

## IN PRINT

SUMMER 2012



SUBSCRIBE

## recent issues

Summer 2012  
 May 2012  
 April 2012  
 March 2012  
 February 2012  
 January 2012  
 December 2011  
 Archive to 1998



## L.A. Riot

VAGINAL DAVIS ON JABBERJAW



Vaginal Davis and Father Larry Wessel performing at Jabberjaw, 1990. Photo: John Aes-Nihil.

**THE LOCATION WAS PERFECT.** Jabberjaw, the legendary all-ages Armageddonist salon-galleria, opened in Los Angeles in 1989 at 3711 West Pico Boulevard: a former evangelical church turned sign shop (or vice versa) that had also been the site of a gruesome, Black Dahlia–like quadruple homicide. Just off Crenshaw, Jabberjaw was officially Mid-City, the nexus of South Central LA. And it happened to be next door to Catch One, the famed black gay disco where Madonna would drag a bored Warren Beatty during their courtship as he filmed the comic-strip clunker *Dick Tracy*.

The whole setup—which will be anthologized in the book *It All Dies Anyway*, due out this summer—stemmed from the liquor-fueled hallucinations of Michelle Carr and Gary Dent, along with their über-hung silent partner, Rob Zabrecky, of the indie-pop band Possum Dixon. I had first met Michelle a few years earlier, when she was still a sensitive and slightly withdrawn San Fernando Valley weenager who religiously followed my performance art band the Afro Sisters. She was motherless, so I eagerly adopted her as my slightly damaged drag daughter, nicknaming her tight gaggle of young girlfriends the Lana Turners for their penciled-in, shaved eyebrows and expressive Rosie the Riveter, *pachuca* high glamour.

At the time, Michelle and her best friend, María, both worked for a rag warehouse in downtown LA that supplied merchandise to local vintage and charity shops. Michelle and María, or M&M, were stunningly stylish; the latter was a spitfire of a Latina who resembled golden-age Mexican film starina María Félix. Every time I saw them at an Afro Sisters show or at my controversial Hag Gallery—small, contemporary, and haggard on the Sunset Strip—I'd start thinking of ways I could showcase their talent for working an outfit. An idea struck when I opened Café Hag, a monthly speakeasy at Kafe Kafka (a Czechoslovakian restaurant in Hollywood): The girls could be my barmaids—a job they performed clad in old-fashioned scanties. They were an immediate sensation!

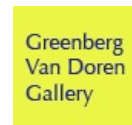
Outdoing Bettie Page in kinky finery, M&M soon became the Dominettes, backup dancers to my act as *haute* sexy dominatrix lead singer of Pedro, Muriel & Esther (PME), my “positive” punk/speed-metal/thrash band. All I'd have to do was give these gals a mere whiff of a theme and they'd show up perfectly camera-ready to take the stage alongside my crew of musical misfits—whether as the Killer Klowns (for a Queer Nation benefit that also featured '50s sex kitten Mamie Van Doren), or for an Amputee Times Roller Derby Rockin' New Year's Eve Gala (with the band L7 at the Whisky a Go

BLUM  
&  
POE

links



fonti

SIMON  
PRESTON  
GALLERY

Go), or as the Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling (at the infamous Club Fuck in Silver Lake with humpy homo studkin Brian Grillo and his backup band Lock Up).

Before long, though, Michelle and her straight-boy fag hag Gary branched off and started Jabberjaw, because they wanted a space of their own where they could experiment the way I did with performance parties such as my Barefoot Boys Club. I was so proud of Michelle—a smart and sassy working-class white girl from the hideous San Fernando Valley staking out new territory in the Pico corridor of LA's Funkytown. Of course, the crack cocaine epidemic had hit that part of the city very hard in the 1980s. Some artists who were major dinge queens did live and work in storefront lofts along Pico near Arlington, and there was a popular underground gay sex club for urine aficionados called the LA Water Polo Team nearby, but Jabberjaw was the first live music and performance art venue of its kind in the area. Michelle was an urban pioneer!

What I loved most about the early years of Jabberjaw ('89, '90, '91) was that the club booked everything—eclectic musical acts, indie rock, noise and experimental gigs, performance art, live installations, visual art—mixing all of it together on a regular basis but not in a way that appeared obvious or careerist, the way it seems things are done now. Jabberjaw never made a big deal out of anything; what they did felt subtle, like being inside serial killer John Wayne Gacy's Pogo the Clown paintings. And the decor was great—very homo *moderne*, as though filtered through a showroom of Easy-Bake Oven kitchenettes made for Monsanto. I'll never forget the art show by the insanely talented Father Larry Wessel. The setup included a re-creation of the volcano Krakatoa in full eruption, with toxic-smelling lava fumes so strong that the neighbors were compelled to call the police and everyone in the place had to retreat to the open-air patio out back. When the cops arrived, they thought a meth lab had exploded. Luckily, they were convinced otherwise after seeing several billy goats and a pet pig running around the husky provocateur Father Larry, who was writhing about in ox blood.

On another of my favorite nights at Jabberjaw, Psychodrama played with special guest star Lisa Crystal Carver (aka Lisa Suckdog, publisher of the early-'90s feminist fanzine *Rollerderby*). This was before Lisa married experimental soundscape artist Boyd Rice (aka NON) and they had their kid, Wolfgang. A little-known performance art collective from West Virginia, Psychodrama were responsible for inspiring the late mutant punk rock singer GG Allin—Allin having been in New York at Danceteria the night Psychodrama flung their own feces into the crowd, leading club owner Jim Fouratt to unceremoniously eighty-six them from the venue for life. There was no excrement involved at the Jabberjaw show, just menstrual blood and urine—that is, until a cruel, club-cocked white hustler named Zack (who worked part-time next door at Jewel's Room, the lesbian nightclub annex of Catch One disco) added other bodily fluids to the mix, showboating Psychodrama's set by fellating himself onstage and ejaculating into the audience. The legendary Goddess Bunny (aka Sandie Crisp, née John Edward Baima), muse to photographer Joel-Peter Witkin, was also in the standing-room-only crowd that evening, going around collecting money for one of her many grifts, though I can't remember which.

The first time I performed my itinerant preacher persona the Most High Holy Right Reverend Saint Salicia Tate was at Jabberjaw. I was opening for the Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black. Drew Barrymore was in the crowd (trying to be incognito in a brown wig) alongside her beau at that time, Eric Erlandson (of Courtney Love's band Hole). I attacked both of them, using my tongue as a power drill to bore into their mouths, Filipino-psychedelic-surgery style, removing imagined cancerous growths. A few weeks later, when Adam Pfahler (brother of VHoKB's lead singer Kembra) and his band Jawbreaker played Jabberjaw, I introduced them to my alter ego Rayvn Cymone McFarland. Rayvn was the teenage lead singer of black fag, my other art band, which also featured Bibbe Hansen, the former Warhol star (*Prison* [1965]) and mother of pop darling Beck. Jabberjaw had been open just a year or two, but its popularity as an all-ages venue had by then reached the outlying areas of Los Angeles; later that same evening, I was attacked by some homophobic Orange County X-urbanites. But Michelle instantly jumped to my rescue. In one bansheelike swoop, she mowed down several of the suburban hickoids. Unfortunately, her boyfriend at the time, a handsome undertaker at a Hollywood mortuary, joined in the fracas and wound up getting a metal plate in his head. Of course all of this was captured on video by my *Fertile La Toyah Jackson* video magazine partner, Beulah Love.

Nothing lasts forever, not in this life or the next, and though Jabberjaw closed its doors in 1997, a performance there by the radical lesbian feminist band Fifth Column left me with an image I'll never forget. Having formed in the early '80s, the Toronto-based band had been riot grrrl *avant la lettre*; for a leader they had the consummate artist G. B. Jones (also quite possibly the coolest woman on the planet, known, among other things, for her Tom's Girls drawings). During the band's sets, Jones would have the entire audience under her spell. This night was no exception: She quietly commanded all the men in the audience to remove their clothing and do helicopters with their penises. It was a beautiful, glorious moment to behold, looking on as they all complied.

*It All Dies Anyway: Jabberjaw, LA, and the End of an Era*, edited by Michelle Carr, is forthcoming from Rizzoli.

*Vaginal Davis is an artist who lives and works in Berlin.*

SHARE PERMALINK TALKBACK (0 COMMENTS)

VV  
VENEKLASSEN  
WERNER

PAULA  
COOPER  
GALLERY

team

Lisa Cooley

David Zwirner