

ONTARIO
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DESIGN

SKETCH

WINTER 2010

The magazine of the Ontario College of Art & Design





SKETCH

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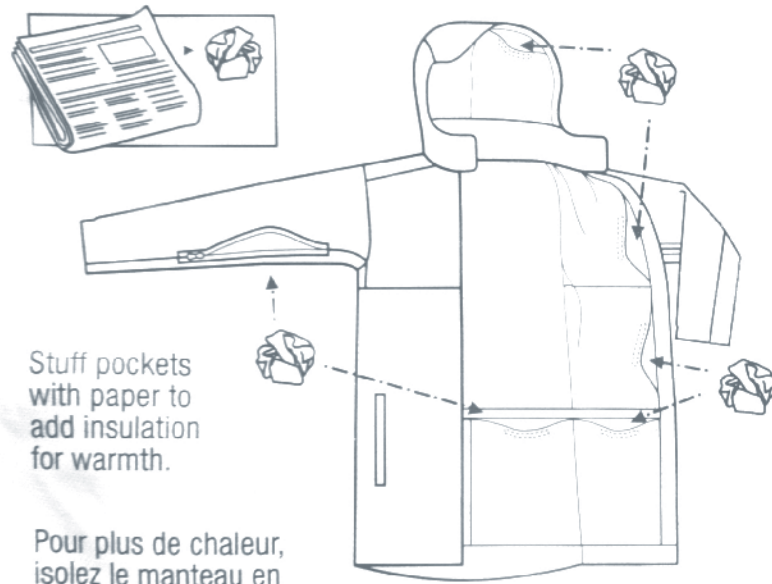
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The OCAD Professional Gallery at the Ontario College of Art & Design hosted an opening reception on Tuesday, October 20 to launch its first-ever fashion exhibition — Fashion Forward: Toronto (ad)dresses the future, which runs until January 24, 2010. The reception was held in conjunction with the Fashion Design Council of Canada's (FDCC) LG Fashion Week Beauty by L'Oréal Paris in October.

STUFF IT ↓ ISOLEZ-LE



Stuff pockets with paper to add insulation for warmth.

Pour plus de chaleur, isolez le manteau en remplissant ses poches de papier journal.

FASHION FORWARD: FASHIONING THE FUTURE

PGII

By Charlene K. Lau

“The world needs another fashion exhibition like Valentino needs another pug,” posted Horacio Silva on The Moment, *The New York Times*’ daily blog. While that may be true for the hopping Manhattan scene with its plethora of exhibition venues for fashion, it is quite the contrary for Toronto, where we rarely have the chance to view homegrown talent in a dedicated space. It is precisely this fashion-as-visual-culture dialogue that has been missing from the cultural community in Toronto, and Fashion Forward fills the gap, positioning fashion at the forefront of design in imagining new realities for the collision between art, design and — in the case of many of the exhibition’s pieces — technology.

Perhaps this difficulty in displaying fashion lies in a contentious relationship between art and design. While it can be said that historically, society has positioned design hierarchically lower than “fine” art, the inverse could be stated as well. Coco Chanel once disparagingly referred to Surrealist artist and fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli as “that Italian artist who makes clothes,” almost as if voicing her own inferiority complex in having her couture business threatened by an untrained peer.

Born of the political ideology of Marx, the psychoanalysis of Freud and the predilection for “making strange,” formerly rigid delineations between design and art faded in the era of Surrealism. This interdisciplinary approach blurred the boundaries between theatre, interiors, fashion, film, architecture and advertising. Are we approaching some semblance of this once again in our contemporary times? Charles Reeve, curator of the OCAD Professional Gallery, thinks so.

“Design is rapidly assuming a place in the conversation around culture equivalent to any other



“Design is rapidly assuming a place in the conversation around culture equivalent to any other cultural endeavour.”

PREVIOUS PAGE
IS BELOW JACKET
TAXI & LIDA BADAY
PHOTO: LINO RAGNO

ABOVE
INSTALLATION VIEW
PHOTO: LINO RAGNO

cultural endeavour [visual art, music, literature, etc.],” notes Reeve, “and fashion is part of that movement.” Asked what he thinks of purist naysayers, Reeve says, “For every person who feels that art should be pure, separated from everyday life, there’s someone else who thinks that art should be engaged with current social and political issues. For every person who thinks design’s job is to solve problems, there’s someone else who thinks that design’s job is to make our lives more beautiful.”

As an exhibition, Fashion Forward assumes a role in the shift to present fashion in its fluid form. It questions and envisions a multitude of future possibilities — special needs, wearable tech, sustainability and choice — exploring new collaborations and ideas of social responsibility. Long-standing Toronto designers Comrags, Hoax Couture, Izzy Camilleri and Lida Baday share the space with teams of experimental newcomers, and together they envision fashion as not only speaking to aesthetics, but also to inclusiveness, personalization and functionality. Lily Cornell’s LED-

light dome dress for Alan Auctor evokes Atsuko Tanaka’s 1957 Electric Dress and the more recent romance between art and technology in Hussein Chalayan’s conceptual designs. This playfulness is echoed in jewellery designer Mimi Shulman’s EarWear covers for hearing aids, which show, literally, that fun is a part of function. Shaped like bananas, herring and corn, Shulman’s designs illustrate how a tool that eliminates impairment can also become fashion, albeit by accident. Shulman asks: Can hearing aids not go down the path as eyeglasses have today, with the perfect-sighted sporting frames without lenses?

Demonstrating how interdisciplinary in fashion is rooted in collaboration, Fashion Forward teams of researchers in diverse fields — ranging from computational, engineering and medical sciences to the police force and fashion designers — collaborated on various garment projects. Canine Work Apparel (CWA) is a joint endeavour between a Ryerson team of fashion and computer science students alongside computer, mechanical and

electrical engineering researchers and the Ontario Provincial Police. It outfits urban search and rescue dogs with Canine Augmentation Technology (CAT) cameras attached to harnesses, allowing rescue units to see what the dogs see. In the event of an urban disaster such as an earthquake, helping response teams to provide immediate assistance to survivors.

Another multidisciplinary melding of interests is the partnership between Ocorant — a medical-device design company founded by Queen’s University students — and a team of George Brown College researchers, including students from fashion, nursing and mechanical engineering. This alliance produced an electronics-embedded heart-monitoring vest that can be worn discreetly underneath clothing and for lengthy periods of time, while aiding health professionals in collecting data.

In a more visible mode are the modular sling bags and belts crafted by the Sansu design team of Susan Barnwell and Sandra Tullio-Pow, faculty members from the School

of Fashion at Ryerson University, in collaboration with Joyce Nyhof-Young of Princess Margaret Hospital. The bags and belts allow breast cancer survivors with decreased motor skills and swollen hands and arms to carry personal items easily in a series of modules with special features — such as an armrest concealed behind the bag and, in the largest handbag, LED lights illuminating the interior for improved visibility. Meanwhile, Izzy Camilleri does not compromise style in her Iz Collection of Adaptable Clothing, which is geared to seated clientele. It eliminates bulk in the front and back of the garment and accommodates spinal cord injuries with high-backed clothes that can be worn as separate halves. In these cases, fashion not only helps those requiring assistance in managing their daily lives, but also mediates the relationship between the wearer and society.

Wendy Traas, half of the design duo Passenger Pigeon, custom-designs eco-friendly bridal wear, ensuring that all production processes — from sourcing sustainable textiles to where the dresses are sewn —



ABOVE
 MODULAR BAG WITH THERAPEUTIC ARM SLING
 SANSU (SUSAN BARNWELL AND SANDRA TULLIO-
 POW) & DR. JOYCE NYHOF-YOUNG
 PHOTO: LINO RAGNO



ABOVE
 EARWEAR® FASHION HEARING-AID COVERS
 MIMI SHULMAN
 PHOTO: LINO RAGNO



ABOVE RIGHT
 CANINE WORK APPAREL (CWA)
 PHOTO: LINO RAGNO

BELOW
 GEORGE BROWN HEART-MONITORING VEST PROTOTYPE - SP4 VERSION I
 DESIGNER: ANGELLA MACKEY
 PHOTO: LINO RAGNO

PGI3

are socially responsible. Susan Harris focuses her interpretation of sustainability on the use of recycled materials for her designs, and Jack & Marjorie utilizes reclaimed military surplus materials for its handbags.

But while sustainability can mean employing recycled or sustainable materials and processes, socially responsible fashion can also manifest itself by directly helping those in need. Womenswear designer Lida Baday paired with TAXI Communications to produce 15 Below, a rain jacket for those living on the streets. Made of lightweight, waterproof, windproof and breathable Aquamax fabric technology, the jacket can be folded into a backpack and serve as a pillow or, alternatively, be stuffed with newspaper for insulation. Paper, it seems, is a simple, yet very effective, insulator: "Yesterday's information becomes today's insulation," the 15 Below website reads. The jacket accommodates this insulating technique with many interior pockets. This winter, 3,000 15 Below jackets will be distributed across Canada and

the U.S. to the homeless to help them survive the cold.

Fashion can be many things — aesthetic, pragmatic, political and social. More importantly, however, is its future, which is in sustainability, with an increased focus on the adaptability of the clothing to the wearer, to social responsibility and to sustainable methods of production. With its experimental and adaptive exhibits reflecting and engaging this mode of production, Fashion Forward is just one of the first of, hopefully, many opportunities to view contemporary fashion and its relevance to the future of design in Toronto.

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 Charlene K. Lau is a Toronto-based art writer whose reviews have been published in *Canadian Art*, *C Magazine*, *Akimblog* and *Fashion Theory* (forthcoming). She recently received her MA in History and Culture of Fashion from the London College of Fashion in the U.K. and is a curatorial assistant at the Textile Museum of Canada.

