

## **“The Back Room, lessons in glamour..”**

He slides on a dress and steps into heels. Make up is applied with grace to a face that defines its own beauty and a wig that is wrangled into a position of maximal attitude. His transformation is almost complete, from chrysalis to glamorous butterfly, requiring only the embrace of an audience.

The process is mesmerizing, and I am honored to bear witness to the creation of those astonishing personae only a drag queen, or king can create. I have tried to be an attentive student to the artistry and there is so much to learn. There are many motivations for someone to emerge as a new being, as numerous as the elements of couture. It is in the dressing room, where the lines of gender and sexuality become purposely blurred.

Drag queens/kings are not sham women or men or comic impersonators. Such simplification would be degrading. There are those who do drag for reasons of pride.

*“When I see photographs of myself in drag sometimes I am in awe because I created her. She is my imagination.”*

Some drag queens perform because they love to entertain.

*“When I get on stage and perform, I hope I can make people laugh and forget about their problems.”*

Some are transgender women and others identify themselves as gender queer and femme, employing drag to unpack and reaffirm gender identity.

*“I love the adoration from the audience because I do not see it in myself”*

Some gay men who perform drag emphasize that their drag queen identify as an iconic entertainer.

*“Honey, this is a Bob Mackie dress.”*

There are those performers who adopt feminine identities as a tool to connect to life off stage

*“I started doing drag with the name of Jasmine Harlow. Jasmine was my mother’s name and Harlow was from the Documentary about Queen.”*

Drag queens/kings commit to who they will become and share the new born authenticity with each other.

*“Now who has my lipstick”,*

*“I forgot my eyelashes”,*

*“Oh my god, she is beautiful.”*

*“The face doesn’t come together until you have on your lips.”*

*“Girl, I was doing that song tonight.”*

For the audience, the drag queens/Kings create a space, in which nothing is as it appears. She is a magician...sexual smoke and feminine mirrors. At the same time, they are challenging all of us to shift our perception of male and female, beyond rigid biological classification. Is it only in the chromosomes? “Does it matter how one defines themselves sexually?” My intention with this body of work is to initiate a dialog as it relates to

a possible fusion of male/female within all of us, and that the “self” lies along this continuum.

I saw my first drag show about 25 years ago and was strictly part of the audience, enthralled with the performance and the ability of these “actors” to transition so beautifully. As I became friends with the individuals within the drag community, I was invited into the back room to observe the transformation. A trust of both my prior photographic work, as well as respect for the performers, gave me complete access to the intimate secrets of who these individuals are, as well as how the transitions occur. I learned the stories of each performer, and what brought them to the stage.

I have often felt that we are mirrors of each other, so my attraction to this particular project, opens up for me, the questioning of **WHO I AM, WHAT FACADE DO I WISH TO PRESENT TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD**, and most importantly, **How easily can we shift the observers view merely with how we walk, what we wear, and how we speak**. I have always been keenly aware that it is human nature to label and identify ones sexuality based upon how one acts, dresses, and present themselves. We as a community seek to identify ourselves with labels, either those we create or are placed upon us both others. The desire to label others based upon what we believe our eyes are seeing, has always been a theory I have personally rejected. If I were to create an identity of someone defined by what I think I see , then I would be missing the ability to get to know the true spirit of another individual and what lies deeper within them. Drag tends to mock identity, and dares the viewer, the audience to say..

**“Who do you think I am?”**

All photographs have been shot with DLSR camera, and some manipulation completed within Lightroom and Photoshop.

These photographs are not posed, nor set up with specific lighting and backdrop, but are shot while the individuals were completing their makeup and dressing, and ultimately the performance.