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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Ooooooh Wheeeeeee! To be a pig in a tree...

[THE ONE THAT GREW EMOTIONS AND DIED]

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
Master of fine arts

In

Visual Art

By

mika Castañeda

Committee in charge:
Professor Danielle Dean, Chair
Professor Anya Gallaccio
Professor Roy Perez
Professor Alexandro Segade

2023

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The Thesis of mika Castañeda is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego
2023

Dedication

To my dead cat Mayhem and to the boy at the top of the bridge...

This will also always be for you.

Epigraph

Lovers, 1988

Don't be afraid of the clocks, they are our time, time has been so generous to us. We imprinted time with the sweet taste of victory. We conquered fate by meeting at a certain TIME in a certain space. We are a product of the time, therefore we give back credit where it is due: time.

We are synchronized, now and forever.

I love you.

- Felix

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In many different dimensions I've had the endless honor and privilege to be a part of many creative and alternative communities/families whose knowledge, movement, care, and love inspire and drive my very own pedagogy, practice, and thought; from the ladies at the dive who like my shoes, to pals of Pneumonia Opossum, children of Art Power Equity, the drunks of my Meeting in the Park, and the community that holds the future potential Treehouse Project.

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Hayden, lover, who makes sure my knees are taken care of and the dog is fed.

Those who are here, in this text, the images, objects and artwork. My ancestors, biological and chosen, may we sow our seeds forever.

I have found myself over the last four years cared for and nurtured, sustained and challenged immensely, by a most incredible community, a community too large to name, both within the confines of the institution and a multitude of reaches beyond. I am nourished and constantly ignited by you all. I'm confident you know who you are, and fear failure in a gesture to name. For those I shared immediate creative space with and those who had hands in this work: Arlene, Hazel, Deanna, Heige, Wren, Jax, Cat, beck, Toni, kelechi, jun!yi, Alejandrina, and Nicoletta. Esha and Ian.

Abstract of the Thesis

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Oooooooh Wheeeeeee! To be a pig in a tree...

[THE ONE THAT GREW EMOTIONS AND DIED]

by

mika Castañeda

Master of Fine Arts in Visual Arts

University of California San Diego, 2023

Professor Danielle Dean, Chair

Spanning dive bars, drag shows, trashcans, and AA meetings. *Oooooooh wheeeeeee! To be a pig in a tree... [THE ONE THAT GREW EMOTIONS AND DIED]* asks us to reflect on the ways we create and maintain our histories, problematizing many questions around the autonomous/collective observing/preserving of love and community. Departing from varied pasts, presents, and our constantly becoming futures, *Oooooooh wheeeeeee! To be a pig in a tree... [THE ONE THAT GREW EMOTIONS AND DIED]* stands both as a testament to fringe acts of mutual gazing and, as a venue within a venue, provides a delicate framework that identifies our togetherness,

anticipation, and fantasy as critical tools for the potential development of a more felt and held future.

Standing as a found and fabricated social sculpture and queer archive
Ooooooooooh wheeeeeeee! To be a pig in a tree... [THE ONE THAT GREW EMOTIONS AND DIED], brings together an intimate collection of time, objects, and collaborative projects by Alejandrina M. Medina, jun!yi Min, beck haberstroh, and mika Castañeda, sincerely establishing a record that seeks to cultivate a deep sense of community embedded with affirmations towards one's sacredness and capacity for transcendence.



Image 1, Piece of Paper, found, The Living Room Coffeehouse, 2022

At 8:14am I turned 26 years old. today I am also turning 25 days old, and this 25 days feels longer than that 26 years, it's October 21st 2022. I'm sifting through two years of notes and trying to weigh my thoughts between varied histories and my current present, literally where I'm sitting now, and how I think I got here.

If you need a friend
Don't look to a stranger
You know in the end, I'll always be there

But when you're in doubt
And when you're in danger
Take a look all around, and I'll be there

I'm sorry, but I'm just thinking of the right words to say
I know they don't sound the way I planned them to be
But if you wait around a while, I'll make you fall for me
I promise, I promise you I will

When your day is through
And so is your temper
You know what to do
I'm gonna always be there
Sometimes if I shout
It's not what's intended
These words just come out
With no cross to bear

I'm sorry, but I'm just thinking of the right words to say
I know they don't sound the way I planned them to be
But if you wait around a while, I'll make you fall for me
I promise, I promise you I will

I'm sorry, but I'm just thinking of the right words to say
I know they don't sound the way I planned them to be
And if I had to walk the world, I'd make you fall for me
I promise you, I promise you I will

I gotta tell you
Need to tell you
Gotta tell you
I've gotta tell you

I'm sorry, but I'm just thinking of the right words to say
I know they don't sound the way I planned them to be
But if you wait around a while, I'll make you fall for me
I promise, I promise you

I'm sorry, but I'm just thinking of the right words to say
I know they don't sound the way I planned them to be
And if I had to walk the world, I'd make you fall for me
I promise you, I promise you I will
I will, I will

I can loosely recall the days following my release from the hospital, it had a lot to do with my drinking. There's a short 'lifetime's' worth of junk in the way and I'm only 26... and stupidly I got another fucking concussion. I'm learning about remembering and I'm learning how to be

situated in place. These days I feel comfortable and confident leaning into an indescribable belief in magic and I'm learning to allow the walls to be my higher power. I remember in 2017 I got to hold a personal collection of love letters between gay men who were in sadomasochistic relationships. These love letters between faggots contained poetic reflections on their feelings of place in s/m spaces and how these to them were their 'only places'. These were utopic and euphoric sites for healing through crisis, and sickness, health, time, trauma, and love. They romanced about the hospital bed being the only thing painful in all of this, how they would piss on each other so their dying wasn't so bad, the ways fisting never hurt them, how being high and tied still for hours was only a blink when they were together, it was an honor to be an ashtray to groups of men with your gaping hole cocked towards the sky, it was love to let your lovers watch and to be watched. I can't actually see in my head myself holding these things but more so I can feel that it happened because I think it was felt. I can remember the felt -ness of it all, the actual quality of myself feeling these things and maybe how I felt, the quality of what it meant to bear witness. I'm confident I found a love and a life here in this little collection of letters or maybe, in the felt -ness I experienced, these things produced a shared knowledge that let me know these things exist, can exist, and existed, and will persist. These letters found me at a time when I wasn't able to acknowledge or offer anything of the sort towards my own self, the object/s which I held became a tangible place for me to understand my proximity to a 'love' and 'life', my own qualities of being, the things which we seek or just the things I sought. These men knew I'd be watching and were writing to me. I know they wanted a voyeur because this is what they said, this fact turned them on, they wrote as if in their afterlife they'd still be getting off. I know I wasn't able to see anything at this time besides what I was holding, literally what was in front of me and what I could touch, but I know I saw these letters and I know they saw me or at least I think they saw me. These men were educators and they wanted to teach me something, and they made it clear they knew the letters themselves as something of their little collection which passed

between them would be passed to me and could be held and eventually would be held and had the power to teach.



Image 2, Flower bouquet, Meeting in the park of Alcoholics Anonymous, 2022
Image 3, Flower bouquet, Meeting in the park of Alcoholics Anonymous, 2022

I guess this is the magic, they knew they would be found, felt and seen and felt, again and again and again, they knew I was looking to hold and to be held, I was looking for something. I was the first person to read these letters since they were archived upon the writer's death, they were a bit older than I am now. I see so many of us here too in this sweet collection, these men spoke of our love, our proximity and our heldness and with such a soft fondness they presented themselves before us alongside the psychic powers which they felt in all positions between and betwixt each other. Their submissiveness and dominance reflecting the ways we stage ourselves for each other, in a world of things we are both audience and performer. How we share some things and how some things share us, what does it mean to be a holder of another or to be held by another, how can I hold you, how can I hold your things, how do you

hold? I look up to these men and their letters, still theirs and somehow mine, and also yours. I'm inspired by their knowledge that these private encounters would become our endeavor. These love letters produced by strangers found themselves buried for years in a private collection beneath a university, only to be brought to the surface by my faggy request. I think it's kind of funny how the value of things can be produced and then maybe reproduced over and over, I wonder about value a lot. What is the system that determines your value and mine, and, what are the things which we hold that reflect this? What is the system and what is your system? How might we collapse?

... "How do we stage utopia?" —by suggesting that utopia is a stage, not merely a temporal stage, like a phase, but also a spatial one.

- José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*

I've never seen the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres in person, he's my favorite artist and I fantasize about seeing his work often. I want to experience the indistinguishable loss and beauty he shares. I let this affect how I behave with other people, the movement between fact, fiction, fantasy and love. I fantasize about seeing the work with a lover. I most often think about *Untitled (Go-go Dancing Platform), 1991*. The work features a cubed blue platform with lights lining the edges on top of it. It remains empty all but for five minutes each day. Unscheduled and unannounced a go-go dancer appears to perform a brief solo in little satin shorts, sneakers, and with a walkman plugged into headphones covering their ears. I think I fantasize a lot about this five minute extravaganza, what it must feel like to hear the music blaring from the dancers headphones, or what the sounds their sneakers will make, what the sweat will look like as it starts to make the dancer shine hoping to catch the scent or maybe see a drop fall to the platform's surface. I wonder what it would feel like to see this with a lover. I want to see their remarkable face as the dancer lifts themselves onto the stage to dance. I imagine they listen to their favorite song, what would we be doing as the performer leaves just as quickly as they

appeared. What song would I listen to, what song would you listen to? Right now, This Must Be The Place (Naive Melody) - Talking Heads.

I think I fantasize about its emptiness, not knowing when something will happen or if something already has or ever will. It's the antici... .. pation of it all. I want to feel like I'm waiting forever with the person I love, I want to look past an empty stage and see them imagining. I fantasize what thoughts they might fill the platform with, I'd like to dance on the platform for someone. Without the performer we have so much room to pretend, we can roleplay or we can just be together laying held surrounded by the lights. The way someone might wait all day having never seen someone come to dance is beautiful, being pushed between something grounded and imaginative. This romance removes us from ourselves and places us with the others who gather, we can feel as if we've pushed through something to come out on the other side, it allows us air to breathe.

I am surprised to learn that Gonzalez-Torres doesn't specify a gender for the dancer, and that the image I have formed has been made a man by me. Were the go-go dancer announced somehow, perhaps their arrival made explicit in the title of the piece (with dancer), the platform would be otherwise empty. But unannounced, that space is always complete as is, lit. It's a very exciting moment, to wait for someone to arrive, to give you pleasure by giving themself joy and pleasure. How many people can this person be? Can this person be more, somehow? But the piece is another kind of reversal in Gonzalez-Torres's work, a tease like maybe some go-go dancers try to be, too. You take the candy and eat it, and you fold the paper for home, and you walk through the beads, but can you tip the dancer? Can you reach your hand out, and if you do, will he take it?

- T. Fleischman, *Time is the Thing a Body Moves Through*



Image 4, Rug on Stage, Tower Bar, 2022

The stage suggests a space where one can manage queerness, it is a bridge that enables communication up and through private/public, our privacy and our intimacy. Through a stage one can learn the procedures by which we understand ourselves, analyze, interpret, and recognize ourselves, it allows us to understand that we are places of possible knowledge. The

stage is a space for queer subjectification. I'm curious as to what it means to situate a stage as an artwork, or if by utilizing it as visible device for the work, and sharing that it is both involved in creating the work and displaying the work, what spaces then are opened up for our imposition, and what can they then impose back? Situating a fantastical display system such as the stage as a highlighted subject in an artwork allows for a space in which it is possible to imagine place, place being something that is defined as offering the first step of inhabitation of space— that of creating personal identity, in which one might identify the actual self. This allowance functions similarly next to that of the queer bar, a bracketed stage or display system is also an 'only place' where one might begin to experience an inhabitation of space/body which helps us create personal identity, through community. The language of display works here to firstly inform the meaning and persistence of what I'm making, it works double time as the quality that allows for what is staged to communicate through any sort of difficult or prescribed predisposition that we attach to the things which are on display. Through the powers of social production, a stage produces intimate interaction between viewer and performer, and so what happens when one is removed or one is replaced? What do we and the things we hold become? Responding to the spaces where queers are not fit to live, the stage, in this spatial practice, carves out a liveable arena where queerness can persist as something which embodies opportunity for variation in our abilities to hold, love, and to be together.



Image 5, Alejandrina fucking an ear, quieting down, Performance Space, 2023

Though many times, much like a gay bar, the stage might be the only safe place where a certain queerness can be embodied, the edge of the stage is not where these things end. When we enter a space we bring in our dust, when we leave we leave with others. The sweat of the gogo dancer trails off the stage and into the realm of the audience, a threshold flips and we all take something home. When a concert ends the vibrations in our body shape the way we lay in our beds, the people we brush against touch the objects we situate in our own worlds and vice versa, we all take home one another. These works fight to open the recognition of oneself as a

knowledge producing site through the display of things, a little collection. The qualities of these stage's pull out, prop up, highlight, cover or redact. They fall out, off, up and through, into challenging dimensions, the realm of the audience is the realm of the personal, sprouting open spaces where we stage ourselves and deepening the recognition of queer subjectivities offstage, our qualities of existence and our qualities of feeling held.

The stages as mechanisms engage the poetics of display, they are what we must confront in order to access the artwork, our first steps into the little collection shared before us. Physically they change the realm and relationship we have to the objects set here, and those others around it, and the ones we have elsewhere. This poetic speaks directly to an object's specific ontological existence. What do these mean when I see them like this and what does it mean for them to be next to each other? The power and magic rests here, we derive it from the display systems which are deployed to bracket things outside the realm of the actual object, what they really are and how they usually are? But also the actual object. Does the bracket confer a different status on that which I share, what exists and to what degree, what are these things? What's deployed points at a critical heldness, loveness and proximity. What does the bracket do to the object in these moments, we realize where else the stage may exist and by this do we derive even more power.

When we attempt to express a novel experience or thought— when we aspire to render the unspoken speakable and the unheard audible— we do so as functions of artificial memory, as functions of lifeless objects. That is, our experiences and thoughts assimilate with lifeless objects to form inextricable unities. ... It is not the case that we first experience or think about something and, subsequently, scour the vicinity for an object with which to record it. Rather it is already ... that we begin to experience and think. Material, lifeless objects (stones, bones, letters, numbers, musical notes) shape all of human experience and thought.

- *Flusser, Vampyroteuthis Infernalis*

We have a lot to learn from the things we save for ourselves, the way the things we keep reflect and record how we live and love. When we are made to turn our attention to the things we surround ourselves with and that which we save, we can begin to think differently about our bodies' relationship to another. I also wonder here if by understanding objects in this way can we reverse the effects of control one might face on their body, especially in a queer body. We must understand ourselves as students to our things, our little collections have a lot to teach us, they assist us as they are arranged in developing new methodologies around the ways we experience our bodies and the worlds we move through and where they show up elsewhere. The things we hold, the things between us, our things next to and behind us, are our psychic record keepers and life forces. What does it mean to collect and arrange things next to each other, a thing whose value is determined only by the fact that I want to fill my pocket with it? Is this actually the only fact?



Image 6, Ryan's candy wrapper, Standing Room Only, 2022
Image 7, Unknown patron's lost hat, Standing Room Only, 2022

Our things, like a stage, are identified as a potentiality. The constant resituating of this collection of these things turning into other things is about our ability to constantly become. We do not end and the things we have do not end. Three straws stored in a golden candy wrapper vs. three straws placed parallel to each other with the golden candy wrapper delicately placed on top allows us to imagine ourselves as something else. These things are quite familiar to us and we can usually gauge how to approach them based on the value systems that have been created for us. We know what a chewed up straw and an empty candy wrapper that's gathering ants is worth. But when we can imagine these things as something else, when situated and staged in a way that is curious and when the value is defined by something like a heldness or a love, we can then imagine ourselves as something else through these things. It opens up an expansive personal understanding as to what we can be in the world. Posing them in this way,

in the poetics of a bracketed stage we posit ourselves in new formations of locality, community, and collectivity. The world of things established in the work calls upon viewers to change how we interact with these things and to understand “what is seen”? Viewer is placed on a human scale alongside the complexity of the collection. What does this give the viewer? Do we perceive ourselves as malleable, a place of constant processing and unfolding, are you held alongside these things and where can this take you? How can i hold those i love beyond this lifetime, how can these things do what the faggy love letter did?

The life of these objects reflects on my placemaking, it provokes a being in a life of love and validates my body’s ability to be situated. Someone once told me that the human object struggle has to do with our desire and search for immortality, we produce objects and objects produce us and we produce objects, there’s more to this circular graph but i’ve seemed to have misplaced that bit of my notes, somewhere in there is culture but it’s still a cycle of these things producing each other in an unending way. How does one make place and how do we make this visible, how do I make place and is it visible? How is it sustained and substantiated? This is beyond our exoskeleton, our human object world, it is a tender desire towards an individual wholeness, ultimately a critical practice of holding and proximity, a performance of heldness, a way of being with you and a way of seeing you.

How do we think through the ways that archives challenge us to think about the experience of potentiality? To dwell in the affective potential of the archive is to think of how archives can animate intensities ... The affective potential of archives is therefore both a political as well as an aesthetic question in its ability to activate one's capacity to act, and it is on the very faculty of imagination and possibility that this conflict is located.

-Shaina Anand

A little collection, or rather importantly I think the task and desire in this instance to create one's own is to acknowledge that the state archive is only an instance of collecting, it is merely a form often by which a monopolization of public memory takes place and where often times too, as an institutional practice, there exists a movement towards, or perpetuation of, the targeting, surveilling, and disciplining and ultimately the production of a wrongful categorization and separation of community.

I suppose then, my interests and questions are:

What does it mean to look towards our own little collections and do they counter the targeting, surveilling, and disciplining that archives often reproduce, or do they involve themselves too in this reproduction? Is it to destabilize or reorient or neither? Am I simply opting out of a certain type of looking? Taking a look at, and or, turning to a periphery vs. making an attempt to destabilize that which persists in an 'capital A archive', that is, what we understand to be totalitarian and central? Does cruising this little collection that sits in an experimental interrogation of the affective potential of a personally gathered material create new ways of accessing a larger understanding of our individual and collective experiences and, instead of supplementing what is missing, or participate in a named practice of destabilizing/decentralizing/archiving, does it pull to the foreground what is currently unstable or

that which is there and has always been there? Does it call to attention that which exists and has existed up and through my hands, life, and love? I guess a simple paradoxical understanding of my interest in a practice of collecting, is am I trying to combat an archive with another 'archive'? I genuinely don't know I'm trying to figure this out.



Image 8, Stranger's sea shell collection, Balboa Park, 2022
Image 9, Ryan holding a rock on Hazel's film set, Stanlunds Inn and Suites, 2022

It is by understanding how we become oriented in moments of disorientation that we might learn what it means to be orientated in the first place. ...orientation is not so much about the relation between objects that extend into space (say, the relation between the chair and the table); rather, orientation depends on the bodily inhabitation of space.

- Sara Ahmed

I believe in a collection's magic (one's own, this one i've placed here). Like queerness, this collection is a malleable and an affective potentiality. Something which continually comes into existence, and out of existence, latent with qualities and abilities that transcend a linear movement through real time, guiding us up and through all the futures that come. We have not yet reached a point of collection, i think it dies when we believe there to be a finish or to have an end. This is the start of a debate, it exists as a process, one of pointed performance which can be used to develop a way to deflect and combat the paradoxical anaesthetization of an already sedated memory and collective present. I don't enjoy speaking about these paradoxes, honestly the labor does not feel productive to what i'm doing, it works against the urgency i feel. I think a lot of what is held in all of this requires an amount of trust I find unintelligible to me, but I say it's an honor. I want to share these things but how do i bring to the surface the things i hold without killing that which i'm holding, i'm seeking a form of bearing witness that does not harm that which is witnessing, that respects one's opacity. It is not a threat, but an invitation.

While we sat in that car, my parents worried about where I was and what I was doing with whom, and I know they must have been trying to comfort themselves by letting themselves think that I was merely at a stage. What we were learning in that parking lot as the Germs song "Forming" played was that there was another stage out there for us, both temporal and spatial, one in which potentiality, hope, and the future could be, should be, and would be enacted. Today I write back from that stage that my mother and father hoped I would quickly vacate. Instead, I dwell on and in this stage because I understand it as one brimming with utopian performativity that is linked to the ideality that is potentiality. This potentiality is always in the horizon and, like performance, never completely disappears but, instead, lingers and serves as a conduit for knowing and feeling other people.

-Muñoz, Cruising Utopia

I find myself understanding the cruising which takes place in these little collections as an act of visibility and mitigation, it is a tool that reduces the multitude of feelings around being threatened, cast off, abjected, or objectified, cruising and collecting are the tools used to find a place where one can be held. Even if just briefly, this type of making activates a space which inverts all that we know to govern a queer body in the day-to-day, and potentially bodies in the day-to-day. In how I understand it, it is an idea of 'standing' and 'existing' together but apart, a space where one can be witnessed by another or witness another, to heal with and to care for. This movement is a form of reparative objectification, it is another mode we can use to collectively counteract the damaging effects of being objectified through the mutual objectifying of each other -interfacing with one another as bodies, but doing so in a way that supports rather than tries to destroy it ...I want us to look at each other like objects in profound affirmation, to learn to see each other, to look at one another as bodies and say yes. To look at our things, see ourselves, and to say yes.

Through taking seriously the ambient effects of this now named cruising's casual, localized, and relational practices we're able to stand at a starting point which I believe to reveal critically the ways in which our intimacy, community, and care might offer possible answers to the questions I've posed above. This practice exists importantly as one that's predicated on act and gesture, where what one does, either idiosyncratically or characteristically, is a queer tactic of holding and care that establishes an actual place where there is community, there is affirmations to the sacredness of a person, and there is a capacity for human transcendence.

By instigating this practice and by probing at a person's and a collective persons inherent and often suppressed malleability I create a response with the paradox I find myself thinking about, I deeply want to avoid the reproduction of the problems I see clear in an archive. Can I, through the creation of and offered access to these stages and spaces of affect (i guess new cruising grounds) and through an asking of other people to put their bodies and themselves

at stake, a position which is required for the work's life, negate harm the archive often produces: again that is the targeting, surveilling and disciplining and the categorizing and separating of community. I feel this to be what guides my urgent need to collect and care for the things. I wonder what it can literally mean or what can literally happen when people situate themselves with this collection/these stages/these objects and what can happen when we are amongst these concepts and things from which I pull and make. With their presence, what happens when they can actually see themselves placed there and what happens when they are made aware of the fact that their body is amongst/with these things and in relation to them and that their body can alter what is seen, what happens when this interaction is shared or performative?



Image 10, Rehearsal documentation, SUCK OFF!, 2023

To hold this collection of these things in the manner I do, in the “-ness”ness of everything is to bear, to sustain, or to support, as with hands or arms, or by any other means. It is to hold something or someone, oftentimes both, very tightly, it is an action. When I apply the “-ness” to the adjectives that I do it is to produce nouns, always referencing the state or condition, or quality of being that adjective. Heldness for example refers to the quality of being held, the quality and human condition of being sustained, supported and borne. The work is a critical heldness and this is a foray into a practice which situates a tight hold and honest belief in the power of profound affirmations and the transformative potential of space/place, the power one

holds in their little collections of things and the things which we let sit between us, our autonomous archives where our love and community sit as the ecological systems that establish and sustain a value. An experimental approach to understanding my relationship to the stages I find myself against. This personal collection of things which specifies and describes, brackets and restages the mechanisms for production and display asks me: What stories do you remember when you're sad, and where do you go to hear someone say I love you? How do you share your constant becoming and your sought futures, what does this look like and where do you keep yourself? Is your ability to be orientated in this, a guide toward a new radical system of care? Is this the scaffolding you've made for yourself like those gay men who were in love and the ones who waited until i got out of the hospital? They are my best friends, you reading this and the literal people I have in my life are those gay men and I thank you, celebrate you and want to become you. I'm alive because of you.

The letter as it's changed–

So here we are, inside a little room we've made together. We have put ourselves here, and for our purposes and enjoyment, we shall stay. Here we claim our rights: the right to see, the right to hear, the right to move about as we please, the right to sensation and feeling, the right to love, the right to dance and the right to sparkle, the right to sing happy birthday, the right to become and be, our right towards potentiality and our right towards something yet to come. These things, we have not thrown them cautiously to the wind but we have placed them gentle and firm in each others hands, knowing full well that they'll be returned to us touched.

We think it took a longtime to put ourselves in this position; and in our truth, it took years.

Sometimes it blows me away how much of ourselves we give to each other in this moment, and how much responsibility that involves when we accept it. The trust that we imply, simply by being in the position we find ourselves in, is overwhelming.

Do we realize, sweet pea? Why do we do this to each other? What do we get out of it? I am an artist, and we are lovers. We have used each other to create something of great beauty, I feel soft, and we are exhibitionists. We get breath from the sounds of our friends, the sighs and whispers from those next to us, the admiration of all their positions, the desire of and towards each other.

We enjoy the look of each other, the knowledge that with each passing moment we are together and between each other, and we can take this from each other and we need not lift our fingers... We are each other's biggest fans. Our bodies root for each other, our things quietly rooting for us. Teaching us. These things, set before us, support us in going the distance we've set, cheering our love on. I'm proud of you when you win.
Thank YOU

It was so stuffy and it was in the middle of winter so I know I was bundled up to a degree that did not make me feel comfortable, I always want to be wearing as little clothes as possible. I remember the room that I was in where I found this collection was temperature controlled and uncomfortable, my bundling didn't help. The other ways the environment was controlled past that, not just the temperature, were also not comforting. Feeling present and together with care was hard. This room reminded me of being in the hospital a bit, and the temperature and stuffiness is something I can still feel, it was incredibly isolating.

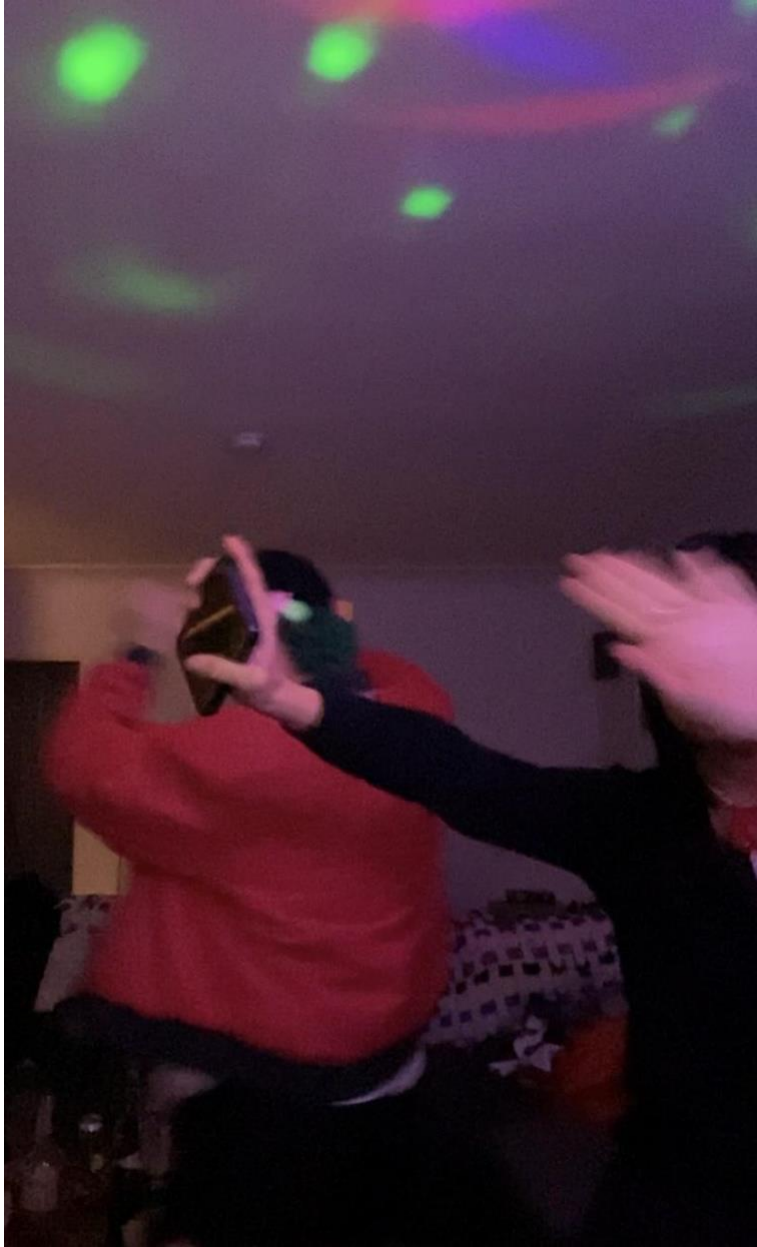


Image 11, Dancing on New Years with Jocelyn, 2022

I remember being allowed to transcribe what I saw with a number two pencil and I mostly wrote about the room I was in and not the love letters I was reading. My things were taken and stored in a locker outside of the room before I could enter. I can remember wearing white gloves which seemed a bit excessive to me, I also remember there being a scanner bigger than any I'd ever seen, it was for scanning posters, i didn't scan anything. There was a woman who watched me all the time and I really want to remember her name. She was incredibly kind to me, but I

was scared of her. There was a shocking lack of dust in the room or any sort of mark that made it feel like a real place, but sometimes dust would fall from the letters. At the time of me starting this writing I'm sitting in a cafe looking at one of the original love letters, actually a copy that i had written for myself in 2017. I have held tightly to it for the last five years, always carrying this replica in my wallet or pocket, somewhere I go to often when I need to remind myself of the -ness of everything. I try not to cry every time I hold it because I really do just think it's one of the most beautiful things I've ever gotten to read, it tells me so much every time I look at it. I'm sixty pounds heavier than I was five years ago and I'm happy I can feel my body while looking at this letter. I'm listening to music and the table I'm sitting at isn't dusty but the varnish is peeling off and at the top of my stack of books that I brought with me is T Fleischmann's 'Time is the thing a body moves through'. This feels like the letter's magic and could also make me cry, it's a book i try to gift to as many queer people as i can, lovers, as it was gifted to me with a similar love. There's a lamp and a yerba mate can, and not much else or at least you could probably imagine what im sitting with and what may be around me while i type, it's nothing too remarkable. Next to me at a different table are two of my best friends who I get to occasionally glance at, this is something remarkable. They're working too and I'm happy I get to see them. I feel so lucky. Earlier we took a break for a bit to draw photos of ourselves and giggle, this is helping me feel less shitty about everything. They have their drinks and computers, and again everything else you could probably imagine, it's also probably just more romantic that way anyways. Between myself and them, there's this little piece of paper which looks as if it had probably fallen from someone's spiral note book, it's like those shitty little bits you get when you tear a page out, it's really fucking beautiful and for some reason everything I'm able to feel is in this piece of paper now. I feel like ive found my counterpart or maybe I've found the response to the love letter I carry with me. It's also something that's looking back at me and is a thing I get to look up and through to see people I love, right now it is our mirror. It is an absolute excess and overflow of us and it is the heldness we share when we laugh at how stupid the drawings of us looked, we

laugh at their accuracies and know we look stupid too, we are such cliches. It's a tiny little bridge that is connecting and marking the magic I feel in my heart, the thing that carries me in and out of my love for another person, it is the up and through that Eric told us about. I might just be overly sentimental or maybe it's my hoarding tendencies but I think it is a heldness of something and feltness of something, a different model of togetherness, just the up and through, my desire to become another person or to see another person and cheer them on. I don't plan on picking it up because I'm afraid I'll lose it; I think it's smart to let it live out its life on the ground until it's thrown away. Our shared sight is enough for us right now. I won't pick it up but maybe Ruben was right when he said he thinks there's more to the things that I collect than what I can share. Why does this piece of paper do this to me? I'm so sure I'm in love and I'm certain we're serious when we say I love you.



Image 12, Bouquet for Victor, Performance Space, 2022

Our life is here being breathed between us and I am certain I want to share this with you. What would would happen if i placed this on a platform surrounded by lights and and what would happen if it got stepped on by a faggot gogo boy, i think that journey would be precious. Victor always says something to me like, "it merges histories and ways of thinking, it's for future queers" and though i know these words are really general he's referring to something only faggots understand, it is the up and through that Eric talks about, it's like what the drag queen said the other day "where we come from is still where we are". If i showed this piece of paper to him i think he would get it, if i say i love you i think you get it. My favorite flavor of pie is cherry pie. I eat it because it reminds me of Jocelyn's Instagram handle she had when I met her, @chrrypie. I lost the cherry stems from the cocktails we drank on her birthday but I'm confident

they're where they need to be. I know these people have been here the entire time, you were all there with the letters when I got out. I want to keep laughing at how cliché it all is because 'The Promise' by When in Rome just started playing and right now, I am so beyond certain it needs to be in my thesis.

-mika

Notes on the work itself

As it's exists

Ooooooh Wheeeeeee! To be a pig in a tree...

[THE ONE THAT GREW EMOTIONS AND DIED]

distinctly manifests in three different parts:

The installation itself,

Ooooooh Wheeeeeee! To be a pig in a tree...

[THE ONE THAT GREW EMOTIONS AND DIED]

a collection of objects, and a constellation of stages. A performance, *quieting down*, which draws from practices of the mundane, and trans acts of getting ready that dislodge cisnormative standards of progress and position central focus on quiet acts of care and affection. And finally a musical, *SUCK OFF!*, which poses next to traditions of queer camp theater as we follow the main character, Dracula, through their relationships with an Angel, Asshole, Astronaut as they pursue their dream of going to space. Ultimately, *SUCK OFF!* is an exploration about what it means to be queer when an aspiration towards assimilation can, or must fail.

As a collector I have a compulsive obsession for attempting to understand what it can mean, if anything at all, to nurture and treat with care things of fringe identity. To love them and to share them with others, to quite literally prop up and hand over space, a place to lay or act, to allow for their persistence.

The installation is a composition of three distinct 'locations'. Three staged spaces located in a dimly lit black box theater positioned, poised, and lit as if maybe for performance, as well as lit for actual performance. The space immediately triggers a response towards the inactivity of these things, I am currently sitting looking at it while people visit and there are no performances or activations. We're looking at something that registers in the direction of use,

maybe. As a viewer we're asked to wonder if maybe we've missed something, has it all happened? Will it ever happen if it hasn't already? What's possible if something were to ever happen, if something hasn't? Or what's possible if something were to never happen? Am I allowed to look? We know at this point that things did happen with these sculptures, or rather one thing has happened and another will, but not right now. As I look it seems that it was built for this, the inactivation. A bracket for the things collected. Are these props or could they be someone's personal belongings? Maybe they could be a few people's personal belongings or also maybe just some bits of trash and random objects. I've set this collection on these stages and throughout the space gently, ready for use – use for fantasy and projection. A sort of individual or collective roleplay depending on who you might be in the space with and at what time.

Decorative pendant lamps with amber bulbs work to highlight and redact, guiding our gaze the entire time through the space, the objects and through the performances. Hanging at various lengths with various proximities to the walls of the space and varying proximities to the objects themselves, we must work if we want to see. Some things reveal slowly, and also maybe never fully. The warm light lingers softly, mimicking the touch of a dive bar. It gives just enough, it is a guide and mirror to shifting opacity. These lights place the scattered theater flats and stages in a realm just steps away from some grand performance space, it is.

During the performances we become increasingly unsure of what is set in the space as a prop, something to be used or something that might be or may never be, what is to become or to be let be for us to see.

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