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Expressive, Conceptual Textiles Become Runway Art
At the 2014 Port Townsend Wearable Art Show

“Wow!”

That was the first sentiment exclaimed by judge Michael Cepress at the 4th Annual Port Townsend Wearable Art Show. It pretty much spoke for all of those present at the Saturday evening, May 10, performance that included standing ovations and much applause for the forty artists and their models from Western Washington, Alaska and California.

Cepress presented six awards based on outstanding creativity, construction, and presentation. Judging criteria included hair and makeup.

The event, a fundraiser for the Jefferson County Community Foundation’s Fund for Women and Girls, raised an estimated \$18,000, besting their goals, with 1,000 people in attendance for dress rehearsal, matinee and evening performances held at the Elks Lodge.

Best In Show

Best in Show winner Rebecca Maxim from Seattle created “Videotape Confection” from 68 VHS cassette tapes she crocheted into a gown and headdress. Model Melodee Hanson of Port Townsend created the persona of a Pagan Princess dancing to erratic, underworld music. Maxim received \$500 from OSKA Seattle and a gift certificate to the Pacific Northwest Art School.

Fittingly honored on Mother’s Day weekend, Maxim credits her 93-year old mom for teaching her the traditional techniques that she applies to her own “trash fashion” art making.

“I take crazy materials that you wouldn’t ordinarily use and see how they can be combined or altered to make something completely different. I had a vision for a high-fashion, haute couture gown and figured out how to recycle and crochet this unnatural material to create something new and original,” she muses.

Maxim says she was “flabbergasted” by the award and feels this is a valuable honor; her first wearable art show win.

“Port Townsend has such spirit! I was amazed with the hot competition. It was a well-organized, well-attended and very professionally run show. I feel so good about winning here!”

Other Winners

Port Townsend’s Margie MacDonald stunned the crowd with her engineered paper creation, “Expansion,” which received the Second Place award. The 70-inch wide honeycomb creation took 92 layers of paper cut with a razor knife and laminated with two gallons of white glue. It enveloped model Bonnie Obremski, who skillfully moved the piece-- rolling it, opening and closing it, seemingly bringing it to life. She received \$200 from KMI Insurance and a gift certificate to La Bella Day Spa.

MacDonald explained, “I wanted to remove the human body as a feature. I want the body to be the engine of the sculpture, not the sculpture itself.”

MacDonald also won the People’s Choice Award. She received \$150 from Nancy E. Scott, CPA, \$100 from the Jefferson County Community Foundation, and a gift certificate to the Clothes Horse.

Terra Holcomb from Kirkland captured third place honors for “The Mussel Gatherer.” Model Allison Dey’s lively dance performance moved 30 pounds of iridescent shells attached to a crocheted underdress. Holcomb says it took her six months to create the piece. She was given \$100 from Max Grover Gallery and gift certificates from GLOW natural Skin Care & SOAK.

The Student Award went to crowd pleaser Una McFadin from Port Townsend who modeled her creation, “Duct Tape Diva.” Her colorful display of patterned tapes and interesting foundation shapes, combined with her spirited runway presentation, endeared the 8-year old to everyone in attendance. She received a \$100 gift certificate to Northwind Arts Center, \$100 from Home Staging by Patti Wickline, and a World’s End Gift Certificate.

Nonie Gaines from Port Townsend took home the Honorable Mention award. Her “Samurai Swoosh” piece, expressively modeled by Ella Becker, was made from woven fiber blinds and metal to creatively represent her vision of a Samurai warrior’s armor. She received a gift certificate to the Fountain and a bag of buttons from Judith Bird.

Judge’s Observations

Cepress designs for both men and women and teaches Wearable Art at the University of Washington. He said it was exciting to see all the proposals that he first viewed four months ago as “seeds of ideas” become fully realized works of art.

“I was sent a pile of applications from 73 people. They ranged from unconventional, to conventional, to inventive ideas,” he noted. “The fact that there were 73 is no small thing.”

He was impressed with how the finalists played with materials and manipulated them.

“They made them something else, something bigger than they were supposed to be.”

Cepress says the 40 pieces, including everyday wear, expressive, and craft/theater/visual creations, were difficult to judge.

“The expressive world of Wearable Art is one where many voices are welcome, all materials are possible, and with the right inspiration, finesse and hand-skill, most any idea can become a powerful work of art ready for the runway,” he says.

“Wearable Art is as vast and far-reaching as the range of materials and techniques that can be used to make art for the body. This can include some of the most time-honored textile traditions like tailoring or dressmaking, tatting, appliqué or trapunto, and also leaves room for the most innovative, unconventional materials, which we certainly saw on the runway Saturday night.”

Event Co-Chairman Debbi Steele is overwhelmed with the response. “This show is only four years old and we’ve created a bold art statement with the support from our sponsors, the support of hundreds of volunteers and the people who paid to see all the wonderful creations by our talented designers and their models. By building community, we’ve brought attention and funding to the JCCF Fund for Women and Girls.”

“This year’s event has exceeded all our expectations,” Steele declares. “Just wait til next year...”

First Federal was the main sponsor of the event. Other sponsors include Waterbirth Solutions, Port Townsend Paper Company, Linda Foard, Hasse & Co. Port Townsend Sails, Michelle Sandoval-Windermere Real Estate, Joyce Wilkerson, Judith Bird, Marsha Wiener, Northwind Arts Center, Trisa & Co., and Media Sponsor KPTZ . Key City Theater was the executive producer.

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