Bill Arning curates ’Hauntings’

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Hervé Guibert, "Thierry", 1983, gelatin silver print , 5 5/8 x 8 5/8 inchesHervé Guibert

Bill Arning, director of the Contemporary Art Museum in Houston, curates a selection of Visual AIDS Artist+ Member artworks, titled Hauntings, which explores the poignancy of memory and the “pastness” of photographs.

View Bill’s lightbox of Hauntings images and read his web gallery text below. Bill was one of nine collaborating curators for Visual AIDS 26th annual Day With(out) Art, Radiant Presence.

I am haunted more by the memories of men I never kissed, fucked or played with much more than those I did. I have joked that within me there is a chubby 14-year-old English girl obsessed by Morrissey and sure I will never be loved, and considering a future career as the ritual hanger on to a coterie of gay men. Those haunts go back to my teenage years, and most objects of these

unhealthy dreams not only never saw me as a potential lover, they were likely unaware that I fantasized and pined for them. One of my earliest friends who died from AIDS was named James W, and everyone I knew had crushes on him, he was, and remains in memory, perfection personified. When he got sick his family whisked him home to Utah, where, he just vanished from our lives. When years later I found by accident his panel at the AIDS memorial quilt I thought, “well now I will never know what his kisses would have been like.” While many of these crushes did not die...and thanks to the wonders of Facebook occasionally pop up aged and different than I remember, there is that constant reminder of the phrase, “this I shall never know.” The following selection of images each reminds me of mortality, and the constraints of life, the nonnegotiable finitude of life’s pleasure. AIDS is but one of the many ways in which the sweet limits of mortal lives must be daily acknowledged. Photography as an art form is defined by its pastness, as soon as an image is made it records its begins marking its transit swiftly away from present tense. This unthinkable quarter century that has passed since Electric Blanket’s premiere is a splendid time to remind myself all I have is today.

Bill Arning is the director of the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. After arriving in Texas in 2009, Arning organized solo exhibitions of Marc Swanson, Melanie Smith Matthew Day Jackson, and the late Stan VanDerBeek. Jackson and VanDerBeek were jointly organized with the MIT List Visual Arts Center where Arning was exhibitions curator from 2000 to 2009. At MIT he organized shows of AA Bronson and Cerith Wyn Evans, and a retrospective of the work of Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler. From 1985 to 1996, Arning was director of White Columns in New York City, where he organized groundbreaking first solo shows for many of the best known artists of his generation including John Currin, Marilyn Minter, Andres Serrano, Richard Phillips, Cady Noland, and Jim Hodges, among many others. In 1993 Arning organized the first exhibition about gender and sexuality in South America, Maricas, at the Center Cultural Ricardo Rojas at the University of Buenos Aires.

Arning has written on art for journals such as Artforum, Art in America, Out, and Parkett, and multitudes of international museum publications, including texts for retrospectives of Jim Hodges, Keith Haring, Christian Jankowski, and Donald Moffett as well as other writing for books by Elmgreen and Dragset and Lawrence Rinder. He has written an essay on the art market and AIDS for the upcoming publication ArtAIDSAmerica being organized by the Tacoma Art Museum. Arning co-organzied with curator Elissa Auther and the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver a survey exhibition Marilyn Minter: Pretty/Dirty and also the first large scale museum exhibition of Mark Flood, titled Gratest Hits, in 2016.

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