



Something fantastical – Wearable Arts Festival

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coordinator



First of all, wearable arts has nothing to do with fashion. It is recycled materials or natural fibres created into something wonderful or fantastical that represents art and can be worn. My favourite piece last year was called *Marie Eggtoinette*. It was one of the more headache-causing outfits because the whole thing was made of eggshells! But it had a little throw which was made of feathers and it was so unique and so stunning. The audience loved it. They went crazy.

Then there was another piece called *Dry Town Diva*. It was an outfit made by Nicky Shonkala who was actually the previous *Wearable Arts Festival* co-ordinator. She created it from beer cans. There were a few artists who used the beer can theme because Alice Springs, as you probably know, is a very beautiful place but there is a bit of a problem with littering! And these outfits were also a comment on the town's new drinking laws.

The audience here always loves the *Wearable Arts Festival*. It attracts a lot of people who don't ordinarily attend arts events. It brings together artists, models, performers, hairdressers, makeup artists, community groups,

businesses and the locals and it's a lot of fun. Right from 2002, when we had the first Wearables at the Alice Springs Council's lawns it's been one of the most anticipated events. It's held at Araluen at the cultural precinct and the entries are not from people who necessarily specialise in textiles. Wearables attracts about 40 entries from people in all walks of life. All sorts of people who have artistic talent in sculpture, photography, painting and who want to present their work to an enthusiastic audience.

A few days before the show the artists will bring in their outfits. There are six adult categories and the prize money for each is \$1,000. The artist chooses a piece of music and creates a little choreography. It's all up to them how they present their outfit. They organise the models or sometimes do it themselves and part of the judging criteria is the presentation. We have mainly females entering the Wearables. In fact, thinking about it, we didn't have one male entrant last time. We had some male models but no males putting in a design. Oh I've just realised... we'll have to work on that!

Up to now the winning outfits have always been acquired but we are running out of room. Some of the pieces in the last few years have been so bulky that it makes huge difficulties for storage. Some have been so big that we haven't even been able to get them through the doors! (And imagine the manoeuvring just to get them on and off stage.) This year will be the first time that we will acquire only the overall winner. It was inevitable as the Wearables itself

grows in size too. Last year for example was the first time we had a second show.

We had an afternoon session where all the adults performed plus we had a children's category. We had no idea if the children would be interested at all and the lead up time was too short for the schools to incorporate a project into their curriculum. But we received 20 entries from children and we were very pleased with that. This year, we're involving the schools very early and we're hoping to entice them to do their own little internal awards and then present the winners. That's what I would like to see. I'd really like to attract the younger secondary students too because up to now we have never had their participation.

Last year was my first year as coordinator. I've lived in Alice Springs for seven years and I've always been a keen participator in all the events of the *Alice Desert Festival* but the Wearable Arts was always one of my favourites. My background originally is a teacher and when I was raising my children I was very much involved in all sorts of committees at the Steiner School. That was really where I gained a lot of background experience to put on events and make everything happen.

There's a lot involved and many creative people take part. In fact, even though the Wearables is a part of the *Alice Desert Festival* it's always taken outside the festival because we just have so many events and we don't want them competing. Last year there were 100 participants backstage and kids and crew so it was just mammoth. But we see it here as something the whole community can be involved in. It's got that feeling of a community celebration full of colour and humour and in a sense what is unique about Alice.

There are not many places where people in the audience can call out to a man dressed in an extremely wide, Scarlet O'Hara type hoop dress made of bubble wrap and say, 'We love you, Henry!'

RIGHT:
Michelle Shelford models *Marie
Eggtoinette* by Helen Brown,
Karen Jones, Steph Gaynor
and Jo Nixon (pictured with
Michelle)

PHOTO: MOVING PICTURES

BELOW:
Citrus Chicks modelled by Ella
Gaynor, Ella Moyses and Ruby
Farthing

PHOTO: MOVING PICTURES

