

COMPANY

Stewart, Chris, *The Collagist Reassembles Black Consciousness, the Latinx Experience & the History of the Racially Charged Zoot Suit*, GAYLETTER, Issue 8, 2018, Print, pg. 73 - 76

GAYLETTER



TROY MICHIE

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ART

I met Troy Michie twice before I invited him to talk. I'd taken a liking to his work after seeing some of his collages in "Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon," a New Museum show investigating gender's place in contemporary culture. Situated alongside the show's militantly gender-neutral works, Troy's collages of black and Latino men in orgasmic pleasure seemed almost out of place.

What began as Troy's genuine curiosity for static imagery and vintage niche pornography resulted in a yearslong research project that yielded several works and countless group shows. "Strangers," the series featured in the New Museum show, reinterprets the stereotypes that surround black men: overt masculinity, large endowment, etc. But Troy was growing tired of the men, he told me, "and then the election happened."

Growing up in El Paso, Texas, Troy spent his formative years looking up to his mother and grandmother, two Mexican women up against the usual struggles faced by first- and second-generation immigrants. (Troy himself is Afro-Latino.) From a young age, he was taught that he would need to work twice as hard to get what he wanted. Though racial dynamics and socioeconomic factors continuously worked against him, he would find himself at Yale University, where his working-class background was seized by academic rigor.

"In my first critique, [the class] ripped me to shreds," Troy told me. "I got to Yale and felt like I had to perform. It was like: 'Oh, you're this gay Afro-Latino, and you're from the Southwest. Now you have to tell us about your experience.'" He quickly scratched the work he was making and instead started on assemblages from found objects. "Everybody had this grand concept where it was like, 'According to theories of this and that....' I was just making work because it came from an interior space."

Troy was back home when the zoot suit came up in conversation with his stepdad. He had been thinking for many years of a way to make work about El Paso, but he didn't know how. Popularized by jazz musicians in the early 1940s, the zoot suit has quite the history. The baggy fashion found its footing in the African-American art scene in places like Harlem and Detroit. It was then adopted by Mexican-American youth, also known as *Pachucos*, who were associated with flamboyant, devious behavior. The zoot suit grew to signify gang affiliation and nightlife shenanigans.

Then, in 1943, the production style was sanctioned by the military since fabric was being reallocated into uniforms. *Pachucos*, however, continued to don the look, so, as World War II raged on in Europe, white servicemen in Los Angeles took to the streets in what became known as the Zoot Suit Riots, a series of fights targeting Mexican-Americans. These hate crimes have since been repackaged by some historians as acts of patriotism.

With its racially charged history, the zoot suit made for the perfect subject in Troy's new body of work. It covered the breadth of Troy's interests: black consciousness, Latinx experience, immigration and queerness. In "Fat Cat Came to Play"—Troy's first solo exhibition at Company Gallery in New York—the zoot suit is picked apart and unpacked through collage.



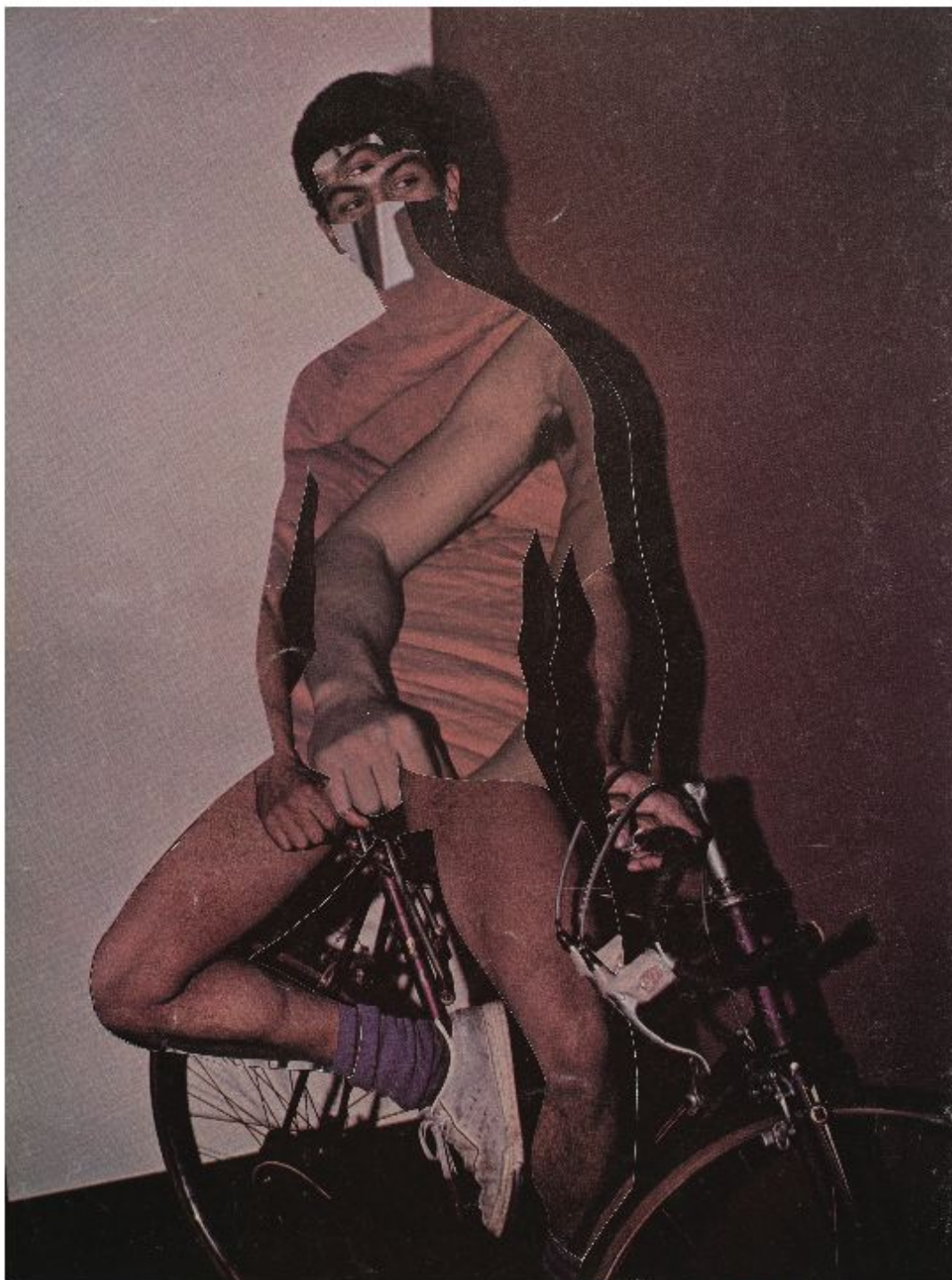
"I think growing up in a border culture influenced my ideology of collage," Troy says. Even when he was painting in undergrad, Troy couldn't stop himself from doing more than putting paint to canvas. He sewed extra fabric onto his works, layered canvas onto canvas, and pushed a more sculptural sensibility into the painterly medium. As with "Strangers," "Fat Cat Came to Play" features magazine pages and faceless models, but here the work is more autobiographical and political. Troy incorporated some of his own clothes into his collages as well, gluing, stapling and manipulating the way in which you'd see a belt or the waist of pants. It's all very suave.

An avid reader, Troy cites Agnes Varda, Octavia Butler and bell hooks as references for his own work. These writers use prose to deal with ideas of black Futurism, white guilt and double consciousness. Like Troy, they cut apart and paste together the many narratives sewn into racial dynamics in American art. ■

All artwork images courtesy of Company Gallery, NY.

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TROY MICHIE



Opposite page: "Chair" (2015). This page: "La Bicicleta" (2015).

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ART



"Aguila," paper, photographs, clothing, and acrylic on masonite panel, 60" x 48" x 2" (2017).