



From top: Monika wears Dress by Omer Asim.
Sneakers by Adidas Originals.
Mackenzie wears all clothing by Omer Asim.
Makeup by Junko Kikoka at Joe Management.
Hair by Marki Shkrelí at Artist.
Models: Mackenzie Drazan and Monika Sawicka
at Marilyn and John Swiatek.



NEW DESIGNERS

Photography by Colin Dodgson / Styling by Zara Zachrisson

OMER ASIM

The evolution of Sudanese designer Omer Asim from academics to the avant-garde to minimalism has been a striking one. He was born the fifth of six siblings in Khartoum, where he had little exposure to fashion, let alone any interest in designing. Asim instead took up architecture studies at the Bartlett at University College London before earning a master's at the London School of Economics. He then began preparing a PhD proposal on the visual consumption of fashion with aspects of visual anthropology, psychoanalytic studies, and social psychology all playing a role. He spent a year trying to find a PhD supervisor who could advise him on all three disciplines before realizing he was more interested in making clothes than writing about them.

After learning basic pattern cutting and sewing, the 34-year-old Asim developed his technical skills through internships at Savile Row tailor Maurice Sedwell and Vivienne Westwood. He then freelanced in the wardrobe department of the *Harry Potter* films before embarking upon his own line.

"My initial interest in fashion was in the avant-garde," says Asim. He sent editors resin casts of dead chickens instead of traditional invitations to his first, elaborately sculptural collection, presented at London Fashion Week in 2009 and inspired by Kevin Carter's Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph *The Vulture and the Baby*. "Now I think 'avant-garde' has become yet another fashionable term to signify something very desperate! I counteract that by approaching the avant-garde from the other end, through the basic and premodern."

Asim's Spring 2013 collection, with its clean, stripped-down lines and neutral palette, is a reflection of his "holistic pattern cutting technique, which is basically a seam-elimination process." Even the styling of his fashion show in Lagos and the ensuing look book were a study of subtraction. Asim and stylist Nobuko Tannawa stripped away elements until all accessories, even shoes, were eliminated. He employed texture in place of color, manipulating materials including bamboo, reinforced paper, cotton organdy, leather, bonded jersey, and thread work chiffon.

This season, Asim concentrated on perfecting a new cut in which the sleeve is integrated into the whole of the garment as opposed to a separate extension of it. "I don't normally use sleeves in my work, and I wanted to start this collection from that point of view, as if I hadn't seen a garment with a sleeve before," he explains. "I un-design as much as I can to achieve a sense of imperfect beauty, something essentially human." —*Suzanne Weinstock Klein*