

# RELATIONSHIP

ZACKARY DRUCKER  
& RHYS ERNST



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& RHYS ERNST



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## Foreword

Driving up to the Silver Lake, Los Angeles, home of Zackary Drucker and Rhys Ernst in April 2013 triggered strong memories of an earlier chapter in the city's history. The artist Ron Athey had previously lived in the house, and I couldn't help but think about my first encounters of the neighborhood in the early 1990s, when Athey was central to a lively, underground (pre-Internet!) scene for which bodies and genders had no limits, where identities were being shredded, interrogated, and recomposed into new frontiers.

Vaginal Davis had been a notable neighbor and collaborator of Athey's and was an equally vital and provocative fixture in the Silver Lake scene at the time, long before she would decamp to Berlin a decade later. Davis would subsequently have a cameo as the Whoracle of Delphi in Drucker and Ernst's 2012 semiautobiographical film, *She Gone Rogue*, a project that had prompted my visit; I was eager to discuss including the film in the 2014 Whitney Biennial.

Before Drucker, Ernst, and I could get down to the business of watching and discussing *She Gone Rogue*, they poured a round of margaritas and asked if they could present some earlier photographs as contextual material for the film. They stressed that these snapshots formed a private diary and were not intended to be shown publicly. After glimpsing only the first few images of the series, I realized that it included more than a few iconic images documenting a tender attack on the conventions of gender binaries and the systems that arise to regulate them. It simply and directly revealed the quotidian details of a couple falling in love while mutually transitioning, Drucker from male to female, Ernst from female to male.

My mind again started to ricochet between 1990s Los Angeles—specifically the photographs Catherine Opie had made at the time, including seminal portraits of Athey and Davis—and the then-present moment in which I was encountering a critical document of millennial queerness charged with what José Esteban Muñoz might have called “hope and utopia.”<sup>1</sup> If Opie's 1990s images had serially mapped

the scarred and punctured flesh of a queer community still ravaged by the first decade of AIDS and actively performing the difference of their analogue bodies, Drucker and Ernst's photographs and the relationship they document reflect what Paul Preciado has termed "a becoming between multiplicities" shaped by the emerging dynamics of techno-capitalism and advanced biotechnologies.<sup>2</sup> The photographs are exquisite, surprising, and efficient in dissolving so many of the structures of fear that still allow gender to be policed so stringently. Needless to say, I invited Drucker and Ernst to participate in the Biennial and urged them to consider including the series. Happily, they agreed.

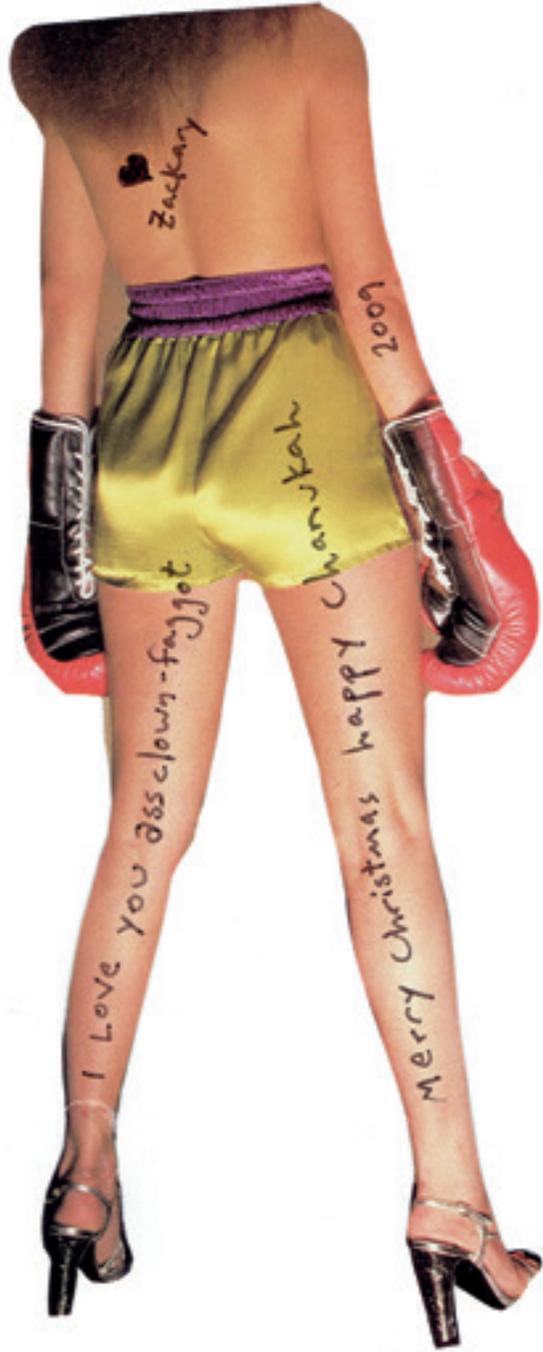
*She Gone Rogue* is both an imagined story of Drucker and Ernst's relationship and a homage to an intergenerational family of transgender pioneers including Davis, Holly Woodlawn, and Flawless Sabrina. Together with the photographic series *Relationship*, this body of work forms a codex for how we might reconsider our families and relationships, not as fixed structures but as elastic communities capable of celebrating, rather than fearing, transformation.

**Stuart Comer**

Chief Curator of Media and Performance Art, The Museum of Modern Art,  
New York

Notes:

1. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009), 18.
2. Paul B. Preciado, "Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics," *E-flux Journal*, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/testo-junkie-sex-drugs-and-biopolitics>



# The story of Zacka Rhys

Zackary  
Drucker

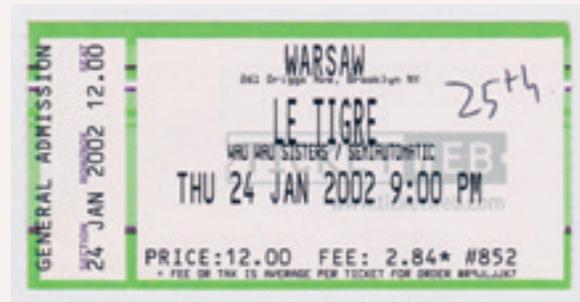
Rhys  
Ernst

If our greatest artwork is the way that we live our lives, then a relationship is the ultimate collaboration.

Flashes of light: a field of daisies; the musk of sheets and flesh entangled in the height of summer; a distortion seen through the magnifying lens of self-critique; short blond hair growing longer; facial hair appearing . . . and disappearing; desire; a look of emptiness; knots, passion; more desire.

Tracking my movements and Rhys's before we met delivers us first to a New York City Le Tigre concert in 2002, bouncing up and down to the beats of the great post-punk feminist band. Zoom forward to the summer of 2005: Trans Pride, New York's first, and an after-party at Nowhere Bar, which is still open, miraculously. Rhys remembers seeing me from the bar and thinking, "If I was going to be with a non-cisgender woman [I think he put it more bluntly than that] it would be her." We once found a party photo on Myspace—a throbbing roomful of bodies dancing, captured at a party on Bleecker Street, a surviving snapshot from an obsolete profile that we can't log onto. Both of us there in the shot, not yet a part of the other's story.

We met, finally, in the heat of August in a friend's backyard. Our friend was the caretaker of a mansion in Los Feliz, right at the base of Griffith Park. A utopia of Los Angeles wealth, gated behind high fences. It was 2008, a year best known for a global financial crisis.



*Zackary and Rhys at "Stache" in a photograph found on Myspace, 2005*



Zackary, 2006

I was at the bottom of the expansive yard and as Rhys approached, there was a tremendous leap happening inside of us, a bridging of the chasm between our previous selves. Our disparate histories and communities of origin, always running side-by-side, finally coinciding. We were changing already, seeing in each other something that no one else had seen.

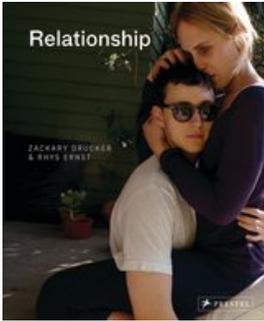


Los Angeles, 2012

I had just moved to Los Angeles three weeks prior, a New York fish out of water, trying in vain to constantly compare the two cities. Everything was new to me, and I had planned on being married to my work—planned on exploring the city, and my new life, on my own. Los Angeles was proving difficult to read at first glance, because its secrets are kept just under the surface.

From Rhys to Zackary,  
c. 2013

After that fateful meeting, we were a couple for six years. Those years incidentally covered the span of both of our gender transitions. We had each started the beginnings of our individual transitions separately. I had started testosterone injections six months prior, and when the hormone kicked in enough for me to blend as a male, I drove cross-country to start a graduate program and a new life in Los Angeles. In the months that led to our first meeting, Zackary began the slow incline of her hormone replacement therapy: first testosterone blockers then estrogen pills and finally injections. Had we met at another point of our lives, we might not have been so driven to document ourselves. But we were in the unflattering throes of yet another puberty, each changing genders, each learning from the other's gender history.



Zackary Drucker, Rhys Ernst

## **Relationship**

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