

Justin Vivian Bond
My Model / My Self
 March 13 - April 10, 2016
 Opening Reception, Sunday, March 13, 7-9pm

My friend Billy's father once said you could measure the depth of a person's tragedy by the amount of distance between how they see themselves and how they're seen by others. As an American and as a transperson, I find this hypothesis to be really interesting. —Justin Vivian Bond

From March 13 - April 10, 2016, PARTICIPANT INC is proud to present **Justin Vivian Bond, *My Model / My Self***, a solo exhibition comprised of watercolors, sculptural installation, video, and performance, originated at Vitrine Gallery, London in 2015, and restaged on the occasion of Joe's Pub at the Public Theater's yearlong retrospective of Bond's career as a performer, artist, writer, and activist.

The exhibition opening coincides with *Mx America* at Joe's Pub, in which Bond explores "ways of seeing and being seen." Central to this exploration is Bond's childhood and ongoing obsession with supermodel Karen Graham — the face of Estée Lauder cosmetics from 1972-1985. Bond's essay on Graham appears in the Feminist Press anthology *ICON*, edited by Amy Scholder. In it, Bond writes:

She was blank and sphinx-like, only more modern because she was wearing lots of makeup. I decided that with enough makeup on you could convince anybody of anything. So I stared at her for hours on end and convinced myself that one day I would be seen as the person I knew myself to be — but until then I had to hide her in order to survive. All I had to do was to wait, and believe, and keep staring straight ahead at the future. She, the vision of blank perfection in the Estée Lauder ads, assured me I would become the person I am today.

Upon entering the exhibition, visitors are greeted by the video work *Two Minutes is a Long Time* (2015, 3.56 minute loop), in which Bond pairs a video made by fashion photographer Nick Knight with a re-creation featuring Bond as Graham. After years of looking at still photographs of Graham, Bond later discovered Knight's video series *More Beautiful Women*, an homage to Andy Warhol made on the occasion of the millennial celebration of *British Vogue*. One of his subjects was Graham. Appearing throughout and central to the exhibition is a collection of watercolor diptychs consisting of mirroric portraits of Graham and Bond, some of which take on repeated patterns in commercially produced, limited edition wallpapers made in collaboration with wallpaper designer George Venson of Voutsas.

Bond's work continues to evolve a legacy of radical queer art, performance, and philosophy, and is rooted, most notably, in the pioneering efforts of figures like Jack Smith and Ethyl Eichelberger who, like Bond, made work in homage to strong, independent, and defiant women in history. Described as "the greatest cabaret artist of (v's) generation," by writer Hilton Als in the *New Yorker* ("v" is Bond's chosen pronoun), V's formal mastery of theater and music is made even more complex and profound by philosophical exploration of evolving gender identity manifested through a deeply personal reclamation, reinvention, and re-definition of the artist's own body and self. Here, such states of hybridity are revealed in v's paintings and wallpapers, in which human and floral forms tend to intermingle.

The title *My Model / My Self* references the pop-psychology book *My Mother My Self: The Daughter's Search for Identity*, originally published in 1977 by feminist author Nancy Friday. Bond's version, *My Model / My Self: The Transchild's Search for Identity* (2015, paperback book, printed jacket), appears in an elegant domestic tableau, albeit as an imagined secret hiding place. Re-contextualizing a myriad of source photos and 'tear-outs' of Graham — a stand-in for Lauder herself — in watercolors, books, and posters (many created by Viktor Skebneski for Estée Lauder ads), Bond also makes subtle reference to designer Billy Baldwin (note well-placed potted plants), by staging a series of readings derived from four lectures given by Baldwin at Cooper Hewitt in 1973 (Sundays at 6pm; see participantinc.org for details). Bond has written of these influences:

As a small-town transperson, I was sure that what I wanted was to escape into a world of glamour and elegance, taste and refinement. I scoured books by famed interior designer Billy Baldwin, who, I found out later, was a gay man from Baltimore, Maryland, where I'm from. Amazing to think of me as a child gazing into these books filled with environments designed by a queen from Baltimore and advertisements for beauty creams created by a Jewish lady from Queens, planning my dream house, my dream career, and my dream life.

Performing at the gallery, Bond will occasionally appear within the designated “step and repeat” space with customized wallpaper, red carpet, and velvet rope, wearing a pink silk dress designed by Frank Masandrea – a young fashion designer whose clothes were modeled by Graham, who died of HIV related complications at the age of 41 in the late 1980s. As instructed by the artist, this space is only to be occupied by Bond or Graham.

Mx Justin Vivian Bond is an American artist, performer, writer, and activist. Solo exhibitions include *My Model / My Self*, Vitrine Gallery, London, 2015; *Gold Mesh Cross-Body Bag*, Art Market, Provincetown, MA; 2014; and *The Fall of the House of Whimsy*, PARTICIPANT INC, New York, 2011. V is the author of the Lambda Literary Award Winning memoir *TANGO: My Childhood, Backwards and in High Heels*, The Feminist Press, 2011; and *Susie Says...*, a collaboration with Gina Garan, Powerhouse Books, 2012. V's debut CD *DENDRPOPHILE* was self-released on WhimsyMusic in 2011 and was followed by *SILVER WELLS* in 2012. Bond has received numerous accolades for performing, including winning Obie (2001), Bessie (2004), and Ethyl Eichelberger (2007) awards, while also earning The Peter Reed Foundation Grant and a 2007 Tony nomination. V has performed stages including London's Soho Theatre and Queen Elizabeth Hall, New York's Knitting Factory and Carnegie Hall, as well as a host of other venues worldwide. Notable theatrical endeavors include starring as Warhol Superstar Jackie Curtis in Scott Wittman's production of *Jukebox Jackie: Snatches of Jackie Curtis* as part of La Mama E.T.C.'s 50th Anniversary Season; originating the role of Herculine Barbin in Kate Bornstein's groundbreaking play *Hidden: A Gender*; touring with *The Big Art Group*; and appearing in John Cameron Mitchell's *Shortbus*.

In 1993, as a response to the devastation of the AIDS crisis, Bond created the character Kiki Durane, a washed-up yet irreverent, resilient, and ultimately triumphant torch singer. In collaboration with Kenny Mellman, the two invented the now legendary act Kiki and Herb, which they continued to perform for nearly 15 years. The comeback that the 70-year-old characters Kiki and Herb claimed they were making when they conceived the act in small San Francisco clubs became reality. Kiki and Herb went on to play in Carnegie Hall, The Sydney Opera House, and London's Queen Elizabeth Hall, in addition to mounting the Tony-nominated production *Kiki and Herb Alive on Broadway* at The Helen Hayes Theatre, and the Off-Broadway *Coup de Theatre* (The Cherry Lane Theatre). Kiki and Herb will come out of retirement this spring with *Seeking Asylum!* at Joe's Pub, as part of the 25th Tranniversary.



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PARTICIPANT INC is located at 253 East Houston Street, between Norfolk and Suffolk Streets on the LES, ground floor, wheelchair accessible. Subway: F to Second Avenue, Allen Street exit; or JMZ to Essex/Delancey. participantinc.org

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