



LOIN CLOTH AND ASHES

Born in Dar-Es-Salaam, Tanzania, to diplomat parents, Anisa Mpungwe was a child of the fine arts. In her early years, armed with crayons and colour pencils, her mother's walls became her canvas. Daniela Panzeri tracks down the designer behind Loin Cloth & Ashes to chat about her success

You moved to South Africa in 1994, did the move influence your view on fashion?

To tell you the truth I do not remember, it was 15 years ago. I wasn't really interested in fashion at age 10, just art in general. I was just in awe of the fact that we had a swimming pool in our back yard and that I was going to school with many white kids and that I had to do needle work as a subject. Fashion magazines were not really a big feature in my life until my early teens. I must say though my mother influenced me the most growing up, because she was the only fashionable person who was always around me. She had to dress up many times for the embassy parties and when important people were dining at our home. I always thought she was glamorous.

When was your love for fashion solidified?

Matric 2002, when I was 'crowned' the 'in-house designer' at school. The reality was that I just drew pretty pictures and had no clue what to do with them until someone said, "Hey, maybe you should do fashion, you draw so well". Fashion really chose me.

You studied Graphics before moving onto a BA in Fashion and Marketing, what valuable lesson did you learn while studying?

I learnt Adobe Photoshop and about negative and positive spaces. I also learnt how to present art work that was not pixelated and in the most professional way possible. I am really glad I went through that because to this day I still use the same programmes in my business.

Have you worked with any other established local designers, if so how did they influence you?

I have worked with Melba by Melissa Botha, Anna Getaneh for African Mosaïque, Craig Jacob for Funduzi and Black Coffee. The most important I must say was my first employer, who was also my mentor, Melissa. Discipline was key with her and quality finish. She made me love pattern cutting and

taught me how to handle challenging situations in a business.

You started Loin Cloth & Ashes in April 2008, where did the name come from?

Loin Cloth & Ashes was a name that my friends and I were throwing around for years, since we all went to a Christian school. Its origin comes from Sack Cloth and Ashes. It is a Hebrew custom of expressing humility before the higher spirit by wearing coarse cloth, normally used to make sacks, and dusting oneself with ashes. People used to practise this when they were fasting. This concept stuck with me for a long time, and thought that it would be an interesting name for a clothing label.

In April this year your second range at Spring/Summer Sanlam SA Fashion Week was titled "Metropolis", what was your inspiration for the collection?

The collection was inspired by pop art, massive production and consumption (of everything). Also the movie Transformers, Lily Allen's sweet but painfully blunt outlook on life and today's world affairs from economic imbalance to social balance or imbalance.

What Loin Cloth & Ashes piece is a must-have for December 2009?

The draped front dress! It has been my bestseller this year. It suits everyone who wears it. It is classy because it has a complimenting silhouette, not too loose not too snug, it is sassy because of the distinctive design detail, it is comfortable because it's made of 99 percent cotton and one percent stretch and most of all it simply turns heads!

How can one get their hands on Loin Cloth & Ashes?

My studio and showroom at 80 Bogey Street, Waterkloof Heights, Pretoria. Open Monday to Saturday. ☛