Jean-Paul Goude

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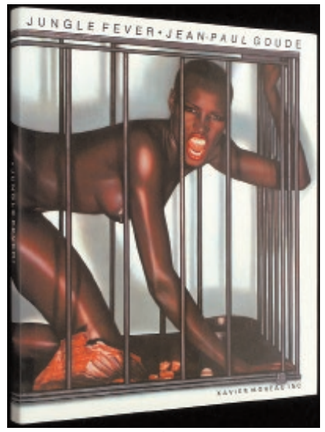
Grace Jones



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Goude's book *Jungle Fever* (1983), a controversial autobiographical retrospective documenting his obsession with black culture, immortalized his formidable ex-muse, Grace Jones.

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Goude's sketches of Jones; extraordinarily, she epitomized drawings of the daydream.

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Goude designed the artwork for Jones' single 'My Jamaican Guy' (1982) – a vivid manifestation of his singular vision to create a new breed of artist, and woman.

Perhaps nowhere in the rich historical co-mingling of music and fashion has the notion of 'becoming' been as vividly served up as by the Jamaican pop star Grace Jones. As the world's first new wave pop artist, Jones herself once attested, 'I wasn't born this way. One creates oneself.' But the story of Jones' creation is no solo show, for it was the irrepressible and exacting vision of Jean-Paul Goude - the legendary French art director, filmmaker and Jones' then lover - that drove her unforgettable visual legacy.

An icon in terms of both fashion and music, Jones collaborated with Goude to create performances, album art and music videos that propelled her semi-surreal image into the stratosphere. The pair met in New York in 1977, when Jones, then a model and aspiring singer, walked into his office at *Esquire* magazine. According to Goude, not only was she everything the other glossy models of the Farrah Fawcett-flick era were not, even more bizarrely she was the flesh-and-blood reality of his daydreamed sketches: 'It's a hot summer day and she's wearing a Miyake shirt to mid thigh, no skirt and there's no panties underneath, I swear, and flat shoes so it's almost like she's barefoot. She just has a little hat on the top of her head and, incredibly, things I've done in my own pictures – arm-warmer sleeves on her elbows and knees like colourful bandages. The contrast between the stark simplicity of the Miyake clothes and her wild look was amazing. And she was carrying a big bottle of wine – she was something else.'

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A deconstructed version of the cover for the album *Island Life* (1985), and the final version. The image (also known as `The Impossible Arabesque') is central to Goude's mythology thanks to the `French Correction' design technique: his graphic re-sculpting of the body to visualize physically unobtainable perfection.

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The artwork for Jones' single `Slave to the Rhythm' (1985). The video features clips from the pair's television ad for the car brand Citroën.

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It was true lust, pre-love, compounded by the fact that Jones' extraordinary looks encapsulated Goude's well-documented fetishization of African and black culture (his first book is titled *Jungle Fever*) – a libidinous obsession born out of his childhood in Paris, where he lived close to both a former colonial museum and the zoo in Vincennes. The cocktail of exotic animals, alien landscapes and frescoes of half-naked African women constituted early but enduring visual prompts; Jones, a willing creative accomplice, lit the touchpaper. They partied hard, becoming permanent fixtures at New York's legendary club Studio 54. Goude says: 'The music–fashion fascination and my knack for entertainment comes from my upbringing: my mother was a dancer and had a little dance school. I was excited by it all – the costumes, the lights, the music, her screaming at the girls. But the first time it was all brought together, when I connected with the feelings I had had when I helped my mother at her dance recitals, was with Grace. I believe that you inherit your sensibility first of all, it's what orients you, and then your curiosity elevates you. With Grace I had not only an opportunity but also a very talented and extraordinary girl. I dropped everything.' The gesture was as grand as it was romantic. Goude was only 29, a prodigious talent ensconced at a prestigious magazine and a self-confessed playboy. 'But there's something devilish about Grace. Her wildness seduced me in a way I had never been seduced before.'

The relationship was cemented over a *New York* magazine shoot that produced the famous 'impossible arabesque' image that later became the record sleeve for *Island Life* (1985). The design is a piece of accidental iconography (in fact, all of Jones' seminal album covers were originally created as single portraits) that is regularly billed as one of the top 100 album artworks of all time. The image is critical to both Goude's mythology and the genesis of his partnership with Jones, thanks to the use of the 'French Correction' – a concept Goude coined at *Esquire* to denote on-page remodelling in the pursuit of superficial physical perfection. It was a precursor to the excessive retouching of the digital era; body parts were extended in a bid to correct what Goude, the ultimate inventor, saw as inherent weaknesses that offended his graphic-designer adoration of balance. Goude's sleeve design for *Slave to the Rhythm* (1985) and music video for the title song, which features clips of the duo's advert for the car brand Citroën, deploy similar extensions – stretching Jones' mouth and hair – but with arguable wit and approachability.

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I take the truth and blow it up. I don't need reality, I just need to be exposed to it in order to come home to my studio and give you a synthetic version.

Jean-Paul Goude

As canvases go, Jones was a dream come true – but Goude's vision ran faster, higher, bolder. Reality was a superfluous drag. 'I told her, "Your face is like a cubist character, I want to transform you into a minimal shape," and I gave her examples: Kandinsky, the Bauhaus, Russian constructivism,' says Goude. 'I tell good stories. I take the truth and blow it up. I don't need reality, I just need to be exposed to it in order to come home to my studio and give you a synthetic version of what I've lived through a drawing or a painting or a film. For me, to re-create reality is much better. As with Grace – I felt I was there to highlight the goods. In a lot of ways it was pure machismo, the oldest story in the world. I wanted my friends to know that I'd got the best girl and to understand why I found her interesting. In other words, I had to package it to show them.'

Jones' transformation was nascent, however, and Goude, as the ultimate architect of her new identity, had to persuade others of her latent stardom – including acclaimed musicians who had been asked to record with her, such as the Jamaican rhythm and reggae duo Sly & Robbie and Britain's Barry Reynolds. Goude launched a shock-and-awe visual campaign to set the tone and eradicate any unresolved issues of validity. Reynolds recalls, 'I'd listened to her albums and hated them. I thought they were clichéd like anything else coming out of Europe at the time – a tired disco beat with a bad string arrangement. But then I met Jean-Paul and I realized he was someone with a real vision that spanned music, style, everything. He has a groove that brought it all together and he really wanted us to cross a border. I'll always remember, they [Goude and producer Chris Blackwell] covered an entire wall in the studio with a huge poster of Grace with these huge shoulders and her legs apart – the image that was later used for the cover of the *Warm Leatherette* album, 1980, the first to display her new sound – staring down at all of us musicians. We were suitably shocked into understanding this was something different.'

Goude was killing off the more trite aspects of Jones' 1970s disco persona ('pulling her out of her disco rut') – rebirthing her via super sexually charged androgyny that would propel her into the pantheon of pop music's most illustrious gender-benders, including David Bowie and Annie Lennox. Her hair was cut and Goude had his own tailor create suits for her to cultivate a masculine sensibility. 'It was a total revolution. Diana Ross was her biggest competition. She [Ross] sold records but she was Broadway, she was Las Vegas – very glittery and glitzy in an American way, as opposed to Grace, who came from the art world. Grace was like a character out of a movie that didn't exist yet,' says Goude. Hollywood clearly took note: by the mid 1980s Jones had appeared in the Bond film *A View to a Kill* and in *Conan the Destroyer* – on both occasions capitalizing on her fearsome visual identity.

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Even at the start I had the knock-'em-dead fantasy of presenting a new woman through her. I saw pictures of the [Claude] Montana shows and Thierry Mugler shows and everything I was seeing seemed weak next to what we were doing.

Jean-Paul Goude

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The cover of the album *Nightclubbing* (1981) became a seminal image in pop-music history thanks to its hitherto unseen sexually charged androgyny.

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The cover for Jones' album *Warm Leatherette* (1980) was created by Goude to shock even hardened industry doubters into understanding `that she was something totally different, crossing a border'.

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Goude's artwork for *A One Man Show* (1982), a long-form music-video collection compiled from concert footage.

The cover for the album *Nightclubbing* (1981) boasts the image Goude believes most truthfully crystallizes his overall vision of her – a fearless modern heroine, outstripping all others with her extreme subversive beauty. Jones boasts a sharply structured flat-top hairline, a black square-shouldered Armani suit (later retouched to look more extreme) and a torso so sculpted that the décolletage-cum-breastbone could be male or female. Her skin is inky black (Goude painted it black himself then overlaid blue powder to deepen the look), her lips dark red – countered by the sleek stick of a white cigarette. 'I call it blue-black on black in black, as opposed to white on white in white – a typical black expression of the 1970s. It was about extremity, playing on her masculinity. Grace simplified to the maximum,' says Goude. For her A One Man Show tour in 1981, Goude reimagined the look with high-water trousers and a sharkskin jacket – even changing the lyrics of her songs to consummate fully the new identity. On 'Walking in the Rain', from the album *Nightclubbing* (1981), he changed the line 'feeling like a woman, looking like a man, making when I can' to 'feeling like a woman, looking like a man, mating when I can' for pure animalistic resonance. 'She was 8 feet tall and so skinny and so beautiful I could cry. I thought I was really touching her depth,' recalls Goude.

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Jones' performances, too, were critical in establishing her as a new breed of pop artist. 'I would try to bury all this disco music in lavish sets and presentations,' explains Goude, who got her to train at a boxing gym on New York's 23rd Street for one of her earliest club performances – so when she first arrived onstage in a hooded boxer's robe, she could shuffle and throw jabs with real presence. Inspired by his own short film about boxers, Goude employed Puerto Rican fighters to jump rope to the beat of Cuban drummers playing congas in the background. For the track 'La Vie en Rose', Jones mimicked playing the accordion before singing; while in a Halloween-night show at New York's Roseland Ballroom in 1978 (choreographed by Goude), she prowled on all fours, dressed like an alley cat, just inches away from a real caged Bengal tiger.

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Preparatory and final images for an elaborate mechanical maternity dress Goude conceived for Jones' `baby shower performance' in 1979 at New York's Garage nightclub, an influential gay hub that was very receptive to her wildly uncategorizable, thrillingly larger-than-life persona.

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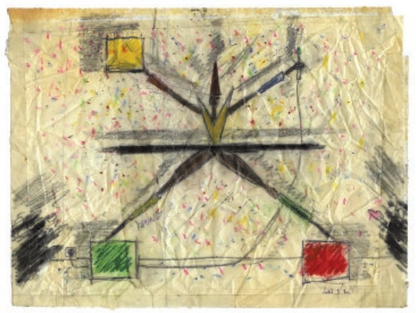
Jones appeared on the cover of *The Face* magazine in 1987, in a classic example of the duo's deliberate assault on social etiquette in the form of taboos of gender and race.



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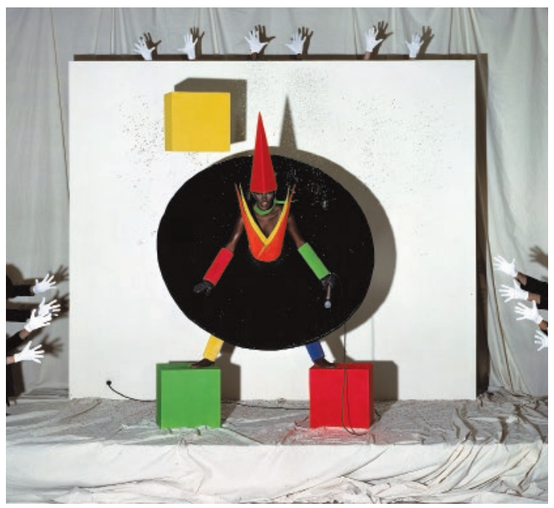

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