

The Art of Design
Benjamin

Shine

With an ongoing array of projects ranging from artworks and fashion collaborations to creative toys and furniture, Benjamin Shine continues to stretch the boundaries between art and design.

The spark of an idea, the twinkle of something brand-new and innovative, a burst of creative energy perhaps - or maybe a reference to his broad creative vision and the global direction his brand is heading? Which ever it is, a lot can be read into the simple dots that make up the Benjamin Shine Studio logo.

London born designer Benjamin Shine describes his creative approach as 'constructional problem solving.' Indeed, lateral thinking plays an obvious role in his work. "I like to let the materials dictate the design", says Shine, who is currently working on a myriad of projects, oscillating between creating one-off artworks and products that can be mass-produced.

While his artworks are commissioned by collectors and companies alike, his growing range of products are distributed throughout Europe and the US under his namesake brand. As his range of work expands, Shine has found that his early training in fashion design (following stints under Stella McCartney and Hussein Chalayan) continue to influence his approach to design. "Working in the fashion industry provided a great introduction into the creative world", says Shine. "Without an understanding of pattern cutting and textiles, I wouldn't have arrived at some of the concepts that have been so successful", he adds.

Shine first gained recognition among the fashion set following his graduate collection, 'Realised'. Born out of an act of rebellion following his teachers advice that 'everything had been done before', he set out to prove them wrong. Earning him a 1st BA degree with honours and the highest grades ever awarded by the university, his 'Realised' collection reflected the genuine feeling of optimism, hope and change in the wake of entering a new millennium.

"I wanted to find a new way of cutting clothes - to make it a visual statement - even if at times it was at the expense of conventional wearability", says Shine. The collection explored entrapment and emergence through one-piece pattern cutting, where continuous hemlines appeared to curve through the body, encasing it. "The body became increasingly exposed throughout the catwalk's sequence of black and white outfits," Shine explains. "The idea of separating oneself from one's surrounding was the underlying message."

Hailed as the star of London's Graduate Fashion Week, Shine was featured in various fashion and design publications. Harpers Bazaar claimed, "Our investment tip: Benjamin Shine", Vogue insisted, "Benjamin Shine's much hyped collection didn't disappoint", and Tatler exclaimed, "A rising star - long may he shine." Interior design

guru Kelly Hoppen, who commissioned Shine to create a bespoke outfit, endorsed the young designer by saying "I think Benjamin Shine is pure Zen... his cutting is ingenious."

Shine went on to accept an offer from the prestigious St Martins to study on their MA fashion course and his interest turned to a more sculptural aesthetic, but this did not sit well with the infamously volatile course leader Louise Wilson. Shine explains, "One day she said to me - You are the best cutter on the course and I believe you will have an impressive show but I don't think you're benefiting from all of this - it's too stifling." Shine found himself agreeing and left St Martins the very next day.

Fuelled by the disappointment of St Martins, Shine continued to develop his collection of mixed-media artworks. It was during this time in 2002 that he also designed one of his first commercial clothing products, the 'Skoody'. Following a suggestion from his brother, the Skoody was conceived as a multifunctional accessory to combat unpredictable weather. "The Skoody was an exercise in pattern cutting, fabrication and costing, aimed at a universal market", says Shine. The garment, stored in a small pouch, can quickly transform into a warm hooded top before reversing into a rain-proof jacket.



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With this, Shine quickly learnt the importance of maintaining a clear business strategy. "The Skoody experience taught me the basics of running a business - I was a one-man-band managing design, sample making, raising purchase orders and invoices, as well as selling, marketing and delivering the goods," says Shine. Receiving widespread media-coverage and well-known clients such as Arsenal Football Club and Coca-Cola, the Skoody's success earned Shine the Enterprising Young Brit Award in 2004. The Skoody also became the first of Shine's products to become patented and licensed, the latter freeing him from the burden of manufacture and providing the template for marketing and distributing future products.

With his self-taught approach to product design, Shine ventured further into new territory with his next patented invention, 'Cordz': "I wanted to create an activity that provided a tactile approach to drawing - an idea I first developed through my own fabric-portraits." His innovative Cordz range enables children to create expressive pictures on reusable boards. Using pieces of cord in a variety of lengths and colours, limitless designs and pictures can be created with lengths of cord which are easily lifted and reapplied to a Velcro-like surface via the cord-loading pen or by hand.

Cordz was awarded Top Creative Toy in 2007 and it was in this same year that the Courvoisier Future 500 talent scouts singled out Shine by ranking him top of their list as 'The One to Watch in Art and Design'. Cordz has since won the internationally acclaimed 2009 Red Dot Design Award, positioning both Cordz and Shine's design reputation among the greats of the design industry.

Most recently Shine was commissioned to design a range of limited-edition Perspex products. One of his chairs, aptly named the '40 Winks' chair (which takes the form of a person sitting comfortably) provides a bold and witty visual pun. "It plays with the idea of human inhabitation, both on a small scale where the chair space appears inhabited and on larger scale, where a group of these chairs appear to populate an environment." Shine explains. "The relaxed and slumbered silhouette aims to evoke a sense of calm and peacefulness." Launched during London Design Week, '40 Winks' stole the attention of British fashion house Aquascutum, who promptly requested the piece for their Regent Street store.

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BENJAMIN SHINE



reddot design award
winner 2009

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As well as feverishly churning out new product ideas, Shine continues to develop new artworks and techniques, working predominantly with fabrics. However, his ambitious 'Landscape' sculpture concept for Parliament Hill in Australia's Capital Territory opened the door to a new realm for Shine to explore. Depicting a human hand holding a paintbrush, poised as if painting the backdrop scenery, Shine's 'Landscape' concept was short-listed from a wealth of leading international architecture and design firms. The 25ft-tall sculpture, constructed from 20,000 cast bronze paintbrushes represented the 'creative vision' behind the man-made capital of Australia. "Working on such a large-scale opens up entirely new ideas," Shine says. "The responsibility in providing a sculpture that connects with an entire community is a great challenge," he adds.

Whilst Shine steals time to work on such personal projects, the demand for his striking fabric-portraits has rapidly grown, to such an extent that there is now an enviable waiting list. "It's been a pleasant surprise as when I created my first fabric portrait, back in 2003, I never anticipated making another." The technique is certainly unique, consisting of frayed shreds of fabric, woven through thousands of eyelets onto a solid 4 ft x 5 ft tableau - like a giant complex dot-dot. Shine says that the materials used to depict the subject are chosen to reflect the sitter, for example, Lady Thatcher's portrait was constructed from silk on rusted iron (a reference to the 'Iron Lady' tag). "Sir Edmund Hillary's portrait was made from weatherproof nylon fabric on piercing-blue anodized aluminum," Shine explains. "The idea was to avoid using paint in creating these 'paintings' - instead to create the sitter's likeness through the combination of materials alone."

Just last year, during the 2008 presidential campaign in America, Shine began to create a unique portrait of Barack Obama, constructing his image from the material of a single retired American flag, which was then woven through mesh - to form an oversized tapestry. "Aside from the challenge of using just a single flag of limited colours, it seemed appropriate to use the nation's flag, reconfigured to reflect the positive notions of change and the aspirations to rebuild the United States," Shine says.

1. "Skoody" 3-in-1 garment
 2. Winning the Enterprising Young Brit Award presented by Gordon Brown in 2004
 3. Shine's sketch from his "Realised" collection
 4. "Realised" Collection
 5. "Cordz" creative activity
 6. Cord-loading pen to draw pictures
 7. "Landscape" sculpture
 8. "40 Winks" Chair in 25mm Perspex
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9. Shine's portrait of Rembrandt "The Space Between Light and Shade"
 10. "Changing States" portrait of President Obama
 11. Lady Thatcher unveiling Shine's portrait on Iron
 12. Shine presents Sir Edmund Hillary with his portrait



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His portrait entitled 'Changing States' provided a poignant and powerful image of the 44th President and was officially unveiled at the New York Museum of Arts and Design shortly after the Inauguration ceremony on January 20th. In addition, Shine's iconic image was replicated on Barnes and Noble's official commemorative range of products, including mugs, T-shirts and posters, sold throughout the United States.

It's present day and Shine's latest technique takes his fabric medium to yet another dimension. This time a single length of tulle is manipulated through pleating and pressing to form intricate representations. The first of such artworks bravely depicts Rembrandt. Entitled 'The Space Between Light and Shade', the piece references the 'Old Master's' pioneering method of emulating light and dark.' "I'm really intrigued by this technique as there is a lot of scope to really push the qualities of this material to its limits, particularly the ability to create such tonal variation," says Shine.

With an ongoing array of projects ranging from artworks and fashion collaborations to creative toys and furniture, Benjamin Shine continues to stretch the boundaries between art and design. Whilst it would be easy to ride the wave of his various achievements and awards to date, it is clear that Shine remains more focused than ever on exploring the creative challenges the world has to offer... and we certainly look forward to seeing the results!

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