




A Collaborative  
Curatorial Project  
by Lex Lancaster  
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# Our House!

Portraiture  
and the  
Queering  
of  
Home



# Our House!

## Portraiture and the Queering of Home

“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 exhibition’s queer re-iteration and exclamation of “Our House!” explores portraiture both as a crucial mode of minoritarian self-representation and as active maker of meaning and space, specifically the domestic spaces we call home. These portraits, hanging (out) together within an intimate space that is both public and reminiscent of a private house, operate as ways of taking and claiming space, of making bodies present, and of occupying the space with and for these bodies. At the same time, they point to the ways in which queerness opens 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, these portraits might estrange the familiar and familial space of home that is both alien and actively hostile in displacing queer subjects and bodies, but they 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 as a playground for forging new, creative, and affectively bonded domestic arrangements.

In utilizing the activating exclamation in “Our House!” I am thinking with Jill Casid’s *The Imperative Mood*, in which she advocates for working with the powerful feelings sparked by and inherent in the emphatic, the animating, volatizing exclamation of practice in the imperative mood. Asking how we might move away from the commanding orders of the state and toward counter-practices that engage the powers of imaging and affect, the “schoolmistress” Casid performatively teaches us how queer potentialities exist in the counter-praxis of language and objects that promise to displace and ultimately transform the master’s tools and orders (and, I might add, the master’s house).

Thinking with my teacher (Casid) and learning how I might work with what would seem to be the given – the imperative orders, the official histories – in ways that re-animate the past for a better future, I am haunted by the failures and unrealized promises of what might be “safe space.” My melancholic longing, my homesickness, for an alternative domesticity encompasses not only the desire for a home built with and through the affective ties that forge unconventional domestic arrangements, but more crucially the feelings of freedom in safety that come with the sense that one belongs.

And yet, Professor Casid’s gesture toward and imperative to “Domesticate. Domesticate radically and for freedom,” to carve an opening in space and time (however strange or small) also opens a queer time and space for me to re-imagine and re-claim the seemingly stable matter and aesthetic supports of the spaces we traverse and the places we live.

This exhibition is my hopeful re-imagining of the domestic through the matter of portraiture, not the stable content lining the walls of the master’s house, but the radically re-charged and queerly volatile practice of being and knowing that opens a time and space, a home in the here and now, in which we can practice the imperative mood and exclaim, “Our House!”

-Lex Lancaster



# Embodying (trans)masculinities

Photography by Skyler Lawton  
Video by Morganita Surrealista  
in collaboration with Cole Rizki



A

February 10, 2010

Masculinity is not a concept I've ever really given much thought to. Many years ago I probably would have described it as simply "being a man". But what does it mean to "be a man"? Who am I to even begin trying to define what constitutes a man in the first place? Who even says the terms 'masculine' or 'masculinity' are solely reserved to *men*?

I think it's up to a person to decide what ultimately defines masculinity. For me, it can be anything. And I don't believe anymore that masculinity is something reserved for describing males (be they cis- or transgendered) either. To be honest, I still can't define specifically what "masculinity" is to me.

I can define my masculinity easily in the common societal context of what "masculinity" is: I don't wear make-up though I'm expected to, I hide my breasts because I think they look better in clothes that way, I generally walk with my head up and with a reasonable amount of confidence – especially when navigating areas unfamiliar to me, I don't shave my body hair ... I could go on.

To define it myself: it's being me. For instance, I love wearing nail polish and I love the color pink. These are my masculinities too.

Gender performative. But I understand how important it can be to "get things right" – I hate that I have an assumed gender other than what I perceive myself as. It's very hard to be non-normative in a very rigid binary system. I'm not 'masculine' enough to be male, and not 'feminine' enough to be female. So?

My gender is genderqueer. I am both female and male, and I am simultaneously neither. I am who I am ... I just wish non-normative gender identities were a standard thing in society, and that people understood what it means to not be cisgendered.

If I could pick one word to express my gender, it would be: indefinable.

I picked this place to take these pictures because Sage is where I go to practice my Horn. For about 40 minutes or so, it's *my space*. Yeah, I have my residential room too, which is also my space I guess, but this is a place where I truly have to be with myself. There are too many distractions in my room. I sit here, and I do music. Playing Horn is very therapeutic to me – sometimes I may be hard on myself, especially if I'm having an especially lousy practice session, but it's still a space where I can shut out the outside world reasonably well, and focus on something I love doing. I love music. It has been a part of me for most of my lifetime. I really don't know where I'd be right now had I decided to quit playing when I was younger. Perhaps this space is not something exclusively tied with how I feel or perceive myself in terms of gender identity, but it is important to me to have a space where I can not only tune out all the crap I've dealt with on a particular day, but also where I can sit and concentrate on something that is very important to me.



## A

I also took the approach of this conceptually – I like that for the most part, the practice rooms of Sage are ambiguous in the way they look – pretty much a room with blank walls, minus the piano in there. I asked that the framing of the photos intentionally left out the piano. Ultimately, *music* is a space where I feel affirmed, and this was the best way of expressing that through the photographic medium. I play music and I also listen to music. This may sound cheesy as hell, but music in general is what I feel gives me some purpose for being here. To sit and connect with my Horn or to sit and just listen to a great song are things that are very important to me and things that I feel a deep connection with. Both playing and listening to music is intrinsically satisfying for me.

In short, this location suits me best.

It's interesting to be here [Smith College], because in a way I “forget” about my gender – which is pretty nice, because ultimately I want to be recognized for the person I am. I'd prefer to be genderless and this is a place where I nearly feel that way. It's weird though, because this is a “women's” college (whatever that means). There are women who are more ‘masculine’ than me, and there are men here who are probably more ‘feminine’ than me. To be honest, I've never felt too worried about or stifled in my gender expression here, and I think it's great. What I worry about though, is the anonymous, underlying community who believes transpeople or even people such as myself who are gender variant should not have a presence here, or that we don't belong here. I have no idea how large that community is, but it was made apparent with those transphobic posts made on the *Daily Jolt* a couple of years ago. Most of the time I don't give it a second thought, but who knows what the person you encounter in class, at the CC, in the bathroom or whatever thinks. Perhaps that person is one of those who are transphobic.

But when do you stop worrying? Life outside of “the bubble” is much the same but with actual physical violence. So yeah, I ultimately feel fairly safe here, especially considering that I know I live in a world that, for the most part, doesn't accept who I am. This school has a great population of people who either support those who are transgendered or gender variant or people who just don't give a shit. To be honest I still feel affirmed with those who are ambivalent. I guess I'm an optimist.



## Dutcher

Febraury 11, 2010

Masculinity is felt, understood, and expressed in as many different ways as there are people. I feel that masculinity is relating or considering any physicality/feeling as any semblance of “maleness,” while embracing the fact that “maleness” is an unstable, changing element.

My masculinity is dominant, but not governing. It threatens my father with its cool temper and respect. It's into football and wears a skirt in matches on the tennis court. It's the only thing I remember from my childhood.

Gender is a self-understanding, an impossible thing to write about when believing it's limitless.

My gender is genderqueer, with a dash of FTWTF? I know I am in a state of transition, but where I am going and how fast I get there is of no concern to me. I'm not in a rush to define how I feel and identify, because it will undoubtedly be different tomorrow... I'm often in the wrong bathroom.

If I could pick one word to express my gender, it would be: impending.

I picked this place to take these pictures because:

The shower is where I'm faced with physical reality. I alternate between feelings of dysphoria and ambivalence, but never quite *comfort*. It's an important part of my day, in terms of my mood and outlook.

I couldn't be me, today, anywhere else. Smith College is not perfect, by any means, especially to the trans community. However, gender identity consciousness and awareness on campus, though levels are not *incredibly high*, are still *present*. Hundreds of other campuses could not say the same.





## **Anna**

February 15, 2010

Masculinity is to me, parallel to male performance as per the social norm. I wouldn't mind adjusting that mind set at some point, but I'm focused on other things at the moment.

My masculinity is indulgent. I admire classically masculine tidbits so I adopt them sometimes. I am shy about my masculinity because it's something I admire in others and want so badly for myself that I can hardly believe when I realize it's there.

I don't know what gender is, and I don't care right now. My gender is such a tiny part of my identity that I rarely think about it. I am no more one gender than I am Jewish or sparkly or real or shy. I guess my performance and psychological place is a mixture of covering and revealing and unexpectedness. Thrillingly, I am not confused and I am comfortable. I almost declined to answer this question because it is so inapplicable to me, but for the purposes of this project, there you have it.

If I could pick one word to express my gender, it would be: Anna

I picked this place to take these pictures because I always bike here.

My gender expression is my being me. I have always done my own thing, but Smith [College] allows me to really run with it. I've come to realize, though, the ability to run with it all comes from within, accepting oneself, and growing up, so I don't know how much Smith has to do with it.

I'll take this opportunity to say I'm very flattered to be a part of this project. My inclusion represents my passing as queer, or whatever (as language restricts me here), something which I have wavered about. Often I find this community to be cold, unaccepting, intimidating. But I think I perceive that because we all have our insecurities. I don't think humans are inherently badly intentioned or mean-spirited. Anything I perceive as negative is just a manifestation of someone's insecurities which have yet to be deconstructed. This community is slowly warming up, only after a lot of work on my own insecurities. We're all coming from different places. Let's try to remember that and be understanding, because I just want to get along and connect with you. I don't want to judge you and I'm not going to bullshit you. If you want to know something about me, ask me, experience it firsthand. I hate this questionnaire because in it there are so many opportunities for me to be misunderstood. I'd rather be sitting here under these photos, answering your questions and thanking you for caring about what I have to say.

## Sophia



Masculinity is an aesthetic, a category, a comment term used for descriptive purposes. My masculinity is about aesthetics. It is about my public persona and the expression I give off. It is about power and strength. Personally it is about a long torso and skinny legs. It's about getting others to see me the way I want to see myself. If to show such things or to have such an existence is considered masculinity then so be it.

Gender is chaos and control. Gender is a complicated term. Gender itself is multidimensional. It is a spectrum of appearances and characters. Such a spectrum is easier to understand and present by using its extremes and averages. The extreme categories used for classification of gender became common knowledge and therefore hold power in our society. They hold cultural power and functional power, while, at the same time, giving power to the groups they define. They become the standards that many strive for. There is masculinity at one end and femininity at the other. All other genders are considered non-standard or deviant to society.

My gender is Female, Kinsey 5, Dyke Top likely to change over the next 10 years.

If I could pick one word to express my gender, it would be non-standard or healthy.

I picked this place to take these pictures because of the light? I am not sure. I liked the starkness and single color spectrum.





**Ethan**

February 15, 2010

To be completely honest, gender and masculinity are not questions that I focus on. In fact, more often than not, I try to avoid focusing on them. I honestly don't have an answer to what I consider either masculinity or gender to be. Gender and masculinity will vary from person to person just as much as personalities, interests, and preferences. In my mind trying to define gender or masculinity is comparable to trying to define a student or an athlete. Students vary drastically; there is no one type of student, and there isn't one type of athlete. Likewise, there isn't one way for someone to express his or her intellectualism or athleticism. For some it is an essential part of their being, for other it is a meaningless adjective. Regardless of the adjectives, it all goes back to the person, and that is what I think is most important.

For me gender and masculinity are just adjectives that other people use to establish distinction. Instead of focusing on defining gender or masculinity I concentrate on trying to be myself and trying to feel comfortable with myself. I don't try to embody any form of alternative masculinity or any stereotype of masculinity. Instead I do what makes me happy and project who I feel I am. If this fits into someone's definition of male or masculine, then so be it. In terms of general conceptions, I identify with male because that's where I find myself more comfortable.

However, like most others, I hope gender is not the first thing that people think of, and it's not the first thing I want to project. I want people to get to know me without measuring me against their expectations of gender or masculinity. Trying to conform to any particular conception of gender has not shaped me.

More than anything else academics and sports along with friends, parents, and travel have made me who I am. Gender has had little to do with shaping me, perhaps even less than other people. My life has not been about trying to fit into a stereotype or trying to avoid them, rather it has been about trying to figure out who I am, what my morals are, how to have fun and how to laugh as often as possible. Identifying as male has only helped me find myself and feel comfortable, but it does not define me.

The most I can hope for is to have people get to know me as a person without having ideas of what masculinity *should* be in and comparing me to that ideal. That's why I avoid thinking about how I define masculinity or gender; if I do, then I will only add to the comparison that prevents people from truly getting to know each other.



## Ollie

February 15, 2010

Masculinity is a social construct that one must acknowledge especially if it one is going to make it an active part of their identity. It is nothing and it is everything.

My masculinity is faggy! I came to the realization this year that I think I would be the best “woman” I could be if I were “male.” So I try and embrace that identity in my masculinity. Hence, masculinity is the color magenta and tight jeans, as well as the gym. It is my sometimes high pitched laugh, and it definitely has eye liner in there somewhere. I think that navigating the gray areas of masculinity are what I like best as a gender variant person. I find comfort in my masculinity, and hold fast to it, especially as someone who does not plan on transitioning or identifying solely as a male. It seems almost harder to claim my masculinity under such an identity.

Gender is another social construct! And a wonderful toy...

My gender is super duper queer...currently genderqueer to give it a simple little label. It also changes by the day of the week or the hour of the day. Something I think too much about it, and sometimes too little. Gender is the controller of too many of my thoughts and the freedom of many others. An infiltrating factor into all parts of who I am (for better or worse).

If I could pick one word to express my gender, it would be: Mercuric

I picked this place to take these pictures because I recently had a long conversation with friends about using bathrooms, what they mean to us, and what they don't mean. I think bathrooms draw attention to gender in not so positive ways for a lot of people—and I wanted to liberate myself from that karma. I wanted to show that the bathroom, although it is a place of legitimate fear and danger—can be a liberating place to fuck with your gender. It was also simply a place that forced me to think about my gender for better or for worse, which also made it seem appropriate.



I honestly [decided to attend] Smith College *because* of my gender. When I was questioning my gender identity a friend once asked, “Well if you might be a man, wouldn't it be worse to be at a women's college?” And I replied that no, in fact, it is probably 1000 times more liberating to be my kind of “man” at a mostly women's college. I adore this aspect of Smith and am so, so lucky to be here.

*Photographs by Skyler Lawton, Northampton, MA*



María Morgan Disalvo

Videasta y docente queer punki-femme(nista)

18 de febrero de 2012

Me gusta pensar en las imágenes como formas de pensamiento en proceso y a la vez, celebrar la posibilidad de pensar y sentir a través de las imágenes. Hay una frase de Teresa De Laurentis que viaja conmigo, donde sea me conduzca la mirada, como un slogan sujeto con alfileres de gancho: "(,,,) no se trata de representar y hacer visible aquell\*s sujet\*s invisibles o invisibilizad\*s, sino de cuestionar las lógicas mismas de la representación y la visibilidad para que surjan nuev\*s sujet\*s". Poder reflexionar e intervenir en función de una política de la(s) imagen(es), de una política perceptual, es una premisa que intento abrazar a través de todo lo que hago.

Creo que las imágenes forman parte de un proyecto de pensamiento poético-político: las imágenes condensan pensamientos, pensamos (y actuamos) a través de ellas, y por este motivo es necesario poder reflexionar continuamente sobre ellas, intervenirlas y cuestionarlas.

Hay una palabra en alemán acuñada por Walter Benjamin que ilustra bellísimamente esta idea: *denkbilder*, que vendría a significar "a thinking image" o "imaged thinking". Esa es la forma de mirar y de pensar (el pensamiento como intervención) a la que quisiera acercarme.

María Morgan Disalvo

Filmmaker, video artist and queer-punk femme (nist) educator

I like to both think of images as thought-forms in process and, at the same time, celebrate the possibilities of thinking with and feeling through images. There is a quote from Teresa de Laurentis that travels with me, like a slogan tacked up with pins, wherever my gaze may go: "... it's not about representing or making visible those subjects who have been invisible or invisibilized, but of questioning the very logics of representation and visibility so that new subjects surge forth." To be able to reflect on and intervene in the political functioning of images, in the very politics of visibility, is what I attempt to do.

I create images that form part of a political-poetic thought process: images condense thoughts, we think with and act through images, and because of this, it is necessary to be able to reflect on them continually, intervening, retooling and questioning them persistently.

There is a German word used by Walter Benjamin that most beautifully illustrates this idea: *denkbilder*, "a thinking image" or "imaged thinking". This is the form of visualizing and of thinking (where thought is understood as an intervention) that I would like to approximate.

# Spinster Style

Jill H. Casid



Jill H. Casid, *Spinster Style*, 2012, Polaroid SX-70 print made with PX70 Color Protection Film, mounted on Impossible Project White Leather SX-70 Polaroid Camera Case, white kid leather gloves (made in France, 1970s). Dimensions: 8.75 in long, 4.75 in. wide, and 1.5 in high.

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The scene: a table at the Russian Tea Room on East 57<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City. A warm haven on cold nights when you wish the concert at Carnegie Hall could last forever? An enclave opened in 1927 by former members of the Russian Imperial Ballet? A tourist trap? An over-ornate, gilded refuge for eastern European exiles? An old-school, old-world, over-stuffed restaurant with deep red leather booths and a retro menu on which the Cotelette à la Kiev of my childhood, the chicken breast that disgorges butter when sliced is still the featured entrée? Whatever the truth (and it's probably all true), this was home. Or, rather, my wished-for not-home. The gilded dream palace to which the woman I called my Auntie Mame would usher me at least once a visit. Like the Auntie Mame of fiction and film, my great aunt Lis may not only have promised but also actually delivered on those lines: "I'm going to open doors for you. Doors you never dreamed even existed." But, unlike Auntie Mame, my great aunt Lis—the Holocaust survivor from Germany who trained to be a French professor but, unable to find employment, supported herself as an accountant instead—was a life-long spinster. And a gourmande. Who paid for her own elaborate dinners (and for mine) with a poor salary and meager savings. Such restaurants where she was led to a table of her own (maybe not a nice one--she was an old woman alone after all--but a table nonetheless) were a kind of home to Lis. And they became an anti-home of possibility for me. In his essay on the secret of Jane Austen's style, D. A. Miller writes of Style with a capital "S" as a kind of place, "Like the Unheterosexual, the Spinster too resorts to Style, the utopia of those with almost no place to go." What I learned from the deep pleasures of the table in the company of my great aunt with a gourmandizing palate and fastidious taste was that Style could also make a habitable place for a woman, an old woman, a queer woman alone. Style turned the tables on an unhomey world of places set relentlessly for men escorting their dates to dinner. Style opened a delicious aperture for an aging, queer woman who likes to do her own escorting, who was over-fond and remains inordinately and perversely attached to her great aunt, and who couldn't breathe but also couldn't get sweaty breathless without the doors she swung wide with her queer, old Spinster Style.

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# Blanks, II

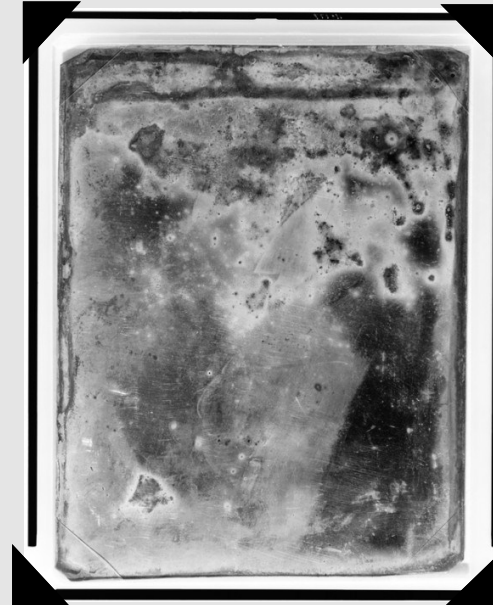
## Marget Long

The sources for the *Blanks* are daguerreotype portraits by Mathew Brady found in the Library of Congress online catalogue. I selected these particular photographs based on the archivist's notation: "Image Deteriorated Beyond Recognition." The "daguerreotypes" were downloaded as 12 megapixel tif files and reprinted without alteration at Adoramapix.com, where "Priceless Pictures Printed Less."

My primary interest here is in the archivist's impulse to preserve (digitize) a daguerreotype portrait that fails to perform its proper function as a portrait. Daguerreotypes are valued for their capacity to depict their subjects with incredible detail and clarity. The online images are precise records of *something*--the daguerreotype's poor material condition--and yet they are also perfectly delineated records of the *wrong* thing, since they no longer have representational value as Brady portraits. *Or do they?* My other interest is in the digital status of the daguerreotype itself: the startling fact that a one-of-a kind, 19th century photographic object can be re-materialized through a totally routine, de-skilled consumer process. The *Blanks* are the result of a completely on-screen transaction: from government scanner, to search engine, to download, to upload, to payment, to notification, to receipt in the mail, this "portrait" has accumulated human labor but is made with the bare minimum of human contact. What then is the relationship of this new photograph to the "original" copy?



Reproduction Number LC-USZ62-110120, DAG no. 522,  
Adoramapix Order Number, 1129504\_8uis



Reproduction Number LC-USZ62-110181, DAG no. 467,  
Adoramapix order number 1129504\_8uis

# Queer Portrait Project

## Jen Clausen

The Queer Portrait Project tells the stories of people in the queer community in my paint and in their words. I am painting queer-identified people and having each person write a short bio to accompany the painting. I am painting people I know and people I don't know. I am painting gay people, bi people, trans people, old people, young people, outgoing people, shy people, tall people, short people...queer people. I seek to illustrate the diversity, breadth, and variety that is the queer community. I like the thought of art used as a connection and a bridge in this tightknit, yet also disparate community. We tend to subdivide ourselves according age, race, gender, and class. I hope to show, in the most basic of ways -images and words- how art can be action for change. We have the power to strengthen and sustain each other: as queers, as artists, as people.

I am a queer artist living and painting in Madison, Wisconsin. I love painting people. I love hearing their stories.

I paint only from life, which allows me to connect with my sitters in ways that would be impossible when painting from a photograph. In this age of digital communication (facebook, email, twitter, et cetera) we can easily forget the importance of face-to-face human interaction. Because my project involves community and illustrates community, I want as little separation from my subjects as possible, and I believe that as a result of sitting for me and talking with me, my subjects have a strong connection with their portraits. Because they are done from life, these paintings convey more depth, character, and connection than I could convey otherwise.

In the few months I have been working on this project I have had an overwhelmingly positive response from the people in the Madison community. Thank you for supporting my project.

If you are interested in posing for the project, send an email to [jen@paintpunk.com](mailto:jen@paintpunk.com)

I think of myself as being generically queer. For over ten years I exclusively partnered with and dated women, and that was lovely. Most recently I became involved with a man, and that's also been lovely. I have a fear of my queer identity being erased or misunderstood because of being in a heterosexual relationship. But I've come to realize that my own queer identity does not depend on the gender of my partner or even having a partner at all. Regardless, I'm a somewhat androgynous woman with experience loving all kinds of people. I'm happy with that reality.



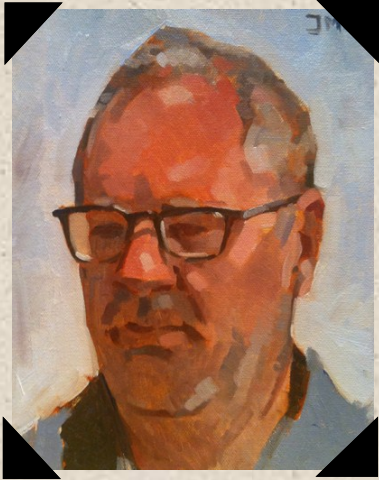
Elisa



Ames

From the time I was born there was something quite unique about me. Unfortunately, growing up in a small town had many small minded people with very loud opinions. "Is that really a girl?" "Hey you are using the wrong bathroom" I felt destined to exist in this world alone. It wasn't until I moved to Madison and experienced such a diverse culture and acceptance that I could truly start to grow and learn about how I can be comfortable in my own skin, and that I am not alone.





Michael

I was born and raised in a small farm community in northern Wisconsin, in a time when it was impossible to feel good about my orientation. I managed to survive with my interest in art, movies, theater, travel, and books. That was my salvation...and those things kept me sane. I now find myself teaching graphic design, proud of the creative community I am part of.



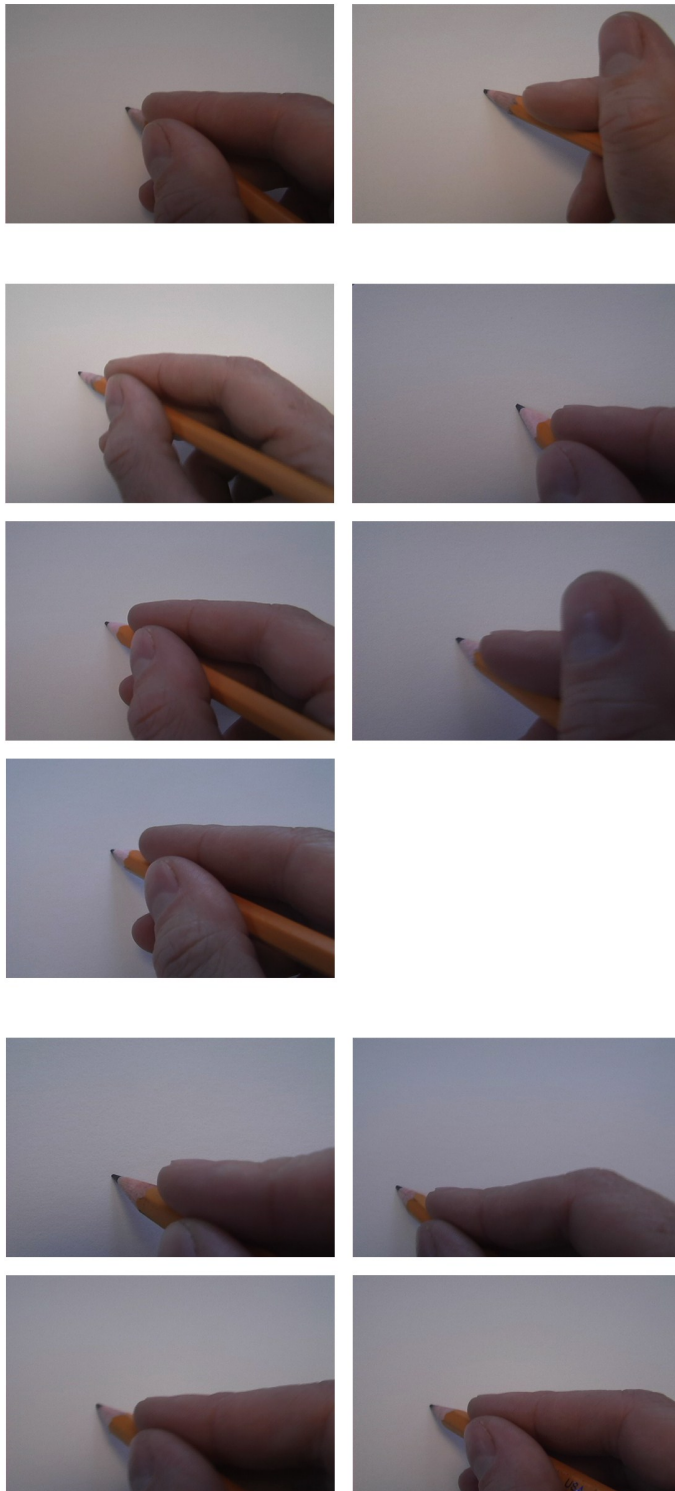
Angela

People often talk about how small the queer community is, mostly like it's a bad thing. But I love being a part of the queer community! Realizing I was queer was one of the best things to happen to me. Not only because I got to stop pretending to be something I wasn't, but I finally felt like I belonged somewhere. And isn't that what we all want? You don't hear straight people saying, "Oh, I have such a sense of belonging with the straight community," because it's the norm. Queerness aside, I never saw myself as part of the mainstream. It just seemed so...boring. And too many people there. I found conformity unsettling, which is why I sometimes wonder how much of my queerness is chosen or innate. Which came first- rejection of the majority or being gay? It doesn't really matter. I just like being a part of a community where social networks are constantly intersecting, yet new people are coming in. I love that there are so many events that give me the chance to identify as queer, along with something else- queer and writer, queer and performer, queer and athlete, queer and activist, queer and social. I like having this common link that joins us together. I guess it makes sense that I am currently working with queer youth to both cultivate their own community, as well as acquaint them with the adult queer community. I love this community and I am committed to ensuring its existence for future queers.

Hi, my name is Jenny. Although not pictured here, I normally have teeth. I was born on the north side of Madison and moved away when I was seven. For the past 12 years, Madison has once again been my home, where I first worked as a middle school teacher and, more recently, a social worker who partners with homeless families. Despite the many things we have to be grateful for in this city, it still is not necessarily easy to be queer here. I love the potential and strength that our communities have, although, like the microcosm they are, they remain highly segregated by race, class, gender, etc. The LGBTQ Narratives group is especially important to me, as it is an example of how art can be used for activism, how our words can support and transform one another, and how we can create intentional community with the goal of social justice. I appreciate projects such as this one that highlight not only our ability to be visible as queers, but also tell the stories that allow us to see ourselves reflected in each other.



Jenny



You asked me if I could carry you home.  
You asked twice.

It wasn't hard to rub your feet,  
to comb your hair,  
to get your ice chips,  
to brush your teeth,  
to call the nurse.

It was hard to wear gloves,  
hard to think it could be dangerous to kiss you.  
It was hard to think about what would have happened  
if I had carried you home.

script from the single channel video *To carry*  
Anna Campbell, 2011



## Safe Space (In the Sheets)

Lex Lancaster

When you left,  
You left me with all of your clothes.  
I was not surprised when they fit me perfectly.  
I was surprised when I could not stop wearing them.  
At that time, I found safety in silence.  
I imagined that your clothes could speak for me:  
I could not say goodbye,  
I could not say how I lost you,  
I could not say we were the same,  
But your black leather jacket – with your pink triangle and my red ribbon –  
said it all.  
My father told me to be careful;  
I was too much like you, and what I was could kill me too.  
But the weight and warmth of your heavy jacket  
felt like your arms still around me.  
Your cruising jacket became my bulldagger jacket,  
And there I found my safe space.  
I never imagined that I would lose you, that you would never heal.  
I never imagined that I would learn to sew,  
That such a domestic and feminizing act would help me,  
Not merely to mourn, but to feel safe in my melancholic attachment to you.  
I knew about the AIDS Quilt, the NAMES Project,  
But I could not name you,  
And I could not add your name to the long list of others,  
And I could not let you go.  
When I created a quilt from the clothing you left me, I added my own.  
I curled up in the fabric of both of our lives:  
Your Van Gogh to my Day of Silence,  
Your roses and thorns to my rainbows,  
Your eighties Goth Jesus to my last photograph of you.

My queer attachment to your clothes,  
As if they absorbed everything of your fabulous life,  
My desire to unite yours and mine,  
Allows me not only to remember everything that we shared,  
But everything that we didn't share, everything that made us different;  
To create the fantasy of us  
As if we always already were, are, and will be together;  
To imagine that you could have known the niece who grew up in your clothes,  
The soft and sensitive dyke in drag who fails to be either butch or femme;  
That I could have known the queer uncle from before I was born, before AIDS,  
The beautiful young man waiting tables at *Café des Artistes*,  
waiting to make it as an actor;  
That something could have been done to let you live on with me,  
That we could still be visiting museums and painting together,  
That an *after AIDS* might have existed, and might yet come.

When you died, I heard people say that you were going home.  
For me, home is in the clothes you left me.  
I found home in my own body, the safe space of my skin  
Beneath men's button-down shirts and shoes that finally fit.  
I found home within a community of queer activists;  
In the streets, marching in your leather jacket and red sneakers,  
A space of screaming with fiery fists in the air at the  
hate and neglect that took you;  
And in the sheets, beneath the quilt I made for us  
that has absorbed so many tears,  
A space of sorrow as well as sensual holding-on, of love and longing;  
I found a home in which I will never really lose you,  
but in which I can lose it nonetheless,  
A home that holds not only memories but the fantasies that come with forgetting,  
Our home of difference and dreams, of longing, losing it,  
and sometimes letting go.



# ***You'll Always be my Baby***

[Tape deck from fifth grade, metal sawhorses, an audiocassette to keep us going]

Beats and vocals: River Bullock

Original lyrics: Mariah Carey, Jermaine Dupri, and Manuel Seal on *Day Dreams*. New York: Columbia Records, 1996.

Production and Recording: Tyson Reeder, Club Nutz, Chicago, 2012.

*I sang this song for my brother, David, in preparation for death. And now almost a month later, I sing it again, with and through time, and into the work of the unknown.*

We were as one babe.  
For a moment in time  
And it seemed everlasting  
That you would always be mine  
Now you want to be free  
So I'll let you fly  
'Cause I know in my heart babe  
Our love will never die

And you'll always be a part of me  
I'm part of you, indefinitely  
Boy don't you know you can't escape me  
Cuz you'll always be my baby

Time can't erase a feeling this strong  
No way you're ever gonna shake me,  
Ever gonna shake me

Won't cry no  
And I won't beg you to stay  
If you're determined to leave boy  
I will not stand in your way  
But you'll be back again  
'Cause you know in your heart babe  
Our love will never end  
You'll always be a part of me,  
I'm a part of you indefinitely.

David this one's for you,  
Happy Birthday, number fifty big fifty  
My brother David  
I love you,  
This one's for you.