

The 2019 Cordwainers' Footwear Student of the Year competition took place in London in June with a total of 15 footwear design students presenting their ideas. Three universities at the forefront of footwear design education in the UK—London College of Fashion, De Montfort University and the University of Northampton—were represented by five students each.

# A night that can launch careers

One of the claims of the Company of Cordwainers, one of London's ancient livery companies (trade guilds), is that it has been driving new design ideas in footwear for 700 years. Another, and something that current master, Jonathan Hooper, is particularly proud of, is that it is what he calls the largest single provider of bursaries and awards to footwear design students in UK academic institutions today. The Cordwainers' Footwear Student of the Year competition, which takes place every June, celebrates both these commitments, serving as a reminder, Mr Hooper says, that the UK "leads the world in footwear design", while providing a platform for the students who take part to demonstrate their creativity and passion.

"It is a night on which careers can take off," the Master of the Livery insists. "This evening is hugely important as it provides the students with the opportunity to network with the most influential people from across the sector and, in turn, enables industry professionals to meet the footwear stars of the future."

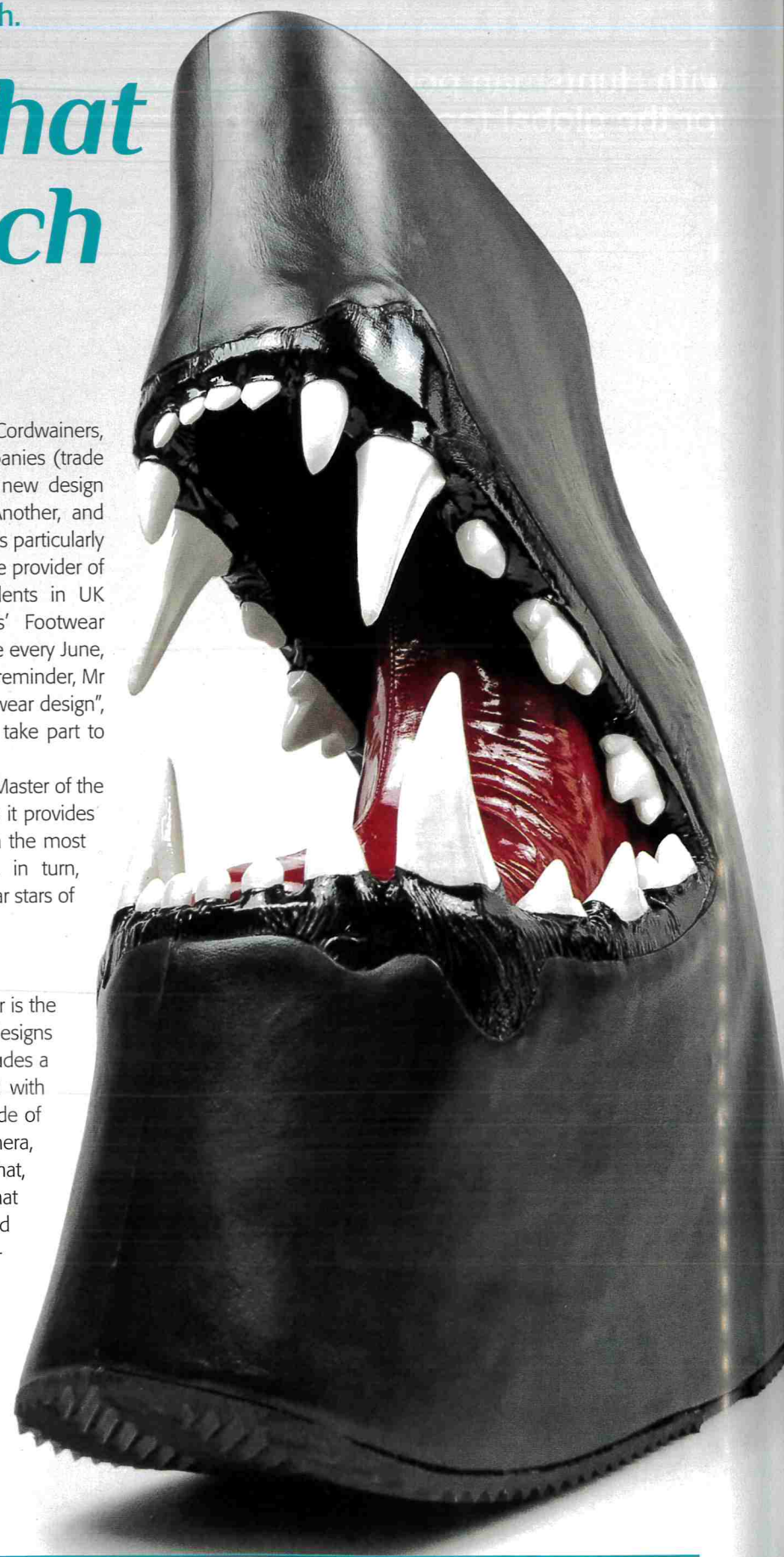
## Eye-catching ideas

London College of Fashion student Meta Cunder is the winner of the 2019 award. Her work comprises designs for performers in the London drag scene and includes a thigh-high leather boot, the Leviathan, decorated with accessories that look like eyes on the front and side of the stock. Another of her boot designs, the Chimera, has an animal's mouth built around the vamp so that, in the words of Ms Cunder, wearers will feel "that they are part of the beast". She has already created her own brand, Varmint, to promote these eye-catching creations.

Second prize on the night went to Dimitri Gabellier from De Montfort University, while London College of Fashion's Emily Hill won

*Meta Cunder's Chimera boot. The wearer's foot goes into the red, tongue-like vamp, enveloped by the rest of the animal's mouth.*

CREDIT: META CUNDER



third prize. There were commendations for Monica Bateman of the University of Northampton and for Sara McMullan of the London College of Fashion.

One of the De Montfort students, Yeseul Ra, presented to the competition judges a design for a sling-back shoe with a white leather vamp criss-crossed by black patent leather straps. It had a six-centimetre heel, then a wide gap between the heel and the sole of the shoe. "It feels like a boot when you wear it," Ms Ra says.

University of Northampton representative Faizal Mohammed based his entry to the competition on a project he calls Out Of Control. From this, he developed a sneaker that he refers to as "a shoe for rebels", footwear for people who want to resist all the closed-circuit television, facial recognition software and other identity-capturing technology. He can make individualised soles for each pair, but wants to keep the key elements of the upper design in place each time. Silver colouring across the upper represents the wires that are everywhere, Mr Mohammed says, while the central design element consists of the wavy lines and circles of a fingerprint etched into the leather. "It comes from a scan of my own fingerprint," he revealed.

## Success in no time

A previous recipient of the award, Helen Kirkum, gave the keynote speech at the 2019 event. Ms Kirkum won the inaugural Cordwainers' National Footwear Student of the Year Award in 2014 while completing her undergraduate studies at the University of Northampton. She went on to study for a master's at the London College of Fashion and then worked for adidas in Germany before returning to London to set up her own studio.

Ms Kirkum recounts that her experience since the end of her student days has been interesting. "I created a look," she says, "that a number of brands, including some very big brands liked. I'm glad of the time working at adidas; it taught me a lot about the commercial side of the business. Armed with that knowledge, I simply decided to try to reclaim the vibe I had created, return to London and go it alone." She agrees that this offers an example to the 2019 participants of what they can achieve in a relatively short time.

*Competition finalists, together with Master of the Cordwainers Livery (centre), represented three universities: the University of Northampton, De Montfort University and London College of Fashion.*

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*Meta Cunder, winner of the 2019 Cordwainers' Footwear Student of the Year competition.*

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