

WOW 2010

by Robyn on September 28, 2010

It's World of Wearable Art season again, where scores of ladies (and some gents) converge upon the capital to witness the extravaganza that is the World of WearableArt show. This year's awards show was held on Friday night, and again The Wellingtonista was invited along for the WOWstravaganza.

The fun of the WOW show is that it's never just models walking down a catwalk. For a start, WOW uses dancers (and some of the costumes require physical strength and stamina to wear) and that catwalk is an three-headed serpent with rotating circles for maximum display potential.

The night started with the South Pacific collection, which this year saw entries drawing heavily on traditional Maori styles, as well as the pieces inspired by nature. Thankfully the Halloween costume-style animals of past years were absent.

The winner of this category was Mana Uha by Oliva Hall of Nelson, a Maori cloak made of plastic strapping.



The children's category was working with the theme of "the magic of books", and seemed to have a smaller number of entrants this year – only 12. But they were superbly showcased with a giant pop-up book accessorised with dancers dressed as paper-cut-out storybook characters.

The children's category winner was Victus Libri (Who Needs Computer Games?) by Jane Ewers, another Nelsonian.



Then it was time for the black lights to come on, as the old favourite Illumination Illusion section returned.

The necessity of using fluoro colours limits the palette, but this entrants managed to avoid looking like a giant late '80s casualwear fest.

The winner was The Cycle of a Fungus by Dimitri Jagtenberg of the Netherlands. Incidentally, fungus popped up in a few other WOW pieces, so I think we can declare that fungus is the new bacon/zombies/steampunk for '10.



The open section is, by its nature, the most varied category. But it also produced both the supreme winner and runner-up.

The winner was Loops by Yogesh Chaudhary and Manas Barve of India. It's laser-cut Merino wool felt, that carefully loops together without the need for seams. The philosophy behind it reminds me of the stuff that Japanese fashion designer Issy Miyake does, with his thoughtful, technology-driven designs. It's interesting that the two young winners have a design background, rather than fashion or art.



And the open section runner-up was Horridus by Lynn Christiansen of the USA. This copper suit made a clacking noise as the model walked around the stage. More clothes should clack.



My favourite piece in the show was also in the open category. It was *You Don't Bring Me Flowers*, by Catherine Anderson of Wellington. If the floral design wasn't awesome enough, it's described as "a tribute to Barbara Streisand and Neil Diamond".



The avant garde section had the theme "inspired by the circus", and it seems that many designers were inspired by the big top and/or ringmaster costume.

This included the winning entry, *The Ring Mistress* by Richelle Dynae Rudeen of the UK. This lady has a circus in her pants.



But this category produced other gems, including commended entry Lady Curiosity by Fifi Colston of Wellington, a tattooed lady inspired by Rachael King's novel "Magpie Hall".



But you know what was the best thing about the circus category? Little doggies in elephant costumes. They stole the show!

This year's Creative Excellence section had the theme "The Art of Light", which is awesome because LEDs are so hot right now.

The presentation for this category also included the amazing Vospertron dance group, whose clever costumes evoke the classic sci-fi film Tron, cross over into the uncanny valley and back a few times, and generally managed to amaze me.

The winning creation was Lady La La, which celebrates "the glamour, precision and music behind New Zealand's marching girls".

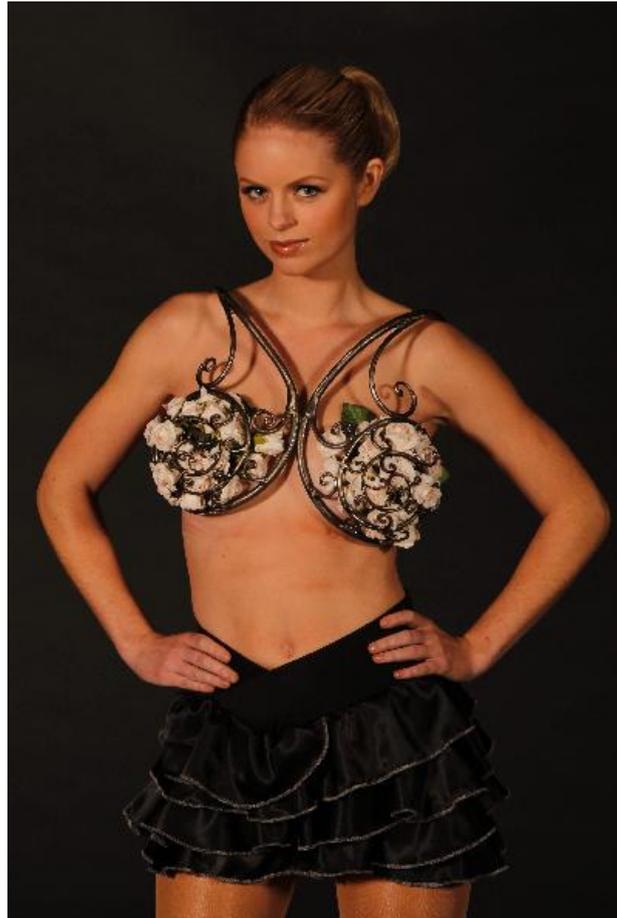


Speaking of ladies, the spectre of Lady Gaga was everywhere. Whereas before the WOW entries were art, not intended for everyday wear, Lady Gaga has changed everything. The costumes she wears are intersection with wearable art.

There were already a few pieces this year that seemed more than inspired by the world of Gaga. It will be interesting to see how far the influence extends for future WOWs.

And finally it was the ol' crazy tits Bizarre Bra category. I always worry that this has been debased by all those Bendon 'n' hot glue gun fundraiser bra-decorating competitions, but the creative WOW spark remains strong.

The winner was Every Rose Has Its Thorns, by Violet Oliver of Auckland. Sadly it was not inspired by the excellent Poison rock ballad, but by the artist's daughter breastfeeding her baby.



I was impressed with the overall standard of entries this year. There are far fewer entries that feel like they belong at Sevens weekend, and more entries that are making splendid artistic statements.

The stagecraft was excellent and big praise must go to artistic director Malia Johnston who just brought everything together to superbly, from the elephant dogs to Te Radar the master of ceremonies in a fried-egg bra.

WOW will be back for 2011, running for an extra week to capture the curious part of the Rugby World Cup crowd that intersects with WearableArt. Can they top elephant dogs? I hope so!