

PARIS HILTON: FANTASY AND SIMULACRUM BY IKÉ UDÉ

Artist IKé UDé talks about his Paris Hilton exhibition at Oslo's Stenersen Museum, his work for aRUDE Magazine and book Style File.

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Since 2002, the Norwegian public has been familiar with IKé UDé's work, when the artist participated in the group exhibition "A Doll's House", that involved a modern interpretation of Ibsen's play. Yet the event "Paris Hilton: Fantasy and Simulacrum", that recently opened at Oslo's [Stenersen Museum](#), will finally allow Oslo's contemporary art fans to admire UDé's first solo event.

The exhibition - that was first launched last year at New York's [Stux Gallery](#) - is a sort of conversation between the artist's alter ego, Visconti, and Paris Hilton. The result is a unique visual dialogue about popular culture and the construction of the Paris Hilton phenomenon, carried out through elaborate mixed media works. Provocative materials from gossip blogs, porn sites, wallpaper samples, photocopies, mirrors, film and fashion and lifestyle magazines, clash and combine with UDé's fantasy and sense of humour providing a fresh perspective on a celebrity most people think they already know and forcing the visitor to question issues of fame and the aesthetics of cultural decay. "The result is pure magic," Selene Wendt from the Stenersen Museum says, "whether or not one likes or admires Paris Hilton, she is truly fascinating from a sociological perspective. IKé's intellectual and artistic investigation of Paris Hilton is as relevant and interesting today as Andy Warhol's approach to the stars of his time. Those who understand the subtleties of the artist's approach will be open to the infinite layers of meaning embedded in the work, including questions surrounding popular culture and the intricacies of who achieves stardom and why within our society."

IKé UDé was born in Lagos, Nigeria, and moved to the States in the 1980s. The founder of the quarterly [aRUDE Magazine](#), he is also the author of the impressive volume *Style File: The World's Most Elegantly Dressed* published by Harper Collins, a compendium of the "Style File" and "Elements of Style" sections originally published in aRUDE. The book features over 50 interviews with pioneer stylemakers, such as John Galliano, André Leon Talley, Stephen Jones, Iris Apfel, Christian Louboutin and Dita Von Teese.

Dazed Digital: You recently opened your exhibition Paris Hilton: Fantasy and Simulacrum in Oslo: what is the concept behind it?

IKé UDé: There really isn't anything behind it that one cannot see or discern with time if one steps a little closer and make some voyeuristic investment, intensely, casually or otherwise.

DD: What does Paris Hilton represent for you and what inspired you to concentrate on this contemporary icon?

IU: I find Paris Hilton rather delightful. She is the first and only honnette femme, like the 17th and 18th century honnette homme counterpart, but with an obvious contemporary bent and harmless mischief, to boot. She represents our age in so many ways, which is to say, the Tabloid Age, really.

DD: Will the exhibition be touring Europe?

IU: If the Europeans are not too depressed, I'm sure that this rather, Parisian, hot exhibition will find many more venues in Europe.

DD: Is there an artist you'd like to exhibit/collaborate with one day?

IU: I would love to do something with Luigi Ontani and/or Cindy Sherman. They have truly been huge supporters and champions of my work. And I think the timing is right actually. Once a mutually inspiring moment presents itself, then it will happen, it can't be forced or contrived, at all. And it may never happen but the idea is even enough and better than a result of it, you never know.

DD: The first issue of aRUDE came out 15 years ago: what has changed in the world of art, culture, style and fashion publications since you founded aRUDE?

IU: My life is mostly hermitic, monkish and stoic mixed with rewarding moments of inspired reverie. I'm often in my loft/studio in delicious conspiracy and conversation with my books, hence, I hardly have time to chart changes on this or that. I think that change is rather overrated, really! Since the Renaissance or the age-of-enlightenment or age-of-reason, we are sold to believe that change is always good. This notion of change is patently false and has been further degraded and fouled by commerce and brut-capitalism. What we call change is often totalitarian acquiescence en masse; the real change which happens once-in-a-blue-moon is far more subtle, individualistic, useless and durable.

DD: What is the most challenging aspect of running aRUDE?

IU: Trying to avoid fashion shows because of their redundancy, uniformity, hysteria and corruption. With the exception of a VERY few designers/shows, it is all about much ado about nothing. Rather tragic, no?

DD: What do you think is missing in art/culture/fashion magazines nowadays?

IU: Missing in action: substance, integrity, honesty, courage and love of beauty, grace, elegance and moreover style.

DD: Can you tell us more about the genesis of Style File?

IU: Style File is one of the oldest departments in aRUDE. I'm not terribly interested in fashion so I created a forum to showcase individuals that are invariably stylish, imaginatively elegant and with contagious attitudes that we all love to catch.

DD: Is there a particularly stylish actor/actress, artist or designer you would have liked to be featured in the book but you haven't managed to interview yet?

IU: In the end, John Malkovich—whom I adore—didn't manage to meet the interview deadline but gladly made it in Timothy Greenfield-Sanders photo-album. Brian Ferry was also on tour and therefore missed the deadline. Bowie was able to make the interview. But I managed to include all of them without the interview. I shall work with them at some future date if the perfect circumstances present. There are no disappointments, however.

DD: People often wonder if fashion can be called "art". But from Style File you get the impression that style is actually a form of art, would you agree?

IU: Fashion is not art. Fashion is, well, well, well...fashion and that should suffice. Something that changes every three months—if you count the cruise collections, etc—is not art. It is like confusing tabloid for journalism or journalism with proper writing. Style is not a form of art, it is. The very essence of art is in the style not in the fashion or trend of its age. Without style, there is no art worth its weight in gold—and one is left with some cheap, popular and fashionable souvenirs. We don't like that, do we?

DD: Is there anything you learnt about style after interviewing the people featured in the book?

IU: I learnt that style is a subtle art that requires unyielding but rewarding discipline. It evolves and matures in varying, indeterminate, imprecise poetic shades and bents—all the more intriguing, precisely because it is unquantifiable, yet miraculously qualitative.

DD: Artist or publisher: which of these jobs do you like best?

IU: Truth be told, I'm simply an artist who invests the habitual and inevitable artist's spare time in executing a smartly tailored periodic journal. I've never deemed myself a publisher—I've always thought that one must be at least 60 years old, bald, white-haired, pot-belly, unattractive, money-hungry, in order to be a publisher. I'm neither of the aforementioned

DD: What are your future plans?

IU: I will do an extraordinary online TV and videos for our mutual amusement and delight. Furthermore, I will do a couple of books, maybe an autobiography which some has suggested that I do, and more commissioned portrait in my new pictorial style.

IKé UDé's "Paris Hilton: Fantasy and Simulacrum" is at the Stenersen Museum, Oslo, Norway, until 10th May 2009.

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