

*if* Silence =  
Death,  
how can you  
live without  
me?

R. M. Vaughan

As a faggot artist, I've grown used to being described as "too"—too loud, too angry, too graphic, going too far. I've had countless arguments with straight artists who claim my work is only valid as a kind of cultural Affirmative Action program. My personal position as an out faggot not only informs my work, they argue, it also supports the substance and reading of the work—intelligence, style, and talent being the exclusive property of "apolitical" straight artists. No matter what sort of work I do, no matter what subject matters entice me, I am, according to my straight colleagues, a "gay activist" first and an artist second. Ignoring my daily reality of dealing with bigoted publishers, cowardly art dealers, and timid grant juries, straight artists love to tell me how lucky I am—after all, I've got a ticket on the minority gravy train. I've got a schtick. If it's so simple (and profitable), why don't they just pretend to be fags and dykes? Constantly having my work read first as gay product makes me defensive, and probably a bit paranoid. It also, unfortunately, causes me to indulge in some naive illusions about the commonality, and community, of Queer artists. After some years of being told that I'm "too," I've just discovered that in some Queer art circles I'm not "enough."

**Out and about OUT:** whose self-representation is it, anyway?

Several months ago I submitted some work to a Toronto magazine in response to their upcoming All Queer issue. After a cursory glance at my slides, the art editor informed me that my work simply wasn't "gay enough" to be published.

I jokingly suggested I spray paint the word FAG over each of my paintings. "Hmm," he replied, in earnest, "That would be cool."

Thus, in the same spirit of reductivist art thinking (ahem), this faggot artist would like to offer to other underqueered artists (straights included) a simple:

**12 STEP PROGRAM FOR FAGGOT ARTISTS WHO ARE NOT GAY ENOUGH FOR TORONTO ART MAGAZINES**

or  
**HOW TO MAKE OUT ART**

1. Get naked.
2. Get some props—sports equipment, domestic utensils, hand puppets, a pair of heels, another naked fag. A cheap wig is the best way to up the Irony Odds.
3. Take a picture of yourself looking:
  - a) aggressive
  - b) coy and knowing, like you've been around
  - c) arty and banal, awash in harsh light (for black and white shots only)
  - d) bored with it all.
4. Apply the following words to the image of your naked body, covering your cock (for private liberal galleries) or your forehead (parallel galleries): Fag, Faggot, Queer, Queen, Boy, Toy, Boy Toy, Slave, Master, Danger (parallel galleries), Victim (private galleries), Man, Not Man, Dick, Cock, Suck, Fuck, Fruit, Fairy, Sissy, Butch...

5. Pose with one or more naked fags in a provocative, neo-surrealistic manner that cleverly hides the exact gender and/or genital identity of one or all of you. Reduce those re-contextualized bodies to angles and shadow and light—get clinical! (again, black and white shots only).

6. Project onto your body recent clippings from rightwing newspapers and/or the names of dead faggots from the nineteenth century (private galleries), or faggots killed by AIDS (also private galleries).

7. Shave your head.

8. Modify the nouns from number 4 with racist slurs appropriate to your ethnicity—everyone will know that you don't mean it 'cause you're a homo and you understand oppression.

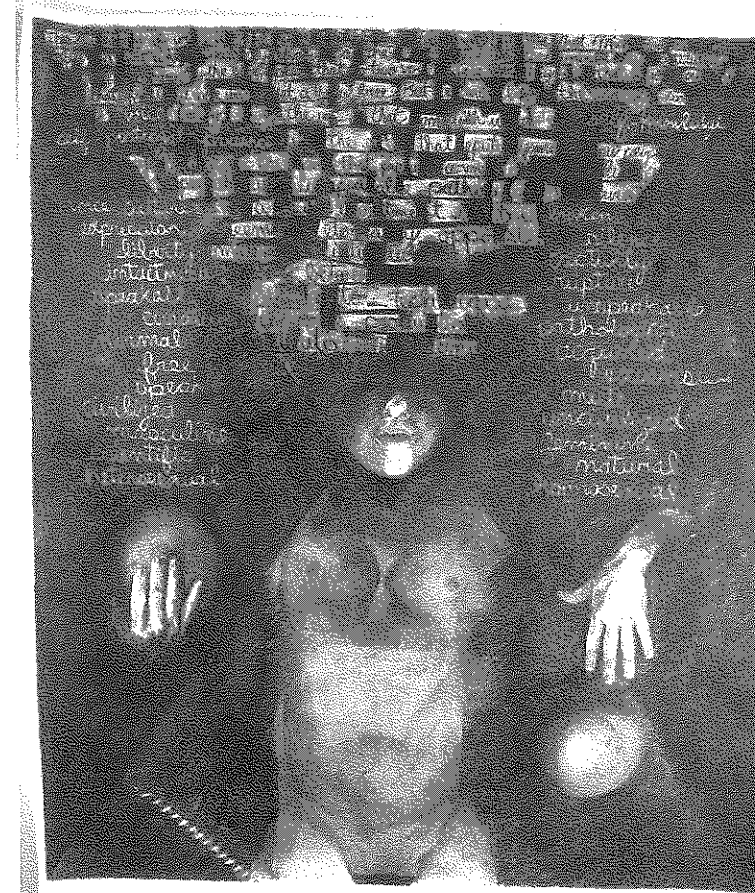
9. Type up some stories about getting the shit beat out of you in high school, put them in a glass vitrine, and position them next to the images of your newly liberated, naked Queer self.

10. Find a gentlemanly Gay art dealer and frighten him into exhibiting your work—he will invite other Gay gentlemen to his gallery and frighten them into buying your work.

11. Invest—remember what happened to all those graffiti artists with names like Zeno 2000 and Rico X13? Or Mark Kostabi?

12. Finish your MFA. You can always fall back on teaching.

Detail from painting by R. M. Vaughan



Julia Patterson