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Fashioning the Intangible: The Conceptual Clothing of Ying Gao at the Textile Museum of Canada

by [Katia Jean Paul](#)
published June 27, 2014

The Montreal designer and professor's latest solo exhibition showcases pieces of wearable art that are more than meets the eye.



From left to right: *Incertitudes*, whose multiple pins move in unpredictable ways when words are spoken (Photo by Mathieu Fortin) and *No (Where) Now (Here)*, an organza creation that glows in the dark and writhes in response to one's gaze. (Photo by Dominique Lafond)

A diaphanous dress covered in pins sees them shift in response to speech; another made of super light organza and photoluminescent thread glows in the dark and 'comes to life' when one stares at it. Indeed, [Ying Gao's](#) creations go beyond the functional and even aesthetic properties of clothing, and interact with their surroundings. Showcasing six installations created between 2008 and 2013 by the Montreal designer and professor at Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM)'s École supérieure de mode, *Fashioning the Intangible: The conceptual clothing of Ying Gao* renders the immaterial, material and the invisible, visible. How? Thanks to microphones, sensors and eye-tracking technology. The works and how they interact with the viewer in time and space playfully challenge commonplace ideas about clothing and its place and role within our environment. They put the transformative powers of fashion on full display.

Gao—who also heads the product design department at the Geneva University of Art and Design in Switzerland—has shown her conceptual work in museums, galleries and on runways worldwide. The recipient of the Phyllis Lambert Design Montreal grant in 2009, her explorations meld design, science and technology with poeticism, the instrument through which she makes incisive observations on fashion, the individual and his/her environment.



Take, for instance, *(No) Where (Now) Here*, the designer's aforementioned glow-in-the-dark photoluminescent dress. The work is actually made up of two dresses that light up and whose intricate detailing shifts in response to the ever fleeting blink of an eye. Inspired by Paul Virilio's 1979 essay, "Esthétique de la disparition" (*The Aesthetic of Disappearance*), Gao's technological garments posit the concepts of absence and presence as one and the same. Meanwhile, the designer's *Facebook as a Pop-Up Book* piece is a satirical materialization of the social network and its many interactions, in a pictorial skirt.

First exhibited at UQAM's Centre de Design last November, Gao's interactive garments are currently on display at the [Textile Museum of Canada](#) in Toronto.

***Fashioning the Intangible: The conceptual clothing of Ying Gao*, now showing until September 1, 2014 at the Textile Museum of Canada.** For more info: www.textilemuseum.ca

Facebook as a Pop-Up Book (Photo by Dominique Lafond)



Fashion, art, architecture, design, TV, and film: Katia Jean Paul is a Montreal-based writer who casts a critical eye on her many idées fixes, unearthing the aesthetic and cultural dimensions within each and every subject. / Follow Katia on Twitter: [@KatiaJeanPaul](#)

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