FAMILY STYLE

Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo & Anohni

No Place Like Home

U.S. $20 / U.K. £12

ISSN 2996-0118

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Michèle Lamy and Scarlett Rouge wear full looks by RICK OWENS.
Photographed by Venetia Scott in Paris.

Address Me as She

Before revealing her identity, *Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo* was an elusive presence: Her performances were obscured by a layer of fog, carried out by avatars, and veiled in elaborate costumes. Under the brilliant lime-green surveillance of her self-imposed captivity at the New Museum, the artist is still an enigma—but now she is exposed as herself, a profound embrace she shares with *Anohni*.

Artwork by Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo

Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo, *Untitled*, 2023. Image courtesy of the artist, Galerie Balice Hertling Paris, and Galerie Barbara Weiss.

Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo is an ethnographer of sorts, seamlessly blending cultural motifs such as identity, class, and sexuality into visual narratives that create a conversation within her multifaceted world. A trans woman of Taíno and Japanese descent, the artist, who goes by the name Puppies Puppies, isn't easily defined. She leads spectators into alternate realities and interrogates preconceived notions about the trans experience with her immersive installations, such as *BODY FLUID (BLOOD)*, in which she erected a public HIV blood testing site inside the Canadian Remai Modern museum in 2019; and *Anxiety, Depression & Triggers* at Galerie Balice Hertling in Paris the same year, where she addressed mental health concerns with performance-based painting that confronted work by white male painters of the past. With each project, Kuriki-Olivo takes us on a psychic odyssey. Green hues often suffuse her realized visions, symbolizing not only the union of blue and yellow—two colors used in discourse around gender binaries—but also the shade of the heart chakra. Her community-centered practice serves as a dynamic forum for the exploration of identity, heritage, and the fluid interplay between tradition and modernity. It's a through line that continues in the original body of work the artist has created for this magazine. Way before Kuriki-Olivo realized any of this, or even herself, Anohni's music was a formative force for her growing up in the outskirts of Dallas, Texas.

Over three decades, the enigmatic voice behind the band Anohni and the Johnsons has addressed themes including animism, environmental collapse, the American military-industrial complex, Abrahamic and patriarchal toxicity, and trans representation throughout history. Through Anohni's emotive voice and songwriting, as well as her installations, paintings, drawings, sculpture, and experimental theater, the artist intuitively and viscerally engages issues that have been slowly rising to the surface of the cultural, collective consciousness. Her seminal concert-performance, *TURNING*, starring Connie Fleming, Kembra Pfahler, Joey Gabriel, Honey Dijon, Nomi Ruiz, Johanna Constantine, and others, was presented for the first time at the 2004 Whitney Biennale and then toured across Europe in 2006. Anohni held a powerful, ceremonial space for the intersections between experience and presence of urban trans femmes and a subset of cis females who have used their bodies as tools in the resistance of the patriarchy. A decade later, a similar spirit stirred in the collaborative exhibition event series, "Future Feminism," in which Anohni was a key facilitator.

In New York—where the hyper-private Kuriki-Olivo has set up a second home under 24/7 camera surveillance inside the lobby of the New Museum—the artist bares all. She joins her idol for a candid conversation to discuss the world as they know it in a time of global uncertainty. Their respective bodies of work propel us to look past surface-level visuals and delve into the profound depths of transgender identity. — **K.O. Nnamdie**

Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo: Maybe this is an intense note to start on—"surreal" is the first word that comes to mind—but to get to meet you connects me to my younger self. When I was younger, I would listen to your music. I still do. It bridged this gap between before and after transitioning. It felt so close to home in this way that I hadn't fully experienced before. Sometimes I feel like a totally different person than I did at that time, but I also realize there were moments in which I always knew myself. It meant a lot.

Anohni: I'm excited to meet you, too. I've been following your work for several years. How old were you when you were listening to my music?

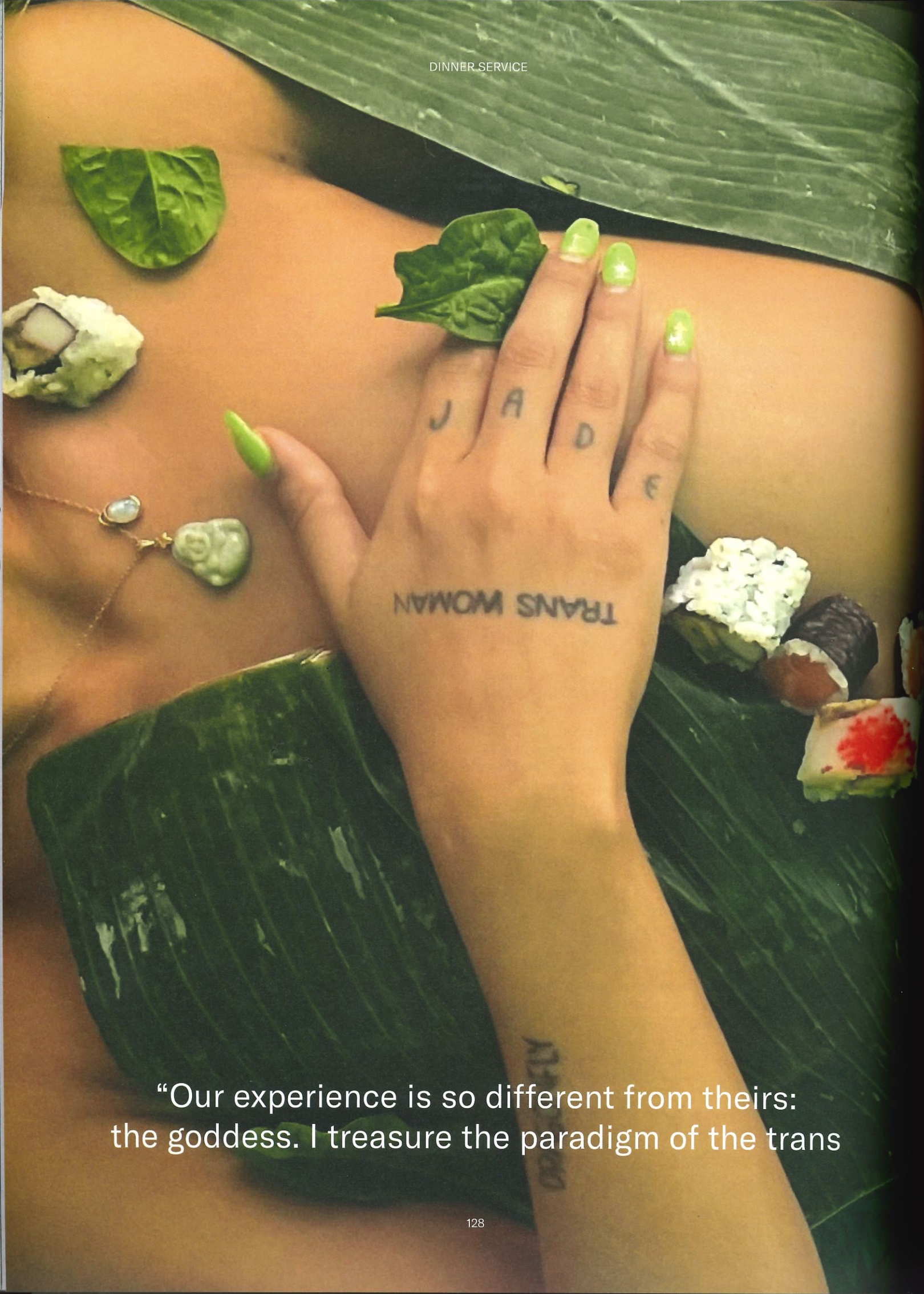
JGKO: I would listen to it when I was on the bus, on the way to school, from middle school into high school. I was just becoming a teenager, and shit was changing. I was more in tune with vulnerability in a way that I had to shut off over the years. There's a vulnerability in your expression that touched on my heart strings for sure. I was a baby.

A: What year were you in middle school?

JGKO: 2003.

A: Wow. I'm curious to ask a question that has recently been in my mind: For trans kids around the world—because I am two generations older than you—was it clear that I was trans? In 2005, when I was doing interviews for [the album] *I Am a Bird Now*, I was talking about myself as trans, but I wasn't using non-binary language. I was also using a male name. They'd ask me if I was gay, and I'd say, "No. But if you are asking me if I would marry a man... the answer is yes. I'm transgender." At the time, there wasn't the semantic innovation of non-binary as a viable way of talking about things: You had to choose whether you were going to try to tell them that you were a man or a woman. I was transgender, and I was also saying my name was Antony. How did that sit with you as a kid?

JGKO: That's what was so beautiful. It felt like pure emotion. It reached past gender, and I couldn't even fathom that fully as a concept. I was just starting to understand because puberty made me aware of how I'm different. It was a time of self-discovery.



“Our experience is so different from theirs:
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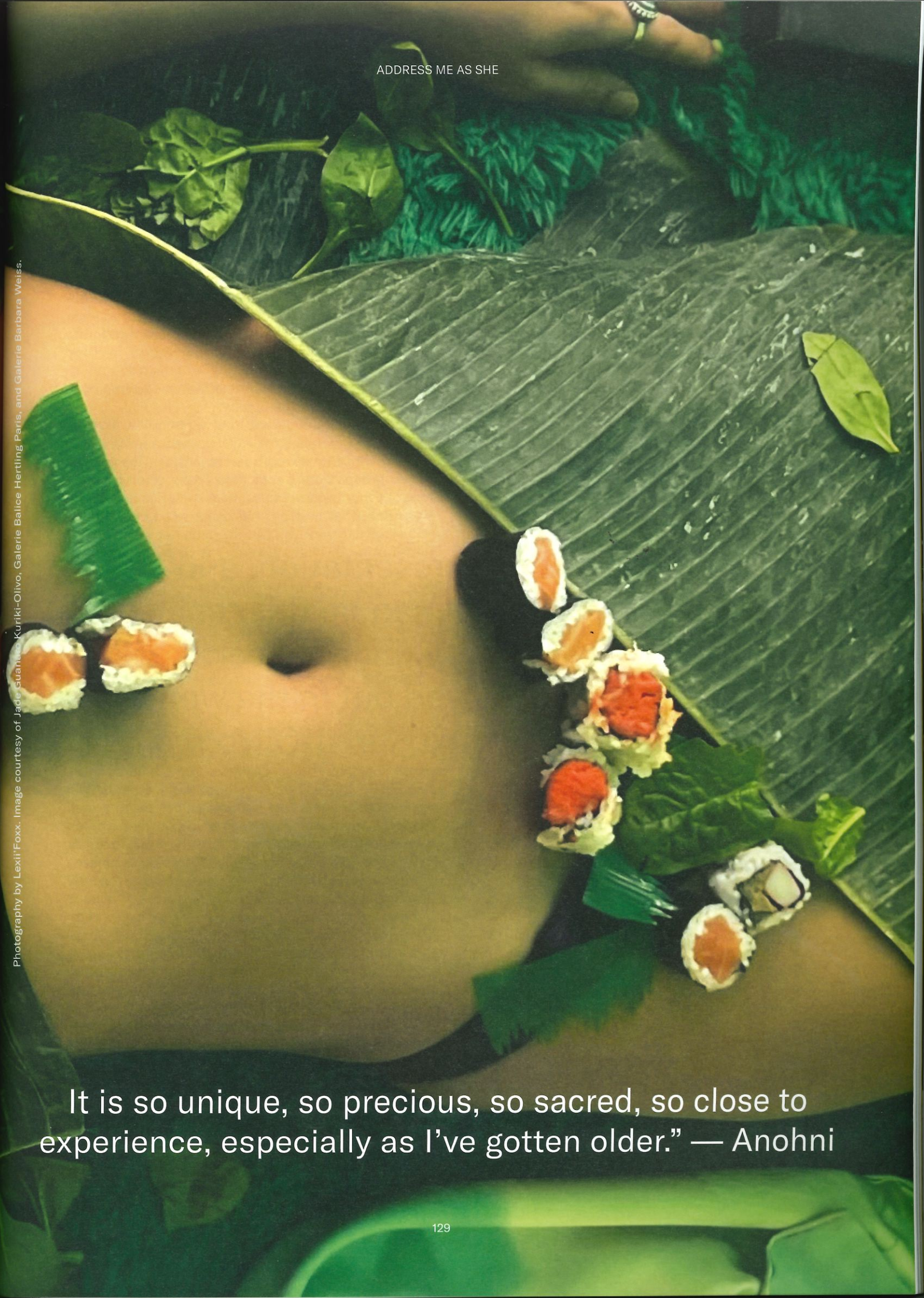

Photography by Lexii Foxx. Image courtesy of Jade Guamos, Kuriki-Olivo, Galerie Balice Hertling Paris, and Galerie Barbara Weiss.

It is so unique, so precious, so sacred, so close to experience, especially as I've gotten older." — Anohni

I let myself feel free listening to your music. It's kind of intense how repression works: I really couldn't understand the notion of gender in that way yet at all. It was a feeling-based thing.

A: So the conversation was sublimated, and yet the feelings were present.

JGKO: Yes. And later, going back in my head, I realized, *Wow, that was a big moment.*

A: I was a kid in 1982 when Culture Club released "Do You Really Want to Hurt Me." Boy George was so feminine, so young, wearing only the lightest amount of makeup. His face and eyes looked deeply like those of a girl. He sang from this super emotional, deeply powerful point of view. At that moment, especially with AIDS, no one would even say they were gay. George's quote was "I prefer a cup of tea to sex." Seeing someone who was in some ways like me but not hearing them say "I'm trans" was both exhilaratingly affirming and confusing. I was still marooned in certain respects. No one was explaining the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation and the complex ways that those things can interact. I got most of my understanding of gender identity from the natural world.

JGKO: Like your Boy George moment, I had to really look to culture to find myself. After I started to acknowledge who I truly was, I started to look back, and certain things really stuck out. There were moments of profoundness on the road to figuring out who I was or who I am, but then again, that's always evolving. I think about representation, and I think about how it can be this really painful, intense, scary thing to feel like a representative, exposed out in the world. The world that we live in is very different from the world that I grew up in, that you grew up in. I think it's changed over time. Today, there's a hostility that surfaces when you put yourself out there.

A: Do you think that there is more hostility now?

JGKO: I don't think there is more; it's just different. I've witnessed the backlash that can come with people understanding exactly who you are. So I feel like representation can go in multiple ways. When I was growing up, there were moments where I'd be on the train, and I would see a trans woman, and time would stop. It stuck out to me for the same reason your music stuck out to me so intensely that I had it on repeat. These were moments that I now understand as stepping stones to understanding myself and filling in this big gap that was missing. Now the younger generation is seeing more trans representation. To see yourself mirrored is life-changing.

A: It's a very particular subset of trans kids who have access to this new experience.

JGKO: True. I marched for a little over a year [in 2020 to 2021] with Stonewall Protests, a Black Trans Lives Matter group. During that time I was often creating symbolic performances, such as the *Walking While Trans Ban*, that involved me using sex work to raise the money for a life-size, realistic suit of metal armor. The law made it easier for cops to arrest trans women for suspicion of sex working; I walked the city in armor for months before it was repealed. The ban was meant to target trans women and femmes who were simply existing in public spaces.

A: I'm shocked even just watching *RuPaul's Drag Race* and hearing the extent of the hardship that some girls are still having to face as teens... the most basic, monstrous American experiences: being thrown out of their houses, sent to conversion camps. These are kids in their 20s talking about shit happening to them that I thought was finished by the end of the '80s. Then there is this new generation that is coming up in LA and San Francisco and London, raised in more liberal families and environments. Some are transitioning young; they're not having to deal with secondary sex characteristics in the same ways. There has been a kind of rolling genocide against trans expression in

"I think about representation, and I think about how it can be this really painful, intense, scary thing to feel like a representative, exposed out in the world."
— Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo

Abrahamic cultures for at least 2,000 years that waxes and wanes with the decades; the long knowledge of our constant presence in all societies has been carefully extinguished.

JGKO: When I first discovered artists that I feel so close to—artists like Félix González-Torres, whose work really helped me understand my own queerness—I wanted to understand queer and trans history and what life was like for them, what it was like for your generation. Now I wonder what it is like for these younger kids and how much has really changed. The work of González-Torres and the other artists who came out of the '90s is still so relevant today even though it was a different time.

A: In less liberal parts of the country, bias persists. Trans people, and women more broadly, are in bad situations in some states now. They still have the Internet, but how much can the Internet help in communities overrun by fundamentalists? The trans and queer experiences are so unique as minority experiences because we spring from the bodies of every race, creed, and demographic—even from the bodies of those who would declare us their mortal enemies; it's a sleeper cell in their genomes. There's this presumption of a sort of inexorable progress in social evolution. While I don't take the progress that has been made for granted, more and more I see the pendulum swing back and forth, depending on conditions. Things can get worse as quickly as they can improve.

JGKO: In 2001, [artist] Gregg Bordowitz made a piece that said "The AIDS Crisis Is Still Beginning." That was something that really resonated with me because there are people in my life that are having to deal with being HIV-positive and what that means today.

A: I remember [artist and activist] Chloe Dzubilo, my best friend in the early '90s, had AIDS. She often had to battle with the hospitals to be treated with any sensitivity or dignity in the healthcare system, and that was in New York City. The status of trans medical safety and security in many parts of the world is still very, very fragile. In the U.K., the prime minister is railing against our existence. They just made it illegal for trans women to be treated in women's medical wards. We had, like, a three year burst of visibility in the late 2010s, where European and American societies pawed at the idea that trans people existed. Now we are in an election cycle in the U.S., and our bodies are being used by the right wing—by both parties, really—as weapons to distract from broader political and eco-social crises. We're being used again as a substitute for more complicated conversations that the politicians don't actually want to have about

Photography by Alethia Isis Rael (A.I.R). Image courtesy of Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo, Galerie Balice Hertling, Paris, and Galerie Barbara Weiss.

Photography by Lexii'Foxx. Image courtesy of Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo, Galerie Balice Hertling Paris, and Galerie Barbara Weiss.

economics, about the military-industrial complex, about the fossil fuel industry, about corporate lobbies, and about the deteriorated mandate of care for their citizens. It's hard. As a trans person, you want to step your foot forward and be like, *Yes, let's talk about our experiences.* Then on the other hand, in a system this sick, we are mostly just clickbait to lure people into knots of hate and blame. In Judeo-Christianity, trans femme bodies have long been expendable: a bundle of sticks to feed a fire beneath a witch and the memory of the Goddess that she represents. Trans children are encoded with that wilderness. They are creatively aligned with the body of the Earth herself.

JGKO: Genocide and erasure have come in a variety of forms. Recently, I read a story on Twitter about how a U.K. museum discovered that a Roman emperor was a transgender woman. People were discussing the different reasons why it took so long to accept her as trans, and somebody said that's what happens throughout history: Erasure happens when one group doesn't want the other's ideas or identity to be passed down to future generations. I always wonder about the people in history who were trans but their identity was erased.

A: Chloe and I took shelter in the notion that there were dignified seats for gender-variant people in some indigenous cultures. That concept was a revelation and a boon to us as survivors of our own anonymous communities of origin. We read books about the *hijra*, the *fa'afafine*, the two-spirits, the *muxe*. Until recently, in most parts of the world, it was up to transsexual women, trans men, and gender outliers to determine how to live in the margins of societies that denied their existences. This was certainly true in the U.S. in the late '80s and early '90s. We each navigated through that in different ways as kids, convinced we were the only ones. For me—having never existed within any aspect of the gender binary—it took a long time to eventually say, "address me as *she*." That was a conversation I had with the heterosexual world in more recent years, to be clear that it was tiresome and disrespectful to keep calling me *he* after having lived the life I had lived.

My gender identity has been the same since I was born. I've always been transgender; I've always been femme and girl-like in some respects, androgynous in others. Irrepressible trans expression in children, in any direction, is hard-wired. Until I moved to NYC, almost all my friends were girls; we were the most similar. I fled the heterosexual world in my later teens and moved to a gay ghetto, where I finally met queens, and things opened up. Obviously, my trans experience socially and biologically has been different from cis-gendered females' experiences. When binary lines have to be drawn, I belong more on the side of women. It doesn't mean that I am the same as cis women, or that I necessarily desire to be, or that I expect cis women to pretend I am of the same experience. In my case, we are often in intersecting circles. When the side of women is inhospitable to me, I am cast outside the circle entirely. Especially after getting through childhood and assuming my seat in a queer community, outside that circle is often where I have been safest and the most free.

Trans femmes have long been shock absorbers for some of the worst misogynist loathing that any society or religion has to offer. An advanced subset of cis women acknowledge that today. It is the *TURNING* revelation: the common denominator of a certain essence—a biologically and spiritually inescapable pledge. Trans femme bodies are used for terrible purposes in societies founded on the subjugation of femaleness. Abrahamic patriarchies feed on the torture of femme bodies. And despite this, like a steady stream, trans femme children continue to pour from women's bodies, generation after generation, advocating for Her, deifying Her form, taking some of the worst blows for Her. Our experience is so different from theirs: It is so unique, so precious, so sacred, so close to the goddess. I treasure the paradigm of the trans experience, especially as I've gotten older.

JGKO: It's beautiful to hear you say that you always have been yourself. For me, there was this huge moment of transformation, where my feelings broke through, where I decided that I needed to make a change in my life to figure out who I was. When I started to medically transition, I spent a year working at a nonprofit providing resources for trans women and people of color. I thought it was a departure from art, but in reality it was just a different manifestation of my practice. After I left that job, I started to focus my efforts on attempting to enact community care and social work through my art. At Performance Space New York, I collaborated with my trans sisters, including Lexii'Foxx, Alethia Rael, and LindaLa, to create a gala fundraiser and a series of live performances in which the stage became a space exclusively for trans, nonbinary, and two-spirit performers. I realized that, despite the capitalistic, cis white supremacy in the art world, there was a possibility to use opportunities that came my way to create gigs for community, create a space for community—even if it's temporary—create a stage for community, and acquire funds for community to survive. We've been kept out of many spaces and continue to be because of discrimination, transphobia, racism, classism, and the list goes on. I want to see more people from my trans community in the art sphere.