

# SURFACE DESIGN



## **FUTURE FABRICATION: SDA INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION IN PRINT**



CREATIVE EXPLORATION OF FIBER AND FABRIC

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# CRAFTIVISM AWARD

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**P**ersephone's *Reflection* is set in a dystopian future where climate change has exacerbated forest fires and a young woman named Persephone uses her ingenuity to survive in an abandoned pomegranate orchard. In this projected future scenario, fast fashion has imploded on itself and textile artists have moved to the forefront with new alternative organic materials. Despite the economic collapse, the advances made in sustainable textiles have influenced a generation who, as ecological survivors, are fully able to apply their DIY creative problem-solving toward a viable subsistence. Unlike the fully armed sexy-vixen garb predicted in Hollywood postapocalyptic films, my heroine clads herself in a jacket made from pomegranate peels, a skirt woven with dates, boots fashioned from fruit leather and a protective respirator mask filled with healing herbs.

*Persephone's Reflection* is part of my *Weedrobes* series, which began in 2005 as a challenge to fabricate a 100 percent compostable garment out of live plants. It has grown into a body

of work referencing the ephemerality of our ecosystem and our lives, while also giving voice to my long-standing interests in sustainability and consumer culture. I come by my interest in eco-fashion and renewable textiles through growing up in my mother's ladies' clothing store, where I learned how to discern quality manufacturing and the importance of shopping local. In addition, as a teenager I witnessed the poor working conditions in garment factories and the effects of chemicals used in treating fabrics while working in a nonunion sweatshop for a summer.

My garments may be sci-fi fantasy, but they are rooted in the real life work of today's designers and innovators who are developing new fabric options such as pineapple leaves, banana stems and coconut husks, as well as organic cotton, hemp and flax. I am inspired by organizations such as the **Ethical Fashion Forum**, which is a platform of tools and services for the fashion and textiles industries to work sustainably and put the spotlight on best practices. These types of resources are vital if we are to successfully shift from

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Left page: **Nicole Dextras** *Persephone's Pomegranate Ensemble* (back detail) 2015, pomegranate peels, dried mushrooms, thorns, fish mah, orange peel, bark, red dates, constructed over sea grass and reed armature, attached with thorns, peyote stitch.

Right page: **Nicole Dextras** *Persephone's Reflection* 2015, organic materials, furniture, *Pomegranate Ensemble*.

large monoculture agriculture, which harms the environment, to a more diverse and therefore ecological material sourcing.

The characters and garments I create in my artwork are the future descendants of the groundbreaking eco-pioneers of today. For example, my 2011 *Laurel Suffragette* piece was created as a time traveler from the past who had fought for reform after the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory disaster in NYC in 1911. She was curious to see if present-day garment factory conditions had improved. Wearing a design based on the Victorian mutton sleeve embellished with blue hydrangeas, she ambled down the street asking shoppers where their clothes were made. The result was a wide range of intimate conversations ranging from fast fashion to being ushered out of a jeans store after inquiring about factory conditions.

It had been my initial intention in 2005 to stage this kind of intervention with my *Weedrobes*, but it took many years of research and testing before I was ready. I have no formal training in textiles or fashion, but my 10 years of working as a freelance costume designer laid the groundwork for my crash course in







innovative garment construction. The main challenge in the *Weedrobes* project was to work without a glue gun or plastic of any kind. My first successful wearable piece came from my research into pannier dresses, where I discovered that supple branches were once used before the advent of whaleboning. This led me to investigate basket-weaving materials and techniques to eventually fabricate a sturdy armature. I also adopted methods used by early environmental artists such as Andy Goldsworthy, whose use of thorns to pin leaves together suited my fashion aesthetic. I culled my first plant materials from my neighborhood in the verdant city of Vancouver, whose abundant plant species have been a constant stimulus and a bountiful scavenging ground.

I have framed my current work in the future as a lens by which to examine the present issues that face the textile industry. Unlike the assumptions made in early science-fiction films, our future wardrobe will not be full of shiny lamés and pointy shoulder pads or the MacGyvered outfits of *Mad Max* but new plant-derived fabrics and accessories. I, for one, have a few more ideas



up my sleeve. If we take our cue from Persephone, the future does not belong to the fittest but to the most creative.

Ethical Fashion Forum: [ethicalfashionforum.com/about-eff](http://ethicalfashionforum.com/about-eff)

—*Nicole Dextras is a graduate of the Emily Carr University of Art in Vancouver, Canada, and her art practice is based in social interventions and environmental installation, rooting nature to our everyday urban experience. Dextras has exhibited her work in Canada, the U.S. and in Asia. nicoledextras.com*

Left page: **Nicole Dextras *Persephone's Pomegranate Ensemble*** 2015, pomegranate peels, dried mushrooms, thorns, fish mah, orange peel, bark, red dates, constructed over sea grass and reed armature, attached with thorns, peyote stitch. Right page, left: back detail.

Right page, right: **Nicole Dextras *Pomegranate Respirator Mask*** 2016, pomegranate peels, orange peels, willow bark, roses, red corn, wooden fan, antique lace, anise seed, root, cloves, wooden beads, rudraksha seeds, mung beans, metal lamp stand, constructed over a reed armature, peyote stitch.