

MODEL BEHAVIOUR?

OUTSPOKEN. OUTLANDISH. OUTRAGEOUS. THE SELF-PROCLAIMED 'FIRST SUPERMODEL OF THE WORLD,' JANICE DICKINSON, TELLS IT LIKE IT IS WITH MORE FIERY OPINIONS THAN IMELDA MARCOS HAS SHOES. EXPLORING THE POLITICAL STRUGGLES BEHIND THE RUNWAY, THE ORIGINAL MODEL/DIVA DELIVERS THE HARSH REALITY ON BREAKING, MAKING AND FAKING IT IN THE CATWALK JUNGLE

When I first arrived on the fashion scene, I was used to knocking on the doors of the likes of major agencies (such as Ford and Wilhelmina) and being turned down because my look was not your typical blond, blue-eyed beauty. Atrocious, racist remarks about my lips being "too ethnic" came in truckloads. Today, my "bee-stung lips" are now so popular that millions were spent last year on Botox, collagen and whatever other crap people are injecting into their forehead, lips and eyes to get The Look. To know now that I have paved the way for these exotic beauties only adds to my inner joy daily.

How politically correct do you think it was when Eileen Ford said that my "ethnic look" would never fly with the people in the sticks? Thousands of magazine covers later, she had to take on a new belief in my appearance even though I still politically rub her the wrong way. Being hired as a token brunette was all I ever heard, so I developed a politically incorrect, defiant attitude that people misread as diva behaviour.

While growing up in southern Florida, I attended a high school with mostly African-American students, and the experience opened my mind completely. Ironically, I had a racist father who hated everyone and he was my only homegrown male influence. It's a miracle I didn't come out of the womb wearing a white hood and carrying a burning cross.

Let's face it: the monotony of ad executives and agents has tarnished the fashion industry. Finally, *Vogue* and *Women's Wear Daily* have begun to use models again on their covers and inside their editorials instead of celebrities. How boring is it to look through a glossy magazine and see a fat-assed Renée Zellweger in couture even if she *can* afford it? Or Julia Roberts being shot by Steven Meisel? I need to see Linda Evangelista shot by Meisel.

I need to put the supermodels back where they belong. The film studios are dictating to the magazines which star graces the covers according to which films they have coming out that month. Back in my day, it was me, Iman, Christy, Kelly LeBrock, Kelly Erberg, Rosie Vela, Patti Hansen and Beverly Johnson. That was it. We reigned for five years in the magazines and ads, on the runways and as spokespeople. Now, the only model you see worth her Leonardo DiCaprio ass is not even American. Brazilian beauty Gisele Bundchen? Please! There are hundreds of more deserving beauties out there! But it seems in America, the girl-next-door is still your blond, blue-eyed WASP chick. Take that, Tyra Banks!

Speaking of politics, let's address the genius gay men who have made my career possible as well as thousands of other models through the years that have since passed away and/or been forgotten. Such geniuses as Way Bandy, Isidra Suga, Barry McKinley, Joe McDonald, Halston, Victor Hugo and Steve Rubell have all given us so much. Even now, I find it appalling that not enough is being done to fight the AIDS crisis, so to this day, I donate whatever spare time I have to this cause. When AIDS first broke out, no one wanted to deal with any artists that came down with it. Models refused to work with hairstylists, manicurists, makeup artists, photographers and anyone else involved in a shoot. Disgusted with the industry of the time, I gave my crown to Cindy Crawford and moved to Italy. Because of the AIDS crisis and how it affected my life, I became one of the first voices for gay men afflicted with AIDS, making me today, a gay icon.

Elite was devastated about my departure. Come to think of it, they were probably glad, seeing that I never paid them a red cent of commission. It was truly a privilege to be the world's first supermodel. I know this sounds conceited, but at least I wasn't a pervert like some agents who would screw underage models — not exactly politically correct, wouldn't you say, even for the disco era? In reality, I pulled covers and blasted model rates to what they are today. Where's my Christmas card, Naomi?

The politics of fashion has not changed much since my day. Race and the model's right to be on the cover of a magazine are still prevalent. Bravo to Tyra Banks, who hired me for my voice and thirty years of experience. Some people don't respond to brutal honesty. I don't give a rat's ass. You can kiss my ass.

A friend of mine who is an editor at *Jane* magazine recently informed me that the industry has now become so serious. Please, it has always been freaked out in some way, shape or form. Take Calvin Klein, for example, who still won't speak to me after I wrote my first book, *No Lifeguard on Duty*, and ratted him out for having no idea that selling stupid underwear is not an original idea. And he's still pissed that on a shoot in Tokyo for an Istanbul department store, I accidentally swallowed Quaaludes instead of what I thought was vitamin C. Got a little too loaded for the clients. Sorry, Calvin baby. I also feel sorry for guys like Tom Ford, who had to conform to the likes of big corporations and who has no voice. Maybe he should call me. I can give him some pointers and I don't even need any exchanges for clothes. Ha, ha, ha.



Talk about power! Not only was I paid astronomical sums of money for advertising, I was flown on the Concorde, provided with cocaine by blond Italian designers to keep me going on shoots and dated major A-list actors and rock stars. Forget the list of who's who — buy my books (my other one is *Everything about Me Is Fake...and I'm Perfect*). I've been given furs, jewellery, show tickets, anything for work. After being torn down in the beginning, only to rise as the legend I am now, I'm still here, baby.

This is my message to the girls today: Come out strong. Believe in yourself no matter what bigotry or close-mindedness comes your way. If you can be as strong as I was, you too could be the world's next supermodel. I'll do my part to get you girls back on the covers of magazines, like it should be. I hate the word "survivor" because making it as a model was never a matter of surviving; it was a matter of destiny for me. I, from day one, have lived and breathed the art that is image-making. As long as the air is alive with the essence of true art, I will keep living. Legendary photographer Sir Norman Parkinson used to point out to models that he thought 'had it all' and say, "She can fly and fly." Norman, baby, I'm still flying! □