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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

The ManShed

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Visual Arts

by

Matthew Port Savitsky

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2015

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University of California, San Diego

2015

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The ManShed

by

Matthew Port Savitsky

Master of Fine Arts in Visual Arts

University of California, San Diego, 2015

Anya Gallaccio, Chair

Hot House highlights the current evolution of *The ManShed*, an ongoing solo project that takes the form of a multi-screen video installation and accompanying film set. Beginning in summer 2013, *The ManShed* refers to an enclosed, two-roomed meeting place built from conjoined panels that plays host to a series of sexual encounters between myself and other men. Under its roof, an infrastructure of hidden cameras documents these interactions between my body, a stranger's, and sculptural forms that interest me. The participating men were

solicited through online services used to locate partners for casual sex, like Craigslist and Adam4Adam, as well as through my involvement with the San Diego Fetish Men and the San Diego Gay Pride event.

In its first iteration, the resulting video and sculptural elements are organized in a minimal, highly staged environment set in adjacent galleries in the University of California, San Diego's Visual Art Department. Presented in flux, this work represents an ongoing investigation of alter kinships that spring up within gay male communities and the unexpected conditions in which they flourish. A sculptural environment, *The ManShed* acts as a metaphorical 'hot house' of queer experimentation, breeding a "rare species" of feeling, exchange, and desire.

Outside the conceptual formations of project, this exhibition unifies my sculptural and performance-based production under the umbrella of a single work and represents my current direction toward constructed, theatrical environments combined with video display.

THE MANSHEED

Walpole

small buildings



Illustration 01: Walpole Catalog, Front Cover, 1967

MY TERMS: I want to film you through a hole in the wall. I don't want to show your face. We can sign an agreement. I don't particularly want to meet you. From your end, I could see how it would appear like, as the passive observer, I am putting nothing at risk. But in most sexual dynamics, I bottom-from-the-top, which means that even though I'm in a position of receiving; my emotions are at stake because I am actively involved with your level of humiliation, exposure, and success. If you feel embarrassed, I am doubly so because a) I want to see you express something you're proud of but can't and b) because I am the one who prompted the whole scene. Also, I am trying to set up the terms of a situation that I myself will try to live up to and may fail. And then there's always the penance of turning back. But in the end, rest assured, I'll feel awed by your disinhibition and full of yucky piety.

SYNOPSIS

The premise of my thesis work reflects critically on the distance between studio practice and aesthetic product. Looking to many artists who have radicalized creative process by aestheticizing their production lines, I feel most influenced by the sprawling and enter-able machines of John Kessler and Paul McCarthy. Their installations commonly center on massive film architectures, which, when exhibited, become crosshatched with conflicting time scales of production, effacing any unified time-sense a traditional exhibition might grant a viewer. Kessler's edgeless installations are sites of production where mechanized sculptures embedded with ad hoc surveillance systems fracture and multiply material dimensions of a viewer's space. Almost the inverse, McCarthy's vacated, splattered sound stages present the props and debris of a performance event amidst the videos produced there. Taking specifically from a visit to McCarthy's *WS* at the New York Armory (2014), I sought to reimagine my studio practice within an enclosed film set to be used in the production of video works as well as an object for eventual display.

From this proposition, I transposed material systems and technical forms from my sculptural practice into the architecture of the shed and developed an unmanned, multi-camera schematic to film its interior from multiple, unseen angles. Each video shoot thereby selectively frames different systems put into motion by live bodies, during which the total apparatus mandates the exhibited form.

From this vantage, the irretrievable moments lost during the process of making gallery-friendly objects could be foregrounded as direct subjects. More specifically, sculptural themes I typically employ for aesthetic heft - home space, gravity, holes -, in this case, form the *mise en scène* in *The ManShed*. Additionally, I employed recurring architectural forms from my installations, like false walls, crawl spaces, and doors, that separate my body from my guest's at all times, eroticizing the function of a boundary that provides anonymity. Once aggregated in this context for the possibility of real use during sex, these forms exit static representation and become exploratory substances. In other words, I was interested to create a sexualized, live environment where the desires of various individuals predicate the function of the forms they engage.

The formation of this project is preceded by a number of works completed at UC San Diego, where I adapted the closed processes of my studio-based practice as the subject of various video projects and performance works. I was most conscious of this decision during the production of my short film, *Life Under Glass* (2014), made with my collaborator, Todd Moellenberg. Here, various sculptural motifs circulate within a movable set that physically subdivides our bodies as well as the space of the video frame (*Illus. 02*). I portray the visuals of our rehearsals (practicing for the 'real thing') that evade narrative resolution and take on a purpose closer to that of role-play. In front of a camera, our reality as friends arouses typologies of performance in response to being filmed, a proposition that is propelled and constituted by its documentation. Similarly, in my thesis project, the conceptual strategy to diversify my material language does

so by tumbling it through a filmed intimate exchange. The production of meaning is therefore wholly dependent upon an instantaneous and shifting arrangement of relational systems.



Illustration 02 : Film Stills, *Life Under Glass*, 2014

Anticipating the presentation of *The ManShed*, I sought to challenge the ‘past-tense’ status stamped on works after they are exhibited (process marked as terminated). Once locked into place, the artwork’s meaning does not diminish but, instead, is deeply inflected by the conventions and hierarchies that shape its reception and must be read as such. Because of my view, the exhibition format seemed another set of unstable relational terms to negotiate that, like any of the systems I brought to it, carried its own malleable logic.

Given the opportunity to design a two-gallery installation, I could display both the hidden systems of production (what is gone is now happening) alongside the tools of creation (objects no longer in use). In *Hot House*, the shed is reconstructed on its back, appears display-like, and retired from use. In the adjacent gallery, constructed theater flats divide the cube architecturally to organize four video projections and two monitors depicting video material from the encounters. Additional works created especially for *Hot House* – an installation of orchids recreated from a personal memory and a video made from

found footage - render previously 'lost' material into the present. Overall, I exploit the static sense of time set forth by an exhibition to halt and reorder each of the systems involved into a new aesthetic arrangement. This arrangement replaces a relationship previously held together by mechanized functionality.

SHED DESIGN

To design *The ManShed*, I cross plans for a utility shed with private BDSM dungeons fashioned in residential basements or spare rooms. The basic model for *The ManShed* was lifted from a dated catalog I found in my grandfather's basement, selling a variety of small buildings for the 'modern' backyard (*Illus. 01*). I was drawn to the chipper and sensible language used to appeal to a homeowner's practicality and taste while sketching out, what I read as, a masculine identity. Issued in 1967 by the Walpole Company, accompanying conté illustrations of male bonding and family life depict throwback ideals of 1950's suburbia, where homeowners subdivided their properties. These descriptions give aesthetic purpose to the front and back of the house—traditionally posing the backyard as the hidden rear versus the presentational front lawn (*Illus. 03*).

The ManShed is my formulation of a heavily gendered zone that blends adopted and autobiographical associations of masculinity. I was attracted to the backyard enclosure for its zoning of masculinity behind the house as well as structurally for its collapsibility and impermanence. In my associations, the shed is a site for illicit behavior. In films, sheds, set away from the scripted reality of the home, foster sexual discovery, invention, tinkering, murder, and interclass love affairs. Cheaply, I share an affinity with most, if not all, directors of gay porn films who coopt routine spaces and interactions for wholesale eroticization.

To construct the shed body, I joined large wooden panels to form an

enclosed box whose interior is subdivided by a false wall. During sessions held in *The ManShed*, the false wall separates the submissive guest from dominant host while the engineering of each side reinforces these roles. The guest area appears like a typical room in a dungeon, but, in my version, is walled with acoustic foam to dampen sound and customized with ambient film lighting.

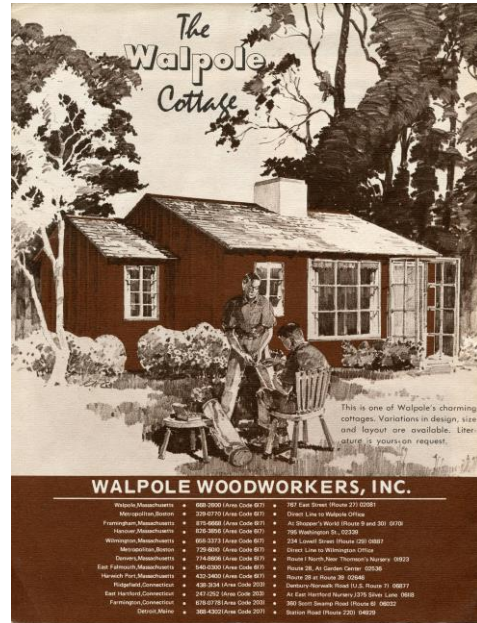


Illustration 03: Walpole Catalog, Back Cover

The most recognizable device I borrow is the 'glory hole', found most often in public restrooms, through which partitioned strangers copulate while retaining their anonymity. A carpeted platform - the topside of my crawl space - abuts the false wall and contains a set of holes positioned directly below matching crotch and eyeholes fashioned into a massage table attached to its surface. A booth only I may enter stands in a corner. The face is made from an old door and cut with one hole at crotch height and another near the feet. A window set into the top panel of the door is covered by a set of office blinds, which allows me to participate in a scene without exposing my face (*Illus. 04*).

In addition, I developed a multi-camera infrastructure to record each encounter and generate multiple video batches to be projected in an installation. During each session, six unmanned cameras are stationed at different holes made into the exterior structure and interior dividers. Four of the cameras film

continuously through side holes with the addition of one that films down through the ceiling as well as up through the floor. The placement of the camera holes creates sightlines to areas of sexual exchange that anticipates a flow of movement based on discussions of the scene prior to it being filmed.

The cameras simultaneously record the encounter from different points of view that all together do not share the same orientation with gravity. At the same time, each camera is set to film my guest's body in extreme close up to obfuscate their identity and show them in a fragmented and partial way. The resulting video images of the encounters appear abstract, incomplete and upside-down. The tight views and disorienting angles eliminate the need for a viewer to look for grounding points or to project narratives, but involve them in the act of reading bodies as scattered anatomical information.

These conditions map out portraiture as a disorienting exchange between the artist, sitter, and eventual viewer of the work. In this triangulation, information is transmitted to the viewer through assembling ambiguous images of, whether in the physical space or its depiction in video, texture, sound and touch. In presenting this work, I aim to disable a viewer's relationship to content as a consumptive ritual and, instead, activate natural impulses to imaginatively project into constructed and alluring holes.

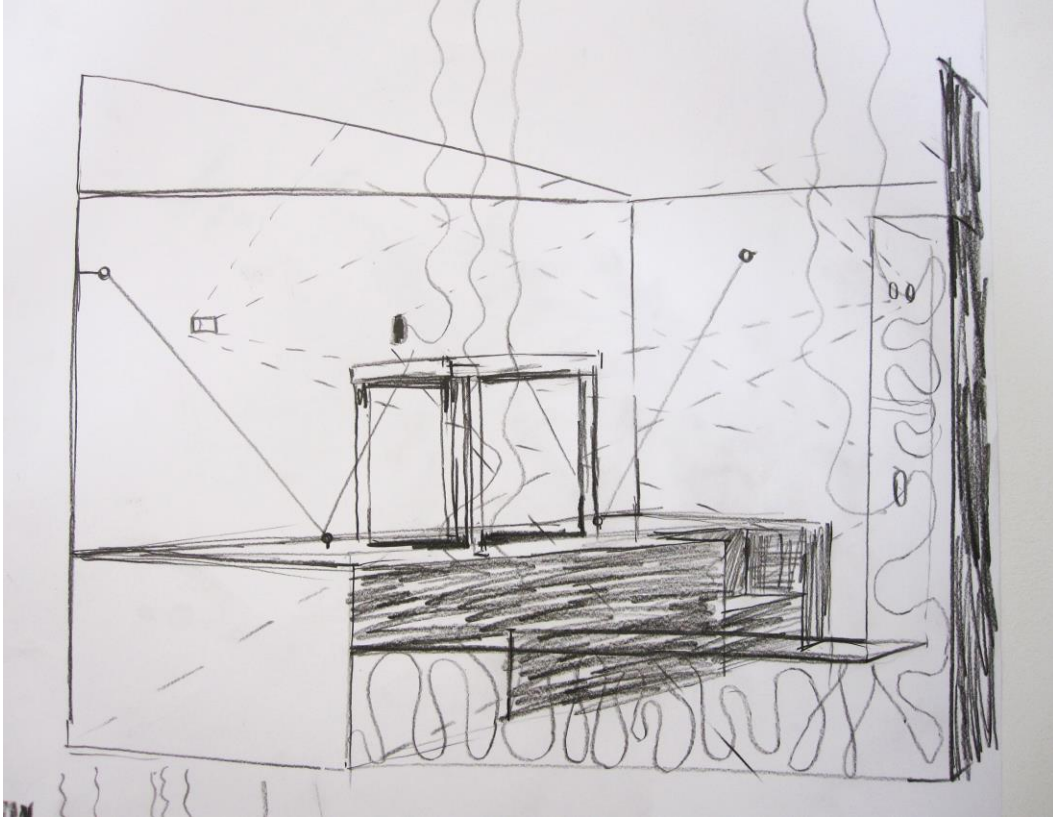


Illustration 04: ManShed Sketch, Guest Area, 2014

SHED FUNCTION

The ManShed functions as a rich theater that offers a collection of opportunities for touching and engaging. Barriers limit the amount of physical contact to what can pass through holes while, at the same time, increase the chances for mishap and ad-lib in the course of finding ways to connect. The alternate routes for sexual expression write uncertainty into both the dominant and submissive roles by design and open conventional S&M role play practices in which the 'dom' re-sequences a cycle of sadomasochistic practices.

All but blind to each other, the restrictive conditions of the shed have resulted in sex that combines the use of breath, odor, heat, light, electricity, plumbing and sight as integrated forms of erotic stimulation. In the *Manshed*, sensual play between these material systems and psychological premise loan my guest alternatives to genital-centric sex (penetration scripts ingrained by pornography and fixed by top-bottom qualifiers), and, instead, spurs erotic ingenuity.

In the beginning stages, I scripted myself as the master of the space who embodies the dominant role of the voyeur. As described in the previous section, various crawl spaces in the shed create passages that allow me to cross into the same room as my guest while remaining hidden below or behind barriers. Equally, by diffusing my presence to the excitement of my guest, I retain my primacy as a performer, free to access a range of roles spanning voyeur to choreographer. Therefore, he is unable to discern my location until the moment I

choose to make myself known to him, reinforcing my position of power. My unknowable position creates a situation of vulnerability for my guest, which connects to his level of investment in the submissive experience.

I should note here that the dynamic I have just outlined, while it completely informed the way the shed was designed, proved hypothetical upon the solicitation of my first guests. From the outset, all communications with potential guests were held online to ensure the anonymity of both parties up until the encounter. However, due to a combined lack of time and permanent location for the shed, it became too difficult to attract and schedule sessions with people I had never met. In the final months of the project, I decided to film a few sessions with men I had already met in person over the course of the project, the details of which I will explain in the final section of this paper. This factor alone automatically neutralized my role in the scene and prevented me from fully inhabiting the dominant role.

Additionally, during these successful encounters, my attention was divided between managing my own desires and wishes for the scene while orchestrating the filming of the encounter. In this sense, I did not have the time to develop my tool past these dry runs and could therefore not reconcile my role as master of the space before the project's end.

Although these factors dramatically altered the sexual roles I had hoped to explore more purely, I was not prevented from creating an integrated experience that offered different levels of intrigue for my guests. The few sessions I filmed produced compelling images that would allow me to pursue an installation based

on the conditions that produced them. That being said, I believe that without the time or means to develop the social complexity to the quality I would have liked, the shed was most successful in its function as film set.

I realized that, the film architecture, while design-wise a surveillance system, doubled as an, albeit removed, sexual partner that intensified arousal in the men I filmed. In my previous artworks, the presence of cameras bestows an event-like feel that can add stakes to ordinary moments. In this case, their presence creates a pseudo panoptic scenario to model the shed as a type of disciplinary mechanism. This was enough to sustain the submissive fantasy, yet affected the performative attitudes of each individual differently.

The architectural figuration of a power mechanism is a false one that converts the real possibility of punishment into a suspended kink fantasy that, at the same time, diffuses my presence. The individual is aware that he is visible in several ways, what Foucault identifies as the defining trait of inmates in *Discipline and Punish*, as "the object of information, never a subject in communication"(Foucault 195). In this way, triple voyeurism occurs: the subject is watched by me and by cameras producing a record that will eventually be seen by an audience of viewers. When installed, the spatial arrangement of the multiple video threads creates a disjunctive bodily presence that corresponds to my viewing position of them during the encounter.

SCREEN TESTS & CLOSE-UPS

Before the elaborate staging of the shed, my original inspiration to create a series of portraits initially offered a set of jobs that interested me: playing a casting director, understanding the subject, and, through manipulation of light and form, creating a penetrating likeness. Beyond these conventional tasks, I came to see that I was most interested in portraiture as confrontation of distance, and the portrait as the artist's record of this ostensibly impersonal, yet, historically erotic, encounter.

A flickering interest became ultimately forged while researching Andy Warhol's *Screen Tests*. In his serial cataloging of personalities of the 1960's Factory milieu, Warhol delineates the psychologically torturous mechanism of portraiture by subjecting the sitter to the barrel of his camera. These familiar directives, usually issued for ID photos, turn into diabolically demanding performance instructions for the sitter attempting to sustain them for the duration of a hundred foot film reel. We witness a perverse audition, what Callie Angell, curator and champion of the Warhol Film Project, calls, a "series of allegorical documentaries about what is like to sit for your portrait, each poser trapped in the existential dilemmas of performing as –while simultaneously being reduced to– his or her own image." (Angell 14) The minute bodily clues and subjective reactions can be read as the sitter's attempts to resolve his or her own image by the reel's end, a fraught task that, at the same time, requires picking the lock on the uneven Warholian challenge that inscribes the entire mechanism. (*Illus. 05*)

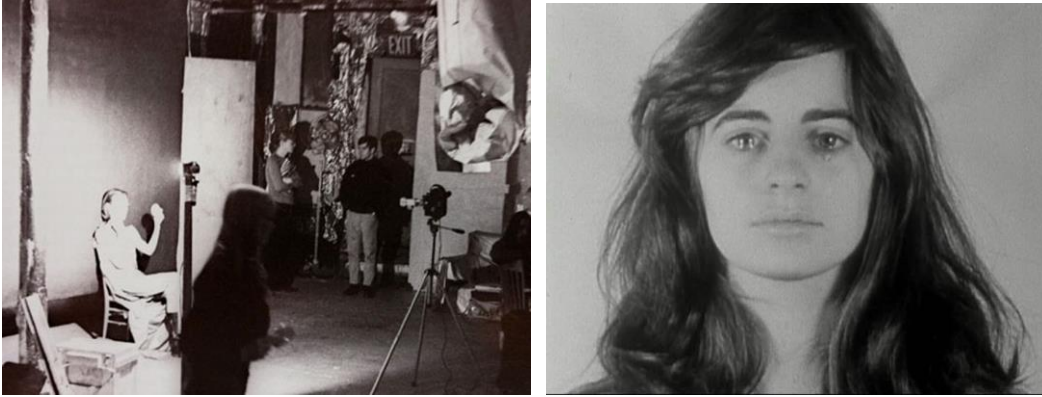


Illustration 05 : Andy Warhol Screen Tests

What gives the screen tests their poignancy as portraits is the pace at which we perceive the banality of their unraveling. What makes this possible technically is Warhol's use of the close-up trained on the human face. Using exclusively unbroken close-up shots, the viewer confronts a more or less anonymous, motionless person whose face can be studied and perused as a physiological object. The films capture the physical and emotional responses to this particular solicitation transmitted by the riveting flux between voluntary and involuntary movement.

Despite their name, the "screen tests" were not made to determine the subjects' viability as actors/actresses for film projects but became discreet events in themselves, extending the flat materiality of Andy's serial portraits into the all-too revealing realm of self-presentation. For me, these films merge two structural aspects of The Factory's social temperament: a screening process by which each sitter is effectively canned and labeled whose being there amounts to a byproduct of daily routine. However, it is important to remember they can be watched as films with the content being relayed through bodily movement. The drama of

the film is the sitter caught in the act of registering, experiencing, and responding to the complex relational system in which he or she is placed.

In Benjamin's essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', he writes of the visual possibilities of the close-up: "With the close-up, space expands...The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise in what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject" (O'pray 176). His reading of the transformation the subject undergoes was central to the reasoning that led me to depict encounters with my guests in close-up.

The ManShed videos remain generally unedited and shown in their full duration. A few channels have minor edits that appear arbitrary or close to surveillance cut-aways. The straightforward, incidental gaze of the surveillance footage shot in close-up desexualizes the exchanges and detracts from a literal description of the acts themselves. Without narrative edits or conventions as guides, small physical features and bodily movements read as the dramatic action of the work. Additionally, the precision of the lighting in the shed casts the action as staged, compounded by the theatrical nature of the role-playing being depicted. Due to the way light governs appearance photographically, mundane aspects of the bodies responding to, say, a strike on the ass, take on an unexplained significance.

For me, looking at the body framed in sections closer than the eye can behold liberates it from the weight of identity to which legibility must be assigned. In this way, it was my priority to establish the viewer's connection to

the physicality of the bodies I filmed as passing information, making it difficult to project a personality, age, or value onto it. Therefore, my focus is not that which can be interpreted from how the individual projects himself, but to record his physical reactions to the situation and his interactions with the constructed space.

SOLICITATION

To begin seeking subjects, I advertised the premise of *The ManShed* online in profiles, classified ads, and flyers distributed at San Diego Pride, framed as an invitation to participate in experimental erotic art while listing the particular fetishes I sought to explore (*Illus. 04*). The activities I described generally attracted submissive and curious types who were drawn in by my unusual proposal and their centering of voyeurism, sensory deprivation, and anonymity. My listings included traditional genres of BDSM play like Bondage, Glory Holes, Hands Free Orgasm, and E-stim (electro-stimulation), while naming shed-specific activities I coined as fetishes, like Distance Play, Hiding & Suspense Games, Eye Contact, and Sperm-Gazing.

On the surface, my use of live bodies in an elaborate portraiture device sideswipes Mika Rottenberg's over-aestheticized, Goldberg-esque machines, implanted with live bodies that enact absurdist labor chains of advanced capitalism. However, unlike Rottenberg, the men solicited to visit the shed were not hand picked as physical anomalies and assigned tasks, but whose sexual curiosity and submissiveness categorize them as ideal volunteers of their own accord.

Originally seeking only partners online, these conversations were more non-committal and did not lead to a single meeting within the time frame of the project. Unexpectedly during this process, however, I became connected with individuals who became integral to its evolution beyond this initial rule. Through

a profile I created on Adam4Adam, an online cruising site, I met Rob Green, a central collaborator in the evolution of the *ManShed* project and inventor of Liquastim™. His fully patented device feeds low voltage electric current through an encapsulator worn over the penis to achieve an intense, ‘hands-free’ orgasm. To achieve an orgasm, this device requires no physical contact whatsoever and fit in as one of the other mediated sexual experiences I was eager to engage with partners. I fabricated a massage table under which I would affix the Liquastim, offering it as one of the main features of the shed experience.

Some months later, donning a paintball mask, athletic clothing, and knee high boots, I attended each day of the San Diego Gay Pride event as Minty (*Illus. 06*), my alter ego, and distributed copies of a handmade promotional flyer (*Illus. 07*). Ground promoting allowed me to connect with potential guests in person while remaining relatively anonymous and ambiguously gendered. Returning to the ‘Leather Tent’ as a home base, the BDSM contingent offensively cordoned off from the thoroughfares of Pride, I introduced myself to various members of the San Diego Fetish Men’s Group (SDFM) whose weekly meetings I began to attend. Certain members felt particularly enthusiastic about my project and circulated a digital image of my flyer to the larger online forums that connect the Leatherman’s group in San Diego.

Formulating my desires publically in each context, I began to sound out the terms of my evolving proposal. This figuring quickly became two sided the more I conversed with people who were curious about my project or had similar fantasies to my own. This time of the project was very interesting and

intimidating for me since I had not practiced, in any conscious regard, what I was proposing. Therefore, by verbalizing my desires, an odd community of people sprung up around me whose sexual makeup was similarly characterized by feelings tied to anticipation, rejection, violation, manipulation, and abuse.

Through attending the Leather Meetings, I was struck that its members spoke of their favorite fetishes as connected to their previous sexual abuse. The desired effect of these fetishes is conjured through a physical embodiment of them. During ‘safe, sane, consensual’ role-play, recreating personal abuse scenarios does not only repeat trauma masochistically, but gives the individual choice where they previously had no agency. Many of whom I heard speak suggested that their lifestyle was their way to enact taboo behaviors in a ritualistic manner. This allows for an open and meaningful expression of behaviors, previously repressed because of guilt and shame, to constitute a sexuality that converts trauma into pleasure. The individual’s embrace consequently alters the narrative of abuse that, through awakening memories fused to bodily sensation, rewires, yet centers, the traumatic moment around which their erotic makeup was, nonetheless, formed.

I identified this expression of the group as having similar circuitry as my art practice. In my work, I have dealt with negative emotions as the underexplored territory in art, specifically in how live performance authentically recreates stakes of failure and exposure theatrically. For me, there was an obvious and compelling overlap between how I conceived of these works I had made and how I began to share my personal fetishes at a group level at SDFM meetings.

Adam4Adam

www.adam4adam.com/profile/view/ManShed

ManShed

ManShed is Online

USA - California - Southern CA San Diego - Other in: San Diego
[Contact](#)

Profile

If I Build it, You will CUM

30, 6'2", 145 lb, 32 w, Swimmer's, Brown Hair, Some Body Hair, White, Looking for 1-on-1 Sex, 3some/ Group Sex, Misc Fetishes.

Calling all kinsters!

Seeking the eager and curious for EXPERIMENTAL EROTIC ART.

I've built a two-roomed shed for us to play in.

Serious Inquiries Only

Spy Cam, Hands Free Orgasm, E-stim, Distance Play, Hiding, Glory Holes, Suspense, Eye Contact, Sperm

Alternative, Out Yes, Smoke No, Drink No, Drugs No, Zodiac Virgo.

Versatile, 6.5" Cut, Safe Sex Only, HIV Negative, Prefer meeting at: My Place.

Sperm Gazer

Contact ManShed

You can't contact yourself

[Send Message](#)

Click on the image to close

CA San Diego - Other in: San Diego

Illustration 06: Adam4adam Profile of the ManShed, Screen Shot, 2014

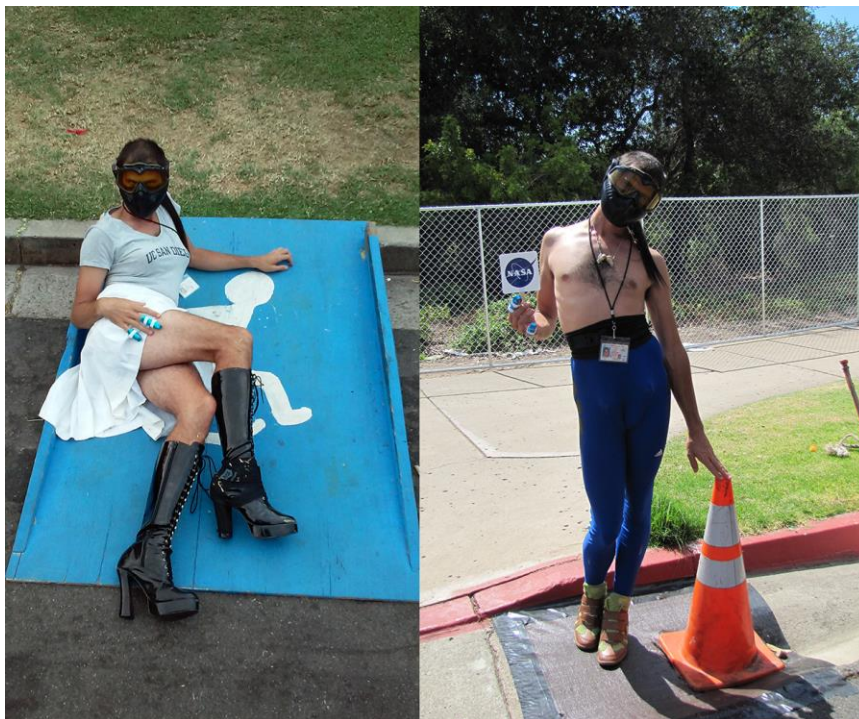


Illustration 07: Minty Performance, San Diego Gay Pride, 2014

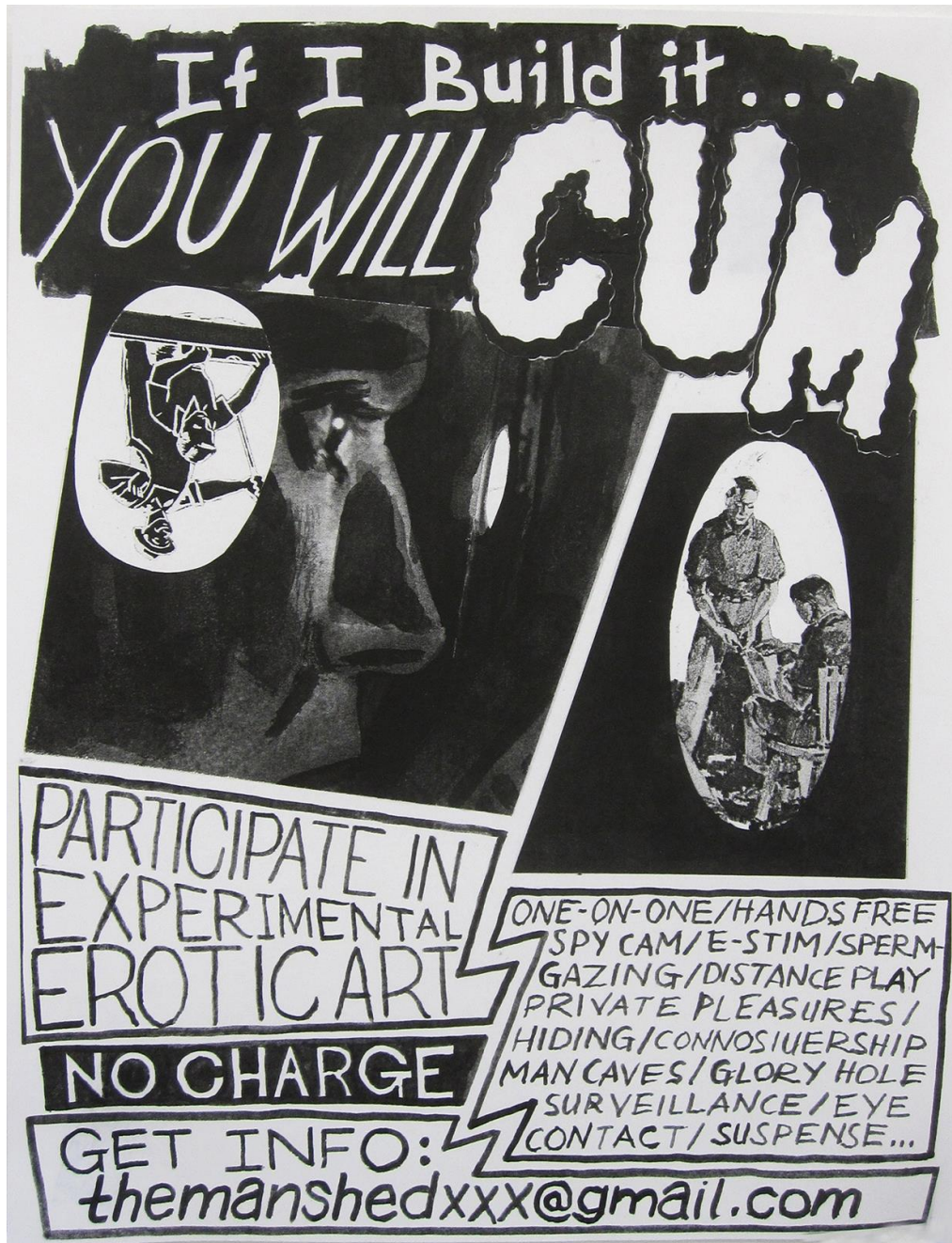


Illustration 08: Original ManShed Flyer, Ink on paper, 2014

JEAN GENET & WALLS

I have established that the motivation behind hosting sex partners in the ManShed sought to eroticize physical boundaries that originate, via their form, in my sculptural practice. As mentioned, I felt that to unearth the erotic potential hidden away in these forms required a concerted investigation in different mediums.

Beyond my regular diet of exhibitions and museums, I began to deeply immerse myself in the history and current state of queer media-making practices. From the outset, I did not filter my absorption and treated the novels of Dennis Cooper with the same attention as a vintage porn rag, or, the cut-up films and music of Genesis P. Orridge with YouTube uploads of at-home dungeon scenes. In fact, at this juncture, I could hardly differentiate which of these influences led to where. Although the foundation of *The ManShed* borrows widely from a range of sources, I could not cite one that has been more central to its conception than Jean Genet's only film, *Un Chant d'amour* (1950).

The narrative is of two male inmates in neighboring prison cells. Throughout overlapping story lines told through a fragmentation of space and time, Genet's actors enact materials that sublimate their desire for each other. Here, Genet's ongoing use of symbols, structures, and thematic concerns from his novels are transposed into cinematic form. His notable objects -the racial body, the cell wall, and flowers- do not mean one thing but are rather are forms that mutate in their significance within the fictional narrative. The transformation of

objects into symbols occurs for Genet in their use by the actors. In the case of *Un Chant d'amour*, these changes are motivated by and, at the same time, express figments of homosexual male desire.

The drama of the film in large part is driven by the masturbatory fantasies of the men taken flight, what was made necessary to Genet during his own incarceration. The cell wall separates the inmates from the possibility of penetration with each other and turns their desire back onto themselves. The older convict caresses and kisses the cell wall, engraved with graffiti, and is juxtaposed with shots of the other inmate caressing his tattooed shoulder. In a notorious scene, the older inmate penetrates the wall with a long, thin reed through which he passes discharged cigarette smoke received by the convict's mouth on the other side. (Giles 59-61) (*Illus. 09*) This sequence gives us an exultant moment born in confinement that suddenly brings to life a fruitful and extant sexual desire that derives its richness from its trap.



Illustration 09 : Film Still, *Un Chant d'amour*, 1950

Specifically the cell wall, which becomes the focus of sexual activity for the inmates, bears importance to the investigation of desire formed in connection to transgressing boundaries in my thesis work. Of desire Samuel Delany writes,

“Desire is never outside all social constraint. Desire may be outside one set of constraints or another; but social constraints are what engender desire; and, one way or another, even at its most catastrophic, they contour desire’s expression.” (Delany 89). Similarly, the false wall dividing *The ManShed* separates me physically from my guest, but gives rise to other expressions of sexuality shaped by those conditions.

REFLECTION

Drawing, performance workshops, and daily writing track the evolution of my long-term projects and, more importantly, narrow the swarm of possibilities and inclinations that spring forth in that process. Keeping these practices central and active over its course creates a productive instability in what could easily become a process of straightforward execution. While working on my thesis, dedication to these core practices diversified the expressions of content and brought me closer to identifying my primary relationship to it.

Leading up to the staging of *The ManShed* project, I had been experimenting with themes of anonymity on a more informal scale. The online Classified Ad, where people leisurely post listings and create profiles to locate other users looking for dates or casual sex, became a rich rhetorical strategy. In 2012, I began posting ads to Craigslist in order to arrange encounters with strangers as content for video works. The first of these was a short, improvised piece, called *Flagged for Removal*, created in the front yard belonging to a San Diego couple who allowed me to perform in drag during the removal of their unwanted palm tree (*Illus. 10*).



Illustration 10: *Flagged for Removal*, Video Still, 2012

While visiting my hometown in rural Pennsylvania some months later, I began engaging its dispersed gay culture

online, cruising Craigslist and casual sex websites. Having moved permanently from this locale in 2001, I wanted to access gay culture that was invisible to me during the 1990's, my teen years. The activity of public 'cruising' for sex in my small town, as in most places, was relocated online, connecting men residing in similarly sized towns of the larger region. Alongside ads explicitly for 'casual encounters', I published other listings asking strangers to photograph me in vulnerable positions while offering their living space as the ready backdrop. I have included images taken during one successful encounter in which a stranger and I took turns photographing each other (*Illus. 11*).



Illustration 11: Craigslist Encounter, Digital Inkjet Prints, 2012

The impetus to channel the search for 'one-night-stands' into a unified project led me to formulate *The ManShed*, coinciding with my thesis work at UC San Diego. Historically, promiscuous sex within gay male culture, public and otherwise, intergenerational, interracial, and interclass contact has thrived. In Samuel Delany's *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue*, his book about the hygienic cleansing of Times Square, NY in the 1970's, the author and critic

claims that "...social contact is of paramount importance in the specific pursuit of gay sexuality" (Delany 89). For Delany, this vital sociality was made possible in public locales (movie theatres, bars, public parks) in New York that served as important hubs not only for finding sex, but for connecting a diverse population of gay men. The stigmas and violence that forced gay culture and socializing indoors, to the cracks of bars and porno theatres, consequently contributed to a unique model of interactivity, sculpted, in part, by a desire based on transgressing social constraints.

Holding the activity of meeting strangers as the driving concern, I imposed a chain-like mode of production: the creation of various online accounts, the solicitation of a guest, the sexual encounter, and the generation of video artifacts of the encounter. However, streamlining a socially minded endeavor into a pat assembly line underestimated the capricious nature of working with other people. For instance, one potential guest was not particularly interested in my fetishes and demanded piss training and bondage. To accommodate this would have meant water-sealing the interior and devising a method for binding my guest without crossing fully into his designated space. While this posed an interesting adaptation of my initial design, I realized that to overhaul my design for each guest was untenable within my timeframe and tainted my 'strangers only' policy as perfunctory.

A more alluring and challenging option emerged when I decided, mostly from a practical standpoint, to actively incorporate recent acquaintances I

had met over the course of the project into my original model. Of the sessions I held, the resulting video projections on view in *Hot House* depict encounters with Rob Green and Sir Alf and Boy Richard, a partnered leather couple I met at SDFM. At the same time, the idea of sharing taboo areas of my sexuality with potential friends and collaborators threatened my privacy. Without the foil of anonymity, the terms I had laid out for shed activity accessed my vulnerability against a new set of risks. Handing over my identity linked, me, the individual, as the issuer of the project, which also set me closer to the shortcomings, uncertainties, embarrassments, and responsibilities of performing sexually.

This shift was, in part, marked by my concurrent involvement in weekly meetings of the San Diego Fetish Men's Group, where fetish and role-play are discussed and demonstrated synonymously with conversations around intimacy. Its members frequently discuss roleplaying as a therapeutic means to re-enter previous abuse scenarios while wielding agency in its reenactment. This ties physical violence and intimacy to feelings of trust that powerfully bonds individuals in prolonged S&M relationships. I had difficulty sharing information about my current project at a group level, which disallows intimacy and aims to recreate experiences of alienation and mediation.

I quickly found myself at the center of my own knot and was forced to acknowledge my acute resistance to sexual intimacy. However, it remained important to acknowledge that, in my mind, intimacy jeopardizes my independence. These feelings are evident in the distancing mechanisms I built into the shed design, which ensured my separation from my subject while shielding

my guest from witnessing any signs of discomfort or weakness in his master.

At this juncture, I was able to refine my working method in response to a conception of intimacy as a confrontation -and, perhaps, an embrace- of distance. Over the course of this project, my investigation of the role physical distance plays in my erotic makeup lies in the *anticipation* of physical contact, which I pursued with each guest as an experiment in mutual fulfillment. In retrospect, I am puzzled as to why I would not have taken a more discreet, direct route toward satisfying my curiosity. For reasons yet unknown, I felt the need to couch this experience in an elaborate and public social-sexual experiment.

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