

MAJA LESKOVSEK:  
**A COLOUR STORY**

BY BELLA WEBB



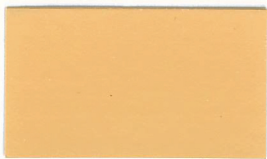
Dorchester Pink® 213. CS 60



BLUE GROUND® 210



ST GILES BLUE® 280



Mortlake Yellow™ 265.



ARSENIC® 214



Royal Navy™ 257.



VARDO® 288



Mischief™ 13.



Cape Red™ 279.



The MA Fashion studio is an odd space. It sits high above the rest of Central Saint Martins, with a curved glass ceiling that makes it feel like a fishbowl in the sky. Machines lend a droll hum to the atmosphere, as clouds of steam rise from the heat presses and tufts of smoke escape from behind the ears of delirious, overworked students. As I walk in, I immediately feel the urge to retreat. Waiting mannequins crowd the entrance, idly observing the chaos. I allow myself a single, unsure scan of the room, searching silently for Slovenian designer Maja Leskovsek. I find her nestled in the corner, brow furrowed as she inspects the fabrics her helpers have just bought.

She looks up, surprised, as I approach. "Is it five already?" she asks. It's a Friday evening, half an hour before the electricity gets cut off and the designers are forced to go home or revert to machine-free tasks. The studio is crammed full of people. There are people hunched over desks, people poring over line-ups, people pushing rails. They move in pairs, designers and their helpers.

The sheen across Maja's forehead testifies to a long day spent hunched over her station in the balmy studio. As colours, patterns and fabrics flood her mind, the menial details of everyday life slip away. She introduces me to her friend Tim, who has flown over from Slovenia to help her. We already met two days ago. She skirts around her workspace, narrowly avoiding the unfinished garments strewn across the edges as she paces aimlessly, a milk chocolate digestive hanging from her right hand. "I need a coffee," she says. The coffee Tim just bought her sits untouched on the table.

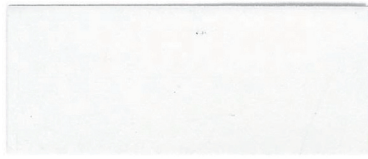
A month or so into the first year of her MA at CSM, Maja realised that spending Saturdays in the library was not a social sacrifice worthy of extra credit, but the bare minimum expected of her. By the time the show rolls around, she hasn't been on a night out for six months. Losing half a day to a hangover is too high a price to pay. I'm not sure whether her commitment to this course is impressive or concerning. Either way, it's unwavering. "I don't mind suffering - working late, whatever - if I feel like I'm getting something back," she says. "If I'm learning, getting information, context...It's the same as moving to another country, it doesn't matter to me. But once it crosses the line where I'm not getting enough back, then it just doesn't make sense anymore."

A few flecks of grey hair catch the light as she turns back to her work.

As the MA Fashion show approaches, Maja's anxieties really begin to surface. When I meet her at the start of February, she is running between the fashion studio, where the L'Oréal prize is being judged, and the photo studio, where she is shooting the looks for her backstage rails. She hands me a garment bag as I walk in and briskly sweeps out of the studio, beckoning for me to follow her. "Everything is happening at once," she says over her shoulder. "This is proper cardio." A smile flashes across her face, but disappears just as quickly. As we walk into the photo studio, her helper is zipping the model into the yellow dress. Something rips. There is a sharp intake of breath as his eyes dart towards Maja's and she realises the dress has torn. Maja remains surprisingly calm, perhaps buoyed by the adrenaline. "We'll put some mesh in there." The tension briefly lets up as she moves over to the camera. Short, sharp instructions come from behind the lens, as Maja works disarmingly efficiently. "Front. Side. Back. Ok, we're done."



Rubine Ashes™ 243.



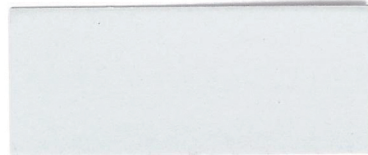
Ceviche™ 230.



Serpentine™ 233.



Dash of Soot™ 244.



Fescue™ 231.



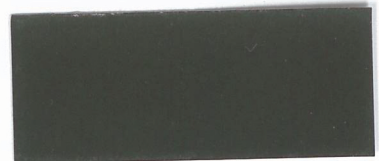
Grey Moss™ 234.



Perennial Grey™ 245.



Cool Arbour™ 232.



Toad™ 235.



Dolphin™ 246.



Knightsbridge™ 215.



Chimney Brick™ 247.





Low-rise jeans, exposed thongs and bedazzled boob-tubes: in 2004, MTV was the home of fashion, the only place to see the latest trends on the hottest celebrities. At least, that was the case for Maja. Growing up in a small town called Žalec, where the population is less than 5,000, the young designer grabbed whatever morsels of fashion she could. "The local newspaper would have one page on some kind of fashion, at the end," she explains. "You couldn't buy Vogue in my town. Maybe you could in Ljubljana, but all I had was MTV. That was my connection to the real world. We didn't get cable TV until later."

"Slovenia is not a fashion country," Maja continues as we sit down for a coffee in the canteen. "We have a lot of machinery, skilled seamstresses and good tailoring, but it's not fashion. It's just production." In a place where clothes were functional and magazines were sparse, design offered Maja a chance to escape. "I didn't even know that fashion design was a profession," she says. "I was just drawing. I have drawings of clothes from the age of 6 or 7. Dresses, necklaces, shoes. Even in school, if you had to draw people on a boat or something, mine would have little outfits on."

Surrounded by seamstresses but lacking in inspiration, Maja conjured her outfits from the depths of her imagination. There was no H&M to nip into, no Zara offering endless, affordable options. The most practical option was to have clothes made or customise the basics you could buy. "I'd come to school in things I'd made myself," she recalls. "I would customise earrings or jeans or anything. I never looked that weird, I was never outrageous; it was just small things for myself. I never did crazy makeup or crazy outfits, but it was weird enough for the other children to think I was strange. They were very ordinary."

Special occasions meant bringing in the cavalry. Many of her mum's friends were seamstresses, and they would help Maja make her designs. One particular outfit stands out in her memory: a baby blue suit with a sheer top underneath. The occasion - her confirmation into the Roman Catholic church - was of little consequence to Maja. "I didn't really care what it was. I went because my parents wanted me to, and it was an opportunity for a new outfit." Even at the tender age of 12, she found freedom in the design process.

It was in middle school that her propensity for design found a focused outlet. "One of my teachers told me about a school where I could train to be a fashion designer. Nuša Božiček - her surname means 'Father Christmas'," laughs Maja. Going to study fashion meant leaving her parents behind, but she was surprisingly unfazed by this, especially for a 14-year-old. "There were a few heated conversations," she recalls. "My parents thought I was too smart for that school, but I was also smarter than them, so I convinced them." The thought of her parents' approval lingers in the air for a moment, but she dismisses it with a smile: "My sister's a doctor so they can be happy with that."

2004 was also the year that Maja left Žalec for a vocational boarding school in Ljubljana and Slovenia joined the European Union. Though she didn't realise at the time, this opened up a world of possibilities for the young designer. Growing up in Slovenia, the idea of becoming a fashion designer in London felt far away. It was a distant dream, but one which Maja has been tirelessly working towards ever since the thought first entered her mind. The ease with which she moved to boarding school at 14 could be seen as naive, but she has made a habit of moving wherever her career takes her. During her MA, she went to Denmark for three months, on her own. "I didn't know anyone, I didn't know the language, but I just don't care," she shrugs. "If I think it's important to go there, I forget that I'm really scared." Even getting

locked out of her apartment on the first day couldn't throw her off. "I just don't care about those things. My parents probably thought it was really scary and stressful."

Her desire to study abroad, to be at the epicentre of fashion and as far from Slovenia as possible, caused tension with her parents. "I wanted to study abroad, but my parents thought that was just for rich people." They had a point. "I really didn't have the support or the help to leave and go that far away," says Maja. "I had no money. I wanted to go Belgium, to Antwerp."

As Maja's imagination delved deeper into the world of fashion, and her design skills grew, Slovenia felt increasingly stifling. After four years on the only BA in Textiles and Fashion Design offered there, Maja was hungry for more. "In Slovenia, the whole design process is just one person, then they have it sewn somewhere else. There's no studio, you can't see that dynamic. It's so small." Frustrated with the lack of opportunities in her home country, she started to look elsewhere.

An internship was calling, or rather, she was calling them. "I couldn't even get a contact, I didn't know who to email," says Maja. "So I literally wrote up a list of designers that I liked, and I aimed for the ones who had just graduated, or the smaller brands. I would send emails to info@, basically just phishing." After months of guessing email addresses and refreshing her inbox, Maja finally secured an internship at Michael Van Der Ham. As soon as she graduated from her BA, she packed her bags and left for London. "I intentionally chose something small, so I was very close to it - it was just him and a few assistants at that time, plus someone for textiles. I didn't want to go somewhere big where I wouldn't see anything. Otherwise, I wouldn't even know how fashion works."

Compared to the drab, suffocating grey of Slovenia, London seemed alight with colour. Captivated by the possibilities it offered, Maja enthusiastically sent out MA applications. "I just wanted to get out of Slovenia at that point," she recalls. "I didn't want to be there. And when you go back, having been away, it's even worse. It's a small space and I felt like it was swallowing me. I just outgrew it."

Despite her determination, Maja's hopes of completing her MA in London were dashed. She returned to Slovenia to study for an MA there. It wasn't the creative carpet ride she had in mind, but Maja's first MA planted her feet firmly on the ground, equipping her with the technical skills that underpin her work to this day. "It was Textiles and Fashion Design, but we also went back to chemistry, and we did fibres. Then we did a bit of knitwear, weaving, a lot of more technical stuff." She sounds bored by this, but when she eventually got accepted onto the MA at Central Saint Martins in 2017, it was her technical ability that caught the tutors' eyes. "Maja is someone who understands colour, cut, volume, draping, construction, fabrication," says Fabio Piras, the course director at CSM. This is about as close to gushing as Fabio gets. "When she started, she was much more of a technical person. Now, she can be considered a designer."

At 29 years old, Maja is amongst the oldest in her class. With a BA, an MA and plenty of practical experience already under her belt by the time she joined CSM, you wonder why she needed it. But Fabio hit the nail on the head: before CSM, Maja was not a designer. She designed clothes, but she did it for function, not fantasy. Her Slovenian training gave her grayscale garments, and CSM injected the rainbow.





RECTORY RED® 217



EATING ROOM RED® 43



RADICCHIO®



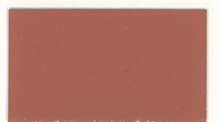
\* PREFERENCE RED®



BLAZER®



Carmine™ 189.



Tuscan Red™ 140.



Mischief™ 13.



Atomic Red™ 190.



Theatre Red™ 192.



Cape Red™ 279.



Baked Cherry® 14.



Bronze Red® 15.

Colour is an unsurprising fixation for a fashion designer. To drain clothes of colour would be to overlook an artistic vocabulary that gives meaning to the meaningless. Colour permeates life in a way that we can never fully communicate. We can be green with envy. We droop our shoulders when we're feeling blue. We blush in a flurry of pinks and reds when we experience embarrassment.

When Charles Darwin boarded the HMS Beagle in 1831, he took *Werner's Nomenclature of Colours* with him. There are only seven colours in the rainbow, but the human eye has the capacity to see millions more; the possibility of his personal vocabulary falling short when faced with the wonders of the world was too great a risk for Darwin to take. Even the famous magazine editor Diana Vreeland struggled: her pursuit of the perfect red plagued her life. "I can never get painters to mix it for me," she told *Architectural Digest* in 1975. "It's exactly as if I'd said, 'I want rococo with a spot of Gothic in it and a bit of Buddhist temple' - they have no idea what I'm talking about. About the best red is to copy the color of a child's cap in any Renaissance portrait."

Fashion has its own colour lexicon. Giorgio Armani is associated with a deep shade of blue: it's the slither of sea caught in the moonlight at midnight. His A/W19 show was an homage to the colour; a 'rhapsody in blue'. Similarly, the soles of Christian Louboutin shoes carry a coveted slick of cherry red, and shocking pink became more important to Elsa Schiaparelli's brand than the logo. A solo colour can become a signature, but a symphony of colours is a lot harder to orchestrate.

The painter Paul Cézanne said that colour is a collaboration of the mind and the world. For Maja Leskovsek, colour articulates her inner thoughts. When her eyes feel heavy with stress, she lifts them with a slick of atomic orange or magenta. Colour is her third language; the primary colours are her A, B and C. But colour is a messy playing field to navigate; it has so many local dialects, so many tricks of the light. As David Scott Kastan wrote in his 2018 book *On Color*, "the sensation of color is physical; the perception of color is cultural." There is a fashionable fable hidden in Maja's collection, a riddle in the rainbow. "It's always a colour story," she says.





ALL WHITE™ 2005

WEVET® 273

WIMBORNE  
WHITE® 239

POINTING® 2003

RAILINGS™ 31

OFF-BLACK™ 57

PITCH BLACK™ 256

\* PAEAN BLACK® 294

Lamp Black™ 228.

Jack Black™ 119.



The work Maja produces is an homage to colour, but her work ethic is monochromatic. It is single-minded, focused to the point of being blinkered. It is black and white.

Maja's process is fuelled by experimentation, but plagued by uncertainty. The success of her ideas depends heavily on her technical ability, on whether she can play God to the fabric. "My tutors think I'm insane," she laughs. Like Molly Goddard and Giambattista Valli, Maja makes virile ballooning shapes, but her creations are crafted from paper-thin fabrics, not endless layers of tulle. Harnessing couture techniques on a student budget, Maja's designs display both her resourcefulness and her determination to apply a modern veneer to the fantasy of romanticism. The yellow dress reminds me of the Ikea cloud lampshade that adorns so many London bedrooms. Sitting as the dresser instructs it, the dress leaves its proportions open to interpretation. Maja shows me two pictures, one where the dress' draping has been left to gravity and another where the folds have been tugged, plumped and propped up for maximum volume, tousled with a hairdresser's light touch. "I'll try to get it out even more," she says. "I want it to look different from every side, so I'm trying to keep it bare in the front and big at the back."

Her initial drawings are almost childlike: post-it note colours captured in storybook shapes. Happy blobs atop grayscale models. "Initially, I just drew shapes and filled them in with colour, but the tutors thought it was too flat. I kept the outlines, but just filled them in differently, going a bit deeper." Maja takes inspiration from Franz Erhard Walther, a German artist best known for his canvas sculptures. Blurring the boundaries between fashion and art, he invited viewers to step inside the shapes, turning canvas tubes into sleeves, and people into plinths. "I'm very 3D," she explains. "So I make little tests, like the canvas sculptures." She explores different techniques and papers almost immediately, preferring to run her ideas through a microcosmic process as soon as possible, like skipping to the end of a film to see whether the ending justifies watching the whole thing. "I don't lack ideas," she says, exasperated by just reliving her arduous process. "It just takes a really long time to make them and do the patterns, try them, get them right..."

As I probe Maja on her process, she becomes more guarded, pulling her cards close to her chest, but letting one slide - the one that reveals her perfectionism. "I'm constantly walking that fine line between amateur couture and looking professional. I don't want to show you everything, because I'm not sure of everything." She's hesitant to show us unfinished looks, and quickly discards toiles that don't work out, as if destroying the evidence of her necessary imperfections. Yet if you ask her, she argues that it comes down to space. "At some point you just have to throw them out because there's nowhere to put them." She scrunches her face, wincing. "I also like to cut them up. I've stopped now, because the tutors would ask, 'Oh, do you still have this? Can we see this?' and I'd be like, 'No. I cut it, or repurposed it for something else.' It's been a problem when they want to see the old one. I tend to want to move forwards all the time. I don't like to dwell on things."

"I'm very obsessive," Maja continues. "I just had a hallelujah moment with the sleeve look." She's referring to the cheek-skimming mini-dress with huge shoulders like Mickey Mouse ears. Artfully hidden crin - a stiff, tubular form of polyester commonly used in couture ateliers - props up the voluminous shape. "That took six toiles!" exclaims Maja. In this case, physically mocking up the garment each time she wanted to change it felt excessive, so there were digital renderings as well as the half dozen reconstructions. Her portfolio is crammed full of these collaged looks. She will cut, stick, Photoshop and draw over existing sketches to



visualise her ideas.

Her notes give little away to the untrained eye. Slovenian scrawls remind her to change a pattern, lift a hem or add a zip. Frantic thoughts are jotted down in whichever language comes to her first, captured on the page before they flee her busy mind. Entirely idiosyncratic, they are written in a code only Maja could understand. Yet she has the capacity to be ruthlessly efficient. It is in her production notes, sent home to the Slovenian seamstresses making her tights, that you see Maja's aptitude for clarity. Neat grids with fabric swatches pinned to the paper carry strict instructions in bold black marker. Each combination is laid out clearly, each question answered before it is asked. She ordered them from Slovenia because the exact stitch she wanted - the zig zag stretch stitch found on swimming costumes - wasn't possible in the CSM studio.

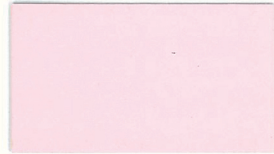
Watching Maja work isn't eventful or entertaining. She neither fulfils the stereotype of manic design student nor tolerates it. Her manner is disarmingly consistent. Calm in the face of small hiccups and logical in the face of bigger obstacles, Maja conjures memories of a strict but fair schoolteacher. That's not to say that she is matronly, but there is a certain respect that she commands. You can imagine her running an atelier, coolly handing out orders to the seamstresses working beneath her, diligently wading through her own work.

It strikes me that Maja is incredibly self-assured. This grants her an odd sort of immunity from the drama of the MA course at CSM. When her peers become tyrannical, she rolls her eyes and continues with her work. When the studio is too crowded, she politely but firmly tells first year students to leave before burrowing her head back in her sketchbook. Whilst other students emerge from Fabio's office with tears pricking their eyes, or doubt flooding their minds, she exits as she entered, unapologetically herself. An unwavering confidence has propelled her over each hurdle. Whilst her faith in her creativity might falter, her faith in herself never does. "I definitely feel like I'm here at the right time," she says. "I'm here for myself, not for Fabio or CSM, which I think is important. You have to know your own mind."

For Maja, knowing her mind means knowing her process, and committing to it with a dogged determination. "I'm going to keep pushing this collection until the last minute," she says. "I'll never be completely content with what I have. I'm always asking, could this be better?" Given how many qualifications she has, it comes as no surprise that Maja is driven by a desire to learn. "There has to be something new, not just visually but technically. You wouldn't want to be doing the same shapes and patterns your whole life. I always want a new challenge."



Hortense™ 266.



Confetti™ 274.



Hellebore™ 275.



Carmine™ 189.

60



Leather™ 191.

70



Marigold™ 209.

70



Orange Aurora™ 21.

50

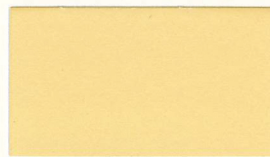


Apple™ 137.

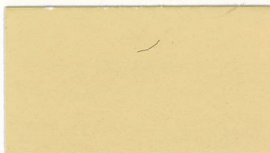


Light Gold™ 53.

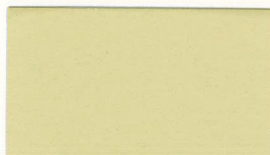
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Sunlight™ 135.



Oak Apple™ 63.



Apple™ 137.



When I first met Maja, I wasn't sure if she would warm to me. There's a protective layer swaddling her, a self-imposed facade of coldness that stops her from letting too many people in. Maybe it stems from her single-focus efficiency. Either way, I'm not the only one who felt it. Rike Stanitzek, the German textiles designer who works on the table next to Maja's, had a similar first impression. "I thought her and I wouldn't vibe at all," she says. "She's just really reserved." It turns out, Maja just takes some time to open up. When she chooses to let you in, she becomes the warmest person in the room. "I love working next to her now," continues Rike. "I would have really liked to work with her, because I think my textiles and her shapes would be such a nice fit."

There are a gaggle of girls working around Maja who have become her close friends. Sophia Mingoia, an Italian womenswear designer working with domestic objects like lampshades, even wanted to start a joint brand with Maja. The prospect of working with Sophia is more tempting to Maja than having her own brand, but her dream is to work in a couture atelier. A more obvious collaborator might be Constance Blackaller, who sits a couple of tables over. Her technicolour, Tupperware-inspired dresses play with colour and volume in a similar vein to Maja's. Surprisingly, on a course renowned for its catty competitiveness, there is no animosity between the pair. "At one point, we realised we were both doing these big, colourful, circle things and we had to have a conversation, but it was fine. Our worlds are very different," says Constance. "We both support each other and we both want each other to do well so there's no rivalry there at all."

Outside of the course, Maja is in constant communication with her friend Peter Movrin. A fellow Slovenian, it was Peter who encouraged Maja to apply for CSM in the first place, after she helped him with his graduate collection back in 2017. "She is mega-talented and she has this attention to detail," explains Peter. "She was trying to work in the industry before, and I just thought she needed to move to another level. You can't go to a proper house without CSM or another good school." Maja took his advice, and now their friendship has morphed into a creative collaboration for the ages. "I am this gay designer who is always dreaming about womenswear, and she is a woman who wants to wear it," he laughs. Observing them together, it feels like he is the designer and she is the seamstress. They bicker like siblings, an effervescent energy bouncing between them. "Why do that?" "Why that kind of stitch?" "Oh no, just leave it like this!" A few weeks before the show, Peter joined Maja for a fitting. With every nook, cranny and corridor around the studio full of other students also doing fittings, they end up having to squeeze into a stairwell. It's bright and airy but technically not allowed. She tenses and hushes the model everytime a door swings or a person passes below. Her flickering gaze settles on the shoes: kitten heels from New Look, covered in a lupin grey velvet. "What about a blue?" she asks Peter. "An exciting blue." They both contemplate this in silence for a moment. "What about that?" replies Peter, pointing up at the first aid box mounted on the wall. She likes it.

Maja's family are supportive, but they don't speak fashion. She finds it hard to lean on them when she's struggling with work. Friends in the industry provide a lifeline. "It's really hard to talk to someone who doesn't understand what it's about," she says. "I just get annoyed because I don't know how to explain it. At the same time, you're making clothes, no-one's dying. That's why I talk to Peter a lot, because he went through it. You're so in your head with it, you can go round and round. It's just easier if you can have a conversation with someone." Having been through the same process, Peter and Maja have a heightened sense of each other's emotions. "You think she's calm, but she's hiding everything," explains Peter.

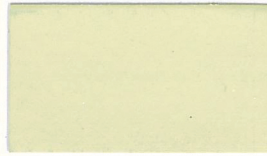
“Sometimes she is just exploding with her emotions, but she never yells. She’s just like, ‘Oh my God, I need that Coca-Cola! I need that cake! I need that chocolate!’ Or she’ll ask to go for a cigarette so we can talk about things. She doesn’t even smoke.”

Maja’s lunch, which she eats absentmindedly as we talk, is a small packet of breakfast biscuits and a banana. “I prefer tangerines, but they are so messy.” Peter tells her she needs to eat more. Maja laughs it off. “I don’t even care what I’m eating. I just need to be fed and get back up to the studio.”

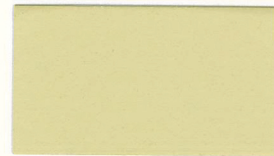




Pea Green™ 91.



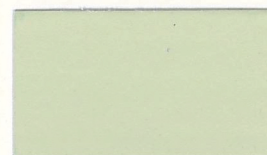
Olive Oil™ 83.



Apple™ 137.



Aquamarine™ 138.



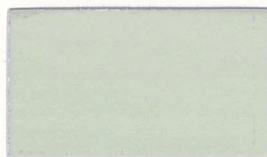
Kitchen Green® 85.



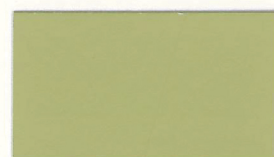
Pale Lime™ 70.



Aquamarine - Deep™ 198.



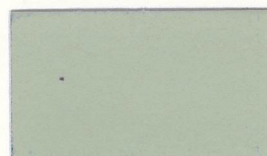
Tracery II™ 78.



Boxington® 84.



Pleat™ 280.



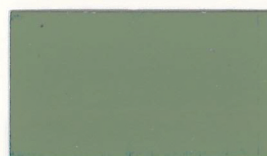
Normandy Grey™ 79.



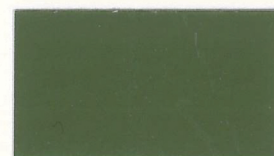
Citrine™ 71.



Livid™ 263.



Sage Green™ 80.



Olive Colour™ 72.





“We pay for everything,” says Maja. A heavy silence falls over our conversation as she reflects on this. “I worked in shops alongside my BA and saved everything I got for my birthday too. I had about £2,000 when I started from whatever I’d pulled together. My boyfriend helped me massively last year and he still does. His parents paid my fees.”

On the topic of money, Maja seems weary. “You have to get over it at some point, but it is hard, because you see someone next to your table who can get all the help they need,” she explains. “They can afford to get a pattern-cutter, they can get this and that... It’s not impossible, but it’s very hard to do it all by yourself.”

Since presenting her pre-collection to the CSM tutors in June, she has received four scholarships, totalling more than £25,000. That money is quickly dwindling. The first scholarship came at the end of her first year. It was £5,000 from CSM. Later in the summer, she received the same amount from the British Fashion Council, a stamp of approval awarded to just two students per year. The biggest injection of cash - €11,700 from The Ministry of Culture of Slovenia - came next, followed by another £5,000 from L’Oreal, the main sponsor of the CSM MA Fashion show at London Fashion Week. “It sounds like a lot but it goes very quickly,” she adds. Each time the money is replenished, Maja makes a detailed budget, determined to make it stretch. She measures each pattern meticulously, determined to buy just enough, to make the money last. “I go back to the shops for every single thing, so I don’t buy too much.”

As we talk, her helper, Jaime, is playing a fraught game of tetris with pattern pieces. He unfolds and refolds the mint green fabric, trying desperately to make the pieces fit. Maja comes over, calm and pragmatic, rearranging the crisp paper patterns until they fill the fabric. “There you go,” she says. Her restraint in stressful situations is extraordinary.

After a fitting with Fabio, Maja has to rethink her fabric choices. He wants to see more options. She sends Jaime to scour her go-to shops: Pongees for silk, Laurent Garigue in Kensington for more specialist weaves, and wherever in Shepherd’s Bush is the cheapest for everything else. “Anything expensive?” asks Sophia. “All of it,” laughs Maja.





Citrine™ 71.

50



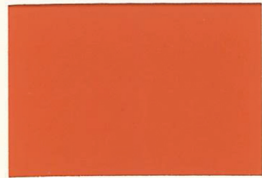
Hicks' Blue® 208.

60

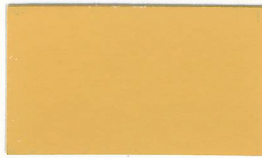


Leather™ 191.

70



CHARLOTTE'S  
LOCKS® 268



Yellow-Pink™ 46.

R





Although she rarely voices her anxieties, it was clear that the MA Fashion show was playing on Maja's mind. "People are so successful afterwards," she says. "But you're in this very vulnerable moment now, having to show something. If you're not in the show, you already feel like a failure, even though it doesn't mean that you are. Her friend Rike is more optimistic: "I think Constance will open the show and Maja will close." Her prediction turns out to be quite accurate. Constance was the first womenswear designer in the line-up, the second person overall. Maja was third from last, a prime position given the length of this year's show.

Maja's graduate collection toys with the possibilities of colours in collaboration. The contrast of light and dark plays tricks on our minds, drawing the eye to areas of emphasis, two colours creating an optical illusion. Maja uses this to deepen the chasm between big and small, to unsettle and challenge our gaze. It makes a bold statement on the catwalk. The expansive yellow and orange dresses, inflated and undulating, stand in stark opposition to the skin-tight mini-dresses. A black bralette made of small, interconnecting circles provides a focal point amidst swathes of purple fabric in the final look. "I wanted a flat kind of volume," she muses. "There is a tension between the big and small pieces. That's what makes it fresh." It's here that Maja's sense of humour comes out to play. "There were some accessories proposals that won't happen," she says. "The tutors couldn't imagine what bag the model could possibly wear with a humongous dress. I wanted a really small one, like Jacquemus!"

Off-kilter colour combinations steer the work away from being saccharine, but there's a definite undertone of escapism. "I'm not very thematic," she says. "But I wanted a feeling of vibrancy and light. It's a reaction to the time we're living in I suppose. It's colourful, voluminous, spirited! I think they're pretty glam." Peter calls the collection "modern couture."

What does Fabio Piras, the invisible hand behind CSM graduates' careers, think of Maja's final collection? "It shows a clarity of creative vision, so therefore it's somebody who can research, who has a vision of fashion and a point of view. She has a lot to offer and that collection is the best portfolio she can have." It's a glowing report. I'm interested to hear his thoughts on her future. After all, he will likely have a role in shaping it. "The relaunch of Patou would be a great place for her to start. I think her portfolio would be very appealing to a house like that, and I hope LVMH will see that. She can work at Dior, she can work at that level. If I were Michael Halpern, I would hire somebody like Maja."

A couple of days before the show, I ask Maja if she is happy with her collection. "You're so on your own with it, it's easy to lose sight of whether you like it," she says. "But this really feels like it's mine. It has life, it has colours...it's me."