

South African invited to London's Fashion Finest Renaissance

At the London Fashion Week's Fashion Finest Renaissance, Lesego Malatsi, co-founder of Mzansi Designers Emporium and alumni of the Branson Centre of Entrepreneurship in Johannesburg, was the only South African invited to participate.



He joined 10 other designers from Nigeria, the UK, US, Angola, Zambia and Ghana on 17 September 2011 to showcase their emerging talent to the world at the official off-site event to the premium shows

Malatsi says, "Taking part in this event was such an honour, as it gave me a chance to share our country's unique creativity, energy and vibrancy. The Branson Centre's support and practical advice has given me the confidence to succeed and create jobs for many people."

Hailing from Soweto, Malatsi says his success as an up-and-coming fashion designer wasn't an over-night success story. "Like many young South Africans, when I finished my studies I couldn't find a job. So I started my own business instead. However, finding support to help me launch my fashion label wasn't easy so I approached the Branson Centre of Entrepreneurship in 2006 and received many networking opportunities to promote my business."



Today, he employs 18 people, has a store in Maponya Mall, Soweto and exports apparel to a fashion store in Regent Street, Cambridge, UK where he was 'discovered' by the London Fashion Week team after they saw his work at a local event.



"A core function of the Branson Centre is to facilitate opportunities for our alumni to network and gain skills from mentors in their industry, be they local or international" explains Tracey Webster, CEO of the Branson Centre, South Africa. "As such, our UK team jumped on board to help Malatsi prepare for London Fashion Week."

Webster goes on to say that entrepreneurship is about creating sustainable employment for others by working with them to maximise opportunities. "For example, we have connected him with two other Branson Centre entrepreneurs - Freda Sebolai; Eclectic Collaborations and Folake Adejuyigbe; Lord's Hats & Accessories, who have designed the collection's accessories, jewellery and hats."

Another player in his entrepreneurial success is Nina Quiros. An American entrepreneur who is part of the Virgin Unite global community of entrepreneurs, she came to South Africa in November 2010 and spent three months with Malatsi at the Branson Centre. Today she is regularly involved in connecting him with new business opportunities.



"In a country where unemployment is rampant and youth have little hope for their futures, we believe stimulating entrepreneurship is critical to boosting employment and fostering long-term economic growth. Malatsi is testament to this vision and we are so proud of how far he has come as a South African fashion designer and entrepreneur," Webster concludes.

For more information, go to www.bransoncentre.org or www.virginunite.com.

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