



NORWICH
UNIVERSITY
OF THE ARTS

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The Unknowing...X

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Output Reference: NUA-RSS-02

Output Date: 2019-20

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The Unknowing...X

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1. SUPPORTING STATEMENT

Output title	The Unknowing...X
Output type	M - Exhibition
Output date	2019-20

Since being diagnosed HIV+ in 1994, Sawdon Smith has visually documented, explored and resisted categorisation as a 'medicalised body'. Being a long-term AIDS survivor, initially given 5-10 years to live but now having a 'normal' life expectancy 27 years after diagnosis, *The Unknowing ...X* celebrates this fact and considers future possibilities. The work presents identity as mutable and multiple from the perspective of the adult dressing-up box and role-play. It explores the multi layered and complex relationships between the different personas and online profiles inhabited during a lifetime. Through play and performance Sawdon Smith reviews past lives and an unknown future: AIDs patient to university professor, gender bender to porn star, go-go dancer to boxer, drag queen to leather queen, son to daddy.

Research included reviewing family and personal photographs as well as his past work, including using the medical/fetish 'Face Corset' from the 2014 series *Behind the Face*. Sawdon Smith also assembled and referenced a wide range of art, fetish, bondage and medical images. The work was staged in Sawdon Smith's studio as a domestic performance, creating different personas and fantasies, playing with sexuality/fetish, physique/masculinity in a safe space. The colour balance and tone of the images were manipulated, with most being exhibited in black and white. The work responds to HIV+ stigma by celebrating being an AIDS survivor and by refusing to be defined solely by this status.

The body of work is arranged in five themes: Bend over and take it like a man; Who's the Daddy; The Category is Butch; Life is a Drag (King); Queerness, Borderless and Leaky.

45 images from *The Unknowing...X* were first exhibited at the 'Millennial Masculinities, Queers, Pimp Daddies and Lumbersexuals' international conference, where Sawdon Smith also delivered a conference paper. Images from the series have subsequently been exhibited, presented and published in a number of venues.

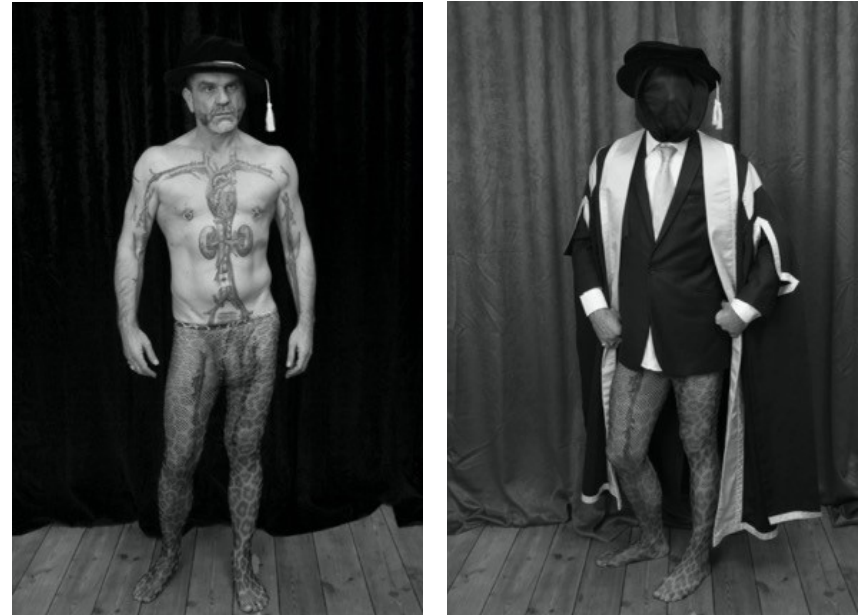


Fig.1 From: Bend over and take it like a man Image 16/51(right) & Image 17/51 (left)

2. RESEARCH PROCESS

As well as gathering a variety of clothes, costumes, masks and wigs, Sawdon Smith also assembled a wide range of art, fetish, bondage and medical images to inform the work, including the work of Ken Currie *Red Ground*, Sadie Lee, Samuel Fosso, Polly Borland, Pierre Molinier, Zorro, Claude Cahun, Lygia Clark. The work was 'performed' on a stage set within Sawdon Smith's studio, signified by the use of the red velvet curtain.

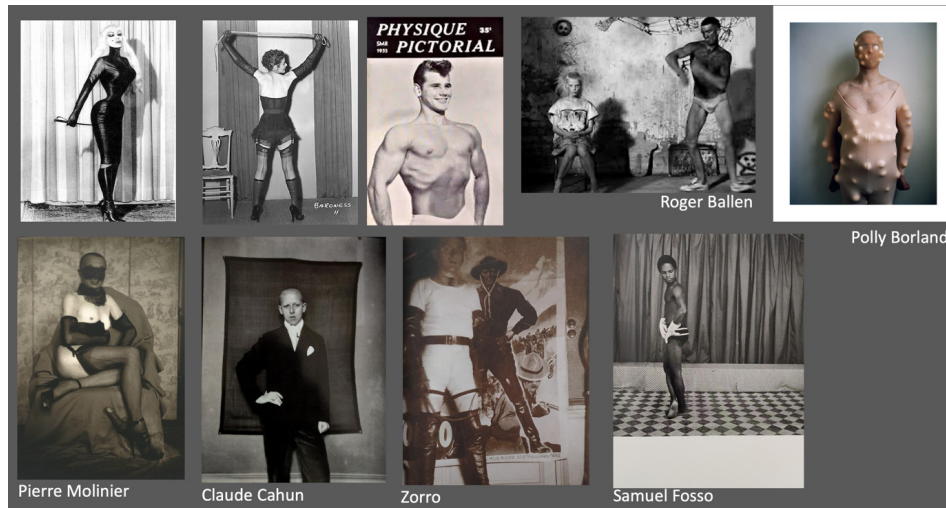


Fig.2 Research images



Fig.3 Research images including from Ken Currie's *Black Backed Gull*, 2018

3. RESEARCH INSIGHTS

Body of photographic work, arranged in five themes.

51 images to date of which 45 have been publicly exhibited.

This series represents a departure from Sawdon Smith's usual way of working, from the single image or a small number of images in a series carefully planned and constructed to a more open-ended, performative and mutable process. Moreover, work responds to HIV+ stigma by celebrating being an AIDS survivor and by refusing to be defined solely by this status. It explores the multi layered and complex relationships between different personas and online profiles.

The work is presented in themed categories: Bend over and take it like a man; Who's the Daddy; The Category is Butch; Life is a Drag (King); Queerness, Borderless and Leaky.

Bend over and take it like a man



Fig.4 Image 2/51

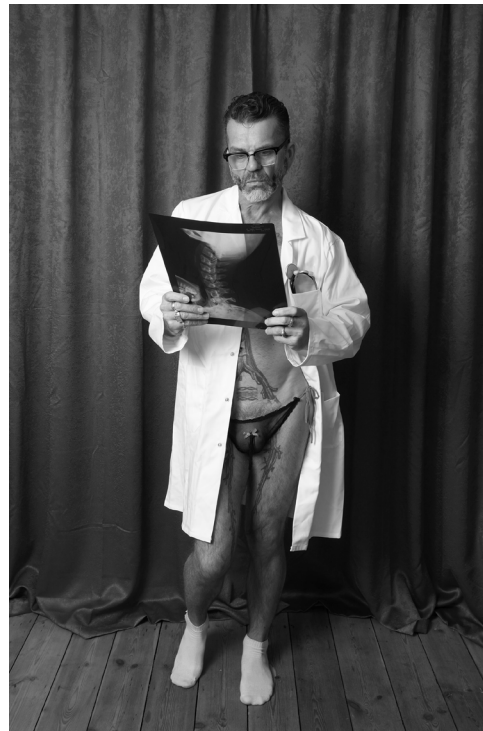


Fig.5 Image 32/51



Fig.6 Image 26/51

Who's the Daddy?



Fig.7 Image 3/51



Fig.8 Image 18/51



Fig.9 Image 24/51

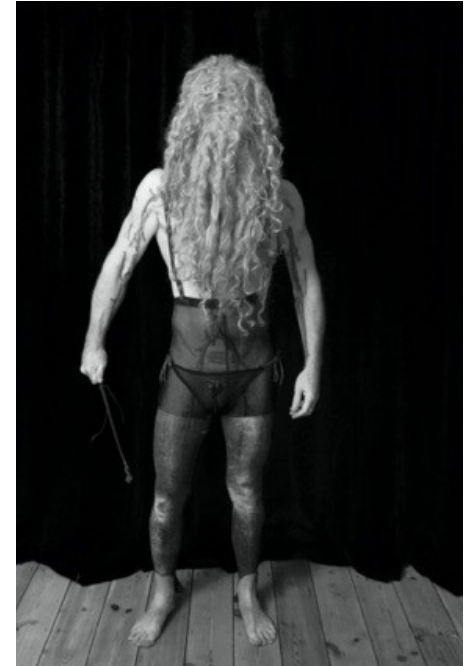


Fig.10 Image 37/51

The Category is Butch



Fig.11 Image 11/51



Fig.12 Image 12/51



Fig.13 Image 21/51



Fig.14 Image 23/51

Life is a Drag (King)



Fig.15 Image 40/51



Fig.16 Image 41/51



Fig.17 Image 43/51



Fig.18 Image 45/51

Queerness, Borderless and Leaky



Fig.19 Image 14/51



Fig.20 Image 15/51



Fig.21 Image 29/51



Fig.22 Image 30/51

4. DISSEMINATION

The work was first exhibited as 45 postcard size images (Images 1 to 45) at the *Millennial Masculinities Queers, Pimp Daddies and Lumbersexuals* International conference at College of Creative Arts, Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand, 10-11 December 2019, where Sawdon Smith also delivered a conference paper.

Exhibitions

2020

Visual AIDS online Gallery Viral exhibition 'Viral: a contagious kiss, transmittable video' plus text and spoken word January 2020 (2 images and text/sound recording – *The Unknowing...X* Image 6/51 & Image 26/51)

https://visualaids.org/gallery/viral?fbclid=IwAR05ePceYSMBv-ISiC-HXXbhQ4c5o2N80bArC1M9bq_-SG95vP7OdJtAPbs

(accessed 18 March 2021. Images 11/51 & 12/51)

Photo LA January 2020 - http://www.photola.com/exhibitors/all_exhibitors.php (accessed 18 March 2021. 1 image – *The Unknowing...X* Image 30/51)

Long Gallery, West Hollywood's Plummer Park Gallery 8 February – 4 March 2020
(1 image – *The Unknowing...X* Image 30/51)

Archive Gallery, 'Queer Art(ists) Now', London, 13-29 March 2020
(1 image *The Unknowing...X* Image 29/51)

Head On Photography Festival Sydney Australia May 2020

Solo exhibition in the festival as 'featured artist' (45 images)

Presentation and panel discussion as part of the festival programme, Sydney

https://www.headon.com.au/search/exhibitions?search_api_views_fulltext=Richard+Sawdon+Smith

(accessed 18 March 2021)

VisualAIDS, 'Amplifier than Loneliness: Documenting Collective Resilience Through HIV/AIDS and Covid-19', online exhibition September 2020 (1 Image)

Disorder Gallery, Sydney, Australia, 12-28 November 2020

The Unknowing...X (45 images)

<https://www.disordergallery.com/disordernews/head-on-photo-festival-2020> (accessed 18 March 2021)

Publications

2019

UCS (Uncertain States magazine) issue X 2019 (5 images and text)

2020

Richard Sawdon Smith 'The *unknowing* ... X: Queering representations of masculinity in an *undetactable* world.' Photo Essay in Critical Studies in Men's Fashion, Volume 7 Numbers 1 & 2, pp223-227, December 2020 DOI: 10.1386/csmf_00026_7

Conference papers, talks & presentations of The Unknowing...X

2020

Head On Photography Festival Sydney, Australia May 2020

https://www.headon.com.au/search/exhibitions?search_api_views_fulltext=Richard+Sawdon+Smith

(accessed 18 March 2021)

RMIT, Melbourne, Australia May 2020

Viral Masculinities – conference September 2020 Online https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWC8uku_t1M&t=1284s

'From The Damaged Narcissist to The Anatomical Man to The Unknowing', *The London Independent Photography*, London 22 October 2020

<https://www.londonphotography.org.uk/upcoming/2020/10/12/richard-sawdon-smith-online-talk-hosted-by-jennifer-nash/> (accessed 18 March 2021)

2019

Millennial Masculinities Queers, Pimp Daddies and Lumbersexuals International conference at, Wellington, New Zealand, December 2019

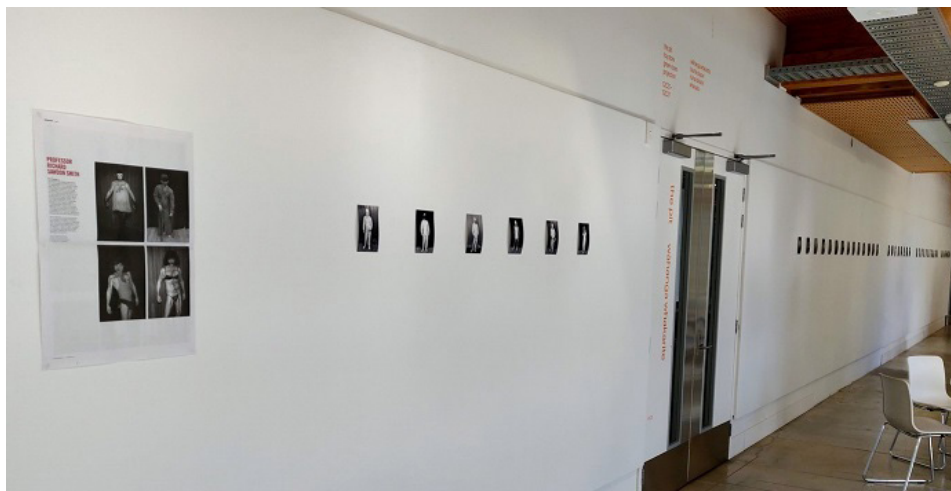


Fig.23 Installation of images 1-45 at College of Creative Arts, Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand, December 2019



Fig.24 Close up of installation of images 1-45 at College of Creative Arts, Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand, 10-11 December 2019



Fig.25 Installation of images 1-45 at the Disorder Gallery, Sydney, Australia 12- 28 November 2020

**PROFESSOR
RICHARD
SAWDON SMITH**

The Interview
 In the first of our interviews, Professor Sawdon Smith discusses his work as a performance artist, his relationship with the body, and his interest in the history of the body as a site of experimentation and discovery. He also talks about his recent work with the artist and filmmaker, and his plans for the future.

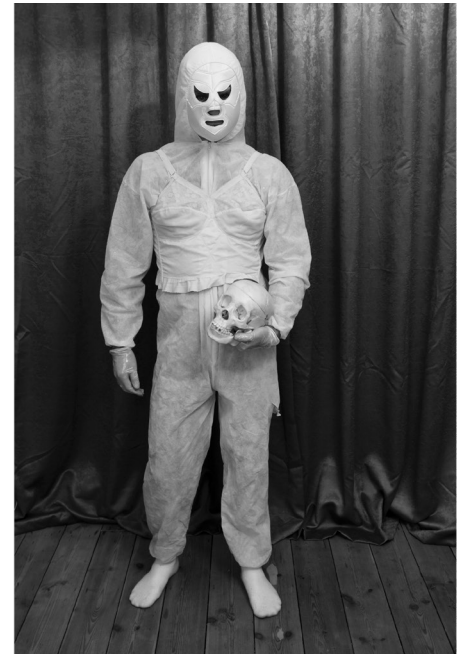


Fig.26 Uncertain States magazine Issue X 2019

Critical Studies in Men's Fashion

Volume 7 Numbers 1 & 2

© 2020 Intellect Ltd Photo Essay, English language.

https://doi.org/10.1386/csmf_00026_7

Received 15 February 2020; Accepted 23 March 2020

PHOTO ESSAY

RICHARD SAWDON SMITH

The *unknowing* ... X: Queering representations of masculinity in an *undetactable* world

Over the years, I have amassed a huge dressing up box, accumulated from different parts of my life – AIDS patient to university professor, gender bender to porn star, go-go dancer to boxer, drag queen to leather queen, son to daddy! HIV+ since 1994, on medication and Undetectable, I approach my sixth decade reflecting on past lives and the unknown future.

This series is about dipping into the dressing up box to create new and potential different roles by performing for the camera and playing with gender, identity, sexuality, masculinity and everything in between. It is about Unthinking in a space of creative Unknowing. An exciting place where anything can happen and nothing is predetermined, where there is everything to look forward to.

The X of Unknowing ... can be a kiss from me to you, a reference to non-binary, non-gendered specific pronouns, or it can refer to an undetermined space, literally and metaphorically.

KEYWORDS

performativity
masculinities
queer masculinities
fetish men
gender sexualities

Fig.27 Photo Essay in Critical Studies in Men's Fashion



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