

STYLE

WEDNESDAY, MAY 26, 2010



Back to the future

Independent designer Chu Joe fills gallery-cum-boutique AMPM with playful whimsicality and an edgy attitude

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER

Independent fashion designer Chu Joe (朱書嫻) loves neon colors and adores loud designs such as animal prints and geometric patterns. She used to lament the nonexistence of leggings in local clothing shops. It wasn't until a few years ago during a trip to Canada and the US that Chu had a personal epiphany. She realized that everything she loved could be defined as 1980s style.

"I grew up playing Nintendo games and watching MTV ... I have always been drawn to the 1980s look but could not find [the designs] in Taiwan," the 32-year-old says, referring to the time before 1980s retro fashion took Taipei's hipster scene by storm.

Chu set up her fashion label Pet Shops Girl (寵物賣女孩) and co-founded boutique-cum-gallery AMPM around four years ago. After two changes of location, the stylish establishment has now moved to its current spot tucked away in an alley in Taipei's East District (東區), carrying Chu's indie women's fashion brand and the street clothing line RTTC.

AMPM's edgy interior exhibits a high level of craftsmanship and artistry as exemplified by ceiling murals inspired by the 1982 sci-fi classic *Tron* and graffiti and graphic art hung on a wall that showcases a variety of street styles and influences.

Outside, a window display shows what could be described as a 3D theatrical tableau featuring spray cans devouring Barbie dolls in a post-apocalyptic urban setting.

But the crimson and silver-colored boutique would be less flamboyant without Chu's outrageous fashion creations. A metalwork and jewelry-design major in college, Chu started her career hand-making necklaces and accessories with found items. The above-mentioned epiphany prompted the sassy hipster to become a full-fledged fashion designer who is now noted for her audacious use of vibrant neon colors as well as charmingly kitschy and whimsical designs and prints.

Chu's leggings (mostly NT\$1,000 to NT\$2,000) are saturated with new rave coloring and luminosity. The *Like a Virgin* Madonna of the 1980s is recalled in one of the designer's collections that features

a corset with black lace and lip print (NT\$2,580) and lace opera gloves (NT\$880).

Surprisingly, it is cinema, not fashion, that Chu considers her most important source of inspiration. "I was quite bummed out over my designs being the same as everyone else's in this 1980s craze. One day I saw *Cry Baby* and went 'Wow, that is super cool!'" she says.

The result is the 1950s-influenced collection Chu put out last September. It took her clients a month to get used to this new departure before they started to pick up items like the red wool jacket with puff shoulders (NT\$3,680) and high-waist pants with polka dot design (NT\$3,380, tie included). It is a big improvement, though, considering how back in 2007, it was five months before customers were willing to try out Chu's first batch of leggings.

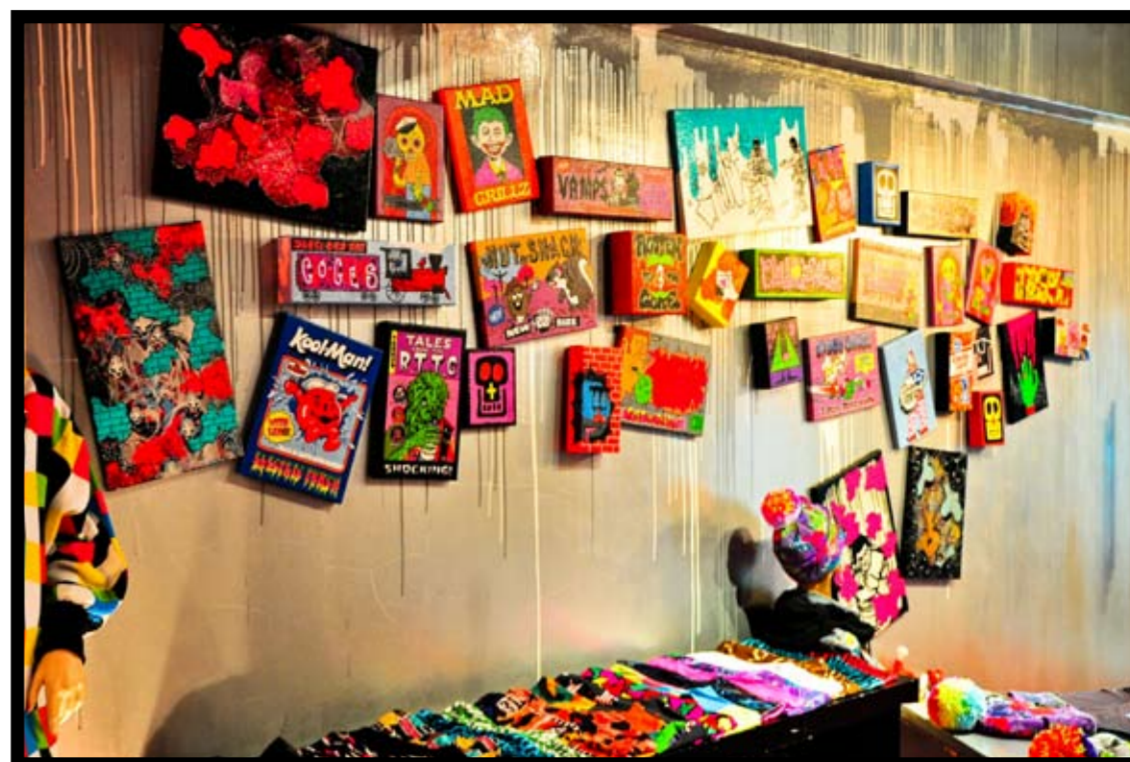
"You need to give people time to absorb and accept [different things]," Chu says. "Half of my clients are fashionistas and the other half are just ordinary people who want to be special."

What can best sum up Chu's fanciful tastes is probably the quickly sold-out handmade necklace collection titled "Kill Bear." A tribute to the *Kill Bill* movies, the pendants are made up of bear dolls in the process of being dismembered, with plenty of fake blood, made from knitting wool and chains.

"Lots of my designs look kind of sweet, humorous and sick at the same time," Chu says.

As for the latest collection Chu put together this month, it is all about the hippie style updated and re-interpreted. The line includes a high-waist skirt (NT\$2,380), dress (NT\$2,180), top (NT\$1,680) and leggings (NT\$1,480) in bright yellow and red, with a nod to ethnic clothing.

AMPM also doubles as a ticketing outlet for dance parties and music events. Ticket information and event news are regularly posted on Pet Shops Girl's Web site. The boutique's owners' involvement in fashion, music and the club scene has made it a hot spot frequented by cult celebrities including DJ Steve Aoki and party photographer Cobra Snake (real name Mark Hunter) when they are in town.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF RYAN CHEN AND AMPM



STORE NOTES:

WHAT: AMPM
WHERE: 5, Alley 26, Ln 205, Zhongxiao E Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市忠孝東路四段205巷26弄5號)
OPEN: 3pm to 9pm
TELEPHONE: (02) 2711-0581
ON THE NET: www.petshopsgirl.com

