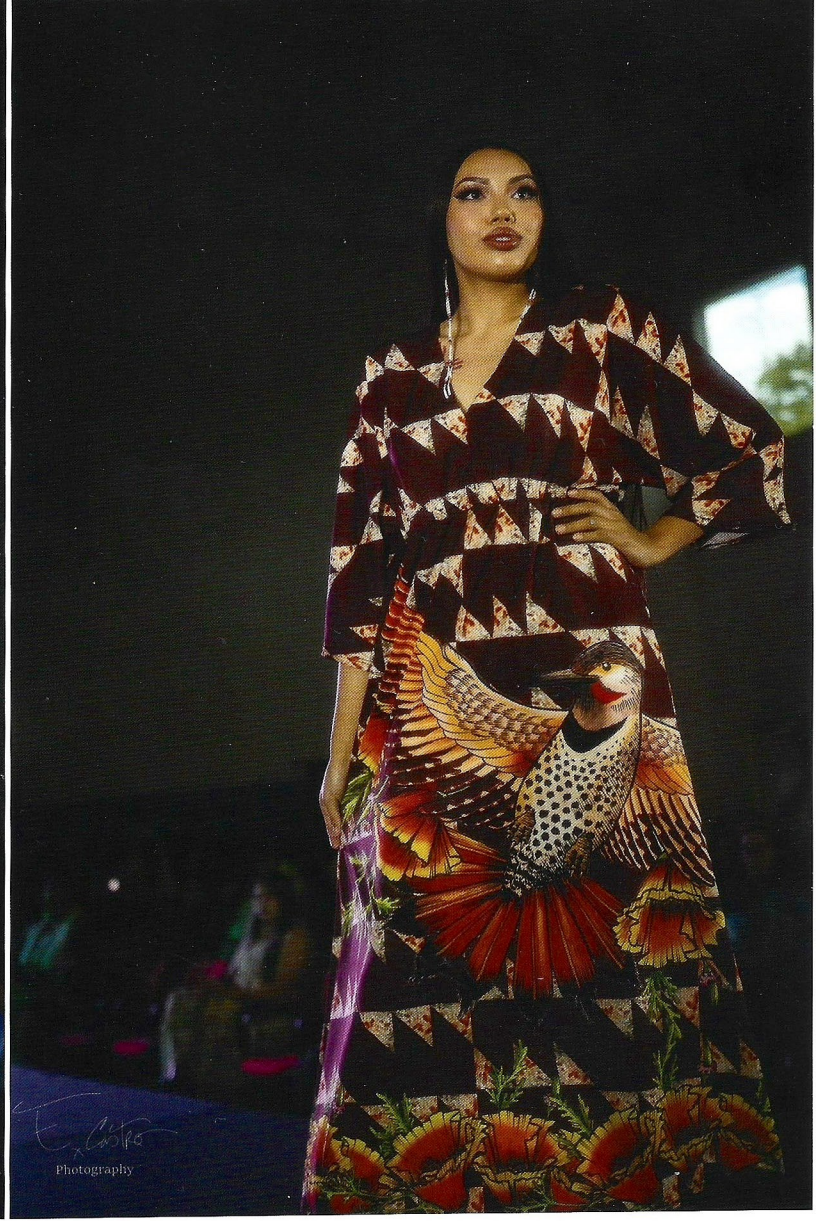




NATIVE QUEEN RISING

Meet Virginia Hedrick, the Yurok designer who is emerging onto the fashion landscape with her collaboration-driven brand Native Queens Design



by
Niya Degroat

Sacramento-based fashion artist Virginia Queen Hedrick, an enrolled member of the Yurok Tribe of California, didn't get her start in fashion taking

the traditional route. She didn't grow up sewing nor did she attend fashion school. In fact, the thirty-nine-year-old mother and wife currently serves as executive director for the Consortium for Urban Indian Health, with years of experience in public health and Indian health advocacy.

"I moved from the Yurok reservation to Los Angeles at the age of eighteen," said Hedrick. "Once I got there, I felt

invisible, and I was racially misclassified on a regular basis. No one ever guessed, 'Oh, you're Yurok? You're Native?'" To counter those types of interactions, Hedrick began using Native style as a shield: "I began wearing jewelry and clothing that had Native prints. Something to signal to other people that I was something different, that I was Native in some way, without having to say words."

Her admiration for established Indigenous designers such as Bethany Yellowtail, Jamie Okuma, and Red Berry Woman only fueled her interest in fashion. Recognizing a lack of northwest coast artistry in the market, she attempted to make a print-on-demand dress using her sister-in-law's

ceremonial dress as inspiration. "My sister is a traditional regalia maker, and at the time, she was making a dress for my daughter's upcoming ceremony," recalled Hedrick. "I asked her, 'Can I take some digital photos of this dress and try to design a print-on-demand version for us? One for you and one for me. It could be fun!'"

With her sister-in-law's approval, Hedrick forged ahead. Weeks later, the dresses came back, and Hedrick was not at all pleased with the results. "I hated them!" she chuckled. "They looked so bad. The white shells looked blue, and the placement of the designs were off." Hedrick was deflated and ready to throw it all away, but her sister-in-law kept the dresses and encouraged her to

continue experimenting. “She said to me, “This is your first time. Just keep trying.”

Shortly after, in May 2024, Hedrick, with the collaboration of her sister-in-law and silent partner, Molli Meyers, entered the Cali Native Collective Fashion Show in Loleta. This debut collection offered a versatile range of men’s and women’s ready-to-wear dresses, blazers, tops, skirts, shorts, and pants in an understated grayscale palette accented with warm browns. The pieces, primarily polyester, were uniquely embellished with digital replications of Meyers’s intricate beadwork and basket designs. The collection was warmly

received, marking the official launch of Native Queens Design.

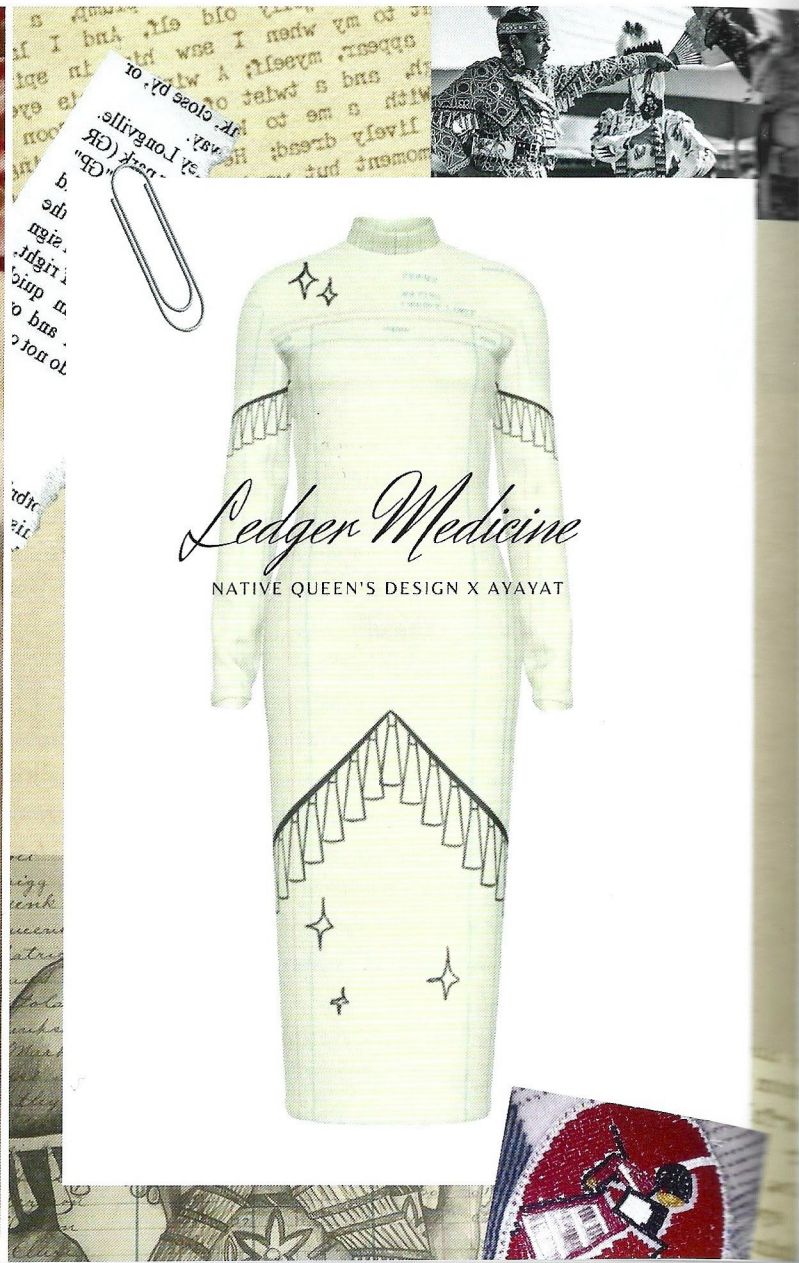
“Queen is my middle name,” said Hedrick proudly. “It’s my great-aunt’s name, Queen James, and she lived to see a time of first contact with non-Natives entering our territory. She was a phenomenal basketmaker. Although I never met her, she remains an influential person to me and my family.”

For Hedrick, Native Queens Design isn’t just about creating beautiful clothes; she’s building a community. Her designs aren’t born in isolation but rather through vibrant collaborations with fellow Indigenous artists. “The goal has always been for me to uplift

California artists,” said Hedrick.

Indeed, her second ready-to-wear collection, a striking blend of red abalone shell, bird motifs, and florals, is a testament to this collaborative spirit, realized in partnership with Indigenous graphic designer Eric Wilder (Kashia Band of Pomo Indians). And in a powerful fusion of fashion and ledger art, Hedrick recently launched the Ledger Medicine dress—a bodycon dress featuring a jingle dress design by Oregon-based artist Keeli Littleleaf and her Ayayat brand.

These collaborations are a resonant expression of shared heritage, artistic vision, and a commitment to uplifting





the next generation of Indigenous talent. Native Queens Design is a platform, not just for Hedrick's creativity but for a collective of artists jointly creating a rich textile of Indigenous expression within the fashion world.

Other tenets of Hedrick's brand include affordability and accessibility. Hedrick's digitally replicated red abalone designs, for instance, offer a sustainable and accessible way to celebrate this culturally important element. "Because red abalone is an endangered species in California," she explains, "it's important to be able to wear the look of red abalone without having to source it. For me, there's some cultural alignment in that."

Like other Native designers, Hedrick would like to keep her price point under a hundred dollars, so that Native people can afford her clothing. This is especially important given the economic disparities faced by many Indigenous communities. "People come up to me and say, 'I've been saving up to buy one

of your pieces,'" she said with a deep sigh. "I want my community and family members to afford my clothing, so it's important for me to keep the brand accessible to folks."

Still, other fans eagerly await the time when Hedrick will branch out into other markets. "I get questions like, 'Virginia, when are you going to do high fashion?' or 'When are you going to do couture looks?'" Hedrick acknowledges the demand for high-end designs and her mind is constantly swirling with new ideas. But she's also keenly aware of the financial implications. Couture requires more expensive materials and intricate techniques, which will inevitably drive up the price.

While the artistic pull is strong for Hedrick, ultimately the needs of her community come first. "I'm reminded of Ralph Lauren's collaboration with Naomi Glasses. Those collections are amazing, but they're a little out of reach for most people. A four-hundred-dollar

dress is just not in their budget," said Hedrick. Still, repurposing clothes offers another avenue for Hedrick to explore her creativity while remaining true to her commitment to affordability. "I know there's this whole movement around upcycling. I think that's beautiful. I think we're going to see more of that. The possibilities are swirling in my brain, right now."

Hedrick's journey is a testament to her passion, heritage, and community. And as she looks to the future, her vision remains clear. "In the coming months, I want to keep creating," she said. "I think what's next is probably another collaboration with another artist. I'm just going to keep doing this as long as it's fun, and if it continues to grow, then I'll grow with it." With her talent, dedication, and unwavering commitment to accessibility, Virginia Hedrick is poised to continue weaving her unique mark into the fabric of contemporary Indigenous fashion.