

SUMMER 2016

## ARTISTS AND IDENTITY

### WU TSANG

**IDENTITY IS THE ACT** of putting the self together each day, for a brief moment that is both vulnerable and automatic. As a metaphor, imagine you are getting dressed. As you add clothes to your body, your image changes. The clothing creates a thin, porous layer between your internal sensory apparatus and its outward presentation. Why do you dress? How do you decide—what is the feeling of having made a right or wrong choice? Do you have a choice? Do you protect yourself? Is there anything natural about it?

*Wu Tsang is an artist based in Los Angeles; this text is based on notes for a film with Jonathan Oppenheim.*



From left: **Wu Tsang, *Untitled*, 2015**, fabric, metal stand, crystals, 80 × 32 × 32". **Wu Tsang, *Untitled*, 2015**, fabric, metal stand, crystals, 73 × 18 × 16".

### ZACKARY DRUCKER

**OVER THE PAST DECADE**, I've worked as an advocate for my transgender and gender-nonconforming brothers and sisters through my artistic practice and, more recently, as a producer on the TV show *Transparent*. Sometimes, artist friends ask when I'm going to return to the art world, as if I've left—as if the realm of television production is totally separate from art. Though I've continued to make work, allowing my different roles to inform each other just as my work as a trans advocate informs them, the dynamic between these roles continues to shift.

Art is communication at its highest level: a visceral, psychic, cerebral, and metaphysical divine exchange between bodies. Art has played integral roles in many social justice movements, and I believe that artists will have an expanded role in the future, not least because our physical reality will necessitate finding creative solutions to augment a deteriorating environment. The precious boundaries of high art may quickly become a remnant of the past.

Because trans people are unified by a feeling that is completely internal, all of the externals are up for grabs. Our cultural unity has been fractured by the "trans tipping point" of the past few years, and is now just barely coagulating. The tracks we've laid in media and entertainment are fresh, and we still face a pandemic of violence, suicide, underemployment, and inadequate health care. We are only protected as full citizens in a handful of states, and are combating a growing backlash in communities where too few cisgender people have evidence of our common humanity.

Visibility is a material. Like most trans people, I monitor my visibility depending on how safe I perceive my environment to be. The existence of our forebears has been all but erased and buried, and too few elders have survived to pass the story along. One of our most effective survival strategies has been hiding,

"passing," being creatures of the night. Transparency is the antithesis of visibility—although, paradoxically, in my case they are one and the same.

Today, we are having a cultural conversation about gender that is evolving faster than we can translate between communities. For me, as a human, an artist, and a trans person, art and politics and the personal are one, and the act of living is a fully realized work.

*Zackary Drucker is an artist based in Los Angeles.*



**Zackary Drucker and Luke Gilford, *This Is What it Looks Like (To Go from One Thing to Everything)*, 2013, C-print, 20 × 30".**

### **COCO FUSCO**

**IS A CONCERN** about political and economic crisis truly shared by all arts professionals? Hardly. There have always been some artists who produce thought-provoking responses to the crises of their day, inviting us to become more aware, to act, and to empathize with those most directly affected by violence, injustice, and bigotry, by man-made and natural disasters. That concern is not reducible to identity politics; it's a matter of how one embraces the task of sharing our planet with others. Nonetheless, there are many who remain convinced that good art can only be about itself. It is time for a thorough consideration of the political implications of that insistence on the pursuit of beauty and formal perfection, as it provides a convenient rationale for ignoring how deeply implicated our institutions and practices are in maintaining a very imperfect world.

*Coco Fusco is an artist and writer based in New York.*



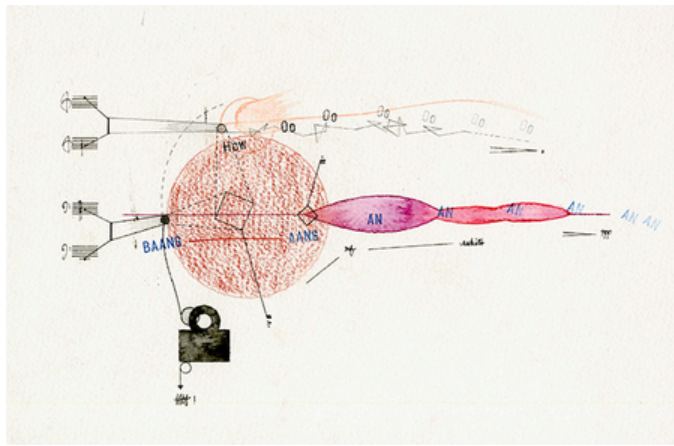
**Coco Fusco, *A Room of One's Own: Women and Power in the New America*, 2006–2008.** Performance view, Park Avenue Armory, New York, March 2008. From the Whitney Biennial. Coco Fusco. Photo: Eduardo Aparicio.

### **SAMSON YOUNG**

**STOP TELLING ME** to stop dichotomizing the East and the West. I am not done yet. Stop dismissing my site of resistance. Somebody else's version of permeable identity always wins, and then I get pushed to keep moving along, when my lived reality is actually anchored unless I am pushed or pulled.

We might be able to imagine a transnational composer, but where is a truly transnational music to be found? John Cage's project has failed Asia. The institutions of music continue to neglect and negate Asian composers. Composers outside the West are invisible in their own concert halls. Debunking the East-West binary involves not only a disruption of the essentialized concept of the East but an equally rigorous interrogation of the essentialized concept of the West. We must begin by confronting the very language with which we describe the auditory and the act of composition. What does it mean to "orchestrate" and to "compose"? Could one orchestrate and compose without reproducing the power structures that are implicit in these terminologies? What is the new silence, the new decay, the new reverb, the new resonance?

*Samson Young is a sound artist and composer based in Hong Kong.*



**Samson Young, 4 Gauge Elephant Gun, 2015, ink, watercolor, colored pencil, and stamp on paper, 8 x 11 1/2". From the series "Studies for Pastoral Music," 2015-.**