





Introducing

"Who´s Afraid of America?"

A thought-provoking voyeuristic experience awaits the spectator when WAS -Wonderland Art Space - presents the exhibition "Who's Afraid of America?" offerin an intense, personal and unpolished glimpse into American life. Seen through the eyes of six American photo artists all working within the field of documentary photography, the exhibition portrays parts of American society by focusing variously on subcultures, fringe populations, loneliness and family life.

Entering WAS, the eye is caught by a spectacular mosaic of frozen moments. The gallery space is temporary invaded by a settlement of images craving our attention. Inviting the eye to explore and engage, the photographs form scattered storylines, giving viewers the possibility to dive into the fragments of life in contemporary America.

Experience the intimacy of LaToya Ruby Fraziers's staged invasion of privacy as she documents her own family - Larry Clark's search for the intensity of youth apturing teens struggling for identity. Dig into the works by Tobin Yelland and Cheryl Dunn documenting the faces of numerous subcultures and life on the streets, each from a very different perspective. Meet John, Jim and Phil, depicted in their profoundly intimate living spaces, in Justyna Bardach´s almost uncomfortably honest "Bachelor Portraits" and join Zoe Strauss in her native Philadelphia as she captures the grim yet resilient nature of forgotten neighborhoods and the struggles of everyday life, casting an unsentimental eye on overlooked members of society.

The United States is at the moment facing significant changes to their political institutions. These changes and their possible implications have focused an inredible amount of attention and energy on America. Hours and hours have beer spent so far analyzing and speculating about the upcoming presidential election and its effects, and even more coverage is about to take place. These analysis and points of view are generally relayed to us by politicians, journalists, economists and sociologists.

WAS find it interesting and imperative – to also depict the state of America as seen through the eyes of the artists.

With an upcoming presidential election, relevant not only in the US but also to the surrounding world, "Who's Afraid of America?" brings an honest and uncensored snapshot of the current state of the American nation, from the perspective of the invited artists. This provides an ideal opportunity to examine the work of young American documentary photographers and their influences, showing their experience and understanding of the country they live in - its dreams and nightmares, hopes and fears for the future.

WAS - Wonderland Art Space











This exhibition is supported by



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by Laura Heymann

Looking at America can be a little like looking at the sun. It's difficult to see the country clearly, surrounded as it is by the glare of its mythic past and potential future. Myth is a fundamental part of American identity, something the pilgrims first came to understand while they were starving to death in what was supposed to be an edenic paradise. Of course the more problematic elements of that particular history have been excised in retelling, an alchemical process that eventually transforms tragedy into victory, and myth into fact.

The excision of difficult facts is another fundamental element of American identity. We would not be ourselves without our can-do, our know-how our never give up. Sometimes the myth of America (this "American spirit") illuminates and sometimes it obscures, and as such it is both the best and the worst of us as a country.

But a curious thing has been happening in the United States for the past ten or fifteen years. There is an increasing disconnect between the way the country pictures itself and the pieces of the picture being edited out. It's as if we've gone through the looking glass and are experiencing a form of national hysteria – everywhere we turn we see gold, and anything that doesn't look like money becomes invisible.

It is against this backdrop that the work of the six photographers in this exhibition becomes so crucial. They bear witness to the things happening all around us, things most of us don't allow ourselves to acknowledge. They tell the truth. What they see is what they show us. Sometimes it's beautiful and sometimes it rattles us to the core.

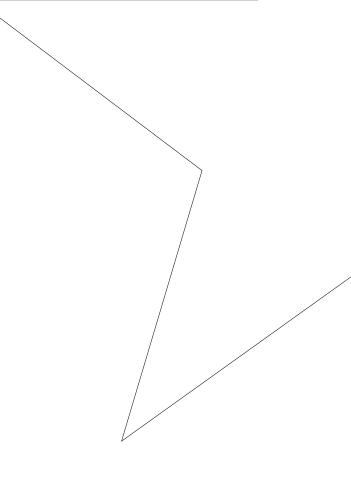
Larry Clark's pictures of Jonathan Velasquez contain all of the promise of adolescence, the poignancy that comes with viewing that potential from a distance, and the pain of knowing its inevitable death. Clark photographed Velasquez for almost four years and the viewer gets to watch him grow up. But this does not produce the requisite sense of pride and joy, and we witness as his grin changes into a smirk, and finally to a scowl. The beauty of the project is that Clark captures this unbelievably angelic boy on the cusp of manhood, and makes the viewer see, as he always has, that this is a very complicated place.

The future for Tobin Yelland's mostly male subjects is a bit more rosy. There is a remarkable immediacy to his images – looking at them, one experiences a flash of recognition; I remember being that age, at that party, in that place. Being with people you knew well and cared for deeply, the family you construct for yourself as a teenager, and how that world eclipses everything else. But this is not nostalgia, it is still very much Yelland's life, and he has continued to photograph it with the same sense of wonder he had at fourteen. Only his subjects refuse to grow up, if that means conforming to society's expectations of them. And so they exclude themselves from certain experiences and choose to operate on the fringes.

If Yelland's subjects are afraid to grow up, Justyna Badach's bachelors show us why. Her Bachelor Portraits gives the lie to the façade of male power. The portrayal of bachelors in their kitchens and living rooms reverses our traditional ideas of home, and a woman's place in it. Badach emphasizes the emotional traits of her subjects, an act of kindness towards men, who are as devastated by expectations of active, public power as women are by expectations of passive, private receptivity. Through her collaborations with her sitters, Badach has created images that speak of a new masculinity—her subjects engage the camera with a combination of pathos and heroism that allows them to embody dignity and humility at the same time.

This is a radical re-imagining of gender, and to look upon these images is to sense that the material is illicit, so far does it veer off -course from prevailing ideologies regarding the American male. LaToya Ruby Frazier enacts a similar reversal of expectations with her work, but while the subjects in her world are largely female, in her case the reversal she enacts is primarily class-based.

In picturing her family - matriarchal, African-American and low income - Frazier accomplishes something that seems almost impossible. She makes a world we hear about as being so very "other" appear familiar. As Frazier is an integral part of the community she documents, viewers are placed in the middle of her life, without the usual comfortable distance that most documentary work provides.



ted States

With this shift, Frazier has managed to do something completely different with the genre. The work is revolutionary in its combination of visual elegance, emotional power and lack of judgment.

The subtext of much of the work in this exhibition is class. If Americans were as clear-eyed as Badach, Clark, Dunn, Frazier Straus and Yelland, they would not be able to deny the various attitudes and bureaucratic structures that keep America's class system in place. Zoe Strauss and Cheryl Dunn engage different documentary forms to simply illuminate, in Strauss's case, and harshly expose, in Dunn's the results of a decades long war on the poor and working class in the United States.

There is a long tradition of social documentary work in the United States, starting with Jacob Riis, the Danish immigrant and photographer whose experience in the tenements and poor houses of New York City turned him into a public crusader. His book *How the Other Half Lives* became a model for subsequent generations of documentary photographers, men and women like Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange who thought their photographs could change the world.

In a sense they could, but this is also another great American myth, one that was perhaps best exposed by Robert Frank in his seminal book *The Americans*. Frank was not a crusader. He was traveling through America by car in the late 1950's, a time when all of the suppressed tensions between the myriad populations that comprised the country were boiling to the surface. It was enough for Frank to truly see and attempt to understand the world he pictured. He knew he could not change it.

Zoe Strauss does not fully subscribe to Robert Frank's world-view. Unlike Frank, she has deep ties to the community she documents, and like LaToya Ruby Frazier, she photographs that community from the inside. Strauss's respect for her subjects is evidenced in part by the annual "Under I-95" exhibition, which she stages under the freeway every year in Philadelphia in order to make sure that the people she photographs have an opportunity to see the images she makes of them. But the real proof of Strauss's sense of kinship with her subjects is the lucidity of her vision. Her portraits recall not the freaks of Diane Arbus, but rather the lovingly depicted familiars of Nan Goldin. Seldom has this population been pictured with such clear-eyed love and generosity.

Dunn's photographs of New York seem almost nostalgic, if one could be nostalgic for the New York of the 1970's. But Dunn is not mining the aesthetics of that decade to inject some sense of gritty realism into her work. Her photographs are current. Dunn is a street photographer, and her eye is somewhat compulsive. It darts back and forth, grabbing minute details from anywhere and everywhere. This method produces an extraordinary volume of images, but then her brand of genius is cumulative. To view Dunn's work is to understand the true nature of a place, and to understand also that places change, more often for worse than better.

The current school of American documentary photography often positions both itself and its subjects as outside of societal norms. Practitioners do this in part by focusing on subcultures, fringe populations, and the disenfranchised. While some might see these groups as a small portion of the overall population, they share a real sense of disillusionment and cynicism about the U.S. government and American Society at large, whether they are excluded from it by choice or circumstance. Thus the process of documenting these subjects can be viewed as a form of political protest.

Under the current political circumstances, is not surprising that images from national tragedies like Hurricane Katrina have so little traction in America's collective consciousness. We live in a country whose president urged the public to go shopping in response September 11th. But the photographers in this exhibition refuse to avert their eyes. They see everything, and in picturing it, force us to see it as well. The photographs assembled here, with a bit of American arrogance, issue the following proclamation: This is a real place. This is New York, and Philadelphia, and Los Angeles. This is the United States. It's broke and dirty and sad and funny. Tenants are evicted. Cops beat people up. Hell is real. And liberty has seen better days.



Artists

Tobin Yelland, Larry Clark, Cheryl Dunn, Zoe Strauss, LaToya Ruby Frazier & Justyna Badach

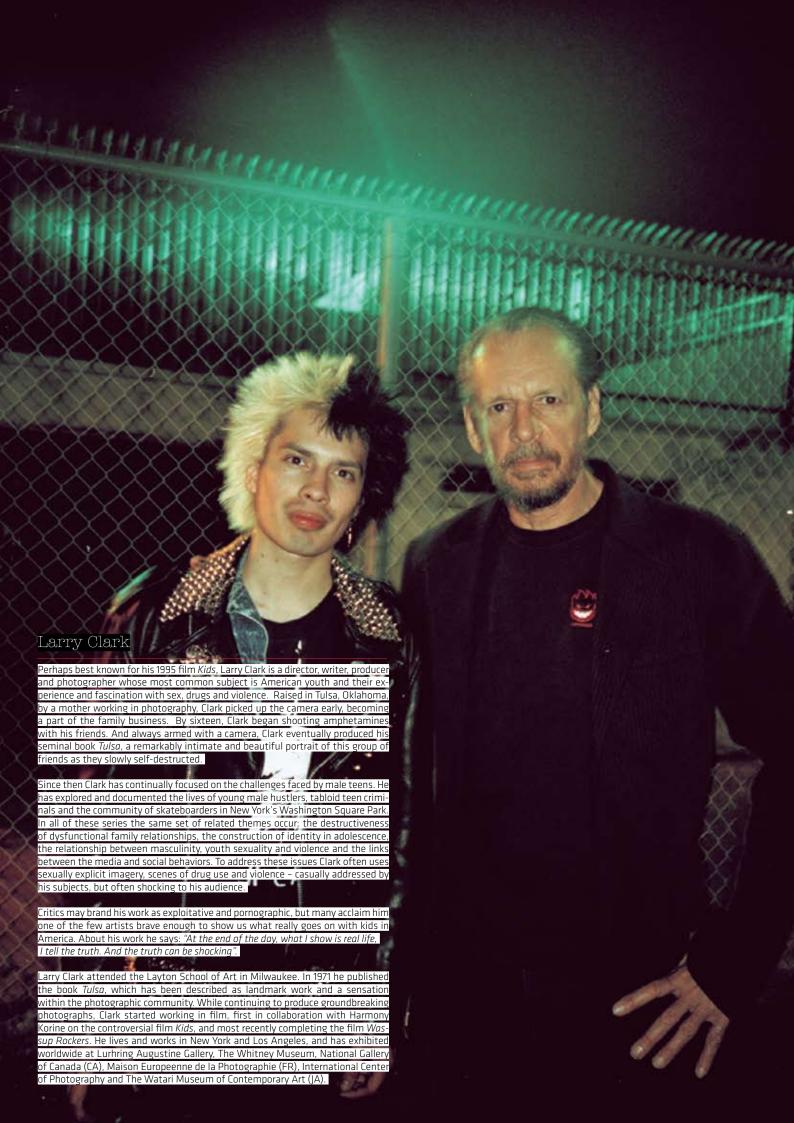
Tobin Yelland

At the age of fifteen, Tobin Yelland started documenting his life skating around the streets of San Francisco, taking pictures of his fellow skaters. First published in *Trasher magazine*, Yelland's work has since expanded beyond the world of gnarly street skateboarders to become a collection of images that transcend many different social identities and subcultures.

Yelland's work often features the day-to-day experiences of different characters playing out their sexuality and aggression with youthful invincibility. As a self-taught artist, starting out as a skateboard photographer and learning by trial and error, Yelland always liked documenting cool funny moments of people doing their thing. Many of his favorite photographs have taken place hanging out with friends in the kind of situations where something unexpected happens and he is ready with his camera.

About his photographic style Yelland says: "One thing I was turned on to was documenting my friends. That's probably the most obvious, and I thought, "Wow, I can probably take better pictures of my friends, and I take pictures of them all the time anyway. I should take advantage of the fact that I'm so close to these people that are interesting."

Today Tobin Yelland both works with photography and filmmaking – where he recently worked as co-producer on Aaron Rose's documentary *Beautiful Losers* (2008). Yelland's photographs have been exhibited at The Luggage Store, Deitch Projects, Thread Waxing Space, White Columns, Institute for Contemporary Art, Philadelphia and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. His work has also been featured in various publications including Visionaire, Tokion, Spin, and The New York Times. He currently lives and works in New York.



Cheryl Dunn

It's not that Manhattan-based photographer and documentary filmmaker Cheryl Dunn has any desire to glorify gritty streetscenes, violence or suffering – but she sees a truth in these kinds of moments. New Jersey-born and rooted in the 1990's DIY (do-it-yourself) subcultures of skateboarding, surf, punk, hip hop and graffiti, Cheryl Dunn is a self-taught artist who together with her peers grew up creating art that reflected the lifestyle they led. She is drawn to people who are born without privilege but have the audacity to seek notoriety and success: "[I'm inspired by people] who try to somehow figure out how to have a voice, whether it's doing graffiti, or protesting, or whatever... Maybe they're making it, and maybe they're not. But they're not buying into their place, and they're trying to have a voice"

Dunn presents a clear-eyed portrait of her peers in the male-dominated underground she came up in, and as a photographer, she has had full access to arenas where women are not always accepted as equals: "I was like some kind of tomboy girl with a camera. I was not the sexy girl, they couldn't put me in a box. I became much more of a fly on the wall. But I was knowledgeable about their sport, so I got a lot of these quys to really open up to me, because they couldn't be vulnerable in front of their peers."

Through the last two decades Dunn has photographed widely varied cultural pockets of American life. In addition to her photography, she also works as a documentary filmmaker – and is furthermore one of the portrayed artists in Aaron Rose's documentary Beautiful Losers (2008). The film follows a group of artists who started as outsiders, developing their craft with almost no influence from the "established" art world. This group, together with the subcultures they sprang from, has since become a movement that has transformed pop culture. Cheryl Dunn has participated in several film festivals and exhibited her photographs in the US and internationally, amongst others at Deitch Projects, Fuse Gallery and recently at Galerie Impaire, Paris, and Santander Cultural Center, Brazil. She has a BA from Rutgers University, New Brunshwick, NJ.



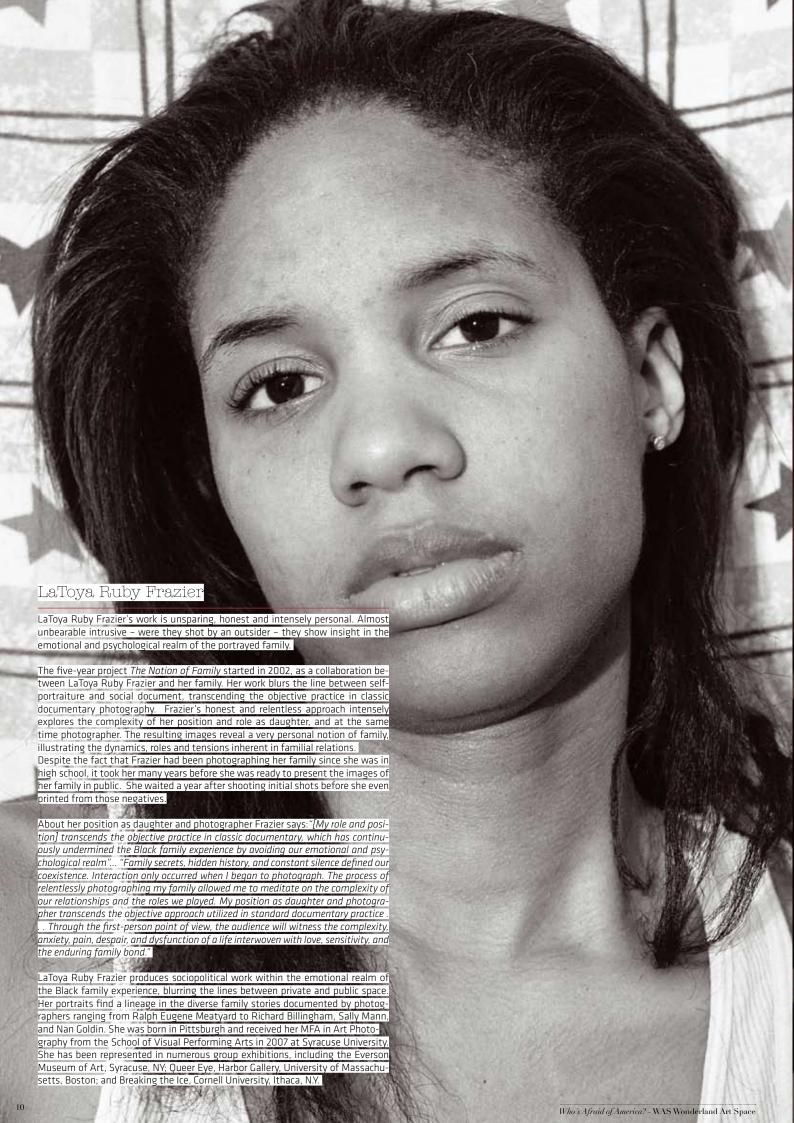


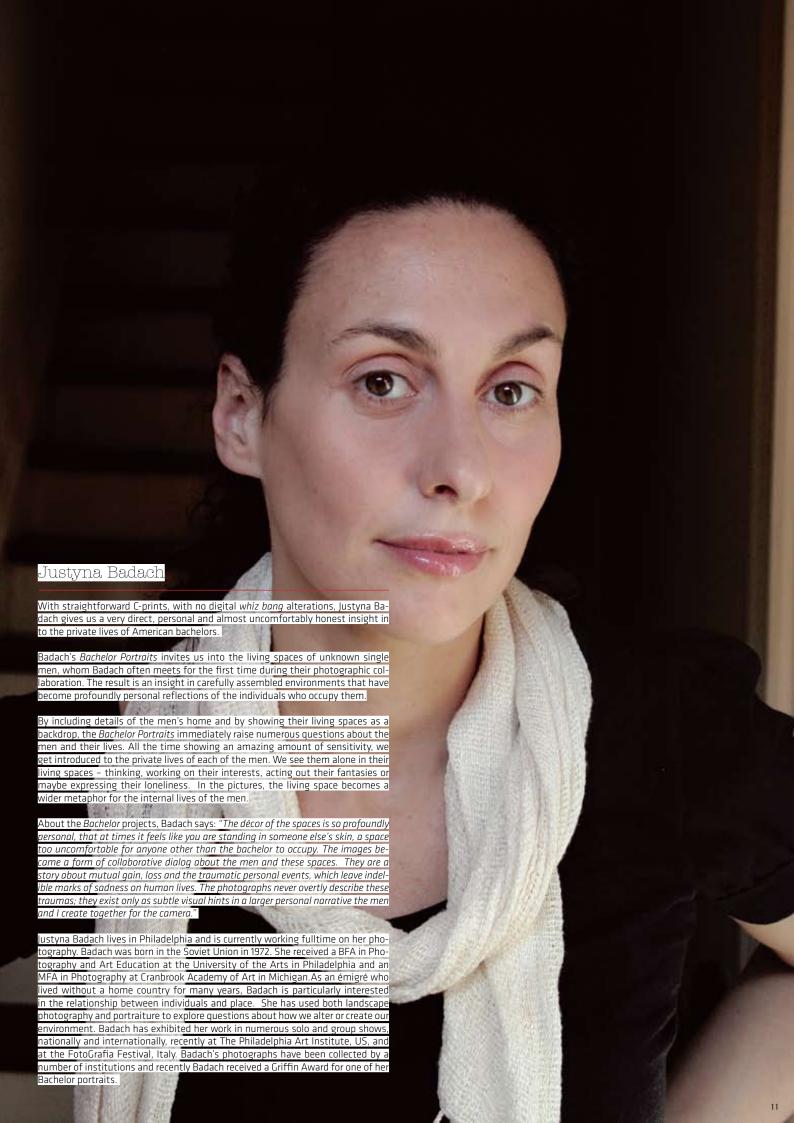
Zoe Strauss

With Philadelphia as the primary setting and subject for her work, Zoe Strauss photographs whatever strikes her interest, paying particular attention to the overlooked - or purposefully avoided - details of life. Strauss is a self-taught photographer deeply connected to her roots and surroundings in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Frequently shooting near her grandparents' former home, she portrays shuttered buildings, empty parking lots and vacant meeting halls, illuminating her South Philly neighborhood's grim character. As with all of her work she uses her life in Philadelphia as inspiration. Her intimate portraits capture the dignified resignation of the city's residents. The photographs are sympathetic but still decidelly unsentimental, showing a heavyset blonde woman with bright yellow fingernails showing off a tattoo on her chest, a black transvestite standing under the highway or a woman who has unzipped her shorts to reveal a hysterectomy scar.

About her work Strauss says "[it is] a narrative about the beauty and difficulty o everyday life."

Strauss picked up the camera when she was 30 and started taking pictures of life in the city's marginal neighborhoods. In 2002, she received a Seedling Award in photography from the Leeway Foundation. Tree years later she received a Pew Fellowship. In 2006, her work was included in the Whitney Biennial, at the Whitney Museum in New York. Her contribution was a slide show, accompanied by music, consisting of blunt, riveting color images of the streets of South Philadelphia as well as the devastated cities of Gulfport and Biloxi, Mississippi, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Strauss also mounted a solo exhibition, "Ramp Project: Zoe Strauss" at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia and participated in the exhibition "This Is America: Visions of the American Dream" at the Centraal Museum in Utrecht, Holland.





Art work

WAS - Wonderland Art Space* 30.10.08 - 31.11.08



Tobin Yelland; Ethan Fowler, California, 1994, Gelatin silver print, 27,9 $\,$ x 35,6 cm, Edition of 10



 $To bin \ Yelland; \textit{Wheatberry, San Francisco, California,} 1985, \ Gelatin \ silver \ print, \ 27,9 \ \times \ 35,6 \ cm, \ Edition \ of \ 10$



Tobin Yelland; Shawn Martin, King City, California, 1991, c-print, 27,9 x 35,6 cm, Edition of 10



Tobin Yelland; $Stefanie\ and\ Rose,\ New\ York$, 2003, Gelatin silver print, 27,9 $\,$ x 35,6 cm, Edition of 10





Tobin Yelland; Antonius Dintcho, San Jose, California, 1996, c-print, 27,9 $\,$ x 35,6 cm, Edition of 10



Tobin Yelland; Shelley, NewYork, 2004, Gelatin silver print, 27,9 x 35,6 cm, Edition of 10



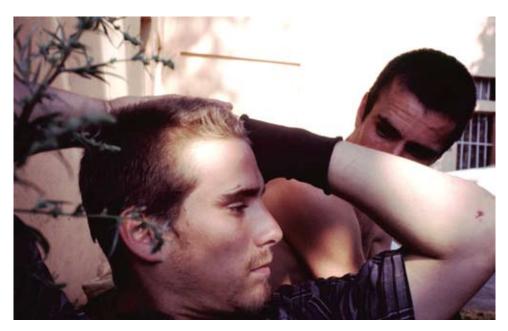
Tobin Yelland; Shaun Odell, New York, 2002, Gelatin silver print, 27,9 $\,$ x 35,6 cm, Edition of 10



Tobin Yelland; Shawn Martin, San Jose, California, 1985, Gelatin silver print, 27,9 $\,$ x 35,6 cm, Edition of 10



Tobin Yelland; *Harief, NewYork*, 2006, Gelatin silver print, 27,9 x 35,6 cm, Edition of 10



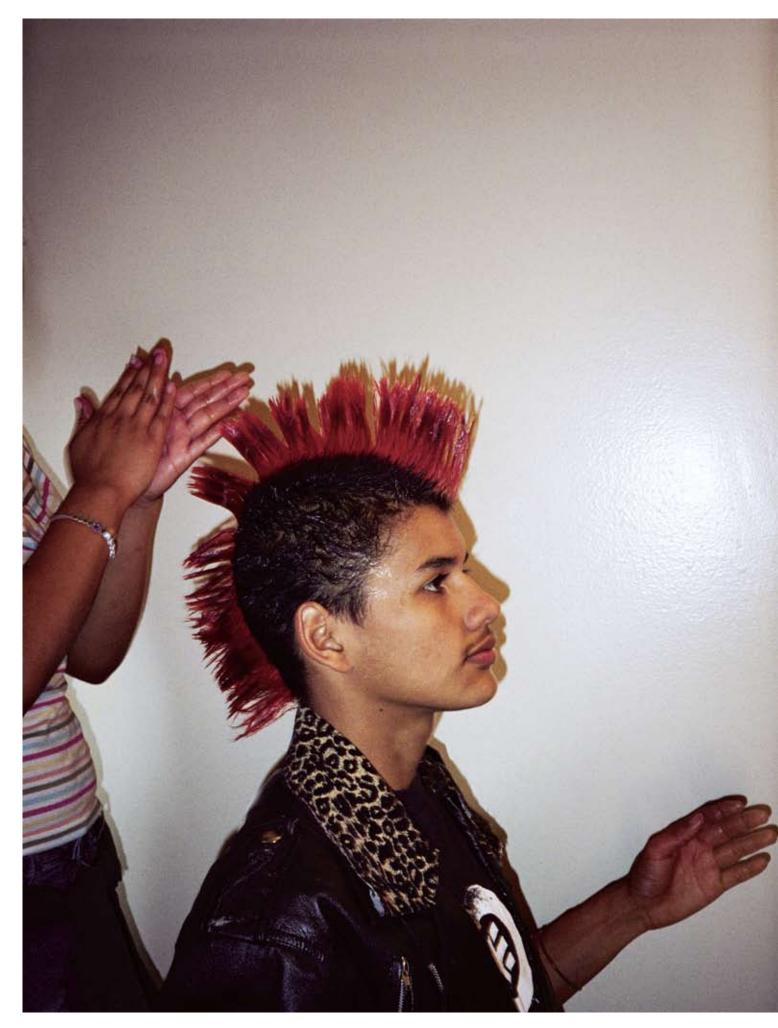
Tobin Yelland; John Cardiel and Skip Pronier, Prague, 1994 c-print, 27,9 $\, \times$ 35,6 cm, Edition of 10



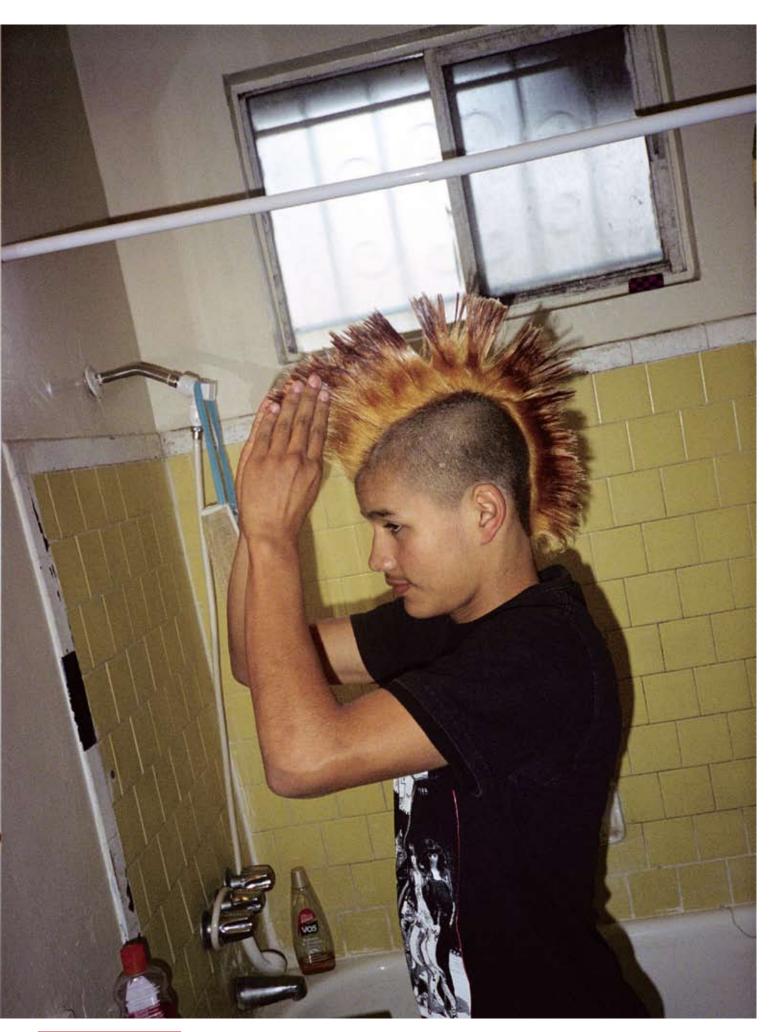
Tobin Yelland; Girl in the Green Car, San Francisco,1992, c-print, 27,9 $\, \times$ 35,6 cm, Edition of 10



Tobin Yelland; Vanessa, NewYork, 2005, Gelatin silver print, 27,9 x 35,6 cm, Edition of 10



Larry Clark; Jonathan Velasquez, 2004, Pigment Print, 107 x 141cm, Edition of 3 $\,$







Larry Clark; Jonathan Velasquez & Kico, 2003, Pigment Print, 73 x 107cm, Edition of 3



 $Larry\ Clark; \textit{Jonathan Velasquez}\ \textit{G-Cindy},\ 2005,\ Pigment\ print,\ 74\ x\ 107cm,\ Edition\ of\ 3$



Larry Clark; *Jonathan Velasquez*, 2003, Pigment print, 74 x 107cm, Edition of 3



Larry Clark; Jonathan Velasquez, 2004, Pigment Print, 73 x 107cm, Edition of 3 $\,$



Cheryl Dunn; *Sad Day 1,* 2001, Print, 27,9 x 35,6 cm Edition of 10



Cheryl Dunn; *Rats-3rd.ave.* 1997, Print, 27,9 x 35,6 cm Edition of 10



Cheryl Dunn; *Hole fans,* 1998, Print, 20,3 x 25,4 cm Edition of 10



Cheryl Dunn; *Video games,* 1999, Print, 20,3 x 25,4 cm Edition of 10



Cheryl Dunn; *Blake motel,* 1999, Print, 53,3 x 58,4 cm Edition of 10



Cheryl Dunn; *Fireworks*, 2002, Print, 27,9 x 35,6 cm Edition of 10



Cheryl Dunn; *Atlantic city girl,* 1995, Print, 20,3 x 25,4 cm Edition of 10

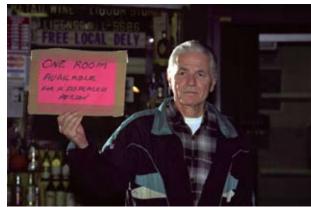


Cheryl Dunn; *Statue of liberty,* 2005, Print, 20,3 x 25,4 cm Edition of 10

Cheryl Dunn; *Father and son,* 2008, Print, 27,9 x 35,6 cm Edition of 10



Cheryl Dunn; *Sad Day 2,* 2001, Print,27,9 x 35,6 cm Edition of 10



Cheryl Dunn; *Jersey board walk,* 2001, Print, 20,3 x 25,4 cm Edition of 10



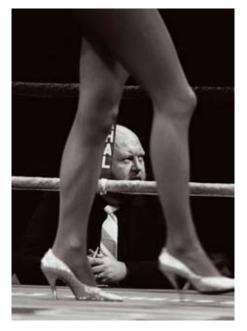
Cheryl Dunn; *Hell is real,* 2005, Print, 50,8 x 76,2 cm Edition of 10



Cheryl Dunn; *Marla and Don,* 1996, Print, 20,3 x 25,4 cm Edition of 10



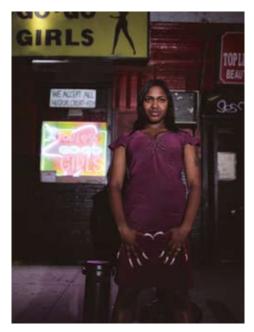




Cheryl Dunn; *Ring card-girl,* 1994, Print, 27,9 x 35,6 cm Edition of 10



Cheryl Dunn; *Roy Jones jr.,* 2000, Print, 27,9 x 35,6 cm Edition of 10



Cheryl Dunn; *Babydoll lounge*, 1996, Print, 53,3 x38,1 cm Edition of 10



Cheryl Dunn; *Willies weiner wagon*, 2005, Print, 50,8 x 76,2 cm Edition of 10



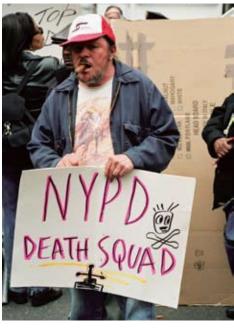
Cheryl Dunn; "Sea side heights, NJ", 2005, Print, 50,8 x 76,2 cm Edition of 10



Cheryl Dunn; *Street tv,* 1999, Print, 27,9 x 35,6 cm Edition of 10



Cheryl Dunn; *American owned,* 2002, Print, 40,6 x 50,8 cm Edition of 10



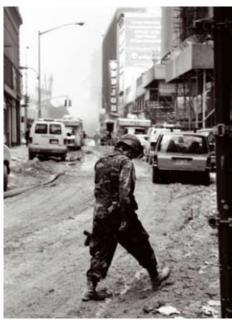
Cheryl Dunn; *Deathsquad*, 1999, Print, 20,3 x 25,4 cm Edition of 10



Cheryl Dunn; *Dragged*, 2003, *Print*, 50,8 x 76,2 cm *Edition of 10*



Cheryl Dunn; *Cocoon,* 2000, Print, 27,9 x 35,6 cm Edition of 10



Cheryl Dunn; *Army guy,* 2001, Print, 27,9 x 35,6 cm Edition of 10



Cheryl Dunn; *Lynn we are watching,* 2004, Print, 27,9 x 35,6 cm Edition of 10



Cheryl Dunn; *Hillary,* 2004, Print, 20,3 x 25,4 cm Edition of 10



Cheryl Dunn; *Skull car,* 1987, Print, 27,9 x 35,6 cm Edition of 10



Cheryl Dunn; *Mall of America*, 1998, Print, 27,9 x 35,6 cm Edition of 10



Cheryl Dunn; *Eviction*, 2001, Print, 27,9 x 35,6 cm Edition of 10



Latoya Ruby Frazier; Grandma, JC and Me in the bathroom, 2007, Print, 40,6 x 50,8 cm, Edition of 20



Latoya Ruby Frazier, $\it Grandma~Wiping~Gramps$, 2003, Print, 40,6 x 50,8 cm , Edition of 20



Latoya Ruby Frazier; Mom, Me and the Huxtables, 2008, Print, 40,6 x 50,8 cm, Edition of 20 $\,$





Latoya Ruby Frazier; Momme Series, 2008, Print, $40.6 \times 50.8 \text{ cm}$ Edition of 20



Latoya Ruby Frazier; Mr. Yerby, 16x20 print, 2003 , Print, 40,6 x 50,8 cm Edition of 20



Latoya Ruby Frazier; Mom and Ziggy on American Redcross, 2005 Print, 40,6 x 50,8 cm, Edition of 20 $\,$



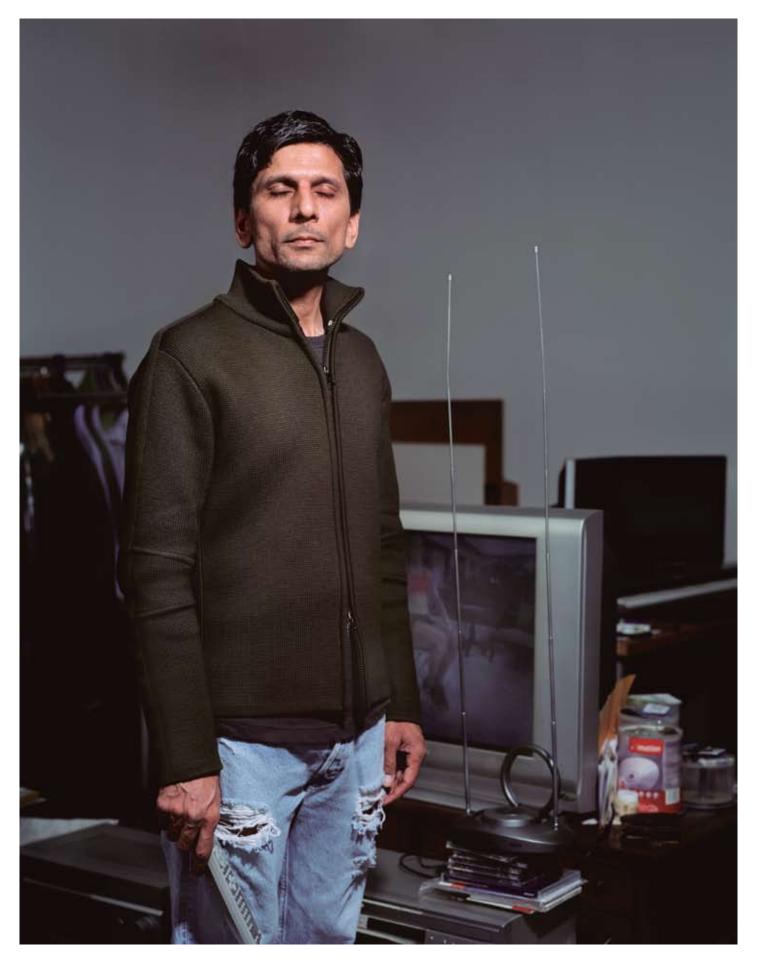
Justyna Badach; Jim, 2007, Archival Inkjet print on photo rag, $59.1 \times 76.2 \text{ cm}$



Justyna Badach; *Phil*, 2007, Archival Inkjet print on photo rag, 59,1 x 76,2 cm

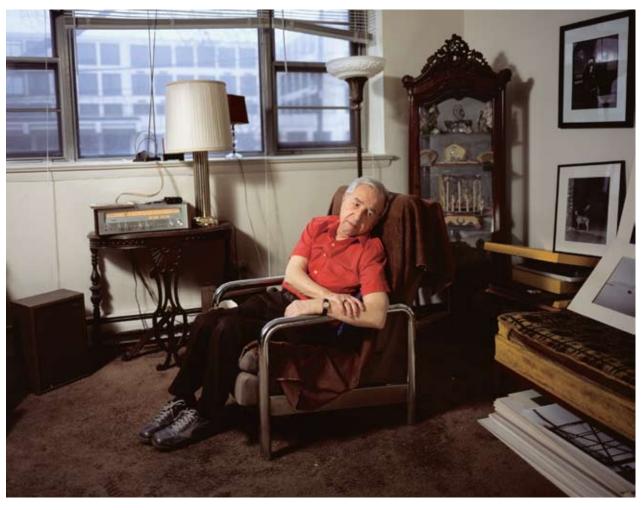


Justyna Badach; John, 2008, Archival Inkjet print on photo rag, 59,1 x 76,2 cm



Justyna Badach; $\it Maneswar$, 2007, Archival Inkjet print on photo rag, 59,1 x 76,2 cm





Justyna Badach; Phillip, 2008, Archival Inkjet print on photo rag 59,1 x 76,2 cm



Justyna Badach; George, 2008, Archival Inkjet print on photo rag, 59,1 x 76,2 cm



















