

rexit is not the only factor kicking out foreigners from the United Kingdom. 'Three years ago, I tried making a few brooches to sell online to financially support my studies in London,' says Central Saint Martins BA Knitwear graduate Yueqi Qi. She is on the other end of the line, speaking from the South of China, where she was raised. Her enthusiasm is palpable as she speaks about her upcoming collection. Think Japanese architecture, futuristic craftsmanship and a spoon full of Art Deco. Living in London, a city that formally earned its reputation as a hotbed for diverse fashion designers and creative flair is becoming increasingly expensive and aspirational.

Judging by her aptitude for fashion design, you would be surprised that this was not the career path Qi had her heart set on pursuing. 'I really wanted to be a fine artist,' she tells me. Oil painting and sketching are some of her fondest and earliest childhood memories — but it was the originality and distinction between artists lacking from the Chinese arts education system that encouraged Qi to venture into what she deemed to be the more liberating field of fashion design. 'Everybody follows the same tutor, their work is the same,' she reflects on the Eastern art scene. 'I found Central Saint Martins to be the best place to mix functionality and fine art.

At first, it was challenging to adapt to the Western education system and wildly independent nature of Central Saint Martins. 'Tutors don't teach you — they don't sit down in a classroom with you. You have to learn from your classmates and communicate with them,' she explains. 'It took a lot of time to figure out how to balance my original skills of Chinese aesthetics with Western style.'

The theme of her final BA collection was Ghost Marriage — conflicting, morbid but with undertones of romanticism. 'It's a very bizarre culture in South Asia.' In essence, it is the matrimony of the living and the

deceased, which is believed to bring about eternal love. *Butterfly Lovers*, an old Chinese TV programme inspired by this, became a significant springboard of ideas for Qi's collection. 'I went to an exhibition in Tokyo last year and bought many of their posters as a souvenir. I used it as the main pattern for my final collection,' she explains.

If there is one unique selling point of her final collection, it's the intricate, artisanal beadwork. It turns out that Qi's experience in the embroidery department at Chanel was invaluable, not only because it is a major achievement to boast about on her CV. but also for instilling in her essential transferrable qualities, notably patience and resilience. The purple bead cage is one of the standout pieces in her collection. So much so that zeitgeist powerhouse stylist, Matthew Josephs, borrowed it to style his client and music sensation, FKA Twigs. 'I remember I had more than six helpers for my final collection helping me stick beads on paper as I had to weave it by myself. I think it took almost two weeks. It's long but not crazy!' she laughs.

At Central Saint Martins, there appears to be a burgeoning romantic tradition whereby the designer's partner assists the making of their laborious final collection. 'My boyfriend created the music for my part in the BA graduate show,' Qi shares. Paolina Russo, budding knitwear designer luminary

receiving the prestigious L'oreal Professional Young Talent award, Russo took to Instagram to thank him for his enduring support. 'I could not have done any of it without my partner/favourite bitch @aidanzamiri. Thank you for dedicating so much of your time and patience to me. I know it's not easy. I love you.'

In light of the New Year and goalsetting period, Qi will be dedicating most of her time to creating her new collection. 'So far, it's just my boyfriend and me,' she tells me. 'I'm currently setting up my studio in my parents' house. I've taken up some rooms with my knitting and sewing machines.' Qi has had to move back to China to pursue her passion of setting up an eponymous label. 'I really want to have a showroom in London and Paris but it's quite hard because I need to get money first.' Qi explains that while many young Chinese designers come from rich families who can support them, this is not the case for her. 'I miss London. I really want to do a Masters but because of family reasons, they cannot support me.' Matty Bovan, despite making noise in the fashion industry as one of the hottest, most disruptive emerging fashion designers to be taken under the wing of the British Fashion Council, still struggles to financially support himself. 'I cannot afford to live in London so I commute from York often for work,' he says during a talk at the Elle Weekender, earlier in November. Bovan demonstrates

## 'FASHION HAS ITS OWN CURRENCY AND IT DOESN'T ALWAYS INVOLVE MONEY'

and Aidan Zamiri, filmmaker and recent BA graphic design graduate, were one of Central Saint Martins' favourite power couples. Upon

that fanfare does not necessarily bring about financial reward. Fashion has its own currency, and it doesn't always involve money.







Nevertheless, Qi is optimistic and refuses to let money become a barrier to her future goals. 'Sometimes, I sell vintage Jean Paul Gaultier and Issey Miyake to finance the collection but I'll need to find a part-time job, maybe as a teacher.' The upcoming collection will be an exploration and hybrid of Art Deco, craftsmanship and Japanese architecture. As for her muse, 'I don't have anybody in my mind but I have a picture in my mind. Just a very elegant Chinese Art Deco woman. Qi will continue to experiment with weaving, which proved to be a popular feature of her graduate collection, but beadwork is just too time-consuming to justify on this occasion.

'I think the new collection will have six to eight looks. I don't want to put my mind through the stress of following

the traditional London Fashion Week schedules. It's not really good for me.' Often, designers who quickly rise to fame underestimate the scale of production and demand that follows London Fashion Week and lucrative orders from leading fashion buyers. This is the case for sustainability advocate and socially conscious fashion designer, Bethany Williams. At the Maiyet Collective, a monthly event to showcase emerging brands and innovations within sustainable fashion, Williams explained that she has to limit the number of orders she accepts in order to manage production. As a brand that is still in its infancy, Williams is open about the obstacles she faces as she endeavours to scale up her business while maintaining social and ethical responsibility. 'I'm just not able to take on any interns because I

want to be able to pay them but it is not feasible at the moment.'

Qi is not the first designer to reject the traditional London Fashion Week schedule. The evolution of technology and the innovation it has sparked within the fashion industry has had a controversial impact on the significance of the annual fashion calendar event. The increasing accessibility and widespread content around the catwalk shows on social media have dimmed the lustre on the formerly exclusive, prestigious event.

Now, it's onwards and upwards as Qi sets out on establishing her eponymous label, saving the funds to move to London and fulfilling her long-term goal of enrolling on the MA Print course at Central Saint Martins.



FASHION Yueqi Qi Graduate SS19 Collection MODEL Lena-Marie Zochmeister and Martha Somerflield MAKE UP Ksenia Galina