

THE ARCHIVE 38

SPRING
2011
The Journal of the
Leslie Lohman
Gay Art Foundation



Private Album 4
from the *Luigi & Luca* exhibition
9 Feb — 12 March 2011



(top) Amos Badertscher, *Nine Squares Middle Figure*, silver gelatin print, 10 x 8"

(above, left to right)
Gio Black Peter, *Game Over*, 2010, mixed media collage, 8.5 x 11", Artist's collection.

Gio Black Peter, *B Day Surprise*, 2010-2011, mixed media drawing on slave c.v., 8.5 x 11", Artist's collection.

Josef Kozak, *Untitled*, 2011, pen, ink, crayon, gold paint on paper, 22 x 14.75". Gift of the artist.

Leslie & Lohman Gay Art Foundation

is a non-profit foundation established in 1990 to provide an outlet for art work that is unambiguously gay and that is frequently denied access to mainstream venues. The Foundation's gallery mounts exhibitions of work in all media by gay and lesbian artists with an emphasis on subject matter that speaks directly to the gay and lesbian experience, including erotic, political, romantic and social imagery. The Foundation provides special support for emerging and under-represented artists. Its programs include regularly scheduled exhibitions, artists' and curators' talks, panel discussions, a quarterly journal, an archive of artists' data, and a permanent collection of art.

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The Archive

The Journal of the Leslie/Lohman Gay Art Foundation, Number 38
Editor: Seth Clark Silberman, Ph.D.
Production Editor: Joseph Cavallieri

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FRONT COVER
Luigi & Luca, *Private Album 4*, 2007-2009, digital pigment print, 11.8 x 7.9"

CORRECTIONS

Patrick Angus' painting *I Get Weak* (1991) included in last issue depicts a scene at The Prince on West St. in Greenwich Village, not at The Gaiety Theatre near Times Square.

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John Burton Harter, *Peter*, 1995, oil on panel, 30 x 24", Collection of Stuart Butler

This issue of *The Archive* is made possible entirely by a generous donation from the **John Burton Harter Charitable Trust.**

A Conversation with Amos Badertscher

BY CRAIG SEYMOUR



Big Daddy: Sunday: Under an Interstate

Amos Badertscher, *Big Daddy: Sunday: Under an Interstate*, silver gelatin print, 8 x 9"

For nearly four decades, Amos Badertscher took pictures documenting a side of life that most people never see, that some never want to see. He chronicled the margins of Baltimore's bustling gay scene — all the cool night crawlers and, especially, the young, mostly straight hustlers who worked the clubs and streets. He was turned onto photography in the late '60s by a co-worker at an all-male preparatory school where he was teaching Math. He learned about the craft largely from looking through a

series of *Time-Life* photography books, but this lack of formal training did not stop him from creating stark, arresting images of guys who lived on the hard edge of what was sometimes ironically called Charm City. Often, he wrote the stories behind the photos on the prints, stories such as: "[Brian] had entertained men in one way or another since the age of ten. This photograph was taken in Oct. of '89, three years before he died of AIDS, at the age of twenty-one."

I had the chance to talk with Bad-

ertscher, now 74, about his work, the guys who inspired him, and why he ultimately decided to abandon the art form that he once called "an extension of my life."

Q: Have you always been interested in art?

A: You have to remember that I came up in the '40s and '50s. In the neighborhood in which I grew up, they were all professional men, engineers and so forth. My parents had absolutely no interest in art; so I just had no interest. But the only thing that happened is I went to Union College in Schenectady, NY. In my junior year, I took an Art History course, and I really did well in it. I really loved it to death. And I had this ability to look at art works and remember them instantly. But it never even dawned on me that I should've stopped right there and changed courses. I should've turned my life around and pursued Art History. And then, from there, possibly pursue creating some form of art. But it never dawned on me.

Have you always been interested in sex?

I came up in a world where there was no "gay." If you were attracted to males, you didn't know what all that meant. I always thought in terms of girls and marriage, and I thought that's just what you did. And I thought at some point in time, I would find a girl, I would marry her, and it would just be the way it always was. I didn't even know what sex was. I actually didn't have sex — I mean, I couldn't even approach sex until about a year after college. I was terrified of it.

I'm sure you more than made up for the lack of early sexual experiences.

I made up for it. But, when you don't have those experiences as an adolescent, it presents a problem for you that you never forget. When you have a relationship as a teenager, you learn what life is about, how people relate. If you don't learn that, there's something different, very different, about the way you approach sex later on. It's a time you can never go back to. You can never make it different by having all the sex that you want later on. It's not the same thing.

Do you remember the first time you saw a picture of a naked or nearly naked guy?

Yes, this goes back to the 50's. All the [physique] magazines like *Tomorrow's Man*, I had sent to my house. My parents were clueless. This was my first ex-

posure to the desirable male body. But it was illegal to send nude images through the mail. I remember looking at one boy, specifically, illustrating the exercises with weights. His name was Marvin Eder. I still remember that name. I found him extremely sexually attractive, and I thought by doing the exercises, I'm gonna look like that, I'm going to be like that boy.

Tell me how you were introduced to photography by a co-worker.

When I was teaching at this [all-male, preparatory] school, I knew nothing about photography. I never had any training. This teacher who was new that year, I think it was around 1968, was a photographer, and he showed me pictures that he had taken in the classroom of some of his students, which were [also] some of my students. And I was quite fascinated by the way he did it. They looked so natural, just like the boys were. He was able to capture the essence of these boys' personalities. So I was really impressed with this, and I said, "how do you create this?" That inspired me to get a camera,

"I just thought that when a wider audience saw these nude beautiful teenagers, they would just be overwhelmed by the beauty of youth. I really believed that."

and I started out taking photographs in the classroom because I had a captive audience.

What's the relationship between your development as an artist and your sexuality?

When I actually started photographing nudes, I was photographing hustlers, boys that I would pick up on the street. And I thought that they were very photogenic. I have a very good eye for faces, body movements, body shape. I don't just photograph anybody. I had this natural instinct for who would photograph well. The predominant drive was sexual contact, sexual exploration. And, unfortunately, I photographed them in such a way, totally nude, that was going to prove very unacceptable to the art establishment and to any gallery that might want to carry my work. I was totally clueless. I just thought that when a wider audience saw these nude beautiful teenagers, they would just be overwhelmed by the beauty of youth. I really believed that.

How would you photograph the guys?

I had no knowledge of technical pho-

tography. I didn't know anything about lighting. But, in the apartment that I had, the sun in the late morning came in at a certain angle, and I discovered that, if I put a model against a white wall, I could get really amazing results as the sun hit a certain angle and reflected off the floor onto the model. And, so, I would just say to the kid, I want to photograph you and I'll pay you such-and-such. It wasn't much. I would say that I have to be able to pick you up in the morning. Would you be interested? Some weren't, but enough were. They had no clue what art photography was. They just wanted to make a few bucks.

Did you ever have relationships with the hustlers?

Never have I thought, even vaguely, of having a relationship with these boys — ever. It just never occurred to me, beyond sexual and social contact. I suppose such a relationship works out at some level for some men, but for me it would be too emotionally and logistically stressful, like in the movie, *Mala Noche*.¹ I need a partner who can contribute very posi-

tively, both emotionally and financially to the relationship. I need all the help I can get. Too many men try to make these mentally and emotionally scattered and sometimes drug-addicted boys their love objects. They really try that. They like to have them living in their apartment. They like to have them as their lovers. Mostly, it hardly works out, of course, because these kids are drug addicts and they have no idea what a relationship is. They're not necessarily gay. Some of them don't know what they are. It is totally futile.

So, there is no long line of straight "trade" that broke your heart?

Oh, Christ, no. But there has to be this absolute aura of straightness about the boys [I photograph]. I really do have to identify with the straight image. "Straight" is the exact thing I wanted when I was in high school. I wanted to be these boys. I wanted to be these straight, normal-acting, contented, accepted boys. I really felt that if I had looked like that when I was a kid in high school, everything would've been different. I would've been accepted. Of course, it probably wouldn't have been different. But, in my mind, that's what's going on. I wanted



Brian Householder
Brian was one of the more talented dancers at Club Atlantis in Baltimore. He had entertained men in one way or another since the age of ten. This photograph was taken in Oct. of '89, three years before he died of AIDS, at the age of twenty-one.

Amos Badertscher, Brian Householder, 1989, silver gelatin print, 10 x 8"

to be these boys. That's usually who I photographed.

You mentioned that you had some resistance to your work from the art world. Were you actively taking your work to galleries?

No, I was not doing that. I didn't really get that far. What got me going and what sustained me in this effort was that a lot of the people I was photographing were the cool people in the gay scene. These were charismatic, cutting-edge people. There were the people I hung out with, and they really started pointing to my work and saying, "You know, this is really good, Amos. What you're doing is fantastic. Could you photograph me?" That's when I got my first indication that maybe I should keep doing this. And that's just what I did.

Tell me the story of how you got the

for money. I want to show, in the most graphic terms, what hustling is all about, what sex-for-sale is all about. This is a way to understand that lifestyle.

Are you satisfied with the recognition that your work has received?

My work in my lifetime is never going to be recognized by a wider audience. It's just not gonna happen. If you could press all the wrong buttons in your work, I have pressed them. I recognize that now. But what I wanted was just some more recognition, and I wanted to make some money at this. I wanted to be able to devote more time to creation of the work.

Why did you decide to quit photography?

I was getting really sick of darkroom work and there were some technical problems I was running into. At 74 years old, I just felt there were not yet the recognition and the financial compensation that would really drive me to continue; but I am still trying to figure out ways to extend the art form.

I can give you a small example about the technical problems. I used to use something called Tri-X film when I first started, and no matter what kind of picture I took, when I printed it, it was razor-sharp. It was fabulous. And then over the years, they changed the formula or they changed something in Tri-X film. Somehow or other, it didn't give me the sharpness. I lost my confidence in my ability to create razor sharp images, and I didn't know how to address it. I was just overwhelmed in the end.

And I wasn't making any money. If I could be assured of \$500 or \$1,000 every time I made a print, that would be extreme motivation to continue. But, after all these years, I just had the sense that I'd done it. Why push this thing when it's not really gonna go anywhere? So, I just stopped.

If you could go back to any particular time in your life, when would that be? Was there ever a period that felt like the perfect time?

I never saw anything as perfect. I just lived from one day to the next, and I was just engrossed in what was there. As it changed, I was equally engrossed in it. But it's sheer folly to want to go back, to even think about it, because it's impossible. And if it can't be a reality, it's of no interest to me. ■

Craig Seymour is a writer/photographer. He is author of the memoir, *All I Could Bare: My Life in the Strip Clubs of Gay Washington, D.C.* and the photo book, *American Boys: a strip club diary*. For more information, go to <http://www.craigseymour.com>.

¹ Gus Van Sant, Director, *Mala Noche*, 1987.

Amos,
Just a few lines to say Hello!
your letter! How are you
but I have a good memory!
photographs come out good!
I'm sending you a small
but its all I have, cause there
any money no one to rely on!
for the next few lines. When I
and she fucked over me in more
father's company which in
and Robbed her father of \$35,000.00.
ret. earned \$37,000.00 Back to
Barracuda gly mouth. when I
3 years at the State Correctional
here for 1/2 and wait up for Parole
15-months more to do. So I was
a parole agent. So I was charged
the Judge sentenced me to
meaning after my 1/2 to 3 years!
hunt the girl just let her know
and drinking and being able
you and understand that I'm not
doing till I was arrested!
me and give me another chance
but you all now because I was
together... and I'm hoping that
me, it will never happen again!
I read things and can't get
any pack ages at all. if
account and whatever
from that so far I'm in \$ 55.754 dept and don't care, because I don't have it and can't get it from any one!
I received \$200 so far since I've been here and couldn't have it because it was cash and not a Money Order for me!
sounds crazy right? But cash could buy all the dope in the jail! I'm scared because if someone doesn't help
me pay my debt then they'll get other inmates to hunt me. like Breaking my legs or arms I'm twenty two years old and never
had a Broken Bone in my Body... Do me one small favor and help me - But never tell anyone about the Jail because I could
get into alot of serious trouble and I'll never Make parole. So please hush-hush. just help me! okay? I can't get anyone
to help me cause I have no one! I asked you to send me some of those pictures. its cool to do so I have a guard whill
be waiting on them and hill do anything I ask him to do. So please send me a few nude or not nude okay? 1- nude
if you sending me any! the rest must be presentable okay? I'm on the Jail's Boying team and my record is 13 rooms
7-loves. 8 knockouts and 1- Decision. I do this to keep in shape and to keep myself alive! Please help me
out. Write me soon! I want to remain as yours amos - But your have to decide and help me - if you help me
then I'll repay you in Bed once I'm out of jail my word!



I am very Happy but shocked to see
doing? I really its been along time,
I'm glad to here that my
why don't you send me a few?
picture of me, its not the best one
picture cost \$2.00 each and I don't
I will explain my reason for being in jail
left Baltimore I ran into this chick
ways than one. So I worked for her
Globe Security. So I was on Hiram
I was arrested 3-weeks later and
her father and I bought myself a 1971
car the Judge he sentenced me to 1 1/2
but at 100 Camp Hill, pa. When I was
the Board fucked over me and gave me
very bent and upset, and tried to kill
with attempt to kill a at all official
10 months to 2 years running consecutive
I feel Bad because I never intended to
that I was hunting! I miss being high
to drive my car and live freely! I am
a criminal I did not realize my wrong
I hope that you Brad + Kay can forgive
with you all? I don't write to any body
thinking of the good times we all had
will have more to come? Please forgive
I'm not doing so well and can't because
then with my looks! I can't accept
I read things I charge to my prison
I receive money the deduct it

Love Always
John
4-16-79

Amos Badertscher, John, 1979, silver gelatin print, 13.9 x 11"

Privacy, Publicity, Photography: Presenting *Luigi & Luca*, Pondering *Private Album*

BY SETH CLARK SILBERMAN



Luigi & Luca, *Learning*, 2008,
silver gelatin print, 17.7 x 11.8"



Luigi & Luca, *Private Album 73a*,
2007-2009, digital pigment print,
11.8 x 7.9"

Meeting someone you know from photographs promotes the implicit power of images. They characterize that person, or compose them during some period in their past. Photography manipulates our vision by exploiting our pre-supposition that we, too, transparently perceive the world around us. However conspicuously manufactured any image may be, whether its subject poses explicitly or its photographer animates the colors or alters the setting after the fact, we assume that photographs preserve moments in time. They report, rather than distort, experience more clearly than human eyes. Or, as painter Francis Bacon once explained their perceptual command: "one's sense of appearance is assaulted all the time by photography and by the film. So that, when one looks at something, one's not only looking at it directly but one's also looking at it through the assault."¹

Then, a photograph's living subject walks into the room, without violence, as Luigi did when we first met to talk about his art at the Leslie/Lohman gallery in advance of the opening of the *Luigi & Luca* exhibition. His breathing body does not contradict the photographic sense of him on display as he says hello. Nor does the artist I meet necessarily correspond to the photographs hanging in the gallery, or to the ones I first saw of him years ago. This Luigi before me, following Bacon, seems more moving image than man. He stands not before me, but visible, or available to be interpreted, as if this Luigi is a photographic assault on par with *Union* (2008), a digital photograph printed on canvas hanging on the wall behind him as he approaches to shake my hand.

Union presents another Luigi ceremonially on his knees, before his now-former partner Luca. Both are inside a five-bone hoop skirt slip that could serve





Luigi & Luca, *Union*, 2008, digital photograph on canvas, 39.4 x 27.5", edition of 5

as a bridal petticoat. As a wedding photograph via Italian *Vogue*, *Union* manifests the erotic nightmares — or fantasies — of right-wing opponents of gay marriage. Luigi consummates their stylized union by taking Luca's cock into his mouth. Luca gazes upward, with mouth parted and Adam's apple protruding. He conveys cultivated reverie. His left hand rests on the back of Luigi's head. Luca's right arm folds itself behind his back so as not to block our view of Luigi's engaged mouth. *Union's* sexual display also distracts. Its erotic sleight of hand overshadows Luigi's second left hand — not the visible one holding Luca's cock, but the one on Luca's leg, resting beneath translucent petticoat ruffles. *Union's* Photoshop-elaborated tableau reveals itself when eyes linger and wander.

Union opens the *Luigi & Luca* exhibition, their debut American show, because of the flair with which it exemplifies their artwork's deliberate stylization of themselves, of their photographic relation to each other, as well as of the manipulation of the image, both its construction and its post-production. Blowjobs notwithstanding, *Union* ponders heady philosophical quandaries about how we come to experience ourselves and to understand each other intimately, through the rituals we perform with and the desires we sate through our bodies. So do the snapshots that anchor the exhibition and comprise *Private Album* (2010), a book project encouraged by curator, art historian and publisher Peter Weiermair, who joined Luigi and me for our conversation. *Private Album* may not seem as theatrical as *Union*, with its explicit grounding in fashion photography iconography, but the book's intimate tableaux pack the same performative punch.

Taking *Private Album's* snapshots between 2007 and 2009 may have started "as a joke," as Luigi confesses, as "a documentation of our life, or moments we spent together that were meaningful to us" while the couple collaborated on other artwork, including *Union*; but those "private" images wield their own visual language.² Some of the book's pictures they took in the same locations in which they shot black-and-white photographic series such as *Clean* (see page 12 for *Clean 3* (2008), for one of the three photographs from this series). For Luigi, the digital snapshots assembled into *Private Album* accumulated new meaning as his relationship with Luca fell apart. They became a visual roadmap for his memories: "Every picture I can relate to our relationship." The photographs Luigi selected for *Private Album* each bear "a real feeling" about his life with Luca, a relationship that was once "symbiotic."

For Peter Weiermair, Luigi using "the

term *feeling* is very important because it indicates that *Private Album* was not exhibitionism. It was not narcissism. It has a narrative that leads to memories; but it is not speculative. What makes it so sensational in that sense is that *Private Album* is so lyrical, so poetical." Weiermair first saw Luigi and Luca's work when acclaimed celebrity photographer Greg Gorman told him to "look at this extreme couple" — Gorman, Luigi and Luca are friends — before Weiermair met them for himself at the 2009 Arte Fiera international exhibit of contemporary art in Bologna, Italy. Weiermair was "very much interested in the phenomenon that they were a couple working in a very different way as other gay couples — let's say, Gilbert and George or McDermott and McGough or Pierre and Gilles. Luigi and Luca were a couple using photography in a different, open way." Weiermair was "fascinated by the frankness" of the snapshots that became *Private Album*, a book he calls "obscene but not pornographic. It has the purity of a child — a child who presents his genitals and how they function, how everything works" without shame, without

"As a wedding photograph via Italian *Vogue*, *Union* manifests the **erotic nightmares** — or fantasies — of right-wing opponents of gay marriage."

the weight of social expectations about being "appropriately" clothed.

Agreeing with Weiermair's assessment, Luigi suggests that his relationship with Luca in *Private Album* merely functions as the book's "point of departure" toward the themes they pursue throughout their work. Or, as Francis Bacon suggests, "photographs are not only points of reference; they're often triggers of ideas" (FB, 30). Bacon proves a good foil for *Private Album's* "departure" through snapshots. While Bacon "departed" from painting into photography and film to find visual inspiration with which he could "distort [his painted subject] far beyond the appearance," Luigi and Luca "arrive" at photography through painting (FB, 40). They craft fine art tableaux as if flesh could behave like paint.

Bacon, Luigi and Luca employ photographic imagery against expectation. Rather than a source of documentation for Bacon, photography signals mood, much like Luigi describes the "stratification of meaning" he finds across the seemingly improvisational snapshots of *Private Album*. If those photographs have amassed artistic resonance for Luigi only after he found himself newly distanced from the coupled self he still sees in them, he admits that taking them then

nevertheless followed an "unintentional process": "we just flowed with the work and then at the end we have an image that reflect us, in a way." However unintentional their process, though, can artists who regularly use their bodies and their relationship as material ever take even a snapshot without their visual instincts, without their "photographic eye"? What "reality" stands outside the host of aesthetic and mechanistic choices made by any photographer taking even the most casual of shots with his smartphone? Even if accidental, recorded documentation entails both photographic technology and artistic vision.

Nevertheless, the strength of *Private Album* comes from its presentation "without concept," as if it could be an innocent diary, all the more emotionally vulnerable because it now marks the end of a personal — and still private — era for Luigi and Luca. Its innocent, creative vulnerability gives it a sense of authenticity. Peter Weiermair summarizes that sense of the book as follows: "This is very much like two children playing with themselves until they hate each other." Luigi and I laugh in reaction — and

I joke that it should be the title for my essay — but Weiermair justifiably highlights the project's self-professed naïveté. Against their conspicuously more formal tableaux, rife with "references to the history of art" that Weiermair explains as we survey the gallery to discuss the black-and-white photographs that complete the *Luigi & Luca* exhibition, *Private Album* seems raw.

The book's images coalesce differently, however, when viewed as a function of a present generation of twentysomethings who were borne through a Friendster-MySpace-Facebook-Twitter social networking apparatus that encourages online confessionals and who are prone to use online platforms such as Flickr or YouTube to upload a heft of rather revealing photographic and video material made possible by the democratizing revolution of affordable, user-friendly digital technology. The blur between what was once "public" and "private" can come across as rather extreme without considering this new politics of publicity in context. For anyone engaged in this kind of at-times cacophonous online public, the content of *Private Album's* unrestrained sexuality will not shock. (While most social networking websites police for sexual content, Tumblr does not. A Google



Luigi & Luca, *Clean 3*, 2008, silver gelatin print, 11.7 x 11.8".

mation of Union as an impromptu hunger. The similarity of color palette and Luigi's consistently full mouth link the two photographs. So do their two mise-en-scènes. If Luigi and Luca's sexual interplay provides a formal flourish in *Union*, then the angles of their intertwined bodies that echo the shape of the pipes on the tiled walls in *73a* could make their sex act equally utilitarian, if not cleansing.

If the snapshots of *Private Album* approach their intimate life differently but from the same "point of departure" as their seemingly more formal work, then Luigi and Luca's new venture, a London-based biannual magazine called *Dust*, approaches their mutual interest in the history of art and the contemporary use of fashion with a new collaborative spirit as they embark into the world of publishing. With *Dust*, Luigi wants to push both the art and fashion worlds away from convention and toward the sensory freedom of experimentation. Of course, *Dust* will feature new work by Luigi and Luca but it will also showcase daring, emerging artists who do not enjoy the publicity of coverage by traditional art or fashion magazines. Its anticipation of new voices aims to broaden the public for work that inspires them. The theme of *Dust's* premiere issue, "Seeds," takes root in the notion that fashion iconography, its aesthetic rendering of the body politic, channels new growth in the wake of the global financial crises that have wrecked the certainty of previous models of exchange. In a sense, *Dust* continues the lessons of *Learning* (2008) (see page 8), a meditation on living as "a process of looking with your body," as Luigi explains the rooftop-set photograph of him holding a funnel above his head and Luca placing another funnel in his anus. Luigi does not want to delve too deeply into *Learning's* iconography — "if I explain too much it's going to lose where it comes from" — but he explains that the funnels are surrogate eyes. He sets the scene as follows: "The sky is still empty so we were looking for something to arrive from the sky." ■

Seth Clark Silberman is the editor of *The Archive*. Most recently, he edited text written by Luigi for the premiere issue of *Dust* magazine. For more information, go to <http://www.dustmagazine.com>.

¹ David Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1987), 30. Subsequent references appear as FB in the text.

² Luigi Vitali and Peter Weiermair, interview held at the Leslie/Lohman Gay Art Foundation gallery, New York, NY, 7 February 2011. All subsequent quotes from Luigi and Peter come from this interview.

³ Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 1987), 46.

search will reveal how many Tumblr users have posted, "reblogged" or "liked" Luigi and Luca's work, including the popular *Union*). What remains remarkable about Luigi and Luca's work, especially reblogged online, is its theater. In concert with its matter-of-fact intimacy comes its contemplated if unimposing rendering.

Private Album complements a contemporary popular culture industry transformed by so-called "reality television," which has supported the new coming-of-age techniques through social networking and has re-organized entertainment expectations for narrative and personal access across the board. By fulfilling these expectations from the art world, *Private Album* also continues to elaborate longstanding aesthetic — or anti-aesthetic — projects such as the rad-

ically recontextualizing one Marcel Duchamp pursued with "canned chance" and readymades that aimed to belie art's claim to be an elite form not easily reproduced, one confined to already conferred themes or contexts.³ If Luigi and Luca's intimate life together served as a kind of readymade for them as artists and *Private Album* arbitrarily presents and arranges that material, then the book knowingly offers its own contradiction: a collection of unassuming snapshots that wield the visual language of a gay male couple we may already know from more formal compositions with uncanny precision.

For example, the romantic ritual of joint bathing that Luigi and Luca stage with *Private Album 73a* (see page 9) seems to refigure — or perhaps prefigure, given the two-year range accorded to the book's photographs — the matrimonial consum-

Private Album Review

Privacy was a technology long before digital gadgets made uploading personal pictures all the easier. Since the advent of photography, privacy has remained this new vision system's paradoxical modus operandi. We presume that photography captures private moments that would otherwise remain mental memories held only by those present; and yet we know, too, that the presence of the camera necessarily changes everything. Even if those pictures taken are not tagged and disseminated through social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter, for example, their presence as *photographs* invites the possibility that someone unintended could look. Whatever privacy we think these snapshots represent remains tenuous.

The event or emotion we think that our pictures clearly document could be read another way, without the knowledge of the private narrative that the people, objects and setting captured by the camera complement. Indeed, the very staging of the photographs draws from our visual bank. Just as we learn our native language, so, too, do we develop photographic syntax. As children of a media culture, we may appreciate that our self-imaging demonstrates our mediation of private moments and public expectations; but those pictures represent our reality just the same. We want to hold onto the idea that photography can document our experiences



Luigi & Luca, *Private Album 86*, 2007-2009, digital pigment print, 7.9 x 11.8"

ship as the material for their work, *Private Album* both seems personal and staged — or *backstaged*, as if it offers a glimpse of the "off camera" lives that produced their more formal tableaux. Remarkable is the book's matter-of-fact and almost architectural depiction of their sexual connection. Erotic and playful, *Private Album* attests to one of Luigi's written confessions included throughout the book: "I only feel spontaneous when we fuck." Their artful spontaneity produces pictures like

couple no longer together, the pictures that comprise *Private Album* could accumulate nostalgia that Luigi's writing sometimes assigns them; but they still bear the life they frame. Images outlive their subjects, after all. Without them, photographs testify to their worldview.

Perhaps no other image from the book does this as well as *Private Album 86*, with its "cockeyed" Luigi looking assuredly at us. Its conceptual pun reflects the book's method. Here, a deliberately posed shot does not flaunt its subjects. Unlike the others, it makes no claim to capturing a private moment or even staging some kind of imagined verisimilitude. In the book, the picture accompanies the following reminder: "When the heart does not understand it's better to choose the genitals' point of view. When I see things with my dick, I suddenly feel better." The photograph promotes not hedonism but corporeality. If their privacy provides the material for their public artistry, as *Private Album* suggests when compared with their other work, their bodily comfort refigures their fleshly presentation with a sense of wonder that complicates the kind of naked voyeurism that explicit imagery like theirs could inspire. Just look into Luigi's eye — whichever one you want. ■

"When I look back I can see my past in the shape of pictures. I can see life condensed on the surface, as if we had *breathed on a mirror*."

and with those images we can reminisce, as Luigi suggests in his opening text of *Private Album*: "When I look back I can see my past in the shape of pictures. I can see life condensed on the surface, as if we had breathed on a mirror. Our feelings, our thoughts are frozen in visual segments stolen from our intimacy with a timer primed camera."

The innocence of its remembrance is *Private Album's* strength, particularly at its most explicit. For artists known to use their bodies and their relation-

Private Album 73a (see page 9), with their limbs intertwined just so, as if in symmetry with the stainless steel piping also adorning the hotel bathtub in which Luigi blows Luca, in time with camera's shutter. If hotels provide the setting for much of *Private Album*, it is because, as Luigi explains, they are "a useful distance from the world."

So, too, are photographic stylistics. By orchestrating the everyday, photographs necessarily remove the images they preserve from it. As the record of a



Eric Rhein, *Cave Branch, Revisited*, 2010, b/w photograph, 1/15, 20 x 16". Gift of the artist.

Recent Donations & Acquisitions

COMPILED BY WAYNE SNELLEN

We have some wonderful work being donated to the Leslie/Lohman Gay Art Foundation (LLGAF) collection to report on for this issue of *The Archive*. Last issue, I reported that two major donations were in the works. Well, one of them has come through; and the other is still forthcoming. Hopefully, I can report on the latter in our next issue.

This first major donation comes from photographer Amos Badertscher, whom we have exhibited in the past and who has two books to his credit. Badertscher has donated his life work, some of which accompanies the interview with him that starts on page 4. We have received a large portion with much more on its way. Other important donations come from the following artists and collectors:

Jean-Claude Baker has donated a wonderful watercolor of a friend by the artist Schawecker (page 15).

Charles Leslie, LLGAF co-founder, has donated to the Foundation six works of art: a wonderful sculpture by Cassandra (page 15), a small drawing by J.C. Etheridge that was completed during the Leslie/Lohman Erotic Drawing Studio (page 15), a painting by Michael Hennessy and a painting by Scott Siedmann from the *Four Visions* exhibition and two photographs by Eric Rhein from his show, *Transmutations*.

Josef Kozak has again donated several interesting drawings, including *Untitled* (page 2).

Eric Rhein has donated a wonderful photograph from *Transmutations* that honors Fritz Lohman (1922 - 2009), LLGAF co-founder (left).

Steven Snake, of Oklahoma, has donated two paintings to the collection.

Samir Sohby has added 12 mixed media paintings on paper and 14 ink drawing on paper, including *Untitled* (page 16), to his previous donation to the Foundation.

There are two donations I want to take particular notice of because one donated by **Lewis Holman** is an important documentation of an exhibition of LGBT art that he curated. The other is documentation on the artist, Robert Bliss, donated by **John T. Quinn**. Donations such as Mr. Holman's are ex-



(above) J.C. Etheridge, *Untitled*, 2011, crayon on paper, 9 x 11". Founder's gift.

(above left) Schawecker, *Portrait of a Friend*, 2006, watercolor on paper, 22.5 x 17.75. Gift of Jean-Claude Baker.

(left) Cassandra, *Flag*, 2010, bronze on stone base, 26 x 16 x 22". Founder's gift.



Recent Donations & Acquisitions



remely important for the historical record of LGBT art, which often remains scattered across the continent, impossible to find. Tracking the path of LGBT exhibitions not only proves the presence of gay and lesbian representations, it also alleviates some of the burden that curators, galleries and museums may feel. A collected exhibition record places new LGBT shows within a history that illustrates the validity of LGBT art.

Mr. Quinn's donation is equally important because of the dearth of information on many gay and lesbian artists. Yes, we know that LGBT artists such as Robert Bliss are out there; but there is little, if anything, written about them. The amount of research and time involved in finding and documenting them is monumental. I urge you to submit any written documentation on LGBT art or artists you may know of. We are trying

to establish a central clearing house that will hopefully one day be an important resource for LGBT arts research.

Special thanks to all the artists who have donated their art to the LLGAF. ■

Wayne Snellen is the Director of Collections at the Leslie/Lohman Gay Art Foundation

Samir Sohby, *Untitled*, 2011, watercolor on paper, 11 x 8.5". Gift of the artist.

ROAD TRIP

The Leslie/Lohman Gay Art Foundation Travels for *Hide/Seek* BY JERRY KAJPUST



Walter Ernst, Snapshots from the *Hide/Seek* trip, 2011

helps us make up for years — for decades — of intentional repression by art ‘professionals’ who knew all along that we were being cut off from access to art that embraces day life.”¹

For me, and I can also vouch for so many of the others who attended, the power of the exhibition went beyond the art. As Jonathan David Katz stood in front of each image and shared his vast knowledge, he brought the show to life with stories about the artists’ public and private lives. He also spoke about the historical importance of and public attitude toward each image. Included was his thorough discussion of the social climate in which the artists created each piece. As Kelly McCray so eloquently told me, “The uncharted history of queer representation illuminated by the exhibition was expressed with a contagious passion that held the audience captive beyond the queer artists through the ages.” In creating this exhibition, Katz went seeking for, and brought our gay history out of hiding.

On a cold January 16th morning morning, a group of 36 meet on the front steps of the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C. to visit the *Hide/Seek* exhibition. We gather there for

a tour hosted by the Leslie/Lohman Gay Art Foundation (LLGAF) and guided by Jonathan David Katz, co-curator of the *Hide/Seek* exhibition and LLGAF Board Member. Some of us made it to D.C. from New York City as a group via rail. Others joined us from around

the D.C. area, San Francisco, Minnesota and Toronto to enjoy “one of the best art experiences I’ve had in many years,” as several people told me during the trip.

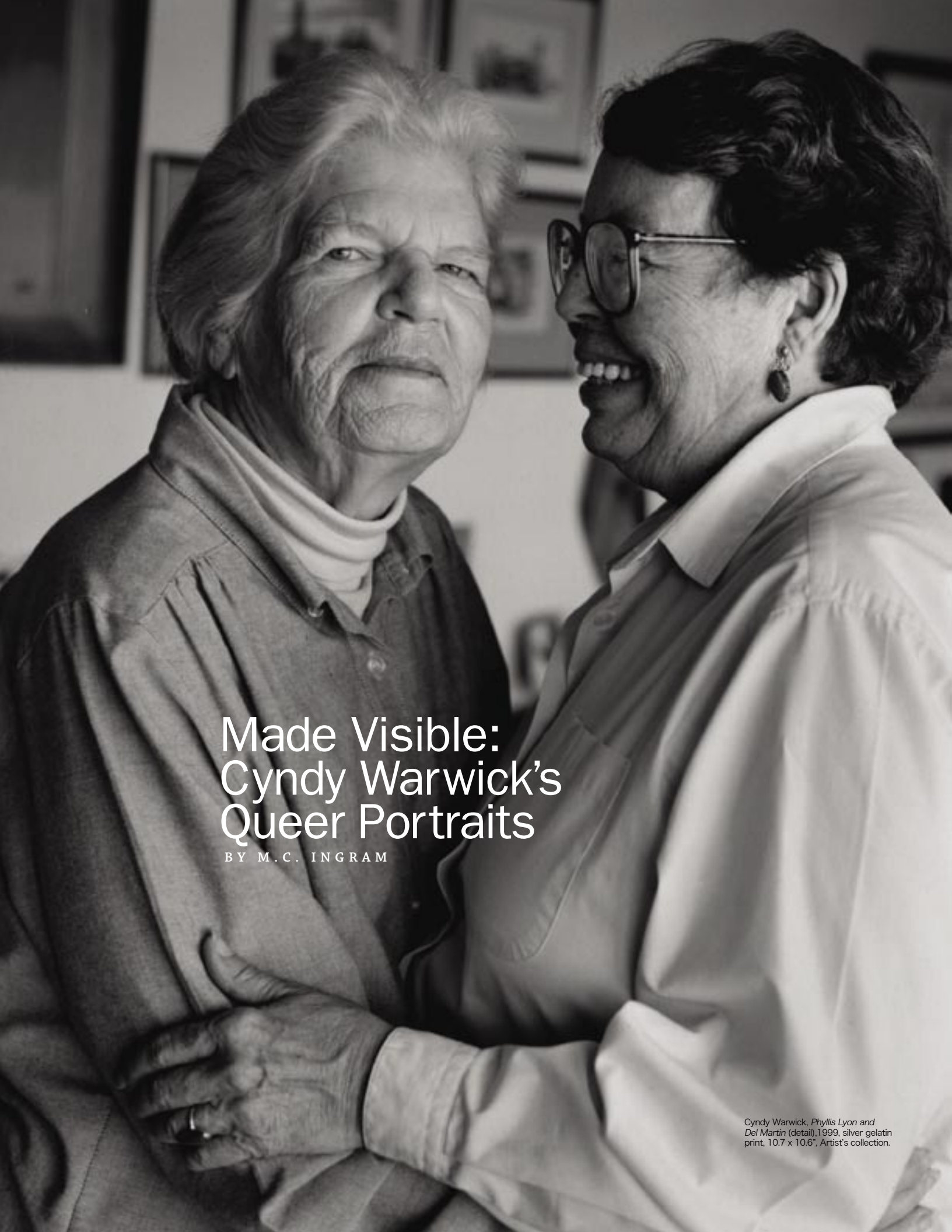
Hide/Seek was the first major museum exhibition to focus on sexual difference in the making of modern American portraiture. This show’s significance was beautifully described by tour participant Earl Carlile: “I believe that this show has elevated gay life — and certainly gay art — in ways that no one except Jonathan and his co-curator, Mr. Ward, could have imagined. As a scholarly exercise, this show is an important validation of gay studies. It may be the most important validation ever. A show like this

After the tour, a group met at the Sequoia Restaurant, a D.C. landmark, and shared their experiences and insights of the exhibition and passion about art. In addition to the exhibit and the tour, another great aspect of the trip was meeting and relating to the other tour participants who all shared an interest in the same creative subject — in, as Steven Frim put it, “creative art that focused on subliminal and direct gay, lesbian and bisexuality life.” The LLGAF looks forward to hosting more opportunities to bring groups together to appreciate LGBTQ art as well as the people who love it! ■

Jerry Kajpust is on the staff at LLGAF and is a frequent contributor to *The Archive*.

¹ Earl Carlile, interview held at the National Portrait Gallery and at Sequoia Restaurant, Washington D.C., 16 January 2011. All subsequent quotes come from tour participants Earl Carlile, Kelly McCray and Steven Frim on this day.





Made Visible: Cyndy Warwick's Queer Portraits

BY M. C. INGRAM

Cyndy Warwick, *Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin (detail)*, 1999, silver gelatin print, 10.7 x 10.6", Artist's collection.

“Lesbians are homebodies,” my queer female friends explain.

Jokes about bringing a U-Haul to the second date, treating dogs and cats as children and dressing identically are familiar to queer women's ears. The punch line of these jokes is the fact that they do, occasionally, describe the reality of queer women's relationships. Among my friends and acquaintances, a fairly reliable pattern materializes: after a certain amount of time passes in a relationship, the couple goes “off the grid,” so to speak, rarely to be seen again in social settings. It is a situation bemoaned by both friends of queer women, and queer women themselves searching for community. Refreshingly, Cyndy Warwick's book, *Women Together: Portraits of Love, Commitment, and Life* (1999), succeeds in doing what many queer women struggle to do on a Saturday night. Through portraiture, it builds community by encouraging interaction and conversation.¹

Warwick's portraits are affirmative, genuine depictions of couples and families that resonate with a vast audience of queer female readers. On a micro level, the photographs capture scenes of wholesome, truthful and profound love. Accompanied by honest accounts of the “highs and lows” of committed relationships, each photograph is a poignant depiction of family. Every gesture, every upraised chin, every pair of shining eyes and intertwined arms illustrates an ar-

The women speak for themselves, too, in the written profiles for each of the 29 couples Warwick shoots. They consider their lives together — what holds their love and commitment together, what they deeply share in common. Just being women together, as if by serendipity, does not fully represent the collaborative work it takes to seem like ordinary homebodies. Their affection for one another radiates both in their words and in Warwick's masterful portraits. The diversity of the women included and the particularity of their stories prevents *Women Together* from simply collecting women united by banal proclamations of lesbianism. As Mona Holmlund explains in the book's introduction, “to say someone is part of a lesbian couple is ultimately to say nothing at all — the only common denominator being the gender of the lovers” (*WT*, 13).

Warwick's portraiture delves much deeper. For example, the pictures of Chelle Mileur, Tina Podlodowski and their infant daughter demonstrates the artist's “us, plus” strategy for capturing in-the-round photographs of queer wom-

“Each picture joins two women together in the same frame to suggest the rich lives they lead, **simplistically and privately**, after Warwick and her camera depart.”

chetype for romantic love.

Warwick's artistry does as much to glorify queer female love as the couples' embraces. Each photograph bears the mark of the artist's hand — the graceful blur of a tiny movement, the enveloping glow of the mid-morning sun. These are not arbitrarily posed moments. They seem like film stills, photographs taken on film or television program sets during production for promotion. Each picture joins two women together in the same frame to suggest the rich lives they lead, simplistically and privately, after Warwick and her camera depart.

en's families (*WT*, 16). On one hand, the viewer sees Chelle and Tina as an affectionate, joyful couple, leaning into one another and beaming as they gaze at their daughter. On the other hand, this is not simply a portrait of a couple; the image portrays their very human lives, complete with play-pit balls, marine life mural and a screaming toddler.

Warwick honors difference among her couples, seemingly offering “something for everyone” to her audience. A variety of age groups, races, professions and brands of relationships shape *Women Together* for viewers to identify with and compare. In this way Warwick effectively builds the community of the couples in her portraits. The viewer's comparisons and contrasts among the photographs

serve to bridge one couple with another so that, at least in the viewer's mind, they may interact.

Though *Women Together* presents well-rounded tales of its heroines' struggles and triumphs, strengths and imperfections, one must consider these women's stories beyond the context of the queer community. Viewers of Warwick's work must remain vigilantly aware that the women depicted do not exist within a vacuum. The fact that several reviewers on Amazon.com considered these images so moving and necessary indicates how difficult it continues to be for queer families to “prove themselves” in the quest for legal sanctification. Perhaps the reason that so many reviewers were pleased to identify with the couples in *Women Together* lies in a desire to campaign for oneself in the public arena. Suddenly a world that is difficult to access — if lesbians can, in fact, remain homebodies — is spread out for all to see, literally in black and white. Thus, each of the women in each of Warwick's couples is a “poster girl” for equality, with toddlers and cats and dogs and all.

Though *Women Together's* honesty can be occasionally discomfiting, the overall message of Warwick's portraits is that it does, in fact, get better. Through her lens we may discover a community that fortifies itself with differences in the ages, races or social conditions of its members. Warwick's is a noble project, simultaneously idealistic and movingly authentic. It trounces stereotypes and allows each one of us to see the community we may have been missing, the one we could have overlooked. ■

M.C. Ingram is a Washington D.C.-based poet and short story writer. Ingram earned a bachelor's degree in English and Art History from Georgetown University.

¹ Cyndy Warwick and Mona Holmlund, *Women Together: Portraits of Love, Commitment, and Life* (Philadelphia, PA: Running Press, 1999). Subsequent references appear as WT in the text.

Singing the Praises of *Making the Boys*

BY THOMAS BISTRITZ



(above) Mart Crowley, still from *Making the Boys*, 2009, Dir. Crayton Robey

(below) *Boys in the Band* Cast Shot, still from *Making the Boys*, 2009, Dir. Crayton Robey

(right) Still from *Making the Boys*, 2009, Dir. Crayton Robey

Few plays create such an impact that they force a generation to look inside and redefine themselves. But when Mart Crowley's *The Boys in the Band*, a story focusing on group of homosexual men coming together for a birthday party, opened off-Broadway in January 1968, audiences were captivated. It was the first time a play had not merely hinted at homosexuality but rather faced it head on. Although theater and cinema had been representing homosexuality under the guise of overly effeminate and flamboyant characters for years, *Boys* was the first time their sexuality was discussed. The characters were gay and living in a modern society that, unfortunately, was not receptive to the lifestyle. They presented a range of emotions about and reactions to contemporary prejudice. Their journeys, and emotions, were real; and audiences responded. The show ran for 1,001 per-

formances — an unprecedented amount for an off-Broadway production.

Slightly shy of its 44th anniversary comes the film *Making the Boys*, a documentary by director Crayton Robey that examines how an underground play forced its way into mainstream America. It also relates how the play broke through Hollywood's production code to become a film that paved the path for other artists to create their own truthful visions — often with the condemnation of *Boys* for being too retrograde. In following *Boys* from off-Broadway to Hollywood as well as through Crowley's life and career, Robey tells more than the story of the making of a play; he offers an eye-opening portrayal of the gay right's movement. Chronicling the hush-hush of the 60's to today's sometimes ambivalently queer generation, Robey captures a culture — a gay culture, in this case — eager to define life for ourselves. His

film includes interviews with some of today's notable gay celebrities as they reminisce on their first experience with *Boys*. (Fashion designer and *Project Runway* winner Christian Siriano even admits to not being familiar with *The Boys in the Band*: "I don't know [who they are], cute boys in a band? The Jonas Brothers?")

And then there's Mart Crowley, the playwright at the center of the film who invites the audience to share in his story. He leads the audience with anecdotes of his creation of the characters and the journey he took to be able to pen a play that pushed the boundaries for its time. His story is not without its own hardships. A groundbreaking piece for its time, the play premiered but eighteen months before the revolutionary Stonewall Riots, an event that liberated an entire generation and immediately dated his play — and the film that was already in production. Described as self-loathing by some (playwright Edward Albee, who refused to invest in *Boys* and tried to dissuade those who did, believes it did "serious damage" towards the gay community), *Boys'* film version, released in 1970, was met with critical reviews. Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Tony Kushner recalls that it was "the first time in American history that gay people picketed a Hollywood film." Surrounded by tragedy — many of the production's

original cast members and creative team were victims of the AIDS crisis of the 80's — yet defying adversity and an evolving gay culture, *The Boys in the Band* inspired artists and audiences to open their minds to a presence in American society that could be ignored.

Making the Boys, a production of 4th Row Films and distributed by First Row Features, opened Friday, March 11th at the Quad Cinema in New York City's Greenwich Village to a theater packed with devoted *Band Boys* — those who breathtakingly remember their first encounter with the play, including the Leslie/Lohman Gay Art Foundation (LLGAF) staff and Charles Leslie, LLGAF co-founder, who is interviewed in the film — as well as novices. Also there were director Crayton Robey and Crowley, who answered questions after the film. Among the many details that Crowley, now in his mid-seventies and still obviously having his wits about him, shared was the inspiration for the play's title. "There's a line in that Judy Garland film, *A Star is Born*, that says, 'you're singing for yourself and the boys in the band.'" Since 1968, Crowley has hardly been singing alone.

Asked again about his connection with legendary director Elia Kazan — they met on the set of the 1956 film *Baby Doll* — Crowley delicately described their friend-

ship and explained how Kazan went on to become his mentor. (This was how he became close friends with the late Natalie Wood, a relationship described in the film as one that one of the most profound impacts on his life.) Crowley's story featured a strangely cinematic twist of its own, set on Manhattan's 57th street, where Crowley and Kazan were reunited in a chance encounter after meeting years earlier on a film set in Mississippi that made Crowley's career possible. Crowley told this story with a tear in his eyes. The audience, also clearly moved, gave him another round of applause.

What the film reminded audience members is that *The Boys in the Band* remains more than just a period story about homosexual men but rather about friendship, acceptance and the human experience. No other play staged before, or arguably any play staged since, has portrayed the camaraderie that gay men share as accurately as *Boys*. Although its references may be dated, the themes remain universal and as relevant in the 21st century as they did when first penned almost 40 years ago. ■

Thomas Bistriz is a New York City-based freelance writer and performance artist. He is author of *Don't Piss in my Martini, please!* (2006). More information can be found at his website, <http://www.demandadahling.com>.



Gio Black Peter

Born Giovanni Paolo Andrade Guevara in Guatemala, Gio Black Peter is a performance and visual artist who emigrated illegally to the United States with his family at the age of five. He takes the name *Black Peter* from the menacing elf assistant of St. Nicholas who doled out coal to “bad” children on Christmas. In fifteenth century Dutch folklore, Black Peter, or *Zwarte Piet* in Dutch, was first represented as a Spanish pirate. With the rise of imperial colonialism, Black Peter became an often-shackled Native American or African. Now, he remains a mischievous elf. Giovanni takes on Black Peter as a trickster figure, a truth-teller who exposes hypocrisy, challenges believability, questions authority and champions multiplicity.

Like David Wojnarowicz, a multimedia artist he intimately admires, Gio’s artistry draws from his voice and from his body. If the personal has proven to be political, Gio’s bold sense of self fleshes out whatever medium he works. Known for performing his music in boxer shorts that often dip below his waist, Gio uses his

recently re-interpreted the conventions of pornography with his own experimental signature evident in his first feature film *No Skin Off My Ass* (1991). Like the musical and multimedia work Gio continues to produce, “Revolving Door” implicates us in his artistic vision.

Q: How are your music and your art connected? Do you think your music is another form of self-portraiture (as some of your art is)?

A: Yup — both my music and my visual art are autobiographical. You want to know about me? Look at my work. I’m always honest and never embarrassed.

How was the process of making your new album, *The Virgin Shuffle*? What inspired it? How did working for yourself (your own label) change your creative process?

For starters, *The Virgin Shuffle* was self-released, which means that I had no label backing me in any way. I had to raise all the money myself. It’s been a long journey to get to the finish line. At one point,

the song as a poem two summers ago while shooting *Otto; Or Up with Dead People* in Berlin with Bruce. That’s where the first opening verse comes from: “We spent summer raising the dead.” The song tells of a short-lived love affair. In the song, I explain to my lover that he is lucky I cannot be his boyfriend because I am a sadist who would devour him. The imagery in the video shows just that. There are some other bits that are not so obvious, like the American flag and that fact I am dressed like a soldier. There is also a painting of mine in the background of a soldier that is bound and gagged with a flag across his lap. I find many similarities between a disregarded lover and a disregarded soldier; so I wanted to make that connection. The Pope is there to represent a form of rape. Bruce is a genius. Working with him is always fun and easy. We talked about what the song was about; and then he took over. The video was shot in one day with the help of some of my fellow comrades: Daniel McKernan, Matt Lambert, Brian Kenny, Slava Mogutin, Truffles (the pig) and my boyfriend, Neil Young.

When is *The Virgin Shuffle* out and how can we get it?

The Virgin Shuffle is digitally available on iTunes. Or you can purchase a CD with original which artwork and a limited edition poster at <http://www.gioblackpeter.com>.

Who are the artists (visual or music) who inspire you?

David Wojnarowicz is my brother and my lover. I have been inspired by him since I read his book, *Close To The Knives* (1991), when I was 16. I find his work so beautiful and tragic and powerful. His art mattered when he was alive and it still matters today. Musically, I am into Patti Smith, Lou Reed, Bright Eyes, Nick Cave and Belle & Sebastian because I’m big on lyrics.

Of what importance the male body, in your art? Are you often less-than-fully-dressed live performances an extension of that — a kind of “nude and live life” rather than the expected “nude and still life” in art? Let’s just say I like to bare it all. ■

Watch the “Revolving Door (New Fuck New York)” video at <http://www.gioblackpeter.com>.

Left: Location shots from filming of “Revolving Door (New Fuck New York)” video, 2010



“The song is about the frequent and anonymously cannibalistic sex that happens in cities”

body to form profound connections with his audience. For Gio, eroticism encompasses far more than the fleeting physical embraces we either regret or hope they remain. As Gio illustrates with *B Day Surprise* (2010) (see page 2), the erotically presented and received body overlays any abstract self-representation — here, his work-worthiness on paper. *B Day Surprise* is one of his *Pinochio’s Revenge* series of mixed media drawings on copies of what he calls his “slave c.v.” that he introduces as follows: “He didn’t offer up the truth / He didn’t have to make up lies / He just drew pictures of the things / he saw when he closed his eyes.”

A different kind of corporeal insight informs the video that introduces his new album, *The Virgin Shuffle*. Directed by Bruce LaBruce, a Toronto-based filmmaker, photographer and author of *The Reluctant Pornographer* (1997), “Revolving Door (New Fuck New York)” offers an animalistic and bloody take on the seemingly endless possibilities for gay sex in big cities. Provocative and explicit, the video accelerates the energy of a Gio Black Peter performance and continues LaBruce’s at-times controversial film work, which has

I ran out of funds and I didn’t think the album would ever be released. Luckily, I had the help of 31 Kickstarter backers who believed in me and in my project. Also, the business side of music can be extremely draining. Having said that, I would not have done it any other way because I have done everything my way — 100 percent — no compromising with mainstream bullshit and hangups. The most obvious examples of this are the lyrics for “Revolving Door (New Fuck New York)” and its music video, directed by filmmaker Bruce LaBruce. If I had been tied to a label there would have been no cocks, no sex — and no Pope — in it.

How did the concept for “Revolving Door” develop? What were your visual inspirations for its imagery? How was working with Bruce on your own project (as opposed to working with him in one of his)?

The concept for the “Revolving Door” music video came from the lyrics. The song is about the frequent and anonymously cannibalistic sex that happens in cities. As I say in the song, “In New York City there’s always a New Fuck!” I wrote



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Like the beautiful bodies of those who died before growing old,
sadly shut away in a sumptuous mausoleum,
roses by the head, jasmine at the feet —
we appear the longings that have passed
without being satisfied, not one of them granted
a single night of pleasure, or one of its radiant mornings.

C.P. Cavafy