

One to watch: Thando Ntuli, the emerging talent behind SA womenswear brand Munkus

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

7 Feb 2023

South African contemporary trans-seasonal fashion brand, Munkus, is the brainchild of ambitious young designer Thando Ntuli.



Thando Ntuli, creative director and founder, Munkus. Source: [SA Fashion Week](#)

The Soweto-born creative is profoundly inspired by the generations of women and maternal figures in her life, and launched her Munkus label in 2019 with a vision to raise the voice of the everyday woman through craftsmanship with garments that imbue a sense of comfort and confidence in the wearer.

Through her designs, Ntuli tells stories through bold colour and print, paired with classic silhouettes influenced by 80s and 90s South African fashion.

Now in her mid-20s, Ntuli and her work have already caught the eye of the local industry, earning her titles including SA Fashion Week New Talent 2022 and Design Indaba [Emerging Creatives Class of 2022](#), and she scooped the AllFashion Sourcing Young Designer Competition in 2021.



Source: [Munkus](#)

She advocates nurturing homegrown creativity and the advancement of local, equitable production, and is passionate about empowering other aspiring young designers. Her [YouTube channel](#) is evidence of this, with videos including sewing tips and tricks to advice on creating a clothing brand from scratch.

Here, Ntuli shares the aspirations behind her Munkus brand, the inspiration behind her latest SA Fashion Week collection, and her thoughts on boosting support for the local designer-led fashion industry.

■ **Thando, tell us about your brand Munkus – who is it made for, and what is its brand philosophy and aesthetic?**

Women! It is based on closing a generation gap, between the younger woman and the older woman. Quality bespoke pieces that could be handed down and dressed differently to suit each age group. The collection is based on the 'Me' in every woman's journey.

My goal was to help women find themselves in the pieces I have made...by giving them an extension of their personality or the persona they want to have for that day, the collection is rich in colour and loud in print. A collection to face the world with just the right confidence.



■ ***When did you notice you had an affinity for fashion design, and what convinced you to pursue it as a career?***

As a child, I developed a fascination for others' styles and often borrowed items from my family members' closets. Despite receiving criticism for not always returning these pieces, I saw it as a way to make each item my own. My interest in unique and unconventional clothing styles eventually influenced my artistic expression through the use of colour and print. The roots of my creativity can be traced back to these early experiences as a "closet thief".

■ ***You presented your latest AW 2023 collection at SA Fashion Week in October. Tell us about your range and what inspired it?***

AW 23 – Umama Wami translate to 'My Mother'.

The collection I have created is a tribute to my mother and the numerous roles she embodies - nurturer, healer, giver, fighter and leader. These five pillars, which she embodies with grace and strength, have shaped my life and inspired me to create a collection that highlights the appreciation for these personas in every woman's life.



Munkus AW23 - Umama Wami. Source: [SA Fashion Week](#)

This collection speaks to the heart of mothers, not just my own, but also those of South Africa, who wear multiple hats to keep their families together and still maintain their individuality.

I was inspired by the resilience and strength of South African women, who have faced adversity in every aspect of society, and sought to create a symbol of their fight to be seen, understood and valued. The prints are visual representations of my mother and pay homage to her journey and those of South African mothers alike.

■ ***What role does storytelling play in your work?***

Storytelling plays a crucial role in my work as a designer. My brand, Munkus, is inspired by the generations of women in my life who wore many hats and paved the way for me to have the life I have today. This important legacy is reflected in my collections, which are designed to serve as a way for women to express themselves and be their best selves as they navigate their life journeys.

The concept of 'home' is central to my brand as it represents a place where one is comfortable and confident, and I aim to imbue that sense of comfort and confidence in my designs.

■ ***What have been some of the highlights of your design career so far?***

Some of the notable achievements in my design career include winning the 'Most Fashionable Commercial Range' award from Truworths in 2019, being recognised as the 'AllFashion Sourcing Designer of the Year' in 2021 and being selected to showcase in Paris in 2023.

I have also had the privilege of showcasing my designs at prestigious fashion weeks in South Africa and Lagos and being featured in renowned media publications such as *Sunday Times*, *S Mag*, *News24*, *Business of Fashion* and *Glamour* magazine.

Additionally, I was honoured to receive the 'Emerging Creative of the Year' awards from both Design Indaba and *Glamour* magazine in 2022 and being recognised as the 'SA Fashion Week New Talent' in the same year. To top it off, I successfully launched my brand, Munkus, as an emerging label in South Africa.

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■ ***How do you feel South Africa's retail industry could support more emerging designers like yourself?***

I think in South Africa it's always just been resources - physical and intellectual. A career in entrepreneurship in any sense is difficult, I think that SAFW was a step to show me this can be bigger if I dream bigger. Where the industry is acknowledging young talent and telling them that creative careers are a happy space and that this is a career that you can walk into and be successful.

Now it's just believing in myself, being the one to look out for information, look out for funding and just be smart in the way that I run a business.

I think most young people in South Africa struggle with just understanding the possibilities and the opportunities that are available. There are small groups within the industry now pushing this which is amazing to see. I think we need more focus on how to be creative with our resources and where to find resources as local designers.

I think platforms that discuss the realities and difficulties of resources are great and speak on how much resources can play a part in creating creatively. South Africa needs to put its people first and develop from home to grow our industry.



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■ ***Who are some of the local fashion designers you look up to and admire, and why?***

Traveling to Lagos Fashion Week with designers Imprint and Ezokhetho was an eye-opening experience. I quickly realised that talent and creativity come in many forms and that this industry truly embraces diversity. Not only was their work beautiful, but their humble and down-to-earth personalities made a lasting impact on me. I learned to cherish the journey and always stay humble.

■ **Complete the sentence: The future of fashion is...**

Africa's hands!

■ **What would you like your legacy to be in the fashion industry?**

I aspire to leave a lasting impact on the fashion industry by creating opportunities and fostering growth for emerging designers. My legacy will be one of empowering and supporting the next generation of creative talent and working towards a more equitable and sustainable manufacturing landscape.

■ **In your opinion, how can South African consumers be encouraged to shop from more local designer-led brands?**

To uplift the design industry, it is crucial for larger companies to acknowledge the value of designers and their creative vision. These designers need support and resources to bring their ideas to life, and larger retailers can play a major role in providing this support.

By collaborating with designers, retailers can help market their work and build a stronger presence nationwide. Furthermore, buying and manufacturing locally should be a priority in order to promote sustainable growth in the industry.

■ **What's next for you and Munkus? How would you like to see your brand grow and evolve over the coming years?**

One, I am aiming to build my reach. Two, to create my own manufacturing space for young designers, and three I am aiming to push myself creatively this year. I manifest all will come to fruition. Oh! and meet great people in the industry I can learn from!

ABOUT LAUREN HARTZENBERG

Managing editor and retail editor at Bizcommunity.com. Cape Town apologist. Dog mom. Get in touch: lauren@bizcommunity.com
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