

*John Neff Prints Robert Blanchon*

May 18 - June 25, 2011

Reception: June 4, 6 - 9pm

Equal parts exhibition and performance, *John Neff Prints Robert Blanchon* will be on view and in process at Golden Gallery from May 18 to June 25, 2011. This is John Neff's first exhibition with the gallery.

The artwork of Robert Blanchon (1965 - 1999) is inseparable from his life - as an artist, an educator and a gay man living in Chicago, New York City and Los Angeles - and from his death from AIDS. This exhibition will be the first time a Chicago audience has had access to Blanchon's surviving body of work in over a decade.

John Neff's work - in curatorial projects, installations, photography and writing - often focuses on marginal artifacts and events that, in their indeterminacy or obscurity, cast a freshly indirect light on problems central to contemporary culture. Similarly, his work's blurring of the spaces of production, presentation and reception dramatizes the ways in which those categories are interdependent and interpenetrated. Neff's past projects have investigated subjects as diverse as John Boskovich's epochal 1993 exhibition *Rude Awakening*, Fred Camper's rarely-screened film work, Milwaukee's Hermetic Gallery and the significance of collaged substrates in Kerry James Marshall's large-scale figurative paintings.

*John Neff Prints Robert Blanchon* will revolve around Blanchon's 1995 photo-based conceptual work *Untitled (aroma / 1981)*, a collection of advertisements for sex products selected by Blanchon from pre-AIDS gay publications. The images are presented as delicate sepia photographs, and were intended to be printed - and left unfixed so as to fade away - with every showing. Since Blanchon's death in 1999, the negatives he made for *Untitled* have disappeared; however, an assortment of the supposedly ephemeral prints (crafted in the 2000s) survives.

For this two-stage exhibition, Neff will first display the extant posthumously printed components of *Untitled (aroma / 1981)* and then, within the gallery space, use those remnants to recreate negative transparencies, and - this time unfixed sure to fade - sepia prints. If Neff's past exhibitions are any indication, radicate media and objects will ultimately accompany the process.

Around 1981, theories abounded about the possible causes of then-emerging "opportunistic infections and cancers" that would come to be known as HIV/AIDS. One theory described amyl nitrite or butyl nitrate "poppers" (inhalational drugs used recreationally during gay sex) not as catalysts, but as chemical causes, of the disease. In both form and content, *Untitled (aroma / 1981)* reads this medicalization of sexual practice through other "chemistries": the erotic and the photographic.

Blanchon's *Untitled (Drawing Horse)*, 1998, a plate glass sculpture in the form of a drawing horse of the sort used in traditional figure drawing studios, will also form a part of the exhibition. The sculpture draws attention to the bodies of both the artist and figure, and to the constant threat of harm to its fictional user, again suggesting the precarity of representations and of those who render them. Neff will create a copy-and-print stand mimicking *Untitled (Drawing Horse)*, which he will use while (re)printing *Untitled (aroma / 1981)* in the gallery. Both sculptures will orbit one another in the exhibition space, forming a dialog between present and past, active and passive, subject and object.

Additionally, Neff will also produce a limited edition, modified bookwork altering the Robert Blanchon catalogue published by Visual AIDS in 2006.

*John Neff Prints Robert Blanchon* is not intended to restore Blanchon's work to an "original" state. Nor is it designed as a commemorative or honorary event. Rather, the project is an investigative reflection on and reprocessing of the life and work of Blanchon - an effort to develop production and presentation methods that engage his daring, difficult work with the levels of attention and risk it deserves. *Untitled (aroma / 1981)* is - to echo artist Steve Reinke - not torn, but asunder from the very start.

John Neff will be performing, in print and process, the project on two dates during the exhibition: May 21 and May 28 from 1 - 4pm. A reception will take place Saturday, June 4, 6 - 9pm. All interested parties are invited to attend.

Both John Neff and Golden Gallery acknowledge with appreciation The Estate of Robert Blanchon, Mary Ellen Carroll, The Fales Library & Special Collections at New York University, and Visual AIDS for their collective and continued support of this exhibition.