

3D Printing the Future of Fashion



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Nora O' Murchú and Hua Shu, "THX.OBJ" (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

Last month's spring/summer 2016 collection presentations are quickly fading from memory, and we as a culture are in the throes of divination. What's the next trend? What's the new black? Will fringe be back? But the biggest question is: how soon before the future takes over?

Down in the South Street Seaport, a recent exhibition showcased the vanguard of fashions of the future. [Eyebeam's *Re-Making Patterns*](#) featured the 3D-printed creations of students from this year's [Computational Fashion Master Class](#), 15 designers, engineers, and media artists experimenting with new technologies to augment the body in ways that are just burgeoning. Garments of intricate interlacing, typically reserved for the tedium of knit one, purl two, were rendered through complex code that produces similar — if not more complicated — results.



Andrea van Hintum, Hillary Sampliner, and Billy Dang, "Poseidon Shawl" (click to enlarge)

Code and coagulation are replacing the interconnectivity of fibers: beauty rendered by binary; couture through computation. Gazing upon the white plastic shrugs of tiny, shell-like pieces at Eyebeam's South Street Seaport pop-up, and the webs of plastic forming a modern take on the bustle, was like looking into a crystal ball and seeing the runways 40 years from now.

In a sense, the class's creations were obviously the work of students: clunky and unrealized, hints of beauty instead of works of overwhelming resplendence. The works on view were a bit unrefined and not quite rendered correctly, but a bed of good ideas showing a great deal of potential — and a depressing dearth of color.

The students' plasticized garments, so slight and insignificant in a way, did not give any indication of an actual look or style, yet were incredibly complex. The exhibition was indicative of a late-21st century assembly line on which hard plastic will replace the diaphanous draping of silk and pattern-making will be supplanted by lines of code on a screen.



Kate Chapman Specter, Sayeh Sayer, and Kim Magloire, "Butterfly Microstructures"

One mini-collection of accessories entitled "Butterfly Microstructures," by Kate Chapman Specter, Kim Magloire, and Sayeh Sayer, was inspired by the microscopic geometry of the insect's wings and eggs. This translation of the natural world into futuristic technologies showed the relationship between past and present, as well as a parallel between the human engineering and the engineering of the insect world.

Of course, practical concerns (especially environmental) are typically on display when designing for the future. Post-apocalyptic paranoia frequently permeates our visions of the years ahead, so clothing's protective functions — shielding wearers from inclement weather or the sun, for example — are typically heightened, as in Amy Cheung, Chester Dols, and Laura Nova's "Survival Vest." While one of the weakest objects aesthetically in the show, verging too much on a cartoonish sensibility of what our future selves would wear, it still spoke to a larger cultural panic about what our future holds.

We cannot escape the fashion of the future. Students like those featured at Eyebeam are paving the way for a kind of clothing that will be standard in a few years, replacing the old dressmakers and creating forms that, while alien to us, will seem to future generations as typical as a tunic to the Ancient Greeks.



Amy Cheung, Chester Dols, and Laura Nova, "Survival Vest" (click to enlarge)

[Re-Making Patterns](#) was on view at [Eyebeam's space](#) (117 Beekman Street, South Street Seaport, Manhattan) September 10–17.