



January 2014

## Distance learning

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.vtc.edu.hk/ive-de-signed>



Part of the [Art Education Commons](#), and the [Fashion Design Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

(2014) "Distance learning," *SIGNED: The Magazine of The Hong Kong Design Institute*, 42-45.  
Available at: <https://repository.vtc.edu.hk/ive-de-signed/vol9/iss9/12>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Design at VTC Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in SIGNED: The Magazine of The Hong Kong Design Institute by an authorized editor of VTC Institutional Repository. For more information, please contact [wchu@vtc.edu.hk](mailto:wchu@vtc.edu.hk).



# DISTANCE



# LEARNING

*The Travelling Fashionistas arrived in Hong Kong this summer to present their novel approach to design education, based on a mixture of international awareness and a hands-on approach to tools and materials. PUI WONG reports.*

In the 21st century, there has been a ceaseless advance of technology and electronics infiltrate every part of our lives. It sometimes seems as if technology is pushing humanity to the margins of the creative process as Computer Assisted Design (CAD) and 3D printers fed by algorithms take over production.

When everyone is racing to abandon the old, fashion educators Natalie and Brodie Gibson have distinguished themselves by calling for a retrograde approach to making fashion and educating fashion designers. Ironically, their insistence on sticking to classic principles is beginning to be seen as a relatively progressive wave in an increasingly mechanised fashion industry.

Natalie and Brodie are no strangers to the intricacies of fashion manufacturing. An eminent textile designer and instructor at the world-leading design institute

Central Saint Martins, Natalie has instructed and mentored many who became prominent fashion icons, including John Galiano and Sarah Burton. As for Brodie, Natalie's son, his interest in fashion developed early, under the influence of his mother who has an immense talent and passion for her work. In 2012, Brodie started the group "The Travelling Fashionistas" with the aim of introducing a new concept to fashion education.

The pursuit of higher qualifications has always been costly, and even more so for aspiring fashion students, with most of the prestigious fashion schools located outside of Asia. This is why The Travelling Fashionistas hopes to offer an alternative solution to students who wish to learn first-hand from superb teachers with an international base and reputation.

The Travelling Fashionistas consists of three established fashion professionals: Natalie Gibson, Elisa Palomino and Carol Morgan, who tour together to lecture fashion students all over the globe. The Travelling Fashionistas came to the Hong Kong Design Institute on June 10 and 11, with the mission of expanding the minds of local students by introducing them to unfamiliar ideas about design and encouraging them to experiment more boldly.

"The goal of The Travelling Fashionistas is to make learning from proven inspirational lecturers more accessible. We know there are many talented people out there who are constrained by the monetary side of things, and it would be wonderful to offer them an opportunity to join us and have an equal chance to benefit and be successful," Brodie says.

A crash course that The Travelling Fashionistas held recently offers us a glimpse of the creative and flexible teaching method it promotes. For a week, they rented a house on the south coast of England and stayed with ten students, who spent all day learning and receiving critiques from their instructors, as well as eating with them and engaging in casual conversation. This immersive approach was designed to transform the young designers' approach to their work. Several of those who attended the course were later accepted to Central Saint Martins at the University of the Arts, London.

There is something special about the way the Gibsons and their colleagues teach that distinguishes them from other forms of fashion education. Instead of emphasising the use of the latest technology, Natalie and Brodie prefer students to learn the old-fashioned way. "The students had no computers but used arts materials like sketches and garments to create their ideas," says Brodie. "The key element to fashion design is initially learning and mastering the basic art of drawing, painting and drafting your ideas. You don't need technology to be able to make a sample or show your thoughts.

"Without technology, you can still do everything if you know the basics. If one day there was an electrical blackout,



we could still teach you all the essential skills for design."

The Gibsons say that as the residential course proceeded, the rooms in the house became buried in papers, designs and crayons as testimony to the power of their take on creativity, the scattered materials becoming a physical representation of the creative process.

Stressing the importance of a traditional fashion education, Natalie and Brodie expect their students to have a comprehensive understanding of the various production phases, and the skills required to make a piece completely by hand. "If you are a fashion design student you should have experience of each step of the design and manufacturing process, and many don't. You should know how to, even if you don't end up doing it."

The Gibsons' proclivity is perfectly understandable. In this digital age when most designs are done on computers and garments are mass-

LEFT NATALIE GIBSON WITH (FAR LEFT) ELISA PALOMINO OF THE TRAVELLING FASHIONISTAS AND STUDENTS ABOVE A DRESS DESIGNED BY NATALIE GIBSON

PICTURES NATALIE GIBSON

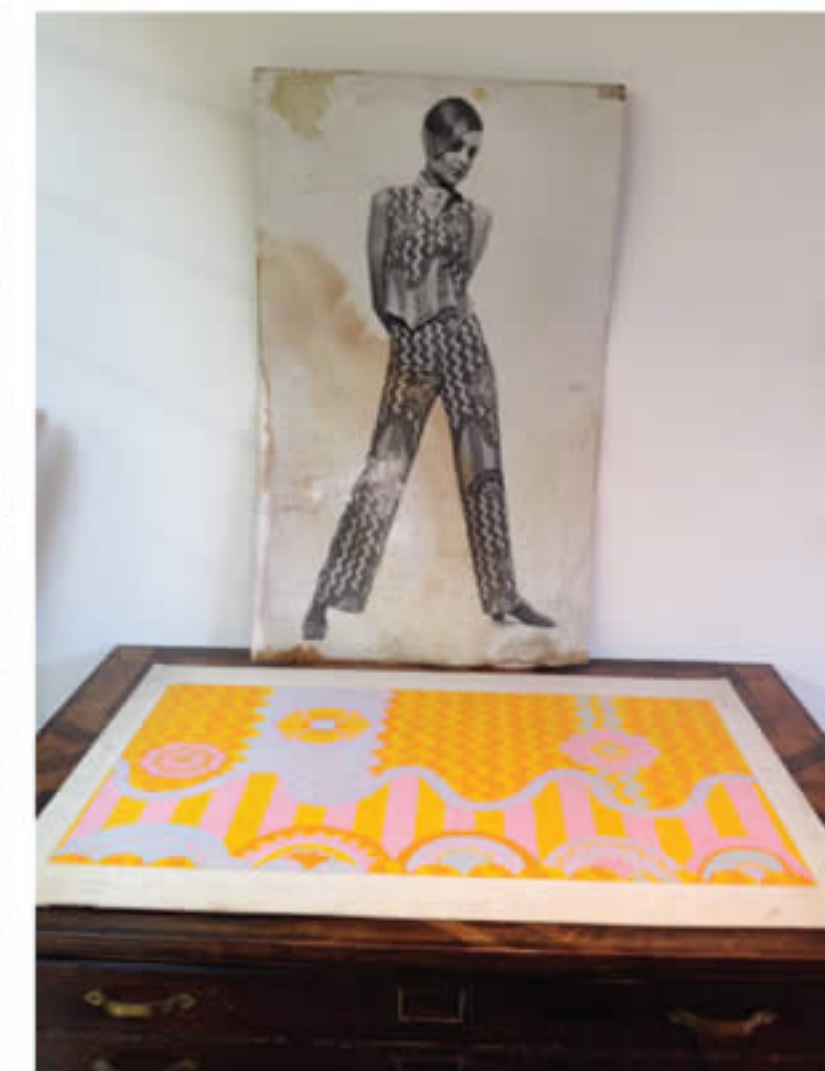


produced, designers rarely participate in the production of their creations, which often come to life in factories thousands of miles away. However, the success of a design often requires a designer's thorough knowledge of materials and techniques used in production, for his familiarity with them helps him envision the entire project and greatly impacts his choices, thereby contributing to the overall quality of the design. Sometimes the slightest details that weigh in a designer's consideration can make or break a design. In these

circumstances a designer's first-hand connection to the production process can have a powerful impact upon the success or failure of the design.

As staunch believers in tradition, the Gibsons have an inclination towards non-digital research. Whether an answer comes from books or people, they emphasise the need for one to find it personally

« BEAUTIFUL THINGS ARE OFTEN VERY SIMPLE THINGS. WE HOPE TO SHOW PEOPLE THAT THEY CAN CREATE A WONDERFUL IDEA FROM VERY LITTLE. »



and manually instead of relying on the Internet. "If you use the Internet, it'll often come up with the same pictures everywhere. Just do your own research in the right way."

When it comes to making fashion, Natalie likes to derive inspiration from the world around her instead of a computer screen. Her inspirations come from daily life, including her garden, cats, parrots and the miscellaneous old things in the house that she has lived in since the 1960s. In short, anything but electronics can be a source of delight for her.

Natalie frequently travels for inspiration and to collaborate with other artists. She visits India every year to teach Dabu (mud resist printing), a historical art that is slowly disappearing and involves various methods for preventing dyes from reaching all parts of a piece of cloth. "There are many ancient skills around the world that are dwindling and, once gone, will be very difficult to revive." For this reason, Brodie says that The Travelling Fashionistas is interested in doing projects that preserve the skills of local cultures, like Dabu in Jaipur, India.

"It is a strange juxtaposition that people generally love and admire handcrafted things but are rarely willing to pay for them, though they are willing to pay big money for a 'brand'," says Brodie. "We want to show people that with brands 'ruling the world' in all aspects of life, creative individuals can and do make their mark by bringing a touch of personality, fun, inspiration and style that the world really needs. You don't need to be in London or any specific city to learn these things,

LEFT EXAMPLES OF HAND-CRAFTED WORK BY NATALIE GIBSON; NATALIE AT HOME WITH HER CHILDREN ABOVE (CLOCKWISE) GIBSON AT BUCKINGHAM PALACE TO RECEIVE THE MBE FROM QUEEN ELIZABETH II; A FABRIC THAT GIBSON DESIGNED FOR TWIGGY, ICONIC BRITISH FASHION MODEL OF THE 1960S

but you do need the right group of people to learn from. That is what we bring to wherever we go."

Though still rather new, The Traveling Fashionistas has already laid out a bigger scheme regarding its future development. "Our ideal would be to run longer courses within each country that we go to, giving us more time to interact with each local project. This is a very different scenario with many challenges to set up, but one we would love to try," says Brodie.

"Beautiful things are often very simple things, we hope to show people that they can create a wonderful idea from very little and have fun doing it." ©