



● Amanda Foley, Third Year, 'Serendipity' Children's Collection

Limerick As A Leader In Fashion

WHEN it comes to fashion, Limerick is a leader. Each year when the Limerick School of Art disgorges a fresh set of fashion graduates, they are snapped up readily abroad.

With demanding and fastidious lecturers like Michaelina Stacpoole, Lucy Erridge and Patricia Kieley who are familiar with the demands of industry, their reputation for inventive knitwear design is unequalled in the country. Now more and more Irish manufacturers are realising the potential on their doorstep and are looking to Limerick for new talent. Blarney Woollen Mills and Carlo Bellini are currently employing a number of graduates, for instance.

The thirteen students in the class of '89 who held their graduate show back in May all have jobs and though most expected to emigrate, more than half have remained in Ireland. Tom Gleeson who designed a prizewinning collection of cotton lace knits all in pure white is working for the A Wear chain. Una Seymour and Colette Walkely

By Deirdre McQuillan

are with Penneys, Deirdre Heavy is with Athlone Apparel, Miriam Gaynor got a job in Dundalk and the gifted Amanda Foley who stole the show with her multi-coloured prints for children, is working towards setting up her own label.

The three year diploma course was set up in 1975 by Pam McCarthy, now retired, to whom all credit must go for establishing its reputation. According to the students the £425 a year course "is the cheapest in the EEC," though most have to take out bank loans to see them through and to pay for their final collection which can cost between £1,000 and £2,000 for fabrics and trimmings.

Each year there are about 50 applications of which only 19 are accepted. According to Pat Kieley, present director of the course, the students come from all over the country, from Cork, Limerick, Mayo and Donegal. "We eat, drink and sleep fashion," they say. "It takes over your complete life."

Limerick is also home to Loretto Bloom, one of Ireland's state-of-the-art factories who recently installed the latest computer aided design systems to speed up and streamline production. They insist that fashion graduates must be "computer literate" a fact Pat Kieley also recognises. She has now organised an introductory course in Dublin for the students, on CAD systems.

"What it comes down to is that we feel students should be as competent technically and they are from a creative point of view," she says. Students are also encouraged to take an interest in other areas of industry such as retailing or buying and Pat Kieley intends inviting buyers from the big merchandising operations to the show next year. "Our students are used to overload, they can accommodate various demands. Limerick has the kind of people they want."

Photographs by
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