



For Immediate Release:

# I AM A CAMERA

*LGBTQ Communities Seen From Within*

**July 9 - August 29, 2015**

**ARTISTS RECEPTION**

**Thursday, July 9, 6-8pm**

**FOTOFEST INTERNATIONAL**

**at Silver Street Studios**

**2000 Edwards Street**

**Houston, Texas U.S.A.**

**[www.fotofest.org](http://www.fotofest.org)**



Paul Mpagi Sepuya, *Self Portrait*, June 3, 2011. Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town/Johannesburg South Africa

**HOUSTON, TEXAS - JUNE 12, 2015** - FotoFest announces a new exhibition of international artists exhibiting work focused on communities; specifically lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer (LGBTQ) and questioning communities. ***I AM A CAMERA*** is on view **July 9 - August 29, 2015 at FotoFest's exhibition space at Silver Street Studios**, 2000 Edwards Street, Houston, Texas 77007. The nine artists in this exhibition work directly with particular communities, which at times include themselves, in the creation of compelling and diverse views of contemporary LGBTQ life.

FotoFest is organizing a number of **public programs to accompany the exhibition**, including artist receptions and talks, film screenings, a panel discussion and exhibition tours. Several of the artists will visit Houston during the exhibition. A list of programs follows below and will be posted, and updated on the FotoFest website at [www.fotofest.org](http://www.fotofest.org).

**"I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking... Some day, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed."** - Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin*

Taking its cue from Christopher Isherwood's introduction to *Goodbye to Berlin*, an observation of the narrator's milieu and the effects wrought by acute political and social upheaval, *I Am A Camera* is about representation, sexual orientation, gender identity expression, and society. The members of the communities pictured self-identify across a broad spectrum of sexuality, gender roles, race, class, culture and politics. A varied and diverse population, it resists generalization and traditional, normative expectations. As such, LGBTQ communities have defined themselves on their own terms. *I Am A Camera* is an exhibition that also performs as a conduit for sexual orientation and gender identity expression.

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The artists in *I Am A Camera* explore a number of humanist themes, including relationships, self-realization and determination, class struggle, and community and space building. Their works encompass traditional black & white photography, contemporary staged photography, film, video and installation work. They represent a wide spectrum of sexual identification – lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and queer-allied.

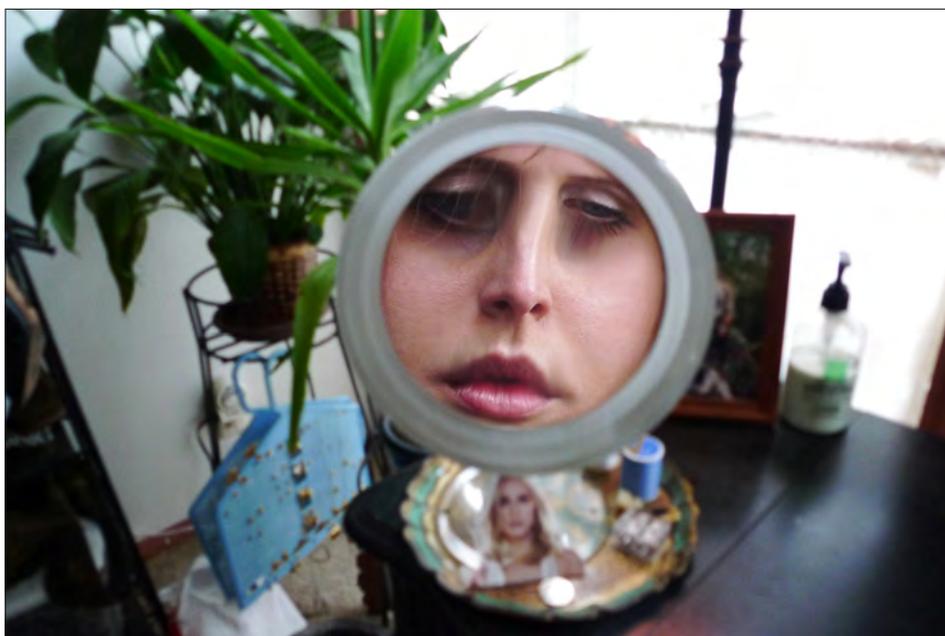
The artists featured in *I Am A Camera* are: **Zackary Drucker & Rhys Ernst** (USA); **Sunil Gupta** (India/UK); **Lindsay Morris** (USA); **Frédéric Nauczyciel** (France); **Irina Popova** (Russia); **Anna Charlotte Schmid** (Germany); **Paul Mpagi Sepuya** (USA); and **Charan Singh** (India).

## THE ARTISTS

**Zackary Drucker and Rhys Ernst** are accomplished artists working in photography, performance, video and film. Their collaborative photographic installation, ***Relationship***, chronicles their multi-year relationship as they transition genders - Drucker from male to female, and Ernst from female to male. Made up of 65 images, the work is faceted but direct, reflecting intimate moments in their shared journey. Expanded for this exhibition, an earlier version of the series was featured at the Whitney Biennial in 2014. The artists' collaborative short film ***She Gone Rogue***, will be screened at FotoFest Saturday, July 25, 2015, at 4pm, and explores and questions the process of identity construction as “Darling,” played by Drucker, encounters characters who illuminate moments in the history of transgender women. The film also stars the legendary performers Holly Woodlawn, Vaginal Davis, and Flawless Sabrina.

Indian artist **Charan Singh's** video ***Do I Know You?*** also explores relationships. The artist spent 13 years working as a HIV/AIDS activist in India, and worked extensively with sex workers. His video is a re-creation of a real-life relationship between two young male sex workers, Amit and Parvez, whom he grew to know through his activist work. Ultimately, *Do I Know You?* tells the story of their relationship's untimely and tragic end.

Singh's portrait series ***Kothis, Hijras, Giryas and Others***, documents homosexual Indian sub-cultures. The series title comes from the indigenous terms used by queer working class and transgendered men, often forced into sex work, to define their different and particular sexual identities. In Indian society, where class and caste are still major forces, these



Zackary Drucker and Rhys Ernst  
*Relationship #35 (Pygmalion)*, 2008-2014  
Courtesy of the artists and Luis De Jesus  
Los Angeles

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three groups are among some of the most marginalized. Singh's portraits are made in dialogue with the history of Indian photography, back to the stately portraits of the British *Raj*, and continuing through today's *Bollywood* starlets. The subjects, some of who have never been photographed previously, are given a space in the images to feel safe with their class, caste and sexuality.

**Sunil Gupta** is an artist and curator. In three separate series, Gupta showcases his ongoing interest in gay public space where LGBTQ people meet and interact. The earliest series, **Christopher Street**, was made in the mid-1970s while Gupta studied under Lisette Model in New York City at the New School for Social Research. *Christopher Street* is a document of New York City gay life in the period after the Stonewall Rebellion, but prior to the AIDS crisis.



Lindsay Morris, Untitled from the series *You are You*, 2007-2012  
Courtesy of the artist

Gupta's two other series included in the exhibition, both made in India, explore similar issues of public space as his earlier work. **Exiles** (1986-1987) was made with a commission from Photographers' Gallery, London and visualizes and vocalizes the experience of gay men in the Indian capital of New Delhi. The series **Mr. Malhotra's Party** (2007-2012), is in many ways an update of the previous project, 20 years on. Gupta finds contemporary queer citizens of New Delhi confident, confrontational, and proud. In the absence of clubs and open "gayborhoods" like those that exist in the West, Gupta finds LGBTQ individuals have turned to the internet and other virtual means to create queer space – both public and private.

**Lindsay Morris'** touching photographic series **You Are You** was made by the artist at a camp for children who are questioning their sexuality and gender identity, which she attended with a loved one. The annual camp offers an opportunity for these children to express themselves in an environment free from heteronormative expectations. Showing the carefree joy of the children in a supportive space, sometimes with family members, the images are powerful and affirmative. Since 2012, *You are You* has been featured in a number of prominent media outlets including New York Times Magazine, Time, BBC, and the San Francisco Chronicle. Lindsay Morris will participate in a panel discussion on the topic of families with youth expressing their gender identity and sexual orientation, Saturday, August 8, 2015 at 11am, at FotoFest.

**Paul Mpagi Sepuya's** installation **Studio Work** is engaged with problematizing representation and "queering the archive." Sepuya's stylized, minimalist portraits have been described as 'anti-hunk', celebrating an imperfection and ordinariness unexpected in homoerotic photography. The portraits, of the artist's milieu, often lay bare both the figure and the setting - the artist's studio - with piles of books and paper, discarded photographs and other evidence of inhabited, well-used work space. The work is self-appropriating, continually repurposing the artist's own archive in new works. Earlier photographs appear pinned to the studio walls, framed on tables, or printed in books, creating rich collages of recontextualized and reworked imagery evocative of cut-and-paste collages found in zines. Through his photographic installation works, Sepuya shows viewers a contemporary community that includes gay, straight, bisexual, lesbian, queer, questioning, and trans identities.

French artist **Frédéric Nauczyciel's** initial trip to the gritty, inner-city streets of Baltimore was inspired by the acclaimed television drama *The Wire*, and its character Omar, an openly gay gangster and stick-up guy. But while in Baltimore, Nauczyciel encountered the **Fireflies**, the urban, African-American "Vogue" Ball community of the city. Popularized by the

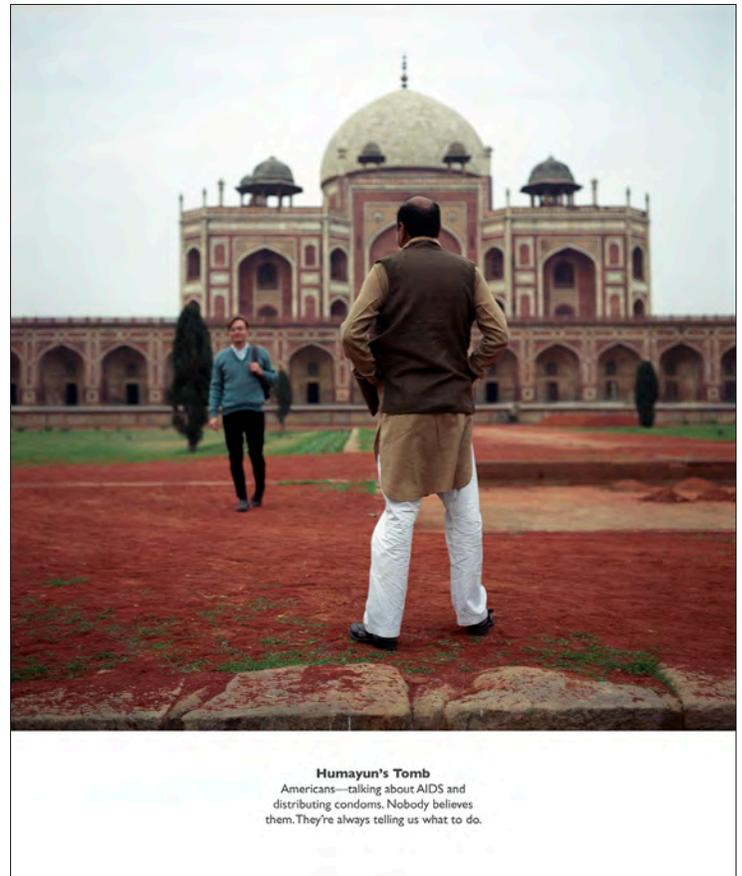
1990 documentary film *Paris is Burning*, Ball Culture is marked by hotly contested dance competitions, flamboyant costumes, runway walks, and surrogate families known as “houses.” The artist shows the duality of the Fireflies, picturing the dancers against gritty Baltimore neighborhood backdrops, with cinema verité lighting, or in the studio, mid-dance. In both settings the projected and performed personas of the subjects are undeniable.

Award-winning photographer **Irina Popova** was born in Russia, a country whose archaic and institutional homophobia was brought to worldwide attention in recent years in part due to celebrity boycotts and the political activism of the feminist-punk band Pussy Riot. The photographs in Popova’s series **Apt 779** chronicle the daily life and drama of a group of young lesbian women, including the artist, living communally in the titular apartment on the outskirts of Moscow. The artist documents the small parties and the quiet moments, the petty quarrels and the tender make-ups. Theirs is an insular, personal universe, a refuge from the goings-on of the world outside. It is a document of a protected, private existence.

The delicately lit, carefully-composed portraits of young gay men in **Anna Charlotte Schmid**’s series **The Other Side of Venus** are replete with direct, if unconfident stares. More boys than men, the soft faces convey an unease that accompanies the “limbo of post-puberty” in countries and regions where being different means being ostracized, facing persecution and discrimination. The images act as poetic metaphors for authentic emotion, as the subjects look for shelter and security among vacant and abandoned sites.

“With these nine artists, FotoFest proudly showcases a diversity of contemporary creative voices” says exhibition curator and FotoFest Executive Director **Steven Evans**. “The artists bring deep engagement with their respective themes, but they avoid essentialism. Their works present nuanced views of evolving societies, sub-cultures, and communities formed through difference.”

Evans, who joined FotoFest in 2014, has curated projects focusing on gender, identity, sexual difference, and the body in the past, including the exhibitions *Sexual Difference & Power* (1988) at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (Halifax, Nova Scotia); *The Clinic* (1990) at Simon Watson (New York); and *Steady Decline* (2012) for Visual AIDS (New York, online exhibition).



Sunil Gupta, *Humayun's Tomb*, from the series *Exiles*, 1986  
Courtesy of the artist and SepiaEYE, New York, USA



Irina Popova  
*Ana & Nadya, guests of Apt. 779,*  
*having an intimate moment, Moscow.*  
From the series *Apt. 779*, 2009-2011.  
Courtesy of the artist

## SPECIAL PROGRAMS

All special programs for *I Am A Camera* will take place in the exhibition, at FotoFest at Silver Street Studios, 2000 Edwards Street, Houston, TX 77007. The programs are free and open to the public.

### Thursday, July 9, 6-8pm - Opening and Artists Reception

With artists Sunil Gupta, Anna Charlotte Schmid, Paul Mpagi Sepuya and Charan Singh

### Saturday, July 11, 11am - Saturday Matinée Artist Talks

with Sunil Gupta, Anna Charlotte Schmid, Paul Mpagi Sepuya and Charan Singh

### Saturday, July 25, 4pm - Saturday Matinée Artist Films

#### presented in conjunction with QFest Houston

Including *She Gone Rogue* (2012) by Zackary Drucker & Rhys Ernst; *Do I Know You?* (2014) by Charan Singh; *A Baroque Ball* (2013) by Frederic Nauczyciel; and *Paris is Burning* (1991) by Jennie Livingston

A reception follows the screenings.

### Saturday, August 8, 11am - You Are You: Families with youth questioning their gender identity

Panel discussion with artist Lindsay Morris and guests

### Saturday, August 22, 2pm - Curator Tour

With exhibition organizer and FotoFest Executive Director Steven Evans

## EXHIBITION DETAILS

*I Am A Camera* is on view Wednesday – Saturday, 11am - 5pm, July 9 - August 29, 2015, at FotoFest at Silver Street Studios, 2000 Edwards Street, Houston, TX 77007 in the First Ward Arts District, north of Washington Avenue, west of Downtown. The exhibition and all public FotoFest events, including the Artist Receptions, Talks and Exhibition Tours, are free.

For more information on *I Am A Camera* or other FotoFest programs, please contact FotoFest, at 713.223.5522 ext. 19; [info@fotofest.org](mailto:info@fotofest.org); or visit the FotoFest website at [www.fotofest.org](http://www.fotofest.org).

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### **I AM A CAMERA EXHIBITION SPONSORS (in formation)**

Lee Anthony and J. Travis Capps Jr.; Bill Arning and Mark McCray; Michael A. Chesser; Susan Oliver Heard; David J. Klonkowski; Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town/Johannesburg, South Africa; Eliane Thweatt; George J. Toland III; and anonymous donors.

### **FOTOFEST 2014-2015 EXHIBITION SEASON SPONSORS**

Houston Endowment Inc; City Of Houston Through the Houston Arts Alliance; National Endowment for the Arts; Texas Commission on the Arts; The Wortham Foundation; Hexagroup; Houston Public Media; Iland Internet Solutions; European Photography Magazine; FotoFest Board of Directors; Judith and Gamble Baldwin; Robert Gerry III; William and Rosalie Hitchcock; and Gregory and Lisa Spier.

### **FOTOFEST INTERNATIONAL**

FotoFest International is a non-profit photographic arts and education organization based in Houston, Texas. Founded in 1983, FotoFest was established to promote international awareness of museum-quality photo-based art from around the world. The first FotoFest Biennial was held in 1986. It is the first and longest running photographic arts festival in the United States, and it is considered as one of the leading international photography Biennials in the world.

As an international platform for serious photographic arts exhibitions, the FotoFest Biennials and FotoFest's year-round programming have become known for the discovery and presentation of important new work and new talent from around the world. In selecting its exhibitions and related art programs, FotoFest has a strong commitment to aesthetic quality and important social issues. FotoFest has curated and commissioned exhibitions of photo-based art from Latin America, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. Its Biennial portfolio review, the Meeting Place, is considered one of the best in the world. In addition to its year-round art programming, FotoFest's school-based education program, Literacy Through Photography, uses photography to stimulate visual literacy, writing and analytical thinking.