

The New York Times

[Art & Design](#) | Art Review

The Artist and the Work, Both Intricate and Fluid 'Greer Lankton,' a Retrospective at Participant Inc.

By [HOLLAND COTTER](#)
DEC. 4, 2014



A depiction of Jacqueline Kennedy in "Greer Lankton: Love Me." Credit Greer Lankton

Greer Lankton was one of the most intrepid artists of the East Village 1980s, though the mainstream New York world never knew what to make of her determinedly underground art. The small career retrospective called "[Greer Lankton: Love Me](#)," at Participant Inc. on the Lower East Side, is the first solo look at her work here since her [death in 1996](#) at 38. It is a great show, at the top of my best-in-galleries list this year.

Lankton was born Greg Robert Lankton in Michigan in 1958, the child of a Presbyterian minister. With the support of her family, she had sexual reassignment surgery in 1979, when she was 21 and an art school student in New York. She settled in the East Village and became an integral part of the blossoming art scene there.

On casual acquaintance, she came across as low-key, even demure, and meticulously put together. Her art is put together too, though demure is not the word for it. As seen at Participant, her stitched and painted soft-sculpture figures, from doll-size to life-size, add up to a kind of club-crowd crush of priapic trolls, hermaphrodites and addicts, joined by portraits of celebrities (Jacqueline Kennedy), fashion stars (Diana Vreeland) and gender-bending luminaries (Candy Darling, Teri Toye). To some extent, every Lankton image was a self-portrait.

In technique, the work is beyond exquisite. Made from fabric sewn over wire armatures, and incorporating glass eyes and human hair, some figures are fitted with custom-made clothes and accessories. Many, though, are nude. As it was in early feminism and would become again in art of the 1990s, the body was Lankton's primary subject: gorgeous, gross, absurd, sick and, above all, mutable, bulking up, thinning down, ever-changing. One small early figure looks as desiccated as a mummy; another — a life-size, blue-skinned figure titled "Princess Pamela," on loan from the singer Iggy Pop — is a full-bodied vamp. Here and there in the show, detached genitals appear in shrine-like containers, as if waiting to be claimed.

In the 1980s, the sculptures filled Lankton's small studio apartment, and spilled over into galleries, clubs and a neighborhood storefront boutique co-managed by her partner, Paul Monroe. Her work attracted lots of attention in the East Village and even outside it: Her figure of Vreeland made it into a Barneys window. (Now in the collection of the Met's Costume Institute, it's in the show.) But in the 1990s, interest in her waned, she and Mr. Monroe separated, and she left New York for Chicago.



Greer Lankton's figure of Diana Vreeland. Credit Paul Monroe

A lot has happened in both art and gender politics since then. After two decades under the radar, Lankton is now, in some sense, a prophet come home. Still, a case needs to be made for her, and Lia Gangitano, founding director of Participant Inc., makes it, with terrific panache, in an installation of two ganged-together groups of sculptures surrounded by dozens of photographs of the artist by friends and peers (Nan Goldin, Peter Hujar, Zoe Leonard and others). In addition, in a miracle of research, there two vitrines full of related memorabilia, much of it from the Greer Lankton Archive Museum, which is overseen by Mr. Monroe.

The East Village world Lankton lived in was devastated by AIDS; she died of a drug overdose. Mortality enwraps her story. But so does a sense of passed-on vitality, felt in the work of contemporary artists like Nathalie Djurberg and Basil Twist, whom she prefigured. And hovering over the exhibition itself are spirits from the past: Hans Bellmer, Egon Schiele. Lankton's art brings them straight to mind. And she's right up there, in some kind of underground heaven, with them.

"Greer Lankton: Love Me" continues through Dec. 21 at Participant Inc., 253 East Houston Street, near Norfolk Street, Lower East Side; 212-254-4334, participantinc.org.

A version of this review appears in print on December 5, 2014, on page C26 of the New York edition with the headline: The Artist and the Work, Both Intricate and Fluid.

VULTURE

DEVOURING CULTURE

December 10, 2014 at 1:25 PM

The 19 Best Art Shows of 2014

• By [Jerry Saltz](#)

5. Greer Lankton, “Love Me,” at Participant

This extraordinary, museum-level labor of love devoted to the transgender artist Greer Lankton — a standout in the East Village art scene at the time of her death in 1996 — included an array of the artist’s poignant, meticulous dolls, plus many amazing drawings, collages, photographs, and other ephemera. The show breathed the air of art, life, sex, and love. The sheer commitment of Participant founder-director Lia Gangitano is one of the things that makes the New York art world so special.



Greer Lankton

HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE



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10 of My Favorite Things From 2014

Posted: 12/23/2014 6:41 pm EST | Updated: 12/23/2014 6:59 pm EST

2. Greer Lankton at Participant Inc



I was late to seeing this scary, stunning, splendid exhibition as I am not in NY full time. Now, alas, it's down. The gallery owner told me it will be traveling in some form, she's just not sure yet about where. Greer Langton was born Greg and had gender reassignment surgery in the 80s. She grew up making dolls in Flint, Michigan, where it must have been brutal to be her. But it is not just her dolls which are so piercing and dynamic. Like Nan Goldin or even Warhol, she often was the subject of her own art. It may seem weird to make a comparison, but Lankton curated her environment as much as Carlo Scarpa did his. She was a junkie, and anorexic. There was probably little hope that she would live to a ripe old age. But her star flamed brightly in the East Village of the 70s-80s and going down to Participant Inc Gallery felt like a throwback to the time when the East Village was not the locus of every trendy restaurant in New York.



VIEW IMAGES

Doll Parts: Hilton Als Recalls Some of His Most Poignant Memories of Artist Greer Lankton

TEXT BY HILTON ALS

I'm trying to remember the specifics of Greer, the way her legs and arms moved in her summer dresses. Because that's the season I associate her with, and I associate her, too, with something diaphanous, but I wonder if that impression is based on Nan Goldin's famous photographs of her, and the one I'm thinking of specifically was taken against a brick wall where Greer sort of sits and sort of leans, smoking, looking, at first, like another down on her luck artist, but something more, too, like a ruined movie star having a movie star moment in the photograph that was happening just now, first to Goldin and then to us. But no artist is down on her luck when she has her art. It's what Greer fed on, even when she ate no other food at all. Her dolls were starved for our attention. They had thin arms but lips or eyes that competed with the klieg lights one saw inside their living minds. What was the name of that place where Greer displayed her dolls? It was at—what would you call Einstein's in the East Village? A boutique? I remember it was on First or Second Avenue, and I remember the windows filled with Greer, her dolls attenuated limbs stretching this way and that, and those incredible faces, the manifestation of some dream of femaleness, usually, that reflected Greer's own ideas about her own femaleness, a hard journey that didn't make her any happier but gave her herself, a maker of females in her own emotional image. Sometimes, looking at Greer's dolls in that window at Einstein's, I had to turn away, they bordered on a kind of drag that I don't particularly feel comfortable with—woman as an object of ridicule rather than celebration—and when I think of that I wonder what Greer was thinking, largely about herself? About her past, as the daughter of a pastor? A native of Flint, Michigan who transitioned from Greg to Greer based on funds her father collected from his congregation—that's a very public way to come out, and I'm sure not free of guilt: how could Greer ever repay them? Well, one way, of course, is by becoming the artist she was, it's all there in the work, her various complications, dreams, and beliefs, all produced during a time when spotting someone like Greer on Second Avenue, or in a bar, was not unusual and unusual, all at the same time. It's so hard to look back and see what's been erased of New York when artists like Greer lived in New York but isn't it marvelous to know that their imaginations live in the concrete, still, like some old and nourishing song, or the very art Greer created out of her tortured, whole, and vibrant self?

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Greer Lankton, LOVE ME opens November 2, 2014, at Participant Inc, 253 East Houston Street, New York. ♦



INTERNATIONAL ARTS AND CULTURE

REVIEW

CREAM OF THE CROP: THE TOP 5 ART SHOWS IN NEW YORK CITY LAST YEAR

DEAN DEMPSEY — JANUARY 4, 2015

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1) *LOVE ME* – Greer Lankton at Participant Inc.

And in first place (that is, in my opinion) is the one and only Greer Lankton. I don't know where to begin. It seems like anything I write would be trivial to the magnitude and significance of her life and work. But to give you some background, Greer was an enormously prolific and pivotal character in the East Village art scene in the early 1990s. Primarily a sculptor, she hand-sewed dolls of friends, celebrities, and personal icons, some of which are life-sized. Her works have been wrongfully described as "grotesque," when they should instead be termed monumental, brave, and sincere.

A trans-woman born to a Presbyterian family, Greer's work grapples with gender and sexual identity, alienation and love. Mortality at times seems to overwhelm her art, as does the fear, allure, and stink of sex. *LOVE ME* was a small retrospective at Participant, Inc. of the late artist's life and artwork, which was in cooperation with Greer Lankton Archives Museum, aka G.L.A.M. Some clothed and others nude, *LOVE ME* was comprised largely of her methodically sewn dolls, including those of Jackie Kennedy, Divine, and Candy Darling. Also on display were photos of Greer by photographers Nan Goldin and fetishist Eric Kroll. A variety of ephemera complemented the exhibition, reflecting on Greer's process and life, and the inseparability of the two.

This exhibit helped carve her place in queer history and gave homage to the luminary artist that is Greer Lankton.

<PREV

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Greer Lankton, Diana Vreeland, circa 1989



VISIONAIRE RECOMMENDS

1. Greer Lankton: *Love Me* is on view at Participant Inc. until December 21.

Upon entering Participant Inc, you're welcomed by an array of icons: Edie Sedgwick, [Diana Vreeland](#), Candy Darling, Jackie Kennedy and many more. Some of them are photographed and some are real life-size dolls. The thing they have in common is that they have all been eternalized by the late American artist, Greer Lankton. The Michigan-born artist became known for blurring the line between folk art and fine art with her radical lifelike dolls. Considered

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ART=CITY

The Ten Best Exhibitions of 2014

by PADDY JOHNSON on DECEMBER 31, 2014



Greer Lankton, Participant, Photo: Paddy Johnson

Greer Lankton, Love Me

An awe-inspiring retrospective consisting of hundreds of the late artist Greer Lankton's dolls, photographs, and drawings, most of which are autobiographical in some way. For this show, that means dolls in the likeness of Lankton depicting her sex-change operation, her anorexia, and her anxieties; dolls in the likeness of friends, and sculptures, photos and drawings usually on the subject of sex.

An awe-inspiring retrospective consists of hundreds of the late artist Greer Lankton's dolls, photographs, and drawings, most of which are autobiographical in some way. For this show, that means dolls in the likeness of Lankton, depicting her sex change operation, her anorexia, and her anxieties; dolls in the likeness of friends; and sculptures, photos and drawings, usually on the subject of sex.

The show is nothing short of jaw-dropping. On a basic level, it's incredible to see the volume of Lankton's production given her short life. She died in 1996 at the age of 38 due to a drug overdose, and yet Participant's packed exhibition space practically explodes at the seams. Vitrines line the center of the gallery, and photographs and drawings cover the walls, which have been painted black. The exhibition looks less like a diligent gallery retrospective than it does a time capsule of New York in the 80's; Lankton was acclaimed then with shows at The Whitney Biennial and Venice, but in the aughts her work had largely fallen off of the exhibition circuit.

This show changes that. And what's crazy is how much of the work in the exhibition truly feels impactful. That's not always a good thing. There are only so many mutilated dolls a viewer can look at before you start to worry that the artist's inner life was full of pain and anxiety. With inclusions like the burlap doll with a gaping hole for a vagina, and legs splayed apart with rope, the violence depicted pushes the work into dark territory, and casts a shadow on other lighter works. In the context of this show, a series of belly button photos looks like patterned wounds.

That's powerful misery, but there's playfulness here too. In one shot we see Lankton smiling in a bathtub, surrounded by a small collection of her weird dolls. It's not quite a family portrait, but she looks content and at home.

THE NEW YORKER

Dec. 22 & 29, 2014 issue



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ART

GREER LANKTON

Years before the Lower East Side was home to surf shops and vegan cupcakes, AIDS and drugs ravaged the community, and galleries had names like Civilian Warfare. It was there (among other venues) that Lankton, who died in 1996, exhibited her remarkable doll sculptures. Although best known to many as a muse of Nan Goldin's, Lankton was a superb artist in her own right, capturing the glam and the pain of the artistic life in paint, paper, and wire. In her case, the pain was both psychic and physical; born Greg, in Michigan, Lankton had gender reassignment surgery in her early twenties, an operation she detailed in watercolors seen here. As compelling as the figures themselves are (from a life-size Diana Vreeland to a bust of Candy Darling), it's the memorabilia and the photographs of Lankton (by Goldin, Peter Hujar, and others) that will capture your heart. Through Dec. 21.

November 2 - December 21

[Participant, Inc.](#)

HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

Best of 2014: Our Top 20 NYC Art Shows That Weren't in Brooklyn

by [Hyperallergic](#) on December 24, 2014

#1 – Greer Lankton: LOVE ME at Participant Inc.



Installation view, 'Greer Lankton: LOVE ME' at Participant Inc. (photo by Jillian Steinhauer for Hyperallergic) (click to enlarge)

November 2–December 21

This incredibly rich and dense [exhibition](#) felt like the revelation of 2014. Most of us had heard of Lankton, either from surveys of the 1980s East Village scene or after paying a visit to her [installation](#) at the Mattress Factory, but few were prepared for the visceral power of her intensely personal, intimate, and generous work. Participant Inc. packed in as much work as possible, from the grotesque and macabre dolls to the irreverent videos and a great wealth of

ephemera, yet managed to leave us wanting more. That, incidentally, is our resolution for 2015: more Greer Lankton! —*Benjamin Sutton*

By Anna Battista | December 21, 2014

Beguiled by Bodies: Greer Lankton, Love Me @ Participant Inc, New York

Naked trolls with their faces covered in make up and a pile of messy hair on their heads languidly stare at visitors; an impeccably dressed doll of Diana Vreeland stands tall in another glass display, the red nails on her hands looking as if they had just been coated with fiercely red nail varnish, while Jackie Kennedy is frozen in her pink wool suit with matching pillbox hat, the outfit she was wearing when her husband President John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

These silent yet disquieting presences haunt the visitors of the "Greer Lankton, Love Me" exhibition at Participant Inc (253 East Houston Street, New York; on until today), the first event organised in New York in collaboration with the Greer Lankton Archives Museum (G.L.A.M.) since Lankton died eighteen years ago.

Born in Flint, Michigan in 1958, Greg Robert Lankton studied fabrics at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago between 1975 and 1978. After undergoing sexual reassignment surgery in 1979, Lankton continued her studies, receiving her B.F.A. from Pratt Institute for Sculpture.

Upon graduating, in 1981, Lankton was included in the "New York/New Wave" exhibition at MoMA PS1 curated by Diego Cortez; three major solo exhibitions followed at Civilian Warfare between 1983 and 1985, as well as four group exhibitions at the Whitney Biennial and Venice Biennale.

Between the mid-'80s and the early '90s, Lankton displayed her work at the East 7th Street boutique Einsteins, founded by her husband, the fashion and jewellery designer Paul Monroe. Together they became known for iconic window displays featuring her dolls and for catering to a clientele of celebrities, including Madonna and Andy Warhol among the others.

The art world darling of NYC's Lower East Side, a muse and model for many, Lankton had her last show - "It's all about ME, Not You" - in 1996 at Pittsburgh's Mattress Factory, prematurely dying from a drug overdose shortly afterwards at just 38.

Curated by Lia Gangitano at Participant Inc, in collaboration with Monroe, and entitled after an Avedon photo, one of Lankton's favourite images of Candy Darling, "Love Me" features nearly 100 of Lankton's dolls, including trolls inspired by Pinky, a beloved pink haired doll from the '60s that was her only friend as a kid; Sissy, a five foot five bald drag queen and the voluptuous six foot tall Princess Pamela.

The exhibition features also ephemeral materials, works on papers and photographs by friends and peers including Nan Goldin, Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, Peter Hujar, Eric Kroll, Zoe Leonard, Paul Monroe, Daryl-Ann Saunders, Kate Simon, and Geoff Spear; plus films by Joyce Randall Senechal and Nick Zedd. Some of the pieces come from private collections (Iggy Pop loaned for the occasion the blue-skinned Princess Pamela), but also from main museums, such as the Costume Institute at The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Vreeland's figure was displayed into a Barneys window and later on entered the Met's Costume Institute collection).

While it is interesting to rediscover this intriguing artist via images, objects, and personal memorabilia (the glass displays with bits and pieces from Lankton's life are a testament to the fact that she used to surround herself with images and loved good stories or bizarre facts like Diana Vreeland getting all the soles of her shoes lacquered in bright red), it is her dolls that powerfully mesmerise visitors.

Her figures reflect indeed Lankton's own lifelong obsession with her own body: her fashion icons, drag queens, hermaphrodites and transsexuals display the marks of drug addictions, weight and gender issues (Lankton suffered from anorexia, asthma and drug addiction), turning into repulsively attractive (and meticulously constructed with wire structures, fabric, glass eyes and human hair....) symbols of the artist's own passion for the extremes in life. Monroe recalls indeed in an essay how she would surround herself with images of both anorexic people who couldn't lift their heads and 500 pound people unable to leave their beds.

Yet "Love Me" is not a just visual journey through Lankton's legacy to queer art history. Sickly thin or grossly obese, her doll figures tell us indeed stories of abuse, transgression, illness and glamour, becoming the lucid statements of an artist with a profound body-consciousness and prompting us to ponder about the current individual desire to experience freedom from both masculinity and femininity (think about fashion designers' mismatching body sex and gendered dress codes) and about our collective obsession with digital and physical body alterations and modifications.

Contemporary Art Daily

A Daily Journal of International Exhibitions

Greer Lankton at Participant Inc.

December 18th, 2014



Artist: Greer Lankton

Venue: Participant Inc., New York

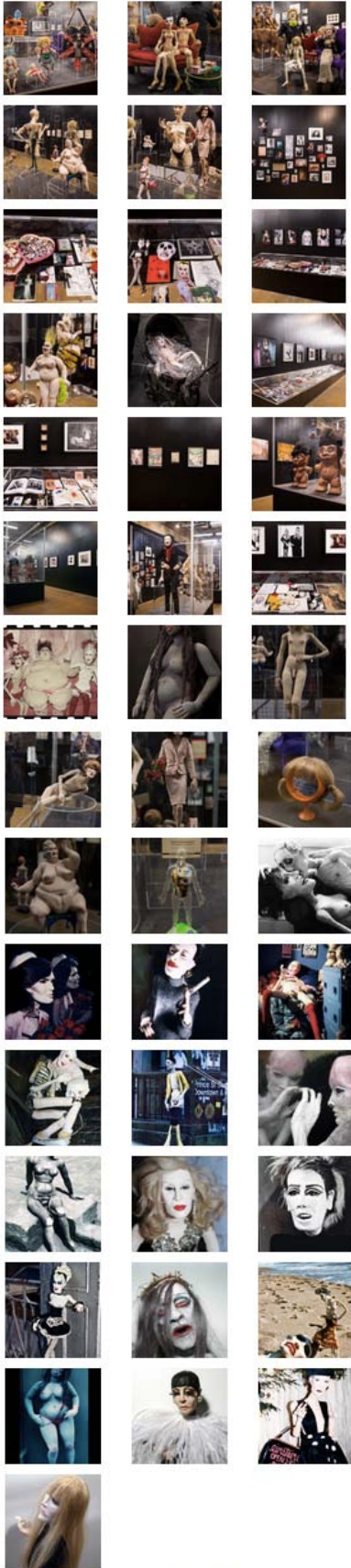
Exhibition Title: Love Me

Date: November 2 – December 21, 2014

[Click here to view slideshow](#)



Images:



Images courtesy of Participant Inc., New York. Installation photos by Karl Peterson, Conrad Ventur and Wolfgang Tillmans.

NEW YORK OBSERVER

By Alanna Martinez | 12/16/14 6:31pm

Art Scout: 11 Must-See Shows Before 2014 Ends, and a Few to Carry You Into 2015



Greer Lankton, LOVE ME, installation view, left, Nan Goldin, Greer in the tub, NYC, 1983, Courtesy of Matthew Marks Gallery; right, Trolls, c. 1982-1983, Collection of Francine Hunter McGivern. (Photo by Karl Peterson, Courtesy Participant Inc.)

“Greer Lankton: Love Me” at Participant Inc., Through December 21

Over 100 dolls, photographs and works on paper feature in the first major exhibition of the artist’s work since her death in 1996. The show revolves around photos by friends, including Nan Goldin, Eric Kroll, Zoe Leonard, and is a highly personal retrospective look at an important artist of the East Village art scene of the ’80s and ’90s.

The New York Times

[Art & Design](#) | The Year in Culture

Roberta Smith's Top Art Shows of 2014: Gober, Koons and More

By [ROBERTA SMITH](#)
DEC. 11, 2014



A display from the Robert Gober survey at the Modern. Credit Ruth Fremson/The New York Times

There are many ways to parse the highs and lows of the year just ending. Among the more uplifting events was, for example, the Detroit Institute of Arts' being rescued from the city's predatory creditors — and also from city ownership. Another was the large and fabulous assortment of Cubist works given by the collector Leonard A. Lauder to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, one of the most important gifts in the museum's 144-year history. Among the lows was the Met's clumsy redesign of its three-block-long plaza along Fifth Avenue. (Never mind who paid for it.) The deepest low: the needless destruction of the building formerly known as the American Folk Art Museum by the Museum of Modern Art.

But one of the most memorable aspects of 2014 was the unusually high success rate among New York museums in the design and installation of exhibitions of contemporary art. The routinely dull arrangement of exhibitions is something you learn to live with in this town, where museum space is at a premium, and gallery design is often uninspired.

But this year was different. There were several shows in which art and the surrounding architecture were seen to best — or at least much better than usual — advantage. Sometimes, the design and placement seemed almost laugh-out-loud serendipitous. The Guggenheim Museum’s exhibition [“Zero: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s-60s”](#) a survey of adventuresome postwar European art, fits its spiral container with rare perfection (the show runs until Jan. 7). Art and architecture seem both radical and quaint in equal part, which makes sense: around half the art on view dates from 1957-62, the very years during which the Guggenheim’s building was completed and inaugurated.

Not surprisingly, several of these shows were monographic efforts in which artists had some or a lot of say in the show’s layout. At the Whitney, [Jeff Koons](#) and the curator Scott Rothkopf fashioned the building into [a Koonsarama](#) of considerable clarity and pacing. The layout opened yet another window onto ways Marcel Breuer’s big boxy volumes can be divided up and viewers routed through them.



Jeff Koons’s “Play-Doh” at his retrospective at the Whitney. Credit Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

In October, Robert Gober’s [retrospective](#), overseen by Ann Temkin, who heads the Modern’s painting and sculpture department, added to the museum’s short winning streak. No surprise, an overtly Goberesque sense of sparseness and quiet prevailed, in keeping with this sculptor’s installation pieces as well as the Charles Burchfield survey that he organized at the Whitney a couple of years back. The Gober exhibition unfolds (until Jan. 18) throughout the museum’s atrium and the second-floor galleries usually reserved for post-1980 works from the permanent collection, and it makes them look better than they ever have.

Other memorable museum-installation moments this year include [the survey](#) of the artist Chris Ofili at the New Museum, which was overseen by Massimiliano Gioni, the museum’s artistic director, and has some of the perfection of the Guggenheim’s “Zero” exhibition. Divided into distinct bodies of work in accordance with the museum’s architectural layout, the show seems also to have installed itself. It is one of the first times the museum’s galleries have escaped the inherent grimness of their proportions and lack of windows.

And at the Brooklyn Museum, hardly known for illuminating exhibition design, the darkened [“Killer Heels”](#) (until Feb. 15) brings a fitting sense of glamour and remarkably successful spatial flow to another dead-end gallery, while the [Judith Scott retrospective](#) (until March 29) accentuates the ingenious color sense of this artist’s yarn-wrapped sculptures to sparkling effect with an arrangement against traditional white walls. (It was orchestrated by Catherine J. Morris, of the museum’s Sackler Center for Feminist Art, and Matthew Higgs, director of White Columns.)



Scrutinizing “Kodak Three Point Reflection Guide ©1968, Eastman Kodak Company, 1968 (Meiko laughing) Vancouver, B.C. April 6, 2005,” at “Christopher Williams: The Production Line of Happiness” at the Modern. Credit Jake Naughton/The New York Times

Of course, beneficial elucidations of space are never limited to big-name museums. Four occurring elsewhere this year that will stick in my mind include Darren Bader’s [“The Show Is Three Shows.”](#) a combination of found-object artworks and borrowed photographs evenly distributed around the walls and across the floors of the Andrew Kreps Gallery in Chelsea last spring. Another was [“Macho Man Tell It to My Heart: Collected by Julie Alt.”](#) an exhilarating exhibition of contemporary works accumulated by Ms. Ault, an inveterate alternative-art worlder, organized at SoHo’s Artists Space, where, for better and for worse, every show is some kind of departure from the exhibition form.

In [Kai Matsumiya’s](#) hole-in-the-wall gallery on the Lower East Side, [Rainer Ganahl’s installation “El Mundo.”](#) a double video projection, was based on an ad hoc performance by classically trained musicians at the unheated El Mundo discount store in Spanish Harlem in winter, amid only slightly distracted shoppers. It created a kind of reverie of art and determination in the conflation of two quite different spaces, uptown and down. **And still open for viewing is the [transporting exhibition](#) devoted to Greer Lankton’s heroic, gender-bending life and work, which seems to all but float in a series of all-but-invisible vitrines at Participant Inc., through Dec. 21.**

Holland Cotter's Notable Art Events of 2014: 'Black Radical Brooklyn' and More

By [HOLLAND COTTER](#)

DEC. 11, 2014

Retrospectives [“Alibis: Sigmar Polke 1963-2010.”](#) at the Museum of Modern Art provided a long-awaited in-depth look at an artist whose refusal of a signature style slowed down his canonization but puts the seal on his greatness. The [Nicole Eisenman retrospective](#) at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, through Dec. 28, catches a matchless American painter in midcareer. [An overview of the French-born Venezuelan artist Marisol](#) that originated at the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art became a single fabulous conceptual piece upon arrival at El Museo del Barrio in Manhattan (through Jan. 10). **Finally, a tribute to the East Village sculptor [Greer Lankton at Participant Inc. on the Lower East Side, through Dec. 21, is one of the best gallery shows of the year.](#)**

Art in America

Art in America

[Exhibitions](#) The Lookout



Greer Lankton

at Participant Inc.,
through Dec. 21
253 E. Houston St.

A central figure of the 1980s East Village scene gets a well-deserved posthumous retrospective. A transgender woman, Greer Lankton appears as a fresh-faced, smiling beauty queen in photographs by friends like Peter Hujar and Nan Goldin. Her works explore gender and identity politics in a gleefully dark collection of handcrafted dolls, some life size, some replete with miniature Chanel purses or spilled guts. The dolls, some of which represent real-life figures like Diana Vreeland and Candy Darling, also served as avatars of the artist and her circle.

ARTFORUM

[500 words](#)

Greer Lankton

10.31.14



Eric Kroll, *Greer Lankton Surrounded by her Sculpture*, 1984, C-print, 19 1/2 x 15 1/2".

“LOVE ME” is the first New York retrospective of works by Greer Lankton (1958–1996). Known for her distinctive dolls—modeled on friends, celebrities, fictional characters, and herself—Lankton was an important figure in the East Village art scene of the 1980s. This exhibition, curated by [Lia Gangitano](#) in cooperation with G.L.A.M. (Greer Lankton Archives Museum), includes over ninety of Lankton’s dolls as well as ephemera documenting the installations she created for them, her artistic processes, and her milieu. *“LOVE ME”* will be on view at [PARTICIPANT INC](#) from November 2 through December 21, 2014. Here, Gangitano speaks about the show.

UNFORTUNATELY we can’t locate *Sissy*, 1979–96, the doll that Greer worked on for most of her adult life, but there are many photos of her in the show. She was a little bigger than life size, and, as Greer’s most autobiographical work, she evolved over time. Like Greer, *Sissy* was trans, she had gender reassignment surgery, though that might not be the right term: Greer referred to it always as “the operation.” She made

operation-themed dolls and drawings that make it clear that this was not an easy thing. She transitioned while she was a student at Pratt, where she was already making these incredible dolls. They are meticulously painted, with glass eyes. The fabric ones are jointed, they're bendable, so that she could pose them. Someone told me that she constructed the skeletons from broken umbrellas—I love that!—but I don't think it's entirely true. I sometimes try to imagine what it would be like to do studio visits at an MFA program and see work like Greer's—a life-size doll of a hermaphrodite giving birth, for example. I mean, what she was doing is not like anything else. We have some of her student work on view, and some things from her childhood, including a marionette she made with her dad around age seven.

After art school, Greer lived in [Nan Goldin](#)'s loft for a while, and many people recognize her from Nan's work. Nan is one of our lenders for the show. [Peter Hujar](#) also took beautiful photos of Greer, and she collaborated with [David Wojnarowicz](#) sometimes. (One of the dolls we have in the show comes from David's papers at the Fales Library at NYU.) So, some people are familiar with Greer through her associations with other artists. But many people who were in New York in the '80s know her work from her solo shows at the East Village gallery Civilian Warfare, or from walking by Einsteins, which was her husband [Paul Monroe](#)'s boutique at 96 East Seventh Street. Greer and Paul made ever-changing installations in the shopwindow—we have a great photo of *Sissy* in a maid's outfit vacuuming with a cigarette there. Paul kept great records of the Einsteins era, and he founded G.L.A.M. to preserve Greer's work. She died quite young, from an overdose.

It'd be hard to recount the magic chain of events that led Paul to call me about doing this show, so I'll just say that when I got off the phone with him for the first time, I felt that it was fated, that this was what I was supposed to be doing with my life. We've been working on the exhibition for two years. Paul has a large collection of Greer's artwork and personal ephemera, and he also knew how to start tracking down many of the other dolls on view.

[Iggy Pop](#) was one of our first lenders. He and Greer lived in the famous East Village building the Christodora House at same time, and *Princess Pamela*, 1980–83, is from his collection. *Pamela* is one of two life-size dolls in the show. Greer made her from a fat suit that she would sometimes wear to go out! The other life-size doll is *Diana Vreeland*, 1989, who Greer made for a window display at Barneys. [Anna Sui](#) bought *Diana* and then later donated her to the Met's Costume Institute. I think it's important to note, though, that Greer's community was decimated by AIDS, and many of her friends—who were also her collectors—are gone. So this could never be a comprehensive survey; it's difficult to find her work. But my hope is that the exhibition will introduce Greer to a broader audience, and to new generations of trans artists in particular, so that forebears are known. Really, I see “LOVE ME” as a starting point for understanding a prolific and influential artist who was so loved by her peers.

— As told to [Johanna Fateman](#)

GREER LANKTON

AND HER WORLD



REMEMBERING THE LIFE AND AND WORK OF A MESMERIZING ARTIST, GREER LANKTON (1958-1996)

SUNNY SUITS
EDITOR

PETER HUJAR
PHOTOGRAPHY

"GREER'S BODY WAS
HER WORK OF ART."

Paul Monroe

MODEL, MUSE AND ARTIST

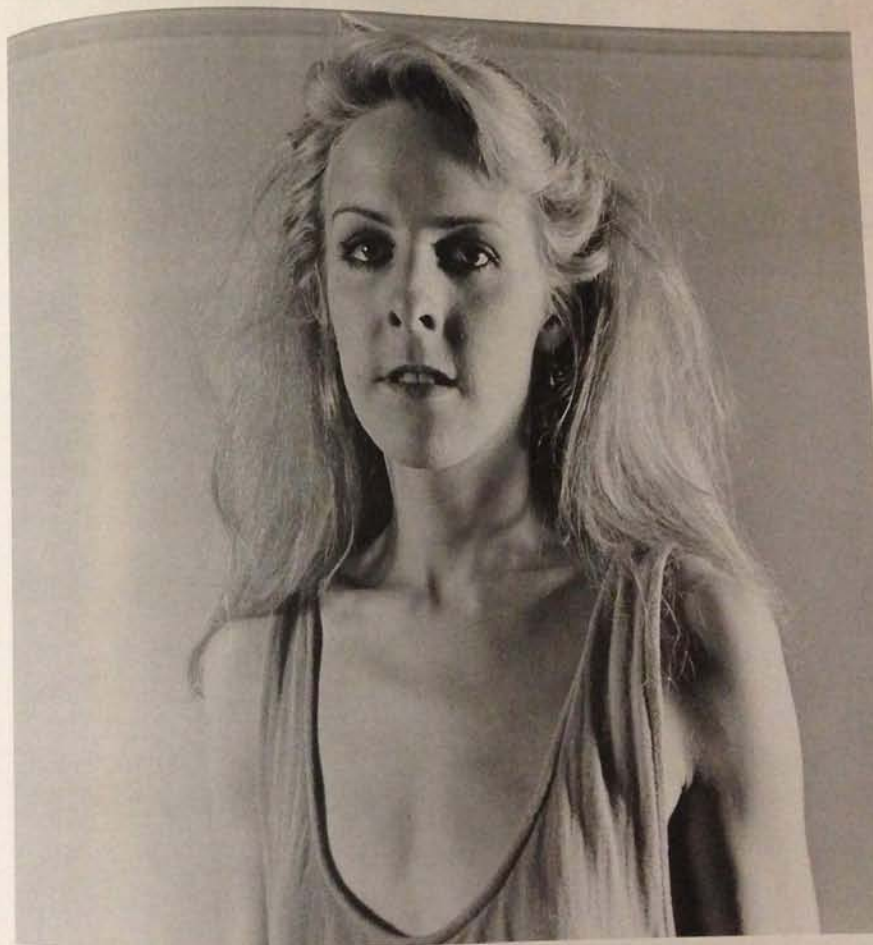
A tiny Tincher Bell of a girl at 5'7", Greer Lankton looked like a 1930's movie star more than anything else. You can almost smell powder and perfume when you look at her picture today. The art-world darling of NYC's Lower East Side, muse, model and artist Greer Lankton sewed up all those titles and more into one perfect masterpiece: her life. Most have come to know of Greer through Nan Goldin's photographs of a lost New York. She was an Egon Schiele painting come to life, baller dancing through a bohemia on the verge of extinction. For a time Goldin shared her loft on the Bowery with Greer who she photographed and filmed extensively. A friend and favorite of Peter Hujar as well, Greer moved from artist to subject easily. As an artist, Greer's accomplishments came early. The seminal 1981 exhibition *New York/New Wave* at PS1 in Long Island City formally marked the dawn of the East Village art scene, and Lankton's work was featured. The Pratt Institute graduate followed with three solo shows in 1983, '84 and '85 at the East Village gallery *Civilian Warfare*. By 1985 Greer was chosen to be included in both the Venice and Whitney Biennales. The following year she installed what would be her last show, *It's all about ME, Not You*, at Pittsburgh's *Mattress Factory*. Greer died of a drug overdose not long after the opening. She was 38 years old. The installation has since become part of the gallery's permanent display. Greer was also featured in many group shows of the era, such as the now historic *Witness Against Our Youth*, which was curated by Nan Goldin. Fellow artist and friend David Wojanowicz was both a collaborator and a source of support for Greer. Despite his notorious reputation, he seemed to hold a soft spot for her and once refused an invitation to exhibit unless she was included as well. Another time, rather gallantly, he passed her a grand under the table at a diner on Second Avenue, knowing she was in need of cash. *Einsteins* was an East Village boutique that became a universe unto itself. Fashion and jewelry designer Paul Monroe opened the boutique in 1980 and from there started selling his surrealistic jewelry and clothing that changed the fashion landscape in the East Village and beyond. This was when there really was a distinction between Uptown and Downtown in New York City and Einsteins bridged that gap perfectly. *Einsteins* was where you went to get a pair of Paul's candleabra earrings or Schiaparelli-inspired accessories, not to mention a Pucci dress. Greer met Paul Monroe and the two became conjoined, marrying a few

years later. Goldin photographed the wedding with Hujar, Wojanowicz and Eihyl Eichelberger among the guests. By 1983 Greer was working in Paul's shop Einsteins, his and her art studio were installed in the back, and they'd smoke and talk with friends when they showed up. Teri Toy was an *Einsteins* icon, and Greer and Paul worked away on the most incredible window displays featuring her dolls. Racks of vintage, Paul's one-of-a-kind clothing and of course Greer's Dolls Club gallery set up in the center of the boutique all add like mad to a chenele that included Madonna, Bette Davis and Andy Warhol, to name a few.

Greer's work has been neatly summed up as blurring the lines between folk and fine art, but even more notably she blurred the lines between art and artist. Her dolls have the familiar problems of many: drug addiction, weight and gender issues, and disease. Greer was transsexual and suffered from anorexia, asthma and drug addiction — all things that definitely informed her work. But they are not the sole things that defined her. A life's work is in danger of being overlooked. As in Goldin's early work, Greer evoked the comfort of feeling surrounded by your own tribe. Something safe. A confirmation of importance as part of the human condition. She drew from her life and explored these themes before they became part of the collective unconscious, creating a touching community of the familiar around her — dykes and faggots, drag queens and junks, the obese and the anorexic, hermaphrodites and transsexuals. Her dolls are artifacts from the last bohemia. Lia Gangitano at Participant Inc takes risks in the art world, giving a platform to some of the most important artists today. She and Paul Monroe are putting together what will be the first survey of Greer Lankton's work, a show that will also be Greer's first in New York since the 1980s. Paul has pulled from his personal and professional archive for the exhibition. The title *Let Me's* taken from an Avedon photo, one of Greer's favorite images of Candy Darling, where she uses a lollipop to hide her Adam's apple. It's also the last thing she painted on Suzy, her most treasured doll. Paul Monroe has generously shared photographs from his personal archive with *Candy* as well as taking the time to reflect on his life with Greer.

SUNNY SUITS

Greer Lankton, *Love Me Exhibition*, Participant Inc, NYC, Nov 2nd - Dec 21st 2014.



Opening spread and this page: Greer Lankton, 1983. Courtesy of The Peter Hujar Archive

PETER HUJAR
PHOTOGRAPHY



Einstein Boutique 96 East 7th Street, NYC
(Photo by Greer Lankton, 1986).



Sissy and Cherry in front of Einstein, NYC
(Photo by Paul Monroe, 1988).



Tari Toye Doll by Greer Lankton
(Photo by Paul Monroe, 1987).



Peggy Muller Doll by Greer Lankton
(Photo by Paul Monroe, 1986).



Divine Doll by Greer Lankton
(Photo by Paul Monroe, 1988).



Ethyl Eichelberger Doll by Greer Lankton
(Photo by Greer Lankton, 1986).



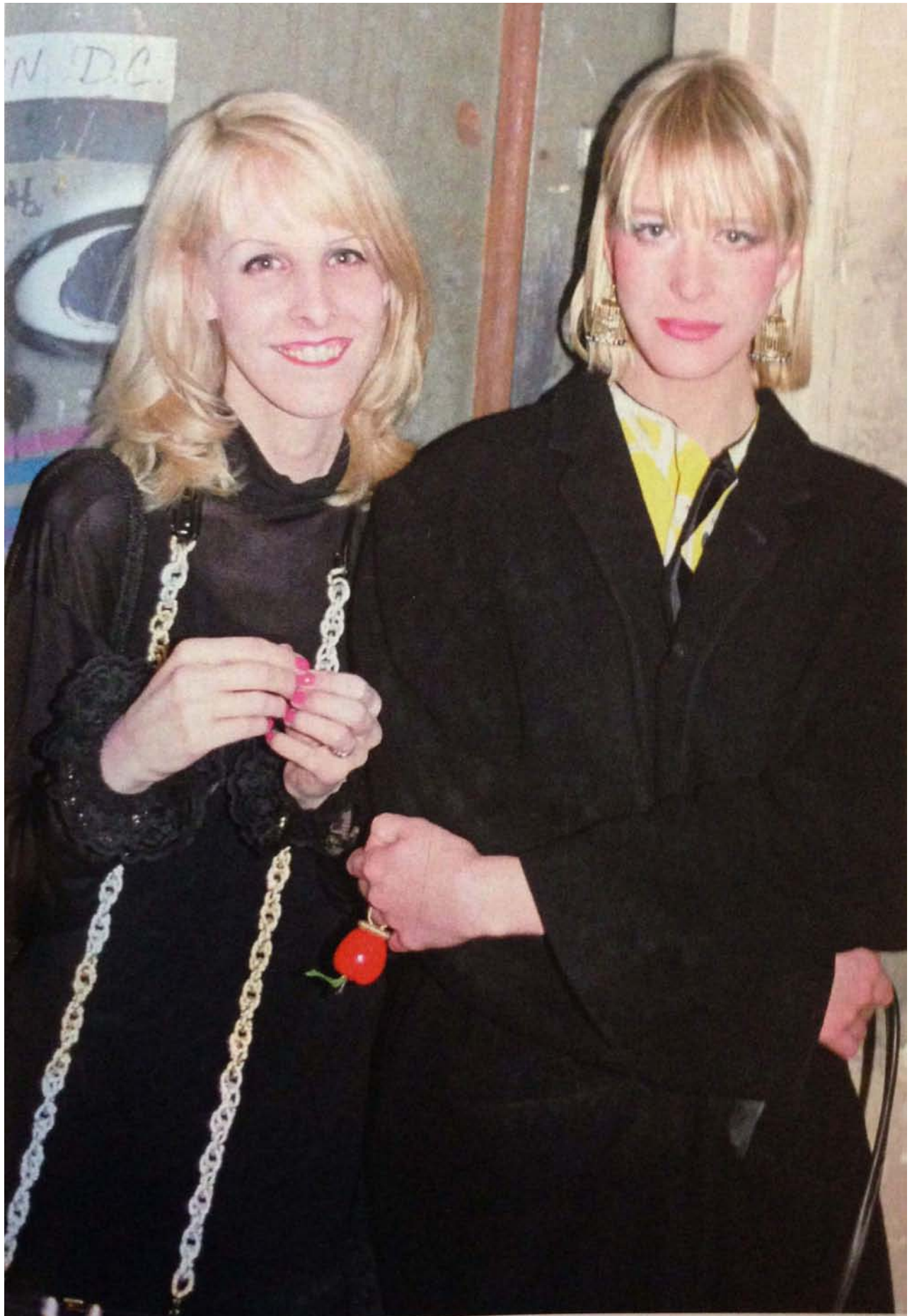
Jackie Kennedy Doll by Greer Lankton
(Photo by Greer Lankton, 1985).



Candy Darling Doll by Greer Lankton
(Photo by Greer Lankton, 1985).



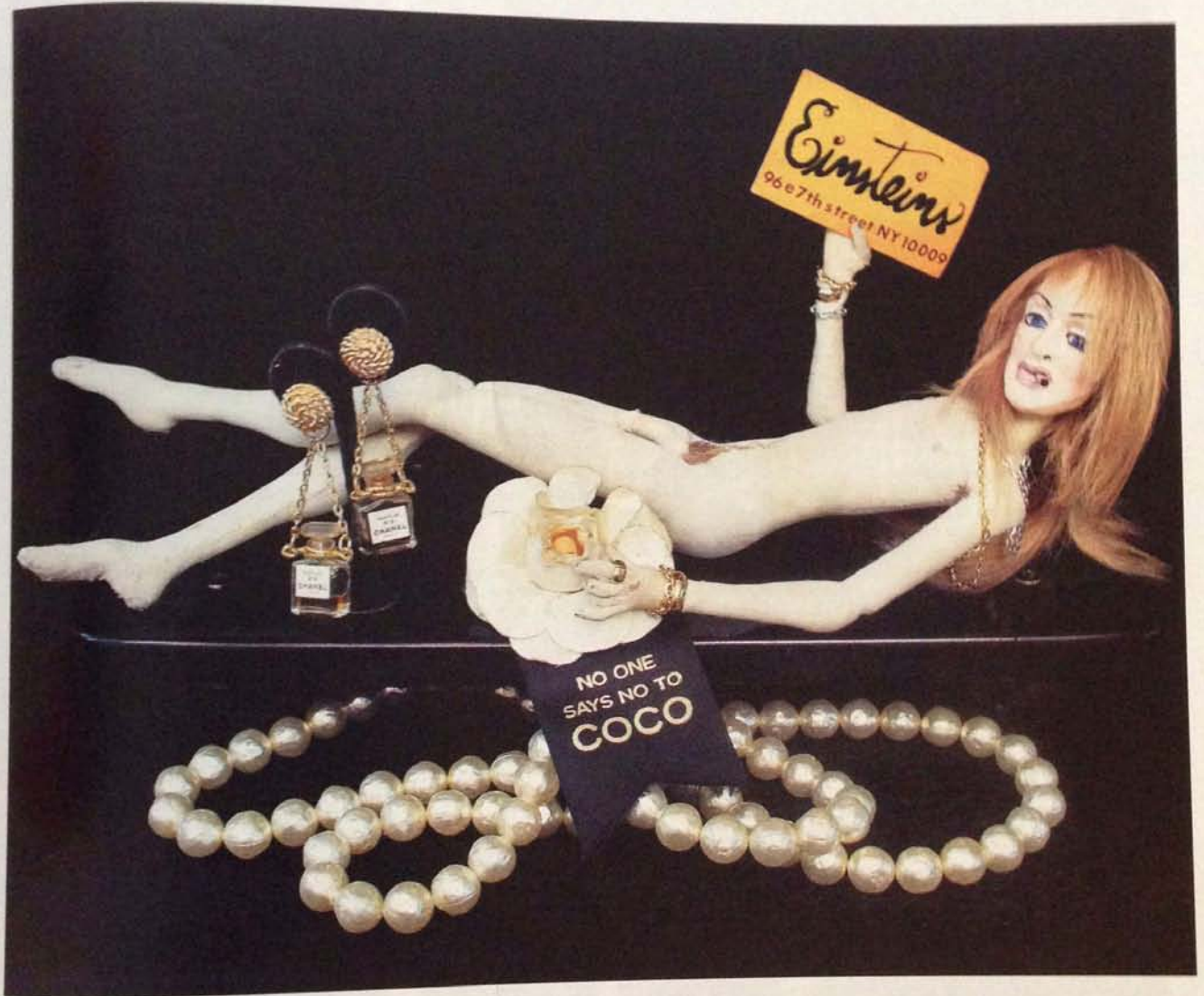
Rachel Doll by Greer Lankton
(Photo by Greer Lankton, 1986).



Greer Lankton at Teri Toyne backstage at the Palladium NYC for Paul Monroe's fashion show *Hero's on Herion*, 1987. Photo by Paul Monroe.
All archival photos from the personal collection of Paul Monroe. (www.facebook.com/greerlanktonarchivemuseum)



Window display at Estée Lauder NYC, 1989. Diana Vreeland Doll by Greer Lankton (Photo by Paul Marra)



"HER VANITY WAS DECORATED WITH PICTURES AND MEMENTOS
AND LOOKED LIKE A HISTORY OF CAMP."

Paul Monroe

Window display at Einstein's NYC, 1986. Paul Monroe Doll by Greer Lankton. (Photo by Paul Monroe)



Greer Lankton and Paul Monroe, Palm Beach.
(Photo by Paul Monroe, 1985).



Greer Lankton in Hollywood.
(Photo by Paul Monroe, 1988).



Paul Monroe and Greer Lankton, Tompkins Square Park, NYC. Courtesy of The Peter Hujar Archive.
(Photo by Peter Hujar, 1984).



Paul Monroe and Greer Lankton, Our first apartment New Year's Eve, NYC. (Photo by Greer Lankton, 1982).



Wedding Cakes, Monroe and Lankton Dolls on top by Greer Lankton. (Photo by Greer Lankton, 1987).



Greer Lankton & Paul Monroe, Central Park, NYC.
(Photo by Greer Lankton, 1984).



DAVID ARMSTRONG
PHOTOGRAPHY



Greer Lankton.
Brooklyn, NY, 1978.

filthy dreams

For Minorities Who Don't Even Fit Into Our Own Minorities

ART

The Pretty Ones Aren't Very Interesting: The Genderqueer Art Of Greer Lankton

Posted on December 19, 2013 by EMILY COLUCCI

3 Comments



Greer Lankton with one of her works, 1996 (Photo by Annie O'Neill, via artnet.com)

One aspect of our collective Filthy Dreams personality that you, dear reader, can be sure of is our ability to get unabashedly, giddily excited at a moment's notice. Just a mention of Santa Claus near the holidays sends us spiraling into the sleazy stratosphere. It doesn't even matter how far in advance this event, exhibition, concert or book release is—we'll just gush and gush until that event actually happens. Which brings me to the announcement last week that Lower East Side nonprofit art space Participant Inc. is working on a major solo exhibition of trans artist Greer Lankton's phenomenal, genderqueer art in November 2014.

An important figure in the heavily romanticized period of the East Village art scene in the 1980s and 1990s, both Lankton's dolls, in all their destroyed glory, and her own striking appearance in other notable artists' work from Nan Goldin and Peter Hujar's photographs to Nick Zedd's transgressive classic *Bogus Man* make her an essential (if not unfortunately slightly forgotten) link in queer art history.

As John Waters snarled at Marion and me as we posed with him and our own striking doll, "You know I love dolls." And yes, we too love Greer Lankton's distorted and beautiful dolls.

Getting ahead of ourselves as we often do in our typical unbridled and slightly off-putting fashion, we want to highlight Greer Lankton's art even though her solo exhibition *LOVE ME* will not appear at Participant Inc. for another year.



My first introduction to Lankton's art was her most ambitious and her final art piece, which is on permanent view at Pittsburgh's Mattress Factory. A stunning and semi-terrifying installation, Lankton's "It's All About ME, Not You" lives up to its wittily egotistical title, encapsulating all of Lankton's personal obsessions, creative interests, experiences and struggles, which eventually led to her death from an accidental drug overdose right after the installation was finished in 1996.



In "It's All About ME, Not You," the viewer walks through an Astroturf-covered lawn and patio inside a trashy-looking white house in which Lankton recreated her own apartment where she both lived and worked. Filled with her dolls, as well as shrines to her heroes from Warhol Superstar Candy Darling to punk goddess Patti Smith, the installation encompasses Lankton's entire artistic world view. While decadence pervades all of Lankton's art, this installation forces the viewer to confront decay with an almost life-sized doll in a bed, surrounded by pill bottles, an eerie premonition of the artist's own death.



Born Greg Lankton in Flint, Michigan, Lankton moved to New York in 1980 after her sexual reassignment surgery at 21, which was paid for by her Presbyterian minister father's church. After her arrival in New York, Lankton almost immediately began exhibiting profusely in the burgeoning East Village art scene at galleries like Civilian Warfare with fellow artistic outlaw David Wojnarowicz, as well as the seminal *New York/New Wave* exhibition at PS1.



Nan Goldin, Greer Lankton (via theblitzkids.com)

Making dolls since she was a child, Lankton's painted dolls, constructed out of wire, pantyhose and glass eyes ordered from a taxidermy shop, resemble uninged surrealist Hans Bellmer's distorted, detachable and sexualized dolls. Drawing on this surrealist legacy, Lankton's dolls ranged from known subcultural figures such as Divine and Edie Sedgwick to her own imaginative creations.

As Lankton explains in her 1984 interview with I-D Magazine, "Because all other dolls are not so real as these. These are grotesque. I want them to have a personality. I think that while I'm making them something from me goes into them."



Unquestionably spot on with her analysis of her own work, Lankton's art mirrors much of her own experiences as a transwoman, playing with notions of gender performance, identity and sexuality. For example, one of Lankton's favorite and most used subjects was glamorous drag queen Candy Darling. Looking at her Candy Darling dolls, the dolls reflect Lankton's own trans beauty through Darling's lithe, old Hollywood form.

Not only do Lankton's dolls portray Lankton's performance of gender and sexuality, she also imbued the dolls with their own personal problems, reflecting her own. Struggling with anorexia and drug addiction, Lankton created dolls in her own image with a destructive impulse countering their gorgeous exterior.

In her interview with I-D Magazine, Lankton reveals, "Eating disorders, depression, they can't get jobs, their apartment is too small...all the normal problems that all of us have. They also have bad habits...I mean some of them do eat too much though some of them don't eat at all. They stay up too late, smoke too much...the most tasteful doll I've made is a real pretty one, but I don't like him too much because the pretty ones aren't very interesting. It's like with people. The prettiest people are the blandest."



Promotional image for Participant Inc.'s Greer Lankton LOVE ME (Courtesy Participant Inc.)

Since her passing in 1996, Lankton's legacy certainly lives on through Nan Goldin's iconic photographs. However, her surreal, stunning and slightly disturbing art has often been overlooked in the dominant understanding of the East Village art scene, passing by Lankton for more male and commercially acceptable artists. With so much significant art and writing currently being made around transgender and genderqueer issues, Lankton's solo retrospective at Participant Inc. is posed to resurrect Lankton's legacy, putting her in conversation with these younger artists and giving her a proper place within queer art history.

And, Mary, we can't wait!
