

Steven Arnold: Theophanies

August 11 through September 24, 2022

Opening Reception

August 11th, 7 – 9pm

The Fahey/Klein Gallery is pleased to present *Theophanies*, an exhibition of works by multidisciplinary California artist Steven Arnold. The exhibition has been curated as a limited retrospective of Arnold's surrealist tableau photographs, supported by a small selection of drawings, paintings, sculpture, and films. *Theophanies* features previously unseen photographs and includes an installation inspired by Arnold's elaborate Los Angeles-based Zanzabar Studio.

Steven Arnold's work engages themes of spirituality and sexuality, often with great humor, while referencing traditional world religious iconographies and philosophies. Through his tableau photographs, films, sculptures, and drawings, Arnold explored myth and mystery, androgyny and beauty, humor and artifice, life and mortality. His intricate black and white photographs showcase the artist's reimagined gods, goddesses, spirit guides and archetypes – slowly revealing an infinite number of subtleties, inviting a deeper dive into Arnold's personal mythology.

Realized between 1981 and 1993, Steven Arnold's tableau photography represents a confluence of his myriad other disciplines. This modality allowed him the freedom to fully realize his cinematic visions without outside influence or compromise. After sketching storyboards inspired by his dreams, a habit from his filmmaking days, Arnold would craft his tableaux using cardboard, seamless paper, metallic and patterned fabrics, cut paper, paint, and selections from his obsessive collection of antiques, costumes, make-up, and dime store finds. Finally, he would dress, paint, and pose his models within his tableau, bringing his vision to life, then captured with his Hasselblad, often utilizing multiple exposures.

Born in Oakland, CA, in 1943, Arnold's creative eccentricities were encouraged early on. At a young age he built sets, designed costumes and props, and began performing visual spectacles in his attic. His artistic pursuits led to a BFA in Painting and an MFA in Photography from the San Francisco Art Institute. His education included study abroad at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, after which he travelled throughout Europe with a group of friends while experimenting with LSD, making art, and studying Eastern spiritual traditions — a time the artist recalls marked his transformation into a "celestial being".

Arnold made four short films while at SFAI. The premiere of his third film *Messages Messages* led to the creation of the Nocturnal Dream Shows, the first Midnight Movie showcase in the country, for which Arnold curated films and drew posters. The Dream Shows also introduced the influential underground performance troupe The Cockettes. Arnold's feature-length film *Luminous Procuress*, also featuring the Cockettes, won International recognition and led to his role as a protégé of Salvador Dalí, later being dubbed a "Prince" in Dalí's "Court of Miracles", and helping the maestro complete his museum in Spain.

Steven was a proud, prominent member of the LGBTQ community years before this moniker became part of our common vernacular, and sadly died of AIDS in 1994. Most recently, he is the subject of a documentary, *Steven Arnold: Heavenly Bodies*, co-narrated by Anjelica Houston and Ellen Burstyn.

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His works are in the collections of the Whitney Museum in New York, the Tang Teaching Museum in New York, the Frankfurter Kunstverein in Germany, Cinematheque Francaise in Paris, the Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archive and Museum in Los Angeles, and the Cincinnati Art Museum.

Past publications of Steven Arnold's work include *Exotic Tableaux* (Stemmel Edition, 1996), *Angels of Night* (Parco Press, Japan, 1988), *Epiphanies* (Twelvetrees Press, 1987), and *Reliquaries* (Twelvetrees Press, 1983).

Press Photographs & Press Materials Are Available on Request

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