

NEW PROSPECTS FOR THE MALE WARDROBE

By Silvia Bombardini



Though still a minority, we've been treated to, and grown both fond of and familiar with quite a few female designers exclusively showing menswear collections in recent seasons here at London Collections: Men. From Lou Dalton to Astrid Andersen; their aesthetics may vary as much as what motivates them (which is rarely spoken of) but it is perhaps not too farfetched to venture that there might be something self-indulgent, liberating, or even empowering in a girl's desire to push men out of their comfort zone. "What a privilege it is for us as women to be able and allowed to do that for menswear today," muses New York-born, London-raised Chelsea Bravo, one of the brightest budding talents presenting her SS15 collection in the Designer Showrooms at the Hospital Club for the first time. "A man designing for a man may think 'would I wear this?' or 'will my friends ridicule me if I wore this?' I am free from those very questions, which takes the fear away and allows me to be unrestricted in my design process and create something unique for the market. I don't want to design in accordance to what is seen as 'acceptable' for a man to wear. I see it as my job to put out a new idea or prospect for the male wardrobe." It is indeed true, if perhaps unexpected, that the pressure of conventions on men's attire appears to have lasted much longer than it has on women's, who divested themselves long ago, and at times literally, of both etiquette and taboos — at least as far as the catwalk is concerned. And yet finally, the stiff upper lip of the

Savile Row-clad British gentleman only represents one side of the coin. And Bravo knows it well, having trained with both Christopher Shannon and Martine Rose — seasoned talents, despite their youth, of what's been termed a London Menswear Renaissance — before setting up her own label. "Both designers have kept a young, raw, and home-grown energy about their collections, as though they are still trying things out, and I like that," she recalls. "I remember working with rubber, carpet underlay, and gold emergency blankets whilst interning with Martine." Named after Barbara Hepworth's 1951 marble sculpture, Chelsea Bravo's spring silhouettes instead are crafted in linen, denim, and cotton drill to mirror the texture of canvas, finished with strip-weaving and felt appliqué as if to bridge this gap between fashion and art that we ever so often find ourselves on the edge of. "I'm drawn by shape and love to use it as a starting point in my design process," she explains, and it's the solid but airy shapes of the sculpture, the simultaneous multiple views of Cubism, and Hepworth's own "direct carving" technique that Bravo echoes in her construction and patterns. "Upon looking at her work you want to touch and interact with it," she adds, "which is something I wanted to translate in the 'Concourse' collection."

www.chelseabravo.com