Breaking the Binary: Queerness and the Image

This print viewing introduces students to a range of images that focus on the spectrum of identities within the umbrella of LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, and Queer). The images focus on topics of youth, aging, identity, performance, and the notion of living an authentic life. The selection of works encourage students to discuss perceptions on identity and how photography can either represent or misrepresent that identity, while also navigating the artists’ choices in color, composition, point of view, and staging.

Artist: Alexandre Haefeli  
Title: “Untitled” from “The Company of Men” series  
Date: 2015-2016  
Medium: inkjet print  
Dimensions:  
Credit Line: Museum purchase
**Artist:** Zackary Drucker and Rhys Ernst  
**Title:** “Relationship #22 (Tillamook Dairy Parade), from the “Relationship” series (2008-2013)”  
**Date:** 2010  
**Medium:** chromogenic development print  
**Dimensions:** 7 1/2 in X 10 in  
**Credit Line:** Museum purchase

**Artist:** Zackary Drucker and Rhys Ernst  
**Title:** “Relationship #31, from the “Relationship” series (2008-2013)”  
**Date:** 2010  
**Medium:** chromogenic development print  
**Dimensions:** 20 in x 13 5/16 in  
**Credit Line:** Museum purchase

**Artist:** Zackary Drucker and Rhys Ernst  
**Title:** “Relationship #28, from the “Relationship” series (2008-2013)”  
**Date:** 2008  
**Medium:** chromogenic development print  
**Dimensions:** 12 in x 16 in  
**Credit Line:** Museum purchase

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**Zackary Drucker and Rhys Ernst**  
American, b. 1983 and 1982, respectively

The series “Relationship” can be approached in several ways. First, it is a documentation of the romantic relationship between artists Zackary Drucker and Rhys Ernst, which lasted from 2008 to 2014. The pair’s photographs were not originally intended for exhibition or publication; they are snapshots of their daily routine and mementos of their life as a couple. “Relationship” also documents the numerous physical changes that occurred as the couple simultaneously realigned from one gender to another. Drucker is today a trans woman and Ernst a trans man. In their photographs, the artists capture the successive stages of their respective processes of gender realignment. “Relationship” therefore assumes a third level of meaning, since it also refers to the relationship of an individual with their body. The artists are also Emmy-nominated Producers on Golden Globe and Emmy-winning Transparent.
Artist: Jess T. Dugan
Title: “Dee Dee Ngozi, 55, Atlanta, GA”, from the “To Survive on the Shore” series
Date: 2016
Medium: inkjet Print
Dimensions: 24 in x 18 in
Credit Line: Museum purchase

Artist: Jess T. Dugan
Title: “Gloria, 70, Chicago, IL”, from the “To Survive on the Shore” series
Date: 2016
Medium: inkjet Print
Dimensions: 24 in x 18 in
Credit Line: Gift of the artist and Catherine Edelman Gallery

Jess T. Dugan
American, b. 1986

Jess T. Dugan is interested in representations of identity, particularly as they apply to LGBTQ communities. Commenced in 2013, “To Survive on this Shore” started from the recognition that, in representations of transgender and gender-nonconforming people in the media and the arts, older people feature very rarely in comparison with younger individuals. Dugan seeks to remedy this absence by photographing trans people aged fifty or older. She has produced over eighty works for the series in collaboration with Dr. Vanessa Fabbre, assistant professor at the Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis, who conducted interviews of Dugan’s subjects. The paths of their subjects range widely and reveal the complexities of living a gender that doesn’t suit one’s identity.
Alexandre Haefeli
Swiss, b. 1992

“The Company of Men” by Alexandre Haefeli is a series centered on the male figure and the representation of sensuality. While the theme of voluptuousness is often portrayed via female nudes, erotic portraits of naked men are far less common. Particularly interested in the young adult male, Haefeli humorously overturns the codes of masculine imagery: the men appearing in “The Company of Men” seem delicate, mischievous, and sensitive—qualities typically considered feminine. This series thus reminds us that it is possible to live and to express one’s identity as a man outside the clichés generally associated with virility.
Kelli Connell
American, b. 1974

A single model plays two roles in each of the photographs in the series “Double Life” from Kelli Connell. Connell uses elements of private relationships she has experienced herself or witnessed in others to inspire these two-person scenes. She then uses Photoshop to stitch multiple medium-format negatives together to create the juxtapositions in the final photographs. The result is a multi-faceted questioning of duality: of masculine and feminine, exterior and interior, static and evolving. Appropriately, Connell’s intentions here are two-fold. On the one hand she exposes her autobiographical questioning of sexuality and gender roles, particularly as they influence identity in relationships. On the other hand she is also interested in how the response of viewers reveals their own notions of identity and social constructs.
Iké Udé
Nigerian-American, b. 1964

Nigerian-born artist Iké Udé works between photography and performance art in his ongoing series of self-portraits, “Sartorial Anarchy.” Exploring the multiple personae that one can adopt, Udé plays with theatricality, fashion, and notions of celebrity in his portraiture, revealing identity to be both cultural construct and individual creation. Through overt self-styling that combines historical and contemporary fashion, he explores the ambiguities of gender, sexual, and cultural representations within the art world. The haute couture vibe of Udé’s work is achieved through the elaborate construction of props, costume, pose, painted backdrops and post-production.
Zanele Muholi
South African, b. 1972

Zanele Muholi is a photographer and visual activist whose ongoing series of large-format black and white photographs “Faces and Phases” aims to redress the invisibility of lesbian and queer identity in post-apartheid South Africa. Muholi counters conventional perceptions of lesbian and transgender communities—which suffer from an epidemic of continuous assaults and “corrective” rapes—by creating portraits of individual members that convey their dignity and empowerment. To date, she has made more than 240 portraits, ensuring black queer visibility and assembling an archive of an often invisible and marginalized population for posterity.
Robert Mapplethorpe
American, 1946-1989

Risqué and unexpected, Mapplethorpe’s works deal not only with the exploration of sexuality as self-image in the late twentieth century but also the contradictions inherent in the classical depiction of the human form. Though infamous in the 1980s for his nude studies that seemed to straddle the fine line between art and pornography, Robert Mapplethorpe also spent a significant portion of his career creating self-portraits and traditional floral still-lifes. Yet Mapplethorpe is remembered by many for being at the center of the 1989 National Endowment for the Arts controversy over the funding and exhibition of art that challenged the accepted social mores of the time (along with artist Andres Serrano). Arguably, Mapplethorpe and his art are best understood in these historic terms: after all, many artists have led lives on the edge of social acceptability and have chosen to reflect this reality in their artwork. Mapplethorpe, however, is also recognized for his aesthetic accomplishments, which include a type of highly stylized image that sleekly packages a quite personal and intimate vision. The evolution of this vision, which cannot be divorced from Mapplethorpe’s homosexuality, can be traced from his earliest experiments with Polaroid photography to his more elaborate studio portraits, still lifes and nudes.
Artist: Paul Mpagi Sepuya
Title: “Mirror Study (Q5A3505)”
Date: 2016
Medium: inkjet print
Dimensions: frame: 33 in x 22 in
Credit Line: Museum purchase

Paul Mpagi Sepuya
American, b. 1982

Paul Mpagi Sepuya is interested in the intimacy created during portrait sessions between the photographer and subject and the performative nature of photographing and posing in a studio environment. In his series, “Figures, Grounds and Studies” (2015-2016), Sepuya’s uses young queer men and himself as models. Using heavy drapery to cover portions of the bodies, Sepuya plays with the power of suggestion and denies the viewer of the ability to gaze at his subjects’ faces. Additionally, as with “Mirror Study” (2016), the artist often tears his prints into fragments, splitting the body parts of his models and collaging multiple prints. The resulting flat, yet sculptural, works obscure the identities of his models and create an assemblage of sometimes unidentifiable parts.