

ABSOLUT VODKA

ART'S BEST FRIEND



## BRITISH ART SPECIAL

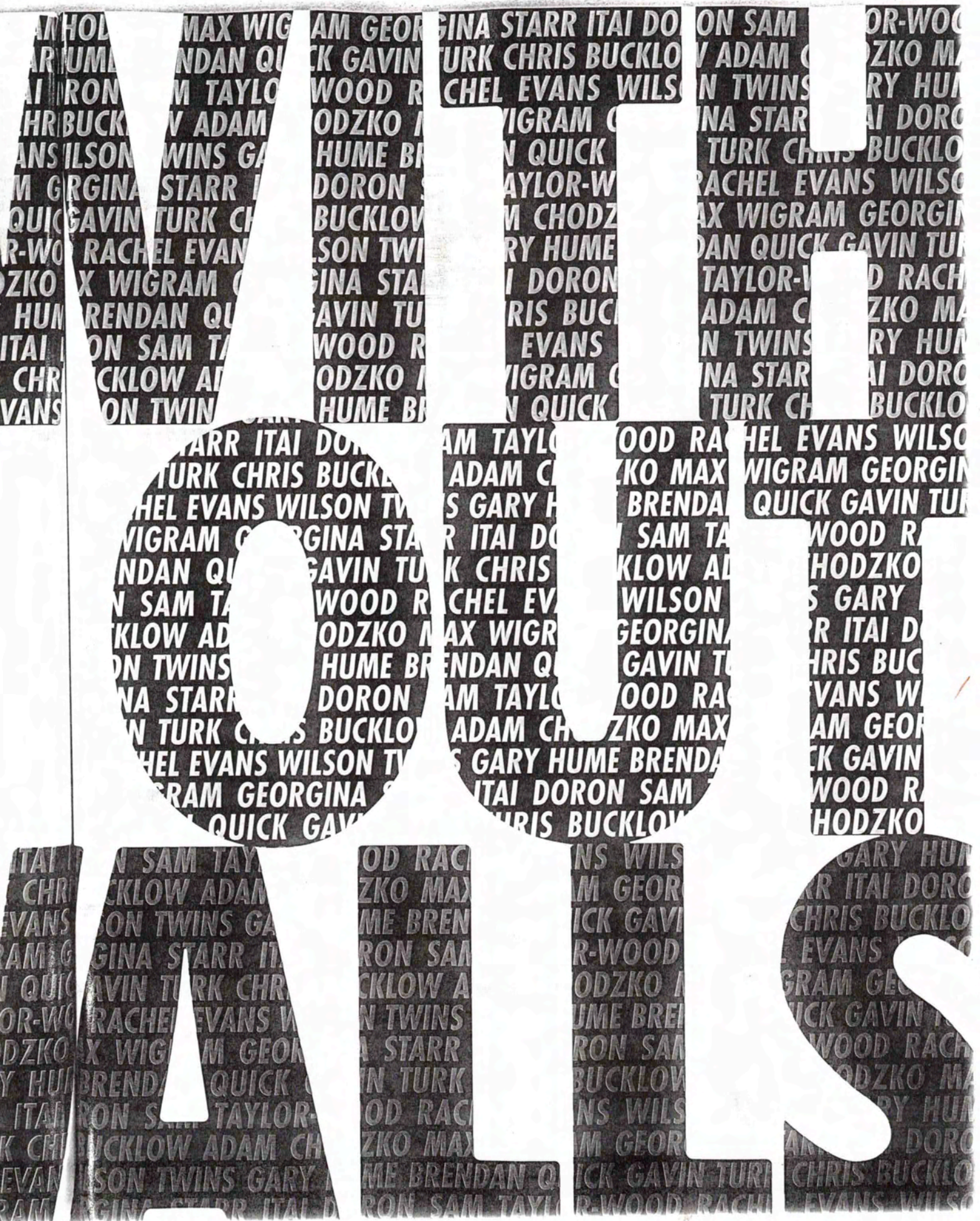
A new generation of young artists has put Britain on the international map, stirring up controversy and making waves beyond the boundaries of the art world. FACE ART is an exhibition that dispenses with the gallery, a collection of specially commissioned works from the cream of the new crop

Commonly perceived as obscure, elitist and ultimately irrelevant, contemporary art often seems to have little place outside the sanctified space of the gallery where anything, it appears, is justifiable in the name of art – from a pile of bricks or a jar of human excrement to aborted fetuses used as earrings. Equally, however fulsome the critical praise, much supposedly high-concept work still seems to crumble in the face of that most direct of public putdowns: “I could do that.” Which, in a way, is the point of FACE ART. Specially commissioned (or in two cases recent) work from eleven of Britain’s most talented young artists, the following images prove that art at its best is challenging, infuriating, amusing, thought-provoking and occasionally brilliant. If all that’s shown here doesn’t meet with universal approval, then that, maybe, is something to cheer. Like the mixed reactions which greet the diverse shows at a couture fashion week, it’s impossible to please all the people all the time, however high the overall standard, without heading swiftly into territory marked bland, consensual and dull – everything which British art at the moment is not. After years as a cultural layby, playing second fiddle to the markets of New York, Los Angeles and Tokyo, Britain is now one of the world leaders in contemporary art, a position it hasn’t held since the Sixties Pop Art era of David Hockney, Peter Hall and Richard Hamilton. Boosted by burgeoning public interest and eager collectors, a generation of artists in their twenties has created a scene whose vibrancy has few parallels abroad. Much credit obviously lies with Damien Hirst, whose shark in a tank did more than any other single work to put Britain back on the international map. But if Hirst, with his shaven head and disquieting penchant for rotting carcasses, is very much the main man of the movement, he’s hardly its totality. When the judges of this year’s Turner Prize gave their award to Rachel Whiteread’s *House*, a full-scale concrete cast of the interior of a two-up two-down terraced home, sans walls, they faced the usual barracking. Yet most critics ignored the fact that *House*, situated in a modest corner of Bow, east London, was that rare commodity – a genuinely popular art work, which drew admiration from local crowds as well as praise from the art cognoscenti. Like punk – an analogy which may not be too inappropriate given the shock value potential of both scenes – there’s a DIY ethic at the

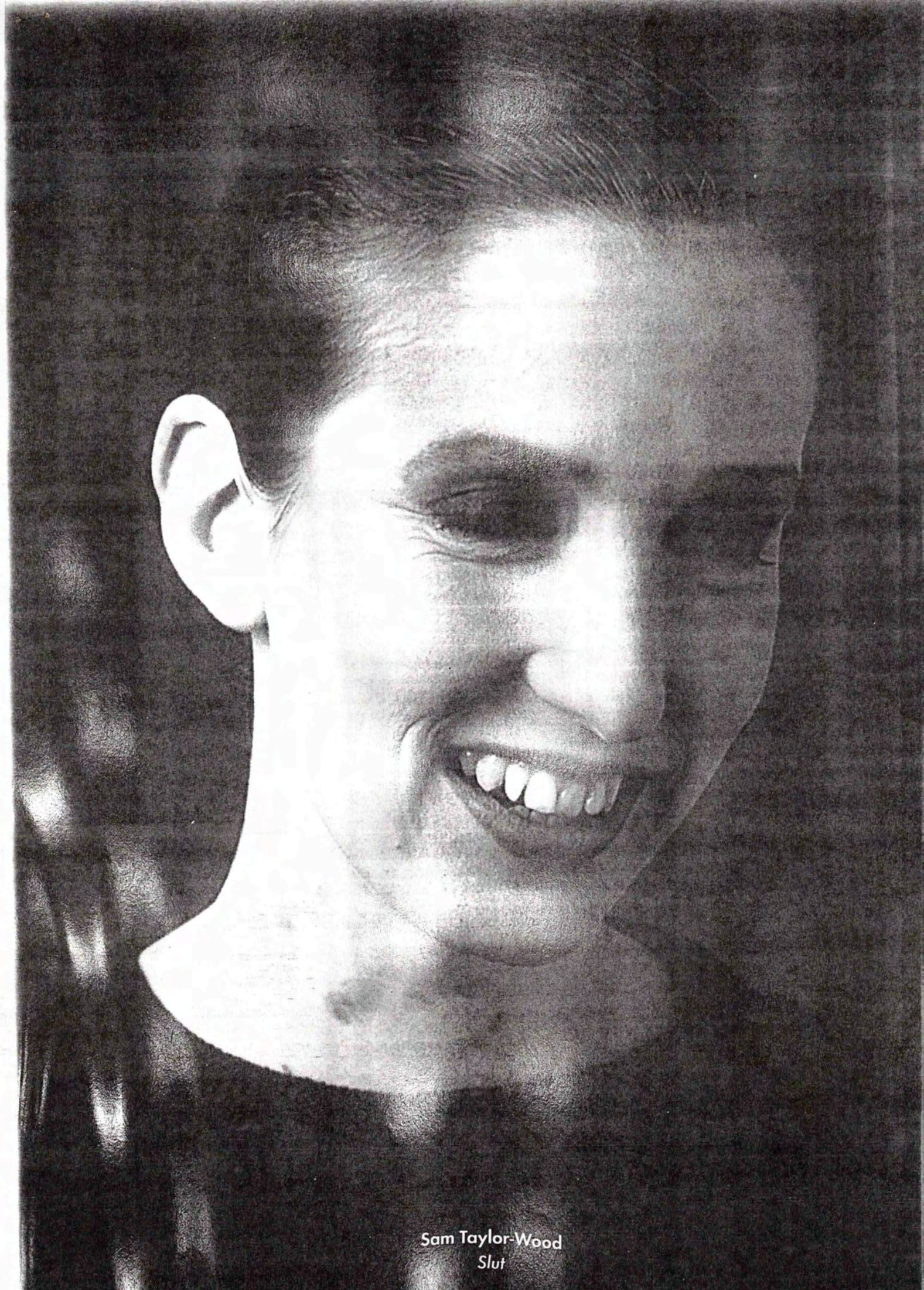
heart of the new art: from exhibitions organised in warehouses and empty office spaces, to artists curating group shows by their contemporaries and pooling resources to establish communal studio spaces. Out of such intense activity have come artists with prodigious reputations such as Turner Prize nominees Fiona Rae and Ian Davenport, Anya Gallaccio, Sarah Lucas and all those who’ve contributed to FACE ART. Their skills are eclectic, from sculpture and time-based video work to installation, photography and traditional oil-on-canvas painting. Their talent, however, is unquestionable. And unlike a gallery show, which in most cases can only attract relatively limited numbers, the work of those involved in FACE ART will reach a far larger audience than that which normally judges what makes good or bad art. Indeed, at a period when the cream of the crop already have the status of pop stars and much of the international art world is toasting British creativity, what could be more timely than to turn what’s long felt like an invitation-only affair into a party where both pretension and prejudice can be checked in at the door? Ekow Eshun

addicted to beauty







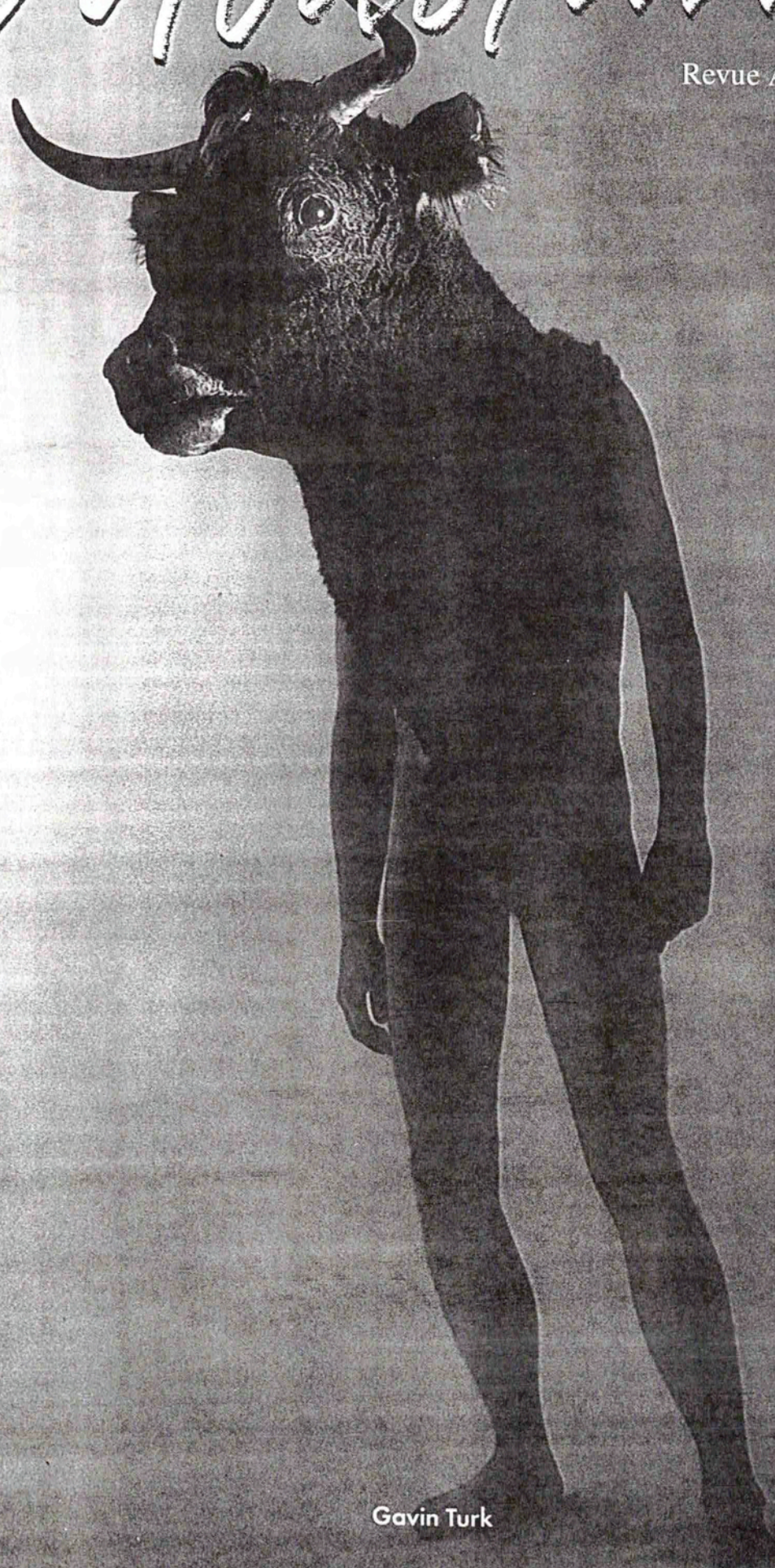


Sam Taylor-Wood  
*Slut*



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