



AGE OF CONSENT

Curated by Talia Linz

Sue de Beer
Wendy Coburn
Kyla Mallett
Leslie Peters
Rebecca Fin Simonetti
Tobias Yves Zintel

April 14 – May 12, 2012
Opening Reception: Saturday April 14, 2-5PM

Doris McCarthy Gallery

Free shuttle bus for the opening departs 401 Richmond Street West, Toronto, at 2PM, returning at 5PM



LESLIE PETERS *100 Prince Charles Drive*, 2005, video, 11 min. Courtesy the artist and Vtape, Toronto.

AGE OF CONSENT

Teenagers are highly visible and highly mythologized agents of contemporary western culture. This demographic is targeted earlier and earlier as consumers, sexual beings and biocapital, with the mass media and advertisers in particular appealing to and exploiting the teenage drive to both conform and individualize. As Anita Harris notes: “It is primarily as consumer citizens that youth are offered a place in contemporary social life.”¹ The growing presence and power of youth and the deluge of fears and anxieties around their behaviours, desires, and choices, have been reflected in and influenced by popular culture. Artists, musicians and filmmakers provide us with a cultural lineage of “misbehaving” teens, from the idiosyncratic films of John Waters to the recent *Twilight* series. Ideas of play, excess and experimentation figure large, as does the negotiation of systems of authority and the development and projection of self-identity. *Age of Consent* brings together the work of six Canadian and international artists who look at adolescence in various forms, exploring experiences (real and projected), perceptions (internal and external), myths, dreams and desires connected to this demographic and this time of life.

Leslie Peters’s *100 Prince Charles Drive* uses source footage from the day before the artist’s sixteenth birthday, the very first time she used a video camera. Peters and a friend take on and switch between the roles of director and performer, reveling in the play of power enabled by the then-newly affordable domestic technology. We see the seductiveness of performing for each other before the lens and the boldness permitted by its mediating role. We witness Peters being and “performing” a sixteen year old, misbehaving and taunting the camera with practiced smoke rings and “up yours” gestures. The artist revisits this moment from her adolescence with time slowed, looped and made non-linear, revealing the human compulsion to understand the present through the past, and to re-inhabit and re-imagine our younger days.

Historically, the teenager is a relatively new cultural phenomenon that came into being at the turn of the last century, tied in with urbanization and a rapidly changing economy. It could

be argued that our current consumer society is based in effect on a teenage sensibility—a perpetual present characterized by a flippant next-thing mentality populated by adults who can't, or won't, grow up. Certainly a quick survey of mainstream television or hit box office films would indicate this trend. Teenagedom is often conveyed (and at times experienced) as flanked by compulsions of socialization and anti-socialization, and much of its representation swings between these poles. So teens are both violent and vulnerable, highly sexualized and innocents needing protection; bored, apathetic and unproductive while also the key to the future.

Being “young” is generally equated with inexperience and uninformed naiveté, and consequently teens are pitched as questionable in the knowledge and articulation of themselves. Both New York-based Sue de Beer and Berlin-based Tobias Yves Zintel work with teen performers and collaborators to create compelling, fantastical films. Zintel's *Neverland Rising*, 2010, mixes music, dance and theatre to look at themes of growing up and self-identity in a surrealistic mash-up where subconsciousness and reality are equal partners. De Beer employs space as a metaphor for psychological or emotional terrain. Her works are often filmed in theatrical sets of teenage bedrooms—that iconic sphere that signifies both safety and confinement—and draw on a range of youth culture references from stuffed animals and figurines to signifiers of grunge and gothic subcultures. Along with her 2005 video piece *Black Sun*, included in *Age of Consent* are a selection of De Beer's photographs that riff off the gratuitous imagery of horror movies and speak to the media sensationalization of teenage violence that haunts the North American collective consciousness.

With their melancholic and diaristic quality, Rebecca Fin Simonetti's drawings could decorate the walls of a teenage girl's bedroom. Her personal inventory employs animal totems such as lambs and horses, frequently associated with girlhood. The girls in her pictures are most often alone or accompanied by these animals—both lifelike and in various states of dying or inanimation—summoning a place not quite real and not quite imaginary, but hovering between the two. Her work deals obliquely with desire and longing, looking at the difficulty of social relations, of searching for a communion with self and with others.

A particular focus within this exhibition is the notion of girlhood, its role as cultural capital, and how it relates to contemporary feminisms and the construction of femininity in western culture. Wendy Coburn explores the imaginary of a young girl that sees her desire reflected nowhere on earth. *Untitled (girl & dog)* depicts a dangerous ambiguity when innocent youthful play may become proscribed as an act of deviant sexuality. Kyla Mallett's photographs of notes passed between schoolgirls magnify an often devalued social practice, honouring its unique coloured-pen language of adolescent love and frustration. These works present girlhood as a “contradictory rather than coherent subject” in an effort to “understand the ‘girl’ not as a singular state defined by age or behaviour, but as a constantly shifting, discursively constituted sign that comes to mean and represent many things besides ‘young female.’”²

For all the artists, the question of the adult spectator (and creator) begs interrogation. These youthful representations must be, after all, the projection of adult fantasies and desires—idealized, sentimentalized, regretful, abandoned. They tap into the connection between temporality and adolescence, which is often framed as emblematic of the liminal, a transitional phase to move through to achieve a more stable state of being. Coming-of-age tropes of awakening, blossoming or maturing mark many teenage narratives, regularly accompanied by personal/sexual/social/moral enlightenment. In this regard, adolescence stands as an allegorical state, allowing for a level of instability in regards to self-identity.

Queer theorists provide useful frameworks to think about time, applying queerness as a non-normative methodological approach that is not limited to sexuality in a narrow sense. Elizabeth Freeman writes of the “chronopolitics of development,”³ referencing the internal and external pressures associated with the passing of time, unpacking the idiomatic directive to “grow up” that is tied to perceived productivity, itself linked to capitalist values of so-called progress and profit. This conception of queering time challenges the assumption of a linear, “correct” path of development. Tim Dean discusses the concept of becoming through what he terms a queer notion of futurity: “As a ceaseless movement of being that is not coordinated



KYLA MALLETT *See ya!*, 2004, lightjet print, 40 x 31 inches, edition of 2. Courtesy the artist and Torrys LLP.

by teleology or development, becoming never results in anything resembling an identity.”⁴ So there is something in the works in *Age of Consent* that celebrates wading in the uncomfortable unknowing of adolescence, and asks how this paradigmatic period shapes the formation of the self and continues to inform adult subjectivity. The artists included are interested in looking at the hinge between then and now, allowing for a fluid movement back and forth. In *The Queer Child*, Kathryn Bond Stockton writes of growing sideways instead of up because it suggests that “the width of a person’s experience or ideas, their motives or their motions, may pertain at any age, bringing ‘adults’ and ‘children’ into lateral contact of surprising sorts.”⁵



SUE DE BEER *Sasha La Rosa*, 1999, c-print, 50 x 40 inches. Courtesy the artist and Michael Clifton.

1 Anita Harris, "Jamming Girl Culture: Young Women and Consumer Citizenship," in *All About the Girl: Culture, Power, and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 163.

2 Jennifer Eisenhauer, "Mythic Figures and Lived Identities: Locating the 'Girl' in Feminist Discourse," in Harris, *All About the Girl*, 87.

3 Elizabeth Freeman, "Time Binds, or, Erotohistoriography," in *Social Text: What's Queer About Queer Studies Now*, 84-85 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 59.

4 Tim Dean, "An Impossible Embrace: Queerness, Futurity, and the Death Drive," in James J. Bono, Tim Dean and Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, eds., *A Time for the Humanities: Futurity and the Limits of Autonomy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 135.

5 Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 11.



WENDY COBURN *Untitled (girl and dog)*, 2001, plastic, edition of 12. Courtesy the artist.

SUE DE BEER is a graduate of Columbia University and Parsons The New School for Design, New York. She has exhibited nationally and internationally in such venues as the New Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art, MoMA PS1, the Brooklyn Museum, Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, the Reina Sofia, Madrid, and the Museum of Modern Art, Busan. De Beer's work is in the permanent collections of MoMA, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Goetz Collection, Munich. De Beer lives and works in New York and is represented by Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Christian Ehrentraut Gallery, Berlin.

WENDY COBURN is a Toronto-based artist and educator. Coburn studied at the Dundas Valley School of Art, Ontario College of Art, and holds an MFA from Concordia University. Coburn currently teaches sculpture and interdisciplinary courses at OCAD University and is a Fellow at the Mark S. Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies at the University of Toronto. Coburn's work has been exhibited and screened nationally and internationally in galleries and festivals including *Photophobia*, Art Gallery of Hamilton; *The Living Effect*, Ottawa Art Gallery; MIX: The New York Gay & Lesbian Experimental Film/Video Festival; Transmediale International Media Art Festival, Berlin; *Uneasy Pieces*, Oakville Galleries; Kassel Documentary Film & Video Festival; and the Dublin Lesbian & Gay Film and Video Festival.

KYLA MALLETT completed her MFA at the University of British Columbia in 2004, after attaining her BFA at Emily Carr University of Art + Design in 2000. Her work consistently deals with the intersection of language and the social realm, utilizing pseudo-anthropological strategies of research, collecting and archiving. She has exhibited at the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris, Vancouver Art Gallery, Presentation House Gallery, Artspeak, ThreeWalls in Chicago, Southern Alberta Art Gallery, and is included in the upcoming group exhibition *Tools for Conviviality* at The Power Plant, Toronto. Mallett is an Assistant Professor in Visual Art and Graduate Studies at Emily Carr University.

Toronto-based artist **LESLIE PETERS** has been working in video and multi-channel installation for the past 15 years. Her work has been exhibited internationally including exhibitions in the UK, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, Australia, Peru, Egypt and Italy. In Canada, Peters's work has shown in screenings and festivals as well as in galleries including The Power Plant, the National Gallery of Canada, Oakville Galleries, Dunlop Art Gallery, and the Art Gallery of Ontario. Peters's work is distributed by Vtape, Toronto.

Born in Vancouver in 1985, **REBECCA FIN SIMONETTI** graduated in 2009 from OCAD University with a BFA in Drawing and Painting. Simonetti translates her installations, music and performances into works on paper and canvas. She has received numerous awards across mediums, including the Donna MacLean Award and the Eric Freifeld Award for painting. Her work in film has garnered international acclaim, including Best Experimental Film at Cascadia, and Best Drama at Burbank International. Most recently, Simonetti has been featured in *CACTUS* and *Offerings* and spent much of the past year in Baltimore where she presented her fourth solo show *Are They a Threat*.



REBECCA FIN SIMONETTI *Red Porter*, 2011, ink on paper, 13 x 14.5 inches. Courtesy the artist.



REBECCA FIN SIMONETTI *Caduceus*, 2011, ink on paper, 14 x 17.5 inches. Courtesy the artist.

TOBIAS YVES ZINTEL was born in 1975 in Passau, Germany. From 1996 to 2002, he studied at the Catholic University of Eichstätt and LMU Munich. From 2002 to 2007, he was a student of Joseph Kosuth at the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich. Zintel works with photography and video in the junction between music, performance, theatre, video and art. His work has been screened at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, and the Reina Sofia in Madrid as part of *Rencontres Internationales 2008*, and his 2010 solo exhibition *Acid and Ice Cream* was held at Honor Fraser Gallery, Los Angeles. Zintel lives and works in Berlin and is represented by Barbara Gross Gallery, Munich.

Originally from Sydney, Australia, **TALIA LINZ** is currently based in Toronto where she is undertaking a collaborative Masters in Curating and Sexual Diversity Studies at the University of Toronto. She holds a BA in Performance Theory and Practice from the University of Western Sydney and an MA in Writing from the University of Technology, Sydney. She is an independent writer, former executive producer of arts and culture at FBi Radio 94.5FM and former assistant editor of the quarterly journal *Art & Australia*.

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GALLERY HOURS

Wednesday to Friday 10-4pm
Saturday 12-5pm

The gallery is wheelchair accessible.

GALLERY STAFF

Ann MacDonald, Director/Curator
Erin Peck, Exhibitions & Outreach Coordinator
Katrina Enros, Gallery Administrator
Jessica Thalmann, Gallery Assistant

DIRECTIONS

The Doris McCarthy Gallery is located on the upper level of the Academic Resource Centre at The University of Toronto Scarborough.

BY CAR

From Toronto, take Highway 401, exit at Morningside Ave. southbound, then turn eastbound onto Military Trail.

BY TTC

From York Mills Subway, take bus 95/95B/95E/95F.
From Scarborough Town Centre, take bus 38.

COVER IMAGE TOBIAS YVES ZINTEL, *Neverland Rising*, 2010, HD video, 31 min. Courtesy the artist.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Talia Linz would like to thank the artists Sue de Beer, Wendy Coburn, Kyla Mallett, Leslie Peters, Rebecca Fin Simonetti and Tobias Yves Zintel for their beautiful work, insight, and generosity; Barbara Fischer for her inspiring wisdom and infinite guidance; Ann MacDonald, Erin Peck and Katrina Enros for all their hard work and professionalism; Rebecca Gimmi and Christopher Régimbal for their invaluable help and advice; the curatorial committee for their time and enthusiasm—Christof Migone, Ihor Holubizky, Ann MacDonald, Richard Hill, Lisa Steele, and especially Jessica Wyman for her erudite input; Claire Christie for her design prowess; Deidre Logue, Erik Martinson and Vtape; Annie Rana and Marianne Boesky Gallery; Catriona Jeffries Gallery; Hannah Dyer; Doug Stone; Sue Lloyd and the VIS 2002 class for the thought-provoking discussions; and Wanda Nanibush and Eric Woodley for being such wonderful colleagues.

A special thank you for the kind support of lenders Michael Clifton, Guy Knowles, Alex McLeod, and Torys LLP, and for the generous contributions from the Centre for the Study of the United States, Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto; The Mark S. Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies, University College, University of Toronto; The Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures, St. Michael's College, University of Toronto; and Scarborough Paint Centre.

This exhibition is produced as part of the requirements for the MVS degree in Curatorial Studies at the University of Toronto.

BROCHURE DESIGN Claire Christie

PRINTED BY Captain Printworks

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