

# RALPH RUCCI: A Brush with Art and Fashion in San Francisco

By Diane Dorrans Saeks. Photography Thomas John Gibbons.

**R**alph Rucci, haute couturier. Ralph Rucci, ready-to-wear fashion darling. Now make that Ralph Rucci, artist. Rucci, based in New York City, and the only U.S.-based American designer to be invited to show under his own name at the Paris couture collections, recently celebrated the premier exhibition of his newest canvases and collages, "Ralph Rucci: Recent Paintings and Works on Paper," at the Serge Sorokko Gallery here in San Francisco. Before the ink on invitations had dried, flights were booked both by Rucci's couture clients and by an international group of art collectors, and all were out in force at the premiere. "Tatiana and I had been aware of Ralph's amazing paintings for some time, but until now they had been Ralph's exquisite secret," said gallery owner **Serge Sorokko**. "We proposed a show for Ralph in the gallery. He shipped 60 paintings to California. We immediately sold four of them."

Paying homage to the designer on opening night at the gallery and at a private dinner given by the Sorokkos at Fifth Floor

restaurant later that evening were fashion icon **James Galanos**, **Denise Hale**, **Dr. Seth Matarasso**, and **Pam and Dick Kramlich**, plus Houston socialite **Becca Cason Thrash**. Also traveling from near and far to attend the opening vernissage were **Carré Otis**, **Chrisse Otis**, **Louise La Palme Mann**, **Susan Casden**, **OJ Shansby**, **Shannon Bavaro**, **Beth Townsend**, **Boaz Mazor**, **Sally Debenham**, **Kimberly Bakker**, and **Jean Larette**.

"Ralph Rucci is the best fashion designer in America today," said Hale, who admires the complex construction of Rucci's jackets. "He selects the most beautiful fabrics. The silhouettes are exquisite. His art is thought-provoking and original." Los Angeles-based Galanos, who has attended Rucci's couture shows in Paris for several years, showed his support. "I so admire Ralph's sense of line and proportion," said Galanos, whose own couture designs are now among the hottest collectibles on the vintage fashion circuit.

The same poetry, perfection, knowledge of art history and seductive lines inherent in his fashion designs now illuminate his abstract canvases. One dramatic, seven-foot-tall work portrayed a Khmer Buddha face printed on white silk chiffon, floating over a white textured canvas.

Beside it hung a tall white canvas overlaid with layers of silk chiffon and printed fragments of 16th-century manuscripts. The collaged image was used in the resort 2006 collection, Rucci said. "I used to give the paintings away," Rucci admitted. "Painting is a way of evolving my mind, my senses, so that I can also bring that sensibility to my fashion design."

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— Ralph Rucci



Katia Sorokko

OJ Shansby in Miami

Chrisse Otis

Carré Otis

Jean Larette

Becca Cason Thrash in Ralph Rucci

Shannon Bavaro



Seth Matarasso



Joy Venturini Bianchi



Serge & Tatiana Sorokko Ralph Rucci



Norah Stone



Maria Martinez Ed Hardy



James Galanos



Rucci's 'The Men in White Robes', 2005



Sally Debenham



Kimberly Bakker

The normally reclusive Rucci's visit to San Francisco turned into a triumphal Grand Tour. After his gallery opening, Rucci celebrated his first Chado Ralph Rucci stand-alone boutique for Neiman Marcus (his only other shops are in Bergdorf Goodman and Saks Fifth Avenue in New York City) with a two-day trunk show and

a chic luncheon for 40 clients and friends. "I am absolutely thrilled to have the very first Chado Ralph Rucci shop at Neiman Marcus," said store manager John Capizzi. On hand to celebrate were Rucci's fans, including **Tatiana Sorokko**, **Lori Puccinelli Stern**, **Denise Hale**, **Norah Stone**, **Joy Venturini Bianchi**,

**Barbara Brookins Schneider**, **Sally Debenham**, **Maria Muzio**, **Vicki Kahn**, **OJ Shansby**, **Elizabeth Thieriot**, **Carol Young**, **James Galanos**, **Susan Casden** (from Beverly Hills), and **Becca Cason Thrash** (from Houston). Sorokko toasted Rucci's new boutique, saying, "In Russia,

when you do something for the first time, try something for the first time, you have to make a wish." And though Rucci wouldn't reveal what he wished for, more than one of his luncheon guests confessed to coveting pieces from his fall collection. The assemblage dined in Neiman's newly redesigned Rotunda restaurant on a

demitasse of cream of morel, followed by a lobster salad created especially for Rucci's appearance. Immediately following the lunch, the guests rushed to the new Chado Ralph Rucci Shop on level three, where they enjoyed champagne, strawberries and petits fours while Rucci-clad models strode about.