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REIGN SUPREME

Photographed by Ellen von Unwerth

BREAK THE MOULD

Meet three designers who have their sights set on elevating Canadian fashion.

BY SUZANNE ROGERS

AS THE SUZANNE ROGERS FASHION INSTITUTE AT RYERSON UNIVERSITY ENTERS ITS SECOND year, I am honoured to introduce our sophomore trio of Fellows: Matin Mithras, Olivia Rubens, and Jonah Solomon. These dynamic individuals will follow in the footsteps of our 2017 Fellows, who are busily honing their skills as they continue their educations in London. Alexandra Armata is attending Central Saint Martins, enrolled in its superb MA Fashion program. Stephanie Moscall-Varey recently entered the equally remarkable MA Fashion Design Technology Womenswear program at the London College of Fashion (a program Rubens will also be joining).

As our new Fellows prepare to take the next big step in pursuit of their fashion dreams, I was delighted to sit with all three to discuss their plans and hopes for future success.

JONAH SOLOMON

FUTURE LEGACY

“My goal as a fashion designer is to one day be in a place where I can inspire the next generation of fashion creatives. Throughout my evolution as a designer I have always looked up to, and continue to look up to, a countless number of designers. These designers have inspired me to pursue fashion, and have helped shape who I am as a designer. To inspire just one person to pursue a future in fashion would mean the world to me. It would signify that I have a reach and an audience. It would also help to solidify my place in the history of fashion, as that one person would continue to tell my story to others. To get to a place where I can inspire someone, I hope to work in an established heritage house like Louis Vuitton, or under one of my idols, like Miuccia Prada, Nicolas Ghesquière, or Viktor & Rolf.”

AGENT OF CHANGE

“Being only 20 years old, I have grown up in a world that has seen incredible shifts towards being more inclusive, accepting, and aware of our actions. This has shaped who I am as an individual, and as a designer and creative person. I want to impact the global fashion industry by continuing to use a diverse cast of models in terms of ethnicity, race, size, age, and gender. My garments are to be worn by any and every individual, just as all fashion should be. I also want to make the industry more globally conscious, by adopting ethical, sustainable, and transparent production methods. By attending school in Toronto, I have access to so many talented people, including fellow designers, photographers, and artists. I want to use my position to help showcase the work of other talented Canadians through collaborative work, and to act as an ambassador and advocate for unseen talent.”

CREATIVE PROCESS

“When I need to find new inspiration, I tend to do so at home in my studio space. Over time, I have built an expansive library of fashion and art books that I always refer to. If my books don’t give me the inspiration I need, I often travel downtown and walk around different areas of the city. Whenever something catches my eye, I instantly take a photo to refer to. I have a note on my phone with my thoughts, and the names of people, places or things I want to research. One of the main sites I use is Tumblr—it is such an underutilized resource for designers, and I’ve learned so much about this industry, both in terms

of its history and its contemporary discussions. People constantly post photos and reviews of archival and current fashion shows, magazine covers, and editorial spreads, and engage in discussion. I currently have close to 20,000 of my own posts and re-posts that are meticulously tagged and organized to look back on. Once I have a source of inspiration, I enjoy listening to classical music to start designing. Something about the melodies clears my head and allows me to tap into my creativity.”

IMPACT OF SRFI

“The generosity of the SRFI will help in so many ways that it is hard to know where to start! Being interviewed by this magazine is a great example. Having the chance to be showcased in a magazine like this is really a dream come true, and something I wouldn’t have believed would be happening at my age. I owe it all to the SRFI. The institute will also give me the means to network and connect with amazing people in the industry. It will allow me to showcase my work on a national and global scale. The SRFI has already helped me grow my confidence as a designer and has validated my path up to this point.”

DESIGN AESTHETIC

“My main objective is to create pieces that will have storied histories and last lifetimes in someone’s wardrobe. Garments that will be passed down through generations, but are still idiosyncratic, so they always feel fresh and modern. I never design based on current trends. I often start with very classic silhouettes and modernize them in some way, whether it be through updating the fabrication, changing seam lines, or adding appliqués and other details. I also want my clothing to be lived in—my clothes are to be worn and exposed to the real-life activities of the wearer. I like to focus on bringing a hand-done craft to my clothing. Art informs so much of my inspiration as a designer, and art is a craft that is done entirely by hand. Contemporary fashion moves so quickly, and a lot of clothing produced today is manufactured entirely by machinery. I want my clothing to reflect an idea of slowing down and to reintroduce the magic and beauty of hand-done craft. I try to achieve this by customizing my fabrics or final garments with decorative stitching work, patchwork, dyeing, and quilting.”

Photographed by Andrey Klobucar; Models: Shelby Furber (Sutherland Models), Ella Swan (Elmer Olsen Models); Danielle Browne (Elmer Olsen Models); Hair and makeup by Mark Jordy Gonzales (Judy Inc.)





OLIVIA RUBENS

FUTURE LEGACY

“Ultimately, after working for a luxury brand like Faustine Steinmetz or Vivienne Westwood in order to elevate my craft after graduate school, I’d like to come back to owning and operating my own eco-friendly ready-to-wear womenswear company. I hope to change the often negative or bland stereotype about eco-friendliness and give new, innovative, and exciting meaning to the possibilities and aesthetic it can offer, and hopefully I can change at least some of the market’s values and consumer habits in the process. My goal in my MA at the London College of Fashion is to bring up-cycling, eco-friendliness and hopefully biodesign down to the level of the creation of the fabric, and to build beautifully executed and well-thought-out intrinsic pieces from the ground up, which is how I plan to structure my brand in future.”

AGENT OF CHANGE

“While slow, the emerging designer market is growing in Canada with so much talent—I’d love to be a part of that. I plan to come back to work on my company again, and to keep giving Canadian design life, so we can keep elevating our international competitive capacities. I hope that being a part of that, along with other very exciting emerging designers, can change the perception of the majority of the Canadian market to buy more locally, to buy well and intelligently, and to buy with values in mind. Sustainability should have been more in the mainstream conversation many years ago, and I hope that I can help make an exciting difference so that we might think differently about the way we purchase our clothing here in Canada.”

CREATIVE PROCESS

“My lifestyle at the moment hasn’t had a lot of room for ‘regeneration’ but I like to take the small moments when I can. I am a really observant person, so I appreciate a long walk through the city, tak-

ing new routes and observing architecture and landscape when I can—the small in-between moments. This will be taken to the next level in such a beautiful and new city as London, England. Where I really thrive, though, and where I can get going on a concept is the library. I’ve learned how extremely beautiful and resourceful Toronto’s Reference Library is, and I am so looking forward to seeing what the libraries at UAL have to offer.”

IMPACT OF SRFI

“I’ve put in a ton of work (and lack of sleep) to get to where I am today, and I am so appreciative that I am being recognized and fully supported and illuminated for that. I finally got into a graduate school that I love, which has been my goal since my years at Ryerson, and I hope that by being illuminated in Canada and abroad, I can be an important part of what the Canadian landscape has to offer, and that I can raise awareness about what I believe in, and about my work in both Canada and the international market. This will give me such a strong foundation from which I can grow in this difficult industry, and I’m thankful I have the SRFI to help me navigate the somewhat unknown or undiscovered in what lies ahead for my career. I believe in my work and my future as a designer, but it means the world to me that such a strong organization has my back.”

DESIGN AESTHETIC

“I would describe my designs as ‘femme tomboy’. I enjoy ‘girly’ or playful elements such as ruffles, patterns, and bright colours, but my aesthetic is relaxed, somewhat effortless, and a little boyish. My woman is not afraid to dabble in colour and print, has a powerful air about her, but is also a truly easygoing woman who is definitely off the beaten path.”

MATIN MITHRAS

FUTURE LEGACY

"I simply want to design clothes for a living—clothes that can make a statement and are more than just covering the body. I like to nurture and enrich the soul of people who are wearing it. To me, this is progress and evolution and not an ultimate destination, as you can always reach newer heights."

AGENT OF CHANGE

"With new global developments, especially the political changes in the past two years, I believe Canadians can be more influential in the world than ever. Our Canadian values of freedom, equality, inclusion, and respect for different cultures is inspiring to me and will be reflected in my work. I want to do my best to develop a unique style and identity while supporting other talented, hard-working Canadian designers to bring more attention to the Canadian fashion scene."

CREATIVE PROCESS

"When it comes to design and creativity in fashion, there is no limit to the ways you can express your ideas. With each project I take on, I explore new techniques and materials that make me excited to come up with new and original ideas. The joy and eagerness I get from this process motivates me to keep going. I get inspired by an intellectual conversation, a documentary, a music video, a historical character or event, visiting a museum or art gallery, and nature's beauty and

intricacies. I love spending time in a library, walking the aisles and searching for hidden treasures that can't be found online. After some good finds, I analyze how I can utilize them in my world."

IMPACT OF SRFI

"The fact that the SRFI is the only fashion fellowship program in Canada will have a tremendous impact on raising my visibility and reaching a broader audience, which opens many doors to success. More importantly, the SRFI provides amazing support by investing in us and helping us overcome many obstacles and issues that, under normal circumstances, would be more difficult to resolve. The SRFI gives me this strong motivation to work harder and push myself to the limits in order to achieve my goals."

DESIGN AESTHETIC

"My design aesthetic very much revolves around the way my mind functions, which is very contradictory, and an amalgamation of polar opposites. I enjoy aspects of contrast and drama, and the combination of old and new. As avant-garde as I am as a designer, I still decode and deconstruct the classic arts, including architecture, and allow them to influence my designs. I am drawn to bold and expressive looks that experiment with colour, form, and texture, although I genuinely appreciate the classic silhouettes."

