



**Gender-elusive beauty:** Lea T (left) at the 2011-2012 fall-winter collections in São Paulo; model Andrej Pejic in Jean Paul Gaultier this month

## The new transsexual chic

*Trans are front and centre in the fashion world these days. But for how long?*

WHEN GIVENCHY'S CREATIVE director Riccardo Tisci decided to photograph Brazilian model Lea T for the luxury clothing label's 2010 fall-winter promotional campaign, he had no idea what kind of impact it would have. The 28-year-old Ms. T.—formerly known as Leandro Cerezo—was the only transgender woman in the shoot. When word got out about Ms. T.'s past—that she was a man transitioning to be a woman—both indie fashion magazine *Lurve* and style bible *French Vogue* booked her for shoots. Even Oprah was onto the story.

"By doing the [Givenchy] campaign, I was thinking [I could help] another transsexual in a similar situation to me—being a female in the wrong body," said Ms. T. in an interview with *Models.com*. "I hope a 20-year-old transsexual can see me in a magazine and feel more comfortable with herself. It's a big message for girls and boys who are changing to say that people believe in us." On *Oprah* last month, Ms. T. walked a shocked audience through the medical process of transitioning from male to female (her gender reassignment surgery is reportedly scheduled for later this year).

Following Tisci's lead, French designer Jean Paul Gaultier recently capped off his spring 2011 couture collection in Paris by having male model Andrej Pejic walk down his runway in a wedding dress (the same one Rihanna wore at this year's Grammy awards). Although 19-year-old Pejic does not identify as a transsexual woman, his feminine figure and facial features had the majority of front-

row attendees convinced he was a she.

New York designer Marc Jacobs was so inspired by Pejic's gender-elusive beauty that he cast the Bosnian-born model in his women's wear spring campaign. Jacobs recently channelled his own feminine side by cross-dressing for a cover photo shoot with London-based magazine *Industrie* ("Mrs. Jacobs" read the cover line).

Katie Grand, the editor-in-chief of another U.K.-based style publication, called *Love*, took note of all this trend-making trans activity while producing the magazine's spring-summer issue. She deemed two covers "equally iconic" for the issue: a close-up of Justin Bieber and an image of Lea T. and supermodel Kate Moss locking lips. *Love's* timely issue was conceived at the same time upstart Thai airline P.C. Air announced its decision to hire transgender flight attendants, and a denim company named Acne was prepping its second collection of transsexual clothing.

This trans-takeover/makeover in fashion isn't just happening across the pond. One of North America's most famous transsexual women is Amanda Lepore. The long-time catwalk model now has her own makeup line (Collection Lepore), a namesake perfume deal (the scent retails at US\$550)—and a recording contract, with a full-length album

out in April. "It makes sense that women like me are having a moment in fashion and popular culture," says Lepore. "Who better than us to show others how the right makeup, clothes and hairstyle can transform you into something you are not born with?"

Yet another New York-based performer making tracks on the fashion and music front is singer-turned-model Nomi Ruiz. Labelled by style bloggers as "the trans superstar of tomorrow," Ruiz sang with dance-pop group Hercules and Love Affair and founded her own pop group, Jessica 6, prior to signing on as the spokesmodel for a swimwear company called Rica. "Big steps are being taken by the fashion community to really broaden the definition

of what is beautiful. Transsexuals should be in that definition," Ruiz says.

Still, can transgender women such as Ruiz seriously be considered beacons of change in an industry built on creating and destroying flavours

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of the month? (Givenchy has already replaced Lea T for its spring-summer 2011 campaign with an albino male model.) GLBT advocate Boy George (a.k.a. George O'Dowd), who revolutionized the concept of androgyny in the '80s with Culture Club, wonders if it's all just a "passing fancy." He hopes it isn't, though. "[Transgender] people represent the core of what fashion is—bringing your inside beauty outside." **ELIO IANNACCI**