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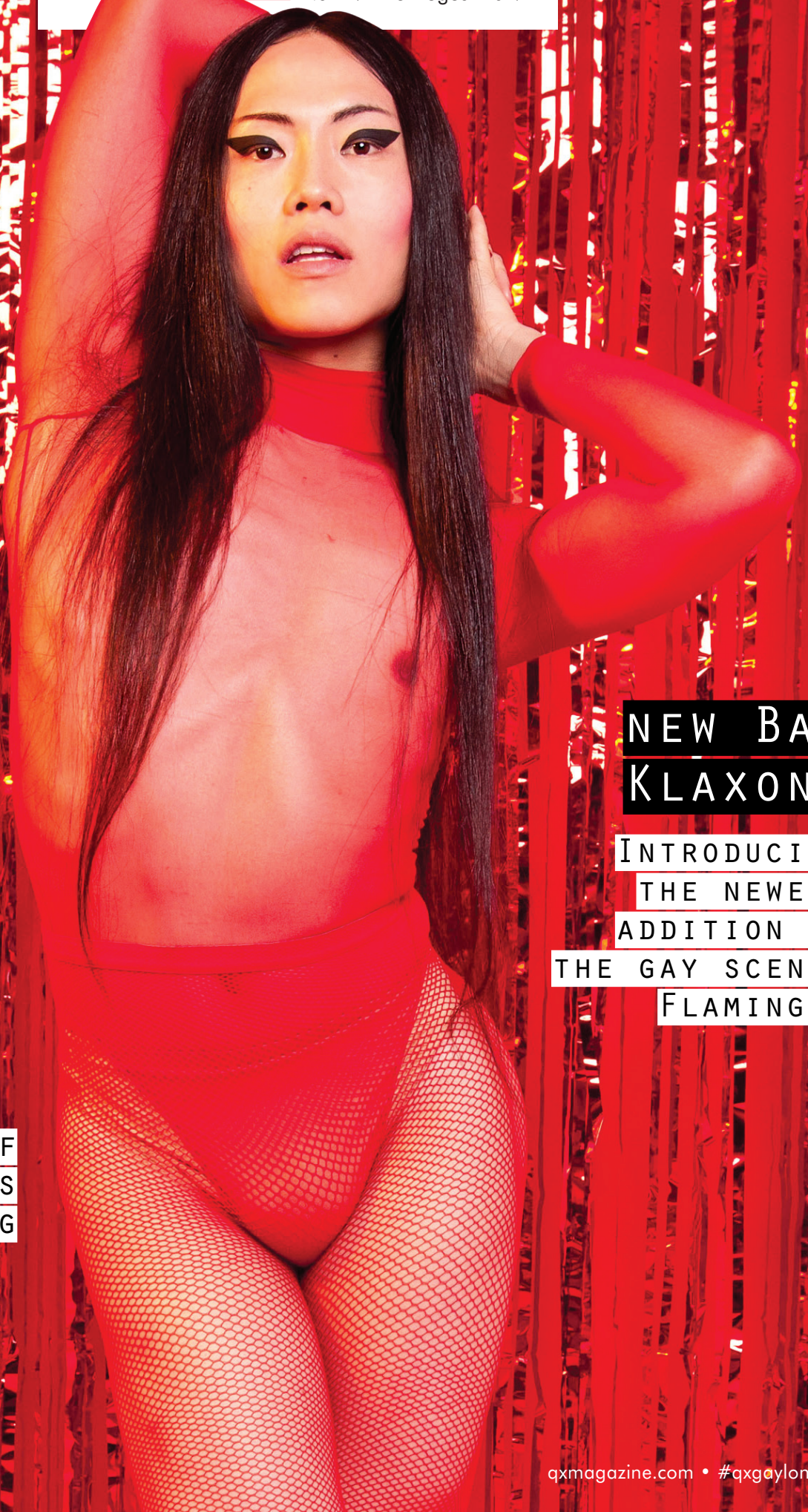
qx

No 1171 16 August 2017



Flippin' eck, it's Fil!

We meet audiovisual artistic sensation, Le Fil

New Bar Klaxon!

Introducing the newest addition to the gay scene, Flamingo!

Briefs

Our review of the salacious scintillating boylesque extravaganza

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Suitable only for persons of 18 years and over

QX MEETS...

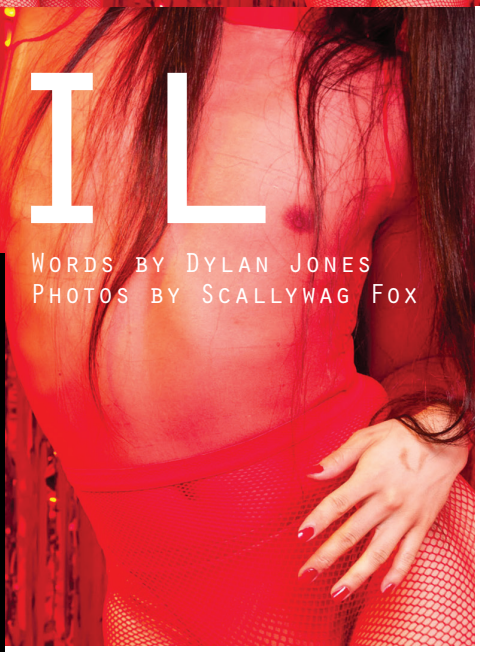
LE FIL

Words by Dylan Jones
Photos by Scallywag Fox

Artist, performer, and general ingenious ingénue Le Fil, is sitting on a banquette at Flamingo Bar in Holborn, sipping a double gin and tonic. He's wearing lots of fab eyeliner, a glissade of gauzey black fabric, witchily cascading down to his trademark Vivienne Westwood wedges.

Instantly incandescent, Fil lives life on his own terms. He defiantly defies boxes – cultural boxes, tick boxes, gender boxes and, most of all, cardboard boxes.

But he exudes quiet confidence, is assertive without being preachy, and refreshingly self-assured. As disco lights spun and Despacito played for the thousandth time, we talked about fetishisation, preconceptions, and his new show, 24/7.



Hey Fil! So tell me about 24/7
It's gonna be like a pop gig with extras. It's a culmination of all the stuff I've been working on, in terms of music and performance art. The show is about how we package ourselves. The way we present ourselves 24/7 to a wider world. I perform it live, with a full band and dancers. And my EPs weave into the narrative. I'm really excited about performing these songs live, especially with a full band. It gives it such a different dynamic and sound to the music. It'll sound epic. It'll be an entertaining show but the audience will also go on a journey with me. The show is almost a confessional - quite a private and personal look into my world of relationships and dating. I definitely don't believe in TMI! And it references gender codes as well, but in a very fun, entertaining, pop culture way. There'll also be lots of Chinese references, and anecdotes about fetishation.

Oh! So have you experienced fetishisation a lot?
Yeah. And it's something that I wasn't always particularly aware of. I was in relationships, or in certain interactions with people, and I didn't realize that was going on. I don't think people necessarily set out thinking "I'm gonna fetishize this person." It just happens.

And it was only after I looked at patterns in relationships when I was like "oh fuck, this is what's going on. Why is it happening?" I think it's down to how binary gender is. And how men and women are represented. The fact that there have to be these definitions. Like, an androgynous person is often confused with a 'ladyboy' and that type of visual imagery that the western society is used to. And then somehow they're interconnected. And you're just this object that exists in between two worlds.

I expect there are some people with no imagination, who feel like they have to put you in a box, but they can't decide which box to put you in.
Totally. And that's what I find quite amusing about our cultural scene at the moment. Because there are so many boxes. Like you've got twinks, you've got ladyboys, you've got trans boys. And all are fetished by people. So trying to put me into one of them is just a bit problematic. "Submissive bottom twink". Don't be so sure! You can exist in lots of different states at any given point, depending on what you choose. So the idea of labeling is quite difficult.

> "IF I WAS GONNA IDENTIFY AS SOMETHING IT WOULD SIMPLY BE AS "A MAN". IN DOING THAT I'D WANT TO EXPAND THE DEFINITION OF "A MAN". BECAUSE THEN IT BECOMES REDUNDANT. THAT'S MY GOAL."

The public conversation with regards to gender roles and certain definitions has really taken off in the last year or so. How helpful do you think that's been?
The more people talk about it, the better. Visibility is such an important thing. There's so much awareness of trans issues now, which is great, and I've noticed it! In restaurants and stuff, people will call me "madam". Last week when I was with my friends a waitress said "ladies your table is ready!" I'm not sure if she was being really pro-trans, or if she was just ignoring my gender. I totally identify as a boy. So when people do that, I always wonder why. What their type of categorization is for me. Whether they've made a mistake, or if they're just really up on trans awareness.

And I guess you can't really pull them up on it because you don't want to discourage them from at least like, trying to be woke...
Yeah that's it! So I'm like "fuck". Especially when it's in genderqueer spaces as well. Because my thing is, it's all about the definition of what it is to be a guy. Especially an Asian guy with long hair. There's certain codes that people can't get their heads around.

It's crazy that something as simple as hair is such a big thing to people...
I find it so funny. It just hair, it's stuff that we grow. It's this image-based thing that you project, in terms of what you choose as the components that make you. And it varies from country to country. In Hong Kong, it's very strange to people. I'll be going down an escalator, and as people pass me on the way down, they'll look up and make this horrified face. There, people just don't know what to make of it. Whereas here, it's attached to feminity in more of a western sense. Over there, you're seen as homeless or unruly. I think it's because, in Chinese culture, in all those older movies and stuff, men would have their hair in knots. And only in their bedroom scenes, when they're at their most broken, then their hair is out. That's part of their cultural learning. Whereas for us it's a sense of femininity, and it relates to sexuality too. In terms of heteronormative worlds, a man might think; I need to have short hair, and be a man, and therefore I need to like women, who have long hair, and like pretty feminine things. You're creating specific ideas, and then in turn, people are conforming and living to those ideas.

There's so much of it in the gay community too. People expect you to conform to certain roles. A guy once said he was surprised when I wanted to bottom, because I have a deep voice...
Ha! So do you think from now on he'll only go for bottoms with deep voices?

Who knows! It's all meaningless though isn't it.
Well. Those decisions implicate daily life. What people choose to like. A recipient of those decisions... people have a lot of preconceived ideas about how to approach me, or how to interact with me. I feel like I get the brunt of it. I'm either too masc for the guys who like femmes, or too femme for the guys who like masc stuff. I feel caught in the middle.

What do you think of the gay community as a whole at the moment? Do you think gay and queer men are happy?
Oh my god that's a difficult one to answer! We are now in a place where we've got a lot of visibility, and people are talking about things, which can only be good. But there are also still a lot of very heightened stereotypes. We've spent so many years trying to break away from this one idea of a heteronormative gay man, and now we're in danger of bringing ourselves back into very specific boxes, and having to conform to things. The idea of being queer is different I guess, because it's rejecting whatever ideals are there, and trying to remain fluid.

"My performing is like Kylie, meets Christeene, meets Lucy Liu."

So do you identify as queer?
Yeah. Actually, fuck that, I'd identify with any word.
Well I guess even saying you're queer is still putting yourself in a box.
Yep. And if I was gonna identify as something it would simply be as "a man". In doing that I'd want to expand the definition of "a man". Because then it becomes redundant. That's my goal.
SO back to your performing...who inspires you the most?
I'm a total sponge. My performing is like Kylie, meets Christeene, meets Lucy Liu. It's the pop sheen of Kylie, with the performative intimacy of Christeene, and then the idea of the stereotypical Asian dragon lady, Lucy Liu. I like existing between boundaries, so it's good to use set reference points. Grayson Perry is another one. Mixed with FKA Twigs. Early Gaga! All sorts of people. But in terms of how I bring that into my performance, it might just totally depend on the day!
So tell me about the creative process for the show.
Well I've been doing the music for a couple of years. I worked with Bryony Kimmings, who did Sex Idiot at the Soho Theatre. She was great because like me, she mixes comedy with music, but in a theatre form. So I did a workshop with her and then I was like "ok, this show can make sense as something that sits across theatre and music." Because I found it quite hard to approach the music industry. I definitely feel like an outsider as a person, but I feel like it with my sound as well. So I wasn't sure what the entry point was.
I can imagine you being a great pop star!
Well I'm trying to get on that right now! I remember going for an interview ages ago, for some funding. There was a Radio 1 presenter, there was a producer, there was someone from Sky Arts… it was a board of eight people. I presented a preview format of my show, and they were like "do you not think it's a bit much? You need to be a bit less arty if you want to make it."
Oh that's the worst! How boring.
They were like "well sometimes if you want to be successful, you need to be able to compromise."
And that's how you get artists like Sam Smith.
Well that's it, and that's what's produced! It's the music industry's way of saying "we're ok with gay people." Having said that though, Olly from Years & Years is great.
Oh yeah he's brilliant. He just does his thing and he's unapologetically feminine and queer.
He's a good example of where it's broken through quite nicely. But we're still yet to see any proper Chinese pop stars!
That's true! Why do you think that is?
I think because people like to see white people on all their products.
Oh god. Yeah, you're probably right.
Also, some of the music from Hong Kong at least, doesn't have its own voice yet. But it's representation as well. I know other Asian artists in London at the moment who are trying to do stuff, but no-one's managed to break through yet. So I'm like "OK, there's a gap in the market!"
So tell me your goal with 24/7.
24/7 is really exciting for me, because it's an opportunity to REALLY put on a show. The goal is to be able to show it to more and more people. I want to bring it to Edinburgh Fringe next year and stuff. But also take it to Australia. And if I'm heading that way, then Hong Kong as well.
What do you think people there would make of it?
They'd be like WHAT IS THIS. WHY IS HE TALKING IN AN ENGLISH ACCENT. When I try and talk Cantonese I still sound like I'm from Yorkshire. But yeah, ultimately I just want my show to open up more discussions. About appearances, gender codes, and everything else.

Le Fil: 24/7 Live is at Hackney Showroom, Amhurst Terrace, E8 2BT