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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 30, 2016

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Defy/Define

September 17 – October 22, 2016

Opening Reception: Saturday, September 17, 6-8pm

Transformer launches our 15th Exhibition Season with *Defy/Define*, presenting the work of a select group of emerging visual artists exploring issues of identity through photography, video, and performance art.

Featuring works by **Ebtisam Abdulaziz, Eli Barak, Jason Barnes for Noir Creative, Jo Ann Block, Nakeya Brown, Hoesy Corona, Rex Delafkaran, Kunj, and Renee Regan**, *Defy/Define* seeks to address intersectionality within struggles to have racial, ethnic, cultural, sexual, and gender identities understood & accepted.

"Transformer is proud to be launching our 15th Exhibition Season with work by artists who defy stereotypes and examine how we define ourselves in a time of tumultuous social and political change." - Victoria Reis, Executive & Artistic Director; Co-Founder, Transformer



Events Schedule

Saturday, September 17, 6-8pm

Opening Reception & *Black Dionysus*, a performance by Jason Barnes for Noir Creative

Saturday, October 1, 2pm

Nakeya Brown Artist Talk

Saturday, October 1, 6-8pm

The Game of Who Wins the Most?!, a performance by Renee Regan

Wednesday October 5 - Saturday October 8

Nightly from 6-7pm

incognitus, a performance by Kunj

Saturday, October 8, 4:30pm

Jo Ann Block Artist Talk

Saturday October 15

7-8:45pm

Transformer, a performance by Hoesy Corona

Saturday, October 22, 6-8pm

It's Like You Get Me Honey, a performance by Alexandra "Rex" Delafkaran

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Artist Bios & Work Descriptions:

Ebtisam Abdulaziz is a multidisciplinary artist, Curator and writer. Reflecting on her Bachelor's Degree in Science & Mathematics, Abdulaziz incorporates her unique perspective on mathematics and the structures of systems to explore issues of identity and culture through installations, performance pieces and works on paper. Her works are evidence of a fascination with systemic ways to produce emotionally or intellectually meaningful forms of expression. Abdulaziz has exhibited as part of the Inaugural UAE and ADACH Pavilions at 53rd Venice Biennale, as well as at the 7th & 10th Sharjah Biennial; Languages of the Desert, the Kunst Museum, Bonn, Germany; Dubai Next, a collaboration between the Dubai Culture & Arts Authority and Vitra Design Museum, Basel 2008; Arab Express, a group exhibition at The Mori Art Museum, Tokyo; 25 years of Arab Creativity, The Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris; Inventing The World: The Artists as a Citizen, Benin Biennial 2012, Kora Centre, Benin.

Autobiography 2007, Video Work

The artist states 'The numbers are a summary of my autobiography for a certain period, and I employ it in the framework of a theatrical that portrays the negative aspects of today's society where the individual is rendered useless in the midst of consumerist societies that only recognize material profits. The video is of a deliberate moving scene, the same one we take part in everyday, except I present it in a cynical manner that mocks class divisions. It is a cynical critique of consumerist societies signifying the transformation of the human being into a code or a set of numbers. The artist's body is changed into a well-known brand or an emblem printed on t-shirts and placed on giant billboards.'

Eli Barak was born in 1979 in Kfar Yona, Israel and lives and works in New York City. He received his BA in Fine Arts and Art Education from Hamidrasha School of Art in Israel; a graphic design certificate from New York University; and an MFA in Fine Arts from the School of Visual Arts in New York City. Barak's work is layered with history, culture, and politics. Through the concept of assimilation, he investigates individual and cultural identity.

A Rolling Stone, 2015, Video Performance

Video documentation of a four-hour performance. A fabricated, wearable rock wanders through Central Park into Grand Central Terminal in a search for be. Resulting in an impromptu funk dance party between a styrofoam boulder and a throng of pedestrians. The performance *A Rolling Stone* incorporates the idea of longing to a place in society. This use of metaphor follows a more historic legend that evolved from Christianity of "the wandering Jew", reflecting on the idea of being out of place and in a condition of a perpetual diaspora.

Jason Barnes for Noir Creative is a DC native who first made her name in Paris as a classically trained opera singer and artist. Since returning to the States, she has quickly transfixed DC's art and nightlife communities and affixed herself as one of the most recognizable fashion icons in our nation's capital. Although not a drag queen, Pussy Noir uses "gender-fuck" fashion to portray a woman on stage during her performances across Washington. Offstage, in her everyday life, Noir (known as Jason Barnes to his friends) lives a very male existence.

Black Dionysus

Inspired by the variety of western beauty displayed in the late 70's disco era, a time in which both black and white beauty was expressed in cohesion, black gay communities to spawned and began to accept their identity. The creative cone of power conjured in the early ball scene as Olympic escapism. It stretched the creative mind and delved further into transformation. *Black Dionysus* will use classical music from the 19th century, another period in which black masculine beauty was explored for their Greek-like, muscular bodies as well as the feminizing of youth. The tableau, vivant performance will tell a story through music of transformation and acceptance.

Nakeya Brown is an award-winning photographer who is known for exploring the complexities and politics of African American hair in her work. She was born in Santa Maria, California in 1988. She received her BA in Visual Arts and Journalism & Media Studies from Rutgers University. Her work has been exhibited at the McKenna Museum of African American Art, Woman Made Gallery, Vivid Solutions Gallery, and Mason Gross Gallery. Brown's work has been reviewed by *The Washington City Paper*, *African & Afro-Diasporan Art Talks*, *ForHarriet*, and has been published by international publications, *Hysteria* and *Elephant*. She is a recipient of the Hortense May Boutell, Richard T. Evans, and Winifred Todd Farah endowments. She is currently pursuing her M.F.A at The George Washington University. Nakeya lives in Washington, D.C with her 3-year-old daughter, Mia.

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The Refutation of "Good" Hair, photo series

The Refutation of "Good" Hair focuses on the "good hair" idiom used to praise and debase black women's bodies—specifically their hair texture. The "good hair" phrase, which describes African American hair textures that mirror Eurocentric traits, is subverted to denote its literal meaning through still life and portraiture. Within each portrait, the act of consuming Kanekalon hair represents the ideas around beauty and femininity that are imposed on black women's bodies.

Jo Ann Block's work comments on the complexities and ambiguities of queer identity. She is interested in the inherent plurality of identities and the impossibility of constructing an intelligible identity through time. Her projects investigate queer history, sexuality and identity as they are inscribed within historical and contemporary culture.

I Am Surfacing, collage on paper

Lesbian artist, Jo Ann Block, reflects on "Why Do I Care So Much About Transgender Men?" The response to this inquiry is an installation of colliding images and ideas triggered by feelings of displacement, owing to what Block terms as a "generation gap" between butch lesbian culture, now somewhat past its defining cultural moment, and the transman queer culture, an ascending cultural identity that challenges categories of sexuality and gender. The result of this exploration surfaces in autobiographical paper collages representing stages of gender exploration and an exploding wall/floor collage showing the ever-shifting narrative on identity. *I am Surfacing* demonstrates the struggle with how identity is defined and presented both then, and now.

Hoesy Corona (b.1986 Mexico, based in Baltimore, MD) is a multidisciplinary artist, independent curator and founding co-director of Labbodies performance art laboratory in Baltimore Maryland. Hoesy is an artist of change. He is Hoesy Corona and he is also Dr. H. Corona. His alter egos are part of his larger inquiry into who we are and how we construct ourselves and our identities. Corona's unapologetically colorful, sculptural and performance based works have been deeply influenced by his queer immigrant experience in the United States. Additionally, formative encounters with racism, discrimination, xenophobia and otherness have shaped the ways in which Corona creatively interprets the contemporary world around him in new and compelling ways.

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Part of Hoesy Corona's ongoing series *The Nobodies* (2009-Present), Corona explores what it means to be a disenfranchised member of society in North America by embodying the abstract concept of 'nobody'. Nobodies are scapegoated not for who they are but rather for who they are not. And are routinely dehumanized in order to validate the violent attacks upon them. Corona makes colorful sculptural garments fitted to the human body that create other worldly experiences for the viewer. The artist revels in the simultaneous visibility and invisibility that the garments bring to the wearer. In these performances audience members are invited to play a part in the act of nobodizing, an operation that consists of making somebody, nobody. "Nothing" all of a sudden becomes individualized, becomes body and eyes becomes no one.

Alexandra "Rex" Delafkaran is an interdisciplinary artist and dancer from San Francisco, California. After earning her BFA in Sculpture and Performance Art from the San Francisco Art Institute, she relocated to Washington, DC working in local galleries. Her work revolves around intimacy, sex and vulnerability and their relationship to utility, language and the body. She performs and exhibits her work along the coast, working out of Red Dirt Studios, and on curatorial projects of her own.

'It's Like You Get Me Honey', performance

In a desperate attempt and quest to be desirable, the artist's movements devolve into a futile display of youthful desire, sexuality and awkwardness. 'It's Like You Get Me Honey' is endearing and uncomfortable, soft and sarcastic, its here for you and not for you, honey.

Kunj explores both cultural and sexual identity through performative ritual with a focus on hetero-normative dissuasion. Questioning and rebelling against institutional ideas of race, gender, and queerness – Kunj often creates work that is impermanent, using ritual performance and structure to explore the notion of no-identity versus new-identity. He received his BA in Anthropology and Studio Art from the University of Maryland, with emphasis on physical culture, identity, and printmaking, and has performed at Grace Exhibition Space (NY), EMP Collective (MD), and The National Portrait Gallery (DC).

incognitus, durational performance

On a quest to understand customs-- who is she? Who is he? Or better yet, who are they? Only one way to find out. GAG!

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Renee Regan strives for a connection with the audience by using familiarity and absurdity to comfortably break the status quo. Her performances revolve around a web of connected strings that pull in various ways on the certain dichotomies that surround us. The moments of intimacy vs. complacency, chaos vs. patterns, or personal identity vs. societal creation. A main focus of her performance involves a set of accessories for success or as she likes to call them "Successories". Her alter ego, Rex Reginald the 4th Second, a creature from Planet Advivon, is able to liberate taboos as we succumb to our unsuspecting desires. The creature's presence is unapologetically confrontational both psychologically and physically. This combined with the "Successories" can lead to boosts in positivity, purity, or power.

The Game of Who Wins the Most?! is a performance game show where contestants roll dice for one of two ways to play. Chance will be the deciding factor in how the answers of the future and the winners are revealed. With this amount of uncertainty, it is the game of life played out in the gallery.

Image Credit: Nakeya Brown, *Hair Portrait #2 (The Refutation of Good Hair)*

EXHIBITION HOURS: Wednesday-Saturday, 12-6pm and by appointment.

t r a n s f o r m e r is a Washington, DC based 501 (c) 3 artist-centered non-profit visual arts organization, providing a consistent, supportive, and professional platform for emerging artists to explore and present experimental artistic concepts, build audiences for their work, and advance their careers. A catalyst and advocate for contemporary artists and emergent expression in the visual arts, Transformer connects and promotes emerging visual artists within regional, national and international contexts through exhibition and programs partnerships with artists, curators, commercial galleries, museums and other cultural institutions.

t r a n s f o r m e r's 2016/17 Exhibition Series and programs are supported by: The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, The DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities/ NEA, The Morris & Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, The Bernstein Family Foundation, The Robert Lehman Foundation, The CrossCurrents Foundation, The S&R Foundation, The National Endowment for the Arts' Access to Artistic Excellence Award, and The Visionary Friends of Transformer – individual donors, members of our Annual Auction Host Committee, and Corporate Sponsors.