

University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

**ScholarWorks@UARK**

---

Graduate Theses and Dissertations

---

8-2023

## Ways to Endure

Skyler J. Maggiore

*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd>



Part of the [Fine Arts Commons](#)

---

### Citation

Maggiore, S. J. (2023). Ways to Endure. *Graduate Theses and Dissertations* Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd/4925>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UARK. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UARK. For more information, please contact [uarepos@uark.edu](mailto:uarepos@uark.edu).

# Ways to Endure

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts in Art

by

Skyler Maggiore  
State University of New York at Purchase College  
Bachelor of Fine Arts, 2016

August 2023  
University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

---

Kat Richards, M.F.A.  
Thesis Director

---

Vincent Edwards, M.F.A.  
Committee Member

---

Aaron Turner, M.F.A.  
Committee Member

---

Loring Taoka, M.F.A.  
Committee Member

## **Abstract**

*ways to endure* is an installation of photographic-based inquiry through light, steel, emulsion, glass and, healing welted skins. Topographic satellite imagery of flood-prone peaks and valleys within my rural home county are abstracted by a Google Earth glitch. Acupuncture needles are a reminder of sorrow and relief and an indicator of boundary and location. The Fresnel lens has a historical responsibility as a beacon, a tool of survival and navigation, originally used to concentrate and project light in lighthouses, and fire starters in survival kits. The Fresnels are fixed in front of intimate portraits to magnify and abstract. This installation of lens and image works to subvert the function and gaze of a traditional photographic lens, the making and presentation of a photograph, and to implicate the viewer within an installation. It offers safety in abstraction.

©2023 by Skyler Maggiore  
All Rights Reserved

## **Table of Contents**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Introduction                                | 1  |
| Translucent and Opaque Bodies               | 3  |
| Deconstructing the Camera                   | 7  |
| The Camera as a Connective Tool             | 10 |
| Wayfinding: Internal and External Locations | 13 |
| Safety in Abstraction                       | 16 |
| Under the Surface                           | 18 |
| Conclusion                                  | 20 |
| Bibliography                                | 21 |
| Figures                                     | 22 |

## Introduction

Opacity has the potential to be a safety mechanism. Translucency has the potential to be both an offering and a target. Layers of societal boundaries dictate the desire to be both seen and hidden. If one's existence transcends these boundaries, where does safety lie? Photographic mechanics offer conceptual means to investigate perception, surveillance and protection. Questioning the expectations of the camera alongside photographic history provides space to consider ethics and autonomy. Through portraiture, photographic inquiry, and installation, the work I make contemplates legibility, transformation, grief and survival within a non-heteronormative existence. *ways to endure* creates a duality within the viewing experience where one's level of awareness may provide more insight, and demands an active viewing for some more than others. In a 2016 essay for Temporary Art Review, David Getsy asks a question in regard to Jonah Groeneboer's work,

"What does it mean for an artist to make works that are hard to see? As viewers, we cannot help but feel that decision's effects. One questions if one is looking at or for the right thing. Incriminations emerge. Some viewers ask why the work cannot just reveal itself better, while others search themselves for ways to look more intently, scrutinizing every detail for incident, event, and evidence. Such frustrations and compensations arise because of our faith in seeing. It is hard to realize that your ability to see cannot fathom all that appears. But that does not mean one should not work to see. Rather, such visual art and its refusals ask us to consider the ethics of sight—sight that we are reminded is limited rather than imperious."<sup>1</sup>

I turn to abstraction due to the existence of trans and gender non-conforming being threatened nation wide. I am not willing to present a clear image to be digested passively. Those who desire to see clearer must look closer, with care. Those who look and see even a trace of themselves are

---

<sup>1</sup>Getsy, David J. "Seeing Commitments: Jonah Groeneboer's Ethics of Discernment." Temporary Art Review, March 16, 2016. <https://temporaryartreview.com/seeing-commitments-jonah-groeneboers-ethics-of-discernment/>.

who the work is for. The works in this installation are beacons of endurance, calling to those who seek what I do — safety.

## Translucent and Opaque Bodies

What does it mean to be both legible and illegible? Known and unknown? Revealed and concealed? Visible and invisible? Enduring a conservative state as a trans person means constantly having your existence debated, and questioning when it is safe to be seen. In January 2023, during my last semester of graduate school, the Arkansas State Legislator proposed Senate Bill 43 which stated,

“A Drag Performance means a performance in which one or more performers exhibits a gender identity that is different from the performer’s gender assigned at birth using clothes, makeup other accessories that are traditionally worn by members of and are meant to exaggerate the gender identity of the performer’s opposite sex; and sings, lip-syncs, dances, or otherwise performs before an audience at least two persons for entertainment”

The legislature proposed these performances be withheld to Adult-oriented businesses, and illegal in the presence of minors. This first iteration of the bill passed in January 2023. The fact that legislators cannot comprehend what these terms actual convey is terrifying, and left so many trans and gender non-conforming people in Arkansas questioning what their lives could look like in the near future. The language used in this bill that intends to define a drag performance fails to recognize the nuances of transgender and gender non-conforming life. The attempt to define the term “performance” and the room left for interpretation is dangerous to anyone who presents in any fashion that deters from their gender assigned at birth. The local response from Arkansas constituents was loud and prideful. Two fellow artists led local students and peers in Fayetteville to create multiple 12-foot banners that poetically refused the bill by hand-stitched descriptions of daily acts by queer individuals such as *TRANS BOY SINGS JOLENE AT KARAOKE*, *NON-BINARY BUTCH SINGING WITH THE CHURCH CHOIR*, and *GENDER FLUID COUPLE RECITING POETRY IN THE PARK* (Figures 1 and 2). These outward facing messages were



collaboratively made with care and are so dear to my heart, containing cut fabric from my own transitional clothing. They were first displayed in the School of Art, a newly built state-owned building that students began to inhabit in Spring 2023. On an evening in late January, the group finished sewing the first banner and rolled it up to be brought to its initial hanging spot. A few of us carefully rested a section of the rolled banner onto a shoulder and walked in a line together to the third floor. Some of us described it as an unspoken procession. We tied it to the third floor banister and released it as our peers watched it unravel from the floor below. Working with others in this effort reminded me to hold a built community close, and the importance of keeping each other safe. The tenderness that came out of aggressive lack of awareness was incredible and hard to fathom. Our joy and mourning had intangible ends.

Four banners were hung in and outside of the building, and were quickly deemed as an issue due to school policy and complaints from the conservative public. The School of Art's administration failed to see the real issue at hand, relying on vague and dated building code to ensure self preservation instead of truly standing up for their students rights and well being, an issue fueled by the realities that come with a state funded art school. This specific issue preceded a semester of art students at the University of Arkansas fighting against censorship and state policy. I have constructed a thesis exhibition while enduring a state that doesn't want me to exist, alongside so many others that I care for who are being equally affected. My environment instilled fear, anxiety, and concern among my personal life and influenced the way I proceeded with creating the work to install. I lost faith in a large amount of the administration, faculty and potential mentors. I know that I am not alone in my experience with complacency, misguidance and apathy as a student in this program, and I encourage those who this resonates with to speak up, and to leave a record in their chosen manner. In February the consistent pressure by activists,

artists and Arkansans alike caused the legislature to amend the bill to rid of any specified gendered language or reference to Drag performance.

To be so brutally misunderstood is inevitable when lawmakers are ill-equipped to speak on the behalf of transgender constituents. SB43 is not the first or last bill of its kind. It is one on an overbearingly long list of bills within the United States that target trans and gender non-conforming people, threaten human rights and force binary ideals, which are proposed by representatives who are only capable of representing a very specific portion of the population. In Shon Faye's book *The Transgender Issue: An Argument for Justice*, she writes on visibility,

“Today, the typical news item on trans people features a debate between a trans advocate on one side and a person with ‘concerns’ on the other – as if both parties were equally affected by the discussion [...] Time and again, when trying to raise the systemic issues affecting trans people’s lives, I have found myself frustrated, even silenced [...] This, then, is a question of power: the terms of the conversation that is happening about trans people are rarely set by trans people.”<sup>2</sup>

As I write this thesis in April 2023, Montana State Legislator Zooey Zephyr has been barred from the statehouse floor for speaking on behalf of transgender youth, and “told supporters of a bill to ban gender-affirming care for minors that she hoped they would see ‘blood on [their] hands,’ alluding to studies that show that transgender health care can reduce suicidality.”<sup>3</sup> Zooey is a vital voice with lived experience to represent transgender people in the state of Montana. The day after she was banned from the floor Zooey tweeted,

---

<sup>2</sup> Faye, Shon. 2022. *TRANSGENDER ISSUE : An Argument for Justice*. S.L.: Verso.

<sup>3</sup> “Montana GOP Doubles down after Blocking Trans Lawmaker from Speaking, Citing Decorum.” 2023. NPR. April 25, 2023. <https://www.npr.org/2023/04/25/1171921647/zooey-zephyr-transgender-montana-house-republicans-blocking-speech-decorum>.

“As I left the House chambers, I pressed my light to speak—a reminder that this legislature is removing 11,000 Montanans from discussion on every bill going forward. I will always stand on behalf of my constituents, my community, and democracy itself.”<sup>4</sup>

This gesture, shown in the image attached to her tweet (Figure 3), is a beacon of hope and survival for those she represents by actively showing and speaking up. By leaving her light on to speak, she sends the message that she will continue to unconditionally represent the LGBTQ+ communities. Zooey’s visibility as a Montana State Representative caused her position to be threatened because she believes trans kids should have access to gender affirming care, but particularly because of how she is perceived. The underlying motive when it comes to anti-trans legislation is fueled by fear of anything that is non-heteronormative, a fear that is instilled in most cisgendered people, especially those who don’t personally know someone who is trans. Recent attention within the past few years on transgender and gender non-conforming communities is influenced by outdated media, often coming from a place of assumption, and misinformation. I often contemplate the ways that a visible queer or othered body has the potential to be perceived and treated, and my experience since living in proximity to violent legislation has heightened that concern.

---

<sup>4</sup> Zephyr, Zooey. Twitter Post, April 26, 2023, 4:12PM  
<https://twitter.com/ZoAndBehold/status/1651333572266176512>

## Deconstructing the Camera

The inner workings of a camera are relative to human perception. One might say that a free standing camera on a tripod, particularly a large format camera, has a presence that is human-like, with the ability to surveil and record. Coming to understand this relationship between tool and body shifted my attention from using my manual large format camera as a tool of *taking* for a matter of record, to an interest in questioning the camera's sensibilities by breaking down its parts and pieces, both physically and conceptually. Pupils function like a pinhole camera, opening and closing as an aperture does to control the amount of light let in, projecting an upside down and backwards image onto the retina, before the brain processes it to an upright orientation. The ground glass or focus screen is a rectangle that works as a viewfinder, and interacts with the lens in the same way our eyes do with our brains, projecting an upside down and backwards image onto the ground glass. I have identified Fresnel lenses, based on a convex lens and broken down into concentric sections to guide light through each groove, as a conceptual and visual intersection between perception and the camera, which is parallel to my inquiry into the connections between queerness, survival and photography. The Fresnel was created in 1870 to concentrate light into a narrow beam for a lighthouse to project light into the darkness as a guide to safety. I have designed Fresnel lenses through a mathematical formula to digitally render 3D models, which are then printed in four sections, fixed together and molded into plaster and silica, and fired in a ceramic kiln to burnout the positive to prepare for the glass casting. The design and concept of the Fresnel is similarly used as a signaling device for airplane runways, concentrating and dispersing light to fly and land planes safely, and as a fire starter in survival kits, magnifying rays of the sun to create heat. Light operates within these optical and

navigational systems as the power house, as it does in photography. Without it, there would be no function, only tools in the dark.

Historically, photography has been a tool of control and surveillance. It is a medium that has the implications of truth, and the potential for deceit. A photographic lens acts alongside its operator's perception and dominance. When considering the representation of others, the dynamic between photographer and sitter is historically unbalanced. Canonical photographers that were part of my undergraduate curriculum such as Philip Lorca DiCorcia's, whose series *Heads* consists of portraiture made on the streets of New York City, have contributed to my inquiry of the role of the photographer in determining a subject's agency. DiCorcia rigged a flash onto a construction scaffolding and set up his camera a significant distance away, which was lost among the lights of Times Square. He photographed over a thousand people without their consent, resulting in a law suit in the interest of freedom of religion. Nussenzweig, the Hasidic Jewish man who sued DiCorcia after discovering his portrait being displayed and sold for profit of the artist, lost the case due to a ruling for freedom of expression. My appreciation for the history of street photography is stunted by my belief in representing others in their own likeness, and connecting with your subject through the medium. This influences the ways that I make and present portraiture, refusing to adhere to limited and one-sided ways of depicting others.

The Fresnel has potential to work alongside an image to project onto a surface in front of it, similar to a camera obscura, or to be fixed closely in front to abstract it. Considering the highly politicized environment in which I've begun to develop this work, the function of abstraction is conceptually significant. Material investigation offered my practice new means of withholding an intimate image. In the exhibition, *S., sense of self portrait No. 1*, and *F., sense of self portrait No. 1* are fixed onto steel stands, both images printed on steel mesh which have

reflective backs where the flood lamp shines onto. The images reveal themselves based on the presence of light and the orientation of the viewer. Fresnel lenses are fixed in front of the images to abstract the figure through magnification. The portraits are cradled in between illegible outer layers, leaving the viewer to investigate further with little satisfaction, and potentially more questions than answers.

## **The Camera as a Connective Tool**

*ways to endure* contains small tucked away layers that function both as connective tissue to speak to those who share similar experiences to mine, and as learning tools in a teen workshop facilitated alongside the exhibition. The past three years I have cautiously contemplated ways to approach photographing others. I've asked myself the same questions over and over again. Why would I take a photograph when I can give through collaborative creation of one? How can I break down a traditional structure of subject and observer? How can I relinquish control and offer agency? One of the two images tucked behind a Fresnel stand in the exhibition is a portrait of a dear friend F. that I connected with regularly on the internet. (Figure 4) We planned to meet at the summer camp I've worked at since 2019 so I could hand off my instructor position that I knew they'd fulfill and enjoy. Even though I was meeting them for the first time in person, there was a familiarity. I think it is their knowledge and experience of the Northeast as a TGNC person and their passion for analog photography. This day marked one month post-op and I wanted to document the progression of my healing, so I asked them if we could make some photographs to make these merging moments. They agreed to help me record my chest. I hadn't been outside without my shirt since surgery. We decided to share sides of the camera, and made portraits of each other in the field behind the alumni cabin. Almost a month later, I developed the negatives and cried. We both willingly and comfortably positioned ourselves in front of and behind my camera and helped each other fortify our individual sense of self. This intimate exchange is a layer within the Fresnel Stands that are only revealed by my hand for my intended audience.

Alongside the exhibition, I facilitated a three day teen workshop inspired by this effort within my practice to balance both sides of the camera. During this workshop, I connected with a

teen who expressed feeling represented by the content of the work, and the importance of this experience existing in Arkansas. He trusted me with vulnerable insight into his personal experience such as how he's trying to guide his grandmother in having a more open mind, and teach his parents to not excessively gender his youngest sibling, along with grief regarding anti-trans legislation and people with closed minds. He assured me he has supportive friends and teachers. Desire for these connections live somewhere deep in my gut and are kept whole in my heart. I often consider how my life might be different if I had the resources to understand myself as trans sooner. There is something intangible, transparent and comforting about how we understand and relate to each other.

The room which held the exhibition within the School of Art and not built to be a traditional gallery. I reclaimed this space by blocking off the window and entry with dark curtains, and kept the door locked when I was not present. To retain agency and control in an environment where such opportunities are sparse, I held a soft opening of the exhibition for my Queer and TGNC peers and local community members, inviting them to see deeper into the work. For this viewing I opened the Fresnel lens in front of the image *S., sense of self portrait No. 1* (Figure 5), which was built to be fixed on a bolt hinge, and invited my intended audience to view this vulnerable depiction of my body in a state of healing. The opened lens recalls the function and sentiment of a locket, its interior only revealed for those it is impactful for. During this gathering, Queer and TGNC viewers became part of something more than just an exhibition viewing. Students, faculty, friends, acquaintances, and strangers engaged in a form of a cruising space where they had time to reconnect, catch up, or meet for the first time, free of heteronormative policy. Terrance Hunt writes on the futurity of cruising in a capstone



dissertation for the City University of New York stating, “Encouraging the acceptance of the cruising’s alternative intimacies might expand possibilities for inclusion of people who struggle with culturally constructed constraints.”<sup>5</sup> Hunt points to the ways that cruising codes have evolved alongside technology and cultural values, and its “capacity to offer connection, and the radical potentiality of outsider and divergent communities.” Providing this safe environment for my viewers and workshop participants is not dissimilar to tucking an image of myself or F. behind a Fresnel lens. Both are offering a temporary haven to disconnect from a structurally oppressive world, and an opportunity to be authentic in a controlled space.

---

<sup>5</sup> Terrance, Hunt, “Secret and Divine Signs: A Cinematic Ode to the Art of Cruising”, CUNY Academic Works, 2017.

## Wayfinding: Internal and External Locations

Dark curtains keep the outside world separate from the installation, which is positioned under a staircase next to an active main street. Slight echoes of cars passing and movement outside are reminders of life, but the space provides a safe enclosure. Three flood lamps provide a source of light and introduce warmth to the space, balanced by the repetition of cold industrial materiality of concrete, nails, and steel. At the front of the room, both sides have a *Relief/Support Altar* (Figure 6) and a *Fresnel Stand*. (Figure 7) The interchanged positions of these pieces creates a specific pathway through the front of the space (Figures 8 and 9), interrupted by power cords and precarious materials, challenging the viewers physical and mental senses to navigate their way to the back. *Topographic Skins* (Figure 10), a digital composite of Google Earth screenshots of my home county over time after each major flood, rests on the ground at the back of the space. Printed on drafting vellum, held down by a steel welded frame, and supported by concrete blocks, its opposing material qualities speaks to both temporality and permanence.

Growing up in a rural valley within Northeast Appalachia bound me to a conservative education, a catholic upbringing and regular flooding due to excessive runoff from the hills during the springtime, each marking their own form of distress. Almost every ten years, my hometown is washed out by water, sweeping away more terrain with it each time, leaving scars on the land and those who reside within it. The differing belief systems within my bloodline influenced how I understood myself in relation to expectation and connection to myself and others. Locating my sense of self within these boundaries was nearly impossible, and my conservative hometown assured that the resources to do so didn't exist. The relief and support systems that I have built to replace these past insufficient ones with are my survival tools. Both

*Relief / Support Altar* installations are structurally reminiscent of holy trinities and kneeling altars, and contextually subverts such belief systems. A segmented concrete pedestal rests on the floor holding broken shell remains from the Fresnel lens castings. They are fallen monuments, exoskeletons of what once was, and shells of former selves. Hung above are three steel shelves holding remnants of steel swarf that softly glitter in the dim light. At the top, four nails jut out of the wall to fix an image of a scar, printed on drafting vellum, in the process of dissolving excess tissue and calming nerve receptors through acupuncture.

In response to their personal experience and the nature of my work, B. Chomyn, someone dear to me and my practice contributed a forward for my exhibition. They wrote, “Our bodies, these vessels, hold us. Our skin, though soft and vulnerable in its own way, protects all that it contains. It hides our body’s more precious contents behind a politicized exterior landscape. It regenerates to heal wounds, leaving reminders of a life lived, adapts to account for environmental changes, and bears the weight of others assumptions and preoccupations with what lies beneath. It reveals and conceals us. There is a distinct difference between just existing in and actively occupying one’s body. What does it take to ensure you feel comfortable enough to reveal yourself beyond your shell? Where, or when, or what, or who, is home for you? What has it taken to bring yourself here, and for how long will you stay?”<sup>6</sup> B. and I collaborated to make the image *Here* (Figure 11). Both our personal experiences intersect in beautiful and formative ways, and they help make me feel more present. To be *here* is not just to exist physically and perceivably, but to feel at home in ones body and mind. I can’t recall a time in my life when I felt complete presence and comfort until I understood my body in relation to my feelings, and I still

---

<sup>6</sup> B. Chomyn,. 2023. *ways to endure*, Windgate Studio + Design Center, March 31-April 7, 2023.

often lose that sense of myself. I got the word *here* tattooed on the base of my neck as a reminder that I am physically present in the world, and have the strength and ability to inhibit my inner and outer most parts. Determining a sense of location internally and externally is nearly impossible when societal factors cause an inconsistent flux in corporeal legibility. Most days I'm aware I won't be in a space that I'm legible beyond my clothing, I spend hours deciding on a t-shirt, or I choose my black pants instead of my pink ones. I often consider how I would present myself if I lived in a vacuum, and am reminded that my daily decisions on how I appear are based on fear and uncertainty, determined by mental and physical location.

## Safety in Abstraction

Light from a flood lamp passes through the steel mesh and Fresnel lens to project a shadow onto the wall. Properties of the mesh and lens cause a quasi optical illusion. The shadow appears to expand and contract as lungs do. It breathes. This subtle presence informs a significant absence. A bodily form is suggested in the size and shape of the steel stands. The welds bearing the weight of the stand have been hand buffed, but not ground completely. As viewers walk around the four foot stand, the image and lens sit on two right angles, comparable to one's shoulders and head (Figure 12). Electrical cords that power the flood lamp are loose between the lamp and the wall outlet. This path obstruction and the stands proximity to the wall demands caution while navigating its circumference. When circling the stand, magnification pushes and pulls the image, and a small space in between only allows a limited view behind the lens, causing each possible viewpoint of the image to vary drastically. There is no point in which the image can be fully viewed without obstruction or distortion. Abstraction relies on material. Looking at the clear glass lens straight on only reveals a blurred and magnified silhouette of the portrait behind.

Steel mesh is a tightly woven grid. It allows light to penetrate it only so much to illuminate the silver and grays of the black and white portrait printed on it. In the book *Dragging Away: Queer Abstraction in Contemporary Art*, Lex Morgan Lancaster references Lorna Simpson's use of the grid,

"The grid carries many difficult and often contradictory implications, both formally and politically. As a form of geometric abstraction and a fraught object of modernist discourse, the

grid presents certain problems and possibilities for artists such as Lorna Simpson who are engaged in contestatory politics of gender, race, and sex”<sup>7</sup>

The image behind the lens is printed onto mesh through a silver gelatin emulsion process, further complicating the grid function, restructuring it as a matrix. It’s orientation in proximity to the light’s passage transforms it into a somewhat functional lenticular where the image is more visible from certain angles. Here, the grid works similarly to the lens, subverting its intended function. Lancaster continues on to say,

“I argue that grid is made to work queerly as a form of resistance when it is shown to subvert a symbolic structure’s power to cohere a signifying form or body and instead taps into the excessive and relational capacities that scholars have shown to be already operational in grids themselves. The grid is queered when its excessive and materializing capacities are radically deployed, dragging with it the weighty repressive implications of the grid that still persist and cannot be discarded.”<sup>8</sup>

Utilizing the grid’s ability to transform gives power to the images that rest upon it. It refuses to be fully legible without consent, allowing the ability to choose when one is seen. A bright spot light is typically used as a surveillance tool. A flood lamp illuminates the backside of the mesh to reveal its steel sheen, withholding the image from the back view, which would reveal the image’s reverse without the spot light. (Figure 13) Political perception is operated by the camera and the grid. Subverting the functionalities of these tools through material exploration is an act of resistance.

---

<sup>7</sup> Lancaster, Lex Morgan. “Dragging Away: Queer Abstraction in Contemporary Art.” Duke University Press, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Lancaster, Lex Morgan. “Dragging Away: Queer Abstraction in Contemporary Art.” Duke University Press, 2022.

## Under the Surface

“Materiality in its entangled psychic and physical manifestations is always already a patchwork, a suturing of disparate parts.”<sup>9</sup>

The process I endure to create work is relative to retaining my sense of self, both internally and externally, as a trans person. It is tedious, non-linear and imperfect. Integrating evidence of process and material in the exhibition of my work reveals the attempts and failures that is part of continually building and upholding oneself. In a 2022 Frieze article, Jack Halberstam writes about an image by photographer Elle Pérez,

“Surfaces, says Pérez, ‘have the ability to contain the traces of an experience. These traces are simultaneously evidence of presence and absence. They open onto the unrepresentable experiences that make up transgender life – the unspectacular or invisible moments of being unseen and unnoticed – and the traces remind us that the figure is only the crudest representation of transitivity. For the more subtle details of living in a trans body, all of these images propose, look to the dark side of the photograph, to the material that lies in shadow, that has been bleached out by the light. In these corners, we find the material that never made it into the open.”<sup>10</sup>

Beyond means of figurative abstraction, varying physical states of material work in tandem to show time passed, healing, and layers of self. Solid steel functions as a stable bodily fixture, and steel swarf that I’ve collected over time implicate remnants of a whole self that go unseen. Close up images of post-mastectomy scars printed on drafting vellum act like skin, pierced with steel nails to float on the wall at the top of the *Relief / Support Altars*. It’s softness and semi-opaque quality feels ephemeral. Similarly, the satellite imagery on vellum in *Topographic skins* works to reference bodily or vessel-like qualities. It rests less than a foot off the floor, it’s long rectangular shape reminiscent of a water retaining system, or a tombstone. Its solid foundation of concrete

---

<sup>9</sup> Barach, Karen. "TransMaterialities: Trans\*/Matter/Realities and Queer Political Imaginings." *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2015). Accessed April 26, 2023.

<sup>10</sup>Halberstam, Jack. 2022. “Trans Representation after the Figure.” Frieze. April 29, 2022. <https://www.frieze.com/article/trans-representation-after-figure>.

functions alongside other structural materials like steel, flood lamps, plaster, power cords and nails to fulfill an aesthetic recalling a construction site. This aesthetic of a site in this state of flux attempts to reference a bunker, or a hidden safe space.

Transness is multi-faceted and complex. Parts and pieces can constantly shift or be a work in-progress. The potential for these changes is part of a spectrum of trans and queer experience. These experiences often get buried under misconceptions, some that even I was led to believe are true. Until later in my life, I understood transness to exist as a monolith. This has never and will never be the case. Cyrus Grace Dunham, the sibling of a well known actor and the child of a famous photographer, shares his experience with recalling and finding comfort in his past self,

“I awake to someone saying “Cyrus. You’re in recovery, Cyrus. You did great. You’re all done.” I was shivering a little, already felt tears leaking from my eyes. I knew Cyrus was me, intellectually, but I needed some other aspect to be summoned in order to fully wake up. “Can you call me Grace?” I said. “Cyrus” was the name in quotes on my fluorescent green hospital bracelet, but Grace was there too. She’d been right under the surface today. Horizontal, vulnerable, wrapped up tight. I needed her to be addressed directly in order to move forward. “You’re in recovery, Grace.” I smiled and cried...”<sup>11</sup>

Cyrus found solace in connecting with his former self. Binary ideals influence gender to be linked to a singular self. When one is led to believe this is true, core characteristics of oneself can be buried deep.

---

<sup>11</sup>Cyrus Grace Dunham. 2020. YEAR without a NAME : A Memoir.



## **Conclusion**

My three years in the School of Art have caused me to negotiate the amount of myself I can safely give through my art practice, specifically here in the South Central area of the United States. My external surroundings have made me question my existence and have changed the trajectory of my thesis work. My practice is deeper than protection. The desire for safety and contemplation of how to display images is a byproduct of an ignorant and violent legislature, and conservative ideology that spreads nothing but hate and misinformation. How can I share intimate images in their clearest form if I cannot ensure those pictured will not be safely perceived? I prioritize myself and those close to me who I share my practice with. I hope anyone who resonates with the content of this paper find their own ways to endure.

## Bibliography

Barach, Karen. "TransMaterialities: Trans\*/Matter/Realities and Queer Political Imaginings." *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2015). Accessed April 26, 2023.

Cyrus Grace Dunham. 2020. YEAR without a NAME: A Memoir. Little Brown and Company

Faye, Shon. 2022. TRANSGENDER ISSUE : An Argument for Justice. S.L.: Verso.

Getsy, David J. "Seeing Commitments: Jonah Groeneboer's Ethics of Discernment." Temporary Art Review, March 16, 2016. <https://temporaryartreview.com/seeing-commitments-jonah-groeneboers-ethics-of-discernment/>.

Halberstam, Jack. 2022. "Trans Representation after the Figure." Frieze. April 29, 2022. <https://www.frieze.com/article/trans-representation-after-figure>.

Lancaster, Lex Morgan. "Dragging Away: Queer Abstraction in Contemporary Art." Duke University Press, 2022.

Terrance, Hunt, "Secret and Divine Signs: A Cinematic Ode to the Art of Cruising", CUNY Academic Works, 2017.

Yu, Ashley. "Impact: Philip Lorca DiCorcia: Head On." Musée Magazine. Musée Magazine, October 26, 2020. <https://museemagazine.com/features/2019/9/23/impact-philip-lorca-dicorcia-head-on>.

## Figures



Figure 1. *TRANS BOY SINGS JOLENE AT KARAOKE*, banner installed at The Windgate School of Art + Design. Image by Author



Figure 2. *NON-BINARY BUTCH SINGING WITH THE CHURCH CHOIR*, and *GENDER FLUID COUPLE RECITING POETRY IN THE PARK* banner installed at The Windgate School of Art + Design. Image by Author



Figure 3. Zooey Zephyr pushes her light to speak, Montana House of Representatives.



Figure 4. Fresnel Stand (Side detail of *F., sense of self portrait No. 1.*) Install documentation by Author.



Figure 5. *Fresnel Lens (opened to view S., sense of self portrait No. 1)*. Install documentation by Author.



Figure 6. *Relief/Support Altar*. Materials: digital images on draft vellum, concrete supports, metal remnants on steel shelves, plaster and silica casting shells. Install documentation by Author.



Figure 7. *Fresnel Stand*. Materials: glass casted fresnel lenses, silver gelatin emulsion prints on steel mesh, welded steel stands and frames. Install documentation by Author.

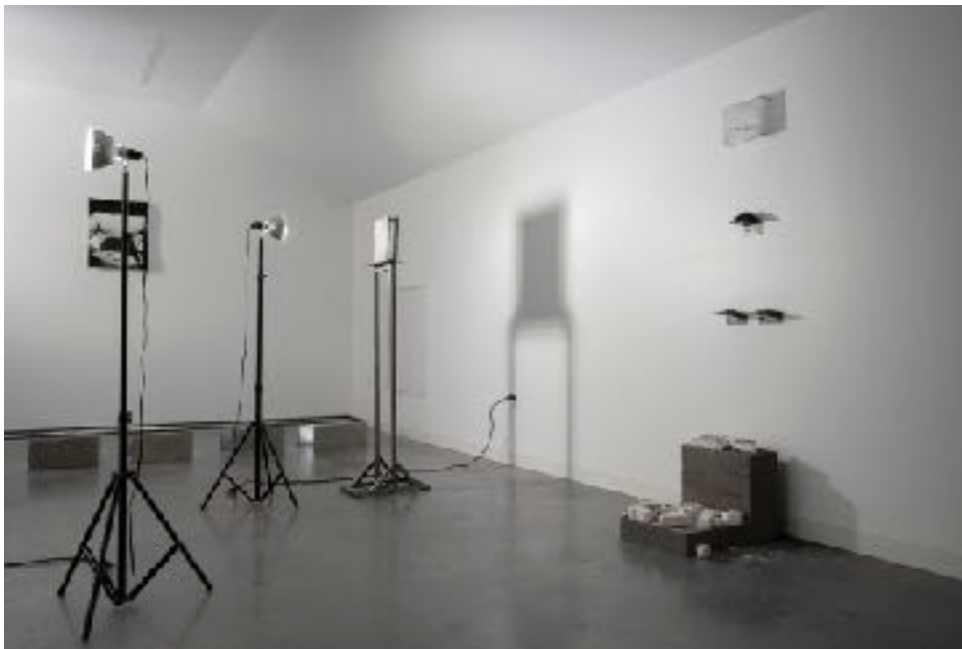


Figure 8. *ways to endure exhibition installation (1)*. Install documentation by Author.



Figure 9. *ways to endure exhibition installation (1)*. Install documentation by Author.



Figure 10. *Topographic Skins*. Install documentation by Author.



Figure 11. *Here*. Large Format Photograph. Image by Author



Figure 12. Fresnel Stand (Front detail of *F., sense of self portrait No. 1.*) Install documentation by Author.





Figure 13. Fresnel Stand (Back detail of steel mesh) Install documentation by Author.