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OLIVO

PUPPIES PUPPIES

Until very recently Jade Kuriki Olivo was cloaked in a fur coat—mythically, she was known as Puppies Puppies Woof Woof, Puppies Puppies Woof, Puppies Puppies, or just *Puppies*, an anonymous artist who presented dozens of catchy exhibitions in a few years, many of them involving performances behind iconic millennial masks. In London and Los Angeles, they were Voldemort, sleeping care of pills. In Mexico City, at the Material Art Fair, they danced as *Bob Esponja* with a cheeky protest sign. They've perched on a plastic boulder as Gollum in a basement in Detroit, and in that same gallery (What Pipeline), they wore a Minions costume, and let a field of green grass brown around a tombstone, bones, and brain. They lurked at Kunsthalle in Bern as a smoking NASA astronaut. And on the roof of the Whitney, as part of the Museum's 2017 Biennial, Puppies played Lady Liberty as she appears in Midtown, a living ad for souvenirs. The objects in Puppies' shows have been likewise readymade and popular: IKEA furniture, Purell hand sanitizer, gun triggers, retractable belt barriers, a tinsel jacket, hand mirror, and posters from *Una mujer fantástica* (A Fantastic Woman), which won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film a few months after Puppies screened it in Berlin. Like a style icon who can wear anything and it becomes them, in Puppies' paws, popular forms—no matter how well known or loaded—are transformed. They become somehow both more and less iconic, decommodified and reconcretized. Between this alchemical skill, their prolific nature, and elusiveness, the artist has inspired a lot of gossip.

I heard that Puppies Puppies often didn't install their own shows, and that the persons behind the masks were sometimes paid actors. I heard that almost no one had met the artist face-to-face. Gallerists and collectors either met with associates of the artist or Puppies would arrange it so, for example: they'd be showering while speaking to a collector, or lying *under* a couch that a gallerist sat *on*. These stories were delivered with awe and admiration. If there was anything biting about their telling, it was a glint of envy from contemporaries of the artist who wished they'd thought to play the artist-as-brand and attention economy as waggishly as Puppies.

On the first day of 2019, *Interview Magazine* published a conversation between Jade Kuriki Olivo, coming out as Puppies Puppies, and Laura Albert, the author behind JT LeRoy, a turn of the century literary persona made infamous by pre-social media press, who has since been reclaimed as a queer legend. The pairing of Laura and Jade situated Puppies Puppies within a field of life/art performance related to trauma, queerness, femininity, and hypersensitivity. When I got to exchange emails with Jade, I also got this impression: that what I initially read as mischievous art world pranking—her mask dawning—had more or as much to do with anxiety, repression, and societal oppression. When I asked to fact-check the myths surrounding Puppies' trickster communications, Jade replied:

I've always loved that early conceptual art spread through
 mysterious photographs
 And via
 storytelling
 I have hid from many
 Things
 People
 Situations
 over the years
 Out of shame
 Fear
 Anxiety
 Or the need to withhold
 / sometimes
 none of the above

Unknown Author

Many of Jade's replies to my questions were signed "Unknown Author." A couple ended with "Probably Me." Her definition of zeitgeist—I asked, and she answered brilliantly: "zeitgeist is the momentum that exists inside a bubble that seeks to break the bubble. the zeitgeist then dies when the bubble bursts—" was attributed to, "Someone from Irvine." While statement about her childhood, signed "Ren Light Pan," said: I remember irvine, california as starbucks green. my parents were kinda anti toy so i drew a lot. i also liked the jungle gym and handball. eventually my aunt in taiwan sent me and my brother a gameboy color. it came







Permanently Closed Voting Booths (Stack Relative to the Height of a Human), 2019
Courtesy: the artist and Queer Thoughts, New York (p. 110)



Ansel Adams, Monument in cemetery, 1943 (Scanned Reproduction) (Sherrie Levine After Walker Evans) (Proposal for a Soul Consoling Tower in Various Locations Around the World) (Soul Consoling Tower), 2019 Courtesy: the artist and Queer Thoughts, New York (pp. 108-109)



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with a knockoff pokémon blue version where id run into an endless brick wall every time i tried to enter cerulean city. it also didn't save my progress. i was pretty addicted to that. my parents took me back to see family in taiwan about every other summer. i also got to tour china when it was really cheap to stay in five star hotels. i was so impressed with the hotels but really disappointed with things like the great wall which was just old bricks and misleading postcards in the middle of nowhere.

From the *Interview* article, I'd learned that Jade Kuriki Olivo (b. 1989) is a trans woman of Japanese and Puerto Rican descent, who grew up outside of Dallas, Texas, and was diagnosed with a since-excavated brain tumor in 2010. Cross-referencing this interview with Puppies' press releases from recent years, one can read much of the latter as memoir. In them, Puppies addresses her given name, her fear of flying, her brain tumor, hormones, and her former role as her high school's mascot. Or consider the poem press release accompanying Puppies' show dedicated to *Una mujer fantástica*, a portrait of transphobia and queer dignity in contemporary Chile:

I cried endlessly in this movie.
Just waterfalls sprouting from the
the innermost crevice
where lid meets the eye

A few times during our correspondence, Jade expressed difficulty in responding due to intense emotions. "I'm not in the best mood or headspace these days," she wrote. "Too much is going on for me." And: "I'm just a human with a brain and a heart, I feel too much honestly." She wished, "for a better life for my community, I wish people cared about trans people more," then shared links to the TransLatin@ Coalition, an advocacy group she works with. Regarding what's soothing, Jade called upon Michelangelo Antonioni's 1964 film *Red Desert*, in which "Monica Vitti runs around in the middle of the night in what appears to be a shipyard. She starts to talk to a stranger. She says to him, If you pinch me you feel no pain."

With her last reply, Jade requested that I include any unanswered questions in this publication as, "I think they are relevant."

The first question was about readymade actions. In a 2016 interview, Puppies suggested that actions, such as taking a sleeping pill, can be readymades. "I actually think," she continued, "that's how Puppies tries to differ from Duchamp, however crazy that sounds."

I loved this notion applied to Puppies' practice and to deciphering life. "It's both an exciting and ominous proposal," I wrote Jade, "as it brings to mind artistic gestures—mindfully animating readymade actions, performatively, to enlighten, demystify, and enchant, as I see you do—but also the mindless, mundane... how so many of the actions people carry out everyday are scripts, and the repercussions of that." I wondered what readymade actions Jade had to unlearn in her lifetime, and how one might coin a new iconic action.

This lead into a query about how Marcel Duchamp's urinal may have been shipped to him already inscribed "R. Mutt" by artist-poet Elsa Hildegard Baroness von Freytag-Loringhoven. I asked Jade what she made of this information, and how we might document art history in such a way that accounts for multiple authors, fluid exchange, and influence (considering art more like ecology than property). "I'm thinking," I told Jade, "of how Puppies Puppies involves so many: pop culture characters, your former partner, absences making room for infinite projections..."

While I was trading emails with Jade, a solo show by her was up in Manhattan. Titled *Executive Order 9066 (Soul Consoling Tower)*, the show, at Queer Thoughts gallery, featured many of Puppies' signature moves, including the use of wall vinyls, readymade objects, and bright blue plastic (this time in a tower of twelve decommissioned voting booths from Sarasota County, Florida). (Another Puppies' move: using the gallery—approaching "a show—" as a medium in itself; an ecosystem and set, not just room for objects.) Besides the voter booth blue and golden-bronze on an urn containing ashes from burned American flags, the show was all black, white, and grey. There were reproductions of photographs by Ansel Adams of California's Camp Tulelake where Japanese people were interned during World War II, as well documentation of a current proposal: a fence that would limit access to the former camp, now a heritage site, where Japanese-Americans and allies pay pilgrimage to regularly. The space was full of voices—above an audio piece of three Japanese women testifying to their internment experiences, attendees spoke their takes out loud and in echoing whispers. When I first walked in, an art student was schooling a curious layperson on Puppies' *whole thing*. "They love this blue," she told him. "Also bright yellow and green." Despite holding a press release that said Jade Kuriki Olivo, "lives and works in Los Angeles," the student confidently proclaimed, "Puppies live in New York." Fans love to feel close.

