The background features a vibrant purple field with large, overlapping, angular shapes in a light orange or tan color. These shapes create a dynamic, layered effect, with some appearing as cutouts or overlapping planes. The overall aesthetic is modern and graphic.

This 150+ page survey brings together artists and creators who are tickled and driven by an exploration of sexuality in their work.

*Follow
them into
the depths
of the
flesh,
digging up
entangled
notions
of pleasure,
scandal,
identity,
subversion,
and good
old fun.*

*Sex on screens captures but two senses, but meat bodies are blessed with five—if not six! Here, the **interplay of sex, sense and visual culture** is the hot topic of discussion of a diverse group of artists and practitioners—including pornstar **Vex Ashley**; scent archivist **Sissel Tolaas**; erotic fiction publisher **Badlands Unlimited**; sex-ed instructors **Ana Cecilia Alvarez and Victoria Campbell**; and LA-based artist **Petra Cortright**, whose latest gallery show involved larger-than-lifesize digital strippers.*

*Moderated by **Fiona Duncan***

FD A quick game of association to start. Foreplay, if you will. Could you tell me what word, image, or idea springs to mind when I say “sex and art”?

VA Louise Bourgeois, Helen Chadwick, Tracey Emin. Sex as anxiety, as a weapon, or as a narrative, not often about sex itself.

VC The feeling is mutual.

ACA Wet paint.

BU Magic Mike 1 and 2.

FD How about “sensuality and art”?

PC I think of those Indian Kama Sutra paintings haha.

VA Making— physicality—tactile or bodily materials.

VC The scientist, the neurotic, the ascetic, the artist.

BU Claude Calhun.

FD “Sex and the Internet”?

VA Technodildonics, porn.

VC Entrepreneurial solutions to the crisis of connection.

BU Isis.

PC porn >.)

FD “Art and the Internet”?

PC Uhhh like somebody's Google image search of “Picasso.”

AV Replication—detachment.

BU Cats.

FD “Sensuality and the internet”?

BU Passwords.

VC How to be sensitive to details, to organize tasks, to mediate conflict. How to negotiate attention span over a spectrum of relationships and sustain a productive relationship between being and being-in-touch.

ACA In other words, writing a good e-mail!

VC Is this a casting couch?

ACA Do you want it to be?

FD What do you think, Sissel?

ST The world we live in is driven by “LOOK! HE, SHE, IT, LOOK!” Our society and culture have traditionally been dominated by the visual, but vision clearly distances us from the objects we see. As long as we primarily operate using our eyes to understand sex and the world, art, as well as Internet, is very successful. But healthy humans are equipped with hardware (the body) and five senses. These tools are there for free, but they need to be consciously trained and used. It is like if you do not train your muscles, they stop functioning. So it is with the senses. 31% of communication is rational, the rest is emotional. We better start. Even sex will get back on track again.

FD I'm happy you brought up the predominance of the visual, Sissel. I wanted to ask about that next. Does everyone agree that contemporary human culture is dominated by the visual? Why or why not?

PC Yes, I think technology has pushed things even more towards the visual. Think of all the screens now involved in daily life: what they display signifies access and information, and designates a level of wealth via the ability to communicate with the world. It's all visual at this point. That's definitely the biggest thing for me. Especially in making digital work, I don't necessarily have the luxury of using things like touch or smell, so I rely heavily on the visual world. In sourcing material for any of my work, images that already exist on the Internet or in software hugely influence the execution of my ideas. Whatever message, mood, or function they're designed to carry, I'm in a constant conversation with images that have already been constructed.

BU No. Contemporary human culture is dominated by social inequalities and regressive, barbaric notions of sexuality that in part justify those inequalities.

VA I think our culture has always been dominated by visual information, but it's our ability to produce, share and distribute visual culture that's vastly expanded in recent years. Seeing something is taken as truth. It's like the only full experience is in seeing—and in being seen to have seen. Like, as a kid, hearing two people having sex in the hotel room next door would probably be laughed off by your parents, but the idea of being there actually seeing it would be considered inherently damaging. So there's a sensual hierarchy, with sight being at the top.

ST In the beginning was actually not the word, but rather the smell. Chemical detection was the communication tool used by the first bacteria appearing on earth for food and reproduction. Smells are used constantly, consciously or subconsciously, for communication among plants, animals and human beings alike. I believe that smells are a crucial component in the definition, understanding of, and orientation to an environment. Smells surround us all the time. But we live in a world that is sanitized for our protection, and because all smells cannot be pleasant, the consequences could be that we will have none at all! By contrast, smells surround, penetrate the body and permeate the immediate environment,

and thus one's response to smells is much more likely to involve strong effect. Humans have more than 400 scent receptors (ten times more than the next kind of brain receptors, and almost 100 times more diverse than the receptors for vision), and with a direct connection to our amygdala and hippocampus (in two synapses only). Our brain is uniquely wired from childhood to perceive smells. We breathe up to 24,000 times a day and move 12.5 cubic meters of air. With every breath we take, smell molecules flood through our bodies. Even when we sleep, we smell. These facts tell it all! Historical, sociological, and religious reasons have pulled the contemporary human being into almost ignoring more than one per cent of his genes! Only education can revive these hidden capacities.

FD What effect does visuality's dominance have on your life and work? Do you feel a lack of any of the other senses?

limiting it to just sight and sound is always going to strip some of the intensity. I often think that why so much of traditional porn falls flat for me is that the explicitly visual is often the only focus. The lighting and presentation is used to be completely descriptive immediately, so it becomes an overload. That kind of thing shorts my interest really quickly. In our work with Four Chambers, we try to communicate the sensation of touch in a visual way. Looking at skin and the tactility of bodies is a big focus when we're filming. I think often "sensual porn" sounds like it's going to be romantic—porn for women, Mills & Boon-esque erotica, blah-blah—when actually I think the most successful work about sex is about communicating the sheer intensity of sensation.

FD I'm curious what people think about artist Ann Hirsch's assertion that, "Whenever you put your

In the beginning was actually not the word, but the smell.

BU Yes, we feel an utter lack of common sense.
ACA Sometimes taking a picture feels like sad masturbation. Like just scratching a perpetual itch, lazily. It's a default. Even though I am working to create more content, it doesn't feel generative. It feels excessive: more data, more data, more data. Then again, images are my talismans, my spirits, the voices I hear in my head. That Kahlo painting, the heartbroken glint in Marilyn's eyes, my mother's half smile. They are my mirrors. I have this recurring fantasy/nightmare: I stand in a hall of mirrors, my likeness, multiplicitous and overcrowding, overwhelms me. I can no longer separate my reflection from my flesh.

VA Recording sex visually has the same difficulties as any image-making, in that it always feels like a way to create a fictional narrative rather than true documentation. Taking something that's so tied to a sensual bodily experience and then

body online, in some way you are in conversation with porn." Do you agree, disagree? Are bodies online necessarily sexual? Is the Internet gaze sexual?

PC I agree. It's hard to think of an instance where that is not the case. The Internet is what, 99% porn? Porn drives a lot of technology forward—streaming video, HD resolution video, etc. If you think about it, the porn industry paved the way so that you could Skype or FaceTime with grandma in HD pretty seamlessly. So yes, I agree with Ann. I even try to find ways myself to put my image online, but it doesn't matter how sad I look, or how fucked up, how weird, etc. There is always going to be some remark from someone that is sexual, even if it's simply to say that I look "pretty."

I don't think I've ever posted a video successfully without getting a suggestive comment, but it







doesn't anger me. It's just kind of like, "huhhh..." Like I'm stumped. It's like a level in a video game that you just can't beat. I'm in this body of a woman, and there is just a level that I can't beat using my own "image" or something. I can't figure out how to post a video as a person—it has to be a video posted by a woman, with a woman's body. It seems that men can put their body online and remain "people," even if they are drawing attention to their body or gender as a point of conversation. That really seems to define everything about the videos that I make: that I'm a woman. Even though some of them are quite boring, and in most of them I'm definitely not doing anything sexual or trying to elicit a sexual response, they will still get that response regardless. The Internet is a consumptive place. Watching a woman do anything online is still watching a woman online, and that is always in conversation with porn.

As with any form of representation, porn doesn't fully exclude anyone, but a part of everyone will necessarily be excluded. My body has as little to do with porn as it does with any other representation that might claim it, just as Public Enemy has little to do with Elkhorn City, Kentucky, despite being only seven links away from it. The flaw in Hirsch's statement isn't that relativity on the Internet is totally arbitrary—this is the gamble, after all—but rather the implication that a body can be offline at all. We are always online; we are always at work; we are all Caitlyn Jenner. We are all power couples of gaze and screen, fertility and impotence, production and reproduction, pornography and feminism, cold war and soft skill. The Internet is "sexual" to the extent that sex is a protocol, our bodies are an interface, and our data is a reproductive force. My question back to you all is: Adderall or Viagra?

ACA Viagra! Adderall alienates. It divorces your

Technology has pushed things even more towards the visual.

VC If photography is the "go-for-broke" game of history, the Internet is the casino. To put Hirsch's hypothesis to the test, we can start at her Wikipedia page and count the number of links it takes us to get to pornography. We can then compare this to the number of hyperlinks from Ann Hirsch's page to the Public Enemy (Band) page, then the number of hyperlinks from Public Enemy (Band) to Caitlyn Jenner. The average is about seven hyperlinks. Beginning from a random page, we're eight clicks away from pornography and seven clicks from Public Enemy. Therefore, the probability of anyone's body online being relevant to pornography is around seven hyperlinks. Pornography is the democratization of the male gaze. It offers up a phantom phallus, a universalized prosthetic to be consumed by everyone, regardless of gender or genitalia.

attention from attention to your body: you forget to eat, forget to sleep. Viagra just pumps your fucking blood. To your cock.

VA I want to try Viagra, a lot. I was talking about it recently. In my head it'd be a similar sensation to putting on a strap on. Watching porn on Viagra sounds like a good exercise in performative male-gazing.

FD Petra, you just had a show open titled "Niki, Lucy, Lola, Viola," in which digital images of strippers, captured from the PC program Virtuagirl, are collaged into various wild environments atop green screens and projected on a super-scale. You must have spent a lot of time looking at these women. I'm wondering what kind of relationship you developed with them. Did you extrapolate character traits from their looping movements? Did they become more than bodies on screens?

PC I find myself naming them—not necessarily what

their name is in the program, but a name that I might name a daughter, or a pet, or something. It's abstract, though, and it's almost like what I name them in my head, I wouldn't even want to tell somebody out loud. It would break the relationship somehow. It gets complicated with the girls. I worry about what I'm doing with them, or what my intentions are, and even if I should be working with them at all. But I'm fascinated with them on a deep level. I definitely extrapolate their personalities a bit, and try to amplify what I feel should be coming through. I feel like I know them, but I'm constantly confused by who it is I feel I know. I don't know anything about the real women who are the models for the program. I've heard a few people mention that they are actual porn stars. But what happens to them once they're in the program, after they have been virtualized, changes them. Within the program you can change their size, so they can be really

an online course, with the requirement that all enrolled be fucking IRL, and then figuring it out over some kind of message board situation.

ACA SEX-ED's final assignment is to plan an orgy. Outside of any value judgment about which mediated interaction is most desirable, the fact remains that it's so much harder to get bodies together. Online, all you need is an avatar and an URL. IRL, you need to find space (and not just any space—we're talking about finding space in Brooklyn); you need to find a time that accommodates many, but not too many. Our urban space is siphoned and split to keep people in the same class and in the same space; it's more challenging to find spaces to meet that are accessible to most (but not all), that accommodate our handicaps. The rewards digital interactions offer—chief among them, accessibility—also make the challenge of IRL intimacy, to me, all the more sexy. 🗨️

It's all about communicating the sheer intensity of sensation.

itty bitty, or they can be more lifelike. You can pick them up and move them to a different spot on the desktop. You can decide who or what they appear alongside.

FD Ana and Victoria: I understand your SEX-ED course was created in part as a response to digital culture, as a way to get people together IRL. What intimacies do you think were facilitated by the live-bodies-in-one-room setting?

VC In SEX-ED, the bodies were too much. There were too many bodies, too little space. The formality of the classroom setting made it hard for people to feel comfortable even sitting on the floor. The relationship we had to the class as teachers, or simply as people presenting information, made interacting with bodies in space incredibly difficult. And the more bodies there were—over 60 at one point—the more pressure I felt to perform. I think the class would be cool as

Fiona Duncan is a writer and artist living between Toronto, New York, and Los Angeles. She is a regular contributor at *Adult*, *Sex Magazine*, and *Texte Zur Kunst*, and can be found online @fifidunks.

Ana Cecilia Alvarez (Mexican, b. 1991) and **Victoria Campbell** (American, b. 1989) program SEX-ED as a weekly lab dedicated to sexuality, intimacy, affect, and play at Bruce High Quality Foundation University.

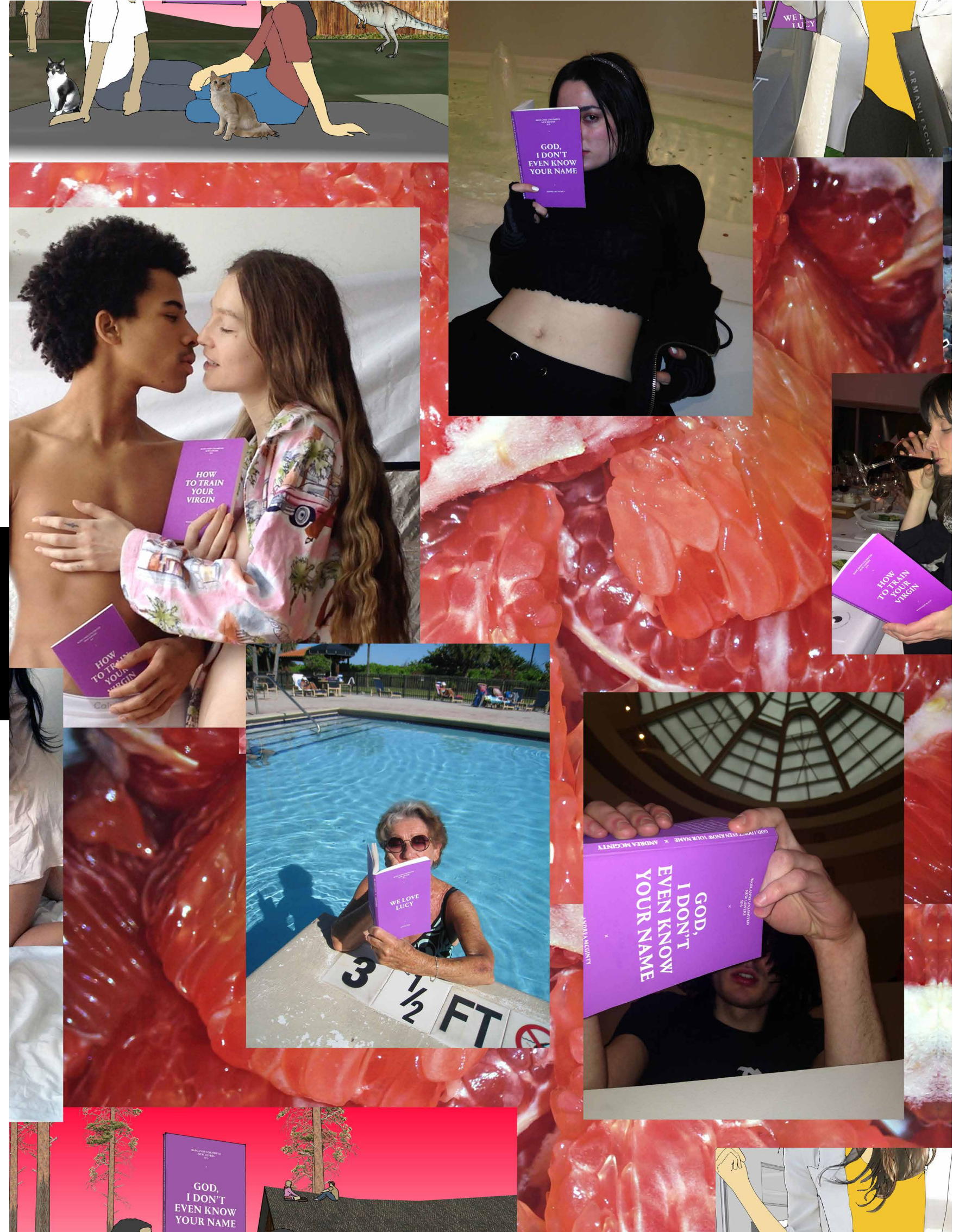
Vex Ashley (British, b. 1989) is a webcam and porn performer, producer and creator with the independent pornography project Four Chambers.

Paul Chan (American, b. 1973) founded Badlands Unlimited in 2010. Their most recent series, "New Lovers" (2015) is devoted to publishing emerging writers and artists working in the genre of erotica.

Petra Cortright (American, b. 1986) is an artist who lives and works in Los Angeles, CA. She is represented by Foxy Production, New York.

Sissel Tolaas (Norwegian, b. 1963) is the founder of the Re_Search Lab, a station designed to facilitate dialogues between a range of experts on scent and communication.

Right: **Badlands Unlimited** "New Lovers" series





WALTER PFEIFFER

Growing up in the Swiss countryside, a boy with a tendency for one-sided love found his way to becoming the eye of Zurich's underground scene and one of the world's most influential photographers, with erotically charged portraits in which the image of sex outdoes its reality.

*Interview by
NICOLAS TREMBLEY*

It's rather strange, but talking sex with the great photographer Walter Pfeiffer isn't easy. He doesn't feel comfortable with it: he is shy and his sex trauma is old, having grown up in the countryside of Zurich in the early '60s, at a time and place in which no real possibility of freedom seemed possible. Provincial, bourgeoisie, the city didn't have an open context for open sexuality. Pfeiffer did much to help change that, but he paid a price, feeling ostracized not only from broader society, but also from an art world too embarrassed to confront his images of cocks. He was a solitary faggot artist trying to swim with courage against the mainstream. Now, at almost 70, he just likes to work, to hike in the mountains. We had this conversation on the phone rather than in writing, as Walter's a one-finger typist.

NT Hello ma chère! I thought you didn't drink alcohol, but I heard you drink champagne?

WP Yes, I always did, and I still do. But not too much—only with people to make them lose control. Them, not me.

NT What happens when you lose control?

WP I tell too many secrets—about other people, about myself. So I'd rather stop.

NT And when you've lost control, did you also have sex?

WP Yes, I did, but it was horrible. People always told me all the sex stories, and I was very impressed, but I'm not a champion of sex, you know? I was always in a state of learning; I just never graduated.

NT Because you didn't find a good teacher?

WP When I was super young, nobody told me how it would be. When my first partner seduced me, I was so overwhelmed. I had never had a feeling like that before; I'd only ejaculated in my dreams. I'm a country boy, coming from a time and place in which nobody talked about sex. Well, he just gave me a book of Jean Genet and a copy of *Kake* from Tom of Finland. That was my education.

NT Did you practice this education?

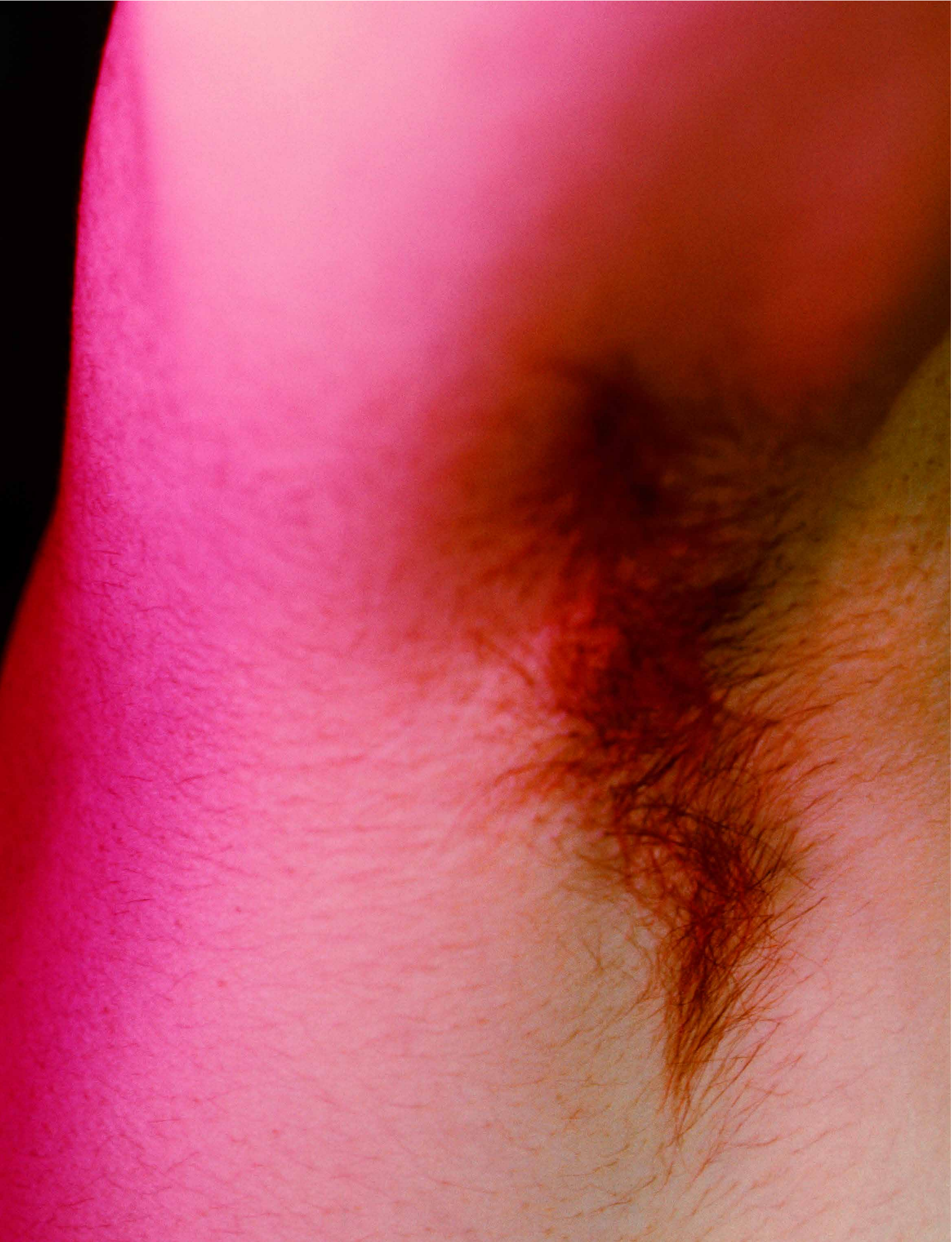
WP When I was in my twenties, I fell in love with an older guy who was incredibly handsome. In fact, his actual name was Casanova. He took me to a gay bar in Zurich—the beautiful one they have since destroyed, can't remember the name... But the guy wasn't interested in me, of course.

NT You say you were not an expert when it came to sex, but you were photographing the queer scene in Zurich, where a lot of sex was going on, wasn't it?

WP When I started to do my own thing, it was the only possibility for me after so many times falling in love with the wrong person. I was always into straight men, never gay men. With a certain image of beauty in mind, I started working with models, and somehow that helped me overcome my pain of one-sided love.

NT What was your sex fantasy?

WP Really sporty men—bigger, stronger, "original" men like those I saw working in the fields during



my days growing up in the countryside.

NT But you never photographed these kind of men, only young people. Why is that?

WP Maybe because I was afraid that they would slap me in my face! They had an outlook, you know, those rude people.

NT Did you have sex sometimes with your models?

WP In the beginning, yes. But you know what? It was a disappointment and I lost interest. Maybe that's why the pictures are so sexy.

NT You mean they're sexy because you desired these men but couldn't have them?

WP Maybe.

NT So can we say that sex was not important for you? Sexy images were important, perhaps, but not sex itself?

WP The image of sex, yes. Not the reality of sex.

NT So how was it when you were photographing the underground scene in Zurich? Was everything taboo?

WP Yes, even in the art scene, because it is such a small city. In 1980, I did a book with ten years of work. It was sold at Printed Matter in New York, but here in Zurich, all the critics went silent on it because of the cocks. It was horrible for me.

NT You said that Tom of Finland made your education. Did you ever meet him?

WP No, but I was very seduced by his work. At the beginning of the '60s, you know, Tom of Finland was really intense! And everything was undercover then. It wasn't until the '70s that he became mainstream.

NT He's highly recognized in the art world now.

WP When I was in New York in 1980, I went to the opening of a show of his drawings, and he was there. He was the gay hero.

NT What would you ask someone about sex?

WP About how you bring people to do sex pictures. For me it came when I discovered Polaroids. I did a shoot with my favorite model. I told him, "Please do it for me?" and I made really beautiful sexy pictures with a strong beautiful cock erection—he looks so great, and it's still erotic. When I did it, I didn't even touch it.

NT You didn't touch what?

WP His cock. In the picture, it's just WOW—it looks like it's exploding.

NT So would you do a book with your Polaroids?

WP Yes, but not now. Now what I think I have to do is a drawing book.

NT I don't really know your drawings.

WP Nobody does, and that's good. I don't want to do a Polaroid book now, because it would be repetitive and expected. Meanwhile, I have all these drawings from the '90s that no one knows. People and portraits. No hardcore yet.

NT Well it's never too late, right? When is your next birthday?

WP Next year. I'll turn 70 on 29 March. I'm an Aries. What sign are you?

NT I'm Virgo.

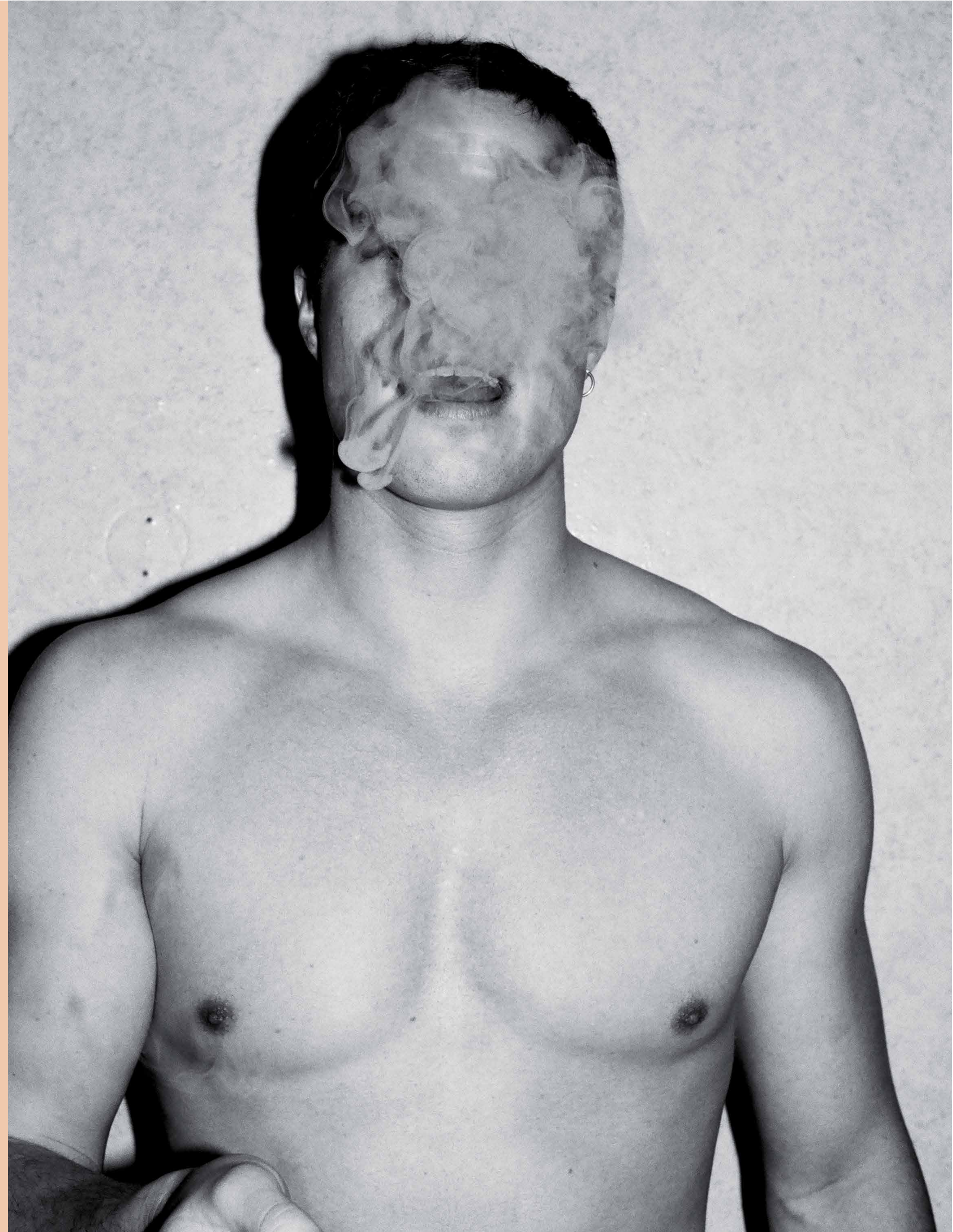
WP They say astrologically it's a good match for sex!

NT Lets go for it! 🙄



Walter Pfeiffer (Swiss, b. 1946) is a photographer who lives and works in Zurich. He is represented by Galerie Sultana, Paris, and Galerie Bob Van Orsouw, Zurich.

Nicolas Trembley is a Swiss critic and curator working in Geneva and Paris. He is the co-founder of Bureau des Vidéos, Paris, and head curator of the Syz Collection, Geneva.



GASPAR NOÉ

Using the camera as a (sex) toy and featuring the most hardcore intercourse scenes ever shown at Cannes, the controversial director's latest joint is a 3-D auteur porn movie—one designed to shock the critics, arouse the viewers, and introduce the notion of “sentimental sexuality.”

by DAMIEN MEGHERBI

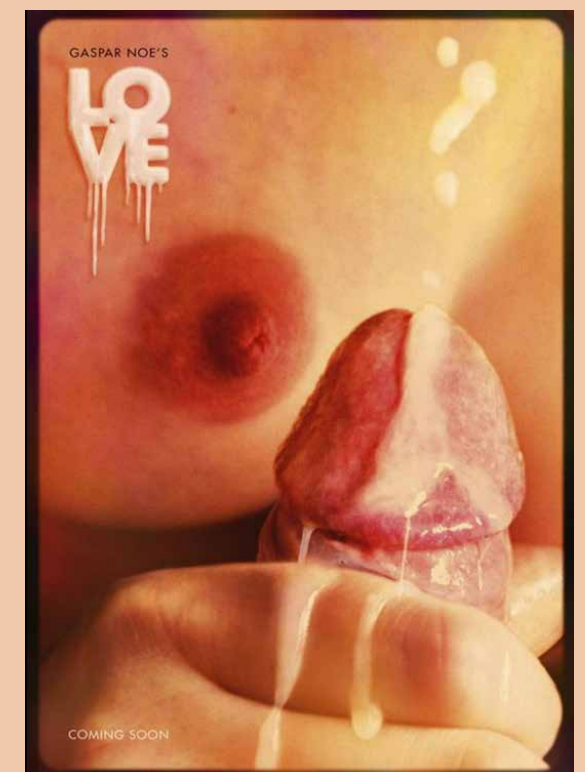
Each edition of the Cannes Film Festival needs a good deal of sex and scandal to make it lively, to grab the attention of the press and of a large part of the audience. Since Luis Buñuel with his film *Viridiana* in 1961, Cannes has always been the perfect place to show full-frontal sex in “auteur cinema.” This year it was Gaspar Noé, the famous enfant terrible of contemporary French cinema, who was in charge of bringing flesh and controversy onscreen with his sexually explicit 3-D movie *LOVE*.

The final cut was not ready when the official selection was announced, but Thierry Fremaux, the director of the festival, smelled the perfume of scandal and wanted to present the movie in his festival. Noé worked twenty hours a day to reach the finish line in time for the Cannes premiere, and *LOVE* was finally shown out of competition in a midnight screening. There were, of course, other movies dealing with nudity, but Noé's new opus was by far the most hotly, wetly, erectly

anticipated. Before the premiere, the film had been described as a highly provocative, sexually driven drama. Its promotional posters featured semen-drenched font design, a three-way and sloppy tongue mix, and a proudly erect penis. Even more arousing: it was in 3-D! Who wouldn't want to see a 3-D porn movie?

The Argentinian-born director is famous for his in-your-face style of filmmaking. You must know him from one of his previous features: *I Stand Alone*, *Irreversible*, and *Enter the Void*, each of which provoked reactions of both outrage and praise. Talking about *LOVE* in interviews, Noé himself was more than clear: “With my next film, I hope guys will have erections and girls will get wet.”

Running over two hours long, *LOVE* presented spectators with what was undoubtedly the most hardcore onscreen sex ever shown at Cannes. The film is collage-like, with successive cuts to black punctuating its depiction of a troubled and immature relationship between Murphy (Karl Glusman), an American ex-pat living in Paris, and his former French girlfriend Electra (Aomi Muyock). Murphy is an aspiring filmmaker with dreams of making a sentimental sex movie in which feelings are expressed through lovemaking. It is hard not to hear the voice of the French director in this line





leaving nothing to the imagination, is one the audience will never forget. In *Enter the Void*, on the other hand, there are several indications that the main character has incestuous feelings for his sister, and we look on, partly stunned, partly horrified, as he watches her being penetrated by a giant CGI penis from a vantage point within her vagina. Some will see these notorious sequences as weird pornography hiding behind so-called art, others will declare them genius, but everyone must admit there is consistency to Noé's filmography.

There are plenty of details and references in *LOVE* that evoke his previous films: the cold and bitter voice-over recalls the protagonist of *I Stand Alone*; the deconstructed storytelling recalls *Irreversible*; a flash brings to mind the 2001-look-alike trip sequence of *Enter the Void*, whose "Love Hotel" model is echoed in Murphy's place. Generally speaking, it's easy to draw a parallel between the mechanism of drug addiction described in *Enter the Void* and the process of being in love, which Noé himself has described as being "like an addiction to some kind of weird chemical that your brain is releasing, and you get addicted to serotonin and dopamine, endorphins." But *LOVE* is tonally different from his previous work: its sexuality may be hardcore, but the effect is much softer than Noé's earlier movies, lacking the shock factor of *Irreversible* and *I Stand Alone* and the severe mind-meddling of *Enter the Void*. Though highly anticipated, *LOVE* is probably a minor work in Gaspar Noé's filmography. Still, his powerful filmmaking force remains obvious. If you judge *LOVE* by its visual bravura, it's actually rather amazing. The inevitable money shot—a 3-D cum shot sprayed from Murphy's larger-than-life penis directly into the spectator's eye—is not the film's most interesting visual statement. Sculpted lights and characteristically vivid colors highlight every perfect pore of the young actors' skin in visually impressive scenes, often captured with top shots where the bodies are framed in what look like dance choreographies, set to a soundtrack that blends contemporary electronic music with Bach. Because of this aestheticized approach, the onscreen sensuality may be judged to not seem true to life, and maybe *LOVE* is not the movie everybody was waiting for. But it certainly does continue Noé's mission—his tireless quest for the perfect film about drugs, violence, life and sex. 🗨

Gaspar Noé (Argentinian, b.1963) is a film director who now lives in France. Among his best known features are *Irreversible* (2002) and *Enter the Void* (2009).

Damien Megherbi runs a film production company and writes about cinema in several magazines.

of dialogue, but unfortunately, Noé doesn't accomplish as much with this film.

In *LOVE*, sex and sentiment remain separate. If you remove the sex scenes, the story itself is rather trivial and, beyond the 3-D treatment, there is nothing playful or surprising in the way the scenes are filmed. The film brings a lot of positions and permutations—in couple, threesomes and group, and in a variety of locations—but always in a very cold and pornographic way, showcasing only casual, heteronormative and male-centered sexuality. The sex is always perfectly performed by actors with great bodies. But despite all the sperm, tears and saliva, the result feels hollow: too smooth, too tame to make the humping, licking, swallowing, signify anything meaningful. It is like Noé as a provocateur had written a manifesto, but as a director, hadn't respected his own rules. Maybe *LOVE* is not a film about a couple, but about the phenomenon that exists between Murphy and Electra; not really "love," but rather, as the main character Murphy calls it, "sentimental sexuality."

After all, sexuality was already a key topic in the self-consciously controversial director's previous movies. For Noé and his long-time collaborator and chief operator Benoit Debie, the camera is like a (sex) toy. There are at least two full-frontal sex scenes in Noé's filmography that will always polarize, but inevitably affect, the spectators. In his most shocking piece of work, *Irreversible*, a nine-minute rape scene with Monica Bellucci filmed in a single, unbroken shot,



*Like all fluids humans excrete, language is sticky. “Gender fluidity” and “post-identity” are two trending terms designed to thrust us into a queer-for-all future. Here to define, refine, and contextualize them are five forward-thinkers—unisex fashion designer **Telfar Clemens**, trans magazine pro **Amos Mac**, ambi artist **Andrea Crespo**, androgynous **A.L. Steiner**, and hot chaos philosopher **Harry Dodge** on gender, identity, post, past, fluid, solid, hot, not, I, we, and other kinks of language.*

*Moderated by **Fiona Duncan***

FD What do “gender fluidity” and “post-identity” mean to you—personally, professionally, and culturally?

TC I would think “gender fluidity” refers to a free-flowing perception of gender. I’m not familiar with “post-identity” as a common term, but to me, it would be an identity that you adopt after your original identity assignment.

AM Personally, the term “gender fluidity” makes me think about those who do not have a “binary” experience with their gender. It doesn’t always have to be in one space—it can shift and be in constant motion. In the past, I’ve had people assume I’m “gender fluid” because I’m transgender, while my experience is actually pretty opposite. “Post-identity” sounds like a lovely catch phrase for my next business card, but I don’t really know what it means. It’s also interesting to think of this on the flip side: “post-gender” and “identity-fluid.”

AS In my bio, I’ve always described myself in terms of gender, which has been a long-term experiment, although I’m not sure exactly where it’s led [laughs]. I describe myself as an “androgynous.” The word itself is useful or interesting to me because it’s talking about a fluidity that’s constant. “Androgynous” is slippery, while highlighting terms for the body, and it’s an etymologically fun puzzle, which I really like about it. I’m really most interested in being present within a context or a moment or a time, and that’s where I see gender being relevant. There’s this really nice quote by Lucy Lippard where she breaks the self into three parts: the body, soul, and the self. From her essay “The Scattering Self”: “The relationship between self and body varies within any single life. Body first determines self. Then self determines the body’s posture and adornments, and to some extent its physical characteristics... Identity, on the other hand, is more often imposed or arrived at collectively, compressed between internal and external needs and demands. Aside from a ‘proper’ name, identity (class, race, gender, vocation, sexual, geographic, and religious preference) is both predetermined and an ideological choice. Projected identities are a group phenomenon.”

HD First off, I don’t know what anything means. I eschew hubris. It seems to me that so many categorical words end up making cookie cutter ideas. Sure, they’re easy to throw around, and speed is fucking awesome for variety’s sake, but these categorical words are mostly useless

because as one-word descriptors, they arrive with no ability to precisely or accurately convey any condition, situation, or flow that was at issue in the first place. See Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle, or Neils Bohr’s idea that science isn’t about nature, but about describing nature in the state of being observed and measured, or even Adorno’s idea of “non-identity,” which is what he calls the stuff that’s left over after you make a concept, the oomph and filigree that remains unconfined by your formed thought.

Now, having briefly mentioned my reservations and hinted at my turmoil, I’ll try to answer. For me, when I use the words “gender-fluid” (although I want to wretch talking about gender at all), I’m trying to say that I don’t sit in any position in relation to a “gender identity.” It flows. I flow. But really it crackles and pops and flips, so how fluid is that? I should say “gender fractal” or maybe just “roadkill” or “burnt bacon” or “rain” or “stacked” or “simultaneous” or “grainy,” or my spirit is anal-fist-fucked by a volcano of thuggish, ecstatic-leggy becomings with a french fry poking out of the top. I say “gender-fluid” sometimes as a repulsive shorthand, simply in order to tell you that I don’t have an experience of “man” or (maybe even) “woman.” We’re pressured to be in relation and response to this binary. It’s deeply disciplinary, and I am so fucking tired of talking about it, being in relation to it. Other people are so addled and excited to see people with interesting gender expressions that it’s all they can think about when they’re in front of you. It’s a kind of ongoing sense that I’m overwhelming everyone, or that I am dancing while we talk, but I’m not. I’m trying to get you to think about something with me, hopefully something that is actually interesting to me. Like sociality, electromagnetic flow, specificity, the sensual pleasures of thinking, particle physics, sedimentary rock, turbulence, love as QFT, and fried chicken—the way it cooks in flows, the water inside the item that’s being deep-fried boils, and the vapor pushes outward wanting to travel toward the surface.

As for “post-identity,” while I’m interested in the idea that culturally-constructed categories are violently general, and have been used as red herring differences (other-ing) to fragment the oppressed and keep us fighting for scraps, there is something about certain of these new current notions of “post-identitarianism” that lately, in practice, are promulgating a kind of homogeniz-

ing, color-blinded, fascistic mode. I'm interested in DIFFERENCE, not sameness. I'm interested in profusion, not minimalism. I'm really fucking amped up by the idea of cultivating difference in solidarity. I'm interested in flow, and in relation as the forming force. To paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari: "Collisions explain everything."

FD Andrea?

AC We like to change our gender fluid every day for extended mileage. We usually keep the fluids or essences in properly labeled containers; this makes them easily and instantly shareable. They do not override sexual difference.

FD Can you clarify your use of the pronoun "we"?

AC We are many, it helps us regulate and keep sane.

FD I love that. I also love Harry's idea of encouraging difference in solidarity. Identity, etymologically, stems from Latin and French words meaning "sameness" or "oneness." As a fashion follower, when I think of identity, I think of infinite little

HD I'm with you on all this. I'm slowly developing an affection for nouns, as I deepen my lifelong practice of considering and experiencing even seemingly "inanimate" matter or "things" as agentic. This is kind of an offshoot from the concept of a plural subject, you know, part of that stream of thought is based on this fundamental interrogation of the seemingly immutable "subject/object" or "actor/acted upon" binaries. I'm absolutely interested in scale, continuum, the brackets of our human senses and the real-life goings-on that remain out of the field of our perception. That includes infrared light, cliff face erosion, the desire of lightning, love, quantum entanglement, and the coil of time.

AM I'm all for creating new language and words—specifically around identity, if you don't feel like you fit with a term that has already been created and thrown around. I usually don't approach language traps. I stay away from labels and let peo-

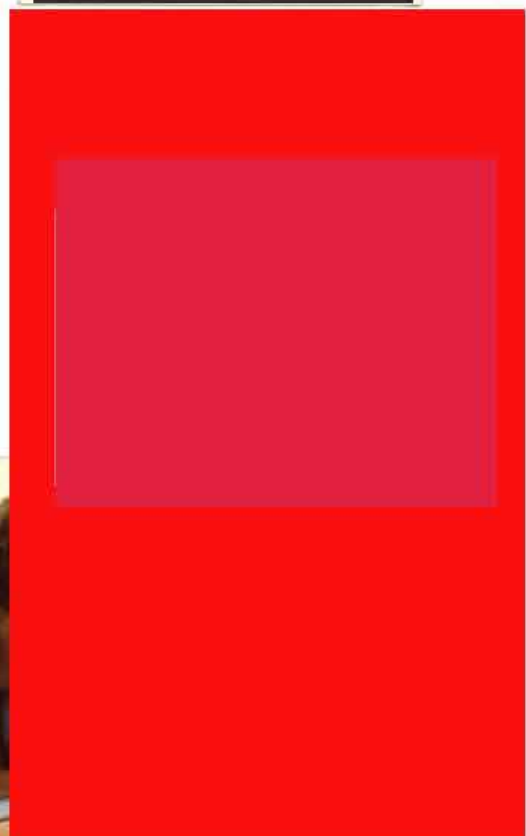
Gender identity flows. But really it crackles and pops and flips.

semiotic differences, like subcultural codes of dress and identity, like cyber goth, gabbers, hippie punk, lipstick lesbian, etc. These codes are designed to express sameness and difference at the same time. For me, "post-identity" might mean moving past the idea that selfhood is one or whole, and with that, this idea that one can represent oneself in a fixed sign. Both "gender fluidity" and "post-identity" are terms I personally would love to forget about, though, as they reaffirm the concepts they are trying to move away from. Still, I love language. I'm wondering if we can imagine new ways to address such ideas? For example, I've been thinking about this Native American language, Nootka, that I learned of from Alan Watts, in which there are no nouns, only verbs and adverbs; all that is described are actions and relations, so we could just be fluid, no "gender" needed.

ple speak for themselves. I try never to assume anything in regards of other people's gender, and I'm not someone who tells people what they can or cannot say or identify with, online or off. I mind my own business.

AS One of the holdovers from the activism that I participated in the 1990s is about checking oneself a lot—that's the call for movements like Black Lives Matter, and continuing conversations around erasure, violence and genocide, as well as privilege. And there's always an attempt to systematically disappear such efforts by reactionary ideologues. Cultural and physical erasure are part of a violence towards bodies, and so language is power, knowledge is power. There's no way around it. There's no way to counter psychological, physical and cultural violence, oppression, suppression, and injustice without language and voice.





- AC** The fluids sputter into a centripetal, computationally driven vortex, releasing little droplets which crystallize into a sort of pollen or fertile dust. At this point, they either directly infect a host (rare) or begin to multiply and interweave along the contours of various desiring circuits. They entangle their prey in their sturdy but flexible semiotic webs, luring them with libidinal mists, affirmative identity politics, and lavender essences. Nevertheless, I feel very alienated by LGBT/Queer® and its genderist doctrines. I'd rather focus on embodied and material operations that can't be talked about in terms of identity, queerness, or cartesian gender fluids.
- FD** Telfar, could you speak to the gender of your label? TELFAR is often identified as a menswear brand, but you regularly show your clothes on female and androgynous bodies.
- TC** TELFAR is a genderless brand mostly focusing on functionality, but in terms of construction and

mitosis to be so much hotter than gender. I think meiosis is really traumatizing though, as it leads to sexual difference.

AS I think the idea of tension—of push and pull—is so critical to what we find fetishistic, what we find comforting, what turns us on. While the interior world of fantasy is a vast abyss of production and meaning, the external world has a lot of investment, literally and figuratively, in promoting and producing archetypes and rigidity; basically, marketing value. The implementation of standardization and institutionalization of sexuality was a mechanism of the Industrial Revolution. Ideas of normativity are beholden to it; the nuclear family, as well as hetero and homosexuality emerged very much out of this. But if we are thinking about revolutionary ideas around gender and sexuality, desire is a core part of that revolution. Focusing our languages solely on civic institutions like marriage and the military

I'm all for creating new words but I stay away from labels.

some sizing, it does have a focus on traditionally masculine practices of clothing construction, even while fusing elements of women's wear. For example, the side that I place buttons is traditionally masculine, but then I might use a specific detail mostly seen on women's garments in a non-traditional functional way. I feel these aspects vary from collection to collection, but over time, it's become its own language relating to the fluidity of fashion.

- FD** Telfar's clothing is sexy to me, I think because it perverts norms, like by cutting up uniforms, uniforms being porn-fare: the hot plumber, delivery man, security guard. I'm wondering what it is about norms—there must be something hot about them if humanity keeps reproducing them, if only to break with them.
- AC** It sounds like norms are just more likely to sexually imprint us. My imprints are way off, so I find

purposefully subverts liberation into institutional structures. We can't counter patriarchal oppression and its violences and aggressions directed at our bodies unless we can talk about the liberation of our bodies. I think liberation requires manifestations of desire in language and action. It's obvious that nothing's more threatening to the oppressive order than the noncompetitive intimacy of bodies. The more desirous we are of, and disciplined by, the means of productions and reproductions of capitalism's destructive marching orders, the further away we are from liberation from those orders.

- FD** I recently read this quote from Michael Taussig: "Always a step ahead of conscious awareness, fashion makes language race to keep up." Which reminded me of José Esteban Muñoz's idea in *Cruising Utopia* that, "aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic, frequently contains blue-

prints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity.” All of the artists in this panel I consider time travelers, fortune tellers, forward thinkers: practicing future truths through aesthetic. What do you foresee in, or envision for, the future, based on the aesthetics of today?

AM I see a lot of denim, cracked iPhone screens, recycled gifs, untouched paper, genderless identities and post-trans experiences.

AC To reiterate, the futurities we are interested in aren't queer. We are more interested in teratological and machinic futurities that are beyond the scope of the popular queer imaginary but nevertheless imminent. An autistic or machinic aesthetic rather than a queer aesthetic. Our future may very well be radically weird, but that doesn't necessarily make it queer. Queer does not hold a monopoly over all differences and potencies.

FD What do people think about the trendiness of concepts like “gender-fluidity” or “post-identi-

dividual minds that will defy the stereotypes of trending topics.

AM When a trans concept is trending high—which it always is, as we are in the middle of a trans civil rights movement right now—even if I'm in one of my anti-social media off-the-radar kicks, I can usually tell because my personal inbox gets flooded with requests for quotes or feelings, and I have to dig into my “stock trans answers” file folder so I can find something new to say and appear relevant and intelligent. Gender talk, and specifically trans visibility, has been trending for a few years now, but it's getting bigger in terms of mass media stuff. I'm pretty optimistic that any day now, this won't be interesting to anyone any more: gender fluidity, non-binary and trans experiences will be accepted, and the focus will be on our survival and treatment as humans with the same rights as everyone else, rather than it being just another hot topic. 🙄

The intimacy of bodies is threatening to the oppressive order.

ty”? To be honest, I'm ambiguously uncomfortable with the topic. I think this has to do with a discomfort with saleable identity, like branded, commodified selfhood; the reduction of the complexity of being to a #tag or product. But then I have days when I'm really pumped! Does anyone else feel discomforted? Optimistic? What does it mean for a concept to trend?

TC I actually think that there's nothing wrong with this concept being a trend. It's more interesting than most news and visuals I see daily. I think that's why mass media and the general public are finding a way to brand and categorize gender identity: there's an audience. I think if people can categorize or generalize something, it makes them feel like they have insight into a topic they actually know nothing about. I think confusion causes a shift toward another alternative way of thinking, which I feel will happen, with in-

Fiona Duncan is a writer and artist living between Toronto, New York, and Los Angeles. She is a regular contributor at *Adult, Sex Magazine*, and *Texte Zur Kunst*, and can be found online @ffidunks.

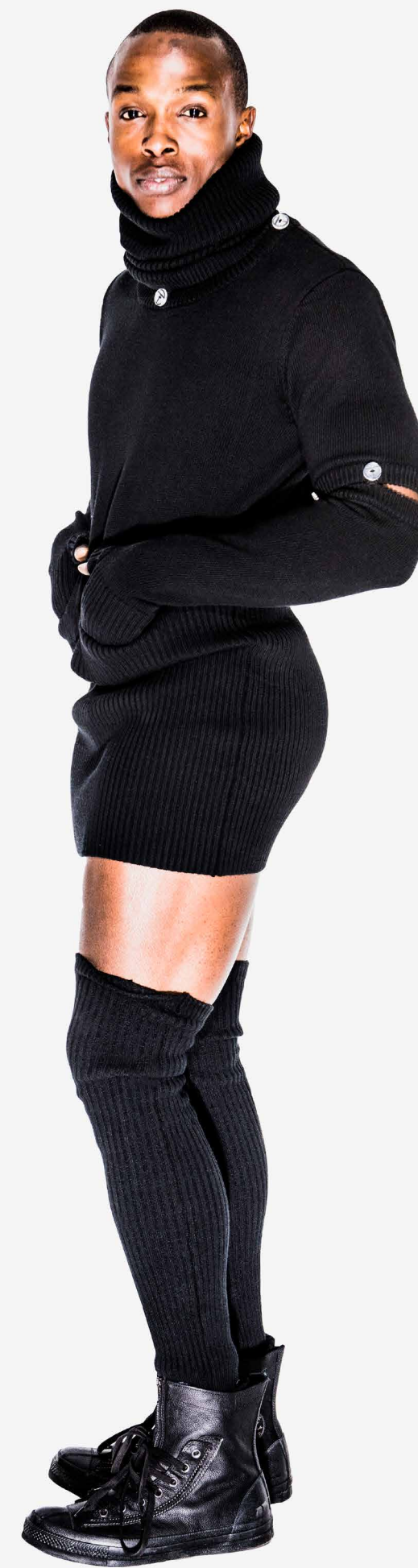
Telfar Clemens (Liberian-American, b. 1985) is a fashion designer and artist. Launched in 2004, Telfar's namesake label incorporates unisex designs with the principles of comfortable sportswear and “simplicity.”

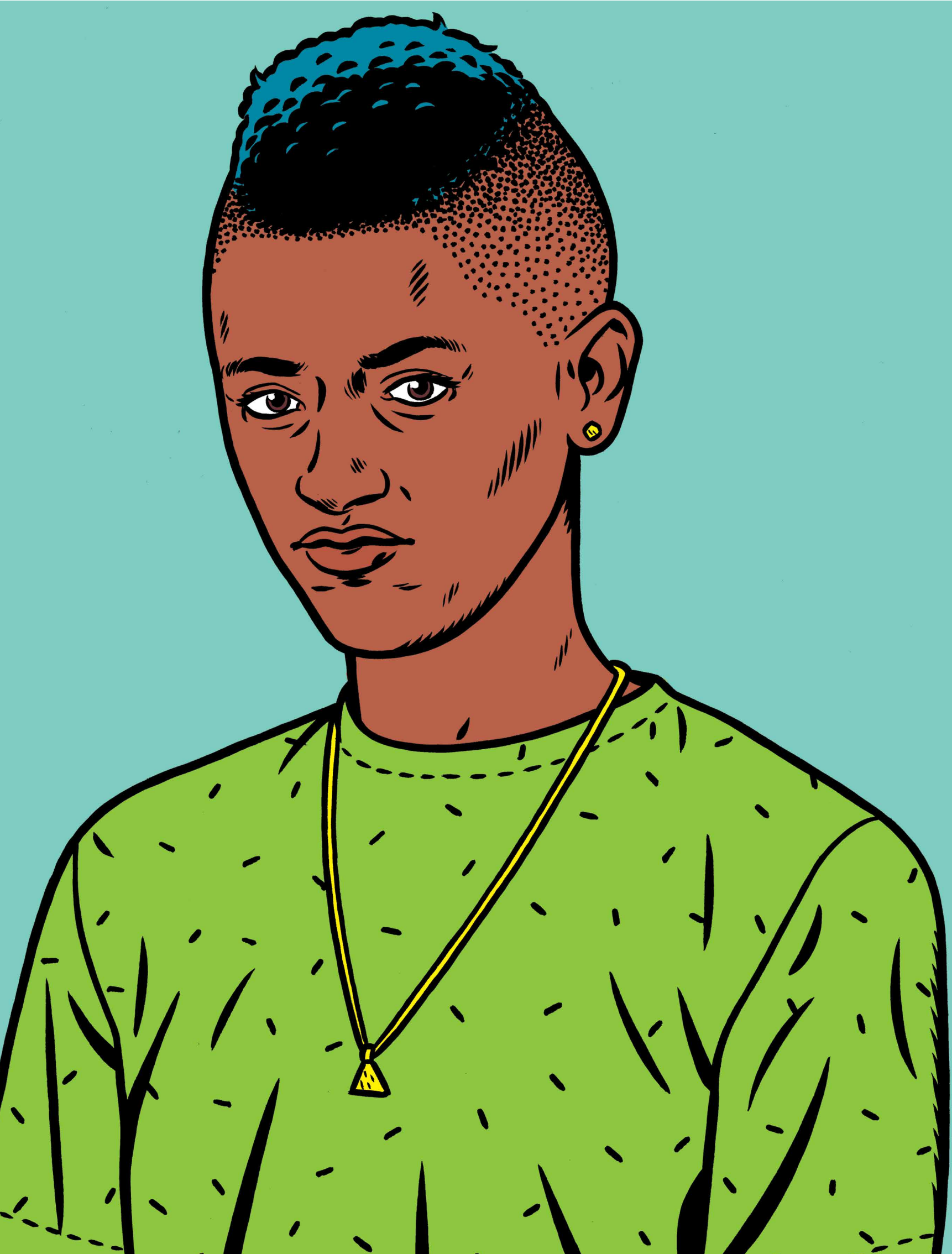
Amos Mac (American, b. 1979) lives and works in New York as a photographer, writer, editor and publisher. In 2009, Mac co-founded *Original Plumbing*, the seminal quarterly publication documenting the culture of transgender men.

Andrea Crespo (American, b. 1993) lives and works in New York. A recent graduate of Pratt Institute, current interests include neuroscience, fandom/roleplay culture, and posthuman embodiments.

Harry Dodge (American, b. 1966) is a Los Angeles-based artist and writer. Recent exhibitions include the critically-acclaimed solo show, “The Cybernetic Fold” at Wallspace Gallery, New York (2015).

A.L. Steiner (American, b. 1967) is an artist who lives and works in Los Angeles. She's a collective member of Chicks on Speed, co-curator of Ridykeulous, and co-founder + Board member of Working Artists and the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.).





THE INTERNET

In the context of a heteronormative commercial mainstream, the duo's outspoken singer is at the forefront of a new breed of emancipatory queer hip hop—but is she also the epitome of gender radicality being sugarcoated by the marketing of subculture?

by JESSICA GYSEL and MARIA GUGGENBICHLER

When asked to write about the Internet's new album *Ego Death*, we couldn't help but think of a text entitled "Where Do All the Sad Girls Go?," by Alok Vaid-Menon, one half of the trans South Asian performance art duo Dark Matter. Although the question might appear romantic at first glance, to us it provides the critical entry point to thinking about the ongoing and current appropriation of the LGBTQI movement and its subcultures by a normative, if not hetero-normative, commercial mainstream. It is not symbolically that we ask, "What are the places that remain for the sad girls?," in a time when the polarity remains extreme between a "normalization," and commodification of (happified) gay culture and the ongoing battle of queer and trans folks for their lives, presences and cultures.

Enter the Internet, whose charismatic singer Syd tha Kyd (recently shortened to just Syd) has slowly morphed in recent years—at least in pictures—from a sad, unhappy and insecure lesbian into a smiling, happy

creature. Riding the lesbian wave in the wake of a new breed of queer RnB singers post-Frank Ocean, Syd could be seen as the epitome of cool, casual sexuality. She identifies as butch—a hot one—and is probably a refreshing character within the mainstream music industry, but in queer culture her public persona reiterates a cliché, conforming to a straight understanding of what a butch lesbian (and her feelings) look like. One must recognize that it is important to have underground artists tumbling into the mainstream who address issues that are sensitive in this mainstream context. Syd does her part by singing very explicitly about the ups and downs of lesbian relationships, in the very personalized context of the insecurities attached to her newfound success. Nevertheless, dominant culture should not be lured of its own censorship and selection: queer public cultures and queer (hip hop) artists have always existed, whether or not they were granted high culture or mainstream attention. Lesbian public culture has always existed, before and after it was "discovered" by SONY. Think Planningtorock, The Gossip, Jungle Pussy, Juliana Huxtable, the whole New York-based Getto Gothik movement. Recognize also that the inclusion and marketing of subcultures, in most cases, equals a diluting of once-radical, political and emancipatory projects. The mainstream alters them, and often sucks them dry.

With *Girls Like Us*, we are looking for and supporting the places and spaces that sad girls (like us) can carve out for themselves today, in a time when queer cultures are commodified by straight culture as a trick to win more votes, or to provide trivial products with a "cutting," or sexy edge. We believe in outspokenness, self-identification, speaking for oneself, gender non-conforming, gender fluid self-expressions, opening a queer space and gender radicality. Underlined by daring, bold, vanguard aesthetics, explicit language and imagery, radical artistic positions; parental advisory. Obligatory. ☹

The Internet is a Los Angeles-based soul band consisting of Odd Future members Syd the Kyd and Matt Martians. Released in June, *Ego Death* is their third full-length project under the Odd Future imprint, distributed in partnership with Sony / Columbia.

Jessica Gysel and **Maria Guggenbichler** are editors of *Girls Like Us*, an independent journal mapping new routes towards a feminist, post-gender future.

DIAN HANSON

A prolific editor in the 1970s hippie porn scene, the mind behind TASCHEN's iconic *Sexy Books* explains that sex sells when you embrace its baggage of nostalgia, fetish, humor, fantasy and empowerment—and the only limit is the line between interesting and boring.

**Interview by
ALESSIO ASCARI**

- AA** When and how did TASCHEN's *Sexy Books* series come about, and how did you get involved?
- DH** Benedikt Taschen started his publishing company in 1980 and has been doing sexy books from about 1991, before we met. He was a man who always wanted to do books about what interested him—and sex interested him quite a bit. He was a fan of my magazine *Leg Show*. As is his way, when he's interested in something or somebody he tracks them down. So we met around 1994, and he began asking me to start making his books with him. It wasn't until 2001, when my publisher died, that I decided to leave my magazine, at which point I knew that TASCHEN was the place to go.
- AA** What was your professional path before TASCHEN? What did you learn from it?
- DH** I was a hippie, actually, starting in Seattle, Washington, which is where I come from. As

was part of the hippie lifestyle, I was very interested in sex as a teen. A lot of people don't realize that hippies were involved in porn early on, but really, what could be better? Sex was good, sex was positive, sex was love—and if we could make porn and make money off of sex, that was doubly good! So I had this dream of working in pornography, and as per usual, I let things happen organically. I had a boyfriend who had the opportunity to start a porn magazine in 1976, and I joined in, moving with him to New York. What I found was that it was a tight knit community, hard to get into, but once you were in, it was easy to move around because everyone knew each other. So when I eventually left that magazine, which was called *Puritan*, I could transition into another magazine and another magazine. And that was what I did for 25 years. In the beginning, I was working in an assistant role, but very quickly I moved up to being an editor and a creator of titles.

- AA** You've published several titles on sexy periodicals—from the recent *Forever Butt* to the six-volume anthology of *Playboy* via *History of Pin-up Magazines*. In your opinion, how crucial was (and is) the magazine format for the circulation of images and ideas of sexuality?
- DH** The magazines contributed a great wealth of material. Back when there were a lot of adult magazines being published, there were hundreds if not thousands of photographers making their living selling photos to these magazines. Gay, straight, fetish, high class, low class, in the middle: there were all these people of varying talents and abilities who were producing vast numbers of negatives and slides which we could then repurpose into magazines.
- AA** How do you think the digital landscape has changed things?
- DH** You know the old saying about monkeys on typewriters? That if you have a thousand monkeys typing on a thousand typewriters for a thousand years, they'll eventually create Shakespeare? The digital landscape has allowed people with borderline talents to again produce some art.
- AA** It's an era dominated by the moving image, which is especially true when it comes to porn.



DH Video has definitely tamped down still photography. The majority of people who are looking for masturbation inspiration are going to turn to video because it gets the job done quicker and easier and probably with a higher level of arousal. But at the same time, this allows us to see the artistry in the still photography, so that we can then take the high-quality porn and put it into books, where it might be appreciated as a kind of nostalgic art form.

AA Sex sells. What are the best-selling Sexy Books?

DH Number 1 is the *Big Penis Book*; #2 is the *Big Book of Breasts*. After that, the *Big Butt Book*, and then the *Big Book of Pussy*. The *Big Penis Book* stands alone in all this because it appeals to everyone. It appeals even to straight men, who want to look at it in horror and compare themselves.

AA So what does that tell you about the audience of Sexy Books? How do you plan your strategy in terms of gender and sexual orientation?

DH It definitely tells you—and this is no surprise—that the main consumers of sexual material are men. Gay or straight, men tend to consume along very similar lines. Men are more visually oriented and have higher levels of testosterone. Therefore they think about sex a little more.

The idea of trying to make a book just for women has been on everyone's minds forever and ever, but it's a very difficult thing to do. We've stumbled on books that have sold well among women. *The Big Book of Breasts*, actually, has sold quite well among women, who take comfort in seeing women with fuller figures, softer bodies that are more like their own. We also made a book called *Le Petit Mort*, which showed women of all ages masturbating, and that one was very popular with women as well. Many said that was an empowering book.

AA Sense of humor is, I think, another key element of the Sexy Books. What about the relationship of sex and humor?

DH When a person looks at sexual imagery, it can make kind of an unbearable sense of tension. Humor releases that. Why should sex be so serious? Who doesn't like to laugh?

AA What do you think is the line between erotic and pornographic?

DH I hate the word "erotic"; it's pretentious and I don't use it. It's really a line between being interesting and boring.

AA How to do define pleasure? And fantasy?

DH I'm a pleasure-loving person. Pleasure is a positive stimulation of the senses. It comes in through your fingertips, through your ears, your mouth, your eyes. Fantasy, on the other hand, is a kind of masturbation of the mind. It's where we go to play with possibility.

AA Do you consider yourself to be a feminist? What does it mean to be a feminist in 2015?

DH I considered myself a feminist in 1970, and in 1971/2, when there was a lot of sex-positive feminism. That was a big part of me buying a vibrator and experimenting with sexual pleasure, and believing that I had a right to birth control, and that I didn't have to follow my mother's pattern of getting married early, having a lot of children and staying home. In that sense, I was definitely a feminist. I stopped in the 80's, because feminism was by then defined as anti-sex, anti-porn—basically anti-everything I was doing. At core, though, I'm of course a feminist, because I believe in female equality and freedom to pursue challenges and careers and to be free of the fetters of male domination. I think to be a feminist in 2015 means simply that.

AA What are you currently working on?

DH I'm completing a book entitled *Lesbians for Men*. This fantasy of seeing women together has been there for men for probably millennia and nobody ever says what it is. It'll be another one that upsets people! 🙄



Dian Hanson is editor of TASCHEN's Sexy Books. Previously, as a twenty-five-year veteran of men's magazine publishing, she edited titles including *Puritan*, *OUI*, *Outlaw Biker*, *Juggs*, and *Leg Show*.

Alessio Ascari is the Founder and Editor-in-Chief of *Kaleidoscope*.

