

## Flora, fashion and fascination

'The Birth of Fashion Revisited' highlights humanity's roots in nature

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KAPAA — For Gilles and Louda Larrain, life is magic, and that magic is comprised of light, texture, music and movement.

They're finding that magic to be abundant in Kauai, where they've spent the last three years working on a project that marries humanity and nature — a project that combines Louda's forte for fashion with Gilles' pre-eminent photography.

The project is titled "The Birth of Fashion Revisited" and can be likened to an Adam and Eve-type venture in which Gilles photographs regular people dressed in island foliage. The couple is also making a documentary of the project's behind-the-scenes work.

"We have talked some of our friends into coming in and we really welcome all kinds of people for this," Louda said. "We're all connected to nature and that's what this is about."

So far, the couple has photographed more than 30 people for the collection, wearing the clippings and leftovers from landscaping projects island-wide.

"One of our women, she's photographed wearing branches that her son brought in from his property for us to use," Louda said. "We would love to connect with hotels and landscapers, for instance, so we could reuse their flowers after they are done with them."

Those who donate the supplies for the outfits are highlighted in the final photograph's description. Louda creates her foliage fashion in the couple's in-home studio and said it usually takes her about 15 or 20 minutes to dress a model. She lets intuition lead the process and the outfits she creates are strategically structured. Usually they are secured to the models with only one or two wax cords.



Photos by Gilles Larrain



“This island is so full of inspiration and I just design through intuition; it’s so easy to tap into that here,” Louda said.

And though they’re working with sticks and stones, Louda said the final product is framed in finesse.

“It’s not just a pile of leaves, it is elegant couture,” she said.

Louda got her start in fashion and art growing up in Omsk, Siberia. She said the city, nearly a million people at the time, was an “industrial city in the steppe” with harsh weather and little artistic inspiration. That had to be created with books, theater and the rare outing to the movies.

She got an education at fine arts schools and at The Textile Academy, and moved to Paris in 1996. Five months later, she was a creative partner at Chanel Couture.

“That’s where I got my big break,” Louda said.

Her husband of 10 years, Gilles, also has a background steeped in travel and the arts. Throughout his childhood he lived in many countries including Indochina, Vietnam, Spain and Paris.

He made a study of architecture, attended Massachusetts Institute of Technology and has published more than a dozen photography books. His camera has captured the faces of Robert Mapplethorpe, Miles Davis, Sting, Phoebe Cates, Jennifer Jason Leigh and many more.

One of Gilles’s favorite stories is making breakfast for John Lennon — another of his subjects —

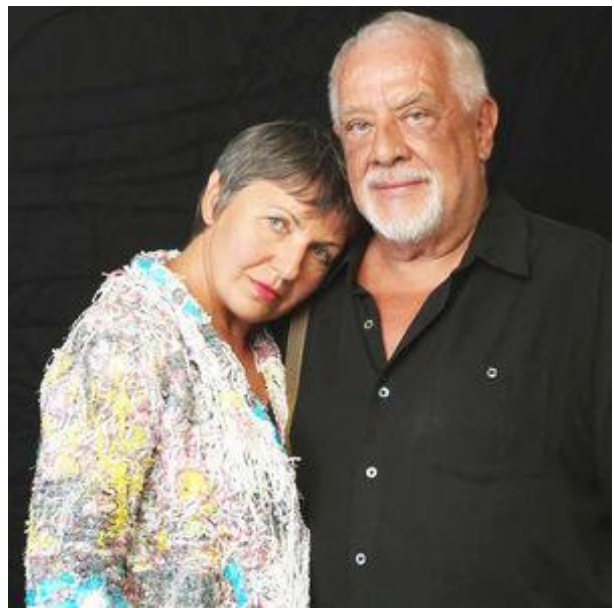
after a culinary disaster one morning while the two were running in the same circles.

“He burnt the eggs and I told him, ‘You’re good at a lot of things, John, but you can’t cook,’” reminisced Gilles, an accomplished chef. “I told him, ‘Give me 10 minutes,’ and I poached some eggs and made real breakfast.”

Gilles and Louda said their deep passion for their individual art is dynamite when it’s combined together on projects like “The Birth of Fashion Revisited.”

“We work really well together and we’re so lucky to have this kind of creative team,” Gilles said. “We are lucky to have lived the lives we’ve lived.”

Currently, Gilles and Louda are looking for people who have extra foliage and plant trimmings they aren’t using. They’re also looking for people who might be interested in being photographed. To contact them, email [louda@loudacollection.com](mailto:louda@loudacollection.com) or call 212-925-8494.



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