

CAYUGA



Michelle Gabel / Staff photographer

ERIC DiMATTEO, 16, an Auburn High School freshman and a member of The House of BS, designs a poncho for Mesh 2, the ThINC-sponsored fashion show scheduled for April 30 at the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse. Jesse Kline (*background*), of Auburn, also a member of The House of BS, works on a piece.

A Student of Style

Auburn 16-year-old to present designs at fashion show

By **Beth Beer Cuddy**
Staff writer

Eric DiMatteo has had an interest in fashion ever since he can remember.

He first used a sewing machine at age 5. At 11, he received a 3-foot-tall "My Size Barbie" for Christmas, and he used it as a mannequin, draping fabric on it and taking pictures.

"I used to spend hours with it. That sounds so cheesy, but it was the best thing for me," DiMatteo said.

Now 16, the Auburn resident will premiere his designs at Mesh 2, a fashion show put together by ThINC (The Institution of a Now Culture) during the Syracuse International Film Festival. It is scheduled for April 30 at the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse.

"This is really going to be my launching point, this fashion show," he said.

DiMatteo has been collaborating with two other Auburn designers on a line of clothing called Tongue-tied.

"It's called Tongue-tied because you won't know what to say," DiMatteo explained.

They have coined their design team The House of BS (Bitch & Stitch), meeting every Sunday at a studio in Auburn to show off what they worked on during the week.

Denim and white tank tops are the unifying themes and make an appearance in each of the 12 ensembles.

The collection transcends the idea of traditional men's and women's clothing — vests and ties for women; skirts and purses for men.

"We're building bridges as far as if you want to put a man into a skirt — not a micro-mini, but like a sarong-style skirt — there's no reason why a man shouldn't be able to wear it," DiMatteo said.

A week ago, DiMatteo modeled a vest he made from tan cargo pants.

DiMatteo has traded in his "My Size Barbie" for a dress form, which displayed one of the design team's completed outfits — a denim skirt with pieces of duct tape applied on it, a white tank top with swatches of crochet squares sewn onto the top and ties sewn to the midriff, and sleeves made from 1960s-vintage material displaying pink butterflies and lime-green flowers. A cowboy hat was placed on the top of the

headless form.

"Country-rave, that's what we should call it," DiMatteo said. "We try to keep it country, but everything's so bright. It's like they had a party in the barn."

Although the team has been working together for a few months, the collaboration really began more than a year ago. DiMatteo had sought out fellow collaborator Jesse Kline after seeing her around the city and admiring her taste in eclectic clothes. A mother of one of DiMatteo's friends brought them together.

"He helped host an event at the (Cayuga) museum and had on this great vintage tuxedo shirt, but it was dyed magenta and I was thinking 'Who's this? We need to meet,'" Kline said. "I was definitely drawn to him, too. I knew he had a good sense of style."

Kline was friends with Pat Poole, who had known DiMatteo for years.

Poole admitted to being the most practical of the three designers.

"Eric is a little out there," Poole said. "Jesse tends to be out there, too. She has no limits. They want to go and get sequins and beads and I'm like, 'Let's make the dress first; then we'll decide on

Teen shows his designs

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the beads.' ”

DiMatteo says he does most of the team's sewing. Kline provides the vintage fabric that she has collected over the years.

“We're always trying to play off of each other,” Kline said.

“Add our own take on what the other person is working on. We have a similar aesthetic, too.”

DiMatteo's goal is to attend a design school, such as the Parsons School of Design in New York City. He keeps a book of designs that he has separated into style sections like “space age,” “grunge” and “country bumpkin.”

The Salvation Army's thrift store is DeMatteo's mecca, he said. The \$2 fabric racks at Wal-Mart are where DiMatteo finds the sources for his creations.

“They always get something that's bizarre and stretchy and kind of crazy,” DiMatteo said. “For \$2, you can't go wrong even if you just stare at it.”

His collaborators believe DiMatteo will go far and admire his talent and drive.

“We're like ‘Remember the little people, Eric. Remember your small beginnings,’ ” Kline said.