

4/2004
Time

O U R T I M E

H I P H O P G Y H E A D M O N E Y F I T N E S S F O O D T R E N D S



THALIA SODI
top: \$13
handbag: \$13
shoes: \$20

DAISY FUENTES
cargo-pocket skirt: \$34

REPUBLICA
Rooster
Newsboy
cap: \$62

PERRY ELLIS
Cubavera
stitch
pants: \$50

Wearing la Vida Loca

Latin clothing lines are courting crossover fans in malls everywhere

By ISABEL C. GONZÁLEZ

LATIN CULTURE HAS JOINED hip-hop as a muse to the major players in fashion. Perry Ellis International announced the launch last month of two Latin-inspired and Latin-targeted women's sportswear lines: Cubavera, to be sold at major department stores, and Havanera Co., a private label to be manufactured for JCPenney. Each is an extension of a successful men's line bearing the same name. "Our Hispanic-focused brands brought in \$23 million in revenue in fiscal 2003, and we

expect to almost double that for fiscal 2004," says Perry Ellis International's CEO, George Feldenkreis. "At this point, no American company can afford to ignore the Latino market."

The new Perry Ellis lines join a crowded field. While Latin designers, from Oscar de la Renta to Narciso Rodriguez, have already made their mark in haute couture, mass-marketed, Latin-targeted lines are a recent development. Mexican singer-actress Thalia's line, Thalia Sodi, sells at 335 of Kmart's 1,500 stores in the U.S.; by July, the clothes will be available in every store. In February, Kohl's

department stores debuted a women's collection by Cuban-American Daisy Fuentes for the general market.

While the clothes in these new lines aren't necessarily designed differently from nonethnic clothing,

some bear striking Latin signatures. The Cubavera and Havanera men's lines feature tops that are inspired by the loose-fitting, four-pocketed guayabera, a traditional shirt that's popular with many Latin men. But the market goes beyond the Latin customer base. Jennifer Lopez, who launched her JLo fashion empire in 2001, has a diverse clientele, as do

some of the other brands. Says Feldenkreis: "Our brands have crossover appeal." República Trading Co., a small men's apparel brand

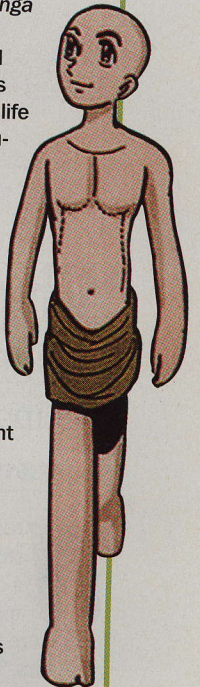
founded by Rafael Jimenez, started out targeting a very specific Latin niche—Dominican ex-pats living in New York City's Washington Heights neighborhood—but has grown to envelop a much wider audience. República's shirts, jackets, pants and sweaters, which often feature Latin iconography and phrases, are carried by Bloomingdale's and Up Against the Wall. Says the Dominican-American Jimenez: "República is progressive streetwear that is designed from a Latino perspective but is for a multi-ethnic audience—like me."



MIRTH AND MORALITY

Looking for a great comic? Just follow Buddha. Osamu Tezuka (1928-89), a pioneer of the *manga* (Japanese comic book) form, added his own characters and stories to the life of the great spiritual leader, creating a graphic-novel epic. Translated into English by Vertical Inc. as an eight-volume series of stylish, \$25 hardcovers, the third installment comes out this month. Though Tezuka's characters are cartoonishly cute and he frequently inserts goofy humor, the series also explores adult themes of romance and violence. Literati and pop-culture mavens alike will enjoy this *manga* masterwork.

—By Andrew D. Arnold



TEZUKA

Body Paint for the Office

Stylish women can now spray on instead of pull on. The Air Stocking, released by Nissin Medico in Japan last year and now available in the U.S., is applied like spray paint and makes legs appear to be covered by hosiery. Company founder Yoshiumi Hamada says he got the idea for the product while speaking to a female co-worker who complained of wearing hosiery in the heat. Air Stocking costs around \$28 a can (yielding 20 to 25 applications), comes in three colors and washes off with soap and warm water.

—By Tamika Edwards

