

# Fashion Arts - Ivan Liang

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## Ivan Liang

### Seneca Program

[Fashion Arts](#)

### Degree Program and Institution

[BA \(Hons\) International Fashion – Manchester Metropolitan University](#)

### What inspired you to pursue a career in fashion?

Growing up, I always loved to watch my grandmother as she sewed. She used an old Singer machine – one that pre-dated the automatic models. Simply put, I was enthralled by the garment-making process. My grandmother is also skilled at knitting. I would receive brand new, hand-made knitwear – head to toe – from her each winter. Around the age of 15, I took some art classes and began sketching fashion designs. That's when I knew this is what I really wanted to do.

### How would you describe your aesthetic?

I like playing with and mixing different textures such as juxtaposing hard and soft materials. I create pieces that have movement and often experiment with different fabrics to see how they move on and/or against the body. I also like blurring boundaries around our understanding of gender through garments.

### What inspires your work and designs?

I draw inspiration from the human condition and experience. I often tune into others' emotions and feelings; then I try to interpret them and capture them some way in my designs. I want my designs to emote and tell stories but also be easy to wear at the same time.

## **Prior to attending Seneca, you completed one year at Loyalist College. What factors influenced your decision to pursue the Fashion Arts program at Seneca?**

I enrolled into the Marketing and Communication program at Loyalist College immediately following high school. It was the “safe” choice. No one in my family knows anything about fashion, so they were worried about job opportunities for me in the future.

The program at Loyalist was good but just not for me. By that point, I was spending much of my time sketching and even hand-sewing designs (because I didn’t know how to use a sewing machine). That is when I decided to withdraw and make the switch to fashion. I did some research and attended a Seneca Open House. I remember the first question I asked while touring the campus was, “How hands on is this program?” And the response I got was, “Very!” It was then that I decided Seneca would be the right fit for me...and it was!

## **Was attaining a degree always a part of your educational plan?**

I did not decide to pursue a degree until after I graduated from the Fashion Arts program. In fact, I had been working as a fashion designer for Ciao Sea, a Canadian-based luxury resort wear line, for two years. As much as I enjoyed the job, I began to feel the monotony of my day-to-day routine and felt that I was losing my own creative identity.

I started to think about my future and envision what was next. I remembered that furthering our education was always a part of our dialogue with faculty. I sent some emails to my Seneca program contacts and began exploring my options.

## **How did you learn about the pathway to Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU)? Why did you choose to pursue this option?**

I have to thank my Professor, Zoran Dobric. He supported me through the entire process — from choosing the right school to completing the application process.

After graduation, he kept in touch with my class — notifying us of different runway and magazine opportunities. He was the first person I reached out to when I started considering going back to school. I intended to ask him to refer me to someone who could help me with the process but before I knew it, we were on a call together and he was asking me why I wanted to pursue a degree and offering me lots of advice and suggestions.

## **How would you describe your transition to studying in a new city, country and school?**

The U.K. is quite different, even though Canada is a part of the Commonwealth. The most difficult adjustment has been getting used to the traffic. There are fewer stop signs so, as a pedestrian, you have to be aware as you cross the roads. Additionally, as many people know, they drive on the left. It takes some getting used to.

Living in England, you come to tolerate a lot of rain. Kind of like snow in most parts of Canada — except it rains here year round!

I visited London a couple weeks ago and I really loved it. The city is so vibrant and the museums are fantastic. I am learning more about England every day and overall it has been a positive transition.

## **How have you enjoyed studying at MMU?**

I am in a small cohort, so the learning experience has felt rather impactful. The faculty members are all very approachable — we have been able to make meaningful connections with each of them.

MMU has been great in helping international students feel welcome. The orientation schedule was full of activities and outings, so there were plenty of opportunities to meet and connect with others. There is no denying that transitions are always hard. The first day I landed in the U.K., I got sick. I felt helpless and alone but part of living abroad is learning how to be independent, taking care of yourself and balancing your responsibilities.

I have now completed my first semester. I have made some new friends, am discovering the city more and more and have established a routine. I can say I feel comfortable here now.

## **What are you up to now (life, work)?**

As I type these responses, I am currently touring Morocco with friends I made while studying in Manchester. We all just finished our first term and this was a great way to celebrate. However, this trip is not just for fun — I am surrounded by endless inspiration. As soon as I return to the U.K., I will begin a new project for the second term. In this project, we have to design a collection and make one head-to-toe outfit using at least one innovative method such as ultrasound bonding, laser cutting and 3D printing.

## **Would you like to share any tips with students interested in studying outside of Canada?**

Being away from close friends and family is hard, but I have done it twice now. Feelings of loneliness and being homesick are completely normal and should be expected.

When moving to a new country, I would recommend that you research the culture and try to grasp some of the social norms that govern daily life – and be respectful of these. Mingle with locals; the great thing about studying abroad is that you will be joining a community (at the school) that you can turn to for support and resources. Last but not least, have fun. Enjoy and fully embrace the experience – make the most of all it has to offer.

## **What are your plans for the future – short-term and long-term?**

I am eager to do more and learn more. After I complete my degree in England, I am planning on returning to China. I feel that the fashion industry in China has grown so much in recent years, not only in terms of production, but I see so much new, up-and-coming talent emerging to the scene. It is great to see! Eventually, I hope I can start my own brand, one that carries a positive message and purpose. While aesthetics are important, I don't want to be known for just another pretty brand. I think designers need to be more sustainably conscious and be even more aware of the environmental impact this industry brings while looking for creative strategies to try to make garments that last.

## **How would you describe your overall experience at Seneca?**

I enjoyed my time at Seneca. I learned all the things I expected to learn and more, met lots of interesting people and made some life-long friends. Teachers are all friendly and approachable and would do their best to help. Of course, there are areas that I feel can be improved, like maybe there can be more sewing machines and more lectures about design concepts, but speaking from my experience, I think it's great overall.

## **How did your Seneca program prepare you for your degree program? For your current career?**

Seneca helped me to develop all the basic skills I need for the industry: pattern making, sewing, sketching into an actual garment. Right after graduation, I secured a job as a designer; it is so rewarding to be able to put my learning to use in professional applications. Thanks to the rigor of my academic program at Seneca, I have been able to easily manage and meet my deadlines in industry. I feel so prepared.

As for my degree program, I literally used the same content from my final portfolio that I did in school for my entrance portfolio into the degree program. With the help from Zoran, I rearranged and added to it a little bit. About a week later I received the offer. Going into my degree program, I actually felt like Seneca prepared me better than lots of my degree program classmates. I remember my classmates asking about whether we were going to be taught how to use "Gerber," and that is something I had already learned.

## **Can you share a standout experience or memory that you have at Seneca?**

Without a doubt, Redefining Design — a fashion show hosted by Seneca that features the final collections of the graduating Fashion Arts class. I dedicated the entire year to conceptualizing the collection and creating the garments. After hours of hard work and countless fittings, I felt such a sense of accomplishment when I was finally able to debut my designs on a runway. I was so proud of what I created.

After the show, I kept getting emails from Seneca inviting or informing me about different opportunities. I did not expect that and I think it is great that Seneca really cares about the ongoing development and success of its students.