

THE NEW EQUILIBRIUM

SPRING
2021

THE POWER OF ALEJANDRA MUNOZ

Photographed by Eloise Atkins





Creative Direction &
Photography: Eloise Atkins
Shoot Assistant: Devon Clark
HMUA: Kiera Young
Lighting: Robbie Ewing
Model: Alejandra Muñoz Pons
Designs: Alejandra Muñoz Pons
Fans: FANGIRL



by
THE NEW
EQUILIBRIUM

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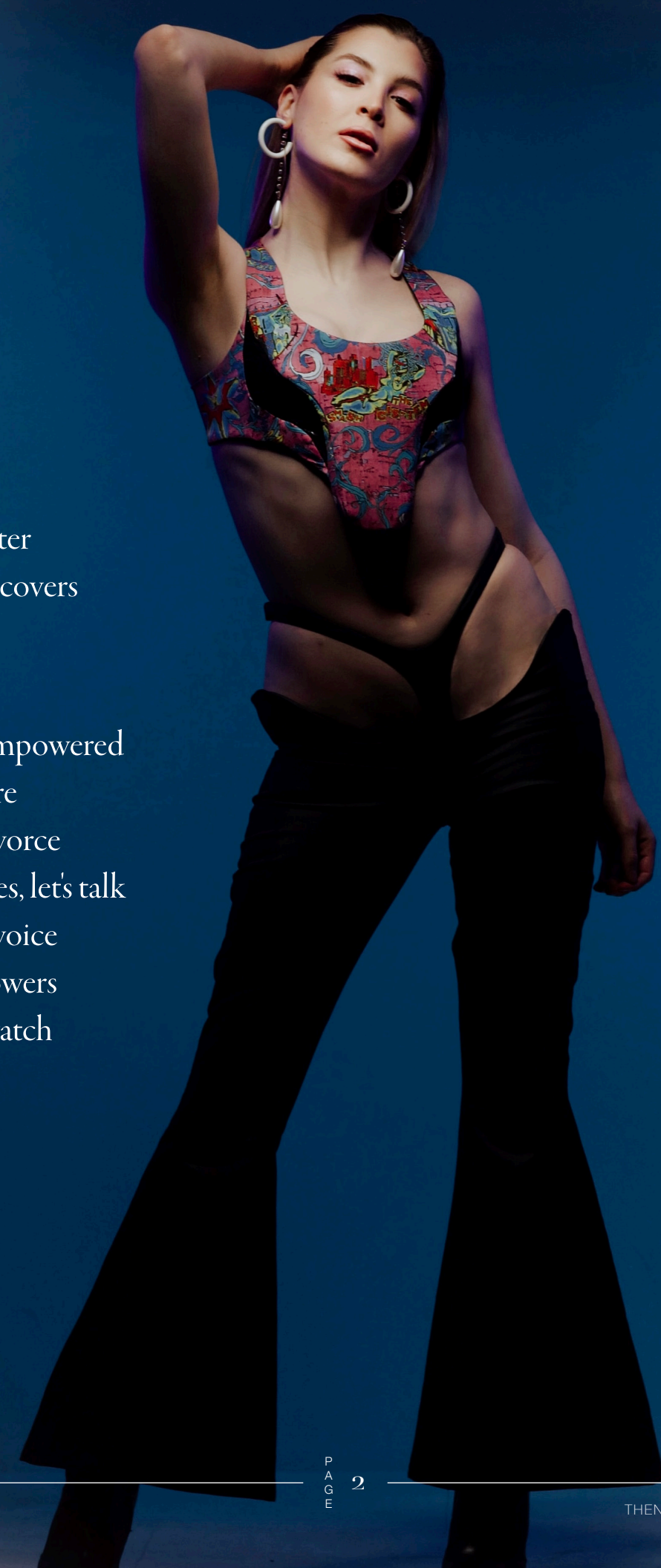
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BY SERENA PRIETO

Editor's LETTER

The theme for this issue was planned last October, with women's empowerment intended to follow the November issue on identity and toxic masculinity.

I wanted our empowerment issue to explore the different facets of feminine identity, subverting traditional stereotypes to understand why embracing femininity is emancipating.

This month has marked women's achievements throughout history and the need for further advancement, yet it also coincided with the tragic killing of Sarah Everard. Thousands of women visited Clapham Common in South London to leave flowers in memory of Sarah. The 'Reclaim the Night' protests that have since followed have sparked the societal re- reckonings about women's safety.

How is it then that empowerment can exist at a time when women, especially transwomen, women of colour and women on a low-income, face daily life without feeling safe and secure? Aidan Greenwold

highlights this very point in his article, which draws upon the experiences of forty women who discussed how to overcome the barriers to autonomy.

Talking about women's empowerment without discussing hardships and how far there is to go feels jarring. For this reason, Megha Dahdrai's article about continuing to speak up about sexual misconduct at university is an important reminder about ongoing conversations we need to have. Megha is empowered by her art, which has helped her to embrace her identity and find joy. At TNE we aim to amplify joy, striking a careful balance with our media to inspire and look towards a better future whilst acknowledging our hardships.

I could not be more thrilled to feature our cover model Alejandra Muñoz's interview with Whitney Jones, where she discusses how, as a transwoman, she has a unique perspective on celebrating femininity. Drawing on queer theory, Alejandra stresses the importance of reconceptualising our ideas about



womanhood to embrace our feminine qualities with pride – an idea she chooses to express through fashion design.

In her article this month, Zoha Naser speaks about the women of social movements who have made, and are making, history. The contrast of celebrating women's achievements and the stark reminder of our vulnerability has shaped this issue. I'm not pretending to have the answer to this, but I do believe that just as happiness and sadness can coexist, so too can empowerment and vulnerability. The richness and variety of our experiences matter, and the lessons we learn allow us to redress societal imbalances for the betterment of all. So, let's continue to celebrate women and what it means to be empowered in the 21st century.

Serena





BEHIND *the* COVERS

Three covers, each shot by Eloise Atkins. We asked that she shares her inspirations behind the covers. Read her impressions opposite ...

ASSOCIATE EDITOR FASHION
Eloise Atkins

The concept behind this shoot was to create something striking and bold to visually represent femininity. Too many times, women are perceived as soft and gentle (which there is nothing wrong with), however, there's this unhealthy and obsessive expectation in which we are all supposed to be like this. We are never taken seriously, often ridiculed and branded through certain stereotypes performed and displayed in the media.

In the powerful words of FanGirl 'we are all here to set a blaze in our own path'. This piece shines a flaming spotlight on individuality and self-expression. Through the beautiful silhouette designs of Alejandra Muñoz and the vivid colours of FanGirl, 'Girl on Fire' is empowering all to be confident and unapologetically lit.



Viewpoint

women EMPOWERED

We share the experiences from forty powerful women about how they face and overcome prejudice, how they empower others and precisely what empowers them. So, blast some Taylor Swift and sit back as we discuss: exactly how do we empower one another to overcome the prejudice within society?

Words AIDAN GREENWOLD

VIEWPOINT

Happy Women's History Month! It is a time to celebrate all that womenkind have achieved and how much progress they have made, fighting countless stereotypes of 'needy' and 'emotional' to assert their place in society. Although womenkind has made such wonderful advances in a society laced with discrimination and oppression, we must never forget that there is still work to be done for humanity to be truly equal. A meaningful way for this to happen is women supporting women and empowering them to reach greater heights. But how? To provide greater insight into what goes into empowering others, this article uses the experiences and thoughts from forty insightful, powerful women about how they face and overcome prejudice, how they empower others and precisely what empowers them. In Women's History Month, and well beyond, blast some Taylor Swift and sit back as we discuss: exactly how do we empower one another to overcome the prejudice within society?

We are all painfully aware that society isn't equal. Systematic oppression in our society deliberately gives an advantage to some and a disadvantage to others. To remove prejudice, we have to know what forms it takes. From the questionnaire feedback, it's clear that discrimination against women takes many different forms. A frequent report was of catcalling in public or making unwanted comments towards a woman, such as, but not exclusively, commenting on a woman's driving or parking ability or the clothes that she's wearing. This often leads to victims feeling very afraid. Although it may seem like 'funny banter' (it's not, stop it), this supposedly small action is a stark reminder that we live in an unequal society. An alarming number of the questionnaire answers spoke of a double standard that permeates every industry that women attempt to conquer. From a young age, social norms create a divide between boys and girls in schools, which only serves as a microcosm of broader society. When

I was growing up, there was no problem with me, a little boy, making daisy chains or doing cartwheels on the field with the girls at lunchtime, so why is a girl playing football with the boys different? Because 'girls can't play football'? Sure, Jan. If this article were a sitcom, this is when I'd look into the camera and roll my eyes. The notion of a girl doing something that isn't stereotypically female breaks the mould of what girls and, by extension, women are supposed to be in the eyes of a misogynistic society. But I'm glad to see from the responses I received that what it means to be 'female' and 'feminine' are being redefined every day.

Unfortunately, the concept of girls and women only being able to do certain things has grown up with us, and now it affects women daily. If it doesn't come in the form of dismissal, the prejudice of the female double standard can take the form of belittlement. During her questionnaire response, one of the women recalls when she was belittled and laughed at by co-workers on shift of a manual labour job because 'girls aren't strong'. Another of the women who filled out a questionnaire pondered that when she is assertive and takes control in a professional or academic environment, characteristics that would make a man a 'good leader' are described as 'bossy' or 'bitchy'. If women can't be categorised by a misogynistic society, they can't be controlled or kept down and thus threaten the status quo. The only way to remove this toxic hierarchy is to prove it wrong. So, what actions can we take daily to ensure our sisters are bolstered and breaking the mould left, right and centre?

On reading the questionnaire responses, there was a fire in my soul when I read how women empower one another. It was truly amazing to read. There were many physical ways that women empower themselves, such as putting on their favourite lipstick or outfit, and lots of ways to empower others, such as complimenting them. This was not solely on clothing or makeup but on

endeavours and personality traits, which is precisely what makes each one of us unique. This is SO easy to do. I set myself a goal to say three nice things to people every day. You don't need to roll out a red carpet and get a marching band to back you to compliment someone's response to a question in a seminar, or someone's shoes, or someone's smile. There is no limit to what you can say. Do not underestimate the power of words; a nice comment can make someone's day. Another frequently mentioned form of empowerment was supporting others in their endeavours. This could take many forms, such as buying from female-owned brands. One of the responses noted that these products are by women, for women. This supports women individually as well as on the whole. Sounds like a win-win to me!

Alternatively, this could be as little as believing in someone. Giving them the encouragement and support they need to reach their goals. The possibilities really are endless, and as one of the other questionnaire responses noted, 'a win for another woman is a win for me'. This is the rationale and thought process that will leave the patriarchy bald and quaking under a table somewhere; with this, we can genuinely bring equality to contemporary society.

Something else I found to be wonderful and directly linked to empowerment was how so many of these fierce women have embraced themselves. Like one of the greats has said: 'if you can't love yourself, how in the hell are you gonna love somebody else?'. Self-love is by no means a small feat, but if you can show love to someone else, why not yourself? It is an incredible form of empowerment; it's intrinsic. Start small and use nice words to yourself. 'That was really well done', 'you gave it your best today', 'you can always try again tomorrow'. You deserve all the love, and it's vital that you, above all others, show it to yourself. ■

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EQUITY

To redress the imbalance

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COMMUNITY

It takes a village

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SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

For the betterment of all.

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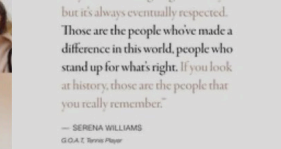
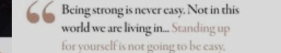
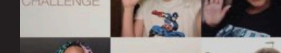
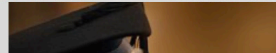
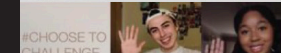
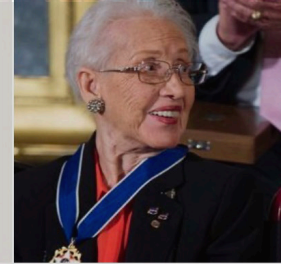
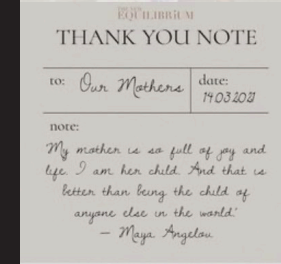
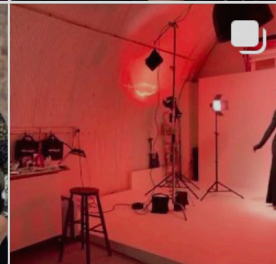
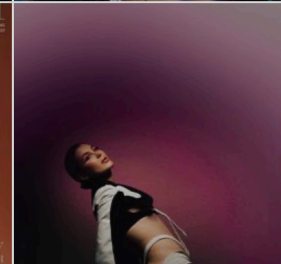
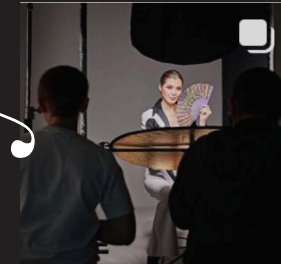
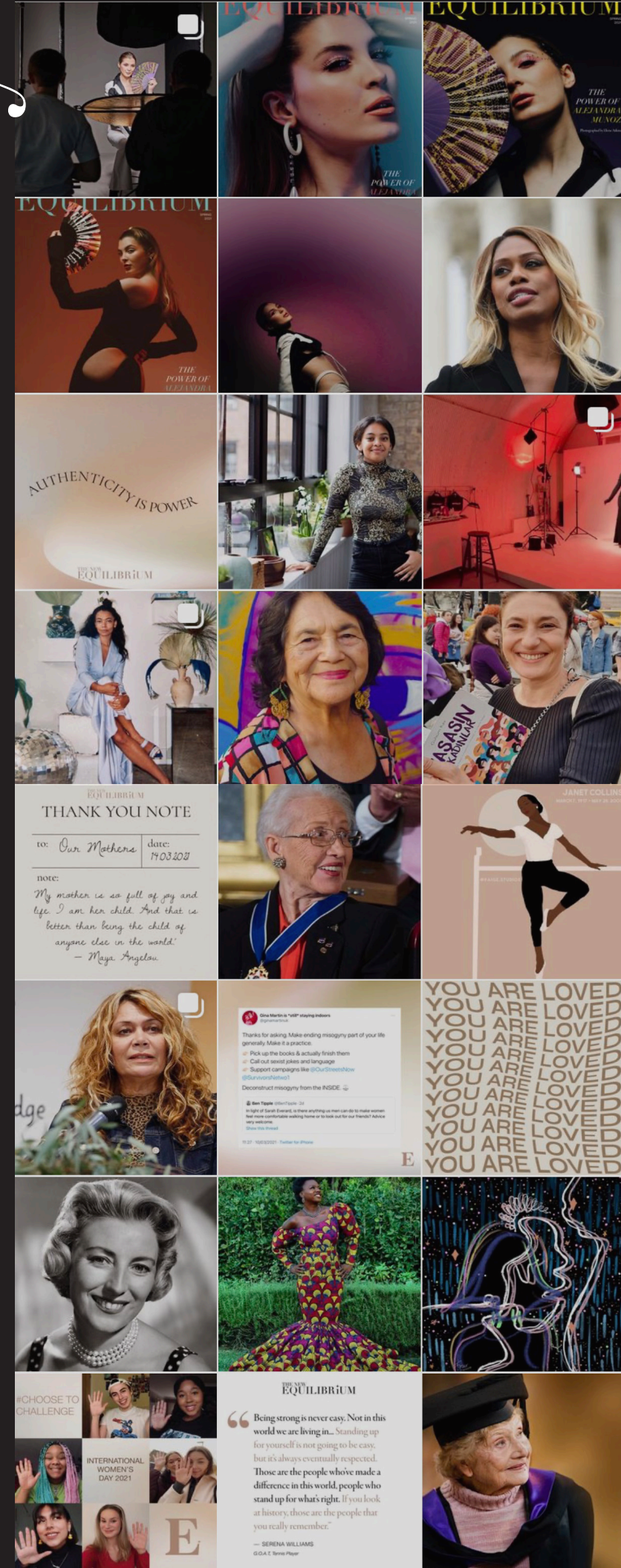
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Interview

GIRL ON FIRE

"The bravest people I met happen to be the most feminine. Embracing your femininity in a patriarchal world is a sign of self-confidence, autonomy, and bravery. Without embracing my femininity, I don't think I'd be alive right now."

WORDS:

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PHOTOGRAPHY:

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HMUA:

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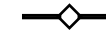
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INTERVIEW



As a little girl, my family would describe me as ultra-feminine.

I rejected anything that seemed 'boyish' - trousers, Harry Potter, the X-box, you name it. My mum constantly tried to fight me, unsuccessfully, to wear trousers because all I wanted to wear were dresses and skirts. I would twirl into every room and run down the stairs to make my dress float. In these clothes, I felt like my true self; confident, elegant, and powerful. This feeling continued into my twenties, but I now feel just as powerful in a wide-leg pantsuit. A new wave of reclaiming femininity through fashion has seen women embracing new styles that make them feel good. These style choices range from urban streetwear to oversized grandad jeans.

What is femininity? Ask a million women, and you'll get a million responses. My mum and sister's definitions are vastly different from mine. But what I have found is that femininity, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. Femininity is personal and an expression of how we see ourselves. It's about what makes you feel happy when you look in the mirror and strut your way down the street. A powerful tool we often overlook. Society excludes voices from marginalised groups in Femininity discussions as they challenge the archaic narrative.

The New Equilibrium is challenging this.

Chatting with Alejandra Muñoz, a fashion designer and model, I wanted to learn what femininity means from a trans woman's perspective. The London-based designer graduate from the prestigious fashion school, Central Saint Martins (University of the Arts London).

As well as being a model, Alejandra is also an activist who regularly protests for more trans visibility in the fashion industry. Her graduate collection, *When I Dress As A Woman, The Audience Laughs*, is incredibly impactful.

"Femininity is an expression of how we see ourselves. It's about what makes you feel happy when you look in the mirror and strut your way down the street."

It provides commentary on society's negative perceptions of transwomen. **Alejandra is a powerhouse, through and through.**

WJ: Who is Alejandra Muñoz?

AM: I am a fashion designer who graduated from Central Saint Martins two years ago. I have been developing my brand working with Hundred Showroom. I also do a lot of modelling to keep the bills paid which I have been doing since my early teens. I enjoy it so much. I am also passionate about LGBT+ rights. I get involved in many demonstrations to fight for the pass of new legislation that would make life easier for my

community.

WJ: Femininity can be described in multiple ways. What does femininity mean to you?

AM: Femininity is a socially made-up concept used to describe a set of characteristics that we, as a society, have decided are more related to womanhood. Playing on the binary narrative, regardless, we all have both feminine and masculine traits. Femininity is always regarded as a weakness, but I disagree.

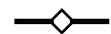
The bravest people I met happen to be the most feminine. Embracing your femininity in a patriarchal world is a sign of self-confidence, autonomy, and bravery. Without embracing my femininity, I don't think I'd be alive right now. Long live the fem!

WJ: Within your collections, you highlight the hourglass silhouette. How do you think all women can embrace the femininity of their bodies without fear of judgement?

AM: We live in a society that shames cisgender women that embrace their feminine side since we associate femininity with weakness, naivety and too emotional. The patriarchal society we live in ridicules women that celebrate, own, and accentuate their feminine side. But, at the same time, they lust for them and expect women to maintain traditional femininity. This objectifies and others womanhood. A great thing that queer theory and the feminist movement do is bring this back to the conversation focus. They recontextualise and push the pride and ownership of femininity.



“ A big part of my collection was to create feminine silhouettes that would reshape trans and gender-nonconforming bodies into a more dramatic feminine allure. I wanted to celebrate their inner truth without the need to modify their bodies.”



As a transwoman, I have a unique perspective on the topic. My femininity is what allowed me to become myself. wholeheartedly celebrate it. And my advice to anyone is to do the same, follow your instincts and never let other opinions hinder your self-expression.

WJ: Your collection, *When I Dress As A Woman, The Audience Laughs* is incredibly powerful. Why did you decide to use fashion to provide commentary on trans-women's experience?

AM: I have always thought that fashion is a wonderful way to tell stories. At the end of the day, you communicate so much about yourself through the way you dress, it is your presentation card. Also, when we speak about gender, clothing becomes extremely important. Sex is biological, but gender is a social construct that we must develop and refined as society moves forward.

Fashion has a lot to do with this construct. From colour clothing to patterns to silhouettes, they are all definitive markers that fuel the gender binary ideology. Furthermore, by using all these factors in the way you choose, you can take back ownership of your own body and the perception you give to others. For example, a big part of my collection was to create feminine silhouettes that would reshape trans and gender-nonconforming bodies into a more dramatic feminine allure. I wanted to celebrate their inner truth without the need to modify their bodies.

Clothing can have incredibly transformative power.

WJ: Society is changing at a slow pace. How do you think we can support the trans community more as we move forward?

AM: I think a lot of progress is happening compared to 10 years ago when I started transitioning. Back then, most people never had the word transgender in their vocabulary.

But I did notice the problematic trend when it comes to representation. Trans individuals are always in front of the cameras, but behind them are a team of still white, cisgender, and straight.

"It would be better to allow trans people to write and tell their own stories instead of having other people telling them for us."

And I think this fully applies to all other sectors. It would be better to allow trans people to write and tell their own stories instead of having other people telling them for us. Most articles regarding the topic are still written by cisgender people, which keeps the othering narrative going for our community.

WJ: The fashion industry has a lot to do in being more representative of society. You regularly protest for trans visibility in fashion. What actions do you believe the fashion industry needs to take?

AM: I think highlighting trans designers, stylists, editors and more would be an interesting next step. These actions are necessary instead of just using our image to make the brand look progressive. Also, actively including us in the conversation and the decision making, instead of just having us on the mood boards. That would be a great start.

WJ: When are you at your most confident self?

AM: I am at my most confident self when surrounded by like-minded people. I think it is crucial to find your chosen family in life. Moving to London was one of the best decisions I made. It allowed me to feel more confident in my body and identity. I am thankful to the people I have met through the years in the queer nightlife community. Surrounding yourself with people that understand your story and celebrate it is the most powerful tool. From this, you can start healing your past and become proud of your identity.

WJ: There is an enviable beauty about you. From your incredible cheekbones to your heart. How can we encourage the next generation to believe that true beauty starts from within?

AM: I think nowadays there is a problem of lack of empathy. We live in a system that constantly placing us in competition with each other from an early age. The capitalist mentality celebrates individuality and success as the winning characteristics. We leave behind humanity. We also are developing into a society that is more disconnected from each other, making us feel like strangers.



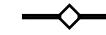


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INTERVIEW



What I try to do is connect with others and learn about many different realities to mine. This allows me to develop different perspectives and understandings of different lifestyles. Getting out of your comfort zone is extremely important. I believe a lot of this lack of empathy comes from a lack of knowledge and education about other lifestyles, which inevitably promotes fear.

WJ: What message do you have for those fighting for equality for everyone, regardless of gender, race, sexuality, and class?

AM: To keep going.

What does femininity mean to you? ■



Shot by Robbie Ewing



Shot by Robbie Ewing

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Viewpoint

Family divorce

In hindsight

Divorce is difficult to talk about. For those going through it, it can be frustrating and overwhelming, while those on the outside are often uncomfortable with the topic. Divorces can tear families apart in a brutal way – and children can be caught in the middle.

WORDS EMMA RANTAKANGAS

VIEWPOINT

Divorce is difficult to talk about. For those going through it, it can be frustrating and overwhelming, while those on the outside are often uncomfortable with the topic. Divorces can tear families apart in a brutal way – and children are commonly caught in the middle.

CBBC's new spin-off miniseries, *My Mum Tracey Beaker*, shows Tracey Beaker from the perspective of a mother as she tries to find love again. Whilst most adults watched this series to relive their childhoods, I couldn't help but identify with the perspective of Tracey's daughter, Jess. She struggled to accept a new man in her mother's life and viewed it as a disruption of their family equilibrium.

Due to my parents divorcing when I was four, I too experienced this feeling as my mum looked for love. Most noticeably, these emotions arose with the introduction of my mum's marriage, which was also evident in Jess' story. For a child, where does the fear of a new partner entering a parent's life come from? Is the process of divorce the source of this fear, rather than the new partner themselves?

As a child, my father leaving made me wonder if my mum would leave me too. My mum says this was something I cried about even though I don't remember. It has me debating whether this is why I am so fearful that anyone who gets close to me could leave my life too. Is this the case for a lot of young children getting introduced to step-parents? Does

divorce create mistrust in children who once knew nothing but trust? A lot of young children aren't necessarily aware of what is happening when their parents get divorced. I didn't understand. I just knew my dad wasn't there. Of course, I missed him and cried as a child, but it wasn't until a few years later that the impact of him leaving really hit me. Most children process divorce over a long period of time – they need to develop



and mature in order to understand the concept. However, once children are able to dig and ask themselves questions about the divorce, a lot of self-blame comes into the picture. 'Was I the cause of this?' is the most common question. Children put a lot of focus on themselves as the cause of the divorce, and picture themselves as the love match-maker who can force their parents together again.

Divorce doesn't just split up a child's parents, however. It can cause all sorts of complications, even for the family members who weren't directly involved.

In my circumstance, moving from Sweden to England when I was four resulted in me not seeing my sister, grandparents and cousins until I was eighteen. I am still due to see my brother, who I also haven't seen since

I was four, and I have missed the birth of my niece and nephew. The hardest part of not seeing my family was that when I was finally able to meet my grandparents, they were already given their Alzheimer's diagnosis. I missed out on a great relationship with them and their health is now declining.

Despite parents trying their hardest to prevent their children's pain, it seems really difficult to avoid. I remember finding a book in my house explaining how to talk to your child about divorce. I got upset discovering this – but why? Surely this was evidence that my mum was really trying? Perhaps the issue may lie with parents creating a big scene with divorces or the introduction of a new partner that may cause children to feel as though there is a massive change.

Change is scary to children, and amplifying the severity of it may make it harder for the transition.

However, what is needed to be understood is that there is no right way for this process to occur, especially for a stressed, overly-emotive parent.

But the knock-on effects for children definitely need to be acknowledged – after all, they are the ones caught up in the middle. ■

universities, LET'S TALK

WORDS: MEGHA DAHDRAI

I am a student at Royal Holloway, University of London. This is me talking about the prevalence of rape culture and the treatment of sexual misconduct across various universities, drawing upon the University of Warwick as a case study. My opinions have been shaped by my personal experience of being a female student, discussions with my peers and a BBC documentary on the subject, titled: 'The Warwick Uni Rape Chat Scandal'. Unfortunately (and unacceptably), these issues are practically universal across the majority of higher education institutions. I will try my best to advocate for those who have, and continue to, fight for their justice regarding their safety within the school they pay high tuition fees to attend. In this article, I discuss the issue that stems from privilege, barbaric misogyny and a lack of restorative justice. Rapists are compromising women's students' safety – this is, wholeheartedly, everybody's affair. However, it is also an issue being majorly faced with silence from the side of the university. If the matter is pushed, the assailants face minor repercussions and are often allowed to return to campus, the same campus where their victims are studying. Women do not pay £9,250 a year to go to an esteemed university that does not protect them when they need it most.

The University of Warwick has a Student Sexual Misconduct Policy. It states:

"Our University Principles make clear that we do not tolerate sexual misconduct, violence or abuse." (Principle 3).

They also make clear their commitment to providing a campus environment where all community members feel safe and respected:

"We are committed to preventing and eliminating all forms of sexual misconduct... We are committed to providing a supportive and confidential environment where individuals feel confident and

empowered to disclose, will be listened to and understand the options available to them. We will support everyone in our community to challenge inappropriate behaviour where it is safe for them to do so."

A petition was posted, titled 'Warwick uni to take action against sexual assault cases, and has over thirty-seven thousand signatures at the time of writing. Despite the rape chat scandal emerging in 2018 and continuing through to 2019, students are still sharing, commenting, screaming into an abyss of social media.

From the documentary, Anna said: "I was just going with 94 pages of evidence and hoping that they could help because I didn't know what to do." She felt entirely let down by her institution, who had appointed their Director of Press and Media relations as their Investigating Officer, introducing a conflict of interest which the university later denied. It is utterly abysmal that, even for a second, Warwick's reputation was prioritized over its students' emotional and physical well-being.

The amount of courage it requires to step up and explain that you have experienced some form of misconduct is immense. It is even more exasperating when that courage is utterly disregarded and not given the attention it deserves. Another quote from the documentary states: "I noticed that a lot of the conversation that was surrounding my friends and me was about rape and gang rape, and genital mutilation." (Anna, about a 'lads' group chat on social media).

This isn't something we can dismiss as banter. Nobody should ever be allowed to discuss that kind of degradation and violence over somebody else with such little consequence. Such examples of misogyny should be taken seriously the first time they are ever brought to light, and when they aren't, it is excusing the perpetrator's actions. It lets them know

that the matter won't be treated with urgency because it clearly isn't urgent enough: it is normalizing rape culture. It is a painful injustice towards the victims. So, where do we go from here? Please, keep on pressuring your schools and universities; make them aware that this is not an issue they can keep ignoring. The more people that voice their rage, the louder the sound of our dissatisfaction becomes – the power of social media is commendable when used for positive change. Stand in solidarity with your peers, friends and students.

We need to make universities demonstrate their professionalism, empathy, and immediate action plan when faced with another situation like this. If you come across a victim of sexual harassment, abuse, or misconduct, listen to them attentively. They have trusted you enough to confide in you.

Need to talk? Here are two resources that may help:

Warwick Nightline (<https://warwick.nightline.ac.uk/>)

Nightline is a student-run, confidential, and non-judgmental peer-to-peer support listening service.

Email: nightline@warwick.ac.uk
Call: 02476-522-199
02476-574-322

Nightline (<https://nightline.org.uk/>)

London Nightline is an anonymous listening and information service run by students in London, for students in London.

Email: listening@nightline.org.uk
Call: (+44) 207 631 0101



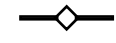
Interview

HEAR MY VOICE

The Women of the Social Movements that are Making History

Words ZOHA NASER

VIEWPOINT



From the Igbo Women fighting misogynistic colonial rule to the Sikh women at the helm of the Indian farmer's protests, this month, we celebrate the women who have shaped and continue to shape history.

In the dark of Clapham Common, a sea of camera torches lights the scene of Sarah Everard's vigil. They stand strong, holding signs that say, "she deserved better," "she was walking home" and "we will not be silenced." Everard was a 33-year-old marketing executive who went missing during a walk home from her friend's house on the evening of 3 March 2021. Her disappearance and murder ignited unrest in the United Kingdom over violence against women and the culture surrounding sexual assault. Calls for women to stay indoors after dark for their safety were met with backlash reminiscent of that of 1970s Yorkshire, as crowds of women stepped outside to reclaim the night and reclaim the streets.

The role of women in social movements throughout history is a gargantuan one. From Boudica's battle against the Romans to the female factory workers of St Petersburg, the Igbo Women fighting colonial rule, and the widespread 2016 Women's March, women have often played central roles in the fight for change. This article seeks to celebrate a handful of women who have made history and continue to make history through their words, actions, and spirit.

---- Fight Like a Woman ----
November 1929 and the Igbo women of Bende District, Umuahia had had enough. British colonial rule in Nigeria had significantly altered Nigerian women's role in society, robbing them of their legal right to

participate in politics, culture, and the economy. Traditionally, Nigerian women played an equal role to that of their male counterparts – they were members of local government, participated in the economy via their presence in the marketplace, and saw gender equality in the domestic sphere. Colonial rule instead sought to 'correct' this 'moral wrong' and bought them corruption, forced labour and increased economic hardship.

In late October 1929, an elderly woman named Nwanyeruwa was approached by a census taker. He demanded that she count her animals and her family members, leading

"I am an illiterate woman. I cannot talk well, but I can sit tight – and I will sit here till the next elections if these laws are not called off" –
Gurmer Kaur.

Nwanyeruwa to assume this meant she would have to pay tax for all of them. She responded by retorting, "was your widowed mother counted?," referring to the fact that women were not taxed in Igbo society. This angered the census taker, who exchanged words with Nwanyeruwa and then grabbed her by the throat. She went to retell her story to the women's network in her city of Oloko. Enraged by this, the three women who lead this network – Ikonnia, Mwannedia and Nwugo – decided to organise a campaign to ensure that this unfair tax system would not continue.

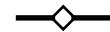
The protest widened to encompass women from six different ethnic groups – the Ibibio, Andoni, Orgoni, Bonny, Opobo and the Igbo. Led by

rural women, it upturned colonial Nigerian structures in eliminating the colonial role of Warrant Chiefs. The pressure these men faced resulted in their widespread resignation from office and the replacement of Warrant Chiefs with clan heads appointed by Nigerians rather than the British. Going largely ignored in history books, the movement was further significant in women being appointed to the Native Court system, advancing women's movements in the region, and later inspiring African nationalism campaigns across the continent.

----TheFirstBrickatStonewall----

In the early hours of 28 June 1969, the police stormed the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, New York. They harassed and arrested roughly 200 LGBTQI+ individuals at the bar, including Stormé DeLarverie, a mixed-race butch lesbian. As she was shoved into the back of the police vehicle, she pushed back against the officers and exclaimed at the surrounding crowd, "aren't you going to do something?" – it was at this point that historians believe the historic Stonewall Uprising began.

For roughly a week, LGBTQIA+ individuals from all walks of life came together to demonstrate against the marginalisation, abuse and discrimination the community faced. The uprising led to the establishment of gay rights and trans solidarity groups, fuelling the movement for equality amidst the homophobic and aggressive attitudes of the time. Influential figures, such as black drag queen Marsha P. Johnson and fellow trans activist Sylvia Rivera, and DeLarverie and other 'stonewallers' rallied the community behind the cause and led the fight for equal rights.



Though it is fiercely contested just who exactly threw the first brick at Stonewall, the protests changed the face of the LGBTQI+ movement forever. The Stonewall Inn was a symbol of comfort and home to the gay community of New York City, as accounted by Dick Leitsch, executive director of the Mattachine Society of New York, the first gay group to hold a demonstration in the city: “Then too, there are hundreds of young homosexuals in New York who literally have no home. Many of them are running away from unhappy homes ... some were even thrown out of their homes with only the clothes on their backs by ignorant, intolerant parents who’d rather see their kid dead than homosexual ... The Stonewall became “home” to these kids. When it was raided, they fought for it.”

---- My Body, My Choice ----
The fight for abortion rights has been a long one in Poland. For years, activists have rallied against some of the most repressive reproductive rights laws in Europe, and tensions came to a boiling point in 2016.

Politicians introduced a bill in October 2016 that would seek to further restrict abortion rights for women in Poland, proposing a blanket ban on abortion and a prison sentence of up to 5 years for those who underwent the procedure, with doctors performing the termination also at threat of jailing. When the Stop Abortion coalition and conservative Law and Justice Party pushed for the bill to face reading by a parliamentary committee, a protest was organised.

Around 30,000 women, many dressed in black, boycotted jobs and classes to gather in Castle Square, Warsaw, and demonstrate. Standing in the pouring rain, they shouted, “not one step

further” and carried signs with slogans such as “Women Just Want to Have FUN-damental Rights”. In a country where approximately 150,000 illegal abortions are performed every year, the shift towards a ban was unacceptable to many.

Despite the government’s U-turn on the bill in the face of such mass protest, there have been renewed attempts to introduce similar laws ever since. In 2021, groups once again gathered on the streets, with over 400,000 people protesting in hundreds of towns and cities across the country. Even amidst the turmoil of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Polish women have turned out to protest for their reproductive rights and have clearly shown the government they are not going down without a fight.

“There is more courage in society to speak about abortion. People educate themselves and each other. I think that we now have more solidarity and strength in society to fight for reproductive rights.” – Kamila Ferenc, Lawyer (The Federation for Women and Family Planning)

---- Who Keeps You Fed? ----
At the helm of the world’s largest protest in history stand a band of women who are battling day after day for their rights. Women make up approximately 1/3 of the farmers and have become the faces of the movement as they battle harmful agricultural laws. Women like Indian Farmers’ Union (Ugrahan) representative, Harinder Bindu, highlight the plight of women trying to make a living for their families under the constant struggle farmers already face and will continue to face in light of these laws.

The controversial legislation introduced by the I

ndian government in 2020, which have garnered backlash in that they largely take economic control away from farmers and instead hand them to corporations. For farmers, this is a threat in that companies can set the prices in which they buy agricultural goods, often for a reduced price, meaning fewer profits for farmers. With farmers already facing dire circumstances, including mental health struggles and unpredictable crops, the laws represent a further burden on the community.

Bindu highlights the impact of these laws in relation to an incredibly high suicide rate amongst farmers, with statistics showing that 10,000 farmers in India commit suicide every year. For Bindu, women on farms whose husbands are now dead have to balance the challenge of raising a family, working the farms alone and earning enough money to support that family. The farmers’ laws will give them less bargaining power against the corporations looking to buy for them, leaving many families liable to low pay and exploitation.

The Indian government has tried to urge elderly farmers and women to leave the protests – to which the resounding response was a strong “no!”. Women have been at these protest sites since demonstrations began, and over 100 days and 248 deaths of protestors later, they show no sign of leaving any time soon.

“Why should we go back? This is not just the men’s protest. We toil in the fields alongside the men. Who are we – if not farmers?” – Jasbir Kaur, 74, Farmer

“The awareness among women about their own power has never been higher than now” – Sudesh Goyat.



ART *EMPOWERS*

"I grew up with this idealized image of who I had to be as a person. I think she should have been destroyed."

WORDS: MEGHA DAHDRAI

I come from a rather conservative Asian background – it might sound cliché, but I grew up under the impression that a woman has to be straight, academic, courteous, helpful and charismatic. She should dress modestly. She should never be overdramatic or, heaven forbid, mentally ill. She should pursue a career that pays well – be a doctor, a lawyer, study STEM. The importance of academia was ingrained so deeply into my psyche that it may as well have been tattooed on my forehead so that I was reminded of it in every reflective surface. These qualities and characteristics are brilliant to have, but I would be a liar if I said that I possessed more than one.

So yes, my entire world did collapse when my younger self discovered that I was queer and mentally unbalanced. I was furious at the world and the standards enforced on me from such a young age – I sometimes still am. I grew up with this idealized image of who I had to be as a person. I think she should have been destroyed.

In my lower key stages I tried my best to fit into this mold and it was utterly detrimental for my mental health. I repressed my love for things like art and ignored an undeniable talent in literature until I chose it as my degree subject. I'll be twenty-one this year – each year I congratulate myself for being alive past the age of eighteen. My brain and I do not magically get along now that I am an artist, but I'm definitely happier living with it in my life. Art, for me, is a form of catharsis and I'd be in a much darker place without it.



I have had to rewire myself completely, destroying the molds that made me think less of myself because I did not fit within them. I have spent years having to redefine my ideas of what success and happiness are. Being married to a man with a child by the age of twenty-five is a perfectly reasonable goal to have for someone that desires that kind of life. I'd be lying again if I said it was one of mine.

Now, I make art based on things relevant to me. Things I have experienced, the music I enjoy listening to, my overactive brain, whatever it is that I feel like making with whatever kind of medium I desire. I can write about things that I think are important or the cup of tea that I drank last night. It has taken a lot to realise that I am entirely my own woman and I can do whatever the hell I want to do.

Sometimes it can be difficult making art, writing things, dressing up, – self-doubt constantly scratches the back of my throat and leaves me choking on my own ideas. Am I being too obscure? Is this going to be received well as a piece of work? Is anything I do ever going to be good enough? I am not studying medicine, I am not straight, I am not any of the things that were asked of me – it is far too easy falling into that spiral of thought because it's something that I'm so used to. It has been undeniably difficult, detaching myself from the idea that I have to be somebody else's definition of perfect.

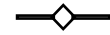
Each and every day is a new kind of revelation. I'm trying to teach myself that nobody's opinion of me matters to me as much as mine does. I am okay, exactly the way that I am, as long as I'm happy with what I'm doing.

I am incredibly thankful to be able to surround myself with other unique and creative people. I have the support of so many badass women, they inspire me constantly and I could not be myself without them. I see them doing what they want to do and it makes me feel omnipotent.

There are so many categories that I don't fit in from somebody else's perspective. Conversely, there are so many different characteristics that make me who I am. I try my best to remind myself that I am a powerful being, despite what anybody else thinks of me.

I am empowered by myself, my decisions and the things that I am capable of making.

Pictured opposite: Space Girl by Megha Dahdrai. "I nearly gave up on this digital drawing so many times. It started off as a doodle in one of my lecture notes and turned into a fully-fledged rainbow and I do really like the way she turned out. I turned her into a limited edition print and I donate £1 to MindOut with each purchase. I'm glad I can use her in a way that helps others. ■"



ONES to watch

WORDS: WHITNEY JONES

Fashion is a woman's playground, complete with an abundance of choices, colours, and creativity. While women have artistic freedom in their style of dress, men are handed bland palettes and fashion for function. However, fashion remains a male-dominated industry with most fashion labels in womenswear run by men. This doesn't reflect its target audience and the fact that women spend more money on clothing than men.

To celebrate Women's History Month, The New Equilibrium collated 5 of our favourite emerging female designers that should be on your radar. These designers are challenging patriarchy, supporting sustainability, and putting political statements across their capsules. There are new techniques innovative cuts stylistic same patterns throughout their respective brands. With their fingers firmly on the fashion pulse, these female designers are paving the way for the next generation of fashion lovers and creators.

Here are our new designers of tomorrow to keep your eye on.

1) **Didi Akinyelure**
Bold, Fearless and Edgy. In one breath you could be describing April & Alex, the UK womenswear line, or the aspirational woman behind

it, Didi Akinyelure. This woman has done it all from having a career as an award-winning journalist to now being the founder of a fashion brand that celebrates female empowerment. Inspired by her grandmother's and mother's tailoring careers and innovative fashion choices, Didi found her creative flair in designing contemporary pieces for daring women. April and Alex is for a woman looking to push boundaries, not afraid to stand out in the crowd, and a trendsetter. Think saturated sleeves spell trim scars show shoulder pads in velvet materials. The British-Nigerian identifies as a 'multipotentialite' – someone who lives to their fullest potential in all areas of her life. A lifestyle that all women can get behind.

2) **Sophie Parnaby**
The UK struggles to highlight talent in the north of England in many industries. But people won't be overlooking Sophie Parnaby after she combined two polar industries; tech and fashion; to create an unrivalled collection. Future Mythologies utilised 3D print technology to create a sustainable alternative method to embellish luxury fashion with zero-waste production. The future is truly female. Sophie's creativity allowed her to burst onto the style scene with all eyes watching. From hybrid shapes to metallic colourways, it's a captivating collection. Sophie is a Yorkshire based designer who recently graduated from Manchester Metropolitan University last year. Her label's futuristic mission includes new ways to transform plastic waste into embellishments that appear as fragmented black glass. She's more than your average designer, she's a visionary and there are more exciting designs to come.

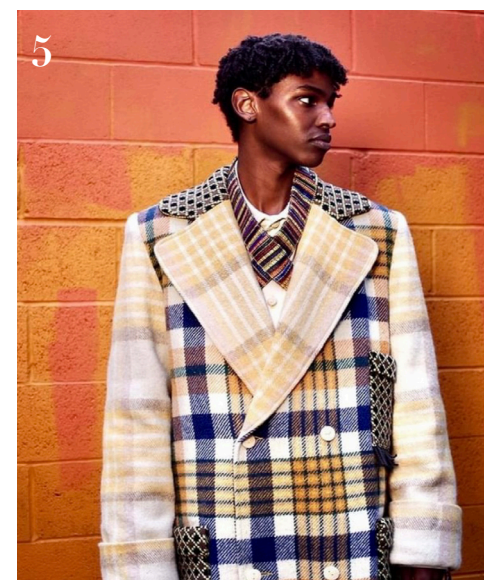
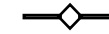
3) **Yuhan Wang**
Yuhan Wang's signature look is

highly celebrated for its delicate designs that showcase feminine strength through a romantic and nostalgic lens. The Chinese designer launched her eponymous brand in 2018, specialising in whimsical womenswear. She has many notches on her belt including graduating from the highly esteemed Central Saint Martins with both a BA & MA in Womenswear; winning the 2016 L'Oréal Young Talent Runner-Up Award; scouted by Fashion East in 2018. Yuhan made her London Fashion Week debut last year and has quickly become a cult favourite. Every thread and seam in her collections are dreamy with pastel palettes, lace and florals, and silky silhouettes. These are not ordinary design choices, instead, they are carefully selected to convey a political message. Yuhan's collections of apparel and jewellery challenge traditional ideologies of female fragility. Here there are cultural references to tradition Chinese femininity and its connections to Western culture. If she wasn't on your radar before, then she will be now.

4) **Abigail Ajobi**
Another designer hoping to disrupt archaic beliefs is Abigail Ajobi. The North London native is making her voice heard with her debut collection, Those Who Don't Hear Must Feel. Her military-style designs and relaxed streetwear are lashed with phrases referring to the years of uprising and rebellion of Black British people. Stereotypes, police brutality and BLM are prevalent across jackets and trousers as they are in society. Starting strong, the young designer only established her brand in 2020 – a year of the uprising itself. The namesake label's core values are activism, sustainability, and being charitable – a portion of profits from each collection gets donated to a charity related to the theme. Abigail channels her Yoruba upbringing into her work, centring themes of culture and

race with her luxury streetwear. The label's contribution to sustainability and community empowerment was awarded UAL's Enterprise Award. What's not to love?

5) **Bethany Williams**
The fashion industry may have switched its focus to activism, but sustainability is still a critical issue that emerging designers are challenging. Two years ago, Bethany Williams, first made waves upon winning the Queen Elizabeth II Award for Design. Since then, the sustainable fashion designer has grown from strength to strength. Renowned for its knitwear heavy style, she forms her signature pieces from organic, recycled and deadstock materials. Turning one brand's trash into treasure, Bethany committed to green and ethical fashion when launching her eponymous brand in 2017, even using recycled garments created by those in prison. Although her capsule is presented at Men's Fashion Week, Bethany sees her pieces as unisex. She places focus on comfort over highlighting gendered silhouettes. Beyond her design work, Bethany is also a humanitarian and artist. Kind to the core, she collaborates with charities, supermarkets, and renowned brands to raise awareness of hidden dilemmas across the UK, including homelessness and hunger.





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MAGAZINE

ISSUE 04
SPRING 2021