

# WWD Los Angeles

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## THE CLUB SET

Long live the preppy! This tony girl keeps her chic style cool, clean and unfussy.



## Last Word

## MEETING OF THE MINDS

With help from their mentors, fashion design students learn about fabric, fitting and physics.

By Faye Hanson

Imagine a dress or a suit that reflects the colors and images of its surroundings, and you get a little closer to understanding what designer Isabel Toledo, illustrator Ruben Toledo and the senior class at the Otis School of Fashion Design are up to in their quest to create a future trend.

Otis and Isabel Toledo, who once again is part of the school's annual volunteer mentor program, are collaborating with the UCLA Media Arts department, under chair Victoria Vesna, in an exhibit of the creative and practical applications of nanotechnology, the manipulation of matter at the atomic and molecular level.

The UCLA group opened "Nano," an interactive exhibit at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, on Dec. 12. The show runs through September 2004. With its many installations, "Nano" serves to illustrate the concept by fragmenting, increasing and shrinking the size of an image. For example, when visitors enter the space, some two dozen cameras capture their image, which then appears as fragments (a partial head and shoulders here, a lower torso there) in other sections of the exhibit. The idea is that an environment — and matter, itself — alters with each new addition.

Mentor and designer Michelle Mason works with the senior class at the Otis School of Fashion.



In regards to fashion, the Toledos and their Otis charges are designing clothes of taffeta, organza, organdy and other lightweight textiles — all in white — into projectable, collapsible surfaces. The Toledos encourage their students to be "fearless with volume" in order for the shapes to collapse and form spontaneously new silhouettes. And no curves: Reflecting the atomic six-sided shape, only straight lines are allowed.

"It's the hardest project we've ever done in our 25 years," says Rosemary Brantley, the founding head of the Otis fashion department. "The clothes have to beautifully fit the female form — but they have to be able to drape to collapse. Bodies are boxes of muslin. Armholes are triangles. It's really forcing the students to understand perspective and how that perspective is translated in form and fabric."

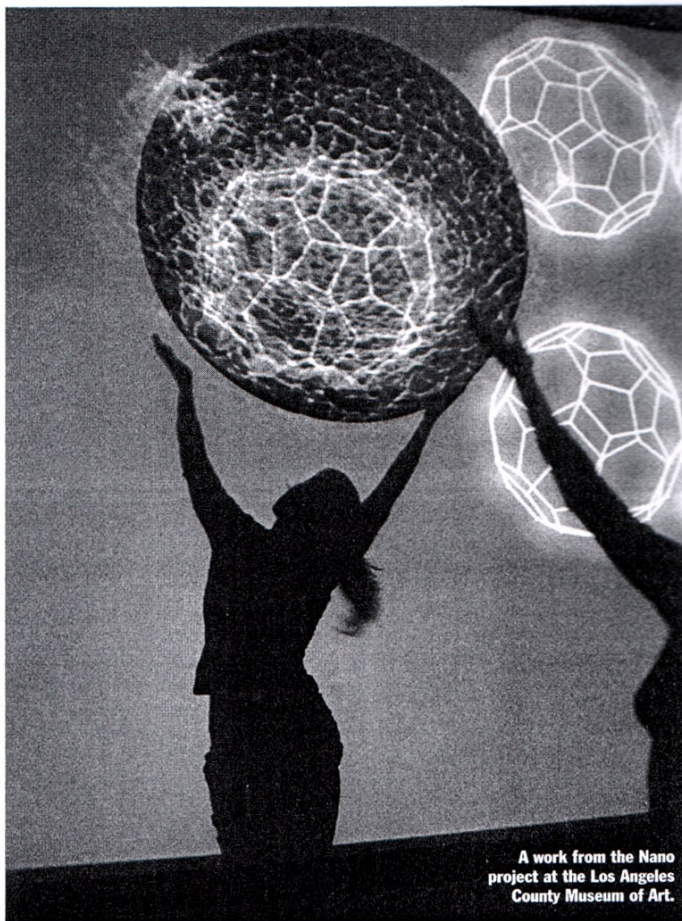
The results will bow at the Otis Scholarship Benefit and Fashion Show to be held May 1, and then become part of the LACMA exhibit thereafter.

The Nano project is the first of its kind for Otis and just the beginning of Brantley's new mission for the school and its mentoring program. "Our long-term objective is for Otis to be a think tank for experimental ideas and for innovators to come here first to try them out," she said.

The school claims a 95 percent placement rate in the industry, and the mentoring program has been integral to that.

This year, some 15 mentoring companies and designers — Michelle Mason, Rozae Nichols, Ghost's Tanya Sarne, La Blanca's Rod Beattie and a team from Mattel, which boasts 20 Otis alumni, among others — are working alongside groups of 13 juniors and seniors.

They direct students on individual projects, guiding them through critical stages of development — sketching, critiquing, making fabric selections and doing fittings. Upon completion, a jury selects only half of the 200 student garments to qualify for the May event.



A work from the Nano project at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Henry Duarte, known for his boutique brand of intricately crafted leather and denim collected by rock stars, is a veteran Otis mentor, as well as a former student.

"It's a rush to see all the talent. Each time I'm here I try to recruit someone for my team," he said.

And Isabel Toledo has made the trek out west from her Manhattan headquarters

for a decade now. "Being a mentor is a tool," she said, "and I am lucky to be able to keep mine well-oiled. Also, being a New Yorker, it is refreshing to feel the West Coast vibe."

For students like senior Patricia Delaunay, the mentoring experience is a precursor to real life. "This is like our dress rehearsal."