

Growing up as a closeted queer teen in the Post-AIDS epidemic and Pre-Internet era of the 1990's, I often felt powerless inside of my own body, held back by my own internal restraint and the constraints enforced by societal norms for men. Within gay culture, and more and more mainstream culture too, having a perfectly trim body that is at once strong, while also impossibly perfect and eternally young sets the perfect stage for body dysmorphia, a disconnect between the real and imagined self. In that pre-internet era, printed materials such as magazines, postcards and other such ephemera were often utilized as a means of communicating and disseminating queer ideology and desire that ran contrary to the mainstream heteronormative ideal.

Understanding for myself what it means to be man, and a gay man inside of that space, has been the crux of my artistic work for the last few years. Looking at both the interior and exterior factors that influence and affect identity formation have been key to my own understanding. Examining the self-imposed internal restraints and social external constraints that influenced those facets during my formative years has been helpful in understanding how I interpret my own gender and sexuality today. The book and box forms I have been experimenting with reference that sense of containment, while the photographs offer a counterpoint to that.

At the core of my current practice are photographs, sculptures and moving images that feature male presenting weightlifters. Solicited online, these individuals were photographed against a draped backdrop in my studio, sometimes with gym props or engaged in exercise. As such the works nod towards the tropes of physique photography, a genre that depicted semi-nude, muscular men popular from the 1900s through the 1960s. These images were often disseminated as postcards or magazines. Where physique photography presented models as idealized types, I attempt take these idealized bodies and present them as people. I don't filter according to age, race, or sexuality, what I am looking for is how they choose to present themselves to me in the studio environment. What I get is less a meditation on 'toxic masculinity,' than individuals projecting their gendered identity with a degree of vulnerability and openness. Using self-portrait, I position myself in this project as I work through my own issues and attempt to make myself more vulnerable and open to changing my own views.

My current work attempts to provide a space for reflection and interiority often denied men, who often are told by society to be stoic, reserved and temper their emotions. The intimacy of the book and box forms provide a repository for those often-denied feelings and emotions. The tactile and playful forms allow for a sense of touch, play, discovery.