

Video by video you can watch Janet Jackson bloom, like a flower in time-lapse music television, into a pop star: feisty, shoulder-padded teen (in *Nasty*, 1986) turns velvet-roped sex symbol (*Anytime, Anyplace*, 1994) goes futuristic fantasy femme (with brother Michael in *Scream*, 1995; with Busta Rhymes in *What's It Gonna Be*, 1999; and with Nelly in *Call on Me*, 2006).

After setting a new standard for her own sexual self-confidence on an iconic *Rolling Stone* cover (Patrick Demarchelier's September 1993 nude, with a strategically placed pair of hands), Janet seems determined to make no less of an impact in print. She marked the release of her 2006 album, *20 Y.O.*, with an eye-popping parade of skin-filled magazine covers. Now, gearing up for a 2007 world tour, the most famous woman in the world (or, at least according to this year's Guinness Book of World Records, the most searched-for person on the Internet) meets one of the most talented image makers of our time, Jean-Paul Goude, the celebrated illustrator, art director, and photographer. We joined these two forces of (human) nature to discuss the making of Janet's image, the expectations of celebrity, and the rules of physical attraction. **Mitchell Healey**

JEAN-PAUL GOUDE

MITCHELL HEALEY After the shoot, Janet said she found you quite sexy.

JEAN-PAUL GOUDE Sexy? Me? How flattering!

MH You must have that effect on a lot of women.

JPG Please. I wish. No, that's why I'm so flattered. Though, there was a time when—well, first of all, I'm happily married...

MH You used the term "juicy" more than once on the shoot. Do you care to elaborate?

JPG Those who are sensitive to Janet's type of morphology will understand why I use the term. To me, Janet is indeed *very* juicy. And when she loses her timidity, she literally radiates. At first, she seemed frozen; I can't blame her, since what I had her wearing didn't work at all. That's when we decided to get rid of the clothes to privilege the Dior and Givenchy headpieces. And when she realized the effect she was producing on everybody present in the studio, grips, assistants, stylists, myself—all of us our jaws hanging—she relaxed and started to perform. A classic case of narcissism—the impression she made on us seemed to ignite her.

MH Is that something you're trying to capture in a photograph?

JPG Not necessarily, but in Janet's case, this small miracle is all I could pray for. Even when working out at the gym, she's extremely feminine. She's not dried up like most female body-builders. She's voluptuous and, surprisingly, still has this childish appeal that gives her a special edge. The pictures are just snapshots really, but they convey the steamy atmosphere of the shoot.

MH And you caught all the signature Janet elements—the smile...

JPG The smile, the bosom, the muscles, the small waist, the stupendous rear end, the humility, the good manners—that is my first impression of Janet. She is the opposite of the classic self-centered showbiz personality. It's such a treat to meet someone who is actually better in person than one had imagined.

JANET JACKSON

MITCHELL HEALEY Did you know Jean-Paul before the shoot?

JANET JACKSON I knew of him, but I hadn't met him. He's very sexy.

MH Is it the French thing?

JJ No, it's just him. I've never thought twice about an older man being sexy. Not that I think older men aren't. And I met him and I thought, This guy is really sexy.

MH Funny, he made the same observation about you. For me the image of you dancing in the desert sun in your 1991 Herb Ritts video for *Love Will Never Do* was when I first remember thinking, Whoa! Janet! Do you feel like that unveiled you as a woman?

JJ I think it actually did. And the funny thing about it is, I knew at some point I was going to have to stop covering up from the neck down. I told Herb I wanted to do something different. Not that I was searching but I was feeling a little different. And I wanted to do a video where I would wear a dress. I grew up as such a tomboy. I'd see a dress and I'd think, Well that's pretty, but not pretty for me. I'd rather be in a pair of jeans, pants, suit, tuxedo. And he said, "Well, let's not wear a dress. Let's wear a pair of jeans and just a little top so we don't have to do too much." And that's what we did. I think what really made it was that wig. Putting on that wig made it very soft, very feminine.

MH And did you feel that way inside?

JJ I didn't feel uncomfortable at all. The change was starting to

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—JEAN-PAUL GOUDE

happen then. Because after that came *Janet*. And I felt much more comfortable with my femininity.

MH Obviously your image is important to the people who manage your career. Do you feel like you're constantly fighting with them over control?

JJ I've been very, very fortunate that I've never had to fight. Because a lot of people do. I was at a radio station the other day and this girl said to me, "You've got such the sexy image. And when I see you in person you look so wholesome. Is this something you want to be known for?" And I was like, "No." But it doesn't mean you can't be yourself. That's what the *Damita Jo* album was really about. Just because you see that in the video doesn't mean that's not me that you're seeing.

MH When I imagine your life, it's like a music video. Something out of *That's The Way Love Goes*—just Janet hanging out every day. Do you have that same sense of a sort of a stylized version of life, or do you wake up and go, "Eh, groceries, laundry, bills..."

JJ I think there are moments when it's a little bit of both. I don't know about the groceries part [laughs]. It's so funny because I haven't set foot in a grocery store in years, you know. And that's so embarrassing. A few years back Missy [Elliott] and I were hanging out. It was sooo late at night, and we went to the grocery store—this is when I was living in Malibu—and I hadn't been in a grocery store in so long. I kept going, "What's this?" First of all I had the cart and I was riding down the aisles, standing on it. And there's nobody there but us. And we got in the...the...

MH Checkout—

JJ Checkout!

MH She doesn't even know the vocabulary.

JJ Right? And I'm seeing this square thing, and I'm like, "What's this you guys?" And Missy just looked at me. And they said, "That's so you can use your credit card." And I said, "You can use your credit card in grocery stores now?" And Missy cracked up laughing. She thought it was the funniest thing. I didn't know.

MH And you had your credit card on you?

JJ Yeah, I did! But I was always the one that never had money on me. My friends would be like, "Don't ask Jan." I'd be like, "You guys, I got \$5." It's like, don't borrow the money from Jan 'cause she ain't got none. I never carried a wallet. I was that kind of kid. Had all my money in my back pocket. And that was only about \$5.

MH That Missy outing kinda sounds like a video life to me.

JJ There are moments when it's like a video, or you could look at it and it seems like a video. But for me it's just truly life. My brothers were famous when I was 2 years old. So for as long as I can remember we've had security, always been behind gates. And this has really been my life. So, I know nothing else but this, and to entertain. And I think for someone on the outside looking in it would be like a video.

MH In spite of what some people in America would like to see from you—and I think it's your quiet voice and trademark smile that might give an impression otherwise—you're actually quite openly sexual, especially in your lyrics.

JJ I have no problem singing about it or talking about it. I write about life experiences. It's a big part of my life—and I enjoy it.

MH And when you agree to pose topless for glossy magazines, and have your clothes disappear in the *So Excited* video, you're not trying to make a statement; you're just being yourself?

JJ Exactly. That's why I say either you hate me or you love me. I'm just giving you who I am. And this is who I am [giggle].