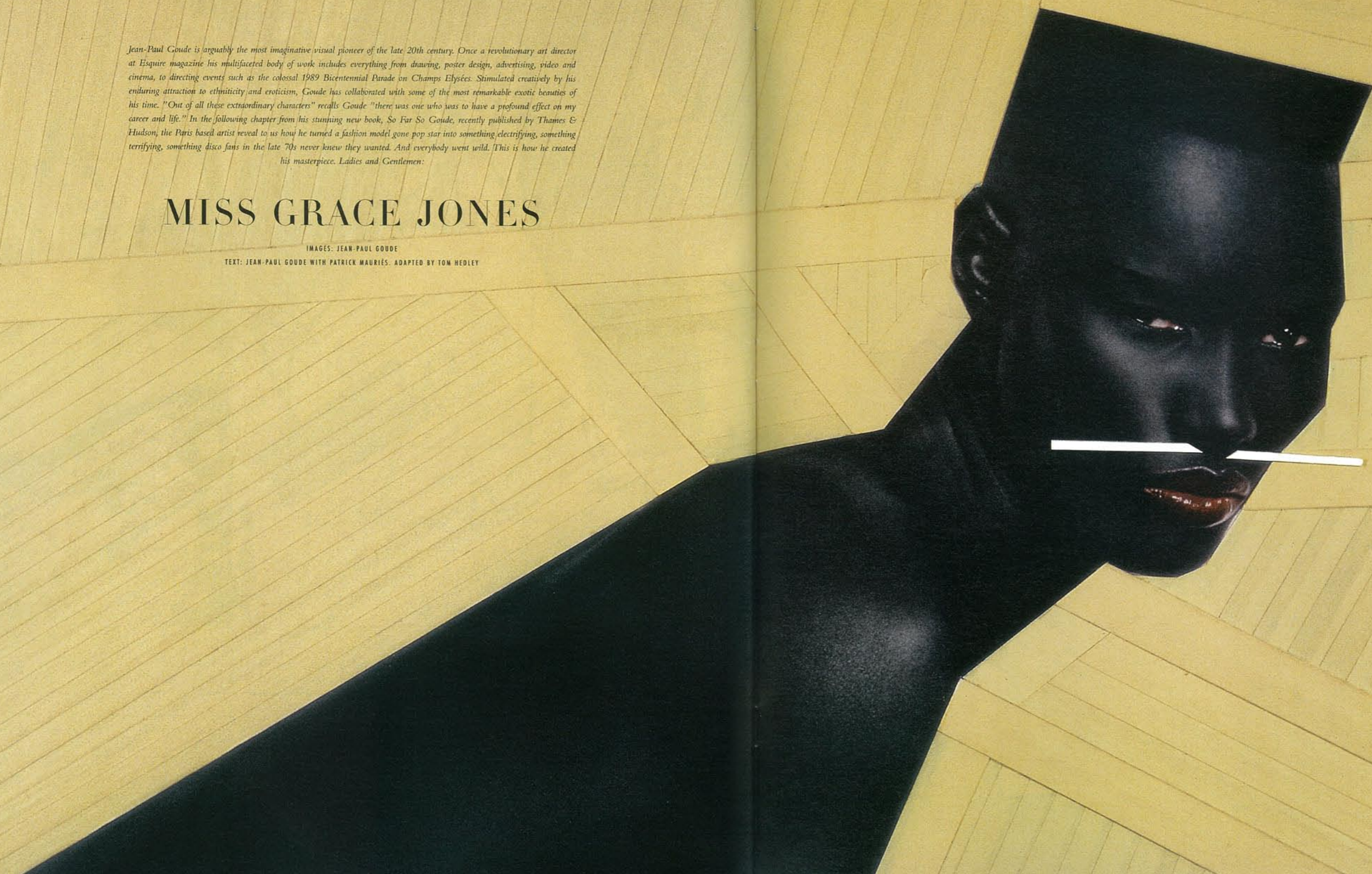


Jean-Paul Goude is arguably the most imaginative visual pioneer of the late 20th century. Once a revolutionary art director at Esquire magazine his multifaceted body of work includes everything from drawing, poster design, advertising, video and cinema, to directing events such as the colossal 1989 Bicentennial Parade on Champs Elysées. Stimulated creatively by his enduring attraction to ethnicity and eroticism, Goude has collaborated with some of the most remarkable exotic beauties of his time. "Out of all these extraordinary characters" recalls Goude "there was one who was to have a profound effect on my career and life." In the following chapter from his stunning new book, *So Far So Goude*, recently published by Thames & Hudson, the Paris based artist reveal to us how he turned a fashion model gone pop star into something electrifying, something terrifying, something disco fans in the late 70s never knew they wanted. And everybody went wild. This is how he created his masterpiece. Ladies and Gentlemen:

MISS GRACE JONES

IMAGES: JEAN-PAUL GOUDE

TEXT: JEAN-PAUL GOUDE WITH PATRICK MAURIÉS. ADAPTED BY TOM HEDLEY



“From the very beginning I was looking for inspiring characters upon which to dream”

— JEAN-PAUL GOUDE

PARIS 1977: Grace Jones, a friend of Toukie's, was one of the most visible black fashion models of the moment. And from one day to the next she had crossed from fashion runways to pop music. One night she invited Toukie and me to hear her sing at a gay disco called Les Mouches. Tall, skinny, very dark, her hair cropped like a boy's, she wore a romantic tutu that was too small for her and every once in a while her bosom would pop out whenever she raised her arms. The power of the image she projected came from a constant duality: on the one hand looking at her, she was like a caricature, almost grotesque, but on the other, she embodied the most classical African beauty. Watching her perform, you kept asking yourself whether she was beautiful or grotesque, or if she was both at once. And how could she be one if she was the other? But then, fortunately there was this wonderful ambiguity, this irony in watching a woman who looked like a man in drag singing *I Need A Man* to an audience of men who liked men. At the opposite of all canons of beauty, you could easily see just how Grace would terrify the average hetero. Was it her special aura, her popularity that made me want to conquer her? Or merely the fact that I had unconsciously recognized her as an ideal candidate for a future *French Correction*?

And, when Nick Cohn, to whom I had spoken about Grace for weeks, finally met her, he wrote one of his most inspired pieces — by far the best in the series. As for me, I photographed her in a variety of positions, which I combined into a montage that made it possible to show her simultaneously full-frontal and in profile, like an Egyptian bas-relief. Then, having transferred the montage to photographic paper, I used it as the preliminary sketch for a painting meant to give the photographic illusion that she alone, like a contortionist, could assume the pose, though on a closer look you can see that from a strictly anatomical point of view the pose is impossible to achieve.

I have always wondered why so many dancers who haven't been blessed with a natural instep try so hard to point their feet like ballerinas. Why desperately try to force one's reluctant arch, when one could turn this *handicap* to one's advantage? My picture tried to show how a flexed foot could make a classical arabesque more interesting — beautiful and grotesque at the same time, just like

Grace. It was with this picture of her that my life took a new turn. Up to then, I had always ranked work over pleasure. Now I wanted the opposite. My wish was soon to come true, as I was about to live yet another rhythm — namely hers! For months our nights were exclusively devoted to drinking, smoking, dancing and fornicating. Her reputation for fast living was no fraud. I was having a wonderful time.

DO OR DIE

In all honesty, I didn't find Grace's public image up to the one I had of her. I found it too conventional, too basic. The more she talked about her ambitions, the more I was convinced that she was on the wrong track. Among others, I had seen the final rehearsal for the opening of what was to become the legendary Studio 54. The plan was for Grace to make her entrance out of the belly of a giant cobra, surrounded by dancers in G-strings dressed-up in an outfit by Norma Kamali that tried to be chic. I was dismayed. Grace deserved better. I didn't want to hurt her feelings, yet very carefully so as not to endorse such a mediocre performance. I decided to shut up and avoid Studio 54's historic opening night all together. Hardly an hour after leaving with her usual entourage, Grace rang my bell. Alone and in tears she stood at my door. Between sobs she informed me about the disaster of her performance. She was crushed. The intimidating icon, the diva, the hard-boiled party-girl, was crying in my arms like a little girl.

A few weeks later, as I was fine-tuning Angel, my film treatment about Chu Chu, Grace announced that she had decided to “borrow” one of my musical numbers in my project, for her own show. If I was annoyed by the nervousness of her request, I was very curious to see how her choreographer would do. I had expected the worst, and I was not disappointed. Not only was their demonstration unconvincing, it was in my opinion totally lacking any kind of humor, even in a campy way.

So, if anything, it's my pride that drove me into show business. After all, if Grace was going to borrow an idea of mine, why not do it *properly*. Also, I was eager to prove that I could do more than simply criticize. It was too late to turn back, and since she was willing and ready, I decided to get involved at

one hundred percent. From now on, the ball was on my side of the court.

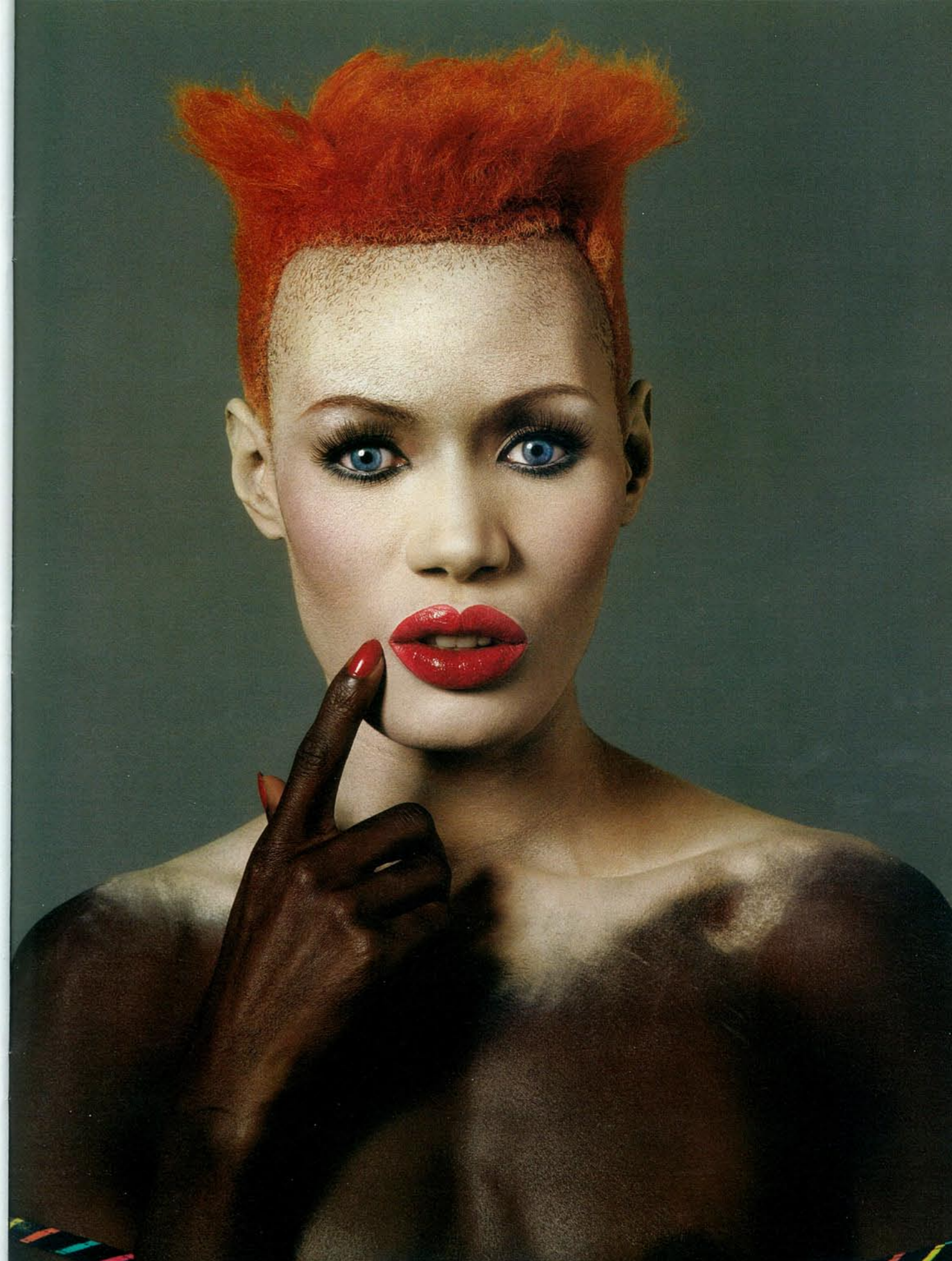
A week later we were touring Europe. I scrutinized every moment of her life with an entomologist's precision. I registered her tiniest movements, I dissected all her facial expressions. Grace had become an obsession. Work and everyday life were completely entwined. It was very exciting. At first the performances were almost always improvised. I would have an idea at breakfast and at the same evening we would try it out on the stage. In Sicily, for example, on opening night, she was to perform her disco version of Prévert's *Les Feuilles Mortes*. Standing erect in a long black dress that covered her feet, Grace started her song a capella like a French réaliste singer and as the taped pre-recorded music joined in, she lifted her dress over her head, exposing her backside. Gracefully skating backwards on a pair of rollerskates, she glided like a big, black sailboat on the surface of the stage, as the wind blew under the fabric of her dress. The last scheduled stop of the tour was Roseland in New York City, on Halloween night. The famous dancehall — which had just been remodeled into a mega-disco — was, after Studio 54 and Mudd Club, well on its way to becoming a key hot-spot on the New York scene. Anybody who was anybody in the recording industry was meant to be there that night. Naturally, it was crucial that we come up with a strong idea. Aware of the stakes, Grace had put everything she had into the show. Halloween is the celebration of devils and witches, an excuse to act wickedly, a night when everybody is drawn to drag. What's more, all the real drag queens from every borough in New York would be there. It was absolutely *essential* to make sure the performer wouldn't be upstaged by her audience.

My first idea was to stage the act in the open, on the docks of the West Village, in the heart of the “meat market.” Grace would sing from inside one of the trucks, right in the spot where gays of all walks of life usually cruised and had sex. But it was too late in the season; too cold. So, in order to camouflage the unbelievable kitsch of Roseland (ideal for a concert by Bette Midler or the Pointer Sisters) we tried to duplicate the atmosphere of the docks inside the place with scaffolding and a cloud of fog that masked the entire upper part of the dance floor. We replaced the stage curtain with an enormous, corrugated-

metal garage sliding door. I wanted the show to be as far as possible from disco spangles and as close as possible to theatre. On both sides of the stage a group of drummers played congas while two tiny Hispanic boxers jumped rope like in the gym. All this, in the middle of an audience of sensitive young men and women who fanned themselves languorously while they waited for the star. The contrast was staggering. Picture two flyweights glistening with sweat, their tough faces half-hidden by their beat-up leather helmets; hands bandaged, hunch-backed. Totally indifferent to what was going on around them, they serenely jumped rope. Four microphones strategically hidden caught the sound of their breathing at the same time one heard the snapping of the ropes on the ground in perfect unison with the drums. To me this was much more exciting than a dance performance. Unlike dancers, our athletes didn't try to imitate boxers through stylized movements; they were boxing.

It was my first attempt at directing a real show. I thought I needed to push around this audience that scared me, show them who's the boss, find an effective way to put them in an open state of receptivity. I decided to use two, big, movie-wind machines and aimed them at the crowd along with a wall of glaring spotlights. Blinded by the storm of light, the audience would have to squint not to miss Grace's entrance whose long black cape snapping in the wind dramatized her menacing silhouette. With the first chords of her song, Grace finally appeared in full light, dressed in a boxer's white satin robe. Her face hidden under its hood, she shuffled up and down the stage singing until using a break in the rhythm she threw the robe aside and appeared in full boxing gear. Hands wrapped, wearing a protective cup over her groin, throwing right hooks, bobbing and weaving, even shuffling like Muhammad Ali, Grace moved like a pro. The house was delirious. Like for a real fight.

For the finale we had to go beyond all expectations. Imagine a large cage pushed by stage hands, forcing its way through a crowd of some 6,000 delirious fans. In the cage, an enormous Bengal tiger. Uneasiness and fear give way to hysteria. Spectators huddle together. Suddenly, a spotlight frames Grace. She's standing way up on a scaffold, dressed as a tiger. Climbing down as she sings, she crawls on all fours up to the cage and faces





the tiger provocatively. Eye to eye, the beauty and the beast stare at each other. The tiger lets out a roar. Grace responds with the refrain of her song "Do or Die." At the exact moment that she opens the door of the cage, the music stops dead. The place goes pitch-black while coming out of nowhere, the terrifying sound of two wild animals engaged in a fight to the death blares out. Ten long seconds go by and the light and music come back on. In the cage no more tiger – only Grace, who resumes her song as she chews on a big piece of meat.

A ONE MAN SHOW

To tell the truth, I didn't have the faintest idea where this improvised career was leading me to. I took a real pleasure in staging

Grace's performances, but the effort was way out of proportion with the result. It was exhausting and very frustrating at the same time. I decided to return for a while to my still pictures, a discipline that I controlled thoroughly. Besides I thought the time had come to improve on what was quickly becoming the Grace myth.

Grace has a geometric face, a bit like an African mask. Her outrageously prominent cheekbones form two triangles. Together with her hair that I cut in the shape of a square to dramatize the volumes of her morphology, she did somewhat look like an African-inspired cubist sculpture. The same reasoning applied to her sets and costumes. In those days, I'd often go to see old Japanese movies, which gave me the idea to convince her to study Japanese

dancing. I found it refreshing to imagine that an entertainer with such an aggressive image walk around the stage with small delicate steps like a Geisha, instead of whopping and hollering like everybody else did.

Things were getting better and better for Grace and me. Her transformation was a success; she was no longer just another Disco singer, but a credible recording artist with an original repertoire that Chris Blackwell, her charismatic producer (and myself in my own way), had helped to define. One of my all time favorite tunes, Astor Piazzola's *Libertango* – which I had submitted to Blackwell as a potential song for Grace – was eventually adapted and released under the title "I've Seen That Face Before." Chris, the founder and President of Island Records, liked to refer to

Grace and me as "a match made in heaven."

I was busy at work on all sorts of new schemes, when the big news broke. Even though I felt far from ready to assume the responsibilities of parenthood, quite naturally the idea of becoming a father flattered my pride. But an event of that magnitude didn't quite fit business plans. Grace would find herself unable to promote her new record. We were stuck. What does one do in such a case? Hide until the baby's birth, spreading the wildest rumours, or on the contrary brave public opinion by flaunting her new image? Something had to be done!

It seemed to me that Grace should deliberately make use of her pregnancy. Even if it meant shocking anyone who would find that approach in bad taste. My solution was

the *maternity mega dress*. The challenge was to make the dress as beautiful and spectacular as possible, while adapting it to Grace's new shape. I asked Antonio, the famous illustrator (himself a fashion icon), to make a geometric dress, a sort of origami-meets-Cubism costume that would be in harmony both with her face and her new silhouette (she was eight months pregnant on the day of the show). The dress was almost ten feet tall and Grace stood on a narrow platform. The bottom of the dress was lost in a cloud of dry ice. Mounted on wheels, moving slowly across the stage, the huge sculpture seemed to glide through the mist on the surface of the lake. It was magical.

Grace escaped the traditional conflicts of African American beauty. On one hand,

Black American princesses (that is an infinite minority of wealthy, bourgeois, jet-setters) shopped in Paris or Milan dressed by Givenchy and had their hair done by Alexandre. On the other hand, those who considered themselves the *real* black women, *proud sisters* (inspired by African traditions) fostered ethnic influences.

If Grace's androgyny, combined with her natural skin color that I tried to sublimate by painting her blue, appeared to some music business professionals to be less than attractive, it wasn't long before they changed their minds. She was now regarded as a completely modern creature, a slightly threatening alien, whose unique beauty transcended both her sex and her race.

For two years that followed the birth of our son, nothing mattered to me besides

fine-tuning the myth. The shows I staged for her were a direct consequence of my fixations. On stage, Grace became this erotic menace, this male-female automaton that I wanted her to be. She let me make her over completely, use any effect I could find to achieve what I wanted at any cost. Furiously hitting on cymbals she harangued her public. Or else, backed by a discreetly hidden synthesizer, she would mime French songs on an accordion or blow inhuman shrieks out of a trombone. I even created an army of Grace Jones – militiamen who goose-stepped, wearing masks that were exact replicas of her face. They paraded for her in perfect order. Whatever she couldn't do, a double did for her. With this *One Man Show*, we conquered Europe. Yet once again I was coming to realize that I had gone too far.

My "masterpiece" was the result of a vision that only belonged to me. I had wanted to thrust my fantasies upon a resolutely basic person who felt more manipulated than loved and who was getting tired of holding the pose. Once the European tour was over, back in New York, I understood that the notorious party girl was about to reclaim her identity. It was time to move on.

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