

20 People to watch in 2012



JOEFF DAVIS

A CUT ABOVE: "Both of us still needed an outlet for our creativity. So we got together and imagined one that nobody was directing but us."

Amy Flurry and Nikki Salk: The Paper Sculpture Duo

As the Paper-Cut-Project, the duo creates paper sculptures that capture the art world's eye

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An oblong orb of paper hair towers atop a mannequin head like a hot air balloon that's made an emergency landing. The image bestows a similarly perplexing sense of wonder as contemplating the physics of a hovering dirigible.

The gravity-defying paperscape is one in a series of pithy Marie Antoinette-inspired updos by local duo Amy Flurry and Nikki Salk, aka the Paper-Cut-Project. In the midst of a free-falling economy in 2009, the former fashion writer and local boutique owner (Buckhead's now-closed Addiction), respectively, formed an artistic partnership to create handmade paper sculptures and installations.

"It was a glum moment, but both of us still needed an outlet for our creativity. So we got together and imagined one that nobody was directing but us," says Flurry.

Their first job: Design windows for the New York and Atlanta outposts of Jeffrey, the longtime arbiter of high-end women's fashion in Atlanta. "We had a plan for a window and thought that maybe we could convince someone to go along with," says Flurry. "Then, we thought: 'The Jeffrey window.' They knew both Nikki and I, and on trust and with a little bit of collaborative effort with their visual director, they gave us the windows in New York and in Atlanta."

Since then, Flurry and Salk, a formally trained artist, have cut their way through commissions for some of fashion's most recognizable and respected names: a mess of Shirley Temple curls springs from a bulbous bouffant for a holiday window display at the Bay; strands of coal black hair whip like licks of flame on the side of the Grim Reaper's hot rod for a series of wigs for Kate Spade; feathers rise like succulent shoots of aloe from the crown of a paper cockatiel in an exclusive collection of animal masks for Hermès.

Any given Paper-Cut-Project sculpture can be made up of thousands of hand-cut, hand-placed, hand-glued pieces, the final work sometimes taking upward of 80 hours to create. And the duo doesn't have six months to create seven pieces when Italian *Vogue* comes knocking. Paper-Cut-Project does it in a month. (The wigs are on view at Jackson Fine Art through Jan. 21.)

"For the two of us to work together, it is this very fluid knowing because we've done it together from the start. It would be almost impossible to bring somebody else in because it's a piece-by-piece, cut-by-cut situation," says Flurry. "People look at these pieces, and they think, 'You must have had a whole crew of people sitting around cutting this stuff.' It couldn't work that way."

And then Christie's called.

About a month ago, the elite New York auction house phoned the duo during the last-minute prep for its high-profile sale and exhibit of Elizabeth Taylor's couture collection last December.

"They had all these exquisite jewels for couture on the mannequins, and they looked goofy without something on the head," Flurry says.

Flurry and Salk, barely back from her honeymoon, knocked out four pieces in two weeks, including a daisy-adorned ponytail to top Taylor's lemony chiffon sundress she wore for her first wedding to Richard Burton.

"The lovely thing about Paper-Cut is that we're not really concerned where it's going or where it ends up," Flurry says, "so it ends up in the right home somehow."

The pair is tight-lipped about plans for the coming year, likely because they're sticking to the same strategy they've had all along: serendipity. But Salk's eyes widen when she takes a moment to discuss an idea she's got brewing for a line of paper-molded jewelry.

"The textures, the lines that you can get with paper, and the stacking and layering even though it's made from metal, you'd know it was made from paper. Not like rings of flatness," Salk says. "It'd be like hardcore, intense, intricate stuff."