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ABSTRACT

Almost Real 3D transgender portraits: research into the illusionary representation of transgender people in illusionary 3D depth.

Wind, water, waves: research into the elements of landscape using animation to capture time. A study taking the form of an exhibition of lenticular photographs exhibited at the ANU School of Art Gallery from July 5 to 14, 2006 which comprises the outcome of the Studio Practice component, together with the Report which documents the nature of the course of study undertaken.

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Introduction

In between finishing my graduate diploma in 2003 and starting the Master of Art, Visual Art by coursework in 2004 I missed the structured way of working inherent in university study. I knew that I had not grasped what the study of art at tertiary level was about and I hoped, by returning to the Photomedia Workshop, to discover a way of working that I could apply to my practice after university. The value of having access to some of the best photo-media teachers in Australia was an added attraction.

Over the course of two years part-time study in 2005 and 2006, my work followed two completely separate threads: landscapes and portraits. Not only were the subjects completely different, so too were the techniques I used to manifest my visions despite both using the same lenticular technology.

Technicalities

Lenticulars are tricky because the end product is a very fine photographic print laminated to an equally fine-lined plastic sheet. The laminating process is not an exact science and relies on a skilled operator; an error of a fraction of an inch in alignment means discarding the sheet and print and starting the procedure over again with a new print and a new lenticular sheet. When working in large sizes the expenses are not negligible. I found an average failure rate of 30 per cent had to be factored into my costings.

Capturing an element of time by using animation in a "still" image was the motivation behind my animated landscapes. I hoped to see clouds blowing across the sky while their shadows scurried along the ground or to see waves breaking on the beach and for this show to play itself out each time I walked past the picture. Capturing time is an important aspect of lenticulars, instead of the frozen moment of still photographs lenticulars can capture a sequence of events or extended moments.

In my second year, after having acquired a specialist 3D camera from China, my focus switched to making 3D portraits. I chose to photograph people of ambiguous gender for this ambiguous medium, men as women, women as men and a flat plastic sheet with illusionary depth.

Much of my energy was taken up investigating the possibilities, nuances and drawbacks of lenticular technology by trial and many errors, dashed hopes, and a few delights but when it worked it was worth it.

Why landscapes?

To live in the Snowy Mountains is to be surrounded by the sublime force of nature writ large. "The Sublime is an almost excruciating beauty - on the edge of reality," according to American artist James Turrell¹, a statement I find appropriate for the mountains where extreme weather makes for ever-changing views, each more impressive than the last. Technicolor sunsets and sunrises, great voluminous storm clouds with 'fingers of god' -shafts of light - that pierce the clouds to kiss a rock or field, are common.

Australia's old mountains, eroded by this extreme weather over millions of years, are not the jagged sky-reaching peaks of other continents with their corresponding deep valleys that exist in perpetual shade, here the sky is expansive and ever changing, the sunlight bright white and especially blinding when reflected off snow. Here, the rain and snow arrives, more often than not horizontally, driven by fierce winds that frequently blast us at more than 100kms an hour.

What is weather if not air, water and light and what are the essential elements to life on earth if not air, water and light?

These are the elements I wished to incorporate into my landscapes without turning out yet more "picture postcards" that the tourist haunts of Jindabyne are full of. The difference between mere beauty and something deeper, that I'll call the sublime, (for lack of a better word), is aptly put by the New Yorker critic Peter Schjeldahl, who says:

"The merely attractive (pretty, glamorous) and merely pleasing (lovely, delectable) are not beautiful. They lack the element of belief and the feeling of awe that announces it.

"The experience of awe is characteristic of encounters with the sublime and is traditionally the opposite of the satisfying delectation provided by beauty..."²

The many landscape photographers still working in the Ansell Adams tradition - producing images of inviolate, pristine beauty - are legion, I don't want to be one of them, the romanticism of wilderness, itself a construct, is not what interests me in photographing landscapes. David Stephenson wrote in his paper: Beautiful Lies, Photography and Wilderness³:

"Transmitted through Adams with all the spiritual trappings, the lineage of the sublime (along with the picturesque and the beautiful), is also traceable in more recent colour wilderness photography from Eliot Porter to Tasmania's Peter Dombrovskis."

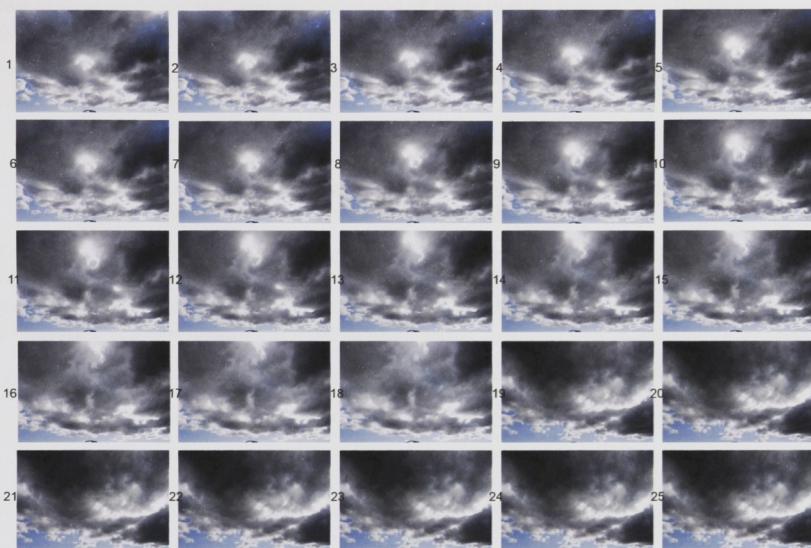
I am more interested in the elements of air, light and water visually represented by perhaps the same subjects used by 'wilderness photographers' but for different reasons.

My animated landscapes are more about time than scrupulously excluding evidence of human defilement from a supposed pristine natural environment.

I'd heard indirectly from Robin Ford, who runs his own lenticular company called OzIllusions that it is possible to interlace up to 24 images to make a (still) mini-movie and if I could succeed in interlacing a large number of sequential images that this could provide the differentiating dimension to my landscapes. At least I was excited by the challenge.

One of my biggest disappointments with lenticulars is the loss of detail that occurs when images blend together and are never really viewed singly, each individual image was loaded with fine detail but beyond a three image flip - as in my graduate diploma work - it was lost to view in the flow of the 'movie'.

I never succeeded in interlacing more than 15 images in a landscape, 10 images were clearer but the action sequence sometimes looked jerky. More than 15 images and the result was an unintelligible blur that was headache inducing for the viewer.



Sequence of moving clouds

Taking field trips to suitable coastal locations proved a major attraction to producing my 'wave-scapes'. Sitting on coastal headlands waiting for the sun to rise over a sea that Sugimoto might have photographed was on occasion uncomfortable but also meditative and fulfilling. In the end, however, the sunrise and sunset lenticulars were a disappointment, the ghosting between images that facilitates the animation flow also drained the intense colours and I abandoned them to concentrate on moving water in different guises, inspiration coming from Sugimoto's beautiful black and white seascapes⁴ and Roni Horn's book *Another Water*⁵, among others.

Horn's disturbing text is as much about suicides by drowning in the Thames in London as it is about the nature of water. In it she discusses ideas of colour and lack of it in relation to water, its blackness, transparency or opacity, familiarity and elusiveness among other attributes and she intersperses these observations with accounts of actual suicides in the river. The book's pages, however, are largely filled with beautiful photographs of the water's surface under different lighting conditions supposedly taken at the places the victims entered the river.

The juxtaposition of visual beauty with accounts of death brought a shiver to my spine as Horn no doubt intended. Not referring to Horn's work but appropriate none the less, artist Fred Tomaselli⁶ said of the sublime:

"Not many people do (talk about the sublime) it's one of the last taboos. It's about mortality and melancholy...beauty and death..."

Clouds are a clichéd subject visited by almost every photographer since the beginnings of the medium including famous cloud gazer Alfred Stieglitz whose photographs of clouds, that he called 'Equivalents', are classics of the fine art photography genre.

In a 1923 magazine essay entitled "How I came to Photograph Clouds," Stieglitz stated that he decided to make photographs of what was furthest from places he could influence with his will.⁷

In the Alfred Stieglitz and his Contemporaries exhibition that I saw many years ago in Tokyo, the curators said:

"In many (of the Equivalentents) he has deliberately made it impossible to tell which way is up or down; nor is there any need to. These are not photographs of clouds. They are works that borrow the forms of clouds to transcend time and space and express abstract ideas."⁸

While I don't aspire to these same ideals in my cloud work, I certainly hope to develop it to where there is more to see in them than the obvious form. So far the major point of difference between my clouds and other people's is that mine move and hopefully capture more time than a still image.



Margot Seares, Clouds Snowy Mountains, 2005



Alfred Stieglitz, Equivalent, 1924-26

I feel that I have only touched on the possibilities of this work and though I have never felt entirely sure of where I was going with it, I was instead hoping to see where it would take me but unfortunately the imperatives of assessment forced me to come up with a concept. As a unifying idea I used global warming as justification. Scientists tell us to expect higher sea levels and more extreme weather events as a result of global warming, and I felt that my pictures did express this but I articulated it unconvincingly at assessment time. Having been influenced by Susan Norrie's⁹ work on global warming, I was particularly struck by a video piece she made of a child being carried on an adult's shoulders through cherry blossoms in Japan, the caption explained that Japanese cherry trees are flowering weeks earlier than they used to because of global warming.

I further extrapolated the global warming connection from an interview by Hiroshi Sugimoto - Sugimoto's seascapes feature only water and air, sea and sky. Echoing Stieglitz's sentiments in his *Equivalents* some 70 years earlier, Sugimoto said that he was searching for:

"the most unchanged scene on the surface of the earth... seascapes must be the least changed scene, the oldest vision we can share with ancient people. The sea may be polluted but it looks approximately the same. So that's a very heavy time concept."¹⁰

My ideas though not fully formed have a direction, I consider my landscape work as ongoing and I look forward to developing it further.

3D transgender portraits

Technicalities

Making 3D portraits had been in the back of my mind from my first contact with lenticulars. Inspiration came from reading about Frenchman Maurice Bonnet, an inventor and researcher at the CNRS (Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique) in 3D lenticulars in the 1930s. In 1942 Bonnet set up a portrait studio in the Champs Elysees, a photo of which survives showing a large sign inviting passers by "to give the gift of a 3D portrait". Many notable French celebrities were among his clients and his process began to be used in advertising in France from the 1960s onwards - notably for fashion house Pierre Cardin. The Musee Carnavalet in Paris houses a few of Bonnet's prints but a larger number are held in museums in Poitiers and in the Tarn region of France.

Interestingly, Bonnet's camera was enormous, taking up a small room, he sold several to researchers in Russia and Eastern European countries.

For my first 3D trial I photographed a (stationary) dandelion using a camera on a rail taking 10 shots a few centimetres apart and interlacing them with the usual software. At this stage I didn't have dedicated 3D lenticular screens and I used the same screen I'd been using for flips that gave a shallow 3D effect but 3D nonetheless. The result was encouraging enough for me to order 40 lines per inch, 3D screens from America. The major difference in the screens is the angle of view, wider for flips and narrower for 3D.

Using a camera on a rail is fine for static subjects but impossible for portraits. A living, breathing subject has difficulty remaining motionless during the time it takes to move the camera across the field of view. Tasmanian artist Sarah Ryan makes shallow lenticulars using a camera on a rail; her subjects (friends) are often seen only as legs and torsos or with eyes closed when a head is shown because of the time taken to complete the exposure.

Websites I visited suggested that five to 15 angles of view give the smoothest result. Interestingly cameras with four lenses were made in the 1950s using 35mm film and can sometimes be found second-hand but their image quality is generally low. A better alternative is to synchronise a number of larger format cameras to simultaneously take the same subject from overlapping angles. Such a rig made with five twin-lens reflex cameras is available from a US company for \$US5000, rather more than I had available at the time.

My next move was to look for five identical digital cameras, someone to make a bracket for them and then find a technician who could wire them up to fire simultaneously. This turned out to necessitate expensive cameras with manual focusing because the subject wasn't in the centre of the viewfinder except for the centre camera and the other views would be out of focus. With the cost escalating, I let that idea die.

Fortunately, while searching the net I came across a Chinese company that manufactures a camera with five lenses for a mere \$US3000. It uses 120 film and is five cameras in a single body but only the centre one has a mirror and a twin-viewing lens. All five lenses focus together and all five shutters fire at the same time. My contact at the factory said the cameras are popular in China for weddings and at that stage they had sold one to a client in Germany and another in India, but there had been plenty of interest at that year's Fotokina trade fair in Cologne, Germany.

GLBTQ: Gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender and queer folk

Now with my new camera I set about photographing people and who better to use as models but those of ambiguous gender for this ambiguous medium. Lenticulars provide a virtual or illusionary third dimension, the print is in fact only millimetres deep and many of the transsexual models I used were only virtually of the gender opposite to the one they were born with. It is difficult for a tall, broad-shouldered man to pass as a woman despite makeup, feminine clothing and a wig but many of them feel that they are really women trapped in men's bodies and they do their best to 'pass'.

Generally, woman who would rather be men have an easier time of passing as their chosen gender than men wanting to be women. Hormone treatment can provide facial fuzz if not quite a beard and men's clothing is less revealing than women's.

At first I went for Hollywood type studio lighting, theatrical set-ups and make up but gradually I realised that keeping my side as simple as possible allowed the subjects to shine through. In the end the portraits have a straight forward, suburban studio look about them with conventional lighting and flattering poses they seem perfectly normal till you look closely at the hints of a five o'clock shadow here and an obviously fake moustache there.

The first discovery I made was that the gaze was even more important than in a non lenticular portrait, without it there was no contact with the person's soul.

To find models I rang Tilley's café in Lyneham to ask if they knew of any drag queens who might like to be photographed, Stephanie who answered the phone wondered if I'd be interested in photographing drag kings and she and two of her friends became my first subjects. We had many photographic sessions while I was working out what worked best in lenticulars and we built friendships. Without a relationship with my models this work would never have happened, they need to trust me to not portray them as freaks. I showed them the results all the way through the process and asked permission to show the results to my supervisor and later to exhibit the prints.

Another contact put me onto Heather aka Maya, a New Zealand transsexual, after the usual passage of texts we spoke on the phone to arrange where to take the first photos. Heather said: "Darling why don't you come here? We have a fully equipped brothel at our disposal, we can use the green room or the blue room or the red room."

Never having been inside a brothel, I agreed at once.

Heather is a lot of fun; in her early 20s she has been living as a woman since her 18th birthday. Her life, she said is all about sex though relationships are really hard; she'd just broken up with her gay boyfriend. She worried (unnecessarily I thought) about her square jaw and small breasts.

Heather introduced me to another 'tranny', Eden, by far the most beautiful girl in the brothel, tall, blonde and elegant, Eden worried that her Adam's apple was too prominent - it wasn't.

Later I posted a request for models on the ACT Queer bulletin board and received enthusiastic responses from both men and women of different ages and backgrounds, transsexuals, a drag queen, several lesbians who like to dress as men and a man who had just transitioned to living as a woman. Some are public servants, one is an academic, another is a landscape gardener, all in all, their occupations are as varied as non-transgender people. One respondent, Catherine, saw to my education; generously lending me her extensive library of books on

gender issues that proved very helpful in researching the art theory essay that is included in this report.

I developed a short questionnaire to find out more about my subjects and although not all of my models responded, the responses I received showed clearly that life is neither easy nor straightforward for gender variant people. I feel privileged to have been allowed to photograph them.

Many of the models came to the first showing of the portraits in Photospace; their feedback encouraged me to continue with the project. Ultimately I wanted to exhibit the portraits in Sydney during the Mardi Gras festival in March and I achieved this through Gallery Xposure in Rozelle. I sat in the gallery for a couple of days a week as part of the conditions of exhibiting and it was most interesting seeing the reactions first to the 3D effect and secondly to the extended captions attached to the pictures, an idea that Martyn gave me. Most visitors read every word and studied the pictures at length and not many of them were from the gay community.

The Herald photography critic was supposed to visit on a day when I wasn't available but he required transport and, according to the gallery owner, didn't show because we didn't provide it, which seemed rather odd. Competition for his attention was pretty fierce with Mike Parr on at the MCA at the same time.

Nevertheless my show received 3/4 of a page in The Glebe and two paragraphs and a photo in the SMH daily planner section and a listing on several photography related websites.

Captions to tell the story

The following captions were written in conjunction with each subject, and were approved by each subject via email before I used them under each portrait in my solo exhibition in Sydney in March 2006.

Chiara, 19, student, "Socially, I am occasionally dressed as a guy and feel like I shouldn't speak because my voice would give me away and that is always embarrassing for both parties. I have also had occasions where women will walk into the bathroom, see me, apologise then walk out into the men's toilet...that's always funny but I don't like the stares I get while people are figuring out my gender.

"I clash a lot with my brother who tries to dominate me and assert his size/strength based authority despite the fact that he is younger. I am constantly pushing my mother and sister into more assertive roles. Within my family I see a lot of gender stereotyping."



Chiara as a youth boxing 2005

Catherine, in her fabulous 50s, a transsexual woman 24/7 since 2000, divorced father of two, public servant.

“I have been gender variant since my earliest memories and to be gender variant is to live at the crossroad where social role and self-determination meet. Like many crossings this has had destructive moments but thankfully more smooth transitions than not.”

Ollie, 28, community worker and student, long-term lover of women.

“I have a thing about labels, they're just a little bit limiting for the human condition.

“My girlfriend says it makes me sound like a post-modern wanker, but she finds labels unifying and solid. Interesting to get different perspectives eh?”

“I think that people who discriminate against others on the basis of their sexuality are very unhappy people, they face social challenges regarding this stuff daily. I don't, I'm very happy with my life and as a consequence most of the people in my life are happy people.”

Szusza, 53, public servant and musician, father of two and living 24/7 as a woman since 2003.

“God bless the day when my new birth certificate arrived. It's never too late to achieve your dreams...as long as you have the courage, determination and recklessness to do so.”



Lovely Lisa in 3D 2005

Lisa, 30, born Goulburn NSW, computer engineer, living 24/7 as a woman since 2005.

"I knew very, very young (5 or 6) that something was 'not as it should be', but I also learned very quickly that effeminate boys get beaten up. So really it wasn't until my late 20s that I started admitting and exploring my issues."

"How does it feel to be me now? Wonderful. Sure, I may be a freak to some, and find it hard to find shoes in the right size, but now I'm the me I should always have been. I feel comfortable within myself (barring a few issues that still bubble to the surface from all the years of denial)."

Megan, 37, artist/youth worker and wannabe drag performer.

"I only recently came out. I saw a light in the corner of the closet and then kicked the door down. So much makes sense now. I've always loved gender bending and now I understand why as a child I dreamt of being a rock god. I'm hoping to do at least one performance in 2006.

"Has it been worth it? Yes, yes, yes... I have lost the lonely feeling I've had all my life, I wasn't in denial, I didn't know I preferred women, which seems really odd now and hard to understand. I've never fitted in to any groups, now I do."

Simone, 37, scientist, father of two, plays guitar in an all-girl band.

"I describe myself as a transgender person. I don't like describing myself with gendered nouns or pronouns such as man or woman, although I am undeniably biologically male. I cross gender boundaries: I don't feel much like a man anymore, if I ever did, and I don't think I can claim womanhood: that would be hubris. I crossdress, but I don't do it for sexual thrills. So I don't describe myself as a transvestite. My medical records say transsexualism, but I think that is a limiting term because it has connotations of surgery, which I don't feel that I need. Also, many transsexuals support the gender binary, which I am uncomfortable with. I am heterosexual (mostly!)."

Emma, 22, film maker, queer

"The people I care about know who I am and all about the drag king stuff I get up to. I do often get mistaken for a guy though, which confuses a lot of people. Luckily I like to play with people and their perception of gender and usually let them figure out I am not a man on their own and watch them get uncomfortable. I don't find it embarrassing at all, but they usually do when they realise they've made a mistake. I have a bit of an evil side, and if people like to stick to the binary perception of gender I like to ruffle them a little bit. It's not hard to do, I just have to be myself and that seems to confuse them enough.

"Drag lets me reveal my other self and I loved the chance this project gave me to bend gender stereotypes a little and explore this other part of myself."

Heather, 20s, from New Zealand, an out transsexual since her 18th birthday

Tania, 18, school leaver, currently living in a lesbian relationship. Tania doesn't mind being mistaken for a boy, though she has recently grown her hair and wears girlie clothes now and then.

Steve aka Marilyn, 18, hairdresser, gay, loves to frock up occasionally to go to clubs.

Eden, 20s, transsexual, lives in Melbourne.

Being over six feet tall has its advantages in crowded nightclubs she says.

Digby, 35, landscape gardener, lesbian, mother of one.

"I am outraged that the Howard government says lesbians can't raise happy, well adjusted children -- WE CAN!"



Eden, 2005

Portraits

Formal studio portraits are a contract between the artist and the sitter. The sitter agrees to be represented on the understanding that the artist will do so fairly and if not flatteringly, at least in a way that doesn't injure their self-esteem.

I wanted my portraits to have a hint of the old-fashioned suburban photographic studio, the sort that people used to visit in the 1950s and 1960s to record milestone birthdays, engagements, christenings and weddings. The expectation: of a highly retouched, softly lit, blatantly flattering result, was fed by these studios to differentiate their product from the now readily available, everyday snapshot. My first part-time job while a photography student at RMIT was in just such a studio in Melbourne in the late 1960s, heavily retouched, large format black and white film produced prints that were then hand coloured with oil paint - at a time when colour film was readily available - a style the ethnic owners had brought with them from Europe some twenty years earlier.

Sandy Nairne, director of the National Portrait Gallery in London said recently that:

"Portraits have a number of functions that go beyond the immediate purpose of recording a likeness. They denote status, power and wealth, ... and give insight to personality and psychology, ... and the conventions of male and female portrayal."¹¹

It is the 'insights to personality' and 'male and female portrayal' that were uppermost in my mind while photographing my transgender models. I agree with Lucien Freud's comment that a great portrait is to do with the intensity of the regard and the focus of the specific, in this case I used direct eye contact to see into the sitter's personality, hopefully with the result that viewers would question the subject's real and imagined gender role.

The umbrella political grouping of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and queer (glbtq) folk, under the banner of ACTQueer in Canberra, are fighting for a better deal from government agencies, such as same sex civil union, superannuation benefits rights for same sex partners etc. Grouped despite a great diversity of views on gender roles and sexual orientation, they are in fact fighting to be treated as people with the same rights as everybody else.

In my sample group of models notwithstanding being able to group them into male-to-female transgender and female-to-male transgender, they were indeed a diverse group. Digby, a strong, muscular landscape gardener who is often mistaken for a man, objected to my questionnaire that she said was directed at transsexuals. One of the questions was: "when did you first realise that you weren't happy with your birth gender. Digby (and others) said they are perfectly happy to be the gender they were born with, just not with the roles they are expected to play. Digby, the mother of an IVF conceived nine-year-old boy is uninterested in surgical adjustment, she also does not want to be her son's father and though she looks masculine in everyday life and has a feminine partner she is not a transsexual.

Similarly, the other lesbians in my sample group: Emma, Ollie and Chiara do not want to become men; the masculine attire is to attract gay female sexual partners. In the same way Steve aka Marilyn frocks up for parties and to visit gay clubs to attract gay male sexual partners.

Transsexuals on the other hand desperately want to live as the gender opposite to the one they were born with and agree with the gender binary in the same way that the heterosexual community does.

Many MTF transsexuals, while learning to look like women give themselves away by almost parodying the female with over-the-top makeup, and ultra sexy, revealing clothing. Ingrid Singh, a commentator on Q-Radio¹², suggested that MTF transsexuals who transition in their 40s and 50s are going through the experimental stage of makeup, hair and dress that women go through as teenagers.

The two prostitutes I photographed, Heather and Eden were beautifully made up and expensively dressed each time we met, making the other women in the brothel appear dowdy by comparison. Ingrid Singh again has a theory that as MTF transsexuals cannot be mothers (the Madonna image) they are attracted to the whore image often the only two roles they imagine women can play, as Heather said to me: "my life is all about sex darling."

Masquerade

All of my subjects are masquerading as something they are not, something they would like to be whether permanently or only briefly. Amelia Jones, writing about Cindy Sherman, an undisputed master of masquerade, says that masquerade is playing into the projective gaze and Jones defines the projective eye as being violent and penetrative, capturing its victims in its vice grip.¹³

Jones explains that masquerade became increasingly common in the 20th century, mentioning the cross-gendered characters of the surrealists:

(Man Ray's) "Barbette, a transvestite acrobat, the better known Duchampian Rose Selavy, and Claude Cahun as interesting examples of how cabaret met the avant-garde through eroticised and simulated feminine/masculine bodies."¹⁴

An important element of this argument is masquerade's evident fakery. Jones postulates that:

"the performance of the intersection of gender and sexual orientation had played a major, if suppressed, role in transforming modernism...into a postmodernism enacted by dissolved, non-normative subjects marked in their particularities. Sherman, like Barbette, dissolves herself into exaggerated and so apparently fake femininity."¹⁵

Later in the same essay Jones puts forward the notion that Sherman's Historical Portraits (with no direct gaze) turn the projective eye into a hole that embraces and sucks in our gaze.

I found direct eye contact to be crucial to the success of my portraits, without it the subjects were less alive, more mannequin-like, the masquerade shown to be a fiction at first glance, the fakery not only too evident but too campy for my purposes.

With their direct gaze my subjects invite you to look at them - and even if you have picked up the clues - to nonetheless suspend disbelief long enough to see them as they see themselves. The clues that give them away could be missed, the slight five o'clock shadow under the makeup, cheeks smoother than a real man's, male jaw lines on women and female hairlines on men. I was after a more subtle, less direct approach to fakery and masquerade than Sherman's, wanting to take my audience in for a moment or two before they realised that all is not as it appears.

Del LaGrace Volcano and Shigeyuki Kihara are both transgender artists who make self-portraits. How do they deal with issues related to transgenderism and voyeurism in their work?

Del LaGrace Volcano and Shigeyuki Kihara are transgender artists who have both produced self-portraits. Superficially their commonalities - confrontational self-portraits taken from within the milieu of their transgender communities - appear important but their different cultural backgrounds also suggest that the art they produce stems from entirely different motives with different intentions and therefore with different results.

Aesthetically the work of each artist is different, informed by different photographic styles and traditions, different backgrounds and different cultures with varying degrees of acceptance by the world around them of who they are and who they say they are. Living in England and the United States, Del LaGrace Volcano calls himself a gender terrorist: "my belief (is) that most people are terrified by anyone who either won't or can't conform to gender norms ... it's becoming increasingly important to resist hetero-normative cultural and political dominance."¹⁶

Volcano primarily photographs the Drag King scene that he inhabits using a mixture of grainy documentary-style photographs of actual performances and posed studio photographs of his drag king friends. Drag Kings are a performance-based phenomenon, the female equivalent of the gay drag queen scene, they are not necessarily women who live as men, some of Volcano's subjects only dress as men on stage and are therefore not transsexuals, most are lesbians.

Kihara is a fa'afafine – a biological man who expressed female mannerisms from an early age. In her native Samoa such people have an accepted place in society. Traditional Samoan culture not only allows fa'afafine a place in society but also respects their choice to live as a third gender. Unlike her Western equivalents Kihara had no hard-fought gender battles to win for acceptance as a transsexual, she slotted into an existing cultural role.

From the five solo exhibitions Kihara has had to date, her photographs are often constructed scenarios using herself as the model. In her most recent exhibition (2004) called "*In the Manner of a Woman*," - the literal translation of fa'afafine - Kihara is the dusky, topless maiden of colonial times shown as an object of curiosity and desire and perhaps also ownership who, surprise, surprise, turns out to have a penis under her grass skirt.

Gender-wise, Volcano and Kihara are diametrically opposed: Volcano is a female-to-male transsexual while Kihara is a male-to-female transsexual, thereby inhabiting different places on the gender continuum of the male to female spectrum.

Kihara and Volcano demonstrate that the transgender world is as diverse as any other grouping of the human race. Ranging from occasional closet cross-dressers to post-operational transsexuals and of course, every imaginable stage in between.

What informs the practice of these two artists? Why do they photograph themselves? And why do they choose to show genitals, breasts and in Volcano's case, simulated sexual intercourse? Is it because they can? Is it to shock the straight world? Or is it simply to be noticed in this picture-saturated culture we live

in? Is there a deeper political reason, perhaps righting past colonial wrongs in Kihara's case or perceived ongoing discrimination in Volcano's case? Or does Volcano's work: "unravel conventions of gender and sexual differences and the social hierarchies that enforce them"?¹⁷

Or is it because there is no subtle way to get their message across and what exactly is the message? Is it that the 'men' Volcano photographs are actually women pretending to be men rather than being men or taking steps to become men (i.e. through surgery or hormone therapy)? Or in Kihara's case, that the women are not really women after all?

In order to understand these two artists and why they make the work that they do I feel it is necessary to explain what transgenderism and transsexualism are before discussing their work. I found this journey of discovery to be an interesting one.

The Oxford Medical Dictionary defines transsexualism as: "the condition of one who firmly believes that she or he belongs to the sex opposite to his (or her) biological gender. The roots of such belief usually go back to childhood. Adults with such beliefs can seldom be persuaded to change them; surgical sex reassignment is sometimes justifiable, to make the externals of the body conform to the individual's view of himself (or herself)."

Thus in medical terms transsexualism is about gender and not about sex and transgenderism is a stage on the way to transsexualism. The terms are used interchangeably in many texts.

David Harrison, quoted in Kate Bornstein's important book on transsexualism, *Gender Outlaw*, explains the gender/sex divide: "Someone asked me if the transgender community is like the gay/lesbian community. I said no, the gay/lesbian communities are based on who one relates to, whereas the transgendered experience is different: it's about identity – relating to oneself."

Transsexuals frequently report that they feel trapped – destined to live out their lives "imprisoned in the wrong body". This incongruity between mind and body is referred to in medical literature as gender dysphoria or gender identity disorder.¹⁸

Since artificial hormone treatment became available after World War 2, the dream of changing one's biological sex became a reality. Rather more satisfactory to those trapped in the wrong body than dressing up as the other gender and announcing it to world. Now with surgery available to snip away unwanted penises, make vaginas out of scrotums, implant breasts or remove surplus ones, and hormones to make it all the more real, would-be transsexuals have to prove that they require the procedure for their mental well-being before doctors, and psychiatrists will allow them to proceed to medically mediated sex reassignment, and before government departments will pay for it.¹⁹

Kate Bornstein, amusingly, but with enough point behind it to prick some sensibilities, outlines a hierarchy in male-to-female transsexualism that also succinctly explains them.

Post-operative transsexuals (those who've had genital surgery and live fully in the role of another gender) look down on:

Pre-operative transsexuals (those who are living full or part time in another gender, but who've not yet had their genital surgery) who in turn look down on:

Transgenders (people living in another gender but who have no intention of having genital surgery) who can't abide:

She-males (a she-male friend of mine describes herself as “tits, big hair, lots of make-up, and a dick.”) who snub the:
Drag queens (gay men who on occasion dress in varying parodies of women) who laugh about the:
Out-transvestites (usually heterosexual men who dress as they think women dress, and who are out in the open about doing that) who pity the:
Closet cases (transvestites who hide their cross dressing) who mock the post-op transsexuals.”²⁰

Similar division and hierarchies probably exist in female-to-male transsexuals but there is little available literature on it. Sex researcher Pat Califia in her book, *Sex Changes, the Politics of Transgenderism*, laments the lack of available female-to-male transsexual autobiographies, unlike the best selling books by Christine Jorgensen; Dr Renee Richardson - the male to female transsexual who played tennis on the women's professional circuit in the 1970s - and of course, the distinguished travel writer Jan Morris who gave up being James Humphrey Morris nearly 50 years ago and published *Conundrum* in 1974.²¹

Jorgenson's sex change in Denmark was a sensational scandal in the US, on her return to America in 1953 “she was met by the largest assemblage of press reporters in the history of New York International Airport”²² and headlines proclaiming American GI Becomes a Woman. She felt harassed and lived unhappily pursued by the media until her death of cancer in 1989.

The tabloids, on the other hand, treated Renee Richardson better perhaps because she was a doctor, wealthy and a well-known tennis player.²³ Jan Morris, already a well-respected foreign correspondent before her sex change, called on friends in the media to treat her transition as a non-event, which they did for the most part.²⁴

According to Mildred Brown in her book *True Selves: Understanding Transsexualism*, “there are an estimated 6,000 to 10,000 transsexuals in the United States who underwent sex reassignment surgery pre 1988. This was, at the time, less than .001 of the population but the figures don't take into account those transsexuals who did not seek surgery.” The majority of these were male-to-female transformations.²⁵

Brown, as a professor of clinical sexology in San Francisco is well placed to comment and she suggests that: “Female-to-male transsexuals may simply be under reported. Since women in the US have far more flexibility with regard to clothing and demeanour than men do, female-to-male transsexuals are able to cross dress without attracting as much attention as their cross-dressed male-to-female counterparts. They can blend more easily into society without hormones or surgery and are sometimes mistaken for masculine looking women or feminine looking men.”

Billy Tipton, an American jazz musician who was happily married with three adopted sons, was discovered to have been a woman only on his death in 1989. No one guessed, not even his wife who believed the story of an abdominal accident that prevented normal intercourse, she never saw her husband without his bandages. Tipton is only one of hundreds of recorded cases where people have been found out only after they died and their bodies revealed all.²⁶

Turning a woman into a man surgically is much harder than the reverse, building a new penis is trickier to achieve successfully than removing an unwanted one. Mark Rees an important transgendered activist in the United Kingdom wrote *Dear Sir, Dear Madam: The Autobiography of a Female-to-Male Transsexual* in 1996 but it was not widely reviewed or read. In it he details his life as a series of failures and disappointments, he rejects phalloplasty: “Eager as I was to have a penis I had no

wish to submit myself to perhaps ten operations, great pain, scarring and risk of infection in order to acquire something which was useless, ugly and without sensation.²⁷

So then where does Del LaGrace Volcano fit in?

According to his entry in *'glbtq', an online encyclopaedia of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer culture* (that refers to Volcano as she): "Del's life and work are inseparable, born Debra Dianne Wood in California in 1957, she (sic) lived the first 37 years of her life as a woman, but since then has been attempting to live as both male and female – as 'intersexed'.

"The theme that dominates her work is not sex but gender. Her photographs betray an anxiety about the performance of gender, in particular, the performance of masculinity by lesbians."²⁸

In his first book: *Love Bites* published in 1991 Volcano was still Della Grace, queer dyke photographer, by the time *The Drag King Book*, with Dr Judith Halberstam, was published in 1998 Della Grace had become Del LaGrace Volcano, a transman (both man and woman).

Volcano, the *glbtq encyclopaedia* goes on: "Grace courts notoriety with some skill. Her (sic) own identity had metamorphosed from lesbian to hermadyke to transman to intersexed.... Here 'truth' becomes irrelevant, for example, her (sic) famous beard is variously claimed to be natural or the result of artificial hormones taken as part of the gender-transitioning process."

Volcano's claim to be intersex is an appropriation of a medical term that doesn't hold up: he wasn't born with mixed genitals or mixed up sex chromosomes; he was in fact a biological woman. To get around this, he qualifies his statement by calling himself 'intersex by design'. He and other transsexuals have taken up the cause against surgical sex reassignment on babies born with an intersex condition inferring that the intersex condition is somehow applicable to transsexuals by association.

In the catalogue notes of the *Sexmutant* exhibition at the Nunnery Gallery in London 2000, Del LaGrace Volcano even goes so far to say: "you probably aren't aware that there are at least as many people born with an intersex condition, (of one form or another and there are many forms), as there are fraternal twins. But the shame and stigma attached to being intersexed cause the majority of us to remain silent and invisible. Not an option in my case. The work I do is intended as an in-your-face antidote for this form of global ignorance."

The practice of reinforcing the gender of infants with intersex conditions shortly after birth, (with surgery and hormones), as is currently the standard medical practice in paediatric hospitals in Australia, is under review.²⁹

In a *Health Matters*, radio program on the ABC aired in February 2002, the statement that "one in every 4,500 babies is born with genitals that aren't obviously male or female," would have come as a surprise to most listeners.

Associate Professor Garry Warne, an endocrinologist and hormone specialist at Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne says he sees one a month. "I might be called to a maternity hospital where a baby has been born and no-one in the room is able to tell what the sex is," he explained. "The penis might be too small to be really called a penis, there might be a cleft but not one that would be typical for a girl, the urinary opening might be in the wrong place for either a boy or a girl, and perhaps we can feel no testes at all, or perhaps one teste."

Planned follow-up studies will hopefully determine how many of the Royal Children's previous patients over the past 30 years are happy with the gender assigned to them. But there is no data to suggest that any of them became transsexuals or sought sex reassignment surgery. One of the reasons for this may be that the most common procedure applied to intersex babies turns them into females and female-to-male reassignment surgery is difficult, onerous and comes with a high failure rate.³⁰

Some transsexuals have latched onto the idea that the two conditions are interrelated but this is false according to the Australian Intersex Support Group that uses the Australian Medical Association's definition of Intersex to refute claims such as those made by Del LaGrace Volcano. This states that:

"intersex people are born with a reproductive system, external genitalia or sex chromosomes that are not exclusively either male or female. While transsexuals have no such physical abnormality, they are biologically normal men or women who feel themselves to be trapped in the wrong body. The word intersex has replaced hermaphrodite in medical literature."

There is recent, unsubstantiated, research that suggests the brain nuclei in male-to-female transsexuals is closer in size to female brain structure than male and therefore transsexualism may yet have a biological origin. Interestingly the nuclei structure is formed later in life than previously thought, that is, in the late teens to early twenties.³¹

As Kate Bornstein put it in *Gender Outlaw*: "We're born, a doctor assigns us a gender. It's documented by the state, enforced by the legal profession, sanctified by the church..."³²

Experience or expediency?

The fact is that Volcano is no longer completely female since taking male hormones – he has reputedly grown facial hair but retains his breasts and calls himself "mutilated by design". Not interested in sex reassignment surgery, he sees himself as an in-between gender. By championing the intersex baby issue as the *raison d'être* of his activism and personal position, Volcano is squarely in the camp that seeks to link transsexualism and the intersex condition.

Andie Hider, Medical Liaison Officer with the *Australian Intersex Support Group* wrote in 2004: "Interestingly the transsexual community made no attempt to claim that transsexualism is an intersex condition until after the public profile of intersex conditions was raised and the intersex community began to achieve widespread support."

Del LaGrace Volcano's oeuvre is intimately tied up with being what he depicts, lesbian/ ambivalent/ transgender/transsexual and living his convictions in this world that a straight artist would not have access to. Many of his portraits and some of his self-portraits show the contrast of masculine features, bare, obviously feminine breasts and fake penises; many are artificial scenarios of simulated sexual intercourse with bizarre and obviously plastic dildoes. His in-your-face explicitness goes with the subject's knowing-gaze as if daring the viewer to keep looking and enter this world or look away and reject it.

"Grace's photographs...are important on several levels. By pillaging gay men's porn and simply not caring if men get off on his work, he became one of the instigators of polymorphous perverse queer culture."³³

In a lecture at Artspace, Sydney on the screening of his film *Sublime Mutations: 10 Years of Gender Queer Relationships* in April 2003 Volcano is quoted as stating:

"I've possessed and been possessed by a multitude of names of bodies and identities in my forty odd years. Change, mutation and migration are [as] natural to me as staying the same might be to you. I have called myself a Gender Terrorist, and Intentional Mutation by Design (as opposed to by diagnosis). I refute the pathological status given to those of us who can't or won't conform to the binary gender system...that there are only two genders: male and female."

The 'pathological status' idea probably comes from post-modern theorist Judith Butler, a prolific author on Western gender matters who argues "that it is not possible to be a human subject without taking shape within the law of a gender – either male or female. This exclusionary framework creates a domain of the 'unliveable', occupied by people who do not fall into the binary divisions of gender."³⁴

If Volcano is arguing that his domain is liveable it does not appear to be a wholly comfortable place even for him. On his website he describes being bashed up by a group of teenage youths on a London bus "for wearing red trousers and odd boots". In a later interview at the Maine College of Art he details an incident of verbal abuse at the makeup counter of a London store that left him feeling bruised.

In '*Hermlove*', a poem and prose piece on Volcano's website, he states that he usually passes as a male in everyday life. "I possess abundant facial hair and a deep husky voice." He adds that there is also something feminine about his looks, small features, large hazel eyes on a neatly, balanced medium frame.

"Lipstick and a frock on a hirsute muscular frame create visceral dissonance in those I encounter. I must be queer with so many clues competing for a pronoun."

It appears that Volcano is looking for a place somewhere between the genders and is attempting to legitimise his voluntary gender reassignment by appropriating the place of or at least associating with those affected by involuntary gender assignment.

Helen McDonald writing in *Art Monthly* sounds like a drag king fan, especially of the local (Melbourne) scene that she describes as "witty, home-grown transgender talents...they parody masculinity to the point of absorbing it, and by dint of their own bent versions of it become stars."

McDonald goes on to argue that drag kings are visual artists ... "prompting their audience to imagine possible identities – that is as a sort of forum for assessing the ethical and *ontological* status of variant sexualities." (My italics).

It sounds more like bois (pronounced boys) having fun on stage in front of more bois but I wasn't there.

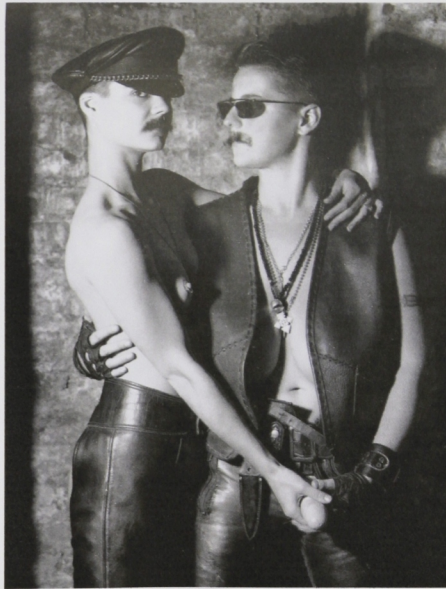
Writing on Del LaGrace Volcano, McDonald claims that Volcano's first book *Love Bites*: "coincided with a shift in emphasis in queer criticism of the 1990s from the deconstruction of gender roles to embodiment, desire and polymorphous sexuality, and in practice from the performance of masculinity by lesbians to embodiment (intersex by birth) or body modification (through hormone treatment and/or surgery). The trend culminated in the emergence of the female-to-male transsexual into the public domain."

By public domain I assume that McDonald probably means mainstream, popular culture. Hormone therapy and sex reassignment surgery have been available for over fifty years it's not a 1990s phenomena. And female-to-male transsexuals have always been more successful at 'passing' than male-to-female transsexuals. Many female-to-male transsexuals live their lives without drawing attention to themselves; they don't suffer the stares that their counterparts must learn to live with. Stares that

can come with being six feet tall and having big feet that no amount of hormones or surgery can alter.³⁵

Del LaGrace Volcano's earlier book, *The Drag King Book* (1999) was co-written with academic, Judith "Jack" Halberstam who states her intentions in the foreword and perhaps explains McDonald's 'public domain' comment: "By preserving and presenting a small slice of Drag King culture in all its complexity, I hope to counter the mainstream media representations of Drag Kings as supermodels with moustaches. While magazines like *Penthouse* and *Marie Claire* try to use Drag King culture to bolster their lurid fantasies about lesbians with penis envy or playgirls with dicks, this book expresses my interest in precisely what is queer about Drag Kings and their performances."³⁶

The 100 or so mostly black and white photographs in *The Drag King Book* range from flash-on-camera backstage or dressing room snapshots to elaborate studio tableaux, including overtly pornographic sex scenes with plastic dildoes. "*Lesbian Cock*" from the *Daddy Boy Dyke* series, London 1992 appears at first glance to be two leather-clad gay boys with moustaches embracing in front of a brick wall. Except for a nipple caught in the side lighting that reveals feminine breasts, when you look further her partner has breasts too, mostly hidden in the shadow of a leather vest. Below the vest an erect penis protrudes from his (?) leather pants, cupped by each model's hand. The image is voyeuristic, erotic and powerful, a parody of pornographic gay photography. The subject with the highlighted nipple looks directly at the viewer through the camera challenging you to meet her gaze or look away if you're shocked, you are left feeling like a peeping tom, if you're not a little uncomfortable the artist didn't succeed in making you an accomplice in his/her risqué little game.



Lesbian Cock, Del LaGrace Volcano

Interspersed between live performance, backstage or street photos are figures in a studio against a white background that in many cases has been etched away rather

like commercial advertising shots that clash, in my view, with the unetched ones. The studio shots are often in series of two or three, front then back, clothed and serious then partially unclothed and in some cases having simulated sex. Many of the dressing room shots show the subject and their mirrored reflection.

Halberstam is right to claim that Volcano is using a 'deep surface' technique to reveal more than one side of the body and the mirror to suggest that the body is made up of many surfaces.

Multiple views, by their nature, suggest that there is more to the scene than what you see and that these characters will reveal more if you stay around long enough to see their other sides.

Performer Mo B Dick appears in three different mirror shots in *The Drag King Book*, the last one in gorgeous colour. Mo sports an exaggerated 1960s rocker hairstyle; the bleached front stands up at least four inches in a cockscomb. Halberstam refers to it as a pompadour hairstyle. Mo stands looking into a full-length wardrobe mirror adjusting the collar of a lewd leopard print suit. The facial hair is obviously fake, and what appears to be chest hair above a white singlet must be as well. The picture is split down the middle by the edge of the wardrobe mirror and on the other side we see Villan another Drag King, slim and elegant in a three-piece white suit and brown open-necked shirt sitting, watching Mo. But no, it is Villan's image reflected back into the centre of the composition by a dressing table mirror that appears to watch Mo watching himself, whereas the real Villan is actually looking out of the picture. Nothing in the room suggests a man's sensibilities, makeup, moisturiser cream and ornaments on the dressing table point to a woman's touch but then these drag kings are women pretending to be men. Kings only for a night? Or Kings only at night?



Mo B Dick and Villan, Del LaGrace Volcano

Volcano's self portraits in *The Drag King Book* are almost incidental, it's interesting to see how he portrays himself, small and pixyish, with the facial hair of a teenager

cultivating his first beard in the hope that it makes him look grown up enough to get into his local pub. These snap shot style portraits don't really add anything to the book except to show that he belongs to the genre, that he is part of the scene.



Del is on the right

A really striking (shocking?) self-portrait appeared beside an interview by Chris Thompson of the Maine School of Art before a Volcano public lecture in April 2004.³⁷

Volcano wears a black bowler hat and not much else, his eye makeup and red lips based on the Malcolm McDowell character in Stanley Kubrick's film, *A Clockwork Orange*. This notoriously violent film, notable for it's main character, a callous, unrepentant rapist shocked audiences of the 1960s and Kubrick withdrew it from UK screens after it was blamed for copycat violence.³⁸



The caption under Volcano's self portrait reads: His Terrorist Hat: Del LaGrace Volcano slips into many roles as he fights gender norms.

Volcano's arms are forward to emphasise the shoulder and chest muscles but at the bottom edge of picture are unmistakable female breasts, the nipples too large to be a man's despite the evident body hair.

Tamsin Wilton writing on Volcano's voyeurism suggests that by photographing himself Volcano sidesteps any suggestion of exploiting his subjects: "By exposing himself as he exposed his models, Grace asserts community with the women who have posed for him and interrupts the voyeuristic gaze with his own controlling presence. Few women struggling with the male-dominated conventions of erotic art have confronted them with such courage and audacity." ³⁹

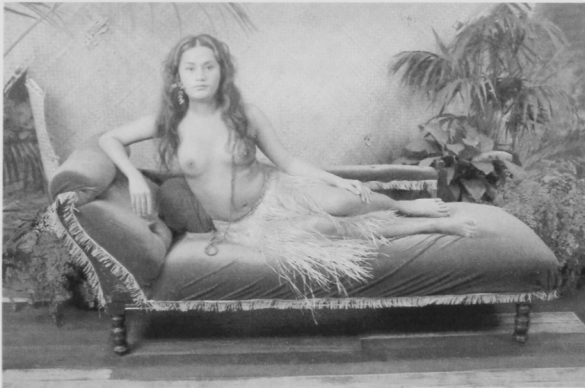
Volcano himself questions his own motives: "As a photographer who deals in seduction and exchange I have been wondering why it is that people allow themselves to be photographed by me in what you could call compromising positions.... I ask them to submit to my fantasies and to confess their own to me. Is it any more than narcissistic pleasure? Or an overwhelming desire to speak sex and hear it spoken?"⁴⁰

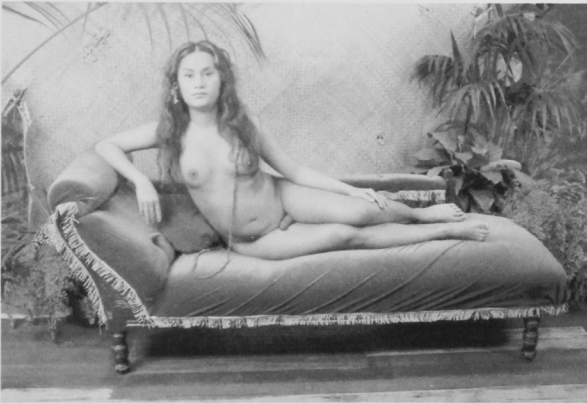
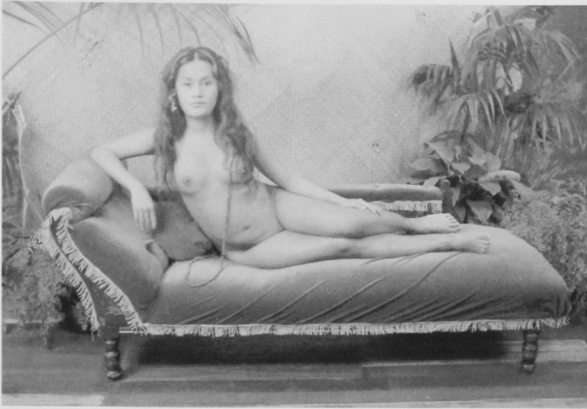
How does Kihara fit it?

Shigeyuki Kihara is young, as evidenced by her self-portraits and the fact that she graduated from the Wellington Polytechnic in 1995 aged 19. But a defining fact about Kihara is that she is a fa'afafine, a Samoan male-to-female transsexual. Her most recent exhibition called, *Fa'afafine: In the Manner of a Woman*, - the literal translation of fa'afafine - was of intimate self-portraits revealing all, her female breast implants and penis, a brave move on her part.

The portraits are styled to look like colonial-era studio portraits, sepia-toned and stiffly posed against a painted back drop, as if the subject is holding still during a long shutter exposure. A pose that dehumanises the subject, already an object by virtue of her race and gender, whose gaze we can't catch because that would be considered insolent by her white viewer (or voyeur) for whom portraits like these were often taken.

A series of three near identical, reclining nude photos are arresting, in the first she wears only a grass skirt in the second she is naked and in the third there is a penis between her legs. She gazes out but not directly at the camera but blankly, without expression, looking at nothing.

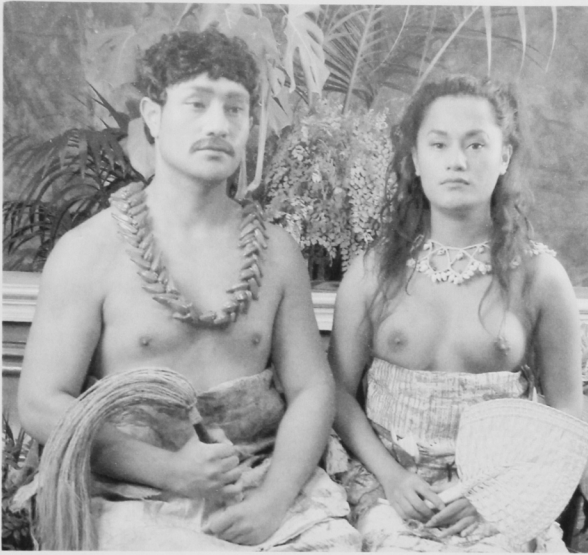




Fa'afafine: In A Manner of a Woman 2004-05 Shigeyuki Kihara

In *A Man and A Woman of Samoa*, the seated couple is clothed in traditional native dress. The coarsely woven fabric of her skirt stops below her bare breasts. She wears an intricate necklace made of shells and holds a fan rather demurely in her lap. The Samoan man wears a similar skirt but his neck is adorned with a necklace made of seedpods. Kihara reputedly posed for both portraits but unless she underwent radical breast surgery between the two photographs this statement is hard to believe.⁴¹

Only in, *A Man and A Woman of Samoa* where the pair is in the same frame, does Kihara look directly at us, proud and aloof.



A Man and a Woman of Samoa Shigeyuki Kihara 2004-05

Fa'afafine are considered a third gender, neither men nor women and are generally biological males who have expressed feminine gender identities from an early age and are brought up as girls. In traditional village life in Samoa fa'afafine do women's work, such as cleaning, food preparation and caring for relatives and they are defined by the gender role of the work rather than their sexuality.⁴²

Samoa's neighbouring islands have their own equivalents of the fa'afafine, in New Zealand Maori it is whakawahine, in Tonga it's fakafafine, and in the Cook Islands it's akava'ine.⁴³ In Hawai'i transsexuals are mahu and they too, are reputed to have held privileged positions in their communities in pre-European contact days. "Mahu were the keepers of cultural traditions, and performed the roles of goddesses in hula dances that took place in temples that were off limits to women."⁴⁴

Sex researcher and academic Pat Califia, in reviewing Walter L. Williams' book, *The Spirit and the Flesh* written from a gay historical perspective principally about Native American gender roles, in her own book *Sex Changes, the politics of transgenderism*, in it Williams "describes a custom among the Lache Indians of Columbia, South America that allowed a woman who had five sons and no daughters to turn one of them into a girl to share her household chores. He also describes a practice among Aleut and Kodiak Islanders, who sometimes chose to raise one of their sons, from infancy, as a girl, in order to later sell the child, between the ages of ten and 15, to a wealthy man who wanted a boy-wife."⁴⁵

Third-gender roles existed among many North American Indian tribes and were referred to globally as berdache by early European anthropologists.

"The Gay Indian History Project has published a list of over 130 Native American tribes that had berdache-like roles for men. Some, but not all, of these tribes also recognised gender-variant roles for women. A few tribes also recognised a fourth gender, that is, females who took on male roles."⁴⁶

The word berdache is not based on a Native American language but came from Persia via Spain and France into English and refers to the passive partner in anal intercourse.

It is a common theme in countries that allow (or have allowed) space for a third gender role that young men often have their first sexual encounter with such a person.

Ramon A. Gutierrez, a gay, male academic like Williams is quoted by Pat Califia, as believing that the "berdaches were actually captives taken in battle who were forced to impersonate women and provide sexual service in order to humiliate them."⁴⁷

Gutierrez disputes the commonly held romantic view that berdaches were shamans, temple experts and go-betweens mediating between the sexes. He says: "Berdaches were reported as being under male ownership. They were frequently found in male social spaces performing activities associated with females during male rituals: fellating powerful men or being anally mounted by them."

In Burma where third-gender people are called "acaunt" it is entirely acceptable for heterosexual men to have sex with them precisely because acaunt are not seen as men and the behaviour is therefore not considered homosexual which in Burma is against the law.⁴⁸

Likewise in Thailand it is far more socially acceptable for men to have sex with a 'ladyboy' than with another man.⁴⁹ Again this reasoning applies in Samoa where young men who engage sexually with fa'afafine are not seen as gay because their behaviour is not threatening to marriage and procreation, 'everyone knows' that they will eventually marry and have children.

Unfortunately, "the most obviously visible Samoan fa'afafines living in Auckland are the cross-dressing sex workers on the streets in the red light district, Fa'afafine appear over-represented in the sex industry." This comment is from Johanna Schmidt who undertook research in Samoa on fa'afafines. That is not to say that all fa'afafine are prostitutes.

Schmidt also points out that in Samoa "fa'afafine are an unremarked part of everyday life in Apia (capital of Samoa), working in travel agencies, serving in bars, and shopping in local supermarkets without, on the most part, attracting undue attention."⁵⁰

Jim Vivieaere, an Auckland based artist and curator in his catalogue essay for Kihara's *Fa'afafine: In the Manner of a Woman* exhibition at Shermann Galleries in April this year, seems to suggest that Kihara escapes Western ideas on transsexualism basically by not being a Westerner. He too, quotes Judith Butler, as everyone writing about gender does, and says that Kihara fits into Butler's category of passing as if belonging to the chosen gender category.

Jim Vivieaere goes on to say that: "Painters who portray themselves are subject to their own scrutiny." Before *Fa'afafine: In the Manner of a Woman* Kihara's other exhibitions also exploited her Samoan background but not her gender status. 'Vavau' presented a range of characters from traditional Samoan legends, simultaneously parodying Western velvet paintings and paying homage to her ancestry.⁵¹

"Where the velvet painters are notorious for portraying Pacific people from the colonial gaze," Kihara says in her artist's statement. "I come from a point of view of the insider."⁵²

Essay conclusion

Both Volcano and Kihara exploit the voyeur in us - the audience, if we want to keep looking after the initial gasp of surprise we have to approve to a certain extent, it's as if they are saying to us: if you don't agree with what you see you can leave and oh, don't slam the door on the way out please.

The approaches are different; Volcano uses the complicit, direct gaze of her subjects to good effect. Kihara on the other hand shows herself as objectified, mostly with a blank gaze that gives nothing away, only in one picture in *In the Manner of a Woman*, is she the proud native woman of substance unafraid to look at us through the camera.

Despite protestations to the contrary, Volcano's work is as much about sex, as it is about gender, sex with the added twist of uncertain gender identity. As for his political claims of the rights of those born with an intersex condition, they appear somewhat shallow, more as justification after the fact rather than the motivation for his images. Not that his images aren't powerful but they are powerful images about sex not intersex.

Both artists show us the worlds they inhabit, from an insider's perspective, in Kihara's case she is referencing her country's history rather than the present and her pictures have a certain cachet of authenticity due to her insider status.

The main message from Kihara seems to be that there is a third gender in Samoa, the fa'afafine, women who are not women but not men either. Whereas Volcano's work suggests that in her world the bipolar view of gender is outdated, between 'man' and 'woman' is a multitude of genders, a rainbow, with black and white at the extremities but with every possible shade in between.

End Notes

1, Anthony Haden-Guest, essay in Sticky Sublime anthology edited by Bill Beckley Allworth Press 2001 p51

² Thomas McEvelley, essay in Sticky Sublime anthology edited by Bill Beckley Allworth Press 2001 p75

³ Beautiful Lies: Photography and Wilderness, electronic paper, University of Tasmania www.utas.edu.au/art/imaging/Stephenson viewed 4/6/06

⁴ Time Exposed portfolio started in 1980s

⁵ The text is written in numbered footnotes, Another Water, Roni Horn, Thames and Hudson, London, 2000

⁶ p54, essay by Anthony Haden-Guest, Sticky Sublime anthology edited by Bill Beckley Allworth Press 2001

⁷ p190, essay by Joseph T Keiley, Dallett Fuguet and John Francis Strauss in Alfred Steiglitz and his contemporaries, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, 1997

⁸ idem

⁹ Susan Norrie, Notes from Underground, MCA 2003

¹⁰ Interview with UK art critic Martin Herbert, www.eyestorm.com 15/8/2000

¹¹ Why do Painted Portraits Still Matter, lecture by Sandy Nairne, Director, National Portrait Gallery, London, given at the National Portrait Gallery, Canberra April 28, 2006

¹² Interview July 20, 2006

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¹⁴ p.37, op sit

¹⁵ ibid

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- ¹⁷ ibid
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- ³⁸ Steve Dow, interview with Malcolm McDowell p.54 Sunday Life magazine Nov 12, 2005
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- ⁴² Johanna Schmidt, Redefining Fa'afafine: Western Discourses and the Construction of Transgenderism in Samoa 2001 www.sshe.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/issue6/Schmidt.html 2005
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- ⁴⁵ Califia p.131
- ⁴⁶ ibid p.124
- ⁴⁷ ibid p.143
- ⁴⁸ ibid p.147
- ⁴⁹ www.viceland.com/issues 2005
- ⁵⁰ Johanna Schmidt par17
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Addenda

Report Conclusion

It is with regret that I finish my studies; I dragged the course out for as long as I could, not only because it was enjoyable but it was enlightening as well. The course of study provided me with new ways of looking at my practice.

Not having an art school or an academic background I could not at first see the value of studying other people's work until the obligatory essay forced me to read extensively. Previously I had associated referencing other people's work with a lack of originality. In fact the Art School appeared to me to be churning out endless wannabe Hensons, Parrs and Shermans but in the library I finally 'got it' – that the 'why' of a piece is as important if not more so than the 'how'. Finally, I understood how to use research to inform my artistic expression rather than simply to justify it.

Approved study program

Semester one 2004

Aims of the project outline

To investigate further the inherent possibilities in lenticular flip technology to show time passing, something I started in my 2002 graduate diploma. This time around I want to express the concept of time via minimalist landscapes.

Coming from an illustrative photography background my experience has been in showing all the detail, and I want to learn how to reduce my images to the essence of an idea without spelling out the meaning.

In this digital age of image saturation where we are bombarded with still and moving images in all areas of life from advertising and graphic editorial in the morning paper to television entertainment at night, sophisticated viewers require very few clues as to what an image is about.

I found inspiration in Hiroshi Sugimoto's seascapes that feature only water and air, sea and sky. He said in an interview that he was searching for "the most unchanged scene on the surface of the earth...seascapes must be the least changed scene, the oldest vision we can share with ancient people. The sea may be polluted but it looks approximately the same. So that's a very heavy time concept." (Martin Herbert, www.eyestorm.com 15/8/00).

Using Sugimoto's time concept as a starting point I would like to investigate light, space, colour and emotion that are ever-changing in nature and seek to capture this change in lenticular prints.

Methods and resources

I am fairly self-sufficient as far as equipment goes and I have experience in lenticular technology. It would be useful to have access to Photomedia's 120 film scanner as I intend shooting some of my source images on 120 slide film.

Context

Animated and/or 3D images that don't require special glasses (ie stereo) or expensive lighting (ie holograms) for viewing are not only a novelty but add to the repertoire of available techniques for artistic expression.

Anticipated outcomes semester one

I anticipate that research and gathering of source material will take up 50% of semester one including trips to the coast to photograph sea and sky and making test lenticular prints will take up the other 50%.

I hope to have a series of small lenticular landscapes to show at the end of semester one.

Semester one 2005

Aims of the project outline

In this Semester's Studio Practice unit I propose to continue my work with 3D lenticular technology, producing as many 3D portraits as I can; in order to find out what works best. I believe that mastering the technical aspects will free me to concentrate on the creative content. Happy accidents are nice and I am open to whatever outcomes my technical research might bring but accidents cannot replace technical mastery and the need to produce reproducible results over a body of work. I intend to work through the different printing methods and substrates and the different methods of mounting and alignment currently available in order to discover what pitfalls might await me.

At the same time I am reading and researching the world of my transgender and gay subjects to better understand them and travelling whenever necessary to photograph them.

Methods and resources

Having bought a specialised five-lens camera that uses 120 roll film for my 3D work last semester I will be queuing up to use Photomedia's film scanner until I can afford to buy a second-hand one for my studio.

I also intend to acquire a portable background system to take to portrait sessions.

Context

I am working towards producing exhibition prints for a coherent show at the end of my course of study. This show, based on portraits of people of ambiguous sexuality photographed in the ambiguous medium of 3D lenticulars, will be called "Almost the Real Thing."

Anticipated outcomes semester one

In this semester I am enrolled for only one unit of Studio Practice as the Art Theory subject I am required to take is not being taught this semester, I therefore intend to use the time principally for technical research of the materials involved.

Semester two 2005

Aims of the project outline

My main aim is to produce a coherent body of life-size 3D portraits fairly equally divided into "men as women" and "women as men" for my continuing 'Almost Real' project. To this end I have actively sought out models from Canberra's transsexual community and I have been fortunate to find a diverse cross section of people willing to have their photograph taken by someone who is not of their milieu.

Methods and resources

The Chinese 3D camera I bought last semester is working well, I have since bought a new 120 film scanner as film will always be the medium with this camera. Photomedia's scanner is showing its age and it's a long way from my studio. The majority of my portraits have been taken in Photomedia's lighting studio, a wonderful resource that I am very grateful to have the use of.

Context

What I am working on is a series of photographs of ambiguous subjects in an ambiguous medium to make people think about 2D-3D, men-women and all the shades in between.

Through interviews and reading I am learning about gender dysphoria, its prevalence in our society and how people cope with it in their lives, from simple part-time cross-dressing to partners living 24/7 as the opposite sex.

I have come across other photographers dealing with gender ambiguity notably two who are transsexuals themselves. Both of these artists take confronting photographs that often feature blatant evidence of their subjects' biological gender in a visible penis on an otherwise female body or female breasts and facial hair. My approach is more subtle, the clues are there, a beautiful woman with a slight beard shadow, effeminate boys with (fake) moustaches. The medium of lenticular 3D also helps to differentiate my work from what has been done before.

Anticipated outcomes semester two

By the end of the semester I will have a series of portraits suitable for exhibition and a wealth of knowledge about gender that I didn't have before - fodder for the required art theory essay and final report.

Semester one 2006

Aims of the project outline

This semester being the final one of the MAVA I intend to produce a summary exhibition of the two projects I undertook during my course of study – Wind, Water, Waves, a series of animated lenticular landscapes and Almost Real, a series of 3D transgender portraits. The required studio report will also be completed this semester.

I hope to print one of the landscapes in large scale to better appreciate the time factor that the lenticular flips inherently allow, as in clouds scurrying across the mountaintops and their shadows doing the same at ground level. Or a wave breaking on the beach, or the water's surface being rippled by the breeze.

The 3D portraits of transgender subjects will be blown up to life-size after I have resolved the problem of whether to give up photographically accurate skin tones for the sake of inkjet accuracy of registration of the interlaced images with the very fine (40 lines per inch) 3D screen.

Methods and resources

I am self-sufficient as far as equipment goes and I now have extensive experience with lenticular technology.

Context

Wind, water, waves: these moving landscapes incorporate time in a single image, like a very short video sequence but without the necessity of an enclosed, darkened space to view them.

Each picture is made up of 10-15 sequential images that are interlaced with special software, the resulting print is laminated to a plastic screen made up of multiple lenses that allow you to see the sequence play out as you walk past.

Air and water being the very basis of life as we know it, I am interested in trying to capture evidence of these elements at work in the landscape but in a moving picture rather than the classic still photograph.

Almost Real (3D transgender portraits), is a series of studio portraits of gender ambiguous subjects for an ambiguous medium. All the men in my pictures are actually women and all the women are actually men while the 3D pictures are really only 2D though many people are fooled into wanting to look behind them to see the rest of the subject. The subjects were all photographed in Canberra and ranged from part-time drag queens and drag kings to transsexuals living 24/7 as the gender opposite to the one they were born with.

Anticipated outcomes semester one

I anticipate producing at least one large -scale animated landscape and several 3D transgender portraits for assessment and for the graduating exhibition mid-year.

Curriculum Vitae

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Born 1947, Baden bei Wien, Austria

Education

- 2004-06 Candidate Master of Arts Visual Art
School of Art, National Institute of the Arts, ANU
- 2002-03 Graduate Diploma of Art (Visual)
School of Art, National Institute of the Arts, ANU
- 1966-70 Diploma of Illustrative Photography RMIT

Group Exhibitions

- 2006 William and Winifred Bowness Photography Prize, Monash Art
Gallery, Vic
- 2006 Graduate season, ANU
- 2006 Kodak Salon, Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne
- 2005 Phoenix Spiritual Art Award, ANU
Josephine Ulrick Award, Gold Coast City Art Gallery, Qld
WIP exhibition PhotoSpace, ANU
Raglan Gallery, Cooma, NSW
- 2004 RawNRG Gallery, Thredbo, NSW
- 2003 Evolve, Graduate season ANU
Nikon Summer Salon, Centre for Contemporary Photography,
Melbourne

Solo Exhibitions

- 2006 Almost Real, 3D transgender portraits, Gallery Xposure, Sydney
- 2003 Timeframes, Artespresso gallery, Canberra