

Unique activewear with Mieke

 By Ruth Cooper

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On the back of a successful reception at the recent Autumn/Winter 2017 SA Fashion Week, up-and-coming fashion designer Mieke Vermeulen launched her collection of uniquely South African activewear.



Mieke Vermeulen

started off with.

Self-titled Mieke, the activewear pays homage to South African artists; Jacobus Hendrik Pierneef and Nina Torr. We got in touch with Mieke to find out more about the range and also what it takes to start your own line and business.

Tell us about the recent launch of your activewear Mieke.

I like the idea of fashion that one can both exercise in and style to go out in. I think the 'athleisure' trend is very stylish and practical and I wanted to express this functionality in a uniquely playful, South African way.

Can you take us through the process of starting your own line and business?

I am in the process of a lean start-up and I think at the moment it is the best way to go for new fashion entrepreneurs. Competing for attention with imported products and the fast fashion cycle means you need to be able to adjust and pivot until you've got it just right. This process can take weeks or months, so being agile is key here. Be prepared not to achieve success overnight and for the possibility that you might not end up doing what you

■ I read that you identify yourself as a "side-trepreneur". Can you explain what you mean by this?

Being a "side-trepreneur" means that during the day I have a fulltime job and I only get to work on my products in the evenings and over weekends. This doesn't leave me with a lot of time on my hands, but it does mean I won't run out of working capital while I'm testing my ideas.







▣ ***What advice would you give to aspiring fashion entrepreneurs?***

Groundwork and planning are probably the most important parts of entrepreneurship. Not in the sense of a business plan – there are too many unknowns in this industry – but rather as a business model that best suits your lifestyle, finances and aesthetic. In the end, fashion is more about business than designing and creating.

▣ ***What was the response like to your Neo-Africana Autumn/Winter 2017 collection at SA Fashion Week?***

I got the sense that people found the ‘athleisure’ range very energetic and fresh, and that the inspiration and mood came through very strongly. A lot of people remarked on the amount of detail and the feeling of déjà vu that the prints and

techniques gave.

▣ ***What was it like being involved in the PPC Imaginarium awards?***

The design and production of pieces using unusual mediums is challenging and stretches the mind. It opens you up to new design possibilities. It was a learning experience that was well worth the effort.

▣ ***Using prints by local artists; Nina Torr and Pierneef gives your clothes a very unique and distinct aesthetic, how did this inspiration come about?***

The inspiration behind my work has always been South Africa. I am a big fan of [Nina Torr](#)'s illustrations as her work has a unique South African perspective and style without being too literal. Her subtle concepts and colour palette really inspired my range. With [Pierneef](#), I have always been fascinated by the way he sees the South African landscape. His geometric style inspired my silhouettes and prints.







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

I was a finalist in the ELLE Rising Star Design Award 2013 and showcased my Neo Voortrekker Collection in Cape Town. I exhibited my graduate collection at the SA Fashion Week Buyer's Lounge in April 2014. I am also part of the 2016 Design Indaba Emerging Creatives programme and have exhibited garments and accessories at the Watershed, Cape Town. This year I showcased my Neo Africana collection at SA Fashion Week as part of the Sunglass Hut New Talent Search.

■ ***How would you describe Neo-Africana?***

I wanted to create a new South African look that wasn't too literal and that was very wearable. I am inspired by techniques that have a traditional feel. I love merging the 'traditional' and contemporary to create a look that is novel, but relatable.







🔴 ***If your style of design could be described as a song or an artist what would it be and why?***

Come with me by Black Coffee feat. Mque. Like the video, the song is subtle, but strongly South African.

🔴 ***What's your favourite emoji?***

Definitely the clapping hands. You can congratulate someone or dance or tell them to hurry up!

🔴 ***What is your favourite item of clothing, currently?***

I have an appliquéd linen waistcoat that my mom wore in the 90s. I just style it with everything and wear it way too much!







▣ **Where is the range available?**

At the moment I work on a made-to-order basis for the printed leggings, so anyone interested can contact me via email, mieke.vermeulen@yahoo.com.

▣ **What's next?**

I am expanding on the prints for my active wear at the moment. In the future, I would like to work more with accessories.

For more information on Vermeulen and her Neo-Africana collection visit her Facebook page at [Mieke Vermeulen](#). To get in touch, contact her via e-mail at mieke.vermeulen@yahoo.com.

ABOUT RUTH COOPER

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