



Sarabande studios

We met four creative women working inside the studios of London's Sarabande Foundation, a charitable foundation set up by Lee Alexander McQueen

words *bre graham*
photos *kristy noble*

Inside a very nondescript building behind the canals of Haggerston in east London is the Sarabande Foundation. More than 20 years ago, the foundation was set up by famed fashion designer, Lee Alexander McQueen as space for creative minds to work. Named after McQueen's 2007 Spring/Summer collection, the foundation provides scholarships to students, as well as being a physical space to house artist studios. When you visit, you find McQueen's personal art collection scattered throughout the building. The foundation also offers its artists mentoring, peer-to-peer support, workshops and a gallery space to show off their work. On a bright spring morning, we sat down with four of the foundation's brightest creatives to get a glimpse into their working worlds. →



*Katie Roberts-Wood,
fashion designer and founder
of ROBERTS | WOOD*

Fashion was definitely not what I thought I'd be doing. I did an undergraduate degree in medicine in Glasgow and thought I was going to be a doctor. I had a realisation that I wanted to be creative, but I always perceived it as a less solid career path. During my degree though, I was teaching myself to make clothes. The first thing I ever made started as a charity shop upcycle. When I graduated, I applied to the Royal College of Arts to do a masters course in fashion - and I got in. I love the technicality and the romance of fashion. I never went into this wanting a job at a fashion house, I always wanted to start my own thing and work for myself.

I decided I not only wanted to make something new, but I wanted a new way to create the clothes. I use software for the patterns, then laser cut them. I love it when techniques and technology come together to make new things. I create the same shape over and over again, then the assembly of all of these hundreds of pieces has to be done by hand. It's a craft and an artisanal technique, but I like

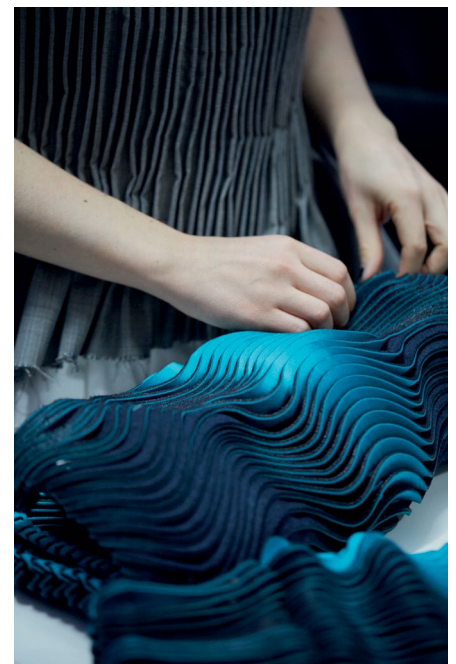


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that you can involve technology to make it really forward-thinking. You are taking one action and one form, and creating something that's more than the sum of its parts. Sometimes I think it links in to my scientific background because I like that type of repetition you can find in nature, my dresses almost look like DNA structures.

I also love ruffles, bows, pleats and things that feel like exaggerated femininity. You have to be unapologetic, I want these things to feel powerful and female led. There's a fluidity to my designs too, I want women to be able to move when they wear them. I wear a lot of my own clothes, I don't want these just to be occasion pieces, I want real women to wear them in their lives. →





*Michaela Yearwood-Dan,
painter*

I hate white canvases, I usually start painting the canvas a block colour straight away. A big white canvas is very daunting. I drift between figurative and abstract works. I'm really inspired by collage, literature and music. I worked on a series called 'Love Letters to Siri' after a bad break-up. It was a long time coming and was a big self-realisation of 'I can do better'. I prepped three medium-sized canvases and I wasn't sure what I was going to create. In my old notes section on my phone, I found messages that I never sent, so I started taking those bits and writing them into the artworks themselves.

I'm a cliché, I've always drawn, I've always been involved in the arts, but painting is the one that's captured my long-term interest. I went to art school and I always loved how subjective it was. I did a Fine Art BA in Brighton - and now here I am. I've been at Sarabande for six months and everything I've been working on here is really personal and identity driven. As a black woman, a lot of my work touches on race, femininity and culture. My next show is titled: 'One English



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Pound', after someone in my family was left just £1 in a will – which is so amazingly petty. Someone once told me my work was petty, so it's a nod to that.

I love working with glitter, it's a mess but so beautiful. Oil paint and charcoal are what I use in all my work. Green is my favourite colour to work with. It's the colour you crave the most, the colour you see on holiday, it reminds me of the Caribbean. I'm about to do a one-month transfer residency in Johannesburg, South Africa. I'll be working with other artists there and then putting together a proposal for a piece at artist-run festival Lagos Biennial. So I'll be working through a lot of paint in the next six months. I love mixing paint, it's such a nice thing to work with in a digital age of art making. →



*Kristina Walsh,
footwear designer*

There's something poetic about shoes and the idea that they walk you through life. They affect how you move in your environment. I trained as a footwear designer and, while studying, I saw an exhibition that featured a prosthetic leg and my mind was blown. I knew that's what I wanted to work with because essentially it's a shoe. The way that something looks really affects how people feel about their bodies. It will become a part of her wardrobe and the beauty of the design must be considered.

There are so many different emotional experiences to losing a limb and when working with an amputee there are a lot of big issues you're working with. You have to involve the person who you're designing for because you're designing a part of their body and life. I am working with a double amputee called Erin, and it was so incredible watching her try on my designs for the first time. Emotionally, it was indescribable - it will be part of her. We started with two prototypes carved from wax that she chose from. You have to consider everything from how tall they'll



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be to how heavy. Once the final design is chosen, they'll then be made from carbon fibre. I'm working with different amputee dancers and performers who are having to adapt their work to suit their new limbs. They have to be functional, so it's a really specific way to work when you're designing for people who have to dance. This practice makes you think about how you use footwear.

A lot of my work is not just about physically connecting people, but emotionally too. I also design jewellery and even when I design rings I want there to be an element of feeling and touch about them. I learnt how to work with jewellery from my Sarabande neighbour James so being here really helps you work across disciplines. →



Saelia Aparicio,
multidisciplinary artist

I don't focus on the medium. I start with the narrative and the meaning behind the work, it's all about the ideas. I have many obsessions. I have lots of scattered writings in notebooks and eventually they all come together. My inspiration is always from people, social situations and biology. I just did a project about an estate in Newham and all the people that used to live there. I didn't know it at the time but it was actually where Lee Alexander McQueen grew up. I become attached to situations and want to question them, such as how pollution affects us and our bodies. It's something that living in London has made me think about and now it's filtered into my artwork.

Now I'm working on a project making sculptures about cleaners and sex workers. I'm drawing on ceilings with ink and old cleaning products. I really like aspects of performance in my work, non-visual sensations that can connect with other parts of your brain. I like combining different things in my work. I made these plywood chairs in a series of



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12 all modelled on real people that I know. They're painted with ink, then wood stained and digitally cut. They're really heavy but designed to be functional stools. They stack upon one another to save space.

I love being here and being surrounded by people working with different materials. My studio is situated between a hat maker and a fashion designer, which seem so different from my work. It helps keep you creative. I've been dedicated to being an artist now for over 15 years. Creativity is cyclical. When I started out, I worried less about creativity and focused on the practical side of being an artist, from packing artwork to contracts. The art world is a lot more than just making work. ♦

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