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ID DUNEDIN FASHION
31 MARCH –1 APRIL 2023

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Figure 1. iD returned to its original venue at Dunedin's historic Railway platform in 2023. Photograph: Chris Sullivan.

After a COVID-19 hiatus, iD Dunedin returned to the iconic Dunedin Railway Station, much to the delight of fashion enthusiasts who have had little chance to glam-up during the pandemic years. Fashion is a barometer of cultural change, and as I hauled my Zambesi jacket out from the back of the wardrobe and answered a "what should I wear?" text from a friend, I wondered how the current state of our world might be conceptualised by the emerging fashion designers.

Now in its twenty-third year, this year's iD Dunedin Fashion show combined parades by New Zealand designers and the iD International Emerging Designer Awards. Celebrating diversity was a key theme, and this was reflected in the models marching down the runway – they showed us that fashion is for all bodies. New Zealand design was represented by established favorites that included NOM*d, Charmain Reveley, Mild Red, Carlson, Zambesi, Liz Mitchell, Company of Strangers and Moochi, and upcoming designers including Jojo Ross, su'mar; Vader; James Bush and Kate & Frances. Milliner; Willmott-Dalton Design, delighted with a collection of contemporary headwear



Figure 2. Amber Bridgemans, Kahuwai label - iD Dunedin NZ commercial fashion designer. Photograph: Chris Sullivan.



Figure 3. George Smart, Manchester Metropolitan University, 2023 iD finalist. Photograph: Chris Sullivan.

inspired by traditional techniques. Amber Bridgman, Kāi Tahu, and the designer behind the Ōtepoti, Dunedin-based label Kahuwai, made a strong presence with a collection that used traditional weaving techniques and spoke to the landscape. Capsule collections from Central Otago designers ReCreate, New Lands and Margaret Wray highlighted the strong design vision in our regions. Some of the loudest applause from the crowd was reserved for Otago Polytechnic graduates who were showcasing their 2022 graduate collection: George Park, Francesca Flynn, Finn Duffy, Russelle Ivan Tino and Sidney North.

It was wonderful to see Dunedin unmasked and dressed up for the evening. In another flurry of pre-show texts with the girls, I mourned the loss of occasions to dress up for and hoped that the rest of the audience was also dragging their finest out from the back of the wardrobe. On our group chat one friend concurred: "no jeans girls" and "make an effort with make-up." As we each turned up for dinner before the show, we marvelled at outfits we hadn't seen on each other for a very long time, stroked fur-covered arms, fondled fabric and admired jewellery. When we got to the railway station, we were not disappointed as we sat back and watched the parade of well-dressed individuals take their seats before the show started. For five hours on Saturday night we were transported miles away from a world beset by illness, inflation and war.

So mesmerising was the event, we didn't even feel the cold. Well, hardly ever. There were moments in the show which brought me right back to earth, and these moments occurred during the iD Emerging Designer Awards (<https://www.idfashion.co.nz/emergingfinalists23>). I was struck by the number of entries which presciently conceptualised a dystopian future. George Smart, Manchester Metropolitan University, made me sit upright up in my seat with his *Lost World* collection consisting of shelter garments, including a danger-red-coloured jacket, for living and surviving in. His iD collection blog explains:

Lost World is set in a post-world war dystopian future and focuses on the lifestyle of humans still surviving in these tough and dark conditions. The world is a wasteland full of makeshift shelters, deconstructed buildings and rubbish. The humans who remain, deserted on Earth, need to find inventive ways to stay alive using the resources available. Inventiveness and individuality are key to staying one step ahead. Protective, transformable and modular garments are at the forefront of design for functionality and protection purposes (<https://www.idfashion.co.nz/finalists-23-blog/george-smart>).

I was also troubled by Nuoqi Shen's *Mars Odyssey* collection. From RMIT, Melbourne, Shen's collection featured space suits, wearable oxygen and life-support systems for a future life on Mars. The garments captured a growing interest in sustainability, using upcycling and zero waste design principles.

Zong-Lin Liang of Shih Chien University, Taipei, Taiwan, won the iD Emerging Designer Award for her *Urban Refugees* collection, described on the iD blog as: "Struggling in the city, trying to escape but hopeless. The *Urban Refugees* collection is inflatable clothing equipped with portable fans. The design presents people, architecture, pressure and burden all becoming one, and the dynamic process of exploding and disintegrating" (<https://www.idfashion.co.nz/finalists-23-blog/zong-lin-liang>). More playful than Smart and Shen's design, the inflatable garments were able to be worn in several different ways.

These designers are working within a lineage of clothing as architecture and shelter: Lucy Orta's *Refuge Wear* series produced between 1992 and 1998, using the tent as a frame of reference, created a series of functional garments to wear in times of emergency (Pinto et al., 2003). *Refuge Wear* was made within the context of the plight of Kurdish refugees, nomads, escaping from a war zone, and individuals who had become homeless after the devastation of the 1995 earthquake that struck near the city of Kobe, Japan. In *Fear and Fashion in the Cold War* (2008), Jane Pavitt explored the simultaneous celebration of space-age fashions in the 1960s and 1970s and the shelter-like bubble garments that emerged at that time in response to darker discussions around survival in the event of a nuclear war.



Figure 4. Nuoqui Shen, RMIT Melbourne, 2023 iD finalist. Photograph: Chris Sullivan.



Figure 5. Zong-Lin Liang, Shih Chien University, Taiwan, 2023 iD Emerging Designer. Photograph: Chris Sullivan.

Survival fashion is not new, but fashion's reflection of the cultural present means that conversations on survival wear erupt when we are living through times of flux and crisis. The emerging designers who engaged in this conversation in Dunedin gave it a contemporary 2023 twist. As I left the iD fashion bubble and drove home, I felt uneasy. I got more than I bargained for from iD. Art is like that – it challenges us, and the best artists and designers are the ones who leave us sitting on the edge of our seats, in that space between awe at their creativity and discomfit in their ability to speak to the issues of our time: sustainability, survival, shelter.

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