

OBITUARY

Peter Hidalgo, Fashion Designer, 53

● Hidalgo had his own company at one point, and later dressed Kanye West, Nicki Minaj and other celebrities.

BY ROSEMARY FEITELBERG

Fashion designer Peter Hidalgo, 53, died Jan. 17 in Manhattan.

The cause of death has not yet been determined, according to publicist Marion Greenberg.

At the time of his death, Hidalgo was in a homeless shelter, where he had been temporarily living with the hope of qualifying for subsidized housing, according to his friend and former employer Miguel Adrover.

Asif Zaidi, who worked with Hidalgo several years ago, said his decision to live in the shelter was a sign of his kindness in that he would not want to impose upon his friends.

A co-winner of the 2010 Fashion Group International's "Rising Star" award for women's wear, Hidalgo was primarily working with a couple of private clients including Nicki Minaj in recent years. He had given up his studio.

A private memorial service is being planned for this spring.

Adrover met Hidalgo in 1994 at the club The Sound Factory. "Peter was in drag. He was this night creature. He was really famous for voguing in all of the houses [of ballroom]. He was dressing up and working in clubs as a dancer," Adrover said.

Hidalgo started the New York chapter of his fashion life by working as an in-house designer and designing the store windows in a West Village boutique. "There were five people who worked there. They were outrageous club kids. He used to do these fantastic windows with the mannequins. Everybody used to walk by to see his windows, and everybody used to talk about them," Adrover said. "We were friends the entire time that I was in New York. We were friends before we worked together on fashion. All these years we've been like brothers."

After the terrorist attacks of 2001, Hidalgo started coming to Adrover's downtown studio. When Adrover's right-hand person Sebastian Pons left, Hidalgo took his place. "Peter was one of the best-ever illustrators. I have a lot of illustrations by him of all the looks in the collections. He personalized the faces and the bodies of what the models were going to be," Adrover said. "I remember spending many, many nights drawing and drawing until late at night. He was a little unreliable sometimes. But he was really creative and he had a lot of energy."

Raised in a creative family, Hidalgo's father was a professional musician. Hidalgo's interest in illustration and fashion started in school in his homeland of Santo Domingo. Hidalgo was selected by the highly regarded fashion illustrator Antonio Lopez to enroll in a special studies course at The Altos de Chavon School of Design, an affiliate of Parsons School of Design. There Hidalgo finessed his illustration and design skills.

In 1987, Hidalgo earned "Best Designer of the Year" from his school. (Lopez died that same year.) Coverage of Hidalgo's win in local newspapers helped the designer land his first job, creating clothing for local fashion boutiques in the Dominican Republic. Simultaneously he created one-of-a-kind designs for private clients. Hidalgo's success in fashion enabled him to pursue styling,



makeup, art direction and set design for television and theater production companies in the Dominican Republic. Some of his private clients also hired him to decorate their homes.

Hidalgo started traveling to New York City in 1990 to buy fabrics for his fashion creations, moving to Manhattan in 1994 and joining Adrover seven years later.

"At that time, I had no money. I had this big studio on Chrystie Street. I had about five people living with me, sleeping under the tables and everything. Peter built this little room kind of like a bunker made out of wood. He used to live in the corner," Adrover said. "There was a lot of energy in those days. Money was not required to work. It was about the energy that you had inside. We didn't have a business plan or anything. That's something unimaginable right now, I guess."

Adrover's first collection with Hidalgo fully on board was dubbed "Citizens of the World" and the pair combined men's and women's collections with "the Surreal Real World," "the Americans," and others.

"He was a real fashion designer. He really loved being in fashion," Adrover said.

Zaidi also met Hidalgo at The Sound Factory and recalled noticing the vintage burgundy velvet Yves Saint Laurent jacket that he was wearing. About 20 years later Zaidi handled the embellishment for Hidalgo's designs for celebrity clients. "He was just a genius with patterns and draping, and mixing his cutting-edge ideas with classic ones. He had a very different way at looking at fashion that was very modern for the times. But at the same time, he loved very classic silhouettes like Dior," Zaidi said. "His fit was everything."

After Adrover shuttered his company and moved back to Mallorca, Hidalgo later traveled there to help him set up his studio. Hidalgo subsequently launched his own label and made his New York Fashion Week debut in February 2006 with Rita Hayworth-inspired silhouettes updated with a fresh modern edge.

Having last spoken with Hidalgo three weeks ago, Adrover said he had been increasingly difficult to contact. "I know he was not feeling well. It was really hard to get in touch with him," Adrover said. "I would tell him all the time, 'Peter, love, you should move back to Santo Domingo, because you have your family.' Also, you know how New York is. If you don't have money, it is really a hard city to survive. He was not young either. I was devastated."



A gown by Peter Hidalgo.



Peter Hidalgo's collaborative dress with artist David Salle was modeled by Scarlett Johansson in a 2019 issue of As If magazine.

Hidalgo shared the 2010 "Rising Star" award for women's wear with Joseph Altuzarra. FGI's late leader Margaret Hayes, fashion writer Marylou Luther, fashion editor Rushka Bergman and retailer Linda Dresner were among Hidalgo's supporters. The FGI accolade motivated Hidalgo to pull together a runway presentation in just two weeks. The ultra-refined minimalist designs were inspired by the concept of love. One of the winning looks on his catwalk was "the black angel" gown with scraped folds on the back that gave the effect of wings.

Like many young designers trying to make their way in Manhattan, Hidalgo found that breaking into major retailers and securing significant financing were not automatic givens. But he continued doing seasonal collections through 2013. During that time, he also clothed celebrities like Kanye West and Usher, who wore Hidalgo suits to the 2011 MTV Music Video awards and the Grammy awards respectively. By 2014, Hidalgo was working primarily with private and celebrity clients. Nicki Minaj wore a Hidalgo gown for the opening performance of the MTV Europe Music awards, which she also hosted.

In 2019, he teamed with the artist David Salle and As If magazine for "The

Collaboratory" project, designing cocktail dresses screen-printed with Salle's art.

"Avengers: Endgame" actress Scarlett Johansson modeled the dresses on three different As If covers.

As If's Tatijana Shoan said after Hidalgo was featured in the inaugural issue, he continued to contribute in any way he could – lending dresses for last-minute photo shoots and creating custom ones for celebrity portraits. He even surprised her by designing a three-piece suit for her engagement party as well as an "exquisite" wedding gown.

"I will always treasure Peter's commitment to excellence, his excellent taste, his unmatched loyalty, kindness, laugh, the sparkle in his eyes and his abundant talent," Shoan said.

When Adrover's repurposed Burberry raincoat was featured in a Costume Institute exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Adrover told Hidalgo that they needed to update it. Hidalgo then posted an image of a curvaceous Black woman wearing it. "He was a true New Yorker. He built the nightlife of New York. He was part of the energy in the city of the '90s," Adrover said.

Hidalgo is survived by his mother and a few siblings whose names could not immediately be learned.