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Bangkok Fashion Week 2000

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SUBHEADLINE: Tracy Mulligan, new talent on the British fashion scene, lent her skills and insight to the second Elle Bangkok Fashion Week

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There was a time when London was renowned in the fashion world only for its impeccable suits and superior tailoring. But the tide has turned, perhaps under the vision of people like Vivienne Westwood, the maverick Brit designer since the '70s, rated by Women's Wear Daily _ a past fashion bible _ as one of the six best designers in the world.

For the past 10 years or so, in the wake of fashion capitals like New York, Paris and Milan, London has seen an unparalleled flowering of creative talents, with a host of young designers springing up to join the big names such as John Galiano and Alexander McQueen, now officially in residence at the house of Dior and Givenchy, respectively.

Tracy Mulligan, who was supported by the British Council to present her new collection in the Bangkok Fashion Week organised by Elle Thailand magazine last week-end, is one of those outstanding young British talent whose reputation has very quickly gone international.

Trained at Central Saint Martins, Tracy Mulligan co-founded Sonnentag Mulligan (one of the original Young British Designer teams) before launching her own label in February 1998 during London Fashion Week.

Her collection was said to have created ``quite a commotion" in the fashion world, with a reaction so favourable that ``store buyers worldwide practically started a bidding war to get their hands on it", according to a report by Angela Buttolph from Vogue magazine.

Her innovative style, dedicated to urban contemporary women and men, has also won awards; the New Generation Award sponsored by Marks and Spencers in the September '98, February '99 and September '99 catwalk shows, as well as a nomination for the British Fashion Award New Generation category in 1998. Her clothes have sold to major stores in Britain, the US, France, Italy, Japan and Hong Kong.

Marked with sensitivity, shyness and gravity, Tracy Mulligan doesn't feel completely comfortable in the volatile, superficial and highly commercial world of fashion, where ``trends are changing so dramatically every season", she explains.

``It is all the more reason why you have to stay with your own style, because if you are trying to go with the bandwagon, you can get lost; it is changing so much, there is no longevity for the clothing," she commented, amid the cheerful hubbub of Bangkok Fashion Week.

``My clothes don't date so quickly although they are very modern. They are meant to bring a sense of calmness and serenity," she said.

In the business for only two and a half years, Tracy Mulligan's signature has already asserted itself clearly; a fusion of functional and contemporary classics incorporating innovative cutting, prints, embroidery and silhouettes, usually based on a spiritual mood inspired by art or philosophy.

She aims her collection at modern, urban, elegant women; ``somehow a modern Audrey Hepburn who is independent and has her own style," she says. ``My clothes are not about drawing as much attention to yourself as possible _ like some other clothing for women _ but are more about subtle attraction," she commented.

Among her main sources of inspiration are the French fashion icons of the 50s such

as Dior and Balenciaga but also the loose, full silhouettes of Japanese kimonos (a prominent theme in her second collection) and the square lines of building and architecture.

Tracy Mulligan's latest collection entitled ``Something Old, Something New" puts the urban environment into the limelight in many prints designed by Sarah Morris and inspired by buildings and architecture. The something old _ traditional lines, pleating _ and the something new _ innovative prints and obviously non-commercial show pieces _ all formed an impressive yet very wearable collection.

Away from the glittering crowds of Bangkok Fashion Week, Tracy Mulligan had the opportunity to meet with a host of students and aspiring designers during a talk organised by the British Council at the Siam Discovery Centre. In the darkness of a movie-theatre-cum- agora, Tracy Mulligan _ flanked by Kritika Buabusya, lecturer at Chulalongkorn's Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, and Ruth Sinclair-Jones, deputy director of The British Council _ gave some interesting insights into the UK fashion scene and a glimpse from the wings of her own creations.

Giving some advice to young artists, Tracy Mulligan commented: ``You have to develop a style and look that is unique to you. Even if you aspire to join another collection, you will have to feed this big company with your own ideas."

``Always keep a camera with you so that you can keep records of everything that you like, remember what you used to be fond of as a child, otherwise as a creator you might dry up," she said. ``And the first good test for your work is to think: `What would I feel if I was wearing those clothes?'"

Questioned about her opinion on the nascent Thai fashion industry, Tracy Mulligan confessed that she ``hadn't had a minute to see the other participants' collections", but judging from the rehearsal she could find quite a few similarities with British designers. Her extended stay in Thailand, another two weeks following the show (for a private vacation), will surely open the doors to bring Thailand closer to Britain, and vice-versa.