



Paint by Number, TRIIBE

Educators' Resources for *TRIIBE: same difference*

On view February 7 – June 5, 2016



TRIIIBE: same difference

Fueled by a common interest in identity, performance artists Alicia, Kelly, and Sara Casilio (identical triplet sisters) and National Geographic photographer Cary Wolinsky joined forces in 2006 to form TRIIIBE – an artistic collective that often expands to include family, friends, and fellow artists. TRIIIBE's painstakingly staged photographs, performances, and videos play up the sameness of the sisters to provoke cultural conversations about gender, equality, and difference, while traversing hot-button social and political issues. Behind each TRIIIBE endeavor is a clever, satirical, and egalitarian exchange of ideas and an elaborate cluster of costumes, wigs, props, and make-up.

TRIIIBE: same difference begins by welcoming FAM visitors into a fantastical, faux dressing room, awash in the actual clothing and accessories worn by the Casilios to bend gender and slip through stereotype. The photographs visitors will see in FAM's main galleries are the result of countless hours of sketching, planning, costume changing, and fine-tuning by all members of the group, collectively. Wolinsky is an integral part of this creative process and in his hands the camera, too, becomes a collaborator, rather than just a documentary tool. Every shot, every tableau is shaped by TRIIIBE with and through the camera's lens. Wolinsky and the sisters then scrutinize hundreds of possible images, poses, and variations before reaching consensus about the final photo to print. This labored, democratic approach results in unique conceptual photographs that are highly theatrical, stylized, forceful, and refined.

FAM is honored to share **TRIIIBE: same difference** with our audiences and grateful to the artists and Arlette Kayafas of Gallery Kayafas in Boston, MA for making this show possible.

TRIIIBE: same difference is organized by Curator Mary M. Tinti and Koch Curatorial Fellow Emily M. Mazzola and has been supported by a grant from the Artist's Resource Trust.

In Search of Eden

TRIIIBE's series of triptychs, **In Search of Eden**, originated in 2010 as a site-specific project for Boston University's 808 Gallery. Responding to BU's colossal 11,000 square foot gallery—formerly a luxury car dealership—TRIIIBE was immediately drawn to the dichotomy between the space's commercial function and its atmosphere of religious grandeur, achieved through marble floors, a decorative ceiling and towering columns. TRIIIBE set out to fill the massive gallery with a project with philosophical implications of an equally lofty scale. According to Sara Casilio, "We wanted to get down to the bottom of what is commercialism and what is religion." So TRIIIBE began where it all begins—so to speak—with the Book of Genesis, ruminating on the figures of Adam and Eve, the serpent, Eden, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and of course, the apple.

The collaborative arrived at a plan to create seven triptychs, a historical form of religious art that originated in the middle ages and has been used for centuries in Catholic churches, most typically as altarpieces. Triptychs were devised to visually communicate the word of God to the illiterate masses. Here in **In Search of Eden**, TRIIIBE conflates Genesis with the word of a different god, namely, Capitalism—daring viewers to consider what their own faults, shortcomings, and wrongdoings would look like in a biblical context.

Each triptych riffs off one of seven apple varieties commonly available in grocery stores: Fuji, Golden Delicious, Granny Smith, Macintosh, Pink Lady, Red Delicious, Royal Gala. Throughout the series apple and Bible metaphors meld together with art historical appropriations to equally humorous and thought-provoking effect. Nothing is as it seems or should be—Fuji apples form a surrealist **Garden of Earthly Delight**; the serpent is not a reptile but a back-alley crook; and the Tree of Knowledge is a data superhighway constructed from computer cords. TRIIIBE asks us to consider: if locust and flood are no longer the price of lust, greed, and vanity, what is?

In Search of Eden is about the power of imagery and the importance of questioning, highlighting the often overlooked intersections between religious and commercial iconography. The triptychs of **In Search of Eden** explore the similarities between religious and commercial imagery, as modes of communication that proffer unobtainable ideals of perfection—be it a life free of sin or cellulite.

For a behind the scenes look at the making of the **In Search of Eden** triptychs check out the series of videos available in the Learning Lounge!

Abstinence Eve

Abstinence Eve is a product of the first collaboration between the Casilio sisters and Cary Wolinsky. It was originally conceived by the Casilios as a guerilla street performance in which they would dress as nuns and attempt to sell their hand-made, bedazzled and flag bearing chastity belts to passers-by. The scene evolved rapidly before the camera when TRIIBE took these religious hijinks from the streets to the studio. Despite the ridiculousness of their premise—inviting strangers to literally “buy in” to abstinence by publicly purchasing a flimsy homemade medieval device, entirely futile for its intended purpose—TRIIBE makes a point worth taking seriously. In our contemporary moment when pop stars flaunt chastity rings for PR, professional athletes are more famous for what they do or don’t do in their bedrooms than what they accomplish on the field, and reality stars build empires from their home videos, hasn’t the public exposure of private life reached a new point of absurdity? Within this swath of mixed-messages regarding female sexuality, TRIIBE provokes us to consider Eve’s determination to be abstinent. Is her choice one of free will, religious indoctrination, or social and cultural pressure? And is there really a difference?

3 Mil Plastic

In **3 Mil Plastic**, Alicia Casilio evokes screen siren Marilyn Monroe. Her perfectly frozen figure is at once unsettling and perversely fascinating in part because bodies are not supposed to be wrapped in plastic or appear made of it. Through the iconic figure of Monroe, TRIIBE probes our fixation with celebrity culture and its celebration of scalpel-made beauty, wealth, and spectacle. **3 Mil Plastic** also calls attention to our desires to consume tragedies and disasters as entertainment—much like Monroe’s now mythologized life and death. Viewers may notice that the blonde wig and perfectly lacquered lips of Marilyn are the same as the female character of **Homeland** (also on view). With only the exposure of a shoulder and one seductively cocked brow, a housewife is transformed into a starlet. The performative work of TRIIBE hinges on photographic acumen, the dramatic theatricality of sets, costumes, and lighting, and the Casilios’ masterful ability to communicate a vast range of emotion through subtle facial expressions and postures.

Compatibility Quiz

Picture this...three young ladies enter a bar: a buxom blonde in a plunging top and miniskirt, a brunette in business attire and pearls, and an auburn-tressed creative in colorful clothes and scarf. Now, imagine how other bar-goers might interact with these women. Are their conversations similar? Is each woman treated with the same attention, courtesy, and respect? What role might a person’s preconceptions play in these interactions? The sisters devised this covert, social experiment to prompt all of these questions and more. They hit the town dressed extremely differently from one another and let the interactions unfold.

Compatibility Quiz is TRIIBE’s staged, photographic homage to that real-life performance, one that plays on assumptions about appearance, approachability, female stereotypes, and sexuality. Which woman do *you* think received the most attention?

Equal Opportunity

Thanks to the help of extraordinary make-up, careful costume choices, and a natural predilection for performing different roles, the Casilio sisters are masters of bending gender. It is safe to say that the lines between male and female are as fluid in TRIIBE images as they are in real life. That fluidity is on full view in **Equal Opportunity** – shown here not as two separate photographs, but as a lenticular that vibrates between two images as viewers pass by. In the first image, Sara, Kelly, and Alicia portray pregnant young women with wildly different looks. In the second, they transform into their male counterparts – *if* those men could be with child. Like all TRIIBE images, **Equal Opportunity** elicits introspection about knee-jerk first-impressions, social and cultural stigmas, and class and gender stereotypes. The opportunities for equality to which TRIIBE alludes in this lenticular are many and masterful. But perhaps most pointedly, TRIIBE asks viewers to consider how the politics of pregnancy might change if childbirth was not solely the responsibility of women.

Fine

In **Fine** the Casilio sisters fade into their domestic environment, dressed alike in the pattern of their surroundings. Each dress, shoe, and hairstyle is distinctly different yet the same—the inherent tension of life as a triplet. The relentless sameness of the decorative floral verges on oppressive as tension looms under the surface of these coordinating figures. If asked if they are all right, these rigidly posed women would respond with a curt but final, “Everything is fine.” The Casilios’ confrontational gazes make us uncomfortably aware of our position as viewer, calling attention to the issue of public and cultural visibility and invisibility more broadly. For example, how often do we look the other way or pretend not to see the homeless or a person asking for change on the street, rendering them invisible? **Fine** brings to the fore the fact that the freedom to demand attention when you want it or slip into a crowd is a privilege dictated by race, class, gender, and physicality.

Homeland

Like so many TRIIBE tableaux, **Homeland** is an image rife with suggestive ambiguity. It was created post 9/11, when the term “homeland,” was used widely in contexts of protection and security, and the repeal of the country’s “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” policies were at the forefront of every political debate. In this image straight from the heartland, TRIIBE introduces a 1950s-era American couple posed in their living room. A military portrait on the wall signals an absent family member, presumably a son. The couple’s expressions seem simultaneously detached, stoic, and unsure, signaling that whether their soldier son is deployed or deceased, he is greatly missed. Given these clues, **Homeland** becomes a powerful multi-layered portrait of American ideals, nostalgia, and loss. It is a statement about the cost of war for all families (both those in favor of military action and those opposed) and – by extension – an indictment of the events that lead to that end game.

Miss

In **Miss**, TRIIBE shines a spotlight on beauty pageant culture, inviting viewers to question the relevance and authenticity of such competitions as well as the values they champion. Pitting female contestants – or, as the reality television circuit might suggest...toddlers in tiaras –

against one another comes across as counterproductive to elevating the status of women across the world. The infamous Miss America Pageant ballad, for example, praises the winning woman for being “beautiful,” “ideal,” “feminine,” and “fair.” Such superficial descriptors seem strange to herald in the twenty-first century, let alone reward. TRIIBE calls out that discrepancy by showcasing how the top three contestants are versions of the same person on the surface— each has long, curly hair, a sequined gown, a plastic smile, and a sash. Instead of indicating the states from which they hail, their sashes convey a little title-related wordplay – “misapprehension,” “mislead,” and misrepresent” – terms that encourage viewers to explore mixed messages about diversity, misogyny, beauty, femininity, substance, strength, and accomplishment in society today.

MySpace

Teenage angst and parental concern consume the bedroom of **MySpace**, a messy family portrait in which the looming eye-roll of a rebellious daughter can be sensed by all who view this photo. This is an image full of emotion, worry, and attitude, one that pits privacy and personal expression against responsibility and naivete. In both its title and explosively decorated interior, **MySpace** also eludes to early social media platforms that made personalized internet profiles all the rage, particularly for young people. As such, it captures the gulfs of misunderstanding, miscommunication, and differing opinions between generations that feel even wider during those cringe-worthy, growing-pain years.

Right to Life

Metaphors about abortion, capital punishment, and the separation between church and state swirl together in this uncomfortable image of a pregnant young woman in an electric chair. **Right to Life** is in fact an impossible image, for no prison in America can execute a prisoner who is pregnant. Thus, the scene serves to both shock and unsettle, as only political propaganda can. Taking the title of this photograph to heart, TRIIBE illustrates the complexity of a pro-life point of view that is opposed to a woman’s right to choose, but in favor of the death penalty. **Right to Life** also asks viewers to explore their capacity for empathy and compassion. Without knowing this woman’s crimes, can viewers feel sympathy for her? Should they? Is that different from the sympathy they might feel for a man? What if the race of the person changed as well? **Right to Life** is an exploration of all of these controversial questions and more, again utilizing the sameness of the sisters to astoundingly provocative effect.

Table for Three

Because of their physical likeness, the Casilio sisters have the uncanny ability to portray “everyman.” With a single image, if not a look, they can convey the deep and profound sense of humanity we all share regardless of gender, race, culture, or religion. TRIIBE illuminates that equity in **Table for Three**, an image that unites a Jewish Rabbi, a Catholic Priest, and a Muslim Imam. These are aging men who represent religions with core principles of goodness, compassion, and peace. Such commonalities are vital to bear in mind, especially with dangerous fearmongering and isolated, extremist actions of hate taking place the world over. In titling and staging the image in this way, TRIIBE also underscores the fact that there are no seats for women at this table. This absence of the “everywoman” similarly allows **Table for Three** to prompt questions about gender bias and the roles of religious women across belief systems, too.

Triplet Crime

In **Triplet Crime** the familiar scene of the police line up plays out to humorous effect. Like in popular crime TV shows and buddy-cop movies, similar looking people are placed side-by-side for direct comparison. In **Triplet Crime**, however, the jig is up for the justice system. Outward appearance cannot be used against the accused when they are physiognomically identical—making the Casilio sisters the perfect criminals. The triplets are dressed in low-cut shirts, fur trimmed jackets, and tight pink corduroys that expose fleshly midriffs and black G-strings. Sexualized but unfashionable, these figure are definitely not the glamorous professional women of **Bailouts and Bonuses** (on view on the movie room). TRIIBE puts the viewer in the uncomfortable position of having to confront our own prejudices regarding class and sexuality when trying to surmise what crime the triplets have committed and just might get away with.

Unnamed

FAM is thrilled to debut **Unnamed**, which marks an interesting conceptual departure for the collaborative. In **Unnamed**, TRIIBE moves away from using the sameness of the Casilios as their theoretical jumping-off point for the first time. In the months leading up to **TRIIBE: same difference**, Kelly Casilio created a tapestry inspired by the experience of her pregnancy and “the creature” she had yet to meet. Kelly hand spun and dyed yarn to weave the textile visible here. Dyed shades of blood red and fleshy pink, with softly undulating edges, the handmade textile’s corporeal nature is magnified by cascading tendrils that bring to mind umbilical cords and pending childbirth. Fingers, eyes, lips and ears poke through the layers of yarn, at once revealing and concealing the members of TRIIBE and their family and friends from view. The effect is mysterious and surreal. By poignantly juxtaposing textile, femininity, and family TRIIBE’s newest work speaks to the threads of human experience that connect us all.



Educators' Resources for *TRIIIBE: same difference*

Activity Suggestions for the Classroom

Generative Questions for Discussion or Writing Assignments

Choose 10 questions from the list of Questions About Identity in this packet, and ask students to pick one and write their answer to it. Share out.

Using all or most of the questions from the list, this activity could be modified to be a daily exercise for students' private journals.

How does photography reveal or mask identity?

What is the advantage of putting on costumes and performing in order to tell a story or comment on society and politics?

When does satire and imitation become not funny?

When does collaborating help you?

How does what *TRIIIBE* does compare to Halloween?

Art Activities

Take several photos of a classmate in different poses and facial expressions that express different emotions. Look at them together and decide which one expressed the emotion best. Be able to defend your decision with evidence in the photograph. Switch places and do this exercise again.

Dress up as a character of your choice, take a selfie, and then write a fictional story about your character.

For middle and high school students:

In groups of 5 or 6, think about important social and political issues that concern you, and pick one to focus on. Decide on a statement your group would like to make about the issue. Figure out how your group could express its statement in a satirical way by using creating a tableau with your bodies, props, costumes and even make-up.



Educators' Resources for *TRIIIBE: same difference*

Questions about Identity

Questions about one's character, beliefs, and values

What three words describe you?

Did you grow up to become the person you wanted to be?

How has your identity changed from 10 years ago?

What makes you extraordinary?

What makes you ordinary?

How are you limited?

What are you afraid of?

When are you happiest?

What would you change about yourself?

What gift(s) can you give to the world?

Who have you influenced in a positive way?

What character in your favorite story are you most similar to? What character in any story would you like to be?

Are you introverted or extroverted?

If you could have any special talent, what would it be?

What do you need that makes life worth living?

Where do you feel most at home?

What are your religious or spiritual beliefs?

For who or what would you die to protect?

continued

How does your body affect your identity?

What is your gender identity?

How do you express your sexuality?

What labels do you put on yourself?

How do you label others?

What choices define your life?

Do you make decisions based on feelings or logic, or some of both?

How much power do you have?

Questions about the influence of outside forces

What person(s), experience(s), or knowledge greatly changed how you think about yourself or your life?

What decisions about your life have been made for you?

How did the physical environment you grew up in influence your identity?

What is your role in your family? In your job?

How are you different from your parents and siblings?

How much do you identify with a specific culture?

What “tribe” do you belong to?

Which social conventions have had the largest impact on how you see yourself?

What does collaborating with others teach you about yourself?

Who has your vote?

How have government policies shaped you?

What laws do you not agree with?

How has money shaped your identity?

How do your clothes reflect your identity?

Continued

Questions about masking our identity

What story do you tell on social media about your life? What part of your story do you omit?

Who are you pretending to be?

What costumes, props, or sets do you use?

When do you perform?

What is your brand?

In what ways do you conform? How much does conforming cost you?

In what ways do you rebel? How much does rebelling cost you?

What does living an authentic life mean to you?

Questions about how others see you

How do your friends see you that is different from how you see yourself?

How do acquaintances tend to mischaracterize you?

What stereotype do you represent?

What would your obituary say?

What adjective do your parents use most often to describe you?

What is Performance Art?

In performance art, the artist's physical actions are the work of art, often aided with props, costumes, music, video, or other performers. Performance art may take place for any length of time or in any place, and may be scripted or unscripted. Like dance, music, and theater, performance art is time-based, and can be documented with photography or video.

TRIIIBE's photographs are the carefully crafted result of collaborative experimentation and decision-making between the Casilio sisters, Cary Wolinsky, make-up artists, and assistants.

Examples:



Marina Abramovic
Film still from 'Marina Abramovic: The Artist Is Present', 2010



Joseph Beuys
Performance, *I like America and America likes me*, 1974



Choreographed by Austrian artist Willi Dorner,
Bodies in Urban Spaces
is an outdoor moving event featuring a group of 24 performers, 2009

Throughout history, artists have adopted other identities.

Here are a few examples:



Rembrandt van Rijn
(1606-69), painter
Self-Portrait



Self-portrait as
the Apostle Paul



Marcel Duchamp
(1887-1968)
Mixed media artist



Duchamp as his alter ego, Rose Sélavy

Both photographs by artist Man Ray
(1890-1976)



Cindy Sherman,
(1954-) photographer

Photograph by Mark Seliger



Cindy Sherman, self-portrait in the style
of old movie stills

Artists' Strategy: Appropriation

To appropriate is to borrow. In art, appropriation is the practice of creating new artworks by taking existing images from other sources —art history books, advertisements, the media— and transforming or combining them with new ones.



Robert Rauschenberg
Caryatid Cavalcade //ROCI CHILE, 1985



A detail of “Mona Lisa A; Mona Lisa B,” (2004), by Paul Giovanopoulos, which salutes — and mocks — 36 painters with 36 variations on the famous face.

The *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo DaVinci is perhaps the most appropriated image in contemporary times. Here an artist has also mimicked the styles of famous painters in order to alter the original image.

Influences

In this exhibition, TRIIBE borrowed from historical paintings, photographs of famous people, and the form of Medieval Christian altarpieces to comment on contemporary society.



Madonna and Child with Saint Peter and Saint John the Evangelist (c. 1360) by Nardo di Cione. Located in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

continued



Marilyn Monroe, The Biography.com website



1136 × 801 - dailyartfixx.com

Vincent Van Gogh, *The Potato Eaters*, 1885

Artists' Strategy: Recontextualisation

This long word simply means taking words and images from their original context and placing them in another context to change their meaning.



Marcel Duchamp, 1951
(original version 1913)



Unknown artist



By Ben Goraj, from <http://blog.stateofgreen.com.au/origami-art-reinterpreted-with-upcycled-aluminium-cans/>

Artists' Strategy: Satire

Defined as “the use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues,” satire has historical roots in political cartoons and literature.



Honeré Daumier, *It's Safe to Release This One*, 1834
lithograph

Contemporary television, such as *Saturday Night Live* or *The Daily Show*, and political cartoons like “*Doonesbury*,” continue the tradition of using humor to highlight political and social injustices.



Comedian Tina Fey (on left) impersonates Governor Sarah Palin, 2012,
on *Saturday Night Live* television program

Images from *TRIBE*: same difference



Compatibility Quiz

Photo credit: Cary Wolinsky



Miss

Photo credit: Cary Wolinsky



Equal Opportunity Gals

Photo credit: Cary Wolinsky



Equal Opportunity Guys

Photo credit: Cary Wolinsky