

NEW YORK

Mixed Reports of Racial Diversity on This Season's Runways Emerge



Jourdan Dunn at Cape Town Fashion Week last month. Photo: Getty Images

Black models filled only 94 of the 1,584 runway slots at February's Fashion Week. That's just 6 percent. Even fewer Latina girls were cast, nabbing seventeen slots — a whopping one percent. Will those numbers improve significantly at all this time around? *Who knows?!* Tracy Reese told the *Daily News* that agencies seem to be sending more diverse models to castings, perhaps inspired by the media's increased scrutiny of whitewashed runways. Pamella Roland also told the paper she noticed a fuller range of ethnicities among the models at her castings.

But casting director Roger Padilha, who's cast shows for Aurelio Costarella, the Blonds, Chris Han, and Harlan Bel, said his selections weren't any better than last season's.

"I saw about 400 girls, again, as I do every year," says Padilha. "My exact number was 378, from 10 agencies. And of those girls, I'd say that I saw about eight black girls. ... Some of the girls that came in were not very good, so it isn't like I really have eight black girls to choose from. I have about three or four that made it into my 'yes' pile. So it's frustrating."

On the other hand, Robert Barr, who cast Yeohlee's show, told us he noticed show packages from agencies like Ford, Marilyn, Major, Elite, Click, and Trump included a particularly strong mix of ethnic girls. He added he specifically looked for girls representing a range of ethnicities and nationalities for the Yeohlee show, partly to make the runway diverse and partly because such an aesthetic best complements the collection. Thus the Yeohlee cast includes girls from Venezuela, Korea, Somalia, China, Sudan, Tunisia and Denmark, Hungary, and Malaysia, one half-black American, and one girl who is half-Indian, half-Dutch. Even so Barr still noticed packages from other agencies remained whitewashed.

Last season Jill Stuart was one of many labels that used only white girls in the show. CEO Ron Curtis told the *Daily News* the house had been interested in casting popular black models Jourdan Dunn and Liya Kebede, but couldn't because Calvin Klein booked them for the same time slot. If they were the only women of color the label pursued last season, we sure hope it expand its horizons this season. But Curtis couldn't confirm this year's cast would be any more representative of the world's population than last year's. We'll see soon enough.