

QUEER STATE[S]



VISUAL
ARTS
CENTER



Department of
Art + Art History

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN



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**VISUAL ARTS CENTER
DEPARTMENT OF ART + ART HISTORY
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
SEPTEMBER 9 - NOVEMBER 5, 2011
CURATED BY NOAH SIMBLIST
WITH DAVID WILLBURN**

ARTISTS

Queer State[s] artists include:

Ben Aqua
Libby Black
Robert Boland
CHRISTEENE
Thomas Feulmer
Heyd Fontenot
K8 Hardy
Otis Ike and Ivete Lucas
Ivan Lozano
Senalka McDonald
Wura Natasha Ogunji
Richard Patterson
PJ Raval
Adam Shecter
SKOTE
Michael Smith
Jason Villegas

An afterparty for the opening reception including a performance by CHRISTEENE was held at Cheer Up Charlie's.

SYMPOSIUM

In conjunction with the exhibition, a symposium held at the VAC on October 22, 2011 includes Lisa Moore, Associate Professor of English; Ixchel Rosal, Director of the Gender and Sexuality Center; Risa Puleo, Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art at the Blanton Museum of Art; and Andy Campbell and Chelsea Weathers, both PhD candidates in Art History. In addition, other participants will include Nathan Lee, an independent curator and critic from New York; Leah Devun, a Faculty Fellow at Stanford University and an Associate Professor of History at Rutgers University; and Jonathan D. Katz, Director of the Doctoral Program in Visual Studies at the University at Buffalo and co-founder of the activist group Queer Nation, San Francisco and the Queer Caucus of the College Art Association.

A reception for the symposium and book signing for *Last Men* by Adam Shecter was held at DOMY books.

SCREENINGS

Two film screenings are also presented in association with the exhibition:

Films by Jack Smith

Selected and Introduced by Ann Reynolds, Associate Professor in Art History and Center for Women's and Gender Studies
October 27, 2011: 6:30pm
Art Building Room 1.102

Red Without Blue (2007)

Directed by Brooke Sebold, Benita Sills and Todd Sills
October 20, 2011: 12pm
Visual Arts Center

Cover Image:

K8 Hardy
Position Series, Form #19 (2010)
Courtesy of the artist and
Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York

Interior Spread:

Otis Ike and Ivete Lucas
Tetas Espectaculares, Bauru BR (2008)
Courtesy of the artists

QUEER STATE[S]

This exhibition began when David Willburn and I sat down in the fall of 2009 in the wake of a police raid on the Rainbow Lounge, a gay bar in Fort Worth. This event, reminiscent of the famous Stonewall raid that sparked the gay rights movement in 1969, was a reminder that Texas was still far behind the curve in terms of gay rights and acceptance. In this context, we thought that an exhibition focusing on queer sexuality in Texas might be able to do two things: First, it could provide a space within Texas to gather together a vibrant community of artists that are working with imagery that is outside of normative structures of sexuality. Secondly, it could subvert the perception by some outside of Texas that the cultural life of this state exists solidly within a Bible Belt paradigm.ⁱ

Queer State[s] explores the ways in which Texas artists queer gender identity and the performance of sexuality through visual representation. The term queer is not meant to be literal, as in any gay artist in Texas, but rather it is meant to refer to gay and even straight artists that engage queer sexuality in their work. Queer here is meant

to refer to a kind of sexuality or gender identity that resists easy classification and exists in a more ambiguous way.

The derogatory term “queer” emerged in the 1950s, referring to fags, dykes, trannies, thieves, junkies, and bikers—anyone that fell outside of the norm. The term was replaced and co-opted by homosexual movements in the 1980s that indicated a political position that was non-assimilationist. It was an attitude that was in your face, adopted and espoused by groups like Queer Nation and ACT UP. It was from these politics that queer theory emerged.ⁱⁱ

This exhibition is by no means meant to be a definitive or comprehensive survey of queer Texas art, but it does assemble a group of artworks that question how artists participate in the performance of queer bodies.ⁱⁱⁱ We are familiar with this notion in the case of drag kings and queens, but how is queerness evident in other forms? Can it be found in as traditional a genre as life drawing or as mainstream a form as fashion photography? Can sexuality be queer when gender roles are reversed but remain straight?

Are there ways that gender stereotypes can be pushed so far that they become queer?

Libby Black’s paintings often draw from fashion advertisements: Her painting *Watching You* (2008) is based on the model Stephanie Seymour wearing Vivienne Westwood cock underwear. Fashion photography both reflects and participates in the construction of gender and as a painting of a photograph of a cock printed on a pair of women’s underwear, *Watching You* slyly references an enormously complex set of ideas through one of the central concepts in feminist theory—the signification of the phallus.^{iv} K8 Hardy’s photographs also comment on the genre of gender performance through photographic portraiture. But like the work produced by the feminist gender-queer collective LTRR that she co-founded, the characters represented in her photographs resist easy classification.

Mining the space between men’s health magazines and porn, Thomas Feulmer’s work helps us to look at the hypermasculinity and the coy alluring gaze of the models depicted in centerfold photographs.

Below:
Libby Black
Watching You (2009)
Courtesy of Artist Pension Trust



Richard Patterson’s study for a portrait of Amy Phelan from her time as a Dallas Cowboys cheerleader also plays with the visual effects of exaggerating gender via football, an exemplar of heteronormative Texan culture.^v Robert Boland’s video *Methods for Training #4* also investigates masculinity, although in this instance it is more about the failure to perform. Boland set up a camera in a room with its floor covered in yogurt. All that we see in this scenario is the artist’s naked body, bruised and glazed with sweat, as he desperately tries to keep up with a break dancing instructional video from the 1980s.

Ben Aqua's photographs and a video of the performer **CHRISTEENE**, directed and produced by **PJ Raval**, push the boundaries of gender, but within the particularities of southern regionalism. Aqua's photographs *Hunter* and *He Had it Coming* tell the story of a man who has captured and killed something, but rather than focusing on the dead animal, the object of the sport, he focuses instead on the genre of the prize shot where the main object is not the prey, but the enactment of masculinity instead. In Raval's **CHRISTEENE** video *Fix My Dick*, we see characters that obscure age, origin, race, religion, and even gender, but somehow allude to a mashup of gender tropes of the American South.

Mining the venerable tradition of life drawing, **Heyd Fontenot's** project for *Headmaster* magazine depicts notable Texans such as David Koresh, Robert Rauschenberg, and Susie Parker. Typical of his practice, Fontenot made these works by photographing friends who serve as his naked unprofessional models and then made delicate and disarmingly intimate and sometimes funny drawings from them. **Jason Villegas** also uses the artist's studio model as a starting point with his drawings, paintings, and textiles, but he obscures the faces of his chubby models that lounge in tighty whitey underwear with an enigmatic, fetish-like kind of headgear.

Like Villegas's use of headgear, other artists in the exhibition also use costume as a method to emphasize otherness and a resistance to blending in with normative gender codes.

Senalka McDonald's photographs are self-portraits of the artist wearing a knitted apparatus that covers all of her body except for her sexual organs. **SKOTE**, the collaborative work of Jill Pangallo and Alex P. White, is represented by videos of the artists in elaborate costumes walking through spaces in which they clearly don't belong. In one video, they can be seen in black patent leather go-go boots and two foot-tall headdresses that obscure their faces, ritualistically removing a stripper pole from the lounge of the Skowhegan residency program. **Michael Smith** originally developed his Baby Ikki character, a pre-verbal, pre-sexual man child as a response to feminism in the 1970s. He most recently explored these ideas through a collaborative project with Mike Kelly in which Baby Ikki went to Burning Man.

Some artists in the exhibition allude to darker visions of queer bodies: **Ivan Lozano's** photographs signal an absent body through his elegiac memorials to a generation of men who passed away from AIDS. **Adam Shecter's** video installation and book project riffs on the 1930 science fiction novel *Last and First Men* by Olaf Stapledon, which tells the story of two billion years of human history. This story involves generations of social Darwinist warfare until the most advanced species evolves to the point that multiple sub-genders emerge, creating new models for family units.

Opposite:
Ben Aqua
Hunter (2009)
Courtesy of the Artist



Finally, the artist duo **Otis Ike and Ivete Lucas** and **Wura-Natasha Ogunji** engage in a kind of ethnography of queer identity in cultures that are represented, but not always foregrounded in Texas. The installation by Ike and Lucas combines two cultures into one duplex video estate, one from Appalachia and one from rural Latin America, paying particular attention to drag culture in Mexico and Brazil. Ogunji's video documents a performance that the artist enacted in Nigeria that explores an exaggerated gender performance of an action from everyday life.

Queer State[s] is predicated on a position of multiplicity and the blurring of clear boundaries between not only sex and gender identities, but also regions and medium specific practices. The exhibition includes video, performance, photography, painting, and sculpture. It also includes artists that have various relationships to Texas. Some were born here and live elsewhere. Some are from elsewhere and are recent transplants, and some passed through for various reasons. *Queer State[s]* queers even state identity in a region that still has a fraught and evolving relationship with LGBTQ culture.

-Noah Simblist
2010-2011 VAC Curatorial Fellow

Opposite:
Otis Ike and Ivete Lucas
Dearest Wilderness, Ivanhoe VA (2009)
Courtesy of the Artists



NOTES

ⁱ It should be noted that there are precedents for such exhibitions including *¿Y QUÉ?* curated by Harmony Hammond for Landmark Arts at Texas Tech University in 2007. In 2010, the Station Museum in Houston presented *Because We Are*, an exhibition about LGBT civil rights. One important and foundational exhibition that dealt with queer politics is *In a Different Light*, curated by Lawrence Rinder and Nayland Blake at the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive in 1995. Most recently *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*, curated by Jonathan Katz and David C. Ward, was at the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution and *Queer Voice*, was curated by Ingrid Schaffner for the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania.

ⁱⁱ For more on this history go to *Bad at Sports* to hear this great conversation with Gregg Bordowitz and David Getsy <http://badatsports.com/2007/episode-91-gregg-bordowitz-and-david-getsy-on-%E2%80%9Cqueer%E2%80%9D/>

ⁱⁱⁱ The performance of gender and sexuality is also a running theme in this exhibition. Most famously, it has been analyzed by Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick but many recent scholars such as Jose Esteban Munoz have also looked at the role of race and ethnicity in gender performance.

^{iv} Elizabeth Grosz, *"The Phalus and Power"* Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction (New York: Routledge, 1990) p116

^v In an article in *W Magazine*, Casey Spooner, a friend of Phelan's relates a story in which Phelan acknowledges her gender performance. "We were rocking out in the living room, and Amy said, 'Let's go to the kitchen and cut all our hair off!'" remembers Spooner, who was appearing in a play with the Wooster Group theater company at the time. "I said, 'I can't. I have to keep it for my role.'" Phelan's retort? "Me too!" http://www.wmagazine.com/society/2008/02/amy_phelan

ABOUT THE CURATORS

Noah Simblist is a writer, curator and artist. His current research focuses on the relationship between contemporary art and politics regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He won the 2007 Moss/Chumley award and has written for *ART LIES*, *Art Papers*, *Pidgin* and *Transmission Annual* as well as web-based publications such as D Magazine's *Front Row*, *Daily Serving*, *Glasstire*, *Pastelegram*, and *...might be good*. He was the director of Garner Tullis print publishing in New York and curated *Yuri's Office*, a project with Eve Sussman and the Rufus Corporation at Fort Worth Contemporary Arts (co-curated with Christina Rees) and *Out of Place* at Lora Reynolds Gallery in Austin, *Abstraction/Construction* at SOIL Gallery in Seattle, *Collecting and Collectivity* at Conduit Gallery in Dallas, and *3 Propositions and a Musical Scenario* in Fort Worth (co-curated with Subtext Projects). He is an Associate Professor of Art at SMU and was the 2010-11 Curatorial Fellow at The Visual Arts Center at The University of Texas at Austin.

David Willburn is an artist who lives and works in Fort Worth. He earned a BA from Vermont College of Norwich University and an MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts (FKA Vermont College). Willburn serves as art faculty and Department Chair at Eastfield College in Mesquite. Investigating ideas of sentimentality and narrative, Willburn creates hand and machine embroidered drawings of objects and spaces culled from home furnishing catalogs, as well as photographs of his own home environment. Willburn's work has been featured in exhibitions at 500X Gallery in Dallas, University of Art and Design in Helsinki, Museum of Arts and Design in New York, and Museum of Contemporary Craft in Portland, Oregon.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The curators would like to thank the participants in the exhibition, symposium, and all supplemental programs, and the Department of Art + Art History and the Visual Arts Center – in particular: John Yancey, Lee Chesney, Jade Walker, Alex Codlin, Xochi Solis, You You Xia, Marc Silva, Hunter Thomas, and Bill Hadad. Thanks also go to Bill Arning, Risa Puleo, Dan Byers, Laurence Miller, and Joe Arredondo for early consultations regarding the curatorial premise. Thank you also to lenders to the exhibition including Artist Pension Trust, and Josh Greene, as well as Marx & Zattero Gallery and Eleven Rivington Gallery for facilitating loans of works by their artists. Thank you to John and Amy Phelan for the image rights to reproduce Richard Patterson's painting. Thank you to The Blanton Museum and Austin Museum of Art for loaning equipment for the exhibition. Thanks to Marcella Mendez for exhibition research. Thanks also to Benjamin Slade from what.it.is creative. Finally thanks to Cheer Up Charlie's and DOMY Books for their collaboration on supplemental events.

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WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Hunter, 2009
Ben Aqua
digital archival print
courtesy of the artist

He Had It Coming, 2009
Ben Aqua
digital archival print
courtesy of the artist

Miu Miu Underwear, 2008
Libby Black
oil on canvas
collection of Renee Gertler and Josh Greene

Watching You, 2008
Libby Black
oil on canvas
courtesy of the artist and the Artist Pension Trust
(APT Los Angeles)

Label My Love Lesbian, 2010
Libby Black
gouache on paper
courtesy of the artist and
Marx & Zavattero Gallery, San Francisco

Methods for Training #4, 2006
Robert Boland
single channel video
courtesy of the artist

Methods for Training #8, 2007
Robert Boland
single channel video
courtesy of the artist

*Plastic cover for Attitude (The Sex Issue),
December 2010 magazine*, 2011
Thomas Feulmer
found object
courtesy of the artist

*Attitude (The Sex Issue), December 2010
(jet black, v1)*, 2011
Thomas Feulmer
gesso and gouache on purple heart
courtesy of the artist

Plastic cover for DNA #127, 2010 magazine, 2011
Thomas Feulmer
found object
courtesy of the artist

DNA #127 (pure blue, v1), 2011
Thomas Feulmer
gesso and gouache on mahogany
courtesy of the artist

FAGGOTROIDRAGE 2 (two upside down), 2009
Thomas Feulmer
spray paint and glass glitter on foldouts from
Exercise for Men Only magazine
courtesy of the artist

*Self-Portrait as David Koresh, Messiah/Martyr,
b.1959, Houston, Texas*, 2011
Heyd Fontenot
graphite and ink on paper
courtesy of the artist

*Joe as Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, b. 1925, Port
Arthur, Texas*, 2011
Heyd Fontenot
graphite and ink on paper
courtesy of the artist

*Chris as Susie Parker, Fashion Model, b. 1932,
San Antonio, Texas*, 2011
Heyd Fontenot
graphite and ink on paper
courtesy of the artist

Position Series #15, 2010
K8 Hardy
c-print and wooden frame
courtesy of the artist and
Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York

Weeping Rainbow, 2011
Otis Ike and Ivete Lucas
Installation
courtesy of the artists

*A WITNESSING (FOR CLARITY IN THE PROPER
EMOTIONAL PLACEMENT OF THINGS)*, 2011
Ivan Lozano
inkjet print, prepared frame, epoxy, and tape
courtesy of the artist

*A WITNESSING (FOR FIDELITY OF INTENT
UNDER LOW LIGHT CONDITIONS)*, 2011
Ivan Lozano
inkjet print, prepared frame, epoxy, and tape
courtesy of the artist

*A WITNESSING (FOR INTEGRITY OF
FORESIGHT AND FORM)*, 2011
Ivan Lozano
inkjet print, prepared frame, epoxy, and tape
courtesy of the artist

SIGNAL NOISE, 2008
Ivan Lozano
single channel video
courtesy of the artist

Force, 2008
Senalka McDonald
color C-print,
courtesy of the artist

What's Left, 2008
Senalka McDonald
color C-print
courtesy of the artist

*Will I still carry water when I am
a dead woman?*, 2011
Wura-Natasha Ogunji
digital video
documentation of public performance by
Jelili Atiku
courtesy of the artist

Study # 5 for Exile on Jackson Street, 2003
Richard Patterson
mixed media
courtesy of the artist

Last Men, 2011
Adam Shecter
single channel HD digital animation and video
with edition of 1000 trade paperbacks
dimensions variable
courtesy of the artist and
Eleven Rivington Gallery, New York

destination: TYBEE, 2009
SKOTE
single channel video
courtesy of the artists

jerk the circle, 2010
SKOTE
single channel video
courtesy of the artists

Baby IKKI, circa 1983
Michael Smith
pigment print
courtesy of the artist

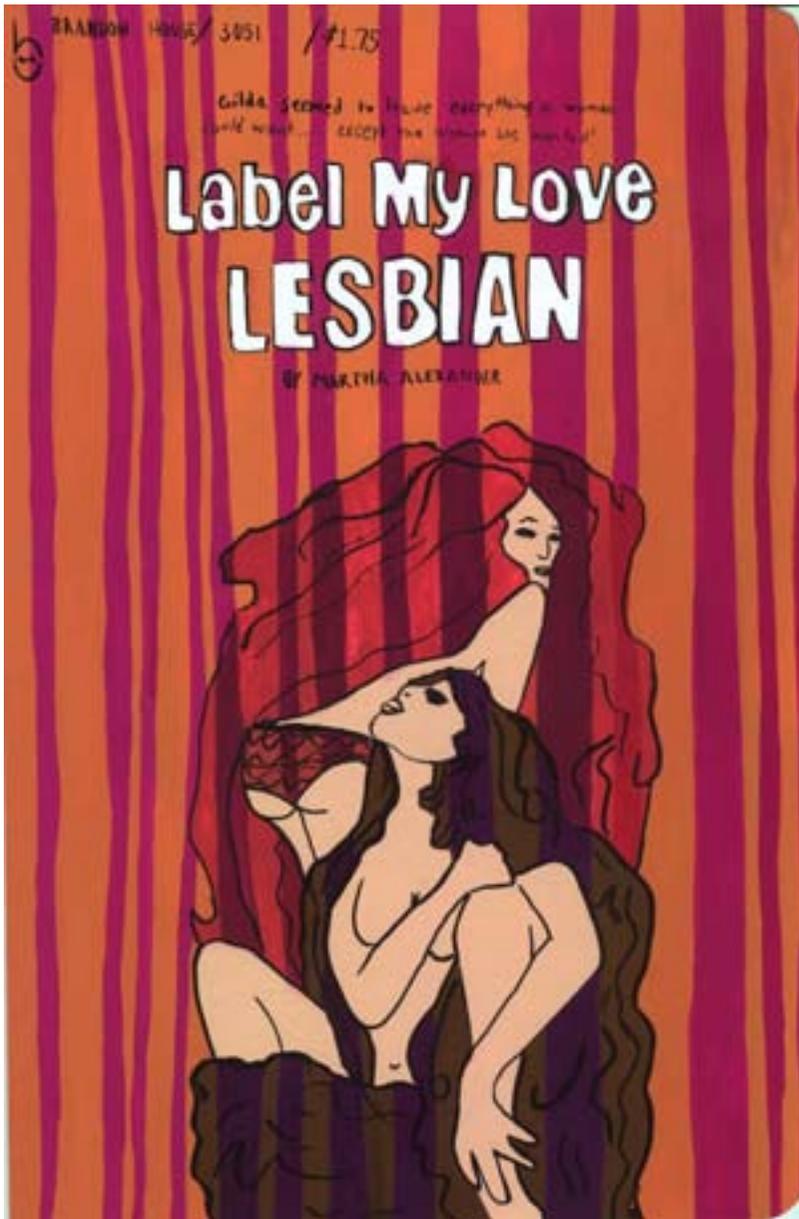
CHRISTEENE: Fix My Dick, 2009
PJ Raval
single channel video
courtesy of the director/producer

Gluttonous Conjuring of Textile Spirit, 2009
Jason Villegas
acrylic on paper
courtesy of the artist

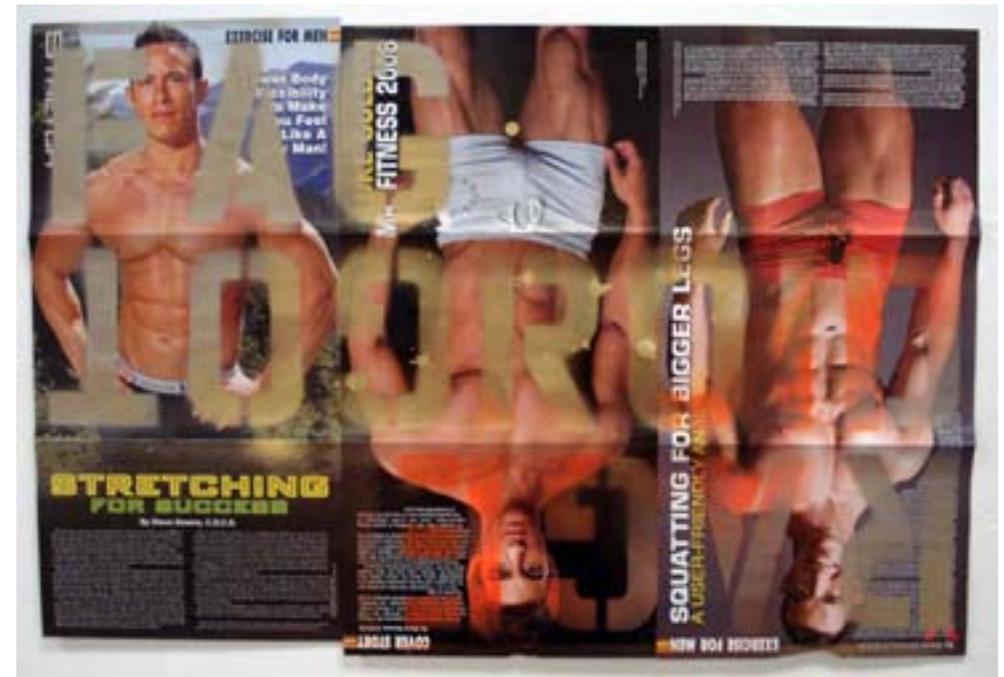
Self Portrait as Hare Brand, 2008
Jason Villegas
fabric on board
courtesy of the artist

Online Pile, 2011
Jason Villegas
acrylic on paper
courtesy of the artist





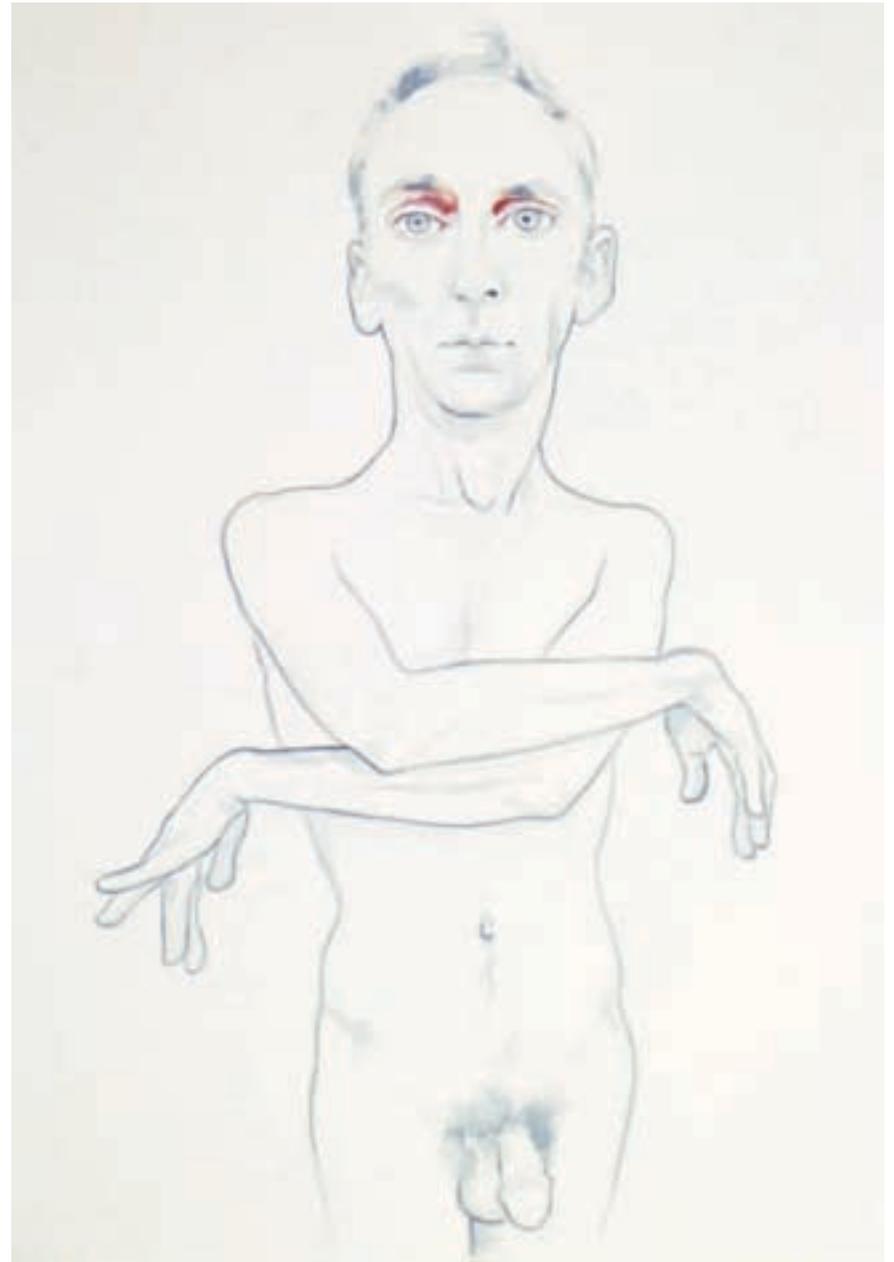
LIBBY BLACK



THOMAS FUELMER



JASON VILLEGAS



HEYD FONTENOT



CHRISTEENE



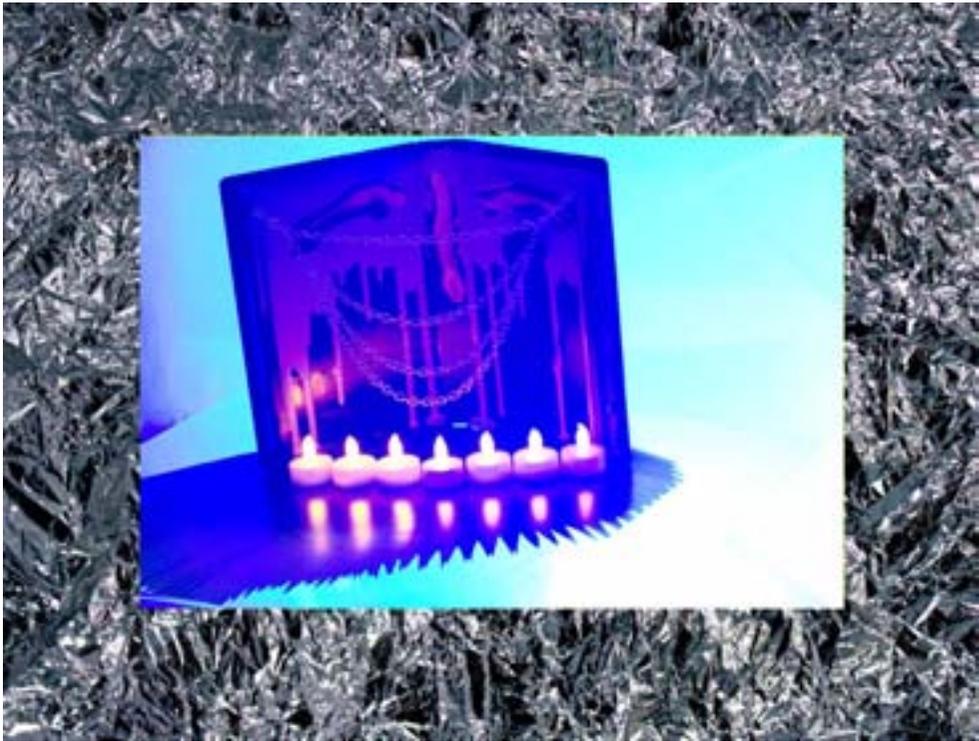
RICHARD PATTERSON



ROBERT BOLAND



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