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**manifesto
of cuteness**

Local designer pays homage
to childhood through fashion

By Erika Hobart



Lynn VanBrocklin likes to increase the cute factor in her clothing.

The Thread Fashion & Lifestyle Show is chaos. More than 100 fashion designers battle to carve out their space in the main exhibition hall of the San Diego Aerospace Museum as clothes horses run rampant and models zip by, flaunting their scantily clad, impossible physiques. Thankfully, there's enough booze in the house to forget the sweltering heat of late June, sink into the pandemonium and have a grand ol' time.

Even amid the chaos, designer Lynn VanBrocklin's booth isn't hard to find. The creator of Lynn's Rags doesn't disappear easily into the crowd. She stays busy throughout the show; many people stop to inspect her work. Her designs are a mosaic of rainbow hearts, deep color contrasts and lots of frills. A teenager spots a black and white striped tank top and shows her friend. "That's so cute," the friend announces.

That stamp of approval means a lot to VanBrocklin. "When girls tell me they like my stuff, that's the biggest compliment," she says. "It just makes me so happy."

The 26-year-old designer wears a constant smile as she sits perched on a small chair surrounded by heaps of purses and clothes. VanBrocklin bears a striking resemblance to Tinkerbell with her platinum pixie-cut hair and petite size—even though she's wearing four-inch platforms. She dresses in bright, cartoon-like clothing and has several tattoos, including a pair of pink ribbons near her collarbone. It's a refreshing change from the hordes of 20-something Aberzombies.

"In high school, I felt like all the girls looked the same," VanBrocklin says. "They'd all be wearing the same shirt, except maybe in a different color. I loved going to the thrift store and buying something and then altering it. It was nice knowing that nobody would be able to find what I was wearing in the stores."

VanBrocklin taught herself to make clothes in high school and now works from home, creating and shipping out 30 to 50 items a week, thanks to word-of-mouth advertising and eBay. "I can just whip stuff up," she says with a giggle. "I get creative and chop things up and make them fit. I don't use patterns or do anything the traditional way—it's all by eye."

She describes the clothes she makes as "vintage with a modern twist."

"Vintage" because she draws much of her inspiration from her childhood—she digs the flowing blouses and short shorts her mom used to wear, and she fixates on cartoon characters from *My Little Pony* and *Strawberry Shortcake*. "Modern" because she does things her own way—if she finds bed sheets printed with a design she likes, she uses it as fabric.

"I hate going shopping and seeing that the only selection out there is the trend of the month," she says. "There's nothing unique about it. My clothes are an alternative to that."

VanBrocklin's clothing is an alternative to the high prices you'd pay at a mall, too. Her stuff often sells for less than \$30 on eBay.

"That's my No. 1 thing," VanBrocklin explains.

Lynn's Rags (www.lynnrags.com) is available in local boutiques like Hitch Couture and Rags and, luckily, VanBrocklin's fans don't have to worry about her packing up and hitting the bigger L.A. fashion scene anytime soon. She has unfinished business to attend to: getting San Diegans out of their beach-bum apparel.

"We basically have a lot of flip flops and tank tops here," complained VanBrocklin. "That's something that I want to see change." **CB**

**GOING DEEP
BELOW SEA LEVEL**

ARTIST BEN HORTON SHARES HIS PHILOSOPHIES
ON LIFE AND RACCOONS

BY ERIKA HOBART

An old man with an anguished expression is drawn in black on a white canvas. The words scrawled boldly across the top read: "WHY'D SHE HAVE TO TAKE THE DAMN DOG?" Artist Ben Horton might have had an answer in mind when he created the drawing, but he prefers ambiguity.

"His ex-girlfriend could have taken the dog," Horton suggests. "Or, who knows, maybe someone killed the dog. Then there's always the question of why the dog is so important. There's some meaning behind it, but that meaning could be different for you than it is for me."

Horton began drawing quirky creations as a child and channeled his talent into a professional career designing skateboard graphics for the last 15 years. He kept his paintings and drawings a hobby until four years ago, when he had his first public show. Since then, Horton's continued showing his work and is now showcasing his latest pieces at downtown's Voice 1156 Gallery in *Below Sea Level*, an exhibit he says is as a reflection of daily life.

"I have a pretty busy lifestyle," Horton explains in a voice that reflects anything but. "I have a day job, I have a wife and two children, and then I do freelance art. Sometimes I feel overwhelmed—the expression 'trying to catch my breath' fits right. It's a sea of constant errands and relationships that need to be taken care of, and there's no time to float around."

Horton's hectic lifestyle doesn't prevent him from taking in his surroundings. He sees people and animals as extraordinary art forms; his take on everyday life is filled with a Zen-like appreciation.

"Animals seem so common, but you rarely see them unless you go to the zoo," says Horton. "It's almost as if they're mythological, like dragons. Raccoons aren't particularly unusual, but if you see one on the street you'll still be surprised. Animals get that reaction from you. They're untouchable."

There are always more people and animals to paint, but that doesn't mean Horton wants to quit his day job at the skate-

board manufacturing company. "Skateboarding is artistic in many ways," he says. "It's therapeutic and a way to express yourself. It's like dancing or creating art—there are no rules."

Horton may like the therapeutic aspects of his work, but he isn't sure if he wants the world to know about them. In fact, he remains vague about his future plans. "I've been inspired by identifying with someone's book or art, so if I can do that for someone with my work, that's cool," he says. "But I don't know how long I'll be showing things. It's kind of weird. Expressing your thoughts and feelings to people you don't know is rough." **CB**

Ben Horton's Below Sea Level is on view at Voice 1156 Gallery, 1156 Seventh Ave., Downtown, through the end of July. www.benhortonart.com.



"Manor Farm" by Ben Horton