The body, a long contested site of identity construction, has been used by historically by queers to convey desire, build affinity and transgress norms. As contemporary art practices engage with the rupture of legible bodily semiotics, what new modes of expression form in their wake?

Cruising the archive, what legacies & genealogies do artists engage, which ones will they willingly forget?

What does the embodiment of queerness through dress look like in our current historical moment? What do these art practices say about the future of explorations of identity through dress?

Looking at the fashioned queer body, this show will engage with objects, performance and film which approximate, provide proxy or depart from the body as a site. In this way, it will explore the social and political quagmire of getting dressed, and will examine the discursive practices, nuanced modes, and slight twists fashioning undergoes in the hands of queers.

This show will explore the ways that practices of queer fashion refuse a neat linearity, opting instead for a cruising of the archive rather than a clean submittal. Rather than assuming that the archive always either contains & captures or liberates & educates, this show might hope to acknowledge this duality while also wondering what else practices of display can engender.

Beneath the assumption of the body as a legible surface for reading identity lies a dense network of associations, proclivities and meanings that queer theory constantly wrangles with. Simultaneously, these works themselves question the traditional modes of identity construction and the supposedly stable categories of gender, sex, sexuality, race and ability.

Additionally this show will explore the way that the fashioned queer body and its manifestations are co-opted by the mainstream. Especially in our moment of Mass Queer Culture, where cooption is a continual process, these articulations, nuanced modes and slight twists of ‘dressing’ are as ever present and potent.
materiality

Textiles play out heavily in this proposal as they are closely linked, both materially and aesthetically to practices of fashion. Although not analogous to each other, they do reference each other in certain capacities. And, much like fashion, textiles (and similar crafts) have been viewed by the art world as “low” or base materials, regarded as the stuff of everyday life as opposed to “elevated” art materials. Textiles and fabrics in fine art appeared as a part of a Feminist art movement with much fervor in the 60s and 70s responding to the hyper masculine eliteism of Minimalism and at times even echoing the aesthetics. Rather than furthering the conversation around textiles as “women’s work” or craft as “fine art” the pieces and creative practices in this show exemplify how malleable fabric and textiles themselves can be in terms of practices and associations. This slippery, sumptuous nature lends them brings forth evocative relationships to bodies, both collective and individual, a particularly generative mode as queer politics and self fashioning move towards increasingly fluid identities.

methodology

Proposals, as plans, are attractive to me in this context because they deal in the hypothetical, while still having some valence on the ‘actual’. This proposal, rather than presenting one curatorial option, presents many different many options and alternatives. If accepted, there will probably be 5 artists used, not the 7 featured here. Similarly, there are multiple layouts presented here, only one of which would be used. My intention is to present a multitude of versions, what differentiates them from one another is the different guiding approaches as well as pieces featured in each one. These guiding principles, mostly poetic invocation, are featured on each page.

“...When conceived as multiple, audiences can register and produce very different kinds of knowledges.”

From On Queer Curating, pg. 3
**option a: a bodily energy;**

“To restore a differently queer body to queer theory - the body erotic thought not only in terms of its possibilities for making sexual cultures but in terms of its capacities for labor by which I mean both the social relations of production / reproduction and the expenditure of bodily energy.” Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories By Elizabeth Freeman

Each of these works finds, creates or makes space for a differently queer body, or a queer body differently. Through literalizing this body, figuring it into a new landscapes, spatially locating or building a world for and around difference, these artists work in a bodily energy through established social relations, their labored textile work the first steps in these new imaginings.

**option b: body novel threat**

“Throught the thirities, queer life in America had grown ever more visible, continuing a trend started by the pansy craze of the late 1920s. But the lightheartedness of America’s early flirtations with queer people did not hold. “Awareness” quickly transitioned into “surveillance,” and queer people went from “novelty” to “threat.” From When Brooklyn Was Queer By Hugh Ryan

As difference moves from novelty to threat, and seemingly back to novelty, as with representational politics, can we make it as that queer bodies create become weaponized? What happens when visibility is not sought for liberation, but becomes a tool for creating further confusion? Perhaps, as with the powerful stance of the model on the bonanza runway, this is a creative potentiality that fashioning gives us.

**option c: what?!ever**

“Fugitive could be another mode of telling—like when someone runs away from visibility, makes themselves scarce, what does it say? What truths does it hold up? Refusal can be a sort of protest of all these conditions of being.” Trapdoor: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility, Edited By Reina Gossett, Eric A. Stanley and Johanna Burton

The works in this version help us to confront our own gaze, as well as interrogate assumptions we make, just as we have to question the way the dressed bodies also gaze back. Fugitive in this sense might be a coherence (as with Wang and Dwyer’s work), seriousness (as with the works by Bonanza and Calderwood) and with bodily boundary (Nestler). These works neither run from or to, visibility, instead they generate a confrontational moment with the gaze and with to recognize its ability to construct spaces and the identities that might inhabit them.

**option d: figuring**

“a body both semiotically and sensually at productive odds with itself.” Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories By Elizabeth Freeman

The body, both itself a figure, and figured (or not) in the work, is constantly “figured” out. This evisceration, and its inherent failures, seems particularly fitting for textile based practices, which evoke at once a body in their portrayal, materially assume a surface and skin underwritten by the logic of their production (weaving is a binary process) and also a body in absentia; the body that produces the textile. A textile might inherently also function like Freeman’s description of the body. These works in particular seem to look at modes of how queerness might figure into this frame of textile work.

**option e if the past is a retreating edge, what will the future be?**

“The order of simulation, or post-modernism, problematizes the notion of a correspondence theory of representation, and is based on coded similarities and differences. Since fashion makes no reference to an outside reality, it invites a reading of a different order: a perpetual re-examination of the code.” Thinking Through Fashion: A guide to Key Theorists By Efрат Tseelon

Using ancient processes, these works portray new forms doing, and in doing so, call in legacy, while calling out to new futures. They are, together, the antithesis of the tapestries of antiquity, which were commissioned by those in power to exalt themselves. In these works, all taking the form of wall-hangings, we see a bevy of techniques for mnemonic devices of queer storytelling, and hopefully, some prothetizing of queer futures. For these works truly depict the length we go to in order to make worlds for ourselves.

---

**legend:** find out more about each curatorial option here via corresponding letter

**legend**
1. Ricki Dwyer  
Pieces of Work

2. Rose Nestler  
Deep Pockets

3. Craig Calderwood  
Untitled (Immature)

4. Diedrick Brackens  
The Flame Goes

5. Hope Wang  
the dust continues to scurry into the spotlight

a bodily energy

getting located: option A
1. Bonanza *The Young and the Restless*
2. Ricki Dwyer *Pieces of Work*
3. Craig Calderwood *Gift Giver*
4. Rose Nestler *Hung Out to Dry*
5. Hope Wang *in the valley*
6. Diedrick Brackens *in the valley*
1. Bonanza The Young and the Restless
2. Hope Wang throwing a short glance in the sliver between the glass barred against the warm air
3. Craig Calderwood See you in Hell, from Heaven
4. Rose Nestler Athena Pendant Flag
5. Ricki Dwyer Like this?
figuring

1. Rose Nestler Athena Pendant Flag Detail
2. Diedrick Brackens ventriloquist
3. Craig Calderwood Gift Giver
4. Hope Wang face prostrate, temples kissing, the baked facade,
5. Ricki Dwyer Like this?
if the past is a retreating edge, what will the future be?

1. Diedrick Brackens *the flame goes*
2. Rose Nestler *Rubber Gloves with Cufflinks*
3. Hope Wang *the neighbors fractured a hole in the drywall*
4. Ricki Dwyer *I Never Got To Be A Dyke, But I know I'll Get To Be A Fag*
5. Craig Calderwood *Gift Giver*
Craig Calderwood's work features innovative usage of materials more likely to be found at a craft store than an art gallery; fabric paint, found fabrics, markers, etc. She flexes the intended use and meaning of these materials she calls “low end.” The resulting work, evocative of a certain otherness that comes from exploration into the realms of desire and biodiversity, utilizes coded visual language and inside jokes. Analogous to the covert signaling used by queer communities, such as the sartorial choices of dress, her works are designed for queer audience recognition, not made for a straight audience palatability. Her pieces, such as the large tapestries that are massive in scale, have been featured in a solo show at the Luggage Store in San Francisco, as well as the Queer California: Untold Stories group show at the Oakland Museum the incredible compendium Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility edited by Reina Gossett, Eric A. Stanley and Johanna Burton. She has been a SECA Finalist (Society for the Encouragement of Contemporary Art) program at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art active since 1967.

Calderwood’s humor, such as buttholes featured around the grommets on the tapestry pieces, are a testament to the ways in which queer humor and smut have always been part and parcel of self fashioning. The highly decorative and patterned textiles she employs relate directly to the act of dressing and the fun and fabulous ways queers have employed clothing and pattern. That recognition of pattern, or looking is center here is key, as Nicole Archer writes in Trap Door, “the act of looking is predicated on the contingency - as opposed to the certainty- of seeing (what lies beneath the garment, the code, the work of art). Her figures make no promises to resolve their identities.”

Ricki’s work “combines sculptural practices, printmaking, and ceramics to reflect the potential of cloth as an embodied form.” In Dywer’s pursuit of cloth as a contextually defined material, they explore highly complex weaving structures in a familiar millennial textile vernacular; the checkerboard pattern of Umbro shorts, the faded pastels of Limited Too. They are drawn to cloth as a material because it cannot be separated from the body. This enmeshing of cloth and body has three major manifestations; embodiment, the haptic, and wage labor of its production. Cloth’s relationship to the body is also calibrated by Ricki in the ways that the sculptures themselves take up gesture as posture; the cloth drapes, is held up with bungee cords and carabiners, like a body posed and primed for the social sphere. With clothing and textiles, we often assume they submit to our desires of what we intend for them to be; both as objects and as signifiers of identity, Ricki’s work explores what happens when we instead give them licence for power and agency. Posed as alternative or proxy bodies, Ricki’s work (most notably the Bodies series), explores the ways that bodies navigate and push up against categorization in a binary reliant world. Additionally, Dwyer’s “interest in ‘memorializing’ objects and connecting them to the representation of the body,” engages conversation of queer legacy and the collective memory textiles themselves can inhabit. The axioms and phrases they use tend towards the relatable slogan, with a touch of heartfelt earnestness, almost like something you would read on a t-shirt, as is the case with: I never got to be a dyke, but I guess I’ll get to be a fag.

In their most recent work, the ‘cloth’, an industrial pre-fabricated textile, is literally burnt out during the process of its casting in porcelain clay. The referent, cloth, is eliminated in this process, leaving behind a literal shell, its hollowness only understood by those acclimated to the process. Alchemically, that which is soft now takes on a rigid hard form, belying its evocative draped appearance. This re-tooling of material speaks to the ways in which bodies cannot be read as simple containers for our assumptions, and that, for many queers, mercherial ‘fires’ of self-production are processes that may create external surfaces that confuse legibility.
Getting located: about the artists

Rose Nestler

A recent graduate of the Brooklyn College MFA Program, Rose Nestler’s work looks carefully at the ways that certain garments have vested power to highlight the highly political nature of getting dressed. Altering and exploiting iconic items such as the power blazer and the sports bra, she attunes our awareness to just how steadfast the supposed gender of clothing is. By turning to cloth, with its connotations and material capacity for softness, and stretching it into taut forms, Rose reflects the rigidity of such societal conditions of gendered stereotypes implicit in these garments. In their heightened and exaggerated forms, these caricatures of ubiquitous garments also show how notions of queerness are more integrated in processes of fashion than we might assume; wearing a business suit to ‘pass’ as a business (affluent) person, wearing a sports bra to make a chest less noticeable. These modes can all be understood as ways of making discursive bodies ‘fit in’ to gender and sexuality tropes. Rose’s slight twisting of materiality, be it exaggerated Madonna bra boobs on a zoot suit, or the metal hardware affixed to a seemingly banal rubber glove, shows how bodies, rather than easily and smoothly integrated into stringent societal mores, are mostly discursive and unruly. The absence of the body, a body even, in Rose’s sculptures, speak to the concealing and revealing of the body in fashion, and how this process both negates and produces desire and identity alike. Nester recently had a solo show at BRIC, and was featured in a very lauded presentation at Spring / Break Art Show.

Bonanza

“If we do not imagine the future, someone else will do it for us,” reads the opening sentence of Bonaza’s press release for Sooner or Later, a group show, they were featured in at Southern Exposure gallery last January. The collective’s creative output ranges from video, fashion, installation and various sculptural mediums; its many morphologies reflect the diverse perspectives and approaches of the three person group. Their work, featured at such Bay Area Institutions such as Di Rosa preserve, Recology and at institutions such as Syracuse University, has also been written about in SFAQ (San Francisco Arts Quarterly). Dress for this, a show at Oakland’s n/a gallery in 2013, deals specifically with presentation (of self and body) and ways in which it “attributes, masks, and alters meaning.” A multi-media immersive installation, the “individual pieces within their installation change character in relation to each other”, as the pieces themselves change “so too does the distinction between the artists’ individual practices, a strategic challenge to the value of authorship and the fixity of identity.” As with their other projects, centering the viewer allows for an “engendering alter-identities and establishing new sets of relations, bonanza’s collaboration, the space, and the public together propose multiplicities of experience, a game of appearing and being, and being anew.”

Diedrick Brackens

Using tapestry weaving to tell stories of Black queer men and their relationships, Diedrick Braken’s work asks ‘what does it mean to be tender as a man?’ Diedrick’s methodologies come from a rich “interlacing [of] diverse traditions, including West African weaving, European tapestries, and quilting from the American south” and feel simultaneously historic and contemporary. While they feature and picture commemoration, they also seem to call in new futures and potentiality of relations. These tensions are also materially evident, the weavings, a complex feat of a highly advanced double-cloth techniques, feature various slippages and errant threads, even their selvedge ends are knotted, messy and casual. These moments of humanistic imperfection call in the queer body and all of its materially connective tissues and narratives. The act of weaving for Brakens seems to be tapping into this ancient practice of creation: creation of new worlds, a re-telling of history, and new forms of relationally. Even his use of dyes, a haberdashery of both natural dyes and commercial ones is a distinctively contemporary and almost anti-purity bent. Diedrick was born in Texas, and now lives and works in LA. Diedrick’s first solo show at the New Museum from June to September of 2019.
K8 Hardy’s incessant documentation of her chaotically brilliant mash-up personal style predated selfie culture and personal fashion blogs. A graduate of the ISP Program at the Whitney, Hardy returned to the Whitney for a multi-faceted fashion show presentation for the Biennial in 2012. Raised in Texas, Hardy was acclimated to “the rigors of personal appearance” where she was often sent home from school for her outlandish and shocking outfits. It is Hardy’s humor-laden cultural mixing of high and low with fashion and art that makes her work so relatable and unmistakably queer. K8 herself even says, “every article of clothing is so loaded with signifiers, I don’t know how you can help but make up stories about people and their desires based on what they wear.” Her potent mixing is not lost on Holland Cotter, who described her work as “childhood make-believe, 1960s activism, 1970s feminism, queer politics, the cult of narcissism.”

Hope and architecture, both prime examples of Foucault’s bio-power, use technologies of the body which are constructed through societal and political influence. Like fashion, the built environment can be read as a spatial production of norms, power and white supremacy. This surface, not legible as a solid structure but as layers of malleable porous substrate, functions like skin, the primary surface of the architecture of the body, which ‘must’ be covered by the garments, the socially constructed skin. In much as this surface/non-surface of a building (and a clothed body) reflects, transmits and absorbs, Hope’s work does too; its fabric edifices are themselves malleable. Through reifying and recreating a surface she generates a multitude of soft layers, themselves a type of false copy. This mimicry as process is inherent through these modes; the production of cloth, buildings and fashion; every blouse is itself a copy of a prototypical ‘blouse’ in a way that every building references a ‘structure’. Surface tension emerges from this copy with no original, choice here is another construction, as limiting as the endless options for ‘freedom’ and ‘self-expression’ in a corporate-driven fashion system.

Hope’s sculptures denote, observe and generate spheres of the public and the private, distinctions that constructed spaces, both bodily and spatial, contend with. Within these vignettes, a mark of spray paint, a quick dash of spray paint, the lock on a construction site, are like sartorial marks through which one can eviscerate meaning, seeing the interplay of larger structures; financial inequity, gentrification, the increasingly atomized and privatized spheres of modern life etc. These tally marks, and their supposed signifiers, resist a singular, legible and linear narrative, indeed queering coherence. Hope’s work also evades simplistic readings of identity politics, opting instead for a centering of the periphery, a cataloging of the experience of marginalization. Through the mediation of these public spaces, and the framing of these gestures of negotiation (the yellow and black slash construction sign that gracefully leans on the floor and wall) we can reconsider the visual semiotics of bodily presentation. Or, what does a woven depiction of a blue tarp tell us about a scarf around the neck?


3 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
9 Ibid.