

## **Artist Statement:**

This practice is meant to exist as the continuation of the art practices of queer people who could not complete their full body of work because they were lost too soon the disease, persecution, closets or fatal sadness. Many such artists have well known names, such as major influences David Wojnarowicz & Felix Gonzalez-Torres, but most were not afforded the opportunity to grow into a mature practice. A desire to participate with these queer artists and mentors is the energetic force behind my work. Many contemporary queer artists are concerned with this project such as Paul Mpagi Sepuya, Carlos Motta, Gordon Hall & Edgar Fabián Frías, to name a few. Most of the work I have generated to date exists on the margins of queer sex, often exposing the location of intimacy (cruising places, my own body), suggesting at the outcomes of intimacy (solidarity, joy), or depicting the tools for sex (glory holes, poppers). I'm pleased with what I have been able to produce across multiple media and am reaching new achievements every year.

"Instant Gratification" is a growing collection of Polaroids capturing forms of queer intimacy between me and my community. I transform Polaroid photography overlaid with embroidery to obscure the identities of my subjects, allowing for a new form of free expression where any participant can become a model. I generate a scenario with a model or a group of models; with their permission I take a series of Polaroids using my 1998 Polaroid Cool Cam. I then select specific Polaroids for fineness, make hi-res scans, and feed the scans into an embroidery software. I use the resulting pattern to produce photographic embroideries in the same dimensions as the original Polaroid. After I've completed the embroidery, I make a hi-res scan and use design software to decide how to combine photo with textile. The final step is carefully folding and ironing the embroidery to be overlaid onto the photo, then mounting the combined media. The folded textile adds dimension to the resulting work, creating an invitation to the viewer to peek behind the textile to get a better view of the person(s) in the photo.

I have recently started making works I deem "grief rituals" which depict either bodies entirely obscured by textile, or Polaroids shown with the back facing the viewer. The addition of these works demonstrate the consequences of turning away from or denying queer joy, or as is increasingly common, the bigoted persecution of queer joy (see samples). We must both celebrate our queer bodies through free sexual expression as well and resist the forces which wish to hide our sex and our bodies in the service of fascist oppression.

This body of work currently encompasses 18 individual small works & growing. Pieces come in two formats at the moment: 1) single Polaroids, 5" x 5", or 9" x 9" mounted, and 2) Polaroid diptychs, 8-10" x 5", or approx. 12" x 14" mounted. Many curatorial options are possible for presenting this work in the Strut gallery. If selected for a group show, consider including works titled "Polaroid (unknown)" and "Shadows at Iwash Polaroid Diptych"

I wish to bring what would be my first solo show, if selected, to Strut because my work is deeply embedded in the shame-free expression of queer sex & intimacy, and in the communities we form around its expression. Some of my greatest success as an artist to date has come from making work to benefit Cascade AIDS Project in their annual art auction; participating in the ongoing fight for HIV prevention & treatment, and the fight against stigma are purposes driving my work. I stand in solidarity with the Strut mission: "we strive for a day when: race is not a barrier to health and wellness; substance use is not stigmatized; HIV status does not determine quality of life; and HIV transmission is eliminated."

**Bio:**

Michael Espinoza (they/them, born 1984 Colorado Springs, CO/ Cheyenne, Ute & Lipan Apache land, lives/works in Portland, OR/ Multnomah, Wasco, Cowlitz, Kathlamet, Clackamas, Bands of Chinook, Tualatin, Kalapuya and Molalla lands)

As a living beneficiary of the fight to survive AIDS, I am called to help carry the legacy of queer, trans and gender expansive communities into the future. I do research in queer cruising grounds, closed down bars, baths, and potent queer sites, such as San Francisco's Castro District, to contextualize my participation in an ongoing project of queer history-making. Building and sharing community, living a visible queer life, and making joyful contact with queer bodies are my primary forms of inquiry. My practice started in 2016 in Oregon as an act of resistance to the world I saw changing around me and in rebellion to the self-imposed pressure that art has to "be" something. My original practice centered connection with ancestors in the form of altars, eventually culminating in the adoption of live performance in 2018, though I didn't show performance again until 2022 due to the pandemic. Making work in isolation, I created my first work of stand-alone visual art, a COVID Mask made from quilted condom wrappers. I also made video exploring different aspects of my devotional practice, connecting the act of tying, binding, and embroidery to how I use my body for connection with ancestors exhibited for World AIDS Day, 2020. The most recent iteration of this practice combines digital media, photography, and embroidery to generate artifacts which explore an embodied queer experience and my connection to queer history. Three principal bodies of work have emerged from this discipline: 1) "We teach us to survive" (2020-2022), artifacts that explore the ways queer communities confront crises, 2) "snapshots for future lovers", a group of small works combining embroidery, quilting and photography to investigate cruising and the ways queer bodies intersect with environments, and 3) "Instant Gratification", described above. The purpose of current work is to engage queer communities in a conversation around the practices and beliefs of building community, solidarity, and survival. As this practice grows, I wish to explore new dimensions in the work around scale, social practice, and place, deepening my connection to audiences, peers, and the Queer Ancestors we honor.

**Connection to Strut:**

I have many partners who receive vital HIV treatment & prevention care from Strut. I have volunteered for, donated to, and otherwise supported similar organizations such as Blue Mountain Heart to Heart in Eastern Washington & Cascade AIDS Project in Portland, OR. Nearly every person in my community is a person living with HIV or a person taking PrEP and the importance of Strut's mission is crucial to our survival and strength as a community.

**CV:**

Residencies, Grants & Awards:

- 2023 Tanne Foundation Award
- 2023 Cascade AIDS Project Art Auction, Curator's special selection, Portland, OR.
- 2023 Arts3c Grant, Regional Arts and Culture Council (RACC), Portland region, OR.
- 2022 Caldera artist in residence, Sisters, OR.
- 2022 Make|Learn|Grow Grant, RACC, Portland region, OR.

Selected Exhibitions:

- 2023 OTHER/SELF, group show with Allan Pichardo at Carnation Contemporary, Portland, OR.

- 2023 The Queer Conscience, juried photography show at The Image Flow, San Anselmo, CA.
- 2023 It's a Pleasure, Group Show, AFRU Gallery, Portland, OR
- 2023 Friends of Dorothy, Group Show, Patricia Reser Center for the Arts, Beaverton, OR.
- 2023 RADFAF: The Radical Faerie Art Fair, Portland, OR.
- 2023 Breaking More Boundaries, juried photography show at Culture Lab LIC, Long Island City, NY.
- 2023 A Joyous Grief: Molly Alloy & Michael Espinoza. Paragon Arts Gallery, Portland Community College, Cascades Campus, Portland, OR.
- 2022 In Sickness & In Health. Group Show. McNichols Civic Center, Denver, CO.
- 2022 Portland Textile Month. Group Show, Portland, OR.
- 2020 Bound: a ritual for Queer Ancestors lost to AIDS. Video Installation. Vicki Myhren Gallery, University of Denver, Denver, CO.
- 2020 MASK. Group Show. Vicki Myhren Gallery, University of Denver, Denver, CO.
- 2020 A Place/Un Lugar. Video Installation. Museo de las Americas, Denver, CO.
- 2018 queer burials: Jean Genet, Leslie Feinberg, Michel Foucault, Walt Whitman. Risk/Reward presents PAVEMENT. Live Performance. Portland, OR.

Collections:

Multnomah County, OR Behavioral Health Resource Center  
 Multnomah County, OR Main Collection

Press:

- 2023 Variable West, interview with Adie Steckel
- 2023 The Gay Guru, interview with Brian Madigan.
- 2022 Queer Trans & Gender Variant Project, interview with Edgar Fabián Frías
- 2020 The Queer Spirit Podcast, interview with Nick Venegoni.

Education:

2008 BA Gender Studies, Whitman College, Walla Walla, WA.

**How does queerness speak to or is a part of your art?**

I make queer art for queer people.

Material: I engage in a diverse practice using various media as an attempt to "queer" various forms. I consider my embroidery work to be photographic and algorithmic; images are captured then pixelated, printed by hand and combined with the original photograph. In this way I wish to use materials to queer the media I use.

Subjects: I recruit models from a diverse community of queer sex workers, friends, lovers, and chosen family. I live within intersecting identities, as a multiracial, non-binary queer person and I wish to chose collaborators to help capture and complicate what queer identity looks like. Queer bodies, including my queer body, are explicitly centered in this body of work and in the entire body of work from my studio.

Purpose: I work in the shadow of all queer people who have ever existed for the survival of all living and future queer people. I aim to accomplish this by learning about queer history,

surrounding myself with queer artists across disciplines, and participate meaningfully in a queer community with my whole body and my full heart.

**Inclusivity Statement:**

Yes, in short, by platforming the representation of artists of color and non-binary artists. Trans people and people of all genders, abilities, and racial identities can see themselves represented in this work. I also wish to use this opportunity as a chance to learn more about the Strut community and further my approach to fostering an inclusive & welcoming environment throughout the future of my practice.