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"The Watcher" by Caleb Cole.

By Cate McQuaid

Globe Correspondent / April 21, 2010

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Artadia, a national fund that sweeps into American cities to support local artists with money, exhibitions, and networking, came to Boston last year and tapped seven local artists for awards. "Artadia Boston," spotlighting those artists, is up at the Mills Gallery at the Boston Center for the Arts. It's a smart show. BCA curator José Luis Blondet has shaped an engrossing exhibit that spirals around themes of portraiture and the construction of identity.

At the center are Eric Gottesman's heart-rending photographs from "The Preservation of Terror" series. Gottesman takes as his subject Ethiopian photo IDs made in the 1970s and 1980s, when, wall text tells us, the communist government outlawed photographs. Ethiopians had to go to official photographing centers for their IDs. For many whose family members disappeared or died in those years, these are the only pictures they have.

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At: Mills Gallery, Boston Center for the Arts, 539 Tremont St., through

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April 25. 617-426-8835, www.bcaonline.org

SUNKOO YUH:

Love and Other Inspirations
At: Lacoste Gallery, 24 Main St., Concord, through April 30. 978-369-0278, www.lacostegallery.com

“Mother and Son Reunited (1978/2002), Re-photographed and Degraded” is Gottesman’s photo of a black-and-white image someone constructed from two portraits: the ID of a young man who went missing in 1981, and a more recent picture of his mother. The effort to reunite them only underlines the tragedy of the

son’s loss. Even here, in this ragged, creased pairing, he seems gone — staring into space, brow furrowed, as his mother looks directly at the viewer, sad and stolid.

Across the gallery hang Caleb Cole’s crisp, sad color photos of himself in character. Cole imagines himself into a variety of melancholic figures, both men and women, in costume but without much makeup or wigs, so his moon-faced mug is prominent: a mournful version of that of the cartoon character Tintin. Performance plays a part in how we see ourselves and how others perceive us, and Cole pushes that to the edge, while holding to the unchanging essence of his face.

Claire Beckett travels to US military bases where Marines train in role-playing situations. Her photographs of the participants are lush and disarming. “Lance Corporal Joshua Stevens playing the role of a Taliban fighter, Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center” shows a young man with a skimpy blond mustache and ocean-blue eyes, wearing an Arab headdress. Blondet said in an interview that the characters these men and women play are well defined, with names, sets of skills, and networks of friends, just like Civil War reenactors or Second Life players. Beckett and Cole raise questions about what the cultural rise of role-playing might signify.

In her sweet, incisive video and a set of old color snapshots, both titled “The Modernists,” Amie Siegel plunges into the construction of self by means of changes in fashion. Both depict a woman looking at art in the 1960s and ’70s. Her hair and clothes change with the times. What doesn’t change is her spokes-model presence, which sets up an eerie correspondence between the woman and the art. Both, it turns out, are objects of the male gaze, as the snapshots ultimately reveal a man behind the camera. [Continued...](#) [Continued...](#)

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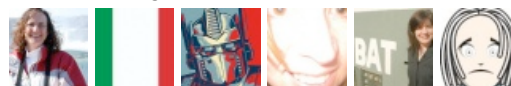
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