

1.

Hello Everyone! Thank you all for being here today, and for the invitation. I'm very sorry I can't be there in real life with you all, but I am there in spirit, and excited to talk with you all about my work.

2.

My name is Liss LaFleur, and I am an interdisciplinary artist currently working out of Texas. My talk today is titled *DYKE CAMP and FUTURE FEMINISM*, and it is an overview of some of my artistic practice, influences, and inspirations. This talk will also include some pedagogical oversight, and examples of recent courses I've developed at the University of North Texas, where I am currently an Assistant Professor of Studio Art.

3.

Before we get started, I want everyone to read a manifesto with me - outloud. Just follow along on the screen. This is titled "We Who Feel Differently" written by Carlos Motta in 2012.

Build an agenda

Based on the needs of

Queer minorites

Reject the politics of

Assimilation, stop begging

For tolerance

Welcome the celebration of

Sexual and gender diversity

Demand

The transformation of

The system

Truly desacralize

Democracy and demoralize

The judiciary

Define our

Emotional and sexual

Needs on our own terms

Value critical difference

Instead of false equality

Phew- doesn't that feel good to say out loud?

4.

If you are not familiar, Alex Motta is a Columbian artist working out of New York. Through the *We Who Feel Differently* project, Motta collaborated with multiple people to explore a variety of problems surrounding contemporary queer and LGBT activist communities in the US and abroad. His work, like my own, proposes a performance of gender as a personal, social and political opportunity rather than as a social denunciation.

5.

As a new media artist, I produce work at the intersection of art, technology, and Future Feminist discourses. Through video, performance, and installation art, I question power and oppression in relation to identity and image making.

6.

Central to my practice is an investigation of glass, a material that I explore conceptually, physically, and digitally, to reference the body in flux. Much of my work is about taking up space and finding community, to envision a technological future made in response to social movements, historical narratives, and political change.

I grew up in a tiny Texas town called Humble, and my gateway into recognizing my own queerness and relationship with feminism was not easy -- but thankfully, it started with a healthy obsession with the Spice Girls and access to online chat communities at the birth of the internet. This was coupled with growing up in my mother's female run stained-glass studio, where I would witness her working tirelessly as a one-woman show to cut intricate pieces of glass for very large windows and designs.

7.

Aside from being raised around glass (these are all images from my mother's studio), culturally and historically, it is an extremely interesting material. The beginnings of stained-glass date back to medieval Europe from the 10th century to the 16th century. The purpose of stained-glass windows in churches was both to enhance the beauty of their setting and to inform the viewer through narrative or symbolism. Many people who would attend church were illiterate, so the visual representations of narrative played an essential role in telling stories and passing down history.

8.

In 2018 I was awarded an immersive scholar fellowship from the Andrew Mellon Foundation and began developing methods to create 3D forms of virtual stained glass for new large-scale video installations. At the same time, I began researching the #metoo movement as a way to understand digital forms of feminist protest. As an Immersive Scholar, I was able to compile one

of the first public libraries of data in the U.S. related to the hashtag metoo. This data later became one of the first acquisitions at the #metoo Digital Media Collection at the Schlesinger Library at Harvard, where it now resides under creative commons.

Both in my practice, and in this talk, we will talk about glass in varying ways...

9.

In the Lesbian Avengers Handbook from 1993, the group states (quote) "there is more to direct action than catharsis. In our postmodern age, media coverage is the message. Direct action is about getting attention -- so give them something to look at... dykes in deb gowns, slanderous slogans on banners and placards, **Sapphic serenades**, and flaming shrines."

10.

How many of you know what a serenade is? (PAUSE) According to the dictionary, a serenade is a *noun-- it is ...* a piece of music sung or played in the open air, typically by a man at night under the window of **his** lover.

The word serenade comes from the Latin word *serenus* meaning "serenity." This action, based on the webster dictionary definition, is presumably for a cis, heteronormative, male -- used as a tool to woo over a cis, female lover.

If this is an effective way of expressing sentiments of affection outwardly, then why does this definition make me SO incredibly uncomfortable? In 2015, I began thinking of ways in which I could use the act of a serenade as a new form of performance.

11.

The first in a series of video serenades I've produced is titled *You Belong to Me*. This large-scale, immersive, video installation replaces the physical embodiment of a body/ in space/ serenading a viewer -- with an image of a figure trapped within the digital frame.

For this work, I recorded myself singing an extremely slowed version of the Duprees 1952 song *You Belong to Me*. My love song was to the technology, to my lover, to that moment in time as a frustrated person.

12.

When installed, the video is projected through five large pieces of fringe, forcing the image to deteriorate along with the slowed lyrics of the song. This is a looping artwork, and I've found that when it is installed viewers return to it -- letting it linger with them in the space. We're just going to watch an excerpt so you can get a better idea of this work in space.

13.

1.5 minutes

<VIDEO EXCERPT>

14.

Recently, I was commissioned by the Contemporary Art Museum of Houston to create the third serenade in this series, titled *Don't Worry Baby*, and projected it onto a new collection of purple fringe. For this new work, the figure slowly lip-syncs to a remix of the Beach Boys 1964 pop song, "Don't Worry Baby." The repetitious slowing of time creates a tender and nostalgic space, holding attention, while also exploring the relationship between technology, language and identity.

For this work, the color purple signifies transitions, transformations, and the space in which the masculine and feminine energies combine. With this work I am questioning; what happens when you inhabit other people's materials (specific to this song = queer womxn embodying harmonies originally written and performed by white cis men, who were singing about their hetero loves)? How can lip synching be a form of vulnerable spoken-word performance, one that feels both familiar and foreign? What role does digital looping, or repetition, play in maintaining a state of mind for the viewer?

15.

As outsiders, literally *on the fringes*, language fails us. So I accept our myths as facts and mine them for their truth. In an early video performance, titled CHATTERBOX, I created a persona, and performed directly for the camera wearing an oral prosthetic device in the form of a 3D print of my mouth.

Each tooth is printed with a singular small hole. Reflecting on *vagina dentata*, visions of adornment on the female body, and pop music, I spend 10 minutes attempting to assemble and disassemble my mouth, threading a frying pan, colander, fork, knife, spoon, and spatula in each tooth, all while humming Leslie Gore's 1962 hit "You Don't Own Me."

16.

The result directly challenges a historically feminist relationship with oral hygiene, oral contraceptives, and a physical opening used as a mode of communication, pleasure, and activism. In 2017, this work was projected on the Manhattan Bridge in New York as part of Light Year 29. Throughout the night, this video serenaded the city in a public space -- outside the walls of a gallery or traditional format.

I just want to show a short clip of this work before we move on:

17.

1 minute

<video>

18.

Camp is defined in the dictionary as: ostentatious, exaggerated, affected, theatrical; effeminate or homosexual; pertaining to, characteristic of, *homosexuals*. Susan Sontag was the first person to attempt to properly define camp, in her seminal 1964 essay “Notes on Camp.”

Her approach has been debated in the 50 years that have followed, particularly in her emphasis on camp as something that is all style over content. But her initial definition of camp as a sensibility marked by artifice, stylization, exaggeration, theatricality, playfulness and irony still holds up fairly well, particularly in her announcement that the “essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural.”

19.

When I try to explain dyke camp, people often think I mean the opposite of camp as defined by Sontag, rather than something related to it. In an early series titled GREENER PASTURES, I attempted to understand what dyke camp could be by reconfiguring my identity as a Queer cowgirl on the new frontier.

The title for this series was inspired by the cowboy phrase, “A loose horse will always graze for greener pastures,” as well as a recognition of my own body as I returned to my home state of Texas. Performance works in this series challenge established methods of taming animals, with my own body in their place, through strategies of parody, humor, and inversion.

20.

In this series, I produced a collection of extensions from the body that are functional, and signify bodies-out-of-bound.

A pair of blinders with pink plumage was used in a durational performance with my partner on a family ranch.

21.

A hollow pistol, combining a military issued female urination device with a cast of a glass candy dispenser, was used to urinate through a video performance.

Rather than drag, which parodies what is real, dyke camp takes the real and magnifies it, so that it becomes absurd or funny or simply attractive in its own right.

Whereas Sontag's camp can be a series of ironic layers, dyke camp is the equivalent of merging all of those layers on Photoshop; it creates an artificial physicality via exaggeration. Dyke camp is linked intrinsically to the body that's underneath, either defending it or revealing it.

Writing in the *Journal of Lesbian Studies* in 2016, Elly-Jean Nielsen declared that lesbian camp more commonly followed three themes: erotic, classic, and radical. Dyke camp overlaps with camp in some areas, certainly. But in others it is completely different; it has its own electric vision. If camp is the love of the *unnatural*, dyke camp is the love of the *ultra-natural*, of nature built up and *reclaimed*, of clothes that could be extensions of the body, of desire made obsessive, of gestures or mannerisms maximized and accentuated.

(Water break)

22.

On June 28, 1969, at 1:20 a.m in New York, NY, a butch lesbian named Stormé (1920–2014) was hit on the head with a billy club and handcuffed at the Stonewall Inn. She was bleeding from the head when she brazenly turned to the crowd and screamed, "WHY DON'T YOU DO SOMETHING," potentially starting what we now know as the Stonewall riots. Although this event is remembered as one of the most significant events in LGBT history, Stormé and other butch WOC have been erased from narratives within the queer community. This provocation is amongst the influences that inspired my 2019 series, *Queen Bee is Stinging Mad*.

23.

Queen Bee is Stinging Mad includes a single-channel video projection, a dance remix made in collaboration with JD Samson, and a collection of engraved glass annals.

The single channel video depicts a 3D rendering of a virtual stained glass window, in which Stormé DeLarverie is positioned gazing directly back at viewers. The audio accompanying this series is a dance-remix created by [JD Samson](#), representing all of the songs that were documented to be in the Stonewall Inn jukebox in the summer of 1969 when the first riot occurred. For this installation, audio is played through a large black megaphone.

24.

1 minute

<Video excerpt>

25.

The collection of eight engraved glass annals in this series document the original Stonewall Riot of 1969 through first person narrative statements, each collected from a different news outlet, oral history, or record from the event. A single red or yellow rose bud is placed in each annal when on display, and changed weekly as a living artist book and memorial. This work questions the universal need for sanctuary space and visibility, while also acknowledging the complicated and intersectional narratives of queer history.

26.

There is a long history of artists' involvement in protest movements. Early examples include Keith Haring's work in Act Up, and contemporary examples include Stephanie See-WHO-ko and Sharon Hayes.

27.

In her CITIZENS series, See-WHO-ko probes philosophic and historic definitions of what it means to be a "citizen" in terms of national belonging, civic engagement, and radical responsibility. Through sewn fabric banners based on historical protest signs, she crafts an analogue manifestation of protests in the digital age. Barely legible texts obscure certain words exploring how information can be disseminated and distorted.

28.

In Sharon Hayes series *In the Near Future*, she is photographed in public spaces carrying protest signs from historical protests. As a single figure in the street, Hayes references a collective memory of resistance, and describes her project as 'a set of anachronistic and speculative actions in an ongoing investigation into the figure of the protester.'

29.

In 2017, I was invited to be an artist in residence at the Museum of Glass in Tacoma, WA. At the same time, I began researching the work produced of a psychology professor during the early 1960s, named Dr. Frank Robert Wake. His research, which was funded by both the Canadian and United States Governments, focused on identifying and purging queer people from civil service positions; individuals that were viewed as a threat not only to heterosexual hegemony, but also to national security. Known as "the fruit machine," he proposed a series of tests that could quote "significantly detect homosexuals." Ultimately, this was an extremely biased and failed attempt, nevertheless, thousands of individuals were targeted, harassed, and expelled from their jobs and homes.

30.

While in residence at the museum of glass, I embodied the idea of a literal “fruit machine” -- referring to myself as the fruit -- we produced intricate blown glass sculptures, scaled to the proportions of my body.

A glass banana the length of my leg, apples the size of fists, and blueberries as nipples, were measured on site and produced, mimicking equally as problematic anthropometric methods of physically measuring the body of the other. Once installed, each individual glass fruit is filled with colored gelatin, a fruit derivative.

Dr. Wake believed that through a number of tests, including pupillary response, sweat tests, and word associations, he could identify similar body language and physical responses among homosexuals. After finally getting my hands on one of Dr. Wake’s only declassified reports, from the Canadian Government, I created a single-channel video artwork titled, *Boi with a Fruit Basket* (2019).

This 20-minute film takes Dr. Wake as an unlikely collaborator to explore contemporary queer female subjectivity. The title references the 1853 still life painting by the same name created by Caravaggio, but spells boy as B-O-I to serve as an identifier within the LGBT butch and femme community. In this work, an electric cello and a soprano react to text taken directly from Dr. Wake’s report on the “Fruit Machine.” We’re going to watch an excerpt of this 20-minute film, in which a single figure slowly devours an entire bowl of fruit.

31.

3 minutes

<video>

32.

From Eve’s apple to queer vernacular, I am continually inspired to make this work after researching the intersectional ways in which fruit has historically been used to feminize, criminalize, and sexualize the body.

33.

There are no images, schematics, or designs that exist publicly, or share visual representations of the Fruit Machine: not in the Cold War Museum, the International Spy Museum, or the Canadian War Museum. Furthermore, official state offices in both the United States and Canada still continually deny responsibility for these biased anti-queer campaigns. This is something I continue to research and dig deeper into, uncovering surveillance methods and spy tactics as they relate to the queer community.

Similar to the way in which Ridykeulous collaborators, Nicole Eisenman and A.L. Steiner, redacted the Guerilla Girls' work "The Advantages of Being a Female Artist," in 2006 -- I am now considering methods of redaction and erasure as another way to read the Fruit Machine report. (image of ridykeulous)

34.

Future Feminism

As a movement, Future Feminism seeks to expand the ways feminism has been defined in the past, and speculate what it can encompass in the future. It is a philosophy beyond that of women, of non-male, non-cis, non-white, non-western, non-conforming, built around sustainability. It is a call to reconfigure reality towards other futures, so that we can collapse the political notion of linear space and time as an act of resistance.

An important aspect of my research and practice also includes my pedagogy. At the core of my pedagogy is a strong belief in what Paulo Freire describes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as facilitating "education as a practice of freedom." In pursuit of this freedom, I blend critical and professional practice, progressive pedagogy, and collaborative social engagement in an immersive educational environment.

For the first time this semester, I am teaching a new interdisciplinary studio art course, cross listed for both graduate and undergraduate students, called "The Future Feminism Lab."

This course begins with a grounding in basic questions such as "what is feminism" and "what is feminist art," and an understanding of bell hooks' definition of feminism as "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression."

35.

Together we study and discuss the works of key artists and the configurations of power, gender, and sexuality questioned through their aesthetic experiments and interventions. The second half of this course focuses on world building. World building methodology is often used to create sci-fi, fiction, and fantasy narratives in film, video games, and literature. It is a practice in which a holistic world is designed, from which an infinite number of narratives can be generated.

As a cohort we harnessed the power of collaborative imagination within our own feminist community to envision a series of future feminist based objects and themes for a world 200 years from now. These were just a few of student's sketches. As a final project, each student is currently working to create a new feminist artwork inspired by one of our discussions or themes this semester.

36.

The development of this class was inspired by Judy Chicago's pedagogy, and the California Institute of the Arts Feminist Art Program, Womanhouse. This course aligns with what Chicago outlines as her pedagogical model -- preparation, process, and art making.

37.

The last project I want to share with you today is an old project that I started in 2015, but I am revisiting anew as of this year. In 1930, the surrealist artist Claude Cahun, wrote her only performative work -- titled *Héroïnes: Andromeda to the Monster*. Through a collection of 15 monologues, she attempts to rewrite the narratives of misunderstood female figures (figures like Eve, Sappho, Cinderella, Virgin Mary, etc). Cahun intended to create a theatrical production of this text, and publish a fully illustrated text including costumes, but her imprisonment for anti-Nazi activity during WWII derailed this development. Cahun's monologues have never been performed nor produced.

38.

Research for this project began in 2015, when I established a relationship with Cahun's archivists in France and received copies of the original monologues. As a preliminary way to hear each monologue, I recorded live performers using 3D scanning technology as they read the original texts in French and English. My exchange with the performers, the technology, and Cahun's text was recorded via an online feed and later installed as a two channel video installation in an exhibition titled, "In Training." After working with the text, I realized that it needed to be performed not in isolation, but as part of a chorus.

Cahun's text reads as a radical gesture, beyond even today's ideas of intersectional feminism. In Cahun's telling, Biblical Eve finds herself identifying with her own desire, tempted not by a snake and apple but by a modern-day advertisement for her own sexual pleasure ("... Make your sex life a joy!"), while Cinderella's Prince Charming is trans with a foot fetish. Through both a confessional and liberating voice, Cahun's rewriting of each figure proposes an imaginative feminist reality.

39.

It is my goal to stage Cahun's text as an episodic cyberfeminist narrative. Using telepresence robots in lieu of the body, performers can be "cast" from all over the world, and performances via the bot will be filmed in 15 different locations. This work takes cues from Nam June Paik's early trans-atlantic show, *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*, to envision a faux historical, feminist future.

40.

In conclusion, some of the primary questions I continue to ask myself in my work are:

Q: Who gets to tell the stories of the past, and how are queer narratives understood anachronistically -- recognizing *queer* as a contemporary term that aligns with methods of resistance, outlaw sensibilities, self-made kinships, utopic futurity, exilic commitment, and rage towards institutions that police erasure and existence?

Q: What are the politics of visibility, and how can the protesting body become visible through computer-mediated language and digital activism? And who holds the power, with many narratives being shared on proprietary platforms?

Q: Does the language around social movements, historical movements, and cultural movements in online spaces coincide with the same forms of activism in the physical world? Or does it serve another purpose? If so, what? And why?

41.

The different modes of my practice form a continuous circle, driven by metaphysical code switching. I'm interdisciplinary, sometimes the performer, the filmmaker, the writer, the glass maker, working across mediums, towards a collapse of boundaries. I take on whatever role I need to get my ideas into the world. I create my own structures outside of established conventions, I work from the margins, I privilege my instincts, and process in public.

I'm regularly asked to dissect my art practice in response to my own queerness, and I have to find and fix the gray lines no matter how ambiguous or ridiculous its parameters may seem. But queerness is a discourse. In my work I think about how queerness, intersecting with other identities, is constructed. They are abstractions that are made complete by social, economic, and legislative phenomena.

Many of us live in a present time where the systems that we exist in are not built to address and promote our needs, fears, hopes and dreams. I encourage you all to re-imagine new possibilities, claim non-linear time, non-contiguous spaces. How can we tell stories of alternative (and specially non-western/ non-binary) futures? How can mythology, fiction/science fiction, and other forms of digital storytelling become practices for being more visible? To take over agency and ownership of spaces and time initially not designed for us.

< Thank you >

More readings to recommend/ artists:

- Jacolby satterwhite
- Angela washko
- Legacy russell
- Kate durbin
- Zak blas