

**MAKE-UP OR SKINCARE?**

The rise of hybrid beauty products | **C6**



# life

## Weekend

**SPICY COLLAB**

Granny Q Penang Lemak Laksa pop-up at Rappu | **C4**



**BACK TO BASICS**

What peptides do for your skin | **C7**



# Made to treasure

Thai designer Madaew is a social media rock star whose claim to fame is fashioning wild and wacky wearables from trash

(From far left) Some of Madaew's creations include a puffy outfit made from recycled ponchos and a multicoloured gown made with discarded slippers.

(Left) One of five outfits created by Madaew for the upcoming Trash To Couture fashion show in Singapore, where the designer will be a guest judge. PHOTOS: LENDLEASE, MADAEW99/INSTAGRAM



**Louisa Lim**

"Looking good doesn't depend on money," Apichet "Madaew" Atirattana once famously declared.

The Thai fashion designer broke the Internet in 2015 with avant-garde clothing made from everyday objects such as banana leaves and trash bags, and certainly knows a thing or two about looking good, even in a potato sack.

She gave new meaning to the saying after wearing a do-it-yourself romper made out of a coarse, beige fabric on the pages of Time magazine.

Hailed as a "Mixmaster of Fashion" by the American publication, the then 17-year-old was featured alongside 19 other exemplary young individuals – including American gymnast Simone Biles and award-winning Afghan journalist Lotfullah Najafzada – in a story on Next Generation Leaders in 2016.

Now 24, the designer – better known as Madaew – will be in Singapore as a guest judge for a sustainability campaign titled You Won't Believe It's Trash from May 9 to 13. Organised by real estate group Lendlease, this year's campaign

takes the form of a competition, with Trash To Couture as its theme.

To win, designers had to submit their ideas for couture pieces that are fashioned from at least 80 per cent upcycled materials.

The top 10 designs will be displayed at a runway show on May 11 at 313@somerset, together with five creations by Madaew, before appearing at a roving exhibition across four Lendlease malls – 313@somerset, Jem, Parkway Parade and Paya Lebar Quarter – from May 12 to July 2.

"One of my favourite pieces I have designed for the show is a black dress made from roof canvas, fishing nets, rubber and cable ties," Madaew tells The Straits Times via a translator in an e-mail interview.

"I have always believed in doing something unique through my designs and I am thrilled that they will be featured alongside those of budding talent in Singapore. I hope it helps to inspire people to broaden their thinking and mindset when it comes to recycling and up-cycling."

Born to a poor family, the fashionista – whose father was a mechanic and whose mother worked in a market during the day and in a shoe factory at night – grew up in Isaan, Thailand's most impoverished region.

Madaew found solace in the neighbourhood barber shop's vintage fashion magazines and, inspired by images of beautiful models and breathtaking dresses, pleaded for a Barbie. Using fabric



**My designs are a celebration of individuality and purpose. I want to transform things seen as without value – useless things – into ones with value.**

THAI FASHION DESIGNER APICHET 'MADAEW' ATIRATTANA

scraps from a tailor shop, she started designing clothes for the doll.

The little project morphed into a full-blown passion, and Madaew began making clothes for herself as well. The first few dresses were created from bolts of silk stolen from her grandmother's closet as well as leaves from a banana tree.

"We didn't have enough money to buy expensive fabrics, so I had to use whatever I could find around the house," she says.

One outfit – with a matching headpiece – comprised several chicken cages tied together. "We had some woven bamboo cages at home. I noticed the holes of the cages and decided to try putting them on my body, and they looked beautiful," she says.

This move raised more than just a few eyebrows – it got Madaew noticed.

By 16, she was modelling these madcap creations on social media, working with a dizzying array of materials.

Nothing was off-limits – not mosquito netting, clothes hangers, masks or cooking utensils lying around at home, or discarded keyboards, flip-flops or bicycle tyres found in her neighbourhood. Often modelled against the bleakest of backdrops, the creations were occasionally funny and always fun, but also profoundly meaningful because of their dystopian view of the world.

"My designs are a celebration of individuality and purpose. I want to transform things seen as with-

out value – useless things – into ones with value. Everything has value, be it ourselves or even trash," she says.

The big-city fashionistas did not take Madaew seriously in the beginning, but the skinny teenager was determined to prove them wrong.

"The greatest challenge was showing people in Bangkok that Isaan people can be creative... People often had the misconception that people of Isaan are dirty, uneducated, but I took it upon myself to showcase our successes," she says.

Her big break happened in 2016, when she was invited as a guest designer on season four of Asia's Next Top Model. The reality show catapulted her into the global spotlight as a legitimate fashion maven.

With over 64,000 followers on Instagram, she is now an influencer – albeit a very different kind who relies on her own resourcefulness and ingenuity rather than a generous trust fund.

Fame brought many opportunities. Apart from appearing in talk shows around the region, she recently clinched third place in this year's Miss Fabulous Thailand, an inclusive beauty pageant dedicated to transgender and non-binary individuals.

Now a hero in her home town of Khon Kaen, she also mentors local youth and works with them on various creative ventures.

CONTINUED ON C2

# Success story an inspiration to kids

FROM C1

"I am an inspiration for many kids to come out of their shells. It doesn't matter where you're from, I have shown them that success is possible," she once said.

Throughout it all, however, she has never lost sight of what she loves most: creating sensational outfits capable of igniting even the dullest of imaginations.

"I have always perceived fashion as a medium for expression, and a reflection of interests and personality. It is inspiring to have increasing visibility of what a more planet-friendly fashion industry might look like," she says.

Madaew is also looking forward to the future. Details are still under wraps, but she is due to launch her own fashion brand later in 2023.

"I'm working on my own brand to make my clothes more accessible. I find myself wanting to push the boundaries even further on what can be repurposed into fashion. The more I upcycle 'waste' materials, the more inspiration it sparks for me in my designs.

"It has allowed me to be really innovative even when it comes to ordinary textile materials in fashion designing," she says.

[louisalim@sph.com.sg](mailto:louisalim@sph.com.sg)



(Above) An industrial-chic romper with a train crafted from heavy-duty rice sacks originally used to carry construction materials.

(Left) Madaew patched the holes of a punctured inflatable pool to create her avant-garde take on the trending inflatable fashion style.

(Far left) A pair of worn heels given new life with strips from a woven nylon bag. PHOTOS: MADAEW99/INSTAGRAM

## Scraps made stylish

The finalists for Lendlease's Trash To Couture competition have been selected, and the top 10 winners will be announced on April 28.

Madaew is looking forward to seeing the designs when she arrives in Singapore in May.

"I am really excited to see these budding talents' designs, how they view trash from their own lens and translate it into a fashion piece. I want people to see that ugly things that don't seem to go together can become something beautiful," she says.

Here is a look at some of the creations.



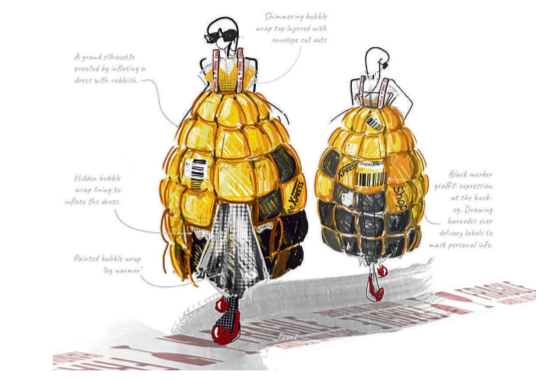
### Feliony Faustine, 21, student

Ms Faustine has designed several dresses that are inspired by English author George Orwell's dystopian novel, 1984. Created from vinyl banners and bubble wraps, the dresses showcase exaggerated silhouettes and cracked panels to symbolise extreme temperatures and climate change.



### Andrea A. Karundeng, 21, student

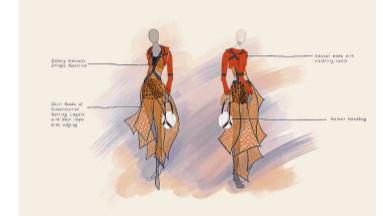
Ms Karundeng decided to use cardboard boxes in her sculptural gown and headpiece because they were the second largest form of trash generated in Singapore in 2022, according to the National Environment Agency. The rest of the dress will be made from coffee jute sacks, which are deconstructed to give it a more fluid appearance.



### Kassandra Lim, 31, student

By reimagining single-use postal packaging, Ms Lim has come up with a grand ballgown made with panels of padded envelopes. To inject volume into the skirt, she uses a hidden bubble-wrap lining instead of a petticoat or crinoline.

PHOTOS: ANDREA A. KARUNDENG, CHRISTINE WAN, FELICIA TOH, FELIONY FAUSTINE, KASSANDRA LIM



### Christine Wan, 28, sustainability manager

With her dress Drowned In Detritus, Ms Wan hopes to bring a human touch to the issue of pollution by depicting a mermaid ensnared in a net brimming with oceanic waste. Made from actual ocean debris – such as plastic bags, disposable bottles, plastic food wrappers and straws – that has washed up along East Coast Park, the dress will also feature a train made from fishing nets.



**Felicia Toh, 36, architect**  
Construction chic – these are two words to describe Ms Toh's dress, which pays homage to construction workers with its construction netting-derived skirt and playful handbag repurposed from a hard hat. The visibility vest-turned-cropped jacket that accompanies the dress is a modern take on the Spencer, which was originally worn by women in the 1790s over their dresses.