



- News
- Opinion
- ArtsEtc.
- Sports
- Comics
- Multimedia
- Special Issues
- Blogs
- Bar & Dining Guide
- Classifieds

- Archives Search
- E-mail Subscription
- News Feeds
- Contact Us
- Corrections
- About the Herald
- History
- Staff
- Colophon
- Employment
- Subscribe
- Advertising
- Online
- Display
- Classified
- Media Kit

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## Images stage the world

by Alex Truong  
Tuesday, April 22, 2008 00:00

At the culmination of each semester, graduate art students host a major exhibit of their new works. At Sterling Hall, Paul Baker Prindle stands out with his often intensely sexual and personal large-print photography, which simultaneously conjures up in the viewer a multitude of public narratives.

Prindle's show is collectively dubbed "Proscenium." The title's namesake implies a focus on the theatrical and an awareness of how actors promote themselves to an audience, and his work reflects this idea.

University of Wisconsin has one of the best printmaking departments in the nation, and Prindle has been working toward a M.A. and an M.F.A. in printmaking for the past two years. Most of his work involves location, and all of his work seems to be either medium or large format photography — something he takes pride in.

"I think there's a very specific beauty to a large photograph. With a really fine grain, dramatic lighting and a care for color, there's a way to do it right. At least for me." Prindle said in an interview with The Badger Herald.

I had a chance to sit down with Paul as he installed the rest of his photographs in various rooms in Sterling. The images, ranging in size, are all things one might see at a nightclub. "I think there's something about nightclubs that are easily identified by certain things," Prindle said. "I wanted to recreate the feeling you get from a nightclub by calling out all the ingredients that make up how the idea of the nightclub is presented. These pieces might be meaningless as individual works, but they gain their meaning and create a narrative that I hope is provoking and interactive."

Looking around the room, one sees things that are seemingly innocuous. Glittering signage and men in dramatic poses are among them. These large-scale portraits of men — including Prindle himself — depict them shirtless against

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PAUL PRINDLE  
[Enlarge image](#)



PAUL PRINDLE  
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dramatically lit backgrounds. There are even some photographs of a stranger variety, like the image of a large outhouse next to a plethora of images associated with nightclubs. Another photograph that immediately struck me appears to be none other than a glory hole roughly carved through a green wooden door.

"I'd like the viewer to really feel invited by the context of the images to construct this narrative that can be anything and is totally influenced by the biases and opinions they have."

I think back to the first image I really paid any attention to: a disco ball next to a set of intricate black straps, resembling a weird sort of harness. This image is placed about three feet from a similarly sized photograph of a perfectly framed topless male, bathed in the pock marks of a disco ball's light. One cannot help but feel a bit dirty by the purposeful combination of these two photographs.

"That's actually a sex swing," Prindle explained. "I think this is definitely a performance, and it's a performance that requires the viewer." Clearly, the right effect was elicited.

Most of the photographs have a risqué connotation, and a few prominently foreground issues of homosexuality. However, shock value isn't the show's only asset, and it is almost camouflaged among the images with a more innocent initial appearance.

We discussed his other work, and Prindle described his interest in spaces and more specifically, how cultures and subcultures construct and inhabit their spaces. His work involves cataloging this process in order to achieve something larger.

"I don't think you have a narrative with just a straight shot or a really classical portrait," Prindle said. "I'm more interested in the indexing of humanity through the remains of some event and creating a narrative through the suggestion of that event."



PAUL PRINDLE

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This narrative, at one point, takes the shape of a finely focused close-up of a discarded condom wrapper in the forest. Apparently, this forest is somewhat notorious for hosting many impromptu casual encounters between anonymous young men. Another image shows a pair of tight-fitting blue men's underwear, soiled and defiled in the woods.

"I love that," Prindle said, "it's so nasty, and yet there's this great story behind it that can really be anything the viewer wants."

Altogether, "Proscenium" is thought-provoking, funny and, above all, done with commitment. There's a real honesty that comes when artists do what truly interests them, and Prindle's passion for his work comes to the forefront in this exhibit.

More about the artist and his photographs can be found at [www.paulbakerprindle.com](http://www.paulbakerprindle.com). "Proscenium" continues in Sterling Hall through Friday.

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