

Knitwear Moves into Print

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May 19, 2011 - International knitwear companies are turning to the power of print as a new field for high-value garment design -- and New Zealand's young designers are following the trend with innovative knitwear creations of their own.

A flat bed digital printer has been developed by Shima Seiki of Japan that allows designs to be converted by software, and translated into a pattern for printing onto garments using reactive dye.

The technique was evident in an entry into the textiles section of this year's New Zealand Pride In Print Awards from AUT University student Alysha Gover. AUT's Textile and Design Lab Manager, Peter Heslop, says it has opened the opportunity for garment designers to consider specialist one-off creations and small-medium size production runs.

"Shima Seiki's expertise is in flat bed knitting machines and associated software for design and programming. They introduced their range of digital printers as a means by which their clients could apply designs to items of knitwear that couldn't be done by the conventional method of knitting various colours of yarn into the piece.

"We understand that several of these machines have been sold to knitwear companies in Italy, Japan and the US. They are being used to create high-value designer knitwear. As the process can be quite labour-intensive, depending on the nature of the garment style and design, such items of knitwear are generally aimed at the top end of the market," says Mr Heslop.

The processes involved are the pre-treatment of the garment or panel, printing using reactive dye (dyes which do not compromise the handle of luxury fibres), fixation of the dye using steam and finally a wet finish to remove both the pre-treatment and any residual dye.

Mr Heslop says the AUT has worked with some local designers and knitwear companies printing to 100% merino wool knitwear, angora and merino/possum blends.

"The range of printed 100% merino wool knitwear that our student Alysha Gover designed was the result of a summer research project that she undertook to determine how printed knitwear would be perceived by local designers. She won the "Ensign Award of Excellence" at the Hokonui Design Awards last year for her digitally-printed knitwear."

The AUT Textile and Design Lab is continuing to use the print technology in its research and development work, applying its flexibility to print onto garment panels, finished garments and piece lengths of fabric.

For further information please visit our website: www.tdl.aut.ac.nz