



Sinbad in the Rented World

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JOEL GIBB

ANDREW HARWOOD

JEREMY LAING AND WILL MUNRO

IAN PHILLIPS

THE ENSEMBLE OF TOPS 'N' BOTTOMS

SCOTT TRELEAVEN

lan Phillips
Untitled Found Object, 2003 [detail]

Untitled Found Object, 2003 [detail]

Sinbad in the Rented World

WITH AN ESSAY BY R.M. VAUGHAN
AND A STORY BY DEREK MCCORMACK

ART GALLERY OF YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO



Jeremy Laing and Will Munro
Pavilion of Virginia Puff-Paint, 2004 [detail]

ON THE OTHER HAND

Sinbad in the Rented World

With the title, *Sinbad in the Rented World*, I pay homage to the legacy of the legendary underground filmmaker and performer Jack Smith, referring to one of his unfinished film projects. Not that I suspect Smith's legacy to be fulfilled by the artists in the exhibition—or even his amazing achievements in film, experimental theatre, and installation necessarily to be known. What I want to explore is a queer aesthetic in Toronto art but as applied to social function. Is this a new phenomenon? Perhaps, if we are willing to stretch our understanding of the parameters of visual culture—or queer art. One might not think that glamour or the superficial excess of glitter could have a social function, but Smith adamantly believed so saying: “Could art ever be useful? Ever since the desert glitter drifted over the burnt-out ruins of Plaster Lagoon thousands of artists have pondered and dreamed of such a thing, yet, art must not be used anymore as another elaborate means of fleeing from thinking because of the multiplying amount of information each person needs to process in order to come to any kind of decision about what kind of planet one wants to live on before business, religion, and government succeed in blowing it out of the solar system.”*

The environmental costuming of the gallery (to extend a phrase of Charles Ludlam's) that takes place here can be considered co-extensive with social practices in the world, even if the works herein contained seem too playful. Social function can be defined in such a way that also redefines what we consider the work of art to be, so that the visual paraphernalia that surround the performances of a band, its publicity, and product dissemination, for example, could be considered an aestheticizing-socializing role. Flamboyant and flaming, social and subversive are no longer opposing terms. So let's not think of this work as the “silly side of subversion” but rather as the social side, for instance, of stitchery of boys who sew and then some.

As different as they are, the two exhibitions *Sinbad in the Rented World* and *What It Feels Like for a Girl* were always considered in my mind together as a current look at art in Toronto—hence their publication in one catalogue.

Philip Monk, Director/Curator

*Jack Smith, “Capitalism of Lotusland,” *Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool: The Writings of Jack Smith*, ed., J. Hoberman and Edward Leffingwell (London: Serpent's Tail, 1997), p. 11.



Scott Treleaven
This is THE SALVATION ARMY
Issue X, 2004 [detail]

Sinbad's Bastards

R.M.Vaughan

After turning the question over in his mind, he eventually came to the conclusion that what he should try to do was this: to employ cheerful means to attain a drab end, or rather, to impress on the room as a whole...a certain elegance and distinction, while yet preserving its essential ugliness. — J.K. HUYSMANS, AGAINST NATURE

Ever since a gaggle of discontented, disproportionately influential American drag queens (and their Canadian mimics) conned their way into New York City's public-access television network in the mid-1990's—a broadcast medium wherein anybody with a head can talk—and bitched like Chicken Little about the supposed demise of gay culture (i.e., the dwindling returns on their own fame), the idea that gay men are no longer culturally relevant, are no longer the ruling heterosexual culture's main critics, its warped magic mirror, has spread like an intellectual flu. In the last ten years, we North American gays have been told over and over by our allegedly cleverer betters that our status is no longer *quo*, or queer, that we have ceased to be a force for social change and aesthetic rebellion—indeed, that gayness itself has disappeared.

Yet, for a supposedly meaningless, expired and tired “epiphenomenal minority” (I once dated an academic who flung that term at me across a dinner table, on our first date no less), we've produced rather a lot of contentious and engaging Books of Revelations charting our annihilation.

Alarmist screeds such as *Anti-Gay*, *The End of Gay* and Bruce La Bruce's vinegary Toronto *eye Weekly* columns have all foretold our doom, damning gay men (in the most entertaining prose, naturally) to a life of empty Pottery Barn consumerism and suburban assimilation. Meanwhile, plague of toads-like signs of the End Times, such as *Gaiety* (a male-male bridal magazine), the self-help book *Finding the Boyfriend Within* (I am not making this up), and the wretched sitcom *Will and Grace*, warn us, directly or by horrid implication, that being gay is potentially a frighteningly mainstream way to be—“mainstream” almost always meaning little more than the quirky truth that, lately, some people are pretending to be homosexual on television.

Well, I don't buy it. And here's why: I still go out at night. And what I see, nightly, and even in the less forgiving daylight hours, is a thriving gay culture that owes nothing to decorating shows, witless comedies, or governmental policy papers on same-sex civil unions.

What I see is something far more akin to the aesthetic Monsieur Huysmans expressed above, more than a century ago—a desire to create art, and thus a social culture, that may appear decorative but is ultimately critical of, if not hateful toward, dominant notions of elegance, good taste, and propriety; to fabricate a world that celebrates the rundown, the indecent, the mad and the malodorous while perversely employing the most pretty colours on the palette and the richest embroidery; to appear to be celebratory, perhaps frivolous, as one lobs accusatory (or at least questioning) hand grenades into crowded halls; to tell the sordid truth with rhyming couplets, to decorate one's discontent—and thus make apparent, via the back-handed compliment of ridiculous luxury, the crappy truth of living as second class citizens.

As Toronto artist Daryl Vocat put it in one of his many pieces of slogan art: Not Gay as in Happy—but Queer, as in Fuck You.

When curator Philip Monk, who is not a male homosexual, approached me to write an essay about this most male homosexual of exhibitions, my first thought was: It's about time.

A bit of essentialism now and then goes a long way. Furthermore, I've been connected, either by art or friendship, or both, to all the artists in *Sinbad in the Rented World*. So, if my appreciations of the work drift now and then into rapture, into giddy delight, it's not just the writer's fee talking. These are my people.

At first glance, the artists assembled for *Sinbad in the Rented World* appear to be a disparate bunch. What, for instance, can the black-clad anarcho-punk drive of Scott Treleaven's videos have in common with the glitter drag of Andrew Harwood's photo games? How does the quiet, mad librarian feel of Ian Phillips's found object works harmonize with The Ensemble of Tops 'n' Bottoms (a collaboration between Joel Gibb and Karen Azoulay) goofy dress-up play dates, or Joel Gibb's noisy pop star glam? And as for Will Munro and Jeremy Laing, well, they appear to have a planet all their own. But a deeper look, and a bit of social history homework, tells us that these works are intricately, although not obviously, intertwined.

For instance, Treleaven's punks labour under the same romantic attraction to delirious sex as Munro and Laing's freaky alien fucking machines—they just have different tailors. Munro actually appears in Treleaven's video. Similarly, Gibb's faux church basement art and The Ensemble's basse couture are spawned from the same affection for discarded “outsider” culture as Phillips's sidewalk finds. And, again, Munro has appeared on stage as a dancer in many of Gibb's concerts (the plot thickens). Harwood and Laing are both addicted to sequins—and Harwood, a textile queen deluxe, is a mentor for many young gay artists looking for tips on where to buy cheap speckles and sparkles. In fact, the first incarnation of Laing and Munro's *The Wall of Virginia Puff-Paint* took place at Zsa Zsa Gallery, a venue operated by...Harwood. Karen Azoulay once co-ran a gallery with Treleaven's boyfriend. Phillips has a Perfect Attendance medal from Munro's monthly Vazaleen parties. Get the picture?

Although it would be inaccurate to describe this assembly as a lavender cabal, some sort of Toronto School of gay art—each artist is far too independently minded to be a part of anything so formal (some of them don't even like each other, but that's none of your business)—they definitely carouse, gossip, and wander in the same circles, inhabit the same guest lists. It's how they manipulate the shared materials (and pleasures) that makes for intrigue.

Andrew Harwood's art is, as my mother might say, gay as the birds, specifically, as peacocks. Relentlessly shiny and dappled with jewels, Harwood's photo assemblages signal an immediate gayness with abandon and glee. Of all the work in this show, Harwood's is arguably the most overt in terms of identity and reading. In fact, Harwood's adherence to an almost nostalgic agenda for gay creativity—make it bright, make it loud—makes him appear to be something of a throw-back amidst the more ambiguous (in terms of artist identity) works of the other artists.

But this is a misreading. First off, glitter and sequins, although hallmarks of drag and gay performance, are not our sole property (too bad). Secondly, what Harwood is doing with said bits of light and magic is hardly a simple re-statement of his own way of life. Had Harwood chosen to decorate, say, images of gay icons or, for that matter, himself (being the emerging gay icon that he is), one could delight in his work without having to confront much more than its blinding dazzle.

That Harwood has chosen instead to literally enlighten aspects of Canadian history—stolid but, let's face it, uninspiring narratives of technological conquest—means that we must ask ourselves unhappy questions about buried histories and social erasure.

A bit of forthright talk is required here: hire thousands of men as labourers, send them deep into the wilderness with no women, and give them lots of liquor...Well, what do you think will happen? To paraphrase Churchill's famous description of the British Navy, our railroad was built with rye, sodomy, and ladle cakes. Of course gay men participated in one of our founding narratives—but where are the accounts, the histories, at least the legends? Dismissed or suppressed, unbecoming as they are to such manly pursuits as blowing up mountains.

Harwood's *Sequined History* fills this vacuum with twinkling fairy lights and diamante glitz. If I can't find myself and my culture in our official histories, Harwood's work declares, I will write myself and my heritage in—and, as a final kick at invisibility, I'll dump a wheelbarrow full of sequins on the floor and call it *Self-Portrait*. Try erasing that!

If *Sinbad in the Rented World*, like all good universes, has a sun around which the other works radiate, it is Harwood's effulgent revisionism.

At the dark end of the galaxy resides Scott Treleaven's *SALIVATION ARMY* project—a mock history (depending on who you ask) that questions the sacrosanct gay/queer dogma of radical sexual liberation whilst glamorizing the movement's players.

I have my own take on this film, one Treleaven disagrees with: he made it all up. There are no gay sex gangs running the streets of Toronto, pledging to overthrow the oligarchy with anal sex and thrift store fashions. The whole mini-media empire of the *SALIVATION ARMY* is a delicious, beautifully wrought fraud, meant to both entice and parody self-positioned sex radicals. The reason Treleaven denies my reading, of course, is that the whole project, the vast sardonic and cynical structure, falls apart as soon as he admits to any artifice. As Treleaven put it, “straight people think it's all true and gay people think none of it is true.”

How telling. Who exactly is Treleaven's film and accompanying zine for? The uncool gays and shocked straights who take it at face value, or the wary gays who watch it with the same squint we apply to any “documentary” about our lives? Gay men, after all, have their own issues with anthropology.

Perhaps the question of audience is irrelevant to Treleaven's work. Perhaps what we have here is more in line with speculative fiction, with the sci-fi punk narratives of William Gibson, or the alternate universes in Matthew Barney's films, than with any actual documentary practice, wherein the format is merely a convenient structure on which to build a dream world, a secret urban garden where boys meet and play at sex (and death) games.

A true Lost Boy, Treleaven has created a work that resonates with menace not because it is factually true, but because it is emotionally true. Who among us has not wanted to run in a pack and hunt for adventure?

Role play is key to Joel Gibb's work as well, as remote as his topsy-turvy fashions and weird, apparently earnest “gay Christian” art might be from Treleaven's grubby monsters. If all three artists thus far have anything in common, however, it is a dedication to elaborate plays with carefully selected icons and representational systems. In other words, they're all thieves.

Raised in a deeply religious household, Gibb knows all about church basement culture, a land where everything is affirming, every bit of art or decoration redirects the viewers attention to the blessings of The Almighty, and where play is limited to its uses in liturgical instruction. It is not

surprising that Gibb has replicated the materiality of this world in his felt constructions and childish collages. The surprise comes from the content.

Like a visitor to a foreign land who apes his hosts but muddles the details, Gibb gives us a church hall decorated with skulls and penises, knives and streams of piss—all rendered as if made by a demented nine year old. Many of the costumes created by Gibb during The Ensemble's performances resemble choir robes, if Mars had a choir.

The whole endeavour reminds me of Tim Burton's film *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, wherein creatures from Hallowe'en land attempt to celebrate Christmas. Trees are hung with shrunken heads, vampires drink bloody Christmas cheer, and, like Gibb, everybody has a wonderful time recasting otherness in their own fashion: becoming both adherents and commentators. A core difference lingers, however: unlike Burton's supernatural characters, Gibb is perfectly at home in the smarmy world of Christian triumphalism. He just wants to do it his way.

It's hard to tell whether or not Gibb means any of his work as a direct *f'accuse* against Christian anti-sex hypocrisy, how wittingly his work is positioned as a commentary. And, like Treleaven, he'll never tell. Again, to reveal any intentionality would be to spoil the guessing game. So we are left with only the certainty of the loveliness of the objects themselves, with their doe-eyed, slapstick charm. A more decisive verdict is yet to come, as Christians like to warn us.

Ian Phillips's sincerity, on the other hand, is not up for question. Phillips is a world-class collector and, like all true collectors, he loves his finds like a parent. Why else would he fill his house with the curlicue ravings of the mad Portuguese woman who haunts his neighbourhood with her lamppost posters? He can't hope to sell them. He must love these insane totems, and expects you to as well.

Other things I know Phillips collects include 1950's romantic novel covers featuring nurses, lost pet posters, and anything to do with the documentary *Grey Gardens*. All perfectly reasonable examples of camp any gay man would recognize.

Why, then, Phillips chose to exhibit his crazy lady posters in this show has puzzled many viewers, as there is no apparent connection between these objects and gay life. But here's a secret about my community: most of us fags are chronic hoarders. We fill our lives with junk and treasure because, to be blunt, we can. Without children or other heterosexual dilemmas, we are free to pursue the oddest, most unprofitable hobbies.

Like Harwood (minus the revisionist agenda), Phillips scrounges around for inspiring ephemera. Unlike Harwood, or the other artists present, Phillips leaves his found lilies as they are, free from guilt. Subsequently, this collection asks us to confront the obsessive undertones lingering throughout *Sinbad in the Rented World* face-on without interruption or interpretation. It asks us to acknowledge not only a kind of general madness, but also a more specific one, borne of displacement and marginalization. Clearly, the woman who created these panels feels as harassed and oppressed as any minority member, and although we might like to treat Phillips's discovery of a kindred soul as a kind of overstated parody of his own outsider status, we cannot look away and say that everything in the original artist's intent is foreign to our experience.

From obsessive-compulsive behaviour (Phillips's and that of his muse) to outright, chipper lunacy, is no more than a few steps—and a truckload of props—away, as Jeremy Laing and Will Munro demonstrate with their sumptuous performance/installation the *Pavilion of Virginia Puff-Paint*: a work of fabulous (and I mean that in the old sense, as in "from fable"), otherworldly dimensions that managed to freak out the otherwise too-PC-to-be-offended York studentry.

When I was making plays at Toronto's queer theatre Buddies in Bad Times, then artistic director Sky Gilbert repeatedly told us young'uns that unless we added some sex, or at least advertised our shows as if we had added some sex, "the fags won't come."

Did Monk consult Gilbert? If so, I doubt Laing and Munro's spacey sex show was exactly what Sky had in mind (but he would love it). Half freak tent, half Shavian smoking room, *The Pavilion* is a collision of sensibilities, ranging from hardcore porn to comic books to Oscar Wilde to *The Kama Sutra* to trade show displays to children's literature to fetishism and back to pornography, with all of the elements geared, and geared up, to one large end (and this is a work full of small ends, tight ones, if you know what I mean)—namely, the synthesis of sexual pleasure.

By turning themselves into monsters (or miracles) equipped with limitless ways to sexually satisfy each other and themselves, Laing and Munro make overt the inherent sexual content, and sexual orientation identities because there is no way to read this work and not address its rude (and I mean that in the old way too, as in "transparent") content, the simple fact that these Quasimodos are fucking and sucking themselves into an atavistic frenzy.

And what a delight to watch! Such inventive postures, creative penetration strategies and promiscuous use of limbs and appendages. That it all happens in what looks like your great aunt's living room only makes the whole business more smutty. Chintz will stain so.

While Treleven and Gibb test their gods, and Harwood and Phillips plunder like pirates, Laing and Munro get down to the core expression of gayness—sex. Maybe that academic I mentioned earlier was right, maybe whatever gays do after sex is merely epiphenomenal...an idea I can agree to as long as the sex is that good and that strange.

I can't pick a favourite work in *Sinbad in the Rented World*. I won't even try. But I can pinpoint a single, overarching delight —this show doesn't promise The Gay Experience, does not make like a Royal Ontario Museum diorama, pretending to encapsulate all of the gay experience. Thank it for that. There are gay men out there—not that I know such people well—who will find all of this exhibition puzzling, unrepresentative, offensive, and even derisive. They will not feel included, which is not nice. But gay culture has a fair amount of nice sugaring it up these days, and as fun as *Sinbad in the Rented World* is, it's not the kind of gay show you'd take your mother to, not if you wanted her to understand the whole of your community. Let some other project attempt to define the entirety of gay life. Best of luck to them (suckers).

For now, I'll be in the pavilion with a glue gun, some construction paper, a few knick-knacks from Value Village and a bag of glitter, thinking about taking over the world.



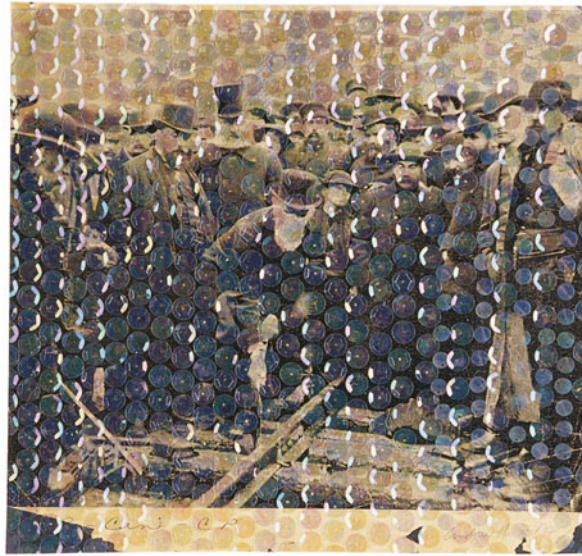
Joel Gibb
CD cover and flyers and for
The Hidden Cameras, 2001-03

OPPOSITE PAGE:
Banners for The Hidden Cameras, 2003
Golden Streams, 2003 [on monitor]



JOEL GIBB





Andrew Harwood
Sequined History, 2003

OPPOSITE PAGE:
Self-Portrait, 2004

ANDREW HARWOOD



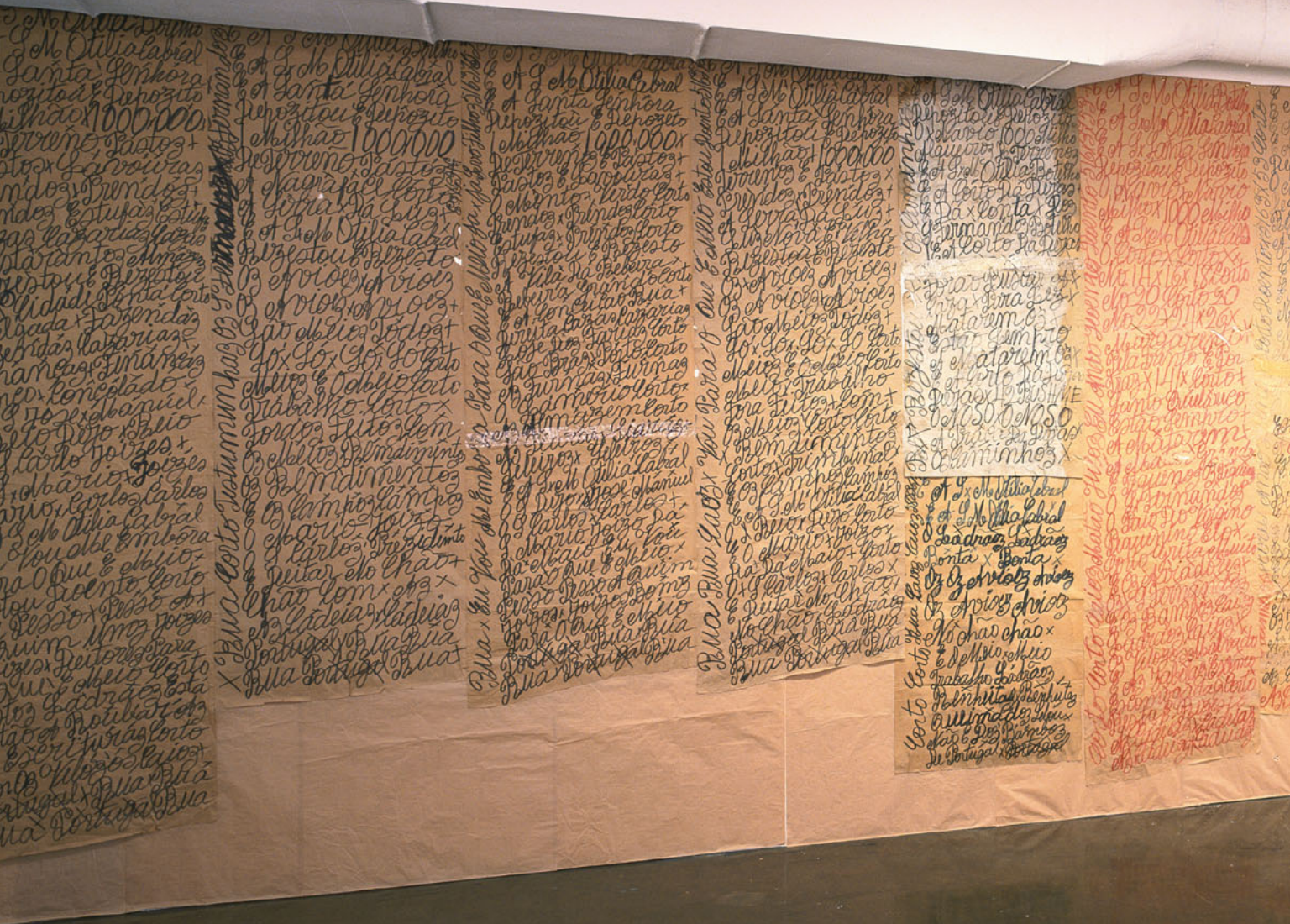
Jeremy Laing and Will Munro
Pavilion of Virginia Puff-Paint, 2004

OPPOSITE PAGE:

Inside the *Pavilion of Virginia Puff-Paint*, 2004



JEREMY LAING AND WILL MUNRO



Ian Phillips
Untitled Found Object, 2003



IAN PHILLIPS

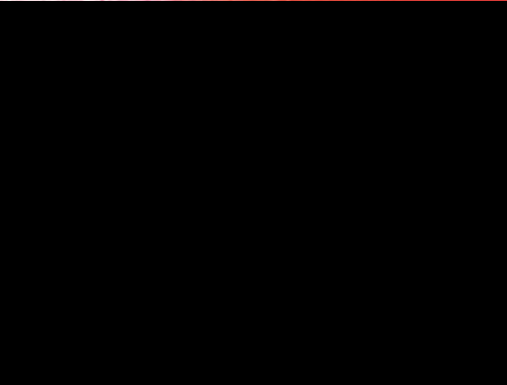
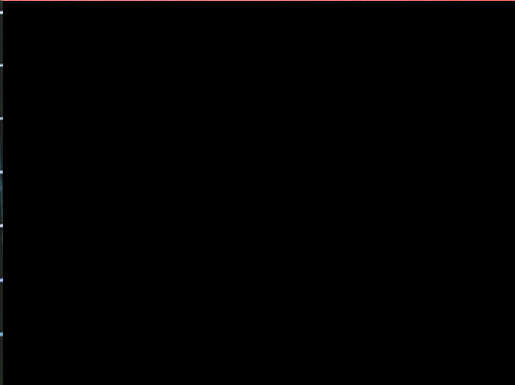
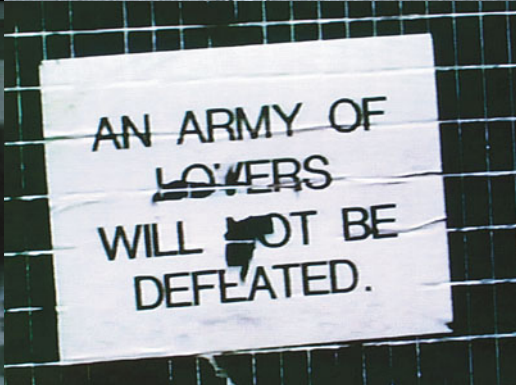
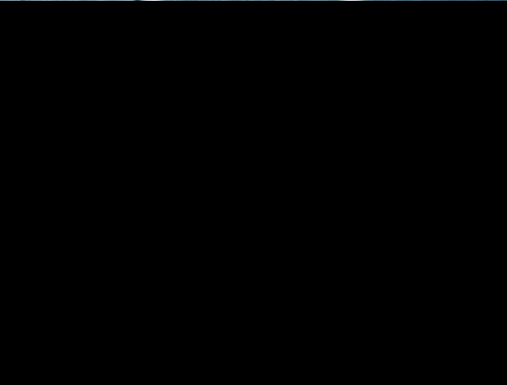
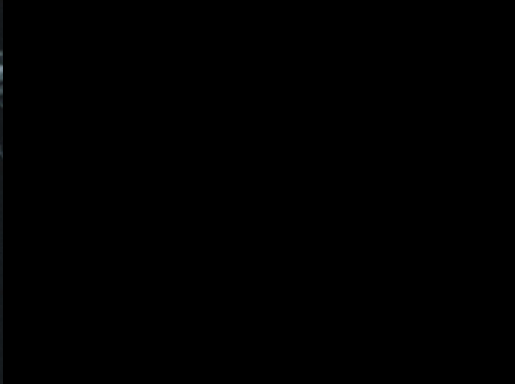
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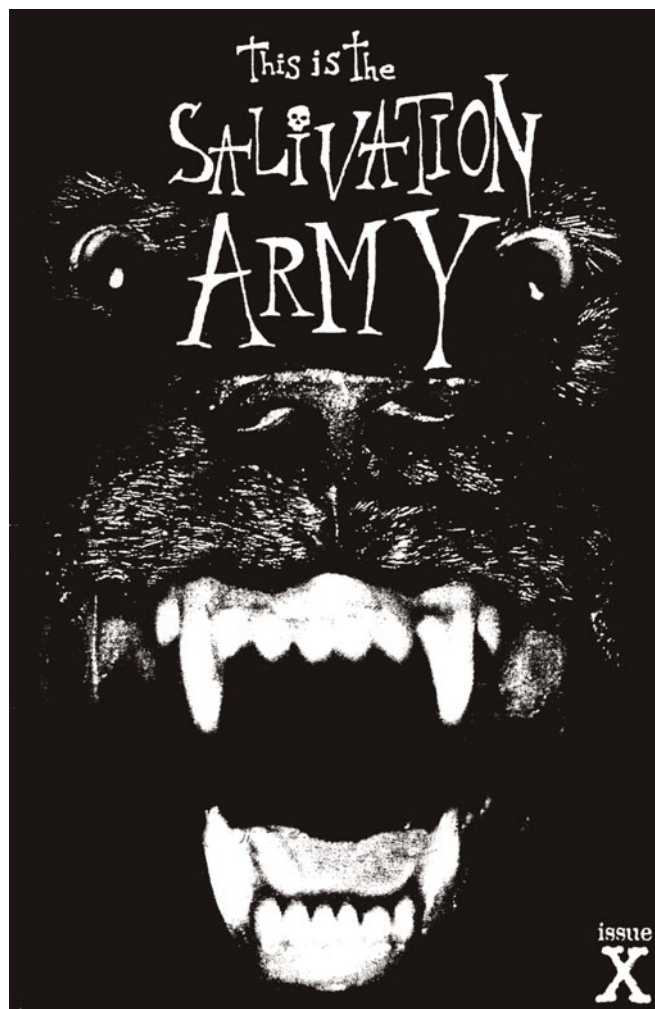
The Ensemble of Tops 'n' Bottoms

Photographs, 2003 [details]



THE ENSEMBLE OF TOPS 'N' BOTTOMS





Scott Treleven

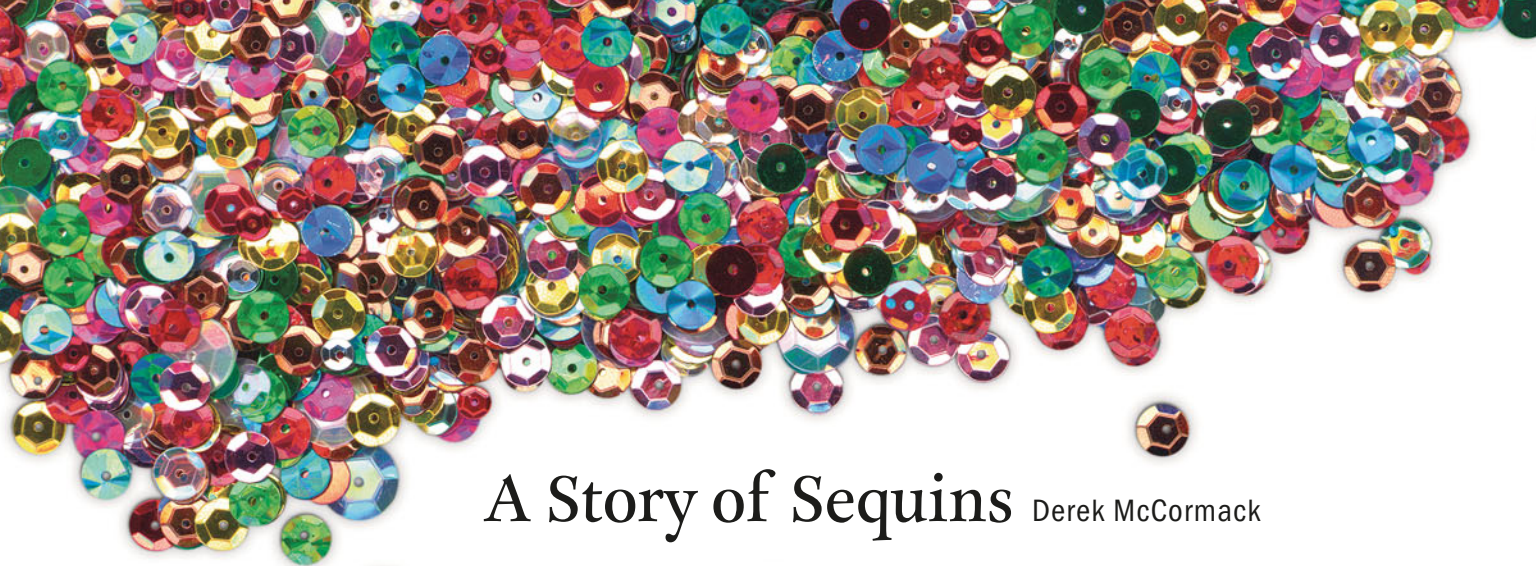
This is THE SALIVATION ARMY

Issue X, 2004 [detail: cover]

OPPOSITE PAGE:

THE SALIVATION ARMY, 2001 [11 stills]

SCOTT TRELEAVEN



A Story of Sequins

Derek McCormack



Codex Atlanticus.

The name of one of Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks. It's full of ideas for inventions. My favourite: a machine for making sequins.

It's a mess of pulleys and levers. A sheet of gold slides onto a table. Punch presses punch. Sequins drop into a basket below. Scrap gold slides out.

Or something like that. It was never actually built. Still, I have to mention it. There are few visionaries in the history of sequins. Leonardo's one.

Herbert Lieberman. He's another.

Strippers. Shriners. Sonja Henie.

Mr. Lieberman costumed them all. He sewed sequin headdresses. Ringling Bros. Circus ordered them. For elephants.

Mr. Lieberman manufactured sequins. His former factory in New York turned out six million spangles a day. Spangle is a synonym for sequin.

He pioneered sequin production in the United States. He pioneered the use of plastics in sequins. He invented a new species of sequin. By solving a problem that plagued plastic sequins. The problem: dirt. He invented the washable sequin.

I phone him at his home in Florida. To talk sequins. The history of. The making of. How he made sequin history.

"My father was an artist," Mr. Lieberman says. "He made the pennants they bring to college football games. In those days they were handpainted." The 1910s. His father a teen.

"The company my father worked for started to embroider pennants," he says. "They taught my father the embroidery trade." Mr. Lieberman, Sr. struck out on his own. As the Algy Trimming Company. He did contract work. Embroidering fine ladies' wear.

"Then they found King Tut's tomb." Tutmania took America. Fashion designers designed sandals with Isis buckles. A "Luxor" gown in Egyptian colours. Gold and black. A New York City store advertised an Egyptian winter coat with "aristocratic" collar. The collar was squirrel.

Embroidery business boomed. Algy embroidered dresses with Egyptian motifs. Sphinxes. Scarabs. Hieroglyphics were big. It didn't matter what they meant. "My father did well," Mr. Lieberman says. "We always do well on fads. Who's that woman that's been married ten times? She played that queen? Elizabeth Taylor?"

He laughs. "We sold more Cleopatra costumes," he says.

King Tut wore sequins.

At least his mummy did. "When they found King Tut's tomb," Mr. Lieberman says, "everything was gold."

Gold sequins tucked between Tut's bandages. In the antechamber of the tomb lay a shirt. Shimmering with sequins. So Tut could dress well in the afterworld.

"Ornate gold rolled thin and cut out and hung on," he says. Egyptians glazed the gold. To stop scratches and chips. "Those were the first sequins."

The Roma migrated to Europe in the Middle Ages.

Dark hair. Dark eyes. The Roma hailed from India. Europeans mistook them for Egyptians.

Called them Gypsies.

Gypsies wore sequins. On belts. On blouses. “Gypsy coins,” Mr. Lieberman says. “They came to be known as Gypsy coins. And it was real gold, authentic gold.”

Europeans hated Gypsies. Loved Gypsy coins. King Charles VI of France hired a gold beater. To beat sequins. A French sumptuary law of 1294 declared that only royal princes could wear spangled embroidery.

Almanach des fabricans travaillant au matieres, d’or, argent, et autre metaux.

A directory published in Paris in 1810. It included a list of working goldsmiths. Almost a thousand. Among the smiths: “Manufacturers of spangles.”

Their days were numbered. Napoleon and his army had just crawled back from Egypt. He’d tried to colonize it. Failed. His troops were weak. He’d fed them a new food supplement.

Gelatin comes from carcasses. Boil cows. Horses. Old shoes work, too. Jelly rises up. Gelatin. Napoleon hoped it would take care of his army’s dietary needs. He was wrong. It’s pure protein. No vitamins. It had other uses.

“The first form of plastic was gelatin,” Mr. Lieberman says. France used gelatin in its paper money. Photographers used to develop photos on silver plates. Gelatin plates coated in silver worked just as well, they found.

And dress designers. They found that gelatin could be rolled into sheets, punch pressed, electroplated.

Voila—sequins.

“During the Great Depression,” says Mr. Lieberman, “people were honest.”

A customer owed Algy a debt of one hundred and seventy five dollars. The customer had no cash. He had something else. Mr. Lieberman, Sr. got paid in sequins.

“It took two taxis to transport them,” Mr. Lieberman says.

The sequins were gelatin. Made in Austria. Austria, Czechoslovakia—these were the capitals of sequin production. “And the colours,” he says. “Vivid.” The dye had lead.

“Gelatin melted if it got too hot,” he says. Forget dry cleaning. Forget ironing. “Someone would leave a garment close to the heating stove, it would melt.” Moisture was no better. “Someone got caught in a rainstorm, it would melt.”

Washing machines liquefied sequins. “The early sequins you couldn’t do anything with,” he says. “They just looked beautiful. You could only sponge the garment a little to get the perspiration odour out.”

Algy sequined nightclub dancers. Mardi Gras paraders. Sonja Henie wore Algy in her Hollywood Ice Revue. The first touring figure skating show. The first skater to sport sequins.

“My father taught himself how to stitch sequins,” Mr. Lieberman says. “And he was quite successful. If people needed sequins they looked to him to get it.”

Then sequins vanished. “All the European supplies dried up in World War Two,” Mr. Lieberman says. He himself served overseas. In Italy. A volunteer. His father persevered. “He had to learn how to manufacture sequins himself.”

Algy tried a new plastic. “Eastman Kodak was producing acetate for their film stock,” he says. “Clear plastic. They plated it on one side with real silver.” Kodak customized acetate for

Algy. "They coated the silver with a clear ink of the colour we desired. They coloured the other side as well."

The effect was brilliant. "The light would penetrate through the colour, hit the silver, and reflect back," he says. "Like you painted a mirror with nail polish." Brilliant, but brittle. "Acetate will crack like glass. The harder the plastic the nicer the sequin's going to be."

When war was over, Mr. Lieberman went to work for his father. "I knew sequins," he says. "I wanted to find some new products."

Mr. Lieberman started producing costumes for Broadway shows. It didn't pan out. "If the show was a success, you got paid," he says. "If the show was a failure, you didn't get paid."

Algy made costumes for Shriners. "We made sequin headdresses, jackets, pants," he says. Shriners wear fezes. "They were coming in and spending thou—" He stops himself. He doesn't want to snitch on Shriners.

Mr. Lieberman worked on The Jackie Gleason Show. He made costumes for Gleason's costars, the June Taylor Dancers. "There were twelve or sixteen dancers," he says, "and we had to produce a set of costumes for them each week."

"Here it is Friday," Mr. Lieberman says, "and the show is Saturday night, and Jackie Gleason came up to the establishment. 'How do you expect the girls to dance in these?' he says. 'They'll all break their necks, they're going to catch their heels!'"

"I went and got him a big pair of shears," Mr. Lieberman continues. "All the girls stood there and he cut twelve inches off of those skirts." Mr. Lieberman laughs. He's 79 years old. "I'm having a blast remembering."

"Purdue University came out with their Golden Girl," Mr. Lieberman says. In 1954. The Golden Girl was a baton-twirler featured at football games.

"She wore the first all-over sequin uniform." Made by Algy. The company had a new name. Algy Dance Costume Company. "Band directors from all over the country started asking, 'Where did that costume come from?'"

Majorettes and marching bands became major markets. "Some of our products were terribly abused," he says. "They [customers] will go to the parade, and sit on the ground, or sit on a hard wooden bleacher bench. They can get them extremely dirty."

Plastic sequins were harder than gelatin sequins. Still, they could melt in sun. And tarnish in rain. "We had to get around that eventually," he says. "It took many, many years. We experimented with different methods. What we came up with was a sandwich."

Mylar's the bread. Dupont developed Mylar during the war. To replace nylon in women's hose. "It's the plastic sequin with a piece of very thin, clear mylar around it," Mr. Lieberman says. "The colouring is actually inside. Protected." It'll survive a washing machine. Set on Gentle. And Cold. "I warn mothers, 'Don't put it in a dryer,'" he says. "Or we'll have very disappointed kids."

In 1970 Mr. Lieberman sold the sequin factory. He moved Algy to Florida. It became a catalogue company. "We narrowed our scope," he says. "The costume world is so vast. We concentrated on kiddie recital costumes. The other area where we concentrated was in the marching bands for high schools and colleges."

"Drum corps is very big in Canada," Susan Lieberman-Gordon tells me. Mr. Lieberman's

daughter. She and her sister Laurie Godbout run Algy. She's joined the conversation. "You have two very competitive drum corps up there. And we have dance school clients in Canada, but no high school squads."

"Weather's our biggest enemy in Canada," Mr. Lieberman says. He retired in 1999. He still comes around the office. "I get no greater joy than seeing these kids come pick up their costumes," he says. "The minute a little girl puts on her fairy costume, she's a fairy. I get the best photos and letters."

Sequins aren't made with silver anymore. "Silver tarnished," he says. "As the air got in around the edges. Like your mirror turns black around the edges. Also the cost of silver was getting prohibitive." New sequins come coated in aluminum. "The truth of the matter is that most sequins today aren't as brilliant."

"Today the sequins are made out of vinyl plastic," he says. "It's easier to work with. It's not brittle. The plating adheres to it better because it's a softer surface."

"Unfortunately, it will curl up as it gets older," he says. "Vinyl has a memory."

THE END

Artist's Biographies

JOEL GIBB is an artist and musician from Toronto. His band, The Hidden Cameras, has three albums: *Ecce Homo* (2001), *The Smell of Our Own* (2003), and *Mississauga Goddam* (2004).

ANDREW HARWOOD is a Toronto based artist, curator and writer. He is the former Co-Director of Mercer Union, Interim Programme Director A Space Gallery and General Manager of C Magazine. He is currently celebrating the seventh anniversary of Zsa Zsa, the most important room for art in Toronto (his gallery). His works from the *Trucker* exhibition, 2004 have been exhibited in Belgrade, Serbia and Calgary, Alberta. Harwood is presently part of the Toronto Alternative Art Fair International Collective which held their first fair in September 2004. He is also producing new works for an exhibition called *Biker*.

JEREMY LAING is a Toronto-based fashioner and the founder of The House of Laing. A recent graduate of Ryerson University, he also studied at the University of Westminster in London. In 2004 he has participated in group shows at Deitch Projects and Passerby at Gavin Brown's Enterprise in New York. Jeremy is one of the initiators of the Westside Stitches Couture Club, an alternative stitching gang. His performance and installation project, *The Chronicles of Virginia Puff-Paint*, a collaboration with Will Munro, debuted September 2003 at Zsa Zsa, has been shown at the AGYU and Art In General, New York, and screened at the 2004 Liverpool Biennial.

WILL MUNRO is a Toronto-based installation artist and promoter. Born in 1975, he is a graduate of the Ontario College of Art and Design. His work has been exhibited extensively in commercial and artist-run galleries. Reviews of his work have been published in *Dutch*, *MIX*, *NOW*, *I-D*, and *Lola Magazine*. Will is also involved in organizing events such as *Vazaleen* and is currently collaborating with local artist and fashion designer Jeremy Laing.

IAN PHILLIPS has been hoarding since the early 1960s. In his spare time he cuts up magazines for his scrapbook and plays with his pup "Fancy." He has been dabbling in photography and art, and running a small press for over twenty years. His works have appeared in galleries from Moscow to San Francisco and are in the possession of collectors worldwide.

THE ENSEMBLE OF TOPS 'N' BOTTOMS is a collaboration between Karen Azoulay and Joel Gibb. Selected performances include Power Ball 5 at The Power Plant in Toronto and Great White North at Scope Art Fair in Los Angeles. Photographic documentation has appeared in various publications including *C Magazine*, *Boiler*, *Fashion*, *The Globe and Mail* and has also been exhibited in a solo show at the Helen Pitt Gallery in Vancouver. They have published two issues of the zine *The Ensemble of Tops 'n' Bottoms*. Most recently, their video *C'est Fashion!* was screened at Ocularis in New York City.

SCOTT TRELEAVEN is a Toronto-based artist, writer and filmmaker, best known for his zine-cum-film *THE SALIVATION ARMY*, which the *Village Voice* listed as one of the most notable underground films of 2002. His fiction and critical writings have been published internationally, and his collage work has recently been exhibited in Chicago, Paris, Los Angeles, and New York. Treleven has also curated a number of groundbreaking events in conjunction with Pleasure Dome, Toronto, as well as performed alongside friend and counterculture legend Genesis P-Orridge. He is currently working on his first feature film script. An archive of events is available at scotttreleven.com.

Exhibition Works

Joel Gibb

Banners for The Hidden Cameras, 2003

Three felt banners

Golden Streams, 2003

Music video on DVD 4:28 min.

The Smell of Our Own, 2003

Record covers for The Hidden Cameras

Andrew Harwood

Sequined History, 2003

Sequins on colour photocopies mounted
on museum board

Self-Portrait, 2004

Sequins

Jeremy Laing and Will Munro

The Wall of Virginia Puff-Paint, 2003

Canvas, lace, found silk materials

Video documentation from September 25, 2003
performance at Zsa Zsa Gallery, Toronto

Pavilion of Virginia Puff-Paint, 2004

Canvas, lace, found silk materials, props

Video documentation from February 11, 2004
performance at the Art Gallery of York
University, Toronto

Ian Phillips

Untitled Found Object, 2003

Magic marker on brown craft paper

From the collection of *pas de chance*

(Ian Phillips and Grant Heaps)

2.7 x 13.7 m

The Ensemble of Tops 'n' Bottoms

Photographs and Zines, 2003

Scott Treleaven

THE SALiVATION ARMY, 2001

DVD 22:02 min.

This is THE SALiVATION ARMY Issue X, 2004

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