

Prospectus and Call For Entries
Visibilities: The Art of Negotiating Identity
October 2-31, 2009

The Durbin Gallery of Birmingham-Southern College invites entries for an invitational exhibition in October 2009 that examines the complex social, political, and sexual issues surrounding identity and visibility in the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and queer community. Meant to coincide with National Coming Out Day and Gay History Month, the exhibition seeks to encourage dialogue on the constantly evolving definition of GLBTQ people, the very validity of a unique identity in modern times, and the ways in which contemporary visual artists negotiate the varied and shifting currents of sexual identity, visibility, and invisibility in their work.

Although the representation of the GLBTQ people is more prevalent than ever in contemporary culture, those depictions are often still based on inaccurate stereotypes or are at best ambiguous. While right-wing evangelists persist in vilifying members of this community, the increased acceptance of other religious institutions has led to a new spiritually-enriched identity for some. Biologists continue to pursue studies that point to a genetic or biological basis for sexual orientation that will surely change the way the community is viewed by others and how it sees itself. Furthermore, the relevance of traditional LGBTQ identity has come into question given the recent blurring of boundaries between gay and straight, male and female, as seen in the emergence of the modern “metrosexual,” and among the youngest generation of the community, which in some cases has opted to create completely new defining categories free of the baggage that accompanies age-old labels. The issue of visibility itself has become politically contentious in regards to the fight for civil rights. Some see unified activism as the only means to progress, while others find a more localized visibility, that of living an open but integrated life in their broader communities, as equally important. Even the concept of gay “ghettos,” those traditionally protective and nurturing havens in large urban centers, have been seen anew as irrelevant or even detrimental to the cause.

Contemporary art is increasingly concerned with issues of gender and sexuality, and GLBTQ artists often speak to their identity through visual expression, though some do not. What are the dynamics behind the creation of “queer” identity in visual culture and how do artists establish such an identity in their work given current debates about GLBTQ identity and visibility?

The exhibition will be juried and curated by two BSC faculty, one art historian and one studio artist. Approximately eight artists will be invited to participate with two-three works each. All media will be considered and some monies may be available to assist with shipping charges. Submissions for consideration are due May 1, 2009. Please forward name, mailing and email address, 10-20 digital images clearly labeled, and a brief artist statement relative to the exhibition’s theme to Dr. Tim Smith, Department of Art and Art History, Birmingham-Southern College, 900 Arkadelphia Road, Box 549021, Birmingham, Alabama, 35254. Submission may also be made by email to tsmith@bsc.edu; (205) 226-7875. Please include a SASE for any submission that needs to be returned.