

WALT CASSIDY

SELECTED PRESS



Walt Cassidy - Galeria Melissa, New York. Portrait by Derek Mega for NY ARTBEAT.



Fashion's biggest name, the German designer **Karl Lagerfeld** launches this season four styles created for MELISSA, photographs our cover and an exclusive editorial, becoming part of the brand's history!!!

MELISSA MAGAZINE
Winter 2013

Cara
Delevingne
by
Karl
Lagerfeld

CineMelissa

- ★ A HISTORY OF CINEMA
- ★ THE ERA OF FASHION FILMS
- ★ ROMANTIC MOVIES
- ★ YOU IN THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR
- ★ THE GLAMOUR OF THE RED CARPET
- ★ HOLLYWOOD OR HOLLYWOOD?
- ★ CINEMELISSA: BECOME A STAR
- ★ THE AESTHETICS OF BRAZILIAN CINEMA

Plastic Dreams 106

Galeria Melissa NY celebrates its 1 year anniversary in great style!

WITH A NEW EXHIBITION BY WALT CASSIDY GALERIA MELISSA NEW YORK REAFFIRMS THE BRAND'S COMMITMENT TO ASSOCIATE ITS PRODUCTS TO CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS.

01 Since its opening in 2012, Galeria Melissa New York has showcased the talent of unique and multifaceted creators such as Ava and Julie Verhoven, who were able to translate the brand's contemporary and pop approach to footwear design into daring and colorful artworks. To celebrate its first anniversary, the concept-store located in SoHo commissioned works from an artist closely linked to the city's identity, Walt Cassidy.

Formerly known as Walt Paper, a key club kid of Michael Aali's outrage-as-art New York party scene of the early 90s, Cassidy has become a key artist in the city's thriving art scene. His work serves as a personal alphabet charting a private topography of history, experience, emotion, and thought. Surveying inner landscapes, rendered in a visual language both intimate and arcane, his productions include ink drawings, wall sculptures and photographs. They testify, with remarkable emotive force, that the most demanding affective experience is often the private one, and that our most urgent expressive imperative is to render it sensibly - to make outer order from inner chaos.

The pieces produced for the gallery are from Cassidy's Paper series of photographs, featuring flat constructions of cut paper. These narrative abstractions seek to narrow the photographic plane, while conceptually challenging the notion of still life photography and illustration, on which much of his work is rooted.

The window of the gallery presented a new sculpture called "The Wishing Well" created from brass and wood. Cassidy, as a diarist, uses his sculptures as an invocation of the varied symbolism he refers to as "protective motifs" - repeated ideas, patterns, images and themes, which serve as the physical bedrock upon which he extricates himself from his personal experience.

A video played on the back wall of the gallery showed parts of the documentary "BOOB: The Live Performances" - an immersion into the NYC club scene of Walt's generation, compiled and edited in partnership with Nathan Maxwell Cann. BOOB was a conceptual hardcore rock band that began amidst the infamous 1990s New York City club scene at the time of Peter Galien, owner of nightclubs Limelight, Tunnel, Palladium and Club USA. Led by club kids Walt Paper, Desi Monster (Desi Santiago) and Loxanna (John McGrath), BOOB consisted of Mr. Johnson (Scott Johnson) playing the guitar, Sonia Sonic (Sonia Manalli) on bass, and Mayumi (Mayumi Shimokawa) on drums. The burlesque performer "BOOB" was featured as their mascot, "The BOOB Girl" "BOOB -The Live Performances" includes archival performance footage from many of these NYC venues, combined with interviews and press clips which provide a glimpse into the frequently referenced period of New York City nightlife.

At the opening, which took place in February 2013, a group of fashionistas joined the artist and the hosts in a lively night to celebrate not only the first anniversary of Melissa's American outpost, but also the excitement of the Big Apple.

CineMelissa Winter 2013 107

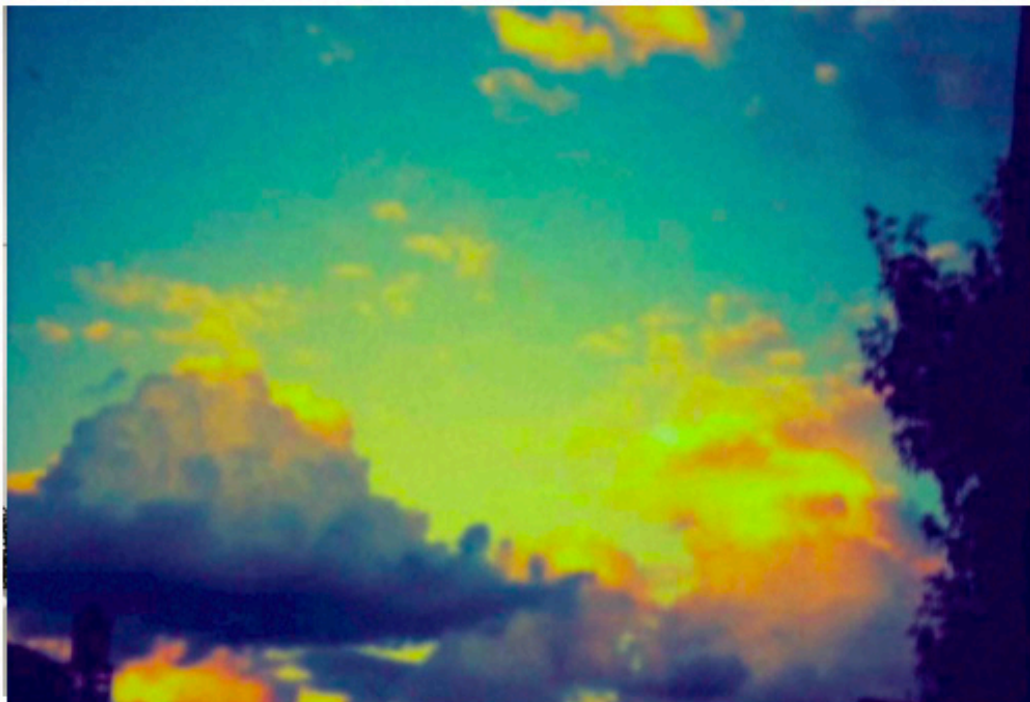
01 Belen Brieago and Bubi Canan. **02** April Palastly and Astra Moragains. **03** Nicholas Gorfam and Dan Terry. **04** Julie Reynan and Fay Power. **05** Walt Cassidy and April Palastly.

06 Interior of Galeria Melissa Walt Cassidy NY. **07** Jeta Chiminzazo. **08** Walt Cassidy. **09** Sami Dussin and Lorenzo Martone. **10** Hakan Urfaoglu and Juliana Huxtable. **11** Claude Morais, Jeta Chiminzazo, Ariela Suster and Brian Wolfe. **12** Victor Corona, Jocelyn Saldanha. **13** Mischa G and Stella Rose. **14** Interior of Galeria Melissa.

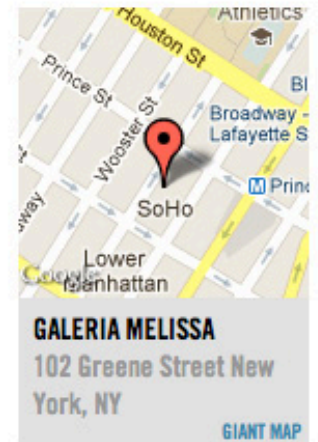
RACKEDWIRE

Melissa's New Installation

Monday, February 25, 2013, by [Tiffany Yannetta](#)



SOHO—To celebrate its one year anniversary, the **Melissa** boutique in Soho commissioned New York artist **Walt Cassidy** to design the store's new installation. The window now includes a sculpture made of brass and wood titled "Wishing Well," and a set-up on the back wall plays video from "**BOOB: The Live Performances.**" BOOB being a band popular during New York City's club scene in the '90s. [RackedWire]



[SOHO](#)

[COSABELLA](#)

[GALERIA MELISSA](#)

[MELISSA](#)

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[THE FACE](#)

[ULTA BEAUTY](#)

[WALT CASSIDY](#)

Last Night's Parties: Hilary Rhoda And Coco Rocha Attend The MCNY Annual Winter Ball, Solange Knowles Brings Down The House At Webster Hall, And More!



6 of 7



Melissa Shoes Celebrates One Year Anniversary Of Galeria Melissa

Where: Galeria Melissa

Who was there: Guests included Walt Cassidy, Lorenzo Martone, Brian Wolk, Claude Morais, Ariela Suster, Jeisa Chiminazzo, Andre Walker, Stella Rose and Emin Kadi.

Other details: Melissa celebrated the one year anniversary of the Galeria with NYC artist Walt

Cassidy. The Brazilian brand commissioned special installations for the party including a new sculpture titled *The Wishing Well*.

solo show

WALT CASSIDY



New York City-based artist **Walt Cassidy** continues to define a creative legacy extending from his Club Kid persona **Waltpaper** to punk rock band **BOOB** in these gilded works. Beautifully constructed assemblages of brass, copper, and wood shine a dozen shades of blonde.

Photograph: Kevin Campos and Natalie Starr



2012 December 11

PARTIES! PARTIES! PARTIES!

Art Basel Miami: Lorenzo Martone Edition



Diane Von Furstenberg, Lorenzo Martone

Billy Farrell Agency [View Gallery](#)

*(MIAMI) You haven't gotten the real scoop from Art Basel Miami until you take a stroll down memory lane with PR consultant (turned fashion bike designer) **Lorenzo Martone**. Ready, set, Basel!*

DAY 4: NADA preview. Nada was my favorite art show. It hasn't always been my number one each year but things change. This year's edition was surprisingly strong. I even acquired a piece from **Walt Cassidy** for my collection. It's a gorgeous brass sculpture named "The Haad of Lavat." At lunch, I stopped by the **DvF + Evian** collaboration lunch at Soho House and told Diane about NADA and ended up bringing her back to the fair after lunch. **Hamish Bowles** and **Sofía Sanchez Barrenechea** joined us. We had quite a blast exploring the fair with emerging artists and quality museum pieces. UK-based Seventeen's pieces were breathtaking. Same goes for Invisible exports. I hope Diane and Hamish agree with me.

Fix

2012 December 10

News & Scoops

Dear Daily! Live From Art Basel Miami Beach



Kris Van Assche, Bruce Weber, and Stefano Tonchi

Patrick McMullan [View Gallery](#)

*(MIAMI) The decadent parties! The XX-luxe art! The celeb-fested tableaux! **Lisa Anastos**, founder of ARThood, reports from her action-packed weekend at Art Basel Miami Beach. Without further ado!*

After lunch, I drove to the NADA art fair, where **Lorenzo Martone** and von Furstenberg were checking out the works by **Walt Cassidy** at the Invisible Exports booth. PULSE Miami, the destination art fair for collectors searching for emerging artists, was next on my art hit-list, where the fair's director, **Cornell DeWitt**, treated me to a private tour, which included a stop at Widmer + Theodoridis Contemporary's booth to view the work of the **Nadine Wottke**, the 2012 PULSE prize winner.

New York

“The Displaced Person”

INVISIBLE-EXPORTS

14A Orchard Street

January 6–February 12

Alienation, it would seem, can be a creative force for inclusion. And, as each of the artists in “The Displaced Person” proves, one is rarely found without the other. Freud viewed alienation as the by-product of a cultural divorce between man and his natural impulses. For the artists exhibited, it’s in the very gaps between body and ideology that one finds reconciliation between the two.

Performance artist Ron Athey's installation *Foot Washing Set w/ Blonde Hair Towel*, 1996, typifies the artist's melding of religious and BDSM rituals. A nod to the Christian practices of foot washing (see Luke 7:44), Athey's twist on the tradition includes a handwoven towel made of hair, and a bloodstained cactus-spine brush. Here the body, or rather its sanguineous traces, becomes a symbolic site on which, as with Christian theology, dogma supercedes the physical. In Sue Williams's *My Oeuvre*, 2005, the presentation of the body in fragments lays bare perceptual attitudes towards it. A cartoonish bioamorphous mass of sphincters, orifices, and bulbous mounds, Williams's anatomical fantasy points far less to any recognizable specific sex organ than to collective impressions forced upon them.

With Walt Cassidy's *The Weeping Tower*, 2011, the artist examines structures that impose both conformity and alterity on the body. Carbon photographic prints of idyllic male youths, framed within hand-drawn structures, reflect an eroticization of, and dislocation from, the male form.

Tellingly, Cassidy's choice of settings includes New York's Jacob Riis beach—honoring a man who documented the blight of the industrial era's downtrodden. Each of the works in this exhibition reminds us that those on the fringe often find themselves center stage.

ARTFORUM



Ron Athey, *Foot Washing Set w/ Blonde Hair Towel*, 1996, wigs, wool, metal pipe, stone, wood, crystals, blood, 50 x 23 x 10”.

— Joseph Akel

HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

'The Displaced Person' Exhibition Examines The Spaces Of Participation And Alienation (PHOTOS)

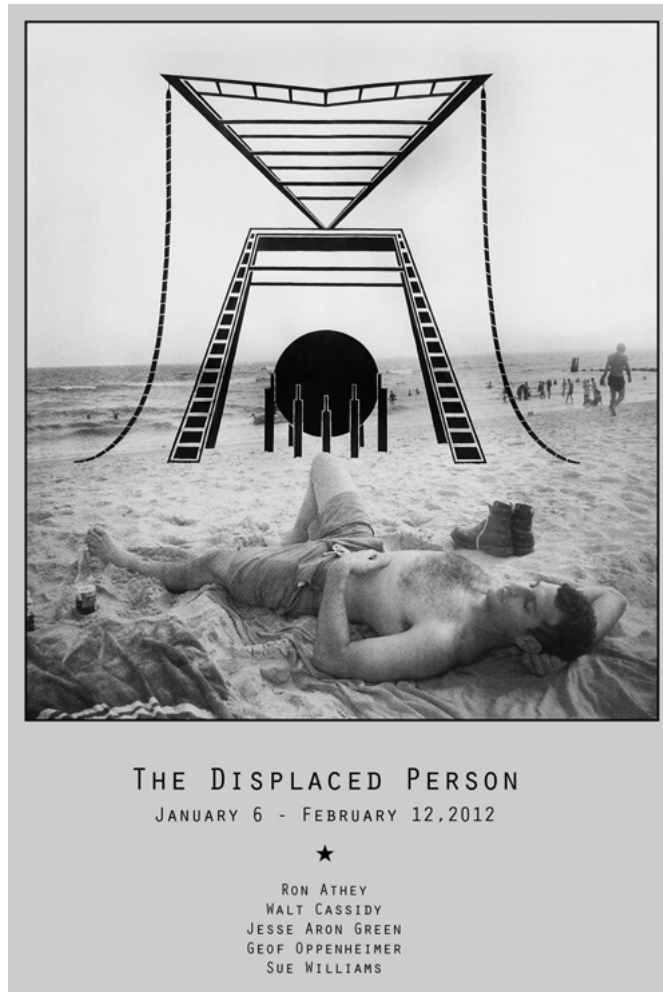
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Privacy is rapidly becoming a quaint notion of the past and the whole world seems to be turning into a giant public space. Displacement and exclusion become part of our daily lives as everything becomes a question of participation vs. alienation. The exhibition 'The Displaced Person' suggests that though it is often skewed negatively, exclusion is a virtue, and always has been.

The exhibition features work from Ron Athey, Walt Cassidy, Jesse Aron Green, Geof Oppenheimer and Sue Williams. Each approaches the sense of loss and isolation in the public sphere differently, yet they all share a sense of noble vexation. The eerie beauty of Ron Athey's lone, hanging mass of blonde hair-- real human hair, by the way-- reminds us that sometimes beauty must be achieved through loneliness and discomfort, and the same can be said about art.

The exhibition runs at [INVISIBLE EXPORTS](http://www.invisible-exports.com) until February 12 in New York.



THE DISPLACED PERSON

JANUARY 6 - FEBRUARY 12, 2012



RON ATHEY
WALT CASSIDY
JESSE ARON GREEN
GEOF OPPENHEIMER
SUE WILLIAMS

SAATCHI ONLINE Magazine

Discover art. Get discovered.

DOUG McCLEMONT'S TOP TEN NEW YORK SHOWS-JANUARY

By Doug McClemont · January 19, 2012 · Art News, NYC, Top 10 Shows · Tagged: Featured

The Displaced Person at Invisible-Exports

Quickly becoming on the coolest galleries in New York, Invisible Exports under the passionate direction of Risa Needleman and Benjamin Tischer, presents another winning group exhibition. Black and white drawings by Sue Williams, Queen of the Droopy Body Part, hang near Walt Cassidy's handsome and haunting photo based works. Cassidy's elegant touch coupled with his mystical reverence for romanticized locations—a transsexual beach, gay cruising locales—send us off in search of lost time. Works by Jesse Aron Green and Geof Oppenheimer are every bit as compelling. At the crowded opening, guests rubbed up against performance pioneer Ron Athey's human hair towels, which were hung low to the ground, teased and tantalizing. Hopefully, this show marks Athey's (overdue) return to New York's gallery scene.

Through February 12th

www.invisible-exports.com

ARTFORUM

Walt Cassidy

INVISIBLE-EXPORTS

14a Orchard Street

April 2–May 9

In his first solo exhibition, "The Protective Motif," Walt Cassidy maps his own unconscious through a group of photographs, drawings, and sculptures filled mostly with geometric forms. Whether these triangles, dots, and lines are meditations on his inner experience (or instead diversions from it) remains unclear, yet the results are visually engaging, if affected.

Though his series of photographs "The Inferior Orbs," 2006, seems to refer unselfconsciously to the now popularized new age dream catchers, the circular form present in works including *The Broad and Beaten Way* is a bicycle wheel that was a material base for Cassidy's sculptures. His work does, in fact, draw conceptually from a sustained interest in occult symbolism, though the connection between that and his use of found and very personal objects (he has used a former beloved's wedding ring in a work) seems arcane.

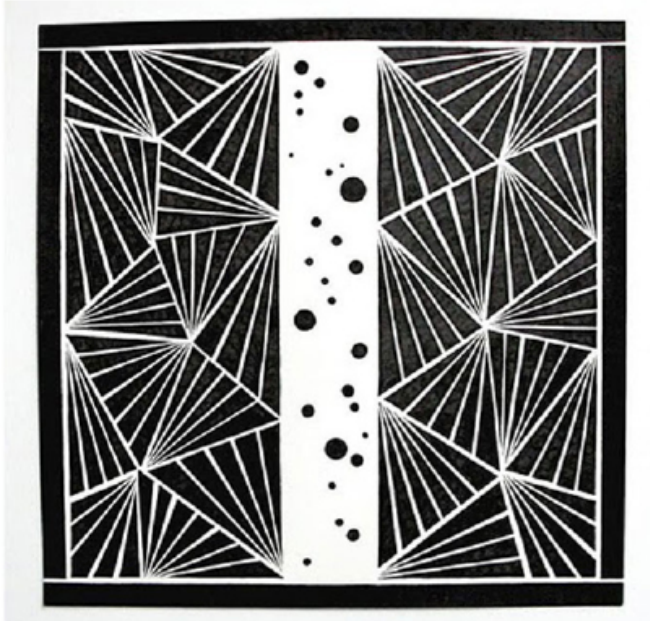
Successful are Cassidy's elegant forays into cut brass, including the quasi-Futurist or perhaps Duchamp-inspired *Attack on the Ascending*, 2010. In a reversal from his concern with the symbolic potential of recycling, his recent works highlight the foundational relationships among essential shapes, while also demonstrating the outcome of childhood exercises the artist learned from his psychologist father. Cassidy repeats and reinvents his motifs in multiple media, which suggests a sense of continuity among the works, and among his many lives since emerging as club kid Waltpaper in the early 1990s. While some of the works evince beautiful and genuine moments, it remains difficult in this show to ascertain just what Cassidy is protecting.



Walt Cassidy, *The Broad and Beaten Way*, 2006, color photograph, 15 x 15". From the series "The Inferior Orbs," 2006.

— Beth Citron

First Solo Exhibition by Walt Cassidy at Invisible Exports



Walt Cassidy, "Through", 2010. Ink on paper, 9 x 9 inches. Photo: Courtesy Invisible Exports.

NEW YORK, NY.- Walt Cassidy's works are a personal alphabet—each piece charting a private topography of history, experience, emotion, and thought. "The Protective Motif" is a survey of that inner landscape, rendered in a visual language both intimate and arcane. Ranging from ink drawings and wall sculptures to photographs, the work testifies, with remarkable emotive force, that the most demanding affective experience is often the private one, and that our most urgent expressive imperative is to render it sensibly—to make outer order from inner chaos.

The works in "The Protective Motif" compose a meta-narrative across medium and are rooted in childhood exercises, learned from his father, an industrial psychologist. These physical meditations were used to ground the neurological electricity of the brain, by doing such things as burying ones hands in soil (modeled on the analeptic structure of the lightning rod). The pieces gathered here act as maps that trace the contours of private experience, constructed on the basis of a therapeutic autobiographical agenda through the transformative ritual of reexperience.

Cassidy places his faith in these constructions, which invoke again and again the varied symbolism of the "protective motifs"—repeated ideas, patterns, images and themes, which serve as the physical bedrock upon which he extricates himself from his personal experience.

In the introductory suite of photographs, "The Inferior Orbs" (2006), Cassidy reconceived, as a personal cosmography, the map of the universe sketched by John Milton in his "Paradise Lost"—a series of circles chart the paths between heaven and hell. These photographs act as a template, both formally and conceptually for Cassidy's other work. The most recent sculptural series is centered on the work "Nail Bomb" (2009), which illustrates a field of fragments wired together in an ode to his personal emotional surrender.

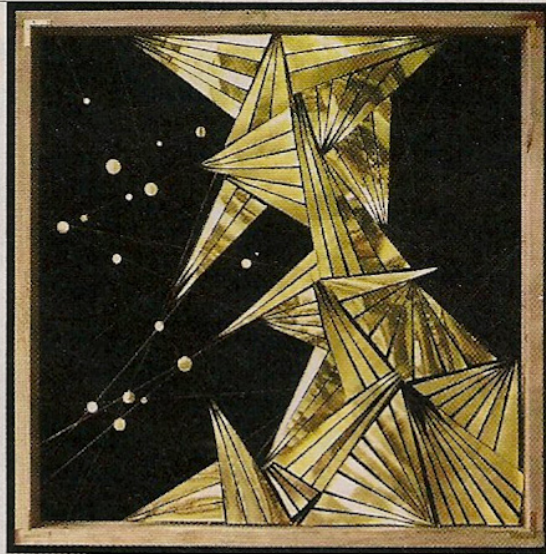
Walter Cassidy lives and works in New York. He has exhibited at MASS MOCA, Paul Kasmin Gallery, and Deitch Projects.

The exhibition is on view at [Invisible Exports](http://InvisibleExports.com) through May 9, 2010.

Interview

Interpretation of Dreams

For his solo show, *The Protective Motif*, which opens this month at New York City's Invisible-Exports gallery, Walt Cassidy has built visual gateways to the unconscious, primarily using what could be called "dream catchers." That might sound precocious—or even dangerous—except for the fact that in prior incarnations Cassidy has been a Club Kid and a curator of the work of artist Kenneth Anger. Cassidy's spectral photographs of ring-shaped sculptures inset with jewels and geometric metal ornaments are a codex to a universe where romanticism and abstraction stand at the brink of untold tales. More info at invisible-exports.com —ALEX GARTENFELD



Alex Gartenfeld, "The Interpretation of Dreams," Interview Magazine, April 2010

Interview

STUDIO VISIT: THE MAGIC OF WALT CASSIDY



PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER BOLLEN

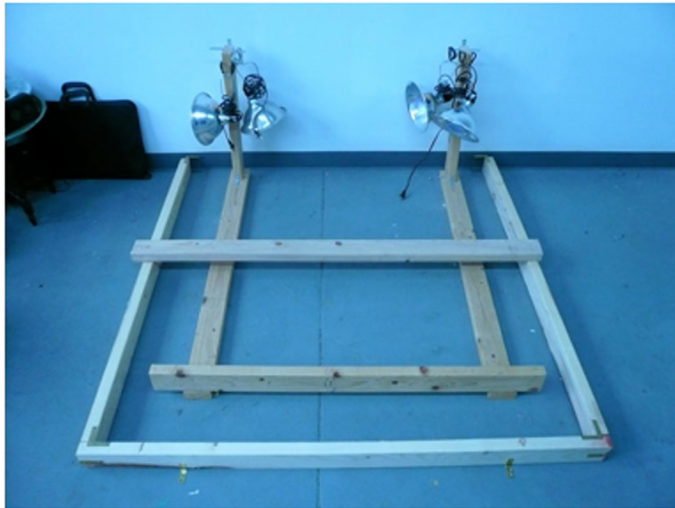
Underneath the BQE in the Sunset Park neighborhood of Brooklyn, Walt Cassidy is in his Studio City studio preparing to ship his photographs and sculptures for his solo show, "The Protective Motif," which opens Friday at Invisible-Exports on the Lower East Side. It's surprising that this will be Cassidy's first solo show in New York City, since he's lived many artistic lives in this town—most famously as Waltpaper, a key club kid of the Michael Alig outrage-as-art early 90s party scene.

But Cassidy's days at Limelight are over and much of his new work is about escaping those earlier ideas of himself, particularly through an examination of alternate belief systems and the occult. Today he's got a more sober sense of balance, and his idea of living as an artist doesn't include the description *enfant terrible*. Could it be that this is the work of a reasonably happy artist?



Cassidy's continual use of wheels and circular shapes comes from semi-divine sources. "The shape of orbs that I use are rooted in alchemy," Cassidy says. "And specifically Milton's construction of the cosmos in *Paradise Lost*. Lucifer is the rebel archetype in that story. I was thinking about that archetype and how the rebellious, dark, fallen outsider artist has overwhelmed art from the 1920s to the 1990s. I think we are past that state."

Cassidy's work operates symbolically on multiple levels, indicating a level of religious spiritualism and secular cultural resonance while also working as a deeply autobiographical portraits. For five works he plans to show—photographs of abstract sculptural pieces he completed in 2006—he says they are as personal as "a Nan Goldin photograph."



In these photographs, the empty space in a metal frame is woven with aluminum, brass, and copper wire entangling pieces of glass, metal, and specifically sentimental items such as wedding rings from a one-time partner. The circular frame in each photograph is actually a bicycle wheel, which suggests a reflective orb or a mythical wheel, but also the artist's limited means. "I was making work out of my own apartment so I didn't have space to store the work I was making. I found that bike rim on the street because I didn't have a lot of money and I kept photographing what I made on it."

Since he established his own studio space a year and a half ago, Cassidy found room to create on a larger scale and preserve the results. Lately he's been working in cut brass, weaving, stripping, and hooking abstract patterns and textures on a wood frame across a black background that read almost as meditation pieces. "I didn't want to use any more found items," he says, "because I was looking

for materials and shapes that didn't have energy attached to them already. That way the work could be more my own." Certainly, the ambitious pieces—minimalist in material but maximalist in emotion—are more about reflection and illumination than in binding or fastening something in. Interestingly, Cassidy's work also operated where autobiography meets methodology: in the 1970s in Southern California, his father was an industrial psychologist in the days of IQ testing. Cassidy remembers taking the test, which boiled down to arranging shapes in certain formations. "It was about finding a personal logic in abstract emotions," he says. "And so is this work."

THE PROTECTIVE MOTIF OPENS APRIL 2, 6–9 PM. INVISIBLE EXPORTS IS LOCATED AT 14A ORCHARD STREET, NEW YORK.



Diary: Jack Pierson



Walter Cassidy's work first came to my attention in a group show called "Male Multiple" at the Stay Gold Gallery in Brooklyn in 2005. I was impressed enough to include a piece in a great big exhibition I curated for Paul Kasmin Gallery in 2006. Since then, his work has been featured at MASS MoCA in a groundbreaking show called "The Believers."

JACK PIERSON: *Walter, your work has always taken the form of still life photography to me. This new piece is at once more sculptural and more graphic. What's going on?*

WALTER CASSIDY: When I first started making these works, I really wanted to get away from the collaborative elements in making photographs [of] people or places, so I focused on still life. I wanted to "build" a photograph.

JP: *The high-key palette also impresses me. I know you've evinced a great love of Agnes Martin and her work lately. Is there any correlation?*

WC: Because of the staging aspects of the work, and working with a lot of metal, I always worked against a black background. It worked great, formally, but seemed to lead to a lot of dark interpretations of my work. I became a bit

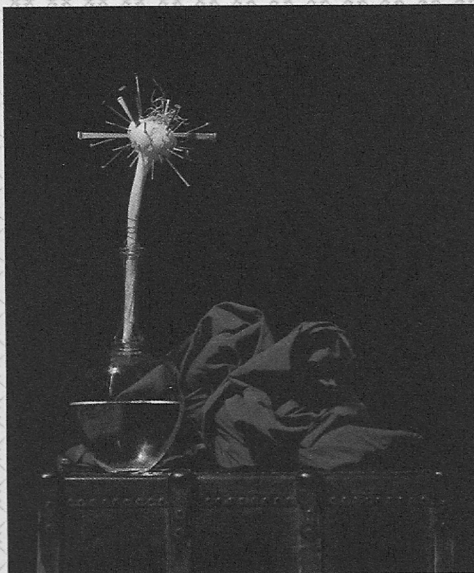
obsessed by Agnes when I saw an interview where she spoke about making work that dealt with emotions that were "above the line" and that were void of aggression. She said that you shouldn't look at anything that you don't love.

I realized then that making work without angst and aggression was difficult and not so common. So I wanted to make work about joy. Joy to me is color. Joy to me was the Cher show.

JP: *The Cher show?*

WC: Well, I have always maintained that the best art show ever in NYC was the Bob Mackie show at FIT in the nineties, with the mountain of Cher costumes. I love the production values of those television shows, especially the sets. Everything had to be made in a sculptural sense, with color and lighting being very important.

Walter Cassidy
I've been thinkin' about you, baby,
 2005
 Unique pigment print
 Courtesy of the artist



WALTER CASSIDY

BORN IN LOS ALAMITOS, CALIFORNIA, 1972.
 LIVES AND WORKS IN BROOKLYN, NEW YORK.

Raised as an agnostic, Walter Cassidy grew up living between Southern California and a 200-acre ranch in Missouri's Ozark Mountains. As a child, his father told him that all bodily imbalances are rooted in the "electricity of the brain," and if bad feelings emerge, he should find the nearest patch of dirt and stick his hands in it to ground the electricity of his brain. This simple ritual became a major principle for his art. The spells illustrated in *The Inferior Orb* photographs stem from this; they are constructed as conductors that map and ground electrical signatures of the brain.

Cassidy's interest in the occult emerged during his teenage years in response to his agnostic upbringing, in which emotional and physical experiences were always framed logically and with a veil of scientific certainty. He was attracted to the theatricality and physicality of the spiritual experience in the occult. While studying African Studies at Kent State University, he further explored traditional ritual, performance, and tribal iconography.

Cassidy's pursuit of the occult is apparent in his art. His performances and photographs draw from a plurality of traditions, ranging from Greek mythology to West African rituals to western popular culture. His piece *I've been thinking about you, baby*, reminiscent of a renaissance Dutch still life, illustrates a spell that includes a head of garlic pierced by nails. The pierced garlic, made to resemble a wishful dandelion, has referents as diverse as the Pieta and West African fetish statues. In the latter tradition, a nail is sometimes licked and then inserted into a figure to symbolize an agreement between two parties. It is believed that if the deal is broken, the statue will come alive and haunt its betrayers.

Following the ritual

By John E. Mitchell, North Adams Transcript
Article Launched: 05/10/2007 11:23:06 AM EDT

Walter Cassidy's 'The Gateway'

Thursday, May 10

NORTH ADAMS — Photographer Walter Cassidy has taken his experience with the occult and mixed it with the science of his upbringing to go on a singular spiritual path documented through rituals captured in his photos.

Cassidy's photographs are closely aligned to his beliefs, but he doesn't want to force people to think too hard if they don't want to. Cassidy is perfectly happy if people enjoy his photos on a decorative level. Knowledge and context can widen the enjoyment for some, but he doesn't require people think of it as more than pretty photography.

"I tend to be more keen on work you can look at and get an emotional response from," said Cassidy. "I don't really gravitate to overly conceptual stuff, but more to aesthetic works. I find comfort in the order and organization of decorative types of work, and generally prefer an earnest approach to art making."

Paradise found

This isn't to say that Cassidy does not approach his work conceptually. Part of the structure of his work has been influenced by John Milton's "Paradise Lost," specifically the concept of orbs from which the action takes place. Cassidy uses that structure to create his elaborate constructs that mirror

Milton's idea while mapping out a more personal terrain — five circles that reveal varying degrees of perspective, zooming in and out and bringing alternate views. In many ways, Cassidy's constructions are a personal alphabet.

"They are similar to hieroglyphics," said Cassidy, "a combination of things that I can't really express verbally. For some reason, I need to quilt together these bits of information, and have it all be contained in one symbolic sculpture."

For Cassidy, the structures were part of a puzzle and the camera served as another tool in putting those pieces together. The patterns in the work were obvious to him, but he needed something to both study the objects closer and to help interpret them for the eyes of others.

"It was a litmus test for me, because I was curious to know what a camera picked up from the assembled elements," said Cassidy. "I felt that I was picking up a radiance from these sculptural combinations. I feel that a camera and film have more of a sensitivity that's like the subconscious mind, that they could see things that the human eye couldn't see in an immediate sense. That's how I got into photographing them, I didn't have any photographic agenda, it felt like a microscope to look at the objects."

Cassidy's constructs function like maps to his mind and this intentionally mirrors his journey to discover the source of spiritual belief and how it relates to the expression of these sensations.

"My interest was the drawings in my brain, neurologically, for spiritual experiences, ecstasies or ritual experiences," said Cassidy. "For these types of gestures, what type of pattern exists in the brain, and is that why when putting together these puzzle pieces, some type of clear spiritual logic seemed to emerge?"

Neurology and its part in the spiritual process interests Cassidy and has roots in his father, a psychologist, who was very concerned with neurons and the patterns of electricity in the brain. Cassidy has kept up on his father's pursuit and takes inspiration from the idea that the brain itself is a three-dimensional map that we are now learning to not only read more completely, but interact with.

"For every gesture or motion that we do, there's a very specific neurological drawing that maps it," said Cassidy. "If you move your head from the left to the right, there's a very specific signature in your brain for that."

This understanding of the ways the brain functions are central to Cassidy's unique mix of magic and science in his spiritual beliefs.

"Most people get into spiritual paths and approach it like it's this ethereal, airy kind of thing that exists outside of the physical body," said Cassidy, "and you arrive at it through letting go of the body. I believe the opposite. I believe the body and the brain generate the spiritual experience."

What this logic achieves is a system where the ritual of spiritual and religious thought might be more important than the reality of what that thought points to. Cassidy sees ritual as a physical passageway to the inner transcendence he speaks of and one that he connects with the creation of his photography.

"My interest in African rituals, or any kind of ritual, has always been in the physical experience," said Cassidy, "a combination of moves, gestures, imagery and sound and all of these things produce some sort of chemical release in the brain where it was almost like you could go through these



portals. If you combine the right grouping of things, somehow you penetrate it and can travel to that spiritual plane. With my artwork, it's like a series of trials and errors of combining different things to make that journey."

Cassidy says he doesn't believe in a god, in the conventional sense, but more in terms of godliness, an experience of god that is brought on by ritual.

"It's the only thing I can believe in at this point because it's the only thing I feel I have personal evidence to," he said.

Science and magic

Cassidy's belief is that ritual taps into the brain's subconscious rather than any external spiritual plane. But the fact that it is internal doesn't make it any less profound to him or mystical – he believes also in an energy that can be directed and absorbed and activated that he tends to qualify as electricity. This all harkens back to his upbringing, which was decidedly agnostic and grounded in science, and his personal quest to align this knowledge with the world of spiritual sensation that he applies to his work.

"Science is incredibly mystical and incredibly romantic," said Cassidy. "Geometry always made sense to me on a very deep level. Step one, step two, step three, step four, one leads to the other and you're explaining something that is very abstract. It seemed like a very obvious path for me, to work in abstract shapes and lines and the ideas of planes and meridians and how people are connected. It all seemed explained through geometry."

Cassidy's spiritual path took him through subcultures that have come to shape his beliefs as well. His teen years were spent in the industrial music scene, leading to one wayward adventure to attempt to join Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth in Columbus, Ohio – a mysterious and mystical collective that delved into forms of magic and was helmed by Psychic TV leader Genesis P-Orridge.

"I never actually got in, because I was a runaway," said Cassidy, "and I was sort of a hot runaway, because my father was a retired military guy. He used to fly spy planes for the military and he had a lot of connections, so everywhere that I would go, the following night FBI would show up. Everybody liked me, but they were all really nervous."

Despite this setback, Cassidy explored the world of the occult, which led to the tribalism that is part of it. It's this sense of community that Cassidy found endearing and it's still one of the most important aspects even as his own spiritual path takes individualistic turns.

"People from the outside look at alternative cultures and they always think it's this anarchy run wild and all this stuff, but it's actually really civilized," he said. "That's one of the things I was attracted to, the etiquette of being in punk rock or industrial music. There was this tribal etiquette and part of that is taking care of each other, supporting each other."

Cassidy has been able to put this ethic into action with the people he has connected with, including Anita Pallenberg and, most significantly, pioneer experimental filmmaker Kenneth Anger, who is best known for the book "Hollywood Babylon." Anger is also a follower of occult legend Aleister Crowley and friend to famous Satanist Anton LaVey as well as of America's first openly gay filmmakers. Cassidy met Anger at an art show in Santa Fe.

"I got really frustrated because it didn't make sense to me that Kenneth was basically starving in Los Angeles," said Cassidy, "and there were all these artists making millions of dollars and so much of their work was indebted to Kenneth Anger, a complete pioneer of the short format film. I didn't understand why nobody would help him out, find a way to get him some money."

Cassidy ended up helping Anger produce work, organize and curate shows and keep himself from being overlooked.

"It just seemed really crude and really immoral that we're not taking care of our pioneers," said Cassidy, "and that happens so much in America, these geniuses get buried, there's nothing in place to help them or take care of them. It comes down to community to make sure they're sorted out."

In many ways, this pull to community fuels Cassidy's perception of his own art and, in some ways, perpetuates not only his own ideas, but furthers the web of connections he has made.

"The art that we like is just based on our experiences," said Cassidy. "Somehow we see something as a reflection of our own personal experience as we've gone through life that far. There is no good art or bad art, there's just the question of whether your soul and your experience matches up with the imagery and the forms. On one hand, it's nice to explain to people how these things are art to me, but I feel like if people see it and connect with it, maybe they're already part of this tribe."

Walter Cassidy is currently featured as part of "The Believers" exhibit at Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art.



FROM SPEAKEASIES TO BOOMBOX AND BEYOND

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WALT PAPER

As one of the most recognisable faces of the New York club kid scene, with his outlandish piercings and diverse sense of style, Walt Paper became immersed in the excitement and vibrancy of the city in 1991, and was at the forefront of the scene for the better part of the decade. As a close personal friend of Michael Alig, Walt Paper saw the scene disintegrate from a positive creative outlet for artistic practise, to a drug-riddled scene that saw many casualties. Here, Walt talks about his personal and highly eclectic style influences and of the enduring fascination for that exhilarating era.

When I moved to New York City in 1991, as a 19 year-old art student, I was immediately intoxicated by what I saw and experienced. It really did seem that I had walked into the 'global village' filled with a whole cast of characters playing out some sort of urban tribalism.

If you were an artist or eccentric in any way, the clearest means of supporting yourself during this time was either through working in a retail shop or a nightclub, and I quickly found my way to clubs like The Building, The Limelight, Palladium and The Pyramid. My first job was doing décor for The Building's Saturday night party, Groove Thing, which was hosted by the now infamous Michael Alig and his boyfriend DJ Keoki. What I remember most about The Building (and most of the clubs of this time period) was the diversity. You had a full spectrum of New York under one roof—straight Puerto Rican homeboys, Afro-centric dancers, voguers, muscle queens, gothic kids, celebrities, transsexuals, Europeans—the list was endless. I was amazed that you had all these different and beautiful people hanging out and dancing together and the whole scene seemed like an oasis of people who were the best at whatever it was

that they did. There was an editing process that went on at the entrance of the club, and you were allowed in based on the quality of either what you did or how you looked. Perhaps because of this, everyone was challenged to be the best of whatever they were from avant-garde fashion designers to car salesmen otherwise you could not participate.

The club kids of the time redefined the social construction. When you put a group of people together, then separate them from the whole of society, new laws and codes emerge. People's energy begins to play off each other. A forum is created, and enthusiasm and competition pushes people to be creative and to find their role in the group. The clearest expression of this energy is often identity and costume. It defines the individual in the group, and it defines the group to the outside world of onlookers.

The nightclub for me was like a laboratory, a place where you were encouraged and rewarded for experimentation. If you brought something different to the table, you were celebrated. Beyond being celebrated, if you were good at what you did, you were eventually paid to be there.

For me, as a struggling artist, this club scene was never just about the fun—it was also a way to earn a living without having to compromise my self-expression or conform in any way to everyday, mainstream living. The clubs that I frequented and worked at were often very large with huge budgets allocated to each night. There was a lot of money involved, and along with the money came the public relations people, magazines that were funded by the club owner, art crews, promoters and so on. Being part of the club was a tremendous resource if you had a project you wanted to do, and it was a wonderful way to network with other creative people.

It was in this arena that Michael Alig came into my life. He was the axis on which all of these club aspects seemed to rotate. He was the link between the creativity and the resources that funded it—the club owner. In retrospect, I don't think it was that much different from the old Hollywood studios, with Michael serving as mogul, who carefully selected his stars.

When I was taken into this system of club life, I was not even old enough to legally attend the clubs I was being featured at. Before my group, there had already come a series of club kids who were about ten years older than me. These were the first New York City club kids, and when I arrived on the scene, these people had taken on more administrative roles in the clubs. They were working for the magazine *Project X*, organising the Style Summits, managing the club kid trips to other cities, or doing art direction and design. With the original club kids taking a backseat, there was a need for new faces, and I ended up being one of them. It was a huge turning point in my life, and an incredible learning experience.



People always wonder why I remained so loyal to Michael as a friend. There were two years that were a complete nightmare, and the scariest thing I have ever had to endure, but prior to that were many years where Michael really took the time and energy to teach me how to survive in a city like New York. He really did believe in the talent of the club kids, and proved to be an important mentor to me.

Style

In terms of style in the early 1990s, my main influences were African tribes and the movie *Flashdance*. I saw myself somewhere between a Masai warrior from the Omo Valley and a theatrical, sensitive stripper. You may laugh, but you need only look at the photographs to see. Beyond that, it really came down to whatever raw materials I could find or whatever movie, book or magazine I got my hands on. I used to live at the Chelsea Hotel, and would often find wonderful things in the garbage, or at the flea market in Chelsea. These things would usually be a starting point. From there, I would go to Canal Street to the plastics and electrical supply shops for accessories. For example, I would buy a beaded curtain at a Chinese market, and wear it as a necklace with nothing else but boots and makeup. There was a kind of balancing act that you had to do—a certain compromise in what you wore—because whatever you chose, you needed to be able to dance and run around to various parties and events in one night. You had to be mobile.

A typical night would start off with an outlaw party—a mass meeting of people partying illegally on some abandoned bridge or a donut shop—which often ended in all of us running from the police. From that point on



MY MAIN FASHION INFLUENCES WERE AFRICAN TRIBES AND THE MOVIE *FLASHDANCE*. I SAW MYSELF SOMEWHERE BETWEEN A MASAI WARRIOR FROM THE OMO VALLEY AND A THEATRICAL, SENSITIVE STRIPPER.

you went to the first club, which was usually the one you worked at, like The Limelight. Once there, we would usually have a sit down dinner served. Then we would have to dance or walk around the club socialising for the next couple of hours.

Oftentimes, Michael would gather us up, and shuffle us off to another event or club midway through the night. Then we would return to the club we worked at, get paid at

four in the morning, attend another club that stayed open well into the early hours—like the Tunnel. Then it was usually off to a proper after hours club to score whatever drugs you needed or pick up a boyfriend, and the night would usually end with a wind down in one of our houses.

Work nights were long, and your makeup and clothes needed to be able to endure all of the travelling that had to be done. My formula was to keep the clothes to a minimum. I tried to say what I needed to say visually with hair, makeup, good shoes and accessories. My clothes often consisted of nothing more than a g-string and a t-shirt with a 'showy' jacket or fur. I did work really hard at the way I looked though. I used to spend all day looking for raw materials, or finding inspiration and doing research. I also had a couple friends who were studying fashion and often I would draw out what I envisioned for a garment, buy the materials, and then take it to them for construction. As I began to make a bit more money from clubbing, I became more interested in having things custom-made—there was only so much one could do with hot glue, and at a certain point you needed to find someone with a sewing machine.

Freakish Fashion

I was never a rich kid. I was never able to afford proper designer fashion. The only garments I had, were given to me from young designers, or were from the photo shoots and odd modelling jobs I did. I guess that was one of the perks of being a successful club kid, at a certain point the fashion industry became interested in using real street kids and club kids as models. No longer were we doing

freaky, subversive photo shoots for *Project X* or *Paper* magazine, but ended up doing more mainstream stuff as our culture began to go overground. Club USA and the second version of Tunnel opened at this time, in addition to The Limelight and Palladium. The Peter Gatten/Michael Alig empire grew to four massive nightclubs.

The idea of fashion suddenly became prominent at this time. It was the beginning of all the hype surrounding supermodels and heroin chic. Everything from our relatively small world suddenly felt bigger and more mainstream at this point. There had always been celebrities involved in the clubs, dabbling in the underground, but this was another level. Club USA—designed in part by Jean Paul Gaultier and Thierry Mugler—was the quintessential designer club, with a very designer-influenced crowd. There was even a commercial that ran on *MTV* for the club, and it was located in the heart of Times Square, New York. Club USA embodied the peak of the club kid's success but, in retrospect, signaled the beginning of the end for the scene. The drugs culture began to get very heavy. The drug of choice, heroin, was everywhere and everything began to look and feel like a Nan Goldin photograph.

There were two or three of us club kids that got modeling agents, and did a couple of modeling gigs here and there. I was flown to Paris for the first time, on a club kid trip to see an exhibition of photographs of me by William Laxton at the Louvre, so I was feeling especially chic! I never liked modeling though, and I hated going on go-sees and being judged. So my moment with mainstream fashion burned up pretty quick. I ended up walking away from it all after I met Richard

Avedon, who was trying to cast me for the CK Be commercials. He really seemed to love the way I looked and had said that he hadn't seen "such beautifully precise makeup, since I photographed Boy George", which was a great compliment to me. He called me a few times, explaining that he was frustrated that the Calvin Klein people just didn't get me—I was a bit too extreme. At that point I just decided to stop. I thought Avedon was the best and, having won his affection, I had had an impressive validation. That was really my peak with the fashion industry and I saw no need to go any further.

The club kid scene was clearly dying in New York a couple years later. The rampant drug use began to take its toll on the clubbers—Michael ended up murdering one of the drug dealers, the clubs were all raided by DEA agents, and Mayor Giuliani began his Quality of Life campaign, which wiped the city of most of its underground club culture. This culture that had been in place since the jazz age, was essentially erased. It was a sad time for New York.

In terms of the mainstream appeal, the club kid freaky aesthetic and "I'm fabulous, because I say so" attitude continued to become very common. It could be seen in the popularity of people like Marilyn Manson, and with the development of Internet celebrities and reality lifestyle television shows. If you look at the appearances of the club kids on talk shows in the early 1990s, you can see very clearly the links to things that became prominent trends many years later. I don't know that we would have Paris or Perez Hilton or emo, had it not been for the club kids.

I do see references of our scene in fashion today, and a lot of people tell me



Opposite The piercing stare of Walt Paper, 1989. Photography Jojo Americo.

Left Walt Paper in pure club kid elegance, circa 1980s. Photography William Laxton.

about things they see that look like stuff we did back in the day. The reality is that many of the original New York club kids have gone on to have fantastic careers in fashion, serving as makeup artists, designers, and stylists.

In terms of current fashion, I really love the clothes of Cassette Playa and Bernard Wilhelm. I would say, these people seem to operate within a club kid lineage, and I am sure there are many more that I am unaware

of. With any luck there is a whole new batch of 18 year-olds, boiling with ideas and energy, about to creatively escort us out of the early millennium!