ABOUT THE ARTIST

Asher Hartman is an interdisciplinary artist whose work has been exhibited extensively including at The Hammer Museum, Whitney Biennial, the Beijing Open Performance Festival, and a number of Los Angeles venues including Machine Project, LACE, Human Resources, Track 16, and Highways Performance Space. Forthcoming are performances at The Walker Art Center and a large-scale installation performance at Machine Project. Hartman received his BA from University of California Los Angeles and MFA from California Institute of the Arts.

For more information, visit http://www.asherhartman.com/

Support for ASHER HARTMAN: HALFWAY TO VEGAS is provided by UCR's College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences and is organized by UCR Culver Center of the Arts and is curated by Jeff Cain, exhibition designer, UCR ARTSblock and Jennifer Frias, associate curator, UCR Sweeney Art Gallery.

RELATED EVENTS

Exhibiton Reception | Saturday, January 14 | 6-9 PM
Artist and Curators Walkthrough | Saturday, January 14 | 7 PM

HALFWAY TO VEGAS is a selection of film/video works of artist, Asher Hartman. Known for his projects that are between performance art and experimental theater, Hartman’s work is an ongoing investigation into the ways that Western culture has informed the development of the concept of self, specifically in regards to power, gender, race, language, and sexuality. Hartman’s claims his work embraces queer aesthetics1 and that his ideas are heavily informed by the work of Antonin Artaud and Absurdist Theater.

The three videos in Halfway to Vegas were shot before, during, and after the artist’s transition from female to male. They are an attempt for Hartman to understand his own masculinity and its constraints as well as to confront ideas of self-loathing and the self-liberation within a binary understanding of gender, which he understands to be constructed by, and enforced by language.

These works evolved from a personal process to explore performance for the camera. Much like the way that young adults coming of age playfully experiment and perform new personas in photographs and videos to construct a new self online, you can see Hartman playing out and parodying several conflicting masculine roles in Holy Smokes! (2007). Likewise, For Sale, Cougar (2009) began as an all day improvisational workshop where attendees could play roles based off a script comprised of sexist commentaries from YouTube about “cougars”—older women who like to date younger men.

Much like Artaud’s theory of the “Theater of Cruelty,” which directs ruptures in staging, structure, and language with the intention to break “false realities,” Hartman sees language as the fulcrum of understanding and control, moving either in the direction of politically dangerous categorization or erotic joyous transcendence, or both. In these videos, the elements of utterance, gesture and inane parlance break apart fixed understandings of masculinity, desire, and family and open up possibilities for an exalted state. Phant (2003), for example, begins as a recognizable family fairy tale based on the 1980 movie, The Elephant Man, but by the end collapses into gibberish, which is simultaneous with the characters experience of rapture, bliss, and transcendence.

- Jeff Cain, exhibition designer, UCR ARTSblock | co-curator, Asher Hartman Halfway to Vegas

1 Queer Aesthetics is less of a unified idea, but an aesthetic position and tradition that defines itself to be at odds with the dominant, normal, and legitimate. It often embraces camp, subverts categorical distinctions, and directly addresses issues of sexuality, gender, and desire.