

SHAPESHIFTING CONTEMPORARY MASCULINITIES

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, Brooks Dierdorff and Fall On Your Sword 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

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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.

Angie Bos, Associate Professor of Political Science, set SHAPESHIFTING 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 for this year. 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, and her *Intermediate and Advanced Painting* class, and Nancy Grace's *First Year Seminar* for providing *Students Respond* contributions. (Please note that a two-part exhibition brochure and all student/faculty contributions are available 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.

—KMZ

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.