



maya hayuk

The Brooklyn artist and photographer sits down to talk punk rock and propaganda

Maya Hayuk has shot the album covers and portraits of such musicians as Jean Grae, Stereolab, DJ Dangermouse, and Tracy + the Plastics [see page 42]. On canvas, she paints everyday objects electrified by elements of magical realism — blinged-out chains with a golden pacifier attached, psychedelic trees sprouting from oxytocin and commuters contemplating Siddhartha. Her art's been featured in shows from Tokyo to L.A. to Paris. Hayuk was raised by Ukrainian immigrant parents in "a Wonder Bread suburb of Baltimore" and danced in John Waters' film *Hairspray*. Tonight she's preparing for an epic pilgrimage to the Ukraine and is painting the final details upon work to be featured in a springtime show in North Carolina. — *Chantal Gordon*

So tell me about your newest project, *Sir Gawain's Five Knightly Virtues*. It's a series of paintings depicting people doing a variety of things — having sex, playing the guitar, kicking it around a hot tub — and each painting is titled something like *Generosity*, *Chivalry* ...

Generosity, Piety, Courtesy, Chastity, and Chivalry — those knightly virtues are old-fashioned notions of what it takes to be a good warrior, a righteous human. Like *Chivalry* is two people who are masked in knight helmets, ripping each other's clothes off. There's a perfect equilibrium between them — that would be my definition of chivalry.

Why is everyone in the series covered in fur?

Because we all think we're so damn evolved — but we're so super basic in the way we behave. They're doing things that are base instincts. Like the desire to be in a hot tub — *pret-ty* base. Give our ancestors the option to get into a hot tub, they would've.

How did you start photographing musicians?

I was really into punk rock when I was a kid. When I was 16, 17, there was a Grateful Dead cover band I wanted to see, but you had to be 21 to get into the club. So I made a press pass, called the club in advance, and told them I was the editor of a fictitious magazine and that I had a photographer who wanted to take pictures of the band. Then I appeared at the club with camera in tow.

That's when I was starting to realize the importance of saving stuff, of making a record of things. When you look at pictures, shit looks so fun, but it wasn't necessarily a whole night at that volume; it was just this random moment that this funny, fucked-up thing happened.

I love your painting that says, "Enjoy life — eat me out more often" and shows a woman in front of a glorious red vista. What inspired that?

I was thinking about those propaganda posters that I'd seen since I was a little kid every time I went back to the Soviet Union. I wanted to re-enact those but I had my own line of propaganda that I decided to employ [laughs]. There was this truck I saw all the time that said, "Enjoy life, eat out more often," so it immediately turned into, "Hey — eat *me* out more often!"

Also, it was about learning how to duplicate things, getting good eye-hand coordination and not using any of the tools that I knew I could, like overhead projectors or Photoshop. Basically I've always just wanted to refine my own craft.

