

Master of Fine Arts Thesis

If Not **Home**, Then **Where**?
An Act of Queer Healing

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Abstract

This paper in consortium alongside the MFA Thesis exhibition “If Not Home, Then Where” and the art history paper “Hidden Voices - The ancient lives of the LGBTQ+ community seen through ceramics and sculpture”¹ completes an preliminary intersectional examination of queer identity conducted during this two year program.

Exhibition Statement:

By exploring queer identity through the different lenses of art, history, language, and space one can begin to understand the wide and complicated ranges of the queer experience told from a queer point of view.

So much is lacking in academic institutions when it comes to supporting queer identifying students especially with faculty, classes, and availably taught subjects. “Queer studies” is often religated to the study of Sex, and when looking at the Arts we see the cis/het majority’s sway. Queer art often puts queer bodies, hypererotized, at the center showcasing queer identity purely by the sex the community has or by the genitals so often demanded to be put on display.

Often queer students and artists are made to bare their bodies and their intimate moments. Their work is not authentic enough to be queer if those ideals, set historically by the cis/het majority, are not met. I contest these ideals by refusing to showcase my body or any other queer body in a way that puts their sex or sexuality on display. The focus rather is to attempt to dig deeper into the queer experience, looking to themes dealing with isolation, loneliness, homelessness, abuse, and the act of searching for ourselves when the world seems to deny our existence time and time again.

¹ Available in through the Scholes Library Special Collections

Dedicated to all Queers feelings lost,
You will always be welcome here with me. Home.

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Forward

“We are entitled to our anger in response to this oppression: our anger is a message to ourselves that we need to get active and change something in order to survive.”

— **Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us***

There are times in life, where reflection is the only way forward. You look back on your experience through life, recognizing that hurt is prevalent enough to cause you to freeze and stop truly living. As a maker, my ability to work is tied and perhaps at the mercy of my ability to navigate everyday life as a queer person with a hefty amount of trauma and emotional baggage. What I’ve come to realize is that there is a dance in forgiving, holding on to painful things, and my own ability to use those things to make work that I feel I can connect with and connect with others through.

Ultimately, balancing between past hurts and currently occurring hurts associated with my queerness is challenging. Much of what I do is attempting to educate the people and the spaces around me, to hopefully appear more normal and less alien. The work is exhausting but with the promise of experiencing less painful things in those spaces with those people. However, it often feels contrite, belittling and aggravating like a twisting and untwisting deep seated knife wedged in the pit of my belly. The belief that our “self-realization” is entirely on us “queerfolk” and that the difficulties we experience are due to our selfish, self-centered “choices”, is a hard pill to swallow. It moves the blame of the pain, the discrimination, the bullying, the violence, the isolation and the physical, emotional and literal homelessness we feel onto us and away from the cis/het majority that dominates our world.

Erasure and silence are perhaps the most totalling and destructive forces for the queer community driven by the cis/het majority. Done in excruciating ignorance, queer youths are left grappling to validate their existence from the moment of recognition that they are somehow, in some way different. Many are left falling with no guidance, no

understanding that they in fact belong to an ancient, rich, beautiful, and global community with deep histories, cultures, rituals and ancestors. My own queer story is not so different.

As a child, I just knew that I was different despite the fact that I had no frame to explain or understand how I was different. I wasn't given access to knowledge, to language or the acceptance to even begin to understand. I was left to drown in my own shame, to feel separated and isolated from peers and was made to understand that I was at fault purely because I was the one with the queer and warped problem even if I couldn't understand it, verbalize it or see it. Because of that shame and the guilt that grew with me from the moment of self awareness, I felt like I was living on borrowed time. I couldn't see my past, I could barely register my present, let alone believe in a future.

In reflection, like perhaps every queer kid, in recognizing my own queerness, is that what I wholeheartedly wished for was to be loved. To fit in. To be safe. In recent years, social activism has moved heaven and earth to make life more bearable and full for the queer youth now growing up in this world, so that they don't have to learn the burden of growing up the way we did. In that work, I and older queers are finding healing but most importantly we are finding our voices and the language to share our stories.

Work containing queerness without the use of coded or hidden language is new. It is evolving and the people making the work right now are learning as they make. The ability to read and negotiate queer art loudly for what it is, is the new resistance.

GLOSSARY

sourced from the Human Rights Campaign Website

Ally | A term used to describe someone who is actively supportive of LGBTQ people. It encompasses straight and cisgender allies, as well as those within the LGBTQ community who support each other (e.g., a lesbian who is an ally to the bisexual community).

Asexual | Often called “ace” for short, asexual refers to a complete or partial lack of sexual attraction or lack of interest in sexual activity with others. Asexuality exists on a spectrum, and asexual people may experience no, little or conditional sexual attraction.

Biphobia | The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people who love and are sexually attracted to more than one gender.

Bisexual | A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. Sometimes used interchangeably with pansexual.

Cisgender | A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Coming Out | The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates their sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others.

Gay | A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender. Men, women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

Gender binary | A system in which gender is constructed into two strict categories of male or female. Gender identity is expected to align with the sex assigned at birth and gender expressions and roles fit traditional expectations.

Gender dysphoria | Clinically significant distress caused when a person's assigned birth gender is not the same as the one with which they identify.

Gender-expansive | A person with a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system. Often used as an umbrella term when referring to young people still exploring the possibilities of their gender expression and/or gender identity.

Gender expression | External appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, body characteristics or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.

Gender-fluid | A person who does not identify with a single fixed gender or has a fluid or unfixed gender identity.

Gender identity | One's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.

Gender non-conforming | A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category. While many also identify as transgender, not all gender non-conforming people do.

Genderqueer | Genderqueer people typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and often, though not always, sexual orientation. People who identify as "genderqueer" may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female or as falling completely outside these categories.

Homophobia | The fear and hatred of or discomfort with people who are attracted to members of the same sex.

Intersex | Intersex people are born with a variety of differences in their sex traits and reproductive anatomy. There is a wide variety of difference among intersex variations, including differences in genitalia, chromosomes, gonads, internal sex organs, hormone production, hormone response, and/or secondary sex traits.

Lesbian | A woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women. Women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

LGBTQ | An acronym for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer."

Non-binary | An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do. Non-binary can also be used as an umbrella term encompassing identities such as agender, bigender, genderqueer or gender-fluid.

Outing | Exposing someone's lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender or gender non-binary identity to others without their permission. Outing someone can have serious repercussions on employment, economic stability, personal safety or religious or family situations.

Pansexual | Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of any gender though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. Sometimes used interchangeably with bisexual.

Queer | A term people often use to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream. Queer is often used as a catch-all to include many people, including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or folks who have non-binary or gender-expansive identities. This term was previously used as a slur, but has been reclaimed by many parts of the LGBTQ movement.

Questioning | A term used to describe people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Same-gender loving | A term some prefer to use instead of lesbian, gay or bisexual to express attraction to and love of people of the same gender.

Sex assigned at birth | The sex, male, female or intersex, that a doctor or midwife uses to describe a child at birth based on their external anatomy.

Sexual orientation | An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people. Note: an individual's sexual orientation is independent of their gender identity.

Transgender | An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

Transitioning | A series of processes that some transgender people may undergo in order to live more fully as their true gender. This typically includes social transition, such

as changing name and pronouns, medical transition, which may include hormone therapy or gender affirming surgeries, and legal transition, which may include changing legal name and sex on government identity documents. Transgender people may choose to undergo some, all or none of these processes.

— my additions —

Queer Coding | Queer coding is the subtextual coding of a character in media as queer. Though such a character's sexual identity may not be explicitly confirmed within their respective work, a character might be coded as queer through the use of traits and stereotypes recognisable to the audience.

Queer Theory | First used in 1988, Queer Theory is an approach to literary and cultural study that rejects traditional categories of gender and sexuality.


Polari | A secret language primarily used by the Gay community in Britain since the 19th century. Now out of use, this is considered a “dead language”.

QUEER CODING - Hidden in Plain Sight

The term and idea of queer coding began due to a Supreme Court ruling in 1915, that declared that motion pictures were “a business pure and simple,”² and therefore not protected by free speech under The Constitution. Prior to this ruling and subsequent actions to protect the morality and success of the film and media industries, representations of queer folks³ were scattered relatively heavily and openly throughout motion film and media, albeit not usually favorably. This ruling created what thus became named as The Motion Production Code⁴ which determined the morality of the images, themes, characters and stories being shared via the film and media industries.

Origins of the Code

Hays's Thirteen Points



Exclude Pictures Which

1. Deal with sex in an improper manner;
2. Are based on white slavery;
3. Make vice attractive;
4. Exhibit nakedness;
5. Have prolonged passionate love scenes;
6. Are predominately concerned with the underworld;
7. Make gambling and drunkenness attractive;
8. Might instruct the weak in methods of committing crime;
9. Ridicule public officials;
10. Offend religious beliefs;
11. Emphasize violence;
12. Portray vulgar postures and gestures; and
13. Use salacious subtitles or advertising.

A 1922 cartoon depicting Will Hays coming to the rescue of the motion picture industry.

Hungerford, Cy Cy Hungerford illustrating the perception that Will Hays was coming to rescue the movie industry, 1922, Editorial Cartoon

² Justice Joseph McKenna

³ Along with other topics and representations deemed “immoral or sinful”.

⁴ Latter dubbed Hay's Thirteen Points or Hay's Code

As a form of retaliation, queer coding later became a way for people under the LGBTQ+ umbrella to hide queer narratives within heteranormative storylines. As highlighted by Mikayla Mislak in their article “From Sissies to Secrecy: The Evolution of the Hays Code Queer”,

“Although the Hays Code made it almost impossible for homosexuality to be shown on film, filmmakers were able to hint at it by creating the “sissy,” portraying homosexuals as both villains and victims, and writing between the lines.”

However, this primitive imagery in film of queerness was almost always detrimental to the queer community, and by the 1940s and 50s with the leniency of the Code⁵, the utilization of the “sissy” character seemed to imply that their villainous natures were due to their sexual deviancy and or the implication that their sexual or gender orientation led to insanity. Queer coding was thus initially used by film-makers and directors such as Alfred Hitchcock to demean and villinize the queer community. It wasn’t until 1992, when the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute⁶ created a survey that linked the depictions of villain queer-coded characters in mainstream media to the heightened violence the queer community was suffering.

In tandem with the activism happening outside of Hollywood following the Stonewall Riot, closeted and not closeted filmmakers, actors, writers, artists, and performers began to reclaim queer-code to authenticate their work as way to enter mainstream media and art spaces. Some of which we can now easily recognize, for example Timon and Pumbaa from the Lion King, Francis from A Bugs Life, or Tai from Clueless or artists such as Grant Wood and Hannah “Gluck” Gluckstein.

As an art community, if not as a society, we have to understand that this new perspective of truly accepting and accomadating queer folk is barely a decade old, pivoting from centuries of persecution, violence and death. This is to say that the

⁵ Depictions of homosexuality could be included so long as the characters were greatly reprimanded.

⁶ “**Anti-Gay Crimes Are Reported on Rise in 5 Cities**” New York Times, March 20th, 1992

transition of openly showcasing and representing queerness in the arts and media in today's society is completely new.

Despite growing up as perspective art student in NYC and subsequent art student in University in both Boston and Jerusalem, I had zero mentorship or guidance in accessing queer perspectives in the Arts. This is somewhat remarkable given that art spaces theoretically provide some of the safest places for queers to inhabit and exist in. While I knew some of my peers were queer, if any of my faculty were they kept that part of themselves very hidden⁷. Part of my journey, not unique to me, was having to scrounge and essentially re-invent the queer wheel. This meant having to recognize my internalized queerphobia and to begin searching for answers, information, and as an artist start exploring art from a Queer point of view. This meant often following the “controversial” storylines in art history to be able to see a more authentic truth.



Of Chairs and Closets, 2018

It wasn't until my BFA thesis in 2018, that I finally understood that there might be a way to share a part of my story safely in the conservative cis/heteronormative environments I was in. Through the use of iconography, I could build vague narratives, imbuing them with sub-context, composition and colors cues to connect with and reach my queer community. As seen with “Of Chairs and Closets”, a ceramic and wood piece about coming out of the closet as a teenager, I, without objectively knowing it at the time, used queer-coding within my own work as a tool to share my queer story.

Upon entering my MFA studies in 2020, one of the questions I would ask myself is if I could shed the icons, with their gentle vagueness for a more striking and overt

⁷ The head of my Dept. at Bezalel Academy of Art and Design was an openly gay man, however, he never guided or spoke to me personally about being a queer person in the arts nor anything about queer art. This wouldn't have been deemed appropriate at the time.

representation of queer narratives and perspectives. Was the queer coding that I was using hindering or helping? Is it shameful for me to hide behind coded language or brave to embrace them into this new language the Queer Art community has been building?

I used the early part of my studies experimenting and thinking about how to tackle these questions though the process filled me with deep anxiety and dread. What if I made the wrong decision and added to the bad representation? This hesitance came paired with the advice that I was receiving from my faculty advisor. Much of it guiding me to make more sensual, sex orientated work triggering and adding the trauma I already have as a queer person. This led to works such as “I Was Told to Make More Sensual Work- is that what it means to be a queer maker?”, which depicts a portrait of me painted on a fleshy pink background, in a languid blue hue holding my cheeks while white gold luster dribbles out of my mouth.

This piece represents a difficult time period of my MFA experience. This type work and style are not congruent with my own experience of queerness. While I love the way the work summed up the moment in time for me as a maker, this was not the maker I wanted to be. I turned back to narrative and storytelling to find my roots. *Language as an artform. A beginning.*

In the hopes of creating a more organized coding system, at the advice of my mentor Adero Willard, I created a spreadsheet to identify all the icons and symbols currently active in my work and their metaphors relative to me. This project will be an ongoing document that will grow and evolve as my understanding of the relationship between the images and language evolves. While this is most definitely still “coded” language, the acknowledgement that my code is not with the purpose of hiding a community but instead with the outreach towards the community changes how I feel about utilizing this type of visual tool.

ICONOGRAPHY	MEANING
HOUSE (with/without fire)	Seeking of safety, care, love, nostalgia, or the lack thereof
FLOWER	playful, joy, childlike need to tag simplistic icons of beauty
TABLE	To highlight family rituals and connections or disconnections/ nostalgia
CHAIR	To be used when attempting to touch on the intimate setting of discussions. Depending on the time of chair it might be able to specify the emotion of the moment
TEARS	In the inability to share authentic emotions in both real life and in the work, the use of "tears" conveys this seemingly shallow version of queer melancholy
CLOUDS (with/without lightning, with/without rain)	Depending on the type of cloud, several different meanings can emerge but most often are seeking to forshadow.
BATHROOM (home vs. public)	Bathrooms are a sacred space, but also a place in which violence against lgbtq folks occur, depending on orientation of depiction I have insinuating safe space or insecurity
EMOJI ICONS	intraspective, internal thoughts
GRECO-ROMAN VASES	Past self, tied to time
GRIDS	Structure, order, constraints, binding
HANDS (depending on the composition)	intimacy, selfishness, selflessness

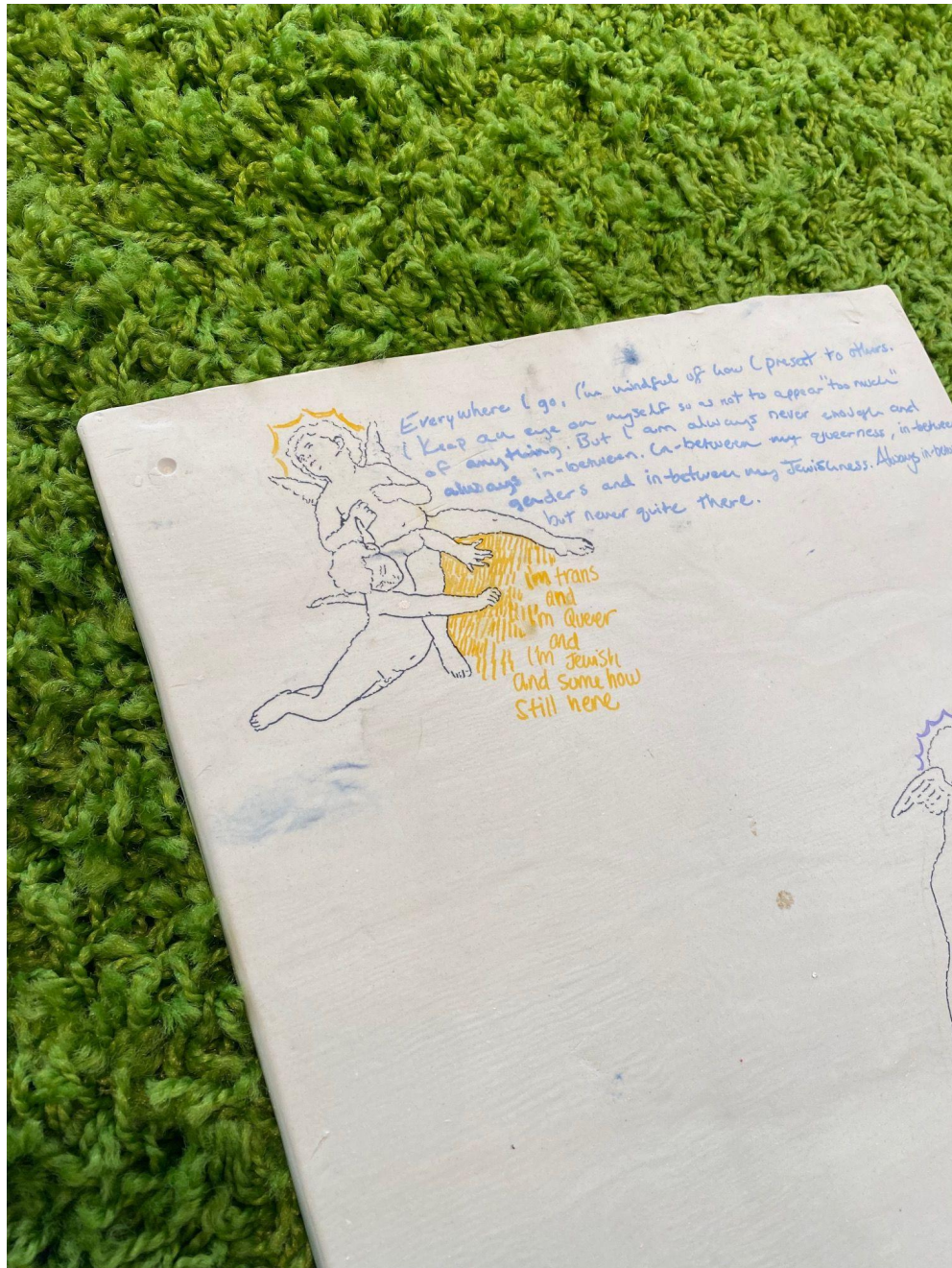
Table of iconography dictionary

Found in the most recent research done during the tail months of my thesis, I want to recognize that my code system can also call upon Polari, a form of Queer language that existed in 19th and 20th century Britain. It was made up of several different linguistic components from the Romance languages to yiddish, Romani, and thieves cant. An example of this language would be “Bona to vada your dolly old eek!” which is Polari for “Good to see your face.” Gay men until the 1990’s used Polari to evade detection and subsequent homophobic consequences and violence.

As an Ode to these queer grandparents⁸ I've included some of these phrases and words in my Illuminated Notebooks and Loose Leafs, a series of porcelain and red clay

⁸ The peak use of the Polari language dates to the 50s and 60s.

notebooks doodled not only with my own thoughts and knowledge⁹ but with the thoughts and poems of the viewers that attended the show.



Detail of Loose Leaf, 2022

⁹ Which have been drawn with underglaze, decals and marker

Queer Theory - No Longer in the Closet

When Teresa de Lauretis' article "Queer Theories: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities" came out in 1991, utilizing the term Queer Theory for the first time, a clear definition was perhaps not totally specified. However, Terasa defined Queer Theory loosely by 3 main principles: 1. The refusal to accept heterosexuality as the foundation to sexuality, 2. Arguing that Lesbian and Gay studies shouldn't be seen as a singular entity and 3. Race shapes sexual bias.

In the practice and growth since the originating article in the 90's, Queer theory challenges and questions the established norms and dualistic categories society has created within the boundaries of heteronormative principles. By practice as highlighted by Annamarie Jagose in their book "Queer Theory",

"To attempt an overview of queer theory and to identify it as a significant school of thought ... is to risk domesticating it, and fixing it in ways that queer theory risists in fixing itself."

Queer theory is perhaps best suited to the community when it is underdefined - allowing us to shape it as our needs are to be met. Queer theory thus is a tool that can be used by queer folks across fields of work and study to bolster and structure the safety net of argument. It provides a place for Queer theorists and modern day philosophers to research and pick apart societal constructs that confront extreme binary gender and sexuality arguments.

When I think about Queer theory in relation to the arts and my own art practice, I think about how I can also utilize this tool. I believe I do this in two different ways, one of which is my re-examination of my community's history in the Arts prior to that of the 19th century. To be able to not only properly identitify ancient queer representation in mainstream museums and academic publications, but to also be able theorize and try to understand the lives of these ancient queer folks within their societies through art

provides a grounding for current and future queer artists. Another way I utilize Queer theory through my work, is by adapting this “loose” structure to bolster my own works narratives or lack there of, of a clear and defined narrative.



Oh! How the Tears Do Fall, 2021

In the understanding that my work is built up with layers composed of symbols, icons, phrases and figures, the lack of an absolute narrative is obvious. My work is thus best suited to the community when it is, like that of queer theory, underdefined. This allows the queer viewer to approach the work and see themselves represented, to fill in the gaps between the visuals and create the bonds needed for the work to be truly seen.

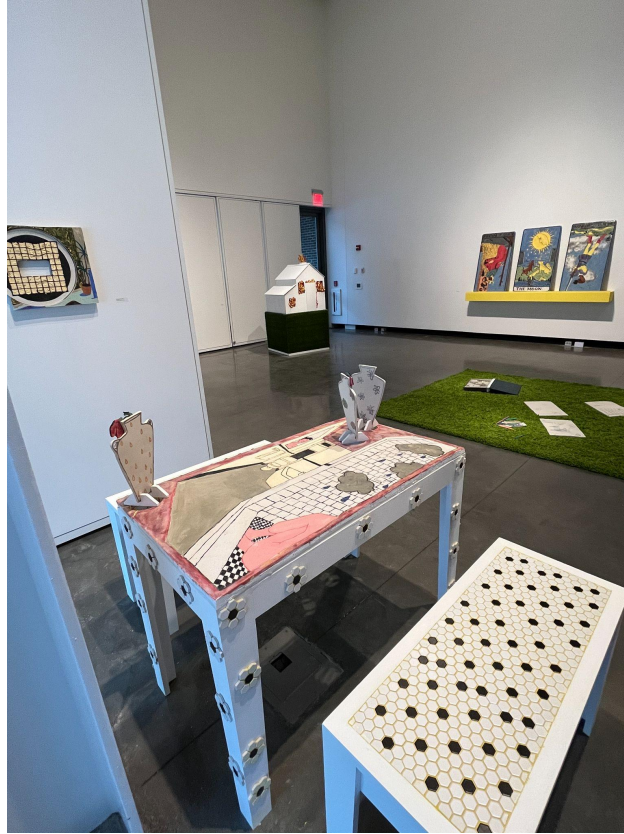
QUEER METHODS- A PRACTICE IN TRUTHFULNESS

When I peer at my work, I never truly know what I am looking at. Is it a self-portrait? A commentary on queer loneliness through the lonesome figures locked in their flattened illusionistic worlds? Am I aiming for edibility or am I truly trying to confront my deep seated emotions and beliefs around gender, sexuality and identity?

In the book “Imagining Queer Methods” by Amin Ghaziani and Matt Brim, I came across another definition of queer theory that ran truer to me in its simplicity and specific attachment to methods,

“Although they write from different backgrounds and different countries, English and comparative literature professor Jack Halberstam (1998) in the United States and emeritus sociology professor Ken Plummer (2005) from the United Kingdom both see in queer theory “a refusal of all orthodox methods—a certain disloyalty to conventional disciplinary methods”

In a strange but not unrecognized twist, I have observed that my own approach to making is akin to my approach to living. I come as a maker that is Queer and having to walk through the world differently than that of my cis/het peers. This means my way of dealing with the ebbs and flows of life are most often the unorthodox ways. As Halberstam and Plummer have said “a certain disloyalty to the conventional”, I mirror that in my own art making, and I find solace at the very least in my *queer* approach and methods to art and craft.



Installation image of Unrealistic Expectations, two bench and a table 2022

I am as queer as my art process may be. Ping-Ponging myself into dualistic worlds of art, merging and blending them regardless of content to match my non binary and fluid self. I recognize perhaps belatedly, that the content is almost unnecessary, the works as queerly defined by the way they were conceived. Building, crafting, painting, collaging blending together to create one new queer thing. I can rest my worries of making work not queer *enough* to warrant an activist or authentic queer role.

I once described my art as an object akin to a lure for fishing. To entice the viewer towards the work, coaxed by warm, bright, illustrative colors and designs strewn across the surfaces. In that moment of almost callous deception, I create the illusion of safety in a frivolous and joyful image. I hesitated in that deceit. How often am I personally lulled into a sense of security before being pried apart by spaces and work promising inclusivity and family? Is that my role, to be equally deceitful? Does the two-faced nature of the works give fuel to fire that the *oppositions* argument that queers are hostile

and untrustworthy? Or am I simply using the tools already available to me and queering them for my own personal and communal gain?

“Methods are queered when we use the tenets of queer theory to tweak or explode what is possible with our existing procedures. The most common pursuits include making strange the otherwise commonplace or familiar” - James McDonald “Queering Methodologies and Organizational Research: Disrupting, Critiquing, and Exploring”



Installation view of Bullet Journal, 2022 and Loose Leaf, 2022

Perhaps, my determination to create a soft and gentle space both in the gallery environment and the environment of my work, is to use this warmth not to coax the viewer into a false sense of safety but rather a real sense of safety that they may be comfortable enough to access the necessary emotions not only to fully engage but to sit and stay with the work.

Queer Experience: Beyond the Hyper-Eroticized, a personal perspective in making.

Living as a queer minority forced to exist within the cis/het majority filled spaces, especially in academia, I have faced having to navigate deeply ingrained stereotypes surrounding me and my community. In the United States, transgender women were only *just* beginning to appear into the limelight of mainstream Hollywood as more than a joke in 2013/2014, and while out gay men, primarily cisgendered white, gay, men, have been steadily gaining in popularity within the Art markets around the world, depictions of queer bodies are still severely under represented.

As a marker and a painter, I am always in deep conflict when scanning the imagery surrounding the lgbtq+ community. More often than not, we are portrayed in salacious positions and acts. Almost always we are completely or partially nude as though without the open fields of our skin visible there would be no way to identify our bodies as *queer*. This is a trope I see both established and up and coming artists falling into. I look to my contemporary idols in the arts, like Tourmaline¹⁰, Doron Langberg¹¹, Cassils¹² and I see bodies at the mercy of the cis/het gaze.

Is it reclamation of our bodies if we are the ones to paint this hypersexualization of ourselves for the cis/het majority to then feast themselves on? Why is no one talking about why we are almost always hypersexualized in media and art?

Almost immediately upon entering my MFA I came face to face with this pressure to submit to this hypereroticized threat. In a traumatic formation of events I was told to learn what it meant to be sensual and was encouraged to make works that were bodily and sexual. I almost fell into line with this way of thinking and the works that were made

¹⁰ Pleasure Garden Series, 2020-21

¹¹ Zack and Craig, 2019 (amongst many others of a similar strain)

¹² Remnants of Cassils, 2020

during this early period lay off to the side in my studio as my queer heart tried to make sense of them in following weeks, months and subsequently now years.



I Was Told to Make more Sensual Work - is that what it means to be a queer maker?, 2020

Something like sensuality is so foreign to me personally, my own body either fetishized or abominated, sexiness and feeling that way about my own body was and is not something I can relate to. Where were these works coming from? Me or an ignorantly perverse *idea* of me?

I was determined to make sense and understand what emotions, narratives and authentic bodies I wanted to collage together to create examples of my current understanding of the queer experience, beyond the 2-dimensionality of sex, sexiness and erotica drowning queer art¹³.

To do so I had to begin with imagery of myself that was authentic, relatable and portraying perhaps more than what a bust could convey. I had to become vulnerable,

¹³ Not uncommonly, representations of queerness in history are accessible in books concerning erotica. Most of the well-known queer ceramic objects existing for example in Paul Mattieus book "Sex Pots: Eroticism in Ceramics."

somehow more vulnerable than any naked image I had ever painted, sculpted or photographed of myself. Almost in a strange compulsion, I couldn't completely let go of the conditioning and ended up painting a scene in which a stubborn nipple peeks out



When Life Gets Mean, 2021

from beneath a fold of sweater draped open across my torso. Almost like a last cry of resolution, I feared not being seen as *queer enough*. My red reflective thoughts floating in the white sterile window into my mind, almost too eerily judging or perhaps mocking my primitive attempt at resistance.

My next attempts at painting were somewhat more successful in highlighting more enigmatic queer experiences. Yet I still found that I missed painting the figurative form and did long to paint the queer nude. Which has led me to think about why that may be. Perhaps our wish to love our bodies and ourselves outweigh the dangerous and perverse gaze of the cis/het viewer, that we make the sensual images of ourselves in spite of them. Maybe we, like how the cis/het viewers are enamored and spell-bound by the queer alien like forms that drape the canvas, photographs, films and more rarely sculptures of the art world, we too are enamored and spell-bounce.

I alone cannot answer this. This conversation belongs in a deeper, broader and much needed dialogue amongst queer makers that is only barely in the formational stages. Recently, I have taken to social media platforms to reach out to queer artists dealing with the figure and more specifically the queer figure. There is very much a particular type of resistance to talking about this issue, and I have found it frustrating to find the right language to encourage and engage my own community to discuss. I have begun slowly engaging fellow queer artist, who focus of queer bodies in conversation. Many of these conversations are deeply private, but hopefully one day will be able to be spoken aloud and recorded into the fabric of time.

LGBTQIA+ Resources

United States:

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/lgbtq/>

<https://transgenderlegal.org/>

<https://www.equalityfederation.org/>

<https://www.thetaskforce.org/>

<https://victoryfund.org/>

<https://biresource.org/>

<https://www.accreditedschoolsonline.org/resources/lgbtq-student-support/>

<http://safeschoolscoalition.org/>

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

<https://gsanetwork.org/>

<https://www.glsen.org/>

<https://modernmilitary.org/>

<https://transgenderlawcenter.org/>

<https://www.sageusa.org/>

<https://www.nclrights.org/>

<https://www.aclu.org/issues/lgbtq-rights?redirect=lgbt-rights>

<https://www.matthewshepard.org/>

<https://pflag.org/>

<https://www.hrc.org/resources>

International:

<https://ilga.org/>

<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/our-work/international/international-resources>

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Technical Statement

The Work

Why Clay?

I am commonly asked “Why clay?”, “ Why bother with the physical, logistical, financial challenges clay brings when I could work in a more accessible medium such as traditional oil painting - if all I’m going to do is paint?” It’s hard to answer those questions linearly in a conversation, partly due to all the different and rotating reasons as to why it is important for this work to be made out of clay as the primary material.

The most important reason being the addition of fire. To paint images of queerfolk, queer lives, or simply *queerness* to be then be burned permanently onto the surface is perhaps akin to a letter of care and acknowledgement to the lack of proper representation through time. I want to *burn* these images and stories permanently into this stone surface, where it will stand the test of time - with the right documentation etched on to the front, sides and back of the works.

Another particularly profound reason is the history of ceramics. Through my research for my essay, “Hidden Voices: The ancient lives of the LGBTQ+ community”¹⁴, ceramics has a history of queerness that dates back millenia. However, much of this history is either erased or considered controversial. I want to sink my hands into that history and understand it. By giving myself permission to work in the same materials my queer ancestors have worked with, I allow myself lineage and access to culture and traditions that I have been previously denied due to my identity.

However, on a personal level, there is my relationship with clay. Clay is material that works with a method of give and take that no other material or process has really

¹⁴ Available to read via the Scholes Library - special collection

resonated with me as maker. I work with this material, pushing and most often compromising with it until the material and I make something that feels right. I am most deeply moved when things don't go according to my own plans, especially when something initially fails or breaks, as it most often does in clay. In my personal life, I've never been able to feel safe in failure. Failure has meant deep losses and trauma.

However, in consequence, I push and push for a result in my work - firing and re-firing until the clay finally tells me to stop most often by physically breaking. That break which ends up feeling like a physical manifestation of how broken and lost I am in that moment, ends up being the catalyst to allow me to cry or to feel. With that I find that the work is not judging me, but simply resting beside me as I try to understand myself. It becomes my companion, gently telling me that in the chaos of heartbreak and homesickness for a place to belong, I belong with it and that's enough.

Paintings



I wish it didn't happen, 2022

These works, which I determinedly described as paintings, have become the basis of my work. Starting off as thin, hesitant and incredibly fragile “tile” works, these paintings have evolved into large, dense, colorful and acutely “present” works of art that hang flush to the wall. They look deceptively weightless, despite weighing over 100 lbs each, mounted at 55” to center, their middles often coming directly at eye level. They are composed with contemporary painting in mind, meant to be seen on white sterile walls to command attention to each work in turn.

They are not tiles, not made to be created by many of the same and mosaiced together. Each clay canvas is unique, made with unique dimensions that have been fired and re-fired into its own unique shape and bend, like that of traditional hand-made canvases and their stretcher bars. The surface is carefully prepared for the particular set of images that will be added on at varying stages of the process. I look to painters, most often queer painters throughout history, to learn how they compose their narratives to see if I can thread those ideals into my own work.

Tapestries and Banners

I am deeply interested in how a simple function of a slab of clay can evolve into something completely different. By changing the edges of the clay slab and hanging style, what used to become a painting is no longer doing that.

Why does that matter?

By turning what used to be a canvas for painting and turning it into in this case a tapestry, new ideas, imagery, symbolism and content can be woven into the dynamic. I also took this opportunity to delve into the ties to my french culture and heritage, at which France was at the center of bringing what we now know to be classic European Medieval tapestry to fruition.

Fiber as a concept or icon, has become a primary interest throughout my work and while I have no desire

to weave threads, I am acutely interested in weaving together stories, histories, imagery and queerness together. Pushing the bounds of what the slab can become always otherness to enter the material that gives me breathing room. I don't approach clay and craft in the same way as most trained ceramicists do, but I use that to my advantage when thinking about my relationship to the material.



Mi Shebeirach, 2022

Illuminated Notebooks

Finding different ways to share stories other than through the classic structures of painting, I wanted to find a method of work that created a dynamic in which the viewer became the participant.

I needed something small, tactile and approachable.

These works, which I called Illuminated Notebooks, are manuscripts crafted out of clay, glaze, underglaze, luster, decal and experimental materials such as wood, and piano hinges. The books have places which are left raw or unglazed to be able to receive the words and stories of viewers in the gallery setting.

This allows the work to document the thoughts and feelings of the “other” that have encountered and found safety in the space I have built for them. I find this powerful, rather than me as a painter attempting to capture the essence of who they are, they have the power and autonomy to do so themselves.

Installations

To enter the thesis exhibition “If Not Home, Then Where”, viewers had to walk past Crane Zhu’s immersive installation installed underneath the Immersive Gallery. When we begin to walk around the outside of her work, we are confronted with an empty archway within a fake wall that spans across the gallery effectively separating it into two different spaces. The fake wall is made up almost entirely out of gray fabric curtained between two smaller walls that jut out from the gallery’s empty shell. This new wall spans not only across the gallery but up 10 feet into the air.

It was important to me to be able to create a completely enclosed “queer” space. This was two fold, one to create a sense of security and comfort. Secondly, to make the viewer aware that they are entering a “different” space and what social privileges they might have as they enter.

What is first a dominating and rough atmosphere, with the bare timber of the set-like structure showing, turns into a soft, warm and gentle environment. A rug lay in the center of the space, calling people to sit and relax within the space. A table covered in tile flowers reminiscent of a sweet childhood collage project is placed on the left side of the rug, inviting another moment of pause, rest and discussion.



MFA Installation View

Being queer is dangerous enough, I don’t feel the need to bring that sense to the space and the work. Instead I am looking to create welcoming, gentle spaces for viewers and the work to spend time in.

THE CHEMISTRY

Glazes:

Tapestry Black: testing is further needed. The act of removing Best Black mason stain from the Sugar Baby Black glaze and instead sprinkling on the surface of glaze pre-firing.

Gloop: Cone 05 with 10min hold (can withstand hotter temperature such as Cone 04 which is better suited for the glaze rugs)

29.73 - Custer Feldspar

28.83 - Gerstley Borate

27.03 - Silica

9.01 - EPK

3 - Bentonite

3- Whiting

10-15% - Stain

3D printer compatibility: Be sure to have a smooth well mixed consistency, like very soft clay

Verda Blue/Green/Purple Gloop: Cone 05

43 - Barium Carb

29.83 - Custer Feldspar

27 - Silica

9 - EPK

3 - Bentonite

4 - Copper Carb

Underglazes:

Oil paints:

30 - Mason Stain (for white - decrease to 5 zircopax, 10 titanium dioxide)

30 - Frit 3124

10 - Molochite 200 mesh

10 - Glomax

6 - Silica

10 - EPK

2 - CMC

2- Veegum

Mixing medium - 77 h2o + 3 cmc (mix in hot water with hand blender to use right away- if not let sit overnight) then add 20 glycerine and mix well. Propylene Glycol might make for a less viscous mixture. Worth testing.

Instructions: Mix dry ingredients with mixing medium gradually to reach desired consistency.

Ceramic Oil Pastel:

Desired glaze recipe base (I went with a stroke and coat dupe¹⁵)

Mason Stain

Beeswax

Mineral oil + Linseed oil (not stan oil) mixture

Instructions: Add to a double boiler: 6 parts glaze base, 3 parts mason stain, 3 parts beeswax, 2 parts mineral/linseed oil mixture. Melt to liquid, prepare mold (can use tinfoil formed around wooden dowel and sealed with tape. Pour and let it harden.

Firing:

I typically paint initial layers of glaze and underglaze on, during the different stages of greenware before drying completely and firing through bisque to cone 2/3. After which I downfire to different temperatures incrementally lower depending on what glazes, underglazes, overglazes and lusters I wish to use. I choose to not care too much about formalistic ideas of firing and glaze applications, rather I choose to purposefully ignore any preconceived rules and do things one might say is the *wrong* way to do it. Through this I discover new surfaces and reactions I couldn't have possibly stumbled across had I stuck to the fundamental rules of ceramics.

¹⁵ [Stroke & Coat Base | Glazy](https://glazy.org/recipes/69363) (<https://glazy.org/recipes/69363>)