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Artist with fabric transfers his creativity to canvas



Ralph Rucci, left, autographs his fashion book at the Serge Sorokko Gallery, where Charlotte Shultz, above (from left), James Galanos and Jason Lizotte were among those attending his art opening.

Ralph Rucci's couture clothing is known for its intricate construction and elegant design, admired and worn by some of the world's wealthiest and most fashionable women. The designer's foray into the art world has attracted even more admirers, albeit for different reasons.

"I like its simplicity," said Cheryl Smith, who with her husband, Randall, was contemplating a purchase of "Coromandel," a large work with ancient Chinese characters printed on fabric.

"Messages From the Void, Part 2," Rucci's recent show at the Serge Sorokko Gallery on Grant Avenue, was a collection of large-scale paintings and drawings with an Expressionist and Minimalist aesthetic and — like his clothing line — a distinct Asian flair. Many of the pieces also incorporated bits of fabric as an homage to his roots.

The Smiths, both software engineers, started collecting Rucci's artwork in May 2006, when the designer premiered his first collection at the same gallery. As to the new work, Randall Smith said, "I'd



Rucci and Tatiana Sorokko, wife of gallery owner Serge Sorokko.

seen 'Coromandel' at least a month ago," adding that he snapped a photo of it to show his wife. However, he said, "The cell-phone picture just doesn't do it justice," so he brought her in for a look in person.

Among others taking a look were Rucci's close friend James Galanos, the retired fashion designer who also has embarked on a career in art (shown at the Sorokko gallery); San Francisco Protocol Chief Charlotte Shultz; modern art collector Norah Stone; venture capitalist Derek Barnes; and chef Ted Hiscox, who entertained Rucci at a private dinner at Barnes' ultra-hip loft South of Market.

Of his work, Rucci said, "It's an evolution." He said he found artwork to be a release from the pressures of his life.

"It's a psychiatric endeavor. I allow myself to be led and function on a purely unconscious level, as if fast-forwarding myself years with a therapist."

Heady stuff for a man more closely associated with the frills of fashion, but something everyone can relate to.

"I'm trying to take myself out of the maze of fashion," Rucci said, "and be conscious of living my life and enjoying life to the fullest."

— Carolyne Zinko