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Supima Names Finalists for Student Design Competition

By ARTHUR FRIEDMAN



Jacqueline Chen, Jacob Blau, Jiyeon Lee, Bibhu Mohapatra, Duston Jasso, Kara Kroeger and Jeffrey Taylor.

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The Supima Student Design Competition is back for its ninth year, with one new school joining in and some aspects continuing for a second go-around.

Buxton Midyette, vice president of marketing and promotions at Supima, the Phoenix-based organization that represents producers of American Pima cotton, said New York's Parsons School of Design is joining the competition for the first time this year.

"Parsons is recognized worldwide and is a great addition to the program," Midyette said.

This year's student designers are Jacqueline Zeyi Chen, a fashion design major from Parsons; Jiyeon Lee, a fine arts major from New York Fashion Institute of Technology; Duston Jasso, a fashion design major from the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising in Los Angeles; Kara Michelle Kroeger, a fashion design major from Ohio's Kent State University; Jacob Blau, an apparel design major from the Rhode Island School of Design; and Jeffrey Taylor, a fashion design major from the Savannah College of Art and Design.

The winner will be announced at the runway completion, set for Sept. 8, which is opening day of New York Fashion Week, at Skylight Clarkson Square, and will receive a \$10,000 cash prize.

For the past eight years, Supima has hosted a student design competition, where select students from the nation's top fashion design schools are challenged to create a capsule collection using Supima cotton fabrics.

Companies such as Brooks Brothers, Uniqlo and AG Jeans provide fabrics that include shirting, knits, denim, corduroy and twill to create eveningwear collections that are judged by a diverse panel from the fashion industry.

"It does push the boundaries of what people believe to be possible with Supima fabrics," Midyette said.

For the second year, eveningwear designer Bibhu Mohapatra is serving as mentor to the finalists throughout the competition, and will also be present at the judging and runway show.

"Bibhu has added tremendously to the competition in supporting and guiding the finalists," Midyette said. "He puts his heart into it. Mentoring is a real passion for him and he has so much expertise to offer."

The final collections will also be presented for the second year during Paris Fashion Week, on Sept. 29, with the winning designer in attendance.

"It was such a success last year, and to give our participating schools the international exposure is important," Midyette said.

Started in 2008, the annual Supima Design Competition was created to give runway exposure to emerging talent.

Since its start, former competition winners have gone on to launch their own labels, show at New York Fashion Week, and secure jobs with top international labels including Michael Kors and Ralph Lauren.

"We have a lot of alumni that often come to the shows and it's great to see how successful so many have become," Midyette added.