

By Tom Hedley



Karen Park, *The Queen of Seoul* (1994)

«Art is whatever you can get away with»

[Marshall McLuhan]

We open our story in the heart of darkest Africa. War drums can be heard but only in the head of young Jean-Paul Goude – perhaps he's about seven. But the jungle-beat is real nonetheless. He creeps, bare-breasted as always, stalking some interior adventure. From time to time the boy stops to adjust his loin-cloth – a sock stolen from his father's drawer.

When his neighborhood pals were cowboys shooting-up Saint-Mandé, he was the fierce Apache, Geronimo, struggling not to be captured or killed. To little Jean-Paul, the white guys were never the good guys. But his instinct to fill his daydreams with 'sensuous brown flesh' was no mere yearning to play the underdog. Exoticism had already claimed him.



Childhood drawing (approx. 1950)

After all, his earliest memories of amazement were the sculptures on the facade of the Museum Of The Colonies – a short 100 yards from his house in the Paris suburb also known as Vincennes. Or as he would say later of the sculptures: «All those gigantic, naked, exotic women held such romance for me».

The little boy would stare up at the nude creatures frozen in time. His mind would unconsciously follow the line of those luxurious pillows otherwise known as the female backside or the defiant, flaring nostrils, the mysterious slanted eyes or lips so full they appeared to perpetually be caught in the act of blowing a kiss. In these childish reveries a libidinal key was turning.

It wasn't surprising Jean-Paul Goude's earliest drawings were of American Indians and wild tribal goddesses. One of his first creations was an Indian he called Wamba who would send all cowboys running for cover. Already he had the mentality of an artist. His need for revenge and personal justice would be channeled into art work. His obsessions took root in a fertile Gauguinism. A drawing that would begin respectfully as a white nun would become a black wonder woman. His love for stories and popular culture was painted from a palette of his favorite fictional heroes.

«I loved Red Rider and Little Beaver», he said of the American comic book characters. «Myself, I was very short and puny. So was Little Beaver, but he had style, he wore baggy pants. I learned that short, baggy pants make you look taller. Little Beaver was great. He had straight hair that stood up and he was a cute little kid. And Sabu! Very important. I would

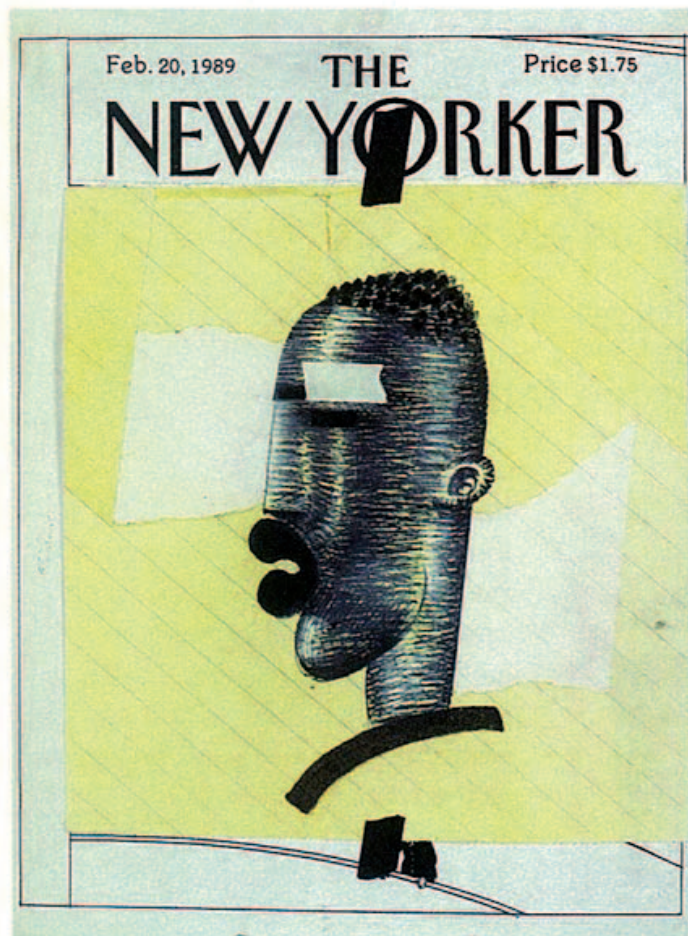
have given anything to be Sabu because, again, he was short like me. He was a kid in the movies and he was brown and savage looking, which was my dream». «France is a religion», the historian Michelet said. And back in the days of Jean-Paul's childhood, when the nation still felt the pride of its colonies, the dark, exotic faces were celebrated – they were part of the religion. Goude's fascinations were born of a more accepting world – before the country moved relentlessly

toward the right, and 'immigrant' became a suspect, even threatening word.

His talented mother, a former Broadway dancer, remembers him as a little boy staring at a beautiful African man on a bus and wandering away to kiss the stranger's hand. Perhaps in this charming act, the pure gesture of a child, a clue can be offered up. Goude's work, criticized by some as racist, others as sexist, and still others as cruel caricature, when all is said and done, is surprisingly the product of a humanist, a moralist and a hopeful universalist. As he grows older, he approaches his implicit liberalism with a wary comprehension. He has come to understand the American intellectual George Kennan's notion: «Let us not repeat the mistake of believing that either good or evil is total... No other people, as a whole, is entirely our enemy. No people at all – not even ourselves – is entirely our friend».

The confusion over his work's interpretation comes, I think, from Goude's instinct to solve all issues of content graphically. He will be the first to admit that there are two toads in his garden – a self-mocking vanity and a neurotic perfectionism. But he manages to keep the toads at bay so that fabulous flowers may grow. His method is demanding and supremely disciplined. First he must find an idea. Then he must find an honest narrative. Then he has to get things right logically. Finally he must solve all of this graphically – exercising technique.

His method has been intuitively consistent through commercial illustration, through his



time as art director of Esquire Magazine, through his creation of Grace Jones as a pop icon, through his admired television commercials and through the joyful celebration of the famous bi-centennial parade – it's, by now, deep in the bone.

I started to work with Jean-Paul at Esquire, as early as 1968. Over the years I've watched his persona and work merge until they've become virtually inseparable. Since his Esquire feature *The French Correction*, where he essentially re-designed himself along graphic lines that were more pleasing to his eye, he has, in a sense, become his own model. But in all matters of content he is tough and exacting. Under his surgeon's knife he is constantly dissecting Goude and the world of Goude. From the beginning his work has been rooted in autobiography.

The startling spirit in his images shows how much unmitigated fun he's been having. But part of the good time comes from being able to treat the creation of an image as a job – a problem looking for an inspired solution. He would call this the 'craft of the applied artist'. Autobiography must be subtle in such work and is treated essentially as a style. There's a certain emotional comfort in the distance created by the job itself. It's the kind of work that can display astonishing imagination without personal surrender. Jean-Paul Goude can no longer wear his father's sock as a loin-cloth. As he matures he worries, as we all do, about the inevitable dramas of thinning hair, middle-age and the fear of Nietzsche's unnerving line: 'When sexual potency goes, so does creative talent'.

Goude's story has taken on a gravity that comes with loss, experience and age. His work

is now moving into its most personal chapter – a time for intimate revelations, for personal surrender. It's time to make a statement and he knows it. Will the new world of Goude be melancholy or hilarious? Will it be loving or cruel? Will it be expressed with a showman's flair or a poet's perspective? Will it be outrageously sexual or quietly spiritual? Will it be fashion or style? Will it be improvisation or choreography? Will it be a movie?

How will the beat go on?

The answer is it will be all of these things and more – the next chapter, I believe, will be his most realized period. He's become both Pygmalion and Pygmalion's creation. It's time to let the creature go and damn the consequences. All hell could break loose.

I'm sitting with the artist in his studio that has an inspiring view of the Sacré Coeur and a distant Eiffel Tower. It's Bastille Day, 1996. André Breton, if he were with us, would turn 100 this year; Descartes 400. Jean-Paul Goude will never again see 49. But he will die young at any age. A new wife, a new baby, a new direction – it's instructive to listen to what he was to say about it all:

T.H. Is your fear of growing old related to the deaths of your grandparents who both died within a year of each other when they were about 30?

J.P.G. No... My fear of growing old is related to my sense of graphics...

T.H. What do you mean by that?

J.P.G. As I grow older I don't like the way I look and I don't like the way I feel. At the same time I worry that time is going by and I haven't made a statement. I've made a living and I've managed to get my name afloat, but I haven't made a true artistic statement.

T.H. You mean the parade in Paris wasn't a statement?

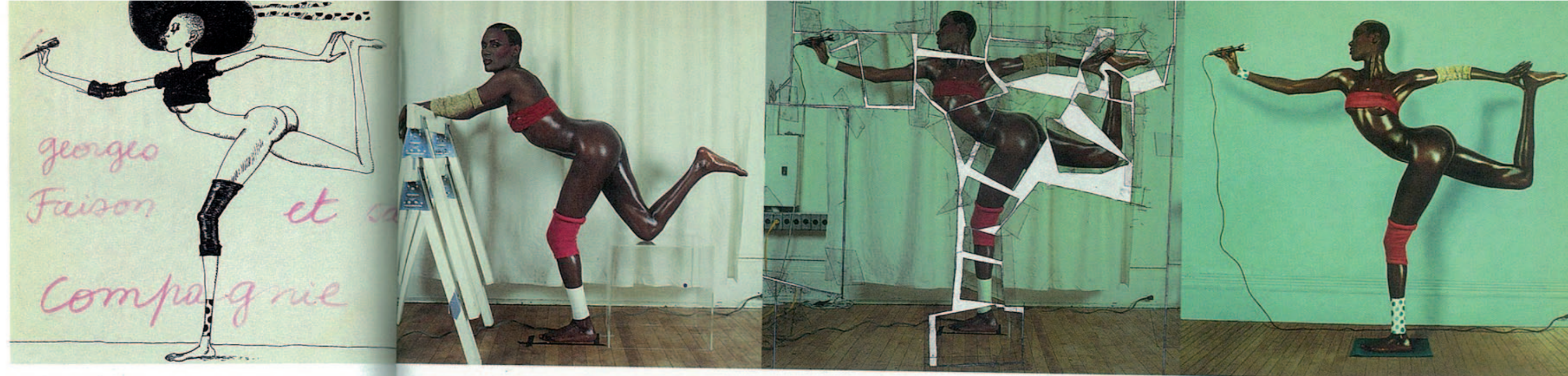
J.P.G. It wasn't the ultimate statement: It wasn't personal enough. It was a solution to a problem. The parade was just a job, not different from making a commercial.

T.H. Was your book *Jungle Fever* your first attempt to be personal?

J.P.G. Nearly... *The French Correction* in Esquire was even earlier. My brush with the editor Harold Hayes was very important to me. He persuaded me that my self-examination was not simply a neurotic thing but could be considered, as it was in the literary world, a search for content. About that time I became a little more concerned with content than form. It's been a very long apprenticeship in that direction. I still have a long way to go before I master content.

T.H. You mean before you master yourself?

J.P.G. No. Few of us ever do... I mean before I master the content of the character myself



Comedy is a way to take the bitterness and drama out of racial difference.

suggests... It's an art problem, not a matter of redemption. Or, if it is, it's seen and recorded from a distance that is attempting to create objectivity.

T.H. That sounds so cold.

J.P.G. Sometimes it has to be.

T.H. You have set up difficult imperatives for yourself as an artist. You've chosen illustration, fashion and television commercials – pursuits that the art world has prejudices against. And yet you've attempted to be autobiographical throughout.

J.P.G. Most of the time I've tried to be... I discovered autobiography very early. My earliest drawings were a reflection of my own private interests. And my best drawings were about what was personal to me. I was able, very young, to make an evaluation of my

career and realize that my best work was a reflection of my, I guess you'd say, soul – my values, personal fascinations, my own ideas. I also discovered that my weakest work was when I only used my technique to advance somebody else's thoughts or ideas...

T.H. The absolute insistence of using commercial art forms from the beginning is the thing that separates you from the art mainstream.

J.P.G. If I had been brought up in America I probably would have been involved with Pop-Art. But yes, it's true. Being tied to commercial art is almost a lost battle from the start if you consider what the art world is about... But it's too late to worry about it. Commercial forms were always my motor. I need to be challenged, like a performer with his public. I try to amaze and even though I express myself through advertising and commercial media I don't consider myself as an advertising person. I take advertising as a tool to develop my own ideas. I don't try to solve 15 problems a day. I get interested in one and I approach it like an art project, without cynicism, but with passion.

T.H. In a formal sense is your work rooted in the French tradition of *tableau vivant*?

J.P.G. You could identify it with *tableau vivant*... I'm an arranger of the human figure. Even the photographs or drawings are in a way like little films or *mises en scène*... They are tales, and whether my pictures are stills, or move and talk, they always tell a story.

T.H. You have always been fascinated by sexual glamour. What forged your sexuality?

J.P.G. I wasn't exclusively attracted to blacks, as everyone assumes. I was simply attracted to mysterious morphologies, through which I felt the thrill of adventure. The girl next door never made me dream.

T.H. You were not a ladies man? A Casanova?

J.P.G. Please! Not at all... I'd get romantically involved with one woman at a time, and like many artists before me and many to come, I'd attempt to paint her portrait, but not necessarily with brushes on canvas. I'd draw her, but I'd also take pictures which I obsessively doctored or retouched in attempts to bring out what I considered to be her true beauty. I'd advise on make-up, clothes, design costumes, make films and stage shows (providing I was involved with a performer). In other words, I tried to turn every woman I ever

loved into a statue and, as if she were my creation, I'd put her on a pedestal for everyone to admire.

T.H. But sexually isn't this a form of fetishism? J.P.G. It took me a long time to find out, but, yes, it is!

T.H. Would you tell me about your first real experience with an exotic woman?

J.P.G. Makoya... She came from Guinea... A dancer who had defected from the African ballet and was surviving in Paris with no papers. I always suspected she was a part-time hooker... I was about 20, making a living as an illustrator. I had a little place, rue Mazarine near Saint Germain des Prés. She was about 17 and most of the time, she'd come to visit at about three or four in the morning – after dancing the night away at a club called 'The Tabou'. She'd wake me up for sex. It was all taboo for me. I was discovering Africa... The darkness of her skin, her mentality fascinated me. And if she indeed was a cartoon, she was a new kind of cartoon, certainly not a 'charming' little 'Sambo'; she was heroic. She had a torn ear-lobe from fighting with a guy who ripped her ear ring off. She was brutal, sweet and completely natural... Her unusual beauty, her uncontrollable laughter, her earthy smell, her muscle tone – all of it titillated me. She encouraged me to embrace adventure – this was even more important than the sex... Who knows? Maybe I simply mistook my 'passion' for a desire to conquer the timidity her blackness inspired in me? Maybe she made me question my wimpiness. Or maybe I had some kind of missionary attitude towards her.

T.H. A new definition of the missionary position?

J.P.G. But she was a heroine to me! Maybe the heterosexual sissy I knew I was and claimed to be, loved that she would have the guts to fight some pimp on the streets and have her ear-lobe torn to pieces. She was like all the comic book characters I loved. A black version of Sheena Of The Jungle – she had stepped off the comic-page and had slipped naked into my bed.

T.H. You have always attempted to be an innovator. Was that a conscious thing?

J.P.G. I like the idea of being first at something. I think I was the first to elaborately doctor photographs and present them as illustrations and to cut up *ektachromes*. I still

do it, extending peoples features, to make the figure more elegant, change morphologies...

The best things I do, I think, come back to my initial obsession with the body, anatomy and drawing. It's basic.

T.H. But you can't deny your instinct to satirize. Are you laughing at your creations or are you laughing along with them?

J.P.G. I'm not laughing at them. I try to comment on them. And quite naturally, I usually pick on their morphology. It's a graphic issue. For instance, if I've used Azzedine Alaïa so many times in my work it's because he's very tiny. If he was of average height he wouldn't hold the same interest to me. I've always liked little foreign (therefore mysterious) characters.

T.H. Like Grace Jones, do you want to exaggerate what's there? Or do you want to fix them in some way?

J.P.G. Any attempt at portraiture involves a certain amount of exaggeration. I take what's there and dramatize it. I 'paint' portraits! In the case of Azzedine Alaïa for instance, I chose to show him as the little 'Emperor of Fashion' that he is. Another time I produced a record on which he sang with Farida (an Arab girl I was in love with) and I chose to present him as a diminutive 'waltzing' dervish, so small that Farida could carry him around like a baby. T.H. Isn't this a classic definition of political-correctness – making difference part of the mainstream? Your work is often criticized for not being politically correct.

J.P.G. I am politically-correct. I always have been... There has been lots of misunderstandings about the images I produce. When I portrayed Grace Jones naked in a cage chewing on a piece of raw meat, I was attacked for being racist, which is unfair if you consider that Grace always took great pride in behaving like a wild animal. I only dramatized the image she was promoting. My analysis was fair...

T.H. But aren't there political realities in ethnic difference that put your work on the defensive?

J.P.G. You always have to be aware of the tensions. In my own life I have my own Franco-American conditioning. My wife, a Korean-American, is still essentially an Asian in the way that I'm still a European. These are inherited traits, whether we like it or not. When I'm late she can't tolerate it. She doesn't

understand being late. She doesn't understand being lazy... On the other hand, I don't understand knocking yourself dead purely for the sake of keeping yourself busy. Getting up at six in the morning whether you have to or not... This, I find as picaresque as Makoya's torn ear-lobe. I don't want to have anything to do with it. Though it is fascinating to me, even flabbergasting, it is not my particular conditioning. Criticism of such traits could be considered racial prejudice. But in art and, especially in comedy, we touch on them all the time. Think of the American sit-coms: All In The Family, Sanford And Son, Freddie Prinz's series... there are many examples. Comedy is a way to take the bitterness and drama out of racial difference. I try to do that in my own work.

T.H. Here we are in the last years of the twentieth century and you've chosen two of the most controversial arenas to work in – sex and race. Where do you intend to go with all this?

J.P.G. Funny you should ask that. Awhile back the new director of the Châtelet Theater in Paris asked if I would think about creating a show for the year 2000 – reprising the theme of racial brotherhood and celebration of cultural mixing that the parade was all about... An interesting idea... But it is no longer 1989... The atmosphere has changed drastically in France... If you were to do a show at all it would have to be centered around the idea of once the inter-marriage of race and cultures has happened, how do we get along? Because, we're not getting along... It's become more and more like America here... The immigrants stuck in the restrictions and poverty of suburban ghettos are rebelling – not enough education, opportunity, or jobs. It's a class war. This is not a time of celebration but of suspicious retrenchment.

T.H. How do you solve the problems for such a show in the year 2000?

J.P.G. Make it funny... Instead of dramatizing the complications of living together right in the face of each others differences – you show how hilarious these prejudices can be...

Laughter and amazement are still the great breakers of tension... The differences, the conflicts are precisely the dramatic materials we can use for comedy... You have to find a way to make it positive in a milieu and zeitgeist that appears hopelessly negative.

T.H. Over the years, I've had both departures and reunions with your work because, occasionally, I've misunderstood the politics and humanity of Jean-Paul Goude. Is it because your point of view consciously plays with ambiguity? Do you like to play the edge where a celebration can look like a put-down?

J.P.G. In France, more so than America, there is a tradition of ambiguity. Foibles are expected. I play on that. It is not simply a decision of love or hate – it's the necessity, to make a love-hate relationship work. That's the

juice. In it we find the humor, the honesty and the flawed beauty... I like to work on that edge. There is a double-edged sword to my work but I think it's positive.

T.H. Are you a romantic?

J.P.G. Definitely not...I find romance hilarious.

T.H. Maybe this interview isn't trashy enough.

But I refuse to ask how tall or old you are. In

case you have any female fans I should ask:

What do you wear to bed?

J.P.G. Only my Egoïste... And, by the way, I'm six feet four, and thirty-nine, any day now.†




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 GUEST | PAGES

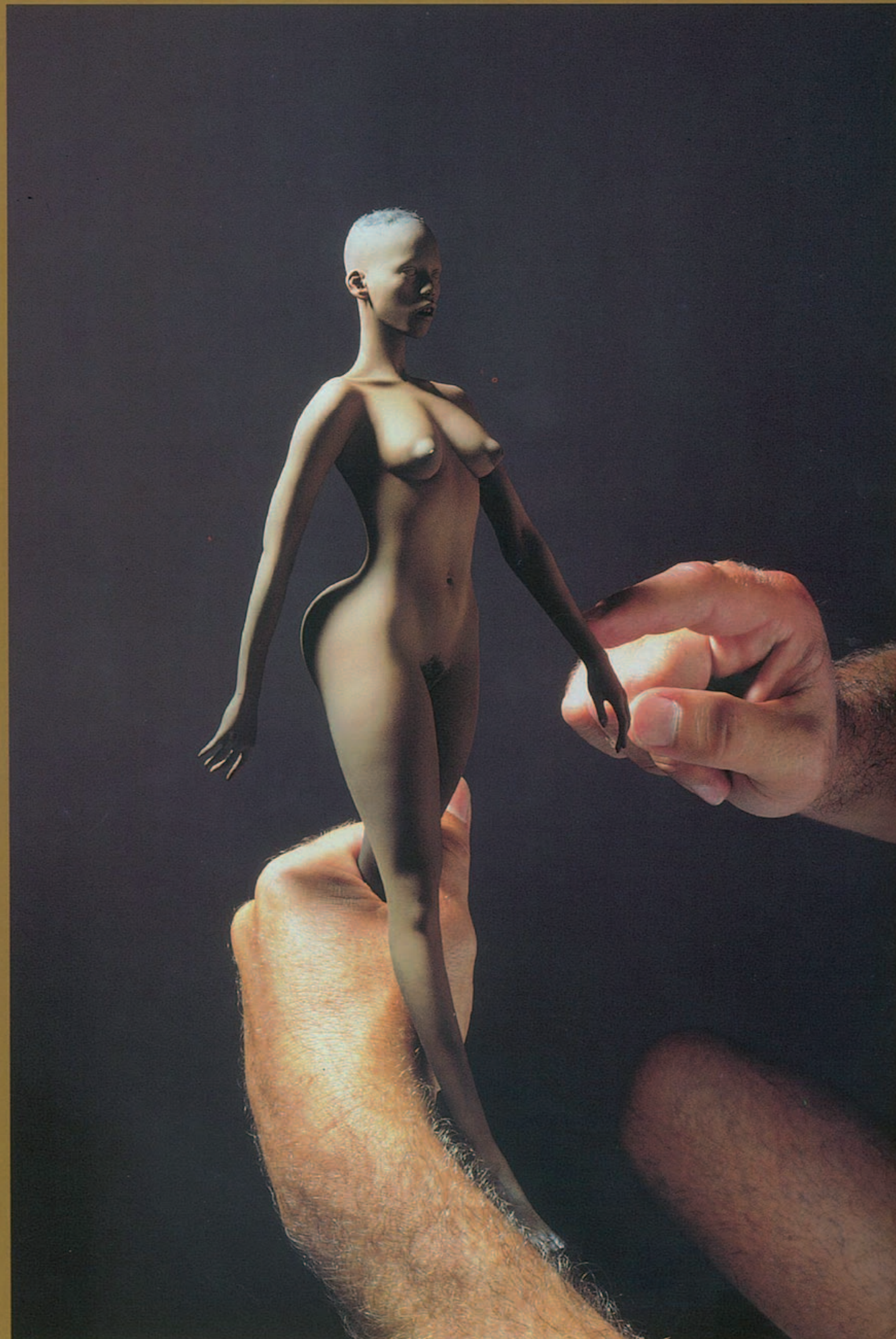
Grace Jones; 'Nightclubbing',
N.Y. (1979)



Radiah & Jet Set crowd,
N.Y. (1972)



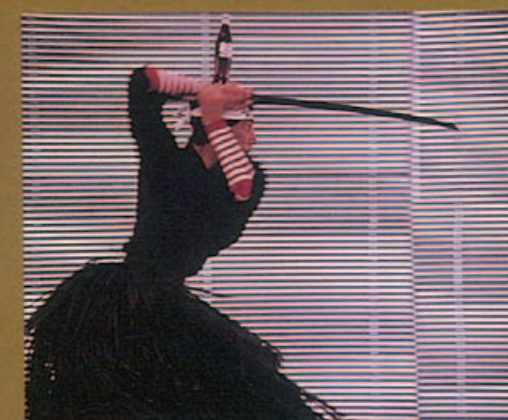
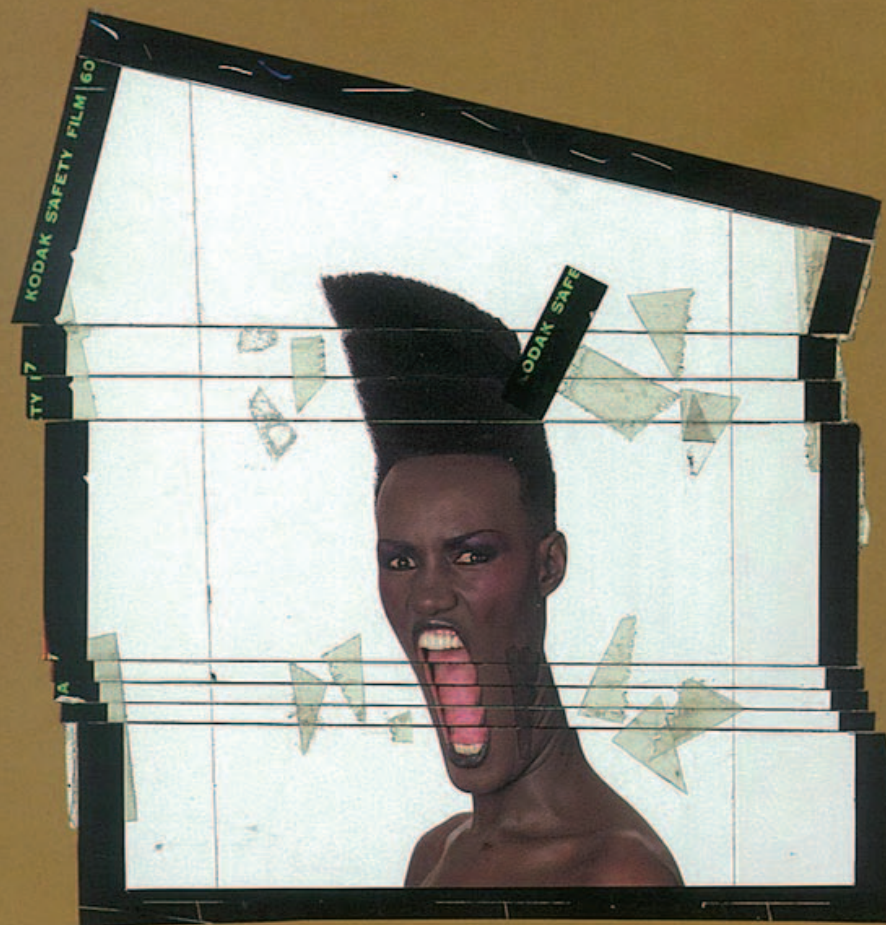
Radiah & Jet Set crowd
on platform shoes



Toukie Doll (1974)



American Dances
Four ethnic groups:
Whites
Blacks
Hispanics
Gays



Grace Jones;
'Slave to the Rhythm',
N.Y. (1984)

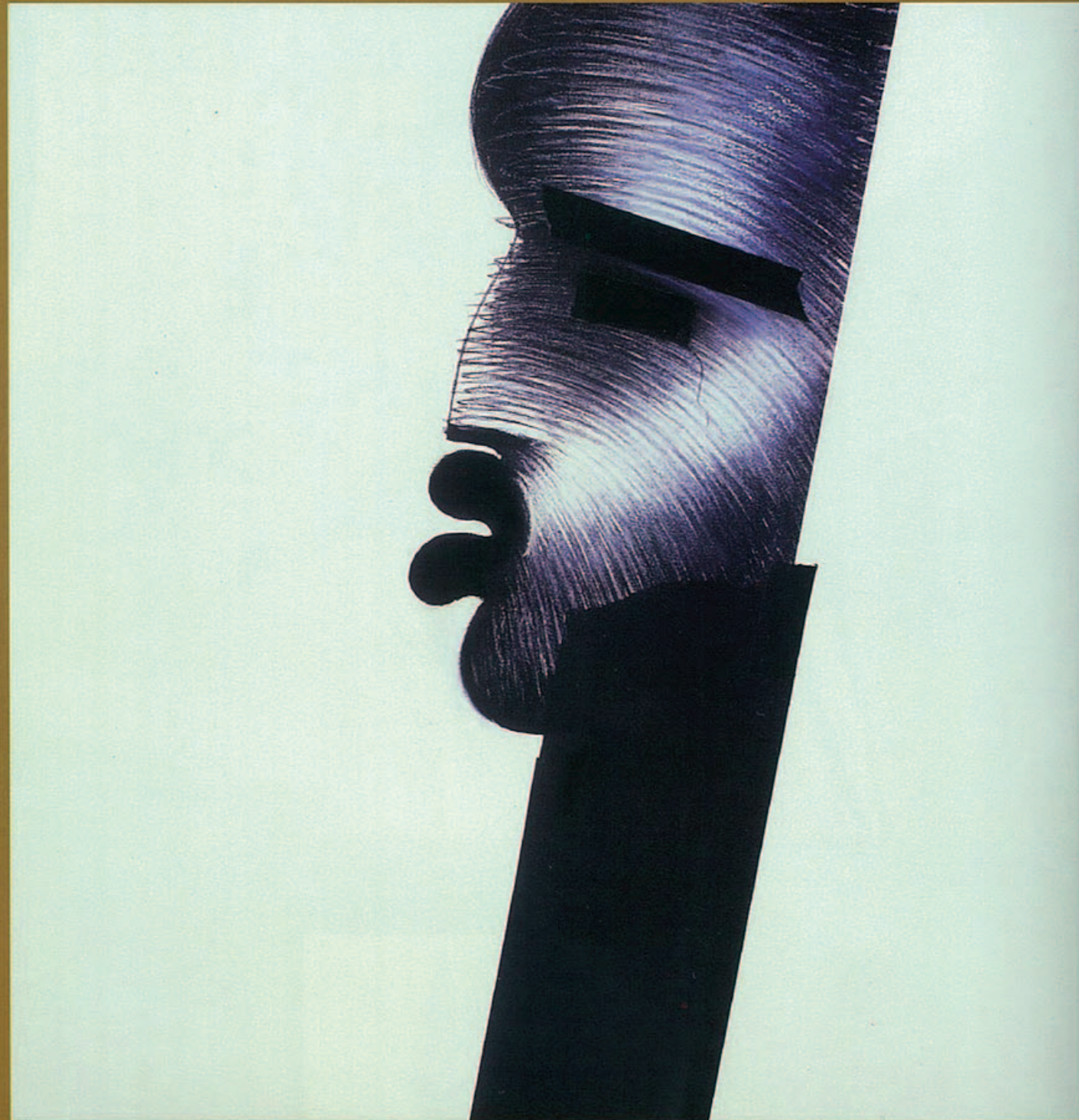
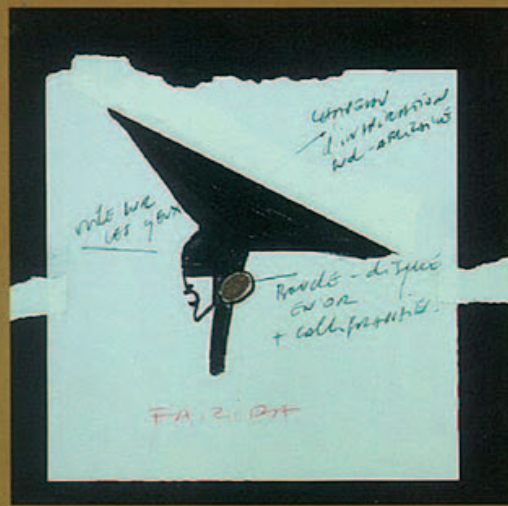
Grace and twin brother,
'Jungle Fever' (1981)

Grace Jones;
'A one man show',
N.Y. (1981/82)

First video, N.Y. (1981)



Cherry Coke (1986)
Farida, TV show (1988)
Citroën CX (1986)
Club Med (1986)
Affiche Expo; Musée Cantini (1987)
Lee Cooper (1983)
Lee Cooper (1983)
Lee Cooper (1982)
Lee Cooper (1982)



Azzedine Alaïa and Farida (1988)
Elle magazine special TV program,
'A portrait of Farida'
by Jean-Paul Goude

Azzedine and Farida (1988)

Hairstyle sketch, Farida TV special

Hat sketch, Farida TV special

Farida drawing (1988)



Farida as George Sand

call Quincy
to call
Hesse Jackson



A TRIBUTE TO JAMES BROWN THE KING OF SOUL MUSIC
A TRIBUTE TO RUTH THOMAS INVENTOR OF THE "FUNKY CHICKEN"
"THE PUSH AND PULL", "THE DO", "THE FUNKY PENGUIN", "THE WHITE MAN"



Bi-centennial 1989

Bi-centennial Parade Costumes

Bi-centennial Parade, France

Bi-centennial Parade, France
(Arab community)

Bi-centennial Parade, U.K.

Bi-centennial Parade, China

Sketch book Bi-centennial Parade



Vanessa Paradis as 'Coco' (1992)

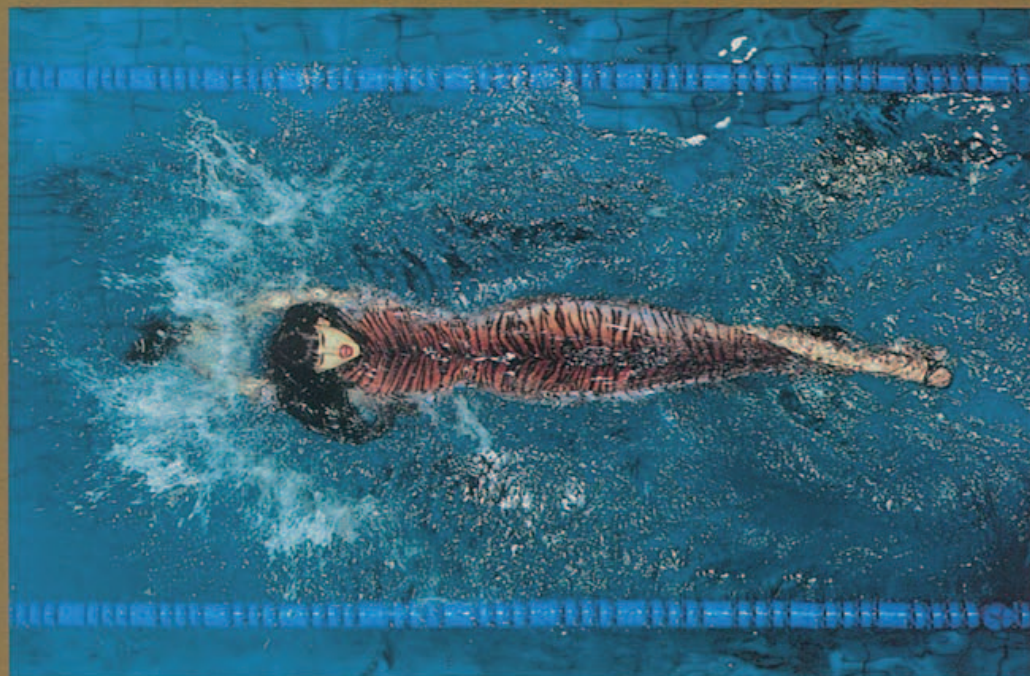


Azzedine for 'Gitane' (1995)

Azzedine and Beatrice Dalle (1996)

Azzedine and Beatrice Dalle
(Paris Match, 1996)

Azzedine and Beatrice Dalle (1996)



'Olympic' serie
for ELLE magazine
(1996)

'Olympic' serie
for ELLE magazine
(1996)

