

Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward explores how the expanding influence of digital and online technologies, fandom subcultures, and artistic discourse has created new possibilities for queer identification, changing how personal roles and forms of expression are defined in contemporary society. Based on the premise that the cultures of role play, sexual play, and digital play have all flourished beyond the boundaries of art structures, this exhibition provides a gathering place and platform for the exploration of queer play created by individuals and groups from the worlds of game design and theory, performance, kink, and activism.

In the past ten years, digital media has given rise to new areas of sociability while eroding the stability of institutions that had previously been the public forums for LGBTQIA identity formation: bars, community centers, bookstores, and periodicals. Queer people are now much more likely to access their peers on places like Tumblr, Instagram, or fan sites devoted to role playing and collaborative fictions.

Out of these interactions a new model of identity has arisen, one that is not only performative, but collaborative, based on mutability and intersection. Rather than framing selfhood in relation to a presumed mainstream discourse, people are warping the pathways of discourse itself, making new selves for and with each other. It's this warping and performance that I refer to as "queer play."

Our current political climate is one of speed, polarization, and panic: it demands that sides be chosen, positions clarified; it reduces all utterance to shouts across a widening divide. I am drawn to the work in this show precisely because it doesn't traffic in essentialism, because it imagines utopias of various possibility and complexity.

The artists in *Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward* are not afraid of mess or confusion. They take our

current problems as the starting point for invention, pleasure, and productive doubt. They construct their identities through whatever materials are at hand. They dress up to dismantle. I find their anger to be hopeful rather than cynical. The point of play is to re-awaken hope, and the point of queer play is not to produce winners and losers, but to expand the game throughout our lives.

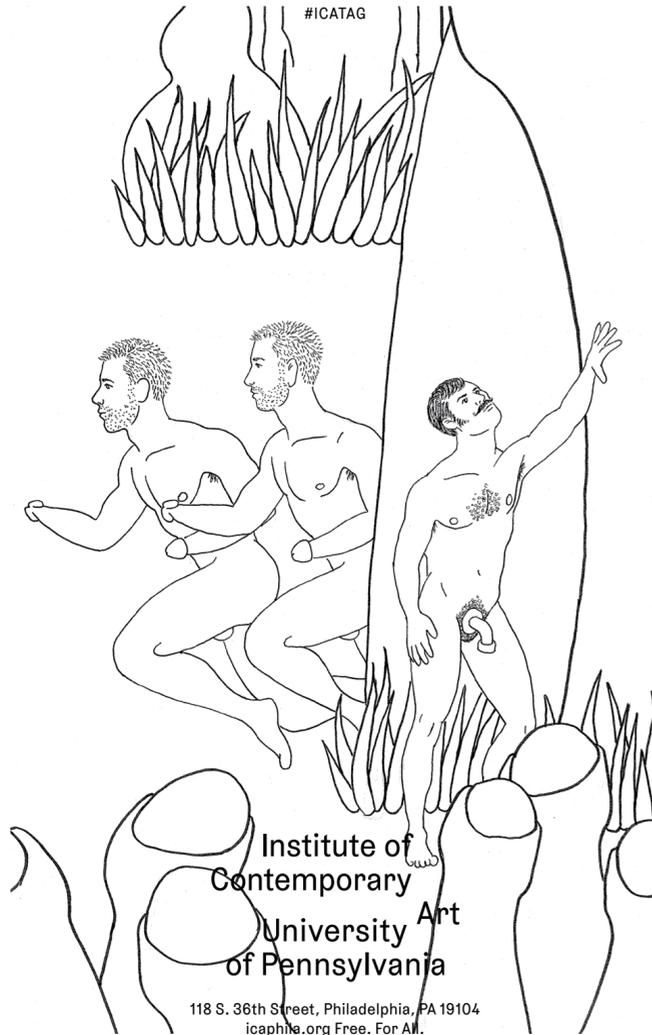
—Nayland Blake, Sachs Guest Curator

ARTIST BIO

Nayland Blake is an artist, writer, educator, and curator. Born in New York City in 1960, they attended Bard College and then California Institute of the Arts. After receiving their MFA, they moved to San Francisco in 1984. They have had one-person exhibitions at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; University Art Museum, Berkeley; Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston; and the Tang Teaching Museum at Skidmore College and their works are in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art; the Whitney Museum; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Brooklyn Museum; The Studio Museum in Harlem; and many others. They have authored numerous catalogue essays, as well as articles and interviews appearing in such publications as *Artforum*, *Out*, *Interview*, and *Outlook*. In 1995 they were co-curator, with Lawrence Rinder, of the landmark exhibition *In A Different Light*, at the University Art Museum, Berkeley, the first museum exhibition to examine the impact of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer artists on contemporary art. They are currently the founding chair of the ICP/Bard MFA program at the International Center for Photography in New York. Nayland is represented by Anilim Gilbert Gallery in San Francisco, and Matthew Marks Gallery in New York.

Organized by Nayland Blake, Katherine Sachs (CW'69) and Keith L. Sachs (W'67) Guest Curator, with support from Laporte Associate Curator Kate Kraczon. ICA gratefully acknowledges support from the Katherine and Keith Sachs Guest Curator Program.

A fully illustrated catalogue will accompany the exhibition.



3

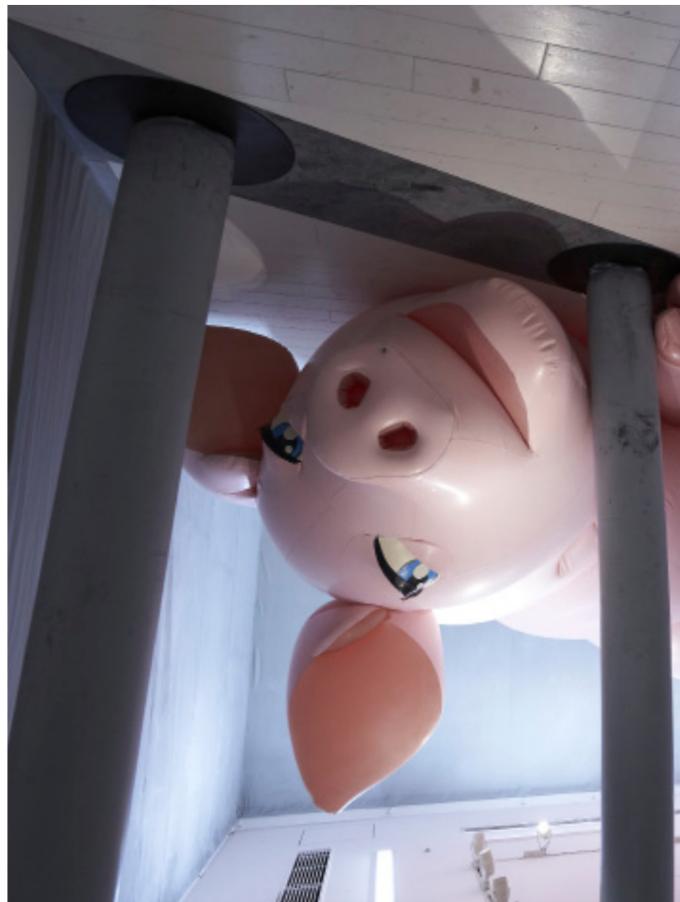
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<p>Dusty Shoulters <i>Untitled (Slate Toga or I Wake Up Like This)</i>, 2015 Photo printed fabric, costume jewelry, and feathered felt hat Performance at ICA on June 23</p> <p>Cupid Ojia <i>Keely the Cub Scout</i>, 2017 Twenty-one C-print photographs Courtesy the artist and Callie Fine Arts, New York</p> <p>Clément Hill Goldberg <i>Love the Alien: Instructions for Other</i> Web series: Season 1 (Episodes 1-6) <i>The Deer Inbetween</i>, 2012 Video, color, sound, 2:26 minutes</p> <p>Cupid Ojia Three selections from <i>Cupid Ojia</i> Digital video, color, sound, 26 minutes</p> <p>K8 Hardy <i>Express Looks (of Outtumentary)</i>, 2016 HD video, color, sound, 16 minutes</p> <p>Tommy Bruce Edition 1/5 Courtesy of the artist and Reena Spaulings <i>Fire art</i>, NY/LA</p> <p>Tommy Bruce Archival inkjet print <i>Arms at home</i>, 2017</p> <p>Tommy Bruce Archival inkjet print <i>Wade</i>, 2016</p> <p>Tommy Bruce Archival inkjet print <i>Football gear photoshoot</i>, 2013</p> <p>Tommy Bruce Archival inkjet print <i>Shie the rabbit</i>, 2013</p> <p>Tommy Bruce Archival inkjet print HD video, color, sound, 40 minutes</p> <p>Arnold J. Kemp <i>WHEN WILL MY LOVE BE RIGHT</i>, 2013 Galvanized welded and riveted steel, leather, brass, copper, and seashell</p> <p>Tommy Bruce Archival inkjet print <i>Kris and House</i>, 2016</p> <p>Tommy Bruce Archival inkjet print <i>Jackpot with carrot-on-a-stick</i>, 2016</p> <p>Wood, stain, and laminate</p> <p>Savannah Knopp Archival inkjet print <i>Meekret and Spruce outside Wawa</i>, 2013</p> <p>Tommy Bruce Archival inkjet print <i>Bell Crusher</i>, 2016</p> <p>Tommy Bruce Plexiglass and tractor hardware <i>Mid City Angels</i>, (2017-ongoing)</p> <p>Matt Savitsky Durational Performance at ICA on April 11th</p> <p>Paul Mpagi Sepuya <i>quatched Harness</i>, 2017 Laminated two by four and wood stain</p> <p>Savannah Knopp Archival inkjet print <i>Figpen</i>, 2016</p> <p>Saeborg Latex Edition 1/5</p> <p>Paul Mpagi Sepuya <i>Fitzy</i>, 2013</p> <p>Saeborg Latex <i>SAFORK-1 723765-1</i>, 2016</p> <p>Courtesy the artist and Callieco Fine Arts, New York</p> <p>A.K. Burns Topping soil, foil-wrapped hard candy, and resin <i>Corporal Soil</i>, 2017</p> <p>A.K. Burns Video completion: <i>Figpen</i>, 2016</p> <p>Courtesy the artist and Callieco Fine Arts, New York</p> <p>A.K. Burns Topping soil, foil-wrapped hard candy, and resin <i>Corporal Soil</i>, 2017</p> <p>A.K. Burns Video, color, 8 minutes <i>Stinghouse-9</i>, 2014</p> <p>Courtesy the artist and Callieco Fine Arts, New York</p> <p>A.K. Burns Topping soil, foil-wrapped hard candy, and resin <i>Corporal Soil</i>, 2017</p> <p>Larry Mantello <i>Corn Stalk</i>, 1994 Mixed media</p> <p>A.K. Burns Topping soil, foil-wrapped hard candy, and resin <i>Corporal Soil</i>, 2017</p> <p>Dusty Shoulters <i>Untitled (Foxy Pocket or Hanky Panky)</i>, 2012/2017 Recycled denim, hankies, disco detritus, Kindling, and costume jewelry</p>	<p>Dusty Shoulters Performance at ICA on May 19 <i>Playthrough at ICA on May 19</i> Video, color, sound, 10:07 minutes</p> <p>HANA, 2016 Archival inkjet print <i>noa really = a game</i>, 2016</p> <p>Playthrough at ICA on May 19 <i>The Price of Youth</i>, 2016</p> <p>Playthrough at ICA on May 19 Video, color, sound, 1:43 minutes</p> <p>Buzz Slutsky Archival pigment print <i>My Doll is Just Like Me</i>, 2016</p> <p>Matt Savitsky Performance image made in collaboration with Jacinto Astazaran Archival pigment print <i>Vertical Study (Life Cycle)</i>, 2017</p> <p>Matt Savitsky Performance image made in collaboration with Young Joon Kwak Archival pigment print <i>Hunt Me Flenty and Succulent from the Radiator 2 Collection</i>, 2017</p> <p>Matt Savitsky Video games, PC, and monitor These works can be downloaded for free at radior2nig.itch.io/radior2</p> <p>Archival pigment print with Noe Olivas ALL ARTWORKS: courtesy of the artist unless otherwise noted.</p>
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FRONT: Cupid Ojia, *The Gender Wilderness Coloring Book* (detail), 2015. Pigma pen on paper. Courtesy of the artist. ABOVE: Saeborg Latex, *Figpen*, 2016. latex, wax, wood, wood, and steel. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Kyoichi Tazuki.

Why play? Because the current rules are insufficient, because the current ways that bodies and identities are imagined, used, and discussed have brought us to a boiling point of anger and reaction. Play awakens us to the possibilities in ourselves and in others that fear hides from us. In building a space for play, we make a space to come together and reimagine ourselves and our circumstances. Play leads us out and through. Some of the works in this exhibition imagine spaces of queer freedom; others tackle the ways in which we construct ourselves through costume and display. Others still provide new avenues of communication beyond traditional gallery settings.

SHARANG BISWAS devises roleplay scenarios that allow players and viewers to inhabit difficult and complex emotions through communal experiences. Their game *Feast* takes the form of a potluck dinner in homage to the work of artist Félix González-Torres (1957–1996). Players use taste and narrative to describe the absent memories of characters that the players devise, but then consume.

LEE BLALOCK's work *Loving the Alien* posits a new performance interface, combining game mechanics, video processing, and computer programming to create a performer whose actions are extra-bodily. The resultant videos awaken us to that which is alien and unknowable in even the simplest gestures that we make.

TOMMY BRUCE documents the Furry Fandom with an eye to the way that personalities and personas intermingle and inform each other. Fursuiters are both dressing up and undressing, revealing the selves that are invented and true. The fursuit is a costume and an extension of the desired body. Bruce finds fursuiters at home, in transition, and at conventions, and shows how these spaces become havens of connection and communal identity.

A.K. BURNS's objects are charged with dissent, and their most recent installation

brings together a suite of fragmentary sculptures and a video whose discursive rhythms culminate in a subterranean dance number. Burns skews the everyday into moments of political consciousness, enlisting friends into a cast of philosophers and stars.

CLEMENT HIL GOLDBERG's animated series *The Deer Inbetween* is a low-key soap opera about the fate of the earth and the weight of the human soul. It is a funny animal cartoon whose animation style recalls *Davey and Goliath* (a clay animated TV show from the 1960s and 1970s) but whose characters face the dilemmas of difference and connection. Goldberg's touch is light, but a mournful consciousness pervades their tales.

The rise of social media and digital photography has given birth to new sorts of identity, play, and exploration. K8 HARDY's feature film project *Outfitmentary* documents the thousands of outfits Hardy has worn over the course of eleven years. Hardy has turned the act of dressing up into an expression of kaleidoscopic selfhood. *Express Views (of Outfitmentary)* is a raucous, four-minute edit of the larger feature, one that brings us into direct correspondence with the artist's play of style, history, and humor.

7

CLIFF HENGST's mordant placards are anti-tweets: handmade yelps of despair, outrage, and bemusement that still manage to be funny and comforting. In a year that saw many people making their first protest signs, Hengst provides the slogans we need: succinct and tart. They envision protest as a game of wits.

JUNTAE TEEJAY HWANG's haunting installation *Blue Salmon* is a meditation on belonging and displacement, a ceremonial space through which the artist tells the story of the blue salmon's attempts to return to its origin. Hwang works across the mediums of video, installation, and performance to decenter Western narrativity in favor of empathy with the lost and wandering.

ARNOLD J. KEMP's work is lush and precise. Their carefully made objects and installations are suffused with feelings of longing and absence, asking us to draw close and notice subtleties of material and arrangement.

SAVANNAH KNOOP combines bondage and prosthesis. Their sculptures highlight the absurdity and delight of bodies at play and at rest, providing tails that rock, knee extensions, and the world's largest ball crusher. These are toys as much as athletic gear, and Knoop—a gifted performer—treats these objects both as props and as visual challenges.

For the past twelve years, SAEBOERG LATEX has been constructing a fantasy world that is equal parts cruelty and whimsy. The style of their inflatable latex suits and installations recalls that of the German toy company Playmobil—with primary colors, smiling faces, and barnyard animals—but the scenarios these characters inhabit are those of birth, lust, death, and consumption. Of course, these are the sorts of topics that we all base our childhood play around, but we conveniently ignore that truth as adults. Saeborg returns the serious stakes of play to

center stage. The mother pig in their installation *Pigpen* may be suckling piglets, but its nourishing presence is also locked away behind thick bars. The latex costumes Saeborg builds and wears are similarly exuberant and confining.

LARRY MANTELLO's sculptures glory in accumulation and abundance. Mantello gathers toys furniture, artificial flowers, and party favors into fantastic structures that allow us to get lost in the details covering their vibrating surfaces.

RAMEKON O'ARWISTERS organizes crochet jams, group events that allow communities to come together and create in concert. They envision these activities as spaces of quiet, non-judgmental reflection, born out of African-American crafting traditions. The building of collaborative spaces echoes the play of responsibility and invention with role-playing games.

CUPID OJALA works both through role-play and by imagining multi-gendered terrains through drawing. *Kelly the Cub Scout* is their latest performance, documenting their appropriation of a sibling's scout uniform as a way of revising their own childhood. Ojala's fantastical *Gender Wilderness Coloring Book* is redolent of artists Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450–1516) and Peter Max (b. 1937) in its use of sylvan setting and frolicking bodies.

NICA ROSS's *nooreality = a gayme* is designed to bring groups of people together to create stories of queer interaction via a custom designed deck of cards. Players must both remember the previous parts of the story and invent extensions as they play their cards, prompted by Ross's evocative photographs. While the rules are simple, play sessions can take surprisingly emotional turns, as the players strive to complete each other's thoughts.

MATT SAVITSKY's most recent exhibition was an extended improvisation session, where a series of sculptures was created



by the actions of Savitsky and their collaborators. Made through play, these pieces wear their eccentricities with pride, shifting through many states before finding a final form. Savitsky works with both with queer gesture and performance as a way of reclaiming the canon.

Photographer PAUL MPAGI SEPUYA has developed a studio practice that is a kind of hide-and-seek within the camera. In puzzling out the way that their images are constructed, we are drawn further into the questions of what we want to see, and what Sepuya wants to display. Most recently, they have begun tracking the way that their pictures have been selected and recirculated online, primarily on Tumblr. As individual images, Sepuya's photographs engage with one sort of desire; as part of other people's feeds, they are prisms through which to see many kinds of desire refracted.

In heaven, everyone will be dressed by DUSTY SHOULDERS. Their outfits are exercises in wit and joy, and Shoulders combines a scavenger's eye and a painter's sense of color and form. In a time when mass market clothing degrades into timid uniformity, Shoulders returns pageantry and exuberance to dressing.

Buzz Slutzky seeks a complex language of gender across and through clothing, pop culture, and queer history. Their video *Clothes Feelings* is a compendium of the

various ways that our outfits chronicle doubt and comfort, and through their pyrography pieces they mingle the hand-crafted traditions of camping with private stories of love and identification. The plainspoken nature of Slutzky's work invites intimacy, and yet it is willing to sit with our daily difficulties.

In FREDERICK WESTON's *My Doll Looks Just Like Me*, Weston compiles dozens of possible identities across genders, ages, and races, and turns them into a shufflable group of placards. Weston's work often uses collaged self-portraits, and the mutable and multiple nature of their imagery strikes a note of delicate exploration.

One strain of video game development has been the field's concern with, and in many ways glorification of, narratives of power and mastery. Game developer and critic ROBERT YANG makes games that confront those narratives in the service of changing the conversation. Yang's games often look familiar in their settings and character designs, but they revolve around mechanics that subvert players' expectations, forcing them to reconsider how they play and what they expect from games. In the place of conflict, players may be asked to express intimacy. The casual violence of many games is often linked to societal violence in Yang's work, and Yang's writing is an excellent guide to dismantling the assumptions that lay under the gaming industry.

9

FURTHER READINGS

- J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens, A study of the play-element in culture* (1944)
- A. Anthropy, *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters* (2012)
- D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (1971)
- B. Ruberg & A. Shaw, *Queer Game Studies* (2017)
- M. Kopas, *Videogames for Humans* (2015)
- P. Jones, *Gaming in Color*, (2015), feature-length film

LEFT: Tommy Bruce, *Shia the cabbit*, 2013, archival inkjet print. Courtesy of the artist.

8

10