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Tailor made

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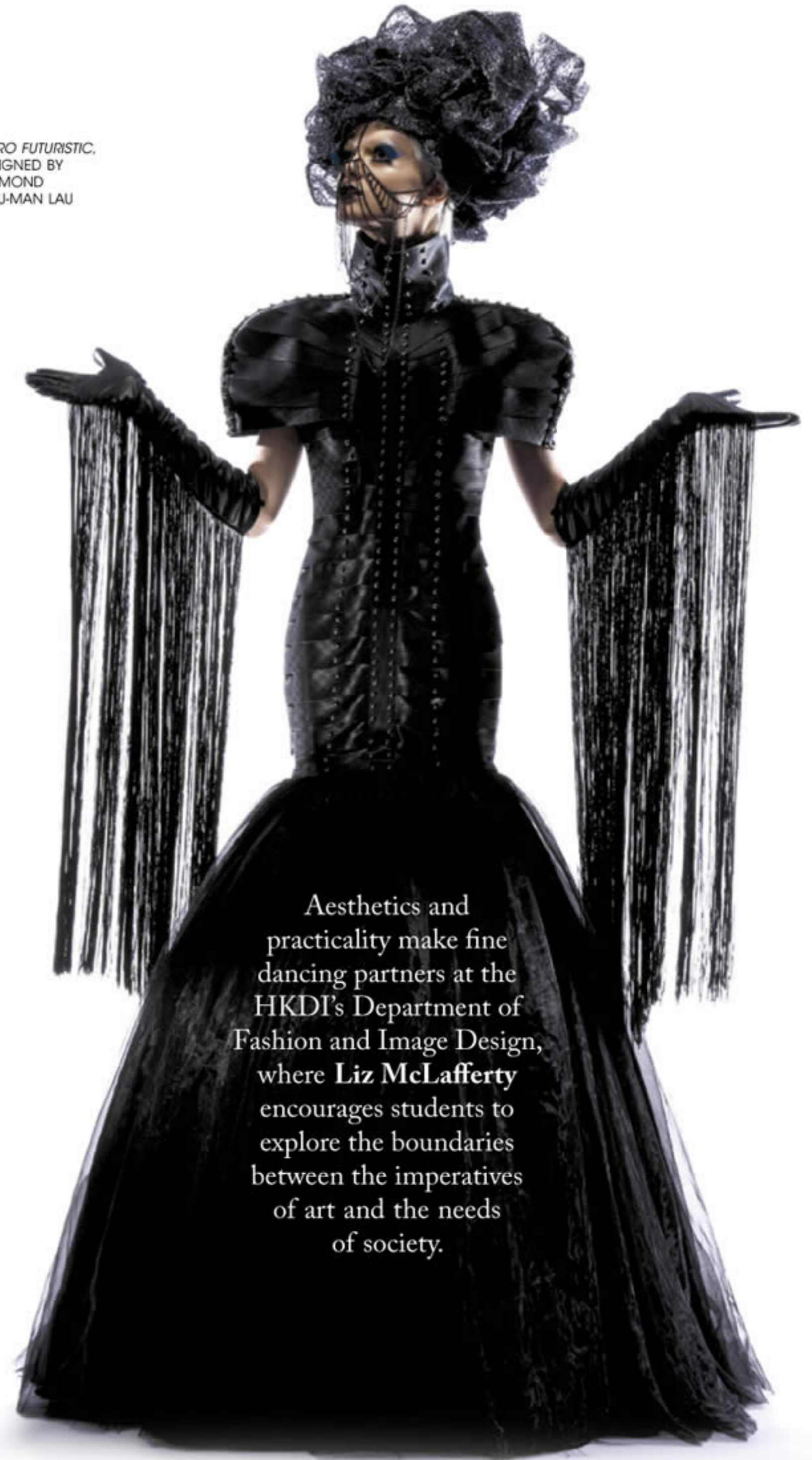
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BEAR,
DESIGNED
BY TAI-CHUN
YEUNG

RETRO FUTURISTIC,
DESIGNED BY
RAYMOND
CHIU-MAN LAU



Aesthetics and practicality make fine dancing partners at the HKDI's Department of Fashion and Image Design, where **Liz McLafferty** encourages students to explore the boundaries between the imperatives of art and the needs of society.



LIZ McLAFFERTY

IN THE 19TH CENTURY Theophile Gautier coined the phrase *ars gratia artis*, or art for art's sake. This bohemian doctrine insists that art be judged for itself and not by reference to commercial, religious or political criteria. At HKDI, *ars gratia artis* has its place and young talent is encouraged to produce work of a purely aesthetic nature, but the institute's fundamental belief is that the creative industries can and should be tools for social education and change, highlighting global concerns among students and the general public.

With this philosophy in mind, HKDI has sought to raise the profile of Hong Kong as a design hub and a centre for sustainability within the mediums of fashion, photography, and art. The creative trades both define and transcend culture – and so it makes sense that a school seeking to foster future generations of artists should also be global and thus the Department of Fashion and Image Design now has UK-born Liz McLafferty at its helm. She was appointed from the London College of Fashion on a two-year contract at the end of last year to increase the international element in the department's curriculum.

Respected for her experience in hair, make-up, fashion styling and visual imagery, McLafferty smiles as she contemplates her role as an educator. Having left school at 16 with only a few minor qualifications she worked as a hairdresser and never considered a career in academia. Working on photo shoots sparked an interest in make-up, sowing a creative seed for what was to come. Wanting to expand her skillset, McLafferty enrolled in night school classes to complete her A-levels, demonstrating the tenacity that would later bring her to Hong Kong. By the time McLafferty was 26 she had moved to London to gain her higher diploma in Theatre Studies at the London College of Fashion, after which she earned a BA in Education. Her MA studies took her to South East Asia and Japan, and her dissertation was inspired by Kabuki and Takarazuka, a dramatic art form in which woman play all the roles with the aid of elaborate make-up.

McLafferty's hands-on experience has seen her directing Wigs and Make-up backstage at musicals like *Les Miserables* and *Phantom of the Opera*, and also lending her expertise to television shows on the BBC and UK's Channel 4. Invited by her old Alma Mater to return in a professional capacity in the early 90's, McLafferty developed the first higher diploma in Fashion Styling for LCF, and was eventually appointed principal lecturer. McLafferty spent 12 years promoting the school around the world, and a collaboration between the LCF and the Vocational Training Council began in 2007, with BA courses in Fashion Styling & Photography and Fashion, Hair and Make-up, leading to her joining HKDI in 2011.

The school is "all-inclusive and all-encompassing of the greater community" according to McLafferty, something which strikes a personal chord due to her own challenging journey through the UK's education system. She speaks passionately about bringing the arts to all ages and backgrounds; not just school leavers, but also adult learners, and she is an advocate for evening and short courses that build up vocational skillsets, which are directly transferable into the work place. She says, "Even if young people don't have the Hong Kong secondary school qualification, there are other mechanisms by which HKDI allows them to acquire credits and then eventually go onto study at HKDI for a higher diploma."

McLafferty likens HKDI to "a rosebud gently opening, about to spread its petals", an entity in its infancy, taking its first steps towards the international stage. She says, "Check back in 5 years or less, we'll be up there with the best." Whilst HKDI is yet to launch the career of a true fashion star, its students are gaining international acclaim and winning competitions around the world. At the recent ReMix competition in Milan two students from HKDI reached the final, proving that the institution's students can compete on the world stage.

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ROSEBUD
GENTLY
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PETALS»

RESPLENDENT
WARRIOR,
DESIGNED BY
CARMAN,
HO-YEE WONG



CHINA DOLL,
DESIGNED BY
LIZ LAI-YUNG
CHENG; BELOW
LEFT STRAW,
DESIGNED
BY WAI-TUNG
LEUNG; BELOW
RIGHT FREE TO
FLY, DESIGNED
BY AH-CHING
YEUNG

McLafferty credits her principals at HKDI, Alex Fung, who was UK-based for many years, and Leslie Lu from New York, both native Hong Kongers, with bringing an international perspective to Hong Kong's educational setting. Both have helped her to advance interdisciplinary thinking, develop creative growth and challenge existing paradigms. In pursuit of these goals HKDI regularly invites visiting fellows to engage students in new dialogues.

McLafferty especially commends HKDI guest photographer Michiel Meewis for teaching an alternative to "the big idea". Pondering life in Hong Kong, she attributes the hectic, fast-paced buzz in the city to the goal-orientated methodology in the students' work. Her objective is to ask the students to pause sometimes and understand that the journey is sometimes just as important as the final destination.

Meewis agreed and he felt the HKDI students were encapsulating too many concepts into one space or medium. Meewis brought them back to basics by considering simplicity as a "big idea" in itself by playing with simple colour palettes, and encouraging them to use the Hong Kong cityscape as a backdrop for their work.

Moving away from the classroom, in a field where practical teaching is already the norm, an increasing engagement between different areas of study is another vital aspect of the fashion department's ethos. To this end, McLafferty is looking forward to the arrival of Richard Strange, the famed actor/poet/musician, who will be a visiting creator in residence. He will be running a cross-disciplinary creative collaboration between the Digital Media students and the Fashion Image & Design students where they will style, shoot and edit short films with original soundtracks.

In addition to the cross-pollination of disciplines and cultures, McLafferty feels that the responsibility of higher learning lies in promoting a sustainable, ethical practice in design. This is especially true in cities like Hong Kong, which often fall short of acceptable environmental practices in industry. In 2010, a staggering 234 tonnes of textiles per day were discarded, on average, into Hong Kong landfills, according to the Environmental Protection Department.


"You'd be astonished at the amounts of waste involved in this industry, not just scraps of lace here and there, but huge rolls of material that are slightly off colour or somehow imperfect," says McLafferty, "It's our duty to raise awareness of the damage this industry can cause to the environment, and education is as much about teaching the fundamental skills, as it is about the bigger picture involved."

McLafferty points out that the European Commission estimates that 80% of the environmental impact of a garment is determined by the designer's decisions, giving fashion designers a major responsibility to do better. HKDI is therefore resetting the guidelines of design, from production into retail. The cycle begins with teaching pattern cutting that reduces fabric wastage, and recycling materials as well as minimizing pollutants, energy and water consumption.

McLafferty likens it to a dripping tap: you have to persevere, eventually the sink will fill up and the message will hit home. "Everyone is a fashion consumer," she exclaims, "Let's make some noise so the average buyer is thinking about these issues whenever they get dressed or walk into a shop."

The HKDI's vision for sustainability connects students, professional designers, manufacturers and the local community. The Event/Community aspect of the Fashion Design & Branding course seeks to raise awareness of industrial garment waste, as well as to highlight the plight of disadvantaged residents in Hong Kong. Garment waste will be used to produce accessories and bags, and members of the Salvation Army and The Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation will be invited to participate in the production alongside the students. The profit from sold products will be go to the Salvation Army – a heartening example of a course poised to make a measurable difference.

A horticultural venture is next in the pipeline. HKDI is looking to establish a garden on their campus grounds to cultivate plants from which to extract natural colourings for fabric processing. Currently in the planning stages, the programme will include research projects on the application of natural dye plants in various fields including fashion, textiles, hair and paper. Workshops and seminars will be given by leading dye experts, research undertaken and a collection of fashion and textile designs produced.

When asked about her objectives for her two years at HKDI, McLafferty says that whilst it is a limited timespan, she'd like to be known as supportive and inclusive of all the staff. She is adamant that everyone should have a voice, as the lecturers and tutors are the backbone of the institute, and in ensuring their "sustainability", she hopes to ensure the sustainability of the students and school itself. A fine ambition and one tailored to succeed. 



HKDI