

[...] I started putting up posters all over Atlanta - It really made me famous there 'cause

Lettin It All Hang Out, RuPaul, 1995 (Hyperion)



no one else (apart from the Now Explosion) was doing posters. I took pictures of myself and blew them up by Xeroxing them. I didn't have a budget for air-brushing, so I would do it myself by taking a pencil eraser to shape up the outlines, white out those unsightly marks, and, using my own natural artistry, enhance the eyes. Then I would slap on a slogan like "RuPaul Is Red Hot" or "RuPaul Is Everything," make 200 copies, and plaster Midtown armed with a paint brush and a bucket of wheat paste.

Generally the slogans were borrowed from other places. One of my favorites was from *the* Donna Summer album *Donna Summer*. It read: "This is the hottest summer on record." Isn't that genius? For Donna Summer, the hottest summer on record. Another of my favorites, "The future belongs to those who can hear it coming," was on David Bowie's *Heroes* LP. I took that and made it, "The future belongs to those who can *smell* it coming." I've always loved clever advertising slogans, like the ones Samantha came up with on the TV show *Bewitched*.

Funny enough, some of the people I have shared this detail of my career with have been quite shocked and said, "What, you didn't make them up yourself?" Of course not! The point about pop culture is that so much of it is borrowed. There's very little that's brand new. Instead, creativity today is a kind of shopping process—picking up on and sampling things from the world around you, things you grew up with. That's very much my *modus operandi*. If you knew all the references, you could deconstruct one of my performances and place every look, every word, and every move. I do. I know all the references, and watching myself on tape I love to sit with friends and unstitch (to their amazement) the patchwork of my performance, identifying this bit from here and this bit from there. I really see myself as a sampling machine. Even the supermodel drag queen I would later become is a kind of Frankenstein's monster—a collage made up of bits and pieces from old television shows, copies of *Vogue* magazine, and advertisements. I think at this late stage in the twentieth century it's

If It Ain't Fun, Don't Do It

almost all been done, and everything now is a kind of rehash. My life and my work is really just a question of filling in the blanks and coloring by numbers.

The posters were a huge success and helped establish me in Atlanta. By that summer I had gotten enough money together to get my own apartment in Midtown with my friend Cathy, who later changed her name to Carson, who later changed her name to Cabbage—it was a punk thing. Shortly after Cabbage and I moved in together, I met up with other kids who had moved to Midtown Atlanta from the sticks of suburbia in search of something. Like John Ingle, who would later become renowned as the "Lady" Bunny. She was straight off the bus from Chattanooga, and without doubt the sharpest wit I ever met. He had me in stitches. Like Floyd, who was Bryan Chambers then, but fresh out of high school and looking for trouble. Although Floyd is one of my dearest friends today, we didn't really like each other at first because we were both know-it-alls. The question would come up, "What movie was it when Bette Davis says 'What a dump?'" And we'd both simultaneously say "Beyond the Forest" and look at each other thinking, "I can't stand this guy."

RePAUL'S FAVORITE DRAG QUEEN MOVIES

1. *Mahogany*: I live for the modeling montage.
2. *Paris Is Burning*: The film that inspired *Supermodel (You Better Work)*.
3. *Valley of the Dolls*: The rise and fall of three queens and their hair.
4. *Funny Face*: Kay Thompson is brilliant—think pink!
5. *Rocky Horror Picture Show*: Don't dream it, be it.
6. *Torch Song*: Joan Crawford in blackface with red hair!
7. *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*: Fun-loving road picture.
8. *What a Way to Go*: Shirley MacLaine has a million Edith Head costumes.
9. *Cleopatra Jones*: At 12 I wanted to be Tamara Dobson.
10. *Mommie Dearest*: Ups and downs of being a queen.
11. *All About Eve*: Bette Davis—Strong as a man, made like a woman.
12. *A Streetcar Named Desire*: Misunderstood queen caught in reality.
13. *Vertigo*: Girlfriend gets clocked.
14. *Auntie Mame*: Life is a banquet and most drag queens are stuffing their faces.
15. *Stage Door*: Queens trying to make it on the Great White Way.