

Few teenagers would have the confidence to start their own art collective, but India Salvor Menez was never typical. Now an established artist, actress and muse to many, she talks to us about her creative philosophy, inspiration and curating 'Crumbling World Runway' at Moma PS1.

The Modern Muse

Photography: Sandy Kim
Styling: Zara Mirkin
Words: Gemma Lacey



Area NYC dress, Trashy Lingerie underwear & tights, Chanel shoes



Chanel earring, top & skirt, Trashy Lingerie tights

A self-described 'Intermedia artist', India brings together a wealth of designers, visual artists, writers and performers in her latest project, but this notion of diversity is something that is common in her own work and creative expression. Her work in film and visual arts is obviously where her passion lies, but she has an established presence across the creative spectrum – even modelling. Although she views this with a very pragmatic lens – describing the financial freedom it afforded her and the “small, sad empowerment in knowing it was the only field of work where women make more money than men.”

It's clear India is especially assured in her direction and beliefs, though she takes pleasure in it all. As she puts it, “They all speak to the visual experience, but good art and film or TV speak to more than the visual, and I even think some fashion can be great art, while some art can be fashion bullshit.” For her, the context is what separates these mediums. As an artist, her goal is to work on things that challenge her and teach her something new.

A common theme in her work is the notion of gender, and she's vocal that “binary thinking is built to divide and conquer the masses.” Her views being that “gender is an extension of this power structure and that through patriarchy, men are granted more power than women.” She believes this dy-

namic encourages women to compete for the attention of men to share their power, or experience the comforts of it. Her own take is that gender is “in fact, spectral. I know I am not a woman just because I have a vagina, and I know that swimming into the uncertainty of my gender actually brings me closer to myself.” This is certainly reflected in the way that so much of her work focuses on intimacy and connection through collaboration or direct expression.

One way in which this is evident is in how she serves to inspire her peers: often described as muse by some, India herself is quick to downplay it, “I have always been irked by this term as it feels too heavily embedded into an art history that made women into muses, and men into artists – women: passive, men: active.” She references how Duchamp's 'Fountain', or so-called 'ready-made' was submitted on his behalf by Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, who is never credited in this context. Instead, India focuses on how these relationships foster community and the positive aspects this brings.

Her recent show has allowed her to create her own community and work with a trove of inspiring artists including Maria Jose, Ariel Zetina, Ser Serpas, Women's History Museum (duo), Sara Grace Powell & Rowan Oliver. She also cites Cao Fei, whose work she “really fell in love with.” As with any crea-

tive, she says she struggles to name her influences because “I just think of all the geniuses I love, but whom somehow I will forget to mention. But yeah, there are many!” In this case, she names Isa Genzken, Hilma af Klint, Maggie Lee, Camille Henrot, Princess Nokia, Rose Salane, Nicole Beutler, Narcissister... It's clear to see her affinity with these, as there is an obvious correlation in how they and she work.

It's not just her relationship with artists which is notable with India though, from cat embellished sweaters to shoes, her fondness for all things feline is clear too. Her own kitty, which she describes as a “literal angel”, has a suitably grandiose name 'Peony Zirqulan Willow LA Necromancy Rodriguez Bullard Menez Shannon' or 'Peony Z' for short, or 'P' if she's feeling extra brief. Peony also boasts her own beauty mark on her lip and a fondness for Cheerios and almond milk. With her cat, her love of challenge is also obvious. As she puts it, “It's about a preference of how you like to receive affection. Dogs will love you no matter what. I like to work for it, which I guess is why I am more of a cat person.”

Clearly not one to shy away from voicing her opinion or expressing herself, India frequently uses her presence to highlight larger cultural and political issues. Recently, she has spoken up for Planned Parenthood, but as she's quick to express,



This page: Stella McCartney top & trousers, Merch Junkies boots
Opposite page: Jacquemus top, Trashy Lingerie skirt & tights, underwear – model's own





she takes the time to dig into the mechanics of each situation too. "Planned Parenthood is great, but I am currently working to produce a limited edition of risograph printed artist posters to raise money for the Center for Reproductive Rights. They are the people behind actually enacting the laws which determine what a clinic like PP can even offer their patients. And with the rise of Anti-Choice (Pro-Life) Legislature and politicians, we will need as much money behind the lawyers protecting our rights."

Equally, as her art explores gender, this is encompassed by her belief that "contemporary feminism needs to be more trans-inclusive and intersectional in general." Currently, she feels women of color and

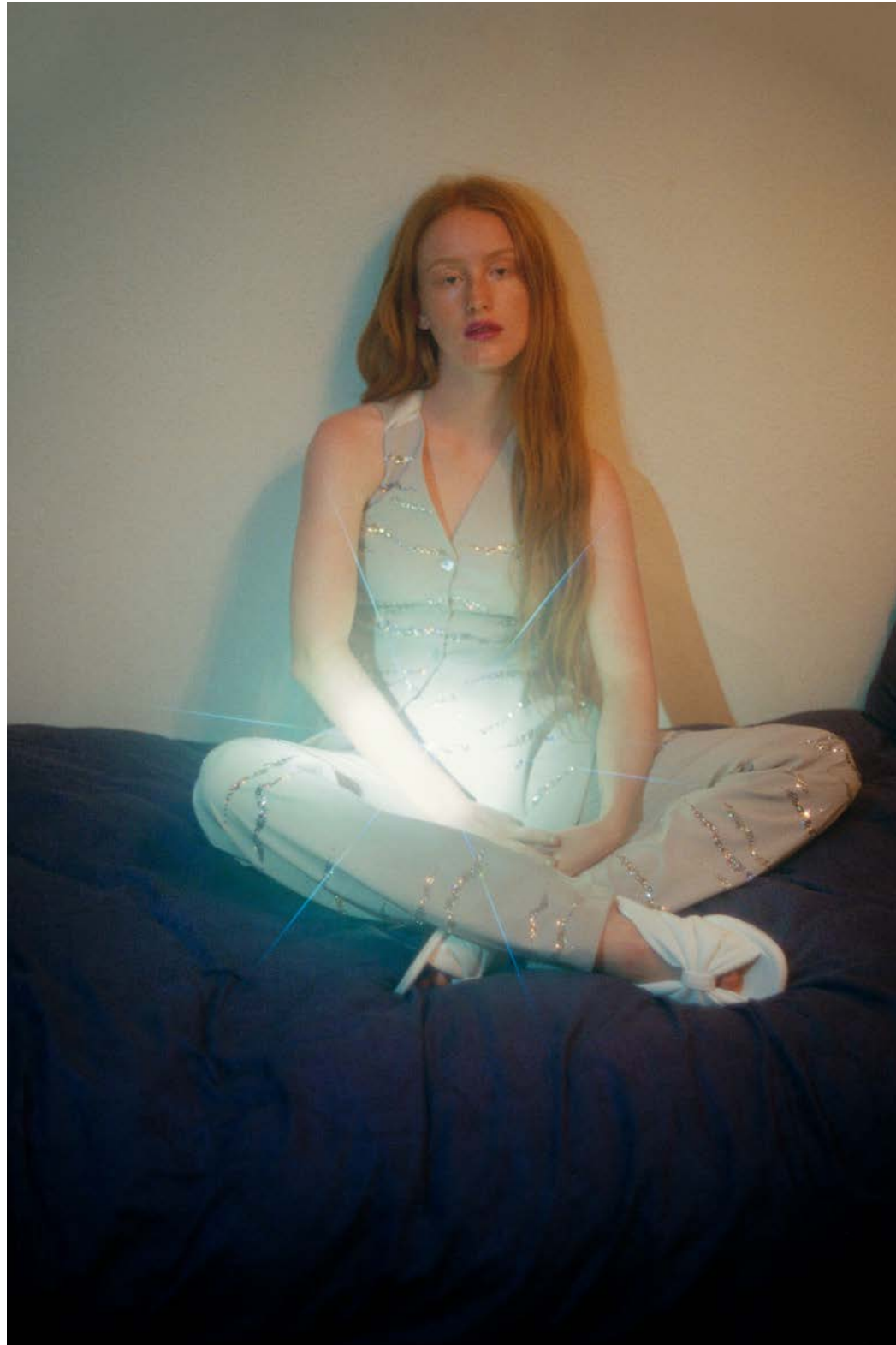
trans or non-binary folks are left out of the conversation for equality. The impact of this is "feminism that excludes and perpetuates the repression of WOC and trans people and becomes an extension of the patriarchy, of white supremacy and the gender binary." With this comes a gentle call to arms too, "I think we need to continue to push each other to have a more inclusive and intersectional feminism." Given her large media presence and social media following, this is clearly something she considers in how she communicates as a whole. "I feel a responsibility to attempt to put out content that is uplifting and educational; this is the kind of content I just like to see. Yes, Instagram is built much for a braggadocious culture, and I pro-

mote projects I am working on in a way that may make my life seem 'so cool', but I work hard, and it's important to me to post content I think is worth sharing."

Given the rich melting pot in which India operates, her skill for weaving her narrative together across her many projects is admirable, as is her energy. The start of 2017 has already seen her launch an edition of posters, curate her show at Moma PS1, act in Jill Soloway's *'I Love Dick'* and continue to expand her activist work. As if that wasn't enough to keep her busy, she also expresses a simple wish "to keep working on special movies with amazing female directors." If anyone can unify this diverse skillset, then it's India.



This page: Miu Miu top, shirt & shoes, Trashy Lingerie tights
Opposite page: Simone Rocha dress, Trashy Lingerie underwear & tights



Makeup: Michelle Mungcal at Jed Root
Hair: Darine Sengseevong
Photographer's Assistant: Colby Hewitt
Stylist's Assistant: Sam Rhoades



This page: Simone Rocha jacket & dress, Merch Junkies boots
Opposite page: Area NYC top & trousers, Balenciaga slides