

Amatrix Gaming Lab & Studio presents

# WHAT WE MADE DURING THE PANDEMIC

## MARGINALIZED RESPONSES TO COVID-19



Co-Curated by Jocelyn E. Marshall, Cody Mejeur, Blair Johnson,  
and Morgan J. Sammut

*What We Made During the Pandemic: Marginalized Responses to COVID-19* is the catalog for ***Creativity in the time of COVID-19: Art as a Tool for Combatting Inequity and Inequality***, a multi-site exhibition installed at **Buffalo Arts Studio, Buffalo Game Space, and Squeaky Wheel Film & Media Art Center** in the Tri-Main Center located in Buffalo, New York. Co-curated by Jocelyn E. Marhsall, Cody Mejeur, Blair Johnson, and Morgan J. Sammut, the exhibition showcases the work of BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and/or local Buffalo artists presented by the Amatrix Gaming Lab & Studios at SUNY Buffalo's Department of Media Study.

*Creativity in the Time of COVID-19* is a public humanities collaboration between University at Buffalo, SUNY, Michigan State University, Washington University in St. Louis, and the Air Force Academy with support of the Andrew W. Mellon "Just Futures" Initiative.

**Artists:** KS Brewer, Tia Brown, Lorenzo Camacho, Cassils, Famous Clark, Michael Anthony DeAnda, Emira and Rory, Carmen Flores, Madison Ford, Soren Glassing, Tallulah Gordon, Michelle Handelman, Kayla Hardy, Iris M. Kirkwood, Faith Kleese, Tianjun Li (Timjune), Cody Mejeur, Filio Zoi Milioti, Sam Moyer-Kardos, Sabrina Parsons, Andra Ragusila, Simone Robinson, Vlademir Rodrigues, Maria Servellon, Morgan Stewart, Melissa A. Swiatek-Odien, TD, Lachlan Thompson, Wes Turner, Verbena Vy, Austin Wilson, and Tansy Xiao.

**Essayists:** Famous Clark, Tim Georger, Morgan J. Sammut, Lee Rice, Van Tran Nguyen, and Johann Yamin.

This catalogue was designed by Morgan J. Sammut and edited by Jocelyn E. Marshall, Cody Mejeur, Blair Johnson, and Morgan J. Sammut. Cover art courtesy of Sabrina Parsons.

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**ISBN: 978-1-4384-9762-4**

This catalogue is dedicated to all of us—those who have survived the pandemic, those who have not, and those who have been changed.



Squeaky  
Wheel



# CONTENTS

<b>(Don't) Touch the Art</b> .....	1
Van Tran Nguyen	
<b>Creative Practice as Modes of Resistance</b> .....	3
Jocelyn E. Marshall, Cody Mejeur, Blair Johnson, and Morgan J. Sammut	
<b>This is Not Normal</b> .....	9
Morgan J. Sammut	
<b>Self Reckoning and Self Recognition in Disorder</b> .....	17
Lee Rice	
<b>Transformative Resilience in Art</b> .....	24
Famous Clark	
<b>Loops</b> .....	31
Tim Georger	
<b>Queer Worldbuilding amidst the Brutal Environment of Linear Time, Gravity, and Space</b> .....	40
Johann Yamin	
<b>In Isolation We Reach for Each Other</b> .....	48
Morgan J. Sammut	

**Endnotes** ..... 56

**Artwork by Venue** ..... 57

**Artist Biographies** ..... 59

**Essayist Biographies** ..... 68

**Curator Biographies** ..... 70



# **(DON'T) TOUCH THE ART: CREATIVITY IN THE TIME OF COVID-19**

A foreword by Dr. Van Tran Nguyen

About a week ago, I had my first haircut in three years. As I was instructed by the hairdresser to look down, surrounded by a shuttered tunnel of my own hair, I peered at falling bits of freshly-cut hair. Wet clusters fell quickly and sank into the checkerboard tiles, waiting for the soft, dry patches to join. They clung to each other to resist gusts of air from an open door. The feeling of my own hair against my toes is a foreign concept, considering for the past three years I have only felt my partner's hair fall onto my feet. During the pandemic, I've taken to cutting his hair. Every few months, I become bold enough to take scissors to locks in our bathtub. The intimacies of self care had replaced services and hospitality while we were locked away from each other. I sit still with this memory and a faint tension emerges: the push and pull of insular and external fluctuation. I am reminded of how desperately I needed to protect myself, extend my care, while knowing that I am limited in both efforts.

Conversely, limitations foster creativity. A quick search would garner a myriad of creative opportunities. During the pandemic, people shared recipes, sang, taught, grieved—all together, at once. In all of this discovery, we learned that the notion of being self-taught could be more precisely articulated by the fact that we were materializing the influences of memory and fortifying by our collective knowledge.

We all traversed the tension of practicing self care while deciding how far we can reach out. As artists, we use our creative voice as an extender into the world to give record of our feelings, discovery, and care. *Creativity in the Time of COVID-19* highlights the case studies of those who did just that: depicting self-portraits from small spaces to the universality of the smallness we felt within uncertainty.

Iris M. Kirkwood's *COME ZIP MOMMIES DRESS* addresses the smallness of space and time; in the nook of an elder's neck, we see a microcosm of our world. Sabrina Parson's *Sewing Scissors* depict familiar intimate affects, feeling the uncertainty of self-possession in concert with the need for self-preservation. An internal conflict of knowing which ends to cut or keep is a small voice that raged within during this period of collective suffering. The capacious lineage of families quarantine together is juxtaposed with mirror images of singular self-hood.

Inside, our internal fires rage while the collective fire of solidarity blazoned. The combined conflict became clearer; a push for a more capacious representation washed over the nation as we marched together in support of Black Lives, Queer Liberation, and stood up against Asian Hate. A restless search for humanity is found within and its materials know no bounds. The exhibition *Creativity in the Time of COVID-19* exemplifies that art-making is far beyond the comfort that imagination can bring. These artists not only fortify making as a form of survival, but also making as a strategy for closeness in disparate times.



## CREATIVE PRACTICE AS MODES OF RESISTANCE

An Introduction by Jocelyn E. Marshall, Cody Mejeur, Blair Johnson, and Morgan J. Sammut

The theme of coping through creativity is often alluded to in artists' statements and exhibition wall-text, though such understandings sometimes miss us, the general public. Prompted by the unprecedented historical moment of pandemic shutdowns beginning in March 2020, this approach to art as a method for cultivating resilience unexpectedly found many of us as we wrestled with grief and heartbreak—searching for ways to still navigate joy and hold hope on high. Whether we took up crocheting or sat longer with our experimental film edits, work from the pandemic-era oeuvre uniquely reflects the paradoxes of severe loss amidst the pleasure of coming home to oneself and one's community.

*Creativity in the Time of COVID-19: Art as a Tool for Combatting Inequity and Justice – Buffalo NY* dualistically highlights individual experiences of marginalized communities and the larger, collective narratives of which they are a part. Showcasing LGBTQ+, BIPOC, and/or Buffalo-based artists and first-time makers, the exhibition traces evolutions in self-recognition and transformation, community building and advocacy, and modes of telling and listening to stories. Together, these works help account for the specific histories and conditions that contributed to lockdown isolation, as well as celebrate the creative practices many have used to survive the pandemic and care for each other.

Reflective of this group show dynamic, the exhibition was supported by work across several organizations through the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's Just Futures Initiative grant. For three years, the *Creativity in the Time of COVID-19* art and research project has examined how people used creativity during the pandemic, ranging from first-time creatives to professional artists. Data collection and select exhibition materials were spearheaded by the Digital Humanities & Literary Cognition (DHLC) out of Michigan State University, in partnership with Washington University in St. Louis and the United States Air Force Academy. The primary organizer of *Creativity in the Time of COVID-19 – Buffalo NY* was the Amatrix Gaming Lab & Studio (AGLS), a lab in the Department of Media Study at SUNY Buffalo dedicated to gaming, virtual reality, social justice, and community storytelling projects. AGLS was additionally supported by DisArt, an arts organization dedicated to centering the work and experiences of disabled artists, who assisted with accessibility planning, and partners Buffalo Arts Studio, Buffalo Game Space, and Squeaky Wheel Film & Media Arts Center.

Housed within the storied Tri-Main Center in Buffalo, the exhibition space sprawled across three venues on different floors. Welcoming visitors into Buffalo Arts Studio, where the visual and literary artworks were displayed, was a cascade of Melissa A Swiatek-Odien's zines. The paintings and photography collections adorned the walls, immersing visitors in the different worlds, mediums, and styles of the wide-ranging artists. In the midst of the gallery were Michael Anthony DeAnda's crochet crowns positioned on a pedestal in front of a mirror. A sign encouraged visitors to wear them, disrupting the idea that art in a gallery space is only meant to be viewed. The second venue, Buffalo Game Space, provided a home for the exhibition's videogame and virtual reality works. Mirroring each other were Amatrix Gaming Lab & Studio's *Trans Folks Walking* and the 2D game by Emira & Rory *DYS*, each

centering on the trans experience. Tansy Xiao's virtual reality piece was projected alongside these works, with Xiao's fantastical world spanning the wall and giraffes flying across the screen singing for their audience. The new media pieces were housed in Squeaky Wheel Film & Media Art Center, where the videos were projected in a loop across the backwall of the space with benches in front of them to allow visitors a chance to sit and enjoy. The large projection was framed by two pieces: on the right, Cassils' *\$HT Coin* NFT and manifesto project played on matching monitors; to the left, TD's video work played within a wooden frame adorned with lace.

The first essay in this catalog, written by Morgan J. Sammut, examines pieces that directly address the fears and anxiety that COVID-19 plunged us into, both on a socio-economic and a personal level. Everything you did seemed wrong—going to work, shopping for groceries, leaving the house—and like just another way to get infected. Even turning to friends in this moment of tragedy was a danger, leaving you alone. The photography of Faith Kleese, painting by Morgan Stewart, and NFT by Cassils each speak directly to these fears and socio-economic injustices. When paired with Melissa A. Swiatek-Odien's zines and Simone Robinson's video, which encourage viewers to pause and consider their own mental health, this selection offers a way to acknowledge and work through the ways the pandemic has affected us.

With the second essay, Lee Rice analyzes how quarantine allowed for a time of personal reflection, both in terms of how one presents to the world and how one presents to oneself. When you are no longer going out into the world and the only other person you see is yourself in the mirror, how do you begin to look at yourself differently? When you cannot surround yourself physically with your community, could appearance and clothing be an alternate way to connect it? Is there a way to unite this inner and outer

presentation? This paradox of the portrait is exemplified through the works of Sabrina Parsons, Simone Robinson, Carmen Flores, and Lachlan Thompson—some of whom choose to depict their subjects directly through recreating them in the work and others through abstraction.

In "Transformative Resilience in Art," Famous Clark explores how artists are able to transcend boundaries imposed by society through the creation of imaginative, dream-like worlds. This was demonstrated through the display of Filio Zoi Milioti's hanging wire and nylon sculpture, which was installed in the corner of the exhibition along with ambient music playing to create another small world in the exhibition itself. With its placement next to Tianjin Li (Timjune)'s double-exposed photographs, the two spoke to each other and together put forth a vision of otherworldliness. Continuing to look beyond our world, Lorenzo Camacho's postcards depicting dreams of resistance and Verbena Vy's painting of a personal deity offer different ideas of what strength and resilience can look like—ranging from national protest to moments of intense personal pain.

Through the video work of Andra Ragusila, Kayla Hardy, and TD, Tim Georger's "Time as a Loop" reflects on how these pieces play with this idea of repetition in the artist's day-to-day lives during quarantine, when each day seemed to bleed into the next. Georger goes on to look beyond daily lives to the historical repetition highlighted in the sculptures of Melissa A. Swiatek-Odien and KS Brewer. Just as one day seemed to repeat again and again for individuals, these "unprecedented times" are part of our large and cyclic history. So, how *do* we break through the cycles and move beyond?

Johann Yamin's essay "Queer Worldbuilding Amidst the Brutal Environment of Linear Time, Gravity, and Space" engages with

this very question in their study of the queer, optimistic world-building amidst an increasingly prejudiced and hostile world. In the works of the Amatrix Gaming Lab & Studio, Emira and Rory, and Michelle Handelman, the experience of queer artists is centered through narrative and video editing. Rather than creating a world through a queer protagonist, Maria Servellon and Tansy Xiao construct alternate queer worlds that mirror our own by first drawing on familiar imagery and then distorting it. All of these artists construct a new world that mirrors our own, while also extending beyond it to look forward.

As Morgan J. Sammut writes in "In Isolation We Reach For Each Other: Facilitating Connection Through Art," the limited physical contact with others resulted in quarantine being a time characterized by longing for community, which many found a solution to through art. The photography collections of Tallulah Gordon and Vladimir Rodrigues document the communities the artist themselves belong to, inviting viewers to see the intimate moments and history of these communities. Similarly, Soren Glassing's tribute posters and Iris M. Kirkwood's paintings also center this idea of creating a sense of intimacy between the viewer and the work itself. In each of these pieces, art is a means to reignite connection and express gratitude for the relationships in our lives.

*Creativity in the Time of COVID-19: Art as a Tool for Combatting Inequity and Justice – Buffalo NY* captured a wide range of ingenuity and experiences, which is arguably a simple start to documenting and showcasing the new and established talent informed by the pandemic. The exhibition offered a space for each person to share the unique situations and emotions they experienced and the different modes of resilience they exercised during the pandemic. What emerged in that space is a collective story of loss and hope, grief and joy, similarities and differences, that this exhibition and catalog endeavor to preserve and tell our story.



# THIS IS NOT NORMAL: IMAGINING A NEW WAY FORWARD THROUGH ZINES, PAINTINGS, AND NFTs

Morgan J. Sammut

Selected Works: *Are you O.K.?* (2020-2021) and *Rising Waters / The Flood* (2020) by Melissa A. Swiatek-Odien | *Germs* (2021) by Faith Kleese | *Things I Ate During Quarantine* (2020) by Morgan Stewart | *The Language of Mental Health* (2021) by Simone Robinson | *White Male Artist Manifesto: Eat Your Crypto - \$HT Coin for the Revolution!* (2021) by Cassils

During the first few years of COVID-19, the phrase “new normal” echoed throughout the news stations, Zoom rooms, and email listservs. Addressing this attempt to normalize the experience of the pandemic, artists pushed back and worked to create space for both themselves and others to process their experiences with mental health and feelings of worthlessness.

Melissa Swiatek-Odien’s *Rising Waters / The Flood* zine illustrates this dichotomy between the impact COVID-19 had on the U.S. as a whole and the personal impact it had on individuals. By using collage, the zine situates us at the beginning of the pandemic through headshots, diagrams, artwork, and newspaper clippings that were widely circulated during the pandemic interspersed with personal notes on the rising awareness around racism, classism, and consumerism. In Swiatek-Odien’s other zine *Are you O.K.?*, she similarly asks direct questions about the reader’s experience and presents the reader with blank space for their responses. Rather than telling readers to just accept their “new normal” and move on, Swiatek-Odien's

work challenges us to consider how the pandemic has affected us personally and to give ourselves the grace to recognize that "moving forward" will look different for each of us.

This theme of connection to others continues in Simone Robinson's *The Language of Mental Health*. The piece features two interviews Robinson conducts, first with someone struggling from depression and the second interview with a person with borderline personality disorder. Each describes their unique experience with the condition, how it affects them, how they manage their symptoms, and what other people should know. While the audio is playing, Robinson creates multi-media pieces informed by their responses. The juxtaposition between the emotional audio interview and the slow creation of artwork suggests artmaking as a place of refuge and a tool to navigate mental health challenges, which Robinson further explores in her portrait *Peace with Myself* (p. 27).

Faith Kleese's photograph *Germs* similarly allows viewers a vulnerable look into the artist's mental state as a mode of connection. The subject is Kleese herself, though she has specified it is not intended as a self-portrait, presenting the emotion and reaction of the subject as universal rather than personal. The hands serve as a physical embodiment of the germs and evoke the panic around physical touch present at the beginning of the pandemic. The discomfort of the subject is palpable, with their body curled into itself and their face covered as though to protect it, captured eternal in the enduring medium of the photograph.

Cassils' non-fungible token (NFT) pieces *White Male Artist Manifesto: Eat Your Crypto - \$HT Coin for the Revolution!* and *Special \$HIT* directly references Piero Manzoni's *Artists Shit* (1961), a satirical work where Manzoni put his own excrement into cans to question the desire of viewers to commodify and own artists. An NFT art piece is unique in



that each artwork has a digital identifier and thus, there is an owner even though the piece is digital. By choosing to make the piece an NFT, a medium notoriously dominated by white men and one where the artwork itself is still viewable by anyone though is “owned” by one person, Cassils shows how the white patriarchy continues to glorify commodification. During a time when we are all being told to accept our “new normal,” which for many meant to return to the violent consumerism that demands workers risk their lives to serve those with money, the piece becomes an all-consuming question: what is each of us worth?

This question of worth continues in Morgan Stewart’s *The Things I Ate During Quarantine*. The work features different foods with captions that reveal the socio-economic position of the artist. Stewart spaces the food out across the page, as opposed to presenting them together or on a table, utilizing the negative space to show the lack of food available during lockdown. This is ironic as Stewart herself works as a professional chef. For other essential workers (especially those also working in restaurants) during quarantine, this paradox between going into work to cook meals for those who could afford them while struggling to feed oneself is a familiar and poignant one.

Rather than asking viewers to “return to normal,” these pieces push for a questioning of what our “normal” was and a reconsideration of what life should be like after the societal and personal changes caused by the pandemic. Through acknowledging the effects COVID-19 has had instead of rushing back to the injustice of the “normal,” we have a chance to imagine and construct a new world together.

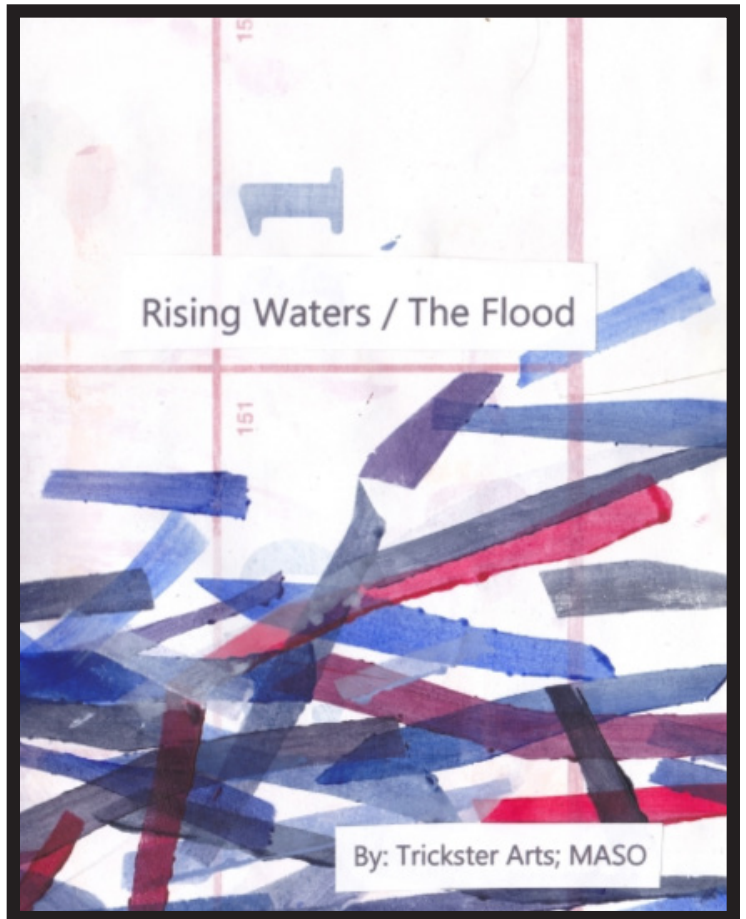
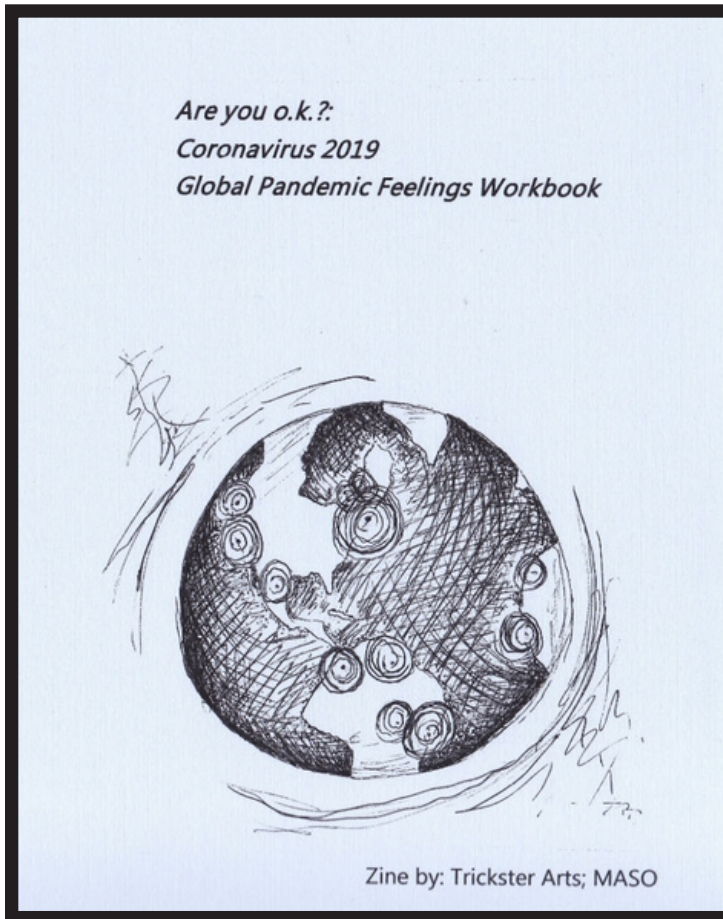
# *GERMS* (2021)

## Faith Kleese



"It felt as though the germs were closing in on me and there was nowhere for me to escape to. There was no safe place for me . . .  
It felt as though I was drowning."

# ARE YOU O.K.? (2020-2021) AND RISING WATERS / THE FLOOD (2020) Melissa A. Swiatek-Odien



"This zine was created out of my desire to help others navigate the emotional turmoil brought on by the pandemic, by making accessible the tool of journaling. Under the guise of helping others, I coped with my own feelings of helplessness."



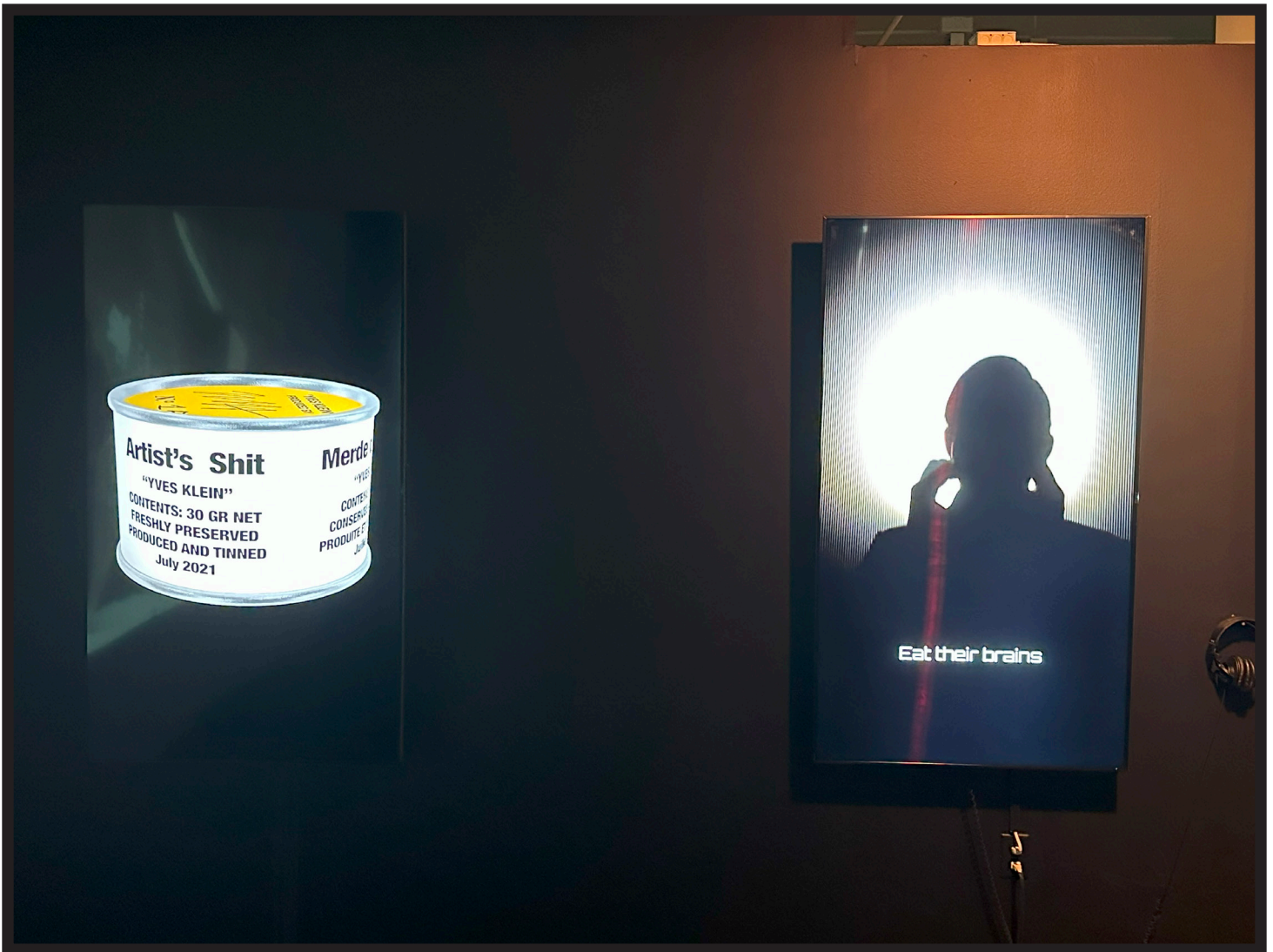
# THINGS I ATE DURING QUARANTINE (2020)

Morgan Stewart



"I began documenting what I cooked and . . . [it] opened into a way to understand economic insecurity through food, and the irony of struggling to feed myself as a professional chef."

# WHITE MALE ARTIST MANIFESTO: EAT YOUR CRYPTO - \$HT COIN FOR THE REVOLUTION! (2021) Cassils



"When we take [the idea of value] onto something where there is actually not even an object, where it becomes almost just about bragging rights around ownership, that [. . .] was really abstract and interesting in a way to me." [1]

# *THE LANGUAGE OF MENTAL HEALTH (2021)* Simone Robinson



"I interviewed a few people to understand different perspectives of what it means to live with certain mental health conditions, and creating a piece that was dedicated to these people and telling their story."

## SELF RECKONING AND SELF RECOGNITION IN DISORDER

Lee Rice

Selected Works: *Power Portrait* (2022) and *My Gaze* (2022) by Carmen Flores | *A Portrait of Modern Bindings & Beginnings* (2020) by Lachlan Thompson | *Sewing Scissors* (2020) by Sabrina Parsons | *Peace with Myself* (2020) and *For Casey and Niah* (2020) by Simone Robinson

These accumulated works submitted by Sabrina Parsons, Lachlan Thompson, Simone Robinson, and Carmen Flores bravely exhibit an assertion of the self. Understood through fragments, the self becomes immortalized within the confines of these canvases, a metaphor of each artist's quarantine that echoes the soul's yearning for rumination and connection amidst chaos. The notion of alienation emerges from this collection with earnestness, begging the question of how we can understand ourselves as individuals in a world split open with disease. Understanding the sanctity of life through community proves virtually impossible without first splitting us open toward self- reckoning and self- recognition.

Fragments of the body are most poignantly illuminated within this collection: a cutting of the hair captured in Sabrina Parsons's *Sewing Scissors*, a hand emerging from roots and handprints that decorate Thompson's *Portrait of Modern Bindings and Beginnings*, faces colorfully highlighted in Simone Robinson's *Peace with Myself* and *For Casey and Niah*, and Carmen Flores's electric assembly of self- portraits. Above all, these pieces not only grapple with life, but cherish it in what looms amidst death.

Thompson's *Portrait of Modern Bindings and Beginnings* honors marginalized voices most vulnerable to the silence that COVID-19 resulted in during isolation. The keys demonstrate a call to secrecy and denotes a sense of suppre contrasting the blatant objectivity displayed through the facts within the handprints, and denote a sense of suppression in the fear of voicing one's truth. The flowers blooming from the roots remind us of the beauty rooted within our stories lest we forget the power they hold.

Robinson also highlights life with her pieces, *For Casey and Niah* and *Peace with Myself*. Through *For Casey and Niah*, Robinson honors the life of Casey Goodson despite the tragedy of his death as a result of state-sanctuated violence. Hands softly embrace the faces of Casey and Niah, the subjects of this piece, and demonstrate the kind of warmth our communal hands can extend for love and nurturing. The figure centered in *Peace with Myself* possesses a look of contentment through confronting one's whole self through the honesty yielded from pain.

In Parson's vibrant *Sewing Scissors*, we can glean a sense of playfulness related to grappling and experimenting with one's self-image. The immaculate detailing of the skin and clothing speak to a hyper self-awareness typical of quarantine, but not as self-critically etched as in Flores's *Power Portrait*, *Mirror Painting*, and *My Gaze*. Declarations of anguish pierce the viewer, as Flores states that they "[dare] them to look at the true state of how I was feeling." These brave self-confrontations demonstrate an actualization of this distress, which is transformed into celebration and commemoration.

These pieces atomize and epitomize the human experience with what we are made of: limbs, flesh, bones, perspectives, and truths. All of these fragments speak to the innate yearning we have to be understood—taking pieces of ourselves, our bodies,



and our experiences to erect them in a form that makes sense of all the madness. It is the curious and unapologetic configuration of personhood, welded under the arch of community—to be viewed and positioned in its honesty.

# *POWER PORTRAIT* (2022) AND *MY GAZE* (2022) Carmen Flores



"I wanted [these pieces] to reference classical nude portraiture in which women's bodies are objectified and sexualized by the voyeuristic gazes of their largely male painters. I subvert this by painting myself as honestly as possible."

# A PORTRAIT OF MODERN BINDINGS & BEGINNINGS (2020) Lachlan Thompson



"Rather than settle for nihilism when it comes to reckoning with violent, traumatic histories, I lean into a radical sense of possibility. I create with a sense of hope that these histories can be tended to and transformed."

*SEWING SCISSORS* (2020)  
Sabrina Parsons



"Many people, myself included, felt out of control during lockdown, and cutting my hair gave me a sense of something that I could control."

*PEACE WITH MYSELF (2020)  
AND FOR CASEY AND NIAH (2020)*  
Simone Robinson



"For me, my anxiety [piqued] and I found myself drowning in work . .  
. I realized that this was not the way to live for me or anyone."

## TRANSFORMATIVE RESILIENCE IN ART

Famous Clark

Selected Works: *Anonymous* (2022) by Filio Zoi Milioti | *Hyacinth* (2021) by Verbena Vy | *La Luna y el Hacedor* (2020-2021) by Tiajun Li (Timjune) | *Suenos oniricos, misivas de resistencia* (2021) by Lorenzo Camacho

For centuries, visual storytelling has been a powerful mode through which artists can express their innermost thoughts, emotions, and perceptions of the world. By highlighting under-examined aspects of the human experience, artists have used their creative talents to explore each of these various aspects, from personal struggles to societal issues. *Hyacinth*, *La Luna y el Hacedor*, *Sueños oníricos*, *misivas de resistencia*, and *Anonymous* explores themes of self-discovery, human resilience, and the impact of nature and society on the individual.

Verbena Vy's *Hyacinth* is a testament to the journey of self-discovery that many individuals, especially women and femmes, embark on throughout their lives. The artwork portrays the struggle of finding oneself amidst instability both internally and externally. The hyacinth, a symbol of feminine strength, serves as a metaphor for the resilience required to face challenges head-on. The oil painting presents the transformative power that comes from confronting and embracing one's vulnerabilities. This artwork encourages self-belief, -empowerment, and -commitment, even when the odds seem stacked against the individual.

*La Luna y el Hacedor* by Tiajun Li (Timjune) delves into the awe-inspiring encounter with nature's overwhelming power through the medium of photography. By constructing a dreamlike world, the photographs pay homage to the boundless nature of the human imagination and its ability to transcend the limitations of reality. The mystique and allusion to the cosmic symbolizes the connection between the earthly and the celestial realms. In the face of nature's grandeur, humans are reminded of both their insignificance and their boundless capacity for creativity and resilience.

Lorenzo Camacho's series of drawn postcards, *Sueños oníricos, misivas de resistencia*, presents a collection of dreams experienced by people during a period of turmoil marked by the pandemic and social protests in Colombia. The postcards offer a glimpse into the collective unconscious affected by violence and scarcity. This artwork becomes a testimony to the human spirit's enduring ability to find hope and alternative ways of coping with injustice and adversity. Despite the challenging circumstances, the dreams painted on the postcards demonstrate the power of the human mind to envision a better world and resist the forces that seek to suppress it.

*Anonymous*, a sculpture created by Filio Zoi Milioti, challenges the notion of an idealized world, one that is often perceived as magically protected and removed from reality. The artwork juxtaposes disparate materials that do not naturally belong together, representing the discord between the idealized concept and the messy reality of life. The idea of "female nature" rarely entering reality alludes to societal expectations and constructs that women and those of other marginalized genders face. This artwork questions the validity of constructed realities and highlights the ephemeral nature of ideas, which can float freely but struggle to manifest in the real world.

Together, these pieces collectively convey a message of human resilience and the constant pursuit of self-discovery. They explore the intricate relationship between nature, society, and the individual, highlighting the transformative power of embracing one's vulnerabilities and seeking alternative paths in the face of adversity. Through the lens of creativity and imagination, these artworks serve as powerful reminders of the indomitable human spirit, ever-evolving and transcending the boundaries imposed by the world around us. They inspire us to navigate our own journeys of self-discovery, find strength in our vulnerabilities, and nurture the limitless potential of the human imagination.



*ANONYMOUS* (2022)  
Filio Zoi Milioti



"With this work[,] I thought of combining materials that do not fit together as their choice (such as black pantyhose) represent the idea of female nature that almost never enters reality."

# SUEÑOS ONÍRICOS, MISIVAS DE RESISTENCIA (2021)

## Lorenzo Camacho



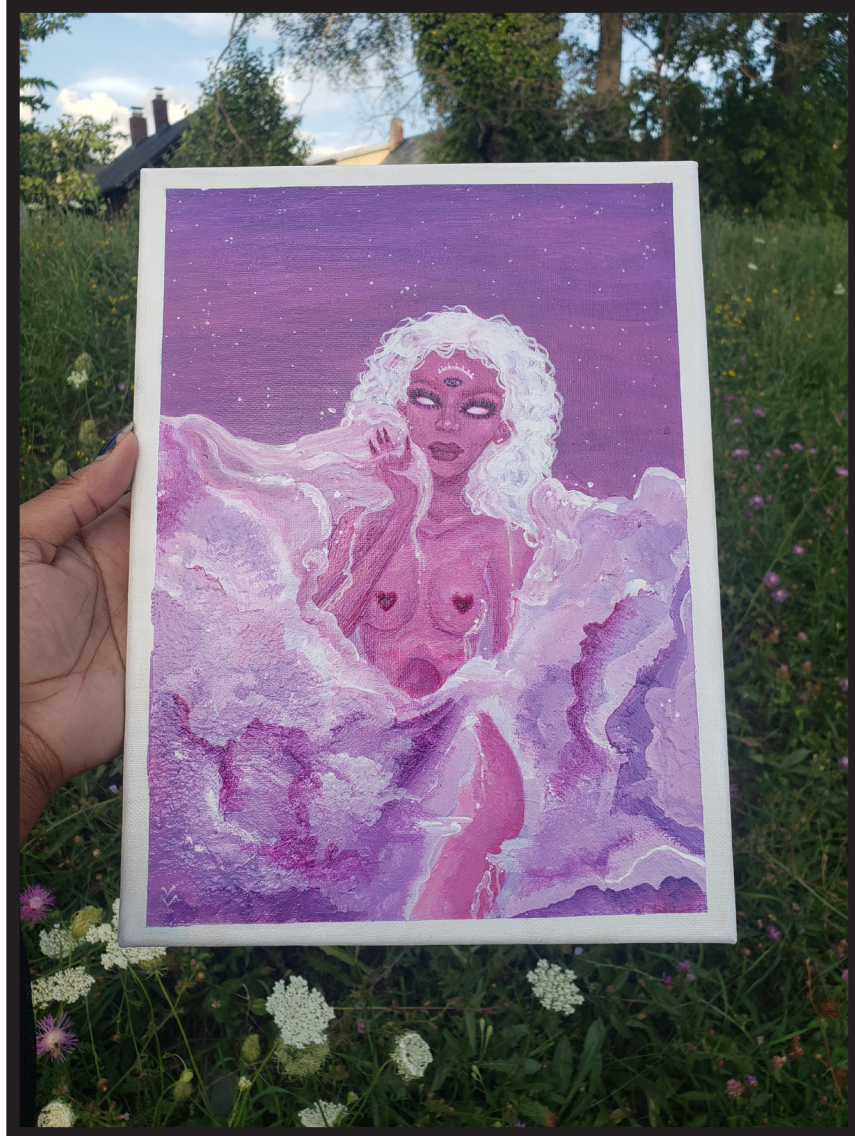
"[Featuring] dreams people had during the pandemic and the social protests in Colombia[, the each of the postcards] speaks about our fears, our confusion and pain, but also our resilience and hopes[—]our imagination."

*LA LUNA Y EL HACEDOR (2020-2021)*  
Tiajun Li (Timjune)



"By reimagining photos taken before the pandemic, I aimed to construct a dreamlike world that pays homage to the boundless nature and limitless imagination of humanity."

*HYACINTH* (2021)  
Verbena Vy



"Everything was chaotic - physically, emotionally, and environmentally; but I was in my own world painting [*Hyacinth*], with nothing but dreams for fulfillment."

## LOOPS

Tim Georger

Selected Works: *Loom* (2020-2021) by TD | *Pendulum* (2020) by Tia Brown | *Hello, can you hear me* (2021) by Andra Ragusila | *Canary Resuscitator* (2021) by KS Brewer | *COVID-19 Reliquary/Memento Mori* by Melissa A. Swiatek-Odien | *Still Kiss You* (2021) by Kayla Hardy

The technique of looping video is inextricably linked to the manipulation of time. The loop by its own definition has no true beginning or ending, and therefore no linear temporality. Causality itself becomes morphed and skewed as the head and the tail of the loop end up informing each other. From a formalist point of view, this is useful when trying to express the condition of lockdown. As we grow further distant from the period marked by COVID-19 and we are forced to reflect over the past three or so years, it is increasingly apparent that the event of a global pandemic has uniquely warped our perception of time. The safety and security of our homes became antagonistic once we began looking at the same four walls just a little bit too much.

The video loops in question all have an antagonistic relationship with their homes. TD's video project *Loom*, for example, emphasizes the idea of an antagonistic home through the wooden window and the lace curtain framing the piece. The simulacrum of a window shapes the viewer's perspective, focusing on small, unseen moments, such as a cicada's last moments. It also brings attention to the similarities between a spider's web as both home & weapon, and our own homes taking a similar direction. Andra Ragusila's video *Hello, can*

*you hear me* takes this hostile relationship between the home and its inhabitants even further by emphasizing the act of pacing in one's apartment, overlaid with the unique sense of seclusion that comes with being on a Zoom call. The continuous looping of these pieces offers the sense that the viewer is trapped with no escape, as many found themselves during lockdown with each day indistinguishable from the last, as if time itself is conspiring against them.

K.S. Brewer's *Canary Resuscitator* & Melissa A. Swiatek-Odien's *COVID-19 Reliquary/Memento Mori* sculptures meanwhile venture back in time to historical examples of how death was understood in the past as a way of coping with the death from a global pandemic. *Canary Resuscitator* makes the idiom “canary in the coal mine” physical by drawing a lineage directly back to its historical use, and asks if we could have been better prepared for the tragedy if we heeded the warnings of our most vulnerable people. *COVID-19 Reliquary/Memento Mori* references past experiences with mass loss, and asks how we can apply these lessons to cope today. *Memento Mori* is a reference to Gothic Europe after the Bubonic Plague, telling the listener to remember that they will one day die. This is contrasted with imagery of the Spanish Flu, the last major worldwide pandemic whose shadow we still seem to be living in.

The video works of Tia Brown's *Pendulum* & Kayla Hardy's *Still Kiss You* take a slightly different approach to time, looking at its relationship to space and the resulting distance it creates. *Pendulum* uses the medium of the video loop to play with space rather than time, distorting the same loop with different reflections and effects. *Still Kiss You* is a song nostalgic for a time pre-pandemic, again tapping into the isolation of being made distant from the ones you love with little else to do other than lay in bed alone. The two pieces ache for a world without the pandemic, where one is not pacing the same

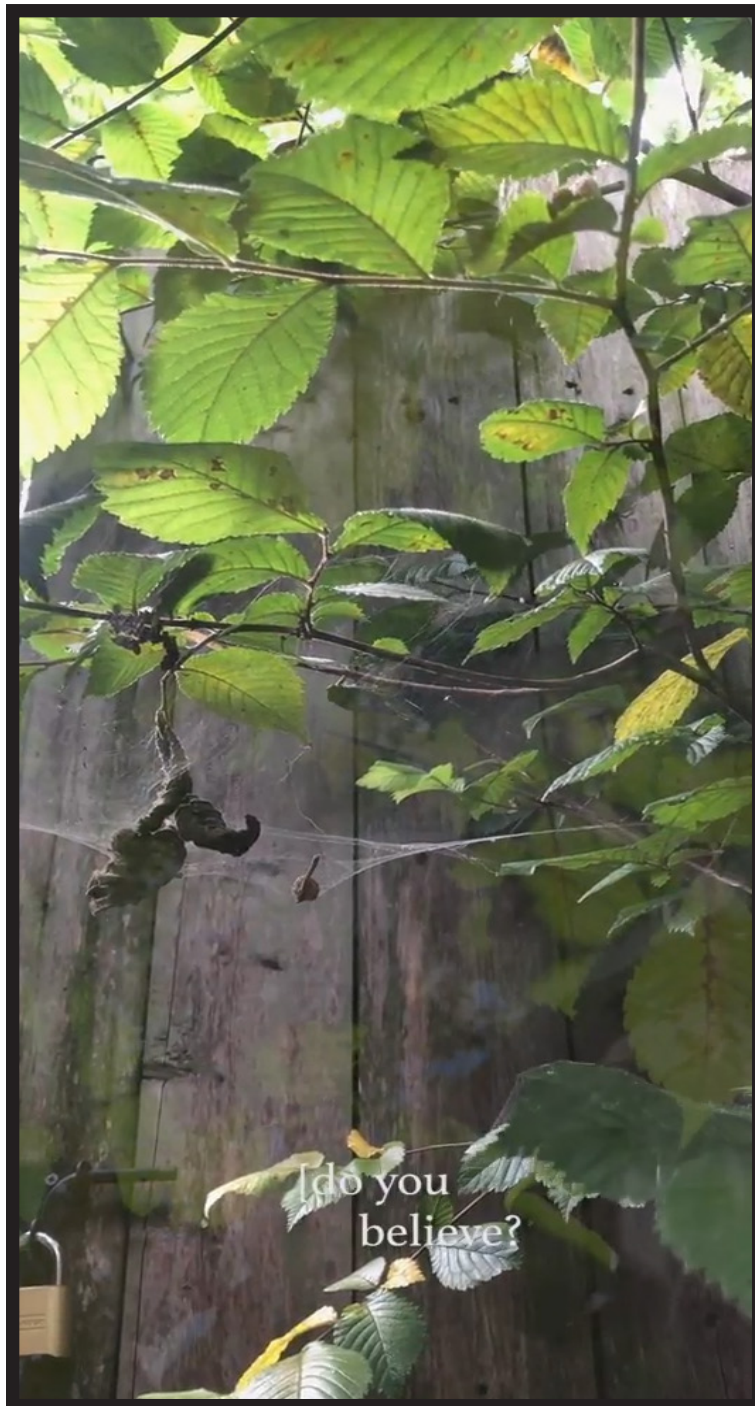
room every day by themselves, longing for another person to share it with.

Although we are survivors of a historical world changing event, now in 2023 it feels as if COVID has left our vocabulary. Society seemingly decided that it is time to move on as soon as possible, despite the pandemic's significant influence on our current condition. The video loop taps into a unique condition of the COVID-19 era and the isolation many of us had felt day-to-day. In order to heal from the trauma that comes from the desocialization and anxiety COVID-19 induced, we have to reflect on, rather than shy away from, what it was like to live through these last few years.

# *LOOM* (2020-2021)

## TD

". . . I'd intended for [the project] to be furious and difficult, as transition for me often feels. Too fast and in flux for me to feel or understand. [Instead it] beckons as a rest at the window, and I wait there calling too."





*PENDULUM* (2020) FROM THE "PROJECTIONS"  
SERIES  
Tia Brown



"'Projections' are how I explore the darkness and aloneness we all find, face, and feel we cannot fight on our own but often do."

# *HELLO, CAN YOU HEAR ME (2021)*

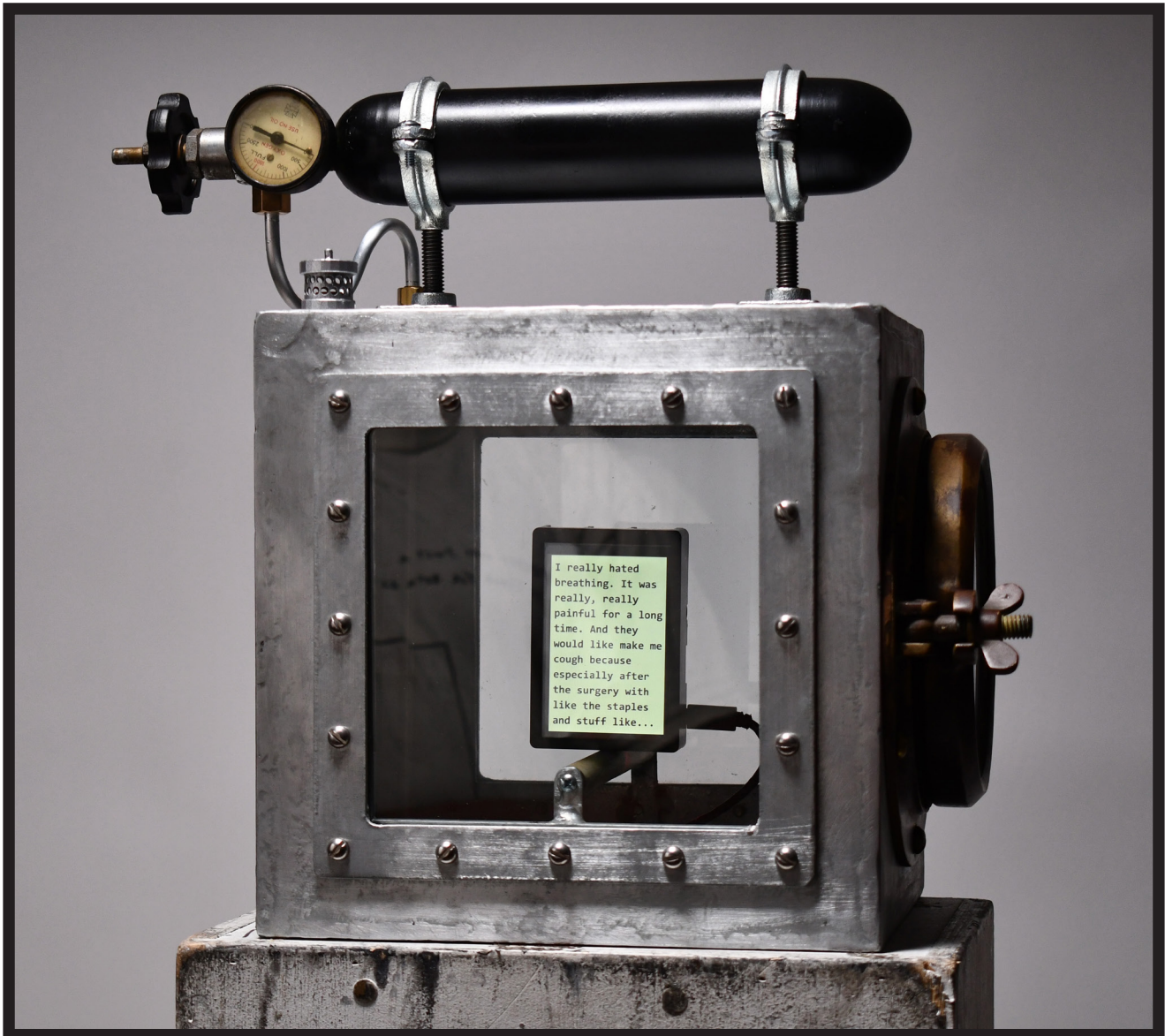
## Andra Ragusila



"Through the video I am trying to show the paradoxes of being all alone, while being constantly connected through technology . . . The result is an awkward effort of preserving normalcy while the voices crackle with a sense of longing."

# *CANARY RESUSCITATOR (2021)*

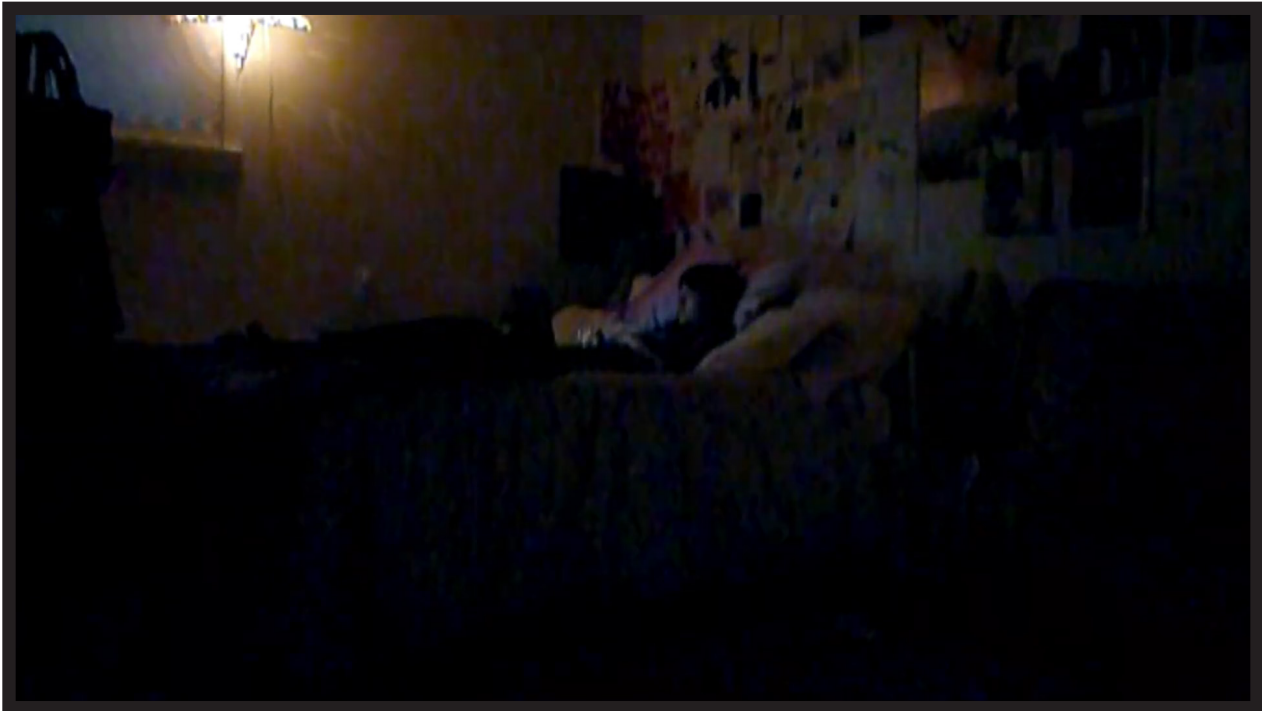
KS Brewer



"I aim to create experiential art with the capacity to implicate participants in a visceral, interactive encounter that can feel disruptive in a productive way - creating a 'productive rupture' that queers destructive hegemonic expectations and operating procedures."

# *STILL KISS YOU (2021)*

Kayla Hardy



Would've been nice if u left a note  
Cause now you're gone and I'm not  
sure what for  
I guess I was never any good at  
keeping secrets  
I spill my heart to strangers on the  
weekends  
And you'd be mad if you knew what  
I was thinking  
You'd tell me shut up, you've been  
drinking all night

But I lost my heart and you lost a  
friend  
My dad would tell me to make  
amends  
And you've probably said that you'd  
leave for good  
That's fair enough I know I would  
You must get tired carrying all  
those words  
They're oh so heavy and trust me  
they hurt  
And still if someone told me kiss  
the prettiest girl in the room  
I'd still kiss you

# COVID-19 RELIQUARY/MEMENTO MORI (2020-2021) Melissa A. Swiatek-Odien



"Like a prayer inscribed upon an alter, espousing faith in the power of scientific discovery to improve our lives, as evidenced by the development of laboratory and home tests, drugs and vaccines."

# QUEER WORLDBUILDING AMIDST THE BRUTAL ENVIRONMENT OF LINEAR TIME, GRAVITY, AND SPACE

Johann Yamin

Selected Works: *The Linguistic Errantry* (2021) by Tansy Xiao | *DYS* (2022) by Emira and Rory | *These Unruly and Ungovernable Selves* (2020) by Michelle Handelson | *Isolated Conversations* (2020) by Maria Servellon | *Trans Folks Walking* (2020-2023) by Cody Mejeur, Madison Ford, Wes Turner, Famous Clark, and Austin Wilson

“Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew,” writes Arundhati Roy in her now seminal piece about the COVID-19 pandemic. “This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.”<sup>[2]</sup> In attempting to articulate artistic practices that persevere across landscapes of magnified inequity and injustice, one continually returns to a belief in artists to conjure portals across seemingly incommensurable worlds. In the following works, we see artists wield virtual space and visions of alternate realms to enact dizzying sites of queer worldbuilding. They create places for spiraling in and out of fantasy, exhaustion, and hope.

Maria Servellon’s *Isolated Conversations* begins unassumingly as a webcam video self-portrait. Now synonymous with video call platforms made unappealing from overuse during the pandemic, Servellon recovers the webcam video feed as a space of playfulness. Back in 2007, Internet artist Petra Cortright visualized her disinterested

mental state through *VVEBCAM*, where default special effects slowly dance across the artist's unimpressed face in a video uploaded to YouTube. *Isolated Conversations* rearticulates a similar online ennui, now for a time marked by contingency and loss of agency, with silliness as a salve for Zoom fatigue and a means of seeking out tenderness in technology.

In *These Unruly and Ungovernable Selves*, a video essay by Michelle Handelman, characters from Handelman's oeuvre of multichannel narrative works are remixed together to construct a multiverse of queer dystopias. As the piece sonically escalates into distorted beats, Handelman's characters contend with "the incredibly brutal environment of linear time, gravity and space," suggesting that modes of survival emerge through transgression. Providing glimpses into Handelman's expansive practice, the work conjures worlds of indeterminate thresholds and boundaries.

Strange worlds continue to unfurl through Tansy Xiao's *The Linguistic Errantry*, a virtual environment that a player may navigate, swathed in an almost-infinite combination of sounds determined by randomized, pre-programmed variables. Xiao creates a surreal landscape where a group of 14 giraffes gallop about. One utters a propaganda phrase against revolution while the rest of the giraffes produce notes from L'Internationale, the widely-translated anthem of socialist and communist movements. Humorously, if given an infinite amount of time, L'Internationale could be produced in full through the synthetic cognition of these giraffes—suggesting the potency of contingency in resistive acts, even as it abstracts and reappropriates political ideals.

The subjective interiority of the trans protagonist in *DYS* by Emira and Rory is dutifully centered in a labyrinthine game world traversed in darkness. Players alternate between tapping a key to charge up their light source and holding another key down to keep the light aglow

as they navigate maze-like maps. Interspersed are a series of text exchanges where the protagonist's internal dysphoric struggles are worked through. Through this deliberate struggle to power a source of light, *DYS* conveys the laborious intentionality of maintaining hope in carving out trans futures, even in the bleakness of isolation.

In 2015, trans game designer Anna Anthropy importantly critiqued labeling games by queer game-makers as “empathy games,” a framing that emphasized the emotional education of cis, straight audiences. Amatrix Gaming Lab & Studio's *Trans Folks Walking* is a narrative game experienced in first-person perspective as a player navigates 3D environments and encounters fragments of audio and text. A growing anthology of trans narratives from the U.S., it first begins with a familiar, tension-filled scenario of a trans man having to choose between the men's or women's bathroom while in school. A second surprising scenario sees an elderly trans woman visiting her old childhood church and recounting the ostracism she faced after wearing a skirt there for the first time. Eventually removed from the church, the player is greeted by a darkened space with multiple queer futures to choose from. In the wake of Florida's ‘Don't Say Gay’ bill, queer games such as *DYS* and *Trans Folks Walking* urgently center the complex multiplicity of trans experiences, insisting for a “grammar of possibility” amidst embattled times.<sup>[3]</sup>

Together, these works imagine different ways of being in the world, putting gameful visions into practice. By contending with states of disrepair and disillusionment, artists allow possibilities to unfurl through concerted acts of worldbuilding.



# *THE LINGUISTIC ERRANTRY (2021)*

Tansy Xiao



"The consolidation and disintegration of sovereigns, an anticipated revolution to be generated by mere chance, or a parallel universe where nothing ever happens and only entropy reigns supreme."

# *THESE UNRULY AND UNGOVERNABLE SELVES* (2020) Michelle Handelman



"When we find ourselves cut off from all that forms our identity, then who are we? . . . As my dear friend and trans activist Zackary Drucker says, 'When you hit a wall, when all you see are walls, shift your plane of gravity and make it the floor.'"

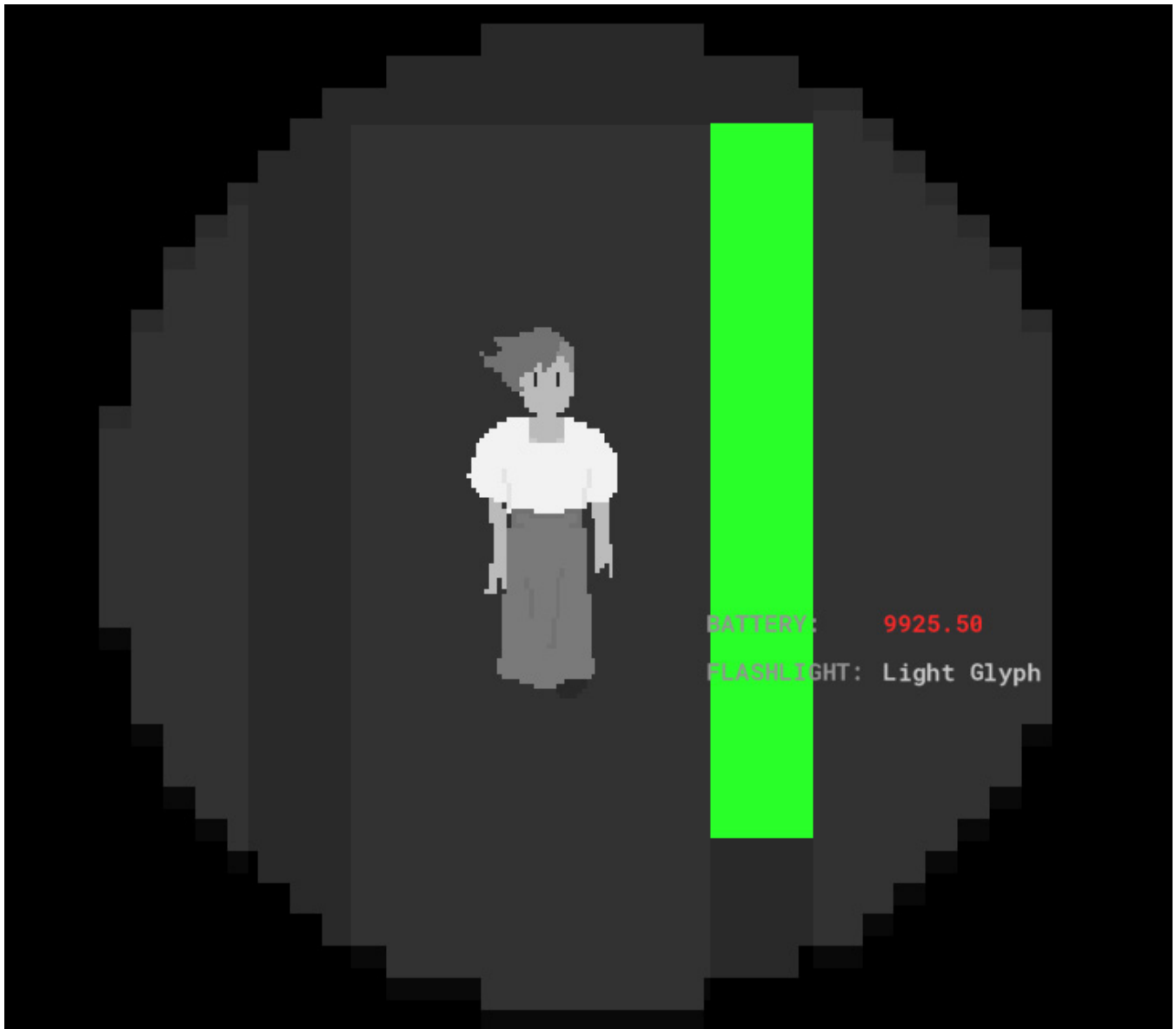
# *ISOLATED CONVERSATIONS* (2020)

Maria Servellon



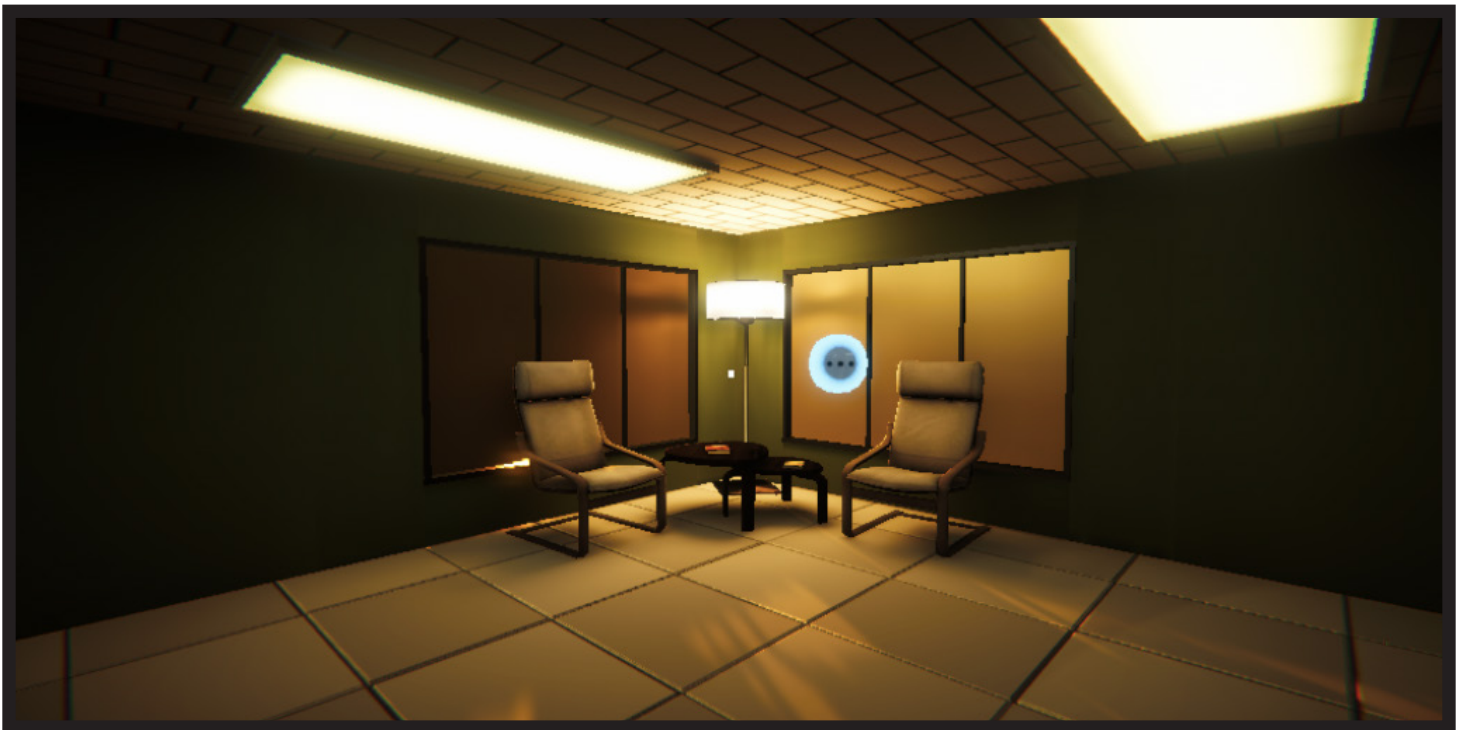
"I participated in one too many Zoom calls and was inspired to take my voice and image's agency again to break the unofficial 'Zoom rules.'"

*DYS* (2022)  
Emira and Rory



"Art is a beautiful thing, a tool that can be utilized to bring emotions and sympathy. If we can capture our feelings, we can make people think they understand."

*TRANS FOLKS WALKING (2020-2023)*  
Cody Mejeur, Madison Ford, Wes Turner,  
Famous Clark & Austin Wilson



"The game currently puts players in several situations drawn from the experiences of trans folks in contemporary America . . . The game creates space for trans folks to share their stories and for players to experience small parts of what it means to be trans."

## IN ISOLATION WE REACH FOR EACH OTHER: FACILITATING CONNECTION THROUGH ART

Morgan J. Sammut

Selected Works: *PO DI TERRA - STORIES OF MAMA DI NHANTONIA* (2020) by Vlademir Rodrigues | *Queer Community of Buffalo New York* (2020) by Tallulah Gordon | *Covid Tribute Poster Project* (2020-2022) by Soren Glassing | *Comfy Royalty* (2020-2023) by Michael Anthony DeAnda | *I DON'T LIKE APPLES* (2020-2023), *OASIS* (2020-2023), *I SAID NO* (2020-2023), *COME ZIP MOMMIES DRESS* (2020-2023), and *WHAT'S GOING ON* (2020-2023) by Iris M. Kirkwood

When lockdown procedures were put into place, many felt isolated. Six feet apart feels too far. How do you find a way to reach across the distance and create connection? For these artists, the process and physicality of their work became the way to maintain connections.

Michael Anthony DeAnda's project *Comfy Royalty* is a series of crochet crowns that he sent out to his friends. In choosing to make crowns, DeAnda designates these people as deserving of a royal status. Instead of being made of gold, each crown is made from a common material—yarn—equating not the material itself to gold, but DeAnda's labor. What started as a solitary activity became a way for him to show affection through a physical object that carries with it the time and intention of its creation. Like DeAnda's crowns, the

physicality of the posters from Soren Glassing's *COVID Tribute Poster Project* is an essential feature.

Glassing, a hospice chaplain, created these posters in honor of his COVID-19 patients, so they would be seen and remembered not as a full person rather than just a name. Each poster features patients' favorite colors, symbols, and descriptors provided by their friends and family. This inclusion makes the poster creation a collective one and welcomes viewers to see the patient through the lenses of their community alongside that of the artist. In this way, the poster functions as a physical object that facilitates connection between the viewer, the artist, and the subject.

Through Tallulah Gordon's titling of her photography collection *Queer Community of Buffalo New York*, Gordon narrows the broad lens of community to as a small group of close queer friends. Throughout all the photographs, viewers are presented with an intimate glance into the lives of the subjects. Gordon explains that, through the project, she wants to show that queer people are deserving of love, which she does by capturing subjects smiling, talking, walking, looking, embracing, and other small moments of joy.

While Gordon's project focuses on capturing the present moment, Vlademir Rodrigues' *PODI TERRA—STORIES OF MAMA DINHANTONIA* centers the preservation of history by documenting elders. By both naming the collection after Mama Di Nhantonia and starting the collection with her portrait, Rodrigues uses Mama to frame the series. Viewers are guided to discern the photographed objects as features of Mama's life; Mama smoking her pipe, Mama grinding her coffee, Mama wrapping her hair. This relationship between Mama and the objects reminds viewers that these are not relics of the past, but part of Cape Verdean's present. Rodrigues also includes

a short description for each image, keeping the knowledge of Cape Verdean traditions alive and inviting viewers previously unfamiliar with these traditions to learn the history of the community. Through documentation, Rodrigues is able to show the culture and history of Cape Verde to a larger audience.

Iris M. Kirkwood's series of multimedia paintings showcase moments of community, inviting viewers into the narratives of each piece. *COME ZIP MOMMIES DRESS* and *WHAT'S GOING ON* do this through both their titling and the positioning of the figures, each of which situate the viewer as part of the very scene they are seeing. On the other hand, *OASIS* grants viewers access to an intimate moment between a mother and her unborn child. The soft colors and relaxed expression of the mother show this moment viewers are gazing at is the titular "oasis."

Art is a binding force that can transcend the physical and, during a pandemic where connection cannot be physical, allows a new avenue for connection. These works remind us that even in moments of isolation, we are not alone. There is a community surrounding us when we reach out for it.



# COMFY ROYALTY (2020-2023) Michael Anthony DeAnda



"My goal in sending crowns to people was to highlight my admiration for them and give them cozy vibes through the accessory."

# QUEER COMMUNITY OF BUFFALO NEW YORK (2020)

Tallulah Gordon



"By documenting members of Buffalo's Queer community, I hope to help us find that voice that we need . . . We deserve love. And we deserve peace."

# COVID TRIBUTE POSTER PROJECT (2020-2022)

Soren Glassing



"We set up a small hospice unit inside our hospital so that patients could die in comfort and peace. As a chaplain, I wanted my patients to be humanized and not just a number."

*PO DI TERRA - STORIES OF MAMA DI  
NHANTONIA (2022)*  
Vladimir Rodrigues



"A series of photos that explore Cape-Verdeans history through expressions and household collections. What was once part of the daily life of Cape Verde are now just part of the nostalgia of MAMA DI NHANTONIA"

OASIS (2020-2022)  
Iris M. Kirkwood



"I tell stories with my art of the little moments in life, those of sorrow, joy, love, envy, etc. I am consumed [by] the emotional content of human life."

## ENDNOTES

[1] Cassils, "Cans of poop, NFTs, and cryptocurrencies: A wild conversation with Cassils." Interview by Christianna Silva, *Mashable*, 27 August 2021, <https://mashable.com/article/cassils-artist-cans-of-shit-nft-interview>.

[2] Arundhati Roy, 'The Pandemic is a Portal,' *Financial Times*, April 4, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca>.

[3] "So what is the alternative? This simple question announces a political project, begs for a grammar of possibility (here expressed in gerunds and the passive voice, among other grammars of pronouncement), and expresses a basic desire to live life otherwise." See Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 2.

# ARTWORK BY VENUE

## Buffalo Arts Studio

KS Brewer - *Canary Resuscitator* (2021)

Lorenzo Camacho - *Sueños oníricos, misivas de resistencia* (2021)

Michael Anthony DeAnda - *Comfy Royalty* (2020-2023)

Carmen Flores - *Mirror Painting* (2022), *My Gaze* (2022), *Power Portrait* (2022)

Soren Glassing - *Covid Tribute Poster Project* (2020-2022)

Tallulah Gordon - *Queer Community of Buffalo New York* (2020)

Iris M. Kirkwood - *COME ZIP MOMMIES DRESS* (2020-2022),  
*I DON'T LIKE APPLES* (2020-2022), *OASIS* (2020-2022), *WHAT'S GOING ON* (2020-2022)

Faith Kleese - *Germs* (2021)

Tiajun Li (Timjune) - *La Luna y el Hacedor* (2020-2021)

Filio Zoi Milioti - *Anonymous* (2022)

Sabrina Parsons - *Sewing Scissors* (2020)

Simone Robinson - *Peace with Myself* (2020)

Vladimir Rodrigues - *PO DI TERRA – STORIES OF MAMA DI NHANTONIA* (2022)

Morgan Stewart - *Things I Ate During Quarantine* (2020)

Melissa A. Swiatek-Odien - *Are you O.K.? Coronavirus 2019 Global Pandemic Feelings Workbook* (2020-2021), *Covid-19 Reliquary/Memento Mori* (2020-2021), *Rising Water / The Flood* (2020)

Lachlan Thompson - *A Portrait of Modern Bindings & Beginnings* (2020)

Verbená Vy - *Hyacinth* (2021)

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## Buffalo Game Space

Emira and Rory - *DYS* (2022)

Cody Mejeur, Madison Ford, Wes Turner, Famous Clark, and Austin Wilson - *Trans Folks Walking* (2020-2023)

Tansy Xiao - *The Linguistic Errantry* (2021)

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## Squeaky Wheel Film & Media Art Center

Tia Brown - *Pendulum* (2020)

Cassils - *Special \$HT, White Male Artist Manifesto: Eat Your Crypto - \$HT Coin for the Revolution!* (2021)

Michelle Handelman - *These Unruly and Ungovernable Selves* (2020)

Kayla Hardy - *Still Kiss You* (2021)

Andra Ragusila - *Hello, Can you hear me* (2021)

Simone Robinson - *The Language of Mental Health* (2021)

Maria Servellon - *Isolated Conversations* (2020)

TD - *Loom* (2020-2021)



## ARTISTS

**KS Brewer** is a transdisciplinary artist-researcher based in Lenapehoking/Brooklyn, NY. They received their BA in filmmaking from New York University and use their training in time-based technologies and their work as a professional fabricator to inform their practice. They've exhibited internationally with recent shows at 601 Artspace, Collar Works, and Peer to Space. Their work has been published by Forbes, Ravelin, and Hyperallergic. They've been an artist in residence at ChaNorth, Laboratory, The School of Making Thinking and PLAYA, participated in Queer Art's Book & Print fair, spoken at the Queer Form panel at Satellite Art Fair, lectured at the Thessaloniki Queer Art Fair and Field Projects, received the Working Artist Grant, and curated the exhibition 'STAG: The Illicit Origins of Pornographic Film' for the Museum of Sex.

**Tia Brown** is a writer, educator, and creative from Buffalo, NY. She holds an MFA in Writing from Pacific University, is the former editor of Utterance, and is an Oishei 2020 Leaders of Color Fellow. Her work has been featured in CivicScience, LittleSis, One for One Thousand, Qween City, and Truthout. When they aren't writing they can be found creating music under the moniker Projections.

**Lorenzo Camacho** is a Latinx artist who has been working with the important, strange and beautiful artifacts we know as dreams for years now. They worked on this project in collaboration with Andrés Torres, Catalina Ochoa and Nathalia Martínez. We all are people who spend most of our lives dreaming.

**Cassils** is a transgender artist who makes their own body the material and protagonist of their performances. Cassils' art contemplates the history(s) of LGBTQI+ violence, representation, struggle, survival, empowerment and systems of care. For Cassils, performance is a form of social sculpture:

Drawing from the idea that bodies are formed in relation to forces of power and social expectations, Cassils' work excavates historical contexts to examine the present moment. Cassils has had recent solo exhibitions at HOME Manchester, Station Museum of Contemporary Art, Perth Institute for Contemporary Arts, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, NYC; Institute for Contemporary Art, AU; Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts; School of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston; Bemis Center, Omaha; MU Eindhoven, Netherlands. They are the recipient of the National Creation Fund (2022), a 2020 Fleck Residency from the Banff Center for the Arts, a Princeton Lewis Artist Fellowship finalist (2020), a Villa Bellagio Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship (2019), a United States Artist Fellowship (2018), a Guggenheim Fellowship and a COLA Grant (2017) and a Creative Capital Award (2015). They have received the inaugural ANTI Festival International Prize for Live Art, California Community Foundation Grant, MOTHA (Museum of Transgender Hirstory) award, and numerous Visual Artist Fellowships from the Canada Council of the Arts. Their work has been featured in New York Times, Boston Globe, Artforum, Hyperallergic, Wired, The Guardian, TDR, Performance Research, Art Journal and was the subject of the monograph Cassils published by MU Eindhoven (2015) and their new catalog Solutions, is published by the Station Museum of Contemporary Art, TX (2020). Cassils' work was recently acquired by the Victoria Albert Museum, London, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto and the Leslie Lohman Museum. Cassils is an Associate Professor in Visual Studies at the University of Toronto.

**Michael Anthony DeAnda** is a game designer, educator, and crafter. DeAnda researches the intersections of games, sexuality, and Latinx lived experiences. Faer work extends to crafts to explore design and computation in analog forms.

**Emira** is a 17 year-old closeted trans girl who has recently begun exploring her identity. She works as a web/graphic designer and she studies web tech and game design at a separate school. Her main goal in life is to be happy and telling stories to anyone who is willing to listen. An impactful

story is the most important thing you could ever give someone. Her entire life she has been obsessed with creative things and computers, and that isn't stopping any soon! She saves up all her money so she can express her inner-nerd at conventions with her friends. Emira can't wait to be given the opportunity to show the world who she is some day.

**Carmen Flores** is a nonbinary Indigenous Latinx painter and multimedia artist. Their work is meant to invoke that of classic nude portraits, but rather than idealizing the figure, they strive to create honest self-portraits to explore themes of self-image.

**Madison Ford** is the narrative designer for the *Trans Folks Walking* team and holds a Masters in English Literature from Michigan State University. She imagines, writes, and creates the story of the game to be experienced by the player, pulling from personal and interpersonal experiences in queerness and everyday existence.

**Soren Glassing** is a hospice chaplain and artist who believes in using the healing and humanizing power of art.

**Tallulah Gordon** is a filmmaker and photographer (though they don't limit themself to just those two mediums) born and raised in Buffalo, NY. Their work focuses on a variety of different social issues with Jewish and queer life being front and center. They like to focus on the humanity of their subjects while not being tied down to realism. This allows them to be expressive in their work and to experiment with more abstract ideas than what people might be used to in photography and film. They've never worked with Amatrix Gaming Lab & Studio before, but they're delighted to be involved in their first exhibit with them.

**Michelle Handelman** uses video, live performance and photography to make confrontational works that explore the sublime in its various forms of excess and nothingness. Her background is a study in opposites—raised

during the late '60s and early '70s, Handelman split her time between Chicago, where her mother was a fixture in the art world, and Los Angeles, where her father was a player in the counterculture sex industry. Over the years Handelman has voraciously traversed both these worlds, developing a body of work that investigates ways of looking at the forbidden and revealing dark, subconscious layers of outsider agency.

**Kayla Hardy** is a 19 year-old lesbian songwriter, musician, and creative based out of Boston, MA. She studies writing, literature, and publishing with a minor in womens, gender, and sexuality studies at Emerson College. She began writing music during the pandemic and fell in love with expression through song. Since attending Emerson College, she has worked on a handful of projects including hosting her own radio show as well as starting a band and playing shows. She hopes to combine her love of music, movement, and storytelling to create art that connects to the communities around her.

**Iris M. Kirkwood** is an African-American female, born and raised in Buffalo, NY. She is a self-taught visual artist. Iris uses a variety of mediums to create her visual narratives--pastel, pencil, colored pencil, markers, ink and miscellaneous bits of paper. It would not be accurate to label her a multimedia artist though she freely mixes the various mediums. On viewing her finished pieces, it is often difficult to determine how the piece was made. Iris has shown her work in numerous art galleries and centers in the country. She has been commissioned by various art galleries and museums to create temporary art installations. The major theme in her work is the emotional content of her visual narratives.

**Faith Kleese** is a photographer from Angola, New York. They graduated from Fredonia State with a Bachelor of fine arts, visual arts and new media: photography degree, with minors in psychology and criminal justice. Faith was the Photography Intern for the Department of Theatre & Dance at Fredonia State, (February 2022-May 2022). They photographed all of the

theatre and dance performances and they were posted on Fredonia State's social media accounts. Faith had their photography series, *Disorders*, in the 2021 Senior Show at Fredonia State with photos showing aspects of different disorders. They had photos displayed at the Ripley Public Library Annual Art Exhibition. Faith won third place in the Reconstructing Narratives: Student Photo Competition, with a photo that showed the impact of the pandemic on the elderly, which was displayed at Fredonia State. Faith's passion is photography and goal is to share their photos with as many people as possible.

**Tiajun Li (Timjune)** was born in China in 1999 and is a transcultural and queer visual artist and photographer. Timjune's works focus on the interplay between diverse photographic subjects reflecting on living reality and self-identifying, creating a new poetic visual dimension through the process of reconstructing various elements. This unique approach allows him to reinterpret contemporary phenomena with an ethereal perspective of surrealism.

**Filio Zoi Milioti** was born and raised in Athens, Greece. Her influences and perceptions are democratic and civil to the world. She believes in freedom of speech and expression at any age of our life. At 19 she studied theology and discovered the position of women among theological texts over the centuries. Milioti studied education and Byzantine art at the same time. For the last year she has been studying fine arts at the College of DuPage as well as preparing a good portfolio to be accepted into a master's degree program in fine arts. Her passion for art from a young age was great and any form of art became a pole of attraction for her life. She is on a never-ending journey to find new ways to innovate and add extra depth to her work. Knowledge, inspiration and life are endless and what motivates Milioti are her values, her roots and all the memories she carries.

**Sabrina Parsons** is a local Buffalo Artist and Educator. She is currently a Teaching Artist with Starlight Studios at their off site studio at the Buffalo AKG. Her BFA is in K-12 Art Education. Her art-making experience extends

to multiple different mediums, such as Ceramics, Drawing, Painting, Printmaking, Fiber Arts, 2D and 3D Design, Film and Digital Photography, Graphic Design, Multimedia, and non-traditional materials. While her personal favorite medium is Ceramics, the foundation of her educational philosophy is exploration, and providing students as many creative materials/experiences as possible in order to communicate their thoughts, emotions, and ideas. During the pandemic, creating became one of the only things that kept her going. She spent all of her time in lockdown alone in her apartment, as her place of work at the time was closed indefinitely, leaving her temporarily unemployed. During the worst of it, she was terrified for her family, a large portion of which are immunocompromised, and there was not yet a vaccine. These were just a few of many things that kept her in a constant state of stress and anxiety. She needed to process the constant feelings of hopelessness and dread, and focusing on her artwork was something that gave her a sense of hope in those times. In college one of her studio concentrations was drawing. She had an amazing professor, Lin Xia Jiang, who helped Parsons to improve her work by teaching her to get out of her head, and just focus on what she sees; what is tangible. She uses those same skills he taught her in all areas of her artwork, and it has greatly improved her ability to effectively transfer her ideas from her brain to a physical, tangible piece.

**Andra Ragusila** is a queer photographer and video artist who uses art to capture and express their personal experiences.

**Simone Robinson** is an African-American multimedia artist that strives to use her artwork to shine a light on the issue of mental health. Art has been a way for her to recognize her own mental health challenges while giving voice to others that also struggle with it.

**Vladimir Rodrigues** is a Cape Verdean artist dedicated to using visual art and storytelling to change the narrative about Africa by showcasing the positive side of the continent, its people, lifestyle, and culture.

**Rory** is one of the creators of *DYS*.

**Maria Servellon** is a queer Latinx artist who has participated in one too many Zoom calls. Their work is an attempt to return to in-person connection and the nuances it entails.

**Morgan Stewart** (she/they) is a former restaurant chef and current graduate student in urban planning, where she considers what the hospitality industry can learn from planning principles (and vice versa). Her current research involves food retail gentrification in medium-sized cities like Buffalo, as well as the ways in which urban space in general and restaurant spaces in particular can be 'queered' in design and practice. She is a resident of Buffalo's Schiller Park neighborhood, where she is very slowly renovating a house with her partner despite their several pets' attempts to thwart the process.

**Melissa A. Swiatek-Odien** is an emerging queer, mixed media, assemblage, and zine artist. When the pandemic began in early 2020, her studio became a safe space in which to explore her emotions and anxieties, and became a coping strategy for the extended shutdown; providing structure and goals in the midst of uncertainty. The artwork she created during the quarantine period helped solidify her developing studio practice. Drawn to zines for their tactile experience and storytelling potential, Melissa published her first zine, "Animals in my Yard" in 2015. Her mixed media and assemblage work is characterized by the use of found objects, texture, and interactive elements to encourage a personal experience/ relationship with the work. Her compositions of mundane items aim to collapse the perceived divide between the ethereal and material experience.

**TD** is a misplaced Southerner, poet and image-maker living and creating film, poetry, installation and physical media work in Buffalo. TD weaves their own memory together through evocations of a Southern Baptist atmosphere transposed onto the textures of the homes they've built

away from home, meditating on place and its ability to constitute self or selves and asking what it means to be somewhere, and—in so being—not be somewhere else. Through a navigation of these strange spaces and those between, TD seeks to imagine and share spaces where self can be safe, sacred, and freely discovered. TD holds an MFA in Media Arts Production from the University at Buffalo.

**Lachlan Thompson** (they/them) is Northampton-based mixed media artist, storyteller, and survivor support worker, who is known for delving into the realm between public and private memory. They transform collections of oral stories, photography, poetry, and folkloric material into fantastical collages – illustrating connections between who we are, where we come from, how we belong, and how the stories we share shape our past, present and future. They seek to inspire people to be part of cultivating community care networks through political action and internal transformation. Lachlan graduated from Hampshire College in 2020. Since then their artwork and writing have been featured in numerous literary journals and exhibitions including *Ode to Queer*, *Nefarious Contemporary*, *Beyond Queer Words*, and more. In March 2023, Lachlan was an artist in residence at the Knoxville Museum of Art through a collaboration with the Kolaj Institute; and their first solo exhibition, *The Dreamweavers*, launched in June 2023.

**Wes Turner** is the Lead 3D Artist for the *Trans Folks Walking* team. He creates and textures the objects seen in each player experience in an effort to generate a cohesive atmosphere for our storytelling.

**Verbena Vy** is an expansive, resilient, queer black woman, existing uniquely in this world. Her ability to think outside our societal constructs and ask herself 'what can life be like for me?', despite experiences that would keep others from dreaming, is the very thing that keeps her motivated to continue striving forward. Her experience with *Hyacinth* has been bittersweet because of its deep meaning of self evolution under pressure, feminine beauty and escaping a hard time feeling worthy but wounded -



most of the prints she has sold of *Hyacinth* have been to people who aren't aware of how much she really means to Vy. Her art tends to be aesthetic and digestible at face value but some pieces are symbolic and meaningful and document a life experience that feels too detailed to explain, leaving her feeling misunderstood and undervalued.

**Austin Wilson** is the Sound Designer and Composer for the *Trans Folks Walking* team. He records, edits, and mixes sfx and music to give our 3D environments an immersive and compelling soundscape.

**Tansy Xiao** is an artist, curator and writer based in New York. Xiao creates theatrical installations with non-linear narratives that often extend beyond the fourth wall. Her work explores the immense power and inherent inadequacy of language through the assemblage of stochastic audio and recontextualized objects. She finds solace in the unknown, ludicrousness in the authorities, and absurdity in the geopolitical demarcations that separate and differentiate people. Xiao's work has been shown at Queens Museum, New Media Caucus, Píksel Festival, Sound Scene, HASTAC Conference, UKAI Projects, The American Society for Theatre Research, University of Porto, Osaka University of Art, The Clemente Soto Véllez Cultural & Educational Center, New Adventures in Sound Art, Pelham Art Center, The Immigrant Artist Biennial, Azarian McCullough Art Gallery, among others. She has received grants and support from NYSCA Electronic Media & Film | Wave Farm, Brooklyn Arts Council, Foundation for Contemporary Arts and Harvestworks Digital Media Arts Center.

## ESSAYISTS

**Famous Clark** is Lead Programmer for *Trans Folks Walking*. He integrates folklore and feminist gothic motifs into games and techno applications as a PhD student at the University at Buffalo.

**Tim Georger** is a Buffalo born media theorist and intermedia artist interested in the intersection between experimental music and video game design theory.

**Van Tran Nguyen** is a multimedia artist. She was born in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam in 1992 and immigrated to America in 1997. Tran Nguyen holds a BA in Fine Arts and Biology and an MFA from the State University of New York at Buffalo. In 2021, she received a PhD in the Philosophy of Electronic Art at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. She has exhibited in many solo and group exhibitions including *Ill at Ease: Dis-ease in Art* (2017, University at Buffalo), *Shape of a Pocket* (2017, Squeaky Wheel Film and Media Art Center), *Strange Agency* (2017, Buffalo Arts Studio) and, *Paris, Orange County* (2020, Lycoming College). In 2016, Tran Nguyen and collaborator Natalie Fleming co-curated *The Measure of All Things: Rethinking Humanism through Art* at the University at Buffalo Department of Art Gallery. In 2017, Tran Nguyen and Fleming premiered their group exhibition *Forging American: Art in the Workings of an Asian American Rust Belt* at Big Orbit Project Space (CEPA Gallery) in Buffalo, New York. Their third curatorial project, *Art Stands Still*, exhibited in Troy, NY at Collar Works Gallery in May 2019. She currently lives in Baltimore with her cat, Gordon.

**Lee Rice** is an Asian-American mixed race undergraduate student at Emerson College with a major in journalism and a minor in women and gender studies. Born in Methuen, Massachusetts, Rice was raised in Lawrence, MA, before moving to North Chelmsford, MA, where her family resides.

She is of Korean and Irish American heritage. Rice strives to cultivate her writing skills through her reporting, impassioned by connecting with others to uplift community voices, and hopes to one day become a published author.

**Johann Yamin's** (he/they) writing and research focus on emerging media, digital cultures, and histories of technology. His projects have taken shape as essays, moving image installations, and text-based videogames, alongside curatorial work and varied forms of support. They were previously Curatorial & Research Resident at the Singapore Art Museum in 2021, and a 2020 Rapid Response for a Better Digital Future Fellow at Eyebeam, New York for co-organising the online project, Pulau Something. He was awarded a Rhizome microgrant in 2023 to write about the lifeworlds and afterlives of Flash-based artworks.

## CURATORS

**Blair Johnson** is a poet and PhD candidate in the University at Buffalo Poetics program. She received her MFA in poetry from Washington University in St. Louis. Her poems have been published in *Diagram*, *Boston Review*, and *Best American Experimental Writing*. She is the book and web designer for Essay Press. In collaboration with her partner Luke Williams, she makes code poems and handmade books.

**Dr. Jocelyn E. Marshall** is Affiliated Faculty in the Departments of Visual & Media Arts and Writing, Literature, & Publishing at Emerson College. Her scholarly, curatorial, and editorial projects focus on contemporary U.S.-based diasporic women and LGBTQ+ artists and writers, researching relationships between intermedia practice, historical trauma, and queer and feminist activism. They currently co-chair the Gender & Feminisms Caucus at the Society for Cinema & Media Studies and co-edits the Feminist Interview Project at *Art Journal Open*.

**Cody Mejeur** is the director for the Amaytrix Gaming Lab & Studio as well as the project director for *Trans Folks Walking*. They research, teach, and make intersectional trans, queer, and feminist media stories at University at Buffalo.

**Morgan J. Sammut** is a recent graduate of Mount Holyoke College where they studied English and computer science. They are a Lambda Literary Review intern and a member of both the Amatrix Gaming Lab & Studio and the Palah Light Lab. Their work *re: defintion* has appeared in the art exhibition "Hops Ahead: The Art of Alternate Histories, Presents, and Futures." Sammut is also currently serving as a program committee member for the 2023 International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling's Virtual Worlds, Performance, Games and Play track.



ISBN: 978-1-4384-9762-4

