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photos by David Baltzer
CREDITS

Gob Squad's Kitchen (You've Never Had It So Good)

“If tomorrow I find somebody who is pretty much like me and I put her here to sing, she can be Nico while I go and do something else.”
- Nico

“When my time has come and I die, I don’t want there to be anything left of me. I do not want to be a leftover. I want my machine to disappear. And yet I am attracted to the thought that people turn to sand or something similar, so the machine can work on even after your death.”
- Andy Warhol

Concept Gob Squad

Devised and performed by
Johanna Freiburg
Sean Patten
Berit Stumpf
Sarah Thom
Bastian Trost
Simon Will
Sharon Smith
Nina Tecklenburg
Laura Tonke

Guest performer
Erik Pold

Seattle cast
Sharon Smith
Berit Stumpf
Sarah Thom
Simon Will
with members of the audience

Video Miles Chalcraft (Martin Cooper)
Sound Design Jeff McGrory (Jeffrey Fisher)
Production Manager/Dramaturgy Christina Runge
UK Producer Ayla Suveren
Artistic Assistants Sophia Simitzis (Tina Pfurr)
Stage Design Gob Squad and Chasper Bertschinger
Tour Manager Mat Hand
Gob Squad Management Eva Hartmann


Gob Squad’s Kitchen (You’ve Never Had It So Good) is a Gob Squad production, co-produced by Volksbuehne im Prater Berlin, donaufestival Nieder-osterreich, Nottingham Playhouse and Fierce! Funded by the Senatsverwaltung fuer Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kultur Berlin, Fonds Darstellende Kunste e.V. Bonn and the Arts Council of England.

gobsquad.com

The original screenplay for Andy Warhol’s film Kitchen was written by Ronald Tavel. You can find out more about Tavel’s work at ronaldtavel.com
ABOUT GOB SQUAD
by Gob Squad

“This feels like one of the most impossible, beautiful, courageous and epic theatrical experiences you can imagine” - The Guardian

Gob Squad is a seven headed monster, an arts collective with seven bosses. Gob Squad has a schizophrenic identity and a multiple split personality: hermaphrodite, binational and bilingual, both a patchwork family and a social utopia. Gob Squad have been devising, directing and performing together since 1994, working where theatre meets art, media and real life.

Always on the hunt for beauty amidst the mundane, they place their work at the heart of urban life: in houses, shops, underground stations, car parks, hotels or directly on the street, as well as in theatres and galleries. Everyday life and magic, banality and idealism, reality and entertainment are all set on a collision course and the unpredictable results are captured on video.

Motivated by a desire to elevate the everyday and empower audience members to step beyond their traditional role as passive spectators, Gob Squad set up often absurdly utopian scenarios where meaningful collective experience and genuine encounters involving passers-by and audience members are suddenly possible. Audiences seem to like the feeling that anything might happen during an evening with Gob Squad. They might be asked to dance, sing or even kiss one of the performers. They might play guitar in a band, play the part of a lover or liberator in a semi-improvised film, or be asked to explain the complexities of the world to an unknown future. Or they might just simply be asked to sit and bear witness to the organised chaos unfolding on stage before them.

For almost 20 years, Gob Squad have been searching for new ways to combine media and performance, producing stage shows, video installations, radio plays, interactive live films and urban interventions. The use of audio and video technology plays a prominent role in their work, with the result that alienated forms of intimacy have become a central theme. They try to scratch beneath the shiny, pixelated surface of the 21st century, seeking out the dark corners and hidden desires of contemporary culture.

Gob Squad was founded in 1994, whilst its members were still at Nottingham Trent and Giessen universities. Berlin has been the group’s creative home since 1999. Core members are Johanna Freiburg, Sean Patten, Sharon Smith, Berit Stumpf, Sarah Thom, Bastian Trost and Simon Will. Other artists are invited to collaborate on particular projects. The group is managed by Eva Hartmann.

Gob Squad’s international reputation has grown steadily since coming to prominence at Documenta X in 1997. Their productions have been shown worldwide (including in Australia, India, South Korea, Brazil, Canada and the US), where projects such as SUPER NIGHTSHOT (2003), GOB SQUAD’S KITCHEN (2007), SAVING THE WORLD (2008, winner of the Goethe Preis at the Impulse Festival), REVOLUTION NOW! (2010) and most recently BEFORE YOUR VERY EYES (2011, selected for Germany’s Theatertreffen) have received wide acclaim.

gobsquad.com
CURATOR’S NOTE

Approximately four years ago, theater titan Romeo Castellucci created a performance inspired by Dante’s *Inferno* for the Avignon Festival. On stage at the Palais de Pape – amongst a dozen attack dogs, a flaming piano, a glass cube of babies, a burned out car, a human catapult and exploding TVs – Romeo placed a figure dressed as Andy Warhol as the maitre d’ of hell. Romeo said after one show, “For me, hell is not deep. It’s shallow like Andy Warhol.”

A lot of people share similar sentiments about Warhol and the contemporary culture the artist would later influence. It all can feel inhuman, flat, cold and copied by the hands of assistants. This is why Gob Squad’s ability to find humanity in this subject matter feels like such an epiphany. Like Warhol’s *Screen Tests*, the ensemble points the camera at normal people but instead of being dispassionate or clinical, they embrace their charges and effectively dance with them. Perhaps it comes back to that question about empathizing with ones subject. Much of modern art suggests this is a bad thing and that it compromises a creator’s ability to communicate what is actually present such as when a model sits for a painter. But cold analysis and posturing over the results under the guise of irony and critique is as much of a shtick as sentimentality.

The critic Norman Mailer had this to say after seeing Warhol’s film *Kitchen*: “I think Warhol’s films are historical documents... I suspect that a hundred years from now people will look at *Kitchen* and say, ‘Yes, that is the way it was in the late Fifties, early Sixties in America. That’s why they had the war in Vietnam. That’s why the rivers were getting polluted. That’s why there was typological glut. That’s why the horror came down. That’s why the plague was on its way.’ *Kitchen* shows that better than any other work of that time.”

Whether one sees heaven or hell or the in between in a subject depends on the person or people who are watching or creating. From watching Gob Squad’s *Kitchen*, one can glean a lot about the creative temperament and worldview of the ensemble. It’s full of compassion, playfulness, curiosity and humility. Welcome back to Seattle, Gob Squad. It’s nice to see you again.

Lane Czaplinski
BEGINNER’S GUIDE TO GOB SQUAD

1. Gob Squad is a performance artist collective with members and bases in both the UK and Germany. Gob Squad’s founding members met at Nottingham Trent University in England while taking a contemporary arts course in 1992. They made their very first pieces as a way to get into the Glastonbury Festival (a festival of performing arts) for free, as performers. The group became official in 1994 and quickly expanded to include their German members, whom they met as foreign exchange students at Nottingham Trent University. Gob Squad was based out of Nottingham for many years, but after doing artist residencies in Germany, Gob Squad currently calls Berlin home.

2. How did the name Gob Squad originate? “Gob” was the title of a mix-tape found, by chance/laying around, and they were attracted to the word. Gob means mouth. A squad is, yes, a team. And Gob Squad thinks the name sounds like a mash-up of children’s theater and punk.

3. Gob Squad, influenced and fascinated by pop culture, has tackled the king of pop art himself, Andy Warhol, in their production of Gob Squad’s Kitchen. The company is on a mission to reconstruct some of his classic films: Kitchen, Kiss, Sleep and Screen Test, which are actually rather hard to see. The original Warhol films were restored and catalogued by the Whitney Museum, and are held by MoMA, and the copyright to the footage is held by the Warhol Museum. The films are loaned out to art museums around the country, including the Seattle Art Museum which showcased three of those films in 2010. If you have never seen an Andy Warhol film, check out this screen test featuring Factory star Mary Woronov (an excerpt from the film 13 Most Beautiful with music by Dean & Britta).

4. Gob Squad is notorious for using video and soliciting participation from the audience. Their work is largely experiential and they frequently cast audience members in their performances. The company likes the use of video because (paraphrasing the FAQ section of the Gob Squad website) film and TV are the main cultural language of our times, and it’s important to be not only a consumer of this media, but a producer! Take a look at this video about the creation of Gob Squad’s Super Night Shot for an example of their brilliant video work.

5. Gob Squad’s Kitchen won the 2012 Drama Desk award for Unique Theatrical Experience. The Drama Desk award is the only award where Broadway, Off-Broadway, and Off-Off-Broadway productions compete side by side. The same award has previously been awarded to The Blue Man Group, Cirque de Soleil, and John Gielgud.

6. Gob Squad last visited OtB in 2001 with “Safe.” Billed as part theater, part plane crash, part rock concert, this show was more like Spinal Tap and less like your average piece of performance art.
GOB SQUAD: PORTRAIT
By Christian Rakow
Courtesy of the Goethe Institut

Gob Squad are masters of pop culture experimentation; their test material is the modern big city. Armed with video cameras, the German-English performance collective enters the public domain and puts its cinema, television and computer game fantasies to the test. In *Super Night Shot* (Prater, 2003), for example, a self-proclaimed superhero embarks on an urban night life mission, getting passers-by to help him produce a story suitable for filming. Three companions act as scouts, keeping their eyes open for possible film partners, while the hero gets people hurrying by to call out a mission for him, one that should be as heroic as possible. If everything goes smoothly, his mission will have a happy ending, finishing off with a kiss with a freshly cast night owl. This is a one-hour videoed city tour from the viewpoint of an ego-shooter; after the outdoor shooting, the sequences are mixed live and shown in the theatre on four parallel screens.

The group’s performances feature an odd blend of the cool and the ridiculous. Trivialities are charged with meaning through expansive pop gestures. The group’s real penchant is for the antihero, for the lives of the clueless and the lonely. “Help Me Make It Through The Night” is the subtitle of *Room Service* (Kampnagel, 2003), a hotel performance in which four isolated actors enter into contact with the spectators via video and phone and request ideas for the night. It could equally well be called: let us kill time together. Gob Squad’s art is always part banal and part emotional. In its city tour *Saving The World* (Kampnagel, 2008), this double meaning is even evident from the title: anyone wishing to record everyday life on celluloid must do so as a saviour of the world. Only something that has been made to shimmer in popular art is noticeable and worth preserving.

Gob Squad’s work is absurd art, living off the fact that the performers never find the right balance. Their intentions and claims are always too expansive (saving the world), their realities always too simple. Accordingly, they find their best moments in alienated miniature form: it is when punks suddenly begin dancing along to a choreography in a bank late at night, when those waiting quietly talk about “love at first sight”, or when drug addicts, their speech slurred, demand the hero to abolish drugs, that this live art touches reality in a wonderfully bizarre way, and the Gob Squad members triumph as theatre guerrillas wearing jester’s caps.

The group developed its characteristic interactive formats after 1999, initially at the Podewil in Berlin, then at the Prater venue of the Volksbühne theatre. In the only series of events to date in which the playwright and Prater director René Pollesch allowed his plays to be produced by other artists, Gob Squad took over *Prater-Saga 3: In diesem Kiez ist der Teufel eine Goldmine* (i.e. *Prater Saga 3: In this neighbourhood, the devil is a goldmine*, 2004). For the performance, they invited passers-by to appear on stage, kitted them out with headphones and then sent them into the theatre, as if by remote control. Hesitantly, the newly-cast actors performed the actions and spoken texts that they were instructed to via the headphones. The audience was able to experience live their battle to understand and their reactions – which ranged from amusement to emotion – to the texts, which are among the most complicated in post-dramatic theatre. The show became the highlight of the Prater series.

The casting principle has been perfected still further. In *Gob Squad’s Kitchen* (2007), spectators are invited (via headphones, once again) to re-enact old Andy Warhol films and to revive the aura of the 1960s pop era. The group was recently criticized for its first performance of *Revolution Now!* (2010) in the Volksbühne's Grosses Haus, which explores the dogma – one that is often allowed to apply in theatres unquestioned – of the necessary “shift in relations” brought about by casting. The audience is taken hostage until such time as a passer-by in front of the theatre can be recruited as a flag-toting barricade fighter. A pop circus, featuring electric guitars rather than machine guns, fills the gap while the audience is waiting.

This experiment was described in reviews as being naive and hollow. One critic felt it to be a declaration of bankruptcy by political theatre. The group, however, actually provokes this reaction in the performance itself, in its usual mad fashion. “Do you want to join our revolution?”, an activist asks wide-eyed at Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz. To which a person hurrying past coolly replies: “There is no revolutionary situation. What you’re saying makes no sense whatsoever.” That is absurd art par excellence. Where artists like Gob Squad are willing to make fools of themselves and to make themselves look small, they can carry – on their backs, as it were – this sort of statement, with all its historical significance, into the artistic domain.
In the mid 60's, Andy Warhol, already established in the contemporary art scene by his paintings of celebrities and soup cans, extended his artistic talents into film production. He worked mostly out of his “Factory”, an urban loft formerly used by a hook and ladder company. A number of his films have gained status as avant-garde classics and he was prolific, generating an approximate 600 films and 2,500 videos between 1963 and 1968.

The first films Warhol produced were sometimes dubbed ‘anti-films’. They were concerned with non-narrative portraiture, repetition, duration, and stillness. The films were silent and shot with a 16mm Bolex camera which could only shoot 100 foot (or, 4 minute) lengths of film. Sleep, Kiss, and the Screen Tests were made between 1963 and 1964, and are amongst Warhol's earliest experimental/experiential 'anti-films'. In later films, such as Kitchen (1965), Warhol employed more movement and direction and even scripts, though never going so far as to have a plot.

Sleep, Warhol’s first film, shot in 1963, is a silent film of poet John Giorno, Warhol's close friend and lover, sleeping. The idea for Sleep may have developed after Warhol saw a dance piece choreographed by Yvonne Rainer—a member of the Judson Dance Theater, which was a loose collective of avant-garde dancers and choreographers working in Greenwich Village in the 1960’s. Rainer’s piece was called Terrain, and the choreography was built out of basic body movements like running, walking, and crawling. One of the movements in her piece was called Sleep.

About a month after Andy saw the dance piece, Warhol confronted his friend Giorno, asking if he could film him as he slept. To give a sense of what the film is like to watch, it starts out with 45 minutes of a close up of a Giorno’s abdomen, rising and falling with breath. Some people who watched the movie would walk out, yell, “Wake up!” at the screen, or try to get their money back, frustrated by the lack of . . . anything. Some people loved it.

Warhol had planned for Sleep to be 8 hours long because it’s the amount of time a person should sleep a night “according to science”. However, filmed on his Bolex, capable of shooting only 4 minutes of film at a time, Warhol ended up looping much of his footage and generating a five and a half hour long film. Ironically, Warhol was taking prescribed speed at the time, and barely needed to sleep at all.

In Kiss, filmed in the later part of 1963, Warhol created short, 3 to 4 minute films of couples kissing. He recruited the ‘cast’ for his film from members of the avant-garde art community and his factory ‘super-stars’. Warhol represented all gender combinations—man/man, woman/woman, and man/woman in his kisses. The idea for this film may have started as a rebellious statement against an old Hayes Office film censorship regulation which forbade actors from touching lips on-screen for longer than 3 seconds. Kiss may also have been influenced by a screening of a 1929 Greta Garbo film, The Kiss, at Cinema 16—an influential experimental cinema—around the time Warhol bought his Bolex camera.

The Kiss films were originally shown in weekly installments during underground film screenings organized by the Lithuanian champion of avant-garde film, Jonas Mekas. The films were known as The Andy Warhol Serial and were shown in four minute segments. Later, they were spliced together into the 54-minute-long ode to kissing now known as Kiss.

Warhol's Screen Tests are some of his most iconic film work, maybe because they are films about iconography. Inspired by pop culture, Hollywood, and the ‘packaging’ of celebrity, Warhol’s screen tests captured portraits of celebrities, beautiful people, and his Factory superstars. Screen Tests are an example of Warhol’s “industrial” or serial art production. The tests parody Hollywood screen tests, where an actor is assigned a few lines or an action and then briefly filmed as a way to assess their filmic potential.
Warhol filmed are around 500, 4 minute screen tests between 1964 and 1966. The films are paradoxically, ‘motionless’. The subjects of screen tests were instructed sit still and face the lens of his 16mm Bolex camera's for its entire, short, reel's worth of film. His subjects were extensive, and sometimes incredibly iconic, a few examples being Bob Dylan, Salvador Dali, Alan Ginsberg, Lou Reed and Nico, alongside factory stars, Edie Sedgwick and Mary Woronov.

Some of his first Screen Tests were compiled into the his film, The Thirteen Most Beautiful Boys and The Thirteen Most Beautiful Women, where the number 13 references a police pamphlet he found in 1962 titled, “The Thirteen Most Wanted,” (which also inspired his controversial mural, “The Thirteen Most Wanted Men,” commissioned for the New York world’s fair). Recently a selection of Warhol’s screen tests have been released in a film called 13 Most Beautiful...Songs for Andy Warhol’s Screen Tests, a collection of the films with a soundtrack by Dean Wareham and Britta Phillips.

Kitchen, a more obscure film from 1965, was staged in a minimalist kitchen and was supposed to be a vehicle to showcase Edie Sedgwick, Warhol’s adored ‘superstar’. It was one of Andy’s first films in which he used a script, acted as a director, and actually rehearsed the action before filming it—though still refusing a plot. The script was written by Ronald Tavel, who worked with Warhol on several of his other films, including Chelsea Girls (1966).

Edie was totally uncooperative, however. She had trouble learning her lines, so copies of the script were hidden around the set—in the calendar, in books, and in the refrigerator, etc., so if she forgot her lines, she could open the fridge or flip through the calendar and regain her place. She was also given instruction to sneeze if she forgot her lines, a cue which has turned into one of the most memorable parts of Kitchen; Edie appears to have a terrible cold, she sneezes all over the place, and her sneezing eventually becomes comedic. The film is chaotic, full of innuendo, and random events and conversation; cake is served, Edie spills coffee, and burns her hand on the stove. Towards the end of Kitchen, the actors don’t know they are being filmed anymore, and the film sort of just unravels.

Most of Warhol's films are only viewable in art museums which builds a sort of mythos around them—they are more talked about than seen, more imagined than experienced. Andy's films challenged art and the audience. They democratized art: he was shooting people who stumbled into his studio, his friends, filming in kitchens and apartments. The picking up of his camera was a call to arms; we can all pick up a camera and make art out of the things and people around us. The audience was asked for their endurance, trust, and acceptance. He must have felt that an audience need not be coddled by a narrative: they could be confused, left hanging, or exposed to such tedium that they might enter a state of lucidity, yelling ‘wake up!’ at a screen of a man sleeping. He embraced the paradoxes of Pop and made his work his world where he was king.
COMING SOON!