

Within the Garden of Hidden Desires (2011)

Fashion is art is fashion is art - this statement says it all in the cross-over between art and fashion as over the centuries fashion designers have taken cues and inspiration from the art and artists of their time to conceptualise and create clothes for the people of their generation.

Afterall, is art not the soul of a place and the voice of its people? In line with the gallery's objective of taking art to the people and making it a little more accessible, pitting fashion designers against artists was a natural decision as it would see a meeting of creative minds all working within the same 'space' and time zone.

We hoped that by doing this, it would allow the audience a glimpse into how artists and designers feed off one another and how the fashion designers of today can take inspiration from the up-and-coming contemporary artists of our time.

Thus, the choice of artists and designers was a deliberate attempt to bring into the foreground the young, emerging voices of art today and pair them up with some of the most established and cutting-edge fashion designers working in Malaysia.

The Garden of Hidden Desires theme links them all together yet allows room for interpretation and self-expression without putting too many limitations on either the artist or designer.

Interestingly, this is the first time a collaboration of this type has taken place in Malaysia and the results have been truly provocative.

Some artists' works inspired the designers directly in the case of IM and Michael Ong, where the colour and texture of the artists' rattan head aptly entitled 'Arousing Venus' inspired the designer to create a dress which screams that it was born from the boughs of the artwork. For the artists it was their first collaboration and foray into working with an alternative material-rattan and is a fresh look at how craftsmanship can be reinterpreted. Another designer Alvin Tay, worked with Gan Tee Sheng, took an image of a shadow lurking in the depths of the painting 'Room of Hidden Desires', and created a spectacular purple dress made for a bride who appears lost and wandering in another dimension.

For Faisal Suhif and Jonathen Cheng, they decided to work on the premise of camouflage. The artist not only painted the canvas entitled 'Blue Fish Morning' against which the mannequin stands, but also silkscreened and painted 10 meters of organza which the designer used to make the dress.

In a similar vein, using the element of fish and water, Dhavinder Singh designed a cross shaped aquarium which is divided by a screen of fabrics created by the designer Izrin, and filled it with transparent fish. The designer has always drawn inspiration from water, so in this instance, the pairing was synergistic and almost symbiotic in nature. Other designers managed to get into the frame of mind of the artists, and vice versa and the results were quite inspiring. Munkao and Sonny San drew inspiration from a weird and wonderful, dark Mangga tale of a 'P-Bear', who chased down and raped young girls in the forest. To this end, the artwork, 'P-Bear' which has been pencil-rendered on a large canvas shows a larger than life bear charging towards us, with blood oozing from its open jaws. Running away in front of it is a mannequin who dons an artfully 'blood splattered dress with a 'train' made of faux fur. Both the artwork and the dress are united by dripping blood and stand together as an installation to tell a story. Individually, they stand alone and make their own distinctive statements. The pairing of Justin Lim and Tom Abang Saufi, saw the artist not only silk screening images from his work 'SOS' onto fabric that Tom had created, but also managed to discuss life, death and religion in his nine pieces. These elements are echoed in the dress which show life (green and red) in the top

part which gradually flows down into death and is depicted by dried leaves which form the lower half of the dress.

Cheng Yen Pheng and Alexandria Yeo traded ideas and took elements from one another's previous works and translated them into the pieces they made for this exhibition. Yen Pheng delved into the fetishes that inspired the designer, coming up with a work which glows in a myriad of candy pink shades depicting balloons twisted into somewhat phallic shapes and is aptly titled 'I love long balloons'. Alexandria took the flowery designs that Yen Pheng had typically painted over her 'skulls' and embroidered them onto a see through, flesh-toned lingerie dress.

Samsuddin Wahab created a work which questions paradise found and lost in his work entitled 'Shall we stay or shall we go?' which shows a nuclear disaster taking place and the elimination of the world as we know it. Ultra, the avant-garde team, have responded with a dress which uses a fabric reminiscent of material one might use to fight a nuclear disaster.

All eight couplings have responded to this project in their own distinctive way, some directly, some through an amalgamation and fusing of ideas and others through a common statement and point of view. Whatever it may be, the results have been both interesting and stimulating as it is a challenging task to try to find a middle ground when dealing with another creative mind.

We hope that this exhibition will be another way of lowering the barriers between people and art to make it seem less intimidating and will hopefully encourage more people to understand the curious relationship between art and fashion and the inspiration behind each of the creations in the Garden of Hidden Desires.

Lim Wei-Ling, June 2011.