

Flash Art



Lee Bul
"Amateurs"
Portrait series



IKÉ UDÉ

BETWEEN A DANDY AND HIS CHOICE OF CLOTHES

Shirin Neshat

SHIRIN NESHAT: *As an artist I understand the need to create an environment where an artist can think, dream, imagine, become inspired, and produce. In my case I have to remove myself altogether from the West and look East to find inspiration and the right mental space to make art. Iké, you have created an unusually rich and seductive environment for yourself right here in New York. You more, than any other artist I know, live your art. One can't look at your work without being drawn into the world you exist in. You have surrounded yourself with multiple groups of talents in fashion, art, film, popular culture, and intellectuals. Your mere physical presence and style are a work of art. In this sense your art is immersed in the person you are, that is to say one is constantly reminded of the collapsing boundaries between the artist and the work of art, between the subjective process and the objective result. If such, then how is it possible to maintain a critical distance, or is it at all necessary?*

Iké Udé: Consciously or not, there is always a critical distance between the artist and the work of art, between a dandy and his choice of wardrobe, between an individual and his/her known quantity, between thought and action, between process and result — the exception is to make it appear seamless. I subscribe to exceptionality in subjectivity and objectivity however tenuous a balance it may strike. On the other

hand, to maintain a critical distance for its own sake — as espoused by critics and practiced by most artists — is an intellectual faux pas.

SN: *I see your wok as a type of protest, a rejection of artistic conventions that end up defining and separate disciplines. You seem to constantly cross and blur boundaries between the fields of design, fashion, visual art, performance, cinema, literature, and more. This is evident in the artistic direction of your magazine, aRUDE, and in your personal photographic work. Are you suggesting anything and everything can be art?*

IU: The notion of art is far more candid than its meaning. The great thing about art is beauty and idea, not specific meaning. To impose an orthodox definition of art is futile. To inscribe an unyielding boundary on art inevitably invites a dead-end. For art to be relevant, it must continually be in want of meaning or, say, lycra, which allows for elasticity of constant interpretation and practice. The cleavage between the idea and meaning of art is negotiable. The ultimate value of art is the quality that lubricates its attendant contradictions. Conventions in art, as in all fields of human endeavor, serve a purpose, albeit a limited one. Any strict adherence to artistic conventions is ultimately a fatal compromise only suitable for artists who are satisfied with the fashionably intellectual lethargy of the present. Quite frankly, I'm indifferent to the

opinions of contemporary critics. The only tape of objective criticism is by the future critics, who have the benefit of hindsight and distance of time. My multidisciplinary practice is hardly novel — which is not the point — because such personages like Man Ray, Warhol, Jean Cocteau, Colette, to name a few, had worked in such a manner before I was even born.

SN: *A considerable aspect of your work deals with the issue of gender and sexuality. Your images of striking portraits seem to intentionally confuse the viewer by constantly crossing between male and female representations.*

IU: Oh dear, such sins!

SN: *Could you speak a bit about your recent work, particularly about your film-based work that you have been producing about dance.*

IU: Essentially, I'm investigating how music informs a dancer, and conversely what the dancer brings to bear as a result.

The title and soundtrack, *Je Te Veux*, derives from Erik Satie's precious work. It serves as a constant thread unifying the various esteemed choreographers: Bill T. Jones, Stephen Petronio, Desmond Richardson, Molissa Fenley, John Kelly. Next, I need to film Pina Bausch, Michael Clark and Arthur Aviles. In addition, each of the choreographers wore fashions by Comme des Garçon, Yohji Yamamoto, Martin Margiela, Rive Gauche/YSL etc.



Untitled (#11), 1997. Iris print on watercolor paper, 35 x 24 inches.
Bottom: Stern, 2000; Type C print on aluminium.
Opposite: Untitled #14, 1997.



SN: Can you talk about how your earlier *Body Painting series* evolved into the *Cover Girl series*? What they have in common is their intense graphic value, but you moved from subtle black and white photos to very pronounced, colorful photographs.

IU: I often work thematically, varying the themes by employing a different framework, medium, subject matter, attitude, concept, etc. However most of my work has an underlying leitmotif: concealment/revelation, seduction/denial, mask/substance, and earnestness/playfulness. As for the perceived shift from subtle to pronounced photography, each theme requires a different treatment of color, touch, or lack thereof. ■

Shirin Neshat is an artist. She lives and works in New York.

Iké Udé was born in Nigeria. He is an artist, aesthete, writer, and publisher of New York based *aRUDE* magazine. He lives and works in New York.

Selected solo shows: 2001: MAK, Vienna; 2000: Analix, Geneva; Fifty One Gallery, Antwerp; Marcus Derschler, Berlin; 1997: Gallery 101, Ottawa.

Selected group shows: 2000: Seventh Havana Biennial; 1999: "Double Lives," Textil Musum, Barcelona; "Structure," Southeast Museum of Photography, Daytona; 1998: "Bathroom," Thomas Healy, New York; 1997: 2nd Johannesburg Biennale, South Africa; 1996: "In/sight: African Photographers, 1940-Present," Solomon Guggenheim Museum, New York; "What I Did On My Summer Vacation," White Columns, New York; "Inclusion/exclusion," Steieischer Herbit 96," Graz (Austria); "Hotter Than July," Margo Leavin, Los Angeles; "Interzone," Kunstverein, Copenhagen; Uppsala Konstmuseum, Sweden; "Po-Mo-Funk: Urban Expressions Beyond Post-Modern Theory," Miami Beach; 1995: "Modern Life," Aljira Center for Contemporary Art, Newark Museum, Newark; 1994: "Let the Artist Live!," Exit Art, New York.

