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## Wijnants wins Woolmark Prize

**UPDATE:** BELGIAN designer Christian Wijnants has won the 2013 International Woolmark Prize.

And while the star-studded fashion event is a long way from the Australian paddock's which produce the wool, AWI's chief executive Stuart McCullough said the original investment of \$1.5 million into the prize had already generated \$27 million in media value - a figure which he expects will triple now the winner has been announced. "We are delighted with the result," Mr McCullough said.

"Everything we do is about selling more wool. With Australia providing more than 85 per cent of the world's apparel wool, raising the profile of wool with this prize will directly benefit the grower."

Mr Wijnants' collection of chunky, hand-knitted and hand-dyed dresses and jumpers - made from 100 per cent Merino wool - impressed the high-profile judges including Victoria Beckham, Donatella Versace and Diane Von Furstenberg.

Mr McCullough said to have somebody like Victoria Beckham, who only gives two or three interviews a year, talk at length in an interview about wool is a "big deal" in the fashion world.

A revival of the original fashion design award held in 1954, the prize is funded by the Australian Wool Innovation through The Woolmark Company.

The six finalists, which included Australia's own Dion Lee; Ban Xiao Xue, China; winner Christian Wijnants, Belgium; Pankal and Nidhi, India; DRESSEDUNDRESSED, Japan; and Sophie Theallet, USA, presented their collection of woollen garments at the final night held during London Fashion Week last weekend.

As well as \$100,000 in prizemoney Mr Wijnants designs will now be stocked in the most important boutiques around the globe including Australia's David Jones, London's Harvey Nichols and New York's Bergdorf Goodman.

Mr McCullough said the AWI board had agreed to three years of funding the prize, but after the success of this year they may look at extending the project.



# AWGA - News Update



High stakes: Models vie for success in the International Woolmark prize grand final in London Picture: Getty Images