Apparel design graduate wins at international conference

By Sheri Hall

Xiaopei "Jennifer" Wu '08 from Cornell's Fiber Science & Apparel Design (FSAD) program was awarded the top design prize in the International Surface Design Association's student exhibition last month.

Wu's "Button Dress" features an asymmetrical seamed bodice made from silk charmeuse and embellished with hand-sewn silk chiffon, buttons, beads and gems. On the skirt are 2,000 shell buttons sewn on by hand. Wu spent more than 300 hours creating the dress.

"I wanted to make a piece, not to 'wow,' but to beckon the audience to come closer and look," said Wu, who graduated in December. "I am about detail."

Wu was inspired by the painting "The Birth of Venus" by Sandro Botticelli, which depicts the goddess Venus emerging from the sea as a woman.

"Her work is an example of extraordinary creativity coupled with meticulous work," said Van Dyk Lewis, associate professor of FSAD.

Wu's garment was selected from 171 entries submitted by colleges around the world. In total, 42 student pieces were exhibited at the International Surface Design Association semiannual meeting in Kansas City, Mo., in May.

"Jen is a talented designer who has produced outstanding work," said Ann Lemley, professor and chair of the department. "This dress is an example of the creative work produced when a gifted student designer, working with our talented faculty, has the opportunity to propose and create a fiber arts object that is also a piece of apparel."

The work of two other Cornell students was also among the 42 pieces selected by a jury to be included in the show. Jessie Fair '09 designed two gowns "Eden" and "Heaven," and senior Nicole Castelli created a wearable art piece called "Nouveau Naturelle."

All four designs were funded by fiber arts scholarships from the Barbara L. Kuhlman Foundation Inc., which is dedicated to supporting student explorations in fiber arts. In 2007-08, 12 FSAD students earned Kuhlman Scholarships; eight students won Kuhlman Scholarships for the 2008-09 academic year.

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