

# STUDENTS SHOW OFF DESIGNS FOR LIFE... AND DEATH

Emma Clayton on how a poignant photography exhibition has inspired a group of fashion hopefuls to create a collection To Die For

**A**t first glance it's a ripped paint-splattered T-shirt, with a jacket draped around it. But on closer inspection, fashion student Jade Anderson's design is a striking reflection of her own traumatic experiences. When she was four, Jade was in a house fire, and aged 11 she was seriously injured after being in collision with a car. "I had a cracked pelvis and couldn't walk. I was off school for four months. I have a permanent scar on my eye and a bump on my leg. Going through that, and the fire, made me

appreciate life instead of taking it for granted," says the 20-year-old. "This T-shirt symbolises survival; I've burned marks into it and stained it with paint, which is meant to be blood." The jacket is decorated with medals Jade bought at a flea market. "They represent the honour of people who help survivors, the emergency services who work in traumatic incidents. It's a tailored, formal jacket - it represents strength, protection."

Jade's design was inspired by an exhibition at Bradford's Impressions Gallery exploring the role clothing plays in two rites of

passage. Clothes For Living And Dying features photographs of teenage girls dressed for school graduation, and of old women preparing clothes they wish to be buried in after death.

The photographs were taken by Margareta Kern, who grew up in Banja Luka and came to Britain aged 17 in 1992 during the conflict in former Yugoslavia. Later returning to Bosnia, Margareta discovered the ritual of death clothes; her Clothes For Death photographs are of weather-beaten old women sitting in their homes with items of clothing they've chosen for burial. In contrast, Graduation Dresses features girls posing in replicas of glamorous dresses worn by stars like Jennifer

Lopez and Keira Knightley. What connects the old and young women is that their identities have been shaped by turbulent historical, political and cultural currents.

Jade is one of a group of students on Bradford College's fashion degree course who have created imaginative designs inspired by the life and death themes of Margareta's exhibition. Their striking designs went on display at Impressions in a collection called To Die For.

"I looked at my own experiences, and at tragedies like September 11, the July 7 bombings and the Tsunami," says Jade. "None of us know what clothes we're going to die in. Margareta's photographs are powerful because they show the significance of clothes throughout our lives."

Natalie Crabbe based her design around tattoo art. "People get tattoos to mark occasions and rites of passage," she says. "I used tattoo designs, including memorial tattoos which people get to remember loved ones. We know we'll die in our skin, just as we were born in it. I love the Clothes For Death pictures; I'm fascinated by the organisation those women put into it, sometimes years before their death."

A stark striped jacket designed by James Line reflects the uniform worn by prisoners in concentration camps during the Holocaust. Different coloured triangles stitched on to the back of the coat represent categories of prisoners, and a yellow Star of David is sewn onto the front. Cloth figures pinned to the coat symbolise the struggle of Holocaust victims. "It reflects the horrors of war, but not in a military way," says James.

Jade Hannam drew inspiration from both 1920s under-

wear and her 84-year-old grandmother for her design! "I looked at skin and how it ages," she says. "I took photographs of my Nana and studied the skin on her face and hands." Jade's striking outfit features handprints taken from her photographic images, and the fabric is occasionally scrunched like wrinkly skin. "You don't choose your skin, but you can choose your clothes," says Jade. Nicole Strachan's design comprised three pairs of gloves, reflecting different stages of life. "What struck me about Margareta's exhibition was the death clothes the elderly ladies kept in a box. It reminded me of a bride storing her wedding dress away," she says. "Initially I was

going for a wedding dress, but I thought gloves would represent the beginning and end of the life cycle. Gloves are traditionally given to babies and also worn at weddings and funerals. I used an example of each." Hafsa Faquir based her design on the Muslim wedding ceremony, using the colours red, green and gold to represent various stages. "It shows how significant clothing is over the five days of the wedding period," says Hafsa. "I used a photograph of my sister on her wedding day, dressed in traditional wedding colours of red and gold, and one of her wearing green and yellow the night before. On her engagement

she wore blue and on the second day of her wedding she was in turquoise. I was interested in how we collect things over the five days; clothes, money, henna, jewellery and gifts." Another design called Happy Life, made of newspaper print fabric and flowers, explores the notion of life and death in the Army, while The Lottery, featuring a necklace made of lottery balls, reflects the role of money in life. Mexico's Day Of The Dead, celebrating the lives of deceased loved ones, is the inspiration for a design with fabric skulls stitched on to a jacket, and another design features a leather jacket belonging to a late grandfather,

Through their designs, the students showed that clothing can serve as a canvas for expressing and exploring themes, emotions and experiences

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Bradford College fashion students Jade Hannam, James Line, also right, Hafsa Faquir, Jade Anderson and Nicole Strachan with their creations for their To Die For exhibition at Bradford's Impressions Gallery that were inspired by the work of Margareta Kern, below, including her images of Bosnian women and their 'clothes for death', below right



Jade Anderson with her T-shirt and jacket designs that were inspired by her own traumatic experiences

## My View ON WEDNESDAY



Graham Hoyle is a former IT management consultant from Shipley

### Let's get the wheels in motion

When was the last time you rode a bike? Do you think you still could? They were the questions we asked ourselves on encountering a cycle hire shop in Cornwall. My answers were '30-plus years' and 'probably'. In an effort to discover what our greener friends were rattling on about, my wife and I decided to bite the bullet and give it a go. We had arrived upon the coast-to-coast cycle trail - a series of redundant tinning tramways converted into cycleways.

From a wide range at the hire shop at Cambrose, we selected a bike each. Mine was a rather groovy-looking Land Rover model, Lynne's a kind of shopping bike. After a brief demonstration and a safety lecture, we were off - well, Lynne was off, I managed to stay on a little longer.

Initially wobbling along a roadside, we must have looked a sight to passing motorists and the more able cycling types on their racy machines, dressed in garishly-coloured lycra, but we soon rediscovered the old balance and, passing into woodland, we felt almost at home in the saddle. Then we got to the gates!

Along the trail there are staggered gates preventing vehicles from entering. That's a good idea, until you get a little over-confident and, instead of dismounting and pushing through, you try to slalom it, like you used to. That particular bit of balance didn't return so quickly and it was a few more gates before we finally got the hang of it. After a pleasant ride, we arrived at Portreath. The last quarter-mile of the trail was on quiet roads through the village, but the presence of any cars with earshot meant Lynne lost her bottle and decided to push. On the seafront, a cafe was beckoning, looking out over the surf-rich Atlantic. That's when we discovered another downside of cycling - we'd left all our stuff, including cash, back at the hire shop.

We worked our way back to where we'd started and returned our bikes. So, what's the verdict on cycling? Bikes have certainly moved on since my heavy old Hercules, and a new lightweight, cross-country-cycle with suspension, easy gears and sharp brakes is almost a pleasure to ride. Certainly in that wonderful environment, in a holiday frame of mind and with the right weather, it's a lot of fun, even if you haven't done it for decades. You quickly rediscover the skills you'd found so natural as a child, although this time with perhaps a little less bravado.

Will I be buying a bike for local use at home? No. Apart from the steep hills here, the probability of matching the right weather with lack of things to carry, and the time to go at bike-pace, seems just a bit too remote.

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