ghost signs are more than paintings on brick

Eric Anthony Berdis
Virginia Commonwealth University

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ghost signs are more than paintings on brick

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University

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Thank you to my amazing studio mate Laura Boban for welcoming me into your life, dreams, and being a shoulder of support as we walk on this journey together. You have taught me so much and your strength, thoughtfulness, and empathy make me both grateful and proud to be your peer.

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Abstract

“ghost signs are more than paintings on brick”

My work embraces a maximalist aesthetic that incorporates, archival research, personal secrets, and pubescent gay boy glamour. I seek to create a stimulating yet jarring experience, while building a world that is both familiar and inherently strange to the viewer. Thrift store cast-offs, hobbyist craft supplies, and saturated drawings are reassembled into a cast of characters and costumes that balance on the line between ghosts, creatures, and friends. While we often think of costume and even art installations as meant to cover bodies and walls, my work tends to reveal more than conceal. I aspire through this work to shine light on the uncomfortable truths of failure, the pain in becoming; the tragedy of the AIDs epidemic; or the uphill battle of navigating inclusive conversations and spaces.

I charge my color palettes and materials with childhood idealism, mythology, and historic events subvert ideas of place, actions, and imagery that are often considered neutral in a heteronormative society. Drawings work in tandem with my sculptural performance practice, as a backdrop and a way to apply use in the performances. Both consider the romances of queer collectivity and kinship.

Through craft, I am earnest. In my version of ’sloppy craft’, I echo the messiness of the emotions I feel when confronting the political structures that confine queer bodies. For this
reason, I tend towards a direct form of address; I want my work to scream at you much like the ACT UP activist screaming at you for political change.

In the work presented in this document I am influenced by the forgotten generation-those remembered in the AIDS Memorial Quilt. Performers like The Cockettes, Leigh Bowery and public fish sculpture from my hometown. Here I recontextualize the American Halloween symbol of the ghost. I reimagine the bleached cotton bedsheet veiling a body- the ghost symbol we are familiar with- as a queer ghost- something full of life and love not hiding, but standing boldly in the light. Through saturated fabrics, vibrant trims and embellishments, I build a cast of characters who, with fluidity, shift between fantastical friend to worst nightmare.
Forward

I’d like to acknowledge that I am writing this under social distancing and self-isolation, advice by the government to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Zoom conference and Facetime have become my main forms of communication as I pursue the completion of my Masters in Fine Arts Degree from Virginia Commonwealth University in the Fiber area of the Craft and Material Studies department. I write from a sunroom in my parents’ home in Erie, Pennsylvania away from my studio and resources in Richmond, Virginia.

Through my performative practice I engage and connect the audience with community, and collective comradery to share stories, make a point, and teach a lesson. All of this is done through worldbuilding, costume making, and solo repetitive gestures. With the restructuring of our social-norms due to preventative measures and fear of contracting or spreading illness, I recognize that this work may never be viewed or performed in the same way.

As I write this document there is a heightened state of anxiety, both in my own life and in the world at large. I look toward writer, artist, and organizer Ted Kerr who posted this status on his social media:

“The often unhelpful conflation between early days of HIV and COVID-19 is a good reminder that there is a lot of misinformation about AIDS history and HIV more generally; and that HIV-related PTSD is real, powerful and in need of action. Oh, and that HIV takes a special place in people’s hearts, minds, and psyche.” (Kerr)

As contagion anxiety heightens, an ‘everyone for themselves’ mentality becomes prevalent: stockpiling resources, a general disregard for underserved vulnerable populations, and a lack of trust in others. I see evidence of this all around me in my hometown and on social
media. The atmosphere here is very different from the liberal bubble of an academic institution. Here in my small rust belt town, I am also faced with the ghosts of my past as I continue to contextualize my research around LGBTQIA+ death due to systemic structural violence.

Now, back in this place, I reflect on the ways in which I escaped it—physically, by leaving, but also through art, high and low. Since I was young, I have looked toward art history books, public fish sculptures, and crafts made at county fairs or summer day camps. Art has always been that place of escape and it has been where I found community, and a voice. From the art classroom, the DIY art scene, the streets, to the museums, I hope my work can speak to others who seek that same escape. I make art for myself, to shed light on injustice, to share something sweet, funny, and just mine with the world, and to honor the ghosts whose shoulders I stand on.
I see the world in a non-linear way, and my work follows suit. I want to briefly describe the conceptual framework for my art process as well as the format for this document. My paper as you read is broken into various essays around my research, performances, and bodies of work. Throughout the essays I bounce back between personal anecdotes, historical movements, and artist influences, as well as my own work.

As an overarching theme, I use *serial* and *parallel* structures to organize larger ideas in my work and life. Defined as two contrasting modes to accomplish more than one task or objective. In my work, life, and art practice I find myself adapting, and changing through these structures every day. I recognize that my thoughts, writing and studio practices are neither sequential nor organized as such, but I discuss them here through the loose metaphor of serial and parallel structures.

The dominant characteristic of a *serial structure* is that of unbroken or uninterrupted sequences, linear and singular – doing one thing at a time from start to completion. One example of this, for your imagination, can be thought of like a string of Christmas lights. When one of the bulbs is burned out, the whole system breaks. To repair: one by one each bulb is checked and replaced. When the disruption is fixed; the current of electricity moves through the whole strand and illuminates.

In this thesis, I have written a series of essays that I would like you to imagine as various bulbs on the serial strand of lights. The essays broadly look at my work in relation to such

**Holiday Christmas lights and Thrift Store Castoffs**
themes of failure, expanded definitions of ghost signs, and historical art references. Within these essays there is a parallel structure of information, which I feel more closely represents my artistic practice, voice and influence.

The dominant characteristic of a parallel structure is that sequences fold into one another, multi-linear – two or more things occurring at once or in alternation. An example of a parallel scheme resembles the workings of a restaurant kitchen (or for the sake of imagination, my first job at the Harborcreek McDonald’s, in Erie, PA) in which a timer/stage manager cues the cooks at the different stations. As the fry cook, I had to start (or drop) the French fries when the cooks at the grill gave me the cue. When the hamburger that the fries would accompany was 3/4 done, the fries needed to be dropped so that both would arrive on the tray hot and ready to enjoy together (convergence).

Electronic engineering: voltage source + 3 resistors [diagram] (fig.1)
Series circuit, “one burns out and all go out.”
Parallel circuit, one burns out and others are unaffected.

The minimal poetics and multilayered gestures of Felix Gonzalez-Torres’ work have been extremely influential in my life and work. The persistent ambition to link private or sociocultural associations to neutral objects was subcurrent throughout his career. Spilled
candies on the floor, stacks of paper, two clocks synchronized together. The modesty and
open-ended quality of his sculptures set a tone and direction that, for the clued-in viewer, trigger
overwhelming emotions evoked by a knowledge of his tragic, short life. *Untitled (Petit Palais)*
rejects a monumental and heroic tone in favor of a quiet, personal one. There are delicate,
decorative strands of light designed to admit a wide range of meanings. Purity, memory,
inevitable dimming over time are just a few. As a “clued in viewer” myself, it is hard to see the
separation between Felix’s queer life and his art practice. When I have encountered this work at
major institutions like the School of Art Institute of Chicago or the Carnegie Museum of Art in
Pittsburgh, his queer experiences are summarized in coded language:

“It is a dedication to his “friend” who died of an “illness” in 1991 in Los Angeles,
California.” (Artic.edu)

One can quickly infer that same-sex friendships is code for partner or lover, and “illness”
in 1991 referred to the AIDS epidemic that took Ross and Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s life. When I
looked at that museum panel I felt small, and I felt like the words, so carefully chosen by the
institution, had been twisted into a knife. I felt disappointed. My pilgrimage from rural Slippery
Rock University, to these urban, more accepting spaces still made me feel shame.

This is where my passion lies, in naming and disrupting these patterns. The patterns of
feeling alienated, confused, or invisible. I interrogate these constructs by using repetitive acts in
my making process, drawings, gestures, visual and spoken language. This repetition functions as
a metaphor for labor that I and other queer bodies perform in the political climate that often feels
void of the history we are repeating. My work is a flamboyant declaration to be seen, heard,
considered, embraced and remembered.
Through my work I seek to be a part of a queer subjectivity, fueled by the messiness of collaboration, education, and community. I think about Gonzalez-Torres’ work as one serial symbol in a lexicon to the parallel world I am building. By embedding countless minimal gestures in a maximal one, I amplify them to make a bold, exuberant and theatrical declaration. I work to pull together that which has historically existed on the fringe and fray- bringing forth the beautiful, the hidden, the forgotten, the painful, the disregarded scraps of queer, marginalized identities- personal and collective. Through my work, I show them as I see them: incredible and sparkling.

Instead of one string of Christmas lights I turn towards an uttermost level of expression. Much like the Oregon Hill Christmas House in Richmond Virginia, decorated by Marc Leslie and Liz Kolonay who claim the proud title of having “the tackiest house on their block”. “It’s just a mismatch of lights and blow molds, and nothing is symmetrical,” Kolonay says.

(Richmond.com)
Every inch of the tiny Oregon Hill yard is filled with decoration. Items like Santa, baby Jesus, the world’s ugliest little angel (at least, that’s how Kolonay describes it), and even a disco ball. It’s the kind of house that you need to stand in front of and stare at for a while. However because it was so bright it often hurt your eyes if you looked at it for too long. “There’s a lot of detail,” Leslie says. “We pride ourselves on detail.” They favor eclectic, vintage finds, such as blow molds from the 1940s. There’s a lot of Santa’s, old-school Nativity scenes, and anything left on their porch by neighbors and friends. The couple gravitates toward items with a sense of humor, such as a giant Nativity scene a local daycare donated because “it scared the children.”

In my own installations, the poetic gestures of Gonzalez-Torres are echoed, but so layered atop one another that my finished works are more akin visually to the Oregon Hill Christmas House. Through the overload of thrift store cast-offs, loud sequin stereotyped "gay" fabric, and craft store novelties, I maintain the use and tactile strategies of queer theory in a manner similar to what Josh Faught and LJ Roberts have described as "overperformance."

“Strategies such as overperformance are endorsed by queer theory to critique stereotypes that overdetermine identities. Similar to the way in which drag performance functions, the work of Josh Faught magnifies and dismantles prevalent craft stereotypes...much like the campy drag performance Faught’s installation is a masquerade: on appearance, the brightly colored granny squares are familiar, pleasant, and sweet, but in its center is a crass and dirty sense of humor...” (Roberts, p. 254)

Roberts and Faught’s work is part of a lineage of artists and growing community of “Queer Threads” makers. A community of artists that have been a huge source of inspiration, and support to me as an emerging artist even before my graduate journey. A community as John Chaich describes:
“[LGBTQIA+ community] around the world who are remixing fiber and textile craft traditions and materials. Loading up with gender connotations, feminist herstories, and tactile experiences, handicraft crochet, embroidery, knitting, macrame, quilting, and sewing providing a fitting platform for examining taste, roles, and relationships socialized with and around gay and lesbian culture, as well as bodies, cultures, and spaces that we shape.” (Queer Threads iv)

I have positioned my research, practice, and academic journey to be a part of that succession. I pull from a variety of materials and processes much like a metaphor for queer life and collectivity. Arranging a series of symbols and lexicons through hyper clash sentiments, I create a chorus of off-key singers. "I act as the conductor whose only qualification is playing the kazoo.

My work is sloppy in the earnest way looking at Jack Halberstam queer art of failure and roles around in it. To quote Halberstam:

“Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may, in fact, offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world. Failing is something queers do and have always done exceptionally well; for queers failure can be a style…What kinds of rewards can failure offer us? Perhaps most obviously, failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods. Failure preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood and disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children, winners, and losers. And while failure certainly comes accompanied by a host of negative effects, such as disappointment, disillusionment, and despair, it also provides the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life." (Halberstam 2-3)

I find myself failing in the studio quite often. Quite frankly my ambition is too high for my skill set. Much like Halberstam writes about the unruly childhood, I channel that into my making, working on the floor, as children do. Much like a child, I also allow myself to let my emotions control me: frustration and anger leading to tantrums and unplanned actions. Although
this can sometimes be destructive it also allows for discovery and a creative process unburdened by judgement and doubt.

I created a series of quilts while thinking about transitional objects of childhood, like security blankets or stuffed animals. These objects go through wars, adventures, nap times, trips to the bathroom, shopping excursions, and deep dream slumbers. They are irreplaceable and often inseparable from their young owners, even for cleaning. My personal object was a blanket. It kept me warm, functioned as a skirt, hood, pillow, and a place to have picnics. As an avid thrifter, I've found many discarded blankets over the years that reminded me of my own childhood blanket; stain covered, lumpy batting, tattered edges. They are in such rough condition that nobody in their right mind would pay money to take them home- more fit for the landfill than the thrift store. Whenever I find one, I always buy it.

I've learned so much from these once beloved objects. Taking them apart, and laying them bare, and stripping them down, to see them clearly for what they are or have been. These thrifted objects hold memories, and hold onto their previous life, keeping dye, stains, even previous stitches.

By tracing their stitch lines and following them on the sewing machine, I became more comfortable with the tool. It brings me joy to give these blankets a second life.

In deconstructing these blankets and re-stitching them together, I create a base layer which I then proceed to embellish- loading them with meaning and message. Cutting up garments to flatten them, piecing together the fabric to create fields of pattern, I mark them with moments of transition similar to those that have marked me. I arrange torn t-shirts with
band-aids, similar to those I received when I was HIV tested, or when I stabbed myself learning to sew. I incorporate objects reminiscent of those I would suck on as a teething infant. Objects that I would suck on to mimic the childhood habit of putting things in the mouth when you're teething. I further embellish the surface with other paraphernalia and imagery from my own childhood- studs and safety pins like the ones on the belt from Hot Topic that I wasn't allowed to wear at school, stickers, patches and stitched or sequined drawings all become a part of my world-quilt.


I am constantly examining areas of transition and becoming in my own life. In remembering and recognizing these vital moments, I feel I am honoring myself. I romanticize them as a way of distancing myself from them and letting go of some of that pain - in this way I
understand them as just a part of who I am today. We don’t call a butterfly a caterpillar once it grows wings.
In the boom of the industrial revolution many consumer corporations and businesses began to use their buildings as vehicles for advertisement. Sign painters, nicknamed “Wall Dogs” were hired to hang from pulley systems and scaffolding to paint announcements, services, products, and events. With the advent of computer software, sign painting has been displaced by computer-controlled machines. The craft has all but disappeared. The traces of these once vibrant advertisements have faded due to exposure from natural elements.
Most ghost signs persist for material reasons. Lead-based paint strongly adheres to the masonry surface and remains difficult or costly to eradicate. Sometimes they did not function as advertisements but as signage announcing the building’s name. Those types of signs now indicate the past life of a building. Often, the preservation or restoration of the work requires repainting the entire surface again. My research pointedly examines this language term “ghost signs” as a catalyst to examine histories that are abandoned or endangered.

*Because ghost signs are more than paintings on brick.*

“Meet me under the Kaufmann's Clock” was a frequent phrase throughout the 20th century, speaking to the captivating nature of the clock amidst the streets of Downtown Pittsburgh. The gracefully aging clock, named after the Kauffmann department store, has stood in the same spot for over a century, keeping time and attracting photographers (like myself).

During the holidays, the clock marked a place for families. Children would peer through the windows at magical Christmas displays filled with lights, decorations, and toys. “It was like Higbee’s in *A Christmas Story*” my mom, Emily Tuttle, recounted to me about the department store. As I began to examine archives and history, I became fascinated with the story around the clock and how these warped narratives can permeate time and shift our understanding of the world.
As an artist, I was trained to believe that what we can see and touch is only half of any object- the other half lies deeper- hidden in the material meaning and embedded metaphor. With luck and skill, an artist, (hopefully me), can convince a viewer that certain kinds of magic exist and to acknowledge that history, memory, and the ghosts of our pasts are sometimes just as tangible as anything we can hold in our hands.

In 1981, the Kauffmann’s Building was given landmark status from the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation after 68 years of timekeeping. The Kauffmann Clock, (still referred to as such, despite the bankruptcy of the Kaufmann department store and the subsequent name and usage shifts the real estate has undergone in the past 16 years), still stands there today. The fact that this strange but noble Clock will remain on the corner of Smithfield and Fifth
Avenue as a reference point and important identifier of downtown Pittsburgh is inspiring to me in its longevity and persistence.

Art history buffs may recognize Kauffmann's name as the financial backers and owners of the historic *Falling Water* by architect Frank Llyod Wright. Located in Bear Run, Pennsylvania, the summer home is nestled in its sylvan surroundings with sweeping horizontal lines and dramatic overhangs. *Fallingwater* and its 1,500 acres of land was left to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, by Kauffmann Jr. as a tribute to his parents.

Edgar Kauffman Jr. died in 1989 and his ashes were scattered on the property. His partner Paul Mayén’s ashes were scattered around the property of *Falling Water* with Edger’s in 2000.

*Ghost signs are more than paintings on brick.*

My interest in both the Kauffmann’s Clock and Frank Llyod Wright’s *Fallingwater* comes from how both of these narratives cantilever over their existing landscapes. Wright describes it as a tree formation that mimics the naturalistic style.

I began to activate the idea of the cantilever in my choreography this summer at the Abandon Practices Institute at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago. Inspired by the ghost signs and modernist architecture throughout the city, I pushed my body and fellow performers to think about extension and tension. We mimicked the positioning from Wright’s modernist design of “form follows function” by standing on one foot, holding our arms and legs out as parallel as we could. We hold these architectural positions without support. The audience watches this effort as the performers return the gaze. After a few minutes, the body begins to grow tired and
leads to a radical difference. The execution of the choreography is draining. Performers begin to fall to the ground and stand back up again, but they grow weaker and weaker as the performance continues. As we struggle to hold the poses, eventually toppling, we collectively recite the english alphabet, backwards, with each performer reciting one letter, in turn.

Z, Y, X….W, V, U,

When one performer grows tired we all stop.

T, S, R,

I can feel my ankle begin to give out,

Q, P, O…M N L,

I fall on my face.

K, J, I

Our breath gets heavier, we start shouting letters now.

H! G! F! E! D! C! B! ...A!

The alphabet becomes our timekeeper. Each letter becomes a passing hand of the clock. We fall. We get back up. The performance ends as the last performer’s body becomes exhausted, and experiences a collapse for gravity, much quicker then architectural masters.
“Standing tall verse gravity” performance still, 2019
Decoder Rings

In a personal dedication, Marsden Hartley’s *Portrait of a German Officer* fragmented the traditional still life or portrait into dynamic symbols, and into compositions that became puzzles. The coded message itself asks the viewer to work to solve it’s meaning. Thinking back to my museum visits at the National Portrait Gallery in DC, I came across a Hartley. I looked at the wall text for answers.

![Portrait of a German Officer, Mardsen Hartley, Museum of Modern Art, NYC](image)

“Following the death in the early stages of World War I of a German officer friend, grief-stricken Hartley commenced his famous War Motif series, in which symbols represent both the spiritual and physical aspects of his subjects.”
(National Portrait Museum)

In this painting military insignia, medals, Iron Cross, Flag of Bavaria, and the German flag are assembled and arranged into a fragmented portrait, cloaking an individual. No identifying features or markers that would signify a body are present, except the (vertical?)
arrangement and the initials “KvF” in the bottom left-hand corner in gold and red. From these clues and external research, the identity of KvF is revealed to be Karl von Freyburg, and the painted yellow '24' turns out to be the age von Freyburg was when he was killed. The painting is revealed as a secret love letter: Hartley conveyed his attraction choosing to paint a painting with a secret code to honor someone he fell in love with. Hartley conveyed his emotions regarding his “friend's” (or lover’s) traits in his paintings through everyday items (Meyer pg 68).

“Why must we hide who we are, and hide who we love?”

I have become incredibly fascinated by this language. A language that comes from small towns like mine, or spaces where queerness is still not as visible or predominant as the collective norm believes it to be. Language like Hartley’s paintings becomes a series of clues with alternative meanings. Where the meaning of words are lost and become weapons. A language that finds its way into history books, or childhood lullabies, that are repeated and repeated. As I began to unpack and expand the definition of ghost sign- I began to insert that history and practice into the work I was creating in my studio.

Because ghost signs don't need to be paintings on brick

Hartley lived and worked in a period when homosexuality was illegal and heavily stigmatized. At the turn of the twentieth century, homosexuality began to be attributed to someone’s identity or kind of person, rather than a discrete act, sin, or crime. The English word “homosexuality”, a medical invention, remained a clinical disorder until the mid-1920s.

Polari was a way to conduct a conversation in public spaces. This secret language alerts
others to your sexuality. Many of the words allow speakers to gossip about mutual friends or to critique the appearance of people who were in the immediate vicinity. It has also been used to elude acts of cruising, and places to find safety. During the first half of the 20th century, the language was associated with lower-class travelers, marketers, beggars, circus performers, and prostitutes. It eventually found its way into Britain, to London and port cities, and gradually became used by gay men and female impersonators. Polari became a tool to disguise homosexuals from hostile outsiders and undercover policemen. It was also used extensively in the British Merchant Navy, where many gay men joined ocean liners and cruise ships as waiters, stewards, and entertainers.

Polari supplemented with a wealth of slang terminology from different sources, including Cockney Rhyming Slang, backslang (pronouncing a word as if it was spelled backward), French, Yiddish, and American Air Force slang. The language itself, full of camp, irony, innuendo, and sarcasm, also helped its speakers to form a resilient worldview in the face of arrest, blackmail, and physical violence.

I don’t have hard facts to say that Hartley was influenced by Polari, or that his shame of loving a man caused him to create a coded portrait. I can’t help but see similarities in the object abstractions that Polari had to the language in Britain during the same time that Hartley, an English speaking artist, painted Portrait of a German Officer. Choosing to conceal his love for a friend of the same sex through symbols parallels concealing your sexuality through social expression.

I use symbols, layers, and gestures similar to Polari and Hartley’s abstractions that
communicate feelings, both familiar and peculiar, but not quite understood. It reflects on the
ghost of the past, haunts me as well as asks to be honored. The lowbrow craft supplies I use are
juxtaposed through slapdash and impromptu methods of construction, which mimic the costume
of circus performers and sideshow acts that inspired Polari, as well as nodding to the sometimes
colorful uniforms and trimmings of decorated military personnel. Through the materials I use
and the ways I choose to combine them, I feel I am stitching myself into the communities of
people and performers that I reference in my work.

The Twins get along with everyone except each other, 2019
Public Fish Sculptures along the Sunset

Ghost signs don’t need to be paintings on brick

They can also appear as paintings on fiberglass fish. I began to examine my work in relation to Erie, Pennsylvania, my hometown. Located along the Great lake it was named after, the city developed in the heart of the rust belt. An important manufacturing center during the Industrial Revolution, Erie acted as a railroad hub during the great American westward expansion.

Unfortunately, Erie’s industry began to decline by the 1970s as many factories fully shut down in the 1980 & ’90s. By the 21st century, Erie was a very different place that it had been in the past- effectively a shell of its former self. In the 2000's the Go Fish Erie Project emerged, transforming the downtown center into an aquarium in hopes to bring a vital splash of color to the grey skies, urban blight the city experienced in the decade prior.

This project partnered Erie Artists, City Officials, and corporate businesses together as a means to attract out-of-towners and ‘Erieites alike to witness them all.’ Modeled after the Cows on Parade in Chicago, the public art project invited local artists to decorate one of two options of fiberglass fish sculptures. These fish sculptures would then be placed outside or near local attractions, businesses, and scenic locations. Artists were juried through a proposal process and had the liberty to add relief features, to accent, or to fully transform their canvas into the creative vision.

Many cities and towns followed this trend in the early 2000s. Often cities select peculiar
animals or objects that reflect their town identity. Erie selected a mascot to echo it’s connection to the Great Lake. I remember as a child my grandparents would take my brother and me around town with our “Go Fish Erie Maps” to locate all of the artist designs. Due to the collapse of the industry, artist funding was incredibly limited. This project was my first encounter with contemporary art. 90 fish, all unique and special, located throughout the city to explore.

“Artifishial”, 2200 E 38th St, Erie, PA, Outdoor Sculpture

In my performances I examine abjection, humor, and shame and the ways in which they can be vehicles to embody a ghostly presence and subvert power relationships. Art critic and historian Lucy Lippard argues:

“that ‘taste’ structures museums collections, the commercial valuation of artworks, and cultural worth. Good and bad taste, she states, is largely class-determined, and since differences in class-status are inextricably linked to one's (racial, gendered, sexual, etc.) identity, ‘taste’ is also inseparable from such considerations.” (Lippard)
In Julia Kristeva’s “Powers of Horror” she writes:

“it is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, systems, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules”
(Kristeva pg 6)

As a queer person, I find that to be true with shame. Shame infects feelings, forces one to come out, and be prideful, shame separates. A normative structure that labeled me “as other” and is a weapon to make me feel unloveable.

Tacky, flamboyant, and peculiar, fish sculptures not only subvert the landscape of depressing Erie, Pennsylvania, but I believe they provide a queer insertion to a place that could be perceived as a small town and homophobic. As the sculptures turn 20 years old this year, they are weathered, sunbleached, and abandoned. My interest in these fish also explores feelings about awkwardness, camp, and fighting to not be forgotten.

(for a full description of the performance Singing a Landscape, Erie, Pennsylvania see appendix)
Flower power originated in Berkeley, California as a symbol of action or protest against the Vietnam War. In November of 1965, Allen Ginsberg’s essay How to Make a March/Spectacle advocated for peaceful gestures of resistance instead of violent ones. He stated that violence only causes more violence, so protestors should swarm with a “mass of flowers” to be handed out to armed forces, press, politicians, and spectators. This prompted advocates to use flowers, toys, flags, candy, paper halos, and music as a means of opposition during anti-war rallies. This sparked a form of street theatre that reduced fear, anger, and threats inherent within protests.

During the 1967 “March on The Pentagon”, an anti-war protest, the photographer Bernie Boston captured the photograph that he called “Flower Power”. The photograph depicts a young man, with long hair, in a turtleneck sweater, placing carnations into the rifle barrel of a military officer. The individual in the photograph was later identified as George Edgerly Harris III, an 18-year-old actor from New York. My interest in Harris started like any gay boy...his attractive features...but I was taken with the information that I learned as I continued to explore.

Harris grew up in Brookville, New York, and loved to perform with his siblings. Harris continued to pursue his acting career in New York City, until 1969 where he moved to San Francisco to start a new path. Harris became Hibiscus, whose full beard, vintage dresses, make-up, and costume jewelry created a defiant look, embracing a drag and drug path to spiritual liberation. This attracted a group of like-minded hippies who loved show-tunes, dressing up, showing off, and dropping acid.
I’ve been interested in drag and pageantry for many years, but the strongest influences on my work are the post stonewall era performers, The Cockettes. The man in the photograph above, Hibiscus, became one of the founding members and leader of the Cockettes. Most of the collective migrated to San Francisco, having bought one-way tickets from their perspective locations. From small plain towns that provided few opportunities, each member seeking new experience and adventure. Few members held regular jobs, and many identified as “college dropouts”. They collectively lived on the fringes of society, existing off of shared welfare checks and their ability to steal, barter, and trade.

The Cockettes were known for their elaborate costumes made from stolen, scavenged, and thrifted treasures. Their ad-hoc improvisation methods of construction matched their performance practice, both psychedelic, campy, and garish. Julia Bryan-Wilson writes in her book, Fray Art+textile politics

“Drag was a word used frequently by members of the Cockettes; rather than narrowly designating a modality of gender inversion, they understood drag as their daily process of getting dressed. It was how they referred, generically, to their clothes, in an acknowledgment that their outfits jumbled the norms and
codes of legibility of the straight world” (Fray 44).

They did not see their attire as costume, but as their true identity. They lived equally as family, theatre troupe, and were active promoters of a new queer feminist mode of fashion. No part of my practice is untouched by the impact the Cockettes have had on me. I want my work to reference their aesthetic rather than high-end glamor, and of course to reference their love of safety pins!

In my studio, I take the collage style from the two-dimensional wall pieces to freestanding walk around sculptures. Towering at 7 feet tall, my ghosts are larger than life and have a mysterious presence. Too large to veil just one body, they pose the possibility of holding more than one- a collective ghost.

When describing his portrait Felix Partz, 3 hours after his death, AA Bronson said:

“The photograph depicts Felix as he presented him in the last two weeks of his life. As he began to become more ill, he became more and more vibrant and surrounded in pattern, more full of life in a way.”(Bronson)

Materially, in print, Partz’s portrait is the scale of a commercial billboard. The image at that scale becomes a startling monument that forces us to confront our often repressed feelings about our own mortality.

AA Bronson describes this moment taking care of his collective comrades as a beautiful time, and taking the photo was a terrifying moment as the hairs stood up on the back of his neck. This is a ghost. Like Felix, Hibiscus was an early AIDS casualty: at the time of his death the new illness was still referred to as GRID or Gay-related-immune deficiency in 1982. At this time,
gay cancer and the gay plague were also used.

“We need to remember,” Bronson said, “that the diseased, the disabled, and, yes, even the dead walk among us. They are part of our community, our history, our continuity.”

(Bronson)

Bronson's work speaks to the tradition of post-mortem photography, the practice of photographing the recently deceased. Positioned as if to receive visitors, Partz’s emaciated figure is surrounded by brightly colored bedding and clothing, as well as other tokens of comfort including the remote, cigarettes, and his beloved tape recorder. His eyes couldn’t be closed upon dying. His eyes are haunting from hollow sockets and his face is relaxed.

Instead of thinking of these ghosts as normative depictions of white cotton bed sheets, I imagine them like AA Bronson describes, full of life, surrounded in pattern. In my studio I had some thrifted striped crocheted blankets which reminded me of one my grandmother had made for me as a child. I also had a small print out of Felix Partz’s portrait hanging in my studio. I was taken with his expression and collapse of capillary circulation throughout the body. Gravity caused the blood in his body to sink down into the lower parts and his face sagged. I began to cut
into the blankets. When they were hanging on the wall, they were smiling. The blankets like the photo of Felix Partz were bright, full of color. As I constructed the stand-alone sculptures in my studio they started to become *multi-facial*, and had no direction. They were staring at all angles. I wanted to capture Felix’s facial expression. One night I placed the afghan smiling blanket on to the sculpture, and draping changed its presence from a smile into a scream. I am drawn to the way this draping and stretching might mimic the faces of the recently departed- will my own face look like this when I die?

Smiling Afgan Blankets hanging an on *Goldie (Ghost), 2019*
Wallpaper

Behind the ghost was a printed and drawn wallpaper entitled *Remembering a Landscape and a Performance*, that took up the back wall of the installation. Talking through a series of performance notes and scores as the motif elements, I began to collage and draw or fill in elements that inspired the work. Taking direct imagery from the song musical lyrics: *Do a deer a female deer, ray a drop of golden sun, mi a name I call myself, fa a long long way to run, sew needle pulling thread, la a note to follow sew, tea a drink with jam and bread*. The second set of imagery, symbols from my home, was layered atop the first.

In his work *Untitled*, at the Paula Cooper Gallery in New York in 1989, Robert Gober constructed two three-sided rooms defined by temporary sheetrock walls. The rooms were outfitted with wallpaper depicting alternating images of a sleeping white man and a lynched black man hanging from a tree. At the literal center of the installation, the figure of a bride is strongly conjured by a wedding dress supported by a welded steel armature. The delicate dress stands rigid and empty, waiting to be filled. Gober himself has speculated that the relationship between the bride and the sleeping man in the wallpaper is that of husband and wife. Eight hand-painted plaster bags of cat litter line the walls of the room. A material that absorbs or hides waste, the litter serves as a symbolic remedy for the figurative mess of the bride, groom, and murdered black man.
Elissa Auther writes in her essay *Wallpaper, the Decorative and Contemporary Art* Installation:

“Gober’s use of wallpaper for this installation trades on the mediums associated with domestic intimacy and its conventional functions as decorative or background pattern. Like his earlier [work]...the wallpaper for this installation undermines a conception of the home as safe, pure, comfortable, or familiar by acting as a distorting mirror.” (Auther pg 125)

I echo that statement with the imagery depicted in 3 self-portraits: a triangle repeated throughout the back wall (with openings that are later filled with the sharpie drawings). The self-portraits are all actions repeated in the performance *Mi a name I call myself (Singing a Landscape, Erie, PA)*. One drawing is of me running in place, one is of me falling, and the last is of me gagging on my own fingers. Surrounding these drawings are decorative embellishments that are also a part of the ghosts. When entering the exhibition, there is almost no area of visual rest. The wallpaper becomes the backdrop for the ghosts that are emerging forward, in beaming
colors. They are still in space, not together or separate, but drifting full of color and more full of life in a way...and there is an overpowering smell of fresh oranges filling the gallery.

*Strange Fruit (for David)* was made over the course of five years from the rinds and skin of about three hundred pieces of fruit that the artist Zoe Leonard and her friends had eaten and then allowed to dry. She “repaired” and adorned the opened seams with colored thread, shiny wires, buttons, and zippers. Leonard explains that the piece developed as a work of mourning after a friend's death, "a sort of a way to sew myself back up." She began with two oranges were sewn in Provincetown, continued in New York, and later in Alaska, where she relied on fruit sent to her by mail. The “David” in the Title and the sewing closure, is a reference to the artist and activist David Wojnarowicz whose work highlighted issues around systemic oppression and discrimination, particularly with respect to the AIDS crisis.
Like a sun over Lake Erie turning the sky golden orange and pink, the drying oranges in my work reference Zoe Leonard’s *Strange Fruit (for David)*. They become another clue that is not a utopia. I placed whole and peeled oranges on the top of the wall for the duration of the installation of the exhibition. Throughout the first night and during the exhibition, within weeks the orange began to dry, teeter and fall from the sky like rain. Often, you would hear it happening before you could see the last few seconds before one hit the floor, it would feel like a phantom shuffling the edge or playing a trick.

“The bed of my friends are made from the scarps in my basement” installation view, 2019
“Flowers, Ghosts, and Studyguides Oh My!”

For my thesis exhibition I have attempted to address action creating a floor piece that acts as a sight of performances, leisure, and education. The impetus for the floor piece in the installation was Lin Hixon’s description of Pina Bausch’s 1982 masterwork *Nelken (Carnations)*:

“Imagine a floor as an obstacle, a vibrant floor that resists the feet of the performers, a floor that we have discovered and allowed, that impedes the dance and becomes a duet. Consider this floor from Carnations, the 1982 work of the Wüpperthaler Tanztheater with a floor as a remembered field of flowers from the childhood of choreographer Pina Bausch. The carnations of *Nelken* operate in a similar way. As the performance begins, one first apprehends the floor as an image and a visual field. Soon the dancers enter, walking across the field, slowed by it, hesitating, lifting, and placing their feet. In these moments, as the relation with the human became clear, the evocations of memory arose most clearly.” (Hixon)
Despite being performed on a bed of pink carnations, it’s dark and foreboding, pushing on this dream is fantasy or nightmare. *Carnations* is composed of different vignettes, permeated with vivacious energy, humor, and a sensitivity to the human psyche, with its dreams, fears, and longing for love. Rather than a traditional narrative arc, the connection between the different scenes is created through the feelings and associations they evoke from these vignettes. As the dancers move and create a series of ad-hoc and surreal sequences that ultimately cause the destruction of the field. This work speaks to me and a series of my own work throughout my practices and feels poignant. Paralleling emotions and movements through repetition, endurance and humor.

In my installation the audience will be a part of the performance in the round instead of viewing from a stage. Instead of the floor being covered in flowers, mine would be covered with quilts. The AIDS memorial quilt project on the Washington Mall, led by Cleve Jones, and the collective energy of community has been a source of inspiration for me as a queer artist working in fiber. Like the Cockettes and Pepe Espalui, I am interested in how this object has created collective kinship
and addressed cultural norms. In an era when funeral homes would decline the handle of bodies of those who died of AIDS, and relatives, routinely declined to recognize the surviving queer family, the AIDS Memorial Quilt gave a larger meaning to an individual right to grieve. The Quilt follows a formula that brings a web of mourners together with makers to process their loss through creativity

Julia Bryant-Wilson writes in her very expansive essay on the quilt in Fray: Art + Textile Politic:

“We should neither overlook the fault lines of the AIDS Quilt nor nostalgically champion it. Instead we must struggle to preserve and complicate these histories; as I have suggested, one way to do justice to it is to attend to its specific formal idiosyncrasies—to take it seriously as a textile that offers a plenitude of visual material, rather than a monolithic abstraction. The Quilt is not only an abject object or kitsch creation but also a polyvocal site of conflict—a conflict that plays out across its textured surface.” (Bryant-Wilson, 250)

For me the AIDS Quilt becomes a visual reference that I depart from, but I look towards it as a visual material that covers the landscape. Before I go any further, I must first address it’s formal and technical qualities.

Each panel and name dedication measures the standard size of a human grave 3ft by 6th. Drawing from the quilt language each panel is arranged like “blocks" grouping and arranging and then sewn together to form twelve by twelve feet squares. Each square contains 8 blocks (normally). Then it is stitched together and finished with an off-white canvas border and grommets spaced evenly to hold each piece down from big winds. Cleve Jones started this project not knowing how to sew, so created in a fury using stencils and spray paint to his lost friends.
As the project took off, regional community centers and advocates would hold information sessions, workshops, and making parties. Appropriating the communal craft tradition of woman’s quilting bees, into a more expansive representation of gender. Access to the project was ultimately defined by communities’ resources to time, labor, and material. This obvious race and class determined, and representation of the gay men reflecting in the early years of the pandemic is a product of that. However there has been including heterosexual men, women, and children as the project progressed.

The list of material is almost as expansive as the panels themselves, and I try to capture that spirit materially in my own work. Pantyhose, flowers, jewelry, barbie dolls, photographs, feather boas, stuff animals, records and cassette tapes, baby clothes, human hair medical scrubs, coupons, mementos like magnets and figurines, matchbooks, napkins from restaurants, military regalia, shoes, jockstraps, bathings suits, postcards, news clippings, beads, seashells, buttons, patches, bowling balls, and even the deceased ashes are integrated apart of the work. These items are kitschy and banal, and animate the personal panels, infusing the work with stains, smells, and textures that become reliquaries, evoking a personal identity amongst the mass.
I have only experienced the quilt in a fragment one time, in 2017, in Philadelphia. The event was in the Northeast area Philadelphia, at the Tacony Branch of the Free Library. Featuring 14 blocks of Quilt panels, some with ties to the Philadelphia area, the event had live music, and all the quilts were suspended vertically on amateurs (not depicted like in the photo). My job (which was part-time) was to support a generation of older quaker individuals, running errands for them, supporting them with daily chores, and the occasional evening outing often hosted by a monthly meeting. A few of the members in my community, were older gay men who had lived through the AIDS crisis. We attended this event together.

For me this moment was an educational lesson, a party, and a place for the community to share stories. The men that I drove to the event shared their remembrances of the past with me. The
spoke about their faith and how through monogamy -or celibacy-was the key to their “survival of this plague”. Many of their friends did not survive as they did, and they spoke of the grief they felt at the disappearance of some many members of their community. One of the men, Carter, even made one of the panels that were in the collection at the event. He spoke about how it was the only thing he ever sewed, and how challenging the embroidery of the name was both physically and emotionally. He said that he just wanted to use glue, but knew the stitch was more long-lasting. He hadn't expected to see the quilt again in his lifetime. The time we spent that night searching for his contribution, sharing stories and grieving together for all those who were lost to AIDS, will forever be a treasured memory.

Nelson Goodman writes:

“We start, on any occasion, with some old version or world that we have on hand and that we are stuck with until we have the determination and skill to remake it into a new one” (Goodman)

Cutting, arranging, organizing, piecing, stitching. Collage as a medium personally excites me. It's accessible to a wide range of skill sets, it's affordable to a teacher and an artist. The nonlinear structure mimics the queer collectivity and community I am trying to build in the world. Juxtaposing materials allows discovery in the process of doing, and the end product is not the goal. Like the performances I organize, a framework is used for navigation, but each situation is different and every rendition unique.

My proposed thesis exhibition would feature a floor piece which would mimic the AIDS Quilt in material range and density. In this piece I wanted to reflect the cacophony of experiences, histories, memories and material references I have previously mentioned in this series of essays and vignettes. Like a scavenger hunt, I sprinkle imagery, text, and material
throughout the work. Echoing Pina Bausch’s Nelken, I wanted my audience members to move through the piece, navigating their own path by following writing, drawings, and collaged personal items.

At various “stations,” there would be an interruption of Red Igloo Coolers. Ready for a picnic, the cooler labels read:

“working hard or playing harder, their 9-quart cooler is the perfect size for lunch on the move, featuring a compact, easy-to-carry design that keeps snacks and drinks colder for longer by elevating them away from the heat of the ground.”

...expect once the audience opens them they discover a cornucopia of a different sort.

Inside, the coolers are filled with short readings by queer theorist, fan-zines of various queer thread artist, LGBTQIA+ artist flashcards, and drawing activities with an assortment of markers, and stickers. It is my hope that by creating an inclusive space for participation, my work and process could inspire constructive dialogue around queer pedagogy, placemaking, and history that has been so important to my practice. Furthermore, the coolers aim to serve as a reference for future practitioners that work with queer youth and in queer spaces.
Inprogress collages, before university, closed fine art building, 2020
Appendix

(Singing a landscape Erie, Pennsylvania)

Jose Munoz writes in the opening of *Disidentification* “There is a certain lure to the spectacle of one queer standing on stage alone…. without props, bent on the project of opening up a work of queer language, lyricism, perceptions, dreams. Solo performance speaks to the reality of being queer at this particular moment.” (Munoz, pg1)

In my performance “Singing a landscape (Erie, Pennsylvania)” I use a fish sculpture as a character. Not 90 fish all unique and special around the city to explore, but 1, standing before preparing to sing his final song. Standing in front of my music stand I continue that expectation for my audience as I begin using a tuning pipe and sing my first note. The humorful nod begins as I sing “Do Re Mi” a song made famous by Julie Andrews in the Sound of Music.

Within the story, the song is used to teach the notes of the major musical scale. Each syllable of the musical system appears in the song's lyrics, sung on the pitch it names. The lyrics teach the syllables by linking them with English homophones. Homophones are two or more words having the same pronunciation but different meanings, origins, or spelling.

The song use of homophones teaches the musical scale becomes a code for understanding. 2 Homophones examples in the song, “Doe a deer a female deer” or “me a name I call myself” The singer is singing “Do” “D-O” but are asked to picture a female deer “D-O-E” This logic bends The childhood tendency of right and wrong to create a beautiful melody and to teach a lesson.

What are other ways we bend the rules to teach a lesson? Or to create a beautiful melody?
As a queer person, it’s hard to unpack learning lessons without considering shame. Shame teaches us that we have to come out to be accepted. Shame separates me and my body as “other”.

The root word in homophones: homo is a word with alternate meanings in itself

- Meaning same, or one
- Also referring to humans through a scientific lens
- And as through a lens of shame, being an offensive term to refer to a gay man.

As I reflect on this pejorative term, homo, I reflect on the shame taught to me by a ruleless logic in middle school: “Chorus is for homos”. Singing would make “me, the name I call myself, a homo”. In the performance, instead of motioning to my chest, I subvert the action by pointing my finger inward….. Into my mouth and I repeat the song, adding an additional finger at the beginning of each phrase.
“Mi a name I call myself” (Singing a landscape, Erie, PA), performance, 2019

The fingers I am gathering are not mine, but the audience members’.

What are other ways we bend the rules to teach a lesson?

Or to create a beautiful melody?

I motion toward an audience member by breaking the 4th wall as the performer. I invite the audience into this world. In those moments, I confront the messiness of feeling that I face in the political structures of this world that confine queer bodies. My queer body. I place a latex glove on the audience members’ hand, singing them the phrases, *Doe a deer a female deer, ray of a drop of golden song, mi a name I call myself (Sing with 1 finger in your mouth)*, and that moment I motion for the audience member to place their finger in my mouth, disrupting my
As I complete this action I leave the platform in which I sing. Each platform is a bucket, filled with color reactive dye. As my white socks enter the bucket they become saturated with the color, creating footprints along the ground tracing my steps.

_Do a deer, a female deer, ray a drop of golden sun, mi a name I call myself (Sing with 2 fingers in your mouth)._ 

There becomes a choice for the audience member to make: Do they stand by a bucket to participate in the work, do they move out of the way, or do they try to capture the moment to share with someone else? _Do a deer a female deer, ray a drop of golden sun, mi a name I call myself (Sing with 3 fingers in your mouth)._ What are other ways we bend the rules to teach a lesson? Or to create a beautiful melody?
In this performance I take the gesture of hooking the fish by the month and “queering” the power dynamics. I, the fish or the prey have the power, and the audience member or the fisher is the follower. We leave the platform together to the next bucket across the room. What are other ways we bend the rules to teach a lesson? Or to create a beautiful melody?

_Do a deer a female deer, Ray a drop of golden sun, Me a name I call myself (sing with 5 fingers in your mouth)_

As I repeat these actions, the anxiety of the work builds. As the second hand of the audience members is introduced, the song becomes less and less recognizable as well as difficult.
for me as the performer to sing. I continue these actions around the room, my voice filling the space and architecture echo’s it but it also begins to get muffled. Who has the power? Who is in control? The buckets are all different colors, shapes, and size, changing my footing, and reliance on the participants, our power dynamic is shifted. I begin to lean on them for support.

The ones who choke me also keep me standing. We make eye contact. There is giggling. I am breathing heavily. The singing continues. Do a deer a female deer, ray a drop of golden sun, mi a name I call myself (sing with 7 fingers) What are other ways we bend the rules to teach a lesson? Or to create a beautiful melody?

My footprints change color again as we move to the next.

As all ten fingers point inward to me, Do a deer a female deer, I experience a gagging sensation and farther down, spasms in the stomach, ray a drop of golden sun, provoking tears and bile. As expel it...I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which I claim to establish myself. (from Kristeva pg 8)

The performance ends as I return to the music stand with members of the audience. Removing the hand from my mouth and taking the glove with it. Each audience member naturally backed away from me as I bowed in the bucket.
Endnotes


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The Physics Classroom © 1996-2020. May 1, 2020


Vita

Education
2018-2020  MFA- Virginia Commonwealth University, Fiber, Craft & Material Studies, Richmond, VA
2015-16   Post-Baccalaureate Tyler School of Art, Fibers & Material Studies Department, Philadelphia, PA
2009-13  BFA Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, Cum Laude, Slippery Rock, PA

Solo & Two-Person Exhibitions
2021   (forthcoming) “Ghost signs we see”, Iridian Gallery, Richmond, VA
2020   (forthcoming) The bed of my friends is made of the scraps of my basement, Marlin and Regina Miller Gallery, Kutztown University, Kutztown, PA
2019   Don’t let them clip you tiny little insect wings, curated by Jessica Brigham, University Galleries of Illinois State University, Normal-Bloomington, IL.
        Drawing, Ephemera & Scores of Performances, Milner Library, Illinois State University, Normal-Bloomington, IL.
        Puffer Fish, Anderson Gallery, Richmond, VA
        Trot, Tip-toe & Gallop, Project 1612, Peoria, IL
        Space Jam, University City Arts League, Philadelphia, PA
        The Ghost of you is what haunts me, Bunker Project, Pittsburgh, PA
2017   Neck Out, Practice Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
        Objects in between Us, Random Access Gallery, Syracuse NY
2016   Flex, Stellia Elkins Tyler Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
2014   Unnecessary Details, Two-Person Show with Louise O’Rourke, Salon 1522, Philadelphia, PA
2013   Boys, Girls, Ladies, & Gentlemen, Martha Gault Gallery, Slippery Rock, PA

Performances
2019   Fish Parade, Virginia Commonwealth University to the Institute of Contemporary Art, Richmond, VA
        UnBound 8, Candela Books + Gallery, Richmond, VA
        It’s going to feel like Wednesday all day, Fine Art Building, Virginia Commonwealth University, VA
        Las Flowers of La Mitochondria, Performance with Sungjae Lee, No-nation Art Lab, Chicago, IL
        Abandoned Practices Institute, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL
2018   I told you a secret and you told everyone the floor was lava, Anderson Gallery, Richmond VA
        Exorcism, Glitter Box Theater, Pittsburgh, PA
        Pen-Pals, LB&T2F collaboration, Little Berlin, Philadelphia, PA
        Hey honey bee be happy bee happy, Arts and Crafts Holding, Philadelphia, PA
        Queer (R)ager, curated by Amy Cousins, The Galleries at the University of Illinois, Normal, IL
        Real Adult, Mazzoni Center, Philadelphia, PA
        Uline Official, Baltimore Artist-Run Art Fair, Little Berlin, Baltimore, MD
        I/We In/Out/ Our/Own, 733 N. 2nd Art Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
2016   Poems Night, Little Berlin, Philadelphia, PA
        Safe Space, Suite 250 Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia, PA
        Lip Sync for your Final Grade, Tyler School of Art-Artist Palate, Philadelphia, PA

Group Exhibitions
2020   (Forthcoming) VCU Graduate Thesis Exhibition, The Anderson, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
        The Daily, Ely Center for Contemporary Art, New Haven, CT
        Insert; SELF, Galleries at Main Street Station, Richmond, VA
2019   American Life, Ohklahomo, Chicago, IL
        Serial/ Parallel, Sullivan Galleries, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL
        Because Of, ArtSpace, Richmond, Virginia
        Sample, Anderson Gallery, Virginia Commonwealth University
2018   Hiss Issue 3 Launch Party & Screening, Wexner Center, Columbus, OH
        Formerly Philly, University City Arts League, Philadelphia, PA
        Exchange, The Front Gallery, New Orleans, LA
New People So Rarely Settled, Kitchen Table Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
Stitches in Time, Old Stone House, Slippery Rock, PA
Different Directions, Butler Art Center, Butler, PA
Where You Go, Martha Gault Art Gallery, Slippery Rock, PA
Full Stop, curated by Joe Arci, After School Special, Milwaukee, WI
Pen-Pals, LB&T2F collaboration, The Second Floor, Karachi, Pakistan

2017
Private/Personal, curated by Ashley Feagin, EastEnd Studio & Gallery, Marshall, MI
Educators Exhibition, Friend Select Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
Wood, Practice Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
Vacation in November, Annex -Little Berlin, Philadelphia, PA
Family, Annual Juried Exhibition, William Way Community Center, Philadelphia, PA
Idle Hands, Juried Exhibition, Pilot Project, Philadelphia, PA
Alt-Love, 733 N. 2nd Art Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
Decade: New Members Exhibition, Little Berlin, Philadelphia, PA

2016
Autumn Exhibition, Eye’s Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
Live/Work, juried exhibition, Icebox Project Space, Philadelphia, PA
Art Educators Exhibition, City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, Asian Art Initiative, Philadelphia, PA
Annual Tyler Juried Exhibition, Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia, PA

2015
Remake Revise, Group Exhibition – Stella Elkins Tyler Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
Suite 250 Installation, Fibers & Material Studies Suite, Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia, PA
9th Annual Juried Art Exhibition, Winners Show, William Way LGBT Community Center, Philadelphia, PA

2014
9th Annual Juried Art Exhibition, William Way LGBT Community Center, Philadelphia, PA
Gallery Walk, Project Safe Zone, City Year Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA
BFA Senior Exhibition, Martha Gault Art Gallery, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, PA
Kaleidoscope Student Show, University Union, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, PA
Annual SRU Student Juried Exhibition, Martha Gault Gallery, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, PA
Slippery Rock Autumn Student Show, Bottlebrush Gallery, Harmony, PA

2012
Inter-studio Collaborative Exhibition, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock PA
Out of Context Exhibition, Spinning Plate Gallery, Pittsburgh, PA
60X60 Experimental Music and Dance Concert, West Gym, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, PA
While You Were Out Exhibition, Martha Gault Gallery, Slippery Rock, PA
Kaleidoscope Student Show, Miller Auditorium, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, PA
It’s almost summer, Associated Artist of Butler County, Butler, PA
Annual SRU Student Juried Exhibition, Martha Gault Gallery, Slippery Rock PA
Sketchbook Project, Art House Cooperation, Brooklyn, New York
Winter Collaborative, Bottlebrush Gallery, Harmony, PA

2011
Kaleidoscope Student Show, Miller Auditorium, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, PA
Slippery Rock Campus Autumn Banner Exhibit, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, PA

2010
Kaleidoscope Student Show, Miller Auditorium, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, PA
Juror’s Award- Annual Student Juried Exhibition, Martha Gault Gallery, Slippery Rock, PA

Curatorial Projects
2018
Hickey, collaboration with Fred Blauth, Little Berlin, Philadelphia, PA
The Dr. Jones’ Excellent Art Show, Bunker Projects NCECA, Pittsburgh, PA

2017
I grit my teeth before it began, Little Berlin, Philadelphia, PA

Civic Engagement and Public Art Projects
2019
Don’t Let them Clip you tiny little insect wings Workshop, The College of New Jersey
Don’t Let them Clip you tiny little insect wings Workshop, Office of Multicultural Student Affairs, VCU, Richmond, VA

2018
Fabulous Fashion, Philadelphia Museum of Art Family Fest, Philadelphia, PA
Our Ugly Sweater Party, Philadelphia Museum of Art Final Friday, Philadelphia, PA
Inside Out, collaborations with Jesse Harrod, West Fairmount Park Arts Fest, Philadelphia, PA

2017
Safe Space High School Workshop, Friends Select School, Philadelphia, PA
Please Crush Museum, RAIR, Philadelphia, PA

2016  Collaborative Weaving, Arch Street Meeting House, Philadelphia, PA
Community Weaving, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Friends Center Philadelphia, PA
REcreation, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Muhlenberg College, Allentown, PA
Mosaic Mural Workshop, Isaiah Zagar, South Street Whole Foods, Philadelphia, PA

2015  Collaborative Weaving, Arch Street Meeting House, Philadelphia, PA
Community Weaving, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Friends Center Philadelphia, PA
REcreation, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Muhlenberg College, Allentown, PA
Mosaic Mural Workshop, Isaiah Zagar, South Street Whole Foods, Philadelphia, PA

Chew Recreational Center, Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, Parks and Recreation, Philadelphia, PA

2014  Coming Out and College Lecture, Friends Select, Philadelphia, PA
Gallery Walk, Project Safe Zone, City Year Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA
Spring Break Service Project, Universal Bluford Elementary School, Philadelphia, PA
Comcast Care Day, GW Childes Elementary School, Philadelphia, PA
Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service, Blaine Academics Plus, Philadelphia, PA

2013  City Year Serves Day, Tilden Middle School, Philadelphia, PA
City Year Opening Day of Service, Mastery Charter Schools, Shoemaker Campus, Philadelphia, PA
Slippery Rock Main Street Spring Banner Exhibition, Slippery Rock, PA

2012  Picnic Table Murals, Slippery Rock Community Park, Slippery Rock, PA
Slippery Rock Campus Autumn Outdoor Banner Exhibit, Slippery Rock, PA

2011  Slippery Rock Campus Autumn Banner Exhibit, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, PA
Picnic Table Mural, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, PA

Residencies
2019  Snipes Farm Education Center, Artist in Residence
Abandoned Practices Institute, School of the Art Institute of Chicago

2018  Project 1612, Artist in Residences
University City Arts League, Teaching Artist in Residence

2017  Bunker Projects, Artist in Residences
Fabric Workshop Apprentice Program

Awards
2020  Lavender Empowerment Distinguish Graduate, Office of Multicultural Student Affairs, VCU
Graduate Thesis Grant, Virginia Commonwealth University
Graduate Studies Travel Grant, Virginia Commonwealth University

2019  MECCPAC Grant, Illinois State University
Illinois Arts Council Agency, Illinois State University
Town of Normal Harmon Arts Grant, Normal Illinois
Quaker Life Council Research Grant, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting
Graduate Studies Travel Grant - Virginia Commonwealth University

2018  Graduate Studies Travel Grant - Virginia Commonwealth University
Graduate School Assistantship, Virginia Commonwealth University

2017  Quaker Life Council Research Grant, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting
Signaling the Refusal of Mastery & an Insistence on Processing & Becoming Award, Genderfail Press
Worst in Show/Worst Ready-made, Pilot Projects,
Laurie Wagman Alumni Lecture, Tyler School of Art, Craft Department

2015  Segal Education Award
City Year Philadelphia Corp Member Community Inspirational Lecture

2014  Juror's Award, William Way LGBT Community Center
Segal Education Award

2013  Distinguished Graduate of the LGBTQ Community of Slippery Rock University

2012  Martha Gault Art Scholarship
2018-2020- Equality VCU, Virginia Commonwealth University
2016-18- Little Berlin Artist Collective Membership, Philadelphia, PA
2009-13- Martha Gault Art Society, Slippery Rock University - President

Teaching Experience
2020  Virginia Commonwealth University, Teaching Assistant for Intro to Textiles Course
      Virginia Commonwealth University, Teaching Assistant for Material & Meaning/ Adv Fabric Design Course
2019  Virginia Commonwealth University, Teaching Assistant for Screen Print/ Adv Fabric Design Course
2018  Virginia Commonwealth University, Teaching Assistant for Pattern Weaving Course
2016  Tyler School of Art, Teaching Assistant for Introduction for Fibers and Material Studies

Lectures/ Visiting Artist
2020  Kansas City Art Institute, Queer Archive, Kansas City, MO Visiting Artist Lecture
      Stetson University, Deland, FL, Visiting Artist Lecture
2019  Institute of Contemporary Art, Richmond VA, Craft / Material Studies Graduate Lecture
      Illinois State University, Milner Library Lecture
      Materializing Resistance: Gender, Politics, and Craft Symposium, University of Kentucky, Presenter
2018  The College of New Jersey, Visiting Artist Lecture
      Tyler School of Art, Craft Seminar Professional Practices, Lecturer
2017  Moore College of Art, Socially Engaged Graduate Studies, Lecturer
      Tyler School of Art, Craft Seminar Professional Practices, Lecturer
      Fabric Workshop & Museum, Apprentice Lecture
2016  Random Access Gallery, Syracuse University, Visiting Artist
      Tyler School of Art, Craft Seminar Professional Practices, Lecturer

Queer Activism/ Youth Mentorship
2019  Office of Multicultural Affairs, LGBTQIA+ Student Service Assistant
      Side by Side Community Quilting Bee, Studio Assistant & Quilter
2018  University City Arts League, Summer Program, Teaching Artist in Residence
      Friends Select, Day School Substitute & After School Teacher
      Gay, Lesbian of Whatever (GLOW) Club Advisor, Friends Select
      Philadelphia Art Center, Visiting Teaching Artist
2017  Spiral Q: Art and Stories, Intergenerational Workshop, College of New Jersey, Instructor
2016  Philadelphia’s Magic Gardens, Peco Family Jams, Teaching Artist
      Philadelphia Mural Art Program, Chew Recreational Center, Artist Assistant
2015  Philadelphia’s Magic Gardens, Twilight in the Gardens, Teaching Artist Assistant
      Assemble Pittsburgh, Crafternoon Teaching Artist, Visiting Artist
      Blu Ford Universal Charter School, City Year Philadelphia, 5th grade Americorp Member
2014  Grover Washington Jr, Middle School, City Year Philadelphia, 7th grade Americorp Member
2013  Rhodes Elementary School, City Year Philadelphia, Americorp Member
      Mattress Factory Museum, Art Lab Community Days, Volunteer
2012  Kaleidoscope Art Festival, Teaching Artist
2011  Slippery Rock Public Library, Teaching Artist
      Westminster Highlands, Teaching Artist & Program Coordinator
2010  Camp Lambec, Teaching Artist and Program Coordinator

Related Experience
2020  Landscaping and Home Renovation, COVID-19 employment, Emily Tuttle
2018-2019- Studio Assistant/ Screen Printer, Invasive Queer Kudzu Project
2018  Monitor Manager- Fiber Area, Craft/ Material Studies Department, Virginia Commonwealth University
2016-2018- Studio Assistant, Jesse Harrod
2016-2017 - Product Finisher - Rittenhouse Needlepoint
2014-2016 - Philadelphia’s Magic Gardens, Visitor Assistant
2014-2015 - Studio Monitor, Technician’s Assistant, Tyler Fibers & Material Studies Studio
2013 - Studio Assistant, Sarah Hempel-Irini
2012 - Studio Assistant/ Gallery Docent - Tom Ferraro Studios- The Looking Glass Projects