

The Equality Forum's art exhibit does away with classic boundaries.

Once there was a hierarchy in photography. It went from high-art photographs at the top, to documentary photographs (working photojournalism) in the middle, to snapshots (for us amateurs) at the bottom. But those hierarchies don't exist anymore, and today what's squarely in the forefront of prized fine-art photography is (say cheese!) the snapshot aesthetic.

These new snapshots, which focus on people and ordinary scenes, are often printed as large paintings and assert a raw humanity that's made dignified and monumental through close observation. We're all worthy, this aesthetic seems to say.

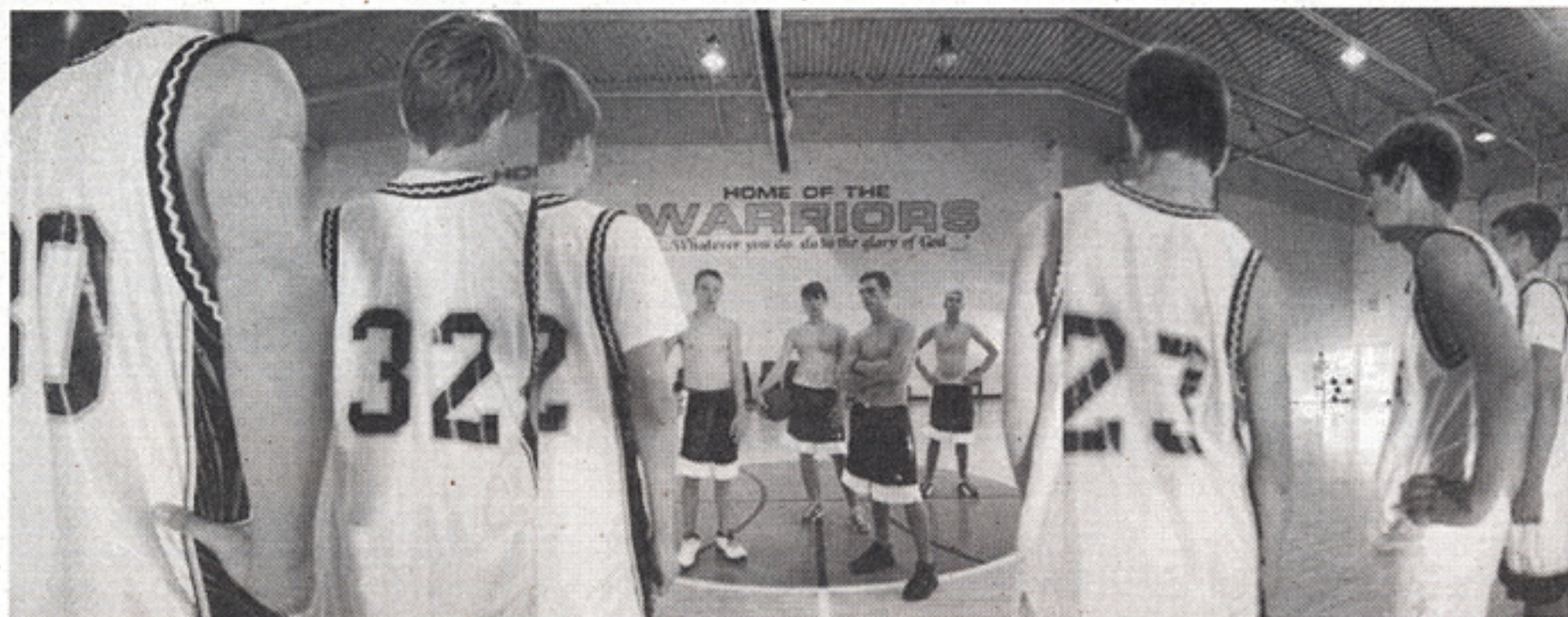
Two great examples of the snapshot aesthetic are the works of artists Ryan McGinley and David Hilliard that are on view as part of Equality Forum, the week-long civil rights forum on GLBT issues. McGinley and Hilliard, whose works are interwoven in the two gallery spaces on

rooftop at dawn or dusk, his torso covered with graffiti that may be tattooed on or may be the product of someone writing on him with marker. Here and in *Boy Hiding*, in which a young boy on a playground exposes his bare back to the camera, McGinley uses skin as a kind of visual metaphor for a mental state (confusion or ferocity for *Dan* and fear and a dissociation from reality in *Boy*).

It's probably not too big a stretch to read a full-blown humanism into McGinley's photo-obsessions, even though the viewer senses a stoner mentality at work and a kind of fashion sensibility. It seems the work talks broadly about psychic states regardless of whether it consciously aspires to do so.

Hilliard is more cinematic in his approach to what is, after all, a storytelling enterprise. (A picture is still worth a thousand words.) His triptych panoramas, which capture small moments (two girls sitting outside a house pitting

# PHOTO FINISH



**Looking for a fight:** David Hilliard's *Shirts versus Skins* captures a portentous moment.

**By Roberta Fallon**

"Pure: The works of David Hilliard and Ryan McGinley,"  
Through May 2.  
Sol Mednick Gallery (15th fl.)  
and Gallery 1401 (14th fl.)  
University of the Arts,  
211 S. Broad St. 215.717.6300.  
www.uarts.edu

the 14th and 15th floors of a University of the Arts classroom building, push the personal scrapbook aesthetic in slightly different ways. But the overall themes of friends, family, dignity and love are so close between the two artists that before looking at the labels on the wall I initially accepted one Hilliard as a McGinley.

McGinley, who had a solo show last year at the Whitney Museum in Manhattan, is a face-and-body guy. His large unframed C-prints of *Marc, Emily and Hannah* and others bespeak a photographer wed to his camera and snapping away at everything he loves. He's got a good eye, and his portraits—handsome boy-men and girl-women talking, swimming, riding bikes and spray-painting graffiti—are moody and intense. But the works also scream vulnerability in shots that serve up skin (bare backs, bare torsos) as something sacred yet easily violated.

*Dan Dusted*, a poignant and compelling work, shows an agitated young man on a

cherry; Dad smoking a cigar, seen at night through a bright-lit window) have a slow, foreboding, panning quality that recalls Hitchcock. The sense of something unfolding grows as your eye moves from left to right and details come into focus.

The girls' legs are splayed and you see their panties; Dad's house needs paint while the neighbors' houses have aluminum siding. The details are telling even though the story is unclear. Once again, the artist is mining metaphors and the human psyche.

Hilliard, an associate professor at Yale, is perhaps best known for his work with high school basketball teams. In *Shirts versus Skins* two teams pose, one with full uniform and the other without their shirts. The gym belongs to the "Warriors" team, and it does indeed seem that there's going to be a battle.

Overall the work of both photographers is enormously impressive and resonant for our time. ♣