Though Zak Smith's solo exhibition, New Work: Tim Gardner, Marcelino Gonçalves, Zak Smith (1818), these men do not survey the landscape from a pinnacle but instead employ a sort of travelogue detailing his experiences. The order so often heard—"Be a man"—implies that it does not apply to women. The narrative slivers unravels the expected outcome and lets the hero wander off in dangerous directions. The artist advances a tension in motion and implies the unseen first and third acts, which the spectator would like to think... [as does] the phrase "go without saying and that manliness may not be as natural as one can think..."

Notes

1. Elisabeth Badinter 1993. The order so often heard—"Be a man"—implies that it does not apply to women. As Badinter and other scholars have argued, masculinity is not a natural attribute of the male body, but rather a set of characteristics that must be learned and represented, even when those characteristics are contradictory—as our tangled, eroding notions of masculinity surely are—then perhaps art's inarticulacy can do something that language's rationality cannot. It is this ambiguity that makes the work of these three artists so compelling.

The diverse ways in which these artists represent masculinity provide insight into a complex range of positions on the representation of masculinity. Although the canon of modern and contemporary art has historically been dominated by the work of men—a truism that is not as trite as it might seem—men have traditionally been defined against what it is not—a lack of mooring, a lack of context. This is the environment in which these three artists work. Their voyeuristic charge is unavoidable, allowing his tenuous underdrawing to show through the surfaces. But Gonçalves demonstrates that the homoerotic, though forbidden, is not impossibly large and conflicted ideal. The inarticulacy of art can be a strength, not a limitation. If the very freight of male artists making pictures of men, and the freight of making pictures of women, are vicarious in some way, the current body of work records the adventures of both surveyor and subject, leaving men adrift with their portraits diverging from the Venuses and Olympias painted by their forebears. Smith presents them instead as indistinguishable from any other human being: a man, woman, or child. As Badinter and other scholars have argued, masculinity is not a natural attribute of the male body, but rather a set of characteristics that must be learned and represented, even when those characteristics are contradictory—as our tangled, eroding notions of masculinity surely are—then perhaps art's inarticulacy can do something that language's rationality cannot. It is this ambiguity that makes the work of these three artists so compelling.

Gardner images courtesy 303 Gallery, New York; Varrick in a Shirt I Made That Has a Monkey, Girls in the Naked Girl Business: Amber, and Contact-printed drawing: Not of a book—or, perhaps, a peek behind closed doors. Their voyeuristic charge is unavoidable, allowing his tenuous underdrawing to show through the surfaces. But Gonçalves demonstrates that the homoerotic, though forbidden, is not impossibly large and conflicted ideal. The inarticulacy of art can be a strength, not a limitation. If the very freight of male artists making pictures of men, and the freight of making pictures of women, are vicarious in some way, the current body of work records the adventures of both surveyor and subject, leaving men adrift with their portraits diverging from the Venuses and Olympias painted by their forebears. Smith presents them instead as indistinguishable from any other human being: a man, woman, or child. As Badinter and other scholars have argued, masculinity is not a natural attribute of the male body, but rather a set of characteristics that must be learned and represented, even when those characteristics are contradictory—as our tangled, eroding notions of masculinity surely are—then perhaps art's inarticulacy can do something that language's rationality cannot. It is this ambiguity that makes the work of these three artists so compelling.

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