

A Russian Artist's Fashionable Flights

By RUTH LA FERLA

NOVEMBER 14, 2011 6:27 PM November 14, 2011 6:27 pm 2 Comments



Steven Kasher

GalleryA detail from “Wall of Textile Samples,” by Louda Larrain.



Steven Kasher Gallery“Bride to Be,” by Louda Larrain.

There are plenty of arresting moments in “Idols,” an exhibition of photographs by Gilles Larrain of the denizens of Max’s Kansas City in the 1970s. Mr. Larrain’s searingly colorful portraits — the likes of Harvey Fierstein, Taylor Mead, Holly Woodlawn and the New York Dolls vamping in shrill makeup and assorted states of dishabille — were first

published in the '70s. Since going on view earlier this month at the Steven Kasher Gallery in Chelsea, they've drawn a steady stream of visitors.

Just as intriguing, though, if more discreet, is the ancillary installation at the rear of the gallery, a collection of patchwork teddies and wraithlike mannequins made out of cloth, their extrusions of tulle and silvery techno-fabrics lending them an otherworldly air. Daft cuddle toys for grown-ups, they are the brainchild of Louda, Mr. Larrain's wife, who embellished them with Frankenstein stitching. "I'm quite sure they will make people think of Tim Burton," she said, acknowledging that the artist and filmmaker has long been a personal idol.



Steven Kasher

Gallery "Crochet Bear."

Coming of age in Brezhnev-era Russia, Louda, 50, who is known in art circles by her first name only, found herself drawn to the landmarks of Western pop culture, especially films like "Apocalypse Now," "Taxi Driver" and those of Mr. Burton, which she rented by the day and viewed in the company of the fellow artists who shared her communal work-and-living space near Red Square. At the time, she nursed an ambition to become a fashion designer, only to have it quashed. "To be a designer in those days was not considered intellectual enough," she recalled dryly.

Eventually she decamped for Paris to create one-of-a-kind wearable art pieces and textiles interlaced with shreds of cloth and embroidery. Her crazy-quilt of rainbow-colored swatches, which cover a far wall of the Kasher gallery, are made mostly from remnants of the custom-stitched fabrics she fashioned by hand for Christian Lacroix, Emanuel Ungaro and Thierry Mugler, among others, in the '80s and early '90s.

In those heady days, as Louba recalled, no notion was too outlandish, impractical or extravagant to find its way onto the runways, not the silk and raffia stems she incorporated into Mr. Lacroix's designs, nor the gorilla fur favored by Mr. Mugler, with whom she collaborated for a time. "And he never even used the fabric," she said with no trace of regret.

A decade ago, when she arrived in New York, artisanal fashions were in demand, and stores like Bergdorf Goodman and Neiman Marcus began to showcase her designs. But she found the production cycle taxing and, finally, unrewarding. "You just keep repeating what sells," she said. "Today I'm much better off making much less, designing just one piece at a time, but a really loved piece."

The audience for her quirky, custom-made fashions (loudacollection.com) is limited, she knows, but she likes it that way. "I do sell my work," she confided, "but I sell it very lazily."