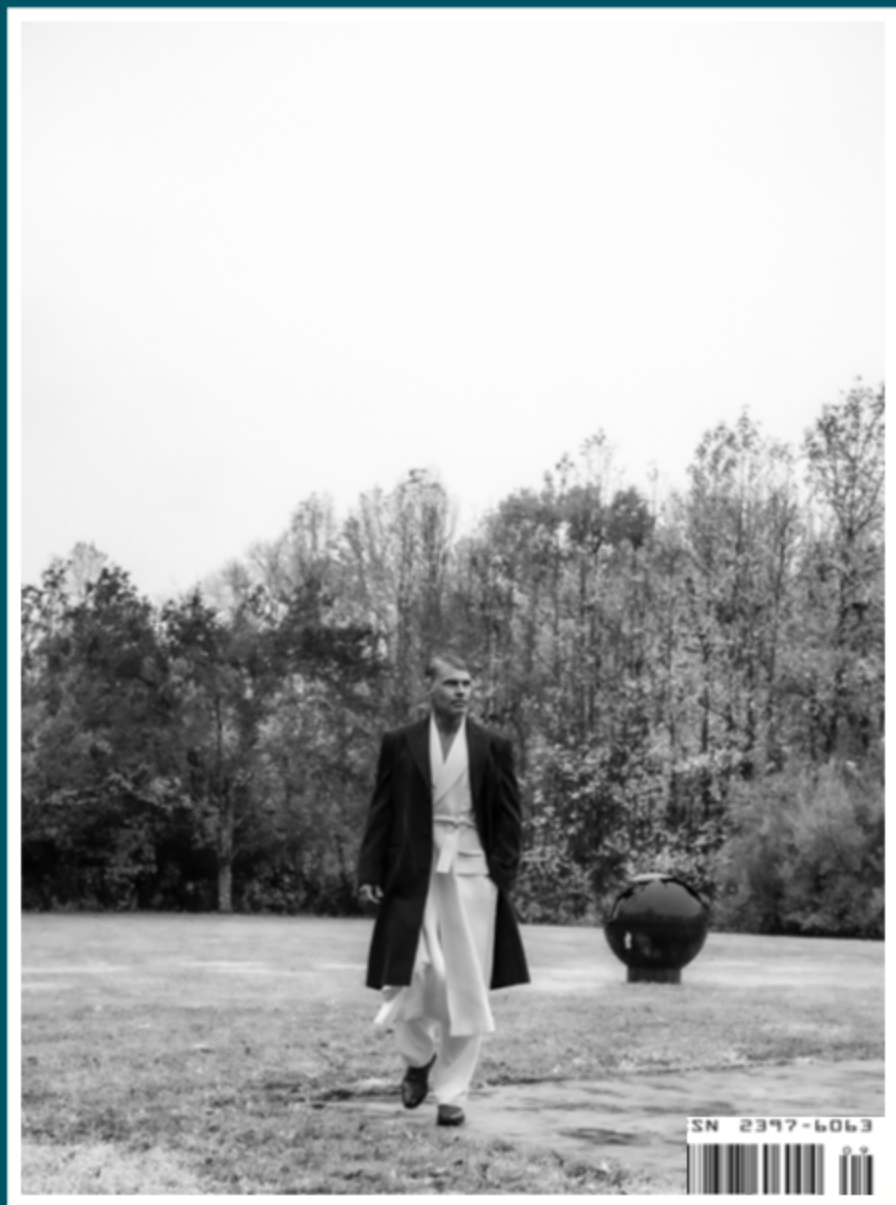


DESIRE HOMME

vol. 12



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RJ & Charlie/ Interview

006-029

**A Man Under The
Influence**

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030-037

On Set

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064-075

Editors

Note

Become / Inspired:

Every day is a new beginning. Treat it that way. Stay away from what might have been, and look at what can be. - Quote by Marsha Petrie Sue

Please allow me to start by wishing you all good health and continued success this New Year with your loved one.

Here's a suggestion that's much easier said than done: "think positively!" Let us all affirm that everything will be okay—and feel happier as a result? Optimism is something we should all strive for in 2021, but the good news is you don't have to be an unrealistic Pollyanna to reframe your point of view and become a more positive person.

It's simply important to embrace the darker aspects of a situation in the process. "The most helpful definition of being positive is having hope and confidence in one's ability to handle what's coming ahead, along with remembering that nothing is all negative all the time.

We here at Desire Homme thank you all for your continued support.

"A single decision can make all the difference."

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arsene', with a long, sweeping horizontal line above it.

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Mike Ruiz

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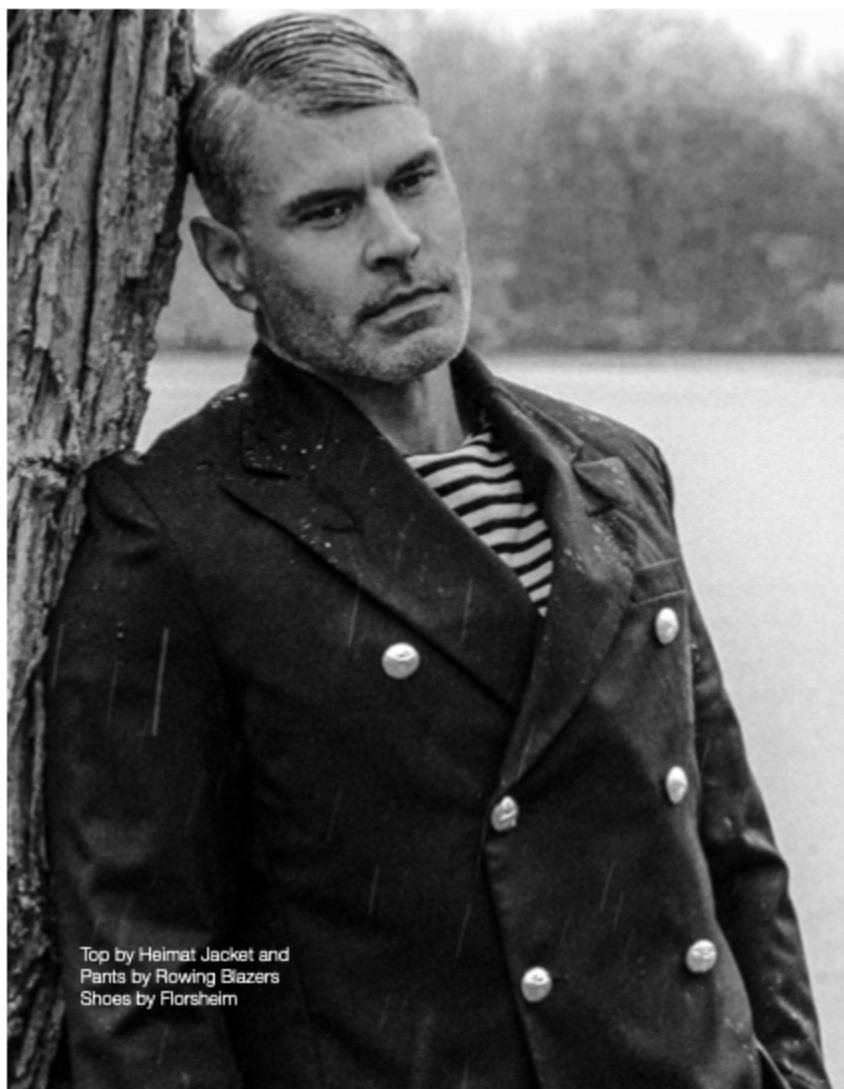
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Jersey (Outdoors)

By Joshua Goldfond
For
Desire Homme



Top by Heimat Jacket and
Pants by Rowing Blazers
Shoes by Florsheim

"I used to be a lazy bastard when I was younger. I just coasted." Mike Ruiz is speaking to me over the phone as his beloved pit bull, Julia, gnaws on one of his hands. The 56-year-old photographer, actor, model, bodybuilder, philanthropist, animal rights advocate, and LGBTQ activist is reflecting on a different time in his life. One that wasn't jam-packed with a flurry of activity that might exhaust someone half his age. It's tough to imagine, but he claims that it's what made him who he is today.

Growing up overweight, directionless, and gay in a small Canadian community that had no place for him, he left for New York City at age 19. It was the 1980s, and the Big Apple was a beacon for the LGBTQ community in Ronald Reagan's conservative America. It was also the epicenter of the HIV/AIDS crisis, where tens of thousands would soon perish in a plague that ran largely unchecked. Working as a model and actor, Ruiz kept his head down and largely stayed out of politics and activism.

The trajectory of his life changed at age 28, when he discovered his passion for photography. The resulting career has been expansive and enduring, never slowing down as he continues to evolve and reinvent himself. He's done photo shoots for celebrities (Jim Parsons, Lewis Hamilton, Edie Falco, Kim Kardashian) and music legends (Dolly Parton, Prince, Wyclef Jean).

He's shot album covers (Kelly Clarkson, Bex, Deborah Cox) and has built an extensive portfolio in fashion and advertising. In 2007, he made his directorial debut in the RuPaul indie film *Starbooty*, then followed it up by directing music videos. He was a reality TV personality for a time, appearing on *America's Next Top Model*, *RuPaul's Drag Race*, *Kathy Griffin: My Life on The D-List*, and other programs.

This last decade has seen him turn to philanthropy and activism. Over three-and-a-half decades after first arriving in New York City, Ruiz once again found himself in an America ruled by a celebrity-turned-politician. Like Ronald Reagan, Donald Trump pursued an anti-LGBTQ agenda with a fervor equal only to the apathy he displayed towards a raging global pandemic. Now an elder statesman of his craft and an icon in the LGBTQ community, Ruiz has spoken out loudly against what he considers to be an existential threat to America's LGBTQ community.

Self-motivation has been in short supply in 2020. It's been the year of COVID-19, of divisive elections, of social distancing, of economic uncertainty, and pervasive public fear. I spoke with Mike Ruiz shortly after the American Presidential election, hoping to learn how he's kept his usual aplomb and energy in these difficult times.



This has been a challenging year for everyone, all over the world. How have you been coping?

Better than I would have expected. I've actually learned a lot of new skills. It's been an educational process that I've tried to make the most of. I've used this lull in normalcy to try to get a bunch of projects going. I've been working as the creative director for a magazine that's set to re-launch in January. I've done a little creative directing work in the past, but never reworked an entire platform like I have with this thing. There's been some TV work on top of that, and a few projects that I signed NDAs for. I also started an online retailer, where the proceeds go to a rotating group of charities. Everything from legal funds, to animal rights, to political causes. It's called Social Impak, and it's something that I'm proud of.

How have you managed to stay motivated in all of these endeavors? A lot of Americans are struggling with feelings of helplessness.

I think it's just my predisposition. Well, maybe that's not true. I used to be a lazy bastard when I was younger. (laughs) I just coasted. I really only got super-motivated and organized when I found photography in my late 20s. Now, I'm doing what I love and that keeps me motivated. Work, philanthropy, fitness... I draw satisfaction from all of those things. Quarantine has given me a lot of free time and isolation. I needed to self-motivate; no one was going to do it for me. If nothing is going on organically, I make it happen.

This year, you've been very active in rallying the LGBTQ community politically. Can you talk a bit about „Flex The Vote“?

It was something that I started earlier in the year, because I read the statistic that one in five (American) LGBTQ people were not registered to vote. Which I found shocking.

I enrolled a bunch of photography and fitness colleagues to do some sort of flexing moves in photos. To basically use their voices to make a difference. There were eight of us, and we all got dozens of e-mails from people telling us that we were the reason they registered to vote. I'm not sure what the numbers are, but even a few people would have been a success, in my opinion.

When you first moved to NYC in the 1980s, it was in the grip of the HIV/AIDS crisis. You've indicated that although it had an impact on you, you weren't very politically aware. Was there a specific time that this changed, or did it happen gradually, as you got older?

I was pretty self-absorbed in my early 20s. I didn't have the wherewithal to really take anything else on. I had the kind of upbringing that didn't lead me anywhere. I didn't have any guidance or role-models. I guess (my politics) changed when I started working in photography. I started becoming successful, I started attending fund-raisers. I started meeting people who were politically conscious.

In one of your interviews from earlier in the year, you said you moved from New York City to Washington DC for a few years in your 20s. You had expected a more subdued, conservative social life due to the political scene, but it turned out to be—and I'm paraphrasing you here—“one of the most deprived places you've ever lived.”

(laughs) Yeah. Well, you know, whenever people are expected to conduct themselves in a restrictive, constrained way, it all has to manifest somewhere. Usually, in some darker place. Like the (Jerry) Falwells and all those anti-gay politicians. It's become a barometer for me. The most conservative groups tend to be the most secretly deprived.



Shirt by Drake's
Suit by Miranda Kurtishi Coat
by Apotts
Shoes by Florsheim

Trump may have lost the election, but his political party (Republicans) made gains in Congress and the Supreme Court. With all of the work you've done, I was wondering how you felt about the political climate now. Will people be able to keep up the pressure, or will they fall back to sleep?

I think the 'kraken has been awakened'. People are going to breathe a sigh of relief and take a break from the constant, constant need to be diligent. But then, I think they'll see that it's not a slam dunk just having the Democrats win.

First of all, this moron (Trump) is setting every fire he can right now to make things difficult (for the incoming Biden administration). There's going to be damage control that needs to be done. Then, there's the handling all of the damage he's done to human rights and civil rights. Still a lot of work to be done.

The election woke people up on both sides, and I think (the LGBTQ community) sees the dangers of being complacent. Smart people have said that Trump is a symptom, not the problem. There's

still a political movement out there looking to get another one like him in office, and maybe the next one won't be such an idiot. We've got to stay diligent, and I think we are.

If Trump is the symptom (of rising homophobia and racism), what do you think are some of the causes?

If you ask (many Trump supporters) today why they have the feelings that they have, they couldn't tell you. Everyone who's not white or heterosexual is the enemy. They don't know why, that's just what they're taught. It's indoctrination, and it's systemic. There are structures of oppression in America, created over time, that have existed over generations.

Like housing discrimination ("redlining") and the denial of bank loans to people of color. This is all documented, it's a historical fact. So, it's not just a matter being "not racist," we have to re-evaluate how things are set up in this country.

Do you think that the economic and social gains that the American LGBTQ community has made over the last two decades has led to a decline in solidarity? Are members of the community voting more in line with what they perceive as their economic interests?

I would say so. The same systems that lead straight people to be racist can also lead LGBTQ people to be racist. We had a record turnout from the LGBTQ community this year, but the number of LGBTQ people who voted for Trump doubled from 2016 to 2020.²

Economically, I think there's this perception that voting Republican is an automatic safety net for their finances, which is absurd. I don't know where that comes from. There might be some tax breaks, but it's certainly not a guarantee of prosperity. I happen to know some gay guys, personally, who voted for Trump in 2016. There are people who could be stripped of all their rights and thrown in a concentration camp, but that doesn't matter as long as their 401K is intact. I just don't get that logic.

Do you think that the election of Biden is a chance for the America to reassert itself as cultural leaders of the LGBTQ community? Was a lot of ground lost in the last four years?

I can't speak for other people, but my speculation is that they see that for the past four years we've been battling for our rights. We haven't been on the forefront of the movement. We've been fighting to stay alive. I've gotten a lot of sympathy from friends internationally. I think they pity us. Hopefully, that will change, quickly, and we'll go back to being leaders.

Then again, we weren't necessarily leaders before. We were late to marriage equality, we were late to trans visibility and rights. I think it's sort of split. We've led in some areas, and in others we've always lagged.

Do you feel any sort of connection to the younger LGBTQ community that's coming of age (Millenials, Zoomers)?

I don't know that I feel a "connection." My generation had to navigate things very differently than the way that younger people have to navigate things now.

I'd say I'm "connected creatively" to a lot of young people. That's kind of how I thrive, tapping into other people's creativity. I'm drawn to innovative people with youthful energy. Youthful energy is not something I equate with age. I equate it with people who are enthusiastic about what they're doing. That kind of energy keeps things young and fresh and new. I don't get jaded,

I don't get bored. I feel renewed. As time goes on, I find that all of the people I worked with, maybe ten years ago—I don't work with a single one of them anymore. It's kind of like a romantic relationship. You evolve, you grow, you grow past it, and the grass sometimes seems greener somewhere else. Being as hyper as I am, I need a lot of stimulation and I'll get it from a lot of sources.

I'm not creatively monogamous, is what I mean to say. I'm creatively polygamous.

Lastly, how has your pit bull been holding up under quarantine?

I got her in 2012 and she continues to change my life. A lot of who I am today is because of her and my previous dog, Oliver. They've brought about a lot of very positive changes for me.

But, the universe sent me two dogs that hate other dogs. Which is good because I could easily have become a dog hoarder. I would care very well for them, but I would own literally thirty dogs.

Thanks for your time!

Thank you.



Tank Top by Dolce & Gabbana
Pants by Kyle'Lyk Coat
by The Armoury Shoes by
Florsheim



Sweater by Apotts Pants by
Rota
Coat by The Armoury