

Post Tomboy

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Abstract

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This thesis paper gives context to the ceramic sculptures which make up the exhibition *Post Tomboy*. Communicated through clay, a material which expresses the malleability of the body and of the self, these sculptures showcase the complicated journey of understanding a gender and sexuality which exists outside of the cultural norms. Using personal narrative, examples from other artists, as well as brief histories and definitions of gender diverse and LGBTQ+ identities, this paper goes into depth about each sculpture within the exhibition and how they relate to me as a queer and gender non-binary individual. Portrayed as animal-human hybrids and shapeshifters, these figures speak about queer experiences and deconstruct the notions of gender to find a place where non-binary identities exist. As each animal comes with their own physical qualities and mythological associations, therefore the therianthropic qualities of these figures shed light on a humanistic characteristic or feeling which is invisible to the naked eye. Queerness and gender identities outside of the binary can be isolating when existing in a heteronormative society. By sharing my personal journey, my work normalizes and celebrates these forms of identities.

Outline:

The Tomboy: This is Not a New Phenomenon.....	p. 4-6
Animality.....	p. 7-10
In Goat we Trust.....	p. 11-16
Coming Out of the Infinite Closet.....	p. 17-20
The (Last) Unicorn: A Gateway Drug to Queer Sex.....	p. 21-23
Acknowledging the Insecurities to Move Past Them	p. 24-25
End of this Chapter, Beginning of Another.....	p. 26
Endnotes and Bibliography.....	p. 27-28

The Tomboy: This is Not a New Phenomenon

The gender-queer subject represents an unscripted, declassified relation to being—s/he is wild because unnamable, beyond order because unexplained; s/he has no place in creation and as such escapes and defies the regimes of regulation and containment that shape the world for everyone else.

-Jack Halberstam, Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire

This thesis project began only recently, but it is the result of a life-long journey to understand my own gender and sexuality, and where there is room for me in the society in which I exist. The terms I use to describe my identity, queer and non-binary, have come from countless conversations over many years with people, who I discovered, felt just like me. Isolated. Different. Hearing their stories helped me make sense of the complexities of gender and sexuality and how they relate to my own experiences. More importantly, they enabled me to see beyond heteronormative societal convention. Knowing that I was, in fact, not alone in these isolating feelings and experiences, I want this thesis project to be an inspiration and to show any genderqueer individual who sees it that they are not alone. On the contrary, we are not a new *internet fad*, or a passing stylistic trend. We are a strong community with a long and rich history.

Since the first moment my mum put me in a dress, and I understood this to be a feminine thing and I hated it. I was maybe five. She has countless stories of wrestling me into dresses, eventually giving up, and accepting the fact that I was her little tomboy. That is, a girl who insisted on looking like a boy. The constructs of the gender that I was supposed to fit into just didn't feel right to me. I wore no dresses, no pink. My hair was always short. I played with dinosaurs and transformers. I even occasionally got kicked out of girls' bathrooms by adults. None of this bothered me because that meant that I did, in fact, look like a boy. Those initial "rules" that I was taught about being a boy or a girl created categories that I didn't fit into, and being called a *tomboy* seemed like the only way my society was going to accept me. I wanted to

exist somewhere in the middle, I didn't want to be a boy, I was happy in the body I was in, but I didn't want to be seen as or treated like a girl.

When my breasts started coming in, like any reasonable teenager, I panicked about my body. I tried to hide them, the tightest of sports-bras, the baggiest of t-shirts. I continued to confuse people. When I was thirteen, a teenage boy a few years older than me demanded in front of a big group of my classmates, "are you a boy or a girl?!" He yelled this with such accusation and anger that I felt my presence both confused and insulted him. This embarrassed me, but it happened a lot. I was confused as to why my appearance, my inability to fit into a recognizable box, was so offensive as to provoke such attacks.

When I was sixteen, I discovered that if I wore tight fitting clothes that I got attention from the boys. Since I saw myself as one of the boys this seemed like the best way to get into that club. This is also when I learned my value of being an "attractive female." People started giving me attention in a way that was entirely new to me, so I went through a short phase of dressing sort-of feminine. Even though I was rewarded for presenting in a way which matched how society saw me, I slowly began to realize that this was simply the sexualization of my body and nothing more. What I thought was my ticket to being accepted by my society, was just me falling into an expected and acceptable gender role. So, it was time to fall back to my tomboy ways.

It wasn't until I was in my mid-twenties that I finally learned that there is a place for me outside of the gender binary. I learned the terms "queer," "gender-fluid" and "non-binary," which helped me begin to understand that there were spaces for people like me who didn't cleanly fit into a gender category. Alok Vaid-Menon, a gender non-conforming artist and writer breaks down the gender binary:

"The gender-binary is a cultural belief that there are only two distinct and opposite genders: man and woman. This belief is upheld by a system of power that exists to create conflict and division, not to celebrate creativity and diversity. We deserve more options. (...) The real crisis is not that gender

non-conforming people exist, it's that we have been taught to believe in only two genders in the first place" (Vaid-Menon, 5).

Understanding this and accepting myself as an entirely new gender and sexuality than what I thought was even possible allowed me to shed the weight of trying to fit into the role of man or woman. Wanting to look like a boy but not be a boy is a confusing place for anyone in a heteronormative society to exist. By altering the language and perspective to understand that gender identity is a spectrum, not a binary, we can create a space for everyone to feel acknowledged and accepted.



Fig. 1 & 2 gallery views of *Post Tomboy* Exhibition

Animality

Socio-cultural awareness of multispecies companionship—and thus, a transdisciplinary/transspecies perspective—enables one to think collectively not from a position of the domination of the empowered but rather to see the world as interconnected.

Justyna Stepień

My thesis exhibition *Post Tomboy* is composed of eight therianthropic ceramic sculptures which act as vignettes, or chapters, that when compiled together, tell a larger story.

Communicated through clay, a material which expresses the malleability of the body and of the self, these sculptures showcase the complicated journey of understanding a gender and sexuality which exists outside of the cultural norms. Upon entering the gallery, the viewer is confronted with a variety of animal-human hybrids, or shapeshifters. Caught in a moment of transformation as one emotion or experience encapsulated in clay, becomes the whole identity of that figure. I use animal forms as a method of shedding light on a specific characteristic or feeling which is quite human but invisible to the naked eye. Each animal is chosen for their physical traits or myths associated with them, when blended with the human form they speak to a specific human emotion or experience. John B. Kachuba explains how “The shapeshifter represents the struggle to find one’s identity, to find where one fits in society” (Kachuba, 11). Each sculpture is an embodiment of a formative moment in the journey of someone who grows up genderqueer. The blending of the human and animal forms brings a recognizable narrative and mythology that makes these works both transformative and accessible. They reveal a gender non-binary existence that is natural, persistent, and a component of the human experience. For what are we all if not animals ourselves?

Another artist who reminds us of our connections to animal nature is the ceramic and multimedia artist Lindsay Pichaske, whose work focuses on anthropomorphic animals. In her artist statement she expresses how she “use(s) the animal figure to explore empathy and sentiency, and to challenge the perceived order and comfortable classification of life. (...) They oblige our instinctual reactions, yet as we begin to identify with them, we admit that their

identities are perhaps not so clearly defined” (Pichaske, 12). Human society is composed of complex and strict rules about how we should fit into our roles and categories. Pichaske’s figures are “subtle hybrids, inspired by the nuance and sameness of species’ behaviors and anatomies” (Pichaske, 12), which reminds us that we are more similar to animals than we think we are. Western human society teaches us that monogamous, heterosexual relationships are the only way to raise a family and that to be a woman one must submit, while being a man means being a leader. The argument that anything outside of those strict sets of rules is *unnatural* is inaccurate, but also complicated. Joann Roughgarden, an ecologist, evolutionary biologist, and trans activist describes this complexity in her book *Evolution’s Rainbow*:

“I do *not* argue that because gender and sexuality variation occur in animals, this variation is also good for humans. People might anticipate that as a scientist I would say, “Natural equals good.” I do *not* advocate any version of this fallacy that confuses fact with value. I believe the goodness of a natural trait is the province of ethical reasoning, not science. Infanticide is natural in many animals but wrong in humans. Gender variation and homosexuality are also natural in animals, and perfectly fine in humans. What seems immoral to me is transphobia and homophobia. In the extreme, these phobias may be illnesses requiring therapy, similar to excessive fear of heights or snakes.” (Roughgarden, 17)

Roughgarden deftly illustrates how relating human experiences to animal ones can carry both positive and negative connotations. Historically the slurs yelled at queers and trans folks focus on them being lesser than human; that they are perverts and animals. My project relates all people to animals, not just the LGBTQ+ communities, by showing the queer experience as a human experience.

From cave drawings and ancient mythologies to contemporary interpretations, animal-human hybrids exist in the folklore of most modern societies.¹ These hybrids play many roles for the people creating them, such as ancestral beings or gods, but one characteristic of these beings is that they create deeper understandings of human experiences. Kiki Smith’s bronze sculpture

Rapture depicts a woman walking out of the stomach of a wolf as it lays on its back. The woman grasps a paw of the flailing creature as she has one foot firmly on the ground and the other still within the opening on the wolf's stomach. Smith investigates the connections we share with the non-human creatures which we share these lands with. "Smith's work becomes a morphological hybrid that erases bodily boundaries between the animal and the woman as they both materially depend on one another, radically erasing the otherness" (Stępień, 235). She ties together the bodies of these two seemingly opposite creatures to showcase the overlapping experiences of both. As the woman appears to be walking out of the wolf, we can assume that both figures lived as one body moments before they were frozen in time. As she emerges, becoming her own entity, she will take with her some attributes of that wolf. As Smith's work depicts one figure becoming two, the work in *Post Tomboy* depicts multiple figures becoming one. Human and animal forms shifting into one body so the human portion can acknowledge the feelings of *otherness* and express them in the form of the animal who shares those attributes.



Fig. 3 *Alignment (detail)*



Fig. 4 *Alignment*

In Goat We Trust

I will begin with the largest and central piece in the *Post Tomboy* Exhibition, titled *Alignment* (fig. 3). Located in front of the back wall of the gallery, central and taller than the rest, is a human figure with the head of a horned goat and repeated goat faces running down the front torso of the figure, with a set of horns for each extending out the back. This figure has no arms, as it does not need them, its power rests elsewhere in the body. The image of a wild goat, more specifically an ibex, has become a personal symbol for me for multiple reasons: both the males and females grow horns, their rebellious nature and relationship to mythic archetypes.² I use horns, tusks or antlers as a symbol of strength and masculinity in my work, and as an expression of that masculinity that I have always felt inside myself. As I acknowledge my relationship to gender presentation and learn about the possibilities of gender affirming healthcare and surgeries, I have come to realize that it is possible for me to change my body to more authentically present how I feel inside.

During my two years at grad school, I have been examining that masculinity and considering what it means to me. After much thought and research, I decided to start taking testosterone and get myself on a wait list for top surgery, as a way of appearing and sounding as masculine as I have felt for most of my life. It feels liberating to make these changes, to acknowledge these internal needs. Initially, I was concerned that I was too old to be discovering these parts of myself at the age of 32. I believe now that it is important for everyone to arrive at these discoveries, understandings and decisions about themselves at the stage of their life that is right for them. There is no *right* or *wrong* moment. I have been fascinated with the idea of top surgery since I was in my early 20's, but I was not interested in getting it myself at that time. Now, a decade later, with new information and understanding about myself and what's possible to alter with my body, I am ready to make these changes to align with my inner being.

Transitioning one's gender or sex is not just for FTM (female to male) or MTF but can aid in affirming a non-binary gender identity. This might seem like an obvious statement to some, but it wasn't until I read Alok Vaid-Menon's book, *Beyond the Gender Binary* that I realized that being non-binary and trans were not mutually exclusive:

“Some transgender people experience incredible distress from the disconnect between their external bodies and internal sense of self, and some transgender people do not. Some transgender people are men or women, and some are non-binary. It is possible to hold both truths without disqualifying or discrediting one or the other.” (Vaid-Menon, 53)

Understanding this changed the way I thought of trans identities and what is achievable in affirming a non-binary gender identity. I didn't feel that distress that I hear from many transgender folks, which gave me doubt about my own experiences, but I have always felt not-quite-right about being viewed as feminine. *Alignment* speaks to this feeling, the excitement of realizing I can alter my body in a way which will more closely align with how I feel.

The wild goat with its powerful horns is a representation of my current self, feeling strong and secure in my discoveries and decisions. As the additional faces extend down the torso, they align the inner/unseen identity with the outside of the body, which can be viewed by others. The goat faces extending from the chest down to the groin purposefully hides the genitals but implies the possibility of a phallic shape. The genitals are deliberately obscured in order to circumvent the questions and concerns about trans people's genitals that are often an unfortunate and sometimes obsessive focal point on conversations about trans identities. *Alignment's* form comes to completion with gold mastectomy scars lining each side of the chest. Instead of representing a loss, the gold luster is an intentional celebration of transformation. By referencing kintsugi, the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold, I show that such scars are not a disfiguration or a lack of something that once was.³ Rather, they show a being that is now stronger, more complete and more striking as a result of the change.

In their 2011 project *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture*, (fig. 5 and 6) the queer and trans-masculine performance artist Cassils pushes the boundaries of the gendered body. They document themselves everyday over 23 weeks while they build muscle. This piece is in response to Eleanor Antin's piece *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972), while she documents herself on a crash diet, showing her naked body shrink over a series of 148 photographs. “*Carving*

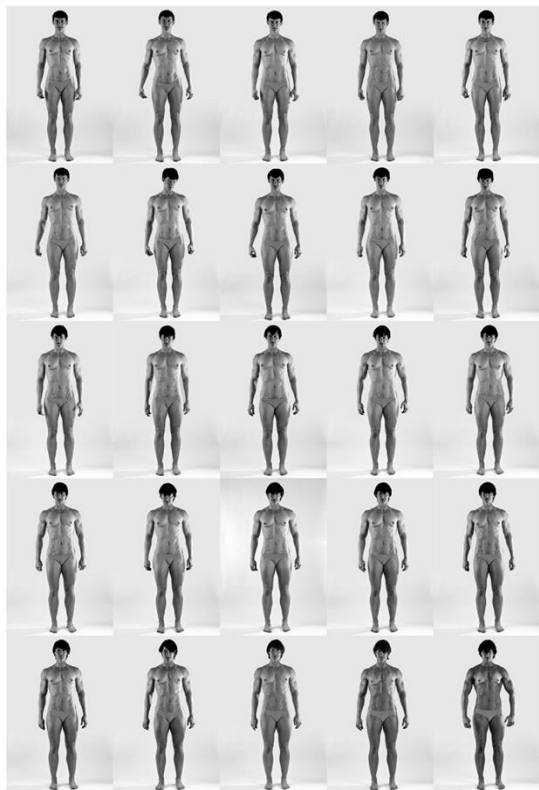
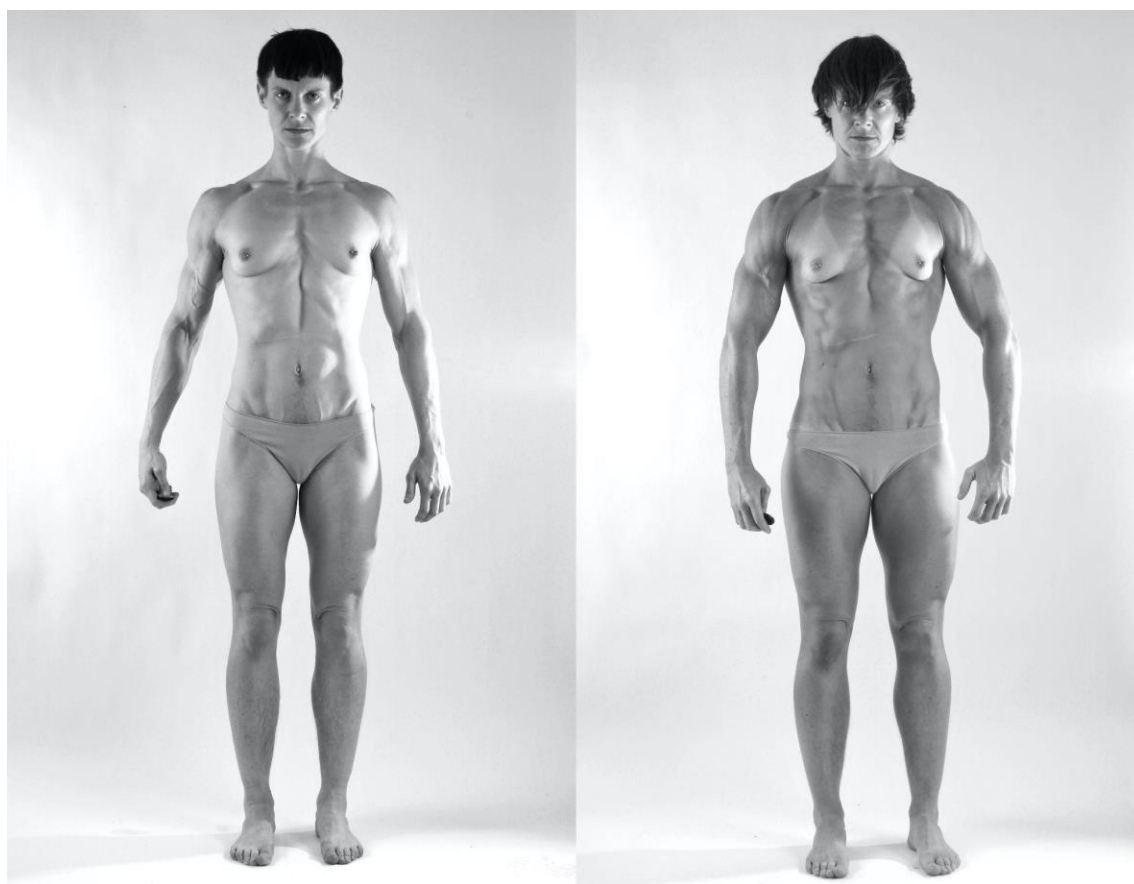


Fig. 5 (left image)
Cassils
Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture: Time Lapse (Front), 2011
archival pigment prints
60 x 40 in.
Courtesy of the artist

Fig. 6 (image below)
Cassils
Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture, Timelapse Before/After (Detail), 2011
Courtesy of the artist



makes visible the unhealthy ways in which women sculpt their bodies to be considered the ideal feminine form” (Crusan 39). While Antin comments on what it takes to achieve the desired female form, Cassils takes on the masculine one from a trans-masculine perspective. While these pieces, as well as *Alignment*, comment on the lengths that people will go to affirm their gender, Cassils also pushes categorical qualities of gendered body parts. Antin uses her completely naked cis-gendered body, whereas Cassils is naked except for their brief-style underwear which cover their genitals. Their feminine breasts remain with visible bikini tan lines, which literally draws a line between the gendered male and female body parts. These simple gestures emphasize the reproductive body parts associated with being a man or a woman and disrupts the ideals of “peak-masculinity.” Similarly to Cassils, *Alignment* considers the notions of gender-nonconforming bodies by presenting this body with feminine hips, a flat masculine chest and the suggestion of a phallus.



Fig. 7 *Masculine Desire* Fig. 8 *Masculine Desire* (detail)

The relationship to masculinity can be a complicated one, as Cassils suggests, there can be extremely high standards that one must reach in order to win that medal of masculinity. *Masculine Desire* (fig. 7 and 8) is a work that shows the complicated relationship to gender from the trans-non-binary perspective. It is a set of antlers placed against a wall, held high like a hunting trophy to symbolize the desire to achieve that peak masculine energy and the ideal masculine form. Placed on a black shelf just below the set of antlers is a single bloody antler which represents, by contrast, the abandonment of those high expectations. These pieces question whether, when so many human characteristics are gendered male or female, if there is any room in between for those who don't fit the preset categories?

In a society in which so much is defined by perceived gender identity, everyone necessarily partakes in actions which affirm their gender, even those who do not question their gender assigned at birth. Gender affirming surgeries are not only for transgender bodies, such as top surgery (the removal of breast tissue for a masculinization of a female chest), or facial feminization surgery, for trans women to appear more feminine. Cis-women get breast or butt implants to affirm their femininity just as cis-men get their extra breast tissue removed to affirm their masculinity. *Masculine Desire* speaks to those physical traits that have become gendered, and questions which qualities we look to in order to affirm our own gender.

Unlike "male" and "female" qualities, genderqueer and non-binary genders do not have any physical traits directly associated with them. Transgender people often set "transition goals" when they start taking hormones, a point they wish to get to in order to feel their body affirms their gender. Some might wish to "pass" as a man or woman, which reinforces the binary of gendered physical traits, and some might just want the androgyny of a few traits from each category. *Masculine Desire* is an embodiment of that process, as I figure out which masculine traits I am seeking in order to feel affirmed in my decisions.



Fig. 9 *Two Versions, One Self*



Fig. 10 *OUT*

Coming Out of the Infinite Closet

'Queer' not as being about who you're having sex with (that can be a dimension of it); but 'queer' as being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and that has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live.

-bell hooks

Living in a dominantly heterosexual and cisgendered society means that most of the time queers are assumed to be straight until proven otherwise. Sometimes that means coming out over and over again, or hiding that part of ourselves entirely, which can be exhausting. In their paper *The Double Edge of Visibility and Invisibility: Cassils and Queer Exhaustion*, Jamee Crusan “consider(s) queer exhaustion a product of the struggle between self-erasure and self-abnegation driven by continually negotiating hegemonic histories, desires and experiences. In self-erasure, one erases part of themselves; in self-abnegation, one is summed up in a rainbow flag” (Crusan 37). Queer experiences are complex and varied, there is no single path to take, which is why I share my own stories, showcasing one queer experience which is totally different from the next. In sharing these stories, I work to normalize these identities, so that fewer people have to hide who they really are.

In *Post Tomboy*, there are two pieces dealing with the subject of coming out; the first is *Two Versions, One Self* (fig. 9), a wall sculpture depicting two goat heads positioned horizontally, their horns connecting in the middle to create one being, held apart by their own horns. This self-portrait reflects a duplicity that only I was aware of, my two versions grew separate so slowly that I didn't notice for some time. I feel quite lucky to have such an accepting family, my parents knew I was queer long before I did, but the conversation about gender was a much harder one to grasp. The only fear I had about coming out to them as non-binary and trans was that they would not understand and would reject any changes that I was making on my body or to their vocabulary. But I knew this would not be malicious, I knew they would love me either way. Even so, with such a safe environment, I felt the need to keep my gender identity a secret from them for almost five years. It made it easier that I was living in a

different city. I was (at the time) Jess (she/her) in Vancouver, and Jess (they/them) in Montreal. *Two Versions, One Self* is a reflection of that moment I realized I was a different person in each city. Keeping my two versions separate was a way to protect myself from what I feared; rejection or uncomfortable and judgmental questions from my family.

The piece, aptly named *OUT* (fig. 10), represents the moment I finally did come out as non-binary. It is a sculpture of a scarlet macaw with wings outstretched, beak open in exclamation with a human torso and legs. A bird born as the colors of the pride flag, showing how we are born this way, not *groomed*.

When I moved to Seattle for graduate school, I was finally, after 10 years, geographically close enough to visit them more than two times a year. My two lives were slowly getting mashed into one. When I did come out to my family, my sisters were very supportive with my new name and pronoun, and my parents have had a harder time with changing their vocabulary. They told me that even if they don't totally understand it, none of it is a surprise and they support me no matter what. We haven't explicitly talked about the trans part of this journey yet, I am not worried, just taking this process very slowly as I am still wrapping my mind around all of it. I always found it fascinating that my parents knew I was queer long before I did. I assume the whole tomboy experience was a big clue for them, even if I didn't see it myself. Queer gestures are a fascinating part of anyone's coming-out story, as it was with mine. As my coming-out was no surprise to my family, that is not the case for everyone. It all comes down to what constitutes queer gesture and how it frames the individual embodying it. When we consider the existence of queer gesture, we must also acknowledge heterosexual gesture, we cannot have one without the other. As hetero gesture is the common and expected form of expression, that one is not questioned. Gender and sexuality are all performances, played out to fit into certain roles. Men with effeminate movements and women dressing butch are ways in which queer gestures are spotted, because it places these individuals outside of their expected gender roles. Even if these gestures do not apply to all queers, hetero gestures have such strict rules as to what constitutes as "straight," that people can "look queer" if they don't cleanly fit into their gendered category.

Since I spent my childhood as a tomboy, my parents interpreted that as my own queer gesture. I wandered out of my gender category and grasped onto anything I could from the other one, I was teased for this but never enough to make me want to change. Muñoz talks about his own experiences, as a child he was teased for moving in a more effeminate way. He talks about a time when his older cousin called out: “look at the way he walks, how he shakes his ass. I wish I had a girlfriend that walked like that!” (Muñoz 68) This teasing caused Muñoz to analyze his movements to figure out why the way he walked motivated such a “proto-homophobic attack.” He became “a spy in the house of gender normativity,” (Muñoz 68) and began to examine the stiff ways that men walked, and the fluidity of female movement, and tried to un-naturally mimic the male movement to fit into that club of masculinity.

Understanding these gestures can be used to either blend into mainstream hetero culture or make oneself stand out to be clocked as LGBTQ+, which is what *OUT* is doing with its colorful wings outstretched on the wall. These can be intentional decisions based on safety, or unintendedly, simply being aesthetic choices. I have been told that I look quite queer, I believe it's my short, partially shaved hair and masculine attire, but since I dressed like a boy long before I knew I was queer, I have never seen my style as specifically queer. I do have many queer friends who present straight only because they fit cleanly into the gender categories. They have told me that because of this, it's harder for them to meet queers, but easier for me, as I am assumed to be queer based on appearance. Sometimes these friends will wear specific clothing to showcase this side of them, my favorites being a set of earrings of scissors “scissoring”, or a shirt with the large print saying “I WANT A GIRLFRIEND,” worn by my fem friend. *OUT* is referencing these gestures and how we as queers might feel the need to wear our identities clearly as to attract more queers (when it's safe obviously), our own mating dance that many birds are famous for; weird and colorful. As most of the population is undoubtedly quite heterosexual, and many queers are too afraid or ashamed to come out, sometimes we need to be as visible as the most colorful birds just to find our people and our community.



Fig. 11 *The (Last) Unicorn*

The (Last) Unicorn: A Gateway Drug to Queer Sex

A unicorn is a magical creature that exists in this world only because people have committed to believing in them so fervently. They have a long history that spans mythology, theology and, more recently, queer identity. In Christianity they are a symbol of grace, purity and the incarnation of Christ.⁴ They are marketed towards little girls as part of the princess culture in products such as *My Little Pony* and *She-Ra*. When paired with the rainbow flag, they are now a symbol of LGBTQ+ pride. Using this fluid symbol, I will discuss how the unicorn represents the quest for queer acceptance. My sculpture *The (Last) Unicorn* (fig. 11) is both a reference to Peter S. Beagle's book *The Last Unicorn* written in 1968,⁵ as well as to the polyamorous term of being a unicorn. This sculpture is a unicorn-headed human torso, positioned on an elevated platform, exposed breasts with arms extending down through the platform. Its mouth is open and with expressive hands as it appears to be yelling in frustration.

I began exploring polyamorous relationships in 2013, I was 22 years old. I had only an inkling that I was queer at this point and I was still wrapping my mind around the terminology. Having sex with not-men seemed out of my reach at that time, it was new territory I was not yet ready to explore. As someone who loved the freedom and flexibility of poly relationships, the idea of being a unicorn was an exciting prospect of experiencing a new kind of relationship. Being a unicorn essentially means someone who dates both people in the coupled (usually heterosexual) relationship, but does not become emotionally involved enough to inconvenience or cause problems in that existing relationship.⁶ This was my gateway drug to queer sex, and I loved it for many years. As I dated these hetero couples, I got to test the waters of queer sex without claiming the title. I was able to explore a female body without the fear of not knowing what I was doing, because there was a male body right there, and I knew how to sexually interact with those. The more I interacted with those couples the more I realized my attraction to the females in the duos. This in turn gave me the confidence to eventually flirt with not-men, since I had gained some experience while in that unicorn role. Eventually I began to feel like nothing more than a fun toy whenever a couple wanted to spice up their sex life, so I ended those

relationships. I had no regrets since it gave me enough experience to confidently flirt with women and other non-men.

The book *The Last Unicorn*, which tells the story of a unicorn who believes she is the last of her kind. She eventually goes on a quest to find her fellow unicorns, seeking a community of beings that understand her entirely. As my sculpture started off simply as an ode to my sexual gateway drug, the links to the themes in this book could not be escaped. So many queers have felt like this unicorn, believing they were alone in the world, and no one would understand them; especially queers from small towns. When I was a kid, I had no queer role models to ask questions, no one who I thought would understand the gender or sexual confusion. I felt not just like the last unicorn, but the only unicorn! When I found out there was a herd of unicorns just like me, sprinkled around my community and beyond, I felt less alone knowing there were people I could relate to in these ways. When I was 21, I moved to Montreal, and it took me some time to find them, but eventually I found a rad queer community who taught me about LGBTQ+ identities and how they are celebrated.

This sculpture uses multiple unicorn metaphors to tell the story of coming to terms with my queer sexuality, they speak to the initial solitude and searching for queer acceptance. Both metaphors tell of existing in straight-time, in a world designed for hetero existence, while seeking queer acceptance in hopes of finding a queer utopia.

“Queerness is utopian, and there is something queer about the utopian. (...)”

Indeed, to live inside straight time and ask for, desire, and imagine another time and place is to represent a desire that is both utopian and queer. To participate in such an endeavor is not to imagine an isolated future for the individual but instead to participate in a hermeneutic that wishes to describe a collective futurity that functions as a historical materialist critique.” (Muñoz, 26)

The (Last) Unicorn exists in one reality, as its torso sits on top of the platform, but it reaches into another as its arms extend down in between the bases. The frustration conveyed by the mouth

and hands express the uncertainty of living in one reality but seeking another, blindly reaching until it grasps what it's looking for. Seeking queer communities can feel like this, knowing there's people out there who understand, but not knowing where or how to find them.



Fig. 12 *Take Cover*



Fig. 13 *Take Cover* detail

Acknowledging the Insecurities to Move Past Them

Along with the liberating and validating feelings of discovering and embracing these aspects of my identity, comes the negative and unwelcome ones, a package deal. They are hard to ignore, but we cannot be oblivious to the reality of living with an identity that much of society refuses to accept. Especially as legislature such as the “don’t say gay” bill is passed in Florida, and over 400 anti-LGBTQ+ bills being proposed elsewhere in the country.⁷ One thought I had while making the decision to start taking testosterone, was that I might not feel safe traveling to certain places anymore, in and out of North America. I grew up in big Canadian cities as a visibly queer white person, I have been cautious to a degree, but that might be changing. As my body starts to appear more androgynous, as I have always wanted, will I still be accepted by non-queer communities? Will I still feel safe in places that I never questioned as unsafe before? With the euro-centric, hetero-normative and cisgender beauty standards, will I still be desirable?

At the entrance to the gallery is a small sculpture placed on a low black base, very close to the floor, titled *Take Cover* (fig. 12 and 13). This is the embodiment of all of my fears and insecurities about the changes that I desire for my body. The changes that I have thought about for many years, but now that they can be a reality, I fear what the outside world will think of them. This will not stop me from pursuing what I desire, but they do make me pause and consider my safety in such a polarizing time of LGBTQ+-acceptance and hate. The sculpture is a naked figure, rabbit-headed and human bodied, crouched on the ground with its arms crossed in front of its face. Covering its face with its hand, it peeks through its fingers to see who might be looking down at it. The entire front of its body is covered by the fact it is crouched on the ground and the addition of the small wall built flush against its skin covering any possible assumed gender or sex markers. Its naked body causes the viewers to wonder about any genitals, as they are almost visible, except for the wall blocking all gendered body parts. Rabbits are known for always being scared, being that they are at the bottom of the food chain. This sculpture is an embodiment of that nervousness and the fear of repercussions from those who have made their negative opinions of LGBTQ+ people quite vocal.

The sculpture *Bearded Dragon* (fig. 14) is a suspended torso of a bearded dragon headed human figure, with a row of smaller bearded dragon faces running across its chest, from shoulder-to-shoulder dipping down in the center. The torso is open where the rib cage would

end, and falling out from deep inside the body are hundreds of spikes, mimicking the ones which grow from its head. The bearded dragon has the capability to change its sex, which is a characteristic shared by a few species of amphibians, fish and a variety of invertebrates.⁸ The fluidity of sex and gender is very much a part of LGBTQ+ communities, and there is always the hope that we are still accepted by the greater community even if we don't cleanly fit into those gender categories anymore. I cannot stress the importance of queer communities for this reason, knowing that even if the hetero-normative groups won't accept our identities as real or valid, the queer communities will always have our backs. I also chose the bearded dragon because of the armor that they are born with. The spikes falling out of the insides of the torso are the self defense systems that we have built to take care of ourselves. LGBTQ+ people need their own specific armor as they are targeted for simply existing. Each person has their own unique approach to how they take care of themselves, as everyone's experience is different, especially depending on which LGBTQ+ acronym they identify with.



Fig. 14 *Bearded Dragon*

End of this Chapter, Beginning of Another

This exhibition, *Post Tomboy*, embraces the sculptural tradition of ceramic object making as a vehicle to process and share complex feelings of queer experience through the nuance and fluidity of material and presentation. In sharing my personal experiences with these topics of gender and sexual identities my work both normalizes and celebrates these diverse ways of being.

Footnotes:

- ¹ Devlin, Hanna, Reed, Betsy, *Earliest Known Cave Art by Modern Humans Found in Indonesia*, The Guardian, Archeology, published Dec. 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2019/dec/11/earliest-known-cave-art-by-modern-humans-found-in-indonesia#:~:text=Cave%20art%20depicting%20human%20animal,cave%20art%20by%20our%20species,> accessed May 25th, 2023
- ² I have taken a lot of inspiration from stories about Baphomet and the Greek deity, Pan, both being human-goat hybrids who, in a sense, create their own rules for how they want to exist in their worlds.
- ³ <https://mymodernmet.com/kintsugi-kintsukuroi/>
- ⁴ History Today, *Unicorns: A Mythological Creature of Extraordinary Resilience*, Volume 69, Issue 1, January 2019, accessed May 25th 2023
- ⁵ “The Last Unicorn”, Peter S. Beagle, Rankin Jr, Arthur, Bass, Jules, Rankin/Bass Productions, 1982
- ⁶ Chambliss, Kitty, *Glossary of Polyamory Related Terms*, LovingWithoutBoundaries.com, 2017, accessed May 27th, 2023
- ⁷ <https://www.cnn.com/2023/04/06/politics/anti-lgbtq-plus-state-bill-rights-dg/index.html>
- ⁸ Virata, John, *Bearded Dragon Embryos can Switch Sex Two Different Ways Study Says*, Reptiles Magazine, <https://reptilesmagazine.com/bearded-dragon-embryos-can-switch-sex-two-different-ways-study-says/#:~:text=This%20is%20attributed%20to%20a%20warming%20planet.&text=The%20bearded%20dragon%2C%20the%20most.Whiteley%20%2CClare%20E.> April 19, 2021, accessed May 25th 2023
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