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Aspiring Designers Compete in TÉLIO's National Design Competition

WRITTEN BY FASHION PUBLISHING | DEC 20, 2013.

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How a Canadian company is supporting emerging talent in The Great White North



Our very own James Mendolia, reviewing entries

On October 24th, 2013, our very own Director of Fashion Marketing, James Mendolia, participated on a jury panel in Montreal for the 8th annual "Canada's Breakthrough Designers" Competition. The competition is organized by TÉLIO, a Montreal-based company that offers fabrics to designers, manufacturers and retailers that are at the cutting edge of fashion. Along with Mendolia, the jury is made up of four other fashion experts, including Nicole Bridger (Fashion Designer), Lolitta Dandoy (*Fashioniseverywhere.com*), Dominique Lemieux (Costume Creator), and Truc Nguyen (*Flare Magazine*).

Each year, TÉLIO brings together 23 fashion design schools across Canada for the competition. Their focus is to prepare aspiring fashion designers for the commercial realities of the industry as well as assist them in creating opportunities for recognition in the media. Since its inception, the company has been committed to the growth and development of the next generation of up and coming design talent in Canada. Supporting, preparing, challenging and giving back are all major reasons why TÉLIO continues to host their annual design competition year after year.



The jury...

To find out more, I caught up with James Mendolia and TÉLIO's Project Coordinator, Rebecca Lawson.

This past October, the initial judging took place, whereby the jury joined together in choosing 25 finalists out of the participating schools. Prior to this, students were given fabric swatches for inspiration and then submitted 7 of their best sketches according to this year's theme: TEXTURES. After the finalists were selected, they were sent fabrics by TÉLIO and given the budget to make their designs come to life. Come February, the jury will once again convene to review all of the designs and decide on the final 5 winning

Parsons560 (P560): Can you tell me more about how TÉLIO supports and prepares young fashion designers in Canada?

James Mendolia (JM): TÉLIO works with emerging designers and has lower minimums than working with a mill. That makes it a great opportunity for a designer that's just starting out, who wouldn't be able to work with a textile mill in another part of the world with super high minimums. TÉLIO is truly dedicated to embracing and fostering emerging designers in Canada.

Rebecca Lawson (RL): All of the criteria and regulations in the competition are made for a real life context where the designer has budget restrictions, such as 6 meters of fabric or more, and must design with a targeted clientele in mind. Our competition's mission is to expose the participants to 'real life' industry expectations. Media is also a major factor. Some finalists are interviewed before the finals to cover their story. Media is also present at the grand finale Fashion Show and all 5 winners get media attention after the show.

P560: Do you think that will become a growing trend? What TÉLIO is doing for emerging designers?



JM: I definitely do. TÉLIO imports fabrics and their minimums aren't huge. One of the things we're facing in the fashion industry, which is a bit of a crisis is the fact that we're doing so much production offshore that a lot of small to medium sized factories and vendors in the United States, Canada and Mexico in the last decade have closed their doors. The problem with this is that it makes it impossible for emerging designers to start their business. So companies like TÉLIO not only

support students, they also support designers that are starting small businesses and ultimately will grow. I have so much respect for companies that support emerging designers – it's becoming harder and harder to find. It can't be all about the mega retailers or the mega brands because that can get quite boring.

P560: The theme of the 2014 competition is TEXTURES. What was the inspiration behind it?

RL: TEXTURES was a melting pot of many ideas. Firstly, TÉLIO has so many beautiful fabrics that for this 2014 edition, we really wanted to showcase them. These fabrics include sequins, wools, satins, plissés, shimmery, and more. We wanted the students to go "WOW!" when they saw this year's Competition fabrics selection! With textures being present in future major trends, we thought it could be such an interesting feel for the runway show in February. The toned down black and white 'color' palette was the best way to let the textures steal the show.

P560: What are some of the common trends you noticed when reviewing the sketches submitted by finalists?

RL: A lot of texture worked into the actual garment design such as pleating, gathering, piping, 3D flowers, etc. The students went beyond simply sticking to the obvious fabric textures. We also saw a lot of layering, structured designs and patterns that were intricate, well thought out and really done on a professional level.

JM: It was clear to see that many of the applicants were very inspired by the fabrics. Sometimes it goes the other way around, where designers create something and find fabrics for it. Here, it was definitely reflected in what we were seeing that students were inspired by the fabrics. I was impressed by all of the hand-sewing techniques and fabric manipulation to create 3D textures. I can't wait to see everything come to life in February.

P560: Now that the 25 finalists have been chosen, what happens next? What are the students competing for?

JM: The finalists were given a budget and fabrics from TÉLIO and now must do everything such as the cutting, draping and sewing in order to take their designs from sketches to the finished product. All of the judges will return to Montreal in the beginning of February and review the designs. From those 25, we will pick the top finalists and those students will be invited to be a part of Montreal Fashion Week. That's super exciting for the students. There are also a whole host of prizes that TÉLIO provides along with the competition partners.

RL: There are amazing scholarships awarded along with other prizes, including LECTRA software licenses and even Equipment Delisle machines such as a complete industrial plain stitch sewing machine with a table and everything. Combined, the scholarships and prizes total over \$60,000.

P560: Have any of the past student finalists continued on to launch their own labels following graduation?

RL: Yes! To name a few: Pedram Karimi – a 2011 winner, Marilyn Baril – a 2009 finalist, VFranz – 2013 finalist, and Alanna Klatt – 2013 finalist. Many others either have a part time or a full time job in the industry and continue working on their own designs. There are also many students who choose to go abroad to complete their studies to schools such as Central Saint Martins in London.

Check out the following sources for more information on the competition, TÉLIO and to follow the finalists as they continue on their journey:

- TÉLIO TEXTURES Blog (<http://teliotextures.com/category/canadas-breakthrough-designers/>)
- The TÉLIO National Design Competition Facebook Page
- Or feel free to contact Rebecca Lawson with any questions at rebecca.lowson@telio.com