

Curatorial Text by **Jesse King**

July 2023

Celestial Bodies

The Deconstruction of Gender Roles in Colonial Society

The exhibition **Celestial Bodies** will showcase indigenous identities that identify as Two-Spirit, indigiqueer, or reside within the LGBTQIA2S communities—giving a platform and space for the rarely recognized voices. The exhibition's goal will be to question the colonial presence of societal normalities regarding identity and deconstruct and abolish gender roles through the themes of **desire, euphoria, despair, and dysphoria**.

Being Two-Spirit is transcending past the colonial structures that have been forcibly made surrounding identity and gender.

This exhibition explores and responds to the social order that has been surrounding two-spirit and indigi-queer individuals living in larger North America.

Categorization is a significant part of our society, and it is everywhere we look; it is believed to determine the “norm.” Most people immediately start to put individuals into metaphorical boxes of categorization by how they look or how they express themselves. Being Two-Spirit, Indigi-Queer, or anyone identifying as non-binary is about removing these parameters of exclusion. To remove the meaning that only one gender belongs to a single individual, to deconstruct archetypes and reconstruct spaces for inclusion and a define-less shape of identity. Individuals who identify as being two-spirit, indigiqueer or who belong to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community who are also indigenous have weathered the difficulties of colonization, which ultimately westernized the idea of gender and has created parameters surrounding normality

regarding gender, creating a society that allows discrimination, marginalization and the major depleting representation of indigenous culture especially surrounding the values centering around gender and identity.

The public perception of masculinity and femininity is accompanied by terminology and views that are simple, dull, and a *cop-out*. These same views police who deserve or who should be entitled to wield the embodiment of masculinity and femininity, and an individual can only possess one. Without a doubt, visibility and recognition are crucial for any marginalized community because they acknowledge our existence and allow individuals to see the importance of their identity, being able to see people who look like them and have the same experiences and turmoil, allowing one to feel validated in who they are.

Sadly this isn't the case for individuals who identify as two-spirit, indigi-queer, or non-binary. We seem always to be overlooked or perceived as needing to be 'educated' on our identity; where most of us don't have the privilege of being taught about our gender identity, most must prepare and guide themselves with a few little sources or literature. This is why creating this exhibition is so important, not just for the works to be shown; but for the artists involved, for me, and for individuals who see themselves in these works. This space is for them to feel safe and to feel acknowledged finally, we are celestial bodies, and we transcend.

I would like to thank all the artists involved for seeing what the exhibition can be and what it can serve our kin through their unique perspectives and multifaceted storytelling.

===

Description of Presented Works

Class Order Family Tribe [2016]
video art / U.S.A. / 26:00 / 2016 / 1080p
Roberto Fatal

Class Order Family Tribe is a silent, experimental documentary by video artist and filmmaker Roberto Fatal. The film is comprised entirely of 8mm footage created by the filmmaker's matrilineal Indigenous mestizo family as they struggled to survive poverty, racism, and boredom from the 1950s - 1970s in Central California. Using a stream of conscious narration, intuitive editing, and camp, Fatal engages the macabre and darkly comedic footage as a textual narrator. Fatal's written words examine the overlapping and dissimilar uses of gender, violence, sex, and memory as survival strategies from one generation to the next in their indigenous family.

Directed, written, and edited by Roberto Fatal
8mm footage courtesy of the artist's family

Snake Series [2023]
Photography | Sculptural Mask
Duane Isaac

Combining photography with contemporary masks, my objective as an artist was to challenge traditional notions of portraiture. Instead of establishing a connection between the viewer and the subject through their eyes, my artwork disrupts this convention by using masks to conceal the subject's face. As a result, viewers are compelled to seek out other points of connection within the image. This creates a sense of mystery and fascination, drawing viewers into a visual exploration of the subject's body and the surreal features of the mask. Furthermore, my work is imbued with sensuality as the masked subject exposes their body to the viewer.

As a queer Indigenous person, my personal experiences inspire my art. My "Indigiqueer" perspective shapes my artistic practice by exploring the intersectionality of identity, culture, and sexuality. Through challenging stereotypes and creating a space between worlds, my artwork invites viewers to examine and question their perceptions of the self and the Other.

Crafting surreal and otherworldly masks by hand, I use lighting and digital manipulation to heighten their narrative presence. Ranging from darkly demure to expressively gaudy, my masks are opulent, clever, twisted, unsettling, sexy, and undeniably queer. Through my lens, I seek to achieve a balanced relationship between body and mind, where masks externalize a rich internal world populated by grotesque and seductive creatures. Guided by Indigenous ways of knowing, the queer gaze, environmental angst, and an apocalyptic perspective on the past and future, my artistic practice traces the ephemeral.

Big'Uns

Dayna Danger

Photography | Sculptural

Big'Uns is an ongoing photographic portrait series that explores the reclaiming of sexuality and bodily autonomy.

In the current cultural climate, women-identified, transgender, and non-binary individuals often lack power over their sexuality. This lack of power occurs through misrepresentation, objectification, and violence against them in various media types, from fashion magazines to music videos, mainstream porn, and even hunting magazines.

Sport hunting, which has widely replaced hunting for sustenance, uses a language that is violent and oppressive to animals and women identified, transgender and non-binary individuals. Linda Kalof, Amy Fitzgerald, and Lori Baralt state that within sport hunting discourse “is the sexualization of animals, “women,” and weapons, as if the three are interchangeable sexual bodies in narratives of traditional masculinity.” (*Animals, Women, and Weapons: Blurred Sexual Boundaries in the Discourse of Sport Hunting*, 2004) They also conclude that “Animals’ physical attributes are described using stereotypical feminine characteristics of appearance.”

An example is the common term “Big’uns” to refer to an animal’s antlers. Antlers commonly come from male animals, fetishized much like breasts, particularly “big ones.” This type of language usage plays a crucial role in disempowering our sexuality.

Through these photographs, Danger aims to take back control of the sexuality of the underrepresented. The antler racks attached to the reproductive areas symbolize women’s struggles to maintain healthy relationships, positive self-images, and sexual experiences. These struggles result from factors such as the effects of cisnormative heteronormative imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (miigwetch bell hooks and Laverne Cox), sexual abuse, and unrealistic media portrayals of our bodies passed down through generations. By showcasing ownership of the antlers on these

bodies, the artist hopes to empower women-identified, transgender, and non-binary individuals to take control of how they are perceived.