

ARTFORUM

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Neil Goldberg, *The Gay Couples of Whole Foods* (detail), 2013–15, forty-five ink-jet prints on archival paper, dimensions variable.

NEW YORK

“Under Construction: Photography, Video, and the (Re)presentation of Identity”

CRISTIN TIERNEY
540 West 28th Street
September 6 - October 17

It could be said that the human condition demands a perpetual attempt to define oneself.

As luck would have it, societal expectations

will mostly do the job for you. This group exhibition probes the ways our external selves are perceived. Consisting of photographs and single-channel video works from the 1970s to the present, the show proffers an insightful subversion of the norms and narratives that dominate our everyday existence.

Cindy Sherman’s *Untitled Film Still #32*, 1979, classically posits her as both artist and subject. Here, she’s a solitary film-noir starlet surrounded by abyssal darkness, lighting a cigarette while avoiding the camera’s penetrating gaze. Sherman’s nameless figure is a blank space for preconceived projections, speaking to the degrading stereotypes women are continually ascribed. Neil Goldberg’s gridded photo series, *The Gay Couples of Whole Foods*, 2013–15, functions on an ostensibly similar wavelength. The suite of forty-five photographs portrays pairs of men leaving the titular grocery store, all of whom Goldberg assumes to be gay. These paparazzi-style snapshots participate in a larger cultural narrative about the typecasting of gay men, employing a heteronormative mode of surveillance that works to undermine its very normativity.

Displayed in the gallery’s back room, Martha Rosler’s video *Vital Statistics of a Citizen, Simply Obtained*, 1977, depicts the artist undressing in an aseptic, white room. Poked and prodded by two male scientists, her body is measured and subsequently compared to an “average.” Over voiceover, a female speaker reminds us: “Scientists who measure are not innocent. Scientific human measurements have been used to keep people from access to education, to keep certain races and nationalities out of America, to keep women subordinate, to keep women in their place.” The thirty-nine-minute work is a bleakly haunting demonstration of the gendered and racialized essentialism that continues to pervade even the most (supposedly) objective fields. Alas, very little is sacred.

— Keegan Brady