

# arts & letters

## Future fashion



*de rigueur for  
a new century*

by  
Faith  
Dawson

"The Jetsons" provided a glimpse of the future for more than a generation of children: space travel, robot maids—and very cool galactic clothing. Yet more 30 years later, nothing's changed. Can we still adhere to the rules of gravity, human hands still scrub-and-wax, and as for clothes, let's just say that most Americans, loyal to their closets, have developed a symbiotic relationship with the Gap.

As millennial mania reaches a fever pitch, a group of local fashion designers will give us a hint of what may be in store for the 2000s. This month Red Room will be the setting of "Beyond Paradise II: Costumes for a New Millennium," an evening of fashion, art and music. Last year the fledgling event was Fashion Group International's Alpha Award for best fashion fund-raiser.

The primary force behind Beyond Paradise is clothing designer Corina Leedy, a young Seattle-area native who moved to New Orleans for years ago. Last year she and two other designers conceived the show and approached Red Room owner Juan Spinella with the idea. At the time Red Room was still new, but several other people had approached him about hosting fashion and music events there as well. "I called them all together and said... if you all are willing to collaborate on this, I'm willing to bet on it," Spinella says.

Guestie shows seem to inspire many people; they argue that they can't afford and would never wear the fantastic collections that come loping down the run-

way as supermodels. To be sure, Leedy isn't designing khaki pants and polo-style shirts. Her collections meet at the crossroads of vintage, otherworldly and dinky Hollywood glamour. Rapunzel might wear Leedy's dresses (or T-shirts).

But to Leedy, dresses are apparel and so much more. They are her art form. In her bedroom house/studio, dresses decorate her bedroom walls, and shoes are precariously displayed on nest shelves.

"This is the kind of art that I'm interested in collecting," she says. "I love painting, and I love sculpture, but the thing that really moves me is fashion, because you have the opportunity to completely possess the art and to make it part of yourself, and appropriate it for your self-expression. It's the only art form that can be personalized in that way."

So in the name of creating art for the body and not just evening for the body, Leedy spends hours designing, sewing, hand-painting and hand-beading garments for her collections, which have names like "Gardens and Jungles," "Bodies Inside Out" and "Transformations," a collection which was inspired by the fantasy of an incomplete metamorphosis from human to fish, bird or animal.

"The fashion-as-art thing is really important to the whole way that I've structured the show. Two of the designers don't even know how to sew," Leedy says, emphasizing that artistic vision and attention to texture and details mean more to the show than the ability to meet a zipper.

Setting the scene at

Beyond Paradise

1998. Above: Leedy

Leedy (in white)

hands out instruc-

tions backstage.

Right: A dress from

designer Adina

Mitchell's "20 Feet

Underage" collection.

