

# Diversions

The Daily Nebraskan's Entertainment Revue

## Design student loves the unconventional

By Scott Harrah  
Staff Reporter

It was after midnight. Like many UNL students, design major Duran Knutzen was up late studying. But he wasn't casually scanning the pages of a textbook with a Hi-Liter. Instead, he was sketching, cutting fabric, measuring, stitching, sewing and creating to the beat of an eerie French new-wave band on the stereo.

Working under the glare of a pulsating red strobe light, Knutzen was doing what he does best — designing clothes.

Clothing design is not Knutzen's college major, it's his current job, future career and the love of his life, he said.

That love has made Knutzen a busy guy. He currently is working on a line of clothing for The Wooden Nickel and costumes for an upcoming production at the Lincoln Community Playhouse, while trying to fill lots of orders for his in-home fashion business, K-Al-Bayati.

So it's no wonder that he spends every spare moment designing — even while being interviewed.

Sporting an elegant cape, long black locks and the five o'clock shadow that's become his trademark, Knutzen said he thinks he looks more like a "medieval warlock" than a fashion designer. That atypical illusion coincides with his feelings about high fashion in the United States nowadays, he said.

"High fashion has become extremely conventional and set in its ways," he said. "The time has come for a break in the fashion establishment so the youth can infiltrate it. It's time for the youth to get some creative exposure."

Non-conventional looks garnished with "avant-garb" features and a creative approach are the basis for all of his designs, he said. Anyone who asks him to design something can expect an outfit that will suit their individual taste, he said. Whether you want something sartorial or sexy, glamorous or gaudy, comical or conservative, Duran said he will deliver.

His personal taste in clothing is usually satirical, he said.

"Everything I design is a parody of everything I'm for or against, because fashion should be whimsical," he said.

The most bizarre fashion parody outfit he has ever designed was "a garment I originally made as a jacket, but turned out to be one that can be worn as a skirt, pants and a head turban as well."

If his clothes ever make it on a national level, don't run to either the men's and women's departments in stores to find them — all of his clothes blend genders for a reason, he said.

"I don't like the stereotypical rules that state that someone must be masculine or feminine," he said. "If a skirt looks good on a human, it should wear the garment. It shouldn't matter whether that human is a man or a woman."

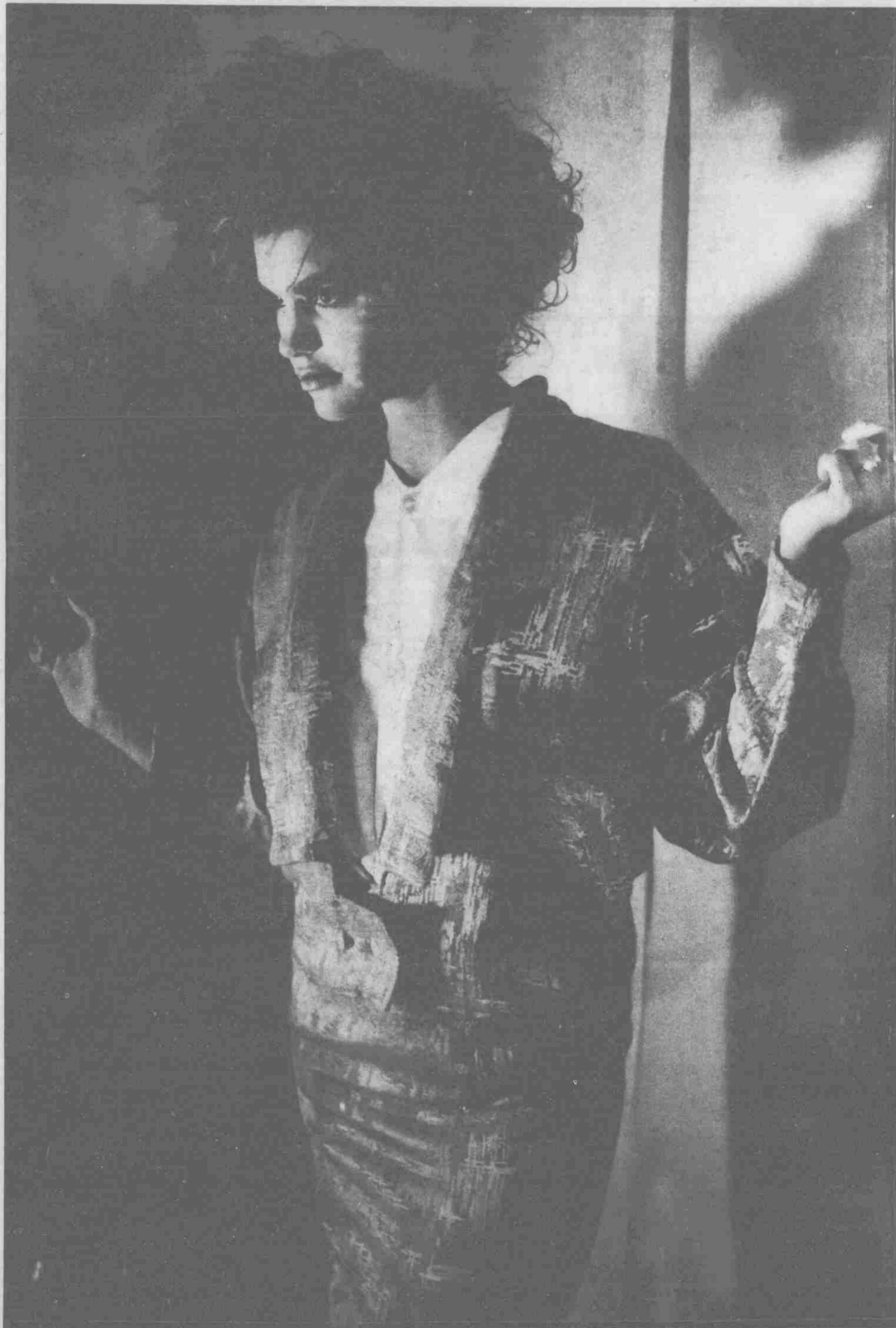
He also observed the immensely idiosyncratic cultures of Europe while abroad, he said.

"I started getting into fashion when I found that there was a lack of individuality with my personality and my friends," he said. "So I began to look in places other than my immediate surroundings and witnessed an entirely different world."

His fashion ideas were first put to creative use in junior high when he met an artist named Janine Al-Bayati, he said.

"I met this exotic Middle Eastern girl who was in the same whirlwind of creative stagnation and trying to break out of it," he said.

Al-Bayati was both an excellent abstract artist and seamstress, he said, so he presented his design ideas to her,



Amanda MacRae models a brocade from the nouveaux riches collection.

Craig Ellenwood/Special to the Daily Nebraskan

which she "sewed while I looked over her shoulder and learned everything she was doing."

At age 17, Knutzen and Al-Bayati started their small in-home fashion business called K-Al-Bayati. The business has gradually gained a dedicated clientele in the past two years and he has become renowned in fashion circles for his progressive approach to design, he said.

Knutzen no longer works with Al-Bayati since he has honed his design techniques, he said, but he owes a lot to her for getting him started so he still uses her name in the business.

His current design techniques are heavily influenced by surrealist,

abstract, futuristic and avant-garde art movements, he said. But, he added, history is just as inspiring for him as art.

"I'm influenced by the entire world as far as the past is concerned," he said. "I'm mixing different cultures and history to create a modern look," he said.

Although he thinks the past is

important, it can be dangerous if people try to live in it when it comes to fashion, he said. He said that conservative looks that are in the vanguard of today's trends could cause a culture shock in a few years if people aren't willing to accept new clothing styles.

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