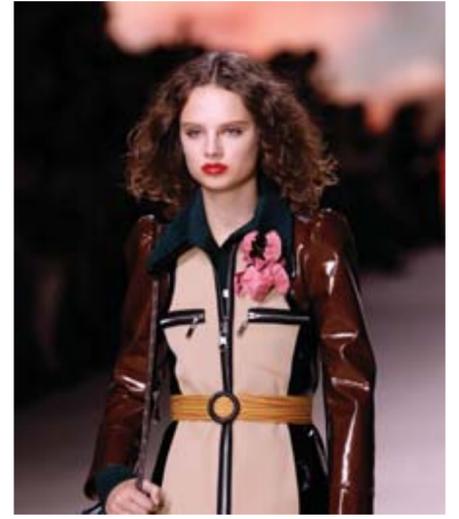


Models present creations by Louis Vuitton during the Women's Spring-Summer 2020 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show at the Cour carree du Louvre in Paris. — AFP photos



Arresting looks: Russian protests get a fashion twist

In cropped jeans and a cream sweatshirt, Alina Muzychenko would easily blend into a central Moscow crowd. But her bright pink socks are quietly subversive-patterned with a drawing of riot police holding hands. The 34-year-old runs a design label with her husband Yegor Yeremeyev which is among a number of trendy brands making clothes that signal support for Russia's protest movement. Sold online and in mainstream shops, the quirky designs have grown in popularity since demonstrations in Moscow in the summer for fair elections that sparked a police crackdown and saw thousands detained.

At their Moscow studio flat, Muzychenko and Yeremeyev, 32, sort through plastic boxes of their T-shirts folded and ready to go on sale. Collaborators drop by and sit with laptops at the table. Their label-named Kultrab after a Soviet-era term for bringing culture to the masses—also produces socks and scarves, as well as accessories such as passport covers and bags. "This summer changed a lot, it's the summer when more and more people started waking up," says Muzychenko.

One of their newest T-shirts shows a riot policeman in camouflage snapping handcuffs on a young woman as two officers hover nearby with batons outstretched like magic wands. A slogan reads: "Freedom and love." "It's all done very colorfully, so that people aren't afraid but instead go out and spread this message," says Yeremeyev, of the T-shirt, which sells online for 2,500 rubles.

Donations to independent media

The first consignment of these T-shirts—a batch of 50 to 100 — went on sale in August and sold out in a few days, the couple says. A website aimed at aspirational young Muscovites, Afisha.ru, included the T-shirt in a fashion feature headlined "Face of the protest: what to wear for a stroll round Moscow." The couple, neither of whom has a fashion design background, has donated money from their



clothing sales to the Mediazona website that reports on protesters' trials.

They also cooperate with an NGO that gives clean needles and advice to drug users called the Andrey Rylkov Foundation. Kultrab has been caught up in several police crackdowns reported by opposition media and sites monitoring protesters' detentions. On the day before last month's Moscow city election, Muzychenko said she and about 14 other people, including two members of Pussy Riot punk collective, were detained by police.

Heading to a magazine photo shoot at the time, she said they were wearing mock police uniforms with badges condemning the "police state" and carrying a banner saying: "Putin, leave of your own accord". They were all freed without charge after around five hours, as supporters held a candle-lit vigil outside the police station, she added. In a separate incident, a young woman, who Muzychenko said worked with Kultrab, was detained for having a sticker on her bag calling for the release of a protester.



Parallel Russia

The Kultrab founders see their edgy streetwear as a way of introducing Russian youth to the notion of participating in society and activism. "Through clothes, we attract a new audience, to learn what activism is," says Muzychenko, a theatre director by training. "Our aim is to spread an idea through clothes, through media," she adds. Their T-shirts are not limited to the summer protest movement.

Designs range from Lenin to a Molotov cocktail, while slogans refer to drugs legislation and Russian rappers. The bestseller, with 500 sales so far, is a pink T-shirt with the crude Russian word for female genitalia that Yeremeyev says is about "female solidarity." Muzychenko interjects: "And rights!" To their amusement, some of their T-shirts are on sale in Moscow's biggest toy store. The largest group of online customers is women aged 18 to 24.

Despite their wide distribution, the pair say they are

part of a "parallel Russia," offering an alternative to mainstream culture. Opposition leader Alexei Navalny has used eye-catching "merch" as part of his campaigning for several years. His clothing line includes a 1,550-ruble (\$24) black T-shirt with the word "Navalny" in the style of a riot police uniform.

Children in police van

The high-profile detentions of journalist Ivan Golunov and students at prestigious universities this summer led activists to hastily print T-shirts and stickers with the prisoners' faces. The items were sold to raise money for their legal defense. One of the most popular protest T-shirts comes from the brand Barking Store, which usually focuses on animal rights.

It shows a police van with barred windows marked "School Bus" and children inside, reflecting the young age of many detained at recent demonstrations.

The 1,390-ruble (\$22) T-shirt is on sale along with sweatshirts and bags of the same design at the brand's shop in a converted basement in Moscow. "It's really very popular," says founder Roman Belousov, 33, whose business raises funds for his mother's cat and dog shelter outside the capital.

The "school bus" design was created in 2017, inspired by the first anti-government protests to include a large school-age turnout. "Thousands of school children ended up in police vans, so this print kind of created itself," Belousov says. "I wear (the T-shirt) myself, and sometimes people come up to me and say 'Ooh, great.'" "You walk around Moscow and see people are walking around who think the same as you—it's a cool feeling inside."—AFP



Models wear creation by the Fashion designer Alina Muzychenko in Moscow. — AFP photos



Fashion designer Alina Muzychenko, left, adjusts a garment on a model.