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TRANSVERSAL



11TH ISSUE — 2018
1500 COPIES
ESP 42€ · EUR 45€ · UK 43£ · US \$65

AGOSTO MACHADO PHOTOGRAPHED BY RYAN MCGINLEY

Becoming Part Of The Universe So The Universe Becomes Part Of You

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Photography

Interview by

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AGOSTO MACHADO

Monday 31, July 2017, New York City

I first met Agosto when I was a baby at the Pyramid Club in the 1980s. There, I was welcomed with open arms by the queens like Agosto, Tabboo! and Ethyl Eichelberger (who, incidentally, suggested I go to beauty school as I liked to do my own hair and makeup so much). Agosto went on to become an inspiration and a living angel in my life. Only later did I find out that Agosto had been a vibrant player in the downtown scene all through the '60s, '70s and '80s that I'd loved, studied and worshipped. He was a part of The Theatre of the Ridiculous; performed with John Vaccaro; was in plays with Jackie Curtis, Holly Woodlawn and Candy Darling; performed with the Cockettes; was photographed by Peter Hujar and Jack Smith and many others; is a long standing member of the La MaMa Theatre; has been featured in many documentaries including ones on Jackie and Candy. He still performs in plays and films and is a muse to artists such as Tabboo!, Jack Pierson and Ryan McGinley. To me, Agosto is an example of NYC at its finest. I run into him on the street regularly, he always looks lovely and has the sweetest, most positive message of love.

—Jimmy Paul

Tabboo! I knew your photo before I even knew you. There was a book called *Idols*, and it was you and Alexis del Lago. So, it's Alexis doing Marlene Dietrich and you doing Anna May Wong. I was very excited when I finally met you because it meant that these queens aren't just in a book that are glamorous. Especially in *Idols* it was more of a Cockettes kind of drag. Am I wrong; weren't you part of the Cockettes at one point when they came to New York and you did a show with Sylvester called—do you remember the name of it? *Pearls Over Shanghai*. It was an Asian show which fit right into you being an Asian drag queen in a Cockettes mode.

Agosto Machado. The only Asian in the show.

Jimmy Paul. Let's back this up a little bit. Let's start from the beginning. Where are you from?

AM. New York! You want to go that far back, when the glaciers were coming down the Hudson, and I was trying to push them back? I'm a surviving dinosaur. And I'm 39.

JP. One thing that I've always loved about you was that you have boundaries, and there are some certain things I might ask you and you'll demure. So please don't hesitate to push back on any questions. I know there's a mischievous side to you that I'd love for the readers to get, that you have these picadillos that are unique to you and part of your magic. So, "Where are you from?" Your answer is New York City. And what nationality are you?

AM. Well, I was Chinese-Cuban or Cuban-Chinese for a while when I was on Christopher Street.

JP. It always seems like you just appeared. I've never heard you refer to your family or your past. All I know is Jackie Curtis met you and asked you if you sang and you said?

AM. No.

JP. If you acted and you said—

AM. No.

JP. If you danced—

AM. No.

JP. "You're perfect!" she said. [Laughs]

AM. "Do you want to be in the show?" I said, "Yes!"

JP. I wonder, when I talk to you, if it's calculated, this kind of mystique you have? That you don't say your age or your exact ethnicity or anything about your family or your real name.

AM. Thank you for being sensitive to that, that I avoid all references. My boundaries are often invisible, even for myself. All I do acknowledge is that I was a pre-Stonewall Christopher Street Queen—that was my life and education. Street queens know how to survive. Like you can spend all night in the old days at Greenwich Village station or Port Authority waiting for a bus and you can catch many hours of sleep—

JP. Oh, I always wondered what you meant about being a street queen. So literally you were on the street. And were you ... hooking?

AM. Well, there might have been an exchange or appreciation.

T. You ran into Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson?

AM. Yes. We were in the same circles.

JP. And you were fond of Marsha?

AM. Oh, very much. Her life wasn't easy because [when] she was growing up she used to get beat up for wearing a skirt or dress to school. Her family tried to protect her but the School of Hard Knocks ... she became her true self when she hit Christopher Street, no one was going to judge her there. God bless her to the end. She was always encouraging the





Flaming Creature Agosto Machado, 2017. Artwork by Tabboo!
Acrylic on linen, 42 x 32 inches. Courtesy the artist and Gordon Robichaux.

Left Page: Self Portrait #29 (Agosto Machado) 2005. Photographed by Jack Pierson
Pigment print. 53 1/2 x 43 inches.



Agosto Machado photographed by Jack Smith, 1966. From Augusto Machado's personal collection.



Agosto Machado photographed by Roz Kelly, 1967. From Augusto Machado's personal collection.

"In the darkness of night and the doorways, we would roll up our pant legs and slip on a skirt and change our shoes and get as feminine as we could."

people around her: "Release yourself, be your true self, let your insides flower!" And there was Marsha, never in the same outfit twice—she was always adorning and changing and sharing. So, I thought Marsha was doing real missionary work to all the potential street queens. As the evening would wear down, a lot of us had shopping bags; in the darkness of night and the doorways, we would roll up our pant legs and slip on a skirt and change our shoes and get as feminine as we could.

JP. Because it was illegal.

AM. Right, you had to be careful. But our part of Christopher Street was down the West Side Highway, and it was dirty and dingy and the police really didn't bother [going] below Hudson.

T. OK, give me your quick impressions of two events that happened in the 1960s. Most queens would have loved to have been there and you actually were there. The first one is Barbra Streisand—closing night of *Funny Girl* on Broadway.

AM. Oh, that was such a blessing. There was this man who worked in the box office who I knew through my services. I mentioned that I would love to see Barbra Streisand in *Funny Girl*. But I worked nights and I wasn't free and you never knew when you were going to get a client. One time, he asked, "OK, if I can get you a ticket, would you not waste it? Would you use it?" And I said, "Of course." He made a few phone calls and he got me one in the orchestra. It was the last performance of *Funny Girl* at the Winter Garden Theater. It was so exciting because there were crowds of people coming to buy tickets for the last show. And autograph-takers at the stage door—you could hardly get in. People came early and they were

all so excited, so titillated—it was such a buzz. And then it was time ... and the speaker said, "Ladies and gentlemen, at tonight's performance of *Funny Girl* the role of Fanny Price will be played by ..." and he took a long pause, everyone was hanging on his next word. And then he said, "Miss Barbra Streisand!" And when she sang "People" she cried through it. It was quite amazing and so memorable that many of us just stayed in the theater.

T. Right! Now, let's switch from Barbara to Judy. You saw Judy at the Palace. What was it like when you heard Judy died?

AM. It was such a shock on the street. I was living at the notorious Hotel Keller, above Keller's Bar on the West Side Highway near Christopher Street. I woke up to queens pounding on doors, thinking, *What are these mad queens doing?* And they said, "She's dead, she's dead, she's dead! Judy's dead!" And listen: On the street, you know a dozen queens named Judy. You know some hookers in the hotel are called Judy. And I thought, *Oh, OK. Maybe some John strangled somebody*, nothing new at the Keller's, which was notorious. And there was all this sobbing. I was very curious and I opened the door and screamed, "Do you know what time it is?" I think it was in the a.m.—I wasn't all together. Doubled up at my feet was this queen sobbing. *Oh dear, should I get her a glass of water or should we call the ambulance?* She's just hyperventilating. And then it sort of comes out: "Judy's dead!" And I said, "Which Judy?" and I'm thinking, you mean the hooker that's on the 3rd floor? Or the queen from the Silver Dollar? Which Judy?

She said, "Garland." And I'm putting the two together because I'm still waking up. "Judy Garland, *the* Judy Garland is dead?" And I

refuse to believe it 'cause she's still in her forties and I said, "No, no, that's misinformation; that can't be true. Rumors fly on the block of people dying all the time and it's not true. So please don't repeat this rumor because it's mean-spirited and evil; you're karmically doing bad things it's going to come back and haunt you." And I shoved her out of the door. There were street queens saying, "She's dead!" Above the traffic and the ambulance and the fire trucks and police. I didn't digest the whole thing because I refused to believe it ... it was only later ...

JP. Let me just interrupt you for a second—this is crucial. I read recently that because she was older than a generation of queens, her death, in fact didn't have an impact on the Stonewall rebellion; that that was a camp rumor and actually not true. You're telling me, though, as someone who was there, that Judy's death did have an impact on those queens?

AM. Yes, on the street queens. But the street queens are many segments and different alliances. My circle, it did.

JP. To the point where they were screaming on Christopher Street?

AM. Yes, but on Christopher Street there are always queens screaming about everything. And yet, what is all this fuss about: "I lost my acid!" and you go, "You took it all, Queen." "No, no!" I mean there was always screaming and yelling and commotions. But this did make an impact.

JP. Let's segue to Jackie Curtis and going to Judy's funeral.

AM. Jackie said, "Holly is coming over later and Candy's still asleep on the sofa, because Candy was crashing there at Jackie's. We did

make arrangements. Everybody was going to take speed at midnight—I didn't need to because I started earlier—and we were going to meet at the Astor Place subway, and go up to Madison and 81st, to the funeral home.

JP. Can I interrupt you to describe what you were wearing to go to Judy Garland's funeral, to stand in line in the summer?

AM. Yes, so I thought I'd be respectful. I wore a capri pant, Capezio ballet slippers, which were not new—

JP. Heaven.

AM. And dark glasses. And I had my hair sort of in a ponytail and I had what I thought was a smart little white blouse with short sleeves and I, for some reason, thought white gloves would be appropriate.

JP. So do I. What would you call that look? Would you call it like demi-drag? Would you call it just the way you dressed? Would you call it drag? Did you have a name for it?

AM. I thought it was Audrey Hepburn-ish from *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. **JP. So, "woman".**

AM. Yes. And who could tell because I had that long hair.

JP. So, you were passing.

AM. Oh, I thought I was.

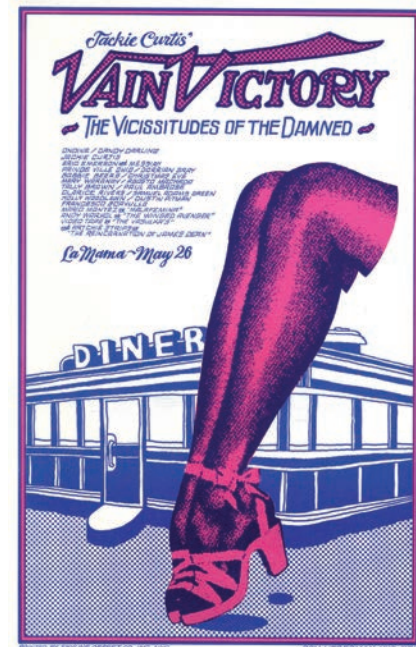
JP. That's all that matters.

AM. And with the Capezio ballet slippers—

JP. Little feet.

T. How many people were there?

AM. I would think at least a thousand people were trying to join or cut in the line.



Top: Agosto Machado with Candy Darling, 1971.

Bottom left: Jackie Curtis' *Vain Victory* poster by Ron Lieberman, 1971.

Bottom right: Jackie Curtis and Agosto Machado by Marianne Barcellona, 1972. © Marianne Barcellona, all rights reserved. From Agosto Machado's personal collection.



Agosto Machado photographed by Marianne Barcellona, 1972. © Marianne Barcellona, all rights reserved. From Agosto Machado's personal collection.

T. But you got in.

AM. Yes. But the mood and the people you chatted with ... but there's a queen I would meet later, Paul Ambrose, who lived at the Hotel Keller, who's really accused of being a murderess—his nickname was Paul "Couldn't Prove a Thing" Ambrose and he was questioned several times and he just died recently, several months ago, in the Bronx at a wonderful hospice. I sort of knew him from the street but not well— he brought one of those portable record players, and he would play "Over the Rainbow" over and over ... and if you were in line it was an hour and a half, it was getting on to two hours. And at certain points, certain queens would say, "Shut the fuck up, I can't take it!"

JP. So, were there a lot of gay people in line?

AM. I would say there was a good representation of our community, in all sorts of outfits. I remember thinking, *Gee whiz*, because raw sunlight with a full-face—it's not always kind. And after two hours there were wonderful queens and their eyelashes and lips were fading; and with perspiration under some wigs, it was getting damper and damper and I thought, *Oh! A mermaid look!*

JP. Did Candy and Holly and Jackie not show up?

AM. No. Jackie said, "We were there we didn't see you," but I suspect that they had crashed, and in their highness, they emotionally and spiritually were there, but they weren't physically there. That doesn't matter because emotionally they felt wounded and they had cried.

JP. What was the reaction to you guys on the street?

AM. Well, dear, we were the majority on that street. The very sedate staff of Campbell's just turned a blind eye. But eventually when you were near the doorway, you were prepared, because they said you couldn't linger: "Ladies and gentlemen, please be prepared to keep moving, there are many people who are viewing Miss Garland and wanting to pay their respects."

JP. So, hit us with Judy now. So, you got to Judy.

AM. Well there were a few queens in front of me who were slow-footed. And I didn't realize—I'd seen her in person on stage—she really was petite. I thought, *Gee whiz, her coffin's too large*. It really didn't fit her. Like there was so much room ... I believe the outfit was sort of like a lavender outfit.

JP. With a hat?

AM. Maybe a pillbox or something. Very subdued and ladylike, I remember. There was a queen—she was ahead of me in line—she had brought a program and she had her pen out. I thought, *Is she so self-deluded she thought Judy was going to sit up in the coffin and autograph her program?* Well, there were a lot of demented queens and very sincere ones, the dear hearts, who never really ventured uptown. It was a whole new adventure for them and they dressed accordingly—what they thought Judy would like them to wear. Judy was a guardian angel to so many queens and her singing "Over the Rainbow" touched a generation of queens—and older queens almost talked with hushed tones about Judy Garland. And might I add, after I came downtown, there were clusters of grieving queens clenching each other and crying. Also, from Sheridan Square down, there were pockets of the community who really didn't have an emotional connection to Judy. They thought, *So what!* She was a drunk and did drugs, she tried suicide so many times. And maybe because she was so successful, they were so hard-hearted in a way and not understanding how many of us really were grieving. But there are always queens like that.

JP. True. Funnily enough, I always talk about myself and my friends as queens, and you do too—maybe I got it from you—

AM. Well, generationally, at Marsha P. Johnson's 25th anniversary, at the pier, of her passing, there was a whole younger generation of

Agosto wears costumes by Tabboo! and a Marc Jacobs bag as a necklace. Hair: Jimmy Paul. Tech support: Pablo Maine.



“For younger people, they think [Stonewall was] a specific night and action. But it was a process.”

transgender queens who were speaking and so forth, and it was like legend to myth and some of them weren't even born or were born after Marsha's passing. And it's parallel to younger queens, who spoke about Judy, who never saw her live, who just saw her in black and white, maybe in reruns. They were more mourning, having feelings for Liza, the daughter, than Judy. As an older queen, they are the majority, we are the minority; but at one point in history we were the majority downtown on Christopher Street. But time has moved on. Progress. Change is change.

T. Change is coming. Talking about Judy dying: that's late June 1969, which is also the date of something called Stonewall. You were around New York City in June 1969. Tell us about it.

AM. Well, I have to preface it with: For younger people, they think it's a specific night and action. But it was a process. If you were part of the downtown scene, you were raided many times in bars and roughed up; the police would raid places and they'd get a payoff. And the thing is, the mafia asked the police to keep the queens off the street—keep them in the bars and then the after-bars—keep the streets cleared. And then we'd have to go to our after-hours bar, and drink and so forth. So, it was one hand feeding the other in their own way. And there were incidents where people that sorta

fought back but were beaten. And so, Stonewall just started out like, *Oh, you know, they're going to be at us, it's a hot steamy night.* A lot of people didn't have air conditioning or any of that business. You went out in the street, you went near the river, you paraded, you changed shoes, and so forth.

T. Were you arrested?

AM. No, they couldn't get me. I wore flats, kid. I knew how to run.

T. That can be a quote, we pull that out big. [Laughs]

AM. Being practical, people who work the streets and so forth had to wear flats because you had to run. In the Meatpacking District, the cobble streets, you don't run in heels—you have to get away from many people. And so, survival of the fittest is that you ran. The truth is, I did not think that night was that special, or an incident like the French Revolution. I just thought, *Oh, this has really gotten out of hand*, and there were subsequent riots for different things in New York. In Harlem, they didn't do so much news, but the black/white problem with the community in Harlem—the police were really being so brutal. But it wasn't playing out nationally. But somehow, slowly, for some of us street queens, it was like, *Gosh, this is really making headlines across the country and in the world.*

JP. You changed the world Agosto!

Agosto Machado in the first Gay Parade, photographed by Ed Drucker, 1970. From Agosto Machado's personal collection.



AM. But who knew?

JP. Can you tell us more about Candy, Holly and Jackie and Warhol? How did you meet them and did they introduce you to Warhol?

AM. Jackie, Candy and Holly each had their own look and personality and it wasn't a competition. They were three separate fabulous jewels. And they weren't competing with each other. But Jackie Curtis took me under her wing.

JP. Yeah, that was your sister.

AM. Yes, and we went down the journey of the drugs and alcohol together. Collectively, everyone was on that wavelength, and as I tell younger people, there was a point downtown, from the East River to the Hudson, when you could smell grass in the air. And people would be toking in front of a police car; but they were young and they weren't going to be bothered writing up somebody who was smoking dope. It was just culturally something that everyone did.

JP. OK, so did they introduce you to Warhol?

AM. Yes, yes.

JP. Where does Mario Montez fit in? Ethyl, especially I remember, would talk about Mario like she was just the end-all great artist-performer queen. Do you feel that way?

AM. Oh, very definitely. Mario Montez has a very special place in my heart and I knew Mario and I'm sworn to secrecy because I knew Mario before he was Mario Montez.

JP. Wow. Let me just interject here that the integrity you're mentioning is something that was very unique and made a big impact on me from when I first met you as a 19-year-old queen.

AM. Oh, thank you, I never thought it was integrity — Minette! I always like to mention Minette because she was the muse of Charles Ludlam.

JP. And Minette was an older... because to me you're—I mean, I know we're not ready to talk about age—but I was a baby when I met you, and you and Ethyl and Larry Ree were a generation above us so Minette was a generation above you.

AM. And what we all loved about Minette was that she was so knowledgeable and sometimes when she was talking about the '60s, she was talking about the 1860s, because she knew so much about clothing and garments. I would show her old tintypes and what have you, and she would name the names of special things of what the ladies wore.

JP. She was a genius.

AM. Minette wouldn't want to hear things about the trucks—"Oh, that's dirty with strangers!" And tea rooms and all that—"No, no, no." But Minette was a stitch bitch. On Bleecker and Christopher, like on the second floor of one of the oldest buildings on that east side, she used to work for a seamstress and that's when she was a stitch bitch; chained to the sewing machine, you know with the pedal going up and down. Then she became independent, and started a business when she retired from being a chanteuse, showgirl, etc.

T. Andy Warhol and his obsession with drag queens: Weren't you and Mario Montez set to play the female leads in Heat before the whole thing with him being shot? Is that true?

AM. Valerie shot him. Not to defend Valerie, but if you ever chatted with her, she sincerely was wounded by men in her life. And she did feel very slighted by Warhol.

T. So, you knew her?

AM. Oh, I talked to her. She used to hang out on St. Mark's Place and sneer at anything in pants.

JP. But not you?

T. You wouldn't be caught dead in pants.

AM. No, but she felt burned by The Factory.

T. But before she shot him, you were set with Mario to be in Heat?

AM. No, Paul Morrissey had asked Mario to be in ... it was called the *Tropicana Motel*—it's a famous motel on some street in Hollywood that musicians and people OD in and what have you. But it had a little pool. But anyway, the Pat Ast role was going to be Mario and then somehow Anyway, Paul had talked to me about ... you know how the politics are. Paul talked about wanting to replace Mario with me. I just thought that would be wrong and I didn't actually approach the subject with Mario, but he was already burned because they were supposed to call him back and they never did to tell him that he really wasn't. And at one point he, beloved Mario, took their word for it and actually planned to take two weeks off work and was packing bags and so forth and he phoned the office at The Factory. "Just tell me which airline and what time do I show up?" They said, "What are you talking about?" And he said, "Well, I talked to Paul and briefly

with Andy who said, 'Oh yeah, it's a go.'" It wasn't happening and it was very rude. And at the same time Paul was sort of enticing me—"Oh, you'd be wonderful in it" and what have you—and then he never got back to me. Then later with the politics and rewriting and what have you is Pat Ast [who] sort of ran that Motel.

JP. So you were up for the role of the Pat Ast?

AM. Right.

JP. So, let's back up to ... tell us about your meeting Jackie and you starting performing.

T. I can maybe jog your memory. The guy who played the cowboy in Boys in the Band—who's your next door neighbor—Jackie Curtis had a crush on him. Robert La Tourneaux was a guy who Jackie Curtis loved, not only loved him but stalked him and found out where he lived. He just happened to live right next to you in the same building.

AM. Yes.

T. So that's how you met—

AM. Officially, because Jackie kept haunting the hallways waiting to entice him before "stalking" was a word. He had told me, "I can't tell you not to be friends with Jackie or to let her visit you, but she's hanging out waiting for me and I told her no. I don't want to be in her play ..." and so forth and so on. Robert had already made the splash as a birthday gift in *Boys in the Band* and was doing other things. But Jackie was so obsessed.

T. How did she find you? You were standing outside his door?

AM. No, she saw me coming up the stairs to go in my apartment.

JP. In your capri pants?

T. With your long ponytail?

AM. Well, perhaps.

T. How long was your hair at the time?

AM. Probably almost to my waist.

JP. So, she gagged.

T. She said, "I want you in my production!"

AM. No, no. But the interaction of downtown—who you talked to sitting on the stoop on Christopher Street, or what have you—that quick interaction is different than, *Oh, you could be helpful, because your neighbor and so forth and so on.*

T. When Jackie approached you to be in the play, you actually took the role and it was a real role. Jackie didn't want you for sex.

AM. Who would want me for sex?

JP. Plenty of people.

AM. Well, we don't know that

JP. Something happened in those trucks and it wasn't stitch bitching.

T. So, the play that she put you in was Vain Victory.

JP. Who were some of the other people in that play?

AM. Oh, it was Candy Darling, Eric Emerson, Peter Allen

JP. Peter Allen?!

AM. Peter Allen was only the opening night. Tally Brown

T. Holly Woodlawn. One of those productions, PBS brought the film crew of An American Family. And there you were—boom! I remember seeing you when I was in high school in the back of a book about it—there was a page in there with you and Candy Darling ... so, I knew you before I even knew you. Wow!

AM. Yes, the son coming out and going to NY and going—

T. —Going to a drag show. The drag show was you.

AM. Well, it was us. But in the downtown scene, it's hard to give the context—everybody was so comfortable. Like Allen Ginsberg. You'd say, "Hi, Alan," or whatever. It's just the downtown people were a cohesive smaller community. We just intermixed and talked casually. Hi, or so forth—

JP. And did you ever think about taking hormones? Like Candy and Holly?

AM. Well, yes. Only, I was seeing an older man who thought that if I would get testosterone shots and hormones and all that, I would be less nelly. And that I could be more presentable. We could go to restaurants downtown, but he didn't feel comfortable with me uptown because I was too limp-wristed.

JP. So, you had to take hormones the other way? Some girls were doing it to be more femme, you took hormones to be more

AM. Yeah, but can I let you in on a secret? It didn't work.

JP. Did you ever meet Edie Sedgwick?

AM. Oh, well thanks to Jackie Curtis and that circle, we always had entrée to the backroom at Max's Kansas City.

JP. Tell us all about Max's.

AM. Well, Max's Kansas City was owned by a remarkable man.

JP. Mickey Ruskin.



Agosto Machado photographed by Peter Hujar, 1977. From Agosto Machado's personal collection.



Ethyl Eichelberger and Agosto Machado photographed by Peter Hujar, 1977. From Agosto Machado's personal collection.

AM. Mickey Ruskin had an instinct that there should be a watering hole—an oasis, a spa—for all the downtown currents of energy and artists. He found a place on Park Avenue South and 17th Street. At that time Union Square was a drug-ville. Everyone, including the police, avoided Union Square. But when Mickey started Max's, and Andy moved the factory to Union Square across the way, people could safely walk from the Factory to Max's. Jackie Curtis and our downtown crowd would collectively walk up Fourth Avenue to Max's from the East Village. Taylor Mead, Rene Ricard were table hopping and all the superstars—Gerard Malanga, Bridget Polk, and all these people—were just a conglomeration. And artists that lived at the Chelsea Hotel were coming in and everybody was talking; and Jackie said, "Oh, you've got to meet Edie." And dragged me across. And we did exchange words; I don't know if I reached over to shake—we didn't really go into that kind of etiquette of shaking hands. But we acknowledged each other. And she was like a little out of it, like a lot of people were in the backroom. But you animated and moved your mouth; and they moved their mouth and would open their eyes and wink and wave. And Rene Ricard would be so much fun because he'd circle the room, and he'd point out different people and say something in front of Edie. And she wasn't aware of what he was saying, but he would say something witty about her. "Poor little rich girl, right here! She doesn't even know where she's at!" It wouldn't be cruel, it would be sort of witty and fun. And *Interview Magazine*, because it was across the way, they would drag in all the people that were gonna be in the magazine that they had just photographed, and so forth, and you'd get to see them .

T. Drop names.

AM. Well, Andy liked Candy so much because Candy was a lady, she was always presentable, she knew her manners. She knew how to sit at a table, she knew which fork to use—

JP. Wow.

AM. So Andy would take her to Fifth Avenue soirees or Park Avenue, and we'd all ask Andy the next day who was there and he said, "I don't know." They were wearing pearls or diamonds or whatever—

JP. Remember the time they wanted to drag you to one of those fancy parties and you had nothing to wear so they went and asked Andy for a fancy, full-length fur coat for Agosto: "Andy, Andy, Agosto needs a fur coat!" And he says, "That bitch will lose it, I don't trust her," and, "Please, Andy;" and Jackie got on her knees and Andy handed over a fur coat—

AM. For me.

T. For Agosto! You wore it to the fancy uptown party; what happened?

AM. Well the party was in Robert Ryan's apartment—

T. Robert Ryan, the movie star.

AM. The movie star. He was ill but his daughter went to RISD and was giving her group—slumming millionairesses and what have you—a gathering. And for fun, she asked Jackie and some of us downtown, from La MaMa, to come; and, of course, this is the apartment John and Yoko would eventually buy; I mean it was uptown. I didn't have anything to wear and it was Halloween and Jackie felt I should make an entrance—as if anybody in the Dakota would care—and so we go to this party, and so forth and so on.

T. Andy does give you a fur coat, right?

AM. He loans Jackie Curtis a fur coat for me—he felt I was more reliable than Jackie. Because Jackie would leave it somewhere and forget and get high and leave. Well, at the end of the evening, I went to one of the many bedrooms to get the fur, and one of the rich kids had taken it. And you know these are really rich kids from RISD, who have those sports cars parked on 72nd and along Central Park West; and they were unaware that it was dangerous to leave those expensive cars on the street. But it was a life lesson in class differential: You never know who's going to—

JP. Steal your coat.

AM. To mop your fur. So, I didn't have a fur to wear to get back downtown. And, of course, Jackie didn't tell Andy what had happened to the fur. And it didn't reflect bad on me because his life just goes on.

T. Just another fur coat ... tell us about Ethyl and the Pyramid days.

JP. So now we're in the late '70s, '80s. How did you meet Ethyl? When you met Ethyl, was she Ethyl or Roy?

AM. She preferred Ethyl.

T. So, you met her as Ethyl. When I saw you, when I first really knew you, it was you and Ethyl doing the classics. She would be kind of the straight man, and you would be the buffoon. And you would

both be glamorous, really glamorous, with tulle, and opera gloves, and hairspray. Tell me about that. What was it like working with her? You obviously were inspired. I remember her saying that you were the greatest living American actress. That's what she used to say.

AM. Yeah, but I could never understand that—of all the people she would pick, you pick me, the one who can't, sing, dance or act—and she said, "Just being on stage with you." And I felt, *I'm not worthy to be on stage with you*. But in any case, her credo about—she was an early feminist, she wanted to play all the famous women and put them in historical context because women are always left out. And so, we were doing the whole women's series and one night at her storefront she played this thing on the accordion: "We Are Women Who Survive." That would be our theme song used at the end as a finale song, after each piece.

T. What were some of the characters you played?

AM. Oh, classics.

T. Like what?

AM. Listen, I don't know who the characters were. Ethyl would tell me all the Greek stories, all the themes, and it would go in one ear and out the other.

T. You were just playing you. You didn't even know who the characters were, you didn't even bother researching. You were just playing you. And she knew you'd play you and she just loved you for it.

AM. I wasn't smart enough to know the context of these very deep stories—I was just like a hamster on a hamster wheel: I was just trying to keep up with Ethyl.

T. Lucrezia Borgia. Who were you in that, do you remember? Her maid?

AM. Well, I was somebody and not the enemy—and people seemed to like it—but in all these sort of tragedies. But people seemed to laugh and applaud through it, and I didn't quite understand. I thought we were doing serious theater.

JP. Everyone loved you! One of the things that I felt when I met you is that you welcomed me into that community, so I'm forever grateful.

AM. Oh, but you had that young spirit of energy. You have to encourage and help the next generation.

JP. Right, gotcha.

AM. And we passed the torch and look at you kids—you've done wonders and you're passing the torch on to the next group.

JP. Tell us more about Holly Woodlawn.

T. Holly Woodlawn!

AM. Holly Woodlawn was so beloved. If you were fortunate to be in her presence—the vulnerability, the childlike innocence—you wanted to hold her and protect her; and she opened your heart to anyone who approached you, because she felt that she could trust them. Many a time we extracted Holly at certain events—"Oh, come Holly, we have another engagement to go to."—because she could not detect the vultures. This was before selfies. "Oh, that necklace, Holly gave it to me; I got her earring." She would be so vulnerable and generous; she was so loving and, yes, she acknowledged that alcohol and pills—I sort of tell the younger people: Holly Woodlawn was loved to death because everyone thought that they loved Holly; but how do you love someone? Oh, here's some pills, here's a joint; oh, she's at the Ninth Circle, let's buy her a drink, and so forth. In a way, it was a little like Quentin Crisp. You just take him out for breakfast somewhere, you have eggs and stuff, and he'd do a show for you. But Quentin sang for the supper. Holly felt if you bought her a drink, or gave her something and you stayed, that she should share. And it was sort of heartbreaking. There was a time when I sort of stepped away from Holly, just like, *May the gods protect you*. Because of *Trash* she was in a different arena, a different plateau; and then Andy and Paul would drag her to events and make her more vulnerable; and the only thing that could soothe her was drink. She only knew how to function in that area and she didn't have the wherewithal or choice to extract herself from all of these bloodsuckers, taking a pound of flesh. "Ooh, here's Holly Woodlawn!"; and she felt she had to perform for them. I remember Taylor Mead saying, "I don't know how Holly does it. I'll stay in the East Village; I can't take this crowd." But God bless Holly. I did talk to her on the phone when she was in the hospice. There's a place for her in Heaven; she was so beloved, always beloved. There are no unkind stories about Holly.

JP. That's amazing.

AM. Because she just gave positivity, *trust* and love to every human being.

