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# PARMA HAM INTERVIEW

Interview and Photography By Jo Blackened

**Altercarnated Photography**

If you've been in London's clubbing scene, then there is no doubt you would've seen or at least heard of Parma Ham. They're known not only for their looks but also being a DJ at London's well-known goth club 'Slimelight', fetish club 'Torture Garden', and queer club 'Monster Queen'.

I had the pleasure of spending the afternoon with Parma to chat about the scene & shoot some photos.

**Hey Parma and thank you for your time today. Some people know you as a model, and others know you as a DJ in London's clubbing scene. What came first, the Dj'ing or modelling?**

I've been in images long before DJing, that said I don't consider myself a model; I appear as myself in images, never as an instrument to make clothes look good. Being in images just comes with having a strong visual identity, and I use shoots to spread and develop that. I'm also happy to be shot as a gender non-conformer (GNC) and be as visible as possible since fashion (and the world) is lacking when it comes to trans and GNC representation.

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How did you first arrive on the Dj scene? And what do you love about it?

I started DJing at a performance-based night called Coven. I was only really doing it to help friends and figured it might be an exciting way to start getting the music I like into clubs. I'm obsessive over new music, so my sets tend to be 80% material released in the last 3 years. That's not to say the old is bad, as the success and strength of goth is on its solid foundation, but I know my place as a DJ is to embrace change.



**Where has been the most exciting place to Dj and why?**

Possibly Torture Garden at the iconic Ministry of Sound because the sound system was out of this world. Or the Comme Des Garçons Fall 2019 runway at Paris Fashion Week, which was a hugely unexpected honour to work with such a great designer.

**You are also a gallery producer and curator, and last month went to LA? Can you tell me more about this?**

My main hustle is contemporary art and exhibitions, and I've been producing books for the Serpentine Gallery in London for the past five years. I recently curated my own exhibition at Lethal Amounts Gallery in LA on social media censorship and how it limits outsider artists. The show was conceived because of my fear that life is moving closer to the digital, and that's particularly concerning for transgressive art, music, fashion and lifestyle – as social media has pretty strict puritanical rules.



I feel social media has grown into a behemoth with way more control than it should, and a lot of us do not want to live the PG-13 lifestyle that it promotes. Recently Elizabeth Warren (who is running for US president in 2020) ran an online ad campaign posing that very question "Does Facebook have too much power?", Facebook in return removed this, which is a huge blow to both democracy and the freedom of the internet.

**Has art always been important to you?**

I love art because art always has an "aboutness" meaning it is always about something outside of itself. Generally, I like anything creative and as a DJ I promote music, as a curator I push artists, and I love to collaborate and work with designers. I also perform, make art, and will be producing my own music soon.



The other thing you're known for is your hair. How did this 'mohican' style first come about and does it take you forever to style it?

I used to regularly go to a bar in Camden called The Black Cap. Despite the huge success of the bar and it's long history it was closed down to be redeveloped into luxury flats. Many colourful and eccentric characters of London's club scene protested outside, and for these protests, I put my hair in a Mohican. It wasn't as big back then, but it was where it started.



You have quite a strong image, is this a way of expression for you?

I look the way I do because this is what I love, find beautiful and feel comfortable wearing. There are no other motives, but I'm aware that being unapologetically myself, confident and self-loving where society tries to shame and manipulate my expression, is itself an act of rebellion. My image comes from a rejection of societal standards, but it's important to remember that this isn't just about rebelling against aesthetic demands of society, it's an all out rejection of the systematic oppression, not just on narrow ideas of sexuality and gender, but also the wealth divide, institutional racism, xenophobia and so forth, it's an all-out disregard for the authority and power that implements these systems. Some people might try and reduce me to being focused on the way I look, but really it's a tell-tale sign that I am my only authority.



**What does 'alternative', 'goth', 'fetish' mean to you?**

These are countercultures which reject the status quo of society in one way or another. Goth does this but with a touch of darkness and macabre. If you're gonna reject a system you may as well look and sound good in the process.

**You're also known for being androgynous. Is gender non-conformity and sexuality important to you?**

Entirely! It was actually the androgyny in goth that attracted me to it, and that's where I found the freedom to experiment with gender and sexuality without getting bogged down with identity politics. These are pressing issues right now as many more people are coming to understand gender and sexuality as unfixed and limitless in scope, so I'm glad these questions have entered the mainstream, despite the heavy backlash.



What do think has changed in the underground scene over the years?

One of the biggest threats to the scene is local governments clamping down on bars and clubs on their licensing arrangements, and generally the absurd amount of development in major cities that is essentially socially cleansing areas of anything mildly interesting. Electroworkz in London now houses Torture Garden, Kaos, Slimelight and live music; and though that's kind of magical to bring the underground together, it's also symptomatic that we have run out of venues.



You co-run the monthly club night Monster in London. Can you tell us more about this & how it came about?

Monster combines goth, techno, fetish, queerness and performance. It's turned into a really special place where dark subcultures merge. We always have an interesting mix of guest DJs borrowed from other clubs, whilst putting on 3-4 performers, which could be drag, shibari, installation, dancers, dominatrixes, burlesque or ritual. We're also starting to incorporate fashion shows and live music. It's a place of hedonism, freedom and enjoyment, but also for creativity, experimentation and community.



Do you have any upcoming plans/projects and events this year?

I'm co-curating an exhibition with Sade English on the theme of Blackness (the colour) and its relationship to Blackness (the skin). Then with Salvia, I'm launching a range of ornamental Strap-on's. I'm also excited to be DJing during Wave-Gotik-Treffen at the fetish club night The Whip which will be on the Saturday during the festival.



Is there anywhere you'd like to Dj and haven't yet?

Brazil and Mexico as their scenes are on fire right now. I also love DJing in unexpected places where there's a chance I can expose and convert people to underground music.



What advice do you have for a young creative? Whether that's an artist, Dj, designer, MUA etc

Starting a new project can be overwhelming, to begin with, or your idea might not be fully developed yet, so one of the hardest thing to do is start it. But once you start, and have produced something (however small) you can develop and build on it, and over time the creativity flows, and your abilities improve. Having great ideas or being a genius creator is only half the work, producing and putting work out there is as equally important.



Also, don't be put off by thinking you can't do something. Remember everyone starts somewhere. Don't wait for opportunities to come to you, create your own. For example, if no one will put you on as a new DJ, put on your own party and DJ!



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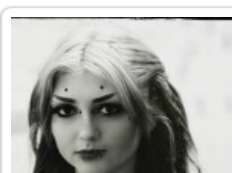
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