



UnRAVE



On the day of our shoot, painter Kimberly Brooks was just back from Paris and eager to show off a stash of vintage fashion drawings she had unearthed there—the kind with cascading heads of fallible pink hair and elaborate so-on interiors in the background. Also, she was about to host a cocktail party to unveil a just-completed wedding portrait of a friend—a ceremonial monument to youth and surreal beauty in which the bride's voluminous red dress takes up the room and tells the story of the piece. A rough rendering with a crisp Art-as-affected symmetry, it was also reminiscent of those old Renaissance pictures of nobility where the richly made clothes were often the focal point of the portrait, even more so than the sitters' face sometimes. Garments have functioned as indicators of social and/or economic status in the art, just like in real life since long before the modern era of the glossy magazine-burlesque, label-obsessed trendsetter. And visual art and fashion can be described using a lot of the same words: pattern, movement, volume, structure, texture, palette, story. But in the art of Kimberly Brooks, fashion is a whole language unto itself, in which garments are decisions not only for encoding meaning—look-wise, but also for sculpting, so to speak, and tumble, industrialize, and increasingly abstract capability. "It's a way for me to craft into abstraction. It all hasn't been done in art, but the way it could be."

D HOW PAINTER KIMBERLY BROOKS RIPS FASHION APART

TEXT: SHANA NYSÉ CAMBROT
PHOTOS: VALERIE MANN

Before her post-graduate art studies at UCLA and Columbia, Brooks majored in English literature at UC Berkeley, so it makes sense that she'd be interested in the narrative potential of fashion as a visual language. For the record, she never actually wanted to be a fashion designer, but through grad school and beyond, her lifelong love of fashion has endured. "I secretly paint people I see at cocktail parties!" Attending a talk hosted by the LACMA Costume Council on Elia Schiaparelli and Coco Chanel's influence on Henri Matisse's Post-Impressionist paintings, Brooks was blown away by the fabulous aging couture creators in the audience. "Those women became the instant inspiration for 'The Stylist Project'—her first solo show with Oliver C. de la Torre at the Dardoba Gallery, in which famous professional stylists like Grace Kodjington (Veggie), Larie Lynn (Mad Men), and Kraine Phillips (Madonna) were asked to dress themselves or models in their parlors. "So I do help people interpret themselves for the public. I was asking them to illustrate small moments in their lives that they themselves were 'artistic.'"

The paintings in the first iteration of "The Stylist Project" (a new series of her subjects' NYC on-the-go portraits is currently underway) were provocative and haunting, and often featured great swaths of finely detailed fabrics and riotous color. There was a lot of emotion and intimacy, so Brooks remains not conscious of her role as portraitist even as she willfully began to unravel the perfection of the staged scenes with loose brush strokes, oblique perspectives, and broken poses—all in the service of exploring the aversion between fashion and modern art. By her second show with Taylor de Cordoba, "Thread," her paintings had gotten weirder and more broken down than ever. The runway-ready theatricality and intensive detailing of earlier work was becoming increasingly loose and unraveled so to speak—like someone who can paint well but has chosen not to. Those paintings were smaller, emptier, and darker, featuring barely resolved figures, architecture, and clothing. All she says for next show in 2018 will be her most abstract yet. "The most exciting place for me is in between abstraction and figuration. And what makes me most excited is watching women moving toward the abstract." There's still a pull to what she says, as the moment in which painting isn't only about interest, it's also the busk of the two. And what Brooks is up to with the way she deploys her disparate ideas about fashion, deconstructing it to be reassembled in a new way, is right on trend.

|| THE MOST EXCITING PLACE FOR ME IS IN BETWEEN ABSTRACTION AND FIGURATION, AND IS IT JUST HOW ARE MORE WOMEN PAINTERS MOVING TOWARD THE ABSTRACT? ||



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