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Riley-Adams, Ella, et al.: *T's Culture Issue: Beginners.*

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T's Culture Issue: Beginners.

**WHEN THESE TWO FIRST WORKED TOGETHER** Love, spats, splits and enduring affinity: creative partnerships that have stood the test of time.  
Interviews by Ella Riley-Adams, Nick Haramis, Nicole Acheampong, Julia Halperin and Coco Romack

**JANE FONDA AND LILY TOMLIN, ACTRESSES** Have co-starred in three films and a TV show, from “9 to 5” (1980) to “80 for Brady” (2023).



Video by Kurt Collins

**JANE FONDA:** It was 1978, and I heard that Lily Tomlin was performing in a [one-woman] show called “Appearing Nitely” in Los Angeles. I don’t know how many characters she played, but she embodied them all so fully. I was smitten. I went backstage to meet her. At the time, I was in the process of developing “9 to 5” [the 1980 comedy about a trio of female office workers who overthrow the company’s sexist boss] and, as I was driving home, I thought, “I don’t want to be in a movie about secretaries unless Lily Tomlin is in it.”

**LILY TOMLIN:** She swept in backstage with a big cape on. We couldn’t believe it — this was Jane Fonda! For a couple of years, I’d worn a hairdo from “Klute” [the 1971 thriller for which Fonda won an Oscar], but I didn’t have it when she showed up that day. I was like, “Why did I drop my ‘Klute’ hairdo at this propitious time?”

**J.F.:** It took a good year to convince Lily and Dolly [Parton, the film’s other lead] to do the movie. It’s not that they weren’t interested, but it was very difficult. Why was it so difficult, Lily?

**L.T.:** I think I was that way about everything.



From left: Fonda, 86, and Tomlin, 84, photographed at Hubble Studio in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles, on Jan. 29, 2024. Kanya Iwana

**J.F.:** You *are* that way about everything: “I don’t know if I can do this. I’m not right for the part.” You do that every time. But it was your idea to get Colin Higgins to direct and to cast Dabney Coleman [as the boss]. You should’ve been the one producing it! My only decision was to make the movie, because one of my close friends, [the former director of the U.S. Department of Labor Women’s Bureau] Karen Nussbaum, would tell me stories about organizing women office workers and what they had to go through.

**L.T.:** I thought I had some lines that were hitting you over the head with the joke. Yet when the movie was released, those lines got the biggest response from the audience.

**J.F.:** Both of us got a kick out of Dolly’s innocence. When she showed up the first day, she’d memorized the entire script. And then the day that Dolly sang —

**L.T.:** Oh, that was a glorious moment.

**J.F.:** She used her long nails like a washboard and started to sing, “Working 9 to 5. ...” Lily and I looked at each other and we knew: “This is it — we’ve got an anthem.” But I think my favorite shooting experiences were when we had the dead body in the back of the car. We went to the Apple Pan [a diner in Los Angeles] because Dolly wanted to get a cheeseburger, remember?

**L.T.:** Everybody would tell stories about their life, and we just fell in love with each other.

**J.F.:** Our worlds are so different. Our backgrounds are so different. Our senses of comedy — I mean, I don’t really have one.

**L.T.:** Jane was so earnest. She felt so passionate about every activist problem that she was trying to solve. It was inspiring and endearing.

**J.F.:** Since then, we’ve done seven seasons of [the Netflix TV series] “Grace and Frankie” [which ran from 2015 to 2022]. Ten days after we wrapped, we started a movie that we both like a lot called “Moving On.” When that came out [in 2023], I was interested in the reviews — almost every one of them talked about our chemistry. And it was like, “Well, maybe we should always work together.” — *E.R.A.*

Fonda: Hair: Jonathan Hanousek at Exclusive Artists Management. Makeup: David Deleon at Allyson Spiegelman Management. Tomlin: Hair: Darrell Redleaf Fielder at Aim Artists Agency. Makeup: Shelley

Rucker at Aim Artists Agency. On-set producer: Joy Thomas. Photo assistant: Jeremy Eric Sinclair.  
Digital tech: Aron Norman

**MARC JACOBS, FASHION DESIGNER, AND CINDY SHERMAN, ARTIST** Have collaborated on multiple projects for the Marc Jacobs brand, from a 2005 photo book to the spring 2024 campaign.



From left: Jacobs, 61, and Sherman, 70, photographed at Go Studios in Hell's Kitchen, Manhattan, on March 5, 2024. Bon Duke

**MARC JACOBS:** In 2004, I reached out to ask if you'd [be in a Marc Jacobs campaign]. I knew your work very well, and I knew that you'd done an ad in 1984 for [the French fashion brand] Dorothee Bis. That made me think, "Maybe she'd do this with us." I was a little intimidated about asking.

**CINDY SHERMAN:** I was so intimidated that you'd asked. I remember thinking, "I'm going to bring a bunch of wigs and makeup." It was just me for a few shots, but then [the German photographer] Juergen [Teller] got playful and started putting himself in the pictures. He gradually shaved parts of his face and head. He'd started the shoot with a full head of hair and beard; by the end, he was completely bald with no facial hair at all.

**M.J.:** I wasn't there, but I got calls from Juergen saying, "It's [expletive] excellent, it's [expletive] excellent." He says that when he's really excited. You created some hilarious characters. There was one where you were both older, sitting on a bench.

**C.S.:** Rifling through a big bag.

**M.J.:** That image became a billboard on Melrose [Avenue in Los Angeles]. It was great because fashion campaigns like that didn't exist back then. Nobody would've ever said, "That's our ad," because it wasn't exactly selling clothes or bags. But it was exciting.

**C.S.:** What's funny is that you'd asked me, a year or two ago during Covid, to do something — I don't even remember what it was. I'd gained a bit of weight, so I was self-conscious and kept turning you down.

[For the 2024 campaign I ended up doing] some of the outfits were a little tight. The people assisting me said, “We can fix that.” And I said, “No, no, it’s [perfect for] the character.” I guess I could’ve thought of someone who was trying to hide, but I decided, “No, she seems like she could just let it all hang out in her leather pants.” How do you feel when you see different types of women wearing your pieces or putting them together in unusual ways?

**M.J.:** It’s the ultimate validation. Of all the stuff that exists out there, they’re spending their money on something I’ve made. How about you with collectors?

**C.S.:** Sometimes it’s a little weird. I remember an early series of horizontal pictures that I called “The Centerfolds” (1981) — I thought they were kind of disturbing, but some collector said, “I have that one hanging over my bed because it’s so sexy.” And I’m thinking, “Ugh, I don’t want to know that.” But you can’t control what happens to a piece.

**M.J.:** Or what other people see in it. Feedback is part of the equation. It’s like, “I’m not just doing this for me. I need you.” — *E.R.A.*

Production: Prodn. Hair: Tsuki at Streeters. Makeup assistant: Nanase. Photo assistants: John Temonos, Tony Jarum, Logan Khidekel

**CARLOS NAZARIO, STYLIST, AND WILLY CHAVARRIA, FASHION DESIGNER** Have worked together on three collections since 2022.



From left: Nazario, 36, and Chavarria, 56, photographed at Chavarria’s studio in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, on March 18, 2024. Emiliano Granada

**WILLY CHAVARRIA:** Carlos and I would see each other at Calvin Klein [Nazario has styled for the brand; Chavarria was its senior vice president of design from 2021 until 2023], but our first formal meeting was lunch at the Odeon. Like Truman Capote’s swans, we had salads and talked about water and weight loss.

**CARLOS NAZARIO:** It wasn't like we were meeting to discuss a project. That sort of evolved organically.

**W.C.:** I was terrified to ask you to work with me. I remember texting to [see] if you'd style my [fall 2023] show. Do you know what you said? "I thought you'd never ask."

**C.N.:** Willy's work spoke to me in such a profound way. There was such a similarity — if not in aesthetic, definitely in intention. A lot of brands lack depth and a soul. I'm Afro-Latino. I grew up in New York with a certain relationship to how one presents themselves to the world, what glamour means and looks like and how it's communicated. I was always intrigued by how Willy's designs encompassed all those things.

**W.C.:** [The way we collaborate] is so natural and unpretentious. We end up telling a story that we feel good about.

**C.N.:** Every relationship between a stylist and designer is unique. Some designers require a lot more — from research to manufacturing and the show. Others want you to come in right at the end and say, "Let's put that on this model." With Willy, our conversations prior to my first day were conceptual. We talked about what he wanted it to feel like, rather than what he wanted it to look like.

**W.C.:** For that first show together, we wanted the cast — all people of color, many of them queer and trans — to feel elevated and empowered. Marlon [Taylor-Wiles, the show's movement director] was going to have the models look down at the guests.

**C.N.:** At the rehearsal, we were like, "Maybe it's a bit creepy." I wasn't uncomfortable [giving my opinion] because Willy's such an easy person to talk to. But anytime you're coming into a space where everyone has clearly defined roles, you feel like a stepparent. You're a bit like, "Do I discipline the daughter? Do I tell her the skirt's too short?" I didn't want to overstep, but I also wanted to make my presence worth it. As we got more comfortable [with each other], we got more comfortable trying things.

**W.C.:** The next season, we took more risks. We wanted it to feel refined and elegant, but we also wanted to inject a youthfulness.

**C.N.:** At a lot of [brands], it's like, "This season, everything's a miniskirt. If your thighs aren't great, see you in the fall!" Willy's casting allows for a very broad vision in terms of what the styling can do: You'll have someone like me, who's 5-foot-4 [Nazario walked in the fall 2024 show], and then you'll have someone who's 6-foot-4.

**W.C.:** You'll have a woman in her late 50s and a 17-year-old boy.

**C.N.:** Everyone from twinks to daddies. If you tried to dress everyone the same, it'd be a disaster.

**W.C.:** I can suggest something that you don't like, and you'll say, "Let's go with it. Let's see." And I'll do the same. I've worked with stylists who will deliberate over the positioning of a hat for hours. The stress level is so intense, it kills the moment. Having the freedom [to experiment reflects] a levity we want the brand to have. You know, we address serious subjects, like human rights, inclusion ...

**C.N.:** Self-identity. But if we're stressed, everyone's stressed. We try to keep it light, but we also understand the weight of the responsibility. It's rare that you work with people who understand what you're feeling and what you want to convey. And I think our trust lies in that. — *N.H.*

Photo assistants: Eamon Colbert, Jordan Zuppa

**MINK STOLE, ACTRESS, AND JOHN WATERS, FILMMAKER** Have worked together on almost every one of his movies since “Roman Candles” (1967), including “Pink Flamingos” (1972), “Hairspray” (1988) and “A Dirty Shame” (2004).



Videos by Melody Melamed

**MINK STOLE:** John, I’ve just been told your conference line is charging me a penny a minute.

**JOHN WATERS:** Oh, c’mon. I’ve been using it for 20 years. It’s never said that.

**M.S.:** It’s fine. I can handle it.

**T:** How did you two first meet?

**J.W.:** Mink also grew up in Baltimore, although I was friends with her older sister Mary, who now goes by Sique. My memory’s that we met in Provincetown, Mass., right before doing my second movie [the 1967 short] “Roman Candles” [in which Stole plays a party guest who gets spanked]. She was looking to go bad and found the right crowd. Prescott Townsend, one of the first gay radicals, allowed us to live in a tree fort he’d made.

**M.S.:** That was the summer I got introduced to homosexuality.

**J.W.:** Did we take acid that summer?

**M.S.:** I kind of think we did, yeah.

**J.W.:** And then we took it again 50 years later. My mother always used to say, “Don’t tell young people to take drugs.” But I’m not — I’m telling *old* people to. Anyway, we shot “Roman Candles” partly at my parents’ house and, oddly enough, a decade later, you filmed a big scene at that same house, in my parents’ bedroom, when you played [the delusional housewife] Peggy Gravel in “Desperate Living” [1977].



From left: Stole, 76, and Waters, 77, photographed, respectively, at Edge Studios in Mid-Wilshire, Los Angeles, on Feb. 4, 2024, and at Waters's home in Tuscany-Canterbury, Baltimore, on March 7, 2024. Melody Melamed

**M.S.:** We threw a baseball through a window and kind of trashed the place. Your mom was a sport.

**J.W.:** So was yours. Mink and I were arrested [along with three other members of the crew] for conspiracy to commit indecent exposure while making [the 1969 film] "Mondo Trasho." It was in the paper. They printed your poor mother's address.

**M.S.:** We *were* acquitted.

**J.W.:** We'd been filming a scene at Johns Hopkins University with [the actor and drag performer] Divine, in full makeup and a gold lamé top with matching treading pants, in a 1959 red Cadillac convertible with the top down in November. I never asked permission [to shoot]. The police came and we all ran. The fact that we got caught and Divine escaped didn't say a lot for the Baltimore police. Mink played an escaped mental patient; she did a nude tap dance.

**M.S.:** I'd get upset when the press would call us unprofessional because, although it was true that not one of us had ever taken an acting lesson, we were incredibly professional. And none of it was ad-libbed. John wouldn't have tolerated that. He knew every comma, every "and," every "but."

**J.W.:** What's that French term for people who go crazy when they're together?

**M.S.:** "Folie à something"?

**J.W.:** "Folie à famille." Everybody chipped in, and we just went for it.

**T:** Mink, were there any scenes you refused to shoot?

**M.S.:** Before we started filming "Pink Flamingos" [1972, in which Stole plays the proprietor of a black-market baby ring], John very casually said, "Will you set your hair on fire?" And I said, "Yes, that'll look great on film." But then as the moment approached, I panicked.

**J.W.:** I was on pot when I thought of that.

**M.S.:** It would've been great, except that I'd be bald today. I think that's the only thing I ever refused to do.

**T:** What've you learned from each other?

**M.S.:** In the early films, we all acted largely. We spoke in italics. In the later ones, when I'd start to behave that way, John would say, "Take it down." I was shocked [the first time he said it].

**J.W.:** When we made those early movies, I was influenced by the theater of the ridiculous — by cruelty, shouting and craziness. It wasn't them overacting, it was me telling them to overact.

**M.S.:** I have enormous respect for John, and John for me. Aside from the fact that I love him dearly, I don't know where I'd be if I hadn't met him.

**J.W.:** And we've never had the same boyfriend.

**M.S.:** Or wanted the same boyfriend.

**J.W.:** Mink and I have been through a lot together. We've fought, we've made up. I don't trust people who don't have old friends. For me, they outlast family. Mink and I are even going to be buried together in the same graveyard. We call it Disgraceland. — *N.H.*

Waters: Makeup: Cheryl Pickles Kinion. Photo assistants: Daniel Garton, Ashley Poole

**COBY KENNEDY AND HANK WILLIS THOMAS, ARTISTS** Have spent three decades collaborating on public art installations and community-focused projects, including 2023's "Reach," a more than 2,700-pound fiberglass-and-resin sculpture at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport of two hands nearly touching.



From left: Kennedy, 47, and Thomas, 48, photographed at Thomas's studio in East Williamsburg, Brooklyn, on Feb. 28, 2024.  
D'Angelo Lovell Williams



**COBY KENNEDY:** We met on a collaboration, actually. It was the summer of 1992.

**HANK WILLIS THOMAS:** I'd been recruited to work with Coby to renovate the darkroom at Howard University [in Washington, D.C.], where his father [Winston Kennedy] was the chair of the art program. We were in high school. Building a darkroom when you don't really know how — that's kind of the way we've always worked. Back then, Coby was a street writer.

**C.K.:** A graffiti writer, in the parlance of our times. My graffiti and school crews melded into this conglomerate [called] the Earthbound Homies.

**H.W.T.:** This was [during the] peak '90s hip-hop days. The group was [made up of] all these young, primarily Black artists. I wasn't one of them, I was a documenter.

**C.K.:** Hank was in museum studies, while the rest of us were in visual arts. He was very quiet and observant. It felt like he was always regarding you.

**H.W.T.:** The core of our relationship has been fostering opportunities for others to interlace their practices. The Wide Awakes [their most recent art collective, named after a progressive group that supported Abraham Lincoln during the 1860 presidential election] took off in my old studio in December 2019.

**C.K.:** We were trying to plug into society and see how we could influence it. When 2020 happened — the pandemic, the lockdown, the insurrection — we really hit the accelerator with it.

**H.W.T.:** I'd call the Wide Awakes our first public collaboration. But then again, 2016 is when "Reach" [their sculpture at Chicago's O'Hare airport] first started. We're excited to have it be one of the largest public acknowledgments of something we've been doing for 30 years.

**C.K.:** In our collaborations, we kind of fill in each other's gaps.

**H.W.T.:** As a conceptual artist, I have great ideas — a lot of them. Coby, who has a history as an industrial designer and animator, is the bridge between the proposal and how it happens. With virtually every one of my public sculptures, he's done all the initial concepting. He's always had this ability to see what others are thinking. We also have different tastes.

**C.K.:** And they're sometimes at odds with each other, which is one of the best parts [of our working relationship], because I'd hate for both of us to be middle ground.

**H.W.T.:** Coby has a very clear, singular vision, while I create art through consensus. I want to make a statement [so I'm often asking others], "What do you think about it?" I envy Coby's talent. But I also think not having his talent gives me a reliance on other people, which is helpful in the context of making public art.

**C.K.:** I know that he'll tell me the truth about anything I come up with, and he knows that if I have to talk trash about one of his ideas, I'll talk trash about it.

**H.W.T.:** As much as I'd like Coby to think like me, then he wouldn't be him and I wouldn't be me. We allow each other to be who we are. — *N.A.*

**INGAR DRAGSET AND MICHAEL ELMGREEN, ARTISTS** Have worked as the duo Elmgreen & Dragset on more than 90 solo shows and site-specific installations, including a 2005 replica of a Prada store near Marfa, Texas, since 1995.



From left: Dragset, 54, and Elmgreen, 62, photographed at their studio in Neukölln, Berlin, on Feb. 7, 2024. Julia Sellmann

**INGAR DRAGSET:** We met at After Dark, the only gay club at the time in Copenhagen, in 1994. I was 24 and Michael was 32. I thought he looked amazing — he had this Dennis Rodman-style hair that was bleached with baroque black patterns on it. We both had big Dr. Martens boots and were much grungier than the rest of the crowd.

**MICHAEL ELMGREEN:** The club was a classic disco — a lot of blown-out hair and Gloria Gaynor. It wasn't difficult to spot each other.

**I.D.:** We got more than a little tipsy. When we both started to walk home, we realized that we lived not only in the same neighborhood but in the same building. That was the beginning of our 10-year romantic relationship. The artistic collaboration started eight months later, a little bit by accident. I was doing theater at the time.

**M.E.:** I was writing poetry and experimenting with texts that would morph in front of people's eyes on IBM computers. To my surprise, I was considered a visual artist.

**I.D.:** Michael got invited to do an exhibition in Stockholm. He had the idea of creating abstract pets that people could cuddle, but he didn't know how to make them. And I said, "Well, I'm good at knitting." So that's how the collaboration started.

**M.E.:** The Swedes are, as we know, a bit stiff; they were terrified about interacting with the artwork. So we were sitting in [opposite] corners with these knitted pets, cuddling them, and people thought it was a performance.

**I.D.:** That accidental performance inspired us to do more. The next one was a piece where I was furiously knitting at one end of a very long white cloth while Michael was unraveling everything from the other end. That should tell you a bit about our partnership.

**M.E.:** When we were coupled, we were almost the same size in clothes, so we even shared socks, we shared bank accounts, all our friends.

**I.D.:** We had one email account, one cellphone.

**M.E.:** Starting a new chapter after we split up was like meeting again, workwise. We had separate lives for some hours of the day. Suddenly, you could bring in exciting things that the other hadn't experienced.

**I.D.:** It was a very difficult time. We put most things on hold, but we had one exhibition that would've been hard to cancel: a solo show at Tate Modern [in London]. In a big room with a window overlooking the Thames, we added another windowpane and, in between the panes, we had an animatronic but very realistic-looking sparrow that seemed to be gasping for life and flapping its wings, and nobody could help it.

**M.E.:** I think the beauty of it all was that we dared to stop being boyfriends because we knew we wouldn't lose each other. Today, it'd be impossible to say who came up with what idea. It's not two half authorships. It's like this imaginary third persona in between us that we feed — an invisible genius kid who's much, much younger, brighter and more charming than either of us. He's creating the artworks.  
— *J.H.*

**BOBBI SALVÖR MENEZ, ACTOR, AND MICHAEL BAILEY-GATES, ARTIST** Have collaborated on dozens of performances and photography projects throughout their decade-long friendship.



From left: Menez, 30, and Bailey-Gates, 30, photographed at Smashbox Studios in Culver City, Calif., on Feb. 1, 2024. Joyce Kim

**BOBBI SALVÖR MENEZ:** I curated a 2014 show at [the Brooklyn exhibition space] Muddguts that was part of a series in which I invited people who didn't always make performance work to create something in a performance context. We'd been in a group show together before and had mutual friends, and I was excited about the work I was seeing Michael make.

**MICHAEL BAILEY-GATES:** It was me, Bobbi and maybe two or three other people. I had this party trick of being able to talk really fast, like an auctioneer. When I said certain phrases, one of them would stand up, and another would scream at the top of their lungs or throw an object at someone.

**B.S.M.:** It felt like the beginning of us making things together on the fly. We both had this down-to-get-into-it energy that was well matched.

**M.B.G.:** We shared an urgency to make work come to life. Sometimes it's as simple as being a body for another person. I've been the lead in Bobbi's performances, and I've been in the background, lying on a floor covered in red paint. Performance art in New York at the time was about executing an idea without a lot of money. These days, I don't go into a shoot thinking we're performing, but it's very much that: The camera is the audience looking back at us.

**B.S.M.:** Michael has this ability to see the kaleidoscopic possibility of someone's self-expression. Around 2018, I was out as nonbinary to my close friends and finding my new name. I took a break from auditions and started working part-time as a substitute teacher. When a film I'd shot the year before got into [the 2019] Sundance [Film Festival], it was an invitation to step back into the spotlight. I'd shaved my head and was nervous about that formal, public coming-out moment. It just felt so cringe. I went to Los Angeles before going to Sundance and made some pictures with Michael that were only for us. Those were the first images of Bobbi that entered the world.

**M.B.G.:** I never want to make a picture of somebody that's not reflective of them. I've chosen in my practice to always focus on a small group of friends, and those collaborations are the grounding force of my work. Without them, what would my pictures be? They'd be something less precious. — *C.R.*

Makeup: Zenia Jaeger at Streeters using Submission Beauty. Hair assistant: Drew Martin. Production: Resin Projects. Photo assistants: Michael Preman, Jack Buster

These interviews have been edited and condensed.

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/04/18/t-magazine/jane-fonda-lily-tomlin-marc-jacobs.html>