Rushemy Botter and Lisi Herrebrugh win 2018 Hyères Festival Grand Prize

By Dominique Muret - 30 April 2018

The 33rd edition of the Hyères International Festival of Fashion and Photography, which drew to a close on Sunday 29th April, stood out for the high level of the collections presented, displaying some clear trends, such as a range of artistic influences, well researched materials and, above all, sustainable development. This last theme was particularly noticeable in the work of these young designers, who also investigated some original subjects for the first time in the Festival's history, such as handicapped and plus size fashion. All of this was more than enough to confirm the relevance and importance of this fashion competition, which has been led with passion for over three decades by Jean-Pierre Blanc.

It was the designers' talent and social engagement which took centre stage this year, as shown by the Première Vision Grand Prize which was presented to Dutch couple Rushemy Botter (32), born on the Caribbean island of Curaçó, and Lisi Herrbrugh (28). The former studied at Amsterdam's AMFI, the latter at the Academy of Antwerp, where the pair have lived for nine years.

Their menswear collection, presented entirely on black models, won spectators over with its inventiveness and its skilful mixing of casual wear and masterfully executed couture. This playful aesthetic manifested itself through suits that were deconstructed and put back together in countless different ways, patterns that were boldly painted directly onto fabrics, a certain artful subversion of fashion codes and a generous helping of humour.

“We wanted something energetic and elegant at the same time, but also easy to wear. We we inspired by fisherman, who wake up early in the morning to catch fish. They carry their nets, which gives them a poetic feel. We wanted to give a voice to these people who don't have one, and then there's also the colours of the
We wanted to give a voice to these people who don't have one, and then there's also the colours of the Caribbean,” explained Rushemy Botter.

As for the Grand Prize for Fashion Accessories, the hands-down winners were Kate Fichard (30), Flora Fixy (32) and Julia Dessirier (30), a trio that aimed to change how people see disability through an original and innovative project that transforms hearing aids into jewellery pieces.

The starting point of the project came from hearing-impaired photographer Kate Fichard, who explained, "I've worn hearing aids since I was 4 years old. While the technology has evolved a lot, the shape and style of these devices hasn't changed at all". The young photographer got in touch with Flora Fixy, a friend she had met at the Ecal design school in Lausanne, and who had gone on to set up a design studio, Anddstudio, with Julia Dessirier.

"We had to bear all of the technical elements in mind, while also finding a way to transform these prostheses", stated the three designers, who found a range of solutions using rings, chains and metallic golden covers. "We wanted to sublimate the hearing aid, to break it down and make it a fashion accessory, in the same way that glasses are", they concluded.

In a similar spirit, 25-year-old Toulouse-native Ester Manas, who developed a sexy and colourful collection of plus-size womenswear, was chosen by Galeries Lafayette to produce a capsule collection. "Is size 36 an absolute goal? Why not be yourself?" asks the young La Cambre graduate, who created "a complete wardrobe made to simultaneously protect and reveal the wearer."

It was Canadian designer Marie-Eve Lecavalier who won the Chloé Prize, as well as a special mention from the jury. Her skilful leather work was particularly well received. The Montreal-born designer, who recently transferred to Antwerp to undertake a placement at Raf Simons, has always loved sewing and working with the material. "I love leather and I've developed techniques like, in this collection, leather knitwear", she said, referring to her impeccable pieces which inevitably put one in mind of Hermès.
The Public Prize for Fashion went to the womenswear collection presented by Belgian designer Sarah Bruylant, a Christian Dior fan who offered up a reinterpretation of the New Look featuring giant accessories, and elegant and impactful dresses painted in a pointillist style.

Elsewhere, the Public Prize for Accessories was snatched up by another Toulouse-native, Cécile Gray, who created golden steel mesh accessories designed to elevate garments, transforming necklaces into breastplates, and bracelets into sleeves with grace and delicacy.

In the Festival's Photography Category, the jury, presided over by Bettina Rheims, gave its Grand Prize to Irish-American photographer Eva O'Leary, and the American Vintage Prize to Dutch photographer Sarah Mei Herman, while the Still Life Prize went to Hungarian Csilla Klenyanszki, and the people's choice award went to Sanna Letho from Finland.

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