

Mutatis Mutandis: Appearance and Identity

Exhibition Checklist

Lyle Ashton Harris

Blue Billie
2003
digital ink jet print on watercolor paper
edition, 4/10
28" X 24"
courtesy CRG Gallery, NYC

Untitled (Silver Handcuffs)

2007
digital pigment print on silver foil
edition, 3/6
47" x 35"
courtesy CRG Gallery, NYC

Jason Horowitz

AnuRa No. 3
2008
archival pigment print on paper
edition, 1/5
63" x 42"
courtesy Curator's Office, Washington DC

Scott

2007
archival pigment print on paper
edition, 1/5
42" x 63"
courtesy Curator's Office, Washington DC

Gia No. 2

2007
archival pigment print on paper
edition, 1/5
42" x 63"
courtesy Curator's Office, Washington DC

Melinda McDaniel

Viewing Myself Through the Edge
2004
C-prints, wood panel
12" x 144" x 18"
courtesy of the artist

Little Liars

2008
C-print, wood, and glass
7" x 6.5" x 10" (large), 6" x 5.5" x 8" (medium), 4.5"
x 4" x 7" (small)
courtesy of the artist

Self Self Portrait

2008
black and white photographs, pins on birch
panels
8" x 10" x 1.5" (2 panels)
courtesy of the artist

Yasumasa Morimura

Ambiguous Beauty / Aimai-no-bi
1995
paper construction,
fan (variable): 11.5" x 19.5"
collection of the University Art Museum,
University at Albany, gift of Peter Norton
Christmas Project, 1995

AJ Nadel

Marla Disrobing
2002
mixed media on paper
48" x 32"
courtesy of the artist

Frenetic Marla

2004
polaroid emulsion transfer on paper
30" x 22"
courtesy of the artist

Portrait of Marla

2006
mixed media on paper
33" x 22"
courtesy of the artist

Marla Fractured

2004
mixed media on paper
22" x 30"
courtesy of the artist

Snapshot #3: Marla at Home

2008
polaroid emulsion and chemical transfers on
paper
9" x 6.5"
courtesy of the artist

Snapshot #4: Ilana

2008
polaroid emulsion and chemical transfers on
paper
5.5" x 9"
courtesy of the artist

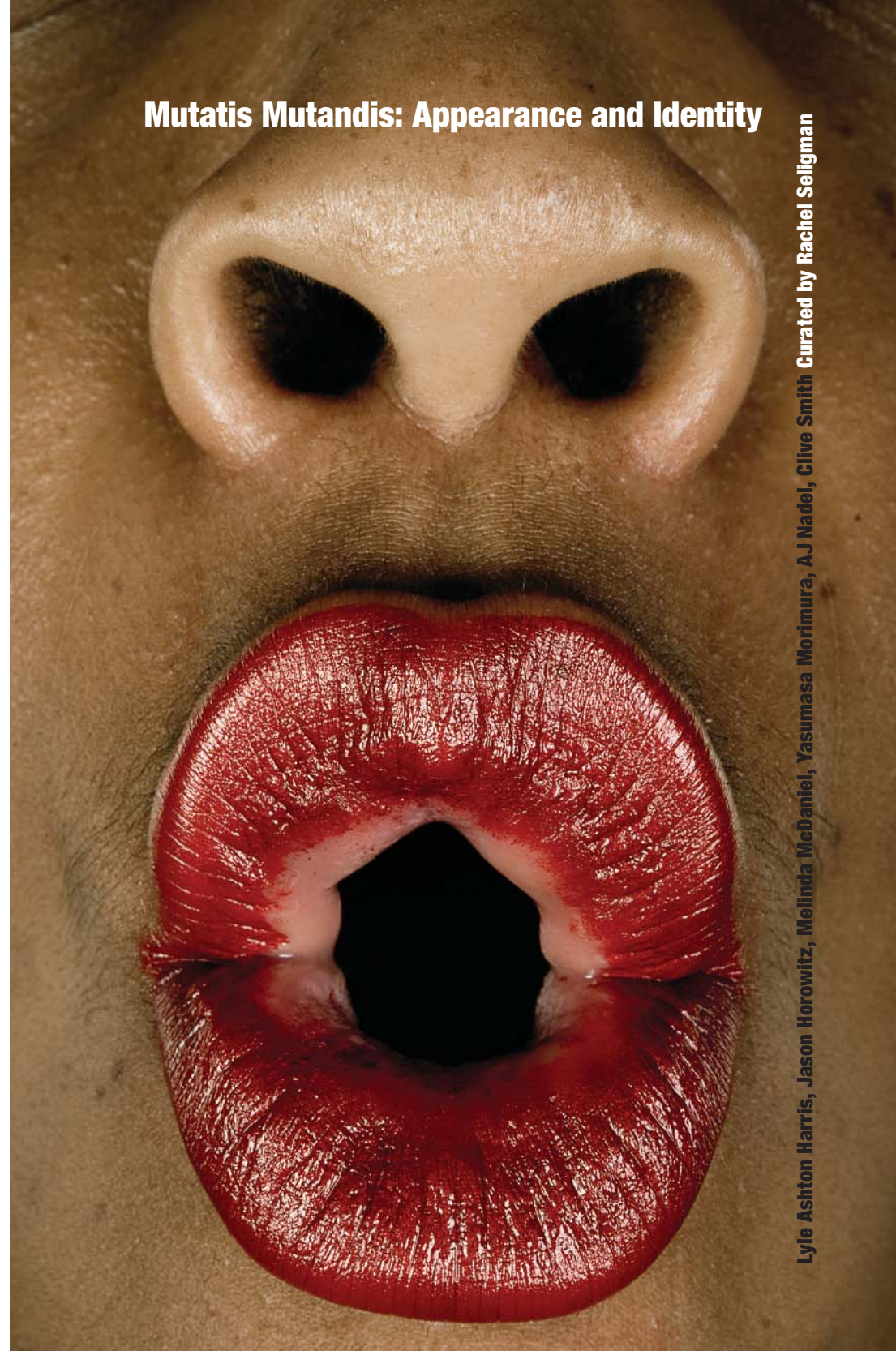
Snapshot #8: Self-Portrait

2008
polaroid emulsion and chemical transfers on
paper
6" x 12.5"
courtesy of the artist

Clive Smith

with and without Jennfier for 33 weeks
2004
oil on wood
30 separate panels, each panel: 10" x 10"
© Clive Smith, Courtesy Marlborough Gallery,
NYC

Mutatis Mutandis: Appearance and Identity



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Curated by Rachel Seligman

Lyle Ashton Harris

Jason Horowitz

Melinda McDaniel

Yasumasa Morimura

AJ Nadel

Clive Smith

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on the cover: Jason Horowitz, *AnuRa No. 3*, 2008, archival pigment print on paper, edition, 1/5, 63" x 42", courtesy Curator's Office, Washington DC



AJ Nadel, *Snapshot Series #4: Ilana*, 2008, polaroid emulsion and chemical transfers on paper, 5.5" x 9", courtesy of the artist

The Necessary Changes

The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.
– Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Understanding the self and what forms identity is an age-old endeavor. In Classical Greece, Aristotle and his followers explored the correlation between identity and appearance, concluding that it was possible to infer character from features.¹ Throughout the Middle Ages these kinds of physiognomic theories were commonly accepted, and over the centuries many artists, writers, and philosophers, including Leonardo da Vinci, Johann Kaspar Lavater, Balzac, Charles Dickens, Oscar Wilde, and Edgar Allan Poe have explored these ideas in their works.² In Wilde's 1890 novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the central premise revolves around the actions of Dorian Gray and their effect on his image – in the form of a painted portrait – which becomes increasingly aged and grotesque as it absorbs and reflects all the evil and violence perpetrated by the actual man. In the 20th century, the prevalence of television and film, especially its use of the close up to acquaint us with subtle facial expressions, has helped solidify our belief in the relationship between appearance and the inner world. Despite the fact that these assumptions tend to reinforce stereotypes, the idea that you can read a person's character from their physiognomy – that the exterior reflects the interior – has a strong hold on us.³

Sense of self is a central aspect of identity – and very often our sense of self is determined by our appearance and our relationship to appearance. What we look like helps determine who we are and how we are understood by others. Today in Western culture, our obsession with appearance has been further augmented by digital technology and websites like Facebook and YouTube that encourage narcissistic fascination with self-image, and provide easy dissemination of those images to the world. But appearance can and does get changed. It is a flexible, adaptable, and evolving construct. Because of their role as professional image-makers, artists are particularly well suited to explore these complex issues. The artworks in this exhibition are portraits, created by artists who significantly mediate the way we view their subjects, and through that mediation, they offer an examination of the forces that shape our assumptions and biases. Their explorations of identity reveal the fluid ever-changing nature of identity, the ways we construct and shift our identities and how appearance is a tool in the construction and repeated remodeling of identity.

Clive Smith's portrait paintings from his series *Different but the same* present us with multiple panels, each with an image of the same person. While reminiscent of Eadweard Muybridge's motion study photographs, these groups of panels represent the passage of time in a different way. Each panel of *with and without Jennifer for 33 weeks* was painted in a single three-hour sitting, once a week. Missed sessions are represented by a space in the progression.⁴ The panels flow like time across the wall, and while at first glance the panels appear to hold the same image over and over, on closer inspection they reveal a myriad of subtle differences. Smith takes us beyond the standard portrait

in which a single image must be taken to represent the whole reality of the sitter, showing us instead that each panel is its own truth. As Eleanor Heartney wrote of these paintings, they “remind us that we are immersed in time, that our reality is constantly changing, and that our identity is a fiction created by artificially arresting some illusion of completeness out of the flux of lived experience.”⁵

Jason Horowitz makes portraits that function as visual synecdoche. His large-scale, intimate photographs of parts of his subjects’ bodies force us to give intense consideration to a very limited amount of body. The viewer must confront the reality of human corporeality – the hairs, the pores, the wrinkles, the creases and crevasses, the bruises and blemishes. Our perceptions of beauty are challenged when we see the tools of our body enhancement up close – the blue contact lens, the eye shadow, eyebrows growing back in: illusions are shattered. These intense close-ups of the human form challenge our secret, and not-so-secret biases about body image. Horowitz works in collaboration with his subjects in choosing how and what to photograph, and therefore these portraits reveal as much, if not more, about the identity of the subject than a conventional portrait might. In an ironic twist, these portraits are photographed using the same lighting set-ups as fashion photographs, but present us with what is real, rather than something idealized.

A.J. Nadel’s portraits literally distort or deconstruct the bodies of his subjects. Concerned with the fragmentation of modern life – its frenetic complexity, and the ease with which we are able to alter and redefine our physical selves through surgery, piercings, tattoos, branding – Nadel fractures, layers, textures, and manipulates his subjects, replicating or enacting the ways in which our bodies serve as a surface on which we act. He combines collage, drawing, and experimental media such as copy-machine toner and Polaroid emulsions, to create portraits that reflect the disjunctions he perceives as existing both in the space between us, and just beneath the corporeal surface of each of us. His desire to cut and paste, join and sever, distort and perfect his subjects creates visceral mediations on the fragility of flesh and form, the ease with which the physical self is altered, and how that affects our understanding of the person beneath the skin.

Melinda McDaniel is a photographer for whom photography is often too literal a medium. She explores this problem by using her self-portrait photographs as raw material: cutting or shredding them, or augmenting them with collaged or sculptural elements, and reconfiguring the pieces to create the final works. She finds this allows her to achieve a more intimate relationship with the image. Surprisingly, this greater personal connection is often achieved through the creation of highly abstract images, which nevertheless speak of self-image and physical appearance – of the inner-self made visible. *Viewing Myself Through the Edge* is a full-body self-portrait created by placing her body directly onto the photographic paper during exposure. Sliced and reassembled, her physical form becomes something new. The original information is still present, but disguised. These works exist at the ever-shifting boundary between what is exposed and what is hidden.

By trying on the personae of others, Lyle Ashton Harris explores issues intimately tied to his own identity. By assuming the identity of certain cultural icons or symbols, he can explore feelings of vulnerability or fear, longing or desire. In this way his images are both self-portraits and the visual manifestation of complex ideas about inner and outer worlds, and how we are received and perceived by others. In *Blue Billie*, Harris becomes Billie Holiday, bathed in a deep, dark blue. Feeling blue, the Blues, black and blue – and what these associations mean for a gay, black man in the 21st century, and for all of us – are just some of the ideas present in this image. The rich sensuality and mysterious, atmospheric quality of these self-portraits emphasizes their multiplicity – the layers of meaning, the performance of obfuscation and revelation that they represent.

While Harris’s self-portraits are quiet, contemplative meditations on identity, Yasumasa Morimura’s are brash, noisy, and humorous challenges to the way we conceive identity – examining cultural constructs by appropriating images of Western, female icons and merging them with his Japanese, male body. *Ambiguous Beauty* explicitly and implicitly juxtaposes Eastern and Western on a traditional Japanese fan. His inherent theatricality is also tied to something traditionally Japanese, Kabuki Theater, where an all male company play both the male and female roles. Morimura uses elaborate costumes, make up, and digital techniques to effect his transformations, but he balances the illusion of the transformation into the “other” with the transparency of the artifice – so that we are completely aware that multiple selves are present in each image. This duality stands in opposition to our essentialist understanding of identity as necessarily encapsulated in a single concept: Eastern or Western, male or female, straight or gay.

All the works in this exhibition ask us to consider the nature of identity, and suggest that identity is a fluid concept, shaped by the interplay between the observer and the observed. Through their artwork, these artists question the ways in which we perceive, categorize, and understand ourselves and each other, and they push us to reexamine and perhaps change the ways in which we approach these issues.

– Rachel Seligman

1. Aristotle (Translated by A. J. Jenkinson), *Prior Analytics* (eBooks@Adelaide, 2007), part 2, section 27. Online at <<http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/a/aristotle/a8pra/>>.

2. Da Vinci does so in his caricatures and intense studies of faces; Lavater wrote numerous essays on physiognomy in the 18th Century; Balzac, Dickens and Poe, among others, linked detailed physical descriptions to personality and character. (for example see Erik Grayson, “Weird Science, Weirder Unity: Phrenology and Physiognomy in Edgar Allan Poe,” *Mode* vol.1 (2005), pp. 56 – 77. Online at <<http://www.arts.cornell.edu/english/publications/mode/documents/grayson.html>>.

3. Joanne Finkelstein, *The Art of Self Invention* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p.123.

4. Eleanor Heartney, “Clive Smith, Painting in Time,” *Clive Smith* (New York: Marlborough Gallery, Inc., 2005), p. 2.

5. *Ibid.*, p.3.



Lyle Ashton Harris, *Blue Billie*, 2003, digital ink jet print on watercolor paper, edition, 4/10, 28" X 24", courtesy CRG Gallery, NYC

Lyle Ashton Harris

Lyle Ashton Harris was born in 1965 and attended Wesleyan University and the California Institute of the Arts. His solo exhibition *Blow Up* was at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Scottsdale, AZ and the University of Buffalo Center for the Arts, Buffalo, NY in 2008. In addition to photography, Harris also creates video and performance pieces. His work has been exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum, NYC; the Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC; the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, England; the Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland; and many others. He exhibited at the 2007 Venice Biennale, and received a Rome Prize Fellowship to the American Academy in Rome in 2000. His photographs have appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Newsweek*, and *Vibe*. Harris lives and works in New York City. He is represented by CRG Gallery, NYC; Analix Forever, Geneva, Switzerland; and Baldwin Gallery, Aspen, CO.



Jason Horowitz, *Scott*, 2007, archival pigment print on paper, edition, 1/5, 42" x 63", courtesy Curator's Office, Washington DC

Jason Horowitz

Jason Horowitz has a B.A. in photography from George Washington University, Washington DC, and an M.A. in photography from Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA. Horowitz has long been concerned with extremes of scale, and intense, almost surreal examinations of everyday items and substances. Extreme scale and intense examination continue to dominate his current work, the *Corpus* portfolio. He has recently exhibited these large-scale body portraits at Peer Gallery, NYC; The Light Factory, Charlotte, NC; Blue Sky Gallery, Portland, OR; and Curator's Office, Washington DC. In 2007 he received the Aaron Siskind Award in Photography. Horowitz's works are collected in the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington DC; the Dimock Gallery, George Washington University, Washington DC; The Sheraton, Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia PA; and others. Horowitz lives and works in Arlington, VA. He is represented by Curator's Office, Washington DC, and Jayne H. Baum Contemporary Fine Art, NYC.



Melinda McDaniel, *Little Liar*, 2008, C-print, wood, and glass, 7" x 6.5" x 10", courtesy of the artist

Melinda McDaniel

Melinda McDaniel has a B.F.A. from Florida State University, Tallahassee, and an M.F.A. in Photography from The Ohio State University, Columbus. She was an Artist Assistant and Graphic Designer for the Jenny Holzer Studio from 2005 - 2008 and has taught photography at the College of Saint Rose, SUNY Albany, and The Ohio State University. McDaniel has exhibited recently in *SNAP! Contemporary Photography* at the Mandeville Gallery, Union College, Schenectady, NY; *Vestuary Operatics*, Saint Anthony's Church, Albany, NY; *The Faculty Show*, The College of Art and Design at The College of Saint Rose, Albany, NY; as well as in *Transformation*, Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH; *Absence/Presence*, The Clean Space, Columbus, OH; *Unruled*, Kathryn Markel Fine Arts, NYC; and others. She will be exhibiting her work in the upcoming Annual Photography Regional at the Opalka Gallery at Russell Sage College, and at the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago.



Yasumasa Morimura, *Ambiguous Beauty / Aimai-no-bi*, 1995, paper construction, fan (variable): 11.5" x 19.5", collection of the University Art Museum, University at Albany, gift of Peter Norton Christmas Project, 1995

Yasumasa Morimura

Yasumasa Morimura was born in Osaka, Japan in 1951 and received a B.A. from Kyoto City University of Art in 1978. Since the early 1980s Morimura has been exploring art history in his photography by placing himself in artworks of the Western cannon – from Van Gogh to Rembrandt to Goya to Manet. He similarly explores issues of sexuality and culture in his series of self-portraits as movie stars like Marilyn Monroe, Greta Garbo and Brigit Bardot, and his “Daughters of Art History” series. His solo exhibition *Yasumasa Morimura – Requiem for the XX Century. Twilight of the Turbulent Gods* was at Galerie Thaddeus Ropac, Paris, France, in 2008 and Fondazine Berilacqua La Masa, Venice, Italy and Luhring Augustine, NYC in 2007. Morimura has also had recent solo exhibitions at Byblos Art Gallery, Verona, Italy; John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI; Shugo Arts, Tokyo, Japan; and Reflex New Art Gallery, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Morimura lives and works in Osaka, Japan and is represented in the United States by Luhring Augustine in NYC.



AJ Nadel, *Portrait of Marla*, 2006, mixed media on paper, 33" x 22", courtesy of the artist

AJ Nadel

AJ Nadel was born in New York City in 1935. After graduating from Union College in 1956, Nadel went on to get an M.D. from Columbia University. Although a practicing surgeon for over forty years, Nadel always held a strong interest in art, and in 1982 he began to study painting. Since the late 1990s, Nadel has been a full-time artist. He exhibited recently in a two-person show at Franklin 54 in NYC, and has had solo exhibitions at AFP Galleries, NYC; Joseph Gierke Fine Art, Tulsa, OK; Chelsea Studio Gallery, NYC; Broadway Gallery, NYC; New York Arts Gallery, NYC; TAI Gallery, NYC; and Berliner Kunstprojekt, Berlin, Germany, and his work has been included in numerous group shows nationwide.



Clive Smith, *with and without Jennifer for 33 weeks* (detail), 2004, oil on wood, 30 separate panels, each panel: 10" x 10", © Clive Smith, courtesy Marlborough Gallery, NYC

Clive Smith

Clive Smith was born in 1967 in St. Albans, England. He earned degrees in General Design and Fashion Design and until 1996 he designed clothing for fashion and clothing companies including Banana Republic. In 1995 he began studying with Peter Cox at the Art Students League in New York City and he had his first solo exhibition in 1999 at the Galerie DeBellefeuille in Montreal. In 2001 he was commissioned by England's National Portrait Gallery to paint actor Sir Ian McKellen. He has exhibited at the National Portrait Gallery, London, England; The Mall Galleries, London, England; Arnot Art Museum, Elmira, NY; and Marlborough Galleries in Chelsea and London. His work is collected in the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO; the National Portrait Gallery, London, England; the Frissiras Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens, Greece; and the Arnot Art Museum, Elmira, NY. Smith lives and works in New York City and is represented by Marlborough Gallery.