



News Release

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St James Quarter supports emerging fashion stars in London

A dynamic new wave of fresh design talent is showcasing its creations at one of the fashion world's biggest events for emerging stars.

Seventeen students studying Fashion at Edinburgh College of Art (ECA) have been selected to present their designs at Graduate Fashion Week in London.

The students' collections draw upon a range of influences and events, including the Covid-19 pandemic and major societal issues such as cultural identity and the climate crisis.

The event, on 12-18 June at Coal Drops Yard in London's King's Cross, will parade the work of BA students from leading fashion schools who are graduating in 26 different specialisms.

Graduate Fashion Week is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year after 2020's event was scaled down and staged digitally because of the pandemic. Organisers say the show is a celebration of the enduring spirit of this year's graduates and the sector's up-and-coming stars.

The designs will be showcased in physical and digital events including live-streamed runway shows which will be available through the Graduate Fashion Week website.

The attendance of ECA students is supported by the St James Quarter – a new retail led, lifestyle district – which is opening its first phase in Edinburgh's City Centre at the end of next month.

Edinburgh students have a successful track record at Graduate Fashion Week, with many scooping major awards. Graduates from the programme have gone on to work for leading brands including Balenciaga, Calvin Klein, Gucci, Stella McCartney and Vivienne Westwood.

This year's group of Fashion students includes Skye Bending, whose dramatic womenswear collection is inspired by how women are portrayed in gothic literature and modern-day media. She combines contrasting materials such as rubber and soft silky drapes for dramatic effect and employs alternative methods of construction to create her sophisticated garments.

Skye Bending said: "As you can imagine due to our current circumstances 4th-year students are having to be more resourceful than ever. This past year, it was a collection like no other, being created entirely from my student flat. To be able to share my work at Graduate fashion Week is an incredible platform as a new emerging designer, it also brings together new networks for potential creative collaborations which I am extremely grateful for."

Sophie Walton's collection is inspired by the exploration of personal identity and self-expression. It combines a love of classic and contemporary tailoring, with softer knitwear pieces. With a focus on sustainability and tackling overconsumption issues, the collection uses recycled wool suiting fabrics, appliquéd on to one another to create bright and bold garments.

Sophie Walton said: "It has undoubtedly been a challenge to create my collection from my bedroom floor as opposed to being in the studio. This independence is something I really value now when going into the industry. It is such a privilege and so exciting to be able to share my collection at Graduate Fashion week."

It's something I've been thinking about and looking forward to since first year when I first saw the fourth year work. It's been a really tough year for creatives and having a platform like Graduate Fashion Week to be able to showcase my collection that I've been working on all year is an invaluable opportunity."

Yige Zhou's collection has taken inspiration from migrating birds and how their movement can link to people searching for finding the purpose of life, in different places. The 3D printed textiles reveal skin-toned bird patterns mixed with fabrics such as wax cotton – inspired by the fabric of bicycle riders raincoats. The collection links to the designer's personal experiences of studying abroad for seven years.

Yige Zhou said: "The whole year of designing and making my final graduation collection was a long, hard process. Low Budget, limited spaces in my room.... there were a lot of problems to manage. But I have to say, without the pandemic, my collection may look completely different, I may not use 3D printing techniques at all. Graduate Fashion week is such a great platform for sharing my graduation collection with the industrials. I am so pleased to see our college stand up strongly each year in Graduate Fashion Week. It was the platform that I knew about ECA's reputation for fashion before I applied to this University four years ago."

Mal Burkinshaw, Head of the School of Design, said: "I am delighted that, despite the challenging year, our talented students will now have the opportunity to showcase their work on such an influential platform as Graduate Fashion Week. This is only possible thanks to the generous support of the St James Quarter, who are committed to supporting fashion graduates in their future careers."

Rochelle Weir, Marketing Director at St James Quarter, said: "St James Quarter is passionate about supporting and nurturing local talent. We're delighted to provide an opportunity for the incredibly talented Edinburgh College of Art graduates to shine.

"We wish Sophie, Skye and Yige the best of luck at Graduate Fashion Week – we can't wait to see their designs on the runway."

Once fully complete, the St James Quarter will feature a shopping galleria with 80 different retailers, 30 restaurants, a Bonnie & Wild food hall, Scotland's first W Edinburgh hotel, a boutique Everyman Cinema, a Roomzzz Aparthotel, residential apartments, and parking for 1,600 cars.

The St James Quarter is also sponsoring the ECA Graduate Show 2021 – the College's annual celebration of its graduating students – which will run virtually via a dedicated website. The Show launches on 18 June.

The ECA Fashion Programme is established as a leader in fashion education.

In 2019 alone, ECA students scooped several prestigious prizes at Graduate Fashion Week, including the Conscious Design Award sponsored by Swarovski, the Christopher Bailey Collection of the Year Award, the David Band Textiles Award, and the George Catwalk to Store Award.

Through its leadership in the All Walks Beyond the Catwalk initiative, it has been an advocate for increased diversity in the fashion design industries by encouraging students to show emotional consideration for the buyer.

To access the Graduate Fashion Week platform go to: <https://www.graduatefashionweek.com/>

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