

COLOUR COLLISION

The chase in fashion doesn't stop at just well-cut pants or an extravagant couture dress. It is in the art of collaboration that designers find the equilibrium between two almost contrasting principles. Malaysian fashion designer Cassey Gan teams up with upcoming visual artist Mark Tan in their latest collection – demonstrating how fashion and the arts can work in beautiful harmony.

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Prints. They are all over. Colours. Splattered in artistic ways across the workroom. In her head, she pictures an explosion of structured patterns in vibrant tones. In his mind, he imagines in black and white. In that antagonistic chaos, they find a meeting point. The balance between two contrasting elements that revolve around “memories” becomes the anchor to this figurative collection.

Cassey Gan is no ordinary designer. She completed her studies in engineering before enrolling in fashion school in London. It was there that she grew to love colours and prints, exploring designs in multitudes of vibrant mishmashes. While in fashion school, she shares: “I had always wanted to be a monochrome designer. But later, my teacher encouraged me to try colours. I took inspiration from Jim Osman, whose works are a mixture of colours that are done subtly through stacks of wood blocks.”

Mark Tan graduated from the University of the West of England in Bristol where he studied Drawing and Applied Arts, majoring in printmaking. “We learnt different crafts from etching to more modern techniques like silk screen and digital printing,” says Tan.

The duo believes that the way they learned things in the UK has helped encourage and nurture their individual creativity. Because it is very experimental, designers find it easier to discover a voice.

“When I first visited his solo exhibition in Zhongshan Building earlier this year, I thought his works were interesting and would work with the collection. His stuff is very monochromatic and I’m very colourful. I’ve got to admit that it is a bit of a clash,” confides Gan.

Harnessing the uniqueness of Tan’s prints, Gan transports the monochromes into her colourful composition. While her aesthetics remain, Gan maintains Tan’s prints tastefully. Within this unexpected collaboration, a conversation ensues.

What’s the idea behind the collection?

Cassey: The Series 10 Collection is centred around the idea of memories.

Mark: Memory acts as the main theme of my work and what I do. Monochrome inherently has nostalgic elements; when you see films and you see things in black and white. Different people have a different approach to that but all are made out of memories.

Cassey: Some fond moments of my life include being in a marching band in school. I loved music and was learning how to play the trumpet. I remembered the costumes that we wore and used that as my inspiration as well.

Mark: Like life, there is repetition and layering. My prints are made out of a repetition of square blocks. Similar to life’s daily routine, there are different challenges and stuff going on every day. Every day beckons with something new and it is always different. I try to translate that through the values and intensity of my prints.

Collaborations lend an exciting energy to the creative industry. Why are you such a supporter of collaborations?

Cassey: I like working with people. Ideas can be the same if you work alone. When we discuss our inspirations, ideas and concepts, we tend to see things differently and that inspires me further; making our day-to-day job more interesting.

Mark: Similarly, my approaches to collaboration centre around working with people. Collaboration is about learning new things together while creating a new silhouette. Prints are always two-dimensional and this is the opportunity for my prints to be transformed into a three-dimensional work.

How do you find the balance and the synergy while working together?

Cassey: When two people work together, no matter how similar they are, there will be differences. You need to work along these differences. It was very clear for me that I don’t want to change his prints. I want to stay true to both his aesthetics and mine.



Mark: Understanding is important. The constant question is, "Would this person fit well in this collaboration?" So, always keep an open mind. You know that collaborations involve new things and new ideas at times that you'd not anticipate. So, don't be too rigid.

Mark, you're a young and upcoming designer. What have you learnt from working with someone experienced like Cassey?

Mark: It has enhanced my practice and changed the way I view my works and influenced how I make my prints. It's quite nice to see your prints portrayed in a different light. I love to quote Cassey's tagline, "Inspiration is Everywhere"; and that's very true!

Cassey: Anything that speaks to you can be an inspiration. (chuckles)

Why do you think collaborations and sharing of ideas should be encouraged globally?

Cassey: It is such an open world now. Fashion can be anything. I see clothes as a product and it is in a way,

product design. I don't see myself just making clothes. In order to do other things, I need to work with other people who are experts in other fields. Then, you're able to push boundaries and know your possibilities.

Mark: We live in a very fluid and interconnected world. In today's context, everything can be anything. It is about learning new skills and taking those skills and turning them into something new. I do believe the art of collaboration should be a common practice for the new generation of creatives.

Given a chance, who would be the person/brand that you would love to work with?

Mark: Marimekko! The philosophy of incorporating art and design into lifestyle products (but not just blatantly a pattern) inspires me. But there is also a story behind it. I love how they translate their stories into functional products.

Cassey: I think it's going to be Alexander McQueen. He was one of the reasons why I love fashion so much. I used to stay opposite his workshop when

I was studying and passed his place a lot. I like how he envisioned his shows. He was very much a trendsetter then; the drop crotch pants and his theatrics. The other would be Zaha Hadid. Her studio was also around the corner where I used to live and I've seen her working with her team. I've always been inspired by architecture, and her aesthetics have had a huge impact on my inspiration as well.

Learning from experience, what can you share from your journey so far?

Cassey: After four years of doing this, I am still loving it so much. You got to have passion. Only with passion and love for what you do, will you be able to motor on.

Mark: Understand what you like and what you like to make. After that, once you know your products and are comfortable in what you do, you go full on!

Cassey: I think you need to find your identity as well. You can't design based on other people's work. Design based on your own inspiration and thought process. I am a firm believer in strong research. Find your story and learn how to apply your voice into it.

