A Companion to Feminist Art

Edited by

Hilary Robinson and Maria Elena Buszek

WILEY Blackwell
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Collecting Creative Transcestors: Trans* Portraiture Hristory, from Snapshots to Sculpture

Eliza Steinbock

"Why are there no great trans* artists?" one might ask, paraphrasing feminist art historian Linda Nochlin's rhetoric of 1971. This companion volume to feminist art practice and theory seeks to rectify the problem of trans omission by including this essay that focuses on trans visual art, but therefore also begs an explanation for what is awry in canonization processes that it (previously) would exclude trans-identified artists and works. Like Nochlin, I won't take the bait to answer the question as it is put: "that is, to dig up examples of worthy or insufficiently appreciated [trans] artists throughout history" without questioning the assumptions and power differentials couched in the question.

In founding a feminist art historical project, Nochlin proposes the methodological study of artistic production, namely by debunking the entrenched sexist notions that art creation arises through autonomous genius, which channels the personal expression of individual emotional experience. She does not advocate, however, for studying feminine expression as a comparable essence to the masculine genius. To assert there are such great woman artists, as yet undiscovered, would confirm the status quo of the terms by which "great art" is judged. It would be to ignore the necessary conditions generally productive of recognizable art practices that are largely unavailable to subjugated subjects. In this chapter I will make the case that the marginalized conditions of creative practice for most trans artists working today may prevent them from being considered "great," but certainly does not occlude them from being meaningful practitioners worthy of serious study, or from being influential within the art world and society at large.

Foremost, the combined sociopolitical conditions of being perceived as less than human, lacking autonomy, and unable to access one's herstory or hirstory presents an obstacle to both trans and cis-gender feminist artists. Just as women making art confront how usually spectacularized, thin, young, white female bodies pass for women's representation, trans bodies most often arrive in visual culture degraded, dismissed, or ridiculed. This context of identity politics centered in fact on the body poses complex issues of how to best engage representation. Feminist and trans artists alike may employ strategies of mimicry, masquerade, or deconstruction, for example. But also, I offer, trans art practices have been neglected in art theorizing because of a formal condition: the prevalent use of the portraiture genre and its varieties.

portrait downgraded within the academic hierarchy. She reasons that the degree of artistic invention demonstrated in a work of portraiture was and is perceived as too truncated. Theoretically, the portrait is assimilated into a concept of realism through the achievement of a mimetic likeness of the outer self and a truthful account of the sitter's inner self. The confluence of a downgraded form and unbecoming content potently combine to prevent trans representation in portraiture from being taken seriously as high art, much less as great art. Therefore, this bias in art theory might reduce trans portraits to the "we exist" social interventions that stage a seemingly simple visual form of activism.

In many ways, feminist portraits that frame women with dignity, individuality, and beauty similarly seek to expand the genre while changing the record of creative ancestry. Lynda Nead, for example, examines the predominance of nudes, also noted by the Guerrilla Girls in their 1989 billboard, "do women have to be naked to get into Museum?" with the statistic of "less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female." After appearing in art history mostly as props or commodities, other ways women most appear are as caricatures, or guise of historical figures. Feminist artists who engage critically with representational tropes, such as Cindy Sherman in her History Portraits series (1988-1990), seek to challenge the naturalness of how gendered subjects appear through reenactment and appropriation. What trans portraitists face is less a disparaged artistic representation than representations by medical doctors who drew, graphed, and less often painted their anatomies, for its noted.

Though appearing within the discourse of disease or pathology, in some artists share the same fate that Whitney Chadwick says results from sexism in which women were reserved for contemplation, "objects of art rather than its producers." Gallingly, the British Royal Academy of Art's women-inclusive history was revised to tell this story: in "The Academicians of the Royal Academy" (1771-1772, Johan Zoffany), a group portrait celebrating its first year, only male members were depicted, engaged in studying live nude male models. Above the fray hang the stilted painted busts of the two women members as it would not be seemly for women to approach the naked model of any sex.

A noted exception to the absence of aesthetic trans portraits are the many images portraying Charles-Geneviève-Louis-Auguste-André-Timothee d'Éon de Beaumont, known as the Chevalier d'Éon (1728-1810), who held positions as a dignitary, soldier, and spy at the court of France's King Louis XV. Though born into a poor noble family, their career brought great wealth and prestige, which enabled many of the Chevalier d'Éon's portraits to confer high status, overlaid onto their ambiguous gender status. Though these portraits accord with the aesthetics of their era, we can find continuities between the jolly, glamorous, and spectacularized "gender-swapping" figure as they were represented, and the cross-dressers and drag performers portrayed today. Though trans portraiture nominally includes a wide swath of gender non-conformity and variance, far more often cis-gender artists prefer to depict trans people presenting themselves in costume, like Caitlyn Jenner in a corset, rather than as "authentic" selves, which is to say, like cis-gender people would be. Jay Prosser's critique of Bettina Rheims' paradigms of how trans people are asked to perform for the camera a (reverse) strip of gendered self through the subtraction or addition of clothing. For this reason I have decided to select trans artists' lives have been undermined a...
decided to select trans artists working in portraiture whose works redress the ways their lives have been undermined as impossible, non-existent, or a mere performance.

It lies beyond this chapter to write the *history* of *trans* art, even though I would suggest such a canonical gesture as recuperative and necessary.9 Instead, I want to resistuate portraiture as a significant transfeminist artmaking practice even while noting its conservative, humanist tendencies. Portraiture as a genre turns upon a central problematisch: each portrait invests in a certain belief about the nature of personal identity evidenced through adherence to convention, color, or format. Editors Julian Carter, David Getsy, and Trish Salah of the *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* issue on “Trans Cultural Production” observe that the bounded individual self has “artifactual counterparts in the related creative forms of autobiography, portraiture, and the novel” that celebrate and enable self-creation.10 Visual art and photographic (self) portraiture, more than literary forms, refutes the solitary voice by allowing trans people to construct an archive of affirmative images of themselves and their communities. The journal’s editors note that autobiography and portraiture are such major practices of cultural production by trans people that they overshadow other histories, for instance of artists experimenting with non-narrative or non-realist forms, performance, magazines, and journalism.11 The subaltern cultural production of portraits, however ubiquitous in trans representation, should not be reduced to a modernist act of self-creation with potentially misguided implications. This would be to downgrade again the academic significance of trans portraiture and discount its popularity and staying power.

I propose to gather together creative transcenestors neglected by traditional, feminist, and even trans-oriented art histories both for insisting on trans content as well as for their use of the portrait form, even if oblique or barely legible. There is certainly no death of the naturalistic portrait today. Granted, the portrait’s status as elite art in the twentieth century may have been undermined; Woodall cites celebrity culture, caricatures, and burgeoning pictorial modes that I would say constitute the “selfie” today.12 Along with Ernst van Alphen’s general claim for the dispersal of portraiture into broader art practices,13 I posit that it returns in trans cultural production with a difference: to irritate and query the boundedness of the gendered subject that historically anchors the authority of a portrait. I will present three modes of dispersed portraiture by trans-identified artists that (1) confront the imperative of self-portrayal for trans people in order to be seen as human, (2) critically explore a portrait’s possibilities as documentation, and (3) mobilize the genre to re-inhabit the body and offer new subjectivities. Before I begin my analysis, I lay out concerns broadly shared by feminist and trans scholars that point to how we may move forward with developing a transfeminist approach to histrorizing art practices and theory.

**Towards a transfeminist art history**

Granted that portraiture is a central if conservative genre for working out gendered representation; however, a feminist approach teaches us that all art forms press the question of how gender status, identity, and expression influence the various processes of art creation, exhibition, and reception. A transfeminist art history would examine the conditions of these processes for how sexism affects women (and men), but equally how cis-sexism affects transwomen and transmen. For example, we could investigate how
the exclusion of trans people from artmaking practices and histories comes through the practice of cultural cloning within personal networks, as well as lack of access to art academies and training programs due to trans- ignorant curriculums or phobic policies. We should also ask why feminist art theorizing has neglected its trans sisters and brothers. Primarily, the strand of art criticism that invests in feminine essence, woman’s tradition, legacy, etc. creates cis-normative barriers. Take, for example, the 2007 WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution catalog, which documents the first exhibition on feminist art artists and groups (120 in total) and includes no artwork by a trans artist.

A transfeminist art history would be sensitive to the conditions under which one can appear as human. It would rail against an art market that continues to devalue bodies that do not appear masculine, white, or properly cis-gender. It would counter the assumption not only that a woman must appear heterosexual or feminine to be in the lineage of women’s cultural production but that a trans artist should include their own transitioned body in order to be marketable as trans art. Many trans artists working today grapple with this aspect of their aesthetic archive inherited from creative transcestors, particularly. This chapter will consider how from snapshot photography to sculptural forms transcestor portraits refugure the expectations of a marked trans body. The following group of artists are assembled together because of their practices that carry on various threads within feminist art theory/practice that works with portraiture’s potent force for creating as well as critiquing the subject and collective subjectivities.

The imperative to portray oneself

People’s bodies are regularly investigated, surveyed, and read by others whose gaze commands said body to show visual evidence of their gender identity. For trans people this daily experience might end with “the reveal,” which Danielle M. Seid describes generally as a moment “when the trans person is subjected to the pressures of a pervasive gender/sex system that seeks to make public the truth of the trans person’s gendered and sexed body.” In the dominant “natural attitude about gender,” this bodily truth is that genitalia are the essential determinants of sex, which in turn determine gender. Though naive, this genital epistemology also plays a structuring role in an audience’s grasp of any image depicting trans bodies. Talia Mae Betitcher explains the double bind of a conflated gender presentation (appearance) and sexed body (reality) as locking in a trans person to being either visible as a pretender or invisible and risk forced disclosure; either way, she states, “we are fundamentally viewed as illusory.” The implicit and often explicit imperative to prove yourself to be who you say you are combines uncomfortably with the imperative for “trans art” to include a body marked as transitioning. As Carter, Getsy, and Salah ask of trans cultural production, “What does trans look like? Must it be apparent and legible?” Trans portraiture confronts this problem of determining the legibility of identity head-on by staging the artist’s conceptualization of subjectivity along with the portrayed person.

Many scholars cite Loren Cameron’s (United States) photographic monograph Body Alchemy: Transsexual Portraits from 1996 as heralding a new era of trans representation for how it centers trans masculine people’s experience. The cover image is a nude self-portrait titled God’s Will (1995) in which the muscular and tattooed Cameron strikes a body building pose to inject a testosterone filled syringe into his buttock with his right hand, while the artist as image-n-embodiment. Cameron geos Westeran culture is central,” which van. The ascription of wh scuro lighting creates and dark, which map God/man, willful/dis through a double cre an act of fierce self-de self as a higher power.

The triptych Distor a medium close-up le ping around the fram of transphobia: “This men. You’re not a man don’t belong here.” T under erasure, and at that Cameron, its sul of the frame appears and impossible dema legibility. Rather than self-portraits recall a tion his identity opti

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Like Cindy Sherm in every image trans-
ties comes through the lack of access to art or phobic policies. Its trans sisters and essence, woman's issue, the 2007 WACK! exhibition on femininity a trans artist, under which one can counter the assumption to be in the lineage of their own transitioned working today grappling transcestors, particularly to sculptural forms of body. The following that carry on various turns potent force for us.

...others whose gaze. For trans people 4. Seid describes genresseses of a pervasive as person’s gendered this bodily truth is in determined gender role in an audience’s claims the double binds reality) as locked in a risk forced disclosure. The explicit and are combines uncond transition. As does trans look like? his problem of de-centering conceptualization of the monograph Body 1 of trans representational image is a nude tattooed Cameron into his buttock with his right hand, while the left hand squeezes the mechanical shutter. It concisely inserts the artist as image-maker doubly producing a portrait and the poiesis of his own embodiment. Cameron’s artistic gestures appear to cherish “the cornerstone of bourgeois Western culture, where the uniqueness of the individual and his accomplishments is central,” which van Alphen cautions is an overly basic understanding of portraiture.19 The ascription of who plays God here is key to a more complex reading. The chiaroscuro lighting creates a sculptural effect by guiding the eye through contrasts in light and dark, which maps onto the other dualities at stake: man/woman, human/animal, God/man, willful/disobedient. Cameron’s confident, precise hands channel divinity through a double creative act even as they craft an earthly body. The image constitutes an act of fierce self-determination to become human, whereby Cameron positions himself as a higher power to gain access to basic humanity.

The triptych Distortions (1994) has in the third image a framed Cameron cropped to a medium close-up looking at the viewer with hurt bewilderment. The bold text wrapping around the frame of the image, imposing on Cameron’s body, reads as a catalogue of transphobia: “This is womyn-only space. Where’s your dick? Sorry, but I don’t like men. You’re not a man: you’ll never shoot sperm. You must be some kind of freak ... You don’t belong here.” T. Benjamin Singer sees that the accusations narrate, “subjectivity under erasure, and at the same time undercuts any viable discursive or social position that Cameron, its subject, might occupy,”20 namely this person crouched into the cage of the frame appears subhuman, cast from gendered belonging. The framing as illusory and impossible demands the usurpation of a godly self-determination in order to gain legibility. Rather than wholly unique or autonomous, though he stands alone, Cameron’s self-portraits recall a broader social field of social stigma and medicalization that condition his identity options.

Extending the investigation of the trans self in relation to social spaces the photographic book Trans Avenue (2013) by Ianna Booker (Canada) presents a series of photographic self-portraits taken in Montreal and New York from 2011 to 2013. The cityscape is more than background or battleground, but is shown to accommodate and reflect back Booker’s experience of her “transformation and emancipation,” as the artist’s statement says. After the cover image, the first portrait is of her right foot, partially entering the frame from the top right corner. The red chipped nail polish hanging onto most of the toenails has the same texture as the white street divider running along the pavement, aligned with her foot. We are denied a face to identify, but this portrait tells us she found her inner mirror in the city’s marking, its strips that are not quite straight, not quite new, that are worn from friction. These self-portraits transpose rather than expose the self. The crisscrossing lines framing Booker’s body in the other portraits – externalized lines from bars, sidewalks, door frames, columns – seem to sediment rather than constrain her transitioning body. Faciality, so key to identification of a unique bourgeois self, or a criminal’s physiognomic peculiarities, is denied here. The viewer is not asked to compare the flesh and blood Ianna Booker with her portrayed likeness, but with these revealed, emerging parts of her in relation to the built urban environments. It diverts the imperative to portray away from the genital epistemology, while still allowing the subject to express her embodied femininity signified with red polish.

Like Cindy Sherman’s famous performative photography in which her body appears in every image transformed into another kind of woman, many trans portraits work the
irreconcilable gaping split between signified and signifier, which van Alphen concludes can be seen as the crisis of modernity.21 Jay Prosser’s study of snapshot portraits included in nearly all trans memoirs considers the work these images carry out in claiming the semiotic unity or breach of the portrayed trans subject.22 The images narrate: “I have always been here,” or, “I am no longer that person.” In short, employing the narrative framing of before and after for paired images can accomplish multiple tasks. Deriving from beauty, fashion and surgical advertisements, the “before-and-after” photographs obey the imperative to portray the self, improved. Working with the title Before/After for a series of photographs, Zackary Drucker and A.L. Steiner (United States) invoke the performative femininity of Sherman’s photographic style, with a distinctive trans difference. Two bodies, rotund and thin, large-breasted and budding, blond hair and dark; each masquerading as the other transformed, if we follow the invited trope logic of before-and-after. Where Sherman engages narrative in single film stills, in which she is the lonely star, this series performs a preposterous split temporally distributed across dual, dueling bodies. Ducking the portrait’s investment in realist resemblance, the split image suggests a transformation trick shot more like in the cinema of attractions, for instance by citing the use of a sheet over the body as was used in theatrical and then cinematic magic acts of disappearance/reappearance (Figure 13.1). The double-exposure of their bodies also invokes the ghostly apparitions of the phantasmagoria; but who is channeling who here?

It is unclear in which direction or into which body we place the unsatisfactory before and the desired-for after. The blanket functions as a screen for our projections of which body might be more desirable: the curves of Steiner or Drucker’s leanness? The double-exposure image, in which two bodies seated and smiling are overlaid, more forcefully confronts the viewer’s ability to determine the relationship of difference. It embodies a generosity of sharing trans femininity by aesthetically layering, almost a gifting, in which body areas and parts could be gained/lost through an optical game of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Engaging Roland Barthes’s theory of the photographic referent, Prosser writes that visual media promise to “realize the image of the ‘true’ self that is originally only apparitional”; therefore, incarnating the trans subject.23 And yet these before-and-after portraits depict bodies cloaked in the transitioning narrative without any clear resolution of which would be the “true” self, or even which body should be taken as realized after the transformative event. The pairing of Steiner and Drucker seems to accomplish a transfeminist practice by contributing in different, even contradictory, ways to the notion of incarnating the trans subject via a radical split. Instead, trans femininity incarnates with mutual longing that pursues an accommodation of difference within.

Pyuupiru’s (Japan) Self Portrait (2008) series also scrambles the semiotics of gender transitioning; though, rather than the narrative of “the surgery” transformation that Drucker and Steiner’s series invokes in order to displace, her close-up face and body shots confront the viewer with grotesque, odd stereotypes. Many are titled beginning with gender markers followed by a trait or description, such as A young girl with a nice smell or A boy that has been beaten and threatened. Pyuupiru’s face and upper body morphs through make-up and costume, but each image has a white studio background. Cleared of any narrative setting that Sherman’s work largely relies upon. This eclectic approach to trans subjectivity (including herself as a clown, hiker, and cat) is made even more concrete in Leo shown in a three-pair head, torso, and legs; of the selves; it asks subjectivity reside? A changed? Also using set into a space that room. Both are setting health while surreptitiously

Vital documents

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more concrete in Leon Mostovoy’s (United States) mix-and-match Transfigure project, shown in a three-part flipbook and film form.24 In the two-minute film version the head, torso, and legs continuously become swapped out to create exponential versions of the selves; it asks the viewer to consider in which changed part of the body does subjectivity reside? And if one part changes, would that mean the whole person is changed? Also using a white background, like Pyuupiru’s self-portraits, these figures are set into a space that could be either aestheticized as a studio or sanitized like a clinical room. Both are settings that judge, evaluate, and determine standards of beauty and health while surreptitiously surveying gender.

Vital documentation

Thus the imperative to portray the transitioned self leads into the vital documentation of the transition process, filling in what happens between the before and after shots. Documentation is politically useful in order to expand the visual vocabulary of a trans body beyond the static, binary terms of womanhood or manhood. The documentation
process of gendered becoming is also central to feminist process-based art that wishes to reveal the ways in which one (un)becomes a woman, such as Eleanor Antin’s Carving: A Traditional Sculpture (1972) in which she daily documents her weight-loss of ten pounds over 37 days, and Hannah Wilke’s last work, Intra Venus series (1992–1993), which documents her transformed physical and mental state during the last stages of lymphoma. Today’s ubiquitous selfie culture also provides a platform for making use of new media as a mode for self-invention as well as documentation of a myriad ways of being and appearing as trans. 29 Tobias Raun’s research on vlogging demonstrates that trans people seem to excel at using technology to provide an account of oneself in a cultural landscape that says you don’t exist, or are not beautiful. 30 One can also point to the potential positive impact on people who participate in the hashtag community building and affirmation of Janet Mock’s #girlslikeme and Laverne Cox’s #transisbeautiful that collate trans self-portraits in snapshot form worldwide. A portrait is always more than just documentation, as van Alphen insists: it comments on the field of representation and offers a theory of subjectivity.

Within the wide array of trans portraits that appear aimed at recording a transition’s process, a number of series stand out that critically explore a portrait as straightforward documentation. An early example is the collaboration between photographer Del LaGrace Volcano (United States/Sweden) and trans activist Zachary Nataf (United States/United Kingdom), who invited Volcano to assist in creating a “visual transsexual autobiography” of his transition in the mid-1990s. 27 The intimacy that pervades the photographs is remarkable; Nataf stands at ease in a suit and tie in one image, flexes his arm topless in another, but also evident is the care taken to depict Nataf’s transforming genitals. In Transcock (1996), a large-scale black-and-white silver gelatin print, shows an extreme close-up of Nataf’s clitoris after hormonal treatment has encouraged its growth; framing the busy pubic hair and lying along the length of the transcock is inserted a worn measuring tape reading either 2 “FEET” or 2 “INCH.” Which measurement should the viewer follow? We are offered a visual pun on racial fetishization, 28 certainly, but it also argues that black trans masculinity is a viable option in this body proudly “measures up” against both standards. Engaging the anthropometrical gaze for a parody is a regular strategy in Volcano’s self-portraits, which often include a scientific measuring grid in the background. The grid appears, for instance, in his own more recent INTERFme self-portrait series, which captures the excess of affective negativity surrounding the de-subjectivized black as well as hermaphroditic body, and shunts it into a generative process of becoming a subject. 29

The use of seriality to coax the viewer into seeing transitions as ongoing and complex can be found in Yishay Garbasz’s (Israel/United Kingdom) two-year project of weekly self-documentation of her transition, which resulted in a flipbook and large-scale zoetrope both called Becoming (2010). The 911 photographs of her nude body against a white backdrop show her one year before and one year after her gender clarification surgery on 18 November 2008, detailing the slight changes underway. Through appearing as “a straightforward look” at a physical transformation, as she writes, 30 the flipbook lowers the threshold for the viewer to take part in the process, flipping forward, back or stopping to play “spot the difference” on the full-frontal body lying small scale in their palm. 31 In contrast, the zoetrope project installed at the 2010 Busan biennale in South Korea insists on the unique physics of Garbasz’s movement. 32 Here a select number of self-portraits were printed life-size, then lit from within and cast in a rhythmic movement. Crucial to a or film, the early modelinging a projection from the display retains authorit in the flipbook of nuanced jerks where di

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movement. Crucial to Garbasz’s decision for this format, unlike the projection of video or film, the early modern optical device achieves movement on its own without requiring a projection from elsewhere. Not only is the documentation self-made but also the display retains authority over how the viewer can visually grasp her bodily transformation. With the flipbook and zoetrope, Garbasz inserts the stuttering of movement, the nuanced jerks where difference arrives to point to the things unseen.

Many trans artists have also developed long-term projects that portray a diverse array of trans people, in part to insist on the myriad ways of embodying “transness.” Their critical approach challenges dominant tropes of either gorgeous passing or suffering non-passing by pointing to the local and everyday experience. For example, the visual field of trans-normativity often includes mirrors that stand in for a cis-gender gaze, reflecting back approval or disapproval. By placing trans men outside on location, photographer Manuel Garcia Ricardo (Mexico/Germany) insists that the titular Trans Men of the World (2012) also belong to their cities; like the local architecture, they are integral to the built environment. It concurs with the insight from Susan Stryker that trans poiesis is an act of artistic creation within and through which the body materializes in relation to its location.33 Photographer Amos Mac (United States) approaches his participants in the Original Plumbing (OP) quarterly magazine with an editorial eye that shows deep appreciation for “trans male culture” that he both documents and creates. Co-founded with Rocco Kayatos and run by an army of interns and expanding list of contributing editors and writers, OP has appeared online and in print since 2009.34 Shooting the cover for each thematic issue, and much of the content, has enabled Mac to develop an art-pop blended visual vocabulary for approaching trans portraiture as if shooting alluring celebrities and lovable neighbors: his participants appear familiar, casually gesturing to the camera, or at ease, confidently posing their sexually desirable bodies.

Elisha Lim’s (Singapore/Canada) collection of hand-drawn and graphic illustrations in 100 Crushes (2014) also relates to popular culture by mobilizing forms such as the calendar portrait and poster art.35 Lim derives the image’s outline from photographs, often selfies or snapshots, posted on Facebook, which then are traced and elaborated with Lim’s own block color and embroidery style (Figure 13.2). Originally a musician who began to shift from lyrics to write short reflective narratives, Lim combines text with image to create comic-type image-word panels. They want their work to have the infectious power of propaganda in the sense of widely disseminating lovingly drawn trans and queer people of color. Fantasy and utopian thinking infuse their portraits, such as The Illustrated Gentleman, an imagined fashion magazine for trans masculine people and butches, “our own illustrated book of subversive sartorial splendor.”36 Documentation is central to Lim’s artmaking, especially the calendar edition of Sissy: Sissies and the femmes that inspire us, which includes statement texts and another project interviewing genderqueers who use “they.” With They the accompanying short texts written by Lim attest to how the portrayed touched or taught Lim personally. This affective dimension of the testimonial fosters a respectful regard for trans and non-binary identified people of color as well as two-spirit indigenous people who are largely excluded from trans-normative portraiture populated by the white bodies.

Many of the portraits discussed challenge the limits of thinking of subjectivity as its uniqueness; rather, subjectivity emerges through social connections and cultural
appreciation. Likewise, which is engaged by the message. Instead, subjective portraits are more than politically vital ends, in the effect of authorizing that wholly re-orient gendered human body.

Re-inhabiting the

Portraying the trans sites, such as medical p "hermaphroditic" body in order to relay the exposure of domino or animal, the heroic as. When portraying subj Dijkstra, Marlene Dun "visual thought" about versalist humanism. 37 are always cast in tern objects portrayed, por ies.38 This gesture has Lorenzo Triburgo's depicts a trans mascul large oil painting by Tr instructor "Bob Ross." Tilt of the chin directi even. The staging into with a heroic masculi Alfred Jacob Miller. Tl outside world to capt from an invisible sou name an incarcerated. Though clearly relate sensuous folds (from also references Judy C 39 women represente a personalized fabric and social histories. I what would they have

The 3-D scanned p recasts history, recall Hermaphroditus (art body lies supine, go.
appreciation. Likewise, the seriality of a portrait shot repeatedly over a longer duration, which is engaged by many artists, refutes the ability to ever capture someone's interior essence. Instead, subjectivity appears to be an ever-developing differential process. Portraits are more than documentation; however, the "more" accomplishes different politically vital ends, including shifting the field of visual representation and producing the effect of authorizing new theories of subjectivity. The final section discusses works that wholly re-orient our thinking about subjectivity necessarily being anchored to a gendered human body.

Re-inhabiting the body

Portraying the trans sexed body has its historical trappings in diverse visual cultural sites, such as medical photography and Grecian renderings of mythical androgynous or "hermaphroditic" bodies. Nevertheless, some trans artists continue to conjure portraiture in order to relay new subjectivities through the genre that is most responsible for the exposure of dominant subjectivities. Though a portrait can be of any object, human, or animal, the heroic and authenticating function has a sincere benefit for trans bodies. When portraying subjects formally excluded from portraiture, as in series by Rineke Dijkstra, Marlene Dumas, and Nan Goldin, van Alphen claims that the images offer a "visual thought" about the history of the genre, even while recalling a tradition of universalist humanism. The portrait is the space of conflict, a battleground of images that are always cast in terms of the already represented. Like women who so often are the objects portrayed, portraiture enables trans subjects to re-inhabit and own their bodies. This gesture has the potential to rehabilitate the genre simultaneously.

Lorenzo Triburgo's (United States) colorful photographic series Transportraits (2012) depicts a trans masculine person in the foreground while the background is filled by a large oil painting by Triburgo of one of the natural landscapes designed by TV "painting instructor" Bob Ross. Shot from slightly below the subject, exaggerated by their upward tilt of the chin directing the gaze off to a lofty place, they appear majestic, transcendent even. The staging interrogates nature as fabrication, while also imbuing the subjects with a heroic masculinity in the tradition of American painters John Singer Sargent and Alfred Jacob Miller. The following project Policing Gender (2014--) turns away from the outside world to capture an interior space filled with folds of rich fabric gently hanging from an invisible source. The series titles each piece like Policing Gender (for May) to name an incarcerated trans and/or queer person, visually presented in their absence. Though clearly related to the art historical tradition of depicting femininity through sensuous folds (from Caravaggio to Catherine Opie), the emphasis on a unique textile also references Judy Chicago's Dinner Party (1974--1979) place settings. Along with the 39 women represented in Chicago's famous installation with a special one-off plate and a personalized fabric runner, it reminds us to question who is missing from our visual and social histories. If we were able to speak with them here, communing at the table, what would they have to tell us?

The 3-D scanned plastic statue Juliana (2015) by Frank Benson (United States) also recasts history, reaching back to the ancient Hellenistic marble sculpture Sleeping Hermaphroditus (artist and year unknown, after 155 BCE) whose life-size, vulnerable body lies supine, granting erotic views of the buttocks and genitals. Artist Juliana
Huxtable (United States) is cast in a pose lying on her side too, but her head is erect, gazing outward, her left hand holding a mudra. Depicted alert, greeting the viewer, and in the color of a hard, shiny metallic that encases the body, suggests that this “hermaphrodite” is far from an accident of nature: Huxtable is open about being born intersex and hormonally transitioning to “push everything a bit further.” The sculpture was first on view at the New Museum Triennial (2015) surrounded by futuristic inkjet self-portraits and poems by Huxtable herself. In Untitled in the Rave (Nibiru Cataclysm) (2015) she revisions herself as a member of the Nuwabian Nation, a sect of the Nation of Islam that, according to Huxtable, “believes black people are the descendants of lizard aliens and created white people.” though she has no association with this cult, the fantastical visions suits her “self-imaginings” as cyborg, witch, and lyrical writer.

A New York City transcester to Huxtable’s characters might be found in Greer Lankton’s dolls, most recently showcased posthumously in the LOVE ME exhibition at Participant Inc. in Lower Eastside, Manhattan (November–December 2014). Most active in the 1980s and early 1990s before her death from a drug overdose in 1996, Lankton crafted sculptural figures that were often installed in elaborate theatrical sets. The bodies range from larger than life-sized to handheld, each hand-sewn over moveable wire armatures, adorned with glass eyes and human hair; though many are nude and simply painted, others are outfitted with custom clothing and accessories. One doll, named Sissy (1979–1996), is said to be Lankton’s own likeness and was remade continuously during her adult years, sometimes bulking up but mostly thinning down, reflective of her own eating disorder. Desiccated chest cavities, addicts outfitted with needles, detached genitals, and dolls of Candy Darling and Jackie Kennedy – the figures could all be seen as self-portraits. Developing this technique of performing “surgeries” on her dolls in the 1980s, however, presages feminist interrogations of the mutable body, and makes her a forerunner of trans art works that explicitly deal with experiences related to transitioning. The performative arranging of the dolls – she posed them in shop windows and around her living space – lends an uncanny liveliness to the soft forms.

Many scholars have remarked on the temporality of transitioning being for some an experience of ongoing death/rebirth, in which polar gendered personae appear to live in one body doing battle with each other. The trans experience of such a body in perpetual transition returns in painted forms arranged by e.die gesso (United States) in the series Attempt to Complicate (2007). His abstract paintings methodically layer “baby pink with baby blue and baby yellow” in a demanding process. The title of each panel lists which colors were used and what number attempt it was. The flesh tones that surface from the dull mixtures range from caramel to bronze, from taupe to rose. Placed together, hung proximate to the viewer’s own shape and size, the panels become animate glowering figures. A quick glance to the side of the panels, though, reveals the drips from the process of layering color. The mono-color drips stand in stark contrast to the intricately worked surface. The streaking drips look like blood, spurting and hemorrhaging from the creation, from some internal wound. This detail indexes the violence wreaked by the achievement of the surface color, which in turn indexes the violence of genderization.

The paintings border on sculpture, offering what Gordon Hall calls an “object lesson,” or a methodology for seeing bodies and genders differently. Hall proposes that sculpture’s form: about the gendered body but because of how portraiture into sculpted a gender onto another. Abstract Bodies: Sexts: that when two bodies of a gesture, it preser no context or cont “transgender capacity morphologies, and su alize transgender an considering a wide v. nonfigurative, rather transition.

Whereas Getsey’s works offer evidence t are already working in elsewhere by Getsey, c Math Bass (United St ment on the mutability News2 (2014), for exai ing from optical illusi interview, Bass explai asked whether Bass s tran.', and performa arrangements three ft able colorful, zppy ol. In contrast, Jonah C light, and painted ce Certain Invisibiliti light bulb, a large an immaterial light draw can be expanded to s exhibitions that bring art indicate this mono mass, and form of the in the words of curat October 2014). The queer is explicitly at (Spring 2012), by arti o

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that sculpture’s formalism, particularly minimalist works, is a unique place to learn about the gendered body, “not primarily because of what we see in the sculptures, but because of how they might enable us to see everything else.”46 The dispersal of portraiture into sculptural forms perhaps usefully deflects the problem of portraying a gender onto another medium that confronts the viewer in space. David Getz’s Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender (2015) reminds us that when two bodies meet in space, such as in sculpture, performance, or the trace of a gesture, it presents an instance of possible gender assignment even when there is no context or content for “transgender identity.”47 Getz develops the concept of “transgender capacity” for moments of recognition of gender multiplicity, mutable morphologies, and successive states of personhood in works that inadvertently visualize transgender and queer theory. This conceptual lens opens up a huge field for considering a wide variety of art works that portray trans bodies in relation to the nonfigurative, rather than the expected figuration of transness as a gendered body in transition.

Whereas Getz’s book-length study makes the argument for cis-gender artists whose works offer evidence of transgender capacity, I find it crucial to locate trans artists who are already working in this direction.48 Some examples of transgender capacity, explored elsewhere by Getz, can be found in the painted pictograms and sculptural objects by Math Bass (United States), which are emptied of a human body, but nevertheless comment on the mutability of the body and the need for a viewer for this to be recognized. News! (2014), for example, presents images that can be seen in multiple ways, borrowing from optical illusion traditions like a picture of a rabbit that can also be a duck. In an interview, Bass explains that “People have anxiety about ambiguity,” in response to being asked whether Bass subscribes to the notion that gender is the first segregator in portraiture and performance.49 Exploring gender multiplicity in Body No Body Body (2012), Bass arranges three forms covered in painted canvas, making for lumpy but approachable colorful, zippy objects.

In contrast, Jonah Groeneboer (Canada) creates much colder 3-D forms out of string, light, and painted canvas in order to point to embodiment issues. The Presence of Certain Invisibilities: Some Known, Some Unknown (2010) involves the installation of a light bulb, a large and small prism, and Plexiglas to create delicate, present, and yet immaterial light drawings. The spectrum reminds the viewer of all the ways perception can be expanded to see more, to see successive states of being. The growing number of exhibitions that bring together trans theamics with post-minimalism and object-based art indicate this movement has hit on a renegade strategy for presenting the shape, mass, and form of the body “that strips the body of its flesh, framework, and constraints,” in the words of curator Orlando Tirado on his show FLEX (Kent Fine Art, September–October 2014).50 The extent to which such work is recognizable as feminist, trans, or queer is explicitly at stake. Consider the exhibition text for Lifestyle Plus Form Bundle (Spring 2012), by artist-curator Daniel Luedtke:

Can we make space for a political interpretation of non-representation? ... Without dicks, vaginas, menstrual blood, references to Jean Genet, cum, anuses, bondage, surgery, scars, reclaimed pronouns, reclamation of the male/female ga(y)ze, sidelong glances cast at Women’s Work (Womyn’s Werq), etc. etc. etc. HOW DO WE KNOW IT’S FEMINIST/QUEER?51
The identity fatigue and press for referential material, if not bodies themselves, has set in. The desire to escape history, however strong and urgent, cannot be eradicated from our viewing experiences. As Jennifer Doyle notes in her defense of "reading into" artworks when they lack the iconographic depiction of sexual acts or trans markers, "we bring a history of sensation to them." The current trend for exploring gender non-representationally still grounds the body in a presented object. It seems that feminist portraiture that sought subjectivity in portraits after appearing in art history mostly as props or commodities has come full circle with trans abstractions of re-inhabiting embodiment through objects.

Concluding thoughts: An uneven uptake

So far I have only made a case for a very select number of works from a far larger collection of trans art that one would hope has found its public. The exhibition history of these and other artists is one place to gage the integration of trans art/artists into the formal art world, art trends, and histories. A key dimension to transfeminist practices of art history would be to consider the uptake of trans masculine versus trans feminine artists. We need to ask ourselves: who's included, who is gaining more of a presence through galleries and catalogs, in the major shows that produce a record of creative transcestors for tomorrow's trans artist?

An impoverished sense of curatorial accountability combined with transphobia in the (queer) art world has led to a hugely disappointing number of missed opportunities. For example, Yishay Garbazi issued a press release in response to the joint project between the Gay Museum Berlin and the German Historical Museum of a survey show *Homosexuality, I-es* (June-December 2015) that did not include one trans woman artist. I might add that this is despite choosing a highly trans citational portrait by Cassils (Canada) (in collaboration with Robin Black, United States) from their series *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture* (2011-2013) for the catalog cover and promotional material. The exhibition notes also clearly state the aim of presenting a cultural history of the "third gender," which is now damagingly narrow, and appears to erase political and creative histories of trans people under the dominance of the homosexual optic. Further, still productive creative transcestors include performer Nina Arsenault (Canada), painter Hans Scheirl (Austria), and photographer J. Jackie Baier (Germany) are rarely included in the US-centric canonization process of solo and group shows.

I want to return to my editing of the 1971 question: "Why have there been no great [trans] women artists?" With her original, Nochlin invokes the aesthetic and political category of greatness that needs to be reimagined, but I want to underline the urgency for addressing this symbolic, epistemological, and literal violence. The suicides of rising art stars Eddy Beth (Argentina, 1998-2014) and Mark Arguhar (United States, 1987-2012), both trans feminine and of color, direct attention to the disproportionate structural exclusions as well as daily micro-aggressions faced by those who confront white masculine hegemony. Though simply entering them and others into the record of art historical evidence is a first step towards doing justice to their contribution, a transfeminist account of the masculinist art scene, racist art market, and cis-sexist aesthetics is necessary to revolutionize the means of cultural production and scholarship. For my part in these efforts, I have shown how trans artists engage the generic category of portraiture that cites from the visual: that trans aesthetics transcends, then re-networked digital, an

Notes

1 In my title and first I of gender identities, gender non-conform where an asterisk in prefix. For legibility for transgender, tran
3 Nochlin, "Why?", 14
4 Much like herstory (narratives of the past pronoun "hir" to me events that compose of canons, talent, a (non-binary and plurality identity is not)
5 The term "cis-gendr" that is "cis" describe assigned sex and gender like trans, comes frc hence it refers to a g
6 Joanna Woodall, "Ir Joanna Woodall M
7 Lynda Nead, The Fe
8 Whitney Chadwick
9 Jay Prosser, Second: University Press, 19
10 Chris E. Vargas has Histrory & Art (MO dedicated to movin
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portraiture that cites
identity authority in order to transform the histories of exclu-
sion from the visual field and proffer trans-affirmative
cepts of subjectivity. I see
that trans aesthetics practiced today consists in taking on
the inheritance of creative transcestors, then re-shaping
and dispersing them through mimetic recording,
networked digital, and abstract sculptural forms.

Notes

1 In my title and first sentence I use the term trans* to indicate the widest possible range
of gender identities, expressions, and perceptions possible that are gender variant or
gender non-conforming. The * sign attached to trans derives from online communities
where an asterisk in a search engine functions as a wild card for any term with the same
prefix. For legibility I will use trans throughout the text, also widely used as shorthand
for transgender, transsexual, transvestite, genderqueer, and so on.

2 Linda Nochlin, “Why have there been no great women artists?” Art News 69 (January
1971), reprinted in Women, Art and Power and Other Essays (New York: Harper & Row,


4 Much like herstory emphasizes the inclusion of feminine and female-assigned subjects in
narratives of the past, the term hirstory borrows the gender neutral (or multiple)
pronoun “hir” to mark the previous exclusion of trans subjects from the great and small
events that compose our understanding of the past, which bears on present discussions
of canons, talent, and even evidence of existence. I will also use the gender-neutral
(non-binary and plural) pronoun of they to refer to some trans people if their gender
identity is not known or is a known preference.

The term “cis” is used throughout the text to refer to a non-transgender person,
that is “cis” describes someone who experiences no or little incongruence between
their assigned sex and gender identity (i.e. assigned female and living as a girl/woman). Cis,
like trans, comes from Latin meaning “on the side of” whereas trans means “to cross”,
hence it refers to a gender identity that stays on the side of one's assigned sex rather than
crossing a socio-cultural barrier erected if not maintained by biomedical sciences.

5 Joanna Woodall, “Introduction: Facing the subject.” Portraiture: Facing the Subject, ed.
Joanna Woodall (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 5.


8 Jay Prosser, Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality (New York: Columbia

9 Chris E. Vargas has mounted the conceptual art project the Museum of Transgender
Hirstory & Art (MOTHA). The website has this mission statement: “MOTHA is
dedicated to moving the hirstory and art of transgender people to the center of public
life. The preeminent institution of its kind, the museum insists on an expansive and
unstable definition of transgender, one that is able to encompass all trans and gender
non-conformed art and artists. MOTHA is committed to developing a robust exhibition
and programming schedule that will enrich the transgender mythos both by exhibiting
works by living artists and by honoring the heroes and transcestors who have come
before. Pending the construction of MOTHA, the museum will function as a series of

13 Ernst van Alphen, "Chapter 2: The portrait's dispersal." Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 21–47. My decision to structure the analysis along these lines of dispersal takes inspiration from van Alphen's own chapter that similarly divides the analysis.
17 Carter, Getsy, Salah, "Introduction," 469.
18 Cameron's work is discussed prominently in the following: Prosser, Second Skins; Benjamin Singer, "From the medical gaze to 'Sublime Mutations': The ethics of (re) viewing non-normative body images." The Transgender Studies Reader, eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006); Josch Hoenes, "Körperbilder von Transmännern. Visuelle Politiken in den Photographien Loren Camerons." Queere und heteronormativitätskritische Perspektiven auf Männlichkeiten, eds. Robin Bauer, Josch Hoenes and Volker Woltersdorff (Hamburg: Mannerschwarmskripp, 2007), 135–148, 201.
20 Singer, "From the medical gaze," 610–611.
22 Prosser, Second Skins, 207–223.
23 Prosser, Second Skins, 211.
24 Leon Mostovoy's Transfigure video can be seen online at https://vimeo.com/76974471, accessed 16 November 2018.
27 Nataf's words are quoted in Prosser, Second Skins, 230.
28 This interpretation is in Prosser, Second Skins, 232.

29 Eliza Steinbock, "Get photographs." TSQ: 30 Yishay Garbuz, Beco 31 Vivian Sobchack ren: Becoming (New York 32 A video documentat: https://www.youtube 33 Susan Stryker, "Dun parallax 14.1 (2008) 34 Cover images of OP www.accessed 16 Novemb 35 Elisha Lim, 100 Crusu 36 Lim, 100, n/p. 37 van Alphen, "Portrai 38 Ina Loewenberg, "Re (Summer, 1999), 398 39 Ana Cecilia Alvarez, on 26 February 2014 16 Noveml 40 Antwaun Sargent, "2 25 March 2015, http scene-queen-to-trar 41 A couple of weeks b Mattress Factory in installation work of was restored a can be found at http accessed 16 Noveml 42 Johanna Fateman, "I com/words/ids=4886 43 Andrew Durbin anc 44 See, for example, a c Empire Strikes Back 45 Gordon Hall, "Obje 46 Hall, "Object lesson 47 David Getsy, Abstra 48 The artists includec 49 The artist included Flavin, and elsewh
30 Yshay Garbarsz, Becoming (New York: Mark Batty Publisher, 2010), 180.
35 Elisha Lim, 100 Crushes (Toronto: Koyama Press, 2014).
36 Lim, 100, n/p.
37 van Alphen, "Portrait’s dispersal," 47.
41 A couple of weeks before she died in 1996, Lankton opened an exhibition at the Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh entitled it's all about ME, not you that was an installation work of her personal bedroom where she lived and worked in Chicago. The work was restored and in 2009 put on permanent exhibition there. Details of the dolls can be found at https://mattress.org/archive/index.php/Detail/114, accessed 16 November 2018.
44 See, for example, a discussion of this motif in memoir literature by Sandy Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," Transgender Studies Reader, eds Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006).
46 Hall, "Object lessons," 47.
48 The artists included are David Smith, John Chamberlain, Nancy Grossman, and Dan Flavin, and elsewhere Getsy focuses on trans and queer artists whose work also informs his conceptual framework of "transgender capacity." See his edited collection Queer in the series Whitechapel Documents of Contemporary Art (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press,
242 Collecting Creative Transcestors: Trans* Portraiture History, from Snapshots to Sculpture

and with Jennifer Doyle the conversation "Queer formalisms." Art Journal Open


50 “Flex” includes artists Math Bass, Dan Finsel, Gordon Hall, and Molly Lowe, alongside works by Richard Artschwager, James Lee Byars, Guy de Cointet, Marcel Duchamp, Robert Morris, and Myron Stout. Another important example is Kris Grey’s curation of “Queer objectivity” at the Stamp Gallery, University of Maryland (October–December 2013). Featuring AK Burns, Heather Cassils, Nicolaus Chaffin, Mary Coble, Lauren Deniziotio, Brendan Fernandes, Kris Grey, Gordon Hall, Katherine Hubbard, J.J. McCracken, Cupid Ojala, L.J. Roberts, Coral Short, Caitlin Rose Sweet, Tobaron Waxman, and Jade Yumang.

51 Daniel Luedtke and Joel Parsons, Lifestyle Plus Form Bundle, press release for the exhibition, Beige Space, Memphis TN, 16 November 2012.


54 Both artists were included in the recent exhibition Bring Your Own Body: Transgender Between Archives and Aesthetics organized by Jeanne Vaccaro with Stamatis Gregory at 41 Cooper Gallery, New York City (October–November 2015); http://www.cooper.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/asset/files/2015/BYOB-catalogue_sm.pdf, accessed 16 November 2018. Effy Beth was one of three participating artists from outside the United States, only one of whom was living at the time. The show was mounted during the writing of this chapter, and I was delighted to find synchronicity in the catalog description, which asks, “Why have there been no great transgender artists?” in the tradition of Nochlin. The curators explain, “Our curatorial assembling of non-identitarian and visual landscape of transgender in sculpture, film, textiles, performance, photography and archival objects is an effort to assign values where it has been withheld” (3). Hence, while I commend the show’s efforts to include less esteemed materials, I find it crucial to offer a sustained analysis of how portraiture and nonconforming and variant gender difference have become excluded from categories of greatness. To this end, I’ve sought to explain the aesthetic strategies of said artists for exposing the exclusionary conditions that have kept trans art/artists from recognition, even within feminist art historical traditions.