

Text by Laura Albert  
Portrait by Calla Henkel &  
Max Pitegoff

“What are you winning?”, the laconic twenty-something beauty Victoria Davidoff asks throughout the hybrid reality show *THE DEATH OF A STAR*, landing unforgettably on the defining question of present-day American culture.

A small cast gathers in the heart of a Hollywood theater, are they supporting or competing against each other? It’s not clear yet.

Their vague backstories are surgical events, Victoria shows her accidentally amputated digit (JUMP CUT to a detached ring-finger), her stump glowingly sensuous.

Ashley Hood is accused by others of getting the non-existent reverse double-eyelid surgery to appear Asian, and when confronted if she is in fact Filipino she replies flippantly, “Yeah, but I spent some time in Paris, so I’m like kinda French.”

Fashion brands are admired, Tat-ta blotting papers are taken without permission, sex-worker glam of the Gen-Z contestants—five girls, one boy—is captured in a black box of a theater as they fumble, scratch and fawn over each

ture artists while also making her own captivating art?

Part of the allure is the fact that those who answer the call to one of Johnson’s pop-up Factory Made events are not scene hangers-on wanting to witness spectacle, they are from the community of creators, producing the most vibrant art you’ve almost heard of.

Factory Made events are hardly advertised, relying mostly on word of mouth, and most find out about them *afterwards*. It’s dawn by the time those who already played their parts have posted.

Factory Made’s first installment erupted upon the parking lot of Pollo a la Brasa on S. Western Ave. back in January of 2023—a reinvention of the literary paradigm, traditional contexts stripped away to release a gathering of carefully selected artists alongside lesser-known writers, all sharing the life’s blood of their work with an audience Johnson calls “a cross-genre pollination of dyslexic debutantes, transgressive twink, ketafiend starlets, and the like.” Disrupting contemporary literature without introducing yet another cult; instead, she unleashes a celebration of the reality of readers’ lives—their experiences, aspirations, fantasies, constructions and de-constructions—as Factory Made march-

stay hidden and let the spirit guide, because she knows we sure do love crucified rock stars.

*THE DEATH OF A STAR*’s contestant Peggy Noonan tilts her head at the camera, blond curls cascading as she admits, “I’m young enough to get away with like being [makes air quotes] *a writer*.” Before Peggy goes on to declare she *is* a writer and then looks toward nothing, she reassures us with the certainty of a fortune teller, “It doesn’t mean anything...”

Jasmine Johnson *is* a storyteller who shares the spotlight, masterfully reminding us all of the urgency to reiterate the nightmare of our culture-defining question, “What have we fuckin’ won?” And that answer in fact means everything.

# Jasmine

other like a box of feral kittens, the wafting threat of overdose in nihilistic pursuit of fame as each struggles to answer what they cannot.

What the fuck are we winning?  
The genius of director/writer Jasmine Johnson is in her deftness at capturing an entire generation and its obsessions.

Then there is the lore surrounding Jasmine Johnson’s ongoing creations—is it true that a contestant disappeared after a flight to Dubai? Fans flew to Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi in Berlin for Johnson’s first solo show, an extended version of *THE DEATH OF A STAR* with an installation of framed works offering a glimpse of *PCH & HEROIN*, Johnson’s much-anticipated narrative feature currently in production.

Of course, many came so they’d be able to say that they had met the elusive Jasmine Johnson, and to figure out whether this person, who creates scenes out of thin air, truly exists.

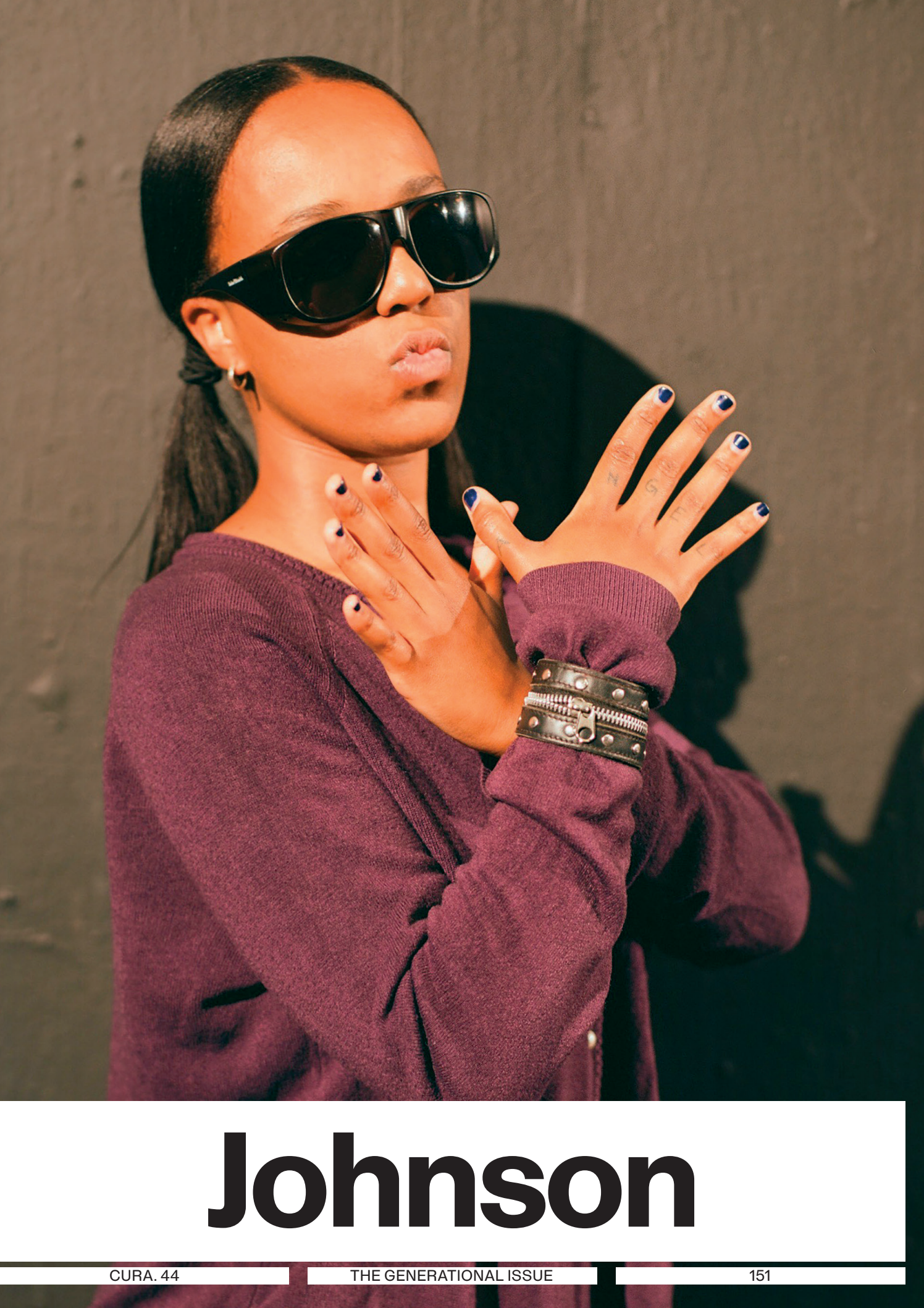
Jasmine Johnson seems to have sprung up a ready-made out of Hollywood legend, who her parents might be is insultingly conjured to explain how else would a twenty-six-year-old woman be able to arise as LA’s new tastemaker? How could someone so young have this indomitable capacity to curate and nur-

es on. “I believe in everyone’s capability, whether they advertise it or not—it’s usually the ones you don’t see coming.”

The following year she put some of those lives onscreen with her four-part *THE DEATH OF A STAR*, selling out a four-day run at the celebrated performance venue New Theater Hollywood, juxtaposing her footage of her cast with the actual players onstage, commenting on the fixed versions of themselves, which were unspooling for audiences. Johnson transformed her novel take on the reality show by force-feeding it even more reality and letting the truths of her individual cast members collide with their own representations. The result was a dissection of the distortions and over-simplifications on which fame relies. There before the God of Grace go I.

Her collisions of messy, slippery realities with groomed, posed, and consumable image-making bypass analysis and criticism. Instead, they serve to release self-recognition, compassion, and empathy.

Johnson knows where power comes from, and because she trusts her own, she does not ask for permission to create the way she chooses. Power comes in allowing community to flourish, and sometimes all it takes is the right woman, younger than Jesus but wise enough to



# Johnson









*THE DEATH OF A STAR*, 2024 (stills) (p. 155) *THE DEATH OF A STAR*, installation view, Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin, 2024 Photo: Graysc (p. 154)  
All images Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin