

# GALLERY OPENINGS

Pasatiempo

The New Mexican's Weekly Magazine  
of Arts, Entertainment & Culture

THE SANTA FE  
NEW MEXICAN

## Me, myself, and you: "Desperately Seeking Other" explores identity

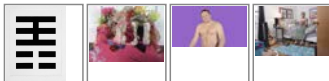
Posted: Friday, January 13, 2017 5:00 am |  
Updated: 9:36 pm, Thu Jan 19, 2017.

### Michael Abatemarco

A home can feel like a sacred place for some people, and no space within it is more intimate than the bedroom — the one room where you might feel safe and secure enough to let your hair down and be naked. It is a place where we can be most truly ourselves. But how would you feel if a stranger came in, not to rob or assault you, but to inhabit your room, to live in it — even if just for a few moments — as you do? Photographer Seiya Bowen's *In Your Room*, a series in which he's photographed himself occupying the bedrooms of different people while dressed in their clothes, explores aspects of identity, gender, and race through role-play. It's a project that touches on identity as a construct. On a more personal level, perhaps, *In Your Room* is about removing barriers to understanding, allowing Seiya to view the world from the vantage point of someone "other" than himself.



Harmony Hammond: *Untitled (black/white)*, 1967, silkscreen



A selection of images from Bowen's series is included in *Desperately Seeking Other*, Offroad Productions' first exhibit of the new year, opening Saturday, Jan. 14. In addition, Bowen's video work *Identity Manipulation* is shown. The premise of the video, which depicts a shirtless man, is simple; the viewer's perception of him is altered by nothing more than a gradual shift in background color. "It's interesting how one's mind changes according to the color, how quickly your perception changes according to the background," said Yon Hudson, the show's curator. "Overall, it's a really subtle work but quite beautiful."

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*Desperately Seeking Other* arose from Hudson's interest in the subjects of identity, longing and belonging, and desire. Along with Bowen, works are on view by a dozen other artists, including Hudson, Michael Freed (the proprietor of Offroad, which doubles as his studio), Tuscany Wenger, and Harmony Hammond. "Everybody in the show is working in the realm of identity," Hudson said, "whether it's their childhood identity, or their religious identity, or how their personal viewpoint of who they are is affected by, say, the church, or by their associates at work, or their family." Hudson's own outlook was partially shaped by the experience of being an outsider. He grew up as a gay man in a small Minnesota farming community, but had the advantage of a large supportive family. "My family felt like the other in my hometown, and yet we weren't," he said. "I had to create my own utopia. I had to find my own realm in order to flourish. That's really the bottom line of the show; how do we find that space, the space in between these people and those people? Where is my true experience?"

Hudson, an artist who works in collage, found affinity with a young artist from Mexico City who goes by the moniker LONER. His work is also on exhibit. "I had never met him personally," Hudson said. "I first noticed his work on Instagram around the time I was working on collages for my first solo show, back in July of this past year. I was struck by how different our work was and yet they were the same thing. They were both collage. That was invigorating to me. There are many different voices. What really blew my mind was that we ended up using the same images from a couple of different magazines in our work. It was striking to me how he choose to use them and how I chose to use them, with very different results."

Wenger, an employee at Meow Wolf Art Complex, is showing *Pink Dune*, a recent 3-D landscape she describes as a self-portrait. She made it using paper, plastic, felt, found objects, and pink-colored sand, which she arranged in a small glass-encased diorama. "Some shapes are partially hidden in the sand," Wenger told *Pasatiempo*. "The idea is that, as the wind blows, some things are buried again, others are revealed." Wenger described the partially buried objects as aspects of the self, some of which recede in time to be forgotten, while others rise to the level of consciousness: an old memory, perhaps, or a self-revelation. "I sort of envisioned the life of a dune," she said. "Depending on the weather and wind currents, whole sections can get buried for years but are still there. The idea is that were born and have this sense of self that does remain constant throughout our lives." Wenger is using a lot of the color hot pink as a way to riff on gender associations. "It's slightly personalized, drawing on my experience being a woman in the world, but pink is also an obvious visual cue," she said.

Wenger's work touches on the individual process of developing a sense of self, which can be a creative endeavor. Her work epitomizes the liminal space between self-actualization and conformity. "For lot of creative people — and I can speak for myself only and other people who have talked about this — at some juncture, there's a moment of 'OK, I don't fit in, and where are my people?'" said Hudson. "But I can be who I am without having to be part of a collective. I like that free zone between those moments of 'Who am I?' and 'I am.' I think a lot of this work really encapsulates that space between those two." ◀

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*Pasatiempo* is an arts, entertainment & culture magazine published every Friday by The New Mexican.

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