

# A Libertine Among Libertarians

## by Matt Morris

We've all been there. Or rather, any of us who have engaged in anonymous sex and "will travel" have entered domiciles that serve as little more than a place to sleep and fuck. The intimacy inferred from such ascetic interiors feels like being welcomed beneath a carapace, closeness with a body described as nothing other than naked, a quality shared with his surroundings. A quality shared, too, with the evolving painting practices of Jared Packard who exploits the absorbency, exposure, and vulnerability of raw, unprimed cotton canvas as a constitutive element of the paintings he presents in more conventional modes of display as well as in experimental configurations that question the collapsing logics between person and place.



*Untitled (blue jeans)*, 38 x 30", Oil, acrylic spray paint and grommets on raw canvas and blue jeans, 2020

In Packard's *My Bedroom Is Not Your Bedroom*, ejaculate is the primary mode for his restless gestures that fling and spatter paint across blanket sized panels of unstretched canvas. Winding like the corridors of a bathhouse, swaying like perverted laundry on a clothesline, Packard's new installation works from the unresolved throes of body politics subsumed in a century of abstract painting and the decisive pursuit of place-making for marginalized or vulnerable positions that accompanied the emergence of queer and feminist inflected pursuits of liberation.

Even at the apex of Abstract Expressionism, centuries old conventions of figure and ground made it so that a body—if no other than the one producing the painting—remained perceptible. Meanwhile feminist art set out with an intimate understanding of public and private zones, with the home as a site of struggle for women and pretty much anyone not a straight, white man.

Issuing from these paternal and matriarchal precedents is Packard's boyishly clever inversion that makes the punishment of "Go to your room!" the pretense for a retreat into private pleasures,

self discovery, and invaluable exercises in maintaining boundaries.

There is a pressure toward visibility bound up in a quest for livable, equitable resources for gay, lesbian, trans, and otherwise queer individuals. For all of the disgust and paranoia publicly performed by a conservative mainstream, at the root of their objections is also a demand for access to the most nuanced, particular, even gruesome details of the lives and practices of queer populations. A twisted, ironic bouquet of revulsion and fascination marks out this nation's encounter with its queer citizens, resulting in medically invasive, objectifying, and variously pornographic impulses in representing queerness as an a priori condition to any negotiation of rights or civil liberties.

That particularly American promise of legislated liberty to its people is the hinge upon which the most unhinged libidinal projections coalesce. When attempting to situate an art form, a sexuality, or an individual lived experience into the context of a present day United States, contending with the frankly bizarre yet long-held notions of individual liberty that are specific to this country comes into play. In recent years, actual insurrection, noncompliance with federally dictated health procedures in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the raucous refusals around what may be taught in public school systems are but a few of the ways that liberty and freedom have been interpreted by the populace.

In debate between such an alternative conception of freedom and those more socially (or even socialist) minded practices implemented variously worldwide, contentious discourses around privacy and publicness advance to the fore. The paradoxes of this nationalist fantasy produce an untidy calculus of intersections that would try to force into coherent operation positions of sexuality (both its orientation and practice), gender and sex, ages of consent (different across state lines), a conception of health that conforms to some arbitrary if not outright pernicious baseline standards, not to mention various degrees of access to healthcare across race, ethnicity, and degree of poverty.

One's home, one's bedroom, even one's closet has been afforded a romantic notion of more or less utter autonomy within a national fantasy of private citizenship. Nowhere more idealized than the libertarian agenda, the primacy of the individual is often emphasized at the expense of a social body and a more accurate depiction of our lives within ecosystems of interdependency. For plenty of marginalized populations, the myth of an absolute privacy has always been disrupted by the apparent precariousness of not only material resources like shelter and wage-paying work without civil protections for sexual orientation, HIV status, etc, but even more so by the ideologies, desires, and activities that give form to a live lived on a continuum between public and private.

Packard's invocation of his own interior within interior (both a bedroom and clearly itself a form of body) as an outpost situated to intervene in the traffic of a given public space serves as a revealing reminder for the medium of painting's own tensions in relation to so-called real or ordinary life.

As Abstract Expressionism came to establish the United States as a cultural center at precisely the moment it came to enjoy status as a post-war global superpower, we find in many different painters’ oeuvres an indecisiveness around how far to distance recognizable imagery of a figure and its surroundings within the syntaxes of painting.

Nearly seventy years hence, Packard’s spiraling corridor and the bedchamber to which it alludes could be thought of as an unfurling of the tight, wallbound, and relatively closeted *Bed*, 1955, that Robert Rauschenberg wedged between the final refrains of Abstract Expressionism proper and the onset of Pop Art’s glorification of objects-cum-products that populate a modest middle class American life. Namely, the narrow proportions of the painted *Bed* “combine” (Bob’s term for these kinds of assemblages he made) self-consciously cropped out the rotation of lovers that figured in Rauschenberg’s life in the years leading up to its exhibition—Susan Weil, Cy Twombly, and Jasper Johns, to recall a few—while arguably inscribing if not their identities than at least their sensibilities in his plush tableau. The romance of Twombly-esque undulating graphite loops waltzing across the pillow adhered to the painting; choppy dashes of primary colors emphasizing their viscous materiality as Johns would do in this same period; and disheveled grid arrangements cascading down the lower quilted portion of *Bed* so much like Weil’s compositional experiments at the time. The *Bed* then not only serves as a representation of the sole, masturbatory emissions of macho boy Ab-Ex-ers, but also as a kind of social network mapped across a plane—more or less conscious couplings of Rauschenberg’s bisexuality established in space and time as material and gesture. Queerness in fact frustrates the boundaries of “my” and “your,” instead blurring binaries dictated by heteronormativity and critiquing the default notion of property ownership within heterosexist systems of capital.

The pitched tent qualities of Packard’s man cave likewise trace out immersive installation experiments as a feminist history: *Womanhouse*, 1972, organized by Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro and including Faith Wilding’s *Womb Room* of that same year; Louise Bourgeois’ *Cells* from the mid-1980s onward; and Allyson Mitchell’s bricolage



*Bed*. | Robert Rauschenberg  
1955. Oil and pencil on pillow, quilt, and sheet on wood supports, 75 1/4 x 31 1/2 x 8" (191.1 x 80 x 20.3 cm)  
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environment *Hungry Purse: The Vagina Dentata in Late Capitalism*, 2006. Proceeding from positions women have been made to historically occupy within the domestic, projects like these delved multi-directionally not only reaching for roles within the goings on of public life but also a hunt for possible ways to affirm a richly psychological interior life tethered to notions like home and its inner structures.

Filling the walls of this spiraling corridor, Packard’s movement from panel to panel is less of a development of language and more a frenetic annotation that continues toward teleological half life. Rectangles like secret passageways deepen in a twilight’s longing for darkness. Bruised violet-reds puddle across the surfaces, showing their porousness, their absorption, while further advancing Packard’s subtexts of paintings as mortal bodies in their own rights. Frothy fingerpainted fuschias float across gridded and splashy compositional notations. Packard isolates an array of masculine, masturbatory gestures from the annals of painting canon and critically directs them toward impotence—doing nothing other than what they appear to, in the service of nothing beyond themselves. This protracted performative failure of phallocentrism lucidly reenacts queer struggles for autonomy, self definition, and context—so much scratching on cave walls, clawing at uterine linings, a productively regressive *sturm und drang* replete with masculine

and infantile significations. Longing without assured requital, the private outbursts that compile into the spatialized paintings on view serve as a reminder of the crushing, biting, flailing loneliness particular to being “out” and yet isolated—hammered into ‘my,’ ‘your,’ ‘not you,’ ‘just my preference’ alienation in queered yet far from utopian social fields.

The expressiveness of these interludes are further expounded through an audio element emanating from the center of this elongated, twisting chamber. Between passages of what sound like the squishes and pants of amateur audio records of sex acts and the related sound effects of painting in action, with its own fluid exchanges and raking auditory textures of physical contact.



Installation shot, *My Bedroom is Not Your Bedroom*, 2023



Surpassing, enveloping, calling the shots over these accumulated layers of painting and audio is a draped canvas architecture that exaggerates the materials historically used in the production of painting as ‘supports.’ It’s a tender recognition that in a moment when painting is elsewhere used to elucidate conditions within language systems, data systems, and globalized systems of cultural transaction, Packard centers his expanded field of painting on the possibility of a support system, one at least inquisitive after if not exactly demonstrative of capacities for self care amidst queer/ed public[ized] life.

My Bedroom Is Not Your Bedroom is a meditation on boundaries. It’s demonstrative of a political crossroads: a standoff between the self-serving interests of libertarian automatons advancing roughshod over a social contract in crisis and a circumspect libertine habituated to sexuality as a public practice. The power negotiation of these boundaries leaves the long-term beneficiaries of such performative displays of queer desire uncertain. Upon encountering the blown loads that spatter across Packard’s paintings, they have been stitched into arrangements with a sewing that brings time and distance into play. With the repression of the closet exploded, *My Bedroom Is Not Your Bedroom* questions the practical moves and impractical but important feelings involved in learning how to make one’s home in the world at large. Beyond the breached individual queer subject and their wavering claims to spaces be they safe, brave, or otherwise, Packard’s paintings propose a discomfiting yet radical libido of the commons and subsequent reordered power relations around what is public and what is sex.



Left: Installation shot,  
*performative skin*, 2022

Right: *gradient/  
smudged*, 48 x 30". Oil,  
acrylic, spray, stitching,  
grommets on raw  
canvas, 2022



“This is a story of art without markets, drama without a script, narrative without progress. The queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being.”

— J. Jack Halberstam, *The Queer art of Failure*





stitched together, 46 x 36" Oil, acrylic, spray paint and grommets on raw canvas, 2020



Untitled (armor threadbare flannel), 40 x 30" Oil, acrylic, stitching, spray paint and grommets on raw canvas, 2020

Installation shot, *performative skin*, 2022



"After all, a person is herself, and others. Relationships  
chisel the final shape of one's being. I am me, and you."  
— N.K. Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*





JARED PACKARD

Jared Packard (b. 1989, Washington, D.C.) is an artist and curator based in Omaha, NE where he works as the Exhibitions Manager at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Art. Packard completed his BA at Clark University and his MFA at School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He has curated *Opulence: Performative Wealth and the Failed American Dream*, Bemis Center, Omaha; the NEA-funded *unLOCK: Merging Art and Industry*, Lockport, IL; the nationally traveling exhibition, *ReTooled: Highlights from the Hechinger Collection*; and *(Re)Flex Space*, Sullivan Galleries, Chicago, IL. He has shown at Project Project, Omaha, NE; ADDS DONNA, Chicago, IL; Sullivan Galleries, Chicago, IL; Centre International d'Art Contemporain, Pont-Aven, France; Hillyer Art Space, Washington, D.C.



JARED BROWN

Jared Brown is an interdisciplinary artist born in Chicago. In past work, Jared broadcasted audio and text based work through the radio (CENTRAL AIR RADIO, 88.5 FM), in live DJ sets, and on social media. They consider themselves a data thief, understanding this role from John Akomfrah's description of the data thief as a figure that does not belong to the past or present. As a data thief, Jared Brown makes archeological digs for fragments of Black American subculture, history and technology. Jared repurposes these fragments in audio, text, and video to investigate the relationship between history and digital, immaterial space. Jared Brown holds a BFA in video from the Maryland Institute College of Art and moved back to Chicago in 2016 in order to make and share work that directly relates to their personal history.

photo by: Dillan Denzell



MATT MORRIS

Matt Morris is a dedicated polymath based in Chicago whose practice incorporates work as an artist, perfumer, writer, curator, and educator. Painting, fragrance, and textile-based installations serve as tools for inquiry into the psychological, historical, and social valences of femininity, repression, fashion, and the political realities of subjecthood. Morris has presented artwork internationally including *Andrew Kreps and Tiger Strikes Asteroid*, New York; *RUSCHMAN*, Berlin, Germany; *Netwerk Aalst*, Aalst, Belgium; *Krabbesholm Højskole*, Skive, Denmark; *The Suburban*, Milwaukee, WI; *DePaul Art Museum and Queer Thoughts*, Chicago, IL; *Mary + Leigh Block Museum of Art*, Evanston, IL; *Elmhurst Art Museum*, Elmhurst, IL; and the *Contemporary Arts Center*, Cincinnati, OH. Morris contributes to *Artforum.com*, *Art Papers*, *ARTnews*, *Flash Art*, *Fragrantica*, *Sculpture*, *The Seen*, and *X-TRA*—additional writing appears in numerous exhibition catalogues and artist monographs. In 2021 chapters of Morris' writing were included in the anthologies *Olfactory Art and the Political in an Age of Resistance*, Routledge; and *Atem*

*/ Breath*, De Gruyter, with Dr. Dorothée King. Morris is a transplant from southern Louisiana who holds a BFA from the Art Academy of Cincinnati and earned an MFA in Art Theory + Practice from Northwestern University, as well as a Certificate in Gender + Sexuality Studies. In 2017 Morris earned a Certification in Fairyology from Doreen Virtue, PhD. Morris is an Adjunct Assistant Professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.





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Installation by Jared Packard and Daniel Picking

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