

Cincinnati CityBeat



All That Sparkles

Nathan Hurst's new fashion line is edgy and heavily embellished

MATT MORRIS // AUG 12, 2009

In the past, I have noted the unique, handmade artistic fashions of Nathan Hurst at downtown parties like the Contemporary Art Center's Contemporary Fridays.

Hurst's first artistic fashion show, *Off with Their Heads*, is this Friday at CS13, a new gallery and music venue in Over-the-Rhine. It will feature a runway show winding down the building's fire escape, to be followed by a party DJed by Northside Nick.

Hurst will collaborate with the Cincinnati-based dance company Pones Inc. for a modern-dance/fashion show as part of semantics gallery's annual fundraiser on the evening of Aug. 29 in Brighton. Plans also are underway for a fashion and hair show sponsored by Pump Salon in September at an as-yet-undetermined location (keep updated at www.pumpsalon.com).

Intrigued by the attention he's garnering for his DIY couture — his signature Urban Regalia label's neckpieces, elaborate jackets and other accoutrements — I meet Hurst at his workshop in Northside to discuss his creations.

His studio is stacked with bins of tassel fringe, sequins, brooches, feathers and silks. A copy of the film *Sex and the City* lies under his desk. Hurst recalls his childhood in Clermont County's New Richmond as full of imagination.

“When I was a kid, I would try to dress up as a knight,” he says. “But then, I also did a lot of dressing up as the princess too!”

Hurst’s sewing is self-taught — he has no formal training in fashion design — and often employs alterations. He will radically repurpose a garment.

“I take things out of context and give them a different meaning. I’m interested in playing with the fabric rather than constructing something systematically,” he says.

A skirt may be reinvented as a shirt or more exotic transformations may be made, like an ascot from baby blankets. Asymmetry abounds with vests and jackets coming together in unexpected ways, or dresses that widen at the neck and tighten around the hips.

His Urban Regalia collection is appropriately full of dramatic flair and embellishment. Gold fringe and buttons sparkle across many of the garments, suggestive of imperial ceremonies. Putting on one gold sequined half jacket to show me the fit, he explains, “Some people like these, some people don’t. The people who do tend to like Lady Gaga.”

Certainly, the daring nonconformity that goes into the Dance Pop singer’s wardrobe is echoed in Hurst’s creations. Along with references to diva stage costumes, Hurst’s work sometimes quotes Roman tunics and other historical costume. As he brings out another piece, he smiles mischievously, “My inspiration for this one is a Spanish bullfighter, a really tacky one.”

The word “armor” often arises in Hurst’s descriptions. He says that these clothes are meant to project invulnerability and power.

“I take things and make them look armored, like those fabric flowers that are stiffened,” he points out, gesturing to a light-blue neck piece in which white collars and cuffs have been folded and hardened in the forms of origami flowers. “I feel differently when I put these clothes on. I feel stronger, like a different personality.”

Hurst says he prefers showing in galleries to boutiques. “The art world is my peer group more than the fashion world. These clothes are more art for me. And I have to have at least one piece of art on me every day.”

The Off with Their Heads fashion show featuring the work of Nathan Hurst is at CS13 (1219 Sycamore St., Over-the- Rhine) Friday at 8 pm. For more info, e-mail contemporaryspace13@gmail.com.