

**Brian Dawn Chalkley**

Press

**LUNGLEY**

---

[www.lungleygallery.com](http://www.lungleygallery.com)

# ELEPHANT



LIFE THROUGH ART

SPRING 2019

Interviews with  
Ai Weiwei  
Tracey Emin  
Yasumasa Morimura  
Eva Vermandel

WHAT'S BECOME  
OF HIM?  
*Recasting Masculinity*





# Who Needs Masculinity?

Masculinity isn't what it used to be: a valued assertion of physical power and a fixed role as provider for and protector of wife and children. In many ways, of course, it never was. Artists haven't been slow to reflect the new uncertainties and the positive changes which go with a more flexible approach to gender roles and, indeed, gender itself. Here Paul Pfeiffer and Tala Madani call attention to the nature of stereotypes and the need to undermine them; while Erez Israeli, Brian Dawn Chalkley and Hassan Hajjaj assert new freedoms.

By Paul Carey-Kent







COURTESY THE ARTIST

Brian Dawn Chalkley  
From *Missing*, 2018 (left)

Before his recent retirement, Chalkley used to lead the MA at Chelsea College of Arts as Brian, and go out by night as Dawn. He also painted carefully fashioned portraits of Dawn as she wanted to be. The recent series *Missing*, at the Lungley Gallery, featured 454 characters much more loosely washed in thin and dirtied colours. Many of the androgynous figures, which could all be aspects of Brian Dawn, were accompanied by imagined monologues. They read as swings in mood and self-perception, building up to suggest an identity in flux: “I am longing for attention from the right person”; “I said fuck you baby”; “Grappling with my self-image is a daily task”...

# studio international

Published 22/12/2020

Share:



## Brian Dawn Chalkley: The Untold Depth of Savagery

### Brian Dawn Chalkley: The Untold Depth of Savagery

Brian Dawn Chalkley's alter ego, Dawn, has sketched a world of androgynous figures with guns in seaside landscapes, on to pillowcases, in a continuing exploration of gender and sexuality



Brian Dawn Chalkley. Antonin Artaud on the beach, 2020. Pencil, felt tip and thread on cotton pillow case, 75 x 45 cm.

by CHRISTIANA SPENS

Now in his 70s, Brian Dawn Chalkley has been exploring gender, sexuality and identity for more than four decades, first in private and then in his art. Having started his career as a modernist painter, whilst a transvestite in private, in 1996 he embraced “Dawn”, his alter ego, into his public art practice, too. Ever since this movement between “Brian” and “Dawn” has fuelled an odyssey into what it means to perform gender, and to form and reform identities, going far beyond the modernist tendencies of his earlier years, and continuing to build an impressive body of work that uses narrative and costume to construct and deconstruct aspects of their personality and personae.

In this second solo show with Lungley Gallery, it is Dawn Chalkley who has created a world sketched on to torn pillowcases, during this tumultuous year. Embellished with drawings, handwritten texts and embroidery, these works contain motifs familiar from earlier work – androgynous figures with guns and dresses, seemingly lost in natural wilderness. Appearing here, these characters, props and suggested stories create a sort of dreamscape, forming a recurrent subconscious motifs and sequences that prompt us to examine our own hidden dreams, fears and selves.



Brian Dawn Chalkley. *Ideal*, 2020. Pencil, felt tip and thread on cotton pillow case 75 cm x 45 cm

In *Ideal* (2020), for instance, an androgynous figure, wearing a 1920s-style striped bathing costume, shoots a gun at a much smaller, child-like figure, already bleeding on the ground, while a figure in red stands in the distance, on what could be the end of a pier or a road. In the middle of this drama, a leafless tree spreads out, connecting them despite the dissonance of the scene. Beyond this, there are little buildings, sea and a beach hut; it seems to evoke a British sea town, perhaps memories from the artist's own childhood, although laced with violence and horror.



Brian Dawn Chalkley. *Anticipation of what was about to come*, 2020. Pencil, felt tip and thread on cotton pillow case, 75 cm x 45 cm.

In *Anticipation of What Was to Come* (2020), there is another eerie scene and another beach hut, with a tree – this time with a few leaves, between fenced portions of land. What seems to be a washing line, represented here with embroidery thread in several colours knotted together, has grown wild and out of control. In felt tip pen, at the bottom, there is some text, but it does not clarify what is going on: “The boy stood in the tree standing upright, his stance kind sculptural installation. The small boat appeared like a house on water. The water looked dark and unclear. The dog scampered towards the distant coastline. This narration gives the impression of a dream sequence, the meaning buried in symbols, the trajectory unclear, and the atmosphere strange and bewitching



In Antonin Artaud on the Beach (2020), the artist seems to mock the famous dramatist (though affectionately), depicting him in a seaside scene, complete with parasol, beach towel, paddling pool and sun shade. Standing there, looking haunted but striking, Artaud's presence points to a quiet, everyday absurdity, an unmistakable dissonance, underlined by the wild drama of the skies behind.



*Brian Dawn Chalkley. Figure in pink, 2020. Pencil, felt tip and thread on cotton pillow case, 75 x 45 cm.*

In all these visceral scenes, which take the British seaside – its pebble beaches and piers and sad, barren trees – as their setting, Chalkley conveys a sense of hopelessness, of existential dread. The complex, ambiguous identity of the figures standing there, often seeming lost in themselves – or their environments – is startling and also moving. It is impossible not to be drawn in, to empathise with these moments of surreal understanding, that the self, our memories, and our places are in flux.

But there is a chasm between the details of the stories, the narrative itself, and the meaning behind both. While we are invited to speculate on, and discover about, these scenarios, they ultimately refuse to give more than these stark, dream-like symbols, and so refuse any true resolution. This sense of ambiguity – static angst and quiet crisis – seems perfectly prescient for this year (also the year in which they were produced); Chalkley has drawn on a lifetime's work as a reflection on personal dissonance, contradiction, interiority and how we relate to our own memories and sense of self, to produce a series of works that cleverly and movingly process the strangeness of the times we are living through – both together and alone.

Chalkley's earlier work is currently on show at the group exhibition [Tales from the Colony Rooms: Art and Bohemia](#), London (until 20 December 2020), which features the work of Frank Auerbach, Francis Bacon, Bruce Bernard, Peter Blake, Michael Clark, John Deakin, Daniel Farson, Lucian Freud, Maggi Hamblin, Nina Hammett, RB Kitaj, Eduardo Paolozzi, Isabel Rawsthorne, FN Souza and many others – all of whom, in their heyday, frequented the Colony Rooms, a notorious private members club for writers and artists. This work gives some context to Chalkley's wider practice, therefore, and indeed the artists of his generation and social circles, in Soho's more bohemian days.



---

**ual:**

[Subjects](#)

[Courses](#)

[Colleges and Institutes](#)

[Accessibility](#)



[Search](#)



[Menu](#)

[UAL](#) > [Alumni & Friends](#) > [Alumni stories](#) > [Brian Dawn Chalkley's new exhibition opens at Lungley Gallery](#)

## Story

# Brian Dawn Chalkley's new exhibition opens at Lungley Gallery

261732



Written by  
Eleanor Harvey

November was a big month for Brian Dawn Chalkley; he was preparing for his latest exhibition, 'The Untold Depth of Savagery' which opens at the Lungley Gallery on 4 December 2020. It also marked his thirtieth year of teaching at Chelsea College of Arts, UAL, where he is currently BA (Hons) Fine Art Senior Lecturer.

Lungley Gallery director Mark Lungley is a former student of Brian's. It was whilst Mark was completing his MA Fine Art at Chelsea that the two bonded over a shared interest in the work of gender and queer theorist and author Jack Halberstam.

Brian Dawn's work is intrinsically linked to identity; where the development of the female persona Dawn allows the artist to create work that is not tied to the same restrictions as Brian. Education also plays a large part in his practise too, as we found out when we spoke to Brian and Mark recently.





## Brian Dawn Chalkley

Brian Dawn, this month marks thirty years of teaching at Chelsea. You're also a graduate from the College, so you've seen the College through a lot of different phases. How has it changed? And has anything remained the same? What has been the highlight of your time at Chelsea?

I started at Chelsea on the BA painting course in September 1969 at the age of 21. I had few academic qualifications, however, I was allowed in under a clause for exceptionally talented students. During this period Chelsea was based in Manresa Road just off King Road which was the coolest place to be at the time. Coming from Stevenage, I felt like I had made it into a world beyond my wildest dreams.

The studios were divided into a broad range of disciplines, with appropriate staff teaching in each studio. The studio cohort was made up of first, second and third-year students, which when I look back was very challenging but amazing at the same time.

My first real encounter with a tutor asked me about my work. He eventually said 'sorry but I don't have anything to say to you', which was a big learning curve at the time. After 6 weeks, the first year students were transferred to another studio with a different discipline and approach to teaching. I ended up in the mainstream painting studio, as it was then called, where I stayed for the next three years. I was being taught by Mick Moon, Jeremy Moon and Malcolm Hughes, all serious mainstream artists with international reputations. They all proved central in the development of my practice and my future career in teaching. I then went on to do my Post Graduate at the Slade, which fortunately for me coincided with Mick Moon and Malcolm Hughes taking up teaching posts at the same time.

I took up a full time Senior Lecturer role at Chelsea in November 1990, where I became third-floor studio leader for the BA course; before going on to develop the Post Graduate Diploma course. This was followed by a time as Program Leader and MA course leader. In addition to working closely with the Development Department at Holborn. I am now back where I started teaching BA students which is great.

The College has gone through what can be described as substantial development during my time there, in particular, moving sites to Millbank and becoming part of the University of the Arts London (UAL). However the main principle set by Lawrence Gowing (headmaster of Chelsea School of Arts, 1958-1965), that students should be taught by practising artists has remained central to the teaching philosophy at Chelsea.

For me, this is the bedrock of what Chelsea is about. Together with a strong critical approach to help and encourage students to develop their own language/practise. It's important for me that the student can engage with the idea of fun as part of a teaching and learning tool. My Post Graduate Diploma course was entirely based on this principle, which was quite radical at the time.

My main highlight at Chelsea is being privileged enough to be taught, and now teaching at Chelsea. Chelsea has a star studied history that I am honoured to have played a role in.

Alongside your teaching, you're a successful artist in your own right, and your work crosses a lot of different media. Can you tell us more about your practice? How has your work changed and developed over the years?

It is important when discussing my practice that a strong element of that practice is teaching. Teaching has given me a platform to exchange ideas and creative processes with a younger generation, they have been vital in my development as an artist.

A major turning point in the practice was the creation of a female persona named Dawn. Dawn allowed me to take on another identity that was not subject to the same historical backdrop as Brian. Adrian Searle wrote, "Obsession, repression, sexual fantasy, secrets, solitude and a very bleak kind of humour are among the artist's subjects. The work is full of character, and the character is the artist's best invention". The idea of being someone else was exciting and allowed for new opportunity's to be explored in the practice for example storytelling, the performative, identity and above all dreaming of being someone else.



Your current exhibition 'The Untold Depth of Savagery' is currently on at the Lungley Gallery in Dalston, London. The works you're showing include handmade crafts such as embroidery, portraits, as well as handwritten and stitched text, all presented on pillowcases and fabric. Can you tell us more about the works?

The current work uses domestic materials such as pillowcases, felt pens and embroidery to create a narrative of dreaming, in some cases a nightmare narrative. My mother used to make me shirts when I was in my teens, which was exciting as no one else had one like it. So this current work looks back to a pre-art school-age of homespun myth and expression, allowing for a broader range of representation and methodology.

The late work of Phillip Guston has always been a major influence on my practice, together with American folk art, Antonin Artaud and Samuel Beckett.





## Mark Lungley

Brian was your tutor whilst you were studying your MA at Chelsea, and your gallery is exhibiting 'The Untold Depth of Savagery'. How did your relationship develop from that of professor/student into a professional one?

We have been planning 'The Untold Depth of Savagery' since Brian Dawn's first exhibition 'Missing' at the Lungley Gallery, in November 2018.

Brian and I shared a common interest in the work of Jack Halberstam which is how we were first introduced to each other. At the time Brian was preparing for a solo show in New York and he asked me to help him in his studio pick the pieces for the show. We first worked together on an exhibition when I was running a space called Side Room with Ilana Blumberg at Chelsea. The exhibition coincided with a new book titled 'The Alterity and Identity of Trans Imaginess' and we have continued to work together ever since.

I don't think of myself as a curator but as a gallerist, and the relationship between artist and gallerist requires a great deal of trust and respect, it is my job to promote the work of the artists and also generate money through the sale of work to enable them to sustain their practice and keep the gallery afloat without compromising the work.



You're a triple UAL graduate, having previously completed a Foundation year at Camberwell College of Arts in 2002, and your BA (Hons) Fine Art at Central Saint Martins (CSM) in 2005, before getting your MA Fine Art at Chelsea. What was your experience of UAL like?

It was eleven years after graduating from CSM before I decided to pursue an MA at Chelsea. The world had changed significantly in that period of time. The cost of living in London was at an all-time high and with the scarcity of government funding, it was becoming increasingly difficult for artists to sustain a career and for galleries to support them.

I have seen the difficulties facing institutions and students alike and the need to evolve. I think all these concerns were important to me which inevitably ended with me rejecting a studio-based practice in favour of Side Room. UAL provided me with the time, space and opportunity to work through concerns.





As director of Lungley Gallery, can you tell us more about your experiences of running your own gallery; what has been your proudest moment?

I love what I do!

It's a privilege to work with artists and spend time with their work. In 2018 I was invited to co-curate an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) Taipei titled 'I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness, I want sin'.

In October 2019 Lungley was invited to participate in the Manchester Contemporary, our first art fair which was an incredible experience.



Brian Dawn Chalkley's 'The Untold Depth of Savagery' is being shown at the Lungley Gallery from Friday 4 December 2020 - Saturday 6 February 2021

Opening times:

Wednesday to Saturday: 11am - 6pm

Sunday: 12pm - 5pm

The Lungley Gallery, currently in residency at Seventeen  
270-276 Kingsland Road, London, E8 4DG  
(Entrance on Acton Mews to rear of the building).

© 2020 University Arts London. All Rights Reserved.

---

17 Apr 2019

[PROFILE](#)

## Brian Dawn Chalkley Opposes the Binary in Fluid Watercolours

When the British artist was fourteen, he painted a giant question mark on his bedroom ceiling. He's been asking questions ever since. As Brian, he was an established artist in the modernist tradition, but his female persona Dawn accesses a much broader art practice. Words by [Paul Carey-Kent](#)



Composite portrait of Brian and Dawn in front of *Lost* by Daniel Devlin / Susak Press



Was is it really only thirty years ago that [Judith Butler](#) first proposed that [gender](#) is a performance, that there is no physical sex-identity which precedes the social—that your gender is something you “do” not something you simply “receive”? That shift in thinking, so radical then, is becoming increasingly mainstream. [Brian Dawn Chalkley](#)—now seventy—is an artist who, even thirty years ago, was aware of his gender as a construction. He was a modernist painter in the then-conventional style, but in private he was a transvestite. That became public in 1996, and movement between his personae of “Brian” and the extravagantly bewigged “Dawn” has since become the wellspring of his art practice. Brian continues to teach at [Chelsea College of Art](#)—he loves it and never wants to stop. Dawn makes all the art.

### **Lots must have changed since you grew up in the 1950s?**

Yes, the boundaries of male-female are being re-contextualized, and there’s a different imagination being applied by the younger generation. Thinking about that takes me back to my school in Stevenage. The whole aim seemed to be to train people to work in a factory, and I failed miserably in everything. I remember horrible moments of being confronted as different, and I see on reflection that even at eleven I didn’t have the male bonding expected.



Screwing Up My Career Was Never About Drugs and Booze, 2011. Watercolour on paper 30.5 x 40.5 cm

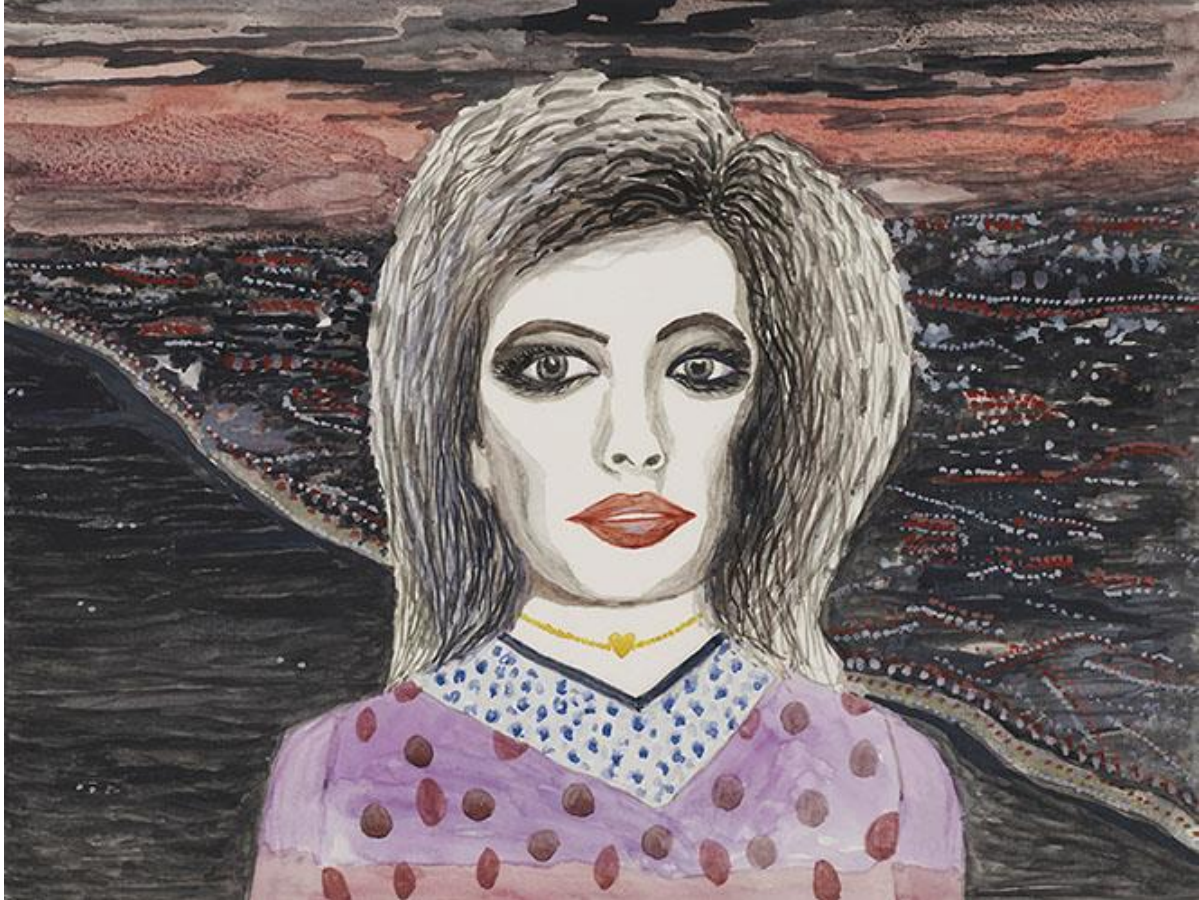
### **You realized very young, then?**

At ten. I remember trying on the lodger's underwear, so that questioning of society has been there all my life. My parents were very liberal, though—at fourteen I painted a big question mark on the ceiling in my room. My father didn't scream and shout "Get rid of that!" but said "That's interesting, I wonder about that question mark"—and he left it there until he moved out himself, twenty years later.

### **Did you resist the construction imposed on you as a boy?**

Exactly, yes. I couldn't have articulated that then, when you're like that you just don't know what's happening. Whereas now an

adolescent can say “I want to be a woman.” That’s a problem too, I think, as it still implants a binary division between female and male, whereas I want to oppose that. The very word “masculinity” seems to define a clarity which I resist. I’m not denying masculinity, but embracing it in a much broader sense.



Tonight I'm Not Taking Any Calls, 2011. Watercolour on paper, 30.5 x 40.5 cm

**You became known as a painter, and led the MA at Chelsea College. When did you make your true nature public?**

In 1996 I started to appear publicly as Dawn. It took a lot of guts at the time, but I was obsessive, going out every night to exhibition openings and performing as Dawn, too. There were mixed reactions. Some artists asked why I had to do that, but [Paul Noble](#) said “Great, send me some work!” and that led to me showing a film at [City Racing](#) in 1998.



## **Can you pin down the appeal?**

Both personae are constructed, but the interest is in the point of transition between them. It's that moment of "becoming other" which matters. You could say, if you're looking at it conventionally, that most trans men look dreadful, but no one questions it in that world: it's the change which matters, not its aesthetic. I'm quite conventional in my female representation, I don't see myself as drag, or as theatrical in the way that [Grayson Perry](#) is—I used to see him often at parties in the nineties. As I wrote in my [Manifesto of a Tranny](#) in 2005, which looked to define such differences, "I am not for the respectable face of drag, as parody, as vaudeville, as family entertainment" but "I am for the badly applied make up. I am for the mirrored excess of beauty."

It's the Same for Any Working Woman. You Try Not to Let Anything Drop, 2011. Watercolour on paper 30.5 x 40.5 cm

## **Your partner is a woman. Whom did she meet?**

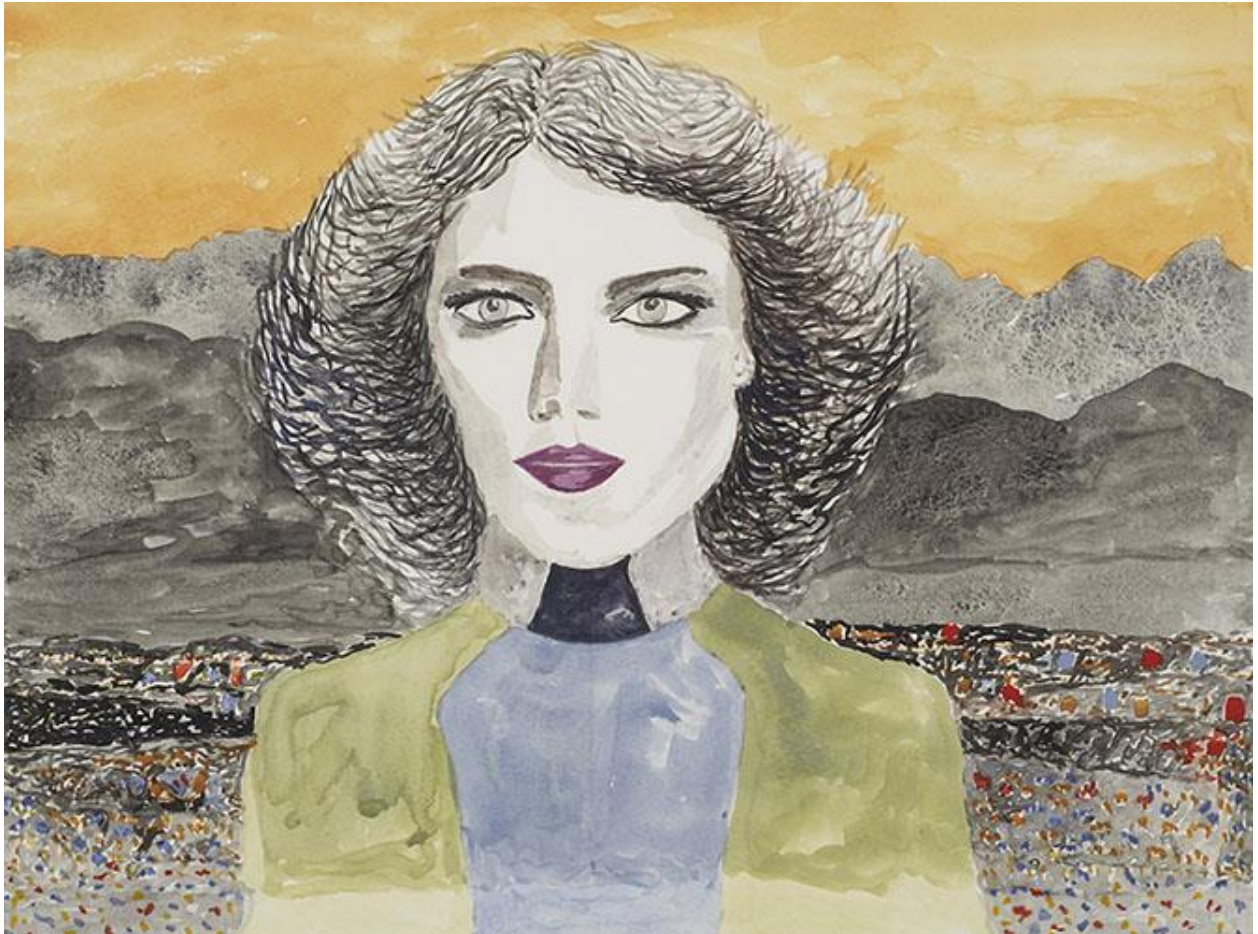
She met Dawn in [The Way Out Club](#). She loved Dawn, and said to me for a long time "I don't want to see Brian," so I had to dress up every time she came round until I said "We can't carry on doing this." I think she was attracted to the relinquishing of the male, rather than attracted to a woman as such. I come out of bisexuality—again, I see that as fluid.

## **How has being both Brain and Dawn influenced your art practice?**

Dawn opened a broader landscape than I had as Brian, the macho eighties painter of big landscapes and steel abstractions. Being Dawn doesn't carry the same art historical



baggage. Her pictures started with line drawings on board—shown as Dawn in Wonderland in 2012-13: I noted them down at five in the morning, when I got back from the clubs. They're very sexualized.



*"The very word 'masculinity' seems to define a clarity which I resist. I'm not denying masculinity, but embracing it in a much broader sense"*

**You introduced more complexity with the series [Career Girls](#) at [Horst Schuler Gallery Dusseldorf](#) in 2011. They have colour, narrative titles and elaborate backdrops and sneak the language of abstract painting into clothes and décor...**

Yes, I started to paint figures of "becoming" Dawn, then I realized I wanted a background, so I invented settings to suit

the figures as I imagined them, e.g. if I thought she was a croupier from LA then I would match that. Possibly I was trying out the characters I would like to be. Painting as Dawn allowed for a certain naivety in the painting... flat, and with lots of emphasis on the makeup. Putting on makeup is like painting a sculpture, and also performative.



Your ongoing new series of watercolours, [Lost](#), are much simpler—but there were already 454 when you showed them at the [Lungley Gallery](#) last year. How do you see these working?

Watercolours are a fluid medium in which to explore fluidity, and also suit how Dawn enables me to embrace the amateur. I like to bring figures and narrative together, and many of the watercolours incorporate fragments of text painting, integrated as imagined monologues rather than as titles. The words come in response to the image after I've painted it, drawing on a bank of texts I've jotted down from conversations or reading. The idea is to show them as an installation, as at the Lungley Gallery last year. The viewer jumps around between scores of characters and builds up a narrative view across the whole.

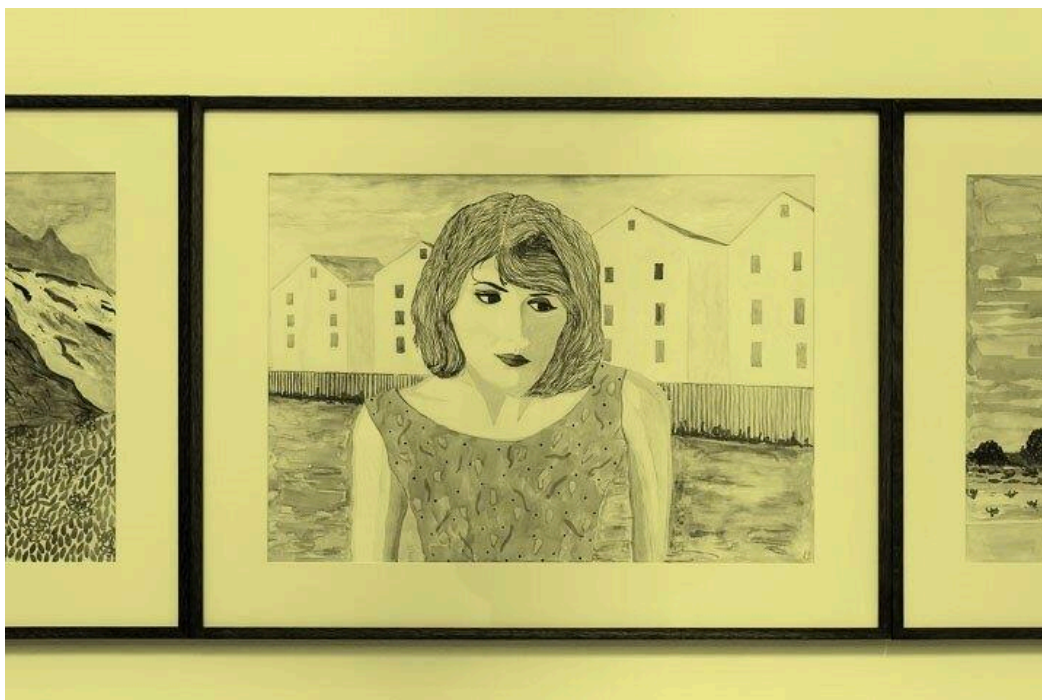
OUTPOST

[About](#) [Membership](#) [Opportunities](#) [Programming](#) [Archive](#) [Studios](#) [Editions](#)

#118 Brian Dawn Chalkley, *Everything I am not. I am becoming.*

2 - 21 March 2015

Brian Dawn Chalkley was born in 1948. He studied at Chelsea School of Art and the Slade. Brian currently lives and works in London.



A conversation between Jessica Moore, Brian Chalkley and Dawn Chalkley.

Jessica Moore: In your watercolour paintings you said they were of 'all the people I want to be'. Does Dawn inhabit the worlds of these women? Is the feeling of becoming something that you are thinking about when you are painting?

**Brian Chalkley:** I think we should ask Dawn about that because she's got some views on that, so Dawn, what do you think?

**Dawn Chalkley:** Well, oh my god, all the people I wanna be. I wanna be everybody I really do. I mean those glamorous girls out there and all the ones that you paint, I want to be them, I want to be her in every way. I want her hair her eyes her nose and I wanna just be fabulous all the time.



JM: Using watercolour seems to be subversive in this context, perhaps even perverse or humorous?

**BC: Yeah that sounds like a real art question doesn't it, subversive watercolour? I mean what I like about watercolour is it comes out of a kind of amateur painting and I don't mean the word amateur in a bad way but enthusiastic painters, which is something I've never been. But people learn classes in watercolour painting. What I liked about it was its so downbeat, so un- arts. Um, so what do you think Dawn?**

**DC: I think watercolours are for amateurs, I never understood why you use that method. It's so crap.**

**BC: Crap! What do you mean by crap?**

**DC: I mean who the hell uses watercolour anymore? Anyway, I don't want my portraits painted in watercolour. Why don't you use oil?**

**BC: Dawn, shut up, you don't know anything about art.**

JM: You mentioned that the tree sculpture is connected to Sigmund Freud's Case The Wolf Man, about a dream his patient had of a tree with wolves sitting in it. You've dressed the tree with pieces from Dawn's outfits, is this to reflect the fearlessness of the wolf?

**BC: Yeah I think The Wolf Man is really important. I'm not sure as to the symbolism for Freud in that but I knew that the Wolf Man was Freud's patient and he had a dream, these wolves sitting in trees and Freud found this incredibly significant. I think he spent most of his life in Freud's analysis and when he was asked at the end of his**

life if it had been effective he had doubts about it. I've been in Freudian analysis for fifteen years and I suppose this is my Wolf Man tree. My Dawn personal tree.

DC: What do you mean dawn?

BC: What?

DC: I'm not a fucking kind of mad person! I've never been to psychoanalysis in my life. The only analysis I've had is in the Way Out club in the darkroom.

BC: Yeah, well Dawn you are a completely different creature aren't you? Anyway, I think analysis has been useful, regardless of what the Wolf Man might say.



JM: In the film you are narrating vignettes of nights out. Is it important you tell stories? It's like each different medium you've used is a window into Dawn's world. Or we are watching Dawn,

gazing out of the window at the trees outside and in the direct gaze of the women in your paintings.

**BC: I think narrative is really important in the work. And very early on when I started to develop Dawn as a persona, I did it without any intention of it being an artwork. I remember somebody saying to me, is Dawn a way of getting into the art world? And I said absolutely not. She has nothing to do with art, she doesn't really like art that much and it wasn't anything to do with a kind of trick, or some art kind of idea. It came out of a desire that had been there since the age of ten, and wanting to somehow have this femininity that I had in my head about being a woman. Not necessarily wanting to be transgender in that way, but I felt like this was such a strong part of my personality that I'd repressed for so long and it had brought me lots of problematic situations in covering up Dawn, of trying to deny Dawn's presence.**

**It was only in 1997 when I did the first show at City Racing with Hillary Lloyd and Jemima Stehli. Paul Nobel invited me into that show, I will always be thankful for his insight into what I was doing. It gave me a chance to put on a show of Dawn and other people that were associated with some kind of transgender. From people I found in clubs who had never made any artwork in their life to people who were professional artists like Grayson Perry and Dawn Mellor. In that show I made a piece about being in a cab and telling these stories about the people I'd met in night clubs. There's a way I think I can tell a story and visualise it in my head at the same time. I think narrative is incredibly important and if you look at the watercolour portraits of Dawn's friends and colleagues and people she'd like to be. It's like a film clip in a way that the narrative suggests the**

**work is not necessarily what you see but maybe what's to either side of it, where that narrative might go so that the spectator can then get involved with their own narrative in relation to it. I think that the models that you see and the quotations in current fashion magazines are the philosophy and the narrative of the present. They are in a way the common philosophy, the one about your personal obsession with beauty, your career, making it and being a celebrity. I'm interested in the notion of the celebrity where a certain kind of attitude comes out which I think is very much about being part of a social structure. So the work is trying to not be about art practice. I'm using all the materials that I used when I left school and worked in an architects office, using tracing paper and Rotring pens, and in my lunch hour I was tracing Pirelli calendars and hiding them under my bed from mum.**







## PAUL'S ART STUFF ON A TRAIN # 109: 'UNCRUSHED DREAMS'

By [Paul Carey-Kent](#) • 13 May 2015



*Brian Dawn Chalkly: 'My dreams get crushed on a regular basis. I guess that's down to the life I'm living', 2012 – Watercolour on paper – 42 x 59.*

Who's the best transvestite artist in the country? Grayson Perry is, of course, much the most famous, not just as an artist, but as a media figure, especially when dressed as Claire. But to my taste the better artist is [Brian Dawn Chalkley](#), similar enough in inclinations to have accompanied Perry to the Torture Garden back in the day. Leading the MA at Chelsea College as Brian and going out as Dawn by night, he's an abstract painter who turned to performance, film and – latterly – figurative watercolours. His slightly washed-out paintings of women look a little naïve at first, but there's lots going on: having sourced a photographic starting point with the right air of anxiety, Chalkley then designs clothes to suit how he sees his ostensible subjects' personalities – often

still referencing abstract art – and then follows a parallel process to decide on a background. A disjointed allure results, pointed up by the lengthy titles quoting from fashion magazines. They gesture towards fleshing out the character but leave us wondering if it's all a pretence – which it might very well be, for these paintings also represent Chalkley's own dreams of how he'd like to be, of the act he'd like to pull off. You can see six of Chalkley's paintings in a three person show (with Jacqueline Utley and Charles Williams at Studio 1.1 to 31 May) which is themed around the construction of narratives.



*Brian as Dawn*

---

