

# OUT

## This Queer Artist Collected 200 Gallons of Urine to Protest Federal Trans Bathroom Guidelines

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Photography: Vince Ruvolo  
Cassils is #PISSSED.

BY HUGH RYAN  
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This past weekend, the Guggenheim award winning visual artist rooted in performance **Cassils** opened their solo show at the **Ronald Feldman Gallery** in Soho. Aptly dubbed *Monumental*, the show centers around "#PISSSED," the gender nonconforming artist's latest work, which is a response to the Trump administration's rollback of federal guidelines that instructed schools to allow transgender students to use the bathroom that corresponds with their gender identity.

Consisting of 200 gallons of urine in a modernist glass cube – every drop that Cassils has passed since the day in February when the Trump administration announced the rollback—"#PISSSED" is a powerful visualization of the literal burden that this move inflicted (and continues to inflict) on vulnerable trans children. As in much of Cassils work, the accompanying soundscape is particularly moving: a mega cut of the various transphobic arguments used against Gavin Grimm, the Virginia high school student who sued his school to be able to use the appropriate bathroom. The two-hour long audio track follows Grimm's quest from his local PTA all the way up to the ACLU's lawsuit on his behalf.

"Quite often with my work, there's this intensive, rigorous, dragging-myself-over-the-coals analytical procedure that I put myself through to get to the point of making an artwork," Cassils told *OUT* during a brief break from installing their show.



*Performance Still (Photo Courtesy Cassils & Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York)*

“But in the case of '#PISSSED,' it was really a guttural reaction. Initially, I had thought, *Let's all send our piss to the White House en masse*, like we could all do this massive urine drive,” Cassils laughed. “But I was undergoing my citizenship application, and my lawyer advised me highly against doing that. So I thought I'd go the realm of metaphor, and commenced collecting my urine.”

This went fairly well, Cassils said, until they'd filled an entire fridge with bright orange collection containers, and their wife requested that no more be kept in the house. “So I had to call up friends that had garage space or a bit of extra studio room,” they said. In the end, they filled seven fridges full of urine.

Cassils' work often incorporates their own body, or its effluvia, as a way of turning their deeply analytical process into visceral art with the power to move the viewer on a more profound, less theoretical level.

“We're in a world which is so incredibly mitigated by technology,” they explained, “there's something about body fluid, presence, or smell, that can shake people up a little bit.”



*Resilience of the 20% (Photo Courtesy Cassils & Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York)*

In fact, "#PISSSED" contains many of the hallmarks of Cassils work, which is an embodied practice that directly references queer politics, community, and rage. For example, the sculpture "Resilience of the 20%"—another piece on view in *Monumental*—taps into that same sense of human resistance.

"Resilience" is the evolution of an older piece, entitled "Becoming an Image," in which Cassils used their martial arts training to beat a 2,000lbs clay block into a torqued and pockmarked mass. The audio recorded at that performance is chilling; with your eyes closed, it sounds like a brutal beating, all panting breaths and wet thuds.

For "Resilience," the resulting block was cast in bronze, suggesting the endurance of queer life in the face of violence. The "20%" in the title of the work refers to the statistic that in 2012, reported murders of transgender people increased 20% around the world.

Although their work has queerness at its center, Cassils is an advocate for an intersectional politics that uses queerness as a way to approach many issues.



*Becoming an Image (Photo Courtesy Cassils & Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York)*

“Queer rage is intersectional rage,” they said simply. “When we look at the repeal of DACA, I mean, that’s 800,000 young people who have been compliant with the government, who are trying to do what’s right and have the right to live in this country. Fifty thousand of those people are members of the LGBTQ community. We need to step up and be rageful for that. With marriage equality, what about those relationships that aren’t valued by the state? Queer people need to stand up for that, too.”

Cassils work speaks to the queer community as a whole, and tries to make space for the most marginalized identities within the community—queer people of color, youth, trans people, queer people who are incarcerated, etc. This, they believe, is at the heart of queer rage: standing up for those issues that might not affect you directly, but are life and death concerns for others in the community.

“There was a time where everybody was trodden upon,” they explained. “Certain demographics of the LGBTQ community have now been given certain privileges. But it’s really important for queer rage to not just come from one’s own lived experiences, but from empathy for others.”

This empathy, of course, fuels the rage that Cassils expresses throughout *Monumental*. It seems strange to say that a show made of piss and pain might ultimately be about love, but then again, queer love has often made space for exactly those kinds of unconventional expressions. Cassils’ work may speak in violence, confinement, and condemnation, but ultimately, their art is about transforming those experiences into something useful—like turning urine into sculpture. They believe that “as much as we need rituals for anger, we need rituals for healing, and rituals for witnessing each other’s pain.”

In *Monumental*, they have created a show that provides all three at once.



**HUFFPOST**

# The Powerful Reason Why This Artist Has Been Saving His Urine For The Last 200 Days

Michelson, Noah. "The Powerful Reason Why This Artist Has Been Saving His Urine For The Last 200 Days." *Huffington Post*. September 16, 2017.  
[https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/cassils-monumental-pissed-urine\\_us\\_59bbeacee4b0edff971b88f4](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/cassils-monumental-pissed-urine_us_59bbeacee4b0edff971b88f4)

"It's crazy that we have to go to these extremes but this is the culture that we're living in."

By Noah Michelson



CASSILS WITH ROBYN BECK; COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND RONALD FELDMAN GALLERY NEW YORK

PISSED: A 200-day durational performance where Cassils has captured all the urine their body has passed since February 26, 2017, when Trump rescinded the Obama era order allowing trans teens to use their bathroom of choice versus the gender assigned to them at birth.

Cassils spent a good chunk of this week trying to ensure that the 200-gallon tank of urine he was installing at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts didn't leak and destroy the gallery and its important legacy.

"Can you even imagine?" the transgender performance artist, who uses both "he/him" and "they/them" pronouns, asked me when we sat down to chat about his second solo show at the New York City gallery. The show, entitled Monumental, features a new work that he made by saving his urine for the last 200 days and collecting it in the tank.

The piece, PISSED, was created in response to President Donald Trump's February decision to rescind President Obama's directive that transgender students should be able to use the restroom that corresponds with their gender identity. PISSED will be unveiled at the gallery on Saturday night when, according to a press release for the show, Cassils will perform a related piece, Fountain, and thereby complete "the 200 day durational performance by linking their body to the minimalist structure."

Cassils, a Canadian-born 2017 Guggenheim Fellow and 2015 Creative Capital Awardee currently living in Los Angeles, has made a career for himself by approaching and proposing theories and questions about the body, politics, gender, history, being transgender and other potentially incendiary topics through his performance-based art. Ahead of the debut of Monumental, he discussed the logistics of preserving so much urine for such a long period of time, his relationship to his body as a transgender artist, the divide between art and activism and more.

**HuffPost: Did PISSED happen organically in response to Trump's action in February or was it a piece you'd be conceptualizing in some way and Trump's move ended up giving you the perfect opportunity to actualize what you'd been incubating?**

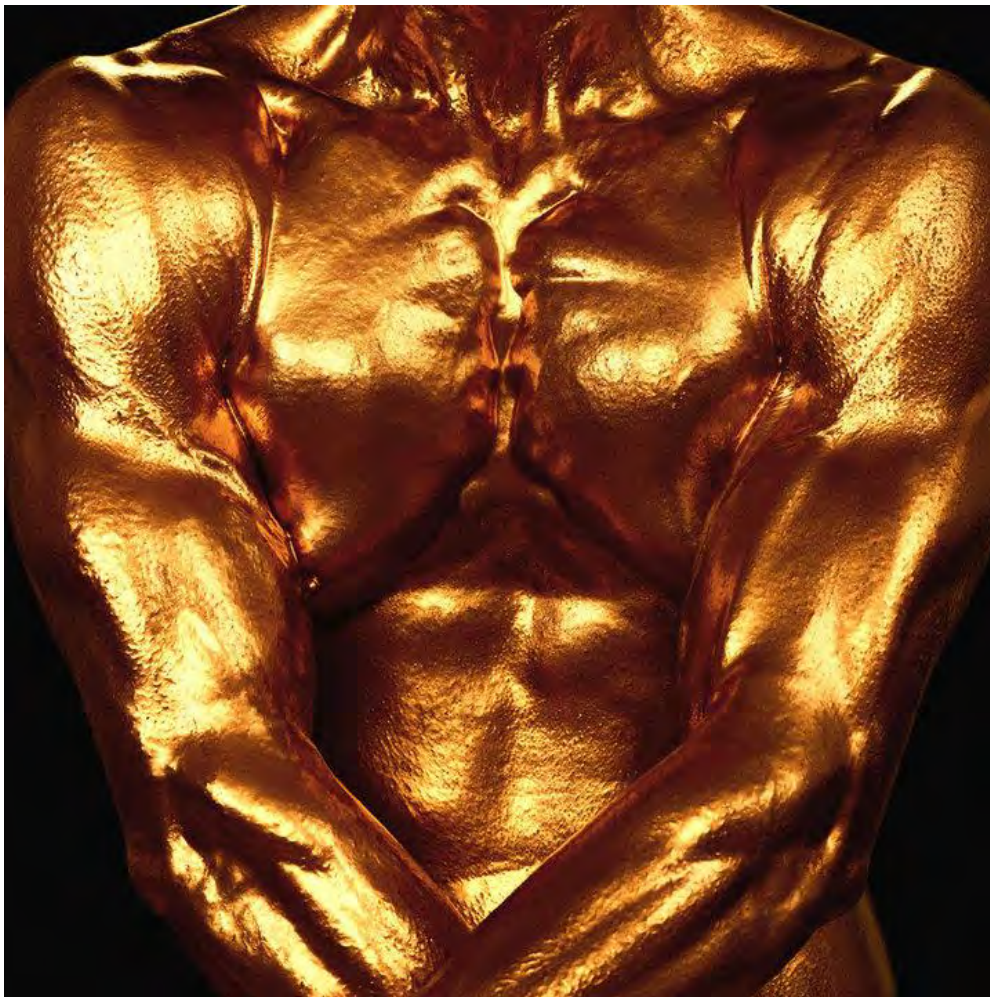
Cassils: It's something that I've been thinking about personally as someone who has to navigate bathrooms on a daily basis. This is just an experience that I've had. It was really [stemming from] following the Gavin Grimm case in depth and being really inspired by such a young person. Looking at someone who was just 14 years old and speaking his truth to a bunch of adults and students who were bullying him — and of course he's picked up by the ACLU because he's articulate, well-versed, educated white trans man, and certainly, he isn't necessarily the stand-in for most trans experiences; there was something incredibly compelling about his bravery. I felt quite attached to that particular story and then when Trump rescinded this order, I just couldn't believe it. I feel like that about so much of what's happened — DACA last week, Charlottesville — these issues are not necessarily separate. When you look at something like DACA, we have 800,000 dreams who are being kicked out of the country — young people who are trying to do the right thing — and 50,000 of those are LGBTQ members of our community, so [Trump] is affecting trans and queer people on many different levels across all these different intersectional boundaries.

When that order was rescinded I was like, "You know what? Fuck this!" I wanted everybody to do an active protest and FedEx their urine to the White House that night. I thought, *Let's all just flood the White House with piss!*

**Literally.**

Literally! But I am undergoing my citizenship application and my lawyer said, “Do not do that. You will be 86-ed from this country so fast” — because sending urine in the post is considered a biohazard, so it’s an act of terrorism, believe it or not. Some people think this issue is ridiculous and that we shouldn’t even be having this conversation but the excretion of our bodies can literally be seen as a loaded weapon. Because of the limitations of taking an actual political action, based on my non-citizenship at the time, I thought, I’m an artist and I’ll go the route of the metaphor and I came up with the concept in a day or two.

Sometimes my ideas take a very long time to come to fruition but this one was just right on the surface. That being said, I just started collecting my piss that day [Trump rescinded Obama’s directive] or two days after. But I didn’t know how the project was going to manifest or how I was going to keep the urine — working with a biochemist and the procuring of seven fridges [to hold the urine] wasn’t something I was thinking about at the time.



*CASSILS WITH ROBIN BLACK*

*Alchemic. Cassils with Robin Black 2017*

**How *does* a person go about collecting and preserving 200 gallons of urine for months on end?**



That's a good question — and that's a question that no one had really previously asked because why would we ever need to save urine? No one does. My wife is a nurse and I asked her to go to work the next day and ask the doctors about urine preservation and she said, "they're not going to know about that. They keep urine for a UTI test for maybe two days and then they chuck it. But you know who would know? A biochemist." And it turns out that my wife, who is a former dominatrix, knows a dominatrix who also has a PhD. in biochemistry and if you go to her website it says "PhDeviant" *[laughs]*. Her name is Mistress Snow Mercy and I called her up and she totally hooked me up. Because she went to UCLA, she had quite a lot of contacts and she contacted the head of the forensics lab at the L.A. Police Department and someone who worked at a higher level for the children's hospital and together they brainstormed this formula. They ordered this preservative off of Amazon for me and it came in the mail and I was about to open it and I got this phone call and the voice said, "Cassils, it's Snow Mercy. Do not open that box." I had opened it a little bit and there was like a skull and crossbones on it. I guess they thought I was in a lab? I was like, "I'm not in a lab — I'm in my bathroom!" *[laughs]*. So they figured out a much more non-lab necessary process, which essentially ended up being borax, which is a roach killer, and it kills the bacteria.

**So you just added that to the urine and you were good to go?**

Right. So, in short, I would carry around a 24-hour medical urine capture bottle and I would bleach all of these bottles to disinfect them and then air-dry them. I have a funnel, because my aim's not so hot, and then I'd have to bleach that each time I used it. So I urinate into the bottle and then when it reaches completion, I add 30 grams of the borax solution, shake it up, date it and leave it in the fridge. Living with a performance isn't always easy *[laughs]* and my wife was like, "You only get one extra fridge in our one-bedroom [apartment]!"

**She must be ridiculously patient.**

*[Laughs]* She really is! I was like, "that's fair." So I had to ask my friends — and a lot of them don't have spare spaces — but I found a couple of friends that have a garage or a studio and I found seven people to let me house fridges that I bought off of Craigslist and then I'd load up my Honda with as much piss as I could fit in and then reposition it in someone's garage. I literally had urine all over Los Angeles.

**That's incredible... and disgusting?**

A week ago, I had to go around with my friend in their larger car and we filled our cars with 200 gallons of urine. We had to make pit stops to assemble it in 50-gallon oil containers for transport out to New York. It was completely insane and logistically, I want to say one of the hardest performances I've ever done.

**Which is saying a lot, considering the performances you've done.**

I think it's because there was very little pleasure factor in it for me. My other works are hard — but they're hard in a way that I like. This was really re-inscribing an oppression. You know, first of all there's the act of saving your piss and holding your piss really replicates the experience one feels when they're cognizant of what their body needs to do to empty their bladder, be it in a public space or a private space and all of the anxiety that comes along with this. This piece really hyper-performed that for me.

**When the exhibition is done, what happens to the urine?**

That's a good question. I don't know what will happen. We've been in motion, so we've just been trying to keep up with the process. This is a 200-day piece — we started this on February 23 and there were certain days when I was traveling and when you're traveling you can't bring urine on a flight with you. So I had to get friends to donate their urine to make up for the days that I couldn't save my own urine because it's not about *my* body, per se, it's about what *one* body has to mitigate.

**So it was surrogate urine.**

Right. I learned a lot from the people who participated in the piece. Some people were trans-identified, some weren't and especially for the people that weren't, it changed the issue in their mind. So, I think going forward, what I'd like to do, as this continues, for example, I have an exhibition in Los Angeles in the spring, and at that point we'll be over a year into this, so what would it be like to create a tank that held 400 gallons of urine and have the city of Los Angeles do a urine drive? That way the piece would be a collective action. So I think I'm going to continue with this but I'm not sure how. As far as keeping the urine [that will be featured in the New York exhibition], I don't know. I have a friend who is an art historian who said, "You need to work with a contemporary arts conservationist," and I was like, "Yeah I do!" [Laughs]

**I love the idea of trying to archive 200 gallons of urine.**

Right? I was talking with one of my friends who let me store a fridge with her and she was jokingly calling it my "archive," but it literally is an archive of my body.



*CASSILS WITH ZACHARY HARTZELL COURTESY THE ARTIST AND RONALD FELDMAN GALLERY NEW YORK  
Becoming an Image performance still from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Historic Cast Hall,  
2016.*

**Tell me more about Fountain, the performance that will take place on the opening night of the exhibition.**

This sculpture that I've made is a result of this 200-day durational performance. The idea behind the sculpture was to showcase to people just how much fluid one body needs to contend with as the result of a government ordinance. So it kind of makes what might seem abstract in nature very concrete. You see this mass and it's intense — it's a lot. So that's present in this room — this large tank of urine. And then the other component is that I've created a four-channel audio piece that accompanies this work and that is basically all of the oral arguments that took place in the Gavin Grimm case. It starts at the Virginia School Board meetings when concerned parents and students are addressing the school board and voicing their concerns about Grimm — including Gavin's voice, who is trying to defend himself, and his mother. It's incredibly moving. And then I follow those arguments all the way up to the 4th Court of Appeals where you hear the lawyer from the ACLU arguing against the Virginia School Board. And what was striking to me — because I've never listened to judicial proceedings from start to finish like that — was the incredible ignorance that ran through all levels of the proceedings. You might expect ignorance at a local school board but you don't expect that from a 4th circuit judge — that's quite terrifying.

This four-channel installation specializes these arguments so that the discussions are literally being hurled back and forth over the cube. So what it does is that it contextualizes what you're looking at. Because although this is an idea about making formally what the fluid amount actually is — at worst it could be reduced to just an aesthetic: "This is beautiful!" "Wow, is this golden nectar?" But when you hear these testimonies — and there's a lot of Bible quoting, it's really crazy — you understand the essentializing that goes on in this country. "God made you man — you are a man! How dare you go against being a man? That's blasphemy!" And although this is about the trans issue, it does speak to the deep divide in our country right now about these fundamental ideologies and ways that we approach living.

And then the performance I'm doing is really a closing ceremony for those 200 days. It's very different from the rest of my performances that are kind of visually bombastic. I will be facing the sculpture on a very, very high [platform] — probably like 10 feet up in the air, so you're not eye-line with my crotch. I'm looking down on you. And behind me, is a grid of the 262 orange 24-hour urine capture bottles I used and they create another cube. There's one space left, which is the one final bottle. So for the two hours of the exhibition opening, I will literally just be standing up there and pissing into the bottle if I have to piss. And at the end of the performance I will climb down and I will dump the urine into the cube and I will place that final bottle on the shelf. So it's really about closing this piece down.

**It seems insane that I have to make a cube of piss for people to get this idea. I shouldn't have to make this. I shouldn't have to hold my own urine.**

**Many trans people do not want to center conversations about being trans around the body because they argue that being trans is so much more than that and that when we focus on just the body, we neglect so many other important issues about and related to being trans. As a trans artist whose work centers around the body — often *your* body in particular — what are your thoughts on that?**

I think that [concern] is totally valid. I think the key to that is not creating works that are completely sensationalizing specifically the idea of genitals, for example. So, I think in a way, I'm on the same page as that. So rather than talking about [gender affirmation] surgery or the specifics of someone's genitals,

I'm showing you what a huge block of urine looks like — something that regardless of what you look like or how you work in the world is something that we all have to contend with. It's about erasing those sensationalist markers. So though it *is* about the body, I try to create work that speaks to — I don't want to say *all* bodies but I try to make work that allows someone who might not have the subjectivity to enter into a reflective dialogue. I try to do something that's emotionally impactful that could perhaps wrench open a little corner of their mind to imagine what it would be like to be that person.

It's about creating modes for empathy. We all have bodies and there's something incredibly powerful about live performance in a world where we are so attached to our screens. I used to live in New York City in the early '90s and when you were riding the subway people would actually look at each other or you would read a book and now everybody is invested in their tiny digital device. So there's something incredibly impactful about the physical presence of liveness and our bodies are what we use as barometers and thermometers to be present. So I think there are ways of speaking to the body without reducing the body to some essentialist or totally objectified or totally sensationalized body.



CASSILS WITH GUIDO MENCARI COURTESY THE ARTIST AND RONALD FELDMAN GALLERY NEW YORK

*Inextinguishable Fire* performance still from the National Theatre, London UK, Spill Festival of Performance 2015

**I'm interested in what you just mentioned about your work possibly "wrenching open a little corner of the mind" for individuals to consider things they may not have considered before. So much of the work that you've done — including PISSED — involves elements of shock or revulsion, and definitely danger. You've set yourself on fire, you've changed how your body looks through extreme measures**



**for and through your art. Is the revulsion and the shock intended — and intentional — to help wrench that corner open?**

I think I am an extreme person but I also think we're living in extreme times. "Cuts," the piece you're talking about where I gained 23 pounds of muscle over 23 weeks was an exploration of where is the line in the sand in regards to how we classify people as male or female. Rather than having surgery or taking hormones, I was interested in exploring my body as a material condition — how can I work with flesh and manipulate flesh and sinew? So on one level you can say, "Wow, that's really extreme." But for me it's more about hyper-performing the things that we take for granted.

Some people say, "God said you're a woman, you must be a woman." Well, actually, my body is a material and based on the sensory input and the nutrition and the biomechanics and the protocol, I can make [my body] one way or the other. This idea that embodiment is so rigid — that you're either "this way" or "that way" — or even as a trans person, you're "this way" and then you take hormones or have surgery and then you're "that" — I'm interested in mutability and the *agency* that we can inscribe. Fine, if you want to take hormones but you don't have to. There are other things we can do. So I guess I'm interested in showcasing that process and unpacking it. So rather than just ending with a really bombastic image, like "Homage to Benglis," with the lipstick — which *is* a really bombastic image — I show every single image in between and I record every single meal that I'm consuming and I photograph all of the food that I've consumed to get to that point. So for me, it's about revealing the mechanisms of consumption and capitalism around that end image.

So, for example, Eleanor Antin, who starved herself for 72 days in 1972, which is the work that that piece is referencing, you look at her body from the first day to the 72nd day and it looks like something, but it's not what we'd expect now. So part of it is trying to reflect the extremity that exists. It seems insane that I have to make a cube of piss for people to get this idea. I shouldn't have to make this. I shouldn't have to hold my own urine. It's crazy that we have to go to these extremes but this is the culture that we're living in. So, I feel like it's a way of calling to attention the insanity of what we're undergoing and what we're enduring — and making it a transparent process that *reveals* the process. It's all about revealing it.

**You recently said that you don't consider yourself an activist, you consider yourself an artist. I'd argue that most people would look at your art and say, "Those are activist works." But it also seems like part of what you're saying is to be a... I was going to say a trans person but perhaps just someone who is "other(ed)" in this culture is to be an activist simply by existing. Talk to me about your ideas about art and activism and how they do or don't link up for you personally.**

I have friends who are lawyers and doctors — and when I say "lawyers and doctors" that sounds "fancy" but what I mean is my wife is a nurse at the LGBT center. She deals with really intense issues around healthcare and people who are on the streets, people who are fighting every day to survive as members of our community. I have good friends that work for the ACLU. I know people who are on the streets and going to D.C. to push hardline policy changes and really affect the mechanics and laws that affect our day-to-day lives in extreme ways. So, I guess it's almost in a way out of reverence for that kind of work that I would never claim [to be an activist]. I think what art does is different. It's really silly, I guess, to distinguish between "I'm an activist" or "I'm not an activist." I want to make the world a better place and I want to change people's minds and if that makes me an activist, then I'm an activist.

**But you're not concerning yourself with the specific terminology — you just want to do what you do.**

I'm doing what I do with the hope that it starts a conversation but I could never say that I can create policy in a direct way — or I'm not doing the work of that. But I'm very interested in working alongside the people who are doing that kind of work. For example, I'm going to have a panel discussion around this exhibition and Gavin Grimm's lawyer, Chase Strangio, will be present on it. I think my job is to visually create a language to talk about these issues that lawyers are doing in terms of the policy change that they're creating or that people in the medical industry are doing around healthcare reform and helping those communities. Maybe I am an artist-activist in a way but what I was saying in that particular context you referenced is that it's a very different kind of work. It's a work that I'm doing in a solitary way to express an idea to create a dialogue versus working in teams in the government against this incredibly grinding bureaucracy. I just think those activists would [look at what I do and say] "That's not activism! That looks like a lot of fun." [Laughs]

**There's such an exhibitionist grounding to your work — and I don't mean "exhibitionist" in a tawdry or salacious way, like a flasher opening his trench coat on the subway — in that your body is literally used as or becomes an exhibition. Who are you doing the work for? You? Your audience?**

I'm a firm believer in the idea that the personal is the political. In many ways, although I just said that I'm trying to make work that doesn't speak to my body, on the flip side of that, my body is my own experience — it's my subjectivity. I can talk about and say, "We need to be making anti-racist works" and I can speak about racism in a larger scheme but I can only speak about it as a white ally and as a Canadian who immigrated to this country. I have a very different experience [from American people of color]. So, I don't think of my work as "for me." If it was just for me, I'd just stay in a garage and paint watercolors [laughs].

I think of this as — I don't have children and I'm not going to have kids, so if I can humbly offer forth something that can make a contribution and allow people to have a different observation about the mechanisms about how we're living, and that can be helpful to cis or queer folks [that's important to me]. I definitely make work for queer people but I end up going to universities and lecturing and speaking to a lot of young, cis white people and I speak to those young people about trans issues, about issues of racism in relationship to visual arts practice from my perspective. I can only speak from my own perspective but at the same time I hope to offer forth something that is helpful to a multitude of people. I think of my work as a kind of porous sponge — I try to make entry points for people that have different understandings. I want to make something that's a strong enough of an image that if you know *nothing* about art, you can get something from it. You can understand it. You don't need to read the wall text and you don't have to have a masters degree. Likewise, I like to make something for the art historian who is like "Oh wow! That's a play on this very particular Donald Judd and that's kind of queering white male dry formalism and injecting this minimalist content with a contemporary political form." And maybe someone's not going to get that — but maybe someone else will. So I want to make all kinds of different doorways.

# The New York Times

Sheets, Hilarie M. "Gender-Fluid Artists Come Out of the Gray Zone."  
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## Gender-Fluid Artists Come Out of the Gray Zone

By HILARIE M. SHEETS  
SEPT. 15, 2017



Justin Vivian Bond performing "My Model/Myself" for the New Museum's coming exhibition "Trigger: Gender as a Tool and as a Weapon."

Credit Nathan Bajar for The New York Times

In the window of the New Museum this month, the performance artist [Justin Vivian Bond](#) plans to periodically strike a pose in a pink gown with rhinestone teardrop, framed by hand-drawn wallpaper twinning the artist's face with that of the former [Estée Lauder model Karen Graham](#). As a closeted transgender teenager in the 1970s, Bond obsessively drew Ms. Graham, until "I made myself my canvas." The artist is wearing a vintage dress by [Frank](#)

[Masandrea](#), one of several little-known couturiers who outfitted Ms. Graham before AIDS cut them down in their creative prime.

The project, “My Model/MySelf: I’ll Stand by You,” proudly puts what Bond calls a “queer face” on the glamour created by gay people that has long been appropriated by mainstream culture. The designers “served the aspirational whim of wealthy upper-class white women and then were completely dismissed by history,” the artist said.

Bond is one of more than 40 intergenerational artists in [“Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon,”](#) opening on Sept. 27 with work that explores gender beyond the binary of “male” and “female.”

It is the largest show to date at a major museum to tackle gender fluidity, which has become native to young people who are used to constructing their own identities on social media and declaring their preferred personal pronouns on college campuses and at workplaces. And as the highly charged debates over transgender rights swirl in the news — from [President Trump’s call for a ban on transgender service members in the United States military](#) to the laws governing access to public bathrooms and locker rooms to harassment in prisons — “Trigger” brings a new level of visibility to gender-fluid artists who have only been acknowledged before in a trickle of mainstream shows.

**“This show is attempting to identify without codifying something that may be completely alien to 20th-century folks still grappling with feminist issues and gay rights,” said Lisa Phillips, director of the New Museum, long known for its politically themed exhibitions.**

Since Charles W. Leslie and Fritz Lohman began showing work by gay artists in their loft in 1969, gender fluidity has been part of the mix, said Gonzalo Casals, director of the [Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art](#) in SoHo. **“But it’s very important for mainstream museums — not just for cultural specific museums like mine — to show that work,” he added. “The best way you can alienate a community is by denying them their reflection in society.”**

Survey shows have traditionally relied on establishing categories like “women-only” or “Latin American artists.” The curator of “Trigger,” Johanna Burton, is intent on disrupting categorization, much as the artists are personally doing.

**“Some of the activist work we think of from the AIDS crisis was really didactic,” said Ms. Burton, who promises that the New Museum exhibition “won’t look like a political show from the ’80s. Beauty and pleasure are really primary for these artists and are seen as a mode of resistance.”**



[Sadie Benning](#)'s lush new series of photographs titled "rainy day/gender," for instance, are self-portraits shot through droplets on a windshield in a way that makes the artist's body appear surreal and almost incomprehensible.

[Mickalene Thomas](#) explores lesbian desire in her 12-monitor video grid, "**Me as Muse**," presenting herself reclining naked on a couch and focusing the gaze on different parts of her body.

[Candice Lin and Patrick Staff](#)'s **smoke machine** will pump testosterone-lowering, plant-based tinctures into the museum lobby in their piece "**Hormonal Fog**" — sure to both delight and startle viewers when they learn what they are breathing.



Mickalene Thomas, "Me as Muse," 2016, a multimedia video installation about lesbian desire.

Credit Mickalene Thomas/Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong; Tony Prikryl for the Aspen Art Museum

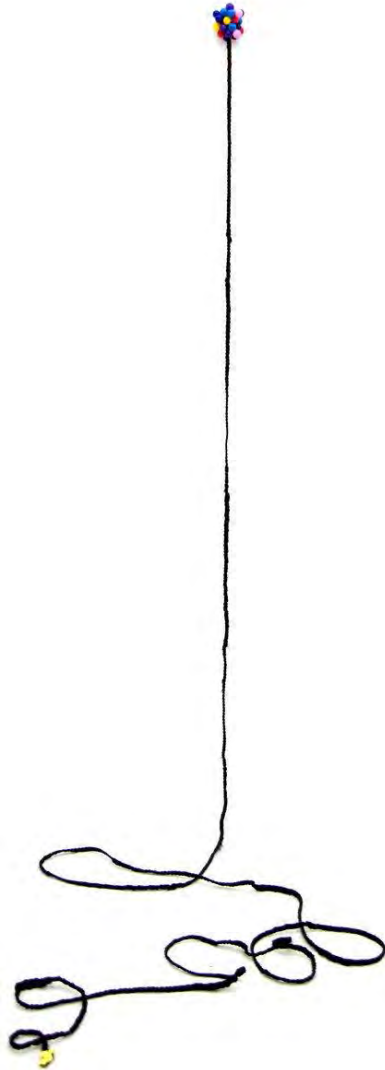
The show considers gender in relationship to race, class and sexuality. About half the artists are nonwhite. Most identify as queer — the term for

nonconforming sexual identity that includes lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. And some, like the filmmaker [Wu Tsang](#), reject the gender spectrum altogether. **“The art itself doesn’t have to be tethered to the biography of the artist,” Ms. Burton said.**

**“Trigger” warning: This show is intended to challenge viewers, and some may find the concept of gender as a moving target difficult to accept.**

Just days ago, conservative critics succeeded in getting Santander Cultural, an arts center in Porto Alegre, Brazil, to [shut down](#) the exhibition **“Queermuseum” amid accusations that it advertised pedophilia and blasphemy.**

**“Transgender and gender nonconforming expressions have been around forever,” said Erin Christovale, the co-curator of the roving film program [“Black Radical Imagination”](#) who recently started work at the Hammer Museum. “What’s new is that people are claiming these terms very proudly and these terms are starting to be valued.”**



With the rise of transgender characters in popular television shows, including “Transparent” and “Orange Is the New Black,” art galleries are getting in on the trend. Diamond Stingily, a transgender woman and, at 27, **one of the youngest artists in “Trigger,” will show new sculpture and video** in a solo exhibition opening later this month at Ramiken Crucible in Los Angeles.

**Diamond Stingily’s “Kaa,” from 2016, a braid of synthetic hair.**

Credit Queer Thoughts, New York

**“The art world is interested now because everybody wants to be woke,” Ms. Stingily said. “That’s a good thing if it gets more people who look like me to come into those spaces and not have them be so exclusive to a predominantly white audience.” For “Trigger” she is making a braid of synthetic black hair more than 200 feet long that will descend through the four gallery floors of the New Museum, summoning the strength and beauty of “racialized” hair and characters ranging from Medusa to Rapunzel.**



Cassils, "200 days, 200 gallons" (2017), a piece in which the artist collected urine.  
Credit Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in SoHo begins its season this week with a solo show by the performance artist Cassils (formerly known as Heather Cassils). On view is a glass cube containing 200 gallons of the artist's urine, collected in the months since the Trump administration reversed President Obama's protections for transgender students to use bathrooms consistent with their gender identities.



Carlos Motta, an artist known for his multimedia work documenting queer communities, calls attention to the underreported discrimination against gender-nonconforming refugees. In his [11 video portraits](#) going on view this week at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, refugees recount the oppression they experienced in their homelands in the Middle East and at refugee camps in the Netherlands.



A video still from “Gender Talents” (2015) by Carlos Motta. Credit Carlos Motta

Mr. Motta is skeptical, however, whether representation in the privileged art world really leads to political change.

**“Of course it is important to tell people’s stories, but who is actually benefiting by projecting a film in a museum and what is this discourse actually doing for communities at stake?” Mr. Motta asked. He has looked for** ways to bridge the socioeconomic gap between art institutions and the marginalized people he films, including using some of his own exhibition funding to give copies of his videos to trans organizations for their own promotion.

Juliana Huxtable, [one of the most discussed artists in the New Museum’s 2015 Triennial](#) because of its representations of her nude transgender body, also questioned whether greater visibility for transgender art will lead to social progress.

Are “audiences obsessed with and consuming media about transness tapping into a derivative pornographic obsession with transgender bodies?” she asked, in an interview in a new anthology, “Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility,” to be published in November by the New Museum. “Or are they putting me on display as a circus freak show?”

“That’s the anxiety that I’ve gotten from the whole situation, because I think that the policing and the violence against trans people have a direct relationship to that increase in visibility.”

Ms. Huxtable pointed out that her work that doesn’t present herself in a sexualized way doesn’t sell. “No one wants to buy work that doesn’t seem seductive,” she said.

Ms. Burton estimated that two-thirds of the artists in “Trigger” have no gallery representation at all.

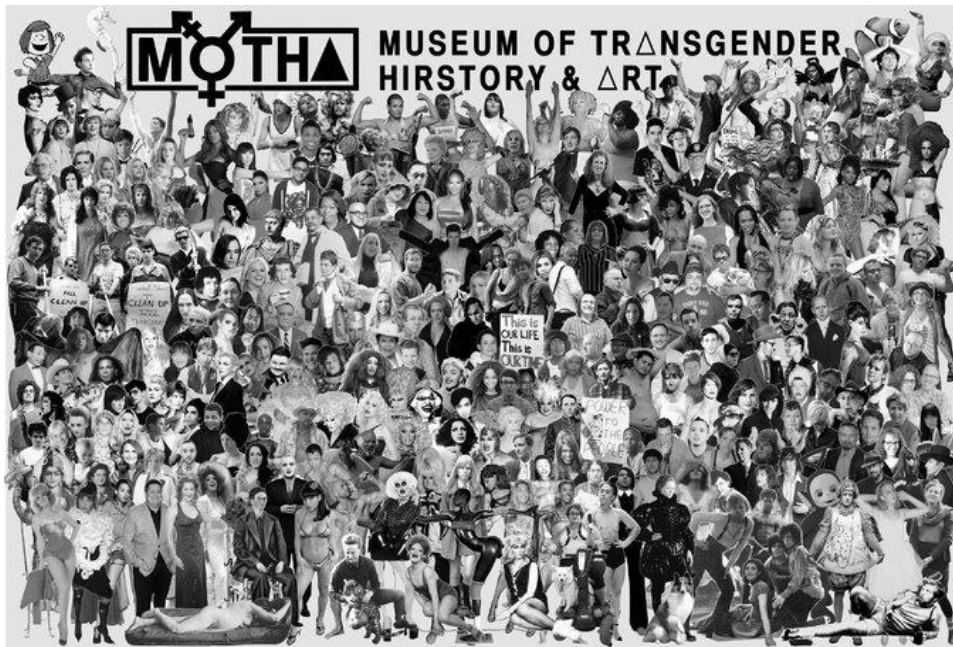


Martine Gutierrez's "Line Up 1," from 2014, a photographic series in which the artist is styled to blend seamlessly with glamorous mannequins. Credit Ryan Lee, New York

Martine Gutierrez, who was born male and is currently transitioning to a woman, struggled to conform to the demands of the art world when she first began showing work. "They want the artist to define themselves and they want the work to be defined, especially if the artist is in the work," Ms. Gutierrez said. This proved unnerving when her identity hovered in a gray area.

Images from her [2014 photographic series, "Lineups,"](#) in which the artist is styled to blend seamlessly with groupings of glamorous female mannequins, are on view in the group show ["Converging Voices: Gender and Identity" at the Hofstra University Museum](#) in Hempstead, N.Y. "This body of work was my first inclination to realizing that I wanted to be seen as a woman," said Ms. Gutierrez, who is now comfortable using the female pronoun.

In 2103, as transgender people began to be included in institutions of legitimacy and power, Chris E. Vargas, a multimedia artist, invented the fictional [Museum of Transgender Hirstory & Art](#), or MOTHA, as a form of institutional critique. It started as a logo and poster with images of more than 250 gender nonconforming heroes, from [Chaz Bono](#) to [Peppermint Patty](#), that will be on view in "Trigger." Mr. Vargas's project has snowballed into tongue-in-cheek events and lectures that he performs in the guise of MOTHA's executive director. (He will be delivering a performance at the New Museum.)



"Transgender Hiroes" from 2013 by Chris E. Vargas.  
Credit Chris E. Vargas

**“Is it the responsibility of an art and history institution, one that is dedicated to a historically marginalized community, to join the mainstream celebration of liberal inclusion?” Mr. Vargas mused in his essay in “Trap Door.” “Or should that institution stay faithful to its history, rooted in disruption and transgression?”**

Ms. Burton, the curator, said that while no artist approached for the exhibition turned her down, she is acutely aware of the issues and responsibilities of injecting these clamorous voices into the ivory tower. She doesn't want “Trigger” to be too easily digestible.

**“If the show is done right, and I hope it is, it makes people interested but doesn't allow them to think they fully understand something,” she said. “If you stop thinking about yourself as a stable identity looking at something made by another stable identity, at least for the duration of the show, it changes the whole game.”**

**“And some people,” she predicted, “won't like that.”**



# ARTNEWS

## Guggenheim Foundation Announces 2017 Fellows, Including Byron Kim, Kay Rosen, and Leigh Ledare

Greenberger, Alex. "Guggenheim Foundation Announces 2017 Fellows, Including Byron Kim, Kay Rosen and Leigh Ledare." *Artnews*. April 7, 2017. <http://www.artnews.com/2017/04/07/guggenheim-foundation-announces-2017-fellows-including-byron-kim-kay-rozen-and-leigh-ledare/>

BY *Alex Greenberger* POSTED 04/07/17 12:48 PM



Leigh Ledare, *Vokzal*, 2016.  
COLLECTION OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO, RESTRICTED GIFT OF THE DAVID C. AND SARAJEAN RUTTENBERG ARTS FOUNDATION

The John Simon Guggenheim Foundation named its 2017 fellows today. Among the 173 scholars, artists, and writers who will be receiving fellowships are artists Byron Kim, Leigh Ledare, and Zinadu Saro-Wiwa.

**“It’s exciting to name 173 new Guggenheim fellows,” Edward Hirsch, the foundation’s president, said in a statement. “Each year since 1925, the Guggenheim Foundation has bet everything on the individual, and we’re thrilled to continue to do so with this wonderfully talented and diverse group. It’s an honor to be able to support these individuals to do the work they were meant to do.”**

Below are the relevant art-related fellows. A full list of the 2017 fellows is available [on the foundation’s website](#).

#### Drama and Performance Art

Carson Kreitzer  
Aaron Landsman  
Rogelio Martinez  
Carmelita Tropicana  
Marianne Weems

#### Film/Video

Signe Baumann  
Zackary Canepari  
Laura Ann Harrison  
Kirsten Johnson  
MiNH Kuchar  
Jen Liu  
Cynthia Madansky  
Antonio Méndez Esparza  
Rodrigo Reyes  
A.V. Rockwell  
John Paul Sniadecki  
Steven Subotnick  
Billy Woodberry

#### Fine Arts

Derek Boshier  
Kathe Kim Burkhart  
**Cassils**  
Mahwish Chishty  
Joseph DeLappe  
Lesley Dill  
Harry Dodge  
Eugenio Espinoza

Elana Herzog  
Nicholas A Hill  
Byron Kim  
Jennie Jieun Lee  
John W. Love  
James Luna  
Shari Mendelson  
Sandeep Mukherjee  
**Paul O’Keeffe**  
Jefferson Pinder  
Hunter Reynolds  
Kay Rosen  
Paul Rucker  
Zinadu Saro-Wiwa  
Jeanne Silverthorne  
Roy Thurston  
Leslie Wayne

Photography  
Marina Berio  
Mary F Calvert  
Daniel W. Coburn  
Kenneth Gonzales-Day  
Thilde Jensen  
Leigh Ledare  
Michael Lundgren  
Amanda Means  
**Shaun O’Boyle**  
Maggie Steber  
Zoe Strauss  
Bradley Temkin

# HYPERALLERGIC

## A 1,900-Pound Sculpture Pushed Through the Streets of Omaha, in Tribute to Its LGBTQ History

By: Karen Emenhiser-Harris

The solemn, four-hour procession closed out an exhibition by Cassils at the Bemis Center.

Emenhiser-Harris, Karen. "A 1,900-Pound Sculpture Pushed Through the Streets of Omaha, in Tribute to Its LGBTQ History." *Hyperallergic*. May 5 2017.



*Cassils, "Monument Push" performance stills, 2017 (photos by John Ficenec; all images courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Fine Art, NY)*

OMAHA — Brute physicality and fugitive imagery lie within the heart of *Phantom Revenant*, a solo exhibition at Bemis Center for Contemporary Art that was bookended by two performances by Cassils, a gender-nonconforming artist and 2017 Guggenheim Fellow based in Los Angeles.

The exhibition came to a solemn conclusion on a drab and rainy April 29 as passersby in Omaha, Nebraska, witnessed a slow-moving and mostly silent procession of about 70 people. At its front, a 600-pound cart bearing a 1,300-pound bronze sculpture was, in a group effort, arduously pushed, pulled, thrust, and jimmied over the cracked sidewalks and buckled cobblestones of the city's Old Market neighborhood. Beginning at the Bemis Center, which organized the exhibition and performances, the four-hour procession stopped at six preselected locations for a quiet pause or short address by members of and advocates for the local LGBTQ community.

This was the world premiere of "Monument Push," the newest work by Cassils, a performance artist known for radically transforming their own body through rigorous, drug-free physical training in an exploration of identities unbounded by the rigid male/female binary. To create this piece, Cassils worked with Bemis curator Alex Priest and Omaha community members for six months, choosing the sites and acquiring the legal permits. The work performs a similar transformation upon the hidden and marginalized history of each chosen location along the 1.5-mile route, monumentalizing its symbolic import in a tribute to community resilience.





*Cassils, “Monument Push” performance still, 2017 (photo by John Ficenec)*

Some of the sites chosen marked locations of violence, such as the street where a 2013 gay-related hate crime took place and the Douglas County Correctional Center, where incarcerated queer youth are often placed in solitary confinement — allegedly for their own protection. One of the most moving moments of the procession came when the crowd gathered in front of the center and Dominique Morgan, a local social activist, R&B artist, and recipient of the NAACP Freedom Fighter Award, took a break from pushing to softly perform a song he had written while confined there in his youth. When he raised his voice for the refrain, it echoed off the walls of the center, amplifying his personal pain and trauma. Other sites marked points of resistance and celebration, such as the street where Omaha’s first gay pride parade took place in 1985.

The approximately 54” sculpture at the center of “Monument Push” is “The Resistance of the 20%” (2016), the title of which refers to a 2012 statistic concerning the 20% increase in the murder rate of trans people. The piece, which is wide at the base and tapers toward the top, is roughly reminiscent of an obelisk, that most ancient of monuments, but its entire surface records the imprints of

fists, knees, elbows, and feet: evidence of a furious and thorough beating. As I took my turn helping to push the 1,900-pound mass, I struggled not only against its weight, but to somehow gain purchase, to fit my own hand into the jagged imprints of that violence. It was a brief test of my own endurance and a profound experience of empathy.



*Cassils, “Monument Push” performance stills, 2017 (photo by John Ficenec)*

The beaten form of the sculpture was directly tied to the opening performance of *Phantom Revenant*. This was “Becoming an Image,” Cassils’s 14th performance of their now-acclaimed work. As with previous iterations, viewers were brought into a pitch-dark room and instructed to wait silently. Cassils soon entered along with a photographer — both as blinded by the dark as the audience. Suddenly, loud smacking sounds resounded as the artist began to furiously pummel a 2,000-pound clay block that had been placed in the center of the room. Grunts and heavy breathing were recorded. The camera flashed, momentarily illuminating the arresting sight of a large monolithic form under fierce attack by the ambiguously sexed, powerfully muscled, nude artist. The ruthless pounding continued, intermittently lit by flashes of light that burned the image, quite

literally, into the retinas of the crowd. The sporadic flashes provided the only light and the only record of the artist's performance, while the searing images implicated the viewers as witnesses. After 25 minutes, the clay monolith had been reduced to a formless mass and the performance concluded.

A few days later, I visited the room where the remains, as it were, lay under a dim spotlight, the clay still moist. A soundtrack of Cassils's breathing and the aural impact of body on clay looped loudly in the background, accompanied subtly by the pulsing of a disembodied heartbeat. Layered with the sounds of violence, a sense of defeat and vulnerability permeated the space. After a 2013 performance of "Becoming an Image," a similar clay remnant was cast into bronze. "Monument Push" marked its first public display.

The blunt materiality of fists and metal, the sculpting of both clay and flesh — these are the primitive tools and techniques employed by the artist to make manifest a global history of violence and trauma. In a brief interview, Cassils told Hyperallergic, "My use of boxing and bodybuilding queer my knowledge of physiology, body mechanics, and nutrition to express ideas about gender and blur the lines of what is possible." Given the plasticity of the body, the work speaks to the construction of identity. Cassils traces their interest in this back to 2003, when they were working as a trainer in Los Angeles with B actors who needed to look like soldiers in six weeks. "It became my job to construct the physicality or image of militarism on a body that had nothing to do with that but that represented its symbolic gesture," Cassils said.



*"Becoming an Image," performance still, 2017 (photo by Cassils with Bill Sitzmann)*



*"Becoming an Image," performance still, 2017 (photo by Cassils with Bill Sitzmann)*



Cassils's interrogation of the mediated image is paramount to their work and could also be seen in a six-channel video installation, "The Powers That Be" (2015–17), a juxtaposition of LA's industrial production of imagery with amateur videos. Cassils worked with a Hollywood fight choreographer to simulate a brutally eerie match, lit only by car headlights, between themselves and a phantom opponent. Cellphone videos made by members of the audience provide the only record of the performance, once again calling attention to the role of the viewer as witness.

That act of bearing witness, particularly to the staging of today's political reality, couldn't be more timely, particularly here in Omaha. "In the current sociopolitical climate, it is amazing to be asked to do this piece in the Midwest," Cassils said. "It is even more powerful here than in NY or LA. There was a women's march here — a huge women's march — and there is resistance here, and there is critical thinking here. The willingness to support this project is probably greater here than it would be in larger cities right now, and I think that is pretty wonderful."



*"Resilience of the 20%" (2016), cast-based clay remnant from "Becoming an Image" performance, 1,300 pounds of bronze, 40 x 36 x 54 in*

*Phantom Revenant was on view at Bemis Center for Contemporary Art (724 S. 12th Street, Omaha) through April 29.*



INTERNATIONAL ARTS | SPOTLIGHT

# Cassils: Transgender Artist Goes to Extremes

By **STEPHEN HEYMAN** NOV. 18, 2015



Cassils melting an ice sculpture.  
Clover Leary, Courtesy of Cassils

The Canadian transgender artist Cassils specializes in physically demanding performances that often require **intense training regimens to transform the artist's form into that of a bodybuilder or a mixed martial artist.**

**"I see the body as a social sculpture," says Cassils, whose work has critiqued the pursuit of an unsustainable physique or the difficulty of representing violence in art. One of Cassils' first major [performances](#) required the artist to stand still, nude, for five hours flush against an ice sculpture of a neoclassical male bust until it melted from the artist's body heat.**

**Cassils's more recent work has been even more provocative. This month, for the Spill Festival at London's National Theater, Cassils was set on fire for 14 seconds, a "static burn" considered particularly dangerous by the stunt coordinators who trained and advised the artist. The piece, "[Inextinguishable Fire](#)," required Cassils not to inhale (to keep from scorching the esophagus) and to wear a freezing fireproof suit that induces hypothermia (to avoid perspiration, which would otherwise boil on the surface of the skin).**

Feats like these have led to increasing exposure for the Los Angeles-based artist. **This summer, the MU art center in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, held Cassils's first solo museum show.** The artist is also participating in a major group show about gender and sexual identities at the [Deutsches Historisches Museum](#) and the Schwules Museum in Berlin. **(The show's poster is a photograph of Cassils, shirtless and muscular, with bright red lipstick.)** In the following edited interview, Cassils discusses some of the ideas behind the challenging work.

***Q. I'm sure you're asked this quite often, but why did you light yourself on fire?***

**A.** In 2002, I graduated from Cal Arts [California Institute of the Arts], which is this essentially Marxist grad school, and went back to my old day job of working as a personal trainer at Crunch in West Hollywood. There I watched the battle of Fallujah on 22 different monitors simultaneously while blonde actresses were running at their optimal fat burn target heart rate. The disparity between those realities really informed **this piece.** But the title comes from Harun Farocki's documentary "[Inextinguishable Fire](#)" [which deals with the Vietnam War]. There's this moment where he's smoking a

cigarette and he looks into the camera and says, “The embers from this cigarette burn at 400 degrees Celsius and Napalm burns at 3,000.” And then he extinguishes the cigarette in his arm.

*Q. While your performance refers to a similarly extreme act, it’s controlled. There’s no intent to harm yourself.*

*A.* Well, there’s always some risk. And the fact is, in the live performance in London, the tension in the room was unbelievable. And it was helped along by the fact that the stunt coordinator had never done this sort of thing as a live performance and he underestimated the power of stage fright. His hands were shaking as he was putting the fireproof garments and this protective goop on me — to the point that it was blocking **my nostrils and my mouth and I couldn’t breathe. And because I had everything miked,** the sound created an intimacy, a kind of acoustic focus. You can hear me telling him, **“Look I can’t breathe, you gotta take some of this out.” It wasn’t acting, it wasn’t** rehearsed, it was an actual moment. And that tension in this simulated environment makes you think about what it would be like to have it not be a consensual performance. What would it mean for an actual body to be experiencing this? I am not self-immolating, I’m doing a controlled action, but it references the constant barrage of images we have of traumatized bodies.

*Q. What was the reaction to the performance?*

*A.* People said they were sick to their stomachs, that they were shaking. People were having these intense empathetic physical reactions. The minute you start to strip the **garment off, there’s so much adrenaline and, even though you haven’t been burnt, the body has sent stress signals, so there’s a convulsing that happens partly due to the** hypothermia and partly due to the body being traumatized slightly. And then you just undergo an after-care, which is to warm up, and then those sensations subside.

*Q. How does a piece like this relate to transgender politics?*

*A.* It’s about not having a fixed body, but a body that’s in a constant state of flux. My goal is to hopefully ask people to think more **critically. When you look at me, you’re not seeing my body, you’re seeing, in this case, an abstracted human form engulfed in** flames, and you can place yourself in that position for a moment and think about what it would be like to be subjected to that violence. Thinking about that may change the way you walk through the world. *Stephen Heyman*

## Fire In The Belly: Trans Artist Cassils Immolates For Art

Posted: 06/04/2015 8:31 am EDT Updated: 06/04/2015 10:59 pm EDT

[Cassils // Inextinguishable Fire - Trailer](#) from [stichting MU](#) on [Vimeo](#).

*Editor's note: This story uses gender neutral pronouns (they, them, their) to refer to transgender artist Cassils, the subject of the following interview.*

In the fall of 2013, transgender artist [Cassils](#) (sometimes referred to as Heather Cassils) [opened their first solo show](#) at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in New York City. Over the past two years, Cassils has continued to perform and show work internationally, has been awarded several major prizes recognizing their artistic achievements, including the first [ANTI International Prize for Live Art](#) and a [Creative Capital Grant](#), and has developed a new incendiary work titled "Inextinguishable Fire."

For readers unaware of Cassils' impressive oeuvre, their multidisciplinary work spans live art, performance, sculpture, sound, installation, photography, video, and even the occasional watercolor. Often through lengthy and rigorous training, their body is altered and specialized to certain endurance tasks that have included everything from bodybuilding to professional stunt school.



*Inextinguishable Fire, Burn for Portrait.*

Here, Cassils and [Kris Grey](#), a NYC-based gender queer artist whose work combines strategies of communication, activism, community building, education, lecture, and studio production, chat about Cassils' work.

**Kris Grey:** Congratulations on your recent achievements and the opening of your first museum and European [solo exhibition at MU Eindhoven](#) in the Netherlands! You have released a teaser for ["Inextinguishable Fire" on your website \(see video above\)](#). Can you describe what happens in the work?

**Cassils:** Thanks Kris. ["Inextinguishable Fire"](#) is both a live performance and a performance for the camera in which I am engaged in a treacherous fire stunt. Using techniques borrowed from Hollywood stunts, I experience the very real human terror of being lit on fire. The 14-second full-body burn is extended to 14 minutes of slow motion flame, shot at 1000 frames per second. Slowing the burn down makes the viewer spend time with the image and the action. Crucial to my film is the use of a slow motion zoom outwards. This constantly changes the context and our understanding of the image is based on what we are seeing within the frame at any given moment. This ultimately makes the staged quality of the stunt as visible as its potential risks. The way the sound operates really informs the image. First you identify with the burning victim, the flames licking at your ears, and the material singeing as if it were your own clothing on fire. However, as the camera moves away, you hear the burning body across from you with ever increasing distance. I wanted to speak to the constant stream of mediated images in our Facebook feeds and play with how identification, alienation and mediation affect the way we experience violent images. Though the stunt is a simulation of violence it still presents real danger. This possibly volatile situation as well as the attempt to control it are captured to create an image where danger, empathy for those experiencing violence, and the privilege of removal all operate simultaneously in one transparent performance.

**Kris Grey:** Like some of your previous work, "Inextinguishable Fire" refers to a specific piece from the past.

**Cassils:** The title of the piece references [Harun Farocki's 1969 film of the same name](#). Both versions of "Inextinguishable Fire" are about the radical unrepresentability of certain forms of trauma and violence. In Farocki's film, he puts a cigarette out in his arm as a way of demonstrating an act of pain and trauma that we can tolerate seeing, as opposed to the incomprehensible image of a body doused in napalm. We can know what a cigarette burn feels like even though we cannot begin to imagine what it is like to be torched with napalm. I see the fire stunt functioning in a similar way. My act of self-immolation gestures toward the desire to know and understand this horror, as well as the impossibility of doing so. How can I enact empathy when my own situation is so removed from the immediacy of torture and war? Many of us are so saturated with brutalized imagery that a distance is created. Likewise so many images are fed to us at such rapid succession that the ability to analyze and think critically about these images is reduced. People "like" articles on Facebook and Twitter based on the fleeting headlines. People don't even read the articles anymore. My hope is that by creating a film where at first you think you are looking at a traumatized body, but at the end of the film you realize you are looking at an image constructed to manipulate you into thinking you are looking at a traumatized body, that people will think

more critically about the construction of such imagery and pay closer attention. I was inspired by Farocki's concept of using images to critique images. Julia Steinmetz writes in her essay "Cassils: Inextinguishable Fire," which will be published in the upcoming book that is accompanying the "Incendiary" show:

**“Self-immolation has a long history as a powerful form of political protest. Under conditions of extreme oppression, sometimes the timing and staging of one’s own obliteration is the only meaningful autonomous act available. The flames of 'Inextinguishable Fire' lap up against the revolutionary fires presently burning on the streets of Baltimore in outraged protest against police brutality and the expendability of black lives, catalyzed by the assault and ensuing homicide of Freddie Gray in the course of his unlawful arrest. The refrain 'I can't breathe' echoes from suffocating scene of of Eric Garner’s death at the hands of the NYPD to the sound of my tightly held breath, spanning the film’s fourteen minutes of slow motion full body burn. The gunshots from Ferguson, Missouri are still ringing in our ears as we see a parade of bodies spelling 'Hands Up, Don’t Shoot,' although we know the unconscious pulled the trigger. Flames fill our news feeds as commentators ask why the residents of Baltimore would set their own neighborhoods on fire, as if there weren’t a long history of self immolation as revolt in the face of intolerable circumstances. Much in the same way that Becoming and Image memorializes the experience of bodies under siege by making lives that 'don’t matter' literally take on a precious materiality, 'Inextinguishable Fire' stages resilience and forges strength through trial by fire.”**



*Inextinguishable Fire, Performance/ Set Still*



**Kris Grey:** I know there was a very specific shift you observed in your work as a trainer.

**Cassils:** Yes, after I graduated from the bastion of marxist critique aka CalArts in 2002, I landed a job as a personal trainer in a corporate box gym in West Hollywood. Training is how I have always earned my income. It was under halogen lighting, surrounded by the flexing of tissue that I witnessed the Battle of Fallujah on twelve separate monitors. Bodies of “others” exploding on the television as an army of hard bodied gay men checked their pulses for optimal fat burn as they whirled aimlessly on the treadmills. Shortly thereafter several “B list” actors who worked out at my gym started to approach me for training sessions. They had just landed a part: could I “make them look like a soldier in six weeks.” It became my job to construct a body that reflected militarism. This made me uncomfortable but it also got me thinking about the tremendous crossover between the military industrial complex and the entertainment industry. After much research, I found a military base called Fort Irwin, located one-and-a-half hours southeast of Los Angeles that used Hollywood stunt men and FX professionals to simulate the conditions of war in Iraq. They had expatriate Iraqis bussed in from San Diego to play “real insurgents.” When I asked the general what they did when they ran out of Iraqi actors, as there seemed to be a disproportionate ratio of soldiers to actors, he said nonchalantly “We use Mexicans.” It became crystal clear to me the ways in which faulty modes of representation inform political unfoldings and have real-life consequences. It is from this line of inquiry that I developed *Inextinguishable Fire*.

**Kris Grey:** Both “*Inextinguishable Fire*” and “[Becoming An Image](#)” employ some form of abstraction. It seems to me this abstraction is a queer strategy to combat the trappings of representation.

**Cassils:** I continue to make work that addresses trans representation. However I feel frustrated at the limits by which my work is perceived in a way which rests solely on my body and identity. Specifically a fetishized muscular body. That being said, it was important for me to make self-empowered, self-transforming pieces such as “[Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture](#),” “[Tiresias](#),” and “[Hard Times](#),” but I now trust that the trans content is inherently “in” the work. Much like the sculptures made from the resulting clay bashes in “*Becoming An Image*,” “*Inextinguishable Fire*” speaks to the unrepresentability of trauma and asks what that means for not just my body but many bodies. In this way I aim to make a humanist work that does not only exist within the confines of the identity politics specific to my own subjectivity.



Heather Cassils with Riem van den Bosch. 2015

*Still from opening night performance of "Becoming An Image," MU Eindhoven.*

There is such a pressure for those of us coming from disenfranchised positions to make “positive images” that speak for this marginalized community. One artist can never speak for everyone. I have become interested in anti-representational tactics. As trans politics become more mainstream we run the risk of becoming a target market subject to the same slotting and governing as the dominant culture. I’m invested in transness as a political position that offers the possibility of resistance. I want to play with formal possibilities which embrace the obtuse and the unrecognizable. I am curious as to what ideas and questions can come from continual transformation.

*"Incendiary: A Solo Show" by Cassils opened on Friday, May 22, 2015 with a live performance of "Becoming An Image" at MU, Torenallee 40-60, Strijp S, 5617 BD Eindhoven, The Netherlands, [www.mu.nl](http://www.mu.nl). The show is on view from May 22 until July 19. Programs include GET A ROOM! #2 an evening of sexual expression on Thursday, May 28 and a live performance and panel on Wednesday, June 17.*

*For more from Cassils, check out more photos below and [visit their website here](#). For more from Kris Grey, [head here](#).*

*This piece was Edited by [Julia Steinmetz](#). She is a Performance Studies scholar and visual artist based in New York City. She has collaborated with Cassils on art-making and critical projects since the turn of the millennium. Steinmetz's current research is focused on transformational aesthetics and the ways in which art interfaces with the unconscious.*

Grey, Kris. "Fire in the Belly: Trans Artist Cassils Immolates for Art."

*The Huffington Post*, June 4, 2015.

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/04/cassils-inextinguishable-fire\\_n\\_7505500.html?1433421111&ncid=tweetInkushpmg00000067](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/04/cassils-inextinguishable-fire_n_7505500.html?1433421111&ncid=tweetInkushpmg00000067)

*Editor's note: This story uses third person pronouns to refer to transgender artist Cassils, the subject of the following interview.*

In the fall of 2013, transgender artist [Cassils](#) (sometimes referred to as Heather Cassils) [opened their first solo show](#) at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in New York City. Over the past two years, Cassils has continued to perform and show work internationally, has been awarded several major prizes recognizing their artistic achievements, including the first [ANTI International Prize for Live Art](#) and a [Creative Capital Grant](#), and has developed a new incendiary work titled "Inextinguishable Fire."

For readers unaware of Cassils' impressive oeuvre, their multidisciplinary work spans live art, performance, sculpture, sound, installation, photography, video, and even the occasional watercolor. Often through lengthy and rigorous training, their body is altered and specialized to certain endurance tasks that have included everything from bodybuilding to professional stunt school.

Here, Cassils and [Kris Grey](#), a NYC-based gender queer artist whose work combines strategies of communication, activism, community building, education, lecture, and studio production, chat about Cassils' work.

**Kris Grey:** Congratulations on your recent achievements and the opening of your first museum and European [solo exhibition at MU Eindhoven](#) in the Netherlands! You have released a teaser for "[Inextinguishable Fire](#)" [on your website \(see video above\)](#). Can you describe what happens in the work?

**Cassils:** Thanks Kris. "[Inextinguishable Fire](#)" is both a live performance and a performance for the camera in which I am engaged in a treacherous fire stunt. Using techniques borrowed from Hollywood stunts, I experience the very real human terror of being lit on fire. The 14-second full-body burn is extended to 14 minutes of slow motion flame, shot at 1000 frames per second. Slowing the burn down makes the viewer spend time with the image and the action. Crucial to my film is the use of a slow motion zoom outwards. This constantly changes the context and our understanding of the image is based on what we are seeing within the frame at any given moment. This ultimately makes the staged quality of the stunt as visible as its potential risks. The way the sound operates really informs the image. First you identify with the burning victim, the flames licking at your ears, and the material singeing as if it were your own clothing on fire. However, as the camera moves away, you hear the burning body across from you with ever increasing distance. I wanted to speak to the constant stream of mediated images in our Facebook feeds and play with how identification, alienation and mediation affect the way we experience violent images. Though the stunt is a simulation of violence it still presents real danger. This possibly volatile situation as well as the attempt to control it are captured to create an image where danger, empathy for those experiencing violence, and the privilege of removal all operate simultaneously in one transparent performance.

**Kris Grey:** Like some of your previous work, "Inextinguishable Fire" refers to a specific piece from the past.

**Cassils:** The title of the piece references [Harun Farocki's 1969 film of the same name](#). Both versions of "Inextinguishable Fire" are about the radical unrepresentability of certain forms of trauma and violence. In Farocki's film, he puts a cigarette out in his arm as a way of demonstrating an act of pain and trauma that we can tolerate seeing, as opposed to the incomprehensible image of a body doused in napalm. We can know what a cigarette burn feels like even though we cannot begin to imagine what it is like to be torched with napalm. I see the fire stunt functioning in a similar way. My act of self-immolation gestures toward the desire to know and understand this horror, as well as the impossibility of doing so. How can I enact empathy when my own situation is so removed from the immediacy of torture and war? Many of us are so saturated with brutalized imagery that a distance is created. Likewise so many images are fed to us at such rapid succession that the ability to analyze and think critically about these images is reduced. People "like" articles on FaceBook and Twitter based on the fleeting headlines. People don't even read the articles anymore. My hope is that by creating a film where at first you think you are looking at a traumatized body, but at the end of the film you realize you are looking at an image constructed to manipulate you into thinking you are looking at a traumatized body, that people will think more critically about the construction of such imagery and pay closer attention. I was inspired by Farocki's concept of using images to critique images.

Julia Steinmetz writes in her essay "Cassils: Inextinguishable Fire," which will be published in the upcoming book that is accompanying the "Incendiary" show:

"Self-immolation has a long history as a powerful form of political protest. Under conditions of extreme oppression, sometimes the timing and staging of one's own obliteration is the only meaningful autonomous act available. The flames of 'Inextinguishable Fire' lap up against the revolutionary fires presently burning on the streets of Baltimore in outraged protest against police brutality and the expendability of black lives, catalyzed by the assault and ensuing homicide of Freddie Gray in the course of his unlawful arrest. The refrain 'I can't breathe' echoes from suffocating scene of Eric Garner's death at the hands of the NYPD to the sound of my tightly held breath, spanning the film's fourteen minutes of slow motion full body burn. The gunshots from Ferguson, Missouri are still ringing in our ears as we see a parade of bodies spelling 'Hands Up, Don't Shoot,' although we know the unconscious pulled the trigger. Flames fill our news feeds as commentators ask why the residents of Baltimore would set their own neighborhoods on fire, as if there weren't a long history of self immolation as revolt in the face of intolerable circumstances. Much in the same way that Becoming and Image memorializes the experience of bodies under siege by making lives that 'don't matter' literally take on a precious materiality, 'Inextinguishable Fire' stages resilience and forges strength through trial by fire."



**Kris Grey:** I know there was a very specific shift you observed in your work as a trainer.

**Cassils:** Yes, after I graduated from the bastion of marxist critique aka CalArts in 2002, I landed a job as a personal trainer in a corporate box gym in West Hollywood. Training is how I have always earned my income. It was under halogen lighting, surrounded by the flexing of tissue that I witnessed the Battle of Fallujah on twelve separate monitors. Bodies of “others” exploding on the television as an army of hard bodied gay men checked their pulses for optimal fat burn as they whirled aimlessly on the treadmills. Shortly thereafter several “B list” actors who worked out at my gym started to approach me for training sessions. They had just landed a part: could I “make them look like a soldier in six weeks.” It became my job to construct a body that reflected militarism. This made me uncomfortable but it also got me thinking about the tremendous crossover between the military industrial complex and the entertainment industry. After much research, I found a military base called Fort Irwin, located one-and-a-half hours southeast of Los Angeles that used Hollywood stunt men and FX professionals to simulate the conditions of war in Iraq. They had expatriate Iraqis bussed in from San Diego to play “real insurgents.” When I asked the general what they did when they ran out of Iraqi actors, as there seemed to be a disproportionate ratio of soldiers to actors, he said nonchalantly “We use Mexicans.” It became crystal clear to me the ways in which faulty modes of representation inform political unfoldings and have real-life consequences. It is from this line of inquiry that I developed *Inextinguishable Fire*.



**Kris Grey:** Both "Inextinguishable Fire" and "[Becoming An Image](#)" employ some form of abstraction. It seems to me this abstraction is a queer strategy to combat the trappings of representation.

**Cassils:** I continue to make work that addresses trans representation. However I feel frustrated at the limits by which my work is perceived in a way which rests solely on my body and identity. Specifically a fetishized muscular body. That being said, it was important for me to make self-empowered, self-transforming pieces such as "[Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture](#)," "[Tiresias](#)," and "[Hard Times](#)," but I now trust that the trans content is inherently "in" the work. Much like the sculptures made from the resulting clay bashes in "Becoming An Image," "Inextinguishable Fire" speaks to the unrepresentability of trauma and asks what that means for not just my body but many bodies. In this way I aim to make a humanist work that does not only exist within the confines of the identity politics specific to my own subjectivity.



There is such a pressure for those of us coming from disenfranchised positions to make "positive images" that speak for this marginalized community. One artist can never speak for everyone. I have become interested in anti-representational tactics. As trans politics become more mainstream we run the risk of becoming a target market subject to the same slotting and governing as the dominant culture. I'm invested in transness as a political position that offers the possibility of resistance. I want to play with formal possibilities which embrace the obtuse and the unrecognizable. I am curious as to what ideas and questions can come from continual transformation.

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## The artists subverting the gender binary

What gender? Meet the creatives manipulating their mediums and blurring the boring lines of male-female conformity

Text **Peter Yeung**



A still from Wu Tsang's *Moved by the Motion*, a 2-channel film installation featuring frequent collaborator boychild via [houstonmuseumdistrict.org](http://houstonmuseumdistrict.org)

From the day we are born we're assigned a gender, and so, defined and delineated by society. Male or female? Check. Birth certificates force a choice within this gender binary, as do national passports, and pretty much any bureaucratic functions that require us to give personal information about ourselves. The truth is that nobody exists as the ideal man or woman that advertising promotes, which is changing all the time. What is a metrosexual, other than a man now incorporating more "feminine" attributes? The lived realities always differs from these definitions, however wide we may want to cast the net (as seen in Facebook's introduction of over 70 gender options this year).

But people are free to self-define, or reject the gender binary. Frida Kahlo made self-portraits that emphasise the fluidity of gender, rejecting rigid masculine and feminine characteristics. Man Ray famously photographed Marcel Duchamp as Rose Selavy in 1921, a female persona he kept throughout his life. Meanwhile, this year's Whitney Biennial was invigorated with a number of queer artists, and a section of an upcoming exhibition called The Institute of Sexology at London's Wellcome Collection consider early transgender practices. What better time to celebrate the artists subverting gender conformity.

### WU TSANG

Los Angeles filmmaker Wu Tsang is a Chinese-Swedish-American video artist whose work combines activism and community organising. Identifying as "transfeminine and transguy", Tsang documents queer and trans community stories, often working alongside other members such as art radical – and another notable creative breaking down the gender binary – boychild. In the video *Green Room*, Tsang tells of a transgender woman who recounts leaving persecution in Honduras for Los Angeles and finding sanctuary in a local bar. The work sheds light on the troubling journeys that gender non-conformists must go through.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZfLgWaxKJE>

## HEATHER CASSILS

Heather Cassils is a Canadian transgender bodybuilder, who uses the physicality of his body to rupture social norms. The performance piece *Becoming an Image* involved Cassils pounding a one-tonne block for a 20-minute period, challenging the notion of a binary gender with his own female body. "It is with sweat, blood and sinew that I construct a visual critique and discourse around physical and gender ideologies and histories," Cassils explained.

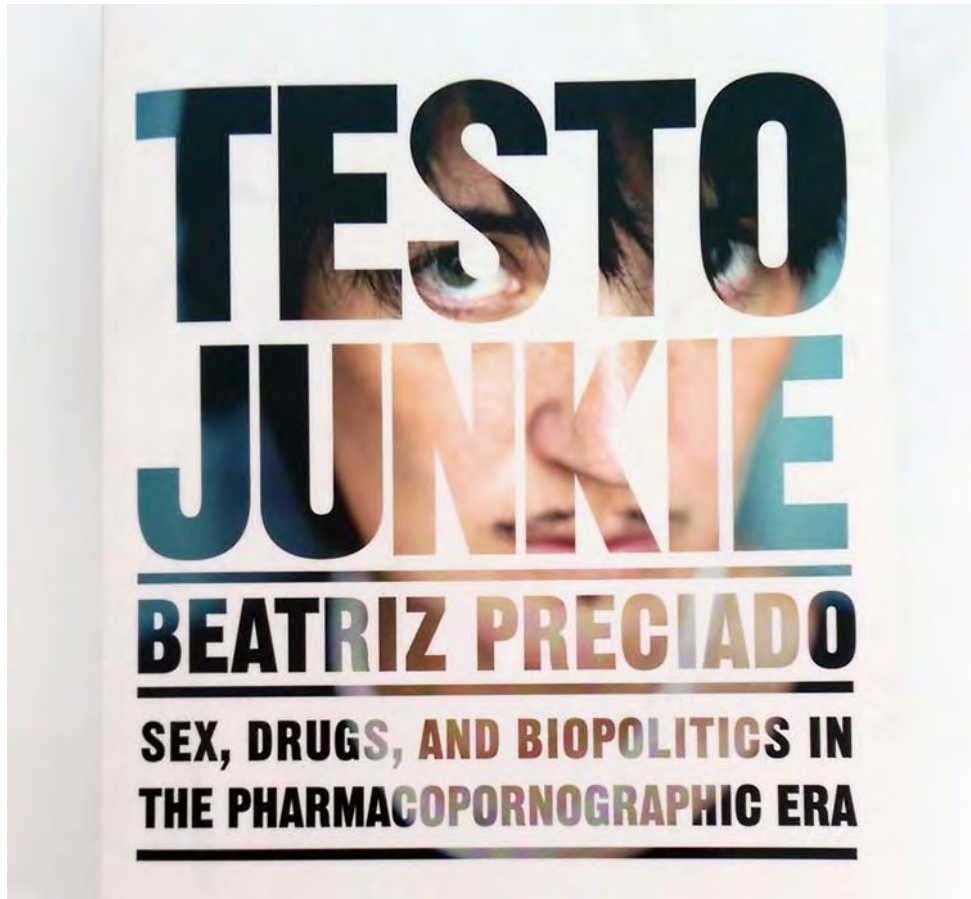


Collaborating with Robin Black, Heather Cassils is pictured here for their mock campaign "Homage to Benglis"

*Courtesy of heathercassils.com*

## BEATRIZ PRECIADO

Spanish philosopher and writer Beatriz Preciado is thought of by some as a queer oracle, radically critique gender norms both academically and performatively. In the project Testo Junkie, Preciado decided to starting taking testosterone as a recreational drug, in the form a gel called "Testogel", giving a high akin to cocaine. As a way of subverting the gender codes that prescribe our social identities, this self-managed use testosterone is what Preciado describes as "gender-hacking".



In the project Testo Junkie, Preciado decided to starting taking testosterone as a recreational drug, in what he described as "gender hacking" via *deartegymnastica.net*

## JACOLBY SATTERWHITE

Brooklyn-based artist Jacolby Satterwhite' work merges performance, 3D animation, crossdressing, and his own personal history as a black, queer person. At this year's Whitney Biennial he presented a surrealist performance piece called Reifying Desire, in which Satterwhite was strapped into a harness, taking up Kama Sutra positions with porn star Antonio Biaggi while a giant digitised tree magically carried them around a colorful cosmos. This is Satterwhite exploring potential narratives of his queerness in a surrealist performance universe.





<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FkmJGMaA5Pk>

## ZAK KREVITT

As featured in our States of Independence project earlier this year, 23-year old photographer Zak Krevitt often casts his lens on the queer community that he is a part of. "It's about opposing forces, being pulled in an infinite number of directions, sexuality, artifice, love, lust, chaos and control, decontextualizing and recontextualizing images that are simultaneously foreign and familiar," Krevitt says. A recent graduate of New York's iconic School of Visual Arts, his images provide insight into the striking live realities of queer activists.



**Zak Krevitt captures Hari Nef's nuanced performance of gender identity**

*Zak Krevitt*

## DRUCKER AND ERNST

Zackary Drucker and Rhys Ernst are two transgender artists who documented their romantic relationship and gender transitions in a beguiling series called *Relationship*. It exhibited at this year's Whitney Biennial, and as the New York Times said, this project puts "queer consciousness on the front burner." Over the last five years, Drucker has transitioned from male to female, Ernst from female to male, and *Relationship* traces both the mundane and intimate moments of gender transition, and so humanises these people that are usually rejected by society.



**Relationship series: Zachary and Rhys at a pivotal stage in their transitions**

*Courtesy of zackarhys.tumblr.com*

## JJ LEVINE

Canadian photographer JJ Levine attempts to reveal the superficial nature of gendered appearance. For the Montreal-based artist's photographic series *Alone Time*, Levine asked friends to pose as both men and women for each photograph, therefore showing how malleable and subject-to-change gender can be. "Gender is nuanced and can exist in multiple forms within any given person," Levine argues. "I'd like to move away from the gender binary, and I think my images suggest that could be a reality."



**JJ Levine's gender bending snaps prove that gender can exist in multiple forms**

*Courtesy of jjlevine.ca*

## CARLOS MOTTA

Carlos Motta is a multi-disciplinary artist who creates counter narratives for suppressed histories, communities, and identities. The Colombian-born artist explores the idea of sexual and gender "difference" within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, and queer community. Motta's video art piece *We Who Feel Differently* was based on 50 interviews with academics, artists, politicians, and researchers, promoting a "concept of equality that provides for greater personal freedom." Watch the project below.

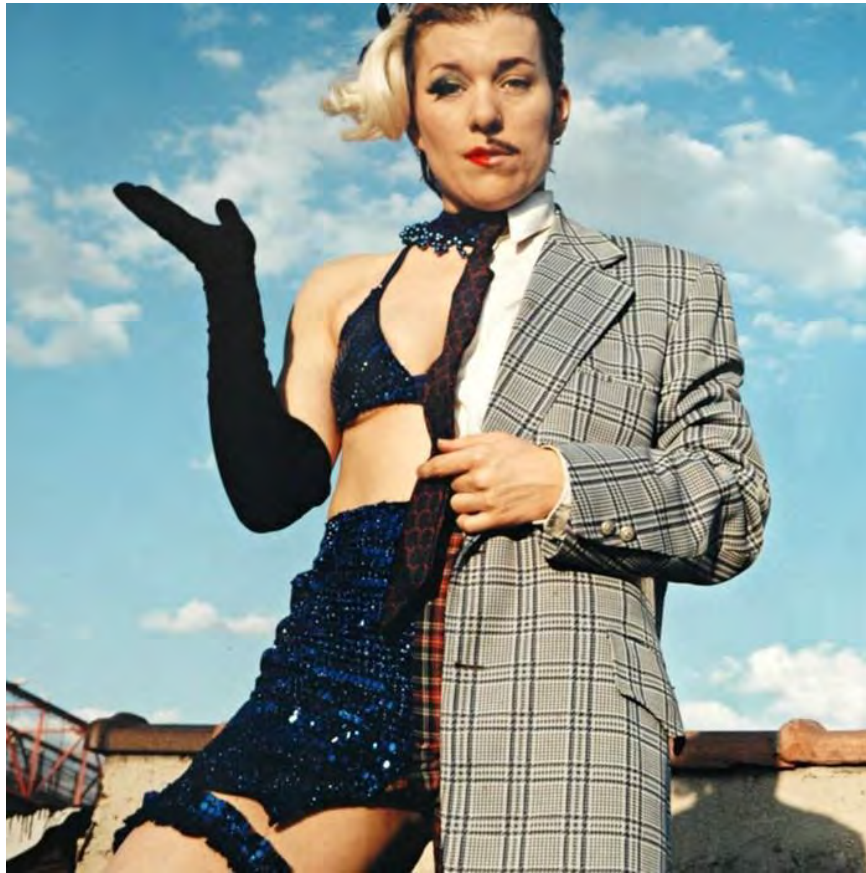


<http://vimeo.com/22907351>

## DEL LAGRACE VOLCANO

The Californian gender variant visual artist Del LaGrace Volcano is a pioneer of LGBTQ photography, undercutting assumptions about the legibility of gender. Volcano's colourful portraits and self-portraits play with usual signs of identifying a body and assumptions about gender, including one image where a gender indeterminate model wears both bespoke menswear as well as a sequined bra and garters. "Art, particularly work, focusing on heroic representations of bodily and sexual difference, will become a long-lost relic of the past," she erupts.





**Della Grace Volcano's piece depicts a gender interdeterminate model**

*Courtesy of buffalonews.com*

## AMOS MAC

Brooklyn-based photographer Amos Mac captures what he describes as “non-model-identified models” in jarring, lurid colours, which often appear far more extreme than the socially-maligned people in his photographs. Mac co-founded Original Plumbing, a magazine dedicated to the culture of transgender men, and his imagery follows along the same lines. His Trans in America project, in collaboration with Dazed, is a snapshot of what it means to be trans today.



**Amos Mac's Trans in America; “In high school I was an athlete in a lot of ways, which is a really weird part of my experience now” – Will (pictured)**

*Courtesy of amosmac.com*

# 10 Transgender Artists Who Are Changing The Landscape Of Contemporary Art

by Priscilla Frank

03/26/2014

Working in an array of artistic media including photography, video, sculpture, classical music and the spoken word, transgender artists are sharing their stories and experiences, their trauma and hope, their pasts and futures -- on their own terms. Whether defining themselves as transgender, gender variant, transfeminine or gender failure, the following artists challenge our current understandings of identity while paving the way for a more aware and accepting future.

With skill, bravery, humor and passion, the following artists interpret transgender life in radically different ways, revealing the infinitely multifaceted reality of the trans experience. The following artistic forces have contributed immensely to the growing transgender presence in the art world and thus in the greater cultural consciousness. Behold, 10 trans artists who are radically changing the landscape of contemporary art.

## 1. Tona Brown





Brown is a mezzo soprano vocalist and violinist based in Baltimore, Maryland. Brown began playing the violin at the age of 10 years old and was partaking in competitions at 14. Brown, who referred to herself as an "androgynous" child, channels masculine and feminine qualities in her voice to give it its unique character. As Baltimore Vocal Arts Foundation founder Robyn Stevens said, "It's very powerful, with the cartilage and larynx of a man, but with a feminine quality. The timbre is unique."

Brown became the first transgender to perform for a living president when she sang the National Anthem to Barack Obama and is currently working to secure a \$3,500 deposit to become the first trans woman to sing at Carnegie Hall during LGBT Pride Month. "I would want nothing more than to sing and or play on the greatest stages and concert halls around the world," she told The Huffington Post.

## **2. Heather Cassils**



Heather Cassils, 'Becoming an Image' Performance Still No. 1, Edgy Women Festival, Montreal 2013  
(artworks © Heather Cassils; photographs by the artist and Alejandro Santiago)

While some view transgender identity as crossing from one gender to another, Cassils breaks down binaries to create a vision of continuous -- and sometimes slippery -- becoming. "I use my physical body as sculptural mass to rupture societal norms," Cassils stated to HuffPost. "Drawing on conceptualism, feminism, body art, gay male aesthetics, and Hollywood cinema, I forge a series of powerfully trained bodies for different performative and formal purposes. It is with sweat, blood and sinew that I construct a visual critique and discourse around physical and gender ideologies and histories." In the work above Cassils attacked a 2,000-pound clay block with kicks and blows in complete darkness, the happening occasionally illuminated by a photographer's flash. The piece, dubbed "Becoming an Image," grapples with issues of evidence, documentation and memory.

### 3. Yishay Garbasz



Golf driving range, Mukaihata, Okuma-machi, Futaba, Fukushima Nuclear Exclusion Zone, 2014

Garbasz's work simultaneously explores her mother's experiences as a Jewish Holocaust survivor and the artist's own personal journey with gender identity. Much of Garbasz's work revolves around the pain of trauma and the beauty that comes with reconciliation, such as her work in the Fukushima Nuclear Exclusion Zone. "My journey through the physical and spiritual reality of Fukushima is part of a life-long quest to explore and document spaces that were affected by trauma," she explained. "My explorations focus on places that are mostly forgotten and traumas whose physical signs have been erased or are invisible. These places are in fact home to a new reality. It is at this intersection where my work takes place."

### 4. Cooper Lee Bombardier



Bombardier is a visual artist, writer, illustrator and performer, whose past jobs include construction worker, cook, carpenter, union stagehand, welder, shop steward, dishwasher, truck driver and

housepainter. "As a writer and an artist I am interested in exploring hinterlands and uncovering subjugated knowledges," Bombardier said. "My creative work is concerned with themes of gender, masculinity and manhood; survival, resiliency, and healing; juxtapositions of culture and identity; and the physical experience and positioning of the queer body in the world; labor and how what we do for money shapes who we are. My work is about journeys: on the road, in community; of body and heart; and the never-ending search to know oneself."

## 5. Amos Mac



Mac is a Brooklyn-based artist who captures striking and playful images of gender non-conforming people, capturing their entire beings rather than solely their gender identities. "Inspired by teen magazines, vintage 'Physique Pictorials' and celebrity fan circulations, I construct artful representations of trans and gender non-conforming people," he wrote to HuffPost. "Often colorful and exuberant, humor and camp (stock queer motifs) permeate my work. Rather than examining transgender bodies or documenting 'transition,' **I'm concerned with manifesting the bold wholeness of my subjects.**"

## 6. Rae Spoon



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=1P7T93rrU7I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=1P7T93rrU7I)



Spoon is a musician and author whose sound fluctuates from acoustic country folk to electric indie pop. Growing up in an evangelical Christian home in conservative Alberta, Spoon began making music as a means of escape. According to Spoon's website, "'My Prairie Home,' Rae Spoon's latest album, explores the meaning of home when it is no longer a place one can return to." With lyrics including **"Lesbian, gay, bisexual/ Transgender and transsexual/ It's better to ask if you don't know/ A message from the Queer Trans Prairie Tourism Co,"** the songs address LGBT issues with humor and hope. Spoon teamed up with director Chelsea McMullan to create the documentary-musical "My Prairie Home," which debuted at Sundance. "Whatever I am trying to communicate with my work," Spoon explained, "I want my audience to sense that I am thinking about them and how they experience my music and writing."

## **7. & 8. Zackary Drucker and Rhys Ernst**



Drucker and Ernst are two transgender artists who have documented their romantic relationship and gender transitions through a stunning photo series entitled "Relationship." The works, which are currently on view at the Whitney Biennial, interlace banal moments of coupledness with shots that reveal more intimate details of gender transition, privileging neither. "This series of photographs represented a return to photography for both of us, and is simultaneously an extension of our narrative film-making practices," Drucker wrote to HuffPost. "It is the real-life film of our 'romance collaboration.' Our bodies are a microcosm of the greater external world-transitions or shifts that we, as humanity, are looking at in 2014. As our earth transitions from abundance into depletion and the decay of our environment. As we move from institutionalized patriarchy to gender equality, and from heterosexist social structures to a more polymorphous spectrum of sexuality." On being an artist, Ernst added, "I'm happiest creating things -- using my intuition and creativity and I think it's because I come from a family of artists and thinkers. I couldn't image it being any other way."

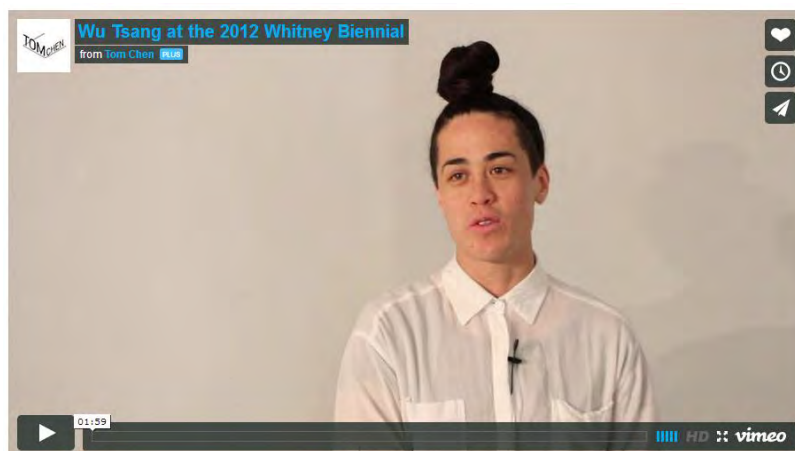
## 8. Ivan Coyote



Photo credit Adam P.W. Smith

Coyote started off singing in a lesbian folk band before realizing she preferred the banter between songs to the actual singing. She now combines music, storytelling, performance poetry and monologue in a singular practice. In her words: "I've never really been much into labels. I am interested in telling stories from the little niche that I have carved out for myself outside of the established gender binary, in the 'not really' space between male and female. I am writing myself down so I can find myself later." She's currently working with Rae Spoon on a multi-media performance and accompanying book called "Gender Failure." Check out her beautiful and hilarious "To all of the kick ass, beautiful fierce femmes out there" on Youtube.

## 9. Wu Tsang



<http://vimeo.com/38857998>



Tsang, who identifies as "transfeminine and transguy," is a Chinese-Swedish-American video artist whose work combines activism, community organizing and the art of the party. At 25 years old Tsang opened up a weekly club night at the LA immigrant gay bar Silver Platter, which he called "Wildness." Tsang documented the mixing of communities as artists and punks mingled with the Latino drag community, questioning the meaning of a "safe space."

A film based on the experiment, also called "Wildness," was praised at Sundance and the 2012 Whitney Biennial. "In my art and as a person, I just tend to be OK with contradiction," Tsang told The L.A. Times.

## Heather Cassils: the transgender bodybuilder who attacks heaps of clay

Through martial arts, weight training and diet, Cassils has redefined the female body – and made it into performance art



Definiton redefined ... Cassils will perform *Becoming an Image* at the Fierce festival.  
Photograph: Heather Cassils and Manuel Vason, courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Art

Before interviewing Heather Cassils I get an email: "In terms of pronouns I prefer he but I'm okay with she. I prefer to be called Cassils but don't mind if people call me Heather. I state it because I know it is not obvious."

This is not only considerate but also a fantastic understatement. From the high, soft Canadian voice and sleek, cropped hair to the rippling abs and occasional slick of scarlet lipstick, Cassils' identity is resolutely ambiguous.

By playing with body art, gay male aesthetics and extreme physical training – from weightlifting to martial arts – the artist has adapted his own female body into a series of powerful physical shapes that challenge any notion of binary gender.

"I resist the idea that you have to live as a man or as a woman," Cassils explains. "I didn't know any queer people until my 20s, let alone have any language for a trans identity. I just remember wanting to present my body in a more male fashion. The crux of my work is to create something that isn't so black-and-white."



Rough-hewn ... Cassils performs *Becoming an Image*. Photograph: Heather Cassils and Manuel Vason, courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Art

Cassils' latest project, [Becoming an Image](#), comes to Birmingham's Fierce festival on 5 October. It was originally conceived as a site-specific work for the [ONE Archives in Los Angeles, the oldest active lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender archive in the US](#). "I built this 2,000lb clay sculpture, moved the archive out, moved the audience in, then attacked the sculpture in the darkness," says Cassils.

The blows delivered during the 20-minute performance are illuminated only by intermittent flashes of a camera. The flash burns the image into the viewer's retina, creating a series of "live" photographs. "It represents senseless acts of violence against trans and queer bodies beyond the historical lens," says Cassils. The audience becomes both camera and witness to the beating, and the clay remains are then put on display.

"I wanted to draw attention to the fact that our genderqueer and trans brothers and sisters are so much more likely to experience physical violence: worldwide, [transgender](#) murders increased by 20% in 2012."

Audiences may see Cassils' muscle-heavy body as a way of challenging such violence, confronting bullying with strength. Through weight training, Muay Thai martial arts, traditional boxing, diet manipulation and supplements, the artist pushes the definition of a "biologically female body" to its visual extreme without taking testosterone or having surgery. Cassils is almost unfeasibly strong, almost entirely naturally.

"I started using weights when I was 16," says Cassils. "I had undiagnosed gall bladder disease in my teens, which may sound benign now, but back in 1987 it wasn't something doctors looked for in young girls."

And benign it certainly wasn't. "It got to the point where my insides were rotting, my bile ducts ruptured, my skin turned green and I went septic," says Cassils. "I was hospitalised, eventually. I had tubes in every orifice, two surgeries and a full blood transplant."

That's where Cassils' interest in physical discipline came from. "Training helped me feel strong again, and being ill made me want to articulate my own sense of wellness."



Claymaker ... Cassils reshapes the 2,000lb clay sculpture. Photograph: Heather Cassils and Manuel Vason, courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Art

This desire sits uneasily with the artist's decision to take steroids for the 2011 piece [Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture](#). "It was a real moral conundrum," says Cassils. "But Cuts is really a conversation with [Carving a Traditional Sculpture by Eleanor Antin](#), where she crash-dieted for 45 days and documented her body wasting away. Just as Antin went through this sacrificial act of starving, I thought [taking steroids] was a necessary act."

It was, by all accounts, a deeply unpleasant process. "The project took over my life," says Cassils. "I had to force-feed myself to get enough nutrients, I couldn't leave the city because I'd vowed to take daily photographs, I needed to eat every three hours and train five times a week for at least two hours. My muscles became so tight my wife had to take my T-shirt off at night because I wasn't flexible enough to do it myself."

Cassils is very clear on the link between politics and [performance art](#): "Our bodies are sculptures formed by society's expectations. I am a visual artist, and my body is my medium." And it is a medium that undergoes constant evolution. Does that make the struggle to be an artist even harder?

"It is difficult to be an artist," says Cassils. "Most people would probably prefer you not to be. But just hold true to your intentions. It's almost like artistic Darwinism – if you can keep going, eventually there will be a breaking point."

## Bashing Binaries -- Along With 2,000 Pounds of Clay (PHOTOS, VIDEO)

Posted: 09/07/2013 7:18 am

*"Transition is always a relief. Destination means death to me. If I could figure out a way to remain forever in transition, in the disconnected and unfamiliar, I could remain in a state of perpetual freedom."*

--David Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*

I am a visual artist, and my body is my medium. I use a rigorous physical training practice as my form. I see the physical body as a sculptural mass with which to rupture norms. My process runs the gamut of performance, photography, sculpture, video and watercolor. Additionally I use weight lifting, explosive power training, Muay Thai, traditional boxing, diet manipulation and supplementation to forge a series of powerfully trained bodies for different performative and formal purposes. I draw on conceptualism, feminism, body art, gay male aesthetics, and Hollywood cinema. Additionally, I am inspired by artists such as David Wojnarowicz and Ron Athey, who questioned the brutality of the status quo in reaction to the devastation of the AIDS crisis. I return again and again to the work of Adrian Piper and Douglas Emory, who apply varying conceptual approaches to language and representation, making powerful work surrounding issues of race and class. These artists create a visual language that is at once emotionally striking and conceptually incisive.

Inspired by these histories, I aim to make images that bash through binaries and the notion that in order to be officially transgender, you have to have surgery or take hormones. I perform trans not as something about a crossing from one sex to another but as a continual becoming, a process-oriented way of being that works in a space of indeterminacy, spasm and slipperiness.

*Body of Work*, my upcoming exhibition (Sept. 7 to Oct. 12) at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in New York City, will present four separate projects in which I forged a series of powerfully trained bodies for different performative and formal purposes. (Please note that there is a live performance of "Becoming an Image" Sept. 7 at 6 p.m. Tickets are free, but space is limited to a first-come-first-serve basis.) It is with sweat, blood and sinew that I bring these images to you.



"Becoming an Image" Performance, National Theater Studio, SPILL Festival, London, 2013, photo by Heather Cassils and Manuel Vason (22 inches by 30 inches).

## **"Becoming an Image"**

*"The spectacle is not a collection of images but a social relation among people, mediated by Images."*

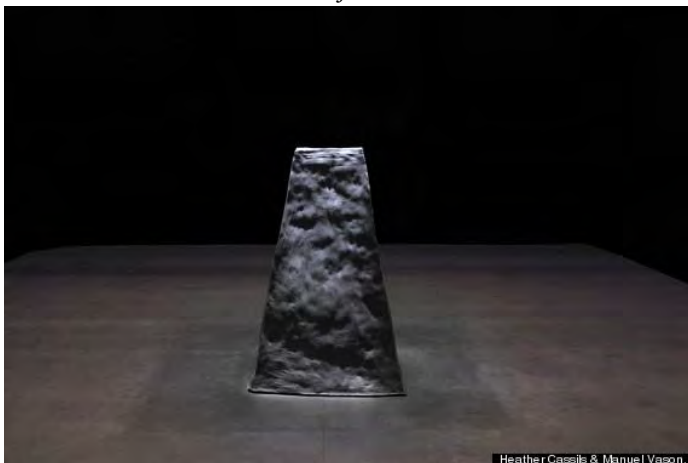
--Guy Debord

The centerpiece of this exhibition is "Becoming an Image," a work where performance and sculpture collide. "Becoming an Image" was originally conceived as a site-specific work for the [ONE Archives](#) in Los Angeles, the oldest active LGBTQ archive in the United States. Staging this performance in the gallery on Sept. 7 at 6 p.m., I will unleash an attack on a 2,000-pound block of clay. Delivering a series of kicks and blows in total darkness, the spectacle will only be illuminated by the flash of a photographer, burning the image into the viewer's retina, creating the effect of a "live" photograph. The remains of this violent sculpting, a soft, passive clay body bearing the indexical trace of the beating it has taken, will be displayed for the duration of the exhibition, accompanied by a four-channel sound installation that recreates the sounds of the my grunts, breath and movements, the sound circling like a ghost.

A black, concrete cast of the beaten clay from a previous iteration of the performance is displayed as an enduring monument to senseless acts of violence against trans and queer bodies that occur outside the realm of statistical notation and beyond the periphery of the historical lens. I wanted to draw attention to the fact that many of our genderqueer and trans brothers and sisters are 28-percent more likely to experience physical violence. Worldwide, transgender murders increased by 20 percent in 2012. Transgender people of color are two times more likely to experience physical violence than those who are not LGBT people of color. My long-term plan is to make a few of these sculptures and install them as "monuments" of sorts to mark the place and create awareness of where acts of violence have occurred.

I also present large-scale performance photographs encircling the sculptures, raising questions of witnessing, documentation, memory and evidence.

*Before*



*After*



*"Becoming an Image," National Theater Studio, London, 2013, photos by Heather Cassils and Manuel Vason.*

*"Becoming an Image smashes the weight of accountability directly on everyone involved -- the audience for agreeing to partake in, and by proxy silently approve of, an act they are not completely aware of; the photographer for distancing himself of responsibility by hiding behind the officiality of the lens, and*



*finally even the performer -- an exhibitionist and punching machine taking refuge in the dark."*

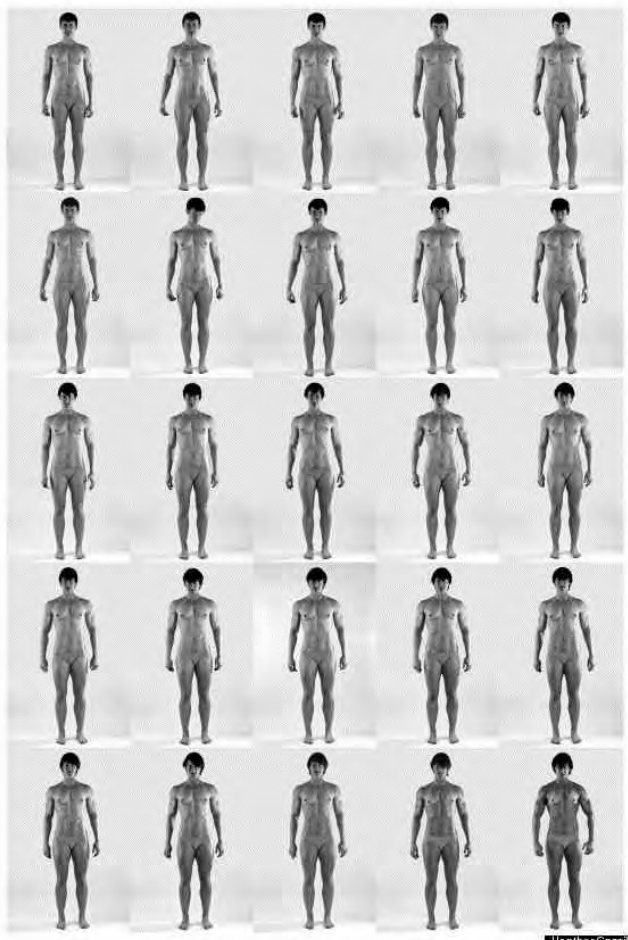
--Bojana Jankovic

## "Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture"

*"One reason for making and exhibiting a work is to induce a reaction or change in the viewer.... In this sense, the work as such is nonexistent except when it functions as a medium of change between the artist and viewer."*

--Adrian Piper

The newest iteration of my work "Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture" is on view in the rear gallery. In a reinterpretation of Eleanor Antin's 1972 performance "Carving: A Traditional Sculpture," in which Antin crash dieted for 45 days and documented her body daily with photographs from four vantage points, I used my mastery of body building and nutrition to gain 23 pounds of muscle over 23 weeks. As opposed to the feminine act of weight loss in Antin's performance, my work performs a transformation into traditionally masculine, muscular form. On view are four grids of time-lapse photographs of my transformation, sorted by vantage point, offering an overview of my muscle gain. These images are shot in the neutralized white of a studio. Their almost medical quality allows the viewer to inspect my body as it changes. This twist on "getting cut" queers the trans body by showcasing the cut of musculature as opposed to the cut of the surgeon's knife.



*Time-lapse images from a 23-week period documenting a 23-pound muscle gain, photos by Heather Cassils.*



*"Pin-Up," from the Lady Face Man Body zine by Heather Cassils and Robin Black, 2011.*

These grids are accompanied by a series of "pin-ups" made in collaboration with photographer Robin Black to stage an homage to Linda Benglis' "Advertisement" (1974). Rather than buying advertisement space in Artforum, we capitalized on our connections in the gay fashion/art publications, both online and off, to disseminate these self-empowered images of trans representation. Substituting a ripped, masculine physique for a double-ended phallus, we leaked the image without disclosing anything about its subject but linked the image to a blog about the project at [ladyfacemanbody.com](http://ladyfacemanbody.com). Placing these pin-ups within these contexts signals the shifts in our cultural landscape and the role of artists like Benglis in bringing about those changes.



*"Disfigured Image: The Resilient 20 Percent," photo paper, marker, gold paint, gouache and razor etching, photo by Robin Black and Heather Cassils, 2013 (11 inches by 17*

When we circulated these trans-positive, self-determined images on the Internet, they were met with a litany of hatred, confusion and phobic comments. Alongside these initial images I have created a series of defaced pinups, made by burning the images, scratching the emulsion from the photos with razor blades, and using paint and markers. These defaced images reflect my desire to push representation forward regardless of the hostility with which such acts are met.

For this exhibition Black and I have created a limited-edition, affordable book entitled **CUTS**, which also includes self-portraits, rendered in watercolor, of my face as it twists in the moments of final exertion as I perform the heaviest lift.

## "Tiresias"

The durational performance "Tiresias" uses the mythological figure of the blind prophet of Thebes, famous for being transformed from a man into a woman for seven years. We display a video installation of this performance, in which my body is pressed up against the back of a neoclassical Greek male torso, carved out of ice for precise contact with my physique. I melt the ice sculpture with pure body heat, which, over a four- to five-hour period, slowly reveals my own reddened flesh. Choosing not to take hormones or have surgery means that most of the time people might not read my "transness." The moment I stop training and manipulating, my femaleness asserts itself. (Breasts



*"Maxing Out Opera Pink (Version 1)," watercolor, by Heather Cassils, 2013.*



grow; muscles shrink.) In this work I recast the myth of Tiresias as a story of endurance and transformation. I perform the resolve required to persist at the point of contact between masculine and feminine.



*"Teresias," photo by Clover Leary and Heather Cassils, 2013.*

As Ron Athey told performance artist Franco B, "It's always been important to reveal the destructive elements in [my] work, otherwise it's promoting an ideal."

## "Hard Times"

"Hard Times" was the initial work using the figure of Tiresias. Here I perform wearing a prosthetic mask, a frosted blonde wig and the deep bikini tan of a female bodybuilder, posing in slow motion atop a wooden plank precariously hovering over the audience. I hold deep muscular contractions that overload the central nervous system, causing uncontrollable shaking, leaving the image of a body that sputters and twitches with the exertion required to maintain its manicured surface. Bodybuilding is a sport with no other purpose than to present a "perfected" surface. I see the construction of this unsustainable body as a stand-in for our culture's insatiable appetite to consume and the drive of capital regardless of consequence. "Hard Times" is a portrait of a social body that rots from the inside out.

In closing, I do not just see my self as an "athlete" or a "fighter" in the sporting sense. On a more personal note, I strive to be an activist; I'm a survivor and, yes, a fighter in the way that I engage with society on a day-to-day basis. This work is dialogical in nature, aiming to engage the public through strategies that heighten viewers' awareness of the material aspect of the work and how it was made. Given this emphasis on the viewer's subjective experience and understanding of my gesture, the underlying concerns of this mode of art making and "abstraction" are potentially as political as they are aesthetic.



*"Hard Times," photo by Heather Cassils and Luke Gilford, 2010.*

I see my practice as a process of creating images that empower, but also those that point to the atrocities and hate crimes that are still happening every day. This is personal for me. If I can use my role as an artist to open people's minds, then I am serving my purpose. I am interested in performative actions that create a ripple effect in the minds and bodies of those who experience them.



*"Post-Performance of 'Becoming an Image,'" photo by Heather Cassils and Manuel Vason, London 2013.*

*"With all these occurrences of death facing me, I thought about issues of freedom. If government projects the idea that we, as people inhabiting this particular land mass, have freedom, then for the rest of our lives we will go out and find what appear to be the boundaries and smack against them like a heart against the rib cage. If we reveal boundaries in the course of our movements, then we will expose the inherent lie in the use of the word freedom. I want to keep breathing and moving until I arrive at a place where motion and strength and relief intersect. I don't know what's ahead of me in the course of my life and this civilization. I just don't feel I have reached the necessary things inside my*

*history that would ease the pressure in my skull and in my future and in my present. It is exhausting, living in a population where people don't speak up if what they witness doesn't directly threaten them."*

--David Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*

A press kit with more information can be found [here](#).

Reception: Saturday, Sept. 7, 6 to 8 p.m. at **Ronald Feldman Fine Arts**, 31 Mercer Street, New York, N.Y.

Gallery hours: Tuesday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Monday by appointment. For more information contact Erika Kram at 212-226-3232 or [erika@feldmangallery.com](mailto:erika@feldmangallery.com).

Images courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

## California Dreamin'

LOS ANGELES

10.07.11



Left: LACMA director Michael Govan with Hammer Museum director Ann Philbin. Right: Dealer Shaun Caley Regen with MoCA director Jeffrey Deitch. (All photos: Linda Yablonsky)

**THE LOS ANGELES ART WORLD** could never rival New York's, or get along without it, but that hasn't stopped it from trying. Last week, it rolled out "Pacific Standard Time," a six-month-long collaboration among sixty cultural institutions that amounted to the city's most ambitious gambit yet.

Funded by \$10 million in research grants from the Getty Foundation, PST, as it is known, encompasses a series of exhibitions extolling art made in Southern California between 1945 and 1980, the formative years of a divided art scene. A good portion of the shows opened over six consecutive days, and for this New Yorker, it was a week of discoveries, not just at participating galleries and museums but also at Art Platform-Los Angeles, a fledgling art fair that capitalized on this moment of reckoning by opening at the same time.

Tuesday night belonged to L.A.C.E. (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions) on Hollywood Boulevard, where Lily Tomlin melted into the chattering crowd of artists and friends arriving for "Los Angeles Goes Live," a PST show containing artifacts and documents of performance art as it was practiced in Southern California from 1970 to 1983.



Left: Artist Heather Cassils. Right: MoCA curator Paul Schimmel with artists Nina Sobell and Tony Berlant.

Yet the work drawing the most interest was made this year by Heather Cassils, a Canadian-born, LA-based former member of the Toxic Titties who is also a gender-bending body-builder. Part of her show consisted of photographs



by Robin Black displaying the “ripped masculine physique” that Cassils attained after twenty-three weeks of grueling training—her entry into durational performance art. A cynic would have sighed, “Only in LA.” But a slo-mo video of Cassils’s transformation into what she calls “Ladyface//ManBody” was as fascinating, and confusing, as her deftly androgynous appearance in person. “Most people don’t know what they’re looking at when they see these images,” she said. “Narcissism,” someone whispered, apparently unaware that the works were an homage to vintage 1970s Eleanor Antin and Lynda Benglis.

History made a haunting reappearance the next day at the LA County Museum of Art, where I stole into Ed Keinholtz’s *Five-Car Stud: 1969–1972, Revisited* during a press preview for another PST show, “California Design, 1930–1965.” Never before exhibited in this country, the Keinholtz is a gulp-worthy tableau of the Civil Rights era, in which four cast-from-life white male figures, illuminated by the headlights of four cars, are about to castrate an agonized black man while his horrified white girlfriend looks on from a truck.

Racial violence and art-world segregation provide a subtext for several PST entries, including LACMA’s “Asco: Elite of the Obscure.” The show, which was already open to the public, is devoted to an activist Chicano collective of Conceptualists who worked in a universe parallel to the nascent LA art scene of the 1970s. But the Asco story was just the tip of an iceberg so enormous it couldn’t even fit into the cavernous Geffen Contemporary at LA’s Museum of Contemporary Art. That’s where the dystopian “Under the Big Black Sun: California Art 1974–1981” previewed on Thursday night, with a number of the 130 participating artists and lenders in attendance.



Left: Artist Mike Kelley. Right: Artists James Welling and Suzanne Lacy with filmmaker Jane Weinstock.

“I am the perfect audience for this show,” said Jeffrey Deitch, the former New York dealer who became MoCA’s director last year. “It’s my first year in LA, and this is my education.” “We’re all goin’ to school,” seconded LACMA director Michael Govan, another former New Yorker who seemed to be everywhere all week. MoCA curator Paul Schimmel was guiding around Nina Sobell, the only artist present who is not in his show, and greeting Ed Moses, Tony Berlant, Judith Barry, Charles Gaines, and dozens of trustees and dealers, all agog at the hang of the helter-skelter artworks, some known mostly to the artists who made them.

“This is some weird flashback,” said Mike Kelley, as he walked through one long gallery, seeing his own history pass before his eyes. “There was a lot of art being made at a really dreary time,” he said. “There were no galleries. You had to be on the road to make a living, doing talks at colleges. But I think LA in the ’70s was the preeminent art city. Look at this,” he said, glancing over his shoulder. “Street posters by Robert Garcia next to some crazy Kim Jones assemblage that came out of nowhere.”

Dinner was a buffet outside on the plaza, where trustee Maria Bell thanked everyone for everything. Strangely missing in action was her board cochair Eli Broad, the billionaire collector who is a presenting sponsor of PST and has spent the last ten years promoting LA as the capital of contemporary art. Yet he had chosen this moment to take what I learned was a long-planned trip around the world, leaving the artists and institutions he supports to shine on their own. “We don’t have

history sitting on our faces,” [Barbara Kruger](#) noted, to laughs from Govan and Barry. “I haven’t vinylized that one yet,” she added, a mischievous glint in her eye.



Left: Dealer [Susanne Vielmetter](#) with collectors Don and Mera Rubell. Right: Curator [Kellie Jones](#).

Art Platform-LA opened its doors the next day with a champagne-soaked preview at the LA Mart, an unprepossessing building in a dismal downtown neighborhood where, it seems safe to say, 90 percent of those who came to check it out had never before set foot. Expectations for the modest, seventy-five-exhibitor fair, an offshoot of the company that owns the Armory Show, were decidedly low. So it was a pleasant surprise to find real gems amid the merchandise, and the small booths jammed with collectors like [Manny Simchowitz](#), [Robert Shimshak](#), [Mo Ostin](#), MoCA trustee [Gary Cypres](#), and others, whom PST had brought down from Beverly Hills, Brentwood, and even Miami. “LA’s always great,” said Mera Rubell as she stopped into [Susanne Vielmetter](#)’s stand.

“The time is now to start an art fair in Los Angeles,” said fair director [Adam Gross](#). Could be he was right. London’s [Max Wigram](#) found buyers for a few works before the fair even opened, while LA’s [Tom Solomon](#) sold three paintings at the jump. Berlin’s [Javier Peres](#) sold eight. At her West of Rome stand, [Emi Fontana](#) hawked activist T-shirts by artists participating in Trespass, a collaborative project by [Rirkrit Tiravanija](#) and [Arto Lindsay](#) that would include a downtown parade of T-shirted activists on Sunday. At Kayne Griffin Corcoran, several paintings by [Deanna Thompson](#), a fifty-year-old artist from Joshua Tree, were turning heads. So too were the Andrea Bowers drawings at Andrew Kreps—wrenching letters from pre-*Roe v. Wade* abortion seekers. “Powerful stuff, isn’t it?” Kreps said.

“It’s all good,” commented [Paul Morris](#), a founder of the Armory Show and now the parent company’s vice president. The next Armory, he said, will have just one hundred exhibitors, less than half the number of fairs past—a curious development in the face of the Frieze fair’s entrance to New York next May.



Left: West of Rome director [Emi Fontana](#). Right: Artists [Maren Hassinger](#), Ulysses Jenkins, Ivan White, and Senga Nengudi.

That night, the Hammer Museum held a dinner for the artists in “Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles, 1960–1980.” This was the one event I attended that attracted a truly biracial LA crowd, though the first people I saw on entering were all from New York. They included Studio Museum director Thelma Golden but also Metropolitan Museum director Thomas Campbell; Museum of Modern Art curator Laura Hoptman; MoMA PS1 curator Peter Eleey; and the show’s curator, Kellie Jones, a professor at Columbia University. Dealer Helene Winer, a PST figure who began her professional life at the Pomona College Art Gallery, accompanied her Metro Pictures player Sara VanDerBeek, whose latest sculpture from photographs had the museum’s project room.

Mark Leckey, the Hammer’s current artist-in-residence, gamely filled the extra man role at this party, but its heart belonged to the exhibition’s artists, many long neglected by the white art world. Most were at the dinner, though not David Hammons or the late Charles White, whose artist son Ivan represented him. For some, like Maren Hassinger, Melvin Edwards, Samella Lewis, Fred Eversley, and Marie Johnson Calloway, the occasion amounted to a hugging, back-slapping, genuinely joyful reunion, sobering only when one realized that few of their works had ever before appeared in a major museum.

Saturday began with a brunch at Royal/T, a Culver City café gallery owned by collector Sue Hancock. There, Kenny Scharf and Ann Magnuson led a tour of their “East Village/West,” a show culled from their archives of Club 57, the historic live performance venue they ran in New York in the early 1980s. “A lot of what we did was influenced by TV shows made in LA,” Magnuson said. But the art on view, by Scharf, Keith Haring, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and other notables of the era, really belongs in Manhattan.



Left: Artist Melvin Edwards. Right: MMPI art fair VP Paul Morris with Art Platform Los Angeles director Adam Gross.

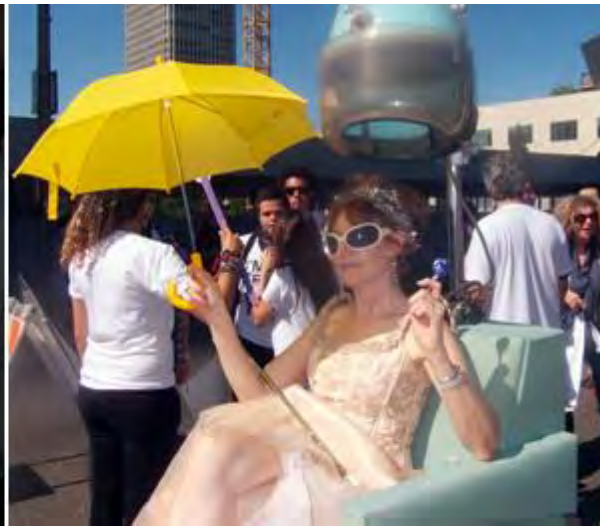
Too many hundreds to count showed up for simultaneous public openings at the Hammer and LACMA on Saturday night, but they only foreshadowed the Sunday night blowout at the Getty. More than 1,500 bigwigs, including surprise guest Angela Lansbury, arrived for the PST “reveal”—a slam-bang, art-historyson *et lumière* show for projection on the museum’s travertine walls.

Afterward, everyone helped themselves to funky food laid out on the plaza in period installations marking the PST decades, too occupied with themselves to notice when former USC dean Ruth Weisberg nearly fell into a darkened reflecting pool. Inside, manicured collectors and artists such as John Baldessari, James Welling, Suzanne Lacy, and Marcel Odenbach toured “Crosscurrents in LA Painting and Sculpture, 1950–1970,” the Getty’s core PST show, and for my money the jewel in the crown of the whole enterprise.

It includes a painting by Mary Corse, an undersung Light and Space artist who revealed she has an opening slot at White Cube’s new Bermondsey Street venue in London, opening next week. But if LA-based art is getting out in the world as never before, the Getty’s afterparty at the Chateau Marmont brought it all back home, when the distinctive aroma of marijuana wafted across the sixth-floor terrace. The source turned out to be Hollywood’s leading pothead, Cheech Marin. “Seeing Angela Lansbury mademy night,” said artist Alex Israel, when the tittering died down. Only in LA, I thought. It’s three thousand miles from New York, yet just an air-kiss away.

— Linda Yablonsky





Left: Artist Alex Israel. Right: Artist Ann Magnuson.



Left: Metropolitan Museum of Art president Emily Rafferty and Metropolitan Museum director Thomas Campbell. Right: Artist Mary Corse.



Left: MoMA PS1 curator Peter Eleey with Hammer Museum curator Douglas Fogle. Right: Dealer Helene Winer.



Left: J Paul Getty Trust board chair Mark Siegel with his wife. Right: Getty Research Institute deputy director Andrew Perchuk.



Left: Dealer Andrew Kreps. Right: Dealers Connie Rogers Tilton and Jack Tilton with dealers Maggie Kayne and Bill Griffin.



Left: Artists Fred Eversley and Samella Lewis. Right: Artist Judith Barry.