

Euphoria in Demontopia:
Utilizing screen-printed photo
collage to construct Trans-space

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Abstract

Euphoria In Demontopia is a practice-led research project that explores the very personal yet aspirational desires of my transgender self towards the building of a queer utopia. My practice seeks to reclaim and process the unpredictable nature of violence upon the transgender body. This attempt to process this nature is in relation to a series of experimental methodologies that develop under my self-made term of 'Queer Chaos'. My project sets out to combine a process of photographic collage portraits into an messy embrace of screen printed fabrics. My research questions how this very personal navigation of my queerness can invite queer communities, through means of my mutative spatial installations, into reflective healing away from a hetero-dominant world.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in Acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed: 

Date: 14/05/25

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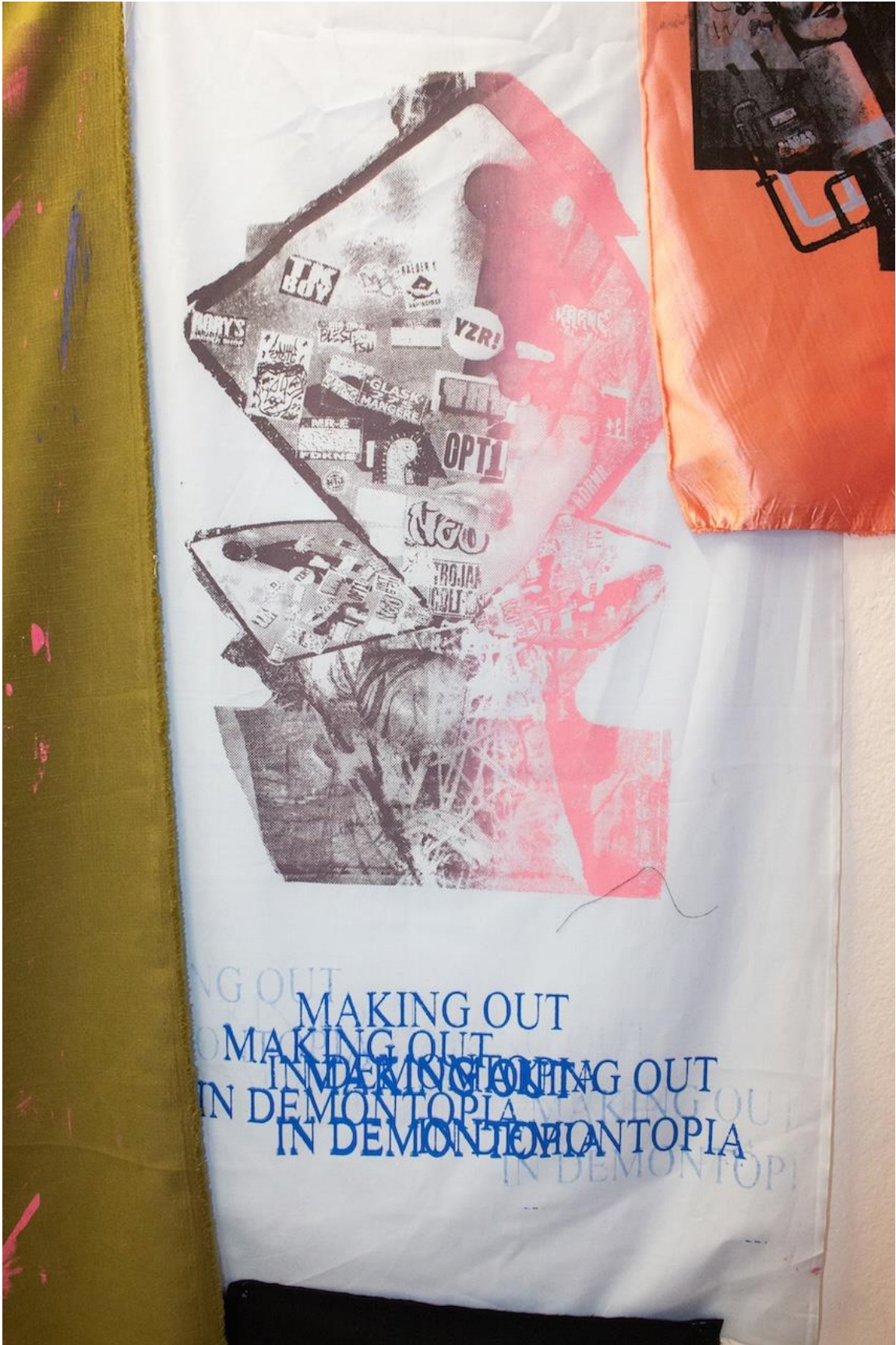


Figure 1, Portrait print with text layered in my studio, March 2025

Introduction

My relationship to photography has always been, in some way, an expressive personal construction of images that celebrates queerness. Growing up in Òtepoti, it became this navigation of the subconscious that would soon lead to my queer revelations of who I am and eventually my transition. Through this realisation, I found that my image-making was always connected to some form of queer desire, which has become the focus of my practice and, in part, this research.

Euphoria in Demontopia is a practice-led research project that explores the very personal yet aspirational desires of my transgender self towards the building of a queer utopia. From my experience of being outwardly queer, I develop a life that is euphoric in the natural states I find myself in my transition, yet at the same time, this existence is in conflict with the unpredictable turbulence of transphobia. My research seeks to process the unbelievable positives of expressing oneself, in a genderqueer context, with an underlying response to the nature of bigotry brewing ever more in society. It questions how my distinctly queer art practice can reclaim the chaos set upon queer bodies, through methodologies that uplift and capture the euphoric nature of nurturing trans self. By setting this project as a ‘diva moment’, the attempts at celebration of queerness are through myself. My research reclaims chaos through a self-made term I refer to as ‘Queer Chaos’ — a position and methodology that asks how one could find security in the very out trans body through purposeful yet sincere means of excess.

In this exegesis, I first discuss my photographic practice towards the connections and transformative moments of a queer utopia in the section ‘It Is all about Utopia Baby/ Photographic Material as the Jumping-Off Point’. I specifically engage with the author José Esteban Muñoz as he situates utopia for queer people as various moments and practices to build a future that is not set up for them. In this, he puts forward utopia as the concept of



Figure 2, Close up image of installation test done in one of the AUT foyers, October 2024

hope.¹ In my practice, I navigate my understanding of Muñoz’s theory of hope by means of an archive built from my various photographic materials. I desire to find processes to activate these images via collage. For the collage process, I take intimate self-portraits and digitally splice them together with my other photographic materials. I am interested in how the distortive qualities of my collages link to my experience of being genderqueer, which also taps into anarchistic notions of disavowing the gender binary. This process leads to an understanding of my image-based methodology as a ‘jumping off point’ from which experimentations with ‘Queer Chaos’ can follow.

In the section ‘The Healing Nature of ‘Queer Chaos’/ what that layering does’, I develop the term ‘Queer Chaos’ as it applies in my research. Thus, for the purposes of this study, the term ‘Queer Chaos’ encompasses a

¹ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York University Press, 2009), 109.

series of different practices that I explore mainly through screen printing my photographic collages and creating space within an experimental mode of installation. Surprisingly, I find this practice engages explicitly with the process of healing traumatic experiences of gender-based violence in my past. Within ‘Queer Chaos’ an interest in printing my collages onto various cut fabrics emerges. I find this process activates moments of euphoria when I embrace a complete mess in the making. This mess develops contextually through author Jack Halberstam’s concept of queer failure². Through his concept of failure, I see my printing practice as a “performance of refusal” or a counteraction to commodification for hetero-dominant tastes.³ I further explore theorist Sara Ahmed’s phenomenological concepts of “queer as a disruption to heterosexually” and “embracing disorientation”, as linked to my process of layering my fabrics in space.⁴

A major part of *Euphoria in Demontopia* is the unapologetic expression of queerness that leans on a broader sense of security. The effective nature of fronting a practice through chaotic means of expressing my trans self is shown in different experimentations in my research. I see that each test or element in my practice should be seen as iterations of effects of ‘Queer Chaos’ taking place. It is how I see this thesis project evolve as my fabric installation process continually expands to include found objects, sculptures, and installation.

In my subsection ‘SELF-CARE FOR ALIENS’, I take time to explore my personal relationship of using makeup to build my transness through my collaborative exhibition *Self-care for Aliens* (2025). In this section, I elaborate on the importance of makeup in relation to my overall research

² Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 94

³ IPAK Centar, “Jack Halberstam on Queer Failure, Silly Archives and the Wild”, 2014, 2:08-2:11, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKDEil7m1j8>.

⁴ Sara Ahmed, “Queer Phenomenology : Orientations, Objects, Others /” (Duke University Press, 2006), 161.

aim of seeking euphoric examples of queer existence.⁵ I attempt to expand on this understanding by experimenting with makeup as a material in my screen print practice. Through making, I encounter a well needed grace towards my trans identity. I extend my trans connection to makeup through the writing of Karla M. Padrón, who broadens my understanding of this by relating specific decolonial efforts through interviews with trans-Latina makeup artist-activists.⁶

In my research, I am also interested in moments of sincerity and care within an excessive queer art practice. In ‘Freak aesthetics and the Rugby Ball is my soul (actually)’ I desire to find thoughtful elements towards queerness not only in my experimentations but also in the practices of queer artists found here in Aotearoa. I reflect on artist 박성환 Sung Hwan Bobby Park’s *BTM Assembly* (2024) to help explore the nature of release for queerness in sculptural form. As part of this exploration, I develop a term that is significant to my research called ‘FREAK AESTHETICS’ which I allocate for Park and me. This term enables me to explore the relationship of being politically thoughtful in queerness through an exterior of distortive expressions.

The section ‘MAKING OUT IN DEMONTOPIA: Use of text in relation to space and queer Art’, explores the possibilities of personal and eccentric text within my prints to seek a broader connection to other trans people, something that I encounter through artistic collective The Killing’s project, *Nuisance* (2021). Through my reading of the collective’s use of arguably crass text in their installations, I suggest that they function as potent

⁵ Euphoric or Euphoria is inspired by the phrase “gender euphoria” or “queer joy” which can relate to the complete happiness trans people can have with their bodies. For myself, when I use this term, it is essentially means that I am referring to the complete joy of oneself relating to the project’s queer themes.

⁶ Karla M. Padrón, “To Decolonise Is to Beautify: A Perspective from Two Transgender Latina Makeup Artists in the US,” *Feminist Review* 128, no. 1 (July, 2021): 156-157,

engagements, calling for self-autonomy for queer bodies.⁷

Finally, in ‘Social Spaces, Space for Queer Connection’, I contextualise my installation practice, questioning how trans spaces can become an open invitation to queer community.⁸ This section returns to Muñoz’s concept of the Queer Utopia, specifically looking at the possibilities within queer spaces that relate to cultivating queer identities.⁹ Through Muñoz’s concept of possibility within space, and the public installation I constructed in Whammy Bar, I desire to reveal through this section the impactful significance of community in relation to cultivating queerness freely.

In staying true to this concept of leading my research in an embrace of ‘Queer Chaos’, I have presented my exegesis in sections that shift around my different research points rather than in a traditional chapter structure. I aim to have whoever reads this feel the euphorically erratic nature that this project was practised upon.

Sorry not sorry x

⁷“The Killing – Nuisance – RM Gallery and Project Space,” accessed November 25, 2024, <https://rm.org.nz/the-killing-nuisance/>.

⁸ The Term ‘trans spaces’ specifically engages with physical and communal spaces that are built directly for trans people to freely exist within.

⁹ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 103.



Figure 3, Early studio installation test, September 2024

1. It is all about Utopia Baby/ Photographic Material as the Jumping-Off Point

The research of *Euphoria in Demontopia*, builds upon the connection of my personal navigation of my queer self with a profound, even political celebration that navigates away from an othered life. I am interested to see what happens when I focus on myself and my experiences in the desire for positive reflection of a transgender narrative. A significant point of this research, and my photographic practice, are ideas linked to utopian theory. I am always interested in the idea of utopia in my work and my style shifts into the otherworldly in moments of finding my queer reality. Not only that, but the rise of a fascist global urge to eliminate trans people really opened my eyes to the possible need for a utopia.¹⁰ This search for utopia is influenced by José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* (2009). In the text, he allocates queerness as positions of "futurity and hope"¹¹, going further to



Figure 4, *View of Help*, March 2024

¹⁰ Judith Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender?* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2024), 48-57.

Also, going into 2024, we just got hit with our most far-right government in years. So that could have also sparked the desire for some sort of utopian project.

¹¹ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 11.

see queers as people who essentially are set up with no hope. This concept of “no hope” essentially involves positions of an unstable or even a vacant future, which he then relates to the need for queer people to make their own future. In my photographic practice, I find myself in deep resonance with the concept of constructing hope and finding queer joy, actualisation, and radical desires. Queer utopian connections to my photography help me understand my subconscious efforts towards queerness. I now see that part of my research seeks to pursue and explore different methodologies in an art practice that always centre on the construction of queer hope.



Figure 5, Orange Web, July 2024

When I started this Masters programme, I began photographing anything around me, from dead leaves on the streets to hormone blockers on my bed (figure 4 and 5). This series of images involves a practice of ‘queering images’ as a euphoric act, rather than the subject matter within them. The collection of these images all hold some traces of queer desire that I find connects to artist and author Erin Manning’s practice of the *Anarchive*. On their website description for this project, *GOAT ISLAND, ANARCHIVE*, she explains that it is an archive that “is not something "we" do. It is something that catches experience in the making. It is something that catches us in our own becoming.”¹²



Figure 6, Photographic image captured for my archive, July 2024

Erin Manning’s concept of the *Anarchive* allows me to think about a more physical role when gathering information that relates to the collection of experiences as part of the archive itself. When looking at my collection of experiences in the form of these abstract images, I know there is some way I could activate them towards an experience of utopia.

¹² Erin Manning. “Goat Island, Anarchive.” Accessed November 25, 2024.

<http://erinmovement.com/goat-island-anarchive>

This idea of seeing my photographic archive as a euphoric grouping waiting to be activated leads to experimenting with digital photographic collage methods. This method gives my images another life as I embrace a distortive flow as seen in *Mother of all Fairies* (figure 7). The collage is an almost cold, freaky image of leaves made to expand into wings and little skull figures existing next to it, all saturated in colours of the pink and blue trans flag. The image taps into fantasy due to this utopia connection I desire by the act of making it through my photographic archive. Yet, there is an almost uneasy feeling that somehow excites me about making something that felt distinctly trans.



Figure 7, *Mother of all Fairies*, July 2024

I begin to incorporate myself into the collages (figure 8). Creating an intimate self-portrait process that involves wearing whatever feels the best and just shooting it by myself in my house. This intimate photographic process, mixed with presenting the most actualised version of my trans identity, creates this second euphoric methodology of image-making. I find this euphoric process of image-making to be accessible in activating utopia for the sake of myself while getting all glammed up and shooting in a calming safe space.



Figure 8, Gurrri Fire, The first attempt of inserting myself into my collages, July 2024

Combining my portraits and this distortive flow into queer images create a potent collage approach that draws on many different elements in my research. The first is tapping into a reflection of my self-identified 'punk' side, which lead me to pursue collage as a technique that I grew up around

in my childhood. In a way, I want to reflect upon this vicious punk style but redirect it via a trans lens, with images captured from my experience. Artist Ava Seymour's series *Rubber Love* (1994-1995)¹³ seems to be in the same neighbourhood creating a distortive world from selected photographic materials. Her series takes on the quality of a vibrant horror show — showing the rich as surreal gimps living their domestic life of luxury that always looks like hell (figure 9). The artworks in her *Rubber Love* series are distinct in their saturated colours, primarily shades of red, which contribute

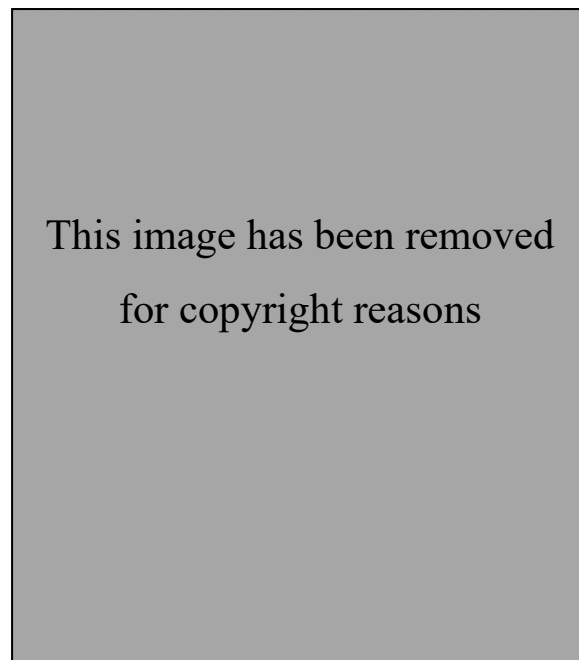


Figure 9, Ava Seymour, *The orange bathroom*, 1994-1995

to the previously mentioned hellish elements of these pictures. Weirdly enough, in the digital constructions of my collages, I utilise a similar distortion of colour, albeit to signify queer liberation. Colour has always been a tool to extenuate my desires for celebration that expands into otherworldly elevations of whomever I am shooting in my practice.

¹³ "Rubber Love," The Arts House Trust, accessed November 25, 2024, <https://collection.artshousetrust.co.nz/objects/6969/rubber-love>.

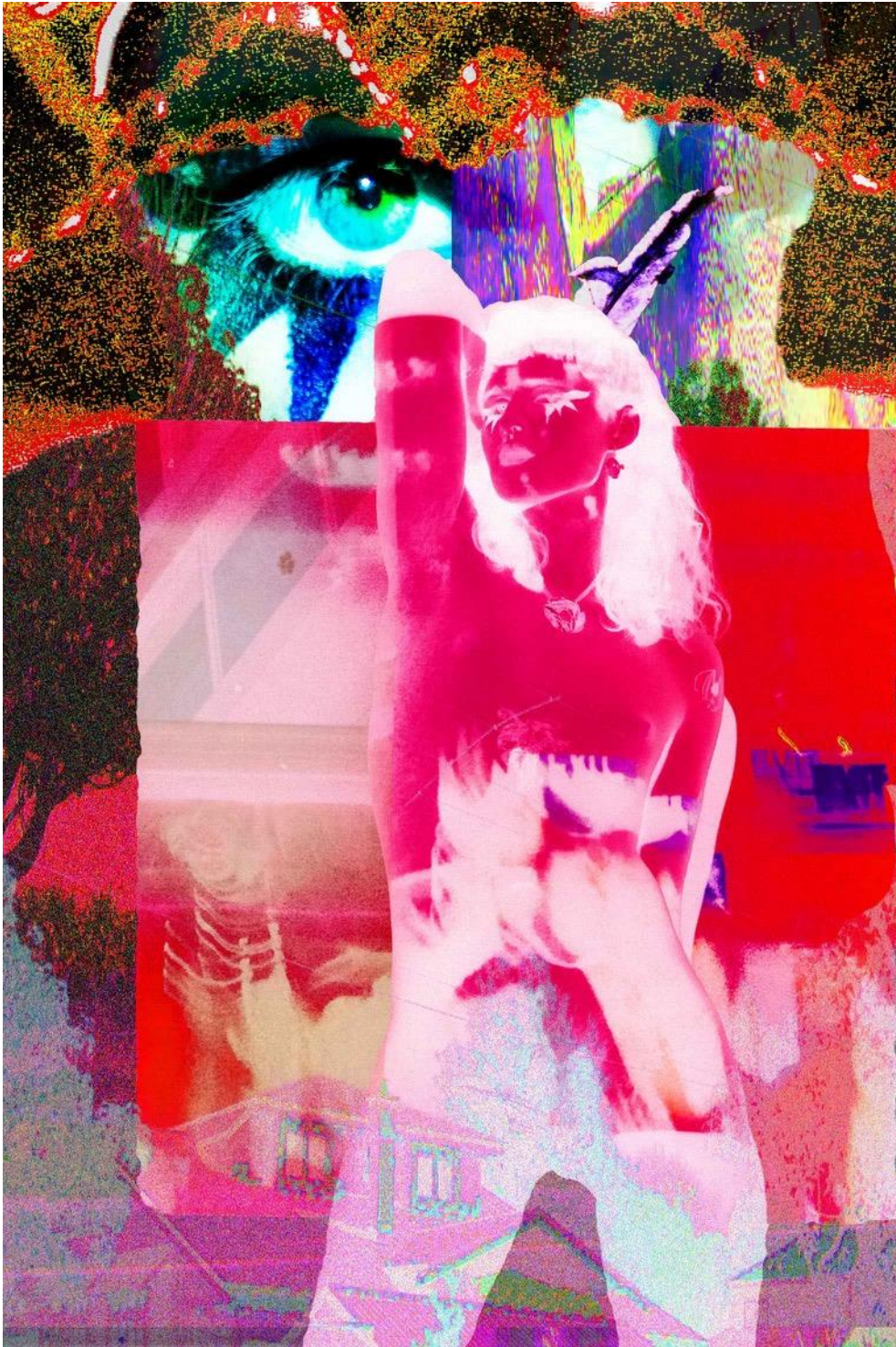


Figure 10, Invert Glitch, September 2024

I situate myself/my practice through this collage artist because similar aesthetic constructions and choices are being made. Distinctly for myself, though, I find that my collages reveal moments of fantasy, disruption,

empowering notions expressing self-beauty¹⁴, and even nodes of violence, all of which centre around my trans identity. These are all made in an improv-like intuitive practice with only the idea of constructing an utopia as the catalyst for most of my works.

Since the images I make are digital, the notion of the glitch comes into thought when contextualising the drastic edits I do to each piece. The idea of the glitch itself becomes a contextual point within my framework of queerness in this collage practice. This embrace of glitch is all due to theorist Legacy Russel's *Glitch Feminism* (2020) and how they link gender non-conformity as a lived glitch concerning the binary systems of gender.¹⁵ This glitch that Russel refers to directly connects to my experiences of being outwardly trans in heteronormative spaces and essentially feeling like an error in the constant perception of how people with more normative values perceive me. This othering placed on myself is sometimes a struggle in the state of just trying to exist freely in these spaces; yet, at the same, like in context of *Glitch Feminism's* live-in state of going against the binary, the glitch within the context of my gender is a natural and secure reality for myself. Through my practice of collage portraits, I seek to embrace and reflect drastic elements of expressions of gender-queerness that are essential in the connection of security for myself. I also find it useful to combine the idea of Russel's Glitch with author Ellis R Herman's theory of Transgenderism as a means to produce radical anarchism.¹⁶ Both schools of thought of the anarchistic contextualisation of gender help explain the desire I have for some of the portraits I make to be a tool that elevates the

¹⁴ This is expressed through highlighting my DIY fashion sense that is integrated in my queer expression.

¹⁵ Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (Verso Books, 2020), 8.

¹⁶ Casey Robertson, "Trans-Feminist Punk in the United States: Collective Action, Activism, and a Libidinal Economy of Noise," in *Smash the System!: Punk Anarchism as a Culture of Resistance*, edited by Jim Donaghey, Will Boisseau, Caroline Kaltefleiter (Active Distribution, 2022), 320. <https://transreads.org/trans-feminist-punk-in-the-united-states-collective-action-activism-and-a-libidinal-economy-of-noise/>

expressions of the non-conformist life I live within my body.

In this process of gender-based anarchistic image-making, I build a sense of unstable feelings within an environment of being trans. The background scenes usually involve a massive clash of images that combine hard reality with queered objects that melt into a dream-like space (figure 10, 11 and 12). Creating scenes with this personal background of mine taps into the disruption of placing a queer body in public, which functions as a euphoric act of breaking boundaries in restrictive spaces. The act of doing so can be quite unstable due to the possible threat of mistreatment that is inspired by real experiences of being stuck in more conservative places. My research questions these ideas of the euphoric duality of queer existence within my collage works by playing with a trans empowerment that is slightly contorted by harsh reality.

The early collages of my research enable me to see that I can experiment by installing them into physical space. I aim to see the possible physical effects of my images in relation to my understanding of Muñoz's utopian theory. Screen printing my images onto fabrics uncovers, for me, Muñoz's connection of hope as it contextualises my digital collage practice as a jumping-off point towards possible experimentations to follow.



Figure 11, Hometown Chaos, January 2025



Figure 12, Pink Guardian, October 2024

2. The Healing Nature of ‘Queer Chaos’/what that layering does

How I build installation spaces is connected to similar focuses of my printed collage fabrics. I am interested in how my research can encounter ‘Queer Chaos’ through means of the visual aesthetics of my collages and installation practices, leading to a messy screen printing methodology. I make messy screen prints within an intentionally continuous practice of experimentation, saturating fabrics to the point that they can fill an entire space with their sheer excess. The relationship I have to excess when representing my trans self comes into possible political undertones as I use excess as a means of breaking away from commodified Neo-Liberal standards of being queer. I want to reveal the trans body in my variation of gender that is not simplified or just tolerated. This counteraction goes further in politically refusing false guises of modernity to dominant systems that impact the lives of so many, as seen in theorist Jasbir K Paur’s *Terrorist*



Figure 13, An early experiment with my fabrics and collages before I took out the photographic print, August 2024

Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times (2017)¹⁷. With this understanding, I seek to evoke different variation of gender expression by fuelling these emotions over a clear image in order to sidestep tolerance in a hetero-dominant world. I pursue the idea of representing my trans emotions by taking out the photographic print and instead having multiple images read all over the viewer at once (figure 13).



Figure 14, *Experiments with Queer Chaos*, November 2024

The emotional effects I attempt to pursue concerns the nature of a self-coined term I develop through my practice called ‘Queer Chaos’ as my work expands into a sense of healing queerness in a thoughtful manner. For me, ‘Queer Chaos’ has a relational nature that is attached to my transness in

¹⁷ Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Duke University Press, 2017), 230.

positive performative ways while also addressing the nature of violence upon the trans body. These positive performances for myself involve constructing the self in a way that may break the conventions of gender and even binary transness. For me the fashion and distinctive makeup I do are euphoric, and function as a significant push towards looks that seem chaotic but are calming for me. ‘Queer Chaos’ is also a reaction to violence. The reason I bring up the theme of violence in my work is due to my upbringing of being queer in Ōtepoti. My upbringing was a rough environment of constant bigotry, and yet it never really stopped me from actualising my most whole trans self in a small town environment.¹⁸ This experience of overcoming all of these harsh experiences for the survival of my true self a what fuels my practice, and is embodied as ‘Queer Chaos’.

Screen-printing is the other expression of healing that comes from my understanding of ‘Queer Chaos’. The act of screen-printing my emotionally charged images helps me reclaim the nature of my body in relation to harm brought upon it in my past. This harm directly links to the unwanted chaos of bigotry towards a trans person like me; so to take any sort of chaos back within my practice opens up new encounters with the euphoric and ultimately queer utopia. To see printmaking within the context of my project is seeing myself place my body ‘in physical force’ into the printing (figure 14)— bringing out my desire to celebrate my queerness into physical space. Through this self-focused methodology, I am looking after myself when printing in relation to negative past experiences of encountering hatred towards my queer reality. In wanting to desire and draw out elements of positive euphoric experiences and aspirations, I begin to double down in this process of celebrating my queer body. I now focus more on the unknown

¹⁸ “To Be Visibly Queer in Octagon ‘Very Scary Indeed,’” Otago Daily Times Online News, July 4, 2024, <https://www.odt.co.nz/opinion/be-visibly-queer-octagon-%E2%80%98very-scary-indeed%E2%80%99>.

This opinion piece written for the ODT reflects the broader issues of being Queer in Ōtepoti. Many of the problems faced by the writer and others are connected to similar instances of bigotry I am trying to process within my ‘Queer Chaos’ print practice.

printed outcomes of my collages because I am interested in the actual feelings they evoke and the traces of those feelings left in the final work.

This idea of capturing a healing nature in my print practice involves wanting to see what are the possibilities that can be taken if I embrace all messy elements within my work (see figure 8). Without any lack of trying, my natural printing state is unbelievably messy or, in other words, ‘chaotic’. Rather than taking a cleaner approach to printing, I want to instead go further towards these messy elements to see what effective processes could be made towards a celebration of the trans body. This approach to mess in screen printing aligns with Jack Halberstam’s ideas of queer failure. The concept of queer failure is embracing and living a constant “performance of descent and refusal” in relation to queer lives in the face of nationalism and capitalism.¹⁹ I consider his idea of living a life of refusal to be pertinent as it is a natural state for myself to live a queer life. For a person like me, fulfilment of self comes from an innate preference for mess over a clean construction of a binary gender. This notion of Queer failure reveals to me that mess is just an outcome of choosing an active state of refusal. I can see this taking place within the traces of my inky hands on my prints, and how images layer over the top of each other in chaotic ways. The fact that I can never seem to cut my fabrics straight does not detract from the excitement I feel in using them within my art practice. The same goes for how I stitch fabrics together by stapling them (I also cannot sew). All these examples of mess or failure become a cherished methodology for working towards a practice of ‘Queer Chaos’. I also suggest that these ideas of representing a messy state of transness are a counteraction of assimilation within hegemonic Western society. In Halberstam’s book *The Queer art of Failure* (2014) he discusses how commodification is only established for straight audiences and tastes.²⁰ Since I am more focused on ‘the lived’ experiences

¹⁹ IPAK Centar, “Jack Halberstam”, 2014.

²⁰ Halberstam, *The Queer Art*, 94.

within my work, I relate this idea to daily life because I find his understanding of commodification can be applied to other hegemonic systems at play as well. It helps me understand the conflicts I engage with when presenting myself in public spaces built for presumably heterosexual cis bodies. I do not want to be, as Halberstam argues, a success in relation to the presentable trans body. It is obvious I cannot, so part of my personal selection of fabrics, and ways of working with them, are built on the notion of this self-desire I have that I know many in my community practice as well.



Figure 15, One early example of embracing a messier approach to screen printing, September 2024

When layering all of these experiences and emotionally charged outcomes into a space, disorientating feelings occur within the installation. My installations are never the same when installed in different spaces/times as I react directly to the space and specifically engage with it when choosing where each fabric is placed. It is vast, but I would not say it is overwhelming, as core feelings of celebration within the works are rushing at viewers when existing in this mutative area.



Figure 16, Close up of installation test with fabrics installed in a studio, December 2024

In critiques and talks with friends who witness my work, there is an engaging push and pull of repeating images that take hold of viewers. In the installation, a joyous disruption is felt when seeing the final prints in space and how the work has the sense of performing *at*. I find great resonance in disruption, and I argue that it is a key part of the utopia I am seeking.

In the concluding chapter of theorist Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), she notes that to queer means to "certainly disrupt the order of things" within heteronormative frameworks.²¹ I am interested in her ideas of

²¹ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 161.

disorientation and how uneasy orientation can become a new embrace. She proposes that “the point is what we do with such moments of disorientation, as well as what such moments can do— whether they can offer us the hope of new directions, and whether new directions are reason enough for hope.”²² Ahmed’s question regarding “what we do” in uneasy moments of change allows me to understand that in my installation practice I am actively seeking hopeful moments of transness through my layering methodology. Based on these considerations, it has become clear to me that my practice of processing chaos, through means of mess and excessive printed fabrics, can lead towards my research position of navigating positive transformations of queerness.

²² Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 158.

3. Freak aesthetics and the Rugby Ball is my soul (actually)

As my project has become more installation and sculptural based, I experimented with making a sculpture of a rugby ball (figure 17). Through this experimenting, I realised that I wanted to tap into my own personal relationship with the found object of the rugby ball. I would be lying if this is not at first a confrontational choice for me. The association of rugby back home is tied to my experience of homophobic men. It was a caution of violence to the point that my friends and I have had to look up game scores to see how crazy town was going to be on a night out. I want my rugby ball sculpture to channel these experiences due to the local narrative of a transgender experience that I find essential to tell.



Figure 17, Rugby Ball sculpture, September 2024

I view working with the rugby ball as another iteration of practicing ‘Queer Chaos’. This time it is even more visceral, using materials such as choker spikes, two-dollar gems, and even cheap acrylics along with neo-pink spray

paint. Apart from the insertion of the choker spikes, which I want to resemble a mohawk flare on both ends, all other materials I use for the ball are made intuitively, letting whatever queer desires manifest in the physicality of the work such that I feel euphoric when gazing at the final outcome (see figure 10).

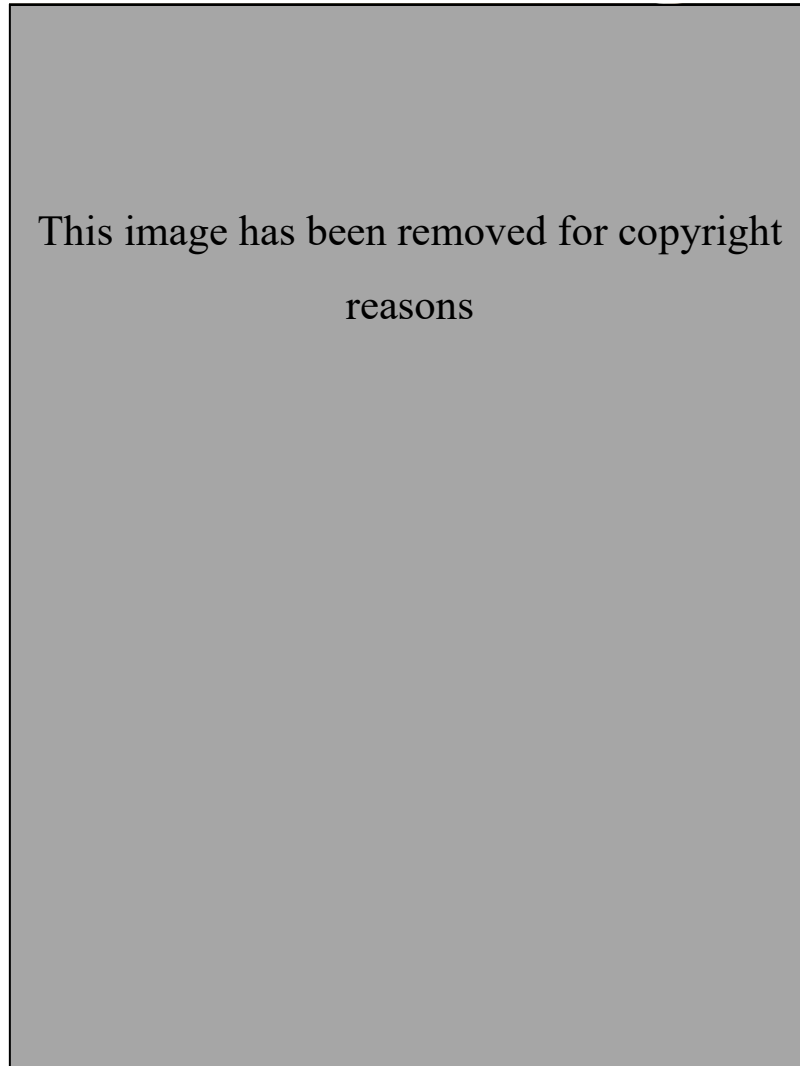


Figure 18, 박성환 Sung Hwan Bobby Park, *BTM Assembly*, Objectspace, 2024

I came up with the term FREAK AESTHETICS in my research to define my sculptural efforts. FREAK AESTHETICS can be found in plenty of works from queer artists, such as the various projects of art collective The Killing or filmmaker Greg Araki's *Teen Apocalypse* trilogy (1993-1997). In particular artist 박성환 Sung Hwan Bobby Park's *BTM Assembly* (2024)

helps to define this mode of my practice.

In this series, Park crafted ceramic bullet-proof helmets that reflect the artist's experience serving in the Korean military.²³ In 2018, the Korean government had catfished some servicemen to then out, interrogate, and cut off their access to health services for being queer. In response to this treatment, Park made each helmet “with imagined personalities – outrageous, flamboyant and free to embody their queer identities.”²⁴ When I look at them, I can feel the repression finally be broken out in full force. Thousands of eyes cover one of them, and a large mouth with cum dripping out in another (see figure 18). All are passionately distortive in their performance of queerness. These works reveal outrageous, in-your-face visual aesthetics that compassionately help navigate queer communities away from the treatment they usually face in existing in systems that are set out to harm them. This I argue, is a release away from normative systems that cause harm or shame upon queer people. For Sung Hwan, they seem like a release from the harsh treatment of the military. Whether they are for the imaginary does not drop their significance because it is fuelled behind a real injustice that is happening in the now.

I see Sung Hwan's artworks as beings which can exist with all their messy attachments. When I relate all these concepts towards the thought process and methodology of my rugby ball, I see that desire to exist untethered to any repression in the maximum way I can. FREAK AESTHETICS is a process of stripping away a restrictive hold on a life that negates an expression of queerness. This breaking away is achieved by use of drastic aesthetic choices that refuses to be pinpointed to any sense of normalcy.

²³ “박성환 Sung Hwan Bobby Park BTM: Assembly,” Art News Aotearoa, September 16, 2024, <https://artnews.co.nz/exhibition-listing/%eb%b0%95%ec%84%b1%ed%99%98-sung-hwan-bobby-park-btm-assembly/>.

²⁴ “박성환 Sung Hwan Bobby Park BTM”, 2024.

When my rugby ball is done, I see it as a complete reflection of me, another self-portrait in a project of self-portraits. This reflection is due to an unseen revelation that attaches to my upbringing and whānau. Long story short, my family on my mum's side are all passionate about the sport and all my cousins are involved in it in some way. I have the most potent love for my cousins because they sincerely supported my transition and my sibling's queerness. When I saw one of them last year I realised.... I actually enjoy rugby. So, I found the process of sculpturing the ball allows me to tap into that, while also enabling me to celebrate the whole expression of my trans-self as someone coming from a small town environment in the South. In other words, the ball represents a messed up, pink, celebration within myself that is manifested in the sculptural object.



Figure 19, Rugby Ball sculpture close up, September 2024

4. The Progression of Mutative Spaces

This section discusses three major experimentations that focus on installing fabric. Each experiment opens a broader understanding of what exactly I am building towards in relation to a trans space. More importantly, each tested space allows different elements of play to be enacted in the installation process that come through my different print-fabric processes. I note the versatility of how my fabrics adapt to certain areas and installation spaces as a key methodology of establishing a ‘Mutative space’. The term Mutative space refers to how my fabrics adapt to a given space in my installation process. I use this term to reflect the experimental nature of my layering process, which also accounts for the distortive qualities taking place. Also, my use of scale allows me to see the significance of that versatility with each completed experiment.



Figure 20, First mutative installation in my studio, September 2024

The first Mutative space installation occurred in my tight three-walled studio: a compact space (figures 20 and 21). In adapting, or as I like to see it, mutating my studio, a multiple queering effect happens by covering every

white space with a hyper-layering effect of fabrics. Some fabrics reach out across the walls and extend further towards the floor. At the centre of the installation, a ‘runway’ of cut-stapled fabrics leads straight to the rugby ball sculpture, which is presented as if ready for kick-off towards all the project’s themes.



Figure 21, Incorporation of Rugby Ball in the first install test, September 2024

The studio space made my expressions of queerness quite confronting due to its tight enclosed spacing. A couple of months later, I installed in a larger foyer at AUT (see figure 22). The larger open space enables a grander scale

for my fabrics to cover, which creates more breathing room. I feel more space creates a greater sense of healing, euphoria, and aspiring confidence in queerness. Due to the foyer's public location, my fabrics get to mutate the space by bringing those who walked past into the project's world. This second install established the idea of an effective adaptability within my fabrics in relation to space, showing that even a simple foyer can be turned into a playground for *Demontopia* to exist.



Figure 22, Second Mutative install test in AUT foyer, October 2024

The impact that my fabrics have when adapting to any given place shows that this is a project of queering space. The notion of queering space refers to how the trans body can queer an inhabited space. As noted in the discussion of Sara Ahmed's concept of disorientation, the spaces I build as part of this project are centred on a distinctly queer disruption that cultivates healing for myself and possibly queer viewers. There is another concept discussed by Ahmed which involves the idea of wiggle room²⁵. On her blog

²⁵ feministkilljoys. "Wiggle Room.", 2014.

feministkilljoys, Ahmed uses the term wiggle to mean taking up space in a room that does not accommodate certain bodies. She thinks of social categories as rooms, which she then relates to notions of gender with the social expectations of being a woman in restrictive or tight spaces of life. The notion of wiggling is therefore tied to the urge to deviate within a space. Ahmed describes this process as follows:

you know those moments when you try and fit in a space that is smaller than you are. You wiggle now with purpose; by wiggling you make more room for yourself.²⁶

It is clear that the purpose and the act of taking up space connects to the reasons behind my installation process. The concept of wiggling is pushed to a very intentionally drastic level within my practice in an attempt to embrace the healing nature of chaos through my installations. Whatever space I am given to produce this project of celebration of trans space through myself, I take it to its fullest with the idea of doing it for my kin as well.

²⁶ *feministkilljoys*. “Wiggle room.”, 2014.



Figure 23, Third Mutative installation in larger studio, Image 1, December 2024



Figure 24, Chicken wire sculpture drenched in printed fabrics, December 2024

I see my final installation test of space as greater extenuations of a chaotic rendition of Ahmed's wiggle room theory, with the third test being done in a much larger studio space (figures 23 to 27). Installing it within a room with wider dimensions means that those dimensions themselves can be mutated with my fabrics to give an area dedicated towards the trans body. These

install methods extend all the way to the floor with many experimentations of larger grounded pieces, and even chicken wire sculptures that shoot out of the floor, drenched by my fabrics. This installation becomes a full exploration of excess, which falls under the concept of doing the absolute most to build this queer utopian space.



Figure 25, Third Mutative installation in larger studio, Image 2, December 2024

One interpretation I have of Sara Ahmed's idea of wiggle room is that to make space for oneself is to essentially build enough to be freely unapologetic in queer existence. For my installations, I find that my installations bring a complete being of a queerness that is unashamed in being trans. This is achieved through the repetitive overlay of photographic fabrics, the clash and marriage of colours, and finding unorthodox ways to cram every piece I have in space. The essential adaptableness or, as I call them, 'mutations' in my experiments are extensions of a personal reflection of trying to adapt to this queer life of mine, with no sense of hiding in heteronormative spaces. This is because queer is just innate; it is a performance I cannot let go at any time and do not desire to. My position is communal with those who are my kin and express similar desires. So in

doing the most with installing my fabrics is to take an ode and celebrate unashamed expression. Of course, this is a struggle for some queer people due to the harsh situations of being openly queer in arguably most spaces in life. So, in a broader sense, my installations fall back onto the idea of creating an utopia, calling for those who must go on the down-low of queer self in public life to be seen. Yet simultaneously my installs are a portrait of those who live a very out life, such as myself, and those of my community.



Figure 26, Third Mutative installation in larger studio, Image 3, December 2024



Figure 27, Experiment with layering my fabrics onto a chair for the third install test, December 2024

5. MAKING OUT IN DEMONTOPIA: Use of text in relation to space and queer art

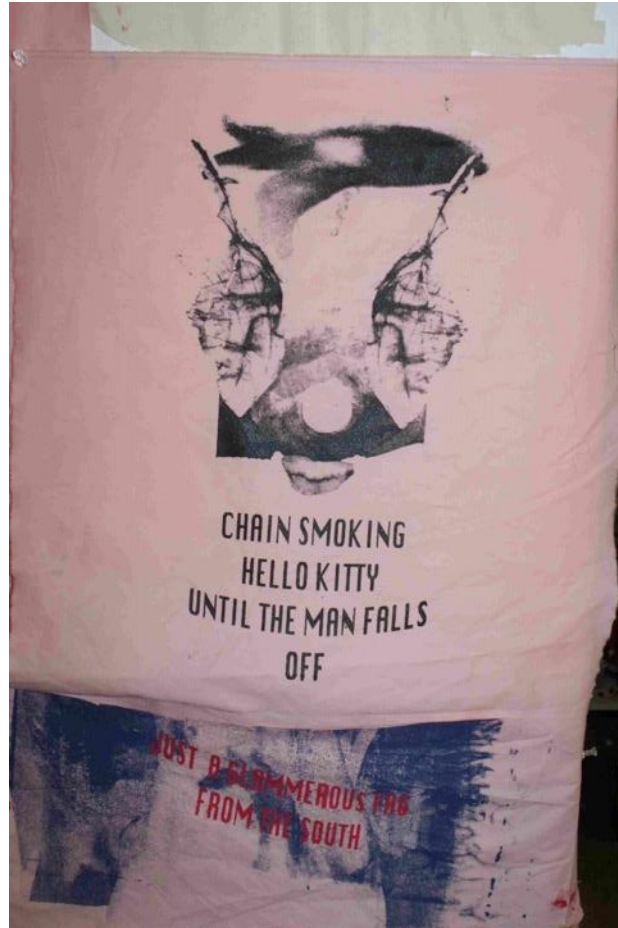


Figure 28, "CHAINSMOKING HELLO KITTY." print with "GLAMEROUS FAG" print layered behind it, September 2024

The introduction of using text in some of my print works is, at first, another test that goes further towards the personal in reflecting and celebrating my queerness. I first experimented with the phrases “CHAINSMOKING HELLO KITTY TILL THE MAN FALLS OFF” and “JUST A GLAMMEROUS FAG FROM THE SOUTH” (see figure 28). Both are attempts to reflect the lived-in narratives of my upbringing. I make these phrases to be euphorically unhinged in their configuration so as to uplift aspects of my queer existence. The inclusion of these phrases offers a

humorous break within a sea of images, which establishes a queer connection. To elaborate on this method within my work, I am drawn to examples of key practices and works of The Killing. All are insanely queer, of course, and they have used text in a way that is both radical and simultaneously able to connect with queer communities.



Figure 29, The Killing, Nuisance, Room Gallery, 2021

In The Killing’s exhibition *Nuisance* (2021), held at Room Gallery, the artists constructed a radical space that reflected ideas of the queer body concerning self-autonomy. The group seemingly also embraced the essence of being annoying, yet this was turned towards a liberatory queer manner.²⁷ The entire space was devoured in pink and covered in multi-media artworks that felt infinite in their hyper-fem glory. The artwork is euphorically confrontational but also embodies a quality of freedom through chaotic aesthetic choices and deep references to queer communities.

In relation to my research, what interests me the most are the graffitied phrases scattered around the space (figure 29). Each phrase feels like a voice

²⁷ “The Killing – Nuisance ”, 2024.

deliciously unhinged calling at me, with some of my favourites being “Eggs bene and dick” and,” she pussy”. Their phrases are also political with some referencing reproductive autonomy, for example: “to live is to stop my reproductive system”; something that resonates significantly with a trans person like me. I feel this immense connection in engaging with the collective, whose artwork releases voices of liberation, horny crassness and all. I think the filth²⁸ is a compelling nature of excitement for queer communities to engage and be invited into space. This is because the loose eccentricity politically strips away harsh realities of being queer by entering



Figure 30, SCARING HETS ON THE REMIX, November 2024

²⁸ Filth, from my understanding and use in the context of my writing, relates to exciting queer representations of mess that are made specifically for various queer communities. For me, this word is incredibly positive.

a space of play and being unapologetically excited for othered identities. It is clear that queer artists like me use language as an expressive liberatory voice that speaks for communities who are forced to be silenced. In this project, part of my research desire is to help break that silence through continuing alongside queer practices that call for the rights of queers through visual engagements. For me, the construction of queer space plays into the mahi towards political engagement, and the phrases accentuate this by tapping into very core references to my trans communities. All the text I assemble in my practice fit into this understanding of first conveying an engagement with my desires and simultaneously positioning them for my community as an utopian space. All phrases bring out some element of my trans experience and some also make references to queer spaces and communities. For example, the “HELLO KITTY” phrase references the character’s association with Sapphics as an initial connective point together when out in the open. Others, like “SCARING HETS ON THE REMIX”, “Leg hairs dipped in Gurrll Fire”, and “GLAMMEROUS FAG” create a blissful ownership of being othered and embracing that.



Figure 31, Use of "Leg hairs dipped in Gurrll fire" in print work, October 2024

Certain queer practices like mine, and ones I am interested in, all focus on embracing voice as a means of ownership for the queer body. This embracement is an effective beauty when witnessing them in space. They are simultaneously expressions for the maker and the audience in mind; both can come together in any space in which the artworks are presented. Their confrontational factor is just that stance of actualisation at its fullest sense in the reflection of ‘non-conventional’ existences of gender non-conformity. That alone—which readers of this exegesis may have gotten by my reference to previous experiences in the project—is enough to cause public and systematic turmoil upon us. That is why voice in the matter of an art practice like this is key to setting out and expressing the construction of printed trans space.

6. SELF-CARE FOR ALIENS

Self-Care for Aliens (2025) is a collaborative exhibition project between my brother Ezra and I, which was exhibited at The Depot in Devonport. From my perspective, *Self-Care* taps into my project's research question of how I can insert into my practice experiences of being queer in a small town and how I can extend that into utopian forms of celebration. The core aim of this exhibition is looking at the survival of queerness by embracing materials that helped construct my transition and bringing that out through my printing practice. The materials I use feature different forms of makeup, which serve to create an experimental approach to my practice of seeking queer utopia.



Figure 32, *Southern Glitch*, February 2025

The process involves using transparent ink as the base to be able to print, and the makeup placed on top of the screen to create all the colour. This relationship with using makeup to produce the visibility of my self-portraits, where the portraits maintain the same constructive desires of *Demontopia* in

the image-making, reveals a more distortive essence of unknown outcomes I have to embrace within the prints. The act of placing makeup on the screen itself became this immense physical act since quite a lot is needed to get any sort of clarity into the fabrics. In this makeup process, I end up truly actualising a practice of 'Queer Chaos'. I grab two-dollar lipsticks and smear them all around the screen with this jagged motion due to the scarcity I have with the cosmetics. I use eyeshadow pallets and crush a whole shade on top as well. The mixture of makeup printed onto the fabrics left traces of lipstick lines into the images, with lippy ending up being the boldest in colour in the results overall. Combining the lipsticks with the eyeshadow creates a ghostly hue in the images that sometimes makes the colour mutate



Figure 33, Southern Glitch, Close up, February 2025

due to using the same inked screen repetitively (figure 32 and 33). All these experiments were initially made on top of large two-metre fabric cuts that combine certain collages together.

What I find in this project of developing an experimental process with makeup is seeing an essential trace of queer spirit be left behind in the results. This queer spirit is my understanding of the significance makeup has had on the construction of my life through the embrace of experimenting with myself. This experimentation is positively potent in making yet it is radically confronting or alien in normative spaces, similar to my life in Ōtepoti. I essentially take all these ideas of experimental construction quite literally within the making of this project, as I find that prints both hold the moments of queer narratives within the image itself and of the traces of projecting them into physical space. The images being developed with makeup allow for a tangible connection of chaotically building queerness to be felt. I can feel them due to the jagged lipstick lines and the actual materiality of makeup, such as some of the shimmer left behind in the works. These experiments reveal an emotive nature towards the act of printing itself, which reflects my desire to find active moments of queer hope that can be seen within the artworks.



Figure 34, gutter girl, Depot, March 2025

I argue for the importance that cosmetics can have upon transitioning and building a real self for a person like me. *Self-Care For Aliens* is that opportunity to do so in a tangible way. Throughout my research, I'm looking for this relationship between transgenderism and makeup. "*To decolonise is to beautify: a perspective from two transgender Latina makeup artists in the US*" (2021), although culturally very different from my experience, and relating to experiences I could never have as a Pākehā woman, reveals to me just the sheer effectiveness within which trans people can use makeup on themselves. In this text, author Karla M. Padrón interviews two trans-Latina beauty artists about "makeup rituals"²⁹ that bring community-led self-ownership of self and beauty in the face of colonial rule. Both discussed artists, Renata García and Brenda Del Rio Gonzalez, teach their trans communities how to do makeup to extenuate their beauty. Del Rio Gonzalez goes deeper in seeing the practice of makeup as "healing our shredded souls" from many "roadblocks: HIV, substance abuse, immigration inequality, discrimination."³⁰ Essentially, she suggests that beautifying for someone like her is to reveal life within her as a form of showing off to a harsh environment. Brenda asserts that, in putting on makeup, "you are demonstrating that you are alive!"³¹ These makeup artists beautifully elaborate on the connection of how makeup on a trans face builds a positive life within oneself. This idea deeply resonates with my explorations of effectively shaping myself.

The idea of self-care, from the exhibition's title, relates to how the distinctive looks I present of myself are a nourishment of the life that I have always had within me. Due to both the lightness of colour in the makeup prints and the wide clean space of gallery (where *Self-Care for Aliens* was exhibited) an interesting feeling of grace is established. I can see this

²⁹ Padrón, "To Decolonise Is to Beautify", 162.

³⁰ Padrón, "To Decolonise Is to Beautify", 161.

³¹ Padrón, "To Decolonise Is to Beautify", 161.

specifically with my piece *gutter girl*, a 2.5m cut of blue fabric with a collage of me naked that is laced with graffiti and another hectic floral pattern printed all around me (figure 34). The posing of myself, the blue fabric and even the hint of orange printed on my portrait create a calming piece for myself through this experimentation with makeup. This artwork reveals to me that this whole series demonstrates my yearning for peace for myself, even if the construction is rebellious or messy. The artworks follow through in that spirit of being distortive yet also signifying that I am looking after myself. *Self-Care for Aliens* seems to reveal the respect and celebration towards the power within to actualise queerness, which I argue is distinctive in my experiences of transness.



Figure 35, Curtain For Mothership Natasha, Depot, March 2025

7. Social Spaces, Space for Queer Connection

The complex and excessive nature of my install practice is set towards genderqueer (and allies) with whom I find kinship, hoping they all can exist within my art space and be seen within its chaos. It is inspired by those places where I can cultivate and exist freely with others. Using myself in print is driven by the hope of being able to mutate space and, in return, invite others to join in the outcomes of my installations. I luckily got to create this kind of social space in an installation of *Demontopia* I did in the public bar of Double Whammy in late 2024 (see figure 36 and 37).



Figure 36, Installation for *A.V CLUB*, With projection, Whammy Public bar, November 2024

This public bar reads to me as the most natural place for my installation to exist as it offers a backdrop for performance and socialisation. It came as no surprise since my first safe space to explore identity and connection was the underground music scene of Ōtepoti, and those experiences charged many of the workings of this project. These elements of queer community and the



Figure 37, Installation for *A.V CLUB*, Image 2, Whammy Public bar, November 2024

spaces that can facilitate it are key points in my research that I navigate through my practice of chasing a queer utopia by layering my fabrics.

Muñoz reflects on his youth in L.A punk communities and the venues attached to it, as spaces for himself to practice his queerness and a “self that was in the process, a self that has always been in the process of becoming.”³² He goes further by looking at his photographer friend Kevin MCarthy’s images of empty stages in their local punk scene as holding this powerful potentiality of something Muñoz calls a “Utopian performative charge.”³³ From my understanding, this “performative charge” refers to the idea of the potential transformation of alternative orientations, such as Queerness, which can be expressed within spaces like these.³⁴ My layering practice intends to find its habitat in creative and communal spaces. The

³² Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 100.

³³ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 103.

³⁴ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 103.

installations are held within my connection I have to the effectiveness of queer transformation that can take place within local alternative spaces. I find it important to represent my personal history with alternative spaces as it reflects a continuous queerness that can be nurtured within oneself. On a good night within these spaces, with friends, community, and lovers alike, they become examples of experiencing life away from a hetero-dominant capitalist world. So, part of my installation presents this sense of release in both the printed fabrics themselves and how they adapt to whatever space they inhabit. I have a feeling that these fabrics must live and that there are places for them and the activity of living an alternative life, both present and future; a backdrop for events that mirror utopia.

Conclusion

Euphoria in Demontopia

This personal euphoric reflection of my trans-self in utopian concepts of “futurity and hope” is primarily connected to building a potent embrace of chaos within my practice.³⁵ That hope stretches out into a photographic anarchist approach to developing a type of archive that reflects my trans desires. I combine these desires into collages that become the starting point of distortive celebrations of queerness in physical space. I find that to celebrate queerness for myself is to essentially pursue every aspect of chaos. My project has consciously created a practice that calls for a response to violence upon the trans body. Screen printing helps me process experiences that have affected me for so long, and together with the excess of those fabrics, creates a shifting orientation that brings me peace. My printing practice is a process of reclaiming the chaotic nature that is projected on the trans body; printing encapsulates my queer desires by building physical space through my fabric works. I am working towards overcoming trauma and finally being gleeful in cultivating my transness. I hope these desires being smashed together allow for the true performance of a safe space for queerness to soar.

My research, including its distortions, excessiveness, and even the filth that is propelled into the artworks, connects to broader sensibilities of care within queer art practices. In this embrace of mess within my fabrics, my print practice is also a full-on process that politically taps into Jack Halberstam’s ideas of “refusal”³⁶ to live a heteronormative and commodified life.³⁷ My attempts at trying to become confrontational in reflecting on my relationship with the homophobia I have faced back home

³⁵Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 11.

³⁶ IPAK Centar, “Jack Halberstam”, 2014.

³⁷ Halberstam, *The Queer Art*, 94.

is illustrated through a discussion of engaging in a sculptural practice using rugby balls. My ‘FREAK AESTHETICS’ is an approach that engages the release of my queerness that essentially makes the creation of my rugby balls into another euphoric self-portrait process that I can explore further. By embracing ‘FREAK AESTHETICS’, by amping up absurdity within the sculptural element of my of practice, I have developed a practice that focuses on my, and my communities, personal liberation.

I have found that in the practices of *Demontopia*—with respect to my methodologies of yearning for queer installation space—are attached to broader hopeful desires for communal queer connection that relate to securing the nature of queer lives. This process has come to life within the various experimentations of building an innately trans space. Through various navigational attempts to express idealistic moments of my transness, I have developed a queer relationship with space that I hope can reach out to other queer people in my community. This desire to reach out is because of the importance of the queer experience and curation of self being tied to spaces that kindly embrace people like me. It is the queer person’s utopia because so many spaces in daily life do not accept and ‘other’ the naturalness of being trans or queer. I want to process all those moments of celebration and harsh political reality into the utopia I have enabled through experimental installation with my fabrics and sculptures.

I hope for exactly two things going forth beyond this research project: that the Mutative spaces of *Demontopia* can continually exist and adapt, beyond being backdrops, so that queer communities can flourish. Secondly, that the chaos within all my artworks can speak and fuel the hope for queer people in our day-to-day lives. I also hope that these different iterations of experimental moments of excess can become a blueprint of how a transgender art practice can build upon and process the many complexities in the existence of being trans. My practice exemplifies taking pure ownership of a very outward existence of queerness. It is how I have approached creating in my own practice as a way to explore all the various

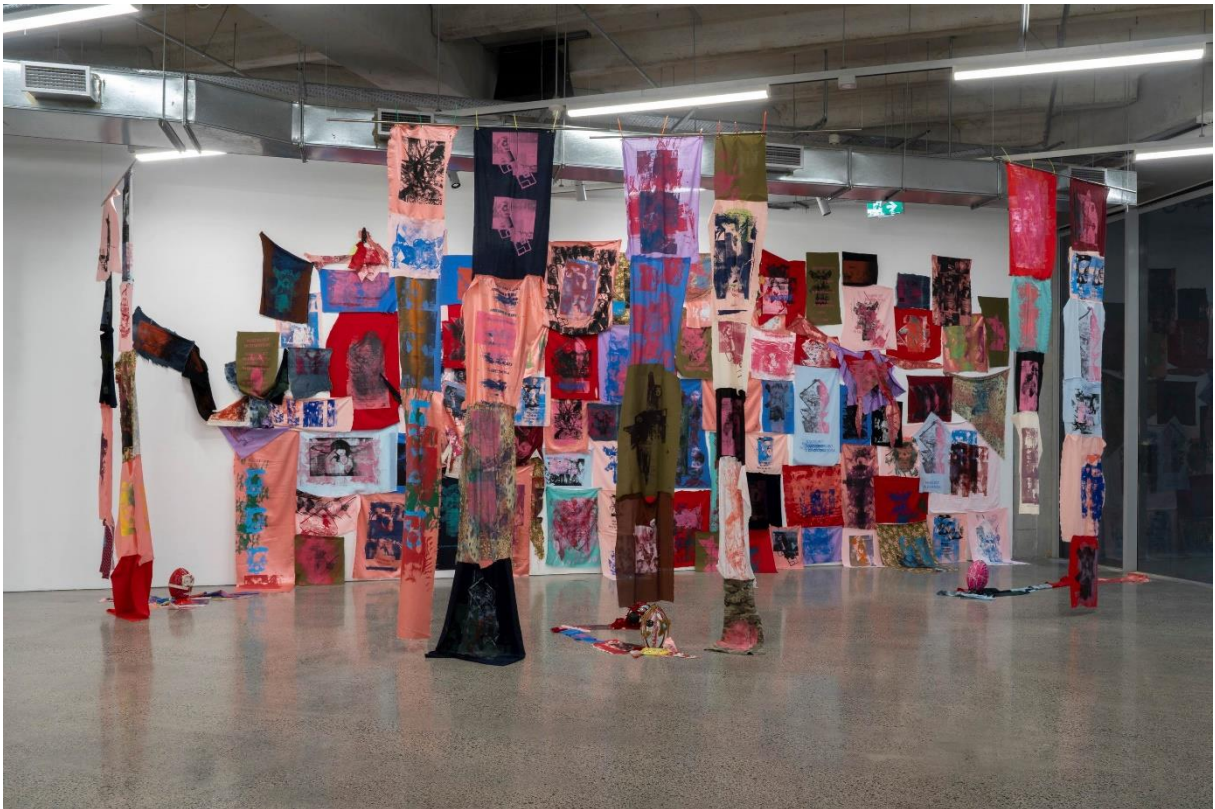
experiences of coming from that small city of Ōtepoti, and I will always be thankful for that.

Appendix: Documentation of Exhibition

Master of Visual Arts Graduating Exhibition

Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery 1

EUPHORIA IN DEMONTOPIA



View of entire *DEMONTOPIA INSTALLATION*, 2025, photographed by Paul Chapman



Wide shot of wall installation for *DEMONTOPIA INSTALLATION*, 2025, photographed by Paul Chapman



Close up of wall installation with a star print experimentation, 2025, photographed by Natasha Munro Hurn



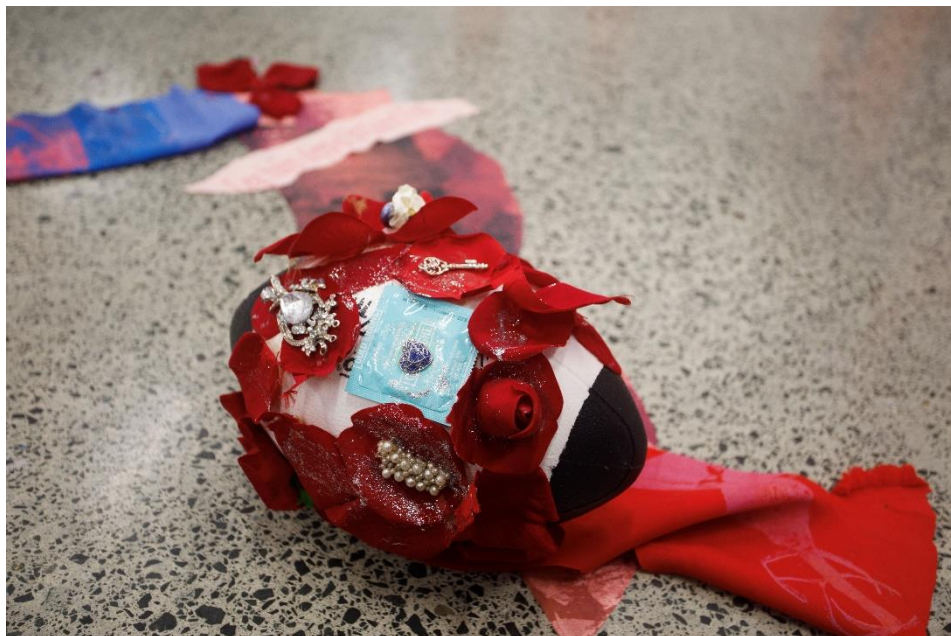
Close up of *Demontopia Installation*, 2025, photographed by Natasha Munro Hurn



Butch and hopeless sapphic sculptures in the middle of *DEMONTOPIA INSTALLATION*, 2025, photographed by Natasha Munro Hurn



Image of *Soul of a Southern Queer* installed on a train of fabric prints, 2025, photographed by Natasha Munro Hurn



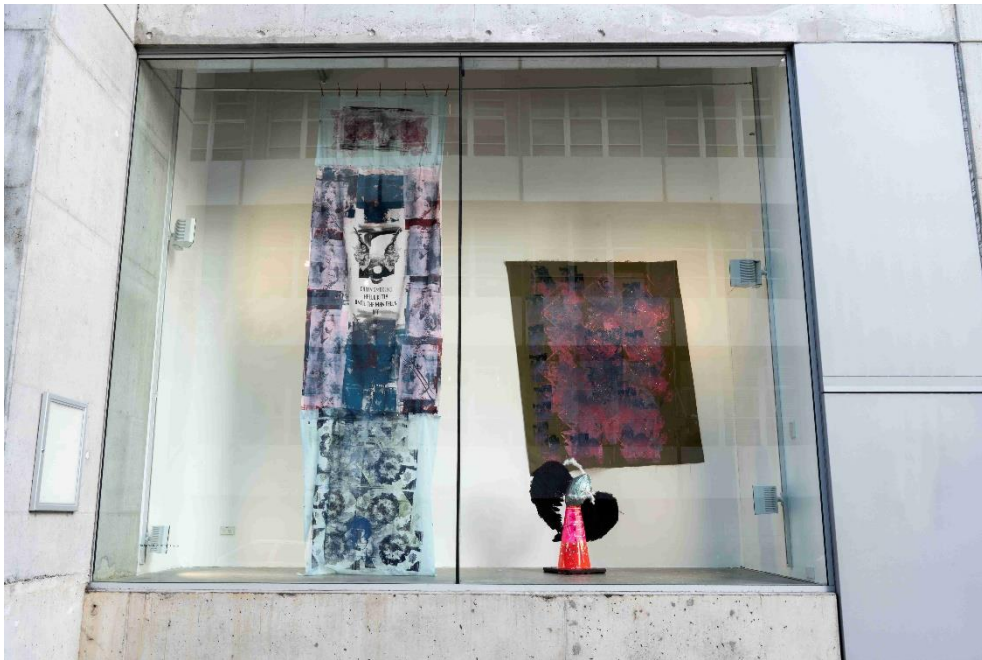
Close up of *hopeless sapphic*, 2025, photographed by Natasha Munro Hurn



Image of *Hello Kitty and my Purse*, 2025, photographed by Natasha Munro Hurn



Image of *He/They son*, 2025, photographed by Natasha Munro Hurn



Street view of window space installation with *Smoking Hello Kitty Banner*, *Dunnerz Girl* and *body feeling*, 2025, photographed by Paul Chapman



Image of *Smoking Hello Kitty Banner* in window, 2025, photographed by Natasha Munro Hurn



Image of *Dunnerz Girl* in window space, 2025, photographed by Natasha Munro Hum



Close up of *Dunnerz Girl* cone, 2025 photographed by Natasha Munro Hurn

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