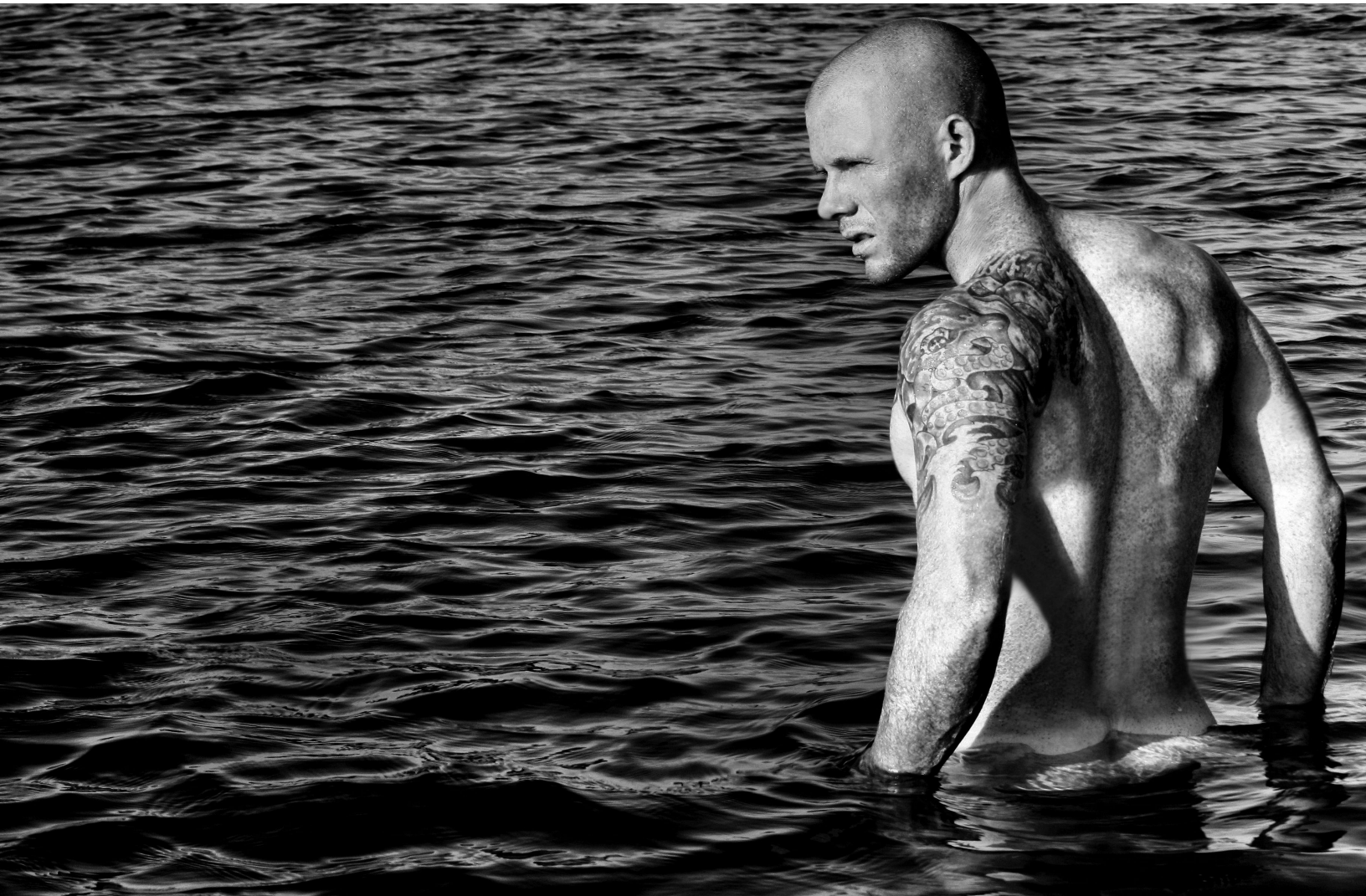


SOPHIA RENEE



THE BOYS OF SUMMER

A Photographer's Transcript: 2010-2016

SOPHIA RENEE

THE BOYS OF SUMMER

A Photographer's Transcript: 2010-2016

THE BOYS OF SUMMER

A Photographer's Transcript: 2010-2016
Words and Photographs by Sophia Renee

Introduction

Beauty, desire, youth and the passing of youth are all elements I associate with photographs that inspire me. Today, as more and more studied depictions of masculine grace and sexuality emerge from the shadows and begin to pervade the pop culture consciousness through advertising and contemporary art, many photographers who work primarily with men — such as myself — are finding it easier to present and discuss their work in more frank and subjective ways.

The Boys of Summer, a series I began working on in May of 2010 and finally completed in 2016, was my reverential attempt at intensifying the male beauty mythology, but it became an opportunity for me to explore my own ideas about exalted masculinity — who I found beautiful, interesting, and why.

Taken collectively, the "boys" form an archetype, a kaleidoscope of aesthetic power and allure. The images — an ode to endless days of sun and surf, skaters and street kids, teenage infatuations, and a time when everything was fresh and anything seemed possible — aspire to more.

It has been said that Summer is not just a season, but a way of life and a state of mind, filled with fleeting glimpses of perfection and unforgettable characters who come and go like the sun.

It is in the spirit of this old adage that I present this body of work and The Boys of Summer who inspired me to create it.

Sophia Renee

Indian Rocks Beach, Florida. 2017

THE BOYS OF SUMMER

A Photographer's Transcript: 2010-2016

Words and Photographs by Sophia Renee

The Boys of Summer were — first and foremost — a carefully selected group of men between the ages of 18 and 36 who appealed to my aesthetic persuasion. My initial goal was to identify and document the unique characteristics of each man in a way that allowed for a more thoughtful examination of their appeal, thereby addressing the abstruse concepts we all have about beauty.

When I consider the various labels that are most often applied to male figurative imagery — muscle and fitness, beefcake, homoerotica — it is hard for me to imagine transcending those distinctions in a manner that allows for a deeper exploration of the genre and most importantly, for a thoughtful and frank discussion about the male mystique and how society's prudish moral code can sometimes play a crucial role in relegating the work of any person who creates this kind of art.

We live in a culture that both craves and criticizes beauty. Because it is no longer politically correct to appreciate someone simply for the way they look, we must now engineer new and inventive ways of appreciating the people we find attractive without promoting a standard of beauty that is often unrealistic and unattainable. This can create a quandary for an artist who traffics in aesthetics.

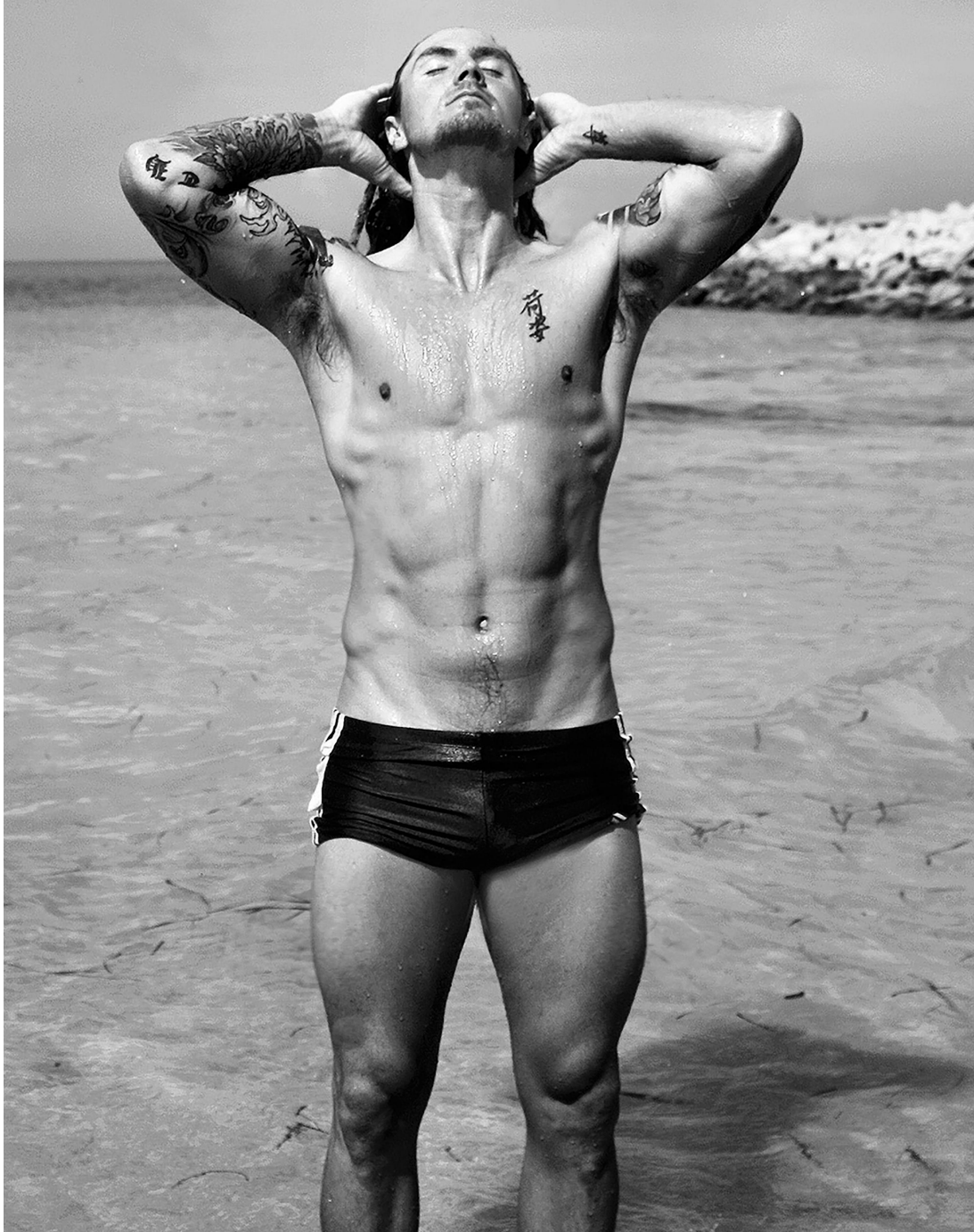
Over the years, I've fielded a host of questions and critiques regarding my work. The subjects of inner versus exterior beauty, lack of multiculturalism, body worship and artifice, and beauty in the Age of Photoshop have all been discussed. It would be absurd to try to over-intellectualize The Boys of Summer. It is what it is, nothing more and nothing less.

As you move through my photo-statement, it becomes clear that some of these men were incredibly inspiring to me. I worked with many for years, while others were more fleeting, transitory comets passing through my artistic universe. It was against the backdrop of this peculiar dichotomy that I discovered and photographed both the substantive and the superficial. And somewhere inside that paradox, I was able to ascertain for myself the vast difference between the rare, special kind of beauty that makes a person unforgettable to me and the intense radiance that emanates from those possessed of confidence and self-admiration, a still powerful quality but one that affects and influences my creativity in a much different way.

PART ONE – SUMMER 2010

THE BOYS OF SUMMER

A Photographer's Transcript: 2010-2016



ROBBIE

THE BOYS OF SUMMER

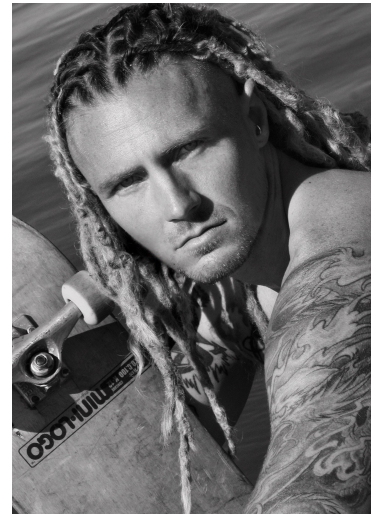
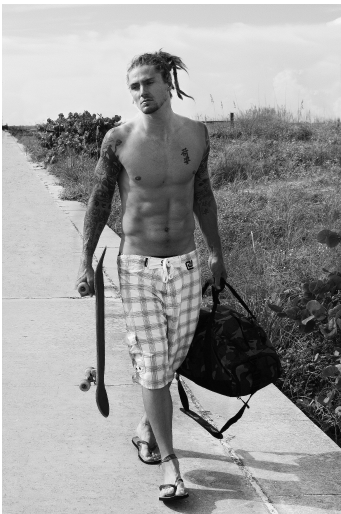
A Photographer's Transcript: 2010-2016

The Beginning. Summer 2010

The Boys of Summer really began with one man, Robbie Gambrell. Over the years, I have elaborated greatly on my work with Robbie. He has been the focus of several of my essays and was the subject of my monograph, *Evidence of Beauty*, published in 2015. The work we have created together over the years extends far beyond the parameters of this project, but it was in the Summer of 2010 that I first discovered and documented him.

Robbie Gambrell was 28 years old when we met on a still, tropical morning in Pass-a-Grille, a charming village at the southernmost end of St. Pete Beach, Florida. Other than a few lone fisherman congregating at the Merry Pier Bait and Tackle, the streets were empty, the town was quiet. The sun was just starting to rise and a beautiful glow was beginning to dance across the Gulf. In the desolation of that erstwhile daybreak, Robbie stepped softly into my morning.

From the start, Robbie was an uncommon seraphic subject — pure, unencumbered, transcendent. He was completely striking, a man so anomalous that even the most seemingly routine moments in a day — skateboarding, doing laundry, playing basketball — were provocatively transformative. I had never photographed anyone quite like him. He was special, no doubt about it.



Robbie Gambrell photographed Summer 2010.
Pass-a-Grille, Florida.
Far Right : Summer 2014. Gulfport, Florida.

THE BOYS OF SUMMER

A Photographer's Transcript: 2010-2016



*Robbie Gambrell photographed Summer 2010.
Pass-a-Grille, Florida.*

THE BOYS OF SUMMER

A Photographer's Transcript: 2010-2016

The Beginning. Summer 2010 (continued)

Over the years, I have been asked to analyze Robbie's appeal, as if deconstructing his physical appearance might somehow explain the phenomenal energy he displays in our photographs. For me, the fascination with him was much more complex and far-reaching than his physical makeup. It was the unseen aspects of his identity — his otherness — that most intrigued me and drove my creativity. Of all the men I have photographed, Robbie remains the most enigmatic. It is the both the magic and the mystery of his character. Today, over three thousand digital and Polaroid images of Robbie remain in my archives. It is the largest collection of images I have amassed of any one individual. Art and artifact, they record the essence of his undefinable charisma like nothing else.



*Robbie Gambrell photographed Summer 2014.
Gulfport, Florida*

THE BOYS OF SUMMER

A Photographer's Transcript: 2010-2016



Robbie Gambrell. Summer 2010.
Pass-a-Grille Beach, Florida.
Age 28.



Michael Heppner. Summer 2011.
Merry Pier. St. Petersburg Beach, Florida.
Age 23.



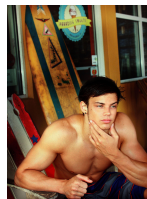
David Cross. Summer 2012.
St. Petersburg Beach, Florida.
Age 27.



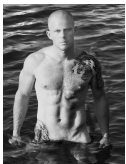
Mikey Ajazi. Summer 2012.
Sunset Beach, Florida.
Age 19.



Colin Atkinson. Summer 2011.
Indian Rocks Beach, Florida.
Age 21.



Chad Page. Summer 2013.
Pass-a-Grille Beach, Florida.
Age 20.



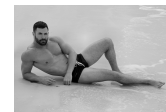
Andrew Cress. Summer 2012.
Tampa, Florida.
Age 28.



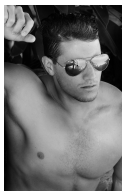
Kyle Surette. Summer 2012.
Pass-a-Grille, Florida.
Age 18.



Chad Erb. Summer 2014.
Tierra Verde, Florida.
Age 34.



JC Arentzen. Summer 2012.
Egmont Key. Age 36.



Tyler Gattuso. Summer 2014.
Treasure Island, Florida.
Age 23.



Eric Eaton. Summer 2014.
Pass-a-Grille, Florida.
Age 27.



Jake Jensen. Summer 2015.
Fort De Soto, Florida.
Age 36.



Zach Hamam. Summer 2016.
Fort De Soto, Florida.
Age 34.

THE BOYS OF SUMMER

A Photographer's Transcript: 2010-2016



The Boys of Summer: A Photographer's Transcript 2010-2016 is an original
photographic work by Sophia Renee.
All words, images, and documents are the sole intellectual property of the artist.
All Rights Reserved. ©sophiareneephoto.com

Front Cover — Andrew photographed Summer 2011.
This Page — JC photographed Summer 2012.