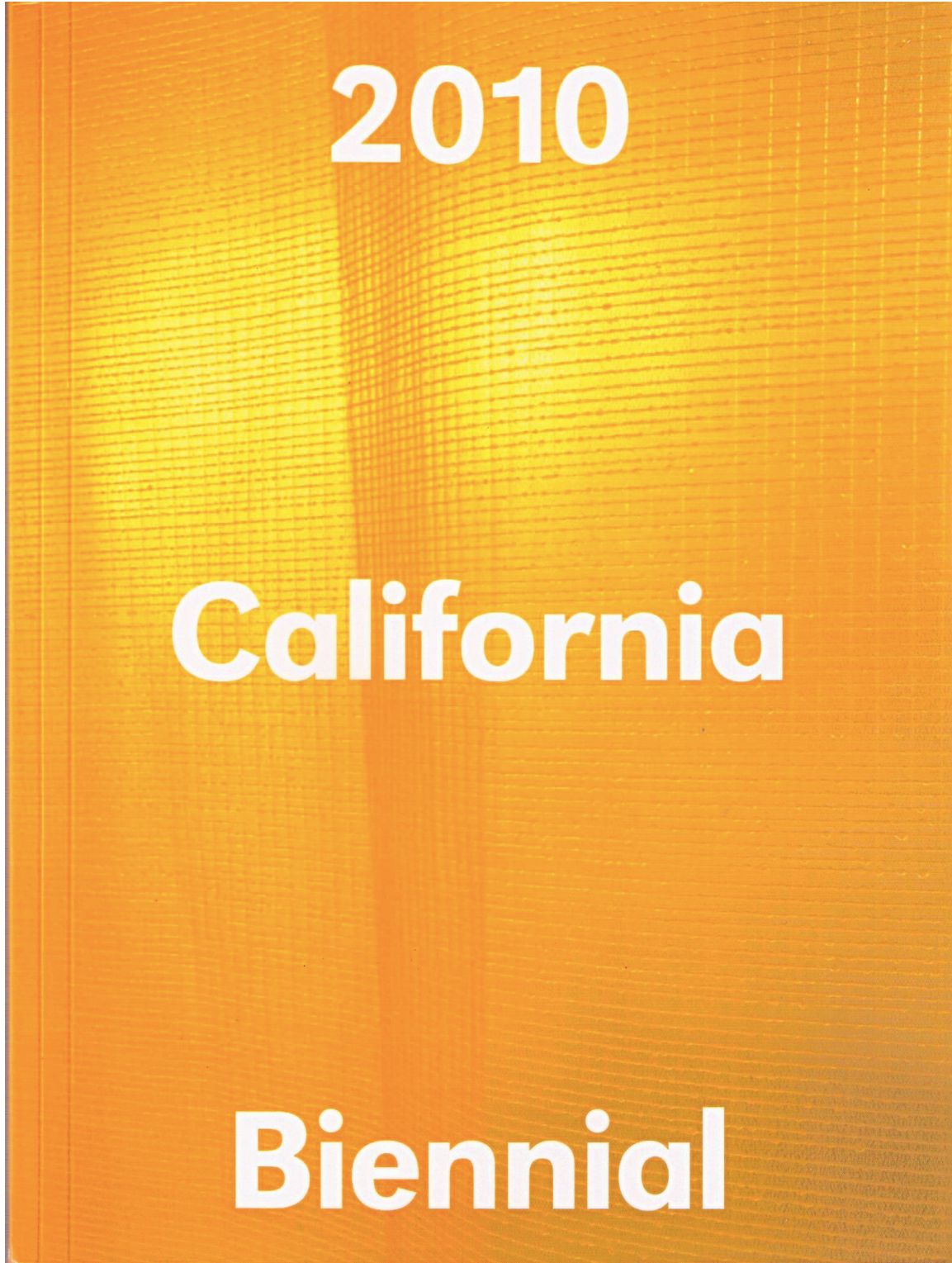
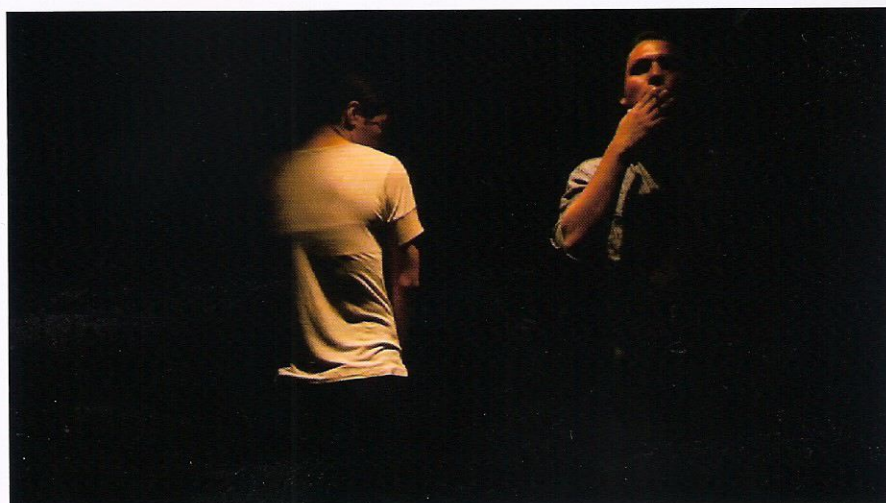
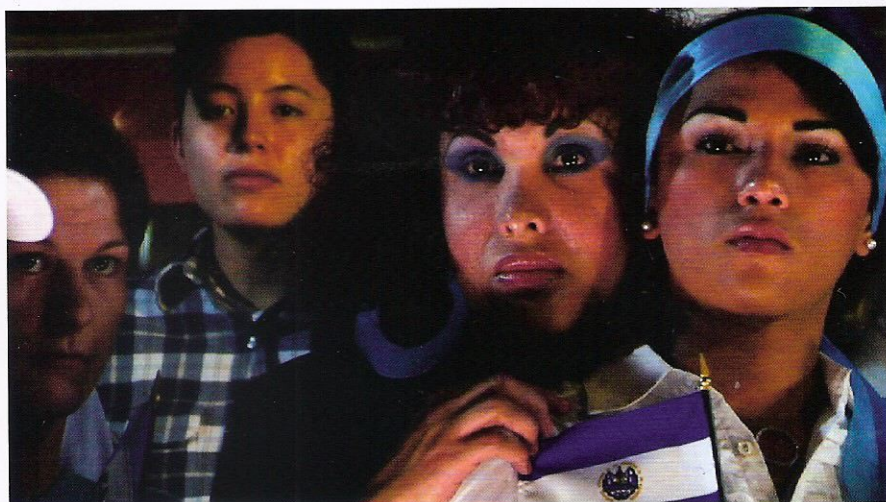
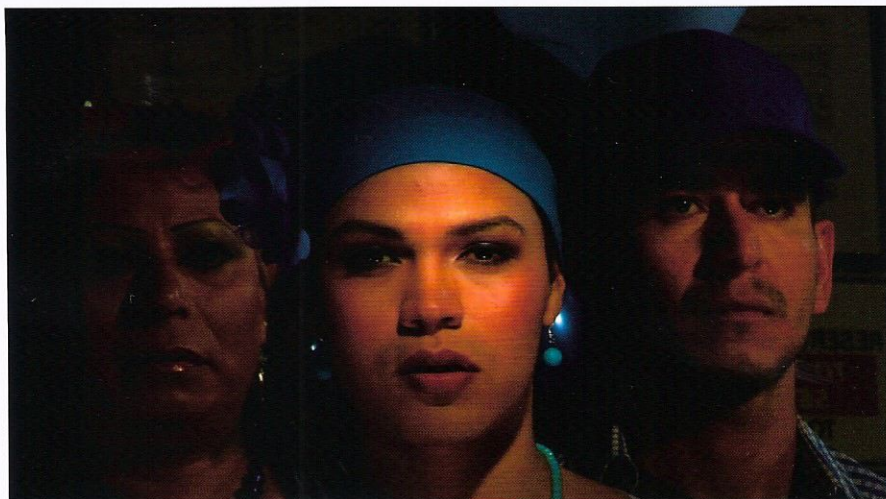


CLIFTON BENEVENTO

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California Biennial 2010: Orange County Museum of Art, January 1, 2011





Stills from *Damelo Todo (Give Me Everything)*, 2010 — cat. no. 128

CF: Can you briefly describe your work for the biennial?

WT: *Damelo Todo* (*Give Me Everything*) (2010) is a projected video installation that hovers between performance, document, and social event. I feel most comfortable talking about it in terms of the conditions of its production. I was throwing a party/performance night at a bar called Silver Platter for two years, and *Damelo Todo* is basically the culmination of that lived experience, in both subject and style. I'm currently working on a larger documentary called *WILDNESS* (the name of the party that I threw in collaboration with DJs Total Freedom & NGUZUNGUZU), which involves crossover characters. I draw a lot of inspiration from my queer nightlife, which is very much about creating environments that are both nurturing and fantastical—and I see the need for both in my community. So *Damelo Todo* is about that effort, both on screen and beyond the frame.

CF: Much of your recent work deals with the idea of the voice as a metaphor and as the medium through which themes of language, identity, and gender politics are explored. Can you talk a little about this?

WT: Right now my practice revolves around two major concepts. The first is "the voice as cock," which comes from something my voice teacher, Juliana Snapper, used to say before a live performance: "Remember! Your voice is a cock!" I guess that's like picturing the audience in their underwear. The first time she said it, my whole world changed. Understanding the voice in terms of power, penetration, and object was so transformative. The second concept is a performance technique I call "full body quotation," which is about embodying the word, not only through text but through everything that contributes to its meaning—i.e., the voice as that thing outside of language. I have always connected to this idea of voice as someone who grew up with a split-immigrant-racial identity, in which many of my formative familial and cultural identifications excluded language. There is also a layer of *Damelo Todo* that is about re-creating this experience. The film is not subtitled, so it privileges a bilingual viewer. And for the rest of us—your point of entry is whatever you bring to it.

CF: You mentioned voice, and in a previous conversation you talked about the voice as a metaphor for community representation, one that provides a voice to underrepresented and underprivileged communities. This concept definitely extends across the scope of your work. But in the wake of providing a voice, you've built a stronger community. Do you consider this community organizing central to your work? If so, what's its role in your artistic practice?

WT: I feel very oppositional to the idea of "underprivileged" and "underrepresented" at the moment. Who is under whom? I don't consider myself to be a community organizer at the moment either, because I'm deep in the throes of editing a documentary about "my community"—and I believe that as soon as you start to create a representation of others, you inherently set yourself apart. It's simply impossible to be both on the outside observing and on the inside experiencing. The process of making the film

WILDNESS has been about trying to inhabit that limbo for as long as possible. I hope I can survive—meaning, I hope that afterward I can still access that feeling of being a part of this thing that I am trying to represent. Does that make sense? I don't mean to be so abstract about it, but I really think that for an artist, filmmaker, activist, or whatever—if your practice depends on social relationships—the whole idea of "speaking for others" is a very tricky, flawed, and doomed path. But I kind of like that! I don't believe *WILDNESS* is about a community, but rather the film calls into being a community that doesn't actually exist . . . so maybe after the film comes out, that community will form? That would be dreamy! But not likely.

CF: For *Damelo Todo*, you've chosen to use film as a format for your artistic expression. Why?

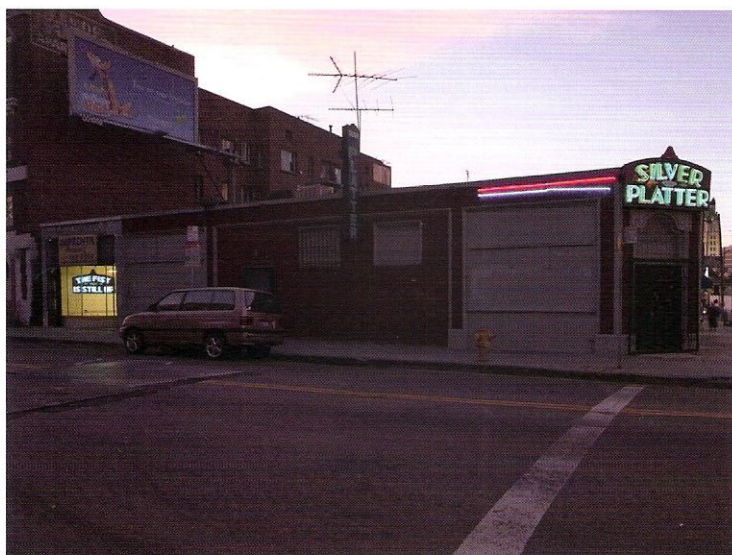
WT: Every audience and every format has conventions. I used to think (very naively) that visual art was outside those conventions because it was so deconstructive, but we all know that being unconventional, transgressive, or whatnot is the convention in the visual arts. My approach to making *Damelo Todo* and *WILDNESS* is about really considering the limits of any given format/audience. To oversimplify it, it's often a tension between trying to clarify something versus trying to complicate it. Art asks questions; documentary gives answers. Again, I'm oversimplifying, but I like the challenge of what those two basic tenets imply about audience. I think there is a narrower audience for the visual arts because ambiguity and codedness can be uncomfortable for a lot of people. So you reach a lot more people when you try to find a common language. I feel resistant to the category of "experimental documentary" because that would imply that "experimental" is a style. Or at least in the film world, people think experimental is a style—basically, anything that isn't straightforward storytelling. But for me "experimental" implies that you are challenging not only form but everything about how meaning is circulated as well. So for me, right now, making *WILDNESS* as a rather straightforward documentary feels experimental because there's a necessity both to clarify meaning and to circulate widely. I want as many people as possible to see the important "ambiguity of being" that is shared by transgender and immigrant communities. ■

Born 1982 in Worcester, Massachusetts; lives and works in Los Angeles. Tsang is a graduate of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (BFA, 2004) and the University of California, Los Angeles (MFA, 2010). His work has been presented at REDCAT, Los Angeles; Art in General, New York; the Kitchen, New York; Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros, Mexico City; Impakt Festival, Utrecht, the Netherlands; and the International Short Film Festival in Oberhausen, Germany. Tsang's recent projects *Damelo Todo* (*Give Me Everything*) and *WILDNESS* are centered on Wildness, the party/performance night that he

co-organized with DJs Total Freedom and NGUZUNGUZU for two years at the Silver Platter in Los Angeles. Tsang's short film *Shape of a Right Statement* was included in *Artforum's* "Best of 2008: Film."



Production stills from *Damelo Todo (Give Me Everything)*, 2010
Courtesy of the artist



Top

Still from *The Shape of a Right Statement*, 2006

Single-channel video

Courtesy of the artist

Bottom

"STILL" lightbox, 2009

Digital C-print

Courtesy of the artist