

## NEW YORK FASHION

## From Young Designers, Ethnic Mix

By Suzy Menkes

International Herald Tribune

**N**EW YORK — Something hot and strong is bubbling in the city's cultural melting pot. Fashion's newest designers — often showing way downtown — have diverse ethnic backgrounds, ranging from Malaysia to Mexico. But they all have the same attitude about stirring things together and spicing up America's traditional sportswear. They also have wild and noisy soundtracks, MTV celebrities in the audience and all sorts on stage, including drag queens.

"I call on all of my background and influences — you can't do things the old way any more," said Todd Oldham, a 30-year-old Texan who has lived in Iran. In his wacky show, Oldham even had a sequined skirt picturing Mona Lisa on the front and a Picasso portrait on the rear. He called it Old Master, Young Mistress. Like most of the young designers, Oldham has a pretty uninhibited attitude to sex.

Oldham's strength is in the witty way he embellishes sportswear pieces. This season, the theme was suburban kitsch, which meant a doorbell chiming over the music, windowpane checks on pantsuits, jackets with prints of quilts like Auntie's bedcoverings — and floral wallpaper patterns on sexy slip dresses. Under all that decoration — and a lot of posing on the runway — the themes were current: pants suits, long skinny skirts and shorter full ones, animal prints and the season's hit leather, riveted with studs. It all made a funny, funky mix.

**A**NNA SUI, a Chinese-American with experience as a fashion stylist, dressed up her well-proportioned clothes in hippie style, as Marc Jacobs did at Perry Ellis earlier in the week. The components of this back-to-the-1970s look are the pantsuit — in corduroy velvet or tapestry; maxi coats brushing the ankles of snakeskin boots; and wacky Wild West themes, ranging from American Indian thongs on short skirts or dresses to dangling fringes on suede pants. Sui made it all seem fun — especially when super-model Naomi Campbell came out in fringed cowboy chaps over the briefest of swimsuits with a butterfly tattooed in a cheeky spot.

Young designers all reflect the sexually charged glamour found in Manhattan's clubs and downtown restaurants as defiant fashion for hard times. The debut collection of



Moore/Thomas

Anna Sui's hippie look and Todd Oldham's kitsch mix.

slithering dresses laced down one side or with bias-cut seams slatted to show flesh. Zang Toi, a 31-year-old designer from Malaysia, tried to whip up old-style elegance with his theme of Orient Express travel — in Technicolor. Tweed coats were in bright checks lit up with glitter, and the show was filled with leather and feathers, as well as fox furs (complete with heads) and ankles a-rattle with jet fringing.

Bob Mackie, who showed Thursday, represents the more familiar silver-screen glamour born of the 1930s Depression — all cantilevered bodices, glitter-gulch decoration and lattice-works of straps. Liza Minnelli, wearing a violet halston jacket with black pants and a sweater, and Cyd Charisse, who was dressed by Mackie, added to the show biz. There was also a Father Christmas on stage, a Thanksgiving platter and a finale of black, white and gold siren dresses, with a barrage of balloons and a chorus of "Let the Good Times Roll." All that concealed the fact that the clothes in Mackie's show were relatively quiet, with a

and Christian Francis Roth emphasized the theme with quirky charm. He showed tailoring made in patchworks of pinstripe and donegal on a stage set of a turn-of-the-century men's dressing room with wardrobe, mirror and grooming stand. Roth showed the vest, often attached as the bodice of a brief dress; and the necktie, enlarged as the stripes on a long, skinny dress. As with all the young designers, when skirts were long they were near ankle-length, and had a period flavor when teamed with short jackets.

**E**VACHUN, with roots in Korea, showed a first collection that was all about throwing a curve. Her silhouette was long and lean, but arcs of seams fitted a jacket or dress close to the body. Hemlines were mid-calf, opening with a slit each side for easy movement, or skirts were short and flared. The spare clothes were enriched by fine fabrics — lush cabled cashmere knits, glossy leather or silk.

came in fabrics from wool, jersey and shiny rainwear, through cashmere knit or satin at night. Michael Kors made sportswear glamorous by shrugging deep-pile alpaca coats over a beaded sweater and narrow pants, wrapping tactile suede blouses above club check skirts. The show was full of fine things, but relied on the supermodels to give substance to simple clothes.

For Anne Klein, designer Louis Dell'Olio sent out every current trend — pantsuits, leather, stretch pants, maxi coats, cable knits, lacing, western chaps, fringe, corset belts and the color red. It was offered without a twist of irony or wit, but offered a professional and commercial overview of the fashion options of the season.

Donna Karan understands the need to ruffle the calm waters of basic sportswear. She staged a bagel-and-pizza party on the rooftop terrace of the new showrooms for her lower-priced DKNY line. Karan's daughter Gaby and family were just some of the models poised on white blocks showing off