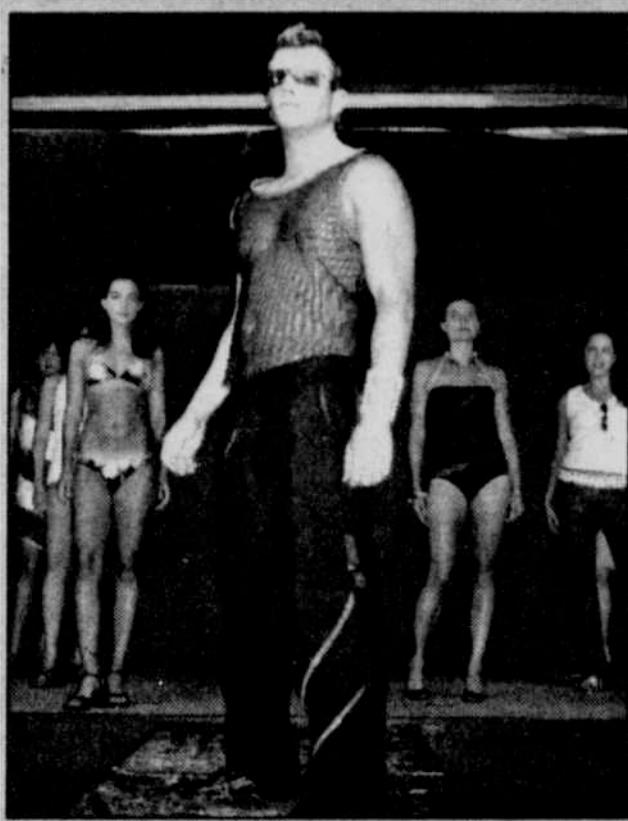


Lighting up the runway



Future fashion designer Cameron Hamilton models clubwear at a recent PDX Fashion Incubator show

PDX Fashion Incubator—a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping designers and entrepreneurs succeed creatively and monetarily—played host to one of a handful of runway fund-raisers July 27 at the Blue Monk in preparation for September's Fashion Week. Executive director Stella Farina welcomed about 100 guests to this fashion-show teaser featuring recent works of local designers that ranged from swanky swimwear to summer evening dresses to dance-fever club couture.

The evening's highlight was the oh-so-cute Cameron Hamilton, the token guy strutting his stuff in hot club duds befitting with red lines of patent leather, fishnet accents and cargo-style pockets by Kaplanova. Though we wish he'd stay on the runway where we can see him, look for this gay hottie to join Portland's fashion ranks as a designer when he moves out of his University of Oregon dorm room and into the Fashion Incubator sometime next year.

PDX Fashion Incubator will play host to Portland's first-ever Fashion Week from Sept. 15 to 19 at Portland Art Museum, 1219 S.W. Park Ave. A "People's Choice" awards ceremony will accompany a fashion finale featuring the spring 2004 collections from local designers. For details visit www.pdxfashionincubator.org.

—MEB

Photo-philology

Charming jewelry designer pictures big business

by Timothy Krause

"I'm just enraptured by the myth of photographs," exclaims Heather Pittenger. "You hear all these stories about how these people were, but when you see them in photographs, it tells you a different story."

Pittenger's obsession with old photos, especially those that speak to feminism or sexual minorities, once led her to discover a rare cache at a Portland antique store.

"I had tears running down my face," she recalls. "Here was this picture from the late '40s of these two women kissing at a party.... The woman has a child, and it seems to me the father is this nelly gentleman who has all these wonderful other [male] friends. Then there are all these portraits of just him, her and this child with grandparents that look totally Victorian and have no idea what's going on around them."

These moments captured in time spoke to Pittenger. As her collection grew, she knew she had to find a way to share "these crazy people doing crazy things." So this 33-year-old queer jewelry designer borrowed a friend's idea for placing tiny photos into charms and launched a business, Charming Zelda, a play on the name her father always wanted to give her.

Working from a studio in the inner Southeast Portland home she shares with her partner, Katie, Pittenger carefully cuts out color reductions of her prized photos. Then she pulls out her dictionary—one of her favorite books, she confesses—to collect words she'll place on the reverse side. Words such as *king*, *tramp* and *buckaroo*.



By juxtaposing antique photos with words of endearment that hold a surprisingly modern sensibility, Heather Pittenger reinterprets myths of days gone by



"From that point on, I pretty much work on the juxtapositions. A lot of times I have ideas in my mind about what the image is going to do, but sometimes it floats around until it finds a match," Pittenger says. "Probably most of my time goes into that part of the charm, deciding which pictures goes with which words."

For example, one bauble reveals a shapely woman dressed in bold horizontal stripes. On the reverse appears the word *revolution*. Another shows the picture of a baby chicken opposite the word *mighty*.

Although the words and pictures range from naughty to nice, sex is what sells. "People really go for the sexy charms because a lot of times people can't say what they want," says Pittenger, explaining how charms encourage intimacy. "You have to invite someone into your space. And that's one thing that can go terribly wrong with the charms, too. You definitely don't want to wear the nun-with-the-boobs out to the grocery store unless you're willing to deal with people and their issues."

Pittenger sandwiches the image and its literary twin between glass, wraps copper foil around the edges and solders the piece together. Each charm comes strung on simple chain that she procures from the neighborhood hardware store, but the loop also is large enough to attach to a bracelet or necklace.

While working at Bagdad Theater, Pit-

tenger began to sell her one-of-a-kind jewelry to employees and friends. But her passion soon became public when she took a batch of 10 charms to the owner of Greg's, a retail shop across the street on Southeast Hawthorne Boulevard that began carrying the Charming Zelda line six years ago. She since has recruited two additional retail outlets in downtown and Northwest Portland.

"That's the hardest part—representing yourself," says Pittenger. "Just following through and learning how to get to the next step. I've failed miserably at that—until these past two years."

That's when things began to change. Instead of juggling her creative entrepreneurship with working at a flower shop, offering child care or selling antiques, Pittenger now focuses exclusively on mixing art and business. She's still a one-woman operation, but instead of making a dozen unique charms, Pittenger is churning out hundreds. Many are traveling with her to the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, but others are for the launch of her commercial line carried by Holden and Co., a wholesale representative of hand-crafted jewelry.

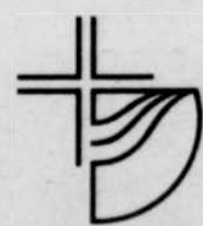
"I have lived on the edge for so long. That used to be really important to me. I didn't want to give in and play this game that I was repulsed by. But, ultimately, it's only going to benefit me to succeed and take care of myself so that I can help take care of the rest of the people in my life," she says.

Making her creativity pay doesn't mean she's giving up the charm's emotion. Amid mass production, Pittenger still sneaks in a few unique amulets for the added element of surprise and a nod to fate.

"Sometimes I'll make 20 of one kind I know will sell, but I'll make one just by itself that has nothing to do with anything—other than it's something I'm trying to say. Maybe it will never sell. Maybe I'll give it away. But maybe somebody will come along and say, 'Oh my goodness, this is so meaningful to me,'" says Pittenger. "This is my little way of speaking my mind. It's definitely one of the only ways I get any points across...this is like my little revolution."

CHARMING ZELDA jewelry can be found at Greg's, 3707 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd.; Retread Threads, 931 S.W. Oak St.; and Stella's, 1108 N.W. 21st Ave. Contact Pittenger at charmingzelda@yahoo.com.

Features Editor TIMOTHY KRAUSE can be reached at tim@justout.com.



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