Abstract

Hiding in the open: a queered artistic practice, Michael Petry

This text investigates creative decision-making in art practice and theoretical models that illuminate the sense of how contemporary working practice as an artist (expert practitioner), functions. Further it seeks to demonstrate how observation and documentation alters the creation of new work, which emerges from the process. It also seeks to show how this perspective differs from that of non-makers (expert spectators). Equally important is the linked thematic content, where complex notions of identity, self and culture are played out against an historic time frame as well as in contemporary art making situations of various models (museological, commercial, academic), and within the several guises I perform (as an artist, writer, curator) which might give rise to signature practices.

These investigations work in parallel with those that seek to identify, understand and explain the nature of coded information that has been used in the artistic practice of same-sex lovers. Embedded coded information is ostensibly about one subject yet contains within itself another subject matter, and I refer to this phenomenon as *hiding in plain sight*.

The Portfolio includes an outline of methods and strategies adopted in the project, an enquiry into the interweaving of objects made, curation, and outlines the most recent project *Golden Rain*, addressing institutional privilege, gifting, and hiding in plain sight. It provides a retrospective account of changes in my practices and records the development of new strategies to deal with institutional homophobia over a series of exhibitions, artworks and practice-based investigations.

Hiding in the open: a queered artistic practice

Michael Petry

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Introduction

"Artistic activity is a game, whose forms, patterns and functions develop and evolve according to periods and social contexts; it is not an immutable essence[1]*"*, and is played out within institutions, with ever changing rules.

Research Areas

This project identifies several research areas which relate to creative decision-making in art practice (in the first person), while looking for theoretical models that might be used to illuminate the sense of how I work as an artist (expert practitioner knowledge), how I observe and document the process and the works, and how that again alters the creation of new work which emerges from the process. Finally, I am concerned to engage here with the question of how that expert practitioner knowledge differs from the observation of non-makers (called 'expert spectators' by S. Melrose), amongst whom we might include many art critics and informed viewers.

These same processes of enquiry are linked to the thematic content, where equally complex notions of identity, self and culture are played out against an historic time frame as well as in contemporary art-making situations of various models (museological, commercial, academic), and within the several guises I perform (artist, writer, historian, curator) which might give rise to signature practices, that is, to practices and works that recognisably bear my name as artist.

This study equally focuses on another field that is bound up with my enquiry into my own art practices: I am concerned here with the artistic practices of male same-sex lovers (who will be referred to as SSLs; the naming convention is further discussed in following chapters) specifically in the visual arts. I propose a number of different enquiries in what follows: first, to consider how coded information has been used in the artistic practice of SSLs to enable them to communicate their same-sex experience to select groups, whilst concealing it from the mass of viewers. Coded information is ostensibly about one subject yet contains within itself another subject matter, and I refer to this phenomenon as hiding in plain sight.

I investigate how institutions (museums, galleries, grant bodies, the curatorial community) have - knowingly or otherwise – effectively obfuscated the sexuality of SSLs; I identify that obfuscation as having resulted from their placing a heterosexual filter before the works and biographies of artists who were/are SSLs. I propose to demonstrate that the application of this filter has brought about what might be called a biographical bias against SSLs, that reaches throughout the wider arts communities, with the effect of limiting and distorting interpretations of their work relative to that of their heterosexual peers.

Research Methods

"Since Duchamp the author has become a curator. The artist is primarily the curator of himself, because he selects his own art. And he also selects others; other objects, other artists.[2]*"*

My research-methodological undertaking has been to explore these research questions through a combination of activities, including writing, curating, literature and gallery research, but principally through my own artistic practice, which the present text aims, in a number of different ways, to illuminate.

Chapter 1, for example, focuses on an installation, *Golden Rain* (2008). I argue that *Golden Rain* reaches the highest level of abstract exploration of the research questions, and contrasts with works made and exhibited at the start of this endeavour. Chapter 2 (*WAS: White as Snow, Bareback Lovers, In The Garden of Eden,* and *America the Beautiful*) attempts to record a journey of self-knowing and the emergence of work that was arguably aesthetically minimal, open and self-knowingly beautiful, which also sought to incorporate a queered perspective and origin, to which I return below. Chapter 3 focuses on a single work, *The Milky Way and Other Fairy Tales*, while Chapter 4 looks at works made after 2005: their making followed *Hidden Histories*, dating from 2004, an exhibition I curated and an accompanying book I wrote which surveyed the work of artist SSLs. The works dating from 2005 were self consciously more abstract than those. I was aware by that time that in order to combat heterosexual filtering – which I critique in approaches to others' work and to which I return in some detail in the pages that follow - I needed to resist imposing a potentially problematic homosexual filter on my own work. What I have begin to outline here is a complex narrative about making work in the context of a research project that I return to in the chapters that follow, and that seeks to demonstrate how theoretical and practical issues impacted the work I was making and exhibiting as a professional artist.

My research methods have been materially impacted by a number of theoretical and practical issues; queer studies and the social/physical/ material consequences of making commercial artistic practice and are discussed below. But a further vital research-methodological concern has been (and remains) with the means of presentation/representation of the art works themselves in this medium. The first and most obvious question that needs to be addressed here is how to represent, in writing and through available visual documentation, what an artist and a spectator experience essentially live, and through human action and interaction. That is, how might I document the live experience of a work of art, in this writerly form whose essential task is to record? The majority of the works under consideration are sculptures while many are installations, each of which supposes particular and complex modes of engagement in space and time. Plainly it is possible to record details of context and site, but what is non-intuitive, in the present medium, is the relationship of the page/screen to the object, and thereafter between the viewer/reader and 'the work'. While the mediation of the form of presentation disappears in the actual view or reading the information/images presented, yet what is engaged with by the reader or viewer here is not only 'not the work', it is rather more tellingly *not the experience of the work*. In the case of the work that is central to this study, the live experience of that work, in the gallery or exhibition space, while it clearly remains individual to the individual concerned, is likely nonetheless to have folded within it, or around it, some kind of knowledge of and/or engagement with the sorts of narratives and ways of seeing and talking about work which resonate with my artistic signature and ongoing interests, as I have begun to outline them above. Part of the task of this writing is to provide some of the details of those missing stories and ways of seeing that the basic documentation of visual art tends to *empty out*.

The recorded images, thus, are not even simulacra of the work but perhaps its signifiers. They point (us) to it, and to its absence, rather than re-present it. Nonetheless, I have chosen these particular signifiers to represent work whose existence now exists as a matter of public record – that is, beyond me and my intentions and my own interpretations of the work. I no longer have ownership of how it is received, although it continues to bear my name and signature. I must however interpret that work, in order to present it in this document. I must select from the work made, and foreground one or another instance of it, in terms of the narrative that I have begun to outline above; yet I am aware of the danger of over-interpretation, and of an interpretation that seems to fit with the particular nature and emphases of that narrative. I need to attempt, accordingly, to limit or at least to highlight my own prejudices about my work, about work in general that I have chosen to draw into this narrative, and about the act of presentation in the present medium. In many senses what I am engaged in here, as artist-researcher, is a form of self-curation, which supposes selection but also non-inclusion, foregrounding and emphasis but also deletion.

How then to minimize my own subjectivity about my work, and the work of others that seems to me to have had an impact upon it? The presentation of the works as photograph, as opposed to video format, is a preliminary step based on my practice of image capture over the years of my own works. This form of documentary view - or perhaps journalistic eye - has come about from a long apprenticeship with the photographer Edward Woodman, who in the past has documented all my installations while I video-taped them. With the introduction of digital still cameras (and an unfortunate accident which prevents Woodman from working) I now document my works digitally. This of course re-introduces the problematic of subjective interpretation of my own work, in that it is now my eye that presents my version of the work, which, while it was made by me, now has an autonomous status, freely available to the interpretation of others.

Signature is thereby doubled in the document, and selection and foregrounding once again bear within them the *impress* of the story that I want to tell, about where work comes from, how creative decisions are made, and to what effect. The writer of the narrative, in this case, writes over the signature of the maker, and that of the document-maker, and it is no longer likely that the maker's signature, as viewed in the gallery or exhibition space, and remarked by a viewer, is still present, here, in the writing. This is my story of the work and its connections with other works and with other practices with which the works engage.

In order to highlight this artifice, I have chosen to present the works in two formats, one digitally in the form of a Power Point presentation with minimal information (merely the name, date, place and materials) so that viewers will be able to look at *"the work"* at their own pace, exploring each image as long as they like, with as little as possible interference by an authorial self. I would ask that the presentation be seen prior to the reading of the text. Yet I am aware that even the choice and foregrounding of the images presented (from a larger group of shots, views, details) leads viewers into an interpretation mired in an inbuilt inability to present work (in two dimensions and as documentation) with as little narrative interpretation as when the actual works are seen and engaged with in public presentations. In those situations I am not there to interpret the work, which suggests a degree of ontological difference between 'my work', 'the work itself', 'the work as experienced' and the work as documented, even if it remains the case that the same name attaches. In making this text, nonetheless, I am always bound in the paradox of the knowledge of self-interpretation even when striving to objectify.

The second iteration of the images of the works is within the text. The text by necessity has a narrative arch and with narration inevitably comes interpretation. As artist maker, expert practitioner - and importantly as expert spectator - I need to construct a history of the making of the work that does not force a narrative reading upon it, and that acknowledges that the narratives that are constructed are likely to have been constructed after the emergence of the work. This observation presents researchers with a huge difficulty with regard to knowledge and the artist, for the artist as expert practitioner might well bring what Melrose, after Karin Knorr Cetina ('Objectual practice', *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, 2001) has called a 'disciplined unknowing' or *quasi-unknowing* about the exact origins of the work, the role of intuition in creative decision-making, and the impact of external factors on that decision-making.

In offering two views of the same material one without text/interpretation and another with, spectators (expert or casual) have a better approximation of the actual work. That is not to claim however that my immersive installations (*Golden Rain, In the Garden of Eden, The Milky Way*) do not have a voice or are without a narrative content. All the work seeks to interact with the viewer and therefore must have something to impart, but in any successful work, the many voices, narratives, conceptual and aesthetic goals I enfold into seemingly minimal works must emerge at their own pace with minimal off-stage prompts. Documentation is a minefield for all works of art. The colour of reproductions of paintings is notoriously hard to control and no printed page has yet to approximate the subtleties of any Rothko. But at least for most painting the documentation has mainly to present a one to one two dimensional performance (i.e. the flat painting to the flat page – though this is not always the case). For sculpture and installation the problem is compounded by two additional axis, that of space and time. The work exists in certain three dimensional spaces that must be experienced in the round and over time. In a work like *Golden Rain* where it is even time-specific (i.e there are certain points in the day that the sunlight hits the bottles perfectly throwing golden light into the room) the engagement with the work is performative and documentation will always fail to evoke the experience and indeed the beauty of the moment, be it in dance, action or visual form. Experience of the work is all. Even in other viewings, the difficulty in seeing a four or three dimensional object in two, while obvious, is not intuitive and it is easy to slip into a privileged two dimensional state (that of the book/page which conveys institutional authority). Books last, while installations pass into memory.

The impact of Queer Studies

Queer is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as *"A adjective 1. strange, odd, eccentric; of questionable character, 2. bad, worthless…. 4. Esp. of a man: homosexual. slang. derog. B noun. 1. counterfeit coin, 2 a homosexual – queercore – a cultural movement amongst young homosexuals which deliberately rebels against and dissociates itself from the established gay scene, having as its primary form of expression an aggressive type of punk-style music.*[3]"

This is a dominant definition of queer, which has itself been deconstructed and reconceptualised through Queer Studies. After a review of relevant queer studies literature, perhaps an alternative definition might be that Queer is a state of mind and behaviour that purposefully and radically does not hide sexual preference. This alternative definition is clearly relevant here, since queer then contrasts with the codification of information about sexual preference, and the obfuscation of sexual preference identity.

Queer Studies were significantly influenced by Michel Foucault's investigations into power structures and sexuality, from *The Order of Things* (1966, 1970 trans) via *Discipline and Punish*

(1975, 1977 trans) to *The History of Sexuality* (1984). Queer Studies were also influenced by Women's Studies. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*[4] and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*[5] are core texts. Butler posits that gender is a performative act, not something 'natural' to the individual. Both argue that historic constructs around gender, sex and sexual preference must be seen as such (i.e. constructs) and not the nature of things, and this is at the heart of a new understanding of how the patriarchy controls those of difference (women, sexual, racial and ethnic minorities).

Another important influence on Queer Studies was the AIDS epidemic. (Foucault died of an AIDS related illness in 1984.) At one point Queer Studies and AIDS activism almost went hand in hand, and produced a substantial literature including: *AIDS Demographics*[6] by Douglas Crimp and Adam Rolston; Lee Edelman's essays in *Homographesis*[7] (1994); Edmund White's *Loss within Loss: Artist in the Age of AIDS*[8]; and Crimp's *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics*[9]. As activists, these writers emphasize the importance of open and public identification on the basis of sexual orientation as a means of combating the AIDS epidemic.

Queer Studies has its critics. Andrew Sullivan, Jonathan Rauch and others in Bruce Bawer's *Beyond Queer: Challenging Gay Left Orthodoxy* claim that *"queer ideology itself is ultimately self - ish and immature…" and that "a disproportionate number of those who work for gay political organizations, write for the gay press, and teach in university gay studies programs call themselves queer*[10]*"*. As the title of that book implies, critics of Queer Studies are often drawn from the right, and their stance is typically informed by social conservatism. One of their main targets was Michelangelo Signorile's *Queer in America: Sex, the Media and the Closets of Power*[11] (1993). Signorile argued for the outing of closeted homosexuals who were hostile to the LGBT community (i.e legislators, clergymen, etc) but not general members of the LGBT community who were not in the public domain. Signorile defended his position stating that as a journalist and historian it was his duty not to lie, or withhold information about those in the public domain. Signorile pointed out that when mainstream media outs individuals they claimed that they are merely exposés, which are not condemned by other mainstream media (who repeated Signorile's information once in print).

This culture war continues to play out in America, where I am represented by commercial galleries and exhibit in public museums. It is the backdrop for much of my work, which addresses these issues on many levels. Queer Theory (as well as other models of intelligibility introduced throughout this text) offers artists a means to process local and historical knowledge into the production of art works (creating new knowledge) without recourse to direct theoretical debate within the objects themselves. They can exist in a practice of knowledge as epistemic objects[12] yet retain a certain crude market appeal.

Impact of site, context and content on artistic practice.

The notion of artistic practice as research is well established: *"The main research interest is to investigate how knowledge is created in the process of making art. Research in the visual arts there - fore asks questions about the processes and products of artistic knowing. To do this the artist is both the researcher and the object of study*[13]*."*

However, artistic practice does not occur in a vacuum, it is impacted by site (physical and social), context (museological, commercial) and content(including hetero/queer codes).

Physical site

Golden Rain was exhibited at the Eigeroya lighthouse in Egersund, Norway, a non-commercial space open to the public, but remote, and difficult to access. It was part of the *On the Edge*[14] exhibition, a visual arts project for *Stavanger 2008, European Capital of Culture*[15].

The Milky Way and Other Fairy Tales and *America the Beautiful* were exhibited at the Sundaram Tagore Gallery (STG), New York. *WAS* and *In The Garden of Eden* were exhibited at the Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery (DBHBG), Houston. *New Love* and *True Love* were exhibited at the Westbrook Gallery (WG), London. STG was situated in downtown New York, home of influential galleries (Castelli, Sonnabend) since the 1960s. Most galleries have moved to Chelsea (including STG in 2006), replaced by designer clothes stores, most notable, Rem Koolhaas' Prada shop, a few minutes away. In this neighbourhood, a leather dress can cost £5,000. Originally, STG was sited in the old Drawing Center, which gave it both an art historic as well as a commercial social context. DBHBG is situated in a recently gentrified suburb of Houston, where galleries are next to gang hangouts. WG is sited in London's West End, a centre for commercial galleries.

The architectonics of each site were important. The STG space featured high Victorian ceilings and iron columns. DBHBG could barely accommodate The Milky Way. WG is an intimate, almost domestic gallery. Eigeroya is a 46m tall lighthouse, comprising six stacked rooms. Physical space plays a large conscious and subliminal part in how works are seen by the public. The exhibitions functioned as theoretical experimentation in their own right, published in the public domain.

Social site

The social site for the work was generally the middle class (who can afford to purchase art), students (of many classes) and tourists (of any class) who casually encounter galleries. Art in commercial galleries has a different context from work made or shown in museum or alternative spaces (which also have commercial aspects). The clientele for the commercial shows that form my practice-based investigations at STG, DBHBG and WG, are those with disposable incomes, and museological staff. The clientele of all of my commercial galleries is overwhelmingly white and heterosexual, specifically: the clientele of STG includes a number of Indians and wealthy New York 'socialites'; DBHBG is one of the major US galleries based outside of New York, with a large LGBT audience; and WG is an up and coming London space whose founder worked for many blue chip galleries. Eigeroya is a regional tourist destination.

Museological and commercial context

Eigeroya is a publicly funded space used for exhibitions and the project's costs were met by Stavanger 2008. As a museological site, issues of cost were secondary but budgetary limits were in place. This enabled me and the other artists to work with minimal consideration to the market. *Golden Rain* was not for sale and as a public project it enabled me to incorporate work by other artists. This and the distinction between commercial galleries and public spaces is further discussed in Chapter 2.

At my commercial galleries, work is generally seen as serious, given social and curatorial status (all regularly sell to museums). They differ from commercial galleries selling work not considered part of the art world dialectic, and from blue chip galleries (e.g. Gagosian, White Cube), who can place work at the forefront of art discourse. My commercial galleries fall in a middle ground, where work is seen as interesting, possibly vital, and affordable (albeit out of reach of most working class viewers). They have influence over curators, but not power. Commercial galleries with power over clients and curators can set their own agendas.

Content

All of my artistic production can be characterised as queer. This content impacts its reception, albeit in unpredictable ways. It functions easily within the dominant, aping beauty and based on faux scientific objectivity and the erotic. It has the hallmarks of advertising, yet advertises its difference in order to disrupt the dominant view of it. How its various languages are understood is a function of the dominant's heterosexual filter and its effect on the viewer. Yet at all times I strive to avoid presenting closed or didactic works, and labelling is minimal and important (Chapter 3); largely, the works are left to speak for and of themselves without my or gallery mediation.

Dominant filters affect studio work even more, bound in the commercial evaluation of objects. This is addressed in the *WAS* and *Fairy Tales* works, eminently luxe objects. These unique objects address craft, sexuality, their own production, the market and are also consumable. From the perspective of the making, queerness is built into them, from the use of patterns derived from gay sex videos, to unprotected sex. As queer artefacts they become less consumer friendly, but equally, this information can be ignored, filtered out, or used as a marketing tool. The use of luxe materials, or those aping luxe, impacts works reception. Materials that have an obvious seductive quality might catch the eye/hand of the viewer, which might lead them to conceptual considerations. If their appreciation stops at skin level that is also a fair way to assess the works, therefore the materials must be of the finest quality and worked by craftspersons (which in some cases is myself). The objects can simply be judged on the level of beauty consistent with surface attention but so many other factors are at play that the obviousness of the seduction encourages greater investigation.

The use of glass in large-scale works sees the visual disjunction of scale to fragility emphasised. Small-scale glass seems within reach and touchable, bringing the viewer immediately into contact with the work. Leather is another animal skin, similar to our own and I would argue that viewers understand the sexual connotations it carries over from fashion. Wood is a timeless sculptural material and I sand and polish it to a fanatical degree where it too becomes skin-like to the touch, carrying a subliminal erotic charge. All the materials touch on other languages of use and their unexpected erotic function can displace the viewer from their mere physicality.

Whether I make the objects or commission them is material in the discourse about the objects' genesis as art works as opposed to craft. When I place myself in the position of the craft worker (often seen as a woman) I do so in order to make an art work. The issue of the ways art and craft are received in the art world (and market) is at the root of many of my choices of materials and these topics are further discussed in depth. As Hugh Davies states, *"It remains a capitalist verity, however, that competent painters of modestly sized realist pictures will make a living, while brilliant environmental sculptors will make art history and need a day job. The secondary market for site-specific artworks is no better today than it was in the seventeenth century for Bernini"* and that *"It is entirely appropriate that non-commercial, publicly supported institutions should sustain creative people who pursue advanced aesthetic research.*[16] *"*

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11 Signorile, Michelangelo, *Queer in America: Sex, the Media and the Closets of Power*, Random House, New York, 1993
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13 Sullivan, Graeme, *Art Practice as Research*, Sage Publications, London, 2005, page 60
14 www.pakanten.no
15 www.stavanger 2008.no
16 Davies, Hugh M., *Blurring the Boundaries Installation Art 1969-1996*, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, 1997, pages 9,10

Chapter 1: Integration

Chapter 1: Integration

Introduction

This chapter looks at my interactive areas of practice and documents *Golden Rain*[1] (Eigeroya Lighthouse, Norway, 2008) an installation that can be distinguished from works described in following chapters, because it is significantly more abstract, while combining my activities as an artist, curator, writer and researcher.

This chapter seeks to demonstrate some of the possible and actual interchanges and interactions that arise between my art-making – as it has developed over the past decade – curation, research and writing, noting Graeme Sullivan's observation that *"What distinguishes arts-based research is the multiplicity of ways of encountering and representing experience, and the deployment of forms of expression that can effectively communicate these phenomena. Thus inter-subjectivity and interactivity are seen as agents in research that are assets rather than liabilities.*[2]*"*

I propose to demonstrate here that my activities as a professional artist and researcher interact fluidly, while a count of outputs suggests the dominance of object-making. Such an observation plainly measures only quantitative data. Sullivan suggests in *Art Practice as Research* that the interactivity inherent in such a tri-dimensional approach to practice might be seen as a liability, but I would argue that it can also be seen as a core strength, developing from earlier processes of performance, and site-specific activity.

Prior to *Hidden Histories* (see Chapter 4) my work fell into two camps, those seen as queer and those not. My intention was not to make two territories of practice. Instead, this distinction between two fields or registers of practice can be observed to have developed out of opportunities presented – hence it is pragmatic rather than ideologically-driven.



Laughing at Time exhibition, *The Treasure of memory,* Hå gamle prestegard, Norway, 2000, glass. rope, steel



The Treasure of Memory, Lommel, Belgium, 2008

1.1 Interactive areas of practice

Laughing at Time (an exhibition of three installations: *The Treasure of Memory, The Forgotten Kisses* and *Pearl Map Unit*) at Hå, Norway, exemplifies the interaction of my areas of practice. I curated my work into a group show of my own work, and wrote about it in *The Trouble with Michael*[3], an accompanying book.

The Treasure of Memory was based on a Roman glass necklace found in a Viking burial grave[4] inside the art centre (during renovations). *The Forgotten Kisses* was installed in the location of that grave, and *Pearl Map Unit* in an upper gallery. The complex (30 yards from a beach where hundreds of burial mounds are located) is sited by a stream emptying into the North Sea. These mounds are legally protected yet people steal stones for souvenirs. The site was until recently the home of a Christian sect. A return to native worship of Norse gods by many local youth has seen a number of stave churches burnt to the ground, lead by the black metal music scene[5].

The Treasure of Memory is a large glass necklace (approximately 60 ft), based on historic glass beads from around the world, though all the designs were my invention. For *The Forgotten Kisses*, 2000 glass stones were fabricated simulating those of the burial mounds; each glass stone was unique. They were installed on the site of the internal burial mound in a pattern similar to those on the beach. *The Pearl Map Unit*, a freshwater pearl necklace whose length is exactly my height, referenced the stream that used to produce such pearls (no longer the case due to pollution). For many local visitors the pearls referred to the site's recent history, while the pearl necklace also referenced a sexual act.

These works are often seen as part of my non-erotic work, though all necklaces carry an erotic charge, as they are body decoration, referencing power structures, and who gives necklaces and who wears them.

Laughing at Time is an example of how the three aspects of my practice come together. What could be seen as completely distinct artistic modes are shown to be interactive areas of research (in the first person) with differing forms of outcome. An exhibition (of objects) needs curation and interpretation in a gallery, and I worked within all three disciplines creating the possibility of a larger experience. To work effectively in terms of the medium, each element needed to be successful within the terms of its own discipline discipline – the book is not an installation, and the continuity of engagement in the installation is difficult to replicate for a reader. For myself, the project gave me the opportunity to reflect on the actual works as an expert maker, as a curator of those works (hence an expert spectator), and an author seeking to find the possibility of identifying my signature practice as an artist. Viewers of a work (or the complete show) needed no intermediary, but for those who only encounter the work via text my contribution is of interest along side that of others.

1.2 Artist as curator

Museum of Installation

I co-founded the Museum of Installation (MOI, 1988) with Nicolas de Oliveira and Nicola Oxley to exhibit site-specific installations in a non-commercial setting. MOI (a registered charity) generated exhibitions, catalogues and editions, and was founded as a museum, precisely because at that time, installations in traditional museums were all but unheard of. Few curators were interested in the genre and many were hostile to commissioning works. It fell to artists to self-organize and MOI was founded on the ideals that work would disappear once shown. We wrote Installation Art[6] helping define the field. By the end of the decade it could be argued that installation was the dominant global art form.

As installations entered the mainstream and commercial world (with the purchase of Richard Wilson's 20/50[7]) we wrote *Installation Art in the New Millennium* (2003); a manifesto for MOI's closure, its charitable aim accomplished (we in no way claim credit for installation moving to the centre). MOI now exists as an archive. It would have been anachronistic to continue, as there is now no need for a Museum of Installation any more than a Museum of Painting.

The phenomenon of artists self-curating shows of advanced art in the 20th century is well documented. From the *Salon des Indépendents* (Paris, 1884) to the Society of Independent Artists (1917, NY) and the many collective Surrealist exhibitions, works that the general public, and many art professionals would not consider to be art, have had to be shown in events generated by artists. Recent examples include Ilya Kabakov's 1980's installations in the then USSR, *Freeze* (1988) launching the YBA phenomenon, and the Chinese art scene in Shanghai's M50 Art District which grew out of artists' studios in dilapidated warehouses (now chic locations). The need to show work has moved artists to find venues, even if when presented, only a few others (often artists) participated. That the histories of these events have become part of art histories is self-evident.

Royal Academy Schools Gallery

Curating the Royal Academy Schools Gallery has provided an opportunity to expand my knowledge of the work of contemporaries. The gallery produces ISBN catalogues (that I edit) for each show, which are sent to hundreds of UK galleries and curators further disseminating them. The introduction to each catalogue explains my curatorial approach in selecting the artists exhibited[8].

The gallery's program features the work of a young artist alongside an established one. These pairings show complementary cross-generational work, where the practice of the younger artist has something in common with or had found an influence in that of the older, allowing the work of the established artist to be re-visited by younger eyes. The artists were encouraged to work together in whatever capacity the more established artist could. Some loaned a single work (Parker/Smith), others so embraced the possibility they worked with the younger artist to make a joint installation (Wilson/Darbyshire).

Artists had input into their catalogue on a conceptual level (though not in the design), and their recommendations were taken into account. My current curatorial remit is to continue the program at off-sites[9], while investigating further long-term sponsorship possibilities. The gallery performs a partly pedagogical role for the School, as students work in various capacities including installing shows.

Curatorial work gives me the opportunity to keep abreast of developing ideas, trends, and artists. As a visually minded person all images influence my art, even if only subliminally. New outputs (objects, exhibitions, texts) are influenced regardless of conscious effort. The concerns of a younger generation, how they see the world, process it, and make work, refreshes my own ways of seeing and understanding the art world. The concerns of late Picasso held no fascination for me as a student, as the forerunners of installation were those I looked to, but by the same token, those same installation artists may no longer hold any sway with a new generation.

My curatorial impulse is based in curiosity and a notion of reciprocity, meaning that while I worked hard over the years, I was still the recipient of a measure of luck and the goodwill of others, through what might be called an ongoing artistic dialogue. I consider it my duty to pass that on. Desire, drive and even access are not always enough for new work to be made and made public, and those in the arts know of individuals with great talent who for some reason have never attained recognition.

The theorist of relationality, Bourriaud posits that *"Each particular artwork is a proposal to live in a shared world, and the work of every artist is a bundle of relations with the world giving rise to other relations…"*[10].

1.3 Mechanics of production

Bourriaud states that significance itself is not immanent but relational: *"Unlike an object that is closed in on itself by the intervention of a style and a signature, present-day art shows that form only exists in the encounter and in the dynamic relationship enjoyed by an artistic proposition with other formations.*[11]*"*

The form of my artistic production varies widely with what might be seen as physical works produced and made public, contrasted with production via curation, and contrasted a third time with textual production. Bourriaud suggests that old boundaries of artistic exchange no longer function in the way they did in the 20th century, as works relate to each other, the audience and makers. These boundaries are in flux and beyond fixity.

He argues that this is a positive direction, allowing art works and artists to escape from some of the strictures of the market. *"If… the artwork has managed to come across as a luxury, lordly item in this urban setting (the dimensions of the work, as well as those of the apartment, helping to distinguish between their owner and the crowd), the development of the function of artworks and the way they are shown attest to the growing urbanisation of the artistic experiment. What is collapsing before our very eyes is nothing other than this falsely aristocratic conception of the arrangement of works of art, associated with the feeling of territorial acquisition… it is no longer possible to regard the contemporary work as a space to be walked through (the "owner's tour" is akin to the collector's).*[12]*"*

I would want to argue, even so, that the art market (and its addiction to luxury) has grown and developed new relations with different regions. Large sums are paid for the work of Zhang Xiaogang, Ai Weiwei[13] and Fang Lijun, who ten years ago were considered subversive artists; they now employ hundreds of workers in many fields in China[14]. Their relationship with the state is still in flux and China may revert to artistic repression as it has done with political expression. How are those in the West to experience this work? One way is market led, marketing consumable luxe items for the few, whose capacity to purchase art might be viewed as (financially) self-affirming, recalling older traditions of patronage.

It has been suggested that a similar re-colonization of India is taking place: Indian artists are fashionable for Western and Indian collectors, being commodified and consumed at high prices. How is this work to be lived through or archived into the many histories of contemporary making? Subodh Gupta is often described as India's Hirst and this comparison has many complications. It posits the idea that the developing world is mimicking the West in its art-making and ways of seeing and publicising it: *"A theme of transience and change is present throughout Gupta's work, in particular the changes to the traditional way of Indian life and the multiple threats to its existence. These include the growth of the middle class in Indian cities, the cross-border spread of pop culture and youth fashion and the threat of globalization to local communities.*[15]*"*

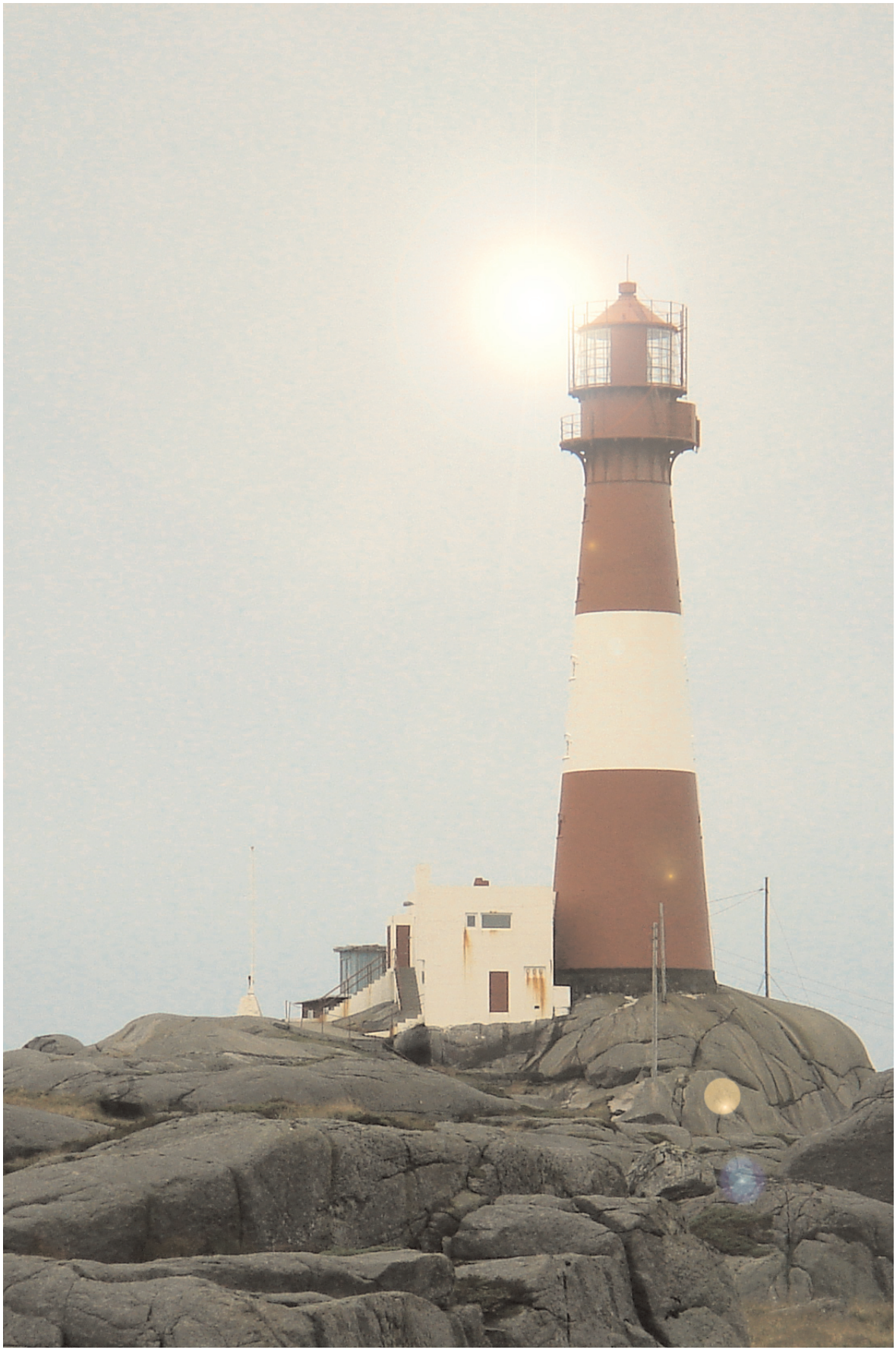
How might we experience this work as western viewers, artists and curators? What are the relationships needed to understand the work, or what relationships need to be build, in order for the impact of the work to extend beyond its commodification and resultant market value? The established art market is not static: Christie's bought the Haunch of Venison gallery in 2007. Moving from the secondary to the primary market caused many including Kate Taylor of the New York Sun to predict that the purchase *"could portend a significant restructuring of the art market, changing the terms of the artist-dealer relationship and blurring the lines between what galleries and auction houses offer. Eventually, the financial might of the auction houses could lead to the consolidation of the art business under a few owners, as happened in the book-publishing world*[16]*".* Whether the market conflates, how artists deal with galleries is always contentious. Haunch of Venison has been banned from participating in many art fairs (major sales outlets for galleries) under the pretext of conflict of interest. Marc Porter, Christie's president said *"To presume that the golden day of the '60s and that gallery system is what's appropriate in a global art world may be a great disservice to artists and to collectors… we're… ensuring that the art business evolves, so that the people who use the business are best served*[17]*."*

These relationships are discussed as if only the market mattered in the production and reception of art. That it is seen as such by most participants signals a change from the 1960's gallery system. The influx of art students (over the last few decades) and the movement of very wealthy individuals into the art market has seen old relationships change. My works, made from leather, pearls and glass have to address the cost of their own manufacture in such a system, yet not yield to its valuations based on price.

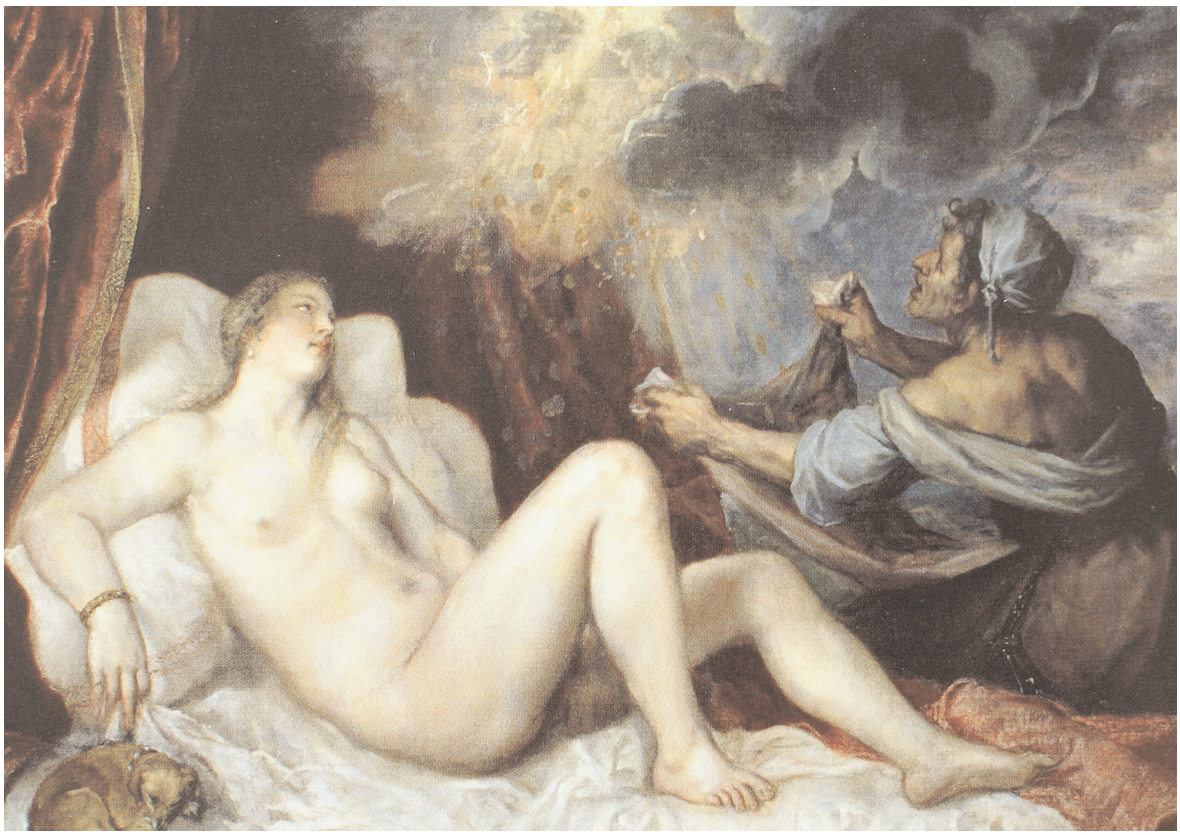
Perhaps the tipping point of this market/artist symbiosis was Hirst's Sotheby's sale of 250 new works - *Beautiful Inside My Head Forever* (2008) – which bypassed Hirst's galleries Gagosian and White Cube, posing a risk to his monetary reputation. The auction started on the evening of September 15, following the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers, signalling the start of a global recession. Hirst raised over £111,000,000.[18] His place at the head of the economic artistic tree was secured as the financial world melted. What is the artistic value of these works? Can they now only be experienced through a financial gaze? Hirst has said *"Art can be about money as long as the art outweighs the financial side. I've got money and I use it to have a goal of making art*[19]*".* Hirst's recent prices have taken a fall with many works unsold.[20]

As an artist making work that can physically be walked through, I hope viewers' engagement is greater than financial curiosity, though they may just tour the surface. My work (often for sale) may be consumed, becoming owned, finding itself in a new context, not one of inclusion (the museological space – to some degree) but in the home, or other private space where relationships are minimized by access to the work. Depending on where work is placed viewers have a different relationship with it. Curators must see how those dynamic, shifting locations alter the reception of work. When deploying artwork in an exhibition my job is complicated by the nature of my act of curation and writing. How I present the work also creates a temporary form.

1.4 Golden Rain



Eigeroya lighthouse



Titian, *Danae with a Nurse*, 1551-53

Background

Golden Rain comprised an installation, a curatorial project, and a book[21]. Eva Watne (curator) invited me and five other international artists to make projects in six lighthouses on Norway's west coast. I was offered the Eigeroya lighthouse (1854), the first built in Norway from cast iron. It reminded me of the tale of Danae and Zeus.

Akrisios, the king of Argos, had been warned by the Delphic oracle that should his daughter Danae (Greek for parched) give birth to a son, the child would grow up and kill him. Akrisios had Danae locked in a bronze tower to prevent any suitor succeeding. Zeus, the king of the gods, transformed himself into a shower of gold and rained through a grated window onto Danae who gave birth to Perseus. Akrisios afraid to kill a god's child, locked his daughter and Perseus in a wooden chest and threw them into the sea to drown. Poseidon the god of the seas saved them. Perseus became the first mythic hero, killing Medusa, and later, in a sporting accident, an old man, who turned out to be his grandfather, for no man can escape his fate. In the text I delve into the art history around depictions of the story, from Titian[22] to Klimt[23].



Gustav Klimt, Danae, 1907/8

Zeus gifts Danae and her child immortality, becoming part of his mythology. Zeus' actual gift, his golden sperm is a gift with many contemporary parallels. While Derrida has posited that it is impossible to give a gift[24], gifts, or at least barters, take place every day. While gifts may be in a person's self-interest, and the gifter may expect something other than a thank you, nevertheless, people engage in the act of giving (if not gifting) things of import and scarcity.



Marcel Duchamp, *Paysage fautif,* 1946

Duchamp made a gift of his semen in box 12 in the de luxe Boîte-en-valise series. Ecke Bonk notes that *"Whereas the construction of the inner Boîte itself was standardized… the valises were made individually over a period of eight years and vary in construction and finish.* [25]"

Each box had 69 identical items (multiples) and a unique work by Duchamp. Number VII/XX was for *Maria*, itself unique as boxes were for fully named individuals; Peggy Guggenheim (I), Georges Hugnet (II), Sidney Janis (VI). Maria is left enigmatically without a surname. Her gift, her original inclusion was *Paysage fautif* consisting of seminal fluid on Astralon[26]. This *Wayward Landscape* has changed colour over time (the semen has become dark), and is a lodestone for



Andy Warhol, Cum Painting, c 1978

my production. It is a precursor to Warhol's urine and semen on canvas works[27] and my *Web Portraits* of pearls and leather.

Duchamp, as Zeus, gifts Maria his semen. In my works using pearls (*The All Americans*, Chapter 2) web users gift me their semen in digital form, I ask only for its image, which is translated (already once removed) into an artwork. It is this distancing that allows strangers to donate such a commodity. Like Maria they remain unknown, hidden but in plain sight. The only other box dedicated to someone with only a first name is to Chilean artist Matta[28] (X111), known by this name (like Dali). Matta's gift of sperm to artist Anne Clark brought into being Gordon Matta-Clark (1943 -1978), another seminal artist to my artistic practice, Matta-Clark being a site-specific installation pioneer, and the godson of Duchamp[29].

My anonymous Web Portraits gifters do so knowing they are hidden from the non-virtual world. They obviously exist, or make a representation of their existence for me to make public with the understanding that their real identities remain unknown. Most hide their faces, chopping off their heads, or blacking their eyes. In my view this virtual self-mutilation corresponds to the harm that hiding has on any real person. It is the secrecy of the closet that is so damaging according to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick who posits that *"for many gay people it is still the fundamental feature of social life; and there can be few gay people, however courageous and forthright by habit, however fortunate in the support of their immediate communities, in whose lives the closet is not still a shaping presence[30]."*

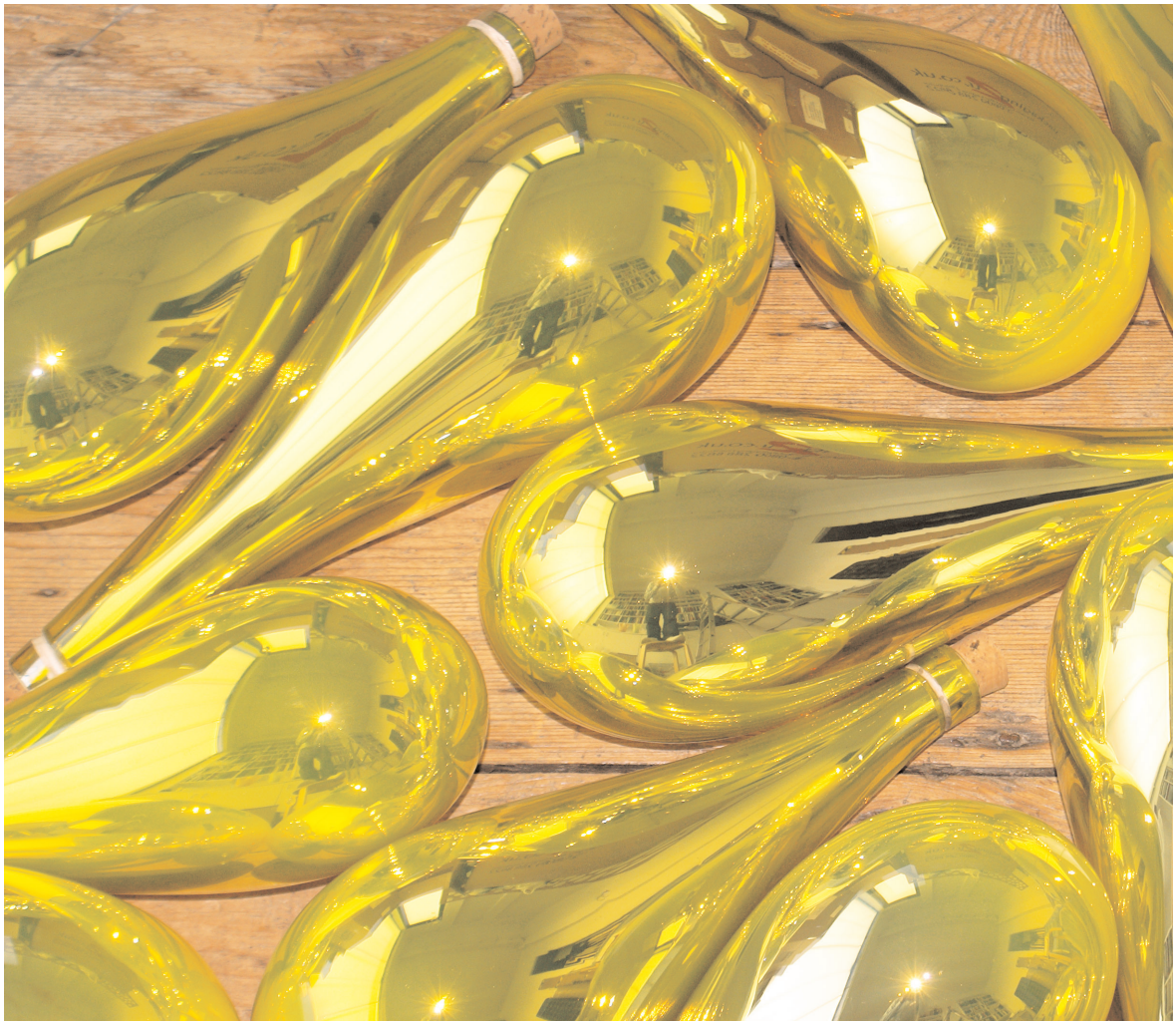
Coming out is a continual process, SSLs need to come out each time they meet a new person, take a new job, and so on, and are presumed to be different-sex lovers in the heterosexual dominant, which is understandable but life-impacting. Sometimes people hide not from a conscious choice, but simply through another's expectation of who they sexually are.

Another problematic gift of semen in the real world is often facilitated by the virtual; the passing of HIV to the uninfected, known online as gifting. Recent discussions about HIV have seen a shift in gay politics. Many state that such gifting is rare if not a media fabrication[31]. Those looking are known as bug chasers. On the UK's most popular gay website[32] there is a chat room for HIV Positive cruising while on www.bnskins.co.uk there is a discussion forum POZcum, gift or curse? A Google search for bug chasers sees over 162,000 pages come up. Whether or not people actually look to be gifted (infected), this complex notion obviously plays a role in current thinking. The fear of death receded with triple combination drug regimes making the disease manageable. Many men who survived the 80's and 90's suffer survivor's guilt (online forums attest to this). In the West, the majority of new HIV infections are amongst young gay men[33] who see it as a disease of old people and Africans. The lack of education has been recent Governments' gift to them, as with Zeus, the gift of semen is one that brings unexpected and life changing consequences.

Context

Stavanger, located in Rogaland, has a tradition of sailing, ships, towers and myths. Stavanger and Liverpool were chosen as European Capital Cities of Culture, yearlong festivals of visual and performing arts. The lighthouses no longer function as guardians of the shore (due to satellite navigation) so six were turned over to artists for the project. When I was asked to make an installation, Danae presented herself as a link to past and present, ancient western culture and a site deep with Nordic myths. What we can see operating here is an initial trigger, itself carrying expectations and the weight of a priori judgements, which began to activate a complex network of ideas, notions and myth, with a particular sort of outcome in mind, characterised, overall with notions of how I make work and what sorts of work I might make.

I installed a shower of golden rain inside the lighthouse, featuring 100 sealed mirrored glass vessels suspended down the centre of the tower. Inside were 100 texts, drawings, photographs, or objects sent to me by creative people from across the globe. I asked them as artist-commissioner-curator to think about what they would place inside a bottle (objects up to 3cm in diameter, and A4 long) if they were locked in a tower with only such a bottle as a means of discourse with the outside. Each response was documented prior to being permanently sealed in a bottle (illustrated in the catalogue). The process of filling the bottles was documented to prove that the messages were inserted. The bottles are mirrored, so nothing inside can



be seen, and I do not know which message is in which bottle – a deliberate stance which resonates with a number of notions and ideas that I explicate elsewhere in the text. Each bottle 'contains', on this basis, more than it concretely contains: it contains request and 'gift', judgement of value and taste, dialogue, belief in the project, an agreement to a degree of self-sacrifice and trust.

Curation and documentation

The project had to be a discussion with other artists as much as an installed artefact, for lighthouses are there to speak (of danger). I asked others to speak by curating a show (*Golden Rain*) within a show (*On the Edge*) with the co-operation of Watne. People were invited with the belief they would make an interesting piece, based on our knowledge of their work. Makers included, jewellers, ceramicists, architects and writers in an attempt to broaden the message content.

This curatorial project spanned eighteen months. I documented most pieces (except for digital files), so that the catalogue had a uniformity of presentation. Keeping the total to 100 was difficult, as real life intervened (several artists dropped out for personal reasons, others were then added). This might have proved a problem, but many artists heard about the project and asked to make a message should a bottle became available.

Once the messages were recorded, the vessels were sealed and shipped to Norway with the exception of Per Barclay's, who wanted his filled with gun powder (*krutt* in Norwegian). This was the only marked bottle. It must be emptied and re-filled for exhibition, due to the difficulty of shipping explosive material. Its inclusion was cleared with Watne and the building's owners (Norwegian Coast Guard).

Themes emerged in the messages, artists using the tale as a reference point for their father, their lover, their child, lighthouses and navigation, the erotic, and the artists' individual practice. The thought that went into the messages is obvious, and many have stories I was privy to as curator, that artist's did not want included in the book (recent deaths of parents, or lovers) which showed the depth of commitment to the project that many felt.

Many said that they felt I had been generous in allowing them to participate in the project, which surprised me, as the addition of their messages was vital to my dialogue with the site. I felt it was they who were generous in giving a piece of art that would be permanently hidden. Many spoke of how they'd longed to make a work for a lighthouse – so strong is its romantic pull. Again, all aspects of my practice merged, making artwork, curation and writing.

Those participating in *Golden Rain* gifted me their message, entrusting me with something of great personal value. The enclosing of the object allows it to hang in the future, waiting to be

exposed. Their works were invisible to visitors, yet were able to be seen in the catalogue. They *hide in plain sight*, and as curator I displaced them from view rather than expose or exhibit them. In *Hidden Histories* I used institutional power to shed light on artists who had to hide their sexuality in order to make work. In *Golden Rain* by hiding the work it enables it to exist in the future, in a sort of time capsule. The men in *Hidden Histories* were SSLs who hid to feel safe, the men and women (of many sexualities) in *Golden Rain* chose to participate, hiding in plain sight as part of an artistic strategy. The messages are undelivered and undeliverable, in a discussion with me, and function like a lighthouse flashing Morse code into the future.

The metaphoric power should be clear: the closet awaits opening, the person hiding dreads the moment of exposure, yet knows that exposure is almost a certainty. The veil holds an allure, it might be raised or fall from the face revealing features beneath. This slippage is at the root of religious fear of women, and only recently have Christian women been unveiled in their practices.

What cannot be had, is of greatest interest, and what cannot be seen produces desire. Sedgwick observes that: *"Privacy is everything women as women have never been allowed to be or have; at the same time the private is everything women have been equated with and defined in terms of men's ability to have*[34]*."*

The dominant decides who is most likely to enjoy privacy and who must hide and this complex notion comes into play in *Golden Rain*. The invited artists chose to allow their work to be placed in a desirous state, they slipped into the vessel and wait, in effect taking the power of the dominant and using it with me in a discussion of privilege. Their status as makers locates them as equals in the project; it is raised by their relationship to me as the curator and maker of the larger work (the installation). Curators provide artists with an opportunity to exhibit, serving as enabler as well as arbiter of quality.

This enablement might equally be viewed as a form of the imperative: only artists with economic and critical stature can afford to say no, and curators tend to have power in any relationship. Curators make work institutionally visible. How then to challenge that relationship? In asking others to participate (and self-curate their contributions) in my invitation, we jointly disrupt the privilege inherent in the curatorial process – although this sort of insight may be limited to artists and curator themselves. Artists weren't told what their message had to be about. They curated their own exhibit in what can be seen as my work in another exhibition. We gift each other power. Artists gift me their message, and I gift them my gift from Watne, visibility, but here, in the form of invisibility, making the gifts even more desirable. The need to see them operated as a demand for legibility, which could only be fulfilled in the form of reproduction in the catalogue, included in this portfolio.

Desire is made manifest but can only ever be partially satiated by a signifier, however complex its internal structure and its symbolic force. The reproduction process (the book) was of such importance to the project, that each artist was sent a proof of their page for comment. Placement on the page as well as titling and additional information was to their specification. Jointly we attempted to make clear the hidden structure of exhibitions, their making, and the status they have within the art world.

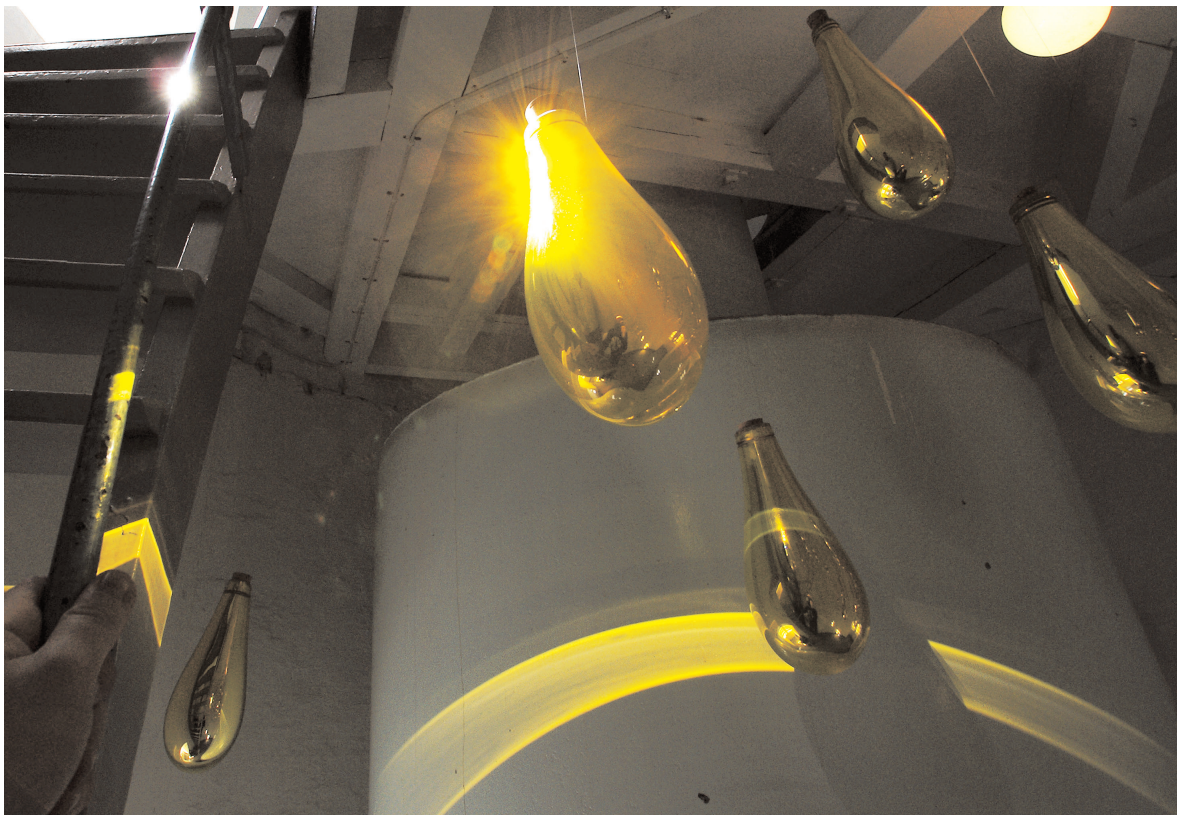
These structures hide in plain sight, the nature of institutional power is so normalized that it becomes invisible. The general public does not see how this power functions, exhibitions seem to manifest themselves, as the working of them is invisible. Directors and curators tend to wield this power within the dominant, choosing who to exhibit, and gift upon them the public, and critical recognition that most artists need/desire and require in professional terms. The position of the other is usually present only as a gift from those who hold the power to give visibility. Being given that gift I chose to pass much of it on, hopefully as an equal, and that our contributions were joint. Over half my budget was spent on the documentation of the messages, the two part book was unique to my project within *On the Edge*, which only had a general catalogue.



Floor 1, entrance view (up)



Floor 2 (up)



Floor 2, each day between 12 and 1 p.m. the sunlight would strike the bottles illuminating them and the room in a golden shower of light.





On Floor 3 the vessels lay on the floor.





On Floor 4 the vessels (in a mathematical grid) surrounded the machinery that made the steam to drive the lighthouse.





On Floor 5 vessels interacted with a small closet.





On Floor 6 a lone vessel hung next to the illuminating lamp of the lighthouse and the sea became dominant. It was alone at the top, open to the light, and visitors could also see nature framed by the windows.



Installation

There was a fear that bottles within touching/pulling distance might break. A large footfall was expected,[35] including many children. Four additional bottles were shipped to replace breakages. At the base of the lighthouse a black velvet lined box with one of the spares was installed for people to handle. A sign in Norwegian and English encouraged parents to hand the bottle to their children, asking them not to touch those in the tower. No bottles were broken.

The fragility of the glass and the possibility of it being broken, revealing the message inside was an engine for the production of desire; to see inside the vessel, to smash one to the ground to see if there *was* a message inside. In many ways glass is there to be broken, it longs to return to its silica state, it is a fluid always in movement. Glass has its own type of slippage; the windows of many cathedrals are thicker at their bases for after hundreds of years, glass yields to gravity. The clear wire obviously strained under the weight of the glass, and there was real physical tension in the room, which added itself to that focused on the concealed message and breakable glass. .

In the lighthouse entrance, an historical exhibition gave information on how it was built, and *On the Edge*. Visitors were encouraged to place their own message in a small glass bottle freely available, along with a printed sheet of paper telling the story of Danae, *On the Edge*, and information for whoever might find the bottle (and where to send a photo of themselves with it, should it be found). On the reverse of the paper, visitors could write their own message or make a drawing. Once sealed, the bottles were released into the North Sea where the Gulf Stream took them on a journey.[36]

This extended the project to a global reach on a physical and virtual level. While communication today is instantaneous, these bottles remind us of the poetry of the written, and the hope that connection might be made between peoples on different shores. While this might seem romantic, it is in keeping with the myths of lighthouses, Viking ships and damsels in distress, yet the adult content referred to in the title kept it on the right side of sentiment. *Golden Rain* alludes to *water-sports*, where a golden shower is the act of urinating on another for sexual pleasure. This is widely known, and my reputation as an artist dealing in sexual themes ensured that (while never directly mentioned) adult sexuality was a lens that *could* be used to view the installation. Zeus rains his golden gift, his semen, onto and into Danae, and she is in sexual rapture, the tale is of *eros* over *agape*. The love the King feels for his child, is overthrown by the erotic, and *thanatos* invoked. Such a tale of sex and attempted child murder already has the romantic at bay.

The Norwegian landscape is undeniably dramatic, disadvantaging artworks in its environs, and needed to be harnessed. This was possibly achieved by the exertion required to see *Golden Rain*. An hours train or car journey from Stavanger to Egersund, then a twenty minute drive

to the lighthouse's parking area, and then a 45 minute walk to the base of the lighthouse (over hills and rocks) allowed visitors time to take in the natural setting, and prepare themselves for the man-made.

For James Turrell the journey to a work sited in the landscape is part of its experience. His installations utilize light as a medium and Julia Brown observes *"throughout our approach to Roden Crater, our relationship with the environment will constantly shift – yet this particular approach is but one way, one path to the mountain. …It is one path in the morning, another in the evening; one path in the summer, another in the winter. How we perceive the crater is contingent upon how we make our journey to it*[37]*"* and so too the lighthouse.

Treasured Object





Treasured Object in situ

Treasured Object

The final part of the project *Treasured Object*, while related to *Golden Rain* was a stand-alone piece. When first visiting the site, a boathouse that had been wrecked by storms (its doors opened directly to the sea) was available for use. It was planned that amongst the mess a precious cargo, a silver glass object, the inside cast of a wooden box, the *Treasured Object* would be sited. Akrisios tried to drown Danae, and Perseus placing them in a wooden box. I built one the size of a baby, in which the glass worker blew a large bubble, searing its wooden insides where the molten glass touched. The object was then silvered and sealed with only air inside. *Treasured Object* is full of potential, a mirror that reflects its surroundings, and the beholder.

The boathouse envisioned as *Treasured Object*'s site was not expected to be repaired, yet funding arrived and the work had to be moved. A wooden shipping pallet was beached in a small bay on the path to the lighthouse, and *Treasured Object* placed there. The work was removed at night and when inclement weather threatened it; while glass is robust, nature is stronger. It looked out to the sea as much as it was looked upon.

Zeus commanded the gods to give Perseus gifts in order that he slay the Gorgon. Perseus was gifted a mirrored shield, so that he could see Medusa's reflection, and not be turned to stone (the result for mortals gazing at the original). Medusa's reflection, her twin, was harmless. So too viewers gazed upon themselves, as they stood at the edge, icy cold water lapping a few inches away, unlike the warm Aegean. Norwegians say a swim in the cold makes you strong. Norse stories tell of heroes fighting demons and swimming the cold seas, but they were blond or had bright red hair like Klimt's Danae, while Perseus would have been dark. The Greek tale's moral was that no man can escape their fate, that like all twins[38], we have two sides, the heroic and cowardly, and that while man's path may have been divined, it is up to each to choose how they embrace that fate, and that all they can hope for is courage and a good death. A hero is a vision of what we might like to be, a mirror of ourselves if only we too were born of the gods.

My works often deal with death, illness, love, and loss, yet they have a sense of humour no matter how serious the subject matter, and they speak of a generalized hope (not a religious or moral one).

The three strands of my practice are interconnected, how they feed into each other is at the core of this project. From the first discussions with the Norwegian organizers I wanted to make an installation, to write about it and to include others in the process. The opportunity seemed so large that it never occurred to me that sharing it would make my part smaller. Logistically this added work to a significant commission, but with each message that arrived I felt honoured and assured of the project's multi-layered possibilities. Even though the messages are now permanently sealed, their interaction with the whole continues. Each message is hidden in plain sight, each (like each bottle) is unique and adds to a sum greater than the parts, perhaps an apt metaphor for my practice.

Golden Rain will be one of three large installations making up a one man show of my work at the Palm Springs Art Museum in 2012 called *The Touch of the Oracle.*

[1] An edited version of the *Golden Rain* section 4.4 of this chapter has been published as Petry, Michael, *Golden Rain, Volumes I & II,* MOCA London and Hå gamle prestegard *London,* 2008

[2] Sullivan, Graeme, *Art Practice as Research*, Sage Publications, London, 2005, page 60

[3] Brewerton, Andrew, Borgen, Trond, Petry, Michael, *The Trouble with Michael*, Artmedia Press, London, 2001

[4] ibid, page 16

[5] www.churcharson.com a website dedicated to the promotion to the burning of churches

[6] de Oliveira, Nicolas, Oxley, Nicola, Petry, Michael, *Installation Art*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1994

[7] cover of *Installation Art*

[8] See examples included

[9] The gallery was lent to the Royal Academy by the St James Group (2003-8), *The One Spirit Showcase* for the Hines Urban Gallery, Dover Street is the first of the new off site shows.

[10] Bourriaud, Nicolas (trans by Pleasance, Simon & Woods, Fronza), *Relational Aesthetics,* Les presses du reel, 2002 (English trans), Digon-Quetigny, France, page 22

[11] Barthes, Roland, (trans by Heath, Stephen) *Image, Music, Text*, Hill & Wang, New York, 1977, page 21

[12] ibid, page 15

[13] Ai Weiwei has his work manufactured by traditional Chinese craftsmen
Smith, Karen, *Ai Weiwei*, Phaidon, London, 2009, page 85

[14] Lijun owns restaurants and a hotel http://www.artzinechina.com/display_vol_aid201_en.html

[15] http://www.balticmill.com/press/index.php

[16] http://www.nysun.com/arts/auction-houses-vs-dealers/52493/

[17] ibid

[18] At the close of the first day over £70,000,000 was raised, £5,000,000 over the total hoped for the sale from three sessions over two days.

[19] The Evening Standard, London, September 10, 2008, Page 19

[20] Adam, Georgina, *Sotheby's suffers in Doha debut*, The Art Newspaper, No 201, April 2009, page 65

[21] Petry, Michael, *Golden Rain, Volumes I & II,* MOCA London and Hå gamle prestegard *London,* 2008

[22] Kennedy, Ian G., *Titian*, Taschen, Cologne, Germany, 2006, pages 64, 65, 72

[23] Fliedl, Gottfried, *Gustav Klimt*, Taschen, Cologne, Germany, 2006, pages 208-209

[24] Derrida, Jacques (trans by Kamuf, Peggy), *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992

[25] Bonk, Ecke, (trans by Britt, David) *Duchamp: The Box in a Valise*, Rizzoli, New York, 1989, page 257

[26] ibid, page 282

[27] Hainley, Bruce, *Andy Warhol: Piss & Sex Paintings And Drawings*, Gagosian Gallery, New York, 2002, page 56

[28] Roberto Antonio Sebastián Matta Echaurren, 1911-2002

[29] Vidler, Anthony, *Splitting the Difference*, ArtForum, New York, June 2003
http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Splitting+the+difference%3a+Anthony+Vidler+on+Gordon+Matta-Clark.-a0103989783

[30] Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, *Epistemology of the Closet*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1990, page 68

[31] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/4895012.stm , HIV 'bug chasers': Fantasy or fact? By Richard Pendry

[32] www.gaydar.co.uk

[33] http://www.tht.org.uk/informationresources/factsandstatistics/europenew/ In Western Europe: 26% of the people newly diagnosed with HIV were less than 30 years of age. *The number of new H.I.V. infections in men under 30 who have sex with men has increased sharply in New York City in the last five years, particu larly among blacks and Hispanics,. The New York Times, January 2, 2008*
http://bloggernista.com/2008/01/02/hiv-infections-rise-among-nyc-young-gay-men/

[34] Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, *Epistemology of the Closet*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1990, page 110
She quotes - (MacKinnon, Catherine A. "*Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the Tate: toward Feminist Jurisprudence,*" Signs 8, no.4 (Summer 1983): 656-57)

[35] approximately 600 people came for the private view and the weekly attendance was in the hundreds, no bottles were broken.

[36] Glass is environmentally friendly degrading into silica and paper is also biodegradable, should the bottles break. No one has yet reported finding a bottle.

[37] Brown, Julia (ed), *Occluded Front James Turrell*, The Lapis Press, Larkspur Landing, California, 1985, page 103

[38] Plato (trans by Jowett, Benjamin*), Dialogues on Love and Friendship*, The Heritage Press, New York, 1968, pages 77-81. In Plato's Symposium he describes the birth of human desire and the original three sexes of humans. In our original state humans were double men (two men joined together like Siamese twins), double women and hermaphrodites (i.e. half man half women). When humans challenged the gods, Zeus devised a plan to split them into two forcing all humans to forever seek out their other half be it a man or a woman, be it in a homo or hetero sexual pairing.

Chapter 2: Becoming Abstract

Chapter 2: Becoming Abstract

Introduction

This chapter explores the research areas outlined in previous sections, but from the perspective of my artistic practice posterior to Hidden Histories – that is, specifically, works exhibited in: *America the Beautiful* (2007, STG, New York), *In the Garden of Eden* (2007, DBHBG, Houston); *New Love* and *True Love* (2007, 2006), WG, London) and *WAS: White As Snow* (2004, DBHBG, Houston).

In Chapter 3, I discuss how work made before *Hidden Histories* explored coded information in what might be a problematic way. In retrospect, with the present commentary in mind, I was concerned that the *Fairy Tales* could potentially represent a didactically queer position in regard to the heterosexual filter. If that were the case, it could be argued that a particular political positioning informing the works might limit their audience. Therefore subsequent works became increasingly abstract and open-ended. The works engaged with in this chapter take that anxiety into account. The distinction between works made prior and posterior to *Hidden Histories* is important, as the project had a profound impact on me. As I have already suggested, work made made prior explored coded information in what some might consider a didactic way, whereas work made after explored coded information in a more open and ambiguous manner as demonstrated in this chapter. The change was due to the realisation that if my work was seen as didactically queer it would be self-defeating, by replacing a heterosexual filter with a homosexual one. In that particular sense, earlier work might seem to be bound-in to a heterosexual norm to which it was reactive.

2.1 The effect of Hidden Histories on me

It was a humbling experience to encounter the immense struggle my sexual forefathers underwent (on a daily basis) to make art, and live a loved life in societies where they were branded criminals. In biography after biography, it became clear how difficult it was for these men to make art about their amorous, and erotic lives (often illegal).

Most contemporary readers know that Marcel Proust substituted women for men in his novels because as Edmund White writes *" he was so determined to disguise his own homosexuality, he was forced to transpose recalled experiences with men into beguiling tales of the Narrator's passion for women. This elaborate game of encoding is the creative half of Proust's effort, the invention added to the data provided by involuntary memory*[1]."

In documenting the works of other artists I tried to re-invest the emotional attachments severed (to present work in the then public domain), by naming depicted men. Where said men were the artists' lovers, this information was re-introduced to the historical record. Indicatively, *The Man in Black* is now Robert Allerton, Philpot's lover, and so on. *Hidden Histories* covers this central issue in some depth, and I raise it here to illustrate the impact of the engagement on my artistic life and subsequent creative decision-making.

The difficulties of their lives, and the open homophobia I experienced in mounting the exhibition left me angry, and as an artist I felt I had to process this anger into my work, not in order to make angry or polemical work, but to make mine better for having identified the history of that suppression at call. I came to understand the references, and the layers of possibility in historic work that spoke several languages at once, saying different things to different populations.

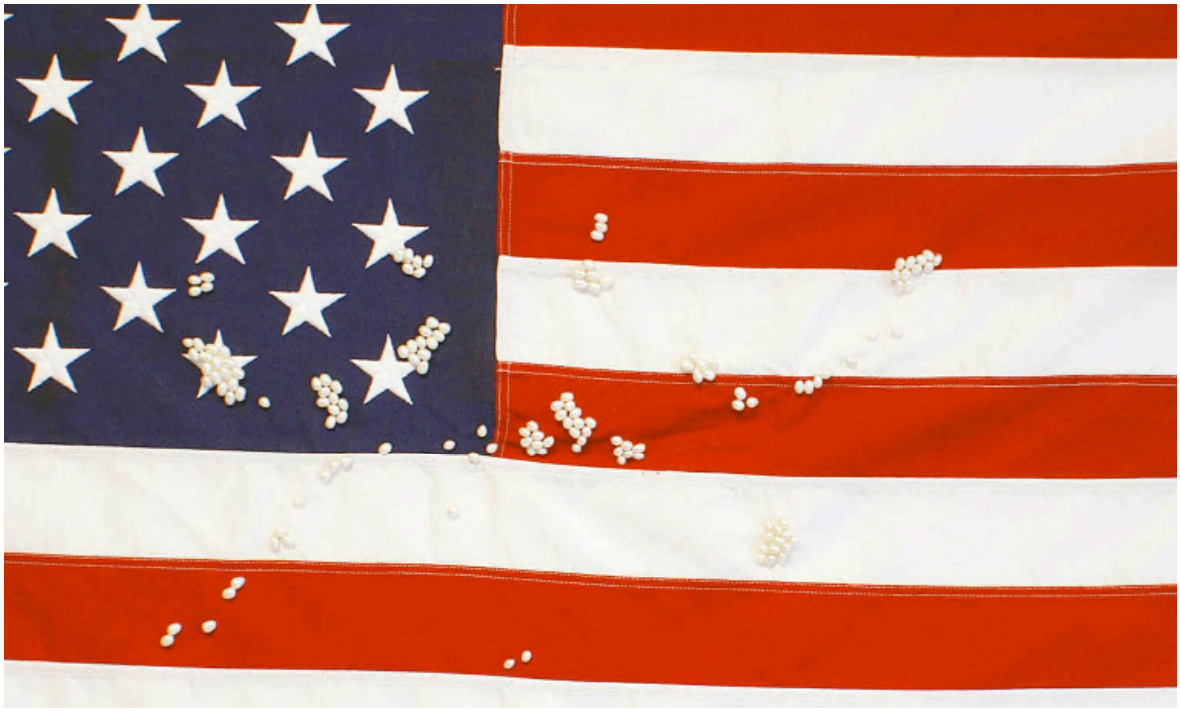
But whereas their layering was done under duress, mine was engaged from a position of strength (i.e. as a queer artist, in a society where most, if not all my rights are those of heterosexuals). And whereas they had to contend with a heterosexual filter obfuscating their sexual identity, I was anxious to avoid taking a reactionary position that might have replaced the heterosexual filter with a homosexual filter. I therefore made what would seem to be increasingly abstract works, which resisted the closure of the dominant but remained open to interpretation. Looking at them in reverse chronology allows the viewer to see the decoupling of these filters.

2.2 Trinity

America the Beautiful



The Monument to the Unknown Soldier: Portrait of an American Patriot, gallery view



The Monument to the Unknown Soldier, detail



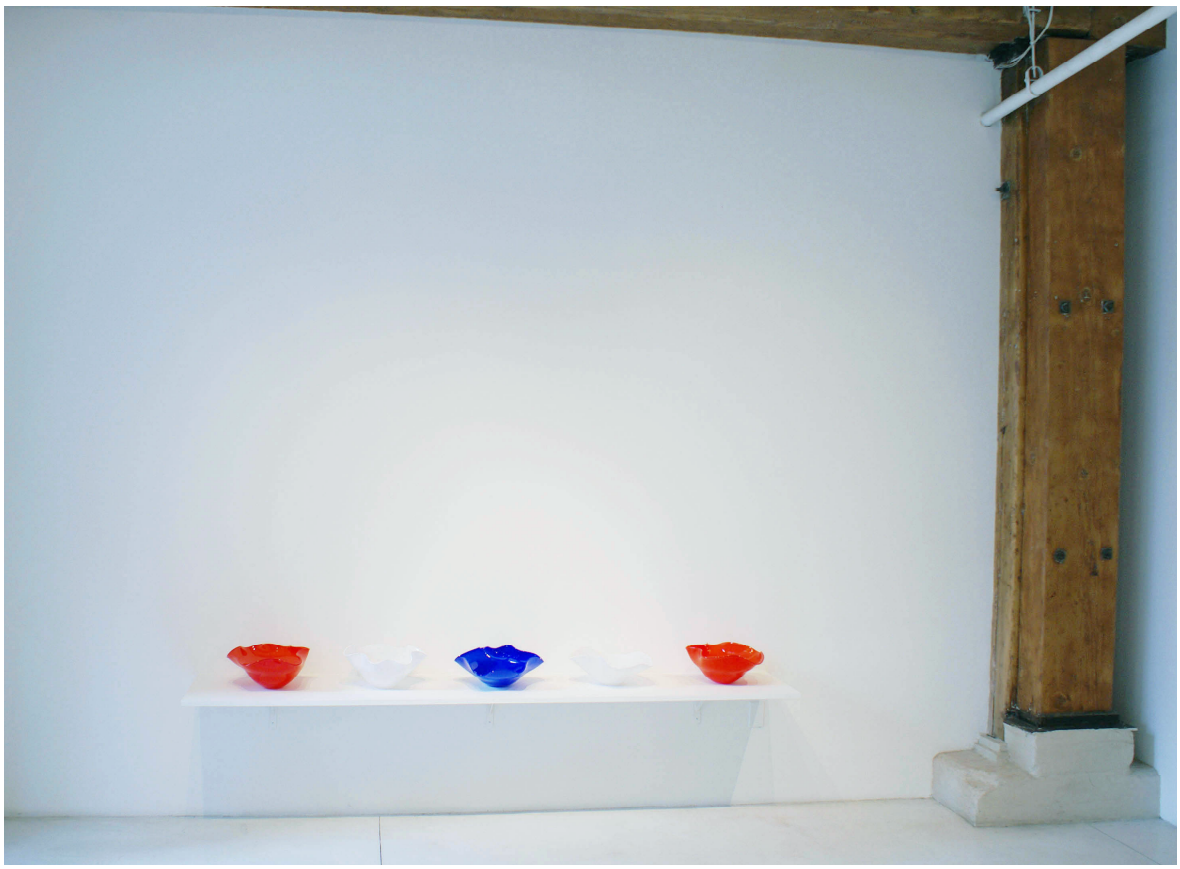
Jasper Johns, *Flag*, 1955, encaustic, oil and collage on fabric – Plate 1

America the Beautiful (STG, 2007) is a visually minimal body of work that has been seen as more queer due to the date exhibited, shown in the context of the waning Iraq War. All the works were red, white or blue or a combination thereof. While the title was based in commentary on the then state of America, the title was purposefully ambiguous.

The Monument to the Unknown Soldier: Portrait of an American Patriot caused deep offence. It extended the Fairy Tales series, using for a background a real American flag that flew over the US Capital (documentation was provided). The image sewn onto the flag is an abstract burst of freshwater pearls. The pattern came from a cartoon representation of semen on paper, given to me by a gay US soldier, and must remain unknown, as SSLs are still banned from the US military. If his actions and status were discovered, the soldier could be imprisoned, ejected from the military and lose his pension, yet he honourably served in Iraq, and many who would hound him out currently call him a hero. I am sworn to secrecy over his identity, and this secret of identity is concealed/revealed at the heart of the work, for those viewers who know how and where to look for it.

The work entered the domain of the web and attracted misinformation where it was alleged, for example, that he had ejaculated onto the flag (which he did not) and a storm grew over the appropriateness of his participation in such an artistic endeavour. The act of writing (on the web) collided with the actual making of the work. No matter how much information about its genesis would (or will) convince those who want (for their own political agendas) the flag to be seen as despoiled, even though it wasn't in actual, material fact. In the American military to despoil a flag is seen as sacrilegious, such is the reliquary nature of it. The title, referring to the "Unknown Soldier", another symbol of veneration, also caused upset, and this case overall signals the extent to which discourse can (mis)direct interpretations of visual art, to such an extent that 'the work' is discursively encrusted regardless of intentionality.

The visually abstract works presented in *America the Beautiful* became politicised by the timeframe when shown. In the future they may only be seen as objects whose cultural resonances are less problematic. The work entered the political debate, as my research is echt political: the recovery of same-sex history within a contemporary art world which has many forces (curatorial, economic and political) seeking to repress it[2].



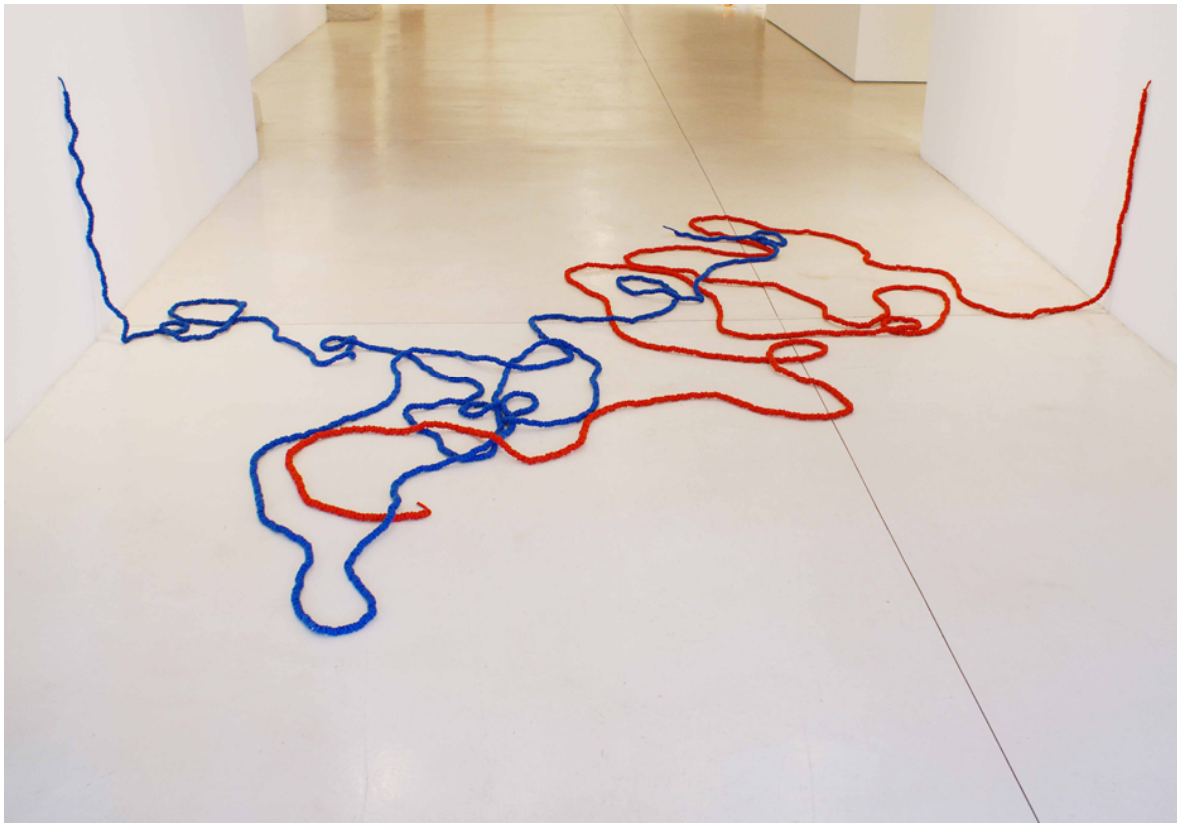
5 Star, glass, 2007, front view



5 Star, glass, 2007, detail view

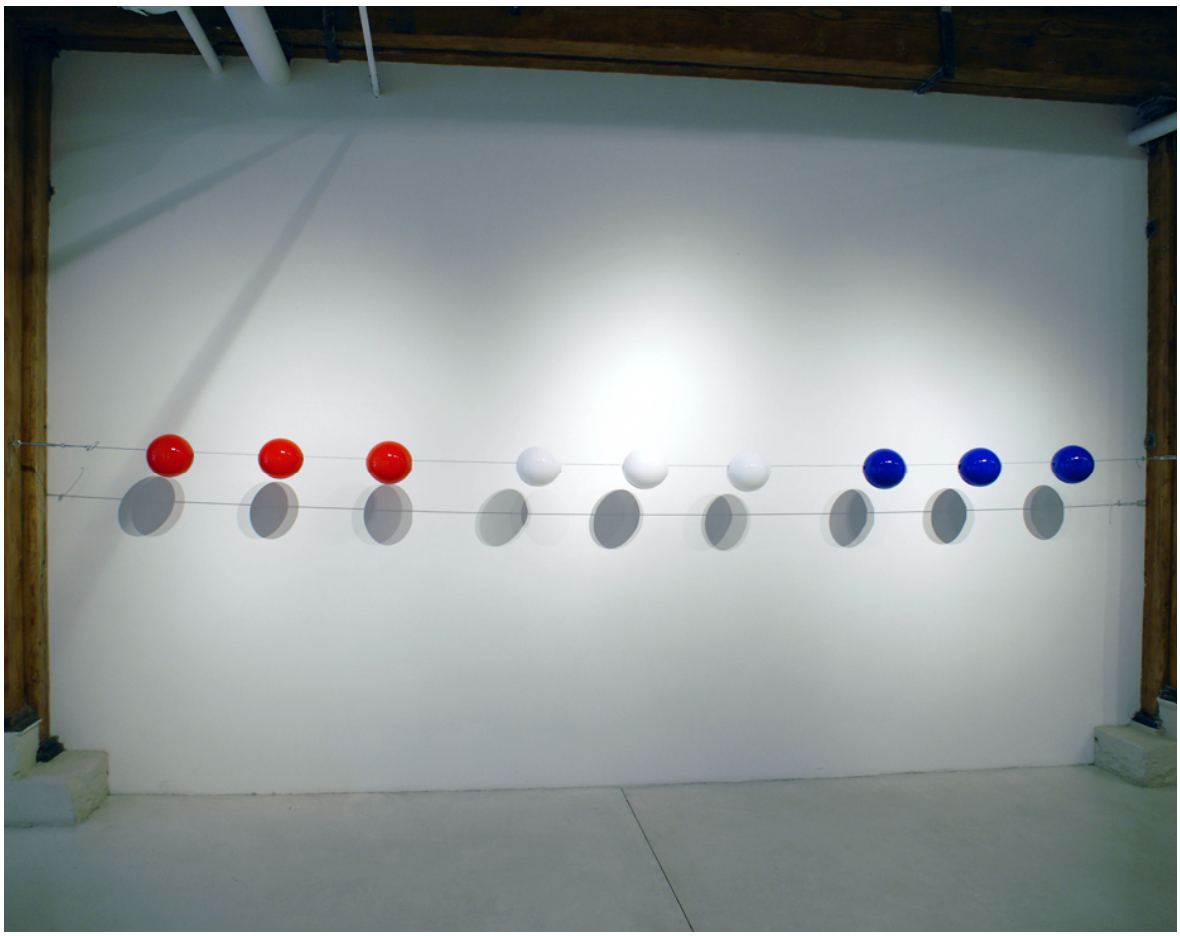


America the Beautiful, at front, *The Lovers (rope)*, left wall *The Axis 2007*, left wall, *The All Americans*, three pearl embroidered leather canvases, rear wall, *The PAs*, glass wall mounted with metal, floor right, *Crocodile Tears*, 21 glass vessels



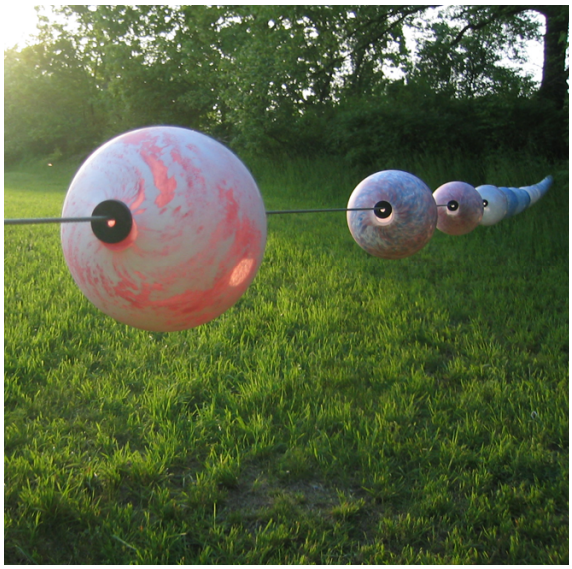


The Lovers (rope), 2007, 2 × 100 meters of knotted rope, dimensions variable



The Axis 2007, glass and steel wire.

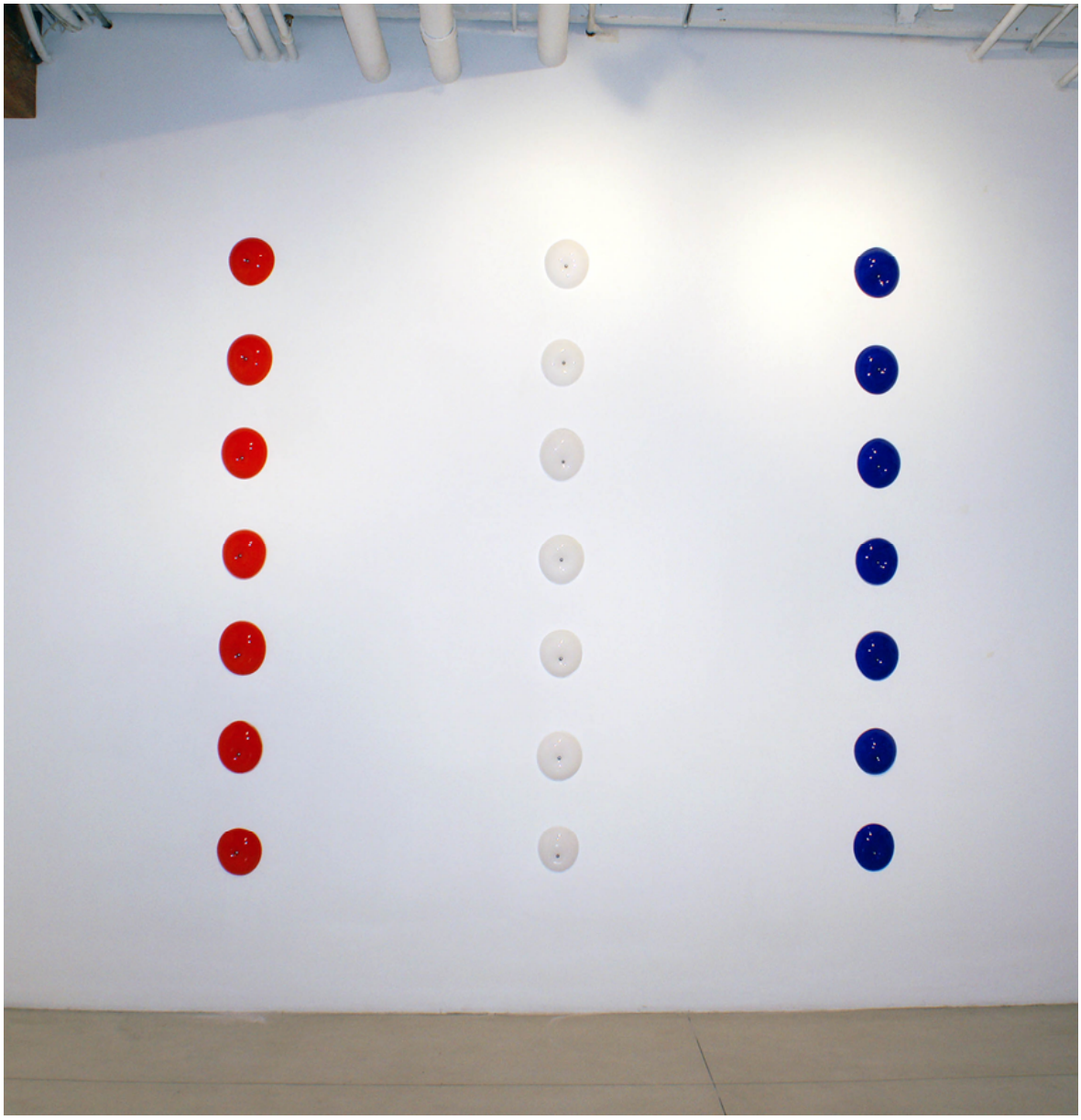




The original work, *The Axis* was part of an exhibition, *In the Gloaming* (2003), the work was vandalized and completely destroyed as it was seen as un-American at the time. Scale view left, detail view right.



The All Americans, three web portraits, leather canvases embroidered with pearls in the shape of unique ejaculations sent to me over the web from American men.



The PAs, 21 pieces of wall mounted glass with metal screws and plastic rims



Crocodile Tears, 21 empty glass vessels

The production and installation of America the Beautiful was another self-curation. Tagore allowed me to create a show that unfolded as the visitor encountered one work after another, each building on the last. While many would argue that that is the nature of all exhibitions, it is not always the artist who curates their own commercial shows, permitting/encouraging certain sorts of experiences to occur over time.

In the Garden of Eden





In the Garden of Eden was exhibited in DBHBG (Houston, 2007) and comprised a number of suspended, highly polished vertical slices of timber, with a circular hole cut-out. The cut is at the height of my penis from the floor, but it might be argued that what that cut evokes, for the differently-informed viewer, is not a necessary aspect of knowledge for that viewer/visitor. From my own point of view, the incised oculus references Duchamp, Moore, pre-historic star gazing machinery, as well as glory holes used for anonymous sex in gay bars, video booths and public toilets, and Jasper Johns' *Target* paintings[3] (which also referenced glory holes).

By referencing John's *Target* series, *In the Garden of Eden* honoured a long tradition of SSLs referring to one another's work (e.g. General Idea referencing Robert Indiana, who in turn referenced Marsden Hartley).



Jasper Johns, *Target with Plaster Casts*, 1955, encaustic and collage on canvas with objects

This installation was meant to be touched, fondled even, and when visitors did interact with the pieces they were confronted with two different sensations. The wood was so velvety it felt like skin (and the oil in their hands was good for the wood) and the pieces were then activated and started to sway. Here documentation fails to inform the reader of the presence of the gently swaying pieces reminding viewers of their original state as trees and images cannot transfer smell. The smell of the wood was intense and evocative but cannot be conveyed here. I resisted the idea of presenting the work in video format as it would be even more staged and closed. The work in the installation space reveals itself in four dimensions, and triggers a number of senses in the viewer/visitor, and as such, its effects/affects are qualitatively different from those that a recording makes available.



In the Garden of Eden, side view



BB59, 2007, glass and silver plated dish, collection of Beverly and Howard Robinson



BB62, The National Collection, UK



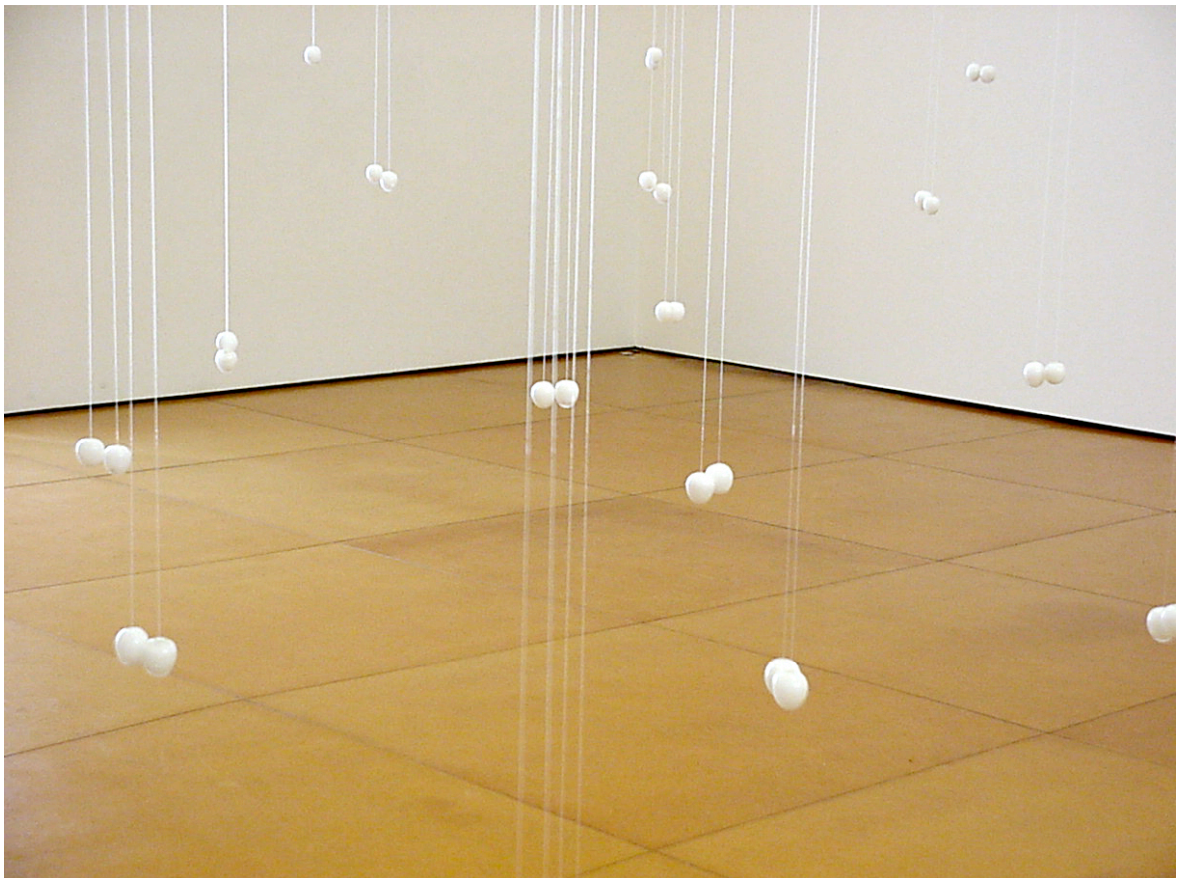
BB1 5, 2009, glass, silver plate

Bare Back Lovers

The *Bare Back Lovers* series were exhibited at WG (London, 2007, 2006). They are silver-plated Victorian metal objects selected for shapes similar to body parts, resembling a mouth, an anus, or a vagina – although once again, their materiality itself can trigger an engagement that is not necessarily informed by that aspect (it may nonetheless resonate subconsciously). Molten glass (hot fluid) is then poured into the open orifice, a definition of unsafe sex: bare backing. These newly merged objects are formed from mass produced items aping craft, but their original status is qualitatively transformed here as unique sculptures made via the application of craft. Their names (*BB1, BB49*) imply mass production, and while stating their number of production in the series, further investigating their object status within the art/craft dialectic, from a queered perspective[4].

They appear as luxe items but are investigations into the possibility of flux. They can be bought, and most are, but that transaction merely completes their object status as they were originally cheap to buy and meant for purchase. They were once multiples but each is now unique. They invite touch and yet reject easy physical contact as they are to be bought and owned by collectors who might then lend them to museums where they will be guarded.[5] They are open in their affectations of beauty yet, as I indicate above, those without the knowledge of sexual slang will not see bare backing as a queer reference. Many languages and codes collide and fuse in these pieces. In my experience they speak to many constituencies at the same time, making it possible to appreciate the work on multiple layers simultaneously. When the investigative viewer or engaged reader ponders the genesis of the work or reads the gallery information sheet, they encounter the objects in a fresh light.

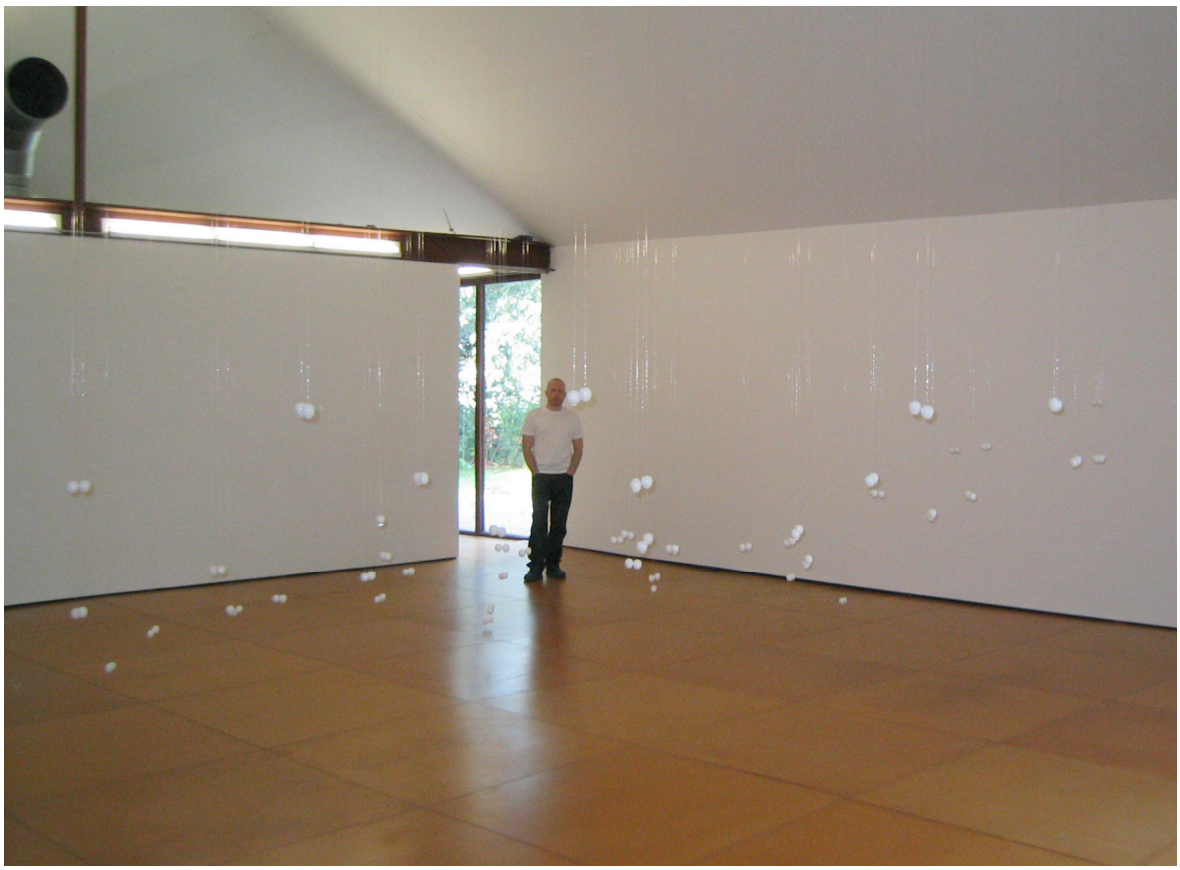
America the Beautiful, In the Garden of Eden, and *New/True Love* continued my exploration of queer coded information, but were increasingly minimal, even abstract, and resisted the closure of filters.



The Milky Way (NASA), 2004, Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston, detail view



The Milky Way (NASA), top view



The Milky Way (NASA), scale view

WAS: White As Snow was exhibited at DBHBG in Houston in 2004. It comprised several works: a re-sited installation of *The Milky Way; The Lovers; Blossoms; Spills*; and *Tie a Knot In It.* Most of the works were made from *luxe* materials, designed to resonate with the Texas audience (who are used to *luxe* if not ostentation).

The Milky Way (NASA)

The Milky Way features 50 pairs of white lead crystal orbs, hung from clear monofilament wire in a spiral pattern similar to the Milky Way galaxy. The central pair of orbs hung at the same distance from the floor as my own testicles (all orbs were modelled on them). The others hung at heights describing a 45% plane from the central point, from floor level (just above my toes) to 6' (just above my head). Visitors were able to enter the space and move between the objects.

Re-siting *The Milky Way* from New York to Houston emphasised both its scientific content owing to its proximity to NASA, and its homosexual content owing to NASA's ban on openly homosexual astronauts. In re-siting the work I focused on the removing those works (*Fairy Tales*) that might have forced a queer reading and possible closure, making it as abstract as possible.

Houston remains a locus of prejudice towards SSLs (and people of colour). Queer bashings regularly feature in news items, as does institutional prejudice. James Barnett, a Trinity Christian Academy student was expelled when his sexuality became known (2004), despite his being highly academically regarded and a varsity sportsman[6]. In Houston two men making love in the privacy of their home, had police break in and arrest them for sodomy. John Lawrence and Tyron Garner took their case to the US Supreme Court winning not only their freedom but the repeal of sodomy laws throughout the US[7]. Their victory (2003) has seen laws change, but not necessarily attitudes, and with the fight to ban gay marriage, outright hatred has appeared and been tolerated in mainstream media.

While those attending DBHBG exhibitions were more likely to be open towards homosexuality, the American South remains largely divided by colour and class (as hurricane Katrina showed, 2005).

The Milky Way was sold to the Museum Of Fine Arts, Houston.

The Lovers



The Lovers

The Lovers was direct a link to previous works the *Fairy Tales*, made of leather and pearls, stretched over wooden frames, but addressed gay marriage. The size of each stretcher was exactly that of one of a pair of real male SSLs. The difference in heights and widths was obvious, as was the use of slightly different colours of white (a visual reference to masturbation) to signal the individuals.

To create these templates each lover was asked to ejaculate onto their partner, and the documentation of these shapes forms the portrait. The pattern was traced from a Polaroid in an attempt to de-sex the image and to fictionalize the process. In the *Fairy Tales*, where the ejaculates were produced within the fictional construct of a pornographic movie, these ejaculates were from people who were real lovers and who often make such patterns on each other but not for exhibition.

In agreeing to make the piece, the couple fictionalized their relationship, as they do not document their ejaculates as a matter of course, and in so doing created a true fiction. It was agreed that their names wouldn't be divulged, nor any graphic images of them. The resultant painting depicts and indeed foregrounds ejaculates from real lovers but in a fictional setting (as all portraits are). Since each panel has a pearl pattern it is clear that both lovers are men. This combination of partners referenced the ongoing debate over gay union. The Lovers is conceptual and abstract and remains at a long distance from agitprop art, yet the context of the site made the work de facto political.

Blossoms





Previous page: *Blossom 1*, blown glass
Above: *Blossom 2*, blown glass

Blossoms

The tiltes *Blossom 1*, and *2* denote their place in what became a larger series. Each was blown to my design based on a web exchange, where anonymous chat room members were asked to send me a portrait of themselves depicting only their anus. These blossoms speak of nature and nature morte, beauty and death, are fragile, and conceptual. Only white blossoms were presented. The anuses depicted may in fact be fictitious (not those of the senders) but culled from online images. The dialogue between myself and those on the web, while in real time, was based on the fictive sexual world of the web where people of all sexualities aim, if not to connect in the real world, at least to do so in the virtual.

Yet these anuses belonged to some person, maybe not the person who sent the image, but issue of precision of provenance is not really pertinent because in the virtual domain, it functions as the real anus of the virtual person who was engaged in chat. In terms of gender orientation and its apparently contentious implications, the anus is the only erotic body part when seen in close up can be that of a man or woman. Viewers have no way of knowing if the source image was from a man or woman, of whatever sexuality. It is a body part all share, but cannot see without outside agents (mirrors, cameras) and in this sense the 'owner' cannot own it. The anus plainly carries many cultural taboos, and is not often seen as a beautiful part of the body. For many, the anus is seen as a tomb8, as HIV/AIDS has been linked to gay men, when in reality, globally, more heterosexuals have been infected some, undoubtedly, through vaginal penetration. These works developed into an exhibition *The Revenge of the Florist* (2009).

I have also asked web users to send portraits of themselves as ejaculates (similar to *The Lovers* for *America the Beautiful*), and document how far they could ejaculate (for a series called *Stoppages*9). Their participation completes a trinity of fictions. The first is the pornographic, wherein the ejaculate is presented as proof of sexual purchase (in fictive amorous situations) where performers (professional actors) have sex under the direction of eros (they are paid, no matter what pleasure they might take). The second is that of lovers (in real life) who would ejaculate on their partner in an amorous setting, but present the ejaculate in the fictive narrative of the artwork upon the request of a maker (myself) for no fee. And finally ejaculates (and anuses) are presented in the fictive (virtual) world, as real and true presentations of the real-world self of a virtual person, in a fictive situation (a fetish chat room), wherein the image is bought through the act of communication which may fulfil an erotic need in the virtual chat ter.

In all cases images of real ejaculates become part of a greater narrative about *eros* (the ejaculate being visual proof of male orgasm), and *agape* (whether in the fictional domain of pornography or the actual bedroom of *The Lovers*) as they were traded/bartered for time, communication and intimacy. Yet the images are so abstracted in their final fictionalization they become conceptual artworks which when shown to a general public, stand without any notion of their original state. That the information of their making is always available is important, but this is not the actual work, and is in effect an additional site the work finds itself in.

Spills





Previous page: *Spent*, melted silver coins
Above: *Spill Bottom*, enamelled silver

Spills

Spills looked at formal aspects of ejaculates, made from sterling silver (*Spill Bottom, Spill Top*), and silver coins (*Spent*). First the silver was melted then poured into its present form, reminiscent of ejaculates, but they are sexual fictions (the silver was spilt onto a jeweller's stone). *Spill Bottom* differs from the others as its underside is enamelled with milky white glass (a tradi tional jewellery technique).

Spills reference Richard Serra's hot lead *Castings*[10] (1969), where he made sculptures in situ by flinging molten lead. Serra's phallocentric (and seminal) works developed into huge steel sculptures which position the artist in the heroic. His castings were more conventionally manly than action painting, as hot lead is physically dangerous, but just as romantic. The subversion of the heroic male painter (with dripping brush in hand) by pansy Pop artists saw 1950's heterosexuals lose a small bit of their dominance to SSLs in the 1960s. So off-putting was it to then current reviewers[11] that Serra and other mainly heterosexual conceptual artists were embraced as saviours. Serra's brute force, like the character Stanley (based on Jackson Pollock) in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (by Tennessee Williams, a same-sex lover) was seen as a force of nature, as opposed to the artifice of Warhol, or Johns. Yet Naifeh and Gregory have shown that Pollock had same-sex experiences throughout his life and that drinking and womanizing were attempts to ease feelings of guilt[12].



Serra in action, 1969



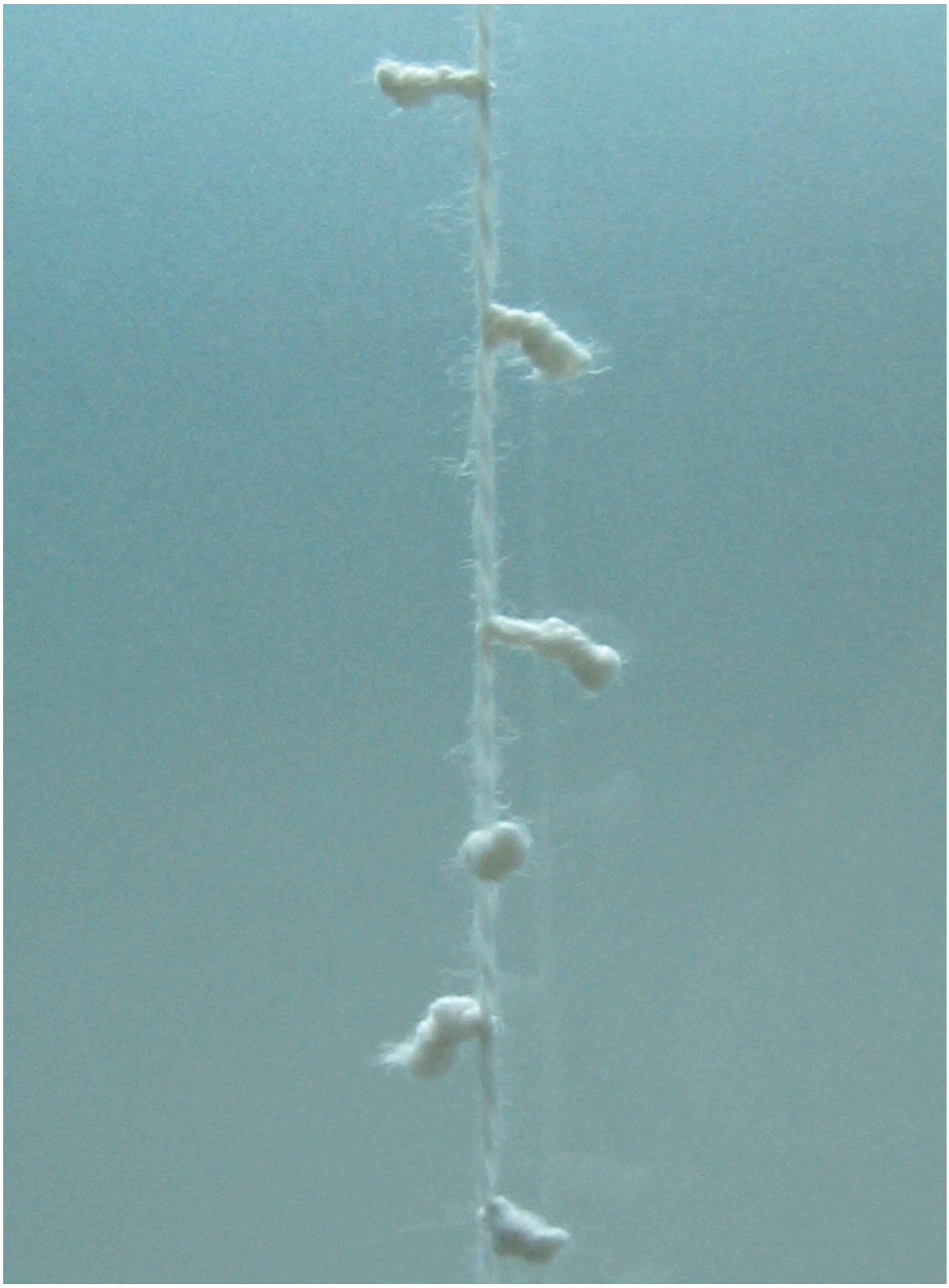
Serra in Cremaster 3

Mathew Barney recruited Serra for *Cremaster 3*[13], to fling what appear to be buckets of semen. Barney's interest with ejaculates is well documented, and his ironic use of Serra in the film allows Serra to critique his own past. Their heterosexual bonding in the film, their knowing team player status (Barney is an ex-American Football player) sees the two men as links in a hetero-dominant art history. Serra, the grand old flinger, passes on the artistic torch to the up and coming man. My *Spills* link me to Robert Gober and Warhol. Gober's work has been described as *"interior decorating with a vengence (sic)"*[14] and Warhol is the echt florist, camouflaging his work behind his personality. It is ejaculate that links all said players to Duchamp.

Where the *Spills* used silver bought for that purpose, in *Spent*, I melted my childhood silver coin collection. It now resembles a large ejaculate, having had many coins, which are now truly Where the *Spills* used silver bought for that purpose, in *Spent*, I melted my childhood silver coin collection. It now resembles a large ejaculate, having had many coins, which are now truly spent. It speaks of childhood and the passage into adulthood, the physical changes that allow boys to become men, yet is still merely spilled metal. The work is loaded with autobiographical information, yet the melting of the collection into a mass, reduces the whole to a mass of memories. *Spent* has the frisson found in melting currency, which like same-sex activity is not legal in many parts of the world.

Duchamp's *Paysage fautif*, (1946) is one of the first known usages of semen in modern art[15], and whether Pollack or Serra saw their drippings as such, certainly Barney, Gober and I do. This generational shift sees production address what it means as men, SSLs or not, to question the totemic status of this body fluid. It is still an explosive substance in today's discourse on men's behaviour.

Tie A Knot In It





Previous page: *Tie a knot in it*, 2004, white yarn, detail view
Above: *Tie a knot in it, 2004*, white yarn

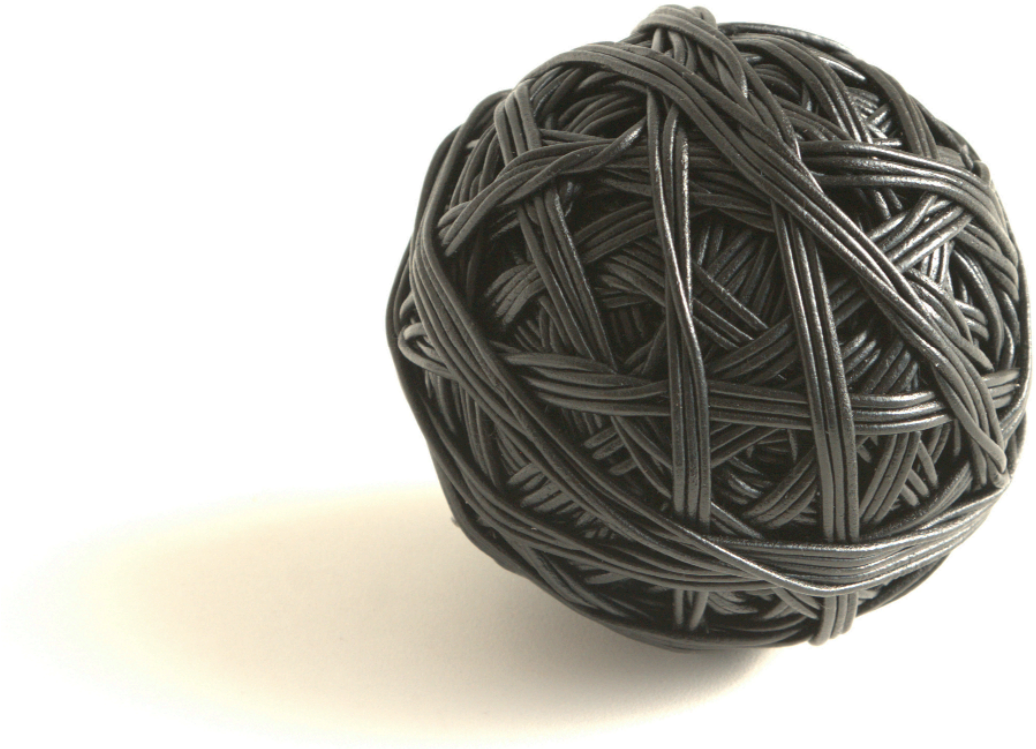
Tie A Knot In IT

The *Tie A Knot In It* (TAKII) works are based in the action of masturbation, where each knot represents an orgasm (male or female). Each sees different lengths or types of rope, string or wire used to make a work that is a series of knots. The distance between the knots may give the work its title (*Nipple Pinch, Rough Neck*) or it might come from the material (all *Sewing Seed* works use garden cord) but all reference the sexual notion inherent in the series' title. This phrase is used as a brush-off for an unwanted sexual advance, or as a term of stoppage when the desire to urinate is not met with an available facility. These works invoke the sexual as well as the romantic, but are abstract, they are after all only a string of knots. A *forget-me-not* shows the desire for one of a pair to be remembered in their absence. Indigenous peoples in South America used belts of knots to send coded messages from one end of the continent to the other in a matter of days. Knots have a history, the most famous, the Gordian, gave Alexander the key to ruling the world.

The first *TAKII* was made from white yarn and is exactly my height in length. Every few centimetres a large clot of knots resembles dripping semen, or just knots. Each of these clots is made from tens of individual knots. The process took over three months to complete, and the work was installed in a way as to be almost invisible, like the time it took to make it. Blue-tacked to the front window of the gallery, it could be seen from in or outside but mostly missed. The work blew in the draught, secured only at the top, it was like a strand of cobweb, yet represented a considerable investment in time.

The knots depict time, and the loss of time. The French for orgasm *la petite mort* (the little death), posits the small passage of time form one state of being to another. The knots hung flaccidly in space, exhausted by the exertion of their creation, soiled, as the knots picked up urban grime (I often knotted on public transport). The work was spent, it was time well spent, and also a worthless piece of dirty string. The series addresses the craft/art divide; made from craft materials, each is similar to macramé, but is not. They speak of traditional women's handicraft, lace-making, sewing, and gender issues in fine art production, they document a man making knots, tying string, making/wasting time.

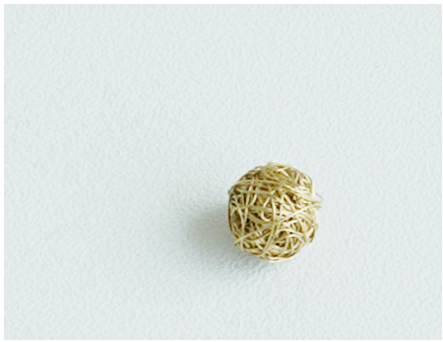
These works are simply string, having little intrinsic value yet are obviously works of art, or at least an artefact from a process, questioning itself as an object of value, and links itself to the work of artists like Eva Hesse[16].



La petite mort III, 2004, knotted black leather



Tie a knot in it (silver sperms), 2004, sterling silver wire, wall detail



The Golden Age, 2006, 22 karat gold wire, 7mm in diameter

By using ordinary (non-*luxe*) materials in conjunction with those that have inherent value the issue of cost/worth is addressed. *TAKII (silver sperms)* is made from sterling silver wire. Knots were made every centimetre along the wire, but left open, forming little loops reminiscent of swimming spermatozoa. The work was extremely fragile and difficult to make as it was easily tangled or bent. The work ran along the floor near the wall so that it was also almost invisible, and gallery personnel were often asked to point it out.

String and silver, rope and pearls, twine and leather come together in the gallery, each with similar purchase prices, but differing material values. What collectors are purchasing is my time, my effort along with my ideas (differing from those where I do not make the objects) and this consumption of me as maker is not dependent on the material used. If I were a 16th century woman tying knots, making lace, the resultant artefact would have little value compared to a work in silver or on canvas made by a man. How these objects were and generally still are seen as craft or as fine art alters not only their artistic reception but the price people are willing to pay for them.

In effect I am a man who performs a *womanly* act, yet my knots are not craft, they are minimal sculptures, but sculptures all the same, and while I may be queer I am still a man, and men's work in the visual arts generally (sadly) has a higher value than that of women[17].

These mean objects still perform as art, doing so in a gallery setting that gives them gravitas by inhabiting those environs (which address the market and an art historical context). The galleries I work with show more established artists lending weight to the presentation of my own work within the minds of their own collectors and curators. Whether or not this is a good situation is not the question, it is the background to any work made for a commercial space. That my work is also shown in museological spaces adds to their seriousness, further distancing them from craft. That the work walks a fine line between craft/art, gay/straight, humorous/serious is what lends them their power to communicate to many viewers/constituencies. It is their openness and ambiguity that welcomes the viewer into their own interpretation of the work.

1 White, Edmund, *Marcel Proust*, Viking, New York, 1999, pages 143-144

2 A fuller debate on this topic is found in Chapter 2 of *Hidden Histories*

3 Crichton, Michael, *Jasper Johns A Revised and Expanded Edition*, Thames + Hudson, London, 1994, plate 7

4 I discuss the nature of the art/craft divide in much greater depth in my upcoming book *CRAFTY: the art of not making, a return to the artist artisan relationship* in an upcoming hardback for Thames & Hudson (publication date March 2011)

5 When shown in my one man show *True Love* at the Muzeum Mierdzi, Legnica, Poland, 2007, the sculptures were constantly touched even though invigulators were in the galleries. I was contacted on a regular basis on how best to clean them.

6 *http://www.advocate.com/html/stories/930/930_barnett.asp*

7 http://www.advocate.com/new_news.asp?ID=9094&sd=06/27/03

8 Bersani, Leo, *Is the Rectum a Grave?,* October, Vol. 43, AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism. (Winter, 1987), pp. 197-222

9 See *A New Love* for documentation and commentary. Hormell, Eric, *A New Love: Michael Petry*, Westbrook Gallery, London, 2007, pages 4-6

10 Spector, Nancy, *Matthew Barney The Cremaster Cycle*, Guggenheim Museum Publications, New York, 2002, page 313 and 471

11 Petry, Michael, *Hidden Histories: 20th Century Male Same-Sex Lovers in the Visual Arts*, Artmedia Press, London, 2004, pages 104-5

12 Naifeh, Steven, Smith, Steven, White, Gregory, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, Clarkson N Potter Inc, New York, 1989, page 481

13 Spector, Nancy, *Matthew Barney The Cremaster Cycle*, Guggenheim Museum Publications, New York, 2002, page 312 and 471

14 Hickey, Dave, *In the Dancehall of the Dead: Robert Gober*, Dia Center for the Arts, New York, 1993, page 21

15 Bonk, Ecke, *Duchamp: The Box in a Valise*, Rizzoli, Rizzoli, New York, 1989, page 283

16 Chadwick, Whitney, *Women, Art, and Society*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1990, page 314

17 http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/theres-never-been-a-great-woman-artist-860865.html

Chapter 3: Filters and Codes Revisited

Chapter 3: Filters and Codes Revisited

Introduction

This chapter explores the research questions through my artistic practice made prior to *Hidden Histories*, in *The Milky Way and Other Fairy Tales* (STG, New York, 2004).

3.1 Past practice-based investigations

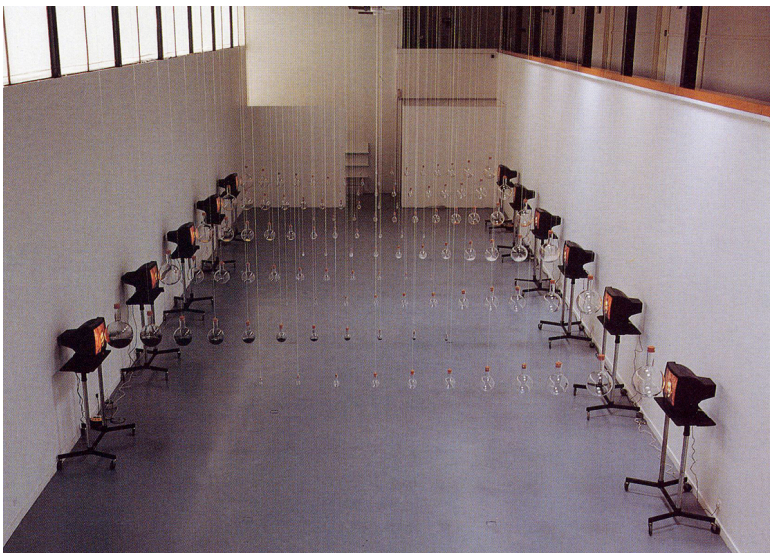
Many works preceding this artist-research project touched on coded information involving science, craft and desire. In each area dominant filters (in the form of stereotypes) have been applied not only to my work, but to practitioners in general. Stereotypes comprise presupposed ideas that coloured the *reception* of the works.

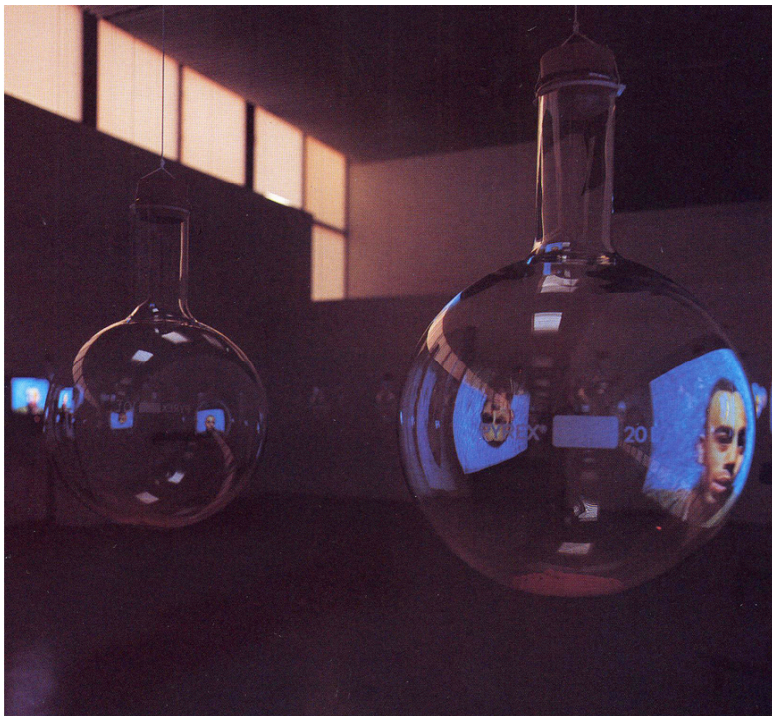
Works exploring science, such as *The Wormhole*[1] and *TWISTOR*[2], had to contend with the stereotype that science is *man's work*, reinforced, for example, by Larry Summers' (former President of Harvard University) claim that men were more genetically predisposed to scientific method than women[3]. These works were based on scientific principles and interactions with scientists where I encountered homophobia when certain practitioners became aware of my sexuality, manifest in comments, actions, and a cooling of relations.

The Wormhole, bright and dark states, Peterborough Museum, 1996, car head lights, wood, transformers









The Chemistry of Love, James Hockey Gallery, Farnham, 1992, overview and detail, video, glass, chemicals, wire

Works exploring human relationships, such as *The Chemistry of Love I-III*[4] investigated desire's function regardless of gender or object choice and did not focus on same-sex issues. As I have written in Abstract Eroticism, most "*…images (by Robert Mapplethorpe) do not depict Eros, only the object choice of one man's desire…I began to think that maybe there was a certain tyranny found in specific bodies, at least the bodies found in erotic images, and that for Eros to live, its domain must be in the abstract, and not in the figurative.*[5]"

These works were made at the height of the Western HIV epidemic when open hostility towards homosexuality was common.

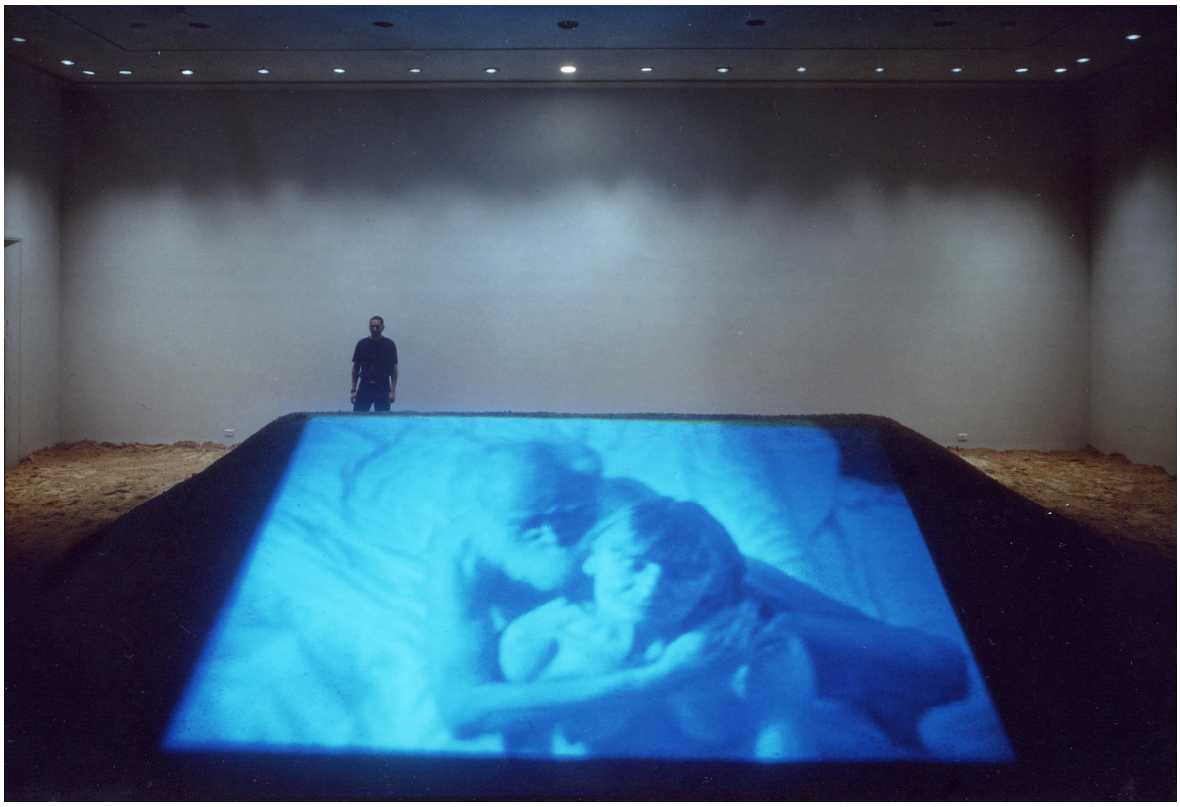
Works exploring craft, such as *More Paperwork*,[6] questioned the Western craft/art divide, and the notions that identify craft as *women's work* (lace, tapestry) parallel to the male domain of fine art. In these works I took the *woman's* role, making paper, *crafted* objects, and jewellery that was at all times defining itself as fine art practice. These works were often thought to have been made by women.

Marcia Tucker agrees "*with social scientist Joan Scott and the many others who prefer to avoid the traditional "us-them" dichotomy created by positing men on one side and women on the other, because such dichotomies are characteristic of the Western, binary system of thought and language that shapes and solidifies inequities. Dualistic concepts such as men/women, black/white, majority/minority, and center/periphery ignore the richness of human identity and experience and perpetuate stereotypes. None of us chose our age, race, gender, or nationality; these are given. Where we position ourselves in relation to the issues, however, is very much a matter of choice*[7]."

Works based on desire, such as *The History of the World*[8] uses homosexual desire as its main generative impetus, if not its imagery. All these minimal, finely crafted works are bound up in beauty and its possibility in fine art.

This is difficult terrain *"For it is a crime to speak of beauty, to refer to it, and to imply that it exists. A felony for sure, it is no misdemeanour to want to make beauty, for beauty is empty, all emptied out, hollow, shallow, only surface deep, like a good wine to be savoured and pissed away*[9]"

The History of the World, Rice Art Gallery, Houston, 1999, scale view, video projection onto 72 tons of sand



Elaine Scarry posits that the *"beautiful, almost without any effort of our own, acquaints us with the mental event of conviction, and so pleasurable a mental state is this that ever afterwards one is will - ing to labour, struggle, wrestle with the world to locate enduring sources of conviction – to locate what is true…beauty is a starting place for education.*[10]*"*

She suggests that *beauty* is misunderstood, and should be brought back into the humanities where it is currently a term of abuse[11]. Scarry does not see beauty as corrupt or slight, arguing that the division of the aesthetic realm into the beautiful and the sublime where *"the sub - lime is male and the beautiful is female. The sublime is English, Spanish and German; the beautiful is French and Italian*[12]*"* has greatly harmed our perception of the world, and such Kantian divisions are fictive and harmful, denying beauty its power to increase the general good.

3.2 Queer Investigations

The Milky Way and Other Fairy Tales was the start of my investigation of the research questions via fine art practice. The exhibition (STG, NY, 2004) was re-sited as *WAS: White as Snow* (DBHBG , Houston, 2004).

Most pieces evolved from investigations into the question of how work made by SSLs might *hide in plain sight.* These queer objects function *oddly*, as well as within a queer (gay) dialectic. When these objects function as queer (gay), those not familiar with certain codes may not see or understand some references, even though 'something' enigmatic in the piece might seem to draw their attention.

In such a case, this codification is largely filtered out *as such*, even from works that are echt queer, because the works can, and do function formally as artworks – by which I mean that their aesthetic value is immanent. They exist in the gallery, and are seen without mediation from myself, yet they simultaneously return to a conceptual investigation focusing on queer codes and the dominant. These works are queer in Judith Butler's performative sense, since in her argument *"Performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part as a culturally sus - tained temporal duration.*[13]*"*

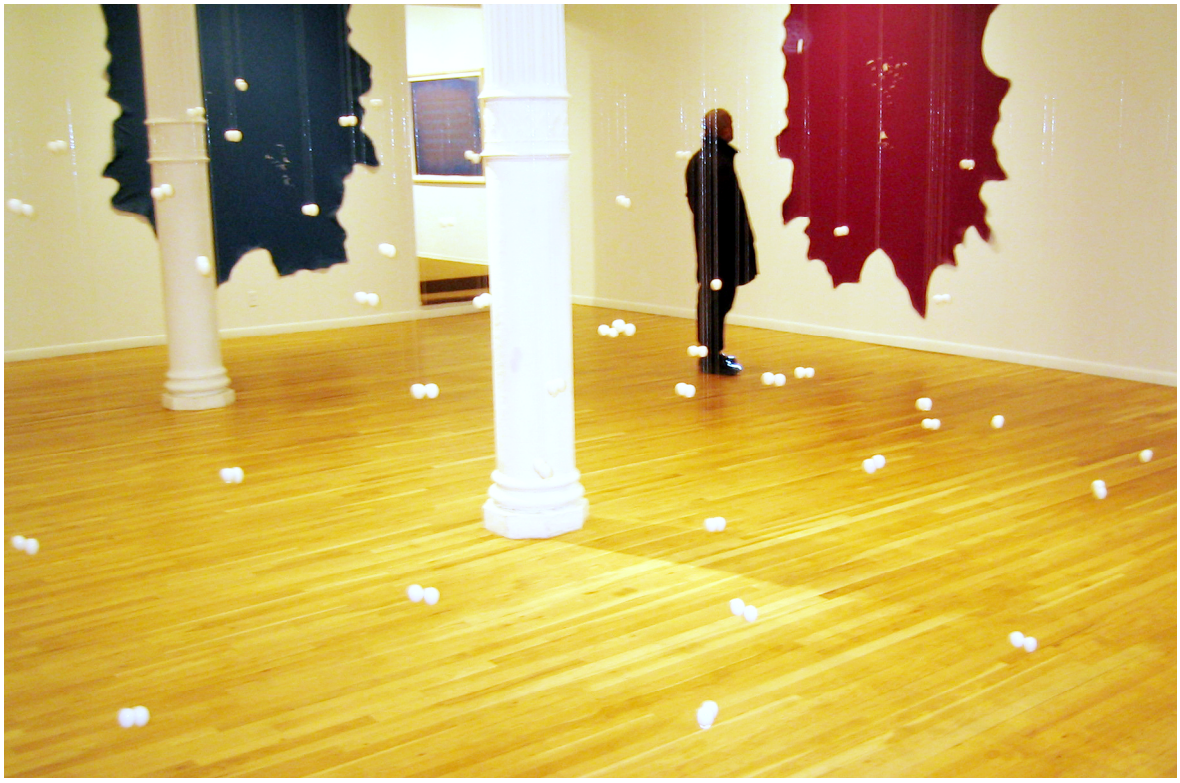
In performative terms, the objects perform as artworks within the dominant and their corpo-reality performs as *straight* unless read as queer. In order to do that, additional information is needed. They are seen as *artworks* and unless the heterosexual filter is disturbed, and not as *gay artworks*. They can be described are constitutively ambiguous, for those aware of complex codification. This complex codification triggers a certain engagement on the part of certain viewers.

Women's art and *gay art* often continue nonetheless to be seen pejoratively by the dominant, and only works by women or SSLs that perform as *artworks*, in the dominant sense, can be considered valid. Felix Gonzalez-Torres' works are usually seen as 'non-sexed' conceptual *art - works,* yet are loaded, for those who can identify it, with queerness. Gonzalez-Torres' candy installations about his lover Ross were based on his lover's physical weight, but look like candy scattered and piled onto the floor. They speak of same-sex love, performing *queerness* as much as they perform as *artworks.*

In sited works, form and content are influenced by architecture. Studio work takes as locus the dominant societal site (heterosexuality), which governs all (even queer) sites, and the *FairyTales* were installed, not 'hung'. By this I mean that each work had to be stretched and screwed to the wall in a unique way, unlike a traditional painting. In overcoming spatial prob-lems new relationships appear, which themselves trigger theoretical investigations.

The Milky Way, 2004, Sundaram Tagore Gallery, New York, top view





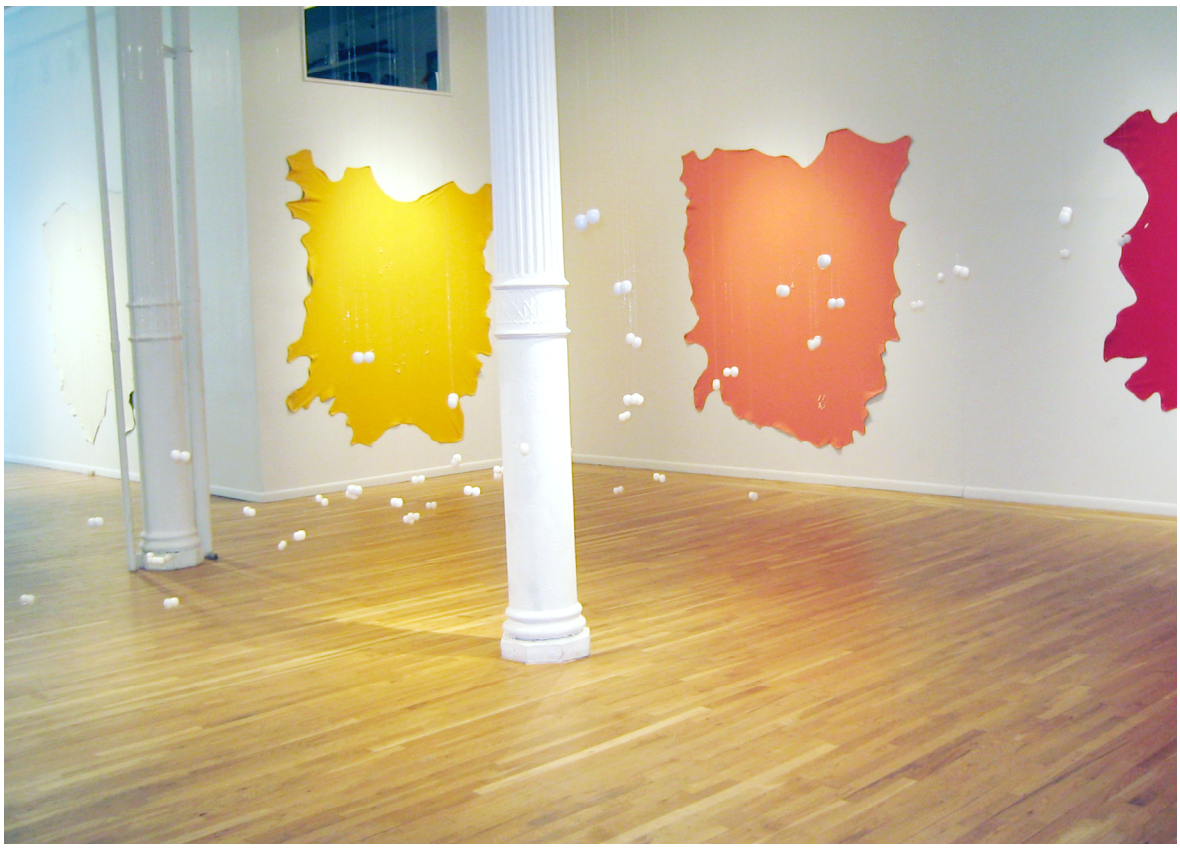
The Milky Way, scale view



The Milky Way, detail of glass orbs



The Milky Way and Other Fairy Tales, rotational view



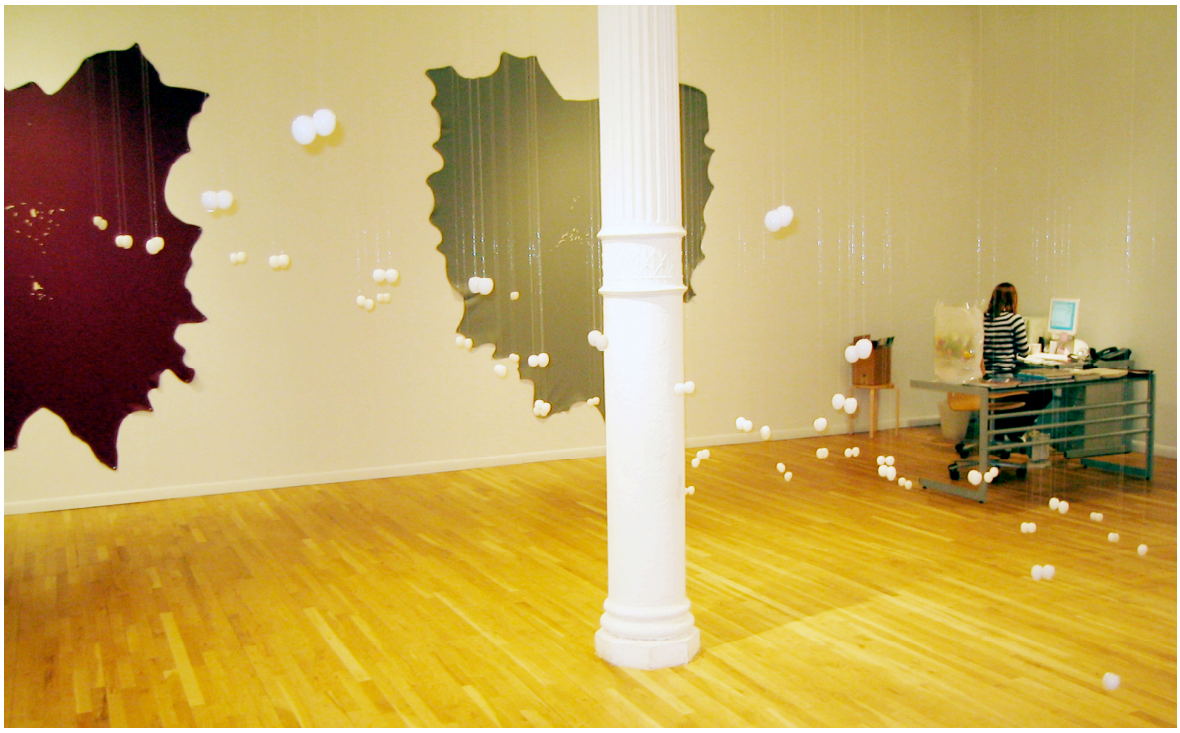
The Milky Way, Southeast corner



The Milky Way, Southwest corner



The Milky Way, West view



The Milky Way, Northeast corner

The Milky Way

The Milky Way installation is made of glass orbs (to my design) blown by Anthony Harris. Our working relationship required a high level of trust. Verbally describing the objects (along with drawings) left space for Harris to interpret them within his craft. In most technical matters I defer to the expert craftsperson but in challenging them to make things they think will not work, all are often pleasantly surprised[14]. Harris made ten various sized orbs for me to review for tolerance of diversion from the ideal, as each object is unique. Each orb had to be slightly bigger or smaller than its pair to be anatomically correct, as men have different sized testicles hanging at different heights. Each orb had a small hole at its top where a steel rod was inserted (attached to monofilament wire).

The objects themselves do not result from my own physical work, yet they form an installation bearing my signature, suggesting very clearly that my intervention is both conceptual and inventive. This disjunction is at the core of all the installations I make featuring glass. Should any piece break, similar objects can replace it, revealing the fact that my invention here is not commensurable with individual items or objects. My work is the installation, not the crafted objects, and these objects function in a way similar to actors in a film. A director makes a film and is credited with its authorship. Whether viewers watch the rolling names that went into a film's production, they understand that these people and their skills will have gone into making the film, but do not begrudge the director taking credit for making the film.

Marc Quinn states that *The Etymology of Morphology* (1996) was *"made by glass blowers in Murano who have a flawless grasp of their technique. It's a question of using their strengths to do something different … It was created on the hoof … I drew the shapes on a piece of paper and the glass blower created them.[15]"*

Purchased by the Tate in 1997, the work features on its website[16] and is listed as an artwork by Quinn. The craftspersons are not credited, whereas in the case of my own work, I credit the glass hot and cold workers wherever possible. It is important to acknowledge their skills, as mine are not dissimilar to the film director's. My job is often only to have the idea/vision of what the installations/pieces will be and how they will be installed.

I tend only to make things that only I can make. The *Fairy Tales* were sewn by me, I tied the knots in the *TAKII* pieces and polished the wood (with assistants) in the *Got Wood* series which features *In the Garden of Eden*. Either I have specialist skills others do not, or my presence is at the core of these works. Where possible I let others deploy their skills.

Questions of *authorship* have been explored since the 1960s, asking whether it is still possible to be the maker, *the author* of an autonomous work of art. Duchamp's *readymades,* posed the question of the (im)possibility of originality. Roland Barthes is credited with the idea that it is

the reader who writes the text, drawing on available knowledge of texts and their interpretations, and his essay *Death of the Author*[17] warns the reader about taking into account the "author's" wishes or intention or biography when reading a work, arguing that it exists outside of the context of the author. After much debate, the re-birth of the author was bound to appear – not least to the extent that I am able to cite Barthes here, as author.[18]

Regardless of the position a viewer takes on this greater topic, those craftspersons who bring into being the objects that make up my installations should be noted. Whether my works are seen as art, craft or hybrids is one of the issues that underlie much of my production.

For *The Milky Way* installation the orbs were laid onto the floor in the spiral pattern, then individually hung. An assistant stood on a platform, and I held each orb in the correct location and height. The assistant found the corresponding place on the ceiling to insert a hook by moving their end of the monofilament until the wire was vertical.

The Milky Way was my height, giving certain onlookers the effect of seeing the length of a body suspended mid-air. The nature of my sexuality (how I use my testicles) came into focus in this abstract work based on scientific observation and measurement. My body was used as a measure to provide human scale and stood in for any viewer. Demonstrating that each viewer interprets the artwork/world from their point of view, bringing previous encounters of art, science, histories and interpretations thereof.

The orbs can represent any male/female reproductive organs, yet centred at the height of my testicles, provide a visual jest hinting that everyone places themselves at the centre of their own universe. The orbs were not called testicles nor was their origin presented to viewers who sought any additional information from gallery staff.

The Milky Way galaxy is commonly depicted at a 45% angle for best visual effect. This is an artistic depiction, rather than a scientific one. It is equally correct to show it from edge on in disk shape. The galaxy looks different for a viewer positioned inside or outside it. NASA's raw data is presented in black and white, colour images are made from building up layers for artistic purposes. The colours presented are in essence artistic fictions made by NASA[19]. Art influences science's depiction of natural phenomena, yet science claims truth, and objectivity. Knowledge of who makes an image/artwork and how it is made comes into play. From whose position are viewers seeing objective facts, who is writing a history and to what end? Does the knowledge that the picture of a nebula is fictive make it less awe inspiring? Does the knowledge that the orbs are based on my testicles alter its reception? Each viewer must decide. NASA's images are consciously didactic, mine strive against closure even if they fail.

The Milky Way addresses scientific knowledge and sexual histories embedded in the dominant, knowledge is presented as flawed, based on a human template. Human error translates into a

desire to understand, and beautiful nebula depictions show how trillions of dollars are spent. Value for money enters the objective scientific dialogue, as NASA knows there are no free lunches. The *Fairy Tales* directly address issues of cost/worth.

The Milky Way challenges dominant sexual histories, as this *male conquest* of space is modelled on a same-sex lover, who would not be allowed into any astronautic program. There have been no acknowledged queers in space, at least not any *out* individuals. The American armed forces still outlaws open gays from serving. According to Douglas Crimp *"Don't Ask Don't Tell is nearly everywhere recognized as a defeat for lesbian and gay rights and a broken Clinton prom - ise because it legislates the closet, codifies into policy the very means of homophobic oppression.*[20]*"*

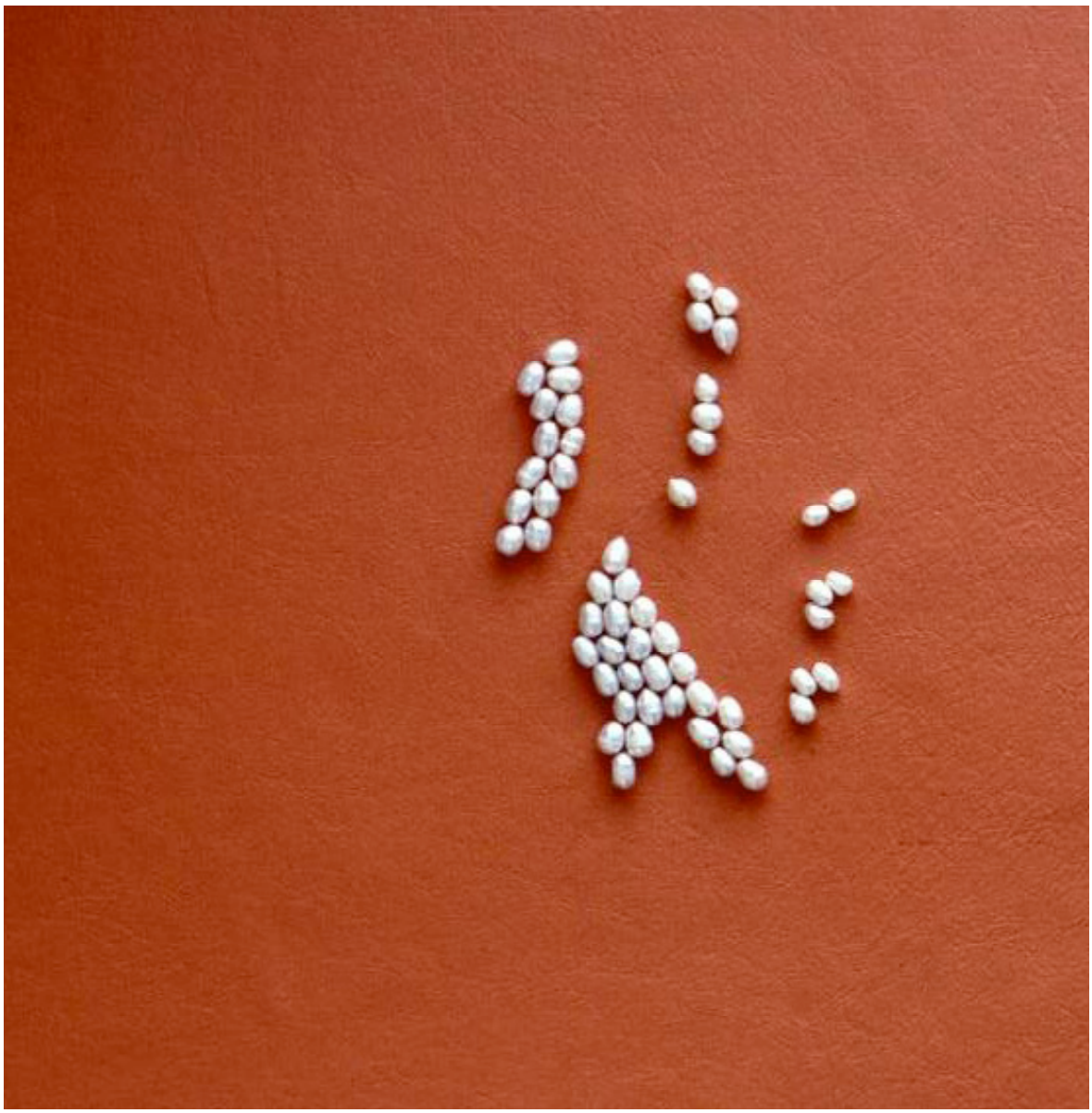
Historically astronauts were taken from the Air Force, precluding openness in inter-planetary exploration. While female military and civilian personnel are allowed on the Space Shuttle, the American stance is that open homosexuality would disrupt morale and discipline. This fantasy was exploded in the Iraq war as American soldiers fought alongside openly gay British troops. These baseless fears were also the views of the British military, and it required a European Court of Human Rights ruling[21] (1999) to force change.

The Russian Penal Code Paragraph 121[22] saw homosexuals sent to gulags and mental hospitals but not into space. Once again: there are no openly gay cosmonauts. Age and fitness apart, I have no chance of obtaining a seat on the Space Shuttle. If I had $20,000,000 as Dennis Tito did (the first space tourist,[23] 2001), the Russians might overlook my queerness. By way of contrast, *The Milky Way* was within my grasp, and that of viewers. While openly queer, it spoke many languages.

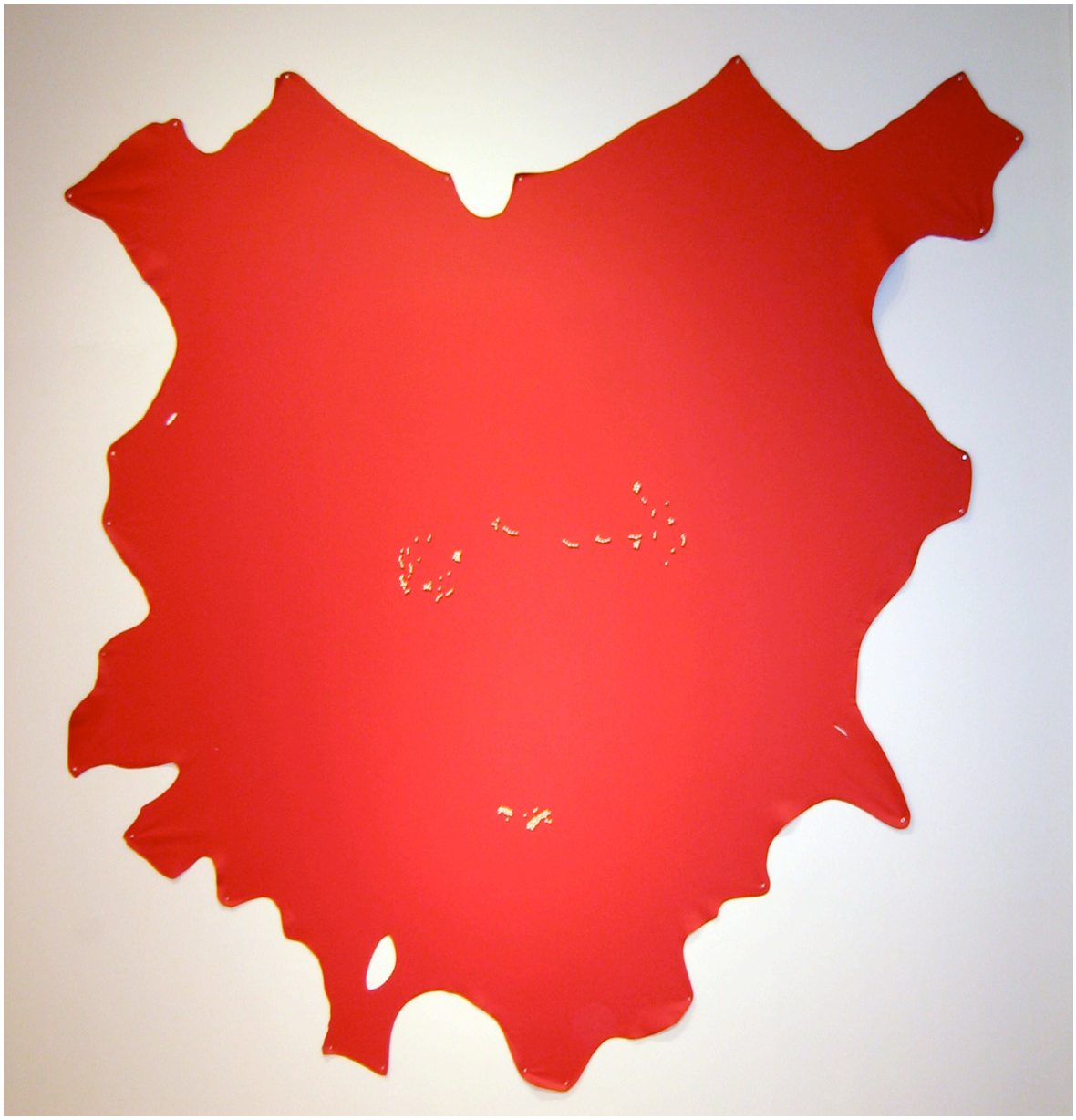
Humour plays a part in many of my works, as an entry for non-specialist viewers. *The Milky Way* seeks to function as a humorous object while also providing a serious reflection on the scientific model, and commenting on its status within the dominant. Whether the response is a loud guffaw, wonder, or derision, the work opens itself to as many possible interpretations as spectators.

The Fairy Tales





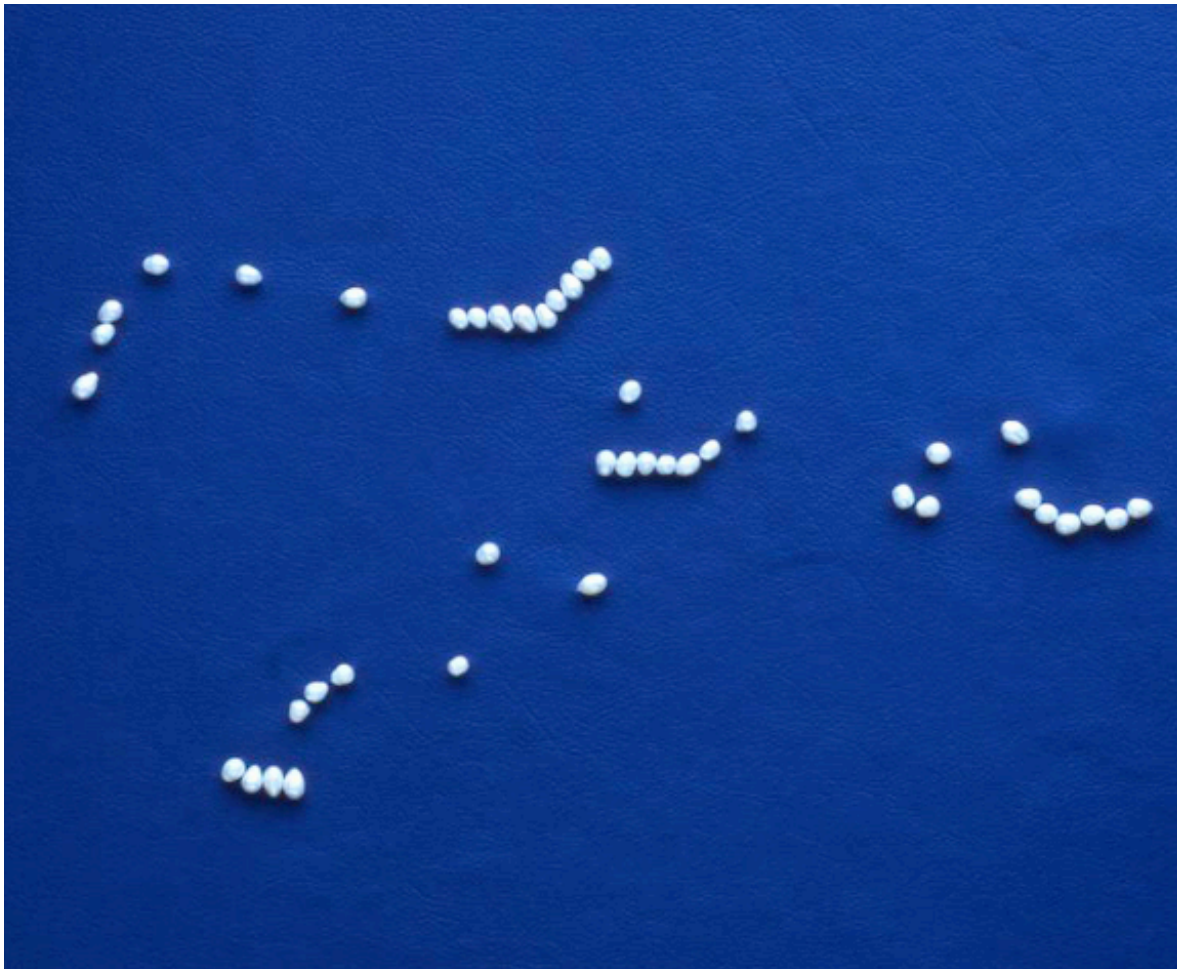
Foot Soldiers, detail view



Fallen Angels III



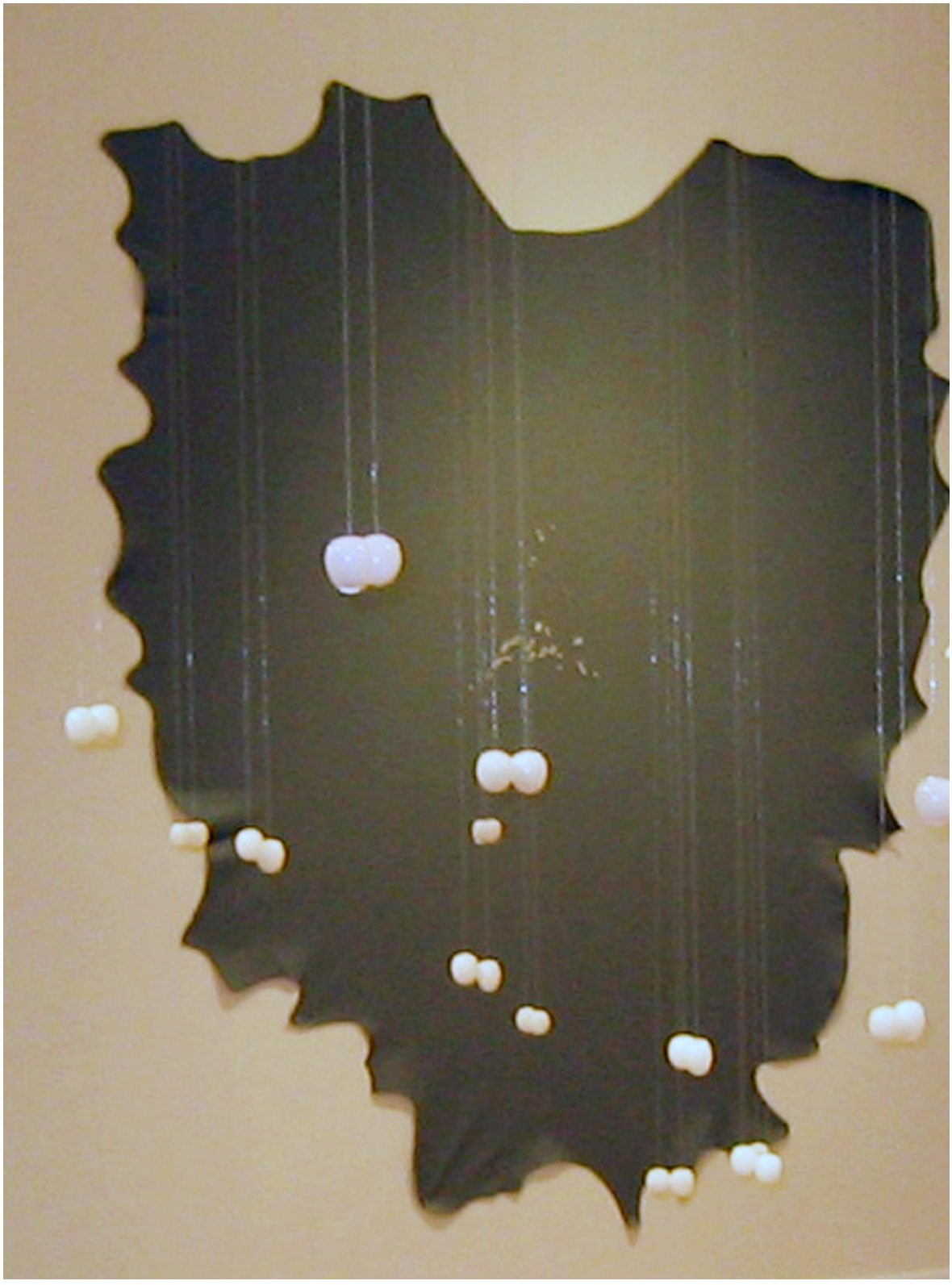
Three Brothers, detail view

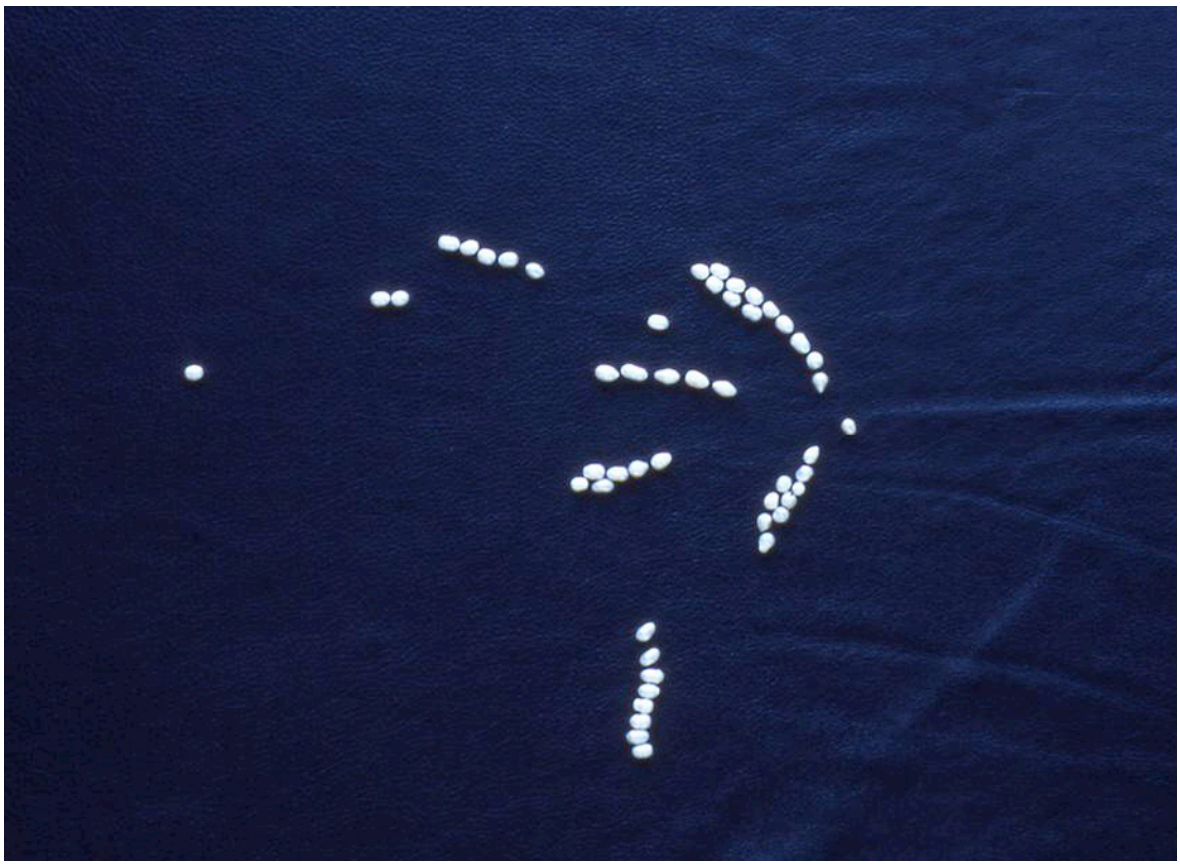


Butt Bangers, detail view



The Punishment Room, detail view





Mansuck, detail

On the left entrance wall *Sex for Sale* (white: semen) was placed, followed by *London Skins* (yellow: urine), *Foot Soldiers* (coral: foot fetish), *Fallen Angels III* (red: fisting), *Three Brothers* (green: incest), *Butt Pluggers* (teal blue: cop fetish), *The Punishment Room* (fuchsia: spanking), *Deviant Detours* (grey: bondage) and *Mansuck* (black: S/M). These were the colours of the *gay* rainbow flag (now a symbol of assimilation), except for black, white and grey, (non-colours).

The *Fairy Tales* featured nine cowhides, embroidered with freshwater pearls. The templates for the embroidered pearl patterns were based on ejaculations ('money shots') from gay pornographic films. They represent images of men who have taken bodily, if not emotional pleasure from one another. To create the templates, videos were paused to make drawings of the ejaculations, which were then re-scaled on a one-to-one human size on the cowhides, using my body as a marker for those in the videos.

This performative element kept the scale correct and the positions of each pearl relative to the semen on the paid performers. The hides - skins - were the highest quality and difficult to sew, but it was important that I did the needlework. Sewing is generally seen as *women's work* and I wanted to address the issue of the pornographic image from a male-to-male perspective, making the objects an exploration of the craft/art dialectic. Certain technical skills (and a lot of patience) were needed, which I had gained in a previous body of work.

Viewers subconsciously take in the human scale, and again my body stood in for any body, not the artist's body. In the *Fairy Tales* my body performed the specific bodies of the men in the fictional encounters of *eros*. It was in contrast to the originally intended scale of measure (the viewer's erection) and the evidence of male orgasm, white semen on tanned flesh (hardly ever pale). Visible ejaculate is proof of the fiction, the contract signed sealed and finally delivered. The male artiste who does not *get wood* (an erection) does not get paid. Those with wood but no *money shot* don't get paid the full whack. Semen is proof of the pleasure the body took in possession, the consumption of the other, and so too in these paintings. This taking of another's body for fictive pleasure and actual payment hangs heavily in the air. The leather paintings were also for sale.

Bruce Hainley says of Warhol's use of semen that they "*remain some of Warhol's most economic works: basic recycling (waste reused) and consideration of the exchanges counted as sex or love… Always a business artist, he apotheosized the "money shot". He spent loads, all the while collecting and recycling.*[24]" Warhol used semen and urine to make a number of important works and, ever the director, had others mark his canvases. I too used marks made by others.

The hides were splayed out, tanned for the viewer's contemplation and spoke of their own mortality. The leather was obviously costly, and its placement in a shop (where art is sold) sitting amongst others where possibly even more expensive leather goods were for sale, chided viewers into questioning their status as objects for consumption.

A Pearly View

I want to reflect briefly in what follows on what might be argued to have triggered my use here of the combination of pearls, skin, and same-sex sexual activity. The pearls themselves double the *nature morte* aspect of the work, having been harvested from living creatures split open, their wet flesh pierced to have their treasure taken. These tiny white orbs are as sensitive to light as those used in *The Milky Way*. Real pearls are distinguished by their luminosity and by placing them against the teeth and tongue, and are had at a high cost to the animal. Whereas the notion of 'beads of sweat' against human skin is commonplace, scattered precious pearls of ejaculate, against (animal) skin functions as a richly-invested metaphor.

There is plainly a long and established history of pearls against skin in Western visual art, although it tends to be gender-specific: a young woman wearing pearls represented virginity; whereas a married woman wearing pearls represented fidelity. Pearls symbolised ownership, bejewelled woman as man's property, or potential property offered by the male head of a family in search of a liaison to suit everyone (with the possible exception of the young woman). Pearls continue to be associated with the gift, rather more than they are purchased by the wearer.

In the sequence of images that follow, and that might be argued to constitute the 'image-stuff' of my visual memory at the time of making the work, pearls are gendered, feminised by association, yet male in the sense of property-ownership and attribution. Their presence is constitutively ambiguous. In a very clear sense, then, they invite a queer reappropriation – to be removed from the gender-dominant tradition, and scattered, rather than dressed and strung, well-behaved, one after the other on a string or pin.





Elizabeth I, three anonymous artists[25]

Portraits of *Elizabeth I* (the Virgin Queen) see her dressed from head to toe in pearls, each by implication untouched and untouchable: not for her the pleasures of a *pearl necklace*, which she might finger26. Elizabeth had pearls sewn onto her hides and woven into her hair. By way of contrast, that other notoriously *supposed virgin*, Mary, mother of Jesus, is almost never depicted in pearls (she was the wife of a carpenter).





Benvenuto Di Giovanni's *Madonna and Child*

Mary does wear jewellery however in Da Vinci's *Virgin of the Rocks*, (1495-1508) and in Benvenuto Di Giovanni's *Madonna and Child* (c. 1491) where the child is seen to reach for the "expertly counterfeited pearls[27]" on her bodice. Jesus often crowned Mary with pearls. Giovanni di Paolo painted versions of *The Coronation of the Virgin* (mid 15th c.) where pearls on golden crowns are a major part of the iconography[28] depicting the renunciation of the flesh. Mary's pearls are to be worn in another world.



Cavaliere d'Arpino depicts *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* (1605-10) as an avenging queen. *"Judith is the embodiment of female virtue and moral perfection, an ideal heroine who has redeemed her people…at the same time, she seems capable of exercising her seductive powers directly upon the viewer, as if the beholder were Holofernes. She is in possession of two dangerous weapons, her sword and her sexual allure.[29]"*

Judith, then, is monstrous, combining male (the sword-phallus) and female principles (the seducer), and her pearls perform that sexual ambiguity: she drips with pearls; they fall from her pink earlobe, they are sewn into her hair, and most seductively a huge glob of pearls slides from between her breasts resting against a red sash, which flows onto a bloody sword. The sense of pearls as ejaculate is already key to the way this image works on a viewer, yet the wearer retains a female-dominant value.



The veiled woman is the greatest threat to chastity, for the religious. She is a fetish object, not a person, a cipher for the unattainable that tempts the savage males' supposedly uncontrollable lust, ever ready to deliver a gift of pearls. The veil is not for her protection, but his. The male is out of control, fearing a female sexuality that rivals his own. He would rather kill her than allow another male to gaze upon her,[30] and yet this veiling arouses his lust to have *another's* woman. Women are unsafe, veiled or not. Caravaggio's virginal widow (*Judith Beheading Holofernes*, c. 1599), above, is seen in the act of decapitation. According to Beverly Louise Brown, he *"intended to show Judith bare-breasted. In the final version she is discretely covered, but her erect nipples still indicate a degree of sexual arousal.[31]"*

She has a single pearl earring dripping from her dainty white flesh held to the lobe by a small black ribbon, showing mourning and fealty. Like Mary, Judith is sexual, and pure at the same time, alluring but unattainable, ripe for bestowing pearls, but as dangerous as the Black Death to any male who dare touch.





Guido Reni paints *Saint Catherine of Alexandria* (c. 1606, above left)[32] with her eyes towards heaven, crowned in pearls wearing a locket (just above her breasts), from which another pearl falls. Emperor Maximinus had this virgin (patron saint of teachers, librarians, and lawyers) broken on a wheel: once again, the pearl is 'given', to the woman, by the other, who conquers her. His *Salome with the Head of Saint John the Baptist* (c. 1638, above right)[33] has pearl earrings. Here a young woman, full of sexual power brings with her beauty: death. Salome and Judith are the agents of action, a masculine trope, which in the patriarchy is a terrifying sight, a female agent, pearled, and holding a man's head.

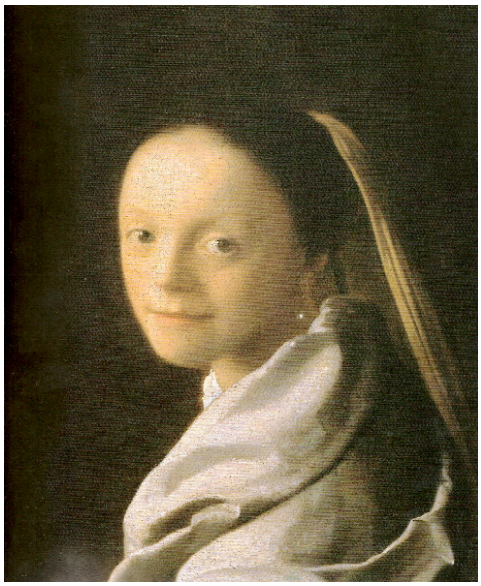




Vermeer's good wife fingers yellow ribbons attached to her pearls in *Woman with a Pearl Necklace* (1662-64, above left)[34], and can be seen as a woman unblemished by a lust equally implied by those same pearls. Yet in *The Love Letter*[35] (1667-68, above right) a woman in an ermine bordered jacket is handed a symbol of 17th century adultery by her maid. Vermeer's iconography is well known and it appears likely he read St. Francis De Sales' (1567-1622) *Devout Life,* which claims that *"it has been customary for women to hang pearls from their ears; as Pliny observed, they gain pleasure from the sensation of the swinging pearls touching them… Isaac, sent earrings to chaste Rebecca as a first token of his love. This leads me to think that this jewel has a spiritual meaning, namely that the first part of the body that a man wants, and which a woman must loyally protect, is the ear; no word or sound should enter it other than the sweet sound of chaste words, which are the oriental pearls of the gospel.*[36] *"*

In Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*[37] (c. 1655, below left) the *ingénue* looks at and through the spectator. A turban holds back her hair so that the viewer gets a good look at her milky neck and pearled lobe. In *Portrait of a Young Woman*[38] (1666-67, below right), a waif stares over her shoulder, presenting her pearly lobe, wearing some sort of veil seemingly pulled away.







Gainsborough's *The Hon Mrs Graham* (1775-77, right)[39] portrays a pale young woman draped in pearls hanging around her breast and sewn onto her skirt and hat. She rests against an erect architectural column, revealing that she too is someone's property. Degas *Family Portrait* (1858-67, below left)[40] features his severe, black clad aunt and her two daughters all wearing dainty white pearl earrings. His aunt is a widow whose husband still lives, as can be seen on the right of the canvas. Their separation is visible in her refusal to gaze upon him, and he looks only upon his children, pearls of his making (implying, by the same stroke, the possibility that they are not). Ingres' *Madame Moitessier*[41] (1851, below right) fingers a pearl necklace that traces across her pale flesh onto a black dress. "*She slightly looks down on the spectator, with a devouring expression of sexual superiority.*[42]" She is the antithesis of Degas' aunt, Madame Moitessier, whose thoughts on being ogled are all too clear. Yet both women are depicted as objects of consumption, the property of men – including the painter. As we can see, the art historical world, and equally the artists' Imaginary, are flooded with (well-behaved but equally provocative) pearls and pearl necklaces, and this link between consumption by and of those depicted finds its parallel in contemporary pornography, in showrooms of luxe objects, and in contemporary art galleries.





While freshwater pearls no longer have the monetary value they would have had as represented in the historical paintings, they still have a residual echo of that value. Classical artists depicting pearls would not have had access to Mikimoto's inventory, and nor did I[43]. Yet the pearls are real and they continue to function as a signifier of desire, of semen and the completion of the orgasm bought and paid for, as I argue they did even in those images commonly associated with purity and virtue.

Purchase and consumption in the system of pornography and the art market rub shoulders with the viewer who must dissemble what they see, the objects that make them up, their upmarket locale all within a global system of luxe consumption. The pornographic fiction of sexual pleasure is only seen as such by the converted, who thereafter cannot escape the implication: to the non-believer, images of congress are likely to provoke feelings of discomfort. In Christian mythology, relics of saints provoke feelings of devotion for believers, and ridicule or indifference amongst sceptics. Veronica's Veil, a handkerchief claimed to have wiped Christ's blooded brow, is said to have miraculously become imprinted with his image.

Some posit that relics are proof of the existence of their god. My relics, relics, the *Fairy Tales*, are proof of *eros*, if not *agape*. The title of each painting is the name of the film from which the money shot originated. Each hide's colour relates to the gay hanky code (which a heterosexual audience might be unaware of) of sexual fetishes and whether the wearer prefers to be sexually dominant (worn in the left pocket) or passive (in the right). Red hankies indicate fist fucking so for *Fallen Angels III* red leather was used, and the ejaculate still taken from a (red) fisting video. Yellow indicates sexual pleasure from urine, grey in bondage and so on. Art is littered with codified meanings intelligible to the cognoscenti. Knowledge is the key to unlocking the strata. An image that may superficially appear abstract might also be a queer metaphor for congress.

Many in the non-threatening sexual rainbow coalition would have the dominant perceive the LGBT community as – *just like them* – except in bed. This de-sexing has been a political move for acceptance and equality in the law. Whether it can be said to have been successful is doubtful in many parts of the EU, and almost certainly in America. This benign flag was even recently banned from the centre of London's LGBT community, Old Compton Street.[44]

The *Fairy Tales* are beautiful, crafted and crafty, *luxe* yet low. They have a history, but can only be seen in the ever present now. They are artifice and art. In the old fashioned sense of the word, they are *queer*, yet allow viewers to react to the contemporary notion of that word.

3.3 Labelling

In the exhibition all works were minimally labelled, a practice I continue to use:

Michael Petry
The Milky Way, 2004
blown glass, monofilament, metal

Viewers encountered this work as an object in space that they could enter or walk around. If they sought out the object's name they saw a label with minimal text. If they asked for additional information it was in the gallery. Biographical information was there for the curious but not didactically placed in front of the work. Inquisitive viewers had to ask staff for information relating to my sexuality or details of the orbs. This extra level of inquiry was important to the project, as it was freely available but gathered through engagement. Like the exploration of the stars, things appear close and obvious here but additional information alters perception and understanding.

No further information was placed on the labels denoting the *Fairy Tales* than below, in contrast to the labelling for the *Hidden Histories* exhibition.

Michael Petry
Butt Bangers, 2004
Blue leather, pearls, metal eyelets, screws

The second line was the name of the painting, corresponding to the movie it came from. It was up to the viewer to ask for additional information to what were layered codes of language, shape and colour. The labelling was deliberately faux-objective. It presented itself as mere information, cool and detached, its simplicity implied depth. It followed museological precedent and stated the least amount of factual information as could be provided. A concern to be non-didactic, or at least have the appearance of it, has been a major concern for the modern museum aping scientific *objectivity*. Works found in museums are already loaded encounters, with labelling being part of that presentation.[45] By aping seeming objectivity viewers are *given* additional art historical space to view the works. This space may or may not exist in anything other than the prejudices of those who care to believe in this type of historicism, but is a useful stratagem in exploring the powers of that myth.

Douglas Crimp attempts debunking it stating *"My response was to examine the institutions themselves, their representations of history and the ways their own history is presented. Pursuing my earlier archeological project, I discovered that the museum's history was written much like art's, as a continuous evolution from ancient times. Locating the museum's origins in a universal impulse to collect and preserve mankind's aesthetic heritage, such history was unimpeded by knowledge that aesthetics is itself a modern invention and that collections differed vastly in their objects and classificatory systems at different historical junctures, up to and including the present.*[46]"

Crimp examines existing structures that create and maintain the imaginary white box. Labels on walls are a small but important part of this fictive act.

Even with minimal authorial intervention the affect of the placement of the *Fairy Tales* directly around *The Milky Way* might have forced a more obvious queer reading on all the works. On reflection, in 2004 – signalling a development in my understanding of the ways in which works function for a range of viewers - I became newly aware that in removing the heterosexual filter, I might have been accused of placing a homosexual one in front of viewers. For that reason I realise, when I look back at the creative choices I was making, I decided to find other ways to make the work speak on many levels, articulating the ambiguity that I have identified above in the use of pearls in classical painting. My work became more abstract, out of what are and need to function as autonomous works.



Sex for Sale, screw detail

[1] *The Wormhole*, Peterborough Museum of Art, Derby Museum, Wooster Museum of Art, 1995

[2] *TWISTOR*, 7th Papier Biennale, Leopold Hoesch Museum, Dueren, Germany, 1998

[3] Harvard women's group rips Summers, Marcella Bombardieri, January 19, 2005
The Boston Globe http://www.boston.com/news/education/higher/articles/2005/01/19/harvard_womens_group_rips_summers/

[4] *The Chemistry of Love,* James Hockey Gallery, Farnham, 1992, Atlantis Gallery, London, 1993, Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn, Germany, 1994

[5] Petry, Michael *Abstract Eroticism*, Art & Design, Profile 47, Academy Editions, London, 1996, page 8

[6] *More Paperwork,* Bellerive Museum, Zurich, 1988

[7] Glaser, Jane R., Zenetou, Artemis A. (eds), *Gender perspectives: Essays on Women in Museums,* Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington DC, 1994, pages 52-53 Marcia Tucker places this dialogue in context in her essay *From Theory to Practice: Correcting Inequalities*

[8] *The History of the World,* Rice Art Gallery, Houston, 1999

[9] Petry, Michael (ed), *A Thing of Beauty is…*, Art & Design, Vol. 12 No 5/6, Academy Editions, London, 1997, page 7

[10] *Scarry, Elaine, On Beauty and Being Just,* Duckbanks, London, 2001, page 31

[11] ibid, page 52

[12] ibid, page 83

[13] Butler, Judith *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York, 1999, page xv

[14] I write about this process in detail in *Through a Glass Darkly: Artists, Glass and Authorship* for Craig, Blanche (ed), *Contemporary Glass*, Blackdog Publishing, London, 2008

[15] Grunenberg, Christoph, Pomery, Victoria, (eds), *Marc Quinn*, Sara Whitfield in conversation with Mark Quinn, Tate Liverpool, 2002, unpaginated

[16] http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=999999961&workid=21917&searchid=9654

[17] Aspen Magazine Volume 5 + 6, Twenty-eight numbered items, including advertisements folder. Edited and designed by Brian O'Doherty, art direction by David Dalton and Lynn Letterman. Published Fall-Winter 1967 by Roaring Fork Press, NYC. The essay gained widespread influence when it was re-published in Barthes' collection of essays *Image, Music, Text* (translated by Stephen Heath) published by Hill & Wang, New York in 1977

[18] Burke, Séan. *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998

[19] http://landsat.gsfc.nasa.gov/pdf_archive/How2make.pdf Nasa's official explanation of how satellite images are coloured

[20] Crimp, Douglas, *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2002, p234

[21] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/458714.stm

[22] Sternweiler, Dr. Andreas, *Goodbye to Berlin? 100 Jahre Schwulenbewegung*, Schwules Museum, Verlag Rosa Winkel, Berlin, 1977, p297

[23] www.spacetoday.org/Astronauts/SpaceTourists.html

[24] Hainley, Bruce, *Andy Warhol: Piss & Sex Paintings And Drawings*, Gagosian Gallery, New York, 2002, page 8

[25] www.luminarium.org/renlit/elizface.htm

[26] In vulgar parlance, to 'give someone a pearl necklace' is to ejaculate on them

[27] Kanter, Laurence, *Painting in Renaissance Siena 1420-1500*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Distributed by Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1988, page 302

[28] ibid, pages 201, 203, 205

[29] Brown, Beverly Louise (ed), *The Genius of Rome 1592-1623*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2001, page 298

[30] "Police believe there may be as many as 12 honour killings in the UK every year." http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/honourcrimes/crimesofhonour_2.shtml

[31] Brown, Beverly Louise (ed), *The Genius of Rome 1592-1623*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2001, page 293

[32] Caroselli, Susan L. (ed), *Guido Reni 1575-1642*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, 1988, pages 185-187

[33] ibid pages 300-301

[34] Wheelock, Jr., Arthur K., *Vermeer, The Complete Works*, Abrams, New York, 1997, pages 42-43

[35] ibid, pages 62-64

[36] De Sales, St. Frances, *Devout Life*, 1608, translated into Dutch, 1616

[37] Wheelock Jr., Arthur K., *Vermeer, The Complete Works*, Abrams, New York, 1997, pages 46-47

[38] ibid, pages 56-57

[39] Holberton, Paul (ed), *National Galleries of Scotland*, Scala Publications Ltd, London, 1989, page 97

[40] O'Neill, John P. (ed), *Degas*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 1988, pages 77-82

[41] http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/cgi-bin/WebObjects.dll/CollectionPublisher.woa/wa/work?workNumber=ng4821

[42] Honour, Hugh, Fleming, John, *A World History of Art*, Macmillan Reference Books, London, 1982, page 486,487

[43] I have proposed a project to Mikimoto, the Japanese pearl equivalent to De Beers for diamonds, but the material costs alone would run into the millions and they have politely declined.

[44] Westminster Council (2005) stated that the flying of these flags was a form of illegal advertisement and banned them for seven months
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/4182109.stm
http://www.pinknews.co.uk/news/articles/2005-173.html

[45] see Tuke biography, Sargent discussion 2.3.1 page 37 in *Hidden Histories*

[46] Crimp, Douglas, *On the Museum's Ruins*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1993, page 18

Chapter 4: Curating a same-sex exhibition


HIDDEN HISTORIES
20TH CENTURY MALE SAME SEX LOVERS IN THE VISUAL ARTS
Ajamu, Kenneth Anger, Patrick Angus, Ron Athey, Francis Bacon, Don Bachardy, John Banting, Per Barclay, Barrett-Forster, James Richmond Barthé, Walter Battiss, Cecil Beaton, Berthold Bell, Barton Lidicé Benes, Christian Bérard, James Bidgood, Nayland Blake, Ross Bleckner, Keith Boadwee, Oliver Boberg, Gregg Bordowitz, Leigh Bowery, Joe Brainard, Marc Brandenburg, Per Christian Brown, Bruce of LA (Bruce Bellas), Edward Burra, Richmond Burton, Scott Burton, Michael Buthe, Samuel Butler, Hamad Butt, John Button, Paul Cadmus, John Cage, Jerome Caja, Rick Castro, Ricardo Cinalli, Brian Clarke, Jean Cocteau, Robert Colquhoun, Michael Craig-Martin, René Crevel, Frederick Holland Day, Charles Demuth, Mario Dubsky, John Dugdale, George Dureau, Thomas Eakins, Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset, Simon English, Neil Emmerson, Pepe Espaliú, Rotimi Fani-Kayodé, Robert Farber, Mark Flood, Robert Flynt, Jared French, Donald Friend, Julio Galán, GAN (Gösta Adrian Nilsson), General Idea, Gilbert & George, Robert Gober, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Lothar Götz, Gran Fury, Duncan Grant, Andris Grinberg, Hervé Guibert, Sunil Gupta, Mats Gustafson, Martin Gustavsson, Brion Gysin, Keith Haring, Lyle Ashton Harris, Marsden Hartley, Andrew Heard, Jan Hietala, Alex Hirst, Oliver Herring, David Hockney, Jim Hodges, Howard Hodgkin, Horst P Horst, Peter Hujar, David Hutchinson, Robert Indiana, Bill Jacobson, Eugène Jansson, Derek Jarman, Jasper Johns, Ray Johnson, Isaac Julien, Ellsworth Kelly, Ken Kelly, Bhupen Khakhar, Terence Koh, Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, Charles LeDray, Matts Leiderstam, Michael Leonard, Micah Lexier, Glenn Ligon, John Lindell, Herbert List, Andrew Logan, Attila Richard Lukacs, George Platt Lynes, Robert MacBryde, Martin Maloney, Robert Mapplethorpe, Keith Mayerson, Angus McBean, McDermott & McGough, John McLachlin, David Medalla & Adam Nankervis, Robert Medley, Bjarne Melgaard, Duane Michals, Tim Miller, Keith Milow, John Minton, Goh Mishima, Donald Moffett, Frank Moore, Cedric Morris, Michael Morris, Mark Morrisroe, Bryan Mulvihill, Piotr Nathan, Marcel Odenbach, Jean-Michel Othoniel, Gregorio Pagliaro, Michael Petry, Paul Pfeiffer, Glyn Philpot, Pierre et Gilles, Jack Pierson, Lari Pittman, Joseph Plaskett, Alexis Preller, Patrick Procktor, Robert Rauschenberg, Guy Reid, Hunter Reynolds, Eric Rhein, Charles Ricketts, Larry Rivers, David Robilliard, Paul Ryan, Børre Sæthre, Mike Sale, Dean Sameshima, John Singer Sargent, Fin Serck-Hanssen, Charles Shannon, Michael Shaowanasai, Jack Smith, Simeon Solomon, Robert Taylor, Pavel Tchelitchev, Wolfgang Tillmans, Tom of Finland (Touko Laaksonen), George Tooker, Patrick Traer, Henry Scott Tuke, Cy Twombly, Keith Vaughan, Wilhelm von Gloeden, Carl von Platen, Wilhelm von Plüschow, Lee Wagstaff, Andy Warhol, Klaus Wehner, Minor White, Robert Wilson, David Wojnarowicz, Martin Wong, Cerith Wyn Evans, Frank Yamrus, Nahum B Zenil

Chapter 4: Curating a same-sex exhibition[1]

Introduction

Hidden Histories[2] was an exhibition I curated at the New Art Gallery Walsall (NAGW) in 2004, presenting the work of twentieth century male SSLs in the visual arts. The book included brief biographies on the artists, and an essay on the presentation of their work by art institutions.

Hidden Histories provides a thorough exploration of the research questions concerning SSLs using coded information about their sexual identity in their works. This is shown by their choice of subject matter; Rauschenberg's repeated depictions of his lover, Twombly; General Idea's reference to work by Robert Indiana; and Jasper Johns' usage of imagery that refers to same-sex erotics in public toilets.

I propose in this final chapter to revisit this early work in order to reappraise it in the light of my developing account of those factors which led me into the production of recent work at the end of the first decade of the 21st Century. I reflect here, plainly with a certain anger that informed my diverse activities, on the ways art institutions have repeatedly sought to obfuscate the sexual identity of SSLs, and have preferred instead to use exhibition signage and catalogues to place a heterosexual filter over their biographies and work. This tendency is shown, very clearly, by the signage for Robert Rauschenberg: Combines at the New York Metropolitan Museum (2005/6); and Cy Twombly: Cycles and Seasons at Tate Modern, London (2008). I proceed, by way of conclusion to this commentary, to revisit those factors (social, relational, theoretical) that have informed my work, which, as a consequence, can be interpreted as singular, bearing my signature, but also as angry, political and critical of certain institutions (and what they support, including heterosexual marriage) on which artists depend for making their work public.

Mounting *Hidden Histories* provided evidence of institutional homophobia, in particular because of the influence of local politicians on art institutions.

4.1 *Hidden Histories* background

> *Mad about the boy,*
> *I know it's stupid to be mad about the boy…*
> *Lord knows I'm not a schoolgirl,*
> *In the flurry of her first affair….*
> *I'm feeling quite insane and young again*
> *And all because I'm mad about the boy.*
> *Noel Coward* (1932, original recording)

The original name for the exhibition was *Mad About the Boy* (MATB), borrowed from a Noel Coward song - an open means and form for hiding one's sexuality, since male homosexuality was then illegal in the UK. It is likely that Coward (a SSL) was aware of Oscar Wilde's prosecution and had obvious reasons to fear public knowledge of his sexuality, yet was part of a metropolitan elite able to enjoy sexual lives as long as they employed certain codes and discretion.

Coward lets SSLs know that he is one as well (by professing his love for another man) yet is left without stain on his character by using the device of pretending to be a woman. *Lord knows I'm not a school girl*, deployed codes in general usage with SSLs (referencing the male self as female). Polari[3] was common gay slang (similar to cockney rhyme) and could be spoken in front of heterosexuals, remaining incomprehensible to those unfamiliar with it. Mitchell and Leavitt observe that interested readers *"displayed an astonishing tenacity in locating those poems, stories, novels, essays, and even individual sentences in which references to homosexual experience might be found."*[4]

The same holds in music and the visual arts. Michelangelo Buonarroti's homoerotic works include poems to Tommaso de' Cavalieri, a young man.

> *. . . If to be blest I must accept defeat*
> *It is no wonder if, alone and nude,*
> *I am by one in arms chained and subdued*[5].

Michelangelo's coyness was influenced by the Officers of the Night established in Florence (1432) to charge men with sodomy[6] then punishable by death. Nevertheless, SSLs have seen Michelangelo's naked young men (from David to the bound slaves) and understood their muted call without art historical help to de-code their (homo) erotic charge. Mad About the Boy was about deniability to authority and declaration to the knowledgeable.

Arguably Michelangelo would not have thought of himself as homosexual or gay (19th and 20th century phrases would have had no meaning for him), but we can document his same-sex activities. My decision to only look at twentieth-century male SSLs was complex and is discussed in Hidden Histories, but the main factors were the birth of a homosexual concept; the subsequent criminalization and medicalization of same-sex love; and the availability of published material concerning the same-sex lives of 20th century artists.

Homosexuality (as a defining term) was first used in an anonymous German text (1869) and the word *"first appeared in English in the 1890s when it was used by Charles Gilbert Chaddock."*[7] As the term became common, homosexual was used in legal and medical paradigms to punish or suppress positive same-sex identity[8]. Magnus Hirschfeld founded the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee in Berlin (1897) to advance homosexuality and his work was well known in Uranian and bisexual circles, terms then used by SSLs to describe themselves. The

Nazis destroyed Hirschfeld's archives. Without this notion of a homosexual identity, it would be difficult to include the work of SSLs before this period, as this concept would have been unknown to them and alien to their work. Sodomy defined a crime or a moral lapse, but it was not a state of being.

Sodomy did not define the self in the way homosexual, gay or queer might. Lord Queensberry may have misspelled his insult to Wilde (handing him a card accusing him of *"posing as som - domite*[9]*"*), but he did not call him a homosexual, because the expression was not in common use. The notion of the possibility of being homosexual, gay, or queer helped to define the time period for the project. This is not to argue for such selves in an essentialist way. It is noteworthy that Michel Foucault in *History of Sexuality* (1976-84) deconstructs the possibility of such notions of being as natural, exploring how power relationships go into developing the notion of the self as a homosexual or a heterosexual.

Wilde's imprisonment (under the Labouchère amendment, 1885) took place within a hypocritical Victorian framework. Wilde was married with two children, as same-sex activity does not preclude different-sex acts. Despite these heterosexual markers, Wilde became the visual manifestation of the homosexual: effete, over-dressed, and slightly sinister. Same-sex love was, and still is, problematic for the dominant culture. To take the feminine role in a misogynistic society is a double strike against a man. The illegality of the act marked out male SSLs for the majority of the 20th century. Women's same-sex activity was never criminalized in the UK, as Queen Victoria notoriously refused to sign the needed legislation, stating that women did not partake in such acts. Radcliffe Hall published books with lesbian content (*The Well of Loneliness*), and may have faced social opprobrium, but had different legal issues to contend with. The criminality of male same-sex activity varied from country to country; however, many would argue that this meant that men not only faced external homophobia but often internalized it.

Their very being was seen as a crime. Peter Wildeblood understood this when jailed for same-sex activities (1954), seeing himself and others within an oppressive paradigm: *"I am a homo - sexual... I am no more proud of my condition than I would be of having a glass eye or a hare-lip. On the other hand, I am no more ashamed of it than I would be of being colour-blind… nothing would be easier for me than to assume a superficial normality, get married and perhaps have a family…it would be cruel, because I should run the risk of making two people unhappy... (He) will always be lonely; he must accept that... More than that he cannot have, because the law, in England, forbids it. A man who feels an attraction towards another man... becomes a criminal."*[10]

Male homosexuality remained visible if coded in public manifestations of all kinds. Francis Bacon saw homosexuality as something to overcome and *"believed that he had been born homosexual and that there had never been any choice in the matter . . . his feelings about his sex - ual tastes were strongly tinged with guilt.*[11]*"*

Homosexuality was considered by the American Psychiatric Association as a mental illness *to be cured* until 1973. Prior to U.K. legalization in 1967, male SSLs faced prison, blackmail, or being forced to undergo electroshock or drug aversion therapy. Alan Turing, the mathematician credited with inventing the modern computer and breaking the German Enigma war codes reported a burglary by a male sexual partner and was himself criminalized, and forced into "cure" which drove him to suicide[12]. Same-sex activity in private was only decriminalized on the Federal level in America in 2003.

Artists in the 20th century left a more visible paper trail allowing for the documentation of their sexual and emotional partnerships and an assessment of their impact on their work. This might seem obvious, as heterosexual artists include partners and children in their work. Yet biographical information for SSLs has been systematically withheld by academic and cultural institutions for many reasons (HH1.1). Tracking down and collating published material relating to artists is at the core of what became *Hidden Histories*. It was similar in format to *Installation Art*[13], the first book to collate material on installations helping transform the discussion on what Installation was and how it might be seen within the institutional context. It is the availability of published same-sex materials that made it possible to generate a same-sex horizontal history. Unlike the dominant culture's vertical transmission of history (as institutionally taught), others have had to devise alternative means of keeping their excluded history viable.

For Nayland Blake *"Queer people are the only minority whose culture is not transmitted within the family. . . The extremely provisional nature of queer culture is the thing that makes its transmission so fragile.*[14]*"*

Hidden Histories featured male artists for many reasons, but particularly because it would have been hard for me, a man, to reclaim an historical voice for women. Many discussions with women artists and interested parties (of many sexualities) confirmed the decision to restrict the survey to male artists.

4.2 Ethical concerns

Any argument that an artist's sexuality is irrelevant to their work is dubious. Heterosexuals with strings of lovers see the public revel in their conquests (Picasso is indicative of the tendency, as the many shows of his women demonstrate, one of the most recent *Pablo Picasso: Celebrating the Muse: Women in Picasso's Prints from 1905-1968* was held at New York's Marlborough gallery, March, 2010). Such relationships are exposed on the institution's walls in the form of descriptive labels. This is a form of heterosexual "outing." It is done so often that it appears invisible in its naturalness. Same-sex love tends to be hushed up. Consequently, *Hidden Histories* aimed to document material on artists who are or were SSLs. Robert Rauschenberg's life has been seriously distorted by biographers, who almost always state that This homophobia can be seen in the light of the Council's previous heavy-handedness with an exhibition called *Unveiled*, where they demanded two photomontages be removed, threaten-

he was married and had a child, but seldom mention that Cy Twombly and Jasper Johns were his lovers, and that a considerable body of his work concerns these men.

Artists' work is in the public domain, and *Hidden Histories* discusses the relationship between openness, homophobia, and the right to privacy (HH1.3). The project did not "out" closeted SSLs. No living person was included whose same-sex activities were not in the public domain, not to escape charges of "outing" but to render them irrelevant. What I argue is unacceptable, is for institutions to hide known important biographical information from viewers.

Glyn Philpot's *Portrait of a Man in Black*, 1913 (below) depicts Robert Allerton, his then lover, as does Duncan Grant's painting of Maynard Keynes (1908). These works show remarkable intimacy, and knowledge of the sitter's sexual relationship with the artists matters. This is not a concession to prurient interests, but important art historical data similar to that commonly provided when the sitter is known to have been the wife or different-sex lover.



4.3 Context

General context

Hidden Histories, at the NAGW was unique for its openness. No other institution of similar authority had presented such an unambiguous exhibition on the subject. That the museum was willing to state publicly what had long been spoken of privately gave institutional backing to what might otherwise have been seen as a marginal history. That NAGW was willing to risk such a discourse is to their credit and speaks of the possibility of the acceptance of others into vertical histories.

In a Different Light (*IADL*, 1995) looked at SSLs' contributions in depth. The goals and content of both exhibitions were diametrically opposed. *IADL* proposed a queer aesthetic, including artists who were different-sex lovers but whose work the curators thought expressed a dissonant chord to patriarchy's phallocentrism. *Hidden Histories* did not propose a same-sex aesthetic. It demonstrated that no visual or conceptual link exists between artists over a century of vast change. It simply stood as a starting point for a history of difference. *IADL* presented the links between Duchamp, Cage, and Rauschenberg in terms of visual styles within the frame of reference of camp and cross dressing (*Rrose Sélavy*), but it laid the groundwork for *Hidden Histories.*

The social context for *Hidden Histories* was complex. Within the NAGW, an open, and inclusive atmosphere was the norm, yet every museum varies in its commitment to knowledge, and the inclusion of others. Walsall is ethnically diverse with a large British Asian population in what was once a solidly white working class area. The Labour Party has been less accommodating of SSLs than might be expected, given their rhetoric of inclusion, and many in Asian communities are deeply conservative. Homosexuality is still illegal in India and Pakistan. Homosexuality in many Muslim countries is punishable by death, as seen by the state murder of two teenagers in Iran (2005) for consensual same-sex activity. Religious-based murders in the newly liberated Iraq, under the guise of "sexual cleansing" started after the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani issued a death fatwa (2005) for all same-sex lovers[15]. Channel 4's *Undercover Mosque* saw extremists in the UK's largest mosque preach anti-Semitism and homophobia: "In one scene, as hundreds of women and some children come to pray, a preacher calls for adulterers, homosexuals, women who act like men and Muslim converts to other faiths to be killed, saying: *'Kill him, kill him. You have to kill him, you understand. This is Islam.'*"[16]

Local context

Local politics surrounding the exhibition proved contentious. *Mad About the Boy* was scheduled to open in May 2004 to meet the requirements of institutional lenders. Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council owns the museum building, and was controlled by the Labour Party, who repeatedly threatened to close the building if not allowed to exercise complete censorship over the exhibition.

ing to lock the museum. The curators decided to place black tape rectangles where the works should have been, accompanied by a statement describing the censorship. One image depicted the Statue of Liberty in a burka, and the Council claimed that it would be 'unpatriotic[17]' to show it. As the exhibition took shape Labour Council members started to worry about potential press interest and 'scandal', and accused the Acting Director of scheduling the exhibition to hurt their re-election chances. I was not privy to all meetings between the Council and museum staff (also Council employees), but it was decided I should present all the selected work before members of the Council staff and that they would agree to each work that could be included.

A dossier was submitted to the museum, who passed it to Council staff with a detailed description of the project. I was asked to present to the Head of Arts, Events and Tourism, who is not an art historian, nor involved in contemporary visual arts. The meeting in February 2004, saw him, the Acting Director, her assistant, press officer, education officer, and myself in attendance. He began by stating the Council's fears about the exhibition being nothing but anuses and phalluses (his language was less scientific). I assured him that this project, historical in nature, was largely denuded of body parts, yet some male nudes would be shown, including Eugène Jansson's, *Sittande Yngling* (The Resting Lad, 1906 - below), and Henry Scott Tuke's *Noonday Heat,* depicting nude reclining youth on a beach, yet no genitalia could be seen.
The official was unsettled by several of the works, in particular by Felix Gonzalez-Torres' candy piece *Untitled (Ross)*, below. The conceptual work is made only from wrapped candy pieces



placed in the corner of a room. The weight of candy used is that of the artist's lover Ross, who suffered from an AIDS-related illness. Visitors are allowed to take away a piece of candy. The works are about adults and adult sexuality, and do not depict the body. The official angrily denounced the work demanding that it be excluded from the show, stating it would encourage paedophilia, adding that everyone knew that all 'homosexuals' were 'paedophiles' and that everyone knew that 'pedos' try to catch children with candy, and that he would not allow 'on my watch' such perversion to take place. I informed the gentleman that "I was a homosexual and was not a paedophile, nor were 99.9% of all homosexuals, and that in the UK, 95% of all convicted paedophiles are heterosexual men, just like him, but that did not make him a paedophile". My minutes of the meeting (submitted for the museum's approval) excluded his comments to prevent fanning the flames, as it was more important that the exhibition go ahead. The gentleman was never reprimanded for his outburst.





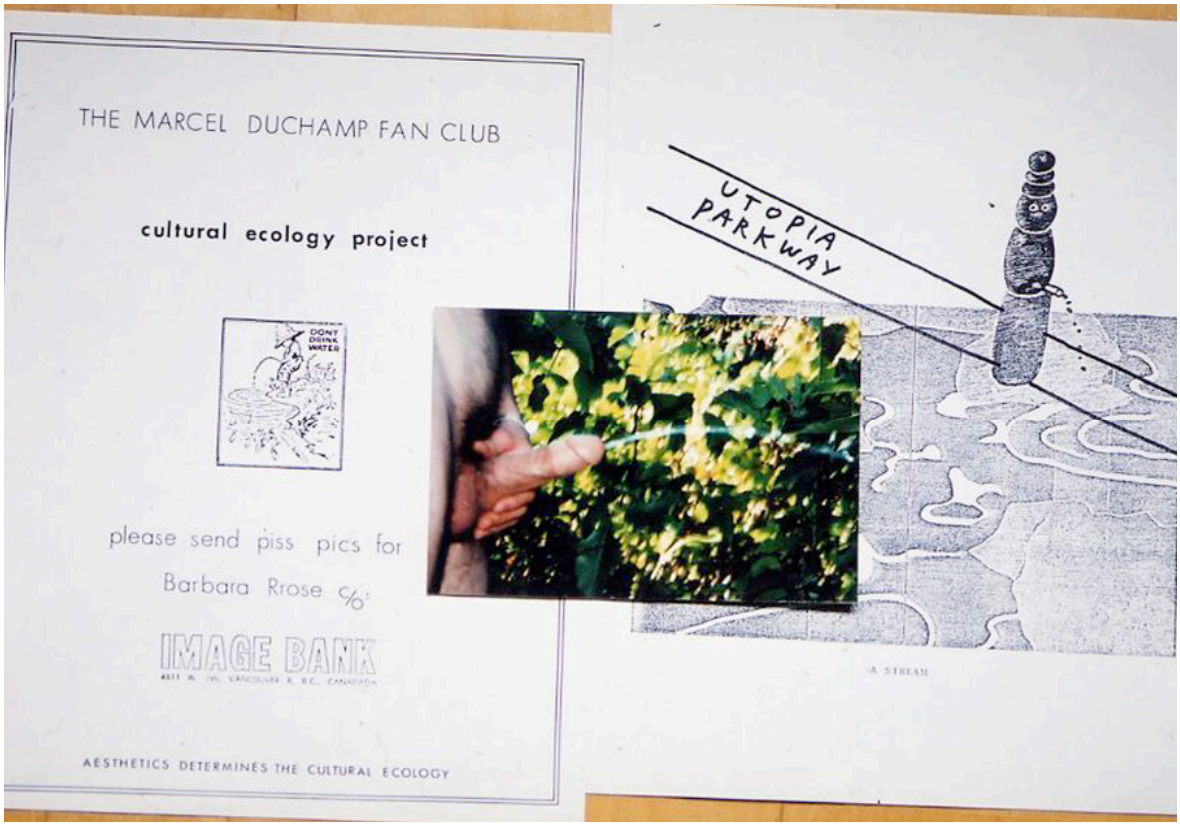
Gallery 3 (15+), from left, works by Michael Shaowanasai, Robert Mapplethorpe

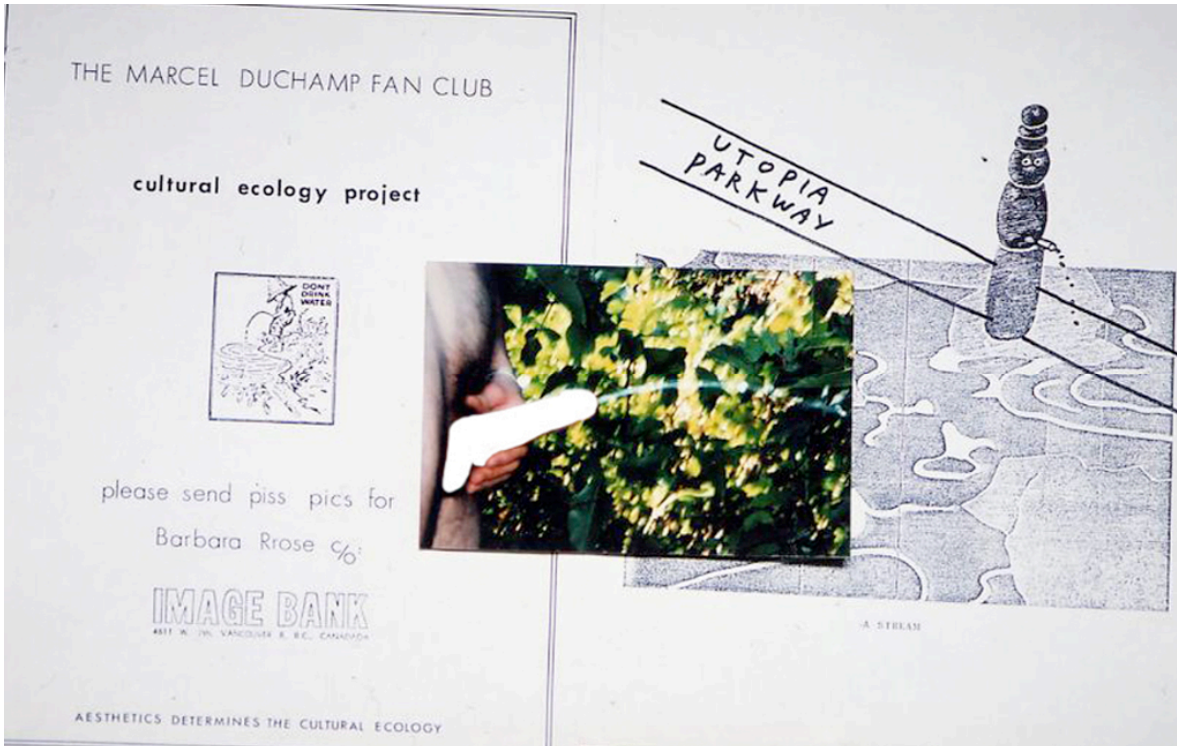
He demanded a room where children under fifteen were to be accompanied by an adult. The 15+ gallery included a drawing by Jean Cocteau *The Erection (Richard)*, two nude 1950's Bruce of L.A. photographs; a photograph of Thai artist Michael Shaowanasai; and Keith Boadwee's *Butthole Target Yellow*, a colour photograph of his anus painted to look like a Jasper Johns target painting. Three works were deemed too adult for anyone under eighteen, and were shown in the library, which had restricted access. These were a Tom of Finland magazine cover *Dick*, a drawing of a soccer player whose penis was visible through his shorts, an engraving by David Hockney depicting two men having oral sex, and black British artist Mike Sale's *Mike in a Jasper Conran Suit*, a deconstruction of Robert Mapplethorpe's *Man in Polyester Suit*, with himself in place of the original anonymous black man. All the works had been widely exhibited without incident. The council agreed that while no images of children were to be in the exhibition (nor any candy), children still might be *damaged* by the exhibition, and that they had a duty of care to prevent this, thus the 15+, and 18+ rooms.

These works should be placed in context as part of an exhibition over four floors of the museum including seventy other pieces that did not feature nudity, including works by Bacon, Johns, Twombly, Rauschenberg, and Andy Warhol. A glance at the dossier confirmed that erotica was only a small (if important) part of the exhibition.

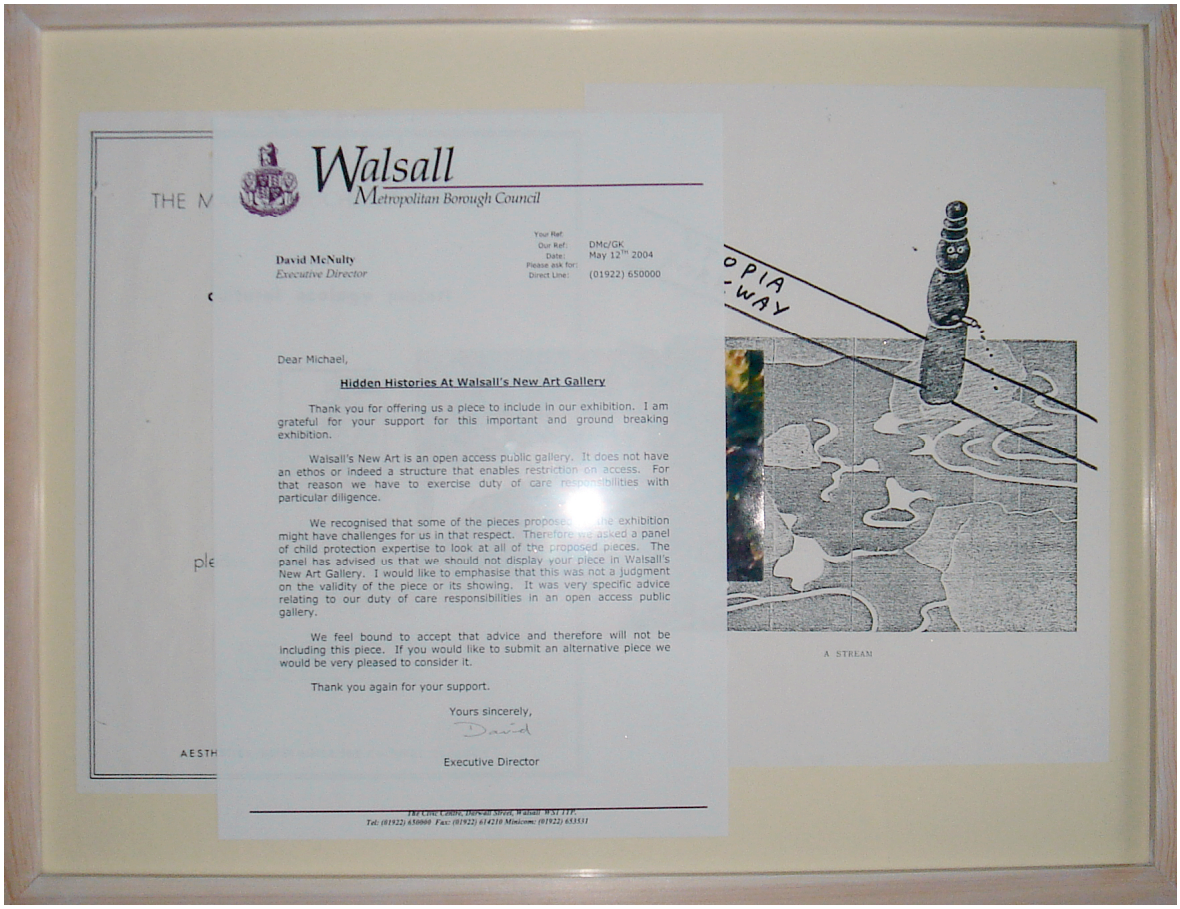
Only one other work was rejected: Michael Morris and Ray Johnson's mail art piece *Marcel Duchamp Fan Club.* This project started as correspondence between the artists in the 1970s and Morris updated the work for the exhibition. The work consists of two black and white photocopies each with a cartoon of a person urinating. Morris enclosed a contemporary photograph of a nude man urinating, asking that the pages be framed so that the new photo was in the middle. Morris' photograph was considered possibly illegal by the Council who said that the headless man might be seen as a flasher.

Morris agreed to white out the offending man's member. Overleaf is how the image is shown in the book, which the Council had no control over (as it was published by Artmedia). Morris stated that he preferred the blanked image to his original idea.





The Council did not consider this to be any better and banned it from the exhibition until offered a further compromise. Meeting with a more senior Councillor, I suggested that he write an official letter stating why they thought the image could not be shown and that we would mount it over the now *missing* yet still *offensive* penis. In writing the letter, the Councillor became part of the mail art project. Morris was extremely pleased with the outcome.





The framed letter collage is in the right corner

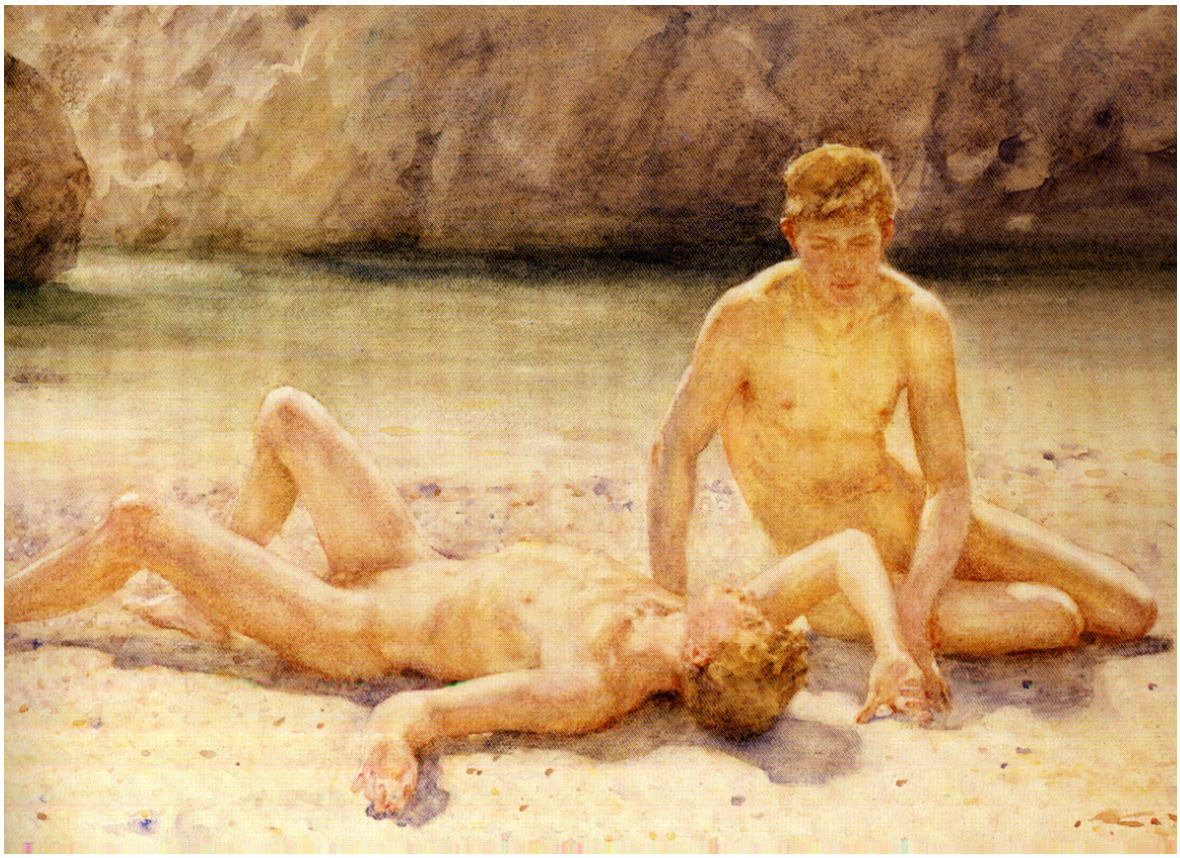
The work was shown with the Councillor's letter over the photograph in the 15+ gallery. The original image could be seen in the accompanying book, available at the museum's bookstore.

Once all the works were agreed upon, the museum hoped the Council's openly homophobic intervention would stop. The *Walsall Express & Star* (5 April, 2004) ran a headline prior to the exhibition, *"Fears as 'porn' art planned for Gallery"* stating that the exhibition would *"include work by a painter who specialised (sic) in images of naked boys,"* and that *"A senior source told the Express & Star that some staff at the £21 million gallery were concerned by the 'offensive' nature of the display by gay artists."* The Acting Director confirmed that of those who had access to the material, none were dissatisfied or offended, nor did anyone speak to the press about the exhibition. *The Express* stated that it was *"a senior figure in the leisure and culture department of Walsall Council"* who was briefing them.

The anonymous source stated that *"The arty people at the gallery don't care about this exhibi - tion, but the the (sic) other staff that work there have said to me that this is not suitable"* and *"From what I have heard it is quite pornographic and certainly contains things which will offend some peo - ple"*. The Acting Director strongly resisted the Council's censorship.

The only people who would have had a final list and images would have been the Labour Council members. Their determined homophobic assault would have been disheartening were it not for the 100% backing of the museum. This included the non-art staff; electricians, guards, and docents to whom I made a well received presentation. The museum asked for a curator's talk to the general public, during which I was constantly heckled by what turned out to be two Labour Party members who were eventually rounded on by the crowd who recognized them and demanded they shut up or leave. After the talk an older woman approached the Acting Director to thank her for bringing so many great works of art to Walsall. She added that she was glad she came regardless of her family who warned that the exhibit would only be *"gay porn"*, saying that her husband and adult children had tried to stop her from seeing the show. She added *"I told them, don't be ridiculous, of course they won't be showing gay porn."*

Henry Scott Tuke, *Noonday Heat (Bathing Group),* detail, 1901



4.4 Direct implications of homophobia

Title change

Mad About the Boy was a reference to common subterfuges used by SSLs including *mariage blanc*, or the use of a "beard," a woman pretending she was a fiancée or girlfriend. Women involved were often good friends who knew the male lovers of the men they lived with (Duncan Grant/Vanessa Bell[18])

The choice of MATB was intended to sum up the situation poetically. Council staff thought it too provocative and would not allow the exhibition to go forward with that title. *Hidden Histories* was more pedantic, and the change led to much confusion. Most artists had been contacted requesting their participation in *Mad About the Boy*, and had to be informed of the change. Nearly 200 artists (and estates) were involved, and it was a huge administrative task to re-secure permissions for picture reproduction or inclusion in the exhibition. The invitation card was not approved by the Council until April for a May opening. The media campaign would usually have been launched six months in advance, not merely weeks. NAGW produces a quarterly events sheet, which was also delayed by the Council but NAGW staff cannot be faulted, as they acted as professionally as possible.

Gallery 2, from left, works by Duncan Grant, John Minton and Francis





Gallery 2, from left, works by Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly, Larry Rivers, Andy Warhol and Keith Milow

Labels

Hidden Histories (book) looks at the labeling of works within the institution. In many museums, labels attached to work of SSLs give only title, date and medium, in contrast to greater biographical information often found for heterosexual artists. If a child is depicted, the biographical connection is likely stated. If the sitter is a different-sex lover, this too, is presented; Dora Maar is never just a model but almost always Picasso's mistress.

Possible reasons for institutional homophobia are examined in Hidden Histories. The Labour Council demanded the right to edit all labels, thereby openly intervening to manipulate knowledge. The Acting Director had written them on the basis of my biographies and they were grammatically correct. The same could not be said for those returned by anonymous censors, whose slow and curious cut and paste work meant that the labels returned only on the day of the exhibition's opening. Many made no sense at all, lacking verbs, and others had misspellings, from clumsy additions. With the exhibition due to open literally in minutes, the labels were placed as they were, for bad labels were better than none; this did prevent press preview of the complete show, which had a negative impact on coverage. The original labels were benign, male lovers were spoken of in academic language, biographical information was simply provided. The Council's behaviour was highly suspect, as local government doesn't usually rewrite museum texts.

It was important the exhibition open, whatever the name, for the fact of its being in that particular institution would break important ground. Living artists (in the exhibition) were canvassed about the events, and they too felt that whatever it took to get the show open had to be done. The exhibition aimed to provide historical information before it was lost, and was about openness and tackling institutional homophobia, but no one expected such difficulties from officials in Britain.

4.5 Signage

Robert Rauschenberg at the Metropolitan Museum, New York

Signage provides an institutional reading of objects, leading viewers into a false sense of security, in that it professes institutional objectivity, while being subjective in the information offered. What is left out becomes an issue when institutions choose information that might provide viewers with a deeper understanding of what they see. Asymmetrical editing prejudices the lives of SSLs and Walsall provides us with a clear example of the ways institutions deal with political or external pressure. Public institutions in general exist within a political arena and while freer in the UK, they must continue to battle with reactionary forces. Signage for *Hidden Histories* was vetted by the Council.

The following examples show this widespread phenomenon.

The signage for *Robert Rauschenberg: Combines* at the New York Metropolitan Museum (2005/6) was particularly misleading. A history of his work and life was mounted at the entry which most viewers read (some were taking notes at the time of my visit). Towards the end of the statement appeared the following: *"In 1949 Rauschenberg and Weil moved to New York. They married the following year, and their son, Christopher, now a photographer, was born in 1951. That spring Rauschenberg had his first solo exhibition, … and met the composer John Cage and the dancer-choreographer Merce Cunningham. Their friendship solidified in summer 1952 at Black Mountain, where they were teaching and Cy Twombly was a student. Rauschenberg and Twombly traveled to Europe, chiefly Italy, for a year, and in 1953, back in New York, they had concurrent exhibitions at the Stable Gallery*[19]."

The institution attempts to place Rauschenberg in the guise of a different-sex lover. If his sexuality is not important, a key question emerges: why inform the public that he was married and had a child? On the other hand, if such biographical data regarding Rauschenberg's different-sex activities is important so too must be information regarding his same-sex activities. He and Twombly travelled to Europe as lovers. This is widely documented, and it would seem that the trip was the equivalent of a honeymoon. It is not explained why Rauschenberg would leave his baby and its mother and go off for a year with a man, nor is it explained that Cage and Cunningham were lovers (*Hidden Histories*). Why were Rauschenberg's same-sex loves deleted?

In *Room 4* signage was equally deceptive about *Canyon* (below)[20] :

"…Canyon (1959), a Combine… includes a bald eagle perched on a cardboard box nest feath - ered by a pillow hanging below…Canyon is often considered an interpretation of the myth of Ganymede, cup bearer to the gods, and relates to the freestanding Combine Pail for Ganymede (1959) that stands nearby. Both works were inspired by Rembrandt's painting Ganymede in the Clutches of the Eagle, in which Zeus, having fallen in love with the boy, has turned himself into an eagle and abducted Ganymede... The boy is so frightened that he urinates: Pail for Ganymede is Rauschenberg's witty response. On the upper left corner of Canyon a photograph of a baby boy (the artist's son Christopher) is Rauschenberg's stand-in for Ganymede… The pillow that dangles off the canvas could be a visual nod to the buttocks of Rembrandt's little boy."



Rauschenberg uses an etch same-sex love story, yet the signage plants Rauschenberg firmly as heterosexual, using the child as a prophylactic against any hint of same-sex love. The classical tale has Ganymede as a youth, not a baby. The signage depicted a reproduction of Rembrandt's painting, and stoops so low as to use Rauschenberg's son as a balance to Rembrandt's imagery suggesting that perhaps Rauschenberg made the work with his son (as opposed to Twombly) in mind. They offer his son as a human shield against the possibility of Rauschenberg being seen in a same-sex light, steering the viewer from the homoerotics in Rauschenberg's works by placing him in the role of heterosexual historian and dad. No image of Rauschenberg's child appears on *Pail for Ganymede* (below) nor is there any reason given for Rauschenberg's attachment to this same-sex lust myth. The institution seeks to suggest that Rauschenberg is merely the painter of gods and heroes, and a possibly a hero for being brave enough to tackle difficult material.



American culture wars have lead conservative institutions to cower behind children. Such exhibitions are expensive and US museums must raise all their funding and are prone not to invite controversy. Homosexuality often dares not speak its name. The institution acted as if the mere mentioning of homosexuality would cause donors and visitors (with their cash) to flee screaming into the streets demanding that their children be protected from the truth. As Helen Lovejoy in *The Simpsons* might exclaim – *will somebody please think of the children*[21]!





The man in Rauschenberg's photographic series *Cy on the Roman Steps*[22], (1952) was not a passer-by, or a friend on holiday, but his male lover. The series depicts Twombly's legs at the top of marble steps, and each subsequent image (of five) sees Twombly closer to the camera and Rauschenberg. The final image depicts Twombly's crotch in jeans (above)[23]. The series is illustrated in *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950's* without information on their sexual relationship. The chronology mentions Rauschenberg's marriage to Weil, and birth of their son, but only mentions that he *"Sails for Europe with Cy Twombly in fall. Settles in Rome.*[24]*"* The same occurs in the 1997 Guggenheim exhibition *Robert Rauschenberg A Retrospective* and its catalogue[25].

In the *Combines* exhibition the museum did almost everything it could to prevent Rauschenberg's same-sex history from being seen. No signage stated that at the genesis of most of the Combines, Rauschenberg was in meaningful same-sex relationships. Only in the huge accompanying catalogue did they briefly mention Rauschenberg's same-sex activities. Page 225 states: *"During the second half of the 1950's, Johns and Rauschenberg were neighbors, friends, lovers, and, most significantly, artists developing work for which they would ultimately become well known.*[26]*"*



Robert Rauschenberg, *Bed*, 1955[27]

Nowhere in the exhibition was this information made available on the signage or labels. The books were expensive ($45 paper, $75 cloth), leading the majority of viewers without this same-sex information, while being continually informed of his heterosexual activities, which cannot be a mistake. Signage is important and discussed at most stages of exhibition planning. Most visitors would have missed the passage if they merely scanned the book. Rauschenberg's art should be at the centre of the discussion, but how is that possible if it is denied that it was often made for and about his male lovers, not for a wife, or child.





Two images of Twombly by Rauschenberg taken at Black Mountain College

Cy Twombly at Tate Modern, London

Biographical distortion is not only an American institutional failure. *Cy Twombly Cycles and Seasons* (2008) presented viewers with distorted signage, referring to the trip he and Rauschenberg took as one between *friends* and in no way acknowledged the same-sexual side of their relationship[28]. The free gallery guide distributed to visitors, had similar descriptions about the trip[29]. However on the following page, describing Room 2, it adds that *"Recently married, Twombly and his wife were staying in Sperlonga[30]"*. The free text does not mention Rauschenberg and Twombly's sexual relationship nor the romantic nature of their trip, but does place a heterosexual filter in front of Twombly by casually mentioning a wife. He is *outed* as a heterosexual in such an oblique way, that the information (that the authors decided should be included) makes sure that the reader sees Twombly as heterosexual in an almost invisible fashion. The information on his sexual life with Rauschenberg was definitely *not* included when their trip to Italy is mentioned.



This was an important trip for both men, so much so that it keeps being mentioned. In Tate's accompanying catalogue their trip is not described as a *honeymoon*. But it and his relationship with Rauschenberg are discussed many times (pages 19, 87, 99, 235), and they are always *just friends*. The chronology states that *"Rauschenberg, who at the time is separating from his wife Susan Weil, decides to join him*[31]*"*. Again a known same-sex lover – Rauschenberg – is *outed* as a heterosexual with a wife. However, after bringing up Rauschenberg's sexuality, no mention of his same-sex love is documented or alluded too, especially not his sexual relationship with Twombly. This part of the chronology is illustrated by two intimate photographs taken by Rauschenberg of Twombly, and a photomontage by Rauschenberg called *Cy + Bob – Venice* (1952), above, in which they are seen side by side. At no time does the text allude to the sexual nature of their friendship or the romantic status of their trip. It does call his visit to Cuba with Tatiana Franchetti *"their honeymoon trip*[32]*"* when it documents their marriage (1959) after

Rauschenberg had left Twombly for Jasper Johns. Twombly's heterosexual relationship is mentioned on pages 83, 238, 239, 240 and 241.

Were sexual information not important, readers would not be told (by the institution) that Twombly had married a woman. That the Tate does not place his relationship with Rauschenberg on equal footing, exemplifies the prejudice SSLs face. That is, one public institution supports another (heterosexual marriage) as though on behalf of its constituency. It is not for prurient interest that I argue that the viewer/reader should be presented with this information, but historical accuracy. The viewer/reader has the right to make up her or his mind as to how this information might colour their interpretation of the artworks, and it is not for institutions to hide it for whatever reason. I wrote to Sir Nicholas Serota and asked for his thoughts on the thinking behind their signage and lack of openness. Sir Nicholas' co-curator, Nicholas Cullinan responded to my letter by email observing that *"…I am not sure it would have added much to the discussion and appreciation of Twombly's work in the catalogue to have made direct reference to his relationship with Rauschenberg (although I would probably have mentioned it in passing if I had a completely free hand)…(it) was not an attempt by Tate to suppress their homosexuality, but rather my own decision to respect the artist's wishes*[33]*."*

It is this sort of biographical distortion that *Hidden Histories* hoped to correct. It confirms the need to continue contesting such practices, and demand openness from all involved. Homophobia works institutionally in the cultural sector as effectively as in interpersonal exchanges.

4.6 Installation of the works

Galleries

Gallery 1, scale view, works by Glyn Philpot, Simeon Solomon, Henry Scott Tuke and Eugène Jansson





Gallery 1, works by Charles Shannon and Charles Ricketts

The Council's lengthy co-selection of exhibits meant the exhibition layout was made in the final weeks before the exhibition, which was unusual. Museums design the physical hanging of the work, models are made and placed in their respective areas on a working floor plan, altered until a final version is decided upon by curatorial staff months in advance. While some works were given the go-ahead there was still doubt about many, including the Cocteau, Sale, and Morris.

The first gallery featured works by Charles Shannon and Charles Ricketts, painters and life long lovers, naked youth (no genitalia shown) by Tuke and Jansson, and a clothed self-portrait by Simeon Solomon, all from a variety of European countries where same-sex cultures were emerging. The Council deemed Cocteau's drawing too erotically explicit for this room.



Gallery 2, in the corner Keith Milow, Keith Vaughan

Gallery 2 contained large paintings by Bacon of his lover George Dyer, Minton of his lover Norman Bowler and Grant of his then lover Maynard Keynes on loan from Kings College Cambridge (the first time it had left the college). These works were hung together, each depicting a man who was the lover of the artist. In most institutions this biographical information is not placed on the exhibition labels, or euphemisms like *companion* are used. The Council eventually allowed this information to go uncensored. Keith Milow's *DATA III* (1994) is an abstract sculptural representation of a male lover. Rauschenberg and Twombly were represented in this gallery by works made about their Italian *journey*.



Gallery 3, works by Jasper Johns, William Burroughs, Ross Bleckner and Keith Boadwee

The entrance to Gallery 3 featured signage that works included might be too sexually explicit for those under 15, who would need to be accompanied by an adult, including the Cocteau, Morris/Johnson, and Robert Mapplethorpe *Star (Black),* 1983.

Other works in the room included a series of targets: Johns' *Target* multiple, Burroughs' shot target, Bleckner's *Bellybutton* (2001) and Boadwee's *Butthole Target Yellow* (1992). The room's focus was on the depiction of the male body including Shaowanasai's life sized self-portrait *Open Gate* (2002) but also had depictions of women like *Marlene Dietrich* (1942) by Horst P. Horst.



Gallery 4, works by General Idea, Michael Petry and Robert Indiana

Gallery 4 had four *Marilyn Monroe* prints by Warhol and at one end of the room General Idea's *Aids Wallpaper* referencing the *Love* works by Robert Indiana. They used the same font and colours as Indiana replacing Aids for Love. An Indiana *Love* work was hung on the wallpaper linking artists of different generations, which goes further back, as Indiana made works based on Marsden Hartley, a same-sex lover. This ongoing visual conversation exists over time, as many artists were in dialogue if not with each other, then each other's work. The room also included a bronze sculpture of my own *Thor* (2001).

Installations

Many installations were sited in the NAGW. It was the first time the whole building was used for an exhibition. Per Barclay's *Révérence (Arnaud)*, below, could be seen as viewers approached the building. Barclay is well known for installations that use water, oil and blood as reflecting surfaces and large photographic works.

Scale view



Barclay constructs his images with photographer Fin Serck-Hanssen who physically takes them. These two Norwegian men are friends and colleagues and their working practice is interesting. Barclay often uses *his* body in his photographs whereas Serck-Hanssen's work has featured portraits of AIDS sufferers, global pollution and an underwater series presented in the lobby of the museum. Serck-Hanssen's *Untitled (1997)*, inkjet on canvas floated above the heads of viewers in the main thoroughfare.

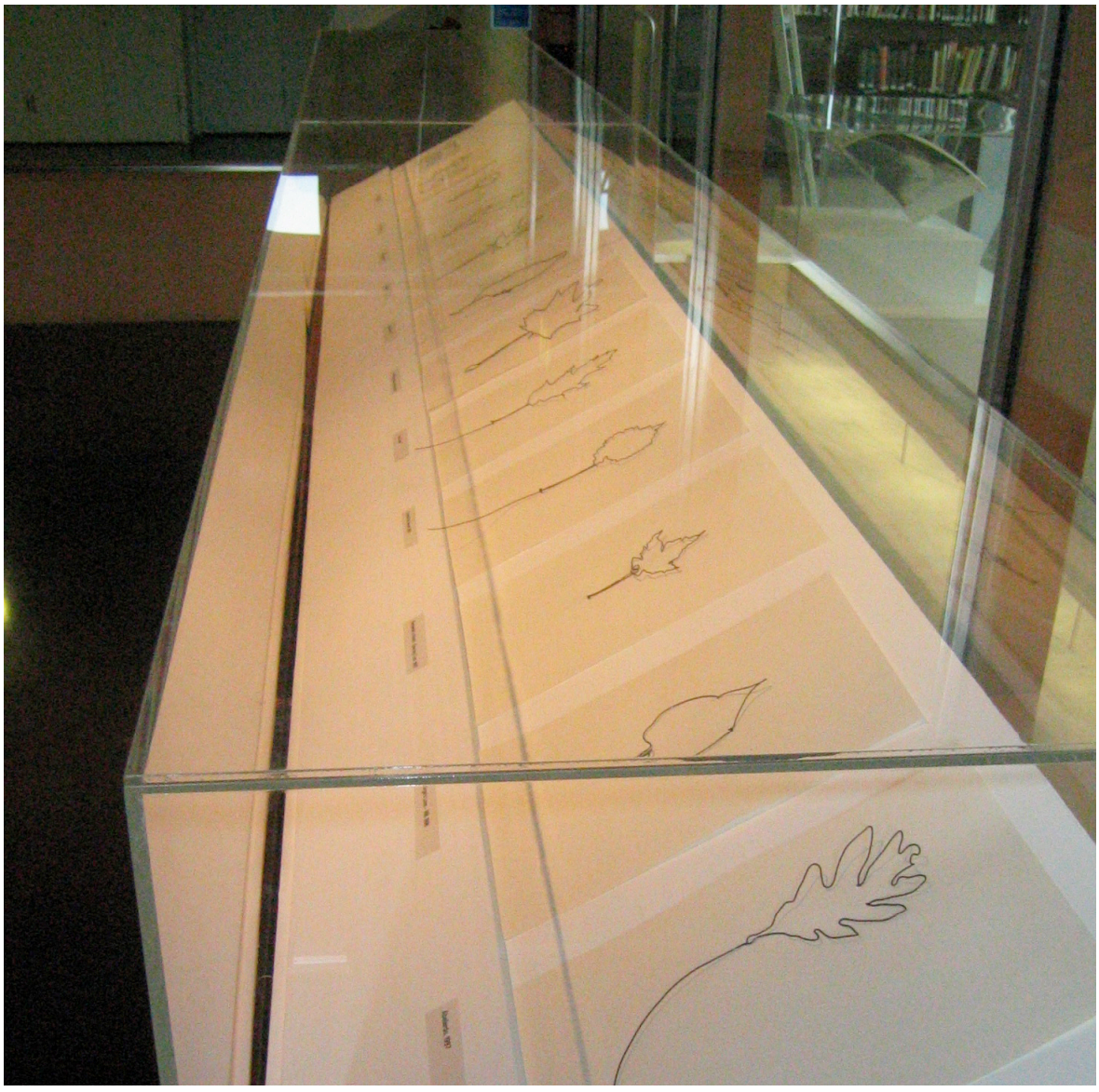
Serck-Hanssen, scale view



Library 18+

In front of the Library Eric Rhein's leaf portraits of people that he new who died from AIDS-related illnesses were sited. Rhein uses wire and found leaves to fashion an object he feels most represents his dead friend. These are mounted to individual sheets of paper except when two lovers have died, where both leaves are attached to one sheet of paper. These portraits number more than 200, and can be shown as a single image or in sets. Twelve were presented in a vitrine where viewers could see the 18+ works through the plate glass window.

Library entrance, Eric Rhein portraits





Library vitrine, front: David Hockney, rear: Tom of Finland

Visitors had to ring a bell to be allowed into the 18+ gallery. The Hockney and Tom of Finland pieces were drawings.



Mapplethorpe book and Sale photograph

The only photographic images were Sale's deconstruction of Mapplethorpe's *Man in Polyester Suit*, and the original displayed next to it in an open book from the library's collection.



McLachlin sticker in the cafe

John McLachlin's *50 Businessmen* comprised transparent stickers placed throughout the museum which could easily be missed. These small (3 x 4") stickers feature a headshot of a man and his name e.g. Tom Sawyer, Rev Suddon and could be bought in the book store. Each businessman is a gay porn star. The mysterious stickers were placed in situ without explanation except in the main gallery.



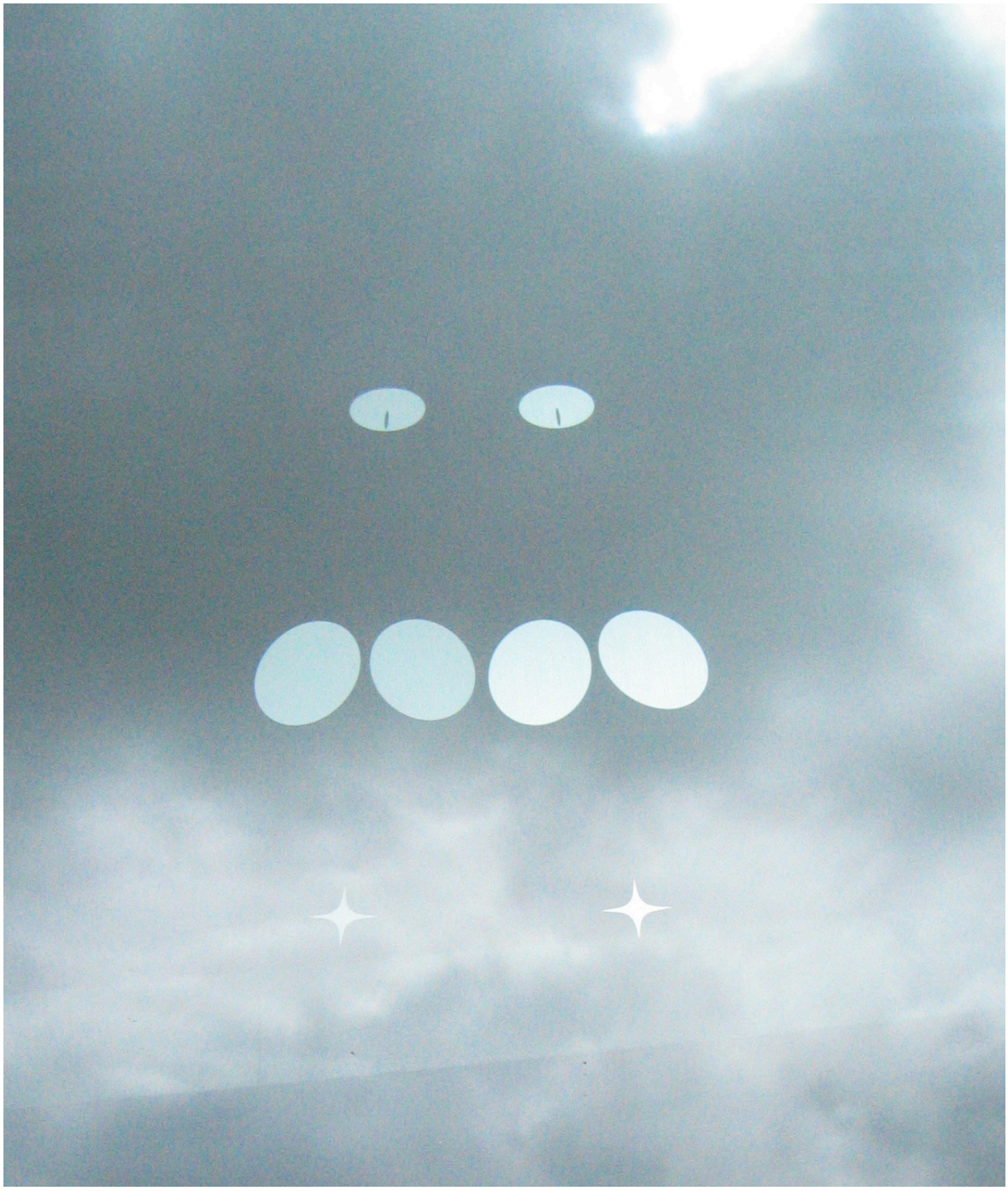
Barrett-Forster's life sized photo installation inside one of the elevators

Outside the entrance to the museum's permanent collection artist duo Barrett-Forster installed a multi-media installation *WRECK!,* featuring life-sized cutouts of people in various states of being wrecked. The work sprawled across the whole length of the museum foyer starting in the elevators where they had also placed photo images of people taped to the in/outside of the elevators.



Mulvihill in the *tearoom* with tea portraits on the wall left

The NAGW artist in residence studio was turned into a functioning tearoom by Bryan Mulvihill for his *World Art Tea Party*. Mulvihill went through the museum's collection and took all the paintings featuring tea and placed them in the room kitted out by IKEA (a sponsor). He asked members of the public to bring in their own teapots, which were added to display cases featuring the museum's collection. Mulvihill manned the room for a month serving tea and making *tea portraits* of visitors.



Detail of Lindell's installation

The final installation by John Lindell was installed in the windows of the top floor of the museum near the outdoor observatory. The large work looks like a series of abstract circles and crosses placed directly on the glass, and were representations of male bodies in various sexual acts. An oval represents a mouth, a star an anus and so forth. Like constellations in the sky, the work recalls the abstract nature of sex, and Wilde's statement, that *we are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.*[34]

The results of the elections in 2004 were that the Labour Party lost their majority on the Walsall Council.

I have attempted throughout this commentary, which ranges over the decade, firstly to provide an adequate account of artworks which, at each remove, have positioned themselves in contexts which have themselves changed, little by little, over time. The combination of images and text here has been informed, secondly, by the need to find the most appropriate means to exemplify and to profile the artworks themselves, such that the commentary, wherever it is located, serves to illuminate those practices, rather than to explain or analyse them. What is revealed in this portfolio, I would argue, is a particular journey, moving from anger into abstraction, which has its own coherence, its own repetitions and differences, its own agenda and its own changing relationships with the real.

[1] An edited version of this chapter has been published in The International Journal of Art & Design Education, Special Issue Lesbian and gay issues in art, design and media education, Guest Editor Nick Stanley, Blackwell Publishing, London, Volume 26 Number 1, 2007, ISSN 1476-8062, and I presented the article as a lecture at The National Society for Art and Design Education conference: Lesbian and gay issues in art and design education, March 23, 2007. Amy Levin, Director, Women's Studies at Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL will reprint the chapter in her upcoming book *Gender, Sexuality, and Museums: A Routledge Reader*, which will be published by Routledge in 2010 in hardback and paperback editions.

[2] Petry, Michael, *Hidden Histories: 20th Century Male Same Sex Lovers in the Visual Arts*, Artmedia Press, London, 2004

[3] Baker, Paul, Stanley, Jo, *Hello Sailor! The Hidden History of Gay Life at Sea*, Pearson Education Limited, London, 2003, page 80

[4] Mitchell, Mark, and David Leavitt, David (eds), *Pages passed from hand to hand, The hidden tradition of homosexual literature in English from 1748 to 1914*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1998, page xiv

[5] Jennings, Elizabeth (trans), *The Sonnets of Michelangelo*, The Folio Society, London, 1961, page 59

[6] Saslow, James, *Pictures and Passions, A History of Homosexuality in the Visual Arts*, Penguin Books, New York, 1999, page 83

[7] Spencer, Colin, *Homosexuality, A History*, Fourth Estate, London, 1995, page 10

[8] Katz, Jonathan Ned, *Love Stories: Sex between Men before Homosexuality*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2001, page 73

[9] Sinfield, Alan, *The Wilde Century*, Cassell, London, 1994, page 3

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[11] Peppiatt, Michael, *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1997, page 78

[12] Jivani, Alkarim, *It's not unusual: A History of Lesbian and Gay Britain in the Twentieth Century*, Michael O'Mara Books, London, 1997, page123

[13] de Oliveira, Nicolas, Oxley, Nicola, Petry, Michael, *Installation Art*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1994

[14] Blake, Nayland, Rinder, Lawrence, Scholder, Amy (eds), *In a Different Light: Visual Culture, Sexual Identity, Queer Practice*, City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1995, page 12

[15] http://www.sistani.org and
http://iraqilgbtuk.blogspot.com/2006/03/iraq-ayatollah-sistani-says-death-to.html

[16] *http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2008/aug/22/channel4.islam?gusrc=rss&feed=uknews*

[17] Arts Journal.com, The Daily Digest of Arts, Culture & Ideas, Thursday, February 13, 2003, "Officials Order Islamic-Themed Art Removed", http://www.artsjournal.com/visualarts/20030201archive.shtml
and link to BBC News, February 13, 2003, "'Islamic' art banned from show", http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/2757743.stm

[18] Spalding, Frances, *Duncan Grant*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1997, page 165

[19] All signage was directly on the wall and I hand copied the texts exactly onto sheets of paper as photography was not allowed. Where I quote signage it is from my direct notes.

[20] Hopps, Walter, Davidson, Susan, *Robert Rauschenberg A Retrospective*, Guggenheim Museum Publications, New York, 1997, pages 134-135

[21] http://simpsons.wikia.com/wiki/Helen_Lovejoy

[22] Hopps, Walter, Davidson, Susan, *Robert Rauschenberg A Retrospective*, Guggenheim Museum Publications, New York, 1997, pages 72-73

[23] This work remained in the collection of the artist and was also called *Cy and Spanish Steps*

[24] Hopps, Walter, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950's*, Menil Foundation Inc, Houston, 1991, page 226

[25] See *Hidden Histories* for additional comment

[26] Schimmel, Paul, *Autobiography and Self-Portraiture, Robert Rauschenberg: Combines*, MOCA, LA and Steidl Verlag, Los Angeles, 2005, page 225

[27] Hopps, Walter, Davidson, Susan, *Robert Rauschenberg A Retrospective*, Guggenheim Museum Publications, New York, 1997 pages 114-115, and see *Hidden Histories* pages 24-25 for further commentary about the work made while Johns and Rauschenberg were lovers.

[28] The exact signage was
"Room 1
Twombly was able to bring together American and European influences even at the start of his career. The earliest painting in this room, MIN-OE, was made while he was studying at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. Other works look back to a formative trip to Italy and Morocco that Twombly made in 1952 with fellow artist Robert Rauschenberg."
From my notes. I should state that I was stopped when I tried to photograph the signage and told by a guard that it was not allowed.

[29] Cullinan, Nicholas, Bolitho, Simon, *Cy Twombly: Cycles and Seasons*, Tate Modern, London, 2008

[30] ibid

[31] Serota, Nicholas (ed), *Cy Twombly: Cycles and Seasons*, Tate Publishing, London, 2008, page 235

[32] ibid, page 238.

[33] See Appendix I for copy emails in full.

[34] Wilde, Oscar, *The Works of Oscar Wilde*, Collins, London, 1948, *page 58*
The line is spoken by Lord Darlington in *Lady Windermere's Fan*, 1892, Act III,

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Appendixes

Appendix I - Correspondence

MOCA
London

Museum of Contemporary Art
Project Space
113 Bellenden Road
London SE15 4QY
44.207.771.9778
Reg No 2945635
VAT No 697277765
www.mocalondon.co.uk
info@mocalondon.co.uk

Sir Nicholas Serota, Director
Tate Modern
Bankside
London SE1 9TG

September 4, 2008

Dear Sir Nicholas

I would like to say how much I enjoyed seeing the Cy Twombly exhibition.

You might remember that I borrowed several major works from the Tate for my show Hidden Histories at the New Art Gallery Walsall. I have enclosed a catalogue for your reference.

In it I was quite open about the relationship between Twombly and Rauschenberg and their 1952 honeymoon trip to Europe leaving Rauschenberg's wife and year old child back in America (pages 23, 24, 132, 133). I was rather disappointed to see that in the Tate signage, free gallery guide and in your extensive catalogue all such openness about their relationship was missing (your catalogue pages 19, 87, 99, 235) while documenting his heterosexual relationships (your's 83, 238-241). I was wondering why that was? Perhaps you could let me know your thinking on this subject.

I await with interest seeing the similar Tate information for the upcoming Bacon exhibition.

All best wishes

Michael Petry
Director

Nicholas Cullinan <Nicholas.Cullinan@tate.org.uk Thu, 9/11/08 5:03 PM

Dear Mr. Petry,
I am writing in reply to your letter to Sir Nicholas Serota regarding the Cy Twombly exhibition. Your question is an interesting and fair one, and not without some history. The short answer is that both Twombly and Rauschenberg were rather sensitive to any mention of their relationship. Cy Twombly and Nicola Del Roscio read through all the catalogue material before it went to print, and I very much doubt that they would have countenanced this issue being discussed or even mentioned. Rauschenberg was even more vehement about any mention of his sexual identity. Cy and Nicola were also reluctant to have other biographical details referred to, such as the fact that Cy married into an aristocratic Italian family or that he lived in a palazzo. This may seem rather odd to you (as it did to me at the time), but their reasoning was two-fold. Firstly, Cy very much dislikes discussing any biographical details of his life. Secondly, Nicola was wary of Cy being perceived as "grand" or "refined", as these notions have been used against him in the past to prejudice the reception of his work.

Of course, the matter of Twombly and Rauschenberg's sexual orientation is a separate, but related, issue. It is clear that both were opposed to being publicly referred to as gay or bisexual artists. I do not know the reason for this, but wonder if it is a legacy from coming of age in America in the 1950s. Again, this may seem like an odd and old-fashioned attitude, but I very much felt that we had to respect their wishes and privacy in this matter. Beyond this, I do often have concerns about biographical fact being used to illuminate an artist's work. Perhaps the apex (or nadir) of this is provided by some of the more speculative literature on Picasso, where psychobiography is used to 'explain' his artistic output. Another example is the burgeoning literature on Caravaggio that discusses his occasionally homoerotic iconography in terms of his own presumed homosexuality, even through no record exists of this, and all the evidence points to him being resolutely heterosexual. This is quite separate from a straightforward biography of an artist, and of course John Richardson's volumes on Picasso are exemplary. The distinction I am making is that I am not sure it would have added much to the discussion and appreciation of Twombly's work in the catalogue to have made direct reference to his relationship with Rauschenberg (although I would probably have mentioned it in passing if I had a completely free hand), while it would be ludicrous to write a biography on Twombly or Rauschenberg and not discuss their sexuality.

This issue was discussed with greater transparency in two round tables discussions during the Twombly conference, held on June 19th this year. These discussions were recorded and should be available through the Tate website. I do want to assure you, however, that the absence of any mention of Twombly and Rauschenberg's relationship was not an attempt by Tate to suppress their homosexuality, but rather my own decision to respect the artists' wishes. Such an effort to eliminate issues of gender and sexuality would clash very badly indeed with my own personal convictions and politics, but in this particular instance, my views had to take a back-seat to those of my subjects.

I do think that a serious discussion of Johns, Rauschenberg and Twombly, and one that encompassed their sexual identity in a broader social framework of America in the post-war period would be an interesting one. But this would not meet with the approval or assent of the subjects during their lifetime. Such are the politics of working with living artists!

I do hope this answers your question and please don't hesitate to contact me if I can clarify anything.

Yours sincerely,
Nicholas Cullinan

Nicholas Cullinan: by email, and cc by post to Sir Nicholas Serota

Dear Nicholas
Thank you for taking the time to reply to my letter regarding the Tate's Cy Twombly exhibition.

I would like to comment on your reply in detail. I am glad that you are aware of the sexual relationship between Twombly and Rauschenberg as many art historians seem to be in the dark about it. While Rauschenberg was often sensitive to his sexuality and his same-sex relationships being discussed, both he and Twombly played/play up their marriages and children, thus bringing the issue of their sexuality into the public domain and up for debate and honesty. I understand that in his later years he became much more honest about his relationships with Johns and Twombly after being openly ridiculed for his involvement in placing what might be called a heterosexual filter in front of his work at the time of his Guggenheim retrospective. I believe he was shocked by the open hostility that many younger artists of many sexes and genders showed to his closeted stance, and the museum's collaboration with it.

That said I am sure you are right that Twombly is still resistant to openness. But as I mentioned in my letter, that did not stop you speaking about his marriage or child – again placing a heterosexual filter in front of his work. By not mentioning his sexual relationship with Rauschenberg, a serious affair for both of them (sexually and artistically) you presented him only as a heterosexual. This may have been his choice, but would it have not been better to have omitted all references to his sexuality?

I never refer to artists as gay, bisexual or Queer for that matter, unless they themselves do. I refer to their same-sex relationships with other men, which does not exclude different-sex relationships, as is the case for Twombly and Rauschenberg. I understand your concern to respect their wishes and privacy but again wonder if privacy is not lost once you mention their marriages and children?

When it comes to how their relationship and the trip in question comes into play with their work and why it is important to know of it in that regard, one need only look at the image reproduced in your catalogue Cy + Bob – Venice (1952) or more importantly Rauschenberg's photo series Cy on the Roman Steps, (1952). Twombly was not just a passer-by, not just a friend on holiday, but his male lover. If you are not aware of this series the images depict Twombly's legs at the top of white marble steps, and with each subsequent image he gets closer to the camera and Rauschenberg. The final image depicts Twombly's crotch covered in tight jeans. This work always remained in Rauschenberg's possession and was also called Cy and Spanish Steps. Their sexual relationship showed up in the work, as is did with his and Johns and others. My book Hidden Histories charts many such instances.

I am not interested in prurient information or psychobiography, but where a relationship throws light on work it is important to be honest about that relationship. Even in the case of Picasso it is important to know that Dora Mara was not just a passerby or model, but his lover. It deepens our understanding of many of the images he made of her, as it is with Bacon and George Dyer.

While I understand that Tate wanted to respect Twombly's wishes, there is also a responsibility to the viewer and the historical record. If a great artist was a racist, or anti-semite would Tate respect their wishes to not have this side of their life raised? The internalization of homophobia is still homophobia. Perhaps in Twombly's case all mention of his sexuality could have been better left out of the time line - along with the information that his wife was an aristocrat and that they live in a palazzo.

All best wishes.

Michael Petry

Appendix II - Gay Hanky Code

The Following is a partial list of gay hanky codes.

In general if worn in the left back pocket it means the wearer is the active partner and on the right, the passive partner.

Color	Meaning	Practice
Black	SM	hardcore SM play, especially whipping.
Grey	Bondage	play involving limiting the bottom's ability to move
Charcoal	Latex	rubber play
White	Masturbation	
Red	Fisting	
Pink	Dildos	
Orange	No limits	when worn on the left, orange indicates that the wearer will top in relatively any fetish. Conversely, when orange is worn on the right, it indicates the wearer will bottom in relatively any fetish, anytime, anywhere.
Coral	Feet	foot play
Yellow	Watersports	urinating on (left), or being urinated upon by (right)
Brown	Scat	excrement play
Light blue	Oral sex	wants fellatio (left), desire to perform fellatio (right)
Navy Blue	Anal sex	dominant/top during sexual anal intercourse (left), submis sive/bottom during sexual anal intercourse (right)
Robin Egg Blue	69	joint oral sex
Aqua	Aquaphilia	sex in water, bathtub, shower or swimming pool
Medium Blue	Uniform fetish	police uniforms
Teal	Cock/ball	genital torture
Khaki	Military Sex	likes wearing military uniforms
Olive drab	Military person	military top (left), military bottom (right)
Kelly green	sex for money	left: a male prostitute; right: a john (i.e. someone looking for a prostitute)
Hunter green	Family play	daddy/boy/brother fantasy play
Lime	Sitophilia	eating food off someone's body or having food eaten off self
Chamois	Motorcycle	wearer is looking for sex involving a motorcycle
Mauve	Navel fetish	
Dark Pink	Tit torture	
Magenta	Armpits	likes armpits licked (left), likes to lick armpits (right)
Fuchsia	Spanking	
Purple	Piercings	
Lavender	Cross dressing	gender play
Mustard	Size queen	has/looking for a large penis
Gold	Menage-a-trois	two looking for one (left) or one looking for two (right)
Apricot	Chubby chaser	
Peach	Bear or cub	who is interested in sex with another bear or cub
Beige	Rimming	anal-oral contact
Camouflage	Rugged outdoorsman	having sex outdoors in the country
Gingham	Urban outdoorsman	having sex in city parks
Doily	Tearoom trade	likes to have sex in public lavatories
Gold lamé	Muscle sex	looking for sex with bodybuilders
Silver lamé	Starfucker	looking for a rock star or male groupie
Houndstooth	Biting	likes to bite (left) or likes to be bitten (right)
Argyle	Geeks	a geek or nerd (left) or interested in geeks or nerds (right)

Appendix III - Portfolio List

Portfolio List

DVD Power Point presentation of art works by Petry

Catalogues of art works by Petry

1 *The Revenge of the Florist*, colour catalogue of works and text by Petry, 2009
2 *Golden Rain Vol. I & II*, colour catalogue of installation and text by Petry, 2008
3 *True Love*, colour catalogue of works by Petry, 2006
4 *The Trouble with Michael,* colour catalogue of works and text by Petry, 2000

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1 *Hidden Histories*, colour catalogue and text by Petry, 2004

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