

materials

Ackermann wins Swiss Textiles Award

Robb Young, WGSN 14.12.04

Antwerp designer Haider Ackermann won the 2004 Swiss Textiles Award and its €100,000 prize as part of the GWAND Fashion Festival in Lucerne, Switzerland

Swiss Textiles, the trade association representing over 200 companies in Switzerland's textile sector, has over the past five years positioned itself as an authority on independent fashion design. Each year in November a handful of the world's most talented fashion designers and industry professionals assemble for the Swiss Textiles Award.



Presentation of the Swiss Textiles Award



Lucerne, Switzerland

In a bid to attract up-and-coming designers to their products and establish a brand association that stresses innovation, Swiss Textiles opened the Swiss Textiles Award to non-Swiss contestants in 2002.

The line-up of seven finalists this year was a selection from the shortlist submitted by an esteemed panel that included Suzy Menkes, Carla Sozzani, Harriet Quick, Sarah Lerfel and other top international press and buyers.

Cosmic Wonder, Eley Kishimoto, Laurent Mercier, Lutz, Preen and Sophia Kokosalaki were among those hopefuls competing, before 33-year-old Haider Ackermann was announced this year's laureate.

Haider Ackermann

A Columbian-born adopted child of French parents, Ackermann grew up in Ethiopia, Chad, France and Algeria before moving to Belgium to study fashion at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp. A cosmopolitan upbringing has not only shaped Ackermann's sense of dress and aesthetics but also his values on fashion.

"The way the woman is presented to the world is as a sexual object. You see everything. You reveal everything. We don't talk about discretion anymore. But I think that somewhere a secret garden is nice to have."



Haider Ackermann

While influences from the places of his youth often appear in some dark ethereal silhouette or mood, Ackermann's designs are technically excellent, highly disciplined and delicate in a contemporary, urban way.

His predilection for finer fabrics - silk jerseys, chiffon, satin and gauze - is certainly good news for Swiss Textiles, whose fashion fabrics rate among

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Fact file

Swiss Textiles Award winner announced November 27:
Haider Ackermann

2004 finalists

Cosmic Wonder (Yukinori Maeda)
Eley Kishimoto (Mark Eley & Wakako Kishimoto)
Haider Ackermann
Laurent Mercier
Lutz (Lutz Huelle)
Preen by Thornton Bregazzi (Justin Thornton & Thea Bregazzi)
Sophia Kokosalaki

Nominating panellists

Suzy Menkes, *International Herald Tribune*
Carla Sozzani, Corso Como 10 (Milan)
Ako Tanaka, Japan *Vogue* (Tokyo)
Hirofumi Kurino, United Arrows (Tokyo)
Makiko Takahashi, Senken Shimbun (Tokyo)
Gity Monsef, Fashion & Textile Museum (London)
Harriet Quick, UK *Vogue* (London)
Ezra Petronio, *Self Service* (Paris)
Marie-Christiane Marek, Paris Premiere Television (Paris)
Paquita Paquin, *Libération* (Paris)
Sarah Lerfel, Colette (Paris)
Armand Limnander, *V Man/Visionaire* (New York)
Joseph Quartana, Seven NY (New York)

The Swiss textiles industry

Clothing textiles – 60%
Technical textiles – 30%
Home Textiles – 10%
Switzerland's largest markets
Germany, Italy, France, the UK and the US

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Unbenannt

the most superior and expensive on the market.

The partnership

The award comes at a crucial time for the winners, dealing with the perilous nature of an independent designer's business.

There had been speculation before the contest that Ackermann, who this season had not presented a runway show for the first time since launching, may not show again next season. When asked now to paint a picture of the year ahead if he hadn't won the award, the controlled and tactful persona resurfaces but admits: "It certainly would not have been easy."

Raf Simons, last year's Swiss Textiles Award winner who passed the baton to Ackermann is more candid a year after winning. "The prize came at a decisive moment because, at that time my financial situation was very difficult. To be quite honest I was on the look-out for money."

Simons, who used the prize money for a big runway production, a look-book and to finance in-house accessory design, elaborates. "It's just not enough to be a celebrated star in the fashion scene. Numerous fashion designers are grappling with problems even when they are on an upward curve."



Haider Ackerman

The collaboration only begins with financial backing. A €10,000 fabric voucher is granted to the winner and €3,000 vouchers to the runners-up as an incentive to use Swiss Textiles manufacturers' fabrics. Simons was able to begin working with Alumo, producers of some of the most exclusive cotton and cotton/cashmere shirting fabrics, while Ackermann plans to work with Alumo as well as Jakob Schlaepfer.

A model strategy

The textile industry in Switzerland, not including the finished garment category, was worth CHF 2.084bn (€1.359bn) in 2003 and was the country's fifth largest contributor to exports. But steadily falling output figures over the past few years are symptomatic of cost-competitive textile regions such as China and India as well as the growing trend for Swiss firms to outsource production and retain only design & development in the country.

Beyond the promotional benefits of the award to the federation, Swiss Textiles vice-president Ronald Weisbrod cites the simple relationships forged through the award as a key part of the strategy. "We expect the Swiss Textiles Award winner to have a very successful career. On the way up the ladder he or she will remember the generous award and come back to us for many years to come."

As for equating the award's performance with increases in collective revenue, Weisbrod says: "It will be difficult to measure the influence of the Swiss Textiles Award on actual sales as this is a long-term effect. We believe the award will have an effect on spreading the values of Swiss Textiles products and, as a consequence, we will certainly sell more products."

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