



Main Space



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***Gucci could Never* curated by Dana Snow**

Binary Rainbow, Lenox Daley, Alexi Pedneault, Sean Sandusky, Maximilian Suillerot
September 6 – October 5, 2019

Note: please read this essay in your most serious scholarly tone.

There have been decades of discussion over what is and is not Camp; culminating most recently in heated discussion around the 2019 Met-Gala: an annual celebrity costume ball based in New York City to benefit the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The theme for this year's ball was based on Susan Sontag's seminal essay "Notes on Camp".

What we all seemed to get wrong during this event was: Camp is not debatable. Either one gets the immediate sense of Camp or one does not – the answer varies from person to person. What can consistently be said about Camp is that it is not a simple flattened aesthetic. To Camp is to deflate pretension and dismantle hierarchy¹ – it is a social practice and way of identification whose elusiveness denies hetero/cis/patriarchal interpellation. On a more personal note: Camp carried the first forms of identification and disidentification with queer culture I had growing up in a 'don't ask, don't tell'

¹ David M. Halperin, "Beauty and the Camp" in *How to be Gay* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) 2012. 207.

community – where glimpses of queerness through pop-culture were one of the few forms of seeing oneself.

Gucci could Never is a group exhibition that practices camp in the gallery space; it figures a place of queer belonging, world building and performance that becomes tangible to the visitor through installation, text, craft and image. It is a space where I would have felt comfortable in the tumultuous navigation of my own identity as a younger person.

Maximilian Suillerot's *Introducing the Sex Magick Warriors* invites the viewer to consider queer presence in the face of systemic absence. The primary palate of pink and teal originates from the original pride flag. Once the hand dyed and sewn flag was commercially reproduced, pink and teal were omitted.² Pink -- symbolizing sex -- and teal, symbolizing art and magic become a signifier for loss, memory, and re-presenting in the context of queerness. Each character presented becomes a point of relation for the viewer through re-grammable personality types. They carry queer coded items such as rollerblades and back pocket hankies. Their names refigure queer persons of history; such as Sappho of Lesbos and *Xena: Warrior Princess*. We are reminded of them and are invited to see them every time we pass by their namesake colours – a source of belonging and care. *Introducing the Sex Magick Warriors* is a healing presence in the face of omission, but isn't afraid to have a little fun with its origins. Through the series' attention to theatrics and its re-appropriation of queer symbology, Camp finds itself woven tightly into a world of performance and community work that the warriors present.

² "Pride flag creator Gilbert Baker on the rainbow's real meaning" *CBC Radio*. 2015
<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/q/schedule-for-friday-june-26-2015-1.3128742/pride-flag-creator-gilbert-baker-on-the-rainbow-s-real-meaning-1.3128763>

Binary Rainbow's *Eau d'Bedroom Dancing* speaks to the experience of coming out as a queer person. Approaching their work as a synesthete, they fuse music and feeling to create immersive environments of soundscapes. In 2001, Le Tigre released their LP *From the Desk of Mr. Lady* and Binary Rainbow came out. This work is a fusion of the two events; the album "perfectly encapsulated how it felt to be a queer teen at that time...that [one] was seeing way more of the world than it felt like most people were."³ Each room draws inspiration from seminal surroundings of Rainbow's teenage-hood (their bedroom and blog layout to name a few) leveraged with the neon glow of Le Tigre's audio-visual impact. Acting as a comprehensive environs of kitsch and punk influence, the work performs a clear announcement of exactly what it means to be a little too loud for comfort; to live unflinchingly in the limelight. *Eau d'Bedroom Dancing* presents us with a set design for a performance that already took place; a sincere setting for the use of camp as formative to identity. Sitting directly beside the portraits of Canadian performance stars and the Sex Magick Warriors, we see possibilities of inhabitants in the gallery.

Alexi Pedneault's shrink film portraits find their inspiration in the current world of Canadian burlesque and drag performers. Shrink film (commonly known as shrinky-dinks) has been used in fan and DIY culture for decades. The medium itself becomes an iteration of camp – the complete embrace of arts and crafts culture in the *serious* space of fine art. Pedneault is a burlesque dancer, and makes work to reflect the diverse community of boundary pushers and artists. Functioning as an active archive of Canadian drag and burlesque culture, the works capture the zeitgeist of current queer performance stars from Beardoncé to Imogen Quest. These are depictions made with great care, from the careful detail of their linework to the powerful poses they strike. By their fixed gaze and poised stances they remind the viewer of what fun it is to camp about, and set the stage for future performers looking for inspiration.

³ Email from Binary Rainbow

Lenox Daley's *What I Gain, I Lose* pokes fun at the gallery go-er. The gallery conditions us to believe we are in the sacred space of white walls and the gaze of the transcendental eye; *What I Gain, I Lose* reminds us that we are in fact, creatures of the abject and the grotesque.⁴ Points of entry to the outside world become contaminated by waste, the mind/body divide becomes impossible to propagate. Daley's work twists the gaze to look unflinchingly back at ourselves – we are not, in fact, a perfectly evolved rational system to enjoy the finer things in life. We find ourselves breathing the same air as others in the space. The element of the grotesque is imperative to this work. *What I Gain, I Lose* plays into camp through its use of the feminine and the abject to “denaturalize and make comic the compulsory heterosexuality that is imposed [upon these bodies].”⁵ To co-opt the abject body into the heteropatriarchal gaze is obscene; *What I Gain, I Lose* holds a threat in self to a gaze that typically operates the gallery space. Instead of rejecting the work or feeling repulsed by it, we find ourselves on equal footing with this goblin femme and see no one deserves the kind of dignity that comes at the expense of someone else's shame. By democratizing the gallery space through the abject sense of camp, *What I Gain, I Lose* lets us revel in filth.

Sean Sandusky's *The Great Temple of Unicornia* promotes a wholistic approach to queer spirituality. The installation features the original Unicorns of The Indus Valley, the first recorded instance of the mythical creatures, predating their symbolic use in Christianity. The work is a tender approach: “You may seek the unicorn, but you may not always find it.”⁶ Using readymade plastic figurines, a constructed alter and a dreamscape fantasy environment, unicorns and rainbows are freed from the restraining bonds of contemporary signification and produce a vast world-being that precludes exclusive ideas of purity. *The Great Temple of Unicornia* invites us to perform our

⁴ Brian O'Doherty, “Notes on the Gallery Space” *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. (Santa Monica, CA: Lapis Press) 1986. 14-16.

⁵ Barbara Jane Brickman “A Strange Desire That Never Dies”: Monstrous Lesbian Camp in the Age of Conformity. *Discourse* 38 (2016) 358.

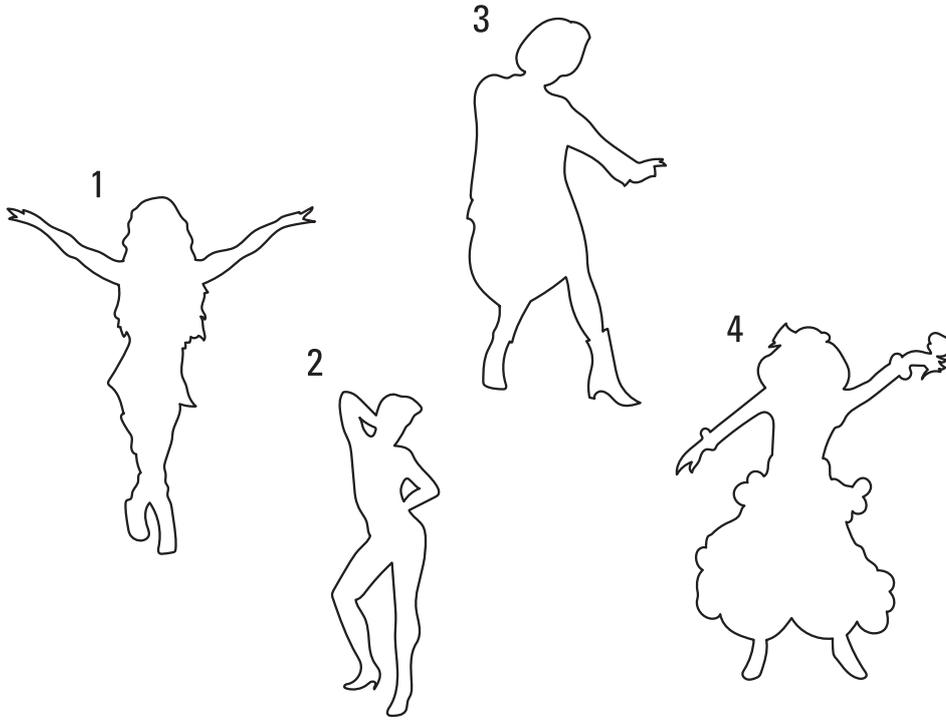
⁶ Conversation with Sean Sandusky

spiritual connection to the ideal pasts and futures we seek. We are welcomed into a place where we are loved and cared for deeply, where we may mend and refresh ourselves. Using camp sensibilities through the playful and kitsch elements of the installation as and repurposing Christian coded imagery, the work welcomes us into a place where we are loved and cared for deeply, where we can mend and refresh ourselves.

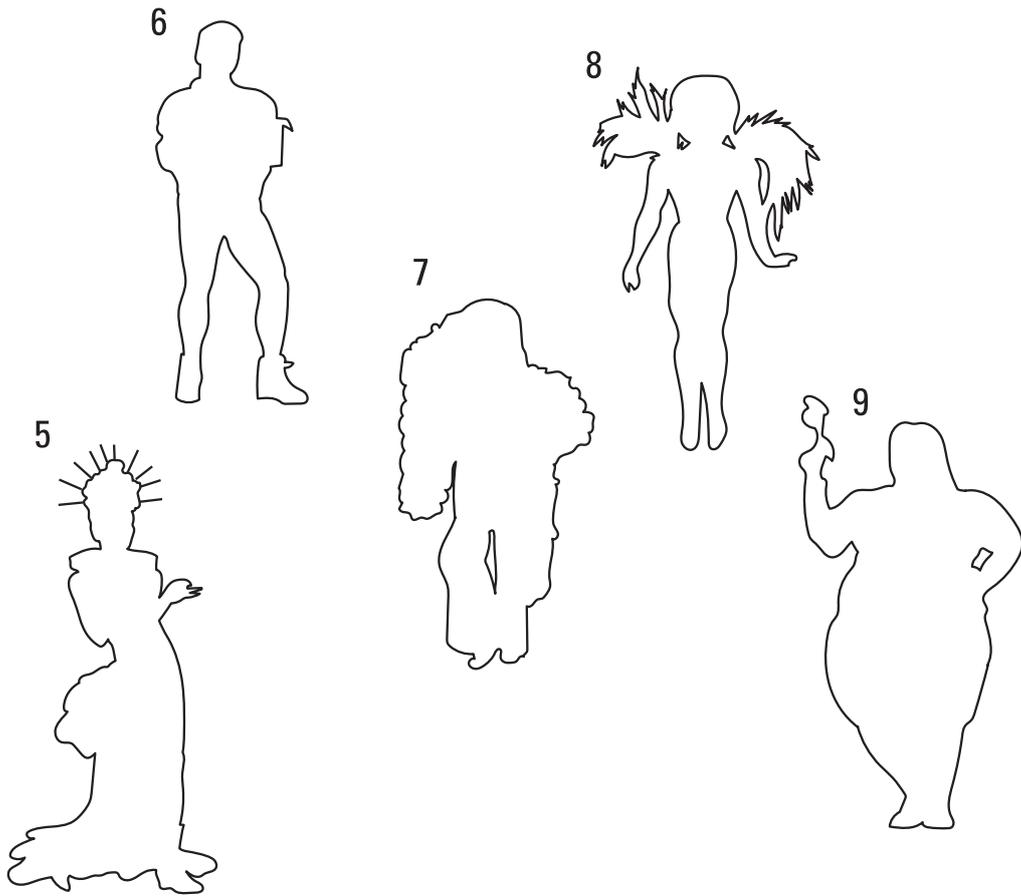
Gucci could Never plays with humour, text, theatricality and general camp aesthetics as a means to express agency and community through camp-y code. Positioned against the flattening of late-capitalist and Neo-liberalist aesthetics, each work functions as a mode of entry and identification into the diaphanous world of being and performing and being as performing. From goblins to unicorns, the works position themselves within Camp as a deeply meaningful transmission of belonging and care.

- Dana Snow

A



B



1. Beardoncé

2. Newfoundlad

3. Alexandher Brandy

4. Imogen Quest

5. Gay Jesus

6. Tygr Willy

7. Força

8. BonBon DiSpell

9. Yolanda Bonnell

