

I NEVER FEEL LONELY

Amanda Lear gets a call from Mark Jacobs to discuss Dali, disco and the love of the new generation.

Photographed in the 7th Arrondissement of Paris by Nicolas Wagner
Styling by Richard Aybar

Amanda Lear is a French actress, painter, singer, lyricist, composer, television personality and novelist.

The Amanda Lear story is so full of decadent cultural moments and sensational details that it can seem laced into a corset about to burst. The French icon, model, singer, actor, television presenter, novelist, confidante, muse and lover has existed as a phenomenon since her discovery by a Parisian modeling agency in 1965, if not before, as the specifics of her earliest years are cinematically unclear. Lear is something of a Forrestissima Gump, a compelling blonde beauty who finds herself intimately involved with fascinating people at times of change. She was a demimondaine of Swinging London, mixing with Beatles and Twiggies, before enmeshing with the surrealist painter Salvador Dali. She was once engaged to Bryan Ferry of Roxy Music; famously appearing on the cover of the band's 1973 album *For Your Pleasure*, before then-boyfriend David Bowie encouraged her to disco stardom as the cavernous voice of "Fashion Pack (Studio 54)" and "Follow Me." Lear inspired The Rolling Stones to write "Miss Amanda Jones" and was Joanna Lumley's dress pattern for creating Patsy Stone on *Absolutely Fabulous*. "It's very strange in life," says the onetime *Playboy* model. "When you are the first one to do something, you're always a pioneer. But you're always too early, and so you are criticized. We are provocative and it's, 'Oh, my God! How dare she do this?' And then you realize a few years later everybody is doing the same thing."

Contemporary creatives from Riccardo Tisci of Givenchy to Andy Bell of Erasure carry on the adoration. Lear performed at Carine Roitfeld's 2010 masked ball for the 90th anniversary of French *Vogue*. She was recognized in 2011, by D&G, with a series of graphic T-shirts that included a wearable image from her 1977 debut album "I Am a Photograph"; and she closed the Spring/Summer 2013 Jean Paul Gaultier show with a pink-sequined bodysuit reveal and then joined the designer for his bow—without her pink-sequined platform heels. "My fantasy is my priority," she sings in the YouTube-banned-and-then-unbanned video for her 2012 dance single "La Bête et la Belle" from her album *I Don't Like Disco*.

"The Queen of Chinatown" spoke with us by phone from a stop in her stage tour of *Lady Oscar*, in which she portrays an imperious fashion editor whose life comes undone. Lear is thrilled in the moment. "It's just theater, theater now. This is the new love of my life," she exults.

Hello?

Hi, is this Amanda?

Yes, speaking.

It's Mark Jacobs from CRUSH. I'm very excited to be speaking with you. Do you have a few moments?

Oh yes, yes, yes. If you want, we can do it now.

Good idea. I'm in the South of France and I'm on tour at the moment. I'm doing a play and every day we are in a different city. So it's difficult

to pin me down because tomorrow I'm off to Bordeaux and then to Cannes. Next week we go to Marseilles and then to Nice. So, I have to do things by phone.

Where are you right now?

At the moment, I'm in my hotel. The good thing about the tour is that I check into the best hotel in town. The production pays for this. I've got a nice bedroom. I've got a chauffeur. I've got a driver. I've got a Mercedes. We go from city to



vintage leather jacket by Dior Homme by Hedi Slimane; cotton tank top by Rick Owens; leather trousers by Alexander McQueen; earrings her own

city. Sometimes I get a little lonely, so I like to hang out with the rest of the troupe. We go to restaurants or to the movies together. It's a gypsy-like life. It reminds me of the days when I was touring with my music. That was thirty years ago. I had my troupe. I had my four dancers and my musicians. We went all over the world. I used to like very much the atmosphere of the tour. It's like a family. We are all together. We have a good laugh together. We end up in a silly pizzeria together. It's quite fun.

What are you wearing right now?

Right now, while I'm speaking to you? I'm wearing jeans. I'm always in jeans. I'm definitely a jeans girl. I cannot stand being in a dress like the proper ladies. No way. You'll never make a Grace Kelly out of me. I have a lovely dress from Givenchy. Riccardo Tisci adores me. Jean Paul Gaultier loves me. They give me those wonderful dresses for free. I wear them now and then, but the minute I wear a dress, I feel like a lady. I'm not comfortable. I feel much more comfortable when I wear an old pair of jeans and boots and that's it.

When did you realize that your life was extraordinary?

Never. [laughs] I don't think my life is so extraordinary. It's just fortune...destiny. I didn't plan anything. Most of the girls in showbiz plan. They go to an acting school or a music school and they plan everything and they have a career plan. Not me. I was a fashion model in London for Ossie Clark in the '60s, and then completely by chance in the '70s, I met Bryan Ferry, and we went on to do the cover of Roxy Music, and then Elton John and then David Bowie. David Bowie was the first one who actually paid for my singing classes and my dancing lessons and he put me under contract. But all this was completely fate. It wasn't planned at all and I never expected to have any success with my first record. Nobody expected that a girl with a voice like me, nice and deep, would have any kind of influence in the world of music.

Why do you think all of this happened to you and not to someone else?

I don't know. [laughs] I think it's a question of being in the right time at the right place. It's complete fate. I was just there in London when it was the days of Ziggy Stardust and David Bowie, *Rocky Horror Picture Show* and Roxy Music. Later on, I happened to be at the right time at the right place in Italy when it was launching all the new television. I happened to be at the right time at the right place in France when it was the days of Givenchy and high fashion. It's just a question of being there. Honestly, nothing is planned at all. I was also on the New York scene in the days of Andy Warhol, every night at Max's Kansas City with Nico and Gerard Malanga and Paul Morrissey. It was a question of luck to be there. I don't know where

I should be now. I should be somewhere else, somewhere sitting with you having a coffee. [laughs] But at the moment, I'm on tour.

What was your most surreal Dali experience?

The meeting was surreal, because I never liked Dali in the first place. I was in art school in Paris. I used to love painting and I was mad for Picasso. I didn't like Dali's painting at all. I thought Dali's painting was frightening, all of these nightmares. But anyway, I met him completely by chance after a fashion show I was doing in Paris for Paco Rabanne. After the show I was all made up and going out with my boyfriend, Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones. We went to this club and Salvador Dali was sitting there and he asked to meet us because he was a bit of a groupie and somebody told him, 'this is one of the Rolling Stones.' So they introduced us and Dali said to me, 'ah, you are a fashion model? Oh, yes. You have the most beautiful skeleton I have ever seen.' I thought that was a kind of compliment no one had ever paid to me before. He told me that I have a good skeleton, a face like a death mask. People tell me I'm beautiful, I've got long legs, I've got beautiful hair. But they never told me 'you've got a beautiful skeleton.' [laughs] I didn't like him very much. I didn't like his entourage, all the ridiculous people around him. And then the next day, he called me and we had lunch. This time it was another man. It was like *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. I met the public Dali and he was not very pleasant. I met the private Dali tête-à-tête over lunch and he was wonderful. He was sweet, he was adorable, he was full of humor, he was attentive. He was fabulous! And I fell madly in love when I met the real Dali. That was the beginning of a long, long affair that lasted sixteen, seventeen years. I was never married to him but I keep talking about Dali because he was so important in my life. It's always a pleasure to mention Dali and to try to explain what a great man he was. And because he was so famous, all the world wanted to meet him. So it was a little like hanging out with a pop star. Sometimes I had the feeling I was hanging around with Elvis Presley because everybody wanted to meet Dali — the musicians, the Rolling Stones, the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, Alice Cooper, Andy Warhol and the painters, [cellist Mstislav] Rostropovich, Onassis. The whole world was going to the Hotel Meurice in Paris to meet Dali, to have a photograph taken with him. Therefore, I met all of those incredible people. I would never, never in my life dream of having the opportunity of running into those people.

Yoko Ono purchased his mustache hair?

Yoko Ono thought it was quite funny to offer it as a present to John Lennon and so Peter Brown, who was then the manager of the Beatles, called us and said that he wanted

to purchase the hair of Salvador Dali's mustache. Dali was very superstitious, like all artists. He thought that Yoko Ono was a bit of a witch. He heard that you could put a spell on people, make magic — black magic — with their hair or fingernails. He said, 'I'm not going to give one of my mustache hairs to this woman. She might put a spell on me. So we're going to trick her, and we're going to sell her fake hair.' So he sent me into the garden to pick up a bit of grass. There was a flower growing in the garden, with a bit of grass which was all dried up and could perhaps pass as the hair from his mustache. We put it in a lovely little box and presented it like it was the real hair. And I think she bought it, I don't know, for a thousand dollars or something like that. Dali, of course, adored doing this. He always enjoyed tricking people and making fun of them. *[laughs]* He'd say, 'Can you imagine? She paid for fake hair.' That amused him very much. He wasn't very honest, I must say. Let's apologize to Yoko Ono.

Do you consider yourself a feminist?

No, I don't think I'm a feminist. It's just that I was a completely liberated woman long before it all started. It's quite funny that nowadays all the girls are running to Victoria's Secret to buy bras and suspender belts when forty years ago they were desperate to burn them. 'Hey, we want to be free.' Nowadays, of course, nobody wants to be free. We're desperately looking for real men, which is not so easy to find.

Your drive is so impressive.

Everybody says that to me. They say, 'My God, you've got so much energy! What are you taking? Are you drinking Red Bull or whatever?' No, it's just energy. I can't sit still. It's very difficult for me. I love to think. I love to dance. I love to act. I love to sing. I don't know. It's good to be creative. The minute I go on a holiday, I'm real bored.

What kind of friend is Amanda Lear?

I'm a Scorpio. I'm very loyal to my friends. That is sacred to me. When somebody betrays my friendship, it's very difficult to forgive. It's true. I'm a little hard. It's very important that I can totally rely on my friends, on the people around me, on the people that I collaborate with. It's a very small circle. I've got only three or four very close friends that I can rely on. But most of the time, I'm really very happy by myself. God, I'm so pleased to be by myself. When everybody complains about loneliness, 'Oh my God, I'm so lonely,' I say, 'Bless you that you are alone. Thank God you are alone.' Your husband divorced you? Well, thank God. You have money now. You can do what you want. Your children are grown up? Good. You're free. You don't have to cook for them anymore. It's so wonderful to be alone, not to have to care for anybody, just for yourself. Honestly, I cannot understand people who

feel lonely. It's impossible nowadays to feel lonesome. Everybody's got television, cinema. Walk in the park. Look at the birds in the tree. Look at the flowers. You cannot be lonely. That's something I don't understand. Personally, I never feel lonely.

You have a new generation of fans.

I did a show for Jean Paul Gaultier two months ago. The theme was disco music so he wanted me absolutely to be the star. Gloria Gaynor is too fat and Donna Summer is dead, so there was only me left. *[laughs]* They say I'm an icon. They say, 'Amanda Lear, she's still there. She's tall. She's thin. She has a sense of dressing.' I say, 'No, I'm just able to survive.' Everybody else is dead, probably. That's why. I've always been interested in the fashion world since I was a model forty years ago. I always thought it was so creative to be a fashion designer. It's incredibly difficult to come up with new ideas, with a new look every two months, every season. It's very tough on them. I admire them like I admire all creative people. It's wonderful. That's why they like me. They say I'm a source of inspiration to them. I don't know why though.

What is it like to make love with Amanda Lear?

Amanda: Ah, well, I don't know. It's quite an experience. *[laughs]* There have been a lot of good-looking young men who were very pleased. I'm over sixty and I walk the street and all those young kids, some of them are nineteen and twenty-one; they say to me, 'Amanda, you're good, you're great,' or 'you're so sexy.' I say, 'But why don't you go out with a girl your age?' 'Oh, no. You are so much sexier, full of experience and your mouth,' and this and that. It's a great surprise. That 'cougar' phenomenon — it looks like they discovered it three or four years ago with Demi Moore. But it's always been there. We didn't need Demi Moore to invent the word 'cougar,' or *Sex and the City*. I've always been a cougar. I've always liked younger men and younger men always like elderly women. It's always been like this. The older woman is more experienced. She dresses better. She knows exactly what to do in bed. She makes them feel like men, powerful, and the young men love it. Later on, perhaps, they will marry a younger woman and have children. But let's say that their first sexual experience should be with me. *[laughs]*

Thank you so much for speaking with us!

It was great talking to you. I hope we meet sometime when you come to Paris.

I would love that. Have a wonderful day.

Thank you, darling. Bye-bye.

Bye-bye.