

Face value

Fashion

Designer creates fashion with character Lesley Mofokeng

Who would have thought that drab steel wool and pot scourers could find their way into glamorous haute couture?

Only the imaginative Sharlene Khan, a Wits fine art master's degree student.

The 27-year-old has used the kitchen scrubbers along with some of her paintings, prints and sculptures to come up with an inspiring and fresh approach to an art installation fused with a fashion show.

Khan launched her range on Friday night at the Joburg campus's Downstairs Theatre.

Inspired by city life and its busy traders, the Durban-born Khan has painted pictures of street characters on fashionable garments such as ball gowns, pants suits and cocktail dresses.

Along with scourers and steel wool, she uses items that can be bought on the street, such as tubes of super-glue, sweets and key rings, as accessories.

"This is just about breaking the stereotypes of paintings, drawings and sculptures.

"You know the old saying that there is nothing more one can



Designs on art: Sharlene Khan with some of her designs and models



do about art except for installations and video work.

"I challenge that and blur the line between art and fashion."

She says the exhibition is more performance-based than just a fashion show.

"It is not properly a performance, art exhibition or a fashion show."

She says the clothes she designs - without having any fashion design background - are wearable, but not washable.

She uses canvas usually used for painting with oils, and lino print for drawing and painting the characters.

The collection took her three months to complete and the accessories were bought in Newtown.

The clothes are modelled to the music of African star Khadja Nin's Sambolera and songs off the Moulin Rouge soundtrack.

Khan says she was inspired by Thupelo, an international artists' workshop held last year in Cape Town. She had the idea to create a coat from a scarecrow she saw out of her window.

Khan already holds a master's degree in fine art from the University of Durban-Westville.

She says coming to Joburg has helped her reach a bigger market as an artist.

However, Khan says she has been shocked by how street traders and hawkers are treated in Joburg compared with Durban.

"In Durban they are considered part of the city life. Here they are treated as a problem," she says.



Fantasy: Model Leesha Devchand, above, wears a pink ball gown made of oil-painting canvas and ink drawings, and decorated with papier-mâché fruits



Bottom line: Preeya Chiba looks funky in a playful pink and blue suit which is accessorised with key rings and flashing toy cellphones