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WISH YOU WERE HERE

Janie Stamm

A thesis presented to the Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts
Washington University in St. Louis.

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

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ABSTRACT

The State of Florida is under threat from the effects of climate change. Rising sea levels are creeping up on to Florida's coast, eroding the beaches and encroaching on heavily populated cities. Over my lifetime I will watch the water spill over the streets of my home town. I will watch the water flood the Everglades, pushing saltwater into freshwater habitats. I will watch the water begin to drown the state, taking Florida's many little known histories along with it. This thesis serves as a document of Floridian life during the Anthropocene.

Within this thesis, I tell the story of nature and Queerness in the State of Florida. Nature and Queerness are in direct relation to one another. Appearing to exist as two parallels, nature and Queer folks often reflect each other. Both are under constant threat from the actions and inactions of people. Using craft-based techniques, like papier mache and embroidery, I tell these stories through historical facts, personal narratives, and possibilities for the future. Specifically those that have shaped me into the person I am today.

This thesis serves as a document of existence, resilience, and survival.

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NOTE

I would like to acknowledge the indigenous people who inhabited and currently live in South Florida: the Calusa, Tequesta, Mayaimi, Jeaga, Miccosukee, and Seminole. These tribes worked with the land and truly saw the all that the Everglades and the lush, southern coasts could offer. In contrast, European settlers and business people sought to drain the Everglades and alter the landscape in such a way that it would have tremendous effects for generations to come, all for their own benefit.

For Queers in my life. Especially Logan.

“That community exists, what didn’t was any type of written, palpable evidence of it that you could hold in your hands.”

-Eduardo Aparicio (translated from Spanish by Susana Peña)¹

I see you.

LET ME SHOW YOU THE WAY

My art lives in the far reaches of my brain, tucked under soft, pink folds. It's a world that is a fantasized version of what home is to me, both fact and fiction. It's purple and green lights shining on a velvet curtain, which when pulled back reveals the world in which only I exist. My secret island. It's overgrown tropical plants with multicolored leaves. It's a small cottage at night with warm yellow light spilling out onto the porch. It's the Milky Way reflecting in a Shark River Slough. It's wading birds dancing along the water's edge. It's a place where my imagination resides. Where I translate my daily observations into thoughtful creations.

My work is composed of repetitive acts: embroidery, beading, printmaking, collecting. I use my practice as a way to help me heal. It is my therapy. I'm a good listener but I'm not always the best with words. I speak to my art with my hands. Each stitch is a deeply considered thought. Each bead is a memory. Each mark is a moment of release. I speak through my work. I watch people's eyes when they interact with my creations. I watch to see where they look, if their eyes grow big with delight or if they squint with uncertainty. The eyes never lie. They are the most honest critics.

But let's start at the beginning:

I was born a little ball of sunshine. A tiny, plump swamp creature. A bitty baby screaming and yowling on the bayside shore of Miami Beach. I was born next to Biscayne Bay, just five years after Christo and Jean-Claude covered the bay with pink polypropylene to help raise

money to keep the bay pristine and healthy. Christo and Jean-Claude helped put Miami on the art map and helped Miami residents see the importance of art. The couple surrounded eleven manmade islands throughout the bay with large, pink plastic sheeting. Hundreds of local people worked tirelessly around the clock to help construct and install (and then later de-install) the bright pink fabric and protect wildlife that could potentially become entangled in the work. People got excited. This was work made by Miamians with the guidance and vision of both Christo and Jean-Claude for local folks to see how amazing the bay was.

Biscayne Bay is located along the southern end of the Intracoastal, which runs up Florida's east coast. It's a salty waterway that separates mainland Florida from the barrier islands. This waterway is home to a rich diversity of aquatic life. The Intracoastal is gentle and acts as an estuary for many ocean creatures. Floridians have dredged, re-shored and polluted the waterway that is home to the state's potato shaped mermaid, the manatee. Christo and Jean-Claude saw how delicate and resilient this saltwater habitat was. They wanted to bring attention to the importance of preserving such natural treasure-scapes. They made an installation that was for the environment and people of Miami, installed by the people in collaboration with nature.

Christo and Jean-Claude picked a shade of pink that imitated the color of the richest Florida sunset. It was a pink so full of exuberant joy and flamboyance it can only be linked with gayness. It's the color of the pink triangle, a colored shape that has been used to identify the LGBTQIA community. I was born pink and queer and just feet away from the creatures of the deep. I was born a Floridian. My Florida blood is thicker than alligator skin: two parts orange juice (the pulpy kind) and one part SPF 45. Gloria Estefan was my first pop music queen. I've met her twice. She is a kind human. Once, my elementary school was closed for half a day

because there was an alligator blocking the door. No matter how hard I tried to resist, Florida's gravitational pull keeps bringing me back home. I grew up just outside of Miami, on the western edge of Broward County, where cookie cutter homes and soccer fields meet the wild, yet managed River of Grass: the Everglades.

Florida is built on the artificial. The state is heavily reliant on tourism, selling itself as a tropical paradise where palm fronds sway in the breeze as you sip an ice cold mojito on the beach. Take a stroll through any of the palm tree-lined streets and you will find front yards dotted with hot pink plastic flamingos, Florida's true local wildlife. Kitsch is the state's number one export. Stop at any gas station, grocery store, or seaside motel and I guarantee that you will find a delightfully tacky souvenir that perfectly encapsulates what it is to be in Florida.



Figure 1. Selection of Florida souvenirs from my personal collection.

I have a deeply complicated relationship with the state. It's the place where I grew up. I used to hate it and now I'm in awe of it and love it. All of my current art is inspired by it. But sadly, I've begun the process of mourning Florida. Florida is a hearty state. It has survived hurricanes, fires, and humans altering the landscape. Now it faces one of its greatest challenges: climate change.

In my lifetime I will watch my home go under water. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not talking about a full six feet of water (yet). I'm talking about the fact that I am going to watch the water creep in at a slow and forceful pace. I will watch it cover the beaches where sea turtles have nested for hundreds of generations. I will watch it submerge the Everglades and blur the lines of where the saltwater ends and where the freshwater begins. I'm going to see the water sit on top of my childhood home's lawn, slipping inside the house, covering the tile and letting time guide it up to the second floor.

Climate change is unavoidable at this point. We have gone far too long without fixing our mistakes. I have watched the polar ice caps melt at a disturbingly rapid pace. I remember being in high school and looking at predictions of what the future *might* hold for us. Altered photographs of the possible effects of climate change, like that of Greenland's shrinking ice sheets. So many of the possibilities became realities. I'm baring witness to the destruction of this planet, which happens to be my home.

This is not a new problem. It has roots hundreds of years old² and I'm not the first one to bring it up within the context of art. We had the opportunity to repair our environmental mistakes over thirty years ago. We could have changed our waste heavy habits, considered our actions and put funds and energy into preserving what we have left. Presidents Reagan and Bush had the

opportunity to do the same for the LGBT³ community as it suffered through the start of the AIDS crisis. Instead, the government turned a cold shoulder. Queer people were ignored as they died painful deaths in hospital beds and scientists' cries to change our ways fell onto deaf ears.

Tony Kushner's play, *Angels In America*, discusses both nature and queerness in the context of the world ending. For example, the play is about the AIDS crisis in the mid-eighties and how it absolutely devastated the LGBT community while referencing the hole that ozone opened up over Antarctica around the same time. The two events are described within the play as being the end of the world. I don't necessarily believe these two events were the end of the world. In fact, I believe they were the end of the way we knew the world before them. Destruction and change are absolutely terrifying, and often can be devastating, but they also provide an opportunity for change, growth, and redemption. They can be a phoenix rising from the ashes.

MOSQUITO BITES

Florida is an oddity. I mean just take a look at the news. I guarantee that there is a headline out there today, while you are reading this, that says something about “Florida Man (does)...” literally any backwards, nonsensical thing (sometimes involving the possession of an alligator).

Florida is an immaculately curated place. If you are visiting, you get to see a side of Florida exclusively designed for tourists and newcomers. It’s the version of Florida that sells the state as paradise: palm trees swaying in the breeze, pastel sunsets, tropical carefree living. But, did you know that Florida’s beaches are made up of sand from different places? It’s imported and blended with the house brand of sand to make the beaches look expansive and lush, not like their currently eroded state. Did you know that most of the palm trees lining the boulevards, boardwalks and front lawns aren’t even native to Florida? There are only twelve types of palm trees native to Florida, only two of which can only be found in the state. People travel to Florida to get away from the stress of daily life. It’s just north of the Caribbean, the beaches are gorgeous, and it’s a place where folks can kick their feet up and relax.

I lived in Florida for my first eighteen years and off and on over the past twelve. It’s strange, but when I lived in Florida I couldn't stand it. I definitely enjoyed going to the beach and doing things in nature like searching for critters and snorkeling but I always wanted to leave. I never understood how much Florida shaped me into who I am until I was almost 28. For the years I lived there all I could do was dream about living in Maine. It wasn't until I was living

outside of the state for ten years that the thought even crossed my mind that, yeah, I might actually miss Florida.

To cope with being homesick for a state that at many points in my life I despised, I chose to make art about it. I transformed my studio into a miniature version of Florida. One that has lush tropical plants decorating the window sills and brightly colored souvenirs covering any and all exposed flat surfaces.

My studio is my habitat. It's my home away from home. It's a place that is filled with cozy shag rugs dyed a soft shade of grass green. The walls are covered in Florida memorabilia: photos of the Everglades, postcards from Miami Beach, and plastic citrus. And I'm not the only one who calls my studio home. Two very large papier mache alligators reside in my creative space. Florida's kitsch is designed to bring joy to peoples' lives. My work is heavily inspired by the things people buy in order to remember their time in the state.



Figure 2. *Bitter Baby Sunshine*, 2019. Risograph, 5x7 inches.

YOU CAN WATCH THE SUN RISE OVER THE ATLANTIC AND SET INTO THE GULF

Patience is key in the Everglades. It's the type of place that if you are willing to wait it will reward you with moments that create understanding and deep appreciation. The golden hour presents a moment of transition, from day to evening to night. The moment the sun kisses the horizon, a great shift occurs across the subtropical wilderness. Night is greeted by a symphony of creature-created sounds. Flocks of egrets sing as they travel to tree islands to rest for the night. Their caws fill the air as they seemingly disappear into the pastel-toned sky. Marsh hens squawk about the lily pads as they scoot towards safety in the brush lining the water's edge. Hums and buzzes vibrate in the thick brush and sawgrass. It's the time where diurnal creatures retreat to rest and nocturnal beasts begin their waking hours. When gators splash in dark water and snakes lay out on manmade concrete pathways, absorbing the remnants of the day's heat trapped in the surface.

In April of 2016 I was presented with such a moment. I drove down to Everglades National Park early in the morning. I was eager to study what the wetlands were like at dawn since I had really only been to the Everglades during the mid-morning to evening hours.

I parked my car and headed towards a popular boardwalk trail. It starts with a short asphalt walkway leading towards a large, looping boardwalk that allows one to explore a pond system. It was a cool morning so the mosquitos were at bay and the breeze felt good across my

neck. I had my sketchbook and camera tucked into my bag and my binoculars around my neck. I was setting out for the furthest spot out on the boardwalk but before I got no more than 200 feet down the asphalt path a sound stopped me dead in my tracks. It was a rumbling grumble that shook the sawgrass no more than 10 feet from where I stood. Startled, I looked around me but there was only one other person on the trail. Before I had the chance to even brew my next thought a second, third and fourth grumble erupted from not only the sawgrass, but from the brush right next to me and the water just a short distance away.

The sound was the bellow of the male American Alligator, a creature that has (in some form or another) remained largely unchanged since the time of the dinosaurs. An alligator's bellow sounds very similar to the engine of a motorcycle or even a very loud lawn mower. Alligators bellow with their backs partially sticking out of the water. The vibrations produced at the moment of the bellow make water droplets on the gator's back jump and dance and electrify the water. Typically these sounds can be heard during early spring, during mating seasons, but truthfully, an alligator can bellow whenever it deems it is appropriate.

In my entire life interacting with Florida's environment, I had never heard the sound. When the gators bellow together it sounds like a slew of revving engines with a vibration that can shake the ground. I was entranced and in awe. I watched an alligator bellow just a few feet away from me. It was only about six feet long. I watched it lift its head towards the sky, hike up its back and tail and gently dip its belly into the shallow water. A bellow filled with the power of a bass drum poured out of the gator. I couldn't help it when my eyes grew wide with pure joy and gratefulness to have been able to have witnessed such a wild moment.

Three years (and dozens of boardwalk strolls) later, I returned to the boardwalk path, but this time it was night. I was going to brave my fear of the dark, I told myself. I was going to take a nighttime stroll through the Everglades, with just a flashlight and a clear sky of twinkling stars to guide me. I approached the path and shined my flashlight towards the water in front of me. On the water's edge were a few very young gator hatchlings with mom just a few feet off shore in the water.

As I walked into the night, I looked along the ground, hoping to find a snake warming its body on the pathway. There is a part of this trail that goes over a little creek and that part is covered with a short boardwalk. I took one step onto the wood and then another. On my third step I realized I wasn't alone.

No more than ten feet away from me was a gator hiding behind some brush. I never saw it but boy, did I hear it. The earth shook with the rumbling of this beast's bellow. My body totally froze. My heart was pounding out of my chest. I was totally out of my element and felt like prey. I don't think I've ever experienced a fear quite like that. It was strange because I've never felt so simultaneously connected with nature, completely terrified and absolutely in awe. I was utterly blown away with how a sound like the bellow, a call that brought me joy just a few springs before, could awaken a deeply dormant, instinctual fear in me. While I was shaking in my boots over this, my respect for the alligator as an apex predator grew ten fold.

Alligators are majestic creatures. They are part of the crocodylian family, born out of the time when dinosaurs roamed the Earth, evolution changing them ever so slightly to adapt to their surroundings.



Figure 3. Alligator peeking out from a pond at night in the Everglades.

The alligator has become a fixture within my work, in particular, within my sculptural, installation-based work. In the fall of 2017 I created Darla, an alligator who lived within an installation critiquing Anita Bryant and Florida orange juice. At first, the alligator was a stand-in for what a Queer person looked and acted like according to Anita Bryant. She believed that Queers were scary and evil, and were trying to “recruit” children. Similar things have been said about gators, except they are accused of eating children as opposed to recruiting them. All of these statements are simply not true.

I realized that the alligator was actually a portrait of me as a Queer Floridian. It’s a creature that I’ve always felt connected to and with whom I could easily empathize. The alligator is just trying to exist as an alligator does, just like me, not looking for trouble or to intentionally

hurt anyone. The alligator I've created to fill in for me is highly stylized. It maintains a fairly true-to-form body but instead of being a dark, blackish green, it is black with white line circles. The form is simplified and is a reference to my appreciation of the graphic nature of printmaking (a discipline I studied for several years in undergrad, and a field I went on to work in at several professional printshops).



Figure 4. *Give Her What She Wants*, 2017. Installation including Darla the alligator.

I use the alligator to tell my personal story in two works. The first is *Birth*, a beaded wall hanging that signifies the year (1988) and place (the State of Florida) I was born. The second is a sculpture called *Come to Me* (*Spring 2012*), which is about me coming out later in life as a twenty-four year old. The alligator provides me with a vessel to talk about myself within the context of my art.



Figure 5. *Birth*, 2018. Fabric, glass beads, felt, yarn, 40x21 inches.



Figure 6. *Come to Me (Spring 2012)*, 2018. Papier mache, wire, conch shell.

SWIMMING POOL WITH AN OCEAN VIEW

Life is deeply powerful. It's fragile yet strong as hell, adaptive when there doesn't seem to be an answer, and a force that gives us permission to exist. Every single plant, creature, bacteria and person exists in an interconnected web of life. Whether or not we notice it, the actions taken at this moment have an effect on what comes next. This web is what keeps life going, it's the system our existence was built upon. Everything relies on what came before, and any disruption within the system has a slow and painful ripple effect on the rest of the web.

Humans love ordering and classifying things to a fault. Sure, classifying things can help us have a conversation where we all know what we are talking about, but sometimes classifications create serious problems. Hierarchies form through the use of classifications. Hierarchies are a social construct; a way to assert control over a population. It's a way to determine what or who is most powerful. It's how people thought that Earth exclusively belonged to humans.⁴ It's a justification for the mistreatment of the environment, flora, fauna and natural resources. It's a justification for discrimination against fellow human beings. At its core, it's a way to belittle things; to separate things into an outdated, binary system where "...Queers are feminized, animalized, eroticized and naturalized in a culture that devalues women, animals, nature, and sexuality."⁵

It has been argued that the word "wilderness" is deeply rooted in masculinity, specifically the masculinity of the white, moral man.⁶ It's a way for a man to go and do manly outdoorsy things like fishing and hunting, or really whatever gender-based social constructs determine what we should do. The wilderness is a space for straight white men to find themselves and get in

touch with nature in its most natural state. But what the hell is natural? And who is making that decision? “Is the tree I’m seeing in my garden the idea of that tree or the real tree?”⁷ The wilderness wasn't initially intended for Queer folks⁸, but I can tell you that the wilderness is for the Queers. It’s a place that nourishes the spirit of the untamed, unbridled being. It’s a place that does not partake in colonial moral social constructs. The wilderness is about survival and perseverance. The wilderness is a reflection of the essence of Queer existence.

There is nothing more natural than Queer existence. Humans are not the only beasts on this planet that exhibit Queer attributes. Many other species participate in same-sex relationships, including penguins and dolphins. Parrotfish can change their gender midway through their lives. Queerness and nature are in direct relation to one another, for being Queer is just as natural as being straight. Queerness is innate and not learned. It’s part of the package when one is born.

Queer people are an endangered species.⁹ Sometimes, when I look around at the Queer community that I am proudly a member of I can’t help but feel despair. I see the way Queer folks are (and have been) treated in our current heterosexual-driven culture. We are ignored and erased and only visible when something tragic happens. I believe that nature is in the same predicament. Humans treat the environment (creatures and habitats) without care. We expect nature to cater to us and provide us with things like food, resources and entertainment, yet we show minimal gratitude in return. We view creatures trying to exist where their homes used to be as pests, and plants that aren't pretty as weeds in our lawn. We remove them from sight because they make us feel uncomfortable and we claim that they are not important. Like with Queer folks, we fear the creatures we don’t understand. And once again, we wait until a creature is almost gone or a habitat is in peril to take any action.

Nature and Queerness are one and the same. We suffer in similar ways. Jan Zita Grover connects nature and Queerness in her book *North Enough*. In a nutshell, she compares (carefully as to not exploit) the AIDS crisis and watching her friends die to the ecologically violent act of clear cutting in the North Woods of Minnesota. She documents what she bore witness to:

...social and ecological history of the region that this place is one that has been systematically abused: logged several times, drained, subjected to failed attempts at agriculture, depleted, abandoned, eroded, invaded, neglected.

And asserts that it is possible to

...emerge from a conscious, laborious process of reflection grounded in intimate experiences and local histories, in the precise ways in which pain and loss are manifest in lives and events.¹⁰

Grover opens up the idea that it is very possible and very necessary to love a devastated landscape. Although one might be hesitant at first, it's important to create space for altered nature and altered culture in order to evolve and adapt. I don't view it as a copout or giving up; instead, it's the embrace of a potential for growth, acceptance and a chance to do better. It's a moment to lift the burden of historical destruction and erasure and develop a new way to preserve and protect what lies in the present and the future.

The gay beach is sanctuary. It's sunshine, sand and sea-quins! The gay beach has served as a place where one can go and be truly authentic to themselves without the pressure to conform to heterosexual social norms. Everything gets checked at the sand dune when entering the gay beach: homophobia, transphobia, fatphobia, the assumed perversion of queers. Why not even

leave your clothes behind (only if you feel comfortable of course)! Queer places like Key West, Provincetown, and Fire Island have provided secluded safe spaces for LGBTQIA folks for decades. Their isolation from heteronormative urban spaces serves an important role within queer society. The gay beach provides freedom to express oneself completely, judgement free!

Like many Queer landscapes, the gay beach is endangered. With the ever expanding effects of global climate change, Queer beach communities are under threat from rising sea levels. These places are low-lying sand patches that are barely above sea level. When the water begins to creep in, these spaces will drown. The histories that have shaped these Queer places will vanish with it.



Figure 7. *Dorothy*, 2019. Fabric, glass beads, shells, 7x10 inches.

In my piece *Dorothy*, I explore the notion of the gay beach, a space designated for Queer people. The piece itself is a small appliqué embroidery with beadwork details. It's a bird's eye view of a small slice of beach. The phrase "Beach reserved for friends of Dorothy" is spelled out on the sand in beads. While the phrase has many conflicting origin stories, one fact remains true: it was used as coded language within the LGBT community. Asking if someone was a friend of Dorothy was code for asking if someone (specifically among gay men) was a fellow Queer. It was a way to be discreet and avoid any potentially dangerous conversation. Writing in the sand is temporary. It will only be seen by a few before the forces of the ocean absorb the message. I sometimes wonder what it would be like if all the beaches were gay. What if all of the beaches were inclusive? What if all of the beaches were safe for Queers to frolic in the sand, splash in the water, and eat popsicles from beach chairs?

The beach is my home away from home. I love going with my mom. It's a place where we both sit in silence for hours and just relax. Okay, okay, so she sleeps most of the time but she does protect my things when I go on shell hunting walks and helps me apply globs of sunblock. Every year we find time to go to the beach together. The beach is for family, both blood and chosen.

When I close my eyes I see a bright sky. I see the Atlantic, a shade of aqua that would make the finest turquoise stone jealous. I hear hungry gulls crying for breadcrumbs and cheese doodles. I smell salt and rotting fish. I wince at the stinging irritation of sunblock melting into

my eyes. I feel the soft weight of my feet buried in the sand. The ocean ever so gently tucking my tiny feet deeper into the sand with each reaching wave. I feel the grit as I wiggle my toes through the sand. It's scratchy but cooling and therapeutic on an exceptionally hot day.

Sand reflects the stars at night. Sitting close to the ocean's edge, one can scoop away the top layer of sand, made warm by the rays of the sun earlier that day. One can swiftly drag a hand across the freshly exposed sand and take in dozens of quick, little light blips. Tiny little bioluminescent *Noctiluca* wake up and glitter for barely a moment in time before they gently fade back to their unlit state. The faster you create friction in the sand, the more it reflects the night sky, a whole universe just beneath your feet.



Figure 8. An uprooted palm laying at the water's edge. Hollywood, Florida.

ORANGE JUICE WITH PULP

“Our role as artist is more controversial now because there are those, claiming the absolute authority of religion, who detest much of our work as much as they detest most of our politics. Instead of rationally debating subjects like abortion or gay rights, they condemn as immoral those who favor choices and tolerance. They disown their own dark side and magnify everyone else’s until, at the extreme, doctors are murdered in the name of protecting life. I wonder, who is this God they invoke, who is so petty and mean? Is God really against gun control and food stamps for poor children?”

-Barbara Streisand, excerpt from “The Artist as Citizen” (as used in the press release for Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (Vultures)* at Andrea Rosen Gallery, 1995)

In 1964, the State of Florida published a pamphlet entitled *Homosexuality and Citizenship in Florida*. Let me tell ya, it’s a real gem of a book. In a nutshell, the fifty-two page pamphlet discusses what gay life was like in the late fifties and early sixties through the morally-biased voices of an all white, cisgender¹¹, and straight panel of legislators. The Johns Committee¹² played a large role in producing this book. The Johns Committee operated out of fear and a willful misunderstanding of queer life at the time. Here is a sample of the Johns Committee’s findings as documented in *Homosexuality and Citizenship in Florida*:

*Society would feel better if there were no homosexuals, but our laws have to face the truth that every society in one way or another produces certain aberrancies.*¹³

The Johns Committee destroyed the life and careers of Queer folks across the entire State of Florida. Specifically of those who worked within Florida’s state funded education system.

Their book gave power to dangerous people who often sought to destroy and degrade members of the LGBT community.

Existing as a Queer person in public spaces can be absolutely terrifying. The challenge is existing as your true, authentic self (the one that makes YOU most happy) without attracting the attention of people who intend to harm you. Blending in with heterosexual society may seem like a form of assimilation, but it can serve as a way to protect oneself from unwanted attention. Camouflaging in with straight folks is a common survival tactic for Queers within a largely straight, cisgendered world.

There are two works that I've created that are in direct conversation with the idea of camouflage as a means of protection. *Mosquito Mesh Hat No. 1: Citrus Queen* and *Mosquito Mesh Jacket No.1*. Both works involve using mosquito netting as a way to blend in with Florida's environment. The netting protects the wearer, the Queer, from words and actions deemed hateful. There is a quote on the back of the jacket from the Johns Committee pamphlet because wearing the quote gives the wearer ownership over the words. The jacket's message is inviting the viewer to follow the wearer into the world of "Gay Society." Having the words of the Johns Committee's findings on the back of the jacket dismantles their message. It allows the wearer to show the world that *this* is what a Queer person looks like, *this* is how a Queer person acts. We are not scary, we are just trying to survive.



Figure 9. *Mosquito Mesh Jacket No.1*, 2018. Jacket, glass beads, felt.
Photo by Shoog McDaniel.

Mosquito Mesh Hat No. 1: Citrus Queen serves as a symbol for protecting the Queer life. Queer existence is represented by a small kinky orange inside of the hat. It floats gently in the center of the hat, protected by the mesh which represents the power of LGBTQIA community. It also important to note that according to *The Leatherman's Handbook*, mosquito netting is used to flag for outdoor sex.¹⁴ Flagging is a form of nonverbal communication within Queer spaces. It's a language purely based on colors, textures and accessories. Outdoor sex was and still is prevalent in the LGBTQIA community, especially in cruising culture where people often meet in parks and open spaces looking for anonymous sex.



Figure 10. *Mosquito Mesh Hat No. 1: Citrus Queen*, 2018.
Mosquito hat, papier mache, felt, glass beads, wire.

No matter how many times people have taken actions to ensure the silence and erasure of the LGBTQIA community, the queers have risen up. We've fought hard. We, the Queers, have always existed and evolution has made us unforgivingly resilient.

On October 14, 1977, Thom Higgins, a gay rights activist from Minnesota, smashed a cream pie into the face of Anita Bryant, a militant Christian homophobe from Oklahoma, during a press conference in Des Moines, Iowa. While I don't normally support acts of violence as a means to get a message across, I occasionally make exceptions to the rule. This incident is one of them.

I don't believe in hell, but I do believe that there are people on this Earth who make life for others as hellish as humanly possible. Anita Bryant is a devil and a coward. Anita Bryant gathered her "moral majority" army to rally against queer life. Anita Bryant stripped protections away from LGBT people in what was then Dade County, Florida, with a ripple effect that reached around the nation. Anita Bryant is a hateful person. Anita Bryant started Save Our Children, an anti-gay rights organization whose sole purpose was to block and remove all legislation that benefited Queer populations. She said that we, the Queers, would corrupt the youth and turn the kids gay with our perverse actions. We weren't pure, we weren't natural, we were sick and twisted sinners.

Anita Bryant, you actively fought for violence against Queer people. You tried to silence us. To take away our rights. You called us sick, said we were trying to recruit children because we couldn't have our own. You demonized us. How do you sleep at night? The Florida Citrus Commission paid her to be the face of orange juice. The Florida Citrus Commission looked the other way when they signed her paycheck. The Florida Citrus Commission did not apologize. Gay bars and Queer folks across the country boycotted Florida orange juice until she was let go by the commission.

Anita Bryant spread hate speech and the Florida Citrus Commission turned a blind eye to the whole situation, making them complicit in Bryant's homophobic behavior. I began to ask myself, what could I do to repair the damage of Bryant's words and Florida's inaction? How could I, over 40 years later, turn orange juice into something that is for everyone?

The answer was clear: gay it up, of course. Sprinkle a little Queerness into orange juice, make it inclusive! I began considering what the visual reinvention of the orange would look like,

how a Queer orange, specifically would look. How could I put a little of my Queer Floridian self into the orange? I wanted to give the orange a fresh twist, to squeeze out the rotten, homophobic past, and make it a citrus for all. I have this one collar I purchased from a designer in Chicago. It's sparkly black vinyl with a small O-ring hanging off of the front. I had it sitting on my desk and then the thought crossed my mind: what if I put my collar on the orange? So I did. I fashioned a miniature version of the collar out of felt, beads, and metal and placed it around the body of a brightly painted papier mache orange.



Figure 11. *Juicy Fruit*, 2018. Papier mache, felt, glass beads, wire, 4 inches round.

The orange transformed into a strange, kinky, queer fruit, *Juicy Fruit*. It truly gave new meaning to the terms fruit and fruity, often used to describe Queer folks. The kinky orange became a symbol in my work for Queerness within the Floridian landscape. It symbolizes

inclusion and visibility within a world that isn't necessarily designed to uplift folks of the LGBTQIA community. The kinky orange is a way to have a little fun, even when discussing heavy topics like homophobia and exclusion.

June is a strange month. It holds great significance and power. Meteorologically speaking, June 1st is the start of hurricane season. It's the time when local news stations relentlessly remind you to stock up on supplies for the impending doom of rolling thunderclouds and powerful winds. June is the start summer. June welcomes land-locked tourists to the sandy beaches along Florida's coast.

June is Pride month. A whole month reserved to celebrate the accomplishments and history of the LGBTQIA community. We celebrate Pride in June to commemorate the Stonewall riots. To remember that trans women led the charge against homophobic police officers targeting a gay bar. June is the month that catapulted gay rights to the frontline of the civil rights movement. Stonewall wasn't the first attack on the Queer community, but rather the straw that broke the camel's back. It was the spark that ignited a fire that became the gay rights movement. June is the month of Queer empowerment.

In June of 1969, police raided The Stonewall Inn.

In June of 1977, Anita Bryant took away rights from the LGBT community.

In June of 2016, Omar Mateen killed 49 Queer people inside of Pulse Nightclub in Orlando.

Queer culture is inherently radical. For generations, Queer people have been forced to live their true, authentic lives underground and behind the scenes. Coded languages were created in order to survive because displaying affection or speaking out in public could get you killed. Sadly, it still can. Secret language flourished in the face of Queer dangers. Things like the hanky code, a Queer language spoken only through the intentional display of colored handkerchiefs in pockets, rose to popularity among gay men in the 1960s and 70s as a way to signal what one was looking for. In addition to the hanky code, Queer folks, specifically those involved in the leather/BDSM communities, pulled a page from the motorcycle club handbook and began identifying and signaling through the use of customized jackets and vests. Each jacket or vest would have pins from various events, embroidery, and patches identifying either who the wearer was or what motor club they were a part of. Over time, each piece of clothing would become completely unique to the wearer and continue the queer tradition of an unspoken, visual language.

My vests, *CrocoDykes Bite Back* and *CrocoDykes M.C.*, are intended to be in conversation with this history. Each piece has a unique set of identifiers that harken back to the fashions of Queer culture. These identifiers can be seen in the form of hand stitched appliqué patches, embroidery, lapel pins, and ribbon tassels. Each identifier represents a different aspect of queer existence, both generally and personally. Both of the vests are inspired by my existence as a queer Floridian in the world. I wanted to create an imaginary, and maybe one day real, biker gang that hailed from Florida.



Figure 12. *CrocoDykes M.C.*, 2018.
Felt, glass beads, thread, ribbon, wire.



Figure 13. *CrocoDykes Bite Back*, 2017.
Jean vest, felt, ribbon.

PLASTIC WILDLIFE: THOUGHTS ON CAMP AND CRAFT

There are two C-words that are a core part of who I am, both as a person and an artist: CAMP and CRAFT.

Camp is a challenging thing to describe. It's many things: it's political; aesthetic; and, it's composed of kitsch elements. For me, it's a way of existing. In her iconic essay *Notes on "Camp,"* Susan Sontag tries best to explain what the world of camp actually is:

*Indeed the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifact and exaggeration. And Camp as esoteric- something of a private code, a badge of identity even, among small urban cliques.*¹⁵

Queer folks have often embraced the camp lifestyle. Camp gives Queer folks a way to stand out after being suppressed for so long due to homophobic and transphobic beliefs. Sontag argues that "Camp is a solvent of morality. It neutralizes moral indignation, sponsors playfulness."¹⁶ Kitsch and camp give allowance to Queer existence. Camp forms a community with similar taste, and that taste is rather kitschy.

Kitsch provides the vessel in which the Queer can materially display their inner selves. Although doing so can attract unwanted attention, Queer people sometimes rely on the power of signaling through kitsch.¹⁷ For example, the use of the pink flamingo. This hot pink, feathered creature has become one of the most widely accepted symbols of Queerness.

On the surface, kitsch appears to be fun and flamboyant. But really, kitsch has a dark side. The things we buy and collect are directly related to our place in society. An invisible veil looms over our subconscious choice. Our desires are not always our own, “far from being an expression of subjectivity, taste reflects...the internalization of class struggle.”¹⁸ In her book *Tropical Kitsch: Mass Media in Latin American Art and Literature*, Lidia Santos argues that there are economic and social divides that cause people to desire specific things.

There is high brow, “the tendency toward...refinement” and on the other end, low brow, “marked by materialism and ‘vulgar’ interest in business.”¹⁹ The high class determines what is en vogue and classes below get the versions they can afford, often knock offs and cheaper items. Marginalized communities typically can only access low brow things. Some people make the knowing decision to go against the grain and intentionally choose the low brow option. The LGBTQ community, for example, often creates their own version of kitsch. The Queer world is deeply rooted in the aesthetics of camp with drag queens and kings, mirrored disco balls and club kid fashions.

I’ve spent most of my life in the camp capital of America: Florida. Kitsch is the state’s biggest export. From the souvenir filled swamp that is Orlando to the sea-shell peppered white sand beaches, Florida is a land that prides itself on the camp aesthetic. Florida had its biggest kitsch boom from the 1940s-70s.²⁰ Nearly everyone who visited the state during this time (and even beyond) brought home tchotchkes²¹ that reminded folks of their exotic vacations to the Sunshine State. Often these items were mass produced, such as ceramic flamingo salt and pepper shakers, clear plastic keychains with shells inside, and postcards of tropical gardens to name a few. These small treasures represented happy memories. They served as reminders that anyone

could access luxury just like the rich. Readily available in every gift shop, you too could take home a piece of paradise.

Stopping in a gift shop before traveling back to wherever anyone came from is a must, well at least for me and millions of other folks who collect useless tchotchkes that serve no purpose but to gather dust. Finding the ideal object is key. Nothing encapsulates “I had fun” and “my sunburn made me look like a cooked lobster” quite like a key chain that has a smiling sun wearing sunglasses with *Florida* written on it.

Our society lives like the bower bird. We each have our own little nests. One that we have customized and curated to impress others and make ourselves happy. The bower bird is a collector. It seeks out visually stimulating treasures to decorate its nest. Eye popping things like bottle caps, pebbles, and flowers are placed ever so carefully around in the ground bound nest. All of these things are sourced from the region around the nest. It’s almost as though the bower bird is chirping “Hey! You! I like you and I saw this by the stream the other day and thought it was awfully pretty and I was like, hey maybe you like it too?”

Things I collect:
seashells
mosquito bites
trash on the beach
alligator ashtrays
Mold-A-Rama figurines

Humans are deeply attached to things. People like stuff. We buy things for our friends and loved ones to show them that we care. We give out heart shaped boxes of candy on

Valentine's Day, snow globes after vacations spent afar, and sometimes we even buy porcelain animals for our own mantelpieces. Objects, especially those considered tacky or in bad taste, make up a very large part of who I am.

One of the very first things I started collecting was plastic injected, press mold figurines. You know, the kind where you put a couple of dollars into the machine, typically a retro Mold-A-Rama, and watch it create your very own wax souvenir. My favorites were the ones shaped like dinosaurs and reptiles. I distinctly remember the smell: like that of a Crayola crayon that has a stearic acid²² ingredient giving it its unique smell. I remember the feel of the warm wax object in my palms, the way it's smooth body felt underneath my thumb. I remember using my fingernail to scrape the excess wax off of the bottom of the figurine.

I started collecting these when I was just a kid. Now I am thirty-one and have amassed a collection of over 25 Mold-A-Ramas. Anytime I pass a machine, I feel compelled to buy one. The way the on-the-spot tchotchke machine is designed is indescribable. Maybe its the distinct tapering shape of the vending machine. Or perhaps the large domed glass that encases the machine's plastic injection gears and gadgets, all on display for viewing pleasure. It's the campiness of the experience that drums up those strong feelings of nostalgia for these tiny plastic bits of kitsch.

Our kitsch "tells the world that I don't take myself seriously, that I am relaxed with my impeccable, appropriately twisted, good taste."²³ Our kitsch holds memories of cherished experiences. Our kitsch does the thinking for us. Our kitsch tells our story to the world. Our kitsch provides space for expression and individuality, no two kitsch collections are the same.

Florida taught me to love the tacky, the gaudy, and the campiest of kitsch. The “definition of camp as something theatrical, artificial and exaggerated...as both an orientation to the world and a set of objects...”²⁴ I fully embrace my place in this world as a person who buys seashell covered boxes at full price.

And now, on to the second C: Craft.

Craft is looked down upon by the larger art universe. Craft is viewed as art with lack of intention, hobby-based and amateur. It’s seen as skill-based thing that can be learned as opposed to a born talent. But in reality, craft is incredibly important in the art world. It is a foundation upon which people are introduced to art. Craft gives me a way to truly express myself, to push my creativity to the edge.

For a long time, I used to think craft was purely a hobby. I believed it was just an afterthought way of making a creation. I loved crafting when I was younger: I sewed, doodled, and made strange creations out of pipe cleaners. These modes of making were fun and all, but they were not the right way to make fine art.

This toxic way of viewing craft-based art completely took over my way of thinking. Over the course of five years (the years I was attending undergrad at Savannah College of Art and Design) I went from making stuffed creatures for my pals and selling at zine fairs to retiring my sewing tools. I wasn't seeing any art in my history classes that involved craft. I assumed that in

order for me to have some sort of real art career I would have to do something that would be considered fine art. Really, just anything but craft.

I took up animation which was good and I loved the experimental side of things but I didn't like how computer oriented everything was. I tried printmaking on a recommendation from a drawing professor. It was true love from day one! I took to etching like a duck takes to water. Have you ever pulled the five foot in diameter wheel of a Conrad French Press? It's like a hot knife through butter.

It wasn't until I was twenty-nine and beginning graduate school that I realized the power of craft. How to elevate it to compete with the big hitters in the major leagues of art, like painting and sculpture. I rediscovered how craft made me feel. It was completely revitalizing. Craft let me celebrate my art and truly appreciate how hard my hands work. There are no true rules when it comes to craft so there is no wrong way to do it. That's the beauty of it. It's an art form that celebrates intuition and imagination. Craft is a world that is forgiving and nostalgic. It's about getting in touch with the things you feel in your soul. Craft provides a platform for me to tap into what makes me the absolute happiest deep down inside.

Craft allows me to be forgiving with myself. For me, it gives me space to appreciate and accept imperfection within my work. This does not mean that I am a lazy artist, instead, it means that I understand and accept the imperfections which show that the work I make is made by my hands.

Craft is a way to strengthen my connections with my family. I'm very lucky. My two grandmothers are incredibly creative and talented people. Both of them are artists in their own way. My maternal grandma is a fiercely independent, interior decorator with an eye for the

dramatic. Her kitchen table is a massive base of a tree trunk that's been flipped upside down with a heavy glass slab on top of it. I dream about that table. My paternal grandma is a life-long crafter and painter. She made this one painting of a tiger sitting chin deep in a pool of green water. I can get lost in the chunks of thick impasto on her canvases. She taught me to sew. She gave me the craft knowledge that was passed down to her.

The act of making through crafting is deeply rooted in a system of knowledge that is passed down generationally. Typically it is the grandmothers and mothers who pass down the information. I'm especially intrigued by how sewing and embroidery have been passed along and have given a voice to women. Through the act of quilting, women have been able to tell stories, document histories, and provide warmth.

The women of Gee's Bend, Alabama have been quilting for generations. Their quilts were originally made as blankets for warmth during the winter. The women of Gee's Bend were incredibly resourceful, using only available scrap fabric and organically piecing it together. The quilts of Gee's Bend were hesitantly sold to collectors in order to make some income. They became a highly sought after item to have within the quilt collecting world. In 2002, the Gee's Bend quilts went to the Whitney Museum in New York and took the art world by storm.²⁵ This moment in quilting history really brought quilt arts to the front of the art world and created space for fellow quilters to follow in their footsteps and have a broader conversation about combining craft and "fine art" (whatever that means).

The Gee's Bend quilting community is still active and a strong resource for the fiber arts community. Artists can travel down to Alabama and participate in quilting bees (basically a gathering of quilters who work together) organized by the folks of Gee's Bend.

Artist and author Faith Ringgold bridges the gap between painting and quilting with her “story quilts”.²⁶ Her quilts are traditional in format and size, a rectangle with patchwork fabric and decorative quilt stitching, but her imagery and materials stand out within the canon of American quilt arts. Ringgold’s quilts often feature a large, centralized painted illustration with strips of fabric radiating around the image. The strips sometimes have text written on them, telling stories that relate to the painting. Her quilts tell the stories of people of color in America, depicting scenes of family life, and moments of joy and pain.

We need more artists like Faith Ringgold. Her work has been in my life since my dad read me *Tar Beach* when I was a kid. Her painted quilts tell illustrated stories of family and existence and survival. She makes art in a way that is solely unique to her. In interviews, Ringgold states that she started painting on quilts because it was an easier way for her to bring her art around the country and display it.²⁷ She uses her quilts to illustrate her books. Ringgold is seamlessly bridging the invisible gap between art and craft. She isn't afraid to use untraditional formats for her work. She takes what is accessible and available and converts them into a tangible thing.



Figure 14. Faith Ringgold, *Tar Beach (Part I from the Woman on a Bridge Series)*, 1988. Acrylic on canvas, bordered with printed, painted, quilted, and pieced cloth, 74 5/8 x 68 1/2 inches.

GUIDEBOOK

I look to Felix Gonzalez-Torres for spiritual art guidance. Through subversion, obfuscation and novelty, Felix's work navigates queer culture, loss and activism. His work uses familiar things like candy, paper and beaded curtains to lure the viewer in and give them permission to interact with his work. He breaks the golden rule of the art world: don't touch the art. Gonzalez-Torres' work encourages the viewer to take without question or repercussion, understanding that people will not always understand the purpose of the art upon first viewing. I was one of those people.

The first Gonzalez-Torres piece I ever encountered in the wild was "*Untitled*" (*Portrait of Ross in L.A.*). It's a pile of brightly wrapped hard candies tucked into the corner of a gallery. I had heard rumors that the candy was up for grabs. Just to be sure I asked the guard and they silently nodded their head in approval. I scooped up a candy and tucked it into my purse and was on my merry way. I remember reading the name on the placard but not the information. Looking back on how I interacted with this work makes me cringe, especially when I found out what the work was about. The candy pile was created for Ross, Felix Gonzalez-Torres' partner who died in 1991 complications related to AIDS.²⁸ The weight of the pile represented the weight of Ross' body, dwindling over time as he got more sick. When viewers take the candy, they represent society's complacency in how people were treated during the AIDS crisis.

What fascinates me most about Gonzalez-Torres' work is his ability to use playful things like brightly wrapped candy (just to name one media among many) to talk about such heavy topics, like cancer, AIDS and death. Gonzalez-Torres' work makes these topics more accessible

and relatable. Many folks have had the unfortunate task of dealing with loss and sadness, and his work provides a way for them to connect to one another through hardship. Gonzalez-Torres allows his viewers to mourn with him, to heal with him, to embrace the isolation we feel.



Figure 15. Felix Gonzalez-Torres, “*Untitled*” (*Portrait of Ross in L.A.*), 1991.
Candies individually wrapped in multicolor cellophane, endless supply.

Mourning is unfortunately a recurring theme amongst Queer people. Don't get me wrong, I understand that all communities mourn and no person's pain is more valid than any other. People who belong to the LGBTQIA community have suffered their fair share of loss and hardship. Imagine what it is like to lose someone you love and to not have been able to be with them in the hospital because you weren't part of their family because you couldn't get married by

law. Imagine watching all of your friends die around you because of an epidemic that the government didn't care about until heterosexuals started getting it. Imagine yourself in Felix Gonzalez-Torres' shoes, watching Ross slowly and painfully die.

The AIDS crisis hit America in the early 1980s and absolutely decimated the LGBT community. Ronald Reagan, president of the United States at the time, refused to acknowledge the disease because it affected the queer community and he and his government were deeply homophobic. Cleve Jones, a gay rights activist in San Francisco who was pals with Harvey Milk, watched hundreds of his friends and community members perish before his eyes.

Jones had seen enough. He wanted these people to be remembered, and he wanted the government to save those who were at risk. Wanting to memorialize his lost friends, Cleve began to think about the idea of quilts: "As I said the word *quilt*, I was flooded with memories of home and family and the warmth of a quilt when it was cold on a winter night."²⁹ Cleve Jones made the first panel of the AIDS Memorial Quilt in 1987. From that moment on, people started volunteering and helping others construct panels of the quilt. People from all over the world have participated in the the construction of the quilt. The AIDS Memorial Quilt is the largest quilt in the world, stretching to over 48,000 panels.³⁰ If the quilt was laid out in a line it would stretch over fifty-two miles.

Quilts bring people together. The AIDS Memorial Quilt in particular brought together many communities. It created public space for people to mourn the loss of their loved ones through the art of quilting. Everything about the quilt is thoughtfully designed to have the greatest impact on people. Each panel of the quilt is approximately three by six feet, roughly the size of a coffin. Every panel is unique, showcasing the wonderful, life that was lost to AIDS. The

quilt had a massive impact on how, we as a society, view AIDS. It was relatable because it was a quilt. It was shocking because of the sheer size of it. It brought us together because it was something we could touch, a piece of art that needed no words to convey its message.



Figure 16. Constantine Manos, *Men sign the AIDS quilt*, 1993. Washington D.C.

California-based artist Cassils created a piece in honor of the folks who were killed or injured in the Pulse Nightclub shooting. They created a short video, *103 Shots*³¹, during San Francisco Pride (just a couple of weeks after the shooting) in which they documented people hugging with a balloon between them. When the embrace became too powerful, the balloon popped. The pop of the balloon is eerily similar to the sound of a gun going off. The video was

edited in a way that made the popping appear to be in rapid succession, like that of the sound of the semi-automatic weapon used in the Pulse shooting. The video is an emotional and powerful reminder of how scary things can be for Queer people in the world, but it also shows that by being there for one another, we can maintain strength, survive, and not live in fear.

My latest work is in the same vein of the AIDS Memorial Quilt with a hint of Cassils' tribute. I'm looking to make a quilt to memorialize a more recent event within the queer community, the Pulse Nightclub shooting of 2016 in Orlando, Florida. While, fortunately I didn't personally know anyone who died that night, the LGBTQIA world is small and I have friends who have friends that were murdered there. Forty-nine Queer people were violently murdered. I want to remind the world that their lives were important, and still are.

My quilt will memorialize the people who perished in the Pulse shooting through the language of Floridian flora and fauna and as well Queer symbology, like flamingos, pink triangles, and rainbows. The quilt compares the fragility of Queer life to that of a tiny snail native to various parts of lower Florida: the tree snail. The tree snail is a threatened species and was brought to the brink of extinction because of the greed of humans. Now, you may be asking, what is so special about a little snail and what does it have to do with queerness...and, that is totally fair.

The Florida tree snail is a small, tree dwelling creature, where each individual is unique. Each snail's shell is different from the next. While the form of the shell is nearly identical, every snail has a different pattern and color story. Humans became obsessed with them for this fact. Their shells are a range of colors including browns, tans, and yellows and they have beautifully colorful tips featuring different shades of red, blue, green, and pink. People killed the jelly-like

snails in order to keep the shells. People even went so far as to destroy entire patches of wild habitat in the hope that other people wouldn't be able to find similar shells. Like Queer people, the tree snail has been put through the ringer by people who simply don't care because they can't feel the way we are suffering (snails and Queers). But you can't erase us. We are here and we will do whatever it takes to survive.

Memorializing may seem like a way to cling to the past, but I see it as a way to educate the future. Memorializing is an important tool for communication. It's a way to preserve stories, events, and experiences in the hope that someone soon can learn from them. As a member of the queer community I want to celebrate those lives lost in the form of a quilt. I use quilting as a mode of therapy for myself. I want to display my quilt like the AIDS Memorial Quilt - on the ground. I want people to touch it, to feel the fabric, to trace the embroidery with their fingers. I want people to wipe their tears with it. I want to bridge the gap of art and craft and create an object that exists in both realms.



Figure 17. *June 12, 2016* (quilt panel detail), 2019. Felt, glass beads, thread, 9x9 inches.

UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN

I use my art to advocate for change and visibility. The work I make will always be political because it is all about identity. Whether it is addressing issues affecting the Queer world or the current environmental atrocities unfolding before our eyes, I will always speak up. If I don't, if I choose to be silent, then I am not using my privilege for good. It's important to find balance when dealing with such heavy subjects as climate change and the murder of Queer people. I use humor to tell my stories. It makes the reality pill a little easier to swallow. It makes the issues that some people have trouble connecting with a little more relatable. Understanding the histories that have made up who we are (both cultural and environmental), we are given the opportunity to preserve our future, and to work with its potential instead of against it.

Art is a vessel for change.

Queerness is powerful.

Nature heals.

¹ Peña, *Oye Loca: From the Mariel Boatlift to Gay Cuban Miami*, xxviii.

² Wulf, *The Invention of Nature*, 57.

³ Throughout various points in this thesis you will find three different acronyms used to describe the Queer community: LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQIA. Each one references a specific time period, for all types of Queer people have always existed, there just wasn't the language there is now. LGBT: until the mid-1990s. LGBTQ: 1990 - the early 2000s. LGBTQIA: early 2000s - present day.

⁴ Wulf, *The Invention of Nature*, 60.

⁵ Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson, *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, 29.

⁶ Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson, *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, 3-4.

⁷ Wulf, *The Invention of Nature*, 35.

⁸ Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson, *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, 21.

⁹ ACT UP, *The Queer Nation Manifesto*, 1.

¹⁰ Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson, *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, 344-345.

¹¹ Cisgender is the term used to describe someone who identifies with their birth sex.

¹² The Johns Committee, also known as the Florida Legislative Investigation Committee, was formed in the mid-1950s by the State of Florida to conduct various investigations into the actions of the LGBT community and the NAACP. The committee was active until the mid-1960s. In 2019, two Florida State Legislators introduced a motion to issue an apology to the victims of the Johns Committees witch hunts. The motion is currently pending approval.

¹³ *Homosexuality and Citizenship in Florida: A Report of the Florida Legislative Investigation Committee. Tallahassee: Committee*, 7.

¹⁴ Townsend, *The Leatherman's Handbook II*, 27.

¹⁵ Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, 275.

¹⁶ Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, 290.

¹⁷ Santos, *Tropical Kitsch: Mass Media in Latin American Art and Literature*, 94.

¹⁸ Santos, *Tropical Kitsch: Mass Media in Latin American Art and Literature*, 79.

¹⁹ Santos, *Tropical Kitsch: Mass Media in Latin American Art and Literature*, 91.

²⁰ Cutwater and Boe, *Florida Kitsch*, 5.

²¹ Tchotchke is Yiddish word used to describe something that is a small object, typically something that is useless junk. It's a word I grew up with. It's a word that is part of my Ashkenazi Jewish culture.

²² "13 Colorful Facts About Crayola." Mental Floss. March 31, 2017. Accessed November 21, 2018. <http://mentalfloss.com/article/65779/13-colorful-facts-about-crayola>.

- ²³ Holliday and Potts, *Kitsch!: Cultural Politics and Taste*, 3.
- ²⁴ Holliday and Potts, *Kitsch!: Cultural Politics and Taste*, 117.
- ²⁵ Cubbs, Arnett, Friis-Hansen, Arnett, and Metcalf, *Mary Lee Bendolph, Gee's Bend Quilts, and beyond*, 8.
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- ²⁹ Morris, *Remembering the AIDS Quilt*, xiv.
- ³⁰ Lateef, Yasir. "The AIDS Memorial Quilt." The Names Project. Accessed October 2018. <http://www.aidsquilt.org/about/the-aids-memorial-quilt>.
- ³¹ https://youtu.be/cpEyQVKif_k

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FIGURES

Figure 1. Stamm, Janie. Photograph, 2018.

Figure 2. Stamm, Janie. *Bitter Baby Sunshine*, 2019. Risograph, 5x7 inches.

Figure 3. Stamm, Janie. Photograph, 2019.

Figure 4. Stamm, Janie. *Give Her What She Wants*, 2017. Installation.

Figure 5. Stamm, Janie. *Birth*, 2018. Fabric, glass beads, felt, yarn, 40x21 inches.

Figure 6. Stamm, Janie. *Come to Me (Spring 2012)*, 2018. Papier mache, wire, conch shell.

Figure 7. Stamm, Janie. *Dorothy*, 2019. Fabric, glass beads, shells, 7x10 inches.

Figure 8. Stamm, Janie. Photograph, 2018.

Figure 9. Stamm, Janie. *Mosquito Mesh Jacket No.1*, 2018. Jacket, glass beads, felt. Photo by Shoog McDaniel.

Figure 10. Stamm, Janie. *Mosquito Mesh Hat No. 1: Citrus Queen*, 2018. Mosquito hat, papier mache, felt, glass beads, wire.

Figure 11. Stamm, Janie. *Juicy Fruit*, 2018. Papier mache, felt, glass beads, wire, 4 inches round.

Figure 12. Stamm, Janie. *CrocoDykes M.C.*, 2018. Felt, glass beads, thread, ribbon, wire.

Figure 13. Stamm, Janie. *CrocoDykes Bite Back*, 2017. Jean vest, felt, ribbon.

Figure 14. Ringgold, Faith. "Tar Beach (Part I from the Woman on a Bridge Series)." Guggenheim. March 20, 2019. Accessed April 23, 2019. <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/3719>.

Figure 15. Gonzalez-Torres, Felix. "'Untitled' (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)." The Art Institute of Chicago. January 01, 1991. Accessed April 23, 2019. <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/152961/untitled-portrait-of-ross-in-l-a>.

Figure 16. Manos, Constantine. 1993. USA. Washington D.C. Gay march. USA. Washington, D.C. 1993. Men sign the AIDS quilt. Accessed April 23, 2019. https://library-artstor-org.libproxy.wustl.edu/asset/AMAGNUMIG_10311544528.

Figure 17. Stamm, Janie. *June 12, 2016* (quilt panel detail), 2019. Felt, glass beads, thread, 9x9 inches.