

A JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY

by Silvia Bombardini



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Fashion images travel faster than ever, but regrettably still in two dimensions and the increasingly online lives we lead are more and more often to blame for what can be perceived as a flattening within the industry, both of silhouettes and sentiment. It is therefore with no small relief that we welcome the work of a young designer so remarkably unaffected by this, and not the least bit nostalgic. On the contrary, Andrea Jiapei Li's oversized volumes in soft neoprene and layers of spacemesh flatter the future and positively brim with feeling. As she says herself, "it is in the stitches, the lining, the fabric, and all the other details that the substance and the emotion of the garment are conveyed." A renewed focus on tactility might be just what we need to balance our virtual side, and Andrea, who, befitting her age, is inspired by impalpable treasures such as an Internet video recording of the swishing sound of garments, plans nonetheless to tell us stories through textures — bonded, braided, or knotted. "I have always been interested in designing as a way to communicate with others," she says. "The storytelling aspect is what fascinates me the most."

When we think of each season as a new chapter in an ongoing narrative, then in Andrea's case this could be a coming-of-age tale, a chronicle of finding her own design identity. It began when she was still in school, which wasn't long ago at all, with a curious double-negative exercise involving a Rubik's Cube and a list of things she dislikes — say, like bows or the color red. Their random combinations had a

redeeming quality, and the unpredictable outcome had potential. "Both the process and the end results are extremely important to me," the Beijing-raised, New York-based designer muses. "While the process can be seen as an one-person journey of self-discovery, the end result is in a sense a destination that I am able to reach." If identity is fluid, or better yet, woven, a subtle, graceful Eastern influence from her roots can occasionally still be noticed mitigating the sportswear shapes in Andrea's work. It's her American education, however, that proved most fundamental. Still a student, she had the chance to intern with the likes of 3.1 Phillip Lim, Diane von Furstenberg, and EDUN, and as a fresh graduate of the MFA program in Fashion Design and Society at Parsons, her spring collection was presented at New York Fashion Week, worn by Lady Gaga, and sold at Dover Street Market shortly after. As she puts it, "New York stands out for its diversity and for its fast pace." Already with the winter season, Andrea Jiapei Li was one of the four web-selected fresh talents to take part in the VFiles Made Fashion show. What next? "I plan to add accessories in the near future which I am very excited about," she reveals, then adds, "generally speaking, I am just very excited and very much looking forward to seeing how the brand will evolve."

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