



Bottomless carpetbag of style

Karen Karam designs clothes that will take you into a fantasy world of lush imagination

Karen Karam's dream at the age of five was to be Barbie. Looking at her now, after graduating from college and starting work, it seems that she never really lost that dream. Her flowing long blonde hair, slight tan and very kitsch outfit are very Barbie-esque. You almost want to ask her where Ken is...

Born and raised in Beirut, Karen has always been fascinated by fashion. She remembers drawing outfits at the age of eight, engrossed with the pattern and colours she can so easily mesh together on paper. But it isn't a simple childhood fascination. After seeing her graduate show go from paper to textile, it is obvious that Karen isn't just another designer outshined by established fashion stars – she's a comet on the rise.

Asked to explain why she left Beirut to study fashion design, she said, "I always felt like an outsider at school there because I was always sent home to change my outfit. But I never let that get to me; I was determined to keep my own fashion style! So I suppose it's very fortunate that I was able to move to London and study what I love. Here you don't feel weird being yourself." She also feels that London has a lot more to offer culturally: "It's just such an inspiring city! Here you are bombarded by different senses of fashion, different notions of what's hip, so just



“I want to make the most fantastic designs that people will love to wear and an outrageous line every couple of years”



watching people on the streets can give inspiration. But Beirut is getting better in that sense, especially in the last two years.”

Central St Martins, where she studied for her degree, provided her with a great network and a sea of creative people and ideas. Her fantastic graduate show, complete with carousels and all, was inspired by *Mary Poppins*. “As a child I was absolutely obsessed with the scene in the movie when Mary and Bert and the kids jump into the painting and enter a new world. The fantasy behind the act was such a stimulus for my imagination.”

As soon as she graduated from St Martins her dresses were called in by *POP* magazine and her bags were snapped up by Colette, Paris. Quite a big achievement for a fresh grad. The interesting thing is, though, she’s so easy to warm up to, as if she is unaware of her achievements. “It’s not that difficult for people in this line of work to become a bit arrogant. I have had unpleasant experiences with such people and I think that has left an impression on me. I’m not there to step on people’s toes. I want to make the most fantastic designs that people will love to wear and an outrageous line every couple of years.”

After graduating she worked at many of the top fashion houses, from Galliano and Chloé in Paris to McQueen in London. “I definitely got more out of that working experience than college. It was so fantastic! My absolute favourite designer has to be McQueen.”

Even though she loves London, Karen knows she wants to end up back in Beirut. “But the situation over there right now is terrible. Lebanon has a repetitive history. When the general atmosphere is peaceful, living there is excellent. But when the situation turns bad, it’s horrible.” For now, though, she’s working on her own clothing line, Karen Kamar, “which will sell in the Middle East, of course. It’s such a nerve-wrecking business, and also extremely exciting!” ●