

INTERVIEWS

## PUPPIES PUPPIES (JADE KURIKI-OLIVO)

Puppies Puppies (Jade Kuriki-Olivo) on transition, retrospection, and a year of protest

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**Puppies Puppies** (Jade Kuriki Olivo), *Brain on Estrogen, progesterone, spironolactone, Truvada, Advil and Marijuana*, 2018, cow brain, marijuana leaf, progesterone, estrogen, spironolactone, prep and pain killers. Photo: Courtesy the artist.

*Jade Kuriki Olivo's retrospective at the Kunsthaus Glarus in Switzerland brings together the Brooklyn-based artist's work from the past decade. On view through August 22, the show maps the evolution of her practice as she transitioned from working under the guise of Puppies Puppies to living as an openly trans woman. Here, Olivo reflects on this transformation and discusses refusing to hide, the turning point represented by this exhibition, and the weekly Stonewall Protests for Black Trans Liberation that have kept her going over the past year.*

**I WAS HIDING** from the world for a long time. In some ways, it was because it was so terrifying to be—or even think about being—a trans woman. It felt like jumping off a cliff when I decided that it was what I wanted and needed in life.

Trans women have been consistently erased from history—our voices have been erased—so it is revolutionary for me, and for every trans person, especially BIPOC, gender-nonconforming, and two-spirit people, to be in control of the way our voices go out into the world. I still don't do many interviews, but unlike before—when my ex-husband or someone else would speak for me and I would be in a costume or sleeping on a sleeping pill—now I speak for myself. It means

something very different to be hidden as a trans woman. At other points in history, I wouldn't have been able to exist. So when I came out, I exposed myself fully and physically in a nude performance in Paris as a way of saying, *I'm here and I'm not going to hide anymore*. I couldn't be out as a trans woman and have hiding be a part of my work. I also wanted to document the changes in my body as my hormone-replacement therapy continued.

This is part of the arc of my exhibition at the Kunsthhaus Glarus. It was emotional pulling this show together because I really wanted people to understand the evolution that's happened within me. The show covers eleven years of work. I called it a retrospective because I was thinking about how the amount of time that one is given, that a person is allowed to exist, is different for different people. Trans women often don't live as long as other people. It creates a different way of relating to time. It's definitely more precious for me, also having had a brain tumor.

The show marks a new way of making work for me. I've always worked with other artists, so collaboration is nothing new, but I'm moving into a more curatorial role—becoming a conduit or a pathway—so that I can give a platform to other artists, especially a growing family of trans/GNC/2S+ artists. Going forward, when an institution asks me to do a solo show, I will invite another artist to do their own solo show, and they can decide how or if they want that to be associated with me. This is the direction I want to go in, and I'm doing sex work and figuring out a way to survive so I can keep moving toward it. This new chapter begins with Bri Williams and Elliot Reed's exhibitions opening at Glarus in September.



**Puppies Puppies (Jade Kuriki Olivo), *Una Mujer Fantástica (A Fantastic Woman)*, 2019**, HD video projection, color, sound, LED light box, tinted Toyota Corolla window, custom jacket, polished metal, mirror, public advertisement, dimensions variable.

Next to giving other artists I believe in space to express themselves, Stonewall Protests is the part of my life I am most passionate about. Stonewall is organized by Qween Jean and Joela Rivera, who have been holding weekly demonstrations for the past year in the wake of the murder of George Floyd. They are really the civil-rights leaders of now. I've been protesting since the age of sixteen, but when I finally found Stonewall Protests at thirty-one, I was like, *Oh my God, you found your family and your home*. I also found a reason to keep going at a time when my art practice was not fulfilling me. It is a healing space. Stonewall is first and foremost a leading formation within the current Black Trans Lives Matter movement. The protests relate in some ways to the ballroom scene, which was founded by Black and Latinx trans women in New York City, specifically in Harlem, and brings that culture to protesting. An amazing group of bikers called Riders4Rights block intersections so the space can become a dance floor where people are able to express themselves to their fullest and feel safe enough to do so. There are different chants and a drum line and music made by a fantastic group called Musicians United NYC. A huge part of the Stonewall protests are mutual-aid events which emphasize the need to support one another, as well as the communities some Stonewall protesters live or grew up in.

In different Indigenous histories, trans people have been identified as healers or helpers, and I'm drawn to this way of existing as a kind of sacred work. This is a practice I became familiar with through my father, who was Indigenous and taught me what he knew, and from my chosen Indigenous queer family members over time. In articulating all this, and thinking about when art and life blend together, I've been really grateful to reflect on this evolution. As Puppies Puppies, I was making meme videos, really concealed from the world in this little shell. And now this is what's happening. It's my life and I'm here.

— *As told to Camila McHugh*