

Fly Life

Pussy Control

Julie Atlas Muz and Michael T let their freak flags fly, among other things

by **Tricia Romano**

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Say hello to her little friend

Tricia Romano

It is Saturday night, and an exhausted **Julie Atlas Muz** sits on her husband Leo's lap at the Deitch Projects gallery on Wooster Street, having just finished a preview of her upcoming solo dance at P.S.122. With strong cheekbones, long blond hair, and a graceful black dress, the Eastern European lass is the picture of elegance, except for the fact that you can see her pussy.

In a fit of exhibitionism that makes **Britney** and **Paris** look like prudes, Muz rests her legs on either side of her husband's, revealing herself for all the world to see. It's a recurring theme in her professional life as a burlesque babe, a downtown dance phenomenon, and now, a visual artist—her character, Mr. Pussy, is on display at Womanizer, a group exhibition she co-curated with **Kembra Pfahler** (of the **Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black** fame), running at the Grand Street Deitch location until January 27.

The show—which also features work from **E.V. Day**, **Breyer P-Orridge**, **Vaginal Creme Davis**, **Bambi the Mermaid**, and **Liz Renay**—explores post-

feminist body image themes, touching on plastic surgery, gender identity, and beauty norms. And then there's **Mr. Pussy**, who is, in fact, Muz's actual private part, best known for his signature handlebar mustache, as well as his smoking habits—cigars, cigarettes, pipes—and impressive collection of hats. (Including a turban.) In a video installation, Muz even makes him talk. She first discovered him five or six years ago: "I would bring people into the bathroom and do little puppet shows with my vagina," she says, adding, "I was stone-cold sober."

Mr. Pussy soon took on a life of his own, and now has his own beauty regime. "There was a very long, awkward phase," Muz says. "He would get into everything. He would sometimes close shut and turn into a chastity belt of woven hair. He's got split ends, and I need to trim it and condition it." Other than that, "I don't know that much about him," she says. "I don't understand him—he's come out of me. As an exhibitionist, I don't have any shame. That's a positive thing."

The other positive thing about Mr. Pussy (not to mention Muz) is his knack for confronting people with things that make them uncomfortable. "The most horrifying thing is pubic hair on a woman," Muz says. "It's really quite frightening to the general public." She found that out in a most unique manner. The formally trained dancer (she went to Oberlin) was included in the 2004 Whitney Biennial via her piece "The Rite of Spring," a meditation on JonBenet Ramsey's life and death. During the opening gala, Muz turned up at the museum naked except for a sprinkling of glitter, which turned out to be the only thing she regretted. "I literally didn't know what to wear," she says. "I just wanted to feel comfortable. I wanted to one-up everyone, feel on top of my game. When you exist in a subculture, you don't really realize how shocking you are. I've been hanging out in a nightclub with heels and a G-string for years. Why not a museum? It seemed perfectly normal to me." She marvels that naked ladies in public spaces can shock so much: "It's still pretty much as radical as it was in the 1400s."

Like **Madonna**—another very famous lady known for exposing herself—**Muz** is from Detroit. Perhaps her rebellious streak surfaced after she got taunted as the school slut (she wasn't) in sixth grade. She also went to a Saturday afternoon Ukrainian school, where she ended her career as a debutante in the eleventh grade when she took a Mexican boy to a dance and they both took mushrooms to celebrate the occasion. It's all been leading up to the moment when Muz, standing on the Deitch Gallery stage Saturday, performed to "I Put a Spell on You," which culminated in a severed hand fingering you-know-what.

Her P.S.122 solo show—starting Saturday and running through February — will consist of Muz, alone, onstage, for an hour. (Mr. Pussy might be joining her.) Made possible thanks to the funding she received as the recipient of the second-annual Ethyl Eichelberger Award, *Divine Comedy of an Exquisite Corpse* is a

meditation on terrorism, fear, and celebrity—an apt summation of life post-9-11.

"I wanted to make a suicide terrorist show," she says. "That's what I wanted. Basically, it starts with an explosion and a bag onstage."

Amazingly, Muz is actually uncomfortable being onstage alone for longer than a striptease. She's used to grabbing an audience's attention for a hot minute—burlesque is quick and dirty. "It freaks me out," she admits. "I am pretty insecure. I hope that after 50 minutes they won't be so bored of seeing my face and my ass. You'll see my fear manifested in the show. I freak out a bunch of times. The show is about fear and vanity. I hope it works. If it flops, it flops. No one show has made me; no one show is gonna break me."

She previewed a snippet of it at the Deitch party to an audience that included **Michel Gondry** and **Justin Bond**; Muz stood on a table in the back of the gargantuan gallery space, running and dancing in place. Behind her, a scroll projection designed by **Cynthia Rojas** rolled past, showing images of chain-link fences and rainstorms. At one point Muz got out an umbrella to shield herself.

"I don't know if it's going to make any sense," she says. "Some sections are gorgeous. Two sections are beautiful. A couple of moments are nice." She offers a final warning, though: "I find disturbing things beautiful."

Muz probably has a lot in common with **Michael T**, the Motherfucker who celebrated his 40th birthday last Thursday night at Sol in a most outlandish fashion. It was an orgasm of unabashed self-love, and we loved him right back, with Mother T performing a nearly two-hour set with a live band that included a four-piece string section and help from friends including **Theo** (of Theo and the Skyscrapers), **DJ Jess**, **Peppermint Gummybear**, and the **Ones**. On the menu—entirely designed and conceived by the birthday boy—were songs evoking '70s glam (**T. Rex's** "Children of the Revolution"), disco ("Hot Stuff," sung by Peppermint), and '80s new wave (**Gary Numan's** "Asylum/I Disconnect From You"). The latter was the set's highlight—just when you thought it was over, Michael and two backup dancers named Milan and Sahara pranced off the stage (helped along by a bright spotlight, of course) and made their way across the floor to the other side of the club, where they climbed a balcony and performed a synchronized robot dance. You just had to see it to believe it. The crowd—consisting of Michael's number one fans, including host **Chi Chi Valenti**, the other **Motherfuckers** (**Georgie Seville**, **Johnny T**, and **Justine D**, who was DJ'ing along with the **Bangers**), **Mistress Formika** (who sang a Cure song), **Miranda Moondust**, and **Tommie Sunshine**—watched in amazement. It'd been a long time since you'd seen anyone make such an effort in nightlife. At evening's end, Sunshine simply said, "That was the most New York party I've been to in a long time."