

# Practice makes *perfect*

The TFIA has been representing the Textile, Clothing and Footwear (TCF) industries since the 1940s, but the recent launch of the TFIA Textile & Fashion Hub has helped a new generation of Australian designers take their creations to the next level. Here, *Ragtrader* asks four designers how.



*Belinda Christie*  
CREATIVE  
SURFACE BY BELINDA CHRISTIE

Melding together a mix of mythical images and natural landscapes, Belinda Christie of Surface textile print studio and Gabrielle Stephens from local label Collecting Pretty Boys, joined forces to create a dynamic printed collection for Mercedes Benz Fashion Week 2012. The range, titled 'Lilith & Valkyrie', was constructed using photographic and collage techniques and uses images including ocean waves, angel wings and hair strands that have then been digitally manipulated onto fine silks and Italian lycra.

The garment process, assisted by Textile & Fashion Hub project facilitator Chole Kerr, saw Christie design a series of swatches that were then scaled to fit the size of the garment digital printers surface area before heading to the Hub.

"Belinda then came to the hub and together we reviewed the file and she gave instruction into how she wanted the files to print," Kerr recalls.

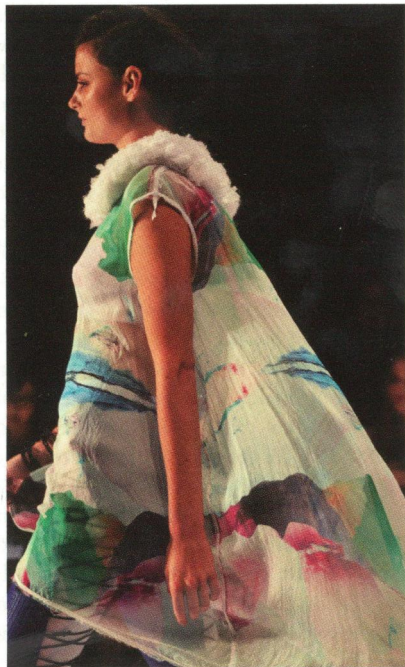
"We used a linen/cotton and cut it into strips for print size before working through the various swatches and printing. Some prints we made adjustments to, in terms of the ink level, to provide them with a washed-out vintage look and some we increased the vivid processing so the brightness was enhanced."

The prints were done as swatch examples of Belinda's print design work, and once printed they were heat pressed, then ready for use. Described as "the exploration of dual sides within personalities", the 'Lilith & Valkyrie' collection combines soft, delicate elements with an urban rock edge, infusing mythological tales through the use of graphics and art in digital prints.

As a member of the digital print cluster for the TFIA Textile & Fashion Hub, Christie regularly utilises the digital printers at the Hub to bring design creations to life and says the group has enabled her to experiment to a greater extent and "learn more about the technical side of the machinery".

"I thought the Hub would be a great opportunity to learn, create and network with other people in the industry, and [in addition to using the printing machinery] I have also met some great contacts and developed business relationships from being involved," she says.

"Digital printing technology is constantly developing though, and because of this it can be challenging to find clear technical information and control the end product. You can find a lot of variation in colour and quality depending on the type of printer/inks/coating and base fabrics used. The cost of printing has also been a challenge but as the technology develops the costs are decreasing and becoming more accessible to small labels."



*Michelle Rae*  
FASHION ARTIST  
M COUTURE

As a fashion artist at M Couture, Rae has created a range of garments over the years, most recently using the TFIA Textile & Fashion Hub to craft a standalone piece, specifically designed for the races, which went on to win the Melbourne Cup Fashions on the Field Design Award for 2012.

The garment was inspired by the lucky yellow rose for Melbourne Cup Day, and influenced by Gustav Klimt's artwork 'The Kiss'. Rae used the Hub garment printer as the key machine to print her design.

"I created my print using Illustrator, featuring the yellow rose, so I initially took my fabric and laptop, with my Adobe Illustrator file, into the Hub and we copied my file to the computer connected to the Hub garment printer, and did a small initial print to get an idea of print size and colour," she says.

"We tweaked a few details, reprinting small samples throughout the process until everything was ready for the final print. The fabric is cut and laid onto the garment printer which sprays the colours onto the print area.

"The beauty of this machine is that it uses natural pigments and only lays the amount of ink required. No wastage. Each print on my fabric had two stages of printing. Almost like a base coat and a top coat. The print is then set under a hot press to give the final product."

The result is a dress with a peplum of over 100 bagged out circles featuring the yellow rose print, "symbolising a garland of roses, just like that of the roses at the track", Rae explains.

"The printed fabric is quite a coarse, heavy, plain weave cotton, so after printing I placed organza over dupion silk to create a softness and contrast texture for the rest of the garment.

"There were challenges though. The background of my print was a couple of shades lighter than I expected. This is because, as I have discovered, post print, that every computer and print machine shows slightly different tones for one colour. So, what my computer shows me isn't necessarily the same as what will be the final print colour.

But experience obviously creates awareness. So when I next do a print at the Hub, I will definitely get a Pantone colour swatch printout to assure full control of the colours, well before print day," Rae says.

"Finding fabrics with prints that exist only in my imagination has been impossible until now. The Hub enabled me to use my Illustrator created fabric print design, and bring it to reality using its garment printer machine. I can honestly say that without the Hub, the technology and the efforts from the team there, it would not have been possible."





**Shauna Toohey**  
DESIGNER  
P.A.M (PERKS AND MINI)

It's not surprising Shauna Toohey favours the TFIA Textile & Fashion Hub garment printer – she had seen one in Japan and recommended it as an addition.

She has used it several times since to print over seams and uneven surfaces, as well as crafted three knitwear prototypes using resources at the collective.

“We used it to print on to the necks of jersey tops, because the garment printer can print on the raw edge band we use to finish the neck. The result is nice and unlike anything you can get with traditional screen printing. It's also cost effective and quick. You don't need to make screens, you just load images straight from a computer or USB and it prints out directly onto the garment or textile. No wasting inks or need for 'strike offs'. It's an exciting development in printing. While I don't think it's going to replace screen printing it does give designers more options.”

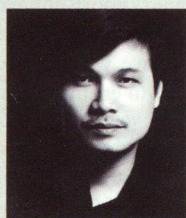
Toohey's garments use a mix of techniques, including a Picnic tank top made of bamboo and cotton. The print was created at the Hub, as well as knitwear



from the coming men's collection titled “To Afro”, inspired by Senegalese natural indigo dye techniques and Visco style wax printing.

“The items are made from 100 per cent Merino wool and were all knitted on the Shima Seiki machine at the Hub.”

“It can be hard to find people in industry able to do the same things you can do in the Hub, especially when you aren't making large numbers of things. It definitely makes sampling and development easier and your output is more innovative.”



**Lui Hon**  
CREATIVE DIRECTOR  
LUIHON

Crafting a collaborative piece as part of the LUIHON AW13 collection, 'Liberty of Love', creative

director Lui Hon joined forces with the TFIA Textile & Fashion Hub and Ramsey McDonald to apply a 2D design to a 3D seamless garment.

“We used the whole garment machine to embrace a no wastage policy and to enhance the efficiency and productivity per garment.

“The piece, titled 'High Split Skirt' is made from high quality Italian yarn from Zegna and the first stage of production saw us prepare a set of patterns which I call a '2D' with a completion toile (rough mock-up),” Hon explains.

“The second stage includes a quick run on the machine for a couple of small pieces with different needle stitching. During this process, the programmer gave us his knowledge and experience of which needle would work the best for the particular yarns we selected and to achieve the design outcome.

“The third stage required us to deliver the

completion toile and 2D pattern to the programmer, after which the programmer manually programmed the skirt design directly into the Shima Seiki whole garment knitting machine. The 2D pattern is the basic guide for the programmer to program the design and the toile is for the programmer to envision the concept of the final garment.”

After the set-up, the first skirt was then run on the machine as an initial draft, but Hon explains that a series of adjustments were required for the final product.

These adjustments included the tension of the yarn with the needles and a quick fitting.

“The fitting in particular was very important because this gave us an idea of what exactly needed changing – for example, which part is to loose and/or which part is too tight.”



## THE STORY SO FAR

THE TEXTILE & FASHION HUB IS BASED ON THE CLASSIC CONCEPT OF A GUILD – A NETWORK OR AN ASSOCIATION OF SORTS PROVIDING PROFESSIONAL CREATIVES WITH A SPACE TO LEARN NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND TECHNIQUES, BROADEN THEIR NETWORKS AND, IMPORTANTLY, COPE WITH THE CHALLENGES AND CHANGES THROWN AT THEM.

The recent upheavals in the local fashion industry, with manufacturers closing down or moving offshore and big changes in consumer behaviour, have presented a whole new set of challenges for designers working in Australia.

As a result, the Textile & Fashion Hub project has been designed to offer a modern, open-minded reworking of a guild-like collective space, providing access to the right tools, ideas and innovative solutions to help meet today's economic challenges, industry-related changes and international competition.

Launched in March this year the initiative is an Australian first. There is such great Textile & Fashion design talent in Australia but a crisis of access, scale, resources and impact.

Currently, eighty-six per cent of the TCF industry is made up of small to medium enterprises without a strong network to support them and very little funding being allocated to assist them. In response, the TFIA felt it was vital to create access to space, equipment, connections, knowledge, experience and investment to help grow these businesses.

A collaboration between the Council of Textile & Fashion Industries of Australia (TFIA), Kangan Institute and the Australian Government, the concept is a relatively simple one. It's a professional, state-of-the-art space that brings together small to medium fashion businesses and arms them with the tools for success and innovation – a place for businesses to develop.

There's a mix of programs and workshops, cutting-edge equipment and facilities for use in Melbourne and nationwide through partnerships all over Australia.

Workshops focus on essential skills in digital printing, knitwear design, leather and footwear production. Social media strategy and IP seminars have been in high demand as well as sessions around branding and how to develop your story, understand your market, growing and export opportunities.

In addition, the Textile & Fashion Hub also provides access to the latest equipment and technology, often out of reach for many designers. This includes whole garment and seamless knitting machines, digital garment printers, a CAD room for pattern making and a 3D body scanner.

There's also a pre-production room, resource library, Pantone and knit library, access to WGSN and Stylesight and all the latest design software and 3D printing coming soon.

Hub participants are also able to use the smartphone TFIA app; a mobile sourcing tool, listing TFIA members and Hub participants to create a helpful directory of the local fashion industry. The sky is the limit as to what can be created.

Julia Haselhorst is Textile & Fashion Hub strategic manager at the Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia (TFIA) Limited. [www.tfia.com.au/hub](http://www.tfia.com.au/hub).

