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An Open and Fearless Capacity for Joy and a Fuller Eros

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Visual Art

by

Daniel Arthur Mendoza

June 2022

Thesis Committee:
James Isermann, Chairperson
Anna Betbeze
Charles Long
Lynne Marsh

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The Thesis of Daniel Arthur Mendoza is approved:

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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Introduction: Revisiting the Past.

Jose Esteban Munoz encourages us to revisit the past to glean potential for a more hopeful, desirable, and queer future. Attentive to the past, he asks us to reach beyond the suffocating present and to, “Cruise the fields of the visual and not so visual in an effort to see in the anticipatory illumination of the utopian” (Munoz 2009, 18). This idea in the book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* has been at the heart of my research during my time at UC Riverside. I took this idea of revisiting the past to mine my personal history, queer history, cartoons and popular media with a queer lens. This was in an effort to free myself and to encourage others to think differently and critically about the stifling patriarchal and heteronormative narratives that have instilled violence and repression in all individuals from childhood through propaganda. I sought to find the potential of quotidian materials to reconsider the sheets we sleep in, the media we consume, the roles we play in our daily lives, and to reevaluate the way we live, love and labor .

For my thesis exhibition I will be presenting two art works. One is a large scale fabric pavilion installed in the Black Box theater titled *An Open and Fearless Capacity for Joy and a Fuller Eros* (2022). I’ll also be presenting a large scale drawing titled *My Awakening, My Insistent Possibilities* (2022) installed on the wall outside of the Black Box theater. Both will be discussed in the conclusion of this paper

The written portion of my thesis will unfold in four parts and a conclusion which will function as a map of my journey through the MFA program at UC Riverside. I aim to present an explanation of my materials, gestures, intentions, and references. Each part

will incorporate an important text (literature, theory, film) that was integral to the making of the discussed work.

Additionally, each part and conclusion will begin with a personal anecdote and a considered personal anecdote as research to contextualize the writing and subsequent artworks following Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes' use of Joan Gallop's *Anecdotal Theory* in his essay "Gay Shame, Latina- and Latino-Style: A Critique of White Queer Performativity". La Fountain-Stokes explains that *Anecdotal Theory* is a "feminist, deconstructive, and psychoanalytically informed cultural criticism that privileges experience as a means to understand and theorize the world" (La Fountain-Stokes 2011, 56). My use of personal anecdote in this way is in an effort to follow a lineage of theorists of color like La Fountain-Stokes, Audre Lorde, and Jose Eseban Munoz who aim to validate anecdote and lived experience as a "more dynamic, alternative form of theory, and for the metaphorical SNAP!-ing back" against popular, white, academic queer theory (La Fountain-Stokes 2011, 56).

Pt1: Queer Affect of Material.

I inherited an interest in repurposing found materials from my father. One childhood memory is of my dad driving around with my sister and I dumpster diving in my hometown of Sacramento, California. One time we were looking for a mailbox. The smell of dust and weeds. Hot. The sound of gravel. The texture of rusty metal from an old car shop on my fingertips.

When I was an undergraduate student at UC Davis I would make sculptures thinking about my working class upbringing and using detritus like hair swept from my grandparents hair salon or saw dust collected from the wood shop on campus. It was at this time that I started working as a studio assistant for the artist Elisabeth Higgins O'Connor who would cover wooden armatures with bedsheets hardened with acrylic and watercolor paper, Afghan blankets dipped in concrete, and delicate doilies stiffened and stuck to distressed, cartoon like figures. I continued a practice of repurposing found materials when I moved to the Bay Area in 2013 by creating soft sculptures made with second hand bed sheets and stuffed with discarded materials, garbage, and studio detritus.

Although my initial impulse to use second hand materials, fabrics and detritus was out of an economy of material, I've come to understand these materials as queer "affective excess" or cultural surplus rooted in queer and feminist art, resistance, memorialization, worldbuilding, and taste. I use the word "affect" here as it relates to psychology and to describe how a material, object, image, or gesture can touch the feelings or emotions of an individual or a group with a collective understanding. Affect by definition from a behavioral medicine standpoint, "is the collective term for describing *feeling states* like emotions and moods. Affective states may vary in several ways, including their duration, intensity, specificity, pleasantness, and level of arousal... Affect is the experiential state of feeling" (Niven 2013). Used materials inherently contain a type of feeling or emotion from their past that can elicit an emotional response by their (re)use, (re)purpose and the potential they hold. This is what Jose Esteban Munoz calls "affective excess" which to him, "presents the enabling force of a forward-dawning

futurity that is queerness” (Munoz 2009, 23). Mining for materials in thrift stores and rummaging the things people don’t want or what has been cast away in order to give them new life is a queer aesthetic practice that finds the potential in the everyday.

The primary material in my works are second hand bed sheets. A material that can come with varying textures, smells, colors, and quality that conjure feelings or personal histories of sex, intimacy, violence, or care. They hold a history of its past use and allow for others to project their own experiences. Munoz connects Ernst Bloch’s idea of *cultural surplus* to Jacques Derrida’s idea of the trace saying:

“[E]phemeral traces, [are] flickering illuminations from other times and places, are sites that may indeed appear merely romantic, even to themselves. Nonetheless they assist those of us who wish to follow queerness’s promise, its still unrealized potential to see something else, a component that the German aesthete would call *cultural surplus*. I build on this idea to suggest that the surplus is both cultural and affective.” (Munoz 2009, 28).

The bed sheets I use are a kind of cultural and affective surplus. They speak to taste and class, and contain an unrealized potential to tell stories and build worlds. Also by drawing, cutting, and embellishing them they push against normative ideas of production and form queer social relations by speaking to histories of using repurposed materials in forms of queer and feminist art and resistance.

In the book *Fray: Art and Textile Politics*, Julia Bryan-Wilson details some histories of queer and feminist uses of fabric and craft in forms of art and resistance. One entry point of queer handmaking she discusses is the hand made costumes of the Cockettes who were a San Francisco based queer, avant-garde theater troupe founded in 1969. Bryan-Wilson says of the troupe that they were “Working through questions of

queerness through textiles... [that] both craftily comment on the consumerist excess, overflow, waste, and the queer vitality of reuse” (Bryan-Wilson 2017, 41). The excess that they were invested in was not excess of wealth but of thrift as their gender bending costumes made from scavenged materials aimed to invent a new sense of glamor through scarcity. Using and reworking what one already has on hand leads to a new kind of intimacy with the world and with one another. This kind of world building with textiles was important for marginalized folks to resist social and gender conformity, and to stake ownership of their life, love and labor.

Another example of repurposed textiles that Bryan-Wilson discusses is *The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt* (Fig.1) conceived by activist Cleve Jones in which, “Jones envisioned creating a quilt of personal names, not numbers, a laying out of the dead that would be devastating and colorful and serious and soothing and overwhelming, all at once” (Bryan-Wilson 2017, 186). Textiles in this project connected life, death, and mourning. The project also bridged various social groups such as women, and gay men to realize its completion. In this sense, “it was part of a broader feminist reevaluation of women’s overlooked histories, the meanings of everyday materials, and gendered associations of craft techniques” (Bryan-Wilson 2017, 191). Although the Quilt was not a quilt in the traditional sense, its use of unconventional materials like photographs, drawings, and jewelry, evoked an affect of warmth, memory, potential, and personal history. Aside from the perceived and eventual failures and critiques that both of these projects possess, Bryan-Wilson’s examination of the historical use of repurposed

textiles and craft stakes a claim on the importance of repurposed materials as a form of world building and resistance.

More feminine, or delicate materials such as tulle, sequins, and sequin backdrop curtains, have been important additions to my materials list. Although these materials and fabrics aren't gathered from thrift stores, they do reference aesthetics of queer and drag culture. Sequin backdrop curtains allude to the performance stage, and the sequin's sparkle attracts the viewer in. The shiny effect of the sequins also reinforces the theatrical lighting which has become an important part of my work. Tulle, a delicate fabric made from a strong mesh, is widely and historically known as a feminine material normally used for veils and dresses. The tulle in my work functions as a light, veiling material, but its transparent quality when layered has the effect of stacked animation cells. This allows multiple overlapping images to collapse on one another yet subsequently create depth of field and convey movement through space.

This mix of repurposed linens and new, cheap, feminine materials bridge the ornamental and the quotidian. Munoz says, "Both the ornamental and the quotidian can contain a map of the utopia that is queerness. Turning to the aesthetic in the case of queerness is nothing like an escape from the social realm, insofar as queer aesthetics map future social relations" (Munoz 2009, 1). These materials, although cut, stitched and transformed, are bound to their history and associations within a cultural economy and taste. However it is in their recycling, repurposing, and rearranging that illuminates hopeful, future possibilities.

Pt2: A New Figuration.

Some of my earliest memories of making art are of using tracing paper to copy the lines of characters from printed media such as Disney VHS covers, pop culture magazines, and comic books. Over the years I've continued drawing forms with cartoony soft edges and bubbly, pleasurable shapes in my sketchbook and sculpture practice. While at UC Riverside my drawing practice has expanded and shifted from constructing soft forms to mining soft, hidden, queer narratives in violent cartoons such as Fleischer Studios' Popeye the Sailor and Disney animated films from the 1940s and 50s. During the early days of the pandemic lockdown I was able to hone in on this practice at a small scale: by looking at animation stills slowed down, frame by frame, to see the squishy, sexy gestures of rendered violent actions.

I became interested in looking in look to the past at early 20th century and midcentury cartoons to mine possible, hidden queer narratives and characters, and to understand where the history of violence in cartoons began. In his book *Birth of an Industry: Blackface Minstrelsy and the Rise of American Animation*, Nicholas Sammond chronicles how early American cartoon characters, like Mickey Mouse, were created using visual signifiers of blackface minstrel actors and theater in the early 20th century. These racialized toons were created for mostly white audiences and unlocked an affect of fear and desire for industrial-era workers as minority groups, especially African Americans, started to gain the possibility of upward mobility. The text examines the insidious connection between laughter and violence, and the contained, excessive yet inconsequential violence as an animation strategy to subjugate a character from

resistance. Cartoon characters were also repressed by the animator or other characters in the narrative by assigning cartoons to racialized stereotypes in anthropomorphized figures such as frogs, rabbits, and apes. Sammond explains: “The racist stereotypes that inform these sorts of cartoons emerged from specific iconographic lexicon and have circulated in animation as commonplace expressions of contempt that dismiss the harm they express as ultimately harmless: in cartoons no one bleeds and no one dies. It’s all good fun, and it’s not really real.” (Sammond 2015, 209). The elastic violence in cartoons carried only as much transgression to power and resistance that the animator would allow as characters were always happy to bounce back and continue their roles. All the while real life racial minorities suffered real state violence in their daily lives.

Cartoons were created to construct narratives of violence and repression through racial stereotypes. But they were also created to construct propaganda for a heterosexual structure of daily life and love. These animated constructions built for children by adults were made to subliminally keep them within the social confines of normativity in the real world, and assigning queerness to the other (the savage, anthropomorphized animals, objects, plants and gestures). These kinds of violent and repressive narratives can have damaging effects on a lonely queer child, but this loneliness can be generative to give space for imagining new worlds and to glean a more hopeful future.

My investigation into violence became the opposite: an investigation in care through drawing. I developed a new kind of figuration and portraiture from a desire to draw or redraw my own images of friends, and images from queer cinema and gay porn. While incorporating and understanding the shapes and visual language from animation

stills, character model sheets, animation artist strategies of “how to draw” books, and by looking at references such as Popeye, Disney, and Archie Comics. The generalized facial features like round noses and eyes disarm the otherwise sexy or intimate imagery.

Rounded elbows and knees render male archetypes as soft and tender. My new cartoon figuration is a way to think about cartoons' relationship to the past, or childhood, to create a new lens for the present. To think about the potential of a freer world that leans into the unrealized potential of hidden queer narratives and a reclamation of racist stereotypes and repressed gendered characters.

Pt3: Fear, Desire, and the Erotics of Hiding. (Dark Blue).

I became interested in the implications of concealment and visibility when I moved into a new apartment with my boyfriend at the beginning of the pandemic which happened to be across the street from a popular gay cruising site. Walking outside I'd constantly feel like a voyeur, the feeling of being watched, or looking back (into and through the landscape) and with the potential of an exciting, comic, disappointing, or sometimes scary interaction. This act of looking through, or looking for something, and slowing down time to make out the image in all its discrete layers became very generative.

Cruising however, also has its less liberated side which is the practice of closeted gay men looking to hook up with other men on the “down low”. Anonymity may be for pleasure, but in some cases it's for survival. I frequently recalled my past experiences as a young, closeted gay man, a hiding subject, seeking a place of belonging within the landscape and

other dark spaces. Looking for contact with other men who also longed for moments of ecstasy and vulnerability that we both desired and feared.

This body of work was driven by a desire to slow down fleeting ecstatic moments to unpack their unrealized potential and the repression they sometimes carry. Jose Esteban Munoz describes ecstatic time as “signaled at the moment one feels ecstasy... during moments of contemplation when one looks back at a scene from one’s past, present or future” (Munoz 2009, 32). I’m recalling and creating narrative dreamscapes that dig through layers of desire, erotics, joy, and the vulnerability of experiencing utopic euphoria. Simultaneously, these veiled ecstatic scenes consider the shame, violence, failure, and fear that is inherent to these desires and the subsequent social requirement that queer people hide, and perform a kind of palpable identity within dominant society. Or, who have to return to, as Munoz calls it, “the prison that is heteronormativity”.

These works are realized as a series of theatrical, nocturnal vignettes in shades of dark blue. They play with the concept of the veil through concealment and visibility with the use of bed sheets, sheer fabrics, and sequins. In one piece delicate flowers are cut from a single bed sheet that covers an image of two men embracing in the dark, enticing the viewer to look through the veil and become voyeurs of the homoerotic scene (Fig.2). In another work, layers of tulle and cut fabric in the shape of plants reveal and conceal penises (Fig.3). Sequins, then render shadows, backdrops, and silhouettes of cartoon, archetypal, masculine figures into sparkly playful forms that can be seen between shadows (Fig.2-5). The dark hues reference nocturnal or moonlight settings to create a feeling of hiding in the dark (in the

landscape, at the disco, in the closet) and grants the viewer limited access to the scene as a whole.

The titles of these works, such as *The Power and the Promise* and *the Mystery of that Body Made Me Suddenly Afraid*, and *Beneath the Joy, of Course, Was Anguish* and *Beneath the Amazement Was Fear*, are quotes pulled from James Baldwin's 1956 novel *Giovanni's Room*. This book served as a literary tool to contextualize how these works explore fearing what one desires, and how hiding, although sexy and intimate, ultimately represses one's true self.

Pt4: You Belong to My Heart (Light Blue).

One of my favorite films as a child was Walt Disney Productions' mixed live action and animated film *The Three Caballeros* (1944) which was released on VHS throughout the 1980's and 90's. In the film the protagonist, Donald Duck, receives gifts from his South and Central American friends, and his *compañeros* (a Brazilian parrot named José Carioca, and Mexican Rooster named Panchito Pistoles) then travel to various parts of Brazil and Mexico chasing women.

The Machismo, or aggressively masculine, homosocial relationships are important throughout the film. In one scene Donald is so enamored with the floating, singing head of the Mexican Singer Dora Luz that it sends him into a surreal dreamlike state (Fig.6). Shooting through the sky as a red rocket, collecting stars, while penetrating and kissing blooming flowers (Fig.6). All while Luz sings "You Belong to My Heart (Now and

Forever)", an English version of the Mexican song "Solamente una vez" (Only One Time).

The Three Caballeros was important in my childhood because it was an accessible depiction of Mexican culture, and seemingly my Mexican heritage, in popular media. However, the film relied heavily on racialized caricatures, heterosexual desires, and was a white washed palpable depiction of Latin American culture from Walt Disney's US government funded goodwill trip to South America in the 1940s. I became aware of these multiple forms of propaganda when I was in my 20's. While I don't agree with the film's propagandistic messaging, there is a lot of potential in reevaluating the animated visuals.

You Belong to My Heart, was my solo exhibition at the Phyllis Gill Gallery at UC Riverside (Fig.7-10). It simulates a night light lit bedroom, a dreamscape, and a theater set. Ghost like male figures framed by floating bed sheets, splattered with watered down acrylic paint that mimic stains from body fluids, engage in explicit sexual acts. The figures interact under tulle veils embellished with sequin stars that function as adornments on the work like tattoos on the body. The stars are a direct reference to the same stars that Donald collects in his loving or lustful reverie of Luz. The stars are scattered randomly on the veil, but some cover the genitals of the figures and points of contact such as a penis to mouth, penis to anus, and anus which doesn't allow the viewer full access to the picture so easily.

The figures in the work are of Latino men from gay porn videos. The use of gay men challenge the original heterosexual narratives and imagine the possibilities of a specifically gay male use of the film's visuals. Although images of the men are mined

from pornography, the cartoon rendering of the figures reintroduces them as less pornographic and with more complex possibilities. Audre Lorde describes pornography as “a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling” (Lorde 1984, 54). It’s in this description of the erotic that gives the figures a more tender reading. The figures then become less central and just as important as the light blue lights, the texture of the materials, the twinkle of the sequins, the billowing stitches, and taught seams which all create an affect of care, intimacy, and softness.

There is an obvious front side to the work, but the backsides reveal a more perverse angle. A privy view where silhouettes morph into one another. This kind of ludic, or spontaneous playfulness, opens the work from normative storytelling and explores affect through material, light, and figuration. Open, as Jack Halberstam says in their book *The Queer Art of Failure*, “Open here means questioning, open to unpredictable outcomes, not fixed on a telos, unsure, adaptable, shifting, flexible, and adjustable” (Halberstam 2011, 16). In this way my installation encourages the viewer to open themselves to new potential futures, and to challenge accepted ideas of intimacy and love.

All of the work in this installation was made from bed sheets, colored pencil, and sequin backdrop curtains in various shades of light blue. The light blue symbolizes moving out of the dark, but still into a private space where the total image is not easily available. The blue gels on the lights filled the space with a blue glow so that the work

and the viewer were immersed in color making the viewer part of the work or part of the scene.

Jose Esteban Munoz recalls Samuel Delaney's loving description of the Christopher Street Piers in Delaney's memoir *The Motion of Light and Water* in which public sex culture revealed the existence of a queer world where utopian visions were continuously distorted. An excerpt from the memoir in Munoz's *Cruising Utopia* reads, "The men in this space took care of one another not only by offering flesh but by performing a care for the self that encompassed a vast care for others— a delicate and loving 'being for others'" (Munoz 2009, 51). This utopian image of care where non normative love could occur was still compromised as the whole scene of figures was always distorted. However, other visual cues can have affective meaning and gesture to a feeling as Munoz concludes, "The blue light of the bathhouse offered a glimpse of utopia" (Munoz 2009, 52).

Conclusion: An Open and Fearless Capacity for Joy and a Fuller Eros (Shades of Purple).

"The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves" (Lorde 1984, 54)

- Excerpt from Audre Lorde's essay "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power."

One night in the summer of 2021, some friends and I were sitting at a round table. Our conversation started with topics of music, books, and gay authors, but at some point we started sharing our coming out stories, closeted experiences, and lessons we've gained

while learning our gay ropes. It's common for our conversations to be steered in this direction. Our trauma and the repression we carry doesn't rule our lives but it's what we share. It's worth noting that we're all in our 30's, and that just ten years ago we would not have had this kind of depth of conversation together as some of us were still learning, lost, floating, surviving, looking, falling, and at times disassociating to survive. Only partially being seen, and partially giving ourselves. One friend asks the group, "when did you know?", but the moment for me can't be pinpointed. I probably knew my whole life but suppressed it so much that I never could tell when I truly knew. Or at what point I wanted to admit it to myself. So many people don't have to discuss these kinds of things, but what a beautiful space we've made through all the adversity. A space to share fearlessly, to have an unrestrained capacity for love and joy, to give into our insistent truth, and to allow endless possibilities with a round table of people who have fallen onto the same ground of understanding as you.

My drawing titled *My Awakening, My Insistent Possibilities* (2022) (Fig.11-13) is on the wall outside the Black Box theater at the Culver Art Center. The drawing references an animated sequence from Walt Disney Studios' *Winnie the Pooh and the Blustery Day* from 1968 (Fig.14) in which Pooh Bear is tumbling into a dreamlike state. The figure in the drawing is a cartoon rendered self portrait as I imitate poses from the animated stills. In the last frame my eyes are half open as if waking up from a dream or perhaps entering a dream state.

Inside the black box is my piece *An Open and Fearless Capacity for Joy and a Fuller Eros* (2022) (Fig.15-19) which is a structure for queer joy. The work is a circular

pavilion which extends 9 feet high with a 10.8 foot diameter that the viewer can penetrate from two opposing entrances. Aside from the large metal ring on which the work hangs, the piece is made from soft materials. Two large sheets stitched from tulle and second hand window sheers are embellished with forms and figures. The outside of the piece is embellished with flowers made from bedsheets, sequin backdrop curtains, and colored pencil drawings. Once inside the soft structure the viewer is enveloped by a scene of queer love, kinship, joy, and gossip. Figures are drawn with colored pencil on second hand bed sheets then cut and sewn directly onto the two large sections. Fabric billows and buckles from the stitching, and at times the drawings become warped and pulled. Unlike the veil functioning as concealing layers of information, the forms, figures, flowers, material, and stitching all collapse onto one another. The veil becomes a decorative kind of architecture, the flowers become decoration rather than camouflage, and the viewer is invited to penetrate its surface where the image becomes fully accessible. The figures are fully visible and present, and flowers project on to their bodies but do not conceal them. Walking through the piece is like walking through flowers, looking around at a party, becoming a witness to love, and a participant in the dreamscape.

On one side is a frieze of multiple figures who seem to be enjoying one another's company (Fig.16,18,19). These figures are not grounded, and sit in an illusion of a landscape. Smaller figures at the top of the piece feel as if they are receding into the background while larger figures take up space in the lower foreground. Most of the figures are clothed in swimsuits or underwear. Some are completely naked and others are enjoying their clothes. The scene is like a bacchanal. One figure actually sits with their

arms outstretched similar to versions of Dionysus or Bacchus welcoming the viewer to the party. Nude or figures undressing at the top of the composition appear to be in the far background but they also function as cherub-like figures.

Across from the frieze are two large, male figures engaging in penetrative sex (Fig.17). Similar to works in *You Belong to My Heart* the boys are much larger than life and in ecstasy. Incorporating the ideas from Audre Lorde's "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" essay, the scene is rendered soft, intimate and quite tender along with the use of color, and materials. However, unlike the previous work the figures here are fully visible.

An Open and Fearless Capacity for Joy and a Fuller Eros is made completely from materials in shades of purple and lavender for two reasons. One, the color is a move completely out of the darkness of the cool blues, and to quite literally add red or heat. Also, lavender in this work points to the importance that the hue has in queer histories of resistance and power. In a short history of lavender as a symbol of LGBTQ resistance Christobel Hastings explains that "In Western culture it started life as a color of desire, thanks to the lyric genius of 7th century BC poet Sappho, whose papyrus fragments told of her erotic predilections for younger women with 'violet tiaras'" (Hastings 2020). Lavender then became a sign of homosexuality in the late 19th century as it was referenced by effeminate, Aesthetes like Oscar Wilde, "who frequently reminisced about his 'purple hours' spent with rent boys" (Hastings 2020). Consequently it was used as a repressive signifier and was used during the McCarthy era when "there was state-sanctioned discrimination when president Eisenhower signed Executive Order

10450, which became part of a national witch-hunt to purge homosexual men and women from the federal government. Dubbed ‘The Lavender Scare’ by historian David K. Johnson " (Hastings 2020). However, since the 1969 Stonewall riots where “Lavender sashes and armbands were distributed to a crowd of hundreds in a ‘gay power’ march”, the color has become a reclaimed symbol of resistance, diversity, beauty, and refusal (Hastings 2020).

The work is a structure for queer joy, and also a structure for refusal. In a chapter titled “Just Like Heaven: Queer Utopian Art and the Aesthetic Dimension” in *Cruising Utopia*, Munoz discusses Herbert Marcuse’s 1955 text *Eros and Civilization* as a “blueprint for sexual liberation”. In Greek mythology Narcissus and Orpheus can be seen as early depictions of non procreative and homosexual love that challenge the social order. Narcissus falls in love with his own reflection and Orpheus, unable to save his wife Eurydice from the underworld, rejects love from women for relationships with younger men. Munoz says, “For Marcuse, Narcissus and Orpheus represent ‘image[s] of joy and fulfillment...Although both these mythological cultural heroes’ stories end in tragedy, their images— according to Marcuse— represent the potentiality of another reality” (Munoz 2009, 133-134). The stories of both Narcissus and Orpheus have been restored from their negative connotations overtime to be representatives of a refusal to repressive social requirements for queer communities to not feel or know pleasure, joy, or themselves fully. Which leads Munoz to describe queerness and queer aesthetics as “The Great Refusal”.

The expressions and depiction of joy and pleasure of the figures in my thesis work are fully visible and present. They refuse to hide behind a camouflage veil of flowers, and instead are embellished and ornamented with the flowers projected onto their bodies. The figures are not archetypes, but cartoon renderings of images of my friends, my boyfriend, myself, and stills from gay pornography. Their ornate surface and welcoming expressions encourage a space to daydream, and the potential for another reality with a fuller and fearless capacity for love, joy, and relationality.

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Images:



Fig.1: Block 1717 from *The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt*. 1985
“AIDS Memorial Quilt Virtual Exhibition.” Digital image. Aidsmemorial.org. June 1,
2022. <https://www.aidsmemorial.org/virtual-quilt/ca#LALGBTC>



Fig2: *The Power and the Promise and the Mystery of that Body Made Me Suddenly Afraid.*
Second hand bed sheets, tulle, sequins, colored pencil, thread, metal hardware.
76 x 68 x 6 inches
2021



Fig.3: *Beneath the Joy, of Course, Was Anguish and Beneath the Amazement Was Fear.*
Second hand bed sheets, tulle, sequin backdrop curtain, colored pencil, thread, metal hardware.

76 x 68 x 7 inches
2021

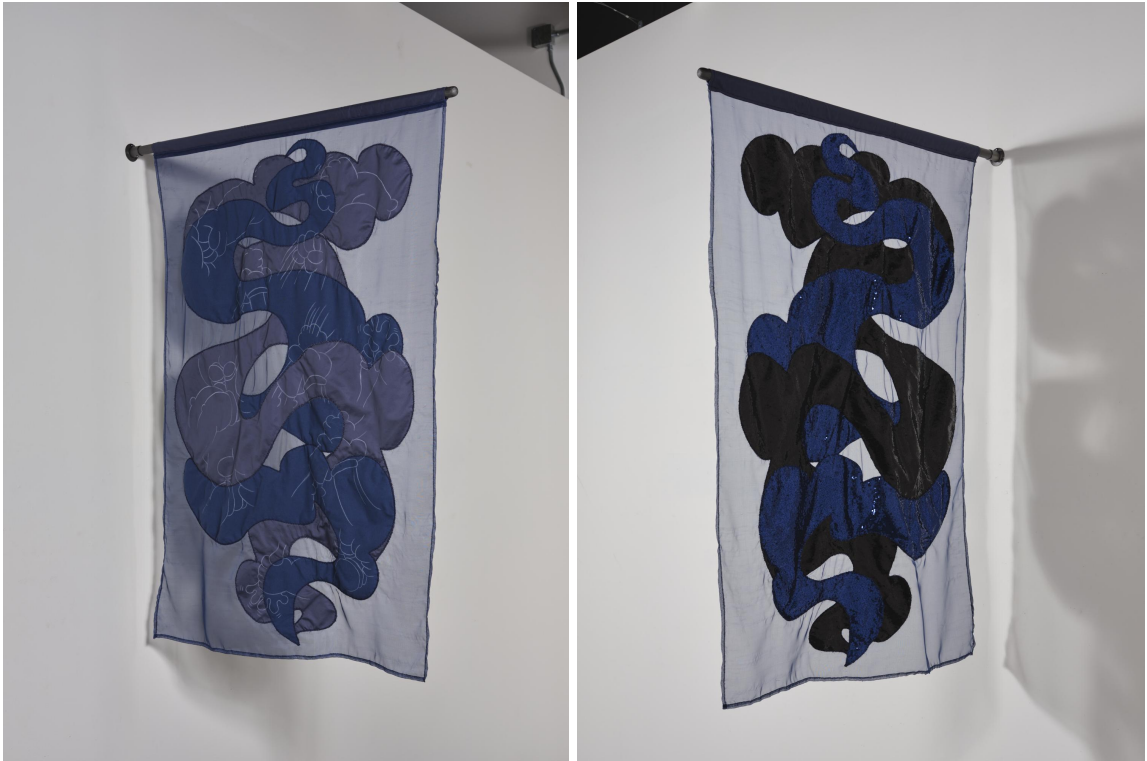


Fig.4: *Last Night's Impenetrable, Meaningless Boy Who Will Shortly Rise and Vanish Like the Smoke.*

Second hand bed sheets, second hand sheer curtain, sequin backdrop curtain, colored pencil, thread, wood, metal hardware, spray paint.

59 x 41 x 3 inches

2021



Fig.5: *Envy and Desire*.

Second hand bed sheets, second hand sheer curtain, sequins, sequin backdrop curtain,
thread, wood, metal hardware, spray paint.

32 x 28 x 12 inches

2021



Fig.6: Cropped animation stills from *The Three Caballeros*. 1944

Disney Movies. "The Three Caballeros 1945 Second Part HD." *Dailymotion*, Dailymotion, 8:41. 31 May 2018, <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6kqdy5>.



Fig.7: *You Belong to My Heart* (Installation view)
Phyllis Gill Gallery
2021



Fig.8: *You Belong to My Heart* (Installation view)
Phyllis Gill Gallery
2021



Fig.9: *And Your Eyes Through a Kiss.*

Second hand bed sheets, tulle, sequin backdrop curtain, second hand window sheer, colored pencil, acrylic paint, thread, wood, metal hardware, blue theater light.

99 x 80 inches

2021



Fig.10: *We Were Gathering the Stars.*

Second hand bed sheets, tulle, sequin backdrop curtain, second hand window sheer, colored pencil, acrylic paint, thread, wood, metal hardware, blue theater light.

83 x 100 inches

2021

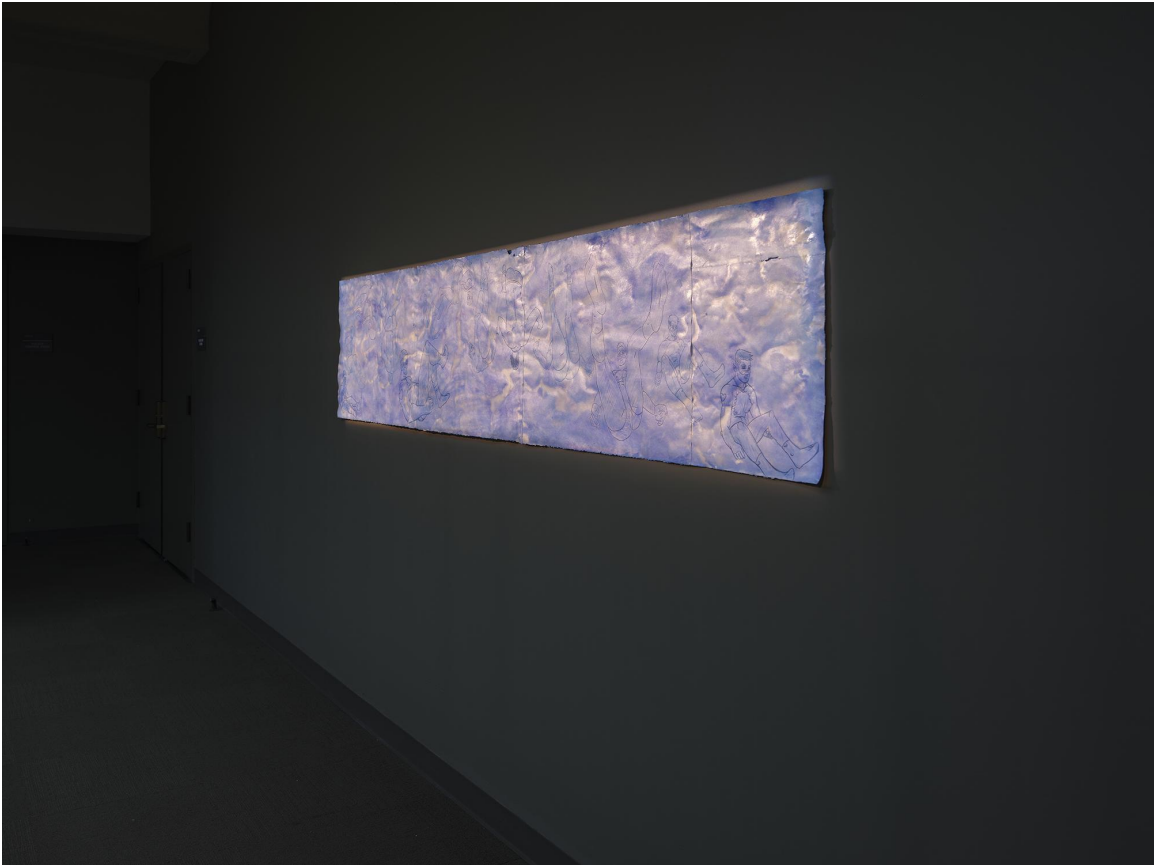


Fig.11: *My Awakening, My Insistent Possibilities.*
Colored pencil, watercolor, mica powder, and acrylic on paper
22 x 103 inches
2022



Fig.12: *My Awakening, My Insistent Possibilities.* (detail)



Fig.13: *My Awakening, My Insistent Possibilities.* (detail)



Fig.14: Cropped animation stills from *Winnie the Pooh and the Blustery Day*. 1968

Walt Disney Animation Studios. "The Mini Adventures of Winnie the Pooh: Heffalumps and Woozles." *YouTube* video, 2:32. Oct 12, 2011.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68pZLPsRBc4>



Fig.15: *An Open and Fearless Capacity for Joy and a Fuller Eros.*
Second hand bed sheets, Second hand window sheers, tulle, sequin backdrop curtain,
sequins, colored pencil, thread, metal hardware.

108 x 132 x 132 inches

2022



Fig.16: *An Open and Fearless Capacity for Joy and a Fuller Eros.* (Interior view)



Fig.17: *An Open and Fearless Capacity for Joy and a Fuller Eros.* (Interior view)



Fig.18: *An Open and Fearless Capacity for Joy and a Fuller Eros.* (Interior view)



Fig.19: *An Open and Fearless Capacity for Joy and a Fuller Eros.* (Interior view)