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# The New York Times

ART IN REVIEW

## WU TSANG

By [HOLLAND COTTER](#)

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*Clifton Benevento**515 Broadway, near Broome Street, SoHo**Through Aug. 5*

Transgender identity, long the basis of an underground lifestyle, now the muscle behind a political movement, is increasingly finding a voice in mainstream art. The young artist Wu Tsang is one of its most visible representatives. Born in 1982 in Massachusetts, living in Los Angeles, self-identified — to use his terms — as transfeminine and transguy, he mixes art and politics in about equal proportions.

His activities range from performing and filmmaking to event planning and community organizing, all of which figure in the short film and installation that make up his first New York City solo [show](#). The film, “Dameló Todo” (“Give Me Everything”), adapted from a short story by Raquel Gutierrez, tells of a teenager from El Salvador named Teódulo Mejía, who comes to Los Angeles in 1985 as a refugee from his country’s civil war. With no place else to go, he finds shelter in a transgender bar where he is befriended by the patrons and begins to perform in their nightclub-style shows.

In the course of the film his connections to the family and political crisis he left behind, and to his original sex, become destabilized. By the end, he has developed a sense of solidarity with a newfound family in the bar: revolutionaries in the cause of gender ambiguity. That, anyway, is how I read the dreamlike narrative, which is deliberately impressionistic but feels elliptical and undercooked, like a film with still-missing ingredients. Either way, it has sources in reality.

The bar in the film is inspired by a real one called the Silver Platter, long a meeting place

and refuge for members of the transgender Latino population in Los Angeles. Mr. Tsang found it soon after he arrived in the city as a student and instantly felt at home there. He went on to help create, on the premises, a one-night-a-week club called Wildness, which specialized in performance events and attracted a new, young clientele. (The gallery installation — long bar, gold lamé curtain — evokes the atmosphere.)

And he's been busy ever since. At present, he's working with a legal clinic in Los Angeles geared to local, low-income transgender populations. And he's in [residency at the New Museum](#) developing a performance-and-film project that will incorporate clips from the history of transgender cinema. If you think identity politics has no more to tell us in art, you should think again, and keep an eye on Mr. Tsang to see where the action is.



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