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Lovingly Stoked Creations

INSPIRATION is all around us. It's in the cool breeze that lightly touches your cheek, the shape of a cloud in the sky, the smell of chocolate chip cookies baking in the oven, and the beat of a favourite song. Anyone can take inspiration and turn it into reality - there are no limitations. You just need faith and follow your dreams.

Fashion designer Louisa Michael did just that. Following her dreams and armed with inspiration from her grandmother's tales of local folklore on how dresses were fabricated by magic, Louisa pursued her interest in fashion albeit some objections from her parents.

"It opened my mind to a whole multiverse of creative possibilities, with the goal of bringing joy to the person who will inherit and adorn one of my lovingly stoked creations," said Louisa, a Bidayuh from Kuching.

Louisa is one of several designers who has been invited to show her collection during the much-anticipated fashion event, Alta Moda Sarawak from August 17 to 19 in Kuching. Set to re-define Kuching city as the fashion capital of Sarawak, Alta Moda Sarawak is a 3-day edition that aspires to high-light

the many colours of Sarawak's cultures and diversities into the streamline of the fashion industry, applying the subject matter of life-style while emphasising fashion as its core.

Since her youth, Louisa developed an affection for art and dreamed of creating collections that will, perhaps, one day grace the catwalks of haute couture land.

She said: "Unfortunately, my parents did not agree with the direction I was taking and wanted me to pursue a common profession as they believed art could not provide a sustainable source of income nor wealth."

Unperturbed, Louisa managed to convince her parents, in reaching a compromise of sorts and went on to obtain a Diploma in Graphic from Cosmopoint Kuala Lumpur. She moved back to Sarawak and started her career with Bumiserasi for 3 years with

much success. Yet something still irked her, as design visions flash through her mind fervently, in rapture to her grandmother's voice.

Louisa then made the fateful decision to pursue her dream. Armed with her newfound resolve, she promised that she would overcome all obstacles,

and went to pursue a Diploma in Fashion at IFTC.

"During my studies, I took time to organise a mini fashion show in Kuching and worked as a backstage dresser for the Malaysian International Awards Show in KL," said Louisa.

"But I still felt unfulfilled and so in 2007, I packed my bags and bought a ticket to the heart of haute couture on a mission, to enrol myself in The Paris American Academy, France." A few years later, she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Fashion. During her studies, she emulated her spunk in Malaysia, working as a backstage dresser for Elie Saab, while doing her internship at Anne Valarie Hash.

Besides being an advent enthusiast of Karl Lagerfeld, Chanel and John Galliano, Louisa comes packed with a gregarious personality that makes everyone around adore her. She consistently puts her whole heart in exploring new concepts, channelling them through creativity and innovation which makes her designs allur-

ing; just as her grandmother prescribed.

Louisa said that Alta Moda Sarawak is a perfect opportunity for Sarawak's designers as they get to show their designs to a bigger audience. It also gives them much broader exposure.

"I am thrilled and honoured to be part of Alta Moda Sarawak. There are so many talented and creative designers here, and I think that this is the perfect opportunity to present ourselves to the world," Louisa said.

Masters of detail and elegance

Two other designers who have pursued their dreams as fashion designers will also be showing their collections during Alta Moda Sarawak - Ben Nazry and Paul Carling.

Ben is a prominent local designer whose creative designs have won multiple nationwide awards in the 12 years he has been active. Known for his work on couture and bridal, the designer is a true master of detail and elegance. "Some of my collection focuses on 'songket' as the subject matter, made diversified into more casual and modern outfit," said Ben, who is from Kuching.

Among Ben's many awards are Anugerah Andaman & Busana Pesona Pengantin and Piala Pusingan Diraja. He was also named best designer at the Grand final Malaysia Musical International Wedding Fashion Week 2015.

Ben said that having an event like Alta Moda Sarawak is an excellent platform for local designers to showcase their latest designs.

"I do hope Alta Moda can open more doors for us to go outside Sarawak as so far, no local platform has done that for us. I am thankful and glad that I was



PAUL CARLING

asked to be part of the event and hope that it will be held annually," said Ben.

Meanwhile, Paul Carling founded his eponymous label in 2016. Known initially as Paul Carling Collections, his designs focus on bridal and fashion wear fused with Borneo tribal motif.

"I started it as a small business mainly to finance my studies during the final year of my Bachelor Degree in Design Technology," said Paul, who majored in Textile and Fashion at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak.

Paul eventually decided to pursue a career as an independent designer with the hope of helping to "lift" the local fashion industry.

Paul, who won the Best National Costume Award (Malaysia) in the Mister National Universe 2017 Pageant in Thailand, feels that Alta Moda Sarawak is a golden opportunity for young designers like him.

He said: "It is a stepping stone for us to bring attention to Sarawakian designers to the world stage."

Besides Bridal wear, Borneo Urban Chic line is part of Paul Carling creation to celebrate and promote Borneo Fabric design and motifs worldwide by implementing it into the design which portrays the true Sarawakian.

Paul's other achievements include being 1st Runner-up in the Sabah Fashion Fiesta 2017 in Kota Kinabalu. He also made the Top 10 of the Sarawak Fashion Award 2017 and 2016.



BEN NAZRY



LOUISA MICHAEL



RACE DAY PARADE...
A woman wears a decorative hat and old fashion dress prior to the 150th running of the Belmont Stakes at Belmont Park on June 9 in Elmont, New York. PHOTO:AFP