

DAVID BENJAMIN SHERRY PHOTOGRAPHER ONCE FREAKED OUT A GROUP OF BOY SCOUTS IN DEATH VALLEY

Interview by [Adam Baran](#)

Photography by [Rassa Montaser](#)

Picture yourself walking through some beautiful natural landscape like Monument Valley in Utah or the Olympic National Forest in Washington state. You're enjoying the vistas, thinking about the intensity of the color on display, when suddenly you spy a figure coming towards you – a nude, skinny man with a shaved head, his body painted, camouflaged in that same color you were pondering a moment ago. He looks like he could be a monster, some kind of demon in purple or aqua. For a moment you're frightened, and then you see his tripod and camera set up and realize he's just some crazy 28-year-old fag photographer from New York City named [David Benjamin Sherry](#). This is the kind of work David's best known for – combination landscape and self-portraiture, with a strong attention to the kind of wonderful color combinations you find in those celebrity portraits that Andy Warhol painted in the 1970s that everybody hates. He recently published his first book, *It's Time*, which collects his work from 2006 to 2009. You may also remember his eerie photographs of the band Salem from BUTT 25. When he's not traveling the country with a trunkful of body paint David works out of his studio in Brooklyn, which is where we met to chat about his work.

January 15, 2010

[Print](#)

[Share](#)

[4 Comments](#)

Adam: Tell me a little bit about your background and where you are from.

David: I was born in Long Island but when I was five my parents moved up to Woodstock to a big farmhouse. They quickly divorced. My mom met another woman and my father had various girlfriends. So I was moving around a lot upstate in the woods, playing in the woods a lot, in the trees.

Yeah, you get the sense that you are an outdoors friendly gay.

Yeah, I am. I love being in nature. I mean, I love being in the city, but I think as an artist living and working in New York City, going into nature, that is where I find my balance. Coming back to the city to go to the darkroom and print my work and make my work here and kind of counterbalance it with being a complete nature oriented gay.

What's your favorite experience in nature and what is your favorite type of environment?

I really enjoy Death Valley. I have traveled through a bunch of national parks in the last couple of years and I think that in Death Valley is where I had the most intimate experiences with nature and with the earth. It kind of keeps me on my toes. For some strange reason it is the most quiet. It's the only place, you know, where there are no trees rustling, there are the most silent noises you will ever hear.

When you go paint yourself in the middle of a forest or a desert or something like that, explain how that works.

Sometimes I bring my friend Rivkah. It's usually, you know, we scope out a location, and I've had a couple run-ins. Once in Death Valley I was perched on the end of this rock, these bright pink rocks and I was painted, fully nude, these neon pinks. Rivkah was with me. She was taking the picture. I set it up and I was sitting up on this rock and I had rocks literally out of my asshole. I was cut. I could not see the blood because it matched with the paint and it was so painful. And all of the sudden a trail of ten-year-old Boy Scouts come like piling out, screaming and all running in a line. Because I looked like a demon. It was kind of a weird thing because I looked like the rock. And they did not see my friend photographing me, hidden, crouched below. She kind of hid.

That must have been a great experience. They probably loved that.

Yeah, I think they must have felt like they were tripping, like they were losing

their minds a bit. The Scout Master was like, 'Hurry up kids, come on, come on! We don't know what's going on!'

And what do you do once you are done with that, if you are in the middle of a national park? You just go home and shower?

This was oil-based, like bright, blood red. It was shiny and it was not coming off. It kind of stained my skin. I would get a lot of strange looks, even driving through the parks, cops would stop and kind of look at me. We got to the hotel and I asked for extra towels and people were like, (Gasps). People were alarmed by it. I would wash off, in the hotel usually, that's where I would go. But with this red thing, it was a disaster. Twenty towels. We left that day and it looked like a huge murder happened. Hand streaks on the walls, a huge clump of bloody looking towels and we just got the fuck out. That was a nightmare. But, usually it's just driving to the next hotel painted and looking like a maniac.

Did you have good Woodstock, like, sex in the woods stories?

I didn't. I came out when I was in grad school, about four years ago maybe. I had a huge crush growing up. I was in the Woodstock youth theater and he was kind of like, my heart would just race around him, but I never really had great sex stories in the woods.

So you didn't come out, but you, I mean, what was your process like coming out?

I kind of put it off for many years. You would think with a lesbian mother that I would have complete freedom. I'm the youngest of four and all of my siblings started getting married and dated and sort of normal, while, not normal, but upstate. I moved down to the city and kind of, it just took me a while. Eventually I met an awesome guy in New York and he opened my eyes and it all came together then. My mom was like, 'What took you so long? I am so happy.' You know, the best kind of coming out. Now the question everyone asks is, why did it take you so long? I think there is a strange pressure, having gay parents that everybody expects you to be gay. I was five and my mom was selling houses upstate and she was friends with the B-52s and I had all these eccentric people like RuPaul coming upstate for the weekend and coming over to our house and having dinner. I would dress up and be like, 'Ah.' And my mom would be like, 'When you flip your wrist, it means something.' And I would be like, 'What does it mean?' I had this super eccentric, energetic childhood. This kind of mid-80s, 90s weird...

And Rupaul and the B-52s would come over?

Yeah, they would hang out. That was my first concert. I was in 'Sassy' magazine with them as like an eight or nine-year-old.

You were in 'Sassy'? That's amazing.

Yeah, we have like stacks in our basement still. Blossom is on the cover. I have a 'Save the Planet' T-shirt on and glasses and I was kind of chubby. It was with Keith from the B-52s, the bassist.

The one who died? Oh no, that was Ricky.

No, his boyfriend, Keith. He was a really beautiful man. Anyway I put off coming out for many years. But it made me who I am now. When I was at Yale with all these great artists and at my first critique I came out, more or less. I said it out loud. They were like, 'What's this work about? Are you gay or what?' I had never really said it out loud. My friends all knew. I was like, 'I'm gay, yeah.' 'So cool, go on, what else you got, is this all you are going to make work about, being gay?'

That's interesting because there is a lot, a lot of people make work that is them looking for the first time at guys and saying, 'Check out this beauty that I am super fixated on.' It's interesting. Sometimes people send us stuff and we are like, 'Okay, we have seen this picture before.' We can't publish every picture of a naked man. But then at other times we are drawn to some energy of how someone perceives someone, you know. But you were at a point where you got through the phase of the work being just all about your sexuality.

Completely. You know, I went to Berlin over the course of the summer and I met this gorgeous boy and we had this beautiful summer together and I came back and just plastered the walls with this boy pissing, shitting, dancing, sleeping together, everything you can imagine. He looked like Joe Dallesandro. We got matching tattoos. He was my love for the summer. It was a great summer. The pictures were all in shades of red, 'because I'm on fire,' I said. I do this whole installation for my first critique for my second year back at Yale and my professor Collier Schorr looked around the room. And everyone was looking around at his cock and these romantic pictures and this life in Berlin and everything was documented fully. I had cases of negatives. And she was like, 'Congratulations, you got yourself a cute boy. What else?' And I was like, 'You are right.' It's painful but it got me going. It's so true. What else? It's not that interesting. I was like, 'But you know what the sad part is? Me and him never had sex, he had a boyfriend.' And she was like, 'Unrequited love? Join the club.' They are never thrilled by the documentation of the boy you can't have or the boy you can have. Because that is just the pigeonhole, that is the way a lot of gay photography is billed, in a weird way. I have books of it, I love it, I can look at beautiful men all day long, but I feel like

personally, there is more inside myself than lusting for that guy. But it does show up in my work, definitely, that search in life and falling in love and all of those things.

So how would you give advice to someone to be able to move past that point? I know critiques are specific to the individual, but...

I think the best thing is just to work through it until you are finished with it. That was the most therapeutic thing. I was showing work at twenty-three of these foggy, hazy portraits of men and my lust and these things that I longed for and had a few women to sort of balance, so you could not decipher which I was more drawn to. But for me, that's what it was about. It was therapy. I lived for my photographs and I would show my life through them. So, I had to work through it. And I am not ashamed of them. I love those early photographs, but they are a lot different from what I do now. But, I think the most important advice is just to not stop it, to keep doing it, and test everything.

It's Time is available on the web in select bookstores across America.

End.



Leave a comment...

SUBMIT



JUSTINIAN · 1 year ago · Reply
paradise lost.



ELEUTHERIUS · 1 year ago · Reply
i love you lik e crazy BUTT



GREG · 1 year ago · Reply
I'd love to meet the handsome David in the wild or in the city, and whatever colour he happens to be at the time.



ABC · 1 year ago · Reply
those pictures are amazing

BUTT · By and for Homosexuals · HOME · CLUB BUTT · MAGAZINE · FAG MAPS

Login, Register · Information, Contact, Shop · Facebook, Twitter, RSS, Newsletter · Back to Top

Copyright © 2001-2011 TOP Publishers · All models are 18 years old or older, of course.

BETA BUTT: This website is still on Beta status. If something goes wrong, please let us know: club@buttmagazine.com.