



EVA & ADELE

WHEN I SEE YOU MY HEART IS DANCING
PHOTOGRAPHY GRETA ILIEVA. WORDS NADJA SAYEJ





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EVA & ADELE are a pair of bald-headed artists who trot the art world in matching outfits. Scratch that. They trot the *world* in matching outfits. One day, it'll be two pairs of heart-shaped wings, the next matching pink business suits with fur collars. Visiting them at home is very different from just seeing them in public. They're known to conceal their identity from absolutely everyone – insisting they met in a time machine in the late 1980s – and even the bell on their apartment building plays along, stating simply “EVA & ADELE”. A tour of their studio reveals a photograph with Jeff Koons, dedicated to them, a signed postcard from Louise Bourgeois, and dozens of paintings that range from metallic abstracts to self-portraits and text-based artworks that repeat their most popular slogan: “Futuring”.

Their first performance was “Wedding Metropolis”, 1991, at Martin-Gropius-Bau Museum in Berlin, in which they performed as two brides. It was the first time they were out in public in matching white wedding dresses. This was only the beginning of their career, which has taken them across the globe – from guest spots as ‘The Eggheads’ on Channel 4’s *Eurotrash* to a solo show at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris and their own trademark watch for Swatch. Despite the similarities, they’re not identical twins. Eva is the taller, more mellow personality, while Adele is shorter, with rambunctious energy and an array of peppy phrases. Their oversized closet is the length of an entire wall, stretching from bedroom to kitchen. All their outfits are paired up, matching, beside one another. One can’t help but notice their penchant for pink and the collection of handmade handbags, each with a name tag. Enviably, they still fit into their early outfits from 1989, a matching pair of little black dresses.

EVA & ADELE (they insist on capitals and ampersand) won’t leave the house or receive guests without a faceful of make-up and full regalia. “Making painting on skin is harder than on canvas,” says Adele, while Eva adds, “We’ve been doing this for 28 years.” As they gear up for their exhibition *L’amour du Risque*, at Me Collectors Room Berlin, opening April 26 – at which a perfume of the same name will make its debut – EVA & ADELE spoke to *Beauty Papers* about cohabitation, New York City and positive thinking over soy milk and espressos.

NADJA SAYEJ: What will you feature at your forthcoming retrospective and why is it called *L’amour du Risque*?

ADELE: It means you are open to taking risks. Even the Dalai Lama says you have to take a risk, it’s a sign you’re alive. We love the statement of philosopher Theodor W Adorno, from his book *Collected Writings 7*: “Art is risky, only those who take their hands off the edge of the pool have started to swim.” We were talking to a journalist who made a film for [Franco-German culture-based TV channel] Arte on our recent show in Paris, who said, “You must

love risk, you have l’amour du risque.” We realised how beautiful that statement is. We will be showing work from 1992 onward, it’s a retrospective with video films, Polaroids, 20 big paintings, drawings, a bed installation and biographical sculptures.

EVA: When we talk to people, we don’t know what will happen. We look in the eyes of the people and see what’s inside.

NS: How did this all begin?

ADELE: When we started being EVA & ADELE, we didn’t even know it yet. You have to remember, it was the end of 1988, beginning of 1989, to go out as EVA & ADELE was really a big scandal. People wanted to hurt us, yell profanities at us and some didn’t even want to stand beside us – and this was people in the art world. We had the crazy people in Berlin who were fantastic, but the rest were old-fashioned people and they were really shocked. When we went to exhibitions, they said, “Sorry, we don’t have any more room here”. It was hard!

EVA: This was not the Berlin of now. The people were less tolerant.

NS: Why are selfies a big part of your art? Fans love taking selfies with you and you love taking selfies with each other.

EVA: It started on the first day we started doing EVA & ADELE.

ADELE: It’s part of our work and it’s a kind of self-assurance, and the first photo of EVA & ADELE, right before the audience run for photos with us. We started collecting these pieces from the early 1990s on, asking people to mail us the photographs in envelopes. We have a fantastic archive of society from that time; now we also have an email archive. We were doing Instagram before Instagram. For us, it’s one part of our work. We also have film, sculpture, painting, watches and perfume. There will be 100 limited-edition bottles of our perfume *L’amour du Risque* at our retrospective in Berlin – we made this scent in the south of France.

EVA: We also have a photo with Roy Lichtenstein and Ellsworth Kelly in New York!

NS: How did you develop?

ADELE: We met as two independent artists. From 1991, we went twice a year to New York City. Without New York, we couldn’t be – we couldn’t do it only in Berlin. In the spirit of New York, the people there were responsive. They said, “Wow! Where did you get the idea to do this?” And we said “Us, ourselves.” They said, “This is so unique.” New York is like a vitamin for our work, it always recharges us. EVA: We always give people our smile all over the world, our smile is a work of art.

NS: You’ve been called “a symbol of Manhattan”.

ADELE: Yes, we are. We’re also a symbol of Berlin, Paris, Cologne. People started saying that around



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the time we realised we should take it more seriously. Even at a bus stop, people know who we are, so we're performers everywhere. We exhibit when we go out. In the early years we never used the word "performance" because we always thought we do something bigger than performance, we do an extension of performance. Now we say "performance", otherwise people are confused.

EVA: For the first seven years, we never spoke to people; we only smiled and looked back with our eyes. Wherever we are is a museum.

NS: What's your philosophy?

ADELE: We act like we are both dandies and monks. If we come back in the studio, we are like monks, thinking, making art and reflecting. Then we leave the house and 20 cameras are in our faces. Humans don't exist in only one position. We like these extreme positions.

EVA: Our bodies are 21st-century sculpture. Over the boundaries of gender.

NS: When you travel for art events, such as Art Basel Miami Beach and the Venice Biennale, you make detailed plans of which outfits you will wear. There are pages explaining what shoes, purses and outfits will fill your days. Will this be shown at your retrospective in April?

ADELE: Yes, 162 different plans will be on the wall, it will be incredible, for us it's a kind of drawing. It's also a document of the performance. It's hard work to pack the suitcases, all its logistics. It's like a theatre, but we don't have an orchestra pit or a distance from the public – and we don't have the helpers they have in a theatre. Sometimes fashion designers help us make our outfits but we usually do it ourselves, we look for the fabric and tailors. When we started, we didn't have much money, so we found cheap stuff and made clever combinations. You can see how crazy some early pieces were.

EVA: We will also show films from our early years and our famous "three wings" costumes.

NS: You met in Italy and your relationship started as a six-hour dance?

ADELE: And a discussion during the dance, and even a little bit of a disagreement – and this disagreement keeps going. We are good fighters. We have such different personalities. Eva is the harder one even though she seems softer. It's fantastic; you have to clear up everything. You must discuss things in a radical way – it's healthy, for the performance and also as human beings.

NS: It keeps the love alive.

ADELE: Yes, it's harmony after discussion, not harmony from heaven.

NS: You don't like superficiality?

ADELE: No, we are confronted with so many

people who have a superficial view of us. We are not a moral institution, they can think what they want. We are interested in surprises, but you must go deeper. Every drawing and painting we do has an idea to reflect upon.

NS: Do you consider your work to be at all political?

ADELE: Our work from the beginning has been political and it still is even until today. We love to quote from a catalogue text of MOCAM Museum in Krakow by Jacek Kochanowski on the occasion of our solo show, *The Artist = A Work of Art 2012*:

"Meanwhile, the more courageously we step outside the script, the more effectively we oppose the system. The submission of our bodies is the condition for the perpetuation and reproduction of the play of domination. In discarding the normative script and living in accordance with their own androgynous and genderless one, EVA & ADELE acquire not only space to roam and self-determination for their bodies, they also effectively strike out at the unjust system of gender segregation. This is why EVA & ADELE's project is not merely aesthetic. It is chiefly political. A project to liberate bodies from the fetters of gender constructs. It is a liberation that opens a path to questioning the whole system of gender domination. Their bodies belong to them."

EVA: People can be very aggressive. One taxi driver drove us around like an F1 car, throwing our suitcases like garbage on the street. So horrible.

NS: How do you deal with a situation like that?

ADELE: In a situation like that, we are not aggressive, we must be silent. That was the only possibility because he showed how much he hated us. Most people are absolutely fantastic and tell you such nice things, we have made a lot of friends over the years. One person handed us a little piece of paper when we were visiting a gallery. It said, "Thank you for making this world a beautiful place." People ask us how we keep doing what we do and if we do yoga or mediate. But, as Eva says, it's art.

EVA: We live art 100 per cent with no vacation.

NS: You have this concept of "futuring". What is it?

ADELE: We had to find a new word in addition to art and we came up with futuring – to create the future and to focus on something that will happen in the future. We became a symbol of bringing gender into the future, we are a new gender. Beautiful things have happened. For example, someone mailed us a carton of wine with a beautiful letter that said, "I am living in a tiny village in the countryside, you are my heroes, I love you so much, I am so happy you exist, for me you are always an anchor. I could maybe one day express myself as well." It's this fantastic love letter.

EVA: That is futuring at work, when we inspire people to find love.——







