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out of the closet

Nigerian-born New York artist Iké Udé is an urban dandy with a razor-sharp mind. Decked out in a super-stylish mismatch of vintage jacket, high-collared shirt, textured tie, and slim trousers, all topped with a round "bush" of black curls, he embodies a style as evocative as his oeuvre. His double role as a conceptual artist and the editor-in-chief of the fashion and arts quarterly aRude allows him an insider/outsider perspective on both the hidden dynamics of clothing and the relations between image and text. The subject of clothing and identity is a prominent theme in his art. *Beyond Decorum*, his installation at Manlio Caropreso's MC Magma gallery in Milan last fall, is a case in point. Udé transformed the space into "a simulacrum of a boutique," with an old wooden wardrobe full of coats and jackets at the entrance; two long, parallel white "desks" with shoes and shirts neatly displayed in plexiglass "hat boxes" in the main space; and a wall covered in large-scale, industrial-style pictures of the same objects. For Ernesto Esposito, a collector and gallery partner, the connection with Marcel Duchamp and his concept of the ready-made is obvious. "Udé isolates ordinary objects and turns them into works of art, but clothing touches a more human, modern sphere than Duchamp." Udé chooses clothing with a highly iconic status: feminine high-heel shoes and masculine shirts. "Heels represent women; shirts, as a whole or just the collar, are representative of men," he says, pointing to a striking wool collar in outsized pinstripes. Instead of designer tags, the items bear texts taken from the personals page of porno mags. Object and text collide, transforming the clothing into a surrogate for the living person. Udé styles the clothes after reading the ads: he imagines what kind of shirt or shoe the person would choose to be represented by. "Clothing is like a shield, it projects an idealized image, but there is a lot hidden underneath. I want to show what's beneath the façade," he says. Appropriately, and very funnily, classic bourgeois-style garments in Udé's closet are aligned with blown-up porno shots, while a priest's collar bears a Marinetti S&M ad. Wearing a shirt will never be simple again. *Angelo Flaccavento*