



DOUG ISCHAR UNDERTOW

MAY 3 - JUNE 16, 2013 AT **GALLERY 44** AND **VTAPE** | OPENING ON MAY 3, 6-9PM
PANEL DISCUSSION SUNDAY **MAY 5** AT BUDDIES IN BAD TIMES THEATRE

DOUG ISCHAR UNDERTOW

May 3 - June 16, 2013

Exhibition @ Gallery 44 (#102) and Vtape (#452)
401 Richmond St. W., Toronto
Tuesday - Saturday 11am - 5pm
www.gallery44.org / www.vtape.org

Panel Discussion

Sunday May 5, 2013
Buddies in Bad Times Theatre
12 Alexander St., Toronto
12pm doors open; 12:30pm panel discussion
Refreshments

This panel brings together Gregg Bordowitz, artist, writer, and Director of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago MFA Low Residency Program; Jean-Paul Kelly, Toronto based artist; Kevin Killian, San Francisco based poet, novelist, playwright and art writer; and moderator John Paul Ricco, author and professor University of Toronto.

A Featured Exhibition in the Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival
www.scotiabankcontactphoto.com

A Community Partner Exhibition in the Inside Out Toronto LGBT Film Festival
www.insideout.ca

Doug Ischar's work is included in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago; and the Norton Family Collection, Santa Monica. His video work has recently screened at the Toronto Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, and MIX Queer Experimental Film/Video Festival, New York. He received his BA from Columbia College, Chicago, in 1984 and his MFA from California Institute of the Arts in 1987. Since 1990, he has taught in the Photography Department of the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Sholem Krishtalka is an artist and a writer. His work has been shown in Toronto, New York and Berlin, and has been included in numerous international publications. His writing has appeared in Canadian Art, C Magazine, Bookforum Online and the Globe and Mail.

Two Platitudes for Doug Ischar | By Sholem Krishtalka

Time is of the essence.

Time is strange with Doug Ischar. There is always a temporal hiccup, an anchor point somewhere behind us. Contemporaneity is irrupted by the past, rendering it tenuous and flickering. Curiously, the past is solid and clear. Whether it's a question of materiality (like it or not, film is now a medium that will henceforth be redolent of then), of soundtrack, or of more obvious things like the use of found footage. *Alone With You* (2011) opens with a clip taped from television – the telltale tracking counter (how long has it been since I've seen one of those?) rappels us back to the heyday of tapes and VCRs. In *BRB* (2008), which has arguably the most contemporary reference (a webchat), the visuals – a passing highway landscape – are nevertheless anonymous, unlocatable in a strict time or geography.

This dubious temporality is most obvious in *Marginal Waters* (1985/2009) – haircuts and fashions and also the very slight fade of the film tell us that we are not looking at now. And of course, there's that slash in the date, although really, the years should be reversed: 2009/1985. We stand on the uncertain shoals of now, looking at a crystal clear, sun-drenched version of then. The film stock is barely degraded, and so the eponymous Belmont Rocks seem solid, and the bodies that sprawl across them – hanging off each other in careless gestures of intimacy shot through with cruisy flirtation – are sensuous in their fleshy buoyancy.

1985/2009, not 1985...2009; not an ellipsis, but a jump. We know what was beginning to happen in 1985, what had already happened. These men, their bodies: they seem so vivid, so firm, and we drink in their corporeal integrity, we drink in the Edenic sunlight, because we know what happened after, what became of those bodies, how quickly that Eden crumbled. A backlash, not an ellipsis; we do not travel through the intervening years, we vault over them.

I was born in 1979. I endured my high school's version of sex education between 1993 and 1996. I came of age, sexually, around 1998. For any gay man of my generation or older, these years are shadow years. They narrate a post-script to trauma; they speak of the silence that follows devastation; they map an uncrossable fissure; they delineate before and after. Broader versions of this point have been made time and time again, and it always bears repeating: I came of age in the moment when bodily fluids, especially gay men's bodily fluids, and therefore, gay men's bodies, became contaminants. Whether they were/are or not, such is the power of the fear that was instilled in me in the antediluvian quiet: metaphor, theoretical possibility and reality collapsed into one.

Sex is dangerous.

Doug Ischar seems always to have known that. The fire of lust, the heat of those who provoke that fire, and the ecstatic joys of immolation pervade his videos and his photographs. You can see it even in the casualness of the *Honour Among* photographs (1987/2011): the undercurrent of aggressive masculinity that lurks beneath aviator sunglasses and leather jackets and chaps, glistens off of nipple rings and the studs of harnesses. In *Tag* (1993), a Lacoste shirt (staple of the gay man's preppy uniform) frames a looped film clip of an attacking alligator; the animal, dangerous and hungry, always lurks beneath. In *BRB*, a webchat between two men narrates a fantasia of punishment and brutality inextricable from love, the possession inherent in desire made manifest: to have someone burn their brand into your flesh as they lick the tears from your eyes; to take their blood into your veins; practices that abut sex and mortality. "I saw you at a sex party," declares an anonymous narrator of *Alone With You*. "I watched you perform with awe. I'd never seen a man suffer as exquisitely as you." This, after we've just watched two WWF wrestlers, two barely dressed men of carnal bulk, theatrically punish each other; this, superimposed on images of Robert Mapplethorpe's various possessions from a Christie's auction house catalogue. Ultimately, his coffee table refuses the posthumous tasteful asexuality of the Christie's estate sale.

Sex is dangerous, I was told by my high school teachers. Do not let fluids cross the borders of your body. Sex is always dangerous, says Doug Ischar, and always has been. To have sex is to force two bodies together, into each other. Ischar's narrators want to surrender themselves to that corporeal melding, to alloy their blood, to rejoice in that temporary obliteration of the self.