

**one labels:
of fag
bashes
back**
part 1

pulliam I-14 • SIUC

thursday, october 6, 1994 • 8:00 pm •

the fag

j. thomson

the sissy

richard williams

LABELS are used by everyone in society. We ascribe them to others of all sorts, we voluntarily take them on for ourselves. We codify socially which labels are okay to use for which persons and for what times. We chastise those who break the rules for being "politically incorrect." Others complain that **USING THE POLITICALLY CORRECT LABELS IS A RIDICULOUS WASTE OF TIME.** At times, it seems that the only persons who get away with using the politically INCORRECT labels, are those that the labels describe. Gay people are the only ones who can use the term "queer," or "fag." Only African-americans can call themselves "black," or even "nigger." Sometimes other labels we use are meant to be derogatory by some people, and honorary by others. Like artist and craftsperson. Or lawyer and accountant. I am many things to different people: **ARTIST, STUDENT, GAY, TEXAN, AMERICAN, SON, ACTOR, VEGETARIAN, CONSUMER.** Notice that labels change people into "things" when we talk about them. The use of labels to identify ourselves and others is closely related to the issue of **PASSING.** For instance, I help myself to "pass" as an artist by proudly calling myself one. Before I felt comfortable doing that, people would often respond to me with: **"THAT'S FUNNY, YOU DON'T LOOK LIKE AN ARTIST!"** We can also be passed involuntarily by other people. If you're straight and you've ever been mistaken for gay, you know what I mean. We're helping to pass someone as something they may not be every time we make assumptions based on incomplete or inadequate information. The truth about ourselves is not on the outside. **THE TRUTH IS WITHIN.**

THE HATE TAPE used in this performance was recorded one year ago tonight. These are actual phone calls made to the office of the registered student organization, Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals, & Friends. The incident was reported, but no one was ever caught. GLBF's flyers are regularly torn down or *burned* away, homophobic slurs are shouted from passing vehicles at social events, and threats are made in the "letters to the editor" section of the daily newspapers. **IT STILL TAKES GUTS TO BE QUEER.** National Coming Out Day is October 11. It is a day when closeted homosexuals everywhere are encouraged to stop living a lie and be themselves. Closeted gays and lesbians come out to their friends, family, co-workers and bosses. NCOD also raises awareness in the minds of those straight people (and those too closeted to make the decision to come out yet) around them. Sometimes we get too comfortable in our daily lives. We don't think about the discrimination others around us feel. Discrimination still happens. It happens on this campus. **DISCRIMINATION IS INSTITUTIONALIZED ON THIS CAMPUS,** even though SIUC has a non-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation. (Gays and lesbians are restricted from domestic partnership benefits and prohibited from living in married student housing on campus.) **I HAVE TWICE BEEN RUN OFF THE ROAD** because I have a pink triangle on my car's bumper. My car has been shoe-polished with many synonyms for "queer." (As if a car has a sexual orientation.) I have been called every name imaginable since I was seven. And I must be extremely cautious of how I act in public with someone I'm dating. **NO HETEROSEXUAL WOMAN** has to fear putting her arm around her boyfriend's waist in the park. No straight couple realizes how they're "flaunting" their sexuality when they walk together holding hands. No straight person hesitates to ask a gay friend to his or her wedding ceremony, not realizing the hurt we feel **because** we are prohibited from legally marrying the ones *WE* love. This performance is my "bashing back" against these subtle forms of discrimination, as well as the blatant ones like the tape.

I realize that many of you here tonight are "**STRAIGHT, BUT NOT NARROW.**" I know that you probably have no problems interacting with gay people, and in many ways I am preaching to the converted (so to speak). Yes, I know this piece is simplistic in its content, though less simplistic in form. I just want each of you to be able to place yourselves in my shoes for awhile. I want you to experience, in a way, the degradation I feel when I hear comments like these. (And **yes**, I've heard them from some of you in the audience.) Over the years, I've spent much of my energy dealing with crap like this. I'd much rather spend my time and energy dealing with other issues in my life and in my art.

This performance represents **PART ONE OF A TWO PART PIECE.** The second part of this piece is an installation of the artifacts of the performance, along with other pieces dealing with this theme of "labels." The installation will be at art alley on the second floor of the student center from October 8 through October 25.

SPECIAL THANKS to Richard Williams for encouragement and participation; Tim Heath, Candy Calcaterra, and Pat Cheak for encouragement and helping move stuff; Bill Boysen for letting me make my debut as a performance artist as fulfillment for a class project in AD414, Advanced Glassblowing. (This performance has nothing to do with glassblowing, but everything to do with art.) Thanks also to GLBF and its members, and especially to those of you out there who are actively making it easier for gays and lesbians to safely come out of the closet.