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STEPHEN
SPROUSE





TOTAL ABANDON - STEPHEN SPROUSE

EDITOR'S LETTER

Stephen Sprouse was one of the most promising "Fashion pioneers" of the 20th century. The American artist and designer deconstructed and defied the traditional dictates of the fashion industry. At the zenith of his success, his influence was indelible and often unavoidable on the streets of New York. In the late 1970s he greeted the advent of punk with his uncompromising creativity, blurring the boundaries between high fashion affluence and punk rock attire, thus ushering in a new era of androgyny, experimentation and exuberance.

In 1983, after establishing his own label, 15 of his designs were featured in the "Polaroid" show for emerging designers. In the show, he elevated classic silhouettes through his quintessential use of graffiti prints and daring day-glo colours. His 60s inspired shift dresses and mini skirts demonstrated this seamless amalgamation of high end fashion with a new cutting edge urban influence. Sprouse's ingenuity ignited infatuation not only amongst New York fashionistas but with buyers from Bergdorf's and Bendel's.

In 1984, Stephen was the recipient of the prestigious "Best New Designer Award," from the Council of Fashion Designers of America, signalling his ascent to acclaim. The following year he moved his studio to the site of Andy Warhol's infamous 'Factory,' before opening his flagship store at 99 Wooster Street in 1987.

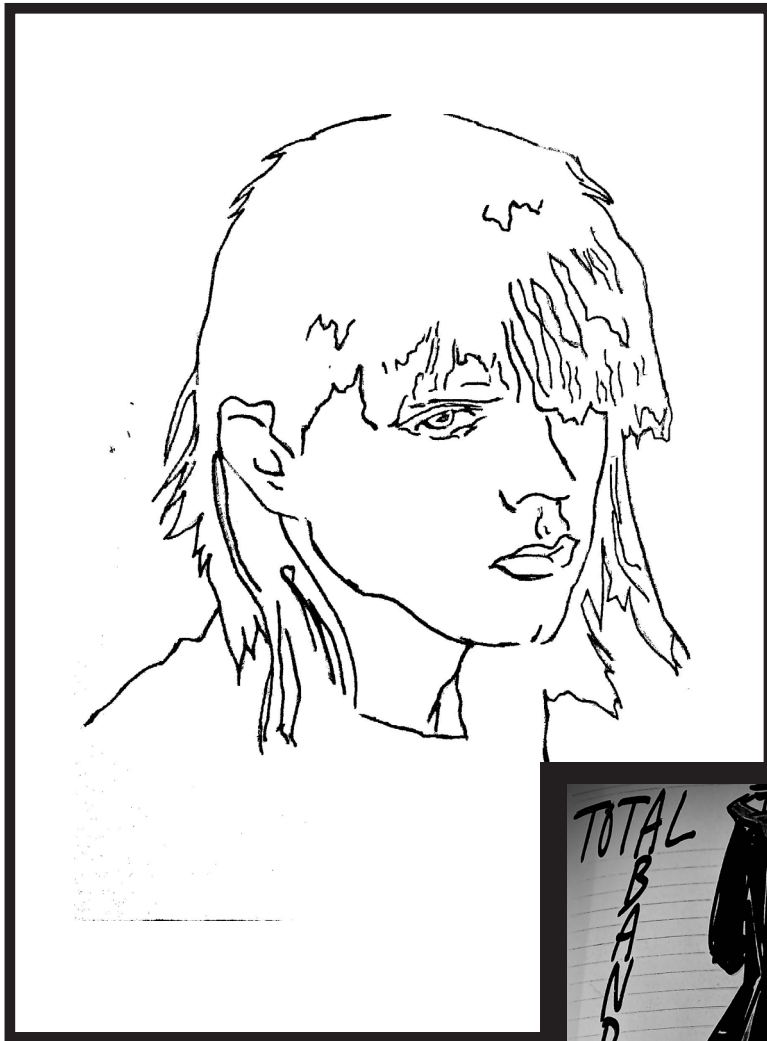
However despite having garnered widespread recognition it soon became apparent that his avant-garde creations transcended the time in question and were sometimes the subject of cynicism and contention from uptown traditionalists. Despite this Sprouse worked compulsively and intuitively with a vivid visualisation of what he wanted to create. He deconstructed the traditional dictates of the ever demanding fashion industry, with his work becoming increasingly characterised by his meticulous attention to detail, the high quality of his fabrics and his multidisciplinary proficiency, all of which entailed an expensive and time intensive production process that didn't translate well commercially.

My interest in Sprouse was piqued by the fact that despite external pressure he didn't compromise his character for monetary gain and he continued with his unwavering pursuit of praise and progress through a futuristic lens. In my eyes, the manner in which he dealt with economic adversity was admirable and was a true testament to the resilience of his character. Instead of retreating from the fashion scene entirely he instead immersed himself in collaborative projects with brands such as Diesel, Target and Louis Vuitton which were so successful that it almost eclipsed the virtuosity of his earlier work.

Since his untimely death in March 2004, reappropriations of Sprouse's work have been rampant and his work has undergone somewhat of a resurgence. Countless retrospective exhibitions have been curated, Roger Padilha and Mauricio Padilha published a tome in his name and in 2009, a party was hosted by Louis Vuitton in his honour, all of which I feel aptly reflect the enduring relevance and the perennial popularity of his designs.

I endowed this fanzine with the title "Total Abandon," a statement which metaphorically alludes to how an assortment of his most inspired sketches and notes were found abandoned in a dumpster in Downtown New York. The symbolism inherent in the discovery of this powerful phrase scrawled across one of his precious sketches is striking. While Sprouse worked with "total abandon," dedicating himself to his creative career, this phrase simultaneously suggests that Sprouse's work was almost forgotten and washed away amidst a sea of cynicism, commercialism and corporate competitiveness. This cruel abandonment was particularly apparent after his label grappled with insufficient finances in the late eighties. In this respect the preservation of his persona could be perceived to have been abandoned. Lastly, from a more optimistic standpoint, the phrase "Total Abandon," conveys how Stephen abandoned convention in his designs, thus shaping sartorial standards and forging a path for the fashion pioneers of the future.

ELLA O' GORMAN



**“MAYBE IF THEY COULD
ALL BE COMBINED- ART,
ROCK AND FASHION,
THOSE WERE ALWAYS
MY FAVOURITE THINGS.”**

- Stephen Sprouse



SETTING THE STAGE FOR SPROUSE- NEW YORK STATE(S) OF MIND



The state, or rather states of mind that were prevalent in The Big Apple during the 1980's ...

New York, the long established epicentre of America's collective creativity was a markedly bleak metropolis by the end of the 1970's. Having been plagued by poverty, economic stagnation and cataclysmic crime rates, its inhabitants were understandably eager to usher in a more prosperous era. In the 1980s, New York became in Debbie Harry's words, "The city of beckoning promise" - overseeing a new period of progression, invention and optimism. At this time, disparate sectors of society united through mediums such as art, fashion and music. Stephen Sprouse serendipitously specialised in designing for all three and was soon situated at the centre of this revolutionary convergence of culture. Having lived in The Bowery with the likes of Chris Stein and Debbie Harry, he witnessed the dynamism of downtown firsthand. It was a place where up and coming artists inhabited semi-derelict buildings, countercultures were celebrated, cross dressing became less of a transgression and where the city's coolest clubs such as CBGB's played host to decade defining performers such as The Ramones, Patti Smith and Blondie.

The music of this zeitgeist had evolved from the establishment of New York rock by The Velvet Underground in the 1960s and the emergence of rock and roll bands such as the New York Dolls in the 70s, to the sudden proliferation of punk. Punk was an anarchic, nihilistic style which deliberately set out to shock. Its amplified visibility on the streets and stages of the city engendered a fascination and fetishization among fashion circles. A titular 'Punk' fashion show was subsequently hosted at the Ritz in July 1980. Meanwhile downtown, a more subversive streak was detected where, according to Harry, "We were doing what punks do, which is break down walls, everybody got by on

no money and nobody talked about mainstream success." In areas such as the Lower East Side and the Bowery, walls were emblazoned with graffiti and the area became "less of an address and more of an attitude," where people had an almost synchronistically subversive approach to styling. Cocaine was consumed "liberally and frequently" and heroin was considered a "chic drug." "Everybody on the scene did drugs," Debbie Harry remarked, "That's how it was back then, part of your social life, part of the creative process."

This confluence of creatives, including Stephen Sprouse, fed off each other's energy and ideas while frequenting hotspots like Studio 54 and Andy Warhol's exclusive Union Square gatherings. "He would invite all sorts of people from all sorts of backgrounds - uptown and downtown." Debbie Harry recalls as she reminisces on the party Warhol hosted for her at Studio 54 when "Heart of Glass' went to No.1. "It was a riotous, breathless, restless, wavy period of time!"

The 'Pop art' prints being produced by Warhol also encapsulated the bold and brilliant zeal of this era and referenced the cult of celebrity that was seeping into New York's social scene. Celebrity culture was more complicated and elusive than than other cities such as London, yet a definite divide could still be discerned. While art was conceptualised and created downtown, most of the money, the clientele and the galleries were situated uptown and this conflict between classes was a tangible source of friction. According to a 1984 edition of The Face magazine, when Andy Warhol moved uptown, it "signalled an end to Uptown's patronage of bohemia as anything other than a means of making money,"

Yet according to the former NY Times editor William Norwich, "Stephen dressed this integration of Manhattan lifestyles," and triumphed in his ability to accommodate the tastes of those on either side of 14th street- the affluent upper classes and the cool crowd downtown.

Although, paradoxically, the downtown youths who coveted his clothes the most could scarcely afford to pay their rent let alone a \$1,200 graffitied dress.

Despite the difficulties encountered during this era, Blondie's Debbie Harry retains affectionate associations with Lower Manhattan and the abundance of inspiration it lent her and her friend Stephen Sprouse, sharing, "Everything I'm attracted to and have ever wanted to be like is in New York. New York is my pulse. New York is my heart. I'm still a New York punk."

SPROUSE'S SELECTION OF SONGS

Songs compiled from the designer's playlist, as confirmed by his former assistant, Jamie Boud. These tunes accompanied both his runway shows and his production process, thus making the punk-rock eighties energy that these anthems embodied evident in his work.

“STEPHEN WAS A LOT LIKE THE MUSICIANS HE INSPIRED AND WAS INSPIRED BY. HIS FASHION PIECES WERE HIS SONGS, EACH COLLECTION WAS AN ALBUM; HIS WORK WAS THE SOUNDTRACK TO OUR LIVES.”
- MICHAEL SCHMIDT



1. Heart of Glass - Blondie
2. The Lost Art of Keeping a Secret - Queens of the Stone Age
3. Dancing Barefoot - Patti Smith
4. Andy Warhol - David Bowie
5. 2000 Light Years from Home - The Rolling Stones
6. Nightclubbing - Iggy Pop

“HE ALWAYS USED TO LISTEN TO MUSIC WHILE HE SKETCHED... WITHOUT FAIL, THE MUSIC WAS BLASTING AWAY WHILE HE WORKED.”

- DEBBIE HARRY

CANDY PRATTS PRICE ON STEPHEN SPROUSE

A discussion with the esteemed fashion director and former Vogue editor about her experience of living and working alongside Stephen Sprouse and how their friendship forged her creative philosophy:



Do you remember your first encounter with Sprouse and his work? What was your initial impression?

My first interaction with Stephen and his work was initially a big wow, everything was so new, so fresh, so sexy!

A mutual appreciation of aesthetics and visual impact was something that both you and Sprouse had in common, did you ever exchange any significant ideas that influenced your individual work?

We shared a lust for the new, for the modern and for shaking things up! I think that's what created our friendship, we wanted to make things that would capture people's attention and make them say "What is this?"

As his former neighbour and friend, you had a unique understanding of Sprouse's creative process, do you think that his personality was reflected in his designs?

Well, he was a very shy boy. I'm not shy and I talked a lot while he was drawing. It was really nice to spend time with him and to gain an insight into his work ethic.

Sprouse undoubtedly had an avant-garde approach in the orchestration of his shows - casting transgender models such as Teri Toye, juxtaposing high and low fashion, and using new materials and prints that had never been showcased so successfully before. What do you think he could have done differently to ensure enduring commercial success?

Yes, Sprouse had a unique visionary approach. He loved the applause, all of us had egos and certainly all of us wanted to be applauded and to receive praise. Yet he was never seeking success monetarily, he just wanted creative appreciation.

Stephen Sprouse's work with Bill Blass and Halston lent him invaluable insights into the industry. Do you think it is beneficial for an up-and-coming designer to acquire experience by working with another fashion house before launching their own?

Absolutely. You've got to learn, you have to spend time knowing what the process is. You can't just draw and proclaim "Here I am, I'm a star," you've got to earn your wings.

Do you have a favourite collection or artwork of Sprouse's?

We (Candy and her artist husband Chuck Price) love and own one of Stephen's iconic scan lines. He produced it on the first colour Xerox machine which was in his apartment downstairs. It is just one of his many creations that are timeless and reflect his forward thinking vision.

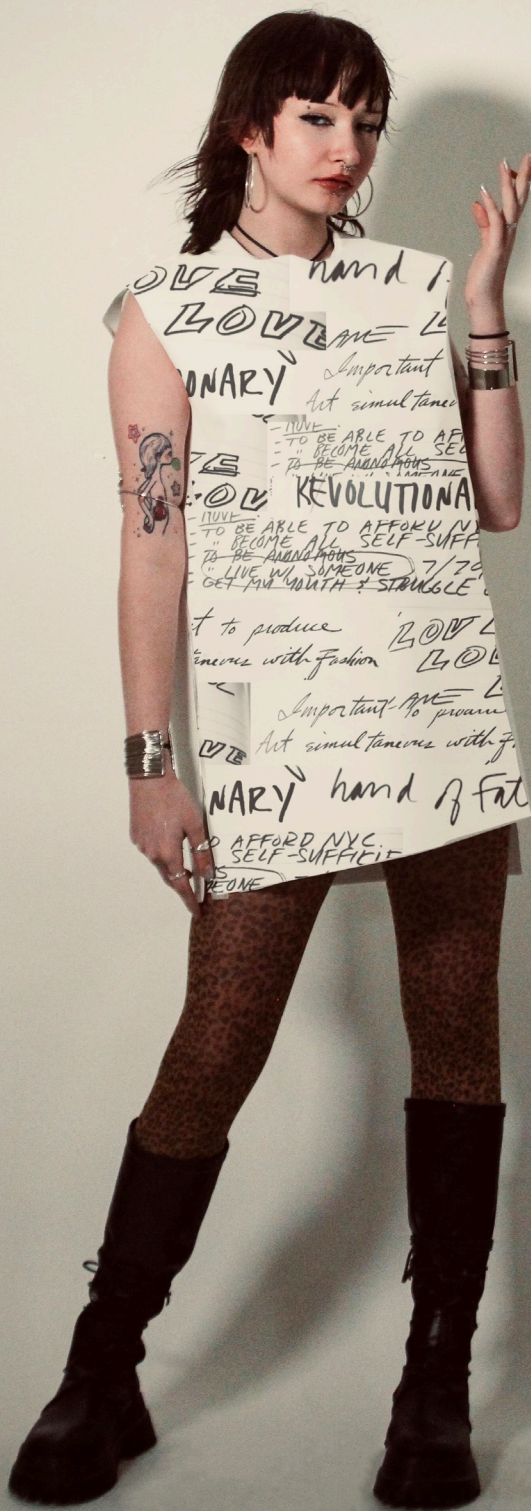
Stephen didn't just stir the pot, he shook it up!



© THE ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION

PAINTED PORTRAITS OF STEPHEN SPROUSE AND DEBBIE HARRY BY MAIA LAVIS



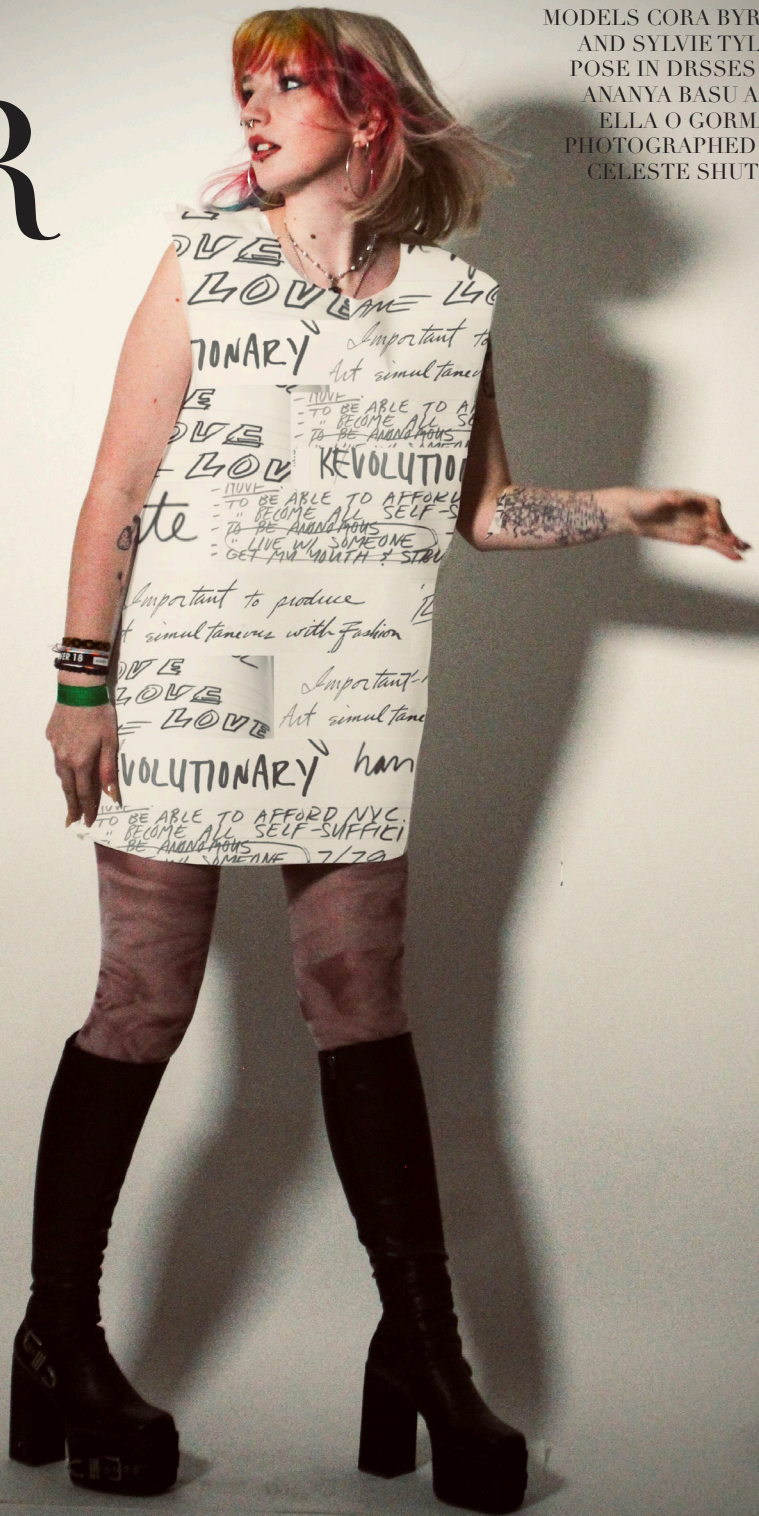


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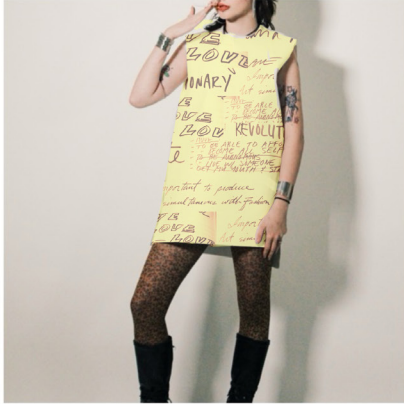
A PROJECTION OF
STEPHEN SPROUSE'S MOST
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REMINISCENT OF HIS '60s
INSPIRED SILHOUETTES

PER INK

MODELS CORA BYRNE
AND SYLVIE TYLER
POSE IN DRSES BY
ANANYA BASU AND
ELLA O GORMAN,
PHOTOGRAPHED BY
CELESTE SHUTON







In Conversation with William Norwich

I had the pleasure of talking to the accomplished author and editor about the life and legacy of Stephen Sprouse, a “fashion pioneer” in every sense

Stephen Sprouse’s designs became synonymous with the punk, rock and art scene in 1980s New York. Do you think that there is a modern day designer who has embraced their zeitgeist’s culture as wholeheartedly as Sprouse did?

I think there are designers who reflect the zeitgeist for fractions of society, for instance, Balenciaga for people who want to make a statement and Gabriella Hearst or Bruno Cuccinelli for people seeking quiet luxury, but there is no one designer doing it for all.

Do you think Sprouse’s visionary designs reflected his personality?

Very much so. He was as luxurious and refined as he was vibrant and fun.

Stephen famously discerned the distinction between art and fashion, producing portraits, prints and silkscreens in addition to his clothing line which incorporated influences from the likes of Warhol and Haring. As a talented caricaturist yourself, how integral do you think Stephen’s artistic appreciation was to his success as a designer?

You are kind to remember my caricaturing. I think especially for designers an ability to draw is enormously useful.

How do you think Sprouse would have adapted his designs in today’s world, given the technological advancements that have been implemented in recent years?

I think he would have thrived. He was always keen to work with high-tech fabrics in his day, even Velcro when it was a new thing, so I imagine he would have sought out opportunities to design with 3D printing, printmaking and more.

Do you consider Sprouse’s punk and glamour infused collections following his debut in 1984 to be the defining moment of his career or would you consider his collaboration with Marc Jacobs for Louis Vuitton in 2001 to be the most preeminent and enduring example of his work?

Literally, the designs for Vuitton will last longer because they were on leather rather than more perishable fabric but no, I think, a combination of his early work and his later work, along with images of him, the trendy, unusual style setter, will be the hallmarks of his design legacy.

At the zenith of his career, Sprouse staged spectacular shows whilst still keeping the spotlight on his clothing intact. His considerably curated music and performance selection sought to enhance rather than detract from his ensembles. Do you think that there is an increased focus on theatrics and performance art in recent runway shows? From your perspective does this commodification taint creativity or champion it?

In Sprouse’s day, the analogue era, designs and shows didn’t have to compete for clickbait on social media. There were always the showstoppers that would appeal to photographers and magazine editors but those weren’t necessarily the pieces that retailers thought they could sell. The shows were happenings for sure but the audience was a more active partner, enjoying and clapping and not removed looking through phones. There was direct eye contact.

Do you have any outstanding memories of Stephen Sprouse as a designer and a creative?

My main memory is how gentle a soul he was. A quiet presence, but a loud talent. At some point, he got sober, and stayed sober; abstaining from the alcohol and drugginess of the bright lights, big city. That impressed a lot of people. A fashion moment I wish I'd witnessed but instead only read about was the mid 1980s wedding of the Vogue editor, and now style consultant to brands and movie stars, Elizabeth Saltzman.

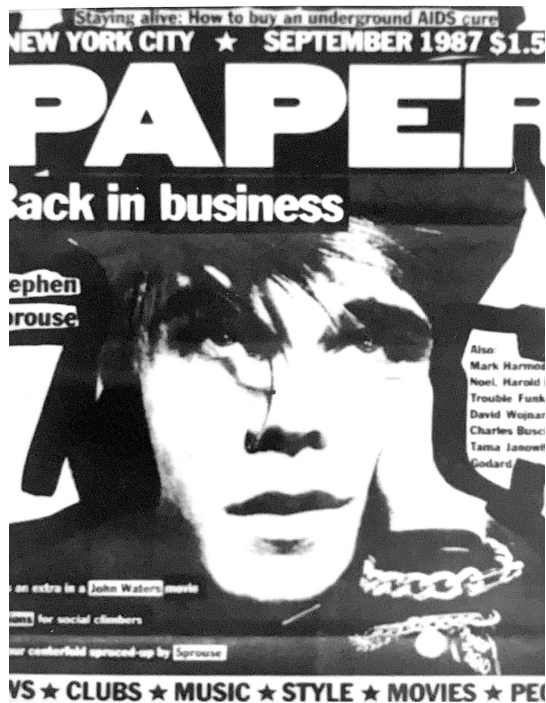
A white dress, a sheath, with a long train, designed by Sprouse. Right after the ceremony, Stephen himself, with scissors, cut off the train. It was a big punk moment.

The thing about Sprouse was the moment he represented. A frustrated New York was divided between uptown elegance and formality, downtown's cool and hip artistry and the desire by a new generation of uptowners who wanted the best of both worlds. They wanted the comforts of uptown's Park,

Madison and Fifth Avenues and the freedom to be less formal in the hip clubs and galleries downtown.

Stephen dressed this integration of Manhattan lifestyles.

The message of the time, his message, was uptown sophistication with downtown punk-pop sensibility. He said it with clothes. His clients said it by wearing them.



© PAPER MAGAZINE, SEPTEMBER 1987

“TOO FAR IS NOT FAR ENOUGH”

HOW STEPHEN SPROUSE CONFRONTED CONVENTION IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY



LEFT: SAFETY PIN DRESS BY SPROUSE © i-D MAGAZINE, THE FEAR ISSUE, NOVEMBER.

RIGHT: SPROUSE'S DEBUT COLLECTION. ©THE NEW YORK TIMES, 1984

Often referred to as a “Punk Glamour God” and “The Duke of Day-Glo” by the press, Stephen Sprouse transcended time through his designs. In his Fall 1999 show, he became the first designer to collaborate with NASA, by using incorporating images taken in space by Pathfinder onto his prints. These “interplanetary prints” were modelled by Stephen’s muse, Teri Toye, who was one of the first successful and openly transgender models to dominate the fashion scene. Sprouse also utilised unconventional materials in the production of his garments such as safety pins and he was allegedly the first artist to dye his designs in distinct DayGlo colours.

“HE WAS ALWAYS FULL OF ENERGY AND IDEAS”

-MARC JACOBS ON HIS COLLABORATION WITH SPROUSE FOR LOUIS VUITTON S/S 2001

©LOUIS VUITTON / MARC JACOBS: IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE MUSEE DES ARTS DECORATIFS, PAMELA GOLBIN, 2012



“We were all wearing Stephen Sprouse...I’m just crazy about him”

- EXCERPT FROM THE ANDY WARHOL DIARIES, © THE ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION, 1984

Stephen was the very first designer to whom Andy Warhol personally entrusted his art collection to before his death in 1987. Sprouse was heavily influenced by Warhol’s work and he used these archival images to great extent in his designs. This level of respect was clearly reciprocated as Warhol specifically requested to wear a black cashmere Stephen Sprouse suit for his funeral.



CORA WEARS A SELF STYLED OUTFIT INSPIRED BY STEPHEN'S MONOCHROMATIC DAILY ATTIRE

LOVE hand of fate

LOVE LOVE LOVE

REVOLUTIONARY Important to produce
Art simultaneous with

LOVE LOVE
- LIVE
- TO BE ABLE TO AFFORD NYC
- " BECOME ALL SELF-SUFFICIENT
- TO BE ANNOYING 7/29

LOVE REVOLUTIONARY

fate
- LIVE
- TO BE ABLE TO AFFORD NYC
- " BECOME ALL SELF-SUFFICIENT
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IVE LOOKED AT MYSELF AND IM READY

Important to produce LOVE
Art simultaneous with fashion LOVE

LOVE LOVE
Important to produce
Art simultaneous with fashion

REVOLUTIONARY hand of fate

- LIVE
- TO BE ABLE TO AFFORD NYC
- " BECOME ALL SELF-SUFFICIENT
- TO BE ANNOYING
- " LIVE W/ SOMEONE 7/29
- GET MY VAULT & STRIP THE DATA
Important
Art simul:





