

Union fights for local industry with style

How does a trade union and manufacturers respond to the massive import penetration of local markets? They turn to fashion promotion to show off the country's great designs and to make the case for the industry.



Bianca Adams (20), an employee of Monviso Knitwear is the SA Clothing and Textile Workers Union's reigning Spring Queen and face of this year's Cape Town Fashion Festival.

May will be the month to celebrate being fashionably South African with the SA Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (SACTWU)'s annual Cape Town Fashion Festival (CTFF), which runs from 1-17 May. It combines a powerful mix of fashion and entertainment, including a catwalk show in the Company Gardens where Afro Pop group Malaika will perform and fashion shows in both Cavendish Square and the Promenade Shopping Centre in Mitchell's Plain as well as a heavyweight business imbizo and the country's largest SETA graduation. It will all culminate in the prestigious Cape Town Fashion Awards (to be held at Spier Estate outside Stellenbosch) to recognise exceptional industry performance.

"Fashion can be used as a vehicle to combat poverty and social disintegration as it has the potential to create decent work. But that is a policy choice we must make, from what consumers buy to where retailers source. Behind the fun, glamour and images, there is a serious business and a major employment opportunity and reality. By raising awareness of the industry's strengths and competitive advantages, the festival hopes to serve as a stimulant for its growth," says Ebrahim Patel, SACTWU General Secretary and Fashion Festival Convenor.

"The industry faces the challenge of tooling up to address the competition from China and other low-wage producers and so we need to show and nurture the talent, quality, fashion innovation and quick-response capacity we are creating in South Africa," he adds.

According to one of the festival co-ordinators, Etienne Vlok, the primary aim of the festival is to profile, position and create buzz around the South African clothing, textile, footwear and leather (CFTL) industry as the sector that, over and above delivering glamour and glitz, has the biggest capacity to drive mass-scale job creation in South Africa. Every R1 million of sales in the clothing sector creates 11 jobs compared with 5 jobs in gold mining for the same amount of sales. The sector also has significant benefits for gender equity as the industry is a major employer of women.

The Clothing, Textile, Footwear and Leather (CTFL) Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) learnership graduation will also take place on 1 May, when 700 graduates will receive their certificates this year, making it the biggest annual SETA graduation in the country.

The 2008 festival program

- 1 May - City Catwalk, 10h30 - 13h00: Company Gardens, Cape Town
- 1 May - SETA Graduation, 9h00 - 11h30: Multi Purpose Hall, Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), District 6 Campus, Cape Town
- 6 May - Fashion Industry Imbizo, 10h30 - 12h30: Levi Strauss SA manufacturing plant, Epping Industria
- 8 May - Cavendish Square Fashion, 19h30 - 21h00, Centre Court, Cavendish Square, Claremont
- 10 May - Cape Flats Fashion, 11h00 - 13h00, Promenade Shopping Centre, Mitchell's Plain
- 17 May - Gala Fashion Night & Fashion Awards, 19h30 to 23h00 - Moyo's Restaurant, Spier Wine Estate, Stellenbosch.

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