

DENNY DIMIN GALLERY

Sean Fader: *Thirst/Trap*
June 23 - August 21, 2020

Denny Dimin Gallery is pleased to announce *Thirst/Trap*, a solo exhibition by Sean Fader, running from June 23rd to August 21st, 2020. *Thirst/Trap* includes two bodies of work made concurrently: *Best Lives* and *Insufficient Memory*. To celebrate the exhibition opening, which coincides with Pride Month, there will be an Instagram Live walkthrough with the artist on June 18th at 6 p.m.

Thirst/Trap bookends the past twenty years of LGBTQIA history, looking back to 1999-2000 as a crucial moment. The past twenty-year period saw the rise of the internet, and Fader's project examines the role of digital photography and queer representation (or lack of it) at the beginning and end of this two-decade transformation. In 1999, President Clinton's State of the Union address called for legislation to respond to reprehensible hate crimes being committed against queer people (this would not be made law until 2009). Since that watershed moment, there has been a continuous, if rocky, expansion of LGBTQIA presence, activism, and legal gains in the United States—until the tremendous setback of the Trump administration. The rise of the internet fueled a national conversation about LGBTQIA presence and community, and twenty years ago was also when digital photography became readily available as an everyday technology, allowing for a greater representation of individual lives and the circulation of images to communities far and wide. Sean Fader, who was twenty years old in 1999, is among those who witnessed this history first hand as a queer artist, and these two related but very different bodies of work—*Best Lives* and *Insufficient Memory*—offer very different responses to this intertwined history of LGBTQIA presence and digital photography.

Best Lives will occupy the front room of the gallery. This series of collaborative portraits focuses on the role of the digital photograph today, and it addresses the messy pleasures and conflicting impulses that characterize the queer uses of digital portrait photography in social media. In accordance with his sitters' self-visualizations, Fader created these large-scale, heroic portraits—each with their own ornate, custom, gilded frame. *Best Lives* began with a custom smartphone app built by Fader that searched Instagram for images with at least one of thirty popular queer hashtags such as #instagay, #nonbinary, and #genderfluid. These images were then sorted by geotag and alerted Fader if they were within a ten-mile radius. Once notified, Fader then wrote to the poster to ask if they would be interested in meeting to talk and make a collaborative photograph.

Like Fader's earlier investigations into the profile photograph and its consolidation of conflicting desires and aspirations, the portraits in *Best Lives* are the result of negotiations between Fader and his sitter. The final choice from the shoot of a representative image was always made by the sitter, who posted this image to Instagram. Fader then took this image, expanded it to a heroic scale, and created bespoke frames to look like those of painted society portraits in a museum. The details of these frames—each specific to their encounter—comment on the attributes and desires expressed by the person who took this image as their own. Fader has been making these works throughout the country and has collaborated with people of different socioeconomic backgrounds, races, and gender identities. (over)

Insufficient Memory will be on view in the back room of the gallery. This body of work examines the moment of 1999–2000 when the Hate Crimes Prevention Act was first being debated in Congress (and not passed). Inspired by the discovery of an old Sony Digital Mavica in 2018, Fader asked what was overlooked, invisible, or erased in the same moment as the digital camera began to revolutionize how queer people saw each other and their community. Reconstructing this history from local newspapers and activists' research, he traveled to over 80 locations where hate crimes had occurred. These were often unmarked and anonymous, with these crimes forgotten. He drove 15,000 miles over months, taking a photograph at each site of a hate crime murder in 1999 and 2000. Because local news outlets were mostly uninterested in these stories and queer news outlets were not digitized, many of these stories were difficult to find. He photographed the sites with the old digital Mavica camera, creating large-scale, grainy images characterized by a literal lack of resolution and digital information (in comparison to the possibilities of digital photography today). While the tragic story of Matthew Shepherd (white, middle class, big future) was the face of the struggle to respond to hate crimes at the time, Fader delves into the stories of those of lesser means to include all who lost their lives. The celebratory tone of the works from *Best Lives* are sobered by the backdrop of *Insufficient Memory*, positing that social progress would not have been possible without queer loss and struggle—even if those stories were not well known to history until now.

Insufficient Memory will be accessible in the gallery and online via a Google Earth Interactive Tour that will allow anyone on the internet to virtually visit all of the sites, view the photographs, and read the stories Fader unearthed and wrote about them.

Sean Fader was born in 1979 in Los Angeles, California. He lives in New Orleans, Louisiana, where he is a Professor of Practice in Photography at Tulane University. Sean Fader received his MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, his MA from the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, and his BFA from the New School in New York City. His work has been exhibited throughout the United States and internationally in Dubai, Canada, Mexico and England. His exhibition history includes *Contemporary Performance* at the Florida Museum of Photographic Arts in Tampa (2019), *On the Map* at Denny Dimin Gallery Hong Kong (2019), *365 Profile Pics* at the SPRING/BREAK Art show with Denny Dimin Gallery in NYC (2017), *Picture Yourself: Selfies, Cellphones, and the Digital Age* at the College of Wooster Art Museum (2016), *Drama Queer: seducing social change* at the Queer Arts Festival in Vancouver (2016), and *White Boys*, curated by Hank Willis Thomas and Natasha L. Logan at Haverford College. Fader was named a NYFA Fellow in 2013 and a Blade of Grass Fellow for 2012-2013, and he received Magenta Foundation's Flash Forward Award for Emerging Photographers in 2012. Fader has been awarded prestigious residencies at Art Omi, Bemis Center for the Contemporary Arts, and Yaddo. He has received press coverage in *MOMUS*, *Hyperallergic*, *Art F City*, *the Huffington Post*, and *Slate*.

The exhibition will be open by exclusive 30 minute appointments with cleaning between appointments Tuesday to Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Please join us for an online walkthrough with the artist on Instagram live (@dennydimingallery) on Thursday, June 18th, at 6 p.m. EST. Denny Dimin Gallery is located at 39 Lispenard Street in New York City. For sales and press inquiries, contact Elizabeth Denny (+1-917-215-3723, elizabeth@dennydimingallery.com) or Robert Dimin (+1-917-445-7956 or robert@dennydimingallery.com).