

# **WE WHO FEEL DIFFERENTLY**

**A Symposium**

Friday May 4, 2012, 4–8 p.m.  
Saturday May 5, 2012, 12–4 p.m.

New Museum  
New York, NY

“We Who Feel Differently: A Symposium” asks both what is at stake and what is made possible by embracing difference as a queer strategy within contemporary art, politics, and society. The two-day symposium is conceived by **Carlos Motta** and **Raegan Truax**, and is moderated by **Ann Pellegrini**. The symposium is organized in conjunction with the exhibition “Museum as Hub: Carlos Motta: We Who Feel Differently” on view at the New Museum from May 16–September 9, 2012.

On May 4, keynote speaker **Esbén Esther Pirelli Benestad** asserts that prevailing male/female gender binaries have silenced many perspectives at great cost to society and proposes exploring new concepts of gender. The panel “Genderfull Lives, Genderfull Politics” includes presentations by **Reina Gossett**, **Tiger Howard Devore**, and **Julian Carter**, and draws upon activist, medical, academic, and artistic discourse to consider trans and intersex experiences and histories. A performance by **Malik Gaines** at the piano concludes the day.

**José Esteban Muñoz**’s keynote talk on May 5 takes Wu Tsang’s film *Wildness* (2012) as a point of departure for thinking about queer brownness as a mode of possibility. The panel “Queer Difference: Memory, Art, and Politics” brings together **Heather Love**, **Mathias Danbolt**, **Emily Roysdon**, and **E. Patrick Johnson** to consider dimensions of queer feeling, memory, collaboration, and art. Presenters from both days then participate in a moderated roundtable, revisiting ideas and engaging in discussion with audience members and each other. Please join us for a reception at Dixon Place, 161A Chrystie Street, after the symposium.

The presentation of this exhibition is made possible through a partnership with the Embassy of Colombia, Washington DC, the Royal Norwegian Consulate General in New York, and the Office of Contemporary Art Norway.

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[back cover]

Carlos Motta, *Our Hand* from “We Who Feel Differently,” 2011. Archival pigment print, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist, Galeria Filomena Soares, Lisbon, and Y Gallery, NY

## Symposium Schedule

### Friday May 4, 4–8 p.m.

- 4:00** Welcome - **Raegan Truax**
- 4:15** “We Who Feel Differently: The Project” - **Carlos Motta**
- 4:35** “We Who Feel Differently: The Symposium” - **Ann Pellegrini**
- 5:00** Keynote Lecture - **Esbén Esther Pirelli Benestad**
- 5:45** Panel: Genderfull Lives, Genderfull Politics  
**Reina Gossett**  
**Tiger Howard Devore**  
**Julian Carter**
- 7:00** Performance - **Malik Gaines**
- 7:45** Closing Remarks - **Ann Pellegrini** and **Raegan Truax**

### Saturday May 5, 12–3:45 p.m.

- 12:00** Welcome and Opening Remarks - **Carlos Motta** and **Raegan Truax**
- 12:10** Moderator Remarks - **Ann Pellegrini**
- 12:15** Keynote Lecture - **José Esteban Muñoz**
- 1:00** Panel: Queering Difference: Memory, Art, and Politics  
**Heather Love**  
**Mathias Danbolt**  
**Emily Roysdon**  
**E. Patrick Johnson**
- 2:30** Moderated Roundtable - **Symposium Presenters and Panelists**
- 3:15** Final Moderator Remarks - **Ann Pellegrini**
- 3:45** Reception at Dixon Place, 161A Chrystie Street (between Rivington and Delancey)

# Friday May 4

## Keynote:

### **Bi, Between, and Beyond: A Multicolored Flash of Gender**

**Esbén Esther Pirelli Benestad**, Professor of Sexology, University of Agder

Within “Western culture,” a dominant binary view of gender has not been without consequences. Gender minorities like transgenders, intersex genders, gender dismissers, personal genders, eunuch genders, and all between and beyond have been ruled out as sick, sinful, or just nonexistent. This also has not been without consequences. Numerous individuals have suffered under the burdens of diagnoses, under the feelings of shame, and under the fear of total rejection. The consequences have spanned from discomfort to tragedy. The “straight world” has, to a minor degree, realized its own agency in this mournful state of affairs. Mournful not only on behalf of the suffering, but also on behalf of society at large, which has missed out on multiple human perspectives that could have added to the total body of human insight. It is time to expire the concept of the gender binary and inspire new concepts of gender that can move our cultures to a less primitive stage in the endeavor to encompass all “colors” of gender.

## Panel: Genderfull Lives, Genderfull Politics

### **Y'all Better Quiet Down! Disruptive Discourses in Movements for Gender Self-Determination**

**Reina Gossett**, Community Organizer

The 1973 Christopher Street Liberation Rally marked one of the first commercial co-options of a gay liberation event. The Christopher Street coordinating committee at the time was comprised mostly of syndicate bar owners such as Mike Umbers, a member of the Gambino mafia, as well as the owner of the gay bar Christopher's End. Umbers's publication of the 1973 parade schedule in his gay publication *Where It's At* successfully ensured a new commoditization of gay pride. Showcased was a lineup of pay-to-play entertainers like Steve Ostrow, owner of the Continental Baths. The route of the march was also directed away from the free public space of Central Park and into West Village bars. In response, the Lesbian Feminist Liberation consolidated enough resources to protest any drag inclusion at the rally as well as hold a counter march—a precursor to the Dyke March—for trans women who could not access meeting space, living space, support, or work from the Gay Activist Alliance.

In the decades following 1973, in order to gain access to well-resourced gay space, trans activists utilized a number of disruptive tactics directed towards gay people with newly consolidated access to power. These included physically fighting to get on stages, destroying the Gay Community

Center's front desk, and leveraging access by informal alliance building. This marked a new aesthetic that pushed against and resisted professional gay spaces and activist entry into nonprofit space. While few trans activists are as recognized as Sylvia Rivera for practicing highly publicized disruptions, little of Sylvia Rivera's activist work from the 1960s through 2002 has been documented through film or audio. In this presentation, I will show a number of rarely seen video and audio recordings of Sylvia Rivera creating a performative politics, including her 1995 interview with filmmaker and activist Randy Wicker.

### **The Preservation of Difference**

**Tiger Howard Devore**, Psychologist and Certified Sex Therapist

Difference is only tolerated by the mainstream if it is closeted. This can seduce us in our wish for good lives and reduced suffering. Trans people that not only pass but also assimilate. Gay people who think that they are winning rights by being just like straight people. Intersex is still thought of as treatable by surgery that “corrects” our different genitals to make us look more male or female. There are still places in the world where gays receive corrective medical treatment—from torture in the form of reconditioning to forced trans surgery. Part of our politics and culture has to be protection for and preservation of our differences.

### **Wrong Bodies and Erotic Connection**

**Julian Carter**, Associate Professor of Critical Studies, California College of the Arts

This talk uses a mixture of experiential material and performance sources to theorize transitional gestures that interpret and intervene in the feeling of difference often described as being “stuck in the wrong body.” The increasing presence of self-identified trans people in the dance world opens a unique space for exploring dysmorphic affect's capacity to propel bodies into socially consequential motion. As all dancers know, transitional gestures are the bodily movements that get us from one place to another. They are also the basic elements of political action: movement is the minimal, necessary strategy for creating change.

### **Gay Marry Me**

**Malik Gaines**, Artist

I will perform a fifteen-minute “medley” of songs, at the piano (Cole Porter, Lerner & Loewe, My Barbarian), offering a counter-counter-narrative to the prevailing counter-narrative on gay marriage.

# Saturday May 5

## Keynote:

### **The Wildness of the Commons**

José Esteban Muñoz, Professor of Performance Studies, NYU

What would a commons that included working-class transgendered immigrants and queer punks and artists look like? Wu Tsang's film *Wildness* (2012) tells the tale of an art project that attempted to catalyze just such a situation. *Wildness* resists many of the protocols of realist documentary. It narrates the story of Los Angeles's Silver Platter, a longstanding Latino gay bar that catered to a local gay community and featured old-school transvestite performers. Tsang and a group of other younger queer artists took over the bar's less-populated Tuesday night slot and hosted a party that featured edgy, queer performance. The documentary tells the story of the Silver Platter through interviews with the bar's proprietors, regular patrons, and those who would become Tuesday night's denizens. The film includes talking heads and performance documentation but also attends to the larger urban ecology that surrounds the space by including adjacent histories of anti-immigrant and queer violence. *Wildness* also features the bar itself as a speaking persona who narrates the ebbs and flows of queer brown life that traverse its walls. My analysis of the film is a launching pad for a more expansive consideration of a mode of queer brownness that is articulated not as a realist or empirical rendering of Latina or migrant experience, but, instead, a theory of brownness as a simultaneously singular/plural sense of the world. Brownness in this analysis is always framed as conterminous with queerness as both a mode of being in the world but also as a critical optic. The paper makes the case that *Wildness* is a cinema of specularity that offers spectators an expanded materialist lens for a new consideration of the striving, conflicts, and flourishing of people, spaces, objects, and feelings that are vitally brown and queer.

## Panel: Queering Difference: Memory, Art, and Politics

### **What Difference Does It Make? Queer Feeling Now**

Heather Love, Author of *Feeling Backwards: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*

In this presentation I will discuss the significance of queer feeling in the context of the contemporary moment of LGBT assimilation in the US. Queerness has long been associated with feeling different, and has been bound up with experiences of alienation and exclusion as well as with willed departures from social norms. I consider the fate of queer feeling in the era of gay marriage, addressing the compulsory happiness on offer in mainstream LGBT politics and media as well as the feelings of those excluded from this new consensus. I will look at a range of responses to youth suicide

as well as violence against queer and transgender people, noting how such incidents disrupt common sense about the facts of queer life across the political spectrum. I suggest that attention to queer history and to the ongoing stigmatization of sexual and gender outsiders can help us to gain critical purchase on the present and to imagine alternatives to an apparently foreclosed future.

### **Queer Preposterousness: We Who Feel Temporally Disoriented**

Mathias Danbolt, Editor of *Trikster - Nordic Queer Journal*

Queer theory is already dead in Norway. The Norwegian media killed it in 2010 when an extensive number of obituaries declared with great satisfaction that this preposterous strain of political practice was finally a thing of the past. The declarations of this theoretical death confused me. Thinking that queer theory was still to be properly introduced and put to use in the Norwegian political debate, the fact that (the words, not content of) "queer theory" hit the mainstream through a series of obituaries made me temporarily disoriented. Drawing on Eric Cazdyn's figure of "the already dead," describing the time warp when a target is killed but is still not dead, "when the future has already come and is still to come," this presentation uses the recent media debate in Norway as a starting point to reflect upon the affective politics of temporal disorientation in queer history. How do we orient ourselves politically when the queer futures we gesture towards are figured as already dead? Can this queer preposterousness make us feel differently about the time and timing of politics and memory?

### **Group Work and Gay Power**

Emily Roysdon, Artist

This presentation will highlight questions I have asked over several years of making projects in, through, and about the queer archive. From editing *LTTR*, publishing *West Street*, thinking about non-monumental public space in *The Piers Untitled, untitled (David Wojnarowicz project)*, and most recently *A Gay Bar Called Everywhere*, which imagined Susan Sontag's whole life happening inside a gay bar. These projects have engaged issues of collaboration, urgency, and identification all the while cultivating a queer history to move forward with.

### **Archiving Queer Memory: Performing SWEET TEA**

E. Patrick Johnson, Carlos Montezuma Professor of Performance Studies and African American Studies, Northwestern University

This presentation will highlight the ways in which performance may be used as a method to archive queer memory. Drawing on the adaptation of the book *SWEET TEA: Black Gay Men of the South*, the author will discuss the process, politics, and ethics of using performance as a mode of preserving queer history.

# Bios

## Julian Carter

Julian Carter is Associate Professor of Critical Studies at California College of the Arts in Oakland and San Francisco, where he also dances and practices bodywork. Carter's academic research explores changing somatic, affective, and discursive formations of normative embodiment. Currently, he is writing about trans-temporality's unfolding in contemporary dance. Other recent essays engage 1950s pulp fiction and the politics of disidentification, the racial imaginary of 1980s gay and lesbian historical writing, and the overlapping theoretical and social boundaries on twentieth-century lesbian identity. Carter sits on the editorial board of the new *Transgender Studies Quarterly* and has taught at Stanford and New York University.

## Mathias Danbolt

Mathias Danbolt is a Norwegian art historian, editor, and queer critic. He is currently working on a PhD project entitled *Touching History: The Affective Economies of Queer Archival Activism* at the University of Bergen, Norway. He is the founding editor of the e-journal *Trikster - Nordic Queer Journal*, and co-editor of the book *Lost and Found: Queering the Archive* (2009). His writings on contemporary art and activism, queer temporalities, and history, have been published in books including *Temporal Drag* (2010) and *Chewing the Scenery* (2011), as well as numerous journals. He lives and works in Copenhagen, Denmark.

## Tiger Howard Devore

Tiger Howard Devore has a long history in activism and as an advocate for sexually different people. He first appeared on television and in media talking about intersex rights and recognition in 1984. In the years since then, Devore has continuously advocated for the acceptance of Gay, Lesbian, Trans, Intersex, and Fetishistic communities, focusing primarily on intersex advocacy as a member of the intersex community. Devore worked with Cheryl Chase prior to Chase's founding of the Intersex Society of North America and has been involved with multiple documentaries for PBS, Discovery, National Geographic, the BBC, and the Oprah Winfrey network, in order to bring awareness about intersex to the general public. In Tiger's private practice as a psychologist and sex therapist, he reaches out to communities of sexually different people.

## Malik Gaines

Malik Gaines is an Assistant Professor of Art at Hunter College. With the group My Barbarian, Gaines has performed and exhibited internationally. My Barbarian's solo exhibitions have included Participant Inc., New York, the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, Human Resources, Los Angeles, and Museo Experimental El Eco, Mexico City. Performance and video works have been presented at MoMA, The Kitchen, New Museum, Whitney Museum, and the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and REDCAT, Los Angeles, the Power Plant, Toronto, De Appel, Amsterdam, El Matadero, Madrid, Galleria Civica, Trento, Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, CCA, Tel Aviv, and others. As a writer and curator, Gaines has focused on the politics of representation. He has organized exhibitions, performances, and programs independently and for LAXART, Los Angeles, where he is Curator-At-Large. Gaines holds a PhD in Performance Studies from UCLA.

## Reina Gossett

Reina Gossett is a trans activist living in Fort Greene, Brooklyn. Currently, Gossett works at the Sylvia Rivera Law Project as Director of Membership and was formerly director of the Welfare Organizing Project at Queers for Economic Justice as well as a Soros Justice Fellow on staff at Critical Resistance. She is a contributing writer for *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment & the Prison Industrial Complex* and believes imagination and creativity are vital for creating strong social movements for self-determination and liberation.

## E. Patrick Johnson

E. Patrick Johnson has published widely in the areas of race, class and gender, and performance. His first book, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Duke University Press, 2003) which dealt with cultural, social, and political battles over origin, ownership, circulation, and performance, won several awards. In addition to his published work, Johnson is also a performing artist. He toured his one-man show, *Strange Fruit*, around the country between 1999 and 2004. He is currently touring *Pouring Tea: Black Gay Men of the South Tell Their Tales*, a solo performance based on the narratives in his book *SWEET TEA*. He is additionally working on an anthology of black queer performance texts and researching queer sexuality and performance in the black church.

## Heather Love

Heather Love is the R. Jean Brownlee Term Associate Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, where she teaches courses in gender studies, queer theory, modernism, film, disability studies, sociology, literature, and critical

# Bios cont'd

theory. She is the author of *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* and recently edited a special issue of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* on the scholarship and legacy of Gayle Rubin. She is currently working on a book manuscript on Erving Goffman, *The Stigma Archive*.

## Carlos Motta

Carlos Motta is a multidisciplinary artist whose work draws upon political history in an attempt to create counter narratives that recognize the inclusion of suppressed histories, communities, and identities. Motta's work has been presented internationally at the New Museum, Guggenheim Museum, New York, P.S.1., Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, Museo de Arte del Banco de la República, Bogotá, Museu de Serralves, Porto, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens, and Hebbel am Ufer, Berlin, among others. He was a Guggenheim Foundation Fellow in 2008 and a Creative Capital Grantee in 2012. Motta is part of the faculty at Parsons the New School for Design, New York, and Milton Avery Graduate School of Arts at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson.

## José Esteban Muñoz

José Esteban Muñoz is a Professor of Performance Studies at Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. He teaches courses in comparative ethnic studies, queer theory, Marxism, and the history of performance art. He is the author of *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999), *Cruising Utopia: The Here and Now of Queer Futurity* (2009), and the forthcoming *The Sense of Brown*. His edited and co-edited collections include the volumes *Pop Out: Queer Warhol* (1996), *Everynight Life: Culture and Dance in Latin/o America* (1997), and special issues of the journals of *Social Text* ("Queer Transexions of Race, Gender, Nation," 1997, and "What's Queer About Queer About Queer Studies Now," 2005) and *Women and Performance* ("Queer Acts," 1996, and "Between Psychoanalysis and Affect: A Public Feelings Project," 2009). He co-edits the book series "Sexual Cultures" for NYU Press with Ann Pellegrini.

## Ann Pellegrini

Ann Pellegrini is Associate Professor of Performance Studies and Religious Studies at New York University, where she also directs NYU's Center for the

Study of Gender and Sexuality. She is the author of *Performance Anxieties: Staging Psychoanalysis, Staging Race* (Routledge, 1997); co-author, with Janet R. Jakobsen, of *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance* (NYU Press, 2003; Beacon Press, 2004); co-editor, with Daniel Boyarin and Daniel Itzkovitz, of *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question* (Columbia University Press, 2003); and co-editor, also with Jakobsen, of *Secularisms* (Duke University Press, 2008). She is currently completing a new book on the performance and politics of religious feelings.

## Esben Esther Pirelli Benestad

Esben Esther Pirelli Benestad is a queer and trans activist, a medical doctor, pharmatherapist, and Associate Professor of Sexology at the University of Agder in Southern Norway. A proud father of two, Esben Esther was featured in the 2002 film *All About My Father*, created by Pirelli's son. The film won the Teddy Award in Berlin. Named Esben, a typical Norwegian male name, and Esther, a typical female name, Esben Esther Pirelli Benestad sees no point in being a man or a woman and celebrates trans gender in the double name.

## Emily Roysdon

Emily Roysdon is a New York- and Stockholm-based artist and writer. She completed the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program in 2001 and holds an MFA from UCLA. Her concept "Ecstatic Resistance," regarding the impossible and imaginary in politics, was introduced in simultaneous shows at Grand Arts in Kansas City and X Initiative in New York. She is the editor and co-founder of the queer feminist journal and artist collective, *LTTR*, and a contributing member of the band MEN. Roysdon's work has been shown at the 2010 Whitney Biennial, "Greater New York" at P.S.1, Manifesta 8, Bucharest Biennial 4, Participant Inc., New York, and Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, amongst others.

## Raegan Truax

Raegan Truax is a performance artist who recently relocated from New York City to the Bay Area to pursue a PhD at Stanford University, where she is researching resilience as an embodied performance while creating a dramaturgy of what she terms the misbehaving body. A former performance poet and singer/songwriter, Truax primarily creates durational performance pieces and participatory choreographic scores and installations. She holds a BA in Creative Writing from Colorado College, an MA in Humanities and Social Thought with a concentration in Gender Politics from John W. Draper Interdisciplinary Program at NYU, and an MA in Performance Studies from NYU. She was the recipient of the Leigh George Odom Memorial Award for Distinguished Master's Student from NYU's Department of Performance Studies.

