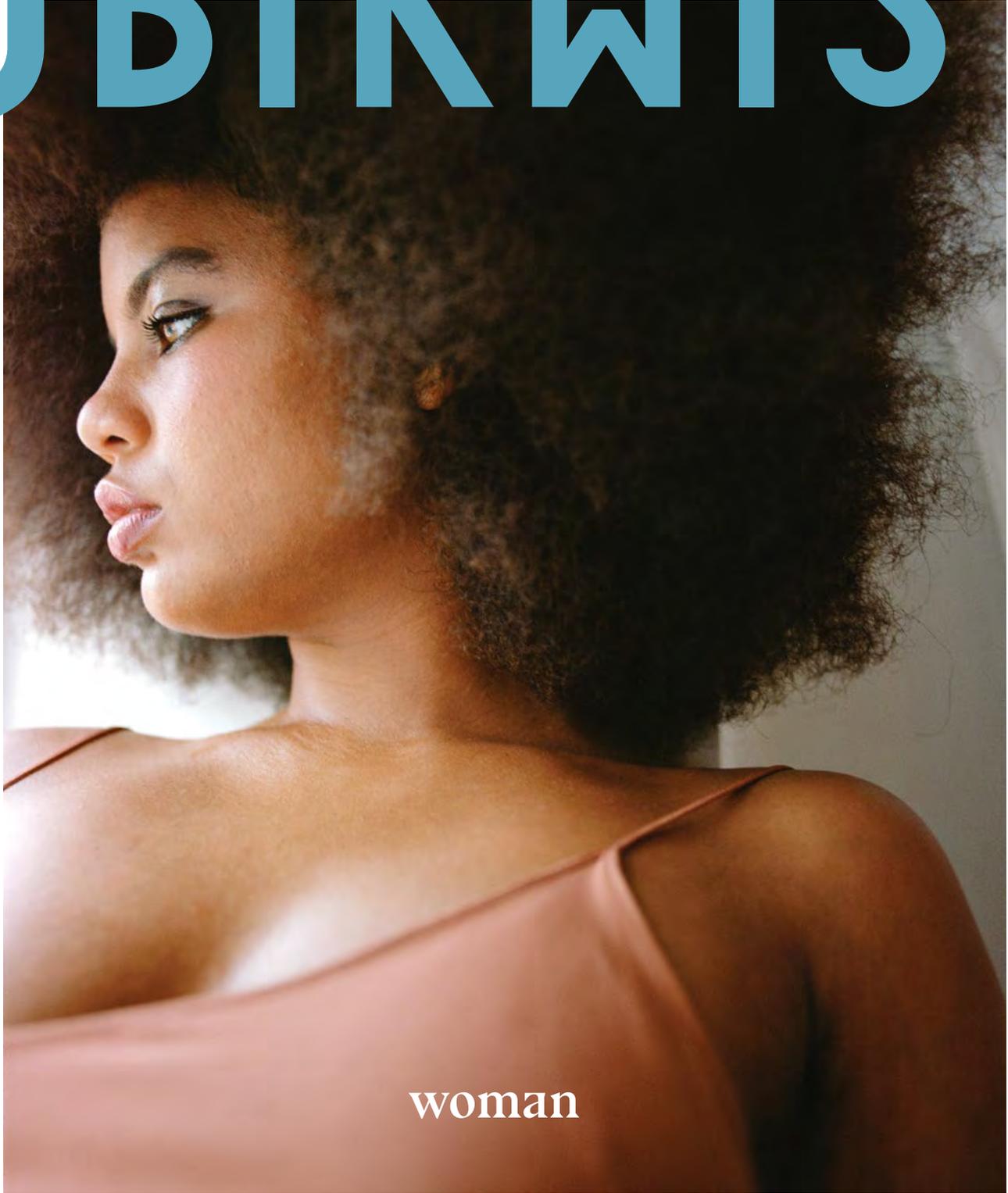


UBIKWIST

#9



woman



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TONI MORRISON • SYLVIA RHONE • MELINA MATSOUKAS • SIMONE LEIGH • DHARA • IFRAH AHMED
DREAM HAMPTON • ALEXANDRIA SMITH • SUSI WYSS • TORKWASE DYSON • KARLA CROME • JILL JONES
XAVIERA SIMMONS • ROOM 502 • SAMIRAH RAHEEM • AVA GREY • VANESSA GERMAN • BETH GIBBS
AWENG CHUOL • JUSTINE SKYE • ZEN LEFORT

GUCCI



EDITOR'S LETTER

This issue of *Ubikwist* is devoted to the theme of WOMAN – and how women are shaping the world's future into one worth saving. Part of this is due to the roots planted by trailblazers we spotlight in this issue: the late, great Toni Morrison, whose literary legacy lives in the inspired work of phenomenal artists Vanessa German, Simone Leigh, Alexandria Smith, Torkwase Dyson, and Xaviera Simmons; filmmaker Melina Matsoukas, responsible for some of Beyoncé's and Rihanna's videos, now making her big screen debut as director of *Queen & Slim*, with a screenplay by Lena Waithe; Somalian activist Ifrah Ahmed, a fierce campaigner against female genital mutilation; Swiss muse/courtesan Susi Wyss, who chronicles her exploits among the rich and famous in her memoir *Guess Who is the Happiest Girl in Town*; former Prince muse and protégée Jill Jones; transgender actress and activist Ava Grey; and Sylvia Rhone, the American music executive who has been helping shape American music tastes through her leadership in the recording industry for close to half a century.

Elsewhere in these pages are fashion and beauty features highlighting the beauty of woman, as well as introductions to sustainable brands Dhara via Lucy Pinter and Room 502 from the venerable Sophie Theallet design studio. Not to be denied, interviews with up-and-coming actress Karla Crome, the singular Samirah Raheem, Sudanese president-to-be Aweng Chuol, the entertainment sensation Justine Skye, and the outspoken, influential dream hampton bring insight and nuance to the trials of ascendancy for women everywhere.

Some say the future is female. *Ubikwist* says, now and forever, WOMAN is past, present, and eternal.

GIANNIE COUJI
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



PORTRAIT BY JEAN-BAPTISTE MONDINO

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PHOTO: PIERRE ANDREOTTI



ADAM LOVE

With 30 years of experience, Adam Love plies his trade as an art director in music, fashion, cinema, & interior design. He studied at Goldsmiths London and has since called Tokyo, Paris, New York, New Dehli, and Shanghai home. Currently he splits time between Adam Love studio (Paris) and Spark Design (Shanghai). His portfolio includes Karl Lagerfeld, Givenchy, Vivienne Westwood, Alexander McQueen. The

French Federation of Fashion and Couture awarded him the *élan de la mode* in 2008. Most recently, Adam champions the revue "Terrain Vague", an inclusive feminist revue about art, pop culture, identity, and gender.



ANGIE PARKER

Angie Parker is a British-born, New York-based makeup artist. Originally a fine artist, Parker segued into makeup in London, assisting world-renowned artists such as Linda Cantello, Mary Greenwell, and Diane Kendal. Since then, Angie's work has appeared in *Vogue*, *Elle*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *i-D*, and *Vanity Fair* as well as contributing as a beauty editor. In Angie's nascent blog, she talks with models and women about their favorite

5 beauty products and highlighting their work in their chosen field. Her latest venture, Beauty5ives will be her own product line, empowering women through beauty in the developing world. @beauty5ives



BETINA LAPLANTE

Betina LaPlante was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and educated in Europe. She attended Harrow School of Art in London before moving to Rome, Italy, to study Dramatic Art. After working in film and television production for several years, she decided to dedicate herself to photography, which had been a passion of hers since childhood. Predominantly working in black & white while preferring to take candid

over posed portraits, Betina's work has graced the pages of many international publications. She currently lives in Los Angeles, California

PHOTO: JESPER HAYNES



BELINDA BECKER

Belinda Becker is a triple threat: DJ, dancer, and actor. Originally from Kingston, Jamaica, Belinda is well-known in the NYC DJ scene, spinning at such clubs as Top of the Standard, Dumbo House, Jimmy at the James Hotel, and the Skylark Lounge and was recently featured in the *NY Times* Metropolitan section. For over 20 years under the tutelage of Pat Hall and Baba Richard Gonzalez, she has

studied and performed Haitian folklore and Afro-Cuban dance, plying her craft with the The Pat Hall Dancers, Bonga and Voodoo Drums of Haiti, La Troupe Makandal, and Urban Tap. Belinda lives in Brooklyn with her beautiful daughter, Willow.



DONALD LAWRENCE

Based in Los Angeles and New York, British Jamaican-born Donald Lawrence has been a fashion stylist since 1997. His creative vision has been featured in such publications as *Italian Vogue*, *Korean W*, *Paper Magazine*, and others. As a Creative Director with collaborative instincts, Donald has partnered with photographers like Albert Watson, Walter Chin, Norman Watson, and Dennis Leupold.

Along with his late wife Tracy Ann Wingrove, he also founded the biannual fashion magazine *AMAZING* in 2012. His current residence is in Los Angeles, featuring his cat, James.



HANAE UWAJIMA

When stylist/fashion director Hanae Uwajima of Japan moved to Paris in 2002, she began assisting stylists for various European publications and advertising clients. Then in 2008, she started working independently as a freelance stylist and consequently relocated to Tokyo five years later. That exposure has allowed her to work for Fila, Lancôme, Mikimoto, and Puma as well as be featured in *Harper's Bazaar*, *Numéro*, *L'Officiel*,

and *Vogue*, to name a few. No stranger to diversity, her looks have been worn by Jackie Chan, Laetitia Casta, Miyu Yamamoto, Nana Komatsu, and Hikari Mori, among others. Hanae still calls Tokyo home.



JAN WELTERS

Born and raised in the Netherlands, Jan Welters began work as a photo assistant in 1983 after an abbreviated stint at the St Joost Art School in Breda. Focusing on fashion and portraits, his photographic career flourished, while living in Amsterdam, New York, Milan, and Paris. A panoply of his visages has graced the pages of *Vogue*, *Elle*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Marie Claire*, to mention a few. This year has seen the publication

of a personal selection of his work, *Profile* (Damiani), highlights from the 90s to now. He currently resides in Topanga Canyon with his wife and kids.



TAMER WILDE

Tamer Wilde, the son of a fashion designer and a classical musician, has been fascinated by art, architecture, music, and fashion since an early age. His formative years were shaped by a nomadic life style, constantly traveling and discovering new cultures. Now, Tamer is a creative industry professional with a record of founding and being part of critically acclaimed and award-winning projects. His work has been

exhibited in galleries internationally and featured in numerous publications including *Harper's Bazaar China*, *Esquire China*, *Baku*, *LOVE magazine*, *i-D magazine*, *GQ Style*, *Wonderland* magazine, and *Stimuli* magazine. He has also produced commercial work for Cutler and Gross and Swarovski.

UBIKWIST MASTHEAD ISSUE 9

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STYLING: GIANNIE COUJI
HAIR: NELSON VERCHER @ RITA HAZAN
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MAKE UP: RENEE GARNES @ NEXT ARTISTS FOR HUDA BEAUTY
NAILS: DAWN STERLING @ STATEMENT ARTISTS
SYLVIA WEARS JACKET BY SACAI, JEWELRY SYLVIA'S OWN



COVER 2 INGRID SILVA
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STYLING: GIANNIE COUJI
HAIR: NELSON VERCHER @ RITA HAZAN
USING RENE FURTERER PRODUCTS
MAKE UP: ANGIE PARKER @ THE WALL GROUP
USING KAT BURKI SKINCARE AND KOSAS COSMETICS
INGRID WEARS JACKET BY GUCCI



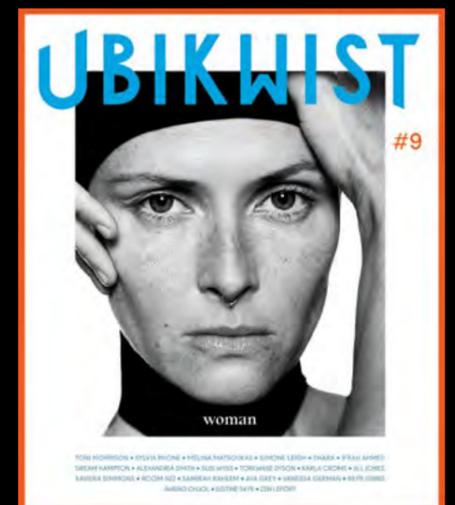
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PHOTOGRAPH: EMMAN MONTALVAN
ART DIRECTOR: ARMINA MUSSA
STYLING & PRODUCTION DESIGNER: BETH BIRKETT
HAIR: VERNON FRANCOIS
@ THE VISIONARIES USING VERNON FRANCOIS PRODUCTS
MAKE UP: CELINA RODRIGUEZ
MELINA WEARS JACKET BY TOGA

COVER 4 AWENG CHUOL
PHOTOGRAPH: JEON SEUNG
STYLING: NEIL STUART
HAIR: ERNESTO MONTENOVINO @ THE LONDON STYLE AGENCY
USING BABYLISS PRO TOOLS
MAKE UP: TERRY BARBER @ DAVID ARTISTS
USING M.A.C COSMETICS
AWENG WEARS JACKET BY MIU MIU



COVER 5 SAMIRAH RAHEEM
PHOTOGRAPH: MYLES LOFTIN
STYLING: GIANNIE COUJI
HAIR: KAZU TAHIRA
MAKE UP: ANGIE PARKER @ THE WALL GROUP
USING KAT BURKI SKINCARE AND KOSAS COSMETICS
SAMIRAH WEARS SLIP DRESS
BY NORISOL FERRARI

COVER 6 TASHA TILBERG
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STYLING: LUCY PINTER
HAIR: SYLVIA WHEELER
@ FORWARD ARTISTS
MAKE UP: NATASHA SEVERINO
@ FORWARD ARTISTS
TASHA WEARS HOOD BY DHARA





ACTIVISM FOR ME IS A SPIRIT, IT IS DEEPER THAN HOW YOU LOOK OR HOW YOU DRESS

SPIRIT POSITIVE

SAMIRAH RAHEEM BY GILDAS

If one day you come across Samirah Raheem's Instagram account, you will see that she describes herself as a model, actress, and hood activist. If this description is an obvious shortcut intended to highlight parts of her daily activities, the reality may be more complex or simplified based on the perspective that we choose to adopt. Complex because as a woman, a Black person, and curvy model, she does not match the stereotypes of the industry that she works in, and thus she cannot take

anything for granted. Each casting is a reminder of the fragility of a status which relies on subjective criteria that more particularly affects the people who find themselves to be "out of the norm." Simplified because behind her self-descriptive words Samirah claims the right to be who she wants to be without compromising – a statement that she has claimed for herself and a bold act for any individual facing adversity during the exercise of this basic right.

Back in 2017 in Los Angeles, Samirah participated in the annual parade of a movement called Slutwalk. The movement challenges mindsets and stereotypes of victim blaming and slut shaming around sexual violence. When she was aggressively questioned by the Reverend Jesse Lee Peterson that day, Samirah refused to be placed into a corner. Whereas the reverend was not so subtly implying that Samirah's outfit and participation made her scandalous, dumb, and lost; Samirah proudly answered back, stating that she was grown and free to choose her own path and that everyone else should do the same. She fought back with her dignity and her words, while holding her head up high.

This important exchange between the pure conservative reverend and the unapologetic millennial went viral and propelled Samirah to an online spotlight. Responding impromptu is a heavy responsibility, especially to have the microphone in one's hand without knowing in advance how one might answer to such unforgiving and hostile criticisms. Thankfully this was not the case for Samirah, as she was not only ready for that moment but also has continued to be a force to be reckoned with when it comes to self-acceptance and self-expression.

When we Google your name, the first video to come up is the one linked to the festival Slutwalk 2017 in LA. How has this video changed the way that people perceive you?

I think it was a huge blessing in the sense that it catapulted me into a space of activism and a position of power that I was not in at the time. It made me everybody's best friend in their head. It is a little bit of pressure because occasionally people depend on me for advice. Plus, I have the impression that people always want me to be that girl they saw in the video. But sometimes I am quite shy, which is something that many people may find hard to believe.

You describe yourself as a model, actress, and hood activist. Can you tell us more about what it means to you to be a hood activist?

I put hood activist because I am not the typical activist who speaks a particular jargon, or who has all the right answers. Just because I talk a certain way or move a certain way, should my thoughts be invalid? Activism for me is a spirit, it is deeper than how you look or how you dress. Why do I have to have the perfect words to be a vehicle for change? I want to own the way I talk, I want to own the way I dress, I want to own the way I look and still figure out ways to make change.

Do you have the impression that there is "standard profile" to be a public speaker?

I think that there is a general consensus in multiple cultures defining who is supposed to talk publicly or not. But, for example, I know that if I would not have talked like myself in the "Slutwalk" video, the video would not have received that much attention.

In one of your interviews, you mentioned that you are "just a girl from Slauson with an opinion." With the freedom of speech that the girl from Slauson has, does Samirah the New York model have the same?

The girl from Slauson was brave, hungry, and unpolished versus... the NYC Sam is more artistic, strategic, and empathetic. I have grown so much, but the girl from Slauson has never left. She's unapologetic about feeling and dreaming, and I call on her for strength.

As a model who does not match all of the stereotypes of the typical supermodel, do you have the impression that the fashion industry is in fact conservative? Or is the fashion industry an exact reflection of society, or more advanced? And why?

I think that there is not one answer; there are so many brands. In that sense, fashion is a mirror on society. Some brands are very progressive; some brands are as classic as bleach. Certain brands can believe in certain things and have specific values like Black lives matter, for example, but they don't want to scare their consumers. When I think about your question, I try to get out of my head, because for me the whole world should be this radical progressive inclusive place. I am very much a millennial and in the world that I live in, everything should be sex positive and size inclusive. In my mind, everybody that is not thinking like that is conservative.

What do you like most about your modeling career? What do you hate most?

I love that I can be a chameleon, that I can collaborate with a designer or a brand and walk into their vision. I love performing and entertaining people. I like to see people's faces lighting up when I kill it during a photo shoot. I like this thing of – I would never wear it, but this character who I now embody would. The hardest thing is maybe the competitiveness that is encouraged towards other women, especially when they look alike. As a Black curvy model, in general, they only want one at the show. It is not the girls' fault; this is the result of this little systematic thing. Me and you, girl, in the real world we would be homies, but for this audition I have to act like I don't even see you.

PHOTOGRAPHS: MYLES LOFTIN
STYLING: GIANNIE COUJI
HAIR: KAZU KATAHIRA
MAKE UP: ANGIE PARKER
@ THE WALL GROUP
USING KAT BURKI SKINCARE
AND KOSAS COSMETICS
MODEL: SAMIRAH RAHEEM @ IMG

LEFT
SAMIRAH WEARS
COAT BY HYKE

RIGHT
SAMIRAH WEARS
JACKET BY CALVIN LUO



**THE GIRL FROM SLAUSON
WAS BRAVE, HUNGRY,
AND UNPOLISHED...
THE NYC SAM IS MORE
ARTISTIC, STRATEGIC,
AND EMPATHETIC**



SAMIRAH WEARS
DRESS BY NORISOL FERRARI



SAMIRAH WEARS
JACKET BY CALVIN LUO



SAMIRAH WEARS
SLIP DRESS
BY NORISOL FERRARI

**FOR ME THE WHOLE
WORLD SHOULD
BE THIS RADICAL
PROGRESSIVE
INCLUSIVE PLACE...
EVERYTHING
SHOULD BE
SEX POSITIVE AND
SIZE INCLUSIVE.**

This idea of scarcity is placed upon us whereas in reality there are more than enough jobs for all of us. We need to band together. But I get it when you are hungry and you go to all these auditions and this girl, with the same hair style as you, gets all the jobs... and your agent is telling you to watch out for that girl, it becomes really easy to fall into that trap. But that's the moment when you remember – I have people who love me; I have communities that I serve; I am special, complete as I am; I don't want to tear this woman down. The same way that I am someone's daughter, she is someone's daughter.

As a college student, you worked in a summer camp in Uganda with former child soldiers. What were your main takeaways from this experience?

The most mind-blowing thing was the fact that there is this unspoken language that connects all humans. All these ideas of borders, culture, language, skin colors that are constantly put in the forefront to separate us are a joke. My trip there also helped me realize that it is not an excuse just because I go through shit I can be an asshole. Kids, a third of my age, were able to understand that shit happens, but you still have to be good to people. Things like that humble you down.

I was impressed by how seriously these kids took their lives and their unique missions on the planet. It was, "I want to become a doctor, because I want to cure AIDS." They all knew why they wanted to pursue a particular goal. It pushed me to find this seriousness within myself and to know the why and because. These kids, without knowing it, were checking me on my work ethic and commitment to activism. This trip was a time in my life where the clock stopped. It really changed me. Before starting the classes, I remember that I would meditate and pray. I could not go in front of these kids if my heart and my soul were not pure because they would feel it.

Did your exposure to other societies help you to approach, with a different angle, the many questions that are linked to the place of women in US society?

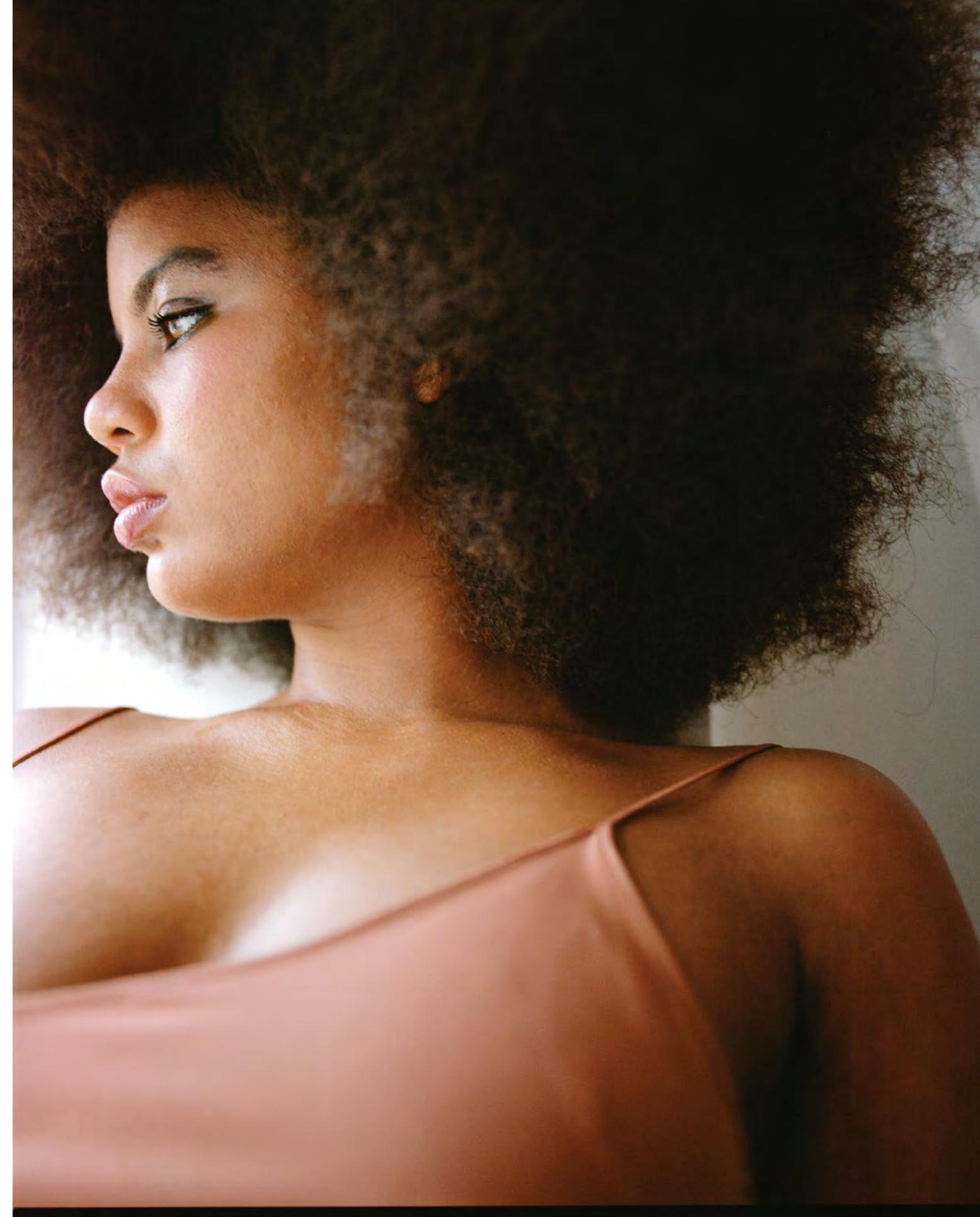
That's a great question. Every time I've stepped out of my world, I've come back with questions. Every society shows how strong women are in different ways which only propels me to wonder why anyone would want to devalue them. Also, being a Black woman in all these societies I'm always reevaluating my place in US society.

IG @thisishowilook

SAMIRAH WEARS
SLIP DRESS BY NORISOL FERRARI



**ALL THESE IDEAS
OF BORDERS,
CULTURE,
LANGUAGE,
SKIN COLORS
THAT ARE
CONSTANTLY PUT
IN THE FOREFRONT
TO SEPARATE US
ARE A JOKE**





JUSTINE WEARS
 DRESS BY BORGIO DE NOR
 EARRINGS BY CHLOÉ
 NECKLACES JUSTINE'S OWN

LIMITLESS

JUSTINE SKYE BY JILL JONES

PHOTOGRAPHS: LELEITA MCKILL
 STYLING: GIANNIE COUJI
 MAKE UP: PASCALE POMA
 PHOTO ASSISTANT: BRYAN SAUNDERS
 STYLING ASSISTANT: TEPI ALHANI
 SPECIAL THANKS TO ABRIMA ERWIAH

Justine Skye has only a few minutes to chat before she is on her way to her first film premiere for her starring role in Keanu Reeves's production of *Already Gone*. It's an urban coming of age story starring Skye, Tyler Dean Flores, and Seann William Scott. She is looking forward to seeing the final result, even though the movie was filmed nearly two years ago. You may have caught her recently playing the character Violet in the "Bodak Yellow" episode of BET's *Tales*.

At the mere age of 24, singer, songwriter, Internet sensation, and stunner Justine Skye is no stranger to the entertainment world. Born right on the cusp at the start of Generation Z, the first generation to be digitally wired and tuned in almost from inception, Justine is one of the early young Internet leaders that has played pivotal roles in framing the current structure of Internet celebrity and influencer marketing we have all come to know today. According to a study by celebrity brand strategist Jeetendr Sehdev, "Internet influencers are the new celebrity" – "even outperforming mainstream traditional stars. It's a phenomenon that has proven to be a major disruptor in all media forms."

She has a proven track record of accomplishments. To her Tumblr Fans, where her early roots were established, Justine is a phenom, having started her Tumblr page at the age of fourteen years old. Like most teenagers she shared the things she liked: various GIFs, quotes, selfies, and video clips of her playing her music. It wasn't just her online popularity that was so appealing, it was her sphere of influence. At one point it became clear that Justine was more than popular, she had become influential – a relatable voice in the crowd of many who stood out and captivated an audience of her generation to listen. Her successful online presence eventually attracted other celebrity peers: "Kardashians, Baldwins, Jaden and Willow Smith," to mention a few. She became a part of a coterie of rich kids with famous parents, and privileged lifestyles that the paparazzi and gossip magazines pursued. However, Justine was more than just a Tumblr star and socialite. Not only just a beautiful face, Justine Skye was and is talented.

Raised by her mother, an esteemed entertainment attorney, and doted on by her grandparents of Jamaican Indo-African descent, her entrepreneur-

ial spirit and work ethic can be attributed to her solid upbringing. Her grandfather, a politician, would often have her sing at his events. Songs such as the Black National Anthem and Sam Sparro's song "Black and Gold" alerted many industry insiders that she was one to watch and to keep an eye on, as it was undeniable she possessed talent to everyone who heard her sing. Not one to make impulsive decisions, Justine viewed her performances at her grandfather's events as "testing the waters." From an outsider's view one might assume that nepotism was at hand in her early success. Not so. A particularly shy and analytical child, she was conscious of the commitment required to take music on professionally. "I guess I developed a fear of not looking foolish... or not making my family look foolish. So I just muted everything inside me," she says.

Working on developing her confidence, Justine continued to focus on doing what she loved at the time: sharing and making an impact via her Tumblr. Unaware that at 14 years old, her self-taught knowledge of online brand development and marketing was something parents spend a small fortune sending their children to college to major in advertising and marketing. She says, "I didn't know what marketing was. I was just being a kid and wanting to share whatever it is that we were doing and making myself a lot of friends throughout the world." People were attracted to her energy and became emotionally connected to her. She posted a cover of Drake's song "Headlines" that went viral, taking in over 2 million streams, almost immediately. Her authentic and relatable presence earned the trust of her followers and a loyal fan base. Justine became the girl you root for, the one you want to see win. Ultimately, opportunity knocked, and it was on her terms and merit.

Modeling assignments, fashion editorials, brand collaborations, a mix-tape release, and a recording contract with Atlantic Records soon followed. The girl with the purple hair who called herself the Purple Unicorn, the beauty who hailed from Fort Greene, Brooklyn was going through a unique transition and evolution not unlike her old neighborhood – expanding and growing in recognition and status.

From 2013 thru 2018 saw Justine release a total of one album and three EPs. Initially when she hit the scene, reviewers were setting her up as the new R&B female coming for Rihanna's throne. A song collaboration with Tyga, titled "Collide", gained her significant attention on the charts, but soon differences with the label arose and release dates of newer material became sparse. Her friendships with Kylie and Kendall Jenner became highly scrutinized and created a backlash that caused some music writers to accuse her of "not taking her music career seriously."

Nothing could have been further from the truth. Hardcore Skye fans pushed back at these claims, feeling that Justine was being maligned and held back from the pop world because she was a brown-skinned woman – a flawlessly beautiful brown-skinned woman who was a role model for young girls in the Black community. Justine was one of the first young women of color other than Willow Smith to have reached a level of status initially from the Internet. In other words, even had she never sung a note in her life, Justine Skye was famous because of who SHE was. Fame preceded her before the recording contracts.

During this time, the music industry was unfamiliar with this new model. A shift had taken place where social media talent had begun to outpace traditional mainstream acts. This was a media disruptor where people online could garner fans and obtain a reach without public relations machines and paid radio airplay and media buys. Advertisers and labels were themselves a bit baffled by the shift in numbers. However, they knew there was value in it somewhere, and they wanted to learn it and control it.

Still, they appeared to be short-sighted and fumbling when it came to understanding the key to Justine's own marketing prowess and strategy. It was her innate ability to simplify, to amplify her message to an attentive

I GUESS
 I DEVELOPED
 A FEAR OF
 NOT LOOKING
 FOOLISH

and engaging audience. An audience that was receptive to her being authentic and not too polished. Status quo corporate music marketing proved to be less than original. Long intervals of gaps in product releases and absences of her previous spur-of-the-moment engagement were not beneficial. This appears to have led to some roadblocks for the young performer and the full scope and momentum of her project.

Usually when there is an absence in releases, it's fairly safe to assume that there are some creative differences going on. I ask Justine what was the turning point with Atlantic Records, when you realized that it's a business.

"I was young. I signed when I was 17. And at that age you think when you sign to a label that everything is going to explode and pop off and be this big huge artist. Everything that I built before that was the reason why I was being signed to a label, but when I got there it kind of... it's like writing a movie and getting other people involved to help bring it to life, and they completely changed it. So my sound changed. Just the way I went about things changed, and I feel I'd finally been finding myself and being free and not being so shy."

"I started by developing a fan base on the Internet on my own and created this whole world for myself and friends. And when I got to a label it got oversaturated, and it kind of became corny. It wasn't as authentic anymore. Everything was being like overproduced, and it didn't feel real anymore. Obviously, I am trusting other people with my choices of records, and I'm trusting them with like, 'They've been in this longer than me. They know what's going to be a hit. They know more than me.' And so I put my trust in everyone else's hands; I put my career in everyone else's hands – that was my first misstep. You live, and you learn. And that's why I don't let that completely discourage me at this point in my life, because I have to go through these

experiences to know what I want and what I don't want."

A subsequent Roc Nation album release titled *Ultraviolet* showcased her powerful and controversial song "Build", featuring rapper Arin Ray. The video for the song was visually haunting and addressed the cycles of domestic violence against women in our society that remain so prevalent. There was a vulnerability that Justine revealed in taking on a huge topic that was very personal to her. She opened up publicly that she had been in an abusive relationship and wanted to share and bring awareness. To connect. To heal. Just as she had always done from her days when she began on social media. Things were coming full circle, and she was starting to get back to what it was that once worked for her personally and professionally. If anything, she had learned on this journey that it was that many relationships around her had become transactional.

She tells me: "I was in a session with someone that I will not name, and he was like, 'People come to me for hits.' And I'm just like, 'OK. Well, these are songs that anyone can sing. I don't think I'm the kind of artist that wants to sing a song that you can just go and give to this or this person another day. If it's my song... it's my stories, my feelings. As incredibly creative and artistic the image of the business might seem, there are some who are just going in there to do their job, and it's more of a science project than a passion project. And it loses all of the feeling and authenticity."

Today, Justine celebrates her newfound artistic freedom as an Independent Artist. Her new song "Maybe" is the first single from her upcoming album soon to be released. More film work is in her future. She is back in control of creating her world the way she wants it to be, just as she did before.

IG @justineskye

I PUT MY CAREER IN EVERYONE ELSE'S HANDS – THAT WAS MY FIRST MISSTEP

JUSTINE WEARS
TRENCH COAT BY CURRENT ELLIOTT
NECKLACES JUSTINE'S OWN



TOP LEFT
JUSTINE WEARS
DRESS BY STUDIO 189
JEWELRY JUSTINE'S OWN

TOP RIGHT
JUSTINE WEARS
TOP BY CHLOÉ
JEANS BY STUDIO 189

BOTTOM RIGHT
JUSTINE WEARS
SWEATER BY VICTOR GLEMAUD
JEANS SEE BY CHLOÉ
BRACELET JUSTINE'S OWN





JUSTINE WEARS
 DRESS BY BORGIO DE NOR
 EARRINGS BY CHLOÉ
 NECKLACES JUSTINE'S OWN
 SHOES BY SABAH

**IF IT'S MY SONG...
 IT'S MY STORIES,
 MY FEELINGS**

JUSTINE WEARS
 TRENCH COAT BY CURRENT ELLIOTT
 NECKLACES JUSTINE'S OWN



BOTTOM LEFT & RIGHT
 JUSTINE WEARS
 DRESS BY JUDY ZHANG
 NECKLACES JUSTINE'S OWN





JUSTINE WEARS
PUFFER JACKET, HOODED TOP,
SKIRT & BOOTS BY CHLOÉ
NECKLACES JUSTINE'S OWN



JUSTINE WEARS
DRESS BY MONSE
JEWELRY
JUSTINE'S OWN

MARI WEARS VINTAGE BOLERO
CORSET BY SIAN HOFFMAN
TROUSERS BY ACNE STUDIOS
HAT BY SAINT LAURENT

PHOTOGRAPHS:
MAXIM NORTHOVER
STYLING: TAMER WILDE
HAIR BY JAMES CATALANO
USING LABEL.M
MAKE-UP BY ELIZA CLARKE
USING M.A.C COSMETICS
MODEL MARI
@ TITANIUM MANAGEMENT
LOCATION AND SPECIAL
THANKS TO
ANDAZ HOTEL LONDON
LIVERPOOL STREET

PROBABLE CAUSE



MARI WEARS
COAT, CORSET & TROUSERS
BY JIVOMIR DOMOUSTCHIEV



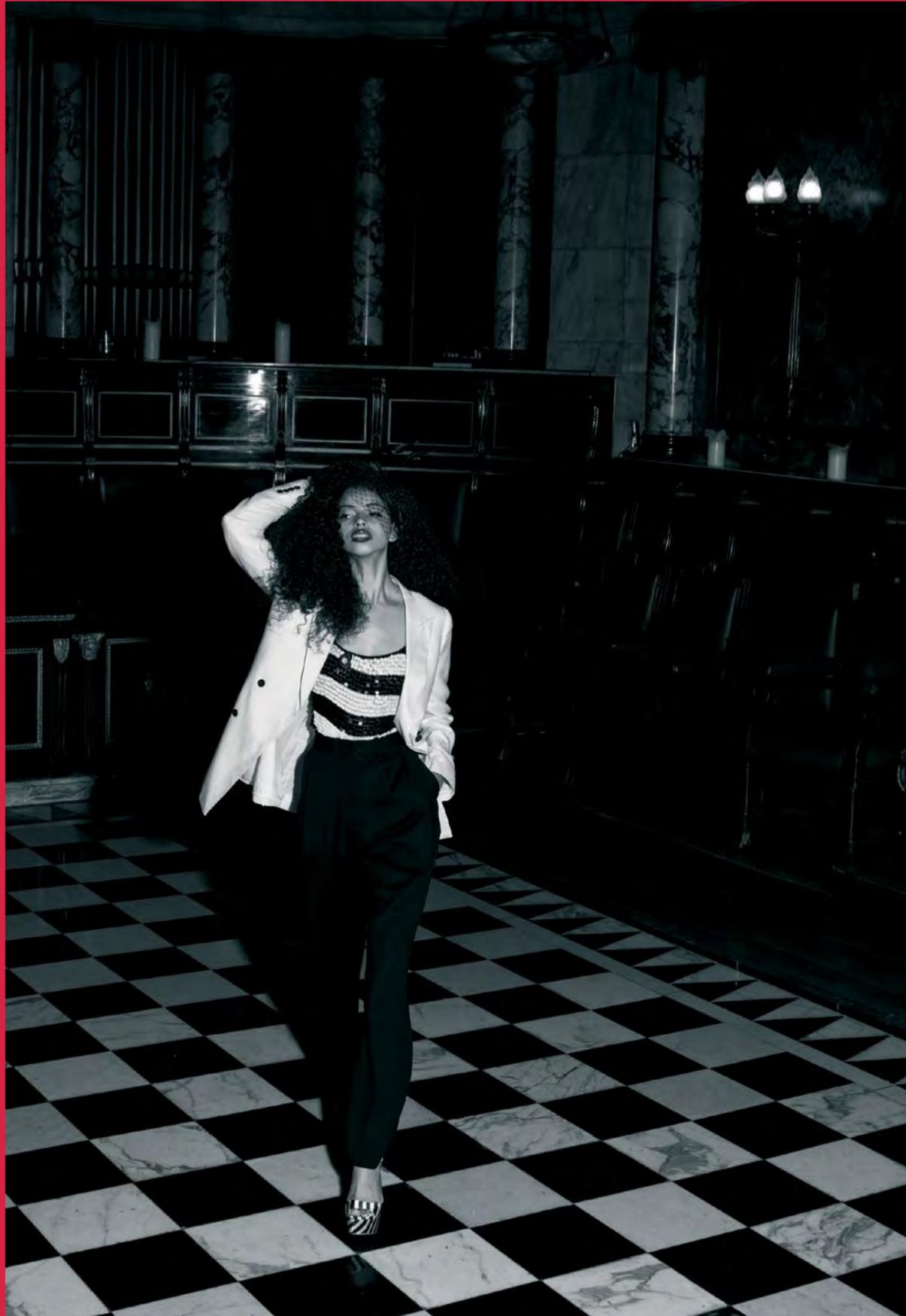
MARI WEARS
GOWN BY LURLINE
HAT BY MAJESTY BLACK



MARI WEARS
CAPE FROM
TRAVIS BANTON ARCHIVE
CORSET BY SIAN HOFFMAN
SHORTS BY PETRIISKI
GLOVES BY MANOKHI
SHOES BY MANOLO BLAHNIK



MARI WEARS
GOWN BY LURLINE



MARI WEARS
JACKET & TROUSERS
BY ALEX EAGLE
TOP BY JOHN GALLIANO
HAT BY STEPHEN JONES
SHOES BY MOSCHINO



MARI WEARS
SHIRT BY RALPH LAUREN
TROUSERS BY PETRIISKI



MARI WEARS
COAT BY
JIVOMIR DOMOUSTCHIEV
GOWN BY PETRIISKI
NECKLACES BY SWAROVSKI
RINGS BY BUTLER & WILSON



MARI WEARS
TAILCOAT TUXEDO
BY HUNSTMAN & SONS
SHIRT BY ALEX EAGLE
WAIST CINCHER
BY SIAN HOFFMAN
SHOES BY
CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN
HAT BY LOCK & CO



MARI WEARS
CUSTOM MADE GOWN BY PETRIISKI
GLOVES BY CHANEL

FREEDOM
IS NOT
BOUGHT –
FREEDOM
IS FOUGHT
FOR



AWENG WEARS
EARRINGS BY TOPSHOP

GOD & KAKUMA

AWENG CHUOL BY JOHN N. BLANKSON

Since Sudan's independence in 1956, six individuals (and three multi-member sovereignty councils) have led the country – all of whom have been men. Aweng Chuol, the fashion industry darling, wants to be the first woman President of Sudan. At age 21, she's found her voice as an activist, met with a Head of State, and amassed a successful modeling career. She hasn't named her fan base yet, but the outpour of love and admiration is prevalent across all her social media platforms – most notably her YouTube channel (MISS 20 SOMETHING) – where she shares personal, candid, and intimate stories about her life and career.

PHOTOGRAPHS: JEON SEUNG
ILLUSTRATION: CARLOS APONTE
STYLING: NEIL STUART
HAIR: ERNESTO MONTENOVO
@ THE LONDON STYLE AGENCY
USING BABYLISS PRO TOOLS
MAKE UP: TERRY BARBER @ DAVID
ARTISTS USING M.A.C COSMETICS

For her 21st birthday, the London-based model spoke in front of an international audience at the UN's mental health forum, in efforts to increase conversations surrounding the mental health of refugees. Chuol was in an exam hall during her speech's broadcast. Yes, the Sudanese beauty spent her 21st birthday taking a Contract Law exam; it's all part of her plan to invest in the kind of future she wants for herself. "The video was a voice of a girl who was born under a tree in a Kenyan refugee camp and has made it to a point in her life where she can speak in front of an influential global audience." She added, "It was more than just a dream birthday gift; it was a step towards change."

Aweng grew up in a household of eleven other siblings – an experience she describes as intriguing. Chuol cites her sibling role as "a spitting image of her mother." That image came with its fair share of responsibilities: having eleven siblings look up to her, taking on life and maneuvering through it. In her own words, it made her humble. She also talks a lot about her culture and how it's influenced her adulthood. "In our culture, your neighbor is family... and the sense of community never made me forget my roots. There was always something to talk about and who to tell it to. That was my world. It made me see the real world as something that needed more of my personal experience – more laughter, more communication, and more voices."

Her experience in Kakuma Refugee Camp is a big part of the story. The model admits it shaped her view of the world and how she appreciates life. "I remember the smell. If I visited the camp today, I could identify the exact place I was born and where I lived. I know the tree that stood in the middle of the village; I still remember the taste of the sand. To me, it's more than a camp. It has a bit of me still there, and I still

have Kakuma in me." She continues, "I've been saying this lately: 'Alongside God & Kakuma, forever and ever, amen,' and it is the truth."

Part of her mission is to raise awareness about the well-being of refugees. You sense her passion in how she talks about it. It's a calling she's fiercely embraced and continues to use her power to echo the conversation. Chuol Aweng is part of the dozens of women *Ubikwist* is celebrating with this issue. Her journey, ambition, resilience, and pursuit for change is why we are in love with her story.

Let's dive right into it. According to the Center On Human Rights Education, up to 40% of adult refugees experience PTSD and in children, the rates can rise to 90%. What should we be doing to suppress these numbers?

I knew the numbers were high, I just didn't know how high. One thing I am currently working on is a rehabilitation home for refugee mothers – not a center, a home. When it comes to psychiatric/psychological steps and ways taken to deal with refugees' PTSD, one mistake society makes is normalizing PTSD.

There are levels to it. I have not just lost a husband... there's more to it: I have lost my identity, my siblings, my children, and myself. The experience of what refugees go through is almost downplayed to victim trauma. Think about the trauma of losing everything – your ancestry – the reality of generational trauma that follows is almost never thought about. We need to suppress these numbers by giving refugees homes to completely open up their realities and understand their dialogues.

Let's talk about Sudan. What started as a protest (led by women) to end a dictator's brutal 30-year reign has now turned into violent turmoil. If the people of Sudan are listening right

now, what would you tell them?

Keep fighting. That's all that is needed to be said. Freedom is not bought – freedom is fought for. The people of Sudan have been fighting for freedom. And they are within their human right to do so.

What do you think Lt. Gen. Ahmed Awad Ibn Auf should be doing to restore peace in the Country?

I do not think one politician or a de facto head of state can single-handedly restore peace in the country. The politicians of the country need to get involved. The ministers, the jurisdiction, the courts, the people who run the country need to realize what is going on and, as a collective, pursue a brighter future. Sudan has bled for too long.

What do you hope to change when you become the first woman President of Sudan?

When I become the President of South Sudan or Sudan, I would want the freedom that is written in the Republic of South Sudan's Bill of Rights to become a reality. The war that happened during my birth changed my birth location to Kenya; that war misplaced my mother's biological parents. It also caused my father's death. No one should experience that! I want the promises that have been written on paper for my people be put into practice.

You were discovered at age 16 and decided to wait until you turned 18 to pursue modeling. Why?

I was young and scared that I would be pressured by the lights and cameras to identify me. So I decided to find myself first and then add the modeling. I also wanted to go to university and experience the debate club, cheerleading, go out late, and not worry about what would

I WANT THE
PROMISES THAT
HAVE BEEN
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BE PUT INTO
PRACTICE



be seen on Snapchat or Instagram the next morning. I did not want to be misquoted or be in front of the media 24/7. I wanted to live a regular non-scheduled life for just a bit.

I also hate doing things without putting in my 100-120%. And I knew that if I became a supermodel, I would want to start building foundations, schools, orphanages, etc. I've always wanted to be a major Hollywood director; I want to get into biochemistry after law school; I also want to build brands and marry my girlfriend. I had to make sure my dreams and goals had been structured before I was given a schedule. I came into this industry with personal ambitions beyond fashion, and I haven't had to compromise any of it.

Do you think your decision would have been any different if models had unions, and do you think models should have unions?

No, I do not think my decision would have been any different. I might have factored it into consideration, but I still would have waited. And yes, I believe models should have unions.

There is someone dear to my heart: I call her my NYC mother, Ms. Mari Malek. She is an activist and owns Stand For Education: an organization that supports female education in South Sudan. She is also working with The Model Alliance: an organization that will serve as a union for models. I've been blessed to have met her at the beginning of my career; she helped me a lot. Not every young model gets that kind of support, and unions will make things better for newcomers.

You've cited Debra Shaw as your first model icon. Who are some of your other favorite supermodels?

YES! Aunty Debra – she is phenomenal. The sweetest of sweets, and I adore her. About my

favorite supermodels, I'll say Naomi Campbell (I have yet to personally meet her, but I would love to have tea with her), Cindy Iman, Tyra, Claudia Schiffer, and Christy Turlington. These women gave us their struts, poise, looks, and absolute super-MODEL dreams. I love how they were mostly in an almost secret circle. And when they came, they gave it their all.

You've been in the business for almost two years and have already established yourself as one of the industry's most in-demand models. What would you say is the reason behind your success, and what can up-and-coming models learn from your experience?

I don't think there is a secret to anything that I do. But I'll say this: I hate complaining – I hate not attempting something that is challenging. I just inhale and get it done. And to any up-and-coming models, an advice I would give is to prioritize your mental health first. If you're not there mentally, it's not worth the trip.

Thankfully, we've moved from an era where there can only be Tyra or Naomi. We have Aweng, Adut Akech, Anok Yai, Winnie Harlow, Adwoa Aboah – the list goes on and on. Ad campaigns and fashion shows are now becoming more racially diverse. Would you say the fashion industry has finally caught up with representation? If yes, what was the pivotal moment?

I have a habit of never giving things a 10 out of 10. There is always room for improvements. And yes, the Industry has moved forward in representation, but we still have many faces that we have yet to see on the runway.

If you had to live in one of the 60+ cities you've travelled to, which city would that be?

I would honestly move to Marrakech, Morocco. It

was my first time on Africa's soil since I moved to Australia. We shot with Tyler Mitchell, and it was amazing, I still have videos of myself screaming when I saw a camel. I love camels... his name was Jimmy.

Which city has the best food?

Milan.

The city with the most fun activities?

Los Angeles. I spent my 20th birthday shooting throughout the city all day and got a free (unlimited) pass to Universal Studio park. It was also during Halloween, so that was really exciting.

Your go-to karaoke.

TLC, "No Scrubs" – an actual classic.

Who rotates on your playlist the most?

Summer Walker. I'm hinting this for my family or anyone at this point to get her to fly to Australia in October and sing "Girls Need Love" for my birthday.

What are some of your hobbies?

I like watching films; I'm really into poetry as well. I like to watch *Animal Planet* with my girlfriend and experiencing new music (currently invested in Afrobeats, especially Burna Boy). I love reading the constitution of different countries as well.

Before we conclude, this is our first-ever Women Issue at *Ubikwist*: name a woman you deeply admire.

I've been blessed to be surrounded by amazing women every day, to be honest. But I'll have to say my mother, Mary Bior. She gave me life and taught me to be a fighter.

IG @awengchuol

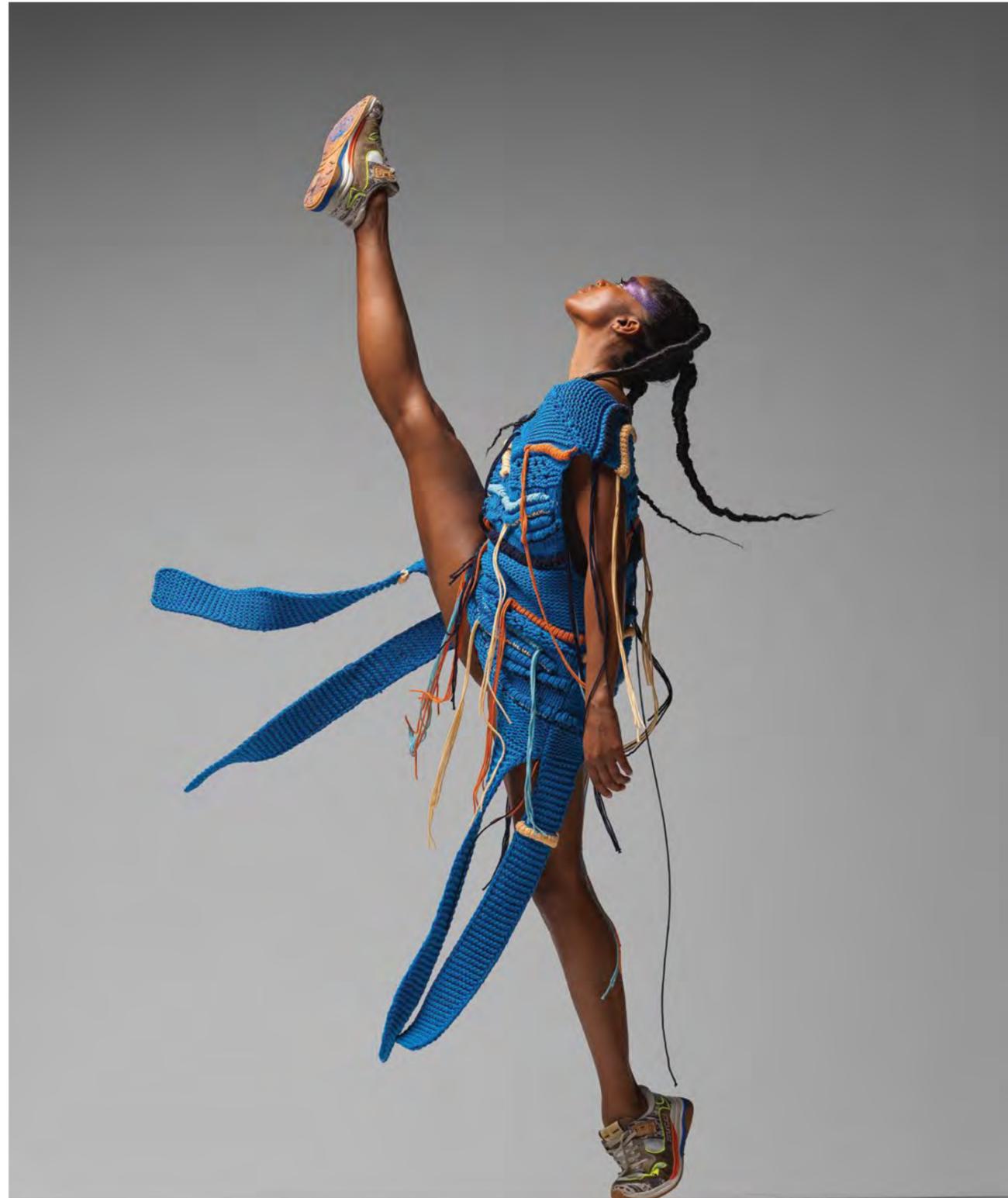


I CAME INTO
THIS INDUSTRY
WITH PERSONAL
AMBITIONS BEYOND
FASHION,
AND I HAVEN'T HAD
TO COMPROMISE
ANY OF IT



INGRID WEARS
DRESS AND SNEAKERS
BY CHRISTOPHER KANE

BOLÉRO OLÉ



NARDIA WEARS
TOP BY CALVIN LUO
SNEAKERS BY GUCCI

PHOTOGRAPHS: NISIAN HUGHES
STYLING: GIANNIE COUJI
HAIR: NELSON VERCHER @ RITA HAZAN USING RENÉ FURTERER PRODUCTS
MAKE UP: ANGIE PARKER @ THE WALL GROUP USING KAT BURKI SKINCARE AND KOSAS COSMETICS
STYLING ASSISTANT: JALIESSA ST JOHN
DANCERS: INGRID SILVA, COURTNEY LAVINE AND NARDIA BOODOO



INGRID WEARS
DRESS BY PLEATS PLEASE ISSEY MIYAKE
TOP BY FABLETICS

NARDIA WEARS
DRESS BY SACAI
SLIPPERS BY REPETTO



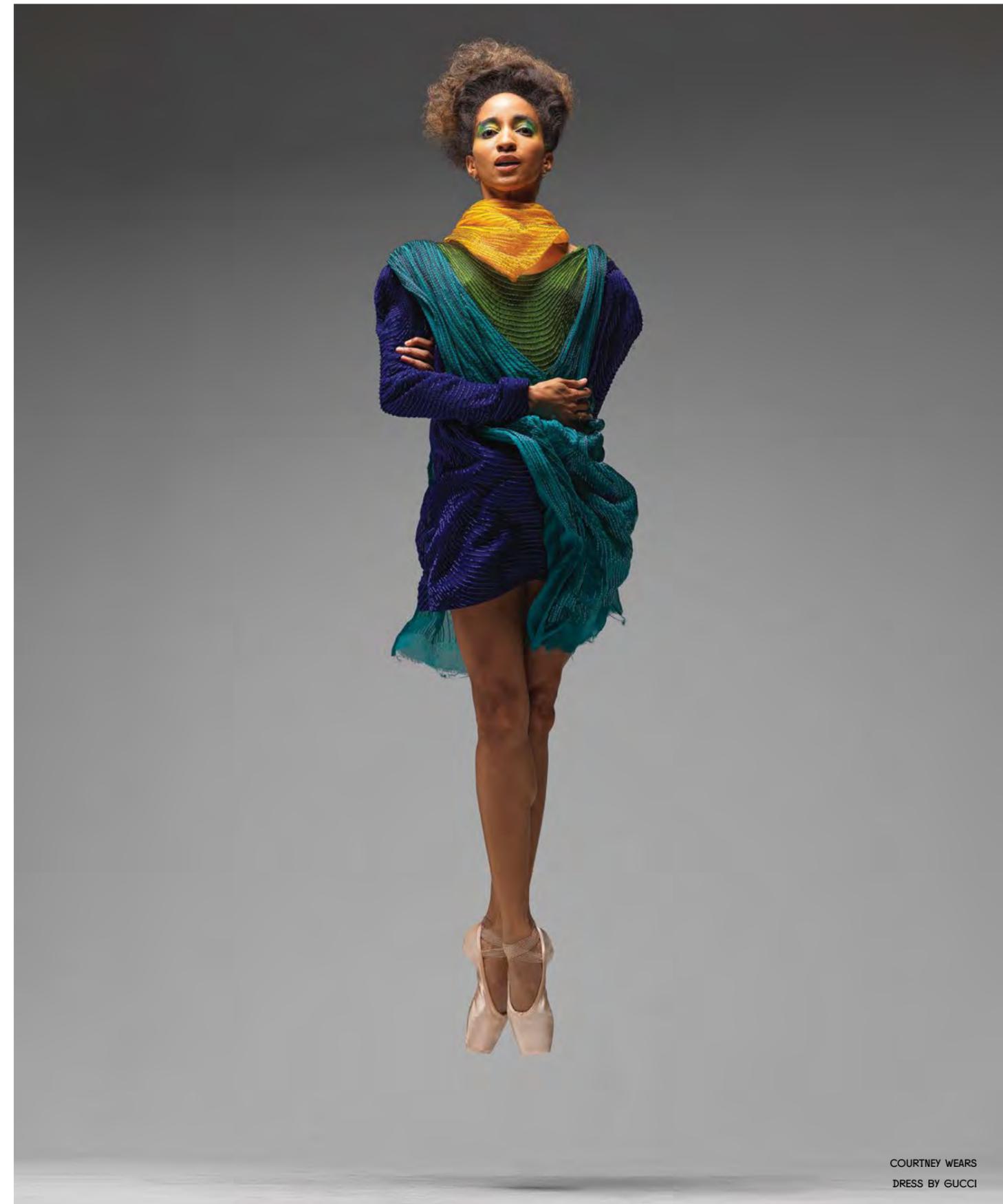
NARDIA WEARS
DRESS BY SACAI
SLIPPERS BY REPETTO



NARDIA WEARS
DRESS BY SACAI



INGRID WEARS
DRESS BY BORGIO DE NOR



COURTNEY WEARS
DRESS BY GUCCI



NARDIA WEARS
DRESS BY SACAI
SLIPPERS BY REPETTO



INGRID WEARS
DRESS BY BORGIO DE NOR



INGRID WEARS
TOP & TROUSERS
BY PLEATS PLEASE ISSEY MIYAKE

COURTNEY WEARS
TOP BY FABLETICS
TROUSERS BY PLEATS PLEASE ISSEY MIYAKE



COURTNEY
WEARS TOP BY FABLETICS

INGRID WEARS
TOP BY PLEATS PLEASE ISSEY MIYAKE

COURTNEY WEARS
TOP BY CAMILLA AND MARC
SKIRT BY MAJE
BELT BY HYKE
SLIPPERS BY REPETTO



NARDIA WEARS
BLOUSE
BY CAMILLA AND MARC
LEGGINGS
BY FABLETICS
SNEAKERS
BY CHRISTOPHER KANE





NADIA WEARS
TOP BY CALVIN LUO

NADIA WEARS
SWEATER BY SACAI



INGRID WEARS
JACKET BY GUCCI



INGRID WEARS
JACKET & SKIRT BY GUCCI
LEGGINGS BY FABLETICS

INGRID WEARS
JACKET AND SKIRT BY GUCCI





KARLA WEARS
JACKET
BY NEW & LINGWOOD
X ALEX EAGLE
SHIRT BY
ALEX EAGLE

TYPE NOT CAST

KARLA CROME BY JOHN N. BLANKSON

Fans can't get enough of *Carnival Row*: the blockbuster series that premiered August 30th on Amazon Prime Video. Karla Crome (as Tourmaline) stars in the series alongside supermodel/actress Cara Delevingne (as Vignette) and English actor Orlando Bloom (as Rycroft), in addition to a lineup of British stars. The series is set in a Victorian fantasy world filled with mythological immigrant creatures whose exotic homelands have been invaded by empires. The struggle to co-exist – the desire to fly, live, and love – seems impossible due to an intolerant and dangerous society. The show is based on the 2005 feature-length script, *A Killing on Carnival Row*, by Travis Beacham.

Yes, the trailer is impressive with a star-studded cast, topnotch cinematography, and great production. What makes *Carnival Row* a story worth watching is how distant, yet relatable, the characters can be. We all love a thrilling love story and *Carnival Row* does that department justice while tapping into race and class dynamics with unpredictable plot twists. It's a captivating story that arouses increasing curiosities with each episode. Perhaps my favorite part of the action drama is where Tourmaline (Crome) finds herself in a love triangle between Vignette (Delevingne) and Rycroft (Bloom). Does she go after her love interest? Or will she let fate decide? The dark, sexy, and fun fantasy drama becomes a puzzle that leads to an epic climax in the season finale. *Carnival Row* has already been renewed for season two and viewers are in for a treat.

Before *Carnival Row*, Karla was dancing to the beat of her own drum both behind and in front of the camera. She is a talented writer who always yearns to tell stories that matter. Her book's adaptation, *Mush & Me* premiered at the 2014 Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Since then, her passion has continued to grow with every project – taking on scripts she deeply cares about. I asked her about one story she is dying to tell and Crome was blunt: "Black women in the UK are 5 times more likely to die in childbirth than White women." She added, "There are a few reasons why this is the case, but it's mainly due to old racist notions that Black bodies are better able to tolerate pain. I found that utterly disturbing, especially as I recently gave

birth myself. The issue needs to be brought to the public's consciousness."

This kind of fire reflects in her work – constantly opening up the dialogue and pushing conversations that are relevant and urgent – whether she's telling it on paper or on screen. Crome spoke to *Ubikwist* about *Carnival Row*, her life, work, and experiences as a biracial woman of color in her industry.

To begin, tell us about the first play you ever wrote.

Yes. It was called *Frozen Tea Therapy*. I gave it a pretentious title because I thought it made me sound very serious and writerly. It was atrocious; I think it was about a racist piano teacher. Most scenes I had her crying over the piano, smoking, and drinking whisky. It was packed with every trope going... sort of what you would expect from a teenager trying to be Tennessee Williams. I entered it for a writing competition and the feedback was "this play makes no sense."

What made you want to tell that (first play) story?

I wish I could say it was the story I was longing to tell, but it wasn't. I guess I wanted to prove I was more than just an actor. There was probably a lot of my ego involved as well.

How has your voice changed as a writer today?

Well, now I know it's not as simple as waking

PHOTOGRAPHS: ALEXIS CHABALA
STYLING: TAMER WILDE
HAIR: BUNNY BRAIDS
MAKE UP: ADAM DE CRUZ
@ ONE REPRESENTS
USING ADC BEAUTY



KARLA WEARS
TOP BY RALPH LAUREN
TROUSERS BY PETRIISKI

I'M AN OPEN BOOK.
I'M NOT AFRAID
OF CONVERSATIONS
BEING HEAVY
OR DIFFICULT

up one morning and deciding to write a play. I know it takes a great deal of research, hard work, and heartache. You have to care deeply about the story you are telling and the characters you are creating, or you won't be motivated to improve it. And writing really is rewriting. After the 5th or 6th draft, if you still care about the world you've created, you know it's worth pursuing.

How much of yourself is reflected in your work?

A bit. I certainly use characters to articulate some of my own thoughts and frustrations, but I also like to try to create convincing arguments that I don't necessarily agree with. That's the real challenge.

How does it feel to know that you are read when you write?

It feels good. I'm an open book. I'm not afraid of conversations being heavy or difficult. All I'm doing is trying to open up a dialogue about something I find interesting. Besides, what you write in a fictional capacity is just that – it's not necessarily a reflection of your own outlook. I don't worry about being judged.

Who and what were some of your favorite writers and books growing up?

My favorite playwrights are still Tennessee Williams and Anthony Neilson.

My favorite novel is *Catcher in The Rye*. My

friend got it for me and said, "I think you'll like this." I don't know if that was a compliment or an insult. I felt a real affinity to this privileged teenage boy in 1950s America. His experience couldn't have been any further from my own, but I totally saw where he was coming from. He observes how insincere and fake adults can be; almost everyone he encounters is fake and phony. While my view of the world is a lot more optimistic (I generally like people), I did find some affinity with him. I do think people often put up a front.

***Mush and Me* is one of your most revered works – a love story between a Jewish girl and a Muslim boy. What made you want to tell such an important and relevant story (why)?**

I was approached by an actress friend who wanted to co-develop an original piece of work. The idea came from a series of interviews we conducted with interfaith couples. We were shocked at the number of ordinary, liberal people who had been rejected – even disowned – by their families for dating outside of their faith. It wasn't just a problem for conservative, ultra-religious families.

I also think it frustrated me because I'm of mixed heritage. My parents aren't religious, but my mum is Black and my dad is White. I understand that people have different values, but when it comes to romantic relationships, I can't understand rejecting someone solely on the basis of their heritage – whether that be racial, cultural, or religious. I find it extremely sad and deeply offensive.



In your own words, why do you think a story like *Mush and Me* is so necessary?

England is a secular country, but our values are based on centuries of religious doctrine. Over 80% of the world identifies as religious. We may think we are a post-faith society, but it permeates every part of our lives. I think if you're unwilling to engage with that, you're unwilling to engage with the world. Religion is everywhere. It's Middle Eastern politics, the pro-choice debate... even how we choose to treat people day-to-day. I am a staunch atheist, but I think we can learn a lot about ourselves when we look at religion. It's the best and worst thing about the world.

Tell us about your first acting audition and what you've learned from the experience. If you could turn back time, would you have done anything differently?

You know, I think it was for the Royal Shakespeare Company. I was incredibly nervous, because I really wanted it. I didn't get it, obviously. I wouldn't do anything differently, but if I had a time machine I would tell myself rejection isn't a reflection of talent.

In 2012, Screen International named you as one of the "UK Stars of Tomorrow". 7 years later, you're starring in the highly anticipated Amazon series, *Carnival Row* which will be available in over 200 countries. What has sustained you till this point, and how do you continue to challenge yourself as an artist?

I've done odd jobs here and there, but since my early 20s I haven't had to supplement my income with anything other than acting. I know a lot of really talented, hardworking people who have struggled and said, "Fuck this" then tried something else. I don't blame them. If I hadn't been able to live off my earnings, who knows? I might have thrown in the towel a long time ago. The work sustains you.

That said, my challenges have been different from the majority of "jobbing" actors. I've always managed to find work when I've needed to – the problem is finding work that feels gratifying and stimulating. I'd never be out of work if I wanted to play the best friend, the girlfriend, or the secretary. I still play these parts... but it's rare to be offered roles that are layered and complex. It's the possibility of playing such characters that keeps me motivated.

You play Tourmaline, a quick-witted faerie poet driven from her war-torn homeland. Describe Tourmaline in your own words and what we can expect from her?

In the world of *Carnival Row* "Fae- folk" (faeries, fauns, centaurs, and the like) live as second-class citizens under the ruling human class. They are refugees who work in domestic service, in dangerous manual labor. They don't enjoy the same rights and privileges as humans. Many of them are forced into crime and prostitution to make ends meet.

I AM A STAUNCH
ATHEIST, BUT I THINK
WE CAN LEARN A LOT
ABOUT OURSELVES
WHEN WE LOOK
AT RELIGION.
IT'S THE BEST
AND WORST THING
ABOUT THE WORLD

KARLA WEARS
KIMONO BY JIVOMIR DOMOUSTCHIEV
CORSET TOP BY PETRIISKI
TROUSERS BY JEAN-PAUL GAULTIER ARCHIVE
FROM PASSAGEPARIS.COM



KARLA WEARS
TOP BY POP BOUTIQUE
OVERALLS BY LANVIN





KARLA WEARS
KIMONO BY JIVOMIR DOMOUSTCHIEV
CORSET TOP BY PETRIISKI
TROUSERS BY JEAN-PAUL GAULTIER ARCHIVE
FROM PASSAGEPARIS.COM

Despite being a revered poet in a former life, Tourmaline has found employment in a brothel. She's not ashamed of what she does. She's a victim of circumstance, and she takes it in stride. Tourmaline is loving and loyal to a fault. She's best friends with Vignette (Delevingne). They were once in a romantic relationship, but Vignette has since fallen for Philo (Bloom), a soldier she thought she lost in the war. Even though it hurts her to see them together, Tourmaline goes to great lengths to reunite them.

Do Karla and Tourmaline share any similarities?

I would certainly describe myself as loyal... and I like writing. I think I'm a little less gracious though.

How did you land the role?

A self-taped and then an in-person audition. It was a standard auditioning process.

We love to hear behind the scenes stories of actors. What would you consider your most memorable experience on set shooting *Carnival Row*?

Oh no. I can only think of really boring things that no one will care about. I loved doing the harness work and acrobatic flying stunts. But if I'm honest, a good day on set is when I get to sneak off and sleep on a sofa somewhere.

IF I HAD A TIME MACHINE I WOULD TELL MYSELF REJECTION ISN'T A REFLECTION OF TALENT

What is one acting role that impacted your life the most?

I think probably *Hit and Miss*. It was my first lead in a TV drama, and it enabled me to seriously progress my career. It wasn't a huge hit, but it was a bonkers concept and quite brilliantly executed. I played a 16-year-old (pig rearing) farmer who shot her landlord after being adopted by a trans contract killer.

Being a minority in any industry comes with its set of adversities. This is our first-ever Women's Issue at *Ubikwist*, and we strongly believe these conversations are necessary and worth discussing. Can you share with us some of the challenges you've faced along the way being a woman of color in your industry?

I've been told that I've only gotten jobs because I'm mixed-race: that it's been easier for me than my White friends. People can be incredibly cruel, and if you hear enough of these comments, they inevitably affect your confidence. As a result, I'm always second-guessing myself. When I do get a job, I question if it's down to my talent or to satisfying a quota.

Sadly, I can pretty much read any script now and tell you right away which roles will be cast with Black actors and which ones will be White. In a nutshell, the good parts – the leads, are White, and they are invariably propped up by a supporting cast of color. It gets boring after a while. I do sense a shift away from this, but it's been a long time coming.

What are some of the discussions we should be having that we're (currently) not?

Disabled women are grossly underrepresented on stage and screen. While people of color are regularly sidelined into smaller roles, disabled people of color are almost completely ignored. I don't remember seeing a Black disabled woman in a lead role on TV. Ever. I think that's so boring. It doesn't take much imagination to throw open your casting bracket, and it would make for a much more interesting viewing. The talent is out there. I'm not interested in watching another tiny weeny White woman saving the world and shagging about it. Imagine an Asian wheelchair user or a Black deaf woman as the next Marvel superhero. That would be interesting.

What motivates you to keep going?

I think the bottom line is that I enjoy what I do. I like pretending to be other people. It's fun.

Who are some of the women you admire both in front and behind the camera?

Samantha Morton, Meryl Streep, Ava DuVernay, Kathy Burke, Phoebe Waller-Bridge. I think Reese Witherspoon is a very clever producer and talented actress.

You juggle multiple powerful art forms. What inspires you?

Good podcasts that keep me connected to what's going on in the world. I like *Beyond*

Belief, *Women's Hour*, *Death, Sex & Money*, and *Criminal*. Other than that, family, friends, good TV, and good theatre. I still get tingles when I watch a great play.

Has the entertainment industry made enough progress?

I think a lot of people want to be seen for doing the right thing. I see people behaving appropriately, and I welcome that. Awareness has been a great motivator for change. That said, I'm not sure how much is really being taken on board. I mean, no one is making lewd comments or trying to touch me up. However, I can still go on set, make a helpful suggestion and be ignored for a man to say the same thing 5 minutes later to a rapt audience. We don't just want our bodies to be safe; we want to be valued and heard. This isn't just in our industry though, it's the same for women in other fields. All we can do is call out bad behavior when we see it.

What are some of the issues affecting women that you would like to cover in your future works?

I just want to see more female roles that are layered, surprising, and complex. Unlike with my writing, I'm not looking to start a debate or push an agenda when I perform. I just want to inhabit interesting characters and worlds.

KARLA WEARS
JACKET BY NEW & LINGWOOD
X ALEX EAGLE
SHIRT BY ALEX EAGLE



IT'S RARE TO BE OFFERED ROLES THAT ARE LAYERED AND COMPLEX. IT'S THE POSSIBILITY OF PLAYING SUCH CHARACTERS THAT KEEPS ME MOTIVATED



LETTING IT FLOW

DHARA
LUCY PINTER BY JOHN N. BLANKSON

After 15 years of sitting atop the iconic fashion house Superfine, Lucy Pinter is ready for her comeback. However, it's hard to call it a comeback considering the famed entrepreneur/creative director/stylist never left. Superfine pioneered the skinny jeans as a style go-to for everyday women and style icons like Kate Moss, Rihanna, and Beyoncé. Today, it's become a reference point for several established and growing brands.

Since ending Superfine, Pinter turned a new leaf to perhaps her most ambitious project yet: Dhara! Dhara is Lucy's newest vision brought to life – a sustainable clothing line for women of all shapes and sizes. Her eye for beauty is expansive, empowering women through clothes and helping them embrace their unique features. The famed denim expert is taking her mission to make women feel their sexiest to the next level with Dhara.

She describes the experience as “learning to walk again.” Pinter's most admirable traits are her fierce determination, unapologetic approach to owning her past, her candor, and her courage to move on. With the kind of credibility, contacts, and reputation the designer earned through years of hard work, Lucy had the pull to partner with big name investors and shareholders. Instead, she opted for a passion project: one that gives her THE say on how she wants things done.

Dhara isn't just another clothing brand to line the pockets of an already wealthy investor. It's a project full of heart that benefits everyone involved while saving the earth as well, whether it is the tailor or the wearer. There are no compromises, no restrictions – just Lucy exerting her creative prowess. It's why Dhara has a deep reflection and personal connection to the creative director herself. It's about who she's become as a woman: a mom. It's about her experiences, the things she loves, and her principle for styling women – merging comfort with edge. Lucy Pinter is ready to make Dhara the future as she gets

into details about how it all started and the challenges she's faced along the way.

First, congratulations on your upcoming sustainable line. Tell us the story behind it. What made you want to create one?

Thank you. My previous line, Superfine, had ended in litigation after a 15-year run. I probably felt disillusioned. During all those years, I'd been chasing my tail working to an insane schedule, playing to what I realized was a pretty broken system.

I've had a couple of years to reflect, and what I've come to realize is that there was probably another way to work: one that benefited the founder, the teams, the consumer, and our beautiful planet instead of one or two business people at the top of the chain.

How would you describe the experience so far?

It's been like learning to walk again. I was used to having a team in Italy (that I adored) and losing them has been rough. I keep going back to my old ways – like looking at fabrics from mills with long lead times and big minimums and start to realize it's the old way. I had lengthy talks with investors which felt uncertain, so I knew it was time to go out on my own. It's been really limiting so far, but also it is freeing not playing to rules, budget, and creative caves.

Why the name Dhara?

Yes, Dhara – it has all kinds of water meanings, but I read into them the word “flow”.



TASHA WEARS
TOTAL LOOK BY DHARA

PHOTOGRAPHS: JAN WELTERS
STYLING: LUCY PINTER
HAIR: SYLVIA WHEELER
@ FORWARD ARTISTS
MAKE UP: NATASHA SEVERINO
@ FORWARD ARTISTS
MODEL: TASHA TILBERG
@ MARILYN AGENCY
PRODUCTION: VIEWFINDERS
SPECIAL THANKS TO
DANA BROCKMAN
& MILK STUDIOS LA



DHARA IS MORE
OF A LOUNGE LINE.
IT'S MORE INCLUSIVE
AND FITS ANY
SILHOUETTE SIZE



TASHA WEARS
TOP & HOOD
BY DHARA

TASHA WEARS
TOTAL LOOK BY DHARA

TASHA WEARS
TOTAL LOOK BY DHARA

TASHA WEARS
TOTAL LOOK BY DHARA



EMPOWERED.
COMFORTABLE,
STRONG,
AND STYLISH

TASHA WEARS
HOOD BY DHARA



IT'S HEALTHY
TO BE ALL
ABOUT OTHERS
AFTER YEARS
OF PUTTING
YOUR NEEDS FIRST

You're known as the denim expert. Can we expect some denim from the line?

No denim. I'm done for now.

Describe the line in 3 words.

Comfortable, conscious, elevated, and inclusive (can I do 4?) or "Your Best Friend!"

How will your upcoming line differ from Superfine?

Superfine was more Rock 'n' Roll – I'm proud of it. It was beautiful. But I've changed. I'm not very Rock 'n' Roll these days. I live up a hill in Topanga Canyon and practice Kundalini yoga every day, and this line reflects those changes. But I still want to look good. Dhara is more of a lounge line. It's more inclusive and fits any silhouette size – still with its edge.

The hard work and demands of starting something new is never easy. What has been the toughest aspect of this process?

Being alone. Sometimes you doubt yourself. I

know perhaps too much about the industry, so there's an element of "can I really do this again?" My skill set is quite specific: I'm not a trained designer but a Creative Director to the core. So while creating the image is easy, the technical part of making clothes is challenging for me and the money stuff, even more so. Deciding on making this sustainable has made the process all the more agonizing because we don't know exactly how to work in that way.

How do you overcome these challenges?

I'm learning every day. I've brought in a friend with a more classic designer background to help me. I have not yet overcome all the other challenges. It's a work in progress.

What have you learned from your experience with Superfine that will translate to your upcoming line?

What not to do. Too many to mention here.

How do you want women to feel when they wear Dhara?

Empowered. Comfortable, strong, and stylish.

What do you hope for Dhara to represent in the future?

The future.

Tell us about your first job?

My first job worth mentioning was assisting the late great Judy Blame. It was also how I got into this business. I was fresh off the plane from 6 years of traveling around Asia and my ex, Eddie Monsoon, introduced me to Judy. I basically begged him to let me assist. I didn't let up and was thrown into a mad creative decadent whirlwind – right smack, bam, in the middle of London Fashion.

For 6 years, I was running around with a bus pass following Judy: Boy George shoots, Philip Treacy shows, late nights sewing buttons onto necklaces, or chain smoking all night so we could burn holes in T-shirts for Iggy Pop.

When I met Judy, I knew I'd found my vibe. I loved working with him even though we drove each other bonkers. We became friends ever since. There will never be another Judy Blame.

Who was your inspiration growing up?

I grew up in Sydney. My brother was punk, but he also introduced me to David Bowie – my first real love.

Looking back at your journey, what are you most proud of?

Superfine. It wasn't easy to maintain my real vision with investors involved and as a result, it lost its magic. But when it was great, it was really GREAT.

If you could go back in time, what would you change?

Not a single thing.

What keeps you motivated?

My children.

Let's talk family. You seem to have a great relationship with your husband, both as a spouse and a creative partner. How is working with him different from other photographers/artists?

I met Jan when I had just started my own styling career. I'd been a fan of his work for a long time and kept persuading my agent to get me on a job with him. That finally worked out and the rest is history. We share a really similar vision. We're absolute equals. I still adore his work. He respects women and always brings out a really special natural quality when shooting them. He's also much better at casting than myself. He likes girls who have some quirk. There's an edge to his work – a twisted foot or an odd angle here or there. Neither of us strive for commercial images. We just try to create something beautiful, which is why it's so fun. We just know each other really well.

What is the best lesson you've learned from being a mom?

Commitment and patience. Once you realize

it's no longer about you, it's actually empowering to give that up. It's healthy to be all about others after years of putting your needs first.

Before we conclude, this is Ubikwist's first-ever Woman issue. What is the most important business advice you can give to women who intend to follow in your footsteps?

Be true. Just come from a place of truth in your work and your choices. That is much easier said than done, but it's absolutely key.

Also, no contract will cover you. I really believe that the legal aspect of this business should be taught in Fashion school. Because it's amazing to know how to cut a pattern, but it doesn't help if you give too much of your brand away. Too many designers put their heart and soul into something only to have it sabotaged as soon as they need funding. There is a new way of working. Crowdfund and build it yourself. Don't buy into the rush. Pause from time to time.

wearedhara.myshopify.com

IFRAH AHMED BY MUTALE KANYANTA

TO BE WHOLE



PHOTOGRAPHS:
CHRISTIAN KILRAIN CARTER COLEMAN
SPECIAL THANKS TO
ANTONIA & SAMMY LESLIE

COMING TO IRELAND OPENED
MY EYES AND MY MIND –
GIVING ME AN OPPORTUNITY
TO KNOW WHO I AM

Ifrah Ahmed is a Somali-Irish activist that established the Ifrah Foundation to eradicate Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) in Somalia and throughout its diaspora. FGM/C includes procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for nonmedical reasons. FGM/C has no health benefits for women or girls; in fact, the process can cause severe bleeding, problems urinating, cysts, infections, compli-

I DECIDED THAT I AM NOT
A VICTIM; I AM A VOICE.

cations in childbirth, and increases the risk of newborn deaths. More than 200 million women and girls have been cut in 30 countries in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Ifrah's life story as a refugee and as an activist has recently been adapted into a screenplay and movie called *A Girl from Mogadishu*, starring Aja Naomi King. Directed by Mary McGuckian, the film was released by Pembridge Pictures and Umedia in February of 2019.

You are known for your advocacy work around Female Genital Mutilation. Tell us a little about your background prior to your activism.

I am originally from Somalia, and I was born in Mogadishu, the capital city. Somalia has been at war since 1991, so I remember very little about life before the war. Being raised in a war zone, I was lucky to escape to Ireland and became a refugee.

In 2006, I sought asylum. The life I remember and know begins then. Coming to Ireland opened my eyes and my mind – giving me an opportunity to know who I am, and giving me a voice to be able to fight for women's rights.

How did you get to understand that you had been a victim of Female Genital Mutilation?

When I came to Ireland, every refugee has to undergo a medical, before anything else. I was told I had to do a smear test as part of that medical. When it came to doing the test, they asked me how did I get injured? That is how I found out that there was a problem. I was one of 18 refugees in this one center, and all of us had the same issue.

One girl in particular explained as she started to cry, that she had been cut, with what she described as a broken glass (which was really a rough shaped, jagged stone). I was very angry and decided that I would speak on our behalf.

What was the reaction from your community when you started to speak out?

When I started to speak out, and the first article came out, they referred to it as a culture clash, as the Somali community was fighting with me. I did not know that FGM was an issue, or that I could be breaking a cultural taboo/silence. I remember thinking, if this is a problem than why do we continue to do it?

I started to receive threatening emails and couldn't help thinking that I had escaped the war only to come to Ireland and still be in danger. I had to deal with it and go

to the police who didn't understand. So I had to leave the city for a period of time, but decided to come back to Dublin and continue my fight. And that is when I decided that I am not a victim; I am a voice. It made me strong and made me realize that I am going to fight back.

What did that mean for you... "to fight back"?

At that time, FGM was normal to practice in Ireland, as there was no legislation. So I had to fight in Ireland to get legislation passed on FGM. I was not the only person doing the work, but I happened to be the person that was effective on the issue, because I knew what it was like to be cut, to feel the pain. I know personally what a young girl will face.

In Ireland, the bill was eventually passed. And then I became a voice in Europe against FGM, fighting for legislation at a European level. All the time I reminded myself that it was for young girls.

Why do you think it exists culturally?

It's a practice that originated 500 years ago. People say it has nothing to do with religion, but that it is a cultural practice. If you look at countries that believe in FGM, Somalia has the most people practicing it at 98%.

Do you feel that there is any relation to FGM and the global culture of violence against women? Intellectually, for me, I see it as a continuation of the patriarchal idea that a woman's sexuality must be controlled, or that they are not permitted to have autonomy over their bodies. These are ideas we see in both the Christian and Muslim worlds.

When we ask ourselves where FGM comes from... we say it comes to Somalia from Egypt. If you look at what country practices it the most, it is Somalia. It is a mix of different reasons that it arises culturally.

In our country even the neighbors have influence in the cutting of a child. It is seen as tradition. My grandmother believes so much in it; my neighbors believe so much in it. If we are in a room with 100 people, only 2 or 3 will reject it. The rest will say that it should be practiced.

I KNEW THAT IF I HAVE A BED, AND IF I HAVE FOOD – I CAN DO SOMETHING.

Once you had achieved success in Europe in changing legislation around FGM, how did you come back to Somalia to continue the work? How did you end up working with the government concerning FGM?

In 2013, when I received my Irish passport, the first thing I did was to return to Somalia. I was lucky, as I had a ticket sponsored to go back. When I saw how many young girls were at risk, and how many girls were being cut a day, that's when I made my decision to return and continue the work. I felt that if I had a voice in Europe, I could have a voice in Somalia too. When I returned that first time and was able to save these young girls from being cut, I felt that it was where I needed to be, without knowing where I will end up.

There was a Minister of Women and Human Rights in the Somali federal government, and a colleague suggested that we work together. I would not be able to get a salary as the government had no money, but the minister could give me a place to sleep and food to eat. So I accepted that offer; for me it was not about money, but because I can make a difference. I knew that if I have a bed, and if I have food – I can do something. So I returned to Somalia as a human rights advisor to the Minister of Women and Human Rights.

I was doing a lot of campaigns with religious leaders, with women's groups, young people, the federal government, with members of parliament... everyone, so that people started to know me. But it was very hard, and my work became very difficult. When people looked at me, they would say, "You are a Westerner; you have been brainwashed since you came to Ireland." I was now in Somalia and being told to go back to Ireland. I had to ask myself where do I belong now, as I felt I did not really belong anywhere.

After I returned back to Europe, I happened to meet with the Prime Minister of the federal government of Somalia in Italy. And I told him that I was giving up working in Somalia. He said, "You can not give up working." He said, "You are a young woman, and you are making a difference. Even if we are unable to give you anything we know the work that you are doing. And it is important." He made me the official gender advisor to the Office of the Prime Minister.

That has given me power to say I am returning back again to work in Somalia. That is how, in 2017, we came very close to passing the FGM bill in Somalia. Even now we are very close to the bill being passed. But the problem in a country like Somalia, where the conflict was high, it is very hard to convince someone to change something, especially when the government is still rebuilding.

But I never give up my hope. People actually think I am crazy, that I am really not correct in the head. They ask

why would I return to the war zone? Why am I risking my life? And truly, I have lost a lot of friends during all this time. Every day people are killed. For example, on Thursday, the 25th of July (a few days ago), people I had been working with were killed. I never felt as sad in terms of what has happened as this time.

I live in sad moments, but I have to accept the reality of Somalia. I have to accept that in this way, I can make a difference. And I am working hard to save young girls from cutting. That is the one thing that keeps me in Somalia.

What is the role of the NGO in the function of a civil society, or making civil society work?

All civil societies cannot do what they want to do; it is not that easy. For example, I can say that something is not working, and I am returning to Ireland. But not everyone is so fortunate to say that they are leaving, as I have my Euro passport. So you can imagine the women's groups that are based in Somalia, the hardest part they face is the fear that they will be killed if they speak openly and publicly – and so they don't. I am able to say that because I am Irish, not Somali. My Irish passport is my protection. If I was a civilian of Somalia, it's going to be hard because people would not like what I do.

So these organizations are doing great work. But I am an activist; I am different than they are. They are here doing a lot of work on the ground for many years, and then I joined the conversation. I am different, on another level, because of my voice. I am a political activist – a crazy young woman who is able to speak out on everything.

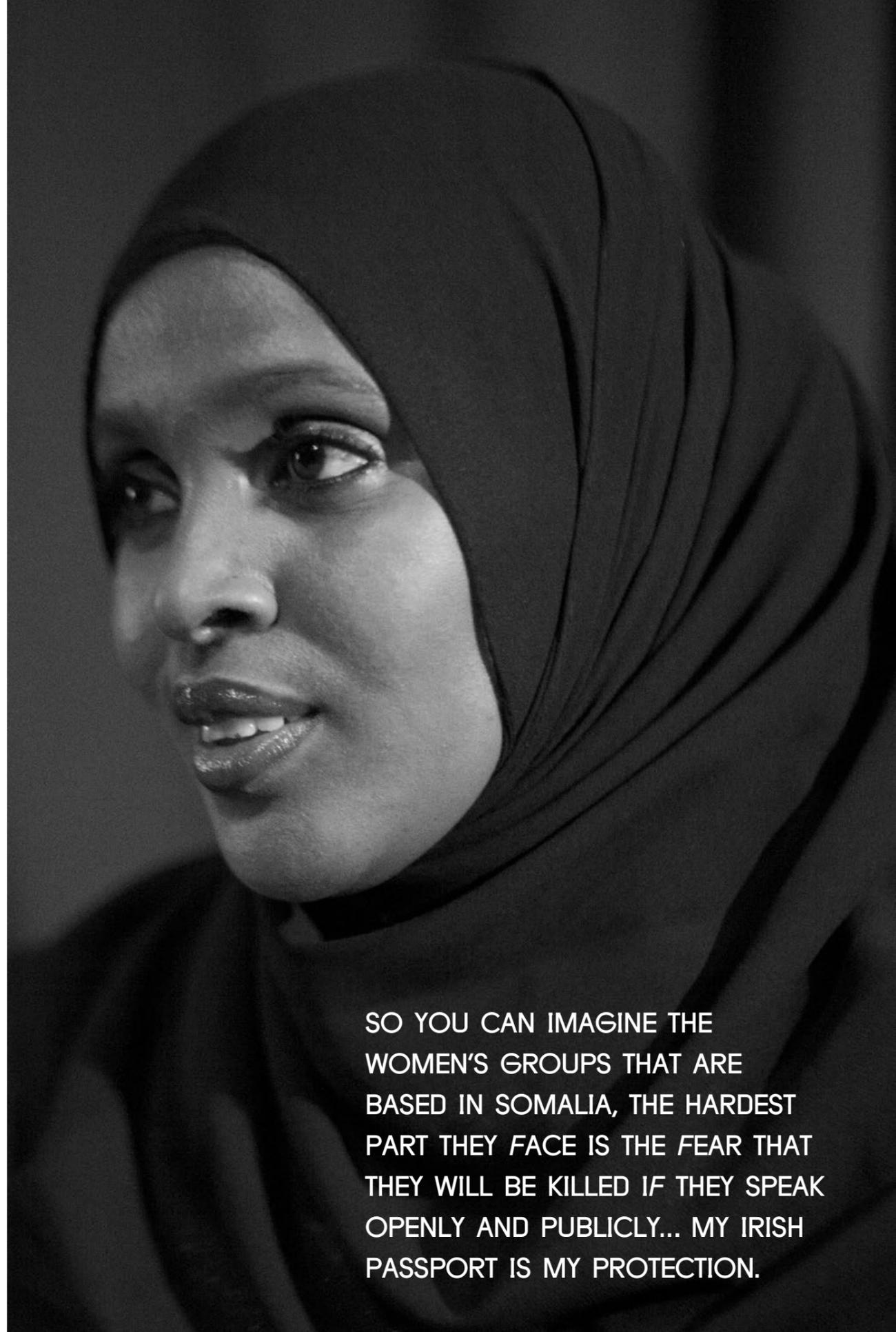
The future is Africa in terms of demographics, because people like you are doing the work to transform our continent and give it a future. What is your wish for Somalia, for the continent?

I wish to see Somalia no longer practicing FGM, and to see, not only Somalia but globally, that young girls are safe and free from cutting, free from FGM, and that the political will be there – that all African leaders take into account the safety of their young women. Not all African leaders are willing to do anything, so I wish for our African leaders to listen...

What does the word Female mean to you? And what does the word Woman conjure up for you?

To be a woman or female is to believe in the power you have in yourself. It means to not be scared – to not only speak out for myself but for others. So for me, it means to have power.

www.ifrahfoundation.org



SO YOU CAN IMAGINE THE WOMEN'S GROUPS THAT ARE BASED IN SOMALIA, THE HARDEST PART THEY FACE IS THE FEAR THAT THEY WILL BE KILLED IF THEY SPEAK OPENLY AND PUBLICLY... MY IRISH PASSPORT IS MY PROTECTION.

PHOTOGRAPHS: LELEITA MCKILL



I TAKE IT AS
IT COMES



PRESSURE DROP

BETH GIBBS BY JOHN N. BLANKSON

The first Instagram photo ever posted was on July 16, 2010. The photo showed a dog in Mexico and Kevin Systrom's (Instagram co-founder) girlfriend's foot. It set the tone of what the social media platform would be about: capturing moments. Nine years later and over one billion active monthly users, the app has evolved into so much more. Corporations use it to promote their businesses and connect with their consumers, entertainers have found stardom, high profile fashion models have been discovered, presidential candidates use it to target voters, and perhaps the most important – it's become an effective tool for grand scale activism.

There's no doubt that photography in itself is a captivating art form: it can tell stories and invoke perspective in a way humans cannot. After all, the interpretation is up to you, the audience. If you wanted to organize a protest, capture emotions of people, raise awareness about the current state of affairs in our political climate, it's Instagram. The ability to reach a global audience within a short period of time and rally a base makes it a suitable tool for engagement of all kinds.

Beth Gibbs, the multitalented, creative maven, falls in the activism category. The kind of activism that is necessary and urgent. Her page shows a creator with a voice – a display of intriguing and thought-provoking images about police

brutality, unapologetic Blackness and family. Yes, family is a big part of Gibbs's inspiration. She has two beautiful boys with her husband, Chris, who is also her business partner.

It's important for Gibbs to use her platform to speak boldly through her content. Idleness is no longer an option – especially when it involves a much needed overdue cause. Gibbs's page has art, culture, beauty, politics, activism, and hope. She dreams of equality; it's something she wants to fight for. She dreams of beauty; it's something she wants to redefine. Even if she's not the beneficiary, she wants her two sons to grow up in a world where an unarmed Black man doesn't have to worry about getting shot by the police during

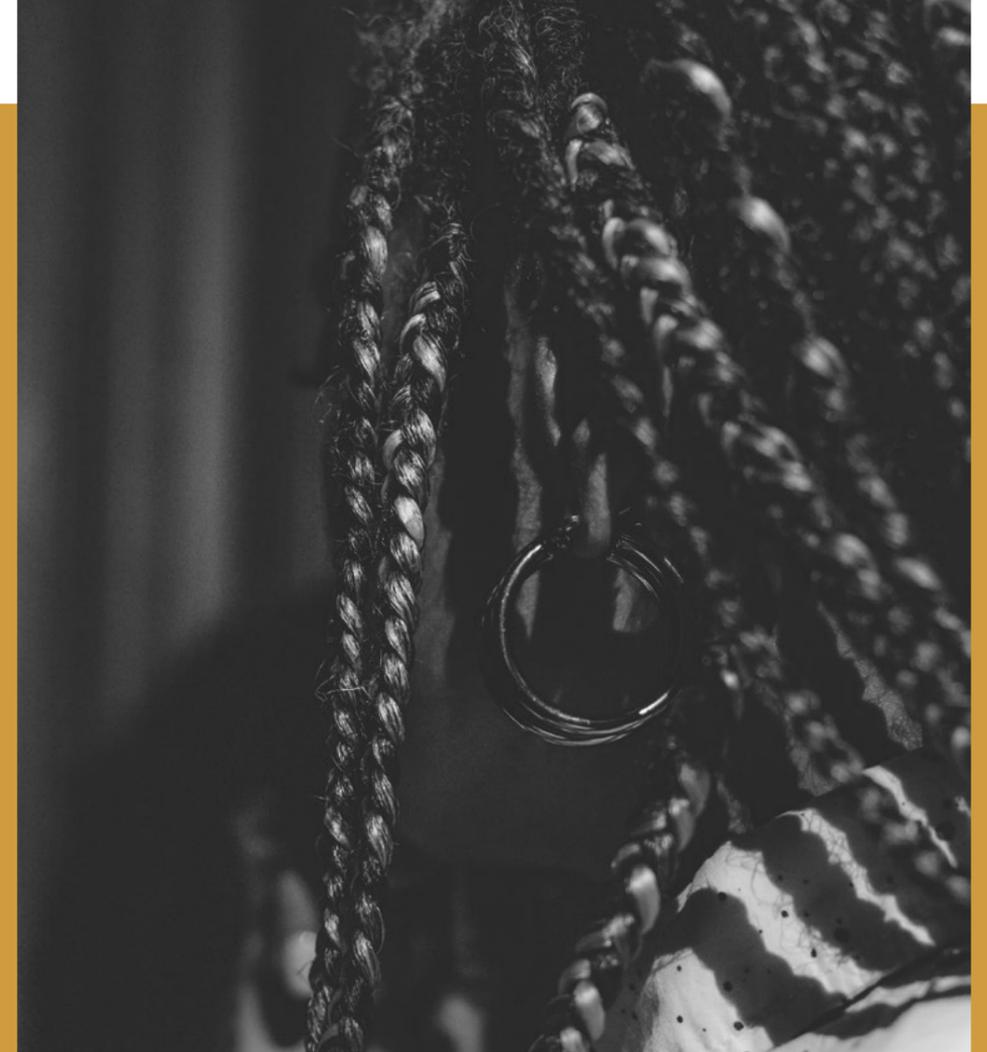
a traffic stop. She wants women, particularly Black women, to feel beautiful and embrace their quirkiness. Beth wants equality!

Beth has been on her creative high for over two decades, starting as an intern and eventually becoming co-owner of Union Los Angeles. Somewhere in downtown NYC stands a giant billboard featuring multiple men of color starring in an ad campaign for Union LA. I asked Gibbs about the significance of such representation. She expressed pride and also advocated for more: more makeup artists of color, more lighting crew of color, more photographers of color, and most importantly, more decision makers of color. For the LA-based stylist, representation means a





I'M GLAD
I NEVER
CONFORMED



GROWING UP, BLACK
WOMEN IN STREETWEAR
WERE ALMOST NONEXISTENT,
AT LEAST NOT AT
THE SCALE OF SOME
MEDIA RECOGNITION



reflection in all facets – both behind and in front of the cameras.

As a co-owner of Union LA with her husband, she expressed the challenges of being a woman and being an owner. “There are people who won’t even respond to my email but will turn around and take a meeting with my husband.” She continued, “Nothing has changed from when I started over twenty years ago,” citing the blatant sexism she faces in her industry. From getting sponsors, investors, exposure, consumers, etc, the streetwear business is particularly difficult for the very few Black women in the field.

Union LA isn’t your average streetwear brand. The brand has heart, and is filled with stories. From ad campaigns to motion editorials, you connect with the models and what they’re portraying. It’s what makes Gibbs’s brand different from any other. She wants sustainability and growth for her business. She wants the world to see what she sees: beauty in uniqueness. It’s been one of her goals as a creator, and she’s glad it’s coming to life.

Gibbs has styled for television shows and films – most notably the HBO special *Native Son*.

Yet, she hasn’t received the name recognition she’s well overdue. Styling for day jobs while simultaneously growing your own brand can be challenging. As Beth put it, “I take it as it comes.”

“Growing up, Black women in streetwear were almost nonexistent, at least not at the scale of some media recognition,” she said. Gibbs relied on her instincts, drive, and vision to mirror the kind of artist she wanted to be. She cited Spike Lee as one of her influences in the arts and was also quick to callout the lack of support within our community. The fact is, the latest report of Black purchasing power stands at \$1.2 trillion (annually) according to Nielsen. When you tally those numbers to the success rate of Black owned businesses, those numbers don’t add up – at least on the profit side of it.

For over a decade, *Forbes* magazine has published an annual list of the wealthiest business owners in America. The top 100 has no Black person on the list. It’s also worth noting that Black women make up a majority of consumers among African Americans. They are also the only racial or ethnic group with more business ownership than their male peers, according to the Federal Re-

serve. On the revenue side, the returns are disappointing. Lack of mentors, investors, and support are evident reasons. Gibbs is breaking the mold, pushing through adversities to make Union LA a legacy business – a brand that speaks on its own, a brand that will outlast her existence.

There’s not enough representation for Black women and “getting there will require believing and supporting our own kind,” she said. The challenges Black women face concerning their looks, image, self-expression and identity from sports, fashion, politics, health, opportunities in Silicon Valley to even our own homes continue to remain an unresolved urgent problem. Beth was blunt about how her identity and image has played an unwarranted significance in her career: “Brands will approach me and will offer to work with me, but then would find politically correct ways to tell me about my hair or how I dress.” She continued, “I’m glad I never conformed.” Gibbs wants young women who are willing to follow in her footsteps to be prepared for setbacks, embrace their passion, and own their ambitions.

IG @bephie

D P
E A
C G
O E



GIAMBATTISTA VALLI HAUTE COUTURE

ALEXANDRE VAUTHIER HAUTE COUTURE



ILLUSTRATIONS:
CARLOS APONTE
CONCEPT:
GIANNIE COUJI



ARMANI PRIVE HAUTE COUTURE

SCHIAPARELLI HAUTE COUTURE





GIVENCHY HAUTE COUTURE

JEAN-PAUL GAULTIER HAUTE COUTURE

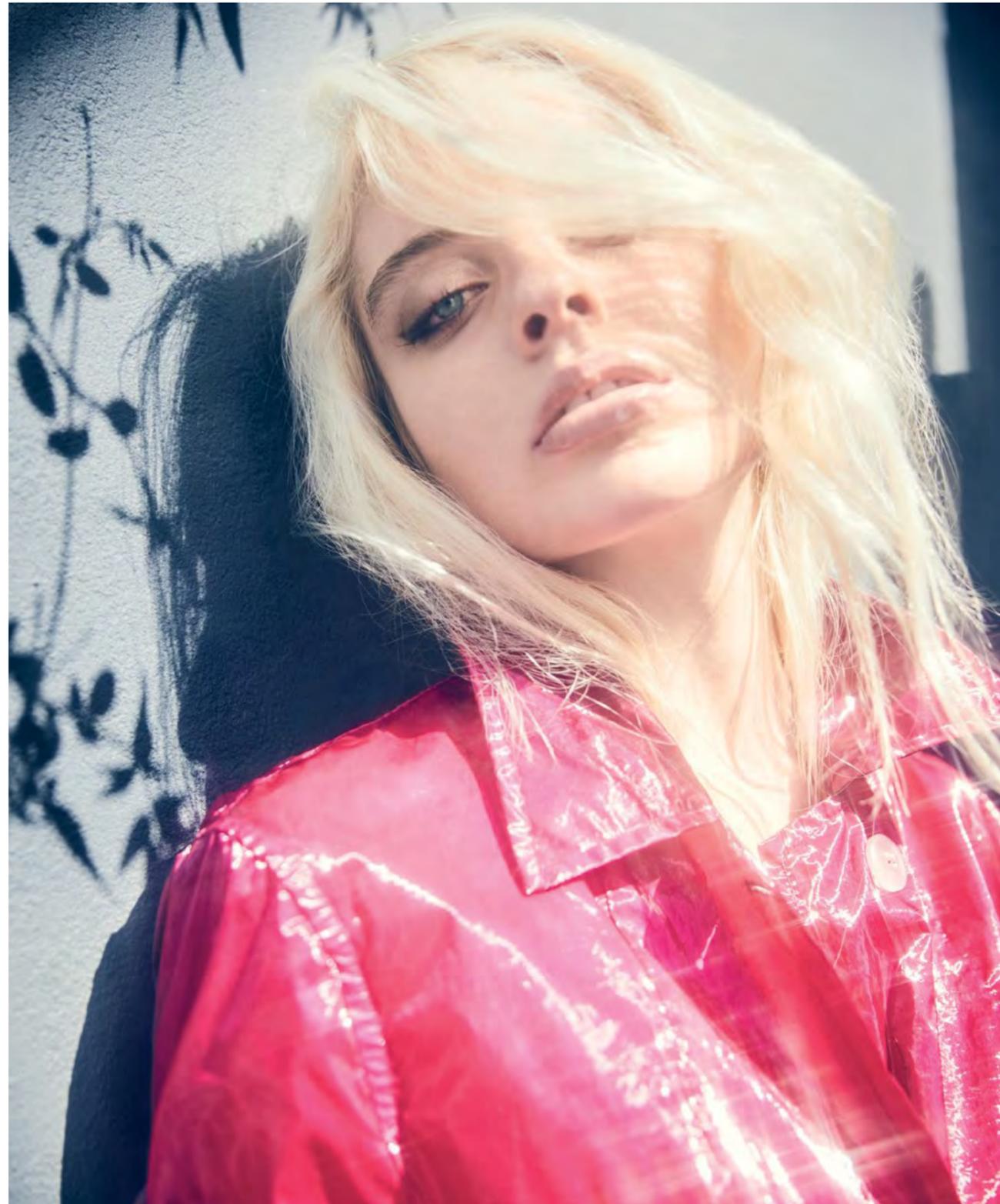




SHIMMER LIT

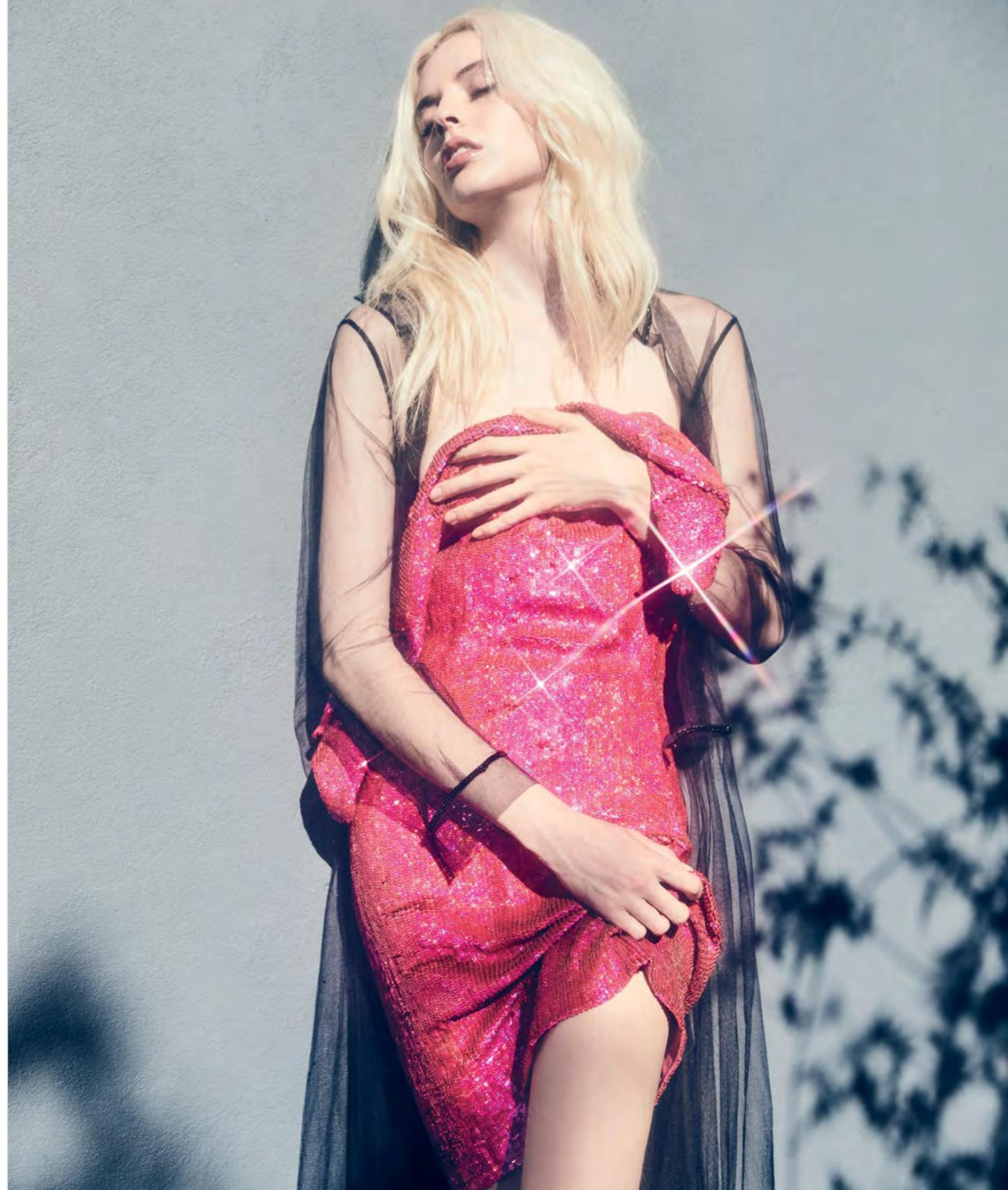
PHOTOGRAPHS: JEON SEUNG
STYLING: NEIL STUART
HAIR: ALEX PRICE @ FRANK AGENCY USING KEVIN MURPHY
MAKE UP: JULIE JACOBS @ DAVID ARTISTS USING NARS COSMETICS
MODEL: KAREN ANDERSSON @ PRM AGENCY
PHOTO ASSISTANTS : JACK LEE AND ETHAN SHIN
RETOUCHING: CURVE DIGITAL

LEFT
KAREN WEARS
TOP BY ISABEL MARANT
GLOVES BY CHANEL
RIGHT
KAREN WEARS
TRENCH COAT
BY DRIES VAN NOTEN





LEFT
KAREN WEARS
DRESS BY
CHRISTOPHER KANE
BOOTS BY GINA
RIGHT
KAREN WEARS
DRESS BY ASHISH
ROBE BY I.D. SARRIERI





LEFT
KAREN WEARS
SWEATER
BY MAISON MARGIELA
KNICKERS BY
DOLCE & GABBANA
NIPPLE PASTIES & TIGHTS
BY AGENT PROVOCATEUR
RIGHT
KAREN WEARS
DRESS BY VALENTINO





LEFT
KAREN WEARS
TEE-SHIRT BY BURBERRY
SUNGLASSES BY GUCCI
RIGHT
KAREN WEARS
DRESS
BY THE VAMPIRE WIFE
SHOES BY GINA



BREATHE AGAIN



SIMONE WEARS
DRESS BY ROOM 502



PRISCILLA WEARS DRESS BY ROOM 502
BELT STYLIST'S OWN
JEWELRY AND SHOES MODEL'S OWN

PHOTOGRAPHS: SEAN WALTROUS
CASTING AND STYLING: GIANNIE COUJI
HAIR: KAZU KATAHIRA
MAKE UP: PASCALE POMA USING M.A.C COSMETICS
MODELS: DEVYN ABDULLAH, DRENA DE NIRO, ELOISA SANTOS,
GIANNIE COUJI, JOCELYNE BEAUDOIN, KRISTLE WILSON,
PRISCILLA DEBAR, SIMONE SILVERMAN, UMINDI FRANCIS

MY ANSWER TO THE CHAOS IS THIS: FRESH AIR

Chaos. It's the theme of today. We are all constantly connected to what's happening not only in our own backyard but backyards around the world. We observe and interact with other people's lives on a screen whether we know them or not. We spend hours endlessly scrolling, unable to know it all or see it all, and this trope has infected fashion.

"My answer to the chaos is this: fresh air. No more clothes," Sophie Theallet says with a laugh. "Only well-done clothes at a good price." She's speaking about ROOM 502: a holistic clothing brand Theallet and her husband Steve Francoeur launched this summer. Based in Canada, the founders made a commitment to impeccable quality and responsible production with respect to the natural environment and society. With limited quantities, bio-degradable packaging, responsible local partners, and donating a portion of each sale to Epic (a global nonprofit changing the lives of disadvantage youths), ROOM 502 is sticking to their mission.

The pair have been working together for over ten years, a truly magical partnership to witness. It seems they know what the other is thinking, often communicating with just a look or finishing each other's thoughts. I arrived where Theallet and Francoeur were staying with their son, Leon, while they were visiting New York City from their home in Montreal, Canada to chat about working the way you want as opposed to how a misguided system tells you to.

Theallet designs and Francoeur produces, but they talk about everything to ensure the best product hits the shelves. Or in ROOM 502's case, it's the website. "You come out with drops when you want, when it's ready, in your time. And you're not in any machine, so it's the ultimate freedom for us," Francoeur shares.

Theallet and Francoeur met in Paris, the most romantic start to a

love story if you ask me, and became fast friends meeting nearly daily to chat about everything. Francoeur moved to New York City to the iconic Chelsea Hotel in room 502 (hence the brand name). Theallet came to visit and they were inseparable. After two years at the Chelsea Hotel, the couple moved to Brooklyn, had a baby, and launched the Sophie Theallet brand in the late 2000s, with Michelle Obama as a fan. In 2009, Theallet won the CFDA/Vogue Fashion Fund Award, and three years later the Woolmark Prize.

Then the 2016 US election results were in. Unafraid to take a stand, Theallet penned a letter and posted it to Twitter refusing to dress the new first lady due to the "racism, sexism, and xenophobia unleashed" by the new administration. The letter received attention to say the least. Some designers supported her vowing not to dress the first lady, but the administration's followers were furious, and mobilized. Theallet received frightening threats via phone, social media, and letters. Plagued by the backlash, including attacks on her appearance and collections, Theallet and her family moved to Quebec in 2018 and ceased production on Theallet's namesake label.

An incredibly talented designer, Theallet was born in Bagnères-de-Bigorre in the South of France, and she "loved to draw little dresses." With her father encouraging her, she discovered fashion in his medical office, often flipping through the pages of *Vogue* and *Elle*. There she saw the most beautiful dresses, and



SIMONE WEARS DRESS & BELT BY ROOM 502



KRYSTLE WEARS DRESS BY ROOM 502

THERE'S NO EGO INVOLVED ANYMORE

she fell in love. At sixteen, Theallet's mother sent her off to London to "perfect her English." She was fearless with the support of relatives who lived in the UK. In London, Theallet discovered and fell in love with Punk and its rebellious, fearless nature, as it matched her own. She attended Studio Berçot in Paris to study fashion, which took a little convincing for her mother. But Theallet excelled – she graduated early and was awarded France's National Young Design Award.

After graduation, she went on to work for Jean-Paul Gaultier, where she "learned how to play with color, work in fashion, and how to take clothes and mix them together." From there, she spent 10 years as Azzedine Alaïa's right hand. In dealing with couture, she watched and learned fit, craftsmanship, and taste. Theallet also worked on the main collection, accessories, and knitwear.

Using her immense knowledge of color, styling, and tailoring, along with her commitment to making women look and feel fantastic, Theallet applied her knowledge of impeccable tailoring to ROOM 502 from the highest in the land – couture – with the simplicity of functional, versatile clothing at an accessible price. The clothes are beautiful inside and out, and you can see the difference. "Sophie has the knowledge. We know how to make great clothes, and now let's make it accessible," Francoeur explains.

ROOM 502's styles are as timeless as they are chic. With limited quantities, the brand never overproduces, and will never go on sale.

In keeping with a holistic mission, ROOM 502 seeks to "make a better product every time instead of trying to re-invent something new that in the end is not lasting." Francoeur says, "So we take the essential styles that designers have been making the past one hundred years and we make them modern, making the best product we can with what we have and we improve it."

Theallet spent a great deal of time speaking with women about what they want in their clothes when creating ROOM 502, which is different from how she designed her namesake label. Explaining her new process, Theallet shares, "This is the first time that I listened. I listened to the woman. I'm not interested in thinking about me as a creative person..." Francoeur finishes her thought by adding, "There's no ego involved anymore." Theallet is fully focused on the woman, instead of selling her a glamorous lifestyle which is largely unattainable by most. "Real lifestyle. People that work and have a living, have things to do... go to restaurants, go out in clothes that work," Francoeur adds.

Rounding out our conversation, Theallet explains, "The more and more you speak with women, they don't want to have a brand on their back – they want to be free. And to have that freedom, you have to forget about the clothes a little bit, because there are more important things to think about." I mean, hello? Have you checked your latest push notification? Your email? What about social media? There is pure chaos. We could all think about clothes a little less.



UMINDI WEARS
DRESS BY ROOM 502
JEWELRY MODEL'S OWN
SHOES BY MALONE SOULIERS FROM
ALBRIGHT FASHION LIBRARY

www.room502.com



ELOISA WEARS DRESS
BY ROOM 502
NECKLACE BY LARUICCI



DRENA WEARS DRESS BY ROOM 502, NECKLACES MODEL'S OWN, SHOES STYLIST'S OWN



GIANNIE WEARS DRESS BY ROOM 502, SHOES BY SAINT LAURENT FROM ALBRIGHT FASHION LIBRARY



DEVYN WEARS DRESS AND BELT BY ROOM 502, SHOES BY PIERRE HARDY FROM ALBRIGHT FASHION LIBRARY

SO WE TAKE THE ESSENTIAL
STYLES THAT DESIGNERS
HAVE BEEN MAKING
THE PAST ONE HUNDRED
YEARS, AND WE MAKE
THEM MODERN



JOCELYNE WEARS
DRESS BY ROOM 502
JEWELRY MODEL'S OWN



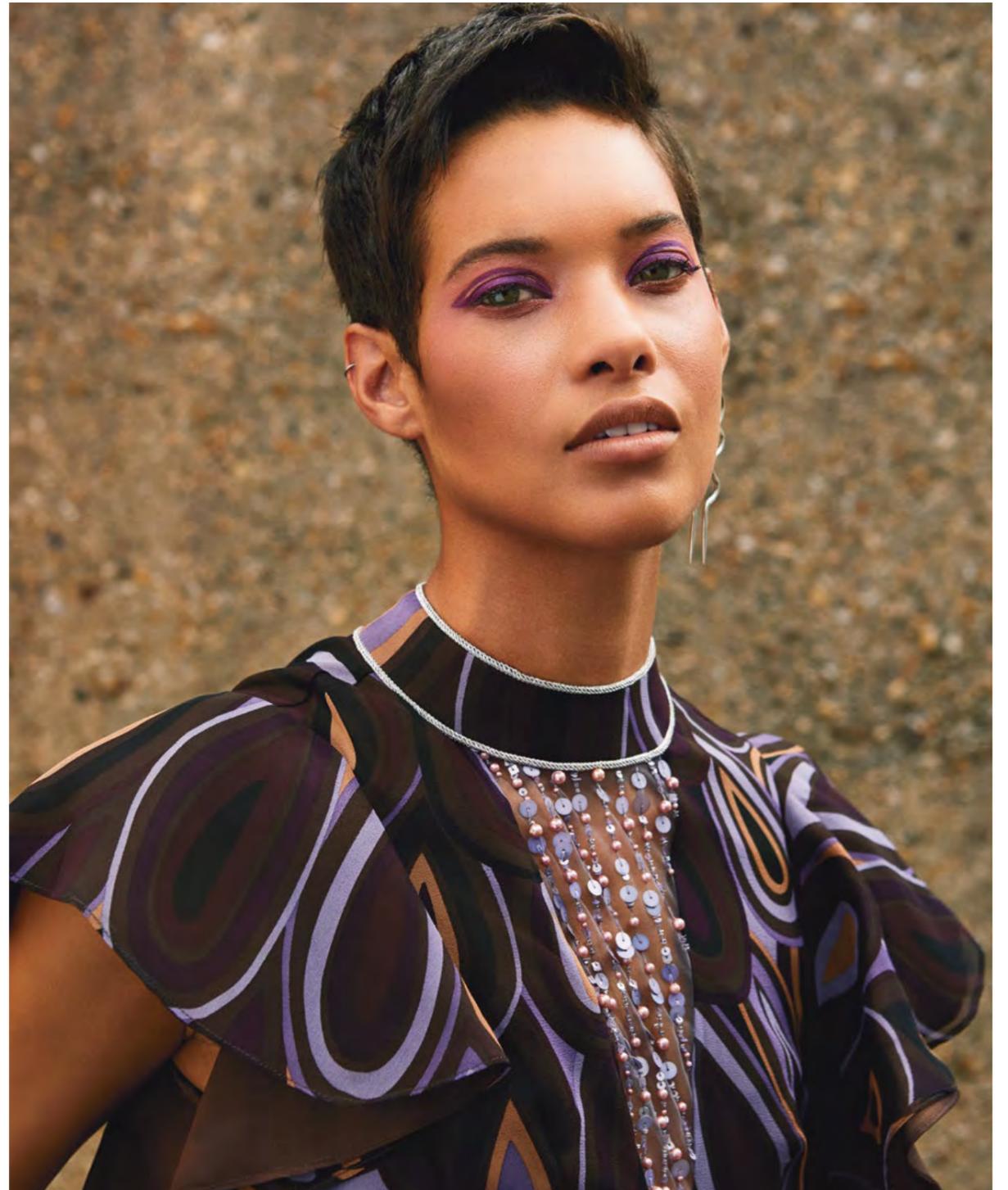
RAINEY WEARS
DRESS BY RACHEL COMEY
SUNGLASSES BY ROBERTO CAVALLI

HONEY SUITE

PHOTOGRAPHS: SEAN WALTROUS
STYLING: GIANNIE COUJI
HAIR: NELSON VERCHER © RITA HAZAN
USING RENE FURTERER PRODUCTS
MAKE UP: PASCALE POMA
USING M.A.C COSMETICS
STYLING ASSISTANT: TEPI ALHANI
MODEL: RAINEY FORKNER
© NEW YORK MODELS
CASTING: JULIUS POOLE



RAINEY WEARS
JUMPSUIT & EARRINGS
BY RACHEL COMEY



RAINEY WEARS
DRESS BY DELACRUZ
EARRING BY RACHEL COMEY

RAINEY WEARS
COUTURE DURAG
BY DELACRUZ



RAINEY WEARS
DRESS VINTAGE SONIA RYKIEL
FROM FUNKANOVA
NECKLACE BY PILAR OLAVERRI





RAINEY WEARS
SHIRT BY CHRISTOPHER KANE
EARRINGS BY RACHEL COMEY
BAG BY PETIT KOURAJ

RAINEY WEARS
DRESS BY CHLOÉ
NECKLACE BY PILAR OLAVERRI



RAINEY WEARS
TOP VINTAGE
MARTIN MARGIELA
FROM FUNKANOVA
EARRINGS
BY RACHEL COMEY
RING BY PILAR OLAVERRI





PHOTOGRAPHS: SEAN WALTROUS
STYLING: GIANNIE COUJI
HAIR: NELSON VERCHER @ RITA HAZAN
USING RENE FURTERER PRODUCTS
MAKE UP: RENEE GARNES
@ NEXT ARTISTS FOR HUDA BEAUTY
NAILS: DAWN STERLING
@ STATEMENT ARTISTS
STYLING ASSISTANT: TEPI ALHANI

STAYING POWER

SYLVIA RHONE BY STEVEN TATE

The word “legendary” gets thrown around a lot today – often for celebrities who’ve been around for a hot minute and have yet to prove their stamina. But Sylvia Rhone has long earned the title “Legend”. With close to five decades in the recording industry, Rhone ascended to the post of chairman and CEO of Epic Records this year, where she guides the careers of 21 Savage, Camila Cabello, Travis Scott, DJ Khaled, and a host of others. This follows years as a top executive at Atlantic Records, Universal Motown, and Elektra, where she either launched, shepherded, maintained and/or championed artists as diverse as Björk, Roberta Flack, Missy Elliott, Metallica, Stevie Wonder, Third Eye Blind, and En Vogue. The first African American and the first woman to achieve all she has accomplished, the Philadelphia-born, New York City native recently added another honor to her list of firsts: the Spirit of Life Award from City of Hope – a world-renowned research and treatment center fighting cancer and other life-threatening diseases. Again, she is the first African American woman to be honored as such. Rhone currently divides her time between both coasts as she navigates a particularly challenging time for the music industry – as streaming has decimated actual sales of music, and various platforms compete for an increasingly fragmented audience.

You graduated from the prestigious Wharton School in the Seventies and famously walked away from a budding career in finance. The story goes you were sent home for wearing trousers in an era when ladies were supposed to wear dresses and skirts – and you decided never to return to that job. What were you thinking when you gave up the lucrative career you’d studied for and took a shot in the dark working in “show business”?

You are searching for your purpose when you come out of college. Being educated at Wharton School, which has been called “the conveyor belt for Wall Street,” most graduates opt for a career in finance. After nine months at Bankers Trust, I realized that a financial career was not for me. It didn’t inspire me. I wasn’t passionate about it, but I was young enough to pursue my dreams knowing I could still fall back on a traditional job if the music business didn’t work out. The minute I got that secretarial job at Buddha Records, I felt at home. I knew it was a place where I could grow and be challenged both intellectually and creatively.

SYLVIA WEARS
JACKET, SHIRT, TROUSERS & GLOVES
BY NOIR KEI NINOMIYA
EARRINGS SYLVIA’S OWN
RING BY PILAR OLAVERRI

How was it growing up when you did?

I came of age during transformative and tumultuous times. It was the height of the Civil Rights era, the women's movement, and the Vietnam War, where hundreds of young men were being killed every day. I don't remember anything being easier back then, but it was clear by the time I entered college in 1969 that you had to take a stand. Young people, White and Black, had gone from a culture of dissent to a more confrontational form of protesting. A counterculture was born, and it changed the way young people engaged the world. Being on the frontlines of this huge sea change had a tremendous impact on my outlook going forward. Black leaders like Huey Newton and Bobby Seale had a huge influence on Black empowerment; White kids, many for the first time, were confronting issues about racial and gender disparity.

It was a great time for the emergence of thought leaders and provokers. There was a true renaissance of music, poetry, literature, politics, and the arts – forces coming together to effect change. This metamorphosis was also reflected in the music of groundbreaking artists like Gil Scott-Heron, Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, Sam Cooke, Nina Simone, and others. Inspiration was coming from everywhere, challenging you to examine your soul and follow your conscience.

Many speak of the Old Boys' network – was there anything similar for women in general or women of color back then, given the challenges you faced in the industry? Is there one now?

Let's not continue to give the Old Boy network more clout than they have. It's time to change the narrative. Let's start acknowledging the women who have made great strides at the top of the corporate ladder: people like Carly Fiorina, former CEO of Hewlett-Packard, who ran for President, Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, and Ursula Burns, formerly the head of Xerox and the first Black woman CEO of a Fortune 500 company. People overlook the history of women in the music business as well. It's true that when I started there were only a few women in senior positions in our industry, but there were those we looked up to who succeeded outside of the Old Boy infrastructure – entrepreneurial women like Sylvia Robinson, Ruth Bowen, and Florence Greenberg who left their mark on our business in a huge way. The playing field is still not completely level. We have to do more to create inclusive talent pools and advancement strategies that end the underrepresentation of people of color and women in senior management positions.

What did you bring to the table in an industry where there weren't many people who looked like you or had your background?

We brought a great deal to the table at that time. None of us were heading labels or had that corner suite yet, but we were discovering artists and creating superstars. The powers-that-be knew we were moving the needle at a very pivotal time in Black music. Think of the early days of Motown Records, or early Atlantic Records. There were also important Black-owned labels that made an impact: King Records, Vee-Jay, Chess, Philadelphia International,

I CAME OF AGE DURING TRANSFORMATIVE & TUMULTUOUS TIMES



SYLVIA WEARS

JACKET BY NOIR KEI NINOMIYA

TROUSERS VINTAGE MARTIN MARGIELA

FROM FUNKANOVA

EARRING & RING SYLVIA'S OWN



and others. Our music has always moved the culture around the world. Those of us working these great artists at the time were recognized for the significant impact we helped create.

It's often said that musical tastes close off after a certain age. You grew up listening to Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and Supremes-era Motown, but your career has spanned Gladys Knight & the Pips, En Vogue, and now French Montana, Travis Scott, and Meghan Trainor. How much does your personal taste play in your signing and promoting acts?

When you're leading a company, you can't make all your decisions based on personal taste. You have to be open to all forms of music. I've leaned into music my entire life. My outlook is inclusive, curious, and I love to be proven wrong about a song. The artists I've worked with throughout my career have represented a diverse cross-section of the culture. Let me emphasize, there is no age barrier when it comes to musical tastes.

What skills or resources do you use to identify an act that may not be your cup of tea, but you can tell will find an audience with the public?

One of the most important qualities of a budding artist is his or her authenticity or originality. A great song is always the foundation of success, but the ultimate goal is to build a sustainable, lasting career. You sign and develop artists that you think are going to make a huge contribution. You cultivate a collaborative team that you hope can discover and successfully deliver those artists to the marketplace.

When did you get to a level in your career when you realized you'd arrived – and no longer had to tolerate racism or sexism?

Racism and sexism will never be nonexistent in the world. Bias doesn't go away because you "arrived." Diversity and inclusion demand an environment where values are aligned with action. Authentic commitment to ending bias must come from company leadership that demonstrates improved representation at every level. My purpose has always been very clear. We all have a responsibility when we get into positions of power to create opportunities for women and people of color and set a standard that is impenetrable.

In this era of streaming, where touring has replaced record sales as an artist's main source of revenue and radio has decreased in importance, what is the record industry's place?

I think it's a misnomer to say touring has replaced recorded music as an artist's main source of income. What's changed is the timing of how artists earn revenue from their recorded music. While it's true that touring is important to artists, recorded music and touring are complementary. One can help drive the other and vice versa. Streaming continues to grow, with a 26% increase in the first half of 2019. With 40,000 tracks being uploaded to streaming services every day, which means there is more music available than ever before, labels are crucial

SYLVIA WEARS

COAT BY RICK OWENS

TROUSERS VINTAGE MARTIN MARGIELA

FROM FUNKANOVA

EARRING SYLVIA'S OWN

BOOTS BY MARC JACOBS

FROM ALBRIGHT FASHION LIBRARY

to helping an artist break through the clutter. We provide connections to the creative community – producers, collaborators, songwriters – with a global network of thousands of experts with experience developing new artists into superstars. That team brings relationships with hundreds of digital distribution partners, marketing outlets, licensing, sync and brand partners, and they bring creative thinking with regard to how we work with those partners for each artist individually.

Historically, artists have wanted to own their masters: George Michael and Prince famously fought their labels for them, while Rihanna recently bought hers back from her label. In the current industry climate, is an artist owning his or her masters what it used to be?

We support and maintain our artists fully, regardless of who owns the recordings. It's the job of the label to make sure we drive sales and consumption of those masters and support the growth of their careers – creatively and commercially. Our interests are aligned with the artists' in terms of making the most of the rights that we have.

What do most people – and artists – misunderstand about the music industry?

I think the biggest misconception is that, in the age of streaming and social media, labels are somehow less useful to artists. *I can record my music. I can upload my music. I can promote my music. What do I need a label for?*

Streaming has democratized the music industry, probably more than any technology since the radio. But has that made the music industry any easier to navigate? Just the opposite. It's like thinking driving is easier now that anyone can own a car. But there are rules of the road that just aren't obvious to somebody starting out, and if you don't know what you're doing, you could get hurt. The notion that labels are obsolete, I think, is a consequence of generations of artists who thought of labels as gatekeepers. But look around. We're not middlemen or tastemakers; we're a resource for artists offering customizable services in areas that no one else does.

You are now deep in your fifth decade in the music industry – at the top of your game. But you could have retired by now and gone off to enjoy a life of leisure. What drives you to continue?

Maya Angelou said, "You can only become truly accomplished at something you love." And I love every minute of it. It's my passion. I wake up every day knowing I'm going to be inspired by the greatest artists in the world, or be surprised by that next great new artist we haven't even heard yet, or getting a song playlisted, or having a video impact across the globe, or reaching 15 million streams in one day – all those touchstone moments that can change an artist's career. You can't ask for a better job than that.

IG @iamsylviahone

MY OUTLOOK
IS INCLUSIVE,
CURIOUS,
& I LOVE TO BE
PROVEN WRONG
ABOUT A SONG



SYLVIA WEARS
DRESS VINTAGE MARTIN MARGIELA
FROM FUNKANOVA
SHOES BY NICHOLAS KIRKWOOD
FROM ALBRIGHT FASHION LIBRARY
JEWELRY SYLVIA'S OWN

LET ME EMPHASIZE,
THERE IS NO AGE
BARRIER WHEN
IT COMES TO
MUSICAL TASTES



SYLVIA WEARS
TOP BY RICK OWENS
JEWELRY SYLVIA'S OWN



SYLVIA WEARS
JACKET BY SACAI
JEWELRY SYLVIA'S OWN



MICAL WEARS
DRESS BY ULLA JOHNSON
EARRINGS BY LARUICCI

MICAL WEARS
COAT, DRESS & EARRINGS BY CHLOÉ
BOOTS BY SÉZANE



THEY SAY I'M DIFFERENT

PHOTOGRAPHS: XAVIER SCOTT MARSHALL
STYLING: GIANNIE COUJI
HAIR: PASCALE POMA USING SHEA MOISTURE
COCONUT & HIBISCUS CURL ENHANCING SMOOTHIE
MAKE UP: JUAN JAAR USING M.A.C COSMETICS
STYLING ASSISTANT: TEPI ALHANI
MODEL: MICAL BOCKRU @ NEXT MODELS
CASTING: JULIUS POOLE

MICAL WEARS
DRESS BY VICTOR GLEMAUD
EARRINGS BY LARUICCI



MICAL WEARS
DRESS BY CHLOÉ
EARRINGS BY LARUICCI
SHOES BY NO 21





MICAL WEARS
SUIT BY JUDY ZHANG
SHIRT BY EQUIPMENT
EARRINGS BY CHLOÉ
SHOES BY RENÉ CAO VILLA



MICAL WEARS
JACKET BY DELACRUZ



MICAL WEARS
DRESS BY VICTOR GLEMAUD
EARRINGS BY LARUICCI
SHOES BY MARC JACOBS



MICAL WEARS
DRESS BY CHRISTOPHER KANE
EARRINGS BY LARUICCI
SHOES BY REPETTO



MICAL WEARS
JUMPSUIT BY ULLA JOHNSON
EARRINGS STYLIST'S OWN
BOOTS BY SÉZANE



MICAL WEARS
DRESS BY MARC JACOBS
SHOES BY RENÉ CAOVIlla

MELINA WEARS
TOP BY
Y PROJECT
TROUSERS BY
WALES BONNER
SHOES BY
ACNE STUDIOS

PHOTOGRAPHS: EMMAN MONTALVAN
ART DIRECTOR: ARMINA MUSSA
STYLING & PRODUCTION DESIGNER: BETH BIRKETT
HAIR: VERNON FRANCOIS AT THE VISIONARIES USING
VERNON FRANCOIS PRODUCTS
MAKE UP: CELINA RODRIGUEZ
PHOTO ASSISTANT: MARK UNDERWOOD
ART DIRECTOR ASSISTANT: LILIANE BEDFORD
STYLING ASSISTANT: ABENA AMOFO-YEBOAH
SET DESIGN: FLOWER INSTALLATIONS
BY ARTIST MAURICE HARRIS @ BLOOM & PLUME
PRODUCER: MELINA MATSOUKAS
SPECIAL THANKS TO DANIEL JACKSON & UNION LOS ANGELES

CULTURE FORWARD

MELINA MATSOUKAS BY MUTALE KANYANTA

Melina Matsoukas is an American music video, film, commercial and television director, best known for her work with Beyoncé and Rihanna, having directed “Formation” and “We Found Love”, respectively. She has also collaborated on *Insecure* with Issa Rae. This fall, Melina releases her first movie, *Queen and Slim*, a date night movie that goes off the track after a racist cop is shot. It’s story arc is emblematic of how quickly our Black lives can go awry when we encounter the police.

I am looking forward to the reactions and debates that will come from this piece, at its release, as it skillfully blends America’s love of antiheroes, guns, and violence with the explosive powder keg of race. As I prepared for the interview, I tried to recall, from the top of my head, Black women directors from the past, and I could only recall Kasi Lemons and Julie Dash. It made me think of the type of strength or resolve it takes to make your own space in a room that has been closed to women, and more specifically women of color.

I spoke with Melina the day after she handed in the final version of *Queen and Slim*. She was on her way to the airport, where she would be catching a flight to the City of Lights. This sounded very glamorous to me, but was most probably exhausting for her; yet here she was on the phone, alert and really pleasant to interview.

UNLESS I AM
COMPLETELY
PASSIONATE
ABOUT IT,
I'M USELESS

MELINA WEARS
BODYSUIT & WALLET CHANGE
STYLIST'S OWN
TROUSERS BY TOGA



MELINA WEARS
JACKET BY TOGA





MELINA WEARS
JACKET BY TOGA

**I HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED
BY THE DIASPORA...
COMING FROM A VERY
MULTICULTURAL PLACE,
UNDERSTANDING
BLACKNESS NOT JUST
IN AMERICA BUT AS A
WORLD CONSCIOUSNESS**

MELINA WEARS
JACKET BY TOGA

Can you tell me a little bit about your background – where you grew up and how much of your childhood informed your journey to be a filmmaker/visual artist?

I am from a small town called New York. [she laughs] I grew up in the Bronx until I was 10. We moved to Jersey City, as my parents wanted me to get a better education, and there was a better school system there. So we ended up living in the suburbs. My mom is Afro Cuban/Jamaican; my father is Greek and Jewish American. They have a very New York love story. I grew up in a very interracial family that valued culture, people, language, food... all of our differences... if that makes sense.

My parents were political activists in their young age. They brought me up as a woman that needed to make a mark on the world. They left it up to me to figure out how I would make that mark and what that would be. I was brought up in a family where we fought for equality for all people, which was an important value for my family.

In high school I became interested in photography. My father is somewhat of an amateur photographer, so he introduced me to the lens and the stories you can tell with image. I went to NYU for undergrad, and my love for photography grew. I started realizing that I could change the world, in a way, by representing stories of people that look and sound like me – by representing the underrepresented. I fell in love with the moving image and that became my activism.

In my research I discovered that your undergrad thesis was on music videos. And then you entered the industry to make them; this was in 2006. How did that happen?

I interned for a music video company in college. I am an MTV video baby, and I grew up loving videos and really admiring the relationship between music and visual storytelling. And as a filmmaker I loved how experimental you could be in the music video genre.

So what makes a great music video?

For me, it's something that is bold, something that moves the culture forward. It says something that represents the artist, as well as the environment that we are part of... maybe have some commentary or criticism on the world and creates a dialogue about the experiences we are having as a culture.

I went through a few videos that you made in the past. There is a video that you made for Lloyd Banks in which the women in the piece are literally used as props, draped all over him. In the context of the current Me Too Movement, it's problematic. But that was 13 years ago, and the times are obviously different. What was once a very common way for male musicians to be depicted has changed. The difference between that work and "We Found Love" with Rihanna or "Formation" with Beyoncé is seismic. I really wanted you to talk to the people that will follow in your footsteps, especially women of color, about the choices that you will have to make in order to get to be the artist you want to be, and make the work that is based on your ideas.

For me, everything comes down to an education. When you set a goal or you aspire to do something, especially as a woman of color, you should be fully equipped with an education, or a tool that allows you to hone your craft, so you can speak from a place of knowledge. You will also know what your options and resources are within that world. That's why I went to film school. It's not something that you have to do to end up where I am, but for me it was the right choice. My mom has a doctorate in education, so she always put a lot of emphasis on the academic side of things. She pushed me to really hone my skills and to get the education.



MELINA WEARS
WAISTCOAT BY ALYX
BODYSUIT STYLIST'S OWN
CHAPS BY
UNIVERSAL COSTUME HOUSE
SUNGLASSES BY
JACQUES MARIE MAGE
SHOES BY
BALENCIAGA

I FELL IN LOVE WITH THE MOVING IMAGE AND THAT BECAME MY ACTIVISM



I started in undergrad. While there, I interned and was a PA for music videos, as that was my interest. I was able to gain experience on set and in real life with those situations, while simultaneously learning about the history and the craft in a more academic way at school. From undergrad I went to grad school for film. Again not something everyone has to do, but the opportunity arose. It was a really great school; I went to the American Film Institute. I couldn't give up the opportunity. It gave me a way to move to Los Angeles and have purpose and not be lost.

It was a really intense two years. I had studied directing in my undergrad. So instead of studying that, I studied cinematography, because I wanted to learn to tell a story visually. I wanted to learn how to do that without having to depend on a script, to learn how all the choices and details that you make as a director lend themselves to that story that you are representing on film. Not that I ever wanted to be a cinematographer and shoot, but as a director really wanting to hone her craft, using that formal education.

I found while looking through your bio that you change course every 5/6 years. 2006, you are doing videos. 2011, you start making commercials. 2015, you start shooting television. 2019, now you have a film. Has it been accidental, or is it purposeful and strategic.

After graduation I did a music video for my friend and one for my cousin, so I had a reel. Because I had relationships from interning on videos and stalked this woman who was a representative, I hit her up with my two projects (that I had essentially paid for myself) and asked her to rep me. I think she saw my talent, and she got me some small music videos from younger artists. I did those and those did well. And then Ludacris and Pharell gave me my first big video called "Moneymaker".

From there, Beyoncé noticed me and gave me essentially my 4th, 5th, and 6th videos ever. She was releasing a visual album, and that project really catapulted my video music career. Then I started to do commercials and trying to broaden my work as a filmmaker. It was a ten-year journey to get to commercials, and I had to work hard to get the campaigns that I wanted. I always wanted to go into TV and film, at some point, but I wasn't in a rush.

I had found success and I was obviously passionate and interested in the world that I was living in, so I was waiting for the right project to come to me. I was offered some other pieces that didn't feel right so I didn't take them, purposely because I knew that unless I could be completely passionate about the project, I would be no good at it. I have to wait for what drives me and what pulls me, so that I can give all of myself to something.

My music video work had started transforming from performance videos into narrative storytelling videos. This is what you see in "We Found Love". I was trying to tell a story and prove that I could. Music video directors are looked down upon. Music videos are not as respected modes in filmmaking. Which I think is quite ridiculous, as I have had the most success in terms of cultural impact through my work in music videos. But the industry does not have the same respect for young filmmakers doing music videos, as they would for someone that came from shooting a short film, or television; though I think that is changing.

So I shifted my intention, and I was given an *Insecure* script for HBO starring Issa Rae for a pilot. I loved it and really related to her character, a Black woman having to navigate through all these different worlds... and also the humorous side of it. I never saw myself as a comedy director; but I love humor, and I love using humor as a tool, as a survival tactic. We, as people of color, have to do that a lot – find the

humor in some of the obstacles we have to deal with. So I went and met Issa, and we spoke the same language: two Black women at a very similar place in our lives. We collaborated on the pilot, and I came on to executive produce and direct.

From there I met Lena (Waithe), and we did a *Master of None* episode on Thanksgiving. While we were shooting that, she was working on this script for the film. And she was like, "You have to direct this." I said, "I'll direct this if I love the script." I try not to let my relationships get in the way of work. I love her, but I don't want that to be the defining factor. I wanted to love the words on the pages. Unless I am completely passionate about it, I'm useless. And so I read the script and couldn't put it down. I felt like... Wow! This is something really impactful and powerful, important and also entertaining. It's a visual meditation on the world that we are living in as people of color. And so it was literally yesterday I delivered the finished film; it was the last day on the film, after a year of work. Today I am off to Paris and feeling accomplished and relieved...it's a good day for me.

Over the last 10 years I have been fascinated by what I am calling the Black cultural renaissance. The idea that new voices are emerging from the global diaspora, that affirm us as a community not bound by location, or stereotypes – that speak of a nuanced yet collective experience, without pandering to the White gaze. I find it really exciting as the work is truly documenting of our times. I believe that is the purpose of art, it serves as evidence that we were here, and what our experiences were. Can you talk a little about the process you have undergone filtering contemporary life through this piece of work, that in effect will inform people how we lived a hundred years from now?

I have tried to infuse myself in the film. I have been influenced by the diaspora... coming from a very multicultural place, understanding Blackness not just in America but as a world consciousness, and seeing how we are all related. Seeing our history in our existence, wherever we are; and also how simultaneously we can be so different, while relating to each other. The two lead characters really represent Black peoples coming from completely different places and times – mentally, socially, and politically. Challenging each other to find love and to change their consciousness, the two characters Queen and Slim force themselves to do that by their shared experience of killing a racist cop in self-defense, and are forced to go on the run.

Because of the intimate landscape of the car, these two people that would normally not relate to each other in any other situation, or even have seen each other again, are forced to learn from one another... share their backgrounds, their histories, and love of the world. They find growth, not by changing places but by living in that shared experience.

In terms of infusing culture and the now, it's a radical idea being Black right now – just by us existing in spaces where we haven't existed in the past. And we haven't owned that existence, without pandering to White people. We are creating art that is really empowering other Black artists; that's what I aim to do in every aspect of my filmmaking. From the behind the scenes photos or publicity shots, I hired Black photographers to come shoot and interpret the story as well. Infusing all that into the storytelling and into these authentic places which is why it was important to be able to shoot in Cleveland, New Orleans, Mississippi. Real life. It's not a stage set, or built. I went to the places where these things are happening. As long as we lean into the authenticity of those worlds, then we have succeeded and are able to empower the stories, by leaning into how real they are.



MELINA WEARS
JACKET BY TOGA

MELINA WEARS
TRENCH COAT BY TOGA
TOP BY MAISON MARGIELA
SHOES STYLIST'S OWN

**WE ARE CREATING
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The theme for our new issue is Woman. Would you be able to tell us what that word conjures up for you?

I think of sistren, which is actually tattooed in Arabic on my wrist. It's sisterhood. It's supporting one another and being really proud of who we are as women. Highlighting what makes us beautiful, what makes us ugly, what makes us laugh, what makes us cry, and supporting one another.

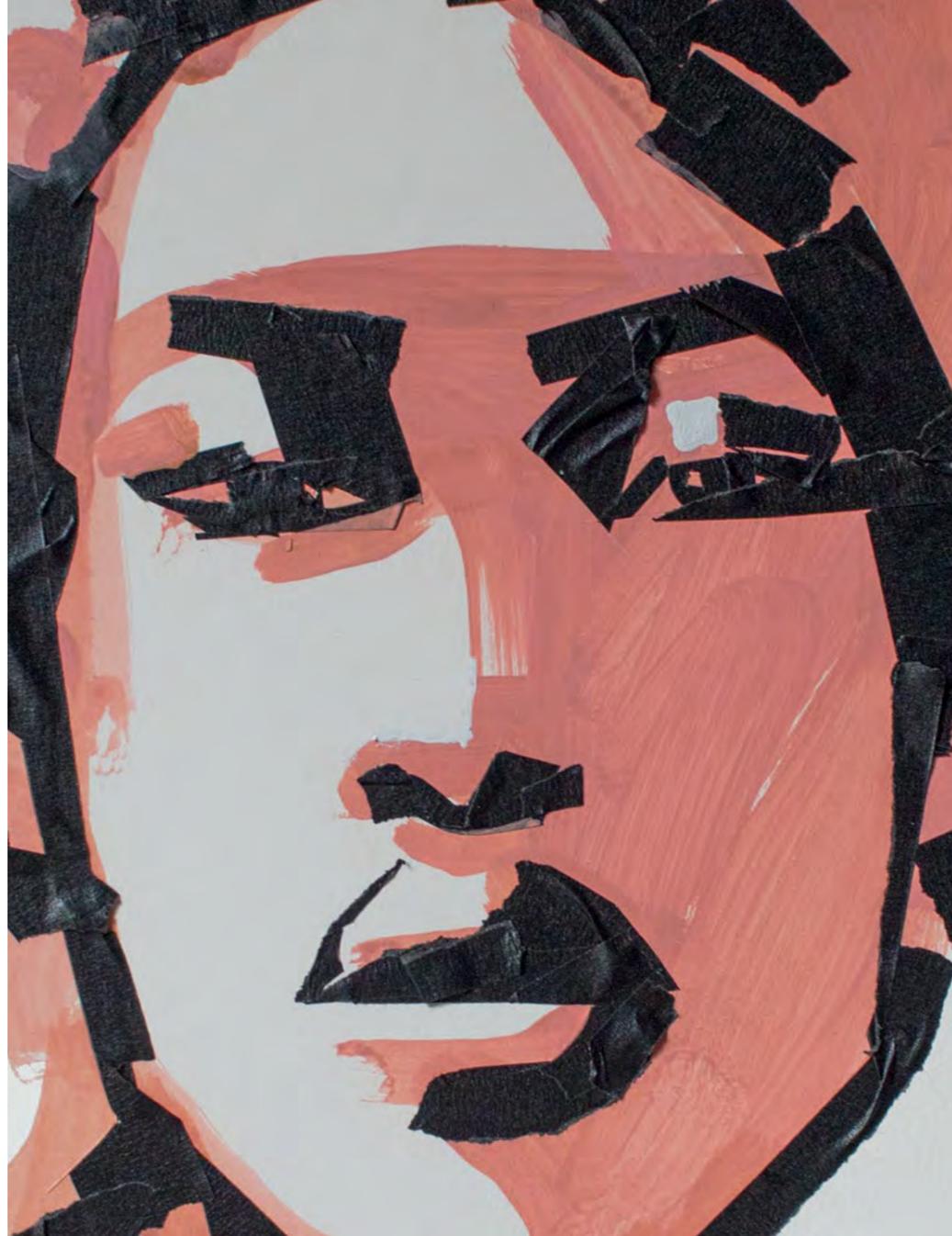
It's funny when you talk about that, there weren't many Black female directors. It's absolutely true. And even now there are still not that many women of color in the industry. But my success has been because of WOMEN.

I accepted the AFI award a couple of months ago; it was from my alma matter. It dawned on me while I was writing my speech that every success that I have had, every change in my career has been because of a Black woman. Even though there are so few of us, they have supported me immensely. And I try to return that favor, as I believe so much in that word Woman, and in that word sistren. It was Beyoncé for my video career, Issa Rae for my television career, and Lena Waithe for my film. Without them I am nothing. Without Woman I am nothing. So that word is everything for me. It's my complete existence, my motivation and inspiration.

IG @msmelina



SO AT A YOUNG
AGE I FELT VERY
SEPARATE
FROM REALITY,
SEPARATE
FROM MYSELF,
FROM MY BODY



IF WE UNITE

AVA GREY BY BELINDA BECKER
ILLUSTRATIONS: CARLOS APONTE

The one thing that strikes me while talking with Ava Grey, the 24-year-old trans actor, model, and activist, is how many times she uses the word beautiful. As a transgender woman of color growing up first in Alexandria, Virginia and then Bed-Stuy, her life has been anything but. However, as the interview wears on I realize that she actually embodies the beauty that she speaks so much about, from the grace with which she carries herself to her soft-spoken confidence.

Since bursting on the scene last year, Ava has done shows for Willie Chavarria, Nike, and Adidas, shot for Gucci and GQ, and has been featured in *Out Magazine*, *Vogue*, and *Playboy*. Her acting credits include *Pose* and the upcoming film *Run Sweetheart Run* (a feminist horror movie produced by Blumhouse and Automatik).

What was your childhood like?

It was distant from reality. I felt like I was a spirit moving around in a vessel. Things weren't tangible. Even the things that I was touching just didn't seem real.

Why did you feel like this?

Because my gender and body dysmorphia was very severe for me. My family was telling me that they didn't perceive me as female, but this is who I am. So at a young age I felt very separate from reality, separate from myself, from my body. I knew myself to believe one thing, and they were telling me this isn't how you look.

How were your teenage years with your family, school, your friends?

Early on I was bullied in elementary and primary school. It was rough. High school was more taunting and teasing. The physical stuff kind of left once I got into high school. I think we were all exploring who we were. But I was from the generation where you had to run home from school, and nobody really knew the word trans. I was coming out of an era where my parents were born into poverty, from people of color, and they had their views on the queer lifestyle as well. So I felt very much alone.

So when did you decide that you were going to embrace who you were?

Later in my early twenties when I started taking hormones. I don't believe that womanhood starts when you start taking hormones. I was presenting and taking hormones in my early twenties, but I always identified as female. I always identified as Ava. I still had a lot of fem energy, so I didn't feel the need to do the hormones yet. And when I felt the need, I did it.

What is your heritage?

Dominican, Black, and Korean.

I also come from a culture that has very strong views against the LGBTQ community. How does your family feel about you now?

We are healing. I have a beautiful pseudo family. A very close friend of mine's family took me in like it was nothing, and they knew that I was alone.

When did they take you in?

About a year ago. That's when I met them, and it's been beautiful. They have been a great support system for me, and through them I had the confidence and courage to go back to my biological family. We spent the 4th of July together, and it was interesting. We're all learning, growing, and healing. It's not there yet.

How many siblings do you have?

I have two, a step sister and a half sister.

How are things with them?

We're healing. One of my sisters has a baby, and they didn't want me to come around the baby at first. Everything is taking time. We are all just in transition now, trying to navigate. We're looking at each other like strangers but feeling the same sense of family. It's an adjustment.

When did you leave home, and where did you go?

Around 15. New York. I had a few friends here, and I made friends quickly. I got a job at Starbucks. I wanted to live, I wanted to exist in the world and find out what I liked. So I just did it.

So how did New York respond to you?

I love, love, love New York with all my heart. It gave me true acceptance, true freedom, and uninhibited, unrestricted control. I felt as if I had everything in the palm of my hands even though I was so unstable as a young kid financially, mentally. I was just a kid, but I felt so happy and that meant the world to me.

And when you applied for the job at Starbucks, no one questioned your gender identity?

It was a very queer-friendly store. Starbucks is a beautifully queer-friendly brand. So that ended up working out really well. It was also my first time navigating a world of queer that was outside of my style of queer. I was able to see different personalities, and that was beautiful to me as well.

How did you get into modeling?

Instagram and photographer collaborations, and that led to a Gucci and GQ shoot. And then after that runway shows. Yeah, so that's it, social media. I'm still modeling, but transitioning more to the acting world.

How are you making that transition?

I actually used modeling as a foothold for acting. I started with plays as a kid. When I started modeling I met people in the acting

industry who told me they had auditions coming up and wanted me to go. And casting directors were reaching out to me on social media. The power of social media can be beautiful: because they got to know me, they gave me a chance. *Pose* gave me the opportunity to make my TV debut. I'll always be thankful to Steven Canals, Ryan Murphy, and Boston Fielder.

When did your activism start?

When I was outed.

How were you outed?

I was outed on social media. I was hanging out with this model, and I just saw my phone going off. And it was all these dual notifications of people tagging me. They had ended up posting old pictures of me and saying this is who I was and who I am. So when that happened I was super scared, because the murder rate for trans women of color is very high. Then people in the industry started telling me, "We can't book you for this campaign or for this job because you don't look trans." It was very frustrating for me, and all of my connects fell apart.

When was this?

Last year. Everyone had this major issue with it, but I definitely wanted to talk about my experience. I definitely want to normalize the trans experience. In this society people are scared of what they don't know. I want to be a beacon of resources, always answering questions about it because when the next person is outed I would love for everybody to be like, "I don't care."

Right now, I'm working with GLAAD and trying to book more conferences and workshops targeted in communities that don't understand the lifestyle, especially the trans lifestyle. I'm trying to introduce a sort of normalization process in the Bronx, Bed Stuy, and in East New York – not just Soho or 42nd Street because we're not really being killed there.

And do you think these conferences and workshops will change minds?

I'm hopeful. I see my sisters getting on board and really taking themselves and ourselves more seriously. I see the people around me waking up. We are starting to find our voices. We are all starting to normalize our own experiences.

As you said, the murder rate of transgender women of color is very high. There have been at least 10 this year alone. How do we deal with this issue?

Definitely by normalizing our experience, talking about it. Social media is an amazing platform for this. It's also about having acceptance across the board. And that is the world that I'm aiming for, the world that I'm hoping for. We are not gimmicks; we are not shows or pieces of entertainment. Once we find that balance in the media and on the runway as well, that is when we will be able to normalize our experiences and when we will see more normalized stories... we're not at a ball all the time. We have normal relationships; we have normal family dynamics. Those are the stories we need to tell. We need to be in charge of our own production companies; we need to be holding consulting positions for shows and media.

As an actor are you only getting roles for trans characters?

I'm very thankful for my team, because they understand that I don't just want trans specific roles, so they advocate for me with casting directors. But it's a push and repel situation. So although I'm able to be in the room, in the end it is about the director and the production company. Can they see it as well? Do they want trans? Do they know the message?

What advice do you have for trans children, because we both know this is going to be a very rough journey for them.

Understanding that they are more than just trans. That is a big thing that's always in my head. It is such a small component of me and not everyone is talking to me the way they're talking to me because I'm trans. So coming out of my own head can be the solution. If you look at how other people are being treated, it's kind of the same. It's a human experience. And the moment we find our own voice to say, "Don't speak to me like that, because I'm a human" is when we're going to see change. So I would say, find that voice sooner, find that voice sooner than I did. And people respond to that, people respond to hurt. If I'm genuinely hurt by you speaking to me like this then you need to re-evaluate why you're bullying, why you're picking on me, what's wrong with that.

Do you have one instance where you've had this kind of confrontation, and you were able to make the other person see your point of view?

Multiple times, especially men of color... just being from the hood.

Can you describe one time?

I was out somewhere talking with a man, and there was another woman. She was like, "You know she's trans, right? She's a tranny." So the guy was upset because he was flirting. We had a whole moment of "Why are you angry? What don't you understand?" I saw his face change, his face was changing in a way that said, "Well, I didn't think anybody would care what I thought. I didn't think anybody would care about my feelings." And I understand that.

Right now the queer community is in a race with the Black community. And that's because of media. Media is pushing this extravagant lifestyle, but there are intersectional individuals right now who are being taunted by the Black community and are not being given their fair share. I saw rainbows all over the place during Black history month, so I definitely understand the animosity between queer and Black communities. But we need to acknowledge the fact that things aren't all right... we need to unite. We need to show the corporate world that no matter what our communities aren't going to fall apart.

There's definitely competition between the queer world and the Black one, since they're both fighting for the same resources. Do you see them coming together?

If we unite. If we hold workshops for underprivileged communities, absolutely. If we can understand each other. We can't have intersectional individuals being scared of the Black community when they belong in the Black community.

I feel like there's this intransigent aspect to, especially the older Black communities, accepting LGBTQ people.

You just see if love wins. I thought my grandma was going to turn her back on me. She was the most prejudiced growing up. But she was there for my surgery; she was there when I had my SRS. She was there for the pronouns; she was there trying to hear about my relationship with my dad. She's been there for me. And I thought she was gonna leave.

What makes the difference? What makes that possible?

I was able to tell her what I was going through, able to tell her that I struggled to be happy. My generation and the ones before, as individuals we struggled to be happy. This wasn't something we chose to do; it was this or nothing. It was live authentically or nothing. I think that people understand hurt; people understand getting over the struggle. That can resonate with anybody.

And you communicated that to your grandmother?

It took a while. And it wasn't just my story that helped, it was other stories she was able to see through media. She would call me up and tell me that she understood a little more now.

Do you feel that it helps you, being a celebrity?

Definitely.

I feel like there are different levels. You're very beautiful, you're light-skinned. I spoke to another transgender woman of color who is a bit stocky and much darker, and she gets harassed and bullied everyday. The issue is so complex, do you find it overwhelming to try and bring all these parts together?

Yes. The fight doesn't end with me; it just gets started with me. I have a true responsibility to advocate for those who can't advocate for themselves – because society isn't gonna listen to what they wanna say, but they're gonna listen to what I wanna say. And that's a bittersweet thing. I'm very very thankful, but dang, we shouldn't just focus on pretty. Because everyone has something to say, and that's the message I want to preach. It takes bridging the gap; it takes making those connections.

How does your family feel seeing you on TV, on the runway?

My family is very proud because they know that they tried to discourage me and they regret it. I can see it in their eyes, hear it in their voices. They know that we share the same blood, and they were some of my biggest critics.

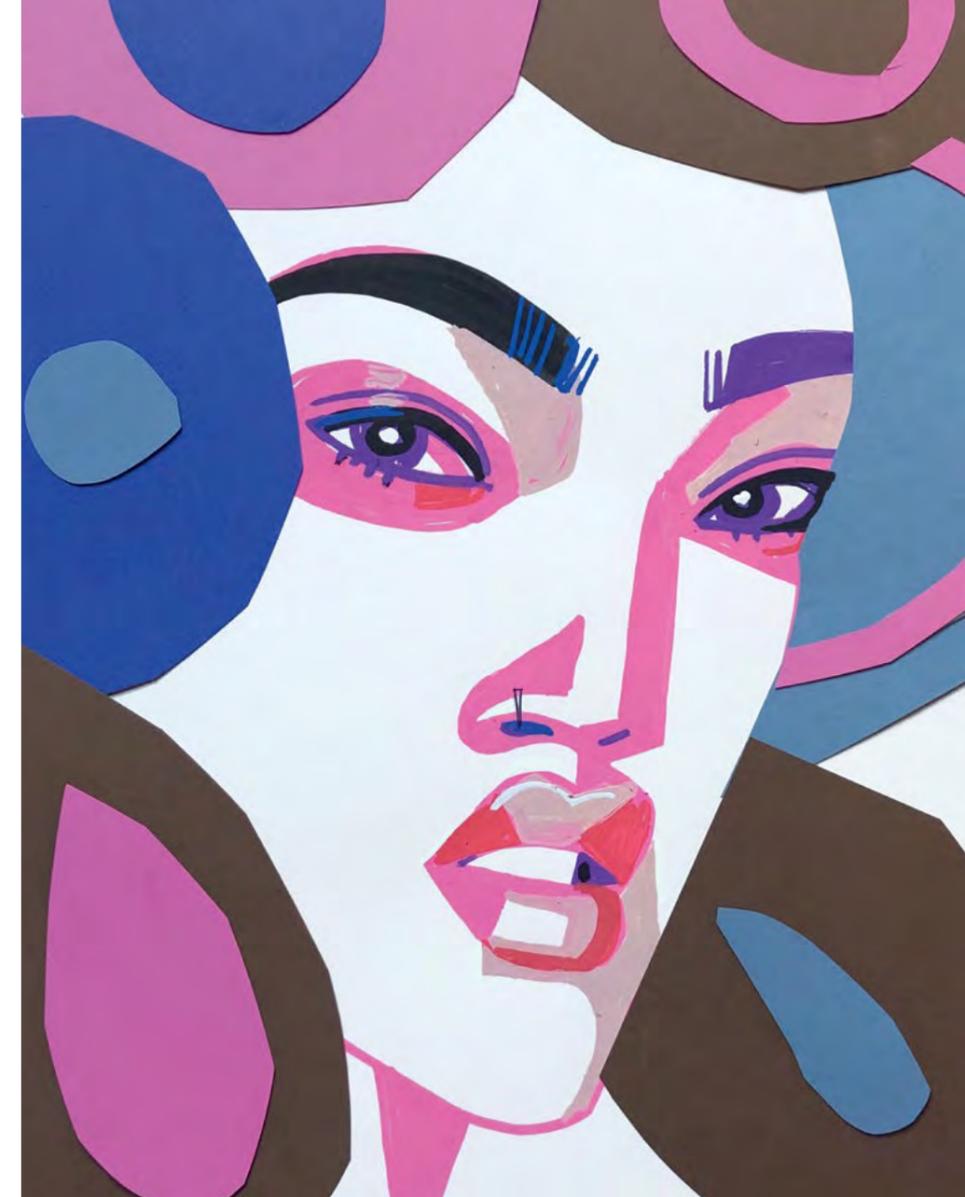
What do you see for your future? What do you want?

I want to be able to have a refrigerator with food in it. I want to be able to provide for my (pseudo) family. No more sad faces, no more "can we make it from week to week." I want to take care of my grandma. Everyone is struggling. I want to be the first to be able to say, "I can help." I want to be at the forefront of the political movement. I want to be making changes to the social justice system. I want to bring awareness.

Are you mainly concerned with human rights for people of color?

Yeah, mainly people of color. We get nothing, even subtle things. I was waiting for the bus: there's one line for the megabus to New York. But then there was a White woman, and she decided to start her own line

I DEFINITELY WANT TO NORMALIZE THE TRANS EXPERIENCE. IN THIS SOCIETY PEOPLE ARE SCARED OF WHAT THEY DON'T KNOW



right next to me. Some people joined her line. And there was another White woman who came, who decided she didn't want to wait in the back of the line. So she just wanted to stand up there in the front, and the other White woman made her feel safe. Even though they never spoke, they felt safe together. They felt united, and that's the feeling I want for people of color. I see you, you see me, we're united.

Do you write?

I love to write. I have my own production company, La Palindrome. I like telling true stories. They don't have to be queer stories, but I want them to be true. I want the people to get paid. That is the most important thing for me. How our stories and our minds, our speech, our style, our culture is used so much – we're not getting paid though.

Do you have any upcoming projects?

I do. *Thorne*, it's a queer love story about a woman of trans experience and a man that identifies as queer. He's only had past dealings with men, but we see them trying to form a bond and see where they fit on the spectrum. As far as love and intimacy goes, it's his first time with a woman and her first time with a man who's only been interested in men. I love to explore the spectrum. I don't like to say words like "gay" or "lesbian" because those are really stagnant words, and I believe that humans are nothing but progressive. It's based off my story, where I tried to have a relationship with a man. It's about the struggles I had to go through trying to navigate in a queer relationship.

Do you have any other interests?

I love to be in nature. I'm all about alignment, finding purpose in things. I love exploring,

getting lost, navigating... being able to walk in an environment that was created for us to be happy in.

Yeah, it's crazy when you look at how much we've been given and how miserable we've made each other with our greed. We, as women of color are all endowed with Black girl magic. How can we not be? From our harrowing journey on the slave ships to present day we have kept our joy, our spirit, our love, and our purpose. We have survived and more than that, we have thrived.

As I watch Ava walk away at the end of our interview, I swear I see a trail of gold dust behind her. And in the blink of an eye, she's gone.

[IG @ava.a.grey](#)



The main source of the village's wealth: its herd of goats. In traditional villages, men take care of the livestock. In Unity, it is women who guide them through pastures, raise them and slaughter them.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND TEXT: ZEN LEFORT

OASIS OF UNITY

The first Kenyan women villages began to appear in 1990. Almost three decades later, approximately thirty of their inhabitants founded Unity, tens of kilometres into "no man's land". Claiming their own space, many of these women wanted to escape Samburu traditions. In seven years, Unity has transformed uninhabited bushlands into a nearly autonomous village where women govern their existence as they intend to live. This village, the most recent of its kind, provides allowance to rebuild themselves and to offer a brighter future for younger generations.

From the moment these villages were formed, their inhabitants were rejected by the rest of the Samburu tribe. But these women have persevered, working as only men have traditionally done – raising their own livestock to survive. Through their craftwork, they have attracted tourists (and thus revenue) to their village, raising their profile. Over the past 25 years, Kenyan society has evolved. Their way of life has become, if not fully accepted, at least tolerated. Living alone amongst other women remains a necessity for some who were traumatized by their experiences living in a world of men.

They have now abundantly embraced their independence. While their mothers submitted to genital mutilation, forced marriages, and domestic violence, the girls of Unity have access to education and attend to their own needs without almost any help from men. The only males in the village are those who have grown up in it. The sons of Unity, once they are adults, return to lend a helpful hand to their mothers and sisters. Bit by bit, this female community has built its place in Samburu society while never surrendering their rights.

www.zenlefort.com

At dinnertime, the women light a fire to cook their mash of grains (millet and sorghum among others) and take advantage of the light from the flames.





The closest city to Unity is Archer's Post, five kilometres away. Every Saturday, Unity's residents go there to shop for vegetables for the entire village. They dress up in necklaces and red robes to show their pride in belonging to the village of Unity.



With nightfall and the return of coolness, village residents come together and talk for hours, but not of past traumas. Those, they prefer to forget...



Alice Lenemynwi dials her mobile phone, powered by solar energy. This is the only link to the outside world for some young women. Though men are forbidden in the village, certain women meet them outside of its borders.

Matilde Lesalkapo, 12 years old, does her homework at night. She is learning three languages: Samburu, Swahili and English. Education of children is even more important in Unity than in other villages where young girls are often forced into marrying men much older than they are. Matilde will also escape genital mutilation, a traditional practice in Samburu society.





To escape male violence, in 2011 some thirty women founded the village of Unity, an autonomous community in the Kenyan savannahs.



Nchekiyo Lembwakita, 80 years old, is with her grandson. She convinced her daughter to follow her to Unity. Four generations live together in the village.



Some rare decorations adorn the walls of their huts. An NGO volunteer took this family photo (without father) and gave it to Ripalen Lekeoimui, dressed in green in this image.



The spring is only minutes' walk away, but the trip is made only after sundown, when the heat is finally tolerable.



With her three children, Patricia Lekeimui, 27 years old, fled her abusive husband. He lives tens of kilometres away. For the children's sake, they still see each other. According to Samburu tradition, girls as young as 13 can be married, often under force.

The containers that they carry on their backs, attached by scarves on their heads, can weigh up to 15 kg.



BUCOLIC



SVETA WEARS
DRESS, SWEATER & SKIRT
BY MAX MARA

SVETA WEARS
DRESS & TROUSERS BY TOGA
BOOTS BY SERGIO ROSSI



PHOTOGRAPHS: MINORU KABURAGI
STYLING: HANAE UWAJIMA
HAIR: TAKAYUKI SHIBATA
MAKE UP: FUSAKO UKUNO
MODELS: SVETA BLACK @ UNKNOWN MODELS
CAR SERVICE: OFFICE SUN



SVETA WEARS
DRESS BY GUCCI



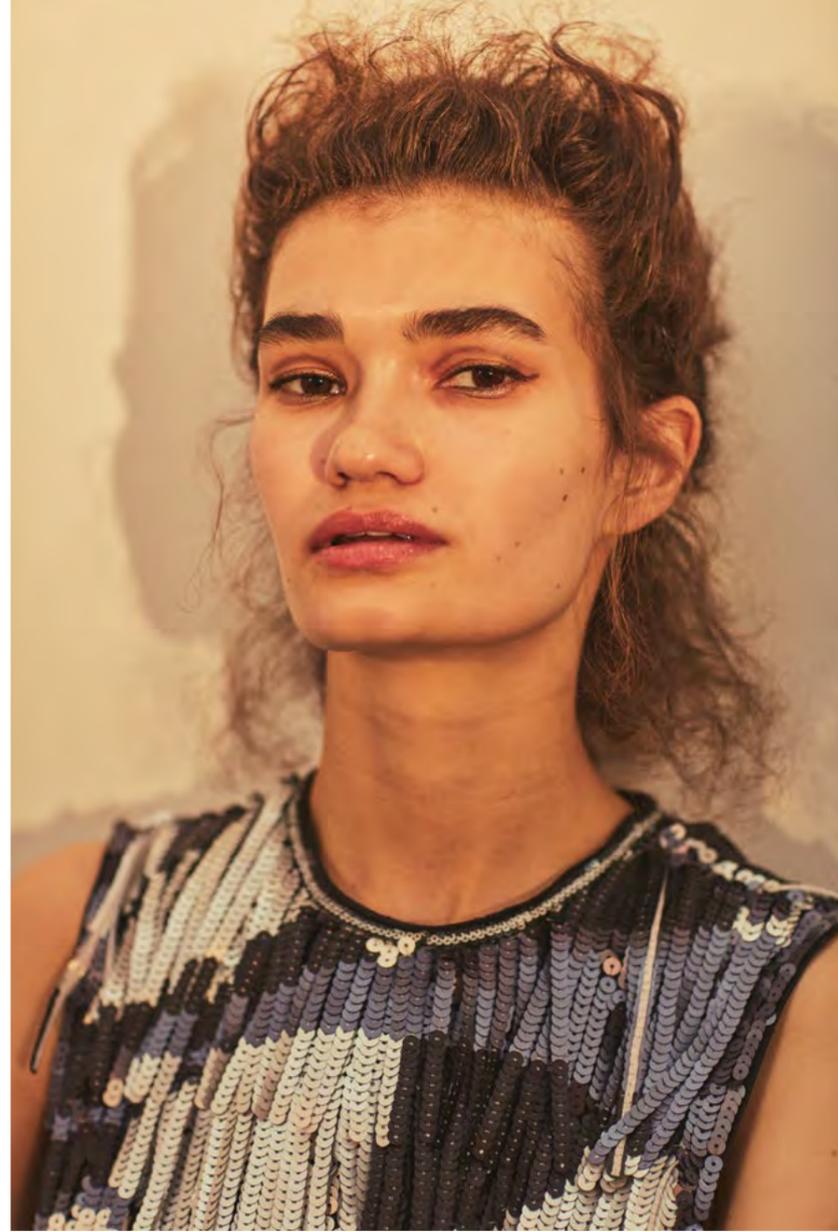
SVETA WEARS JACKET
BY JOHN LAWRENCE SULLIVAN
OVERALL BY Y'S



SVETA WEARS
JACKET & DRESS BY DSQUARED2
BOOTS BY SERGIO ROSSI



SVETA WEARS
DRESS & BOOTS BY ISABEL MARANT



SVETA WEARS
DRESS BY EMILIO PUCCI

SVETA WEARS
JACKET, SKIRT & SWEATER BY 3.1 PHILLIP LIM
SNEAKERS BY SERGIO ROSSI



SVETA WEARS
JACKET, TEE-SHIRT,
FRINGE SKIRTS & SKIRT
BY HYKE
BOOTS BY MAX MARA





SVETA WEARS
JACKET, COAT & SKIRT BY ISSEY MIYAKE
BOOTS BY DSQUARED2

SVETA WEARS
CARDIGAN & DRESS
BY COACH



SVETA WEARS
DRESS BY SACAI



INCH WIDE MILE DEEP

DREAM HAMPTON
BY MASHA CALLOWAY
ILLUSTRATIONS:
CARLOS APONTE



**Listener. Worker. Thinker. Filmmaker. Writer.
Organizer. Fighter.**

dream hampton was named after Martin Luther King Jr's "I Have a Dream" speech. Her father was in the audience when the speech was given at Cobo Hall in Detroit (June 23, 1963), two months before the March on Washington speech at the Lincoln Memorial. This auspicious start inevitably led her to doing documentary projects with the caveat: "I was so moved by injustice, but I don't want people to mistake me for a documentarian." She is a board member for the Color of Change organization. She was not the first female editor of *The Source* magazine.

On August 2, 2019, she starts our interview with, "I declare that, at the moment, all of my efforts are made towards making my world smaller. I think that one of the things about having any kind of success is – and it's not my first time having success, so I know this to be true, in general – is how disappointing it is. It's almost like anything in consumer culture. When the desire's acquisition, the end result is often emptiness. I had three projects come out this year and only one of them is what is considered a success."

dream hampton has had quite a year. She's one of *Time Magazine's* 100 Most Influential People of 2019; she received the Woman of Vision Award 2019 from the Ms. Foundation for Women. She was an executive producer of the record-breaking Lifetime documentary series *Surviving R. Kelly*, which has been nominated for an Emmy award for Outstanding Informational Series or Special, 2019; *Surviving R. Kelly* won Program of the Year at the Banff Rockie Awards and Best Documentary at the MTV Movie & TV Awards, while being honored by *Vanity Fair* for TV Documentaries with the Power to Change.

A moving, well-documented and researched series, *Surviving R. Kelly* provides a narrative on sexual, mental, and physical abuse allegations which have followed the singer for years. The women who shared their stories and hampton have received praise and condemnation. R. Kelly is behind bars, awaiting trial on charges which include child pornography and obstruction of justice, kidnapping, and trafficking of minors and women across state lines for sexual purposes.

Hampton reflects, "In terms of the metrics of what people measure success, my last film *Treasure* (2015) probably was seen by 7500 people – that's if I'm being generous. That would include the festivals and the fact that it's On Demand. This year, I had three projects and one of them had tons of millions of viewers and the other two didn't. In some ways, the other two were more successful for me: in terms of an aesthetic, the things that I had hoped to see happen, the aesthetic visions that I'd hoped to realize that were realized, and also the impact work. Our BET series *Finding Justice* had all this impact."

The *Finding Justice* docuseries travels across the United States to cover individuals and organizations fighting to eliminate issues which disproportionately affect Black communities: police brutality, the lead paint crisis, voter suppression, and "stand your ground" laws. It features the Close the Workhouse movement which explores the cash bail program in St. Louis and efforts to close the notorious Workhouse, officially known as the Medium Security Institute. In Los Angeles, student activists and their advocates joined to stop the Los Angeles School District's "wandering policy": random metal detector searches done on mostly Black and Brown students. An episode featured one of the student organizers on the show. The policy ended "partly because of how we aired them out on BET."

WHEN I THINK ABOUT
FIGHTING INJUSTICE,
I THINK ABOUT
LOVING PEOPLE...
OR LOVING MYSELF
ENOUGH TO
PROTECT MYSELF

hampton is also an executive producer on "The Mystery of Now", a "kind of experimental docu-short" about the socio-political history of life on the San Carlos Apache Reservation with Douglas Miles, artist and founder of Apache Skateboards, and the young leaders who have embraced art, skateboards, and community to deal with and rise above the conditions of their environment.

It's a Hard Truth Ain't It? (HBO, 2019) is a project where 13 long-term prisoners at Indiana's Pendleton Correctional Facility use the experience of learning how to make a documentary film to unravel their journeys from youth to incarceration in a maximum security prison. As co-directors along with Madeleine Sackler, they use interviews with each other and animation to present an innovative look at their personal explorations and shared discoveries.

dream expounds on the series: "That project was about a couple of big things. One of them was about how, in the fields of anything on the spectrum from abolition work to criminal justice reform, there was a lot of wrong language about nonviolent criminals. Ruthie Gilmore and other abolitionists, Black abolitionists who joined her, were making public interventions... critical interventions. We wanted to set right some of the language. In the Indiana prison, Pendleton, where we filmed it, we were absolutely dealing with people who committed violent crimes, because that's what the majority of folks who are in that prison are in prison for. Also, I got to extend this idea that I had been experimenting with Molly Crabapple around using animation to tell the story ('A History of the War on Drugs', narrated by Jay Z). Obviously in the HBO film *It's a Hard Truth Ain't It*, we were able to up that ante and get the same guy who did *Waltz With Bashir* (Yoni Goodman), who did an excellent job on ours."

The interview is punctuated by a moment of reflection: "I don't really live in the past though. From day to day, I try to move forward. But, yeah, I think about the three projects I had this year when I think about this question of success and this question of kind of reducing one's psychic space. You know, encircle and adjust the energetic field to a smaller [one]. Grace Lee Boggs, the great philosopher who ended up in Detroit for most of her life, who married an important labor activist, always said, 'To go an inch wide and a mile deep is better than to go a mile wide and an inch deep.' There are times when I can be rooted in place like that, deep rather than wide, and then... there are times when I can't. So, it feels good, in this moment, to be still."

I DON'T REALLY LIVE
IN THE PAST THOUGH.
FROM DAY TO DAY,
I TRY TO MOVE
FORWARD

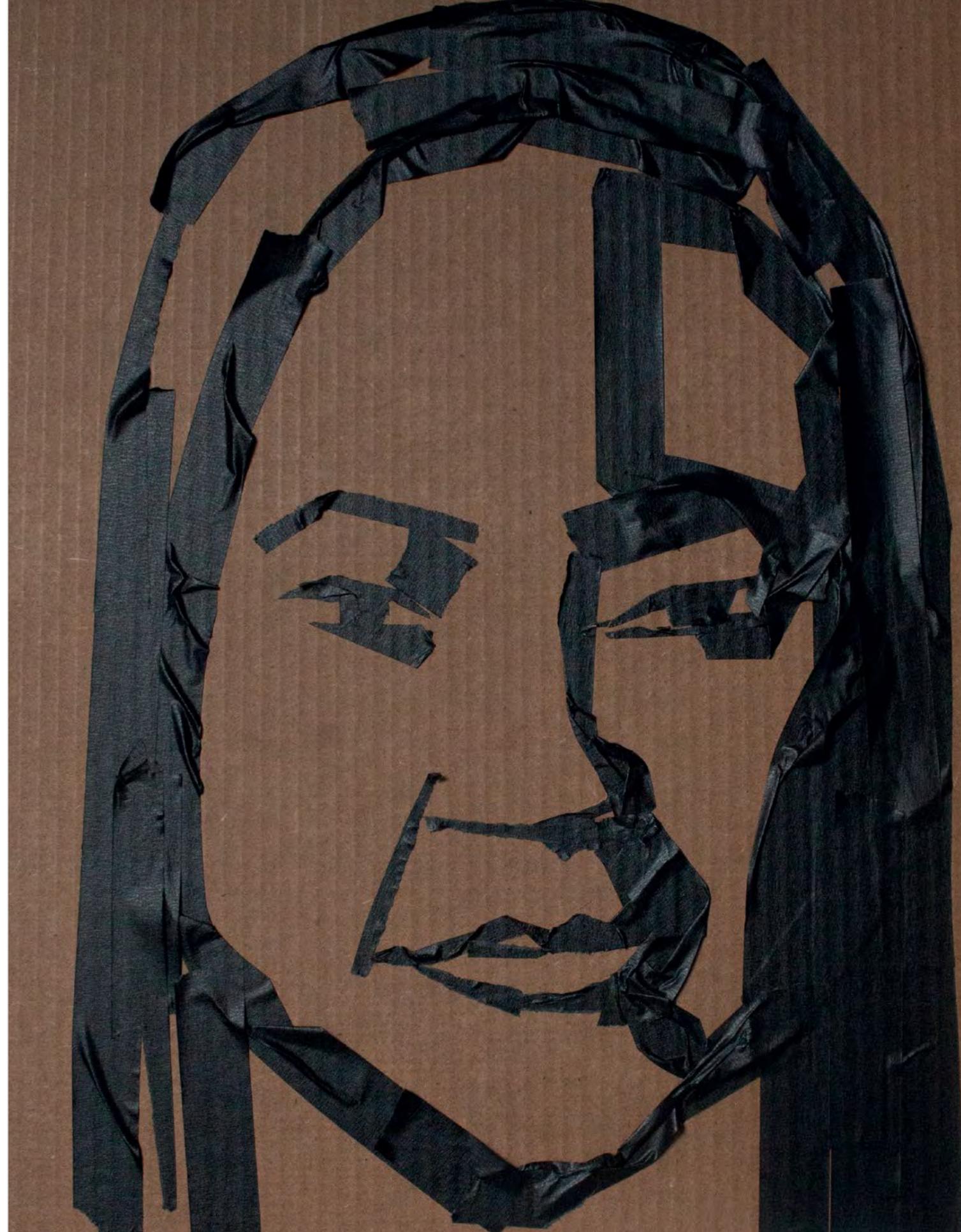
In a search for deeper understanding, I include my perspective of what an audience may be experiencing: "There is one Youtube clip that is an animation where boys are standing in a line in front of a prison. I was thinking, 'Are they... is this an indication of the future? Are they looking at their fathers? What is going on?' Then came the paths, the green paths, which wound around in different directions, crisscrossing and extending out to somewhere. How did you get into animation?"

dream answers, "So much can be shown as opposed to told, you know. And that's a part of the post-tech landscape, too. And, by the way, it's also very ancient: whether you are looking at caves in Europe or temples in Egypt and in Sudan or if you're thinking about Saturday mornings, like I was, with *Schoolhouse Rock!* The only way I know how a law becomes a law in this country is because of Scatman Crothers's voiceover on a *Schoolhouse Rock!* thing. Like, literally, that's the only way I know. I'm sure it was part of my 8th grade civics class, but I know it because of that."

For dream's Time 100 introduction, Tarana Burke (#MeToo movement founder) wrote, "I vividly remember when I knew that dream hampton was the kind of storyteller who would change things. It was 1995, and at the time, few others were giving voice to the feelings and experiences of black women and girls like dream was."

I further the thought: "the kind of storyteller who would change things" – that implies faith.

She responds, "I think that, beyond faith, I try to also connect with work that's meant to be, in any way, advocacy to people who are, in real life, who are doing that... who are committed to it. I know how important narrative change is. I know that almost everything comes from a story that we've been told, and it can be a story about anything."



“I was thinking about how it’s almost time for summer tomatoes, like the really good ones. How, right now, there’s a narrative about how bad foods are for you. Which is tiny. I’m not saying that this is gonna affect someone’s life, although it might. It might be we are perfectly built for fruit as human beings... Whoever wanted to market keto (ketogenic diet) had to get a narrative out about what it was and how it works and part of that threw things like tomatoes under the bus.”

“This doesn’t have to do with the narrative that we are currently being fed about immigrants – which you’ll hear Black people repeating, increasingly having an anti-immigrant stand – the stories that we’re told about Palestine. [There are] the stories we are told about Black people in general, the stories that we are told about women, about young women, about older women, about middle-aged women. I do think that narrative is important.”

“With any project, I’m trying to see if change is possible in the now as opposed to planting a seed in someone’s mind and letting it blossom and form their point of view in the future. If there are actionable changes in the now, who are the best kinds of ambassadors? Coz I’ve done that work. I’ve definitely been that kind of person who is like, ‘Oh, you’re doing a film about this? Let me help you build a campaign. Oh, you’re doing a campaign to legalize marijuana? I’d like you to think about economic equity in the aboveground industry.’ I started doing that work about 7 or 8 years ago. That kind of work I have done and I love to do and I think is important. And then, there’s more didactic work that I’ve recently done. And it’s fine. It has its use.”

Looking for clarification, I inquire, “What do you mean by didactic?”

hampton provides a few examples: “I would say the *Surviving R. Kelly* project was quite straightforward. There’s no nuance in it. It doesn’t signify anything. It’s quite didactic. It lays out a case that’s very straightforward and can be placed in the hands of people who want to take action. It could be against R. Kelly or it could be campaigns to end gender and sexual violence and talk about that in our community. The latter is more interesting to me. I get what Tarana was saying.”

“I think there are times where we create art that serves as a tool. That certainly happens on the Right all the time. *Gran Torino* is a tool for the Republican party. These talking points that people come up with. We are a post-literate, not just as a nation but world. We pretend to read books. They buy them, and then they sit beside their bed. They are proud that they

can say Ta-Nehisi Coate’s name, [but] can’t tell you how his very short book ended. I’m not saying that to shame anyone, I’m that person too. Our brains have been rewired.”

“*Juno* had a point of view. The word abortion is never mentioned in that film. And that becomes a tool for our anti-choice people to guide people, say towards adoption... you know, the young teenagers. That film is older now and I have no idea what the woman who wrote it (the woman who used to be a dancer), I have no idea what her politics are, but that film should absolutely have had a teenager, in the state of Washington where abortions are legal, at least consider abortion. The fact that she didn’t consider abortion was like a choice. It doesn’t feel didactic, but it’s absolutely a politic, you know.”

In a redirect, I mention this quote from her essay “Audacity: Losing My Fear of Outside”: “Now I know I tapped into something bigger than me. My audacity is my fight, to be bigger than my fear. I’ve never been able to summon fearlessness by anger – even when it’s been a reaction to the injustice, social or personal. Instead it’s functioned in my life as a kind of walking meditation. One that has driven me around the world and back.” (hampton wrote about three boys breaking into her house to rape her when she was middle school age)

dream engages: “Yeah, I’m loathe to admit this because I find that people are creating narratives around me. I’ve recently been called a sociopath by young people who just throw words around. My anger is very scary to me. It’s very *Dexter*. Like, when I’m about to have a fight – and I’ve had many physical fights growing up in Detroit – my heart rate doesn’t raise. I don’t get that adrenaline rush. [She laughs] I don’t know what that is... if it was growing up in a war zone, which Detroit was in the 80s, or if I’m just hard-wired in this weird way.”

MY AUDACITY IS MY FIGHT, TO BE BIGGER THAN MY FEAR.

“Anger and fear and all of those, I’m not usually motivated by that. When I think about fighting injustice, I think about loving people... or loving myself enough to protect myself. I don’t know if having experienced so much violence made me numb, or produced not a numbness but a kind of stillness around it... I’m not saying that I don’t get angry, I get furious. But, that produces other types of actions. The audacity part could be like the fearlessness is rooted in love, not hate or fear, you know? Love and faith really.”

Since *Surviving R. Kelly* came out, hampton has done at least 84 interviews where “a good four or five dozen of them” are about the state of mind that she was in during the project. She provides a little insight: “The self care aspect, the dark year, what it was to hold their stories, yada yada. And that’s what it becomes: a yada yada which is part of the loop. It’s a part of the loop that we’re all on.”

“I’m interested in predictive software and its implications for social media. On Facebook, right now, you can create a legacy... You can bequeath your Facebook page to someone and you can tell them how you’d like it to stay up, and people leave messages on it: ‘I miss you so much.’ We’ve seen them all. I mean, we’ve had social media long enough to see our friends die on it, then see what people decide to do with their pages.”

“I’m interested in this predictive software that, because we’re on such loops, because we say the same stuff over and over again, our Facebook pages can keep going even after we’re gone. You can predict what I’ll say about R. Kelly based on what I said about Bill Cosby and the director Nate, whatever his last name is, Parker. Or you can predict what I would say about the latest Gaza bombing by what I said about the last eleven.”

“And, I started to realize that [we’re] hearing people’s daily thoughts in this media – which is new for me. I mean, I’m from a pre-social media generation, and we don’t even check in with the people we are closest to... our lovers, our family members, even our children. We don’t know their daily diary thoughts the way that we do relative strangers on the Internet. One of the things that’s most disappointing about being exposed to people’s daily thoughts and putting one’s own daily thoughts out there is how fucking repetitive they are, how unoriginal we are, period. So, I don’t want to be on a loop. I have been on a loop, and it feels like woork.”

I add, “I don’t think we, as human beings, are served by that. I think our society is making us more and more that way for a purpose, which is so that we can be more robotic and not think for ourselves, and, you know, be controlled. On that, I think we have to go through hard things and do the hard thinking to come up with a new idea or come up with wrong ideas and say that they are wrong, so we can work on that one again.”

dream acknowledges, “I think you’re so right. I was talking to Jenn Nkiru, the filmmaker, who I’m sure you know, and we were doing something at Frieze LA, I think for Gucci, and someone from the audience was like, ‘What’s next?’ And she said, ‘I’m just gonna go somewhere and think,’ you know, which is not the same as build a brand, take these opportunities, do these interviews, go do these dinners and be fêted in Venice. It’s something different than that. All the other things are fine too, but, you know, one might produce more iterative work. And one might just do the necessary things, the things that are required to sustain us as artists too, which is like to build income.”

I DON’T WANT TO BE ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO BECOMES SO PHILOSOPHICAL THAT I DON’T HAVE AN ANSWER OR AN ACTION

I serve up another vantage point: “It seems we are becoming quite nationalist here in the United States. We don’t want those people here, we don’t want those goods because they are from so and so, and they aren’t fair to us. It impacts people. These farmers who voted for Trump, some of them are still on the fence about it – whether he is good or bad for them. Yet his tariff policies force their livelihoods to be losing \$s per acre (farm bankruptcies are up 13% in the time tariffs against China started).”

She continues my lineage of thought: “We’ve had people vote against their self-interest in the past. I feel like Black people have to do that every election cycle... This is what’s so dangerous about Kanye’s rhetoric – how right he is about the Democratic Party. We are constantly voting against our self-interests just to fend off a lesser evil. So, I have a lot of empathy. I’m not looking at those farmers in Iowa and saying, ‘Wow, you’re so ridiculous!’ I’m like, ‘Wow, this is me every two to four years! Vote for somebody who’s awful.’”

“In terms of this idea of the world contracting or wanting it to contract even as it expands – which I’m experiencing on a personal level and which so many nations and people in different countries are experiencing – as the world gets bigger, it is very human to want to burrow down and hibernate. What that looks like in politics is nationalism, is xenophobia. There’s a fear. This is a fear-based reaction to how rapidly and wildly the world is expanding.”

“At the same time, there are things that are happening on the ecological front that are making it necessary to contract anyway. On the one hand, it’s like globalism is inevitable. On the other hand, it’s like we may not be able

to ship goods from one place to another at the scale that we do now in the very near future. These waters warming up by even a degree doesn’t just mean we’ll have experienced things on land, we could be talking about much rougher seas. We are already experiencing that as people who are on planes all the time, experiencing increasing turbulence based on climate change. Imagine what’s gonna happen in the oceans. I don’t mean that they’re warmer, I mean that waves are 6 and 10 feet higher, regularly. For shipping, what does that mean for my Nutella or my Moroccan leather poufs that I wanna use as an ottoman.”

“I think that on one hand, yes, there’s this movement to push back against this nationalism and talk about the ways that we are all connected. But then we’re facing, on another front, this ecological disaster that is gonna necessarily mean that our footprint is smaller. In my decade of flying on planes constantly, I have definitely noticed there is a lot more turbulence, and I don’t want to be one of those people who becomes so philosophical that I don’t have an answer or an action.”

“I was a Bernie supporter, but I saw Trump as the threat that he is. I don’t see a greater threat. And I also see Black people in this Adolf movement supporting him in very frightening and dangerous ways – mostly Black men, but just a lot of Black people. That’s why I find Kanye’s rhetoric so dangerous, and that’s why I wrote about him in the *New York Times* last spring, because I saw it connected to actual players. He’s just talking and sounding ridiculous, but standing next to him is Candace Owens who is connected to very real organizing, very real resources. And then his wife comes up and provides a different kind of political cover as almost coming off as a pragmatist, you know. It’s all just very dangerous. Like I said around narrative. This is a very dangerous narrative, and it normalizes some real fascist thought-shit.”

To bring some levity to the situation, I offer, “How would you describe yourself, besides ‘Twitter quitter. Tweet deleter’?”

Perfectly timed, dream answers, “Virgo from Detroit.”

“Never over-invest in people’s opinion of you whether they be praise dancing you up or pitchforking you down.”

dream hampton

PHOTOGRAPHS: BETINA LAPLANTE
STYLING: DONALD LAWRENCE @ THE REX AGENCY
HAIR: WILL CARILLO @ THE REX AGENCY
MAKE UP: JANICE DAOUD @ THE REX AGENCY

AMUSING MUSE

JILL JONES BY AZUSENA



JILL WEARS
DRESS BY NORMA KAMALI
JEWELRY JILL'S OWN

A conversation with singer, songwriter, Prince protégé, icon, and political Twitter hero, Jill Jones.

In 1980, 18-year-old Jill, born in Dayton, Ohio, connected with Prince Rogers Nelson (also known as Prince) and joined him on what would be the start of her whirlwind career. A multi-talented musician and singer-songwriter in her own right, she was and still is a cult favorite from her role as Jill in *Purple Rain* and all throughout her solo albums and background vocals in some of the most iconic songs in history. Working alongside Prince, but also the likes of Chic and Teena Marie, most would call her a legend. I get to call her my mama too.

I want to start with your unmatched, amazing musical ear. It's one of the best ever. You are responsible for passing some of that down to me. You intuitively seem to just know all of the ins and outs of anything music. What makes a great piece of music to you?

Thank you. I do intuitively crosscheck immediately for prior recorded references and can detect the origins of a simile, phrase, sample in a second. The model rarely changes. So when there is music that cuts through the bullshit, with a new sound – well that's saying something. For me, what makes a beautiful piece of music is when it transports me to another time and space. It could be from a memory or a motivating dream. I believe that songs are mantras. And today, more than anything, what you put into your mind, collects and shapes your thoughts. I love music that edifies the spirit, heart, and mind. I adore a lovely ambient piece. For me, instrumentation and texture have all of the components of form, and my mind feels free from words. It just flows. Pop music, today, is very McDonalds. Not too memorable either, unless it's tied into a sense memory. And for me, just as in my relationships, they have been richer than what that type of experience the pop industry can provide for my needs.

Who are your music go-tos?

I still love Radiohead and Thom Yorke. Those will be my go-tos forever. I like ambient music a lot. Soundtracks. Sometimes House. Mantras.

You're an Ohio girl. Do you feel like you changed a little when you moved to Los Angeles?

Oh, definitely because I came to LA completely naked in a sense. In my old hometown in Ohio, I was kind of popular in school. I think I was school president or some title like that, and I was really involved in politics. We moved at such a critical

time: all my hair had been cut off. Being in the land of looks, it totally stripped me of my identity, and I became extremely insecure. Also being biracial and being exposed to a certain wealth factor here in LA that I hadn't been exposed to in Ohio was a shift as well. I also didn't idolize fame anymore either. And I saw the business in a very different way after being a part of it.

Where did your strength generate from?

When I aligned with my heritage, that's where I found my strength again.

How did you identify with your race when you were younger?

Once my hair was cut off (it was super curly), it wasn't so much what I identified myself as. It was kind of what other people identified me as, and it was definitely of the African persuasion even as fair as my complexion was. I also had a new stepfamily, which was the Gordy family. So we're talking about an immense difference from the small town of my Ohio family to this one who was very celebrity-cultured and a very driven, competitive family who embraced me completely. I definitely changed. Although when I was a small child, I used to have a globe in my room in Ohio, and I'd put pins on the map and say I was going to travel and go to all of these places. And looking back I think the universe opened up the door for all of that to happen.

So do you believe in destiny?

Partially. It's like a vision. You can either stay where you are or choose to walk across the desert to find out if it's a hallucination or if it's real. It could be an oasis or it might not be real, but it's a chance you have to take. I think you're always given an opportunity, but you have to want it.

What do you feel was the best opportunity you were given when you were younger?

Probably moving here to LA. I don't think I realized it at the time, but being exposed to the culture of the entertainment business certainly was a change from growing up in Ohio and thinking that celebrity culture was cool. As I started to hear industry background stories about people's lives, I didn't go into the industry blindly and had a realistic view on it. That was pretty great, but it also turned you off of it too.

I'm curious about the first thing you experienced in the industry that you didn't really vibe with and the first things you remember really liking about it.

If you're trying to raise a family in it, it's definitely a very bohemian lifestyle. The hours of work challenges a family, especially when every single

WHEN I ALIGNED
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THAT'S WHERE
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AGAIN.



JILL WEARS
DRESS BY NORMA KAMALI



JILL WEARS
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NECKLACE JILL'S OWN

person works. I did enjoy that there were so many women in the business on the Gordy side – women being behind the scenes at Motown and being in all parts of publishing and road managing. It was something that you didn't really see everywhere else. Motown had a pretty great creative environment for women and men. It was equal. Everyone was like a family.

With raising a family being a challenge, did you find it impacted a lot of your decision making?

Yes, because the Gordy family always inspired a good debate and having opinions. They highlighted a lot of conversation. The kids were always encouraged to be doing something creative and something you loved. It

didn't always have to be music. You were just expected to be successful and not to think of failure at all.

Did you feel a lot of pressure from that?

No, because in Ohio I felt like that's where my dreams started, and those dreams were nurtured and fostered in Los Angeles. The fulfillment of those were provided by the tools that I received from coming here in LA with the Gordy family who was just like, "You'll have some hard times, but nothing's impossible." There were values which had a lot to do with spirituality and confidence – never victimizing yourself and never giving into defeat.

Did music feel like an obvious choice to pursue based on being around so much of it, or did it feel like a very personal choice?

I think that people tend to go into things that they're exposed to. If I had gotten into science more I probably would have headed down that road. At one point I wanted to be an attorney. When I was really young, I remember my mom had one boyfriend who was an attorney, and I really found it fascinating.

Would you consider it now? You're a natural when it comes to politics, debates, and the justice system.

I don't know if I would want to go into politics, because I don't really like the people in it. I think they're quite foul, and that's because the wrong people are in it. People like me would be perfect for it though, because we're not moved by ego to do it.

You have a pretty big political voice and following on the Twitter sphere. What's your stance on the current climate in a nutshell?

Everyone is out for themselves. The majority of politicians in Washington need to be put out to pasture. The Lobbyists and corporations run the country, and Big Pharma.

How do protests make you feel?

I'm all for protests, but I'm for people being very intelligent with their protests. Behavior always speaks louder. And results will speak louder than any words anybody tells you.

Political debates and discussions online aside, what else interests you on the web?

I really like connecting with people, hearing stories of their lives. Sometimes they've said that my music was a soundtrack to a certain part of their lives. And that's always kind of trippy, especially when I didn't think anybody bought the damn record!

It was a classic. Was there any song they'd pick out in particular?

"Violet Blue", a lot. Some people have their ones like "G Spot". I like the fact that there's this sort of sense memory, like having a vintage outfit. And I think all of Prince's songs were kind of like vintage postcards... and little vintage shoes and books and purses that take people back to really secure times or a time where they felt really strong or they were really hopeful about something.

When you were working with Prince, did you feel like you had enough say in decisions being made revolving around you?

Not really, but I trusted him implicitly. But there were things I didn't really know, and I wasn't asking my family. I had a little bit of pride. I thought that I could manage it all on my own, but I had no idea about marketing and how labels worked. I started to see it when I would see how the label would leverage Prince with his artists. Like, "If you don't do this, were not going to do this" or vice versa. Things like that. I started to understand how business worked, and it's all bullshit.

What was your favorite song that you two recorded together?

I have to admit, I loved most of them. What always stands out for me is "Lady Cab Driver". He was in such a prolific phase of his life. Everything was wide open. And his passion for succeeding, watching him pull together this crew of people around him to facilitate this dream and this chariot ride... well, that was unlike anything I have ever witnessed. His discipline, his ability to manifest, it was incredibly inspirational.

I guess you could say you were a muse to him since "She's Always In My Hair" was said to be about you.

Yes. A muse who kept him amused. An amusing muse.

What's the story with "Wonderful Ass"?

Yes, I worked on this song with Prince. We wrote it together. Joking around and of course being silly somewhat. I recall Vanity of Vanity 6 had left the fold, and one thing we all agreed on was her ass was pretty wonderful. She was the poster child of Asses in those days – pre-J Lo and Kim Kardashian. Don't ask me how it was a topic, but people reminisce. And well, old lovers have conversations about things. Prince and I, by this time and incarnation of that song, we had all been through many things. There was history, but perhaps it had to do with a threesome we all once had, lol. But I digress, there has been some discrepan-

cy with Lisa and Wendy making claim that this song was about Wendy Melvoin's sister Susannah (Since Prince was dating her at the time). But how were some of the other women in his life to know the flip side of his life? Or mine? As my mom said, "Pillow talk is a funny thing. No?"

When I was younger I was a bit more private about a lot of things that went down between Prince and myself. I felt it was no one's business. But since Prince has died, the narratives have just become insane and incorrect at

JILL WEARS
COAT BY CLAUDIA LI
SHIRT BY UNIQLO



times. Look, I am not disputing that Prince might have told these chicks a song was about them. But since I was one of the songwriters, I was therefore in a position to set the record straight on this one.

You met Prince when you were 18. Do you think that he had a lot to do with how you moved through life later? Not even just musically?

It was hard, because there was a standard. Like the Gordy rule, he fit right into that timeline of that whole Gordy belief system. This was somebody who came from Minneapolis. So, meeting him was like, "Oh my gosh, I'm meeting people who vibe with what I'm being raised on." I feel like we worked so well together. He knew that I didn't want to rely on my family. He'd say, I'd have to get my own apartment and stand on my own two feet. And he'd cut up all my credit cards that my mom had gotten for me saying, "You can't live off of your mom, you have a job now."

What did your mom think about you and Prince?

She was a little hesitant about all of the girlfriends that he had and always kept it real with me. She told me to keep my eyes open, and she was right to some degree. He was scared of my mom. He said, "I know women like that."

And she was probably like, "I know men like that."

Right.

Do you feel like he was a source of empowerment for the women he employed?

It was tricky. Yes, I sang with him, but I was also dating him. On the salary I was getting I certainly couldn't afford the rent at any of the places I had. But he appreciated the work I put into things. After I made *Purple Rain*, I didn't make much money from it. I spent most of it buying him a present afterwards and buying my mom something. I bought him this ruby red cross and my mom a diamond opal.

Your stage presence is another thing I strongly admire about you, and I know I've asked you about this a bunch of times. You have this captivating, magnetic presence straight away when you get on stage and also in person. What is performing to you?

It's funny. When I was with Prince, in rehearsals, even though he was charismatic himself, he worked really hard to tame and execute it. Every step was created. I wasn't used to that except when I'd done plays or musicals. Over a period of time I just learned to let go. The camera picks

up everything and shows a lot about you even when you're not doing anything.

Maybe it took you a little while to unlock it, but it was always there it seems and didn't look or feel learned or trained in my opinion.

I didn't like doing choreographed work. There was a thing about making things not look rehearsed too; I never liked that. I've since discovered, I'm a commitment-phobe. In high school I remember a play we did in the summer. My friend wrote the script, and it had gotten picked up, and we went and performed it. If I had to continue doing that night after night – that's where your discipline comes in. Prince wanted all of the choreographed steps, but I just wanted to be free... just take the leash off and let me out of the cage.

What do you prefer out of singing, writing, and performing?

I do like the intimacy of performing. I used to really like writing. I think I had more motivation because of my dad. I grew up not ever meeting him, and he had disappeared when I was born. I'd spoken to him a couple times on the phone. For me, going on the tour and hitting his town and trying to get him to come and see me and those attempts were a great motivator.

I was about to ask where motivation came from with you.

That was it. I wanted to be so famous at one point that I wanted him to have to acknowledge me. When we were on the 1999 tour and it was around Thanksgiving, Prince knew I had invited my dad to the show, and he also knew that my dad didn't come. But it was so great, because he just pulled me to the side and said, "Forget him. This isn't about you." He gave me this whole talk. During the break we had on the tour, we just went and made songs. That was his way of shielding and protecting me, and he was right. No sense in carrying someone else's suffering.

Yes. You became free of that which is beautiful. Now, what is happening with you currently, and do you have any plans for the future? I know you have inspiration flowing in different creative areas at all times.

I'm working on my book of memoirs on the entertainment industry, and currently I'm featured on a weekly political panel for *The Dr. Vibe Show* – "Staggers State of Things", which is a lot of fun. Also, I'm writing articles for *Ubikwist* magazine and working on some new music and scheduling a launch of my Zen Bitch Lifestyle line.

IG @jilljonesmusic

JILL WEARS
DRESS BY NORMA KAMALI
NECKLACE JILL'S OWN



JILL WEARS
DRESS BY NORMA KAMALI
NECKLACE JILL'S OWN



THE GORDY FAMILY ALWAYS INSPIRED
A GOOD DEBATE AND HAVING OPINIONS...
THE KIDS WERE ALWAYS ENCOURAGED
TO BE DOING SOMETHING CREATIVE
AND SOMETHING YOU LOVED.



JILL WEARS
DRESS BY NORMA KAMALI
RING JILL'S OWN

I REALLY LIKE
CONNECTING
WITH PEOPLE,
HEARING STORIES
OF THEIR LIVES.



JILL WEARS
DRESS BY NORMA KAMALI
NECKLACE JILL'S OWN

JILL WEARS
COAT BY CLAUDIA LI
SHIRT BY UNIQLO
JEANS BY ZARA
RINGS JILL'S OWN



I'm late and as excited as someone on her first date. I am set to interview the legendary Susi Wyss in her vivid apartment in Paris's mythic 14th Arrondissement. She has agreed to grant me an audience to discuss her autobiography *Guess Who is the Happiest Girl in Town*, published this past spring.

My mobile rings: "Bouba, where are you? I'm waiting!" And no one makes Susi wait. "You know I hate interviews as much as I hate people who are late," Susi chides me when she opens the door to her queendom on the 10th floor. "Come," she summons me with a smile, "Let's go downstairs for a drink. And then we'll talk."

Susi has always been strictly cash and carry, but from her, we'll accept anything. I've known her since I was 16, when we both partied at Serge Kruger's "Domingo" nights at Bataclan (where she was picking up some tasty, young, blue-eyed dude named Edgar when I first met her).

Today, we both find a corner in a lively brasserie, her dog Lilly with us, where Susi is a regular. This is a woman who loves life and is at home wherever she is at the moment. Everyone in the neighbourhood knows her and greets her accordingly. Susi is a star from a revolutionary era. She is 80 years old, but time has not diminished her stunning face and her big, laughing azure eyes, nor her smile full of mischief, nor her legs which are the stuff of dreams...

Swiss German but of Czech and Hungarian extraction, she grew up in a modest but happy home in Zurich. The eldest of four children, she

married young to Heiri, the man who fathered her son Morgan – and followed her husband to South Africa before setting up house in Paris.

After five years of matrimony, Susi began to get bored. Possessed even then of a certain "je ne sais quoi", she met a jetsetting couple while on holiday in St Tropez at the beginning of the Sixties. The man was an Italian prince and the woman a dazzlingly beautiful Frenchwoman. Together, the couple would initiate Susi to the pleasures of sex and sexual freedom while opening the doors to a whole new world of "beautiful people."

Susi warns that she fears boring me when talking about the life she's lived, but I convince her that it's not every day that one is granted an audience with the iconic Susi Wyss. Her life has been the stuff of epic novels, worthy of Jack London or Joseph Conrad where she has rubbed elbows (and sometimes other parts) with the "rich and famous" for more than 50 years.

Muse, madame, and iconic call girl, Susi has seen it all, lived it all, and survived to tell. The saying "Sex & Drugs & Rock N'Roll" was arguably created just for her. Some of the biggest names of the 20th century have been part of her circle, and she part of theirs: Salvador Dali, Ernest Hemingway, Andy Warhol, David Bowie, Helmut Newton, Yves Saint Laurent, Jerry Hall, Paul and Talitha Getty, Karl Lagerfeld, Iggy Pop, Robert Mapplethorpe, Roman Polanski, Peter Hearst, Baron Eric de Rothschild, Antonio Lopez, Milos Forman, Brigitte Bardot, Gunther Sachs, Kenneth Anger, and Pete Townsend just to name a few...

BON VIVANT

SUSI WYSS BY BARBARA BLANCHARD
TRANSLATION BY STEVEN TATE

PHOTOGRAPHS: IÑAKI

MY LIFE HAS BEEN
MAGICAL,
PURE AND SIMPLE





LE TOUT-PARIS PHOTO FROM ALICIA DRAKE'SBOOK
A BEAUTIFUL FALL: FASHION, GENIUS AND GLORIOUS EXCESS, 2006
DINNER AT LA COUPOLE, PARIS: (F.L.T.R.) SUSI, ANTONIO LOPEZ,
EIA (FROM ANDY WARHOL'S FACTORY), KARL LAGERFELD
PHOTOGRAPH: MAX SCHELER
COURTESY OF EDITION PATRICK FREY



WITH OR WITHOUT
MONEY, NO ONE
HAS CONTROL
OVER ME.



SUSI SUNBATHING NEAR JOHANNESBURG
PHOTOGRAPH: HEIRI SCHMID, 1958
COURTESY OF EDITION PATRICK FREY



HIGH LIFE: DALI, SUSI, HEIRI,
BRIGITTE BARDOT AND GUNTER SACHS
AT COSTUME BALL, 1966
PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY OF EDITION PATRICK FREY

I'VE ALWAYS BEEN
ME EVEN WHEN
I KNEW NOTHING
OF THE WORLD.

How would you describe your life to someone who doesn't know you?

My life has been magical, pure and simple. I'm like a comic book character – a kind of sorceress from seventh heaven. I'm eternally grateful to have had the pleasure to live through a fascinating period (the Sixties and Seventies) and to have had some fabulous friends. It was a time of freedom. Happiness. And then, from one minute to the next, it changed in the Eighties. That imbecile Mitterrand chased all the rich people out of Paris, emptying France's coffers.

You have a certain secret...

I was very ill when I was a little girl. I had this nervous condition that I still have today, but back then there were no antibiotics to treat it. I simply cannot stand the feeling of clothing against my skin. So I guess stripping is in my DNA!

Your childhood holds a special place in your autobiography. Mamatschi and Papatschi were essential to making you who you are.

My parents were plain, fat, and poor. But they had joie de vivre. Joie de vivre, that's a thing that makes life worth living. My parents sang to each of us children every night. I had a simple but very happy childhood.

There's a link in your memoir between food and sensuality... and sex.

Clearly! Cooking is an act of love. In this, my mother was the queen of love. All love. Cooking, relationships – I learned how to love in learning how to eat.

Why did you release your memoir in English?

Sex in German is ugly. French is too romantic. To talk about sex, English is the ideal language. "I'm Horny." It sounds great! And then there's also the fact that I'm not a writer; I'm a storyteller.

Do you really consider yourself a Madame?

Madame, call girl, whatever. I loved making love. I loved fucking. I almost never fell in love, which allowed me to sleep with anyone I wanted to. I was free. It wasn't always easy, but it was the perfect life for me.

At a certain point in your life, you crossed over from being a call girl to being a dominatrix —

I always keep a Swiss Army knife. [laughs deliriously]

You've never done anything against your will?

I've never done anything I didn't want to do. I've slept with men, women, beautiful people,

ugly people. Young, old, invalids. Whatever. No one ever forced me to do anything. Pleasure was my main motivation. There always had to be some chemistry. I've also been crazy in love with people I never slept with.

One could say that you were destined to live a life outside of the ordinary?

I never had this plan for how I was going to live my life. Everything always happened by accident. Who could have predicted that I would meet Dali when I was 25 and that I would catch his eye? Salvador invited me and my son for holidays at his house in Cadaqués. He was the only adult who didn't bore Morgan...

You were even his muse?

He adored me. I knitted him a necklace in the shape of a cock one day. He found it hilarious, and he wore it quite proudly when he'd emerge from (Paris's famed Hotel) Crillon. His patrons were scandalized, but we had a lot of fun. I posed for him in his studio in Cadaqués. The canvas from that session has been on exhibition in a collection in Berlin.

You did realize back then that you were traveling in "extraordinary" company?

I had no idea because I'd grown up with alcoholic neighbours who beat their wives. It wasn't that I wanted to hang out with rich folks because they were rich, I just found them fun. They could do what they wanted. I had friends who had money, and I was very happy for them.

Who are the people you admired most?

They were all unique and fabulous. I've met some wonderful people... really great people, and it would be impossible to name them all. And a lot of them I didn't even have sex with.

Anyone who's been a very important person in your life?

Paul Getty. A very intelligent man. I loved him deeply. He was a friend who saved my life several times. It was he who pushed me to write my book because he knew I wrote lovely letters. As I had no money because I always had to make a living, he even offered to pay for my son's education, as my son wanted to go to school in Switzerland. I was also very close to his wife Talitha. A dear, dear friend... a marvelous woman with incredible style. Even now, she's still in fashion – you can still see her in fashion magazines.

Who was your greatest love?

Rick, my psycho English poet. Not a day goes by that I don't think of him. He was magical, unfor-

MORGAN ON THE SET
PHOTO BY VOLKER VOGELER, MADRID, 1972
COURTESY OF EDITION PATRICK FREY





**COOKING,
RELATIONSHIPS –
I LEARNED HOW TO
LOVE IN LEARNING
HOW TO EAT**

gettable, never equaled. But he was also very tortured. He spent his life in prison. He looked like Elizabeth Taylor with his gorgeous blue eyes and had been a lover of Ava Gardner, my favourite actress. I had to have him. When we walked down the street, we were like gods. We really loved each other, and that made for some sparks. People would stop us on the street. He's still alive, but he doesn't want to see me. But that's OK – I'm just happy to know he's still alive.

Tell me about Egon Spleen (those who have read her memoir will understand).

He was as gorgeous as a god, but he was tight-fisted. He never even gave me a flower! I wasn't in love with him, but we fucked. The sex was out of this world – except when he took cocaine. Then it was too cold. In any event, being with him was doomed. I wasn't well known enough for a guy like him. But I was very proud: me, a woman ten years older than he was – I had him in my bed!

You made a huge impression on a lot of musicians: Iggy Pop even wrote the song "Girls" about you in 1971.

I went from being "the happiest girl in town" to "the most envied girl in town!" But I was never a groupie. For me, it was all about being happy – kissing, fucking, eating. Voilà.

What's your relationship to music?

Music saved me. It has soothed me throughout my entire life. It was thanks to LSD that I "heard" sounds for the very first time. It was wonderful.

Did you ever think of acting as a career? You hung around a lot of directors – Roman Polanski and Milos Forman, among others...

I would have been very bad as an actress. It did not interest me in the least. I don't like acting or being directed: do this less, do this a little more, not like that. I left that to other people. Everybody has their own lane. That one wasn't mine.

But you were photographed by some of the greats!

I was very photogenic: I had a great body, but I really didn't realize it. It was all for fun. Helmut Newton was very funny. But posing for Helmut, Alice Springs, Hans Feurer, and all those others did not earn me one centime. They were all very egocentric, stingy, sometimes horrible – but I liked them. Robert Mapplethorpe loved me like family. He was Antonio's best friend. They were enormously talented, but I never set out to be a model. I had enough just to live.

At one time, you were devoted to fashion and couture designing. Why didn't you continue along this path? You were surrounded by famous designers, after all...

Fashion is slavery. Every day doing the same thing? What a nightmare! I wasn't cut out for that life. To be a courtesan was about freedom. I said yes sometimes, I said no sometimes – but I always had a good time. I love making clothes for my friends for free. But I never wanted to exploit people, nor did I want to be a slave.

You were part of the inner circle of the legendary illustrator Antonio Lopez. What memories do you have of him?

That's the person I loved more than anyone else in the world. The most generous, the sexiest, the most marvelous man I've ever met. The world of fashion – even today – still owes him a great

debt. Certain people are forgotten. Very few people helped him when he fell ill from AIDS. It was my friend Jerry Hall who paid his hospital bills in Paris. When he died, my life stopped for a long time.

One day you'd said you had enough of always being available for everyone.

I'd had enough of spending my life waiting by the telephone. Something had to change. I'd always preferred being poor-but-happy over being rich-but-unhappy. You can't have everything.

Do you still have friends from way back when?

Yes: Frida. My very dear friend Frida from Johannesburg, a lesbian I met when I was living in South Africa with my then-husband. For her, I wanted to leave everything. She was horrified. I've always been me even when I knew nothing of the world. She taught me everything, this extremely cultured woman. Thanks to her, I discovered George Brassens, Juliette Gréco, among others. She lives in Texas now, and we still talk to each other every week.

If you had to do it all again...?

I'd do it exactly the same. I wouldn't change a thing. Or if I did, I'd divorce much earlier! It took me 50 years to get around to it, but we ended up understanding each other. We even talk to each other a lot now. We were virgins when we met. We didn't know anything about life.

**FOR ME, IT WAS
ALL ABOUT BEING
HAPPY – KISSING,
FUCKING, EATING.
VOILÀ**



TO BE A
COURTESAN
WAS ABOUT
FREEDOM



SUSI WYSS
PHOTOGRAPH BY LAURENCE SACKMANN, 1975
COURTESY OF EDITION PATRICK FREY



Any regrets? I was very touched by the chapter "Morgan is sad".

I wasn't a good mother. But what is a good mother anyway? I was there, obviously. Morgan was very mature – too mature for his age. My son is extremely intelligent and funny, but he began taking drugs too early. And who was I to forbid him? Hell, I loved drugs my damned self. Opium was the best. He had the right to do them too. My son had the right to do anything he wanted. But it made me suffer a lot. I feel very guilty about that...

In your memoir, you write, "You yearn for love and all you get is sex, sex, sex..."

In fact, I've lived a normal life. We all want the same thing. So, yes, there's a lot of sex in the book, because that's what people find interesting. But there's also a lot of love; I live for that. My book is like a love letter. All the cooking I've done over the years, all the dinners, it's all love.

What do you think of this era today?

We're going backwards in time, it's the Middle Ages again. When I think of everything people fought for in the Sixties and Seventies: peace, sexual freedom, abortion rights...

Do you consider yourself a feminist?

I detest that word. I don't have to fight for something that was given to me at birth! With or without money, no one has control over me.

What do you think of the women of today?

Ha! They haven't changed. Nothing's changed. Women today don't dare to do anything. They're uptight. I don't know a married woman who

would ever tell her husband that she's had some sex on the side. It's ridiculous.

What's your life like now?

Without a man, I don't care. I don't fuck anymore. But I still have my friends, and I am never without my dog.

What would be a luxury to you?

I'd love to live in a hotel before dying, where people would cook for me and would walk my dog.

Are there things you still dream of doing?

I'd love to go to Croatia, because I have family there on my mother's side. I want to return in the footsteps of Zora the Red. She was a 14-year-old orphan girl who headed a gang of boys, a rebel whose word was the law. She really existed. I love this book by Kurt Held. When I was little, I dreamed of being a man so I could go out on adventures. But as I didn't have a cock and I couldn't change my gender, I became another kind of adventurer.

How do you want to be remembered?

I don't give a damn, really, what people will say about me after I'm dead. They can say whatever they want about me: whore or not a whore, pretty or ugly. I had a perfect body. I no longer have it. So what! I've lived some intensely beautiful moments, and I've lived the life of my dreams.

Merci Susi.

With gratitude to Barbara Blanchard aka Bouba.

Guess Who is the Happiest Girl in Town
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CATBIRD- ING



PHOTOGRAPHS: JEON SEUNG
STYLING: NEIL STUART
HAIR: ERNESTO MONTENOVO @ THE LONDON STYLE AGENCY
USING BABYLISS PRO TOOLS
MAKE UP: TERRY BARBER @ DAVID ARTISTS USING M.A.C COSMETICS
MODELS: AWENG CHUOL @ NEVS
CASTING: CATERINA MATTEUCCI
RETOUCHING: CURVE DIGITAL



LEFT
AWENG WEARS
JACKET BY MIU MIU
EARRINGS BY TOPSHOP
RIGHT
AWENG WEARS
JUMPSUIT BY STELLA MCCARTNEY
EARRINGS BY TOPSHOP



LEFT
AWENG WEARS
DRESS & SCARF BY BALENCIAGA
EARRINGS BY TOPSHOP
RIGHT
AWENG WEARS
DRESS BY OFF WHITE
EARRINGS BY TOPSHOP





LEFT
AWENG WEARS
COAT BY GIVENCHY
DRESS BY THE ATTICO
EARRINGS BY TOPSHOP
RIGHT
AWENG WEARS
HOODED TOP BY 2HR.SET
SKIRT BY PACO RABANNE
EARRINGS BY TOPSHOP
BOOTS BY GINA





LEFT
AWENG WEARS
COAT BY GIVENCHY
EARRINGS BY TOPSHOP
RIGHT
AWENG WEARS
BUSTIER BY THE ATTICO
JOGGERS BY RICK OWENS
EARRINGS BY TOPSHOP



AWENG WEARS
COAT BY BALMAIN
HOODED TOP BY 2HR.SET
SHORTS BY PRADA
EARRINGS BY TOPSHOP
BOOTS BY GINA



LEFT

AWENG WEARS

BUSTIER BY THE ATTICO

JOGGERS BY RICK OWENS

EARRINGS BY TOPSHOP

BOOTS BY GINA

RIGHT

AWENG WEARS

SWEATER BY MAISON MARGIELA

EARRINGS BY TOPSHOP





LEFT
AWENG WEARS
DRESS BY SACAI
EARRINGS BY TOPSHOP
RIGHT
AWENG WEARS
DRESS BY GUCCI
EARRINGS BY TOPSHOP
SHOES BY GINA





ILLUSTRATION: TONI MORRISON
BY CARLOS APONTE

THIN LOVE AIN'T LOVE AT ALL

WITNESS: MONIQUE LONG

This is a tribute to the late, formidable Toni Morrison. Even though she was nearing ninety, her passing came as a shock and loss to many of us. Coincidentally, a week prior to her death, I had been regaling my friends over dinner with stories of how, as a student, I was a bit obsessed and consequently had had multiple encounters with her. They howled with laughter when I recounted the time I crashed a party in her honor on the rooftop terrace of the Kennedy Center in Washington DC, just to get a glimpse of her. The culmination of these meetings was a reading at a bookstore in the early aughts. I tip-toed up to her, humbly asking if she would autograph her portrait in my copy of *I Dream A World*. She refused; "I only sign the books that I write," she said, with her deep voice and serious gaze fixed on me. Rebuffed, but I still had the treasure of her writings.

Morrison is the treasure. Not only was she able to make language submit to her will, she was also a wordsmith who adeptly sussed out the nuance of literature. She was an activist-editor, whose own writing complicated the beauty and importance of being Black in the United States – a literary daughter of Baldwin and Hurston. Timothy Greenfield-Sanders recently released the documentary *Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am*. It's a first-person testimony, with Morrison looking directly at the camera conveying her life story. It's a gift. The narrative is interspersed with images of works by contemporary artists, a filmic strategy I found interesting, if not surprising.

The day after Morrison's death, I found myself in the studio of painter Alexandria Smith. We were both mourning her passing when Smith mentioned that she based the works in her MFA thesis exhibition on *The Bluest Eye*. Speaking with her, I was at once struck by this powerful connection in a way that had not affected me when I saw it in the documentary. I resolved to find other artists whose work had been personally impacted by Toni Morrison. Although I know there are many others, here are a few artists who I had the honor of speaking with as they reflected on Morrison, her legacy and influence.



ALEXANDRIA SMITH: TOP LEFT, *THE UNCERTAINTY OF IT ALL*, 2014. TOP RIGHT, *DEAR CLAUDIA*, 2015. ABOVE, *INTO THE MYSTIC*, 2019, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

WITNESS: ALEXANDRIA SMITH

Toni Morrison has been one of my biggest inspirations throughout my entire life and art career. It started out with *The Bluest Eye*, her first novel, a book that I read four or five times now at different periods throughout my life. I revisited that novel; one time in particular was when I was in grad school about 10 years ago – 2008-2010. When I was at Parsons, I was really analyzing that book, left and right, cover to cover. It became the inspiration for my entire thesis show – I was creating oil paintings of young girls engaging in play (oil on wood panel). So, young Brown girls engaging in play that borders on violent or sexually explicit, but still walking this fine line, this grey area. I thought about the idea of children being seen and not heard, things being swept under the rug and being taboo, especially in the African-American community.

Those were some themes that Toni was exploring in *The Bluest Eye*. There is one piece in particular that I made a few years after grad school, a collage called *mud pies and marigolds*, because there is one line (that I can't remember verbatim) in the novel that was a metaphor for what Pecola was experiencing when she was raped – which was that the marigolds didn't grow that summer, or that spring... something to that effect. It was so poignant and resonated so deeply with me; I made a collage about it after the paintings.

Then I was listening to an interview that Toni gave, and she mentioned that she had one regret out of all her novels; it was that she didn't develop one character enough or she didn't give that character enough credit or compassion... something to that effect, where she was dissatisfied with the way she wrote about that character. It made me think of Claudia, who was Pecola's best friend in the novel. And I was like, that's probably the character. So, I made a portrait of Claudia, called *Dear Claudia* – that's another painting.

And so now, before she passed, about a month ago, I decided that I was going to make sure that I read every one

of Toni's novels this summer. Because some of her earlier novels are difficult for me to unpack and to face... particularly *Beloved*, *Jazz*, and *Song of Solomon*. I didn't read *Sula* for a while, but I read that earlier this year. So, I revisited *God Help the Child*, which loosely became inspiration for the new body of work I'm making, along with other elements (like Grace Jones, Josephine Baker, and dualism). So that's what I was going to embark on this summer and fall... and yes, I was devastated yesterday [upon hearing of Morrison's passing].

Now I'm trying to think about the blueprint that she laid for us and how I can be very clear and persistent in how I want my work to be viewed... and the voice that I'm allowing to come through. I think she's inspired me in a lot of ways, as well as Simone Leigh, in just being unapologetic about who you're making your work for. And there is nothing wrong with that. And who your audience is, which is a question Black artists are always asked – problematically – usually asked by White people or people that don't have African-American backgrounds.

So, I'm trying to figure out how to take all that mourning and grief and loss and sadness and continue to do the work. She's showed us how expansive and powerful and needed our voices are. She's Grandmama Toni – who birthed us, supported us. Throughout my life, I've always revisited her interviews, her work, and her essays, reminding myself (along with Audre Lorde, of course), that "you matter, your voice is important, and people need to hear it. People deserve to hear it and you deserve to be heard."

Alexandria Smith is a mixed media visual artist and co-organizer of the collective Black Women Artists for Black Lives Matter (BWA for BLM). She recently was named Head of Painting at the Royal College of Art, London.

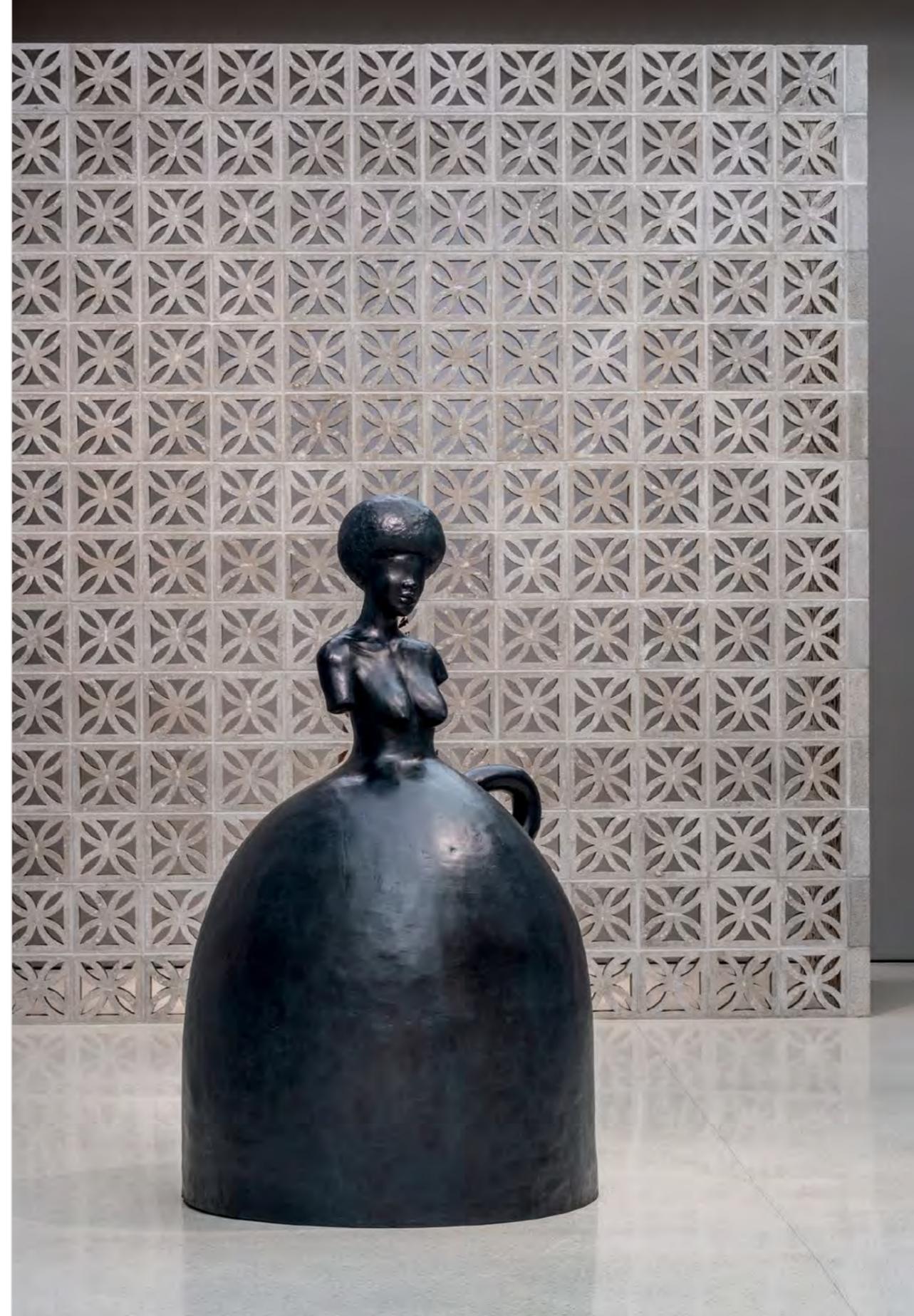
WITNESS: SIMONE LEIGH

Having read *The Bluest Eye* at a very young age (I believe I was 8 or 9), I don't remember a time when I wasn't aware of Morrison's work. It made me feel that there was literature out there that was written for me in particular. I consider it such a gift that I grew up with this sense of self, of being seen in the world. Later, it was her conversation with Charlie Rose that clarified what I had already felt – that she was focused on me, Black girls and women like me, as her primary audience. And she saw that audience as vast and complex.

Later in my early Art world experiences, I would understand why this was so important – looking in the mirror and not seeing oneself in vampirism. This experience becomes

all the more violent when you make work that is contingent on discourse. I would go on to echo her sentiments when I discussed my work. Black women are my primary audience, I have said. It became a call. That audience quickly made itself known. Like-minded women got in touch with me one way or the other. Some have become my mentors, friends, and collaborators.

Simone Leigh's practice is an object-based, ongoing exploration of Black female subjectivity. She won the 2018 Hugo Boss Award and her show, *Loophole of Retreat*, opened at the Guggenheim in April.



SIMONE LEIGH: *JUG*, 2019
© SIMONE LEIGH; COURTESY
OF THE ARTIST AND LUHRING
AUGUSTINE, NEW YORK.
PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID HEALD
© 2019 THE SOLOMON R.
GUGGENHEIM FOUNDATION



XAVIERA SIMMONS:
RIGHT
SUNDOWN
(NUMBER TWO), 2018
LEFT
SUNDOWN
(NUMBER FOURTEEN), 2018
COURTESY OF
THE ARTIST AND
DAVID CASTILLO GALLERY

One of my favorite places in upstate New York is the place where the river, the Hudson River, meets the mountain and there's a beach. It's one of the most beautiful spaces because it reminds me of another space and another country. When I think about Toni Morrison, I think about some of my favorite landscapes, my favorite places, where I can think about the glory of things. When I mean glory, I mean glory as in grace, as in monumental beauty, as in focus, as in clarity, as in flow, as in kind of a speechless beauty.

For me, to meditate or think about or contemplate Toni Morrison is to think about my whole life. What I mean is that I remember growing up and my mother having *The Bluest Eye* or *Sula*, I believe it was, on the bookcase. I remember seeing Toni Morrison's books on my mom's bookshelf, when I was young. She [Morrison] was someone who has always been in my life in different kinds of ways. She was always the guide, she continued to be the guide, she will continue to be the guide.

Her voice is a part of how I have developed into being a conscious, strong, creative woman whose ancestors descend from American slavery on all sides. For me, her words are a clear reflection, have always been a clear reflection of the lineage that I come from. Obviously, she's as monumental as any mountain. There's something about the image of a mountain meeting a river that keeps coming to me. Again, it's one of my favorite images or spaces that I've ever been, because it's very liberating and at the same time very strong and sturdy. When I think about Toni Morrison, I think about both a liberation and a

WITNESS: XAVIERA SIMMONS

strong and sturdy, persistent, persevering spirit.

I think she gave voice to what it means, obviously, to live in America and what it means to be a descendent of this construction in all of its forms with all of the multitude of characters. For me, Morrison, tied to a lot of the people that she loved to read or influenced, is also... she helped to expand my visual and verbal vocabulary. I can only be thankful that she gave the grace of all of herself and for this monumental figure that she is, that she was. She's unforgettable. I mean, she's as unforgettable as Nina, as Aretha, as James. These are titans. These are people who, even though they may have been fallible in their human form – they're titanic, they're monumental, they're necessary. They are part of the blood that makes the country what it is.

Xaviera Simmons's body of work spans photography, performance, video, sound, sculpture, and installation. She defines her studio practice, which is rooted in an ongoing investigation of experience, memory, abstraction, present and future histories – specifically shifting notions surrounding landscape – as cyclical rather than linear. Simmons recently participated in the "Platform" section of this year's Armory Show (curated by Sally Tallant, executive director of the Queens Museum and former director of the Liverpool Biennial). She also exhibited the temporary public artwork *Convene* at Hunter's Point, Queens, following a commission from the Sculpture Center's Public Process program.





VANESSA GERMAN:
INSTALLATION VIEW,
SOMETIMES.WE.CANNOT.BE
WITH.OUR.BODIES, 2018
COURTESY OF THE MATTRESS
FACTORY, PITTSBURGH, PA
PHOTOGRAPH: TOM LITTLE

WITNESS: VANESSA GERMAN

Toni Morrison's work demanded of me to leave behind my small places – to leave behind little thinking and little being and little ways of inhabiting my body and my imagination. To be with Toni Morrison's work, I had to leave behind the lies that have been put into me ever since I was in elementary school – the lies that I was a worthless, ugly, monstrous fuck up. You can't be with Toni Morrison's work... because reading her work is a reading of the soul. It is really a process of being present to the being of your body and the living being that she has created inside of the worth of her life, the worth of her soul, and the worth of her dimensional spirit.

Sometimes, I never felt good enough to read Toni Morrison's work. I think what she was saying is that we are the work, that it is not possible to not be good enough for it. You have to recover from your own self-loathing to be present with that work, as present as possible. My mom used to hang out with women like Toni Morrison, when we were growing up in LA. You just couldn't be a flimsy human being in the room with those women, even as a child. They would tell you who you were. You couldn't say flimsy things to them. I thought that the measure of a woman came from the measure of her hips, because they were all women with these big hips.

In the work that I have, called *sometimes.we.cannot.be.with.our.bodies*, which I go to install at the Union for Contemporary Art in Omaha next week, it's Toni Morrison's work from *Song of Solomon* that begins the progression into the installation space – those words about love, "Lord, don't give me no more love, I can't take it, no more love," and talking about the seven days. That is work to bring your soul into contemplation, to bring your soul into presence, physical presence. There are only 26 letters in the alphabet, so there is really only so much language you can have about allowing your soul into a space to be nourished.

Vanessa German is a visual and performance artist based in the Pittsburgh neighborhood of Homewood. In 2018, she won the Don Tyson Prize, a biannual \$200,000 award for outstanding achievement in visual art from the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas. She was also among this year's United States Artists fellows, an award that comes with a \$50,000 unrestricted grant.

VANESSA GERMAN:
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PHOTOGRAPH: TOM LITTLE



WITNESS: TORKWASE DYSON

SO WHY PILATE AS A CHARACTER?

Song of Solomon is amazing, number one. I'm interested in Pilate's inheriting the song, her singing the song and misinterpreting the song... well, the ways in which the song has been abstracted. Her mother, her father, her mother's dying in childbirth – all of that was about love and land, right? So, she came from an enslaved man who didn't know how to read when he inherited this land. Those were her memories – water and nature and beauty.

When the momma died in childbirth, the father flipped open the Bible and pointed to a word. Toni describes this word in this sentence [pause, emotional]. So the way in which Toni Morrison describes the letter on the page, I was like, wow, I can really fill shapes in that "P – I – L..." So anyway, the father [picks a name for the child, Pilate] and a woman's like, "you can't name the child that, that's the name of the dude who killed Jesus [Pontius Pilate]." And the father says, "Well, Jesus didn't save my wife." And here's Pilate in the world.

Pilate now is a grown, adult woman. She has the same piece of paper that her father wrote "P – I – L – O – T" on. An erring in her ear, she says, "The only word he ever wrote." But it was a box. I cannot stop thinking about that box. Inside that box. And outside that box is her body. Compositionally, that small box on that large, tall, beautiful... I just can't stop thinking about that relationship. And the writing.

So, Pilate, of course, had Hagar. And Hagar had Reba. She was taking care of all of them. She had come to town to take care of Milkman's mother. And just the way Toni described her with fortitude – with a kind of beauty and making, with a kind of purpose and reason for being that was outside the man. When in the end, when you find out that it's her father's bones that she's been having in her cabin all the time, that had been washed up to the cave, where they thought the gold was – the idea that she had

taken those bones, that had been washed up by the water and had them in a bag. Then Milkman, her nephew, then tries to tell her before she's killed that "those were your father's bones you've been carrying around all this time."

And somebody who can conjure all of that, who can sit down with purpose and do right by people and help people you don't even like. Then, when [pauses, emotional] she's in the church after Hagar dies of pneumonia and she's just hollerin', "Mercy!" Just mercy, just mercy. There's so much power in that [pauses, emotional]. It's so... I think that character [pauses, emotional] is just full of fortitude and love. And beauty. And the things that she does, the way she makes things, the way she collects things – port wine, a business out of the house. The way Toni describes her peeling an orange. The way she speaks to people, it's very direct.

And so the character for me, the way Toni builds Pilate: it's about language, but it's also about... where I really seep into the character. She talks about her berry-blue lips, her long legs, the way she sits, the way she talks is "angular" and "tall" and "dark." The fortitude... I can just feel it. You know what I mean? I just feel it. I think that's heaven. That's glory. A lot of people don't get to do that, be that. When I think about fortitude and I think about honesty and I think about love and giving, nature, memories of water and land and connection to both, the natural environment – she wasn't afraid of any of it. All of it was the same. One didn't get more glory than the next. So I'm writing a thing about her now; it's just in the proposal stage.

Torkwase Dyson is a New York-based painter and sculptor. Her latest exhibition, 1919: Black Water, opens at the Arthur Ross Gallery at Columbia University on September 27.



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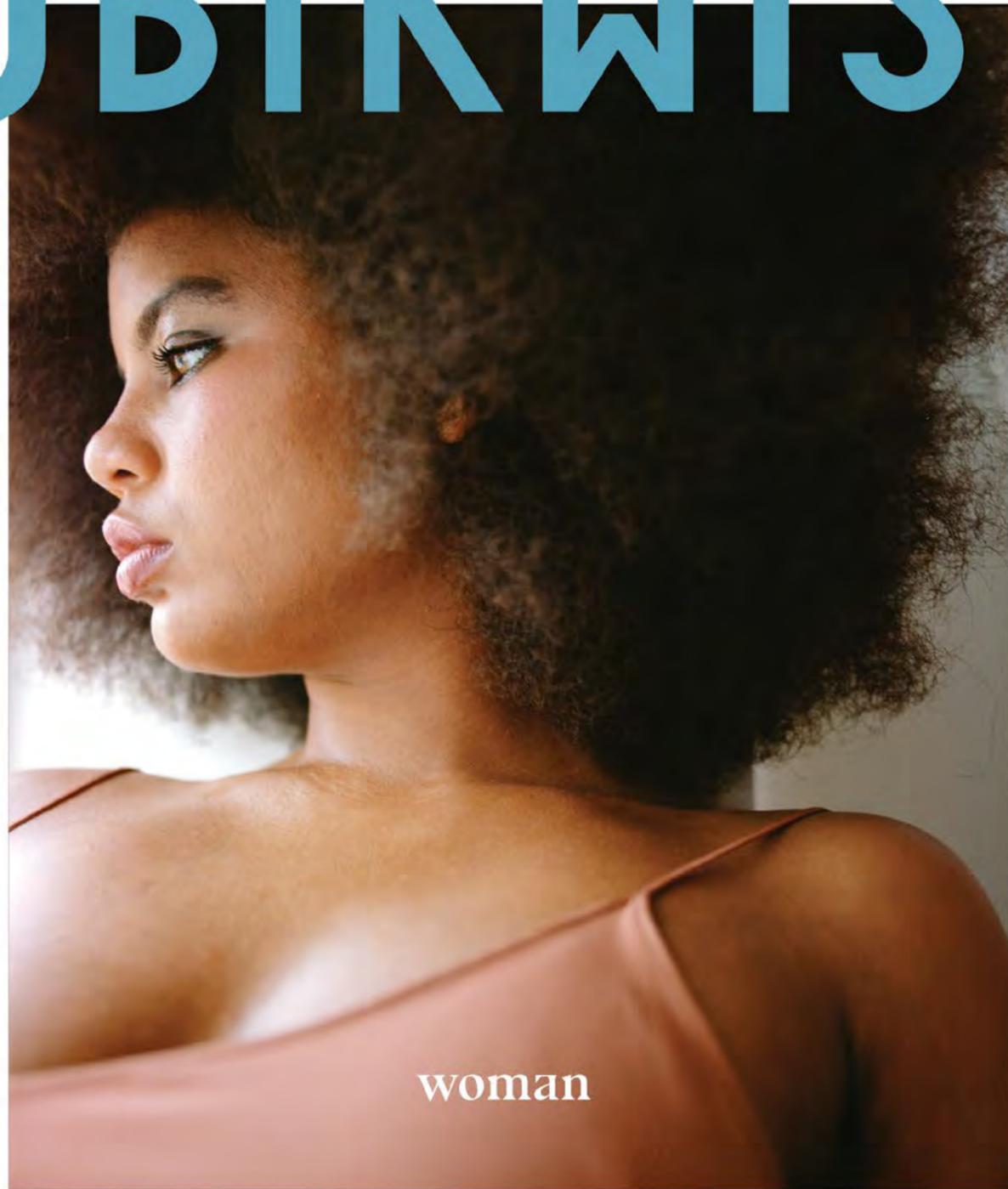


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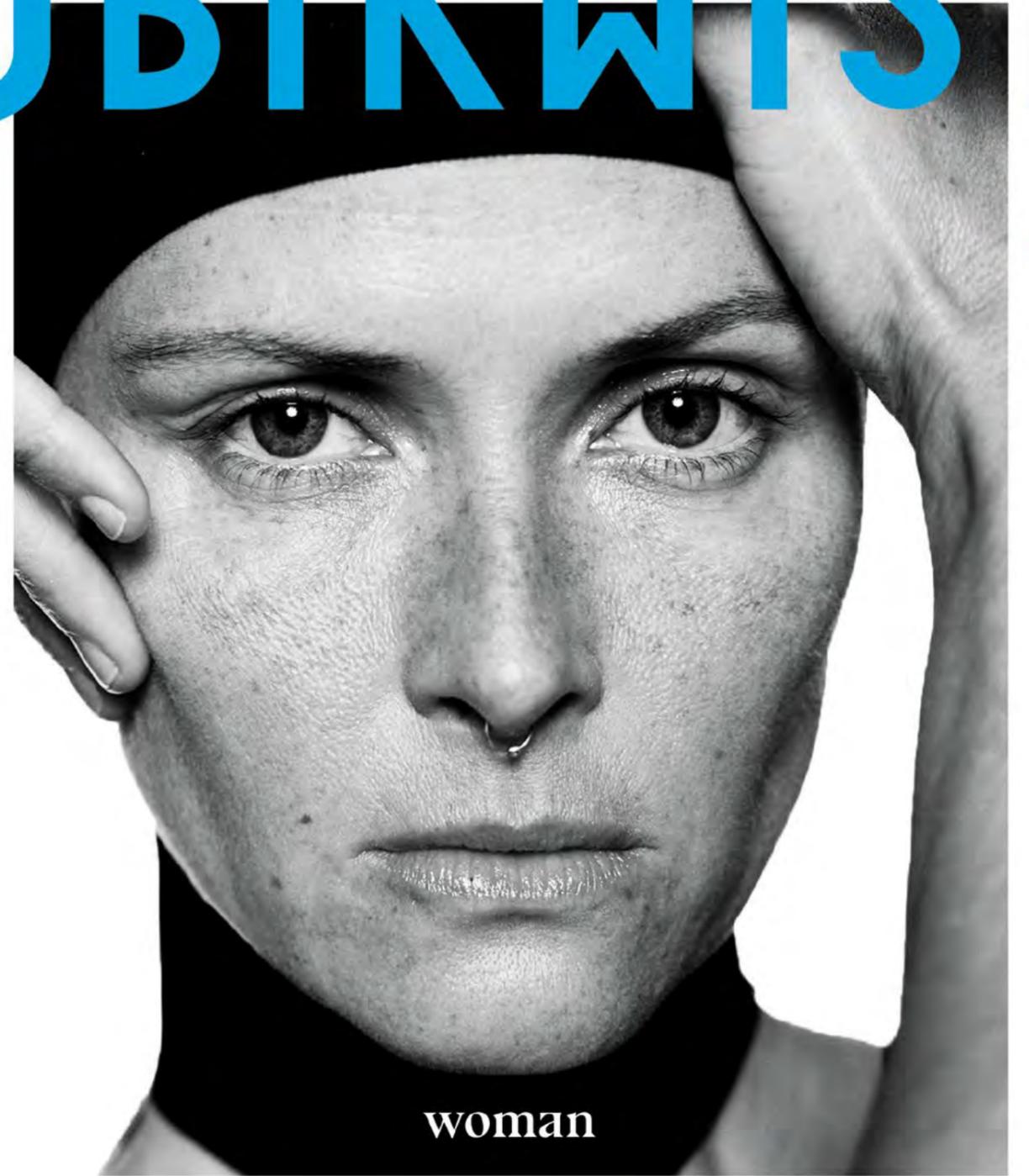


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