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Butch Femme Art of A Dandy

By Jacob Anderson-Minshall

"A real dandy would never ask permission to be a dandy," insists genderqueer artist Chris "Jackadandy" Carraher. "One must simply claim it, and then have the style to carry it off," hy states, actively ignoring the indignation of other self-described dandies who claim a working-class, 50-something, female-bodied butch can *never* be one.

"Not everyone can pull it off," the former San Franciscan—who prefers the pronouns *hy* and *hys*—contends of the "gender trouble" inherent in being a dandy. "But if you can, then you get to define the territory for yourself. It's a self-invention, a creative existence."

Carraher describes hys current series of pastel paintings—*love full of life*, showing in Joshua Tree, CA's Art Queen Gallery until Nov. 28—as having a visibly genderqueer perspective.

"[I] summoned a dynamic of masculine and feminine without, for the most part, portraying conventions of gender. Polarities and dualities abound in the paintings, but so do resolutions—dynamic resolutions. For example, penetration is a frequent theme, but the penetration exists as a reciprocal of a surrounding force of active reception."

"To me, this flaming shape is a phallic impulse within female genitalia," Carraher says, explaining his painting the *blue-ball'd butch* (depicting an orange flame between two blue disks). The work's title is borrowed from lyrics by hys girlfriend—a frequent muse. "I love a femme, and I [am] honest about it," he says.

"There are parts of me that are really only evoked by the proximity of a femme. If there isn't a femme in the picture, those parts have little need of description or expression. At those times, does that part of my identity [exist]?"

Hy believes that picking an identity can be both powerful and dangerous. It *can* lead to what Carraher calls the "citadel of limitation."

"A citadel is a fortress to protect territory...of identity...it not only keeps the enemy out, it keeps you in. There's no room for movement. An identity can feel like home...but as a person grows, one hopes that



their sense of themselves deepens and extends. Otherwise, they become imprisoned by the limitations of the identity."

Identifying as genderqueer, Carraher (www.jackadandy.net) declares that hy has no interest in medical transition.

"Medical models, of course, have their place, [but] my own sensations of difference are not so located in the physical sphere and not effectively approached medically."

The artist argues that there's something both seductive and scary about the dandy role. "The dandy is playing with the traditional female role of attracting while at the same time maintaining a masculinity. Throw in a little power dynamic, a little erotic of class difference, some aesthetic creativity..."

Hy believes that masculine and feminine energies have been mistakenly conceived of as dichotomous locations. "I feel that there *are* polar energies that exist all around us. In the West we tend to place these energies along a straight line or spectrum, one end male/masculine, the other female/feminine. And before you know it that...straight line becomes a value indicator, and you have a hierarchy of power."

Carraher prefers visualizing feminine/masculine as elements in a full dimensional universe in which, "you can't easily discern an orientation, and every one has their own *up* and their own *down*, but all the other bodies out there have energy that reacts with yours in some way. And some of them have a pull you can't resist."

The genderqueer artist believes that for society to truly honor feminine-masculine energies would take "dumping" patriarchy. "We live under a sociopolitical system that is based on the subjugation and containment of the feminine. I personally find hope in the leadership of femmes, who I see as people who are living and championing their feminine from the strength of a tremendous self-awareness."

Carraher's next artistic endeavor, "about claims of territory in the high desert," will premier March 2007 at the Artists Gallery in Twentynine Palms, CA.

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