

**TEACHER'S GUIDE TO**

**JOHN  
WATERS**  
**INDECENT EXPOSURE**

**BALTIMORE  
MUSEUM OF  
ART BMA**



# DEAR TEACHERS,

This resource is designed to introduce you and your students to *John Waters: Indecent Exposure*, the first retrospective of John Waters's visual arts career in his hometown of Baltimore.

**NOTE: The content and themes of John Waters's work may not be appropriate for young students. This guide has been written with high school teachers and their students in mind.**

## LESSONS IN THIS RESOURCE CONTAIN THE FOLLOWING:

- **CLOSE LOOKING:** An exploration of the artworks' visual elements.
- **ART IN CONTEXT:** Information about multiple contexts (historical, art historical, social, cultural, etc.) in which the artworks were made.
- **CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES:** Recommended for high school students; activities lead students in close looking and engage them in important concepts related to the artworks. Each activity is tied to relevant standards from the National Core Arts Standards—Creating, Presenting, Responding, and Connecting.

## LESSONS SUPPORT THE FOLLOWING 21ST CENTURY SKILLS:

- Communication and Collaboration
- Creativity and Innovation
- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- Flexibility and Adaptability
- Initiative and Self-Direction
- Leadership and Responsibility
- Productivity and Accountability
- Social and Cross-Cultural Skills

Please note that the *John Waters: Indecent Exposure* exhibition is open through **January 6, 2019**. Tours of the exhibition for high school students may be scheduled by completing a tour request form found at [www.artbma.org/educators/index.html](http://www.artbma.org/educators/index.html).

We hope this guide provides inspiration and helpful strategies to engage you and your students with the work of John Waters.

**SUZY WOLFFE**



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Special thanks to John Waters and Kristen Hileman, Senior Curator and Department Head of Contemporary Art, for their guidance. Additional thanks to Elizabeth Benskin, Director of School and Teacher Programs, and Jennifer Nelson, Publications Editor, for their assistance.

The *John Waters: Indecent Exposure* exhibition has been generously supported by The Alvin and Fanny B. Thalheimer Foundation, Suzanne F. Cohen, Robert E. Meyerhoff and Rheda Becker, Clair Zamoiski Segal, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Constance R. Caplan, Agnes Gund, Martha and Tad Glenn, Amy and Marc Meadows, The Pearlstone Family Fund, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York, and Sherry and Stuart Christhilf.

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# WHO IS JOHN WATERS?



## CLOSE LOOKING

### JOHN JR.

Although *John Jr.* appears to be a framed pastel drawing of John Waters as a young boy, it is not. It is a photograph taken in 2009 of both the original frame and the pastel drawing commissioned years prior by his parents. Close looking at the photograph reveals a humorous addition. Waters's signature pencil-thin mustache was drawn on the image. A photo was taken of the image and its original frame, and that image was then framed with a white mat and brown wooden frame that closely resembles the original frame.

**"HAVING [A] CREATIVE LITTLE SAFE AREA IN MY CHILDHOOD HOME GAVE ME THE CONFIDENCE TO GROW INTO LATER NEUROTIC MATURITY AND HAPPINESS."**<sup>1</sup>



John Waters was not the first artist to humorously subvert an image by adding facial hair. In 1919 artist Marcel Duchamp drew a mustache and beard on an inexpensive postcard reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and named it *L.H.O.O.Q.* The letters, said in French, create a vulgar expression meaning, "She is hot in the ass."

<sup>1</sup> John Waters, "My Childhood Home: A Paean to the Strange Suburbs of Baltimore," [www.laphamsquarterly.org/my-childhood-home](http://www.laphamsquarterly.org/my-childhood-home)

<sup>2</sup> John Waters, interviewed by Sandy Goldberg (sg scripts) at WYPR studios, Baltimore, MD, April 26, 2018.

## WHO IS JOHN WATERS?



### ZAPRUDER

The black-and-white images of the *Zapruder* series look like film stills from the amateur camera footage shot in Dallas by Abraham Zapruder, a bystander who unwittingly filmed the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Jr. But they are not from Zapruder's footage. Instead, the images are taken from a reenactment of the assassination that was included in Waters's film, *Eat Your Makeup*, made in 1968, five years after the real event. Waters revisited *Eat Your Makeup* in 1995 by playing the VHS tape on TV and shooting still photographs of the film. These images, edited and placed in sequence, form the artwork Waters named *Zapruder*, after the man who filmed the motorcade. Two of the images are pictured here. Waters commented that shooting photos off the TV screen created a grainy effect that looked weirdly similar to the original assassination footage shot in Dallas.<sup>2</sup>

**PICTURED LEFT:** John Waters. *John Jr.* 2009. Chromogenic print in artist's frame. Image: 32 1/2 x 26 in. (82.5 x 66 cm.) Framed: 40 x 34 in. (101.6 x 86.4 cm.) The Baltimore Museum of Art, Gift of Robert E. Meyerhoff and Rheda Becker, BMA 2010.13. © John Waters, Courtesy Marianne Boesky Gallery; **PICTURED CENTER:** Marcel Duchamp. *L.H.O.O.Q., From or by Marcel Duchamp or Rose Sélavy (Box in a Valise) (de ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rose Sélavy (Boîte-en-Valise))*. 1935-1941 (contents); 1938 (collotype); deluxe edition, Series A, 1943. Made in Paris, France, and made in New York, New York, United States. Brown leather valise with handle containing sixty-nine miniature replicas and printed reproductions and one original, *Virgin (No. 2)*, 1938, hand-colored collotype. Valise (closed): 16 x 14 3/4 x 4 1/4 inches (40.6 x 37.5 x 10.8 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art: The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, 1950, 1950-134-934 © Association Marcel Duchamp / ADAGP, Paris / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York 2018; **PICTURED ABOVE:** John Waters. *Zapruder*. 1995. Twenty-four chromogenic prints in two sections. Each image: 3 1/2 x 5 in. (8.9 x 12.7 cm.) First section, framed: 7 1/8 x 86 1/2 in. (2.9 x 219.7 cm.) Second section, framed: 7 1/8 x 36 3/8 in. (18.1 x 92.4 cm.) Estate of Jean Stein. © John Waters, Courtesy Marianne Boesky Gallery

### ART IN CONTEXT

In the movie *Eat Your Makeup*, some scenes featured Waters's friend Glenn Milstead playing the role of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy. Milstead and other actor friends filmed the assassination scenes one Sunday morning in front of Waters's home. Many people found the idea of recreating the event tasteless and shocking coming only five years after the President's death. Yet shock value delights Waters, who privileges "the idea of getting people's attention by saying something horrifying."<sup>3</sup>

Waters was born in Baltimore and raised in a Roman-Catholic, middle-class home that was outwardly conventional, but his love of spectacle and things irreverent and transgressive began at a young age. His parents, who both embraced and questioned his eccentricities, built a small stage outside his bedroom where he acted, danced, and created over-the-top personas using cast-off clothes from his mother's friends.<sup>4</sup>

At the age of ten, Waters, already a fan of pop culture and star power, fell in love with Elvis when he saw the singer's gyrations on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. At that moment, Waters said, he knew he was gay and relished imitating Elvis's performances on his homemade stage.<sup>5</sup> He also emulated Little Richard's extravagant displays and, later in his 20s, copied the performer's iconic mustache because, Waters says, "I just thought he was so alarming. . . He scared my parents."<sup>6</sup>

Young Waters's taste for shock value and dark humor was evident early when he built "John Waters's Horror House" in his parents' garage. While the space had the requisite rubber body parts covered in fake blood, hanging witches, dry ice, and skeletons illuminated by flashlights, this was no ordinary backyard haunted house. To make the spectacle more dangerous and terrifying, Waters shot powder from a fire extinguisher and installed trip wires so that neighborhood children fell down as they attempted to walk around in the dark.

Waters calls his family home his "launching pad to creative filth" and credits his parents for allowing him to turn the house into "the demented childhood amusement park that lived inside [his] brain."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Wolfgang Tillmans in Conversation with John Waters," in *Indecent Exposure*, ed. Kristen Hileman. (Baltimore: The Baltimore Museum of Art, 2018), 162.

<sup>4</sup> Waters, "My Childhood Home: A Paean to the Strange Suburbs of Baltimore," [www.laphamsquarterly.org/my-childhood-home](http://www.laphamsquarterly.org/my-childhood-home)

<sup>5</sup> Waters, "My Childhood Home: A Paean to the Strange Suburbs of Baltimore," [www.laphamsquarterly.org/my-childhood-home](http://www.laphamsquarterly.org/my-childhood-home)

<sup>6</sup> Kirsten Fawcett, "15 Filthy Facts About John Waters," <http://mentalfloss.com/article/70941/15-filthy-facts-about-john-waters>

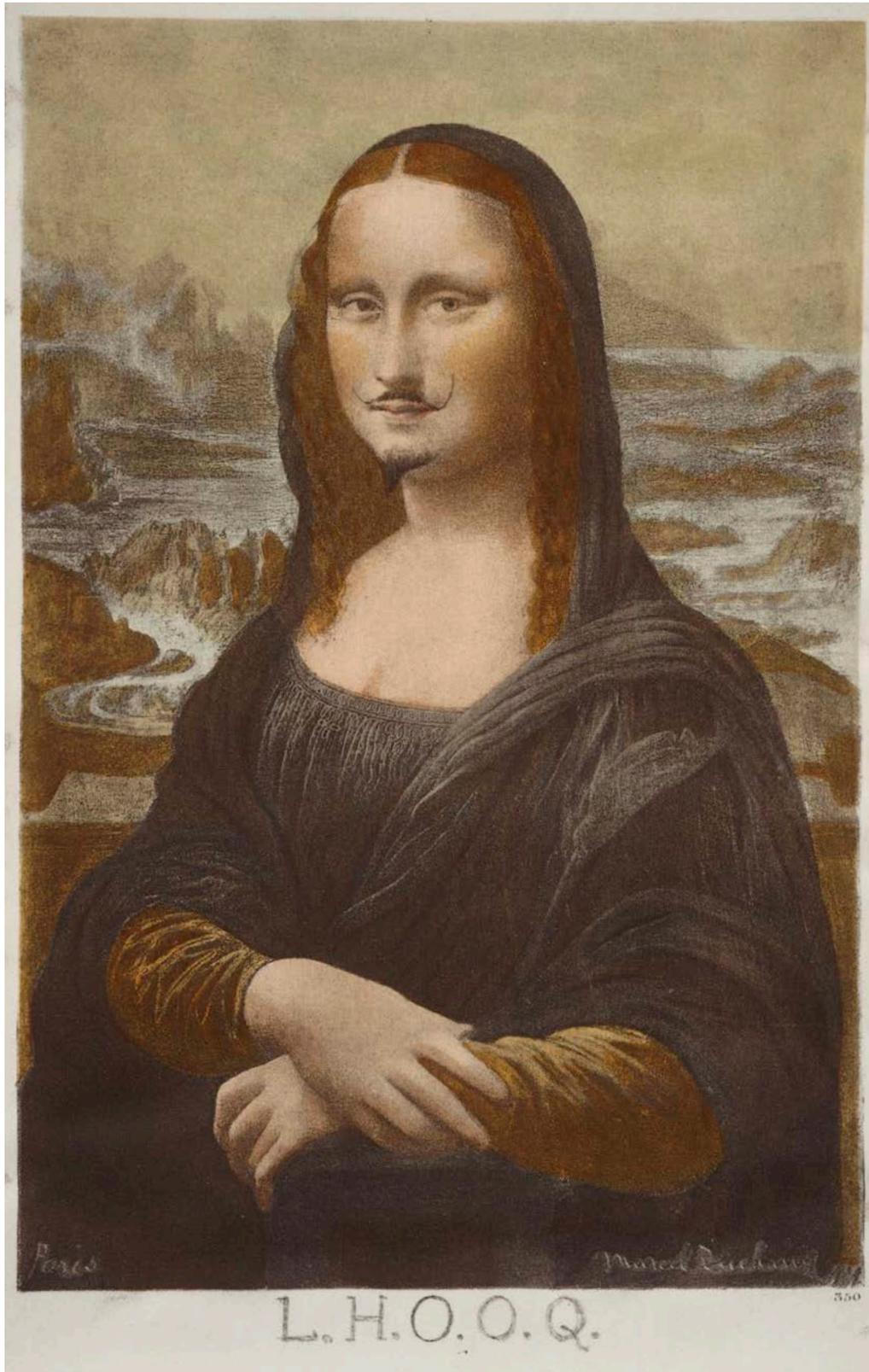
<sup>7</sup> Waters, "My Childhood Home: A Paean to the Strange Suburbs of Baltimore," [www.laphamsquarterly.org/my-childhood-home](http://www.laphamsquarterly.org/my-childhood-home)

## WHO IS JOHN WATERS?



John Waters. *John Jr.* 2009. Chromogenic print in artist's frame. Image: 32 1/2 x 26 in. (82.5 x 66 cm.) Framed: 40 x 34 in. (101.6 x 86.4 cm.) The Baltimore Museum of Art, Gift of Robert E. Meyerhoff and Rheda Becker, BMA 2010.13.  
© John Waters, Courtesy Marianne Boesky Gallery

## WHO IS JOHN WATERS?



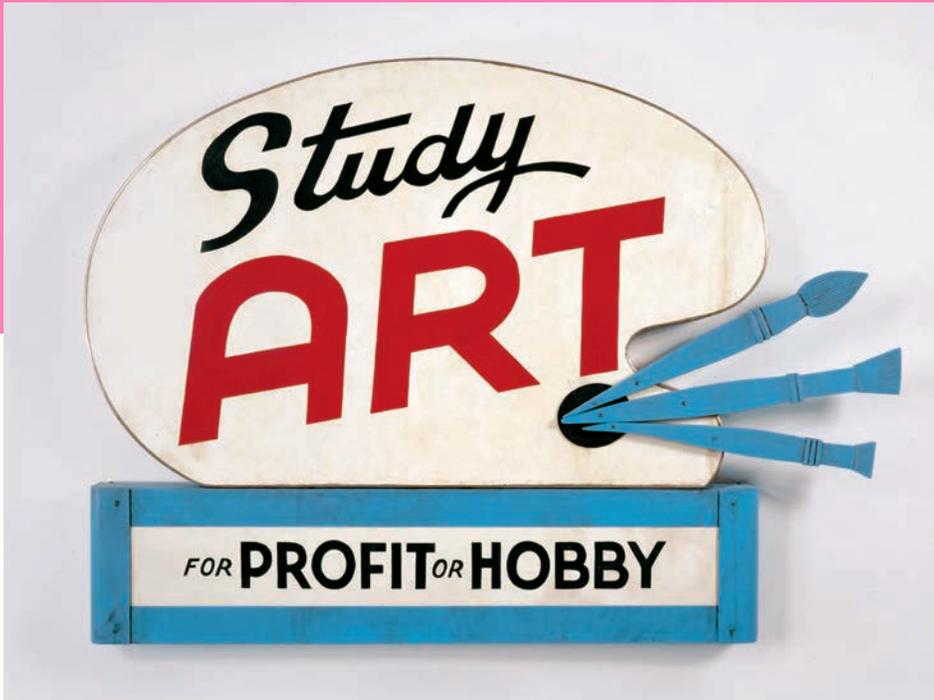
Marcel Duchamp. *L.H.O.O.Q.*, *From or by Marcel Duchamp or Rose Sélavy (Box in a Valise) (de ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rose Sélavy (Boîte-en-Valise))*. 1935-1941 (contents); 1938 (collotype); deluxe edition, Series A, 1943. Made in Paris, France, and made in New York, New York, United States. Brown leather valise with handle containing sixty-nine miniature replicas and printed reproductions and one original, *Virgin (No. 2)*, 1938, hand-colored collotype. Valise (closed): 16 x 14 3/4 x 4 1/4 inches (40.6 x 37.5 x 10.8 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art: The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, 1950, 1950-134-934 © Association Marcel Duchamp / ADAGP, Paris / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York 2018

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John Waters. *Zapruder*. 1995. Twenty-four chromogenic prints in two sections. Each image: 3 1/2 × 5 in. (8.9 × 12.7 cm.) First section, framed: 7 1/8 × 86 1/2 in. (2.9 × 219.7 cm.) Second section, framed: 7 1/8 × 36 3/8 in. (18.1 × 92.4 cm.) Estate of Jean Stein. © John Waters, Courtesy Marianne Boesky Gallery

# THE BALTIMORE EFFECT



## CLOSE LOOKING

### STUDY ART SIGN (FOR PROFIT OR HOBBY)

In 2007, Waters created a series of signs made to look grimy from pollution and age. Each sign has an advertising slogan: “Study Art for Fun or Fame”, for “Prestige or Spite”, and for “Pride or Power”. In making the series, Waters appropriated the style of the storefront sign that hung for more than thirty years outside Le Millet Art School, in the Charles Village neighborhood of Baltimore. The original sign resembles a palette with brushes and reads, “Study Art for Profit or Hobby.” The school, which opened in 1947 and closed in the early 1980s, taught fine and commercial art.

**“[BALTIMORE] IS MY MAIN PLACE. IT’S CERTAINLY MY HOME. WHENEVER I HAVE TO THINK OF AN IDEA, I COME HERE.”<sup>8</sup>**



The original “Study Art” sign that used to hang outside Le Millet Art School at St. Paul and 25th Streets in Baltimore.

**“I’VE GOT AN APARTMENT IN SAN FRANCISCO AND ONE IN NEW YORK, BUT IF I HAD TO PICK ONE PLACE TO LIVE IT WOULD DEFINITELY BE BALTIMORE. . . NOBODY CARES WHAT I DO. THEY KNOW WHO I AM BUT I CAN DO ANYTHING. I CAN BE A VOYEUR STILL. I CAN GO OUT AND WATCH PEOPLE.”<sup>9</sup>**

PICTURED ABOVE: John Waters. *Study Art Sign (For Profit or Hobby)*. 2007. Acrylic and urethane on wood and aluminum. 42 × 56 × 4 1/2 in. (106.7 × 142.2 × 11.4 cm.) Kunsthhaus Zürich, Gift of Matthias Brunner. © John Waters, Courtesy Marianne Boesky Gallery; PICTURED RIGHT: Study Art sign for Le Millet Art School, Baltimore. Photo by Norman James, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> John Lewis, “John Waters Inc.” [www.baltimoremagazine.com/2007/6/1/john-waters-inc](http://www.baltimoremagazine.com/2007/6/1/john-waters-inc)

<sup>9</sup> Will Coldwell, “John Waters on Baltimore,” <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2014/nov/28/john-waters-baltimore-us-way-i-see-it>



**VERSAILLES**

Juxtaposed in this artwork are two images of Versailles: on the right, a TV-screenshot taken with a film camera of the Marble Court of the Palace of Versailles, the opulent home outside Paris where 17th- and 18th-century French monarchs resided; on the left, the entrance sign to a nondescript apartment complex built in the early 1970s just north of Baltimore. The irony is that there is absolutely nothing these buildings have in common but their name—and a slight nod by the Baltimore builders to François Mansart, the 17th-century French architect who invented the four-sided roof seen on the Palais de Versailles. The Baltimore builders tried unsuccessfully to imitate a Mansart roof—using inexpensive asphalt shingles. Waters plays the Versailles contrast to humorous effect by visually calling out the Baltimore Versailles as a sad poseur.

**“REAL PEOPLE LIVE [IN BALTIMORE]. . . MANY OF MY FRIENDS HERE ARE NOT IN THE ARTS, WHICH I FIND REFRESHING. HOW ARE YOU EVER GOING TO WRITE ABOUT THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE OR MAKE FILMS OR DO ANYTHING IF YOU ONLY KNOW INSIDERS IN THE ARTS?”<sup>10</sup>**



“There Is No City More Divine Than Baltimore” 2011 Ad Campaign for *Visit Baltimore* (Baltimore.org)

**PICTURED ABOVE:** John Waters. *Versailles*. 2009. Two chromogenic prints. Each image: 8 × 10 in. (20.3 × 25.4 cm.) Overall framed: 14 1/2 × 26 1/2 in. (36.8 × 67.3 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York. © John Waters; **PICTURED RIGHT:** Visit Baltimore. “There Is No City More Divine Than Baltimore” advertisement. 2011. Sculpture of Divine by Andrew Logan, Collection of the American Visionary Art Museum. Used with permission #MyBmore

<sup>10</sup> “Wolfgang Tillmans in Conversation with John Waters,” 162.

## ART IN CONTEXT

It struck Waters, who passed the Millet Art School sign often, that the sentiment of becoming an artist “for profit or hobby” was the most inappropriate thing one could say in the art world.<sup>11</sup> For many, it is considered in bad taste for artists to declare that their aim is to make a profit. And, in fact, few artists do. The satisfaction, ideally, is supposed to be in the creation of art. The juxtaposition of the word “hobby” with “profit” cheapens the craft as well. A hobbyist stereotypically paints bad landscapes and paint-by-number canvases as a pastime. A serious artist does not want to be associated with a weekend dabbler. By putting forward superficial motivations for pursuing art, the *Study Art* series raises an important question about the best reasons for devoting one’s life to creative endeavors.

Baltimore’s people and neighborhoods have greatly influenced Waters, and the eccentric city most certainly serves as a muse. Some artworks, such as the *Study Art* series, which Walters calls “definitely a Baltimore piece,” are directly inspired by the city.<sup>12</sup> All of his films were set among the Formstone houses, blue-collar biker bars, laundromats, rented halls, drive-ins, and public high schools in various Baltimore neighborhoods. One of his greatest inspirations, Glenn Milstead, who sometimes acted as the drag queen Divine, grew up near Waters and appeared in six of his films, including *Pink Flamingos*. The film, featuring a scene of Divine eating dog feces, was labeled in a 1974 *Variety* magazine article, “One of the most vile, stupid, and repulsive films ever made.” Waters uses his brand of transgression, irony, and humor in his films and artwork to critique mainstream taste. His unique style has been called “the Baltimore aesthetic.”<sup>13</sup> Loyal to his home, few artists are more closely associated with a city than Waters is to Baltimore.



### KIDDIE FLAMINGOS, 2014

Featured in the BMA exhibition, the video piece *Kiddie Flamingos* (2014) is a rethinking of his film *Pink Flamingos* (1972), both of which were shot in Baltimore. He took the story line of *Pink Flamingos*, “the dirtiest movie [he] ever made, removed all the ‘bad stuff,’ and rewrote it for children.”<sup>14</sup> He then gave each child actor one identifying prop from a character in *Pink Flamingos*, and they all did a table reading with Waters as the narrator. Waters calls *Kiddie Flamingos* “playful anarchy” and “a battle about being gross,” just as its predecessor was.<sup>15</sup> It features children and the “qualities they have—lack of inhibition and freedom of expression—that are important to staying creative and critical as adults.”<sup>16</sup>

**PICTURED ABOVE:** John Waters. *Kiddie Flamingos*. 2014. Blu-ray video with two channel audio. 74 min. loop. The Baltimore Museum of Art, Dr. Max Stern Trust Fund; gift of the Friends of Modern and Contemporary Art; Alice and Franklin Cooley Fund; and purchased as the gift of an Anonymous Donor, BMA 2015.85. © John Waters, Courtesy Marianne Boesky Gallery

<sup>11</sup> John Waters, interviewed by Sandy Goldberg (sg scripts) at WYPR studios, Baltimore, MD, April 26, 2018.

<sup>12</sup> John Waters, interviewed by Sandy Goldberg (sg scripts) at WYPR studios, Baltimore, MD, April 26, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Gus Van Sant, “Pink Flamingos” [review], *The Advocate*, April 15, 1997, 40.

<sup>14</sup> John Waters, interviewed by Sandy Goldberg (sg scripts) at WYPR studios, Baltimore, MD, April 26, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> John Waters, interviewed by Sandy Goldberg (sg scripts) at WYPR studios, Baltimore, MD, April 26, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Note from Kristen Hileman, Senior Curator and Department Head of Contemporary Art, The Baltimore Museum of Art.

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

### CREATING, PRESENTING, RESPONDING, AND CONNECTING THROUGH NATIONAL CORE ART STANDARDS.

This activity is appropriate for students in grades 9-12 and may be adapted based on grade level.

In the *Study Art* series and *Versailles*, Waters juxtaposes words and images to humorous and ironic effect. In this exercise, students will pair two words, two images, or one of each to create artworks that are ironic—i.e., they deliberately state the opposite of the truth. The intentional positioning of words/images beside each other is meant to draw comparisons and contrasts from viewers. To begin, share examples of juxtapositions with the class. These might include a fast-food sign contrasted with a sign warning about the dangers of obesity, or place names that are the same but the locations are markedly different, such as Beverly Hills, CA, and Beverly Hills, TX, or Moscow, Russia, and Moscow, KS.

Invite the class to brainstorm additional ideas for juxtapositions to check for understanding.

Ask students to cut from magazines or search online and print contrasting words and images that, when paired, create humor or irony. Students should glue their two selections on paper.

Display the pairings and invite each student to discuss the humor in his or her artwork and how irony was created through comparison and contrast. Does his or her artwork connect to or comment on a contemporary issue? If so, how?

### SUPPLIES NEEDED:

- MAGAZINES AND SCISSORS OR INTERNET ACCESS AND PRINTER
- GLUE STICKS
- PENS/PENCILS
- PAPER



John Waters. *Study Art Sign (For Profit or Hobby)*. 2007. Acrylic and urethane on wood and aluminum. 42 × 56 × 4 1/2 in. (106.7 × 142.2 × 11.4 cm.) Kunsthaus Zürich, Gift of Matthias Brunner. © John Waters, Courtesy Marianne Boesky Gallery



Study Art sign for Le Millet Art School, Baltimore. Photo by Norman James, 1994.

## THE BALTIMORE EFFECT



John Waters. *Versailles*. 2009. Two chromogenic prints. Each image: 8 × 10 in. (20.3 × 25.4 cm.) Overall framed: 14 1/2 × 26 1/2 in. (36.8 × 67.3 cm.) Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York. © John Waters



**There is no city more  
Divine than Baltimore.**

Kinda kitschy. Kinda funky. Definitely quirky. And always ready to welcome you with open arms. That's Baltimore, the town that inspires John Waters—and will absolutely captivate you. Start with the American Visionary Art Museum, where you can gaze upon a larger-than-life statue of Divine, starlet of *Hairspray*, *Polyester* and other memorable films. Then explore eclectic neighborhoods like Hampden, Fell's Point and Federal Hill. Take in a Broadway show, then hit the town for an evening of dinner and drinks in the chic Mount Vernon District, the heart of Baltimore's thriving gay community. To learn more, call 1-877-Baltimore or visit [Baltimore.org/lgbt](http://Baltimore.org/lgbt).

Expect the unexpected.

Visit  Baltimore.



"Divine" sculpture by Andrew Logan

Visit Baltimore. "There Is No City More Divine Than Baltimore" advertisement. 2011. Sculpture of Divine by Andrew Logan, Collection of the American Visionary Art Museum. Used with permission #MyBmore

## THE BALTIMORE EFFECT



John Waters. *Kiddie Flamingos*. 2014. Blu-ray video with two channel audio. 74 min. loop. The Baltimore Museum of Art, Dr. Max Stern Trust Fund; gift of the Friends of Modern and Contemporary Art; Alice and Franklin Cooley Fund; and purchased as the gift of an Anonymous Donor, BMA 2015.85. © John Waters, Courtesy Marianne Boesky Gallery



# STORYBOARDS



## CLOSE LOOKING

### SELF-PORTRAIT

*Self-portrait* is a series of ten photographic prints that, read from left to right, transform movie and television icon Don Knotts into John Waters. Don Knotts's stills are taken from films he starred in, such as *The Shkiest Gun in the West* (1968). Frame number eight is a photoshopped head-shaking confusion of Knotts and Waters's faces. Waters emerges in photo nine with an open-mouthed, wide-eyed expression and clothing similar to Knotts. Photos nine and ten were taken from a television interview Waters had sometime before 1994.

Don Knotts always has a special place in Waters's heart. He calls Knotts "a holy man in [his] life." When Waters was young, he had a crush on Knotts and felt a certain kinship with him. "Sometimes I pretend I'm him," Waters said. "If it's a slow day, I go in and out of being Don Knotts."<sup>17</sup> The two favor each other in looks and character. Skinny, long-necked, and dark-haired, there is a clownishness about both. Knotts was a bug-eyed, comedic character actor and, like him, Waters delights in visual humor. Prior to Knott's death in 2006, Waters contacted his agents regularly about the possibility of casting Knotts and invited the actor to accompany him to movie premiers. Knotts never accepted the invitations.

**PICTURED ABOVE:** John Waters. *Self-portrait*. 1994. Ten chromogenic prints. (Three details shown). Each image: 3 1/2 × 5 in. (8.9 × 12.7 cm.) Overall framed: 7 1/8 × 53 1/2 in. (18.1 × 135.9 cm.) Collection of Bill Block, West Hollywood, California. © John Waters, Courtesy Marianne Boesky Gallery; **PICTURED RIGHT:** Storyboard template. Created by "70Jack90." Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)

**JOHN WATERS SAYS OF MAKING ART, "I'M WRITING WITH VISUAL THOUGHTS, THE SAME WAY I WOULD WHEN I WRITE A MOVIE SCRIPT."<sup>17</sup>**

SCENE _____		PAGE _____	
SHOT #	SHOT #	SHOT #	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>ACTION</b>	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>ACTION</b>	
<b>DIALOGUE</b>	<b>DIALOGUE</b>	<b>DIALOGUE</b>	
<b>FX</b>	<b>FX</b>	<b>FX</b>	

### WHAT IS A STORYBOARD?

Used in filmmaking and television programming, storyboards organize plots into sequences of images often accompanied by notes, bits of dialogue, and directions. Storyboards visually represent the shots planned in a day's filming.

<sup>17</sup> Drew Daniel, "Experience & Innocence," <https://frieze.com/article/experience-innocence/>

<sup>18</sup> Jancee Dunn, "Q&A: John Waters," [www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/qa-john-waters-236819/](http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/qa-john-waters-236819/)

## ART IN CONTEXT

First and foremost, John Waters describes himself as a writer. He has drafted books, lectures, articles and essays, screenplays, and stand-up material. Writing also informs his artwork. To envision some of his film-still photography series, Waters makes notes and storyboards them. He takes photos and edits them, much like text revision, choosing the best images for a particular artwork. The shots are displayed in sequences that, the artist says, are meant to be read from left to right, “almost like a sentence.”<sup>19</sup>

After a thirty-year career making films, Waters started making studio art in 1992. His body of work includes installations, sculpture, sound pieces, and photo-based work. His photographic series are highly connected to filmmaking because they are often juxtaposed stills taken from his films and obscure scenes from other films that stick out in his memory.

**“MY PIECES ARE LIKE STORYBOARDS, MANY OF THEM. THEY’RE STORYBOARDS THAT I DON’T HAVE TO TURN INTO A MOVIE. I’M TAKING A MOVIE AND TURNING IT INTO A STORYBOARD.”<sup>20</sup>**

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

### CREATING, PRESENTING, RESPONDING, AND CONNECTING THROUGH NATIONAL CORE ART STANDARDS.

**This activity is appropriate for students in grades 9-12 and may be adapted based on grade level.**

For some artworks John Waters creates storyboards by sequencing photographic images taken from recorded or live TV programming. In this activity, students will create storyboards from photographs they shoot, organize the images into a sequential visual narrative, and write a story or a dialogue using the images as inspiration.

Ask students to use a camera or smartphone to take six photographs off the TV of various advertisements or television programs. Have students print their images and order them using a storyboard format as an organizer. There are numerous free templates on the Internet that have room for both image and text. One example is <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>, from Wikimedia Commons. Ask students to write brief notes or dialogue ideas on their storyboards for each image.

Students can share their storyboards and request feedback on their narrative ideas.

Finally, ask students to compose a creative writing piece or dialogue based on their photographic sequences and share their narratives.

### SUPPLIES NEEDED:

- CAMERAS OR SMARTPHONES
- PRINTER
- BLANK STORYBOARD TEMPLATES
- GLUE STICKS
- PENS/PENCILS
- PAPER

<sup>19</sup>John Waters, interviewed by Sandy Goldberg (sg scripts) at WYPR studios, Baltimore, MD, April 26, 2018.

<sup>20</sup>Dennis Cooper, “John Waters,” <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/john-waters/>

## STORYBOARDS



John Waters. *Self-portrait*. 1994. Ten chromogenic prints. Each image: 3 1/2 × 5 in. (8.9 × 12.7 cm.) Overall framed: 7 1/8 × 53 1/2 in. (18.1 × 135.9 cm.) Collection of Bill Block, West Hollywood, California. © John Waters, Courtesy Marianne Boesky Gallery

## STORYBOARDS



John Waters. Details, *Self-portrait*. 1994. Ten chromogenic prints. Each image: 3 1/2 × 5 in. (8.9 × 12.7 cm.) Overall framed: 7 1/8 × 53 1/2 in. (18.1 × 135.9 cm.) Collection of Bill Block, West Hollywood, California. © John Waters, Courtesy Marianne Boesky Gallery

# THE TRASH AESTHETIC



## CLOSE LOOKING

### **DIVINE IN ECSTASY**

Created in 1992, *Divine in Ecstasy* was the first artwork John Waters made. The artist wanted a film still of Divine, who had died in 1988, that had not been shot on the film set of *Multiple Maniacs* (1970). To find one, he played the film in VHS format on his television and shot the photo from the TV screen. In the image, Divine lies back with her hands beside her head and her mouth open. The result looks like a gritty black-and-white pin-up of a heavily made-up starlet lying on a dirty surface.

**DIVINE IS “THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IN THE WORLD. ALMOST.” — JOHN WATERS**

### **WHAT IS TRASH?**

The trash aesthetic is a deliberate rejection of society’s mainstream notions of good form and an embrace of so-called low culture and bad taste. Examples of trash could be plastic flamingos displayed in yards without irony, talk shows that require bouncers to keep guests from attacking each other, and cheap paperbacks that feature women with heaving bosoms on the covers. John Waters, called “The Pope of Trash,” revels in the aesthetic.<sup>21</sup> He calls trash a “terrorist act against the tyranny of good taste.”<sup>22</sup>

PICTURED ABOVE: John Waters. *Divine in Ecstasy*. 1992. Chromogenic print. Image: 10 × 13 in. (25.4 × 33 cm.) Framed: 16 1/8 × 20 1/8 in. (41 × 51.1 cm.) Collection of Amy and Zachary Lehman. © John Waters, Courtesy Marianne Boesky Gallery

<sup>21</sup>John Waters on William S. Burroughs,” <http://www.williamsburroughs.org/features/category/john-waters>

<sup>22</sup>Donald Liebenson, “45 Years After Pink Flamingos, John Waters Says the Midnight Movie Is ‘Dead,’” <http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2017/03/john-waters-pink-flamingos-anniversary-midnight-movies>

### ART IN CONTEXT

A friend of Waters since childhood, Glenn Milstead, performing as Divine, appeared in six films before his untimely death at the age of 42 in 1988. It was Waters himself who bestowed on Milstead's character the name "Divine," a reference to a character in Jean Genet's novel *Our Lady of the Flowers*, which follows figures living on the fringes of society. Divine was heavily into her "Elizabeth Taylor phase" in 1970, when *Multiple Maniacs* was shot.<sup>23</sup> The irony is in the startling contrast between Divine and Taylor's physical appearances and the roles each played. Divine wore outrageous makeup and ill-fitting clothes on her 250-lb frame, and her low-brow character variously lived in a trailer, vomited in a purse, ate dog feces, gnawed an umbilical cord, licked a banister, and shot people. A direct critique of the constraining ideals of beauty and good taste that Waters and Milstead grew up with, Divine, with her in-your-face aggressiveness, was the antithesis of the starlet type—slim, young, and pretty—that was perpetuated by Hollywood.

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<sup>23</sup>John Waters, interviewed by Sandy Goldberg (sg scripts) at WYPR studios, Baltimore, MD, April 26, 2018.

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

### CREATING, PRESENTING, RESPONDING, AND CONNECTING THROUGH NATIONAL CORE ART STANDARDS.

This activity is appropriate for students in grades 9-12 and may be adapted based on grade level.

*Divine in Ecstasy* can be considered one of John Waters's celebrations of bad taste. In this activity, students will work together to create definitions of good taste and trash and consider how Waters subverts "good taste" through a trash aesthetic. Each student will select two contrasting images that reflect their understanding of the terms.

On a large piece of paper make two columns with the headings "good taste" and "trash." Ask a student to record the class's answers to the following questions:

What is considered "good taste" in our society? Who decides that? Is "good taste" the same for everyone?

What is "trash"? Who decides that? Is "trash" the same for everyone?

Although taste is relative, ask the class to come to a consensus on at least some characteristics under each column and circle them. Using those ideas, ask the class to create common definitions of good taste and trash.

Continue the discussion: What do you think John Waters meant by describing trash as a "terrorist act against the tyranny of good taste"? Whom/what might he be reacting against by deliberately creating art that has a trash aesthetic?

Turn students' attention to *Divine in Ecstasy*. Ask the class to compare the artwork to Hollywood glamour shots of the 1940s and '50s. How are the images and artwork the same? How are they different? Why is Waters's image considered trashy? What makes it so?

Ask students to find online or in magazines two contrasting images focused on one theme, for example fashion, interior design, etc. One image should represent what the student thinks our society considers "good taste" and one that our society considers "trash." Students should explain their selections and why they think one example is understood as "good taste" and the other is not.

### SUPPLIES NEEDED:

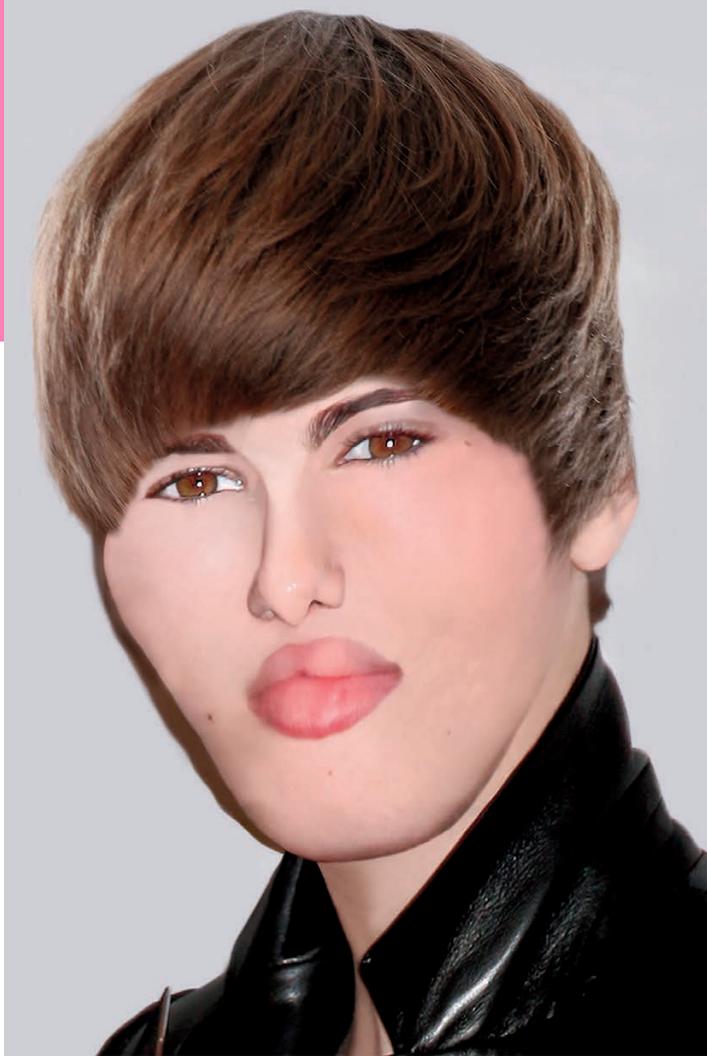
- IMAGES OF PIN-UPS FROM THE 1940S AND 1950S
- MAGAZINES AND SCISSORS OR INTERNET ACCESS AND PRINTER
- GLUE STICKS
- PENS/PENCILS
- PAPER

## THE TRASH AESTHETIC



John Waters. *Divine in Ecstasy*. 1992. Chromogenic print. Image: 10 × 13 in. (25.4 × 33 cm.) Framed: 16 1/8 × 20 1/8 in. (41 × 51.1 cm.) Collection of Amy and Zachary Lehman. © John Waters, Courtesy Marianne Boesky Gallery

# POP CULTURE



**WATERS SAID OF JUSTIN BIEBER:  
"I LOVED HIM FROM THE  
BEGINNING, WITHOUT IRONY."<sup>24</sup>**

## CLOSE LOOKING

### **JUSTIN'S HAD WORK**

Waters manipulated an image of Pop icon Justin Bieber by distorting his face with thin waxed eyebrows, narrow nose, and full cheeks, chin, and lips. Bieber is transformed into someone age- and gender-defying by unnecessary and bad plastic surgery. The cheek implants are too high, the filled lips uneven, the chin too big, the eyes too small, and the hair toupee-like. The title is humorously catty. "Justin's had work" is something one imagines said as an aside, coupled with a knowing side-eye, to a judgmental companion.

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<sup>24</sup>Hollywoodreporter.com/review/an-evening-john-waters-critics-578135

<sup>25</sup>Bojan Maric, "Discovering What is Popular Culture Through Contemporary Art," <https://www.widewalls.ch/blurred-lines-of-popular-culture/>

## ART IN CONTEXT

Pop culture is defined, in part, by the celebrities a society finds most appealing. In the United States, icons include movie stars and pop singers whose images flood all media. The Pop culture movement began shortly after World War II when increased factory production and innovations in mass media meant wider distribution of goods and images to a new consumer culture that clamored for them.<sup>25</sup>

Pop artists such as Andy Warhol took media images of celebrities like Marilyn Monroe and Jackie Kennedy and reproduced them, often repeatedly, in artistic compositions in part to comment on the icons' ubiquity. Waters, like Warhol, comments on the cult of celebrity in a way that is wryly humorous and transgressive. The pressures that come with "celebrity" put a great deal of strain on individuals—how they look, what they wear, with whom they are seen, and where. The irony is that there is no need for Bieber to have "work" done because he's young and to many ideally handsome. However, he may feel forced to redefine his image as he ages. Waters questions why there is pressure that makes beautiful people find imperceptible flaws to correct and, in doing so, transform themselves to look like everyone else.<sup>26</sup>

Waters is, in fact, a huge fan of Bieber. When the two were guests on the British talk show *The Graham Norton Show*, in 2010, Bieber told Waters on air that his signature mustache "was the jam!"<sup>27</sup> Backstage after filming, Waters lent Bieber an eyebrow pencil he used to draw his mustache. Bieber agreeably fashioned one on himself and then greeted fans and paparazzi outside the building.<sup>28</sup>

**PICTURED LEFT:** John Waters. *Justin's Had Work*. 2014. Chromogenic print. Image: 30 × 20 in. (76.2 × 50.8 cm.) Framed: 36 1/2 × 26 1/2 in. (92.7 × 67.3 cm.) Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York. © John Waters.

<sup>26</sup>John Waters, interviewed by Sandy Goldberg (sg scripts) at WYPR studios, Baltimore, MD, April 26, 2018.

<sup>27</sup>The Graham Norton Show, Series 8, Episode 6, December 7, 2010.

<sup>28</sup>John Waters, interviewed by Sandy Goldberg (sg scripts) at WYPR studios, Baltimore, MD, April 26, 2018.

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

### CREATING, PRESENTING, RESPONDING, AND CONNECTING THROUGH NATIONAL CORE ART STANDARDS.

This activity is appropriate for students in grades 9-12 and may be adapted based on grade level.

*Justin's Had Work* is in part a social commentary on issues of celebrity and the futile pursuit of youth. In this activity, students will create a computer-edited or collaged image of a Pop personality, write about his or her rise to stardom, and examine what the rise asserts about their culture's values.

Begin this activity with a general discussion of Pop culture. Ask students to think about celebrities in different genres—music, sports, movies, other media, etc. Who is famous and why? Why is the pursuit of youth so important to fame? How do stars keep themselves relevant? What might happen when these icons age?

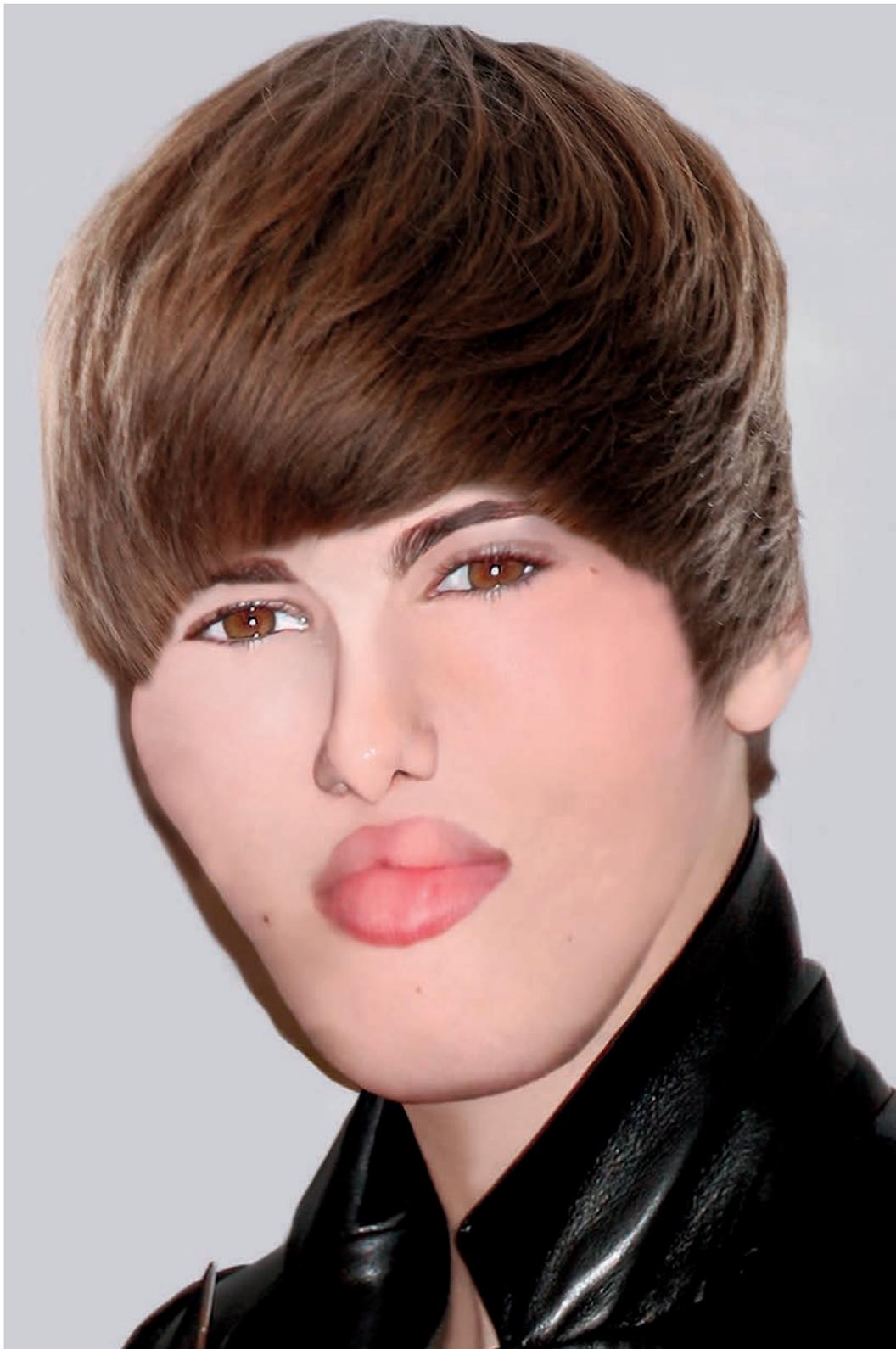
Invite students to turn their attention to *Justin's Had Work*. Compare the artwork to a photo of Justin Bieber. In what ways was the star's likeness manipulated? Why might John Waters have made the image both age- and gender-defying?

Ask students to think about another issue related to the pressure that comes with stardom; these issues could include the pursuit of fashion, fitness, wealth, or an enviable lifestyle. Ask students to find a photo of an icon online or in a magazine that most clearly speaks to them about one of the pursuits above.

Students should then manipulate the image even by adding props to create an exaggerated artwork commenting on the pursuit of their choice. Students should research and write about their subject's trajectory to icon status, what makes him or her popular, and how their artwork comments on contemporary cultural values. Artworks and prose can be shared with the class.

### SUPPLIES NEEDED:

- PHOTO OF JUSTIN BIEBER
- MAGAZINES AND SCISSORS OR INTERNET ACCESS, IMAGE-EDITING SOFTWARE, AND PRINTER
- GLUE STICKS
- PENS/PENCILS
- PAPER



John Waters. *Justin's Had Work*. 2014. Chromogenic print. Image: 30 × 20 in. (76.2 × 50.8 cm.) Framed: 36 1/2 × 26 1/2 in. (92.7 × 67.3 cm.) Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York. © John Waters.

# ART WORLD CRITIQUES



**“SAFETY ZONES ARE WHAT ALL GOOD ART SHOULD TRY TO CRASH.”<sup>29</sup>**

**“I AM VERY MUCH INFLUENCED BY JOKE SHOPS.”<sup>30</sup>**

## CLOSE LOOKING

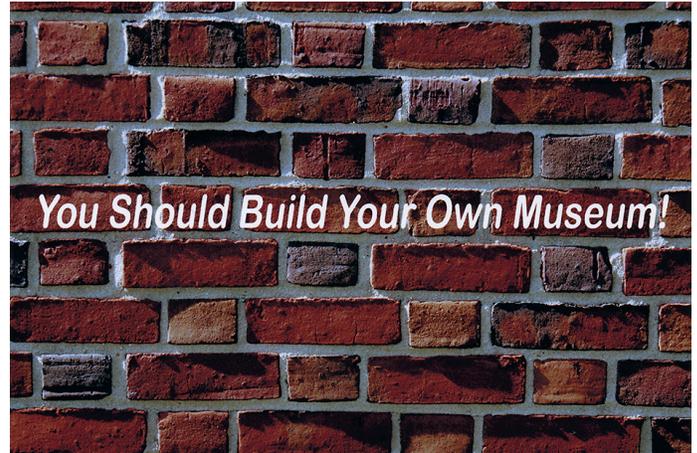
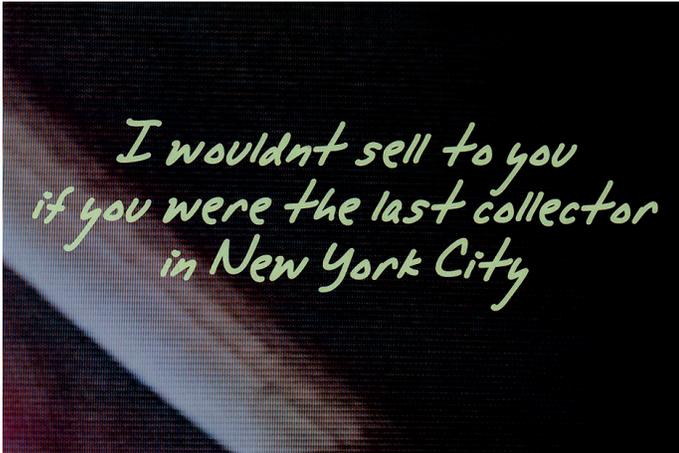
### **HARDY HAR**

At first glance, *Hardy Har* appears to be a framed black and white photograph of two flowers. On the gallery floor below, a tape demarcates the line viewers should not cross for the artwork’s safety. In most museums, if the boundary is breached, a sound sensor alerts visitors and guards. But in *Hardy Har*, the joke is on the viewers. If they move in for a closer look, an infrared sensor activates a mechanism hidden in the photo that shoots water at visitors, delivering a startling shock.

**PICTURED ABOVE:** John Waters. *Hardy Har*. 2006. Chromogenic print with infrared sensor, mechanical pump, and water. Image: 15 7/8 × 19 13/16 in. (40.3 × 50.3 cm.) Framed photograph: 24 1/16 × 28 1/16 in. (61.1 × 71.3 cm.) Overall installation dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York. © John Waters.

<sup>29</sup>Wolfgang Tillmans in Conversation with John Waters,” 158.

<sup>30</sup>Wolfgang Tillmans in Conversation with John Waters,” 167.



### **ARTISTICALLY INCORRECT #1-14, 2006 IMAGE**

*Artistically Incorrect #1-14* is a series of individually framed photographs of sentences and phrases superimposed on generic backgrounds. Each makes a statement that art-world insiders—artists, gallerists, museum professionals—would like to say but do not out of good form. To an entitled, nasty art buyer, one wants to holler, “I wouldn’t sell to you if you were the last collector in New York City.” Other phrases and sentences include:

“Your child probably could do this”

“Thanks for not buying anything”

“We don’t ‘loan’”

“You should build your own museum!”

“Nothing is ever for sale here.”

“No, it’s not archival!”

“No tax out of state shipping available”

“Artistically incorrect”

“If you sell at auction, we’ll have you killed”

“All photographs fade”

“No discounts, please”

## ART IN CONTEXT

Although an insider, Waters critiques the elitist values of the art profession with provocative humor. The practical joke *Hardy Har* mocks the convention of physical barriers that safeguard art and signal its preciousness. Novice viewers assume that any artwork displayed in this way must be taken seriously. And, of course, artists want their work perceived as being of great value both in message and physical form. But Waters thumbs his nose at these pretensions and says, "Nope, the joke is on you!"

*Artistically Incorrect #1-14* irreverently bashes the etiquette of what's done and not done, what's said and not said, in the art world. The works ask what it would be like if we could say aloud what we mutter under our breath.

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

### CREATING, PRESENTING, RESPONDING, AND CONNECTING THROUGH NATIONAL CORE ART STANDARDS.

This activity is appropriate for students in grades 9-12 and may be adapted based on grade level.

The statements in the *Artistically Incorrect #1-14* series are some of John Waters's insider critiques of the art world. In this activity, students will create an artwork that critiques a circle of which they are a part. As insiders in their own school, city, places of worship, athletic teams, social circles, or after-school clubs, it is likely that students have witnessed behaviors or conversations that they would like to respond to but do not, for fear of creating conflict. This activity offers the opportunity to challenge those behaviors and conversations.

Ask students to read the statements in the *Artistically Incorrect* series. Considering Waters's insider status as an artist, art enthusiast, and collector, what might some of these comments mean?

Invite each student to consider his or her insider status in a written response that will not be shared with the class. Where do they fit in? What social capital does this participation allow? Do they receive special treatment because of their involvement? Increased popularity? What elements of that circle or those around it do they find petty or aggravating? What are the unspoken rules of the circle? If given the opportunity, what emphatic statements would they like to make about their affiliate group or those outside it? (The rule is that comments may not be directed at a specific individual.) Why do they not share these thoughts aloud?

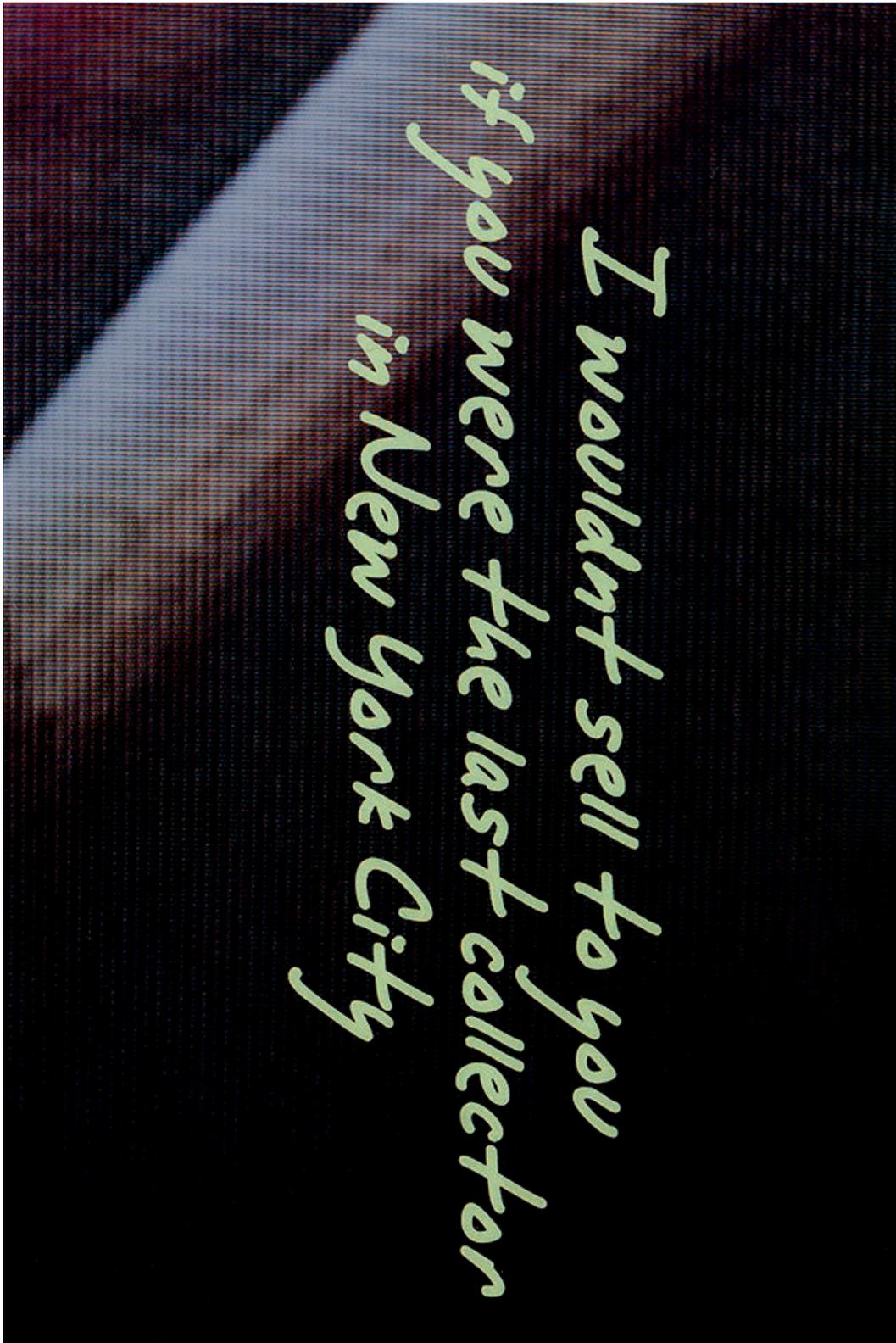
Students should select several of their statements to create artworks. Waters chose generic imagery or TV screenshots for his backgrounds and worked in a 4"x6" format. Students could follow those examples or design different formats. After the statements are printed or written in various fonts and colors, display the finished projects in the classroom. Although students' affiliate groups are different, are there similar behaviors that students spoke out against or similar statements that they made? What does this say about a culture of inclusion and exclusion? When there is common ground among students in their concerns about behaviors or statements, how might students come together to push back?

### SUPPLIES NEEDED:

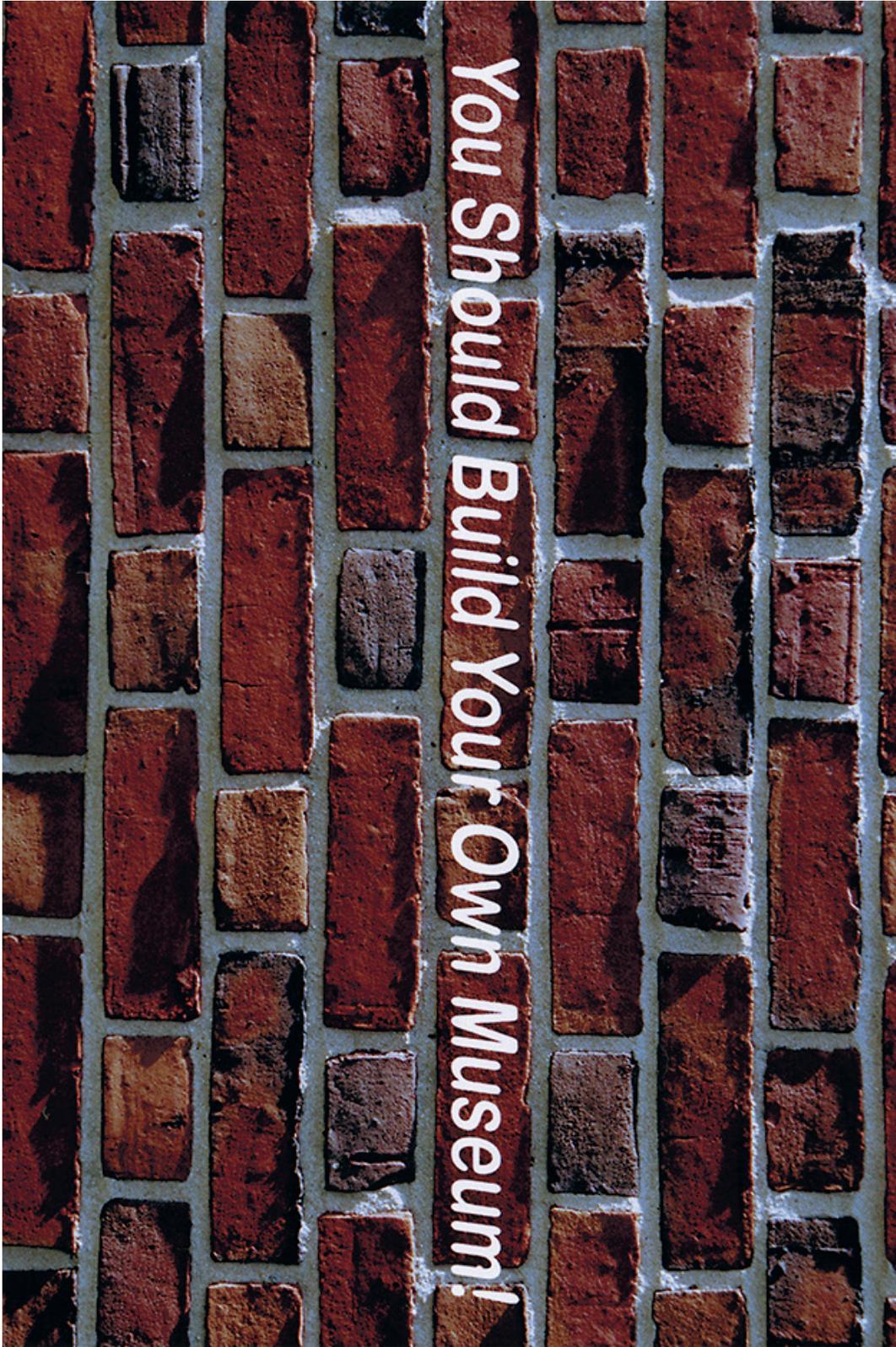
- INTERNET ACCESS OR CAMERA
- PRINTER
- CARD STOCK
- WRITING PAPER
- PENS/PENCILS
- MARKERS



John Waters. *Hardy Har*. 2006. Chromogenic print with infrared sensor, mechanical pump, and water. Image: 15 7/8 × 19 13/16 in. (40.3 × 50.3 cm.) Framed photograph: 24 1/16 × 28 1/16 in. (61.1 × 71.3 cm.) Overall installation dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York. © John Waters.



John Waters. *Artistically Incorrect #1-14*. 2006. Fourteen chromogenic prints individually framed. Each image: 4 × 6 in. (10.2 × 15.2 cm.) Each framed: 7 1/4 × 9 1/2 in. (18.4 × 24.1 cm.) Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York. © John Waters.



John Waters. *Artistically Incorrect #1-14*. 2006. Fourteen chromogenic prints individually framed. Each image: 4 × 6 in. (10.2 × 15.2 cm.) Each framed: 7 1/4 × 9 1/2 in. (18.4 × 24.1 cm.) Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York. © John Waters.

