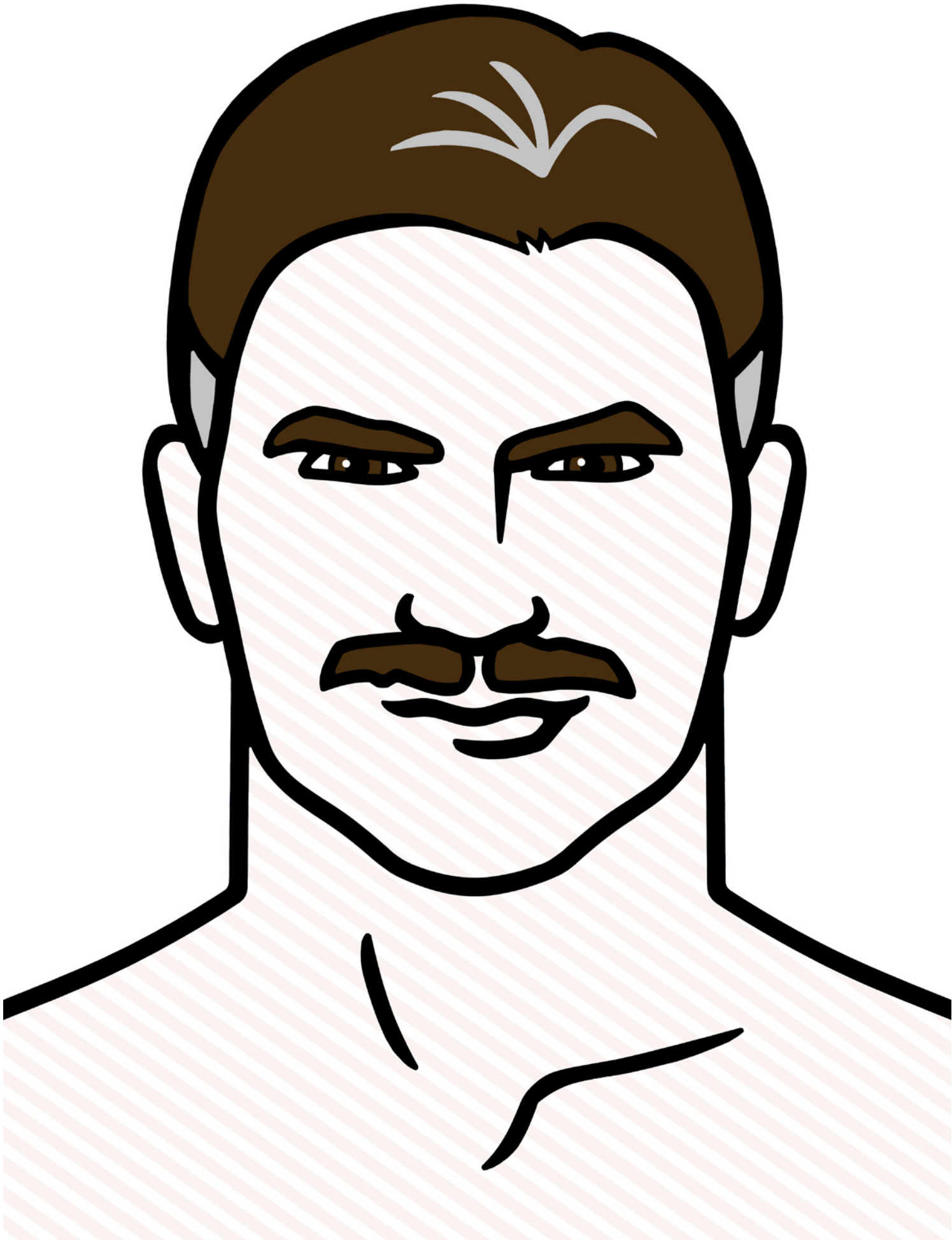


GAG



FEATURING  
AUSTIN YOUNG &  
PEACHES CHRIST





Justin  
Young

BY BRANDI AMARA SKYY

**In a world of mainstream drag, Austin Young's work is the antithesis: confrontational, innovative, and visionary. Young dares you to not find beauty in the raw rough edges that makes each individual uniquely flawless. Young challenges the ideals and conceptions of what drag is for even the most hard core of drag lovers — myself included.**

**BUT THAT'S WHAT MAKES HIM BRILLIANT.**

**THAT'S WHAT MAKES HIM ART.**

**The moment we get comfortable seeing an art form that was designed to push the boundaries of taste, excess, and socially acceptable norms is the moment that we untether ourselves from our roots. Drag needs provocateurs and free thinkers like Austin to challenge our morals and beliefs in an effort to keep us energized and/or to (re)ignite our love and passion for our art form.**

**PREPARE TO BE PROVOKED.**

***GAG: What inspired you to start creating art?***

**YOUNG:** John Waters. Pink Flamingos. Divine. Interview Magazine. Getting stoned and looking at album art. Kate Bush. Andy Warhol's "Portrait of Marilyn." New Wave and Punk. Leigh Bowery and Trojan. When I was in high school, I had a friend who was going to Cal ARTS who saw my work I had up in room and told me I could get into art school and it was the first time I really thought about it.

***GAG: You have been photographing drag and other gender bending art forms for quite some time. In your years of photographing, how have you seen drag and gender benders evolve and change? Do you feel that existing beyond the heteronormative gender lines has become more socially acceptable over the years?***

**YOUNG:** Androgyny pioneers like David Bowie, Boy George, Annie Lennox and The Cockettes were breaking ground for main stream audiences in the 70's and early 80's. Androgyny in the 80's because it was more of a risk. Things started to evolve with the sexual revolution in the 70's and a burgeoning gay scene. Aids really fucked things up. There was a backlash of conservatism. I remember my English teacher at my high school got beat up coming out of a gay bar. I had eggs thrown at me. I was bullied. Drag was political and a defiant act. Drag has become so

mainstream, thanks to RPDR.

**GAG:** *So what do you love about drag?*

YOUNG: I like funny, enlightening, comedy drag. Alaska Thunderfuck, Squeaky Blonde, Jackie Beat, Christeene, Jer Ber Jones, Porcelain. Radical queens like Fade-Dra who are blurring the lines between art and drag.

**GAG:** *As a creative, I am sure you are constantly overwhelmed with ideas, projects, and themes you'd like to do and/or create. How do you choose what you're going to create next? What do you do with your ideas that you don't manifest?*

YOUNG: I've been in the art collective, *Fallen Fruit* (Fallenfruit.org) since 2004. We've done exhibitions in Mexico, Colombia, Greece, Atlanta, Australia, Norway etc.. I have been collaborating with Squeaky Blonde and Fade-Dra on "TRANIMAL Workshop" since 2008. I'm constantly working on my art. I work really hard to listen to myself and move past fears and doubts—to trust my ideas and try not to let fear stop me. My latest project is, "TBD A musical play and video by Everyone who comes". I have always wanted to make a musical and I was watching the years go by and thinking, "I will never do this," "I don't know what I'm doing" etc. etc. etc." It was so easy to put off and my mind can come up

with the reasons why, "I'll never get the money," "no one will help me," and "I'm not talented enough." So I finally just set the dates to make the musical. I created a framework for participation- by anyone. I set up the dates for 7 different workshops. Got 'workshop leaders' to help me lead each workshop: Fol Chen, Bitch aka Beach, WIFE, Cake and Eat it. I asked people to help me film it . . . *and then watched it happen.*

**GAG:** *I am in total awe of your vision. How did you discover your aesthetic—did you always know that you wanted to explore gender and identity in various pop cultural ways or was it more of a slow beginning? Is there a definitive moment when you knew, "This is it. THIS is what I want to do, this is how I want to create?"*

YOUNG: I loved Siouxsie Sioux, Deborah Harry, Nina Hagen. I end up photographing all of them. I went to Parson's in Paris. I studied painting. My aesthetic has always been pop. I was disillusioned with school. I left school and decided to be a photographer. I packed up and moved to NYC. My friend, Chiclet, was a Boy Bar Beauty which was a weekly drag show on St. Marks Place. The Pyramid Club was super-hot then too. I started photographing all those people in that scene. Billy Beyond, Lady Bunny, Connie Girl, Codie Ravioli, Chiclet, Glama Moore, International Chrysis . . . I had a storefront photography studio on Ludlow Street in 1988. I remember

there was a photograph I made of Connie Girl. I was looking at it and thought "This is good. I've found what I'm doing. I'm making good work now."

**GAG:** *You have done and created so much over the years; do you have a favorite piece(s)?*

YOUNG: I always love the thing I'm doing right now the best. I love the portraits of Leigh Bowery in 1988. My work with Squeaky Blonde and Fade-Dra from the "TRANIMAL Workshop." My portrait of Rose Byrne. I feel like I nail it when I make an image that is iconic. Fallen Fruit Wallpaper. The Worm – (which is a series of videos I made with Nadya Ginsburg). My series of Jackie Beat song parodies (my favorite is "Baby Got Front").

**GAG:** *What is the one thing that people need to know about your art?*

YOUNG: It's about intimacy and connection.

**GAG:** *I can totally see that. Seeing as how so many people (including the staff at GAG) think of you as one of the iconic artists in drag, what do you want your legacy to be?*

YOUNG: I would like to be known as one of the great portrait artists of the 20th and 21st centuries . . . and a great film maker too.

" I think taking  
someone's portrait is  
a huge responsibility.  
A responsibility to  
see that person and  
represent them in a  
way that is authentic  
to who they are."



























# Tranquila

EXCERPTS OF A PHOTO SERIES BY AUSTIN YOUNG













