

Benjamin Shine on his inspiration, how it felt to win the Enterprising Young Brit Award and what direction his work is taking now

Shining Bright



A Star That Shines So Bright
by Sarah Toozie

"Innovation" best sums up Benjamin Shine's work. The 28-year-old designer from London, who has an MA in Fashion from Central St Martins, is responsible for the award-winning Skoody - a scarf that can be turned into a reversible shower-proof hooded top.

"The Skoody was developed following my brother's experience," Shine explains. "He got caught in the rain, with only a scarf for protection, and was wishing his scarf could miraculously provide a hood or even some sort of shower-proof body covering. From this genuine necessity, I took up the challenge as I have a particular affinity toward complex pattern cutting!"

Shine designed the first Skoody

prototype in 2001 and within two years it was snapped up by Arsenal Football club, with a promo launch at the Highbury stadium.

The market for the Skoody proved to be wide ranging especially as Shine kept manufacturing costs to a minimum.

"Customers have ranged from young children to teenage skateboarders and adults of all ages," Shine says. "It has been marketed towards and used for hiking, skiing, city workers, golfers, yachting, general travel, sports and children's school kits. In short, the Skoody has a very

diverse and universal market - really it is aimed at everybody as everybody can get caught in the rain."

In recognition of the Skoody's innovation and broad appeal Shine scooped the Enterprising Young Brit Award, in the Creative Category, in 2004. But, surprisingly, he didn't expect to be chosen.

"The process was quite daunting as the short listed candidates had 10 minutes to present their business to a panel of industry judges," Shine recalls. "The candidate who went in before me had an entire camera crew following him and it seemed obvious to all that he was a certain winner...but he didn't win, which

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was a huge and pleasant surprise!"

Shine sees the award as recognition for many hours of toil (alongside the Skoody collection and its website, he was also producing a large range of artworks that took over a year to make).

"It's nice to get a pat on the back once in a while - and that's how it felt to me," Shine says. "In addition, the publicity was very useful in promoting the Skoody, which was a real bonus.

"It has been great to be a part of the Enterprising Brits group of people. They have meetings and

events throughout the year and I often contribute or get involved in things they are doing. Being a designer involves being enterprising especially when trying to push boundaries and achieve challenging goals."

Earlier this year Shine achieved one of his goals when a global licence was agreed with ADM Marlow International for the manufacture and marketing of the Skoody.

"Marlow International deal with far larger clients than I would ever have been able to reach and at far better cost than could have been achieved by my small business," Shine says.

"The idea of bringing the Skoody to market and licensing it to a

large company became the aim and strategy of the Skoody product. I'm really pleased that this actually happened."

Following on from the success of the Skoody, Shine was approached by Rebecca Earley, curator of the Well Fashioned: Eco Style in the UK exhibition, and was sponsored by Rohan, the specialist outdoorwear company, to develop the RUCKJACK garment (a jacket that can be converted into a bag which can be used to carry items).

Earley was attracted to Shine's designs, because of their multi-functional quality - they have the potential for a longer life

SKOODY



span and could be considered more eco-friendly.

Shine himself is concerned by the direction clothing production has taken in terms of ethical fashion.

"I find the quantity of clothing produced and the rate at which new stock is offered staggering and worrying," Shine admits. "For the sake of fashion, new cheap clothing is churned out to serve a very limited life span. I do feel this cannot actually continue for much longer as we are all becoming far more ecological in how we deal with consumer goods. This high turn around of clothing does not compliment the ever-increasing ecological morals we are all learning to adhere to.

"Design, be it fashion and product design, will have to adapt again, very soon, to work within the stricter ecological guide lines that are now being enforced - whilst still making the product exciting and new. It's simply a matter of the design challenge becoming based more on ecological issues instead of being geared towards how quick the product can be churned out. The latter has clearly been mastered and proven, now we should be designing more responsibly with that resource."

But can the fashion industry ever be truly eco-friendly?

"My view has always been: anything is possible," Shine says. "Certainly

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it would not happen over night, but if laws and guidelines are introduced throughout the process - from garment manufacture right through to how consumers throw away clothing - then there is no reason why the fashion industry can't make a significant improvement in becoming that much more eco-friendly."

Shine's work isn't just about designing multifunctional eco-friendly products, however.

"My work has branched out over the years and my interests in commercial designs and one-off design have led me into product design as well as mixed media art works," Shine says.

Indeed, earlier this year he unveiled

Above left: Skoody