



Daryl K is doing just fine.

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No one captures authentic New York grunge quite like Downtown designer Daryl K. For 30 years, she's been dressing rock stars and making regular women feel like one. On a historic day in November 2020, we meet in the Catskills to talk about America, women's bodies, and how punk is Upstate NY.



I FIRST MEET Daryl Kerrigan, otherwise known as fashion designer Daryl K, mere hours after hearing that Joseph Robinette Biden, Jr. has been named President-Elect. We'd been connecting for a while, me from Los Angeles, she, from her house directly on the banks of the Delaware River. I had booked a flight home to New York because it seemed imperative that I physically be there to cast my home state ballot, and it gave me the chance to see her in person. On the day I walk into her pop-up shop in Hudson, NY, a 30-minute, flaming gold-leaved drive from where I grew up, it feels like I'm resuming a longstanding personal familiarity.

We're both wearing battered trainers (hers, blue suede; mine, Chuck Taylor hi-tops) and faded denim and share similarly casual ideas about brushing our hair. When I see Kerrigan's huge, ice-blue eyes, I think what an unfair advantage is given in pandemic times to people blessed with a great set of peepers. Even from behind her ticking stripe mask (she will select a new one from the big bowl on the table to give me before we part ways), Kerrigan has no problem expressing herself, not that she ever did.

She was one of the first to remove herself from the frontlines of the fashion world in the mid-aughts, having developed a distaste for where the industry was headed. More than a decade earlier, she'd already been established as one of New York's most authentic cool girls, one of an influx of unruly young Irish people that roamed the city's music venues in the late '80s and early '90s. "We'd just go see everyone," she says, "the Talking Heads, The Ramones. We'd all gather at the same gigs and bars."

"I came to New York immediately after studying fashion at art college. It was so much cooler than Ireland, which was so narrow-minded." The aesthetic was grunge, punk, rock and roll, and the influence seeped into her early days as a costume designer. Remember Marisa Tomei's razor-sharp leather minis and bombers in "My Cousin Vinny"? That was Kerrigan as co-costume designer. She opened a production studio in the East Village, styled her friends for tours and shows, drag queens and musicians and performers like her old friend, Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon. Her fashion shows are the stuff of legend—in an abandoned swimming pool, atop a flatbed truck in the old parking garage

space that's now Gagosian Gallery. Her thing was pants (which I really want to talk about in a minute): sexy, hip-hugging, bootleg jeans, and leather. Her Bond Street store was home to many a stylist and cool kid slaving for her brand of fluid appeal. She is the fashion version of a band's band.

But then, something changed: her mood, the city, the industry. "Around 2005, the internet sort of sped everything up. Every celebrity wanted a fashion line; every celebrity was at the shows. Fashion shows weren't about clothes anymore, and they certainly weren't about women. The whole industry ended up being insulting to women." Kerrigan has never been one to design for the fashion cycles, and the constant overproduction of clothes was starting to bother her from a moral standpoint. "I don't know how much of an activist I am, but the design process became buyers always wanting something more, something new. I just started hating it."

Kerrigan and her husband Paul bought a place on the New York/Pennsylvania border in 1995, in a market she calls "thrifty store real estate." The proximity to the river is dazzling. You can see it from every point in the house. "My foot was already kind of out the door in New York, and we've been coming here and sitting on the same river bank for 25 years," she tells me. So they installed their kids in the local school and relocated. "It was actually quite punk of her to move upstate," one fashion industry veteran declared. "Rural Pennsylvania is very different from Upstate New York," Kerrigan emphasizes. "There's a strong military presence; they send good looking kids to recruit from the high school. My daughter received an education of the world she wouldn't have in the city. She saw the patriarchy, what America can really be like."

To anyone who has truly loved New York City, we know it breathes like a living thing. "You could wake up, and everyone in the city is in the same mood as if it's just one person. I love it still. New York gave me everything. But it makes me sad, like it's wearing bad cosmetic surgery. It's a commerce-oriented place now, where artists no longer thrive." Except, she says, the East Village. "It never really seems to change."

Long before the mass exodus caused by the

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OPPOSITE: Kerrigan and her husband purchased their home in Damascus, PA on the Delaware river over twenty years ago.



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pandemic, when they felt their city was starting to resemble an over-commercialized face full of filler, Hudson was a place people escaped to when looking for East Village energy. Kerrigan has ended up on Warren Street, right in the middle of the fray, because her friend has a storefront and wanted her to do a pop-up. It’s here, at Dom. Equus, that without even trying she has recreated the early days of her Bond Street hub. “Everyone that stops in has a story to tell about a piece of my clothing from an integral part of their life, on the dance floor or some powerful memory. A lot of people still have them.”

On the day we’re there together, the town is exploding. Doors are flung open, makeshift parades are disrupting traffic, and everyone is hollering. The streets are more crowded than the L-train (which I have my own opinions about), but for now, none of us are sad to be missing the hoopla going down in the city. I’m standing in the corner of the shop with Kerrigan, which is rustic and filled with her friend’s dried flowers and raw wood and looks like the world’s tiniest, chicest barn, and we’re taking it all in.

“This reminds me of 2018 when the abortion referendum was overturned in Ireland. Women came from overseas to vote in favor of the repeal, and the energy was fervid. Like soccer fans at a final,” she says. We’re both vibrating with the emotion of the day but admit that our nerves are not yet settled. Everything is still simmering too hot, the road ahead is too long, and for the moment, I take comfort in the most immediate means at my disposal: Daryl K’s clothes.

Her collection’s lynchpin is the iconic lambskin leggings because, however beloved they remain by models and street style darlings, they’re made to shape everybody. They are soft. They make you feel good. They’re still made in New York City, with the same pattern and machine as when they were first designed. They retail at about \$900 and are meant to be worn a really, really long time, developed with a zigzag stitch used on wetsuits to last forever.

“Design is democratic. It’s thinking about the other person. Maybe I don’t have a really big bust, but she does. Or maybe you have a reticent woman who thinks she doesn’t have great style, and you have her try something new. You can see the transformation in her body and her face when she says, ‘I didn’t know I could look like

that.’ It’s about EMPATHY.”

After leaving and driving back to my childhood home, I head straight for my massive old bookshelf. A gargantuan stack of magazines has sat there for the last twenty years, including the subscriptions to Harpers Bazaar from the mid-nineties I know are still there. I thumb through until I find it, the Fall ’97 issue. Across the page from a feathered Valentino cardigan is the green Daryl K leather jacket and ruched silk mini I remember fiercely coveting. Maybe I made a lot more of an effort to be glamorous in high school than I do now; maybe they don’t make ‘em like they used to, but at the current moment, I have a hard time imagining a fashion culture that burns permanently into the brain of a 15-year-old girl.

Kerrigan texts me images of her newest project, painting watercolors. “Nerdy Mom art,” she calls them, but they’re not. They’re modern, graffiti-esque splashes; they’re cool; and I want one. “I kind of don’t give a shit anymore about being successful in the fashion business,” she tells me over the phone. “Can I say that? I always say exactly what’s true, I always have.” What, I ask, you don’t have a PR person sitting next to you right now? She laughs, and no, she doesn’t, which is probably why she tells me what she’s focusing on right now—writing her book. It’s about the kidnapping of Jennifer Guinness, the Irish socialite, and heiress, who was taken for ransom outside Dublin in 1986. Kerrigan won’t tell me the whole story, just that in authentic, punk form, “there was a very crazy incident, and I ended up in that house.” I decide that I’m no longer sorry if Kerrigan decides to turn her back on fashion, because that’s a book I’d like to read.

OPPOSITE:
Kerrigan goes for a swim every morning. Her property is surrounded by nature and completely private.

