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NEW YORK, February 15, 2011

By Nicole Phelps

You didn't need to know that Kate and Laura Mulleavy had been watching the Terrence Malick movie *Days of Heaven* to ascertain that the sisters had taken the American Plains as their latest inspiration. The clues weren't exactly hard to follow on today's runway: silk gowns printed with a wheat field at the hem, ankle-grazing prairie coats, leather and ponyskin separates with geometric insets that called to mind quilts. The only items that might have thrown you off the scent were the pair of ruby red party dresses at the end. But as Kate explained afterward, "We couldn't go to Nebraska and Kansas and not do a *Wizard of Oz* reference."

Malick's film is a fashion favorite, but the Mulleavy sisters made the reference their own via their signature devotion to craft. The quilting on the pinafore tops and apron skirts was appliquéd by hand, and the wool and mohair sweaters likewise never saw the

inside of a knitting machine. The question is this: Will these clothes, with their countrified starting points, entrance the label's clientele of urban sophisticates the way previous collections have? Dr. Lisa Airan, after all, walked into the 12 p.m. show in a sheer ivory Rodarte cocktail dress studded with gold crystals. The answer? Yes, with the exception perhaps of the sentimental floral embroideries. For one, the show's longer silhouettes jibed with the current fashion zeitgeist. And for another, the Mulleavys continue to push into categories that they've ignored before. It's hard to recall a single coat from their last several Fall collections; here there were plenty to choose from—and thanks to technically accomplished cutouts at the sides of the torso, they looked quite unique.

Commercial is the wrong word for it, but there's no debating the fact that Kate and Laura are steadily getting savvier about the business end while maintaining their singular vision.

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