

JEFFREY TORGERSON

By Zoe Koke

Jeffrey Torgerson is interested in the performance of gender, and this surfaces in his surreal photographs, which often blur the bizarre and the awkward to address issues of gender and sexuality. Torgerson's current series of larger than life photographs is simultaneously kitschy, provocative and serene. In these images, Torgerson's friends confront the camera with the grace and confidence of both holy figures and sexy pop icons. The subjects are featured in drag and are postured to reference famous celebrities ranging from James Dean to Edie Sedgwick. The playful images have then been embellished with gold leaf to allude to ornate Byzantine tiled mosaics, a weighty western history of Christian iconography, and Gustav Klimt's oeuvre. The photo featured embodies the marriage of the traditional and the non-conformative, the past and the present, that makes the body of work both intriguing and visually beautiful. Torgerson's friend, Jordon, is dressed in his own clothing, in his own home, yet he exudes a godlike presence because of his posture and the lighting of the photograph. Although visually opulent, this image refreshingly exposes a sense of genuineness in the individual depicted. Torgerson affirms that the photographs seek to deal with broader societal issues of gender, sexuality and identity. The scale of the photograph and the alluring posturing and expression of the subject featured, harmoniously create an accessible framework, in which we are invited into the images as both voyeurs and equals. From this gateway springs a certain re-imagining and re-instating of a long history of socially enforced visual iconography. By elevating our equals to the status of idols, these images effortlessly call into question whether we have a say in choosing our icons. This photograph, as symbolic of the series, lends us to question if we can relate to the superstars projected through mainstream media. Torgerson negotiates this by playfully presenting to us his friends, his own prescribed icons, with whom we can both admire and feel kin to.

