

The National

If it's in the UAE it's gotta be



Expo Arabia hits a romantic high note

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Things started quietly at the second day of Fashion Expo Arabia, though by mid-afternoon the event was beginning to wake up, partly thanks to an excellent selection of catwalk shows, which drew in plenty of extra visitors.

While some exhibitors have still seen few sales, there have been buyers visiting from the likes of Harvey Nichols in Saudi Arabia and high-end boutiques in Kuwait, as well as other tales of sudden flurries of buys after an item has been seen on a catwalk, specifically on the WGSN runway.

Throughout the event, WGSN's trend-forecasting seminar has been a popular event, kicking off the runway shows at 2pm. Giving an analysis of their "macro trends" for spring/summer 2010 – that is, the general colour, fabric and mood trends of the season – and a sneak preview of the colour directions for autumn/winter 2010/11, Gemma Hare, the senior events editor, has each day picked out three items from the show's exhibitors that reflect the looks she is discussing.



A model displays a dress by British designer Sarah Arnett during Fashion Expo Arabia. [Andrew Henderson / The National](#)

It reveals the difference that a good eye can make: items that would be easy to overlook on the hanger came to life on the models.

Hare's top picks on Tuesday were a beautiful embellished tie-died kaftan from the Indonesian designer Dian Pelangi (who has, it seems, now found a UAE stockist), a raw-edged, white ruffled dress from the Italian designers Carta e Costura, and a minimalist petrol-blue leather dress by Strenesse Gabriele Strehle that could have been straight from a 1960s Courrèe collection.

These are looks that we absolutely will be seeing in the shops come spring.

Another example of clothes showing a whole new dimension when actually worn, as opposed to hung, came with the first catwalk show proper, from the British designer Sarah Arnett.

On the racks, her silk and cotton prints look pretty, but they hang rather droopily, and it is only when they are walked down a runway that the flattering cuts and the flow of the fabric are revealed.

Squeaks of pleasure were heard in the audience as vibrantly coloured dresses and belted kaftans rippled past. The applause was resounding.

Arnett trained as a textile designer, and with the development of digital printing is now able to create beautiful, complex images that perfectly fit the dresses' curves and patterns.

The British designer Kyri was up next, all satins and Swarovski.

His body-hugging cocktail frocks in pastel shades are already popular with pop stars and celebrities for their flattering cut, and it is likely that he will have gained more fans for these sweetly vampish pieces.

One of the only serious designers to have come out of the Emirates so far, Rabia Z showed conservative designs that have developed almost beyond recognition.

There is still a strong sporty, urban vibe, but the aesthetic is very clearly informed by exposure to international fashion, and the quality of cut and construction is a long way from the Juicy Couture-style looks of yore. The spring/summer collection,

predominantly in off-white, cobalt blue and black, has something of a Mad Max-meets-Luke Skywalker feel, with a touch of Rick Owens for good measure. Softly draped and twisted hijabs looked Bedouin-beautiful and the heavily layered tops and harem pants are wearable for proponents of both conservative and western fashion.

The collection that drew the biggest crowd was that of the Pakistani designer Rizwan Beyg.

He has been a favourite among the great and good of Pakistan for many years, but his recent show at Milan Fashion Week – where he was feted by the likes of Franca Sozzani, the pioneering editor of Vogue Italia – could see his designs reaching a wider audience. For now, though, his following turned out in force to see his all-white collection, and reacted with suitable enthusiasm.

What the collection lacked in colour it made up for in texture and detail, with fabrics covered in bows, fringing and beading, and hats accessorising pieces that ranged from tiny short-and-crop-top ensembles to regal gowns and full skirts.

The final show of the day was Sohad Acouri's much-anticipated collection, inspired by Greta Garbo and the heyday of the silver screen. Fluid evening gowns in devoré silks certainly harked back to the 1930s, as did the swathes of tulle that veiled vibrant butterfly prints and the filmy, shivering layers of shot chiffon.

It was a hugely romantic, dramatic vision, and one that delighted his audience of devoted fans, bringing a quiet day to a spectacular end.

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