

# LOEWE FOUNDATION



Divine

LOEWE and the LOEWE FOUNDATION are pleased to present the house's 10th contribution to PHotoESPAÑA, an exhibition of photography, illustration and film honouring an indomitable icon of queer culture, Harris Glenn Milstead - better known by his stage name, Divine.

Born in 1945 in Baltimore, Maryland, Milstead quickly learnt what it was like to feel out of place. He was bullied at school for being overweight and for a manner considered too effeminate. But through this adversity would emerge a bold and defiantly flamboyant character: an actor, a singer and one of the most influential drag queens of our time.

It was filmmaker John Waters who first coined Divine's name - but little did either know how much impact this persona would come to have. Divine formed part of Waters' experimental acting troupe, The Dreamlanders, whose work glorified shock value and bad taste. He appeared in underground cult movies like *Roman Candles* (1966), *Pink Flamingos* (1972) and *Female Trouble* (1974).

One of his most widely-known film performances was in *Hairspray* (1988), in which he doubled up as loveable mother Edna Turnblad and vile villain Arvin Hodgepile. It marked Divine's breakthrough into mainstream cinema - but he died just three weeks after the movie opened. He was 42 years old.



On the cover:  
Divine, Los Angeles, CA, 1987  
Photograph by Greg Gorman

Divine in Studio 54, NY in 1977  
Photograph by Bill Bernstein

Friends remember Milstead as being mild-mannered and soft-spoken. Divine, however, cut a different figure: rude, raunchy and outrageous. Divine was Milstead's unapologetic alter ego - a provocative voice of protest, shouting loud and proud on behalf of that little boy who was teased on the playground for being different.

Divine's irreverent showmanship was a form of activism as well as entertainment, in which scandal and transgression took centre stage. In Jeffrey Schwarz's 2013 documentary *I Am Divine*, screened in this exhibition, the performer says: 'People love to be shocked, I think. So that's my job, to get out there and shock them.'

Even in his art of drag, Divine defied the rules. His aesthetic rejected a glamorised, elegant vision of femininity, opting instead for the filthy and the trashy. Divine was sexy yet terrifying at the same time, blurring the boundaries between the desirable and the grotesque. This challenge to the acceptable, normative body subverted conventions of beauty in a way that felt tremendously liberating for audiences. As Waters put it, Divine 'exaggerated what everybody hated, turned it into a style - and won.'

Today, more than three decades after his death, Divine's legacy endures among LGBTQ+ communities. Disco hits like 'You Think You're A Man' continue to fill the dance floors of gay nightclubs; Divine's persona remains an inspirational figure in the world of drag; and a 10-foot statue of Divine is housed at the American Visionary Art Museum in his hometown of Baltimore.

In a departure from its monographic exhibitions over the years, this photographic homage to Divine marks the LOEWE FOUNDATION's first group show. Rather than showcasing the work of a single artist, the display focuses instead on a single subject, as viewed through various lenses.

Among the more than 40 images in the retrospective are works by 10 professional photographers, some of whom knew Divine well, capturing some of the performer's most eye-catching moments, whether in formal shoots, on stage or behind the scenes. They are exhibited alongside photos from personal albums, depicting Milstead's childhood, school days, family holidays and friends.

The LOEWE FOUNDATION's latest PHotoESPAÑA entry is part of its ongoing exploration of identity, gender and sexuality, as seen in previous exhibitions on Minor White, Peter Hujar, David Wojnarowicz and Hervé Guibert. Our new show about Milstead follows on from last year's digital exhibition of Divine memorabilia, presented alongside the launch of LOEWE's Divine-inspired limited edition collection; fifteen percent of proceeds were donated to the HIV awareness and contemporary art organisation Visual AIDS, and a donation was also made to Baltimore Pride.

By shining a light on this pioneer of gender-diverse artistry, who championed liberty and self-determination, LOEWE celebrates the transformative potential of queer performance. For anyone who questioned the establishment, or did not fit in, Divine was the voice of freedom. This exhibition is therefore a tribute to the power of drag to push boundaries, challenge ideals of beauty and redefine who we are.





Previous page:  
Divine reclining, 1982  
Photograph by Marcus Leatherdal  
Courtesy of Throckmorton Gallery

Next page:  
John Waters & Divine in S. Francisco, 1970  
Photograph by Nelson Giles  
Courtesy of the John Waters' Collection  
Reid Cinema Archives, Wesleyan University



Photograph by Clay Geerdes





Photograph by Clay Geerdes



Photograph by Greg Gorman



Divine, New York City, 1977  
© The Estate and Archive of Antonio Lopez and Juan Ramos



Photograph by Clay Geerdes





Photograph by Greg Gorman



Illustration by Richard Bernstein for the cover of Interview Magazine, 1988



Photograph by Clay Geerdes



The Divine show, THE VICE PALACE.  
They are, starting at the bottom with the blonde woman and going clock-wise, Mink Stole, Sweet Pam, Pristin  
Condition, Scrumbly, John Rothermel and Goldie Glitters in San Francisco, 1972. Photograph by Clay Geerdes



Photograph by Chris Callis



Neon woman (study), 1977  
Color pencil on paper  
© The Estate and Archive of Antonio Lopez and Juan Ramos



Divine, New York City, 1977  
© The Estate and Archive of Antonio Lopez and Juan Ramos



Divine Neon Woman  
Illustration by Richard Bernstein



Divine Fiorucci  
Illustration by Richard Bernstein



**Curator** María Millán

**Text** Agnish Ray

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Mario Algaze, courtesy Throckmorton Gallery

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