

East York

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Special Report

Cities

Profile

Elisabeth Arkhipov

May 2007 £8

It's become somewhat of a cliché to talk about designers who straddle the worlds of art and design, but Elisabeth Arkhipoff is the real deal. A Parisian in New York, she uses her many interests and influences to create work that's both inspired and inspiring.

Angharad Lewis went to meet her to try and unravel the mysteries of the 'Arkhipoff universe'...

You don't have to spend long looking at Elisabeth Arkhipoff's work to realise that here is a real collector. And a visit to her home studio in New York is enough to confirm this. The French artist (she prefers this as a title to 'designer', but more of that later) lives and works in an apartment on the fringes of Greenwich Village that she shares with her husband. It is filled to brimming with stuff—paintings, books, curious objects and an entire wall (floor-to-ceiling) of vinyl records. She dresses too like a collector who loves finding pieces in vintage thrift stores and flea markets.

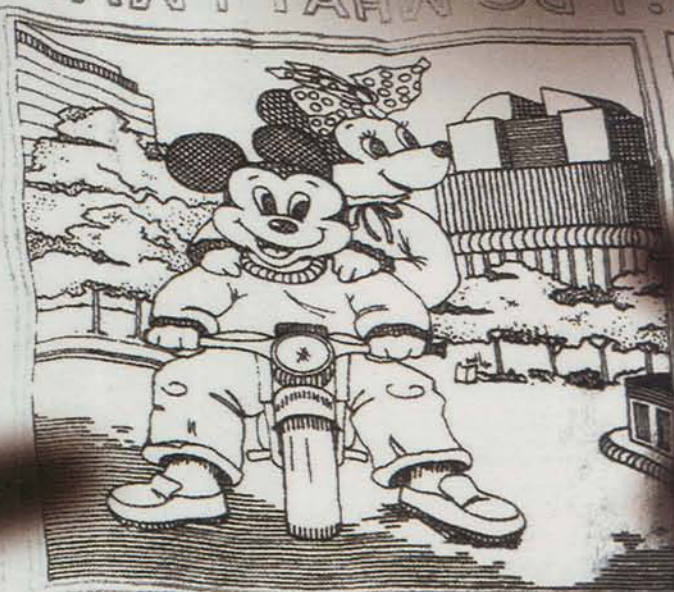
On the day I visit she's wearing a cream woollen frock and vintage heels and smokes her regular brand of white filter tips from Nat Sherman on Fifth Avenue. These are all influences that feed into her work, which is often linked to music (she designs record sleeves, posters and music videos) and fashion (she has worked on commissions for Anna Sui, Eley Kishimoto, Swarovski and Vogue Nippon). The urge to collect, reappropriate and reinterpret in Arkhipoff's work is evident in her use of collage and layering. It also informs her artistic approach, which is wrapped up in selecting, editing and display.

As well as what you might call her commercial commissions, Arkhipoff works on long-term personal projects. She began the first of these, entitled *La Mediathèque Terre-de-ciel*, in 1998 while studying at the Cergy National Superior School of Art. A mutable installation, it takes the form of a lending library of books, CDs, DVDs, videos and other documents. Visitors are as much a part of the installation as the contents, and may borrow any item for as long as they like. Unlike ordinary libraries in which the contents are methodically organised and borrowing is recorded and controlled, Arkhipoff's library works entirely on trust. Lenders must take responsibility for their own actions, and in the process they become responsible for the success of the entire project. The actions of the individual have a direct impact on the whole—it's like a microcosmic utopian socialist state. Further, the library's contents are built up in a free and unmethodical fashion, by donations from visitors. It has evolved the way a collection would, with pieces added here and there over time.

Elisabeth Arkhipoff Profile



... I DO WHAT I WANT
MICKEY DO
MICKEY SEE



Mickey

MOTOR POWER



There is no classification, so exploring the content is a case of jumping in and sifting through, abandoning expectations and making chance discoveries. Items are catalogued according to when they arrived, another subjugation of the library 'rules' to the characteristics of collectorship. That no item has been lost or not returned during Mediathèque's numerous showings is testament to the success of Arkhipoff's egalitarian vision.

Mediathèque is typical of the way Arkhipoff bucks the system, and makes a statement by doing so. Her tutor at art school dismissed the project as "not art" ("you must be joking," he told her). She stuck to her principles and quit the school, going on to win the day a few months later by getting her installation exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris. Despite this success and the fact that she has had her work included in numerous group shows alongside the likes of Fischli and Weiss, Matthew Barney, Gilbert and George, Douglas Gordon and Gerhard Richter, Arkhipoff continues to dodge the conventions of the art world. She is not, for instance, represented by a gallery, and is more than happy to be without one. She is wary of her practice being moulded

by a gallery's demands on her productivity. "The whole gallery system is scary," she says. "I don't want to be into that right now. I want to build my own stuff and after that I might feel, 'OK, I can have a gallery.' But right now I think it would be too much pressure to do stuff—to produce drawings or collages—you have to produce a lot. They want to have stuff to sell..."

In this attitude Arkhipoff seems to be one step ahead of the game. She is not stifled by gallery demands and remains mistress of her own destiny. She's not short of work offers but makes sure she has time for travel and for her personal projects. Despite this evasion of the demands of the art world she still chooses to call herself an artist above a designer, possibly because her artistic projects are what feed the rest of her work, and because she does not seek clients or commissions. Her practice doesn't run like a normal design studio in this respect and she is in the lucky position where work comes to her. Her work transfers across media so well that she can easily adapt to formats that are normally the preserve of graphic design.

LA MÉDIATHÈQUE TERRE-DE-CIEL
BULLETIN D'INFORMATIONS N°8
COMMUNIQUÉ SPÉCIAL RÉASSORT

LA MÉDIATHÈQUE TERRE-DE-CIEL en quelques chiffres

107 LIVRES, 342 DISQUES, 7 CDROMS, 29 VIDEOS.

47 LIVRES SUPPLÉMENTAIRES, 104 DISQUES SUPPLÉMENTAIRES, 9 CDROMS SUPPLÉMENTAIRES, 7 VIDEOS SUPPLÉMENTAIRES.

28 LIVRES, 121 DISQUES ET 6 VIDEOS SONT ENCORE EMPRUNTÉS ET DONC NON DISPONIBLES À CE JOUR!

169 LIVRES, 221 DISQUES, 7 CDROMS, 22 VIDEOS.

CE QU'IL FAUT RETENIR:

10 et 11: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 12: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 13: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 14: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 15: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 16: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 17: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 18: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 19: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 20: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 21: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 22: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 23: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 24: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 25: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 26: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 27: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 28: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 29: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 30: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 31: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 32: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 33: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 34: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 35: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 36: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 37: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 38: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 39: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 40: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 41: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 42: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 43: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 44: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 45: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 46: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 47: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 48: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 49: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 50: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 51: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 52: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 53: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 54: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 55: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 56: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 57: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 58: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 59: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 60: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 61: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 62: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 63: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 64: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 65: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 66: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 67: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 68: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 69: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 70: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 71: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 72: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 73: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 74: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 75: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 76: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 77: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 78: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 79: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 80: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 81: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 82: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 83: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 84: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 85: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 86: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 87: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 88: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 89: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 90: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 91: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 92: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 93: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 94: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 95: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 96: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 97: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 98: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 99: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs). 100: 100 livres à 100 francs (100 francs = 100 francs).

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01

01

La Mediatheque Terre-de-ciel poster

02, 03

La Mediatheque Terre-de-ciel Installation views, Paris Museum of Modern Art, France.

04

Art direction, photography and artwork, Twilight Fantasy, fashion story for Anna Sui, Vogue Nippon (issue #35, september 2002)

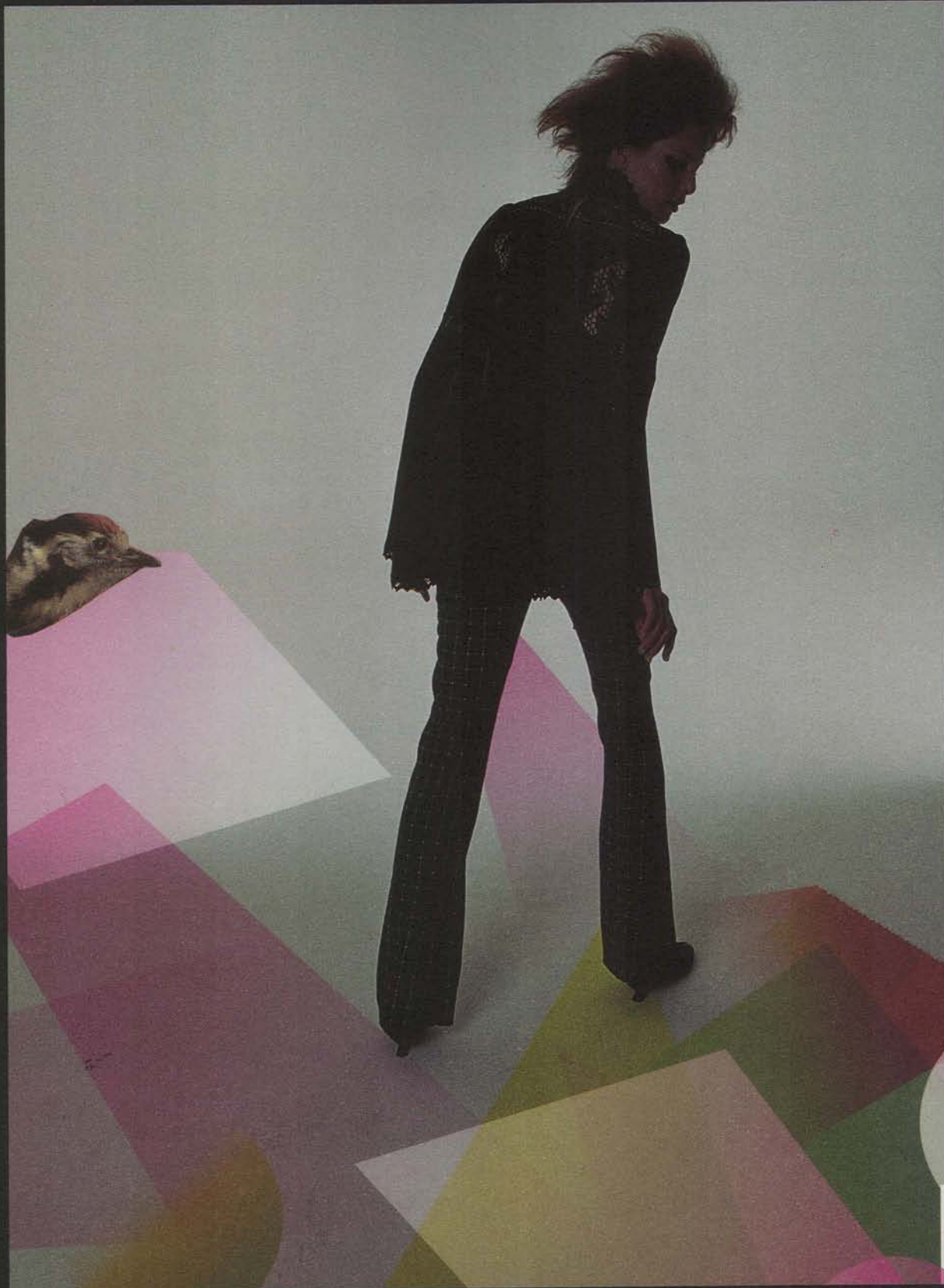


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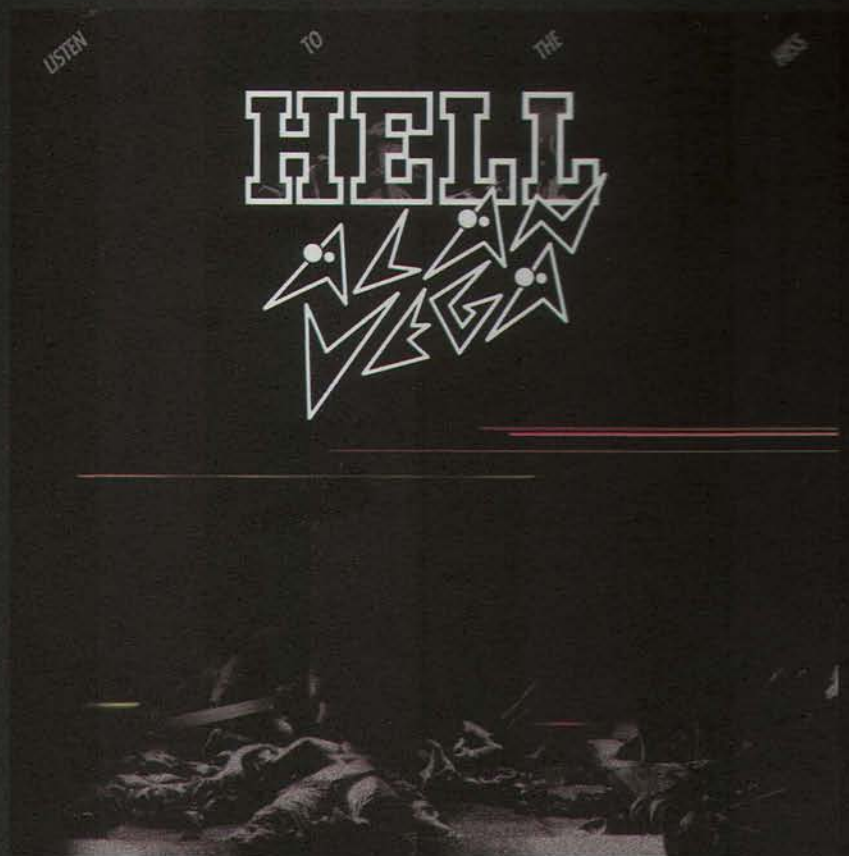


01
Anna Sui, art direction,
photography and
artwork, Vogue
Nippon (issue #35,
September 2002)

02
HELL/Alan Vega—
Listen to the Hiss,
Gigolo records,
Germany, 2004

03
HELL—The Final
Countdown, Gigolo
records, Germany,
2005

04–06
TAHITI 80—Wallpaper
for the soul, CDs,
vinyls, posters and
promotional materials,
Atmospherique
France/JVC Japan/
Minty Fresh USA, 2002



03

02

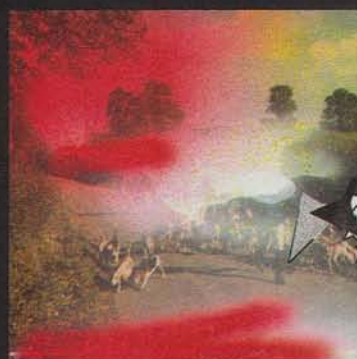
04



05



06



It is very much about her personal preoccupations playing out in her work and when these focus on music and fashion it is natural to produce work for those realms. It is also what has kept her outside art, a feeling that her work does not belong there. "I think in art you really need to be recognised, you have to have a strong image—you are the person that does the painting with the big face, or you are the person that does installation... You have to do stuff that's recognisable and if you do projects that are a little bit scattered, it can be confusing... For instance, I don't have a medium that I'm working in all the time. I'm really interested in a lot of things," she explains. "I think my work reflects that. It's just personal. In the art world that's not commercial but I prefer to do it that way—it's more interesting. At least you experiment with stuff in your life. It's always surprising. I've been contacted recently by Renault to design a car (for a charity event). It's so random."

So right now Arkhipoff is at liberty to do things her way. This means a mixture of paying work and personal ventures. She's just created a series of print ads for Swarovski and is working on a poster with long-time collaborator Laurent Fétis for the Fête de la Musique, the national music day in France. She is also designing a website for Peoplettes, a girls-only blog site, also based in Paris. Clearly living in New York doesn't mean Arkhipoff has loosened her ties with France, and Fétis, along with her family, are strong anchors in her home town of Paris. The pair has collaborated for years and now organise their work together via email. "We met in school when I was sixteen," says Arkhipoff, "and we have always worked together. It's very easy because we understand each other very well. It's super-easy." Their work together commonly hinges on music—an obsession for them both. They have designed many sleeves and posters for bands, most famously for Paris band Tahiti 80, for whom they have designed posters, CD and vinyl sleeves and promotional material for several album campaigns.

01
Poster for New
York based band
Japanther

02–04
Fashion story,
Swarovski
2006–2007



02



03



04

Music is a more natural home for Arkhipoff and the art world. It gives her more freedom and access to a wide audience of people consuming her visuals because they have a genuine relationship to it rather than because they are art critics or buyers. "People who contact me are usually young people that discover my work by themselves," she enthuses. It also delights Arkhipoff that she is working in a medium that excited her so much when she was younger. "I always found it super-interesting, I found it great to have the possibility of doing a record cover or a video," she says. "I found it much more exciting than doing a show, in fact, in a gallery, because when you're young you dream of that—you see a video on TV and then you're like 'oh, I'm doing one too'. It's great."

Youth and its relationship to pop culture have often influenced Arkhipoff's aesthetic and the visual components she uses. In 2001 she created *No Soda No Fun*, an installation made up of slogans ("stupid teenager questions") spraypainted over the various surfaces of a room in which everything—floor, walls, ceiling, furniture—is pure white. Latterly she collaborated with graffiti legend Futura 2000 to recreate the installation and make a music video of the process for DJ Mehdi. It's an example of how Arkhipoff's experimental art practice can feed directly into her commercial work. She has recently extended the project further and created a series of vinyl lettering products based on the slogans used in *No Soda No Fun* ("Single Is Cool", "No Helmet", "Why Do I Always Get Blamed?").

One of Arkhipoff's current schemes is *Sport Hit Paradise*, a fictional band she invented as a banner under which to pursue various music ideas and collaborations. There is an identity, posters, a backstory and band interviews, all crafted by Arkhipoff. The first record, a limited run of 100 twelve-inch vinyls, was recently released, each with an individual handmade sleeve by Arkhipoff. For that particular incarnation the track was provided by various collaborators including New York-based band Japanther (with whom Arkhipoff has worked on videos and sleeves in the past), but the next *Sport Hit Paradise* release will be another alliance. "The next one will be the same idea," she explains, "but it's a different kind of music every time so it could be rock, it could be electro or hip-hop, all under the same name. And there is a website, a fan club, everything like that..."

Sport Hit Paradise has also been cropping up elsewhere—it contributed a track to a compilation by Italian art magazine *Uovo*, a French musician friend has named a song after the band and a certain Monsieur Fétis has been known to make DJing appearances under the name.

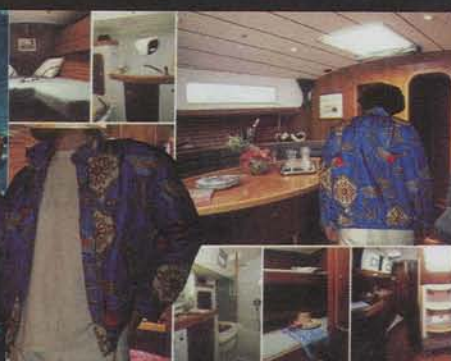
In her work Arkhipoff pulls together things that are not conventionally seen as art, but while they might be more associated with design, she approaches them in an experimental, artistic way. Her other current, long-running project is *Unexpected Feeling and Son*. "It's a clothing project," she explains. "It's stuff that I collect myself, it's a personal collection I'm presenting." She finds garments and in effect 're-releases' them under the *Unexpected Feeling and Sons* label. They are organised into collections, each with a theme and series of supporting graphics, and sold via a website.



04



02



01
Sugar Hiccup, Sport
Hit Paradise, one
of 100 hand-made
sleeves for exhibition
at Taka Ishii Gallery,
Japan, August to
September 2004

04
Unexpected Feeling
and Sons, Piece no. 21
A jacket made
by Yves Saint Laurent
Rive Gauche

02, 03
Unexpected Feeling
and Sons, photostory
for Island Hopping
collection

03

In order to enjoy such an unconventional vantage point at the margins between disciplines, Arkhipoff felt she had to leave France, where, she says, it's less easy to move between or combine art, music, design and fashion. In fact, in her previous life, before being a visual artist she was a writer and art critic, working for numerous magazines and newspapers including *Le Nouvel Observateur*, *Beaux-Arts* and *BlocNotes*. She started by writing for *Nova* in 1995 while she was studying for a degree in Contemporary Literature and Philosophy at Paris X university. She has interviewed art-world luminaries from Jeff Koons and Martin Kippenberger to Paul Morrissey and Gilbert and George.

So does she miss Paris? "I was bored when I left but... I like the feeling of small stuff, like in the street—I miss that. But otherwise I like it here (in New York)." Perhaps Paris is where she also learnt a healthy cynicism about the art system. By designing posters, record sleeves and music videos, she finds an alternative way to her audience. As she herself puts it, "The selection is done by itself with design, with commercial stuff. There is no room for 'blah-blah' or anything like that. In art it's mostly 'blah-blah' and the work is after."

What she highlights here is the value she places on having her work seen in the forums open to graphic design—shops, streets, places which guarantee democratic exposure, and where people are free to make up their own mind about what extent they want to engage with it. It's similar to the way the work itself is formed, with Arkhipoff filtering the world, making her choices and then opening them up for others to pick up the baton and continue the evolution of a range of things from tangible objects (books, record sleeves, clothes) to ideas (Sport Hit Paradise). It's not surprising she pooh-poohs the hyperbole that inevitably surrounds work in galleries. For Arkhipoff the priority is very much the work, and work is an extension of life. She succeeds in generating an 'Arkhipoff' universe that seems effortless because of its veracity. Arkhipoff is as Arkhipoff does.

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