

SELF

featuring matt lambert

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 contemporary
craft Where art comes to life

Featured Artist

matt lambert

BIOGRAPHY

matt lambert is a non-binary, trans multidisciplinary collaborator and co-conspirator working towards equity, inclusion, and reparation. 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.

ARTIST 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 chimerism that goes beyond binary thinking. It is in the inhabited of these queer [and/or] liminal spaces that these interactions gain their strength as a force that is yet to be fully explored for its potential as a terroristic act to 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 rooted into the geological strata of culture and land, I am interested in ways to disrupt and subvert these mechanisms through a chimerical practice of making, collaborating, writing and curating to create systems for platform building and methodologies to talk with and not at in regards to the othered body.

DIS-ORDERLY ENCOUNTERS & IRREGULAR CONNECTIONS: TOWARDS CRUISING

ESSAY BY ALPESH KANTILAL PATEL

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 suitcases with 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 what an artwork means, inevitably, whatever I, as someone who has the privilege to spend time thinking about and looking at artworks, do write inflects a specific “informed” meaning for viewers. At worst, I masquerade as an expert. In this sense, I am unburdened from even attempting meaning-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*.¹

Something quite liberating about the artist relinquishing written language from the viewing experience

So, what is this essay’s function for such an exhibition? It will be to suggest how I believe matt 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.² In my case, these conversations and a more recent one about this exhibition have 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 males’ 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 matt 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.”³ Drawing on Roland Barthes’ writing on cruising, art historian Simon Ofield-Kerr writes that it is a “productive not reductive process” and that it “has an in-built potential for diversion, irregular connections and disorderly encounters.”⁴ 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 “Cartesian theater,” that produces a fallacious mythical center at which supposedly, all things come together and consciousness occurs. By enabling us to cruise, matt undoes the Cartesian 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.⁵

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 matt has positioned objects in the gallery space.

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

² Queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz mobilizes cruising in his book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009) to 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.

³ Simon Ofield-Kerr, “Cruising the archive,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 4, no. 3 (1 December 2005): 357, doi:10.1177/1470412905058353.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ I borrow these terms of being undone and unfitting from Irit Rogoff, “What Is a Theorist?,” in *The State of Art Criticism*, ed. James Elkins and Michael Newman (New York: Routledge, 2007), 97-109.

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, NEH, 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*.

THANK YOU

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Embrace diversion, irregularity, and disorder to find your own path