

Feels Real: The Rhetoric of the Image

Peter Barnett

Documents submitted to the Faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of the Master of Fine Arts in the Department of Art

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Artist Statement

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My work combines video, performance, photography, new media & installation to address consumerism, identity and experience in contemporary culture. A substantial part of my practice is concerned with investigating the power of images. I'm interested in what role imagery plays in the social construction of reality. Borrowing from the language of art history and advertising, my photographic and video works attempt to deconstruct various cultural tropes through strategies such as decontextualization, exaggeration and reification¹. I'm interested in exploring the language of commodity — how it looks and feels — and how our phenomenological experience with commerce and its attendant stimuli, i.e. advertising, affects our personal and collective psyche.

In the highly-constructed images I create, I attempt to parse out the various visual and emotional tactics employed by media, advertising and other systems of consumerism. I'm especially interested in how constructed imagery elicits desire in the viewer, adds value to objects and promotes improved lifestyle through consumption. My work also concerns the embodiment of commodification through the construction of persona. The presence of consumer objects, media and advertising in our personal histories and memories help forge our identities and influence our desires and emotions. I attempt to make clear the power and importance of consumerism in our culture and lives.

¹ In Marxism, reification (German: Verdinglichung, literally: "making into a thing" (cf. Latin *res* meaning "thing") or Versachlichung, literally "objectification"; regarding something impersonally) is the thingification of social relations or of those involved in them, to the extent that the nature of social relationships is expressed by the relationships between traded objects (see commodity fetishism and value-form).



Peter Barnett, *Wraith*, 2012, Digital Video



Thomas Cole, *The Oxbow*, 1836
 Oil on canvas; 51 1/2 x 76 in.
 Metropolitan Museum of Art



John Constable, *The Haywain*, 1821
 Oil on canvas; 130.2 x 185.4 cm
 National Gallery



Peter Barnett, *Wraith*, 2012, Digital Video



Thomas Cole, *The Oxbow*, 1836
 Oil on canvas; 51 1/2 x 76 in.
 Metropolitan Museum of Art



Peter Barnett, *Wraith*, 2012
 Digital Video



Peter Barnett, *Wraith*, 2012, Digital Video

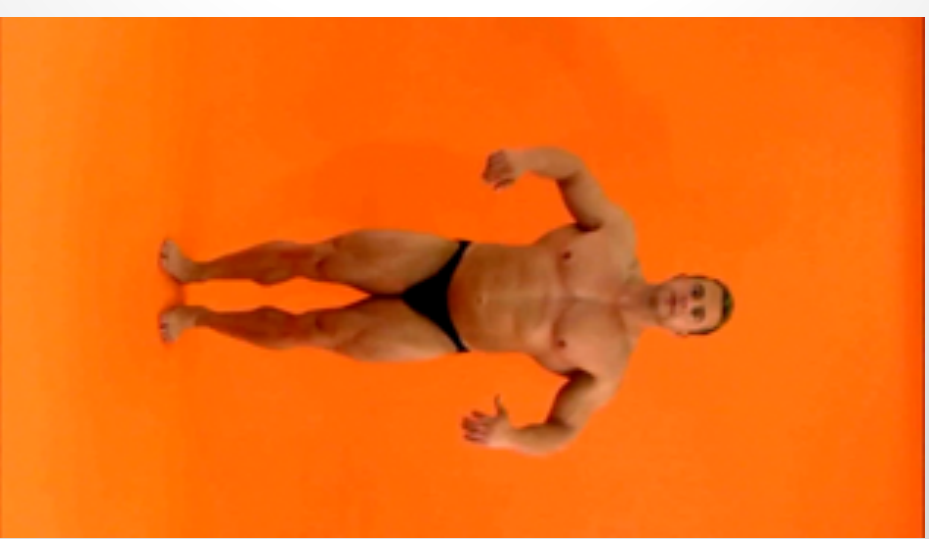


Peter Barnett, *Dream Body Gym*, 2013, Installation View





Left: Peter Barnett, *Dream Body Gym*, 2013, Installation View
 Right: Peter Barnett, *Dream Body Gym*, 2013, Digital Video Still

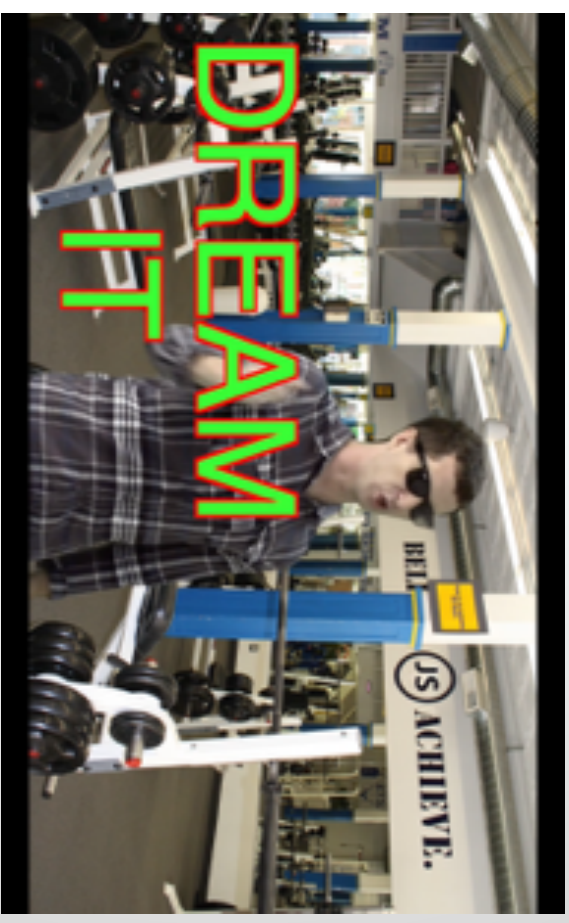




Right: Peter Barnett, *Dream Body Gym*, 2013, Installation View
 Left: Peter Barnett, *Dream Body Gym*, 2013, Digital Video Still



Peter Barnett, *Dream Body Gym*, 2013, Digital Video Stills

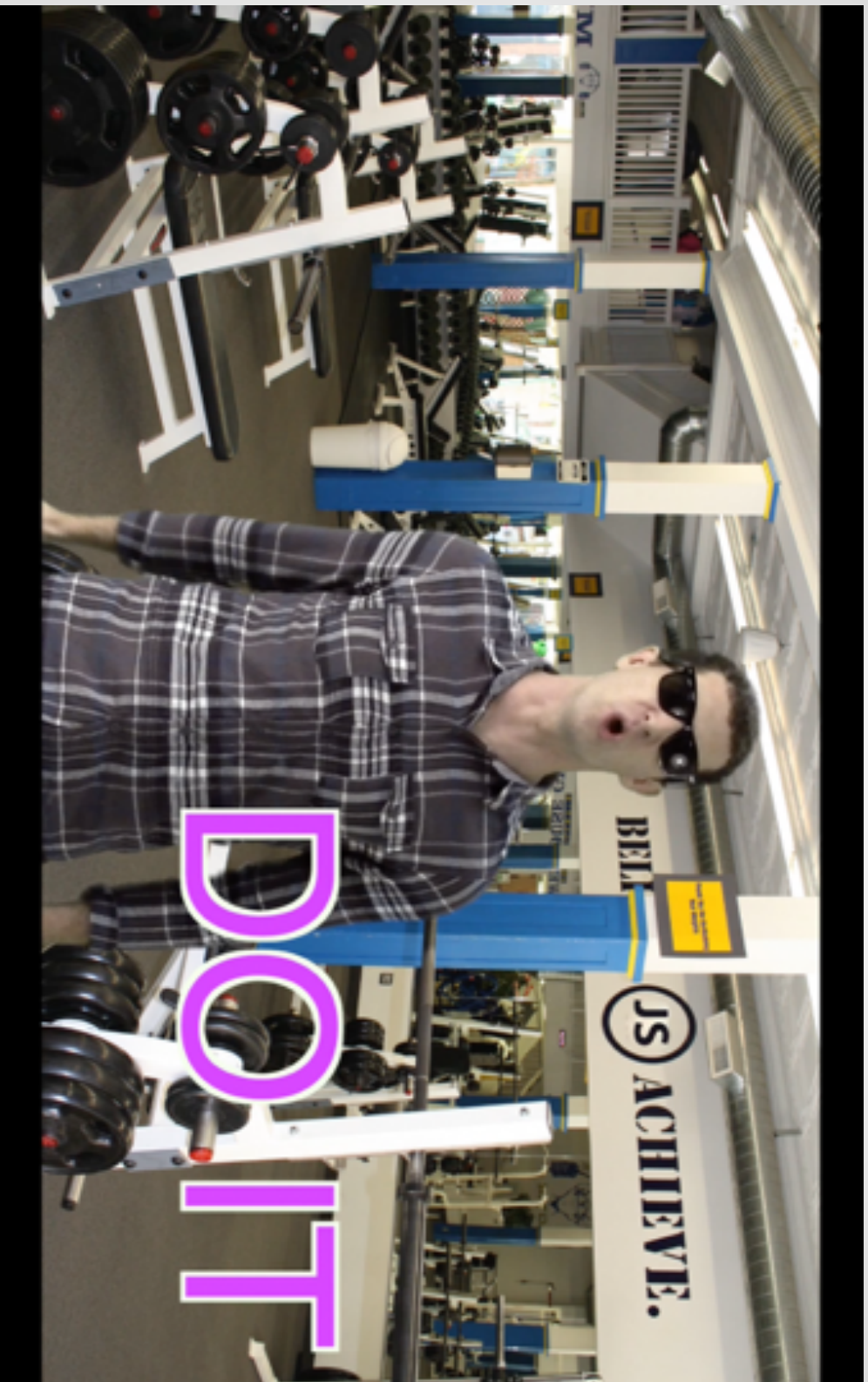




Peter Barnett, *Dream Body Gym*, 2013, Digital Video



Peter Barnett, *Dream Body Gym*, 2013, Installation View



Peter Barnett, *Dream Body Gym*, 2013, Digital Video Still

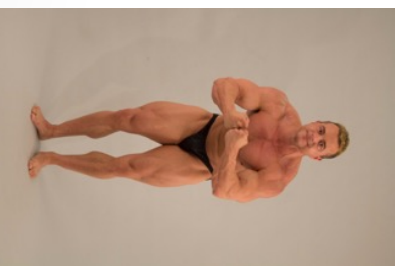
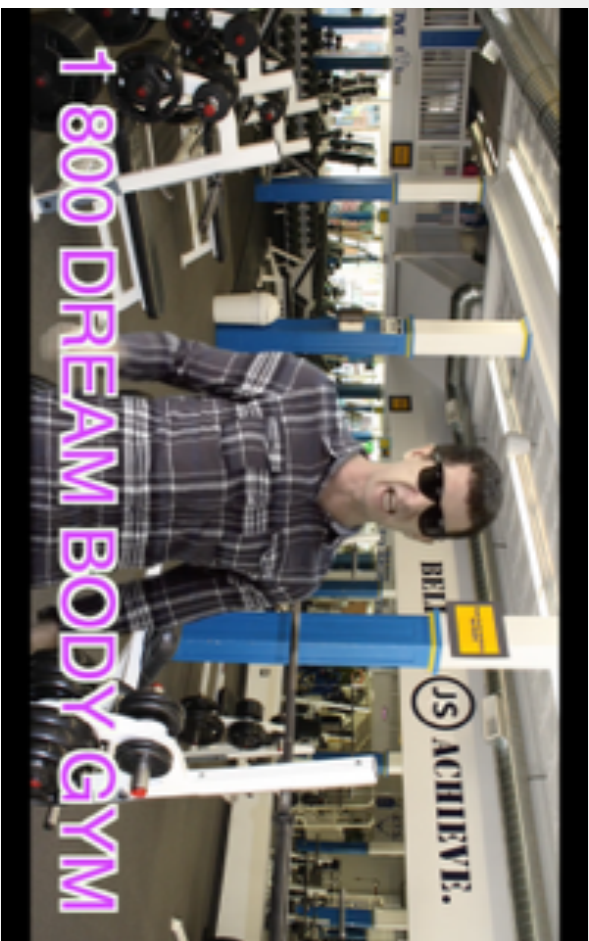
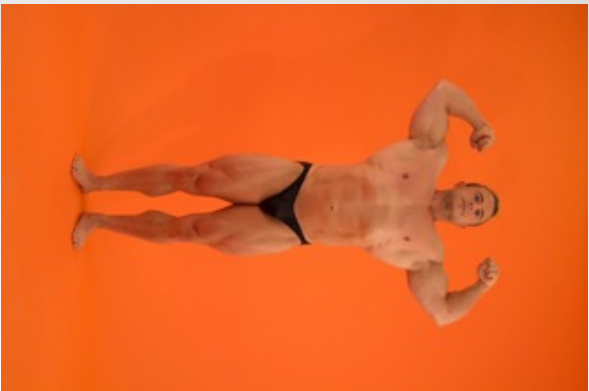


Peter Barnett, *Dream Body Gym*, 2013, Installation View





Peter Barnett, *Dream Body Gym*, 2013, Digital Video Stills



Peter Barnett, *Dream Body Gym*, 2013, Digital Video Stills



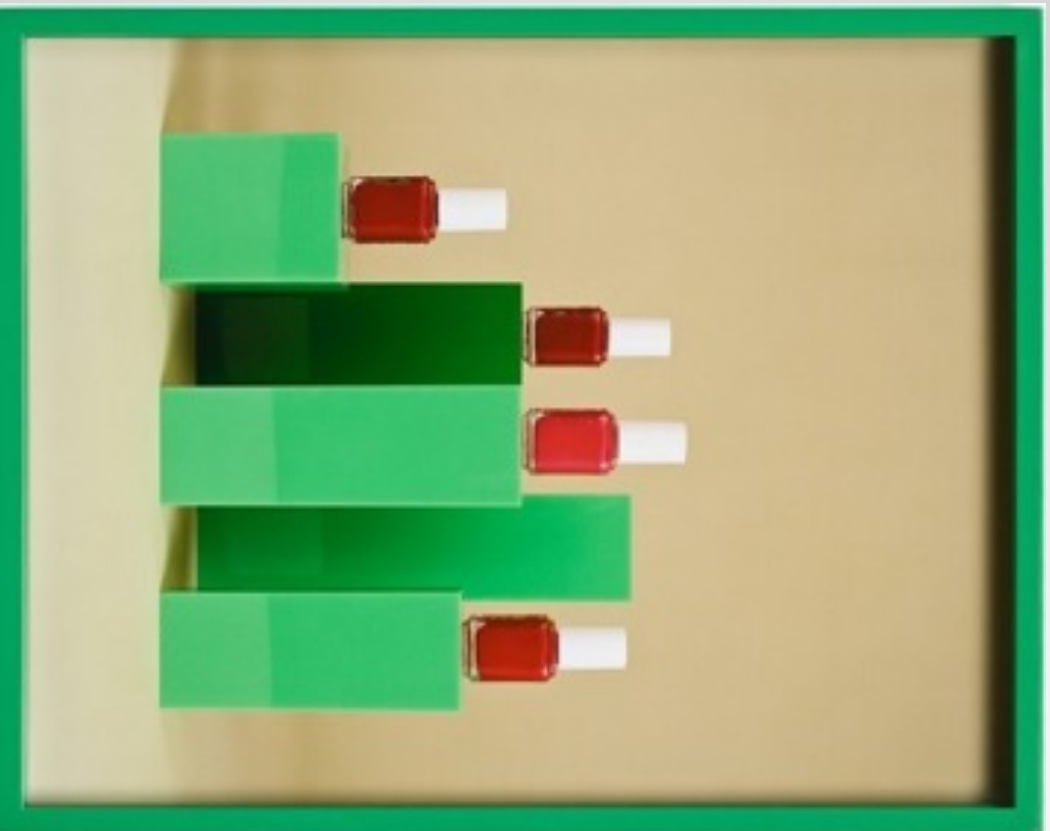
Peter Barnett, *Castle*, 2013, Installation View



Peter Barnett, *Castle*, 2013, Digital Video

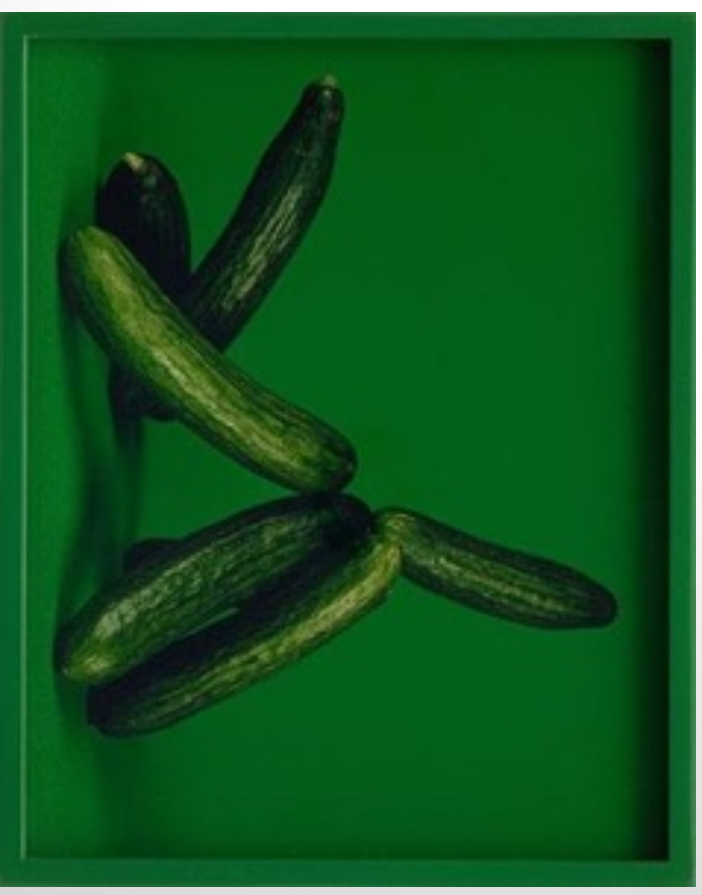


Peter Barnett, *Castle*, 2013, Installation View



Left: Elad Lassry, *Nailpolish*, 2009, Chromogenic print
14 1/2 x 11 in.

Below: Elad Lassry, *Persian Cucumbers*, Shuk
Hakarmel, 2008, C-type print, 9 1/2 x 11 in.

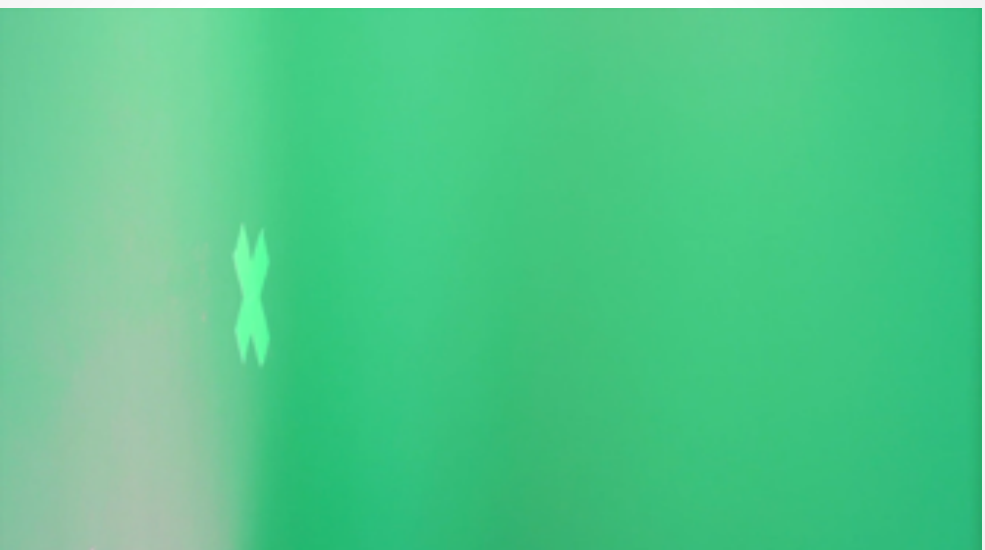




Peter Barnett, *Virtual Life of Flowers*, 2014, Digital Photography



Peter Barnett, *Virtual Life of Flowers*, 2014, Digital Photography



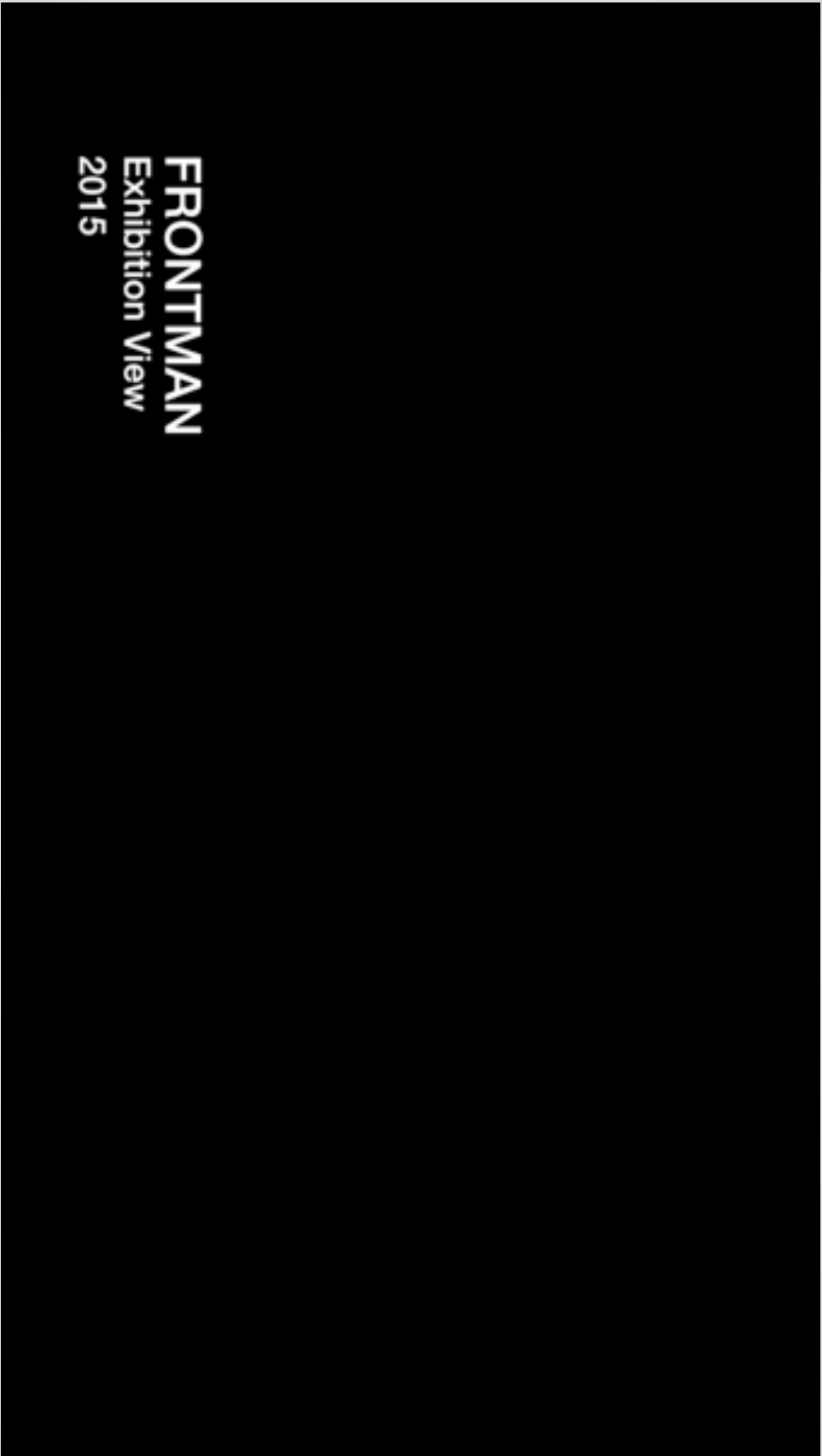
Peter Barnett, *Bouquets*, 2015, Digital Video



Peter Barnett, *Frontman*, 2015, Digital Video Stills



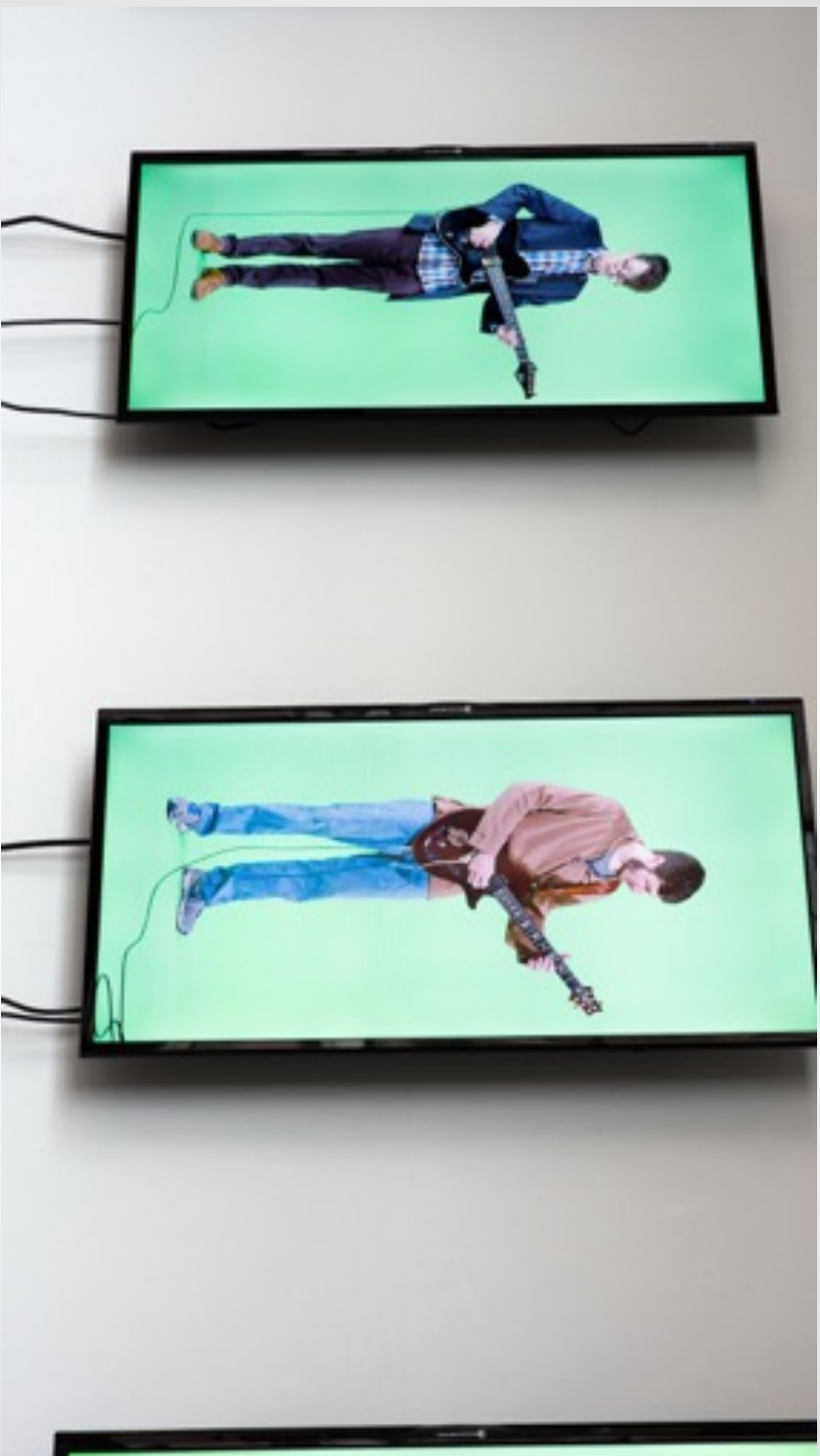
Peter Barnett, *Frontman*, 2015, Installation View



Peter Barnett, *Frontman*, 2015, Video Documentation



Peter Barnett, *Frontman*, 2015, Digital Video Stills



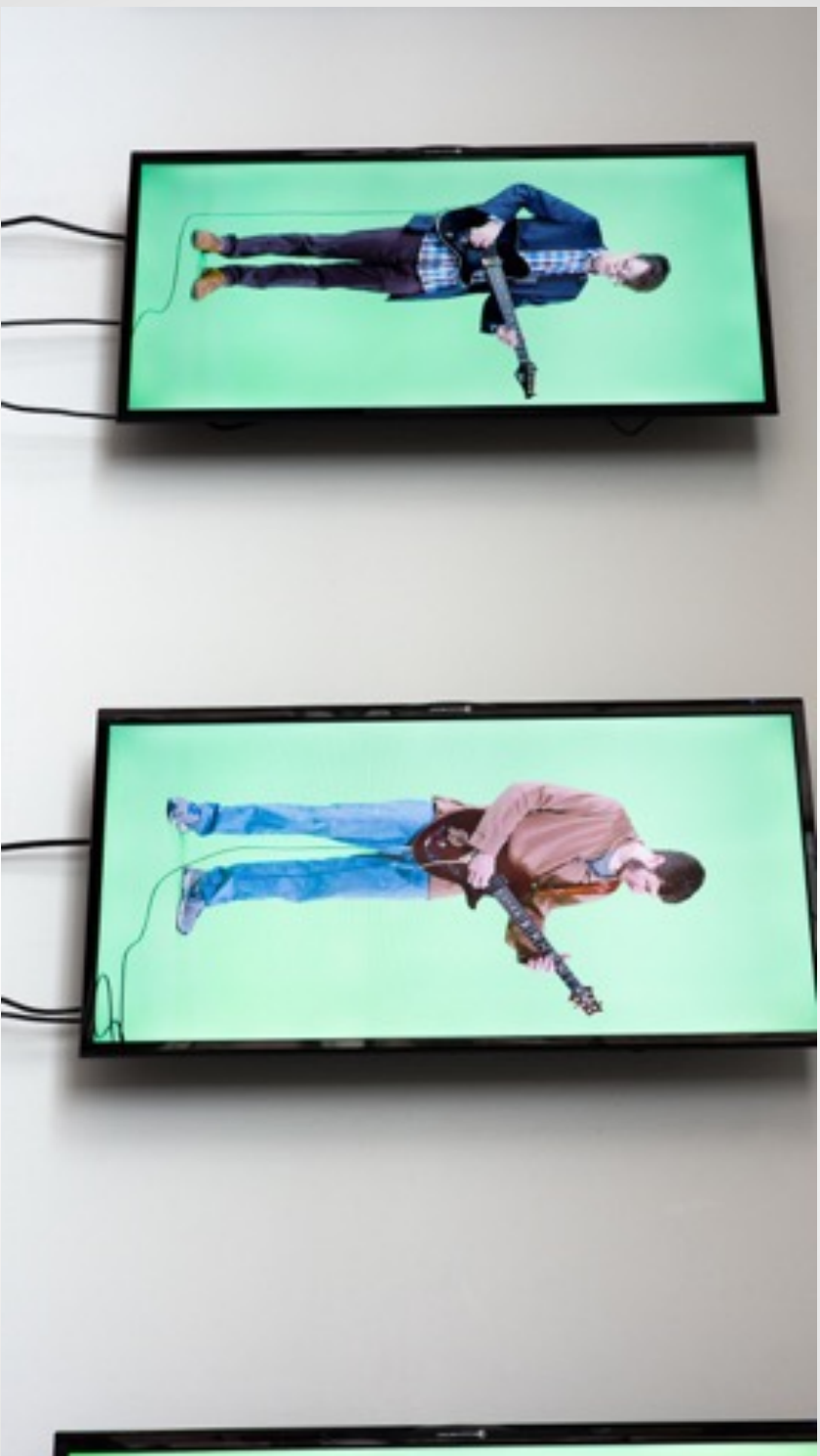
Peter Barnett, *Frontman*, 2015, Installation View



Left: Catherine Opie, *Jo*, 1993, Chromogenic Print, 20 x 16 in.,
Guggenheim Museum



Below: Catherine Opie, *Being and Having: Jake*, 1991,
Chromogenic Print, 17 x 22 in., Regen Projects, Los Angeles



Peter Barnett, *Frontman*, 2015



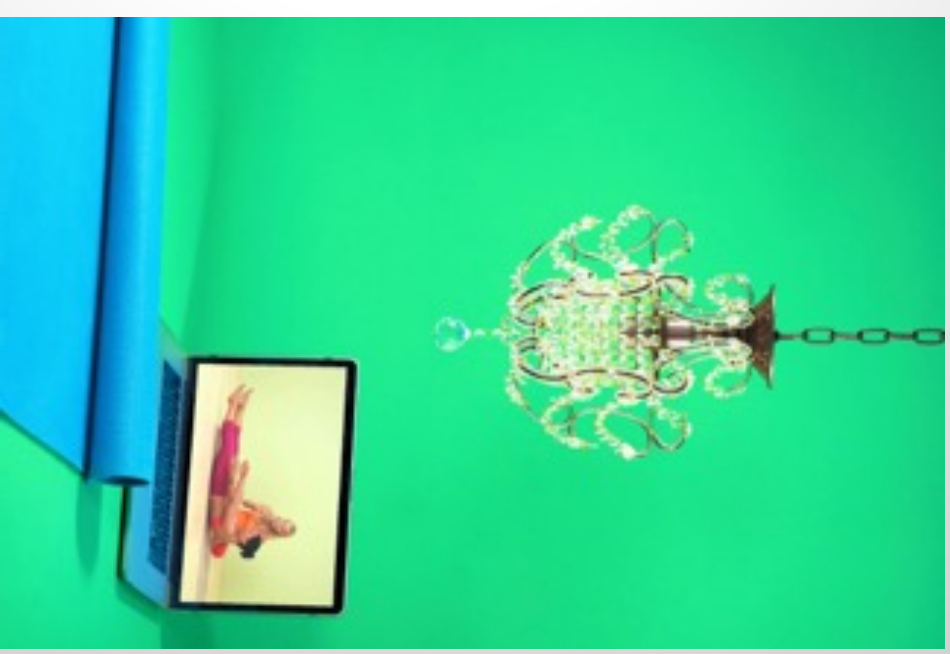
Peter Barnett, *Frontman*, 2015, Installation View



Suburban Metal Kids, Google Image Search



Peter Barnett, *Frontman*, 2015, Digital Video Stills



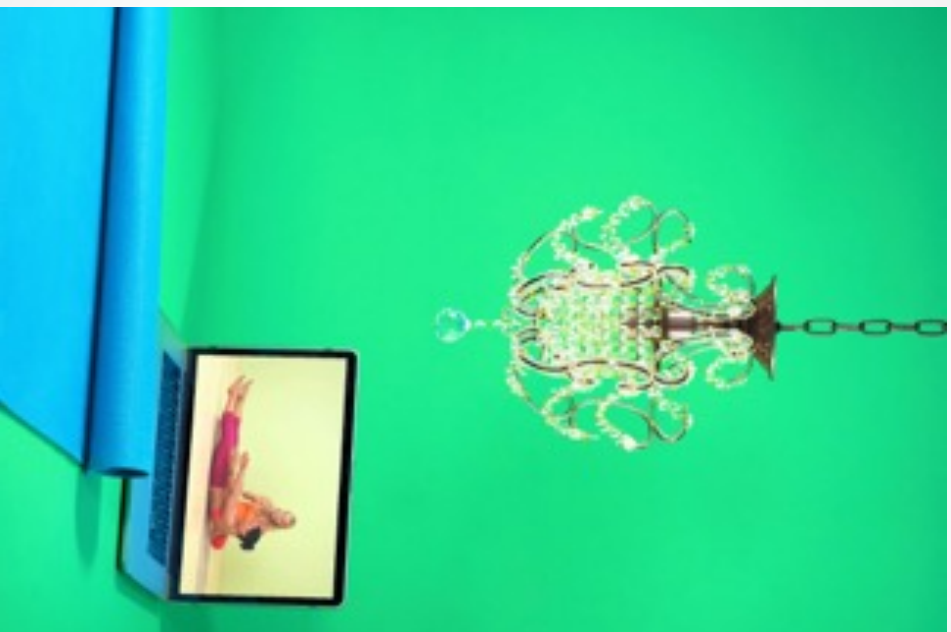
Peter Barnett, *Feels Real: The Rhetorics of Lifestyle*, 2015
Digital Photography



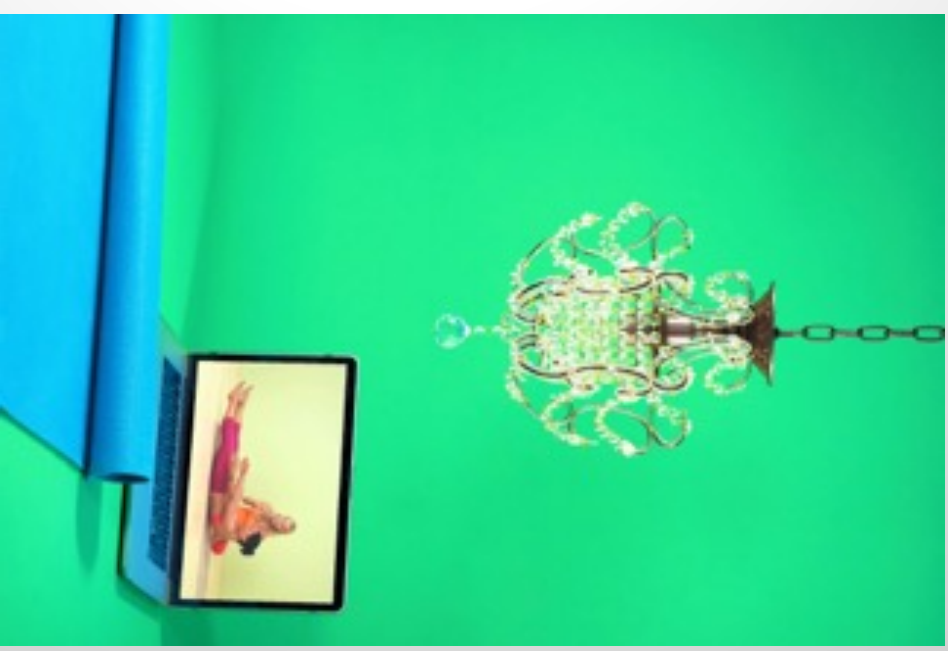
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Digital Photography



Peter Barnett, *Feels Real: The Rhetorics of Lifestyle*, 2015
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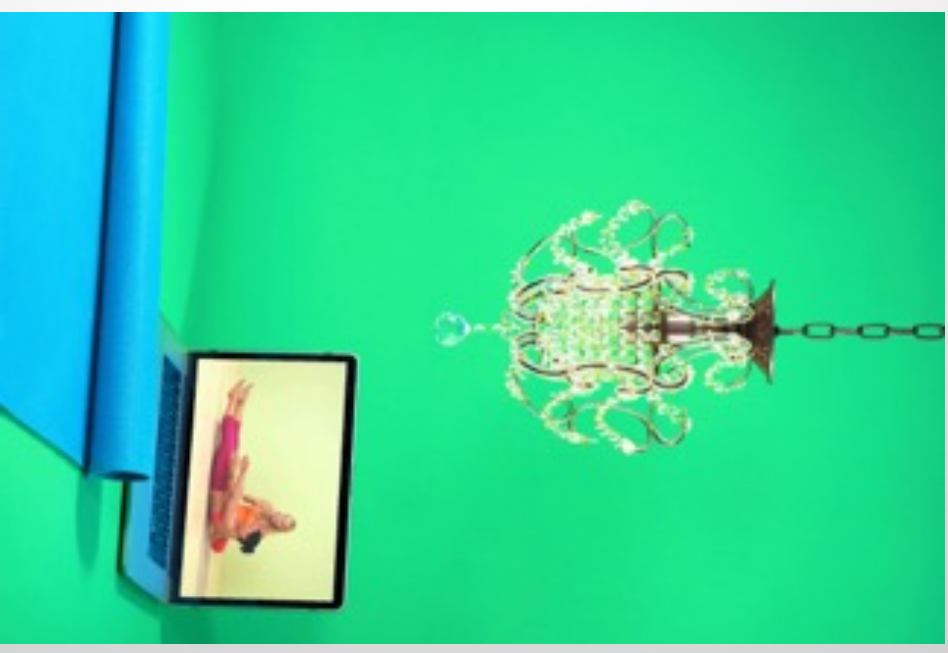
Peter Barnett, *Feels Real: The Rhetorics of Lifestyle*, 2015
Digital Photography



Peter Barnett, *Feels Real: The Rhetorics of Lifestyle*, 2015
Digital Photography



From Barthe's *Rhetoric of the Image*



Peter Barnett, *Feels Real: The Rhetorics of Lifestyle*, 2015
Digital Photography