



Fan club Twiggy, photographed by Richard Avedon with hair by Ara Gallant.

When Hair Could Fly

It was the swinging '60s, and Ara Gallant wielded the brush.

Back before fashion became a global corporate enterprise, it was a haven for deviants from the norm. Fey boys, gawky girls, misfits in their own homes and their own hometowns, they left their backgrounds behind and emigrated to the land of Style, where they were welcomed into the business of making and marketing illusion. In time, they landed jobs as designers, photographers, display directors, makeup artists, hairdressers, stylists, editors, arbiters.

Brilliant but not atypical was Ara Gallant, né Ira Gallantz. He fled the family's Bronx beauty parlor and worked as a hairstylist on photo shoots before becoming a photographer himself. "**Ara Gallant**" (Damiani) brings together images by Richard Avedon and others, for which Gallant styled the hair; his own photos, including Interview covers; memories of Gallant by his friends, colleagues and celebrity subjects; and quotes from Gallant himself. ("I went into hair. ... I hated it. But I was good at it. ... I had always thought to be talented at something, you had to like it.")

Gallant's transmogrification was complete, extending to his own appearance and his meticulously contrived surroundings. Dressed entirely in black, with chiseled sideburns and

kohl-rimmed eyes, he wore a cap that became a trademark of sorts, festooned with charms bestowed by his friends. In the spirit of Huysmans's "Against Nature," he shuttered the windows of his West End Avenue apartment and painted the walls of the living room high-gloss black. (Anjelica Huston liked sleeping there when she was in town.) The white linoleum floor was splashed with red paint, to simulate a river of blood. The dining room walls and table were covered in mirrors — a perfect setting for dinners attended by models and movie stars. (Jack Nicholson was a frequent guest.) From there, Gallant and his glamour squad moved on to Studio 54 or one of any number of other nightspots that prolonged the party until dawn.

"Hairdresser" is too banal a word for the role that Gallant played in many of the 1960s' most striking fashion images. He made hair expressive. In Avedon's photos of leaping, skipping models, even their hair is energized, as if the thrill of being young at that particular moment were coursing all the way to the ends of their flying tresses. A six-foot-long pigtail swirls after Veruschka like a jet trail. Clouds of dynel billow around Twiggy's childlike features in a vision of an innocent Medusa. Blue and auburn braids frame Veruschka's

sculptured cheekbones in a photo shot in Egypt by Franco Rubartelli, reinventing Pharaonic headgear in the terms of space-age elegance.

Gallant's collaborators speak of him with affection and admiration. "He did his research everywhere," says Polly Mellen, the former Vogue editor. "At the library, in books, at museums, on the street, after-hours parties and the gay transvestite world." She lists his persistent inspirations, among them French history and "anything gothic." Eventually, Gallant needed more latitude and picked up the camera himself, capturing the '70s with all the enthusiastic immediacy of an active participant.

The cast is an honor roll of the decade's famous names: Faye Dunaway, Marisa Berenson, Warren Beatty, Diane von Furstenberg. Naked bodies cradle one another or lock in an embrace. Hair continues to fly, but now it's whipped by fans while the model holds still. Sixties exuberance has waned. Intimations of sex and drugs have escalated into Dionysian tableaux. Sophistication has been corrupted by cynicism. An early image of Apollonia, the Dutch model, pulled and shoved by flash-popping paparazzi while fans tear at her dress, evokes David's "Intervention of the Sabine Women," with its pile-up of tangled bodies and flailing limbs, and calls into question the celebrity obsession fostered by the very magazines that Gallant worked for.

And then: His brother is murdered. He runs into trouble with the I.R.S. Forced to sell his New York apartment, he moves to L.A. to pursue a screenwriting career, which goes nowhere. The drugs get the upper hand. He rehabs. He relapses. He runs out of money. A few friends find him work to keep him busy or give him loans. Others drift away, as friends do when they're powerless to help, knowing that the demise is under way but preferring not to watch.

The reports of his death, in 1990, conflict when it comes to the details. One version: He shot himself in a hotel room in Las Vegas, carrying out his half of a failed suicide pact. Describing his photography, Anjelica Huston writes, "He created situations that were both sexy and dangerous." That, too, was a sign of an era that many of its protagonists didn't survive. Like other members of his fashion generation, their careers cut short by drugs or AIDS or both, Gallant self-immolated, battling a coke habit and other demons apparently more difficult to identify. When he left the Bronx for Manhattan, New York for L.A., fashion for the movies, they came with him. ■