

# UNCANNY FASHIONS

It's not just that there is a new wave of fashion film-making, using computer games engines and exploded notions of illustration to deliver uncanny surfaces and depths. **ZOE TAYLOR** examines the work of **REED + RADER** and **QUENTIN JONES**, image-makers shifting the ground around bodies and brands



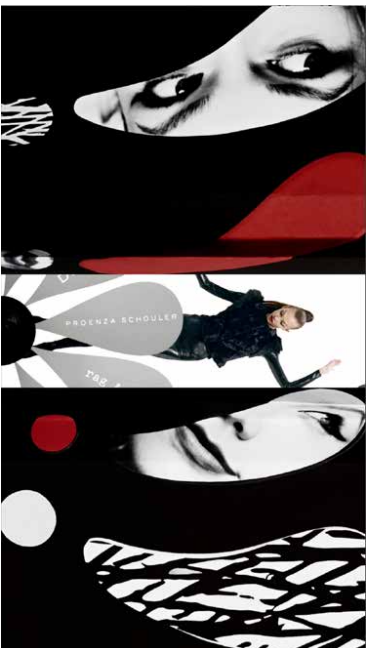
STYLING: CATHYAN MAH  
 Quentin Jones, Annee Johnson, and 15 mixed media, courtesy of the artist



Quantin Jones, 2012, commissioned by House of Wraiths and Mothbats



Kenaz Perle, Quantin Jones, 2012, commissioned by Kenaz



Holding 24, Quantin Jones, 2012, commissioned by Norman Marnett and Target

“A seemingly endless array of creative, moving formations”



Here Comes Halloween, Reed + Rader, 2013, commissioned by V Magazine



Do You Like Soap Mashed?, Reed + Rader, 2013, V Magazine



Tail and Trunko, Reed + Rader, 2013, V Magazine

“The promise of augmented reality takes this idea of manipulating the self to the next level”

A model stands in a field of flowers, her eyes closed and her arms held high. Pearls float around her, suspended in mid-air. It's a romantic vision, but the scene feels unreal; although she seems to have been photographed and is motionless, the camera pans around her, locating her in a three-dimensional environment. It's a slightly unnerving effect, as if one could move around inside the frozen world.

Made as a fashion film for *V Magazine's* online platform, *FLORZENS* p.15 inserts 3D captures of the model into a computer-generated landscape built using *Movie and Unreal Engine*, programs ordinarily used by games developers. This manipulation of games software to suggest fantastical narratives epitomises the recent fashion films of Reed + Rader, celebrated as among the most fun and inventive practitioners of the form. The uncanny effect of much of their recent work – which juxtaposes movement and stillness, photographic and simulated reality – is undoubtedly also part of its appeal.

Now based in Brooklyn, the artist couple Pamela Reed and Matthew Rader met at Pittsburgh Art Institute and, after collaborating for a few years, became Reed + Rader in 2005. Although they have always been obsessed with fashion, they first met through their shared interest in large-format Polaroid photographs. By the time Polaroid ceased film production in 2008, Reed + Rader had decided to focus instead on imagery designed specifically for the web, excited by the possibilities it offered for sound, movement and interactivity.

During their show at London's Protein Gallery in 2012, Pamela Reed said, “Our work combines fun with technology... We get bored really quickly. We constantly want to do and learn the newest thing, so it's always about staying on top of what's new in technology and exploring that.”

In 2013, they launched what is widely considered the first fashion film generated by a games engine – *Breez New 10/10/10*, in which their sweeping “virtual camera” explores a simulated desert circus where live-action models wearing vintage Westwood and Chloé Dior piece as performers. *Breez New 10/10/10* features a variety of textures to focus on and the performers, this world has been hand-scripted by us.” Reed + Rader said on its release. Games engines not only enable them to create and control any 3D environment they can imagine, but they also allow for dynamic camera movements and perspectives that would be impossible (or at least very difficult) in a real-life shoot.

Describing how fashion film has re-energised fashion communications, the academic Nilgün Yusufof writes: “It allows filmmakers to create images of fashion that speak, move, enrage, transport and challenge the viewer in a myriad of ways... akin to the impact of the music video in the 1980s when MTV added a new layer to music with short, fast-moving visual narratives with fashion film, it is the internet that has created for audiences a home and a space for fashion film.” Yusufof notes that the British Fashion Council has witnessed a steep rise in the numbers of emerging filmmakers who are coming from all disciplines from graphic design to fine art”. Among her list of the form's established stars is Quantin Jones.

Jones was raised in London and studied philosophy at Cambridge before gaining an MA in Illustration at Central St Martins. She says that the methodology of working out problems through logic has been useful when solving visual problems. This sense of control is no more evident than in her most chaotic films, in which layers of images flip, cut, spin and splash their way on to the screen, lighting for our attention. Exotic birds, cats, stripes, graffiti and gestural letter forms abound in a seemingly endless array of images, each one a different approach to the same approach, and she often turns the camera on herself, using her own image as raw material. Her gridded and collaged photographs also frequently appear in print editorials. She has suggested that her work is in demand because the boldness and rawness of her illustrations complement fashion photography well.

Jones's stop-motion fashion films initially gained recognition through a series of collaborations with *Another.com*, starting in 2010. Where the majority of Reed + Rader's work has taken the form of online editorials for forward-looking lifestyle magazines with large teen followings (such as *V Magazine*, *Teen* and *Pop*), which give them real freedom to explore their vision, Jones has gone on to work with other major fashion brands, including luxury brands such as Chanel and Louis Vuitton, refining her approach to suit the varying identities of each client. In conversation with Mariel Reed of *Not Just a Label*, she said, “Branding needs to be explicitly linked to enforcing a logo, or a tagline. It can be about creating a mood around a collection, or winning over a new audience.”

Some have suggested that it is Jones's combination of fine art and pop cultural references – ranging from the Czech stop-motion animator Jan Svankmajer (known for his dark sense of humour), Dada collageists such as Hannah Hoch and expressive painters such as Marlene Dumas and Robert Motherwell – that makes her work distinctive. Using paper masks and body paint, she seems to share Reed + Rader's interest in masquerade. Vintage circus imagery, clown faces and scenes of the carnage frequently appear in her work, and Jones seems to share with Reed + Rader a delight in what technology can offer.

All three artists have expressed a desire to disrupt the status quo of fashion film, to take a more imaginative and playful approach to the form. As Rader said to Dazed: “Fashion films can be cool, but most are just a behind the scenes. It's so easy to press a button and record an HD video. We hate that.” And all three juxtapose photography with the “made or illustrated images, forging distinctive styles that are arresting even among the myriad moving images that crowd the internet.”

Considering Reed + Rader's recent work alongside the proliferation of glibly 3D-scanned models now regularly appearing both in the pages of magazines and online, I am reminded of the words of the fashion designer Catherine Malabou, who has written about the impact of digital culture's sophisticated fashion's fantastical images, “ending at the very centre of the contemporary, can also unconsciously voice its anxieties, especially those associated with the body and the self during periods of rapid economic and technological change. Exacted by the possibilities for interactivity, Reed + Rader seem to be addressing this indirectly in setting up a creative studio to explore the potential of virtual reality.” They have said previously that, “Fashion has always been about identity and masquerade. The promise of augmented reality takes this idea of manipulating the self and amplifies it to the next level.”

In works such as *FLORZENS*, Reed + Rader offer us a kind of technological sublime, an experience that, despite the artists' emphasis on fun, carries with it an element of fear as well as wonder. This feeling was summed up by the artist in a recent *Time* magazine interview when he called *FLORZENS*, “the type of paper-theatrical fashion video that makes us see the singularity on the horizon.” Whether or not their films do evoke the moment when humans, machines, reality and virtual reality converge, they fascinate us with the new possibilities of technology, both awesome and apocalyptic. ■

Reed + Rader's next interactive work,

*Dubstep Dinosaur's 3D* should be launching in February. See work in progress here:

[www.iamquantin.com/tag/dubstepdinosaur3d/](http://www.iamquantin.com/tag/dubstepdinosaur3d/)

quantin Jones: [jofb.net/matradar.com](http://jofb.net/matradar.com)

“The promise of augmented reality takes this idea of manipulating the self to the next level”



# INTERVIEW WITH REED+RADER

**ZR:** *m.v.a.d.* What draws you to fashion?

**RD + R:** We use fashion to costume our characters in the stories we tell.

**ZR:** What led you to start using games engines to make fashion films?

**R:** We've been using elements of gaming engines in our project for a number of years, but now that the work has become more 3D oriented, we use gaming engines in every project we do. We've always created worlds with our work, and gaming engines allow us to completely invent camera angles in post-production and even have users walk around our worlds with their own avatars. It's not so much that they're on the edge of breaking out into the mainstream, we feel like we're on the edge of a future where gaming engines aren't just used for games but for movies, theater, live-jogging and other kinds of interactive art where you're a character with presence walking around a

CGI environment for some sort of story. Fashion films are just the beginning for us.

**ZR:** What are your favorite video games?

**R:** All time: *Super Mario World*, *Final Fantasy 3*, *Bioshock*, *The Fighters*, *Animal Crossing* and *Civilization*. Currently: *The Last of Us* and *Persona X*.

**ZR:** Do you feel that redefining the games' look is important to your work?

**R:** From GIFs and videos to hand-cut-out paper collages, games have always been a huge inspiration for our work. Right now we're being gaming engines like *Unreal Engine 4* and *Blender* for the art things we do, which makes it difficult to separate "gaming" from what we are doing. We do have some interest in making actual games but right now we're just using the platform to make videos and interactive installations. Graphics are catching up fast, so unless it's in-

fantional it's going to be increasingly difficult to separate photography from CGI.

**ZR:** Your work often plays with stillness and movement to create an uneasy effect.

**R:** This is why everyone calls our work "creepy." We tend to analyze our visual. Sometimes it's for aesthetic reasons to highlight a certain subject and other times, especially with GIFs, it's for technical limitations.

**ZR:** How do you develop ideas for characters and narratives?

**R:** Ideas are a collaborative effort between us two. We have an ongoing idea board that we both scribble ideas on to remember. Sometimes one of us will see an idea on the board, write down more info for that, and then it'll become a full-blown project. When it comes to commissions, we have multiple brainstorming meetings where we say anything that comes to our mind, no matter how crazy or unreachable due to job constraints (machine budget). From there, we talk characters, technology needed and what's the goal (storyline) of the project.

**ZR:** What role does body-scanning play in your recent work?

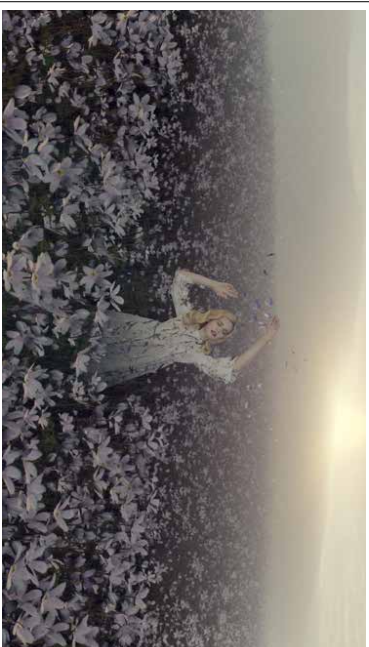
**R:** Creating 3D environments is one thing, but to really make it work you need to go through the tedious process of motion-matching video to the 3D camera angle. Otherwise, video characters just look like cardboard cutouts. The next step is 3D models from body scans. The fidelity of 3D scans these days is getting pretty amazing. You can especially see it in big budget AAA games like *NBA 2K15* or *The Last of Us*. The facial scans are almost true to life. We've been playing around with much lower resolution scans in our work for a while. This past year, we did a project called *Scanner* where we used scanned bodies with a Microsoft Kinect and before that we did *Splatters* with facial scans from photos.

**ZR:** Can you say more about your research with virtual reality programs and your plans for future projects?

**R:** Right now, we are wrapping up the sequel to our project *Distarp Dinosaurs*. It's called *Distarp Dinosaurs 3D* and should be launching in February. We've been working on it for almost a year and we've been busy ourselves with motion capture, 3D modeling, rigging and texturing—not to mention building the entire environment. Where the original *Distarp Dinosaurs* was a composited video, this follow-up has a completely sculpted 3D environment along with 3D characters. This project is so many new things for us and has been a long time coming, so we're excited to get it out there!

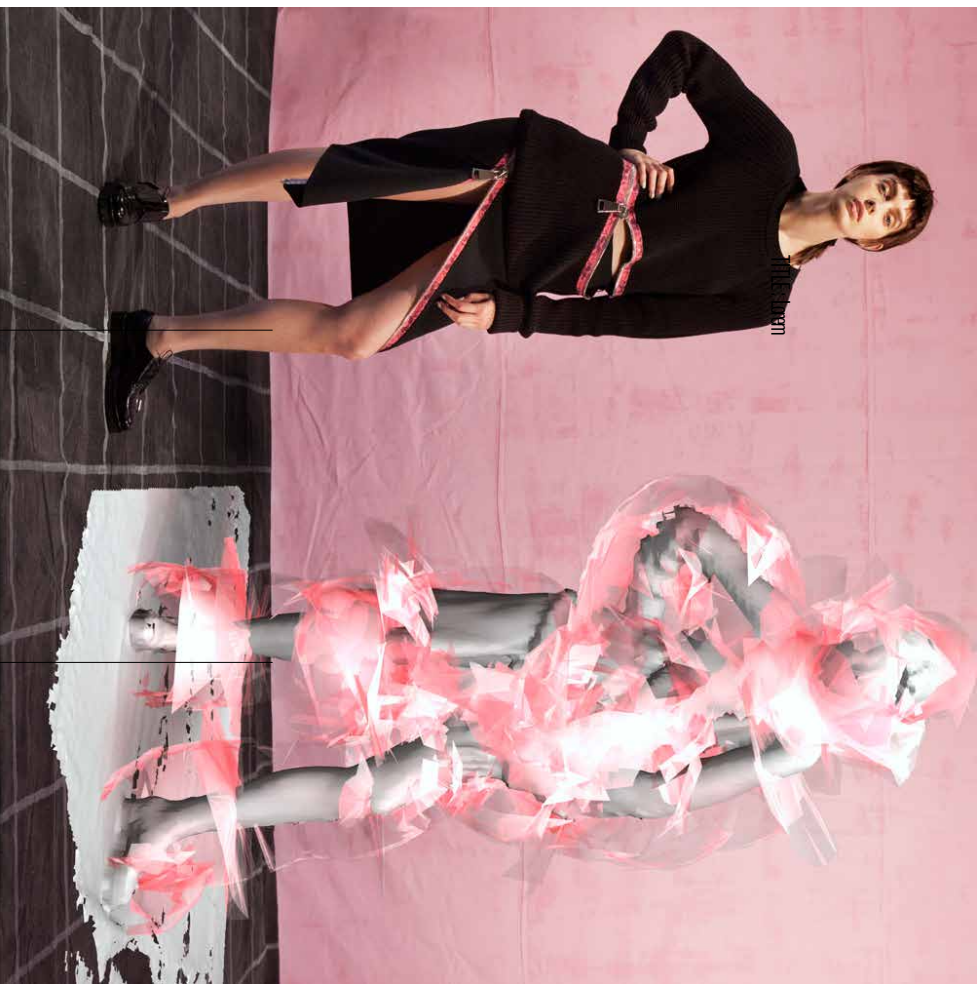


*Bioshock New World*, Reed + Rader, 2014, commissioned by V Magazine



*Distarp Dinosaurs 3D*, Reed + Rader, 2014

“We feel like we’re on the edge of a future where gaming engines aren’t just used for games”



*Scamers*, Reed + Rader, 2014, commissioned by V Magazine