

Sean Fader

SELECTED PRESS PACKET

31 entries · Press, Art, Journal Articles & Catalog Essays · 2007–2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS FOLLOWS

Click any title in the index to jump to that article.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 of 2

-
- | | | |
|-----|---|-----------------|
| 01. | WHITEWALL · 2025 | PRESS |
| | <i>Sean Fader Brings a Queer Galactic Uprising to Paris: "With Wit We Rise: The Fabulous Rebellion of the F.A.G."</i> | |
| 02. | BOMB MAGAZINE · 2023 | PRESS |
| | <i>Sean Fader by Ksenia M. Soboleva: The Digital Image as a Tool for Exploring Queer Histories</i> | |
| 03. | INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION, VOL. 9 · 2025 | JOURNAL ARTICLE |
| | <i>Insufficient Memory</i> | |
| 04. | ARTE.TV TRACKS · 2023 | PRESS |
| | <i>Fast Food Love (Interview)</i> | |
| 05. | THE BROOKLYN RAIL · 2021 | PRESS |
| | <i>Difference Machines: Technology and Identity in Contemporary Art</i> | |
| 06. | BLOCK CLUB CHICAGO · 2023 | PRESS |
| | <i>At Wrightwood 659 Gallery, Artists Explore What It Means To Live In Digital World</i> | |
| 07. | 1854 / BRITISH JOURNAL OF PHOTOGRAPHY · 2020 | PRESS |
| | <i>Sean Fader's Practice Celebrates and Interrogates Digital Technology</i> | |
| 08. | ASAP/JOURNAL (FORUM: HUMOR) · 2020 | JOURNAL ARTICLE |
| | <i>Multiple Exposures: Sean Fader's #wishingpelt and Humor in Social Media Performance</i> | |
| 09. | HUMBLE ARTS FOUNDATION · 2020 | PRESS |
| | <i>The Digital Limits of Queer Trauma and Celebration</i> | |
| 10. | WWD · 2020 | PRESS |
| | <i>Sean Fader Explores New Queer Narrative</i> | |
| 11. | DENNY DIMIN GALLERY · 2020 | CATALOG ESSAY |
| | <i>Sean Fader: THIRST/TRAP — Exhibition Catalog (Essay by David J. Getsy)</i> | |
| 12. | ARTSLANT · 2017 | PRESS |
| | <i>Facing the Black Mirror: Sean Fader's Awesome Year</i> | |
| 13. | ARTNET NEWS · 2017 | PRESS |
| | <i>The SPRING/BREAK Art Show Curator List Is Finally Here</i> | |
| 14. | HYPERALLERGIC · 2014 | PRESS |
| | <i>A Young Artist Debuts at Gagosian, Thanks to Richard Prince</i> | |
| 15. | PULSE PRESS RELEASE · 2014 | ART |
| | <i>See Sean Fader's #wishingpelt in New Portraits @ Gagosian Gallery</i> | |
| 16. | BBC NEWS · 2015 | PRESS |
| | <i>Is this art? Selling other people's online pics</i> | |
-

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2 of 2

- | | | |
|-----|--|-------------------------------|
| 17. | SLATE · 2014 | PRESS |
| | <i>Sean Fader's SUP? Examines the Fantasy and Reality of Online Dating Photos</i> | |
| 18. | MOMUS · 2015 | PRESS |
| | <i>Querying the New Appropriation Art: Is This Cynicism?</i> | |
| 19. | STAMPSY / PLASTIGLASS JOURNAL · 2014 | PRESS |
| | <i>Backdrop for the Rebirth of the Collective Author</i> | |
| 20. | COLLEGE OF WOOSTER ART MUSEUM · 2016 | CATALOG ESSAY |
| | <i>PICTURE YOURSELF: Selfies, Cellphones, and the Digital Age — Catalog (Essay by Leah Mirakhor)</i> | |
| 21. | ESTEVAN MERCURY · 2015 | PRESS |
| | <i>Art Gallery's New Exhibit Addresses Online Dating</i> | |
| 22. | NEXT MAGAZINE · 2014 | PRESS |
| | <i>Sean Fader (Profile)</i> | |
| 23. | THEJAMJAR (DUBAI) — EXHIBITION CATALOG · 2013 | CATALOG ESSAY |
| | <i>How to Do Things with Hair (Curated by Barrak Alzaid)</i> | |
| 24. | TIME OUT DUBAI · 2013 | PRESS |
| | <i>An Art Show About Body Hair in Dubai</i> | |
| 25. | GULF NEWS · 2013 | PRESS |
| | <i>Plucking the Many Strands of Identity</i> | |
| 26. | HUFFINGTON POST · 2014 | PRESS |
| | <i>Sean Fader's SUP?: A Year of Online Dating in Photographs</i> | |
| 27. | ART F CITY · 2014 | PRESS |
| | <i>Sean Fader's SUP?: High on Style, Low on Substance</i> | |
| 28. | A BLADE OF GRASS — ARTIST FILES · 2013 | CATALOG ESSAY |
| | <i>Sean Fader: I Want to Put You On (Artist Files Catalog)</i> | |
| 29. | QUEER ARTS FESTIVAL, VANCOUVER · 2016 | CATALOG ESSAY |
| | <i>DRAMA QUEER: Seducing Social Change — Exhibition Catalog (Curated by Jonathan D. Katz & Conor Moynihan)</i> | |
| 30. | UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS SPRINGFIELD VISUAL ARTS GALLERY · 2013 | CATALOG ESSAY |
| | <i>/fōn' seks/: Digital Devices and the Transformation of Intimacy — Catalog (Essay by Michael J. Murphy)</i> | |
| 31. | THE NEW YORK TIMES · 2007 | PRESS |
| | <i>Giving New Artists a Place to Be Noticed</i> | |



Artist Sean Fader Brings a Fabulous Rebellion to Paris

New York-based artist Sean Fader stages a mythic revolution that fuses camp, satire, and history into a spectacular act of resistance.

KATY DONOGHUE

NOVEMBER 13, 2025

During ***Paris Photo*** week, ***Brigitte Mulholland Gallery*** unveils a cosmic rebellion that is as radiant as it is radical. “With Wit We Rise: The Fabulous Rebellion of the F.A.G.”, the first solo exhibition in Paris by New York-based artist ***Sean Fader***, transforms the gallery at 81 rue de Turenne into an interstellar battleground where queerness becomes both prophecy and power. Through monumental ***photographs*** and sculptural relics, Fader stages a mythic revolution that fuses camp, satire, and history into a spectacular act of resistance.

A Queer Space Opera



Courtesy of Sean Fader and Brigitte Mulholland.



SEAN FADER, "Cheeto Voodoo Candle Kiki," 2025, Archival inkjet print, 50.8 x 38.1 cm, 20 x 15 inches, (#1/5); Courtesy of the artist and Brigitte Mulholland.

At first glance, Fader's new body of work reads like a baroque sci-fi epic—equal parts **Star Wars**, **Versailles**, and drag cabaret. The exhibition's fictional universe, the *Federated American Globe* (F.A.G.), faces invasion by the *Cheezmalite Empire*—a plague of orange spores that infects hosts with fascist and puritanical ideologies. Against this backdrop, Fader introduces a pantheon of queer heroes: **Barbara the Warrior Princess**, **Claude Cahun, General of the Pink Pony Army**, **The Mommy Joan**, **The Daddy of the Dunes**, and **The Daughter of Tides**. Together they mount a dazzling resistance—"a fabulous rebellion," as Fader calls it—fighting tyranny not with weapons, but with wit, beauty, and humor.

The show's tone is defiant and deliciously theatrical. Each tableau channels Enlightenment portraiture through the lens of intergalactic fantasy. Satin robes and armor gleam under cinematic light; baroque gestures collide with drag *performance*. Every image is double-coded—ironic yet sincere, comic yet courageous. As the artist reminds us, "Wit is mightier than war."

History Meets Camp



SEAN FADER, "The Queer Republic Flagging Again," 2025, Archival inkjet print, 76.2 x 101.6 cm, 30 x 40 inches, (#1/3); Courtesy of the artist and Brigitte Mulholland.

Fader's signature use of self-portraiture runs throughout the series. He appears as a clone army—a leather-clad, mustachioed hybrid of **Tom of Finland** and **Peter Marino**—battling an enormous orange sandworm on the beaches of Normandy. Around him orbit collaborators and friends from both France and New York, including **Nicole Eisenman**, **Tamara Gonzales**, **Ryan Wilde**, and **Kahlos Ephémère**, alongside gallerist **Brigitte Mulholland** herself.

"The show's tone is defiant and deliciously theatrical,"

Shot primarily in France, the works also reference historical figures like **Claude Cahun**, the Surrealist artist and **World War II** resistance fighter who rejected binary gender; **Louis XIV** and **the Duke of Orléans**; and **the Chevalier d'Éon**, the 18th-century spy and first person to have their gender legally recognized. In Fader's reimagined mythology, these icons of French history become avatars of queer resistance, rewritten into a universe where their stories continue to evolve and inspire.

Laughter as Liberation



SEAN FADER, "Chevalier d'Éon: The Spy Who Lived Twice," 2025, Archival inkjet print, 76.2 x 101.6 cm, 30 x 40 inches, (#1/3); Courtesy of the artist and Brigitte Mulholland.

Beneath the glittering surface, Fader's work strikes at the core of political and cultural urgency. "With Wit We Rise" expands his career-long interest in how photography performs identity and power. His past series, including *Insufficient Memory* and *Queer American Memorials* (now in the collections of the **Brooklyn Museum** and **Buffalo AKG Art Museum**), transformed sites of violence into spaces of resilience. Here, Fader pushes that transformation further—beyond the archive and into the cosmos.

By turning camp into a weapon and laughter into a shield, the artist reframes humor as a form of survival. The spectacle becomes strategy; the joke becomes justice. Through this lens, *The Fabulous Rebellion of the F.A.G.* is not just an aesthetic fantasy—it's a manifesto for creative resistance.

“The artist reframes humor as a form of survival,”

“Art and queerness are always among the first things attacked under fascism,” Fader has noted. In his Paris debut, he answers that threat with a triumphant vision: mascaraed warriors rising against oppression, their defiance choreographed in glitter and grandeur.

Practical Information



SEAN FADER, “Backdoor Alliance: The Double-Ended Treaty,” 2025, Archival inkjet print, 76.2 x 101.6 cm, 30 x 40 inches, (#1/3); Courtesy of the artist and Brigitte Mulholland.

“Sean Fader: With Wit We Rise – The Fabulous Rebellion of the F.A.G.”

Presented by Brigitte Mulholland Gallery

81 rue de Turenne, 75003 Paris

On view during Paris Photo week, November 2025

For visitors navigating the vibrant cultural circuit of Paris Photo, this exhibition offers not only a moment of levity but also a vital reminder: in the face of tyranny—real or imagined—queer joy and wit remain unstoppable forces.



SEAN FADER, "General Cahun is Not in Training: The Pink Pony Offensive," 2025, Archival ink jet print, 106.7 x 142.2 cm, 42 x 56 inches, (#1/3); Courtesy of the artist and Brigitte Mulholland.



INTERVIEW

Sean Fader by Ksenia M. Soboleva

The digital image as a tool for
exploring queer histories.

JUNE 12, 2023



When Sean Fader and I happened to be on the same Zoom call in the summer of 2022, we quickly decided that the virtual encounter had to be followed by an in-person one. As we were both teaching at New York University, we agreed to meet in front of Bobst Library and walk over to Julius, the oldest gay bar in New York City. We had barely set two steps when it started pouring rain, and as Fader cheerfully picked up his pace without a hint of annoyance, I knew we would be fast friends. What's a little rain when martinis and glitter in a historically queer space are on the horizon?

As I became more familiarized with Fader's work, it occurred to me that Julius offered a compelling analogy to his artistic practice; in both cases, the camp appearance on the surface is steeped in a multilayered queer history. For many years now, Fader has utilized photography to navigate a tension between the historical and the contemporary. Working with the digital image, Fader's photographs engage with an aesthetics of abundance to comment on queer identity, past and present. For his second solo exhibition at Denny Gallery, Fader takes on the role of sugar daddy to explore not only the queer attachment to the term but also its colonialist history.

—Ksenia M. Soboleva

Ksenia M. Soboleva

Your Sugar Daddy (2021-23) project cleverly weaves together the history and etymology of the sugar daddy with the personal life of Danielle Steel. How did you discover the connection between these two?

Sean Fader

When I was living in New Orleans, I was invited to become a member of Antenna Gallery, an artist collective and gallery. We were selected to be a satellite exhibition for Prospect.5, New Orleans's big triennial. The collective decided the theme of the group show would be sugar. During the pandemic, I had developed a belly and my beard had grown out quite a bit. The boys in the local bars started calling me "daddy." So the moment we decided the theme would be sugar, I knew I wanted to focus on the sugar daddy. I had no idea that I would end up researching the history of San Francisco and Steel's life. A quick internet search on the etymology of sugar daddy led me directly to Alma de Breteville Spreckels, and I am obsessed with her.

Alma grew up dirt poor in San Francisco but ended up marrying Adolf Spreckels, heir to the Spreckels Sugar Company fortune. Alma began to call him her "sugar daddy" because his money came from sugar, and he was the same age as her father. The phrase is as literal as it gets! In 1912, they built Alma's dream house at 1080 Washington Avenue at the crest of a hill in Pacific Heights. Steel purchased Alma's fifteen-thousand-square-foot home in 1990. I thought to myself: Steel bought the house of Alma and her sugar daddy! Then I started reading about Steel, and I got obsessed all over again with another fabulous woman!

The show focuses on these two amazing characters and where their lives overlap; and, of course, I use my obsession and my own body as a foil to tease out some of these stories, including my unfounded theory that this world of excess in a historically queer, Gold Rush city—San Francisco—influenced the history of leather daddy culture.

**KMS**

How do you grapple with or navigate the violent colonial history that the term sugar daddy is rooted in?

SF

Well, I think what you are really getting at is the history of sugar and its fundamental connection to wealth, capitalism, and colonialism. It is impossible to understate sugar's historic and continuing geopolitical influence on the planet even today. In some way, I sidestepped that history when I decided my piece for Antenna's sugar show would focus on sugar daddies. As a white male transplant to New Orleans, I felt that I was the wrong person to talk about sugar's violent history on the people of New Orleans and the land; in the context of the Antenna exhibition, many of the artists in the show made work explicitly addressing the racial and ecological violence embedded in the production of sugar. However, pretty soon after starting this work, I realized that I was walking right into the history of sugar and gold wealth in San Francisco, which has its own distinct

colonial legacy.

Spreckels Sugar, Alma's sugar daddy's company, was founded on colonial exploitation of Hawaiian land and extractivist economies dependent on migrant labor. It goes to show that it is impossible for anyone who participates in the art market to actually distance oneself from the violent histories of colonialism and capitalism. Wealth and power are baked into its DNA.



KMS

There is a familiar yet distinct camp aesthetic to your photographs and installations. With the spiked interest mainstream culture has expressed in camp aesthetics over the last few years—think Met Gala, for example—how do we keep camp queer?

SF

Recently, I was speaking to a queer studies class at NYU about my work. The professor was talking about queerness being inherently about a rejection of normalcy and even celebrating being an outsider. One of the students pointed out that their experience was quite the opposite. For their generation, growing up in a liberal community, it was deeply uncool to come out as straight. I'm not going to lie; it made me a little sad. I had worked so hard to turn the pointing fingers and name-calling of my youth into a badge of honor. I am not upset that some young queer people aren't growing up tortured by the world around them, but what saddens me is that there are some people who are claiming queerness because it's trendy. "Pinkwashing"—this idea of selling

queerness and marketing it—demonstrates how capitalism weaponizes marginal identities when there is money to be made. I also have to remind myself that queerness and camp are fluid and ever-changing. Camp is about a secret language that the queers speak, a secret humor that only we get. Yes, some of it pops into straight, hetero mainstream; but we will always find ways to hide in plain sight, flagging and recognizing ourselves in small ways just outside the mainstream. How about us queers learn and update Polari; let's start a new hanky code based on John Waters movies and Lisa Frank's school supplies!

KMS

Social media is another subject of inquiry in your practice. What are the benefits and the challenges of engaging with social media as part of your work?

SF

I always think about social media as a tool and a weapon. Ultimately, I'm still optimistic about it. When people talk to me about how evil social media is and how much damage it is doing to people, I often notice that they are part of prevailing cultural norms. For queer people, social media is often one of the first places where we can find people to flirt with and those who celebrate our bodies and way of life. I think social media is a part of the rich history of queer communications: the smell of lavender, green carnations, Polari, hanky code, nail flagging, now Grindr, Tinder, and Instagram.



It's a way to feel seen in a cis het norm sea.

My undergraduate degree is a BFA in musical theater, so my practice is very influenced by years of obsessing about how my actions are being read by others. Because of that, I think about the photographic event as the site of performance and how we queers are using photography to see and be seen, destroy normative ideas of bodies, and celebrate and support our community in digital public spaces. Photography is going from being controlled by the few to the many. It's time for us to be seen and to shape our own visual narratives.

KMS

Much of your practice explores the role of the digital image. What are the ways in which this role has changed over time, and what does this mean for analog photography?

SF

I grew up with a darkroom in my basement because my mother was a photo hobbyist. I loved that space, and I loved the magic of the darkroom. There will always be a place for analog photography. I think what most fascinates me about the digital image,

which is in stark opposition to analog, is that digital photography is in the hands of the masses, and there are digital public spaces like Instagram for everyone to see and be seen in. We live in a world where 3.2 billion images are shared online every day by millions of people! As a result, digital images are fluid. They are traded as currency: I'll show you mine if you show me yours. They morph into memes, and those memes morph into sub-memes and raise families of memes. They represent us, or who we believe we are, or who we want people to believe we are. They reflect us, often when we don't want to see ourselves. They show us all the possibilities of the people we can be and the ways we can live our lives. That sounds pretty queer to me!

Sean Fader: Sugar Daddy: Dear Danielle is on view at Denny Gallery in New York City until June 24.



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Pedagogy, Community, and Praxis Commentary

Insufficient Memory

Sean Fader

Back Cover Art, “Adam Colton,” from *Insufficient Memory*

By Sean Fader

Artist Statement

Insufficient Memory examines a window of time from 1999 to 2000, when the Hate Crimes Prevention Act was first being debated in Congress (and not passed). In 2018 I discovered an old Sony Digital Mavica which was the first commercially successful digital camera sold in 1999 to 2000. This camera was considered groundbreaking technology because it shot $\frac{1}{3}$ -of-a-megapixel images to a 3.5-inch floppy. I began thinking about what was overlooked, invisible, or erased in the same moment as that digital camera began to revolutionize imaging and visibility. Reconstructing this history from local newspapers and activists’ research, I traveled to 38 states where hate crimes had occurred. Since local news outlets were mostly uninterested in these stories and queer news outlets were not digitized, many of these stories have disappeared; the sites were often unmarked and anonymous, the crimes forgotten. I drove 15,000 miles over several months, taking a photograph at the site of each hate-crime murder from the years 1999 and 2000. I photographed the sites with the old digital Mavica camera I’d found, creating large-scale, grainy images characterized by a literal lack of resolution and digital information (compared to the possibilities of digital photography today). While the murder of Matthew Shepard (white, middle-class, big future) brought attention to the need for legislation that addressed hate crimes against gays, I wanted to focus on the stories of those who were lost in his shadow. The queer histories represented in this work are of an extremely diverse group of people, but often they are non-white people of lesser means. They were victims of horrible crimes that occurred while Congress debated whether queer people should even be included in hate crimes legislation. The social progress we feel today would not have been possible without queer loss and struggle—even if those stories were not well known to history until now.

Adam Colton

Novato, California, Beaten, February 12, 1999

When Adam Colton was 17, he transferred to San Marin High School. An intelligent, highly articulate, and out teenager, he told the principal that he wanted to help form the Gay–Straight Alliance at school. “I’ve decided that I’d really like to be an activist and do something to help make changes at San Marin,” he said. Adam was verbally open about his sexuality, wore gay-positive T-shirts and, on occasion, eyeshadow. In September, a week after talking with his principal, he found gay slurs smeared in ketchup on his car in the school parking lot, and later that night he was jumped by three unidentified young men outside a downtown supermarket in Novato. Two weeks later, someone wrote anti-gay slurs in lighter fluid on his family’s driveway and tried to ignite them.

On February 12, Adam was attacked and wandered semiconscious into a classroom, where he passed out. He later awoke in the hospital with no memory of the attack or where it took place. His attackers used a pen to scratch the word “fag” into his arm and stomach. City officials in Novato called the attack a hate crime.

I made this photograph on the idyllic high school campus where Adam was assaulted.

About *Insufficient Memory*

Insufficient Memory focuses on the years 1999/2000, just after Matthew Shepard’s brutal murder and President Clinton’s State of the Union address calling for legislation to respond to hate crimes committed against queer people (a bill would not be signed until 2009).

These years also promised progress in digital spaces with the advent of the Sony Digital Mavica, the first commercially successful camera that entered the market. After finding a Mavica camera in 2018, I drove 25,000 miles to 38 states where queer people were murdered in these same years, 1999 and 2000.

Using the digital technology of the time, the Mavica camera, I photographed and memorialized these sites. Since local queer newspapers were not digitized and local news outlets uninterested in these victims, many of their stories were difficult to research. There were often no narratives, only scraps of information in various newspapers or police blotters.

Upon returning home, I created this Google Earth Interactive Tour that can easily be accessed with the tiny URL <http://bit.ly/insufficientmemory>. This is meant to allow anyone on the internet to travel across the country virtually, view the photographs I made from each site, and learn the stories of each of these murdered queer people.





Adam Colton

Novato, California, Beaten, February 12, 1999

From *Insufficient Memory* by Sean Fader

Interview for Arte.tv Tracks

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Fast food love : l'amour consommé à la chaîne | Tracks | ARTE

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Difference Machines: Technology and Identity in Contemporary Art

By Charlotte Kent



Visitors with A.M. Darke's 'Ye or Nay?', 2020, in *Difference Machines: Technology and Identity in Contemporary Art* at Albright-Knox Northland, on October 16, 2021. © A.M. Darke. Photo: Jeff Mace for Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York.

Machines have a history of generating identity formations with significant social implications. Buffalo is known as the “City of Light” because the electricity produced at Niagara Falls at the end of the 19th century made it possible to introduce street lamps, which stimulated its industrial boom. The illuminated urban environment transformed social interactions. Everywhere, electricity produced new work forces and identity formations—including stereotypical assumptions about aptitude and engagement.

Recognizing this is crucial to understanding the work presented in *Difference Machines: Technology and Identity in Contemporary Art* at the Albright-Knox in Buffalo, New York. The exhibition does not directly lean upon such histories, but even its use of a refurbished warehouse as venue—the museum proper is in construction—helps to expose how machines and their architectures produce social valences. The curators, Tina Rivers Ryan and Paul Vanouse, focus their broad agenda through four themes: the use of digital technologies for passive (but not always effective) surveillance, how identities are shaped by technology, the erasure of marginalized communities, and the active reassertion of control.

Hasan Elahi's *Thousand Little Brothers* (2014) opens the exhibit with a floor-to-ceiling pigment-printed canvas of images that he took of himself and posted online in response to tracking by the FBI, who thought he was a national security threat after 9/11. This was before social media made such disclosures common. The curtain of color flows onto the floor, a reminder of the profuse data points amassed about each of us.

The adjacent alcove presents work about online surveillance from the 1990s by Keith Piper, an early canary of the social dangers that emerge from government mining of online content. *Surveillances: Tagging the Other* (1992) presents the conflict between racialized tagging online and (the British Left's) efforts to be colorblind; the work foreshadows the threats posed by today's facial recognition technologies. *Blackness for Sale* (2001) is a poignant early net-art work by Mendi + Keith Obadike in which they posted Keith's "Blackness" for sale on eBay. Among these early classics are more recent ones like Stephanie Dinkins's *Conversations with Bina48* (2014-ongoing) and Zach Blas's *Facial Weaponization Suite* (2012-14).



In Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's *Level of Confidence* (2015) a webcam captures your face and provides the percentage match to one of 43 rural students who disappeared from a teachers' college in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico—my facial biometrics coordinated with Felipe Arnulfo Rosa. The students remain missing, despite the supposed efficacy of surveillance technologies. Artists featured here also use gamification to similarly implicate us in social issues, as in Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley's *We Are Here Because of Those That Are Not* (2020) and A.M. Darke's *'Ye or Nay?* (2020). Mongrel's *Heritage Gold* (1997) was an early software that hacked Photoshop so that users could confront the racial possibilities in the application of facial filters.

The curators provide longer-than-usual wall text and a discursive catalogue essay to help audiences access the layered issues in the works included in this show. Sean Fader's photographs for *Insufficient Memory* (2020) require understanding that he used a Sony Digital Mavica—one of the first popular digital cameras, dating

from 1998—to memorialize the locations where LGBTQ-identifying people were murdered between 1999 and 2000 ... while US Congress was debating the Hate Crimes Prevention Act. The camera's smaller digital files produce impressionistic images when printed large. On the back of each one is the narrative surrounding the death. Fader also created an online Google Map to help others learn the histories that he drove 25,000 miles around the country to discover.

Similarly complex is *Root Picker* (2021), a bioreactor with digital video by bio-artist Rian Ciela Hammond about hormone technologies and the occluded histories of colonialism around pharmaceutical manufacturing. Hammond's work includes a land acknowledgement statement to address that "the virtual landscapes we connect and navigate through, like the physical lands we occupy daily are equally contested lands. Built on continued legacies and practices of stolen land, legacies of slavery and forced removal of indigenous peoples."

Walking through Joiri Minaya's floating body parts of hyper-sexualized women in *#dominicanwomengooglesearch* (2016) emphasizes how our browsers influence cultural perceptions and reproduce unfortunate stereotypes. The dismembered figures that twist to reveal tropical print fabrics produce a maze of the interlocked histories of colonization, exoticization, desire, and capital reiterated across the web. Morehshin Allahyari's works examines how digitization appropriates cultural heritage artifacts and asks difficult questions around digital colonialism.

Sondra Perry's art often has a discomfiting humor and *IT'S IN THE GAME '18 or Mirror Gag for Projection and Two Universal Shot Trainers with Nasal Cavity and Pelvis* (2018) is no different: this is a 16-minute video that addresses how the NCAA appropriated her brother's image and sold it for



use in basketball video games, making the assertion that his scholarship gave him no rights to his own image. Such an absurd claim is made possible by the colonial mentality of dispossession that filled so many museum collections.

Skawennati founded CyberPowWow as an online space that centers Indigenous artists, and in *She Falls for Ages* (2017) the artist films avatars in the virtual space Second Life to produce a retelling of the Haudenosaunee creation story. When “half of all American Indian/Alaska Native children lack either computers or paid high-speed internet access” (according to the Population Research Bureau census in 2020), Native and Indigenous content is

less likely to appear online and so continues to be erased from the wider culture. Reclaiming these tools and spaces presents a wider array of histories and experiences across society.

Saya Woolfalk’s *Landscape of Anticipation 2.0* (2021) offers a note of hopefulness. An entire wall is dedicated to nine digital videos that constitute various hybrid creatures from her society of mythic beings, the Empathics. These flora-fauna-human-alien beings offer an imaginary for co-living. A recognition of the pitfalls must be accompanied by consideration of the potential for emergent technologies to produce an equitable society, as many of their proponents claim.

Nostalgic desires for a world before computers or the internet don’t help us address the social and political effects of increased reliance on them. *Difference Machines* demands that audiences take seriously the presence and effect of these technologies. The family guide, the library at the back of the gallery, and the online resources that accompany the show provide support for those ready to engage with the work of wrestling our futures from technologies that reiterate old prejudices.

Contributor

Charlotte Kent

Charlotte Kent is Associate Professor of Visual Culture at Montclair State University, an Editor-at-Large for the Brooklyn Rail, and an arts writer.

LINCOLN PARK, OLD TOWN

At Wrightwood 659 Gallery, Artists Explore What It Means To Live In Digital World

The Lincoln Park gallery marks its fifth anniversary with a multimedia exhibition featuring 17 international artists who examine the intersection of technology and identity.



By Jake Wittich

October 27, 2023

Updated December 13, 2023

**Credibility:**  Original Reporting  On the Ground  Sources Cited

Sean Fader speaks about his photographs at Wrigthwood 659. Credit: Jake Wittich/Block Club Chicago

LINCOLN PARK — Photographer Sean Fader spent summer 2018 driving across the country and visiting every site where an LGBTQ+ person was murdered while the Hate Crimes Prevention Act was being debated from 1999 to 2000.

Fader's gold Subaru Outback clocked more than 15,000 miles as he traveled 37 states and researched every LGBTQ+ person who was killed in that time period, which followed the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard, a 21-year-old gay man who was beaten, tortured and left to die in Wyoming.

Shepard's death brought national attention to hate crime legislation and preceded President Bill Clinton's 1999 State of the Union address in which he called for laws responding to hate crimes committed against LGBTQ+ people. A bill would not be signed until 2009.

"I did this by myself and cried at every location," Fader said. "I feared for my life sometimes and thought about the fear they must have felt, and I felt this sense of responsibility to share their stories."

Photos from Fader's cross-country trip along with stories about the murdered LGBTQ+ people were compiled into a Google Earth photo database for the artist's series "Insufficient Memory," on display at Wrightwood 659 in Lincoln Park.



Fader is one of 17 international artists featured in "Difference Machines: Technology and Identity in Contemporary Art," an exhibition that opened this month at the Lincoln Park gallery.

Sean Fader photographed dozens of locations where LGBTQ+ people were killed from 1999-2000. Credit: Jake Wittich/Block Club Chicago

"Difference Machines," co-curated by Tina Rivers Ryan of the Buffalo AKG Art Museum, explores what it means to live in a digital

world.

The artists featured in the exhibition use various media, ranging from animated videos and video games to biology experiments, to explore the intersections of technology and identity.

In "Insufficient Memory," Fader presents the limits of technology in properly archiving queer history and its participants.

While researching the LGBTQ+ people who were murdered after Shepard's death, Fader often found their stories were underreported by local news outlets, if they were covered at all.

"It shows the limits of digital visibility and the failures that turn into a lack of digitization for queer

histories,” Fader said.

Keith Piper’s “Surveillance: Tagging the Other” uses four video screens that portray a Black man slowly rotating his head for the camera as a target follows his face.



The piece represents how Black people have been “tagged” throughout history, whether through slavery or modern technologies, Rivers Ryan said.

Artist Hasan Elahi’s series, “Tracking Transcience,” also explores themes of surveillance by sharing his experience being investigated by the FBI because of an erroneous tip after 9/11.

Elahi would send the FBI agent surveilling him photos throughout the day showing the investigator what he was up to. The mundane photos ranged from images of the

food he was eating to toilets, scenery and other activities.

“This is my life documented every few moments as I checked in with my FBI agent — not because I had to, but because I chose to let them know I’m doing nothing,” Elaji said. “That was 20 years ago, but now this looks like an Instagram feed, so it’s also about how we’ve normalized surveillance.”

Hasan Elahi’s photos consist largely of the mundane, like what food he was eating or which toilet he was about to use. Credit: Jake Wittich/Block Club Chicago

“Difference Machines” gets its name from the difference engine, an early computer made by Charles Babbage that calculated the differences between numbers.

“We’re invoking that history and concept of the difference machine, that basically computers from the very beginning were theorized as machines for producing difference,” Rivers Ryan said. “And now we can talk about how computers are being mobilized in the production of social difference, whether it’s empowering or against marginalized people.”

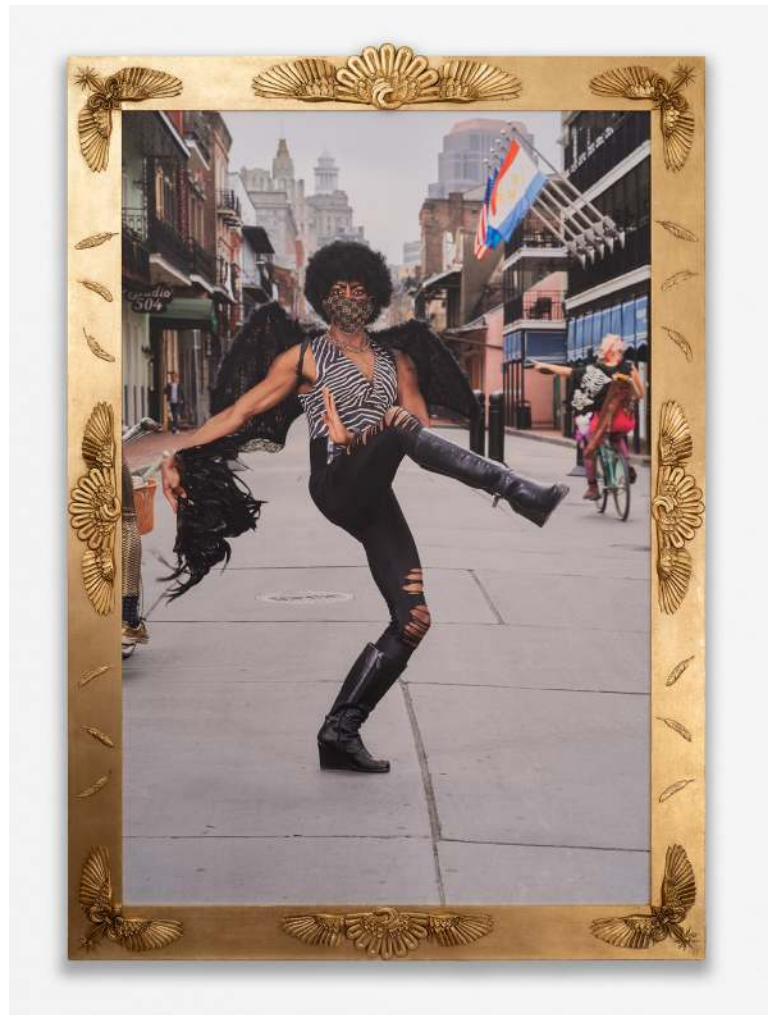
Visitors could easily spend an entire day or multiple visits exploring the exhibition, Rivers Ryan said.

Wrightwood 659’s fall season ends Dec. 16. Admission is \$15 and can be reserved here. The gallery is open noon-7 p.m. Friday and 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday.

LONG READ, PORTRAITURE - 14 JULY 2020

Sean Fader's practice celebrates and interrogates digital technology

by MARIGOLD WARNER



"They're like gigantic formal portraits of queer society," says Sean Fader, guiding his laptop through Denny Dimin Gallery in New York City, where he is exhibiting three 4x5ft portraits in regal custom-designed frames. "We're trained to look at portraits in the Met in these giant golden frames, and learn the way these images are formally meant to be read, but we certainly don't see queer bodies in those spaces." Growing up, Fader can only remember mainstream images of "hairless, fatless gay men", leading him to question what history might look like if the queer community could depict themselves. "I wanted to make a photograph that 12-year-old me could look at and feel empowered by."

Historically, self-portraiture and activism come hand-in-hand in the world of photography, and

Fader wanted to question whether the modern selfie can be considered a form of queer activism. This kind of mutual celebration and interrogation of digital media is a current that runs through his practice — "I love it, but I have a lot of questions for it," he says. "The advent of digital technology created a space to be seen, but there's also erasure, marginalisation, and homogenisation that happens as a result. I'm interrogating those things, but also celebrating the ways in which digital technology can be used to forge connections"



For this project, he decided to look at Instagram, where there are currently 42.6 million images hashtagged 'instagay'. Fader forced his browser to continuously scroll through these images, and asked himself: "What are we trying to say? Are we saying something new? Or are we reinscribing the same violence on our bodies?" These are questions that women have been confronted with for years, says Fader, "but the queer community hasn't quite yet grappled with the long term effects of normalised media attention".

The New Orleans-based artist wanted to talk to people in his local area, so he produced an app which scans Instagram for 30 queer hashtags, alerting him when an image is uploaded within a 10-mile-radius.



He reached out to these people, asking to meet up and discuss what it means to make a queer image, and what it means to publicly come out using these hashtags. They then worked on a shoot based on this conversation, and the final image is the portrait that his collaborator chose to upload to their Instagram profile.

In the gallery's front room, these "society portraits" scream queerness loud and proud. The back room, however, is a sobering reminder of the violence that LGBTQ people have faced through history, and which still endures today. *Insufficient Memory* is a digital installation (also available to view online) which maps LGBTQ murders that occurred in the US in 1999 and 2000 — a window of time that became significant for Fader, in terms of political, digital, and personal history.

“Queer stories are not only erased by lack of media coverage. Queer erasure happens a second round in the advent of digital technology, and our expectations that all histories are digitised”



It all began in 2019, when Fader started a new job as professor of photography at Tulane School of Liberal Arts. His predecessor had left behind piles of obsolete photo equipment, including a Sony Digital Mavica — one of the first commercially successful digital cameras from the late-90s and early 00s. “I had an immediate flashback. My ex-husband’s mother owned one. She was this deep-southern internet junkie who wanted to be like a ‘PFLAG mom’. She would photograph us with it to send to her friends,” says Fader.

Seeing this camera took him back to his own experiences as a queer person in 1999, 16-years before the Supreme Court legalised same-sex marriage in all 50 states. “My ex-husband and I didn’t think we would ever be able to marry,” he says. “Thinking about that 20 years on, it’s a no brainer.” Still, 2019 was the year the Trump administration rolled back an array of protections for transgender people. Holding this piece of technology, which marked the beginning of a mass-democratisation of digital image-making, while thinking about the past 20 years of queer history, sparked an idea.

Fader’s research took him back to 1999, the year after Matthew Shepard, a 21-year-old gay man, was brutally attacked, tied to a fence, and left to die in a field in Wyoming. At the time, federal hate crime legislation only covered race, creed, or religion. Then-president Bill Clinton urged Congress to expand the list to include sexual orientation, but it took a whole decade for the bill to pass, when Obama successfully signed it into legislation in 2009.

Recognising the turn of the century as a crucial time, Fader used a community-compiled spreadsheet to identify LGBTQ people who had been killed in a hate crime in the years 1999 and 2000. There were over 100 names, but for around 80 percent of the cases, he could find barely any information. “I’ve never done a numbers game on this, but you can definitely see that the more affluent, the more white, the more male — those were the stories that were spoken about.” Fader collaborated with multiple people with PhDs in library sciences; sometimes they managed to find a few sentences, other times, nothing. “One of the things that I had to come to terms with was that queer stories are not only erased by lack of media coverage. Queer erasure happens a second round in the advent of digital technology, and our expectations that all histories are digitised.”

The photographer has spent the last year driving over 15,000 miles across 40 states, to visit the crime scene of these murders, documenting them with the Sony Digital Mavica. The resolution is low — “this idea that photography brings visibility, is both a truth and a failure in the images,” says Fader. “It attempts to provide truth, but it fails. Some of the stories that I was able to compile alongside them also lets you know that oftentimes, it was the best I could do.”



The work feels incredibly relevant to this moment in contemporary history, in the midst of the largest movement against racism and police-brutality in US history. “It’s this idea that we can’t let these people be forgotten. We need to hear their names and we need to hear these stories.”

When Fader began making the work, it was 50 years since Stonewall, 20 years since Clinton first introduced a bill to include LGBTQ hate crimes, and 10 years since Obama signed it into legislation. Yet violence against LGBTQ people continues to rise; in the past month alone, five Black transgender women have been murdered in the US, and last year, the American Medical Association declared violence against the transgender community an “epidemic”. In this important time in history, Fader’s work is a reminder that despite recent progress, we must not forget the history of violence, and that the act of remembering is an important part of the continued fight for equality.

Thirst/Trap by Sean Fader was on show at Denny Demin Gallery, New York

MULTIPLE
EXPOSURES:
SEAN FADER'S
#WISHINGPELT
AND HUMOR IN
SOCIAL MEDIA
PERFORMANCE

DAVID J. GETSY

It was a laughable premise. Sean Fader staged a performance at a 2014 art fair in New York City in which he invited participants to rub his chest hair and make a wish. And they did. Lots of them. He and I are good friends, and he told me about his plans for *#wishingpelt* in advance. I told him not to do it, and I was worried that it would make his work seem unserious. I didn't get that the joke was the

bait, and the ludicrousness of the situation was a Trojan Horse.

For the past ten years, Fader has been using social media as a photographic and collaborative medium (rather than just a distribution platform), and he designed *#wishingpelt* for the context of an art fair with its saturation of art-related information, commerce, aspiration, and attention-grabbing. Participants queued up for the event, and Fader stood on a spot-lit pedestal in a darkened room, with attendants managing the crowd. As each participant was called, they were asked to hand their phone to the attendant who then directed the participant to ascend the pedestal, rub Fader's ample pelt, and whisper a wish into his ear. The wish was sealed when the attendant photographed the scene and the participant posted the photograph on Instagram with the titular hashtag. In its art fair premiere, the performance went



Figure 1.

Sean Fader, *#wishingpelt* Instagram image #907 (2014). Digital photograph posted on Instagram from PULSE Art Fair, New York. Image courtesy of the artist.

on every day for five days, with Fader standing motionless on the platform for the full opening hours of the fair—for a total of almost fifty hours. Since its inception, over 2,500 people have posted hashtagged images from the performance.¹

Infiltrating the buzz of the art fair, word of *#wishingpelt* spread fast. The line was long, creating a scene. Photographs of Fader popped up in more and more social media feeds. Instagram had only recently become a major lubricant of the art world, and at this time in the dawn of the age of influencers it was still often used as visual diaries.² A crucial part of Fader's work was the co-option of this social medium as a site of performance. Fader activated the potential of hashtags to metastasize, and soon Instagram feeds throughout the fair (and beyond) were flooded with more and more of these posts. Fader's performance overtook the art fair as his photographs appeared on thousands of hand-held screens. The images seemed earnest to some and, to others, as risible, but their unorthodoxy and consistent visual style drew attention, comment, interest, and more sharing and searching of the *#wishingpelt* hashtag. The absurd premise of Fader's performance acted as lure, with incredulous fairgoers becoming unsure about how to manage (or avoid) this distributed performance. *#wishingpelt* persisted after the fair, but it is important to understand that it was also a live durational performance involving hundreds of participants (both active and passive) that occurred on and through social media across those five days.



Figure 2.

Sean Fader, *#wishingpelt* Instagram image #1479 (2014). Digital photograph posted on Instagram from PULSE Art Fair, New York. Image courtesy of the artist.

The performance co-opted the social media platforms with which members of the art world follow trends, present themselves, and decide priorities. In these practices, the individual photographic image is only one component of a larger, exponential circulation of images, hashtags, and viewer comments online. The critical effect of Fader's *#wishingpelt* was to expose the instrumentalization of social media while, at the same time, to offer alternative sites of real-time connection and exchange in the form of the live performance.³

Despite the work's humor, it was not cynical. I've talked to Fader a lot about his experience, and he has repeatedly told me that it was moving and emotional. However ludicrous the premise might have been, the people who came to whisper in his ear sometimes told

him deep secrets, made painful confessions, and shared earnest pleas. Of course, some were frivolous, but the emotions expressed in this *private* component of the performance were often profound. Sometimes a funny situation allows for very unfunny things to be expressed. Fader will never repeat any of the wishes or confessions, but he has talked about how some people have returned months or years later to tell them that their wish was fulfilled. “Their wishes are forever private and their photos were immediately made public,” Fader later explained.⁴

I’ve compared *#wishingpelt* to a Trojan Horse because it was accepted gleefully as a gift, a gag, or an opportunity for humor. But within it, this work also carries unforeseen capacities for intimate confidences, shared connections, and critical views of the circulation of images as social activity. Many participants surprised themselves (and Fader) with their secret confessions. Others later returned to tell of the delayed personal impact of their hashtagged moment. Spectators of the performance on Instagram had the social networks of the art fair visualized by the inescapable *#wishingpelt* photographs that crowded their feeds. For both the IRL performance and the shared broadcast image, humor was the enticement and the decoy. In all its registers from the initial intimate physical contact to the hashtagged dissemination of digital images, the performance coupled connection and spectacle—the paradox that defines social media and that Fader’s artworks often take as their central concern.⁵ With *#wishingpelt*, it is

important to recognize that the performance is manifold, participatory, and extended in its temporal and social reach. It unfolds over time, with its nested connections becoming more widely dispersed with each new hashtag or share. The private performance between Fader and each wisher is imbricated by, but not equivalent to, the public performance of the social media community created around the work.

By the end of 2014, the hashtagged images of Fader and his wishers had circulated widely, and new layers of the distributed performance subsequently began to emerge. As with the initial encounter, humor was the lure. His parody of the earnestness of the art world and performance art had drawn in visitors at the art fair, paradoxically offering an opportunity to be serious. Not everyone similarly got the potential of the joke’s generosity, however. The performance also circulated to another jokester who thought he could make fun of it.

In September 2014, appropriation artist Richard Prince included one of the *#wishingpelt* photographs in his exhibition *New Portraits* at the blue-chip Gagosian Gallery in New York. Prince took screenshots of Instagram posts on which he had written comments (and hidden others’).⁶ He then culled from these social media images a group that he inkjet printed on five-and-a-half feet tall canvases, exhibiting them as his “paintings.” These appropriated portraits included other artists (such as Laurie Simmons), popular celebrities (Pamela Anderson), and anonymous (to



Figure 3.

Installation view of Richard Prince, New Portraits, Gagosian Gallery, New York, 2014, featuring Sean Fader's #wishingpelt at center. Photograph © Sean Fader, 2014.

him) Instagram photographs—all bearing Prince’s own jokey, abstruse, and sometimes creepy comments. A beautiful, and unattributed, photograph of Fader and one of his wishers (Kara Young) was among the large-scale artworks being sold in this supposedly solo exhibition. Prince’s work has long been the subject of debate, and his brinksmanship with copyright and authorship are notorious.⁷ Thinking he had landed a good opportunity for humor, he let Fader’s Trojan Horse into his Chelsea gallery exhibition.

Whether or not Prince was in on the joke, he proved he couldn’t take one. When Fader learned that he was on the walls of Prince’s Gagosian exhibition, he issued a press release thanking Prince for curating him into his first

exhibition at the storied gallery. “Prince, by placing #wishingpelt in his exhibition, now serves as witness to those many declarations, wishes, hopes, and confessions that are the content of Fader’s social media performance,” it declared.⁸ This, in turn, was taken up in the art press.⁹ Fader’s press release did not take the form of a strident critical attack on Prince; rather, it slyly presented Fader as responding in kind by appropriating Prince’s work the way that Prince had appropriated his (and others’). Fader remarked, “#wishingpelt was supposed to be small, digital, and free. [Prince] made it large, expensive.”¹⁰ In response to this event and other widespread criticism, Prince closed his exhibition early, even—as it is rumored—pulling works from the walls. Apparently, the joke went too far for him, and he refused to let

his own authorship be co-opted or questioned. In a final episode in this back and forth (that was, itself, another of Fader's media performances), Fader exhibited a work titled *Backdrop for the Rebirth of the Collective Author* ("There's a Whole Lot of Authorship Going On."—Richard Prince) in the December 2014 exhibition *Share This! Appropriation After Cynicism* at Denny Dimin Gallery in New York. He appropriated Prince's appropriation, showing it alongside a selfie backdrop with the *#wishingpelt* and other hashtags. Prince responded humorlessly by calling Fader a "vampire" in response to his work being included, without his permission, in Fader's exhibition—the complaint frequently leveled at Prince himself.¹¹

Throughout this scuffle with Prince, a distinction can be seen between making fun of others' images (Prince) and using humor to generate and share images of unlikely connection (Fader). Fader used self-directed humor but never made a joke of any of his participants. The performance was about generosity, and he declared, "Remember, our pictures are for each other. Share."¹² Fader mixed deadpan humor with sincerity, recognizing that the seemingly frivolous act of a social media post—however artificial to some—nevertheless exposes its maker to vulnerabilities, misreadings, and appropriations. Fader's work disarmed his participants by its apparent camp and humor, but these were strategies used to establish a rapport with audiences so that more complex affective engagements could unfold. Both photographs and laughs have more potential when shared.

/ Notes /

¹ A beta version of the performance was shown at DFBRL8R Gallery in Chicago for a single evening on April 20, 2013. Its final version was performed at two art fairs in New York City in Spring 2014: first, at SPRING/BREAK Art Show in March for five consecutive days and, in May, for four days at PULSE Art Fair, New York. Fader later reprised the performance in Mexico City at the Material Art Fair in 2018 and at Art Omi on July 8, 2018.

² Instagram was launched in 2010 for iOS, with its Android release in 2012. It subsequently gained traction in the art world. See Nina Siegal, "Instagram Takes on Growing Role in the Art Market," *New York Times*, August 4, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/05/arts/international/instagram-takes-on-growing-role-in-the-art-market.html>.

³ For Fader's statement on *#wishingpelt*, see the short documentary he made about the project and its reception: Sean Fader, "Sean Fader from *#wishingpelt* to *Backdrop* on *Appropriation* and *Richard Prince*," YouTube video, 4:49, posted by "PhotoArtStar," February 16, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EV8aGUuPkPI>.

⁴ Sean Fader, "For Immediate Release: FINAL WEEK: See Sean Fader's *#wishingpelt* in *New Portraits @ Gagosian Gallery* Organized by Richard Prince," October 18, 2014, <http://www.wishingpelt.com/press>.

⁵ See also David J. Getsy, "Viewfinder: Sean Fader and Queer Visibility in the Age of the Digital Photograph," in *Sean Fader: Thirst/Trap*, exhibition catalog (New York: Denny Dimin Gallery, 2020), 7–23, https://issuu.com/justine-dennydimingallery/docs/sean_fader_thirst_trap_pages-magazine-issuu.

⁶ Prince wrote about his process of writing and masking comments before he screenshot the Instagram images: "My comment, whatever it would

be, would always be the last comment. The last say so. Say so. That's good." As with the comment he added to Fader's image, "Some of the language came directly from TV. If I'm selecting a photo of someone and adding a comment to their gram and an advertisement comes on . . . I use the language that I hear in the ad. Inferior language. It works. It sounds like it means something." Both of these quotations are taken from Prince's aggregating blog "Bird Talk" at <http://www.richardprince.com/birdtalk/>. The segment "New Portraits" from "Bird Talk" was also used as the press release to the London exhibition of *Richard Prince: New Portraits* in 2015: https://gagosian.com/media/exhibitions/2015/richard-prince-new-portraits/Gagosian_Richard_Prince_New_Portraits_2015_Press_Release.pdf.

⁷ For more on the debates about Prince's 2014 exhibition (and the resulting 2015 lawsuit *Graham v. Prince et al.*), see Paddy Johnson, "Richard Prince Sucks," *Artnet News*, October 21, 2014, <https://news.artnet.com/market/richard-prince-sucks-136358>; Tiernan Morgan, "Richard Prince, Inc.," *Hyperallergic*, October 9, 2014, <https://hyperallergic.com/152762/richard-prince-inc/>; Jerry Saltz, "Richard Prince's Instagram Paintings Are Genius Trolling," *Vulture*, September 23, 2014, <https://www.vulture.com/2014/09/richard-prince-instagram-pervert-troll-genius.html>; Peter Schjeldahl, "Richard Prince's Instagrams," *The New Yorker*, September 30, 2014, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/richard-princes-instagram>; Andrew R. Chow, "Copyright Case Over Richard Prince Instagram Show to Go Forward," *New York Times*, July 20, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/20/arts/design/richard-prince-instagram-copyright-lawsuit.html>; and Jacqueline Lefebvre, "Richard Prince: King of Appropriation," *Fordham Intellectual Property, Media & Entertainment Law Journal Blog*, February 1, 2016, <http://www.fordhamiplj.org/2016/02/01/richard-prince-king-appropriation/>.

⁸ Fader, "For Immediate Release."

⁹ For instance, see Benjamin Sutton, "A Young Artist Debuts at Gagosian, Thanks to Richard Prince," *Hyperallergic*, October 23, 2014, <https://hyperallergic.com/157548/a-young-artist-debuts-at-gagosian-thanks-to-richard-prince/>.

¹⁰ Fader, "From #wishingpelt to . . ."

¹¹ In a tweet, Richard Prince wrote: "@RTisman @seanfader @DennyGallery Your pictures are for each other. Yes. That's true. My pictures? They're not mine. Never were. Vampire." Richard Prince, Twitter post, December 15, 2014, 6:37 p.m., <https://twitter.com/RichardPrince4/status/544637446475218944>.

¹² From the label accompanying the work; also incorporated into Fader, "From #wishingpelt to . . ."

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The Digital Limits of Queer Trauma and Celebration

Sean Fader uses two photographic series to bookend a transformative two decades of LGBTQIA history through the lens of digital photography and its role in queer representation.



@Beefcake_Dragqueen #queer #instagay #instabear, 2020

A lot has changed since the first mass-market digital camera was released. Not just in the quality or accessibility of digital images, but how we think about image culture. How we think about selfies. How images are tracked and geotagged. How photography builds connections and relationships. How we use it as a historical record. How we celebrate ourselves, and how we memorialize pain.

Sean Fader's latest exhibition *Thirst/Trap*, on view (from a safe and social distance) at NYC's Denny Dimin Gallery, pairs two recent series to address how technology, accessibility, and self-reflection have shaped queer communities and identities. They do this in strikingly different ways - one from a place of celebration, and the other from a place of terror and mourning.

Best Lives is a series of collaborative portraits Fader made with sitters he met online using hashtags like #instagay, #nonbinary, and #genderfluid - proud references to self-identity and community forging. Fader then photographed his sitters, asking them how they wanted to be represented. The bold and colorful images - often with gestural nods to early painting - capture ostentation and self-determination.

In stark contrast, *Insufficient Memory* reflects the pain and trauma associated with over 50 reported anti-LGBTQ hate crimes committed in the United States in 1999 and 2000. Fader drove thousands of miles around the country photographing the sites of these murders, locations that are largely unmarked. Fader used a Sony Digital Mavica camera, which was released around the time these murders took place. The camera's low resolution creates pixelated and blurred images that reflect the anonymity of these locations, which Fader pairs with text describing the horrific hate crimes.

Contrasting two periods of time significant to the rise of digital photography and its impact on mass culture, *Thirst/Trap* highlights how identity and representation have evolved, how they are celebrated and memorialized, and the limits images have to record or reflect history.

Jon Feinstein in conversation with Sean Fader

(content warning: the text accompanying the images for Insufficient Memory describes awful, violent traumatic hate crimes.)



Jon Feinstein: Did you originally imagine exhibiting these two distinct series together?

Sean Fader: Oh my god, no. I never thought they would be in the same show. I guess I was making both at the same time because I needed the emotional balance that was happening in the two of them. One felt so celebratory, and the other one felt so dark. When I was making *Insufficient Memory*, it felt really, really hard every day, and one of the ways that I was able to pull myself out of those dark places was to make the optimistic celebratory work in *Best Lives*. I think because I was making them concurrently, the ideas that were coming up in both bodies of work started to play off each other.

Feinstein: To your point, these two series have opposing yet complementary qualities. One is steeped in pain, violence, and bigotry, the other is bright, bold, celebratory.

Fader: When I am in making mode, it's rare that I have any real perspective on the work. I'm so deep in it, digging down and excavating, that I often forget to look up and see the sky. In the beginning, I don't think I even realized that I was dealing with queerness, visibility, photography, and Internet technology like bookends of an era 20 years apart, but the works were definitely influencing each other and having a conversation. I didn't really realize how much that had happened until we talked about putting them in the same show.



Feinstein: I interpret your use of gilded frames for *Best Lives* as a celebration, commentary on, and embrace of outward confidence of online performance—a kind of reclaiming of self-representation, a positive embellishment, a middle finger to those who deserve it, a kind of wonderfully blatant: “We’re here.”

Fader: Ha ha. I guess I wasn't really thinking about them as a middle finger, but I love that idea. I did want them to be extremely celebratory and to celebrate queerness unapologetically. On this large of a scale that probably feels like a middle finger to a lot of people. My focus was trying to reinsert these images into an art historical context.

I grew up going to the Met and seeing the celebrated society portraits in giant gold frames. The frames felt like they were telling me that these people and these paintings were important. I wanted to trigger that same response. I wanted to make you feel like the thirst traps and selfies of queer people are the society portraits of today, and I wanted to celebrate and honor these people.

Feinstein: I have only experienced these portraits digitally so far. I imagine they feel even more regally confident in person?

Fader: One of the things that I realized when we installed Best Lives in the gallery was that the pieces are so large that they feel like bodies in the room. They also feel ethereal and as if they could float away. The backroom is completely the opposite, it's empty of physical objects. It's only inhabited by projections that feel like the ghosts of queer people that were lost to violence. The backroom becomes a sobering anchor that nails the large portraits to the ground.



Henry Stuart Matis

Los Altos, California, Murdered February 25, 2000

Henry Stuart Matis, a 32-year-old gay man and devout member of the Church of Latter-Day Saints, pinned a note to his chest that said "Do not resuscitate" and shot himself on the steps of his church. Raised in the Mormon religion, and knowing he was gay by age 7, Henry had long struggled with the church's position on homosexuality as he tried to reconcile his being gay with his faith. The church regards homosexuality as a sin, advocating that gays and lesbians be celibate for life, and its involvement with Prop 22 particularly disturbed Henry. He'd come out to his parents the year before he killed himself, and despite their support, he felt he had to choose between "life" or being Christian.

In his suicide letter, he wrote, "Mother, Dad and family. I have committed suicide....I engaged my mind in a false dilemma: either one was gay or one was Christian. As I believed I was Christian, I believed I could never be gay."

I took this image in front of the church where he killed himself.



Feinstein: Insufficient Memory functions on a few levels for me:

a) the pixilation as it relates to the confusion and erasure of memory and history - the pain we might want to forget, but of course, not forget...

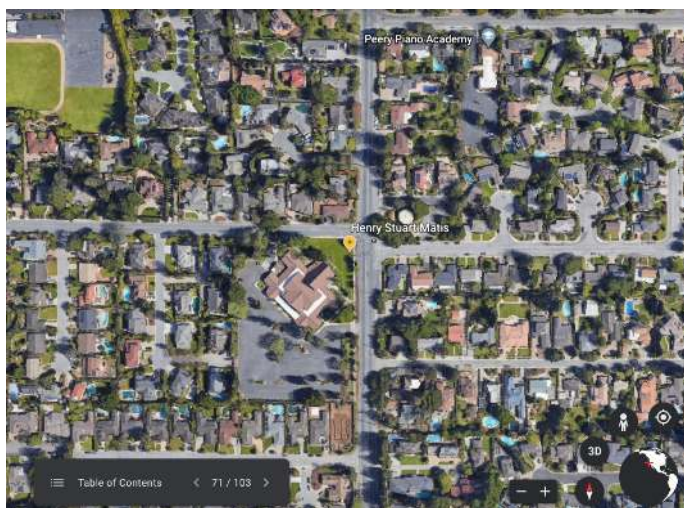
b) your use of technology of the time to reference and memorialize the victims of horrible violence that occurred during this time.

Can you talk a bit about your initial conceptualization?

Fader: The work was initially conceptualized when I moved into my office at Tulane, which I inherited from a photo hoarder (you know the type). When I was digging through all the cameras, expired chemicals, and junk from still lives past, I found this camera, the Sony Digital Mavica. I looked at it and immediately had a flashback to meeting my ex's mother for the first time. She lived in the Deep South, was an Internet junkie, and wanted to be a PFLAG mom. I started thinking about that moment in time and my experience of being a gay man then (now I think about myself as a queer person). As I looked at that camera, I thought a lot about visibility, queerness, and technology back then.

So, I started doing research, both about the camera and the queer histories at the time the camera came out. The Sony Digital Mavica was the first commercially successful digital camera in 1999 and 2000 because it shot to 3.5-inch floppy. In 1998 Matthew Shepard was murdered, and in 1999 President Clinton told Congress in his State of the Union that he wanted to update the federal hate crimes bill to include LGBT people. He promised to sign it. While the 106th Congress debated whether LGBT people should become a protected class, people were dying.

In my research I came across a spreadsheet of hate crimes against queer people, and since it was a spreadsheet, I could organize it by year. I zoomed into 1999 and 2000 expecting that I would know many of the names and realized that I didn't know a single one. In that moment I felt a cross between ashamed and angry. I began researching them, and I realized that I didn't know these stories because most of them didn't get that much coverage. For many of them, I couldn't find more than one sentence. I then spent the following year and a half working to find as much information as I could on each of their stories so that I could tell them.



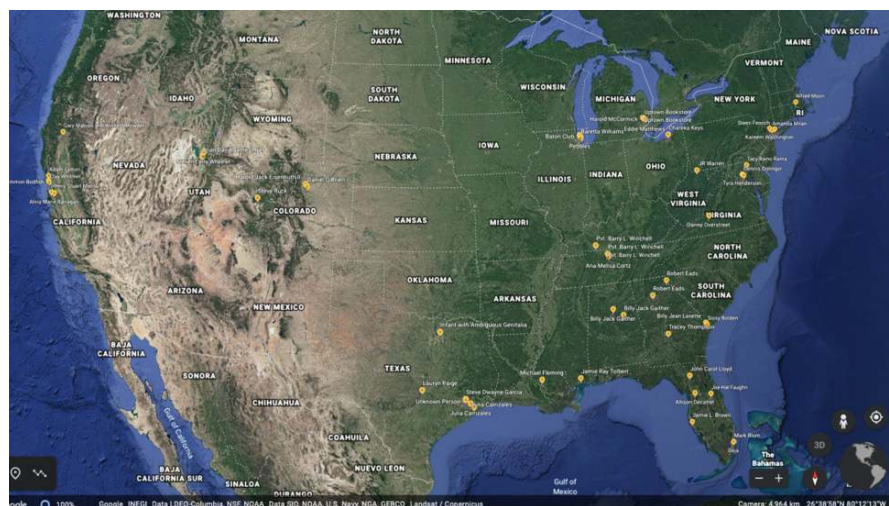
A screenshot of the Google Earth map for the location of the hate crime against Henry Stuart Matis

Feinstein: How did this develop and translate into a photographic series?

Fader: As I researched, I started putting all these crimes on a Google map. I kept looking at the map and thinking I need to go to all of these places. From a technical standpoint, I knew that I needed to photograph them using the Sony Digital Mavica. I knew it was important for me to use the technology of the time to talk about how queer erasure happens;

not just from people ignoring the stories the first time around but also because of how the digitization process happens.

Many of the queer newspapers of that era are impossible to find because they were never archived and never scanned. The images produced by the Sony Digital Mavica are 600x800 pixels (about 1/3 of a megapixel). When I printed those images very large the images became both ghostly and violent. The images revealed something about a reality but also concealed so much because the resolution is so bad. For most of the victims, the press did the same. I struggled a lot when I was making the images because I didn't know how to use the camera. It's sort of cruel and unforgiving because the light needs to be just right to get a decent exposure. I will say that I never expected to like the photographs, but I love them.



A screenshot of the Google Earth map with pinpoints to the hate crime locations Sean Fader photographed

Feinstein: As you began making these images: sat, stood and photographed in these locations among the pain and ghosts, did new revelations come about, moments of clarity, reflection, etc.?

Fader: I think the process of physically going to these places was one of the hardest experiences I've ever had in terms of making a photograph. I thought the hard part was going to be driving 15,000 miles to 38 states. I was wrong. When I stood in those locations, I had such a sense of grief and loss mixed with fear for my own safety. I didn't realize the emotional impact me I would feel every single time. I cried a lot the past year.



Feinstein: As a viewer, it's incredibly hard to process - I can't even imagine. Both of these series seem to build on your larger practice, which addresses self-portraiture, queer identity, technology, and, in stark contrast to the pain of *Insufficient Memory*, often self-referencing humor. I recall being struck by your 2008 series *I Want to Put You On....*

Fader: My undergraduate degree is in musical theater, but I grew up with a darkroom in my basement because my mother was a photographer. In the end, if I were to distill my practice down to one epic idea it would be that I am always thinking about the photographic event as the site of performance and how we create, disseminate, and digest those images in digital public spaces (like Instagram) so that we can understand ourselves, our place in the world, and others. I know it's a mouthful. I think that in varying degrees these themes show up in all of my work. In some work, the focus isn't as direct, but there are always a bit of underlying questions around those ideas.



@Danny_girl_official, #boylesque #genderfluid #nonbinary
#IAmArt #MenInHeels, 2020

Feinstein: How has the process of making this work and getting it to the point of exhibition helped you understand things about yourself/your own experience, identity, etc.?

Fader: Well, I'm not sure that is exactly what I meant though I guess that is probably true. Part of me wants to say that that understanding just comes with age. I also think that making work about how we all understand ourselves and others through the performances of self in digital public spaces might give me a bit of a leg up understanding myself. When I was younger, I was angry that people always talked about me as an emerging gay artist. I wanted to just be thought of as a great artist. I've moved beyond that. I want to be thought of as a great queer artist.

If I was given the opportunity to be reborn and to choose being straight or queer, I would choose queer. When I was coming up in the art world, I had several gallerists come to my studio and tell me that my work was "amazing, but really gay." This was a blatant way of saying that they would never represent me because no one would buy work that could be seen as legibly gay. It just pissed me off. I kept making my work anyway, no matter what homophobic misogyny was thrown at me. I wasn't gonna bury my queerness to make collectors comfortable. A few years back, a friend looked at me and said, "You're so lucky—it's really in to be queer." I just laughed. I still don't feel cool, but I feel great with myself and my work.

Feinstein: What do you hope viewers come away with after seeing and experiencing this work?

Fader: Oh, this is a complicated question because of the structure of the show and I'm too involved to have any perspective. With each body of work there are different questions I want people to struggle with. In terms of the two bodies of work that make up THIRST/TRAP, I want people to challenge the idea that progress is a one-way street. I want people to realize that queer people have not been in charge of their own narrative and that it's important to change that power dynamic. I want people to find beauty and sadness in these stories but realize that they are important to tell. All told I want people to think about how important it is to fight every day for equality and humanity for everyone. Oh, and vote every single time.



Sean Fader Explores New Queer Narrative

The artist's "Thirst/Trap" exhibit in New York highlights queer representation in visual art and LGBTQ violence from the late Nineties. BY KRISTEN TAUER

Last month, NYC Gay Pride celebrated the past 50 years of queer history, marking half a century since the Stonewall uprising carved a new movement forward for LGBTQ rights. In a new exhibition of work at the Denny Dimin gallery in Tribeca, Sean Fader takes a closer look at queer history and representation, homing in on the past two decades. Composed of two bodies of work shown together, the exhibition examines how digital technology has impacted the queer narrative. And although quite different in tone, both series (created in tandem) comment on the idea of archive – who has history prioritized, how are they remembered, and by whom?

The show's collective title, "Thirst/Trap," is about attention. But while the idea of a "thirst trap" photo is often regarded as a playful social media label, the title (and certainly with the work of the slash) takes a more nuanced approach and injects emotional weight to the context of the work. All of the images in the gallery deserve attention, even – and especially – the ones that are difficult to look at.

In his "Best Lives" series, which is displayed in the gallery's front space, Fader interrogates society's expectations of what a gay man should look, and what forces have shaped those ideas. For a previous project, Fader hired freelance photo retouchers from around the world and provided them with a green screen photo of his face and a directive: make him a profile picture that makes him look amazing, and his life look awesome. "They made me this very hetero-normie white bro. And I was really disturbed by it," says Fader. "I started thinking about the history of photography as one being outlined and created in the imagination of the heterosexual white man."

He wondered whether that straight male gaze, which has reinforced and magnified queer stereotypes within culture, extended to the more democratic



sphere of self-made imagery shared in digital public spaces like Instagram and Facebook. "Are we choosing to reinscribe that same violence on our own bodies, or are we thinking about new ways that we can image ourselves?"

The series counters the narrative that was prevalent in the late Nineties, when Fader himself was coming of age. "All the images of gay men were the straighter you looked, the better," he says. "We don't have to do any of that anymore, we can make images for ourselves by ourselves, and eliminate that set of ideologies."

The artist began reaching out to people on Instagram using geotags and hashtags such as #instagay, asking to meet up and take their portrait. Each session was structured around a discussion of what it means for someone to out themselves through a hashtag, beyond their direct friend circles, and what it means to make a queer image. Fader gave each person the freedom to choose how they wanted to look in the photographs, and what they wanted to say to the world through their image. Afterward, he lets his subjects choose which photographs he uses, if any, by posting the images to their personal Instagram accounts.

"If you could go back in time and make an image that you think would be helpful for you when you were 13 years old, what does the image look like now that you've found yourself? Do that for 13-year-olds now, show them who you can be," says Fader.

The portraits are showcased in ornate custom gold frames, a riff on classical paintings and the history of images. As much as the oversize images serve to celebrate the works, Fader also imagined them as a commentary on the broader canon of art history. Why are queer images missing from the historic works displayed in the grandiose frames of art institutions?

A similar idea drives his digital media work "Insufficient Memory," projected in the gallery's back space, which explores how the digitization process has impacted queer history, and specifically the awareness of queer hate crimes committed at the end of the Millennium.

"The 'Best Lives' portraits are these big, celebratory, proud – maybe tacky, even – bright and colorful organic things that felt ethereal almost. I jokingly refer to them sometimes as anthem images," he says. "And then the other photographs and the Google Earth with all these stories on it ['Insufficient Memory'] is this cruel anchor that weights it down."

A few years ago, Fader, a professor of photography, came across a Sony Mavica digital camera in his office at Tulane

University. The early digital camera triggered memories of his ex-husband's mother, "a PFLAG Internet junkie from the Deep South," circa 1999. He began reflecting on that particularly moment in time, which he lived as a young adult. Following the 1998 murder of University of Wyoming student Matthew Shepard, President Clinton's State of the Union Address in 1999 introduced the idea of including the LGBTQ community in the Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which was then debated in Congress.

"Meanwhile, there's all of these people who are being murdered and quite frankly, oftentimes not even investigated," says Fader. "The optics weren't the promising attractive young white boy, the optics were very different in many of those situations and therefore forgotten."

Fader created a new archive of some of those forgotten stories through intensive and investigative research using local newspaper archives and archives compiled by local activists. He created a Google Map, which serves as the project's container, where he plotted and documented hate crimes against the queer community, many of which have been forgotten, between 1999 and 2000. He traveled to the locations of 80 crimes during that period, and took a picture using the Sony Mavica digital camera.

The aggregated information counters the reality of the pre-Y2K Internet, when many people's source of information was dependent on local news coverage, and also assumptions about the modern Internet age as a complete archive of history. Fader draws attention to how the digitization process has shaped history, and how that process can work to erase queer history.

"Who has the power, the education, the privilege to digitize archives, to digitize information from the past?" asks Fader. "Because those are the people whose histories are going to be seen and heard."

It might not be possible to rewrite history, but it is possible to reshape the narrative that gets told.



Work by Sean Fader.

SEAN FADER THIRST/TRAP



DENNY DIMIN
GALLERY

Cover image: @gogo_gemini #gaylife #gaybeard #femme #masc, 2019-2020.
Archival Inkjet Print 3D Printed Frame. 66.5 x 47 in/ 169 x 119 cm. Edition 1 + 1AP.

Detail of @kynmusic #instagay #androgynous, 2019-2020.





SEAN FADER

THIRST/TRAP

Denny Dimin Gallery
New York



VIEWFINDER:

Sean Fader and queer visibility in the age of the digital photograph

David J. Getsy

It is a truism to talk about how much the world has changed due to the fact that most people in the United States carry a camera with them at all times. The possibilities of quick, high-definition photography and video have been catalytic to social movements, political activism, and geographically dispersed community formation. At the same time, the ease of digital photography has ushered in a flood of vanity, commodification, and new and virulent forms of normativity and chauvinism. With its ubiquity, the digital photograph has hypercharged the circulation and consumption of images, tipping us to a new pictographic disposition.

Thirst/Trap, Sean Fader's two-part exhibition at Denny Dimin Gallery, addresses this history by focusing on two key moments—its beginnings in 1999–2000 when digital cameras became commercially available to many and, twenty years later, to 2019–2020, the time when the digital photograph and social media have become perhaps the primary means of political, economic, social, and personal exchange. Fader's two projects, *Insufficient Memory* and *Best Lives*, ask about the ways in which queer politics and communities have been forged through the circulation of photographs at these two moments, and he prompts us to question what exclusions and losses predicated this digital revolution.

Sony's Digital Mavica, from 1999



The series *Insufficient Memory* is the result of Fader's research into hate crimes in 1999 and 2000—years when a national conversation about them gained visibility. Spurred by national outrage over the murder of Matthew Shepard in 1998, then-President Bill Clinton called for federal hate crimes legislation as part of his State of the Union Address in 1999—initiating a contentious debate that would stretch over a decade until the law's passage in 2009. A chance occurrence prompted Fader to think back to this period in time: in 2018, he found one of the earliest fully digital cameras, Sony's Digital Mavica, from 1999. He began to ask about the changes and continuities across the two decades that separated the present from that year that saw the beginning of a national conversation about hate crimes and the inauguration of the age of digital photography.

When it premiered in the late 1990s, the Sony Digital Mavica camera was seen as groundbreaking, and it was one of the first fully digital cameras accessible to non-professionals. The Mavica had first been released in 1981, but these earlier versions were essentially analog video cameras that took digital stills that were then saved to 2in video floppy disks for viewing on television screens and monitors. In the late 1990s, Sony relaunched it as the "Digital Mavica." This series of fully digital cameras produced image files saved to 3.5in floppy disks that could be read by home computers (which, in turn, were increasingly being connected to the internet, albeit usually through dial-up modems). Cameras in the Digital Mavica line were marketed to non-professionals, heralding the rapid growth of affordable consumer digital cameras beginning around 1999.

Compared to the high definition smartphone cameras of today, the Digital Mavica's resolution was low, the number of photographs that could fit on one disk was small, and the retrieval of those images to a computer (let alone the internet) was sluggish. Its memory capacity was limited, and its images would seem grainy today. For Fader, the technical limitations of this once futuristic camera (and its frequent error message of "insufficient memory") became a metaphor for all that went unseen or overlooked in that decisive moment of a national



Lauryn Paige
Lauryn Paige, Austin, Texas, Murdered, January 8, 1999

Eighteen-year-old Lauryn Paige was staying at her best friend Dixie's house in Austin, Texas. That evening the two friends got dressed and went out to see some friends. Later that evening they headed to South Congress Avenue to make some money doing sex work. At five in the morning, they were tired and ready to go home.

They started walking south on Congress, looking for a ride back to Dixie's neighborhood. A white conversion van kept circling and finally pulled over at the Circle K. In the van was Gamaliel Mireles Coria and his girlfriend's brother, Frank Santos. Dixie and Lauryn asked for a ride home. Dixie later recalled saying to them, "Before we got into the van, the very first thing I told them was that we were transsexuals." The four of them parked behind one of the car dealerships to party.

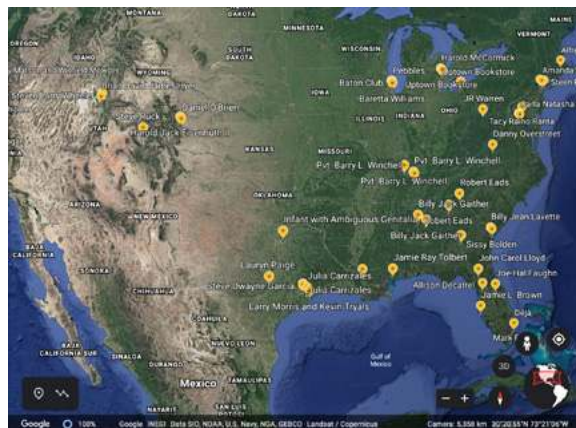
Lauryn and Gamaliel spent most of the time in the back of the van having sex. At about 6 a.m., Gamaliel dropped off Dixie and Frank, but Lauryn stayed with him.

The next morning, Lauryn's body was found in a gutter in front of Tokyo Electron America in Austin. The murder was brutal. Authorities described it as "sadistic." Lauryn sustained 14 blows in the head and at least 60 knife wounds.

Installation view of *Insufficient Memory* in *Thirst/Trap*, Denny Dimin Gallery, New York, 2020.

conversation about hate crimes. Histories of queer and trans activism and community building have often seen the late 1990s as a watershed because of the exponential growth of the internet and household digital technology, emphasizing the greater transgeographic communication afforded by the internet and its ever-growing capacities (especially for the circulation of digital photography and video). But, Fader began to ask, what was never captured in that moment? What had memory failed to retain?

Today, we mark important sites and events through photographs (geotagged, even), but two decades ago the photograph did not circulate as readily (and from so many sources). This



Screenshot from *Insufficient Memory's* Google Earth Interactive Tour

was the case with the reports of hate crimes that Fader began to investigate as part of his research. If mentioned at all in newspapers, reports of violence against trans and queer people were rarely accompanied by a photograph in these brief and often coded notices (some with little information other than a name and a location of the murder).

Fledgling activist websites devoted to chronicling these offenses helped to gather this scattered information in these years, but they, too, often had no access to photographs of the deceased or of the scene of the crime. (Most of these websites are long inoperative, and Fader accessed what he could of them through the archived copies in the Wayback Machine.) This lack of photographic testaments was especially pronounced with hate crimes against people of color (and, in particular, trans women of color), and Fader began to see a pattern of data loss at this pivotal moment when LGBT activism was said to be gaining new reach on the internet. He

Detail of *Tyra Henderson, Washington, DC, Murdered April 23, 2000. Insufficient Memory, 2019-2020*



found that the few hate crimes that were remembered through photographs tended to focus on white victims, as with the murder of Matthew Shepard (who Fader, in his press release, described point blank as “white, middle class, big future”). However much Shepard’s tragic case gave a face to the debate about hate crimes and sparked historic outrage that shifted public opinion, we must also acknowledge that there were multitudes more—including a disproportionate number of trans and queer people of color—whose murders were not able to be mourned with a photograph that made it into the daily news.

Insufficient Memory is a series of photographs of places related to hate crimes that occurred in the continental United States in the years 1999 or 2000. Fader researched this moment and found accounts documenting over 50 murders of trans and queer people in these years—still only a fraction of what occurred. He drove some 15,000 miles in total to visit and photograph places related to each of them, and he paid witness to each murder with a photograph of a site made with the decades-old Digital Mavica camera. The resulting large-scale photographs bear the evidence of that memory loss and historical distance in their pixelation and grainy contours. These photographs are of everyday places, now unmarked and anonymous. In conjunction with these photographs, Fader prepared an interactive GoogleEarth map with narratives written by him about each site. Working with the information he could find, he attempts to tell these people’s stories and create a digital marker (on GoogleEarth) so they can be commemorated and visited remotely. Again, many of these stories relied on local news sources (the kind that are not often—or comprehensively—digitized or archived), and Fader’s photographs and texts collect these stories of loss and violence with the understanding that they are just the tip of the iceberg.

Fader’s other series of large-scale photographs, *Best Lives*, jumps to the present moment, and these photographs have been created in deliberate contrast to the more sober images in *Insufficient Memory*. *Best Lives* is a series of collaborative profile pictures taken by Fader over the last two years. He created a smartphone algorithm that tracked commonly used



Detail of @Beefcake_Dragqueen #queer #instagay #instabear, *Best Lives*, 2019-2020.



Installation view of *Best Lives in Thirst/Trap*, Denny Dimin Gallery, New York, 2020.



queer hashtags on social media—such as #instagay, #nonbinary, and #genderfluid. Many on social media use such hashtags to create community and to self-identify, and the hashtag is a conduit for new viewers of an image beyond one’s circle of followers or friends. When Fader’s algorithm encountered one of these queer hashtags in his geographic area, it alerted him. He would then contact the poster and ask them if he could photograph a new picture of them. This resulted in a negotiation between Fader and his sitter, and the photograph would be taken soon thereafter (sometimes even the same day).

In the *Best Lives* collaborations, Fader worked with his sitter to take the photograph as they wanted to be seen, and it is the sitter’s decisions to focus on certain traits, objects, or elements that he showcases. The results are often-jubilant photographs with layers of signs and objects chosen by the sitter to mark their particularity and identity. Much like the hashtag, there is a contradiction here—the commonly used hashtag or symbol is both a means of individual identification and a conformity to an accepted usage. It is precisely that cross-purposed self-realization that Fader’s series explores, and his photographs chronicle the range of ways that queer and genderqueer individuals have used the photographic image, the hashtag, and symbolic objects to be themselves (their “best lives”) and be part of a community (and, it should be said, that community’s reliance on shared emblems and their commodification). Fader comments on this through the elaborate frames for each large-scale photograph (blown up to the size of painted society portraits that one might find in museums). Each bespoke frame draws out common symbols used both to celebrate the sitter’s desire for self-imaging and to remind us how we traffic in shared hashtags, emblems, and pictograms to meet those desires.

In 1999, when queer communities were hard to visualize and to see (especially in small towns), it would have been inconceivable that one could type the phrase “#instagay” into your handheld phone and see millions of images (at this writing, about 42.2 million) of queer people who proudly put their images into the world. That distance is the basis for the coupling

of *Insufficient Memory* and *Best Lives*, representing two moments when digital photography is both enabling of connection and troubling for its erasures and homogenizations.

It is useful to see these two recent bodies of work against Fader's long-running investigation in the traffic in digital pictures. He was one of the first artists to recognize how social media's use of the digital photograph was a paradigm shift. He focused, in particular, on the profile picture—those idealized emblems of self-presentation through which individuals on social media identify and are identified. Even those who refuse a self-portrait in a little circle on their Instagram or Facebook pages still are compelled to articulate themselves in relation to the imperative to have a profile picture. This development went hand-in-hand with the spread of high-quality, easily-available digital photography, and Fader's work has long interrogated the profile picture as a locus of desire. In year-long project *'Sup* (2010–2011), Fader spent 365



Drew, April 13th, 2010, 2010. Archival inkjet print, 29 x 50 in. From *SUP?*.

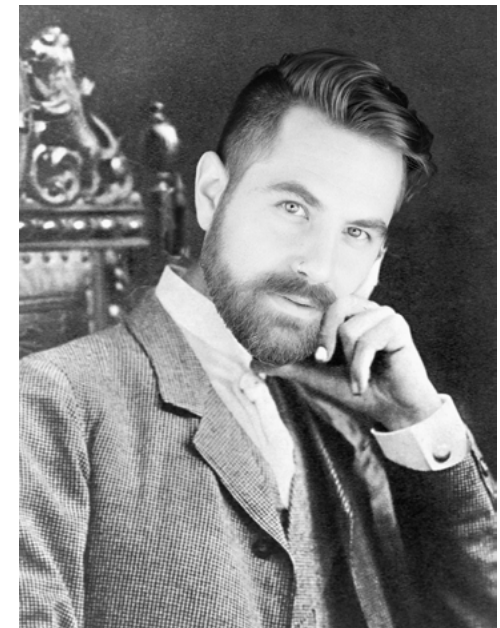
it became a means to examine the disjunctions between how people presented themselves in social media versus in an in-person interaction. Some of the connections lasted months (and some hours), and Fader archived all communications with his participants as a means of

days on gay dating apps soliciting collaborators with the promise of new profile pictures. The contract involved going on a date, with Fader taking a picture at the beginning of a date and one at the end. Many took him up on this offer, and

further triangulating the space between who they wanted to be seen as, how they appeared to Fader, and how those appearances became modified over time through the establishment of a correspondence, a friendship, or a relationship. As in so much of Fader's work, digital

portrait photography was the excuse for a social practice involving collaboration, negotiation, and mutual inflection. His next year-long project involving profile pictures, *365 Profile Pics* (2016–2017), involved him outsourcing photographic manipulation to a global network of online contractors, who were paid by Fader to “make me look awesome.” Given a stock group of photographs of Fader, they used Photoshop to put him into scenes and situations that they thought he would think were amenable and enviable (a father, an officer, a boat-owner, a hunter, an astronaut, etc). Each day, these were posted as Fader's profile pictures on his social media accounts. The result was a

compilation of fantasy profile pictures, often with a high level of kitsch, that made painfully clear the normativity and whiteness that were seen as inextricable from American identity by these Photoshoppers working from other parts of the world. In both these projects, Fader did not shy away from the ways that profile pictures are often generic, cheesy, partial, and uncomfortably intertwined with commodification. This is the condition of profile pictures, and Fader's projects urge us to face the profile picture as a nexus of desires and projections above and beyond those of the individual. The profile picture is never one's own.



365 Profile Pics 120/365, 2016. Archival inkjet print, 16 x 20.91 in, Edition 3 + 1 AP.

In *Best Lives*, Fader extended these concerns. From each photoshoot, it was the sitter who made the final choice of the image to be enlarged to this heroic scale—for it was this image that they also posted to their social media account. By giving the final decision over to the sitter, Fader relinquishes a degree of authorship over the image, and this is a recognition of the ways in which digital images and profile pictures themselves complicate ownership. The profile or Instagram picture is never singularly controlled, and it circulates widely and in unexpected ways. This is, after all, the purpose of the hashtag's leaps between self-contained circles of followers or friends. Fader embraced this condition with *Best Lives*. To some viewers, no doubt, the photographs will appear excessive, vulgar, or *gauche*; to others they will seem fabulous, sexy, or proud. This is the reality of the digital photograph today, and Fader's work asks us to see how we see such photographs as the profile picture, the Instagram thirst trap, or the selfie are evaluated, enjoyed, ridiculed, and circulated. It is confrontational to see these normally hand-held screen images this large, and in that move Fader demands that images such as these be recognized as exemplary of portraiture today.

The images in *Insufficient Memory* are also on a grand scale for this reason, and this somber body of work witnesses forgotten losses. By coupling these photographs with contemporary profile pictures, Fader prompts us to remember how the present-day horizons for queer and trans lives must be understood in relation to the histories of survival, loss, and activism that came before. As I write this essay, the United States Supreme Court issued a 6-to-3 ruling declaring that the 1964 Civil Rights Act protects LGBT people. Common in the rush of commentary in the 24 hours since the news has been the recognition (from all positions) of how much public attitude has changed in the last decades. That change has been the result of activism, love, struggle, community, and defiance—all of which have been buoyed by the photographs we share of each other, reminding us that we are not alone in this. The bookends of Fader's project, twenty years apart, are a further way to visualize how far we've come, what we have forgotten, and what there is left to do.

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Finn Distinguished Professor of Art History at
the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.



Installation view of *Thirst/Trap*, Denny Dimin Gallery, New York, 2020.

Best Lives



@kyntmusic #instagay #androgynous, 2019-2020.

Archival Inkjet Print 3D Printed Frame. 66.5 x 47 in/ 169 x 119 cm. Edition 1 + 1AP.



@gogo_gemini #gaylife #gaybeard #femme #masc, 2019-2020.

Archival Inkjet Print 3D Printed Frame. 66.5 x 47 in/ 169 x 119 cm. Edition 1 + 1AP.



@Beefcake_Dragqueen #queer #instagay #instabear, 2019-2020.
Archival Inkjet Print 3D Printed Frame. 66.5 x 47 in/ 169 x 119 cm. Edition 1 + 1AP.



@Danny_girl_official, #boylesque #genderfluid #nonbinary #IAmArt #MenInHeels, 2019-2020.

Archival Inkjet Print 3D Printed Frame. 66.5 x 47 in/ 169 x 119 cm. Edition 1 + 1AP.



@gaffthewitch #queer #gay #gaywitch #swampwitch, 2019-2020.

Archival Inkjet Print 3D Printed Frame. 66.5 x 47 in/ 169 x 119 cm. Edition 1 + 1AP.

Insufficient Memory



Billy Jack Gaither

Sylacauga, Alabama, Murdered, Feb 19, 1999

Billy Jack Gaither was a 39-year-old gay man who lived with his disabled parents in Sylacauga, Alabama. He cared for them and worked at the nearby Russell Athletics apparel company. His body was found burned on top of a pile of tires on the side of a creek outside of town.

His throat was cut, and his body was savagely beaten before being set on fire. The two men who carried out the murder, Steven Mullins and Charles Monroe Butler, claimed that Billy Jack had come on to them and his sexuality was why they killed him. Witnesses came forward and testified that Steven had had sex with men before and that he may have had a relationship with Billy Jack prior to killing him. In June 1999 Steven Mullins pled guilty to capital murder; Charles Butler stood trial and was found guilty of the same charge by a jury. In August 1999 both men were sentenced to life in prison without parole. In March 2019 Steven was fatally stabbed in prison.

The Billy Jack Gaither Humanitarian Award

recognizes “an individual or organization that has shown extraordinary courage in the struggle against hatred and contributed to the creation of a just society.”

The location where Billy Jack was murdered was difficult to find. It’s deep in the Talladega National Forest. I read Stephen’s confessions over and over and jotted down his description of a small sign with a boat on it marking the gravel road into the forest. When I arrived in Sylacauga, I drove out on Millerville Highway, looking for a small sign with a boat on it. My phone overheated and shut off. After holding it over the AC vent for a while, the phone turned on, and I realized I had gone way beyond where I thought I should have. I looked for a place to turn around. I pulled into a gravel road to make a U-turn, looked up, and there was the small sign with the boat. I would have never seen it driving by. I drove into the forest, turning left and then right as Stephen described in his confessional. When I arrived at the boat launch, the sky opened up and it began to pour.



Infant with Ambiguous Genitalia

Dallas, Texas, Murdered December 8, 1999

An unnamed intersexual three-day-old infant was murdered from blunt-force trauma to the head, as well as strangulation. The infant's parents reported the murder. Gangaudaya Kavali, the infant's father, claimed that when he was at the store his wife, Aruna, left their infant on the couch while she stepped into the bathroom. She claimed that while she was in the bathroom a stranger entered their apartment, stole the infant, and threw him outside.

A Collin County Medical Examiner found shards of glass in the baby's esophagus and small intestine, indicating that someone initially tried to kill the child by forcing them to eat glass, in an effort to cause internal bleeding. Aruna was eventually found guilty of murdering her three-day old child.

The murder was not tried as a hate crime. The media repeatedly identified the child as male and referred to the child's genitalia as being deformed.

When I arrived at the apartment complex that the Kavali family lived in when the murder took place, it was raining. Suddenly, the rain broke and a rainbow appeared in the sky over their building. I made this picture in front of the home where the infant was murdered.



Carla Natasha Hunt

Suitland, Maryland, Murdered May 15, 2000

Carla Natasha Hunt, a 35-year-old trans woman, was found shot to death in the foyer of her apartment. She was the second trans woman to be found dead in the Washington, D.C., area in 2000. The police did not pursue either death as a hate crime. The police repeatedly claimed knowledge that both women frequented a section of the city known as a gathering place for “transsexual persons who solicit sex for money.” There was no evidence that either one of them engaged in sex work.

I made this photograph of the bush directly in front of her apartment door.



Henry Stuart Matis

Los Altos, California, Murdered February 25, 2000

Henry Stuart Matis, a 32-year-old gay man and devout member of the Church of Latter-Day Saints, pinned a note to his chest that said “Do not resuscitate” and shot himself on the steps of his church. Raised in the Mormon religion, and knowing he was gay by age 7, Henry had long struggled with the church’s position on homosexuality as he tried to reconcile his being gay with his faith. The church regards homosexuality as a sin, advocating that gays and lesbians be celibate for life, and its involvement with Prop 22 particularly disturbed Henry. He’d come out to his parents the year before he killed himself, and despite their support, he felt he had to choose between “life” or being Christian.

In his suicide letter, he wrote, “Mother, Dad and family. I have committed suicide....I engaged my mind in a false dilemma: either one was gay or one was Christian. As I believed I was Christian, I believed I could never be gay.”

I took this image in front of the church where he killed himself.



Kareem Washington

Passaic, New Jersey, Murdered August 29, 1999

Kareem Washington's mother said he "loved people and was very happy-go-lucky." Kareem was found dead on Hanover Street by two workers from a nearby trucking company. Kareem had been stabbed several times in the back and throat. The coroner also said he sustained several "defensive" knife wounds.

Police and news reports reported that Kareem "lived alternately in Newark and Passaic." The reports focused on the fact that Kareem was wearing women's clothes and that the industrial area was known to police as a hangout for prostitutes. The police told news outlets that they believed he may have been a prostitute who was killed by his pimp. No evidence was found to support this theory, but the news never deviated from this narrative. The murderer was never found.

I made this photograph looking down the dead-end street where Kareem's body was found.





BIOGRAPHY

Born 1979 Los Angeles, California
Lives in New Orleans, Louisiana and Brooklyn, New York
Professor of Practice in Photography, Tulane University

EDUCATION

2008	MFA	School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
2006	MA	Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD
2002	BFA	New School University, New York City, NY
2001	CD	American Musical & Dramatic Academy, New York, NY
1998-2001		Northwestern University, Evanston, IL

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2020	<i>Thirst/Trap</i> , Denny Dimin Gallery, New York, NY
2017	<i>365 Profile Pics</i> , SPRING/BREAK Art Show, with Denny Gallery, New York, NY
2016	<i>#Fernwings</i> , Bemis Center for the Arts, Omaha, NE <i>#Fernwings</i> , Socrates Sculpture Park, LIC, NY
2015	<i>Backdrop for the Rebirth of the Collective Author</i> (“ <i>There’s a Whole Lot of Authorship Going On.</i> ” - Richard Prince), SPRING/BREAK Art Show, New York, NY
2014	<i>SUP?</i> , University of Illinois, Springfield, IL <i>#wishingpelt</i> , Curated by Elizabeth Denny, Spring/Break Art Show, New York, NY <i>#wishingpelt</i> , Pulse Project, Pulse Art Fair, Sponsored by AKArt, New York, NY
2013	<i>Sean Fader is the Wishing Pelt</i> , Defibrillator Gallery, Chicago, IL
2009	<i>I Want To Put You On</i> , Digital Artists Space, Troy, NY
2008	<i>I Want To Put You On</i> , 3rd Ward, Brooklyn, NY

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2019	<i>On the Map</i> , Denny Dimin Gallery, Hong Kong
2018	<i>Apparatus for a Utopian Image 2</i> , Center for Contemporary Arts, Prague, CZ <i>You Never Know How You Look Through Other People’s Eyes</i> , Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) at Maine College of Art (MECA), Portland, ME <i>Contemporary Performance</i> , Florida Museum of Photgraphic Arts, Tampa FL

2017 *Facial Profiling*, curated by David C. Terry, C24 Gallery, New York, NY

2016 *Drama Queer: seducing social change*, Queer Arts Festival, Vancouver, Canada
Apparatus for a Utopian Image, EFA Project Space Program, New York, NY
Tasteful Yet Biting, Curated by Kim Brickley, CRUXspace, Philadelphia, PA
PICTURE YOURSELF: Selfied, Cellphones, and the Digital Age, Curated by Leah Mirakhor and Kitty McManus Zurko, College of Wooster Art Museum, Wooster, OH
SIT STILL: photography, portraits, and doubling, curated: Nicole Coffineau, Revision Space Gallery, Pittsburgh, PA

2015 *...and I Feel Fine*, presented by Ghost of a Dream, The Re Institute, Millerton, NY
Transgressive Inversions + Identities, Curated by AKArt, Spring/Break Art Show, New York
Share This! Appropriation After Cynicism, Denny Gallery, New York, NY
SWAP, Studio La Suite, Morelina, Mexico
I'll Show You Mine If You Show Me Yours: Love In The Modern Age, Esteven Art Gallery and Museum, Saskatchewan, Canada

2014 *Manly Men, Girly Girls and Everybody in Between*, NIU Art Museum, North Illinois University, DeKalb, IL
Strange Bedfellows, FIU, Florida International University, Miami, FL
Strange Bedfellows, Handwerker Gallery at Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY
Strange Bedfellows, A+D Gallery Columbia College, Chicago, IL

2013 *Strange Bedfellows*, Samek Gallery, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA
Strange Bedfellows, Roots and Culture Gallery, San Francisco, CA
How To Do Things With Hair, Curated by Barrak Alzaid, The Jam Jar, Dubai
The Participants, Denny Gallery, New York, NY
White Boys, Curated by Hank Willis Thomas and Natsaha L Logan, Haverford College, Haverford, PA
Dynasty, Curated by Sara Reisman , Christopher K. Ho, Amy Goldrich, and Omar Lopez-Chahoud, Hotel Particular, New York, NY
Fon' Seks: Handheld Digital Technology and the Transformation of Intimacy, University of Illinois, Springfield, IL
Looks Like Torture, Here Arts Center, New York, NY

2012 *Studio La Suite*, Morelina, Mexico
It's a Small Small World, Family Business, New York, NY

2010 *Undressing the Feminine*, Mindy Solomon Gallery, St Petersburg, FL

2009 *The Wassaic Summer Show*, The Wassaic Project, Wassaic, NY
Your Face Your Race, the Way That You Walk, VINESpace, London, England

2008 *Salon 08*, Matt Roberts Arts, VINESpace, London, England
11th Annual Chicago Art Open (Critics' Choice), Chicago IL
Hic et Nunc (Here and Now), Co-Prosperity Sphere, Chicago, IL
Everyday People, Estudiotres, Chicago, IL
Yes, Leather Archives and Museum, Chicago, IL

2007 *First Look II*, Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, Peekskill, NY
Group Show no. 16, Humble Arts Foundation, New York, NY
This is Not a Self Portrait, Project Space, Chicago, IL

PERFORMANCES

2016 *#Fernwings*, Bemis Center for the Arts, Omaha, NE
Yes Gaga!, Satellite Art Fair, Miami, FL
#Fernwings, 30th Anniversary Gala, Socrates Sculpture Park, New York, NY

2015 *Backdrop for the Rebirth of the Collective Author ("There's a Whole Lot of Authorship Going On." - Richard Prince)*, Residency Unlimited, New York, NY

2013 *Sean Fader is the Wishing Pelt*, Defibrillator Gallery, Chicago, IL

2010 *OPA!*, Johalla Projects, Chicago, IL

HONORS AND AWARDS

2015 EFA (The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts) Studio Program, New York, NY

2013 NYFA Fellowship in Photography Award 2013, New York, NY
A Blade of Grass Fellowship 2013, New York, NY

2012 Magenta Foundation Flash Forward 2012, USA Winner

2008 Gawker Artist
Critic's Choice, Professional Category, 11th Annual Chicago Art Open, Chicago, IL
Leadership Award, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago ILL

2006 Murthy Digital Arts Award, Baltimore, MD

SEAN FADER

THIRST/TRAP

Published on the occasion of the 2020 exhibition at Denny Dimin Gallery, New York.
June 18 – August 21, 2020.

Essay by David J. Getsy
Images © Sean Fader

FACING THE BLACK MIRROR: SEAN FADER'S AWESOME YEAR

BY THE ARTSLANT TEAM



Oscar Wilde famously suggested great art “reveal beauty and hide the artist.” For the 2017 BLACK MIRROR exhibition at SPRING/BREAK, more than 100 curators will feature artworks that explore the dance of identity the artist undergoes—between showing what’s unseen and hiding in plain sight—especially in the face of modern technology, political unrest, and glimmers from ghosts of Art History’s past.

ArtSlant will be exhibiting the ArtSlant Prize 2016 Winners at SPRING/BREAK. In expectation of this uniquely site-specific, curatorial fair, we’re featuring interviews with participating curators and artists, asking them what they see reflected in the black mirror.

Previous interviews: Eve Sussman and Simon Lee on curating Jack & Leigh Ruby, Janusz Jaworski on chashama, and Michael Holman

If the original black mirror, the Claude glass, hid the artist to reveal the idealized subject, then Sean Fader’s 365 Profile Pics is its modern day progeny indeed. Despite comprising some 365 images of the artist’s face, the expansive artwork reveals very little about Fader himself, turning its lens instead onto contemporary culture, image making, and consumption.

Every day for a year, Fader has uploaded a new profile picture on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Using sites like Fiverr and Craigslist, the artist hired image retouchers from around the world to fabricate profile pics for him, pulling from 400 green-screened selfies and instructions to “make me look amazing and my life look awesome.” Over the course of the year, posting a new pic each day, Fader encouraged captions and comments from his followers.

Through the exercise, Fader’s face became the medium through which others projected their ideas of awesomeness, individuality, or conformity. In concert, the images are a broad register of generic moments, surreal scenes, and cultural and political touchstones from the past year. Pouts and red flannel shirts abound, as do well-lit offices and tailored suits. The artist had brief stints as an astronaut and a mega-church preacher. He went surfing, walked some red carpets, and stood behind Melania Trump at the Inauguration.

At SPRING/BREAK, in a presentation by Denny Gallery, Fader transformed his year of profile pics into an ensemble wallpaper. An augmented reality app allows viewers to hover their phone over an image to see the social media comments it received over the past year and to contribute new ones. Like a proud voter fulfilling their civic duty, participating viewers walk away with an “I commented” sticker. Because there’s a little bit of us all reflected in Fader’s black mirror.



365 Profile Pics 15/365, 2016-2017. Archival inkjet print. 30 x 45 in, Edition of 1 + 1 AP & 16 x 24 in, Edition of 3 + 1 AP

How does it feel having your likeness proliferated like this? Have you come to identify with these images?

My father wanted to direct movies and my mother was an amateur photographer, so I grew up thinking about my body as a stand-in or stage for many types of ideas. Until my mid-twenties I trained for a career in musical theater, so my view of my body and my performance of self were malleable. I did believe that there was a one “true” me that I was trying to reveal, but as a performer I also believed that I could transcend myself for the “character.” So many of the Seans you see in this project are characters of someone. Whenever I

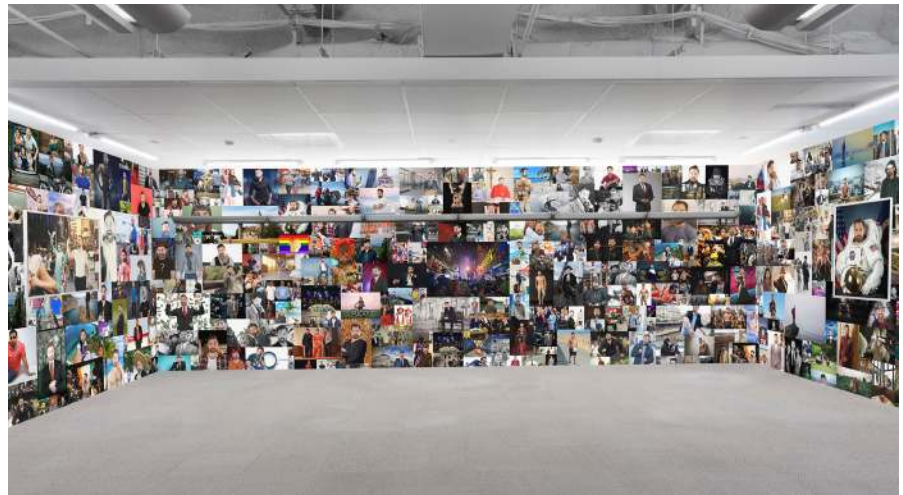
would get an email with an image of me that seemed exciting, I did feel excited. Look, that’s me as an astronaut or a cowboy! Don’t I look like a good businessman, or a sad bro?

They all feel like me and yet they’re not me at all—but isn’t this what everyone is doing these days? People distill themselves into a snap, a gram, a tweet, or a status. These tiny bits are meant to project who they are, but in fact these images are and are not them.

When I started this project I was thinking a lot about the profile pic as a performance site. For instance, when a stranger emails me, I look them up on Facebook and I click as fast as I can through all of their profile pics, which is a little performance of their identity in a tiny square on my computer screen.

Talk to me about ownership.

It is so hard to think about authorship these days without viewing the Internet as a place where you can steal another’s work or be stolen from. In the United States (and the West) we value creativity as a commodity. We want to make one thing that we can get residuals from for the rest of our lives, and we want to claim things as our own. Funny thing, in the “Art World” much of the work is outsourced labor to studio assistants, fabricators, and craftsmen, but somehow because I didn’t take the picture or compose these images there is a question of authorship.



365 Profile Pics, 2016–2017, Installation view at SPRING/BREAK Art Show, February 28–March 6, 2017

What’s your conception of the Black Mirror and how do you see *365 Profile Pics* engaging with it?

Honestly when I read the concept text for SPRING/BREAK this year I thought, OMG I think they are writing about my work. I mean...

Innovation has enhanced the way in which the self is documented, exhumed, and proliferated on the day-to-day. A “keeping up with the Joneses”-style attention to self-portraiture on social media, an embrace of video communication software in the live stream, even the self grooming to meet standards of omnipresent surveillance documentation, or bystander photo-bomb, all keep us constantly rebounding from our subjective experiences back to a meditation on the “me.”

In addition to being obsessed with the performance of the profile pic, I was also looking at how people cultivate fame in social media and how we are outsourcing much of that work. Today celebrities and brands have people that manage their social media accounts; sites like Fiverr are dedicated to retouching people’s photographs for five bucks, you can buy followers; there are social media analytics companies; and there are PR firms that only work in social media. I wanted to use these very same mechanisms in this project, so I decided to outsource the PR of my own identity on Fiverr. I would pay anyone who was interested to take a crack at it. What is the most important thing in social media? To look amazing and to make your life look awesome, so those were my instructions for the retouchers.

What’s the role of the online viewer, and how crucial is a commenting social media community to realizing this project?

I’m a huge fan of Cécile B. Evans so I feel like the answer is “Hyperlinks or it didn’t happen” (an amazing piece of hers). Look at Google: their algorithm determines what we know about the world and is based on PageRank, the



365 Profile Pics 25/365 (Trump got me all like: Preparing to get the fuck out of here!), 2016-2017.
Archival inkjet print, 37 x 30 in, Edition of 1 + 1 AP&
20 x 16 in, Edition of 3 + 1 AP

original algorithm that determines a website’s importance by the number and quality of links to a page. It’s all about connections. I really wanted to understand how the Internet’s hive mind thinks through images. Memes rise and fall in a day but hover in our subconscious, so people commenting in social media is a key component to the project. On the final page of the book I have a thank you page that lists everyone who made images and/or commented on social media. They are all part of this work and continue to be.

I have been feeling like these dual lives—social media and my studio practice—have been the same. The photo print on the wall and the photo shared on Instagram feel like they are parallel practices. I wanted to make the space of the exhibition the liminal space where these two practices collide, so I worked with Erin Ko and Alex Cuff to create an augmented reality. At SPRING/BREAK, people can download the PhotoArtStar app (named after my Insta handle) and point their iPhone at the images on the wall. For 100 of the photos, the app will pull all the Instagram comments on that image and will overlay them on top of the photo. You can also press a button to open that very image in your own Instagram. If you do that and comment, I will give you an “I commented” sticker for you

to wear IRL. The stickers look very much like the “I voted” stickers from elections. I’m doing this because, first, I love giving things away. I also love the idea that participation and having your voice heard is a badge of pride, but this also has the angle of a marketing campaign. So it works both ways.

What are some of the weirdest moments you’ve experienced working on 365 Profile Pics? Were you ever uncomfortable with any of the retouched images?

I was disappointed by how many people depicted me with all the tropes of a straight white American man. You can see how deeply American mass media has penetrated the planet by how many of my retouchers assumed that



365 Profile Pics, 2016–2017, Installation view with App at SPRING/BREAK Art Show, February 28–March 6, 2017

is who I wanted to be. In many ways my prompt of make me look amazing and my life look awesome — combined with the availability of hi resolution stock photography — was intended to critically activate these stereotypes in order to address how they propagate heteronormativity, whiteness, and consumerism. Throughout mass media and visual culture, these circulate as assumptions what normalcy looks like, so I designed the prompt to draw to them surface and to allow us to critique them. The scale of the project (and its humor) mark these normally unmarked assumptions, and it challenges their power by making them ludicrous and revealing the clichés they rely on. By working with a global team of collab-

orators on this, I was able to show how widely these stereotypes circulate and how they have fed into a narrow and problematic stereotype of American culture. Any one of the images can be funny or innocuous, but 365 of them shows the force of these norms operating in visual culture. By visualizing them, we can turn that humor against them to reveal how hollow and fragile they really are.

Did you learn anything from working on this project for a year that you hadn't anticipated at the beginning?

I was shocked people believed that these images were real. On Instagram we seem to suspend disbelief in this way. For those of us that grew up around computers, the idea of realness is no longer tied to an objective photographic reality in the traditional sense. We don't look at an image and decide it is real because x, y, and z things were in front of a camera at a specific time and the camera shutter was pressed—the decisive moment. But it still was funny that people thought the images were real in this way.

The 365 Profile Pics don't necessarily describe a traditional photographic reality but they are still real photographs because all of them do represent something. Many of us seem to be expanding what we think of as real and that is really exciting. I also love that the images on the Internet are small and digital and low-resolution so they actually look more convincing as decisive moments, and I continue to post pics of my own day between each of the profile pics so they even sit side by side. When you see them blown up and printed, the illusion of Photoshop composites often falls apart.

I also learned that outsourcing is really complicated. Many of the retouchers I worked with did not want to be creative. I gave them tech specs and total creative freedom, which made a lot of them angry. They wanted to be told exactly what to do and they wanted to execute it. They also didn't want to follow my tech specs and kept telling me I didn't need a high-res image, even when that was outlined in the original advertisement. I also spent so much time back-and-forth arguing with them that it would have taken me less time to do it myself. I felt bad about paying five dollars an image but felt gouged if they wanted 10. It churned up so much Western guilt and complex ideas about the global market and my idea of my position in it.

I was happy to find that lots of people loved this project, and getting to participate and comment was so much fun and funny.



Art Fairs

The SPRING/BREAK Art Show Curator List Is Finally Here

There's a lot to look forward to next week.

Sarah Cascone, February 24, 2017

New York's SPRING/BREAK Art Show has finally revealed the list of its 2017 curators responding to the theme "BLACK MIRROR," based on the idea of identity and what artists chose to reveal to the world of their personal selves.

It's an organizing principle that is drawn from the Claude glass, or black mirror, used by the Old Masters, but is all the more engaging given the demise of privacy thanks to modern technology.

The scrappy fair, known for transforming unusual historic buildings into temporary contemporary art venues, has a new home this year, trading the decommissioned 34th Street post office at Skylight at Moynihan Station for 4 Times Square, the former home of Condé Nast.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the new venue, owned by the Durst Organization, comes with a new creative partner: Anita Durst's non-profit curatorial group chashama, which has held programming in the building before, will be the recipient of the proceeds of SPRING/BREAK's annual benefit auction, in addition to presenting the work of five artists, curated by Janusz Jaworski.

"Re-thinking what 'art space' means and how to provide artists and art professionals with more has always been [chashama's] vision, and that vision has changed the city we live in for the better," said fair co-founder and co-director Andrew Gori in a statement.



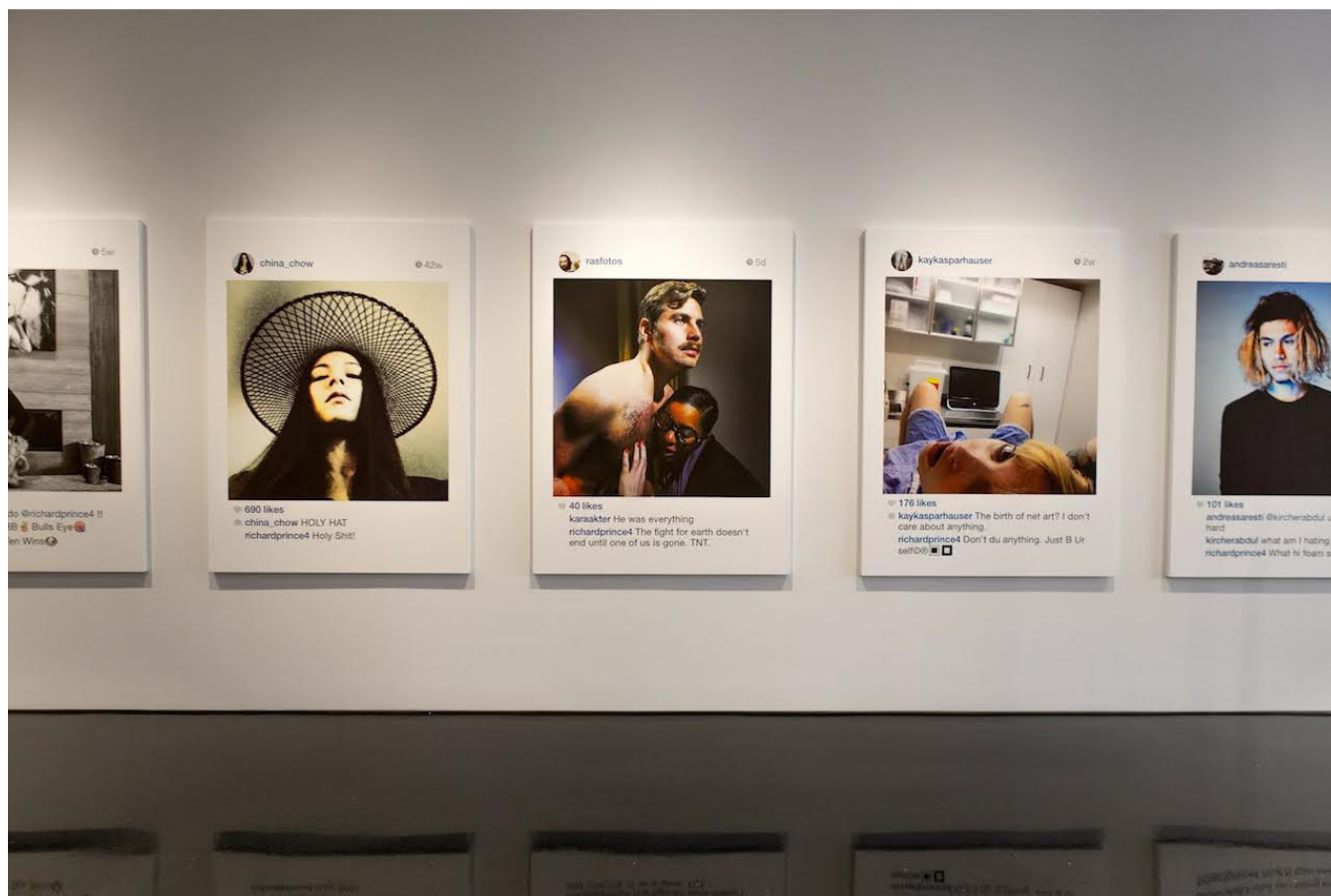
Sean Fader, 365 Profile Pics 25/365 (Trump got me all like: Preparing to get the fuck out of here!). Courtesy of Denny Gallery.

Projects to look forward to next week include Sean Fader's "365 Profile Pics," presented in a special project booth via New York's Denny Gallery.

The artist offered up 400 green-screened selfies to Photoshop pros around the world, hiring them to turn the images into profile pictures that "make me look amazing and my life look awesome." The artist shared the results on his various social media channels every day for a year.

A Young Artist Debuts at Gagosian, Thanks to Richard Prince

by **Benjamin Sutton** on October 23, 2014



Installation view, 'Richard Prince: New Portraits' (2014), Gagosian Gallery, New York (all photos by Sean Fader)

Richard Prince unwittingly gave an emerging conceptual artist his Gagosian debut.

The appropriation artist's current Gagosian exhibition *New Portraits* — which Hyperallergic's Tiernan Morgan dismissed as “an amusing exercise, but it doesn't translate as great art” — features an Instagram photo from Sean Fader's social media art piece “#wishingpelt.” For that piece, Fader prompted participants to make wishes as they took selfies and rubbed the artist's chest hair. So long as the photos were posted on social media, he promised, the wishes would come true. In May one of those wish-granting selfies ended up in Prince's Instagram feed, and has now it has made its way onto a canvas at 976 Madison Avenue. But for Fader, this is hardly a dream come true.

"There's obviously that part of me that's mad because I'm a poor starving artist with six-figure student loan debt, and you're just a giant that runs through Instagram pillaging, taking things into your own museum, and calling them yours," Fader told Hyperallergic over the phone. "If I sued him it would make the work look better. If I sued him it would make him look like he's thinking about rights in digital spaces, and that the work is questioning authorship in contemporary society. But that's definitely not what he's doing, I don't even think he's thinking about much, he's just thinking, oh, this would be cool."



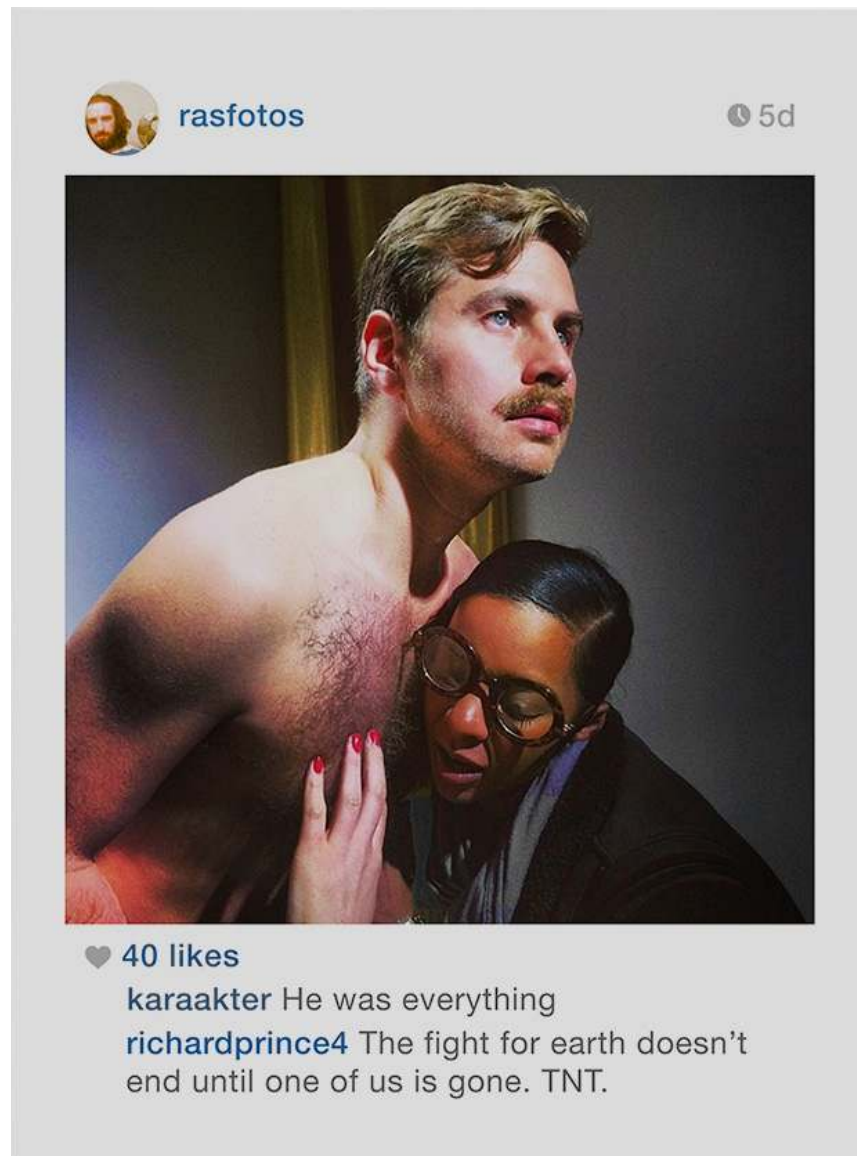
Sean Fader taking a selfie in front of his "#wishingpelt" photo in 'Richard Prince: New Portraits,' Gagosian Gallery, New York

Rather than sue, Fader saw an improbable opportunity in Prince's appropriation.

"I'm really interested in the idea of re-appropriating my own work and taking the work out of the frame that he's put it in, re-engineering it to continue the conversation that I was interested in from the beginning, and shifting the work back to that space," Fader said. "I struggled for a while to decide how I felt about it. When I went and saw it I was fuming. I would be psyched to be appropriated into work that was good. I just think the work is flat. It flattened the work in a way that I was not thrilled about its denial. By not communicating with me, by not talking to me, he denied every level of shared authorship, or engagement, all of those things that were so important to

me in the work. That's what irked me about the whole thing. So Prince made his move, now I'll make mine."

Instead of dwelling on the way that Prince's work emptied his participatory social media project of all its meaning and context, Fader engineered an appropriation of his own, sending out a press release inviting the public to see his work at Gagosian "in an exhibition organized by Richard Price." The incident has been instructive, helping him to focus his practice and his interests.



Sean Fader, "#wishingpelt" (2014) at Gagosian Gallery, New York

"In a weird way it's been really helpful for me to clarify for myself the kind of engagement I want to continue to be doing," Fader added. "It's one of those moments when you see someone do it all wrong and you're like, oh god, don't ever wanna be that guy. It helped me clarify my relationship to working in digitally and socially engaged spaces. What that looks like, why I do it, what my value system is in that space. And that is always a good thing."

Richard Prince: New Portraits, including Sean Fader's "#wishingpelt" photo, continues at Gagosian Gallery (976 Madison Avenue, Upper East Side, Manhattan) through October 25.

SEAN FADER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New York City. October 18th, 2014

See Sean Fader's *#wishingpelt* in *New Portraits* @ Gagosian Gallery Organized by Richard Prince



FINAL WEEK:

See Sean Fader's *#wishingpelt* in *New Portraits* @ Gagosian Gallery Organized by Richard Prince

Now in its final week, Sean Fader's *#wishingpelt* is on view at Gagosian Gallery's Madison Avenue Store in an exhibition organized by Richard Prince entitled *New Portraits*, September 19–Saturday, October 25, 2014.

Fader's *#wishingpelt* uses the social world of Instagram as its medium, and is a forum in which to perform work. Related closely to live events, the Instagram photograph is for Fader a contract with his participants, sealing a bond and producing a shared experience across the thousands of his participants who have not yet met. The images are not documentation. They are performative and utopic commitments.

Prince, by placing *#wishingpelt* in his exhibition, now serves as witness to those many declarations, wishes, hopes, and confessions that are the content of Fader's social media performance. Providing a venue for simple acts of sincerity and honesty, Fader's work values the desire for meaning and hope that is often disallowed in the prevailing orthodoxy of cool irony. It took a great feat of self-denial for Prince to set aside his role as the poster child of such safe sarcasm and, instead, to promote sincerity by lovingly re-posting Fader's work in his own exhibition.

At first glance, one might be led to believe that Richard Prince's intentionally naïve commentary on Instagram images to be merely a last gasp at colonizing the work of others. Rather than just a replaying of that white male privilege as an attempt to stay relevant in a world he doesn't understand, Prince's curatorial effort represents a new turn in the form of his affectionate and deep engagement with the work of his peer, the photographer and performance artist Sean Fader.

The New York live event for Fader's performance of *#wishingpelt* was held in 2014, produced by AKArt at the PULSE Art Fair and previously at SPRING/BREAK Art Show curated by Elizabeth Denny. Over the course of nine days, Fader stood motionless on a platform for a total of 80 hours. Visitors to the *#wishingpelt* were invited to whisper a wish in Fader's ear, run their hands through his chest hair, and seal the wish with selfie tagged on Instagram or Twitter with *#wishingpelt*. Their wishes are forever private and their photos were immediately made public. The website wishingpelt.com and Instagram's *#wishingpelt* hashtag aggregate these photographs, thus creating a growing archive of the public's experience with the *#wishingpelt*.

In today's media-saturated environment, where the private is regularly broadcast as public, there is little room for intimate and private honesty. We are constantly reminded how social media is altering our capacity to know others. Rather than deny or flee from this condition, Fader's work fearlessly makes space for sincerity in the heart of social media spectacle. What at first seems like a ludicrous proposition—rub a guru's chest hair and make a wish—became the vehicle for participants to express wishes, confess crimes, and have a single incontrovertible moment of physical intimacy and honesty. The spectacle got them there, but the private moment of intersubjective rapport between artist and participant was theirs alone. The Instagram photograph taken with their own cameras seals the contract, producing this moment for the demands of social media, and allowing them to participate in the fictitious communities that make up our networked world. What seemed like a preposterous ritual instead became deeply felt and infectious. During the two performances, over 2500 individuals made wishes to Fader, documented in the photographs they uploaded to Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook. After the performances, Fader received countless emails from visitors thanking him for making their wishes come true and for changing their lives. What at first seemed like a preposterous proposition was, instead, a dialectical and disarming way to produce intimacy within social media's compulsory exposure.

Prince's re-posting, in the physical space of his exhibition, is a testament to the fearless performances of attachment and rapport that Fader's participants found. Prince has extended the potential of Fader's social media art, becoming a viral host for hope. Fader's work could not have existed without the circulation of images that is Instagram's aim. The performance was documented on Instagram but also happened through it—being enacted by all those who took photographs of themselves with Fader and declared their participation in that online community of those who dared to wish. Prince honors the thousands of participants who shared with Fader a belief that—even while mediated and broadcast—the singular moment of connection counts.

To see all the images search for *#wishingpelt* on Instagram or go to wishingpelt.com. To follow Sean Fader on Instagram, follow [@photoartstar](https://www.instagram.com/photoartstar). For more about Sean Fader visit seanfader.com.

For further information please contact the Sean Fader at sean@seanfader.com or at 917.374.8690. All images are subject to copyright. Sean Fader's approval must be granted prior to reproduction.

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Is this art? Selling other people's online pics

What would you do if somebody took your picture from social media, and sold it in a gallery as a work of art - keeping the profits for themselves?

Famous US "appropriation" artist Richard Prince has caused controversy after he sold works of art that used Instagram pictures from people's feeds without asking them for permission, or sharing the profits. He's faced criticism online but hasn't granted BBC Trending an interview on the subject.

Video journalist: Alvaro A. Ricciardelli

Magazine. Published 3 June 2015



Fantasy Versus Reality in the Online Dating World

By David Rosenberg

Signing up on 16 online dating sites and going out on 100 dates in a year might not be something you'd talk to your mother about, but it does provide fodder for an interesting photography project. Sean Fader did exactly that beginning in January 2010 and suddenly found himself enmeshed in a project in which he felt like an "emotional train wreck."

Fader didn't start out that way. "Sup?" began much like all of Fader's projects: from a fountain of ideas that constantly springs into his head, often out of the blue. His thought was to send a message to an attractive guy he found online. The two would meet at the person's apartment where, immediately upon arrival, Fader would get to work creating a portrait based on his preconceived ideas of who that person might be based on his online profile and previous communication. He would set up lights, rearrange furniture, and rummage through closets looking for the right clothing.



20twenty22, Dlist.com, July 23, 2010

20twenty22: "Straight acting" is a code for "self hatred." Educate yourselves.

You are a stellar guy Sean Fader. See you soon :)

You are a stellar guy and you bring out the best in me. It's so good to have you around.

Ok so I assume you got my text messages. This is my last one. You can text me and tell me I can expect a phone call from you today or never call me again. The choice is yours.



Evan Bolton Hill, Baltimore, July 24, 2011

The two would then go on a date, and whenever it finished (could be an hour, could be the next day), Fader and his date would then collaborate on a second portrait that showed another—perhaps more realistic—side of the person. In addition to the date each portrait was taken, he included the screen name of his date with the initial portrait and the date's real name and city tagged to the second photograph, along with bits of communication Fader felt was significant to their relationship. "I woke up one morning and thought it sounded like fun," Fader said about the project. "I thought no one would do it, but then I sent messages to three people, and they all agreed ... and then it was like tumbling down the rabbit hole."

Fader said he would never describe his dates as "subjects." "At worst they are sitters, but they are also collaborators," he said. "I said to them, 'I have a game to play. Do you want to play with me?' And they are the ones who wanted to play with me."

Of the 100 dates, 27 decided to play with game. Some wanted to meet with him first, whether out of anxiety over letting a stranger into their home or to simply to get a better handle about what was going to happen. But even a brief meeting before the first shot would destroy the mystery of the initial portrait. Fader said although there were wide parameters to what could happen after the opening photograph, he kept firm about the no-meeting-before-the-first-shot rule. "I couldn't meet with them to make them feel better," Fader said. "We had to jump in with two feet—both of us."

Although it started out as fun, Fader said combining his personal life, his dating life, and his art into one project quickly began to take a toll. In the past, when one part of his life might be not clicking, he would delve deeper into another part. "When it all clicked, it was the highest of highs," he said of the project. "But when the date was awkward, when the photographs were bad, and I felt bad about myself—everything was about an exterior approval—when someone rejects you, it can be ego-bruising, and when you're supposed to also be making work and when you fail at that, too ... it deeply changed me."

On top of all of that, having to constantly make the other person feel comfortable to create the work also began to weigh heavily on Fader. Although at first the goal of the project was to find someone who would make him want to stop the series, Fader eventually decided he needed to cut the project off after the one-year mark. "The work is about the 'other' thing. I had to live [through the dates] to get the other thing. That's why it happened, and it's some of the work I'm most proud of because I did whatever it took to make that happen, and that included a lot of personal sacrifices," Fader said.



Jnderhere, Dudesnude.com, July 15, 2010

underehere: artist
love looking at other guys
trying to gain weight if you have
any tips

WEDNESDY NEXT WEEK MY
PLACE 31SH?

sounds great

I made 2 back to back appoint-
ments to see my family psychic in
NJ on thursday at 4

Perfect can't wait

Me neither.

Hey gonna have a figure drawing
circle this Saturday. Xo

Shoot. Wish I could.



Jan, Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn July 15, 2010

Although the response to Fader's work was mostly positive, some people felt he was being a user or a lecherous photographer. But Fader said he was completely up front about the work, telling the dates, "I think you're hot and interesting and sexy, and I want to photograph you and have sex with you and have a date with you. How do you feel about that?"

Work from Fader's "I Want to Put You On" series will be part of the group show "Strange Bedfellows" at Columbia College A+D Gallery in Chicago beginning Jan. 16. Fader will also have a solo show at University of Illinois Springfield Visual Arts Department in Springfield, Ill., that opens on March 10.

—

David Rosenberg is the editor of Slate's Behold blog. He has worked as a photo editor for 15 years and is a tennis junkie.

Posted January 10, 2014

URL : http://www.slate.com/blogs/behold/2014/01/10/sean_fader_sup_examines_the_fantasy_and_reality_of_online_dating_photos.html

QUERYING THE NEW APPROPRIATION ART: IS THIS CYNICISM?

BY JOSEPH HENRY • REVIEWS • JANUARY 8, 2015



The Denny Gallery may have given themselves a curatorial headache with the title of their current exhibition, *Share This! Appropriation After Cynicism*. There are more tricky connections and presumptions in that moniker alone than in the web mantras and second-person addresses that typically sign most contemporary shows. To begin, the title suggests there was an appropriation art of cynicism. To most eyes, the “cynical” historical referent would be the founding generation of “appropriation art,” the New York Pictures Generation. The list of names in that canon could fill (and have already) their own museum wing: Cindy Sherman, Richard Prince, Laurie Simmons, Sherry Levine, Sarah Charlesworth, Louise Lawler, James Casebere, et al. One hopes Denny makes such a historical claim in their title with a degree of caution. To assemble these artists under an affective genre of cynicism would unfairly reduce the aesthetic particularities of their respective corpi and rob the political, usually feminist, component of its historical import.

Then what is the new, “sincere” appropriation and what was wrong with the old one? The clue lies in the exclamatory clause of the exhibition title: sharing. As the gallery press release clearly states, *Share This!* displays the work of “artists who appropriate the work of other artists.” If the Pictures Generation mined advertisements and Hollywood films for their source material, the new appropriators look to each other for content. This distinction seems to have become more calcified with age: despite the vanguard’s analyses of representation and commodity semiotics, they are distinctly *authorial* figures: for

a generation of artists concerned with overthrowing standard notions of creativity and originality, their practices are decidedly and institutionalized – and expensive. No one's confusing (or selling) a consumer-grade copy of a Cindy Sherman for an authenticated equivalent. The artists at Denny, then, have a different relationship to the market and ostensibly, to each other. Sharing is caring.

What exactly is so “post-cynical” about the work of *Share This!* remains an open question, a deficit reflective of the exhibition's multivalent if not entirely elaborated conceptual premise. Not only does little of the art on display offer a decidedly emotional reading, but the feelings they might generate hardly speak to the utopia of life after cynicism: the artists here, to the show's credit, steal, lie, mimic, and plagiarize in a social world more complicated than just smiles and helping hands. *Share This!* offers little resolution to these questions, which, let it be said, aren't entirely novel: in a 1982 essay titled “Appropriating Appropriation,” the critic considered most adjacent to appropriation art, Douglas Crimp, acknowledged that “appropriation, pastiche, quotation – these methods extend to virtually every aspect of our culture.”

What's new is the alacrity and ease with which appropriation can occur on a mass level. The obvious historical paradigm shift between late and high appropriation is the changed technologies: image duplication and distribution. Michael Mandiberg took this head-on in 2001, in the visually humble installation *After Sherrie Levine*, revived here for the Denny show. Visitors are invited to download a file of Levine's canonical *After Walker Evans*, already a copy of another photographer's work and then reproduce it from a nearby printer alongside a certificate of authenticity. The punch line is Crimp's essay title. Mandiberg's installation works as a historical precedent for *Share This!* and though its very historicity speaks witness to the pace of changing attitudes toward image copying, its premise now rings hollow. The infinite regress of appropriating appropriation is obvious, but what demands a more canny observation is how a print-out of a Levine is definitely not a Levine. The tautological relationship between original and copy, perhaps nascent in 2001, requires a more agile analyst of image economies in 2015 – I think of Hito Steyerl's investigative, shrewd film essays, for instance.

A slightly more contemporary, and thus savvier, dramatization of appropriation is the exhibition's only substantial nudge at its title's good feelings. For a performance last year at both PULSE and SPRING/BREAK art fairs, Sean Fader asked passers-by to whisper a wish into his ear, stroke his chest hair, and document the experience on Twitter, Instagram, etc with #wishingpelt, in reference to the artist's hirsuteness. Richard Prince, influential contemporary-artist-turned-professional-internet-troll, reproduced an image of Fader and a wishing participant for his infamous Gagosian exhibition of Instagram uploads. At Denny, Fader mounts the blown-up 'Gram with a new image captioned, “Our pictures are for each other: #wishingpelt #collectiveauthorship #artselfie,” the notion being that gallery visitors reduplicate the experience with a selfie next to a selfie.

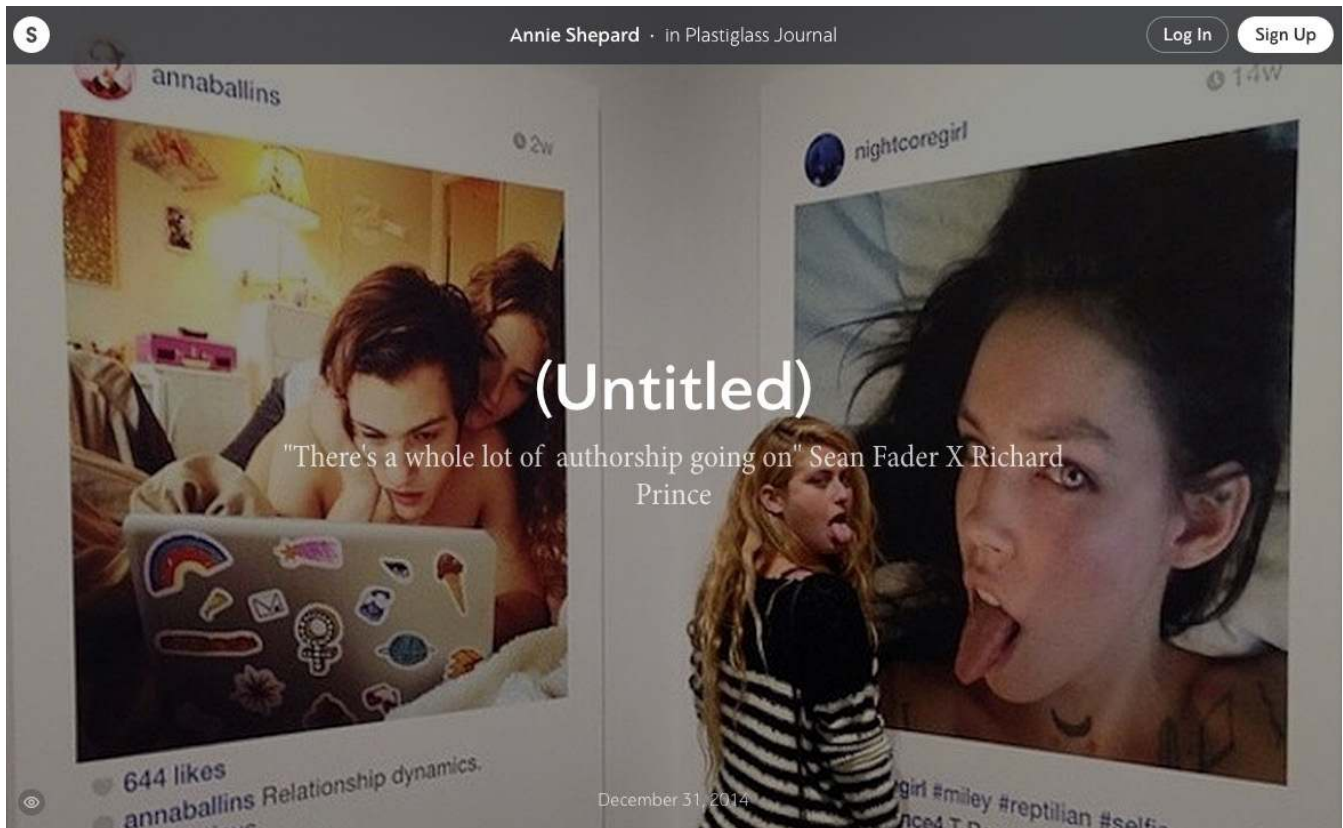
Fader, who's present at the gallery most days to assist with the auto-portraiture, enacts the sharing and caring of the exhibition's title: the optimistic desires of his original performance, based admittedly on a quirky kind of eroticism, necessarily requires its distribution online and on the gallery wall (a counterpoint here is the more enclosed intimacy of the late Adrian Howells's work). I'm not sure the hashtag is an instrument of collective authorship, as much as it is currency for a corporate-minded smart-phone app. But in topping up Prince's own appropriation of the performance, Fader shapes a dialogue on display value and contemporary strategies of (self)-promotion. His connections between the

sentimentality of the wish, the attention of the hashtag, and the creativity of the artist are fertile in their implications, if perhaps naïve in their politics.

But both Fader and Mandiberg teach a primary lesson of appropriation art; the narratives surrounding appropriation, who takes what from who for what, are often far more curious than the aesthetics of the object itself. Artists in *Share This!* who don't convey the complexities of their appropriative networks, like Matthew Craven and Jordan Tate, lose conceptual weight for a scrapbooked, blandly pastiche aesthetic.

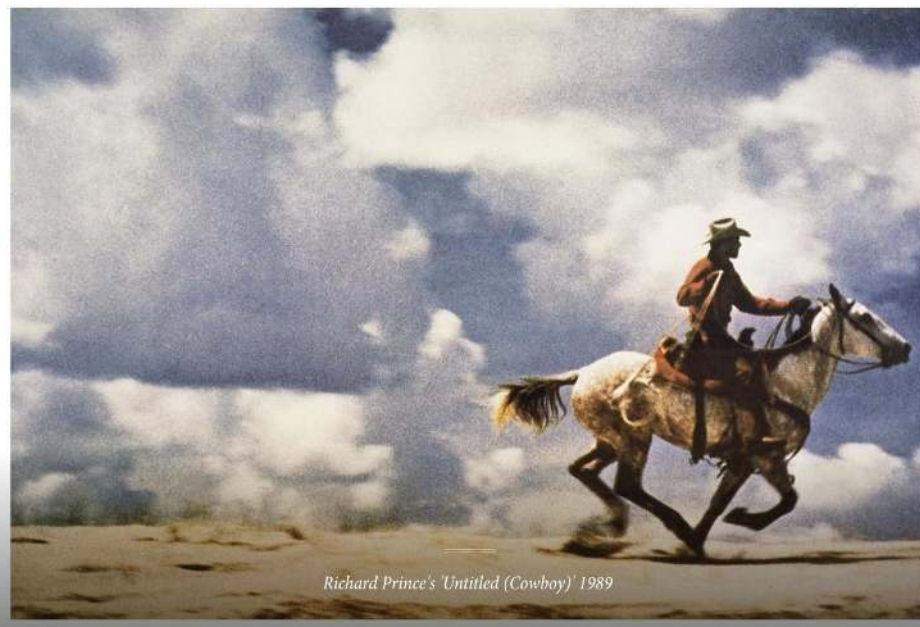
Crucial here, then, is a display strategy that performs the networked nature of appropriation art, something that makes me want to know the story behind the object (relegated to press material and a gallery attendant, in this show's case). Adam Parker Smith, for example, re-enacts, in part, *Thanks*, a 2013 exhibition at Lu Magnus wherein Smith assembled and sometimes sold works stolen from studio visits with other artists. At Denny, a sampling of the objects is presented with its components exchanged for others throughout the duration of the show. *Thanks* hits on the contemporary vogue for the archive no doubt, but it's an archive composed with emotional tones of betrayal, camaraderie, and collaboration. None of the artists objected to Smith's thievery and at Lu Magnus, he often sold their work for them. In a similar case in *Share This!*, Ana Teles riffed on objects made by colleagues under preparation for an MFA crit, copying and modifying them for her variations as she saw fit. Smith, and to a lesser extent, Teles, externalize the concatenation behind artistic influence that requires some plagiarism, some originality, and constant interaction.

What *Share This!* does best is illustrate a microcosm of the relationships between artists not yet at blue-chip-level incomes, especially in an environment as simultaneously hostile and supportive as New York. Many critiques of the neoliberal economy have identified "the artist" as the frightening paradigm of new kinds of labor – underpaid, stripped of benefits, and supported by the attritional pursuit of one short-lived opportunity after another. Taking stock of the networks between working artists, then, is a crucial task. The historicist examples of appropriation art in the exhibition differ little in tactic from their precedents thirty years ago (like artists in *Share This!* quoting from antiquity or neoclassical sculpture). Yet Denny's exhibition puts together a useful micro-history of new appropriation art that highlights myriad responses to current social exigencies. What demands emphasis is not the sharing and sincerity among acts of appropriation, but the sharing and sincerity among appropriators themselves.



Picasso famously said “Good artists copy, great artists steal.”

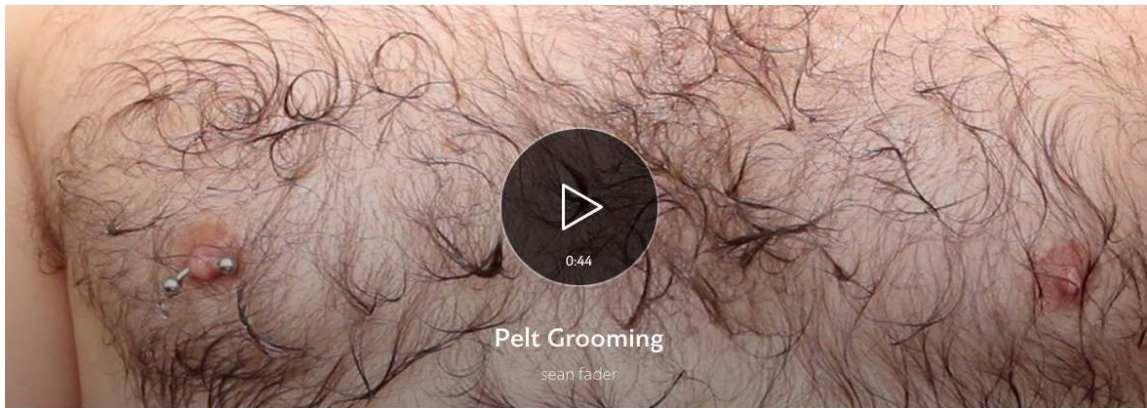
But in the age of the re-tweet and the re-gram, is sharing the same as stealing? How has social media changed our sense of authorship? Sean Fader and Richard Prince’s tiff over an Instagram photo illuminates new ways of thinking about these issues.



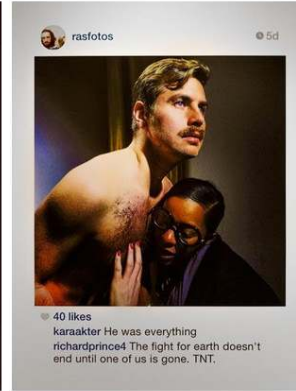
#Wishingpelt

It all began with a wishing pelt and a selfie. And by wishing pelt, I mean Sean Fader’s chest hair.

For his piece, *#wishingpelt*, Sean invited viewers to whisper a wish into his ear, run their hands through his chest hair, and photograph themselves doing it. To seal their wish they had to post the image on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, or Tumblr, with *#wishingpelt*. On the first day, *@rasfotos* posted a pic to instagram with *#wishingpelt*, beginning an art world avalanche.



#Wishingpelt at work



The post that started it all

#NewPortraits

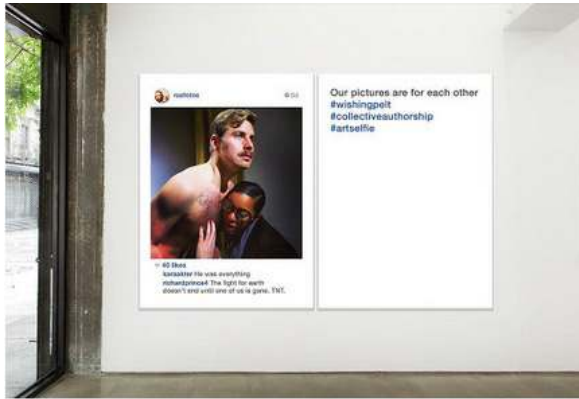
Richard Prince or @RichardPrince4 (read more on the story of Richard Prince's Instagram here) saw the photo, and commented on it. That is normally where this story would have ended, but it keeps going: Richard Prince then made a monumental print of Fader's image from @rasfotos's feed on canvas and put in his *New Portraits* exhibition at Gagosian Gallery.

After learning that Richard Prince had claimed #wishingpelt as his own work (and profited from it), Sean set out to re-appropriate the appropriated piece. Sean sent out a press release that invited viewers to see his work "at Gagosian, in a show organized by Richard Prince." He put Gagosian on his resume, sent his press release out into the world and was "done with it." But then Hyperallergic picked up the story and the article went viral.



#ArtSelfie

For his current show at Denny Gallery, Sean used Richard Prince's print from the *New Portraits* show and added a second panel to create a diptych. Printed on the second panel is "Our Pictures Are For Each Other #wishingpelt #collectiveauthorship #artselfie." This last hashtag explicitly invites viewers to photograph themselves with the piece, thus sending the image back to Instagram



'Backdrop for the rebirth of the collective author' now on view at Denny Gallery



#artselfie



#artselfie

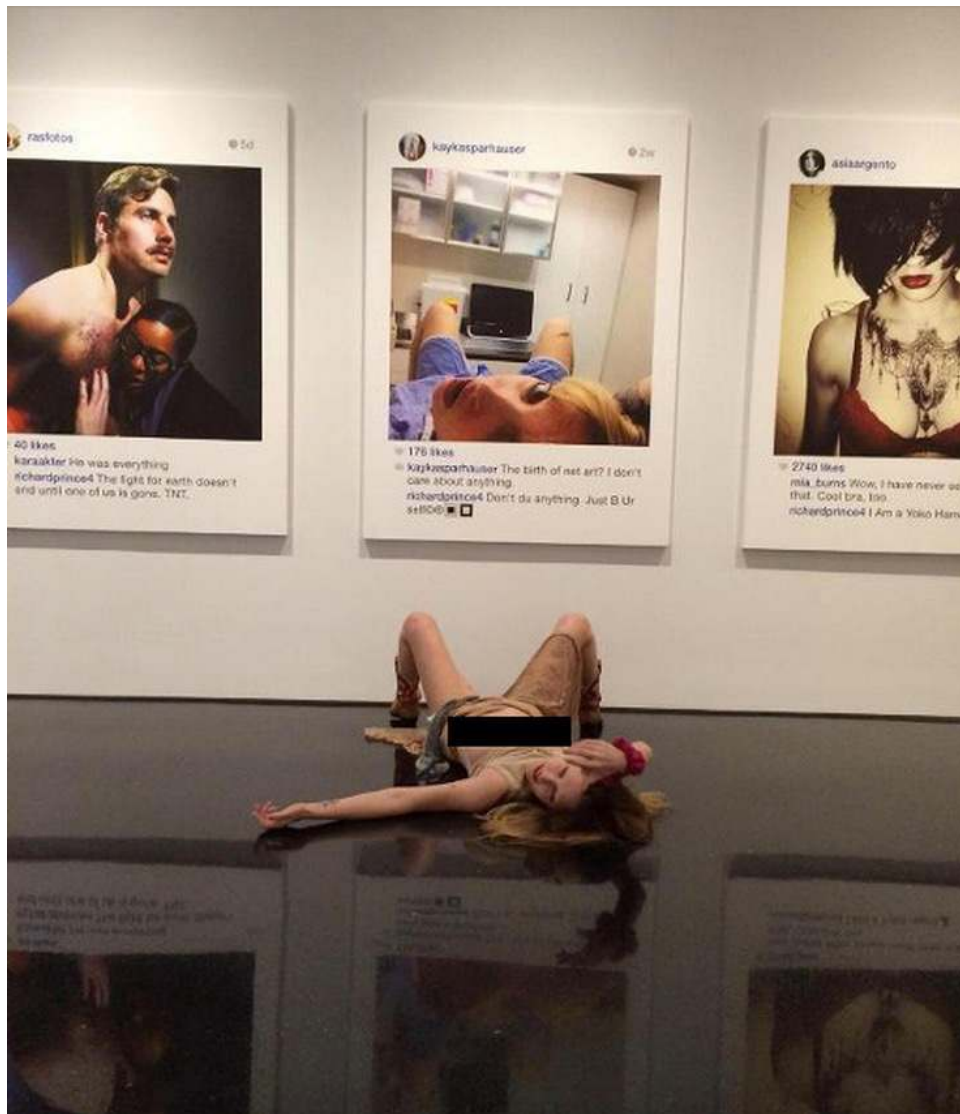


#artselfie

#CollectiveAuthorship

So who deserves the credit for this body of work?

- Is it Instagram, for facilitating the sharing of photographs?
- Is it Sean, for creating *#wishingpelt*?
- Is it the *#wishingpelt* visitor who was in the photo?
- Is it @rasfotos for sharing the photo with his followers?
- Is it Richard Prince for creating a physical piece and lending it his fame?
- Is it Hyperallergic for publicizing Sean's work?
- Is it Sean for re-appropriating the work?
- Is it the viewers for taking and sharing *#artselfies* at Denny Gallery?



Instagram re-enactment

#Conclusion

This piece rejects the idea that *the author is dead*. Instead, its title, *Backdrop for the rebirth of the collective author* (“*There’s a Whole Lot of Authorship Going On.*” - Richard Prince) declares the rise of collective authorship. It’s not about who made what, but about engaging with a larger

Written by Annie Shepard

Sean Fader’s piece “Backdrop for the Rebirth of the Collective Author (“There’s a Whole Lot of Authorship Going On.” - Richard Prince)” is now on view through January 25th as part of Denny Gallery’s “Share This! Appropriation After Cynicism”. The show explores work that has been appropriated from others.



PICTURE YOURSELF

Selfies, Cellphones, and the Digital Age

February 2–April 10, 2016

THE COLLEGE OF WOOSTER ART MUSEUM

Sussel Gallery
Burton D. Morgan Gallery

Daniel Arnold
Sean Fader
Luis Flores
Rollin Leonard
Farideh Sakhaeifar
Andy Warhol

The six artists in PICTURE YOURSELF are concerned with constructions of the self in an era of mass consumerism, rapid technological advancements, urban chaos, vast inequalities, online dating, shifting norms in gender and sexuality, and communities beyond the borders of our physical worlds. Their works ask us to rethink selfies as something other than vanity projects for public presentation. Instead, created with refracted, distorted, and manipulated technologies, these artists shed light on how we perform the self in and for a multivariable world.

Andy Warhol's iconic self-portraits (1963–1986) are prescient images of self performance that play with notions of gender, sexuality, and youth. Warhol's unapologetic expressions are meant to push against our ideas of propriety—whether in lipstick or a fright wig—and reconsider our ideas of what is or is not acceptable or respectable. Like Warhol who casts himself as the subject for analysis, Luis Flores examines the relationship between masculinity and performance in the knitted, life size version of himself angling an iPhone toward his face. On the wall in front of the figure, a red neon sign reads, *Whatever You Want It To Be*, literally illuminating the desire to satiate an audience.

While Warhol and Flores foreground the masculine self, Daniel Arnold and Farideh Sakhaeifar appear in their photographs subtly, almost ghostly; the self is present in the faces of strangers. Shot on an iPhone, Arnold's subway photos capture subway riders immersed in their own worlds. He appears only as shadow or reflection against tired faces or wide-eyed children. Sakhaeifar's *Workers Are Taking Photographs* is a series dedicated to Iranian men working in construction sites or grocery, wood, and metal shops. She enters these male-dominated spaces and asks them to photograph themselves by saying, "hold the cable and release when ready." Behind them, feminine hands hold a white backdrop. Like Arnold, Sakhaeifar controls the image but only appears fleetingly, seeking instead to illuminate the other.

Rollin Leonard and Sean Fader also distort the self, but concentrate on technological manipulations and socially engaged digital spaces to do so. In Leonard's *Spinning Wheel of Death* he photographs his face through water droplets created by spraying a hydrophobic liquid on glass. We encounter his face not as a whole but as broken up, distorted, and reshaped in each drop of water. Fader examines the self-generated depictions of men on online dating and hook-up sites. In *Sup?*, which takes its title from an informal greeting, Fader juxtaposes two images of the same man. The first picture is a reflection of who Fader imagines them to be from their online profile, the other is taken after they have met. There are striking differences between Fader's fantasies and how the men see themselves.

In deftly manipulating technology and cultural norms, the artists in PICTURE YOURSELF highlight how self-representations are acute responses to the world we inhabit as well as testaments to versions of ourselves that we look away from, closet, or seek greater intimacy with. Together, these artists examine how we can see each other more clearly by obscuring, refracting, and reflecting a version of ourselves that betrays who we imagine and project ourselves to be.

Leah Mirakhor
Assistant Professor, Department of English
The College of Wooster

PICTURE YOURSELF: Selfies, Cellphones, and the Digital Age is organized by The College of Wooster Art Museum (CWAM), and co-curated by Leah Mirakhor and Kitty McManus Zurko, CWAM Director/Curator.

Cover: Rollin Leonard
Spinning Wheel of Death, 2015–2016
Dye-sublimation print on aluminum
60 h x 40 w (inches)
Courtesy of the artist

Sean Fader (American, b. 1979)

Sup? is a lived performance piece. For 365 days I trolled online dating and hookup websites looking for men who interested me. I looked at their profile and pre-visualized a portrait of who I thought they might be. Then I contacted them and asked them out on a date. The date consisted of arriving at their home (never having met them in person) pouring a glass of wine, and photographing them immediately. I directed them to enact my preconceived ideas of who I imagined them to be. After our shoot, I took them out on a date. This allowed me to consider how I might alter my first portrait of them. After our date, we collaborated on creating an image that we both felt represented them.

—Sean Fader

A conceptual artist working in photography, performance, social practice, and the Internet, Sean Fader explores projection, artifice, and self-reflexivity in his work. In his 2010 project *Sup?*, Fader investigates perceptions about self-curated online depictions and profiles.

Combining text and image, Fader's *Patryk* and *Evan* are time-based documents; each begins with the text conversation in the middle panel. The chronology then moves to the left of each triptych, and reflects what Fader imagined about that person after reading their dating profile. Taken by Fader as soon as he meets them, both Patryk and Evan are posed bare chested, seated, and are photographed from the front. The photographs on the right are shot post-date, and again, there is a similarity in how Fader sets up these portraits. Post-date Patryk and Evan are now clothed, lying down, and are viewed from above.

While the photographs should ostensibly be the provocative aspect of *Sup?* (other subjects in this series are posed quite differently), it is the text that reveals the reality of meet ups in digital social spaces. Notably, Patryk and Fader's text exchanges are both explanatory and solicitous, while Fader's exchange with Evan is edgier and has the ring of communication miscues with comments such as, " 'straight acting' is a code for 'self hatred'," and "This is my last one. You can text me and tell me I can expect a phone call . . . or never call me again." An abbreviation of the urban slang "Wassup?," Fader's *Sup?* explores codes and signifiers that abound on most dating sites. He intentionally uses these sites as a way to consider what happens in spaces designed for online self-representation.

—KMZ

About the Artist

Sean Fader received an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, an MA from the Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, and BFA from the New School, New York. His work has been exhibited throughout the United States and internationally in Dubai, Canada, Mexico and England. Fader was named a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellow in 2013 and a Blade of Grass Fellow in 2012–2013. He received the Magenta Foundation's Flash Forward Award for Emerging Photographers in 2012. Select exhibitions include: *Share This! Appropriation after Cynicism*, Denny Gallery, New York (2014–2015); *Sup?*, a solo exhibition at the University of Illinois in Springfield (2014); *#wishingpelt*, performed at Defibrillator Gallery, Chicago, Spring Break Art Show and Pulse Art Fair, New York (2013–2014) ; and *WhiteBoys*, curated by Hank Willis Thomas and Natasha L. Logan, Haverford College (2013). Fader has received press coverage in *MOMUS*, *Hyperallergic*, *Art F City*, *Huffington Post*, and *Slate.com*. Fader lives and works in Brooklyn, New York, and is represented by Denny Gallery, New York.



Sean Fader

Left:

20Twenty22, Dlist.com, July 23, 2010

Archival inkjet prints

30 h x 39 1/2 w, overall (inches)

Courtesy of the artist and Denny Gallery, New York

Right:

Evan, Bolton Hill, Baltimore, July 24th, 2010

Archival inkjet prints

30 h x 39 1/2 w, overall (inches)

Courtesy of the artist and Denny Gallery, New York

Art gallery's new exhibit addresses online dating

ALEX COOP / ESTEVAN MERCURY

JANUARY 20, 2015 01:13 PM



The photo on the left is how New York based artist Sean Fader imagined his date would look like, while the photo on the right is the real portrayal.

It's no surprise that online dating is a form of interaction used by millions across the globe, but several artists' in depth look at the world of digital dating opened many eyes at the Estevan Art Gallery and Museum.

On Jan. 15, the opening of I'll show you mine, if you show me yours: Love in the modern age in Gallery 1 was accompanied by the work of three artists who each brought a unique perspective to a topic that is often shrouded in misconception.

"It used to be a very taboo thing, but today, it's very much the norm," said Amber Andersen, curator of I'll show you mine and director of the EAGM, before the exhibit's official opening.

She noted the exhibit was an excellent opportunity for everyone, both who are familiar with online dating and those who aren't, to enter a "safe" environment and gain a fresh understanding of the interactions taking place at the tips of millions of fingers.

Unique pieces dotted the gallery, each approaching the topic of the night from a variety of different angles. Whether it was a mirror with an attached transcript of those conversations or paintings of hopeful animals looking to fulfill their online desires, there was no shortage of creativity.

"People seem to be very comfortable with animal representations," Andersen said about Belinda Harrow's work.

Harrow is known for using animals in her work. “She has these two opposing ideals in her pieces ... because people have different reasons for being on there.”

Sean Fader, an artist based out of New York, spoke with the Mercury after the exhibit and talked about his work in the gallery, a project, he said, which took him over a year to complete.

“It was one of the most intense things I’ve ever done,” he said.

Between Jan. 2010 and Jan. 2011, Fader went on 100 first dates, all of which stemmed from countless interactions on dating websites.

He would try and create an image of the person on the other end of the conversation based off their interactions. Then, upon their first meeting, he would photograph his date who would be dressed as Fader initially perceived them. A second photo was later taken, portraying the real person Fader was dating. In the gallery, the first photo concept was on the left, the second on the right. A short transcript of some of their interactions is placed in the middle between each photo.

“Working on this changed me in an extreme way,” Fader said, admitting it was an incredible experience, while acknowledging the difficulties that came with his personal life and his work becoming a single entity, a consequence he initially underestimated.

“Going on 100 dates in one year is a psychological minefield,” he said. “By the end I lost 15 lbs., I went from a brunette to bleach platinum blonde, I definitely developed an eating disorder at a certain point, and all of my generated self-worth was based on external approval,” he said. “When a date or a photo was terrible, I felt like a giant failure and I took all of it on at the same time. But then if the photo, the date and the sex were great and my date wanted to see me again, it was a high I never experienced in my life.”

Fader said a popular misconception surrounding online dating is the end result of an encounter, which he said many believe is a long-term relationship or marriage.

“What’s wrong with meeting different people and gaining different experiences? So what if your date is a disaster, you’ll have a story to tell later on,” he said.

Fader and artist Shannon Yashcheshen spoke with visitors at the EAGM through an online conference call and talked about their work and online dating.

This photographer explores the relationship between online and real-life identities with his series of photographs, Sup?

By Will Pulos



(Sean Fader)

If you've ever met up with someone you've talked to online, you know that reality can often be quite different than expectations. That tricky relationship between online personas and real-life identities was what inspired photographer Sean Fader's most recent project, Sup?

The series of photographs capture men that Fader went on dates with through sites like Dlist.com, and apps such as Manhunt and Grindr. One of the images of each guy is styled in the way Fader expected his hookup to look based on their online profile, while the second captures something closer to their actual personality.

"I began thinking about how we project our identities into digital spaces," he says. Fader had been doing a lot of online dating, and the idea for the series stuck with him. "I thought no one would ever say yes, but I sent out three messages proposing the date/shoot to boys I was interested in," he explains. "Every one of them said yes. So I thought, 'well now I have to do this.'"

Choose one in each grouping:

Dating Too: **Scruff**, **OKCupid**, Grindr, Manhunt
Scruff and OKCupid. I like them both but sometimes it depends on my location.

Go-To First Text: Hey, Hey What's Up?, What's Going On?, **Sup?**
Sup? Of course. But honestly I cater to what the boy is giving off. I got very good at reading profiles by the time I finished Sup?

Short Answer:

Who's before and after photos changed the most?

You haven't seen him yet. I have only released 6 of the 27 boys.

What most surprised you about doing this?

How much it changed me in a really deep way.

Were that many guys reluctant to have their photos taken?

Loads. Many of them wanted to meet first or talk on the phone. I knew that just hearing their voice would change everything for me. I only photographed boys who trusted me enough to let me walk into their apartment, costume them, restage their apartment and photograph them within the first 20 minutes of meeting them.

Did you meet anyone who was about the same before and after?

Yup. I got real good at reading profiles

What's your go-to drink?

Rye Manhattan

What photographers inspire you?

Taryn Simon, Hank Willis Thomas, Felix González-Torres, early Cindy Sherman

What were you trying to get people to think about with this project?

A bunch of things. How we project our identities into digital spaces, how the digital spaces we take part in often dictate who we believe we are, how we see others and how we understand ourselves being seen, what options we have when picking identities, who gets to decide what the options are, what it means to make a photograph in the age of digital objectification, what intimacy can look like, the search for our "other half," and what happens when you use your own life to learn and grow.

Are you still in contact with any of the guys featured?

Yup, lots of them. In fact, I'm having coffee with one of them this week.

What are current trend you wish would die?

Internalized homo and transphobia within the gay community

What's in your fridge?

Loads of vegetables. I make fresh cold pressed green juice every morning.

What's one of your favorite quotes?

I always tell my students two things. "If your parents like your work you're doing something wrong" and "Go big or go home"

What's your favorite bar in New York?

The Narrows in Bushwick or Beverly's on the Lower East Side. But... you will find me most frequently at Metropolitan Bar for it's cheap drinks and even cheaper men.

What's your favorite clothing item you own?

My jean fanny pack and my gold Michael Kors shoes.

**Hair performs gender,
but by removing it from
its representational role
*‘how to do things with
hair’* remakes male body
hair as a technology of
the body charged with
transformative potential.**

How to do things with hair

PREVIEW 26 OCTOBER 2013

27 OCT - 2 DEC 2013

THEJAMJAR

An artist's experience of their own body shapes their encounter with the world, and when this mediated experience is transformed into a work of art it demands that the viewer look carefully at their own social encounters

In 2011 I sat in **Raed Yassin's** studio and stared at him staring back at me through a stalk of broccoli. I felt implicated, uneasy, and I couldn't avoid connecting the contours of vegetables and hairy bare skin to artistic critiques of representations of 'the exotic other'. By positioning these fruits and vegetables as banal accessories Yassin's hairy body can coopt their successful assimilation into global cuisine. Raed Yassin's self-portraits do not call for a paradigm shift in representational practices, and instead offer a methodology rooted in quiet observation.

Monira Al Qadiri extends her narcissistic association with masculinity and hair to her first sculptural work, a white plaster cast replica of her face wrapped in a long sheep's wool beard. Al Qadiri crafts a kind of cosmology of the beard throughout her work as she inserts her bearded visage into spiritual iconography. *Dreamer* has a particularly austere and reverential aesthetic that reinforces the connection between portraiture and symbols of power and authority.

A large pile of dismembered black cotton cords sit amidst a flurry of coloured cotton thread in the middle of **Dalal Aní's** studio. Her source material is the '*agal*', a mass-produced accessory that holds a Gulf Arab *ghutra* in place. The artist unbraids this tight cord and recontextualizes it as a garment worn during a distinctly feminine threading to draw attention to the alienating qualities possessed by technologies of hair.

Sean Fader stood bare-chested on a platform at dfb18r Gallery in Chicago as members of a public audience rubbed their fingers along his chest hair, made a wish, and captured their encounter on their smartphones. The photographs in *#wishingpelt* track the fluid movement between our every day lives and our online reality to model a way to sustain intimacy and privacy in a digital age where personal information and communication is always public. While the image of the person's encounter with the pelt will always circulate online, via *#wishingpelt*, their wishes are kept secret. *#wishingpelt* indexes a video installation *Pelt*, a two minute long chest hair grooming session that has been lengthened to a thirty minute video to underscore the transcendent quality of ritual self-care.

Rokni and Ramin Haerizadeh's collaborative work *Recovering* typifies the spirit of *How to do things with hair*, and lends it a playful air as a small flower perches precariously on a mound of chest hair. This triptych is an invitation to the viewer to engage in a poetic encounter with an other world.

Raised in Ridgewood, NJ, **Sean Fader** spent most of his life as an actor, acting, singing, and dancing since he was five years old. After attending Northwestern and The New School University he performed on several national tours with stops both on and off-Broadway. Sean then earned his MA from the Maryland Institute College of Art, where he was the recipient of the Murthy Digital Arts Award and his MFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He was named Fringe Underground Magazine's "Art Star" in their Fall 2005 issue. In 2007 his work was featured in First Look II: the best of the new artists in the U.S. at the Hudson Valley Center For Contemporary Art. He was also awarded the Critics Choice Award in the Professional category at the 11th Annual Chicago Art Open. Sean was the recipient of "3rd Ward's Fall Solo Show" prize and was named as one of the winners of the Magenta Foundation's Flash Forward Award for Emerging Photographers. Recently Sean was named A Blade of Grass Fellow for 2012-2013. Sean resides in New York City.

#wishingpelt instagram
image 39,
Archival Pigment Print
60 x 60 cm
Edition of 3 + 2AP
2013
Courtesy of the Artist





#wishingpelt instagram
image 83,
 Archival Pigment Print
 60 x 60 cm
 Edition of 3 + 2AP
 2013
 Courtesy of the Artist



#wishingpelt instagram
image 42,
 Archival Pigment Print
 60 x 60 cm
 Edition of 3 + 2AP
 2013
 Courtesy of the Artist



Art

Area

Al Quoz (42)
 Barsha (7)
 Bur Dubai (15)
 Deira (7)
 DIFC (13)
 Downtown Dubai (2)
 Dubai Marina (4)
 Dubai Media City (2)
 Emirates Hills (1)
 Festival City (2)
 Jumeirah (12)
 Jumeirah Lakes
 Towers (3)
 Karama (1)
 Knowledge Village (1)
 Nad Al Sheba (3)
 Others (15)
 Oud Metha (1)
 Rashidiya (2)
 Satwa (2)
 Sheikh Zayed Road (5)
 TECOM (1)
 Umm Suqeim (3)

Give us [feedback](#)

An art show about body hair in Dubai

Barrak Alzaid explains the rationale behind his unique show at thejamjar [Discuss this article](#)



Picture 1 of 2

Barrak Alzaid explains the rationale behind his unique show devoted to body hair.

Featuring six artists from across the world, curator Barrak Alzaid's exhibition at thejamjar in Al Quoz uses body hair to explore narratives ranging from masculine narcissism and feminine beauty to people's sense of self and their cultural beliefs.

The artists take a number of [different](#) approaches, from an unsettling [video](#) of a hirsute gent from New York blow-drying his chest hair, to a disturbing installation of sheep's hair surrounding a deathly cast of a woman's face via eye-catching prints.

For Dubai, the exhibition is both liberating and challenging – it's almost impossible not to have some reaction. Yet shocking an audience is the opposite of what Alzaid is actually looking to achieve. When asked what he was aiming for with his show, he says: 'I didn't want people to feel that I was confronting or challenging their perceptions of what they thought was acceptable.'

For starters, Sean Fader's [video](#) installation is intimate and unusual. Alzaid describes how his work bridges the 'boundaries between social experiences online and social experiences in the real world.'

This is particularly apparent in the artist's prints on gelatine paper.

The project is called Pelts, and involved an experiment where the public was invited to rub Fader's chest and make a wish. The participants were photographed and the images became the basis for the art.

Raed Yassin's art involves classically posed portraits of the artist alongside vegetables. The idea came from Yassin's residency in Amsterdam, where he became acutely aware of his Arabic cultural identity in contrast to the Dutch population in the city. This was opposite to what he found with food in the city, grown and sourced from across the globe.

Alzaid believes that, far from being a critique of segregation or an attempt to highlight the hypocrisy of social prejudice in relation to individuals' relationship with foods, it's an observation: 'The story of food is inextricably linked to the formation of ourselves and our understanding of culture. He's just bringing it into a contemporary context.'

Dalal Ani's work is possibly the most eccentric aspect of this show. The



Christmas in Dubai

Meal deals, festive features and Christmas cover version vids

artist focussed her work on the agal (the black cord which holds the ghutra or headdress in place). Once unravelled, the black cords reveal colourful threads, which are embedded inside. Ani then used the materials to create a chaotic outfit, which she wore on the streets of New York. She happened to stumble across a threading shop and the results of this unusual juxtaposition between Hani's unconventional attire and her complicity in a beauty ritual that many women experience were photographed.

In comparison to the often addressed subject of the Islamic veil in art, the agal is not something which is in our moral consciousness. Despite the potentially polarising subject matter, Alzaid is measured, quipping: 'I don't have an opinion one way or another but I think studying the phenomenon is interesting.'

Other artworks include photographs of the bodies of Dubai-based brothers Rokni and Ramin Haerizadeh. The colourful duo are pictured with delicate flowers against their torsos, creating a contrast between the beauty of the flower against the human imperfections of their bodies. Cleverly, the pictures were photographed in the frame of the computer screens on which they were projected, raising pertinent questions about our relationship with social media and the increasingly interchangeable roles of our virtual and actual experiences.

The final, centre piece of the exhibition is perhaps the most intriguing. The artist, Monira Al Qadiri, focuses on the topic of male narcissism and the symbols of this authority, in this particular case, the male beard. The installation, which sits inside a glass case, contains slightly disturbing-looking hair, which transpires to be sheep hair, surrounding a dental alginate, or mould, which Monira made of her face. Alzaid delights in telling me a particular reaction to the piece. 'Someone was looking at it on the opening night and said, "that's disgusting". Monira, the artist, who was standing on the other side at the time, responded: "Yeah, this is my work." The woman apologised and Monira said: "No – I like that."

Intrigued about the reaction that such an overtly candid exhibition would elicit from others here in Dubai, Alzaid is optimistic and upbeat: 'People are so excited to be seeing something that's so different.'

With the contributing artists coming from across the world, it's an eclectic and strangely cohesive exhibition. Yet, Alzaid sees things differently. He doesn't want the nationality of the participants to shape people's perception of what they're seeing: 'I want the work to speak for itself.' Having seen the show, I find it hard to disagree.

The Lowdown

Exhibition: 'How to Do Things With Hair' runs until December 2 at thejamjar, Al Quoz (04 341 1367).

Artists: Raed Yassin, Monira Al Qadiri, Dalal Ani, Sean Fader, Rokni and Ramin Haerizadeh

Price of works: On request

By Peter Feely

Time Out Dubai, 12 November 2013

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December 24 2013 | Last updated 11 minutes ago

wereview

IN THIS WEEK'S ISSUE

Plucking the many strands of identity

Photos, videos and installations that use body hair as a tool to explore sociopolitical issues, including status, race, culture, religion and gender

By Jyoti Kalsi Special to Weekend Review

Published: 21:30 November 21, 2013

GULF NEWS



Image Credit:
Threading 1, by Dalal Ani

The title of the exhibition, “How to Do Things with Hair”,

is inspired by J.L. Austin's paradigm-shifting work "How to Do Things with Words", where the British philosopher of language argued that we use words not only to assert something that could be true or false, but also to "do" things.

Curator Barrak Al Zaid has applied this philosophy to the way we look at hair, particularly male body hair, by bringing together works by various artists who use hair in their work — not only as a symbolic representation, but by actually "doing" things with it.

The show features photographic art, videos, and installations by male and female artists of different nationalities. The playful yet thought-provoking works explore various sociopolitical issues, and challenge viewers to think about their perceptions of self and the relationship between their private and public identities in an increasingly interconnected world.

Al Zaid, who is from Kuwait, is the director at Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde. He was among the participants of Campus Art Dubai 1.0, and has developed the exhibition as part of this initiative launched by Art Dubai in partnership with Dubai Culture.

"Although there is an unabashed objectification of the male body in some of these artworks, the subject of this show is not the body but hair, which shapes our social encounters through its association with status, race, culture, religion and gender. Each of these artists is dealing with their personal encounter with the world and personal understanding of themselves vis-à-vis male body hair and the technologies related to it. What makes the show more interesting is the interaction and dialogue between the different artworks and artistic perspectives," Al Zaid says.

The six artists in the show have different approaches. New York-based Kuwaiti artist Dalal Ani uses the “agal” — the cord that holds in place the “ghutra” or traditional headdress of Arab men in the gulf region. She deconstructs and dismantles this symbol of masculinity by unravelling the tightly braided cord and recontextualises it by creating a hairy-looking bodysuit for herself from the threads.

In a sharp reversal of the tradition of women weaving these “agals”, her photograph, named “Women’s Circle”, depicts a group of women engaged in the difficult process of unravelling this men’s accessory. And pictures of the artist, dressed in her strange bodysuit, getting her eyebrows threaded in a New York salon draw attention to the differences in male and female attitudes to hair and technologies of hair.

In contrast with Ani’s pictures of a distinctly feminine grooming ritual, Sean Fader’s video, “Pelt”, shows him blow-drying his chest hair. The New York-based American artist has deliberately extended the two-minute grooming session to a 30-minute video taking narcissistic self-care and objectification to a whole new level.

The video is accompanied by Instagram images from his recent performance in a gallery in Chicago, titled “Wishing Pelt”, where he invited people to touch his hairy chest and make a silent wish. The artist encouraged people to post pictures of their interaction with him on social media, while keeping their wishes secret.

The pictures thus explore our interactions in the online social realm and social encounters in the real world, and the challenges of maintaining privacy and intimacy in this digital age.

The beard is a recurring element in Beirut-based Kuwaiti artist Monira Al Qaderi's work. Her sculptural work in this show, called "Dreamer", features a plaster cast replica of her face wrapped in a long sheep-wool beard. Enclosed in a cabinet like an object in a museum, the surreal piece hovers between the real world and an alternate reality, commenting on questions of male power and authority and the exclusion and suppression of women in a male-dominated society.

Raed Yassin also addresses issues of alienation in his witty series of "Self portraits with foreign fruits and vegetables". During a residency in Amsterdam, the Lebanese artist became acutely aware of how different he looked from the typical tall, fair-skinned, blue-eyed Dutch men. By posing with exotic fruits and vegetables found in Dutch supermarkets and kitchens, he positions himself as an exoticised foreign body, hoping to be as accepted and assimilated in a foreign culture as these foreign foods.

The show also includes a photographic triptych, "Recovering", by Dubai-based Iranian artists Rokni and Ramin Haerizadeh. The playful pictures of flowers placed on their hairy chests juxtapose a typical symbol of beauty and fragility with a male body that is not a prototype of ideal beauty, while also commenting on modern digital technologies and the circulation of images in the digital realm.

"This show is about understanding the broader conversations happening around identity representation. I wanted to move away from the stereotypical symbol of the veil as oppressive or liberating technology of the body to look at other ways in which men and women are thinking about their body," Al Zaid says.

The exhibition will run at The Jam Jar, Al Quoz, until December 2.

Jyoti Kalsi is an arts enthusiast based in Dubai.

Emotional Art

Dubai-based Canadian artist Michelle Angela Jenkins is exhibiting her latest work in the show “From Me to You”. The artist has poured out her feelings in her abstract paintings through an explosion of colours.

“My work is not abstract — it is ‘emotional art’. It comes from within and truthfully expresses my feelings,” Jenkins says. “My mother is from Barbados and the bright colours in my work are inspired by the landscape, beaches, and people there. In Canada, I grew up in a home full of love, life, music and colour, and that is reflected in my work. I hope my paintings help viewers to escape from their daily worries and to just enjoy the beauty and splendour of art,” she added.

“From Me to You” will run at the Latitude Lounge at Le Méridien Mina Seyahi Beach Resort & Marina until December 1.

Sean Fader Explores The Art Of Online Dating In 'Sup?'

By Priscilla Frank

If you've ever taken your love life to the digital sphere, you're familiar with the stressful, agonizing and self-esteem destroying task that is creating your dating profile.

From choosing accurate yet complimentary photos to summing up your charm, wit and brains in a succinct bio, the challenge at hand is an arduous one. In an exhibition entitled "Sup?", Sean Fader explores the complexities of online representations, mixed desires and the occasional breaches of truth:



Drew Kiddo, OkCupid.com, April 13, 2010

Drewkiddo: when i die and go to heaven, i hope to find they've held a seat at the luncheon for me between Katharine Hepburn and Oscar Wylde. we'll be dressed to the nines and fit to chat about breaking conventions without hesitation.

you seem fascinating, also, this is my attempt at striking up conversation.

Don't worry about implying.. i am amazing, talented and charming.. you won't be able to keep your hands off me..

Yes, still have the manfriend. He's great and i feel really lucky. So there's that. :) What about YOU? Anything new and exciting on the lurve front? Let's plan something soon. Would love to see your face.

Let's grab coffee or a drink. Would love to catch up.



Drew, Hell's Kitchen, NYC, April 13, 2011

Fader spent a full year exploring 16 online dating sites, creating photographic portraits that illustrate the space between fantasy and reality when it comes to putting yourself on the internet.

Finding men who piqued his interest and visualized his expectations as judged by their profiles, Fader invited each of his subjects on a date, which always began by pouring a glass of wine and snapping a photograph. The two then got to know each other's IRL selves, talked and collaborated on a portrait that accurately represented their online and offline personas.

Each artwork contains a profile picture, Fader's photograph, and snippets of language exchanged in the process, creating a contemporary portrait of the search for love.

Fader's "Sup?" is part of "The Participants" exhibition, showing at Denny Gallery through July 21, 2013. See more of the series at <http://www.seanfader.com/sup> (warning: some photos contain graphic nudity).

Posted July 15, 2013

URL : http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/15/sean-fader_n_3586335.html

Sean Fader's SUP?: High on Style, Low on Substance

by MARC BOUCAI on APRIL 28, 2014 · [REVIEWS](#)



20twenty22. Dist.com, July 23, 2010

20twenty22: "Straight acting" is a code for "self hatred." Educate yourselves.

You are a stellar guy Sean Fader. See you soon :)

You are a stellar guy and you bring out the best in me. It's so good to have you around.

Ok so I assume you got my text messages. This is my last one. You can text me and tell me I can expect a phone call from you today or never call me again. The choice is yours.



Evan Bolton Hill, Baltimore, July 24, 2010

20twenty22 in Sean Fader's "SUP?"

Can art effectively question identity if it reinforces rather than questions stereotypes? Probably not, which makes any media attention for Sean Fader's "SUP?" a little grating. Fader creates a series of "before" and "after" photos based on his dates with over 100 men he met off of gay dating sites and phone applications. Praised by Slate, and described by the Huffington Post as art which addresses "the complexities of online representations," Fader's project is wholly straightforward; he objectifies his models from beginning to end.

It's perhaps Fader's simplistic premise that has attracted attention in the first place. He enters the apartment of a willing male subject found through online/social media, and with no input from the subject, creates a "fantasy" photo. This photo sexualizes and categorizes him simultaneously. Fader's only rule, that he not meet models before the first shoot, helped keep these subjects as nothing but sexual objects. Once this photo is taken, Fader and his muse go on a date, after which they "co- collaborate" on a second photo, a more "real" and representative picture of the model on display. We are led to assume that during these dates, the models talked about how they do not embody the stereotypes Fader envisioned for them, the second set of photos always seeming less sexy (i.e. less objectifying) than the first.

take your hands off me," proving that he might be aware how his "models" are objectifying and using him as much as he is using them, enlivened to be a muse for a hot artist guy.

This is the type of awareness and self-reflexivity that most of "SUP?" lacks, and so Fader's "Fantasy vs. Reality" premise remains 100% percent about fantasy. Fantastically, all of Fader's model's are beautiful, whether they are being fetishized or being "real." What's more, the second photos are not "real" photos of the subjects; they are models getting a competent cameraman to take expert photos of how sexy and "real" they are.

Take for instance, [D-list](#) user 20twenty22. In his first portrait, Fader constructs him as the ideal twink, shooting him perched on his kitchen counter, topless in a pair of yellow mesh shorts, red-sneakers, and a green baseball tilted to the left. The second photo, tagged with the model's real name Evan Bolton Hill, might be more "real," but it is also just a gay recitation of Terry Richardson's gauzy hipster photos of the 1990's. Here Evan is shot from above, on a bare mattress. His skimpy soccer look is replaced by an ensemble highlighting a striped sleeveless tank, (a necessity in any "hot" selfie these days), the baseball cap removed to reveal a Hitler youth bouffant. Evan winks queenily at the camera, exposing his pits, making clear his belief in his profile tag that "straight acting is code for self-hatred." Although Evan's second photo is more feminine, it isn't much more "real" than the first. Evan remains an object, but this time he is the producer of his own objectification. He is still a pin-up, but he's now self-aware.



Underhere, Dudesnude.com, July 15, 2010

underhere:artist
love looking at other guys
trying to gain weight if you have
any tips

WEDNESDY NEXT WEEK MY
PLACE 315H?

sounds great

I made 2 back to back appoint-
ments to see my family psychic in
NJ on Thursday at 4

Perfect can't wait

Me neither

Hey gonna have a figure drawing
circle this Saturday. Xo

Shoot. Wish I could



Jan, Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn July 15, 2010

Underhere in Sean Fader's "SUP?"

Underhere's "before" photo consists of the tall taut, blond, and bearded model naked in front of his stairs. His dick and bush catch the viewer's eye first, followed by his "manly" sexy facial expression. Underhere is constructed as a daddy top, and likely a damn good one. Fader basically takes his subject's "stats," (height, weight, age, tribe) and uses these to sexually stereotype his subjects; after all these stats, one photo and a bunch of empty banter like "looking?" "more pics," and "into?" is all the info gay men have before embarking on a sexual encounter. In his "after" photo, the

version of a "real authentic" online persona that does not exist.

This false simplicity sometimes works in Fader's favor. The work brings up questions about how others see us and how we see ourselves. Are we just the vessels of other people's desire, aesthete objects, or are we complex beings who wish to be both objects and subjects, desirable and relatable? Can we find a way to talk about online dating/sex without reinforcing the stereotypes, impossible expectations, and insecurities around being wanted?

At its roots, "SUP?" could be seen as calling out the hypocrisy of a queer culture obsessed with labels and tribes if only by reinforcing them. In order to be "hot," one must be legible as a sexual sub-category: twink, bear, top, daddy, otter, cub, leather bottom, etc. Most hypocritical in Fader's work is that his way of calling out the issues with sexual "type-casting" is to reinforce them, literally turning strangers into the pin-up fantasy of their (assumed) sexual category.



Sean Fader

And where is Sean Fader the artist in "SUP?" Although he never appears in any of the photos, he is omnipresent. Without even seeing him, you know he's hot. He has to be to land over 100 hot guys to "make beautiful art" with. (A note to straight readers: Unlike in straight culture, where being rich, famous, or talented can get you laid, in gay male culture, being hot, or at least fulfilling the requirements of a certain type remains a *modus operandi*.) And he is. Fader's artist photo on his website might as well be used in SCRUFF marketing campaigns: Furry, bearded, topless but with shades, Fader embodies the hipster-art otter fantasy.

Sean Fader's "SUP?" shows that we are living under a new erotic economy of realness. My own Grindr profile fetishes my furry chest, and my tagline states "looking for genuine encounters of all kinds." What kind of "real encounters" am I looking for? In short, I want to be wanted for my idiosyncrasies, for being hairy and butch while having the voice and gesticulations of Harvey Fierstein. I want to be your sexual fantasy and my lived reality at the same time. In order to have a "genuine experience" we first have to market ourselves as objects, we must literally sing for our 'sup'per. With every selfie we post on Instagram, every Tindr/Grindr message we send, we make concrete the idea that in order to buy the book, you gotta like the cover. In Fader's case, this a book that is titillating but empty, high on style and pitifully low on substance.



Benjamin Cook April 29, 2014 at 9:50 am



I'm a little torn on this series. (I must admit I know nothing about the work beyond this article) While I can understand and respect your point, I cant help but look at the series not as a political statement about sexuality or stereotypes but as a "post internet" depiction of what it is truly like to be himself in today's world. Yes, he is overly sexualizing his subject, and yes, he has over sexualized himself, but anyone who interacts on a social media platform can understand and participates in the highly self curated depiction of themselves. So I'm not entirely sure that this work has anything to do with gay stereotypes, or being gay at all. If you look at the work as a critique on the culture of hyper self-awareness and narcissism that comes from creating avatars that interact with the world for us while we are away from internet, It works for me. Maybe it's just me, but I thought I'd share anyways. Thanks for reading.

JosephYoung April 29, 2014 at 10:24 am



Seems like their real first names are given along with the neighborhood they live in [Bolton Hill is a neighborhood in Baltimore].

Thomas May 7, 2014 at 12:04 am

Hi Marc, Thank your for your critique. Not only of an art project but of the current state of gay male interaction. This project is superficial and agreed only furthers the desire/contempt matrix of gay cruising. We are left with the "authentic" souvenir of successful (?) sexual conquests that lead to an intimate interaction? It's all a superficial document furthering its premise. But you touched upon much deeper cords. At least in gay bars there is human interaction. Apps and sites are only fantasy that can crumble immediately in person. The current disembodied state of affairs is building the fantasy beyond the beyond. How gay men interact online is a rich topic regarding technology, fantasy and embodiment. I'd love to continue that dialogue with a hairy chested Harvey talking butch dude. Oh, how that delivers discourse to the tired role taking. Let's join radical fairies and take it back to nature. – Thomas

Thomas May 7, 2014 at 1:18 am

Hell, at least Nan Goldin gave us real sex.

PREVIOUS POST: Making + Meaning: An Architecture Summer Program at SCI-Arc

NEXT POST: Giselle Zatonyl's Under Construction

ARTIST FILES



**a blade of grass
nurtures socially engaged art**

SEAN FADER

Raised in Ridgewood, NJ, Sean Fader has spent most of his life as a performer, acting, singing and dancing since he was five years old. After attending Northwestern University and The New School University, he performed on several national tours with stops both on and Off-Broadway. Fader earned his MA from the Maryland Institute College of Art where he was the recipient of the Murthy Digital Arts Award, and his MFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He was named *Fringe Underground Magazine's* "Art Star" in their Fall 2005 issue. In 2007 his work was featured in "First Look II" at the Hudson Valley

Center For Contemporary Art. He received the Critics Choice Award in the Professional category at the 11th Annual Chicago Art Open (2008). Fader was the recipient of 3rd Ward's "Fall Solo Show" prize (2008) and was named as one of the winners of the Magenta Foundation's Flash Forward Award for Emerging Photographers (2012). Fader resides in New York City.

I WANT TO PUT YOU ON,
RAINI, 2007

Archival inkjet print
24 x 30 in.





20twenty22, Dlist.com, July 23, 2010

20twenty22: "Straight acting" is a code for "self hatred." Educate yourselves.

You are a stellar guy Sean Fader. See you soon :)

You are a stellar guy and you bring out the best in me. It's so good to have you around.

Ok so I assume you got my text messages. This is my last one. You can text me and tell me I can expect a phone call from you today or never call me again. The choice is yours.



Evan Bolton Hill, Baltimore, July 24, 2010

SUP?

Left: 20twenty22, Dlist.com, July 23, 2010
Right: Evan Bolton Hill, Baltimore, July 24, 2010

Archival inkjet print

30 x 50 in.

Although the end result of Sean Fader's practice is photography, his real work involves intimate interaction with friends and strangers, and an exploration of how we perceive identity. His practice is informed by his long history of working in theater, which Fader uses when he alternately models the identities of others and asks others to model their own and his ideas about who they are in a unique kind of interactive portraiture.

In *I Want To Put You On*, Fader makes portraits that fuse his body with that of his sitters, who are friends and family. He asks his subjects to pose as the person they imagine themselves to be, takes their portraits, then turns the tables. Assuming the poses from their portraits, he "TELL ME HOW TO BE YOU" asks them, "tell me how to be you." The ensuing conversation reveals unexpected nuances of personality, as demeanor and facial expression are tweaked and adjusted until the right balance is struck. Fader then uses Photoshop to fuse his own likeness with the sitters' bodies, superimposing a zipper on the torso, which makes it look like he is "wearing" his subjects' bodies. Through this process he assumes the identity of the sitter, asking viewers to question the gap between self-perception and the way we are seen by others.



AM82, Grindr, February 28, 2010

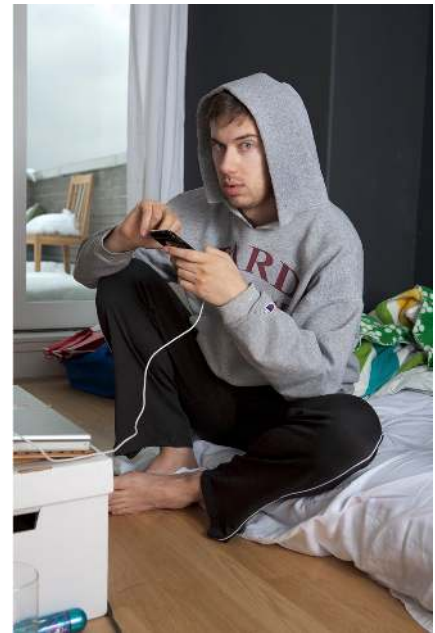
You are the first and ONLY person
to get this pic...
Please do not share :)

You tell that to all the boys

You know, in the name of
art.... and in the name of
Adventure, I think you should
come directly to my place and we
should have our first date in my
room. Raw. Real. What better
place to get to know me?

Ps I woke up to this from you last
night. "If you were Amy awe-
somer you would dpinta-
niaoously combust.". I nearly
shat my bed I laughed so hard.
We were both there together be-
cause I didn't notice the misspell-
ins last night. Hehehehe.

I hate men. Let's get coffee this
week.



Adam, Williamsburg, Brooklyn, February 28, 2010

SUP?

Left: AM82, Grindr, February 28, 2010
Right: Adam, Williamsburg, Brooklyn, February 28, 2010

Archival inkjet print

30 x 50 in.

In another project, the performative aspect of the work involves a deeper commitment. For *SUP?*, Fader spent a year trolling online dating sites, looking sincerely for good matches and imagining in advance what the men might look like. For each, he engaged in only online conversation in advance—no phone calls. If they agreed to a date, Fader asked to make a portrait of each man, depicted as Fader envisioned him from his online profile. He explained that he would like to begin the encounter at their place, with a portrait made using their clothes and a backdrop staged using their possessions. After the portrait session they went on the date, and then the sitter invariably offered an unsolicited account of who they “really” were—their families, lives, past experiences. Apparently the portraits created an aura of trust and openness, which encouraged a confessional atmosphere. Following the dates, Fader would re-photograph the men based on their self-descriptions, allowing them to stage their own portraits. He continued to date some of them for up to several months.

Fader calls this approach “lived performance” because he recognizes that the art is inseparable from his daily life experiences. The two images are presented side by side, allowing viewers to compare the preconceived idea and the self-presentation. This work focuses on the way people edit themselves to appear more desirable, and the disjunction between our public and private selves. Fader uses photography to create intimacy between people, and bring awareness to how we imagine ourselves as a way of achieving greater authenticity.

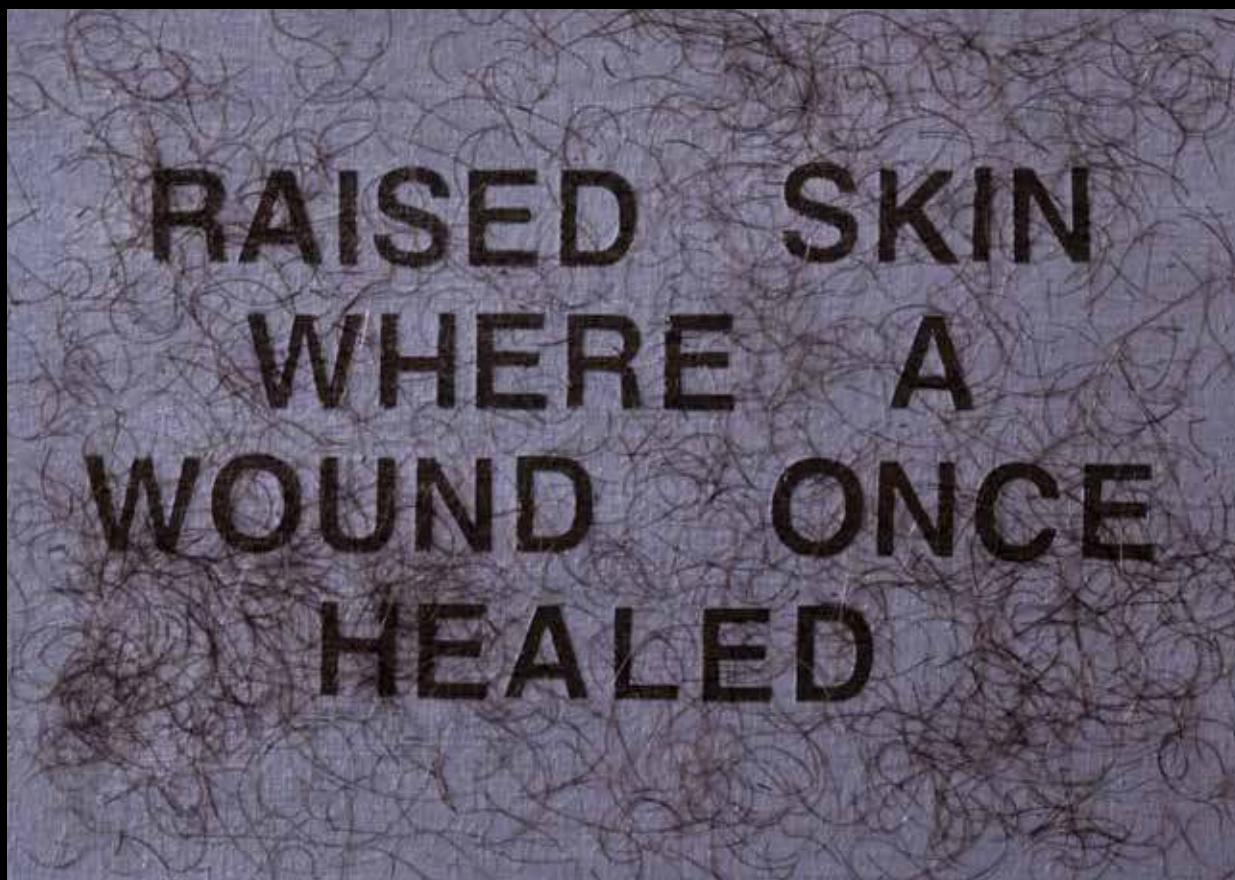
- KB, EG



I WANT TO PUT YOU ON, DAD, 2007
Archival inkjet print
24 x 30 in.

Drama Queen

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE



CURATED BY

Jonathan D. Katz and Conor Moynihan | 21-30 JUNE 2016

Drama Queen

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Queer Arts Festival 2016

CURATED BY

Jonathan D. Katz and Conor Moynihan

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

SD Holman

The paintings of the *other* tradition are not, however, mirrors of society. They are mirrors of what happens to us without our knowing it. In a way, they might be said to objectify experience, to turn feelings into things so that we can deal with them.

—Gene R. Swenson, *The Other Tradition*, 1966

Drama Queer

Conor Moynihan and Jonathan D. Katz

To turn affective *feeling* and inarticulate *emotion* into intelligible, tangible things is the essence of *Drama Queer*. *Drama Queer* explores the role of emotion in contemporary queer art as a form of political engagement, social practice, and resistance—a way to coalesce feelings and direct them towards social change. More to the point, *Drama Queer* is an international survey of “queer emotion” in contemporary art.

At heart, *Drama Queer* explores emotional contradictions in being queer today through the work of some of the best international queer artists, some of whom, fittingly, happen to be straight. Queerness may entail logical contradictions and inconsistencies, but its emotional tenor is clear. While the closet sought to dam up feelings and deaden emotions, queer art nakedly seeks our reaction—to move,

anger, or soothe us. It looks queer because it exists between traditional categories and social norms, paying no heed to expectation. In short, *it looks queer* because it *feels free*.

At once celebrated and lamented, “queer” is itself a highly-contested term, as productively ambiguous in its meaning as it is hard to pin down. After all, what is queer? Where is queerness located in a work—in the artist’s identity or the audiences’ reading? How does it feel (to me, to you, between us)? As the proverbial quip goes, much like for porn, you know it when you see it. Or, in the case of *Drama Queer*, you know it when you *feel* it. More to the point, how can art catalyze queer emotions, to consider emotion as aesthetic form? Asking—but not answering—these questions guides the underpinning logic of this exhibition.

To explore queer emotion, to try to find where and how it resonates in art, necessitates a turning away from the primacy of plastic form. In other words, we must move away from a strict attention to the quality of a brush stroke or the scale of a cube in order to consider the emotional tenor of a work. Furthermore, once queer emotions are exhibited, they open up the possibility for social change—a transformational dynamic that is by definition open-ended and full of possibility.

This is far from the first exhibition that has called into question the overriding primacy of form over feeling. A full fifty years ago, the art historian Gene R. Swenson curated the groundbreaking exhibition *The Other Tradition* (1966) at the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania. As in the above epigraph, Swenson argued that the dominant conventions of art scholarship of his day, then almost exclusively about form, had an “*other* tradition” that had developed alongside of it. This *other* tradition dealt directly with the feelings and emotions generated by art objects within viewers.²

This *other* tradition, as argued by Swenson, had an alternate lineage far removed from the drumroll of art’s incessant formal innovations. Swenson presciently argued that this alternative genealogy of art could be traced from Dada and Surrealism onward to Pop art.³ If, through their connection to the unconscious, Dada and Surrealism seem to have a more direct link with emotion, what does Pop art, with its rude celebration of banality, have to do with emotions—queer or otherwise? Take Andy Warhol’s Brillo boxes: stripped of anything approximating invention, design or masterful execution, the cardinal terms that historically denominated something as “art,” they nonetheless engendered emotion by reflecting our

world, echoing Swenson’s apt description of art as “mirrors of what happens to us without our knowing it.”⁴ Pop art, as an art of the other tradition, turned emotions—our emotions—into things that allowed us to see what was happening to us.

In 1969, only three years after Swenson’s groundbreaking exhibition, the Stonewall Riots erupted in New York City, launching the modern LGBT rights movement. Just as Swenson was writing about feelings as a constitutive material quality in art (i.e. art that was not *just* for art’s sake), Stonewall unleashed precisely the prototypical affect this exhibition explores: queer emotion. Birthed within the contradictory feelings of rage and pride, a new politics emerged. *Drama Queer* celebrates and recognizes this formative moment in LGBT history wherein emotion erupted as a catalyst for social change.

From the 60s to the 80s, through the advent of AIDS, these emotional undercurrents grew in force and power within queer networks, tracking the fury and terror of a community forced to watch its members die unmourned by dominant culture. Taking up rage and anguish once more, art about AIDS took many forms. Whether through the iconic *Silence = Death* poster (created by AIDS activists Avram Finkelstein, Brian Howard, Oliver Johnston, Charles Krelloff, Chris Lione, and Jorge Soccarras) or Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s quieter postminimalist sculptures and installations,⁵ queer art conveyed a firm belief in the power to move as the route towards social change.

Today, queer artists continue to work in the *other* tradition, a dissident tradition of emotional engagement directed towards social equity. Through the painful/

1 More than a year after *Drama Queer* was exhibited in Vancouver, BC, Canada in June 2016, this essay expands the thesis of that show.

2 Gene R. Swenson, *The Other Tradition* (Philadelphia: The Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1966).
3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., 28.

5 For further explanation of how AIDS changed the direction of American art, see: Jonathan David Katz, “How AIDS Changed American Art,” in *Art AIDS America*, eds. Jonathan David Katz and Rock Hushka (Seattle: Tacoma Art Museum in association with the University of Washington Press, 2016): 24-45.

prideful histories of queer peoples, the *other* tradition has evolved from Swenson’s conceptual mapping, spreading from paintings and sculptures to new, other forms including (but not limited to) performance, activism, video, installation, and social practice. Acknowledging this evolution of the *other* tradition, *Drama Queer* includes work by twenty-four contemporary artists from a variety of disciplines and media, each incorporating queer emotion. These works make us feel, but not didactically: they pull us one way, then they jerk us around to feel entirely differently. We often don’t know whether we’re laughing or crying.

In effect, the works included in *Drama Queer* function, as Swenson once observed, “to objectify experience, to turn feelings into things so that we can deal with them.” Queer emotion—with all its attendant complications and contradictions—is now objectified into material form around broader issues of gender, sexuality, race, class, and ability. Such queer emotions often pull in two directions at once: we are different and yet exactly the same as straight folk, we can hate traditional gender norms, and yet find them hot, we want to be mainstream, even as we proudly celebrate our differences. Even the word queer, once an insult, is now, for us, a compliment. Contradiction is the queer norm, for the very identity that marked us as outlaws has now given us freedoms unimaginable a few decades ago.

To viscerally convey the contradictory tug of queer emotion, we begin with **Del LaGrace Volcano**’s magisterial three photographs *Moj of the Antarctic* (2005), *Moj: Minstrel Tears* (2005), and *Moj: White Face* (2005) [pls. 1-3]. In these works, Mojisola Adebayo places herself in black and white face, dresses in showy vaudeville garb, and, positioned

in a desolately unpeopled all-white Antarctic landscape, collapses every visible signifier of identity into an open question: white meets whiteface, blackface meets black, culture meets nature, male meets female. Based on the story of Ellen Craft, an African-American slave who passed as a white man with disabilities in her search for freedom,⁶ the story underscores how completely cultural authority is raced, gendered, and rendered able-bodied. Yet, just as these works inspire pride by revisiting a triumphant aspect of racial, queer, and disability history, the use of blackface punches us in the gut, causing pain, shame, and unease. These feelings are mirrored in the tearstained face of Adebayo. However, it is precisely this double move—being painfully stung as quickly as we joyfully celebrate—that captures the emotional complexity of *Drama Queer*. History, no matter how reclaimed, is never without its shadows.

Zackary Drucker and **Vika Kirchenbauer** instigate similar contradictory narratives in their works. Drucker’s series *5 East 73rd Street* (2006) [pls. 59 and 60] documents the life and ephemera of Flawless Sabrina (a.k.a. Jack Doroshov) and the home he has occupied on Manhattan’s Upper East Side since the 1960s. Flawless Sabrina was arrested over 100 times for cross-dressing—a felony at the time—becoming part of a queer history worth celebrating even as she needs to be rescued from the amnesia of our short cultural memory. Kirchenbauer’s 3D video installation *YOU ARE BORING!* (2015) [pls. 75 and 76] flips the policing straight-/cis-gaze experienced by her Berlin-based international community back onto the viewer. Kirchenbauer plays with the inequity of looking and being looked at in a dynamic that is simultaneously uncomfortable, sexy, and way too close in every sense of the phrase.

⁶ For more on Ellen Craft’s use of disability in her escape see, Ellen Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 28-45. See also, Uri McMillan, *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 65-93.

Famous for her portraits, **Zanele Muholi** puts herself in front of the camera for *Bona, Charlottesville* (2015) [pl. 13]. With dramatically luminous skin and a tribal-printed cloth behind her, her face is reflected in a mirror. We thus see her, and she us, through an intermediary refraction, a rich metaphor for a black, queer artist. There is a sense of artificiality to this series, which complicates the high fashion, glossy aesthetics of these works and their relationship to the camera, a device notoriously connected to colonialism. Nevertheless, as her gaze attests, Muholi maintains control in her work. Amplifying the nascent artificiality embedded in Muholi’s self-portrait, **Sean Fader** literally places himself within the body of his sitters, emerging as one does from a costume, in his *I Want To Put You On* series [pls. 38-40]. If all self-portraiture entails some amplification of the self, **2Fik**’s portrays numerous different characters emerging from within himself caught in a single image to explore a multiplicity of contradictory identities and (self-)identifications. In *Abdel et son frère* (2014) [pl. 64], two figures are joined together by nipple clamps with one of the twins holding a condom. Gleefully playing with art history as fluidly as with identity politics, 2Fik upends the natural while underscoring the performative aspect of all identity.

Transitioning from the purely photographic to the painterly, **Angela Grossmann**’s work—such as *Gloves* (2015) or *Ginger* (2015) [pls. 55 and 57]—combines disparate collage materials to underscore how gender and sexuality are always already constructed. An absurd combination of bodies and clothing styles, pigment and found material create a sense of perpetual foreignness in her figures. Working in painting, **Andrew Holmquist**’s figuration flirts mischievously with

abstraction. However, as the massive erection sprouting from a distinctly female pelvis in the painting *Hips* (2015) [pl. 12] indicates, these works address less how we look in our bodies than how we can feel. Erotic feeling is also central to **Monica Majoli**, but it is ambiguous in an entirely different way. Although black and white, **Amy Used Twice** (2011) [pl. 17] is colored by the emotional gravity of Amy’s downcast, diverted gaze. Rather than seeing Amy, we seem to feel her—dejectedly, desirously—instead.

While Majoli’s work oozes with the uncertain, inchoate emotional intensity of a sexual encounter, **Jesse Finley Reed**’s *If You’re Lonely...* series (2006-2009) [pls. 22-24] revels in the potentiality of anonymous sexual encounter mediated by the internet. His sitters are shrouded in darkness, hidden from view, with only their silhouettes illuminated. These works divert the inward stillness of their subjects outward towards the erotic possibility that follows the silhouettes of these anonymous sitters. We don’t know how to feel, but Reed risks seducing us to feel something anyways, to touch to feel more. **Joey Terrill**’s work in *Drama Queer* also pivots on encounters, but intersected by domesticity and the presence/absence of HIV/AIDS such as in his paintings *Tom Gutierrez* (2000) and *Just What is it About Todays Homos That Makes Them So Different, So Appealing?* (2008-2010) [pls. 29 and 30]. In the video work *The Bees Know What to Do* (2014) [pl. 37], **Vincent Tiley** operates in a similar sensorial register, but complicates the equation further by bringing in age- and serostatus-differences into the emotional-erotic equation. Queerness and queer emotions, however, are not limited to same-sex sexuality, as exemplified by **George Steeves**’s *Excavations* series [pls. 41-48], which combines absurdity, humor, and eroticism in

images sporting subjects that are neither the right age nor body type for typical nude photography—but are arousing because they cause us to feel forcefully anyway.

The works of **Laura Aguilar**, **Cassils**, and **Keijaun Thomas** bring about complicated feelings around pleasure and pain, while simultaneously complicating the relationship between the body, politics, and the “natural.” Aguilar’s *Grounded 111* (2006) [pl. 31] asks us to redefine our very definition of nature. In this work, Aguilar’s back is turned to the camera, mimicking the shape of the rounded boulder behind her. Her ample body is thus at once naturalized into the landscape while, at the same time, anthropomorphized into inert stone. Similarly using body as material through a series of performances in *Becoming an Image* (2013) [pls. 34-36], Cassils trained their body into the very stereotype of hyper-masculinity while beating a lump of clay in total darkness. Invisible to the viewer, Cassils’s grunts, panting, and whacks were the sole evidence of the performance save for a strobe that at irregular moments lit the scene, capturing Cassils’s body at maximum extremity and echoing the presence/absence of the trans community and the violence they experience. In *The Poetics of Trespassing (Part 1. Absent Whiteness, Part 2. Looking While Seeing Through, Part 3. Sweet like Honey, Black like Syrup)* (2014-2016) [pls. 19-21], Keijaun Thomas uses disposable coffee containers, the gestures of scrubbing and sweeping, and white flour to deconstruct and reconstruct Black identity. Addressing the affective materiality of blackness, her bodily and spatial movements poeticize objects with long histories of racial oppression, making visible the racism that structures much of what otherwise passes as commonplace.

Together, all three demonstrate the tenuous mutability of their bodies, making us feel the ways our own bodies are as potentially queerly mutable.

Whereas the body has always signified on multiple registers, the complicated affective circuits in text-based artworks can also unsettle fixed, knowable positions of emotional certainty. **Carl Pope**’s quasi-protest poster installation *The Bad Air Smelled of Roses* (2004-ongoing) [pl. 66] speaks in a Black American slang with a queer sensibility. At turns ironic, humorous, angry, or despairing, they give voice to a range of emotions and experiences born of doubled oppression. But rather than giving in, they speak back, in that sassy queer voice that has long sought to counter physical strength with a sharp tongue and surgical wit. Similarly, **Shan Kelley**’s works take the concept of body politic poetically and seriously, navigating the space between embodiment and the rules and codes that govern how it is seen and spoken. In *Once Healed* (2015) [pl. 51], he draws attention to the corporeality of the body. *Once Healed* reminds us that bodies can be injured, but also that they can be healed. Yet, like the raised skin covering a wound, the healing itself testifies to an initial injury, a reminder that healing doesn’t obliterate pain, but merely covers it over. A different sort of healing is present in *The Uninvited* (2003) [pl. 18] by **Rudy Lemcke**. *The Uninvited* is a poetic meditation on the parallels between two catastrophic, lethal political crises in global history: the American-Vietnam War and AIDS. By implication, the work refutes the common tendency to “other” people with AIDS, forcing the viewer into direct relationship with these shadows by adding their own shadows to the video installation. Thus, these shadows force us to question our complacency in global catastrophes—past and

present. Healing, in all these works, is nascent, but we feel its imminent possibility.

Violence spills forth from many of the works in *Drama Queer*, but most viscerally in the large-scale paintings *7 Devils Dead* (2008) and *The Tattooed Liar* (2008) [pls. 67 and 69] by **Attila Richard Lukacs**. Broadly concerned with the Iraq war and its enduring and reverberating violence, they share not only an anti-war politic, but also a density of reference and a pictorial power unmatched by most contemporary art. They are paintings, not essays, and as such possess the ability to suggest things that language can barely address. Just as his collages [pls. 70-73] denote, there is a latent erotic potentiality to the violence—perhaps an underlying desire for violence. This seems to be echoed and then challenged in the photograph by **Andreas Fux** showing a sadomasochist cutting himself [pl. 61]. In this work, the sitter’s body is marked with a goddess tattoo along his side, an Indian tattoo on his chest, and a haunting swastika right where his hip meets his thigh. As the boy coolly regards his blood, blade in hand, signifiers of pain and pleasure, peace and violence merge—just as it does in the S/M photograph by **Sabina van der Linden** [pl. 74]. While all these works expose themselves to the critique of using violence gratuitously, such a reductionist reading erases the complex equivocality of violence as an emotional device. Queers have often been the object of violence, just as they have been the ethical subject against violence. Thus, these works hold in tension the formative role of violence in queer identity and history.

The ways in which queers experience violence and speak against it, however, are never unidirectional. Sexuality always fits together with other aspects of

identity like a puzzle. As disability rights and queer activist Eli Clare has written: “The layers are so tangled: gender folds into disability, disability wraps around class, class strains against race, race snarls into sexuality, sexuality hangs onto gender, all of it finally piling into our bodies.”⁷ Attending to this intersectional quality of queer emotion is **Kent Monkman**’s installation *Dance to the Berdashe* (2008) [pl. 25]. In the center of this complicated work is the artist himself—part Cree, part European—as Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, his drag alter ego [pl. 26]. Surrounding her are First Nations dancers doing a choreography that combines Indigenous and hip-hop moves [pl. 27]. This work is about cultural exchange and hybridity just as it is about the now centuries-long interchange between two cultures, an exchange that dominant culture tends to deny, both out of a romantic, primitivising nostalgia for the “uncontaminated” Indigenous culture and as a way of protecting itself from its obvious First Nations inheritance. Thus, queer identity, which is often perceived as being inherently western,⁸ becomes Monkman’s tool for complicating the intertwined, unequal narratives involved in colonialism. In effect, we can feel history with a difference through Monkman’s decolonizing, queer aesthetics.⁹

Begun in 2003, **Bill Jacobson**’s *A Series of Human Decisions* [pls. 77 and 78] is a photographic account of human spaces absent people. By removing people from

⁷ Eli Clare, excerpt from “Digging Deep: Thinking about Privilege” (keynote address, Against Patriarchy Conference, Eugene, OR, January 24-26, 2003). Accessed via Clare’s website on October 7, 2017, at <http://eliclare.com/what-eli-offers/lectures/privilege>.

⁸ For a discussion of the relationship between queer in transnational contexts, see: John C. Hawley, ed., *Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001).

⁹ Desiring with a difference is part of José Esteban Muñoz’s disidentificatory strategy, see: José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 1-34.

these photographs, Jacobson leaves behind an open and evocative depopulated space while simultaneously mobilizing metaphors of the closet. *A Series of Human Decisions #1710* offers a ready metaphor for closeted sexuality through its *trompe l'oeil* of spatial depth that actually forecloses clear lines of site into the photograph's interior—evidence that closets are not, by definition, invisible, but can, from the right perspective, always be glimpsed. The role of perspective, and its relationship to our viewing position, maintains importance in his work even in the absence of depicted subjects. For example, that age old pictorial convention of the horizon line in *Some Planes #115* (2007) [pl. 80] achieves new purposes as it describes at once a landscape, seascape, and pure abstraction. The luminous sky and wavy foreground point to shallow seas, but the actual location of the place pales in comparison to its magisterial, unpeopled absences, an evocation of silence that fittingly is the other face of the high-keyed emotion of *Drama Queer*.

The artists surveyed in *Drama Queer* take us down a rabbit hole of emotional uncertainty, just like Alice in Wonderland. They make us feel large and then incomparably small, we laugh even as tears well in the corners of our eyes, our cheeks burning with shame though our eyes brighten with hope. For a moment, through this art, we can glimpse an equitable future—one that does not and cannot forget the past—even as the work also tallies the daily toll of our many struggles today.

As Swenson foresaw, as the Stonewall rioters and AIDS activists fought for, and as the painful not-so-distant memory of Orlando articulates, emotion and sexuality

are so fundamentally intertwined that we can't tell where one begins and the other ends. However, all too often the emotional, the affective, and the queer are scrubbed off the pristine Modernist cubes of art's formal traditions. In that art historical trajectory, a grid is a grid—its repetitious beauty and reassuring sameness of form an analog for a world of stasis. In sharp contrast, the Stonewall Riots, the AIDS Crisis, and the Orlando shooting can never be adequately represented in a formalized grid for the simple reason that they are the obverse of the grid's equilibrium. They are our painful, prideful, heart-breaking, norm-changing histories, histories we still feel even if we weren't born when they happened. Against the Modernist narrative, the artists in *Drama Queer* challenge us to *see* differently by *feeling* differently.

Modernism seemed to promise utopia, but history has taught us that "utopia" is merely a detailed reflection of the failures and insufficiencies of our own times. And since we all have different experiences, different bodies, different desires, different abilities—we are, in fact, seemingly endlessly different—*Drama Queer* instead suggests that the way we understand each other is to feel with and through each other. In place of a politics of either totalizing sameness or unbridgeable difference, *Drama Queer* foretells a politics of analogy. We might not all be the same, but through our differences we will recognize our conjoining likenesses. Precisely through our differences, we continue to desire, dream, and activate for a politics for social change, social transformation. This is the promise, the allure of queer emotion: by daring to look into the mirror, we can *see* how to *feel* differently.

Drama Queer

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

CURATED BY

Jonathan D. Katz and
 Conor Moynihan

2Fik
 Laura Aguilar
 Cassils
 Zackary Drucker
 Sean Fader
 Andreas Fux
 Angela Grossmann
 Andrew Holmquist
 Bill Jacobson
 Shan Kelley
 Vika Kirchenbauer
 Rudy Lemcke
 Attila Richard Lukacs
 Monica Majoli
 Kent Monkman
 Zanele Muholi
 Carl Pope
 Jesse Finley Reed
 George Steeves
 Joey Terrill
 Keijaun Thomas
 Vincent Tiley
 Sabina van der Linden
 Del LaGrace Volcano

Vincent Tiley



Silent, poetic, and quietly erotic, Vincent Tiley's *The Bees Know What to Do* features Hunter Reynolds, an older, AIDS activist, and Jasper Colorado, a younger, able-bodied man. Reynolds arranges and obsessively re-arranges flowers on Colorado's body, pressing flowers between the younger man's toes, in his open mouth, and into his anus. Bringing these two generations of men together, Tiley's work explores how desire (the birds and the bees) and loss color the interaction. But flowers carry emotional weight, used as objects of mourning, courtship, and affection.

Plate 37: Vincent Tiley, *The Bees Know What to Do*, 2014, digital video, 23 minutes, 10 seconds. Cinematography by Fred Attenborough. Courtesy of the artist.



Sean Fader

In his *I Want To Put You On* series, Sean Fader literally loses himself in the body of another. A collaboration between Fader and each sitter, Fader had his sitters direct him, telling him how to perform themselves. Asking what it means to be like someone, the project engages another person to the point of embodying them.

Plate 38: Sean Fader, *I Want to Put You On, Dad*, 2007, archival InkJet print, 36 by 27 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Plate 39: Sean Fader, *I Want to Put You On, Raini*, 2007, archival InkJet print, 24 by 36 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Facing page

Plate 40: Sean Fader, *I Want to Put You On, Muscle Daddy*, 2008, archival InkJet print, 36 by 27 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



ARTIST: Sean Fader

Artist Biographies

2Fik

Assuming the multiple roles of artistic director, photographer, and performer, 2Fik stages elaborate images that often re-enact familiar compositions derived from famous paintings. Tying with reality, his constructed images destabilize the viewer's assumed points of reference, playfully orchestrating scenes that comment thoughtfully on current society.

Born in Paris to a Moroccan Muslim family, 2Fik moved to Montréal in 2003. His encounter with the city's multicultural environment inspired him to examine issues of identity and its socio-political ramifications. Drawn out of this diverse backdrop, the recurring characters featured in his photographs are all interconnected and stem from the artist's life experiences and personality.

Laura Aguilar

Laura Aguilar works primarily in the genre of portraiture. Her work centers on the human form and challenges contemporary social constructs of beauty, focusing on Latina lesbians, black people, and the obese. She often uses self-portraiture to come to terms with her own body as she challenges societal norms of sexuality, class, gender, and race. In her series *Stillness* (1996–99), *Motion* (1999) and *Center* (2001), she fuses portraiture with the genres of landscape and still life.

Critics and scholars closely identify Aguilar's work with Chicana feminism; one writer observes that "Aguilar consciously moves away from the societally normative images of Chicana female bodies and disassociates them from male-centered nostalgia or idealizations." Her more recent self-portraits navigate her personal intersection of identities as Latina, lesbian, dyslexic, and obese. Her photographic series include *Latina Lesbians* (1986–89; probably her best-known series), *Clothed/Unclothed* (1990–94), *Plush Pony* (1992), and *Grounded* (2006–07), with the latter being her first body of work done in color.

Aguilar's works have appeared in more than fifty national and international exhibitions, including the 1993 Venice Biennale, Italy; the Los Angeles City Hall Bridge Gallery; the Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE); the Los Angeles Photography Center; and the Women's Center Gallery at the University of California in Santa Barbara. She was a 2000 recipient of an Anonymous Was A Woman Award and the James D. Phelan Award in photography in 1995. Her work is in held in a number of public collections, including ones at the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Indiana University, Bloomington; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York City.

Aguilar has her first retrospective scheduled at the Vincent Price Art Museum at East Los Angeles College as part of the Pacific Standard Time LA/LA series of exhibitions in 2017–18. It is being organized in collaboration with the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center and is funded in part by the Getty Initiative.

Cassils

Listed by the Huffington Post as "one of ten transgender artists who are changing the landscape of contemporary art," Cassils has achieved international recognition for a rigorous engagement with the body as a form of social sculpture. Featuring a series of bodies transformed by strict physical training regimes, Cassils's artworks offer shared experiences for contemplating histories of violence, representation, struggle, and survival, often juxtaposing the immediacy, urgency and ephemerality of live performance against constructed acts for camera in order to challenge the "documentarian truth factor" of images. Bashing through gendered binaries, Cassils performs transgender not as a crossing from one sex to another but rather as a continual process of becoming, a form of embodiment that works in a space of indeterminacy, spasm and slipperiness. Drawing on conceptualism, feminism, body art, gay male aesthetics, Cassils forges a series of powerfully trained bodies for

different performative purposes. It is with sweat, blood and sinew that Cassils constructs a visual critique around ideologies and histories.

Zackary Drucker

Zackary Drucker is an independent artist, cultural producer, and trans woman who breaks down the way we think about gender, sexuality, and seeing. She has performed and exhibited her work internationally in museums, galleries, and film festivals including the Whitney Biennial 2014, MoMA PS1, Hammer Museum, Art Gallery of Ontario, MCA San Diego, and SF MoMA, among others. Drucker is an Emmy-nominated Producer for the docu-series *This Is Me*, as well as a Co-Producer on Golden Globe and Emmy-winning *Transparent*.

Sean Fader

Sean Fader (b.1985) holds an MA in digital arts from the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) and an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). Fader's recent solo show for Spring/Break Arts Show with Denny Gallery was *#365ProfilePics*. *#365ProfilePics* was developed during residencies at Yaddo, Bemis Center for Contemporary Art, and the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts. Fader received a faculty enrichment grant from FIT and a materials grant from Yaddo to support *#365ProfilePics*. Recent performances include *#ferwings* at Bemis Center for Contemporary Art and Socrates Sculpture Park, and *Yaass Gaga* at Satellite Art Show (Miami). Previous solo shows include *#wishingpelt* at Defibrillator Gallery (Chicago), Spring Break Art Show (NYC), and Pulse Art Fair (NYC), and *Sup?* at the University of Illinois in Springfield. Group shows include *White Boys*, curated by Hank Willis Thomas (Haverford College); *New Portraits*, curated by Richard Prince (Gagosian in New York City); and *Share This! Appropriation After Cynicism* (Denny Gallery in New York City). Recent fellowships include New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA) and A Blade of Grass. Recent press includes MOMUS, Hyperallergic, Art F City, Vice, Art/Slant, Art News, Gothamist, NY1, the Huffington

Post, and Slate. Recent awards include the Magenta Foundation's Flash Forward Award for Emerging Photographers. Fader is based in Brooklyn.

Andreas Fux

<http://www.andreas-fux.de/>

Angela Grossmann

Angela Grossmann began her *Smaller than Life* photo paintings while living in Amsterdam in the late 1980s. She sourced the photos in local flea markets. Grossmann has continued this work in the different cities she has lived in for more than thirty years and it is ongoing. The larger collages (*Mistress Works*) are also made from found anonymous photos; they are a combination of found "erotic" photos of women posing naked in gritty hotel rooms, doll's clothing, vintage toys and puppets.

Andrew Holmquist

Berlin-based artist Andrew Holmquist (b.1985) graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) Masters program in 2014. His primary interest in painting and drawing has recently expanded with investigations in film, video, ceramic sculpture and comic books. His work varies in subject from biographical to fantastical, but at the center of all is a playful stretching of the limits of the human form. He presents new possibilities that blur the line between figuration and abstraction, the physical and inner world, and expected gender boundaries.

EDUCATION

2014 Master of Fine Arts, Painting and Drawing, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago

2008 Bachelor of Fine Arts, Painting and Drawing, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago

2006 Academy of Fine Arts Prague, Painting atelier. Prague, Czech Republic

Ifōn' seksl:

Digital Devices and the Transformation of Intimacy

University of Illinois Springfield
Visual Arts Gallery
March 4 – April 11, 2013

Jurors:
Michael J. Murphy and Dave Kube

Gallery Director:
Jeff Robinson

Gallery Manager:
Allison Lacher

Catalog Designer:
Kim Seiz

Research Assistant:
Alex Williams

A primary task of the visual arts is to bring to light those societal issues that are buried just below the surface of our collective consciousness. In this role, art forces us to confront the most intimate aspects of our being and demands that we expose our deepest vulnerabilities to one another. The diverse range of works featured in *Ifön' seksl: Digital Devices and the Transformation of Intimacy* address how the meaning of sexual intimacy has been renegotiated in (fluorescent) light of advances in digital technology. I want to thank those artists who, through their ideas and artworks, have contributed to this necessary conversation.

My deepest gratitude to Dave Kube, Visiting Assistant Professor of Digital Media in the department of Art, Music, and Theatre at UIS, and to Michael Murphy, Assistant Professor in the Women and Gender Studies department at UIS. The theme of this exhibition was conceived by Professor Kube and Dr. Murphy, and the curatorial effort behind the project would not have been possible without their respective scholarly expertise.

Finally, thanks to all who have made the exhibition and this catalog a source of scholarly excellence. Allison Lacher, manager for the Visual Arts Gallery, put extensive efforts into the preparation, installation, and promotion of the exhibition. Dr. Murphy contributed an enlightening essay to the catalog. Kim Seiz spearheaded the terrific catalog design. Alex Williams collected and organized documents in preparation for the catalog. Additional funding for the exhibition was provided by the UIS Friends of the Gallery and the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.

Jeff Robinson
Director, Visual Arts Gallery
Instructor of Art
University of Illinois Springfield

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It does not require a salacious inclination to have noticed the raft of celebrities, politicians, and other public figures who have been brought low in recent years due to revelations of illicit sexual desires or behaviors expressed or realized via digital devices (think Eliot Spitzer, David Weiner, David Petraeus, etc.). Sex scandals, of course, are nothing new, nor is the moral outrage (real or feigned) that accompanies them. Sexuality, however much it feels private, has always been mediated by legal regulation, social conventions, language and visual representation. There is not and can never be such a thing as personal or private sex. Sexuality is always already social, cultural, economic, and historical. As the feminist philosopher and cultural critic Susan Bordo has argued, “When bodies get together in sex, a whole history, cultural as well as personal, comes along with them.”

Yet, the advent of handheld digital technologies seems to have heralded something entirely new. The meaning of dating, relationships, romance, and even sex itself is currently being renegotiated in light of the fluorescent glow of iPhones, Blackberries, and Androids. These technologies are transforming what it means to be sexually intimate in the 21st century, inaugurating new languages (“dicpic”), behaviors (“sexting”), desires, expressions, communities, identities, and legal and regulatory frameworks. The identification and interaction with others on the basis of a shared sexual identity, orientation, inclination, or “kink” has never been easier, nor have sexual performances or masquerades—scripted or spontaneous—ever been as ephemeral or transient.

The intersection of microcomputer and global telecommunications technologies threatens to collapse longtime distinctions between public/private, personal/political, strange/familiar, distant/immediate, fleeting/eternal, and connection/alienation. Familiar boundaries of self, relationship, community, and nation are easily bridged as desires and technologies combine to put an adult bookstore, singles bar, brothel, and gay bathhouse in your purse or pocket. We are witnessing a revolution in human intimacy and this one will be televised...via the XTube mobile app on your iPhone 4GS.

In light of this, how should we view the transformation of intimate relations enabled by handheld digital devices? The artists selected for this show exploit three main strategies to answer this question: the interpretation of sexualized digital imagery through older artistic conventions and strategies; the translation of such imagery into other media; and, helping us ‘see’ these new representational conventions by working to make them ‘strange.’ The artists and works included in lfōn' seksl: Digital Devices and the Transformation of Intimacy go a long way to help us become more cognizant of this burgeoning phenomenon and help us think through some of the issues it occasions.¹

¹ Portions of the above were borrowed from the call for the show that this essay accompanies, which was co-authored by co-juror Dave Kube.

OLDER ARTISTIC CONVENTIONS

A number of works selected for the show offer evidence that artists are attempting to grapple with the intimate effects of new tech by situating it in the context of older artistic conventions. Striking in this regard is the work of Michael Max McLeod and Cory Peeke. McLeod's self-portrait *#jock #bear #selfie #gaybear #beardporn #menwithdogs #dontwoofatme*, uses very recent digital technology—a cell phone, the photography application Instagram—to compose an image of himself as he'd like to be seen: a hirsute, hyper-masculine male with all the prerogatives that entails. His very, very postmodern body and identity are belied by a much older, and conservative aesthetic style typically encountered in Old Master paintings and prints by artists such as Rembrandt van Rijn. A very narrow color palette of rich browns and blacks, a raking light source, and triangular composition lend a sense of stability and gravity, counterbalancing the transient life passage that the image narrates—one that many might find unduly obsessed with the importance of surfaces rather than substances.

The three works selected by Cory Peeke are from his much larger *Wallflower* series, which consists of mixed media collage, improbably uniting such diverse materials as amateur Internet pornography, vintage wallpaper, and wax. Such materials connect these works to a much older history of image making and art historical conventions for representing the naked human form. The strategic location of leaves or flowers to obscure the genitals in Western painting, sculpture, and printmaking is well known. Such a strategy was essential to legitimatizing and de-sexualizing such images by locating them within the artistic conventions of "the nude." Paintings with pigment and wax (encaustic) were very popular in Medieval and Renaissance art. But the floral wallpaper, with its over-determined connection to feminized domesticity, also helps to undermine and soften the aggressive masculinity of the photographs' subjects.

Notably, where historical nudes used flora to obscure the genitals, here it obscures the faces, and hence identities, of the photographic subjects. Students of the representation of men in film and photography have shown that the masculinity of male film stars and celebrities is often 'salvaged' through direct physical and visual confrontation with the camera, and by extension, the viewer. But the use of floral imagery in these works short circuits that strategy, reducing the subjects to passive objects available for easy sexual objectification—as is so common in representations of women's bodies. Such self-objectification is rampant in the new digital landscape, whether intentional, as image makers attempt to salvage their anonymity by excising identifying details out of their images, or circumstantial, as the act of self-picturing using a cell phone camera necessitates that some part of one's body will not be pictured. Peeke's work helps us understand the complexities of sexualized self-representations now being casually exchanged on cell phones and websites, as well as the artistic instinct to understand these images through reference to older artistic and representational conventions.

Artist Statement: About 'SUP?

I spent 365 days trolling online dating and hookup websites looking for men interested in dates and sexual encounters. When I came across someone who interested me, I looked closely at their profile and I visualized what my photographic portrait of them would be.

"I'm working on a new project that focuses on the ways in which we edit who we are for the web. So I am blind photo dating strangers. Basically I want to come to your place and make a photograph of you immediately based on your online profile.

Then we go out for a drink/date/dinner etc so that I can get a sense of who you are in "real life" and then I re-photograph you appropriate to your personality. You game?"

My dates consisted of my arriving at their home, having never met them in person, pouring them a drink, and photographing them immediately. The shots were staged and often costumed from their own wardrobe. I directed them to perform my preconceived ideas of who they were. After our shoot, I would take them out on a date: often dinner, sometimes drinks, sometimes simply sex on the living room floor. The conversation on our date was always heightened: talking about who we are, our expectations of each other, and always how I misunderstood them. This allowed me to consider how I might alter my first portrait of them. After our date, we collaborated on creating an image that we both felt represented them.



AM82, Grindr

Adam: You are the first and ONLY person to get this pic... Please do not share :)

Sean: You tell that to all the boys

Adam: You know, in the name of art... and in the name of Adventure, I think you should come directly to my place and we should have our first date in my room. Raw. Real. What better place to get to know me?

Sean: Ps I woke up to this from you last night. "If you were Amy awesome you would spontaneously combust". I nearly shot my bed I laughed so hard. We were both there together because I didn't notice the misspellings last night. Hehehehe.

Adam: I hate men. Let's get coffee this week.



Adam, Williamsburg, Brooklyn



20twenty22, Dlist.com

20twenty22: "Straight acting" is a code for "self hatred." Educate yourselves.

Evan: You are a stellar guy Sean Fader. See you soon :)

Sean: You are a stellar guy and you bring out the best in me. It's so good to have you around.

Sean: Ok so I assume you got my text messages. This is my last one. You can text me and tell me I can expect a phone call from you today or never call me again. The choice is yours.



Evan, Bolton Hill, Baltimore



DrewKiddo, OkCupid.com

DrewKiddo: when i die and go to heaven, i hope to find they've held a seat at the luncheon for me between Katharine Hepburn and Oscar Wilde, we'll be dressed to the nines and fit to chat about breaking conventions without hesitation.

Drew: you seem fascinating also, this is my attempt at striking up conversation.

Sean: Don't worry about implying. I'm amazing, talented and charming. you won't be able to keep your hands off me.

Drew: Yes, still have the man-friend. He's great and i feel really lucky. So there's that. :) What about YOU? Anything new and exciting on the lurve front? Let's plan something soon. Would love to see your face.

Sean: Let's grab coffee or a drink. Would love to catch up.



Drew, Hell's Kitchen, NYC

Giving New Artists a Place to Be Noticed



"Desperately Optimistic" by Michael Brown of SUNY New Paltz.
By CATHERINE SPAETH
Published: February 25, 2007

WITH the expectation that international gallerists at the Armory Show in Manhattan this weekend may also want to head upriver, the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art in Peekskill is presenting "First Look II," its second exhibition of works by jury-selected art students (the first was in March 2005).

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Exhibitions of student works are not new — "Supersonic," in Los Angeles, the largest student-run show, exhibits 140 artists from nine West Coast schools — but First Look II is unusual in that it is independent of any school and has gone to great lengths to be more discerning. The invitation reads "16 students selected from over 800 studios — the best of the new artists in the U.S." An undisclosed jury consisting primarily of collectors and gallerists chose the exhibitors.

What has so far characterized the shows at the Hudson Valley Center is a strong taste for contemporary sculpture, and in First Look II, seven sculptors are represented. Their works range from storybook figures to a conceptual investigation of technology. David Mitchell, from [New York University](#), presents a life-size wolf and a girl merging in "Kiss Kiss." Michael Brown, an undergraduate at SUNY New Paltz, reconfigures bits of Americana. A sculpture by Melissa Skluzacek of SUNY Purchase is activated by sound technology. Gareth Long, from [Yale](#), uses voice-recognition to transform the conversations of gallery visitors into a live-action feed.

There is considerable diversity as well among the six painters represented. The small square black-and-white abstractions by Davis Rhodes of Columbia are a counterpoint to the paintings of dented and worn objects by Justin Allen of [Hunter College](#). The two video artists also represent

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opposite poles of their practice. T. Marie Dudman, from Bard, digitally animates her “painting,” and from Hunter College, Bryan Zanisnik films his grandmother with a rifle in her kitchen. And finally, there is one photographer represented: Sean Fader, from the [Art Institute of Chicago](#), exhibits people in bed and down by the river from his “We Are Untitled” series.

Marc Straus, co-founder of the art center, knows the selection and promotion of such young artists will be met with mixed reviews. “Some people are going to hate this show,” he said. “There is a real resentment toward the current art market, with the feeling that it is not in artists’ and galleries’ best interests to have this going on.”

It is not just the youth of the artists that is notable, but the conditions of visibility that are being set for their work by a collector-run nonprofit.

What separates nonprofits like the Hudson Valley Center from museums and other nonprofit arts organizations are the speed and fluidity with which art crosses the boundaries between institution and marketplace. I have seen work removed from the floor of the center in the midst of an exhibition to appear in a major Chelsea gallery, and work on sale in galleries only months before it has appeared in Peekskill. (“Contemporary Sculpture: From a Private Collection” at Zwirner & Wirth in September was immediately recognizable to anyone who has visited the Hudson Valley Center as a sale from the Straus collection.)

In recent history, it was generally assumed that a nonprofit art space had distance from the market. Publicly financed alternative spaces like P.S.1 in Long Island City provided artists the space to exhibit compelling work without market pressure. Alanna Heiss, director of P.S.1, said that in the 1970s, “artists coming out of school never believed they could make a career of art — they didn’t expect to live off it and never thought of living well.”

A textbook example of the difference in institutional approaches is the success of Tamy Ben-Tor, a video and performance artist at “First Look I.” Even though she was in P.S.1’s “Greater New York” at the same time, Ms. Ben-Tor said, it was her appearance at the Peekskill center that led to an invitation to the Performa05 event at Salon 94, followed by gallery representation and a rave review in *The Village Voice*.

Although affiliated with the Museum of Modern Art since 2000, P.S.1, Ms. Heiss explained, has “no collection and therefore no advantage in the market — P.S.1 thinks only of the viewer who comes through to experience art.” But she is also quick to say that any resentment toward supporting the work of young artists in the current market comes simply because “there is always resentment toward the next group of people.” Whether any artists exhibited at “First Look II” will be part of that group remains to be seen — but they are just a small part of the story.

Mark Coetzee, director of the Rubell Family Collection in Miami, one of the best-known collector-run nonprofit arts organizations, said the current expectation of the substantial collector in America is “not to be just an open checkbook for the museums, but to participate in a passionate engagement with the variety of discourses that establish community consensus.” That engagement, as Mr. Coetzee defined it, includes conversations in artists’ studios with other collectors, curators, critics, art historians and gallerists to substantiate the convictions of the collector in a world where the stakes are high.

It is in this mood that an increasing number of collector-run nonprofit arts organizations like the Hudson Valley Center have appeared, allowing collectors to bypass the curatorial system and have their say at a time when the art market is one of the largest remaining unregulated markets in the country and insider trading is the rule.

Ms. Heiss may be nostalgic for a time when it was possible for art to be free of market concerns — an ethical approach she calls the “ideological lodestone” of her profession — but she also enjoys the changes in the art world. As she puts it, “There’s real excitement that’s hard to duplicate except as some kind of strange sport.”

“First Look II,” Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, 1701 Main Street, Peekskill; open Saturdays and Sundays, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Information at (914) 788-0100 or www.hvcca.com.

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