

BRING YOUR OWN BODY

TRANSGENDER BETWEEN ARCHIVES AND AESTHETICS

**NIV ACOSTA
MARK AGUHAR
MATH BASS
EFFY BETH
JUSTIN VIVIAN BOND
PAULINE BOUDRY / RENATE LORENZ
VAGINAL DAVIS
ZACKARY DRUCKER
CHLOE DZUBILO
REINA GOSSETT & SASHA WORTZEL
JULIANA HUXTABLE
GREER LANKTON
PIERRE MOLINIER
GENESIS P. ORRIDGE
FLAWLESS SABRINA
BUZZ SLUTZKY
CHRIS VARGAS & THE MUSEUM OF
TRANSGENDER HISTORY AND ART**

**ORGANIZED BY JEANNE VACCARO
WITH STAMATINA GREGORY
OCTOBER 13 - NOVEMBER 14
41 COOPER GALLERY**

THE COOPER UNION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE AND ART

BRING YOUR OWN BODY presents the work of transgender artists and archives, from the institutional to the personal. Taking its title from an unpublished manuscript by intersex pioneer Lynn Harris, the exhibit historicizes the sexological and cultural imaginary of transgender with objects from the Kinsey Archives and the Transgender Archives at the University of Victoria. Simultaneously, Bring Your Own Body presents contemporary transgender art and world making practices that contest existing narratives in favor of new historical genealogies. Moving beyond the aesthetically defunct category of "identity politics" and the fraught gains of visibility, the artworks propose transgender as a set of aesthetics made manifest through multiple forms: painting, sculpture, textiles, film, digital collage, and performance.

Sexological and diagnostic histories of the clinic and the case study still reverberate in the foreclosure of transgender subjectivity. Bring Your Own Body interrogates the archive's often violent capture of identity, mining visual data, such as "transvestite" photography and police records of transgender women of color arrested for sex work and female impersonation. Other kinds of visual evidence—doodles, correspondence, and ephemera from both sexologists and their subjects—illustrate the embattled forms of agency inherent to the formation of archives.

Contemporary works performatively animate the archive and negotiate inherited representations. Through collage, Chris Vargas repurposes sensational news headlines about "gender deviance" from the 1940s-60s. The film and installation *N.O. Body* by Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz examines idealized forms of masculinity and femininity through the sex theories of Magnus Hirschfeld and the nineteenth-century circus freakshow performances of bearded lady Annie Jones. Justin Vivian Bond constructs an intimate study of beauty and the search for the transchild in watercolor diptychs of the artist and model Karen Graham. Genesis Breyer P-Orridge's polaroids, collage and sculpture, some made with partner Lady Jaye, express a savage resistance to the "tyranny of DNA" and a commitment to deconstructing the fiction of self.

Early, radical artists working in and around gender and performance signal new forms of transgender archives: self-determined and in continual formation. These include a handwritten text by the mother of terrorist drag Vaginal Davis, works and ephemera from the 57-year archive of legendary drag queen Flawless Sabrina, and photocollages by Surrealist outlier Pierre Molinier. Works from the estates of Mark Aguhar and Effy Beth, many of which are on view for the first time, provide critical reinterpretations of artistic canons and mark the importance of digital communities mobilized by young artists.

While the exhibition gathers work under an expanded umbrella of transgender, it does so without identitarian claims. Despite recent and unprecedented visibility in popular media, transgender is neither new nor finished, and a return to the archive offers a critical historical perspective. Bring Your Own Body explores the way transgender is formed in the space between an archive and an aesthetic, between historical taxonomies and lived experience. The space between is the site of tension for power relations and political possibility.

WHY HAVE THERE BEEN NO GREAT TRANSGENDER ARTISTS?

In 1971 feminist art historian Linda Nochlin posed a provocative question: "Why have there been no great women artists?" Her polemic ignited a field and waves of knowledge production about female, feminist, and outsider art. Of significance to the curatorial vision of *Bring Your Own Body* is the strategy Nochlin advocated against in her rebuttal to male dominated art scenes, heteronormative aesthetics, and racist art markets. She warned that to mine the history books and archives for evidentiary claims about great women artists or to recuperate women artists as great ignores the socio-cultural structures that enable greatness and reifies the myth of the great male artist (and genius, composer, or mathematician). To invoke and edit Nochlin and ask *why have there been no great transgender artists* is to suggest that our aesthetic and political categories need to be reimagined. Our curatorial assembling of a nonidentitarian and visual landscape of transgender in sculpture, film, textiles, performance, photography, and archival objects is an effort to assign value where it has been withheld. Offering definitions can be a dangerous thing to do. Our intention in elaborating on the field of the visual is not to generate an alternative canon with borders to police and turf to patrol. In dialogue with the artists and artworks we offer an anchor of organizing keywords.

ARCHIVE The Greek and Latin etymologies of the word secure our understanding of the archive as public record and government house: a register of bodies that counts birth and death. How do we counter the erasure of transgender identities in lesbian and gay archives, feminist politics, and histories of art? Excavating an outsider history can take many forms—to edit and revise, augment and replace, make room and centralize—actions saturated with questions of power. Which strategies do we lean on to build and archive that is continual in its formation and a history that is not resolved? A curatorial exploration of sexological and artistic collections doesn't yield any one history of transgender, but assembles objects and works that can constitute an alternative archive. Encountering the archive demands that you bring your own body.

AUTHORSHIP Poststructuralist thought dictates that works of art are open to the reader for limitless interpretation and analysis, unconstrained from authorial intention (Barthes, Foucault, Mallarmé), ostensibly shifting critical focus from authors to readers, from canonical authority and unitary subjectivity to a fluidity and inclusive multivocality of meaning. Feminist critiques of wholly deconstructed authorship argue that while subjectivity can be found in a range of positions, unrelated to class, ethnicity, or gender, identity is then paradoxically destroyed. And not everyone has the same historical relation to identity formation. When is a Warhol or an Arbus simply part of the Flawless archive? Does it matter who threw the first brick at Stonewall?

FUCKOLOGY Eccentric sex researcher John Money (1921-2006) was a maximalist. In his forty something books and over five hundred articles, he devised many taxonomies: lovemap, mindbrain, behavioron, and normophilia. He called the quasi science of sexology fuckology, a queer sounding science. In 1967, Money organized the Johns Hopkins Gender Identity Clinic with the support of Reed Erickson, a transman with a pet leopard and a family fortune of forty million dollars made in oil investments. The Erickson Educational Foundation financed sex research into transexuality by Money and Harry Benjamin (Erickson's physician), and also supported alternative and new age philosophies like dolphin communication. We can see a trace of the entangled histories of gender self-determination and the psychedelic, New Age human potential movements of the 1960s in Money's archive. He made doodles—groovy, neon drawings of forensic criminology, male and female genitalia, phrenology, and pedophilia—drawn on university and hospital memorandum, gala invitations, and symposia schedules. Money's doodles animate a kind of psychedelic boredom in the sexological apparatus of diagnosis, and his archives foreground the experimental and personal forms of scientific inquiry and method.

MOTHER A motherly genealogy of legacies, revolts and resistance, love, and (self) care flourishes in the archive of transgender art and world making. Flawless Sabrina began the Miss All-America Beauty Camp Pageant in 1958 at age nineteen. Traveling weekly across the United States she "dressed up like a middle-aged lady" and crafted a "non-competitive mother image," continuing her mentorship of young queer artists. Her "granddaughters" Zackary Drucker and Diana Tourjee are cataloguing her 57-year archive. Conceptual artist Effy Beth (1989-2014) wrestled with legacies of feminist art by remaking canonical works like Judy Chicago's *Menstruation Bathroom* (1972) and Valie Export's *Action Pants: Genital Panic* (1969). Her photography and performance revived the utopian pedagogy of second wave experiments while critiquing essentialist notions of the body. "From where," she asked, "do you build your own acknowledgment as a woman and as an artist?"

TALK SHOW The talk show is an elementary medium of transgender exposure. The genealogy of television capture belongs to the history of the clinic, a line we can draw between Foucault and Phil Donahue. In a 1987 talk show on "transsexual families" Donahue advises his transgender guest, "you felt you were born in the wrong body," thwarting her speech in all its registers. The talk show is a site of contestation but also a space of possibility. In its organization of bodies its politics are at once hopeful and dystopic. In the early 1980s Jack Doroshow (Sabrina Flawless) developed *The Apple Pie Show*, a talk show starring John Waters and Divine that was never acquired by network television, but had the potential to turn cult into culture. In *DISCOTROPIC | Alien Talk Show* (2015) niv Acosta tapes his own talk show within an installation of denim phallus sculptures, claiming a fantastical collaboration of bodies human machinic, imaginary, and televisual. Directors/writers of *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* Reina Gossett and Sasha Wortzel play with storytelling on film by casting Marsha "Pay It No Mind" Johnson (1945-1992) – a black transwoman who organized the *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries* with Sylvia Rivera—as the star and writer of *The Marsha Johnson Show*. What is encapsulated, contained, and made possible by the category of the episode—and the series, premiere, and finale?

—Jeanne Vaccaro and Stamatina Gregory

PROGRAMS

DISCOTROPIC | Alien Talk Show **Thursday, October 22, 6:30pm** **41 Cooper Gallery**

niv Acosta seizes on the confessional culture of the television talk show to explore the connections between science fiction, disco, astrophysics, and the black American experience. He films a live performance in collaboration with performers Monstah Black, Justin Allen, André D. Singleton (aka Brohogany Opulence), Juliana Huxtable, and Ashley Brockington.

The Queen: a screening and conversation **Saturday, October 24, 7pm** **Rose Auditorium at 41 Cooper Square**

The Queen (1968) follows a cross-country drag competition organized by Sabrina Flawless that concludes in the Miss All-America Camp Beauty Pageant held at Town Hall. Flawless is in conversation with artist Zackary Drucker and archivist Diana Tourjee.

Reading by Juliana Huxtable **Thursday, October 29, 7pm** **41 Cooper Gallery**

Juliana Huxtable is poet, artist and DJ. Her multimedia work explores the fragmented, mutating and mutable nature of identity, utilizing race, gender, and queerness as mediums to explore the possibilities of a post-identity politics. She uses a range of outlets to unpack these themes including self-portraiture, text, performance, nightlife, music, and poetry.

Salon: Printed Matter **Wednesday, November 4, 6:30pm** **41 Cooper Gallery**

Amos Mac, photographer, writer, and co-founder of Original Plumbing and curator Jeanne Vaccaro facilitate a pop-up salon on printed matter. The Bring Your Own Body library contains *Transvestia* (1960-1980) by transgender pioneer Virginia Prince, ephemera belonging to The Transsexual Menace, and newsletters like *The Society for the Second Self*, iterations of transgender organizing and community formation in the pre-digital era.

TransEuphoria Now **Thursday, November 5, 7pm** **41 Cooper Gallery**

TransEuphoria revisits the artistic legacy of Chloe Duzbilo (1960-2011)—downtown performer, activist, and singer in the rock band Transisters. As part of activist organizations like the Transsexual Menace Chloe directed one of the first federally funded HIV prevention programs for transgender sex workers in 1997. Mx. Justin Vivian Bond, Buzz Slutzky and Jeffery Green talk with curator Jeanne Vaccaro about their creative practice and Chloe's exhibition *TransEuphoria* 2011.

Happy Birthday, Marsha! **Saturday, November 14, 7pm** **Rose Auditorium at 41 Cooper Square**

Reina Gossett and Sasha Wortzel, writers / directors of *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* stage a perforative lecture and screen scenes from their sitcom about the legendary transgender activist Marsha "Pay it No Mind" Johnson and her life in the hours before the 1969 Stonewall Riots.

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Curatorial Assistants:
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