

Viva la revolution

Cheddar Gorgeous, a member of Method's family of fabulous Drag Cleans, discusses the evolution of drag artistry

Drag has always been about disrupting convention. From its Shakespearean theatrical roots – when male actors portrayed female characters because women weren't allowed on stage – to its modern-day explosion into mainstream pop culture, it's an art form that asks questions, demands attention and, above all, entertains.

In today's politically divisive world, drag holds

a mirror to issues surrounding gender identity, traditional notions of masculinity and femininity, sexuality, racism, ageism, classism and inclusion. And it does so in an explosion of glitter and feathers while lip-syncing to disco or Disney.

Research commissioned by Method found that over half (58%) of Brits are unaware of the correct definition of LGBTQIA, yet the latest government statistics estimate that more than a million in the UK identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. And, despite the success of television shows such as Channel 4's *Drag SOS* and

RuPaul's Drag Race, 56% of Brits admit to never having heard of a Drag Queen before, with 70% having never attended a drag show.

This led Method to team up with the LGBT Foundation to create a family of 'Drag Cleans', challenging gender stereotypes, celebrating self-expression and spreading the word about queer communities.

Here, Drag Clean Cheddar Gorgeous talks to Jo Usmar about her take on the influence and importance of drag, both historically and in her own life.



→ **'We're living in a world where nothing is guaranteed. And by that, I mean the stability of the nation that we find ourselves born into, the stability of our economy and of our legal rights. You have to be mindful, vigilant, vocal and visible – wonderful things which drag allows you to do.**

We need something that can provide both an escape, but at the same time, provide us a way to engage with the world. I think anything that helps reveal the absurdity of the world we live in and encourages people to see the absurdity of their own actions (and ultimately recognise that strangeness as something that can be familiar), is all good stuff.

The reason I like to look so strange and extreme, even within the drag world, is because if I can be celebrated for being 'out there', then maybe someone who's just strange in a more everyday sense can see me and feel a bit easier about themselves. If a trans or non-binary person can see people responding positively to me looking like this, then maybe they'll feel better. I'm like, "You think *they're* strange? Here's strange!"

LEARN TO EXRESS YOURSELF

That's the real fun thing you get to do with drag – play with these little elements of gender, pop culture, pop music, comedy, then throw a bit of Disney in. We're collage artists. You get to put that out there and have people connect with it because *you* are the spectacle as a drag performer.

Drag is a very specific expression of me – a very heightened expression. It's a me that's able to connect with people in a way no other version of me can do at the moment. I grew up on science-fiction and fantasy – *Star Trek*, *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, *Quantum Leap* and *Babylon 5* – and it's in science-fiction and fantasy that I still find my inspiration. Those genres take really subtle things we take for granted in our lives and literally turns them into another species. I find that really exciting.

DON'T GET TOO HUNG UP

My looks are elaborate, but it's funny because I know nothing about fashion! I think it can be wonderful and beautiful, but I'm always more interested in stuff that's a little bit strange and a little

The world according to Cheddar Gorgeous

From drag families to the family home, Cheddar Gorgeous reveals what keeps her inspired...



THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

For all French women's talk of personal freedom and not caring about what others think, they care very much about people's opinion on their weight. 'It's absolutely not OK to be fat in France,' says Laura Bennet, a Londoner who lived in Paris for several years. 'And if you do.



THE SCIENCE FICTION FILES

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KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY

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bit creepy. And, within that, things that make us think about what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman; how the idea of beauty has been bound up with so many weird, power dynamics that divide us as a species.

So, I think my interest in fashion is in the disruption of convention. I taught myself how to do my make-up and learnt as I went along. I've often looked a total mess and I think that's important – to not get hung-up on perfection.

For my looks, I work with and riff off others. I think the best creativity always comes from collaboration – creativity is born from communicating with one another. I also think within the drag

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and fashion worlds there's this great need to be the pioneer – to be the first to do something – and I just don't think creativity works like that or can be owned. Drag is about collaboration and alliance.

BREAKING THE NORM

As Drag Queens, we transform ourselves into these larger-than-life characters and that allows people, whether it's through their rejection or celebration of us, to feel immediately connected. And in those moments of connection, we may be able to find communication, and move forward with people. It's really powerful. It makes drag so useful for being able to project a message, to champion a cause, or to work through a personal issue. It gives us a language where we're able to put that issue onto our body – where we can actually live that issue. Also, the artifice of it makes it a little bit safer. The fact that I can remove that costume at the end of the day is important.

The great thing drag can do is to act as a kind of mirror of the dynamics going on in our society. At the moment there's a real tension around women being involved in drag. This is built on the idea that drag is always men dressing as women, and that style of drag has dominated for hundreds of years, but it reflects forms of oppression that kept women off stage in the first place.

The fact that drag can be styled as queer tradition is problematic. I just wrote a piece for *Attitude* magazine on whether we can treat Queen Elizabeth I as one of the earliest examples of drag, because of the way she used clothing, make-up and particular forms of performance, as a way to amplify her own voice. Drag is linked up with theatricality, but I don't think it has to be linked up with gender.

Yes, there's a huge tradition of only men doing drag, just in the same way there's a huge tradition of only men being lawyers, or only men being doctors. Drag reflects what's going on in our world and now we're entering a time where we're actually thinking about how we might expand the many different ways people navigate their gender and relationship between their sexuality, body and identity.

THE NEW PIONEERS

Because drag is a place of identity, it's a safe space of emotions; it's a space where you're able to take all those things that exist within our society and emphasise features to make it the only thing people see. That's what drag should be and what drag probably always has been. The idea that any drag queen would ever say that a person can't do drag because they have a vagina? That's so stupid!



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One of the things I'm proudest of regarding the drag community is it tends to be very right-on when it comes to gender, race, ageism, classism and the environment. So, it's really important that as drag queens we become involved as pioneers of those causes, too – it makes a better world and helps other people. But at the same time, it also ensures that our agenda is put forward and our rights assured.

JOIN THE REVOLUTION

That's one of the things that attracted me to Method: they wanted to question these stereotypes in an inclusive and colourful way. Plus, sustainability is front and centre of everything they do, which is just wonderful.

I was asked to design a look based upon a French lavender multipurpose spray – the whole idea of me, a drag queen, promoting multipurpose spray is very camp and very funny. So, I went for a French Revolution look – for me, the theme of revolution aligns perfectly with the

issues surrounding climate change and challenging stereotypes that exist around cleaning. There's class, gender and age stereotypes within that space that drag constantly questions – I think this campaign blows them out of the water beautifully.

Loud and fabulously houseproud

Introducing Method's Drag Clean campaign, in partnership with the LGBT Foundation



Method, the sustainable cleaning company, has partnered with the LGBT Foundation to create a fabulous 'Drag Cleans' team for its new campaign. The Drag Queens, Drag King and Queer Queen will bring the world of drag and cleaning together in a fabulous melee of colour, fun and self-expression. Determined to ban boring in favour of inclusion and individuality, Method is encouraging us all to be loud and houseproud by using its vegan-friendly, biodegradable

products that blaze a trail of style and colour down the cleaning aisle. From plant-based ingredients to recyclable bottles made from recycled plastic, Method prides itself on producing products that blitz away dirt and germs while looking fabulous and being kind to the planet. The campaign comes hot on the heels of the ASA's recent ban on the harmful gender stereotyping so prevalent in advertising, with the Drag Cleans showcasing their creativity and originality while

subverting the outdated toxic stereotypes associated with cleaning for so many years. Channel your inner Drag Clean with Method and become part of a fresh and fabulous way of thinking.

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