

The New School

Jon Max Goh, Blair Moore
and fellow members of Parsons'
class of 2015 explore their
artistic identities.

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“Dare to dream about a world that hasn’t existed, and design for that world.”

JON MAX GOH

Parsons The New School for Design may be going through a fairly rigorous change in curriculum, but one mantra has always stayed the same at the 119-year-old institution: create with purpose, meaning and global responsibility at the helm.

“The school really forces its students to question what the industry needs to see, what it hasn’t seen, what we can challenge, what we can change, what the pressing issues are,” says Jon Max Goh, 2015’s Parsons Menswear Designer of the Year.

Neither Goh nor fellow BFA grad Blair Moore—a Womenswear Designer of the Year finalist whose collection won her Parsons’ and Kering’s Empowering Imagination contest—looked to the concrete jungle around them for inspiration in conceiving their respective thesis projects. Rather, Goh took memories and materials from his familial ties in Singapore, and Moore revisited her nomadic upbringing on a cattle farm in Australia. Both collections—whose looks here accompany those of fellow grads Leonid Batekhin, Ethan Hon, Emanuel Nunez, Stephanie Seow and Matthew Wallace—play with the sartorial line that often divides masculinity and femininity, with a steadfast focus on sustainability.

Moving from Singapore to New York City to attend Parsons, Goh never thought he’d ultimately design for men. He was captivated early on by the “vibrant, vivid and fantastical” presentations in Dior runway shows. “I designed really pretty dresses, voluminous stuff,” Goh says, “always pushing the boundary of what I could make and what the body could handle as far as shape and form.”

In a way, that’s remained fairly constant in his latest collection, one that has a definite sense of fantasy and whimsy woven throughout each piece. The only difference, of course, is that he designs menswear.

Halfway through his four-year study at Parsons, Goh came to a sudden realization: women can wear practically anything. The risks in womenswear seemed limited, and he was never interested in repeating what’s already been done. With menswear, however, he saw more rules waiting to be broken. “There is this world of expectations and traditions that designers are expected to fulfill,” Goh says, “or at least we’re conditioned to wanting to see it. That gave me the opportunity to push the envelope or take certain notions, and turn them on themselves.”

Goh’s final collection pays homage to his identity and cultural experience living in Singapore, an attempt to form a vocabulary to understand the “post-colonial British hangover” of his native country. To sort through the confusion, he delved deep into his family’s and Singapore’s history to find pieces and memories to infuse into his designs. “The thesis began to evolve into something intuitive, even in the process,” he says. “Sometimes I would look at my grandmother’s blouse on a form next to me while I was draping, and that’s how some of the shirts were conceived.” The prints he used came from curtains and upholstery at his grandparents’ house, and the beading in some of his pieces is an ode to traditional Singaporean women’s slippers.

Aside from playing with the juxtaposition between masculinity and femininity, and East and West, Goh mixed Old World with New World as

well: “I wanted to see how that could seamlessly shift back and forth—you look at some things and it seems like they could be from the past, yet they haven’t been seen before.”

In the end, he created an attention-grabbing collection that makes people ask questions: what happens if you design a dress for a man and call it menswear? Or, as Goh says, “What are the perceptions of gender roles and gender norms, and more importantly, what is that conversation about other traditional menswear that you don’t see on the runway, underrepresented in the media and magazines?”

Looking at Moore’s work, it’s clear she challenged herself with the same sort of questions, though she came up with different answers, focusing on her upbringing in Australia. This piece of her biography enlightens the designs she created for her “Walkabout” series, the name of which refers to the traditional rite of passage, undertaken by male Australian Aborigines, to live in the wilderness. Her collection taps into how women may fulfill this spiritual journey.

“By integrating form, function and necessity, I created a collection that enhances the journey,” wrote Moore from Italy, where she was in the midst of touring Kering’s labs, factories, showrooms and stores as part of her prize for winning the Empowering Imagination contest.

Essentially, each ensemble in Walkabout is its own “travel kit,” as she puts it, “tailored to individual destinations based on elements like climate, terrain and environment. I wanted to look into the idea of how we can carry the things we need on oneself.”

Moore learned self-sufficiency on the cattle farm, which became particularly handy during her four years at Parsons. There, she knew to take part in “just about everything there was to apply for,” allowing her to develop new textiles, “constantly rethink the idea behind construction,” and work with artisans with whom she might not have had a chance to engage otherwise.

One of these Parsons opportunities involved an LDNY Foundation competition, which in turn introduced her to craftsmen in Papua New Guinea, Peru and Mongolia, among other locales. These became the individual destinations that would inspire her Walkabout looks. Moore also got to connect with Maiyet, the luxury label focused on ethically produced fashion, where she explored industrial sustainability further. It became, she says, “a factor present in each of my collections. Since working with Maiyet and Kering, I saw a greater effect on the environment from the mass markets, and how there needs to be something done about it—this is very important to me.”

Goh would agree, having been asked the same question by the professors at Parsons: How can you take your responsibility as a designer one step further to better the industry, and even the world? The idea of changing the world is lofty and intimidating at best, Goh says, but the answer likely lies in finding what the fashion industry lacks.

“If you can think very clearly about what we’re missing, what you can do differently to change the way we experience fashion or change how we buy something that is something the fashion industry needs,” he says. “Dare to dream about a world that hasn’t existed, and design for that world.”



Opposite page: Vest & Trousers ETHAN HON,
Top EMANUEL NUNEZ.
This page: Top MATTHEW WALLACE,
Trousers ETHAN HON.

This page: Top LEONID BATEKHIN,
Skirt EMANUEL NUNEZ,
Shoes MARYAM NASSIR ZADEH.
Opposite page: Vest BLAIR MOORE.





This page Top ETHAN HON.
Opposite page: Top EMANUEL NUNEZ.
Trousers STEPHANIE SEOW.

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