

In Full Bloom

Sonny Ruscha Granade was born into art world royalty. Now she is using her creative clout to bring attention to women's reproductive rights.

BY CAROLINE RYDER PORTRAIT BY KATRINA DICKSON

THOUGHTS OF PARENTHOOD SIT FRONT and center in Sonny Ruscha Granade's mind these days. Not only has she recently taken the helm of Sexy Beast, the arts fundraising organization that has raised nearly \$1 million for Planned Parenthood Los Angeles, but she's also about to embark on parenthood herself; Granade is pregnant with her first child—a girl. Pondering the uncertain future of women's reproductive rights in America, and her new role in protecting them, she is determined to ensure that her daughter grows up in a world where equality and the right to choose what's best for one's own future is a given, and not something “we're constantly fighting for,” she says. With the support of a large swathe of Los Angeles' art community, and a uniquely creative and determined voice, Granade's bringing something formidable to the front lines of the battle.

The daughter of legendary artist Ed Ruscha, Granade has lived and breathed the creative world since she could toddle around her childhood home in Venice, California, which was designed by Arata Isozaki—the architect of MOCA—largely for the purpose of housing her mother's extensive fine art collection. “I grew up with art as my religion, the center of my family's existence,” she says, recalling rolling around on the floor of her father's studio, and conversing as a child with regular houseguests such as Sam Francis, David Hockney, Pontus Hultén and Anthony d'Offay. An entrepreneur from an early age, Granade started a clothing line when she was 16 with her boyfriend—their T-shirts, sold under the brand name Cyrus & Sonny, were carried by luxury retailer Fred Segal. After a stint at the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising, Granade realized that her passion was not so much to be a creator herself, but to be “of service to those who are.”

At the time, Granade was interning at GhettoGloss, a small gallery today located on Eagle Rock Blvd., where she loved interacting with young artists. “I had my sleeves rolled up. I was a teenager, and I loved all of it,” she says. It's there that she met Kristin Stegemoeller, her future co-program director at Sexy Beast. “We became best friends, and have been inseparable for the last ten years,” she says.

Soon after, Granade committed herself to a future in the art world, working at Gagosian Beverly Hills, where she met her mentor, Katharine DeShaw, a prolific arts fundraiser who has since held Granade's hand throughout her career, which has also included stints at Marine Projects, CalArts, Hannah Hoffman and M+B gallery. In November 2016, directly following the presidential election,

Granade, who is married to painter Rives Granade, found herself compelled to merge her professional experience with the increasingly urgent issue of women's rights. “Supporting basic women's healthcare and their right to choose what's best for their own futures has always been important to me,” she says. “But did I know Donald Trump would become president and we'd be going back to the Dark Ages? No.” It was around that time that the opportunity to take the reins at Sexy Beast presented itself.

The mission of Sexy Beast, which was founded by Night Gallery partners Mieke Marple and Davida Nemeroff in 2014, is to raise money for PPLA—the mothership of the Planned Parenthood network—through a series of events and collaborations. A 2016 fundraiser at the Ace Hotel in Downtown L.A., for instance, saw works by Ruscha, Jasper Johns, Barbara Kruger, Paul McCarthy and Marilyn Minter auctioned for the cause. Granade and Stegemoeller plan to build on those successes with a regular schedule of Sexy Beast happenings year-round, culminating with the bi-annual gala to which they currently plan to add a musical component.

Granade's first project as program director is an artist T-shirt collaboration with Jenny Holzer and Virgil Abloh, which launched in December. For the limited-edition suite of three shirts, Holzer revisited her iconic *Abuse of Power Comes As No Surprise* with her 2017 update on the original phrasing, *Abuse of Flower Comes As No Surprise*.

“Jenny Holzer was always our first choice,” says Granade, “not only because she's an incredible artist and our feminist hero, but because the T-shirts themselves, emblazoned with their cuttingly incisive truisms, played such an iconic role in her early career.” When Holzer proposed that Virgil Abloh—Kanye West's longtime creative director and founder of the Milan-based fashion label Off-White—design the shirts, they were doubly thrilled.

Granade believes art can still change the world, playing a vital role in these divided, cynical times. “Art is such a powerful communication tool. It can shine light on important issues,” says Granade, for whom Sexy Beast has provided a kind of emotional, cause-driven fulfillment she'd never before experienced. “I went to the Women's March, you know, but honestly, before that, I'd never really been a ‘take to the streets’ person,” she says. “I think I felt some guilt surrounding that, and was seeking the right context through which I could really give back, using the skills and contacts I've acquired over the years. Now I can.”



Sonny Ruscha Granade is wearing the T-shirt collaboration with Jenny Holzer and Virgil Abloh, her first project as program director of Sexy Beast.