FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The exhibition Self explores ideas related to societal expectations of gender, identity, and sexuality, and what type of interactions coexist in our lives due to these integral components of our individuality. From the most mundane elements of ourselves to the defining moments that make up our lives—each and every one of them cannot be separated from who we are at our core.

The curatorial interest has been immersed in the investigation of adornment and how objects on the body offer a way to express our innermost being, with work focused specifically on gender, the female archetype, and surveying facets of manhood and masculinity. These inquiries have been a yearly practice, and I appreciate that art has offered a lens to characterize such an inquiry.

Wanting to provide viewers with an opportunity to also question these creations all at once and in relation to positionality—the idea for the exhibition Self was born. I have been humbled and honored by the opportunity to work with Erika Diamond and Matt Lambert, as each of their artist practices challenges these notions with breadth and sophistication. Additional gratitude goes to the Contemporary Craft exhibitions team of Yu-San Cheng, Associate Director, and Kate Dockery, Exhibitions Manager, for their earnest partnership in bringing this work to life.

Rachel Saul Rearick
Executive Director, Contemporary Craft

SELF
featuring Erika Diamond
APRIL 14 - AUGUST 19
2023

Erika Diamond is an artist, curator, and educator based in Asheville, NC. She received a BFA from Rhode Island School of Design and an MFA from Virginia Commonwealth University. Diamond has exhibited nationally and abroad, and her costumes have been commissioned by Charlotte Ballet. Exhibition venues include Dinner Gallery, Form & Concept Gallery, Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art, and International Museum of Art & Science. Her work is included in the collections of San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles and Ally Bank among other private collections. She has previously been awarded Fellowships at Virginia Commonwealth University, Rockefeller Foundation, and Pennsylvania School of Craft. She was recently a juror for New Glass Review 42. Diamond is Assistant Director of Galleries at Chautauqua Institution (NY).

Erika Diamond is a textile-focused artist, curator, and educator based in Asheville, NC. She received a BFA from Rhode Island School of Design and an MFA from Virginia Commonwealth University. Diamond has exhibited nationally and abroad, and her costumes have been commissioned by Charlotte Ballet. Exhibition venues include Dinner Gallery, Form & Concept Gallery, Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art, and International Museum of Art & Science. Her work is included in the collections of San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles and Ally Bank among other private collections. She has previously been awarded Fellowships at Virginia Commonwealth University, Rockefeller Foundation, and Pennsylvania School of Craft. She was recently a juror for New Glass Review 42. Diamond is Assistant Director of Galleries at Chautauqua Institution (NY).

ARTIST STATEMENT

My work questions the fragility and resilience of both the human body and our connections to each other. Exploring the potential for textiles to record and managing their historical functions as protective shields, storytelling artifacts, and signifiers of identity, value, and visual allusions and objects that imitate skin, acting as protective yet permeable membranes that can absorb our experiences and bear the scars of our encounters.

With a focus on the paradox of queer safety and visibility, I make textile objects that address the vulnerability and self-preservation negotiated during human interaction. Often those offered the most protection are not the most vulnerable. Imminent Peril - Queer Collection is an ongoing series of fashionable safety vests created with bullet-proof kevlar material initially created in response to the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting. They are specifically tailored and designed to protect and uplift my own queer community, reflecting their individual ideas around personal safety and style.

New mirrored vinyl works reference the disproportionate challenges faced by queer youth today, despite the rise in queer representation and commercialization of Pride. The mirror acts as camouflage, allowing the wearer to blend in as a camouflage, allowing the wearer to blend in as a

Looking intently at either will only result in one looking back at oneself.
Featured Artist

matt lambert

BIography
Matt lambert is a non-binary, trans-multidisciplinary collaborator and co-conspirator working towards equity, inclusion, and recognition. Their research focuses on mapping collaborative movements with craft through a developed methodology of cruising. lambert is currently a PhD candidate in philosophy in artistic practice in visual, applied and spatial arts, focusing on craft at Konstfack University of Arts, Crafts and Design in Sweden. They hold a MA in Critical Craft Theory from Warren Wilson College and an MFA in Metalsmithing from Cranbrook Academy of Art.

Artistic Statement
My work presents body and body-related objects approached through the vernacular of jewelry to create space for the viewer to question positionality, fixedness, and_iform that goes beyond binary thinking. It is an inhabited of these queer (and/or) liminal spaces that these interactions gain their strength as a force that is yet to be fully examined by its potential for intervention into westernized and colonial institutions.

I collaborate with multi-media artists of a vast array of disciplines to reconfigure the current cultural systems of queerness and body politic while challenging the boundaries of craft. By unpacking the witnessing of toxic intimacies and the embedded systems of oppression noted into the geological strata of craft and land, I am interested in ways to disrupt and resist these mechanisms through a chemical process of making, collaborating, writing and curating to create systems to platform building and methodologies to tax with and not at in regards to the other body.

matt lambert

April 14 - August 19, 2023

dis-orderly encounters
& Irregular connections: towards cruising

When meeting with matt to discuss the present exhibition, they explained there are no traditional object labels that visitors might otherwise expect in a white cube. They also noted that the layout of the objects in space would not be predetermined; they would bring suitable things to various works and would decide what makes sense to include in the exhibition when physically in the space. In other words, a performative quality is embedded in “the doing” of the spatial arrangement.

There is something quite liberating about the artist relinquishing written language from the viewing experience. I am freed from the responsibility typically associated with such writings, to a certain degree. While I never try to explain through an essay means, inevitably, whatever I, as someone who has the privilege to spend time thinking about and making art, do write infects a specific normative meaning for viewers. At worst, I masquerade as an expert. In this sense, I am unburdened from even attempting meaningful-making. At the same time, I do not mean to suggest that the written word is supplemental. Indeed, writing in various forms is increasingly becoming a part of Matt’s artistic practice. I would encourage you to consider the exhibition alongside some of their recent writing for Art Jewelry Forum.4

So, what is this essay’s function for such an exhibition? It will be to suggest how I believe that would like you to walk through their work at Contemporary Craft. More specifically, they want you to cruise, a topic we have discussed on and off for several years. In my case, these conversations and a more recent one about this exhibition has compelled me to cruise the exhibition through writing. This more polished (yet still in process) essay you are reading results from my writing as a mode of thinking. Cruising is often conflated with gay white male search for anonymous sex. However, as I was reminded recently, the right to cruise is seemingly unavailable to women, people of color, those who identify as lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, as well as other marginalized sexualities.

matt is nonbinary and transgender-identified, and I am nonbinary and queer-identified. Neither nor I are interested in reinscribing the disabling qualities embedded in cruising; indeed, I have found it a profound metaphor for researching and thinking otherwise. Cruising is the kernel of my book Productive Failure: Writing Queer Transnational South Asian Art Histories (University of Manchester Press, 2017). In short, cruising, as matt and I mobilize it, is not about finding a sexual partner or finding anything for that matter. Instead, it refers to not finding what you are looking for and being open to “something you never knew you wanted or even knew existed.” Drawing on Roland Barthes’ writing on cruising, art historian Simon O’Farrill-Kerr writes that it is a “productive not reductive process” and that it “has an in-built potential for division, irregular connections and disorderly encounters.” What might it mean for viewers to inhabit such a space? In this exhibition, matt invites you to embrace diversion, irregularity, and disorder to find your own path or, more likely, paths toward meaning-making rather than offering pearls of wisdom.

In this way, the black tape through which they have created an orderly spatial grid in the exhibition is a red herring. Rather than act as fixed coordinates, the grid creates a vertiginous experience: signifiers slip out of our grasp endlessly. It is what American philosopher Daniel Dennett refers to as “Carnelian Theater,” that produces a fallacious mystical center at which supposedly, all things come together and consciousness occurs. By enabling us to cruise, matt undoes the Descartanian exceptionalism that cleaves mind from body and man from animal. There are other binaries blasted apart by matt, such as craft, and art. Through the act of cruising the exhibition, you will “unfit” yourself rather than fit into and reinforce boundaries and disciplinary fealty. You will be undone to imagine otherwise.

Writing this essay has been my own personal act of cruising—based not on experiencing the exhibition but on ideas connected to it that matt and I have discussed. In other words, I offer these words as humbly as I believe that has positioned objects in the gallery space.4

Some Things to Keep in Mind

1. A few of matt lambert’s essays can be found on the Art Jewelry Forum website: https://artjewelryforum.org/author/matt-lambert/

2. Queer theorist José Estévez Maldonado meditates on cruising in his book Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity (New York: New York University Press, 2009) in push against the narrow LGBTQ political agenda focused on the present. My use of cruising here is distinct from his, though, in that I am defining it here as more of a methodology rather than a concept.


4. Ibid.


About the Essayist
Alpesh Kantilal Patel is associate professor of art history at Tyler School of Art and Architecture, Temple University, and the 2023 Curator at Large at UrbanGlass, Brooklyn, where he is organizing a series of exhibitions under the theme “Forever Becoming: Decolonization, Materiality, and Trans Subjectivity.” His art historical scholarship, curating, and criticism reflect his queer, anti-racist, and transnational approach to contemporary art. The author of Productive Failure: Writing Queer Transnational South Asian art histories (2017) and co-editor of Storytellers of Art Histories (2022), he has contributed essays to many catalogs and published numerous book chapters and journal articles. As an art critic, he writes frequently for Artforum and other art presses. Grants and fellowships from the Fulbright Foundation, Arts Council England, NCRA, Cranbrook Academy of Art, and New York University have supported his research. He is working on his next monograph, Multiple and One: Global Queer Art Histories.

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