

Marie Callan

# Fashion Accessory Designer

'Hard work, yes, but there is a real sense of achievement that I have created a rewarding career for myself'

Degree in Fashion Promotion

Providing information and advice



**Who I am:** I am a fashion designer, running my own business, designing and producing fashion accessories including gloves, belts and buttons.

**An example of my work:** I became interested in fish skin as a material for fashion accessories like gloves and belts. There was an immediate marketing problem to overcome, namely people associated the product with the sort of bad smell that would turn you into a social outcast! However I became more and more convinced that I had found a material I could use in designs for the younger end of the market, under my own brand name, when I left college.

Most people are unaware that fish skin can be tanned and, once processed, is entirely odorless. Also it is ecologically friendly. A salmon skin can be treated to convincingly replicate an exotic leather such as crocodile skin without depleting stocks in the wild.

**Getting there:** I went to school in Durham and studied art and design right through school although I did feel frustrated at the art and design department's focus on drawing and painting when my interests lay in fashion and textiles. So I then took matters into my own hands devoting a fair bit of my own time to developing work in fashion and textiles - including fabric prints - in order to add much needed diversity to my portfolio.

After a one-year foundation course I attended the University of Lancashire in Preston. The degree was spread over four years and included a six-month placement with Marks and Spencer and a shorter spell of unpaid work experience with Elle magazine, in addition to studio and lecture sessions at the university.

In my final year, having decided on my the idea for my own business, I started off by drawing up a business plan and decided on the name 'Aquarelle', defined in the dictionary

as a 'painting in thin, usually transparent colours'. Through this plan I raised a grant for £1000 from Durham City Council and received funding from the Prince's Youth Business Trust.

A manufacturer with specialist equipment makes up my designs for gloves. Other products (such as buttons for bridal and general wear) are produced at my parents' house in Durham where a ground floor room has been turned into the AQUARElle 'factory'.

I spent the first couple of months in business talking to fashion editors and buyers and secured a vital break through when Harrods placed an order for my gloves.

I am also attending trade shows to promote my products and extend my network of contacts amongst buyers and fashion editors.

**What are the Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS) that Marie needed to succeed?**

Talk to your careers adviser and explore the opportunities to take up work experience in the creative industries where you live.

**What pathways could learners follow in order to enter this career? Learners could draw a progression pathway and consider their options.**

**Linked Activity:  
Fashion Design A13**