



Girlfriend:: Men, Women, and Drag

Holly Brubach

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"Drag is a loaded topic, triggering ferocious responses in a wide variety of people. There are men (both straight and gay) who abhor drag for its flamboyant display and find it alarming that the transition from masculine to feminine can be made by means of something so facile as a change of clothes, and others who are seasoned spectators, who go out and look at drag queens the same way some guys watch Monday Night Football. As for women, there are those who consider drag queens their soul sisters, and others who feel insulted by drag as a mean-spirited, sexist caricature. There are intellectuals (men and women alike) who champion drag as a laboratory for what is known in academic circles as 'gender studies.' And finally, there are those who consider drag decadent, perverse, reprehensible."

But no matter what you think of it, there can be no denying that drag is everywhere--The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert; Dennis Rodman and Howard Stern; Hedwig and the Angry Inch--and in **Girlfriend** this fantastic world of gender-bending is explored by former New York Times Magazine style editor Holly Brubach and celebrated photographer Michael James O'Brien.

Brubach, once described as a writer "who could make a safety pin sound fascinating," covers the drag scene in New York, London, Paris, Berlin, Amsterdam, Rio, Tokyo, and Bangkok, introducing us to a wonderful group of vivid personalities who bring cross-dressing to life in the unique style of each city. **Girlfriend** features individual artists and group events: Wigstock; the annual drag queen invasion of the Pines on Fire Island; the banda d'Ipanema's parade through the streets of Rio during Carnaval; a "Diamonds Are Forever" party in Japan. O'Brien's photographs portray a world of great diversity--witty, flamboyant, touching, and enormously imaginative.

Girlfriend is a brilliant and insightful look at the people and places that create this vibrant culture. In the end, this guided tour tells us as much about our own received notions of gender as about the imagination and artistry of the men and women who dress as members of the opposite sex. Girlfriend is a passport to a new world, one brimming with creativity and joie de vivre, contradiction and irony.

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