

Grace Before Jones: Camera, Disco, Studio

May 22 – August 31, 2020



Jean-Paul Goude, *One Man Show (Grace Multiplied, Paris, London)*, 1982

In 1979, Grace Jones has her face moulded by her collaborator and then-partner Jean-Paul Goude to produce multiple ultra-realist masks. These are intended to be worn by fellow musicians, performers, models, but is also for herself. Grace Jones had multiplied, turned herself into sculpture and serial form – an armada of Grace. Departing from the observation that Grace Jones is not one but multiple, the exhibition *Grace Before Jones: Camera, Disco, Studio* unfurls a range of Grace Joneses: from disco queen to dub cyborg; Jamaican to French; runway model to nightclub performer; black to white; feminine to masculine.

In embodying these seemingly opposite poles at once, Grace Jones entangles binary systems in style and in flesh. She both exemplifies and complicates theories of gender, sexuality, performance, race and cybernetics, discourses that flourished in parallel to her career. Dexterous in the art of self-reinvention, Jones' modes of performance can be said to borrow from what Daphne Brooks (professor of African American studies and Theatre Studies at Yale University) has called “the theatricality of blackness”, whose techniques “are able to articulate not the wholeness of black identity, but rather the constructedness of all identity” (in the words of Malik Gaines).

A cross between fan-fiction and biography, *Grace Before Jones* presents a multifaceted portrait of the iconic singer, focusing on her collaborations with artists, designers, photographers and musicians. Travelling through time, it also seeks to give both a historical background and contemporary perspective to Grace Jones' image-making, while expanding on stage design, music and fashion. Ultimately, the exhibition presents itself as an alternative way to write and tell art history, in welcoming "the manifestation of desire, anxiety, obsession and other fannish affective intensities" (Catherine Grant and Kate Random Love).

Installed across two of Nottingham Contemporary's large galleries, one is treated as backstage ("Right Light") and the other as stage ("Night Sight"). The first is based on the proposal that the studio (photography; music; dance) is a space of study; where appearance, poses, voices and gestures are trialled, rehearsed and corrected. The second, between catwalk and dancefloor, questions performance, spectatorship and intimacy. It departs from Adrian Piper's act of "voluntary self-objectification" enacted in *Some Reflective Surfaces* (1976) whose background is New York's disco scene in the 1960s.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a booklet acting as a score to the project with a curatorial note by Cédric Fauq, an essay by Kodwo Eshun and an unpublished interview of Grace Jones by Michele Wallace (author of the seminal *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* [1979]).

An ambitious public programme will run in echo to the exhibition, composed of performances, talks and listening sessions, as part of "Sonic Continuum".

Artists include ACT UP, Terry Adkins, Anthony Barboza, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Jean Dubuffet & Ilhan Mimaroglu, Babak Ghazi, Jean-Paul Goude, Keith Haring, Satch Hoyt, Peter Hujar, Arthur Jafa, Patrick Kelly, Louise Lawler, Larry Levan, Antonio Lopez, Robert Mapplethorpe, Adrian Piper, Jimmy Robert, Martha Rosler, Ming Smith, David Spada, Andy Warhol and Vivienne Westwood. With new commissions by Kim Coleman, Olu Ogunnaike, Ima-Abasi Okon and Terre Thaemlitz.

Exhibition curated by Cédric Fauq with Olivia Aherne.

"Sonic Continuum" curated by Sofia Lemos with Ryan Kearney.

Exhibition design with architect Borja Velez and artist Simeon Barclay.

Graphic identity by Leandro Pitz.