

EAST VILLAGE BOYS *

JAYSON KEELING: CITY ALL OVER!

by Sam McKinniss

27-JAN-12

GALLERY

READERS' LIVES



Jayson Keeling knows how to make a photograph sparkle, and he knows how to make it last. Jayson has spent his working life perfecting how to get what he wants from behind a camera, his gentle demeanor belying a firm sense of direction and control. Passing through the worlds of hip-hop, fashion, porn and elsewhere, an innate belief in the image serves him like a compass. Raised between the Bronx and Jamaica, he now lives and works in Brooklyn. Lately he's been exhibiting photographs alongside paintings made with glitter, text and debris, each of which is like a skeleton wearing a dirty sequin dress in close-up.

Portraits of Jayson (and Brownie) shot for EVB by Paul Mpagi Sepuya

Cole Escola
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Earl Dax
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Elias Redstone
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Gregory Wazowicz and Riveros
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Max Bernstein
Max Steele
McKenzie Adkins
Mckenzie James
Michael Bullock
Michael Epps
Michael Martin
Michael Oats
Miguel Villalobos
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Nice Collective
Nicholas Harmer
Nodeth Vang
Paul Gunn
Paul Mpagi Sepuya
Peter Janacik
Peter Stanglmayr
Rafael Esquer
Ralf Obergfell
Richard Welch
Robert Clyde Grima
Saheer
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Scooter LaForge
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Stef Smith
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Stuart Sandford
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Thomas Wilk
Tim Donovan
Ves Pitts
Weston Bingham
William Oliver
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HOLY! HOLY! HOLY! HOLY! HOLY! HOLY! HOLY! HOLY!
 HOLY! HOLY! HOLY! HOLY! HOLY! HOLY! HOLY! HOLY!
 THE WORLD IS HOLY! THE SOUL IS HOLY! THE SKIN
 IS HOLY! THE NOSE IS HOLY! THE TONGUE AND COCK
 AND HAND AND ASSHOLE!
 EVERYTHING IS HOLY! EVERYBODY IS HOLY! EVERYWHERE IS
 HOLY! EVERYDAY IS AN ETERNITY! EVERY MAN'S AN ANGEL
 THE BUM'S AS HOLY AS THE SERAPHIM! THE MADMAN IS
 HOLY AS MY SOUL ARE HOLY!
 THE TYPEWRITER IS HOLY THE POEM IS HOLY THE VOICE IS HOLY
 THE HEAVENS ARE HOLY THE ECSTASY IS HOLY!
 HOLY PETER HOLY ALLEN HOLY SOLOMON HOLY LUCIEN
 HOLY KEROUAC! HOLY HUNCKEL! HOLY BOURBOURNS HOLY CASSADY
 HOLY THE UNKNOWN BUGGERED AND SUFFERING
 BEGGARS HOLY THE HIDEOUS ROMAN ANGELS!
 HOLY MY MOTHER IN THE INSANE ASYLUM! HOLY THE
 THE COCKS OF THE GRANDFATHERS OF KANSAS!
 HOLY THE GROANING SAXOPHONE!
 APOCALYPSE! HOLY THE JAZZ BANDS MARIJUANA
 HIPSTERS PEACE & JUNK & DRUMS!
 HOLY THE SKYSCRAPERS AND PAVEMENTS!
 THE CAFETERIAS FILLED WITH THE MILLIONS!
 MYSTERIOUS RIVERS OF TEARS UNDER THE STREETS
 HOLY THE LONE JUGGERNAUT! HOLY THE VAST LAMB OF
 THE MIDDLE CLASS! HOLY THE CRAZY SHEPHERDS OF
 OF REBELLION! WHO DIGS LOS ANGELES IS LOS ANGELES
 HOLY NEW YORK HOLY SAN FRANCISCO HOLY PEDRIA
 & SEATTLE HOLY PARIS HOLY TANGIERS MOSCOW HOLY
 ISTAMBUL! HOLY TIME IN ETERNITY HOLY ETERNITY IN TIME
 CLOCKS IN SPACE HOLY THE FOURTH DIMENSION HOLY THE FIFTH
 INTERNATIONAL HOLY THE ANGEL IN MOLOCH!
 HOLY THE SEA HOLY THE DESERT HOLY THE RAILROAD HOLY THE
 LOCOMOTIVE HOLY THE VISIONS HOLY THE HALLUCINATIONS HOLY
 HOLY THE MIRACLES HOLY THE EYEBALL HOLY THE ABYSS!
 HOLY FORGIVENESS! MERCY! CHARITY! FAITH! HOLY! OUR
 BODIES! SUFFERING! MAGNANIMITY! HOLY THE SUPERNATURAL
 EXTRA BRILLIANT INTELLIGENT KINDNESS OF THE SOUL!

- December 2009 (11)
- November 2009 (10)
- October 2009 (7)
- September 2009 (10)
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- July 2009 (7)
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- Man Woman Girl Boy
- Max Steele/Fag City
- Mikel Marton
- Nice Collective
- Nicola Formichetti

Sam McKinniss: Let's talk about the title of your current show at [Third Streaming, See Jungle! See Jungle! Go Join Your Gang, Yeah. City All Over! Go Ape Crazy.](#) I really like that song, the Bow Wow Wow song.

Jayson Keeling: It's an amazing song.



Sam: Obviously it has something to do with your imagery.

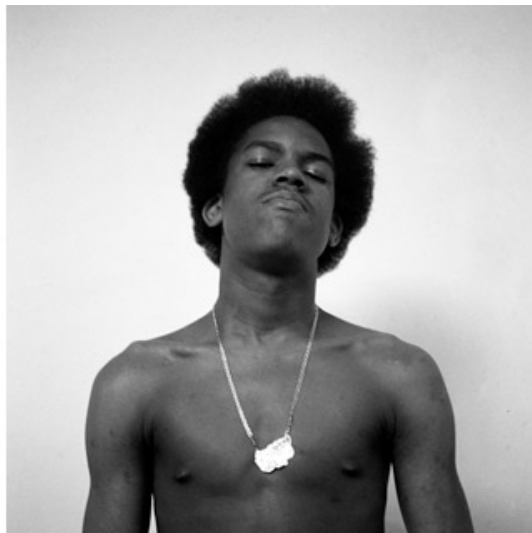
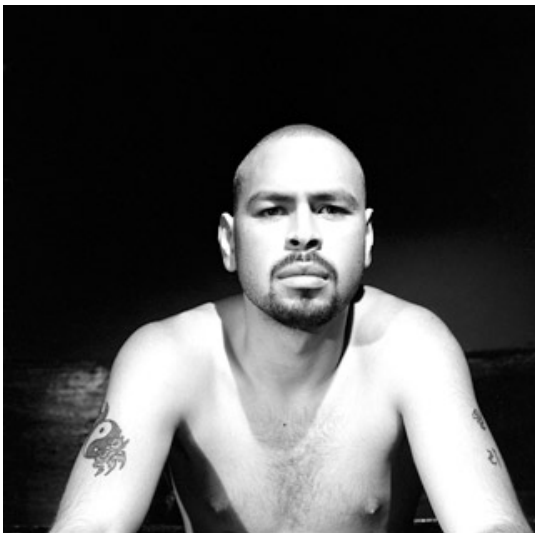
Jayson: It does have to do with my imagery. I chose the title because it synthesized a lot of different things about my practice—my exploration of my own culture, my own Jamaican heritage, and a personal search for ritual. In a parallel way that Malcolm McLaren brought a kind of tribal style to the punk/pop/new wave scene. That's a strange connection to make. I don't consider Jamaica tribal, but it's OK. It's tricky.

Sam: It's tricky in a good way. Maybe it has to do with you being back and forth between New York and Jamaica.

Jayson: That's correct.

Sam: Richard Hell says, *"If you just amass the courage that is necessary, you can completely invent yourself. You can be your own hero..."* That was his message to the New Wave. When I look at your work, I get this similar kind of thrill of self-invention.

Jayson: Continuous re-invention.



Odin
 Opening Ceremony
 Out About Brooklyn
 Patent Leather Daddy
 Paul Mpagi Sepuya
 Peter, Tom & Dave
 Pisszine
 Popbitch
 Pussy Faggot
 Queer Zine Archive Pr
 Richard Haines
 Robert Geller
 Ryan McGinley
 Ryan Pfluger
 Saggerboys
 Scene Downtown
 Scott Anthony
 Scott Treleaven
 See Management
 Shelby Gates
 Slava Mogutin
 Splatterpool
 Straight To Hell
 Stuart Sandford
 The Malcom
 They Shoot Homos Don'
 This Is Fag City
 This Long Century
 this.hearts.on.fire
 Tiny Vices
 Towleroad
 Twerking Hard in the
 Unknown Quantities
 Vanity Teen
 WJCMHA
 WLTF
 World of Wonder
 Yves De Brabander
 Zephyr Files

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Sam: Yeah, or just being in charge. I get some sort of thrill that you know what you're doing.

Jayson: Considering that I've been producing work for over 20 years, thank you. In many ways the work is autobiographical. Basically what's in the work touches on many aspects of my life. The time I spent working in the porn industry, the gay post-hip-hop porn videos. And then at the same time I produced images for magazines like *BlackBook* and *Tokion* and the New York fashion/editorial portrait scene. And also at the same time in the film industry as well as personal projects in Jamaica. All of this spanned 1992-2005 or 2006, which is when I committed to the art world and gave up on those pursuits. Everything touches on the various things I did over that extended period of time.

Sam: But everything you've done is all image, which is great.

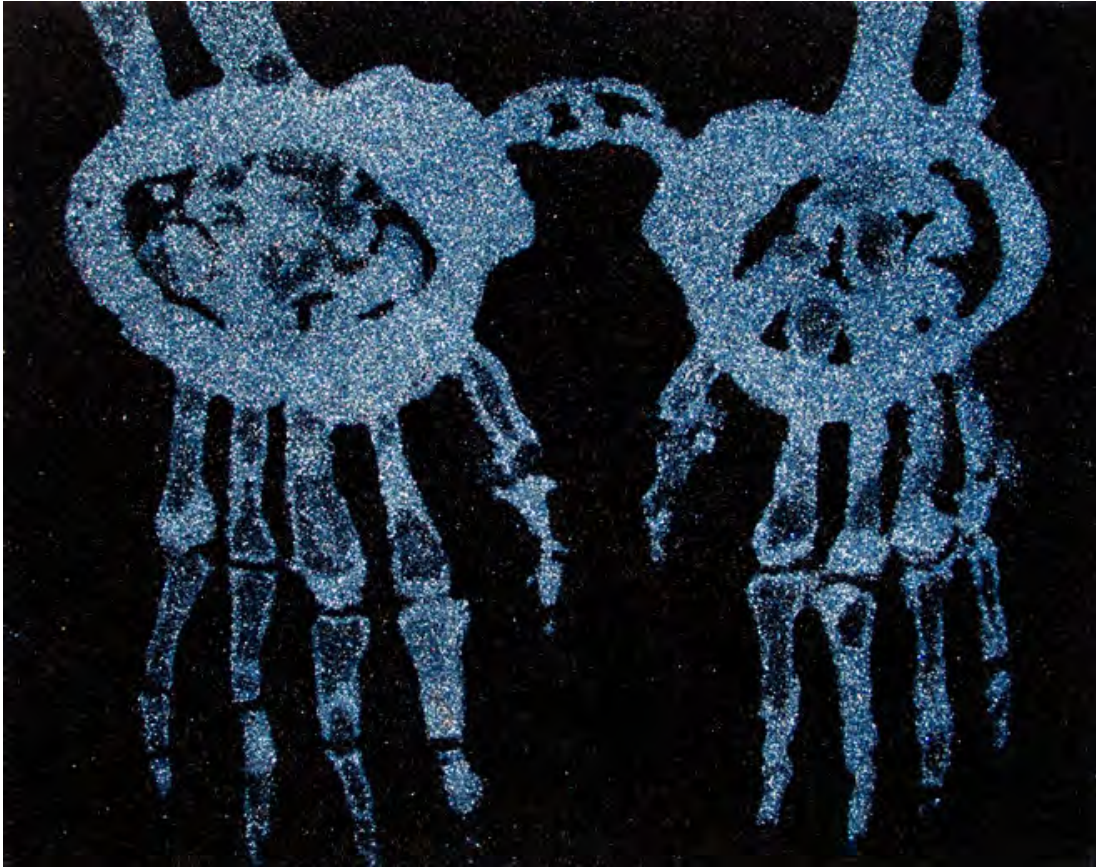
Jayson: Yes.



Sam: So much fashion, so much porn, so much of the imagery that we take in is about self-invention, self-styling. The fashion world is still really potent for you.

Jayson: It is. When I speak about the fashion industry, for me it's not really about a shoe or a belt or a handbag. It's about fashion as anthropology, fashion as the ritual, the ritual of pain, and a transition rite for young people. If you think about the relationship between a great many people, Man Ray and fashion, Edward Steichen, Elsa Schiaparelli and her surrealist clothing, Balenciaga and his sculptural works. There's definitely a lot of exchange. Those are the points of

focus, those are my interests, but like most things I take the essence, the aura and the mechanisms. My intention was never to be literal.



Sam: One of the things I was thinking about while at your show was Gordon Parks and how he goes in and out of these worlds too.

Jayson: The interesting thing about Gordon Parks is he's never really mentioned. You wouldn't know that he existed—and a great many other photographers. There's always that amazing picture he took of Gloria Vanderbilt. The fact that he's a black man published in *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*—

Sam: But you think about him?

Jayson: Of course. Absolutely.

Sam: Maybe one of the reasons he doesn't get talked about on the level that he should be placed is because he did so much, that he had so much material. The films—

Jayson: *Shaft*. Composing music, writing screenplays, photojournalism, fashion—

Sam: But I like that. You seem to have this poly-vocal, multi-tasking practice, too, that I think is exciting.

Jayson: For the Third Streaming show it really was important to bring it all together. That's why certain juxtapositions are the way they are. The works are in dialogue. Forget about fashion—in general everything is in dialogue. It was important to allow viewers into my process—not that it's solely about process. For me it's really important that the process is completed in the mind of the viewer.





Sam: I want to talk about one of the pictures, 'Mathias' [above]. It confirmed for me that reading art history is sexy. Do you agree?

Jayson: [laughs] Yes, I do. Especially Warhol when you get into the 'Sex Parts' series.

Sam: I don't know about you, but when I read art history I skip to the sexy parts.

Jayson: Warhol's history, or just in general?

Sam: All of it.

Jayson: [laughs] I take in whatever I can, wherever I can.

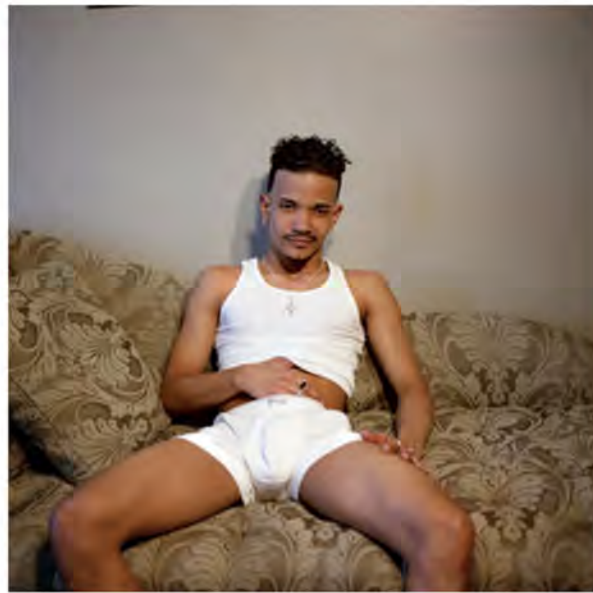
Sam: Who's sexy in art history?

Jayson: Who comes to mind? Basquiat, of course. Actually I love everything about Patti Smith and her personal style. I think she's sexy-scary sexy. I love Nina Simone, I love Prince, I love my fellow Geminis, I love George Clinton, I love Miles Davis. There are so many people. I definitely make the connection with their talent.

Sam: How do you choose models, or where do you meet them?







Jayson: It just depends. Most of my relationships—familiarity is really important. Obviously the guys I've worked with in porn, we had a relationship. In general, with most of them, I knew them for extended periods of time and they were used to me being there since I was the sole photographer shooting them, and photographing behind the scenes.

At a certain point this became really interesting because working between these three or four different fields, there was overlap. In hindsight, my practice was always the same. I functioned conceptually in the commercial photographic world. It's a world where you define yourself, like the art world, with a particular style. My investment in my commercial work was a bit much. At a certain point it became too much. Toward the end of my commercial career I started to focus on photographing men, obviously, and the pictures became too sexualized. The folks I collaborated with, we started pushing the envelope, especially with black and Latino guys. I consider those images a really important body of work, because in a certain way, the models are participating as well. You can feel it and see it.

Sam: They're not just paid models. You can tell that they like you.

Jayson: And I liked some of them! [laughs]



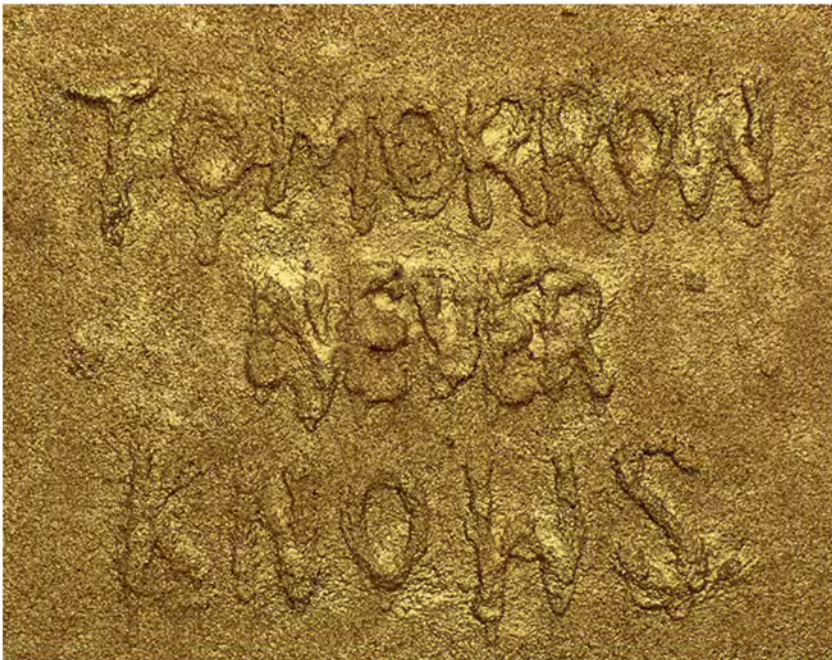


Sam: We need to talk about glitter. Your glitter paintings are totally tantalizing and hypnotic. How did you get to glitter? What do you see in glitter?

Jayson: I see so many things in glitter, then nothing at all. I needed a material that would glow when hit by light in the dark. That, and it's like porn. I wouldn't call it primal, but there's a connection. It always makes people smile. It has built-in associations that people like, but it's not really highly regarded and I like that as well.

Sam: Yeah, it's not gold.

Jayson: Yeah, but at the same time it's difficult to control, and difficult to deal with. Most of all, glitter for me is really about taking that thing that I learned from the fashion industry—the seduction and how to use it. You really participate with it. You can obscure things and play a bit.





Jayson's work is now on view at LegalArt in Miami through January 31, and at Third Streaming in New York through February 25.

Upcoming shows include 'Next Generation' at Contemporary Wing Gallery, Washington DC 'tête-à-tête' at Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, Illinois, curated by Mickalene Thomas 'The Bearden Project' at The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York City