

"Then a new thing pops up. I get to make it a different way. It becomes a different style."

To Arbay, graphics and fashion designs are an ongoing building process. She uses Photoshop to create the design, makes the image into a screen print, and presses her own shirts and bags. And if the butterfly applique is in the wrong place or the print's not the right color, Arbay simply shrugs and reinvents the design.

I ask her which item she is most proud of making at the Style Shop.

"I made this shirt that has a cool logo on it. It has the letters 'BMG' on it, and it stands for 'Best Muslim Girl.'"

It is not until the next day after talking to Seth Capron, one of the founders of Workshop Houston, that I learned BMG is the name of the clothing line Arbay plans to start.

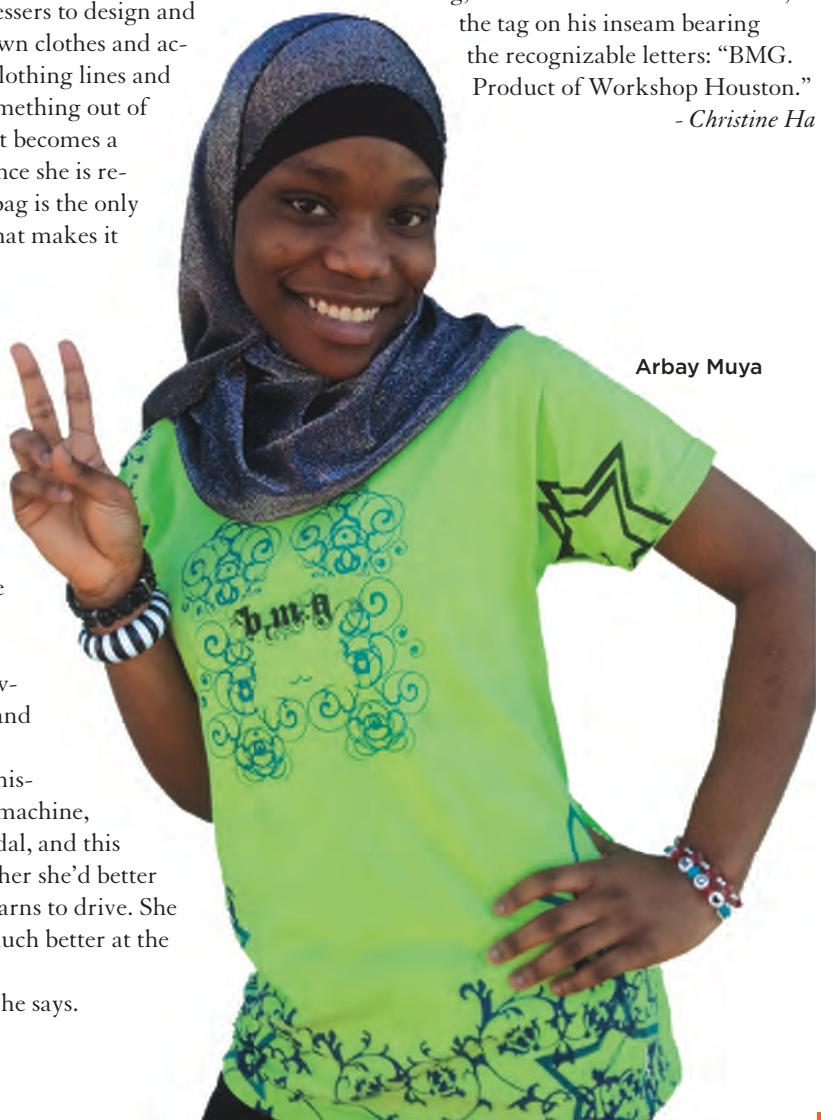
"Is this what you want to do when you grow up?" I ask.

"No, fashion's just a hobby." She tells me about taking care of her nephew when he's sick, how his chubby cheeks puff up when he laughs, how this makes her laugh. "I want to be a pediatrician. I want to help kids." I am marveling at her ambition when she cuts in. "I would be a kindergarten teacher but I don't want that headache."

So in the meantime, in the years before she'll have to leave the sewing machine for the stethoscope, Arbay can be found in an upstairs room of that converted four-plex on Sauer Street putting her thoughts onto cotton. Maybe by the time she is driving, having mastered lightness of foot, Arbay will be the proud face behind a local fashion label. Her nephew, who by then would be walking and talking, would don one of her T-shirts,

the tag on his inseam bearing the recognizable letters: "BMG. Product of Workshop Houston."

- Christine Ha



Arbay Muya

THIS ARTICLE FOLLOWS UP ON AN INTERVIEW IN THE PREVIOUS ISSUE OF C/ITE (84) WITH A STUDENT WHO DESIGNED AND BUILT HIS OWN BICYCLE AT WORKSHOP HOUSTON'S CHOPPER SHOP.

Under a haze that settles over the skyline, the houses-turned-workshops sit unassuming and quiet. Inside, though, there is a bustling of adolescent energy. Up a flight of steep stairs is the Style Shop where Arbay Muya spends her afternoons spinning ideas into clothes.

Before coming to the Style Shop, the 13 year old knew nothing about fashion. "I wore whatever clothes my mom got me." But since her participation in the program starting in September, Arbay has developed a sharp sense of personal style, rattling off her likes and dislikes as definitively as any designer in the industry. The Style Shop is Arbay's haven for fashionable self-expression, where she is free to use computers, sewing machines, screen prints, and pressers to design and produce her own clothes and accessories.

She learns about different clothing lines and fabrics, and how to sew and make something out of nothing. What was once an old t-shirt becomes a book bag for Arbay's schoolbooks. Since she is required to wear a uniform, this book bag is the only piece from her self-made collection that makes it onto school grounds.

I ask her if she's received requests to make these bags for her friends. Arbay nods. "But I told my friend to come here instead and make her own t-shirt bag. What if I make it a certain style, and she doesn't like it?" For a young girl, Arbay possesses a keen sensibility towards those around her, freely acknowledging the vast possibilities of creative pursuits, willing to leave others to their own devices. And in the midst of this growing awareness, she observes, ingests, and manufactures her own designs.

All this, of course, is not without mistakes. "When I first used the sewing machine, I would push too hard on the foot pedal, and this made the fabric move too fast." I tell her she'd better watch that leadened foot when she learns to drive. She laughs and quickly adds that she is much better at the foot pedal now.

"I like it when I make mistakes," she says.
I raise my eyebrows.

COMMUNITY

TALKING FASHION DESIGN

Workshop Houston's Style Shop