



ACTING

# ACTING OUT

Rowan University Art Gallery  
January 20 – March 12, 2011

Nina Katchadourian  
Fahamu Pecou  
Nancy Popp  
Shana Robbins  
Joe Sola  
Jaimie Warren

Curated by  
Stuart Horodner

# ***ACTING OUT***

A child is told that he or she cannot have a slice of cake and then proceeds to scream and cry for several minutes. This is a disproportionate response, and acting out conduct is understood to operate in the gap between desire and disappointment. The words acting and out combine to imply public displays and testing of wills, with youngsters flailing about or holding their breath until an authority figure asserts that “No means no,” and a “time out” is required. Troubled protagonists are sent to their rooms to consider their unacceptable behavior.

When artists are faced with frustrations over unmet wants, their outbursts usually take the form of renewed dedication and persistent production. Their efforts are a constant navigation of stereotypes and realities about the lives of creative individuals: being simultaneously quirky, charismatic, brilliant, misogynistic, indulgent, unreliable, focused, and needy. They often epitomize the title of a 2002 painting by the German artist Sigmar Polke, *I Live in My Own World, but it's OK, They Know Me Here*.

The exhibition *Acting Out* brings together six contemporary artists who utilize their own bodies as a key element in works that explore agency, normalcy, fantasy, and identity. Their activities are generated in traditional studios as well as carefully selected locations (city streets, forests, deserts) that act as stages for scripted or improvised endeavors. At a time when reality television and YouTube can turn the world's citizens into instant celebrities, these artists utilize photography, video, drawing, painting, and performance to assert the often slow and messy nature of the self, and potential re-definitions of work and play.

**Nina Katchadourian's** discipline-bending work is investigative, playful, and precise. She is as comfortable in a library sorting books to find latent meanings in their titles as she is in rewiring automobiles to emit alarm sounds in the form of bird calls. In the passport-sized photograph, *Self-Portrait as Sir Ernest Shackleton* (2002), she attaches two caterpillars to her upper lip and dons a fluffy white sweater and cap to play with gender while honoring an intrepid explorer. Her video, *Mystic Shark* (2007), was shot in a hotel room in Connecticut, and shows the artist holding up a blue book with a line drawing of a shark on it, telegraphing her intention to become like this predatory creature. She then proceeds to earnestly try and outfit her mouth with several petrified shark's teeth. Katchadourian is a polymath and she would certainly know that shark's teeth are constantly replaced throughout their lives and are embedded in their gums rather than their jaw. This knowledge does not make her transformation any easier, however, and she must constantly adjust and reposition the teeth. Her appeal to the camera while dealing with the difficulty of what might have seemed like a simple task is what gives the work such a lovably pathetic and good-natured quality.

**Fahamu Pecou** is fascinated with authority and attitude, and what can be expected from or achieved by African American men in today's culture. For several years, he has maintained a poster, sticker, and merchandising campaign that declares, “Fahamu Pecou is The Shit!” (for those not familiar with urban lingo, to be “the shit” is to be the best, a term originating in drug culture, denoting the high quality of various substances). Pecou adopted the strategy from a grassroots promotion that helped to launch the rapper 50 CENT, and has stated, “It began as a marketing campaign and

became my mantra. To say it was to make myself and others believe it.” Similarly, the artist has consistently painted himself posing as a shirtless or elegantly clothed painter-hero-businessman, on the covers of contemporary art, lifestyle, and fashion publications. In these fantasy magazine covers, Pecou is presented as a cigar-brandishing and middle finger-giving celebrity, projecting serious machismo in the company of adoring women and male associates. *I See You Jockin* (2009) is typical of the series, painted in varying degrees of representational rigor, and rife with drips of acrylic, clear and crossed out language, gold leaf, and sections of bare canvas. *Rock...Well (Radiant Pop Champ)* (2010) shows Pecou reinterpreting Norman Rockwell’s famous 1960 *Triple Self-Portrait* for the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post*, in a somewhat more inquisitive mood than usual, and watched over by his personal wise men including Muhammad Ali, Andy Warhol, and Jean-Michel Basquiat.

Since 2005, **Nancy Popp** has been escaping the norms and boundaries of urban territories by climbing street poles and signposts, temporarily positioning herself above the avenues, stores, and citizens of various cities around the world. These gestures of elevation and endurance question the parameters of regulated and monitored public space and private desire. To see her unceremoniously arrive in a location and begin scaling a common vertical marker is to wonder not only about her motives, but the history of feminism, athleticism, activism, and publicity stunts. Videos of Popp’s climbing actions often highlight her stillness as contrasted with the movement of cars and pedestrians, while photographs tend to create a “Where’s Waldo” aspect of finding the artist hovering in the midst of dense cityscapes. For this exhibition, several documentary photos will be adhered to the gallery windows, images facing inside and information on the back vis-

ible to passersby outside. Interestingly, Popp performed an earth-bound action on August 22, 2010, as part of a group exhibition called ~~*Obsession*~~ *Obsessive Obsessed* at Summercamp’s *ProjectProject*, an alternative space/home in the neighborhood of El Sereno in Los Angeles. It featured the black-clad artist wrapped in DayGlo thread, repeatedly rolling down the steep hill of a backyard, the thread unraveling and marking the rough grassy terrain.

**Shana Robbins**’s works address conditions of feminine power, natural phenomena, and cycles of life and death. Using a variety of media, she presents herself as a solitary and galvanizing figure, elaborately costumed and performing ritualized gestures for the camera (and the landscape itself, as Robbins is a believer in animism) in unique settings in rural Georgia, Mexico, and New Mexico. She draws on her experiences as a fashion model and student of Butoh movement, and numerous mythologies that link womanhood with the Earth and roles of conduit and healer. A Super 8 film captures Robbins performing characters known as “Tree Ghost” (in a camouflage bodysuit, adorned with antique doilies, chandelier crystals, tree branches, and lace gloves), and “Axis Mundi” (in a tea and ink stained bodysuit with a mirror-covered mask), at Vatnajökull Glacier, Jokulsarlon Lagoon, Blue Lagoon, and the black desert of Skeidararsandur, in Iceland. She responds to these otherworldly settings with gestures that are meditatively slow or sexually suggestive. *Monstrous Feminine Costume (Drawing/Collage)* (2008) is indicative of the artist’s works on paper, revealing a sensitivity with traditional materials including graphite and watercolor, as well as a tendency towards collage that speaks to the composite and recycling aspects of her practice and worldview.

**Joe Sola**’s works in performance, video, drawing, and painting, express a fascination with masculinity and desire. In his slapstick-informed oeuvre, he is seen up front and personal, being pummeled by a high school football team, organizing male models and actors to make art on a low slung stage for the duration of an exhibition opening, studying with stunt men, and collaborating with friends including playwright Will Eno and composer Michael Webster. A delicate watercolor and pencil work, *Self Portrait Playing Scrabble* (2008), shows the artist nude, alone and facing away from us as he looks into a mirror which reflects his image, the game in progress, and the trappings of a minimalist home with heat emitting flames in the fireplace. *Riding with adult video performers* (2002) features Sola on a wild rollercoaster ride with male porn stars at Six Flags amusement park in southern California, as he holds his video camera out in front of the group and tapes their expressions in one continuous take. It is often said that we are judged by the company we keep. If this is true, how are we to understand this artist and his ongoing interest in good looks, stamina, and skill? Would he like to be known for bodily prowess rather than conceptual rigor? It is not lost on us that Sola, like the adult performers, is known for videos where expectation, anxiety, and exhilaration mix.

Responding to a question about role models, **Jaimie Warren** told me that Roseanne Barr is her hero, and it is not hard to imagine why. In her own way, Warren brings a working class ethic and ribald sensibility associated with the actress and comedian to photographs that chronicle her own buxom body in the context of friends and family, or in foreign locales. In recent self portraits she can be seen yelling into a dinosaur’s mouth, trying to blend in amongst the sculpted figures in a nativity scene, and

stuffing her makeup-enhanced face with a hot dog at a Kansas City Royals baseball game. This brings to mind Roseanne’s controversial 1990 rendition of “The Star Spangled Banner” featuring high pitched screeching and a crotch-grabbing gesture at the conclusion. In *Untitled (Self Portrait, Mother Teresa, India)* (2010) she is seated amongst baffled but smiling children and adults, like a benign deity or fairy princess. Warren might also be said to possess something of the filmmaker John Waters’ cultivation of trash and transgression. She lovingly plays with exploitation strategies that reveal her own outrageous and vulnerable self, as well as the souls of others. This harmless fun might be best exemplified by *Whoop Dee Doo*, the public access edutainment show that she produces with a D.I.Y. crew of collaborators, featuring werewolves, oddball local talent, and competitions for kids including a “Dirty Diaper Eating Contest” (made with melted chocolate).

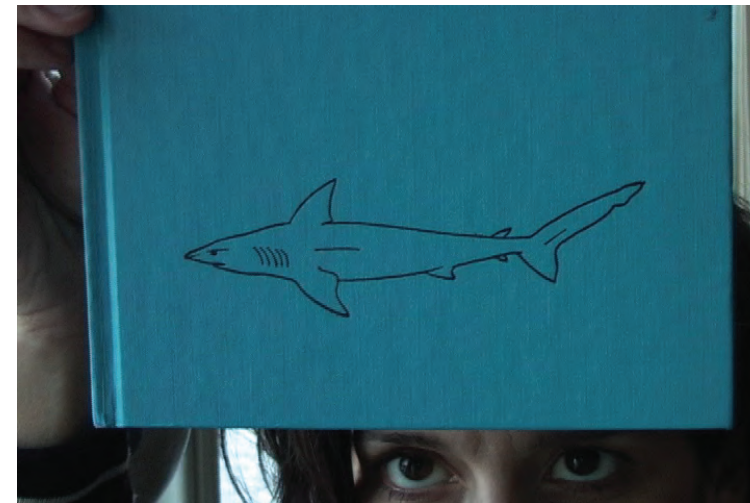
Writer Joan Didion has said, “I write entirely to find out what I’m thinking, what I’m looking at, what I see, and what it means. What I want and what I fear.” This could be said of the participating artists in *Acting Out*, who give themselves opportunities to think and feel and risk, and of the students at Rowan University where this exhibition is sited. Their responsibility is to find the subjects that interest them most, negotiating what is expected of them by parents, teachers, peers, and themselves. It may be that art-making and collegiate study are the ultimate time-outs, and being sequestered in a studio or dorm room is the greatest of pleasures. It is there where curious and talented individuals can follow their hearts and minds into the uncertain future.

**Stuart Horodner**

Dress-up has always been a tried and true way of acting out. Some people screw around with their hair or put lots of holes through their face; that was never my route, but when I was a teenager my friend and I shared use of a sweater that he had found in his shed, eaten to within an inch of its life by rats. There was just enough sweater left to keep the hole-riddled garment hanging on the body, but barely. And it provoked questions. "What the hell is that thing? And why are you wearing it?" I thought it was beautiful, but I also loved it because other people thought it was disgusting, and I liked the beauty and disgust in combination.

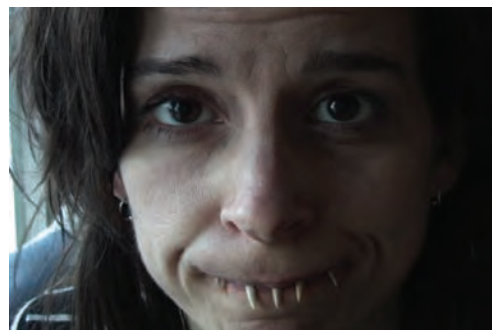
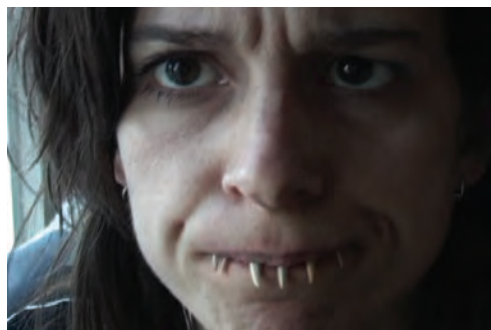
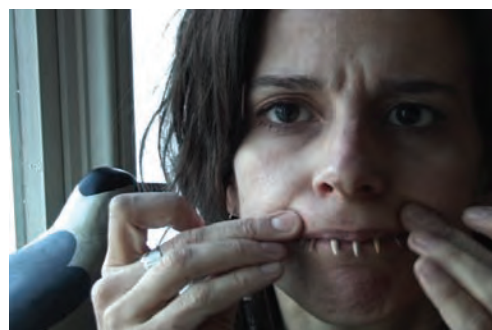
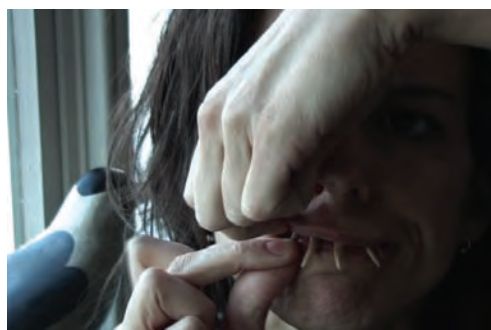
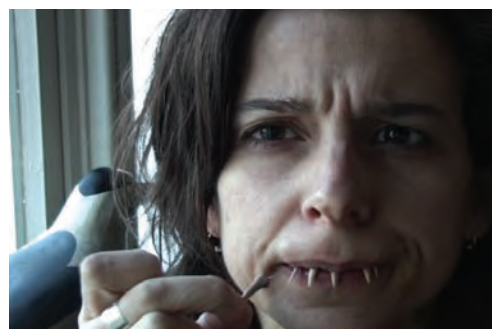
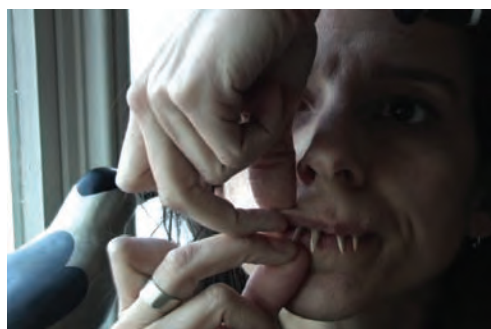
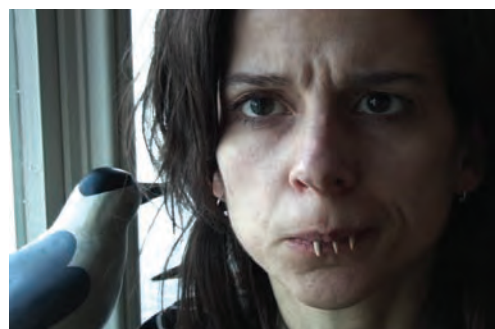
We don't tend to like anything that messes up our hard and fast boundaries around the word "natural," which is one reason I tinker a great deal in that grey zone. Even the word itself appears often in titles of works, such as "Natural Car Alarms" or "Natural Crossdressing." Gender is one instance where culturally we seem to like things really cut-and-dried: male or female, and easy to tell which. As part of the Natural Crossdressing series, where I fashioned two caterpillars into a mustache, I also did some variations: *Self-Portrait as Sir Ernest Shackleton* was my mildly irreverent homage to my favorite explorer.

# NINA KATCHADOURIAN



*Self-Portrait as Sir Ernest Shackleton*  
2002  
C-print  
6.5 x 4.5 inches  
Collection Edward and Hesu Wilson

*Mystic Shark*  
2007  
Video  
4:34 minutes  
Courtesy of the artist  
and Catherine Clark Gallery



*Mystic Shark* was shot in a hotel room in Mystic, CT, using a box of petrified teeth bought at the Mystic Seaport Museums gift shop. *Mystic Shark* tries to elicit sympathy through the awkward and sentimental anthropomorphism of this much-feared and almost mythically vicious creature. What is shown here might be a “behind the scenes” moment

where the tough guy shark gets ready to do his job (maybe he works at the aquarium being a shark in a tank, but lives in a hotel down the road). He’s a bit past his prime, but he is trying to live up to our expectations. In the end, he tries to look endearing, and implores

us silently to just try to love him a little bit. And the act is an inversion; instead of acting out, there’s a caving in: de-fang the shark, render him vulnerable, make him pathetic, and make a viewer see in the look in his eyes that he is lonely.

# ***FAHAMU PECOU***

My work has always been about acting out. I initially began by experimenting with ways of inserting myself into the world of contemporary art. My work took its cues from contemporary popular culture by way of creating a campaign that asserted an idea of “instant art history, immediately.” I began making paintings of myself on the covers of art publications from around the world, featuring my best portrayal of “pop icon.” My character’s in-your-face bravado and irreverent stance was equally a criticism of the insider politics in the world of fine art and an observation on the portrayal of African American men in media.



*I See You Jockin*  
2009  
Acrylic and mixed  
media on canvas  
72 x 60 inches  
Collection of  
Michael Lyons Wier

*Rock...Well*  
(*Radiant Pop Champ*)  
2010  
54 x 54 inches  
Acrylic, gold leaf  
and oil stick on canvas  
Courtesy of Scott and  
Teddi Dolph



Constitución  
Tijuana, Mexico  
2010  
Photo: Susan Siltan

# NANCY POPP

“Acting Out” has multiple meanings; the one I feel most applies to my work is an action as a form of protest or public statement, as in acting out or on one’s internal beliefs.

*Untitled (Street Performances)* embodies this strategy by staging a literal intervention on the streets of an urban landscape. The performance “acts out” ideas of interstitial engagement in finding areas where the dichotomy of public/private or interior/exterior can be fractured to open up a third space outside the typical patterns of movement in a city. Such risky maneuvers are more often seen as masculine in their claiming of territory; these actions confront oppositional notions of gender by inhabiting a space outside those oppositions. The female body firmly occupies an area outside the norm but does not seek to territorialize that space. The “conquering” of verticality is temporary and more symbolic than literal.

In acting outside of these dominant dichotomies, architectural, gendered and spatial oppositions are fractured and destabilized, creating the possibility of multiple points of reference.

Praška/ Nikole Tesle  
Zagreb, Croatia  
2009  
Photo: Ranka Latinovic

Yucca Avenue/ Vine Avenue  
Hollywood, CA  
2006  
Photo: Troy Perry

All works from the *Untitled (Street Performances)* series  
Digital ink jet print  
24 x 36 inches  
Courtesy of the artist







# SHANA ROBBINS

“Under this mask, another mask. I will never be finished removing all these faces.” —Claude Cahun

As a child, I recall my mother, who was a fashion model, constantly and drastically transforming and adorning her appearance, from her hair length or color to her clothing. She would also continually change the colors of the walls in our home. Now, I tend to patch together portions of both my mother’s and my grandmother’s scattered identities as collage material for a multiplicity of selves within paintings, photographs, videos, and performance installations.

I am interested in the archetype of the shapeshifter or trickster—one who continually alters her appearance as a way of both assimilation and self-containment in the world. Part of this process of disguise involves camouflage: merging with or dissolving into a place or space, at times becoming more like an animal or plant. I construct eco-feminist personas and “haunt” remote spaces with these characters as a way of intercepting lost power and destabilizing static notions of the natural realm and the “female” body. My process is a bodying forth or release of underlying intentions, emotions, and energies. It also provides a voice or form of movement (activism) for the nonhuman natural realm.

*Axis Mundi*  
Jokulsarlon Glacier Lagoon, Iceland  
2009  
Performance still  
Courtesy of the artist



*Monstrous Feminine Costume*  
(Drawing/Collage)  
2008  
Graphite, collage, gouache,  
and acrylic on paper  
15 x 13 inches  
Private collection



*Tree Ghost in Iceland*  
Vatnajokull Glacier, Iceland  
2009  
Performance still  
Courtesy of the artist



*Axis Mundi*  
Blue Lagoon, Iceland  
2009  
Performance still  
Courtesy of the artist





*Self Portrait Playing Scrabble*  
 2008  
 Watercolor and pencil on paper  
 22 x 30 inches  
 Collection Rebecca Morris

# JOE SOLA

Eleven reasons why I work with myself:

1. I am easy to work with
2. I show up on time
3. I usually give good feedback about the project
4. I am very critical of the project
5. I take good direction
6. I work on a sliding scale
7. I will work for beer
8. I am extremely sensitive to others when working in public spaces
9. I don't have to do much paperwork for image release, personal liability, etc...
10. I won't sue myself, if something goes wrong
11. I never complain about the food during the project



*Riding with adult video performers*  
 2002  
 Video  
 1:15 minutes  
 Courtesy of the artist

# JAIMIE WARREN

I think that through both my photography and the kids show I help run, titled *Whoop Dee Doo*, it is clear that I am constantly acting out. Both projects are inspired by living in a smaller city where artists continue to push a very D.I.Y. culture and aesthetic, mostly derived from having nothing else to do, but in a good way! I am an artist living and working in Kansas City, MO, and I am in constant awe of the support that comes with living in a city that is striving to make a name for itself. Everyone wants each other to succeed, which strips away any sense of competitive nature, and it is an amazing way to work.

Not to mention D.I.Y. usually goes hand-in-hand with making your own entertainment, which my friends and I have been doing for about 10 years, and which I find both amazing and a little pathetic. From making fake, non-sensical bands (such as my goth band Y-not, which consists of me screaming the word "Why" at the top of my lungs until everyone leaves the room, which usually takes 45 minutes to an hour), to dressing up like a fish and crashing a wedding, or dressing like a dozen ultra-goths to storm in on a line-dancing competition, I try to document everything we do. Because it's FUN!

*Untitled (Self Portrait, Dinosaur Mouth)*  
2009

*Untitled (Self Portrait, KC Royals with hot dog)*  
2009

*Untitled (Self Portrait, Mother Teresa, India)*  
2010



All works:  
Color photograph  
30 x 40 inches  
Courtesy of the artist



# BIOS & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**Nina Katchadourian** lives and works in New York City. She has exhibited at MoMA PS1, Artists Space, SculptureCenter, and Sara Meltzer Gallery, in New York; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Serpentine Gallery, London; New Langton Arts and Catherine Clark Gallery, in San Francisco; The Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, CA; The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY; and Turku Art Museum, Finland. [www.ninakatchadourian.com](http://www.ninakatchadourian.com)

**Fahamu Pecou** lives and works in Atlanta, GA. He has exhibited at Lyons Wier Gallery, New York; The Shooting Gallery, San Francisco; Get This! Gallery and Ty Stokes, in Atlanta; and Conduit Gallery, Dallas. He has participated in residencies at Caversham Centre in Kwazulu Natal, South Africa, McColl Center for the Visual Arts and Harvey Gantt Center for African American Arts + Culture, in Charlotte, NC. He is the host of *The 15 Project*, a talk show focusing on the visual arts and culture, presented regularly at the Atlanta Contemporary Art Center. [www.fahamupecouart.com](http://www.fahamupecouart.com)

**Nancy Popp** lives and works in Los Angeles. She has exhibited at The Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, The Getty Center, and Summercamp Project Project, in Los Angeles; Amory Center for the Arts, Pasadena, CA; Highways Performance Space and Gallery, Santa Monica, CA; and Atlanta Contemporary Art Center. She has performed street climbs in cities including Atlanta, Belgrade, Düsseldorf, Hollywood, Naples, London, Tijuana, and Zagreb. [www.nancypopp.com](http://www.nancypopp.com)

**Shana Robbins** lives and works in Atlanta, GA. She has exhibited at Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, Georgia State University, Marcia Wood Gallery, and Whitespace Gallery, in Atlanta; Space One Eleven, Birmingham, AL; BECA Gallery, New Orleans; MOBIUS, Boston; No Space Gallery, Seattle; and Las Vegas Contemporary Arts Center. [www.shanarobbins.com](http://www.shanarobbins.com)

**Joe Sola** lives and works in Los Angeles. He has exhibited at Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City; The Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, and The Happy Lion, in Los Angeles; Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA; Berkley Museum of Art/Pacific Film Archives, Berkeley; Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH; Atlanta College of Art, GA; P/M Gallery, Toronto; Bucket Rider Gallery, Chicago; and Bespoke Gallery, New York. [www.thehappylion.com](http://www.thehappylion.com)

**Jaimie Warren** lives and works in Kansas City, MO. She has exhibited at Higher Pictures and Smith-Stewart, New York; White Flag Projects, St. Louis; H&R Block Artspace, Kansas City; and Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park, KS. Her work has been appeared in publications including *Nylon*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Fader*, *Elle* (Japan), *Vogue* (Brazil), *Village Voice*, and *Vice*. She is the originator of *Whoop Dee Doo*, a “faux public access television show” which has toured Chicago, Sweden, Omaha, and New York. Her first monograph, *Don't You Feel Better*, was published by Aperture in 2008. [www.dontyoufeelbetter.com](http://www.dontyoufeelbetter.com)

**Stuart Horodner** is the Artistic Director of the Atlanta Contemporary Art Center in Atlanta, GA. [www.thecontemporary.org](http://www.thecontemporary.org)

On behalf of Rowan University College of Fine & Performing Arts I would like to thank the participating artists, the galleries, and the private collectors for lending works to the exhibition. Without their assistance and generosity, *Acting Out* would not have been possible. Special thanks go to **Stuart Horodner** for curating this exhibition and for managing all the details in preparation of it and to **Stacie Lindner** for the oversight and editing of the catalog text. *Acting Out* was presented as part of the Curators Showcase series in which outstanding leaders in the contemporary art community are invited to curate an exhibition for the Rowan University Art Gallery.

—**Mary Salvante**, Gallery and Exhibitions Program Director, Rowan University Art Gallery

Catalog design: **SBowmandesign**

# Rowan University



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