

# THIRD GENDER

Project by

Norbert Francis Attard

## ELSEWHERE

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA.

3rd May - 29th May 2011.



# WORKS

**HERMAPHRODITES** Relief sculptures with objects from a living museum.

**ANDROGYNY** A photographic essay on gender as material.

**TRANS FORMATIONS** Videos featuring the changing of genders.

**TEXT BY ROB PETERSON & CHRIS KENNEDY**



*"If we are no more than the sum total of the gendered expressions we perform, is there ever any chance to stop the performance for a while, to pull the curtain down, and let it rise only if one can have a say in the production of the play itself?"*

**Benhabib, Seyla.** (1994), p.59.

Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange. Routledge: New York.

The ongoing performativity of gender is something we engage in daily and the confines of the Elsewhere Commonwealth are no exception. We enact our notions of what we think a man or a woman should be with little cognizance of our complicity in a process driven by socio-cultural norms unseen but nonetheless there. Specific clothing, colors, walking styles, gestures and vocal ranges construct a dualistic reality in which we participate within and forge a specific sexual and gender identities that heeds a spectrum of maleness and femaleness.

Yet, what does it mean to inhabit a liminal space in which one's gender or sexual identity is located somewhere in the middle, along the spectrum of maleness and femaleness? The work of Norbert Francis Attard seeks to address this quandary in approaching this very question. His time here at Elsewhere has sought to blur the lines between what a male or female could be, not just within the realm of people, but within the collection of Elsewhere objects as well. In a photographic and performative series of works, Attard explores the relationships between maleness and femaleness, carving out an in-between space through which the viewer can inhabit and question for themselves their own identity.



# HERMAPHRODITES

Four relief sculptures using objects from ELSEWHERE, a living museum.

The term “hermaphrodite” derives from Hermaphroditus, the son of Hermes and Aphrodite in Greek mythology, who was fused with a nymph, Salmacis, resulting in one individual possessing physical traits of both sexes.



Hermaphroditus, mythological character: origin of the word ‘Hermaphrodite’.



Using bas relief sculpture as a platform for meditating on this inscribed and constructed heteronormativity Attard has created four works from toys, ribbon, tacks, marbles and reclaimed mannequin parts. The works are at once sideways glances and deeply inquisitive derives into the use of associativity to create objects rich in metaphorical significance. Using toys typically associated with boyhood like plastic cowboys and miniature racecars Attard juxtaposes the component objects' associative gender specificities and each piece's broader gender narrative. His use of gender constructs as materials to be manipulated and reconstructed is freshest when he uses girls fashion dolls to represent male genitals. Beyond being a powerful moment ripe with symbolism, the fact that the penis is a black female fashion doll and the testicles are white and smaller than the black doll is the disquieting signal that this is a point to dive deeper into the conversation brought about by the larger body of work.



## **HERMAPHRODITE 1**

Relief sculpture using objects from Elsewhere, a living museum.

Female jewellery:  
necklaces, earrings, brooches, etc.  
Two manequin hands.

1.2m x 1.2m, 2011.



## **HERMAPHRODITE 2**

Relief sculpture using objects from  
Elsewhere, a living museum.

Artificial flowers, marbles, sofa pins.  
Two manequin hands.

1.2m x 1.2m, 2011.



## **HERMAPHRODITE 3**

Relief sculpture using objects from  
Elsewhere, a living museum.

Different coloured ribbons.  
Two mannequin hands.

1.2m x 1.2m, 2011.





## HERMAPHRODITE 4

Relief sculpture using objects from Elsewhere, a living museum.

Toys:  
Action figures, barbie dolls, cars. etc.  
Two manequin hands.

1.2m x 1.2m, 2011.



# ANDROGYNY

A photographic essay on gender as material

Androgyny is performative gesture that blurs the notion of an identifiable gender - to perform in an androgynous way is a process of rejecting accepted gender norms that confine the fluidity of one's sexual or gender identity. Androgyny is an in-between space, often activated by an individual or group as a subversive gesture aimed at disrupting the conventional notions of heterosexual livelihood - to incite confusion, question agency over identity, and perhaps generate participation and collectivity.



Attard's portraits construct their own sense of androgyny by piecing together through association different individual gestures, glances, gazes, and postures. The nuances of style comparatively represented in each portrait are placed between the male-female pole where they incorporate cultural elements from each, an aggressively masculine lean-to lends its meaning to a more feminine laying of hands upon crossed legs. In each case the subject's own visage defies the characteristic of either, or, and neither, and persons appear in each portrait to address the collective confusion that comes with the viewer's own insistence at regulating identity.

Attard's project is a subversive gesture, a challenge and a question rolled into one attempt at exploring what gender is, and how we perceive it. The idea of gender and sexual identity is incredibly meta, we are performing gender all of the time: we wear pants instead of dresses, we use certain bathrooms instead of others and conform to accepted social roles daily. Attard adds another layer, he asks subjects to reconstruct their gender identity visually within a pre-existing construct of a gendered experience, a kind of simultaneous play. In so doing, we are witness to a trail of evident subversion, a glimpse at what a certain prompt and layer of makeup (or wiping away of makeup) can produce in reaction. Is he interested in a reactionary response, its not quite clear, but it is apparent that he's looking for internal questioning and perhaps a twice-examined inquiry into the role of gender in everyday life.

























# trans formations

Videos featuring the changing of genders

Rob Peterson  
Raffe Purnsley  
Tara Odorizzi  
Kalen Gaulden

*Hair stylist* Jay Bullock

*Make-up artist* Brie Reeder

*Documentation* Norah Hoover & Norbert Francis Attard

Although we are born into a gendered and sexed world there is potential to activate a certain kind of agency that questions and provides a platform for imagining something different. Attard's project provides a time and a place to explore just that, a queered notion of performativity<sup>1</sup>. that becomes an ongoing project for transforming the way we define and break boundaries toward identity. In transforming and blurring the gender of his participant's, Attard's process becomes a queered and performative gesture that considers the idea of gender as a site of inquiry, undulating between satiric critique and subconscious longings to overcome the myth of heterosexuality.

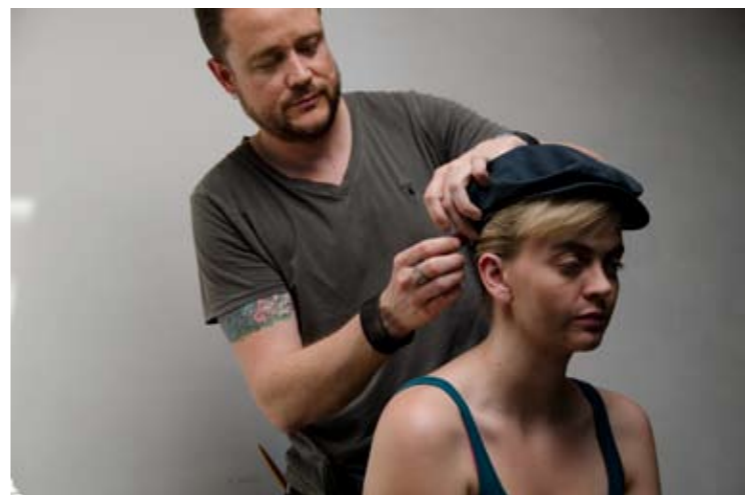
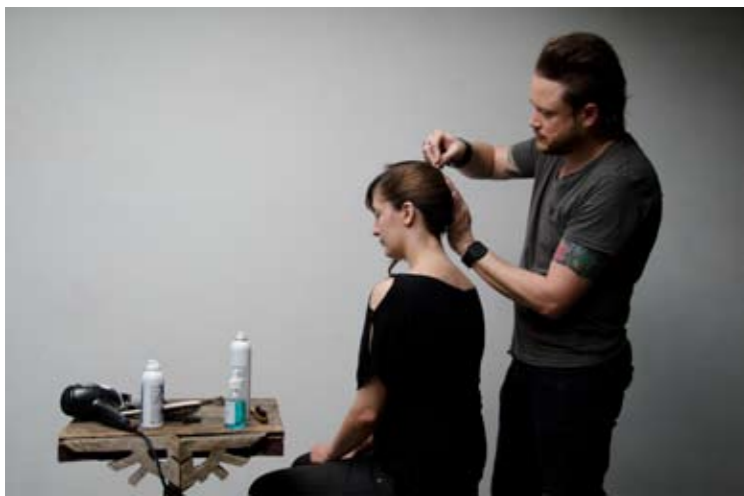
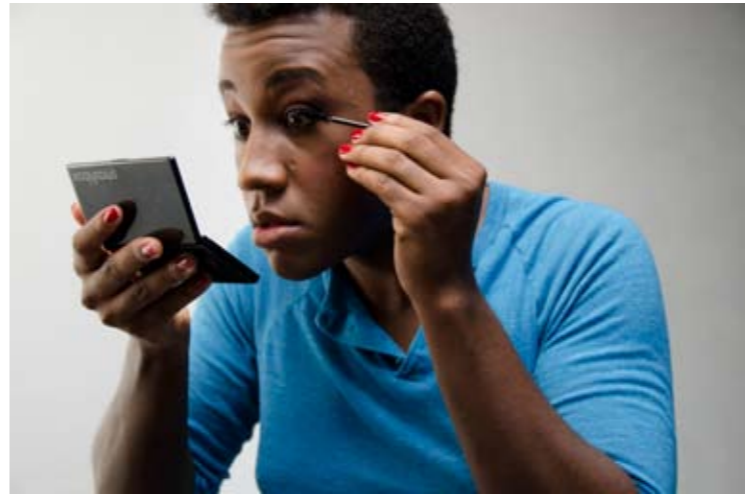
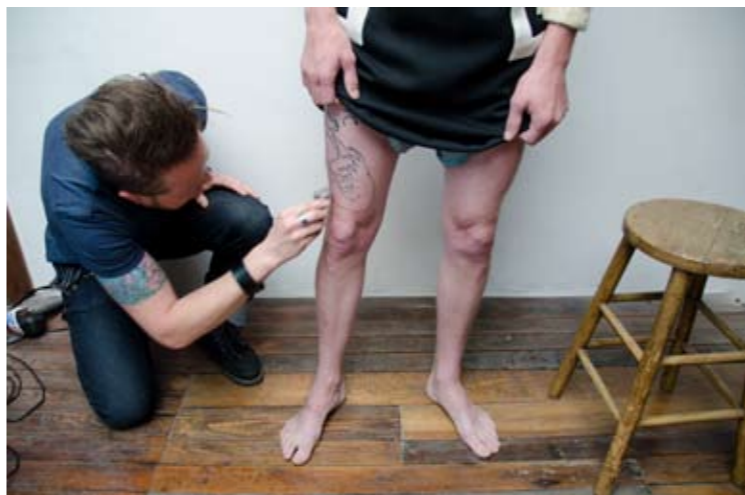
1. Sedgwick, E. (1995). *Performativity and Performance*. Routledge.





Trans Formations exposes the elemental forms of a performative gesture orchestrated between gender, identity, and theatricality. The performance, however, cannot be located in a singular frame or a single element of style, but instead is composed of the movements between frames and between identities. Attard's images of men turning into women and women into men explore a gendered and sexed performance of styles, composed as much of gestures, costumes, make-up, and hair-cuts as they are of the perceived characteristic of masculinity and femininity that emerge in each portrait.













# CREDITS

## Participants

Carmen Langdon  
Julia Garder  
Eliza Wicks-Frank  
Rob Peterson  
Norah Hoover  
Connie Cann  
Stephanie Sherman  
Katie Conner  
Coi Van Pelt  
May Young  
Raffe Purnsley  
Tara Odorizzi  
Jae Han Min  
Lydia L. Lewallen  
Chris Kennedy  
Kristen Morgan  
Olive Oyl  
Kalen Gaulden  
Sarah Ivey Long  
Meredith Carter

## Participants in conversions

Rob Peterson  
Raffe Purnsley  
Tara Odorizzi  
Kalen Gaulden

## Hair stylist

Jay Bullock

## Make-up artist

Brie Reeder

## Documentarian, Elsewhere

Norah Hoover

## Operations Curator, Elsewhere

Valerie Wiseman

## Production Curator, Elsewhere

Rob Peterson

## Building Curator, Elsewhere

Ian Montgomery

## Education Curator, Elsewhere

Chris Kennedy

## Directors, Elsewhere

George Scheer

Stephanie Sherman



Elsewhere is a living museum set in a former thrift store containing one woman, Sylvia Gray's, 58 year collection of cultural surplus. Located in downtown Greensboro, North Carolina, USA, Elsewhere invites international artists to create new works for the living museum.

[www.elsewhereelsewhere.org](http://www.elsewhereelsewhere.org)

