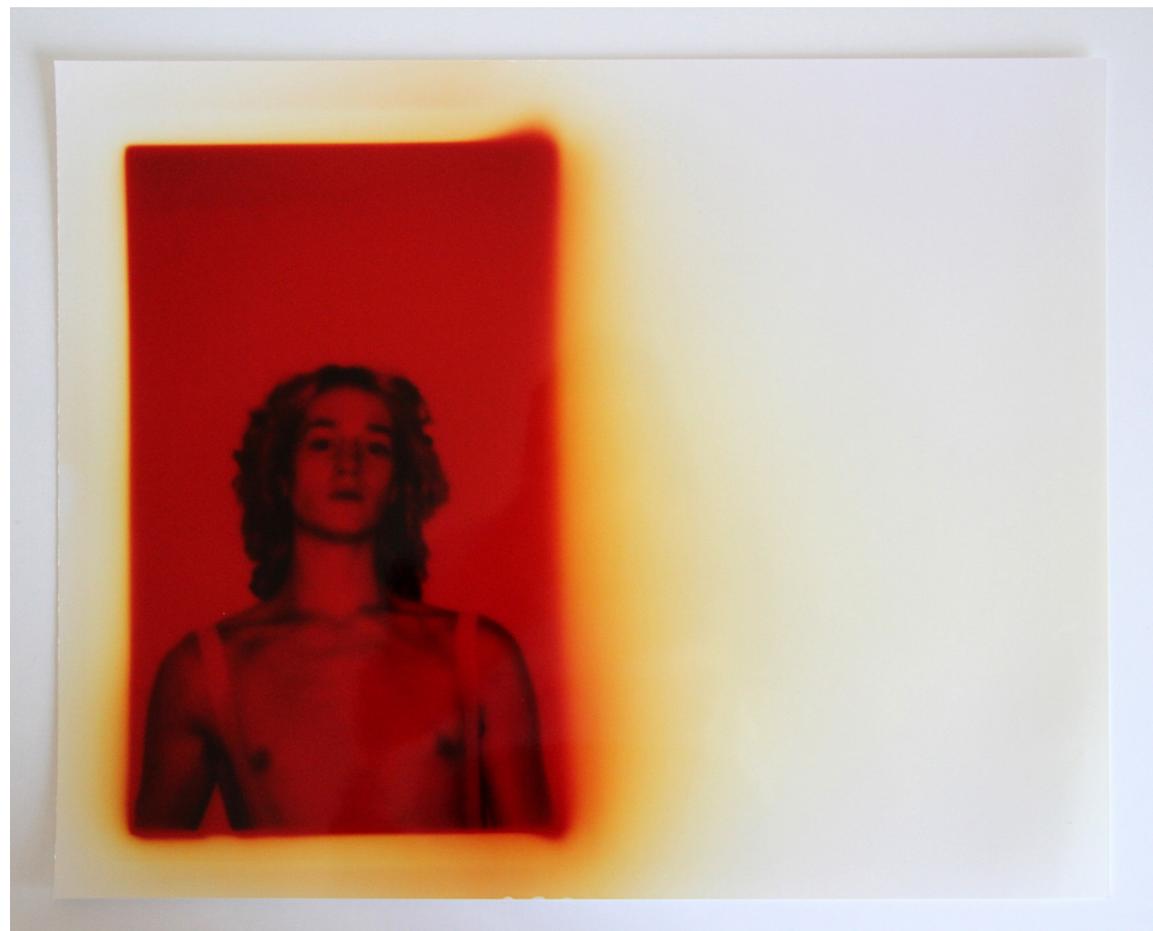


Flash: Job Piston

November 9, 2013–February 22, 2014



Oisín, 2013. Courtesy of the artist.

Over the span of just a decade, our basic relationship to the photographic image has drastically changed. Gone are the days of dropping a roll of film with a developer and waiting to see the results: prints that were tangible in size and surface, glossy or matte. Today most pictures are captured in digital code, and like never before we have come to expect variability in size and transgression of the photographic edge. On the screens of cameras, phones, televisions, and computers, we are incessantly zooming, cropping, and resizing. Today we experience pictures in immediate but fleeting and changeable states, share them virtually, preserve them on hard drives, and frequently forego printing them at all.

As traditional photographic films and papers dwindle on the commercial market, artists find new strategies to produce photographs. Many photographers still use traditional film to make exposures, which they then scan and print digitally. Artist Job Piston has arrived at a method that inverts that more common technique of starting with celluloid film. Instead, his digital images are transformed into analogue prints—photograms—by way of the light of his computer screen inscribed onto photo paper, manifesting digital images in a material form. *Reds* (2012-13) present a unique registration of digital code and chemical impression, the new photography and the old.

Piston is an artist who works in a variety of media from performance to collage. Some of his most compelling work comes out of ongoing investigations of portraiture as fueled by questions of identity, desire, trust, and the nature of our relationships to images. In close collaboration, he photographs models and friends who pose and compose themselves for Piston's camera. Those images, made during commercial shoots and situations staged specifically for his own artistic practice, then reappear in numerous bodies of work, chosen freely from material both commissioned and self-motivated. The identity of the artist can be found there somewhere too, among his subjects.

Using the compositional vocabulary of art history as well as popular culture, fashion, and celebrity, Piston's *Reds* convey romance and desire. *NAR* evokes a 17th century Dutch painting, the subject's face framed by a kerchief and a hand held up to her chin. Her surroundings recede into darkness, implying a dark room from

which she gazes into the street, her features illuminated by moonlight. Whereas she is closed, inaccessible, the shirtless Oisín is seductive. Long soft curls fall onto his shoulders as he delivers a daring gaze into the lens of the camera (or the eyes of the cameraman). The features of his face are delicate. Suspenders taut over a young, lean torso draw attention to the bottom of the frame, stirring the viewer's imagination.

But the enchantment of (and by) Piston's subjects cannot be reduced to flirtatious poses. It must be attributed to the artist's technique as well, a process that grapples with our very attitude to such seductive portraiture. His medium is the photogram, unique photographs created without the use of a camera, made by placing objects directly onto the surface of a light-sensitive material. The receptive surface (such as photographic paper) is exposed to light, and the resulting image is fixed with chemicals. The source of light, in this case, is Piston's computer screen; tracing its shape and scale, the photographs record an impression of that strange, semiprivate surface. This effect is heightened by the inclusion of negative space beside each image, implying a keyboard. The prints concretize an otherwise virtual space, that window onto a whole world that is computer interface. Like all photograms, *Reds* are tangible and direct records of real phenomena, some light in the world—but this illumination comes from a screen and the luminescent portrait it displays. In this uncanny, romantic fold of mediations, it is an image, rather than its referent, that is preserved.

Joanna Szupinska-Myers, CMP Curator of Exhibitions

Works in the exhibition

(left to right) *Sam Banks*, *Oisín*, *NAR*, *David A*, *David B*, *Meg Ryan*, all 2013

Job Piston lives and works in New York. His work has been exhibited at Artists Space, New York; MAK Center, Los Angeles; Jessica Silverman, San Francisco; Michael Benevento, Los Angeles; Roberts & Tilton, Los Angeles; and Khastoo, Los Angeles, among elsewhere. He earned his BFA at California College of the Arts and Crafts, San Francisco, in 2006, and his MFA at UCLA in 2010. *Flash!* is his first solo museum presentation.

Flash! contemporary art series is organized by Joanna Szupinska-Myers at the California Museum of Photography, part of UCR ARTSblock. *Flash: Job Piston* is the third project in the series.