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Junque - The art of the t-shirt

By Bethel Swift

Special to BV Mag



Chicago—For *Junque*, a new Chicago-based urban art fashion company, designing one-of-a-kind T-shirts has led to unique opportunities, including an invitation to design a jacket for Lamorne Morris, who is attending the BET Awards on June 27 and is the host of Black Entertainment Television’s new Fall show *Hot Wyred*.

Junque is the brainchild of high school friends Joey Funk, 23 and Sam Sanchez, 22. Funk, a special education major at Northeastern University, began working on the concept three years ago. When he saw how interest in his designs grew through word of mouth and networking; Funk decided to turn them into a clothing line.

Funk chose the name *Junque* as a unique spelling of “Junk,” his childhood nickname.

He and Sanchez, a communications major at Moody Bible Institute, began working on designs for a line of urbanesque, high-fashion tees. Later, Sanchez recruited Jae Kelton, 26, who holds a fashion design degree from the Illinois Institute of Art.



Junque released their spring/summer collection *Everlasting Junque*, with a fashion show at Chicago’s Joe’s Sports Bar in April, and their shirts are sold online (\$30 each) at www.junquefunk.com. *Junque*’s demographic is mostly 18 to 35-year-olds, and most of their clientele are involved with art. The theme of their debut line is divided along gender lines with V-neck tees and a competitive theme for men and sleeveless tees with a coastal theme for women.

Many of the designs came from Sanchez playing around in Photoshop. For the design titled *Diamond*, Sanchez used the burn tool on a side profile photo of Kelton’s face. After erasing all but the line of her face and mouth, he filled Kelton’s eye with black and surrounded it

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with petals to resemble a flower.

Sanchez says he also wanted to incorporate his Christian faith into his designs. In *Transfer*, the sleeveless pale yellow shirt has a small black bird in the bottom left. The bird appears to fly up and to the right into a blue circle and comes out of the circle changed to white and joins another white bird already in flight. Sanchez explains, "This idea of round transfer; one of the birds coming into the circle and coming out new – is like a new creation in Christ."



Funk says he takes inspiration from everything—including his hobbies. "I play a lot of chess," says Funk, who named one of the designs *Queen's Gambit*, a chess move. Sanchez agrees with Funk that everything from music to religion and graffiti inspires him.

Like their shirts, the design team is a study in anomalies. Kelton recalls working late nights with Funk, hand dying American Apparel T-shirts so they could be sent to the screen printers. Kelton, an avid Audrey Hepburn fan, acknowledges that in college most of her projects were "kind of classy looking." While at the Art Institute of Dallas, she designed a collection called, *Beautiful Wish You Were Here*, funky, European-style cocktail dresses inspired by the '50s. That line included a ball gown with bead-strung safety pins along the bodice and hemline of the dress. "I'm a big detail person," says Kelton. Under her influence, each of the shirts that *Junque* premiered included beading.

Funk and Sanchez say they hope to grow the company by collaborating with celebrities on clothing designs. "It's getting them to promote our stuff while giving them a chance to show their creativity," Sanchez says.



As for their Fall line, Kelton won't give much away. "We've been looking at immigration and we've got this thing for Ellis Island," she says.

**Junque* goods are available online at: www.junquefunk.com or for more info e-mail them at: junquefunk@yahoo.com

(Above: Joshua Swenson and Esteban Pommier Photos)

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