

Art on Your Sleeve | Amy Yao for JF & Son

CULTURE By MARINA CASHDAN SEPTEMBER 8, 2011, 11:00 AM

Performance art meets fashion in “My Favorite Things” at JF & Son.

Not many fashion labels can boast an in-house art curator, but for Jesse Finkelstein and Katie King, the designers behind the New York label JF & Son, Travis Boyer is an accessory they can't live without. Through my “My Favorite Things,” JF & Son works on at least four collaborative collections per year as well as various one-off collaborations. Last year, for example, the artist Ulrike Müller translated her 8.5-by-11-inch pencil drawings into quilts; a version of this project was part of the 2010 Cairo Biennial. “We're trying to be a little more spontaneous,” Finkelstein explains. “It's not about creating a lifestyle for our customer. Adds King: “It's more about creating a vision that appeals to the community.”



Their community, it seems, is made up mostly of fashionable, artsy women. The collaborations have resulted in very interesting collections that are far from conservative, including one with the performance artists Sonya Robbins and Layla Childs of robbinschilds and another with K8 Hardy. “This is a way of giving these artists access to very specific but super-thorough production capabilities — making multiples and using people who are trained to do artisanal things like beading,” Boyer says. Last year, Boyer encountered the artist Amy Yao, whose performance for MoMA PS1's “Greater New York 2010” involved burning a copy of GQ magazine. Boyer knew right away she would be perfect for a project. “All the issues that we tend to engage with have a feminist approach and think critically about fashion and body image,” Finkelstein says. “Amy's work plays with many of those things, so it made a lot of sense.”

According to the duo, Yao's 25-piece collection of clothing and jewelry, “Another Masterpiece!!” which will be shown in a special public performance at the JF & Son storefront on University Place, has been the most fun yet. Highlights include “Baby Boo's Birthday Suit,” multicolored and monotone sequined bodysuits; “YYSL,” a transparent dress with a skirt of synthetic hair; and “Neck Beard,” a necklace made from lime green-colored synthetic hair. Yao considers each piece a work of art, “activated by the presence of someone wearing them, so the consumer becomes the performer without knowing it,” she says. Baby Boo is a reoccurring character in her work whom she describes as “a sexy ghost” dressed in a sheet and high heels, and a “very judgmental and passive character.”

And there are collaborations within the collaboration: a poster and photo print by the photographers David Benjamin Sherry and Michele Abeles featuring the artist Lisa Jo as a model and an ikebana artwork by Carissa Rodriguez; an invitation to the presentation by Yao and the graphic designer Geoff Han; and a “spiritual collaboration” with Wendy Yao, the artist's sister, who will host a second performance of the collection, titled “Another Another Masterpiece!!,” in October, at her store/gallery Ooga Booga in Los Angeles.

Later this year, Finkelstein, King and Boyer will collaborate with the artist Julia Sherman on a collection of nuns' habits, “nunderwear” and draped hoods; a line of dresses with the artist Louise Despont; and their first men's-wear collection with the artist and “action weaver” Travis Meinolf. Which is to say nothing of the JF & Son collection they design themselves.



A public viewing of “Another Masterpiece!!” will be held on Thursday from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. (performance at 8 p.m.) at JF & Son storefront, 56 University Place. For more information, go to jfanson.com