

“In Style: Janice Devali and Her Art”

By Victoria Lu

Janice Devali was born in 1975 in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands. She is a descendant of the Indian Brahmin caste. As the only daughter in her household and the eldest child in her extended family, and grew up in a warm environment filled with love. She has a very unique bond with her mother Ivy which fostered her innate free spirit. Janice lived in the Netherlands, South America, Belgium, and now she lives in Spain (Marbella) with her husband. Having grown up in the West, she did not want to be restricted by the various constraints that Indian tradition has long placed on women; instead, she has bravely sought to break through boundaries in order to pursue her dreams.

Janice's seven years of experience working in the fashion industry helped to develop her unique aesthetic vision. She always enjoyed designing her own clothes. Her distinctive dresses highlight her sexy body, while her sparkling accessories bring out the brilliance of her shining eyes and sharp facial features; all of her physical charms are further complemented by her bright, clear laughter. It is hard not to find her attractive. The first time I saw the vibrant Janice, I immediately thought of India's goddess of fecundity. In her sparkling eyes, so full of joy and enthusiasm, I saw a fearless force. As an autodidact artist, she is as full of energy as the goddess. She escapes from the categories and frameworks that the contemporary art world always seeks to construct. Immersed in the world of her imagination, she narrates according to her own language, incorporating into all of her works the experiences and aesthetic points of view that she gained from her previous career in the field of fashion design. Consequently, it is very difficult to define the style of her artworks. If we were forced to classify her work, then it would probably be best to say that she makes use of “Animamix aesthetics,” a notion that I am currently researching and developing. Her creations reflect my understanding of “Animamix aesthetics” in various ways, which is an important reason why I felt so close to her at first sight.

Since the last decennia Janice has dedicated herself to artistic creation. She works in the studio every day from nine to five. Sometimes she becomes so happily engrossed in a work that she forgets to eat or sleep, finishing it all in a single burst of inspiration. Janice has found her *raison d'être* in her art, as well as her life's greatest joy. Physically fit Janice fell in love with scuba diving as a teenager. She loves the sea. She loves the bright rays of light and the rich colors of aquatic life that one finds in the ocean. She loves the unpredictable transformations that occur as one observes aquatic scenery, and the

sense of multiple, changing perspectives that one has while swimming. But she has no choice but to accept her position as a disoriented observer who is at once physically close but psychologically distant from this sea world. These are all things that people cannot experience from their fixed point of view on land. Those endless rays of light shining in the water, which she has represented in her paintings by applying crystals and pearls to the canvas, have become one of the most distinctive features of her work. The space of her paintings always seems to be composed from multiple, scattered perspectives. In appropriating the visual experience of diving, she creates an imaginative sea world without ocean water, a world that is detached from the reality of time and space.

Pursuing the spirit of the avant-garde and loving pop culture, Janice advocates the power of youth. Fashion has always held a prominent place in her heart. It is not difficult to understand why she so admires Madonna, the Queen of Pop, and Michael Jackson, its King. In her painting *To Take a Bow*, she decorated a large flower with images of Queen Madonna and a crowned King Jackson placed side by side. Fashionably dressed and smiling, the two seem as though they are enjoying the beautiful feeling of being crowned king and queen.

Janice Devali has multiple interpretations of Madonna. She painted *Just Like a Virgin* at the time when Madonna was publishing her first children's books. She used the characters of the fairy tale “Snow White and the Seven Dwarves” to show the two sides of Madonna as a woman: on the one hand, she is pure and lovely “like a virgin”, while on the other hand, she is elegant, seductive and treacherous. This vision of the innate Janus-faced nature of woman is, in fact, Janice's vision of herself. She simply is using Madonna's super-star status as a model through which to depict her own understanding of ideal womanhood.

This dual nature is also reflected in two of her other paintings, *Into the Groove* and *Material Girl*. By presenting overlapping images of a nun and a sensual female body, these works suggest the conflicts and confrontations between the two sides of Madonna's personality. The image of the nun was taken from the character that Madonna played in a film, while the sexy feminine body is a common sight from Madonna's concert performances on stage. In these works, Janice also depicts men's ambivalent attitude toward their ideal lover: on the one hand, they desire their woman to be a virgin; on the other hand, they thirst to gain stimulation and satisfaction from the body of a



Tiara, oil on canvas, 120 x 150 cm, 2009
Exhibited in the Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei, Taiwan

sexy woman. Like a Prayer also combines an image of a nun, plucked from the environment of a church, and her foil, an enchanting female figure wearing black net stockings.

Deeper and Deeper and White were inspired by Janice's experience of being anaesthetized at the dentist. In Deeper and Deeper she creates a vision of the ocean and sailors; she even imagines herself to slip between the narrow gap between Madonna's teeth. All of this imaginative force and fantasy flashed through her mind as she was under the dentist's drugs. She wished to paint from the inside out. She felt that powerful whales seemed to rule the ocean and that their voices could be heard hundreds of kilometers away. Then she painted Madonna's comforting gaze, which seems to say to her fans that people are all equal, that the sounds of our hearts can all be heard.

White is clearly a depiction of a row of Madonna's white teeth. White teeth are often considered to be a standard of beauty, and for Janice, who was under the influence of anesthesia when she painted the work, they became an object of fantasy inspired by the sexy contortions of Madonna's body. Erotica reflects the various tantalizing charms that Madonna has as

a sex icon. Dressed in revealing lingerie, Madonna performs a variety of implied sexual positions, filling the canvas with a heady atmosphere of intoxication. Bedtime Story depicts the joys of rough sex and a group of active sperm. Falling in Love is also a narrative about rough sex. Madonna wears a pair of handcuffs, her face revealing an expression of pain mixed with sexual pleasure. Exploring the sensual charms of the female body has always been a trait characteristic of Janice's work. She was not hidden any of her fascination with the sexual appeal of women's bodies. Consequently, this series of suggestive paintings does not feel vulgar even though it is filled with an intense sense of passion.

When Janice was painting *Tiara*, she realized that the reason Versace's designs are so appealing is that truly creative people can never be taken lightly. She believes that viewers must take each and every creator very seriously and must think about how they use their talents to complete a work. From this point of view, Madonna and Versace are creators who have a high "degree of accomplishment." Their work hinges upon how they see themselves and how they understand their own positions. Janice placed a crown in the style of Versace atop an image of the demure countenance of Madonna to prove the truth of that

old saying that the most demure, serious woman is the most beautiful. Another one of her paintings, I'll Remember, is similar to Tiara in composition and content. In these two paintings, Janice showed the side of Madonna that is elegant and full of wisdom. And in Who is the Girl, there is an apple that has had a bite taken from it, which seems to symbolize women's desire. Madonna's face, bearing an expression of intense yearning, has been inserted into the super-high-heeled shoes that she so often wears.

Famous women are Janice's favorite theme. In addition to Madonna, Princess Diana is also a subject that she has painted. Her painting Candle Light is a tribute to Diana. Janice used Egyptian symbols and the eagle to represent the two cultures of Egypt and England. Janice expressed this tragedy through the sorrowful look in Diana's eyes, which still somehow preserves a certain pride and grace. Princess Diana's two wings embrace the torn English flag in the background, which represents the mourners of England. She is placed in the center as though she were crucified on the cross of the flag of England. The claws of the eagle are transformed into a rose bleeding drops of red and blue blood. Blue blood signifies the royal family, while the red blood represents humanity. This painting is dedicated to the forbidden love story of Diana and the son of the Egyptian billionaire businessman Mohammed Al-Fayed.

Often when Janice is painting the faces of her figures, besides depicting the inner feelings of the protagonist, she also inserts her own personal feelings and critiques. In Monroe the infinitely charming Marilyn Monroe has been placed inside a glass superimposed over the American flag, while the Kennedy

brothers, depicted on her right and left, compete for her love. This painting reveals a true story about "sex, lies, and politics" in American culture. Chanel No. 1 depicts the quintessential French fashion figure and her perfume bottle on the most famous fashion street in Paris. In Chanel No. 2, in addition to the perfume bottle, we see the French flag, the Chanel logo, and Coco Chanel, who wears a long pearl necklace and an outfit that she designed herself. She turns her head to gaze at the viewer, revealing herself to be a wise woman filled with confidence.

Janice Devali's art cannot be placed within any movement. She is a self-taught artist, so we cannot see whose techniques she inherited. The ever shifting point of view in her paintings suggests a sense of carefree freedom, while her pursuit of the sensual, elegant, youthful and fashionable, as well as her love of glittering, beautiful things, makes her works highly decorative. All of this brings her work very close to what I understand as Animamix aesthetics. Janice is someone who values spiritual life; she likes meditation and yoga, as well as learning about the world's rich local cultures and different historical traditions. I invited Janice Devali to participate in the Second Animamix Biennial, which gave her the opportunity to visit Taipei, Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. This kind of cultural exchange has had an extremely positive impact on her work. Janice Devali's art is a quintessential example of work produced in the information age. With her sense of multiple spaces and times, her multi-point perspectives, and her personal symbolic codes, the process of viewing her paintings quickly becomes a visual puzzle, while interpreting her codes becomes an intellectual guessing game.

Candlelight, oil on canvas, 225 x 180 cm, 2008-2009



Exclusive and worldwide promoted by

Robinsons
Art Gallery

Zeedijk 757A
8300 Knokke Zoute - Belgium
Phone +32 (0) 50 60 18 36
Fax +32 (0) 50 60 00 81
info@robinsons-artgallery.com
www.robinsons-artgallery.com