



# ON BEING MALE

HAMILTON ARTISTS  
*Inc.*

## *"ONCE TASTED, THE APPLE OF POWER IS ASHES"<sup>1</sup>*

*In the 1970's women who strove to break free from gender and economic oppression reconstructed themselves in many images. Superwoman, Political Radical, Lesbian Separatist, Masculine-Woman. Above all, we rejected the construction of the "feminine" as our mothers had understood it. We knew this image of the feminine was not "valued" in the dominant, patriarchal culture and in order to be valued, we joined men in rejecting part of ourselves.*

The women's movement created a conundrum for those insightful (dare I say "sensitive"?) males who recognized the inherent injustice of patriarchal society, and did what they could to advance change.

*In the mid 1980's with some structural changes in place, women who had gained power as a result of these changes, began to turn their gaze back in an effort to regain those parts of themselves left behind in their rush for a place at the "Table of Equal Players".*

Now the time has come for men to turn their gaze back towards themselves to rediscover and honour the "masculine" within. However this masculine self cannot possibly be the violent, exploitive, military-corporate man that has ruled Western society since the beginning of the industrial revolution. Or can it? If not, what is it?

*What are some of the questions men must confront when they travel down this path of self-exploration?*

*How is it possible for men to be marginalized in a patriarchal culture?*

*What loss can men possibly suffer in a "man-made" world?*

*How is it possible to talk about empowerment for men in a world where male-driven values dominate all activity?*

Men who feel trapped by male gender, cultural roles must come to terms with the inherent paradox of our situation. To explore the current male construction of self, men must challenge our "gender-neutral" orientation to the world in order to help pry ourselves loose from our

tightly held dogmas and prejudices. During the Iraqi-U.S. War, military commentator Gwynne Dyer took exception to the fact that many feminists considered the war to be a "male-driven" enterprise. The war was not driven by men, he insisted, it was driven by institutions. No "reasonable" man could rationaly describe these institutions (the government, the armed forces, the multi-national oil companies) as "female-driven". They are the tools of men, wielded by men. We can, however, ponder whatever happened to masculinity? How has it devolved and been corrupted into the Frankenstein monster it is today?

*Twentieth Century Western civilization does not honour the traditional masculine principle of steadfast resolve to know and defend what one loves, rather it exploits, twists and mutilates this strength for the expression of its own values -- capitalism and consumption. Women are familiar with this process. The difference for women is that we have no say in the construction of what is valued. This domain has been a priori male territory. Women have been burned at the stake and shot en masse for acting otherwise.*

The liberation of men is not a movement of empowerment, at least not in current masculine terms. It has more to do with according women an equal place at the table which any complete sense of justice understands they are entitled to.

*It has more to do with men and women constructing a new table or perhaps not sitting at a table at all.*

It is however a movement of enlightenment, of spiritual regeneration and ultimately a mind-body reunification. Men have imprisoned their souls in the towers of power they themselves have constructed. It is only the existence of women, free, equal, and fully able to realize their own natures, who can free them.

*In today's movement, women are reclaiming and renaming the "feminine". We are learning to honour Her again in all Her various guises for the abundance and grace She brings to our lives. Men have separate but parallel tasks of reclaiming and renaming the "masculine".*

Janet Tulloch

Bradley Pascoe

ON BEING MALE is an artistic exploration of the socialization of men utilizing the process of personal experiences in order to investigate issues that men encounter in their lives. By entering into what is traditionally a male taboo territory of sharing, these male artists are on the new frontier of reconstructing the concept of masculinity and self image.

The women's movement has had a similar and yet much more reluctant parallel movement in men. Men have been less willing to perceive the Patriarchy as destructive. The myths of male invulnerability, control, and power are false. It has led men, generation after generation to grow farther away from a more complete manhood that recognizes and incorporates both the traditional masculine and feminine sides of his persona into a more balanced male form.

The initiation and teaching of younger males by the elder men has been lost and needs to be reawakened. These ways were much more encompassing than the vague processes that young males have been channelled through for the past hundreds of years due in part to the consequence of the absent father and the absent male mentor. We, the men of today, pay a heavy toll both personally and interpersonally in the perpetuation of these false myths. John Wayne is dead but the myths live on. Alone, each man struggles with this false, destructive form of masculinity that has been set up for him by a remote, invisible patriarchy. Eventually, most men face isolation and estrangement from any connection to this patriarchy as well as each other. Internally powerless and spiritually empty, we grieve but do not know why. It is time for men to heal themselves and begin a new initiation where men can once again teach each other the more humane aspects of manhood. For it is only men who can do what needs to be done.

Toronto performance artist, SCOTT MARSDEN's work utilizes audio and slide projections of his drawings juxtaposed with media idealizations of family to intimately immerse the viewer into a young male psyche. These reconstructions of his memories from boyhood are a means of examining a social construction of masculinity and questions the role of family and the media as a site of social conditioning and struggle for identity.

**SCOTT (memory):** "My father ... I don't remember seeing him very often ... and he hardly had the time to talk to me ... I remember ...he threw me off the deep end of a swimming pool once and hollered ...SWIM! I was only three ... I was so afraid ... I would wake-up at night and listen to his

*snoring rumble like a river in a gorge through the house."*

*"Sitting on my father's lap to read the newspaper with him ... and me only four or five ... and not able to read yet. Dad being so patient and making me feel ... good."*

**FATHER:** "You must be like me. You may not be like your mother and you must wait to love her as I do. You must wait to be like me."



SCOTT MARSDEN

**SCOTT (memory):** "My mother always insisted that we respect our father ... because he's our father, but herself not respecting him and always insisting that I take her side ... against my father ... when they fought and blaming me when I failed."

*"Disapproval of me was my father's main thing. I never seemed to be able to do anything right for him. I was lazy, incompetent and a fuck-up! Once in particular ... I remember I had to clean out the basement. I really worked hard at it .. hoping for once to do a really good job for Dad. But his only words were 'How come you didn't wash the windows?' but I still kept trying to please him. Just once dad."*

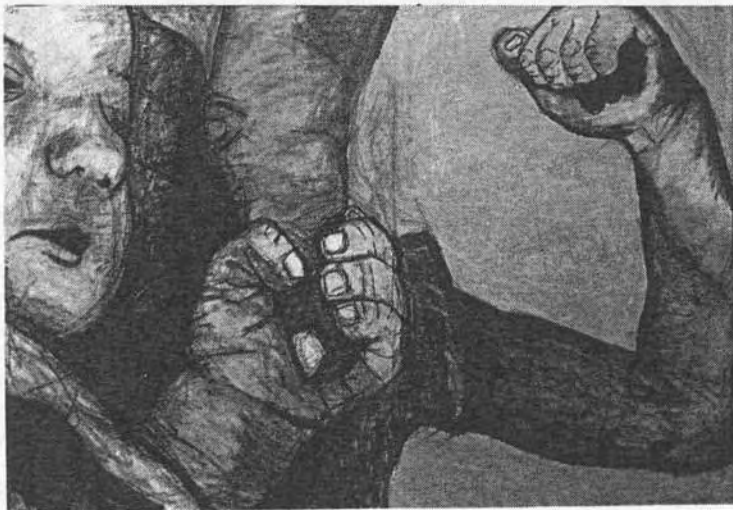
*"As a boy, I had to know many things, like how to fight, how to be athletic, how to run fast, play rough games ... How to be smart, how to take care of myself, know what girls don't know ..."*



*how to stay out of trouble, how to get into trouble."*

*"... to be on constant alert to either confront violence or avoid physical violence. I had to be ready to defend myself. I was constantly on my guard. That built tension and anxiety into the very organization of my body. You get so used to living with it ... It comes to feel 'normal'. I always had to be ready to prove and defend."*

**SCOTT** (questions): *" Why am I so afraid? What am I? Does male bonding exist? Can men really become friends with each other? Why didn't my father talk to me?"*



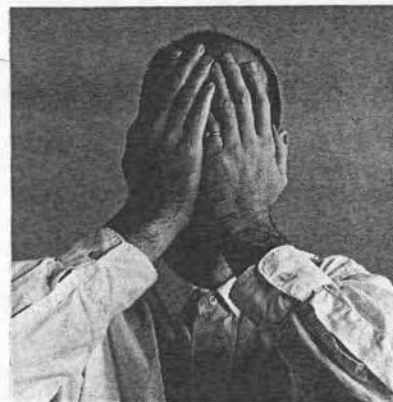
**SCOTT MARSDEN**

STUART MUELLER is a Halifax artist whose photography and text reveals his personal reflections of self from sexual awakening until young adulthood. He sees story telling as his means of revealing information about the group and the individual's place in society. His work acts as a beginning for a discussion with the viewer of our interconnection - - our similarity to one another. This interconnection includes a grieving for that which is not there. Blocked by the myth of a false masculinity that is one sided, men are prevented from coming to terms with their own humanity.



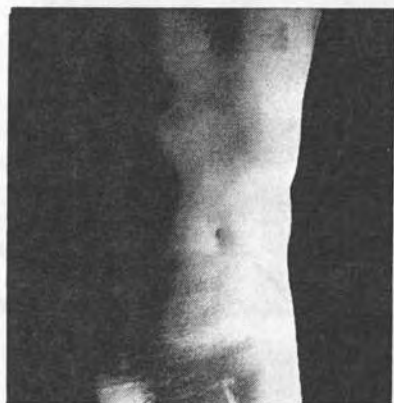
*"One night I was at the disco - this woman asked me to dance. As we danced, she moved her body against mine, at the same time looking into my eyes and kind of laughing. I wasn't sure what to do, she walked away without saying a word. I watched her walk out the door. After a few seconds, I followed. When I got outside, she was gone."*

**STUART MUELLER**



*"I found that if I lied, people could tell.  
It was written all over my face."*

**STUART MUELLER**



*"I had this experience with a man. He was a close friend. We were drunk. It just happened. For a while I was shaken up, confused. I no longer knew where to direct my desire. I finally realized that it was in me; in my head, my body."*

**STUART MUELLER**



Hamilton artist, PETER KARUNA's video "CRYING SHAME" invites viewers to consider where they stand in relation to the norms of male socialization. In part, it questions the emotional inhibitions that men have been socialized to endure in a lonely isolation and how we restrict each other into conforming to destructive, non supportive, invulnerable modes.



**Still from Peter Karuna's "CRYING SHAME"**

GARY KIBBINS suggests that the young male's parental influences can serve to stymie the desire and ability for men to communicate effectively in his video "BEWARE". The concepts of hiding and establishing personal territory begin early in a male's life and are illustrated in this video.



**Still from Gary Kibbins "BEWARE"**

Writer MICHAEL GLASSBOURG's video "BOYS WILL BE..." vividly demonstrates how a group of close male friends confront their own rage and violence towards women, children and each other. Masking themselves in bravado, denial and pseudo liberal enlightenment, they are uncertain about when and how to deal with crossing the lines of aggression, power and rejection.



Still from Michael Glassbourg's "BOYS WILL BE..."

These works reach out particularly to men (and women who care about them) inviting them to seek out what Robert Bly<sup>2</sup> refers to as the "Wild Man" inside. By developing the "Inner Warrior" who clarifies that which is truly worthy of defending, men will guide themselves away from hostility and aggression gone astray. We will move towards a vision of a complete manhood that incorporates components missing in contemporary men after generations of the absent father-mentor syndrome.

Jim Riley  
animateur

1. Heather Robertson (Maclean's Magazine)
2. Robert Bly. Iron John: A Book About Men. Addison-Wesley, 1990.

## ON BEING MALE

(part 2)

### PERSONAL MALE EMPOWERMENT COLLECTIVE

ON BEING MALE (part two) will seek out male artists to collectively examine their own personal, male power as a means of addressing the destructive influences of the Patriarchal society upon themselves, their relationships with each other, children and women.

The collective that forms will support each man as he utilizes his personal reflections of POWER. There are many facets that may be examined by the individuals. It is expected that visual statements will be formulated by each member(s) and the collective will then present their works in the form of an exhibition.

### STRUCTURE

We, as men, are accustomed to interacting with each other in traditional, male hierarchical ways. Men's groups need to be sensitive to pit falls of this process. There are certain expectations that those who participate can expect from each other.

1. The men artists who become involved will have decided to commit themselves to the process described above.
2. The collective exploration will be for a period of one year.
3. Each member will accept the responsibility to meet monthly during this time period. (unless the collective consensually agrees to changes).

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