

# ANGEL CHANG

## S/S 2023

Weaving the future  
with indigenous textiles

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PACE GALLERY  
September 8, 2022

## WELCOME TO A ZERO-CARBON FUTURE

### Land acknowledgment:

LenapeHoking, or what is currently known as New York City, is the ancestral homeland of the Lenape people. We take a moment to uplift and show our respect to the original indigenous stewards of these lands, whose absence is a result of displacement and broken treaties.

May we honor the collective labor, love, and wisdom of all our ancestors that have guided us to this intersection of paths. We recognize that land acknowledgments are simply one small step towards reconciliation and repair.

We are in a global climate crisis. Our apparent disconnection with nature has led to extreme weather, widespread pollution, and the threat of mass extinction. Fashion, the clothing we wear on our bodies, contributes up to 10% of global carbon emissions, more than international travel and maritime shipping combined.

What if we followed a different path? What if we lived in a cleaner and more natural way? What if...we chose to live a zero-carbon future?

My collection ANGEL CHANG proposes a new way of making clothing – one made directly from the earth with a zero carbon footprint.

Unlike conventional clothing today, our clothing is made without the use of electricity, plastics, chemicals, or fossil fuels. It is handmade from seed to button using just three ingredients: sun, plants, and mountain water.

This is how humans made clothing for 20,000 years; only recently have we forgotten how to make clothing in this sustainable manner. Pockets of indigenous artisans around the world have kept these ancient techniques alive, despite pressure to assimilate into the dominant cultures. They have made the collection you are viewing today, but their know-how is quickly disappearing.

It is time for us to reconnect with the earth and re-learn these traditional methods that are healthier for ourselves and the planet. By reviving traditional craftsmanship and indigenous knowledge, we can find solutions for solving climate change and ensure our survival and that of future generations.

## MY PERSONAL JOURNEY

Ten years ago, I left my life as a downtown New York fashion designer and moved to a remote mountain village in Guizhou: China's poorest province. I had fallen in love with the elaborate hand-embroidered Miao traditional costumes exhibited in museums around the world, and so I set about a quest to find the grandmothers who made them in the villages.

But when I arrived, I was told their craftsmanship would disappear in the next 5 to 10 years because the next generation was not picking it up. I could not fathom seeing these textiles disappear, so I began to dream about ways to keep their traditional craft alive. My plan was to turn their traditional fabrics into modern silhouettes for the international market – to bring jobs to these rural villages and inspire the younger generation to continue the craft.

While my original intention was to help the villagers, I soon realized that they were actually helping me.

Growing up as a first-generation Chinese-American to immigrant parents in Indiana, I was unfamiliar with the homeland of my parents and could barely understand Chinese. I knew very little of my family history and was not spiritual at all.

But once I set foot in China, unexplainable signs and synchronicities began happening. Wherever I went, I felt the mysterious presence of invisible forces accompanying and guiding me. They would enter my dreams and meditations to share the wisdom of how to work with the village artisans. This was especially important since I was alone in the villages and could not speak the language. (It would take me another 2 years to become fluent in Chinese.)

Recently, my mother shared with me the biographies of my ancestors for the first time, and I realized they were the wise voices guiding me in China.

These great-grandparents include a philosopher/teacher in a rural village, a silk-weaver and medicinal plant dyer in the countryside, a vegetarian who lived with nuns in mountain temples, and a craftsman-merchant of artisan furniture in the big city. I was none of these identities when I first began this collection; yet somehow today, these ancestral threads are all a part of me.

This collection is dedicated to these ancestors who guided me and showed me how magical and miraculous life can be when one follows her heart.

- Angel Chang

## ZERO-CARBON DESIGN

The pieces in this collection were made following my zero-carbon design philosophy built on three core tenets:

### NO ELECTRICITY

Conventional clothing today is made in factories powered by fossil-fuel energy. Until renewable energy is readily available, our best option is to not use electricity at all.

Each ANGEL CHANG piece is 100% handmade – from growing the cotton seed to spinning, weaving, dyeing, and sewing. No machine is used in the process. Even the buttons and button-holes are sewn entirely by hand. This is how clothing was made until 200 years ago, before the invention of electricity and rise of the Industrial Revolution.

For the artisans, their remote mountain villages only received electricity 25 years ago so they are not dependent on it and practice their traditional way of living sustainably with the earth. Sunlight is our light source and everything is hand-crafted outdoors. The climate and weather determine the speed at which the fabric is produced.

Making clothing this way can only be done using traditional craftsmanship, as it has been practiced for thousands of years. This is ancient couture.

### ALL - NATURAL

Most clothing today is made from polyester, a plastic fiber made from oil-derived petroleum which is a fossil fuel. The chemical dyes and fabric finishes create toxic wastewater that pollute rivers and oceans. By contrast, our clothing is not made with any of these.

Our collection is made only from what nature provides and from what is seasonal. We grow the raw materials to make our clothing entirely from scratch, based on a farming and harvesting calendar dictated by nature.

Native-seed cotton is grown organically on family farms. It is unprocessed so it feels the same as when plucked fresh from the field. Boiled leaves for dyeing are food-grade and do not harm the local groundwater; in fact, they can be drunk as an herbal tea. These medicinal plant dyes like native indigo and wild gardenia create a soothing experience when worn on your skin.

These pieces feel alive, evolve as they age, and become more beautiful over time.

### LOCALLY-MADE

Unlike conventional clothing that travels around the world to be made, our collection is made within a 30-mile radius – using locally-grown raw materials that nature provides abundantly for free.

All the fibers, plants, and materials are grown on the land or foraged in the surrounding mountain forest. The entire process from seed to button is done without traveling outside of one location. It's like growing a garden to make a salad in one's backyard.

This hyper-vertical and local approach is how clothing and objects were made throughout human history. There is no reason clothing must travel around the world to be made. We can simply design it using materials and labor found in one location.





Grandmother  
Jacket



Natural

My Favorite Shirt



Natural

Water Master Pants  
(as shorts)



Natural



Artisan  
Jean Jacket



Natural

Original  
Button-down



Natural

Water Master  
Pants



Natural

Click or scan for info





Navajo Blanket



Natural

Kurta  
Shirtdress



Natural

Biasha  
Palazzo Pants



Natural



Lab Coat Dress



Natural

Click or scan for info





Meditation  
Dress



Gardenia



Anti t-shirt



Gardenia

Farmer pants



Gardenia

Click or scan for info





Kurta  
Shirtdress



Clay

Original  
Button-down



Clay

Biasha  
Palazzo Pants



Clay



Original  
Button-down



Clay

Biasha  
Palazzo Pants



Clay

Click or scan for info





Artisan  
Jean Jacket



Dark Indigo

Boyfriend  
Shirt



Light Indigo

Farmer Pants



Light Indigo



My Favorite  
Shirt



Light Indigo

Original  
Button-down



Light Indigo

Biasha  
Palazzo Pants



Light Indigo

Click or scan for info





Grandfather  
Jacket



Dark indigo

My Favorite  
Shirt



Dark indigo



Farmer top



Dark indigo

Biasha  
Palazzo Pants



Dark indigo

Click or scan for info

## THE HANDMADE JOURNEY

Growing cotton:	4 months
Preparing cotton:	3 days
Hand-spinning:	5 days
Setting up loom:	1 week
Hand-weaving:	3 - 5 days
Washing fabric:	2 days
Finishing fabric:	3 days
Dyeing fabric:	2 - 14 days
Cutting fabric:	1 day
Sewing:	3 - 9 days

**Total time to make each piece:**

**5 - 6 months**

## TIMELINE OF SEED-TO-GARMENT

JANUARY	Waiting for spring
FEBRUARY	Waiting for spring
MARCH	Germinate cotton seeds
APRIL	Plant cotton seeds Raise silk worms
MAY	Grow cotton Feed silk worms
JUNE	Grow cotton Feed silk worms
JULY	Grow cotton Boil silk cocoons
AUGUST	Harvest cotton bolls Spin cotton into yarn Spin silk into yarn Forage gardenia pods
SEPTEMBER	Set-up yarn on handloom Weave fabric Harvest indigo leaves Create indigo dye vat Collect red soil
OCTOBER	Weave fabric Wash and cook fabric Dye fabric in indigo dye Dye fabric with red soil Beat fabric
NOVEMBER	Cut & sew clothes Make hand-knot buttons Embroider labels
DECEMBER	Garment finished



## How an ANGEL CHANG shirt compares to conventional clothing:

### Carbon footprint (cradle to gate):

ANGEL CHANG Anti T-shirt = 0.4 kg of CO<sub>2</sub>e

Average cotton t-shirt = 2.1 kg of CO<sub>2</sub>e

Average polyester t-shirt = 5.5 kg of CO<sub>2</sub>e

### Electricity used:

ANGEL CHANG Anti T-shirt = none

Average cotton t-shirt = 1.808 kWh

### Chemical pesticides used:

ANGEL CHANG Anti T-shirt = none

Average cotton t-shirt = 0.3 lbs

### Water used:

ANGEL CHANG Anti T-shirt = 12 liters + rainfall

Average cotton t-shirt = 2700 liters

### Traveled around the world (cradle to gate):

ANGEL CHANG Anti T-shirt = 30 miles

Average cotton t-shirt = 10,000 miles



For shipping back to the U.S., we calculate the carbon footprint and pay offsets through Climate Neutral. We have been certified Climate Neutral since 2020.





## INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE = SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

I learned this zero-carbon design approach while living and working with the Miao and Dong ethnic minorities in Guizhou province. Their traditional costumes were exhibited in museums around the world and I wanted to work directly with the grandmothers to have them remake the same for me.

While living with them, I observed a sustainable way of life that made more sense to me than the “modern world” I had grown up in. I had to forget everything I had been trained to do as a fashion designer in New York. I learned to follow real seasons--no longer fashion seasons.

I learned to be self-sufficient and make everything I needed by hand. I learned humility and to take only what was necessary. I learned patience and how to wait for things to grow. I learned that by following nature’s timeline, one could live with the land in reciprocity with it.

Indigenous communities are on the frontlines of climate change, and our village was no different. When it did not rain for two months and our wells dried up, we managed to dye an entire collection without running water. Our cotton still grew under these drought conditions, and I saw the resilience and power of native-seed cotton.

I experienced first-hand the power of indigenous knowledge and what we can learn from it.

This is why I am sharing with you the story of my collection today.

## REINDIGENIZING OURSELVES

When I began this journey 10 years ago, I just wanted to make beautiful fabrics. I did not intend to be a “sustainable designer,” nor did I know what “indigenous knowledge” or “craftsmanship” truly meant. I felt the world did not need another fashion designer, and so I did not rush to finish this collection.

But by living in the ethnic minority villages and following their traditional way of life, I learned an entirely new way of living that was in harmony with the earth. I saw how sustainability and craftsmanship are not the starting point, but rather can be the final manifestation of one’s view of the world.

This is why we must change our mindset if we are to reduce our carbon emissions by 2030, 2050, and beyond. It is not simply buying vegan products or removing CO<sub>2</sub> from the air. We have to change our entire approach to living and how we view our place in this world.

In my own journey, I learned how to speak Chinese fluently and discovered my ancestral roots for the first time. Connecting with these ancestors helped me create the collection you see today.

I believe we can all take similar steps to re-indigenize ourselves and revive the traditional ways of sustainable living that our ancestors practiced in the past.

Ask your parents and grandparents how they lived in the past, and the recipes and stories they have of the generations before them. By learning from our elders, we can incorporate these traditional approaches into our own lives. And together step into a zero-carbon future.

# PANEL DISCUSSION

## Weaving the future with indigenous textiles

*Hosted by Cartier*

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### Indré Rockefeller:

Indré Rockefeller is the Co-Founder of sustainable travel goods brand, Paravel, and a current masters student at Columbia University's Climate School. Indré began her career in the fashion industry at Vogue and Moda Operandi, following five years as a professional ballet dancer.

Indré holds a degree in Art History from Princeton University and an MBA from Stanford University.

### Angel Chang:

Angel Chang is an American womenswear designer who has been working with ethnic minority artisans in southwest rural China for the last eight years. She began her career designing for Donna Karan Collection in New York and Chloé (See by Chloé) in Paris.

So in 2012, Angel moved to a remote mountain village in Guizhou province, rural China, to learn the traditional fabric-making techniques still practiced there by the indigenous Miao, Dong, and Buyi tribes. Following in the footsteps of her ancestors going back 14 generations, she rediscovered her ancestral roots and the plant dyes used in traditional Chinese medicine.

As a TED Resident and Smithsonian Artist, Angel now speaks to global audiences about fashion, sustainability, and indigenous knowledge. Her work been collected by The Museum at FIT and the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center.

She received an MA in Modern Art from Columbia University, and BA cum laude in Art History & Visual Arts from Barnard College.

### Rebecca Hui:

Rebecca is the founder of Roots Studio, a collective of indigenous artists and future forward technologists reimagining cultural preservation through consensual co-creations with fashion. Over a decade, they have built the largest digital library of endangered cultural art forms traceable back to 3000 artists across 19 communities, building collaborations with prominent brands influencing the cultural zeitgeist.

Through her passion for bridging cultures, Rebecca has been recognized as a Forbes 30 Under 30, Cartier Women's Initiative Laureate, Echoing Green Fellow, and a delegate to the US Department of State. Rebecca has also designed technologies for cultural conservation and disaster resiliency with partners such as UNESCO and the World Bank. Rebecca started her journey as a Fulbright Scholar and National Geographic Explorer in India exploring human-animal coexistence amongst indigenous and urban communities. She graduated from MIT and Berkeley with a focus on urban design and business.

### Benita Singh

Benita Singh is an award winning entrepreneur who's dedicated her career to supporting the growth and development of artisan supply chains. She most recently was the Chief programs officer and chief communications officer at Nest, the non profit supporting brands responsible and creative engagement with artisans around the world. Prior to that Benita was the founder and CEO of Le Souk, the first online b2b marketplace for transparent textiles sourcing, for which she was the North American laureate for the Cartier womens initiative. She started her career as the co-founder of Mercado Global.

### About the Cartier Women's Initiative

Since 2006, the Cartier Women's Initiative has supported and empowered women impact entrepreneurs around the world, by providing the necessary financial, social and human capital support to help them grow their businesses. The CWI is open to women-run and women-owned businesses from any industry that aim to have a strong and sustainable positive impact on society as defined by the United Nations Sustainable Development goals (SDGs).

# SHOW CREDITS

Artistic Direction: Angel Chang

Event Production & Design: Nazar Agency

Communications Consultant: GWM Consulting

Strategy Director: Holly Caracappa

Scenic Design: Justin Reis

Stylist: Melissa Ventosa Martin

Photographer: Jesse Gouveia

Casting: SD Casting

Music: Wladimir Schall

Hair: Brittany Dion for Aveda

Makeup: Janell Geason for Aveda

Nails: Kim D'Amato

Jewelry: Dezso by Sara Beltrán

Shoes: Birkenstock

Seamstress: Lauren Lee

Interns: Philippine Duplat, Gillian Bressie  
Christa Bailey, Jody Gonzalez  
Antonella Dec-Prat, Liadh Mesch

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