

ESOPUS SPACE

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“Clayton Patterson: Pyramid Portraits”

June 3 – July 15, 2010

Opening reception: Thursday, June 3, 6–8pm

New York, NY (April 26, 2010): Esopus Space is pleased to present “**Clayton Patterson: Pyramid Portraits,**” an exhibition of never-before-seen photographs taken by the artist, documentarian, and community activist in the mid-’80s at New York’s legendary Pyramid Club.

Patterson’s subjects were the extraordinarily inventive drag queens who performed at the “Whispers” cabaret every Sunday night at the Pyramid Club at 101 Avenue A. Like his countless portraits of hardcore punks, squatters, junkies, rabbis, tenement dwellers, and beat cops, these photographs document—and celebrate—the denizens of a dynamic, radically diverse Lower East Side, a community that would soon be decimated by the AIDS epidemic (and in the ensuing years, by relentless gentrification and development of the neighborhood).

“Up to that point, drag had been about referencing movie stars like Bette Davis or Judy Garland,” notes Patterson in an accompanying interview, “But the queens at the Pyramid Club invented entirely fictitious characters.” Those characters, embodying everything from space aliens to goth punks to suburban housewives, were created by performers including Tabboo, Hapi Phace, Sun PK [née Peter Kwaloff], RuPaul, Maze, John Sex, and International Chrysis, all of whom posed regularly for Patterson’s portraits. The photos, which were taken by Patterson in the dressing room of the club over the course of several years, chart the boundless creativity of these artists, who, with little or no money, managed every week to create new personas, each one more outrageous and compelling than the one before. Patterson calls his subjects “availabilists” (after the term coined by performance artist and musician Kembra Pfahler) who utilized everything from shards of broken safety glass to abandoned lampshades to create the ultimate artworks of the period—their selves.

LINKS: [Interview with Clayton Patterson](#) [PDF] [“The Pyramid Club” by Iris Rose](#) [PDF]

About the artist: **Clayton Patterson** moved to New York City from his native Calgary in 1979 and has since amassed an exhaustive photo, video, and audio archive of New York’s Lower East Side, including ground-breaking videos of the Tompkins Square Park police riots in 1988. He has published several books, including *Captured: A Film/Video History of the Lower East Side* and *Resistance: A Radical Political and Social History of the Lower East Side*, and most recently exhibited his work at Kinz+Tillou Fine Art in New York. *Captured*, a documentary about Patterson by Dan Levin, Ben Solomon, and Jenner Furst, was released in 2009.

*Esopus Space is an exhibition and performance venue operated by the nonprofit Esopus Foundation Ltd., which also publishes **Esopus** magazine. The gallery is open to the public Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays from 12-5pm, and also by appointment. For more information, visit esopuspace.org, send inquiries to info@esopuspace.org, or call Tod Lippy at 212-473-0919.*

“CLAYTON PATTERSON: PYRAMID PORTRAITS”

JUNE 3—JULY 15, 2010 AT **ESOPUS SPACE**



Clayton Patterson, *Sun PK*, 1986, color photograph, 13 by 19 inches

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Clayton Patterson, *Alexis Del Lago*, 1986, color photograph, 13 by 19 inches



Clayton Patterson, *Maze*, 1986, color photograph, 13 by 19 inches