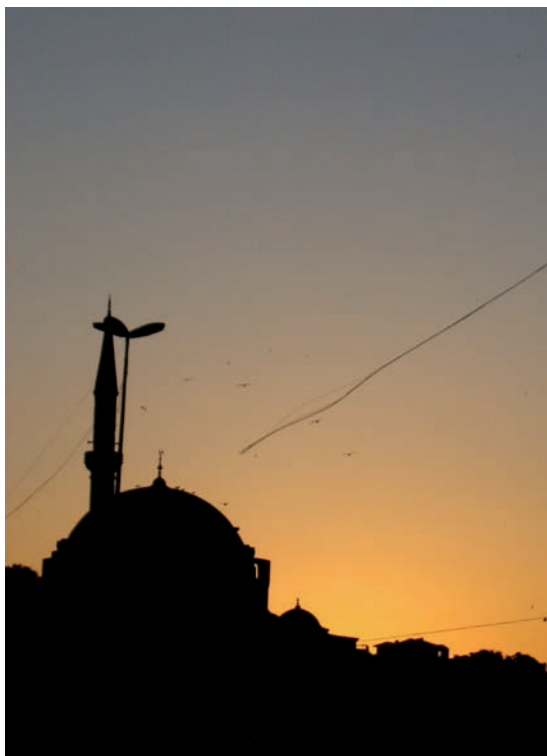


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ISTANBUL FASHION WEEK

The tenth Istanbul fashion week was opened by the charismatic and handsomely moustached minister of foreign trade Mr Kursad Tuzmen, and not a metro-sexual in sight. With speeches out of the way, hundreds of be-suited chaps headed for their relevant posts in adjoining textile and fashion halls – highlighting Turkish fashions role as an industry inextricably linked with production. With rising competition from China, India and Eastern Europe, Turkey is looking to re-position itself not only as a leading producer of textiles and cheap garments, but as a global force in fashion design.

Certainly the refreshingly relevant crop of new Turkish designers currently being embraced by the Istanbul Fashion Council and the Association of Textiles and Ready-to-wear Exporters of Istanbul (ITKIB), sponsors of the event, go some way to addressing this balance. Runner-up in the ITKIB young designers competition, Riza Fergana showed haunting white and grey gowns which hung eerily with a melancholic disposition. Reminiscent of Comme De Garçons Fall 2005 bride collection, the ensemble is dedicated to Niki Douka from the heart-trembling Scorsese produced film 'Brides', in which Douka, alongside seven-hundred mail-order brides, writes letters abroad to a husband she has never met. Meanwhile Selim Baklaci, winner of the Project Fashion contest, presented a directional draped jersey collection with on-trend green and yellow colour blocking. In case the press were left gasping for breath after the show, Baklaci provided the curious styling accessory of oxygen masks. Sinem Yigit on the other hand, took a more traditional approach, working tiny seed pearls onto her pretty origami like garments, and Safak Atahan

included labour intensive hand painted garments with a mission statement simply put, 'to create.'

The rest of the week was essentially a huge eight hall trade fair with everything from 'slimming panty push ups,' to organic baby wear and candy floss dresses in shades of gold and bingo-ball pastels, punctuated by the odd fashion show – including dramatic high wire acrobatics from Safak Atahan. Turkish Fashion Week is a curious blend of old and new, East meets West, not dissimilar to beautiful Istanbul itself. Hence installations varied from an enclosed area of full length coats and headscarves to a fuchsia padded cell filled with revealing leopard spot 'Jennie-on-the-block' gowns and a cute-as-a-button stand housing a real life Turkish granny clicking away at the crochet hooks from knitwear company Els.

A visit to leading Turkish designer, Umit Unal's huge studios and family business in central Istanbul provided a refreshing respite from the thud thud of the trade-fair's Euro fashion beat. To the dulcet tones of Nouvelle Vague, graceful Unal led us around room after room of kooky installations and his latest hair inspired collection – conceptual habotai silk cuts with a hint of Belgian about them.

Turkish fashion is currently in a unique and exciting position with affordable local factories in place to support homegrown design talent. Nevertheless, unless it embraces its heritage to produce uniquely Turkish fashion (in as much as London, Paris, Belgium or New York have their own fashion characteristics), the Eastern meets Western promise of Istanbul fashion week may go unrealised.

Photography and words Aleksandra Olenska



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