

Of Dancing Dragons

Amilani

By Raisa Wickrematunge

As a child, Amilani Perera loved drawing. A student of Musaeus College, she entered the Arts stream after her Ordinary Level examinations, because even then she wanted to do fashion design. She chose an interesting mix of subjects - Economics, Statistics and Art. Following her school days, Amilani applied to the prestigious LaSalle School of Arts in Singapore, and following her graduation began working with MAS Intimates. Recently, Amilani's collection caused a stir at Colombo Fashion Week, during the 'Gen Next' show. This year's Colombo Fashion Week was Amilani's first ever individual showcase of her work in Sri Lanka.

"It was tense backstage, because the first three models were going on last again. But when they reached the ramp... I'll never forget it," Amilani said, reliving that moment. The collection she showcased at Colombo Fashion Week was inspired by the 'makara thorana'. She was inspired by the thought of a dragon motif, "I saw it walking on the seashore, dipping into the sea, and dancing."

The collection she created moved between nudes and golds, and progressed to teal blue and silver, symbolising the dragon's dance from land to sea. The dragon motif was embroidered on some of the pieces as well, but apart from that Amilani said she wanted to suggest the movement of the dragon, rather than translate it onto fabric literally. The end result she wanted was something strong, powerful and feminine - a collection to encapsulate the modern woman. In fact, this is the type of woman Amilani designs her clothes for.

"I'm very interested in culture and the arts, because I have studied it, as well as history, around the world. It's amazing how art has affected life," Amilani said. During her stay in Singapore, studying for her degree, she realised that the country was different to Sri Lanka, being more methodical. This she translated to her designs, favouring a polished, clean finish to her garments. Amilani favours using natural fibre for her designs, preferring to work with cottons, linens and silks, although she did use synthetic

fabric in her collection for Colombo Fashion Week. (She accessorized her collection with Ray Bans provided by Wickramarachchi Opticians).

"I love colour, but I do love using black as well, as it is always so fashionable," Amilani said. "I don't go for using a lot of colours in my designs, rather I go for a palette with minimal, yet strong, contrasting colours." Amilani's graduation collection was inspired by the scarification process in Africa, a process she was fascinated by - in this collection, she used a different colour for each piece. Through art, she attempted to explore how African tribes marked themselves according to significant moments in their life. While she enjoys exploring other cultures, Amilani says she also tries to incorporate her Sri Lankan heritage into her designs.

For instance, when she competed in a 2006 GAS Jeans and Catalogue Magazine competition in Singapore, titled Denim Deconstruction, Amilani was inspired by the 'ayanna' in the Sinhalese alphabet. She created a chic look inspired by the shape of the letter, using deconstructed denim. She was chosen as a top ten finalist, and her work was showcased at the Paragon on Orchard Road, a fact she is proud of as it put Sri Lanka on the design map in Singapore. But this is not the end of her achievements - Amilani's collection 'Marked Memoirs' was featured in Indonesian magazine Swangklossy in 2009. She was also one of the finalists in the British Council Young Creative Entrepreneur competition in 2012. Some of Amilani's designs were also showcased during the Sri Lanka Design Festival, under the MAS Intimates segment.

Although Amilani says Sri Lanka is much more fashion forward than it used to be, she found it difficult to play with different silhouettes and colours at first. One of her initial collections was inspired by Sri Lanka's traditional masks, featuring a striking palette of yellow, red and black.

"Looking back, it was a naive thought... I just put it [the mask motif] on a dress," Amilani recalls. Finding her signature was therefore a challenge. It was difficult too to balance working full time at MAS



Holdings with designing her own label (and also reading for her Masters of Business Administration degree, awarded by Prifysgol Cymru University of Wales.) "There have been a lot of late nights," she laughs, adding that it's all worth it when she sees her work go down the runway.

Now, Colombo Fashion Week 2013 has put Amilani on the map as a designer, with the launch of her self-titled brand. Unsurprisingly, Amilani is full of

plans for the future. She is currently working on a special ready to wear project with Colombo Fashion company, something which she says she is 'very excited' about. In addition, she is working on a unique eco-friendly project, creating a line of shoes and accessories out of used clothes, including cast off saris and jeans. Amilani's collection is currently retailing at the Satin Wilder shop located at 3, Galle Face Court 2, Colombo 3.



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