

Artists:
River Bullock
Tina Cady
Anna Campbell
Jill H. Casid
Portia Danis
Jay Ludden
Madsen Minax
Ruthie Rolfsmeyer
Sylvie Rosenthal

Curated by
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Curatorial Lab Space
Department of Art History
Conrad A. Elvehjem Building
University of Wisconsin-Madison

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Our House!!

Unsettling the Domestic, Queering the Spaces of Home

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“Whose House? Our House!” This was a rallying cry at the Wisconsin Capital during protests of Scott Walker’s efforts to strip union rights in our state during the winter of 2011. We took over the capital building – a place which is not defined as a domestic space – and treated it as a house where we ate, slept, and sang together, building our family through a common cause. This affective experience of belonging in a public space, of being “at home” in a place that was never meant to house us, points to both a comforting affiliation with a place and a group, as well as a discomfiting displacement. While we built our home at the Capital, we did not quite belong.

This curatorial project began with the queer recitation and exclamation of “Our House!” to explore possibilities for taking, claiming and opening up spaces and places for the intimate connections that exceed normative logics of family and home. Here, the *queer* performs as an activity that both homes and un-homes, that familiarizes and de-familiarizes, and radically disrupts the home as conventional site of hetero-domesticity. Through their radical occupation, the bodies and objects in this exhibition might estrange the familiar and familial space of home that is both alien and actively hostile in displacing queer subjects, but they might also transform this bad home, this un-homely space of alienation, into a site of something familiar-yet-different.

“Our House!” seeks to generate a space of home rendered alternatively by forging new, creatively and affectively bonded domestic arrangements. The project continues with the double exclamation following its title to indicate both the second iteration of the exhibition and signal the queer potential of re-iteration that might project something beyond mere fantasy.

With hopes for this project that is also a projection,
I begin again with the repetition of a wish...

“There’s no place like home, there’s no place like home,
there’s no place like home...”

Dorothy’s familiar chant from *The Wizard of Oz* reminds us that iterations and re-iterations of hopes and dreams might materialize something in the world. While Dorothy hoped to find “a place where there isn’t any trouble,” she learned that the utopian “no place” of home is not only one about which she fantasized, but one that she also created.

Not a safe space without trouble, Oz was a home away from home – alienating, disorienting, and unsettling – that might project a different notion of safe space as one in which we find home precisely where we are out of place. And, I would insist, those who find homes out of place or out of line are not only the queer-identified friends of Dorothy, but those who locate the queer possibilities in getting lost.

Taking up queer concepts of space as a site of critical inquiry, this exhibition asks how the domestic might be unsettled and queered through spatial occupation by bodies and objects that radically displace and transform the master’s tools and the master’s house. Rather than a safe space *from*, queering the domestic might mean making a safe space *for* many things: for uneasiness and surprise, for unsettlement and transformation, even for learning to bear the difficult feelings and discomfort around a home that might not be for us, but to which we return and perhaps alter nonetheless.

How can we inhabit the intimate spaces of home, unsettled and re-imagined in order to create something like safe space? How might private intimacies and public experiences exist at once through the queering of home? What might these alternative domesticities and safe spaces look and feel like? What are they *for*?

Exploring possibilities for settling and unsettling home, I am thinking with queer scholar Sarah Ahmed, who takes up the concept of “orientation” and raises questions how we inhabit space, how we relate to objects and others, how we find our way, and how we come to “feel at home.”

And yet, we might learn how we occupy space as home precisely when we leave it behind. Problems of orientation involve the lived experiences of queerness and migration, processes of disorientation and negotiations between the familiar and unfamiliar. As Ahmed shows through a consideration of orientation objects or “homing devices,” homemaking involves bodies and objects and not just the spaces and places in which they dwell. Bodies do not simply inhabit spaces that are exterior to them, but are shaped by their dwellings, as places or landscapes might form unfamiliar “impressions” that reshape its surfaces.

Imagining queer methods of occupying space, I am also thinking about the queer potentials of landscape. Putting landscape into play as a verb, Jill Casid pushes its meaning beyond a passive noun that can be possessed to show how the matter of both bodies and the land become active and work in the realm of the performative. The utopian potential of queer aesthetic wish-landscapes might also be considered, as Casid writes, a “material process involved in making or ‘worlding’ the ‘worlds’ they might otherwise seem merely to depict.” Not mere representation, landscapes work in the realm of the real and the political. Casid’s queer unsettling of landscape also allows me to imagine how home might be transformed from a place to a feeling, an affectual yearning as catalyst for “a homemaking that does not settle.”

Works Cited:

Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006):7-9

Jill Casid, “Epilogue: Landscape in, around, and under the Performative,” *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 21.1 (2011): 101

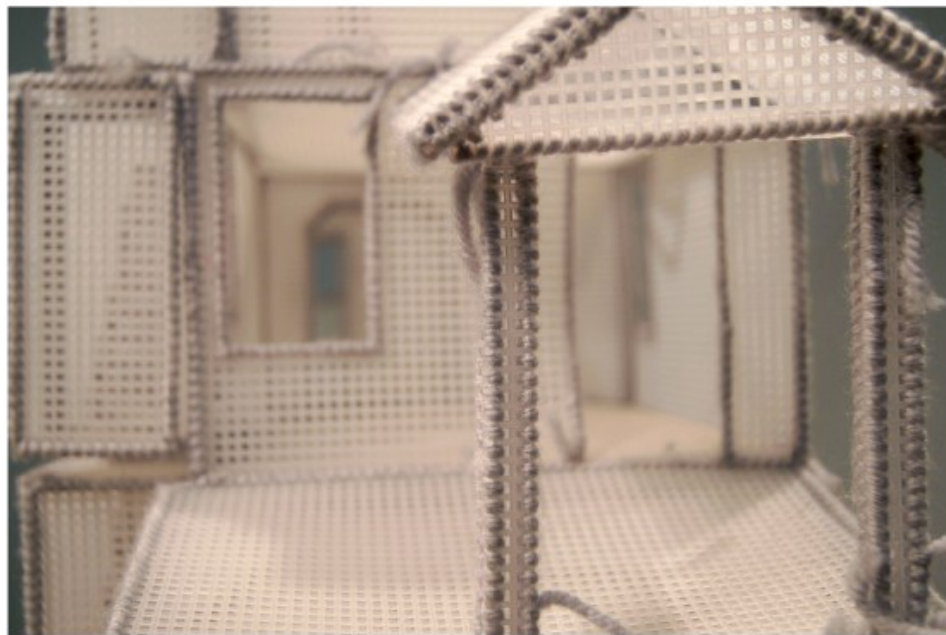
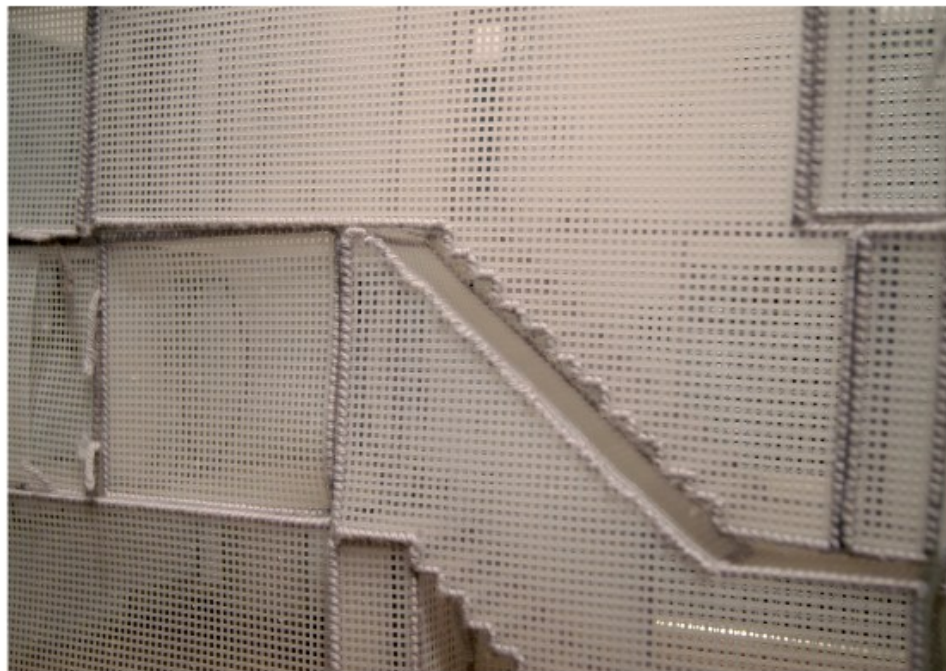
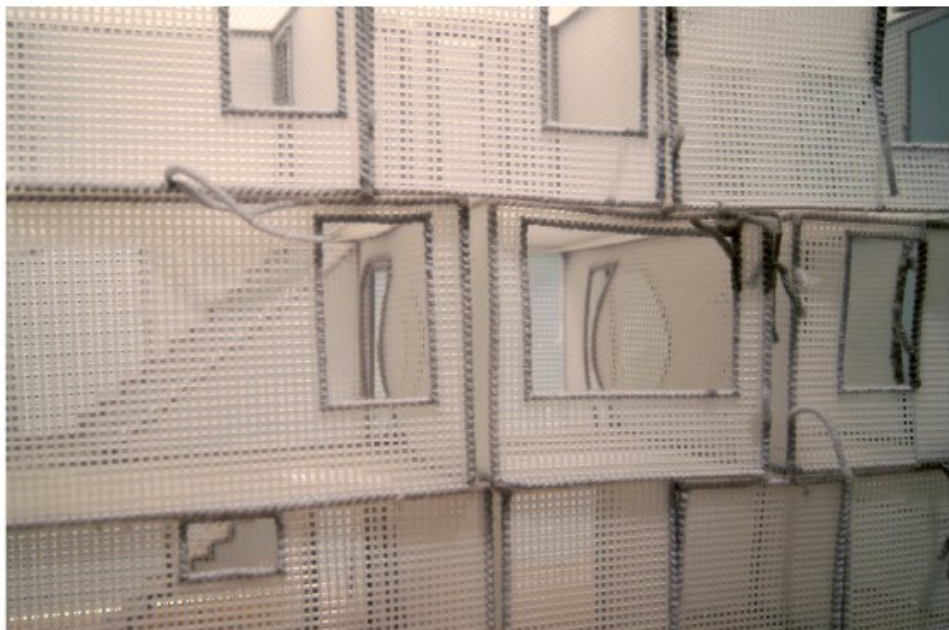
Jill Casid, *Sowing Empires: Landscape and Colonization*. (University of Minnesota Press, 2004)

This project also re-imagines the private spaces of home as potential sites of shared intimacy, of public feelings and mutual experiences of getting lost and returning to home in ways that might generate the feelings of freedom that come with the sense that one belongs. It is my hope that this exhibition will also function as a fluctuating and unstable queer location or wish-scape beyond mere place-setting, imaging instead a form of aesthetic practice that works as its own space-making activity. The exhibition invites a hopeful reimagining and radical unsettling of the domestic by opening a queer time and space in which to reclaim the seemingly stable matter and aesthetic supports of the spaces we traverse and the places we live, a home in which we can exclaim, once again, “Our House!!”



Thanks to all the featured artists, who helped make my dream of this exhibition a reality, a safe space for taking risks and learning to bear, including all the challenges of making home in an old gift shop of the Chazen Museum.

Lex Morgan Lancaster, 2013



Your House/ Anna Campbell/ plastic canvas, acrylic yarn, tv tray/ 2011-2013

Jill H. Casid, *On a Mattress Cover*, 2013



Jill H. Casid, "Lawrence v Texas" from *On a Mattress Cover*, 2013, 10 5.5 x 10 inch glass slides containing 7 original SX-70 Polaroids, one fragment of a mattress cover, and text printed on silk organza displayed on stainless steel shelving.

You asked me to explain what happened when you and I went to the department store around the corner from what was home that summer to find a mattress cover for the bed. I just keep replaying what remains of the scene at the counter in the linens department in my head, re-ordering the elements of that moment when she turned, what lead up to it, what happened afterwards like specimen slides that refuse to stay put. I keep thinking about how Sigmund Freud went from developing a new method for staining microscope samples of nerve tissue to the investigation of what symptoms would appear through talk on that couch. Pressed up against the limits of understanding, the scene in line at the linens department shifts under the glass of its perspectives—the crossing of what I imagine it might be like in your position (and I am no more certain of how it feels from mine), from hers, from somewhere outside the immediate dynamics of the encounter and yet also waiting to pay, as a witness, an injured party, an analyst, as if the details and material stuff of daily life were the dossier for a case study, the evidence from a crime scene, a legal case, the charged and anxious terrain of seepages and stains to be kept at bay, the keepsake residue of a hot and bothered afternoon. What stands out most for me is that even though you didn't recognize all the phrases she used, you felt their sting anyway. One word in particular reverberates: the charge of "indecent" and its echo of outcries over "indecent exposure."

You know that I was asked to write a response to the question "Does public sex matter?" for *Petite Mort: Recollections of a Queer Public*. The little blueprint of a book of drawings and collected commentary is on your shelf. In it you've read how the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Lawrence v. Texas* decriminalized sodomy but only by extending equal protection not so much to sex whether in private or public but to the private exercise of "enduring personal bonds." Buying a mattress cover might seem the perfect symptom of internalized shame in this moment in which sex for its own sake and a politics of sexual freedom would appear to have given way to the evacuation of the street in a flight to take cover under the domestic refuge of home-making, the compulsory act of a domesticated queerness, the tidy housekeeping of sex that doesn't just stay home and clean up after itself but anticipates any potential leakage, prophylactically encasing itself in the white linens of assimilation. But what trips you up may well be that the question of whether public sex matters collides with the problem of what constitutes an affront to public decency on a mattress cover that doesn't hide or shield but rather serves as the projection screen and contact sheet that exposes how the borders of public and private are not only permeable but no boundary resolves the soaking bleed of desire and fear around what sex is or should be. You weren't kissing me; you weren't even holding my hand. Perhaps it was in the crackling atmosphere, the electricity of your body, the air of anticipation about what you would do with me on that mattress cover not impermeable but "ultra-breathable."

The Year I Broke My Voice, is a film project built from interpretations and reenactments of three coming of age films: *The Outsiders* (1983), *Stand By Me* (1986), and *The Year My Voice Broke* (1987), and that re-approaches the master narrative of childhood's transition into adulthood.

This work positions a group of age and gender ambiguous characters in a vacant and post-industrial landscape, from which they must forge relationships amongst one another. Over the span of a day misadventures such as cheating card games, attempts at hypnotism, haircuts by the blade of a pocket knife, and nighttime spooning allow the characters to attempt knowing one another.



***The Year I Broke My Voice*, 2012.**
HD video, 47 minutes
Madsen Minax

<http://brokevoicefilm.com>



Tina Cady

A Safe Distance

Performance with Cody Huston, Artist's Bedroom

2013

A Safe Distance is a performance installation that looks at how technology both can keep us connected to the people in our lives while at the same time, creates a barrier to true intimacy. We see families texting each other at the dinner table, and co-workers emailing one another all the while sitting in conjoined offices, keeping themselves emotionally isolated by the very devices that were originally developed to keep us connected through distance and bring us closer together. In this work, my partner, Cody, and I Skype one another while maintaining physical contact in our bedroom, recreated in the gallery space. By talking about things of an imitate nature through the mediation of technology, I hope to examine our need for intimacy, yet our desire to protect our fragile emotional core.





This installation piece invites the viewer to question the notion of gender and the feminine/masculine dichotomy. The three separate monitors convey images of feminine and masculine identities that are constantly switching so that the boundaries between the gender roles are blurred. The video comments on transgender struggles with society's categorization of male or female based on body type and presentation. This piece shows that people can be either male or female, both male and female, or neither.

Portia Danis

Dysmorphia

2011

You Have Been Toilet Trained

Lex Lancaster

2012-2013

sticker campaign

When I walk into a public women's restroom, I never know what kind of encounter to expect. Sometimes when I exit as another woman is entering, she glances at the sign on the door, then glances back at me, trying to reconcile the disparity between my body and that of the skirted black figure on the sign. Sometimes she waits until I leave before she decides to go in.

When women do talk to me, "Excuse me sir, this is the lady's room" is the most common phrase I hear. Depending on my mood, I might respond, "excuse me?" in a high pitched voice to reassure them; or I retort, "I might not be a lady, but I have a vagina," or "then what are you doing here?" if I'm feeling feisty.

The first time I felt afraid when entering a public restroom, I was 19, driving through Tennessee on my way home from college. Heading into the women's room at a gas station, a large trucker in camouflage grunted at me from behind, "wrong room, son." I froze. I kept walking and hid in a stall of the men's room until he left. Now, I often pass and use men's rooms when traveling, remembering to lift the seat back up.

I understand that I am a six-foot tall person with short hair wearing men's clothes. When people apologize for mistaking me for a man, I tell them I take it as a compliment. This is not a mistake, it's the look I'm going for. What I don't understand is why they are afraid. What makes me so dangerous? Why is my presence perceived as *unsafe* in the space of public women's restrooms?

I made these stickers to ask that others imagine the space of the public restroom as one that could also be a safe space, one where our bodily functions are no longer policed. This is my way of claiming the public spaces that coerce us into picking a single gender, and punish some of us for choosing, every day.



Ruthie Rolfsmeyer, *Clean*, 2013

Sharpie on rubber gloves

In the Victorian era, it was common to send a lock of hair to the one you love. Women would collect hair from brushes and weave it into delicate jewelry, glue it to post cards, and display it in lockets. A woman's hair held her power, her sexual potency.

Hair endures as a vehicle for self-expression. We use it to flaunt a little piece of our identity, and it holds our life stories in its fibers and follicles.

But identity is not merely a surface stain.

We have now entered the 1950s era of plastic and chemical cleaning supplies, the domestic realm of sanitation. Sexuality is not something to be flaunted. Just keep up with the Jones' and scrub, scrape, erase any "abnormalities."

What of this history of suppression and "cleanliness" persists today? How do queer women—women whose bodies and desires do not fit with dominant norms of gender, sexuality, and beauty—experience these imperatives to sterilize our lives and selves for public consumption, coercions that continue to leak into our domestic lives and bedrooms? How might we resist the compulsions to wipe our lives clean?



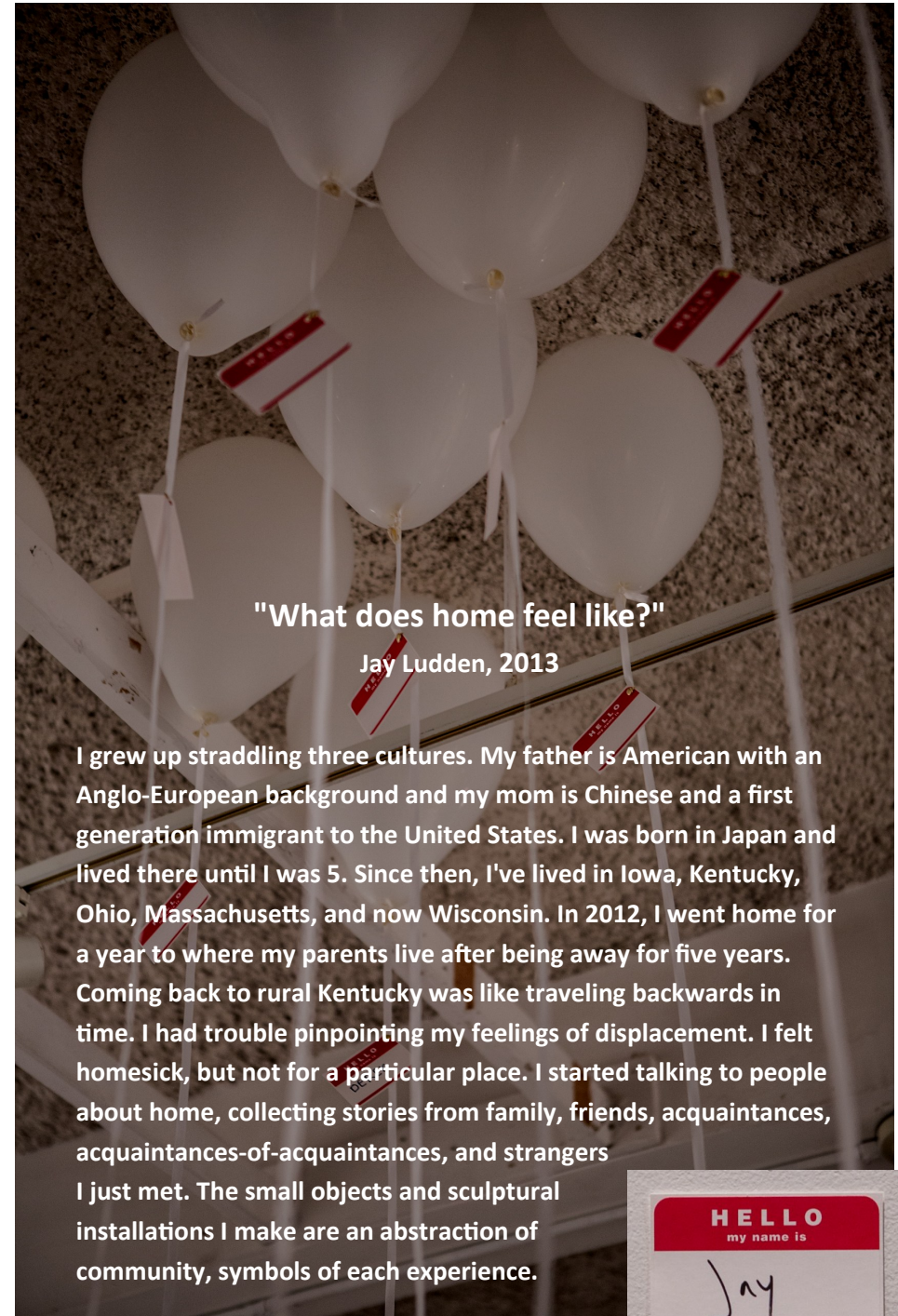
Sylvie Rosenthal,

The Biggest House in the World

2008



Poplar, mahogany, milk paint
16"l x 12"w x 10"h



"What does home feel like?"

Jay Ludden, 2013

I grew up straddling three cultures. My father is American with an Anglo-European background and my mom is Chinese and a first generation immigrant to the United States. I was born in Japan and lived there until I was 5. Since then, I've lived in Iowa, Kentucky, Ohio, Massachusetts, and now Wisconsin. In 2012, I went home for a year to where my parents live after being away for five years. Coming back to rural Kentucky was like traveling backwards in time. I had trouble pinpointing my feelings of displacement. I felt homesick, but not for a particular place. I started talking to people about home, collecting stories from family, friends, acquaintances, acquaintances-of-acquaintances, and strangers I just met. The small objects and sculptural installations I make are an abstraction of community, symbols of each experience.



BUOYS & ABUELAS'.

I am not without you, Gloria Becky Lilian Willola Lucy Johnny Selena Helen Helen Helen Scott Ivy Barney Martha David Gaia Adrian Pheonx Dolores Laura Allison August Augusto Gus Clio Janette Guinevere Rebecca Charles Mabel Anna Ana Maria Maria Maria Marcela Jill Kate Becky Bob Anu Earth Shanti Willow Asher Kim Eric Claire Priya Dory Lindsay Tamar Chioma Nicky Nicki Lia Leah Sylvie Anna Treothe David Joella Ronnie Alex Ute Daniella Marcel Dom Oliver Luke Ajay Nathan Robin Eric Juan Ty Tyson Scott Elysia Alicia Karen Karren Abraham Isaac Isaac Isaiah Miles John-Michael Jennifer Jenifer Jenn Kristi Henry Bob Raven Mike Herb Rita Charles Ang-Thuy Anne Robin Gilda Sara Steve Bradford Donato Jovan Fumie Harold Frances Jack Jackson Jessie Kelly Skip Camille Jon John Kelly Kevin Zaire Meesha Dino Lex Tricia Lucy Mary Mayuko Misty Nancy Nadia Nora Olive Olive Rachael Erin Rae Ray Shana Shemena Jeannine Stanley Donna Jordyn Tanya Matt Diletta Tim Danae Jean Jean Gene Nancy Rachel Margaret Cameron Mike Sheryl Eboni Taylor Leslie Jena Patricia Ellen Andy Mark Ruby Guillermo Mary Cat Connie Aliza Jennifer Ashley Claire Bill Steve Emma Joella Jackson Mayuko Nadia Nora Ali Ollie Renee Shana Shemena Violeta and you.

River Bullock, 2013.