

# The New York Blade

## THE ARTS

### Picture This

Perspectives from three photographers

By RAFAEL RISEMBERG

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If the trend seen in New York exhibits continues, photography will eclipse painting as the medium of choice of gay male artists. Its immediacy, intimacy and versatility in spanning both documentary and fiction are leading artists to embrace photography as never before. Currently showing in Chelsea are three quality solo exhibits by queer artists, in galleries that specialize in photography.

#### 'Filthy Gorgeous'

For humor and poignancy, the exhibit to catch is John Arsenault's playfully revealing self-portraits that stand as a visual diary for the last nine years. Several pieces center on family and home, such as the formal portrait of himself and his lover Joe (in an eight-year relationship) with their two dogs, posed in front of a romantic mural of Venice. More casual are a photo of the two men relaxing in a bathtub, and two beefcake shots of the hunky Arsenault reclining nude. And although a picture of the artist lying on the top edge of his grandparents' tombstone may at first register as flip, it's really full of deep affection.

Lightheartedly provocative is a photo taken on Good Friday of the artist kneeling at the feet of a Catholic priest. One of the priest's hands rests suggestively on Arsenault's head, while the other points up to heaven; tellingly, Arsenault's outstretched arm points down towards hell. Several photos deal in matters of love and sex, from the superficially erotic to the heartbreakingly sincere—"What I Got for a Buck" shows the artist's hand stuffing a dollar bill into the sheer underpants of a male go-go dancer, while "Tony Broke up With Me" is a snapshot of Arsenault crying just after being dumped. By the end, the viewer feels warmly connected to a gay man in various facets of his personal life. ClampArt Gallery, 521-531 W. 25th St., 11 a.m. - 6 p.m., Tues.-Sat., until June 23, clampart.com, 646-230-0020.

*Rafael Risemberg, Ph.D., leads LGBT art gallery tours through New York Gallery Tours, [nygallerytours.com](http://nygallerytours.com), 212-946-1548. The last LGBT gallery tour of the season starts 1 p.m., Saturday, June 16.*



From top: John Arsenault's 'There Never Was a Woman of My Dreams,' 2004, chromogenic print, courtesy of ClampArt Gallery, and Christopher Makos' 'Untitled #9.26,' from 'Altered Images,' 1981, courtesy of Yancey Richardson Gallery.