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Winds of change

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WINDS OF CHANGE

When the HKDI's annual Fashion Show and Image Show took place on two sultry nights in June, graduates from the Department of Fashion and Image Design (FID) blew a typhoon of fresh ideas across a packed audience, as they presented a series of spectacular collections on Design Boulevard. But as **DAISY ZHONG** and **LISA LI** report the extravagant shapes on display have a practical role to play in securing a future for some of Hong Kong's most talented designers.

WONG HEE MAN



MAIN PICTURE (PREVIOUS PAGE) A LOOK FROM *THE REVOLUTION IS NOT A CRIME* COLLECTION; ABOVE RIGHT RETIRING PRINCIPAL ALEX FUNG (CENTRE) ACKNOWLEDGES APPLAUSE FROM VTC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DR. CARRIE WILLIS (LEFT); ABOVE LEFT AND LEFT STUDENTS PREPARE THEIR MODELS FOR THE CATWALK; RIGHT WORK FROM THE COLLECTIONS OF GRADUATING STUDENTS. CLOCKWISE, *CONSTRAINT*, *TREE OF LIFE*, *FURNITURE DESIGNS*, *ALIEN CONNECTED* AND *BARROC*. *CUPID*. 1600

And in the Image Show the students' creativity was encouraged to break the bounds of imagination as they took care of styling a single "look" including hair, make-up and clothing. Thus while the Fashion and Image Shows share a common degree of flamboyance, they each have a different focus.

Elizabeth McLafferty, the Head of FID, says that the Fashion Show concentrates on garment design. "It's a chance for them to manipulate the skills they have learnt. The product might be very abstract or dramatic, but can also be very simplistic in style."

On the other hand, the Image Show is more about creating a whole image that is a moving work of art. "It's more theatrical, like a performance. The designs are like something that grew organically on the body, or a character from a stage play."

Despite the air of theatre, the shows are about far more than entertainment. "They are designed to let students get the sense of what it's like to be a true designer", says McLafferty. "It's an open project, without restraint, and students are free to express their vision of fashion... Besides celebrating the end of their studies and the start of their career, the shows are a platform for them to express their creativity in a professional format".

Indeed, professionalism was woven into every aspect of the shows. Professional models were hired, clothing industry

concerns sponsored some of the materials used by the entrants and the judges for the awards presented after the shows were drawn from the fashion industry, including designers, fashion editors and stylists.

"Inviting professionals to be judges provides our students with a chance to learn more about perspectives from inside their chosen field," says Shaun Cheung, the programme Coordinator of Fashion Image Design. "And the exposure allows our students to become better known to the industry."

The audience at this year's shows was amazed by their variety and sophistication. In the manner of true professionals, students had roamed the boundaries of philosophy, art history and culture in search of inspiration for their collections with themes derived from the anxiety and strangeness that many feel in contemporary society, interactions between religion and evolution, and the search for a harmonious balance between humanity and nature.

At the core of the FID's mission is to bend such abstract concepts to the imperatives of aesthetics and practicability, so that even the most flamboyant pieces on show have the potential to be worn on the street.

« *The shows are a platform for them to express their creativity in a professional format.* »



STUDENTS OF CIDM

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«The most important lesson I learnt from the Fashion Show competition is how to turn a sketch into a garment.»



ABOVE FASHION SHOW OVERALL PRIZE WINNER LEE TAK SHING (THIRD FROM RIGHT) WITH HIS DESIGNS AND DAI FUJIWARA (SECOND FROM RIGHT), ONE OF THE JUDGES; RIGHT AN OUTFIT FROM THE IMAGE DESIGN COLLECTION ALIEN CONNECTED

"Many of the pieces are very dramatic or extravagant, but even with those that don't seem wearable, it doesn't really matter," says McLafferty. "Usually, when you take a few components away or scale them down, they become perfectly wearable. That is the genius of fashion design."

Behind the spectacle of showtime was six-months of blood, sweat, tears as students prepared for their big night.

In her *Metamorphosis* collection, Fashion Design student Tso Yuan Sze was inspired by Franz Kafka's surreal 1915 novella in which a man awakes to find he has transformed into a bug. "I use latex to represent the bug," she says. "It was very difficult to handle the material well. Because of its texture, the latex tends to shrink together and I had to work out a way to ensure that it remained stretched."

The challenges students faced also came from the complexities of fabricating new cloth and hand-made accessories.

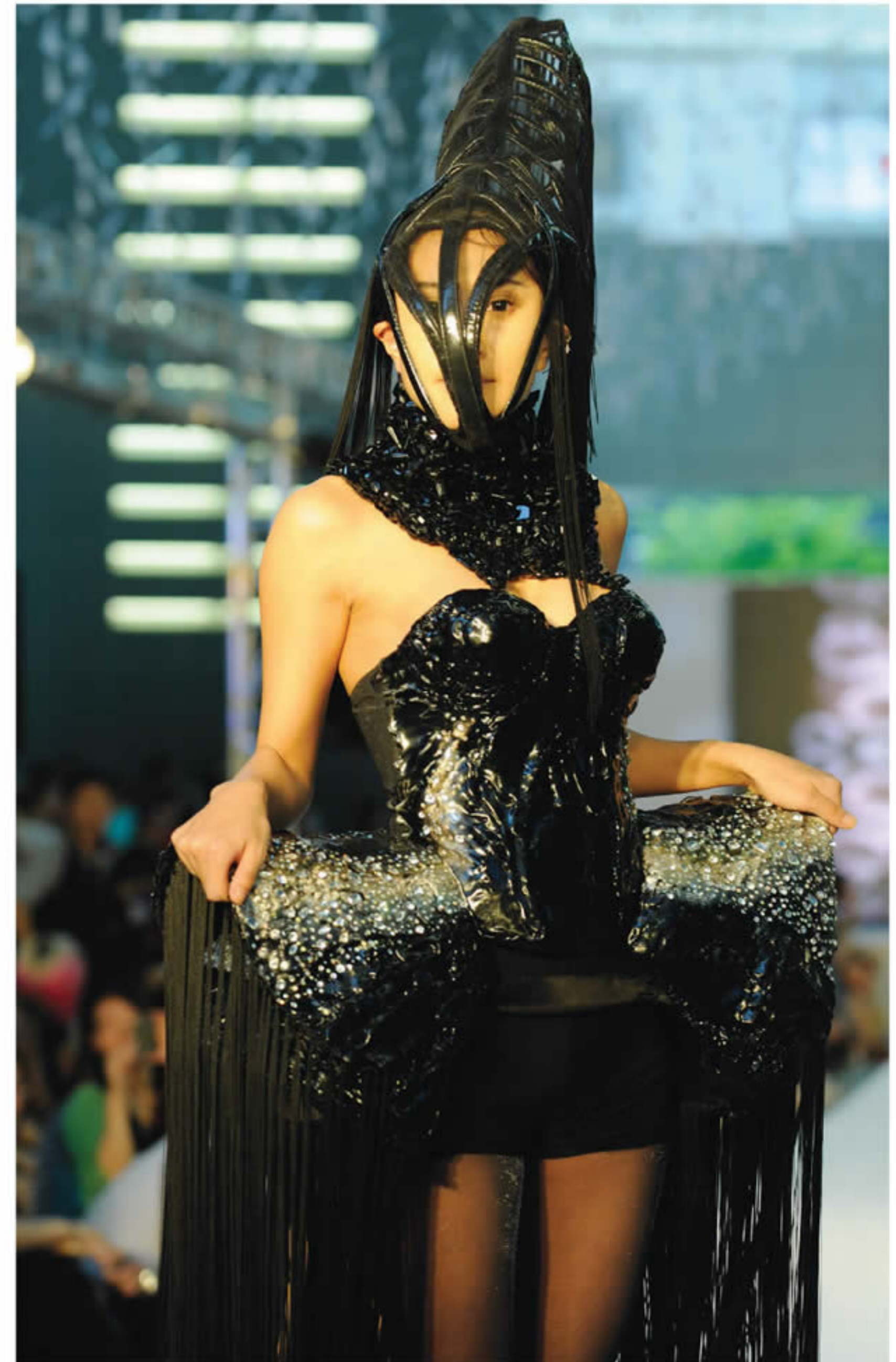
"I did all the weaving myself, in order to create pure symmetry. I started weaving six months ago, and the product was not finished until the night before the show," says Fashion Design student Lui Pi Chu, who drew upon the architecture of Notre Dame de Paris.

All Lui's efforts paid off at the show and she believes that the process of overcoming so many obstacles has made her a more mature and nimble designer. "At first, I was very dependent on the suggestions and reminders of the teachers. Now I feel more independent."

For Lai Ching Yin, his catwalk debut left him with an indelible impression. "From the design of the concept, to the realisation of the idea, to the show itself, you take care of every detail on your own and there is a lot of study involved. The most exciting moment is just now when I saw my work showcased on the models".

Portia To, the programme coordinator of Fashion Design, believes the shows push the creative ability of students to its limits as they struggle to turn an abstract concept into wearable garments and develop problem-solving skills they can't read about in books.

"For example, one student got the size of his clothes wrong," she says. "It turned out that he had made a small mistake in the sizing on his sketch. We had been telling them the importance of detail in class, but obviously, they learn better from practice." Besides being a platform for free-expression and scholarship,



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ABOVE: MODELS TAKE THEIR BOW AT THE END OF THE IMAGE SHOW; BELOW STUDENTS BACKSTAGE MAKING FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE IMAGE SHOW

the shows are also a stage for HKDI students to gain recognition from the industry. Portia To says that many students got job interviews after the show, where the audience included a large number of professionals from the industry.

Meanwhile, fresh graduates are on their way to become future leaders of the fashion industry. Apart from those who work for broadcast companies like TVB, some have become designers for well-known artists, while others have set up

their own business, according to Cheung. Among the 11 Hong Kong designers selected to participate in the World of Wearable Art Award Show in September 2012, 10 are 2011 graduates from the HKDI's Fashion Image Design programme.

And the 2012 Graduation Fashion Show Overall winner, Lee Tak Shing, was on his way to Australia after his victory, a trip sponsored by Australian Wool Innovation Limited after he won the Best use of Australian Merino Award. "It is my first collection," says Lee. "The result is very exciting. I am now discovering the fabrication process of the merinos."

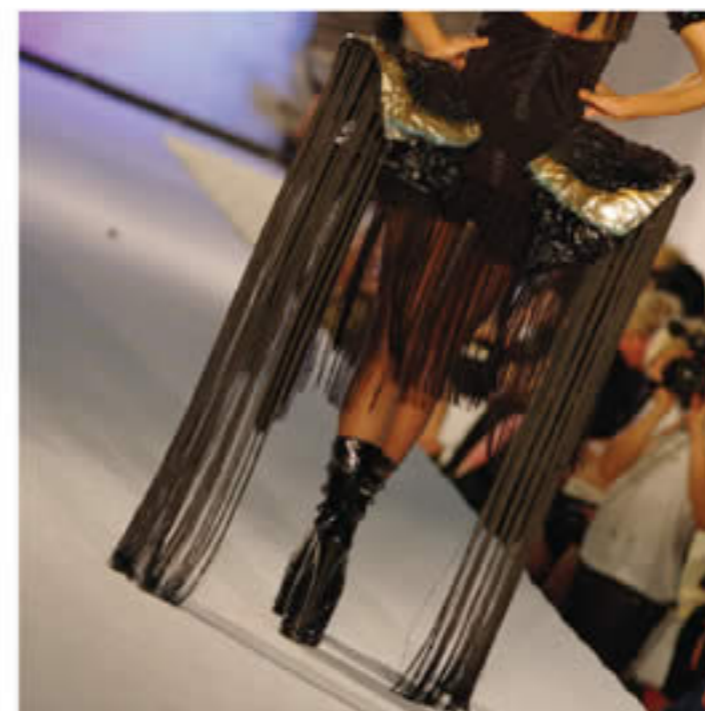
The judges believed that Lee's collection, *The Sentimentalist*, demonstrated a high degree of practicality, completeness in the choice of fabrics and portrayed a natural gradation of colour by applying a technique that knits looped fabric and woven fabric together in a flowing progression.

"The most important lesson I learnt from the Fashion Show competition is how to turn a sketch into a garment," says Lee. "When you do the sketch, you usually do not pay enough attention to the details, which become tremendously important in practice. On paper, you can change the length and width



STUDENTS OF CIDM

BELOW WORK FROM THE COLLECTION ALIEN ACTION; BELOW BOTTOM FROM LEFT TO RIGHT LOOKS FROM THE RADIATION, SURREALISM AND THE WARRIOR'S CONFESSIONS COLLECTIONS



easily but in practice, it costs you a lot of energy to change these details."

For McLafferty the presentation of the students' work is like watching the entire creative thought process unfold. "The shows revealed the concept, the thought process of developing one's own style, and whoever comes to the show can see the strength of the idea and be touched by it."

Away from the dazzling spotlight of the Fashion and Image Shows, another creative blockbuster

from the FID was shimmering in a more discreet manner. As part of the Graduation Show, 25 HKDI graduates from the London College of Fashion (LCF) Top-Up Degree Programme showcased their photographic work in a creative multi-media presentation.

The programme, a collaboration between HKDI and LCF, provides FID Higher Diploma graduates a chance to further develop their expertise.

"Whereas the Higher Diploma students in Fashion Design or Image Design have a more generalised study field, the Top-Up Programme students specialise in just one field, such as hair, make-up and photography. LCF Top-Up students are also trained in terms of the analytical skills used in visual dialogue," says McLafferty.

«Many of the pieces are very dramatic or extravagant, (but)... when you take a few components away or scale them down, they become perfectly wearable.»



STUDENTS OF CIDM

IMAGES FROM THE LCF TOP-UP PROGRAMME
 BELOW THE REMAINS: WAR DEFORMED; RIGHT
 FASHION WORLD'S FAIRY TALE; RIGHT BELOW
 STYLE OF HONG KONG GIRLS AND THEIR
 IDENTITY; FAR RIGHT HOMOSEXUAL TOWARDS
 FASHION WORLD: PREJUDICE OF LOVE

She says that students from two streams – Hair and Make-up, and Styling and Photography – worked together in presenting their graduation projects, an approach that models a practice that is common in the industry. The students' creativity is challenged throughout the programme as they are constantly requested to analyse ideas, produce test shots and make choices regarding makeup or styling.

Tutors of the programme are mainly from LCF. "Students are inspired by the way overseas tutors teach and communicate and by their international perspective," says Athena Choi, the programme Coordinator.

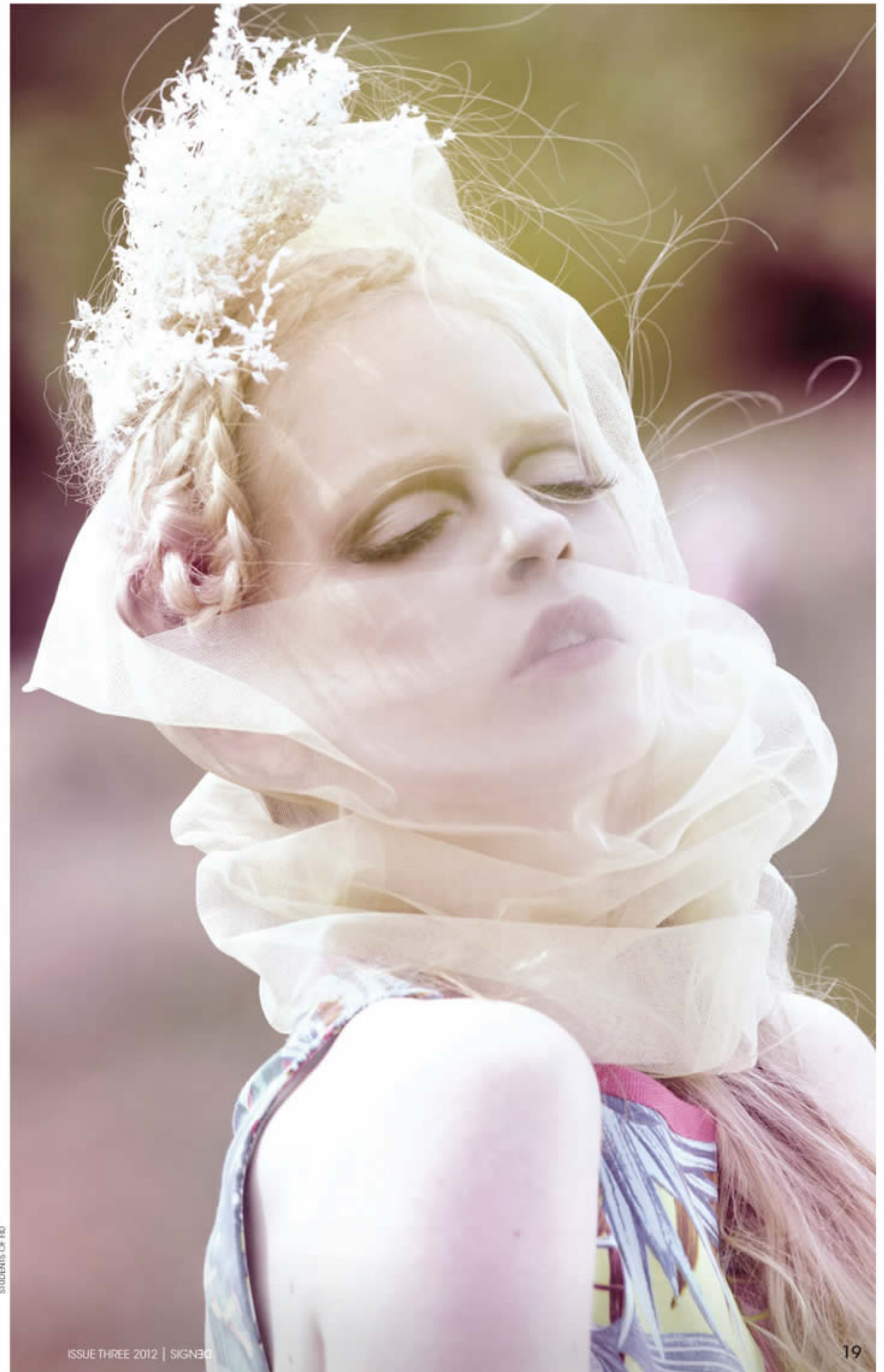
"The graduates' work has to reach a professional level for them to meet the vigorous competition of today's fashion industry. It's obvious that the works reflect a high level of technical skills, an understanding of industrial requirements and the convergence of individual creative sense. Students possess great potentials and have a great chance of achieving their dreams."

This view is shared by Portia To and Shuan Cheung who witnessed FID students grow from novices who did not even know how to use needles to designers capable of independent thought and critical perspective. But the last word should be left to the students themselves, for it is their work that will help frame the industry's future. Among this year's graduates the strongest concern has been about making clothes that are environmentally sustainable, while appealing to the beauty that lies within every person, no matter their shape.



"I want to design clothes that are sustainable and make people feel more confident," says Fashion Design student Tso Yuen Sze. "No matter what kind of figure someone has, I hope my clothes would look beautiful on them. Fashion is about bringing out the personal beauty of each individual. It seems to me that the current fashion industry sets a very standardised view of beauty." But maybe that's all about to change. Paris and Milan had better watch their weft and warp. Hong Kong is coming. ☺

«I did all the weaving myself... I started weaving from the first day of the programme, and the product was not finished until the night before the show.»



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