Fashion Group International returns in person to host the Rising Star Awards

By Roxanne Robinson - May 11, 2022

When 17 female fashion professionals got together in New York City in 1928, the women presumably faced a pressing 'ism' in the industry: sexism. While hardly alone at that time, for an industry aimed primarily at women, it seemed natural for their voices to be heard and their work noticed. This was one basis of the group's founding. Fast-forward to Fashion Group today, and members come in every gender, creed, and color. At the 2022 Rising Star Awards, banishing all the 'isms' was not only one theme of keynote speaker Rebecca Moses' speech but also evident in the vast array of nominees, presenters, and guests.

Maryanne Grisz, President and CEO of Fashion Group International, deserved kudos for the assortment of seasoned industry leaders and legends she included in the presentation of the awards given to brands and designers whose businesses are less than six years old.

The lineup for the oversold luncheon award ceremony held at Pier 61's The Lighthouse included: designer Jason Wu, presenting the Entrepreneur of the Year Award to Cole Wassner; designer Tracy Reese and actress Lisa Arrindell, presenting the President's Award for Excellence to nineties fashion darling Byron Lars; Andrea Rosso of Diesel presenting Mimi Prober with the Sustainability Award; stylist Freddie Leiba presenting the Accessories Award to Betzabe Gonzalez of Mia Becar shoes; publicist Kelly Cutrone presenting the All Gender Award to Tristan Detwiler of Stan; Keita Moore presenting the Beauty Award to Mantas Butkus of Moérie; Graff Executive Marc Hruschka presenting the Fine jewelry Award to Julie Lamb; Pyer Moss' founder and designer Kerby-Jean Raymond presenting the Menswear Award to Christian Juul Nielsen of Ankvas; and Elle editor-in-chief Nina Garcia presenting the Womenswear designer to Frederick Anderson.

In an unusual tie, retail guru Ken Downing presented Nancy Volpe Beringer of The Vault (disability-inclusive
fashion resale) and Nyakio Grieco of Thirteen June (beauty brand for the BIPOC community) with the New Retail Award. Industry financer Gary Wassner presented the Hilldun: Business Innovation Award to Karen Williams of Savitude, a sizing and shape app.

Byron Lars is the nineties design wunderkind known for his expert draping, which reimagined classic men's shirting. Lars had stepped out of the limelight, quietly producing a more commercial-focused line Byron Lars Beauty Mark, before launching In Earnest in 2021. It was a treat to see Lars receive an industry nod as his designs were oft copied, and while not the first, he was a prominent Black designer during a time the industry wasn't that diverse.

While accepting the award, he pointed out that Earnest was his middle name and his father's name. More importantly, for him and his long-time design partner Sheila Grey, the word's definition had meaning. "Earnest means existing to a greater extent or more intensely than before," he told the audience.

FashionNetwork.com caught up with Lars post-show to find out what he liked most and least about today's different fashion climate.

"Social media became a real vehicle to tell your story your way. The immediacy of customer reaction and how customers form a community sharing what they like and didn't like was great information to have me make it better. It was better without the retail filter in between," he offered.

On the other hand, Lars said, "I miss the days of the true merchant, that old-time retailer that got their hands dirty getting out to see everything. They had the intention of finding new great things," he continued.

Stating a firm belief in those classic brick-and-mortar retailers, Lars said, "Our price point is too high for her to click and buy in 17 seconds. We have to prove ourselves to her first, and she needs to experience that in person."

Keynote speaker Rebecca Moses recalled her unlikely (but well-deserved) role replacing Gianni Versace as Genny's head designer before relaunching her label in Italy. Referring to herself as the poster child for survival and reinvention, she shared her own story to inspire this current batch of rising stars and guests of the event.

"Being on a creative journey leads you to new challenges; we evolve from good and bad experiences. Passion and discipline are key to survival," she advised noting that "'impossible,' 'can't,' and 'won't' were never a part of my vocabulary."
She continued by remarking that today's design world requires an in-depth understanding of cultures, lifestyles, ethnicities, and generations. "Creativity is a voice of the time we live, and we live in extraordinary times," she continued.

"We must bury these 'isms' that poison our world and affect many of us: racism, ageism, sexism, and classism," she said, calling out one which particularly resonates throughout the industry. "Many of you in the room have been forced out of a job for various reasons. How about because you are 55 and considered too old and not relevant? Do you accept that? Is age a barometer of relevance?"

While presenting the Menswear Award, Kerby Jean-Raymond of Pyer Moss cautioned he hadn't "spoken for two years, so bear with me. We are two years older now, and I'm happy to see everyone with their masks off. I like to see your noses."

Jean-Raymond was a former Rising Star Award winner in 2014. "The FGI award was the first fashion award I received, and by then, I had already had three brands fail and ten years of trying to do it over and over again. This group was the first to recognize me after never giving up and continuing to try," he said while thanking the organizations for their work in recognizing new talents.

Nina Garcia closed the ceremony by presenting Frederick Anderson, remarking on the last time she had given out an award in 2016. "It was to Brandon Maxwell, and he is now a global luxury brand. Every brand nominee here has the same potential; you are the future," she said.

During the red carpet arrivals, Anderson told FashionNetwork.com that after 20 years in the business, "It was time to leap. You grow up, stop doing it for others, and do it yourself."

Just barely five years into his label, Anderson said he is doing well in part thanks to his biggest partner Saks Fifth Avenue and the post-pandemic events boom.

"This summer, my direct-to-consumer is on fire with weddings. One client said I have six weddings in the next four months," he said, noting the predicted 22 million weddings planned in 2022 in the U.S. alone. "I'll take all of them!"

While accepting the award, Anderson pointed out that Fern Mallis—former CFDA Executive Director known for founding NYFW and former Senior Vice President of IMG Fashion—queried how he could be a rising star after being in the business for 20 years.

"Great question, Fern. Now I am Frederick. I started with Black.like.me (in 2017), and I built what I thought was a dialogue. I continue to tell those stories that I think are important for myself that I share with my clients and friends," he said.

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