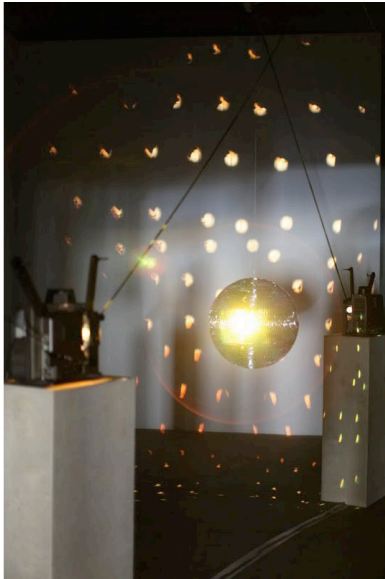


## When I Say Image, That's Different Than Me

by Catherine Wagley

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“What I advocate is threatening,” said [Peter Berlin](#) in 2004, talking to *Butt magazine* about his fondness for wearing nylons under tight, tight white shorts. The artist/porn star, who emerged in the 70s sporting a blond-ish pageboy haircut, explained he’s always running from police who claim he’s wearing only underwear. What does Berlin advocate? A certain breed of exhibitionism, a self-love frightening because of its frank completeness? Or an edgy artifice that’s some offshoot of camp? He often describes the moment he first really saw himself in the mirror and realized his image turned him on, but he doesn’t confuse self and reflection: “when I say image, that is different than me.” “Really,” he said, “the only compliment that I want is to walk on the street and see at least one other Peter Berlin, but I’ve never seen one.”

Six years later, [Mariah Garnett](#) paid Berlin that compliment. The L.A. artist performed him in a video, dressing, posing and turning as he would have, and playing with double exposures and self-photography just as he did. “Doesn’t she look like me?” the now-reclusive Berlin asked when Garnett met him to show him what she’d done.

The original video of Garnett as Berlin, the video of Garnett showing Berlin Garnett as Berlin, and the video of Garnett imagining meeting and making it with Berlin were all on view in *Encounters I May Or May Not Have Had With Peter Berlin*, an installation at [Human Resources L.A.](#) up for only a week. While these reflexive narrative plays were compelling, the installation’s highlight was even more so: a disco ball onto which two 16 mm films of Garnett as Berlin were projected. In the dark gallery, the ball reflected a flickering army of miniature mirror-like images. If you looked up at the reflections closest to the ceiling, you’d see Garnett’s head and chin, as you looked progressively lower, you’d be looking down her jauntily rotating body. She wore a leather jacket, white, well-packed undies, and not much else. When she turned to the front, and you saw her breasts, they didn’t break the façade or necessarily seem that feminine. Even if they had, Berlin-style masculinity was more an exaggerated attitude than a gender, and that blond bowl of hair could never be anything but androgynous.