



Main Space

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***Veins of Existence: Beyond Survival* curated by Sean Sandusky**

Wil Brask with Natalie King, Justus Buenafior, Kevin Holliday, Gabrielle Leighton, and Rowan Red Sky

June 29 – July 28 2018

While looking at histories of LGBTQIA+ struggle and resistance one can observe long and divergent timelines influenced by geographical and generational contexts. Despite the disparity of lived experiences, there are common threads on which one can reflect. The battle for queer, trans, and gender non-conforming individuals in securing legislative protection and public legitimacy is a precarious journey. Fundamental rights have been haphazardly given and taken away depending on socio-political climates, especially when political majority shifts occur--North American democracy being a great example of this phenomenon. Profoundly affected by legislative instability and straddling the line of self-acceptance and existence, dissociative feelings become a part of the queer, trans, and gender non-conforming individuals. This order unwillingly forces individuals into existing in a standardized and binary system, which ultimately hurts and simplifies communities living more complex experiences, each with layered political views and personal intersections. What's interesting about the political shifts of the past three to four decades is that currently, more than ever, there is a need for queer, trans, and gender non-conforming folk to be represented as more than just bodies.

Veins of Existence: Beyond Survival includes queer, trans, and gender non-conforming artists representing their experience and what community has meant to them. Coming from vastly different backgrounds and artistic approaches, the selected works also extend beyond their just their physicality. Themes in these works range from topics of humour, shame, representation, ego, geographical location, heritage, and celebration. The elemental differences in each work help , foster a deep and inward look at the theology and evolution of LGBTQIA+ culture departing from the discussions that are currently prominent.

In her work, "*Blues*", Gabrielle Leighton uses sculptural painting methods on a wooden panel. The canvas is gashed with an axe representing the emotional wounds Leighton carries as a result of growing up queer in the small, right-wing community of Lincoln, Nebraska. Leighton expresses the challenges of coming out in a less accepting political and social atmosphere through layers of heavy abstractions carved into the plywood. The marks come together as branches of a tree above a background of faint smudged blue and purple shades. Through this imagery, she instills in the material her own queer history like the rings of a tree stump, documenting the time spent existing as openly queer while also displaying the vulnerability of her personal journey. The work is suspended off the ground, and a three dimensional element is added by attaching a bag of the sawdust generated from the plywood, physically embodying the grinding of both the physicality the wood, and the emotional labour that it represents.

Justus Buenaflor's work, *undoing the shame to become a better gay*, consists of a sculpture and a digital illustration that delve into the conflicts of self-acceptance and homosexual intimacy merging with shame and hindered self-perception. Materially, Buenaflor works with different methods of physical fabrication and digital animation to create a mini installation that inhabits its own universe while reflecting on lived anxieties. The pieces that make up the work include a hand-made plinth adorned by four rubber silicone faces of Buenaflor, with plaster hands reaching out, and a resin pyramid projecting a digital illustration of his face distorted offering both what one can see about

someone's physicality, as well as an entry point to the inner turmoil and shame that one may carry.

With Kevin Holliday's work, *Day2Day*, the elements of performativity and sculpture come together to comment on the absurdity of commodifying oneself through the internet and outlets like YouTube vlogging. As a multi-racial, queer and gender non-conforming artist, Holliday comments on the erasure of their communities in a capitalist digital market. By suspending LED screens projecting queer theory texts onto fabric suspended from the ceiling, as well presenting a 'day in the life'-esque YouTube vlog on a tv screen. Holliday challenges this erasure while lampooning the culture that erases and dually exploits LGBTQIA+ and racialized people.

Rowan Red Sky's *Fire Keeper in The Moon Lodge*, reflects on their lived experience as a two-spirit-identified person of Onyota'a:ka ancestry through a mural that connects the ideas of spirit, body, and land. With their mural Rowan illustrates a commentary on social taboos of women taking on men's roles and stepping outside gendered assignments in some Indigenous communities. The artist's 's experiences with women's moon ceremonies and participating while menstruating, known as moontime and "sitting in the moon lodge", coupled with a desire to masculinize their community role, lead them to define a third gender space for themselves when attending moon ceremony. Using imagery from lived experiences, Sky challenges that one's biology defines their gender as well the roles that they may play within their respective communities.

Natalie King and Wil Brask's collaborative mural , *do not go forward without my spoken permission*, is an immersive wall piece showcasing the complexities of queer identities through multiple representations, therefore giving visibility to their own individual intersections. Natalie King is an Anishinaabe queer artist that works primarily in mixed-media and painting based work representing queer bodies in an illuminating way. Conversationally, Wil Brask identifies as a disabled queer trans femme artist, and

their practice explores how visual language can change perceptions of gender and disability. Combining their distinctive representational styles of queer, trans, and femme bodies ; they created lively large-scale versions of their communities collaged together on the gallery wall.. The title of this installation originates from Kai Cheng Thom's Novel *Fierce Femmes and Notorious Liars*, a semi-autobiographical fantastical memoir about the writer's experience of being a trans femme identified woman¹. The mural mirrors Thom's novel themes via King and Brask's ability to transcend the magical aspects in representing bodies that face and challenge the troubles of queer, trans, and gender non-conforming realities.

With the stories and issues that are erased from mainstream society, much becomes shut out of extremely important conversations about how gigantic and diverse the queer community truly is. This show illuminates the numerous conversations and intersections in the community, showing that through complexity there is an embrace of the wealth of resources that resonates with the diversity of its members. The selected artworks invite the audience to read each one of them in a different light. The diversity of experiences is a unifying factor, tying the exhibition together. Although surviving I can present as the only embodied option among the queer community, it is important to acknowledge the strength and knowledge that can open to evolve and create more room to be united in understanding, solidarity, and empathy.

¹ Thom, Kai Cheng. *Fierce Femmes and Notorious Liars: A Dangerous Trans Girls Confabulous Memoir*. Montréal, QC: Metonymy Press, 2017.