

MaXhosa by Laduma chats AW2018 collection

 By Ruth Cooper

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Iconic fashion brand MaXhosa by Laduma, known for its signature bold and graphic knitwear designs, showcased their new Op Art-inspired Autumn/Winter collection at the recent AFI Fashion Week in Cape Town.

MaXhosa by Laduma knitwear was born in 2010 with designer Laduma Ngxokolo's desire to explore knitwear design solutions that would be suitable for Amakrwala (Xhosa initiates). Since then, Ngxokolo has received numerous awards and global acclaim.

We got in touch with Ngxokolo to chat about the new collection and the rise of African fashion.



Image by Andile Buka

■ Tell us the MaXhosa by Laduma story. How did the brand come about?

MaXhosa by Laduma was initially inspired by the Xhosa Amakrwala rite of passage. I wanted to create a collection suitable for these Xhosa initiates. I worked with the use of Xhosa beadwork, which has bold colours and distinctive patterns to create a premium range that suited the Amakrwala. The MaXhosa story is all referenced in the collections I have created – it is a story of humble beginnings and seeking inspiration in cultural aesthetics to modernise fashion.

■ How would you describe the MaXhosa by Laduma design aesthetic?

The aesthetic is African renaissance – it captures the rich and authentic feel of the African people. The MaXhosa motifs and signature patterns all forms part of the design. It looks towards a modern way of showcasing a utopian Afro-futuristic collection.



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📌 **Take us through the inspiration behind the range you showed at AFI Fashion Week. Any notable deviations from previous collections?**

This collection is inspired by Op Art, it takes on a new and inventive way of translating patterns towards a 3D look and feel. I took on the task of playing with 3D patterns and fused the MaXhosa signature with the Op Art inspired designs. Op Art creates a lot of movement – you can see the movement in the patterns. The patterns have evolved with us as a brand and are totally different from the place we started from.







The aim of the new collection is to transition the pieces to luxury status; it is styled with the use of the signature patterns, but with a bold and 3D expression – the collection seeks to showcase the consistency of the patterns in an innovative way.

■ ***How do you interpret the AFI Fashion Week theme; #IamAfrica?***

Africa is a continent full of creativity and riches. Our story has been told in many ways, some of which has not helped us advance. It is time for us to control the narrative, and make bold statements in owning and reclaiming our confidence. I am Africa is a bold statement, thus we have to be building our brands to be a global brand. We must aim to be celebrated in Africa, and our products sold across Africa.



■ ***What have been some of your top career highlights?***

Many moments in my career have been highlights; from winning the 2010 International Society of Dyers and Colourists Design Award, which was my first award and marked my first international trip as well as the first time I flew in my life. Two years later, judging in the same award, was a full circle moment. There were many awards after that, which all have meant

something – but my most memorable moment was when a patron came to me and told me that should they be buried, they would want it to be in my collection.

■ ***What would be your top trends for Autumn/Winter menswear this year?***

The top trend for me would be the influence of streetwear, such as sweaters and shirts with bold statements, as well as oversized jackets. I find simplicity to be key, as it is made for functional use.







■ ***How would you like to see fashion evolve over the next decade?***

The evolution into meeting the demand of quality, globally, is one I am most passionate about. I would like to see designers create styles that capture our continent and what it has to offer. This also affects the business of fashion, as I feel that fashion brands have to evolve into being a globally competitive business. It is of the utmost importance for designers to balance the creative with the business, and this might be the great evolution of fashion – where African fashion and luxury is becoming one of the top exports of our continent.

■ ***What are the most pressing challenges facing young fashion designers in South Africa?***

Holistically, most of the designers are not receiving enough business support. This then influences all facets of the design, including the creative output. It is crucial to have support, from there, quality can be assured. Material sourcing and production facilities are all facets of the business, there needs to be balance; the creative with the commerce. Marketing and PR are key ways to push the product out there – brand education and product positioning help push the brand from premium to luxury.

■ ***What will you be working on next?***

The next phase of the brand is the concentration on production, moving in-house, and controlling the value chain. This makes us competitive in the market, as well as ensuring quality control. I am now working and playing around with signature pieces. I have taken time to study my market effectively, I now see that people are looking at cultural statements in the pieces I create.

We also have evolved into being a luxury brand. With production, we are then able to refine the quality even further. The next aim is to be Africa's leading luxury lifestyle brand. We are also moving toward other lifestyle products.

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ABOUT RUTH COOPER

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