

THE DECISIVE MOMENT

Feb 13 to Mar 7, 2009

Opening: Fri Feb 13 6-8pm

LIST OF WORKS

(Counter-clockwise)

1. Untitled (Ben #1), Type C photograph, 20 x 30", 2008
2. Untitled (Ben #2), mixed media, approx. 3 x 4", 2009
3. Untitled (Adrian #1), Type C photograph, 20 x 30", 2009
4. Untitled (Adrian #2), mixed media, approx. 3 x 4", 2009
5. Untitled (Dan #1), Type C photograph, 20 x 30", 2009
6. Untitled (Dan #2), mixed media, approx. 3 x 4", 2009
7. Untitled (Jonathon #1), Type C photograph, 20 x 30", 2008
8. Untitled (Jonathon #2), mixed media, approx. 3 x 4", 2009
9. Untitled (Mat #1), Type C photograph, 20 x 30", 2008
10. Untitled (Mat #2), mixed media, approx. 3 x 4", 2009
11. Untitled (Jono #1), Type C photograph, 20 x 30", 2009
12. Untitled (Jono #2), mixed media, approx. 3 x 4", 2009
13. Untitled (Chris #1), Type C photograph, 20 x 30", 2009
14. Untitled (Chris #2), mixed media, approx. 3 x 4", 2009
15. Untitled (Declan #1), Type C photograph, 20 x 30", 2008
16. Untitled (Declan #2), mixed media, approx. 3 x 4", 2009
17. Untitled (Conal #1), Pegasus print, 20 x 30", 2006
18. Untitled (Conal #2), mixed media, approx. 3 x 4", 2009
19. Untitled (Rohan #1), Type C photograph, 20 x 30", 2008
20. Untitled (Rohan #2), mixed media, approx. 3 x 4", 2009

Framed images and mixed media works sold together: \$500

The artist would like to thank Kings Artist Run Initiative, Jared Davis, Benjamin Creek and the brave subjects of this series.



LEVEL 1/171 KING ST
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HOURS: WED TO SAT 12-6PM

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Drew Pettifer

THE DECISIVE MOMENT





Clockwise from top:

detail from *Untitled (Chris #1)*, 2009;

Untitled (Ben #2), 2009;

Untitled (Declan #1), 2008.

THE DECISIVE MOMENT

Essay by Jared Davis

Since Sigmund Freud's writings on voyeurism in the early 20th century we have encountered not only voyeuristic instances within art and popular culture, but an abundance of analytical and theoretical responses to these moments; thus on entering *The Decisive Moment* we feel a brief familiarity with regard to what could be conceived as an 'acceptable' response to such works. We see close-up portraits of young men at the point of orgasm, framed windows into moments that are unquestionably maintained as private in our everyday milieu. We feel we should not be looking, we feel as voyeurs, we feel in a position that is most certainly familiar through the many moments of cinematic, photographic and pop cultural voyeurism that we have experienced in past. What is the relevance of being put in this situation again? We can identify all too clearly the taboo of the images, the homoeroticism that is eschewed through the presentation of all male subjects, the laying bare of culturally-conditioned behavioural norms that the images instigate. What's more, do we take into account the familiar argument of the 'male gaze'? Such a gaze is often reserved (in feminist theory) for empowered voyeuristic viewing by men of female subjects, hence Pettifer's choice of all male subjects may seem an attempt at subversion. Although as Peter Middleton notes on such subversive discourses in his text *The Inward Gaze*: "If men still have power denied to women how can these male oppressors produce an emancipatory political discourse on masculinity, and subvert their own dominance? Isn't this more likely to be some kind of face-saving exercise than a radical political project?"¹

But what should one make of the film canisters containing the subjects' ejaculate? The artist argues they are physical manifestations of these 'decisive moments' and represent a literal objectification of the subjects. Here we see something that is physically unique to each subject, yet presented in a manner of the utmost uniformity. Each canister is offered as an identical 'objectification' of the subjects, perhaps even a nod to Manzoni's 1961 slight at commodified art objects, *Artist's shit*.

So we see the canisters as a critique of photography's attempts at capturing the physical essence of its subjects. If this is so, do they inject any additional reality or honesty into these moments that have been photographed? We start to question our gaze, the mediation of the camera, the mediation of the photographer and, most importantly, the reality that we ourselves project onto the images. For the works may only be graphically honest to the extent that we the viewers choose to accept these representations as windows into 'realities'. *The Decisive Moment* is not merely a critique of the objectifying nature of photography, where we are placed in the situation of invading the images of the subjects as voyeurs, but a catalyst in our questioning of what we the viewers *experience* as voyeurs and our own role in projecting fantasy and imagined reality (not merely sexualised) in our day-to-day gazing at photography of all kinds.

Pettifer's *The Decisive Moment* is an exhibition ripe with references - one might note allusions toward art historical, cinematic, photographic and cultural theoretical staples - yet it appears that what is most precisely critiqued is a particular act of looking, the 'gaze'. Rather than declaring an overarching statement with regard to much discussed (and yet still with some degree of conservativeness in the Australian public sphere) issues of gender, masculinity, (homo)sexuality and eroticism, Pettifer's work creates a dialogue with which not only to begin to critique the social implications of moments of voyeurism and the 'gaze', but the means and psychological devices that allow us to arrive at these moments constantly.

1. Middleton, P. 1992, 'Introduction: The Inward Male Gaze', in *The Inward Gaze: Masculinity and subjectivity in modern culture*, 1st edn, Routledge, London, p. 7.