

ESF NEWS

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Recycled fashion - © Peter Schultz-Brussels

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Strutting her stuff on the catwalk – Inge Jonckheere goes haute couture

In this issue we continue the feature 'Our Staff' as Inge Jonckheere talks about her flair for fashion.

"Ever since I was young I was fascinated by fashion magazines and fashion in general. It was not so much about the whole hype around fashion but the design of the clothes," said Inge. The importance of fashion in Inge's life is apparent in the effortless elegance she applies to her everyday work clothes.

"Around five years ago my brother got married and I wanted to wear a really fancy dress but didn't want to look the same as everybody else," said Inge. "I had some good ideas but the problem was I could not design the dress myself. So I found a stylist that could make it and then explained what I wanted," she continued. But Inge discovered that it was not so easy to express her ideas purely verbally, and the process of making her dream dress was long and laborious. She eventually got her dress and it was a hit. The experience spurred Inge to start a fashion course around three years ago. She wanted to learn how to channel her ideas and go from abstract concept to tangible design. "I had lessons and it was really to learn how to draw, to express your ideas to a seamstress using a drawing," said Inge. Around half through the course, Inge was offered a job here at the ESF and had to cut her course short. Her drawing became less frequent as Strasbourg life and work took over. But last year, Inge spotted an advert for a fashion competition using recycled material. This was a way for her to combine her passion for fashion design and her scientific background. In the frame of sustainability, Inge set about to design a garment for the competition. Her recycled material of choice was the tissue from old umbrellas. "Coming from Belgium perhaps it was natural for me to think of this, as it's raining all the time and once you have some wind, your umbrella is lost and broken and the material is wasted. This is a shame as umbrellas are often very nice and colourful," said Inge. After collecting umbrellas from all her friends, Inge set about making her garment, stitching the umbrella textile together by hand." I'm quite a practical person so I thought if I could make a dress that could double as a skirt and a bikini which can become an evening top, that kind of thing," she said. Now she was ready for the competition which took place in September 2007. "The competition was very tough, with all the other designers being professionals coming from haute couture schools. But for me it was just something fun to do. I didn't win although some members of the jury e-mailed me afterwards to say that I should have won because my design was the most prêt à porter whereas the other designs were more haute couture, so not wearable," said Inge.

Despite not winning the competition, the show brought with it new possibilities as Inge was contacted in January 2008 and invited to take part in another fashion show on June 14 in the framework of the art fair in Antwerp. Inge explained that the show is under the leadership of the Belgian Six – a group of designers who graduated in the 1980s and since have made it big. The idea of the show is to bring young designers into the business and give them opportunities to link up with people who make clothes, sell textiles and so on.

Inge's inspiration for her next creation comes from the Roman Empire. She has taken elements from this period and applied them to her design but the aim is to produce wearable clothes. This has resulted in a range of swim wear. This time though, Inge invested in a sewing machine when realising her designs. The June show is not a competition, just an event that brings together people working in the business with the purpose of demonstrating what you can do with different textiles.

So what's in the pipeline for Inge next? "I've found that in Strasbourg there are a lot of people on motorbikes as the Vosges is really nice to ride in. A lot of people go to Germany to buy biking clothes but I have to say that the clothes for women are so ugly," said Inge. Therefore she is now thinking that something should be done for female bikers. But first she is aiming to get her motorbike license.

So, the future is bright for Inge Jonckheere and who knows, perhaps another future project could be to design ESF uniforms. The ESF wishes Inge good luck in her June show.



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