



Grace Lillian Lee wearable art in New York. Image credit: Tosin Popoola.

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This New York exhibit shows the future of Australian fashion in its full breadth

What does Australian fashion look like in 2024, and how will it evolve in the future? A new exhibition in New York is putting our industry's innovators on a global stage.



Australia's unique fashion innovations, and the designers who champion them, now have a new visibility on the world stage thanks to a recently unveiled stateside exhibition. Australian Fashion Now, which took place last week in New York and is powered by the Australian Consulate General New York and Qantas, showcases Australia's diverse fashion cohort, with eight designers making invaluable contributions to our unique fashion patchwork.

The participating names were chosen by Parsons lecturer and RMIT graduate Dr. Matthew Linde, and include Grace Lillian Lee, Iordanes Spyridon Gogos, Scanlan Theodore, Kyha, Collective Closets, Cosmetics and Gauntlett Cheng. Also included are sister design duo Laura and Deanna Fanning, the London-based womenswear creative directors of cult label Kiko Kostadinov. Each of the participating names contributed a handful of custom-made looks, intended to show the breadth of their creativity. Through his choices, Linde hoped to embody a cross-section of Australian creativity for an international audience that already covets our homegrown brands.

“While Australia is about as antipodal as it gets, many young designers and buyers continue to aspire to it,” Linde says. “It was important to represent both emerging designers, such as the soft sculptural creations of Jordan Gogos, and established brands, like Scanlan Theodore.”



Grace Lillian Lee pieces photographed in New York. Image credit: Tosin Popoola

The inclusion of the Fanning sisters showed the scope of Australians performing on the world stage, while also staying true to their creativity. “What you won’t find here is a typical list of designers who have gone to work for large conglomerate-owned European luxury fashion houses,” Linde says.

He adds that the new guard of First Nations designers and creatives, including Lee, was also important for tracking the Australian fashion industry’s progression. “Australia Fashion Now is an attempt to reflect both the emerging and more established Australian fashion designers today who, while disparate, synthesise a new multifaceted vision of Australian fashion.”

The New York location, meanwhile, saw each designer pay homage to their setting. Lee, who recently collaborated with Jean Paul Gaultier, wanted her dual pieces, titled ‘Liberty’, to thematically incorporate American culture. True to form, each piece incorporated her signature grasshopper weaving technique.

“By incorporating this traditional method, I aim to highlight the beauty of my heritage while demonstrating its relevance in today’s fashion landscape,” she says of her work, which harnesses methods unique to her Torres Strait heritage. Lee adds the colours of

her works are reflective of the stark and distinct Australian landscape. “The concept behind ‘Liberty’ is to showcase the rich cultural narrative of the Torres Strait Islands and how it intersects with contemporary fashion, particularly as it makes its way to New York City,” she explains.

For Iordanes Spyridon Gogos designer Jordan Gogos, who attended Parsons before moving home during the pandemic, using deadstock fabric to create two new pieces saw him incorporate his signature kaleidoscopic colour scheme, with a twist.



Iordanes Spyridon Gogos. Image credit: Nathan Angelis



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“The work has a top layer of chain-stitch embroidery which was a machine I discovered in the specialty sewing lab at Parsons,” he notes. “Chain stitch machines

are hugely prevalent in America given their enormous denim industry although in Australia it's super expensive and hard to get.”

Look closely at Gogos' pieces and you'll notice the deadstock fabric jackets are made of intricately assembled heart shapes—a nod to the 'I Love New York' insignia. “I don't think Australian fashion should always be seen as 'effortless' or easy-breezy... [it] is fun, but it is serious,” he says. “We do represent a perspective of fashion that blends even the most highly regarded form and categories of fashion, such as couture—even though [we bend] what couture is traditionally known for.”

Australian fashion has long been synonymous with resortwear, owing to our arid climate as well as the success of brands like Zimmermann and Alémais. But with IMG's recent withdrawal from Australian fashion week casting uncertainty over the future of the event, and the greater Australian fashion industry, Linde hopes the exhibition will make the unique perspective of Australian fashion in 2024 a talking point overseas. In his words, Australian fashion “extends beyond the bathing suit and embraces vibrant colour, elevated classicism, and experimental design”.

Lee, meanwhile, hopes Australian Fashion Now—and the pieces she designed for it—place the work of First Nations creative centre stage, when their work has historically been overlooked. In her own words: “I hope 'Liberty' will not only engage American audiences with the unique narratives of Australian fashion but also foster a deeper understanding of the diverse cultures that contribute to it.”



Grace Lillian Lee. Image credit: Tosin Popoola

Image credits for Grace Lillian Lee:

Photographer: Tosin Popoola

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Models : Angeliq Brock and Kali Musa

Image credits for Iordanes Spyridon Gogos:

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