

RYAN RIDDINGTON (b. Rinteln, 1978) lives and works in London. A Slade MFA graduate (2010). Solo exhibitions include *Home Address* at BasementArtsProject, Leeds (2015) and *High, Low and In-between* at Fred, London (2012). Recent group exhibitions include *Shake the Bottle: Contemporary Photography and Sexual Identity* at Herbert Read Gallery, Canterbury and *A Lover's Discord* at Kontor Projects, Copenhagen. His work has appeared in *Granta*, *Chroma*, *Pink Mince* and *SMBHmag*.

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## Visual Art

# Portmanteau: Object, Image and Identity

Ryan Riddington



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THE ARTWORKS SELECTED ARE TAKEN FROM A TIME PERIOD SPANNING THE PAST SEVEN YEARS, when my interest in space, construction and found objects broadened from purely formal three-dimensional expressions to include image-based representations that question my role as a sculptor.

I began to use photography not only to document my work but also to create it, using images of myself that are clothed in, holding, or seated upon whole pieces or fragments of sculptures I had constructed. In doing so I was considering the relationships between subject and object and how these constitute meaning in art through more contemporary notions of identity; that is to say that it was not solely aesthetic. In truth, this was not part of a predetermined effort to reflect my engagement with wider epistemological concerns in my work. Rather, it naturally arose from the originating impulses that first prompted me to make art.

A keen drawer as a child, I later felt compelled to build out from the flat picture plane and into the physical world. Using the lens as well as the naked eye to examine what I had built allowed me to consider these objects alongside varying versions of their own image. New works then arose out of the conversation between them. That my artwork incorporates elements of the personal, the historical and the sexual and touches on issues of belonging, connectedness and status, both personal and material, is probably because these are questions (if they may be called that) that now preoccupy me. As to who and what we are looking at, the viewer will be as good a judge as I.

I have, nevertheless, observed a predominant unifying concern; my work often constitutes an interrogation of masculinity, both in the particular, that is, my own masculinity, and in general, as a concept and a code. This is perhaps a reflection of my tastes and interests, which include hip-hop, the Russian Constructivists, the architectural and the artisanal. I tend to be drawn to what might be considered hard-edged, i.e. stereotypically masculine, areas of interest. I question whether this may be due to the way I was raised, my background as a military brat or my homosexuality. Does what I do reflect a gay sensibility?

I do not proffer my art as a form of answer. I carry on thinking and making so that I may create objects and images, independently or in conjunction with each other, where my interests and concerns coalesce to produce things that can hold themselves to account.

*Images on following pages courtesy of the artist.*



Figure 1. *Cellar*, 2008, lambda print

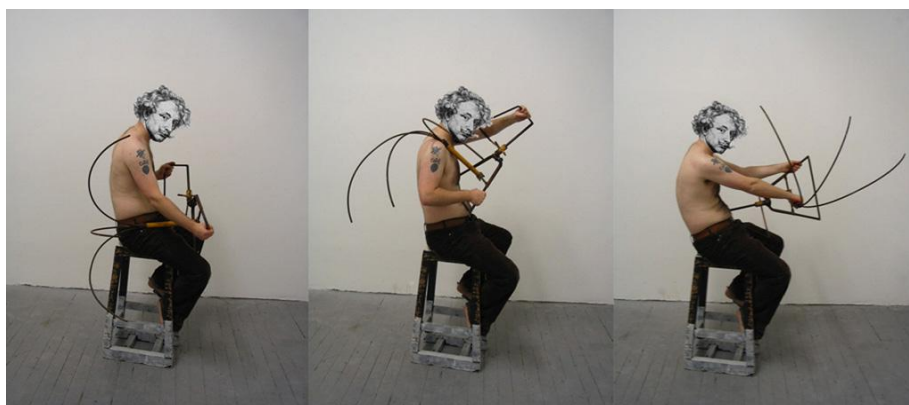


Figure 2. *A Crowd*, 2009, lambda prints



Figure 3. *Portrait of the Artist*, 2009, lambda print

*Cellar* shows an object made whilst Artist in Residence at Cyprus College of Art and Design from a mixture of found and new materials, posed on a stool in the disused basement of a home formerly shared with friends in Leeds. *A Crowd* documents a performance in London with the object from *Cellar*, my face having subsequently been covered with a self-portrait by Van Dyck. *Portrait of the Artist* is a studio portrait of me sitting on another welded metal sculpture of mine. Both objects are no longer physically extant. A fragment of the latter object remains and is depicted in various iterations in photographic series.



Figure 4. *Protection*, 2010, lambda print

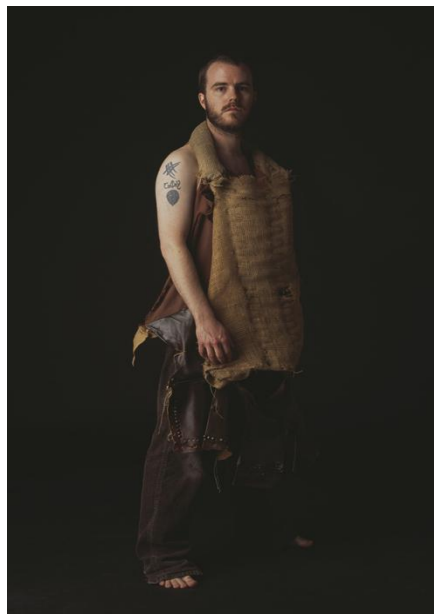


Figure 5. *Foil*, 2010, lambda print



Figure 6. *Mantle*, 2010, lambda print

*Foil* is a studio portrait of me wearing a section from a deconstructed Chesterfield chair that I rescued from being thrown into a skip. In Leeds I had experienced how cold and uncomfortable this furniture is and, although second hand, I knew of its role in promoting a sense of the 'Gentleman's Club'. This led to an investigation of the Chesterfield and its personal and social currency, from its presence in exclusive homosocial and homosexual environments to a symbolic working through of a severed friendship and a consideration of the nature of being. In *Protection* I am disguised by wearing a red raincoat that I found in the Lake District. *Mantle* shows me wearing a combination of the two.



Figure 7. *Thumb*, 2010, photo-rag print



Figure 8. *Walk*, 2010, lambda print

*Thumb* is a marker of lived experience that was close to hand. The 'terrain' depicted is evidence of skin picking shown as part of a phallic symbol or bowed figure. *Walk* resulted from a residency in Crete entitled Utopia and Nature in which I 'performed' the act of outdoor cruising. This was photographed, the image sited in the nearby landscape and then re-photographed to produce the finished image.

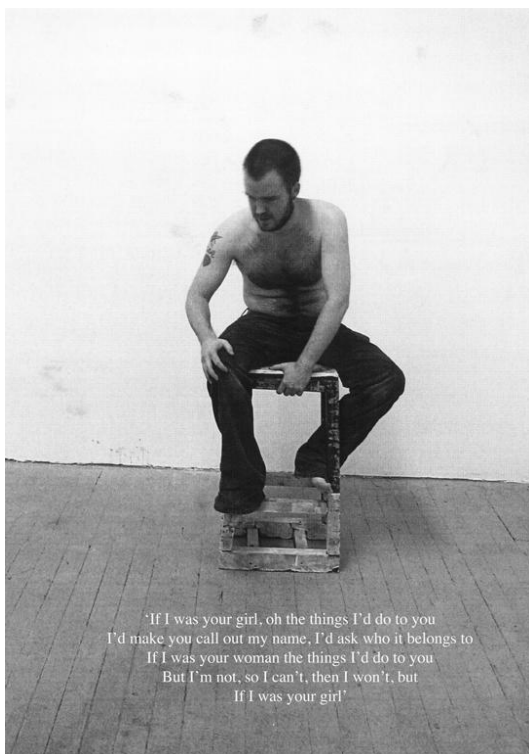


Figure 9. *Control*, 2009, photo-rag print



Figure 10. *Street Soldier*, 2014, collage

In large part a tribute to Janet Jackson, *Control* is a pose work where I present myself as a sexual object and potential partner. *Street Soldier* uses an altered image of Prince Harry to look at my Army upbringing, nationalism and male representation through the filter of the media and hip-hop paraphernalia.