

## COMING OUT

When I was ten years old, I kept a secret book of drawings. The drawings were of a homoerotic nature; drawings of myself with men; prototypes of large, superhero-like men who would embrace me, naked, on a bed. Drawings of men fucking, drawings of oral sex. The drawings weren't only erotic. There were also drawings of specific men; boys I knew, friends of mine from school, boys from my neighborhood. There was a boy with whom I was deeply infatuated, and I expressed this obsession in drawings that were like little odes to this person. I recorded our fantasy romance into the pages of this sketchbook, which I bound with a leather strap, sealed with a metal lock, secured with triple-reinforced tape, and stowed away in a secret place behind my bookshelf.

One day my older brother confronted me and told me that he had found my secret sketchbook. I told him I didn't know what he was talking about. He said "You know, the one you hide behind your bookshelf." I pretended to not understand, although inside I felt a crushing sense of panic and anxiety. He said "Well, I would tell you what is inside, but it's too embarrassing to mention, so I wouldn't say it..."

Shortly thereafter, I took the book from its hiding place and opened the lock. I tore out the pages one by one, and brought them into the bathroom. I filled the sink with water, put the pages into the water and washed the pages, methodically rinsing the paper in the sink with my hands until the pages were soaked and the drawings slowly vanished. Eventually I had mashed the paper with my hands into a muddy pulp. I then drained the remaining water out of the sink and collected the pulp, and squeezed the water out of it. I formed a ball with this paper maché and let it dry before stuffing it into a small leather pouch I had. It was a pouch where I had previously kept my collection of marbles, with a drawstring at the top. I tied off the drawstring and hid the pouch at the back of my sock drawer.

This process was entirely unpremeditated and intuitive; I carried out these steps almost unconsciously and even calmly, as if doing laundry or preparing food. I didn't consider any alternatives like throwing the pages in the garbage, or burning them. The decision to soak the pages and transform the contents of my sketchbook into pulp seemed necessary and came to me very naturally.

Twenty years later, I am fascinated with the psychological implications of this process. This action was purely a physical manifestation of a psychological process: as long as the book remained hidden, I could keep its contents away from my own conscious mind. But as soon as anyone else had seen it - and thereby acknowledging its existence in a reality outside of my imagination - I too became consciously aware of what I had been drawing. My brother's discovery of this book was as much a revelation to him as it was the forbidden fruit to myself, in the garden of my young imagination. The subsequent rinsing of the pages was a sort of symbolic reversal of time; first the drawings are slowly erased through washing, then the pages turned back into the pulp from which they were created. This wasn't a process of destruction, as would have been the case had I burned the pages. It wasn't even a matter of repression, as may have been the case had I simply buried or discarded the drawings. It was a process of transformation, of turning the illustrated thought into material form, through an almost ritualistic physical process of erasure and reversal.

With the work "Coming Out" I am picking up where I left off twenty years ago in my sock drawer. I am re-assuming that physical manifestation of a psychological process but I am doing it in reverse: creating an object - a symbol based on the same internal logic of my actions as a child - which should have the associative power to influence my emotional or psychological state. In this case, all the things which I have hidden away in the past twenty years - whether of a sexual nature or not - have accumulated in this pouch, which has grown into a large sack. The sack is now out of the sock drawer and hangs from the ceiling like a steer, and like in a slaughterhouse the steer's throat has been cut and it's blood is being drained. The preserved contents of this sack have grown too big and the sack is bursting at the seams. Its contents spilling out onto the floor for all to see.

Jon Campbell, 2011