

Bona Drag: An Incomplete History of Drag and Cross-Gender Performance in Film and Video Art (Part 1), November 2, 2018-March 3, 2019

These films and videos examine artists' engagement of drag performance and culture from the 1960s to today. Drag is the theatrical practice of exaggerating a physical presentation and affect culturally associated with another gender. Its long history extends back to ancient Greek and medieval and Shakespearean theater, when the roles of women were often played by young men. In the 20th and 21st centuries, drag has developed into a more formalized cultural practice and sensibility, with artists consistently turning to film and video. Drag's integration of elements of fashion and performances from stage, screen, and music and its defiance of conventional roles of gender and sexuality make it a compelling subject, strategy, and source of inspiration for contemporary art.

Bona Drag presents works that frame drag within the context of the art world and in more experimental examples by figures and collectives celebrated within drag culture. Drag's flamboyant defiance of convention has made it a powerful form of expression for LGBTQIA rights in recent history, most profoundly in the 1980s during the AIDS crisis (which took the lives of numerous artists in this exhibition) and in our current politically divisive climate.

For more information about the films visit RISDMUSEUM.ORG/channel

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Sasha Velour, American, b. 1987
Pirate Jenny, 2018
Video with color, sound
Courtesy of Sasha Velour TL103.2018



Pirate Jenny features the artist performing the Kurt Weill song of the same title on a cabaret stage while cutting to scenes of other figures in drag walking city streets at night. The video combines the music and atmosphere of 1920s Weimar Germany with contemporary references to draw conclusions between present and past eras. This work is from Velour's *One Dollar Drags* short-film series, which considers the numerous cultural forms examined through drag performance.

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Victoria Sin, Canadian, b. 1991
Part Three/Cthulhu Through the Looking Glass, 2017
Video with color, sound
Courtesy of the artist TL108.2018

In this video, artist Victoria Sin poses in a revealing yet elegant white dress, accompanied by a seductively mysterious voiceover. Sin combines drag performance and science fiction to question conventional ideas of race, sexuality, time, gender, and power. The title of the work alludes both to the 1926 story *The Call of Cthulhu* by the horror/ fantasy writer—and Providence native—H. P. Lovecraft and Lewis Carroll's children's 1871 book *Through the Looking-Glass*, the sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.



Mark Oates, American, 1958-1989
Tom Rubnitz, American, 1956-1992
Psycho III The Musical, 1985
Video, black & white and color, sound
Courtesy of Video Data Bank at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago TL121.2018

In this work, Mark Oates's theatrical parody of the horror film *Psycho* (1960) is reinterpreted in video, distinctive from its original presentation on the stage of New York's Pyramid Club, a drag landmark. *Psycho III The Musical* reflects Tom Rubnitz's significant role in representing the impact of the Manhattan nightclub scene on the style, sensibility, and broader cultural awareness of drag in the United States. It also underscores the importance of parody in drag performance, as participants both celebrate and satirize iconic fixtures of popular culture and mass media.



Charles Atlas, American, b. 1949
Mrs. Peanut visits New York, 1999
Video with color, sound
Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York TL109.2018.2

Mrs. Peanut Visits New York is a video portrait of the legendary performance artist, fashion designer, and nightlife icon Leigh Bowery (1961–1994). The camera follows Bowery as he flamboyantly walks through lower Manhattan, dressed in a self-made reinterpretation of



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Mr. Peanut, the Planters Peanut mascot. Atlas's video contrasts Bowery's outrageous presence against everyday passersby—who respond with surprise and confusion—and the blandly wholesome corporate identity Bowery sends up.

Suzie Silver, American, b. 1963
Freebird, 1993
Video with color, sound
Courtesy of the artist TL101.2018

Silver takes on various roles in this video, most significantly that of Ronnie van Zant, lead singer of the Southern rock band Lynyrd Skynyrd, whose classic song "Freebird" is performed in the work. Here Silver parodies the fixed notions of extreme masculinity and femininity associated with pop-culture genres and forms.



Andy Warhol, American, 1928-1987
Mario Banana #2, 1964
16mm film transferred to digital file; black and white, silent; 4 minutes 12 seconds (at 16 frames per second)
Collection of The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh; Contribution The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts TL131.2018

In this film, Mario Montez suggestively eats a banana. Montez, the drag persona of René Rivera (1935–2013), was one of the "superstars" in Andy Warhol's films of the 1960s and 1970s, who often performed simple gestures such as looking at the camera, sleeping, or kissing in ways that emphasized their extravagant personalities. Montez's name is an homage to Dominican actress Maria Montez, whose dramatic presence was an inspiration for the more flamboyant tendencies in Montez's drag performance.