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Fetish

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Anthony Romero, Without Tenderness	pg 3
Anya Liftig	pg 4
Eva Isleifsdottir, It's a sign	pg 8
Mark Cooley, PS4	pg10
Lisa + Ted Landrum, Group Costumes Retrospective Exhibition	pg14
Rakel McMahon, What is the purpose, it's allreadmade	pg18
Sky Fairchild-Waller, Hegemonic Masculinity	pg20

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Without Tenderness

Anthony Romero

"Our Observing is not of: it is. If we insist it is of, then it is of observing. We do not observe things. We observe observing. If we insist there should be "things" to be observed, these "things" come about through our constructing."

- Act Between and Between Acts, Ranulph Glanville.

I have made things from other things. Inventions. Starting with a notebook, a series of notes published by Jerzy Grotowski to accompany a 1963 production of Faust, I have constructed two dances.

Without Tenderness, 2011
<http://vimeo.com/29155474>

Without Tenderness, 2012
<http://vimeo.com/38070860>



Anthony Romero

The absence that I am talking about, that is present in Anthony's work, is not the longing to reinvigorate the past, but rather, the questioning of a past worth invigorating. I know Anthony's work as that swirling matter that surrounds this absence. It does not twinge with nostalgia. It is a call to re-orientate. I always only see what has or is going to happen, never the thing itself, and so I am always re-thinking and re-writing. I am always re-looking someplace else. It is an absence that I can track and trace. But I cannot predict its new site of emergence.

I am a writer and performer living and working in Chicago Illinois. I graduated with a BA in Art History from Texas State university in 2009 and completed my MFA in performance at The School of The Art Institute of Chicago in 2011.

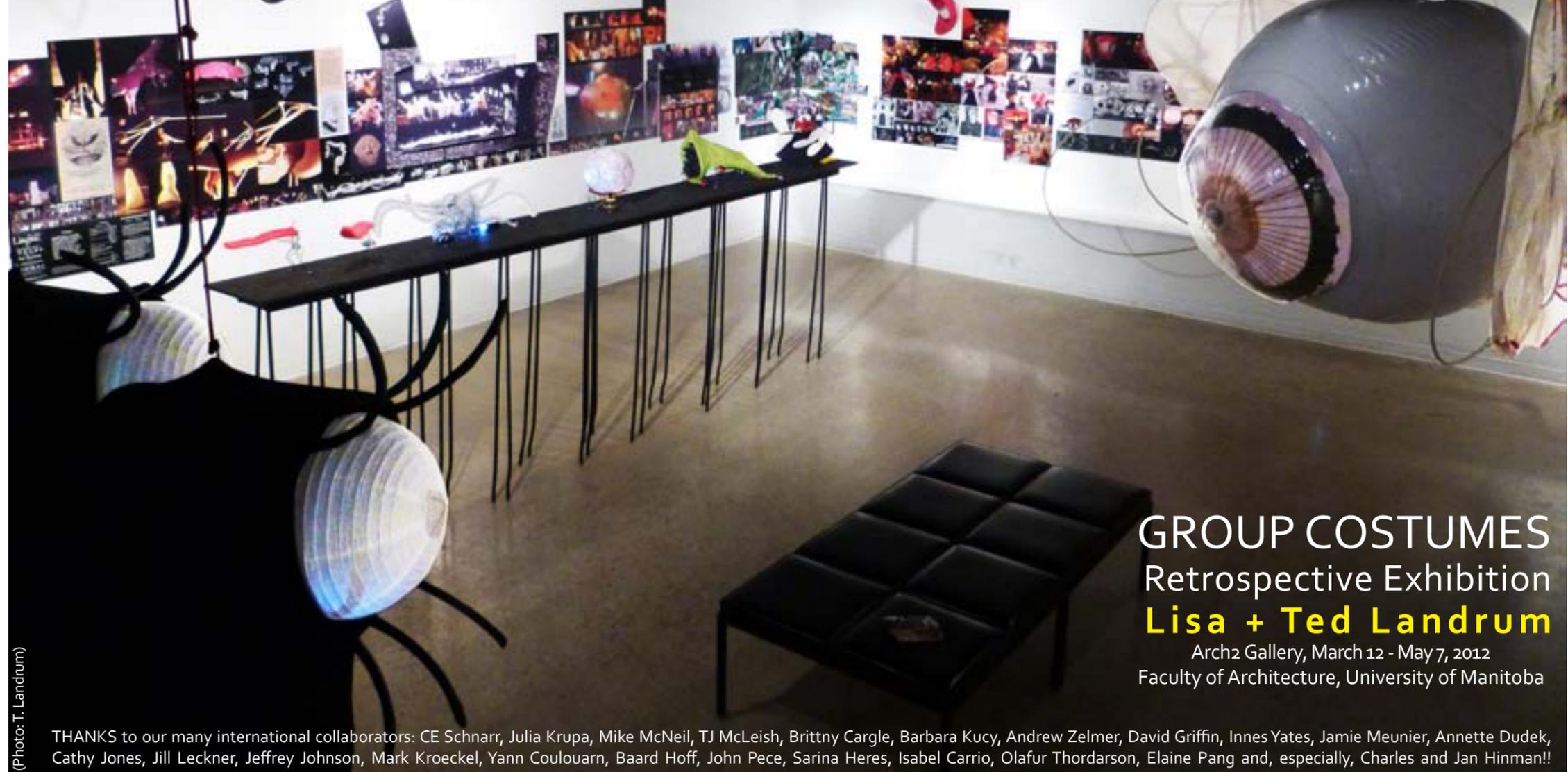
"There is no better image of the logic of socialization, which treats the body as a 'memory-jogger', than those complexes of gestures, postures and words... which only have to be slipped into, like a theatrical costume, to awaken, by the evocative power of bodily mimesis, a universe of ready-made feelings and experiences. The elementary actions of bodily gymnastics... charged with social meanings and values, function as the most basic of metaphors, capable of evoking a whole relationship to the world... and through it, a whole world."

— Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (1984, p.474)

Lisa + Ted Landrum are architects, teachers, critics, writers, poets, makers, lovers and friends of inhabitable places and events. We have always complemented our architectural work — and indulged our social curiosities — with performative practices, including the collaborative design, fabrication and enactment of "GROUP COSTUMES" in civic parades, especially the New York City Halloween Parade, which annually gathers tens of thousands of costumed participants (and millions of spectators) from around the world. Each of our "Group Costumes" prepared for this and other events — including giant inhabitable and operable Tongues, Intestines, a Brain-Theatre, an Armpit (of Liberty), Ear-Wings, a Winged-Eye-Mouth, and Eyes of the Beholder — grew to elicit a larger-than-life understanding of civic situations and festivities, while offering an animate, enigmatic and satirical image of the city's social body.

Why group costumes? Why Parades?

As architects we make collaborative, interpretive and inhabitable assemblages — cultural assemblies which enable creative participation with others (strange and familiar) and with the greater life and meaning of social situations (real and imagined). As agents of transformation, we perform dramatically in the various milieux and media in which we live, learn and play: cities, schools, language and other constructive arts. And, as curious human beings, we take serious pleasure in engaging one another (now and then) in collective existential and representational events: parades, festivals, markets, concerts, fairs, carnivals, colloquia, dramas, contestations, circuses and exhibitions. One could call our costumed participation in such events *witvuls* (rituals with wit). Call them what you will, they are inclusive public-making customs, as ancient (and regenerative) as funerals, weddings and revels. In being openly and radically diverse, monstrously transformational, and simultaneously comical and frightening, the NYC Halloween Parade offers an especially appropriate occasion to engage others in exploring the enigmatic challenge of collective human being, that is of being simultaneously civic, worldly and other-worldly. All this, we're convinced, helps to grasp what is essential to architecting.



(Photo: T. Landrum)

THANKS to our many international collaborators: CE Schnarr, Julia Krupa, Mike McNeil, TJ McLeish, Brittny Cargle, Barbara Kucy, Andrew Zelmer, David Griffin, Innes Yates, Jamie Meunier, Annette Dudek, Cathy Jones, Jill Leckner, Jeffrey Johnson, Mark Kroeckel, Yann Coulouarn, Baard Hoff, John Pece, Sarina Heres, Isabel Carrio, Olafur Thordarson, Elaine Pang and, especially, Charles and Jan Hinman!!

GROUP COSTUMES Retrospective Exhibition Lisa + Ted Landrum

Arch2 Gallery, March 12 - May 7, 2012
Faculty of Architecture, University of Manitoba

Supported by a University of Manitoba Creative Works Grant, we recently prepared a retrospective exhibition of our costumes in the Faculty of Architecture's Arch 2 Gallery. This exhibition featured newly fabricated models of five costumes (from 1997-2008), along with numerous drawings and photographs depicting the context of their making and performance, thus showing the artifacts themselves as well as how and where they happened. This retrospective also gathered illuminating precedents (from Cyclops' eye and Hell-mouth to Gogol's Nose) which help to reveal the long tradition of public performance and the role of significant body parts in allegorizing the tragicomic drama of the body politic. This range of imagery and artifacts, together with two full-scale installations of our most recent wide-eyed costumes — hovering in space as attentive witnesses — provided a perceptual and conceptual horizon, which visitors could inhabit. By orienting themselves amid the Eyes and alongside the "walking street" of models, visitors played their part in the exhibition, completing the schema of a miniature parade. A projected film documenting the "Large Intestine" — from its making and conveyance (out of our studio window, through the streets of Brooklyn, over the Williamsburg Bridge, into Lower Manhattan, and up Sixth Avenue) to its culminating release and dissemination

(as hundreds of helium balloons filled the night sky) — made the exhibition experience all the more immersive.

The exhibition staged seven "**Group Costumes**", each representing enlarged corporeal fragments, or shared metonymies, figuring the social limits and potential of common bodily senses—of speech and taste, of labyrinthine in/digestion, of projective imagination, of polemical and pacifist gesture, and of creatively-judicious listening and vision: a "**Winged-Eye-Mouth**" (of nested beachballs, flexible tubing, a parasol and a parachute, made in honor of the Renaissance architect and far-seeing humanist Leon Battista Alberti); the "**Eyes of the Beholder**" (winners of the Storefront for Art and Architecture Gallery Critical Halloween event); the "**Ear-Wing-Beetle**" (an interpretation of Aristophanes' peace-seeking dung beetle, involving a pair of magical "in-one-ear-and-out-the-other" hats to avert petty talk and con the buzz of truth); the "**Armpit of Liberty**", or "Liberty Dis-Armed" (a protest piece exposing, by radical foreshortening of Lady Liberty's torch-bearing arm, the ominous dark-side of Liberty and an unexpected cornucopia); the "**Giant Brain - Miniature Theatre**" (made of visqueen, hula-hoops, social gyrations and moving imaginations); the "**Large Intestine**" (incorporating buoyant friends and translucent balloon-filled tubes in a

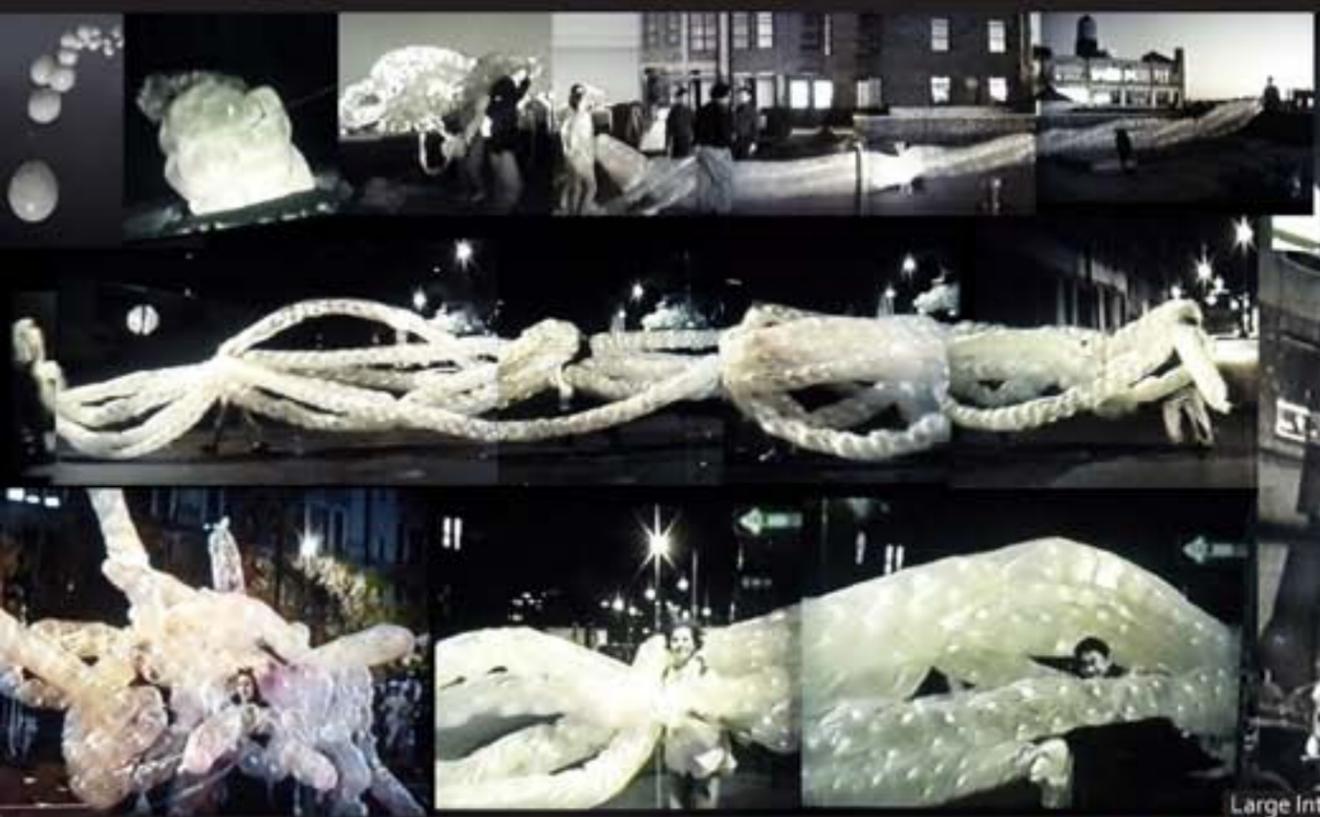
continuous passage toward levity); and multiple "**Giant Tongues**" (set loose in the parade to lick and lampoon the city while extending our perception of its heteroglossia).

Fetish as *Facticus* and *Facere*

Insofar as our "group costumes" are symbolically charged devices of collective mediation, they surely do perform fetishistically, yet they aim to expose and provoke more than a strict Freudian or Marxian may diagnose. Beyond any narrowly modern usage, the basic, full meaning of "fetish" is to make and charm via cultural artifice. It is to *facture* and *feat* in influential ways (as potent dreams are made and perform by imagination, memory, language and desire), yet to do so corporeally, collectively and probingly as socio-cultural and publicly poetic acts. Our work strives for more (and less) than to parade absurdly extended bodies, as panned by Tertullian (*De Spectaculis*, 18). Rather, more in a manner praised by Apuleius (*Metamorphoses* 11.9), our "Group Costumes" are socially illuminating and transformative; comical, critical and ironic; narratively and situationally heuristic; and, ultimately, celebratory—both of our complexly shared human cosmos and of the surprising ways we find to transcend its stubborn boundaries and limitations through artful acts of collective transformation.



Giant Tongues
NYC 1997



Large Intestine, NYC 1998



Giant Brain - Miniature Theatre, NYC 1999



Ear-Wing-Beetle, NYC 2008



Armpit of Liberty, Independence Day Parade, Warren, Vermont 2006



Eyes of the Beholder
NYC 2011



Winged-Eye-Mouth, NYC 2011

