

A REVOLUTIONARY ART EXHIBIT

The Schnitzer's ***West of Center*** will flip the museum establishment in more ways than one **BY ALEX NOTMAN**

The UO Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art is trying to capture an era, an art movement, a revolution. When artists use drugs, publications, shelter and lifestyle as tools for expression just as artists preceding them employed cameras, paint and clay; when artworks don't fit neatly into a gilded frame or beneath a sparkling glass case, museums must adapt and turn the establishment on its head.

Like the glow of a firefly in a jar, the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art (JSMA) will attempt to capture the light and art of the '60s and '70s in the American West. Opening Feb. 8, *West of Center: Art and the Countercultural Experiment in America* will document and recreate the ephemeral art of an explosive 12-year period in this country's history, 1965 to 1977. Originally curated by the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, the exhibit not only explores the relationship between art and activism but also encourages us to explore the legacy of an artistic era whose effects still reverberate in Eugene, seen in local architecture and happenings like Oregon Country Fair and the SLUG Queen pageant. From inflatables to domes, the Cockettes to *The Black Panther* newspaper, psychedelic light shows to radical feminist lesbian communes, the JSMA is about to become a revolutionary playground.

GENDERFUCK AND THE RADICAL THEATER OF THE COCKETTES

In the late '60s, performance artist Fayette Hauser went for half a year without uttering a word. "I had a psychic overload with LSD and all these hallucinogenics and I didn't speak for like six months," Hauser tells *EW*.

That was the beginning of Hauser's time with the Cockettes, a post-gender, "high drag" theater troupe living in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco from the late '60s to early '80s. The troupe blurred the distinction between performance and everyday life, wearing their handmade, elaborate glittering costumes and visages not only on the stage for productions like *Journey to the Center of Uranus*, but also when walking around their neighborhoods or watching movies at home.

"The Merry Pranksters meets The Living Theater was what the Cockettes were," Hauser says. Like The Living Theatre, the Cockettes tore down the hierarchical structure of traditional theater and created a more communal experience, dissolving the wall between performer and audience.

The troupe also blurred the lines of gender and sexual orientation. "All the Cockettes, if not physically then definitely in their heads, were bisexual. It didn't matter what your gender was *at all*," Hauser says, laughing. Often described as genderfuck — or mocking traditional gender roles — Hauser notes that it was less about gender-flipping and more about expressing your "internal psychic persona." The glitter-bearded Hibiscus (née George Edgerly Harris III, Jr.), perhaps the most famous Cockette, said in a 1980 interview, "Instead of dressing in drag, I was dressing more as gods. We were all creating mythic figures."



COCKETTE FAYETTE HAUSER
AS HER 'COSMIC GYPSY' PERSONA