

Larry Clark *they thought i were but i aren't anymore...*

*Luhring Augustine, New York 7 June – 1 August*

I remember the first time I opened Larry Clark's *Tulsa* (1971), a photography book that charts the path of amphetamine junkies – Clark and his friends – from the suburbs to the grave. It moved me. Clark and his subjects abdicate responsibility, and succumb to the abandon of drugs and sex – a delicious nightmare I'm tempted by, but will never allow myself.

In his exhibition at Luhring Augustine, Clark returns to some of the subjects from *Tulsa*. Beginning with *Johnny Bridges* (1961), the first portrait he took with a Rolleiflex camera borrowed from his mother, and moving to the present, the show charts the output of an artist once living the fantasy of youth, but now, as an old man, relegated to the role of voyeur. The heartbreak of Clark's ageing remove seeps through the work, which includes photographs, mixed-media collages and oil paintings on canvas.

The collages read like cabinets of curiosity, or the detritus cleaned out of the apartment of

a dead man. In *Untitled* (2013), Clark combines vintage stamps bearing the likenesses of Sonny Liston, Babe Ruth and W.C. Fields with a photograph of a baby being born and pornographic images of anal sex. *I want a baby before u die* (2010) includes a 1996 *New Yorker* cover, newspaper clippings about child-actor-gone-bad Brad Renfro, an image of Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* (1987) and a Polaroid of a woman under whose pubic hair is tattooed 'Larry'. *Self portrait with tan* (2) (2014) contains dozens of colour photographs of a caramel-coloured body, likely belonging to one of the Latino boys Clark has featured in recent films such as *Wassup Rockers* (2005) – in the centre, Clark superimposes a black-and-white self-portrait from his Tulsa days.

Over the years, Clark has taken on many male muses – most recently Jonathan Velasquez, a young man who came to live with Clark when he was sixteen, and Adam Mediano, the pimply faced, mop-headed young man who starred in Clark's film *Marfa Girl* (2013). The latter is

represented by a series of three topless colour portraits taken in 2011. The images betray that Clark has a type – Adam could be Johnny Bridges teleported from 50 years ago.

Velasquez, who is now in his twenties, is the subject of three oil canvases made in 2014. In them, he is nude – Clark pays special attention to painting his cock. The artist has frequently been accused of lechery, perhaps fairly – but Velasquez is not aroused. What's more striking about the paintings is how amateurish they are: the colours are off, the gestures unskilled.

This is also the case in *Self Portrait* (2014), a painting in which the artist comes off looking like Jesus wearing his crown of thorns. It looks nothing like Clark in his photographs, and because of that, it reads like a mask. What Clark wants us to see is not the person he is today, but rather the beauty that once surrounded him and a youth that, in this work, he appears desperate to recapture. *Brienne Walsh*



*Knoxville (Homage to Brad Renfro)*, 2011,  
colour photographs on board, 107 × 218 cm. Photo: Farzad Owrang. © the artist.  
Courtesy the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York