



The Romantics: Isabel and Ruben Toledo

Description



Isabel and Ruben Toledo

Isabel and Ruben Toledo are best known today as fashion's greatest love story; their endless, intense love for one another is the foundation from which all their best ideas have grown. His whip-smart illustrations and her razor-sharp clothing have overlapped and intersected many times over the four decades they shared together. Even in the wake of Isabel's untimely passing in 2019 Ruben still feels her presence in everything he does, writing in a heart-breaking tribute to his beloved wife for American Vogue, "I see everything and everyone through your unforgettable eyes."

Isabel (born Maria Isabel Izquierdo) and Ruben Toledo's life reads like a classic love story; both of Cuban descent, they met as teenagers at High School in New Jersey and forged an unbreakable friendship. Ruben experienced "love at first sight," while Isabel's love grew slowly over time. "I fell in love with Ruben's art before I fell in love with him," she explained. Together they would haunt New York's legendary disco scene with friends throughout the late 1970s, frequenting Studio 54, Xenon and the Mudd Club where they mingled with artists and celebrities. Isabel made her own distinctive party dresses which caught the eye of fashion photographer Bill Cunningham, who snapped photos of the stylish pair long before they became famous.

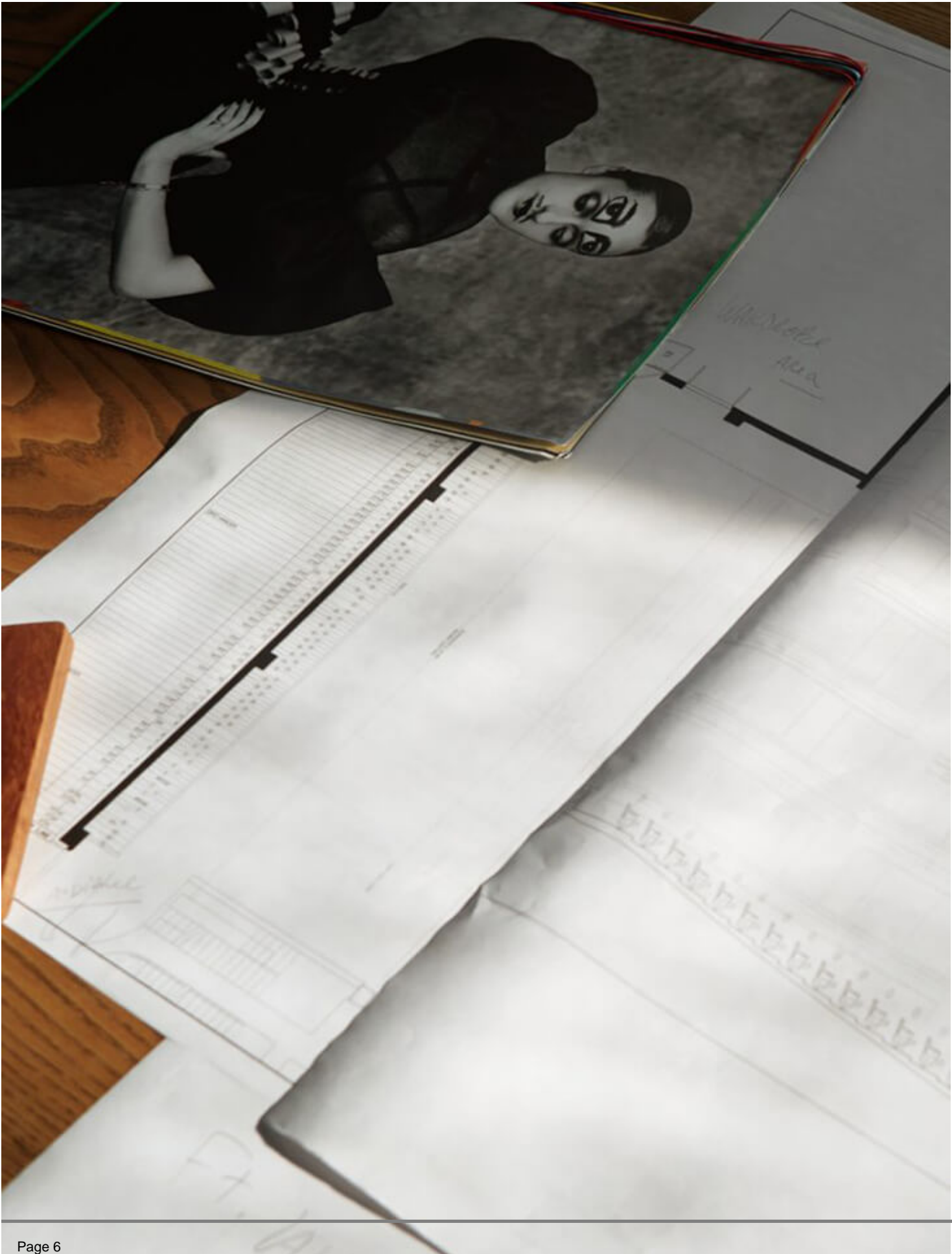


Isabel and Ruben Toledo

During a class trip to the Museum of Modern Art, Isabel and Ruben wandered into Fiorucci, the iconic shop run by drag artist Joey Arias. Ruben happened to be carrying a portfolio of hand-coloured photographs of Isabel which impressed Arias so much he agreed to sell them in his shop. Through their connections with Fiorucci Isabel and Ruben mingled with New York's leading creatives including Lena Horne and Andy Warhol, who were fascinated by these talented and beautiful Cuban teenagers.

Isabel went on to study painting, ceramics and fashion at the Fashion Institute of Technology and the Parsons School of Design in New York, while Ruben remained a self-taught illustrator, retaining a certain quality of quirky, free-spirited innocence in his work. Isabel was his most regular muse, appearing as a doe-eyed, raven-haired beauty in much of his illustrative

work. The pair married in 1984 and the early years they spent living together were defined by determination and hard work. Ruben was a tireless promoter of Isabel's work, securing orders with Patricia Field's 8th Street Boutique and tracing the outlines of each garment while Isabel sewed each one by hand.



The Toledos gradually carved a niche for themselves in the years that followed, exploring how his distinctive fashion illustrations could complement her minimal and angular silhouettes. They organised events and parties together, sending invitations hand-embroidered onto white dress gloves and inviting friends from Fiorucci's to model Isabel's clothing. Ruben even designed a series of mannequins for Barney's in 1989 modelled on Isabel's slimline figure, while Isabel always chose her husband's sketches as stationery and gifts for friends. In more recent years they established a three-story Manhattan home/workspace where each could spread out and be creative, while tiptoeing into the other's space to steal ideas.



Isabel and Ruben Toledo by Karl Lagerfeld

Isabel has compared the interwoven nature of their partnership to a vine, rather than a tree, explaining, “In a relationship, you should never be a tree, you should always be a vine. Trees grow, but they topple. Vines? Well, pieces fall off, but it keeps going.” This allusion to the organic is also reflected in the couple’s attitude towards fashion, which they have responded to as a constantly shifting template that refuses to be static. “Fashion is very modern in that way,” Ruben says. “You can throw anything at it and it absorbs it. Nothing is repelled. It’s an expert at vibrations and connections.”



Isabel and Ruben Toledo New York apartment

As individuals, Isabel and Toledo have achieved remarkable achievements. Isabel’s experimental, angular and architectural clothing has been a celebrated feature of New York’s downtown culture since the mid-1980s,

featuring in progressive magazines including Village Voice, Paper, and Visionaire – this reputation as a left-field radical earned her a niche following throughout New York, Paris and Tokyo. Ruben's madcap, surrealist illustrations, meanwhile, have appeared on album covers, murals, and in world-leading fashion magazines including Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, Paper and Interview. But it is their combined force that has remained the greatest legacy of all, marrying the realms of art and fashion into a singular and inimitable whole.

CATEGORY

1. PIONEERS
2. POWER COUPLES

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