

male//chair
garrie maguire

'I am fond of the idea that Queers anywhere are responsible for Queers everywhere'
French artist Bérangère Fromont

Looking through garrie maguire's recent photographic project set in his studio/apartment with the single prop of a red chair I was struck by the insanity of asking a lesbian to view these images with dicks/penis/ tackle/junk on show in every which way. garrie chatted on that this was a part of his idea...to try to understand difference in how masculinity is viewed through a significantly other to him Q+ lens. The Taoist way to break the binary we were both pushing at is to consider "am I a man dreaming I am a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming I am a man". This collection of photographs is in the heart of this dream.

I wondered at the personal challenge of selecting 34 works from 300 beautiful images for the Victorian Pride Centre Gallery. The models own tasks of presenting the self as nude had to fall away in the selection process as the chair became the protagonist.

garrie has long worked with studio images. In fact, I first met garrie in a studio as he was photographing me for a magazine as a judge for the Mardi Gras art prize in Sydney many years ago.

garrie has often considered ideas around current issues that could reflect how men see men, and how men present themselves to the world. This project encapsulated this idea. His open invitation to a diverse group of men, queer and straight, to be photographed nude with the selected red chair (s) was met as a challenge by some, with great joy by others and clear excitement (if only you could see all 300 images) by a few.

The relationship between artist and model is sharing...garrie uses words that are about gifts of images from model to photographer. The chair becomes the hidden in plain sight collaborator working with both model and photographer.

There is a political question within this project as the sense of pride and the invitation to see and admire the poses put forward, from strength to shyness, invitation and silliness. This work suggests that the personal is indeed political for our communities. Our bodies and desires are increasingly on the line in the constant battle for recognition of our very humanness.

Conservative agendas are running hot with countries like Italy removing the parental rights of the non-biological mother, a war of extremists in the middle east where both sides would legislate against our rights, Russia closing down even use of our terms, and locally the violence demonstrated against the Trans community and the shutting down of drag events. For the VPC to exhibit this project against the current political backdrop of anger at our nakedness and our desire, helps us recognise ourselves in ways we didn't realise.

These images are not the documentary images our queer community is experienced in but rather a nuanced relationship of light and dark, of looking right back at you with full intent. These pictures circle around a kind of spectacle of men showing off... but there is also the materiality of the chair within the balance of light on forms and the blackness of the cloth. The white cis gay male photographer is looking for something about desire in diversity. The assorted blokes treat the chair as a prop imitating Christine Keeler, or a Tom of Finland pose, flexing and preening, the chair as friend and as enemy, as a weight to balance and a cover for nakedness. The display is about themselves not any imagined audience perhaps.

The chair disrupts the relationship of photographer and model, it somehow makes the invitation to get nude for a camera a fine thing, a political move. A personal statement as this studio is garrie and husband Joey's home. garrie has often had his studios in his home. A space shared with his live-in-lover and yet a place to photograph others. Within all of this the chair is both a prop and what makes the image about garrie's life by including his chair(s) the lens sees all these things, the model the chair the home and the artist with his hand on the button.

garrie uses the studio images to balance light and dark, filling space or making it disappear like magic. He is creating these works using traditional techniques against a solid history of gay men images of male nudity, their own search for what it is they desire. In another era these images would be traded as postcards, probably under the counter. Yet there are very few come hither looks and invitations...although I am probably not best placed to even recognise that here. The sheer number of amazingly beautiful images consciously responding to the invitation to be a part of the project is not a sentimental exercise but rather created a definite statement with the 'I am What I am' anthem effect.

Dr. Lisa Anderson

Lisa Anderson was invited by garrie to write an essay for this exhibition

male//chair by garrie maguire is presented in association with XYZ Photo gallery