GENDER EUPHORIA:  
An Embodied Practice of Painting & Drag Performance  
by  
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Abstract

This document is a support paper for my MFA thesis exhibition that highlights certain aspects of my artistic practice as a drag performance artist and painter contextualizing my work within academic theories of socially constructed gender roles. I have been an active participant in drag performance for many years. In this document I discuss how my performance practice has enriched and influenced my creative practice-based research as paintings. Specifically, in relationship to my recent body of work culminating in my final MFA thesis exhibition, Gender Euphoria. The title Gender Euphoria, represents a subversion of cultural codes, and the work itself is the culmination of my two-year residency at UBC Okanagan exploring misogyny, drag, the monstrous feminine and painting.
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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to those who have been marginalized, and to those who have been Othered.
Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Gender Euphoria

“What is important now is that we free ourselves from the prison of gender.”
(Ellison 33)

—Carolyn Heilbrun, Writer and Social Critic (from If Women Ruled the World)

The title for my final MFA thesis exhibition, Gender Euphoria, refers to a profound sense of elation one feels when stereotypical gender roles are disrupted through a self-conscious or unconscious act of subversion and a temporary, yet euphoric, sense of cultural release occurs. One of my favorite examples of this feeling of social elation is a YouTube video of the popular talent competition X Factor, in the Philippines, when a young woman enters the stage wearing a simple black dress and demurely introduces herself as Osang in a sweet feminine voice. (OSANG) Osang then proceeds to shatter the decidedly stereotypical feminine gender illusion she has created, and more than likely reveal that she is transgendered, by ferociously singing a death metal song in a deep baritone voice. The judges and the audience members enter a state of shock and hysterical fervor as the raw singing talent of the performer becomes apparent but also, as her chameleon-like ability to trick the eye into believing that she is, in fact, a biological woman creates an incredibly refreshing double-entendre of sorts. Osang ‘head-bangs’ to Let the Bodies Hit the Floor by Drowning Fool then proceeds to get down to Mr. Bombastic by Shaggy, while still looking ‘pretty’, but with a voice that is very obviously male. I find this example particularly compelling as the weight of the simultaneously disrupt a hetero-normative gender illusion.
In my work, I have explored this sense of elation that one feels when freed from societal pressures. Whether it be to live outside of social norms simply because one has been Othered, or to consciously make the decision to make one’s own choices, rather than have them dictated by society, there are many different ways that one can actively achieve a sense of gender euphoria. In my artwork, I hope to propose an alternative view of gender and identity that examines gender as a fluid spectrum with a complex relationship. The title of my MFA thesis exhibition, *Gender Euphoria*, is a play on the obsolete medical term, ‘gender dysphoria’, and also references Judith Butler’s book entitled *Gender Trouble*, which in turn was also a subversion of the title of John Water’s film, *Female Trouble*, (both of which I will reference in later sections).

In this support document I will explore various topics that are related to my artistic practice as a painter and drag-based performance artist. I will outline some of my influences both as a performer and painter, reveal some autobiographical information which I believe is pertinent, and engage in specific discussions surrounding gender identity, misogyny, drag and the work that I have done during the period of my residency here at UBCO.
1.2 Growing Up

“The artist seeks contact with his intuitive sense of the gods, but in order to create his work he cannot stay in this seductive and incorporeal realm. He must return to the material world in order to do his work. It’s the artist’s responsibility to balance mystical communication and the labor of creation.” (Smith 256)

-Patti Smith, Just Kids

To begin, I’ll have to introduce my self and my practice. I am first and foremost a visual artist. I grew up in Mt. Pearl, Newfoundland, and I have been drawing and painting since I’ve had the ability to put crayon to paper (or wall). According to my mother, my first words when I was a child were “colour, colour, colour”. I’ve always loved art. Interestingly, I have also always had a strong awareness of myself as not fitting neatly into the binary gender roles of mainstream society. As a child, I very early on started to identify as being ‘different’.

In Junior high school I learned a lot about anatomy and drawing the human form from comic books. In my later school days I took to drawing on the desk during math class, with pencil of course, excitedly waiting until the end of class to see what the other student’s thought of my work. Sometimes my drawings were quite risqué or grotesque. My math teacher always applauded my great drawing skills, though was quick to instruct me to erase all that I had done at the end of class. During this time, I also started to experiment with cross-dressing in the form of mixing women’s clothes with men’s, wearing eye makeup and jewelry, growing my hair long, and
painting my fingernails. I also did this publicly, in school, much to the confusion and 
(sometimes) chagrin of my fellow classmates.

Years later, after having gone on a rather exciting journey of self-discovery from 
Newfoundland where I grew up, to Yellowknife (where I moved to live with my 
father for a year), and finally to Winfield, BC; I found myself a young man in a new 
land starting a new adventure. Upon graduating my last year in high school from 
George Elliott Secondary School in Winfield, also having excelled in art there, I 
enrolled immediately into the Fine Arts program at what was then OUC, in Kelowna, 
BC.

My four years at OUC were good, if not a little confusing. I was presented with 
the harsh realities of the art world and also adult life, and though I experimented a 
lot in technique and medium, I didn’t fully find myself as an artist via my four-year 
stint of higher education. I was also not content with North-American attitudes 
about what it meant to be male, so I decided to expand my horizons and went to 
Japan to study Japanese and teach English.

Always having been incredibly excited about foreign cultures, my journey to 
Japan was filled with wonder, intrigue and so much learning. In Japan, from the age 
of 23-27 I found myself. A late bloomer perhaps, but living in Japan was by far the 
most important education I have received to date. Learning about Japanese culture, 
including tea ceremony and ikebana\(^1\), and also about myself via living in a pacifist 
and primarily Buddhist culture for so long was an incredibly valuable experience.

\(^1\) The Japanese art of flower arrangement
Japan was also the place where I officially started doing drag and I will discuss that further in Chapter 2.

While I was in Japan I also continued developing my art. Over the years I didn’t stop drawing or painting; although due to living constraints, size restrictions most definitely came into play. I created 100’s of little ink and watercolor drawings and exhibited them in an Australian-owned gay bar in Osaka’s Doyama district named FrenZy. The exhibition was called DreamZ, the large Z in reference to the bars name. It was successful and I sold a lot of work as well as had a middle-aged Japanese businessman tell me that my work had moved him significantly. He said, “Your work completes me.” That moment was a pivotal point in my artistic career in which I felt that my art had made a significant impact on someone else’s life. I saw the power for social change in art and that is something that has always resonated with me ever since. As the Japanese say, *Ichigo ichi e*, roughly translated as “one chance, one encounter”.

1.3 Embodiment

“The emphasis on embodiment, that is, the situated nature of subjectivity, allows feminists to elaborate strategies of subversion of cultural codes.” (Braidotti 238)

–Rossi Braidotti, *Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*

Recently, I co-created an event that I consider to be one of the most significant achievements in my academic career, the *Embodiment Drag Show* at the Well Pub, UBCO. The *Embodiment Drag Show* was an event that I co-produced with
my drag sister and partner in crime, UBCO social-work student, Dustin Dufault, who is known in drag as *Ella Lamoureux*. This event was particularly significant because it brought people from the straight, gay, lesbian, trans- and bi- communities together with the University community in an unprecedented event at UBCO.

We organized, produced and Headlined at UBCO’s very first drag event. We had record attendance at the Well (over 300 people attended) and it was largely agreed by attendees, participants, and the staff at the Well that it was a very positive and successful event. There, *drag kings, drag queens* and *gender-fuck*² performers presented a very diverse image of drag to an audience who, for the most part, had never seen a drag show before in their lives. The event was graciously co-hosted by two of UBCO’s very own professors, Constance Crompton and Karis Shearer, who emceed the night in drag as well. My drag alter ego *Sasha Zamolodchikova* (figure 1) also took center stage lip-syncing songs about feminism, rape and redemption.

The implications of *Embodiment* were many. Not only was the emphasis on promoting diversity and inclusivity, it was also on acceptance. An extremely positive atmosphere was created where a diverse group of people could gather, drink, dance and enjoy live ‘queer’ entertainment. The title of the event itself, *Embodiment*, was a playful response to the UBC logo, ‘A Place of Mind’. As a painter and performer, I wondered if there was room for the body within the cool academic framework of UBC’s ‘a place of mind’. The term embodiment also refers to a process of physical

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² *Gender-fuck*, in this case, refers to a kind of performance in which the performer is visibly subverting mainstream notions of gender roles by simultaneously displaying aspects of both sexes. For example, a gender-fuck performer might have a beard while simultaneously having breasts. Both are on display, therefore the performer is not conforming to either binary gender roles of what it means to be male or female.
theatre, largely developed by phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in which one unites the imaginary separation between body and mind. Much of my own work is related to this notion and to the practice of ‘being oneself’ regardless of social pressures or environment. In this case, ‘being oneself’ refers to the willingness to bring one’s interior self out into the physical world, and to the embodied act of living visibly as a minority without fear of social condemnation.

Interestingly, the act of performing at such a high profile and highly publicized event as Embodiment, actually served to heighten my awareness of place and time. Prior to performing at UBCO, I was not fully aware of the implications of doing such an event in the small, socially conservative city of Kelowna, British Columbia. It has also been noted by members of the LGBTQTI³ community, that because of our so-called bravery in this regard, we have helped to make it possible for many of the new kings and queens to emerge on the scene, and to perform or simply go out and be comfortable with being themselves. We have also recently secured a regular venue in downtown Kelowna where Ella Lamoureux will be hosting a monthly queer/drag event. This is the kind of social change that I am extremely proud of, and it has been quite wonderful to get the recognition for all of our hard work here in the Okanagan valley today.

³ LGBTQTI – Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Transgendered, Queer, Two-Spirited, Intersex
Chapter 2. Drag

2.1 KISS KISS BANG BANG

"Life in this society being, at best, an utter bore and no aspect of society being at all relevant to women, there remains to civic-minded, responsible, thrill-seeking females only to overthrow the government, eliminate the money system, institute complete automation and destroy the male sex.” (Solanas 1)

-Valerie Solanas, ‘The S.C.U.M. Manifesto’

Disrupting conservative notions of gender roles has always been something of particular interest to me. When I was a teenager I became very inspired by androgynous, glam, or gender-fuck rock stars such as David Bowie, Prince or Marilyn Manson and as I mentioned previously, I started to experiment with my own goth-inspired take on gender-bending in the form of mixing women’s clothing with men’s, wearing eye liner and mascara, growing my hair long, and painting my fingernails. It wasn’t until much later though that I became fully immersed in the world of female impersonation or drag.

I officially started doing drag in Japan, probably around my third year living in Osaka, in late 2009. I had returned to Japan after an unsatisfying six-month stint in Vancouver, and I rented a house with my good friend and artistic collaborator Michael Judd, who’s known in drag as Belgium Solanas (figure 2). Michael is also an artist and his practice is based mostly in photography and film. Our connection is very strong and we have a lot of the same interests in film, music, art and
performance. Over the years, we have collaborated on countless creative endeavors together.

At the time, Michael was dating a young drag queen named ‘Moricco on the Whale’, and after seeing one of her very refreshing performance art based drag shows we decided that it was definitely something that we would like to start doing ourselves. Previous to seeing Moriko’s unique and original performances we had grown accustomed to seeing the usual uninspired drag queens at gay bars doing dull and satirical impersonations of female pop stars. Of course, there is a place for this kind of entertainment, but we decided that we wanted to present a very different image.

Both Michael and myself have very strong femme sides as well as an interest and commitment to exploring the darker side of life so we decided to embody these characteristics in the form of strong femme fatale characters. Not only were our characters serial-killer cannibal witches, they were also strong feminists that identified as butch-femme pansexual/lesbian types. My new name became Sasha Zamolodchikova; illustrious, ancient, serial killer from Russia, and Michael took on his recently deceased grandmothers name Belgium, adding the last name Solanas in reference to Valerie Solanas, famous author of The S.C.U.M. Manifesto, and shooter of Andy Warhol. These somewhat extreme personas suited us quite well for our vision of an embodied performance of anti-patriarchal, alternative drag. We named ourselves Kiss Kiss Bang Bang (figure 3) to reference the hard and the soft, the femme and the butch, the masculine and the feminine, and the desire to seek revenge on the men in the world who have seen it fit for so long to persecute those
who did not submit to their misogynistic patriarchal regime of subjugation, rape and terror.

Our performances were theme oriented and elaborately choreographed while simultaneously referencing and subverting conventions of drag queens that create gender illusions while lip-syncing to female vocalists. In contrast to the usual pop of conventional drag we chose music that was more in the realm of indie-rock, punk, experimental electronica, or with an emphasis on strong female vocalists. We decidedly chose not to portray female characters that represented glitz and glam in the traditional sense.

The venue where we first did drag was an underground club (literally underground because you had to enter through the subway) in Kyoto, Japan, called Metro. There was a very seasoned Japanese queen there named Simone who hosted a regular drag event called Diamonds are Forever. This particular event was interesting because some of the queens were women, some were gay men, one was a heterosexual male and another was transgendered male-to-female. We were excited to add our vision to this interesting and culturally diverse mix. So, one night we dressed up in our best drag (which of course wasn’t all that great at the time. In my case it was more gender-fuck than drag as I didn’t shave my chest or wear a wig) and asked if we could perform at one of their events. They said yes, and a month later we were on stage. The Japanese crowd, which often included some expatriates as well, responded very positively to the two new 6’10” in heels, monstrously glamorous, gaijin (foreign) drag queens. Our dark and chaotic vision was in stark contrast to the light and airy queens of Diamonds are Forever.
After that initial show we consistently found venues to perform throughout Japan. In the year after we started performing we did monthly shows in the metropolitan cities of Osaka, Nagoya, Kyoto and Kobe. And after getting somewhat burnt out from performing for a year, both emotionally and financially (doing drag isn’t cheap), I decided to return to Canada to pursue my Masters in Fine Arts.

2.2 Drag History

“Men are terrified of me. I can easily step into the man's shoe, and that puts the man in a position where he has to become the female. That's what sets off the tension. But my image is supposed to frighten men - so only the good ones come through.” (Brooks 23)

-Grace Jones, Singer, Actress, Model

In modern North American history, drag was first seen on the mainstream stages of 1920's Vaudeville where it was once heralded as a form of wholesome family entertainment, but later declared degenerate by government officials in the 1930's, largely due to Mae West’s production Pleasure Man, which was commonly viewed as distasteful. In Crossing The Stage, Lesley Ferris comments that "While Vaudeville hailed impersonators as virile men transforming themselves through magical skills of performance, Mae West suggested a far more sensational reading: that female impersonation was a vehicle of homosexual self-expression, a means for gay men to flaunt their true sexual selves”. (Ferris 112) Drag was then relegated to
the underground gay clubs of New York, where it stayed for some 50 years and
developed into an integral part of male homosexual culture reaching its pinnacle in
the Harlem clubs of 1980’s New York, famously illustrated in Jennie Livingston’s

There is also a strong history of cross-dressing on the stages of Asia. For example, in China there are long traditions of both male and female impersonation on stage. “Both men and women cross-dressed in the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), even as they performed side by side on the same stages”. (Hui-Ling 35) Also in Japan, even to this day cross-dressing in performance is very popular. A great example is the Takarazuka Revue, an all-female musical theater troupe in Takarazuka, Hyougo Prefecture, where the actors play both male and female roles in Western-style musicals. A more traditional example, which is still thriving today, is Kabuki, in which the actors specialize in onnagata or female impersonation.

If we look back at the origin of the word ‘drag’ itself, we will find William Shakespeare, the famous poet and playwright of 17th-century London, where he coined the term as a short hand for performers who were meant to be in *d.r.a.g.* or “dressed as a girl”. Of course, there are a lot of patriarchal hierarchies embedded throughout the history of theater, most notably, wherein women were actually banned from acting, and in this case drag became more of a necessity of a misogynistic culture rather than an expression of individual gender identity. It has been documented, however, that homosexual or non-cisgender conforming males often, though not exclusively, performed female roles in theatrical plays at this time.

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4 A non-cisgender person is someone who does not identify as the gender/sex they were assigned at birth
as well. (Ferris 29-31)

This, of course, is not the case today as many drag venues often host a variety of drag kings, queens and gender-fuck performers of varying gender identity’s and sexualities. There are even biological women who perform as drag queens currently such as Fauxnique of San Francisco or, as I’ve seen in my own experience, the drag queens of *Diamonds are Forever*, in Kyoto, Japan, or even women who have performed as drag queens with my own troupe, Kiss Kiss Bang Bang.


Divine was unique because what he did was subversive even to the culture of drag. He wore clothes that ‘plus-sized’ queens would never normally wear, he subverted fashion and beauty standards (*I am Divine*) and he used his body as an expressive tool to provide biting social commentary, primarily in collaboration with Waters, that was rather revolutionary for its time. In *Female Trouble* (1974), Divine performed an irreverent cabaret and ended it by famously yelling at his audience, “Who wants to die for art!” to which a young bohemian-looking member of the audience cried, “I do!” and Divine proceeded to shoot him.

Australian born, drag performance artist, model and fashion designer Leigh Bowery (1961-1994), was also known for his avant-garde, gender-fuck,
BDSM/haute couture inspired drag performances. He has been proclaimed as one of the most influential figures in the 1980’s and 1990’s New York and London art and fashion circles. According to Dr. Ann Marsh, “the paradigm of the beautiful body was totally undone and remade by Bowery." (Winkler 2) Performing primarily in clubs, bars and cabarets, Bowery was known especially for his elaborate and often terrifying costumes. Described by Boy George as “modern art on legs”, Bowery’s performances ranged from visually stunning to horrifying.

One piece of Bowery’s that I am particularly interested in, and one of his only gallery performances, was a weeklong installation that he did at the prestigious Anthony D’Offay Gallery in London in 1988. In this piece Bowery installed himself in the gallery protected by a two-way mirror in which he interacted with his own reflection while striking various poses on, behind, and in front of a chaise lounge. Though in description this piece sounds rather mundane, the extreme beauty and dark intensity of his poses and costumes drew crowds. *Artcribe International* described this piece as “fashion slowed down, collapsed into performance, the designer making clothes for himself that were more and more obsessive, with bizarre new connections across the body.” (Tilley 215-16)

There are also some very interesting aboriginal artists currently working in drag performance such as Kent Monkman, Adrian Stimson and Gomez Penya. All of these artists deal with their two-spirited identity while confronting the politics of colonialism and patriarchy head on. Their work includes live performance, painting, installation and photography.

I am particularly interested in Kent Monkman’s work as he is a very well
respected contemporary Canadian artist of Cree descent who, similar to myself, works simultaneously in painting and drag. His drag alter ego Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, who is a trickster character of sorts, features in many of his performances, installations and paintings. Some of his paintings, in large-scale, old-world, oil-on-canvas grandeur, depict quite humorously his alter-ego in full ‘Indian’ drag regalia including headdress and platform heels, performing sexual acts with cowboys; the cowboys often being portrayed in submissive roles. His paintings, while appropriating or adopting traditional European techniques, serve to re-claim the history of First Nations and aboriginal people which has largely remained distorted and hidden by the ever-thriving mechanisms of colonialism. (Niedzwiecki)

There is a strong history of cross-dressing in North American aboriginal culture as well. The Berdache or two-spirited people (both male and female) are “documented in over 130 tribes, in every region of North America” (Rosco 5). Whereas in Western traditions cross-dressers were considered to be entertainers, in aboriginal cultures two-spirited people (who hold certain similarities/ties to drag kings and queens but are not the same by any means) held different positions in society. They often filled sacred roles such as healers, medicine people, nurses, and makers of feather regalia in the case of the Maidu people of Northern California. (De Stefano 1)
2.3 Contemporary Critique of Drag

“*It takes a real man to become a woman.*” (Mitchell)

-Latrice Royale, Drag Queen

There is a contemporary critique of drag which I would like to now address that is related to feminist and queer theory, and which places drag, specifically male-to-female drag performance as misogynistic. It seems a rather unlikely criticism at first, as gay men, the ones who usually perform as drag queens, would at first glance appear to be the last people to discriminate against a group of people who have been treated as minorities by mainstream society. Of course the foremost victims of misogyny are women and it seems common sense to deduce that gay men who are also victims of hetero male discrimination would be the last ones to discriminate against women. But nonetheless, in the gay world, misogyny most definitely does exist, and in the academic world, there is a criticism of drag that is prevalent which I, in part, agree with.

Judith Butler’s view of drag is that by the very nature of a man dressing up as a woman and re-creating the illusion of the socially constructed image of what a woman is supposed to be, he is being subversive. Butler suggested that, “drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity.” She asserts that gender parody does not assume that there is an original source that such parodic identities imitate. (Butler. *Gender Trouble*. 174)

In part, I agree with this. To further support this argument she suggests that we “reconsider then the homophobic charge that queens and butches and femmes
are imitations of the heterosexual real. Here ‘imitation’ carries the meaning of
‘derivative’ or ‘secondary’, a copy of an origin which is itself the ground of all copies,
but which is a copy of nothing.” (Butler. *Imitation and Gender Insubordination*. 313)
She is suggesting here that the argument that drag itself is misogynistic is based on a
hetero-normative, and essentially homophobic model of thinking.

The main criticism of some drag performers is that by portraying stereotypical
images of women they are simply re-enforcing the stereotypes. In some cases I think
this is true. There are many drag queens out there who very satirically and
sardonically present images of women as being unintelligent ‘whores’ or ‘sluts’
(often even using the word ‘slut’ or ‘whore’ in their stage names) and though these
images do sometimes have parodic value, I don’t personally agree with this kind of a
portrayal of women whether the original exists or not. I do, however, partly agree
with Butler’s re-interpretation of gender as “a personal/cultural history of received
meanings subject to a set of imitative practices which refer laterally to other
imitations and which, jointly, construct the illusion of a primary and interior
gendered self.” (Butler. *Imitation & Gender Subordination*. 315) The point at which I
disembark from Butler’s theories is the notion that drag is merely parodic. In my
opinion, drag can be a genuine outer expression of one’s interior self, and I don’t
agree that all ideas surrounding gender are socially constructed.

Personally I portray a dominant female character who is independent and
strong, and who refuses to submit to male standards of sexualized beauty. My
character, Sasha Zamolodchikova, is beautiful in her own right, and adores a darker
set of glamour signifiers, but her standards of beauty are enforced by her own desire
to be beautiful and not by a man’s projections onto her of his own particular sexual desires. Yes, my drag alter ego Sasha wears high heels and dresses, but she does so because she enjoys wearing them and that is her choice. And yes, Sasha wears makeup, but I personally love the artistry involved. I am a painter and I do not see a significant difference in painting my face than I do in painting a person’s portrait on canvas. Many of the same principles of layering color and creating highlights and shadows are involved with painting a person’s face on the skin or on the canvas.

Also, the wardrobe that I choose as Sasha rarely ever conforms to mainstream beauty standards. I am more interested in the fashion associated with punk, rock n’ roll, and dark glam or avant-garde styles of clothing that view fashion as an art form rather than a way of serving up a woman’s body for the ever greedy male gaze.

I would like to explore this criticism further, as I have personally been accused of portraying the monstrous feminine in some of my representations of Sasha. I would assert that yes, most definitely, I am interested in exploring the monstrous feminine as a manifestation of an irrational male fear of all that is female. In Sasha, I align myself with what Julia Kristeva described as the abject, or all that is outside the realms of societal comfort, not rejecting it, but embracing it. (Kristeva 1-4) My entire life I have always been relegated to the world of the Other, growing up as a “freak” in Newfoundland, being gay, being an artist, being a foreigner in Japan, being a drag queen. I have also worked closely with people who have disabilities and have an intimate understanding of the intricacies of existing in the world of those who have been Othered. To me, it is not a terrain that I am afraid to navigate. To the contrary, it is a place where I feel very comfortable. I embrace the Other within myself and in
the world around me.

2.4 The Monstrous Feminine & Misogyny

“The feminine is not per se a monstrous sign; rather, it is constructed as such within a patriarchal discourse which reveals a great deal about male desires and fears but tells us nothing about feminine desire in relation to the horrific.” (Bose 35)

–Barbara Creed, ‘Horror and the Monstrous Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection’

I sometimes embody the monstrous feminine via my drag alter ego, Sasha Zamolodchikova, as a way of exploring things that make people feel uncomfortable. Why does the world of women seem so monstrous to men? Some would assert that men have an inherent fear of women’s connection to all that is physical. In *Phallic Panic*, Barbara Creed quotes Freud as listing dismembered limbs, a severed head, or a hand cut off at the wrist as being equally peculiar and uncanny as intrauterine existence or the female genital organs. This Freudian fear of the female body has existed for centuries.

In the past twenty years, many theorists have looked to the horror film genre as a perverted site of male ritualistic fantasy where the monstrous feminine takes center stage. Creed looks closely at Kristeva’s theories of the abject and ties them to contemporary horror. She refers to Brian De Palma’s 1976 horror film, *Carrie*, as a prime example. “In Carrie, the film’s most monstrous act occurs when the couple are drenched in pig’s blood which symbolizes menstrual blood – women are referred to
in the film as ‘pigs’, women ‘bleed like pigs’... Here, women’s blood and pig’s blood flow together, signifying horror, shame and humiliation.” (Grant 44)

The monstrous feminine has also manifested itself historically in the form of myth. The vagina dentata, which has manifested itself in the horror film genre many times in movies such as Jaws, Teeth or Alien, is perhaps the ultimate symbol of the monstrous feminine in popular culture and mythology. (Caputi 54-56) Of particular interest to me is the vagina dentata’s manifestation in the myth surrounding the Japanese Shinto Kanamara Matsuri or “Festival of the Steel Phallus”. There is a fertility festival that surrounds the Kanayama Shrine in Kawasaki, Japan that originated around a story of a woman who had a demon inside of her. According to the legend, whenever the woman went to consummate her marriage on her wedding night the demon would castrate her lover’s penis with its vicious teeth. The woman was finally saved by a local blacksmith who forged a steel phallus to break the demon’s teeth and freed the woman from the monstrosity that dwelt inside her. (Jacob 6-8) This extremely misogynistic fable can be taken as a metaphor for man’s castration anxieties as well as the foolish championing of male ideals of industry and strength.

Creed asserts that the male Othering of the female stabilizes the patriarchal view that women are unstable, and aligned with the animal, therefore having the potential to threaten “the male symbolic order of law, civilization and language.” (Creed 16) She also asserts that “unlike woman, man does not give birth, lactate or menstruate and hence is not signified as monstrous through his reproductive or parenting functions. He becomes monstrous, however, when he is aligned with the
world of the primal uncanny that the symbolic order has so strongly repudiated. The male monster is made monstrous when he enters the domain of woman, animal and nature. He transforms into a menstrual or blood monster (vampire), a womb monster (mad doctor), a cannibalistic animal (werewolf), a blood beast (slasher) or a woman (transgendered monster).” (Creed 16)

Now of course, dealing with these ideas as an individual who is male bodied is most definitely dangerous territory. I am not claiming to understand what it is like to inhabit a female body. I was born a male, and I don’t have any particular desire to go through any of the tremendous body-altering procedures associated with gender reassignment surgery, but for some mysterious reason I feel a deep connection to the world of women; it is a world that I find neither monstrous nor grotesque. To those who criticize my work as being complicit with a misogynistic worldview I urge them to look more closely and actually think about the context of my work and the intentions behind what I’m doing. Sincerely, I am very much about combatting misogyny rather than condoning it, as it not only affects my life on a deeply personal level, I believe it also affects everyone’s. I also believe and am committed to the idea that feminism is not a topic that should be exclusively left to the realm of “women’s issues.” I feel that in order for feminist ideas to move forward there is a definite need for men to adopt these ideas as well. Misogyny is not only the hatred of women, it is also the hatred of all that is feminine, and so-called femininity is a quality that can be present in both men and women regardless of their sexuality.
2.5 Identity

“I am not a woman. I am not a man. I am something that you’ll never understand.”

–Prince, I Would Die 4 U, Purple Rain

Though Prince’s assertion in his 1984 soundtrack for the film *Purple Rain*, that “I am something that you’ll never understand” in part supports the hetero-normative Othering of non-cisgendered individuals, he also delighted in playing with these gender binaries. His embodied gender performance brought, though subconsciously, the image of a fabulous non-cisgendered, non-heterosexual individual to the popular mind and also to the lexicon of popular visual culture. This is of course an example that is very connected to mainstream North American culture and ideals about gender and identity. “The obsession with just two genders is not universal.” (Danet 3) If one looks to India for example, to the *hijras*, one will find that a third sex is actually culturally acknowledged. These people are considered to be neither male nor female but an institutionalized third gender. (Nanda 5)

As an artist and individual working and living in North America, defining my own gender identity for a hetero-normative patriarchal society is quite a difficult task. Labeling myself with titles such as male or female, gender-queer, intersex or even transgendered have a lot of connotations that I am not necessarily very comfortable with. I inhabit a male body, but I equally identify as both male and
female. I am neither cisgendered nor transgendered and partly due to my own Indigenous heritage, I most readily identify with the term “two-spirited.”

Though the contemporary re-claiming of the term two-spirit or two-spirited defines the word as referring to Aboriginal people who are homosexual or transgendered, I prefer a traditional association with the word in which two-spirited people were actually considered to be mediums of sorts who could bridge the gap between the world of the male and female. (Deschamps 4)

In an article written about a male Mapuche transgendered shaman in Chile named Marta, the author explores how this woman’s identity challenges, “conventional notions of transvestism, transgenderism, and homosexuality, linked to sexed bodies.” The author writes, “Marta’s gender performance adds another dimension to Judith Butler’s theory of identity as performance. Whereas Butler views identity as performative and transvestism as parodic, Marta demonstrates that transvestism may also be a sincere expression of self. Marta wears women’s clothes not to transgress gender norms or to celebrate femininity but to become a woman. Her self is expressed by her clothing, not essentialized by her genitals... Marta’s gender identity highlights the arbitrariness of categories of gender and sexual affiliation, such as ‘tranvestite,’ ‘transsexual’ and ‘transgendered’ that are based on binary sex and gender assumptions.” (Bacigalupo 2) This summarization of Marta’s identity can be closely linked to how I identify myself. Personally, I have no desire to have my genitals surgically altered or to have breasts implanted, but I do consider myself to have an essential womanhood that I strongly identify with and dressing up in drag is a sincere form of personal expression for me.
Chapter 3. Painting

3.1 Process

"The magic realists, deriving directly from de Chirico, create mystery and the marvelous through juxtapositions that are disturbing even when it is difficult to see why." (Weschler 293-298)


I work primarily in acrylic paint on stretched canvas and, because I’ve been afforded the luxury of having a studio space over the past two years, I have been able to once again work on a large scale. I work quickly painting layer upon layer of paint in order to create a richly developed surface that speaks to the physicality of my subject matter, and in appearance looks very similar to a traditional oil painting.

Recently, or for the past two years, I have been working almost exclusively with collages and original photographs as reference material. My collage work is usually a combination of original digital photographs of models that I take myself and found imagery that I collect from the Internet and magazines. I am constantly doing visual research in the form of meticulously sifting through imagery that ranges in subject matter from art, popular culture, the absurd, horror imagery, fashion, kitsch, pornography, and vintage photography.

I paint human beings and the body most often, and though my work is not as visceral as say, an artist like Jenny Saville, it certainly has leanings towards her work or the work of Lucien Freud, for example, in that I consider the body to be an
emotionally charged plane of intimate interpersonal interaction and meaning. I work with live models in photo shoots and this collaboration/intimate interaction is integral to my work. Other painters that have inspired my practice are Francis Bacon, Eric Fischl, Attila Richard Lukacs, George Quaintance, Robert Rauschenberg, William Blake, Salvador Dali, Yves Tanguy, Egon Schiele, Frida Kahlo, Francisco Goya, Edgar Degas, Pablo Picasso and Hieronymus Bosch (just to name a few).

Because I employ formal, traditional techniques such as the depiction of light and shadow to create an illusion of form, my paintings can be described as realistic. And though my work often has surrealist leanings, it is probably most closely described as ‘magic realism’ or ‘imaginary realism’. Some contemporary artists that are well known for this style are Douglas Bourgeois from Louisiana, or Alexandra Levasseur from Montreal.

One contemporary Canadian painter whose work I find particularly compelling is Eliza Griffiths. Though her luscious, neon-colored oil paintings don’t aim to dissect gender as systematically as I have for my exhibition, Gender Euphoria, her ambiguous, irreverent techniques achieve like goals. “The works are character-driven, relating to literary, stage or screen fictions that privilege an in-depth character exploration. Thematic strains in her work have foregrounded gender identity, sexuality, desire and psychology”. (Griffiths) Many of my paintings portray my models as characters on stage, and similar to my drag performances, their costumes are imbued with layers of meaning that speak to many of the issues that I have brought up thus far and that I will also discuss further in the following artist statements.
3.2 Paintings

3.2.1 GENDER EUPHORIA

“It’s a good thing I was born a girl, otherwise I’d be a drag queen.” (Dolly Parton)

-Dolly Parton, Singer

The first painting of my exhibition, Gender Euphoria (figure 4), is a transgressive pastiche of retro glamour with modern-day gender bending inspired collage and echoes of Picasso’s Les Demoiselles D’Avignon. This painting depicts contemporary John Galliano fashion models dressed in elaborately bodiced gowns, jewelry, faces painted with almost Victorian-style makeup and large bouffant hairdos, juxtaposed with monochromatic, loosely placed nude male lower halves situated on top of an abstracted, almost Cubist-style prismatic background.

As one remembers in Demoiselles, Picasso depicted brothel prostitutes wearing African masks in which the Exoticized Other becomes simultaneously the source of fear and the object of desire. (Foster 47). This exoticization of the Other, from the point of view of gender, can be paralleled in the world of Thai lady boys, whom tourists flock to see on stage, or to pay for sexual services. The Other is at once sexualized and reviled. Conversely, in Gender Euphoria, I depicted Galliano fashion models, that have been arguably portrayed by the designer as whore-like (Victorian Makeup), with the bottom lower halves of men taken from Butt Magazine, an alternative gay magazine for hairy ‘bear’ types. In this painting I play with the vernacular of gay and BDSM culture; of ‘top’ and ‘bottom’, to make a visual pun by depicting ‘feminine tops’ with ‘masculine bottoms’. The hetero-normative eroticized male gaze is subverted by the disrupted image of femininity, and the question of
power struggles and gender identity is immediately complicated by the interplay of the original source images.

In the realm of contemporary visual culture we are constantly being bombarded by imagery. In this world of simulacra, where image upon image is layered and overlapping, the original source becomes blurred and various different meanings emerge, sometimes negating the meaning of the original, or sometimes enhancing it. In this piece I am elaborating on the meaning of the original source images via juxtaposing the aesthetics of collage with painting and art history with popular culture.

When I originally created the collage on which this painting is based I was thinking very much about the mass-consumption of imagery and its relation to capitalism and patriarchal systems, and how these systems have largely molded our views on what it means to be male or female. Masculinity is purported to be stripped down and bare. Femininity is presented as a grand performance of decadent physical adornment, which often includes makeup, body altering clothing and even plastic surgery.

But what do the signifiers in this image really represent? How do these signifiers overlap? Gender Euphoria represents, in one sense, an inversion of typical power struggles. The women are represented in a pyramid formation, standing tall, with hands at their hips, in a typical 90’s supermodel power stance; their gaze pointed directly at the viewer. In my painting, the women are on top and the men are beneath them, suggesting a subservient position, but in our society who really holds the power? Is the source of power held in our patriarchal system of
government? Is power situated in an institution? How much power does the phallic image hold?

As with many contemporary artists, I am very interested in inspiring the viewer to think, to ask questions and to come to their own conclusions regarding issues that might arise by engaging with my work. To a certain extent I do agree with Roland Barthes’ theories on the death of the author and as soon as an image leaves my hands it becomes very much the viewer’s responsibility to interpret it and bring new layers of signification to the already constructed messages that I hope to impart.

To simplify my message, in this piece I would like the viewer to consider the fluidity of gender, to look at the deeper meaning of the imagery that we are presented with everyday, and to question the authority that we very glumly accept as the only feasible solution to a world filled with anarchy and globalized terror. If we start to analyze the visual signifiers in our culture we will begin to unveil the complexities of gender representation. It is my hope that my work will help the viewer to see how imagery, especially in the realm of consumer-based culture, can mold and shape us in ways that are significant and fundamentally changing.
3.2.2 THE PATRIARCHY

“Girls can wear jeans and cut their hair short, wear shirts and boots because its ok to be a boy, but for a boy to look like a girl is degrading because you think that being a girl is degrading but secretly you’d love to know what it’s like, wouldn’t you? What it feels like for a girl”


In my second painting, The Patriarchy (figure 5), I am expanding on the issues of power and representations of masculinity that I touched upon in my first piece, Gender Euphoria. This painting depicts a group of male models, all of whom are friends and acquaintances of mine, represented in various stages of dress, collaged into a pink boudoir in which there is a bed and a stage. Other collage elements are also introduced, including a violet rose in the top left hand corner, a pink crystal heart in the center and two smaller rectangular paintings, in the bottom left and right hand corners.

The central figure is represented wearing a nylon mask with eyes sewn shut, a white collared shirt, a wig and high heels. The other main figure to the left, positioned on a pink stage, is painted nude except for a headdress made of fur and feathers. The figure in the background to the right is rather butch with arms crossed, wearing a tiara, skirt, high heels and a tank top, and the last figure in the background, muscular and nude, is standing on the bed waving a pink satin flag.

These different representations of men serve to raise questions about masculinity and patriarchal modes of thinking in which men are considered to be
strong, stoic figures of authority. The model with the headdress is, in actual fact, First Nations of Okanagan decent, as is the figure wearing the mask, of mixed Cree and European background. I, myself, am also of mixed European and First Nations background, and in this painting I am interested in illustrating the ties between patriarchy and the horrific systems of colonization, which are still very much in place today.

An artist whom I reference for this painting is the contemporary drag performer and painter Kent Monkman who evokes the stereotypical image of the ‘noble savage’\(^5\), and then subverts it by inserting his own drag persona of Miss Chief Eagle Testicle into typical, traditional Canadian landscape paintings. In Monkman’s paintings, masculinity and colonialism are simultaneously subverted by humorously positioning the European colonizer or cowboy figure as the passive sexual submissive to the noble two-spirited Indian Other.

In The Patriarchy, I portray my friend who is First Nations wearing a non-traditional headdress with pride. The educated viewer becomes aware that this image of the ‘Naked Indian’ is a way of re-claiming a sense of pride about indigeneity, and also of two-spirited identity, while subverting traditional misrepresentations of indigenous people. The message is that First Nations people are still here; they are not a people who can be exterminated or relegated to the forgotten pages of the history books, nor do they only exist on reservations or hidden away from society.

\(^5\) The ‘noble savage’ is representative of popular misrepresentations of Indigenous people in mass media and outdated ethnographic texts.
The main figure represents the inner turmoil faced by one who is transgendered in a society that marginalizes those who don’t conform to mainstream ideals about gender. The figure in the background foolishly celebrates his sexuality without taking into account many of the other issues faced by his community, whereas the figure in the tiara wears his alternative gender signifiers with pride. It is interesting to note that not too long ago women who wore pants were actually considered to be transgendered whereas this is not the case anymore. (Gender Talk Radio Archives) Are men who wear dresses still considered to be ‘trannies’? Certainly, when faced with the image of a man in drag or a man in a dress it is often people’s first reaction to laugh. Perhaps this is due to the fact that dresses tend to be made to fit the proportions of female bodies, but it also points to the fact that we are still as a society not fully comfortable with the idea of men behaving as women.
3.2.3 ADAM, SEDUCER OF EVE

"Most venomous is he, yet lacking nothing,

When he sees the rays of the Sun and its bright fire,

He scatters abroad his poison,

And flies upward so fiercely

That no living creature can stand before him..." (Seligmann 135)

-The History of Magic

My third painting in this series, entitled Adam, Seducer of Eve (figure 6), explores my interests in a feminist re-thinking of storytelling and myth and its relation to feminism and queer theory today. A good reference for this painting would be Angela Carter’s The Sadeian Woman and her work in re-writing the stories written by the Marquis de Sade. In my painting of Adam, I depict a nude male in BDSM garb with snakes and a leather collar around his neck. In the background I have placed the image of a cell to reference creation. It is referencing the creation myth of Adam and Eve, but I am also suggesting in this painting that Adam might have been the tempter of Eve rather than the snake. His cock and the snake adornments around his neck represent the supposedly evil presence of the snake in the Garden of Eden, as does his S&M garb and terrifying studded mask.

In my version, I am suggesting that perhaps Adam’s fruit, rather than the apple, was Eve’s delightful temptation. I have also suggested that perhaps Adam is submissive to Eve, by placing his arms behind his head, baring his naked belly and his ribs. His sex protrudes from a vinyl g-string and I have tattooed his body with
the ancient symbol of the alchemical serpent, the Ouroboros. In The History of Magic, Seligmann states that, "Some sects of Gnosticism, it may be recalled, worshipped the serpent of paradise who had planted in man's heart the yearning for knowledge. This snake, the Ouroboros, became an alchemical emblem. It is found in Cleopatra's book on gold-making, the Chrysopeia." (Seligman 134) I have interpreted the Ouroboros as representing God the Father swallowing his own tail, which references auto-fellatio and the idea of the patriarchy being a 'boys club', therefore also having homosexual connotations. Below the Ouroboros, I have created my own Celtic Goddess cross tattoo to signify that he is also Under the Sign of the Goddess.

3.2.4 MEDUSA

"What are little boys made of? What are little boys made of? Slugs and snails and puppy-dogs' tail; that's what little boys are made of. What are little girls made of? What are little girls made of? Sugar and spice and everything nice; that's what little girls are made of." (Opie 100)

-Old English Nursery Rhyme, 19th Century

My fourth painting (figure 7) also makes use of mythological references and deconstructs the ancient Greek myth of the snake-haired Medusa as being representative of the monstrous feminine as a form of perverted male fantasy. This painting depicts a young man in a superbly pink and frilly bedroom, sitting nude on a bed with legs extended, his head surrounded by Medusa-like clusters of earthworms. I have depicted another large earthworm on the bed, and yet another
conspicuously entering the canvas from the right hand side looking very alien or tentacle-like, ominously extending its boneless body towards the tip of the figure’s semi-erect penis.

In my re-interpretation of the myth, I have replaced Medusa’s snakes with earthworms (which are hermaphrodites), and the femme fatale character herself is not present. The worms are collaged around his head to suggest that Medusa herself is merely a figment of his imagination. With the violent juxtaposition of sickly sweet pink and violet colors against the disturbing image of the boy and the worms, various associations come to mind such as mental illness, pedophilia and even sexual fetishes such as tentacle porn. The distorted perspective and the crudely rendered yellows and siennas of the floor also reference Van Gogh, and the image of a boy exploring his own sexuality in a bedroom echoes Eric Fischl’s similarly themed paintings, ‘Bad Boy ’ (1981) or ‘Birthday Boy’ (1983).

3.2.5 MALE NUDE with HEELS

“There is a time in a boy’s life when the sweetness is pounded out of him; and tenderness, and the ability to show what he feels, is gone.” (Cosmic Sway)

—Norah Vincent, Writer

In this smaller-scale depiction of a male nude (figure 8) I am making a simple statement by subverting traditional figurative representations. Firstly, in an art historical context, the male gaze is subverted by portraying a naked man as the
object of sexual desire and secondly, he is simultaneously further feminized and
sexualized by depicting him in high heel shoes. Much of my work is concerned with
subverting the traditional hetero male gaze as even to this date in our media-rich
society we are constantly inundated by images that are made by and for the
heterosexual male. In a world that is centered on man as the primary consumer;
holder of money and power, the female and homosexual gaze is deemed secondary.

In art historical traditions women have most often been portrayed as
submissive objects of sexual desire. Though men have often been represented in art
as nude as well, it has more often than not been in warrior-like stances which
champion the male body as strong and powerful. It has less rarely been portrayed as
a site of female sexual pleasure or even homosexual desire. There are some artists
who have explored this viewing of the male. Germaine Greer’s controversial book,
_The Beautiful Boy_, portrayed teenaged male nudes as objects of female sexual desire
for example. There are also many queer artists, of course, who have explored the
beauty of the male body such as George Quaintance or even if one goes as far back as
Michelangelo, who very plainly had a love affair with painting the soft and undulant
male form.

My point is to deliberately paint males in the nude as objects of sexual desire
because images of men as passive objects is counter to the dominant representation
in mass culture. In my painting, men can be represented as weak or submissive, in
order to subvert the notion of men as aggressive, or in a position of authority.
3.2.6 GUARDIAN OF THE SPIRIT: ANIMA/ANIMUS

“Every personification of the unconscious – the shadow, the anima, the animus, and the Self – has both a light and a dark aspect... the anima and animus have dual aspects: They can bring life-giving development and creativeness to the personality, or they can cause petrification and physical death.” (Jung 234)

-Carl Gustav Jung, Symbols

My first self-portrait here at UBC, entitled Guardian of the Spirit: Anima/Animus (figure 9), depicts myself in drag as Sasha Zamolodchikova in a glamorous, yet tongue-in-cheek, 80’s Heavy Metal inspired cosmic setting holding a shining sword with cat eyes, kneeling with one leg up and pant-less. In this painting, my physical body is revealed and on one level the illusion that is created by drag is destroyed but on another the strength of Sasha’s character is solidified. I am showing that I have nothing to hide and that I am, indeed, proud of my two-spirited status.

I entitled the piece Anima/Animus in reference to Jung’s theories about the collective unconscious and how he believed that we all have an inner opposite sex. Jung proposed that our inner anima or animus is an archetype of the collective unconscious rather than an aggregate of father/mother, brother/sister etc. I find this theory quite fascinating- especially his theories concerning the dangers involved in manifesting our inner anima or animus.

This painting also plays with symbols. Floating in the cosmic dust close to Sasha’s sword is the contemporary symbol for female. I found it quite interesting
how this symbol is very similar to the Ancient Egyptian symbol for life, the *Ankh*. In the top left corner and the bottom left are upside down triangles, one pink, one purple, referencing how symbols that have been used in a negative manner can be re-claimed (ie. the pink triangles of Nazi Germany), and in the top left corner two triangles are piercing each other, symbolizing violence or the destruction of the symbol itself. In the bottom right hand corner is the contemporary symbol for male, which I have placed as still being important in this dialogue, but as secondary.

By referencing 80’s sci-fi/fantasy style illustration I am humorously conjuring up contemporary images of masculinity and femininity (*He-Man, Heavy Metal, Star Wars*) while sending a serious message about the power of identity, and how in this day and age we actually still have to fight for individual rights and freedoms. I have situated Sasha as a cosmic gender warrior of sorts with a vulvic symbol placed directly over my penis to denote that through drag I am very consciously subverting my own ‘masculinity’ in order to raise awareness about the absurdity of socially constructed gender roles.
3.2.7 THE GENDER GAME (BUTCH/FEMME)

“When a man gives his opinion, he’s a man. When a woman gives her opinion, she’s a bitch.” (Indianfeminist101)

—Bette Davis, Actress

In the second to last piece of this series (figure 10), I am proposing gender to be a kind of a game in which we can play with the various different roles available to us rather than having to strictly conform to them. The title of this painting, *Butch/Femme*, borrows from the lesbian vernacular, which has parallels in gay male culture as well as straight. This painting is set up as a series of thirteen panels, basically thirteen individual paintings, with one large central panel in the middle. The main figure is of actress, Hedy Lamarr, photographed by Alfred Cheney Johnston (painter turned photographer) in 1941, representing old Hollywood glamour. The top left hand figure is an image of a teenage boy wearing a visor from the 1984 movie *Sixteen Candles* directed by John Hughes, which I have chosen to symbolize the male gaze. The next image is of a delicate flower, everything that a woman *ought* to be. After that, we have the image of a female body builder. I ask the question is she butch, or is she femme? She is muscular but she very plainly has breast implants and is wearing makeup and is presented in a sexualized manner.

In the top left hand corner I have painted the image of the Black Virgin, which is a symbol that has had particular potency for me over the years. The Black Virgin is an ancient Christian symbol of the Virgin Mary with child, whose history is shrouded in much mystery. I included her as a symbol of the divine feminine that has been
downtrodden by the established male order of patriarchal religion. Jean Markale stated that, "As soon as the cult of Yahweh triumphed, the Goddess of the Beginnings was reduced to her simplest form, and the Lilith of rabbinical tradition, consigned to the darkness. Thus the most shameful human impulses found themselves crystallized into the troubling image of "Our Lady of the Night", later becoming "Our Lady of the Underground." (Markale 49)

After Her, we have an image of a member of Pussy Riot, an all-female punk band from Russia who recently got arrested for staging an anti-Putin, feminist protest/punk rock performance at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow. Following Pussy Riot is the image of the phallus, specifically from a Japanese fertility festival in which large phallic statues are paraded through the streets. Below the phallus, in the bottom right hand corner is one of my personal idols, androgynous pop star, model and actress, Grace Jones, from the cover of her 1983 single, ‘My Jamaican guy’. Grace Jones is of particular interest to me as I see her as being one of the most powerful embodiments of the ‘Exoticized Other’ in recent popular memory. Of Jamaican decent, she boldly plays with the image of the sexualized black female while simultaneously subverting that image with her avant-garde androgynous style. Indeed, she has been credited as being at the forefront of the androgynous gender-bending fashion movement of the 1980's. In their collaboration on Jones’ 1985 album, Slave to the Rhythm, David Bowie proclaimed her as “the first to take radical fashion out of its predictable Parisien context and into the music scene... The ambiguity of her act was that she, in fact, looked like a man.” (Jones. The Frog and the Princess) After Jones, I have placed an upside-down heart sticker. I often make a
point of including hearts in my work simply to spite snobbish intellectual traditions that look down upon things that are considered to be ‘girly’ or ‘childish’. (There are also hearts included in my paintings, *The Patriarchy, Medusa*, and *Guardian of the Spirit*).

The next symbol that I’ve included in this game is that of the circle or mandala. Much of the work that I’ve been doing for this exhibition has been about healing the divide between the masculine and feminine, and also about personal healing, and I included the mandala as a symbol of a meditative healing practice, in opposition to the patriarchal tradition of seeking ‘peace’ through violence. After the mandala, is an image of a *merkin*, or vagina wig. Here I wanted to humorously reference adornments to the female body. An interesting and rather absurd contemporary example would be ‘vagazzling’, which is a trend in which women have jewels or feathers glued to their vagina’s in order to ‘beautify’ them. After the merkin is Daniel Craig, famous British actor seen wearing a black leather bra at a beach. I found this image on a random Google search and am actually not sure what the reasoning was for him to be wearing this bra, but I thought it to be an interesting play on the butch/femme theme of the piece; a nice counterpart to the female bodybuilder perhaps. And finally, we have the image of the 1990’s horror/sci-fi character *Predator* who, according to Caputi, is yet another symbol of the *vagina dentata* with the labia-like folds of his mouth and protruding teeth. By juxtaposing these different seemingly unrelated images and using bright, cheerful colors I aim to once again create a sense of *gender euphoria* through my work.
3.2.8 GENDERLESS GENDER

“Albion represents a uniquely utopian figure. His body itself speaks an abstract but articulate language. This nude is delivered from all bondage and all untruth. It is beyond conflict, beyond struggle and inner struggle, wholly realized.”

(Lubbock 1)

-Tom Lubbock, Great Works: The Dance of Albion, William Blake

In my final painting of this series (figure 11), I have depicted yet another nude male figure, arms outstretched like Jesus on the cross, castrated like a Ken Doll, referencing William Blake’s The Dance of Albion (circa 1795), as well as my upbringing as a child in the 1980’s and 90’s. On top of the figure I have collaged half the face of a 1980’s Jem & the Holograms doll, amputated his arms and legs, and covered them with her shiny purple armor. Above the figure is a colorful prismatic pattern reminiscent of my earlier painting Gender Euphoria, and also of the stained glass windows of a cathedral. The figure is kneeling on a violet ground, which brings to mind a stage. On either side of the figure are other symbols from my 1980’s upbringing, Mad Balls, and My Little Pony, as well as a devotional image of Kali, the Hindu goddess of destruction. On the ground is the figure of the Black Virgin representing the subverted divine feminine (as in The Gender Game), and a severed snake emphasizing the figure’s castration, but also symbolizing man’s brutal assault on all that is sacred and feminine.

This painting depicts symbols from my childhood and references the debates surrounding 'nature vs. nurture' and the commercialization of gendered toys for
children. "Human beings are not born with any pre-existing knowledge of, or orientation to, their world. What we come to feel about life and about ourselves, we learn through socialization, the social mechanisms through which gender developments occur." (Bryjal 221) We still live in a world where pink is for girls and blue is for boys.

When I was a child, I adored the animated television series, *Jem & the Holograms*. It was colorful and entertaining. Unfortunately this series was marketed towards girls. Strict gender roles dictated that this was not an appropriate show for me as a young boy and I knew that though it was ok for me to watch it when I was alone, it was not ok for me to watch it when other boys were around. When I was with my male friends we played with toys such as *Transformers, He-Man*, and *G.I. Joe*.

The division between boys and girls toys is still extremely polarized. Girls are raised to believe that they should like things that are pretty, sweet & pink; that teach them the skills they require for raising babies and housemaking; whereas boys should like things that are nasty, masculine, aggressive, violent, adventurous and rough; everything a man supposedly needs to survive in this ‘man eat man’ world. It is amazing how early on gender roles are imposed upon children.

My painting, *Genderless Gender*, depicts a boy who has been castrated, amputated and crucified by society’s strictly enforced gender roles. His identity is lost and he must seek a new sense of gender identity. He must sort through all of these conflicting messages that are sent to us by society and rise above them with his own sense of self, and perhaps with a brand new sense of *GENDER EUPHORIA*.............
Chapter 4. Conclusion

4.1 PURPLE MIND-FUCK

In conclusion, I would like to extend a fascinating eye to encounter revulsion, the remorse of Christianity, Blue guilt, fly-by’s, Newfie heritage, white guilt & the black Madonna, individuality, fame, gender suicide, moose stew, homogeneity, intellectual rigidity, preconceptions of Indigeneity, penis envy politics, queer theater, Transylvanian lesbian poetry, Janet the planet, the politics of wolf theatrics, puppetry of the penis, snails, maypole worship, black gender suicide, Black Devil Disco Club, Suspiria & Belgium, cold serum, crotches, painting black face, cold navy rub, grandmothers filth/David Bowie, murder cases, the snarls, Curly Sue & Siouxsie Sioux, the hearts filthy lesson, suicide awards, Grace Jones, Divine theatre assembly, blonde boys, the Satanic worship of blonde boys, underage drinking, Buddhist reunions, monetary gifts, anti-chivalry movements, incorporeal realms, temporary insanity, writers gifts, lesbians, Morrissey’s parents of mean victims, vicious mean victims, Roisin, Fatima, Strong Muslim Woman (S.M.W.), smooth death posse, criminals, crime scene photos, mug shots, crime addicts, solutions to pain, an addict sometimes, instantly being thankful, being brittle, My Little Pony, long fingernails, tumblr addicts, long standing conditions, oblivious lesbianism, matriarchal revolt, misandrony, homosexuality in lower castes, being oblivious to the point. Serotonin, Serendipity Weeps, amen amen kiss kiss bang bang Hallelujah.
Works Cited


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Appendices

Appendix A: Drag

Figure 1: Sasha Zamolodchikova, Kelowna, British Columbia 2011

Figure 2: Belgium Solanas, Vancouver, British Columbia 2012

Figure 3: Kiss Kiss Bang Bang perform during The Aftermath,

an exhibition/performance event at the FINA Gallery, UBC Okanagan,

Kelowna, British Columbia, May 2012
Appendix B: Paintings

Figure 4: Gender Euphoria

Figure 5: The Patriarchy

Figure 6: Adam, Seducer of Eve

Figure 7: Medusa

Figure 8: Nude Male w/ Heels

Figure 9: Guardian of the Spirit (Anima/Animus)

Figure 10: The Gender Game (Butch/Femme)

Figure 11: Genderless Gender
Figure 1: Sasha Zamolodchikova, Kelowna, British Columbia 2011

Figure 2: Belgium Solanas, Vancouver, British Columbia 2012
Figure 3: *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* perform at *The Aftermath*, an exhibition/performance event at the FINA Gallery, UBC Okanagan, Kelowna, British Columbia, May 2012
Figure 4: Gender Euphoria
Figure 6: Adam, Seducer of Eve
Figure 7: Medusa
Figure 8: *Nude Male w/ Heels*
Figure 9: Guardian of the Spirit (Anima/Animus)
Figure 10: *The Gender Game (Butch/Femme)*
Figure 11: Genderless Gender