

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JAYME HAN, 24, LASALLE COLLEGE OF THE ARTS



"It's about the idea of modern heirlooms and the study of material culture through a melding of identities and craft storytelling. I wanted to re-examine and re-imagine our past for and within the present."

The starting point was when I was KonMari-ing and realised the importance of family belongings. I could live without most, save for the ones that held sentimental value. It led me to imagine what kind of cherifiable heirlooms I would leave behind."

Elements of fine pieces and handmade crochet from my parents were incorporated into the construction patterns and textile development process. I wanted the project to encapsulate facets of my heritage and inherited identity, and become my own wearable heirlooms."

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BAAZAR  
THE POWER OF FASHION  
BY HANNAH MCKEE

This article first appeared in Harper's Bazaar Singapore, the leading fashion glossy on the best of style, beauty, travel and the arts. Go to [harpersbazaar.com.sg](http://harpersbazaar.com.sg), follow @harpersbazaar on Instagram, or Facebook. The August 2021 issue is out on newsstands now.



LYDIA KOK, 22, LASALLE COLLEGE OF THE ARTS



"During the pandemic lockdown, I started exploring domestic crafts as a way to cope. I was particularly drawn to crochet because I love that it's a collaborative action that creates this interesting rhythm that is incredibly therapeutic."

I started seeking out local homemakers to learn crochet from them on weekends. These incredible women inspired me with their stories."

The collection stems from the idea of collaborative design. An example would be the pink-and-blue woven-knit dress with 42 squares of alternating squares that are joined together to create the homemaker's skirt, who have complete creative freedom. I think this reflects that community spirit and shows that a handmade sharing economy, with small-scale productions and environmentally sustainable making practices, can ultimately build an ethical fashion system."

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PHOTOS: COURTESY OF ANADIER ONG SOO TENG, JAYME HAN, LYDIA KOK AND NGUYEN LE HUONG GIANG