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Port Moody Costume Designer hits Wearable Art Big Time with her now-famous Tea Dress

PORT MOODY, B.C. – Angela Bright of Port Moody, a costume designer working for both movie and theater productions in Metro Vancouver, considers herself a small player in the local film industry. But she's hit the international big time as a wearable art designer.

Her enhanced Port Moody Wearable Art Awards "Tea Dress" has been accepted as a finalist in the world's largest and most recognizable wearable art event, the Montana World of WearableArt™ Awards Show in Wellington, New Zealand ("Montana WOW®").

Debuting in 1987, Montana WOW® involves over 10 shows a season before an audience of 35,000. Each year the Montana WOW® judges select more than 150 garments created by designers from around the world to compete for \$NZ100,000-plus in prize money. The competition is fierce.

Bright's "Tea Dress" – as it is now lovingly recognized – was originally named "Let them Drink Tea" and designed for the 2007 Port Moody Wearable Art Awards, an annual event presented by the Port Moody Arts Centre Society.

Bright came up with the idea of making something beautiful from everyday thrown out items after recognizing her entry for a previous Wearable Art Awards show lacked stage presence. From that point on, her earl gray tea bags and her boyfriend's coffee filters were carefully dried and stored and the "Tea Dress" was created. It turned heads at the 2007 Wearable Art Awards in Port Moody and won three awards – the Pacific Coast Terminals Recycled Category, Best-in-Show and the Pasta Polo People's Choice Award.

As the People's Choice Award sponsor, the Pasta Polo restaurant in Port Moody displayed the garment for several months following the 2007 performance. Pasta Polo owner Fred Soofi said the "Tea Dress" attracted interest among his customers and his reputation in town changed from the "Pasta Man" to the "Tea Man". Soofi took his identity change in stride, feeling Bright's work was not only a great promotion for wearable art in Port Moody, but also art in general.

Bright spent four weekends preparing the "Tea Dress" for New Zealand. To minimize shipping costs, the dress was disassembled and reconstructed to fit in as small a box as possible – the cost of shipping the garment in its 2007 state would have been close to \$2,000.

During the reconstruction other enhancements were made – the dress was lengthened, the pattern made slightly more ornate, and tea bags coated with an acrylic gel medium to help the garment withstand multiple performances. To top it all off, a wig made from old sweaters and a pair of shoes, was added.

After some concern that the “Tea Dress” might not reach its destination on time because of a three-week quarantine for packages entering New Zealand, it arrived safely and Bright completed plans to attend the show in New Zealand in September, apparently as the only Canadian entrant this year.

Jane Matthews, Executive Director of the Port Moody Arts Centre, was excited to learn Bright’s work is receiving this international recognition. Matthews says she believes that Port Moody knows its art and expects Bright’s work will challenge for an award or two at Montana WOW®. Matthews also expects that having Bright’s work accepted as a finalist there will encourage other local artists to explore this art form and ultimately produce garments for wearable art shows, both local and international. If the garment wins an award it will not return to Port Moody but will be added to Montana WOW®’s ever-growing gallery in Nelson, New Zealand.

When asked if she would make another tea dress for Port Moody, Bright quickly commented, “no, two years of sweeping up tea grains is enough to drive anyone crazy.” She does intend to continue to surprise Port Moody and the Lower Mainland with creations for future Port Moody Wearable Art Awards events.

In the mean time, the City of the Arts will be keeping a close eye on Wellington, New Zealand.