

ARTFORUM  
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DRISCOLL | BABCOCK

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### “Secret Identities: Superheroes and Selfhood” DRISCOLL BABCOCK GALLERIES

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Superheroes are born from the worst of times: Think of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster’s sexy, Semitic Übermensch coming to life on the eve of World War II, or Stan Lee and Jack Kirby’s psychedelic mutant marvels arriving the same year President Kennedy was assassinated. Hollywood’s bombarded us with all manner of muscle-bound escapism, especially over the last fifteen years, making fabulous bank by exploiting this country’s broken spirits from enervating wars, rotten politics, and economic crises.

For this exhibition, seven artists offer wan and parodic meditations on the superhero mantle, putting threatened, pliant, or ailing bodies into scenarios and costumes that offer little room for shiny, celebratory, CGI-style evasion. Jason Bard Yarmosky’s *Whispering Grass*, 2015, is a tenderly grotesque oil portrait of his grandmother in the throes of dementia, decked out in a pink wig and decrepit Wonder Woman costume, her aged skin as lovingly rendered as the

dying field of grass in which she stands. Mark Newport's, *Bat Man 3*, 2006, is a rendering of the Dark Knight in lurid detumescence—a hand-knit, adult-sized onesie that hangs feebly from the ceiling, an outfit more threateningly infantilizing than empowering. And Peter Williams's three paintings from the series "Common & Proper Nouns: The N-Word," 2015, depict a masked and caped black crusader, N-Word, fighting off cops and crackers in a style that seems a bold marriage of Ben Shahn, Dana Schutz, and Nicole Eisenman.

One won't find any cartoon posturing or machismo in this show, simply because the artists participating are smart enough to understand that revealing vulnerability is in and of itself a remarkably powerful thing.