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Lara Chamandi®

IT'S A LARA CHAMANDI'S WORLD, AND WE'RE JUST LIVING IN IT

From breezy toppers to feminine gowns, “tailored elegance” are the eternal watchwords for Lara Chamandi’s fashion. As for the ethics behind it? It comes with a twist.

Words
CHIDOZIE OBASI

In an age of digital filters and social upheavals where everything seems ground to a firm halt, words of escapism are a welcome respite. Yet despite the erratic news streams, it takes more than just a skill to really capture the zeitgeist, let alone confront modern day perceptions of femininity and growing up. Enter Lara Chamandi, the fledgling designer with a unique eye for soul-lacing fashion and a bucket-load of talent, whose dresses capture the transient nature of spirituality and beauty in such a way that we just had to meet the girl behind those seams.

As a Lebanese descent hailed in Milan, Chamandi’s breezy and subtly-coloured styles flit seamlessly between the whimsical and the realist. Her craft, as she defines it, is “an unapologetic celebration of the authentic, modern young woman.” Chamandi’s beautifully-cut ensembles encapsulate strength in vulnerability; on her platforms, models stare down the camera in a subversion of the male gaze that mark the imagery as formidably feminist. You’d be forgiven to fathom things differently: Chamandi’s work embodies a kind of nostalgia for purist femininity innocence paired with an overly - and overtly - abstract curiosity and awareness that captures the transition from girlhood to womanhood.

Beyond capturing fierce women and the quietly potent aura of the everyday, the designer is interested in juxtaposing nature - from flowers to potted plants - with the sublime elements of astrology. “It’s about having a positively conscious mindset and filling that to the brim with

utter purpose,” she says, adding that, “Both in fabric research and textile sourcing techniques, it comes natural for me to seek for the yarns and fibres that pollute the least, hence I chose Italy as my point of reference for manufacturing and production.”

Chamandi is a woman of gumption and speaks with great poise; no mean feat in a world of stilted zoom conversations. With a label born in the midst of the global Covid-19 pandemic, the designer is willing to take stride and not rest on her laurels, carving a path for women to become in tune within themselves and striving for self care. Using natural materials like silk and avoiding plastics in garment production, the designer is reworking flowy-sized gowns with free-of-fuss cutouts, oversized dresses and minimalist details (not to mention a plunging neckline or two). “As we’ve only just begun, we’re of course broadening our fabric usage; at the beginning I wanted to mainly use silks (all about georgettes, chiffons and bracing lightness), cotton and a lot of viscose as well, but as we’re slowly expanding I want to make sure I incorporate more lightweight, conscious fibres,” she says.

Since 2013, Chamandi had a proclivity for painting and frequented Architecture studies in London for two years, before moving into Furniture Design which led to a new material exploration. That stage of her journey prompted awareness and upped her prowess to new heights, acquiring a latch of talents that took her on a deep dive into conscious natural textiles to rethink responsibility in fashion, as “it starts with us, the designers and owners of companies, to have responsibility with our ideas,” she reckons. “I felt like London wasn’t the right place nor were the right people to kickstart my brand,” she freely admits, with no peacocking braggadocio on display. “I risked it all and moved to Milan: for me it’s about being in the right

place at the right time, always, and as the brand's production is all done ethically in the Italian factories, moving here felt like a great step; I feel connected and energetic around here." But beyond these obvious womenswear touch points, there is another current running through the pieces; an off-beat, Couture-esque dimension that shows through in the contrast stitching on a flared ruffle or a vent made from a neutral floaty fabric.

Chamandi's designs run the gamut from subversive editorial glory (a sleeveless dress hybrid with gentle panelling and a great multitude of pleats) to the wearable avant garde - a black ensemble with a slit back, romantic sleeves and no shortage of quintessential volumes is a personal favourite. "Lebanese people are very flexible and able to adapt," she says, speaking on the cultural references that imbue her work. "This brand is about the connective connectedness of our struggles, our lives, our hopes both emotionally and also in terms of telepathic energy," Chamandi opines. "We (Lebanese) are always grounded in our daily activities, connected to life's consciousness and nature, we very much love to feel pure products and are attached to talismanic objects; even in my family, we are intimately connected to items coming from ancestors and our lands. Because above the tangibility of the clothes, it's a spiritual journey that rolls in an unconsciously beautiful experience to the fashion system."

Back to the collection itself, the designer intends that versatility really could fit into any environment. We're not looking at conventional travel collections that are typically built on comfy bases. It aims and succeeds in meeting the needs of any well-poised woman of the modern day who is conscious not to sacrifice an inch of style in her wardrobe. Rather than create a distinctive jaw-dropping collection that's too avant-garde, Chamandi seems clear on her goal of constantly asking the question: what would a woman want to wear to embrace her full potential, feel beautiful and conscious of where her garments are from? As a result, the designer's stylish reaction is a collection that laces emotion and sheer intention, with the Zodiac Cosmic - more related to nature's seasonal cycles and the sky above. Part of the brand's philosophy. With this thinking in mind, Chamandi has considered the mantra of each look when styling her garments, to accentuate the storytelling or balance out the heaviness itself. Each design is steep in free-wheeling sophistication, precision-cut tailoring, raw under-layers and her signature top stitched uppers, now ruled with poise. Opulent and minimal are the words that spring to mind. But this is minimalism with purpose. As our conversation nearly comes to completion, Lara Chamandi is someone with a message. One that wasn't surface-deep, but exuded truth and candour; an unguarded honesty keen to explore cultural groundings through the lens of emotion,

detaching from preconceived notions of womanhood.

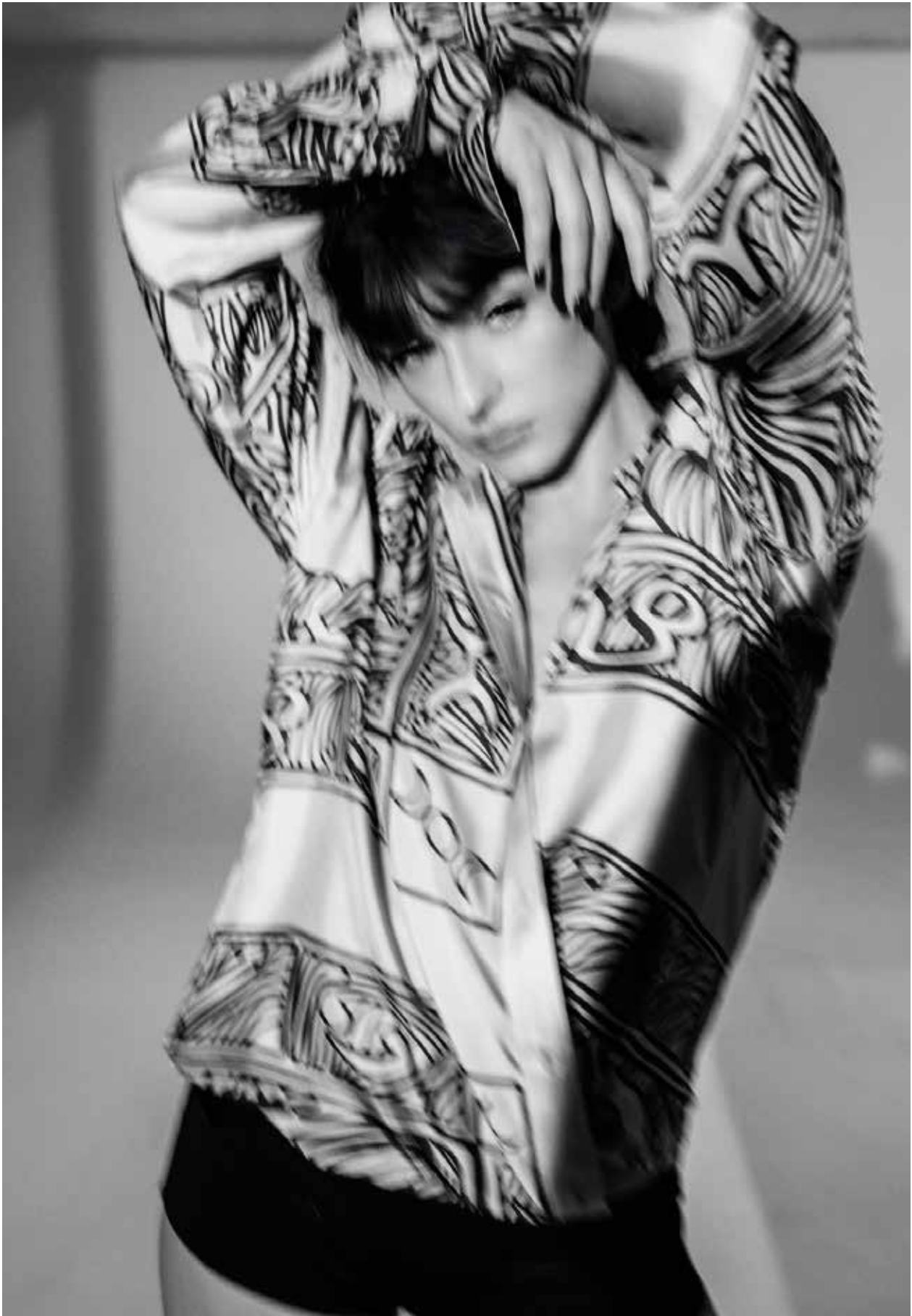
As if her collection wasn't enough, her brand showcased the new SS23 collection on September 19th, 2022, with a special installation created in collaboration with Francesca Pasquali, a designer who graduated from L'Accademia di Belle Arti di Bologna, and whose artistic practice stems from observational drawings of the natural form, translated into complex art works using upcycled and ethically-sourced materials, using satin tracking paper to create a graphically-crumpled effect to epitomise the Zodiac print from the SS23 collection while emphasising the new SS23 collection about the metamorphosis of the butterfly, the energy of the element air-purity of the skies, light-weight and floating in its divine eternity. The intriguing factor? Paper, the material used in the September activation which sees a refreshing take on the medium, experimented by Pasquali and interpreted in Chamandi's style key. But there's more to the story. The fearless intermix of art and fashion, disciplines colliding and quivering perceptions from a wealth of standpoints, is changing; like that of Pasquali and Chamandi, two women at the helm of a conscious revolution. Or better, of a "spiritually-guided zeal" filled with slow fashion and understated beauty. With the words clean, graphic, optimism, reflection, future, transparency, purity, air, energy and lightness all cited as reference for Chamandi's work, her practice collection channelled all of those things. But hers is a verve that serves as a weapon to accentuate her cultural underpinnings, feeding her soul-laced intention into those very seams we first got acquainted with. Truth be told, Chamandi's oeuvre prides on a uniform for the modern girl with her roots firmly anchored in modern culture, raising a glass in the name of elegance. Cheers to that. 💧



Crewneck bodysuit in inlaid viscose knit, LARA CHAMANDI. Platform boots, VERSACE.

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Lara Chamandi®



Long viscose knit dress with high neck and mesh pattern, LARA CHAMANDI. Earrings in recycled gold and drops of peridot, RUBINIA GIOIELLI. Opposite: Oversized shirt in silk twill printed with astrological motif, LARA CHAMANDI.



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THE CONSCIOUSNESS ISSUE

Low-waisted tailored trousers and viscose tank top with placed stretch marks, LARA CHAMANDI.