



SHAPESHIFTING CONTEMPORARY MASCULINITIES VOLUME I

VOLUME I

Alec Soth
Robyn O’Neil
Sara Greenberger
Rafferty
Hank Willis Thomas
Marcella Hackbardt

VOLUME II

Kris Knight
Michael Scoggins
Weston Ulfig
Fall On Your Sword
Brooks Dierdorff

This exhibition brings together ten emerging and established artists who question, reframe, and explore perceptions and anxieties about evolving masculinities in the 21st century. The exhibition is intended to raise—but not necessarily answer—questions about the relevance of the historical male role model, contemporary ideas about gender construction, and the purpose of fraternity.

Scholarship on gender and sexuality began with the emergence of feminist studies in the 1970s, but it wasn’t until the mid-1990s that masculinity studies came into its own. There have been a number of exhibitions exploring this topic—many of which took place in the UK, Europe, and Canada—with most using an overarching theme through which to discuss masculinity. For example, two important 2009 exhibitions, *Hard Targets* and *Mixed Signals: Artists Consider Masculinity in Sports*, used sport as a lens through which artists explored the performance of gender and homosociality, or men proving themselves to other men in a sporting context. SHAPESHIFTING, however, intentionally eschews an overarching theme—hence the title—to better reflect the ambiguities, anxieties, and possibilities facing men in America.

The ten artists in SHAPESHIFTING can be loosely placed into three categories—evolving cultural terrain, gender normative behavior, and the role of fraternity. In the first grouping, Robyn O’Neil, Alec Soth, Sara Greenberger Rafferty, and Hank Willis Thomas mine different aspects of evolving attitudes toward gender roles. O’Neil’s *Hell* series signals the end of 20th-century male norms, while Soth’s *Broken Manual* project investigates the life of the contemporary hermit. Hank Willis Thomas addresses questions specific to African American men, and Greenberger Rafferty melts and morphs iconic male attire. Ideas about the formation and shattering of gender normative behaviors are found in the work of Marcella Hackbardt, Michael Scoggins, Kris Knight, and Weston Ulfig. Hackbardt’s young male dancers are beautiful yet somehow uncomfortable to view, and Scoggins’ oversized marker drawings ask us to remember a youthful self that fantasized about saving the day with larger than life super powers. Kris Knight subverts traditional ideas about the “male gaze,” while Weston Ulfig empowers the stereotype of young boys and guns. Finally, Fall On Your Sword and Brooks Dierdorff consider the role of fraternity through their critique of the actions, repercussions, and value of male bonding forged through sport.

It would not only be impossible, but presumptuous for any one curator or exhibition to speak for all men. Instead, SHAPESHIFTING’s goals are to provoke discussion, and, as Robyn O’Neil suggests, acknowledge that endings, while anxiety producing, are also heralds of new beginnings and opportunities.

Kitty McManus Zurko, Director/Curator
The College of Wooster Art Museum



Alec Soth
Roman, the nocturnal hermit, 2006
Framed archival inkjet print mounted to paper
22 h x 19 w (inches)
Courtesy of the artist and Sean Kelly Gallery, New York
©Alec Soth

Alec Soth (American, b. 1969)

The fantasy of escaping from society and starting anew fuels Alec Soth’s *Broken Manual*, 2010—a photographic essay on the contemporary American hermit. Psychologically charged habitats, tools, and sometimes the person (predominantly white males) populate these oddly compelling photographs. As Soth commented on this series in the February 2012 issue of *Artinfo*, “I was trying to figure out a way to explore this desire for retreat without making it like a documentary essay on rightwing survivalists.”

Learning how to live “off the grid” and out of the mainstream takes instruction, as can be seen in the stack of “how to” videos in *2007_10z10030*, 2007. Written on the wall in a boarded up home in *2007_10z10006*, 2007, (cover) there is palpable paranoia and psychological pain emanating from the phrases, “They did it,” and “I love my dad Tony, I wish he loved me.” In aggregate, the disjointed imagery of Soth’s *Broken Manual* speaks eloquently to a highly specific type of rupture in the social contract.

Robyn O’Neil (American, b. 1977)

Raised Irish Catholic in Nebraska, Robyn O’Neil’s psychological landscapes are, according to the artist, “reflections of what is around me.” These five drawings are part of a series titled *Hell* where men either lose a battle against the environment or inhabit an unpredictable middle ground. When asked about her impetus for creating drawings of groups of men roaming bleak landscapes with little purpose, O’Neil said, “The men I draw were originally based on my dad and his best friend Marty. Regular family guys who would kill for anyone they love. Men who love sports and play and TV. There’s a complexity to them. More than meets the eye.”

O’Neil’s sweat-suit wearing men have a uniformity of dress that encourages a focus on their actions or lack thereof. In her drawing, *The Unmoored II*, 2011, men float, fall, and are chopped down by unseen forces. Familiarity, humor, misery, malaise, and hope intermingle in what might be seen as a cautionary tale about destruction. Yet O’Neil’s work is not anti-male. Rather, the artist considers these tumultuous and ominous drawings reflections on the necessary and inevitable endpoint that comes before a new beginning.



Robyn O’Neil
The Unmoored II, 2011
Graphite on paper
6 1/2 h x 10 w (Inches)
Courtesy of the artist and Susan Inglett Gallery, New York

Sara Greenberger
Rafferty
Tie, 2007
Acrylic polymer and inkjet prints, collage on acetate, Plexiglas, and hardware
33 h x 23 w x 1/2 d (inches)
Courtesy of the artist and Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York



Sara Greenberger Rafferty (American, b. 1978)

In an interview with Miriam Katz in the 2014 *Whitney Biennial* catalogue, Sara Greenberger Rafferty discusses how she approaches gender identity in her work. According to the artist, “My grappling with gender constantly needs to incorporate the world around me and not just the world I was born into.” In other words, Greenberger Rafferty’s work intentionally reflects the rapid pace of change among the Millennial generation. The artist even uses “shapeshifting” to describe not only this influential generation, but also the materials she uses—photo print on mylar—which morph in unforeseen ways when exposed to acrylic paint and solvents.

Greenberger Rafferty disfigures iconic male business attire in *Tie*, 2013, by cutting, melting, and visually equating the tie with a knife. Although there are any number of theories surrounding this innocuous piece of fetishized cloth—from Freud’s association of the tie with the penis to the “power” tie to a tie being synonymous with a yoke or noose—in reality sales of ties have dropped in recent years, in part, because it signifies the latter.

Hank Willis Thomas (American, b. 1976)

Hank Willis Thomas’s eight word paintings offer various options of what it means to be a “man.” This series takes as its subject two pivotal moments of the twentieth century—the civil rights movement in the 1960s and identity politics in the 1980s. The first reference is to placards carried by striking sanitation workers in Memphis in 1968, made famous by Ernest Withers’ photograph of the strike.* The second is Thomas’s very conscious reprisal of Glenn Ligon’s painting *Untitled (I Am a Man)*, 1988, in the collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

According to Christina Knight in *Art 21* (2011), Thomas’s *I Am A Man* series “. . . addresses and deconstructs the same signage from the sanitation workers strike that Ligon takes on in *Untitled (I Am a Man)*, 1988,



Hank Willis Thomas
I Am Man, 2009
 Liquitex on canvas
 Edition 2 of 3
 25 1/4 h x 19 1/4 w
 x 2 1/4 d (inches)
 Courtesy of the artist
 and Jack Shainman
 Gallery, New York

but it also gestures to the differences between these two generations of artists: Ligon reproduces the sign wholesale (if in a painterly fashion), while Thomas playfully splices and rearranges the sign’s words to find new serendipitous meanings.” As Thomas stated in his talk at the Cleveland Museum of Art in February 2014, he began this wordplay series because he was struck by the fact that “the workers felt it was even necessary to confirm their humanity by saying they were men.”

Marcella Hackbardt (American, b. 1959)

Photographed at various dance studios in Northeast Ohio, Marcella Hackbardt’s 2007 series, *All Boy*, investigates what it is like to be the minority gender in dance classes. According to Hackbardt, “Boys grow up within regulated societal pressures that are no less of a challenge for boys than girls—each faces obstacles to the development of a sense of individuality and belonging. *All Boy* challenges the gender normative and socially approved stereotype of being ‘all boy’ only if they are rough and tumble.”

In a recent conversation, Hackbardt mentioned that when she embarked on this project nine years ago, the boys themselves were not anxious about whether or not dance is an appropriately male endeavor. However, when work from this series was subsequently purchased and installed in a non-arts public venue, visitors wondered why “gay” photographs of little boys were on display. To mitigate the public’s discomfiture, the curator provided additional signage clarifying the intent of the artist. Unfortunately, the act of showing *All Boy* outside of the sanctioned museum/gallery space clearly demonstrates the depth of conflicting ideas on culturally acceptable roles for boys in the 21st century.

Marcella
 Hackbardt
**West,
 Sweetheart
 Daycare,**
Albuquerque,
New Mexico,
 2007
 Digital chromo-
 genic print
 27 h x 24 w
 (inches)
 Courtesy of
 the artist



About the Artists

VOLUME I

Alec Soth was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota. His work has been included in the *2004 Whitney Biennial* and the *São Paulo Biennial* (2004), and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, mounted a retrospective of Soth’s work in 2010. His documentary essays have been the subject of numerous monographs, including *Sleeping by the Mississippi* (2004), *NIAGRA* (2006), and *The Last Days of W* (2008). He is a member of Magnum Photos, and his work is included in the permanent collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, among others. The artist lives and works in Minneapolis, and is represented by the Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, and the Weinstein Gallery, Minneapolis.

Robyn O’Neil began her education in British Studies, Art, and Architecture at Kings College, London. She received a BFA from Texas A&M University–Commerce (2000), and did graduate studies at the University of Illinois, Chicago (2001). In 2010, the artist participated in Werner Herzog’s Rogue Film School, Los Angeles. Her work was included in the *2004 Whitney Biennial*, and the Des Moines Art Center in Iowa, organized a retrospective of her work in 2010. Robyn O’Neil lives and works in Los Angeles, and is represented by the Susan Inglett Gallery, New York, and the Talley Dunn Gallery, Dallas.

Born in Evanston, Illinois, **Sara Greenberger Rafferty** received a BA from the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI (2000), and an MFA from Columbia University School of the Arts, New York (2005). Included in both the 2014 Whitney Biennial, New York, and the Hammer Museum’s 2014 Biennial, *Public Fiction*, Los Angeles, Greenberger Rafferty’s work has been shown at: Wallspace, New York (2013); FLAG Art Foundation, New York (2012); Derek Eller Gallery, New York, and the Aspen Art Museum, Colorado (both in 2011); and the Jewish Museum, New York (2010). The artist lives and works in Brooklyn, New York, and is represented by the Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York.

A photo conceptual artist, **Hank Willis Thomas** uses video, photography, social media, and installation to address the framing of identity, history, and popular culture. He received a BFA from the Tisch School of the Arts, and an MA in visual criticism from the California College of the Arts, San Francisco. A 2011 fellow at the W.E.B. DuBois Institute, Harvard University, his work has been widely exhibited in the USA and abroad, most recently at The Cleveland Museum of Art and the Transformer Station, Cleveland (2013–14). Thomas’s work is included in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, The Guggenheim Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Brooklyn Museum—all in New York—and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, among others. Hank Willis Thomas lives and works in New York, and is represented by the Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, and the Goodman Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa.

Marcella Hackbardt is an artist, curator, and professor of art at Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio. She received a BA from the University of Alaska, Anchorage (1993), and an MFA from the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque (2000). Selected one-person exhibitions include those at the Weston Art Gallery, Cincinnati (2011), The College of Wooster Art Museum (2009), and the Galleries at Peeler, DePauw University, Greencastle, Indiana (2002). Selected group exhibitions include *Various Small Books*, Gagosian Gallery, New York (2013), and *Fluid Terrain*, MOCA Cleveland (2011). Hackbardt has been the recipient of two Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Awards (2009 and 2011), and lives and works in Mt. Vernon, Ohio.



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VOLUME II

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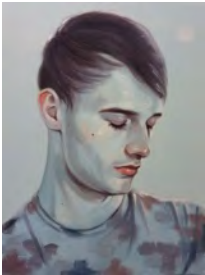
The timing of SHAPESHIFTING is somewhat serendipitous as contemporary masculinity and adulthood have been major topics in the news this year primarily because Millennials (roughly defined as ages 18–33) are taking about a decade longer than previous generations to arrive at traditional markers of adulthood. There are a variety of reasons for this shift—increased life expectancy, the economy, and changing expectations about gender roles, to name just a few. Unfortunately, this change is usually portrayed in negative terms, particularly in relation to young men, and most news reports leave out positive Millennial traits such as optimism and egalitarianism.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Angie Bos, Associate Professor of Political Science, set this project in motion last year when she asked if the CWAM had any exhibition ideas that might support a political psychology symposium on gender that she was organizing. Because I had already started a file on artists investigating masculinity, it was an easy decision to move forward with what became SHAPESHIFTING.

A steering committee met to advise on this exhibition, and I would like to thank the following for their expertise and guidance: Angie Bos; Nancy Grace, Director, Center for Diversity and Global Engagement and Professor of English; Scott McLellan ’15, Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Major; and Ryan Ozar, Associate Director of Internships/APEX. Additionally, Doug McGlumphy, CWAM Preparator/Collections Manager contributed to the genesis of the exhibition premise, provided advice throughout and, as always, designed a sensitive installation. I would also like to thank several CWAM gallery attendants for their contributions to this project; Robin Klaus ’16, Art History, for her outstanding editing skills; and Bjorn Olsen ’15, Studio Art, and James Parker ’15, Art History, who enthusiastically participated in the Roundtable event and contributed *Students Respond* texts to the exhibition. We are also grateful to Amber Kempthorn, Visiting Assistant Professor of Art, her *Intermediate and Advanced Painting* class, and Nancy Grace’s *First Year Seminar* for providing *Faculty/Students Respond* contributions. (Please note that this two-part exhibition brochure and all faculty/student contributions are available free on the CWAM’s website.)

Finally, we congratulate and applaud the artists, galleries, and collectors who so graciously participated in SHAPESHIFTING. True to form, these ten artists are attuned to the cultural zeitgeist, and we thank them for their valuable insights, critical eye, and important contributions.



Kris Knight
Spellbound, 2013
Oil on canvas
16 h x 12 w (inches)
Courtesy of the artist
and MULHERIN, New York
and Toronto

Kris Knight (Canadian, b. 1980)

Repurposing the style of 18th century French genre painting (such as Watteau and Fragonard), Kris Knight strategically employs this period’s lightly veiled erotic artifice in paintings of lyric landscapes and young men with blushing, dewy skin tones and dreamlike qualities. His benign yet disenchanted characters are, according to the artist, intended to be “lost between youth and adulthood . . . they examine performance in relation to the construction, portrayal, and boundaries of sexual and asexual identities.” Innocence and eroticism co-exist in these highly edited paintings.

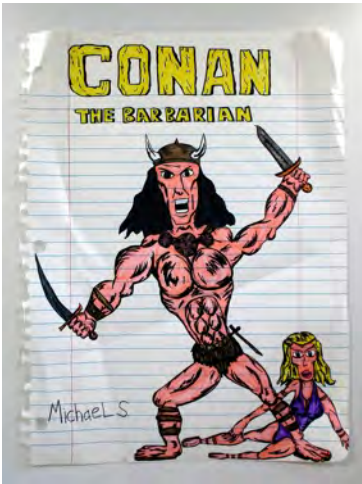
However, it is the historical mash-up that gives Knight’s work its bite. As the artist also states, he “ . . . skews historical romanticism with a contemporary interest in androgyny, psychotropic alterations, and the post-modern gaze.” Knight’s forthright use of the gaze—the figures look slyly down or straight at the viewer—propose a twist on Laura Mulvey’s Lacanian-based theory of the objectifying effect of the “male gaze,” as the artist explores the power and self-regulation inherent in who is enacting, or not enacting, the gaze.

Michael Scoggins (American, b. 1973)

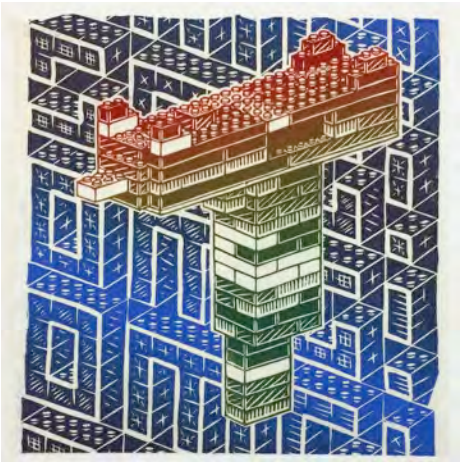
Michael Scoggins’ oversized drawings explore subjects ranging from hyperbolic family values to patriotism run amuck. The artist uses his alter ego “Michael S.” to explore American society through intentionally childlike drawings that belie the artist’s serious and weighty subject matter. He combines grade school art-making materials (color pencils and markers on carefully crafted faux notebook paper) with both the language and visual currency of coming of age to create a kind of cognitive dissonance.

In *The Invincibles* #2, 2006, Scoggins co-opts comic book heroes to resuscitate youthful fantasies about identifying with the incorruptible hero who, along with his trusty sci-fi sidekick, saves the city in peril. *Conan the Barbarian*, 2008, speaks to personal empowerment as well, but is leavened with nascent sexual projections of protection and conquest. Both drawings ask us to recall the power of our youthful passions before they are muted by the realities of adulthood.

Michael Scoggins
Conan the Barbarian, 2008
Marker and Prisma-color on paper
67 h x 51 w (inches)
Courtesy of the artist
and Freight + Volume
Gallery, New York



Weston Ulfig
OMG SMG version 2, 2012
Relief print on paper
12 h x 12 w (inches)
Courtesy of the artist



Weston Ulfig (American, b. 1983)

It is the bane of parents everywhere—that moment when their sons (because it is almost always boys) chew their toast into an “L” to shoot each other at the breakfast table. “Where does that behavior come from?” parents always ask. “How do they even know what a gun is? Is it the culture, nature, nurture?” Or, as Gerrard Jones suggests in *Killing Monsters: Why Children Need Fantasy, Superheroes, and Make-Believe Violence* (2003), could it just be a developmental period of acting out power relationships. Add this to American hyper-violent culture, and such parental concerns become understandably magnified.

In his triptych comprised of two prints and a sculpture, Weston Ulfig embraces and channels his boyhood Lego® Uzi sub-machine gun into what he calls a “totem of inner power.” The artist humorously layers what he considers to be “playful imagery for dangerous and serious ideas,” over a background pattern comprised of repeated “OMG!s” rendered in Lego® lettering—texting shorthand for “Oh My God.” Indeed.

Fall on Your Sword

Accompanied by a re-imagining of Hans Zimmer’s hyperbolic score celebrating the thrill of racing, the interactive video installation *Blaze of Thunder* by Fall on Your Sword (FOYS) amps up the wattage of its popular reference point—the 1990 movie *Days of Thunder* by Director Tony Scott starring Tom Cruise. In the FOYS installation, however, the viewer becomes complicit in the action by first standing on the platform out of sheer desperation to make the crew chief stop screaming at them. The video then switches to a madcap slot car racing through a Brooklyn apartment, filmed from the point of view of the slot car. Hitting the button on the platform (as instructed) causes the video to switch yet again, but this time to a flaming car accident.

Given *Blaze of Thunder*’s filmic reference and configuration as a game of sorts, one might assume that it is a commentary on the trials and tribulations of the hard fought male bonding that drives the *Days of Thunder*

Cover:
Brooks Dierdorff
Cougar (from
the *Trophy* series),
2010 (detail)
Inkjet print
4 h x 6 w (inches)
Courtesy of the artist

Kitty McManus Zurko, Director/Curator
The College of Wooster Art Museum

Fall On Your Sword
**Blaze of
 Thunder**, 2013
 Original video and
 score, electronics,
 wood, metal, slot
 car track
 Dimensions variable
 Courtesy of the artist



plot line. Yet, it could also be viewed as an exposé on the male dominated culture of violent gaming or even a critique on NASCAR, and by extension, the economy and messaging of corporate sport. Or maybe it is just fun. That is up to you to decide.

Brooks Dierdorff (American, b. 1985)

A trophy is something awarded as a prize for victory or success, often the bigger the better. *Trophy* is also the title of a series by multimedia artist Brooks Dierdorff, where only the animal remains as the hunters have been carefully erased in each image (although the hunter's shadow is visible in *Coyote*). In this series of appropriated images from the Internet, Dierdorff investigates how the hunter's absence "represents a set of invisible codes and assumptions whose power is always felt but never seen."

While hunting is hardly the sole domain of men, it is still a male dominated activity where expectations and norms exert a powerful influence. After the requisite separation from society into nature, a new hunter masters the necessary skills of scenting and tracking, with entrée into the hunting fraternity typically centered on the first kill. For experienced hunters, bragging rights accrue to those bagging the buck with the largest rack and number of points, or tines, on the antlers. Once successful, hunters pose with their kill for the requisite trophy picture. According to the artist, such trophy photography "presents a visual index of an American ideology that traces our cultural history." This particular cultural history generally includes the message that in order to belong, success hinges on producing a kill because nobody else can pull that trigger or shoot that arrow for you.

Brooks Dierdorff
Cougar (from the
Trophy series), 2010
 Inkjet print
 4 h x 6 w (inches)
 Courtesy of the artist



About the Artists

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Kris Knight grew up in rural Ontario, and graduated from the Ontario College of Art and Design, Toronto, Canada (2003). His exhibitions include those in Canada, the USA, and abroad. In addition to receiving seven Emerging and Mid-Career Artist Grants from the Ontario and Toronto Arts Councils since 2006, his work is included in the collections of The Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, Kansas, the 21c Museum of Contemporary Art, Louisville, Kentucky, and the Beth Rudin DeWoody Collection, New York. Knight lives and works in Toronto, Canada, and is represented by MULHERIN, New York and Toronto, Canada.

Michael Scoggins attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Skowhegan, Maine (2003), and received an MFA from the Savannah College of Art and Design (2008). He has shown extensively nationally and internationally, and his work is included in major collections including, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Hammer Museum, UCLA, Los Angeles, and the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art, Virginia Beach. Scoggins lives and works in Brooklyn, New York, and is represented by Freight + Volume Gallery, New York, as well as galleries in Atlanta, San Francisco, Vienna, and Seoul.

Weston Ulfig studied at the University of Minnesota-Minneapolis, and received a BFA from the University of Wisconsin-Madison (2006). Influenced by animation, video games, and American Pop Art, he is a printmaker who also works in textiles and sculptures. His published prints and wearable garments have been included in numerous exhibitions including Cutlog Contemporary Art Fair, New York (2014), SPRING/BREAK *Wish Meme*, New York (2013), the *Brucennial 2012*, New York, and SPRING/BREAK *Public/Private*, New York (2011). Ulfig lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

To **Fall On Your Sword** means to take personal responsibility for a group action. It is also the name of an award winning music and multimedia art collective based in Brooklyn, New York, founded by composer Will Bates. Named *Discovery of the Year* at the World Soundtrack Academy Awards in 2012, Fall On Your Sword (FOYS) has won a Cannes Gold Lion and two Clio awards for best music since launching in 2009. FOYS's recent work includes the score to *I Origins* directed by Mike Cahill, and the award-winning interactive art installation *Private Drive-In*.

Brooks Dierdorff is a multidisciplinary artist working in photography, video, sculpture, and performance. He received a BA from the University of California, San Diego (2007), and an MFA from the University of Oregon, Eugene (2012). Dierdorff's work has been shown in Germany and New York, and he participated in the *High Desert Test Sites* (HDTS) project in Joshua Tree, CA, in 2013. The artist currently lives and works in Ashland, Oregon.

SHAPESHIFTING was organized by the CWAM in support of the Mentoring Conference for New Research on Gender in Political Psychology, which took place at the College on October 9–11, 2014. This exhibition was funded, in part, by the Muriel Mulac Kozlow, Class of 1948, Endowed Fund.



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