Forward

The artists in this show are drawn to the work precisely because it doesn’t fit into 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-awake 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
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 take the ways in which we construct ourselves through costume and display. Others still provide new avenues of communication beyond traditional gallery settings.

SHARANG DIBRAS’s device play/experience—dangerous, immersive, and interactive—encourages visitors to imagine a situation that is difficult and complex and allows visitors to experience it through communal experience. The game-fair takes the form of a political dinner in homage to the work of artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957–1996). Players use food and narrative to describe the absent memories of characters that the players device, but then consume.

LEE BLACOCK’s work Living the Alien position new performance interface, combining game mechanics, video processing, and computer programming to create a performer whose actions are extra-ordinary. The resultant video awakens us to that which is alien and unknowable in even the simplest gestures that we make.

TIMMY BRIECE documents the Furry fandom with an eye to the way that personalities and personas integrate 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 furniture at home, in transition, and at conventions, and shows how these become bases of connection and communal identity.

A.K. BURNS’s objects are charged with desire, and their most recent installation I and the dependent objects. She brings together a suite of fragmentary sculptures and a video whose discursive rhythms culminate in a westerly dance number. Burns shows the everyday into moments of political consciousness, existing friends into a cast of philosophers and stars.

CLÉMENT HIL-GOLDBERG’s animated series The Deer (between) is a low-low 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 Deyo and Balhut’s clay animated TV show from the 1960s and 1970s but whose characters face the dilemmas of difference and connection. Goldberg’s tough light, but a meaningful consciousness pervades their tales.

The me of social media and digital photography has given birth to new sorts of identity, play, and exploration. KB HARDY’s feature film project Outfitumentary 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 worldview. Express Views (of Outfitumentary) is a minute, four-minute edit of the larger feature, one that brings us into direct correspondence with the artist’s play of style, history, and humor.

ARNOLD J. KEMP’s most recent exhibition is their latest performance, shouldering pageantry with queer gesture and performance. Made through play, these pieces may engage the primitive traditions of camping with private stories of love and sexual adventure. Panopticon nature of Studioxy’s work invites intimacy, and yet it is written to sit with our daily difficulties.

In FREDERICK WESTON’s My Oxy/Coke Just Like Me, Weston constructs a series of images that present a possible identity across gender, age, and race, and turns them into a web of placards. Weston’s work often uses collaged self-portraits, and the mutable and multiple nature of their imagery serve as a route of desert encampments.

One strata 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 attempts to confront those narratives in the service of changing the one-dimensional games of often look familiar in their settings and character design. He identifies the ‘ambient mechanism thatsubverts 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 visual violence of modern video games linked to societal violence in Yang’s work, and Yang’s writing is focused on dismantling the assumptions that lay under this gaming industry.

By the actions of Studioxy and their collaborators. Made through play, these pieces may engage the primitive traditions of camping with private stories of love and sexual adventure. Panopticon nature of Studioxy’s work invites intimacy, and yet it is written to sit with our daily difficulties.

Further readings:

- A. Anthropology, Play of the VideoGameMMORPG (2010).