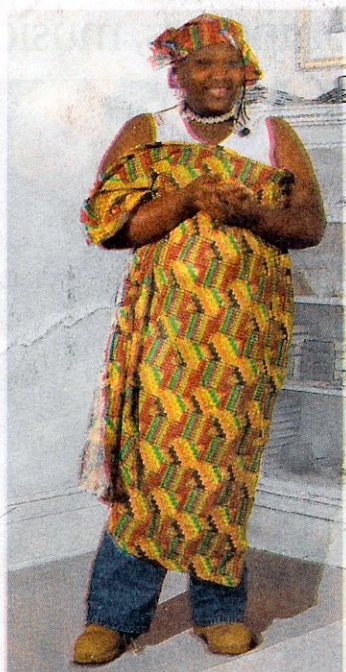


CLOTHES MAKE THE WOMAN



"I am very uncomfortable with my body, so wearing these things are like my comfort zone."

— Erika Mann, high school student, Chapel Hill, N.C.



"This dress, it's called my Yes Dress because when I am asking someone for something and I want good results, I wear the Yes Dress."

— Megan Jones, business owner, Memphis, Tenn.



"And the hat that I have on now is a hat that I've been waiting for all my life, actually. This hat says, 'You sharp.'"

— La'Tasha D. Mayes, graduate student, Pittsburgh



"When we did put on our street clothes and go ashore, we'd still have this swagger of, 'I'm tougher than you. I do cool things.'"

— Claire A. Yannacone, tugboat engineer, Patchogue, N.Y.



PHOTOS BY TWO GIRLS WORKING

After Linda Durham moved to New Mexico in 1966, she asked God to give her a sign that there is meaning to her life. She says the sign came in the form of two ravens, so a few years ago, she had the birds tattooed on her shoulders.

FOR MANY, POWER DRESSING GOES BEYOND A BASIC BLACK SUIT

BY VICKI HYMAN
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

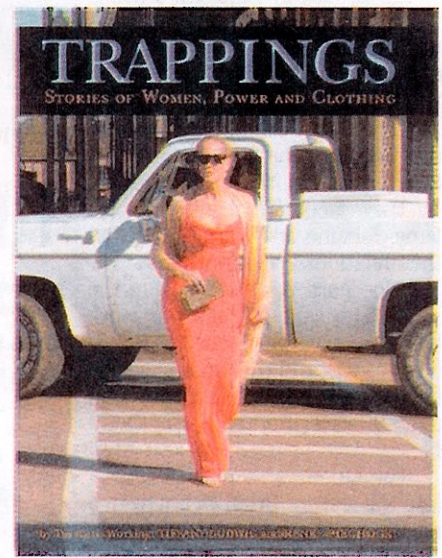
FOR LINDA DURHAM, power once took the shape of a pair of rabbit ears and a form-fitting black leotard. As a Playboy bunny in New York in the 1960s, she says, "I could make up stories about myself because we weren't really permitted to tell our last names or where we lived."

Then power became a passport in her pocket: "In traveling alone in a foreign country where the culture is not that familiar and the language is unknown, there's a sense of learning 'Who am I?'" And one day, shortly after she moved to New Mexico, she took a long walk and ended up at the edge of a cliff. Feeling lonely, she asked God for a sign, for a purpose. Two ravens flew out from behind her and hung in the wind before her.

Four years ago, entering her seventh decade, Durham had black ravens, wings outstretched, tattooed on her shoulders. "So that's my power, and I wear it and hardly anyone sees it."

Durham is one of more than 500 women (and a few girls) interviewed by Tiffany Ludwig of Glen Ridge and Renee Piechocki of Pittsburgh for their multimedia art project, "Trappings: Stories of Women, Power and Clothing."

[See **POWER**, Page 34]



Tiffany Ludwig, far left, and Renee Piechocki, left, collaborated on the multimedia art project "Trappings," in which they used clothes to engage women across the country in a dialogue about power. Rutgers University Press released the book, above, that includes many of the interviews.

POWER

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

Clothes make the woman

(The book of the same title, published by Rutgers University Press, contains edited-down versions of about 80 of the interviews.)

The women, who make up the art collective Two Girls Working, met nearly eight years ago at a conference and hit it off immediately — a good thing, because Piechocki was set to move to North Carolina the day after the conference ended.

Piechocki, who had specialized in landscapes, and Ludwig, a performance artist who also does conceptual digital work, knew they wanted to work together on a project, but in a different medium than each was used to. They spent a year on the phone sharing their work and trading ideas.

They wanted to talk about feminism, but felt the word was too loaded and would scare off the women they hoped to involve. "Everybody gets dressed in the morning," Ludwig says. "Clothing became the entry into the conversation. What is power? Is it confidence? Is it strength? Is it intuition? Is it endurance?"

That gave them their opening question: What do you wear that makes you feel powerful?

Over the next six years, they traveled to 15 states to meet with women — a museum curator, students, an architect, a hockey player, entrepreneurs, stay-at-home moms, a drag king, a boxer and a shaman, among others — in group settings that were part Tupperware party, part consciousness-raising session.

The answers — jeans, a black lace bra, steel-toed boots, red lipstick, a white doctor's coat, a purple cape, a Jordache fake fur coat, engine grease — were illuminating, but the tangents provided the

springboard into race, class, gender stereotypes and cultural expectations.

A petite police officer catalogues her equipment: Bulletproof vest. Mace. Baton. Knife. Handcuffs. Gun. The Taser that makes your muscles, she says, "basically just go into immediate spasm and you fall and cry and scream." But that is not power to her. "I want to look like a girl. I want my hair down. I want to be pretty."

A tugboat engineer talked about going out for an ice cream after a long day at work, still in her greasy coveralls, watching the crowd part around her. "People just go, 'There's that dirty girl.' They're not used to it and they don't know what to make of it, but there's something powerful about it. You're like, yeah, I work with my hands, I work with my body, I'm dirty, what's it to you?"

Kathleen Ferguson, a.k.a. Bas-mah, is photographed in a red leopard, a long red and gold scarf tied around her hips, and bedecked in

gold headdress, necklace and bracelets. "My mother expected me to take the veil, if you understand my drift, but not quite like this," says Ferguson, who teaches bellydancing in Jersey City.

"All of the gewgaws and doo-dads bring us into another culture, help bring us psychologically to a different place," she says. "We are on Cleopatra's barge going up the Nile. We are more than housewives, more than grandmas. We don't sit in front of the TV watching Jerry Springer and knitting socks."

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On tour and online

Tiffany Ludwig and Renee Piechocki's book, "Trappings: Stories of Women, Power and Clothing" (Rutgers University Press, \$29.95), highlights dozens of interviews the artists have conducted with women across the country. A multimedia exhibition of their work is on tour through 2009, and a Web site, www.twogirlsworking.com, archives their interviews.