



The equilibrium

Two sisters deftly balance the opposing forces of creativity and commerciality.

She sits upright in an empty room, pregnant with anticipation. She is, in fact, pregnant with many things—imagination, creation, intuition. She’s clothed in black from head to toe. Maybe Olivia Lin, 28, will never find a colour that suits her better, for black teems with possibilities.

But she—whom we meet in her studio, draped in black as well—lives in a different tenor. Amanda Lin, 26, the business brain of their partnership, follows the lead of her older sister. They are the epitome to how commerciality should run after creativity, and not the other way around.

The balance is a fragile sensibility honed over two decades of kinship. No one has it precisely figured out, but it has surfaced as a pressing issue in the fashion industry—a roulette of creative directors rotating between conglomerates, seeking a perfect lock and key fit. But really, design has a life of its own that the uninitiated will never grasp.

In pursuit of that, we study a point of convergence, that for two lines to meet, they must arrive from opposing directions. “I like things that are different, but she likes things that are commercially viable,” Olivia starts. “I

see what sells, and if we can earn from that,” adds Amanda.

Though the pair has very different tastes in art—psychedelics for Olivia, while Amanda is more object-focused—they converge on minimalism. “In terms of design, we look at Dieter Rams. The thing about him is you have to minimise [your designs] till you reach the final point, the perfect design...” Amanda trails off, before Olivia interjects: “The essence of design.”

The wardrobe that Olivia and Amanda offer their customers is pared-down—black jacket, white shirt, black trousers or denim jacket. The elder of the two thinks it’s irrelevant to have a complex product. “It is very important that the idea behind the art is bigger than the art itself,” Olivia says. “Like, for example, Elmgreen and Dragset; they are very conceptual, they are interested in social issues... and they use their art to communicate.” In the end, design transcends from its physicality towards greater concepts that exist beyond it.

It’s been two months since Inventory Co debuted. They opened their doors to those who are willing to seek out beautifully tailored, well-fitted staples. Olivia measures and drafts all her patterns, before personally cutting the fabric. She then sends the marked fabric to her *sifu* for machine work, after which it is returned to her a week later for fittings. With every step of her process, ethical concerns remain at the forefront in her mind—sustainable employment, fair wages, zero-wastage cutting, zero outsourcing.

Reactionary to our mass-produced, fast-fashion times, the Lin sisters capture perfectly the metaphor “rushing standstill” that French philosopher Paul Virilio coined. He spoke of speed and inertia—that speed is futile, and velocity will always return you to the starting line.

It’s a rapid-fire dynamic between the expressive Olivia and the prudent Amanda. All is in order when a pair of influences continually acts to cancel each other out, for only then will they enter a state of static equilibrium. ■