



pH powerHouse Books

i <3 boy

Photographs by J Yatrofsky

# **I Heart Boy**

**By J. Yatrofsky**

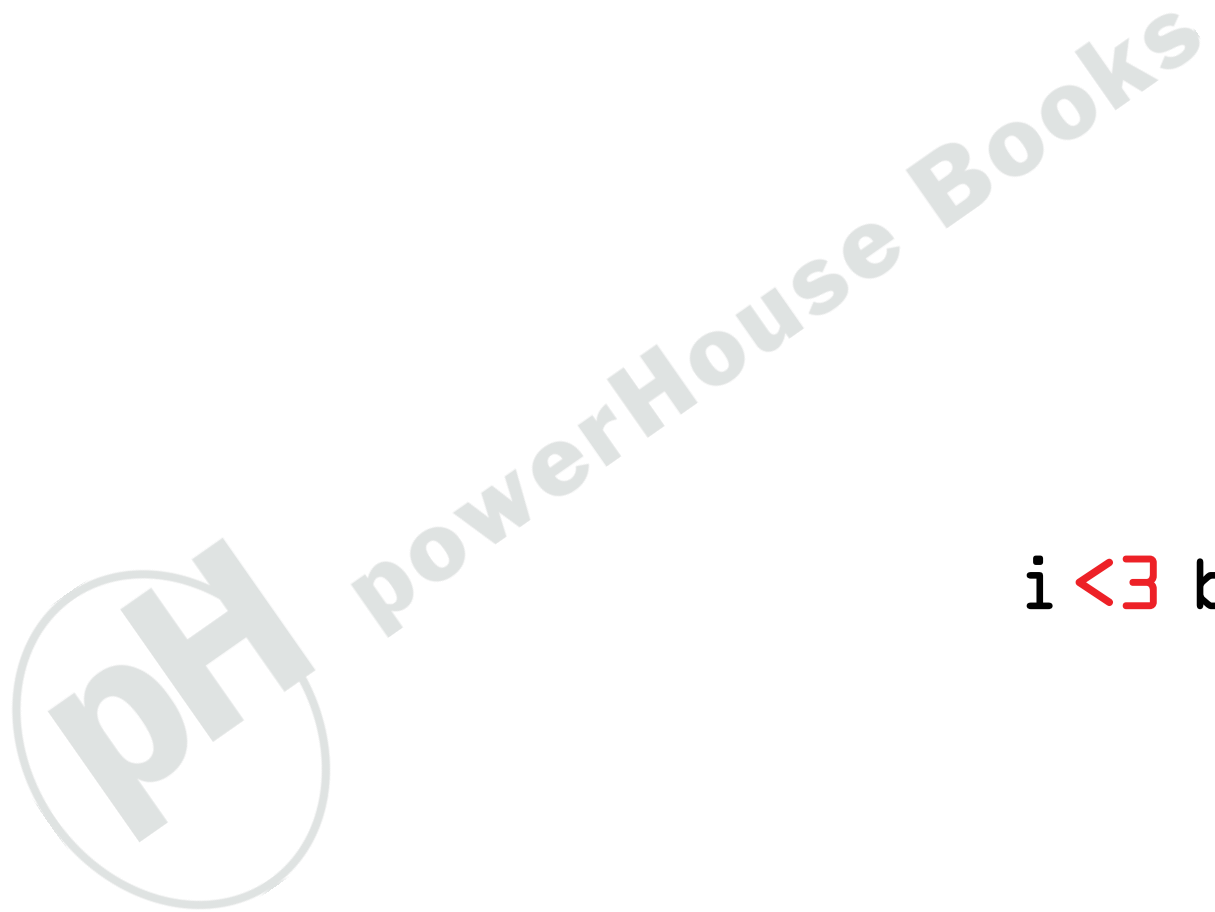
**Published by  powerHouse Books**

**To be released: March 2011**

**This PDF of *I Heart Boy* is only a preview of the entire book.  
To see the complete version, please contact Joel Caceres,  
Publicity Associate, at [joel@powerhousebooks.com](mailto:joel@powerhousebooks.com)**







i <3 boy

Photographs by J Yatrofsky

Introduction by Weston Bingham

**INTRODUCTION**  
**WESTON BINGHAM**  
**EAST VILLAGE BOYS**

Stripping away context and removing the subjectivity of the artist in contemporary portraiture began in earnest as early as 1963 with Andy Warhol's photo booth portraits. His observational approach quickly found its expression in his nearly 500 film portraits, or screen tests, shot over the following three years. By silencing his subjectivity and refusing to mediate between audience and subject, the viewers must interact with an unfiltered image, and will find that neither the photographer nor the models have any interest in telling us about the work or themselves. The images initiate monologues on the part of the viewer, rather than dialogues with the artist or subject matter.

Jessica Yatrofsky's *I Heart Boy* project could be described similarly. Within her concise construct, she produces seemingly authorless photographs of individuals, but declines to explain them. What we glean from the images is only what we, as consumers of the images, bring to them. As Roland Barthes suggested in his 1967 essay, "Death of the Author," the essential meaning of a work depends on the reader's impressions, not the points-of-view the author brings to it. The consumer of the work must separate that work from the author, or artist, in order to understand the essential meaning. In other words, true meaning comes from the audience, not the artist.

However, unlike Warhol's supposed objectivity, Yatrofsky's very personal decisions are always present in her work, though neither the models nor Yatrofsky reveal any of them to us for reading or interpretation. Each of the men in her photographs have been selected by her for purely personal reasons, so it's no coincidence that her subjects are all the same kind of beautiful, or rather, the same kind of look — she is, after all, choosing the boys she finds physically attractive. And there's no coincidence that they usually end up on the floor, often with their eyes covered, often naked — it's what she tells them to do so they can be more objectively documented, observed and studied. She makes these records without regard for time or place. Often the Polaroids from earlier in the shoot appear in the later photographs strewn around the "set," further narrowing the possibility of a narrative outside of the photo session itself. She is creating contextually barren images, rendered with great sensitivity, and unfettered by meaning; just description—though described by an artist, not a documentarian.

As with many other contemporary artists, her method echoes the activities in commercial fashion. Her Spartan, essentialist studies of the men she photographs recall the piles upon piles of casting photographs, produced on the spot — often as Polaroids, as much of Yatrofsky's work is — as a way of documenting and cataloging potential candidates for some future purpose. In the casting photographs, the models walk through a sequence of near mechanical poses designed to reveal the inherent truth of their appearance, usually against a blank wall, unadorned by the trappings of the fashion world, and unmotivated by anything more than simple off-camera direction — look left, look up, turn around. Photos unassisted by the context that would typically make meaning and tell us what we should see.

As viewers of Yatrofsky's photographs, we are being allowed to look into a context of no context — to borrow from the title of George W. S. Trow's 1980 essay — that she has built, and to take from it something that says more about ourselves, our self-image, and our desires, than it does about the

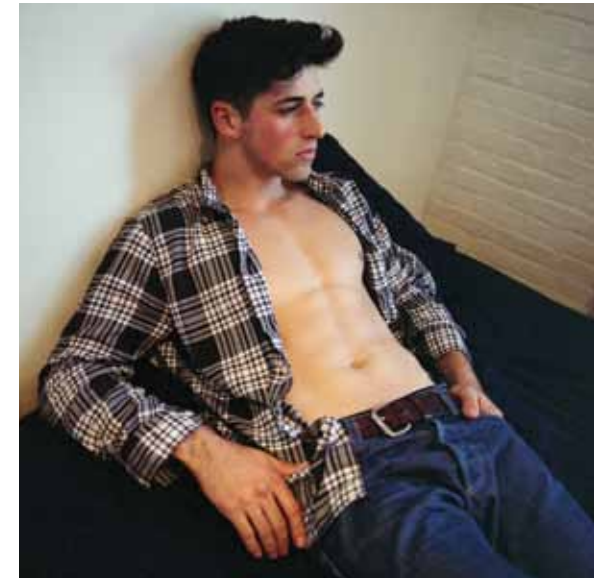


craft or subject matter of her photographs. You can see that each model has a story written on his significant, always-present face, but learning what that story is, or learning anything about them except what they look like, is an impossibility. Meaningful expressions are absent. We can't see them move, walk, or talk. We don't see them in any particular place. In many cases we don't even see them clothed, rather shirtless or naked on the floor, ready to be looked at or ignored — whatever. The viewers are not voyeurs, the models are not exhibitionists; they just are. Their matter-of-fact expressions and rote poses are neither distant, nor asking to be adored. Their always-flaccid penises are neither invisible nor asking to be fucked. There is no seduction in the narratives; in fact there are no narratives, open-ended or otherwise, beyond the linear sequence of one image after another. There is no desire or aversion or any definable quality unless the viewer brings it, but exactly what the viewer brings is how the images get their power. It is then that any intentions by the artist are surrendered to the personal context of each individual viewer and the images finally become meaningful.

Yatrosky's men don't align with the typical checklist of mainstream, contemporary, male beauty to which most American boys learn to compare themselves and aspire. Nor does her process and craft of photographing these men conform to the common notions of how to represent that beauty to better evangelize that particular ideal. She does not rely on the conventional, contemporary American contextual tropes that manipulate us into "understanding" that what we are looking at is intended to be considered beautiful, or sexy, or masculine, or even interesting in any way. In fact, there's nothing sexy about the photographs or the models unless one personally happens to find them sexy. We are not being told to believe that these boys are beautiful. We are not being told where to look, what to think, or how to read the image. There is no sexuality in the nudity, unless their flesh just so happens to make you lust. Neither the photographer nor the models are telling you to think anything whatsoever about what you're looking at. The photographs are observational, not voyeuristic. In them the boys are naked, not nude. They are not males, they are guys, they don't have phalluses, they have dicks. They are everyday. The signifiers of mainstream-consumer and art-world male beauty, masculinity, and sexuality are simply not present — or relevant. So who are these boys and what are they trying to say? What exactly is Yatrosky trying to say?

The short answer to both of these questions is "nothing." Though accurate, it's really only part of the story. The rest is a story of male representation and sexuality, or rather re-presentation and sexual-ness. Yatrosky's agenda for this particular body of work seems to be to destigmatize and desensitize the male nude, or more accurately, the naked guy — an important distinction. She does this by repetition of pose and process, and an iconoclastic insistence on dismissing the canon, which she accomplishes not by reacting to it, but by working as if it never existed, as if she is unaware of most of the stereotypes Americans have been taught to expect and respond to.

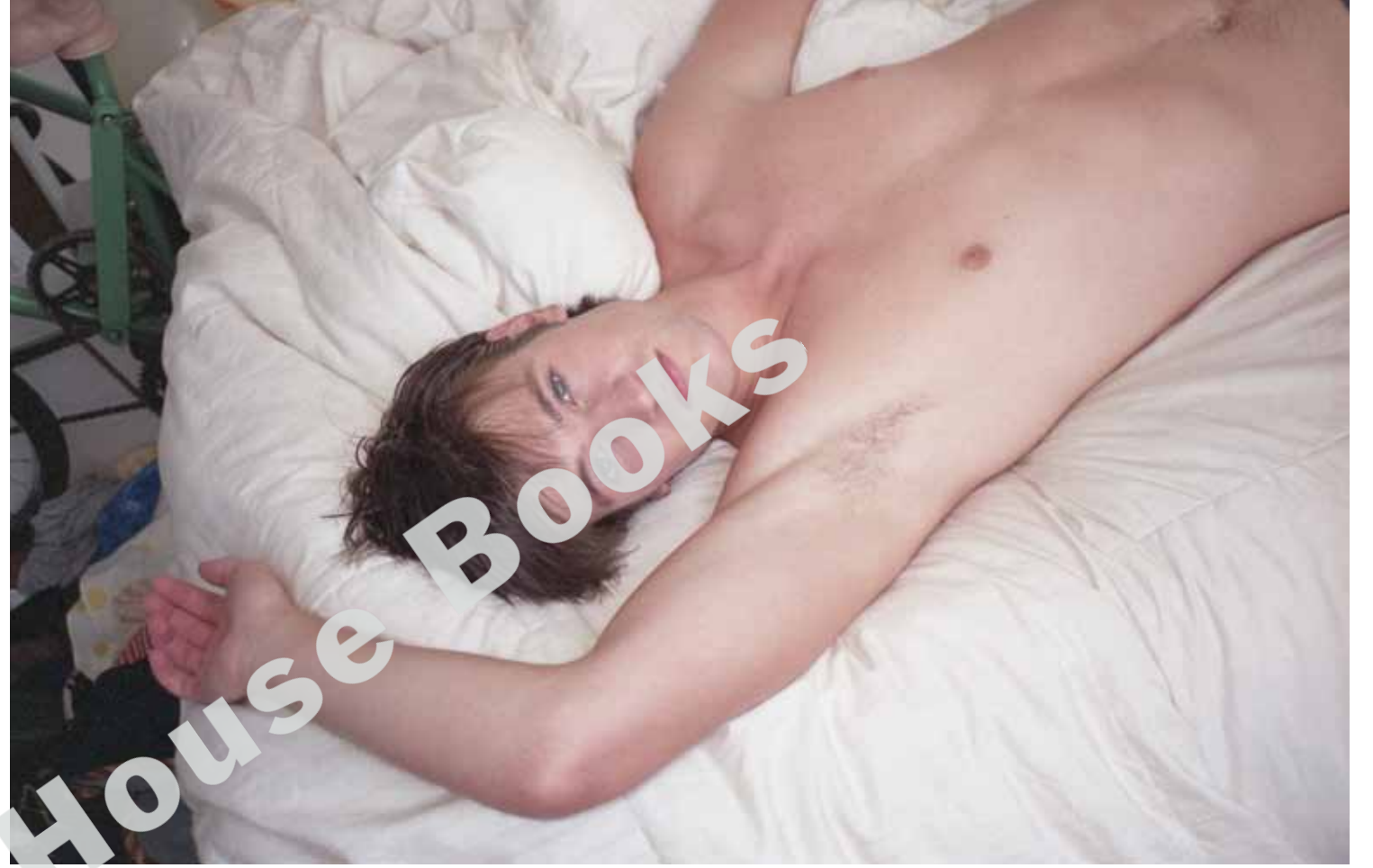
Naked or not, the men in her photos are stripped, and so too is our typical frame of reference, and that is what Yatrosky is pursuing. Her men are collected, curated, positioned, documented, cataloged, and presented for scrutiny and reaction. The resulting photographs are merely the archive of this process. •

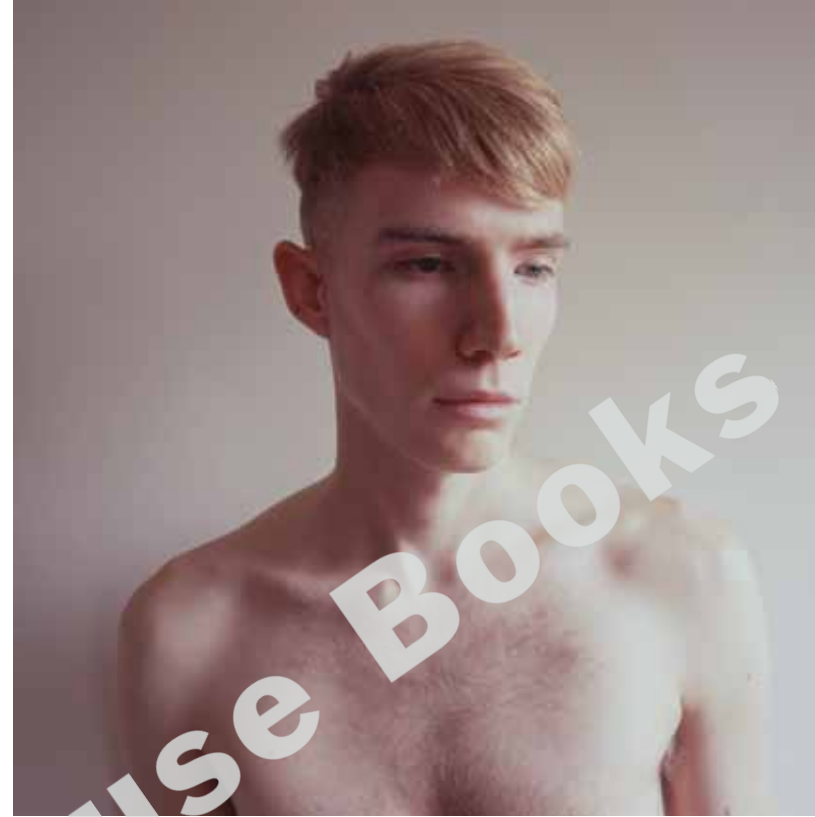
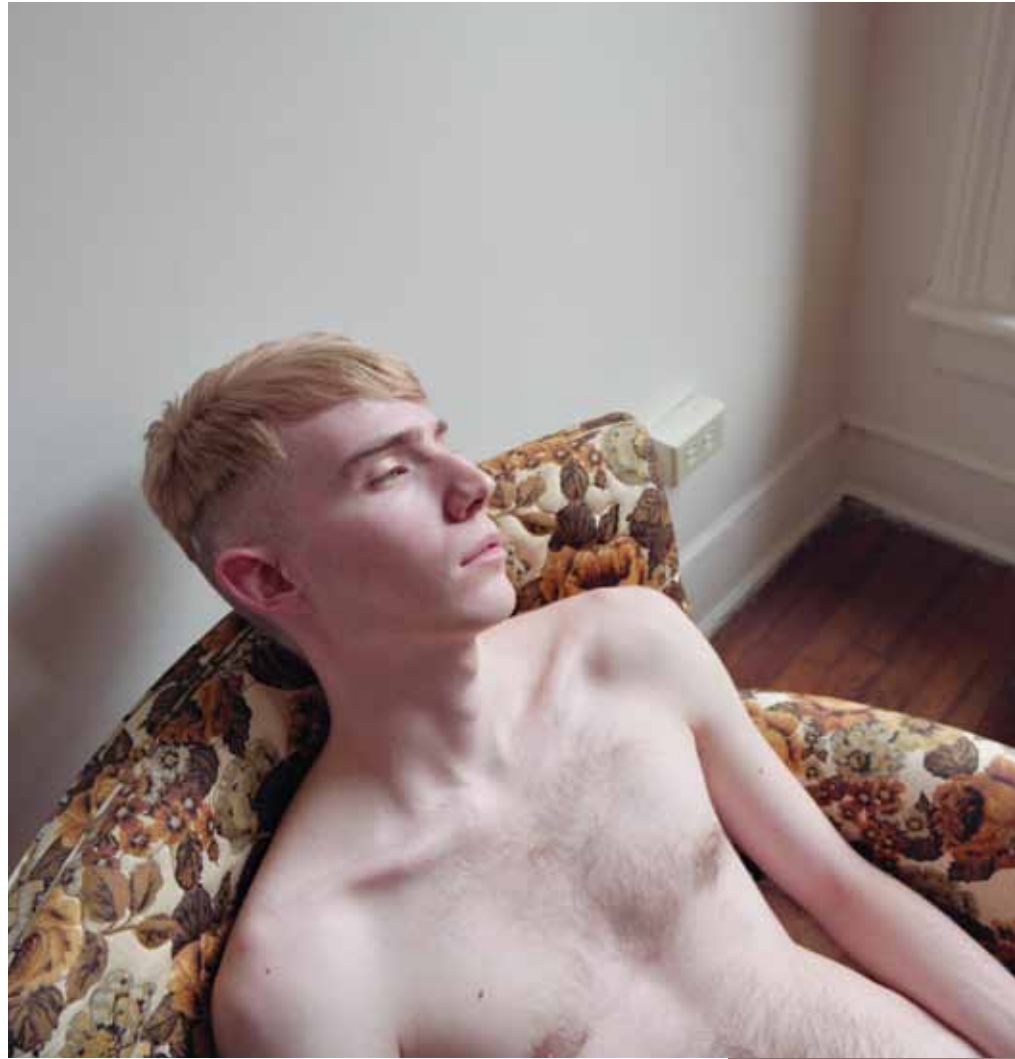




powerHouse Books







powerHouse Books



PH

powerHouse Books

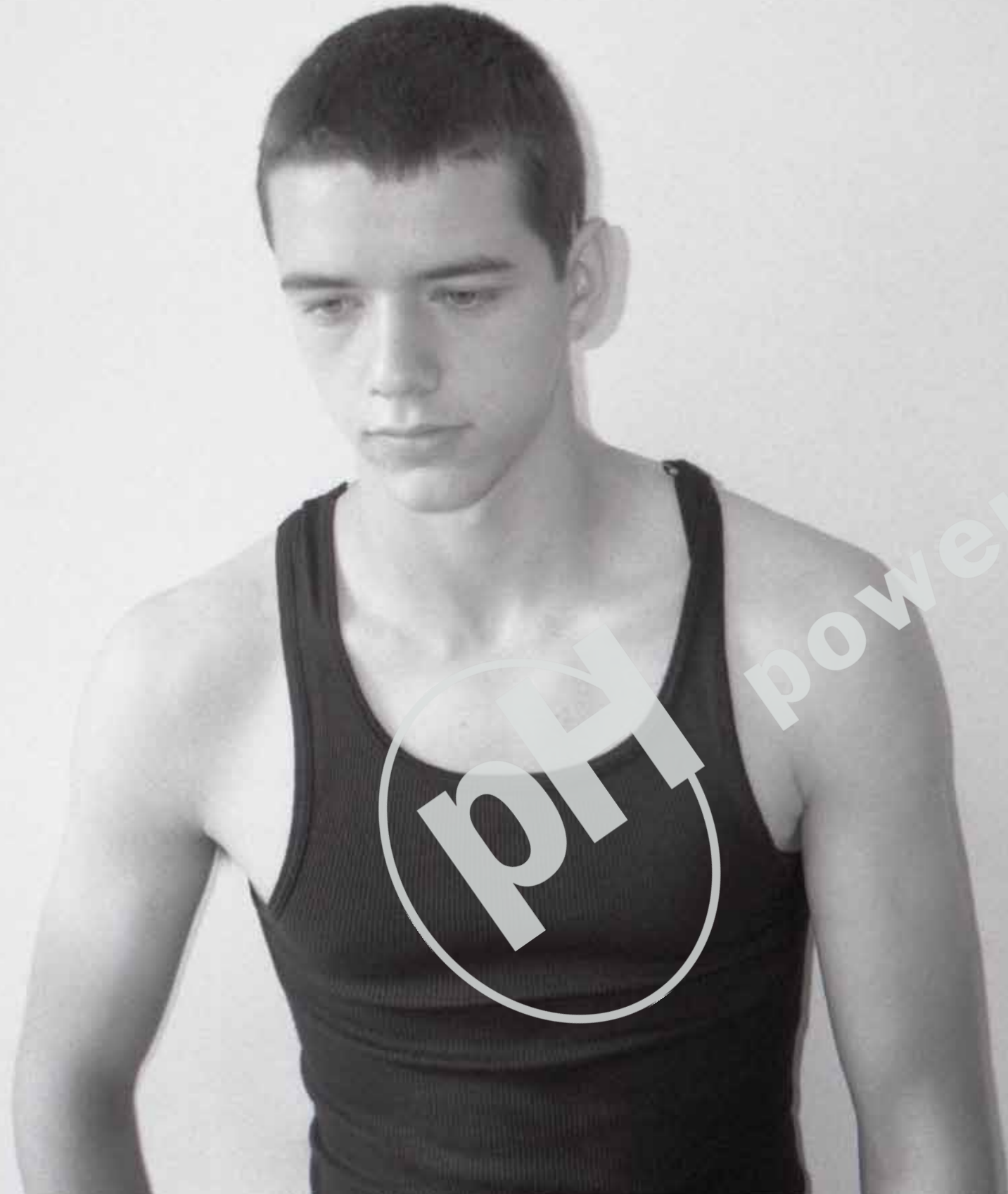


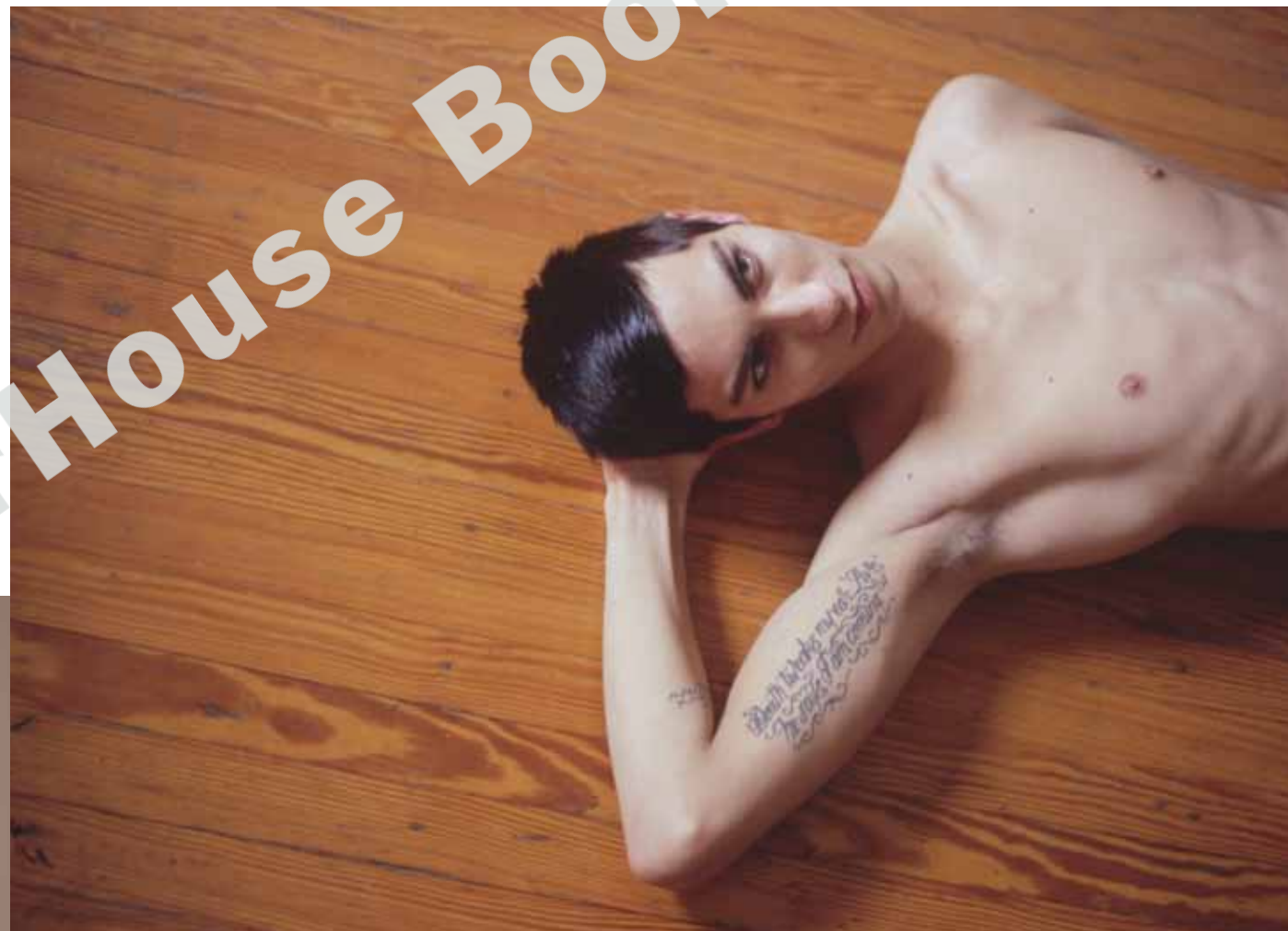
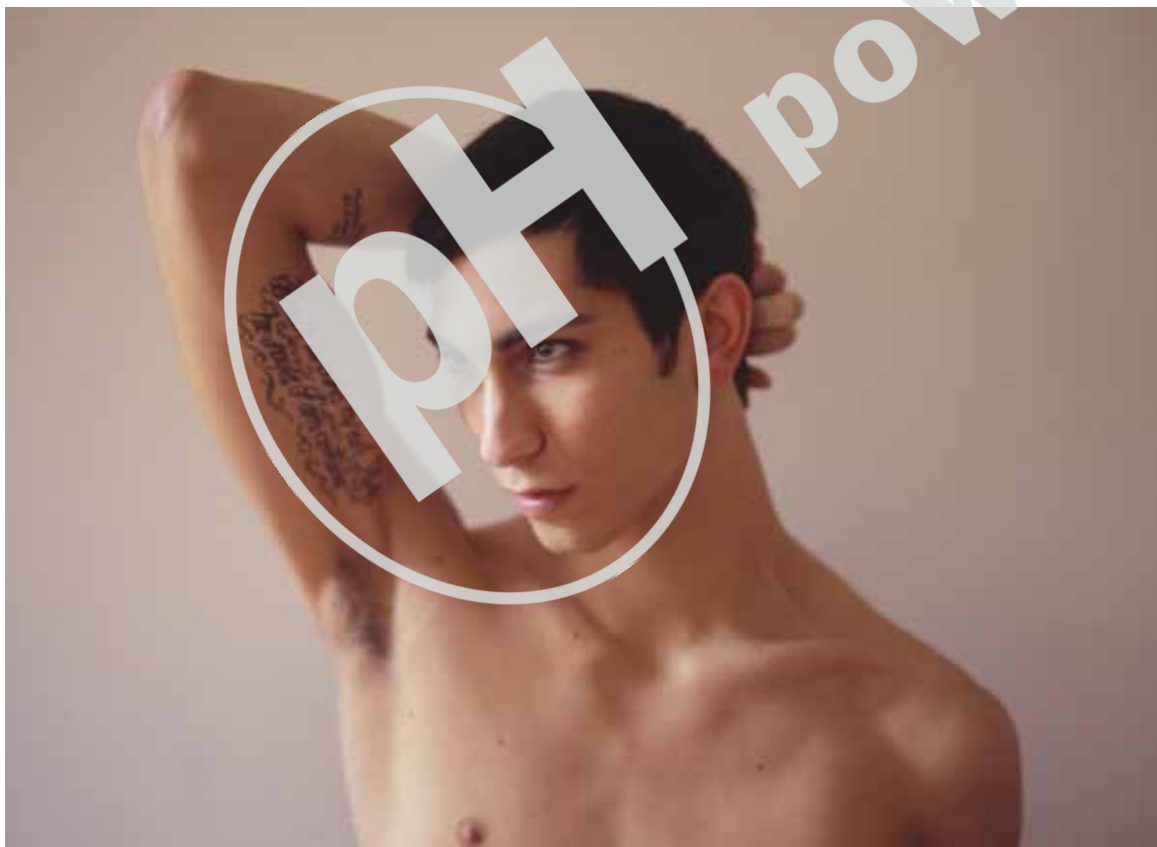


powerHouse Books









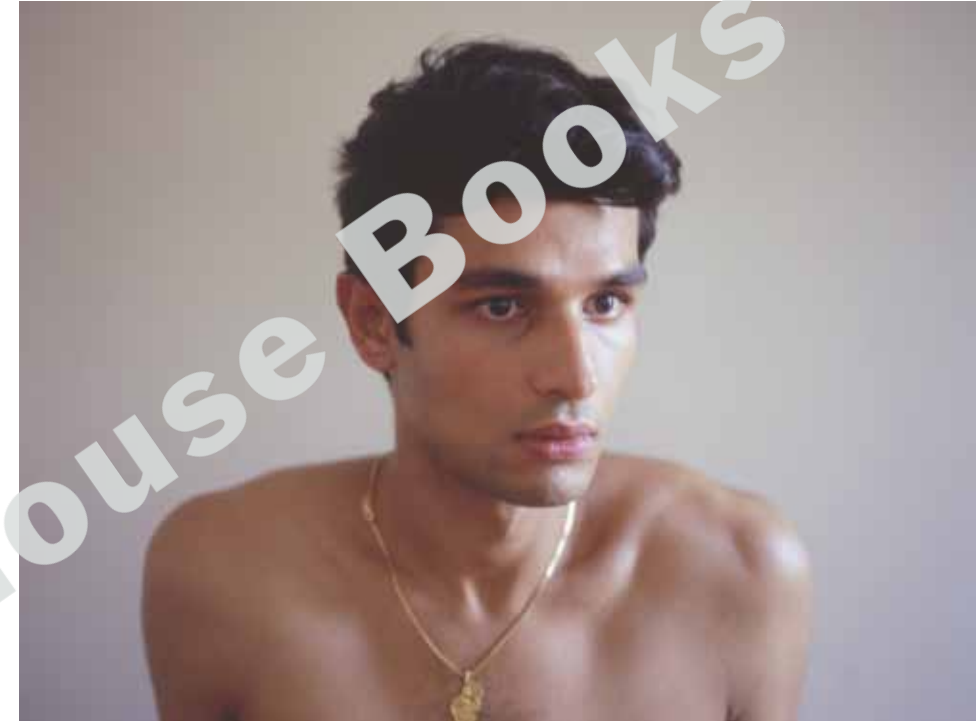


powerHouse Books



powerHouse Books







powerHouse Books





PowerHouse Books



# **I Heart Boy**

**By J. Yatrofsky**

**Published by  powerHouse Books**

**To be released: March 2011**

**This PDF of *I Heart Boy* is only a preview of the entire book.  
To see the complete version, please contact Joel Caceres,  
Publicity Associate, at [joel@powerhousebooks.com](mailto:joel@powerhousebooks.com)**