

Galore
An Exhibition of Drawings

by

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Galore is a series of drawings that celebrate the urge to reproduce and multiply 'beauty'. Working from a collection of appropriated photographs, I have produced a suite of small-scale ballpoint pen drawings that explore issues of desire and mortality through the rendered idealization and categorization of beautiful male types. This work is framed within a theoretical discussion of productive desire and the question of beauty as motivation to copy. Metaphorical associations of the cut flower with the disembodied human head are also examined in relation to the *vanitas* genre of art.

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Galore

Why do people pick flowers? Have people any quarrel with them?
In our innermost selves there is something that is analogous to them. They
are too good to live. We pick them and make garlands of them for ourselves
because we love them.

Halldor Laxness, *Under the Glacier* (108).

My artistic practice and study is rooted in contemporary figuration and the aesthetic concerns of beauty and idealization. In the year leading up to my current body of work, I was producing large, seductive oil paintings of beautiful bare-chested men with flowing hair (Figure 1 and Figure 2). These paintings were at least partly a naïve response to my study of the Old Masters of the Italian Renaissance and the history of the artist-model relationship, which traditionally featured male artists portraying female models as the embodiment of beauty. But I was not necessarily interested in that sort of critique or mild attempt at showy subversion; I loved these guys I was painting. I spent hours trolling the internet for blogs and websites that featured images of pretty-boy models and celebrities so that I could photoshop together their ideally androgynous body parts and facial features to paint from. In recent years I've collected and archived hundreds of these photographs. Since the specific boys I select to save are based on my sexual and aesthetic preference, a type soon emerged. The men are young, but not so young. They are pretty, often with delicate facial features, usually great hair, and always posing for the camera.



Figure 1. *Big Red*. Oil on canvas, 72 x 48 inches, 2010.



Figure 2. *Pink Plastic Glory*. Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 inches, 2010.

Having so many fanzine-esque pics around me, I started feeling like the teenage version of myself, totally boy-crazy, flush with hormones and itchy fingers. I was a girl in love with the idea of a beautiful boy—not a ‘man’ mind you—but a boy. I yearned to be near enough to touch one, to possess one, but maybe not a real-life boy, yet, so I would clip photos from magazines and put them up in my bedroom. I would make labored, awful sketches of the guys I loved most, in an attempt to bring them to life through their copy. As an adult, I kind of want the same thing. Instead of large paintings, I decided to build a paracosm of tiny drawings. This would be a sensual fantasy world haunted by the faces of Rimbaud, Adonis, Bieber, Andrej; guys with eternal youth who will never die.

I began to imagine these faunlettes as Renaissance princes and made miniature drawings carefully rendered in hatching techniques (Figure 3). I am changing the context in which these images exist—the screen and magazine—to re-imagine them as poetic dandies and romantic heroes, steeped in classic pictorial tradition. This work sets the stage for an exchange between the artist/subject and subject/viewer. Viewers are not passive observers, but become participatory in the erotic circuit into which I have invited them.

The scale I chose is intimate, four-inch heads on an eight-inch square support. They hang as fragile ornaments that demand an intimate viewing. The feeling of vulnerability extends from their bee-stung lips to the presentation of unframed paper itself, which can easily be torn, bent, sneezed on, or smudged. The lighting of the face is dramatic, often with deep shadows falling across the eyes. I have banished the telltale camera flash, further removing the appropriated image from its source (Figure 4).



Figure 3. *All The Boys I'd Like To Fuck* (detail). Ballpoint pen on paper, 8 x 8 inches, 2012



Figure 4. *All The Boys I'd Like To Fuck* (detail). Ballpoint pen on paper, 8 x 8 inches, 2012

Careful attention is paid to the delineation of fancy strands of hair. Hair as obvious decoration implies time spent preening in front of a mirror and the desire to be gazed at (Figure 5).

To embody more fully the impression of a silly preteen doodler, I set aside my graphite pencils and employed the ultimate doodling tool, a blue ballpoint pen. The throwaway implications of a forty-cent Bic allow for interesting tension when used to produce precious art works. As I feather-stroked the paper to build surface depths, the casually familiar hue of Imperial Blue took on ethereal connotations. At times the boys seem to float with pretentious inner transcendence like angels or cherubs. Then their twinkling eyes betray not cupid or demigod, but delicate demons intent on stealing souls.

This series of drawings is intended to be viewed as one large piece made up of tiny individual parts. Its visual impact is less reliant on the individual or the individual identity of each figure portrayed, and more concerned with repetition, like a grouping together of several flowers of the same variety. The Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘galore’ as an adjective meaning ‘existing in abundance, in great numbers’, which is often placed immediately after a noun in common usage, for example, ‘with balloons and hot dogs and fireworks galore’. As the title of my MFA thesis project, *Galore* evokes both the concept of ‘many’ and the associated spectacle of such abundance in one space. The term ‘galore’ is also tainted by the excessive qualities of decadence. ‘Decadence’ is a word rooted in decay caused by indulgence, thus *Galore* is also tinged with a tragic darkness.



Figure 5. *All The Boys I'd Like To Fuck* (detail). Ballpoint pen on paper, 8 x 8 inches, 2012

On the Make

The title of this series of drawings, *All The Boys I'd Like To Fuck* is reflective of sexual desire (mine), both in terms of a loving act and an implied violence, as well as the reproductive impulse (both biological and artistic). I am interested in the urge that compels me to lovingly re-produce and re-present the images of pretty boys that I have collected.

An examination of the act of making is unavoidably linked to questions of beauty, representation and desire. In a lecture delivered at Yale University in 1998 titled *On Beauty and Being Just*, Elaine Scarry presented an argument that positioned the concept of beauty in relation to the examined human response. She described the imperative that she feels beauty places on us to *replicate*. “What is the felt experience of cognition at the moment one stands in the presence of a beautiful boy or flower or bird? It seems to incite, even to require, the act of replication (Scarry 3).” The twentieth-century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein says that when the eye sees something beautiful, the hand wants to draw it. Beauty brings copies of itself into being. It makes us draw it, take photographs of it, or describe it to other people (Scarry 3). Plato makes a similar claim in his *Symposium*, which states that beauty prompts reproduction in the form of conceiving children. “When the eye sees someone beautiful, the whole body wants to reproduce the person (Scarry 4).” Beautiful persons, things, and ideas motivate the production of art and even human life, initially through the urge to copy or re-create. Things get made because beauty incites the desire to bring new things into the world: infants, epics, sonnets,

drawings, dances, laws, philosophic dialogues...(Scarry 46). It seems that this phenomenon of unceasing begetting must stem from a primal 'want', from a sense of desire that motivates acts of duplication.

In his text concerning desire, Alan Shrift concludes that historically Western philosophers have usually conceived of desire as the consequence of the lack of the object desired. Twentieth-century philosophers continued this trope: Lacan and Sartre, drawing on Hegel, both made 'desire-as-lack' a defining characteristic of human beings (Shrift 175). Gilles Deleuze however associates the view of 'desire as lack' with Freudian psychoanalysis and offers an alternative notion of 'desire as productive'. Deleuze draws upon Spinoza and Nietzsche to develop a discourse of 'productive desire', one freed from the constraints imposed by the ideology of lack (Shrift 12). "Where the philosophical mainstream has focused on the *desideratum*, the object of desire, as lacking, this other discourse focuses on the motivational force of the *desiderare*, the act of desire, as productive (Shrift 176)." In the text *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari also equated the productive potential of desire with artistic creation (Deleuze and Guattari 39, 31-32). In her essay *Deleuze and Guattari: Flows of Desire and the Body*, philosopher Dorothea Olkowski cites Deleuzian ideals in her argument for an understanding of positive desire that is not connected to the Platonic model that sees humankind as lacking and therefore limiting human productive activity. Both Scarry and Deleuze frame 'desire' as a motivating force behind creative human action. I am not producing this series of drawings from a position of 'lack', (desiring something that I do not possess), but from a proactive standpoint that the desire for beauty prompts.

If I examine the ways in which feelings of desire prompt the production of my work, the obvious motivator would seem to be sexual attraction. Amorous love or possibly just lust undeniably has its place in the making of this series, but I am also interested in the parallels that exist between desire and creativity, between the feeling of desire and the motivation to act, and act through creation. What is it about the beautiful boy that leaves me unsatisfied with photographic representations alone? As outlined above, there is a thread that runs through the Western philosophic discourse on desire that defines desire as a force that promotes action. Elaine Scarry argues that beauty provokes its beholders to make a copy. This body of work is motivated by a productive desire prompted by beauty; by the invitation to re-presentation issued by the photographs of beautiful boys I have amassed.

Violent Bloom

The roses
had the look of flowers that are looked at.

T.S. Eliot, 'Burnt Norton,' *Four Quartets*
(Nancy K. Gish and Cassandra Laity 86).

“The first image was a portrait.” So begins Joanna Woodall’s wide-ranging book on the subject. She proceeds to tell the classical myth of a lovely youth named Narcissus who lay beside a pool gazing in adoration at his own reflection, absolutely overcome with yearning, until he wasted away, died of thirst or exposure and was metamorphosed into the flower bearing his name. “By ‘portraiture’,” Woodall states, “I mean a...likeness which is seen to refer to the identity of the living or once-living person depicted (Woodall 1).” These drawings differ in definition from traditional portraits, in that they are not representations ‘of’ specific humans with individual identities. Source photographs for this project were chosen based purely on how well they fit into my narrow aesthetic category of ideal male beauty. Translated through drawing, these images were further idealized to suit the type of guys I desired for my collection. I think of them in terms of metaphor. They are cut flowers, picked. Without clear reference to individual identities, (beyond a concern with highly stylized hairstyles), they are types meant to represent the full bloom of youth, seemingly preserved, yet hinting at an inevitable fade, thus imbued with a hint of the tragic. Like seventeenth-century Dutch *vanitas*, these drawing quietly warn: “Memento mori” (Remember you will die).

I situate these works via-a-vis a particularly vibrant time and place for production of the still life painting: seventeenth-century Holland. The Dutch used the term ‘nae t’leven’ or ‘naer het leven’ as the formula for mimesis. Artists would often pick and choose the motionless objects they wished to paint, not constraining themselves to the specific flowers in the bouquet on hand or the actual table laid out for dinner, as is implied by the term. They would depict vases overflowing with lush blooms that (in their time) were not cultivated in the same season and could not possibly be blooming together. So the term ‘nae t’leven’, which translated means ‘from life’, could really be taken more as a boast, to mean ‘as if from life’ (Berger 33). This is one of the reasons I identify more closely with the still life painter than the portrait artist. I am making drawings from inanimate photographs that I cull from a variety of sources. Attention to a satisfactory ‘likeness’ is not a concern, rather I curate facial features at will. If these eyes would look better on that face, I transplant them. It is impossible to remove the source material from my images, to deny the appropriation of photographs that depict actual living humans. The difference between drawing from a live model in my studio, and working from photographs with which I take great liberties, cannot be understated. These photographs are not alive, they are still, and I attempt to render them ‘as if from life’. This results in images of faces not as they would appear in the flesh, but how I see fit for them to exist in the form of drawing. They become symbols.

Objects depicted in seventeenth-century still life paintings belonged to a catalogue of icons that allowed viewers to interpret the symbolic meaning of a piece by ‘reading’ a language of pictures. Symbolic readings were mostly pointed in the genre of *vanitas*. In *vanitas* paintings, collections of objects were purposely juxtaposed to remind viewers of

the inevitability of death and the transience of vanity and earthly pleasures. Visual reminders that death literally skulked around every corner were common in both religious and popular iconography (Berger 1). Skulls and candles were the obvious choice when planning a *vanitas* painting, but the artists who were interested in delivering the message of ‘memento mori’ with a subtle backhand would depict cut flowers. It is a bittersweet notion that by viewing something beautiful one could be confronted by such intense melancholia.

It was common in seventeenth-century Europe to equate the brief lifespan of flowers in bloom with the fragile existence of the human body (Taylor 43). Flowers had an aura of almost romantic religiosity, as was expressed in the belief that they served as “divine reminders of death (Taylor 47).” Flowers barely come to a full bloom and they begin to fade, droop, whither. This is how I feel about my boys. Their youthful bloom is perfect and I have plucked them in a vain attempt at preservation. Although the idea of a human head is literally represented and communicated in my series, the deeper implication is *vanitas*. The flower painter Ambrosius Bosschaert was celebrated for his depiction of heavy-headed beauties who seductively whispered “Memento mori” from their vases during the Dutch Golden Age (Figure 6). Floral still lifes are not copies of life, but “imaginary collections or gatherings of collectables in an expressly counterfactual mimesis (Berger 69).” Along those lines, I am working from a photographic collection of heavy-lidded Beauties, but as for an actual collection of living males, that is fantasy indeed.



Figure 6. Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder (1573-1621). *Floral Still Life with Insects and Shells*. Oil on copper, 10 x 7 inches, 1608.

I am interested in issues of implied violence regarding the cut flower, and how this severing of the stem relates to my work when thinking about the series in terms of memento mori. The violence of separating a flower from its roots is rarely contemplated while enjoying a vase of flowers on the kitchen table or looking at a bride's bouquet at a wedding, but although the flowers look perfect, they are dying as we enjoy them. I have drawn a faint line along the bottom of the necks of my boys. It is a blatant severing, violent in nature. Although these faces look healthy, lovely, and perfect, they are dying as we enjoy them. This is the underlying melancholy that creeps in when I look at something so vibrant, whether a hot guy or a pale pink orchid. I cannot help but be struck by the vulnerability, the tiny nightmare of it all. If these were portraits in the classical sense they would live on forever, frozen in time. But running parallel to the metaphor of the cut flower, these drawings will literally fade away. Cheap ballpoint pens will see to that. Due to its inherent quality of impermanence, the celestial blue ink will lose its pigment slowly, leaving only a sepia-tinged ghost-image on the page. Dust to dust. They are a physical reminder of our own vulnerability and mortality, Dorian Gray-style.

A perusal of the bizarre and wonderful works of Joris (Georg) Hoefnagel (an influential precursor to the Golden Age of Dutch still life painting) shows that he would often position cut and uprooted flowers (Figure 7 and Figure 8) in such a way that we are reminded "that violence has been imposed in the interest of separating flowers from "nature" and posing them as art (Berger 87)." If we are aware of the violence, as viewers, it is certainly not first on our minds. The blossoms are too gorgeous to dwell on the unpleasantness of inevitable rot for very long, and it is exactly this tension that interests me. I intend for my work to function in those murky spaces of cognition and

sensation. These jewel-like cherubs are designed to seduce, while the darkness patiently lurks at the edges.

The etymological connection shared by the three nouns ‘bouquet’, ‘nosegay’ and ‘posy’ is “a bunch of cut flowers” (from the American Heritage Dictionary). In his writings on floral still life, Harry Berger takes linguist liberties when discussing the importance of ‘posing’:

The lexical kinship of posy with poesy (used in early modern English to designate an emblematic device, for example, a *vanitas* figure) and its semantic association with mottoes and inscriptions situate it in a network of rhetorical and performative meanings. With only a little pressure, the word can mutate through ideas of presentation and self-presentation to the idea of posing (Berger 70).

The blooms in floral still lifes are posed (the posing being imposed) but they are also posing. Like the still life painter does with flowers, I have separated these “flowers” (young men) from “nature” (magazines) and posed them as art. I am not so much concerned with the position of the figures that I render, but I am fascinated by posing, particularly the impassive, yet self-aware expressions that result from the knowledge that one is being looked at. The boys I render are aware of both the viewer’s gaze and the artist’s touch, (or so their expressions seem to suggest).



Figure 7. Joris (Georg) Hoefnagel (1542-1601). *Leda and the Swan, surrounded by flora and fauna including a Stargazer Lily*. From *Archetypa Studiaque Patrisa, Part II*. Hand-coloured engraving, 6 x 8.5 inches, 1592.



Figure 8. Joris (Georg) Hoefnagel (1542-1601). *Leaf IX*. From *Archetypa Studiaque Patrisa, Part III*. Engraving, 6 x 8 1/8 inches, 1592.

Collecting Beauties

When objects are removed from their original source and displayed together in new groupings, the collector has replaced historical origin and function with a system of classification that allows for the series of objects to be experienced in an entirely new context. In her text *On Longing*, Susan Stewart describes the function of a collection as, “...not restoration of the context of origin but rather the creation of a new context, a context standing in a metaphorical, rather than a contiguous, relation to the world of everyday life (Stewart 152).” The approach I have taken in curating this project is that of a collector. I have selected photographs mainly from the world of fashion advertising, and filtered them through the language of drawing to present a serialized group that works in combination to create new meaning within the context of the collection itself. Thinking of this series in terms of a defined ‘collection’, the primary ‘purpose’ of the original photographs (to advertise commercial products) no longer exists. “The spatial whole of the collection supersedes the individual narratives that lie behind it (Stewart 152).” The relationship that exists between the drawings relies on their seriality, quantity and arrangement within a display space.

The size of each piece within the series directly affects the experience and reading of the work. At the height of their popularity in Europe between the sixteenth and eighteenth century, the miniature portrait (Figure 9 and Figure 10) functioned like today’s wallet-sized photograph that we carry with us or hang on refrigerator doors. They were



Figure 9. Isaac Oliver (1565-1617). *Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton*. Watercolour on vellum, unfinished. Oval, 2 9/16 inches high.



Figure 10. Samuel Cooper (1603-1672). *Algernon Percy, 10th Earl of Northumberland*. Watercolour on vellum. Oval, 2 1/4 x 1 3/4 inches. 1636-1640.

mementos given as gifts to fiancés by way of introduction, or to a spouse if one intended to be abroad. Although there is an obvious thread linking my drawings to the history of portrait miniatures, what interests me about small-scale art objects is not their intended function (gifts of decoration), or even the trend toward collecting, but the sensory experience of scale. I am concerned with how the body of the viewer responds to a miniature representations of disembodied heads. As Stewart points out, “A reduction in dimensions does not produce a corresponding reduction in significance (Stewart 43),” but it does privilege sight as a means of experience.

The miniature offers us a transcendent vision which is known only through the visual. In approaching the miniature, our bodies erupt into a confusion of before-unrealized surfaces. We are able to hold the miniature object with our hand, but our hand is no longer in proportion with its world; instead our hand becomes a form of undifferentiated landscape, the body a kind of background ...we can only stand outside, looking in, experiencing a type of tragic distance...the confrontation of so much life results in an experience of profound aloneness...(Stewart 70).

The figure represented in miniature allows for an intimate, if conflicted, experience for the viewer. The head becomes pure image, no longer existing in the domain of a lived reality and action, “...all manifestations of will are transferred to the position of the observer, the voyeur (Stewart 124).” This Narcissus-urge to possess, to consume the image of another’s face might stem from the unease that results from lacking one’s own. I am not surprised that what remains invisible to us, that being our own face (which can only be viewed through the mediation of a reflected surface or photographic image) holds such fascination. For better or often worse, we associate the image of self with what constitutes “me”, (Facebook profile pics can surely attest to that) and since our own face is invisible it holds massive significance. We look to the faces of

others to “read” meaning, and ultimately hope to see aspects of ourselves reflected back. “The face is a type of “deep” text, a text whose meaning is complicated by change and by a constant series of alterations between a reader and an author who is strangely disembodied, neither present nor absent, found in neither part nor whole, but, in fact, *created* by this reading (Stewart 127).” A straightforward reading of the faces in my work is further hindered by an attempt to idealize the features. When grouped into a collection of ‘types’, the form becomes exaggerated and abstracted to represent not an actual human with a unique identity, but an anonymous subject that exists within the larger whole as a ‘model’. The collection is not constructed by its elements, rather, it comes to exist by means of its principle of organization.

Conclusion

While this series stems from the sensory pleasures of looking, collecting and making, the desire for containment, preservation and aesthetic control of beauty ultimately speaks to a human preoccupation and fascination with mortality. We try to remain young to avoid death, or at least young looking to deceive death. We are aware that we cannot escape dying. It is in the back of our minds and this adds to the bitter pathos felt when looking at images of such beautiful young creatures. They do not seem to know it. My drawings fit well within this modality. Subjects have been rendered at the brief peak of youthful vigour, and if these were portraits in the classical sense they would live on forever, frozen in time. My use of non-archival ballpoint pen to make these drawings reinforces the impossibility of immortality.

Beauty can represent a sort of counterbalance to death, but it will always be imbued with the awareness of death's presence. The power of the image comes from its telling us what is to come, both for its subject, and for us, its witnesses. Derrida asks what the consequences might be of death effectively bringing something into existence through its anticipation: "It means perhaps that the power of the image as the power of death does not wait for death, but is marked out in everything—and for everything—that awaits death (Townsend 6)."

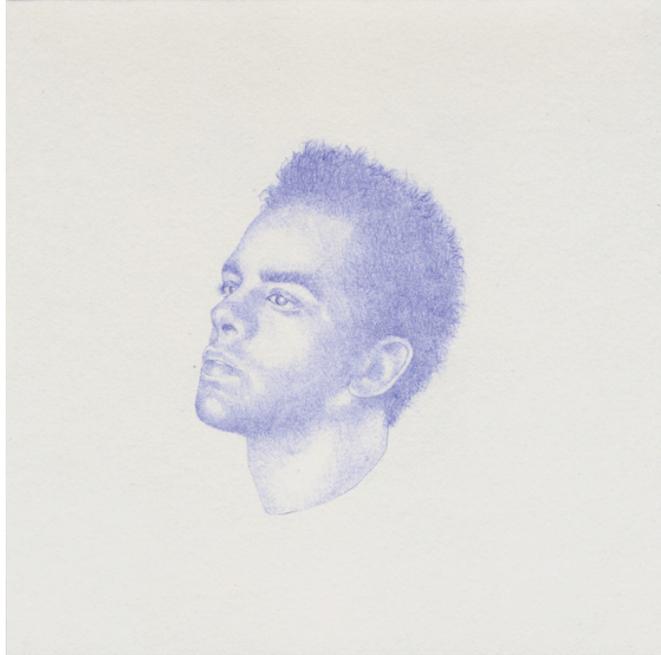
Motivated by my love for the pretty boy, and a desire to multiply him endlessly, I have produced a series of drawings that celebrate the ephemeral beauty of youth. The

excessive nature of *Galore*, both spectacular and awful, foreshadows the decay that is sure to result from such a decadent feast of eye candy.

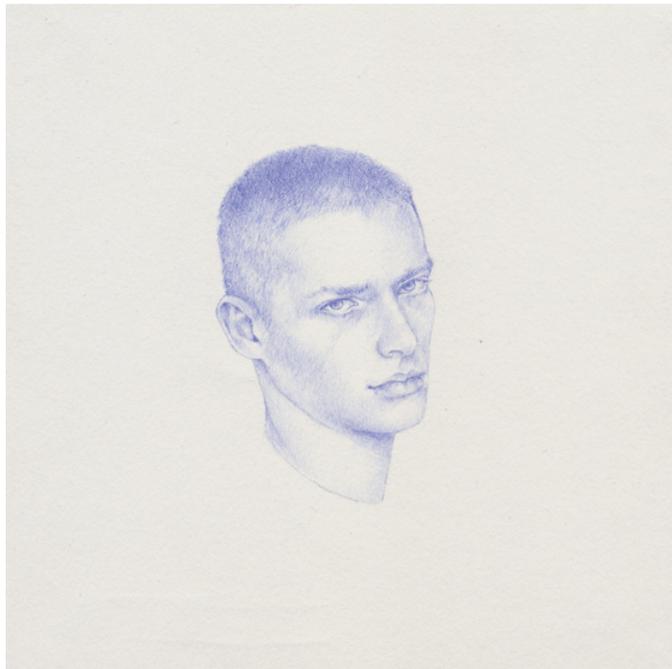
Images



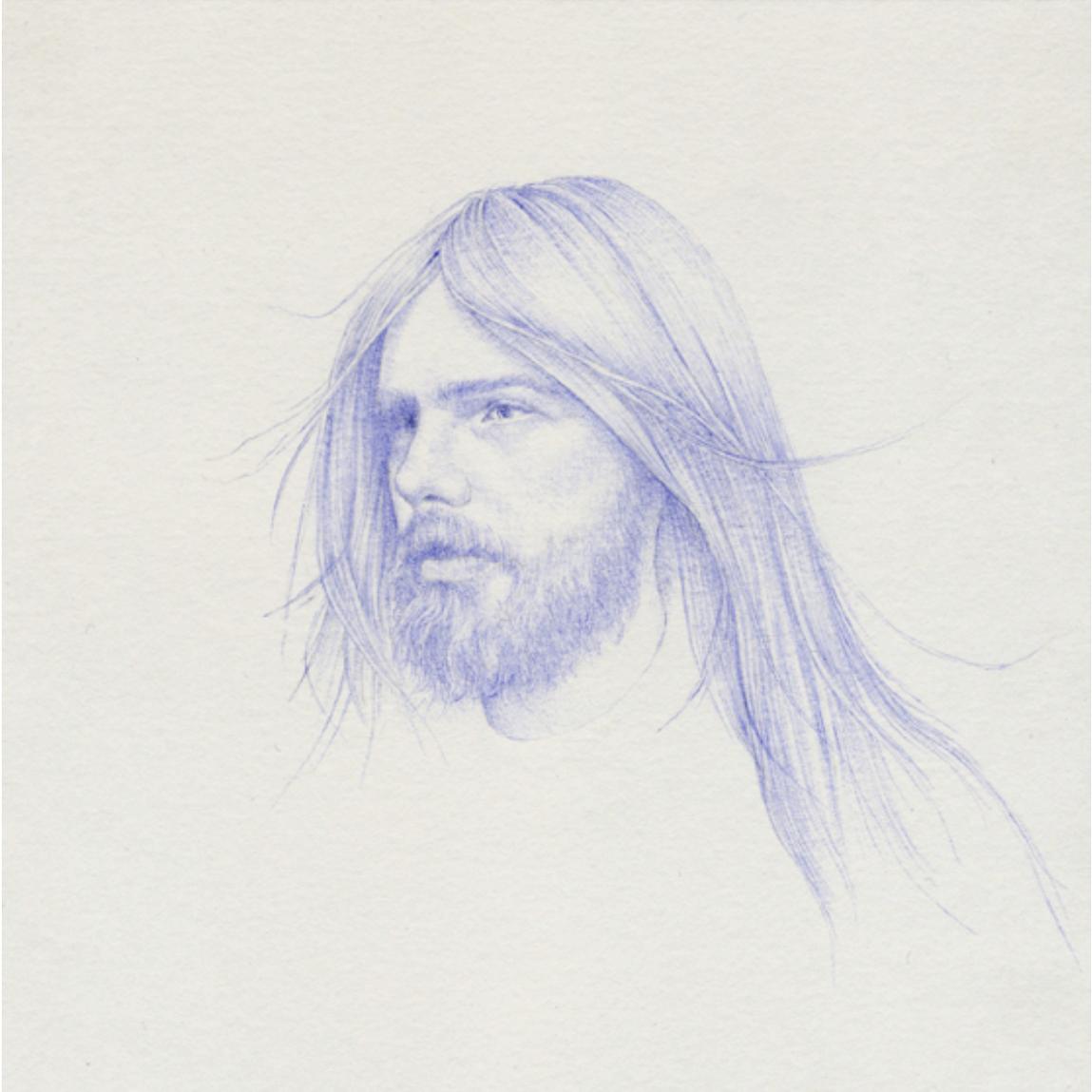
All The Boys I'd Like To Fuck (detail). Ballpoint pen on paper, 8 x 8 inches, 2012.



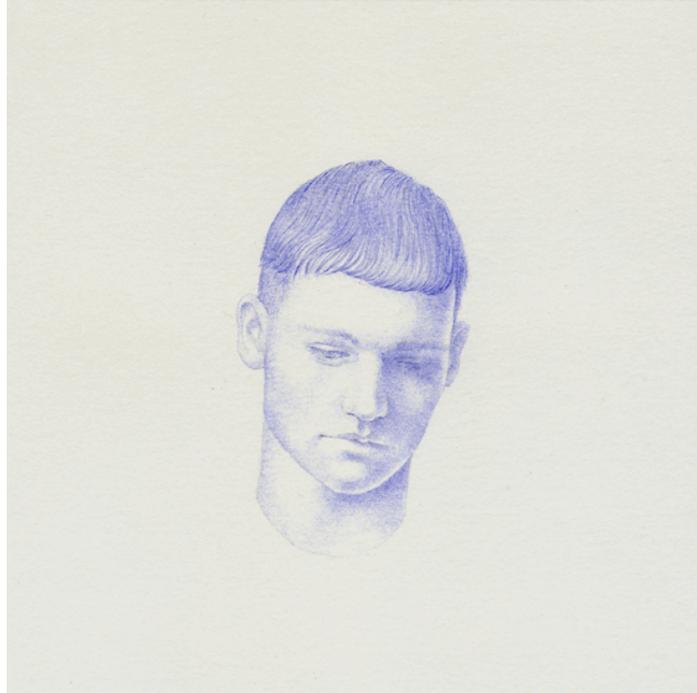
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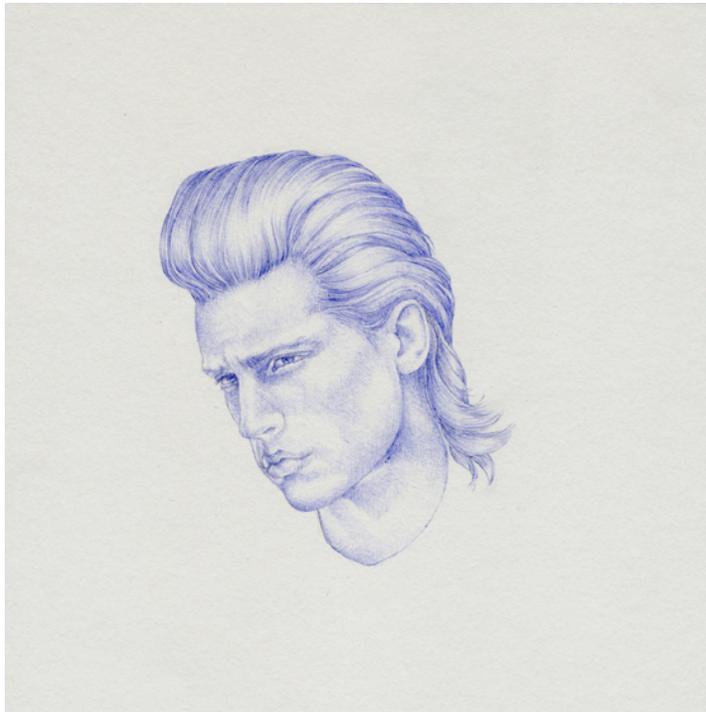
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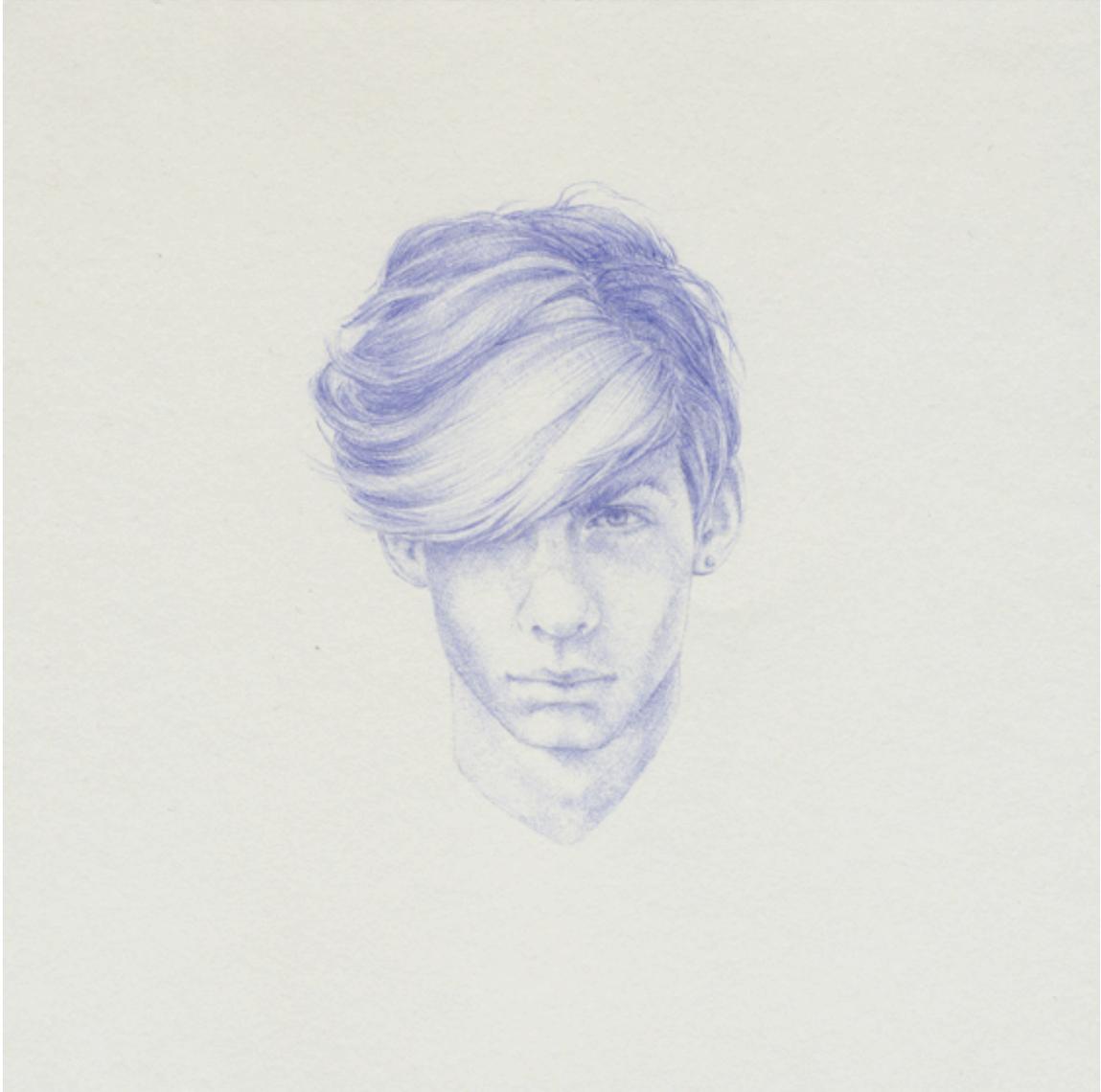
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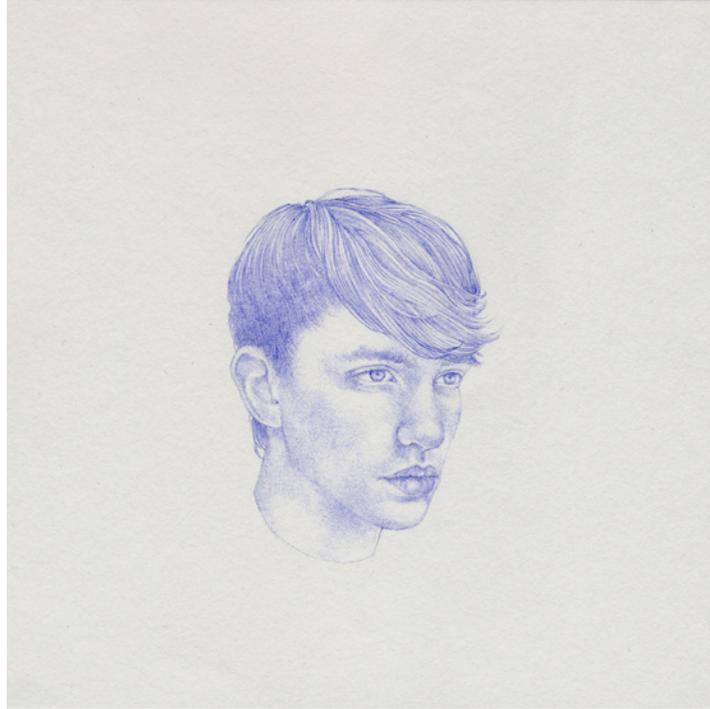
All The Boys I'd Like To Fuck (detail). Ballpoint pen on paper, 8 x 8 inches, 2012.



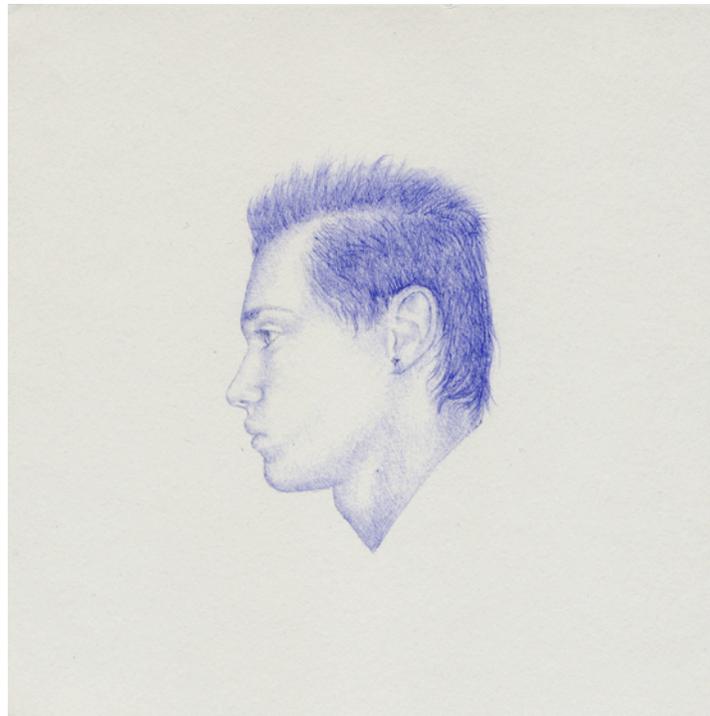
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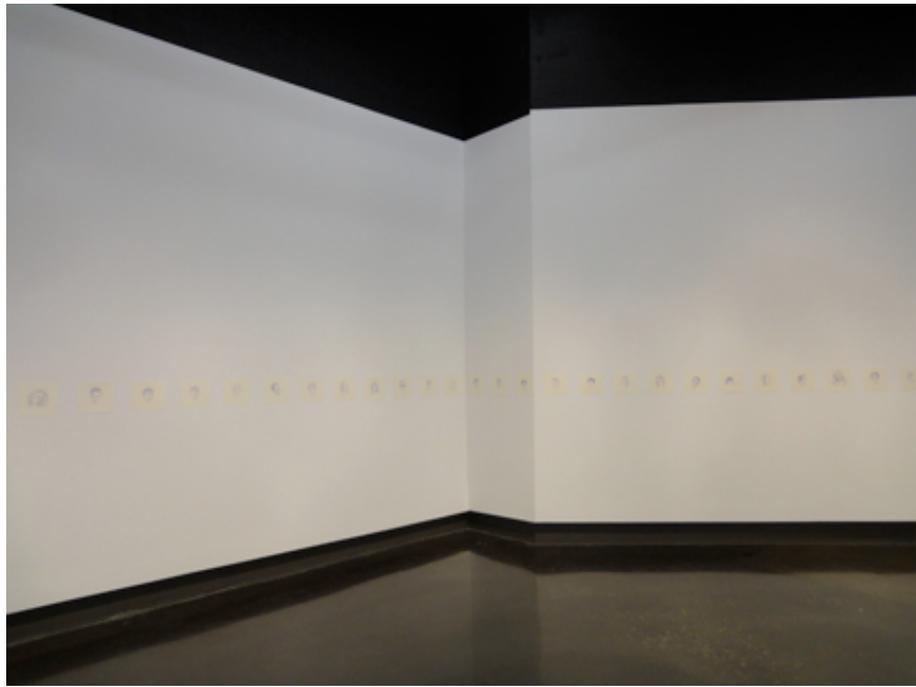
Galore installation, University of Waterloo Art Gallery, 2012.



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