

Eleven Rivington

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ARTISTS SUIT UP DURING SOCHI

Sales From the Collection of Tracksuits to Benefit the Russian LGBT Network

By Kimberly Chou

Of late, many New Yorkers have been gathered somewhere warm to watch the 2014 Winter Olympics or out chasing the cool of Fashion Week. Over the weekend, the Lower East Side gallery Louis B. James celebrated a collaboration that fused something of both.

As visitors milled about the narrow gallery, sporty-looking models jogged out in polyester tracksuits printed with loud designs: brightly filtered landscapes, floral, disembodied limbs. Looking like a charmingly delinquent downtown track team, they mugged, vogued and posed for the crowd, who were snapping iPhone photos and sipping cans of Tecate—and this was all for charity.



A project between the gallery and the print-on-demand company Print All Over Me, Purple & Gold is a capsule collection of artist-edition tracksuits that are an art-meets-fashion response to the Olympic Games in Sochi, considering Russia's reputation as a place largely inhospitable to gay people.

"There has been so much in the press and on social media about boycotting watching the games for social and political reasons," said Louis B. James co-founder David Fierman, "And while I understand the statement, it seems more useful to do something constructive to raise awareness and also funds."

Artists who contributed designs include Kalup Linzy, Jack Pierson and Casey Legler—herself a former Olympic swimmer (and known for being the first woman signed to Ford Models' male models roster).

Proceeds from sales of the tracksuits, available in editions of either 25 or 100 depending on the artist, will go to the Russian LGBT Network, a St. Petersburg-based human rights organization. Each suit is \$200. (Sales of the Tecate Friday night, \$2 each at the launch party, also went to the Russian LGBT Network.)

"The designs are all very different," said Jesse Finkelstein, the founder of Print All Over Me, "all engaging with this issue, in some respects in very literal ways while other designs appreciate it more abstractly."

Artist Scott Hug's design featured a hammer and sickle printed across the iconic LGBT rainbow stripes—two flags in one. Lucas Michael's tracksuit showed a sports trophy paired with BDSM leather gear. For his contribution, TM Davy created a chain mail pattern out of the Olympic Rings.

"I thought of it as a symbolic suit of armor for the protection, freedom and solidarity of all queer/LGBT athletes and persons of Sochi, Russia and the world," he said.

Purple & Gold is a project that feels very much of today. But there is an art-historical reference to it, too, Mr. Fierman pointed out.

"There is a legacy from early 20th century Soviet constructivism of remaking everyday design objects as a way to engage a newly formed proletarian class with ideas of the revolution—forming a relationship with a product of labor rather than having it be expressly consumerist," he said. "I think in a fun way we are engaging that legacy."