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THINGS: a queer legacy of graphic art and play

Curated by Bradford Nordeen

July 17 - August 21, 2016

Opening reception, Sunday, July 17, 7-9pm

Curt McDowell, Tom Rubnitz and Robert Ford, with Seth Bogart, Rafa Esparza, Aimee Goguen and Brontez Purnell

Screenings at Anthology Film Archives:

August 11 - 18, 2016

THINGS is an exhibition of objects made by artists best known for their work in journalism and media. Drafted during moments of leisure and distributed largely through social means, the paintings, drawings and printed matter collected in the exhibition *THINGS* harness the quiet radicality of their activist origins. From the hyper-sexualized drawings and comics of filmmaker Curt McDowell, to the '60s revisionist wall reliefs and high gloss paintings of video artist Tom Rubnitz, through music journalist and AIDS columnist Robert Ford's underground black culture 'zine, *THING* – for “she knows who she is” – the tactics on display carry through to a younger generation, whose object-making bolsters or elaborates the artists' primary, time-based practices. Through expressive self-portraiture, utopian world making, and scene-charting 'zine cultures, the materials assembled in *THINGS* evince the intensely vital and political potential of craft to reflect the world as it appears or is perceived at immensely personal moments of artistic reflection.

THINGS is presented by ONE Gay & Lesbian National Archives and PARTICIPANT INC, in collaboration with Anthology Film Archives, Video Data Bank, and Visual AIDS. The exhibition will be on view at ONE Gay & Lesbian National Archives from September 17 - December 11, 2016.

Time-based art at Anthology Film Archives includes: a restoration retrospective of the films of Curt McDowell, a retrospective of Tom Rubnitz video works, as well as titles by Seth Bogart + Jennifer Stratford, Brice Dellspenger, Nazli Dinçel, Mariah Garnett, Aimee Goguen, Steve Hall + Cathee Wilkins, Dynasty Handbag, Josef Kraska, Young Joon Kwak + Veli-Matti Hoikka, Barry Morse, Brontez Purnell, Vanessa Roveto and Stephen Winter. See anthologyfilmarchives.org for full schedule.

“Curt was curt, cute, controversial, and not celibate,” wrote friend and collaborator George Kuchar. **Curt McDowell** worked in San Francisco from the late 1960s until his death in 1987 – a period that witnessed the Summer of Love, gay liberation, and the onset of HIV/AIDS, to which he succumbed at the age of forty-two. The author of numerous films that recast the American dream of plenty in pansexual terms, McDowell, like so many artists of his generation, indulged in the era’s carnal abundance, and his appetites and experiences are reflected in his work, which alternates between the revealing and the puerile. His short films, such as *Weiners and Buns Musical* (1972) and *Loads* (1980), celebrate sex as well as genre-riffing and autobiographical narratives (McDowell’s insatiable desire for seducing straight men is explicitly documented in his 16-mm works), and bear the influences of Jack Smith’s lush, DIY, camp aesthetic, Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s explosive melodrama, and Nan Goldin’s glimpses of countercultural bohemia. McDowell exhibited his work in illustration and painting during one, 24-hour exhibition during his lifetime.

Over the course of the 1980s and up until his untimely death from HIV/AIDS related complications in 1992, **Tom Rubnitz** captured the personalities and energy of the East Village scene in his loony, anarchic, and hallucigenically-colored short videos. Screwball TV broadcasts from an alternate reality, these videos take the form of cooking shows, music videos, or kids shows, featuring downtown artists like Ann Magnuson, and drag legends-in-the-making RuPaul, the Lady Bunny, and Hapi Phace. As Amy Taubin wrote, Rubnitz’s “glitter-dusted videos distill the sensibility of a generation of TV babies whose venue of choice was the Pyramid Club rather than the Whitney Museum.” Rubnitz and his demented TV takeoffs live on in the YouTube era, with the ever-popular *Pickle Surprise* racking up over two million views and inspiring fan remixes and remakes. Rubnitz maintained a fine art studio practice and in SoHo and was included in various exhibitions, including a three-person show at Artists’ Space in 1980.

Robert Ford was a freelance journalist, publisher, and activist born and raised in Chicago. Creative Director of Rose Records, Ford was a frequent contributor to local publications like *Jam Sessions*, *Chicago Music Magazine*, *Jazzgram* in addition to maintaining regular columns in *Planet Rock* and *Babble*. His groundbreaking African-American-focused AIDS column ran in *Pulse* magazine until the time of his death in 1993. Ford collaborated with Trent Adkins and Laurence Warren to found *Think Ink*, an arts magazine that was, “very Black, not very gay but queer-friendly.” The publishing trio unleashed *THING* into the world shortly thereafter. Running from 1989-1993, *THING* – “She Knows Who She Is” – became legendary in ‘zine communities, with distribution quantities ultimately rising to 3,000. Ford announced the final *THING* after the publication of the 10th issue, in order to focus on freelance writing projects.

Seth Bogart is a multi disciplinary artist living in Los Angeles, CA. Last year he had his first solo show, *The Seth Bogart Show*, in Los Angeles at 356 S. Mission Rd. He likes creating immersive worlds filled with paintings, video, sculpture, and music. He was a member of the bands Gravy Train!!!! and Hunx and His Punx and this year released the first album under his birth name. His first ‘zine, *Puberty Strike*, was released in the late ‘90s, followed by *Psycho No. 1 Fan*. He also runs a clothing line and store called Wacky Wacko.

Rafa Esparza was born in 1981 in East Los Angeles. Esparza studied at East Los Angeles College before transferring to UCLA. His intermedia performance practice spans installation, sculpture, drawing, and painting, exhibiting work at a variety of sites, including traditional fine art contexts (*Made in LA*, at The Hammer Museum; *MexiCali Biennial* at the Vincent Price Art Museum), and community-based platforms as well as outdoor public locations that he has independently sought out and organized.

Aimee Goguen is a video artist, object-maker and experimental animator who received her BFA and MFA from CalArts. Over the past five years, Goguen’s work has screened internationally at venues like Redcat, Anthology Film Archives, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, Night Gallery, and Periwinkle Cinema, in addition to numerous stints at the Druid Underground Film Festival. She has performed in video work by Harry Dodge and provided animated sequences for *William S. Burroughs: A Man Within* (2010).

Brontez Purnell has been publishing, performing, and curating in the Bay Area for over ten years. He is author of the cult ‘zine *Fag School*, frontman for his band The Younger Lovers, and founder and choreographer of the Brontez Purnell Dance Company. He was formerly a dancer with Gravy Train!!!, a queer electro indie band that gained national prominence in the mid-2000s. He earned a B.F.A. in Theatre and Contemporary Dance at California State University, East Bay, just published his first novella, *Johnny Would You Love Me (if My Dick Were Bigger)* with Rudos and Rubes, and will publish a second novel, *Since I Laid My Burden Down...*, with the Sister Spit imprint of City Lights Books.

Curt McDowell courtesy of The Curt McDowell Estate and 2nd floor projects, San Francisco. Tom Rubnitz courtesy of Alan Mace, Mary Lu Roffe, Peter and Susan Rubnitz. *THINGS* issues courtesy of ONE Archives, Steve Lafreniere, and Stephen Winter.



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Common Practice New York is an advocacy group that fosters research and discussions on the role of small-scale arts institutions in New York City. Common Practice New York aims to collectively embody the question, *What is our common practice and why do we value it?* commonpracticenyc.org

PARTICIPANT INC is located at 253 East Houston Street, between Norfolk and Suffolk Streets on the LES, ground floor, wheelchair accessible. Subway: F to Second Avenue, Allen Street exit; or JMZ to Essex/Delancey. participantinc.org

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