

Jean-Paul Goude

*Graphic Designer, Photographer,
Illustrator, Director*

You have a long working relationship with Grace Jones. How did you begin to help craft her persona?

It all started with a portrait I did of her for *New York* magazine in the 1970s when she was my girlfriend. When she eventually asked me—as a favor—to help her with her show, I simply did what I thought Hollywood writers do when they write a script: I conceived a fictional character, and it would become her trademark for years. The character was in complete contradiction with the glitzy style of the entertainers of the period. Wearing bluish makeup to emphasize her African roots, a flattop hair style, and a tight tailored men's suit to dramatize her androgyny, Grace looked more like a menacing alien than a disco diva; instead of belting songs like all the other stars of the day, she recited her lyrics as slowly and precisely as an English schoolteacher. Grace Jones, in 1978, looked and sounded like nobody else in the music business.

You've worked in so many different mediums over the course of your career, from fashion photography to advertising to directing. Is there a common thread among all your work?

Since I realized very early in life that, whether I liked it or not, I could only dance and draw, I decided to incorporate those two skills in all my projects, whether they are advertising, fashion photography, theatrical events, even museum exhibitions. To me, they're all the same.

When you look back at your career, do you have any regrets?

Sort of... it was the '70s, and it was Halloween night in a gay disco during a show that I not only conceived and directed but also photographed for the invitation. Disguised as a tiger, Grace came onstage crawling on all fours while a live tiger in a cage was rolled onstage by two chorus boys. As Grace approached the cage, taunting the beast, all the lights went out, and when they came back on a few seconds later, the tiger had disappeared: Alone in the cage, Grace was munching on a big piece of fake meat as she glared furiously at the audience. We all knew that this was no Shakespeare in the Park, and that the show was meant to be pure burlesque and lots of fun; but stage shows die and pictures stay. Looking back, the whole performance was indeed in the worst taste possible, even if it perfectly suited the spirit of the time.

Who was the first person who taught you that you could break the rules?

I guess it was Harold Hayes, the legendary editor and my boss at *Esquire* magazine some 50 years ago. Harold was the first person to take me seriously enough to run a story in his magazine that was an unabashed reflection on my own neuroses. We called it "The French Correction," or how to improve one's morphologic imperfections by using various prostheses.

Who is the artist or performer that you consider the most original?

I always had a weakness for Lina Wertmüller, the feminist author and director of *Swept Away*. It's a 45-year-old movie about machismo versus man-hating from the mid-'70s. It's a gem.

What was your first major fashion purchase?

I don't shop at all. I know style and I'm interested in clothes, but I've always had my clothes made by a tailor. When I was 15, I used to borrow money from my dad to have my clothes made in secret. I'm not a tailor, but I know how my jacket should fall on me. A tailor can call it his jacket, because he cut it and sewed it, but I call it mine, because I actually designed it.

What is originality to you?

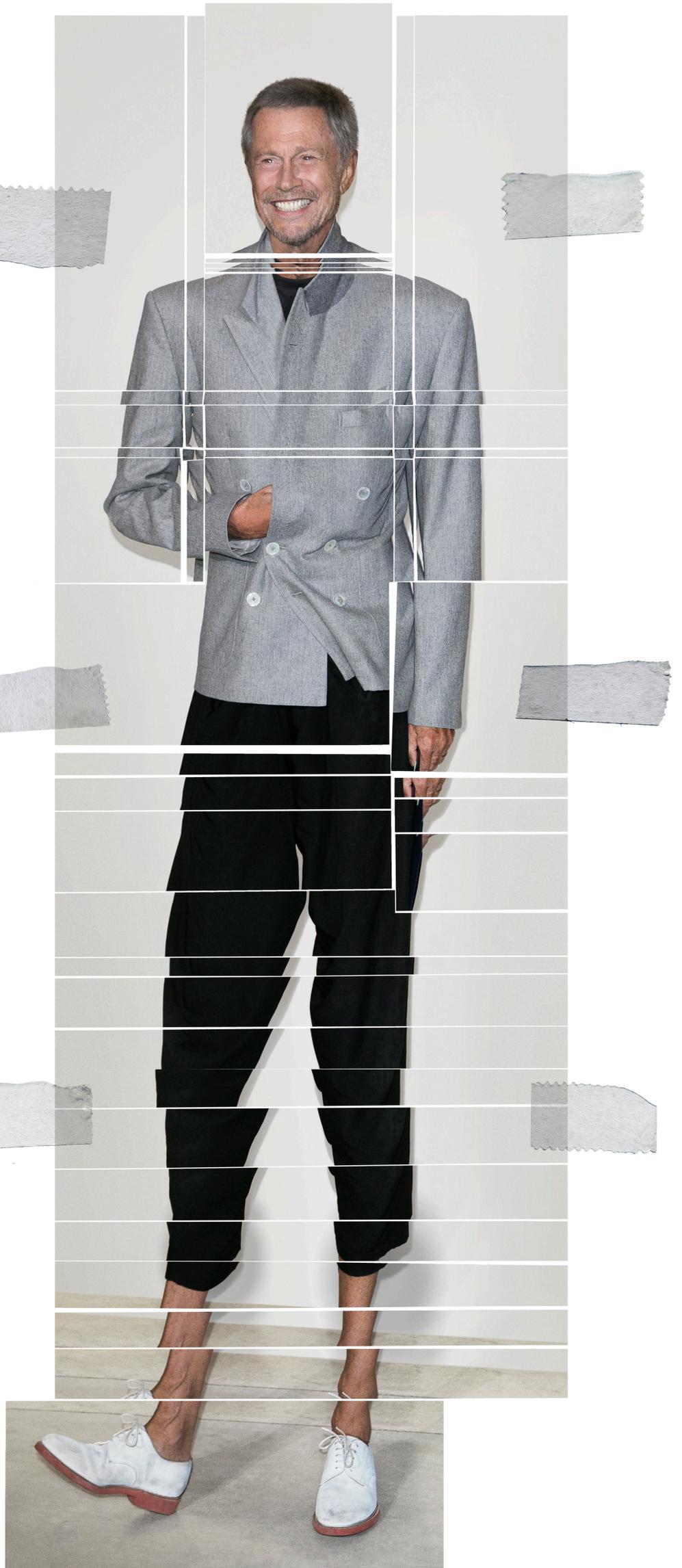
Originality is about being creatively daring. It's about being authentic, different, and, if possible, unique.

Do you feel that political correctness has impacted the execution of your ideas?

Of course it has, and it's been getting worse, especially in recent years, with the emergence of social media.

How much do you care about the public's response to your work?

I care a lot. I'm a closet performer who loves applause and hates bad reviews! s.e.



COLLAGE BY JEAN-PAUL GOUDE

Jean-Paul Goude wears his own clothing.