

## *craigslist*

The exhibition *craigslist* explores how four artists utilize this renowned community website as a conceptual component in their artistic practice. Craigslist.org, a universal database arranged as both an advertisement service and discussion forums, is often considered the Internet equivalent of classified ads. The self-monitored website offers a wide range of services and goods, event announcements, romantic liaison possibilities and advice. The site allows an individual to post incognito for safety or provocation. The exhibition features works by the artist team Joseph Dumbacher & John Dumbacher, Jason Horowitz, and Jason Zimmerman.

Central to all of these artists' works is the concept of anonymity. While we are more hyper-connected than ever online, a curious outcome of our global Internet society is that our identities have become increasingly malleable to the point of obscurity. But just like a Harry Potter invisibility cloak, anonymity can bring out the adventurous side of people, particularly when it comes to exploring socially transgressive situations. In this exhibition, the artists take full advantage of this growing social identity phenomenon and investigate how anonymity generates a new kind of portraiture.

The artist team of Joseph and John Dumbacher solicit models on craigslist.org for their haunting photographic portraits. They offer to purchase a movie ticket to the model's film of choice and meet their subject at the cinema. There they take full advantage of the low light levels and capture shadowy portrait images that actually reveal very little of psychological import about the sitter. It is mostly the sitter's garments that allow the viewer to project a different identity onto the subject. The camera accommodates to the low light, and the resulting photograph becomes rather painterly, evoking the shadowy portraits of Rembrandt.

Jason Horowitz's provocative large-scale photographs function at the intersection of landscape and anonymous portraiture. Like the Dumbachers, he solicits models on craigslist.org to come to his photo studio. There he and the model outline a social contract based on the model's physical and emotional comfort levels. The models may choose to reveal as much as they wish with no pressure from the artist. Horowitz shoots extreme close-ups of the body. By exploding scale, he reveals not only the fascinating visual terrain of the body but also challenges our own hidden or unspoken biases about beauty, ugliness, body image, race, sexuality, aging, and the thresholds of exhibitionism.

In 2005, Jason Zimmerman threw the equivalent of a social Molotov cocktail onto craigslist. The artist notes, "A short request for a supposed rape fantasy was posted in personals forums all over the United States....The words 'rape me' formed the bulk of the content. Nothing more was stated or implied beside a willingness to engage in some level of correspondence with willing, yet unwitting, and relatively anonymous respondents. An attempt to maintain the anonymity of those who choose to respond was made....and, in many cases, the faces, tattoos, and other physical identifiers present in attached images were blurred or otherwise distorted. An artist book entitled "The Willing" was produced as a result, but the project also generated a new type of 'artist book.'" Zimmerman exploits images posted by users on craigslist.org as a found raw material. On view are his digital photo albums that include hundreds of images posted by people on craigslist who are actively seeking sexual partners or indulging in unabashed

exhibitionism. Once again, the individuals' faces are deliberately obscured (or clothed), making the body the focus of attention while cloaking their visages in privacy.

An outgrowth of the social identity politics rampant in contemporary art in the early and mid 1990s, portraiture has undergone a revival in the last decade. Rather than reveal the psychology of the sitter, however, many contemporary artists choose to project agendas – however obvious or subtle -- onto their subjects. The artists also leave their work open-ended enough to allow the viewer to ascribe their own meanings and contexts onto the subject. Social forum websites such as craigslist provide a bridge between willing artist and willing model. The varied results reveal how acutely so many others share our private obsessions.

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