



## Stephen Sprouse interviews E.V. Day



When *\*surface* discovered that the newest designer dress to be blown up by explosive artist EV DAY was donated specially for the occasion by STEPHEN SPROUSE, it was clear what we had to do. We recruited a hand from Brooklyn-based artist and editor Charles Beyer, to get the two creative sparks to settle down with a tape recorder and talk about the project. Stephen Sprouse has previously collaborated with an impressive array of art and music stars, all part of his ongoing quest to create futuristic American rock and roll style. He is currently working on a NASA-sponsored 3-D painting of its proposed space station. Sprouse's 'bar code tartan' kilt worn by Axl Rose, along with a dress adorned by Debbie Harry, is currently on view at the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. His work is also featured in *The Warhol Look* traveling exhibit, set to land at the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh in June 2000.

"Black Bombshell,"  
black sequin dress,  
turnbuckles &  
monofilament  
16' x 20' x 20'  
1999



**interview** Stephen Sprouse **edited by** Charles Beyer

**DAY-BLOW**

**A female artist who blows up couture dresses?** It conjures the image of a hysterical womyn, mad as hell and intent on bringing misogynistic fashion culture to its knees. But EV Day would rather blast fashion concepts into outer space. The artist, who prefers a future rocker personal style, fragments designer frocks as a means to translate anatomy to architecture, and beyond. Day re-spatializes cultural artifacts: She's reinvented the blueprints of Hugh Hefner's personal plane (the *Anatomy of a Private Jet* drawings) and exploded Marilyn Monroe's dress from *The Seven Year Itch* (the *Bombshell* installation currently on view at the Whiney Biennial). EV Day takes out her tool belt and recontextualizes the meaning of these icons, expanding and re-editing their fixed cultural value and spinning them out into fantasy land. Now on view at New York's Henry Urbach Architecture, alongside a series of sculptures called *Celestial Pelvises*, is an exploded silver sequin dress donated by Day-Glo designer Stephen Sprouse. The two are linked in a quest for true space-age style. (Sprouse is current-

158

ly at work on a 3-D painting for NASA's current space station proposal.) As EV prepared to cast an intergalactic new light on Sprouse's garment, the two met for *\*surface* to discuss the method to her madness.

**> Sprouse: Lets talk about what you're going to do for the Henry Urbach Architecture exhibition.** Day: Well, as you know I am going to destroy the silver sequined dress you gave me. I was so thrilled when

you came over to my studio and responded to [previous work] *Black Bombshell* by saying, "Whoah, would you do that to one of my dresses?" How beautiful. What other designer would instantly want me to do that to their work? It made perfect sense—of course a punk designer would offer up a gown for slaughter. I was impressed by the fact that we didn't discuss what kind-of outfit, you just sent over this silver sequined number in a little ziplock bag. I knew instantly what I wanted to do with it. I thought, 'Beam me up.' **What are you calling it?** *Transporter*. I had this snap image of the dress suspended with the form of a figure, sequins vibrating, dissipating into

a column of light. Along the lines of the *Star Trek* transporter, when one of the crew steps into it and goes to some exotic locale. [Absentmindedly rubs her eye and smudges her makeup, shrugs.] I don't need it anymore—'cause I'm going to another place on another planet, where I don't need eye makeup. Stephen, your 3-D Mars NASA [collection] was so amazing. I was seduced by the whole performance. The head banging music, the models cruising down the dark runway wearing your beautiful 3-D fabrics. The dresses dangling with oversized glow-in-the-dark discs and sexy techno head-gear disappearing and reappearing in front of a 3-D projection of the Mars landscape. Your fantasy of existing on Mars. I hope Mars looks like that. The event blew away most performance art I have seen. Sprouse, you build an atmosphere of the future through these outfits, and with my work I am trying to make these entities blast off to *get* there. I never think about my pieces [in the *Exploding Couture* series] as being completed, as the object in themselves, but rather I attempt to push something out of what they are. A potential presence. They are about the desire to transcend to another place. Like, out of Brooklyn. **Will it just be *Transporter* at Henry Urbach, or will you have other work in the show?** I'm also going to have these sculptural pieces I call *Celestial Pelvises*. Delicate creatures hanging from the ceiling constructed out of surgical steel wire and clear resin—installed to resemble a sea of alien jellyfish, underwater inhabitants, or perhaps space creatures. Not totally related to *Transporter*, but in terms of the dress and the dissolving idea, they are kind of like these alien beings, hovering creatures. Maybe *Transporter* is going to the place where the celestial pelvises are. I'm not naming specifically what or where they are, just implying that they refer to an alternate location. Because they all relate to notions of transit, I am so pleased they will be seen at a venue that shows architecture-based projects. This context enhances the sensuous aspects of representing spaces that might be overlooked. I think it is important for me to also say something here about women's issues, to comment on changing roles that are being played out today. People talk of empowerment, but *Transporter* is not about women conquering, seeking and destroying. It's just about *change*. *Change that's positive*. Expanding terrain. Permeation of the existing one. **Transporting**. Exactly. **Will your installation utilize natural or artificial light?** A dark room with artificial light, definitely! It will be spotlit



"It made sense.  
—Of course a  
punk designer  
would offer up  
a gown for  
slaughter."

"Bombshell,"  
white crepe dress  
& monofilament,  
16' x 20' x 20'  
1999

in a way that enhances the sparkles and the sequins. Static electricity. A column of light. **Black light is cool because it will enhance the color of the sequins in the most incredible way, make them very translucent.** That ultraviolet way of dissolving. Even closer to the look of the *Star Trek* transporter. Can you get a black light spotlight, or are they only available in tubes? **Black light spots? Go to Times Square Lighting Supply. You can get the most incredibly powerful spots. That's the kind they use for all the big rock concerts. I've used them for my shows too.** As I mentioned, what's going to be apparent in *Transporter* is a dissolving column of light, but the female figure will be apparent inside the body cavity. The *Star Trek* reference is how much clothing can be a 'vehicle' in itself, using that idea as a metaphor and dissolving it in that way. Different from the two *Bombshell* pieces that are more about celebrating the exploding and expanding of conventional images of girlie frocks. *Transporter* brings it another step forward. You can see the figure actually leaving, not in absence but *en route*. **A tubular implosion. Totally. Totally tubular!** OK, back to Brooklyn. When I think of black light and Day-Glo colors in the way you use them, I think of a sort of futuristic enhancement. Transcendence to an exotic universe. That 3-D painting of the proposed space station you're working on with NASA would be a perfect place to blast off to. **I am attracted to Day-Glo because it's an outer-spacey light. Sort of unnatural light but really illuminating. I always liked Day-Glo not because it's 'psychedelic,' but because they're the most chemical colors, like powders from outer space. I like to think that I'm using space powders when I paint with Day-Glo colors. There surely will be new colors invented in this century.** I hope so. **Maybe you should paint the gallery Day-Glo blue... you can get big containers of it right next door to your studio on Metropolitan Avenue at Klendosky paint. I got gallons of Day-Glo paint from there in the '80s... You couldn't buy it in Manhattan then!** Isn't one of the rooms in your apartment Day-Glo blue? **Uh-huh, My bedroom.** So you sleep in a celestial chamber. Wow. **Once someone said that black light is bad for you, but I've had mine on in my apartment for 20 years and I'm still here. I think it's good for you.** Well, you sure look good! I think I need to get some black light myself! Let's keep talking color. You know that old fashion adage "brown is the new black"? Well, I think that grey is the new white, because it's the primer for the millennium.\*