PUPPIES PUPPIES ((JADE GUANARO KURIKI-OLIVO

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"When Feminisms and Futurisms Collide:Judy Chicago and Puppies Puppies at NewMuseum" by Harley Wong
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When Feminisms and Futurisms Collide: Judy Chicago and Puppies Puppies at New Museum

BY HARLEY WONG (HTTPS://MOMUS.CA/AUTHOR/HARLEY-WONG/) ·
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Left: Judy Chicago, "Immolation," 1972. © Judy Chicago/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy the artist. Right: Puppies Puppies (Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo), "Portrait in an installation dedicated to Atabey, Taíno shamanic healer / musician Irka Mateo, Lexii Foxx, Alethia Rael and Ana Mendieta," 2022. Courtesy the artist and Hannah Hoffman, Los Angeles.

What does an art practice that contends with feminism look like? In what ways can such a practice foreclose a confrontation with the complexities of gender expression and sexuality? Or reinforce an essentialism? Can it resemble a room with CBD hemp plants sustained by grow lights? Or perhaps minimalist paintings and sculptures in a pastel color palette? At the New Museum are two concurrent exhibitions that plumb different aspects of past and present feminist ideology: Judy Chicago's career survey, *Herstory*, and Puppies Puppies's *Nothing New*.

One could argue that Chicago's practice, which intervenes in purity culture with a vulval aesthetic and the self-described "macho arts" of autobody work and pyrotechnics, was subversive in the 1960s and '70s, paving the way for artists like Puppies Puppies, who looks beyond bioessentialism and the gender binary. But *Herstory*, especially when viewed in tandem with Puppies Puppies (Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo)'s compact yet ambitious exhibition, reveals the stagnancy of Chicago's feminism and her failure to innovate beyond heavy-handed symbols used to represent race and gender. Although *Nothing New* occupies only a section of the museum's ground floor, Puppies Puppies achieves in one gallery what Chicago cannot with four floors.

Judy Chicago, *Crippled by the Need to Control/Blind Individuality*, 1983. © Judy Chicago/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Chicago is perhaps best known for *The Dinner Party* (1974–79). Though it remains housed in the Brooklyn Museum, the infamous

installation is represented in *Herstory* via thirty-nine preparatory line drawings for what would become porcelain plates, each dedicated to a woman in history. Each plate presents a stylized vulva that corresponds to the respective woman's life and legacy. For Georgia O'Keeffe, as an example, a purple-and-green sculpture of fleshy ridges sits atop a white dinner plate, evoking the modernist's closely cropped paintings of flowers and their frequent comparisons to vulvae. Here, womanhood is reduced to biology. In the decades since *The Dinner Party*'s debut, it has become a celebrated icon of feminist art despite excluding and erasing trans people.

For those whose feminism is more intersectional, they will not find a curatorial intervention in *Herstory* that acknowledges Chicago's conceptual shortcomings in wall texts or object labels. With the large number of curators credited, including Edlis Neeson Artistic Director Massimiliano Gioni and Kraus Family Senior Curator Gary Carrion-Murayari, it is difficult to imagine that they all simply overlooked the weaknesses in her approach instead of intentionally leaving them unaddressed.

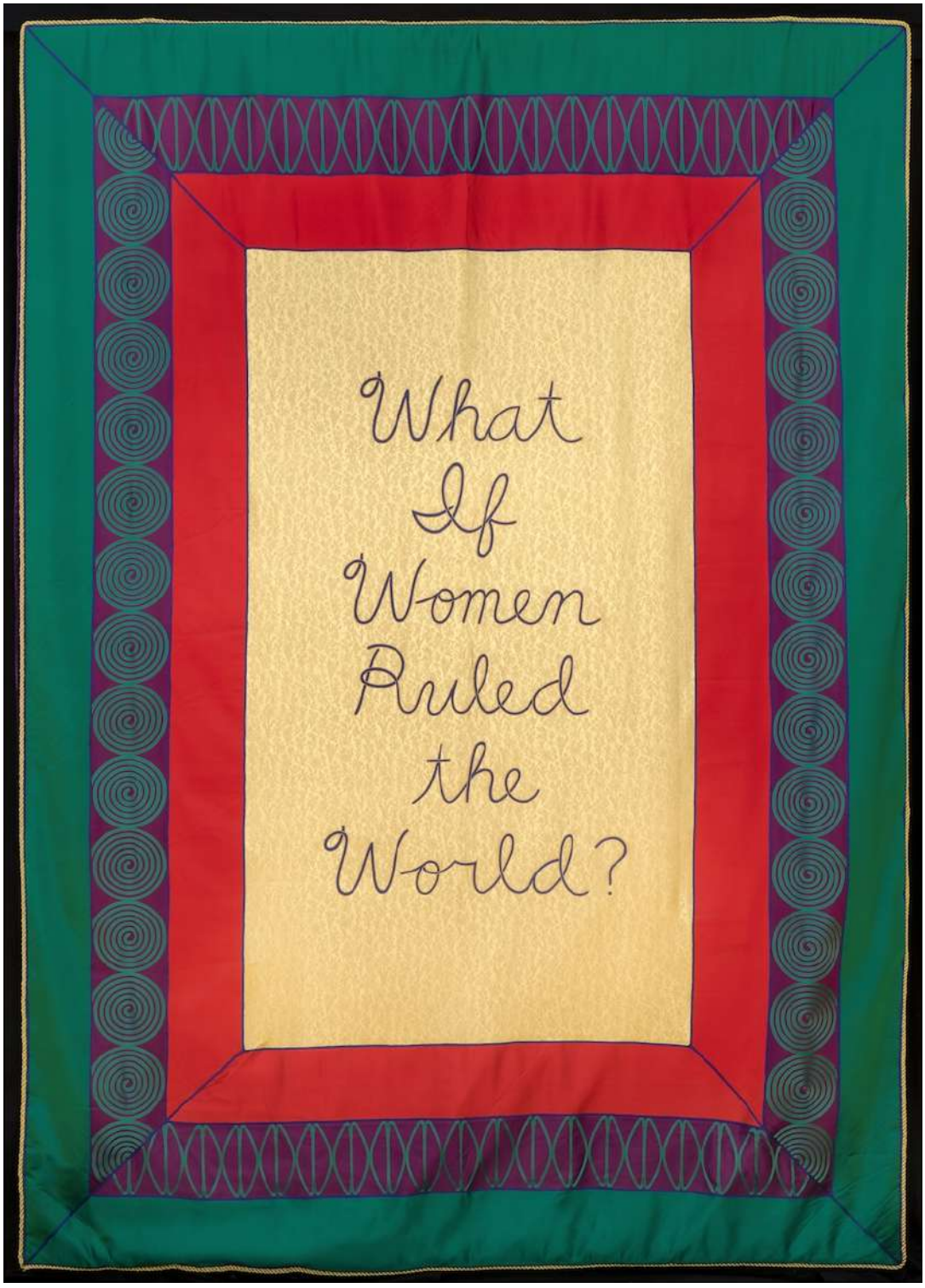
Some prominent artists and writers have long expressed their reservations with Chicago's practice. Alice Walker and Esther Allen(https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/07/08/returning-the-gaze-with-a-vengeance/) both highlighted the weaknesses in *The Dinner Party*'s representation of women of color. Chicago's drawing and subsequent plate for Sojourner Truth feature a nondescript African mask, while the one for Sacagawea is a geometric design perhaps meant to mimic a Shoshone beadwork pattern. Both stand in stark contrast to the organic, flowy forms used to represent the white women surrounding them. Chicago's emphasis on denoting race through generalized symbols ultimately fetishizes and flattens identities into othering tropes.

Indeed, Chicago's engagement with race within her work remains superficial. Consider the stained-glass triptych *Rainbow Shabbat* (1992), which was made in collaboration with her husband, the artist Donald Woodman. In the middle panel, people of all ages and from different ethnic and religious backgrounds gather at a dining table to celebrate the Jewish day of rest. The Star of David, illuminated in glowing rainbow stripes, repeats in the background and fills the left and right panels. Among the seated guests is an elderly Asian woman who wears a conical hat, commonly worn in rice paddies, indoors.

Judy Chicago and Donald Woodman, *Rainbow Shabbat*, 1992. © Judy Chicago/Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York. © Donald Woodman/Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York.

The rainbow in *Rainbow Shabbat* does not so much refer to gay pride, with which it has now become synonymous, but to racial solidarity as articulated by the Rainbow Coalition, founded by Black Panther chairman Fred Hampton. This is, however, a subtle allusion that might elude some viewers. Founded in 1969, the coalition united communities in Chicago across racial divides to consolidate class power and more effectively address issues such as police brutality and wealth disparity. However, an antiracist and anticapitalistic ethos like that of Hampton's is practically nonexistent in Chicago's oeuvre. Instead, appeals for tolerance take the place of calls for systemic change.

In the work *Needlework Sampler* (2000), text such as "TOLERANCE," "HUMAN RIGHTS," "HOPE," and "CHANGE" are stitched one after the other in a rainbow gradient. The embroidery is exhibited in *Herstory* beside other textile-based pieces that similarly promote vague proverbs about equality. In *We're All in the Same Boat* (2000), people of varying complexions work together to survive a sinking boat by patching the leak, bailing water out, and firing a distress flare. The figures appear flat and are rendered in simple forms and colors, not unlike the style of motivational posters one might find on the walls of a grade-school counselor's office. The elementary nature of Chicago's messages becomes clearer in *Bury the Hatchet* (2000), which depicts a man wearing a crucifix necklace, a woman with a Star of David pendant, and a bearded man wearing a turban (presumably meant to represent a Muslim man) burying a single hatchet. Only the ground, slit open in front of them and outlined in red, hints at the blood that has been spilled from empires and nations that weaponize religion to justify colonial and imperial violence. Chicago sidesteps the legacies of war and displacement in favor of the interpersonal. Rather than advocate for the solidarity and direct organizing taken up by the Rainbow Coalition, she pushes a passive framework of individual betterment that does not account for the totalizing force of centuries of oppression and the structures that perpetuate it.



Judy Chicago, *What if Women Ruled the World?* (from *The Female Divine)*, 2020. © Judy Chicago/Artists Rights Society (ARS).

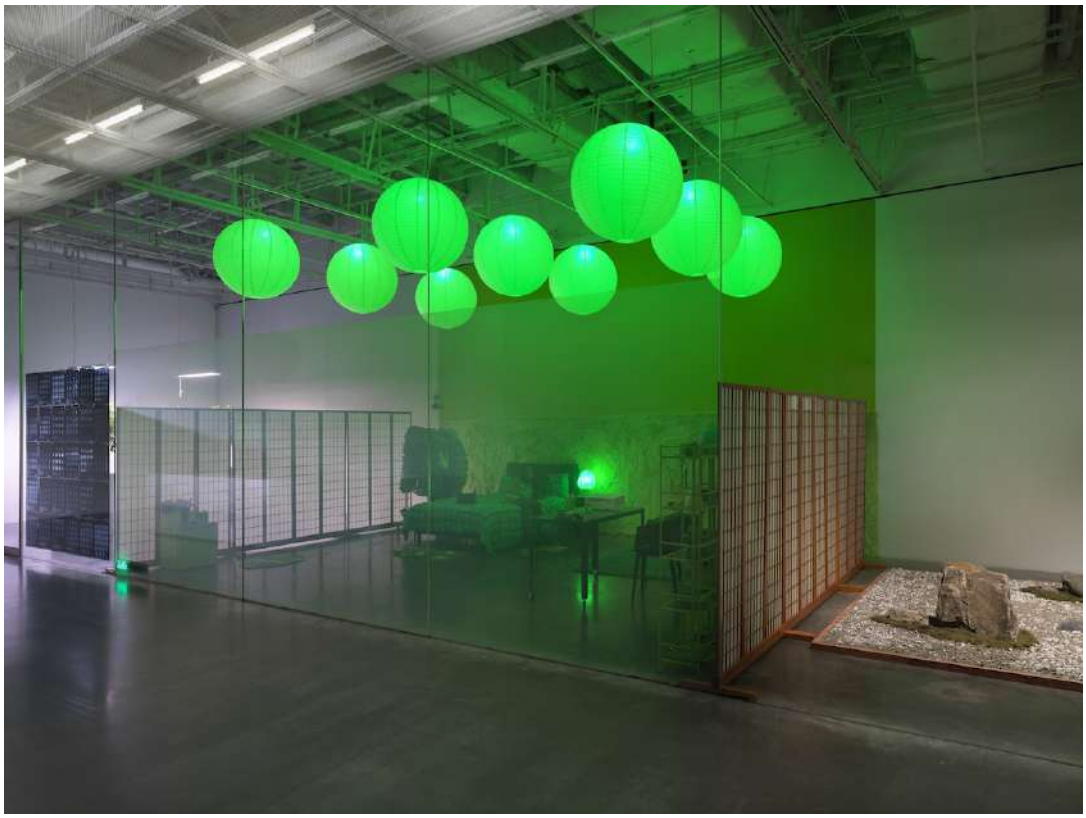
More recent works are also bound by vague social-justice platitudes. On a monumental 17-feet-tall tapestry that hangs as a centerpiece of the fourth floor, Chicago asks, "What if women ruled the world?" Radiating out from the embroidery are ten smaller gold banners,

approximately 10 feet tall, that feature supplementary prompts ranging from harmlessly silly—"Would Buildings Resemble Wombs?"—to irresponsibly absurd—"Would There Be Violence?" The textiles are part of the 2020 series *The Female Divine*, and their questions are predicated on the misguided belief that women are innately good and moral while men are to blame for the woes of today. With its uncritical embrace of gender binaries, the installation offers an overly simplistic, outdated argument. Visitors are invited to respond to these hypotheticals as part of an ongoing project that Chicago conceived with Nadya Tolokonnikova, a founding member of Pussy Riot. On the seventh floor of the museum, one wall is already covered with submissions collected since 2022 from around the world. One participant stated, "If women ruled the world there would be no wars." Another claimed, "We would have the same rights … There would not be as much violence." The reality is that women are not incorruptible. We are as equally capable as men of committing atrocities.

Instead of reckoning with this, Chicago perpetuates second-wave feminism's rudimentary idea that integrating women into positions of power will naturally lead to a more just world. It's a concept as ridiculous as the word that inspired the name of her survey, which is now more commonly used ironically rather than sincerely. As such, the six decades of Chicago's career on view at the New Museum reveal a feminist framework frozen in time.

Puppies Puppies's practice refuses the abstract stances found in Chicago's. Offering much-needed respite, *Nothing New* grapples with surveillance and hypervisibility, especially with how they affect trans women of color and sex workers. The exhibition throws into high relief the limited vision of Chicago's oeuvre. At the same time, within the institutional space of the New Museum, it feels as though Puppies Puppies is tasked with the burden of filling Chicago's conceptual lapses.

Curated by Vivian Crockett with support from curatorial assistant Ian Wallace, Puppies Puppies's exhibition divides the lobby gallery into three parts with shoji screens. The first section is a Zen garden inspired by the one at Ryōan-ji Temple in Kyoto and is a testament to the artist's Japanese ancestry. Another features MRI scans and cannabis plants, tools that, respectively, documented the brain tumor the artist had removed in 2010 and aided in her recovery. The centerpiece of *Nothing New* is a recreation of Puppies Puppies's green bedroom, complete with a full clothing rack and glowing paper lanterns. Together, the three vignettes offer an intimate and revealing look into the life of an artist who has previously hid behind proxies, costumes, and avatars in both performances and interviews alike.



"Puppies Puppies (Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo): Nothing New," 2023 (exhibition view). New Museum, New York. Courtesy New Museum. Photo: Dario Lasagni

"Puppies Puppies (Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo): Nothing New," 2023 (exhibition view). New Museum, New York. Courtesy New Museum. Photo: Dario Lasagni

Nearly five years ago, Puppies Puppies appeared in the flesh and completely nude during her solo performance *Naked Self (Transitioning) (19 Months on Hormone Replacement Therapy)* (2019) at Paris's Galerie Balice Hertling. As visitors circled freely around her, she stood unmoving in the gallery space before painting the words "ANXIETY" and "DEPRESSION" on blank canvases hung on the walls. The only barrier between the artist and her spectators was artificial fog, an artwork itself, titled *Brain Fog (Lexapro Withdrawal Side Effect)* (2019). This was a new mode of presentation for Puppies Puppies, who later told the (https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/18/t-magazine/jade-kuriki-olivo-puppies-puppies.html)*New York Times*(https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/18/t-magazine/jade-kuriki-olivo-puppies-puppies.html) that she began to reevaluate her penchant toward

anonymity while transitioning: “It meant something very different to hide as a trans woman,” she said, “because society forces us to hide.”

In *Nothing New*, Puppies Puppies can, at times, be found inhabiting the New Museum’s constructed bedroom, but she is always separated from us by the gallery’s glass wall. The presentation’s voyeuristic concept is reminiscent of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century world fairs that exhibited women of color from the Global South as racial spectacles for white audiences in Europe and the United States. Here, Puppies Puppies lays bare the ways that her presence is hyper-scrutinized in a surveillance state that is white supremacist, transphobic, and anti–sex work. The first time I visited *Nothing New*, the artist was present, and suddenly, without warning, the glass separating us turned opaque with a startling snap. I was left feeling like a Peeping Tom caught in the act. In denying the viewer’s gaze, one that has historically sensationalized and exoticized those whose appearances deviate from the cis, white paradigm, Puppies Puppies accesses an obfuscation that Afong Moy (https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-american-studies/article/abs/start-of-american-accommodation-of-the-chinese-afong-moys-experience-from-1834-to-1850/5E719CAE8C8AB3869BC36A230ADF30EF) and Sara Baartman (https://www.academia.edu/43281460/Display_of_the_Body_Hottentot), for example, could not.

Just outside the gallery, a digital display shows live video feeds from two cameras inside the pseudo bedroom and one from her actual bedroom. Privacy is an illusion. Puppies Puppies elides her digital sex work of “camming” with her art practice, in which she similarly performs for a camera in her bedroom(s).

If privacy is out of reach and we are always surveilled, sometimes even by each other, what do we want our performances to convey? This notion of artists being monitored and financially compensated or

rewarded for performing a certain way feels particularly relevant now. Many who have publicly voiced their support for Palestinian liberation in recent months have had their exhibitions canceled by galleries and museums. Others have been threatened with deaccession plans from collectors seeking to devalue their work. (It is perhaps telling of Chicago's feminism that she has not, at the time of this article's publishing, taken down or amended an Instagram post from October 16(https://www.instagram.com/p/CydxF0VAdl5/?hl=en) in which she criticized those who "are blaming Israel/Jews for the response to Hamas' fifty years of denying our right to exist," though this claim is factually incorrect. As I write this, Israel continues to commit acts of genocide in Palestine: *Al* (https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/1/16/israels-war-on-gaza-live-at-least-132-killed-in-gaza-in-last-24-hours)*Jazeera*(https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/1/16/israels-war-on-gaza-live-at-least-132-killed-in-gaza-in-last-24-hours) reported that Israeli forces have killed more than twenty-four thousand Palestinians in Gaza since Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel, and more than half a million Palestinians in the region are facing catastrophic levels of hunger and starvation.)

When viewers juxtapose the two exhibitions, a final query emerges: with what feminist ideology do we want to align ourselves? For Puppies Puppies, who has used institutional art spaces to offer free HIV testing and shuttles to blood-donation centers, the prevailing ideology is one of community care and collective resistance. However, if *Herstory* represents the type of "feminist" future that the institutional art world and its financial structures are willing to envision and build, it is a vacuous one. Art and artists do not always inspire. Sometimes, they anchor us firmly in antiquated or even self-serving beliefs rather than propel us to imagine more radical futures.

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PUPPIES PUPPIES (JADE GUANARO KURIKI-OLIVO)
"Puppies Puppies (Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo)" by
Jane Ursula Harris
BOMB, 29 June 2022

BOMB

Puppies Puppies (Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo) by Jane Ursula Harris

The artist installs a home into the New Museum, merging art and life through readymades, surveillance, and performance.

Installation view of *Puppies Puppies (Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo): Nothing New*, New Museum, NewYork City, 2023. Photo by Dario Lasagni. Images courtesy of New Museum unless otherwise noted.

artist's name (Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo) in 2018 in tandem with her transition, and even then, only parenthetically. In an age of self-exposure and self-invention—IRL and online—in which notions of identity have radically changed, one can understand the impulse to simultaneously reveal and conceal. As her exhibition *Nothing New* (2023) makes clear, that impulse cannot be separated from what it means and how it feels to live in a surveilled body that is policed and othered for being non-cis, non-white, and nonconforming.

For artists, the desire to be seen and the need to retreat from such a harmful, scrutinizing gaze can be very difficult to reconcile. Bravely, and yet with great trepidation, Puppies Puppies navigates this strange territory at the New Museum. Living within the glass walls of the exhibition space, with just a button to make the giant fishbowl suddenly inscrutable, she invites viewers in—literally—to engage with this experience. She extends her performance to real life, offering a monitor with a live feed of her apartment to show how facing one's fears can make the gap between art and life just a little less painful. Mind the gap, *Nothing New* seems to say, but don't avoid it.

That we became friends as a result of this two-hour conversation is proof of this. Bonding over a mutual sense of safety in bed (where we both spend a lot of time), our hermit tendencies, our belief in the spiritual potential of art, and the power of centering community to platform marginalized voices reminded me that the art world can still be that magical place where outliers find one another.

Jane Ursula Harris
Two things we share in common are that we both like our weed and we both like our beds.

Puppies Puppies (Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo)
That's right. *(laughter)*

JUH
Both are important for my mental health, but let's just leave it at that. So, I wanted to start by talking about the name "Puppies Puppies." You've talked about choosing this pseudonym after you learned of an acquaintance who had literally disappeared, and when people were searching for them, all they found were pictures of kittens on their Facebook. You've also talked about how a lot of your work is psychologically driven. I'm curious if you could discuss where your head was when that person disappeared, and how that vanishing inspired you to choose the name Puppies Puppies?

PP (JGKO)
It's pretty common for an artist's work to be centered around their psychology. Inevitably art has bits and pieces of your makeup. I put together about a decade's worth of work at Kunsthaus Glarus a few years ago, and it made me

made sense that death was a big part of my work. I also realized I've been like this since I was younger: thinking about the ending of every situation, when something I really love ends, and longing for it after it's gone. When I had sleepovers as a kid, after the person left I would feel like, Damn. I'd look at each little thing in the room of the sleepover and mull over the memory that corresponded with each object, the residue left over from the night.

When I started to transition—and not every trans person feels this, and people who aren't trans feel this too— I kept trying to figure out why I didn't want to exist. Not that I necessarily had a plan to unalive myself, but I did talk about this feeling with my therapist. I don't think it ever got to the point where I wanted to unalive myself, it was more that I just didn't want to exist any longer. I used to romanticize certain things from literature that described disappearance, too. I felt like I didn't belong, and I didn't want to be seen out in the world, yet I had to exist in it. I longed for that invisibility, that kind of disappearance.

JUH
I once wrote a short story where the main character was interviewing people to replace her and take over her life—to do a better job, basically. I was obsessed with the idea of a replacement self. That desire isn't necessarily irrational, and in some ways, it felt very rational. So I can understand that impulse behind naming yourself Puppies Puppies. When you chose it, did you think this was a moniker you'd have for a long, long time?

PP (JGKO)
No, I really didn't. I started using the name in grad school when I presented Puppies Puppies's Facebook account as the artwork. I didn't know how it was gonna go. I didn't feel like anyone really cared at all about what I was doing then. Whenever I presented in any sort of classroom setting, the response was always—

JUH
—What is she doing?

PP (JGKO)
Exactly. It was always like, "Don't bring this into an academic setting" or "This didn't need to be critiqued because it was not worth critiquing." Even the professors had that attitude, like, "I'm not the audience for this work." I found this interesting because it never seemed to me like this would be the automatic response.

JUH
There's this whole lineage of alter egos and pseudonyms in art, starting with Marcel Duchamp's Rrose Sélavy. I think it corresponds to some degree with explorations of gender and other fluid identities. How do you feel it's functioning now? Is the response different?

PP (JGKO)
Sometimes it feels like I tread certain paths in my brain and wonder why I don't ever tread off them. The path that I keep treading now in relation to this alter ego is about how, when I was younger, a big part of my social life was online. Real life was not what I wanted to experience. I was in chat rooms meeting people anonymously through screen names. I remember feeling like that was a part of my creativity, making the screen names that I existed under. I was discovering sexuality through this. Then it evolved into mascoting—I was my high school's mascot, a lion. It was a way to express myself, and I would dance very erratically.

JUH
Do you feel like the name is more meaningful to you, since you've been using the pseudonym for so long and doing some really important work with it?

PP (JGKO)
It's become so attached to me that there's been a merging of the two people: Jade and Puppies Puppies. Earlier on, it was a way to exist under a name that wasn't my own first and last name. I also was doing things that made me seem unserious, and the name was definitely one of them. But I like that the name makes you approach what I'm putting out into the world with curiosity, like, What's going on?

JUH
It makes the work more approachable. Recently, I've seen several artists recuperate the idea of an alter ego or pseudonym to explore what it means to be a surveilled body. This shapes the reality of so many non-white, non-cis, gender nonconforming people who have to contend with being surveilled in this police state.

PP (JGKO)
I did a performance that was against the "Walking While Trans" ban. It was repealed in 2021, but prior to that, it basically allowed police to assume that any trans person was doing sex work because of how they dressed or

a Napoleonic courier and rode into her first show at Casey Kaplan on a white horse. There aren't images of it circulating online, and I liked that it had this mystery and intrigue. The performance allowed me to deal with surveillance in multiple ways. I was protesting a lot at the time, and there was a big police presence at the demonstrations, so it felt right to respond in this way.

Here, in *Nothing New*, I feel like I'm in a fishbowl, but the fish has a perspective too. It looks at the people who are looking at it. It's interesting to try to understand that relationship.

Installation view of *Puppies Puppies (Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo): Nothing New*, New Museum, New York City, 2023. Photo by Dario Lasagni.

JUH

Being surveilled doesn't mean you necessarily should or want to always be in hiding. Being in control of when you're seen and when you're not seems intrinsic to what you're doing at the New Museum. You can frost the windows of the exhibition space at will, right?

PP (JGKO)

Yeah. That's what I'm thinking about in relation to visibility. I am in control. I try to frost the glass subtly, though, so that at first no one really understands what's happening. I had a lot of fear around being seen, and that's still there, but now I feel like I've found my true self, in a way. Even though I'm still scared, it feels and means something different now.

dichotomy between the need to be in control of your visibility and the desire to be publicly seen.

PP (JGKO)

A Fantastic Woman (Una mujer fantástica) was the first film that I saw with a trans woman as the lead. I remember being like, Oh my god, I waited my whole life for a movie that's centered around a trans woman. Later, I discovered some earlier films that I hadn't known about, but in that moment in the movie theater, I couldn't believe it. I had this tingling sensation in my brain, and I cried. It was an emotional moment. I related that feeling to going to the museum and realizing that I could make art even though I lacked the skills that I had always attributed to artmaking. I realized art could be conceptual, readymade, or performance-oriented.

I think of the museum differently now that I've pulled back the curtain and figured out certain things about the art world. Before, though, I really thought of the museum as a sanctuary, especially the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. It was designed by Tadao Ando and feels like it floats on water. There were odd things there, so I felt at home in some ways.

JUH

It's the hopeful feeling that in art anything goes, and you can be any version of yourself. But then, as you say, the art world can be an ugly and very capitalist-driven place. I imagine you're navigating through a lot of that. I always say that I prefer operating in the margins because that's generally where my people are anyway. Do you feel like you're more in control of how you and your work are presented now?

PP (JGKO)

I do have more control over the elements involved, though even those are out of my control a bit. Unlike other work that can be made ahead of time, mine is often done on-site, which means a lot of things don't turn out exactly how I planned. I think the margins are also where I do best, because what I'm doing is not always so straightforward. Sometimes when things are a little too complicated, they're not the best fit for the center stage. At the same time, I've learned that I've lost control completely of things that I thought I had control of at the beginning. Now, once my work goes out into the world, it's really not about how I view it. I've accepted that everyone's gonna come at it differently. This includes when people don't accept that I'm the way I say I am, which offends them. I just have to understand that the work creates a lot of different reactions. But also, there are people who are grateful because they see themselves in the work or see themselves in some situation that I'm presenting. When you mentioned you like being in bed, that really moved me. It made me feel more comfortable to be under the covers right now, even though every day I'm pretending that I'm fine because I'm on display.

Found image: "nude woman behind opaque glass," 2023. Photo by Erik Von Weber, licensed via Getty Images.

JUH

This idea of art as life reminds me of Fluxus, and when you mentioned blurriness, I thought of your previous exhibition, *Green* (Ghosts), in 2017, where you installed your apartment in a gallery and moved into the exhibition space with your partner and your dog. It seems like a precedent for *Nothing New*. At the New Museum, though, there are monitors on the wall—I looked more at these than into the window because the window made me feel like a voyeur. I was like, Am I supposed to be looking? Bad girl! *(laughter)* One monitor shows your actual apartment. What does bringing your apartment into this piece do for you?

bipolar, so I thought of those colors as this mixing of two people and two backgrounds and as simplified versions of happy and sad. I first thought of this when I was in the painting department for grad school. I didn't make paintings, so I didn't know exactly what to make, even though I was meeting with a lot of painting professors. I tried to think of the most barebones version of painting, which was color mixing. Also, I was poor. I still don't have much money, and I have more debt for sure.

JUH
Painting is an expensive practice.

PP (JGKO)
I was like, How can I make this work? I was working mostly with readymades then and thought, What if everything in my life became the work? I slowly collected images and objects in my life that were green, and at that time, blue and yellow. My idea was that the collection would slowly become the work. It was a way to sustain myself, something I could keep doing that was already natural to me. By the time I collected enough green works, I had my first show outside of Chicago, which was where I lived at the time. We drove all our household objects and everything I had collected over the years to the gallery and laid it out. I made an aisle down the center of the space with all the objects on the ground. I'm not with that person anymore, but I surprised my partner by proposing in a Minion costume, which is also blue and yellow, so it was a *Green* work. I had a *Lord of the Rings* ring in a chicken nugget. I combined all these different things that I had been working with for this performance, which was also real.

In the next iteration, we sifted out everything to make the collection mostly solid green, which I was more excited about than blue and yellow. I did a full green show at Overduin & Co. in Los Angeles, where we again moved everything to the gallery. We slept there at night with our dog. It was called *Green (Ghosts)*, because during the day, we would go do our work and not be in the space. Everyone got a different show because everything was moved around pretty much every day. So *Nothing New* is the third iteration of this kind of installation.

JUH
In the gallery, and continuing in your life at home, there's presence and exposure. You can filter what people see, but you're still inviting them to follow along. Your other projects have done the same. To watch you in your apartment, do I have to be in the museum during off-hours?

PP (JGKO)
No. Sometimes I have to be in my apartment during the day. I also have a camera on my phone, and I turn on that camera when I'm out running errands. I make sure to leave the camera at home on most of the time, so even when I'm not at the museum, people can see inside. When I'm not here, you might see all four channels activated.

JUH
You also use the word camming in the title of the monitor work. Does that reference sex work?

PP (JGKO)
Camming's included, because I do it for money sometimes. I'll use different outlets like Chaturbate or Nite Flirt, which is more like phone sex work. They're all different. When I thought about having video surveillance on me, I thought of how all of our lives are on our phones. We all know at this point that if you talk about something in a room with your phone on, you'll start seeing ads for it soon after. Surveillance is always happening to us. Surveillance work became more prevalent with CCTV, but now we're getting it from all different angles.

JUH
The impossibility of evading surveillance leads us to mitigate it by controlling how surveillance happens to us. You can't escape it, so you've got to lean into it in a way that's going to serve you.

I was curious about the reactions you've been getting. Can people invite themselves in? When I was there, two people were sitting on the bed or the couch. You were at the desk, and somebody else was there too. I couldn't tell if they were your friends, strangers you welcomed in to hang out, or if people were just choosing to come in.

PP (JGKO)
I treat the space like it's my home, even though it's hard at times to feel that way. I do invite people in and show them around. I put the torii gate at the entrance because in Shinto, which is an ancient religion indigenous to Japan, a gate might pop up in the middle of the sea or the forest to designate a sacred spot. Nature and animals and animism are part of Shintoism, and these spots in nature can be sacred places.

JUH

That's something I like about your work. The name Puppies Puppies and the collections of toys might lead people into thinking that your work is always on the lighter end. On the other side, there is the torii gate, this beautiful symbol, and the Zen garden and the room of pot plants, the healing and medicinal aspects of which people might think are just silly or ironic. But in what they mean for you personally and as symbols with deeper meanings, I see them as forces of support and protection for you in this space.

PP (JGKO)

I'm happy that you can dig deeper beyond the surface, which might seem ironic or unserious at first glance. Both spaces in the installation are places that I want to exist in forever in some way. I think about reincarnation a lot, and in Buddhism and Shintoism, there's this idea that every entity has its own spirit. I think of myself almost as a monk. I have a friend who trained to become one, and it seemed pretty hard, but the life afterward seemed rewarding. I'd be happy with that life because I'm more of a hermit.

I have a toy Zen garden in my room that I use to burn incense. I scaled up and replicated that garden in the installation, which is loosely based on Ryo-an-ji, a very old UNESCO-protected Zen garden in Kyoto. It has this magical feeling to it. I did an exhibition in Japan and was able to visit it. I could see myself existing there and overseeing the garden every day. The CBD plants correspond to the MRI scans of my brain tumor and the recovery process. Researchers discovered that when soldiers came back from war with brain trauma, there was a six-month period in which tumors could grow or seizures could happen. When I was going through that period, I used CBD and didn't have any seizures. I watched this documentary about a girl that had an absurd number of seizures every week, to the point where she could die at any moment, but CBD reduced her seizures quite a bit. The CBD garden is also something that I dream of for the future. I would love if I could afford to live on a farm, grow CBD or marijuana, and seclude myself. Both spaces are gardens that I fantasize about.

JUH

The flags in the show are beautiful too.

PP (JGKO)

One is the most updated version of the pride flag that I could find that's intersex-inclusive. And then there's a Taíno flag. The Taíno are made up of a ton of different tribes, but the flag in *Nothing New* is what I could find on most outlets. I have a relative that's actually a Taíno chief, and on his website he has this exact flag logo. I don't talk to him because I haven't come out as trans to some people on that side of the family, but I watch from afar, and I'm really proud to be related to him. Then there's the Borikén resistance flag, which is black. There are multiple flags that came before, but this is the most recent iteration I've seen for people protesting different things on the islands. I was looking to include objects related to my ancestry, and it felt good to have some representation from my dad's side.

JUH

I admire how you center other people and share your platform in your practice. The exhibition text refers to how you "[celebrate] the nuanced layers of [your] own identity, eliding tokenization and reductive narratives of racial and

PP (JGKO)

Yeah. With the earlier work, especially before transitioning, I was trying to find ways that we can all exist as human beings and the things we share even though we're very different. Sometimes that would be the barebones elements of living as a human, like being in a body. Over time, it evolved and death became a part of that. After I started to transition, I felt I could use this platform to shine a light on other people. I was so excited to finally have a voice after feeling like I didn't have one growing up. It made me think of people in my life who I wanted to make sure had their voices heard too. That group is always growing as I meet new people in community and in life in general. The art is a vehicle to shine a light on others.

With the show, I wanted to figure out the programming and center it around community events. I'm a part of a house called House of Transcendence, and so I thought I could get its leaders and the whole house to perform. I want to get our name out there and get people I love paid. We're also doing a Community Day, which will be run by Lexii Foxx, who's also a part of the house. She does social work and has a campaign called Stop Killing Us, which makes people aware of the rate at which Black trans women are dying. She did the same thing when I did a show at Performance Space. I always thank her because she's reaching out into the community in a way I would never be able to—she's been working her way into that for years and years. She's organized whole fairs where there were Narcan trainings and testing for HIV or other STDs and STIs. There's different levels to what she does, interacting within and outside of the trans community. I'm grateful because I get excited about art being able to reach out into the world in that way. She makes that possible.

JUH

Love that. I think it's really important. A capitalist art system is not so interested in things that cannot be commodified and sold, but there's this refusal on the part of certain artists to fully assimilate into that system. That's what I mean, too, by being on the margins: you're there because you can't—or won't—fully participate. For me, that's sometimes been to my detriment, but I always tell younger people that I don't regret it.

Is there anything you hope people are going to take from this work?

PP (JGKO)

That's a good question that I never know how to fully answer. I hope the show relates to people on a broader scope. Felix Gonzalez-Torres said that his partner, Ross, was the audience for his work. That was interesting to me, because I never really thought about who the exact audience of my work was. Since the beginning, I've tried to have my work be ubiquitous enough that it could relate to people generally but still convey something personal. I also want to communicate the feeling I had when I went to the museum when I was younger—the feeling that it's possible to be an artist, that the magic of art feels different than the other ways I thought I could contribute to the world.

If somebody comes out of this exhibition feeling less alone and seeing themselves in something within the work, or if the work can affect people in a way that changes them, that would make me really happy. With what Lexii is going to do, I hope people get the resources they need, even if they don't realize what they're experiencing is an extension of art. People have to exist, live, and figure out ways to survive, and I'm excited if the work can make that slightly easier or connect someone to a resource that could make it easier.

Jane Ursula Harris is a Brooklyn-based writer who has contributed to Artforum, Art in America, Bookforum, BOMB*, the* Paris Review*, and the* Village Voice*, among other publications and catalogs. Harris is a freelance curator and an art history faculty member at the School of Visual Arts.*

performance art Ready-Made surveillance community

PUPPIES PUPPIES (JADE GUANARO KURIKI-OLIVO)
"This Artist's Next Project Has Her 'Terrifi ed.' That's the Point." by Zachary Small
NY Times, September 7, 2023

FALL PREVIEW

This Artist's Next Project Has Her 'Terrified.' That's the Point.

An upcoming exhibition at the New Museum by Jade Kuriki-Olivo, also known as Puppies Puppies, puts a microscope on her experience as a trans woman.

By Zachary Small

Sept. 7, 2023

Jade Kuriki-Olivo's guided tour through her apartment on the Lower East Side ended in the bedroom, where the performance artist spends most of her time. Tropical vines crawled along the walls and into a giant lantern hanging opposite a tapestry of green synthetic fur. She burned incense and described her room above a busy Greek restaurant as a sanctuary.

For an interview about her upcoming exhibition at the New Museum, "Nothing New," which begins Oct. 12 and runs through Jan. 14, 2024, the artist donned a camouflage outfit with green leaves attached. She then hopped onto the bed and crouched into the shape of a bush — as if cloaking herself from the spotlight would negate its halo. Kuriki-Olivo, 34, who also uses the pseudonym Puppies Puppies, will certainly grab attention this fall, when she transforms the museum lobby into a 24/7 surveillance operation tracking her experience as a transgender woman.

"I'm terrified," Kuriki-Olivo said, "but I really can't watch the trans community suffer and not make work about that. I find in my spirit that I don't have a choice."

The trapdoor of visibility has become a common theme in her work, demonstrating how transgender people survive a period of heightened surveillance and restrictions that has coincided with a period of increased public acceptance. She has experienced that paradox firsthand, including last summer when she exhibited a nude sculpture of herself as part of Art Basel in Switzerland on a plinth labeled "woman." Conservative groups were outraged and Kuriki-Olivo said she started receiving death threats after people online found her home address. She withdrew from a series of exhibitions for her safety, passing the opportunities onto other artists.

"The organizers ended up hiring a security guard to protect the sculpture," she recalled. "And I watched from across the street as people would purposefully have their dogs pee on it."

Kuriki-Olivo exhibited a nude sculpture of herself last summer as part of Art Basel in Switzerland. via Puppies Puppies and Balice Hertling, Paris; Galerie Francesca Pia, Zurich; Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin; Hannah Hoffman Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo by Vincent Blebois

Details of the New Museum exhibition are still being negotiated with officials, but the artist described a scenario where she lives in the museum's lobby for several months inside a glass display with windows she can fog to obstruct the viewer's gaze. She wants the space to resemble a Zen garden — a homage to her Japanese mother — and plans on developing a repatriation project for Taíno artifacts in memory of her Puerto Rican father, whose ashes are kept in a box on her night stand.

"We are trying to flatten the distinction between her bedroom and the institution," said Vivian Crockett, a curator organizing the show at the New Museum.

The artist has also been toying with riskier concepts, including the creation of an indoor cannabis farm and a method for continuing her sex work during the exhibition, which helps pay her rent. She also wants to livestream herself in the rare moments when she is outside the museum, sharing her perspective through a camera feed linked to television monitors in the lobby.

"I describe my role as a mediator between the artist and the institution," Crockett said, describing the negotiations within the museum to realize Kuriki-Olivo's vision. "Sometimes it feels like I'm also the medium, speaking on behalf of the artist."

Earlier in her career, Kuriki-Olivo drew inspiration from popular culture. She organized a 2015 exhibition on the Minions from "Despicable Me," seeing the yellow monsters as caricatures of the working class. That same year, she picketed an art fair dressed as SpongeBob SquarePants, holding a sign that depicted the cartoon in the loving embrace of his neighbor, Squidward. And during her breakthrough performance at the 2017 Whitney Biennial, the artist dressed as Lady Liberty with a drooping crown and crestfallen eyes. It became one of the first works categorized in the museum's permanent collection as performance art.

"Liberty (Liberté)," 2017, at the Whitney Museum of American Art. via Puppies Puppies and Balice Hertling, Paris; Galerie Francesca Pia, Zurich; Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin; Hannah Hoffman Gallery, Los Angeles; Photo by Bill Orcutt

Her attempts to find herself in these everyday objects stems from a childhood of isolation. Raised in the suburbs of Dallas, Kuriki-Olivo struggled to feel comfortable in an environment where she felt the need to suppress parts of her identity for safety reasons.

"I was scared early on of speaking, that my voice was too soft for a boy," she recalled. "At night, in the small space between consciousness and unconsciousness, I would pray to God with every cell in me that I would wake up with a vagina."

Finding herself in seemingly banal objects was an act of survival, recalling the kind of body politics expressed by queer artists like Felix Gonzalez-Torres, who created meaning from strings of lights and hard candies. Recent works have also shown Kuriki-Olivo's preoccupation with the brutality of death. In 2009, she was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor, which was removed the following year but has remained present as a theme in her work. Nearly a decade later, she created a ghoulish sculpture described as a portrait of the artist after brain surgery. For a 2019 performance at Galerie Francesca Pia in Zurich, she lay inside a satin coffin.

"I'm scared of the pain the future has in store for this deteriorating body," said Kuriki-Olivo from underneath her green camouflage. Later during the interview, she stripped the leaves from her body, lounging nude on the mattress where she entertains clients and performs for webcam sites. She said she has found inspiration from the boundary-pushing artists Marina Abramovic and On Kawara, and in the trans activist Sylvia Rivera.

"Coffin (Sculpture & Performance)," 2019, wooden coffin, coffin nails, pillow, blanket and fabric lining. via Puppies Puppies and Balice Hertling, Paris; Galerie Francesca Pia, Zurich; Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin; Hannah Hoffman Gallery, Los Angeles; Photo by Annik Wetter

Curators described Kuriki-Olivo as someone who unsettles institutions; even the most progressive bastions of the art world walk a difficult line between showcasing diverse artists and tokenizing them.

"Jade really challenged us," said Pati Hertling, director of Performance Space New York. When the venue offered Kuriki-Olivio a commission, she instead asked to program a gala honoring trans women of color. The project involved many sex workers and ran late into the night — far beyond the normal hours for Performance Space staff. Moreover, the women to whom the artist extended an invitation to perform were skeptical that the institution would actually pay them.

"There is still a lot of work needed to create a relationship of neutral trust," Hertling said; the event was an important turning point for her nonprofit. "I am very thankful for Jade to give us the opportunity to fail in certain ways and learn to move forward."

But when she heard about what Kuriki-Olivo had planned for the New Museum, Hertling's heart skipped a beat. Four months of 24/7 surveillance would take an emotional toll on the artist, not to mention raising concerns for her own safety.

"Jade takes on a lot, and it's a responsibility that weighs heavily on her shoulders," Hertling said. "It will not be an easy piece. She is going to be exhausted and emotionally at the limit of what she can take."

Kuriki-Olivo agreed. Sitting in her bedroom with the sounds of the rainforest playing from a speaker on her night stand, she explained it all.

"Sometimes, I wish that I didn't have to make work about my identity," she said. "But I just keep telling myself that you have to be hypervisible, because it means something different to hide."

Zachary Small is a reporter who covers the dynamics of power and privilege in the art world. They have written for The Times since 2019. More about Zachary Small

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PUPPIES PUPPIES (JADE GUANARO KURIKI-OLIVO)
Interview with Puppies Puppies (Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo) and Camila McHugh
Artforum, 17 August 2021

ARTFORUM

INTERVIEWS

PUPPIES PUPPIES (JADE KURIKI-OLIVO)

August 17, 2021 • Puppies Puppies (Jade Kuriki-Olivo) on transition, retrospection, and a year of protest

Puppies Puppies (Jade Kuriki Olivo), *Brain on Estrogen, progesterone, spironolactone, Truvada, Advil and Marijuana*, 2018, cow brain, marijuana leaf, progesterone, estrogen, spironolactone, prep and pain killers. Photo: Courtesy the artist.

Jade Kuriki Olivo's retrospective at the Kunsthaus Glarus in Switzerland brings together the Brooklyn-based artist's work from the past decade. On view through August 22, the show maps the evolution of her practice as she transitioned from working under the guise of Puppies Puppies to living as an openly trans woman. Here, Olivo reflects on this transformation and discusses refusing to hide, the turning point represented by this exhibition, and the weekly Stonewall Protests for Black Trans Liberation that have kept her going over the past year.

I WAS HIDING from the world for a long time. In some ways, it was because it was so terrifying to be—or even think about being—a trans woman. It felt like jumping off a cliff when I decided that it was what I wanted and needed in life.

Trans women have been consistently erased from history—our voices have been erased—so it is revolutionary for me, and for every trans person, especially BIPOC, gender-nonconforming, and two-spirit people, to be in control of the way our voices go out into the world. I still don't do many interviews, but unlike before—when my ex-husband or someone else would speak for me and I would be in a costume or sleeping on a sleeping pill—now I speak for myself. It means something very different to be hidden as a trans woman. At other points in history, I wouldn't have been able to exist. So when I came out, I exposed myself fully and physically in a nude performance in Paris as a way of saying, *I'm here and I'm not going to hide anymore.* I couldn't be out as a trans woman and have hiding be a part of my work. I also wanted to document the changes in my body as my hormone-replacement therapy continued.

This is part of the arc of my exhibition at the Kunsthaus Glarus. It was emotional pulling this show together because I really wanted people to understand the evolution that's happened within me. The show covers eleven years of work. I called it a retrospective because I was thinking about how the amount of time that one is given, that a person is allowed to exist, is different for different people. Trans women often don't live as long as other people. It creates a different way of relating to time. It's definitely more precious for me, also having had a brain tumor.

The show marks a new way of making work for me. I've always worked with other artists, so collaboration is nothing new, but I'm moving into a more curatorial role—becoming a conduit or a pathway—so that I can give a platform to other artists, especially a growing family of trans/GNC/2S+ artists. Going forward, when an institution asks me to do a solo show, I will invite another artist to do their own solo show, and they can decide how or if they want that to be associated with me. This is the direction I want to go in, and I'm doing sex work and figuring out a way to survive so I can keep moving toward it. This new chapter begins with Bri Williams and Elliot Reed's exhibitions opening at Glarus in September.

Puppies Puppies (Jade Kuriki Olivo), *Una Mujer Fantástica (A Fantastic Woman)*, 2019, HD video projection, color, sound, LED light box, tinted Toyota Corolla window, custom jacket, polished metal, mirror, public advertisement, dimensions variable.

Next to giving other artists I believe in space to express themselves, Stonewall Protests is the part of my life I am most passionate about. Stonewall is organized by Qween Jean and Joela Rivera, who have been holding weekly demonstrations for the past year in the wake of the murder of George Floyd. They are really the civil-rights leaders of now. I've been protesting since the age of sixteen, but when I finally found Stonewall Protests at thirty-one, I was like, *Oh my God, you found your family and your home.* I also found a reason to keep going at a time when my art practice was not fulfilling me. It is a healing space. Stonewall is first and foremost a leading formation within the current Black Trans Lives Matter movement. The protests relate in some ways to the ballroom scene, which was founded by Black and Latinx trans women in New York City, specifically in Harlem, and brings that culture to protesting. An amazing group of bikers called Riders4Rights block intersections so the space can become a dance floor where people are able to express themselves to their fullest and feel safe enough to do so. There are different chants and a drum line and music made by a fantastic group called Musicians United NYC. A huge part of the Stonewall protests are mutual-aid events which emphasize the need to support one another, as well as the communities some Stonewall protesters live or grew up in.

In different Indigenous histories, trans people have been identified as healers or helpers, and I'm drawn to this way of existing as a kind of sacred work. This is a practice I became familiar with through my father, who was Indigenous and taught me what he knew, and from my chosen Indigenous queer family members over time. In articulating all this, and thinking about when art and life blend together, I've been really grateful to reflect on this evolution. As Puppies Puppies, I was making meme videos, really concealed from the world in this little shell. And now this is what's happening. It's my life and I'm here.

— *As told to Camila McHugh*

http://www.artforum.com/interviews/puppies-puppies-jade-kuriki-olivo-on-transition-retrospection-and-a-year-of-protest-86349

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PUPPIES PUPPIES (JADE GUANARO KURIKI-OLIVO)
Jameson Fitzpatrick, “The Reappearing Act of Puppies Puppies”
NYT Style Magazine, August 18, 2021

The New York Times Style Magazine

Jade Kuriki-Olivo, a.k.a. Puppies Puppies, photographed in the Brooklyn Navy Yard on Jan. 12, 2021. Melody Melamed

ARTS AND LETTERS

The Reappearing Act of Puppies Puppies

The artist, who also goes by Jade Kuriki-Olivo, began her career as a solitary and mysterious figure. Now, with the support of her community, she's become entirely herself.

By Jameson Fitzpatrick

Aug. 18, 2021

UNTIL JADE KURIKI-OLIVO appeared in the stairwell of her Crown Heights, Brooklyn, apartment building, more than half an hour after the agreed-upon time, I wasn't convinced I'd ever meet the artist. Kuriki-Olivo, who has made work under the pseudonym Puppies Puppies since 2010, had been hard to schedule an interview with and, as I waited on her front stoop, I wondered if her evasion was part of an extended performance. Studying the street for potential clues — there was someone in full-body spandex doing an elaborate jump-rope routine nearby, and two UPS deliverymen — I half expected to see her coming down the block in costume or on horseback, as she has done in past performances.

Like many conceptual artists before her, the 32-year-old gained her reputation as something of a trickster, making a name as Puppies Puppies (Puppies for short) while obscuring the identity behind the persona — what seemed both a canny marketing move and a kiss-off to the contemporary art world's fixation on who's who. ("Who, or What, Is Puppies Puppies?" asked a 2016 headline in Artspace.) Without biographical information, viewers were forced to contend with only the artist's output, grounded in creative ventriloquisms. Puppies' installations, with their evocative, sometimes humorous recontextualizations of readymade sculptures — automatic Purell dispensers among them, years before Covid-19 forced a broader reassessment of hand sanitizer's value — won her comparisons to Marcel Duchamp and Félix González-Torres, artists who likewise made art that felt both wry and surprisingly personal. (The Purell dispensers emerged as a recurring motif due, in part, to Kuriki-Olivo's time in hospitals: In 2009, she was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor, which was removed the following year.)

The artist's "Body Fluid (Blood)" (2019) at Remai Modern, Saskatoon. In the foreground, "Blood Drop Stress Balls (for Lutz Bacher)" (2019). In the background, "Portrait (My Blood)" (2019), which incorporates the artist's blood, a blood donation bag, an IV stand and a fridge. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin. Photograph by Blaine Campbell

Puppies' performances, meanwhile, fueled curiosity about the person (or rotating cast of paid actors) inside the mass-produced costumes that became her signature. The artist's exhibitions regularly featured a lone performer, often portraying a figure from children's entertainment — SpongeBob SquarePants at Mexico City's 2015 Material Art Fair; one of the yellow Minions from "Despicable Me" surveying everyday objects from the artist's home at Detroit's What Pipeline gallery later that year — or a monstrous, if misunderstood, villain. For her first New York solo exhibition, in 2015 at the gallery Queer Thoughts, a loin-clothed Gollum crouched atop a stone plinth; the next year, Freddy Krueger wandered a Los Angeles art fair carrying a photograph of the Hollywood sign digitally altered to read "The End Is Near." During the 2017 Whitney Biennial, a Lady Liberty in the style of

one of New York City's "living statue" street performers held her torch on the museum's eighth-floor terrace. "Liberty (Liberté)" is now the only work categorized as performance art in the Whitney's permanent collection.

The mystique surrounding Puppies' anonymity was rigorously cultivated, sometimes with the help of Kuriki-Olivo's then partner, identified only as Forrest, who came to serve as an interlocutor between artist and public. Those seeking an audience with Puppies at the couple's Los Angeles home would instead be greeted by Forrest, who was deputized to answer any questions while Kuriki-Olivo remained nearby but unavailable — in the shower, for instance.

But in late 2017, Puppies' work began to engage biography as subject more explicitly. The first reference to Kuriki-Olivo's gender transition appeared in "Green (Ghosts)," an installation for which she and Forrest relocated their apartment's contents to Los Angeles's Overduin & Co. gallery, where they and their dog would sleep each night, thus altering the space from day to day. One morning, before leaving, Kuriki-Olivo was moved to affix her daily dose of estrogen — two elliptical pale blue pills — to the wall. In 2018, she created an installation that functioned as a funeral for her deadname, complete with a grass lawn and an engraved headstone. The press release for that show was a poem addressed to her pretransition self and signed, simply, "Jade." The artist now uses her full name, usually set off in parentheses alongside "Puppies Puppies."

The artist's "Plague," at Halle für Kunst, Lüneburg, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Halle für Kunst, Lüneburg. Photograph by Fred Dott

Another view of "Plague," at Halle für Kunst, Lüneburg, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Halle für Kunst, Lüneburg. Photograph by Fred Dott

"Courier on Horse (Donnelly)" (2019), which was part of "Plague" at Halle für Kunst, Lüneburg, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Halle für Kunst, Lüneburg. Photograph by Fred Dott

Now, with only a street address — no apartment number — I waited for a reply to my text announcing my arrival. When a dark-haired woman in a black leather trench coat approached, I squinted to determine if the masked figure resembled photographs of Kuriki-Olivo. It turned out to be her roommate, an artist and designer named Ren Light Pan, who invited me into the lobby to wait. A few more minutes passed. I prepared myself for the possibility of an interview by proxy.

When Kuriki-Olivo did emerge, it was as a blur of apologies and acid green hair that floated around her face; she'd lost track of time while getting ready. But she had a vision for the mise-en-scène of our conversation: We'd talk while she finished her makeup so I could watch her in the mirror.

In person, Kuriki-Olivo is both surprisingly forthcoming and prone to the same associative, idiosyncratic logic that has long been at the center of her work. In an age when many people document their lives in painstaking detail for public consumption online, and self-exposure has become commonplace, Kuriki-Olivo's art offers an alternative take on vulnerability. She's never sought to play tricks on her audience, she told me, correcting a common misconception about her work; Kuriki-Olivo approaches everything she devises from a place of sincerity. When she first performed in costume — as her high school mascot, a lion, to both fulfill and sidestep an athletic requirement — she was drawn to the freedom she felt dancing in the suit: Here was not just a way of hiding in plain sight but a way of being seen, made endurable through the filter of a costume. (As we spoke that afternoon, I kept thinking of Emily Dickinson's edict to "Tell all the truth but tell it slant.")

Through her estrangements of readymade objects, pre-existing characters and quotidian actions, Kuriki-Olivo has created a vocabulary for self-expression refracted through the detritus of contemporary life, one that troubles the distinction between the universal (Purell dispensers; household items) and the specific (the reason for the Purell dispensers; *her* household items, including family heirlooms). In this way, she is indeed working within the tradition of artists like González-Torres, who excavated

something deeply human out of seemingly banal objects. But she is also blurring this tradition, rejecting any singular focus in favor of trying to reflect the messy multiplicity of what Kuriki-Olivo might consider the ultimate readymade: life itself.

Puppies Puppies (Kuriki-Olivo), "Coffin (Sculpture & Performance)" (2019), at the Galerie Francesca Pia, Zürich. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Francesca Pia, Zürich

WHEN WE MET, Kuriki-Olivo was still on a high from the day before, when she'd attended an artist showcase at the Crown Heights community space the Salon on Kingston, which had featured her friends Iman Le Caire, a dancer and actress, and Thesan Pollyanna, a singer and multi-instrumentalist. Their performances — which, after their sets, had continued sporadically throughout the night — exemplified Kuriki-Olivo's own approach to art. "I've always been in love with the idea that art just blends in with life," Kuriki-Olivo said. "Everything seamlessly intertwines,

and you start to not be able to differentiate the edges between the two. That blurriness is where I thrive."

Here, minutes into our conversation, Kuriki-Olivo's voice began to break as she tried, unsuccessfully, not to cry: "Because I always thought I was some sort of freak. And now that I'm finding community — people like Thesan and Ren, trans people who are my community — I realize I'm just a person. As a child, you look at the world as this new, complicated thing that you don't understand. ... And then at some point, you have to ask, 'Who am I in all of this?' I kept thinking there was no real answer to that question. I felt like nothing, like I wasn't even there. Now I feel present — and that sounds so cheesy and cliché, but it's a gift to feel that you're present and you can be yourself." By this point, Kuriki-Olivo had long since turned away from the mirror (nearly ceiling-height, framed with LED lights) to face me. "Well, it was good to get the crying out before the makeup," she said.

Kuriki-Olivo was born in 1989 to a Japanese mother, a public health doctor, and a Puerto Rican father, who met one another in Dallas while in college. She grew up outside the city, in a racist and homophobic environment inhospitable to "a mixed-race, closeted trans woman." For her, the place remains synonymous with trauma. "If people in Texas heard my voice, they would turn around," she said, which taught her, from an early age, to be as quiet as possible.

Her father was especially influential. Around her neck, she wore a fur pouch that he'd made from a rabbit pelt (he was a certified Texas Master Naturalist). Kuriki-Olivo also seems to have inherited his love of Day-Glo colors — one in particular. Her long, wavy hair matched the semi-sheer curtains, the sheets and blanket covering a makeshift bed, a love seat constructed out of multiple circular cushions and a pair of sneakers. (The lingering fragrance of pot contributed to the overall impression of green.) When she disappeared to make coffee, I became suddenly attentive to the spectrum. There was Day-Glo, yes, but also chartreuse, fern, mint ... jade? After she returned, lime green mug in hand, I asked about the color's significance. Green is "a ubiquitous color — it's one of

the most common in the world," she explained. "And it's made up of blue and yellow. It's ambiguous. I am very much a mixed person, and so I think about this mixing that happens all the time, in all that I do."

An installation shot of the artist's 2018 exhibition "Andrew D. Olivo 6.7.1989–6.7.2018" at Detroit's What Pipeline gallery. Courtesy of the artist and What Pipeline, Detroit

A detail of "Andrew D. Olivo, 6.7.1989–6.7.2018" at What Pipeline, Detroit, 2018. Courtesy of the artist and What Pipeline, Detroit

A detail of "Andrew D. Olivo, 6.7.1989–6.7.2018" at What Pipeline, Detroit, 2018. Courtesy of the artist and What Pipeline, Detroit

Kuriki-Olivo's father identified as Taíno, the name for the Indigenous peoples living on the island now known as Puerto Rico, and elsewhere in the Caribbean, at the time of European arrival in the 15th century. Though colonization decimated the Taíno population, for the past several decades activists both in the Caribbean and throughout its diasporas have pushed for recognition of the identity — a claim supported by recent research affirming significant Taíno ancestry in Puerto Ricans today, as well as by, more meaningfully, many generations of tradition. "I think in a lot of ways I'm trying to, through different artifacts from my family, make sure that the past isn't erased," Kuriki-Olivo said. "Taíno culture was obliterated by genocide, but it actually wasn't. Against the odds, it survived." This heritage has taken on particular meaning since her transition, given the traditional acceptance of gender fluidity among many Indigenous peoples. "I'm like, 'Oh, my ancestors accepted it' — and deep down in my heart and soul, a part of them exists in me. ... You can ground yourself in knowing that your transcestors were doing their own thing, too."

IN 2019, THE FIRST year Kuriki-Olivo appended her full name to Puppies Puppies, as well as her first based in New York, she mounted five exhibitions in five countries. Though her work with Forrest ended along with their relationship in 2018, her practice remains rooted in collaborations of all kinds: At Zurich's Galerie Francesca Pia, she and the painter Eliza Douglas created an eerily prescient show dramatizing doomsday preppers' fear of (zombie)

contagion. Surrounded by paintings depicting costumed Puppies Puppies performances past, Douglas, dressed as a zombie, binge-watched scenes from the TV series "The Walking Dead" on a large monitor. Nearby, Kuriki-Olivo — made up to resemble a corpse — lay in an open coffin lined in peach satin. Against one wall, a series of metal shelving units housed bulk quantities of toilet paper, water and food under the title "Survival Preparations," which Kuriki-Olivo dedicated to the memory of her father, who'd recently died. For the opening of her (also eerily prescient) exhibition "Plague," at Halle für Kunst in Lüneburg, Germany, she recreated a 2002 performance by the conceptual artist Trisha Donnelly: Costumed as a Napoleonic courier, she rode in on a horse and delivered news of the emperor's surrender. Her show "Una Mujer Fantástica (A Fantastic Woman)" in 2018 included two portraits of a friend, the artist Cielo Oscuro, on her first day of hormone replacement therapy, along with a link to the GoFundMe supporting her transition (proceeds from the sale of the photographs also went to the fund).

Another view of "Andrew D. Olivo, 6.7.1989–6.7.2018" at What Pipeline, Detroit, 2018. Courtesy of the artist and What Pipeline, Detroit

Lately, Kuriki-Olivo tries to make the opportunities afforded to her useful to others, an echo of how, in that early interview with Artspace, she differentiated herself from Duchamp: "In Puppies' work, the objects must function or else they're props." This condition was clearly illustrated last year in "Body Fluid (Blood)," her first solo institutional exhibition in North America, at Remai Modern in Saskatoon, Canada. The show was inspired by her parents, who shared a rare blood type and frequently donated blood during her childhood, as well as by the queerphobic policies, dating back to the emergence of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, that still place restrictions on blood donations based on gender and sexual orientation in a number of countries, including Canada and the U.S. Inside a private room in the museum's ground-floor gallery, free rapid H.I.V. testing was offered on select dates, with peer mentors available for pre- and post-testing guidance. Outside the consultation room, a glass-doored refrigerator displayed an IV bag of Kuriki-Olivo's blood, ineligible for donation, the floor around it scattered with stress balls — often given to donors to make their veins easier to locate — shaped like cartoon crimson droplets. On Saturdays, visitors could take a shuttle bus from the museum to a donation outpost administered by Canadian Blood Services.

The exhibition was both personal and site-specific: Saskatchewan has the highest rate of new H.I.V. infections in Canada (more than twice the national average), with Indigenous people disproportionately affected by the virus. "Rather than just landing there, putting my artwork up and then going away, I wanted to try to do something that really dealt with the place," Kuriki-Olivo said. Drawing on her time working at TransLatin@ Coalition, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit that provides support and services to the trans community, she asked, "How can I incorporate what I was doing in social work with what I want to do with my art practice?"

At its most political, Kuriki-Olivo's work is also at its most literal, and tends not to equivocate. In her most recent show at New York's Queer Thoughts, "Executive Order 9066 (Soul Consoling Tower)," about the World War II internment of nearly 120,000 Japanese

Americans and Japanese immigrants, for instance, the artist showcased an urn filled with the ashes of burned American flags.

"I've always been in love with the idea that art just blends in with life," Kuriki-Olivo said. "That blurriness is where I thrive."

The impulse to use the platforms made available to her "to try to create some equality when it doesn't exist" defines not just her art but the artist, as well, a sense of responsibility that seems to have become especially urgent as she builds a community with other trans New Yorkers of color. "There's a whole network of us: amazing, beautiful, brilliant, incredible trans artists and creatives," she said. "And we're not getting the attention we deserve." Kuriki-Olivo wants to leverage her success to make space for others, and to take advantage of future invitations to show her own work as a chance to exhibit other artists so that they might "skip some of the unnecessary steps. ... You really have to uplift your trans family, because the world is not going to do it."

WHEN I ASKED her about the origin of Puppies Puppies, Kuriki-Olivo spoke of her past desire to disappear. Inspired by a former acquaintance who vanished after deleting everything from their Facebook page and then repopulating it with photos of cats, Kuriki-Olivo changed both the first and last name on her account to Puppies and replaced its content with pictures of small dogs.

"I romanticized disappearing," she said, invoking Bas Jan Ader, the Dutch conceptual artist who was lost at sea while trying to cross the Atlantic in a small sailboat in 1975. But her alter ego also offered an escape hatch from a name and a way of being that had left her feeling alienated from herself: "I didn't relate to who I was, so I erased my identity. But I put expressions out into the world as much as I could because I had a brain tumor, and I thought the world was going to end. That name came out of pain, but also out of wanting people to see there's beauty that comes from this brain of mine." During her transition, though, Kuriki-Olivo realized that she needed to reassess her decision to make work anonymously. "It

meant something very different to hide as a trans woman," she said, "because society forces us to hide."

A still from the performance "Liberty (Liberté)," presented at the 2017 Whitney Biennial, on the museum's eighth-floor terrace. The piece is now part of the institution's permanent collection. Paula Court

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given her commitment to creating a platform for others, Kuriki-Olivo did not seem especially interested in talking about her own current or upcoming works. Instead, she spoke most animatedly about participating in the weekly Stonewall Protests, which usually begin outside the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, that have been held every Thursday evening since June of 2020. Led by the organizers Joela Rivera and Qween Jean, both Black trans women, the Stonewall Protests refer as much to a collective as to the standing series of demonstrations. The first post on the group's Instagram account (@thestonewallprotests) declares: "We are a community of Black queer and Black trans activists fighting for visibility in the Black community and abolition in this nation. We are here to serve the Black community and end the systemic racism that plagues this country in every aspect, including: health care, education, housing and policing, to name a few." The group, which draws a diverse crowd of regulars to its protests, also coordinates frequent food and clothing drives.

The Stonewall Protests are currently where Kuriki-Olivo is spending most of the energy she once devoted to live performance. One of the protests' important functions is to provide a respite from the violence, structural and personal, faced by community members, to make room for joy, self-expression and, reliably, dancing. "These spaces are about healing, is how Qween puts it," Kuriki-Olivo said, "especially for Black trans queer people. Each protest is also a ball, which stems from the ballroom culture created by Black and brown trans and queer people. We'll block off a whole street and have a dance floor."

Last fall, she also began making videos as @mosstransgirl on her OnlyFans page. (She can get by "only so far" on her art, she said, and also does in-person sex work.) Having grown into her sexuality online, she sees OnlyFans as an opportunity to lean into — and change her relationship to — that complicated history. And these videos also help her process the shame around sex that "growing up in Texas and being brainwashed as a Christian" instilled.

She did tell me about one public performance she embarked upon in the last year. Wearing a suit of armor she purchased with money made through sex work, she went on a series of walks throughout New York. It's a response to the city's much-derided "Walking While Trans" ban, the 1976 anti-loitering statute that was repealed in February after years of pressure from critics, who claimed it was used to disproportionately target and arrest trans women of color. "Honestly, it feels like that some days," she said, "like putting on a suit of metal armor to go out into the world." Kuriki-Olivo was excited to do the performance outside a designated art context, to reclaim "the power in doing something because you love it and you want it to happen." The piece was dedicated to her trans siblings, trans women in particular. "Why I wanted to be an artist was to have a voice," she said, tearing up again. "It's crucial to feel heard, even if you're scared to talk. It's crucial to a human being to feel heard, to feel cared about, to feel love. And I want that for other people. So I think that's what it's all about. Or at least that's where it's going."

Portrait: Melody Melamed. Set design: Todd Knopke. Makeup: Kaori Chloe Soda using MAC Cosmetics. Photo assistants: Xiang-yun Chen, James Reddington. Location: Ten Ton Studio

https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/18/t-magazine/jade-kuriki-olivo-puppies-puppies.html