

Six Eastern Cape crafters wow audiences at annual International craft festival in Milan

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Six Eastern Cape crafters recently wowed an international audience at the annual International L'Artigiano de Fiera Milano (correct) craft festival at the world's fashion capital in Milan, Italy.

The L'Artigiano de Fiera - one of the biggest of its kind - is held at the Fiera complex on the outskirts of Milan. The six artists returned home having sold out their crafts which included soft furnishings such as cushions and curtains, mohair products, African dolls and recycled glass jewellery.

The crafters were part of a 34 member craft team from all over South Africa put together by the Eastern Cape Development Corporation (ECDC) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). Two of the best sellers in the country hailed from the Eastern Cape.

Nomagci Qabaka from Mdantsane, who exhibited jewellery made from recycled glass, says the exhibition was all about showcasing their "Proudly South African" products.

"I was so excited to see the response from the people. It's all about the quality of our work and they bought everything," says Qabaka.

"We are now preparing ourselves for the export market. We were well-supported by ECDC and the DTI," said Qabaka.

Another crafter Kosi Jayiya makes Africa dolls which represent African culture. Jayiya sold out her creations together with a collection of bags and cushions.

"All of my creations were an expression of Zulu and Xhosa culture. The interventions made by ECDC and the DTI place the development of Small Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) at the forefront and they really encourage emerging business people like us.

"This is the type of exposure that we need as small business people at an international stage. It also prepares us for the export market so that we fully understand what international customers require from us. The quality of products I produce can compete with international products," said Jayiya.

ECDC supports three different segments of crafters through its Creative Industries Development Programme.

"We support crafters by ensuring that they get marketing material such as brochures and business cards. We're thinking of going back this year. Nomagci and Kosi almost sold out. It had a fully comprehensive representation from all over the world. They embraced the fair and there were crafters from all over the world. It is one of the best attended fairs in Europe. Milan is the fashion capital of the world so this was a wonderful experience in terms of exposure and sales," says ECDC crafts project manager Melanie Mahona.

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