

GONZALEZ, STEVEN HECTOR

Steven Hector Gonzalez's interdisciplinary work explores ideas of power and personhood and its ties to the body, desire and sexuality. As technology evolves and is increasingly democratized, queer "safe spaces" that once existed within physical space are becoming primarily digital, the internet facilitating a new global bathhouse which provides accessibility to both the consumption of media and the opportunity to connect with others. Although this provides a much safer context for people to experiment, explore, and coordinate for sexual contact with partners, it also can reinforce the exclusive beauty standards that have historically oppressed and dehumanized a vast population of the queer community. Those who can conform to these standards and fit within the param-

eters of the idealized, white, masculine body are perceived as the most desirable within the gay community, and through this perception are given the most power. Specific to social platforms like Grindr and Scruff (which Gonzalez often uses as source material for his work), language including "white only, no fats, no femmes," or conversely fetishizing members of historically marginalized groups, can commonly be found on users' profiles. This casts an unsettling light on the lack of progress made specific to gender and racial politics within the LGBTQIA+ community.

By manipulating images of the idealized male form found on Instagram, Tumblr, television and within pornography, Gonzalez simultaneously attempts to

understand the ways that these standards have informed his own identity. The work calls into question the power structures that reinforce an exclusionary “homonormative” culture.

Given that many of these communications and images are delivered through digital platforms, he chooses to utilize the same media to create his work—drawing connections between his own experiences and larger cultural shifts through video, performance, collage and

photography. Borrowing from the conventions of social media and “selfie culture,” he often becomes the subject of his own work, taking ownership of the way he is perceived and presenting himself as an object of desire. In opening up an honest discourse about his own experiences, Gonzales works to establish a level of vulnerability to create a connection with an audience whose members often find themselves underrepresented.

Fred Holston