

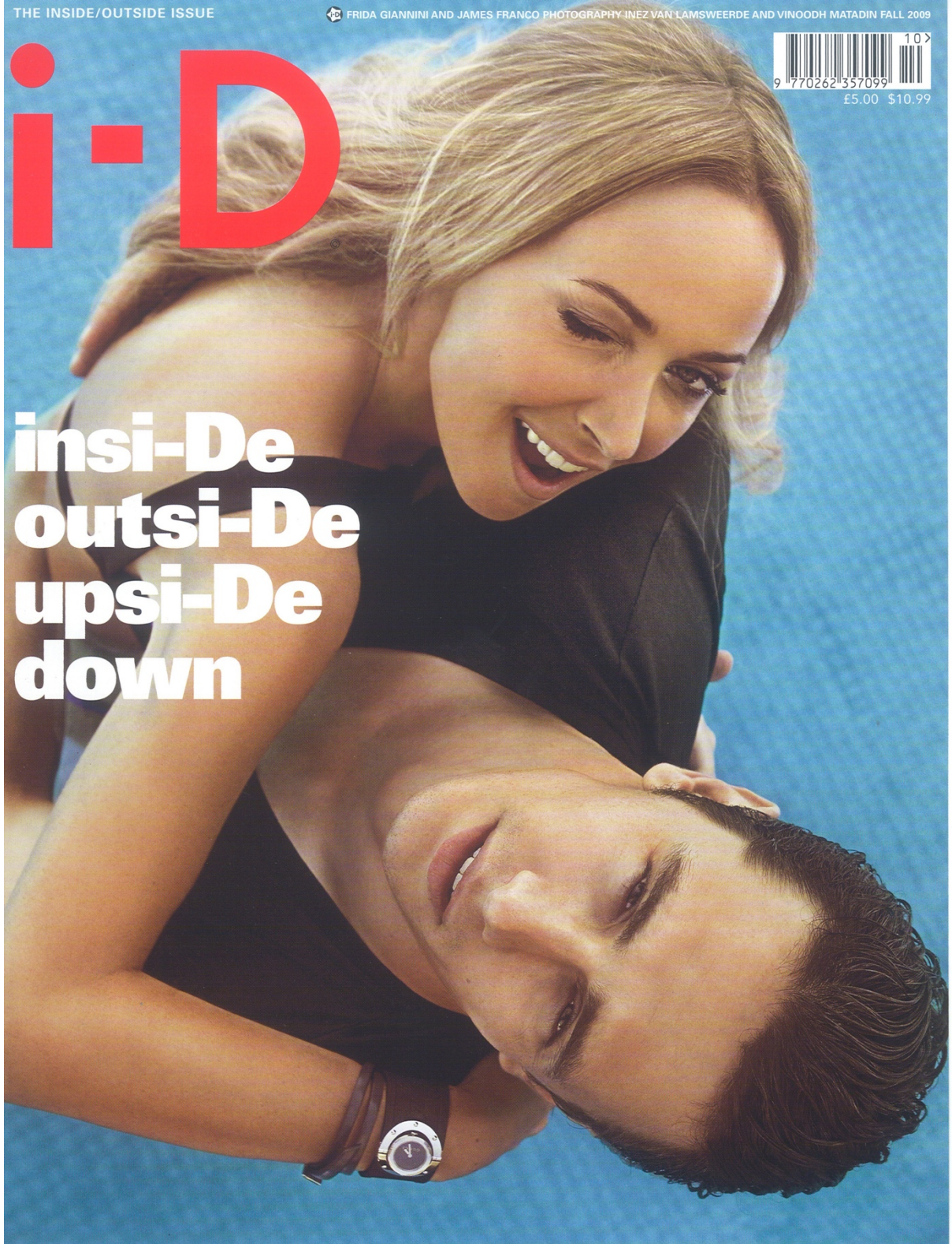
THE INSIDE/OUTSIDE ISSUE

FRIDA GIANNINI AND JAMES FRANCO PHOTOGRAPHY INEZ VAN LAMSWERDE AND VINOODH MATADIN FALL 2009

i-D

9 770262 357099 10
£5.00 \$10.99

**insi-De
outsi-De
upsi-De
down**



BEAUTIFUL FREAKS celebrates the flamboyant and fabulous faces lighting up East London after-dark.

TEXT JAMES ANDERSON
PHOTOGRAPHY RALF OBERGFELL

Hailing from Freiburg, Germany, 37 year-old photographer Ralf Obergfell moved to London in the early 90s as a rosy cheeked whippersnapper keen to explore his confused sexuality. He also wanted to indulge his love of British music and fashion (and apparently eat loads of marmalade which he couldn't find back home!). Despite taking pictures since the tender age of fifteen, Obergfell found his ideal subject matter in the flamboyant freaks brightening up many-a-disco, party and pub in and around East London's art-music-fashion scenes. Ralf's new exhibition - packed full of out-there club kids and hyper-styled 'faces', and displayed in conjunction with set designer Tony Hornecker's rusty-steel sculptures - is rather fittingly called *Beautiful Freaks*. We caught up with Ralf to find out more.

When did you first start photographing people in clubs?

The very first club pictures I took were at Lower The Tone eight years ago. The *Beautiful Freaks* body of work kicked off when I started hanging out at Trailer Trash in 2005. There I became friends with Per QX, Tony Hornecker and Mikki Most. From then on the work progressed via Horse Meat Disco's first NYC Downlow in Glastonbury, through Jonny Woo's birthday bash, The Pale Blue Door and GutterSlut. Count Sergio, Chicken, Tasty Tim and the sexy club kids were some of my first photographic subjects.

Do you 'point the camera and hope for the best' or do you compose the person before taking the picture?

I don't really arrange the person, no. I'm interested in capturing the moment - ideally when the person is not aware of being photographed. Unfortunately my subjects can usually sniff out a camera from miles away, so they can be quite conscious of being photographed. A stylish club kid usually knows how he or she wants to be seen and portrayed by the camera. By doing so they're expressing an act of art that leads to another act of art and so on. It's a fun process!

Who have been your favourite subjects over the years?

Beautiful Freaks is a portraiture series and a tribute to our friends, some of London's most iconic creatures of the



night. It's challenging to pinpoint favourites from a body of work spanning five years and still going. I think the final images that have made it in to the show are definitely amongst the favourites. So in no order of greatness, Jonny Woo, Ryan Styles, Jeanette, Pia, Miss Transforma, A Man to Pet, John Sizzle, Alex Collins and Shabnam. I'm attracted to and interested in their personal styles of sexual and cultural identities, their beauty and the 'I don't care what others think!' attitude, that goes with it.

What club nights are your favourites?

London offers many great club nights and parties. I live and work in East London so it comes natural to go out in the hood. I love the concepts, atmospheres, people and music at BUTT, Gay Bingo, The Pale Blue Door, Trailer Trash, Dalston Superstore and GutterSlut - the club I founded with the Dalston Gay Mafia.

What would you say to skeptics who think the club kid/drag/freak thing has been done better and weirder in the past?

In the late 60s there was Hibiscus and

the Cockettes, in the 80s Leigh Bowery and his troupe, and in the noughties Jonny Woo and his gang. I'm sure there will always be a time and place for future freaky movements within the generations to come. I really hope so, because they are a breeding ground for new creative ideas and trends that form an important part of our cultural and social identities. They enrich our society, one that sadly seems to become more and more gentrified and fucked up.

What do you hope to capture in your photographs?

I hope that each viewer will look at the photographs in their own way. The subjects in the photographs have become my friends over the years, so I know them on a personal level, which some viewers probably won't. The subjects are ultimately an act of performing art, however to me a A Man To Pet, Miss Transforma, Pia and so on are essentially still the same genuine persons they are, whether in drag or not.

Are you a party voyeur? Or do you like to join in the fun?

The photograph wouldn't happen

without the subject and the photographer, so in this instance of course you do become part of it. I love it. At GutterSlut you can see me with and without the camera on the dance floor, around the pole, on the door and spinning a few records in the DiscoSlut room.

What's the freakiest outfit you've ever worn for a giddy night out?

Last year at Jonny Woo's birthday bash. We dressed up in our own versions of Jonny Woo. My head was fully bandaged, and on my nose I stuck Jonny's infamous GutterSlut nose. I wore a red shoulder-padded eighties jacket and a skirt made out of a blouse. I love playing football, so instead of high heels I went for football boots. I thought all these little studs would probably make up for high heels. It worked...

ralfobergfell.com
[facebook.com/Dalston-Superstore](https://www.facebook.com/Dalston-Superstore)