VOLUME 6) NUMBER 3) FALL 2019

QED

A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking

He Had Money and Standing, They Had Youth and Beauty: A Response to *About Face: Stonewall, Revolt and Queer Art*

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Figure 1. Installation view. Left: Leonard Suryajaya. Right: Rashayla Marie Brown. Photo: Courtesy of Wrightwood 659, Chicago.

I navigated the multilevel space of Wrightwood 659 with Fred Eychaner on my mind. In particular, his philanthropy that underwrites this exhibition and the exhibition space in which its presented—a space in Lincoln Park, one of the most expensive neighborhoods in the United States. Wrightwood 659 opened in 2018 as the latest gallery space supported by the Alphawood Foundation, founded and presided over by Eychaner, whose wealth was estimated at over $500 million in 2005. Eychaner's trade throughout his adult life has been mass media—print journalism, radio, and television. His charity has supported a range of progressive causes—chief among them, LGBTQIA advocacy and health, the arts, architectural conservation, and environmentalist issues.

The Wrightwood 659 exhibition space is a renovation of a 1920s building redesigned by Japanese architect Tadao Ando. Next door is Eychaner's 5,600-square-foot private residence, a resplendent, imposing concrete and glass structure also designed by Ando. As one "prominent Chicago political operative" was quoted saying in a 2005 *Chicago Tribune* article on Eychaner's fundraising events for Democratic political candidates, "People will come and pay simply because it's his home."[1] The gallery and home have aesthetically coordinated gates, and I was buzzed in at the sidewalk. I presented my digital ticket, reserved in advance, on my phone to one of several attendants in the lobby space, after which I was card swiped into the network of four floors of gallery space.

Figure 2. Installation view. Foreground: Greer Lankton. Midground: Tianzhuo Chen. Background: Harmony Hammond. Photo: Courtesy of Wrightwood 659, Chicago.

Figure 3. Installation view. Jerome Caja. Photo: Courtesy of Wrightwood 659, Chicago.

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I navigated the multilevel space of Wrightwood 659 with Frank O'Hara in my heart. In particular, the exhibition's introductory text alludes to his poem, "In Memory of My Feelings."[2] A poem that is dizzying in its scope of selfhood as O'Hara searches for authenticity amidst a multiple of selves:

> *My quietness has a number of naked selves,*
> *so many pistols I have borrowed to protect myselves*
> *from creatures who too readily recognize my weapons*
> *and have murder in their heart.*[3]

Having this self-exploration in mind, I begin to follow the five sections that Katz proposes, which are transgress, transfigure, transpose, transform, and transcend.[4] *They are not necessarily phases, as that suggests a linear movement of becoming, but more so a layered and perhaps a destabilizing cognizance of what it is to be queer.*

These sections are actions and an invitation to consider the term "queer" as a verb.[5] *The title of the show also implies primarily portraiture as a mode in viewing a lot of the work chosen; a representation of bodies in various guises and poses with some work also focusing on worldmaking and space.*

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I navigated the multilevel space of Wrightwood 659 with Gregg Bordowitz in my heart, as I often do when I attempt to orient to a country descended into unbridled crypto-fascist, neoliberal hellscapes (not an exaggeration: rapists as Supreme Court judges, immigrant children in cages along the Mexico border, black citizens shot by police, black trans women killed on the regular—Bosch and Bruegel would blanch from being outdone in this horror genre). In a roundtable discussion about cultural representation and appropriation, Gregg cautions: "I remember in the LGBTQ movement, outing and shaming were poisonous to the atmosphere of queer activism, because they led to a litmus-test politics. And there's an old adage on the Left: 'When the enemy is not in the room, we practice on each other.' That is not a future I look forward to. I'm really scared of that."[6]

And I agree. I'm not about that life. Rather, I'm bolstered by something he says elsewhere in the same discussion,

> I think the most radical thing that a work of art can do is to constitute a new audience, a group of people that never imagined themselves sitting in the same room. That is still the radical potential of art—this capacity to form what we used to call coalitions or alliances or affinities across boundaries of difference, to constitute new audiences, new constituencies, as opposed to appealing to a demographic. Constituencies have interests; demographics are groups of consumers. And constituencies can overlap, coexist—in other words, they allow us to conceptualize a public that isn't monolithic, where different groups can have different stakes in these incredibly fraught debates.[7]

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One thing to grasp through this exhibition is the sense and gesture of queerness when encountering a survey show during the fiftieth commemoration of the Stonewall Riot. This exhibition is one of a few in the United States aligned to the anniversary creating various perspectives on the event.

Three ways in approaching this exhibition is the mode of visibility, historiography, and supposition of what is next. When it comes to being visible one promotes a performativity in order to be seen through a self-proclamation with either a reinsertion in a social milieu to coexist or create a separate world altogether to exist. This visibility is expanded in Judith Butler's "Gender Politics and the Right to Appear," in which she mentions that "the freedom to appear is central to any democratic struggle, which means that a critique of the political forms of appearance, including forms of constraint and mediation through which any such freedom can appear, is crucial to understanding what that freedom can be, and what interventions are required."[8]

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It is with this political potential for coalition and affinities across boundaries that I seek to comprehend the work being done in *About Face: Stonewall, Revolt, and New Queer Art*. And although not simply concerned with sexuality, it is with several distinctions—different groups with different stakes—that the exhibition of 492 artworks gathered to speak to recent LGBT history and emergent queer futurity is defined: namely, those of class, the shifting tensions between public service and privatization, an emphasis on individualism over collectivism, and finally, how gender is represented, whether gender is ever afforded the potential to define and represent itself, and a cost/benefit analysis of identificatory systems in practice per se.

About Face is, in some ways, "about" the evolving face of a movement, in particular how sexual orientation is visually described. But even more, I take *About Face* to be an urgent investigation into issues of representation within the practices of curation and art history, with sexuality as a case study from which curator Jonathan David Katz hopes to resolve (or at least generate new questions) in a longstanding dimension of his research into the capacity to queer (as a verb) museum work.

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What is it to be seen when you come from the margins and what do you gain for being witnessed? I am writing this during Pride Month in Chicago and experiencing an exuberance push of rainbow gear from many businesses and positive messages of inclusivity, while being fully aware of the anti-LGBTQ actions being imposed and implemented by the current U.S. administration. What form of queer politics is in the forefront and what is lost? This perceptibility is tied to historiography and the methods and structures employed of who gets lauded and who gets overlooked. This act of remembering and transforming the painful past into something forward looking is understandably a means to create a better world, but this also creates a blind spot. In "Emotional Rescue: The Demands of Queer History," Heather Love reminds us that in writing history, we need to acknowledge a more fraught past as she states that, "[i]n attempting to construct a positive genealogy of gay identity, queer critics and historians have often found themselves at a loss about what to do with the sad old queens and long-suffering dykes who haunt the historical record."[9] How then can we proceed with these specters of the past that remind us of the precarity of being different? Instead of being "correct" in the sense of being visible and tolerated, what does it mean to be misaligned within the confines of identity politics as you desire a world that includes the sad and the suffering? The potential for works of art to speculate what is next could possibly give a glimpse of a twisty pathway that leads you nowhere in particular, but always keeps you second guessing your every move. This reflection is called upon by Jack Halberstam in tribute to José Esteban Muñoz's attraction on wildness, declaring that, "Art provides us with witnesses to the wildness of queer lives and the queerness of the wild. It does so by offering us utopic visions but also by joining those visions to madness, failure, and the temporality of the belated, darkness, and negativity."[10]

This overturning of the self and never or unable to be stable, like O'Hara's poem, expresses queerness as questioning and indefinite.

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Representation and sexuality as concepts, histories, and practices have been placed in tension across several recent major exhibitions curated by Katz: *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*, curated with David C. Ward and Research Assistant Jennifer Sichel at the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian, Washington, DC, in 2010; and *Art AIDS America*, which was curated by Katz with Rock Hushka for the Tacoma Art Museum. The latter traveled to the Bronx Museum of the Arts and then to Chicago, where it was hosted by Alphawood Gallery, a temporary exhibition space established by Eychaner in order to bring to Chicago the exhibition of over 100 artists after seemingly no other major institution in the region would accommodate the project. In the essay that accompanied *Hide/Seek*, Katz figures sexuality as a predicating condition for how representation operates, "Sexuality, as we understand it here, is not a private matter, but a question governing the means of representation."[11]

On the first floor of the Wrightwood 659 exhibition space, an introductory video narrated by Katz, with occasional sidebar commentary from gender and sexuality scholar John D'Emilio, could stand to be singularly analyzed line for line, so jarring is the building rhetoric across the several minutes of context for the exhibition. In it, the civil right of same-sex marriage, established federally in the United States in 2015, is extolled for the deeper philosophical work of normalizing gay men and lesbians in the eyes of heterosexuals. Stonewall and the uprising that transpired there fifty years ago are challenged as a historical marker for the formation of LGBT special interest groups while also seeming to bear responsibility for the binary opposition between gay and straight that has defined several decades of civil rights work in the United States. According to the video, the queer movement from its inception has always embraced a pervasive transness that has defined queerness as a project, and to honor this always-already condition, the exhibition has been divided into five sections, each titled with a word beginning with "trans." Five trans sections, but by my count only four artists who appear to self-identify as trans, nonbinary, or intersex, whereas more than 70 percent of the artists in the exhibition are men. But perhaps most striking within this introductory text is the promise that the exhibition that

follows is ". . . what a world without differences will look like, where our common humanity trumps everything else."[12]

Le gasp! Surely, we can all appreciate that a resistance to binarisms does not necessitate the full obliteration of difference. A world without differences would be nothing less than an overreaction leaving us without useful tools for deconstructive analysis. But more than that, a world without differences would seem to simultaneously install a white gay male centrism into the midst of a transgendered politics mostly neglected in the mainstreaming of queer sexuality (and in this exhibition), while also claiming an absolute continuousness between those who have mobilized oppression toward sexual minorities and those who have suffered under those oppressions. The veracity of those categories is substantiated by the realities of those harms if by nothing else.

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I was certainly stricken by this statement as well on sameness. Queerness, in terms of creating varying relationships and kinships, has paved the way for heterosexuals to see their world beyond the traditional marriage. Are our practices of love slowly permeating into "everything else" that Katz purports? Maybe everyone is turning somewhat queer. Could that be the shift that our difference will eventually blend in? I am trying to see that switch, that about face, as a possibility, referring to John D'Emilio's view on visibility, "We've made gains not because we've shown heterosexuals that we are just like them, or because we've persuaded them to respect out 'differences,' but because many of them have become so much like us that they find us less threatening, less dangerous, less strange."[13]

Although if this is the case, it is a world full of differences and less seeking approval to be seen.

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We can be thankful that the artworks on view don't go far into realizing the visions purported by this introduction. Instead, stripped of the framing devices of the exhibition, the work on display confirms a differing take on exhibition making and the world today that curator Katz made in 2017 when he wrote, "The world is a place of violent differences—and pretending those differences don't exist is merely another kind of prejudice."[14] Yes, an exhibition that pretends those differences don't exist would strike me as prejudicial. And even more, as Judith Butler writes, "But *politically*, we might argue, isn't it quite crucial to insist on lesbian and gay identities [and were this written today and not in 1993, we might guess the author would include bisexual, transgender, intersex, and asexual among these markers] precisely because they are being threatened with erasure and obliteration from homophobic quarters? Isn't the above theory

complicitous with those political forces that would obliterate the possibility of gay and lesbian identity?"[15]

About Face indeed calls attention to a world of violent differences, even while it carries forward the residual scars from the 1990s culture wars, successive eras of censorship, and mercurial, nauseating evolution across the last century of sexuality as a diagnosis, then as a civil rights movement, then as a consumer demographic. This exhibition enjoys the hard-won opportunity to curate exhibitions that explicate sexual orientation. Even its propensity toward conventional portraiture and the numbing consistency of homoerotic male nude photography that populates the exhibition can be taken as celebrations of the ability to show one's face or penis in a world still deeply troubled by hatred dressed in homophobia.

Katz, backed by the Eychaner empire, has made an exhibition that asks what visibility and representation can be made to hold, in particular for populations that will not agree on what their respective queernesses mean. Butler continues her questioning over the insistence on identities as a political framework by wondering what visibility affords the potential for practical interventions into policy: "There is no question that [the LGBTQIA] are threatened by the violence of public erasure, but the decision to counter that violence must be careful not to reinstall another in its place. Which version of lesbian or gay ought to be rendered visible, and which internal exclusions will that rendering visible institute? Can the visibility of identity *suffice* as a political strategy, or can it only be the starting point for a strategic intervention which calls for a transformation of policy?"[16]

It is ironic that *About Face* demonstrates the effects of a world in which difference is being enforced and regulated with disturbing symbolic, and sometimes literal, violence. After all, its predecessor exhibition *Art AIDS America* was arguably driven into the private sector of the gay dollar and liberal progressive wealth due to lack of public institutional support for the Chicago stop on its tour. In an era when the federal government guts arts and education funding, and threatens to strike even the language of gender variance from its documents, the only seeming recourses are outright revolt in the streets or a retreat into self-reliant subcultural communities wherein an exhibition "about revolt" can be curated.

Thus, *About Face* is organized in the face of public endangerment of such exhibitions being sanctioned and supported, let alone integrated into a mainstream of collective concern as its introductory video fantasizes. The exhibition represents a circling of the wagons wherein longstanding cultural warriors might reflect on the queer realities made possible by their efforts. The audience that assembles beyond the gate and buzzer and glass doors and card swipes may need this show as a reminder of who they are and what they've fought for, even as the

cachet of cultural representation diminishes. As artist and scholar Hito Steyerl observes:

> While cultural representation of everything is undergoing massive inflation (coupled with the devaluation and degradation of most individual images, texts, sounds), political representation is not only uneven, it is also less and less relevant. The two realms also seem to be running wildly out of sync. The period of the exponential growth of all things represented, the era of the proliferation of circulating images and data, is also the period of the radicalization of anti-immigration policies, the institution of increasingly harsh border regimes, the growth of neofascist (some prefer to call them right-wing populist) movements and parties, and a general loss of the authority of politics. If one were to push the point, one could conclude that there is almost an inversely proportional relationship between political and cultural representation. The more people are represented culturally . . . the less they matter politically.[17]

That political representation is less relevant today seems indefensible, given to what extent even the democratic process at large not to mention the particular demonstrations of, for example, gay pride are insulated and ordered by corporate interests and upper-tier wealth that wields the power to cleave the planet into its own desired forms. Steyerl's findings around how those culturally represented are made to matter less is debatable, however, and in fact should be continuously troubled in our explorations of how to engage (with) one another. Also debatable is whether the visibility afforded by this exhibition actually extends into a commons of discourse, and whether it proves accessible to broader audiences. By and large, the queerness that is demonstrated here is one primed for facial recognition, for ideal BMI, and for a globalized economy more than a globalized coalition oriented toward justice.

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Visibility then is entangled to a more commodified identity. As Matt points out the inner workings of the exhibition, beyond gender and sexuality, by emphasizing how class supplants any form of difference, which could be the danger when resistance is neatly historicized. As Rosemary Hennessy states and speculates in "Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture," "Redressing gay invisibility by promoting images of a seamlessly middle-class gay consumer or by inviting us to see queer identities only in terms of style, textuality, or performative play helps produce imaginary gay/queer subjects that keep invisible the divisions of wealth and labor that these images and knowledges depend on."[18]

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Figure 4. Installation view. Arthur Tress. Photo: Courtesy of Wrightwood 659, Chicago.

The preferred modes of representation within *About Face* gather around photographic portraiture. Within that milieu are those canonically established perspectives for gay men: Arthur Tress and Peter Hujar, for example. A set of prints of photographs taken by gay rights political pioneer Harvey Milk are included after they were discovered among Milk's archive in the collection of the San Francisco Public Library. The male nude is eroticized and romanticized by these artists, with most of the depicted bodies physiqued in accordance to the still powerfully enforced beauty standards among gay men, or lean from the decimating effects of AIDS. Those tropes continue in the work of lesser known figures like Bill Jacobson, Hervé Guibert, John Dugdale, and Amos Badertscher—the latter a Baltimore-based photographer who for decades has shot portraits of himself with a variety of young male sex workers and homeless youth, and about whom the phrasing in the title of this text refers, quoted as it is from the wall didactic mounted beside his project.

Joan E. Biren's photographs from the late 1970s and early 1980s likewise document lesbian communities, with daily life, erotic portraits, and a grey area between those spheres all captured with tenderness in silvery black and white. Alice O'Malley, Gail Thacker, Leonard Suryajaya, Sophia Wallace, and Del LaGrace Volcano likewise make use of the traditional formal devices of portraiture to depict queer minorities in images that are indulgently flamboyant, experimental, and intent on extending visibility to those who have not fit within the mainstream, even within the mainstream of LGBT history.

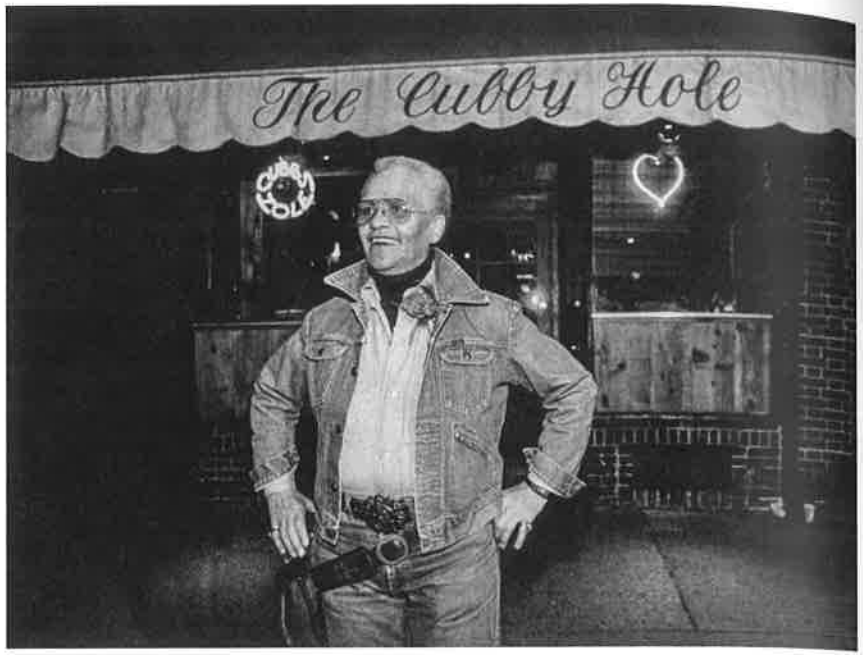

Figure 5. Joan E. Biren, *Stormé DeLarverié greets women coming to The Cubby Hole*, 1986. Photo: Courtesy of Wrightwood 659, Chicago.

Their projects and inclusion here are necessary and laudable. Their contributions mark out a threshold beyond which lie aspects of queer life and experience that exceed and resist these modes of representation. Who and what can't be shown in this manner of portraiture? Who or what hasn't been? Thus, building art history requires us to devise further means of complicated queerness. Abstraction recommends itself, among other as of yet ineffable tactics, as a means of working with unmanageably queer quantities. With a few exceptions, the legacy of queer abstraction as having always problematized binary categories is strangely absent within the argument presented in *About Face*, made stranger for how expertly Katz has researched the topic of abstraction and sexuality in earlier essays on Agnes Martin, Robert Rauschenberg, and Jasper Johns.

The South African artist Zanele Muholi's suite of photographs on view is a striking moment where the especially colonial conventions of portraiture are elegantly effaced with poetic costuming and narrow ranges of richly black-on-black exposures. *Cebo II, Philadelphia*, 2018, for instance, depicts a figure with what appears to be a handbag upturned on their head. As Senga Nengudi and Lorraine O'Grady have done before them, Muholi plays with the disordering of garment and self-presentation in these images, as much to strike at Western

Figure 6. Installation view. Alice O'Malley. Photo: Courtesy of Wrightwood 659, Chicago.

Figure 7. Installation view. Zanele Muholi. Photo: Courtesy of Wrightwood 659, Chicago.

reductions of African culture as to generate more fluid, experimental ontologies on the parts of both artist and model.

Rashayla Marie Brown's installation *The Domestication Effect (Before Olympia but after Venus)*, 2019, fabricated and designed with Brianna McIntyre, signals pluralistically as a sort of altar, library, and celebrity red carpet all at once. The constitutive elements of Brown's installation signal a refusal to be apprehended or fully known under the signs of race, gender, and sexuality, no matter how intersectional their deployment. Framed single images are placed behind black mats with windows for multiple photos. The already shadowy images are further fragmented behind the apparatus of the frame; these are the kinds of structuralist skepticisms that pervade Brown's work as a photographer, writer, performer, and scholar. Multiples of Brown's 2014 photograph *You Can't See Me, Fool* are hung flanking the red carpet that runs across the floor then up the wall. It's a challenging image for the ways the artist "designed the image to go viral using standard 'identity politics' strategies that collectors associate with successful Black women artists: costuming, exoticism, revisionist art history, self-imaging, sexiness/sassiness, etc."[19] The camp and camouflage of animal print layered over animal print in the repeated image open up questions that seek to qualify who is evading being seen beyond the devices of photography, portraiture, and performances of identity compounded in Brown's work. If the matter of representation is at

Figure 8. Installation view. Left: Rashayla Marie Brown. Right: Leonard Suryajaya. Photo: Courtesy of Wrightwood 659, Chicago.

stake, Brown demonstrates the constrictive frameworks by which queer women of color are positioned within historical narratives both artistic and political. These framed prints are interspersed with shelving holding volumes of critical race theory written by such luminaries as bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins, as well as glass triangular forms that could be construed as mystical or as a kind of disappearing sign of the pink triangle used to mark homosexuals in Nazi concentration camps.

This exhibition has been mounted amid a constellation of others that carry with them queer conceits more or less explicitly oriented toward the historical significance of fifty years since the protests at Stonewall. Also in Chicago are surveys of several decades of work by recently deceased Los Angeles photographer Laura Aguilar and artist/writer/activist Gregg Bordowitz, at the National Museum of Mexican Art and the Art Institute of Chicago respectively. *Queer Abstraction*, curated by Jared Ledesma, opened at the Des Moines Art Center, and was noted as the first exhibition in the Center's seventy-year history to focus exclusively on queer subject matter (and including the work of Jade Yumang).[20] In New York, the Brooklyn Museum's Elizabeth A. Sackler Institute for Feminist Art opened *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years After Stonewall*,[21] and this year's summer exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum's Fashion Institute is *Camp: Notes on Fashion*.[22]

I include the *Camp* exhibition in this round up, because it is replete with elements of fantasy, irony, sarcasm, proliferated fictions, and innuendo that would have been a welcome addition to much of the seriousness of ceremony that characterizes *About Face*. Reflecting on the past fifty years of queer history will call to mind tremendous struggle and loss, and the figures in, for example, the aforementioned photographs Del LaGrace Volcano and Sophia Wallace are possessed of strong qualities of resilience and survival. But from my vantage, dark humor, irreverence, camp, and the sorts of wildness to which Jade alludes have been indispensable tools for survival—as operative within the contested spaces of revolt as more direct forms of political action. There are several cases of this fantasy in *About Face*. Among them are not only the dolls composed of fabric, papier-mâché, and human hair by transgender artist Greer Lankton, but also the collection from which they are loaned: these works belong to the legendary, inimitable JoJo Baby, an internationally renowned, Chicago-based club kid and drag artist who may as well have made a more direct appearance within this behemoth exhibition. Lankton's *Horny Homer from the Island of the Children of the Damned*, 1991, is a figurine based on Matt Groening's goofy father figure from the television cartoon *The Simpsons*, here transformed with makeup and hairstyling redolent of Liza Minelli in Bob Fosse's film *Cabaret*. Additional phallic appendages appear to jut out of random spots on Homer's body. Nearby

Figure 9. Installation view. Left: Del LaGrace Volcano. Right: Deborah Kass. Photo: Courtesy of Wrightwood 659, Chicago.

Figure 10. Installation view. Jerome Caja. Photo: Courtesy of Wrightwood 659, Chicago.

princess Muffin in the Cage, circa 1995, is a girlish waif adorned with allusions to ballet and BDSM.

A significant section of the top floor of the exhibition is devoted to Jerome Caja's trash aesthetics intoned, as the wall didactic describes, "through humor and irony—and occasional flashes of rage." Ohio-born and lifelong San Francisco artist, Caja, bears the distinction of being one of the only artists to appear in all three of the major Katz-curated exhibitions that have been discussed. A miniature retrospective nested into *About Face*, the sizeable selection of Caja's works have been cocurated with Anthony Cianciolo, director of the Jerome Caja Foundation. Small, grubby, mixed-media works that range in topics from sexual to deathly, wry and outrageous, are rendered primarily in jewel-toned nail polish, often worked over the cremated ashes of Caja's close friend Charles Sexton. Pieces like *Venus Peeing on a Putto* and *The Last Cupcake* (neither work are specifically dated) are only a few inches in size, supercharged with art historical puns and unrepentant heresy. The sheer amount of the work on view is revelatory, and will hopefully draw future scholarship and recognition to Caja's persistently relative obscurity. His inclusion in *About Face* goes a great way toward resisting a respectability politics that trails behind most discourses about queer assimilation.

Caja's art objects make fun out of scrappy, wistful deprecations of the everyday, and his capacity for fantasy presages the full dynamism of alternate worlds portrayed by video artists Tianzhuo Chen and Jacolby Satterwhite. Both artists develop elaborate fantasy realms that seem entered upon by way of the dance club—another legacy of pioneering gay bars like the Stonewall Inn referenced (mostly obliquely) in the exhibition.

Tianzhuo Chen's *Light Luxury* 光华*—Aïsha Devi*,[23] 2018, overlays Swiss-born, Nepalese-Tibetan Devi's dance-trance music with performances from the Shanghai-based performance troupe the Asian Dope Boys. The atmospheric video work pans across slow-motion shots of churning waters, dark mists, and finally mythic deities outfitted in club kid glamour crafted from orchids, fish parts, and glittering, skeletal ornaments. Fat, voluptuous bodies crash about in sublime, otherworldly spa scenes. The choreography hybridizes motifs referencing vogueing, *butoh*, and Chinese religious practices. Perhaps because Chen and I are the same age, this is a spectrum of queer desire that resonates with my own boredom with body norms, mainstream homoeroticism, and predictable narratives. Instead Chen offers an imaginary that drifts into excess and unapologetic polymorphous perversity. New to this artist's practice, I encountered it with relief and tremendous relish.

Likewise, Jacolby Satterwhite's 2018 video *Blessed Avenue* continues his ongoing work of digitally rendering whole worlds based on sketches made by

Figure 11. Tianzhuo Chen, *Light Luxury* 光华*—Aisha Devi*, 2018, Single-channel video, 5:12 min. Courtesy of the artist and Long March Space.

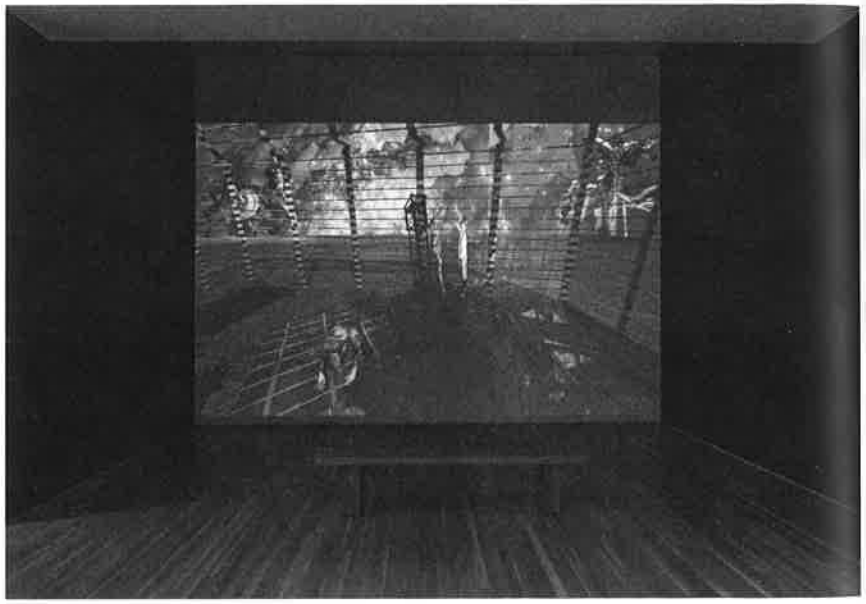

Figure 12. Jacolby Satterwhite, *Blessed Avenue*, 2018, 3D video & animation, 19:19 min. Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York.

the artist's deceased mother. Across these playground-like structures unfurls a dense and delightful orgy of superimposed figures, among them Satterwhite himself, Juliana Huxtable, and other downtown queer party scene icons. The soundtrack is also based in work of Satterwhite's mother, a cassette recording that has been remixed with Nick Weiss from the electronic music duo Teengirl Fantasy. If Rashayla Marie Brown's nearby installation negotiates a shrewd politics of resistance, Satterwhite articulates the outer possibilities of being "extra"—queer, femme, provocative, and hyperactive. Whips and braids of shiny black tendrils lash about around a panoply of fantastical figures piled into porno, POC positivism. Satterwhite's more is more bacchanalia blends Harlem ballroom scene dance moves into bondage, sci-fi, apocalyptic scenarios.

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I too was particularly struck by the work of Chen and Satterwhite as it took to me to other worlds beyond my scope, beyond myself, and go back to what O'Hara gets into regarding the complexity of one's queer identity through his poem. Chen's video, Light Luxury 光华*, is wrapped in a haunting music of the same title by Aïsha Devi from the album* DNA Feelings *that cuts through the exhibition space. A review of Devi's music expresses that, "The best thing an album like DNA Feelings can do to you is make you feel lost, and it does, frequently. 'Light Luxury' tears its vocals to ribbons, then chases its uneasy introduction with a seasick synth riff so high-pitched it borders on the range of microphone feedback."*[24] *The video acutely visualizes this otherworldliness with bodies that are far from the usual fit bodies luxuriating in water and a mythological figure that slithers and directly stares back demanding a different elsewhere. The video refuses to be situated. Here the promise of queer aesthetics, or the "new queer art" that the exhibition title suggests, moves to a new territory that feels limitless, uncertain, celebratory, and unabashed. In* After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life, *Joshua Chambers-Letson talks about the capacity of "[a]rt's formal alienation from the 'real world' (its translation and abstraction of reality into the aesthetic dimension) opens up the possibility for subverting and sublimating the existing world."*[25] *Such is also the case with Satterwhite's work,* Blessed Avenue, *projected large on a wall and tucked in a corner of the exhibition, the video beckons you to imagine queer bodies that surrender to their desires and its sexual performativity is not for others, but for self-gratification. Essentially performing for a queer audience in mind with all the nuance.*

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These excesses push beyond the formation of any concise historical narrative. It's unclear if the subtitle of the exhibition intends "revolt" as uprising or disgust (or both), but Chen and Satterwhite's videos demonstrate queer possibilities that approach the most outlandish fears and accusations of depravity that are cast upon LGBTQIA populations by conservative, straight hegemonic power structures. And it is insofar as "our" desires continue to disgust "them" that terrible, striking differences remain irrefutably in place. Those differences need not reduce down to antiquated binaries nor occlude the potential for coalition, but we must contend with the material reality produced: by the paranoid, fetishistic fantasies that transgender individuals are grave threats to the safety of restrooms; by the abject fear induced by the very suggestion of nonnormative sex practices; by loathing even the thought of anal sex; by misogyny and the as-often-as-not life-threatening hostilities toward women, femme, and effeminate bodies that it fuels; by the lingering residual effects of homosexuality being grouped with other cultural conceptions of deviance under "crimes against nature" laws; by ignoring the epidemic of HIV/AIDS and by undermining its treatment, prevention, and eradication; by the casual censorship, micro-aggressions, and bullying that alienate LGBTQIA peoples and drive them at significantly higher rates toward suicide[26]; by queer people's estrangement from their families, by our trauma, by our individual struggles to surpass the all-too-explicit ways we've been told and shown that we are disappointments to our parents and our intimates and to sanctimonious nationalist fantasies of normative behavior. This exhibition is, in fact, a trenchant expression of what a world with differences looks like, where humanity may not always be our aspiration, and neither commonality, and neither belonging.

Katz wrote in 2017, "In short, what I'm advocating in place of diversity is discord, composed of well-meaning antagonisms, the articulation of competing viewpoints that are never naturalized, but always contingent."[27] And, truly, that is the spirit in which this dispatch has developed in response to *About Face*. I am discordant; I refuse the center. Art history as it has been constructed lacks justice or conscience. I seek to facilitate and participate in constituencies, and the canon will join up when and if it is ready to question its own formative desires.

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I go back to my early questions then of visibility and misalignment. Although, there is an abundance of great individual work in this exhibition, the works were in separate islands not necessarily engaging with other artists' work nor is it meshing with the themes Katz proposes. The exhibition did not lead me to a twisty pathway, but gave me rooms, groupings, neat packages of artists' work that speaks more

of the provenance of the pieces rather than offering the audience (queer or not) a world that is pluralistic and never fixed. I was in a lot of ways looking to be tussled in a wilderness of vigorous and excessive queerness that echoes what Halberstam feels on Muñoz's escape from being an acceptable fag: "Wildness is not the lack of inscription; it is inscription that seeks not to read or be read but to leave a mark as evidence of absence, loss, and death."[28] *I want to know that I will be haunted by sexy queer ghosts and look at history and the uncertain future as a continuation of my messy desires.*

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Accompanying one of several gigantic canvases by Canadian painter Attila Richard Lukacs is a vitrine that houses a Polaroid, locks of hair, and a stack of letters written to the artist by his partner Jermaine, who is incarcerated with a sixteen-year sentence without the option of parole after he attempted a cannabis sale to an undercover police officer. It went awry; there was a physical altercation with the cop; there were weapons; there was a parole violation. No amount of justifications for the arrest, charges, or sentence will assuage the realities of black men like Jermaine being disproportionately targeted by a legal system and prison industrial complex that literally continues the conditions of slavery and exploitation upon which the United States was developed into an industrial superpower.

There's not a lot of information provided about Jermaine nor about the reasoning of including these artifacts in the exhibition. If the stack of worn letters is to function as anything more than an expositional prop for the nearby paintings, the realities of injustice that are commonplace and totally overlooked within our nation must incite, well, revolt in any of us who claim sympathy with a queer political project. I take this outré vitrine to be one of the more subtle but urgent provocations in *About Face*, the residue of which I pass along to you here. I often ask my art students "What do you feel responsible for?" In our present moment, we are only "growing queerer and queerer" as the introductory wall didactic in *About Face* claims, when we escape the confines of our convenient cultural hideouts and cultivate modes of address for the ongoing inequities and oppressions that allow for our own ease of living. To paraphrase, none of us are queer until all of us are queer. Our responsibility is to each other.

NOTES

1. John McCormick, "Fred Eychaner," *Chicago Tribune*, June 7, 2005.
2. Frank O'Hara, "In Memory of My Feelings," in *Selected Poems*, ed. Mark Ford (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 102–7.

3. Ibid., lines 4–7.
4. *About Face: Stonewall, Revolt and New Queer Art*, Wrightwood659.org, accessed June 28, 2019, https://wrightwood659.org/exhibitions/about-face-stonewall-revolt-and-new-queer-art/#exhibition-overview.
5. Ibid.
6. Salome Asega, Homi K. Bhabha, Gregg Bordowitz, Joan Kee, Michelle Kuo, Ajay Kurian, Jacolby Satterwhite, "Cultural Appropriation: A Roundtable," *Artforum International* 55, no. 10 (2017): 275.
7. Ibid.
8. Judith Butler, "Gender Politics and the Right to Appear," in *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 55.
9. Heather Love, "The Demands of Queer History," in *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 32.
10. Jack Halberstam, "Wildness, Loss, Death," *Social Text* 33, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 142.
11. Jonathan D. Katz, *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2010), 15.
12. Jonathan D. Katz, Introductory exhibition video on view on the first floor of *About Face: Stonewall, Revolt, and New Queer Art*.
13. John D'Emilio, "The Marriage Fight is Setting Us Back," in *Against Equality: Queer Revolution Not Mere Inclusion*, ed. Ryan Conrad (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2014), 55.
14. Jonathan D. Katz, "Why I Hate Diversity," *Art Journal* 76, nos. 3/4 (Fall–Winter 2017): 88.
15. Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 311. Emphasis in original.
16. Ibid. Emphasis in original.
17. Hito Steyerl, "Let's Talk About Fascism," in *Duty Free Art* (London: Verso, 2017), 174–75.
18. Rosemary Hennessy, "Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture," *Cultural Critique* 29 (Winter 1994–95): 69.
19. Quoted from Rashayla Marie Brown's artist statement on her website, rmbstudios.com, accessed June 26, 2019, https://rmbstudios.com/You-Can-t-See-Me-Fool.
20. [Jade] At least for me, abstraction helps me address my work in a more oblique and opaque way that does not necessarily announce itself or "come out," the manner of getting there and making it are already intrinsically queer.
21. [Jade] I recently saw this exhibition, which is curated by a team (Margo Cohen Ristorucci, public programs coordinator; Lindsay C. Harris, teen programs manager, Education; Carmen Hermo, associate curator, Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art; Allie Rickard, curatorial assistant, Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art; and Lauren Argentina Zelaya, acting director, Public Programs, Brooklyn Museum. Its Resource Room is organized by Levi Narine, teen programs assistant, InterseXtions and Special Projects, in collaboration with the curators) and reflects a different insight on Stonewall framing it through themes of revolt, commemoration, care, and desire. It is a smaller exhibition located in the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art floor, and consists of artists born after 1969, and is more diverse than *About Face*. It is interesting that the show, although smaller in scale, was more probing and promising in its scope on how to move on from an identity politics based on a monumental event. The works were more spread out and integrated with other artists giving a richer depth and discourse around the themes rather than grouped accordingly per artist's oeuvre; thus, the show feels queerer in a sense of community building, inclusiveness, and questioning. To reiterate, the artists' voices were more apparent and engaging to the themes and the curators played a supporting role to the exhibition.
22. [Jade] I also saw this exhibition (which was packed) and it was fascinating to see how a huge institution attempted to capture the elusiveness of camp. Framing camp specifically through costuming/fashion and having sprinkling of footnotes on camp felt insubstantial because it did not have an in-depth insight on the cultural effect within the queer world, but instead was fluffed to a more mainstream audience. Although there were beautiful tableaus of amazing costumes, the queerness of it all was missing (the pink walls are not enough). As well, the conventional sizes of the mannequins made it palatable to a typical mall environment. Also missing is any reference to John Waters.
23. Video can be viewed in Tianzhou Chen's Vimeo account, https://vimeo.com/291300430.
24. Sasha Geffen, "Aisha Devi: DNA Feelings," *Pitchfork*, May 11, 2018, accessed June 17, 2019, https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/aisha-devi-dna-feelings/.
25. Joshua Chambers-Leston, *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 23.
26. "Preventing Suicide: Facts about Suicide," *The Trevor Project*, n.d., https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/preventing-suicide/facts-about-suicide/.
27. Katz, "Why I Hate Diversity," 88.
28. Halberstam, "Wildness, Loss, Death," 147.

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Matt Morris is an artist, writer, educator, and curator based in Chicago. He analyzes forms of attachment and intimacy through painting, perfume, photography, and institutional critique. He has presented artwork nationally and internationally including Tiger Strikes Asteroid, New York, New York; Krabbesholm Højskole, Skive, Denmark; Shane Campbell Gallery, Queer Thoughts, and Gallery 400, Chicago, Illinois; The Mary + Leigh Block Museum of Art, Evanston, Illinois; the Elmhurst Art Museum, Elmhurst, Illinois; the Poor Farm, Manawa, Wisconsin; and the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, Ohio. He is a contributor to Artforum.com, *Art Papers*, *ARTnews*, *Flash Art*, *Newcity*, *Sculpture*, *The Seen*, and *X-TRA Contemporary Art Quarterly*, and his writing appears in numerous exhibition catalogues and artist monographs. He is a transplant from southern Louisiana who holds a BFA from the Art Academy of Cincinnati, and

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Jade Yumang is named after his mother's beauty salon and from an earlier age has been obsessed with beautiful, yet slightly off, things. His work primarily focuses on the concept of queer form through sculptural abstraction, installation, and performance. He received his MFA at Parsons School of Design with Departmental Honors in 2012 and his BFA Honors in University of British Columbia in 2008. Selected exhibitions include Art League (Houston, Texas), TRUCK Contemporary Art (Calgary, Alberta, Canada); Des Moines Art Center (Des Moines, Iowa), Western Exhibitions (Chicago), BronxArtSpace (Bronx, New York), Brooklyn Museum (Brooklyn, New York), Museum of Arts and Design (New York, New York), the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art (New York, New York), District of Columbia Arts Center (Washington, DC), Glasshouse (Brooklyn, New York), and ONE Archives (Los Angeles, California). He is a recipient of several grants from Canada Council for the Arts and British Columbia Arts Council and featured in a book entitled, *Queer Threads: Crafting Identity and Community*. He was born in Quezon City, Philippines, grew up in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, immigrated to unceded Coast Salish territories in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, and lives in Chicago, Illinois, USA. He is part of a New York-based collaborative duo, Tatlo, with Sara Jimenez and an assistant professor in the Department of Fiber and Material Studies at School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His works can be viewed at jadeyumang.com and collaborative work at tatlo.info.