



SuperMassiveBlackHole

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SuperMassiveBlackHole is dedicated to contemporary photography and the photographic imagery resulting from the time-based processes found in many interdisciplinary art practices today. The magazine seeks to engage and represent respective projects and ideas which utilise Photography (digital or analogue), New Media (high or low tech), Performance and Sculpture (through documentation). Fine Artists are encouraged to engage with the magazine as a way of exhibiting, testing, developing and experimenting with new (or old) ideas whether it is through a single image or a structured project.

Time, Space, Light and Gravity are what drive SuperMassiveBlackHole

SuperMassiveBlackHole is a free online magazine, and is published three times annually. **SuperMassiveBlackHole** accepts almost anything involved with the photographic process, from straight photography to video, performance documentation or written treatments. All submissions should be sent via Email. Please check the submission guidelines at:

smbhmag.com

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Queer Times

Being queer is not about a right to privacy; it is about the freedom to be public, to just be who we are. - Queers Read This

The use of the word 'queer' to describe a spectrum of experience beyond the hetero-normative binaries of male / female or gay / straight has its roots in the distribution of a flier at the Pride March in New York City in June 1990. Entitled *Queers Read This*, the anonymously authored pamphlet was much more than a cry to reclaim a hate-infused insult. The text called for queer people to remain vigilant about their rights to express themselves fully in the everyday. Key to this is the ability of queer artists to be able to unapologetically create work that reflects a diversity of personal, social, political and cultural experiences, and for this work to be seen freely by others.

In 2013 legislation in over 70 countries around the world, in nations as diverse as Russia, India, Uganda, Singapore and Jamaica, punishes lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans* people for no more than being who they are, for being queer. The ways in which this takes place includes lifelong imprisonment, hard labour, torture, fines, forced psychiatric treatment and death by public stoning. While more 'liberal' countries may not inflict homophobia in such overtly inhumane ways, contempt, prejudice and violence are regularly and insidiously inflicted upon queer people through institutions such as education, marriage, healthcare, family, religion, news media and entertainment, and can impact upon lives just as profoundly.

To photograph is to tell and to show. The work by the artists in this *Queer Times* issue present a range of perspectives and narratives that quietly, loudly, playfully or directly point out that queer people have a right to be looked at and to be heard. These photographs may or may not be rooted in dissent or acts of defiance but collectively they speak out about how to be queer is to be diverse and to strike chords that sometimes chime in unison, sometimes in discord. They remind us that indeed we do live in queer times, and that underpinning the need to reclaim is a vital and continued necessity to take back more than just words ●

Anthony Luvera, London, 2013

Michael Koch

(Germany)

Selected Works

People of all cultures and communities are not only individuals with unique personalities and stories but are simultaneously also part of a psychological, social and aesthetic system of self-dramatization and social perception which often goes along with explicit roles. Even though the culture of European modernity - with its emphasis on the individual - has peeled off most traditional role models and pleads for the differentiated perception of each person, still a filter between the self and the other exists. In the moment of the representation of oneself by fashion, which not only includes hairstyle, makeup and clothing but also parameters such as gesture, mimic and language, a self-controlled image is created. Though the underlying elements of this image are seldom created and conceived by origin. The portraits become substitutes for certain roleplayers, for gender archetypes or broken stereotypes. These role models, from dandy to diva refer to the personality of the performers that are examined in the process of explanation.





(Before) *Limbo*; (Here) *Hommage; Nero*

Adelaide Ivánova

(Brazil/Germany)

Autonomy (...)

Michael and Kai are two transgender boys living in Berlin. They were born in a female body. They had barely left puberty when they started another changing process with hormone therapy. They are a couple. They also try to look as similar as possible to one another. And they are punks.

All these aspects made Michael and Kai extremely mysterious for me. I was never able to fully understand what it feels like, to carry this duality within oneself and, moreover, to live as a couple under those circumstances. For months, I struggled to explain, through photography, what I was seeing – trying to be a neutral observer. But when I accepted I would never be able to catch in pictures their complexity, it was when this series was actually born. I started to use my confusion as a narrative tool, trying to work with the questions that would arouse in me during our interaction.

This project is my attempt to talk about being transgender, with my non-transgender perspective. Above all, it is my attempt to investigate the body while a tool for self-understanding.

adelaideivanova.com





(Before) *Untitled*; (Here) *Untitled*; *Untitled*

Ami Barnes

(UK/Hong Kong)

Work in progress

For the photographer images of the self have many functions – they can be accurate and deeply valued representations of the past self, they can be glorious fictions; sometimes they are both simultaneously. Past works, like past selves, inform the present and can also be totally irrelevant to the here and now.

In 2010, when I created a body of work that looked at human connections using first dates with men to give structure I suspected but wasn't certain that I was gay. I never imagined how any future girlfriend would read such honest fictions.

It turns out that such blurings of reality make uncomfortable viewing for her and so this ongoing body of work was created as a counterweight to the photographic ghosts of my past. Using a remote release to allow control over our representation shift between the two of us we have begun framing a new photographic reality – as my girlfriend has insinuated herself into my life, carved a niche for herself in my heart, so too is she situating herself within my photography.

amibarnes.com





(Before) *Untitled*; (Here) *Untitled*; *Untitled*

Thomas Hellstrom

(United States)

Xeno:Mke 2013-2023

Xeno:Mke 2013-2023, a collaborative exhibition and web project between Thomas Hellstrom and the LGBT Community of Milwaukee, WI USA took place summer 2013 at Milwaukee LGBT Community Center. *Xeno:Mke 2013-2023* featured historical material from The LGBT Collection, Archives and Special Collections, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Libraries, the photo archive from Milwaukee's oldest LGBT lounge *This Is It!* est. 1968 and over 100 portraits taken in a free portrait studio in various locations throughout the city. As *Xeno:Mke 2013-2023* considered the community's past and present, so it considered its future. Conceived as a time capsule to be opened in 2023 participants were invited to leave messages from a landmark year for LGBT Civil Rights.



thomashellstrom.net

xenomke.tumblr.com



(Before) Untitled; (Here) Untitled, Courtesy of University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Libraries, Jerry Johnson Collection of Wisconsin Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Ephemera, 1978-2006; Untitled

Mélanie Pottier

(France)

Révolution

A revolution is an event which disrupts an order, but it is also be a closed curve motion. A revolution can be disordered but also ordered, to close in on a circle. *Révolution* is about the boundary between subversive and norm. *Révolution* speaks about the way queer females can exist both within and outside the limits of subversion and exploitation. To be queer can be a way of subverting dominant gender norms but it can also amplify the polar identity of gender norms. It can be a revolution closed on curved motion included by the norms and it can also be out of norms, something which disturbs, broken order.





(Before) *Untitled*; (Here) *Untitled*; *Untitled*

Dean Hollowood

(United Kingdom)

It's All True

These three photographs form part of a series that was taken on the evening of 31st October 1993 in the streets and bars around the Castro, San Francisco. Orson Wells' lost classic *It's All True* was playing at the Castro Theatre that night, the name up in lights above the crowd. This series offers a window on gay life in the post AIDS early 1990's when the issue of sexuality was very much at the forefront of both political and social change. Expressions of difference and visibility were an important part of the gay rights movement as was the notion of Queer. This brought about an attitude and unapologetic gender blurring that we now often take for granted. The participants in the Halloween festivities play up to the camera, hidden behind their costumes. This distortion of reality is reflected in the final one off pieces, the prints having been manipulated in the darkroom over the intervening 20 years. I chose to expose their history by highlighting the physical actions that took place, from solarising, bleaching and toning to incorporating the negative frame within the photograph.

deanhollowood.com





(Before) *Untitled*; (Here) *Untitled*; *Untitled*

Ryan Riddington

(Germany/UK)

Chariots

Chariots I-III shows the flawed, skip-like forms of communal / 'private' spaces in a gay sauna. Rather than scenes of sexual pleasure, here we are witness to the almost unrecognisable aftermath.





(Before) *Chariots I*; (Here) *Chariots II*; *Chariots III*

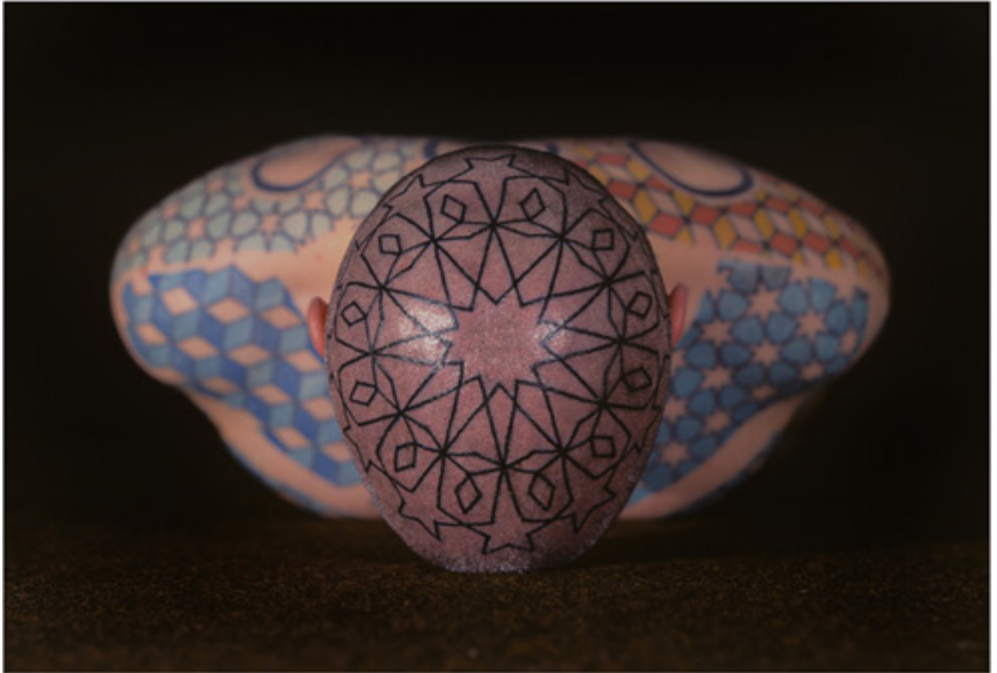
Lee Wagstaff

(UK/Germany)

Selected Works

I create performative (self) portraits that pursue an alliance between faith, space, geometry and anatomy. I use my body as an arena for investigation, experimentation and exhibition, as a means of supplication and contemplation. Through repetitive technical processes and *abductive* reasoning I seek a deeper understanding of my faith and scripture by exploring an aesthetics of theology as part of my own Christian journey.





(Before) *The Watchmaker*, 2011; (Here) *Lamb*, 1999-2000; *Legion*, 1999-2000

Patricia Karallis

(Australia/UK)

On The Cusp

Transgender is a term that was first used by Virginia Prince, a leading American transgender activist during the 60s through to the 80s. The term has since become an umbrella to cover a collective of individuals who don't conform to traditionally accepted norms of gender identity or behaviour. Many documentary photographic portraits that deal with transgender issues exploit the genders of their subjects, pointing to an Otherness or eroticising their bodies. My main prerogative in *On The Cusp* is in dispelling stereotypes; therefore, photographing the sitters in their own environment contrasts with the dehumanising approach that dominate images made of transgender people, which often focuses solely on their gender or trans-status, or uses them to further a specific point about social construction and gender.

As part of this project, I invited people who identify as transgender to take part in shaping its outcome and to sit as models for the production of the work. My main ambition for the work is to break down barriers and dispel stereotypes about people who identify as transgendered, with the work encouraging an open discussion amongst people of all sex, gender and preferences. By creating the photographs in the sitters homes and in their everyday attire, signifiers attached to common stereotypes are stripped away - these are everyday people in everyday environments

patriciakarallis.com





(Before) Felix; (Here) Leng; Lucy

Karolina Sobel

(Poland)

The Heterotopia

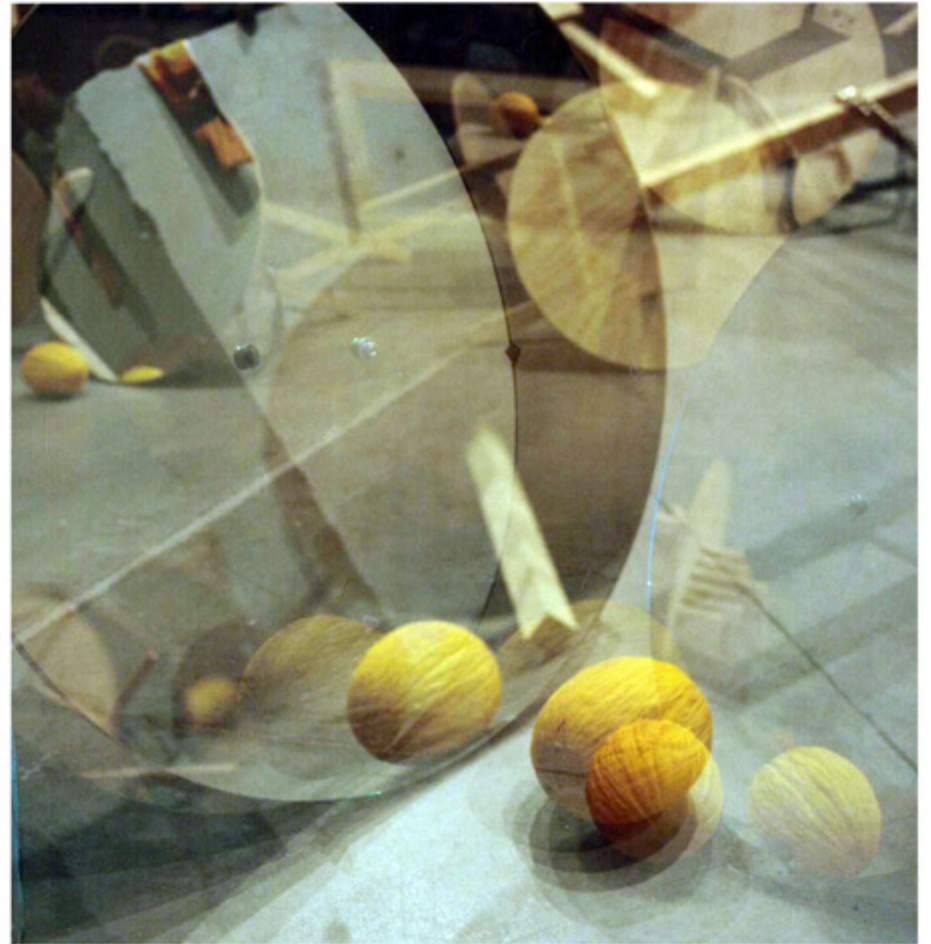
We are at a moment. The present epoch is an epoch of space, of simultaneity, epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of near and far, of the side by side, of the dispersed. The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space. - M. Foucault

I try to capture the intrinsic qualities of space by multiple exposure, gathering the layers of surface (I called it “surfacing”). My intention is a play with subjective and intuitive juxtaposition of different spaces – those public and private, cultural and useful, family and social, leisure and work, internal and external, protected and open, urban and rural ones. By exploration and encounter, there are some spaces which define our knowledge of the world, some places which inform our understanding of who we are, and the landscapes that we could call home.

In my works, I intend to accumulate time and create a space which becomes placeless.

karolinasobel.pl





(Before) *Untitled*; (Here) *Untitled*; *Untitled*

Claudia Moroni

(Italy/UK)

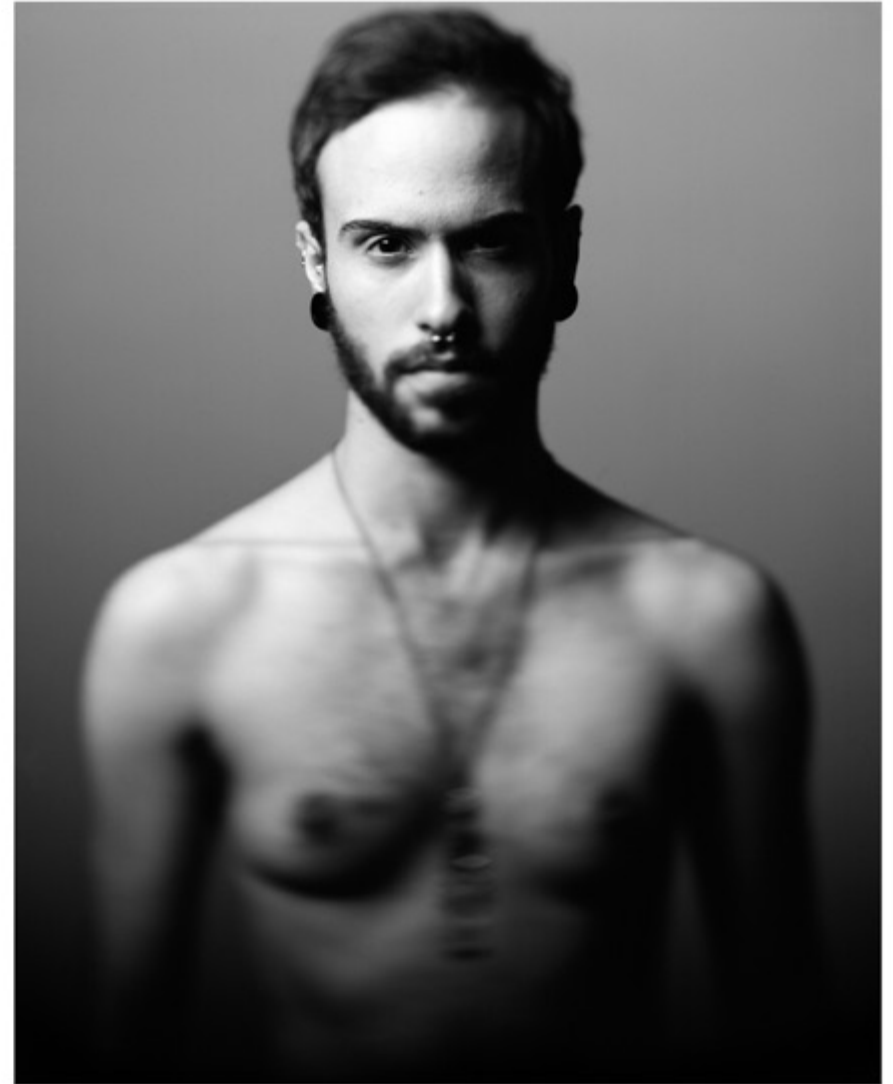
Anima Animus

These three portraits are part of *Anima Animus*, a long term project exploring the borderline of gender.

The first part of this project is a series of black and white portraits of trans* and genderqueer people living in the UK.

Each model has undertaken a journey from the sex they were assigned at birth to the gender they identify with.

claudiamoroni.co.uk





(Before) *Jon*; (Here) *Sabah*; *Rory*

Jon's Statement

My name is J, I identify as non-binary and genderqueer and my preferred pronouns change on a daily basis.

When I was quite young I took part in a documentary about my transition for Channel 4, and I think that my gender identity has evolved since then. I think that the media is very binary when it represents trans people- there's not a lot of scope for non-binary trans people to be portrayed, and I know that in other documentaries about trans people, if they had non-binary histories or identified as non-binary, they would cut down their stories and just hide that part of them to stop people being confused, which I think it's pretty bad because non-binary people already don't have recognition pretty much anywhere in the world and it's very hard for us to be taken seriously; for example at work or by medical professionals who are meant to be helping us transition, so I think erasing our stories and journeys is pretty harmful.

When I did that documentary, I was pretty early on in my transition, and I didn't really know that there were other avenues to go down so I felt scared of coming out as non-binary to my mum when she had just got her head around me being a binary trans person. I was afraid that if I did come out as non-binary so early on in my transition, I wouldn't be taken seriously. I wanted to start hormone therapy and I was concerned that I'd have to hide that side of me in order to get the doctor's approval. Now, I'm out as non-binary to my mum and my friends, and she is accepting of it although she doesn't really fully get it.

I've written a book based on the documentary *The Boy Who Was Born A Girl*, and I've kept it binary- however, I speak a lot about non-binary identities.

I'm very vocal about non-binary people's existence. I'm not outing myself as non-binary but at the same time I'm not keeping quiet.

I still think that tackling non-binary issues is the next step to starting to get full recognition and inclusion for trans people.

Sabah's Statement

My name is Sabah and my preferred pronouns are he, his, him. I firstly identify as queer and secondly as a trans man. I identify as queer because I don't feel like I fit into the binary of male or female. I don't really believe in the binary system of gender. When I first heard and learned about trans people, everything seemed to click into place and I realised I was transgender. Coming out to family was a bit tricky. Now everything is ok, but I think they're all waiting for something to happen, something to change, like surgery or hormones to make it real. I don't think they really understand that I've already transitioned. I did think about changing my name, but it felt like I was being someone else, so I kept my birth name, which is actually unisex. I only thought about changing it because if you want apply for treatment through the NHS for transitioning, they use the name change as one of the markers to decide whether you're trans enough, but they can go fuck themselves.

I think trans representation in the media is very biased towards middle class white trans women, people who can afford to have surgery if they want to, and it focuses only on the medical steps of transition, like the hormone therapy and surgery. There's a general fixation on genitals because for most people, the heteronormative kind of population, that's what it comes down to, defining people according to what's between their legs, so there's no real emphasis on trans psychological well being and the gender spectrum. I'd love to be a counsellor, working with LGBT people.

I'm quite active in the trans and feminist community. In terms of aspirations and dreams, I want to make a difference, increasing diversity in trans communities in terms of different cultures and ethnic minorities, because it's been a struggle for me and it's something that can definitely change. It's hard for people from ethnic minorities to come out because there isn't a trans and BME (black minority ethnic) community out there - there are more hurdles for us to face. Of course, it does happen, but once people are out and have transitioned, they tend to hide and disappear, avoiding any attention and the community is never built.

Rory's Statement

My name is Rory, I'm from Malaysia and I identify as genderqueer because I don't want to confine myself to one role or another and I guess I prefer to be ambiguous. My preferred pronouns are they, their, them. When I was growing up I wasn't either girly or boyish, I was more in-

between, but back then, even though I knew I was a bit different from everyone else, I kept everything to myself. Since I moved here and I've had access to the queer community, I've been able to be more open about my gender identity and sexuality.

I think unfortunately people are still quite ignorant about gender and if you're not actually in the community, it's unlikely that you'd be exposed to it and you won't learn about it. Personally I didn't know much about it myself and only once I started meeting other queer people I've found out a way to describe what I felt since I was little. For example I didn't realise that you could be gender fluid before coming to London. I underwent a brief period of transition where I took Testosterone. I was on it for approximately seven months until I decided to stop. The main reason I stopped was because I felt I was comfortable with the level I was at and happy about it. I'm currently working on my Master's Degree and hopefully will try to get a job in the near future ●

Tatiana Vinogradova

(Russia)

Flashes Of The First Episode

I often meet people who know exactly what's good and right, and most of all what's normal. I guess it's a huge mistake to judge normality by your own mediocrity. Patience and reserving all judgment opens the doorway to the most queer and curious natures.

This documentary project is dedicated to my new friends at the 7th ward of Kashchenko mental hospital in Nikolskoe village, Russia. This is the male ward of the first episode where mainly patients diagnosed with schizophrenia and schizophrenia spectrum disorders lasting less than five years are being treated.

This story is a little bit about queerness and a lot about estrangement, two words that usually go together. If your thoughts and behavior are different from that which is generally accepted, the majority will label you as impossible and insane. After that, perhaps the only thing left to do is to estrange oneself from a hostile world and seek refuge in illness. So, patience is required. In fact, what we call someone's "queerness" is nothing but our own lack of experience and imagination. Queerness is just a collection of elusive feelings which defy definition and are difficult to describe or capture, except in certain moments.

tatianavinogradova.com





(Before) *Untitled*; (Here) *Untitled*; *Untitled*

Focus

1

Momo Okabe was born in Tokyo in 1981 and received her BFA in photography from Nihon University of Art in 2004. Okabe's work has been acclaimed by Nobuyoshi Araki and Masafumi Sanai through the prestigious photo competitions for the young talents in Japan, *New Cosmos of Photography* (99) and *EPSON* prizes (09). However, her name still remains silent to the photo market in Japan possibly because her depiction of subject is considered excessively sexual and provocative.

Her work has been nominated by many prestigious competitions in Japan including:

Special Award *The 8th Exhibition of New Cosmos of Photography* selected Nobuyoshi Araki, P3 art and environment, Tokyo, 1999.

Fine prize for *The 19th 3.3m² Exhibition*, Guardian Garden Tokyo, 2002.

Excellent Work prize *Color Imaging Contest of EPSON*, Tokyo International Forum, 2004.

Fine work prize *The 30th Exhibition of New Cosmos of Photography*, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, 2007.

Special Jury Prize, *Color Imaging Contest of EPSON* selected by Masafumi Sanai, EPSON, Tokyo, Japan, 2009.

Selected for *Yokohama Photo Festival Exhibition*, Yokohama Red Brick Warehouse, 2010.

Selected for *Tokyo Portfolio Review Exhibition*, NADiff A/P/A/R/T, Tokyo, 2010.

Momo Okabe

(Japan)

Dildo

I met Kaori when I was 24 years old and it was summer. Kaori was a woman and had gender identity disorder. We broke up after three years. Then, I met Yoko and we became lovers.

Yoko went to Thailand for sex reassignment surgery and removed her uterus. It was as small as a fist. I heard that people's life became shorter when they removed their reproduction organs and received hormone therapy regularly. Since Yoko doesn't have her uterus and breasts any longer, she can apply for a new family register as a man.

Kaori went through the breast removal operation and lives in Canada now. I wonder if people laugh at us when they know about our story. But we are not doing anything wrong.

Growing up in France in her childhood for four years, Okabe felt isolated all the time as an outsider and she could not speak to her classmates at school. So she started to fantasize her own ideal world alone. Even though she came back to Tokyo with her family later, she felt that she didn't belong anywhere because Tokyo appeared to be too materialistic for her. Only through taking a picture, can she express her inner voice and she believes that photography is the place where she exists and relies upon.

sessionpress.com





Momo Okabe

Momo Okabe





Momo Okabe



Momo Okabe





Momo Okabe





Momo Okabe



Momo Okabe



Momo Okabe

Focus

2

Paul Knight Born 1976, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia; lives and works in London, United Kingdom. In 2009 Paul Knight completed a Master of Fine Art, Glasgow School of Art, United Kingdom, after first completing a Bachelor of Fine Art (Honours) at the Victorian College of the Arts in 2001. In 2007 he was awarded the prestigious *Anne & Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship*. That same year he was the winner of the *William and Winifred Bowness Photography Prize* at the Monash Gallery of Art, Melbourne, and was selected for *Bloomberg New Contemporaries*, United Kingdom.

In 2010 he exhibited a solo presentation in the Open Space section of 44th Art Cologne and was awarded the London studio residency by the Australia Council for the Arts. In 2012, Knight presented a collaborative performance project as part of the Glasgow International Festival for Visual Arts and in 2013 exhibited in *We Used to Talk About Love*, at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

Paul Knight

(Australia/UK)

Chamber Music (2009-2013)

From the very first day that I met my partner Peter, I started taking photographs of us together. *Chamber Music* depicts a couple in a very frank and intimate manner, capturing the patterns of the quotidian in their lives. Rest, sex, food, bathing and travelling are frequent motifs and as such repetition is the ground in which it builds its language.

The camera, via its status as machine and free access becomes antonymous and this in turn creates the visual style of the work, which leans heavily on the history of the vernacular of the family snap-shot.

This work for me is as much about the touch perceived between the two subjects and their world, as it is the potential for touch between the photograph and the viewer. The situation of sight here becomes the rite of contact. This visual contact between viewer and viewed, I would say, is the basis for the political dimension of the work and to activate this, the subjects make themselves vulnerable in the space of the photograph.

As the politics arise from disclosure and its context of the quotidian, part of my interest is in the situation of similarity and the making evident of repartition and how these are shared circumstances. I am looking for reflections of the similar and the shared to build simulations and associations of and to common experience.

As a gesture towards psychology, *Chamber Music* seeks to collapse the typical linear understandings and representations of time within photography and rebuild via juxtaposition, association and memory, a space understood in terms of volume.

This leads to a tension being that I would also say that these photographs are pure simulacra – their own truth. The machine plays formal games with composition, colour and abstraction, whilst we as subjects provide material for the creation of photographs. In this way I do not see these works as portraits, rather they are abstract representations and multi-dimensional-intimate-transactions expressed in the unique way that the camera and its photograph have access to.





Paul Knight



Paul Knight



Paul Knight



Paul Knight





Paul Knight



Paul Knight





Paul Knight



Paul Knight

Talk

Darren Campion

Claude Cahun: The Lady Vanishes

Claude Cahun: The Lady Vanishes

Darren Campion is a freelance writer based in Ireland. To read more visit [The Incoherent Light](#), an online photography journal

In July of 1944 two middle-aged women were arrested on one of the Nazi-occupied Channel Islands – Jersey, to be exact. It seemed that they were the “masterminds” of a resistance propaganda movement that had been operating locally and although they had acted alone, it was just so unlikely that both were strenuously interrogated in order to ascertain the identity of their (non-existent) accomplices. They each attempted suicide, probably with a concealed stash of barbiturates, but were eventually revived and had to endure months of further imprisonment, in deplorable conditions.

Together they produced some of the most enigmatic and challenging photographs

The two were saved from execution only when it became apparent that Allied forces would soon take control of the island, as indeed they did, early in March 1945. These women, whom both the local population and their Nazi captors alike considered to be a pair of eccentric spinster sisters, were Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore. After the war they returned to their quiet isolation, but Cahun’s health had been severely affected by her imprisonment. Worn down by illness, she died in 1954, while Moore took her own life in 1972. Extraordinary as all this undoubtedly is however, the truth is somewhat more complicated than it first appears.

Cahun and Moore were, in fact, Lucy Schwob and Suzanne Malherbe – stepsisters, lovers and artistic collaborators. Together they produced some of the most enigmatic and challenging photographs in the history of the medium, nominally self-portraits by Cahun. Although this work has been little known until recently, enjoying a brief notoriety with the rise of gender studies in art history and academic circles, it traces, at least in part, another lineage within photography. So, while these works are perhaps too wilful, too hermetic to be regarded as an influence on the development of photography in general, the photographs they produced really illuminate, with their own strange radiance, the misunderstood potential that photography has to make the unseen visible, to create new, if uncertain, realities.

Moving in the radical and avant-garde circles of 1930's Paris, they had met André Breton, the architect of Surrealism, and were undoubtedly influenced by his ideas about the irrational and the unconscious in art. Immersed – if never quite at ease – in this heady creative atmosphere, Schwob (not yet Cahun, but operating under a host of increasingly ambiguous pseudonyms) dedicated herself to writing and, along with Malherbe, was deeply involved in cutting-edge theatre productions. But in 1937, tiring of the fevered atmosphere in Paris (and wary of political changes in Germany) they moved to the island of Jersey, where they had previously spent summers and in this private world began to concentrate entirely on their work, though they by no means lost contact with their old associates, at least until the outbreak of war.

The question of collaboration – and indeed, of authorship – remains a thorny one, however. Most of the pictures, and certainly the best of them, feature Cahun in various guises. It is for this reason that the usual definition of the photographs is as self-portraiture, but again, nothing with this work



Self portrait c.1920 by Claude Cahun photograph JHT/1995/32/a

can be so easily defined. In truth, it is difficult to know exactly what their intentions might have been. A lot of the photographs and related material were irretrievably lost or destroyed during the occupation, and what now remains, though not an insubstantial amount, is fragmentary, so whether the pictures were to be understood as artworks in their own right, as studies for

a larger project, or as documents for performances even, will probably never be fully known.

Since the rediscovery of the work a diverse body of critical writing has sprung up, trying to fill the gaps in our knowledge about Cahun and Moore. It seems that in many cases that the attention given to Cahun's electric presence in the photographs has somewhat obscured the role Moore (an accomplished illustrator in her own right) undoubtedly played in their creation, given that they had already collaborated on a series of collage works entitled *Aveux non avenues*. Regardless of whatever their respective roles may have been, there can be no question that the photographs are "about" Cahun – her face is just another mask and she never comes to the end of them, never exposes what the masks might conceal – supposing it is anything at all.

In retrospect it is not hard to see their profound sympathy with the concerns of Surrealism, if not a direct influence, given that they worked in a determined isolation, far removed from the movement's cosmopolitan centre in Paris. This is perhaps not unsurprising, because for all its radical intent Surrealism was, at heart, a boys club, with women largely confined to the role of Muse and as such, incapable of action. It is worth noting however, that Breton's insistence on the objective recording of "irrational" interior processes resembles closely the matter-of-fact treatment that Cahun's transformations receive. Seen on the wall or on the page, the images appear at first like snapshots, anonymous and banal, interesting perhaps in that they recount the mystery of unknown lives and the passage of time, but too distant otherwise to be meaningful.

Look again, though and we see the alchemy of self being played out, using the modest tools of amateur photography – these are snapshots from



Self portrait 1928 by Claude Cahun
photograph JHT/1995/41/n

another reality; here you are not who you were, but someone else – a woman being a man becoming a woman becoming other, in some indeterminable fashion, a play of identity in the deepest sense, which endlessly flows back and forth across the space of who you are, breaking those codes that make up an identity, a name, calling into question any firm idea of who "you" might be. That face in the mirror with its established contours and gestures – is that really you? Well, of course it is, and that's what is so wrenching, so profound about these photographs, the knowledge that it's only "you" until it's not, until the ground shifts and you can't be sure of anything; the mask is off and even its absence is nameless.

Claude Cahun is the face of the 20th Century ●



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