

Behind the Fashion Debuts of Artisans: A New Era Unfolds at Lakm? Fashion Week x FDCI

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In a transformative moment for Indian fashion, five artisan-designers from the Anjar-based **Somaiya Kala Vidya (SKV)** took center stage at **Lakm? Fashion Week x FDCI**, Mumbai—proving that intent, heritage, and creativity can rewrite the runway narrative.

Curated under the **Design Craft** platform, the showcase presented a masterful blend of **bandhani, batik, ajrakh, and mashru**, crafted by SKV's graduates—**Shakil Ahmed Khatri, Mubassirah Khatri, Amruta Vankar, Zaid Khatri, and Muskan Khatri**. Each of these emerging designers brought forward not just skills passed down through generations, but modern interpretations that stunned audiences and experts alike.

Karigar-designer, Zaid Khatri, at work.

Tradition Meets Innovation

Among them was **Zaid Khatri**, 21, who presented an inventive Ajrakh technique developed with his father. The result—a marbled dye pattern created using a laundry brush—left the fashion crowd buzzing.

“This show proved that we—artisan-designers—can do it too,” he stated, reflecting the power shift in an industry long dominated by urban elite fashion designers.

But this wasn't just another ethnic collection. It was a declaration that **India's traditional crafts have arrived at the main stage without compromise**—preserving identity, while adapting in design and execution.

The Backbone: Design Education and Recognition

Founded by anthropologist **Judy Frater**, SKV was built to empower artisans through design education without diluting cultural authenticity. “We wanted artisans to innovate from within their own traditions,” Frater shared in an email from Santa Fe.

From the SKV showcase at
LFW x FDCI last month.

Amrita Somaiya, Director of Somaiya Agencies and Trustee at SKV, echoed that sentiment. “Their education is built on preserving cultural heritage. It's not about fashion buzzwords—it's about self-worth and opportunity.”

Design Craft, as a social enterprise, offers these graduates a marketplace and mentorship pipeline. Mumbai-based designer **James Ferreira** and creative consultant **Aradhana Nagpal** were among those guiding the artisans toward a refined fashion showcase.

Sustainability, Strategy, and the Future

According to **Darshana Gajare**, head of sustainability at Reliance Brands (which organizes LFW), this artisan-led showcase was a culmination of nearly two years of groundwork in Kutch. “The fashion industry often underestimates the creative power of artisans. This show aimed to change that,” she said, adding that Reliance is exploring a dedicated vertical for artisan-designer discovery across India.

Priya Malik’s poetic narration during the show added a heartfelt narrative layer—talking about the land, people, and timeless beauty of Kutch. Her words wove emotion into the fabric of the collection, grounding the garments in a deeper understanding.

Shakil Ahmed with his batik designs.

The Challenge Beyond the Runway

While the show marks a historic entry point, the real work lies ahead. Scaling up production, consistency, and achieving retail finesse remains a challenge. “The silhouettes are still evolving, and supply chains need structure,” Nagpal shared.

Still, the artisan designers will soon test commercial waters at an upcoming **annual Mumbai exhibition**—a platform to gauge customer response, pricing strategies, and viability in competitive markets.

Redefining Success in Fashion

For these creators, success isn’t defined by applause but by **acknowledgement**—of their work, heritage, and voice. With **20 students currently enrolled at SKV**, including a near-equal gender split, and a second campus now established in **Bagalkote, Karnataka**, the momentum is only growing.

Their runway debut is not just a showcase. It’s a **cultural and creative revolution**, stretching the limits of what fashion can be—and **who gets to define it**.

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