Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain: Hindsight in 2020

Kenneth Murphy

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Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain: Hindsight in 2020

A Thesis Presented

by

Kenneth Murphy

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
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Studio Arts
Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain: Hindsight in 2020

A Thesis Presented

by

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ABSTRACT

BLUE EYES CRYING IN THE RAIN: HINDSIGHT IN 2020

SEPTEMBER 2020

KENNETH MURPHY, B.F.A., SCHOOL OF VISUAL ARTS
M.F.A. UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Young Min Moon

The paintings that comprise Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain: Hindsight in 2020 are the output of my research and artistic practice at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. These paintings make visible the complex experiences and misperceptions of men in contemporary society. My intent was to create paintings that bring light to some of the darker aspects of manhood and rework phobias about manhood and male homosexuality through self-deprecation. This reworking is accomplished through the integration of disparate ideas and images, including perception, location, and exteriority, into compositions wherein representation and portraiture (specifically self-portraiture) make visible particular psychological states and hidden impulses attributed to men: the torment of failure, or the desire for power and sex.

Autobiography and confessions can become the best mirrors for deeper forms of self-discovery. One can be both aggressive and protected while remaining effective and hidden. The work, charming or terrifying as it
may be, questions the democracies of viewership, privacy, censorship and interpersonal relationships that can exist within a multicultural society. These paintings represent my own understanding of manhood, identity and sexual orientation; the ways one shields oneself from others, develops modes of self-preservation and transcends life's inherent suffering.
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CHAPTER 1

MANHOOD

One doesn't need to be a male to list the many expectations of the male within contemporary American society, just as one doesn't need to be a female to conjure the many expectations put upon the female here and now. The idea of race also, obviously, imposes its own set of cultural expectations. Some have it better than others.

These statements are simple, but being of these genders, races and also social classes are for everyone complex and naturally personal matters (of fact). The particular experiences, bodies and natural necessities of everyone matter.

One's artistic practice becomes praxis when the work and intention accord to communicate things that transcend the artwork itself, or transgress those aspects of the artist's worldview that he finds to be oppressive: old modes or institutions that need to be turned over or made anew. My praxis regards manhood and the improvement of the social perception or reception of men. This reworking of social perceptions of men is also connected to my identity as a white man and the phobic construction of whites and specifically white manhood.

Research in Men's Studies informs my studio practice. My studies affected the way I used representation and figuration as I moved specifically to self-portraiture. I am a man and the most concise way for me to express my
perspectives on manhood or identity is to work with my body as the first site of meaning. I am inspired in this regard by the artists Vito Acconci, Marina Abramovic, and other body artists who performed or used themselves as subject in their work. I read this work as a kind of self-portraiture that explores ideas of gender.

I recorded an action of painting myself in green acrylic paint in front of a green background. Then I integrated recordings I’d made of flower petals being blown about, mirrored that image to create symmetry and pattern which I placed over a black background. The result was a video wherein I "painted myself out." This erasure is a metaphor for the tactic of self-preservation I had employed in instances where my self-expression was censored. Often times, self-censoring was the mode to prevent subsequent and inevitable discord between my peers and myself. Being outspoken has caused tension to develop between myself and those that don't respect contrary perspectives. Self-censoring became my secret meaning to this work. Like we're told, "Just keep your mouth shut if you want to stay in the game, or don't cause waves", we all make concessions, vastly different concessions depending on what we are sometimes, that maintaining an order in which you find yourself likely means not disrupting that order.

Digital video proved to be a good medium for working through this content; having the images already composed, I decided to create paintings from a few still images of these video works. One of the paintings which both
held the strength of personal meaning and presented the indeterminate meaning for the viewer I'd hoped for was *If I Keep it Secret, I'll be Safe.*

*They're Getting the Wrong Idea, Anyway* (figure 1).
In this oil painting I present a composite image of a shirtless and light-skinned white male body wherein a hidden paintbrush is being used to either paint *in* the man himself, or paint him *out* of the state his presently is in. I intended this to be transitional since his action is in a state of being captured by the viewer, of whom he is also aware. Now the viewer is party to the integration or disintegration of this man with his environment that he seems to be causing himself. Eye contact between the human subjects in art and the viewer has always been an intimate mode through which a motionless art object can transcend its own stillness or flatness to become momentarily *real* or lifelike. In this painting, my missing mouth connotes a silent state while the limited representation of a bald head and mustache are enough to sustain the notion of fragmented manhood.
CHAPTER 2

CHILDHOOD

Aside from the abstract social concept class and the potential for upward class mobility, these four demographics (race, gender, class and sexuality) one is born with as an American dictate our roles in this country. Importantly, being a male or female and of any of the three sexual orientations, ideally, would dictate for one, naturally, how to conduct oneself in society. Generally, boys are taught to be good boys and girls are taught to be good girls. Goodness is the easy part; getting each gender to arrive at the same state of goodness is the complex matter.

As one develops their worldview grows from bedrooms to homes, neighborhoods, communities, and eventually encompasses any world that is imaginable. (1) The ways we imagine the world and our place within it moves from being shaped by a microcosm, the family, to being shaped also by the macrocosm, the world external from our own. This transition, like all transitions, will always have unforeseen consequences. The world could affect your sense of racial, ethnic or religious identity as well as your connection to who you are as a boy or girl.

I am a male and so are my brothers. We were each born as boys and are now men. I am a male and a homosexual. My brothers are males and are heterosexuals.
Manhood is the primary, natural form we inhabit and our sexualities are each a secondary relationship to and from our natures as males. My brothers and I could be a trio of boys that expected to grow up to become men and find women to court and marry, bear children and find financial success. But as we grew, we experienced things, which reshaped our worldviews and secondarily reshaped our self-images.

One may learn during puberty that they're not attracted to the opposite sex. Children are generally raised with the understanding that males are sexually attracted to females and vice versa, though in the recent past, here in the West at least, we have come to understand that being born bisexual or homosexual is as natural as being born heterosexual. In any case, homosexuals or bisexuals or heterosexuals, all remained men after being boys and women after being girls. Social expectations exist for us all and we each find ways to be the man or woman we have the capacity and resources to become.

*Keep Up Appearances, If Just for Others’ Sake,* (figure 2) grows from a desire to represent both an existential sadness, and to show the potential to transcend a state of depression found through bodily discontentment. It depicts a physical integration of human nature (as it can connote a type of internal psychology) and non-human nature (which then becomes an exteriority) to convey transcendence from one type of natural existence to another. The viewer encounters the "man within the painting" undergoing a
transformation; the man is aware of his vulnerability in being observed during his metamorphosis. This form of self-aware protection that is here developing a hard facade (to live up to expectations or to defend against harm) becomes a mode of survival.

Figure 2. "Keep Up Appearances, If Just for Others' Sake", Oil and acrylic paint on canvas, 24" x 24", 2019
In 1991, in LA, a routine highway stop by police escalated into a violent attack. The group of cops were *white* men and the driver was a *black* man. The entire incident was recorded live on videotape, so this horrifying response by the LAPD was played on national television and gave the country an opportunity to confront the longstanding and pervasive problem of police brutality which exists between police and the African American community. The L.A. riots, which took place from April 29th to May 3rd, 1992, were a social and political response to this inappropriate and often violent.

In 1994, the acclaimed American football superstar O.J. Simpson, was driving in his now famous white Ford Bronco on a LA freeway with a friend, fleeing arrest for an alleged violent crime. O.J., a very successful *black* man, was accused of murder in the case of his *white* wife's death. The duration of the coverage and the identities of the parties involved played on America's racially sensitive sensibilities. It was only natural that racial tension would vibrate in louder tones up where we were living in central California after so much occurred in Southern California. This was a national matter, but "on the ground", it was simply a personal matter. Race was always a bigger matter than anything else.

In 1993, I entered eighth grade. My first week began with my friend asking me, "Are you a skinhead? I heard you were over the summer break." This was tough. I was just approaching thirteen years old, and realizing that I felt less like fitting in with the "hip hop" fashion trend that was prevalent at our
school. I was also listening to rock music, which was, like country music, was wrongly associated with racism in our school. Rockers (those into rock music), skaters (skateboarders who'd generally listened to punk music) and any other white male-related social groupings were considered potentially racist. Being different, it still seems, leads people to accept anything about you they may hear. These rumors caused social distance to develop between some of my friends and me. Was it age or society changing the ways we viewed each other? We were all moving into our teens, after knowing each other as sixth and seventh-graders, with this giant racial dynamic weighing on us more so than before.

The popular culture of the early 1990's was racially divisive in a way that seemed new, and we kids were dealing with it. Added to this was a gangster dynamic. In our neighborhood culture, which effected everything from the way we dressed and behaved around each other to the streets we decided to walk down at night. This might make sense in a bad area, but we all lived in nice neighborhoods, so going gangster was actually just a violent trend in our area for a few years. What did it mean that our teenage society was so racially sensitive that white kids couldn't be who they were without fear of being considered racist and attacked? I imagine it was something like black teens being considered by adults to be violent gangsters simply for liking rap music. It was prejudiced, so similar, but the audience was different.
I Heard They Didn’t Jump You ’Cause You Had Your Board With You,

(figure 3) is a painting whose title is taken from an experience I had as a thirteen year old. I found myself skateboarding alone on a neighborhood street and was confronted by a small group of boys from school who’d found my sudden presence to be an opportunity for them to get aggressive. Before

Figure 3 "I Heard They Didn't Jump You 'Cause You Had Your Board With You", Oil and acrylic paint on canvas, 24" x20", 2019
they got close to me, I responded to their fight-suggesting upheld arms with the same gesture, but with my board held easily in the air as well. I did not have to use my board as a weapon, but it was general teen knowledge that others in our area had defended themselves with their skateboards before. Those boys shrugged it off and we all went on our ways. I did not want to confront them physically, but I had to project through a physical gesture my determination to preserve myself.

Beyond occasional instances of male posturing, threats and one knife that was pulled on me, there was one specific instance where my safely and the safety of some of my closest relations was in jeopardy. It was a day where everyone knew that something terrible was going to happen after school and we’d heard about it for days, as we were approaching Thanksgiving vacation. I brought by skateboard so as to skate home quickly afterward, my biggest concern being for my younger sister whom I was to babysit when I arrived home. Within forty-five minutes of the final bell ringing at school, hundreds of students were walking down my street. Aside from a collection of weapon-wielding gangster-wannabe types, droves of kids just wanted to see a fight, and had walked blocks to see something. I had my little sister locked in my parents’ room with a golf club while my two best friends and I looked through the front window to see if anything would happen. Eventually, cops drove up the street dispersing everyone. No one was hurt, that time, thankfully.
Whose fault was this? I later learned that a friend of ours told everyone where we lived. Had he wanted "street cred" so much as to endanger the lives of old friends he knew NOT to be racists? I later saw the ex-neighbor/friend who'd told the crowd where we'd lived and he said he'd felt bad, but couldn't stop the crowd. What made him do it? I learned he and his older brother were in gangs, but that had nothing to do with us.

After this and a few other instances, including my friend's getting jumped quite badly, my parents sent us to a neighboring public school system on an inter-district transfer, so we could focus on school and not have to deal with threats of violence that disrupted our schoolwork and ability to focus on that.

The year we were gone, a racial riot occurred at my previous school, Center High School. The smallest and probably kindest skater we'd known was put in intensive care. He was probably fourteen and certainly had nothing to do with racism. It didn't make sense, but it also did, because somehow the neighborhood maintained this strange need for violence against a racist element it perceived and misdirected that toward us.

That was the last riot at that school, but not the end of antagonistic relationships with certain other males that were maintained by the black or Hispanic gangster type boys I'd known. (If I hadn't played football in seventh grade and plowed down two of these antagonistic guys, I would have been targeted more so than I was.)
One year later, tenth grade, and I was back at Center High School. I had been away a while and the supposition that skaters were racists didn't much exist anymore, but racial dynamics worked their way in. One day that year, after we'd sat down for class, a teacher of mine wanted to turn on the classroom television to watch live the O.J. Simpson trial verdict. My heart dropped. I knew, from the direct threats from the two (aggressive?) black guys in class that if O.J. was found guilty, I was going to find myself personally answering for this perceived racial injustice. As I had, in the past, been marked as "one that might be racist", skaters or rockers, I was already being given special attention prior to the viewing. Guilty or not, my safety depended directly upon the court's verdict. O.J. must be innocent. He was.
William Connolly states that identity is (as) a site of struggle where fixed dispositions clash against socially constituted definitions. Identity is produced at the point of contact between essential understandings of self and socially constructed narratives of self. (2)

With the discovery of the “Americas” the European aristocracy assigned a model of power, which involved a process of historical 
*reidentification*. All other continents of people were attributed new geo-cultural identities (3), which placed them within a categorization of light to dark where light was top and dark was opposed. According to Quijano in his work *Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America*, the result of this colonial power is two fold for the colonized peoples: "first they are dispossessed of their singular historical identities and secondly, their new identities involve the plundering of their place of origin by outsiders whereat their new identities were made by those colonists and are therefore negative". (4)

I was raised as an American and within my family (as I'd hoped with all American families) this meant that we regarded everyone as equal. I was to understand that those that are different from us (I was and am considered
white, by society) in this country, quite possibly "had it worse than" us. This wasn't always the case, of course, but that succinct perspective of the country, as a "white boy", was, for the most part, sufficient to allow me to develop an equal view as I lived in and within this multicultural nation.

Figure 4. "Painting of the Painter Painting the Painter, Greenman", Acrylic paint on canvas, 30" x 30", 2018
Whiteness, like any racialization of a people, is a social construct created by the Europeans, which has for we Americans of other European nations and bloodlines, created a negative context for us within multicultural and contemporary society.

Considering my identity in Painting of the Painter Painting the Painter, Greenman, (figure 4) I illustrated a painting of the painter himself in the act of painting himself, the painter, green. Masking the whiteness I possess was part of the theme of this painting paired with an intention to refer to the traditions of painting, portraiture and self-portraiture. Unlike figure 1, wherein I'd intended to discuss negativity and erasure, I'd wanted this one to be generative and positive. Green Man is a legend of European origin of an elemental within nature, often a man with a leafy face who foretells the coming of Spring, Beltane, or May Day, represents rebirth and the start of the cycle of growth. Instead of overloading the image with disparate things to convey the chaotic troubles of race or gender, I used as few elements as possible, even stopping the painting after the under-drawing and first layer of acrylic paint were applied, so that the paint itself didn't distract from the content. Here, the eye contact, the eye color and the Disney-esque simplicity and coloration of the paint add a particular and American aesthetic to the painted image. For me, this concretized a long-held intuition about myself: I am a self-portraitist. Like a confessional poet, the self-portraitist may use themselves and their
experiences to convey truths they've found within existence to those willing to look in art for those conveyances. I confess that I'm of a gender and race that had a particular and vastly detrimental effect on the many nations of the world and by extension, I, in my body and existence, represent to many that historic and still present scourge. I've learned that to some people in other cultures, blue eyes have particular and negative connotations. I'm intending to rework my manhood from a representation of something oppressive to something generative; I need to regard generation itself.

Within my family, I'm not "white", like some sad oversimplification of the cultural identity that ignores previous generations of my ancestral heritage. I've learned to be white as an identity that exists beyond my racial background.

Culturally, my family is generally of English descent, and members of the Mormon Church. We were descendants of common, not aristocratic, and therefore never slave-owning, lines of Europeans. Like all Americans, we have who we are at home and who we are within the country or society, Like Munoz's hybrid self that is both private and public (5), we here have an internal and external dynamic between family and society. Growing up, my mother used to say, "Remember, you're not just a representative of this family, but also a representative of the (Mormon) church." My identity has had to combine the racial over-simplification of being white with my gender as a male and my Mormon ancestry with my homosexuality. At times it was
strange being Mormon to other Christian kids, then white as a pre-teen, then gay as a teen, and as an adult male or man, it has been strange as I'm outwardly viewed as a potential threat to women for being a man and to people of color for being white.

Figure 5. "Honey, it's Just a Stereotype. Show Them You're not Like that", Oil and acrylic paint on canvas, 36" x 36", 2019
Honey, it's Just a Stereotype. Show Them You're not Like That (figure 5) considers the idea of coloniality and what the racist foundations of a nation might look like. Not only did I regard these basement-level holes as fearful places in which to see eyes, but also as the protection we provide for ourselves. Regarding the title of this painting and it's personal context: when I was simply friends and neighbors with one of the kids who would later lead droves of antagonistic teens to my house seeking to harm me, he'd told me, "My church says that your church worships a white salamander". I denied this; I already knew by then, perhaps the age of ten, that some Christian denominations were threatened by our church. "Show them we're not like that", was my mom's response to how I handled the matter. She followed it up with, "Any church that feels they must denigrate another church perhaps has problems of its own". This idea of showing or illustrating what is true about oneself is pretty queer, but being open about one's faith can be challenging in a diverse place and reconciling difference can be challenging. We're transgressing as Mormons or homosexuals or African Americans simply by our being here. Social acceptance changes over time for some of these matters. Generally, I was allowed to be whatever boy I was, but it became challenging to be myself, not a gangster wannabe as that wasn't me, but deflecting the bad reputation was a constant problem to some groups that didn't know me.
By my childhood, grade schools were co-ed. An educational system intended to equalize my experience with that of the opposite gender sounds good, but in practice, grade school is constructed by women for students that behave as they, females, do. Boys are not females and each gender requires different attentions. I think we should integrate the genders educationally, but maybe only until middle school. Boys are losing at the academic game here in the states (6). My two brothers and myself all had to find alternative means of completing high school for a number of reasons as did most of my male peers. One problem we all shared was aggression from other males that prevented us from focusing on our studies during and after class.

It was usually racial aggression.

The importance of race was ingrained into our self-perceptions by society, not by my family. At home, it was important that I was a boy, but within society, the importance wasn't there, unless choosing clothes or enrolling for recreational sports. Even as children we knew that racial differences existed, that racial segregation had existed and was eradicated. We were of an American generation being raised for optimal equality, during the 1980's, but not without self-awareness. We knew we differed from each other and should celebrate the differences. We understood that our personal demographics (gender, race, economic status, sexual orientation) had significances that were reinforced by society which illuminated those differences for us.
As with some of the preceding paintings, *Why do the Neighbors Stare at Us like That?* (Figure 6) was intended to regard what it means to be viewed in domestic interpersonal relationships and the ways we disconnect ideologically from but live in close proximity to, or not. We can presume so
much about people that differ from ourselves simply because we're disconnected from them.

But perhaps it is the pressures placed on men historically that have made us aggressive. As Freud observes, "The existence of this inclination to aggression which we can detect in ourselves and justly assume to be present in others is the factor which disturbs our relations with our neighbor and forces civilization into such a high (expenditure of) energy." (7) If men are success objects and we find ourselves to be unsuccessful, what are we left with but ourselves? Freud says that, "Men want success and wealth, but few attain it. Which is why men seek pleasure as a removal and avoidance of pain or they lack pleasure."

I started "Self-medicating", it was called, by smoking marijuana and cigarettes in the tenth grade. By the end of my tenth grade year, I'd had to leave traditional high school in our new school district for being so far behind my first two years. I was sent to a "continuation school", which is a tiny high school for troubled, pregnant, or in my case, extremely distracted students. After attending for a few months, I'd made a few friends. One day, I mentioned that I was gay. I didn't think it unwise, for one of the gals was bisexual and I secretly knew another guy there was bisexual, too. In that instance, it was nice to make new friends on a closer level.

The next day, I skipped school (I was routinely truant by then), met a friend of mine at a nearby high school and we spent the day together. The
following day at my "continuation school", I was called into the administration
office between first and second period. I learned that I was being suspended
for having been seen truant on another school's campus. At this age, I was
used to being reprimanded at school. But
when I eventually arrived at my second period class, one of my friends was
strangely excited to see me. I learned that I was to have been jumped in the
yard between the classrooms and the detached art building, but this didn't
happen because I had been called into the office. I also learned who was
against me: white guys that were bigoted against gay dudes. The fright of two
years prior began new. Because of the obvious threat, I was allowed to move
to independent studies for the remaining two years of my high school
education.

In the Mormon Church, it is understood that we actually choose the
earthly parents we are born to. I must have been certain that I wanted to be
born into a North American family of Anglo decent and the pioneering
Mormon line in the year nineteen hundred and eighty in the city of the Great
Salt Lake in Utah. Six months after by birth, my parents separated (how 80's),
so in our mother's custody, we moved to California. Time passed; I grew-up to
be a homosexual preteen boy, white (as I came to understand) and very
"pale-skinned" at that. One doesn't know what one is until others inform them
of what they are. My mom would call me "fair-skinned".
One Sunday at church, I was seated in a row with several other twelve-year-old boys. We were the only boys who'd not decided to go through ordination and become deacons and this was a kind of punishment. I was seated next to an ornery guy whose name I don't remember, but he was Tongan. When we sat down, he looked at our neighboring arms on our armrests and exclaimed, "Man, you are pale!" The other boys laughed. I didn't mind, as I'd always been the kid that needed sunblock, but it was striking to suddenly have it shown to me by someone I didn't know and to have it denigrated. My step-siblings and my half-sister were of Lithuanian descent, and had darker skin than my brothers and myself when they would come to visit us in California from Utah, we would spend time outdoors in the sun, and after a day, they'd have dark, tanned skin, and I'd have accumulated a few freckles on my face and shoulders and maybe a little overall gray/yellow darkness. That's fair.

I don't have to inform the reader of the importance of skin tone and coloration within any culture, but we know that in post-colonial and subsequently multicultural societies that skin tone means even more than it would in a monoculture with few outsiders. As kids, we all had televisions and eventually met other people, so the nation's miscellaneous views on race, nationality or cultural identity crept in, kind or unkind as they were, while we socialized and came to our own conclusions.
What Do They Think We Are, Monsters? (Figure 7) represents the integration of internal psychological states of humans and the external forms found within the natural world. I wanted that integration between humans and nature to be taken to an abhorrent level.

Figure 7 "What Do the Think We Are, Monsters?", Oil and acrylic paint on canvas, 36" x 36", 2020
In my mind, the theme of this work was a diva, or a spirit of a tree; if I came upon this tree in nature, it would frighten or enlighten. This contrast of frightening and enlightening is a metaphor for the exotic to me, for while we are interested in different cultures, this interaction has been problematic in the past.

With maniacal eyes and an impasto-like finish on the facade of this tree, I intended this painting as a place where mysticism and art meet within a social context. The soft, recognizable, and obviously minimal background is merely a nominal frame for the supernatural and possibly beneficent thing imagined. I entitled this painting "What Do the Think We Are, Monsters?" (Figure 7) for autobiographical reasons that regard the ways people have become disconnected from their origins, as well as the ways that Christianity has demonized the deities of those nature-worshipping people that came before them. The title also regards the monstrous ways homosexual men have been portrayed in the past.
CHAPTER 4

SEXUAL ORIENTATION: REPRESENTATION

In sixth grade, I had a few friends, but my best friend was named Ray. I recall watching MTV in his room one day and seeing drag entertainer RuPaul's Supermodel music video. We laughed at how gay it was and how dressing like a woman was funny and strange. We both sort of liked the song, though. I wanted to be a recording artist like Kurt Cobain and Ray wanted to be a movie director like Robert Townsend. I grew up to be a homosexual and I'd later heard that Ray had turned out to be gay, too. I'm sure it wasn't RuPaul's video. .

RuPaul is a man that entertains in women's clothing and is a homosexual. I didn't believe RuPaul's race had anything to do with our reception of his work, but we did suppose he was a homosexual. Like all pre-teens and teenage boys, joking about homosexuality was funny and common. (8) We certainly understood at the young age of eleven that our races mattered. Not that it was spoken about, but soon enough, I understood that Ray liked Townsend, in part, for his being black and representing that perspective in his films. I didn't like Jimi Hendrix for being black, but I later understood the role his race placed in his life, as it does in every man's. We used to call each other "gay", as in insult, of course. I still recall one day in class, Ray jabbed, "I'm so gay!" about which he became suddenly
embarrassed. We laughed. My neighbors and I knew he meant to say that, "You're (I'm) so gay". It was telling and really funny.
CHAPTER 5

PARTICULAR CONCERNS ABOUT *MY MEN: GAY*

It has taken a long time to reshape the zeitgeist in the *Christianized West*, to reach the point where homosexuality and bisexuality are natural sexualities that deserve the same respect as heterosexuality (9). People aren't homophobic, but cultures or religions can make us homophobic or prejudiced. Heterosexuality is, of course, the majority sexual orientation. Numerically, it is supposed that heterosexuals make up about ninety-six percent of the population. Homosexual men and women are a minority at about 4%. The importance we all find precious is our right to be human, sexually, for suppression of one's sexuality is unnatural and potentially detrimental.

It is necessary that heterosexual men and women have sexual relationships with their opposite gender just as it is necessary that homosexual men and women have sexual relationships with partners of their own gender. Bisexual men and women have sexual attractions for both genders. This is sexuality and it is rooted in our nature. Sexuality, is based on behavior and genetics, not just genetics alone. It is within the mind, but connected to the body. Race, gender and social standing are visible. Sexuality is invisible.
Thinking of RuPaul, I'd like to consider, as a homosexual, our demographic's relationship to drag and what that relationship means, if anything, for homosexuality.

As a homosexual man, I'd not associated with drag culture and though I tried to understand it as a teen, it didn’t seem like anything more than a reaction to society’s hateful treatment of its homosexual male population. Like teen boys join gangs for inclusion, some young gay males go to drag for inclusion. As a homosexual man, I'd never felt that RuPaul was trying to express anything beyond a "joie de vivre" and possibly self-acceptance. I may not have felt I’d needed to intellectualize the cultural meaning of RuPaul's presence as an eleven year old, but his presence meant much more when I was a man of thirty-one, in 2011, when identity politics were creeping clandestinely into our culture.

RuPaul had started in his cable television show "RuPaul's Drag Race." Gay male contestants would create costumes and gowns, in traditionally female styles, and work on glamorous-looking hair and make-up so that, the "Best woman", would win. This was around 2011, and until then, I'd never thought much about transgendered people, just as I'd not thought about countless other people I'm unconnected to. After watching a few seasons of RuPaul's show, which included clever writing that poked fun at derogatory terms directed toward drag queens or cross-dressers, the writing had
suddenly been changed. I later learned the show's writers had been censored.

The best weekly bit, in which all of the contestants would gather around a television screen in anticipation of RuPaul's announcement and learn of that episode's objective, we'd hear, "You've got She Mail!" which was both funny and punchy. But, suddenly, it was missing. This joke and other bits were censored and when I'd researched why, it was because some transgendered organizations had found the language offensive. That was the first time I'd been given social basis with which to distinguish homosexuals from transgenders. Before this unexpectedly politicized moment in television entertainment, I'd simply accepted the LGBT grouping as this decades-old monolith of social signification.

Sadly, with the RuPaul incident, I suddenly understood that I was being grouped, as a homosexual, with a people that had nothing in common with me, except that oppressive people had demonized us in the past. Beyond that, my demographic, homosexual men, some of whom had recently created this successful platform (RuPaul's Drag Race), were being *censored!* This was no small matter, as censorship, and in particular, self-censorship, has been a looming factor in the lives of homosexuals for centuries. If this platform of homosexual self-expression could be censored by those supposed to be in accordance with the homosexual community, then they must not be in accordance with us at all. Something had been occurring that I had not
known: that gay liberation and women's liberation had been strange bedfellows since the late 1960's. Most gay men have no idea about the history of feminists censoring gay men from communicating openly between one another and they can't see how *queerness* has been used to make feminism, which is largely anti-male, a way to disconnect gay men from heterosexual men and wrongly align them with women. (10)

This led me to research RuPaul himself to see how he'd arrived a drag, which is in ways, female-impersonation, and I learned that he had started out in the New York punk scene and eventually his punk style of dress moved toward the wearing of female clothing and glamorous makeup. He is a man and uses a women's fashion, which is simply a component of glamour, as a mode of self-expression. He is still a man. His sexuality doesn't matter, but his placement in popular culture, as a homosexual representative that entertains via the glamorization of the opposite gender's traditional fashions, doesn't make him a member of the opposite gender, a woman. Who has silenced us before? What does it mean to be censored now by a "queer/transgender" minority after being censored by a Christian majority? (11)

Since then, I've been particularly sensitive to the ways in which the transgendered community criticizes and tries to censor homosexual men, since we're a minority ourselves with a troubled social history.

In *Stare Hard, Retard* (Figure 8) I consider the wall hidden behind the painting, the flatness of the painted surface, and how it creates a separation
between the viewer of the painting and the viewer within the painting. I considered a line from Jose Munoz's *Disidentifications*, Homosexual white men cannot consider themselves queer for they are not in a status

Figure 8. "Stare Hard, Retard" Oil and acrylic paint on canvas, 36" x 36", 2019
of victimhood like other queers since they (12) possess white male privilege. Depending on my demographics and who is regarding their intersectionality, I am or am not in a state of privilege, and therefore am likely of the oppressive class. When you tell a community of people that aren't in relation, like a homosexual man with a transman, that they are the same, confusion and upset will occur. I believe the mis-grouping “LGBT” does that and its ultimately bad for transgenders, too. Figure 9. *They Supposed the Worst About Me Because of What I Am.* As the title connotes, there's a two-party situation wherein one party is being characterized by another party in a fashion personally deemed unfair and perhaps immoral. Though this came from a very personal place as a homosexual, I despised being treated like a sexual deviant for a supposed deviation from the heterosexual normality who'd at times be group with sexual predators. Now, we homosexuals are being mischaracterized as genderless queers in an abstract way to gain male privilege.

Being a homosexual man and having your manhood and masculinity scrutinized, not by heterosexuals, but by transgendered people is simply the new wave of hatred directed at homosexual manhood and the ways we present or represent our homosexuality. One need only be a homosexual boy developing into a homosexual male to understand the self-worth found in maintaining one’s sense of manhood in a society which uses homosexuality as the antithesis of desirable virility. Cultures that align a male's homosexual
attraction with a heterosexual female's sexual attraction for males can cause homosexual males to regard their place within that culture as the place occupied by a woman. This feminization of a homosexual male acts against

Figure 9. "They Supposed the Worst About Me Because of What I Am", Oil and acrylic paint on canvas, 24" x 24", 2020
his developing manhood and influences him to replace it with a representation of. Perhaps he understood, as a boy, that those that attract to men are women, so in his intellectual isolation he determined to make himself like a female to attract a male, and subsequently, became a thing that many despise: *The gay deceiver*. The cross-dresser, the she-male, the man in women's clothing looking to attract a heterosexual man are all gender-bending manifestations of any sexuality, not just homosexuality. But the negativity developed by heterosexual males directed toward homosexuals is largely due to this deception. "You can still throw a football around and be gay and no one cares", but if you use deception to get what you want, you're deplorable (13). I agree.

We homosexual men have our own problems and reasons to celebrate. I'm still concerned about the dangers of unsafe sex and the still high numbers of cases of HIV/AIDS, and I wanted to regard the joys of homosexual activity and connote the fatality of carelessness. *Gender Matters*. *High Risk Sex* (figure 10) is a small painting compared to the others in this collection and is closely associated with the painting, *Size Matters*. They both present a faux wood, flat surface, and are hung at the height of an average man's waist, like a glory hole. A *glory hole* is a hole often cut in the divider between two men's room stalls to accommodate anonymous male-to-male sexual activity. Though oral sex, which is generally the type of sexual activity
associated with the glory hole, the high-risk comes from unsafe sexual practices, which naturally occur around glory holes as well.

This painted image contains a white person’s hand pointing a gun into the room. To refer to the action I intended, the gun needed to shoot, not as a

Figure 10."Gender Matters. High Risk Sex" Oil and acrylic paint on canvas, 18" x 14", 2020
gun, but rather as a man. The title states that "Gender matters," because often times the media reports as *queer* issues, stories that specifically impact gay men, like violence in dating through social media and the high level of HIV+ cases still within our demographic. In these ways, we are vulnerable as men and as homosexuals in ways that neither lesbians, women in general or

Figure 11."Size Matters. I'm Never Gonna Get Laid", Oil and acrylic paint, 18" x 14", 2020
transgendered people are. *Size Matters. I'm Never Gonna Get Laid* (figure 11) also regards an issue specific to men. I again worked with the format of a glory hole; even if the vast majority of men have never participated in sexual activity at those spaces, we can imagine what it would be like simply by knowing of their existence.

Figure 12. "What I am Privy to that You are Not", Oil and acrylic paint on canvas, 30" x 30", 2019
Humans are sexual beings; gay men are supposedly hyper-sexual (14) and when it comes to the ways sexuality is expressed, presented, represented, contextualized, exploited, stolen, etc. I wanted to create an image (fig. 12) that engaged with the male gaze, the privacy that hides sexuality, and the power dynamics between a white man stealing a view of the viewer. I wanted to speak to the potential reciprocity between the object and the subject. I found a pornographic video online of a prison guard peering at an inmate through the inmate’s cell door. The officer was masturbating to the prisoner who was himself masturbating in solitude. This image of the officer who is in control of this prisoner was a perfect metaphor for aspects of the content I was hoping to instill in my work. I wanted to create an image of a hidden person that derived from a place of positive sexuality and use it to incite feelings in the viewer. I wondered how an image that excites one may also frighten another. I continued to regard the separation between the viewer in the painting and what that separation could be. I felt like I’d created a metaphor for segregation and then considered a material that most people have seen used as a wall or separator between people, so I used a generic plywood pattern. This plane is also a way to regard the flatness of the painted surface which is inherent to painting. I chose to greatly enlarge the face to emphasize the difference in power between the man behind the wall and we that cannot cease his viewing of us. Compared to the pieces that actually involve eye contact, this one represents an aversion of eye contact from many
perspectives when viewed. I'm hoping for further curiosity to develop within the viewer through the hiding. This painting may be queer as in weird and dark, but my intentions are to express male homosexuality through painting.

For *The Male Gaze. The Male Gays,* (figure 13) used the format of a cut wood facade with holes conveying not one eye or one subject, but rather a series of subjects that create a narrative wherein they, as the internal viewers, *capture us bare* by comparison. Camera lens, hands, eyes and other modes of capturing a view of someone are all we can see. A cigarette being smoked is a phallic object, but also one that needs to be handled delicately and enjoyed at the mouth. The blue eye aligns with the hand holding the cigarette to become one man behind the wall. Above these two holes is a third which reveals a pair of hands holding a camera that is aimed at *we* the viewer. Therefore, we have at least two white people taking advantage of our presence before them. Pleasure, viewership, hyper-sexuality, the permanence of images and the privilege of information were the themes personal to me in the inception of this painting.

It is not today queer or strange to be homosexual, which is great! It is still strange to be one gender and decide you're another or find yourself in possession of a psychosis which causes you to believe that you are supposed to be the other, gender dysphoria. Yes, that is *queer* as one could be. (15)
Being *queer* is unusual and relative to your culture, or perhaps the dominant culture within one's society. In our multicultural societies of the West, only one of which I know and understand, the cultures of the African
diaspora have more in accordance with the concepts which comprise
queerness (16) than homosexual or bisexual within our post-colonial and
heterosexual Christian cultures. If being queer means seeing the
unacceptable aspects of acceptable society then, especially here in the
Western hemisphere, it seems that African Diaspora have had the queerest
experience of all. Queerness is relative and based upon representation and
social opportunity.
The bizarre thing about being a male who is often living with the threat of violence from other males (17) is that you steel yourself against outside negativity. We boys, because of a tradition of cyclical violence, deal with or experience the results of pre-existing patterns of aggression; regardless of race or sexuality, males must survive the trials placed upon them just to be considered men.

If we're all suffering from our bodies, the external world and relations to other people, there's only so much we can do to counter that suffering. Often times for men, intoxicating substances or potentially harmful behaviors are abused to diminish our misery are taken up to removed us from those situations. If you have supportive parents, like I had, they will do what they can to protect you, even if they don't understand the threat or why it is there. Even still, we move on and become men and the pressures on men are vastly heavier than those we had felt before.

People can cause harm upon one another without intention or malice. I thought to regard the matter of success and how vices develop especially as we naturally look for ways to cope with the stresses of life as we attempt to create the life we hope to live. In my personal experience, one may begin by smoking cigarettes in junior high school, marijuana in high school, alcohol in college, cocaine and other experiential and party drugs paired naturally with a
daily requirement of sex and eventually require only a few of these as you get older. The algebra of need is a term I've recalled often from William Burroughs' *Junky*, where one finds himself in need of five vices if he can

Figure 14 "Vices or The Algebra of Need", Oil and acrylic paint on canvas, 48" x 48", 2020
accommodate one. The one vice I didn't represent in this painting was sexual activity, but the void and nakedness I'd hoped would connote it.

I perceive a tendency within art education as it exists presently to regard our personal demographics as they relate to everything; this is likely a result of the politicization of academia itself. Can we enter a place of study, or any place for that matter, without being asked to identify ourselves? I intended to attend graduate school to continue my studies in painting, but I found that I needed to focus on men and specifically, homosexual men. Within the scope of my research and studio practice, I have tried to represent my idea of manhood and the often hidden aspects of the male experience which we have been conditioned not to show anyone.
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"Feminism has demonized all non-approved manifestations of natural masculinity as inherently toxic aberrations that need to be either corrected, eliminated or punished". "Pathologized male sexuality, to the extent that all
sexual activity involving men is interpreted as some form of violent sexual abuse, is a feminist construction (that is detrimental to men)."


"Gays are dying en mass is a response to centuries of society's hatred and repression of homosexuality. Gays internalized the hatred and are dying of the disease because of it."


15. *Sticks and Stones*, Dave Chappelle, Netflix 2019

"I feel bad for Ts. They have to admit, that its a fuckin hilarious predicament. If it happened to me, you'd laugh. What if I was Chinese, but I was born in this.. body. This is how I feel, inside."


"Absence and non-presence: intentionality and "The behind" (phenomenon) -What is unseen is conjured, exemplifies the spectrality of sameness (even if unseen) For a queer view, the historicity matters (provenance) as well as the missing view."