

## One Hundred Misfits

Tom Butler

Opening: Sept 4th from 6 until 9 pm

Show: Sept 5th until Nov 8th 2014



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FIFTY ONE TOO proudly presents the first Belgian solo show “One Hundred Misfits” of Tom Butler (UK, b. 1979). In this exhibition one hundred antique portrait photographs of 19th Century Victorian cabinet cards will be shown which the young British artist, currently residing in Portland, USA, has partially overpainted in his personal miniaturist way, introducing them into the 21st Century world of contemporary art.

The artist interferes with the boundaries between the real and the surreal using 19th Century Victorian cabinet cards which he transforms into unsettling characters of his imagination. By putting gouache masks on the surface of these anonymous portraits, he creates facial distortions of hair formations, decorative patterns and gaping toothy orifices which begins revealing an imagined inner personality of the sitter.

*"I am fascinated by the process of Conspicuous Invisibility: the simultaneous human desire to both hide and perform. In a visual way, I collect memories, thresholds and hiding places and attempt to re-manufacture them. My work expresses my natural inclination towards introversion and the opposition of displaying artwork essentially about hiding."*

Combining the two techniques of the readymade ancient photographs with his personal miniaturist painting technique, Tom Butler has found just the way to interfere with the 21st Century world of art. The psychological portraits are becoming grotesque, sinister scenarios with often a macabre sense of humor. The work reminiscent in this sense the surreal collages of Max Ernst by providing a mirror to the masks of our subconscious obscurations, our hidden self. They offer Butler a way to express his personal thoughts, fears and anxieties in an immediate and direct way. Remembering the work of Marcel Duchamp 'L.H.O.O.Q.' of 1919 where the artist draws a pencil mustache and goat beard on a postcard reproduction of Da Vinci's 'Mona Lisa', the same quest can be found of providing the portrait an inner soul, a personality. Whereas the dada movement searched for the rejection of prevailing standards in traditional art, the young Butler has found his personal answer: keeping a focused inertia in an era of speed and superabundance of digital images.

He started performing appropriations by using landscape postcards, withdrawn foreign banknotes and for the last four years he started collecting these antique Victorian cabinet cards. In the Victorian Era between 1860 and 1890 these traditional portrait photographs, originally named 'Impérial Carte-de-Visite' which the American Civil War Photographer Mathew Brady invented became extremely popular. These albumen silver prints on card stock paper of a single person, a couple or an entire family were mailed to foreign families or close friends. Simultaneously a whole range of small stands and customized photograph frames were designed to put these small - 4¼ by 6½ inches - family portraits on their cabinets. As a consequence the popular term 'cabinet card' originated. Whereas the names of the photographer are mentioned at the bottom of the pictures, the sitters always remain anonymous. Precisely with this lack of identity, Butler interacts in his own conscientious way. His personal tendency towards introversion became already clear in the artist's early work 'Invisibility

Machine', a series of photos of himself hiding behind a mirror in various locations in London, giving the viewer the illusion of his invisibility.

After completing his BA sculptor degree at the Chelsea College of Art & Design, the artist earned his Master of Fine Arts at the Slade School of Fine Art in London in 2007. His work has been included in many solo and group shows as well in Europe as in the United States. He co-won the Deptford X Core Gallery Open and the Photomedia Prize at the Charlie Dutton Gallery in London in respectively 2010 and 2011. In 2012 he participated in the Biennial Exhibition 2012 at the Centre for Maine Contemporary Art Rockport, Maine, USA. Solo presentations include, 'Absentees' at CHARLIE SMITH LONDON, 2013, and, 'Inner Worlds' at Aucocisco Galleries, Portland Maine, USA, 2014. Recently GALLERY FIFTY ONE has been presenting this young artist at several fairs; in 2013 at Paris Photo, in 2014 at Aipad New York and Art Brussels.

The works shown at FIFTY ONE TOO are called 'One Hundred Misfits' by the artist, referring to one hundred persons unable to adapt to this world. They are one by one unique and remarkable incorporations of Tom Butler's psychological investigation into what he refers to as 'conspicuous invisibility'. These works are part of an ongoing process the artist started in 2010. Collecting and appropriating these antique utensils in the form of cabinet cards from the 19th Century, he transforms them by means of a personal miniaturist painting technique into a 21st Century piece of art.