



hue

CURRENT STORIES

CONTENTS ▾

ABOUT

hue

RESEARCH/INNOVATION
BUSINESS
DESIGN/ART
THE COLLEGE
CULTURE

Q SEARCH

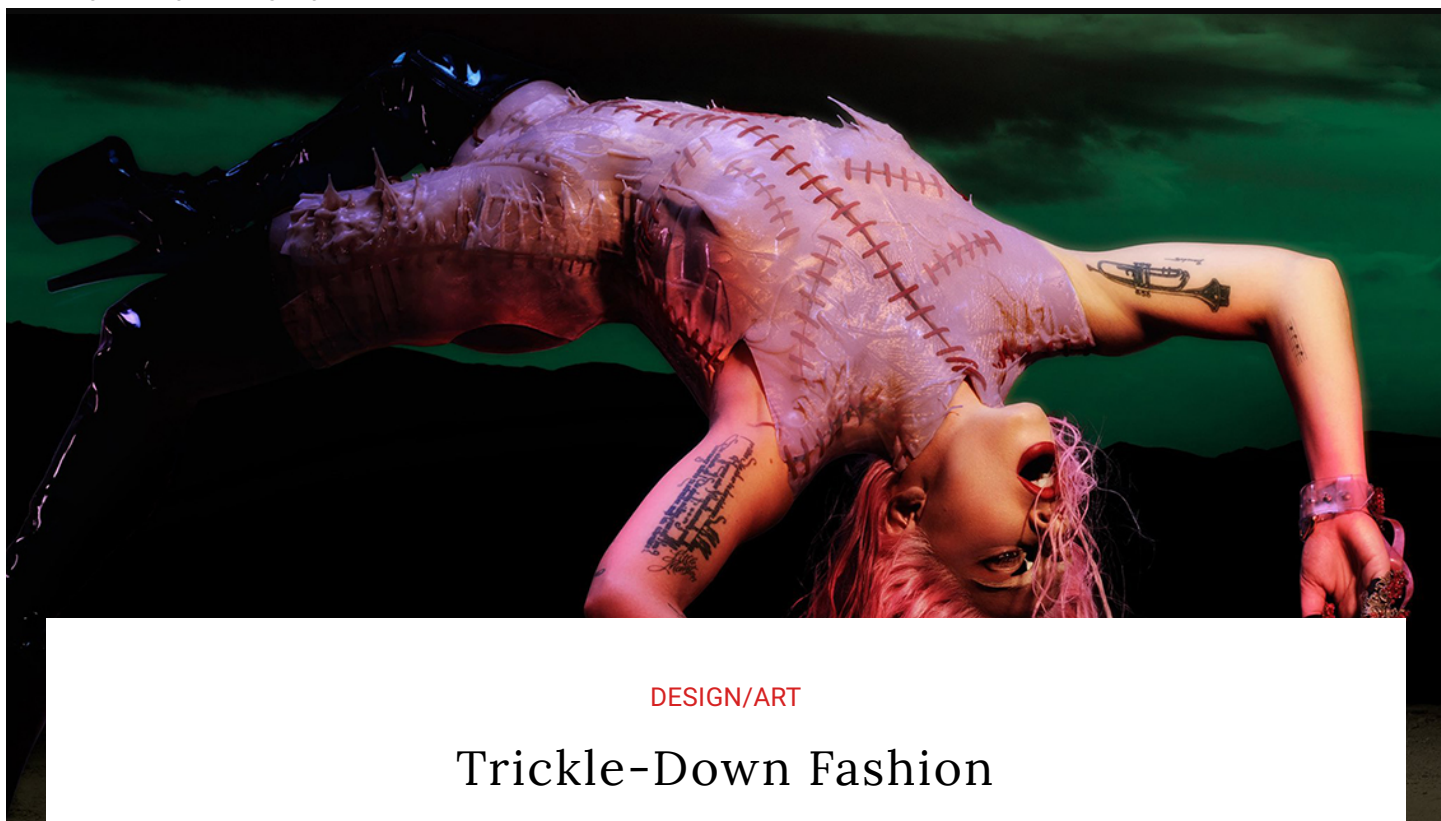
PAST ISSUES

FIT HOME

NEWSROOM

READING

TRICKLE-DOWN FASHION



DESIGN/ART

Trickle-Down Fashion

Kristina Kiss, Accessories Design '09, helped construct Lady Gaga's avant-garde *Chromatica* look

by Winnie McCroy

At FIT, Kristina Kiss spent her days striving for top marks and her nights debuting her designs at Lower East Side dive bars. That's where Kiss first met Lady Gaga, whose fearless style inspired her.

"When I was younger, I was a real hothead. I got crazy stressed and wanted to punch things and throw stuff," admits Kiss, a small-town principal's daughter. "Fashion became an outlet."

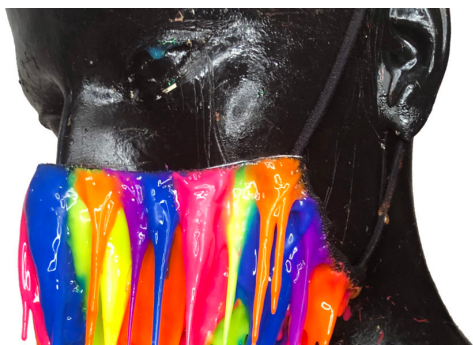
After graduating, Kiss designed footwear for Calvin Klein, but her passion was establishing her brand, [SSIK Designs](#). "I was a little punk who wore and sold ripped-up tees with spikes, heavy chains, and splattered paint everywhere," she says. "NYC's graffiti art influenced me a lot."

Searching for a new medium, she seized upon the unique dripped-silicone technique that became her trademark look.

"I tried dripping paint or wax on a mannequin to create gold shoulders," Kiss says, "until this special FX makeup artist gave me a quick 101 on silicone. It was exactly what I wanted! Drip collars became my first bestseller."



Kristina Kiss wearing her own designs.





Kiss's signature drip design technique.

Transferring the technique to various garments with stunning results, Kiss realized she could carve her own path. Through monthly classes, she mastered adhesives, epoxies, mold making, pigments, glitter, and above all, patience. After her '[black drippy mermaid](#)' look helped fellow FIT alum Aquaria (Giovanni Palandrani) win Season 10 of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, Lady Gaga's stylists reached out.

By 2018, Gaga was well established as a pop provocateur and had vacillated from looks like the infamous meat dress to the luxe glamour of designers Alexander McQueen, Yves Saint Laurent, and Marc Jacobs. But for her sixth album, *Chromatica*, Gaga was ready to return to the pastiche of avant-garde and cyberpunk of her early days. [Videos](#) for the album featured "Kindness Punks" clad in candy-colored embellishments, fighting for kindness and love in a post-apocalyptic landscape.



Kiss designed costumes for Lady Gaga's *Rain On Me* music video.

Kiss was among designers reviving Gaga's signature sartorial weirdness. "I wanted something with shock value," she says, "a combination of scary and sexy."

SSIK Designs collaborated with Studio Formichetti's Marta del Río, constructing pieces including the pink/purple silicone bodice seen in the *Rain on Me* video and the flesh suture stitch bodysuit Gaga wore in the *Chromatica* album art.

"They'd ordered custom batches for possible use, but I didn't believe it was real until my Instagram blew up," Kiss says. "I got daily orders from Gaga's incredibly loyal fans," allowing experimentation with crazier designs and techniques.



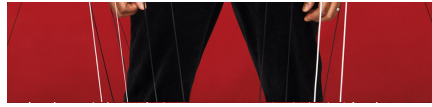
Debbie Harry



Billy Porter



Amanda Lepore



Noted costume designer Patricia Field selected Kiss for her boutique of small-batch designs, and the apparel flew off the showroom floor. *Bust* magazine featured Billy Porter wearing a collared blazer hung with crystalline silicone. Kiss's work graced red carpets and the vestiaries of Neil Patrick Harris, Debbie Harry, and downtown glitterati Amanda Lepore and Susanne Bartsch. She received costume commissions for the Hugh Jackman film *The Greatest Showman* and the TV series *Gotham*.

Kiss spent the pandemic mastering the creation of silicone lips, skulls, and spiked teeth. She forwards new ideas to Gaga's team, grateful for the exposure. "It put me on the map," Kiss says. "I discovered I don't want to grow up—I can be this fucking weirdo for a living."

SHOW MORE ▾

TAGS

#ACCESSORIES DESIGN

#CHROMATICA

#KRISTINA KISS

#LADY GAGA

#SILICONE DRIP

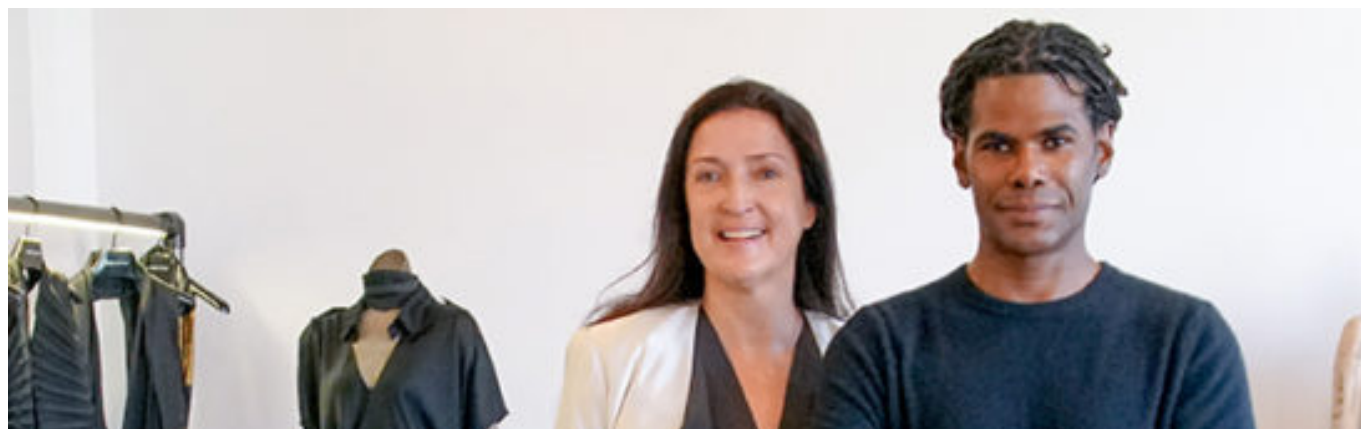
#SSIK DESIGNS

Related





Tickled Blue



It Takes Two



The Persistence of Memory



Virtually There

CATEGORIES

Business
Culture
Design/Art
Inspiration
Research/Innovation
Retail Spotlight
The College

FOLLOW FIT ALUMNI



CONTACT US

hue@fitnyc.edu

FOLLOW FIT



THE MAGAZINE OF FIT



© Hue Magazine