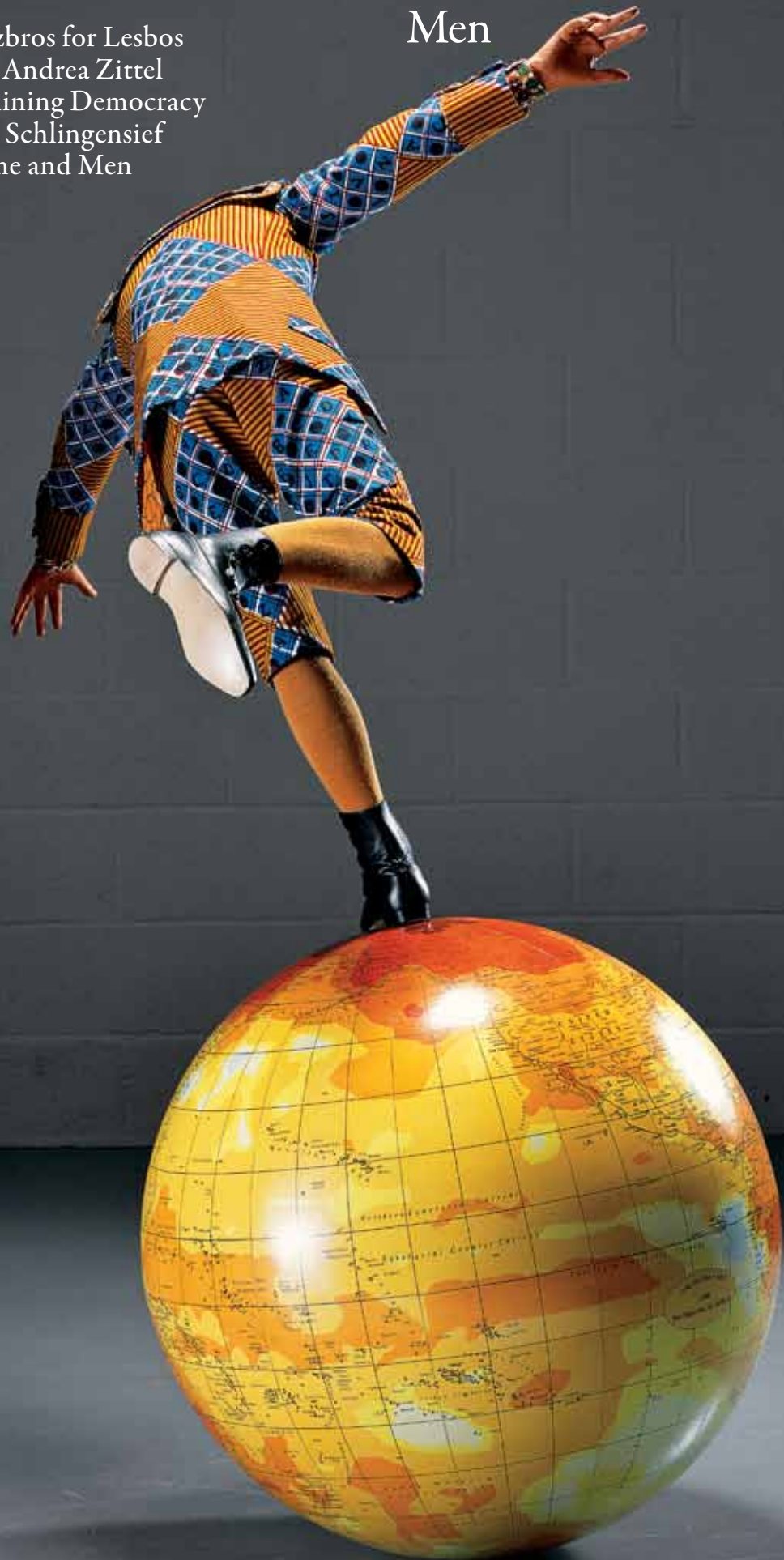


cmagazine **114** *International Contemporary Art Summer 2012*

Gender Diasporist | Lezbros for Lesbos
Attila Richard Lukacs | Andrea Zittel
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Men



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Editorial

- 2 Issue 114: Men
by Amish Morrell

Features

- 4 **Shame and Men: A Queer Perspective on Masculinity**
by Ken Moffatt
- 10 **Everything But the Boy: Chris Ironside's Mr. Long Weekend**
by Kerry Manders
- 24 **Ian Wallace's Monochrome Series**
by Dan Adler

Interviews

- 18 **A Terrible Beauty: Politics, Sex and the Decline of Empires**
Ann Marie Peña interviews Yinka Shonibare
- 34 **Gender Diasporist**
Shawn Syms interviews Tobaron Waxman

Artist Project

centrefold & IBC: Lezbros for Lesbos
by Logan MacDonald and Jon Davies

Exhibition Reviews

- 44 **Michael Flaherty: Rangifer Sapiens**
by Gloria Hickey
- 45 **Material World**
by Jane Affleck
- 46 **Seripop: Landscapes Events Reproduced**
by Amy Gaizauskas
- 47 **My Winnipeg**
by Jeffrey Swartz
- 48 **A.K. Burns: Pregnant Patron Penny Pot**
by Corrine Fitzpatrick
- 50 **Christoph Schlingensiefel: Fear at the Core of Things**
by Natasha Ginwala
- 51 **Attila Richard Lukacs from the Collection of Salah J. Bachir**
by Sky Goodden
- 52 **Althea Thauberg**
by Rose Bouthillier
- 54 **Andrea Zittel: Lay of My Land**
by Jacqueline Bell
- 57 **Declining Democracy**
by Emmy Skensved
- 58 **A Refusal of Images**
by Kirsty Robertson

Book Reviews

- 60 **Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings**, by Judith F. Rodenbeck
Review by Milena Tomic
- 61 **Contemporary Art in North America**, edited by Michael Wilson
Review by Elynn Walker
- 62 **Martha Wilson Sourcebook: 40 Years of Reconsidering Performance, Feminism, Alternative Spaces**, by Independent Curators International
Review by Leila Timmins
- 63 **Noteworthy**
by Benjamin Bruneau

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C School online study guides for Kerry Mander's *Everything But the Boy: Chris Ironside's Mr. Long Weekend* and Ann Marie Peña's *A Terrible Beauty: Politics, Sex and the Decline of Empires*, plus additional readings and links. Available at www.cmagazine.com.

front cover

Yinka Shonibare, MBE,
Boy on a Globe, 2008
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by Amish Morrell

This issue takes its inspiration from many different sources: from feminists, gay men, lesbians, queers and transgender people; from those who don't identify with these categories, such as rural women and men for whom coming out was never an option; and from people in heterosexual relationships who find ways of refusing authoritative and immutable conceptions of gender. Its purpose is not simply to understand how gender is shaped by cultural traditions, social institutions, economics, popular culture and product marketing—which is no small task—but also to examine how reconceptualizing gender altogether might help us to better understand and relate to one another. In fact, those individuals on the frontlines of this reconceptualization might lead us all in broadening our thinking about experience and self-expression.

To assemble the essays and artist projects that follow, we opened up our editorial-commissioning process to a wider audience, issuing a public call for contributions exploring how maleness is both performed and transformed, and how our contemporary understanding of “men” is informed by feminism, as well as by ideas of trans and queer identity. As a result, almost all of the feature articles and interviews in this issue reflect a critical and queer approach to masculinity. Furthermore, the majority are grounded in the idea that maleness—as a social rather than as a biological category—is a cultural construction that is internalized at a psychic level and that intersects with many different facets of who we are, such as our education, social class, nationality and ethnicity. Maleness is a marker of difference that inhabits an especially privileged place in relation to almost all other aspects of identity. And it goes without saying that there's something wrong with that.

In recent decades, feminist, queer and trans artists have helped us rethink gender difference, distinguishing it from sexual difference and the trappings of biological determinism. In semiotic terms, this rethinking liberated the heavily coded signifiers of gender from the referent of sexual biology. Ensuing conceptions of gender and sexuality have opened up new forms of self expression, helped to recognize alternative family structures, expanded how we experience intimacy and sexual pleasure, enabled the formation of new political solidarities, and given rise to new identities. But even as facets of mainstream society begin embracing these ideas, the result hasn't been simply more androgynous styles of self-presentation. Instead, we have the campy and hyperperformative embrace of signifiers of masculinity in places like drag king culture—a feature of American

and Canadian nightclubs in the 1990s and early 2000s—when women perform various tropes of masculinity in order to reveal its artificiality and theatricality.¹ And there is Toronto's ongoing monthly club night *Big Primpin*, where a queer audience appropriates elements of straight hip-hop identity. However, the self-conscious embrace of highly coded signifiers of gender identity isn't limited to queer subcultures. The clothing chain Banana Republic recently launched a line inspired by the television drama *Mad Men* that reflects the highly gendered fashions of the 60s. Or consider *The Chap*, a parodic British men's magazine that espouses impeccable manners, tweed clothing and “interesting facial hair,” publishing articles promoting the lifestyle of the British dandy of the 30s and 40s and also staging Situationist-style public interventions. This broader rethinking of gender helps to explain why mustaches can now be worn only ironically, and also why we can publish an issue entirely dedicated to “men.”

Among the feature articles in this issue, Ken Moffatt looks at the role of shame in the formation of male identity, exploring the work of a number of artists including Kalup Linzy, Johnson Ngo and R.M. Vaughan. He draws our attention to a refusal of acknowledgement and a prohibition that shape both gender and sexuality. Moffatt's ideas parallel an argument made by Judith Butler in her essay, “Melancholy Gender / Refused Identification,” in which she analyzes the psychic formation of gender difference and heterosexual desire through the work of Freud. Stated in the briefest of terms, according to Butler's theory, children disallowed homosexual attachment from an early age will incorporate the identity of the same-sex parent, but it comes at the expense of the ungrieved loss of same-sex attachment. Stated slightly differently, heterosexual desire is based on the repudiation of same-sex desire and, in turn, the gender of the lost object of desire is preserved as part of one's own identity.² While the formation of gender is far more complex than can be explored here, these ideas nevertheless still help us to understand the psychic mechanism that lies at the origins of gender identity and heterosexuality, and present a possible understanding of the basis of heterosexism. In Butler and Moffatt's arguments, prohibition and shame play important roles in shaping male gender identity and male desire.

In the interview “Gender Diasporist,” Shawn Syms talks to Tobaron Waxman about his performance-based works that involve forms of passing in terms of both gender and ethnicity, through masculinizing his appearance and also being read

alternately as either Jewish or Muslim. Through his performances, which often incorporate elements of Jewish religious rituals, and through his video and photo-based work, he explores how the state produces particular gendered and racialized identities and helps rethink ideas of Diaspora. Similarly, in this issue's artist project, which includes a text titled *Shit Girls Say*, and *Lezbros for Lesbos*, a centrefold pin-up and poster, reproduced on the inside of the back cover, Logan MacDonald and Jon Davies reflect on what it means as queer men to inhabit some of the same texts, spaces and ideas as their female peers, and also pay homage to these friends and mentors.

Several essays herein critique normative conceptions of male identity. In her essay on the photographs of Chris Ironside, Kerry Manders examines his photographic series *Mr. Long Weekend*, in which he searches for the “real man” of the Canadian outdoors. As an urban gay man, with no interest in camping, this is an especially elusive ideal for Ironside. Thus, his comic masquerade, in which he performs straight male identity by awkwardly posing in weekend campground scenarios, reveals the instability of notions of masculinity. Nigerian-British artist Yinka Shonibare, another critic of normative masculinity, discusses with Ann Marie Peña the contradictions that underlie popular representations of colonial history through the idea of the flawed hero. Referencing Shonibare's works that often consist of installations incorporating clothing made of Dutch wax fabric—associated with contemporary African identity—they consider how these hybrid forms challenge a dominant global order, while invoking masculinity as part of its undoing.

The difficulty with coolly, or even ironically, appropriating elements of any identity, especially a dominant one, is the unquestioned allegiance it often requires. If we can pass as it, we also gain access to the privileges it offers. It is for this reason that our identification must never be complete: it must always hold within it something that it excludes. Our expressions of gender—whatever they may be—thus should aspire to pleasure and also to revealing our individual complexity. And while it might not always be familiar or comfortable, the negotiation of variable, contradictory and expansive identities can enact a more ethical and inclusive society.

Endnotes

- 1 Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 1998).
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Shame and Men: A Queer Perspective on Masculinity

by Ken Moffatt

It is commonly assumed that men have a narrow range of emotional states that in turn lead to a limited range of masculine roles and behaviour. The assumption of pure male expression of emotions, most often anger, is related to the construction of the man as pure and whole—a raging beast or warrior who is intact and has firm personal boundaries. This thinking about emotions also assumes a singular notion of what it is to be a man. But what if we imagine men’s emotional state through the lens of marginalized men who negotiate emotions in the context of prejudicial social relations? One such emotion is shame. According to feminist scholar Sally Munt, shame is an emotional state that is multi-faceted; that can be experienced momentarily, or as “a cloud of feeling” palpable at all moments. Speaking as a lesbian of working-class origins, she knows shame as that sense of acute and intense humiliation and embarrassment.¹

In the same way that daily acts and attitudes of both men and women construct what makes a man, the social treatment of men contributes to the emotional makeup of men.² For men who have been marginalized, there is no way to imagine oneself outside of social relations of prejudice. The range of emotions for men who are marginalized by social factors such as race, class, ability, gender variance and/or sexuality are intricately related to their daily treatment by others. In fact, these men know from experience that there is no social purity or pure male state because they have to constantly negotiate their masculinity through troubling social relations.³

Shame is an emotional state that is constituted through the psyche as well as through social processes. The reaction of shame is so constant and pervasive for marginalized men and women that it has led me to begin to re-imagine the masculine from the point of view of shame. In recent years, works by R.M. Vaughan, Jared Mitchell, Johnson Ngo, Marina Abramović, as well as Kalup Linzy, have opened up the range of emotions associated with men. I consider their work in order to include the possibility

of shame as constitutive of male gender.

According to philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva, the concepts of the “pure” masculine and the “impure” feminine are used to define men as “rightful” members of the social realm. One of the ways that women are characterized as impure is based on the perception that female social and personal boundaries are less impersonal, distinct, and intact than those of men. Those persons, such as women and queers who challenge a particular conception of male gender, are perceived as impure in order to preserve the cultural construction of the “pure and clean body” of the man.⁴ Women and some groups of men who challenge gender norms know well the experience of being treated as abject and perverse.⁵ Female gender is perceived to be shameful, since it represents the threat against the idealized, pure, individuated male body. Queers and women represent the breakdown of the signifiers of masculinity and social power that men have relied upon to ensure their safety and integrity as individuals.⁶ Munt agrees with Kristeva, arguing that shame is performed culturally to mark certain groups as outsiders. Rather

than the common view that shame is an affliction that can be avoided through good behaviour to create a shame-free body, she argues shame is a process of social differentiation and exclusion according to gender orientation, sexuality, ethnicity, class and race.⁷ The impure identity of the feminine holds the pure dominant male identity in place, and shame thus has a crucial social function in allowing a particular type of male dominance to remain in place.

Elaborating on the work of psychologist Silvan Tomkins, Eve Sedgwick argues that shame is learned at the moment you offer a smile of recognition to another person who, by refusing to acknowledge you, leaves you in social isolation. In other words, we learn that what we said/did is shameful when another person refuses to respond to us. The loss of feedback leaves one caught in the need for relief from the condition of shame and humiliation. Shame is first experienced at the point when the mirroring expression between child and his caregiver is broken by the caregiver. Thus kicks in the social interaction of shame, humiliation and response. In this manner, shame begins so early in life, and is so pervasive, that it is tied to identity formation.⁸ French philosopher and historian Didier Eribon agrees that shame as a social process is tied to the psyche and to identity formation. He explains that the process of being insulted as a fag, gay or queer is not really about the self of the person who is being taunted. It is rather a performative gesture by the aggressor inscribing the power to hurt, and the power to mark one’s consciousness.

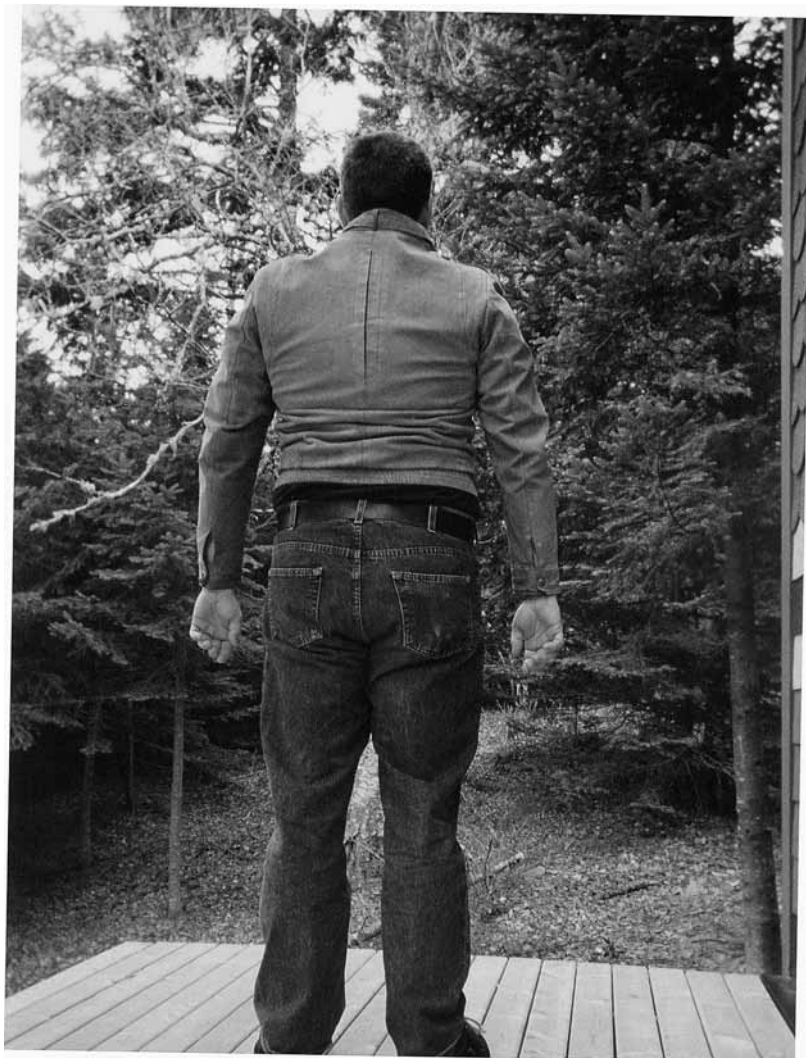
Those who seek to hurt are successful when they inscribe shame in the deepest part of the mind. Eribon argues that the shamed consciousness then becomes part of the queer person’s personality. Although shame has a transitional effect, the experience of shaming accumulates so that it is inscribed in the psyche.⁹

Canadian artist R.M. Vaughan’s photographic series *Am I Becoming My Father?* (2006) was first shown at Katharine Mulherin Art Projects, Toronto, in the group show *Double Chin Picnic*. This series of photographs intimates a type of shame in his relationship to his father as well as to the viewer. In this series of images, Vaughan photographs himself with a cheap camera at his father’s favourite New Brunswick nature retreat. Created after the death of his father, Murray, the series of manipulated photos shows Vaughan attempting to fit into his father’s clothes. Vaughan explains that he positions himself as a type of medium for his father, “both in the geographic and the spectral sense.” He is situated between the photographic space and the memory-laden wilderness his father loved so well.¹⁰

opposite

Kalup Linzy, *Lollypop*, video, b&w, sound, 3:24 mins.

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



In the photographs, Vaughan stands rigidly with his arms straight down the side of his body and his fists partially clenched. His rigid posture belies a “not quite fitting in.” He seems to be uncomfortable in his clothes, with being photographed, and with his surroundings. The artist feels he does not fit the clothes, the commemorative space of his dead father, or the alienating wilderness with which he grew up. No matter where he is located, whether on a deck with the forest behind him, or in a room under renovation, the stance is the same. As the artist explains, he is transfixed by father-son transference, memory, grief, the “cold wild” and the process of record-making. He is a “deer in headlights” who is bent and disoriented.¹¹ Shame is not clearly stated by the artist but the rigidity of stance, and the isolation of his figure, suggests that his relationship to his father, and to the viewer, is muddled, uncomfortable and may be unresolved through lack of recognition. The enacting of his discomfort in the manly environs suggests his queerness among the male trappings.

With fellow artist Jared Mitchell, Vaughan deals directly with shame in their public art series in response to the City of Toronto’s “Live with Culture” campaign. First shown at Paul Petro Multiples Gallery in 2006, then at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art in 2007, the project is a commentary on the sterile and generic images that were being displayed throughout the city of Toronto to claim the city as a world-class cultural centre. The campaign included fit and eager models posed dancing with paintbrushes and books. Mitchell and Vaughan responded by creating a series of banners, buttons and videos using the slogan “Live With Out Culture” where Vaughan is photographed in a too-tight T-shirt, often with his stomach exposed, and always in bare feet. In the banner “Live With Out Music” a broken saxophone lies at Vaughan’s feet; the banner “Live With Out Books” includes an illustration of burning books; and the banner “Live With Out Art” includes an image of leaking cans of house paint.

Since Vaughan’s body is posed in a manner that is both intentionally clumsy and self-conscious, the artists use his “overweight” body as an object of shame to draw attention to the fact that both art and artists are messy, and at times intentionally abject. The well-intended, City-sponsored campaign creates a process akin to the one defined above by Sedgwick: it refuses to acknowledge the attempts of local artists at recognition by representing art and artists through banal images constructed outside the artist community. Mitchell and Vaughan reintroduce and make intelligible the

shamed body made invisible by the City of Toronto campaign. The artists revel in this outsider’s status to poke fun at the campaign while reclaiming the importance of the artists. This manifestation of the shamed body thus becomes a political exigency for making present those hardworking artists who intentionally play with and question social categories and boundaries.

Johnson Ngo’s video *Bend* (2008) was part of the 2009 *Didactic* exhibition at the Blackwood Gallery on the University of Toronto Mississauga campus. The video was screened in a public space on the video wall of the Communication, Culture and Information Technology building. In the video, Ngo is posed against a white wall, bent over on his hands and knees, with his pants pulled down and his buttocks exposed. He shifts his posture slightly throughout the 14-minute video to finally collapse on the floor. At the same time, he constantly stares directly into that camera as if looking at the viewer. According to Ngo, as a submissive Asian man he examines both his vulnerability and the power of the viewer. By apathetically staring back at the gallery-goer, Johnson makes each person conscious of his or her role in constructing him as a racialized, effeminate man. In this video, Ngo and the viewer are intertwined in the observations and experiences that construct the physical differences of Asian-ness. Johnson’s stare, coupled with his posture of submission, problematizes the voyeuristic power of the viewer and exposes racial and cultural stereotypes. He declares his sexualized and racialized identity before viewers can intervene and judge him as foreign and exotic, making them aware of how they are implicated in the cultural construction of both race and gender.

According to author, critic and editor James Westcott, shame is one thread within performance artist Marina Abramović’s art. In the piece *Balkan Baroque* (1995), Abramović works through shame over the brutality of the Balkan conflict; her narcissism and vanity; and her raging sexuality. In this performance, Abramović washed 1,500 fresh bloodied beef bones while singing folk songs from her childhood. The images of her father, her mother and herself were projected on the wall. An earlier version of this performance called *Cleaning the Home* was about facing the abject and cleaning her own body.¹² During the retrospective *The Artist Is Present* at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the re-performance of *Nude with Skeleton* (2002/2005/2010) was placed close to the artifacts of the performance *Balkan Baroque 1995/2010*. During the re-performance of *Nude with Skeleton*, a performance artist lay nude on a block of stone underneath the full weight of a

skeleton the size of her or his body. This performance was held non-stop for 700 hours, enacted by a rotating sequence of naked performers. Abramović explains that to interact and live with the skeleton is to face mortality, to breathe through the skeleton is to face fear of both dying and of pain.¹³ The placement of these two works so close to each other invites a gentle intertwining of shame and messiness within the context of Abramović’s desire to get beyond feelings of separation, to achieve clear expression and direct contact between viewer and artist.

Toronto artist, impresario and community activist Will Munro played with the social construction of shame in performance spaces and at queer nightclub events like *Vazaleen*. Munt explains that as a binary opposite to pride, shame has some positive latent effects.¹⁴ When shame is explored through social interaction, performance and art, as it was at Munro’s events, it has political potential to instigate social change. Interpersonal and social change can occur through the manner with which shame can expose and creatively challenge social norms and hegemonic masculinity. In the right context, such as *Vazaleen*, shame can be experienced as pleasurable and create a frisson of excitement, facilitating political, social and cultural agency among the disenfranchised.¹⁵

During Gay Pride week in Toronto, as part of his monthly *Vazaleen* parties, Munro held an event entitled *Shame* to challenge the taken-for-granted politics of sexuality and gender as well as the increasing corporatization and consumerist trends in Gay Pride events.¹⁶ *Shame* involved the un-working or transcendence of hegemonic masculinities through performance, music, visual art, dancing and socializing. In these spaces, that which is normally perceived as grotesque and abject was openly and fully explored and participants celebrated that which is normally reviled, such as multiple forms of gender expression.

The video *Wall of Shame* was displayed in the 2012 show *Will Munro: History, Glamour, Magic* at the Art Gallery of York University. The video documents participants in the *Shame* event against a simple backdrop entitled “Wall of Shame.” Men and women proclaim and delight in their shame through performances for the camera, such as exaggerated gender performance, illicit sexuality and cross-dressing. What seemed playful at the time of the original event seems quite profound as a historical record. These performances are spontaneous, and at times, the critique of capitalism, technical rationality and social conservatism is either implicit or explicit.

The video *Lollypop* (2006), made by

opposite above
R.M. Vaughan, *Am I Becoming My Father?*, 2004, colour photo taken with instamatic camera
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

opposite below
Johnson Ngo, *Bend*, 2008, single-channel video, 14:25 mins.
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

performance artist Kalup Linzy, was screened in a show dedicated to queer artists at MoMA. In the video, Linzy and Shaun Leonardo, another black male artist, lip-sync to a Hunter and Jenkins song from the 1930s that had been banned from the radio due to its sexual suggestiveness. The shame of sex from the 30s is reinterpreted for a contemporary context by including the shame of gender play. In the video, both artists are bare-chested. The video is framed so we see them from the waist up against a plain white backdrop. Both of their bodies are toned and strong. Leonardo, who wears a fedora, is marked as the male and Linzy, who appears in a bonnet, is female. They sit close to each other. Leonardo, with his eyes downcast in a classic posture of shame, leans into Linzy, who sits stiff, tall, proud and certain. Leonardo implores, "Give me a little bit of that, honey," and when rebuffed, tries again, "Give me a little bit. Just a teeny weeny little bit." Linzy retorts: "Ain't no use you keep hanging around" because "I wouldn't give you a piece, honey, if I could." Leonardo then declares to Linzy "you are making me blue."

According to José Esteban Muñoz, much of the narrative in Linzy's work is about failure, since it is often about love rebuffed, or love or tricks gone wrong. Muñoz places Linzy's work within the realm of "waiting, lingering and backwardness." As Muñoz would argue, in the video *Lollypop*, we have been cast out of straight time's rhythm and into a world where queer, racialized men reconstruct temporal and spatial configurations that anticipate utopia. This queer utopia is never fully realized since one has to await freedom from the preoccupations of dominant forms of masculinity, such as technical rationality, the pure male body and particular forms of racial and gendered dominance. However, a form of personal agency exists in the manner in which both Linzy and Leonardo sit and wait. Their interaction with each other is expectant, desiring and anticipatory in the queerest of utopian ways.¹⁷

In each of the artworks already discussed, the artist is the focus of our attention. There are few distractions from the processes of shame in these representations. How their bodies are presented to us offers hints to understanding the many social manifestations of shame. Their bodies are presented in a manner that brings into question our social and cultural construction of manliness and shame, since the artistic and social articulation of the marginalized body is permeated by the social attitudes of others. At times, social interaction is ill-defined so that the source of shame is unclear and, as occurs in Vaughan's meditation on his father, there is no apparent resolution being

offered. Sometimes shame is illusory but palpable, as in the work of Abramović. At other times, shame is a cultural process that colonizes the racialized and effeminate male as evident in the art of Ngo, as well as that of Linzy and Leonardo.

Shame for queer artists is taken up in a manner that disrupts taken-for-granted notions of masculinity. In the process that Silvan Tomkins characterized as "existential agency," the shamed person exposes his or her body knowing full well it will create discomfort for others.¹⁸ The creation of discomfort is not necessarily the central purpose of the art but a necessary consequence in the context of hegemonic masculinity. Perhaps this sense of agency is most clearly seen in the *Wall of Shame* video, in which the participants are playful, defiant and even gleeful in performing in a shameful manner for the camera. We see a more subtle articulation of agency when Ngo's stare declares his masculine self prior to shaming and other judgment. Vaughan also expresses agency through his posture in *Am I Becoming My Father?*, which is anticipatory of some relief from his discomfort. Linzy and Leonardo play through a tender exchange to which we are voyeurs. Mitchell and Vaughan openly defy a definition of art and culture that does not include the reality of hardship and struggle for artists who lie outside banal, dominant social conventions.

In the same way that emotional states, such as anger or lack of affect, do not completely define the man, shame is not a single defining emotion that can be considered constitutive of all marginalized men. Since it is an emotional state tied to a wide array of cultural and social constraints and possibilities, shame is experienced differently according to ability, race, class, gender and sexuality. Shame can be experienced as social constraint and discipline in response to male dominance, as a playful social process that defies social norms, or as an illusory feeling that is yet to be resolved. In many of the aforementioned artworks, shame is open-ended and relational so that it touches both our psyches and cultural understanding of manliness.

Ken Moffatt is a professor in the School of Social Work, Ryerson University. He is the editor of Troubled Masculinities: Reimagining Urban Men (University of Toronto, 2012), an interdisciplinary exploration of the multiple masculinities of marginalized men. His interests include cultural studies and gender.

Endnotes

- 1 Sally Munt, *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008)
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- 17 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. (New York: New York University Press, 2009)
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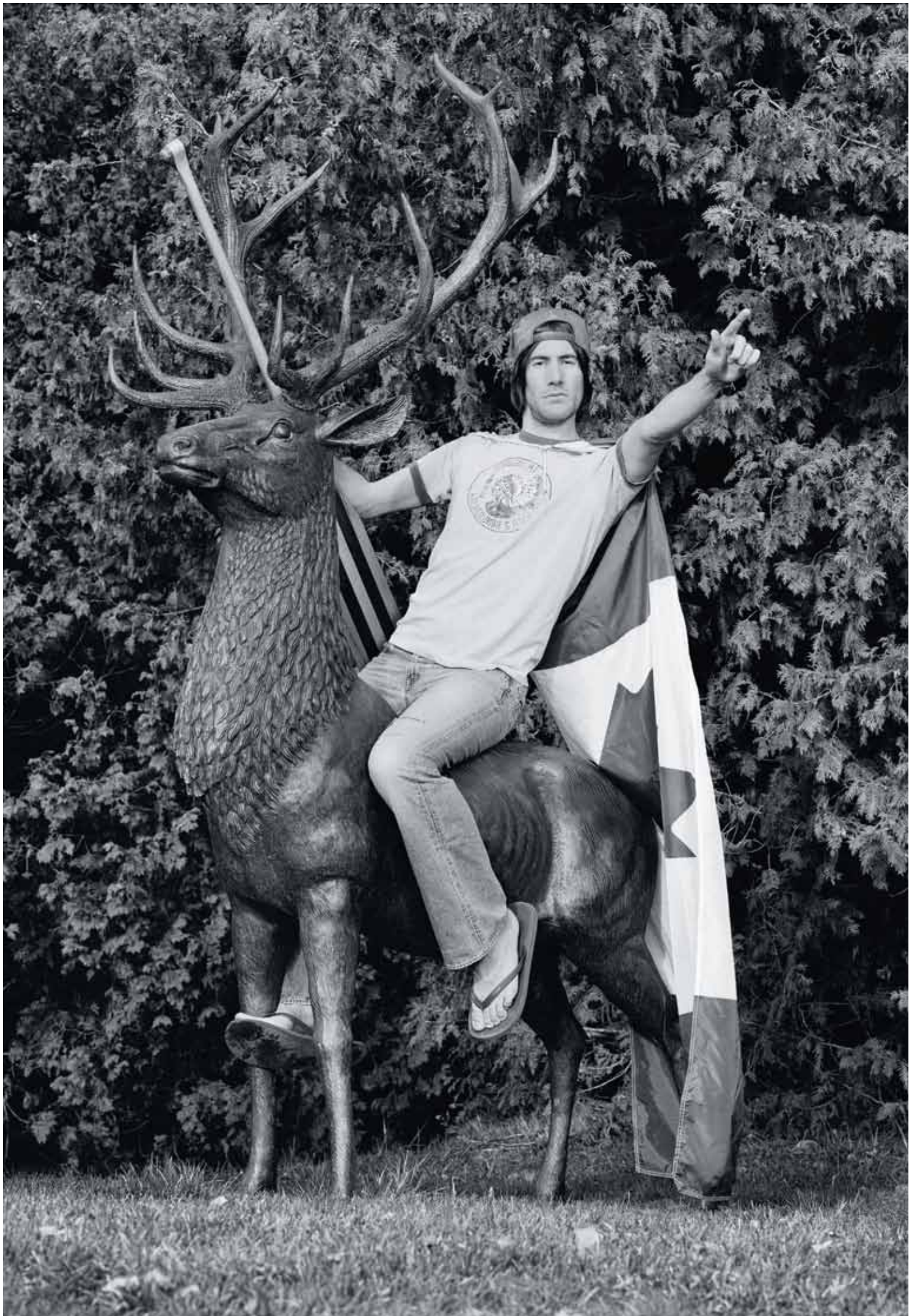
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Everything But the Boy: Chris Ironside's Mr. Long Weekend

by Kerry Manders

“Even in the off hours, men know marks.”¹

—Anne Carson

“[I]f we are visible and invisible to each other, the gap is enough to sustain our attraction.”²

—Luce Irigaray

Mr. Long Weekend #18 features Toronto artist Chris Ironside wielding a canoe paddle as sword and sporting a Canadian flag as cape, proudly riding an enormous stag—or, rather, riding an ostentatious stag-sculpture-cum-lawn-ornament. Here, Ironside strikes a humorously self-conscious (super) heroic pose, one arm raised in triumph and purpose as knight-errant on his long weekend quest (T-shirt, ball cap and flip-flops = ubiquitous long weekend armour). Ironside's quest is neither singular nor teleological; this image, though labelled #18, introduces *Mr. Long Weekend* (2005–10) on Ironside's website and was featured in the advertising material for the exhibition that I attended at Toronto's O'Connor Gallery in the summer of 2010.³ While Ironside's valiant pose mimics the robust stag's, the irony of this virile affinity lies in its impossibility. This male deer is decidedly *not* wild: he is a cast-iron sculpture erected, contained and displayed on private property. Ironside appears to be riding the stag, but he is going nowhere on this immobile beast. Rather, he is remobilizing his engagement with masculinity as nature, as identity, as desire.

Mr. Long Weekend features multiple representations of a masculine body that simultaneously is, and is not, Ironside's own. In what he calls a series of “documented performances,” Ironside embodies variations of a masculine type: suburban dad, (Molson) Canadian outdoorsman, enthusiastic frat boy, Harley Davidson rider. The singular “Mr.” is photographically dispersed into sundry images of boys or men who might claim the series' title, with all that the moniker playfully connotes of masculine competition and dominion. Similarly, “Long Weekend” names not one specific time but any and all “alcohol-fuelled and testosterone-laced” summer holidays, conjuring and recalling

potent scenes and symbols in the collective Canadian consciousness.⁴ It is on such familiar imagery that Ironside perpetually riffs—from beer-funnelling teenagers at Provincial Park campgrounds to cocktail-sipping suburbanites manicuring their fenced-in lawns. Ironside's images evoke any number of domestic beer commercials that imagine and idealize the supposedly normal Canadian man, one who not only consumes said beer but who necessarily loves various sports (playing and spectating), exudes patriotism, ogles women, goes camping, wears plaid, and thinks about hockey (even in the off-season). Developed via his queer lens, Ironside's iterations of normative masculinity suggest

that it is only in and through *reiteration* that gender is produced in the first place—indeed in any place.

There is something positively funny—and delightfully queer—about a gay male artist playing a stereotypically straight dude straddling a male deer. Ironside literally tops the art object, his legs embracing the stag beneath him. This corporeal gesture mirrors Ironside's embrace of his anti-type, embodying him as subject and object and allowing him, as he describes it, “to transition from wanting the object of desire to becoming the object of desire.” Ironside characterizes his photographs as “indirect self-portraits of men I want or have wanted to be.” As a result, they document his effort to identify with such men by inhabiting their difference—his attempts to see, to feel, to record what “he” is like, and what “I” is like as “he.” Looking to understand the otherness within his own gender rather than between genders, Ironside stages hyper-real types not to mock the ostensibly typical, but to engage compellingly diverse desires that simultaneously converge and conflict for him: desires to be, to (be) like, to know, and to have. Ironside has been chasing and tracing these desires throughout his career. His undergraduate thesis exhibition, *Pretty Ugly Boys* (Guelph University, 1996), his MFA thesis show, *Hard Candy* (York University, 2002), and his current projects turn and return to terrains of masculine identity. In *Mr. Long Weekend*, Ironside performs roles that have been normalized into invisibility and indelibly marks the putatively universal gender that so often remains unmarked and unremarked.

In his photograph of a deer-crossing sign bolted to a roadside hydro pole (*Mr. Long Weekend #10*), Ironside echoes his own photographic imagery of wildlife tamed and symbolized. Invariably, the iconic mid-leap deer pictured on these signs are male (the antlers mark their sex). Although *Mr. Long Weekend* is shot exclusively in black and white, the familiar sign implies the cautionary yellow: one should slow down, beware, take care. The sign asks us to be extra vigilant in our perception as we might cross paths with another species. Who has the right of way? Humans have invaded deer territory and yet deer risk their lives crossing our roads. The deer-crossing sign signals not only caution, then, but also potential danger: either or both species may be injured or killed in a collision. As a gay man in a straight world, Ironside is exiled from the Law of the Social that supports and sustains heterosexuality; because abject, his is the more vulnerable masculinity. However, the power Ironside wields as an artist

opposite
Chris Ironside, *Mr. Long Weekend #18*, 2007, archival pigment print, 51 cm × 61 cm
PHOTO: CHRIS IRONSIDE; IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



leaves his subject exposed to a scrutinizing—and often lusting—gaze that strips “the man” of his protective armour and thus strategically, lovingly, unmans him. Gay artist and straight subject intersect in Ironside’s body. The tension between normativity and alterity (stag and drag) coalesce in the physical and representational space of the artist’s body and its documentation. Without clearly demarcated boundaries, these images ask, what do we make of men? What do men make of themselves? How, and why, do men make themselves? While *Mr. Long Weekend* often showcases the potential humour of such questions and crossings, its scenes always retain their gravity so as not to undermine the significance of Ironside’s inquiry.

In photographing the sign, Ironside offers what is arguably his most self-reflexive piece in the series. Compellingly, the deer-crossing sign that Ironside photographs is disfigured, altered by some invisible other who has fled the scene. An anonymous graffiti artist and/or long weekend prankster has spray-painted genitals (penis and scrotum) onto the deer. The sign’s status as found art is thus redoubled as Ironside witnesses the sign play of another, and his photograph becomes a serendipitous collaboration, an encounter with another that is creative rather than combative. Here is a *mise-en-abyme* of representation wherein Ironside and the other refract the tyranny of official, “original” signs. The paint dripping from the genitals can be read as semen, though it is the sign that is reproduced here and not the species. While the leaping stag with its exposed member might appear the picture of masculine strength and purpose, Ironside questions its veneer of virility—the stag, in its fixed and vulnerable pose, appears rather impotent. If the deer-crossing sign implies the cautionary yellow, so might the leaking liquid (potentially urine); I say leaking because the substance appears to fall straight down to the ground—there is no velocity to the excretion. This stag would not win any pissing contests. The image at once evokes masculine territorial marking (see also *Mr. Long Weekend #25*, in which Ironside urinates on a cherry tree) and its opposite. The stag’s genitals are exposed to the elements and to the audience, its excretion a sign of a body not fully self-possessed, contained or controlled.

While the entire series invites its audience to consider the nature of normative masculinity, the deer-crossing sign in particular contends that masculinity is not natural or innate; it is a sign circulating among others, a sign erected and protected by various institutions that hold it dear. Ironside loosens the grip by tampering

with the product and betraying masculinity as eminently malleable: illusive, allusive, elusive. Ironside highlights signs as (re)presentations and repetitions that are dynamic—possibly like the “real” deer that necessarily evades the frame. Just as the stag in *Mr. Long Weekend #18* is an art object, so is the stag in the deer-crossing sign, and so are the men that Ironside fleetingly inhabits. Ironside renders wild life as still life, which is not to say that he omits dynamism. The prosthetic aesthetic (drawing a big dick on a stag is like giving a penis a penis) is also the mischievous matter of male hijinks or “late-night dares” (Ironside) that accentuates its potency and humour: the mark might well have been made by drunk teenage boys, homosocial young bucks out to impress each other.

The occasionally campy sensibility of *Mr. Long Weekend* is fittingly ramped up in the various camping shots. Camp is, in part, characterized by the kind of heightened artificiality and exaggerated performance that Ironside undertakes. Initially these shots struck me as amusing, since Ironside categorically loathes camping. As he tells it, “I set up and took down a tent more times for this project than I ever have in ‘real’ life.” In real life, Ironside embarked on a single camping trip, lasting only one night, and he was done by daybreak: “there is nothing civilized about camping.” He wears this distaste melodramatically in his facial expressions for *Mr. Long Weekend #11* and *#13*: is that extreme discomfort I detect? Or perhaps distress? These photos are more than comical: his face might register fear, and there is an ominous quality, especially to the night shots, a hint of horror film aesthetic. The shots of trees and chairs are eerily and artificially lit as flashlights and car headlights penetrate an enveloping, portentous darkness. Like the deer crossing a highway, a camper pitching a tent outdoors is subject to danger. These dangers are intensified via the prohibition against exhibiting such an “unmanly” emotion as fear. In turn, this prohibition necessitates other signs, other markers to metonymize that which men must not express.

The empty chairs in *Mr. Long Weekend #12* and *#15* (a lawn chair and a chaise lounge, respectively) register Ironside’s temporal play. The chairs are the remnants, perhaps, of a different kind of wildlife; one imagines the absent sitter passed out in a nearby tent. The photographs picture the after(math) of a before pictured elsewhere in the series (they logically follow *Mr. Long Weekend #11* and *#14* but are not exhibited in this order). Defying our expectations of causal-chronological order, there are spaces between these companion

photos, spaces occupied by photos that belong (speaking chronologically) *before* the before and *after* the after. Ironside’s strategic (dis)placement puts his photos into a self-referential dialogue and invites his viewer to construct his or her own spectatorial narrative. Ironside also documents the time of the shoot; here, the performance inheres in the body outside, rather than inside, the frame; the photographs necessarily invoke the photographer, the body behind the camera who is staging and lighting the scene. This intensifies the self-reflexive play: the lighting literally spotlights the time and the mechanics of the photographic shoot.

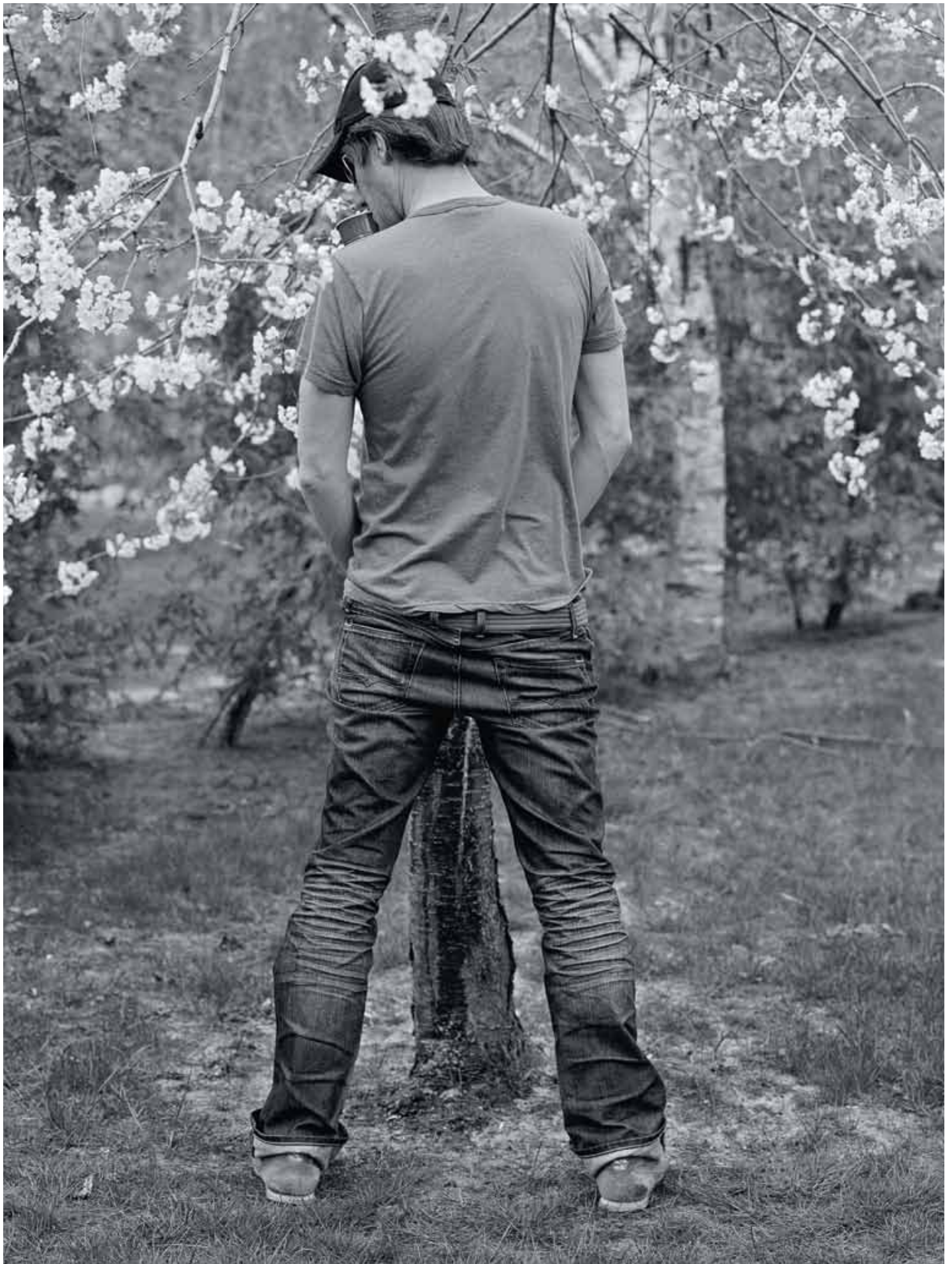
In shooting the absent man—and absence per se—Ironside acknowledges the impossibility of apprehension and denaturalizes the processes of imaging, imagining and viewing any body. We cannot finally locate a body outside of the mediating discourses and narratives that construct it. Moreover, the absent body is irrecoverable through its representation—the photograph is not the body but, rather, a reminder of its absence. In photographing the chairs as material, quotidian objects without bodies, Ironside interrogates categories through which we understand embodied experience and highlights the epistemology of vision, upon which photography—and masculinity—rely. An empty chair connotes the beautiful failure of representation: Ironside pictures the space left behind by bodies that neither the photographer nor his photographs can fully access or render.

Despite the “natural” locales, the *mise-en-scènes* are meticulously contrived; context is as constructed as any identity within it. In alluding to the body no longer in the chair, the photographs suggest the immediate history of the particular scene. More broadly, however, they recall a whole history of summer long weekends by featuring the decidedly old-school chairs that I remember from childhood, with their criss-cross nylon webbing and aluminum frames. These chairs are lightweight and transportable, but famously fragile (and flammable): the webbing frays and the aluminum bends (do these chairs ever survive more than one summer season?). The criss-crossed material woven taut across the frames of the chairs, pictured without the materiality of bodies, reiterates the persistent theme of intersectionality in *Mr. Long Weekend*: crossing deer, crossing orientations, crossing genres, crossing times. The webbing inevitably frays, just as the masculine nostalgia that these photographs ostensibly offer turns into something else: hangover, exhaustion, failure. Saturnalia meets Tuesday mourning, and

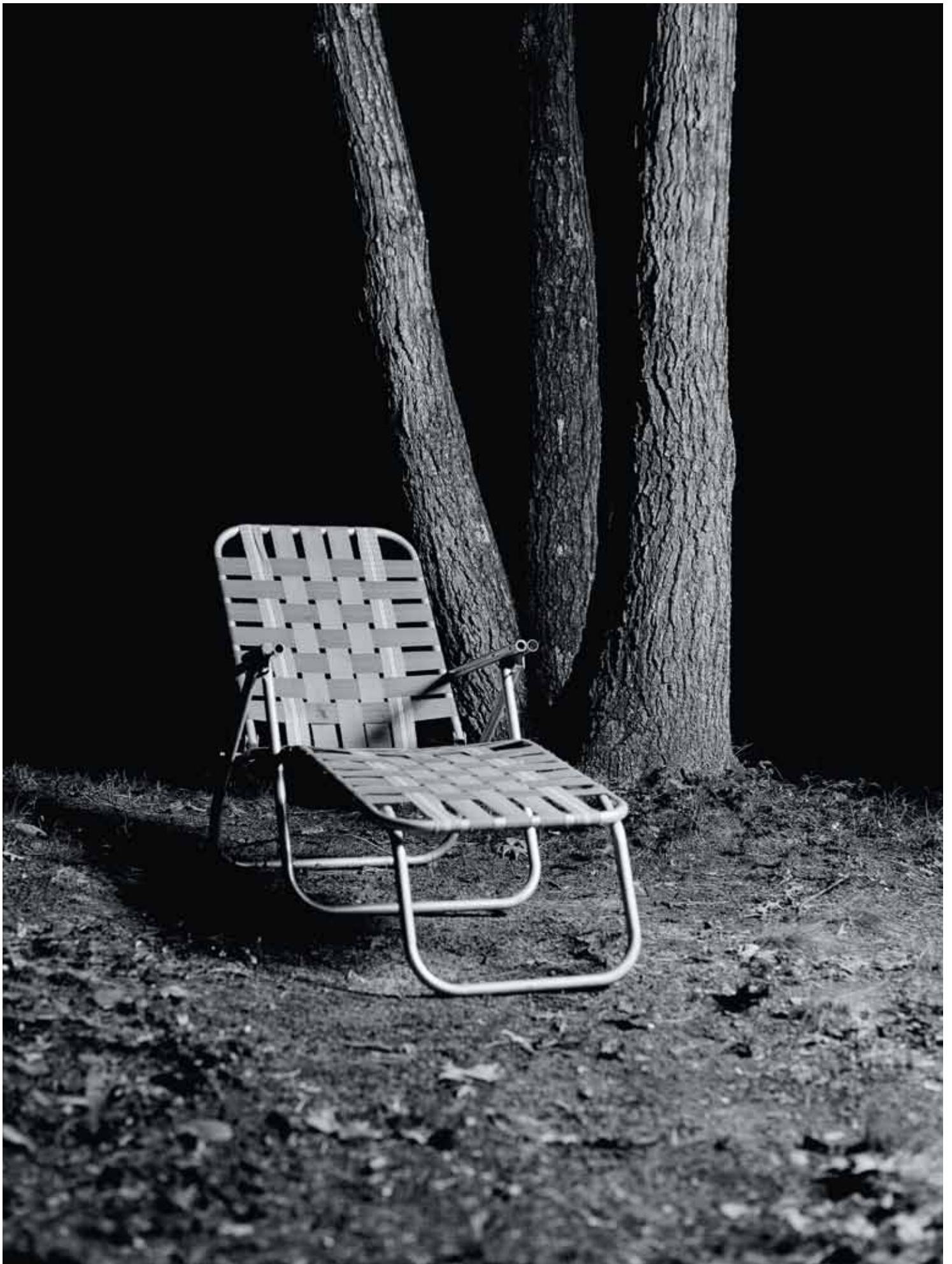
opposite

Chris Ironside, *Mr. Long Weekend #10*, 2005, archival pigment print, 40.6 cm x 51 cm

PHOTO: CHRIS IRONSIDE; IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



Chris Ironside, *Mr. Long Weekend #25*, 2010, archival pigment print, 40.6 cm x 51 cm
PHOTO: CHRIS IRONSIDE; IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



Chris Ironside, *Mr. Long Weekend #15*, 2006, archival pigment print, 40.6 cm x 51 cm
PHOTO: CHRIS IRONSIDE; IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Mr. Long Weekend must go home.

Ironside's work is intriguingly intertextual as it intersects camp with horror, paying homage to one of Ironside's artistic influences, David Lynch, who is famous for his depictions of the mystery and multiplicity of identity and for his pervasive intertextual embeddings. Look closely and you can see that Ironside sports a *Twin Peaks* T-shirt in *Mr. Long Weekend #11*. In this shot, Ironside shines a flashlight towards—and looks searchingly at—his own camera, and thus at his audience. He stages an encounter between artist (as art subject) and viewer. It is as though he scrutinizes our perception of his interrogation of his gender. The effects of the flashlight are as blinding as they are revealing: we might be the deer in his headlights. The artist as his own model looks at us reading the signs; it is a reciprocal gaze. Looking at each other across the (time) frame, we are interconnected and embedded in Ironside's intersubjective scenes.

"I wanted to know what he was like."⁵ I end by citing *Mr. Long Weekend's* beginning, a deceptively simple epigraphical assertion that articulates Ironside's career-long interrogation of, and play with, performances of masculine identities. Ironside began exploring what "he" is, was, and will be like as a Fine Arts student in the early 90s. As an established photographer and instructor today, he remains curious: "I wanted to know what he was like." "He" logically refers to the "man," the other, that Ironside was not, is not, and will not be, despite the accoutrements of normative masculinity that he dons for this series. The crossings apparent in each photograph iterate the allure of the week-ending man, and it is to him that Ironside is irresistibly drawn. The singular subject, "he," belies the mobility that Ironside's practice activates with every take. On stages and campsites, in chairs and weight rooms, in front of the camera or behind it, I/he/Mr. is always and necessarily equivocal—even at the most intimate junctures. Separately and together, the photos in *Mr. Long Weekend* repeat a familiar tale of idealized—adorned and adored—masculinity. Yet Ironside wears such narratives to unweave and ironize them. Playing against his own type (queer, urban, artistic), Ironside does not fit comfortably or fully into the "other" he puts on, throwing into relief the gaps, the disjunctions, between any "I" and its accompanying idealization(s). Ironside's masquerade suggests that roles and landscapes are not fixed and that closed systems are but opportunities for manifold and furtive crossings; the real man is an empty animal track—as fleeting and provisional as our

trespasses into his territory.

"I wanted to know what he was like." Past tense, future tensions. A palpable nostalgia for the boy he never was and a lament for the man he'll never be inform Ironside's present play. He is also mourning the impossibility of knowing: he *wants* (desires and lacks) libidinal and epistemological knowledge. "I wanted to know...": Ironside's wanting is an ongoing curiosity that can never be sated, just as any "I," any incarnation of masculinity, can never be authentic. Crucially, Ironside questions not what he *is* but what he is *like*. I/he can never "be," can only perform resemblances and dissemblances of desire in a series of photographs of self as indelibly other.

Kerry Manders writes about gender, memory and mourning while teaching in the Department of English at York University, Toronto. Her essays have appeared in Latch, MediaTropes, and Magenta Magazine; her photographic triptych, Mourning Drawer, is published in Becoming Feminist (Eds. Lorena M. Gajardo and Jamie Ryckman, 2011). She is currently working on a photography project that explores unofficial signage in and around Toronto.

For galvanizing exchanges about pitching tents, crossing signs and riding stag, the author thanks Tom Cull, Chris Ironside, and Brandy Ryan.

Endnotes

- 1 Anne Carson, *Men in the Off Hours*. (New York: Vintage, 2000), 7.
- 2 Luce Irigaray, *To Be Two*, trans. Monique M. Rhodes and Marco F. Cocito-Monoc. (New York: Routledge, 2001), 16.
- 3 See Ironside's website at <http://www.chrisironside.com>
- 4 When I quote Ironside, I am citing either his artist statement or conversations we had while I was writing this piece.
- 5 Ironside uses this line by Everything But the Girl, from their song "Wrong" (released in 1996 on their album *Walking Wounded*), as the epigraph for his artist statement for *Mr. Long Weekend*.

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In the early 90s, Yinka Shonibare MBE's emergence onto the British contemporary art scene began when he was nominated for the Barclays Young Artist Award from the Serpentine Gallery only one year after graduating from Goldsmiths College. Later, his inclusion in both the now infamous *Sensation: Young British Artists From the Saatchi Collection* group exhibition (which travelled from London to Berlin and New York) and in *Documenta 11*, poised the artist as a significant player on the international scene. His works span all media from large-scale tableau photography and video, to paintings so thick with paint they take on sculptural proportions. His sculptures often incorporate headless figures dressed in perfectly reconstructed Victorian garments—the headlessness both a strategy to avoid depicting any racial identity through facial features, and a nod to the

revolting masses who took on the monarchy during the French Revolution at the end of the 18th century. The elaborate garments refer in their design to an age when Victorian Britain was at the height of its colonial and industrial power, and form a filter through which Shonibare explores current issues of socio-economic power relationships. Here, he also inserts what has become his calling card—Dutch wax fabrics that are synonymous with contemporary African identity despite their roots in Europe, Indonesia and the slave trade. In this interview, the artist discusses the idea of the flawed hero in relation to works from his recent exhibition *Addio del Passato* at James Cohan Gallery in New York, the notion of sex as a weapon, as well as the popularity of his public artwork in London's Trafalgar Square, his approach to working with museum collections and his upcoming exhibitions.

Yinka Shonibare, MBE, *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle*, 2010, Fourth Plinth, Trafalgar Square, London
PHOTO: STEPHEN WHITE; IMAGE © THE ARTIST/COURTESY OF JAMES COHAN GALLERY, NEW YORK/SHANGHAI

A Terrible Beauty: Politics, Sex and the Decline of Empires

Ann Marie Peña interviews Yinka Shonibare

Ann Marie Peña (AMP): There seems to be a burgeoning theme in your recent photographs, *Fake Death Pictures* that reveals itself through the repetitive use of the character Horatio Nelson. He was obviously a real person, an admiral credited with winning the Battle of Trafalgar and contributing to the rise of the British Empire, but as a metaphor, has he become a kind of container through which you explore the notion of the flawed male hero?

Yinka Shonibare (ys): The idea of the hero in these pieces works on different levels. It works on the political level and it works on the personal level. Basically, if you start to look at global issues and the new relationships in the world—you start to look at, say, the rise of the East and the rise of Latin America, and the decline of North America and the decline of Europe—there is the sense that the ex-colonial powers are in a state of demise. Take Nelson as a figure. He would have been a heroic figure of empire, but a very specific kind of empire—British Empire, or you could say a celebration of the white male. We're actually at a point now where, in terms of global economic power, that figure certainly no longer rings true. The work is conflating the political and the personal. We've seen the decline of Fascism, we've seen the decline of Communism, and we've seen the decline of Marxism. All the various ideological certainties are no longer true, there's a skepticism in relation to them instead.

AMP What has replaced these ideologies?

ys A new kind of cautiousness has replaced them. The heroic figures and ideologies that people would blindly follow...nobody now is saying that Marxism is definitely the thing that will come and save everybody, and no one is saying that Fascism can ever work. You know what I mean? There has been a questioning of all heroic certainties in that sense, and then the questioning becomes a kind of metaphor for the demise of colonial power or colonial certainties. Even in terms of the personal, there's a kind of awareness [in me] of personal vulnerability, of my own mortality that may also relate to my autobiography in terms of my health and so on. It's not necessarily overt in those pieces, but those are certainly some of the underlying reasons for making the pieces.

AMP Then from the same series there is the overt sexuality and repression in sculptural works like *Fetish Boots* (2011) and *Anti-Hysteria Device* (2011), which is based on a patented 19th-century machine with a vibrating phallus that was designed to cure so-called hysterical women.

ys Yes, I think at one time it was actually illegal in Washington to have sex in any way other than the missionary position. Sex has always been used as a way to control people and a way to manipulate people. Of course the piece *Anti-Hysteria Device* is based on a way for dominant male physicians to control women—to contain and to control. Sex has always been used as a tool for that historically. The works are a way of exploring sexual repression really, but they're also a kind of slightly humorous way of exploring it. Sex is culturally loaded, as you know; sex is not just sex. There are all kinds of issues related to power relations between groups. Some people—the cultural other or the feminine other—become objects of desire or objects of fetishization; they become objectified.

So, in a sense, these pieces relate to an over-riding concern in all of my practice really, which is hybridity. The hybridity in the works is a deliberate challenge to the notion of purity or authenticity; it's a deliberate form of contamination into the idea of any kind of dominant prevailing ideology or culture. By bringing in elements from other cultures, I'm sort of challenging this idea of cultural purity, and actually saying that the contamination or hybridization of objects will diminish the power of any one dominant idea. The layering is aesthetically complex, as well as ideologically complex. Those are things that go through my work generally.

AMP I guess that relates to the way you have “re-curated” collections in museums. For example, the exhibition at Cooper-Hewitt in 2006, where you presented your work alongside objects from their permanent collection, or similarly, your exhibition *Earth, Air, Fire and Water* at the Israel Museum in 2010. Both exhibitions were a direct experiment in displaying or re-archiving collections along that line of thinking.

ys Again, I always try to look at both museums and artwork as centres of knowledge. There is a kind of historical assumption about the dominance of certain cultures in those spaces. I'm always trying to bring in the voices of others and their contribution to history, rather than just saying we will take the European or American model, and that becomes the prevailing model. I do this not just with the visual arts, but also with aspects of design or popular culture that come into my own work, like the fabric designs. It's a form



of boundary crossing beyond a certain elitist knowledge so that you are also bringing in certain kinds of popular culture into the museum. I would think that my fabrics are a very good metaphor for that. That is also a deliberate bringing in of something that is supposedly “other” or non-elitist that is coming from the craft world, but it’s a deliberate crossing of boundaries—both conceptually speaking and in the actual aesthetics as well. The way you actually use material is also an ideological statement, and the material itself becomes an essential part of the idea. So you’re doing something with material culture within the museum that is also related to how conceptually you are thinking in the material world. It’s about getting that balance really between what one is doing with process and the production of art objects.

AMP You are also participating in *Wide Open School*, a project at the Hayward Gallery brought forward by Director Ralph Rugoff that is being dubbed an “experiment in public learning.” You will be teaching a class that relates to some of the themes we have discussed.

YS Actually I am not going to be teaching a class, I am going to be having a conversation with Richard Phillips—if he agrees to do it. He has written a book about sex in the colonies, and so I want to have a conversation with him about the idea of sex and empire. The provisional title I am thinking of is “Who’s Fucking Who.” But, again, it relates to what we talked about a bit, about the recent show at James Cohan Gallery. I’ve always been interested in the power relations between different groups of people through sexuality, and how sexuality has been used to manipulate, how it becomes a dominant power tool. I’ve always been interested in exploring that.

AMP So, that’s kind of interesting, the link you’re drawing to the idea of sexuality as something that has been used historically—certainly through colonial periods—to obtain power. But we can also look at contemporary references. For example, it’s now the 20th anniversary of the siege of Sarajevo and we’re hearing more about the systemized rapes that occurred through interviews with women who were targeted by insurgents, and the children who were born from these sexual attacks. It’s still very much a contemporary phenomena today, and in unexpected places too.

YS Absolutely. When you think about the various wars in Africa, and also when you think about the idea of sex tourism in places like Thailand...

...or the “human cargo” that travels into the European Union, into the UK and into North America, into the US...

YS Exactly. And it’s always been about power and money. It’s a very complex issue that touches, in fact, on issues of slavery.

AMP Yes, and this also ties into the roots of the Dutch wax fabrics you use in your pieces. In a way, the fabrics were a form of printed currency and were exchanged along nautical routes originally established as part of the slave trade between Europe, Indonesia and West Africa.

YS Well, yes, at the end of the day, it’s about some kind of unequal exchange where the exploited have always had to sell their bodies. It’s unfortunately something that is still going on; it’s not purely a historical thing as you say with the [human] cargos going into the US, or to Europe, by force. It’s an area of exploitation. People use the words “post colonial” as if it’s over, but there are those subtle colonial relationships that just happen through power structures really, through some people having more power than others. Unfortunately, that’s the story of a lot of illegal immigration as well, some people are just powerless to speak up because they will be deported. These issues are persistent and complex, and in a sense, a lot of it happens underground, in the black market. It’s a power thing—people from other cultures, from poorer countries working as sex slaves to serve the richer. It’s gone on through history, and it has taken different forms. These are the issues I’m hoping to explore further in my discussion at the Hayward.

AMP With your piece *Gallantry and Criminal Conversation* (originally commissioned for *Documenta 11* in 2002 by curator Okwui Enwezor), and more recently in pieces like *Mother and Father Worked Hard So I Can Play* (exhibited in the period rooms of the Brooklyn Museum in 2009), there is this aspect of the “haves” and “have-nots,” of the world as a playground for the rich. This is embedded also within your series of children on globes. We see these little girls and boys balancing precariously on large, colourful shiny balls, dressed in Victorian finery made from bright Dutch wax fabrics. However, when viewers take a closer look they see the maps on the globes actually depict global-warming danger zones, and of course, the fabric has a very specific history to which we have already referred. To the works you add an element of luxury and play while highlighting our precarious state of being—it’s quite sinister actually to use this luxurious wealth and child-like glee to talk about dark times ahead.

YS Yes, of course. Often, if you put these dark ideas in front of people, the instinct is to be defensive. But if you put, as you said, gleeful, playful things—opulent things—in front of people, the instinct is to engage because people feel happy. Then, of course, they might take another look and think, actually, these things are not just inviting us to indulge, there are other levels. I find I am able to get people’s attention more if I go the playful route, even if it’s a terrible beauty. People want something that won’t frighten them immediately. Then they can look at something more and ask, “am I complicit in this thing that is being presented to me?” I prefer to take that kind of strategy. I question my own complicity as well, in the sense that I also desire some of those things—I desire excess, I desire wealth. I don’t necessarily feel I want to exploit other people to get these things, but I desire them. As much as critiquing the establishment, I am also indulging, and I do not take a clear moral ground that I do not want some of those luxuries myself. I mean, I do, and I think the works are kind of a reflection of that.

AMP Do you see yourself as a kind of cynical person?

YS I like to think not. I do believe that it is possible to do good. I am not that skeptical of human nature. At the same time, I’m kind of cautious, put it that way. I don’t necessarily think, as an artist anyway, that I can change the world; I think I can present a set of ideas to my audience to go away with. I don’t have any control after that. Privately, apart from the art, I do have faith in human nature. I would like to think there is a good side to people and they could actually really do good if they were presented with the right set of ideas. On the whole, I wouldn’t consider that I was all negative about everything.

AMP I always saw your fourth Plinth piece, *Nelson’s Ship in a Bottle*, as a kind of Trojan horse that sat upon Trafalgar Square in London. It was erected in the madness of a 24-hour installation and on the morning of the unveiling, the Mayor celebrated it as a historical nod towards Admiral Nelson, his nautical feats, and how these contributed to the development of multicultural Britain. People really took this piece on, and it has always surprised me that the work has never been discussed more as a criticism of empire.

YS It’s not just the Mayor; that piece is kind of a darling to the British public. Even today, it’s very popular in Britain for patriotic reasons; people do not read any kind of critique into it. That piece, almost to my embarrassment, has been embraced. I heard the other day that some people were actually crying when it was being taken down.

opposite above

Yinka Shonibare, MBE, *Fake Death Picture (The Suicide—Manet)*, 2011, digital chromogenic print, 148.59 cm × 180.98 cm (framed)

© THE ARTIST/COURTESY OF JAMES COHAN GALLERY, NEW YORK/SHANGHAI

opposite below

Yinka Shonibare, MBE, *Fake Death Picture (The Death of St Francis—Bartolomé Carducho)*, 2011, digital chromogenic print, 148.91 cm × 198.12 cm (framed)

© THE ARTIST/COURTESY OF JAMES COHAN GALLERY, NEW YORK/SHANGHAI



AMP And the British Navy was very supportive of the piece; they wanted to do an official salute and tribute on the morning of the unveiling on Trafalgar Square. There were even high-ranking officials present.

YS Yes, to my surprise, that piece has really touched the hearts of British people, and now that the piece will permanently be going to the National Maritime Museum, I think a lot of people are happy that they can continue to engage with it. On the one hand, I am very happy that happened; but on the other hand, the piece is not as simplistic as that—it's quite a complicated piece. From my point of view, there is certainly a love-hate relationship to Nelson. The public has taken the love aspect of the piece. And, I mean, every artist would like to be accepted and to be liked, but the reading of that piece is, shall we say, not the whole story. However, given the current respect there is for the work, I won't rain on people's parade.

AMP There is an element of social conservatism that seems to be raining down as the current economic crisis digs its heels in. We see waves in England, in Europe and even in North America of right-wing politics seeping into decision-making processes. Similarly, the late 80s, the last years of Margaret Thatcher's tenure as Conservative Prime Minister, were really when as an artist you yourself began to emerge and establish your visual language. Do you see today's politics as a sort of mirror to that time?

YS For the most part, societies are conservative by nature. It doesn't really surprise me, popular culture is conservative generally anywhere you go in the world. I think that people don't like change, put it that way. Any kind of radical idea that means the status quo is going to be changed—you know it could be Obama, it could be anything—anything that means society is going to look different is not going to be easily accepted. When people are doing well economically and they're fine, then they might accept a little bit of change because they're too busy spending their money. But as soon as there's a crisis, people revert back to conservatism. I actually believe that generally societies are inherently conservative, that people don't want change.

To me, it doesn't seem as if society is actually going forward. I feel like we are returning to a lot of things. You get ahead in the polls by showing how hard you are going to be on immigration, by showing that one party is going to be more horrible to foreigners than the other party. That's really what will get you an A star, and politicians are quite happy to wear that as a badge of honour. It was like that in the Thatcher years, and it's getting more like that now.

opposite above

Yinka Shonibare, MBE, *Alien Man on Flying Machine*, 2011
© THE ARTIST; COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND STEPHEN FRIEDMAN GALLERY, LONDON

Of course, the economy is terrible at the moment, so the "others" get picked on and the foreigners become scapegoats—it's a way to distract. The governments are not performing very well, so you just pick on all the immigrants. That is a story that repeats itself. In a way, we are kind of reverting to those Thatcher years. Who knows, maybe as the economy gets better, there may be another wave of Cool Britannia like there was when Tony Blair was in power [laughs]. When there was a strong economic period and there was Cool Britannia, multiculturalism wasn't such a dirty idea; it was an all-embracing "cool" society. As soon as there is an economic downturn, it's all, go back to bashing immigrants again. It doesn't necessarily surprise me, but I think that it's still the job of those on the margins to keep on pushing the boundaries. It's very important that society needs to change fundamentally. Some things have changed—possibly related to gender issues and race issues. Society has not stood still for the past 20 years and there is a degree of movement. But the riots in Britain that happened recently, no one would describe those as a sign of progress. It's a constant issue, a constant battle.

AMP Yes, the riots seem to highlight a certain alienation. They highlight a divide in the class system that still exists based on the lack of potential for economic development—even in central London. Hackney (where there were riots in August, 2011), after all, is only one train stop away from Zone 1 and London's financial centre.

YS Yes, of course. Those issues of inequality of wealth and inequality of education feed into the biggest topics nowadays—how much bankers get paid, the gap with the 99% and the whole Occupy movement. Those are kinds of class issues that are very much present in my own work, the way that I work and the costumes I use. Those are issues I have worked with over the past 15 years or so, but I've dealt with them in a subtle way through the materials I use.

AMP This all relates directly to your new work, a series of alien sculptures for an upcoming exhibition in Sydney, Australia.

YS When I visited Australia in 2009, I saw there were lots of concerns about immigration. I started to think about how most Australians themselves are not indigenous to the country, that there was an indigenous population there before they came. I noticed the, shall we say, lack of generosity towards that population and towards immigrants, and I wondered what would have happened if the original British could not have settled there. I am very interested in the power relationships, the relationships towards new

opposite below

Yinka Shonibare, MBE, *Anti-Hysteria Device*, 2011, Dutch wax printed cotton textile, wood, metal with motor, 77 cm × 104 cm × 48 cm
PHOTO: STEPHEN WHITE; © THE ARTIST / COURTESY OF JAMES COHAN GALLERY, NEW YORK/SHANGHAI

people coming into the country and the lack of power held by the indigenous population. So the show in Australia focuses on issues of immigration using aspects of popular science fiction to talk about those issues. I like to deal with serious issues, as I said before, by using softer images at first. I guess it goes back to what you were saying about the Trojan horse method, where you go in disguise in order to reveal something else later.

AMP You're using this pulpy pop-culture, low-brow alien invasion imagery that actually emerged alongside McCarthyism in the 50s. The imagery reflects the Cold War fear that was bred at that time as a fiction to justify the development of weapons, to justify an enemy that was convenient.

YS Exactly. I think in a sense that is what I have done in the show that is coming up in Australia. The show is called *Invasion, Escape; Aliens do it right!* There's a kind of cheeky aspect to the title, because suggesting that things like "invasion" and "escape" can actually be done properly is being very provocative.

AMP Speaking of immigration, we have often spoken about what it means to say you are "from" somewhere—in your case, what it means to say you are from Nigeria rather than Britain, or vice-versa. After all this time, are you at home here in London?

YS There is a British kind of live and let live, which I like very much. You just do your stuff; I just do my stuff. I'm not going to tell you how to live your life as long as you obey the law—that's it. You're not going to have too many intrusions here on how you think or how you're doing things. That wouldn't be the same if I was living in Nigeria, that kind of live and let live attitude. There are so many things, if you have lived in a place long enough, that culturally you don't even realize you have taken on, even if you don't sound like the people from there. But then, when I leave, I realize how much of British culture I have actually absorbed. I love listening to BBC Radio 4; I guess it is part of my culture. There is a kind of do-what-you-like attitude in the UK, which I find very interesting.

Ann Marie Peña runs the Artist in Residence program at the Art Gallery of Ontario. She previously worked as Studio Manager for artist Yinka Shonibare MBE, in London, UK and for Studio Orta in Paris, France. Peña has taught at the University of the Arts London, where she also obtained an MA in Visual Arts from Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design.

*Yinka Shonibare MBE's exhibition *Invasion, Escape; Aliens do it right!* opens at Anna Schwartz Gallery in Sydney, Australia in May 2012, and then will travel on to Yorksbire Sculpture Park in Wakefield, England. His piece *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* went on permanent display in April at the National Maritime Museum in London, England, and *Wide Open School* will take place at the Hayward Gallery from June 11 to July 11, 2012.*



Ian Wallace's Monochrome Series

by Dan Adler

In 1967–68, Ian Wallace began making a group of monochrome paintings that, according to the artist, have deeply affected much of his work since. My role in this brief account is to add to a discussion initiated by Wallace himself, who has clearly articulated how the series came about and why it matters.¹

First, the facts. Prior to execution, Wallace sketched a set of exacting parameters for the series.² Each of the tall, narrow canvases would be identical in size (200 × 50 cm), with a central field of primary colour (black, blue, grey, red, white or yellow) bordered by a thin band (3 cm) in any one of those colours, except the colour of the field itself. The series would express all possible colour combinations, totalling 30 paintings. Wrought in a workmanlike, methodical manner, Wallace would employ five to six coats of conventional, matte acrylic paint, straight out of the tube, and then tape off the interior field in order to render the border bands. The sides of the support were also to be painted, thus helping to ensure a sense of objecthood for the finished products, which would always remain unframed.

By fully establishing the nature, rules and extent of the series beforehand, Wallace mechanized the process of making them. On this level, these works may rightly be read within the combined contexts of 60s pop, minimalism and conceptualism, in which notions of seriality and mechanized production were at play, and the

boundaries between sculptural and pictorial media were often blurred. However, when considered as a whole, Wallace's series is also treatable as a template of colour combinations—a collection of ready-made samples of mundane combinations of hues that is, in some sense, comparable to Gerhard Richter's *Colour Chart* series. Indeed, I imagine perusing Wallace's 30 works as if I were surveying commercially available options, perhaps singling out *Untitled (Black Monochrome with Red)* purely on the basis of a decorative whim. Such a shopping experience recalls patrons selecting Andy Warhol's "blanks," the monochrome accompaniments to his silkscreen panels, so that morbid imagery of celebrities or car crashes would be juxtaposed with a rectangle of pleasing colour that matched their living-room decor.³ Of course, the choice of certain colour combinations might immediately connote a singular symbolic resonance, as in the case of *Untitled (White Monochrome with White)*, which, in its objecthood, might register as a sign of a flag—or as a distillation of Canadianness in a broader sense.

As in the case of Warhol and Richter,

Wallace's monochrome series does indeed address notions of the nominal and the arbitrary—long associated with a postmodern tradition identified with the Duchampian readymade. However, I would argue that Wallace's series may productively be placed within another artistic context, one tied to the idea of the artist striving to establish a fresh foothold, a new contract with audiences, based in part on the inclusive language of abstract colour and geometry. Rather than situating the series as an autonomous phenomenon, it seems to me most productive to envision Wallace's radically abstract paintings in combination with different elements of his diverse oeuvre.⁴ A revealing case in point was a solo show held at Catriona Jeffries in 2007 that featured several of his monochromes, experienced there in complex communication with a concoction of other works.

Charting a path through the main gallery space, I encountered a playful proliferation of white rectangular forms: a floor-based painted plywood piece, *Untitled (White Line)* (1969/2007), diagonally pointed past a pole—not a "Wallace" but rather a load-bearing non-work, fastened to the ground with a square plate, yet rendered in a similarly pedestrian (or, institutional) white—leading me to face a white monochrome with a black border. This painting was hung perfectly parallel to a door of nearly equal length, similarly suspended (on hinges rather than by a nail), yet lower to the ground, leaving only a precisely drawn sliver of shadowy blackness below. The door registered as a kind of pictorial object, particularly given its lack of adornments, like a distracting doorknob. Next to Wallace's pairing of these black-and-white rectangles stood a lone black-and-white photograph, *Untitled (Intersection)* (1970/1995), depicting the silhouetted backs of pedestrians of the past, waiting to cross the street.

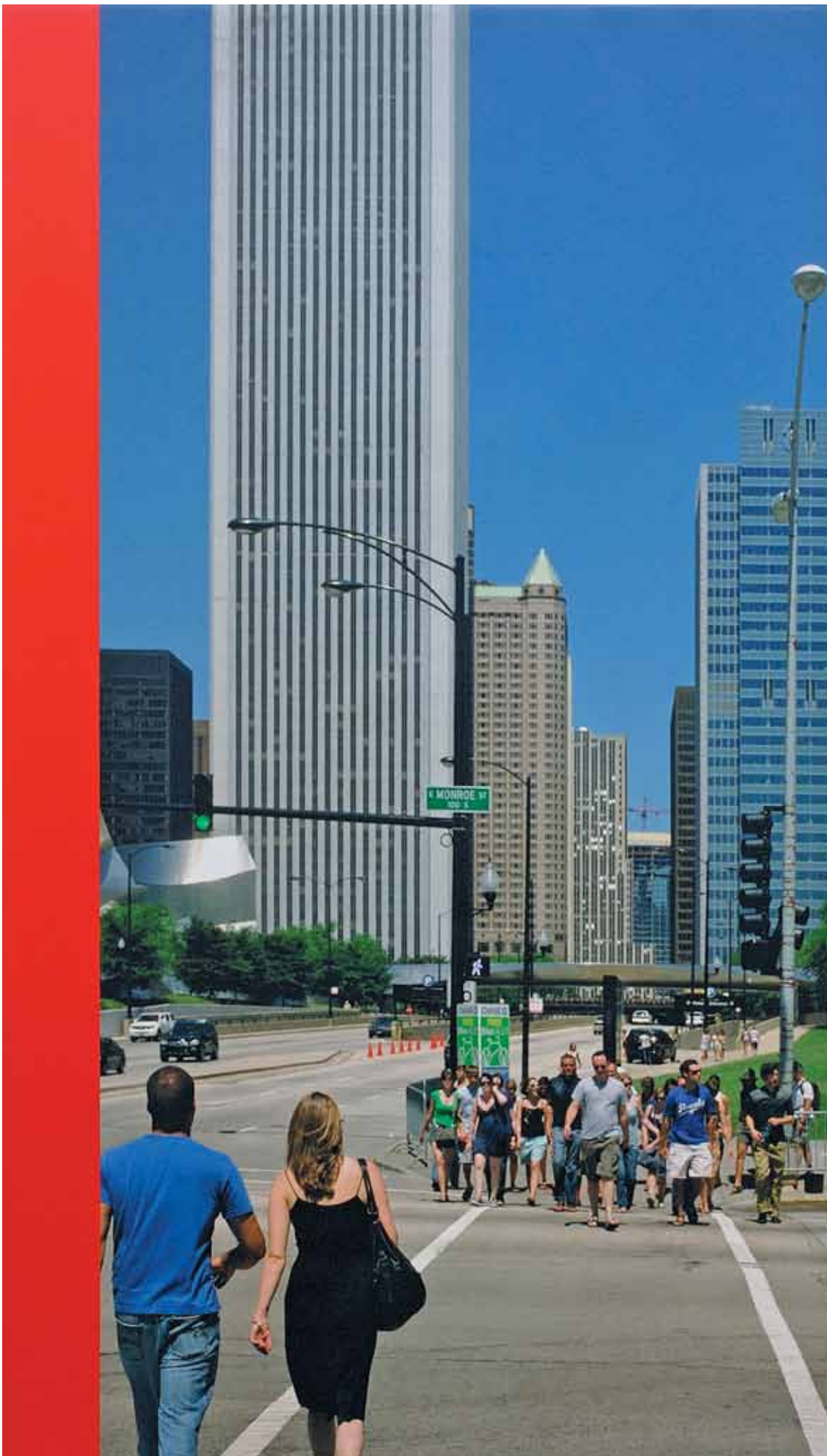
Shuffling a bit to the left, I stopped for a while in front of the opening to the adjoining gallery. This pause afforded a new vista, which included another monochrome—black with a grey border—peripherally placed next to the entrance to the room. This dark rectangle played a supplemental but crucial role in my view of *Chicago Crosswalk* (2007), centrally positioned on the far wall. The latter work includes painted vertical bands of white and red, which frame a silkscreened photographic scene of folks following white vertical bands while traversing the street. Like me in the gallery, these city walkers circulate with alternating degrees of awareness of how geometric bodies affect their movements and lives.

opposite

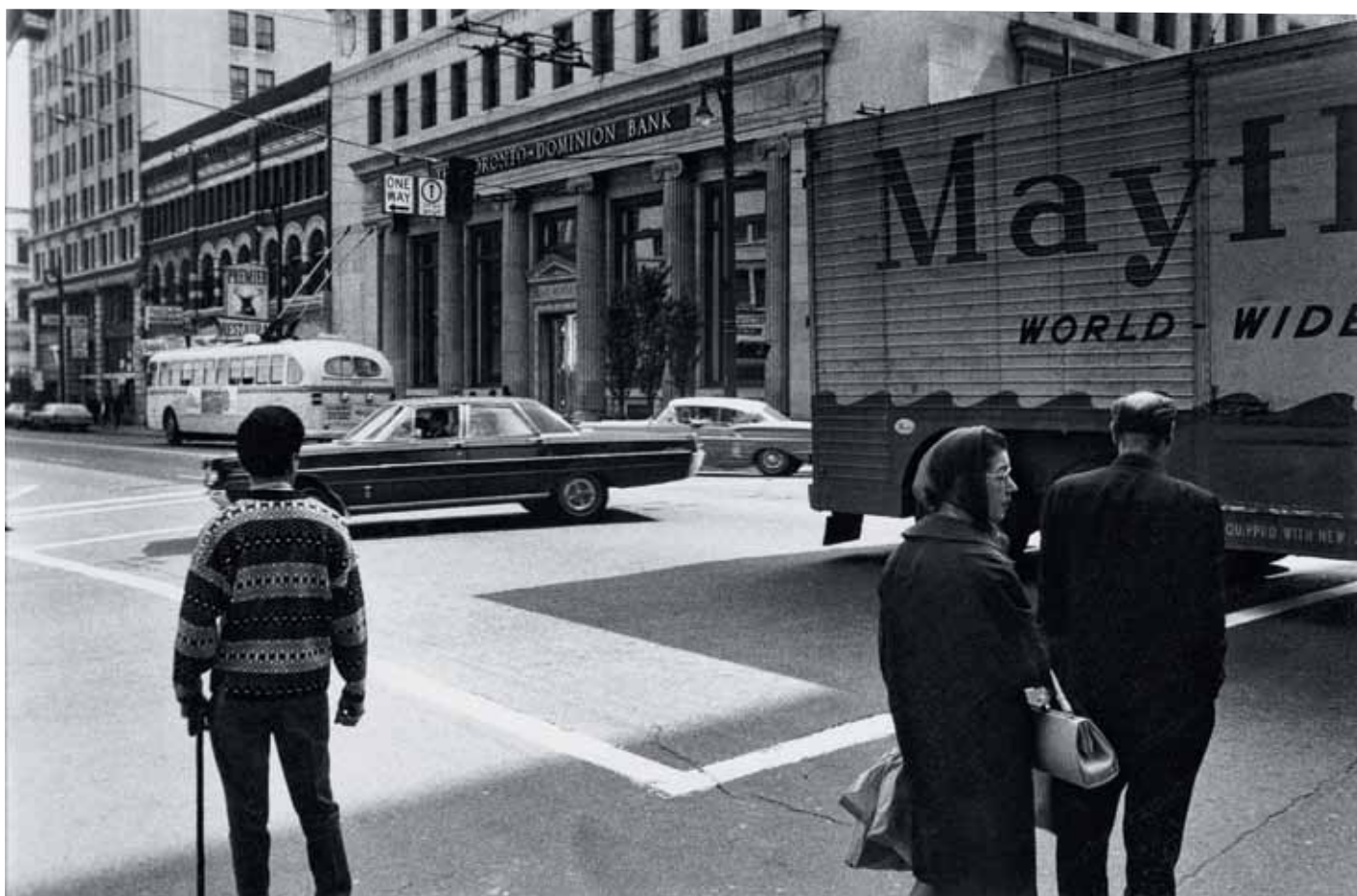
Ian Wallace, *Untitled (Black Monochrome with Grey)*,

1967/2007, acrylic on canvas, 229 cm × 51 cm

IMAGE COURTESY OF CATRIONA JEFFRIES, VANCOUVER



Ian Wallace, *Chicago Crosswalk*, 2007, photolaminate and acrylic on canvas, 244 cm x 189 cm
IMAGE COURTESY OF CATRIONA JEFFRIES, VANCOUVER



In a profound way, my own progression through Wallace's exhibition was analogous to everyday urban experiences, especially those occurring at intersections, halting and glancing up at soaring grey office towers—themselves consisting of framing grey bands that border striated black and white lines—vividly rendered here by the artist, along with hard-edged slivers of sky, rendered a pristine and vivid blue in contrast to the dirty, worn-down white rectangles pictured on the pavement.

Wallace uses the monochrome to suggest a frequently unacknowledged social and perceptual affinity among us, one rooted in geometric language—setting the stage to reflect on how certain concepts and actions, such as framing, containment, adjacency, contiguity and juxtaposition, all contribute to the perceptual and cultural glue that bonds and regulates urban society. The monochromes are situated to encourage us to consider how rectangles may rule our lives, as their abstraction and pronounced material presence—being Wallace's only unframed pictures—provoke the careful viewer into critically contemplating how and why these dominant shapes become unhinged from a singular descriptive or functional

purpose, such as the demarcation of an intersection or the articulation of a building's façade. In the process, they may come to have an independent reality, as colour and shape. In this regard, I am reminded of Henri Matisse's *Open Window, Collioure* (1905), as it offers a series of parallel bands, central and peripheral openings, and a variety of vistas, promoting playful deliberation about the notions of framing and containment themselves. In the case of French doors, compartments feature different monochrome "pictures" of colour that, while peripheral in placement, compete with a centrally placed seascape, quite comparable to the crosswalk scene in Wallace's show. Wallace's bands are, of course, less expressionistic than Matisse's, as well as more precise and regular in their rendering. In this sense, they are particularly reminiscent of Barnett Newman's mature works. Newman often said that what he wanted most to achieve was to give the beholder a sense of place, and like Wallace, he strove to offer beholders a venue for exploring the limits of their perceptual capacities—as in the case of differing combinations of bands and fields of colour that test our sensory abilities to detect lateral extension. Like

Newman, Wallace is deeply concerned with the experience of teasing out such perceptual limits, including the oscillation between centralized and peripheral vision. The certainty of our perception depends on a clear and coherent recognition of figure-ground hierarchy, which Wallace problematizes effectively within exhibitions that cleverly combine peripherally placed monochromes with other works.⁵

Nevertheless, the modernist inclination of Wallace's practice remains firmly rooted in the soil of everyday social scenarios, and not only those occurring at urban intersections.

Wallace's monochromes are supportive of his longstanding exploratory project of documenting monochrome, geometric imagery within cosmopolitan settings, recalling Dan Graham's satirical treatment of minimalist style and suburban tract housing in *Homes for America* (1966–67) or Sol LeWitt's *Photogrids* (1977–78), a dry, witty accumulated archive of images depicting grids in a host of urban sites.⁶ These sources, produced by pioneering figures that, like Wallace, confound easy categorization as minimalist, conceptualist or pop, do in the end seem far more relevant than

Ian Wallace, *Untitled (Intersection)*, 1970/2007, silver print, 28 cm × 35.5 cm
IMAGE COURTESY OF CATRIONA JEFFRIES, VANCOUVER



120V



the work of geometric abstractionists, such as Ellsworth Kelly, that are more exclusively devoted to the aestheticized contemplation of fussy form and carefully calibrated colour. But Wallace's work is capable of causing a "serious" poetic resonance that may be considered apart from any sense of conceptualist irony. In the end, I feel it is best to see the beholding experience of his monochrome works as taking on metaphorical richness that is sincere in nature. Either in the gallery or on the street, pedestrians can become like bodies of colour, perhaps envisioned as extensions of other things, or as products of a geometric order that affects our lives, for better or worse, and colours many of the moves we make in public space, be it in a gallery or on a street corner. Every cognitive and physical act is in some sense influenced by rectangles and the like—to the extent that it might make more sense for us to be thinking only in terms of bands and borders of pure primary colours.

Dan Adler is an assistant professor of art history at York University in Toronto. The author of a book on Hanne Darboven (Afterall/MIT Press, 2009), he is currently working on a manuscript about the aesthetics of contemporary sculpture.

opposite

Ian Wallace, *Untitled (White Monochrome with Black)*, 1967/2007, acrylic on canvas, 229 cm × 51 cm
IMAGE COURTESY OF CATRIONA JEFFRIES, VANCOUVER

above

Ian Wallace, *Untitled (White Line)*, 1969/2007, acrylic on plywood, 975 cm × 61 cm × 2 cm
IMAGE COURTESY OF CATRIONA JEFFRIES, VANCOUVER

Endnotes

- 1 For commentary, see Wallace's text "The Monochromes of 1967 and 1968 and After," in *CJ Press: Anthology of Exhibition Essays 2006 | 2007* (Vancouver: Catriona Jeffries Gallery, 2008). This account provides much contextual information about the origins and importance of the monochrome series, details that I will not repeat here. Another crucial source is Jeff Wall, "La Melancholie de la Rue: Idyll and Monochrome in the Work of Ian Wallace, 1967–82," in Christos Dikeakos, ed., *Ian Wallace: Selected Works, 1970–87* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1988), 63–75.
- 2 The first work in the monochrome series, consisting of a yellow field framed in white, has different proportions from the remaining 30 paintings. Despite (or perhaps because of) its anomalous nature, Wallace has continued to exhibit this work alongside others in the series.
- 3 The Duchampian and nominal aspects of monochrome production are relevant to Wallace's project, and most influentially treated in Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996). For an excellent, recent critique of de Duve's argument, see J.M. Bernstein, *Against Voluptuous Bodies: Late Modernism and the Meaning of Painting* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 194–222.
- 4 It is notable that Wallace was not compelled to complete the series in the late 1960s. Only in recent years has he produced its remaining parts.
- 5 As in the case of Newman's "zips," Wallace's bordering bands are best envisioned as colour planes rather than lines. The modular division of the composition helps to break down oppositions between line and colour, and between line and plane. See Yve-Alain Bois, "Newman's Laterality," in Melissa Ho, ed., *Reconsidering Barnett Newman* (Philadelphia and New Haven: Philadelphia Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2002), 29–45. For relevant treatment of the "postmodern" reception of the modernist monochrome, see Beate Epperlein, *Monochrome Malerei: Zur Unterschiedlichkeit des vermeintlich Ähnlichen* (Nürnberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst Nürnberg, 1997), and Richard Shiff, "Whiteout: The Not-Influence Newman Effect," in Ann Temkin, ed., *Barnett Newman* (Philadelphia and New Haven: Philadelphia Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2002), 77–104.
- 6 I would suggest that the consistency and sheer length of Wallace's decades-long commitment also recalls the work of Bernd and Hilla Becher.



Yes, But Is It Edible? A scored biography of Robert Ashley, for five or more voices (ed. Will Holder and Alex Waterman)



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- 69. No, **you** can't
- 70. get **people** to **do** perfect
- 71. work **unless** they **want** to.

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Shit Girls Say



Hey Girlfriend,

Sunday

Welcome home! The cats are happy and well fed—the plants too!—and all is well in The Lesbian Mansion. Trimming their claws provided the month's only drama: Camille went completely limp but Sandra put up quite a fight—though nothing a little Bactine can't fix ;) It was great to get away from my roommates for a while and make myself comfortable in your glorious pad. I spent many a night curled up in front of the fireplace, making my way through your amazing library. Reading through our cherished classics, from *A Bridge Called My Back to For Lesbians Only*, the *SCUM Manifesto* to *A Cyborg Manifesto*, brought me back to the early years of our friendship. Remember that ill-fated trip to see Ani DiFranco in Vermont? Or trying to make sense of Cixous in that fourth-year feminist theory seminar? The good old days of Edgy Women at Studio 303, and our matching Riot Grrrl haircuts? (What *is* Kathleen Hanna up to these days?)

I'm so happy we found each other. In my mind, developing a queer identity requires walking a circuitous path: certain objects or figures seem to speak one's queer feelings and offer comfort, but in a mysterious language that defies clear articulation. Self-understanding is like a trail of breadcrumbs: secret desires, strange emotions, moments of initiation and deep wordless knowing. For some queer kids, messy feelings cluster around same-sex desire, while for me and many others they manifested more in a keenly felt, taboo cross-gender affinity, which ripened into a potent urge to subvert and betray the male sex and its privileges. Mine was a childhood of intense girl-identification: socializing almost exclusively with the fairer sex, as well as being mistaken for a member of it; dressing in drag and dancing like Madonna; inventing female alter-egos—mine was named "Lisa," probably after my beloved Lisa Simpson, and she loved to wear bracelets—and identifying with the TV girl-heroes I spent way too much time indoors with—Punky Brewster, Darlene Conner, Wednesday Addams, even good old Velma from *Scooby-Doo*.

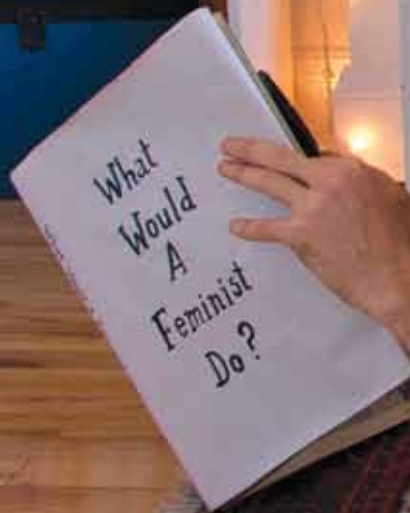
Growing up, the space of the printed page, like the space of the screen, increasingly became a field for imagining bodies and identities beyond those we were taught were fixed and immutable. When I discovered women's and feminist writing—fiction, non-fiction, theory, philosophy—it offered a blueprint for gender liberation that would free us all from the life sentence of biological determinism. The rigid rules of our male bodies collapsed like paper tigers in the face of feminist and queer theories of social construction and performance. The words of a Shulamith Firestone, an Audre Lorde or a Judith Butler—you know, that other "shit girls say": the entire corpus of feminist thought—proved potent enough to transform this girl-identified lad into a full-blown feminist-identified faggot. So what if I wasn't invited to Kat's moon circle, and a certain iconic lesbian authoress who shall remain nameless refused eye contact with me at her book launch?

Gay male culture typically feeds on—even vampirizes—women and their words, with shared feelings of suffering, (understandably) a key touchstone for identification and empathy. Make what you will of the prevailing dynamics between women and gay men: I can't pretend that there are any clean and easy answers to what we make of each other and each other's voices. Written primarily for women readers, the trove of feminist books, zines, music and artworks that we discovered together in Women's Studies at Concordia—the same ones I just pored over in your apartment!—travelled their idiosyncratic, circuitous paths to wind up in the hands of a curious boy like me. Taking over my and other dudes' hearts and minds, they transformed us into allies and drove us to undermine the tyranny of masculine domination however and wherever we can. In some ways, I see us as carrying on the legacy of our elders in the AIDS activist movement of not so long ago: fags and dykes who united and shared skills and strategies to fight a plague that threatened them all. Individually and societally, what does it mean for a queer male identity to be forged in the intellectual and affective furnaces of feminism?

I feel like I've rambled on long enough, I don't want to take up too much space here :)

Against the dictatorship of biological determinism,
For self-fashioning and fabulation,

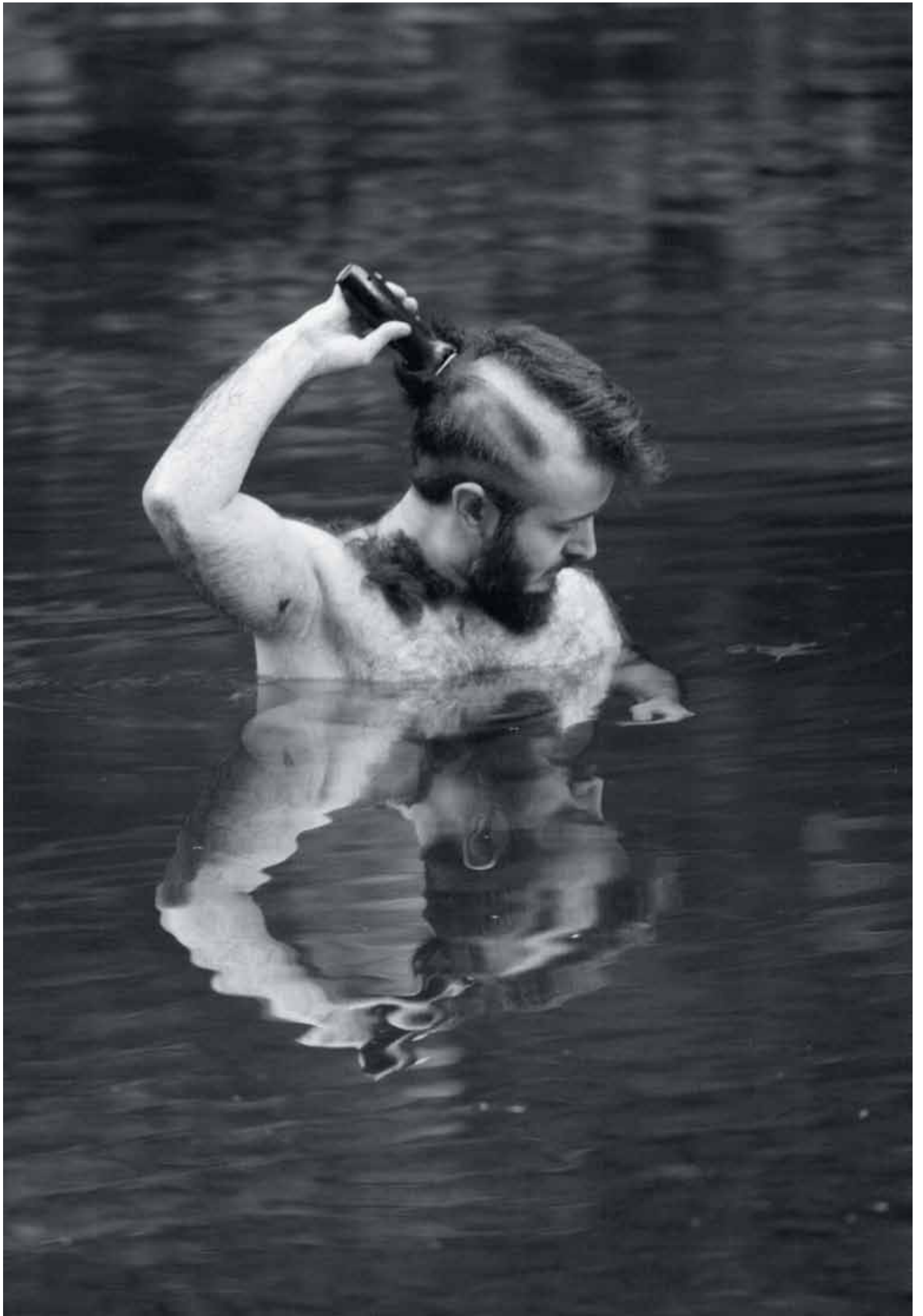
Your Forever Lezbro





DEAR
GINGER
AND
ONYA,
CALL ME
LOVE LOGAN





Gender Diasporist

Shawn Syms interviews Tobaron Waxman

Tobaron Waxman's performance pieces and other cultural productions pose complicated questions of identity on multiple fronts. His work contextualizes gender, embodiment and time as systems of inscription, incorporating elements of traditional Jewish texts and philosophy through politics and desire.

Waxman frequently uses his own body in his work, sometimes in pieces involving the cutting and shaving of gendered signifiers such as his hair and/or beard. He has created striking imagery of men together, in varying bodily configurations and states of undress. In addition to performance, photography, video, voice and sound, he also uses the Internet, tissue engineering, biofeedback processing and choreography. In his work, Waxman examines gender and such issues as consent, sexual representation, conflict and questions of contested national borders and diasporic experience.

This past winter, I engaged in a series of wide-ranging conversations with Waxman about his work and its reflections upon masculinity and gender, race and embodiment, performance and authenticity, and the ways in which the State creates a gender, which have arisen during the past decade of evolving artistic practice.

Shawn Syms (ss): Your cultural practice seems to me to intrinsically manifest a perspective on masculinity and representation even when this is not the intended or primary focus. One example I find particularly striking is *Amidah* (2004), featured in Volume One of the *Carte Blanche* photography compendium.

Six men engage in the motions of the *Amidah* or *Shmoneh Esrei* prayer.¹ They stand together, varying in comportment, age, build and attire. They are also in varying states of undress. It appears that at least one of them may be transgendered. To me, the capture of movement and ritual in an all-male context reflects upon the breadth of ways of being male or masculine.

Tobaron Waxman (TW): *Amidah* was inspired by my thinking when I lived in a gender-segregated environment engaged

in religious studies. At that time, I was not thinking about masculinity so critically but rather about the notion of authenticity and the context in which I found myself.

Shmoneh Esrei: Amidah is a triptych—each panel from the triptych references one of the three times of day when the silent prayer is recited. Rather than have a traditional prayer quorum of 10 men in each photo, there are 6 figures, making a total of 18 figures in the composition, for the 18 steps of the prayer.

It's an imagistic response to issues I wrestled with when I was a religious ascetic. I was concerned specifically with embodiment, and the juxtaposition of my own body in that shared context with the bodies of the other men who were around me all the time. The variance in degrees of clothedness is less about what is hidden than the notion of layering itself. I've also made a JavaScript animation version of

the central panel—“*Mincha*,” referring to the afternoon prayer time—designed for a Web browser, so it is a one-to-one personal experience.²

ss As I see it, male togetherness—and ways in which it can suggest both commonality and difference—is a recurring motif in your work. The *Tisha B'Av/Diaspora NYC* series (2003) provides an example of this. To me, the photographs in this series feel very intimate—one man shaves another's head, his hand supporting the man's neck with seeming tenderness—yet it's a representation of male bonding that reads as emotional rather than sexual.

TW In my action-based work, the production of photographs expands each of those gestures, functioning as evidence. *Diaspora NYC* documents a ritual of inscription. Two figures mutually inscribe one another, articulating peership and homo-social embrace.

ss I've seen these photographs in a number of contexts—in a gallery space, published online, one of them in my home. To me, they challenge an experience of homogeneity I perceive sometimes when viewing male-centred imagery by queer artists. The work feels more like documentary than portraiture. The men are photographed from different vantage points, and different signifiers are revealed in the varying images: a tattooed man has scars from chest-reconstructive surgery; the other man wears a tallit.

Can you share your thoughts with me on how these carefully constructed images reflect upon both New York City and the notion of diaspora?

TW The tall black-and-white one from the series was shown in a very gay eros-driven show in Chelsea. He's wearing a barber's smock, and under his clothes, typical to a religious person, is a *tallit katan* and this is evidenced by the *tzitzit* (ritual fringes) showing below the smock.³ In this context, both the *tzitzit* and maleness can exist in variance. I grew up with a lot of privilege, with very few Jews around me, the first generation with real opportunity to assimilate, and first in my family line to not speak our mother tongue. The *Tisha B'Av/Diaspora NYC* series is a portrait of my fantasy of Jewish pluralism, part of what I had hoped to find in New York. It's about being marked. Jewishly, it's about removal of an additional layer.

Basically, Zionism bought and buys into the anti-Semitic tropes about Jewish men caricatured as weak, crouched over

Tobaron Waxman, *Tasblich*, 2009 (with Ben Coopersmith)
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

and paralyzed and Zionism would renew the Jew—or bring him back to Maccabean glory, which had been all but extinguished in centuries of exile. Along with many others of my generation, I consider that to be self-hating and a distortion of Jewish history. But this is explicitly a male expression of nation. The hero / victim dichotomy, especially post-Holocaust, usually contrasts a heroic, athletic Zionist man with a pale, intellectual, Diaspora Jew less-than-man. This paradigm has to be heteronormative, and also points out an erasure of the girls. Because the girl is replaced by the effeminacy of the “diaspora-boy” and for the “Israel man,” the feminine is the land (*Ha'aretz*) itself. My engagement with Yiddish is both contemporary and reverent—it’s about choosing to Return to Diaspora.

SS I participated in the performance that generated *Chimera* (2005–2007). A range of men were brought together in a series of underwater embraces. We were in various states of undress, sometimes fully clothed (and in my case, wearing shoes!) while submerged. More than one of the men was visibly trans.

TW *Chimera* displays an array of masculinities with a definite erotic element. It’s a cruising park, underwater. There are some bearish types, some other guys, a couple of FTMs and a couple of mermen. These gestures had to occur underwater, because the point was that at that time, no one believed it was possible for FTMs to have sexual peership with non-trans gay men. They appear “visibly trans,” perhaps because of my innovation of an FTM iconography, some wearing chest binders, one with chest scars exposed, and ultimately the mermen in fishtails as a tongue-in-cheek at the “specialness” afforded to FTMs.

SS In addition to same-sex explorations, your work complicates the notion of the male spectatorship of female bodies as well. *Tradewinds Motel* (2006) includes a woman gazing at the camera in traditional pin-up style pose and attire, but the photo series queers heterosexuality and upends gender expectations.

Evoking a nostalgic style, the work speaks to both cultural history and personal agency. Some of the images are sexual and could be seen to represent what’s traditionally ascribed as a male gaze—i.e., a cisgendered [non-trans], patriarchal gaze—but there’s a sensation of support and empathy as well.

TW I was in a relationship with a sex worker. *Tradewinds Motel* was a response to a story she shared about erotic

modelling she’d done under unpleasant circumstances. I photo-edited the only image she liked from that photo shoot, giving it an affect first of the 1920s, then the 30s and finally the 60s, because she enjoyed nostalgia from these periods. And we engaged in a shoot of our own together. I used the camera on a Palm Pilot, creating images that felt fleeting, tracing the memory of an erotic liaison.

The images are grouped in an old-fashioned family-style mat board, as a queer approach to thinking about kinship and chosen family. The images of her, plus those of us together at the hotel, surround an image of her bedside night table with flowers on it. The piece was a collaboration. We reinscribed agency onto a representation that had been made of her. Looking through the ovals in the mat are variations on an image of herself she likes and had a say in, in which she sees herself the way she wants, portrayed as historical evidence. If any prints are sold, proceeds are split between her and a peer-run sex-worker solidarity project of her choice.

SS Your creation of your work does not occur in a vacuum, of course—we all exist in relationship to state apparatuses. Some of your work reflects upon this critically. In *Still Life: Israel Eats Itself* (2008), a nude man applies a black substance to his skin, then scrapes it off and eats it. The soundtrack is in 5.1 surround, an electro-acoustic composition that includes your field recording with an Israeli veteran with PTSD.

TW The masculinity that is being dealt with in *Still Life: Israel Eats Itself* uses the example of the experiences I had in Israel—masculinity in Israel as a way to talk about the state and the relationship of gender to power and hegemony. In this piece, the human body is an analogue to landscape, land occupation and “Holy Land.” It’s concerned with the place at which the human body becomes the subject of a state, and citizenship makes moral and ethical claims upon our bodies. *Still Life* is a 4D portrait of a gendered identity invented by and then cannibalized by the state.

Originally performed as a live artwork in a 5.1 surround sound environment, the work now exists as a video derived from documentation shot on Super 8 and surveillance camera. The imagery references the black paintings of Goya, the scatalogics and “Eye” of Bataille and the Chassidic concept of *klippah*—the shell that both nourishes the physical world and gives it its shape while necessitating its own shedding in order to access truth.

Unpacking experiences with gender is a



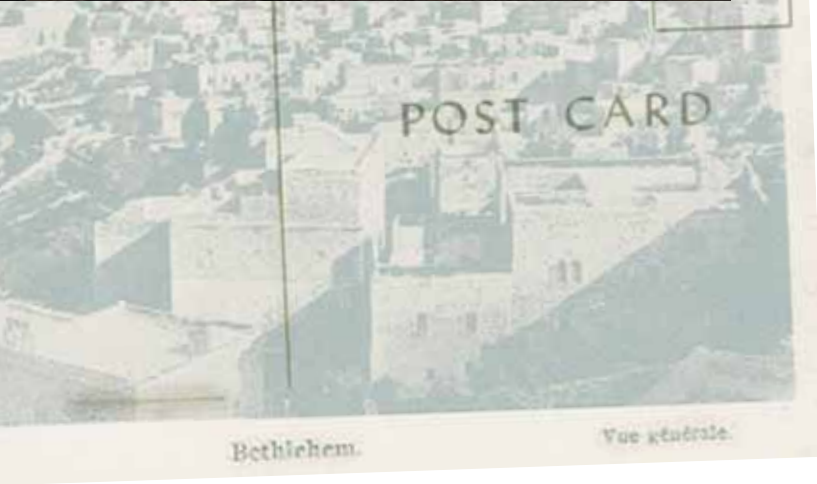
Tobaron Waxman, *Bethlehem Checkpoint* postcard, from *Fear of a Bearded Planet*, 2007
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



Tobaron Waxman, *Chimera*, 2005–2007 (with David Findlay)
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



right
 Tobaron Waxman,
*Diaspora NYC:
 Chatima Tova
 (A Good Inscrip-
 tion)*, 2003
 IMAGE COURTESY
 OF THE ARTIST



right
 Tobaron Waxman,
Tradewinds Motel,
 2006
 IMAGE COURTESY
 OF THE ARTIST



Tobaron Waxman,
*Still Life: Israel
 Eats Itself*, 2008,
 video still
 IMAGE COURTESY
 OF THE ARTIST







Tobaron Waxman,
Amidah: Mincha,
2004 (part of
a triptych)
IMAGE COURTESY
OF THE ARTIST

thread that runs through much of what I do. I critically consider what I have access to now versus in the past in relation to masculinizing my own appearance: how much of that is determined by me and how much by other people, in terms of the eye of the beholder and larger systems of power, living in a misogynist culture and patriarchal structure.

The man whose voice we hear on the audio track was telling me about having served in five wars for the State of Israel. He and the State were the same age—it was 2008—and both he and Israel were 60 years old. The more of his story he told, about this war and that war, about parts of his body and mind that were destroyed by them, the more he began to stammer and unravel, until it became clear that he had basically forfeited his entire virility to the State, with little to show for it but his gasps at the Zionist promise.

SS The notion of crossing borders—of states, of identity categories, of external perception—is a key theme of your current project-in-progress, *Fear of a Bearded Planet*. The title appears to suggest a Public Enemy reference, which is fitting given the ways the performance intervention concerns both gender and race.

TW For *Fear of a Bearded Planet* I sat for souvenir portrait artists, wearing the same outfit each time. When they inevitably ask me where I'm from, I ask them to guess. Each time they draw me as a stereotype of "Jew"—a range including a few Shylocks—or "Arab"—Arab as mostly Muslim fundamentalist/terrorist caricature. The project includes anecdotal text about where I was in the world and what was said each time I was read as Muslim, by a variety of people, including cops and customs agents. I thought it was successful because of its ambiguity, indeed in the most accurate likeness, made in London during a residency in Berlin, all my Berlin-based colleagues thought I was Turkish. The work includes covert photo documentation of the sittings and a postcard project based on a visit to the Israeli checkpoint at Bethlehem with the advocacy group *Machsom Watch* in 2006.

SS In at least one of the caricatures, the creator sketched the Twin Towers in the background.

TW *Fear of a Bearded Planet* is a reveal of the fractured violence of racialization, and it traces and catalogues these experiences and critiques the notion of "passing." The salon-style installation of portraits results in a collective portrait of the Semite, and I can compare the function of the Semite in the

European conscience to the Islamophobia indicated in the drawings from New York. In London, Paris, Berlin and Vienna, when I travelled for work, and in Toronto and New York countless times—to be in different places during things like the second invasion of Iraq versus revolutions in Tahrir Square produced totally different portraits.

For much of the past decade, I've been moving through the Western world frequently mistaken as an ambiguously raced Semite. This has played out in various ways, and includes being mistaken by Muslims from the Arab world as an Arab Muslim. These exchanges begin with a Muslim man looking at my face and seeing something that reminds him of home. I would engage, and say *Assalamu alaikum*. If it happened in Toronto they would say "...no where are you really from?" They would assume I was Muslim, and then ask: "Egypt, Jordan, Palestine...?" Or sometimes, Kashmir. In that moment, I get to enjoy for a fleeting moment feeling like a welcome son; I never had that before in my whole life. I think of bell hooks' essay "Eating the Other"—white men fetishizing black bodies, and wearing signifiers of blackness as a way to have access to something more dimensional.⁴ And it was part of my critical thinking around my own potential racisms. It was very nice, to feel a fraternal embrace from men who are not necessarily thinking critically about their own gender. So they're not thinking critically about mine. They see someone that they think they have kinship with because they think we are both reverent of the same god. Privilege means I am the one who gets to decide when the relationship shifts. On the one hand, I want people to be comfortable with me, I want to be able to tell someone, yes, I'm an ally. But it's important that it's understood that I'm not in the same set of circumstances as that person, that I'm coming to them as an ally with my own set of privileges. And then I come out to them—as Jewish, and against the occupation of Palestine. Then we have another conversation, usually ending in physical contact: shaking hands and an embrace. Once, in Brooklyn, an elderly Yemeni man approached me on the platform, waiting for the subway. We sat together on the train, and for about 20 minutes he told me about his childhood, how his family and a Jewish family lived together in a shared house, before 1948. We held hands and cried.

When this happens in public, it is witnessed. It's a beautiful political moment. These experiences with men are dimensions of gender that I couldn't have learned from the feminism or queer theory I had been exposed to before masculinizing my own appearance. I didn't understand this male vulnerability until I was in it.





Tobaron Waxman,
*Fear of a Bearded
Planet*, 2007,
Central Park, NYC
PHOTO: TINA
MACCARI; IMAGE
COURTESY OF
THE ARTIST



Tobaron Waxman,
*Fear of a Bearded
Planet*, 2007,
IMAGE COURTESY
OF THE ARTIST

SS Your own body also figures prominently in much of your other work. In *Tashlich* (2009) for instance, you shave your head and beard while immersed in a body of water, your motions fluidly represented via long exposure. It strikes me that this performance for a photo seems to engage many of the elements present in some of your other work—from the representation of a masculine body, to the aspect of shaving as a gesture of removing a layer from your bodily self, to the action taking place in water, documenting a time-based action. What can you tell me about the significance of this performance, from a political perspective and otherwise?

TW *Tashlich* is a ritual at the beginning of the New Year, when one symbolically empties their pockets into a stream. It's a way of attempting a clean slate for the new year, admitting to how flawed we are, but committing to trying again. Also, out of respect for the religious world I was no longer participating in or representing, I felt I ought to let go of this signage. That performance in the lake involved cutting off the oldest parts of my beard, over seven years' worth of growth. Riffing on the ritual of *tashlich*, following a traditional meditation, I put myself into the stream and left that signage behind. The racialized experiences catalogued in *Fear of a Bearded Planet* were happening as often as few times a week for years. But my shock at, for example, having my beard inspected for explosives in an airport, was also an expression of entitlement. *Tashlich* was in part a commitment to deal with my own privilege and be more politically effective in the world, a white person informed by those experiences.

SS You have extensive experience in vocal work, as a performer and teacher. But this practice has long seemed very separate from your other artistic work, despite your early background in theatre. But in the performance piece *RED FOOD: Songs of unrequited love, death and transformation* (2012), you shave your head, then your beard, then apply pale-faced makeup, followed by a live vocal performance sitting with soup kitchen patrons eating a menu of red foods garnished with edible gold. The various elements of your performance practice appear to be coming together again, including your voice.

TW There was a period of many years when, both because I was religious and because I was in the process of changing my gender, it was painfully obvious that audiences were looking *at me*, rather than at the work. So I

started taking pictures with other people's bodies. And I made sound projects separate from portraiture, and photographic prints installed with sound for motion-detection playback. My impulse to do live and gestural work became more about stillness or photographing a gesture. By "gesture," I mean both the choreographed performance and also a welcoming that is present and therefore presented. A gesture, in this sense, to the other person resists ingesting and spitting them out, as in "Oh, I know you, because I have the same in me." To articulate is to limit. In a long exposure, the image of people is never fully static, it's by default an empathic move. By synthesizing live art in stillness with my voice work, I am bringing my body back.

My new project involves bringing my own body back into the work, mainly as a vocalist. I've been developing a curriculum for the FTM voice, derived from the various schools of training I have enjoyed, Western and non-Western. The voice is the place where all your symptoms, everything that's going on with you, is immediately apparent. My goals with this include a theoretical text, as well as more case studies with more people on the FTM spectrum, and ultimately to be able to take this curriculum to any male-identified person. I've already had a few non-transmen express interest in doing this voice work with me, which made me think that I could develop a larger project around vocal production as both an artwork in itself and a method of critical enactment. This spring, I performed my first-ever solo vocal performance in about 10 years, in memory of queer and FTM friends who had died or committed suicide in recent years, and the femme widows they left behind to deal with the shatter, coinciding with the tenth anniversary of the passing of my father. The repertoire was all material from the Jewish Diaspora, some from Central Asia/Eastern Europe, some Yiddish, some secular and some liturgical chant—but all of it engages ideas of physical transformation predicating destiny in some way, via motifs of unrequited love, death and transformation. I'm singing in my mother's first language: Yiddish. My interpretation of the songs engages queer utopia in relation to Jewish concepts of destiny, longing and the messianic.

I'm thinking about what the messianic is, via the Derridean concept of the future to come, as unpredictable (*le futur* as opposed to *l'avenir*). So I think this work will take the form of live installations, as I've done before for camera, but with voice. Voice, as it relates to time and presence, performance as an effort to stretch out a moment, and photography in empathy with the gesture itself. This parallels a Jewish way of talking about

time, thinking about the continuous present and an experience of time that is not linear but is simultaneously forward-advancing. To resist moments of before and after.

Shawn Syms has written about culture, gender and sexuality for over 20 years for publications including the Literary Review of Canada, Spacing, the Globe and Mail, The Rumpus, Fuse, Broken Pencil and two dozen others. His writing on body politics has included explorations of drug-use, harm reduction and the criminalization of sexually transmitted infections. His literary fiction was shortlisted for the Journey Prize and his writing about queer trans men has been widely cited, and translated into French.

Endnotes

- 1 The Amidah or Shomeh Esrei is one of the central prayers of Jewish daily worship, recited three times a day. It is structured around 18 benedictions that are meant to encompass one's material, political and spiritual devotions. Traditionally, it is recited silently and then, if a quorum of ten men is present, is repeated out loud for the benefit of the entire congregation.
- 2 <http://tobaron.com/mincha.html>
- 3 Traditionally, the *tallit katan* is a garment worn daily by Jewish men underneath their clothes. It is a four-cornered tunic with ritual fringes dangling from each corner.
- 4 bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992)



Michael Pittman, *Floodplain (Dogs Fighting)*, 2012. Mixed-media on panel, 125 cm x 81 cm

May 26 – August 26

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Michael Flaherty: Rangifer Sapiens

Craft Council Gallery, St. John's, NL
February 4 – March 11, 2012

by Gloria Hickey



Effectively, Flaherty's invention of antler-shards is a timeline of the habitation of the Grey Islands. From the 1500s onwards, cod, herring and seals attracted French fishermen and ultimately English and Irish settlers to these remote islands. However, by the 1960s, the population of the islands had shrunk from about 200 to 86 souls. They were resettled to White Bay, which was deemed more easily administered by the provincial government. In the early 70s, a herd of caribou was introduced to the Grey Islands by the Department of Wildlife to save them from extinction due to overhunting by the non-Aboriginal population, who least needed the caribou for subsistence. During his three months on the Grey Islands, Flaherty repeatedly found shed antlers from the living herd and the archaeological remains of the place's human past. The implications were not lost on him.

Flaherty's response to the historical narrative of the Grey Islands' habitation is especially interesting because of the artist's age and perspective. He is a generation

removed from the hot-button topic of resettlement in the province, and two generations removed from Newfoundland joining Confederation. There are many layers to his complicated and intelligent response. On one hand, Flaherty's vantage point gives him a sobering perspective that his father and grandfather's generation could not easily enjoy. The questions of whether Newfoundland should join Confederation (and Canada) and whether the government had the right to resettle its rural population were topics of fiery debate, which for decades dominated the province's cultural identity and threatened to divide families. Resettlement, for example, was widely regarded as the deathblow to the traditional outport lifestyle that today is the staple icon of the province's tourism ads.

Flaherty has noticeably avoided the term of "resettlement" in his media interviews and artist statement. His art points out the human-centric weakness of earlier dialogues on this topic. Succinctly put, it says: where human civilization stops,

Artist Michael Flaherty describes himself as a "conceptual ceramicist" and occasionally as a "ceramic fundamentalist." Both self-identifications distinguish his studio practice from functional pottery and highlight the fact that Flaherty is part of a new generation of craft practitioners who are as interested in ideas as they are in materials or objects. Leading craft theorist Glenn Adamson characterizes this generation of makers as "post-disciplinary" because they work across disciplines normally distinguished by a medium such as ceramics. This is a radical departure in the evolution of studio craft practice. Among his post-disciplinary peers, Flaherty stands out as "ceramic fundamentalist." He is engaged with ceramics but maintains a critical distance from it.

When Flaherty embarked on a self-imposed exile on one of the abandoned Grey Islands off the north coast of Newfoundland in 2009, he captured the public's imagination. Why would a young, thirtysomething artist leave the comfort of his studio and community in downtown St. John's for the isolation of a remote island? Ostensibly, the three-month project was a self-styled artist residency wherein he set out to "create and document a location specific art piece." In his presentations before and after the event, Flaherty explained that he was there to build an inside-out kiln. It was a conceptual art event where he would symbolically "fire the island." In his blog commentary about the Grey Islands, Flaherty shows himself, the urban potter, decked out in buckskin jacket and coonskin cap, like a campy 2009 version of "a settler." The title of the resulting show, *Rangifer Sapiens* translates from scientific Latin as "wise caribou" and it features haunting ceramic sculptures. They are milk-white, life-sized antlers that grow with organic grace from broken pottery—cups, plates and teapots, usually left with a loop of functional handle. Each "shard" is blushed with rust tones and it appears that the decoration of decal or hand-painted motif has migrated from vessel to antler, leaving its imprint. The fascinating result is a rich, ambiguous hybrid object of human and animal, like a mythological creature that simultaneously taps into two interconnected worlds. All of the sculptures in the show are titled by numbers—birth and death dates—found on gravestones in French Cove. These titles hint at the personal and encourage the interpretation of the works as portraits.

nature flourishes. It is a subtle wake-up call to a province that has only in the past two years introduced a curbside recycling program in its capital city. In other provinces, it is likely that this body of Flaherty's work will be seen in terms of colonialism and relevant to a discussion of the residential schools and forced resettlement of Aboriginal youth.

Flaherty's ability to draw a "connection between past and present, human and animal, presence and absence," as he sets out in his show statement, is impressive. Flaherty's ceramic sculptures have a surprising, nuanced wholeness, both visually and metaphorically. The fusion of antler and cup assumes a visual logic; they are not awkward or jarring. He is able to communicate that the shed antler, which is scientifically classed as "true bone," emerging from the skull of the animal is metaphorically equivalent to the shard or "true bone" of the human. The "shard" portions of the sculptures are thrown on a potter's wheel and then cut with careful precision. They are not broken or damaged. The

top to bottom
Michael Flaherty, *The Grey Islands*, 2009,
durational performance and location-specific
installation
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Michael Flaherty, *1807-1884*, 2012, white
earthenware, underglaze, glaze, terra sigillata,
50 x 20 x 20cm
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

“shards” are fragments worn smooth with time and the elements. The language of European settler ceramics and successive contemporary counterparts are documented on the antler portions not as interrupted pattern but in continuous passages that wind around its front and back.

Flaherty’s sculptures function in the manner of a quoted line of poetry: they are sections but are not broken. In fact, some of

the decorations are miniature landscapes, which Flaherty has said are of imagined places. The silhouettes of cobalt blue waves or rolling hills echo the profile of the antler’s tines. It is a subtle act of reciprocation.

Gloria Hickey is an independent curator and writer living in St. John’s, NL. Her most recent touring exhibition is The Fabric of Clay: Alexandra McCurdy.

Material World

Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax
January 21 – May 6, 2012

by Jane Affleck

David Diviney, the curatorial mind behind *Material World*, asserts that the exhibit’s works, largely from the AGNS’ permanent collection, deal with “the fundamental pleasures of making, undoing and recreating.” Overall, the varied pieces assembled in the gallery’s lower level show a playful hand and, in more conceptual works, the mind of the artist. A couple of works, however, seem lost or aloof; perhaps their materials, less sumptuous or humorous than their counterparts, disappoint. Or perhaps, despite the play with materials, the underlying message is a sombre commentary on our overconsumption. It’s hard to let go and have fun when you’re made to feel guilty for even wanting to.

Through the doors and just to the right, Rhonda Wepler and Trevor Mahovsky’s *Shopping Cart II* (2006) is an aluminum-foil simulacrum reminiscent of a grade-school art project masterminded by glue-covered, scissor-wielding kids (and that’s not meant in the “my five-year-old could have done it” sense). But this cart is flattened and inert, its crumpled foil components lying atop one another not unlike cattle ribs bleaching in a cartoon desert; the cart is the morbid detritus of our consumer wasteland, as though run over and abandoned in the corner of a parking lot. Rather than being fun or frolicsome, the piece’s take-home message is that we can’t take it with us: our material desires have become too great a burden, one that no beast, mechanical or otherwise, can carry.

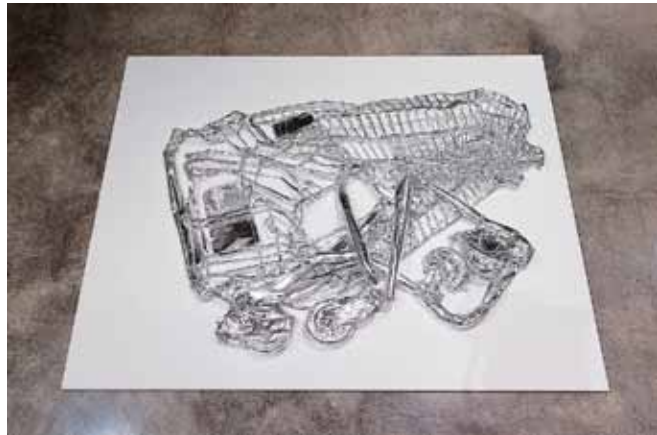
By comparison, Lauren Schaffer’s *Diamond as Big as the Ritz* (1996) plays on several levels—for one, the Brobdignagian size and quantity of the 11 cast diamond forms, their girth the size of an average bathroom sink. Approximating the shape known as the Passion cut, they fall short of the real thing aesthetically: they’re comprised of another sort of carbon, vitreous

china, the same kind to used to make toilets. The work’s title comes from F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novella, in which the protagonist brags his father has “a diamond bigger than the Ritz-Carlton Hotel.” In fact, the diamonds in question are much bigger. However, a diamond’s value is precisely in its scarcity; thus, ones so large are virtually worthless. Diamonds down the toilet—or of so little value they might as well be used to make a commode. But this parody of materials and forms is where the fun lies (and there’s also the nudge-nudge-wink-wink homage to Duchamp’s *Fountain*).

Other forms flirt with layers of meaning, both literally and figuratively: the five plaster-over-cardboard sculptures that comprise Robin Peck’s *Untitled* (2000–2002) could be clumsy layer cakes: square slabs iced with sugary froth, waiting for a gooey cursive “happy birthday” wish. The didactic panel calls them ziggurats, and they could be that too. Or perhaps they’re the most minimal of maquettes, for office towers with no doors or windows, part of a New York skyline reduced to its barest

essentials. As sugary confections, the forms are empty calories; and as office buildings, they are empty too: of character and architectural detail, and of any proof of the industry that might occur inside. Thus there’s something almost sneaky about them—their blankness isn’t that of innocence, but of contrivance or deceit, a desire to sugar-coat the ugly truth that lies within, whether it is a cheap cake, cubicles full of miserable workers, or ugly but practical cardboard.

But what could be more emblematic of innocent fun than a balloon, especially one shaped like Mickey Mouse’s head? Phil Grauer’s *Untitled* (1994) is a painted cast aluminum form that’s pure *trompe l’oeil*: it replicates the gloss and tension of a silvery latex balloon so well that you almost expect it to scuttle across the floor as you approach. But this balloon won’t drift up into the sky or become entangled in a tree branch; and neither will it fill a child’s heart with delight. In fact, the longer you stare at it, the more ominous it becomes: first just phallic or larval, Grauer’s *Untitled*



top to bottom

Rhonda Wepler and Trevor Mahovsky, *Shopping Cart II*, 2006, Aluminum foil, glue, life size
PHOTO: STEVE FARMER; IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ART GALLERY OF NOVA SCOTIA

Gerald Ferguson, *1,000,000 Canadian Pennies*, 1979, one million Canadian pennies, dimensions variable
PHOTO: STEVE FARMER; IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ART GALLERY OF NOVA SCOTIA

soon suggests a bigger balloon—a zeppelin—especially if viewed from the side. Or the sleek form of a nacelle, the outer housing of an airplane. Manifold connotations of flight and of flying, yet the piece has the heft of a bomb. And so perhaps it's right that it sits removed from the rest of the pieces, almost adrift. And with that, despite its mass, it resumes its "balloonedness" again, though with none of the carefree pleasure.

At first, *Shared Propulsion Car* (2005) by Michel de Broin is all fun and games. The almost four-minute DVD work features a "pedicar," a repurposed Buick Regal, propelled through various Toronto neighbourhoods by four plucky friends of the artist. Shots of the car lurching around a corner are cut with views of the pedallers' feet churning away on the bespoke gear system. The joyride comes quickly to an end when two cops arrive and command the vehicle to pull over. The pedallers defend their activities and the authoritarian cop responds, "I don't disagree with the principle of it, but the safety factor is... unsafe." Though inclined to take the riders' side—we should all find an emissions-free way to get around—it's hard not to agree with the cop: the rattling carapace of the Buick seems about to rattle apart, an unappealing proposition with streetcars careening past in the background.

Seripop: *Landscapes Events Reproduced*

Blackwood Gallery, Mississauga, ON
January 18 – March 4, 2012

by Amy Gaizauskas



By stepping inside *Landscapes Events Reproduced*, Seripop's three-part installation in and around the University of Toronto Mississauga's Blackwood Gallery, we enter a psychological place where flat surfaces expand into three dimensions. Entering this "place," however, requires familiarity with the duo's legendary screen-printed poster work: its compelling incomprehensibility, compulsion for failure and awkward syntax. Like Seripop's thousands of gig posters that have coloured the streets of Montreal and beyond since 2002, this first major solo exhibition brings together a dissonant ensemble of shapes and vibrancies, cultural allusions and shrill interruptions. Although the exhibition title references landscapes, the allusions are mostly nautical in the show, thus we additionally encounter *seascapes*. They are all

reproduced, as Seripop's previous design oeuvre is reproduced (or repackaged), with the same anomalous phrasing, this time as installation art.

More Time than Space, inside the Blackwood Gallery, has a lift of folded posters hung by block and tackle above two rectangular gear-like monuments (one obsessively wrapped with intricately silk-screened paper). More prints skim the floor with an onomatopoeic cluster of letters—"RROVFK"—perhaps the imagined sound of the colours splashing into the opposite corner as they hit its surface. Despite being glued down, the prints' positioning suggests movement through space. This play on the dynamic of the posters' two dimensionality in a three-dimensional world serves a double function: the posters are the material used to construct the

After all, it's only all fun and games until someone loses an eye.

Though all the works feature materials that are reborn, recast, and/or repurposed, there's ultimately a sense of endings—or, in some cases, false starts. But, in a way, that makes the exhibition all the more timely. For instance, the federal government has just announced the penny will be taken out of circulation (will Gerald Ferguson's *1,000,000 Canadian Pennies* (1979) now appreciate sharply in value?), and job cuts in all sectors continue to mount. These artists have reconsidered their approach to materials; perhaps we should now reconsider our approach to materialism. It's not an easy or comfortable task, but an increasingly essential one if we are to continue living in this material world we've all created.

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forms, but the gallery spaces also read as three-dimensional renderings of the two-dimensional work.

The installation's reproduction of the poster work reverses the aim of perspectival art, which aspires to mimic three-dimensional space on a flat surface. During the late 20th-century, this illusionism prompted abstraction's obsession with surface as a more honest nod to art's materiality, but Seripop turn perspective in on itself. They take surface further (or deeper) and, in keeping with the duo's psychedelic spirit, bring us into the surface's two-dimensional "space"—the surface acquires depth and inverts art history's notion of perspective. Unlike the posters, though, with this installation, we do the deciphering from inside.

Perhaps the best metaphor for this perspectival twilight zone is the predicament of the great white sperm whale, and Seripop uses it. In *Dis-Donc à la Grosse de se Tasser* (2011), the blue and orange walls go beyond framing the mound of pink paper tubes: they seem to vibrate nauseatingly. "Disengaged and hoisted on deck," a fragment from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) is inscribed high on the walls, taken from a passage that examines the severed head of a whale and details the whale's (poor) sight: "...the peculiar position of the whale's eyes, effectually divided as they are by many cubic feet of solid head...must wholly separate the impressions which each independent organ imparts."¹ Since its small eyes are positioned on either side of its massive head, the whale receives two different images simultaneously. Melville suggests that these flat images never fuse to form a third dimension, as with human sight. In this reading, the enormous pink form that rests on

Seripop, *Dis-donc à la Grosse de se Tasser*, 2011, and *More Time Than Space*, 2012 (detail), installation view from *Landscapes Events Reproduced*, 2012

the bright orange “deck” is an abstracted whale’s head caught (or disengaged and hoisted), much like the predicament of Seripop’s situation inside the gallery, between a second and third dimension.

A similar tension propels *Chandigarh Is One*, installed offsite above a doorway. Cast-away crumpled prints pile up in graduating shades of pink and grey. Riffing on Le Corbusier’s Chandigarh (an infamous attempt at planned city building in India), Seripop invite comparisons of their romantic brand of aggressive excess (which has, among other things, reinscribed the streets of Montreal in their image) with the master of modern architecture’s utopian fantasies of rationally planned cities. However, where Corbusier sought to control the environment and dreamt of a harmonious society, Seripop showcases abandoned ideas and false starts (their failed attempts mount here, while their street posters fade and crumble). Both vilified and revered, Corbusier refers to mid-century modernism’s ideals and failures, and these suggestions don’t end with him.

What Should Have Been And What Would Not, in the nearby e|gallery, continues this conversation. A large net, rigged by pulleys and running the length of the narrow gallery, spills over with hundreds of folded paper diamonds, suggesting a massive fishing haul. The net’s energy seems to emanate from the far wall, which sports a “target” reminiscent of paintings of hard-edged abstraction: a poster of purple and orange that pops against the gallery’s black coating. Meanwhile, the longer walls, running beside the net, stretch its circular shapes into amorphous, worm-like interpretations that evoke ’60s Pucci prints—or anamorphic projections of the “target.” This installation is the furthest extension of the anti-illusionist modernism evoked in *Landscapes Events Reproduced*. Where *Moby Dick* began America’s contribution to modernism, abstract art is a placeholder of where it left off. By the “end” of modernism, the distinction between whale vision and human vision Melville made has collapsed. Human vision, too, is a constructed reproduction of reality. *Landscapes Events Reproduced* wanders through modernism’s (anti-)perspectival chronology, picking up (or spilling out) where modernism left off in *What Should Have Been And What Would Not*. It wraps surface like an inward-turning skin and warps modernism’s ideals as well as our handle on perspective. Like the fragment that makes up the show’s title, *Landscapes Events Reproduced* tells us that modernism might have failed, but its reconstruction remains incomplete.

A recent graduate of OCAD University’s Criticism and Curatorial Practice program, Amy Gaizauskas will begin the Art History MA program at Western University this Fall.

Endnotes

- 1 Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1992), 338–339.

My Winnipeg

Musée international des arts modestes, Sète, France
November 5, 2011 – April 22, 2012

by Jeffrey Swartz



Organized by La maison rouge in Paris and the Musée international des arts modestes (MIAM), in the Mediterranean coastal town of Sète, *My Winnipeg* is an ambitious take on Winnipeg art that would have been difficult to produce in Canada. Inspired by Guy Maddin’s faux-documentary psycho-drama of the same name, the exhibition makes a case for an expanded Prairie Surrealism in Winnipeg culture, where fiction and fantasy find form in unsettling ways. The quantity of deformed, freaky and utterly monstrous representations of the human figure is startling. The colonial ordering of the human and physical landscape, geographical isolation and the harsh winter, along with the tug-of-war played out between modernity and decadence, all leave their mark on Winnipeg art.

These are strong premises for an exhibition. Yet *My Winnipeg* leaves out important aspects of the city’s visual practice (conceptual art, abstraction, new media), as Anthony Kiendl of Plug In ICA rightly points out in his text for the catalogue. No Canadian curator could claim to represent Winnipeg art this specifically without being accused of contriving a canon based on unwarranted exclusions.

Another possibly problematic feature of *My Winnipeg* is its conception as a kind of boutique anthology. Most of the more than 70 artists present are represented by minor or small-format pieces, often hung in tight clusters on the walls. The proposal is charming and lively, as when photographs of 1920s séances by Thomas Glendenning Hamilton sit near funky 1970s landscapes by Don Proch and work by Royal Art Lodge. In contrast, there is frequently not enough work to allow for a more than cursory reading of key artists. A single silkscreen print by Daphne Odjig does not do justice to her prestige nor to her role in The Professional Native Indian Artists Incorporation in the 70s. Similarly, two modest Ivan Eyre paintings, hung on different walls, can hardly express his legacy. *My Winnipeg* makes no attempt at historical balance; it is unconcerned with illustrating how one generation builds upon, adapts or counters the next. This said, *My Winnipeg* is a fascinating exhibition that makes a solid case for the themes running through it. The idiosyncratic way that it has been put together also fits well into Sète’s MIAM, whose founder, Hervé di Rosa, was the project’s initiator.

The MIAM collection features “modest art,” work in the vein of art brut, outsider art and other celebrations of amateur creativity. The MIAM also focuses on art made outside the primary nodes of production and consumption. Di Rosa first visited Winnipeg as an admirer of the films of Guy Maddin and the counter-aesthetic

Kent Monkman, *The Collapsing of Time and Space in an Ever-expanding Universe*, 2011, life sized mannequin, antique furniture, paint, wallpaper, wood, taxidermed animals, audio, dimensions approx 6.4 × 4.3 × 2.9 m.
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND MUSÉE INTERNATIONAL DES ARTS MODESTES

of the Royal Art Lodge (and what members like Marcel Dzama and Jon Pylypchuk have done since its demise). Convinced that the city was a legitimate art centre, however far from more famous centres for art, Di Rosa returned with La maison rouge curator Paula Aisemberg, who is similarly interested in lesser-known artistic scenes, and then enlisted curator Sigrid Dahle (who has developed an image bank of Winnipeg's "gothic subconscious") and filmmaker Noam Gonick (whose curated section focuses on eroticism) to prepare parts of the show. With so many curatorial hands, the title's possessive "my" could denote a confluence of subjective takes on Winnipeg art, though the results were complimentary and coherent.

Two stand-outs in *My Winnipeg* are Kent Monkman and Susan Anne Johnson. A new Monkman installation, *The Collapsing of Time and Space in an Ever-expanding Universe* (2011), exemplifies his witty and perceptive construction of the noble Native queer. Here the valiant brave appears in a refined Victorian interior dressed in a pink nightgown, a *grande dame* domesticated before her time. Gazing teary-eyed out the window, our hero contemplates an image of a previous life—in skimpy leathers on horseback in a wilderness scene—as if longing for a lost idyll.

Susan Anne Johnson, arguably the best known of Winnipeg's younger generation, was represented by a number of works, most notably the three-dimensional *House on Fire* (2009). Each room of a scale-model doll's house episodically reflects moments from her tumultuous family biography, while the home, open to the bitter outdoors, burns from within, reminding us how permeable domestic space can be. Johnson also showed a number of evocative bronze and twig sculptures from 2008, with the botanical material grafted prosthetically onto small dark figurines. Other artists with strong contributions were Diana Thorneycroft, Neil Farber and Wanda Koop, with the show's only large painting, *Native Fires* (1996).

Considerable space was given to filmmakers Guy Maddin and Noam Gonick. The eleven shimmering black-and-white projections of Maddin's *The Hauntings* (2010) deal primarily with different cases in the history of unfinished and lost movies. As each projection corresponds to a particular story, they were difficult to assimilate in this exhibition context; crowded together, they lost the verve of their content. More successful was a series of Noam Gonick snapshots, *Scouting* (1998–2004), grim photographs of mostly North Winnipeg homes and streets displayed in striped patterns on the walls. Taken while preparing for his first feature, *Hey, Happy!* (2001), and the incredible *Stryker* (2004), a biting portrayal of a gang war, this is the closest to hard-edged realism that the exhibition got.

The biggest surprise of *My Winnipeg* was a section where Gonick, now shifting roles, made a convincing case for an erotic current in Winnipeg art. The idea is that when people are shut

indoors through long winters, their sexuality makes itself manifest in unusual and creative ways. Sometimes eroticism is suppressed, leading to fantasy and irony, as with Dan Donaldson's prints of racy tree trunks, or Kevin B. C. Stafford's hilarious ceramic scenes of nocturnal encounters with aliens. But it can also make a statement, as with Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan's *Day in the Life of a Bull-Dyke: Portrait of a Modern Sex-Deviant* (a parodic magazine based on a 1995 video they made). Dempsey and Millan also give the exhibition its poster image: in *Forest Guards* (1997) they pose with bravado as park rangers, turning the protection and interpretation of heritage nature into a lesbian cause.

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A.K. Burns: Pregnant Patron Penny Pot

Callicoon Fine Arts, New York City
March 3 – April 15, 2012

by Corrine Fitzpatrick

Given the nanosecond it takes a consumer to register the subject and object of any graphic ad, one can swiftly glean the context and subtext of A.K. Burns' debut solo exhibition via the glossy photocollage accompanying the press release for her show. Jutting from a slice of electric Manhattan skyline, the still-rising Freedom Tower at One World Trade Center stands just off-centre, implausibly crowned by a tomato red press-on fingernail. With one quick and punk perversion, Burns has femmed up the unabashedly phallic new American monument, daubing a flourish



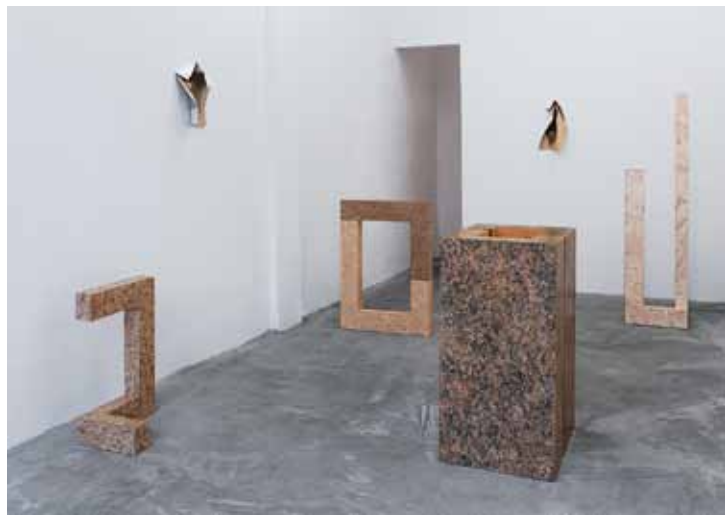
Sarah Anne Johnson, *House on Fire*, 2009
PHOTO: MARC DOMAGE; IMAGE COURTESY OF MUSÉE INTERNATIONAL DES ARTS MODESTES

A.K. Burns, *On Our Knees*, 2012, penny, archival ink jet image transfers on vinyl coated canvas, 48.3 cm × 20.3 cm × 10.2 cm
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND CALLICOON FINE ARTS, NEW YORK

of queer onto a paean of patriotism and capital. Printed on the back of the card is the tightly packed and telling image title, “Castration reconstruction (aka the middle finger), A view from Brooklyn, February 14, 2012.” As a prelude to the 12 hard and soft sculptures on display at Callicoon Fine Arts, the postcard cuts to the chase: by pun or by proxy, Burns appears intent on amending the legibility of existing structures—be it iconic architecture, formalist sculpture, or feminism—from her embodied position on the peripheries of prevailing culture.

Pregnant patron penny pot is comprised of six freestanding sculptures and six wall-hung ink-jet prints on vinyl-coated canvas (all works, 2012). The immediate impression upon entering the small rectangular gallery is that of facing off a sentinel. Guarding what though? A preliminary glance says Minimalism, says “the empty vessel,” says classical sculpture met with the legacy of Judd (albeit evoking *The Dinner Party* colour scheme, thus hinting at a lineage of feminist revision). It takes just one furtive rap of the knuckles to understand that the five hard-edged “marble” sculptures are in fact Formica-surfaced wood constructions. Burns’ sentries expand their allegiance to include both art of antiquity and 20th-century middle-class kitchen decor, bearing on their laminate composite façades a contemporary usurpation of the original by its more accessible simulacrum (loaded as that equation is with consumerist nostalgia and aesthetic longing for traditional forms of yore).

Varied configurations within implied rectilinear frames, each of the five sculptures draws equal attention to its own interior and exterior surfaces. At a height of 32½ inches, *Small Change* connects two U-shaped structures around a deep square void that begs to be peered down into. The four straight appendages of *Hooker* resemble arms and legs bent at the joints in a jumble of 90-degree angles. The contorted figure could ostensibly be turned over and stood in five different ways; the adaptable terms of its self-supporting structure formally complicate the sexual politics of the commodified bodies denoted by its name. A sixth sculpture, *By Any Means Necessary*, is a seemingly reconstructed porcelain vase held together ad hoc-style by foam fill, packing tape, and epoxy (with smearings of copper dust for good measure). An ineffectual vessel—it parodies form and function—with globs of material messily collapsing the interface between inside and out, it is hard to tell whether the assemblage is indeed an attempt to repair a relic or an always already fragmented original unto itself.



In concert with the three-dimensional work is a series of six wall-mounted fabrics onto which the artist has printed images sourced from the New York Public Library Picture Collection and, in at least one instance, the front page of a recent daily newspaper. Each montage has been hammered into the wall with a penny, cheekily punctuating the image-codes with implications of low value, or lowballing. The vinyl-coated canvases weightily drape and turn into themselves in labia or curled book-page-like folds—depending on how one wants to look at it. Scaled to approximate letter-sized sheets, the pieces invite a textual reading. *On Our Knees* (making obvious reference to the first erotica magazine of and for lesbians, *On Our Backs*, which ran from 1984 into the early 90s and was itself in part a reaction to *Off Our Backs*, the seminal feminist publication that often published writing against pornography) depicts in its three sourced images a carved fertility ritual artifact; a woman on all fours, outfitted in head-to-toe latex with an oval glass tabletop across the flat of her back; and a group of predominantly female archaeologists, also on hands and knees, digging at an excavation site. Of the many takeaways this syntax might generate, one readily locates a lesbian-feminist conundrum of simultaneous indignation and sexual arousal at the ridiculously literal objectification of a female body. The double standard is positioned within the associative possibilities of excavation and reproduction, leading me to contemplate new terrain for the framing of feminist-lesbian desire—defined not by what it lacks or reacts against but, rather, by its own replete genealogy.

While the austerity of the new sculptures is (on the surface) quite a code-switch from the video and artist-advocacy work that has garnered Burns’ attention over the past two years, aims pronounced by projects like *Touch Parade* (2011),¹

Community Action Center (2010),² and *Working Artists and the Greater Economy*³—widening the cultural legibility of underrepresented sexual desires; arguing for the fair compensation of artistic work—are recapitulated in these interrogations of traditional forms. Where *C.A.C.* updates the pornographic lexicon with rarely portrayed images of the feminist-minded power dynamics of queer sex and lust, and *W.A.G.E.* works to reinscribe the budgets of various art institutions with monetary remuneration for artists’ labour, *pregnant patron penny pot* strives to fashion a new logo out of extant (and overlapping) sculptural and feminist protocols. Burns’ ethos seems steeped in transhistorical homage, utilized materially in the construction of alternate baselines from which she can non-apologetically present such contemporary paradoxes as a feminist dyke who gazes upon and desires female bodies and a critic of capitalism who must earn and spend capital within the system she critiques. The freestanding pieces present well-crafted and physically commanding notations of the conceptual framework that Burns is lucidly mapping out with the ink-jet prints. Keeping in mind that this is the artist’s first solo exhibition, I read these works as starting points for a sculptural vocabulary that, in time, will push beyond its current stoic contours to assert even more dynamic shapes.

Corvine Fitzpatrick is a poet and an art writer in Brooklyn, New York.

Endnotes

- ¹ *Touch Parade* (2011) is an installation of five tightly-framed videos in which the artist performs banal yet highly eroticized actions from online fetish videos (crushing carrots under crisp white sneakers; slowly pressing a balloon between her hands until it pops; methodically putting on layers of latex gloves).
- ² *Community Action Center* (2010), with A.L. Steiner, is a 69-minute-long vagina-centric and feminist socio-sexual porn video created in collaboration with members of the artists’ extended family of queer artists, musicians, and performers.
- ³ *Working Artists and the Greater Economy* (W.A.G.E.) is a New York-based activist group that advocates for the regulated payment of artist fees by art institutions. “We demand payment for making the world more interesting,” is written on their website.

A.K. Burns, *pregnant patron penny pot*, installation shot, 2012, Callicoon Fine Arts, New York
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND CALLICOON FINE ARTS, NEW YORK

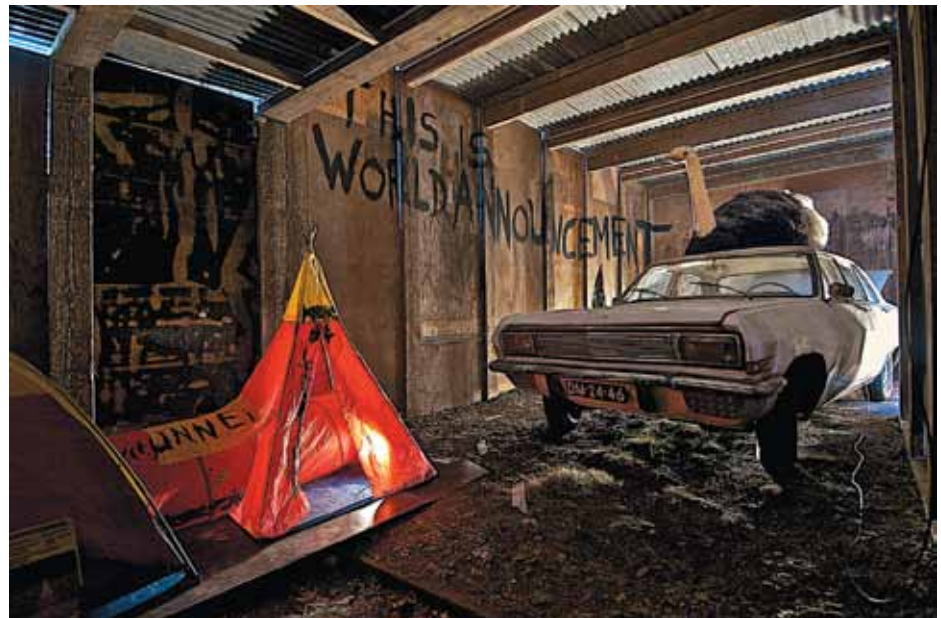
Christoph Schlingensief: Fear at the Core of Things

BAK—Basis voor Actuele Kunst, Utrecht
February 5 – April 29, 2012

by Natasha Ginwala

A few weeks prior to the unveiling of the exhibition *Christoph Schlingensief: Fear at the Core of Things*¹ at Basis voor Actuele Kunst (BAK) in Utrecht, the right-wing Dutch Freedom Party (“PVV”) announced a complaint service to collect reports on Central and Eastern European migrant workers found to be “stealing” jobs, causing housing problems and “polluting” Dutch soil. Further, the party, (steered by populist leader Geert Wilders) is proposing to submit these reports from aggrieved Dutch citizens to the Ministry of Social Affairs & Employment.² In 1998, prolific filmmaker, theatre director, author and artist Christoph Schlingensief (1960–2010) announced the collective action *Baden im Wolfgangsee*,³ for which he invited all of Germany’s unemployed to bathe in an Austrian lake close to a holiday resort being visited by then German chancellor, Helmut Kohl. Schlingensief estimated that the combined body weight of the six million unemployed would overflow the lake enough to flood Kohl’s resort. This action was part of the artist’s ongoing project *CHANCE 2000*, a political party that called for self-organization and radical engagement. The art of politics and the political potential of art are scarcely examined as a conflated paradigm, yet in Schlingensief one finds there is an aesthetico-political wholeness to every act. Through a hyphenated state of Life-Art, *Lebenskunstwerk*, he constructed affective devices to consider “the unspeakable”: revulsion, bigotry, perversities.

Here, the ground floor of BAK is transformed into *Animatograph—Iceland-edition (House of Parliament/House of Obsession) Destroy Thingvellir* (2005). Fish skeletons hang in a corner, while one of several screens portrays a duel between an ostrich and a figure with a Cross. A scrawled note on the floor remarks: “It’s very Political.” One must then crawl into a gigantic “machine” that breeds multiple fables and mutant beings. Norse mythology, infrared lamps and fantastical maps create an uncanny trail that eventually leads to a replica of a Thai cafeteria and invitations to join the Icelandic Army. Schlingensief states: “Anima is the soul...An animatograph illustrates what goes on in the soul; it is a soul illustrator.”⁴ A rotating stage at the core of this total environment functions as an infiltrated skin for sound, film and audiences to project and be projected. The *Animatograph*



is among few Schlingensief works meant for the white cube. However, its reconstruction is in itself a mammoth exercise.

Next is a documentary reconstruction of the controversial project *Ausländer raus—Bitte liebt Österreich* (“Foreigners Out—Please Love Austria,” 2000) realized by Schlingensief for the Vienna International Festival. Represented by press clippings, video footage and photographs, its presentation at this exhibition is disappointing. It is only through the video fragments that one can fathom the complexity of his endeavour. The set-up revolved around 12 asylum seekers invited to live in a shipping container placed in the city centre for more than a week. They are subject to an elimination game and 24-hour *Big Brother*-type coverage as spectators phone in to “vote out” participants, who are immediately

escorted out of the container by a special guard, to be sent back to their respective native countries. However, the site itself is a masquerade of sorts, as it claims an allegiance with the extremely right-wing Freedom Party of Austria (“FPÖ”) and a popular tabloid. Hence, intellectuals, politicians and passersby are unable to ascertain the proponents of this action and its “genuine” motives. A wide range of people gather to protest, damage and find out more about this disturbing intervention in the heart of their city. It is ironic when right-wing supporters eventually rally in favour of the *Ausländer*, calling Schlingensief not an artist but an extremist. The entire complex, inspired by reality television, news hour debates and talk shows, relies on an aesthetics of “overexposure.” The artist is always present at the site with his

top to bottom
Christoph Schlingensief, *Ausländer raus—Bitte liebt Österreich*, 2000
PHOTO: VICTOR NIEUWENHUIJS

Christoph Schlingensief, *Animatograph—Iceland Edition (House of Parliament/House of Obsession) Destroy Thingvellir*, installation, 2005
PHOTO: VICTOR NIEUWENHUIJS

megaphone, calling attention to a precarious architecture through which racism, anti-immigrant positions and class structures become apparent players in a dysfunctional democracy.

In an interview, Schlingensief once remarked: “An artist should be able to portray evil...” He went on to speak of Joseph Beuys, whom he admired greatly. Schlingensief himself navigates the “evil” potential of the filmic image by composing a corrupted scenography. Included in this exhibition is the film, *Das deutsche Kettensägenmassaker* (“The German Chainsaw Massacre,” 1990), which is part of his German Trilogy, which re-plots recent German history through “flesh memory”: displaced bodies, cannibalization and collective hysteria. Global events of 1989, the re-unification of Germany, and the cult hit *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) inspired Schlingensief to construct a film wherein malice thrives as a common parasite. As East Germans crossing into West Germany are “butchered” by a psychotic family, the border is re-made into an excessively bloody site, consuming “the other” and exposing the hypocrisy of nationalism. However, one is unable to empathize with the artist’s characters: they remain ambiguous, existing as a set of inner demons and primal eruptions in the face of ruthless circumstances. As in Fritz Lang’s *M* (1931), here, too, fear is seen as a matrix of transmissions—within and without.

Schlingensief’s work may be best described as “Theatre of Struggle”⁵—subject to self-destruction and new beginnings; a symbolic space to reinscribe history while engaging in “total irritation” of the present. In August 2010, Christoph Schlingensief lost his life to lung cancer. At the time, he was planning his participation in the German pavilion of the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011. While the pavilion’s curator, along with the artist’s closest collaborators, went on to show only his existing theatre and film work, it was enough to win the pavilion a Golden Lion. *Christoph Schlingensief: Fear at the Core of Things* is another of possibly many future efforts to acknowledge and better apprehend one of the most compelling cultural figures of our times.

Natasha Ginwala is an independent art critic and curator based in Amsterdam. She pursued post-graduate studies at The School of Arts & Aesthetics (JNU), New Delhi and has participated in de Appel Curatorial Programme 2010/11, Amsterdam.

Endnotes

- 1 *Christoph Schlingensief: Fear at the Core of Things* is a research exhibition within the framework of the project FORMER WEST.
- 2 <http://www.meldpuntmiddelenoosteuropaan.nl/>
- 3 Tara Forrest and Anna Teresa Scheer, eds., *Christoph Schlingensief: Art Without Borders* (Bristol: Intellect, 2010)
- 4 Roman Berka, *Christoph Schlingensief’s Animatograph. Zum Raum wird hier die Zeit* [“Time Here Becomes Space”] (New York: Springer, 2011), 23.
- 5 http://www.schlingensief.com/schlingensief_guggenheim_eng.php

Attila Richard Lukacs from the Collection of Salah J. Bachir

Art Gallery of Hamilton
October 8 – December 31, 2011

by Sky Goodden



The fall exhibition *Attila Richard Lukacs from the Collection of Salah J. Bachir* worked to underscore the very reasons Lukacs has become iconic. He’s a modern-day Carravaggio, calling names and admitting sins, painting protagonists who are brave because they’re high. His larger-than-life canvases issue insolent ideology and exalted abjection and make it look good. Heroic painting and contemporary allegory and sex—lots of sex—call for a captivating story’s retelling. But beyond the beauty of Lukacs’ false idols, and the almost carnal appeal of their nihilistic self-abuse, there lies a greater mythology yet: the one of the artist, the tragic artist and the story that binds his work to his tale.

Despite being brought up in the relative comfort of 1970s Alberta, Lukacs has always been coming out of a fight—and his works are comfortably perceived as such. He was the “the next bright thing” in a half-generation of barely-there art school ingénues, the Young Romantics, and already the bruised heroes of Lukacs’ massive canvases were pitching trouble. Over the course of a decade in Berlin, the fight in Lukacs’ pictures gained in credibility—the Wall had come down, and Lukacs’ paintings, featuring eroticized Nazi skinheads, suggested a pining less for sex than for something worth believing in.

Attila Richard Lukacs, *The lazy kunstler, and the well-travelled monkey*, 1995, oil on canvas, 2.9 m × 2 m., collection of Salah J. Bachir
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND ART GALLERY OF HAMILTON

Nevertheless, these are idols you dare not kneel down to—though our temptation is one Lukacs has long banked on. Barren warehouses set the tone while men in uniform paradoxically demonstrate their inertia through muscled subjugation and Sisyphean exercise. Stripped, drugged and alternatively active and defiantly still, Lukacs' mercenary models present a certain strength that's scary for its indifference. As famed *Village Voice* critic Richard Goldstein positioned it, here is "*Fight Club* set in an even more idyllic world, where women don't even exist—an Eden without Eve." He termed Lukacs' style as one "that mixes high realism with Nazi kitsch," featuring as its narrative force, the "hysterical male."

Lukacs famously took his "fight" to New York in the mid-90s, but the fight turned on him, and featured his own demons. A tepid US reception to his work and a winning drug addiction famously led Lukacs to sacking his dealers, and shutting the doors to his apartment for "a year of drugs," as he called it. The story is well known—its crisis even documented in the sordid *Drawing Out the Demons* (2004), a film that Lukacs' now-dealer, Diane Farris, says "didn't do him any good as an artist." But the story often wins out over the work, and it's being perpetuated here in the hands of one of his greatest supporters: Salah Bachir.

Bachir's arbitration and seductive possession of the works on display certainly contribute to the allure of the Lukacs mythology. The Cineplex mogul and celebrated patron of the arts plays the part, in Toronto arts philanthropy culture, of the patron saint/concubine wielder. He's well known for his gold-plated neck rings and leather blazers, and for giving generously to young talent and growing artists. But a certain stagnation is being encouraged here too. The megawatt catalogue accompanying this show, for instance—presenting Lukacs' best-known works in the concupiscent binding of a velvet-red, hardcover, gold-tinted, and, indeed, larger-than-life edition—suggests its subject's inculcation to the ledger of our vetted archive. But the story it tells is one of its teller's hubris, and its texts do the work too little favour.

To begin, *The lazy kunstler, and the well-travelled monkey* (1995) occupies one of the first pages, foregrounding a rare self-portrait of the artist as a peasant portrait painter, pinned to the ground by a courtly monkey (the proverbial monkey on the artist's back made manifest). Beyond an easel staked in the middle ground, a romantic landscape stretches out around him, recalling Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1862–3) or Fragonard's *The Swing* (1767). Indeed Lukacs' deft exploitation of art history, and masterful employment of the perennially "dying" medium of painting is, well, unparalleled. But this bound archive of the artist's undoing seems a bit whored out. Where, ironically, John Bentley Mays calls for a moratorium on the "bad boy" narrative, in an essay republished within the catalogue's very pages, the text that follows is a crystal-meth-clouded interview (first published in 2000) between the artist and Robert Enright—one I think shouldn't have found the light of day at any time, let alone be republished in this significant survey. In Mays' "Farewell to Berlin," he warns against this very thoughtlessness, writing:

It is high time Lukacs' handlers stopped warning, conning, tantalizing, and otherwise manipulating the public. The artist himself dropped his famous bad-boy posturing some years ago. It is time we were allowed to appreciate his accomplishment as a painter, and his remarkable gifts as an engaged chronicler of contemporary human conditions.

It's true that Lukacs' willingness, over the years, to say *exactly* what he thinks has not helped distract from his current canonical position as an *enfant terrible* bondservant—to both his art and to his drug addiction. However, what comes through this show and text more stridently than ever is Lukacs' incredible dominance

over his craft. While *The lazy kunstler*, for instance, seemingly subjugates the artist figure to the pastoral environment of a noon-time luncheon, Lukacs' mastery of the medium triggers our reverence for the painter—not the monkey meekly healing the artist's back—and rights his stature as director of the tale. Similarly, *Range of Motion* (1990) could easily conjure images of Eadweard Muybridge's impotent male models demonstrating motion like carousel horses, and position Lukacs as mere observer. However, hands go where they shouldn't, and the artist plays out his fantasies with exuberance and control.

In a way, this exhibition sets up the important but silent rejoinder in the mind of its knowing audience: what next, what now? After all, those of us who have followed Lukacs' notorious trajectory have an inkling of his more recent enterprises—grey-scale watercolour grids, abstract and removed, dripping, like loosened Agnes Martins—and worry, perhaps, after its light's extinguishment. What is a man to do once his mark has been set?

But the more interesting question, I think, is how do we change the story, once it's been set? Lukacs is one of the finest figurative painters to emerge from the second half of the 20th century. It's time to tell this story, and leave the rest for the worst. The work of Lukacs deserves a straight telling, and our earnest praise.

Sky Goodden is the Executive Editor of BLOUIN ARTINFO Canada, and writes for Canadian Art, Magenta, and Modern Painters, among others.

Althea Thauberger

Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto
January 26—March 3, 2012

by Rose Bouthillier

Distant lands and recent pasts were on view during Althea Thauberger's latest exhibition at Susan Hobbs Gallery. Known for her engagement with people in distinct social, economic and cultural groups, such as teenage singer-songwriters, tree planters and military spouses, Thauberger has directed these individuals and groups in the production of photographs, videos, choral arrangements and public performances reflecting on the conditions of their identities. While this exhibition drew from that repertory, Thauberger's role as instigator and collaborator was either once removed or completely absent. With this step back, the focus shifts away from the encounter between artist and subject towards that between image and viewer. What emerges is the artist's studied interest in how bodies channel customs, politics and ideology—and the ability of images to transmit that presence and power.

Upon entering the gallery, the viewer is transported, engulfed. Spanning nearly the entire length and height of the north wall, a vivid photomural immerses viewers in a crowd of onlookers, musicians and actors



frozen in a series of gestural vignettes. Brightly coloured tunics and headdresses of orange, turquoise and magenta punctuate the grey sky, worn houses, bare earth and leafless trees. A list of cast members on the opposite wall reveals the performance as scenes from Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The mural's title *Who is it that can tell me who I am?* (2012), is a line from the play, spoken by a bewildered and disenfranchised Lear, a shadow of his former self.

The actors are members of a Bhand Pather troupe, part of a 2,000-year-old Kashmiri folk theatre tradition. Performances are adapted from a repertory of plots and characters to reflect on current events, often in political satire (hence, discouraged in a land of violent political strife). M.K. Raina, a prominent Kashmir-born actor and director, has been working with the Kashmir Bhagat Theatre in Akingaam—the subject of Thauberger's image—since the 80s. Raina had *King Lear* translated from a Hindi version into Kashmiri, working with the actors to break the story down to its core and re-build it using the forms of Bhand Pather. Lear's suffering after divvying up his kingdom resonates in this new context, becoming an allegory for the oppressive partitioning of Kashmir into violently contested states.

Given this context, how, then, to even hint at the cultural and political complexity, the troubled, echoing layers of meaning, in a single image? The physicality of *Who is it that can tell me who I am?* is integral. Nearly life size, the figures are to be encountered more than seen, creating a palpable urgency. The width of the gallery makes it impossible to stand far enough back to take in the image as a whole, thus fragmenting the scene. Thauberger created the panoramic mural from multiple large-format negatives spanning a 180-degree view; flattened to a wall, compound points

of view are subtly askew. Given nearly equal compositional weight to the performers, the pictured audience members are the first to be met when walking along the mural from left to right; most face out into the gallery, with gazes scattered in multiple directions. Their observation of the events—the performance, the photographing of it—feels very formal, while the actors stuck in carefully structured poses appear to be at play. While the *mise en scène* pulls viewers in, the details of it push them back; the ground appears solid but is destabilizing.

In the upstairs gallery, a selection of small black-and-white photographs concern a very different type of setting. Tranquil and leisurely, men, women and the odd child bathe, picnic, stroll and link arms. The series, titled *Recovered Gelatin Dry Plates (Unknown American Nudist Colony)* (ca. 1935/2012), was reprinted from glass negatives Thauberger bought online. Chemical decay darkens their bucolic light; the aggressive cracks and blotches contrast the soft eagerness of the bodies. Thauberger's anonymous photographer (it's easily assumed to be only one and male) is set apart from his subjects. At times, an acknowledged gaze (*no. 10*) bridges that distance; at other times, elements accentuate it (*no. 9*, where the encroaching foliage and shadowed foreground create a sense of peering). *No. 1* and *2* depict indoor lineups of bodies following exercise routines; while not as immediately compelling as the free-form arrangements, they set up important contrasts: between controlled motion and unconscious gesture; unison and solitary. As re-authored images, these works hold the vision of the original photographer, layered with Thauberger's own. The pastoral scenes are more receptive to this approach; with fewer details to fix them in time, they

are more open to being re-seen, giving the figures an attendant, relaxed assertiveness.

The powerful correlation between bodies and outdoor spaces links the disparate floors of the exhibition. Bhand Pather, traditionally an outdoor theatre, creates a public and social sphere around performances; its censorship by militant groups, which drove it indoors for much of the 90s, lends a sharpness to the open air in Thauberger's mural. At the colony, without threat, bodies still appear most powerful in the landscape, free from the cues of objects and architecture.

Size stands out as an important striking contrast in this exhibition. In the mural, figures have weight and compel a bodily relation, one that is visceral as well as visual. In the small prints, the figures appear sprite-like, emphasized by the negatives' ethereal fogging. The impact of scale in Thauberger's work was also clearly demonstrated at last year's Grange Prize Exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario (the nomination for which led to her time in India, and work with the Kashmir Bhagat Theatre). At the AGO, *Kandahar International Airport* (2009), a mid-sized photograph adhered to the wall, felt like a decal, with a group of Canadian officers running across the tarmac scaled to action-figure size. Also in that exhibition, *Ecce Homo* (2011), featuring actor Nicholas Campbell from *Da Vinci's Inquest* gesturing from an autopsy table, appeared unnervingly ghoulish at near to life-size. As an enormous, looming installation over Vancouver's downtown streets (commissioned by The City of Vancouver Public Art Program), the same figure became a colossal phantom. This is all to say that the Susan Hobbs exhibition further demonstrates how integral the size of a body in an image is to how that image functions—metaphorically and socially. Scale mediates the encounter, shaping the subject's presence, and placing viewers at a certain distance.

Interpretations of Thauberger's past works have often focused on emotional honesty and vulnerable self-expression, neither of which is to be found in *Who is it that can tell me who I am?* or *Recovered Gelatin Dry Plates (Unknown American Nudist Colony)*. These works present little to grab onto in terms of individuality—it seems to recede under the structure of theatre and in the absence of clothing. The focus here is on how groups of bodies do things together: claim space, articulate community and contravene societal norms.

Rose Bouthillier is Assistant Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland.

Althea Thauberger, *Recovered Gelatin Dry Plates (Unknown American Nudist Colony no.10)*, ca.1935/2012, archival inkjet print on bamboo paper, edition of 5, 50 cm x 56 cm.

IMAGE COURTESY OF SUSAN HOBBS GALLERY

Andrea Zittel: Lay of My Land

Regen Projects, Los Angeles
September 16 – October 29, 2011

by Jacqueline Bell



Andrea Zittel's fall 2011 exhibition at Regen Projects, *Lay of My Land*, shares a title with one of the show's central works, her concurrent exhibition at Stockholm Kunsthall and the catalogue for the Stockholm show that is available through Magasin 3. The exhibition at Regen Projects puts Zittel's recent body of work in dialogue with her longstanding *A-Z Personal Uniforms* project. Often referencing Zittel's property in Joshua Tree, California, this new work is linked by its consideration of land use, though throughout the exhibition, the central site for exploration might be framed as Zittel's own life experience.

In the catalogue, which takes the form of an extended interview with Magasin 3 Chief Curator Richard Julin, Zittel is asked about the title with reference to the Stockholm show. The artist responds, "I always imagine a rancher would look at his land and imagine to himself, 'ah, that's the lay of my land.'"¹ In the exhibition, the lay of her 35-acre property in Joshua Tree is made visible as a large-scale, three-dimensional model titled *Lay of My Land #1* (2012). The piece, centred on the floor of Regen Projects II, depicts Zittel's desert home and property, dubbed "A-Z West." Its shape resembles a landscape model where a rectangular piece of earth has seemingly been extracted from the surrounding area. While the base of the model is welded from thick, straight steel bars, the surface is curved and reflects the contours of topographic lines. The model's top layer is constructed from burlap, sand and stone and is painted in white latex to depict the physical details of the desert as well as the buildings on the artist's property. This top layer of the terrain is represented as a discontinuous surface, comprised of adjacent rectangular parcels that reflect the connecting parcels of land forming A-Z West.

In the previously mentioned interview, Zittel speaks to the model's construction with reference to a similar piece exhibited in Stockholm.² To quote the artist, "a parcel map is just a graphic pattern, but when you see it superimposed onto the actual topography, you see these two systems colliding. A natural geographical system

and a man-made system of measurement and distribution."³ Zittel leaves the outcome of that collision open, though I read the conflicting temporalities of the materials more as a statement of the constructed concept of this man-made system than its critique.

Leaving perhaps a stronger impression is the model's sheer size; since viewing the show, I've had a growing sense of the disjuncture between the piece and the modes of representation it references. Encountering the nearly room-sized model seems to undo the logic of the model itself as a way of enabling development. In its miniature and compartmentalized form, the land is clearly a site for intervention. But Zittel's piece could not be further from the tabletop versions used to sell new properties. Instead, its expansion seems to make visible the current land-use paradigm implicit in the form.

A comment on the increasingly parcelled desert landscape is perhaps more direct in the *Wall Sprawl* pieces also on view in the Regen II space. The two works function as partial wallpaper on two walls in the room. In both pieces, a single aerial image depicting buildings is tiled, creating a "sprawl" of repeated imagery across a section of the wall. What's interesting in the display is the limited coverage they provide. It's as if the process of wallpapering is incomplete but contains the potential for infinite tiling in the logic of its medium. While Zittel has spoken about other *Wall Sprawl* pieces as references to the viral logic of parcelled, individual land ownership, the partiality of the wall coverage might reference the possibility of other choices.⁴

In the separate Regen Projects space, *A-Z Personal Uniforms 2004–2014* are displayed on limbless mannequins facing the entrance to the room. The pieces are from an ongoing project where Zittel designs and constructs a uniform to wear every day for a period of three to six months. The dresses on view chronicle the artist's evolution "towards an increasingly direct way of making something," with the final iteration being *Fiber Form Uniforms* made from hand-felted wool.⁵ Beyond Zittel's discussion, the work might signal her commitment to a number of significant choices—including an (implicit) refusal of a particularly insidious form of consumerism.

A sense of personal agency also seems present in the four *Prototype for Billboard at A-Z West* paintings on view in both spaces. The repeated imagery of a single female figure in a desert landscape might be read in dialogue with the *A-Z Personal Uniforms 2004–2014* and contrasting models for land ownership. In this light, *Lay of My Land #1* takes on an additional dimension related to Zittel's literal role as a female landowner in the desert. Though Zittel's joking reference to the (male) rancher seems off-hand, it points to a deeply gendered understanding of the rural landowner in North America—as well as the political dimensions of the choice of title.

Something perhaps misread in the critical reception of Zittel's work is the issue of agency versus self-sufficiency. We are all complicit in acts of consumption and exchange, and the site of the commercial gallery makes this clear. However, the artist has never pretended that her home, or work, or both, exist "outside the system." What Zittel might be getting at is more subtle: an anti-sprawl position isn't necessarily a self-sufficient one. Instead, it requires our creativity and personal commitment for self-aware engagement.

Jacqueline Bell is an MA candidate in the Art and Curatorial Practices in the Public Sphere program at the University of Southern California.

Endnotes

- 1 Andrea Zittel, cur. Richard Julin, Magasin Stockholm Kunsthall. *Andrea Zittel: Lay of My Land* (Munich: Prestel, 2011), [exhibition catalogue] 55.
- 2 Andrea Zittel et al., *Andrea Zittel: Lay of My Land*, (Munich, Prestel, 2011), 50.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 *Ibid.*, 54.
- 5 Andrea Zittel, "A Brief History of A-Z Uniforms." Andrea Rosen Gallery. Accessed October 20, 2011. http://www.andreareosengallery.com/exhibitions/2004_1_andrea-zittel/.

top to bottom
Andrea Zittel, *A-Z Personal Uniforms*, 2004–2014, installation view at Regen Projects, Los Angeles
PHOTO: BRIAN FORREST; IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND REGEN PROJECTS, LOS ANGELES

Andrea Zittel, *Lay of My Land*, 2011, installation view, Regen Projects II, Los Angeles
PHOTO: BRIAN FORREST; IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND REGEN PROJECTS, LOS ANGELES

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Declining Democracy

Centro di Cultura Contemporanea
Strozzina, Florence, Italy
September 23, 2011 – January 22, 2012

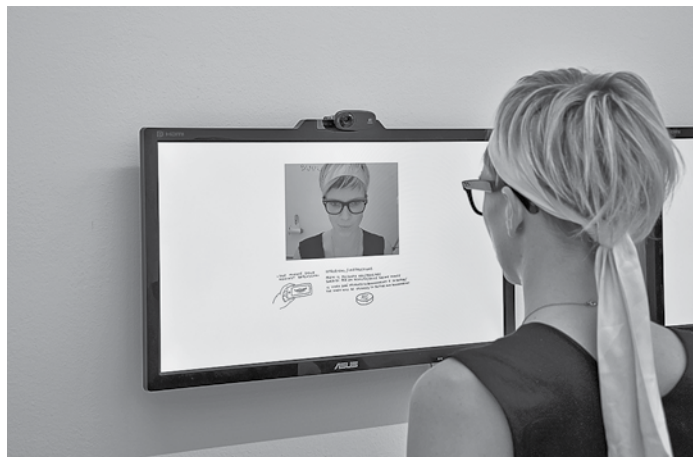
by Emmy Skensved

Picture violent protests complete with riot police, tear gas, molotov cocktails, and cars and buildings set ablaze. Imagine a public spurred on by a steadily climbing unemployment rate, a recession, the curtailment of civil liberties and the curbing of media freedoms. Add to this, waning trust in self-serving governments whose foci seem to be increasingly inward-looking, anti-immigration and right wing. Now picture this set against the backdrop of some of the most iconic capitals of the West: Athens, London and Rome. This is Europe's current reality. Democracy has been on the decline since 2008, and austerity measures put in place to control the eurozone crisis have caused matters to worsen of late. Tensions are running high as the EU's economic woes transmute into a democratic recession.

It seems appropriate, then, that the exhibition *Declining Democracy* takes place in Italy, a country with more than its fair share of the aforementioned problems. Even more appropriate is the location of Florence, the seat of the Renaissance—a movement that helped give rise to our current concepts of liberty, autonomy and freedom.

Declining Democracy at the CCC Strozzina is a tight collection of work by 12 artists that provides a platform for debate and reflection on the values that shape our concepts of democracy. The works offer viewers tools for an in-depth examination of the current state of civil liberties in Europe and abroad. Artur Żmijewski's documentary video piece highlights the necessity for freedom of expression whereas the interactive nature of Lucy Kimbell's *Physical Bar Charts* (2011) and Buuuuuuuuu's *One Minute Smile Against Berlusconi* (2011) give visitors the opportunity to engage in participatory activities, providing tangible examples of democratic actions.

Appropriately titled *Democracies* (2009), Żmijewski's multi-channel video work presents footage from a wide variety of public political and non-political gatherings. Ranging from a roadblock in the Gaza strip, to an anti-NATO rally in Strasbourg, football championships in Berlin and labour union protests in Poland, Żmijewski's recordings showcase citizens



participating in mass demonstrations of intense emotion and solidarity. Screening simultaneously, the 11 videos create a sense of pandemonium. Standing in the centre of these impassioned pleas and assertions is an overwhelming experience. Amidst this barrage of opposing ideals, however, some commonalities emerge. Using a straightforward, documentary approach, Żmijewski captures the power of belief and conviction to mobilize individuals. He reminds his audience that it is precisely the initial act of speaking out and making one's opinions heard that paves the way towards discourse and possible resolution. Moreover, his piece urges viewers to take a position on each of the issues raised, thereby enacting an essential prerequisite to the democratic process: freedom of thought.

Like Żmijewski's work, Kimbell's piece encourages the definition and affirmation of personal values. *Physical Bar Charts* consists of eight clear plastic tubes filled with colour-coded campaign-style buttons and the question "What did you do last week that made you a citizen?" emblazoned on the wall. Printed on the buttons are eight statements ranging from "I said what I believe" and "I obeyed the law" to "I did nothing" and "I broke the law." Viewers are encouraged to select

and wear pins that read phrases that they identify with. Kimbell's work thus urges the audience to outwardly affirm the principles they value and the actions they carry out as free citizens. With this exercise, Kimbell asks viewers not only to consider their convictions, but also to literally wear them, consequently assuming a level of accountability. Doubling as a bar graph, her piece also tracks the social and political tendencies of the visitors as they select pins. On the day I visited the exhibition, the only buttons that remained read "I said what I believe" and "I obeyed the law," indicating that these were the least popular choices—or at least on that day, anyway. Although Kimbell's contribution purports freedom of choice, the fact that there are only eight options to choose from seems to undermine the democratic principles that the work suggests. Furthermore, my associations with pins as accessories worn by indie music scenesters overrode any text printed on the buttons themselves.

The Buuuuuuuuu Collective's contribution to *Declining Democracy* also focuses on the performative aspects of politics. Their interactive piece, *One Minute Smile Against Berlusconi*, consists of a live webcam fed to a monitor with instructional text prompting audience members to record themselves enacting this simple,

top to bottom
Lucy Kimbell, *Physical Bar Charts*, 2011, installation view at CCC Strozzina, Palazzo Strozzina, Florence
IMAGE COURTESY OF CENTRO DI CULTURA CONTEMPORANEA STROZZINA, FLORENCE

Buuuuuuuuuu, *One Minute Smile Against Berlusconi*, 2011, installation view at the CCC Strozzina, Palazzo Strozzini, Florence
IMAGE COURTESY OF CENTRO DI CULTURA CONTEMPORANEA STROZZINA, FLORENCE

voluntary facial gesture in defiance of the Italian prime minister. Upon completion of the 60-second gesture, the seemingly inconsequential action is uploaded to Buuuuuuuuu's YouTube platform, becoming part of a collective online protest. Much like Kimbell's piece, Buuuuuuuuu's work urges the viewer to physically affirm his or her personal ideals, positing that political action can be as easy as this exercise. The pre-existing live feed underscores the low level of involvement required. Captioned by the call to participate, however, the reflection generates feelings of self-consciousness and accountability. Despite their confrontational appeal, I left without recording. My apprehension arose from unfamiliarity with and reluctance to trust the Buuuuuuuuu collective, and uncertainty around how my contribution would be used or framed. In my opinion, this piece functions best in its original online context, where visitors can seek out further information about both Berlusconi and Buuuuuuuuu and participate on their own terms.

Overall, the works in this exhibition highlight the fact that democracy is not a given, but rather a participatory process, constantly in flux, its terms continually being negotiated by individuals exercising and fighting for their rights. Although democracy may not be as straightforward as some of the pieces in the exhibition seem to suggest, the works of Żmijewski, Kimbell and Buuuuuuuuu offer the audience opportunities to consider, define and enact their values. This exhibition can be summed up using the terms that participating artist Thomas Hirschhorn uses to define his own work: it is a "call to arms" to those who are politically indifferent, a summons to become informed, involved and to exercise our personal rights and freedoms. My only concern is that the individuals visiting the exhibition at the CCC Strozzi are those *already* interested in democracy and that this "call" is not really reaching the disengaged or indifferent.

Emmy Skensved is a Canadian artist based in Berlin, Germany.

A Refusal of Images

A Space Gallery, Toronto
January 20 – March 3, 2012

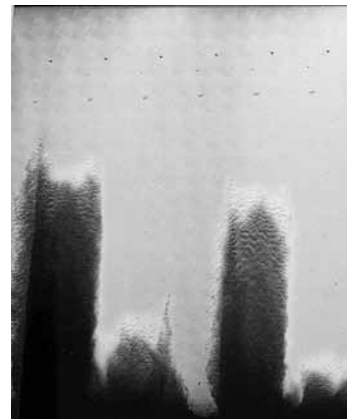
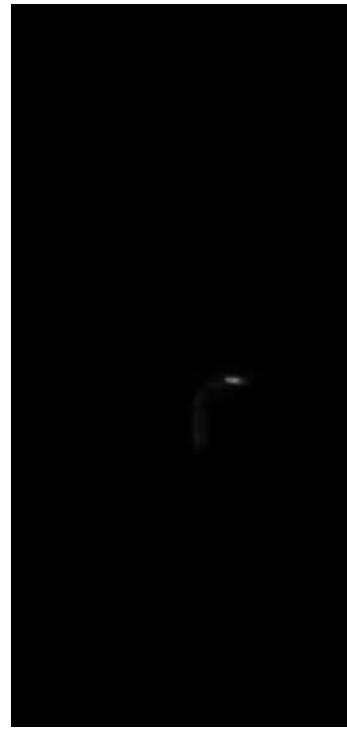
by Kirsty Robertson

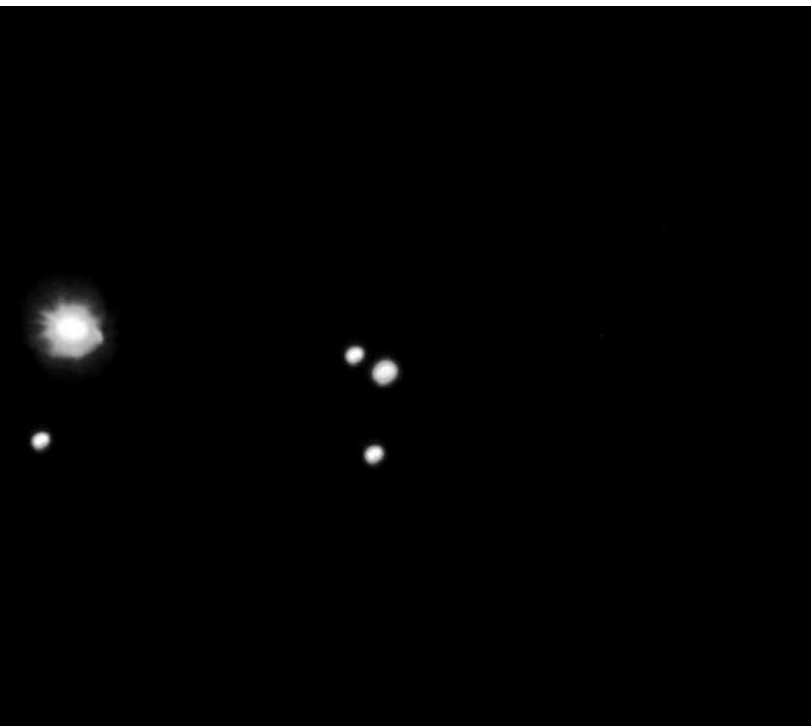
Many years ago, I read British author Vera Brittain's account of her experience of living through World War I on the home front, far removed from the action. What stuck with me was the unknowability of the war for her. As she lost her brother, her fiancé and two close friends, Brittain documented her intense wish to be able to visualize or to imagine the setting in which all of those closest to her were killed.¹ In almost all ways, the war was out of reach for her, and because of that, her trauma was unending, located in her lack of comprehension and access.

Almost a century later, it would seem that there has been a near complete reversal—at least in terms of the amount of visual information that filters in from zones of conflict. In most cases—though certainly not in all—conflict is overwhelmingly visible, conveyed in a variety of forms through corporate journalism and citizen media. What Brittain believed would be a cure, however, has not been. Though pictures from Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Syria and elsewhere saturate the media, mainstream and otherwise, this viewing privilege does not bring with it an ability to make sense of or understand war. As numerous theorists and analysts have noted, photographs can only gesture towards what cannot be seen, felt, or understood outside of the frame.

A Refusal of Images, a recent exhibition at A Space Gallery in Toronto, attempted to tackle some of these issues. Curated by Vicky Moufawad-Paul and featuring the work of Adam Broomberg + Oliver Chanarin and Rehab Nazzal, *A Refusal of Images* pulled together a small number of works that obscure or block expectations of conflict imagery. Take, for example, Broomberg + Chanarin's *The Day That Nobody Died* (2008), a large-scale, seemingly abstract work. In 2008, Broomberg and Chanarin were embedded with British Army units in Helmand Province in Afghanistan. In their first five days, a series of events that should have attracted their photographic attention—a suicide attack, the 100th combat fatality of a British soldier, a visit by the Duke of York—were recorded not by "taking pictures," as did their colleagues, but instead by unrolling a seven-metre-long section of photographic paper and exposing it to light. The end result is a large-scale, abstract colour wash—red, white, yellow and a flash of blue.

Two of these photo works were accompanied by a video documenting the transportation of the roll of camera paper from London to Afghanistan by a variety of heavily armed soldiers. The effort to move the roll of paper seems both Herculean and absurd—a commentary on the strangeness, minutiae and monotony underlying massive conflict operations.





Transported thousands of miles under guard, the photo paper was not used to record the conflict (or at least those aspects of it open to embedded reporters), but rather to comment on the literal and figurative overexposure of certain mediated images of war.

However, this commentary is not immediately accessible. All of the works in *A Refusal of Images* had to be made legible through accompanying information and text. In this, all the artists run up against the limits of the problematic. Though “refusing” images, they must nevertheless ultimately fall back on language—itsself, as Brittain found, an insufficient medium. What results is that *The Day That Nobody Died* was immensely successful in raising questions about the limits of imagery, but it was ultimately unable to answer the questions it raised.

Though *The Day That Nobody Died* definitely occupied centre stage in the exhibition, the most affecting piece was Rehab Nazzal’s *A Night at Home* (2006), a short video shot by Nazzal while visiting her mother in Jenin (West Bank) with her children. Hearing sounds of bombing outside, Nazzal picked up her camera and began filming. The viewer sees (mostly) nothing—a night view of darkness pierced by several lights that may or may not be in the distance. The voices of Nazzal’s family take over—the visitors are anxious and ill at ease, while Nazzal’s mother comforts them by voicing the (relative) mundanity of the event. The video, though conceptually simple, is affectively complex, operating on



top to bottom
Rehab Nazzal, video still from *A Night at Home*, 2006, 4 mins.
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND A SPACE GALLERY

Adam Broomberg + Oliver Chanarin, *The Fixer’s Execution*,
from *The Day That Nobody Died* series, 2008
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS AND A SPACE GALLERY

a number of registers, frustrating the viewer, but also creating an empathic link through that frustration—the potential victims of the bombing cannot see and neither can we, safe as we are in the gallery. *A Night at Home*, with its seemingly routine title, was the most evocative of the works on display at A Space, clearly illustrating the title of the exhibition even though the act of “not seeing” here is not so much one of refusal as of necessity. If anything, it is more successful than the Broomberg + Chanarin work in testing the limits of negated imagery. In this way, Nazzal’s work does more than simply draw attention to the ways visual material is used in conflict by attempting to engage the viewer/respondent in a kind of empathic relationship.

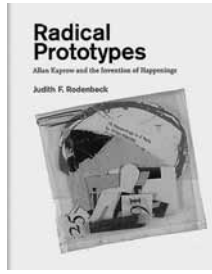
In the pamphlet that accompanied the exhibition, Moufawad-Paul collapses the “refusal of images” with the proliferating use of mobile devices, shaky camera-phone pictures, texts and postings that have defined recent uprisings. And while it is true that social media plays an increasingly strong role in publicizing social movements and conflict zones, in fact it has been the clearest of images that have spread across the Internet: an Iranian protester dying, young activists at Occupy Wall Street and UC Davis being pepper-sprayed, images of crying officers in Tahrir Square. The problem, hinted at by Moufawad-Paul and brought out through the works in the exhibition, is that such shots, while important, tend to equate publicity with actual support. They can encourage sympathy but can never translate an experience—of being tear-gassed (as Nazzal is in *Bil’il* (2010), another work included in the exhibition), of being bombed or hurt or seeing a colleague die in a suicide attack. It is a problem confronted in a relatively small, but powerful, number of works (see also, for example, Alfredo Jaar or Josh Azzarella): how does one *show* the unshowable, at a moment when image-making is increasingly accessible but also increasingly controlled?

The pieces in *A Refusal of Images* offered a variety of possible approaches to answering this question, though all rely on the presence of vast amounts of “official” photography. They are successful because they are defined against something—the works of mainstream embedded reporters in Afghanistan, the typical coverage of protests, and so on. Ultimately, the small size of the exhibition was one of its strengths. Too many images that refuse imagery and it would have simply become another trope, another way of depicting the immeasurability of conflict. So, too, the acceptance of unknowability or inaccessibility was another strength. Whereas Vera Brittain could not access the experience she so desperately sought because she felt she could not see it, here there is an acknowledgement that the limits of embodied knowledge are actually the spaces where powerful statements on contemporary conflict can be made.

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Endnote

- 1 Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth* (London: Gollancz, 1933)



Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings
by Judith F. Rodenbeck
The MIT Press, 2011

Allan Kaprow coined the term “happening” in his 1958 essay “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” to describe the performative departure of action from the confines of the canvas. Happenings were not meant to look or feel like anything recognizable as art, but neither were they entirely dependent on the experience of the participants within a freely interactive setting. Rather, they bracketed out a whole range of everyday behaviours, routines, and responses through detailed event scores, combining playful spontaneity with authorial control. In this sense, Judith F. Rodenbeck’s timely new book, *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings*, addresses a crucial gap in the historiography of American art.

Rodenbeck focuses primarily on the interdisciplinary American milieu of the late 50s and early 60s, correcting a number of oversights and oversimplifications. More specifically, she dismisses the historical over-emphasis on the formal structure of “action” to the exclusion of “material, rhetorical, or narrative content,” doing for happenings what Rosalind Krauss and Hal Foster did for Surrealism in the 80s and 90s. Indeed, just as Krauss and Foster charted a counter-history of the movement against the grain of its principal ideology—namely, by countering André Breton’s *amour fou* with the darker automatism of the death drive and Georges Bataille’s *informe*—so Rodenbeck sets out to dispel certain misconceptions about the hybrid form of the happening.

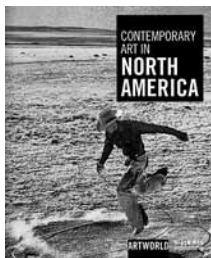
The New York School was a locus of ambivalence for artists eager to dismantle the myth of painterly spontaneity while still being captivated by the illusory appearance of total freedom afforded by that myth. Rodenbeck’s first chapter addresses the intergenerational—and interdisciplinary—debates of that time, though each of the six chapters that follow deals with a distinct set of concerns, often through dialogue with another discipline. In the second chapter, she traces the shared political concerns of painting and urbanism, turning to the department store as a paradigmatic space of spectacle and the proliferating commodity fetish. This allows her to bring together events as geographically separate as Gerhard Richter and Konrad Lueg’s *Leben mit Pop* (1963), which took place in a Düsseldorf furniture store, Kaprow’s own *Bon Marché* of the same year, and Claes Oldenburg’s *The Store* (1961), where plaster and wire sculptures of everyday items were sold out of a space on the Lower East Side.

Theatre and photography play an expanded role in the fourth and sixth chapters, respectively. First, Rodenbeck explores different models of subjectivity in formation, comparing the happeners with The Living Theatre, an experimental theatre company founded by Judith Malina in the late 40s. Second, the author explores the notions of *near-painting* and *near-photography*, which culminate in a close reading of the tripartite Texas happening *Record II for Roger Shattuck* (1968). Seeing as *Record II*’s score calls for the breaking of large rocks and subsequent photographing of those rocks, their “silvering,” followed by more photographs, and finally a “scattering” of the photographs “with no explanation,” Rodenbeck reads the work semiotically as an allegory of the medium. In fact, some of the strongest readings in the book depend on precisely this kind of semiotic slippage. The argument in the third chapter turns on the versatile metaphor of the “black box,” bringing together such disparate attempts to probe the nature of subjectivity and interiority as B.F. Skinner’s conditioning of responses in animals and infants, John Cage’s 1951 visit to a sensory deprivation chamber at Harvard University, Stanislavski’s method acting, and the black box of experimental theatre.

Following the chapter on theatre, but preceding the one on photography, Rodenbeck’s fifth chapter focuses on a single work—Jim Dine’s *Car Crash* (1960)—through the prism of compulsive repetition and trauma. The case study is a well-chosen one. The formal structure of happenings in their own time tended to be emphasized at the expense of what Susan Sontag was virtually alone in identifying as their violent, affective and disruptive character. The well-known *Spring Happening* (1961), for example, modulated the intensity of light and sound, trapping participants in a narrow tunnel and subjecting them to the roar of a lawnmower. And yet later revisionist accounts framed the genre as a precursor to the more recent forms of participatory practice, including Nicolas Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics.

Radical Prototypes makes a convincing case not only for the complexity of happenings but also for their continuing relevance to contemporary practitioners of time-based art. The book is particularly relevant for those with more faith in antagonistic social relations than in relations that are falsely convivial, or worse, that function purely as museum entertainment.

—Milena Tomic



*Contemporary Art in
North America,*
Edited by Michael Wilson
Black Dog Publishing, 2011

What becomes evident when reading *Contemporary Art in North America* is the overestimation of contents that the title boasts. Although the introductory title of this most recent addition to the ARTWORLD series suggests that the book will be organized in terms of geographical classification, instead the influential North American artists included in the volume are surveyed in order of medium. The accompanying photographic documentation of artists' works presents beautiful, high-colour glossy images—some of which, remarkably, have never been seen before outside of the studio.

The more than 50 artists included were chosen by an advisory committee and are the subject of a range of critical essays by acclaimed artists and academics, including Michael Wilson, Jerry Saltz, Ken Lum and Martha Rosler. Although the exclusion of nationally acclaimed artists is questionable, the publication as a whole succeeds at illuminating the ever-expanding boundaries of contemporary art practice within these regions.

Perhaps most notable within this edition is the fact that it brings together a variety of relevant materials that are useful in contextualizing “contemporary” practice. This array of information enables readers with only a shallow understanding of contemporary art to contextualize the political climate of art production over the past 50 years. Included is an art historical and political timeline, summarizing significant cultural events from 1950 to present day. Critical essays on contemporary practice follow select artist biographies and offer investigative research into specific discourses of identity, globalization, and nationalism.

New York-based writer and editor Michael Wilson writes a persuasive introductory essay on the implications of selecting leading artists from within a specifically rich cultural landscape. He explains that America and Canada are fundamentally different in their history of production. The evolution of contemporary art in America, he claims, has produced a hybrid set of identities in response to a multiplicity of conditions; Canada, on the other hand, has confronted issues of regionalism and land in its historically marginalized status. Wilson equates America's enduring conservatism with a beloved tradition of painting. Today, photographic exploration still thrives in both countries, with technical and aesthetic investigations of still and moving images, material and retinal phenomena, and interventions of chance. Also highlighted is the recent shift to more accessible curatorial disseminations by means of virtual networks like *e-flux*, *Rhizome*, and the *Art & Education* newsletters. Other trends and movements, such as Non-Art, appropriation, language-based art, and queer art, have all pioneered expressive and critical deconstructions of the historically “Western” canon.

Also notable within this edition is the diversity of

practices evident throughout its contents, where a variety of mediums, motivations and environments shape our understanding of “contemporary art” in North America, and the complex set of identities that exist there. American art critic Jerry Saltz contributes his own historical timeline of the past 50 years that illustrates the multiplicity of practices presented specifically within New York. This city has been credited as the centre of the art world historically, but this reputation has been destabilized due to the emergence of *multiple* centres around the world following modernist movements like The New York School and Abstract Expressionism. Canadian visual artist Ken Lum expands upon this diversity but takes on a Canadian viewpoint. He explains that Canada's powerful multicultural voice delineates from any centralized classification of identity, so Canadian artists are instead reactive to increasingly multifarious contingencies of globalization in their practice.

Globalization proves to be a significant influence in North American practices, and is discussed by contributing writers in relationship to artists' identity and autonomy. Academic Pamela M. Lee links globalization with the identity crises thought to arise from the “contemporary experience.” Martha Rosler, too, posits that these questions are inseparable from the contemporary North American experience: *Whose art is it? And art for whom?*

Essays that follow by Jan Tumlir and Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) propose their own unique insight into contemporary issues of creative investigation and their respective effects/affects. Tumlir speaks of the political climate of Los Angeles in recent decades and explains how the *Class of 90* worked to expel traditional itineraries of cultural production. CAE writes of the risks of protofascist persecution associated with experimental and interventionist forms of expression, as experienced firsthand by the collective.

It is important to note that the overarching framework in which these artists have been selected does not offer equal representation of different North American populations. The exclusion of indigenous and Mexican visual artists perpetuates the invisibility of these cultures within the diverse cultural landscape of contemporary North America. Furthermore, the omission of prominent Canadian artists such as Rebecca Belmore, Brian Jungen and Liz Magor is surprising, as they are often identified as leading visual artists in Canada. Although this text in no way claims complete authority or criticality, its narrow understanding of diverse geographic populations should be noted.

Despite its effective historical means of organization, expansive photographic documentation and diverse selection of critical texts, *Contemporary Art in North America* should be considered an introductory guide on the subject. Because the book aims to aid readers in their own investigations of popular contemporary art practice, we must be critical of the visibility and invisibility of artists within the ever-expanding boundaries of inquiry put forth by this series of publications.

—Ellyn Walker

Martha Wilson Sourcebook:
40 Years of Reconsidering
Performance, Feminism,
Alternative Spaces
Independent Curators
International, 2011



The *Martha Wilson Sourcebook* is the first in a new series by Independent Curators International (ICI) aimed at offering a fresh conception of the artist monograph. Beyond the expected essays and reproductions, the sourcebook contains archival documents, photographs, book excerpts, curatorial statements and magazine articles that Martha Wilson carefully selected from her personal archive. Together the works contextualize and elaborate on her over 40-year career as a performance artist, feminist, curator and founder of Franklin Furnace, an artist-run-centre in New York opened in 1976 that has hosted performance artists from around the world and was one of the first institutions dedicated to collecting and archiving artist publications. The resulting book is a rare and personal glimpse into Wilson's own library, offering new insight into the social, political and cultural issues that have impacted and inspired her practice.

Wilson first began producing conceptually based performance, video and photo-text works in the early 70s while she was teaching grammar at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD). During this time, under the leadership of Garry Kennedy, many early conceptual artists were invited to visit and teach at the college, including Vito Acconci, Joseph Beuys, Peter Kubelka, Sol LeWitt, Dennis Oppenheim and Joseph Kosuth, among many others. Under their influence, and in opposition to the stringently impersonal forms their work often took, Wilson began to produce her own work pairing textual propositions with photographs as a means of foregrounding her own subjecthood while also questioning bounded notions of identity and gender.

Sourcebook documents these early artistic influences, including original source material for Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* (1975) and Lynda Benglis' 1974 *Artforum* ad, as well as a personal account of how Acconci's *Seedbed* (1971) introduced Wilson to the possibility of sexuality in art. Following this is Wilson's own *Breast Forms Permutated* (1972), which was included in Lucy Lippard's 1973 groundbreaking all-woman exhibition, *c. 7,500*. Here, Wilson displays nine images of breasts organized in a grid that is annotated to show breasts ranging in size and shape, from conical to spherical to pendulous, with the theoretically "perfect" set appearing in the middle. The catalogue for *c. 7,500* is reproduced in full within the *Sourcebook* and stands as a testament to earlier attempts to include women within the countenance of conceptualism. This was also one of the first exhibitions that placed Wilson's work on an international stage. In addition, Wilson has also included Lippard's essay "Transformation Art" from the 1975 *Ms. Special Issue on Men*, which describes Wilson's photographic work *Posturing: Drag* (1972), a double transformation in which she posed as a man impersonating a woman. The work exemplifies the kind of gender play that became a touchstone of Wilson's work, prefiguring both Judith Butler's theories around gender and Cindy

Sherman's own cosmetic transformations. *Sourcebook* also includes anatomical drawings from the famous women's health book *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1971), an excerpt of Angela Davis' essay "Racism in the Woman Suffrage Movement," lyrics from DISBAND (the all-female and punk band Wilson founded, made up of women who did not know how to play instruments) and postcards from the Guerrilla Girls. These works span a period in feminist history racked by deep divisions and they all point to Wilson's own brand of feminism, which was not easily categorized and continued to demonstrate the mutability of gender.

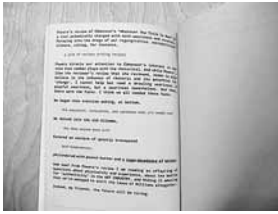
The self-reflexive lens of the monograph is a fitting way of examining Wilson's career, which has continuously explored how identity is defined and negotiated in relation to the body. As a whole, *Sourcebook* not only illuminates Wilson as a tastemaker and a pioneer of performance art, artist publications and new media but also sheds light on the little remembered history of feminist conceptual art. It is apt that Wilson selected the famous photograph Man Ray took of Duchamp as "Rose Sélavy" as the cover image and the now infamous image of Nancy Reagan sitting on Mr. T's lap as the verso, alluding to her more recent "persona invasions" series where she has performed as Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush and Tipper Gore. Taken together, these images suggest a history of gendered performance spanning the past century, a history deeply indebted to the work of Martha Wilson.

Concurrently, ICI is also touring a retrospective exhibition of Wilson's work, *Staging the Self*, which, like *Sourcebook*, is curated by Wilson and provides an overview of the three overlapping stages of her career, including explorations of her early solo photographic work, performance activities in New York, and 30 projects drawn from the Franklin Furnace archive. Both the exhibition and *Sourcebook* mark an important reinvestment in the work of Martha Wilson, as well as offering an interesting opportunity for an artist to document a larger history of performance and creation.

—Leila Timmins

Beginning No End

Danielle St. Amour and Xenia Benivolski, eds. (2012)
see also <http://rearviews.net/>



Occasionally, to get to the heart of something, you have to push it to its limits. St. Amour and Benivolski apply this approach to the concept of the review: they begin by selecting a review of a particular show and then ask a series of writers to take it apart, playing a game of broken telephones by reviewing the previous reviews. Despite its lack of either answers or cohesion and its occasional coherence, it is spectacular, and also admirable for its peculiar mission. It was most likely a doomed venture to begin with, but, like the Titanic, it's jam-packed and goes down with the band playing. (And don't forget, we are *still* talking about the Titanic 100 years later.)

Art.sy
<http://art.sy>

Art.sy is a website touting itself as a new way for collectors to discover artists, but far more interesting is its underlying architecture: a search engine powered by the Art Genome Project, which reportedly compares artworks via more than 800 factual and subjective characteristics. What exactly that means at this time is somewhat uncertain, but AGP has been described as a Pandora- or Spotify-like app for art. Perhaps most tantalizing is the Art.sy database as research site: as it grows and the "genome" is refined, it could become a powerful tool for aggregating and comparing the diverse and eclectic output of contemporary practices.

Overland Station:
par voie de terre, Vancouver to Toronto and back
Aimée Henny Brown
May 13 – 26, 2012
www.overlandstation.ca



Evoking a way of life that has largely been relegated to history, performance artist Aimée Henny Brown spent two weeks on the rails in May, performing *Overland Station: par voie de terre* aboard VIA Rail's cross-Canada passenger train, with an additional performance at the Art Gallery of Ontario on May 17th. Brown investigated the social relations of the rail agent, connecting passengers with both their eventual destinations as well as with the historical circumstances of rail travel. A travelling exhibition in the most literal sense, the performance maintained a one-to-one relationship with the land; Brown transcended regionalisms as she traversed the regions themselves and spoke to the people there.

Journal for Artistic Research
<http://www.jar-online.net/>

Documentation being an often difficult and underwhelming part of an artistic project, the *Journal for Artistic Research* seeks to create a forum where ephemeral works or works that are the result of a long or convoluted process can be extrapolated to show the arc of a project, its sources and conclusions. Using a unique online application called the Research Catalogue (<http://www.researchcatalogue.net/>), the *JAR* presents essays (here called "weaves") using multiple modes of exposition to communicate their authors' research through practice, partly as a means of facilitating a further (or more complete) understanding, but also as a means of extending the epistemological and artistic potential of the essay form. It also maintains an active editorial board and requires peer reviewing, maintaining the high level of rigour required by academic communities.

Oliver Husain, Spoiler Alert
Michael Maranda, ed.
AGYU, 2012.



This first monograph of Oliver Husain's work remains faithful to the disruptive strategies the artist employs in his works. Throughout the volume, the artist interjects notes, allusions, extrapolations of and stories about the works collected within, even amidst essays by Emelie Chhangur, Ian White and Chi-Hui Yang, while exhibition documentation is tampered with. Chhangur's text, the first in the book, is itself an adaptation of Husain's 2010 exhibition at the AGYU; between it and Husain's own running commentary, there is a sense of multiple, nested frames and that the climax can't be revealed so readily.

In Response to Bruce Sterling's "Essay On The New Aesthetic" and "The New Aesthetic Revisited: The Debate Continues!"
at *The Creators Project*

<http://www.thecreatorsproject.com/blog/in-response-to-bruce-sterlings-essay-on-the-new-aesthetic>

<http://www.thecreatorsproject.com/blog/the-new-aesthetic-revisited-the-debate-continues>

There has been some debate online—largely in non-art circles—regarding The New Aesthetic, a self-proclaimed new discipline breaking away from new media art, and just how new it is. James Bridle, the London-based prophet of the movement, and Bruce Sterling, his most ardent convert, have spoken passionately, and perhaps over-enthusiastically, about the radicality of their technologically augmented aesthetic vision. The most thorough discussion of the topic, however, can be found at *The Creators Project*, where 11 artists and cultural critics have been asked to respond. The resulting essays, some skeptical, some

optimistic, and others in between, are strikingly lucid and thoughtful in the face of buzzwordy, TED-talk-friendly Bridle and manic, under-edited Sterling.

Last Address
Ira Sachs, dir.
<http://www.lastaddress.org>

A solemn and moving memorial to a generation of New York-based artists who have died of AIDS over the last 30 years, this short documentary brings the viewer to the final abodes of 28 of the most prominent artworld figures who have passed away from the disease. Shot simply and without affect, the locations nevertheless speak loudly to loss and loneliness, channelling both the despair and continuing presence of the artists who once lived there. The film's atmospheric exterior shots recall the intimate-yet-public grief of Felix Gonzalez-Torres' untitled billboard of 1991, while the soundtrack of environmental noise harshly reminds us that life goes on.

Superpower:
Africa in Science Fiction
Curated by Nav Haq and Al Cameron
The Arnolfini, Bristol,
May – July 1, 2012

In this exhibition, curators Haq and Cameron present 10 not necessarily African artists who slyly critique the unabashedly Western-centric traditions of science fiction, and re-frame them via the African continent. Rejecting futurist utopianism, works like Kiluanji Kia Henda's *Icarus 13* (2008) portray failures of progress, while Neill Blomkamp's *Tetra Vaal* (2004) and Wanuri Kahiu's *Pumzi* (2009) anticipate failures to come. The object here is not to wholly discourage viewers, but to problematize a contemporary imagination where the West lives for the future while Africa is treated as inseparable from its past.

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ERRATA

In issue 113, the image that accompanied a review of Nicholas Galanin: *First Law of Motion*, at the Toronto Free Gallery, was of a work that did not appear in the exhibition. This image was also captioned incorrectly, and should have been titled *The Imaginary Indian Series* (2009).

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