Manchester’s Creative Scene just had its Fuse lit

When thinking of final-year university projects, you never anticipate any to be taken beyond that dreaded deadline.

Even when doing so, you really don’t foresee many to get attention. Before starting my third year at Salford University, the expectations and pressure on myself had a fairly scrappy result on my studies early on.

It was around then I started to notice how lacklustre our industry is, how whitewashed. It’s ‘short-circuited’ wherever you look, and so I wanted to create something substantial to prove that this doesn’t always have to be the case if you try hard enough.

However, look around to the biggest creative platforms, pay attention to your social feed and reflect on the last few creative events you went to: how many people of colour do you see?

Here’s a very clear truth; as a person of colour, you need to see yourself in others who look like you. I unfortunately didn’t, which meant I could’ve easily given up on my studies. A couple of years later however, here I am. For those I know and graduated alongside, some of them haven’t had the luck, or privilege, on their side compared to me.

It’s likely I also would’ve accompanied them if I hadn’t taken my project on and frankly, I wouldn’t be writing this right now. I didn’t see others like me in events I had been to. Big design conferences in the city didn’t feature anyone classed as the ‘other’ – and so, change had to happen.

That’s where Fuse comes in.

, elevating the work and voices from creatives of colour. Born in Manchester, April 2019, just after the semester had begun for my final year, Fuse opened a space dedicated to POC (people of colour), coalescing the community together. Plus, it provided an effortless resource for others to begin diversifying. Fast forward to the present, Fuse is now expanding globally with chapters set-up in Leeds, London, Brighton, Berlin, Zurich and more.

In Manchester, the fuse has well and truly been lit. It’s become the catalyst for much-needed change and soon, the community will undoubtedly welcome those from all walks of life.

In July of 2019, Fuse hosted an event to collaborate, open a conversation and manifest a statement for change , taking the momentum to Design Manchester in with a panel on creating inclusive spaces.

Panelists included two British South-Asian creatives, myself and Heather Iqbal, founder of a British-Black illustrator, Venessa Scott and a British East-Asian creative producer, Kyle Soo, all firsts the conference had never achieved before.

“Fuse is a timely and critical resource which supports our mission to ensure that our line-ups are diverse and we continue to help tackle the imbalance of representation in the creative sector,” believes Kyle, who runs , a series of events designed to uplift creative talent within the community.

“Frankly, events such as ours have little excuse for a lack of ethnic diversity, with a growing portfolio of incredible talent that’s being showcased.”

Upon the beginning of 2020, plans for a third event before the first birthday of Fuse had been announced called “”, inviting creatives of colour from Manchester, to talk about whatever they’d like. No theme, no strings attached. All in all, it elevated the careers of those who took the stage; , , and – a beautiful illustration of how to build a distinct line-up.

In Leeds, the community has the unspoken pressure of being the outside of Manchester , but in just over a few weeks, innumerable creatives have started to be showcased, thanks to

host an empowering advocate for a representative industry.

“Fuse is being seen and celebrated in an industry where we often go unseen.” says Mary, epitomising how a voice finally can be heard. “It’s an inspiring community to belong to, we’re all united by the drive to change what is considered the norm in the creative sectors.”

Over in Birmingham, designers and co-host Fuse Birmingham, excited with what’s to come in the future. “I hope to see Fuse Birmingham continuously grow into a platform for BIPOC creatives in the city, to rely on to help them be noticed by industry practitioners. We already have a good following on pages from industry, and are continuously engaging with them to show the talent Birmingham BIPOC creatives have” says Neeraj, who will look to host an exhibition to do just that, in conjunction with Birmingham Design Festival.

Eugene hopes that the platform will start to inspire the next generation, too. “The icing on the cake is that all the talent featured will be the talent of BIPOC individuals!” he says. “For me it’s all about the creatives, there’s so much creativity in Birmingham and talent throughout the community, but unfortunately a large group of individuals are often overlooked due to their colour.”

“Fuse is a fantastic, empowering platform for creatives of colour in Manchester.” mentions a talented creative and an integral part of tight-knit Manchester’s community. “The platform itself is a wonderful thing but more inspiring to me is the story of why and how it was founded. Its founder, Jaheed Hussain (your author), was a student who wanted more, a

person who saw a disparity in the representation of people of colour in the design sector and in creative education and sought to do something about it.”

Scott has collaborated with the platform more than anyone else currently, having facilitated several workshops and speaking on the aforementioned panel. Thoughts from the audience on the day portrayed how polarising Scott felt, while speaking on the ability of representation and elevating others, instead of yourself.

“It is amazing to see the platform go from strength to strength and its founder too. Fuse to me stands for determination, fairness, tenacity, representation,

acknowledgement and opportunity. It is fantastic.”

Fortunately for our industry, newer and interesting perspectives are finally oozing through the misshapen cracks with more engagement towards conversations about race. Now, more than ever before, we have to keep going.

For Manchester, the work has already begun, but ask yourself, do you want to watch on the sidelines? Or, do you want to light the match?

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