

THE **ACQUAINTANCE** ANDREW SALGADO



Subject, 2013, oil on canvas with spray paint, 160x180cm

ART
GALLERY
OF REGINA

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Curator: Karen Schoonover
Essay: Margaret Bessai
Design: Steve McDonnell: Dalek Design @ www.dalek.ca

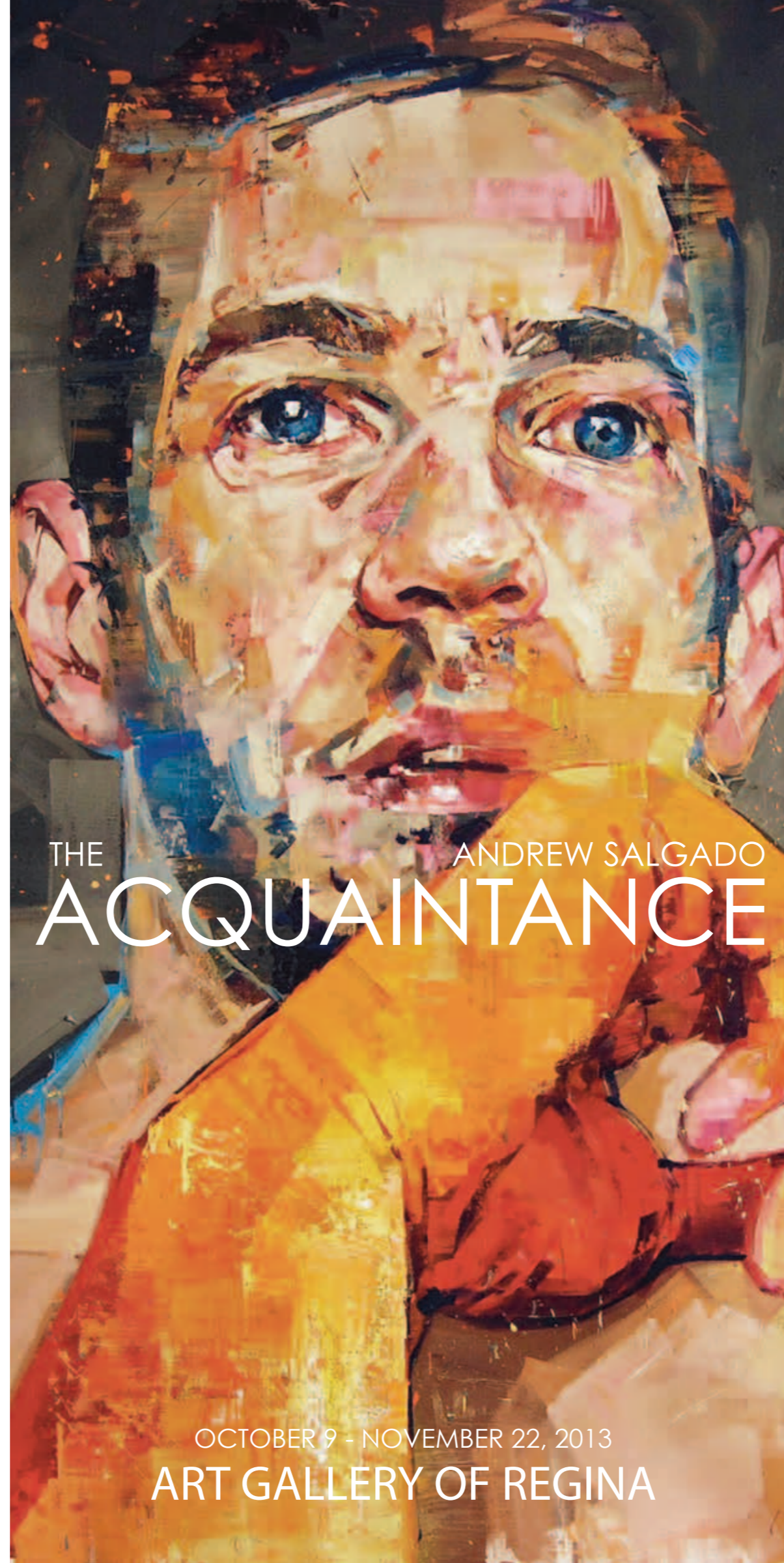
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OCTOBER 9 - NOVEMBER 22, 2013
ART GALLERY OF REGINA

Andrew Salgado is an internationally exhibiting artist based in London, England since 2008. He was born in Regina, Saskatchewan in 1982, and credits his family and local artists for encouraging his art seriously from a young age. Salgado holds an MFA from London's Chelsea College of Art (2009) and a BFA from the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada (2005). He was awarded Courvoisier's Future 500, short listed for Art of Giving at London's Saatchi Gallery, and featured in the Channel 4 (UK) documentary "What Makes a Masterpiece" alongside Anish Kapoor and Bridget Riley.



Cinema, 2013, oil on canvas with spray paint, 160x180cm



Year of the Silencer, 2013, oil on canvas with spray paint, 160x180cm

Cover: *Acquaintance, 2013, oil on canvas with spray paint, 230x190cm*

THE ACQUAINTANCE

ANDREW SALGADO

"Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter."
Oscar Wilde, from "The Picture of Dorian Gray"

Spatters and drips, wide brush strokes, contrasting colour scraped, sprayed, and flung: **Andrew Salgado's** work is a celebration of paint. In this series of new works collectively titled "The Acquaintance," Salgado plays with the format of portraiture. The larger canvases, two and a third meters in height, are an immense scale for work that is closely framed on heads, shoulders and hands. The images are built up in a flurry of mark making. Salgado works to the point of defining shapes and then stops. His subjects materialize in a blur of energy. They are men, similar to Salgado in age. Their eyes and the curving shadows that define their faces and fingers are visual resting points in a storm of paint. Some are lost in private thought, others seem to look past us even as they meet our gaze. The effect is an intimacy that pushes us back, a closeness that still holds uncertainty.

In preparation for this body of work, Salgado approached strangers who interested him and invited them to his studio to be photographed as reference models. He does not use projection or preparatory sketches, but his figures occupy space naturalistically. Abstracted colours and textures give a kinesthetic, lively sense of the subject, as if they were person before us, moving slightly. Salgado describes his process as a methodology weighted toward experiment and spontaneity, "After an initial idea, I plan very little." He begins by sketching an outline on the canvas in Sharpie marker, and then he paints, working intuitively in intense bursts, "My studio is covered head-to-toe in paint. I wear latex gloves when I paint because it is a very physical, almost performative act." Equally important to Salgado's process is pausing to think and edit, "I really like to let the painting inform itself." His current studio, is large enough to work concurrently on multiple canvases. This amount of space allows him to reflect on a body of paintings in progress. Salgado explains, "quite literally the first painting is still being worked on as I commence the last painting. In this way I find a greater linkage and communication between the works. The colors make more sense together; the feel of the show is more cohesive."

This exhibition title is drawn from "The Last Day Of Our Acquaintance," a song written by **Sinéad O'Connor**, which Salgado finds inspiring, "The song that the title is taken from is an incredible, breathtaking work of art. It has tension, pacing, surprise, release, profundity... its utterly sublime... I loved how the simplicity of the song could translate into such larger ideas." The narrative is an elegantly understated account of the numbing sadness at the end of a love affair. Although the term acquaintance usually refers to a near stranger, a person casually met, in O'Connor's lyric it describes the time period of social contact, an intimate knowledge that comes to an end. Acquaintance in philosophy is the relation between a knower and the object of his knowledge. Each of these meanings may be applied to the relationship between artist and model.

Salgado's paintings present us with closely observed, distinct individuals, but as we look at their faces, there are very few things we can know about them by looking. There is an absence of visual elements that describe occupation, or position in society, the commonly used codes of classical portraiture. Salgado explains that his work is not representational in the conventional sense, "I'm not interested in creating pleasant portraits of someone's loved ones; I'm interested in exploring the properties of paint, and the political concepts behind human nature and identity through a figurative painting that in all respects is quite abstract."

An early turning point in Salgado's work occurred in 2008, when he was targeted for being gay and severely beaten. His paintings created in the aftermath of the assault, based on photos his partner took, are disturbing documents of violation, self-portraits with blood and missing teeth, visceral and emotive. Salgado's experience sharpened his awareness of the fragility of the body, and politicized his expression of identity. Five years later, though the events of 2008 no longer form his subject matter overtly, they still ripple through his work. "That part of my past helped form me as a person, but the work is no longer linked to this as aggressively as it may once have been. I believe the paintings maintain an element of activism in the sense that I have something to say through the act of painting, and I want to draw attention to issues that perhaps we take for granted."¹

Culturally, the things we take for granted are norms, the categories of nationalism, class, and gender that underscore our social relations. In Western culture, these binaries are being opened by the effects of globalization, increasing secularism, and the feminist, gay, and aboriginal rights

movements. As the privileges of patriarchy and colonialism dissolve, stereotypes are questioned, and social roles expand. For example, at one time, stoicism was considered masculine. To display emotion was unmanly, and punished. This suppression is now understood to be psychologically damaging, and in contemporary society, both men and women are encouraged to cry and laugh. Even though change can be seen as improvement, there will be more uncertainty, experiment, and even violence before new signifiers of identity are accepted. In 2004, artist and writer David Garneau investigated the subject of masculinity in the curation of *Making it like a Man!* for the MacKenzie Art Gallery, as part of an investigative conference and film series with the University of Regina. During his extensive survey, Garneau observed that men were creating work that was characterized by "ironic, deconstructive, wounded, reflective, perplexed, or otherwise troubled attitudes toward 'being a man'"² Andrew Salgado describes his own work in much the same words, "I want to shine a light on the crippling of established norms: the figures I paint are always wounded, and vulnerable, and sites of interpretation... Being a man bears as much conflict and pressure as being a woman... Further, I'm interested in what it means to be a 'man' regardless of sexuality."

Salgado's work tears away the information that we would usually categorize people with: profession, education, or sexuality. We are invited instead to build a reading of their identities by comparing the stories we see in their faces and hands with our own experiences.

Margaret Bessai
2013

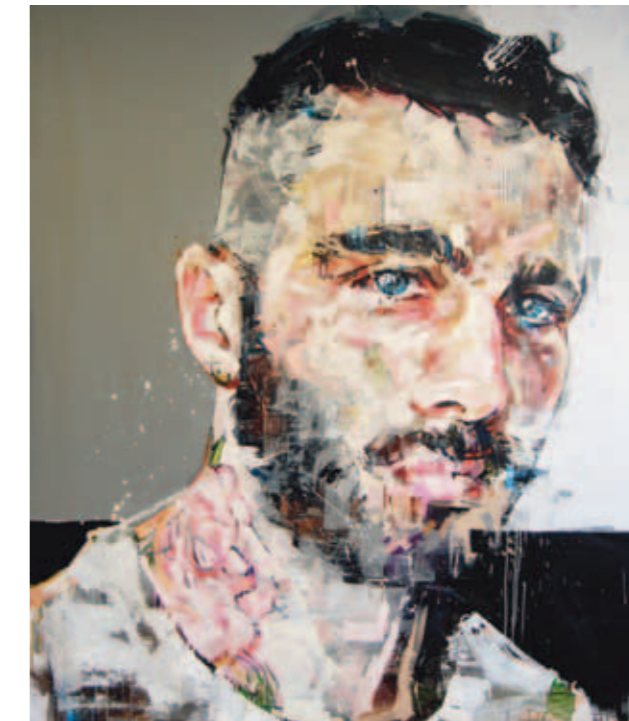
1) interview with Andrew Salgado by Raksha Bihani for Emaho magazine, online at: <http://www.emahomagazine.com/2013/07/andrew-salgado-beautiful-monstrosities/#sthash.McPQMfN1.dpuf>

2) "Making Art Like a Man!" by David Garneau, pages 55-56, from *Making it like a Man: Canadian Masculinities in practice*, edited Christine Ramsay, Wilfrid Laurier University Press., 2011]

All previously un-credited quotes are from an unpublished email interview with Andrew Salgado, graciously granted to the author in September 2013.



Performance V 2013, oil on canvas with spray paint, 160x180cm



Now and Forever, 2013, oil on canvas with spray paint, 230x190cm



The River, 2013, oil on canvas with spray paint, 230x190cm



Modern Painters, 2013, oil on canvas with spray paint, 230x190cm