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Hero Rats and the Fashion Group Harnessing Their Heroism

by Chris Nelson

As the fashion crowd ponders the meaning of John Galliano, an unapologetic attention-seeker, landing at the anonymous house of Maison Martin Margiela (the latest gobsnacker: he's been spotted actually wearing the required white lab coat), it's back to

business for the label's parent company. Only the Brave, along with its president Renzo Rosso, have a host of other priorities in need of attention. Charitable priorities, to be precise.

While juggling the demands of Diesel, Marni, Viktor & Rolf, and other labels in its stable, OTB also maintains a foundation. And that foundation has steadily been increasing its humanitarian load of late, funding socially responsible initiatives throughout the world. The latest and perhaps most peculiar of these is APOPO, a Belgian NGO that researches and develops detection-rat technology in the location of landmines in pertinent parts of Africa and Asia. In Mozambique alone, APOPO's mine action team has helped return over 10 million square meters of land to the local population, for living and farming purposes. APOPO also trains and deploys 'hero rats,' as they're affectionately known, to detect tuberculosis.

In its mission to rebalance social inequality and contribute to the sustainable development of less-advantaged areas, the Only the Brave Foundation will invest in the training of 22 new hero rats — a process that takes nine months — for a demining mission in Angola. This is in addition to the 300 rats APOPO has already trained. To date, the OTB Foundation says it has supported over 150 projects, providing concrete solutions to over 130,000 people.

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APOPO detection rats