



PLAID SHIRT BY NICHOLAS K AND SHIRT AND JEANS BY JOE'S JEANS

# THE ORGIASTIC EDUCATION OF JAMES FRANCO

written by **Marc-Edouard Leon** foreword by **Matthew Bedard** artwork a collaboration between James Franco and Adarsha Benjamin

ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: CLARK PHILLIPS, BRUCE CHEUNG, AND CAMILO FUENTEALBA. STYLING: PALOMA PEREZ AT HELLASTYLE.COM. MAKEUP, HAIR, AND GROOMING: JORDAN BREE LONG AT EAMGMT.COM USING DIOR.

WOOL PLAID JACKET, PLAID BUTTON-DOWN, AND LACE-UP BOOTS BY GUCCI AND JEANS BY JOE'S JEANS. GROUP WEARS ALEXANDER MCQUEEN. JEAN PAUL GAULTIER. DUNHILL. JOE'S JEANS. GUESS. GYPSY 05. CONVERSE. AND AMERICAN APPAREL.

# THE PERFORMER REINTERPRETS MICHAEL MCCCLURE'S THE BEARD AND NICHOLAS RAY'S REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE

PLAID SHIRT BY SANDRO  
AND DENIM PANTS BY JOE'S JEANS



CHECK MILITARY SHIRT BY JOE'S JEANS, DISTRESSED PANTS BY DIESEL BLACK GOLD, AND SHOES BY GUCCI.



JAMES FRANCO'S ASS STARES AT ME FROM MY DESKTOP. IT ALMOST FARTS in my face. It feels like it wants to. Like it's wanted to for weeks. But alas, this two-dimensional ass can't blast any audible sass. It's simply a photo, intended for our art cover—its gassy desires aren't relevant. Of relevance is: how did we get here? How did *Flaunt* Magazine find itself a participant, throughout kept at an usual arm's length, in the multiplicitous James Franco off-the-backlot artistry—what some amidst the fray might call an egoistic cluster-fuck, but what we'll call a modern portrait of an ambitious man of means—onto not one, but two covers?

It begins with Franco's visit to *Flaunt* headquarters. He enters, he sits, he's handsome. We tell him we want to avoid the film work and accentuate the artistry, that we'd like him, the contemporary artist, to execute the rare act of collaborating with our cover one contributor, and that he should have a creative voice on the inside shoot as well. Franco mentions Rob Pruitt as a potential cover one collaborator, whom we adore and featured in our magazine years ago. Fabulous. Franco then suggests David Benjamin Sherry, an art photographer, for the inside images, whom we feel is also fabulous, but would he consider renowned photographer and long-time *Flaunt* contributor Jack Pierson? The combination of Franco-Pruitt-Pierson would be a coup for the ages, in our humble opinion. Sure, he tells us. [This didn't happen. Pierson was lopped from the action after some failed communication between Pierson and someone Franco appointed to failfully communicate with Pierson on his behalf. There might have even been some squabble about Pierson's intention to photograph Franco in the buff—to the point where Pierson offered his own on-camera nudity if Franco was game. Still, a wash. Later, we learn Franco's David Benjamin Sherry concept has walked to *Vice*-light *Wooooo* Magazine.]

Weeks go by. There's arguments with managers [Miles Levy,

you're a gentleman and a peacekeeper for your continued calming of our EIC, our Editor-in-Chief]. There's location changes, friends of Franco are given principle creative responsibilities in the cover shoot, and there is an unwillingness to involve us in the art act that writer/director Marc-Edouard Leon will explain in saucy detail shortly. Meanwhile, after Franco's *Planet of the Apes* makes a splash, he picks up the reigns again on his previous fall's conundrum—a role on daytime's *General Hospital*—even an opening at Terence Koh's ASS gallery in NYC's Chinatown, which sees the plug mysteriously pulled five days into it following speculation that one of the elements Franco references in the show, Rob Lowe, put the litigious hammer down. This, while Franco inches toward more collegiate degrees—this time around at RISD and somewhere else expensive, competitive, lauded, and likely requiring at least weekly attendance from its students (for a full scholarly bio, refer to the film title-free bio he supplied for the Contributors page).

He's a busy guy, James Franco. We get that. Still, what caused the stiff arm to *Flaunt*'s proverbial facemask from the Palo Alto jock? Pierson's suggestion he show a little skin in the photos (I needn't hammer on the irony that his ass is on our cover here)? The relentless ESL emails from our EIC asking for an ETA? Mr. Franco's needing to hold all the cards? It's difficult to say. The lesson is: don't say. Just observe. For this is what we do to actors. And actors, as a column in the back of this mag illumines, have long sought to rid themselves of their vain and consumerist descriptors—to watch them foray into "fine art" is a spectacle worthy of popcorn, not heady analysis.

When told I could not participate in the Franco-directed Chateau Marmont film shoot, part of Franco's forthcoming *Rebel* exhibit, of which Leon will expound upon down the page—to "give the magazine a voice,"

as stated by said EIC—I received, from that EIC, a text message: *I am so disappointed at myself. I was played Like a fool. I have been taken away the last of joy I have in this business. Sad day. Xoxo*

Rather dramatic, sure, but nevertheless, the results of our labors. I, personally, wasn't so miffed, but when the content for the shoot rolled in—again, its creative team not determined by the magazine—I wished things had played out differently, that I'd perhaps been there, as an editor. To do what, though? Holler "Stop!?" Tell him to not read Michael McClure's *The Beard* with a bunch of unrecognizable sycophants at some schoolhouse near the Chelsea Piers? It's hard to say. Hell, before I'd known it, I'd probably have been hanging doodles for an opening.

But it's all good, truly. We're pleased with Leon's tale. We've got our "exclusive photos." We sought to elevate Franco's presence in magazines, and perhaps we have? Whatever the case, enjoy, now, a brief Q&A, sent to Franco via email and returned by his assistant, er, collaborator, which aims to get at a few things, and sees itself shape-shifted into something almost resembling his art—a journey of dalliances, compass-less and perhaps saying something, perhaps saying nothing at all.

*Your recent work (self-referential, video video-ing the video-er, etc.), much like that described by Nicolas Bourriaud and practiced by Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, seems to invoke relational aesthetics, an inclusion/participation of the viewer—'You're as much a part of this as I am,' so to speak. Still, you seem to be quite selective with who that viewer should be, and how that participant should contribute. Are you interested in including the public, or someone at random, in your work? Why or why not?*

The work we did for *Rebel* is not really relational in the sense that we included audience participation during the creation of the work. Everyone

included in the projects was a chosen collaborator, or creator, or performer. I don't think we ever randomly selected people off the street. But in most of the projects there are multiple perspectives of the work: seeing the work being created by the creator, seeing the work on different formats (photos, paintings, video, 8mm film, sculptures), seeing the work juxtaposed in order to give new understanding about how things are connected. This work does try to reach out to the audience. It is inspired by film. The seeds for the project come from the film world, but that material is restructured and reinterpreted so that the interaction with the audience is not standard. It provides new ways to think about this kind of material. I like including the public in work, I like interactive art, but the creation of this art was not interactive. When it is presented it will be a little more interactive in the sense that an audience won't sit down in a theater to watch this material. It will be presented in a fractured way so that the audience will be surrounded by it. *This type of art mentioned—that of relational aesthetics—typically opens the artist to a certain kind of vulnerability. The art is not invite-only, for instance, and a "participant" could walk out, decry the work openly, or even alter the unscripted process. Your situation is different, though. Coming from a position of ultra exclusion—that of celebrity, Hollywood, handsomeness, and institutional academics, intelligentsia—where is your artistic vulnerability?*

I want to pull back the curtain, because what goes on behind the scenes is often more interesting and informative. We are so used to presenting films and art that are polished and impenetrable—they are well-crafted to the point that there is no messiness, and in some senses, not quite human. In our digital age, anything can be accomplished with the computer. Anything can look good. I want to show the little humans with their little messy feelings underneath all the polish. I want to show the humans at work, fucking

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COTTON  
SHIRT BY GUESS



up, trying, doing the best they can with their less than perfect abilities. I also like to feel the material of the work. I don't want the material to fade away. I am not trying to transport the viewer to a different place, and I want the viewer to be confronted by the form as well as the content. Because I come from the film world, I think a tighter connection is made between this work and my professional acting work. The commentary about the way we view mainstream film and art is stronger because of my place in the film business. *There is, amongst those paying attention, a sense that you're in collaboration with nearly everyone, that you seem to be laterally working*

*Your Chateau piece, and a number of other recent works, like that shown briefly at ASS, seem to employ 'shock' value (gender bending, sexual hijinks, debauchery). Still, we are arguably in a culture of 'nothing's shocking,' or 'post-shock.' Do you feel like the shock you exercise is more a product of your position as an acting icon—someone who appears in a Disney film, for instance?*  
We are post-shock in a sense, but it all depends on context. Anything can be found on the internet, but when you take something that is familiar in one context and manipulate it, and put it in a new context, it can be a shock because it defies its former categorization. That is the kind

Baron Cohen. What is confusing is that I'm an actor in mainstream film and the people that usually comment on mainstream film are idiots, and they don't try to think outside of their pop-culture commentaries. It's so easy to criticize contemporary art from the outside: 'Douglas Gordon slowed down *Psycho* so it's 24-hours long? That's easy! I can do that.' That's how the morons in the blogosphere try to critique my work. But the great thing about it is, is that their critiques are part of my work. I like that they are confused. I like that they make fun of what I'm doing. It's a beautiful reflection of where our culture is at the moment.

want them. But in the realm of art, I don't want to be confined. Film has traditionally been a mainstream commercial medium and that means that it is constrained by the desires of the market. A project like *Rebel* can use material similar to that of the film world without the same kind of expectations for remuneration. I don't know if I am rebelling against anything as much as I think defying expectations and creating new connections between things is beautiful and meaningful. *Finally, are you having fun?*  
This is very fun.



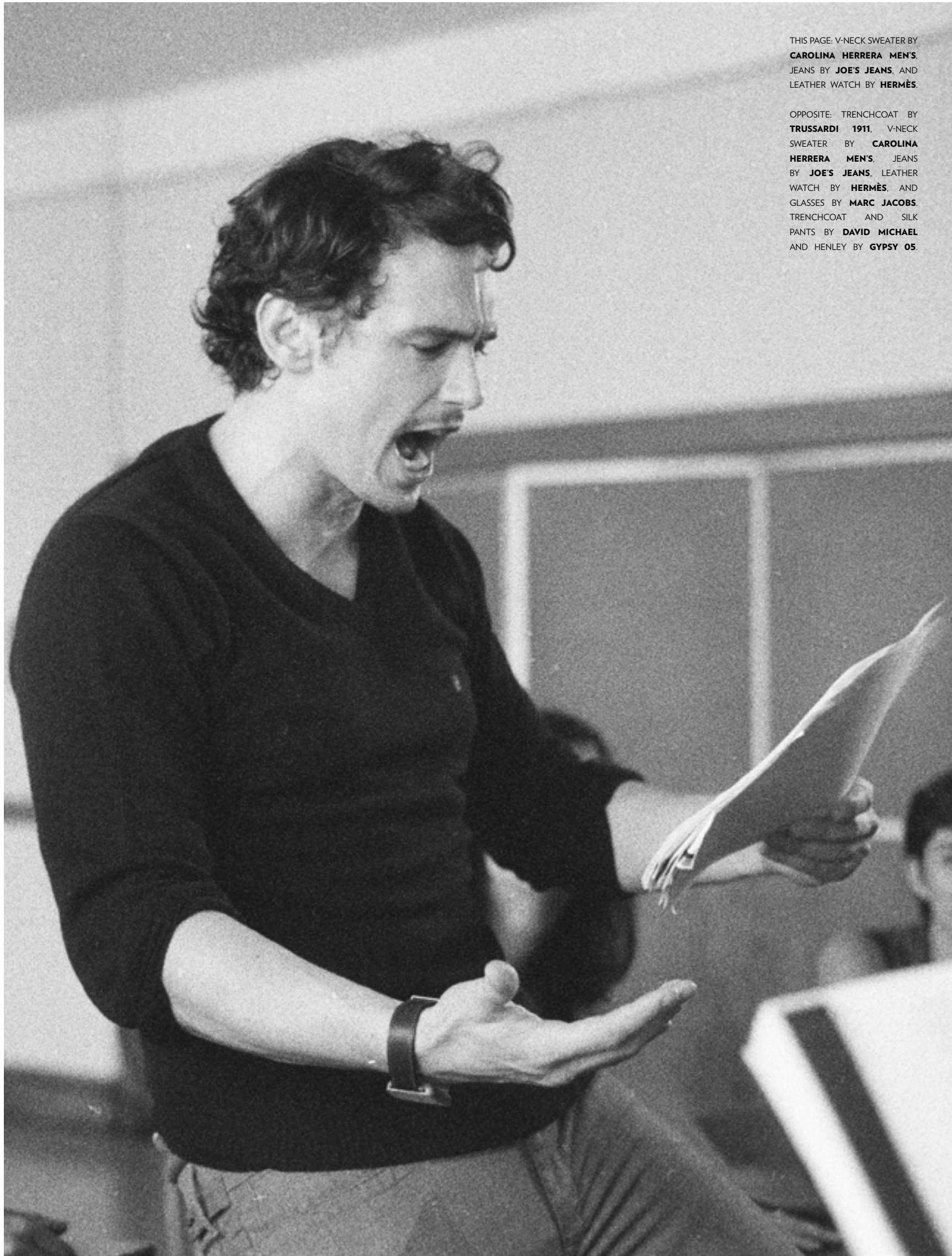
*with heaps of typically high-profile, achieved persons, as well as those unknown to the industry. How do you determine your collaborators?*  
I have learned to collaborate from my experience in the film world. As an actor, one is always collaborating—acting in film is a collaborative exercise. When I started directing and writing my own films, I found that I was lazy when I was writing material based on my own experiences, but when I adapted a previous work (a novel, or a poem, or a biography), I would feel such a great sense of responsibility that I would work 10 times as hard as I usually would. In addition, the collaborations would pull me away from what I knew and show me new worlds. I feel like I am a better interpreter than creator. I like to gather material and experience and temper it, and collaboration is great for that. I look for collaborators that I look up to, because they will make me better. I try not to have an ego about the work. I try to make it the best that I can, and if that means working with someone more experienced and not getting full credit for the final product, that is fine with me. I also like to collaborate with people that are less experienced than I am, because they are usually eager and have tons of energy. That is why I teach as well. I want collaborators who are hungry, and it doesn't matter as much if they are not very experienced, as long as they are open and dedicated and have the right attitude.

of shock that I'm interested in—not shocking content, but defamiliarizing juxtapositions and redefinitions. I want to look underneath things, to show things in new lighting, in order make new sense of them. *There are certainly disaffected themes at play in your work (this includes your fiction writings in addition to your visual/performance pieces). Would you agree? What, to you, is disaffect?*  
The work is disaffected only because things (film, video, books, mass culture) have been proceeding along steady lines for a long time. Mass culture is shoved down our throats—it has become our lives, so I turn around and use it in my work. Mass culture has infiltrated my being. My childhood memories are filled with movies, songs, commercials, and television shows, so I consider it all material to use in my work. If it comes off disaffected, it's part of me trying to shirk the rules that are imposed on me as both a person living in this age and as a performer that is a part of mass culture. *Those who have critiqued your work in the last couple years seem to express a lot of confusion at what's going on—surely, much of which is to do with your voluminous and commendable output. Still, are you seeking to confuse? Is this part of your artistic intent? If so, why?*  
I don't think what I'm doing is confusing. It's no more confusing than what Mathew Barney does, or Mike Kelley, or Paul McCarthy, or Sacha

*Rebel Without a Cause is inarguably amongst the canon of social theory and critique for decades now—all of which includes homosocial breakdowns, power structures, image, Americana, the idea of 'cool.' How does it, having been so studied, limit your project's ability to reach the cognoscenti?*  
*Rebel Without a Cause* has been endlessly studied, but our project is not a study as much as it is an exploration and expansion. We didn't take an earnest look at the original film, and we didn't do it from a stance in the film world. We looked at it through the art world lens in order to break it up, to look at the forces underneath it, to create with those forces. This is not a scholarly study or a celebration. It is using the original film as material for inspiration and as a connection to the history of Hollywood, mass entertainment, and mainstream Freudian thought. *Much of what Rebel Without a Cause aimed to overcome has, in fact, been arguably overcome—homogeny, gender roles, the value systems of post-War America. While they may now exist in different forms, one could suggest contemporary oppression is much more individualized, or laden with technological change. What, then, is contemporary rebellion to you?*  
There will always be social expectations. I suppose we want them. I

#### INFILTRATING THE REBEL PROJECT BY MARC-EDOUARD LEON

I'M LED THROUGH A LOCKED GATE, DOWN A SMALL BRICK PATH LINED with exotic foliage, to the mythic fortress, a forest green craftsman cottage known as Bungalow 2. Entering the secluded two-story unit, it is noted that the '40s furnishings are not as ornate as one might expect, nor are they particularly kempt. Nonetheless, they serve as reminders of the Chateau's original intended use as condos. There's a flatscreen in the corner of the living room, contradicting the impression that you've stepped through a time warp into Hollywood's golden age.  
James Franco hasn't arrived yet. A production crew is gearing up to shoot. A box of 8mm film cartridges sits on the floor, and a jumble of inflatable sex dolls dressed in blue jeans and white tees—some with moustaches and chest hair drawn on to indicate "males"—rests in a cluster nearby. With their mouths agape for dick insertion, they seem locked in a look of permanent surprise.  
Enter Adarsha Benjamin, clad in '50s greaser attire. Alongside Franco's producer Vince Jolivet and curator Dominic Sidhu, the 26-year-old photographer has been helping Franco put together *Rebel*, an ambitious art project that opened at the Venice Biennial on September 3rd. The exhibi-



THIS PAGE: V-NECK SWEATER BY CAROLINA HERRERA MEN'S, JEANS BY JOE'S JEANS, AND LEATHER WATCH BY HERMÈS.

OPPOSITE: TRENCHCOAT BY TRUSSARDI 1911, V-NECK SWEATER BY CAROLINA HERRERA MEN'S, JEANS BY JOE'S JEANS, LEATHER WATCH BY HERMÈS, AND GLASSES BY MARC JACOBS. TRENCHCOAT AND SILK PANTS BY DAVID MICHAEL AND HENLEY BY GYPSY 05.

dition involves collaborations with and contributions by art giants such as Paul McCarthy, his son Damon, Ed Ruscha, Aaron Young, Douglas Gordon, and Harmony Korine. Though details are elusive, I know I'm here at the Chateau to take part in one of Franco's own contributions to *Rebel*. From what I can gather, tonight's program is an exploration of the rumored sexcapades amongst the cast and crew of *Rebel Without a Cause*.

I follow Benjamin to an improvised vanity room. Tamzin Brown, a graceful, red-haired stage actress from London, is being preened to look like the movie's teenaged heroine, Natalie Wood. Brown got involved in the project after she auditioned for the short *Harmony Korine and Franco* made. "I played the part of James Dean's right hand girl, in an all-girl gang

ing devices, from an 8mm camera to a digital SLR, to disposable cameras, iPhones, and a Polaroid.

Nina Ljeti, a young NYU undergrad, undergoes metamorphosis into James Dean, tugging up a pair of jeans, sliding on a crisp white shirt and red jacket to reach the iconic "cool" once embodied by Dean. The student-actress met Franco as a freshman, which led to her performing in *Collage* as Stanley and Stella from *A Street Car Named Desire*.

When my turn comes, the make-up artist stares at me, discouraged.

"You have a beard," she says. "How are you supposed to look like a woman?"



armed with machetes and BMXs," she tells me. "On our lunch break, Harmony shot stills of me wearing a James Dean mask as a merkin."

A hair and make-up artist from the \$200 million dollar, Sam Raimi-directed *Oz: The Great and Powerful*, in which Franco plays the wizard, has offered to make wigs for tonight. "James wants women to play the key men's roles from *Rebel Without a Cause*," she says, "so I styled these wigs made of real hair to look like the movie references." She holds up three greaser pompadours. "This is James Dean. And here's Dennis Hopper. *Rebel Without a Cause* was actually his first movie part. This third one is Sal Mineo. He's the little boy that has a crush on James Dean."

Benjamin transforms into Hopper, and is asked by Franco to take photos in the same way Hopper used to snap pictures on his sets. "James is really interested in breaking down the fourth wall and blurring the lines between audience and participant," Benjamin says. "He did this show in New York, *Collage*, where everyone was given small HD cameras to film the performance and have it play simultaneously on big screens." Benjamin goes on to explain that tonight's performance will include multiple record-

"I don't know," I admit. "To be honest, I have no clue what I'm expected to do."

"You're going to be Vampira," Benjamin laughs. This is the first I've heard that I'd be playing the ghoulish 1950s television fright night host. "James told me you would have to shave."

"Vampira?" I ask. "What does she have to do with *Rebel Without a Cause*?"

"She was friends with James Dean," Benjamin explains to me. Brown hands me a beautiful vintage dress from her wardrobe, before ringing the concierge for a razor and shaving cream. Once the beard is gone, the hair and make-up artist ties my hair, pins on a long dark wig, applies mascara and foundation, and finishes me off with some oxblood red lipstick. I glance in the mirror. I totally look like a transvestite. I always figured my androgynous features would help me pass as a woman one day.

Benjamin is teaching me to walk in heels as Franco strolls through the door, clothed in simple, anti-fashion garb that brings to mind the casual style of Jack Kerouac.

THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE:  
 WOOL OVERCOAT BY **GIORGIO ARMANI**. CHECK MILITARY SHIRT BY **JOE'S JEANS**. DISTRESSED PANTS BY **DIESEL BLACK GOLD**. AND SHOES BY **GUCCI**. BEATNIKS ALL WEARING TOPS BY **AMERICAN AP-PAREL** AND DENIM BY **GUESS** AND **JOE'S JEANS**.

ARTWORK: JAMES FRANCO AND ADARSHA BENJAMIN  
 STYLIST: PALOMA PEREZ  
 ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: CLARK PHILLIPS, BRUCE CHEUNG, AND CAMILO FUENTEALBA.  
 MAKEUP, HAIR, AND GROOMING: JORDAN BREE LONG



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For Franco, whose aspirations go beyond acting in Hollywood films, the *Rebel* project seems to provide him with an outlet to indulge his creative impulses. Franco is drawn time and again to progressive people and movements in history, both in acting and in art, and *Rebel Without a Cause* is one of cinema's most audaciously countercultural moments. "It's a project that came about because I was a huge fan of the movie and of its director Nicholas Ray," Franco will tell me the next day, visibly and audibly bedraggled from the previous evening's late night activities. "I played James Dean in a biopic, so I also felt connections to the original film. I'd done research and talked to most of the people that had done *Rebel Without a Cause* that were still alive. I realized that the stories about the making of were fascinating and that there was an equally compelling drama going on behind-the-scenes. Over the years, I felt like there was a lot of stuff to mine in that original movie. I didn't want to dramatize the behind the scenes in a traditional way though."

The idea of including Los Angeles artist Paul McCarthy came up after Franco ran into him at a party. "We were just looking for an actor and then we thought, 'If we're going to go for an artist, why not let him do what he does also?' So, I called him up and he said, 'Yeah, I'm really interested.' And then we started reaching out to different artists." After a year-and-a-half of Franco having intensive creative dialogues with the artists in the show, the *Rebel* project finally came together. It's something

intrinsic to Franco's work and personality: he takes ideas and runs with them as far as he can. The endeavor mushroomed into a full-blown project and soon became an anticipated collateral event at the 54th Venice Biennial.

"To me, it was the best I could ask for," Franco tells me. "All my favorite artists working on this project. It was amazing." The artists summarily responded with an equivalent amount of enthusiasm to the themes laid forth by Franco. Born out of the stifling conformity of the '50s, *Rebel Without a Cause* is possibly the most recognized representation of teenage rebellion—the plot revolves around a group of troubled and anguished kids that feel alienated from their parents. With his performance, James Dean virtually invented the myth of the sensitive, misunderstood, and tortured American teenager. When Dean broke his neck and died in a crash in Paso Robles a month before the film's premiere, the actor cemented his legend as the ultimate symbol of unbridled youth.

Franco, in his various interwoven rendezvous with Dean—beginning with the aforementioned 2001 portrayal of Dean in the televised biopic *James Dean*—has become a studied scholar on all things *Rebel Without a Cause*. Franco spouts lucid takes on the thematic devices of the film, not the least of which includes the homoerotic undertones in the relationship between James Dean's character, Jim Stark, and a young schoolboy named John "Plato" Crawford that idolizes him, played by actor Sal Mineo. "Plato was possibly the first gay teenager depicted on film," Franco evinces.

Hollywood's Production Code considered homosexuality a

"perversion" that could not be portrayed on film. Yet, during rehearsals, James Dean prodded the 16-year-old Mineo to model Plato's behavior with Jim after the way Jim behaved with his girlfriend in the film. In this, Dean helped Mineo construct an icon homosexual teens in the 1950s could relate to. In one particularly blatant scene set at the Griffith Observatory's planetarium, Mineo caressingly touches Dean's shoulder suggestively and later asks him, "Hey you want to come home with me? I mean there's nobody home at my house, and heck, I'm not tired. Are you?" *Rebel Without a Cause's* subtext was subtle enough to escape censorship, but there was plenty of concern. Prior to the film's release, a Production Code officer sent a warning shot to the head of Warner Bros. in the form a memo: "It is of course vital that there be no inference of a questionable or homosexual relationship between Jim and Plato."

Much has been made about James Dean's rumored bisexuality. He himself said in an interview, "No, I am not a homosexual. But, I'm also not going to go through life with one hand tied behind my back." Though none of the rumors have ever been substantiated with solid evidence, Nick Adams, another actor in *Rebel Without a Cause*, and one of James Dean's best friends in real life, would later claim that the two had an affair on set. Mineo himself would turn out to be one of the first actors to publicly out himself as a homosexual. In fact, Mineo's life story fascinated Franco so much that he wrote and directed a biopic about the final days before Mineo's murder, called *Sal*, earlier this year.

It's become more apparent the reasoning behind casting actors of the opposite sex play the characters of Dean, Hopper, Mineo, and Vampira:

he's bringing to light and twisting gender roles in the context of the Hollywood studios' homophobia, which not only forbade representing homosexuality on the screen but moreover manufactured public relationships to cover the sexual orientation of their contracted actors. Teen idol Tab Hunter, for example, was actually linked in the press to *Rebel Without a Cause's* leading lady Natalie Wood even though he was one of Hollywood's A-list homosexuals. "One of the things about casting women in men's roles," Franco adds, "is that it reminds the viewer, 'Look, we're not trying to make super accurate depictions of these people.' But by referencing them and using part of the mythology, we can ground the performance in a history and evoke something deeper."

Ten years ago, in preparation for *James Dean*, Franco spoke with Dennis Hopper who was only 18 during the filming of *Rebel Without a Cause* and had yet to make his mark. He recounted that one evening, before the production of the film began, Hopper, Wood, and a girlfriend of hers had a wild night of drinking and partying. The three drove from Googie's, the popular coffee shop across the street from the Chateau, to Laurel Canyon and parked on the scenic drive off Mulholland to watch the stars. Wood was upset that Ray hadn't called her back. The director and studio had not booked her for the part yet because they had a hard time buying her as a teenage rebel. Wood drank too much and got sick. Hopper, who was heavily intoxicated, drove them back down the hill, but lost control of the vehicle on the windy road. The car flipped and Wood was violently thrown out into the middle of the street. Hopper rushed her to the emergency room and called Ray to come to their assistance. The director arrived at the hospital

and slapped Hopper for his irresponsibility. When he arrived to Wood's room, she was barely conscious. She had suffered a concussion. She pulled him in and whispered, "Nick. They called me a goddamned juvenile delinquent. Now do I get the part?" Hopper, who was waiting nervously nearby, remembered Ray telling the doctor on his way out of Wood's room, "Take good care of this young lady. She's the star of my next movie."

Hopper then revealed that Nick Ray had actually been sleeping with the 16-year-old Wood during the shoot. The director was 27 years older than her. "It all took place in Bungalow 2," Franco says, bespeaking the very chamber we are seated. Ray's poolside bungalow—this bungalow—was his home during the production of *Rebel Without a Cause*. Over in that corner, Dean and Wood rehearsed. It was through this window that Dean famously climbed to make his audition. And it was here that they partied late into the night. Hopper was having an affair with Wood at the same time as she was seeing Ray; the young actress would sneak out of the director's bed to canoodle with Hopper. Ray found out and that's why most of Hopper's lines ended up in another actor's mouth.

In essence, the project is Franco's cracked fantasy of what happened between these walls.

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"You guys are going to arrive at the bungalow like you just got

peel out onto the Sunset Strip, roar past Googie's former location, then scream up Laurel Canyon with the top down.

Franco rolls an 8mm camera as we're flying up the same tangled, winding hills that the real Hopper and the real Wood sped on the night of their famous accident. Franco commands the girls to take their shirts off. They giggle and strip. Dean sparks a butt in the back with his tits out. The wind slaps hard on our faces. We snake up the road, way too fucking fast. We are under the spell of the legend. I stand on the seat with my arms in the air while we jerk left and right. Franco shouts a nervous, "Careful!" but we are too far gone. I close my eyes and feel myself possessed with the spirit of Dean's reckless youth, and...

BLANGGGG!

My heart skips a beat. A hubcap flies off and goes spinning to the shoulder. James Dean is racing to his death.

I, too, at this moment, want to die young.

BLANGGGG!

Another hubcap frisbees off the car. This is it. I'm ready to burn out for eternity.

And yet.

The car slows at the top of the hill, and I dare to open my eyes. All I see is Los Angeles, the whole city from the peak of Mulholland. We pull off and walk up to the locked gate of Mulholland Drive Stop, a scenic vista high up in the Canyon. Shit, the gate is locked. Franco is not

doesn't even spot Franco. If ever he missed a shot for the cover of *Us Weekly*...

"Now," instructs Franco, "you're going to carry Wood up to Ray's bedroom on the first floor. Ray's going to be like, 'What the hell happened?' And he and Hopper are going to fight over the girl."

We lay Wood on the bed. Ray (played by Jolivet) arrives and he's pissed. His rage is terrifying. He picks a fight with Hopper. Dean tries to separate them. "Tell Hopper she's your girl," Franco tells Dean. Hopper and Dean start barking at each other, faces inches apart.

"She's my girl," yells Benjamin.

"No, she's my girl," screams Ljetl back.

Wood lies in the middle, covered in blood, as the two yank on each of her arms.

"Now, Sal, jump on Dean and tell him he's your girl," directs Franco.

Sal Mineo, played by Miriam Jones, grabs Dean and tells him, "No, you're my girl, Dean! You're my girl!"

"Bring up the blow-up dolls," Franco shouts.

Franco replaces Natalie Wood with a female doll and James Dean with a doll dressed in the iconic red jacket, white T-shirt, and blue jeans.

"Sal," says Franco, "this is the moment you've been waiting for. I want you to show Dean how much you love him. And you too, Dennis. Just make love to Natalie."

our costumes and use the blow-up dolls as floaties. I know that this pool's chlorinated warmth has lapped at every movie star in the world, but this, this is something else.

Dawn creeps over us, and we finally call it a night.

As the sun rises, I walk out of the Chateau. More than ever, the golden age of Hollywood breathes through its walls. Stories true and apocryphal spill out down the hill onto Sunset. The Chateau's most morbid and scandalous tales are the stuff of Hollywood lore: Jean Harlow having an affair with Clark Gable during her honeymoon; Howard Hughes spying on starlets swimming in the pool; Greta Garbo, in her quest for privacy, locking herself in her room for weeks on end; Billy Wilder sleeping in the ladies' toilet ante-room while stranded during his Christmas holiday; Jim Morrison injuring his back while jumping from a balcony; Jim Belushi overdosing from a speed-ball in Bungalow 3; Helmut Newton crashing to his death in the driveway...

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I get back to Bungalow 2 a few hours later to interview Franco. He is unnervingly chipper. He laughs about the sex scene he orchestrated. "Having sex with dolls with plastic dicks is fucking great," Franco exalts, "because you get to examine that act without the onus of people just looking at it and saying, 'That's pornography.' You can actually think about it for a second and ask yourself what is happening there when you're doing that for



dinner across the street at Googie's," James Franco instructs in the main cavity of the bungalow. "You come looking for Nick Ray, but he's not here so you follow Natalie Wood. She used to sleep with him, so she knows the way. She takes you through the back and you break in and go crazy. Just grab drinks or whatever, and we'll tell you what to do. Adarsha, make sure to take pictures."

Franco then hands strap-on dildos to the girls in drag. "Get your dicks on," he says with his famous grin.

On his cue, Natalie Wood leads everyone through the back entrance into the kitchen. Shots of tequila are downed, and beer bottles are popped open and sprayed about. There is the sense that Franco is trying to get us to free ourselves and channel our characters, but this wild and carefree routine also sets the tone for the evening.

Wood leads the conga line to the living room, where Franco hands James Dean the cymbal-crashing, wind-up monkey toy that a drunken Jim Stark is playing with in the opening salvo of *Rebel Without a Cause*. Franco tells Dean to pull out her strap-on and start stroking it while the monkey bangs its cymbals hysterically. Dean has a skinny dick with a big mushroom head. When she "cums," Franco squirts hand lotion on everyone. Vampira takes over my body, and I start to go down on Dean, licking the cum-lotion off his dick and snowballing it into Dennis Hopper's mouth. This by no means is one of Franco's directions.

Wood takes us to the bathroom. Champagne bottles are popped and sprayed all over Wood. She, in turn, removes all her clothes and starts yelling, "My pussy hurts!" She's apparently following a loose script. Franco tells us to carry her back to the kitchen and help cool her off in the sink.

At this point, everyone is a sopping mess of booze and water. Franco leads us to an alley behind the Chateau where an old convertible Mustang is parked. "We've got to watch out, because we don't have any permits," he says. "We don't want to get arrested by the cops." I'm riding shotgun, while Franco sits in the back with Hopper, Wood, and Dean. We

deterred. He waits for a few cars to whizz by and hops the fence. Like teenage runaways, we follow him in the dark, carrying cigarettes and half-empty bottles of liquor. We trespass through dense shrubs until we reach a precarious ledge. "Dicks out!" Franco tells Dean, Hopper, and Mineo. Still topless, they whip out their dildos and circle Natalie Wood, who again gets completely naked. Franco instructs the rest of us to start fooling around. I'm not sure if I'm supposed to make out with a "girl" or a "boy." I do both.

Spent, we admire the sprawling city lights. The moon is full. Its brightness hides the cosmos. Hollywood's sparkling strangely resemble a galaxy, reminding us that this is the city where stars are born. Where legends like the one we're reliving take form. Where the fantasy of the legend is almost more potent than the facts. It's easy to see why Franco is so romanced by *Rebel Without a Cause*. The themes are powerful ones. Sex. Youth. Identity. Conformity. Individuality. Immortality. Death.

We climb down to the car, and Franco explains to us, "This is the scene when Hopper gets into an accident with Natalie. You're all going to be in the car, covered in blood, and you're going to wake up to notice that Natalie got thrown out. You have to carefully pick her up off the ground and drive her back to the bungalow."

Sticky fake blood is splattered on us. It streams dramatically down my face. I pretend I've been knocked unconscious from hitting my head against the dashboard. I stir and blink my eyes. Everyone is moaning, regaining consciousness. Wood lays crumpled in the middle of the street. Hopper and I pick her up, delicately. Careful, careful. We settle her in the back seat and make it down the hill at a pretty good clip. Franco hands me an 8mm camera, and I film Wood's beautiful face. She is mumbling weakly. She can barely keep her eyes from rolling back in her head. For a moment, everything falls away, and the wall between reality and fiction completely vanishes for me.

We rumble to the bottom of the hill, and head for the Chateau. A paparazzi is so perplexed by the transvestites covered in blood that he

The two start going at it with the dolls.

"I wanted your sugar lips on my cock all day, Jimmy," Mineo says before shoving her dildo in the sex doll's mouth. "You are my girl, Jimmy. You feel as sweet as ice cream." She unbuttons the sex doll's pants and flips it over. "Your ass is so ready, Jimmy. Let me put it in your rebel ass." She spits on her dildo cock and stuffs it in James Dean's inflatable butthole. "Tell me how much you like it, Jimmy." The doll flops about on the bed. "You know I like it, Jimmy. Oh yeah! So nice and tight... Such a sweet ass. It's like sweet cherry pie."

Hopper is going at it with the Natalie Wood doll. I'm tossed a Nick Adams doll. Vampira would be into fetishism, I think. I strap on a dildo harness and grab a leather whip. I proceed to whip the doll's plastic cock while thrusting my dildo in its mouth.

I look around. Everyone is making out with dolls, riding them, switching positions. "My girl loves it on her face, doesn't she, Jimmy?" huffs Mineo before squirting the James Dean doll with cum-lotion. We spray the sex dolls with two cans of condensed milk. It's a real cumfest.

Franco, who is in the middle of the action, begins to record himself on an iPhone, repeating, "I'm a rebel, I'm a rebel, I'm a rebel, I'm a rebel..." His eyes are closed. There is no irony in his voice.

"Okay," says Franco, "everyone grab the dolls and let's head to the pool. Remember it's five in the morning, though, so total stealth mission." We sneak out to the pool. Our wigs are sliding off, our clothes are totally soiled, and we're toting half-deflated sex dolls covered in blood and cum. I'm imagining a rich, old powerbroker waking up for a quiet morning swim and running into our motley crew. Some of us start to giggle uncontrollably. Franco shushes us, but he can hardly stop from cracking up either. "Now on my call," he says, "go!"

SPLOOOSH!!!

The water feels unbelievable. I can't say if it washes our sins away. It certainly cleans off whatever sticky shit we're drenched in. We strip out of

real." The whole venture is pretty weird. No matter what anyone says, Franco is producing ideas, turning them into art. James Franco is an artist.

And then, James Franco is also a movie star. "I'm flying to Detroit," he reminds me, packing his suitcase. "Tomorrow morning at 5:30, I'll be on the set of *Oz*." As he talks about the film, it becomes clear that the *Rebel* project is necessary for him. "*Oz* is amazing in its own way," he says. "The sets are unbelievable, and you are taken to another world. But it's a less free-form improvisational experience than the one we had last night. It's a completely different approach, where you make sure everything in the script is followed perfectly and a lot of care is taken with the technical side. One of the reasons I've enjoyed working on *Rebel* is that it allowed for the unpolished side to come out. That's what I think about with each art project. Where does the unforeseeable come in? Where do the mistakes come in? Where does the human come in?"

In this regard, Franco seeks more than to push social boundaries. He also strives for greater spontaneity. It's a borderline-ADD ethos that has led him to cram enough time into his agenda to be an actor, published author, director, collector of academic degrees, teacher, philanthropist, Academy Award host, viral comedian, Gucci spokesman, and so on and so forth. The Chateau project, in fact, arose because Franco took time off the set of *Oz* to shoot new episodes of *General Hospital* in L.A., when he realized he would have a spare night to squeeze in another endeavor.

As *Rebel* is his most complex work yet, it is suggested that it has influenced him to get involved in other artistic ventures. "Yeah," he laughs, suggesting this is an enormous understatement. He glances at Benjamin and Jolivet, who are checking their watches impatiently, with a knowing look. "We have a bunch."

It gives you a kind of freedom.

"Exactly."

Franco rises to leave to the airport. He maybe wants to say more but there's no time.