



THE NEW PANDROGENY

BREYER P-ORRIDGE CUT UP THE GENDER DIVIDE

"It's not about a man being trapped in a woman's body, or a woman being trapped in a man's body," Lady Jaye explains. "It's about being trapped in a body." Identity, self-perception and self-representation have fascinated both Lady Jaye (née Jacqueline Breyer) and Djin (formerly Genesis P-Orridge) throughout their lives. The pair met in 1993, and has since been exploring related issues (as the single unit, Breyer P-Orridge) through the mediums of montage, sculpture, music and each other. The visual work they've recently unveiled, at group exhibits in New York and Europe, reveals this collaborative journey with images of one mimicking or putting on the appearance of the other.

It would be easy at first glance to look at Breyer P-Orridge's art as being concerned solely with gender. With its sexual and transgendered imagery, along with the duo's own personal experiment to appear similar to one another, gender certainly is a big part of it. But to view it in terms alone would be to miss the deeper issues they're questioning, as well as the broader philosophical idea that encompasses their artwork and their very existence. Breyer P-Orridge is concerned with identity in all of its facets, even those we don't understand or have yet learned to communicate.

Their focus on gender and sexuality is rooted in a more complex evolutionary idea, one that attacks binary systems and forms of dualism on all levels. They've coined the term "pandrogeny" to describe their philosophy. Similar to androgyny—which entails having both male and female characteristics—pandrogeny accepts that multiplicities of gender identities exist. It's partly how we're conscious of our own bodies, and how we attach that consciousness to emotion and self-awareness. It's also about how we relate to others—what Breyer P-Orridge describe as "exploring empathy." Not only our instinct to fear things that are different, but also our instinct to trust things that seem familiar or comforting—and then, when they don't hold up to our expectations, force us to question and analyze at a deeper level.

Their montage art, inspired by the "cut-up" idea developed in the 1970s by William S. Burroughs and Brion Gyson (both old friends and influences of Djin's), first appear as mosaic-like designs, later revealing themselves to be cut-outs of the artists' own interconnected bodies in various forms. Their sculptures are more immediately visceral, using objects like taxidermied wolf-heads (with knives extending from the muzzles like tongues) positioned in a way that suggests intimate violence—it's what Lady Jaye describes as "recognizing the animal in all of us, and learning to contain it."

Both have a history of questioning and confronting societal parameters—Lady Jaye, a Brooklyn native, has been doing experimental performance art since the late 80s. Djin, under the name of Genesis P-Orridge, was in the vanguard of industrial music with bands Throbbing Gristle and later Psychic TV. (Their current music project, PTV3, is set to release an album later this spring.) His previous performance art led him into a direct clash with the British monarchy, one that resulted in Djin being put on trial for obscure "indecent" charges in 1975, dispossessed of most of his work and forced to seek refuge in the States.

Personal experiences have shown them not only the dangers of authoritative systems, but also the innate fear people have of new ideas and forms of communication. "We have this tremendous disconnect in terms of where the species is at and where nature is at, and that's a recipe for massive disaster," Djin says. "The imperative for change, any kind of change, overrides fear of the unknown." Lady Jaye concurs, "The human species is trying to evolve, and there is no evolution without mutation."

This was partly the impetus for their own physical transformation, which took place through makeup and clothing as well as physical surgery. The idea wasn't to become the same person, but rather a third being, a shared existence that encompasses both of their identities. It began the night they decided to be reborn.

All of our hair contains traces of DNA, as Djin explains—hair that's three feet long has perhaps five years of experience actually recorded in it. One night, lying next to a log fire they'd built at their isolated home in the redwoods of California, they decided to "literally cut off our nonmingled past and begin a totally involved-in-the-present future." And so they took scissors and razors from the house and cut, shaved and hacked off their DNA.

They kept the hair—one of their pieces, "P-ANDROGENY SIGIL," has Djin's former dreadlocks glued in the center of a vaginal collage. Opposite this, Lady Jaye's ponytail hangs from a painted phallus. A project that spanned six years from that date, it's a testament to their ideas about identity, evolution and mutation. It's a body of work that encapsulates the Utopian ideal of two iconoclasts who want to be remembered "as a love story." **LORI FREDRICKSON**