LYLE ASHTON HARRIS
INTERVIEWED BY PETER HALLEY

Peter Halley: When we spoke the other day, Lyle, you mentioned your hesitancy to talk much about your biography, that it might distract people from your work. I think I have a good question with which to begin: How would biographical facts distract from the work? I guess I'm asking, what is the thing that would be distracted from—the essence of the work?

Lyle Ashton Harris: Over the years my work has been about delving into several complexities, formally. Veering into biography often produces somewhat of a flat reading of the work. I have always struggled with—or enjoyed—the relationship between formal investigation and content. I'm interested in applying pressure to the content to get it to bubble up, so to speak. And often, at least in the context of the U.S., there has been a tendency to focus on biography or the political aspects without engaging the formal attributes of the work. While that's obviously shifted over the years, it's something I've always been wary of.

PH: I know that artists can use the word formal quite informally. But formal is a word that surprises me in terms of your work, because what I see in almost every piece is a very elusive play of codes and languages. I guess that I can't look at your work without thinking of deciphering or gleaning meanings from the juxtaposition, not just of images, but of text, of sources, of where the images come from, of whether you're generating them or if you're finding them somewhere else. To me, the work seems very much about language.

LAH: Yes, without question. But for me, in order to arrive at that play with language, that play with photography and the re-photographing of images—a massaging of those elements to make it all work for me—there has to be a formal investigation, a strategy, which I'm continuously in the process of uncovering for myself. And often, the resulting artwork is a residue of that entire process. I appreciate what you're saying in terms of language. For me this entails foregrounding certain tropes and strategies that will enable an actual confrontation with language.

PH: It's interesting that you use the word massage, because almost every piece goes back to the body. If you're massaging the language or the signs, in a sense it reminds us of the presence of the body, or the fact that your work also seems very much embedded in the experience of the body.

LAH: This was certainly characteristic of my earlier work, in which the body was much more visibly present. There's been a relative absence of the image of the body over the last few years in my recent work, which has been more about presenting stand-ins articulated through language. For me, the effects of scale and magnification heighten the viewer's complicity in the act of looking. As opposed to monumentalizing, it's more about memorialization. I think it's interesting how, over the trajectory of my work, the body has appeared and reappeared, but more recently the physical body has almost taken a backseat to language, as you suggested. In terms of exploring language in its physicality, my new pieces such as Deceivers & Money Boys, Yellow Grid, and the prison letters (Untitled (Letter 1) and Untitled (Letter 2)) speak to this particular concern.

PH: It strikes me that the work you're presenting at Maruani & Mercier is a retrospective gathering together work from the past and the present.

LAH: Serge [Maruani] and Laurent [Mercier] were very drawn to The Watering Hole, a series of works initially exhibited in 1996, which was my first exploration in working with photography and collage. It was radically different from my previous works, presented in my inaugural New York exhibition of 1994 at Jack Tilton Gallery, titled "The Good Life," which consisted of highly stylized explorations of identity through self-portraiture. In my second exhibition at the gallery, the body became displaced by the trope of "the watering hole," which is very much about deconstruction as well as being a meditation on disintegration. The exhibition at Maruani & Mercier in Brussels is the first time that The Watering Hole is being shown in its entirety since 1996, with the exception of a brief appearance in 2012 at

Art Basel in Miami Beach, at which time it drew the attention of the Museum of Modern Art and was subsequently acquired for MoMA’s permanent collection. When the work was first exhibited, it was considered highly controversial. It was ahead of its time in terms of the confluence of mediatization and personal archive, the juxtaposition of highly mediated images and personal, affectively charged materials. Grounded in The Watering Hole, the exhibition at Maruani & Mercier examines themes and ideas that have recurred throughout my work over the years. The exhibition ranges from these earlier photomontages to more recent conceptual photographic work, such as Deceivers & Money Boys, as well as photographs of collages found on prison walls that I shot in Jamestown, Ghana, in 2010.

PH: Deceivers & Money Boys is printed quite large—two meters high. Although at first glance it’s informational, this piece is also rather coded and elusive. In a way it looks like a web page, but it doesn’t quite correspond to a web page. It has a date at the top, and there’s a list with safety tips. Also, I’m not quite sure who the different men pictured are in relationship to the narratives described in the text. Can you take me through it, as someone viewing it for the first time?

LAH: I have half-jokingly referred to this piece as my swan song to Ghana. I lived in Accra from 2005 through 2012 as a professor with New York University’s Global Program, splitting my time between teaching there and at the Washington Square campus in New York. During that period I produced a range of different photographic works—some commissioned for The New York Times Magazine, others exploring themes that emerged while living in Ghana over seven years. During my time there I encountered what might be considered tropes of African modernity. Having celebrated its fiftieth anniversary of independence from colonial rule in 2007, Ghana is a country with a rapidly expanding middle class, according to the World Bank. However I discovered that many Ghanaians who had been living abroad—those who could choose to live anywhere in the world, but that were now returning to live in Ghana—still held traditional and somewhat conservative views about gender roles and sexuality. After having encountered the collages in Jamestown prison—and realizing that those incarcerated men had articulated something that to me felt very contemporary, very fresh, and very raw—I found myself hitting a creative wall, and it became very difficult for me to continue producing work in Ghana. At that time a close friend, Senam Okudzeto, suggested that I start making drawings. Deceivers & Money Boys resulted from that. This piece contains images downloaded from an internet website that includes a link to the U.S. embassy with warnings against sexual tourism. As you know, Ghana is one of many places where sexual tourism has expanded recently. But I was more interested in several other things: One is the performative element—my work has always been performative. On the internet you find men staging themselves performatively for viewers—meaning us—who are complicit in that performance. I was also interested in what it means for these men to be deploying certain codes of gay iconography in terms of bodily gesture, as well as the figure of the odalisque, such as exemplified in Édouard Manet’s Olympia, which I also explored previously in works such as Ready-Made and Blow Up IV. I became quite interested in these various gestural tropes and signs as they appeared in this on-line informational presentation, supposedly intended to inform travelers about the dangers of sex tourism.

PH: Does the image in Deceivers & Money Boys reflect an unaltered web site page? Are the three men shown at the top accomplices?

LAH: The original web page image has been altered slightly; a Muybridge-like grid has been superimposed on some of the figures, along with the inclusion of studies of other pictures found on the same web site. While the original web site is intended to be informational, to serve as a warning, at the same time the images shown there present their own savory,
titillating aspects. I'm interested in that doubling, which reflects my longstanding interest in ambivalence—given what the site is purporting to do—combined with the element of seduction. You know, it's complicated.

PH: Yes, it is complicated. Your identity as a gay man is very much part of your work, and I would also say—going back to the 1990s use of the word queer—that queer strategies are also part of your work. In some sense one could almost find a fierce celebration of your sexuality in your work. For example, in the presentation of Deceivers & Money Boys, with its large scale, you are bringing an on-line experience into the physical world. Perhaps it reads as a poem. But what we are seeing here, in relationship to who you are, is very, very mysterious.

LAH: In a way, Peter, I think it's not so much who I am, as opposed to who we are collectively. Through its scale, its magnification, it becomes less of a personal document and more trans-historical in its relationship to the viewer. Also, there is the notion of homosociality, as opposed to homosexuality. This would include the very tenuous, complicated relationships that can exist between—if you want to use a binary—straight and gay in the realm of the homosocial. This work is about presumably straight men exhibiting physical gestures, such as typically found in gay iconography, as a form of performative seduction. So one could say it's less about gayness or queerness, and more in the realm of the multiplicity of sexuality and those ambivalent spaces in which people can be found crossing over, seeking to fulfill illicit fantasies or otherwise disavowed desires, if only for reasons of economic necessity. And then there are the consumers, people who might actually consume, if you will, these men. A lot of them may be married and have families with children. So for me it's less about homosexuality per se. If anything, it's about the realm of the homosocial.

You can also see this in a new work, titled Mutual Obsession, which emerged from actually digging into my personal archives from 1989. The men pictured there were friends as well as early romantic obsessions of mine, but by later augmenting the image with the inscription of the word mutual, I intended to signify that it's always all about mutuality. As far back as the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was the impulse of cracking open, expanding the notion of what queerness actually is. As Foucault and Pasolini both attested, it's not so much about one's sexuality, per se, as it is about one's relations, new relational connections that
can be opened by embracing sexual difference. There’s nothing ultimately liberatory about queerness in itself or straightness in itself, but rather what kind of mutual relations, what kind of open spaces, what kind of new connections can be made present. I definitely subscribe to that. And I would say, getting back to your point, that it is troubling. One cannot easily say, “This is about a queer sensibility.” I think it’s polyvalent in that way.

PH: It also strikes me that of all the web pages in the world—to select this one—I can’t help but think you’ve selected something whose meaning is very elusive.

LAH: It’s fascinating to me, encountering these “ready-mades,” such as the center panel in Blow Up, an image from an actual newspaper ad featuring the famous French soccer player Zidane, in which he is receiving a foot treatment by an unidentified brown-skinned man—who, by the way, possesses an uncanny resemblance to me. This is all happening in an advertisement for Adidas! What does it mean to unpack this ready-made? Considering the lines of power, what does it mean to re-signify what could be considered to be a very suggestive advertisement to sell Adidas sneakers? In that particular piece, traces of my own semen can be seen splattered across the newspaper page itself, which was subsequently scanned and blown up to oversize proportions. A shift in meaning starts to take place. And I would say these kinds of interpretive shifts are a recurrent trope in my work, a strategy. How does one engage with pre-existing works, images, ideas and—getting back to a term that I used before—massage them until multiple, shifting meanings are engendered?

PH: Coming of age as an artist around 1990, you first attended a very distinguished small college, Wesleyan University, where I imagine the professors were very literary, and the students were very committed and probably highly intelligent. From there you went to graduate school at the California Institute of the Arts (Cal Arts), which was perhaps the primary proponent of West Coast conceptualist traditions, influenced by artists like John Baldessari, who taught there for many years. Then returning to New York, you attended the Whitney Museum of American Art’s Independent Study Program, which is renowned as a place where critical social and political thinking is encouraged. Soon thereafter, you emerge as a master photographer—for lack of a better term—as one who has mastered the techniques of studio photography to produce memorable, seminal portraits, culminating in your 2010 monograph Excessive Exposure. You’re even a photographer that can go on assignment for The New York Times! When I realized that you had studied at all these outstanding yet diverse institutions, I was quite amazed—I mean you did it all! It appears that you made a conscious decision to study at places where people were really thinking about things.

LAH: I think, in a way, it was out of necessity. I never really planned it. Coming from the Bronx, after attending a Lutheran parochial school, then a public high school, I felt traumatized for years—going from being called sissy to faggot to bitch to cunt. I knew I needed to be in a progressive school like Wesleyan.

PH: Did you say you were studying economics in college?
LAH: I was studying economics—my grandfather had been an economist. At that point, as an African American with my background, there were four options: Doctor, dentist, lawyer, or professor.

PH: I thought those were the options if you were Jewish! [laughter]

LAH: Well, those were considered my options. So I studied economics, but it just wasn’t happening for me. I tried to stick it out for a couple of years, then I went overseas to visit my brother, came back with orange hair, and dropped out of school for a while. It was actually my South African stepfather, my mother’s second husband, who encouraged my mother to let me do what I wanted to do. He was a photographer himself, who had gone into self-exile with eleven other men as members of the African National Congress. They had traveled together, overlaid by foot—almost 4,000 kilometers from Bloemfontein, the judicial capital of South Africa, to Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania—during a period of widespread demonstrations against apartheid, in which the identity pass books that all non-white citizens were compelled to carry were being publicly burned in protest, culminating in the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960.

I ended up changing my major after returning to Wesleyan, and I completed an extra year to graduate with honors in art. I had considered applying to graduate school at Yale, but then I met Catherine Lord, who was Dean of the Art School at Cal Arts at the time, and she encouraged me to come out there. Whereas Wesleyan entailed a very formal art program, Cal Arts was completely anti-formal—I was initially traumatized! You mentioned previously my involvement in studio portraiture—well, that was something that was not privileged at Cal Arts by any stretch of the imagination, so I quickly put my formal explorations on ice. Cal Arts was a remarkable experience, in terms of exposure to critical thinking and conceptual practice, but it was traumatizing at first, and although I found myself shutting down the first year, I later came back with a vengeance.

PH: Was the beginning of your art-making practice in photography?

LAH: Yes, primarily photography, as well as some drawing.

PH: Were you initially attracted to larger film formats and studio settings?

LAH: I initially worked with 35mm cameras as well as some medium format photography shooting portraiture and studio tableaus. And parallel to that, I have also extensively shot Ektachrome slide film since 1987.

PH: As a young person, were you constantly exposed to political activity and thought, with people talking about what was going on in South Africa and other places?

LAH: Absolutely, without question. From a young age I just assumed that’s how most people grew up, because even before my stepfather came on the scene, my grandfather had been a “race man.” He was a student of W.E.B. Du Bois and subscribed to the concept of the “Talented Tenth.” From early childhood and in church, there was always a strong emphasis on African-American culture, the self-determination of African people, etc. After my parents divorced in the early 1970s, my mother, who was a chemistry professor, moved to Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, with my brother and me. In the post-civil rights period, many people of African descent in the U.S. became interested in traveling to Africa. My mother decided that it would be a good experience for us, so we lived in Tanzania for two years. After returning to New York and my mother remarried, our home in the Bronx was frequented by many South African political exiles involved in the anti-apartheid movement and the African National Congress, some of whom went on to receive ambassadorial appointments to major western countries. And when there were suspicions that the FBI could be wiretapping the midtown ANC office, they held their meetings at our home in the Bronx. With all that was happening there, at the same time as expanding international awareness of resistance to apartheid, it was a very formative period for both my brother and myself.

PH: You grew up around a lot of actual political activity, then as a young artist you attended educational institutions where the political discussions that took place would be very far afield from any actual action. What kind of experience was that for you?

LAH: Although those institutions were very important for me, I saw myself coming up against them in terms of, let’s say, recognizing certain constraints and exploring how one can transgress those constraints. Even at Cal Arts, which considered itself to be über-progressive, I had a white professor tell me that he couldn’t understand my work because he didn’t grow up in a black community. I imagine that would be unheard of today, but I am from an earlier generation when there were very few African Americans at that art school. I can recall, at the time, watching a 1980s documentary featuring Jean-Michel Basquiat in which one notable New York gallerist actually voiced the suggestion that perhaps African Americans don’t make art that belongs in contemporary galleries. In a lot of ways I actually experienced what that really meant in that particular moment. Although they considered themselves to be progressive, I found myself coming up against and transgressing those institutions and challenging them. It was definitely a rich experience, studying in the Whitney Independent Study Program under people like Mary Kelly and Ron Clark. But if you think about it—given today’s so-called “post-black” generation—how radically things have shifted over the last twenty years.

PH: Even though you grew up in an atmosphere that celebrated blackness, that sought freedom in South Africa and supported positive imaginings of African American culture, there were other factions of those cultural movements that were absolutely homophobic. It strikes me that perhaps your work wrestles with a celebration of your identity as a gay artist, at the same time that you identify as someone who expresses pride in your
Brotherhood, Crossroads and Etcetera #2, 1994
Dye diffusion transfer print (Polaroid), 24 x 20 inches (60.96 x 50.8 cm)
Collection of the Nasher Museum, Durham, North Carolina
identity as African American or even as pan-African. Is that something you’ve wrestled with, especially during the time you spent in Ghana?

LAH: I’ve always been interested in liminality—of being on the border of multiple crossover points, such as race, sexuality, and gender. And how does one engage that elasticity? That’s a concept that I’ve always been interested in, and I think one can make connections with my earlier work. For example, *Brotherhood, Crossroads, and Et cetera* is a collaborative piece with my brother Thomas from 1994, an infamous image with a gun and background colors that allude to the tri-color Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) flag, which dates back to Marcus Garvey in the early twentieth century and came to be associated with the pan-Africanist movement, as well as the Black Liberation movement later in the 1960s. I think one can see a relation between that and my recent work, such as *Deceivers & Money Boys*. For me it’s always been less about celebrating the notion of any type of homogenous queerness or blackness; it’s more about engaging the complexities at the edges of both. In actuality, I’ve never really fit into any particular scene, in a certain sense. I’ve always felt pushed, stretched. In Ghana, where homosexuality is against the law, I was quite well known among the social elite and counted among my friends the son of a former Ghanaian president. What does it mean to be accepted there, to be “out” in Africa, and produce an artwork like *Deceivers & Money Boys*, which addresses symptoms of the current situation there and problematizes it?

PH: *Your Jamestown Prison Erasure Images* are also quite fascinating.

LAH: Those photographs were taken at a seventeenth century fort in Jamestown, Virginia, that was originally used by successive European traders and colonizers to house enslaved Africans, then later used as a prison from the nineteenth century until 2007. Recently, it’s been promoted as a local historical site and tourist destination. Around the time of the fiftieth anniversary marking Ghana’s independence from colonial rule in 2007, I was able to gain access to the site; then over the course of a year, I returned, offering security guards a “dash” to gain entry and photograph what I found there. I was able to witness and document a process of *décollage*, if you will, of remaining images that had been torn from magazines and pasted on the prison walls, which I imagine to be representations of the desires of the prisoners recently incarcerated there. Without the presence of the prisoners to maintain the wall collages, they continued to deteriorate over time. This drew my curiosity, as it represented a very different form of mark-makings, in contrast to work in which I was composing collaged images that would later become photomontages or expansive installations, such as *Blow Up*. Here, it was as if a process of *décollage* was unfolding as a result of the creator’s absence.

PH: Really poignant and incredibly rich, in terms of signifiers; it’s a great use of photography to celebrate the ephemeral.

LAH: While you’ve used the word celebration several times, one thing that we haven’t talked about is a film, or even the idea of trauma. Although there is a celebratory aspect, there’s also the process of working-through trauma and grief, although that may not always be overt or apparent. As I shared with my good friend and colleague Anthony Appiah—given my family background, as well as the particular ideas informing my work as an artist, a gay man, and university professor in a largely Euro-American context—to be well known and accepted in a place like Ghana required quite a shift to compose myself. For instance, upon disembarking to enter Ghana one is confronted by a sign in big red Helvetica lettering at customs indicating that “pedophilia and other sexual deviances are not condoned.” What does it entail to construct myself at that moment as a professor, a seasoned traveler in khakis with ten suitcases and three laptops in tow? It’s a form of drag, of gesture. How does one deal with an existential sense of isolation in the midst of acceptance? *Deceivers & Money Boys* definitely engages that, fueled by a working-through of isolation, of loss and grief. Clearly there’s a working-through of trauma present in *The Watering Hole* as well. I remember that I was with my mother at a Richie Havens concert when a family friend first conveyed to us the breaking story of Jeffrey Dahmer, the guy who was convicted and confessed to a series of killings and dismemberments in which he literally consumed numerous young men, a majority of them African American. At that particular moment, given the often pernicious association of homosexuality with pedophilia, it almost felt like I was actually complicit in the consumption of those men—that’s how damaging stereotypes work. Without my background, in terms of the influences of my grandfather and my stepfather, I certainly wouldn’t be able to make the work that I do through a critical lens, so there is something celebratory there. The flip side of the capacity to absorb so much is that one is constantly having to filter it. The author Truman Capote talked about that, in terms of an artist often being subject to a much greater degree of magnification in sensitivity. In what ways can one take in experience, absorb and process it, to creatively filter it?

PH: When I used the word celebration, I was really trying to suggest the idea of a particular energy. Although you’ve recounted images of trauma associated with being in those in-between situations, exposed to danger, the results always seem very powerful. The word fierce comes to mind for me; it could be a celebratory or a fierce energy. Certainly *The Watering Hole* is a very energized piece.

LAH: I appreciate you saying that, Peter, because when that work was first shown it was considered incendiary. Recently, when Guggenheim curator Jennifer Blessing viewed the piece, she recalled that it almost seemed like too much to take in when she first saw it fourteen years ago. From a pedagogical standpoint, it could be a case study for art students who feel pressured to have their first solo or museum show soon after graduating from an MFA program. Often these things take time, as you know. It’s a good reminder of the fact that if one is led to produce difficult work, it may take time for the public to catch up.
PH: The Watering Hole contains so many contradictory, signatory images, sexualized and seductive images; the handsome Tyson Beckford in a Ralph Lauren ad, Elizabeth Taylor as Cleopatra, Ebony magazine, cannibal jokes, a Bruno-Tyson fight promo, stenciled letters spelling “daddy,” clippings of Jeffrey Dahmer juxtaposed with Babylon—it’s a whirlwind of meanings and points of view. The transformation of the collage into photomontage is very effective, because it puts everything on the same visual plane. It’s a kind of lexicon of so many images, a kaleidoscope.

But there’s also another very, very mysterious piece in the exhibition that I’d like to ask you about: The one with the Deepest Sympathy card in the middle, and the stenciled word “Christian” that wants to become “Christian” somehow—Christian Village. But it’s not “Christian,” and you just can’t help but continue to look at it. I often think the best works of art are those that elude any kind of meaning, any kind of unraveling. This is one of those pieces, where the meaning, the understanding, is just over the horizon.

LAH: I like the slippage that you are referring to. That piece started out as a work on paper. The frenetic quality in the placement of the letters brings me back to where I was when it was actually produced, really capturing that moment for me—it’s all about gesture. Uganda had recently passed draconian laws against gay people, which were instigated by white conservative evangelical Christians who had traveled there from the United States. The same type of interference has resulted in negative social impacts for lesbian and gay people in Ghana, and to a much greater extent in Nigeria. The piece functions as a critique. It alludes to a small suburb in Accra, called Christian Village, where internet scamming is extensive. For me it was all about mark-making, and it just coalesced with the displaced sympathy card, which I had purchased.

PH: It’s almost like finding something in an attic, pieces of a puzzle, but the rest of the puzzle isn’t there. And you’re never quite sure whether you’ll discover what the rest of the puzzle could be. There has to be enough there to keep your mind working on it, although you can’t quite define it. Is it the way the letters are printed? Is it the scale? Is it the formal qualities? Is it the omission of the “R”? Or—one can only begin to imagine—if it is a Christian village, which Christian village, where it is, and how does it relate to the sympathy card? Or even whether deepest sympathy is detached from the idea of mourning or some other kind of sympathy? It’s a great piece.

LAH: I’m excited to hear the way you are describing it, Peter. I like the energy of that piece a lot, and I often wonder if people get it.

PH: You have such an interesting background—your family, the world in which you grew up—this affects who you are as an artist in an important way.

LAH: Absolutely.

PH: I mean, you could say the same about Gerhard Richter, that he grew up in post-war Germany.

LAH: Or Sigmar Polke.

PH: For most of us, as artists, the historical, psychic, and social themes that we’re dealing with become part of it all. In your case, the stories are pretty much celebratory—that word again—or shall I say positive, in terms of coming from a very dynamic family, being involved in a very important political moment. You were sort of launching from there.

LAH: I completely agree. It’s been a great conversation, Peter. I really appreciate it.

PH: I’ve enjoyed it tremendously.

13 August 2014

Peter Halley is an artist working in New York. He was Director of Graduate Studies in Painting at the Yale School of Art from 2002 to 2011. Halley has written on art and culture throughout his career. From 1996 to 2006 he was the publisher of index magazine. He is represented by Gallery Maruani & Mercier.
PLATES
**Untitled (Prelude to The Watering Hole)**

1991-96

Gold leaf on magazine covers, 12 x 9.125 inches each (30.48 x 23.177 cm each). Collection of the artist.

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**The Watering Hole**

1996

Duraflex prints, nine panels, 35.5 inches x 21.75 feet (90.17 cm x 6.629 m). Edition of 6/6.
The Watering Hole II

1996

Duraflex print, 35.5 x 29 inches (90.17 x 73.66 cm). Edition of 6, 2 AP.
The Watering Hole III

1996

Duraflex print, 35.5 x 29 inches (90.17 x 73.66 cm). Edition of 6, 2 AP.
The Watering Hole IV

1996

Duraflex print, 35.5 x 29 inches (90.17 x 73.66 cm). Edition of 6, 2 AP.
**The Watering Hole V**

1996

Duraflex print, 35.5 x 29 inches (90.17 x 73.66 cm). Edition of 6, 2 AP.
The Watering Hole VI

1996

Duraflex print, 35.5 x 29 inches (90.17 x 73.66 cm). Edition of 6, 2 AP.
The Watering Hole VII

1996

Duraflex print, 35.5 x 29 inches (90.17 x 73.66 cm). Edition of 6, 2 AP.
The Watering Hole VIII

1996

Duraflex print, 35.5 x 29 inches (90.17 x 73.66 cm). Edition of 6, 2 AP.
The Watering Hole IX

1996

Duraflex print, 35.5 x 29 inches (90.17 x 73.66 cm). Edition of 6, 2 AP.
A soldier took this picture of Dahmer, on his barracks bed in West Germany in 1979. "Beginning Friday afternoon he would drink, pass out, wake up and start again," said the former Army barracks roommate. "He'd be in his own little world."
Untitled (Oak Bluffs)

1996

Duraflex print, 44 x 48 inches (111.76 x 121.92 cm). Edition of 6, 2 AP.
Untitled (The Devil's Punchbowl)

1996

Duraflex print, 44 x 48 inches (111.76 x 121.92 cm). Edition of 6, 2 AP [in collaboration with Tommy Gear].
Untitled (New York Times Pre-Election Self Portrait Commission)

2000

Archival pigment on Hahnemuhle paper, 44 x 33 inches (111.76 x 83.82 cm). Edition of 10, 2 AP.
**Untitled (Silver Handcuffs)**

2007

Archival pigment on silver foil, 47 x 35 inches (119.38 x 88.9 cm). Edition of 6, 2 AP.
**Untitled (Blue Cell/Blue Christ)**

2010

Two C-prints mounted on Dibond, 41 x 56 inches (104.14 x 142.24 cm). Edition of 10, 2 AP.
**Untitled (Blue Field)**

2010

C-print mounted on Dibond, 32 x 41 inches (104.14 x 142.24 cm). Edition of 10, 2 AP.
Untitled *(Miss Ghana)*

2010

C-print mounted on Dibond, 41.25 x 33.125 inches (104.77 x 84.137 cm). Edition of 10, 2 AP.
Untitled (Erasure)

2010

C-print mounted on Dibond, 14 x 20.625 inches (35.56 x 52.387 cm). Edition of 12, 2 AP.
Untitled (*Letter 7*)

2014

Ink jet on Crepe de Chine, diptych, 42 x 52.5 inches (106.68 x 133.35 cm) each. Edition of 3, 2 AP.
To
From: #
Dat #
Loc: #
Date: 9-17-87

CC: Your photo in Ebony

Sir,

I'm a virgin born, reside in BKlyn all my life bef 1951bs. Very muscular box all my life was adopted at age 6mom. Never seen or heard of my biological parents. The streets were my parents because my adoptive mom deceased in 1982 when I was on my first State b.d. although I came from a dysfunctional household and in just a reformatory slave camps then eventually I graduated to big boy slave trade. I'm still a loving caring honest lonely great person a human being who have been looking for stupidity & ignorance.

So when I came across a handsome successful brown brottha I figured this is who I should look up and should've looked up all my life, maybe I could've met real role models like yourself if you don't mine im soon to be released no more than 3 more yrs. I have over 20yrs on now, my next parole Board date Feb 2008. Anyway I would like you to Teach me everything about the Camera. I'm brownskin ruggedly handsome. God Bless respectfully.
Prince with Red Skulls

2013

Ghanaian funerary fabric and pigment on organza, 60 x 68 inches (152.40 x 172.72 cm).
Deceivers & Money Boys

2013

Pigment print on canvas mounted on aluminum, 82.5 x 60 inches (209.55 x 152.40 cm). Edition of 3, 2 AP.
### Safety Tips

- **Stop**, **Help**, **Run**
- **SOS**
- **Avoid**
- **Stay**

### Background

In Ghana, on-line criminals target men who have sex with men (MSM). They aim to extort money through kidnapping, violence and use of Ghana’s anti-gay colonial law.

As homosexuality is illegal in Ghana, MSM have no protection under the law and reporting a crime can lead to the victim being
*Untitled (looking4dad)*

2014

Archival pigment on Kozo paper, 35 x 45.75 inches (88.9 x 116.20 cm). Edition of 7, 2 AP.
Untitled (colonial law)

2014

Archival pigment on Kozo paper, 35 x 46.75 inches (88.9 x 118.74 cm). Edition of 7, 2 AP.
As homosexuality is illegal in Ghana, MSM's have no protection under the law and reporting a crime can lead to the victim being
Christian Village

2014

Digital ink jet print on watercolor, 26 x 34.5 inches (66.04 x 87.63 cm). Edition of 7, 2 AP.
CHRISTIAN VILLAGE
Untitled (Yellow Grid)

2014

Archival pigment on Kozo paper, 53.25 x 45 inches (135.25 x 114.30 cm). Edition of 3, 2 AP.
Thinks I want to let go of:

- No unsafe sex
- No public sex
- No sex for hire
- No substances
- No porn
- No sex acts by 8/14 Sex club

Various notes:
- More yoga male gay
- A sex deplorble
- In Red by 11pm Three
- A night a woe
- Meeting a couple of sensual baddies
- More Frances
- More gay
Untitled (*Spending Too Much*)

2014

Archival pigment on Kozo paper, 53.25 x 45 inches (135.25 x 114.30 cm). Edition of 3, 2 AP.
on premises
8 away from

then they occur

always above
riding too much
be alone
Untitled (*Easter Break #1*)

2014

Fuji Flex print, 56 x 71.593 inches (142.24 x 181.864 cm). Edition of 3, 2 AP.
OBSESSION

im\u00b4\u00f4\u00e9

Easter Break '89

David, Jonathan, Tony

David, Philip, Birke, Xander

NY
Untitled (Easter Break #2)

2014

Fuji Flex print, 56 x 71.593 inches (142.24 x 181.864 cm). Edition of 3, 2 AP.
Easter Break '89 NY

List of lovers and one night stands with polaroids

3/25/89
**Untitled (Triptych)**

2014

Silkscreen on watercolor paper, three images, each 30 x 42 inches (76.2 x 106.68 cm). Edition of 25, 5 AP, 2 PP.
LYLE ASHTON HARRIS

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS AND PERFORMANCES

2014  Gallery Maruani & Mercier, Brussels, Belgium

2013  Ghana, Kennesaw State University Art Museum, Kennesaw, GA

2011  Lyle Ashton Harris/Self/Portraits, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY

2010  Ghana, CRG Gallery, New York, NY

          Untitled (Black Power), Cokkie Snoei Gallery, Amsterdam, Netherlands

2008  Lyle Ashton Harris: Blow Up, Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Scottsdale, AZ (catalogue)

          Sketches from the Shore, The Neil L. and Angelica Zander Rudenstine Gallery, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

          Adamson Gallery, Washington, DC


2005  Regarding Michael Jackson: Performing Racial, Gender, and Sexual Difference Center Stage, Conference (keynote performance), Yale University, New Haven, CT

2004  Blow Up, Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, IL

          Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris, France

2003  Memoirs of Hadrian, CRG Gallery, New York, NY

2002  New Work, Baldwin Gallery, Aspen, CO

1999  20 x 24, Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT (catalogue)

1998  Distillation, Galerie Analix Forever, Geneva, Switzerland

          Alchemy [collaboration with Thomas Allen Harris], New Langton Arts, San Francisco, CA (catalogue)

          Alchemy [collaboration with Thomas Allen Harris], Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (catalogue)

1997  The White Face Series, Thomas Erben Gallery, New York, NY

1996  The Watering Hole, Jack Tilton Gallery, New York, NY

          Lyle Ashton Harris, Selected Photographs: The First Decade, Centro de Arte Euroamericano, Caracas, Venezuela (catalogue)

1994  The Good Life, Jack Tilton Gallery, New York, NY

1993  Americas, Simon Watson’s Living Room, New York, NY

          Face, New Museum of Contemporary Art, Broadway Window, New York, NY

GALLERY AND MUSEUM GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2014  Rauschenberg: Collecting & Connecting, Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Raleigh-Durham, NC

          Radical Presence, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN

          Fútbol: The Beautiful Game, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA

          Bad Conscience, Metro Pictures, New York, NY


          Lunch with Olympia, Edgewood Gallery, Yale University, New Haven, CT

          Glyphs: Acts of Inscription, Pitzer College Art Galleries, Claremont, CA

2012  The Progress of Love, The Menil Collection, Houston, TX

          Radical Presence, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Houston, TX

          The Bearden Project, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY

2011  Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture, Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, NY (catalogue)

          30 Years of The New York Times Magazine, Eglise Sainte Anne, Arles, France


          Off the Wall, Whitney Museum, New York, NY (catalogue)

          The Global Africa Project, Museum of Arts and Design, New York, NY (catalogue); Traveling 2010 - 2013 to Reginald Lewis Museum, Baltimore, ME; High Museum, Atlanta, GA; Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA; Tacoma Art Museum, Tacoma, WA; Bellevue Art Museum, Bellevue, WA

          Ghana: Who Knows Tomorrow, Dei Centre for the Study of Contemporary African Art, Accra, Ghana (catalogue)

2009  The Summer Show, CRG Gallery, New York, NY

          Kéystol Factory, Grande Halle de la Villette, Paris, France (catalogue)

2008  Expenditure, Busan Biennale 2008, South Korea (catalogue)

          S & M Shrines and Masquerades in Cosmopolitan Times [Co-curator], 80 Washington Square East Galleries, New York University, New York, NY
2007  Think with the Senses, Feel with the Mind, 52nd Venice Biennale, Italy (catalogue)

For the Love of the Game: Race and Sport in America, The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT


Other Families, Palazzo Cavour, Turin, Italy (catalogue)

(Not) Gay Art Now, Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York, NY

Shoot the Family, Cranbrook Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, MI (catalogue); Traveled to Knoxville Museum of Art, Knoxville, TN; Western Gallery, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA; David and Sandra Bakalar Gallery, Massachusetts College of Art, Boston, MA; Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, MO; Columbus College of Art and Design, Columbus, OH.

The Unhomely: Phantom Scenes in Global Society, 2nd International Biennial of Contemporary Art of Seville, Spain (catalogue)

2005  African Queen, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY

Double Consciousness: Black Conceptual Art Since 1970, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX (catalogue)

Earth and Memory: African and African American Photography, Elizabeth Stone Harper Gallery, Presbyterian College, Clinton, SC

Identità & Nomadismo, Palazzo delle Papesse, Centro Arte Contemporanea, Siena, Italy (catalogue)

Male Desire Two, Mary Ryan Gallery, New York, NY

2004  Disparities and Deformations: Our Grotesque, SITE Santa Fe's Fifth International Biennial, Santa Fe, NM (catalogue)

Male Body Image, Storrs Gallery, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT

Neoqueer, Center on Contemporary Art, Seattle, WA

The Muse, Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects, New York, NY

2003  African American Artists in Los Angeles - A Survey Exhibition: Fade (1990-2003), Luckman Gallery, California State University Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA

The Alumni Show, Zilkha Gallery, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT

American Tableaux: Many Voices, Many Stories, Miami Art Museum, Miami, FL

Love Supreme, La Criée Centre d’Art Contemporain, Rennes, France (catalogue)

2002  Goddess, Galerie Lelong, New York, NY

Typical Men: Recent Photography of the Male Body by Men, Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow, Scotland


Rome Prize Fellows Show, The American Academy in Rome, Rome, Italy

2000  Faith, The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT

Man & Space, Gwangju Biennale, South Korea (catalogue)

Masterminds of Mode, International Fashion Festival, Mitsukoshi Nihonbashi, Tokyo, Japan (catalogue); Traveled to Kobe Fashion Museum, Kobe, Japan; Mitsubishi-Jisho Atrium, Fukuoka, Japan

1999  Ghost in the Shell: Photography and the Human Soul, 1850 – 2000, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA (catalogue)

Les Mondes du Sida: Entre Resignation et Espoir, Centre d’Art Contemporain, Geneva, Switzerland (catalogue); Traveled to Dialogai, Geneva, Switzerland; Centro d’Arte Contemporanea, Bellinzona, Switzerland

Postcards from Black America, De Beyerd Center of Contemporary Art, Brodo, Netherlands (catalogue)

1998  Diana.98, Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich, Switzerland

816, Galerie Analix B, Paris, France

Black Nudes: New Identities, Gay Games, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Milenniecento, Galerie Analix B Polla & C Cargnel, Paris, France

Welcome, Città Sant’Angelo, Pescara, Italy

1997  Adrift, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY (catalogue)

Bang! The Gun as Image, Museum of Fine Arts, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL

Face & Figure: Contemporary Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA
1997  |  *Rose is a Rose is a Rose: Gender Performance in Photography*, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY (catalogue); Traveled to The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA

|  |  *Scene of the Crime*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA (catalogue)

|  |  *Selections from the Audrey & Sydney Irmas Collection of Photographic Self Portraits: 1940-96*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA

|  |  *This End Up: Selections from the collection of Robert J. Shiffler*, Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, Cleveland, OH

1996  |  *Hotter than July*, Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

|  |  *Interzones*, Kunstforeningen, Copenhagen, Denmark Traveled to Konstmuseum, Uppsala, Sweden

|  |  *Persona*, Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, Chicago, IL (catalogue)

|  |  *Portraits*, James Graham and Sons, New York, NY

|  |  *The Paranoid Machine*, Shoshana Wayne Gallery, Santa Monica, CA

1995  |  *Desire - Borealis 7*, Helsinki City Museum and The Nordic Arts Centre, Helsinki, Finland (catalogue); Traveled to Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark

|  |  *Face Value: American Portraits*, The Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, NY (catalogue); Traveled to Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH; Tampa Museum of Art, Tampa, FL

|  |  *Hard Comforts*, Zilka Gallery, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT

|  |  *Human/Nature*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, NY

|  |  *In a Different Light*, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, CA (catalogue)


|  |  *Masculine Masquerade*, List Visual Arts Center, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA (catalogue)

|  |  *Mirror: Enigmas of Race, Difference, and Desire*, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, UK (catalogue)

|  |  *Narcissistic Disturbance*, Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, CA (catalogue)

|  |  *Pervert*, University of California Irvine Art Gallery, Irvine, CA (catalogue)

|  |  *Picture Thoughts*, Ambrosino Gallery, Miami, FL

|  |  *PLA(m) (Photography Los Angeles Now)*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA

|  |  *Traces: The Body in Contemporary Photography*, Bronx Museum of Art, Bronx, NY


|  |  *Sincerity and Other Peccadilloes, LAX/’94*, The Los Angeles Exhibition Gallery at Barnsdall Art Park, Los Angeles, CA (catalogue)

|  |  *Telling . . . Stories*, Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago, IL

1993  |  *42nd Street Art Project: Victory Parade*, Times Square, New York, NY

|  |  *Ciphers of Identity*, University of Maryland, Baltimore, ME (catalogue); Traveled to Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, NY; University of South Florida Contemporary Art Museum, Tampa, FL; Fine Arts Gallery, University of California, Irvine, CA; Contemporary Art Center, New Orleans, LA; Woodruff Art Center, Atlanta College of Art, GA; Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, Kansas City, MO

|  |  *Dress Codes*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA (video catalogue)

|  |  *Identifications and Desires*, Real Art Ways, Hartford, CT

|  |  *In Out of the Cold*, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA

|  |  *Markets of Resistance*, White Columns, New York, NY

1992  |  *Ainsi font font font*, Galerie Rizzo, Paris, France

|  |  *Body Politic*, Santa Monica Museum of Art, Santa Monica, CA

|  |  *Fever*, Exit Art, New York, NY

|  |  *In This World: Robert Flack, Lyle Ashton Harris, Denise Lessard*, Contemporary Art Gallery Vancouver, Canada (catalogue)

|  |  *Acquired Visions: Seeing Ourselves Through AIDS*, Studio Museum in Harlem, NY

|  |  *Disputed Identities*, Camerawork, San Francisco, CA; Traveled to Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, LA

|  |  *Scharwe Kunst: Konzepte zu Politik und Identität*, NGBK (Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst), Berlin, Germany (catalogue)

|  |  *Situation*, New Langston Arts, San Francisco, CA

|  |  *Someone/Somebody*, Meyers/Bloom Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

1990  |  *AutoPortraits*, Camerawork, London, UK
PUBLIC COLLECTIONS
Davison Art Center, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT
Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY
JPMorgan Chase Art Collection, New York, NY
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA
Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León, León, Spain
Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA
Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA
Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA
Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Raleigh-Durham, NC
Pérez Art Museum, Miami, FL
Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, NJ
The Progressive Corporation, Mayfield Village, OH
The Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Scottsdale, AZ
The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN
The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

PROFESSIONAL AND ACADEMIC AFFILIATIONS
2014 Trustee, American Academy in Rome, Italy
2013-present Associate Professor, Department of Art and Art Professions, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, New York University, New York, NY
2009-present Board Member, Art in Social Structures (AISS), Accra, Ghana
2009-2012 Director, Dei Centre for the Study of Contemporary African Art, Accra, Ghana
2009 Co-organizer, “Journalist Art Criticism Workshop,” Art in Social Structures (AISS), Accra, Ghana
2007 Juror, Africa Pavilion, 52nd Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy
2006-2012 Assistant Professor (Joint Appointment), Department of Art and Art Professions, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, and Office of Global Education Programs, New York University, New York, NY and Accra, Ghana
2005 Adjunct Professor, Office of Global Education Programs, New York University, New York, New York and Accra, Ghana
2004 Adjunct Professor, International Center of Photography/Bard College, New York, NY
2000 Adjunct Professor, Cooper Union School of Art, New York, NY
2000 Adjunct Professor, Department of Art, School of Art and Architecture, University of California, Los Angeles, CA
2000 Adjunct Professor, School of Art, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA
1998-2005 Adjunct Professor, Department of Art and Art Professions, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, New York University, New York, NY
1997 Adjunct Professor, Fine Arts Department, Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA
1996 Adjunct Professor, School of Art, University of California, San Diego, CA
1996 Guest Artist/Lecturer, Royal College, Stockholm, Sweden
1995 Arts Consultant, Banff Centre for the Arts, Alberta, Canada
1994 Guest Panelist, “Mirage,” Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), London, UK
1992 Lecturer, School of Fine Arts, Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, CA
1992 Guest Artist/Lecturer, “Interrogating Difference,” Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada

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LYLE ASHTON HARRIS

21 October - 29 November 2014

Exhibition and Catalogue

Gallery Maruani & Mercier

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Lyle Ashton Harris interviewed by Peter Halley
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