

September 19, 2017 - Amanda Lepore is a model, singer, performance artist, and icon living in New York City. A legend of nightlife for three decades, she released her debut album *I...Amanda Lepore* in 2011, and *I...Amanda Lepore (Make Over Sessions)* in 2016. Her 2017 memoir *Doll Parts*, co-authored with Thomas Flannery Jr., is out from Regan Arts. Lepore is a frequent collaborator and muse of photographer David LaChapelle.



As told to Thora Siemsen, 2285 words.

Tags: Fashion, Art, Inspiration, Beginnings, Identity, Success.

Amanda Lepore on becoming what you want to be

What did you want to do for work when you grew up, and what are ways that childhood informed what you did anyway?

When I was growing up I wanted to be a nurse, because I thought the outfits were cute. Then later on, because I had so many problems [and] I liked listening to people, so I thought about being a psychologist.

How do you think that informed what you do for work now?

It's very far away from all that. I don't know, I just went with the cards that were given me, and here I am. I ended up being an entertainer.

What was your first year living in New York like?

It was hard, because I had just left my husband and was basically supported by him. Everything was a lot of money. That was really hard to figure out where I was gonna get money to survive. But then there was fun too. There were parties. It was exciting to go to dinners, and there was always something going on. It wasn't like New Jersey.

What would you want Amanda during that time not to worry about so much?

My hair breaking from bleaching. That was a big worry, because I liked really super platinum, and it would always break every two years or so. I wish there was Olaplex or something that they have now, so I wouldn't have to worry about that.

You've said, "Through all the insanity in my life, there was only one thing I could control: myself, on the outside obviously, but on the inside, too." To survive in this business so long, you've had to stay healthy and take care of yourself. What are some ways that you do that?

I definitely do yoga. I only have one or two drinks. Everything is in moderation. I take vitamins. I make sure that I sleep well. I take really good care of my skin. I wake up happy all the time, so that's really fortunate. I just love taking care of myself. I guess I've always been like that. I think it's important. You are your mind, really. I'm a product of mind over matter—becoming what I want to be in my mind.

In your book, *Doll Parts*, you write about flying to Milan for the Armani show, and having the Italian press be voyeuristic towards you. They wrote, "La Silicóna at Armani," and you write, "That was the best day of my life." You've made embracing the sensationalism into sort of a weaponized thing; that doesn't work for everyone, but that's also about being in control, right?

I think that it was like being a movie star without doing anything. You can live that glamorous moment. I love escape and fantasy. I think that's why I do nightclubs. That's why I look the way I do—because I didn't really like basic life. I wasn't welcomed. I made my own level and environment, and that was part of it. You are somebody. People are taking your picture. They're interested, so it kind of verified that, "Oh yeah, you're a model."

Who working in fashion in 2017 excites you?

Zana Bayne, some of the fetish stuff. I don't really like conservative fashion, because I just can't relate to it. I like more fancy stuff. More of the fetish, jewelry designers, people that make pasties, is what I like. I'm not one of those people that have to get the latest handbag, or shoes, or anything like that. I wear what I like. I don't know if you would consider me a fashion person.

I did get a nice bag from Jeremy Scott, from Longchamp, because they have a Marilyn Monroe "As Seen On TV" line. I think I liked it more because it had Marilyn Monroe on it and it was a cool image, but I don't

really care about the bag. I do like Jeremy Scott, though. I like a lot of the Moschino—it's kind of quirky, fun.

Have you always had an unrelenting work ethic?

Yes, I'm always working. Even if I'm not working in the nightclub, I'm doing stuff. I like to keep my hands busy. I make a lot of my outfits, and jewel things, like pasties. I love making outfits. I think up hairstyles, and meet up with people. I'm always trying to improve myself and keep stock of things. I don't wait until the last minute to do it. I've probably been working on this one outfit for four weeks already. I don't just buy something or borrow something from someone. I put a lot of thought into it and make sure that everything is perfect.

I don't think a lot of people would know that about you, that you make a lot of your stuff by hand.

Yeah, well I do a lot of the jewelry, and then I work with two other designers, Garò Sparo and Jimmy Helvin. They'll make things for me, like a base for it, and then I'll embellish it, or do whatever I want with it. I'll ask for the colors, and they have my measurements, so it fits really perfect. My friend Jimmy Helvin made a mold of my body, so you can put stuff on it and you could stone, and the stones wouldn't pop for my measurements.

Do you think of makeup as an art form?

Yes. I love makeup. Instead of watching movies, if I'm up at night, I'll watch makeup tutorials. Lacey Noel, I watch her a lot. I think that she's really cute. I actually copied this eye makeup that I did, called a reverse double cut crease, from watching her videos. I love it. I actually think that she's a good make up artist. It works for me, because I don't like basic girl make up, and I don't like drag make up so much, whereas she's a little bit of both. But I do like a little bit of drag, so she's perfect.

What have been some of your most sustaining creative relationships with other people?

Definitely David LaChapelle. He made me famous and he's an incredible artist. He just does everything himself. It's amazing to work with him. I just shot with him last week. We always have a great time, and even if we don't see each other, it goes right back to where we left off. We love each other a lot. We have a special connection, not only working but also as friends. Love him very much.

What qualities do you look for in a creative collaborator?

I think someone that understands me and will keep me in my comfort zone, or convince me why I should do it. I think what makes a good collaboration is that you really want to do it, and are excited to do it. If it doesn't feel right, then it probably isn't right.

What are some of your favorite performance art pieces you've done throughout the years?

Definitely the lipstick, M.A.C. Heatherette thing. I hated it at first, but then it grew on me. I hated not having a wig on, and my hair was so dirty. I was told I was going to wear a wig, and I was trying to get my hair blonde from being yellow, so I didn't wash my hair for like two weeks. I was at my worst.

David tried to convince me—that Charlize Theron movie *Monster* was out—so he said, "Everyone sees you beautiful, so you should do something crazy like she did." It's a role. I was kind of freaked out and definitely not comfortable. It grew on me, and then I saw it as punk. I actually really like it.

In each photo shoot you do, what are some ways that you create a distinct character?

With David, he kind of took me apart and made me do something beyond the retro Marilyn Monroe, Jessica Rabbit look. He took it to somewhere else, to a place that what was current in fashion. Those pictures were often in fashion magazines. I went along with it, because I trusted him.

We work with the best makeup artists and hair people, and I actually learned a lot. If someone used a foundation that I liked, I would ask about it. I became really good friends with the hairdressers. They loved me, because I was really good at doing my own hair, and I was really knowledgeable.

There was a point that Laurent Philippon was staying at Hotel 17 every time he was at fashion week. He would do my hair every day, on the shoots that he was doing for models. He gave me wigs, and gave me extensions and hair dos. It was exciting. A walking fashion magazine.

What was excavating these parts of yourself with another person, your *Doll Parts* co-author Thomas Flannery Jr., like?

I didn't like it that much, because I'm one of those people that live in the moment. I hated talking about the past. A lot of it was painful for me. I have a really good memory, fortunately. I was drilled about stuff I didn't really want to talk about, but I did, and it turned out to be good.

I think he talked to a lot of my friends when he didn't think he was getting the right answer, so some isn't my words, it's friends talking about me. He did interview me for at least two years, every week, so we spent a lot of time together.

In the book you write about being inspired by classic films, particularly those of Marilyn Monroe. What other forms of art besides film do you visit, or revisit, for inspiration?

I always loved Vargas pin ups. I think that's where my love for see-through clothing comes from, because they were always naked under these see-through dresses, so that became a big part of my look. I just felt they were so pretty, and they were athletic, so that got me to go into the gym. I saw that Marilyn Monroe lifted weights, she worked out as well. I think while I was transitioning, I would take all these pointers, and not just take hormones. I think that had a lot to do with it, that these women were athletic. It was a healthier idea.

What does having such a public archive, with so many stages of your life documented, feel like?

It feels good. I was worried about the book, but then when it was done, it looks great. Even though a lot of the pictures were more recent, it still looked great. I see older pictures of me, from the clubs, and fortunately I think I look better now. I can't get depressed about getting older, because they're better. Some people look at their older pictures and say, "Oh damn, I wish I could look like that," but I'm happy that I look like this. Again, I think that's mind over matter, too.

Yeah, it seems to be a very important part of your life.

Yes, I'm very zen, spiritual. Sort of like a hippie. It's very different than what I look like.

What are some of your spiritual practices?

I think the rhinestoning is kind of like a meditation, because you're very quiet and counting. I feel like the meditation is in the stoning, or the whole ritual of the makeup and routine. It's definitely magic and a discipline. Otherwise, I would just say fuck it and wouldn't do it, or have somebody else do it. I enjoy it. I think it's really important to keep your mind constantly active.

How do you get yourself back to being energized by nightlife when it's tiring?

Sometimes I have to stay up late, especially with the traveling. I don't really think of any sort of schedule. Sometimes I'll sleep an entire day or two if I feel like I need it. I'll just stay in bed and sleep and sleep and sleep and sleep. Other times you can't, and you sleep when you can.

I think you just have to take care of yourself, and when you do have time off, definitely do yoga and relaxing things. You certainly don't want to do swing dancing. Have a ball, but you can't stay out all night and then go on a tour. That's one thing, when I go away, I get anxiety about shopping, because I run out of things. I always know what I have to get. You've gotta prepare for it and rest, and take care of yourself and gather outfits and make sure that you have all the things that you need.

What are your favorite things to do when you visit a new place?

I stay in the hotel, unfortunately. My friend that does my hair, Lorenzo Diaz, does these amazing sculpture things. He goes with me, and he likes to go sightseeing and the museums. I live vicariously through his pictures, because I stay in and rest. I'm really professional, so I'll stay in and rest and make sure I do a great show, and give them my 100%. I don't let myself go on a date or go to a museum or do those sort of things.

What brings you hope?

Work, friendship, new dresses, and shoes. Stuff that makes you want to keep on living.

Recommended by Amanda Lepore:

Sunscreen
Sunglasses
5-inch-high stiletto heels
Makeup, especially red lipstick
Love
Happiness
Bleach
Hormones

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Vocation

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Fact

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