



Chinese painting, calligraphy take the lead at Harper's Bazaar awards

Louisa Lim

In the end, it was Serina Lee's exquisitely rendered clothes that stole the show.

The 22-year-old student from Lasalle College of the Arts in Singapore sent a procession of hand-painted ensembles with 3D textures down the runway on Thursday evening and emerged as winner of the Harper's Bazaar Asia NewGen Fashion Award 2022.

Back after a two-year hiatus due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this annual award – held at entertainment agency NoonTalk Media in Mediaopolis – has been a launching pad for emerging fashion designers across the region since 2013.

There were six finalists in this year's competition, which was held in partnership with Chanel Singapore, supported by whisky brand Chivas Regal and graced by the likes of Thai actor Nattawin Wattanagitiphat (KinnPorsche, 2022).

They underwent a month-long Bazaar x Chanel advisory programme that covered all aspects of the fashion industry, including branding, styling, grooming and visual merchandising.

Out of the six, Ms Lee's virtuosic designs stood out. The five looks offered a visual journey across time and space, with a blouse adorned with 12th-century Chinese calligrapher Su Shi's verse about inkstones – a phrase about time spent on craft and how people dedicate their entire life to practising an art form.

This was followed by a white blazer with black slashes of paint and a dress that revealed an ethereal river landscape with its long, flowy train.

The pieces are meant to resemble the canvas of a Chinese painting and can be worn or hung on walls.

The skilfully structured compositions are the result of 15 years of training for Ms Lee, who has been studying Chinese painting and calligraphy since she was seven years old. "I've always wanted to incorporate my art and fashion together," she said in an interview after the show.

She also experimented with dig-



Finalist Serina Lee's winning collection, lands23 (far left), incorporated traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy in real-world and digital formats, while crowd favourite Joe Kean's Shapes Of Human, Human Of Shapes (left) drew inspiration from the human body.



The awards were attended by local and overseas celebrities. ST PHOTOS: DESMOND WEE

ital filters in her designs.

"I want to propel Chinese painting to the future. Some of the visuals can move when you scan it with Instagram," she said, adding that one of her favourite Chinese painters is 20th-century artist Pan Tianshou, a pioneer in the development of traditional painting education.

The five-look collection took her only two months to conceptualise and design. The process was, however, not always smooth sailing.

"It was challenging to strike a balance in terms of composition because how it looks on the wall is different from how it looks on the body. I also had to find ways to adapt these paintings into contemporary day wear, so I used more modern materials, like denim," she said.

In addition to a cash prize of \$10,000, Ms Lee received a scholarship from fashion school Istituto Marangoni in London. The winning pieces will also retail as a capsule collection at Design Orchard and OneOrchard.Store early in 2023.

Mr Kenneth Goh, editor-in-chief of Harper's Bazaar Singapore, said: "Serina is such an incredible talent – not only in design, but also in

technique, artistry and calligraphy. She also goes further to future-proof that fashion skill by venturing into the metaverse with her outstanding NFTs.

"Her work is remarkable not just because it shows an evident passion for art, but also for the way it takes traditional skills like Chinese painting and calligraphy into the future. It's Serina's unending quest to seek new avenues for customers to experience her work not only as garments, but also as works of art, that makes her a true modern thinker and winner."

Meanwhile, finalist and Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts graduate Joe Kean clinched the Bazaar Academy Choice Awards 2022 as the crowd favourite.

"The human body is very interesting to discover. I want to incorporate shapes and silhouettes to distort the human body without taking away its beauty," said the 24-year-old, who is inspired by the different forms and possibilities of the human body, from contortionists to human deformities.

His advice for budding designers: "Be bold. Take every opportunity you get and just trust the journey. Don't be afraid of taking that leap of faith."