

Rajé

A Black Woman Superhero

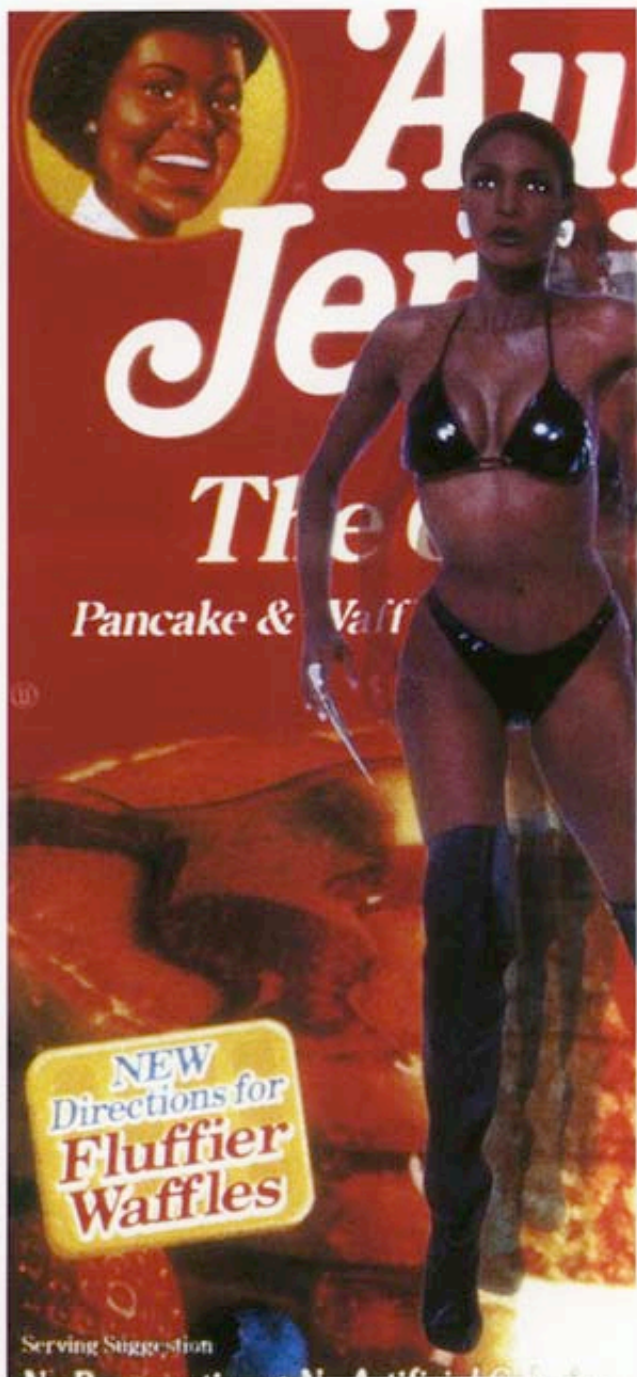
By Greg Tate

The fine arts photography of Renee Cox is saturated with her obsessions: sexuality, stereotypes and her own self-image.

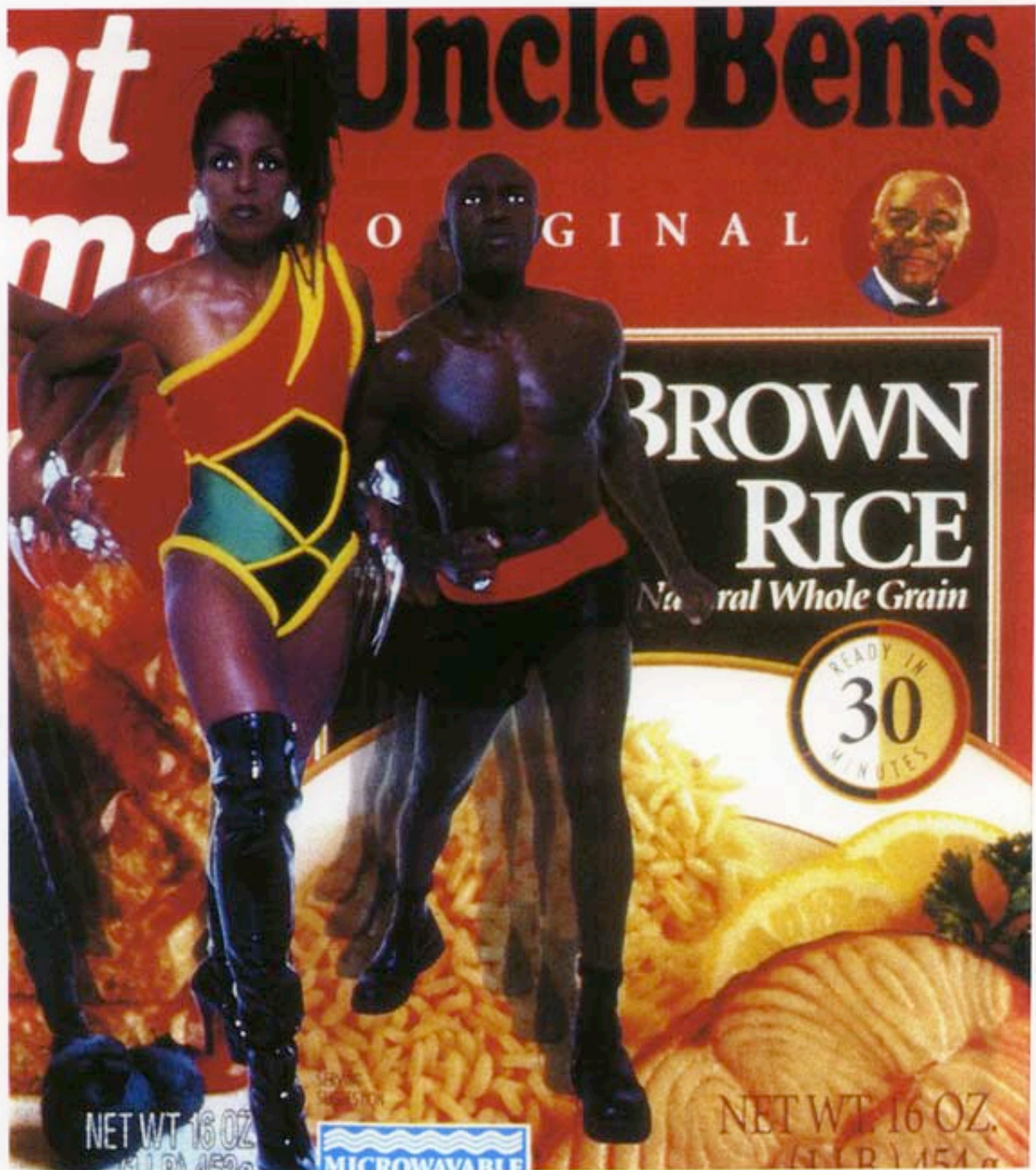
She has recreated "The Last Supper" with strapping, dreadlocked disciples and herself as Jesus; she has presented herself nude post-pregnancy, but looking fit enough to enter a bodybuilding competition.

Cox's latest exhibition, "Rajé: A Superhero, The Bold Beginning of a New Era," which ran at the Cristinerose Gallery in New York this winter, displays Cox as an Afrocentric superheroine who liberates Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben from their grocery-shelf plantations and magically transforms them into the stunning figures of models Roshumba and Rodney Charles. Cox's high-flying creation also defends The Sphinx against Napoleon, who history records as having shot cannonballs at the mysterious figure's Negroid nose.

The format for this graphic



Renee Cox displayed as an Afrocentric superheroine



who liberates Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben from their grocery shelf plantations.

novel is large form cibachrome prints and includes a Barbie-like Rajé doll behind glass as well. As someone who has been following Cox's work for a number of years, I have been consistently intrigued by her integration of theatrical performance, conceptualist conceits, and charged racial politics. In a time when many of her peers are using so-called coon imagery in ironic and critical ways Cox is going another route in the war against stereotypes by presenting black and female figures as models of beauty, resilience and spirituality. That she has been able to do so with wit, lyricism and an exquisite aesthetic sense is a testament to her highly evolved level of craft. She spent years in the field as an international fashion photographer and studied at the New York School of Visual Arts and in the Whitney Museum of Art.



Cox takes it to the white corporate executive.

The Rajé images were designed using advanced computer design programs and have the sheen and hallucinatory power of the ads one would find in glossy magazines. Cox's iconic and heroic depictions of black figures are clearly at odds with the more acceptable and prevalent imagery seen in many downtown galleries these days of blacks as victims of history.

For this reason, her work resists being easily digested by the fine arts mainstream. As a counterattack on visual white supremacy, Cox reads as a one-woman Amazon

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army — a right-on swaggering, fist raised superwoman with a camera and a clear sense of passion. Cox would like to move

from the gallery wall to an animated cartoon series in the hopes of "educating all children about African and African-American history."

Says Cox, "I think my work is very important . . . Right now it's popular for black artists to reappropriate stereotypes. There's the idea that because we spew it out it becomes different. Like teens saying nigger. But I don't think that genre represents a real change. Folks are still comfortable with us in positions of servitude. I think presenting a black woman superhero as an agent of change, ruffles a few feathers and shakes up the status quo."

Greg Tate is a freelance art critic.



Another taxi won't pass this black woman.