

# HOT HOUSE

Young Curators, New Ideas V  
Detroit Art Week

Work by Kameron Neal  
Curated by Marian Casey

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How do we relate to the precarity, comfort, and joy of intentional queer spaces? What is our role in remembering and recording those spaces once they're gone?

At *HotHouse* Kameron Neal exhibits site-specific video installations exploring the ways in which we encode our history and use technology to craft compelling performances of self. Kameron maps the peculiar intelligences of queer, colored, and abject bodies through kinetic environments of stop-action photography, glitch, live video, and bodily fluids that serve as arenas for him to learn how to touch and be touched.

This first solo presentation of Kameron's work explores two parallel and connected histories. The first, three years of Kameron's creative output, an intimate, vulnerable examination of sense of self, queer Black identity, control, and attraction. The second, a regional history of queer creative placemaking: throughout the 1990s, self-taught artist Scott Swoveland painted over 500 unrepentantly queer murals on the windows of Houston bar Mary's, an action of confident communal ownership and political protest. Kameron's autobiographical explorations are here contextualized by Swoveland's story and broader questions of queer spaces, their relation to race, legacy, and cycles of regeneration, erasure and violence.

Kameron's work understands a complex and uncomfortable relationship to the queer culture celebrated by Mary's; spaces where Black queer people were often unwelcome, and where depictions of idealized white gay bodies dominated. His work approaches his own more interior approach to sex and relationships and the evolution of queer encounters into the digital. Yet he also continues to seize at themes confronted by past queer generations: in *Theatre Kids*, a young gay couple candidly and jokingly discuss death, memory, and legacy. *The Odd Throuple*, based on the the Grimm's Fairytale *The Mouse, The Bird, And The Sausage*, explores intentional community, home, and queer relationships with a hint of the absurd. *Make Out/Break Out*, like Swoveland's murals, forefronts the vulnerability and radicality of queer sexuality.

Swoveland and Neal's work sit in the context of centuries of queer communities using art and design as visual signifiers to designate spaces as non-hetero-dominant. It is from this narrative that the exhibition derives its name: Baudelaire, Huysmans and others of the 19th century Decadent and Aesthetic movements frequently linked hothouses and the exotic flowers they housed with decadence, dandyism, queerness, and gender fluidity and experimentation.

## **Kameron Neal**

Kameron Neal is a queer Black video artist, designer, and performance-maker. He is currently a CultureHub NYC Resident Artist. In collaboration with Shayok Misha Chowdhury, Kameron created *MukhAgni*, a multimedia performance memoir, presented under the auspices of Ars Nova's Makers Lab, where they were 2018-2019 Resident Artists. His self-portrait *Liquid Love* was awarded Best of Show at Digital Graffiti Festival, where he returned in 2018 as an artist-in-residence. His video work was featured in Rufus Wainwright's latest music video *Sword of Damocles*. Kameron has also developed and shown work at Vox Populi, Williams College Museum of Art, La Mama Galleria, the Cube Art Project, Outlet, National Geographic, Blue Balls Festival, New Orleans Film Festival, Deep Water Literary Festival, the Vineyard Arts Project, New York Theatre Workshop, Soho Rep., Signature Theatre, the '62 Center for Theatre and Dance, The Public Theater, Joe's Pub, and BAM.

## **Marian Casey**

An independent curator and art historian, Marian's curatorial practice focuses on community engagement, social practice, and building experimental approaches to historic narratives and spaces. She is especially driven to curate projects promoting women and LGBT+ artists and stories, and is a passionate advocate for survivors of sexual violence. Marian co-founded SXR VXVE, an interdisciplinary curatorial platform dedicated to creating and presenting projects and artists engaging with systems of power. SXR VXVE has since curated four projects across the U.S. and the U.K., working with over 90 artists from across the globe. Marian has worked with curatorial teams at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Courtauld Gallery, The Royal Academy, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and Times Square Arts, among others.

## More on The *HotHouse* Project and Mary's, Naturally

Scott Swoveland was a barback at Mary's, Naturally Bar, a cornerstone institution in the historically LGBT neighborhood of Montrose, Houston, when he began painting window murals for the bar. Erasing and re-painting them every week, he painted at least five hundred different murals between 1990 and 1999. The murals were frequently unrepentantly sexual, when nascent and limited representation of gay men and women in popular culture was frequently sanitized and sexless.

Swoveland faced threats of violence from anti-gay passers-by regularly while he painted, repeatedly, onto the bar's plexiglass windows - real glass could not be used because of the perpetual danger of damage from anti-gay vandals. The murals reflected the ever-evolving social and political life of Montrose's LGBT community, celebrating social events, anniversaries, individuals, and mourning the frequent loss of Mary's regulars to the AIDS epidemic. The ashes of countless numbers of these community members were scattered in Mary's back lot. Swoveland also painted an unapologetically gay permanent mural depicting a typical night in Mary's on the outside wall of the building, which became an icon of Montrose LGBT culture.

Swoveland's work is an example of the ways, both provocative and subtle, in which for centuries the LGBTQ+ community has used art, decorative arts, and design to designate space as non-hetero-dominant. In addition to the connotations of home, community, and sexuality present in the title of *HotHouse*, it is from this tradition of subtle queer signifying that the project derives its name. Charles Baudelaire, Joris-Karl Huysmans, and other 19th century Decadent and Aesthetic Movement thinkers frequently linked hothouses and the exotic flowers they housed with decadence, dandyism, and the non-heterosexual and non-traditional sexuality and gender identity with which these movements were often linked.

As a defiant queer signifier, Swoveland and Mary's use of public art articulates a sense of community grounded in the confident ownership of locale. As Swoveland's murals sprung up again and changed every week, it was an active and perpetually ongoing, self-rejuvenating message of support to the LGBT community and statement against the many vocal threats of violence, erasure, and suppression. Mary's closed in 2009, and Swoveland's iconic mural painted over. Varying efforts have been made to commemorate and preserve the space and artwork. Artist Cody Ledvina repainted the mural in 2011, until it was defaced and then painted over by city ordinance. Like Mary's, many of Montrose' gay bars have closed over the past decade, due often to rising expenses in a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood. The same patterns are reflected in queer communities across the country, and these patterns of gentrification themselves are often expletive of the impact of the AIDS crisis; as Sarah Schulman demonstrated in *The Gentrification of the Mind*, the most rapidly-gentrified neighborhoods of Manhattan were neighborhoods where the AIDS epidemic contributed to a drastic increase in apartment turnover, allowing landlords to skirt rent control limits. These patterns of erasure of community, space, and history perpetually contextualize our continued creation of queer spaces and art,

*HotHouse* exists in response to this particular history and in acknowledgment of the many other regional queer histories and community stories yet to be shared. It aims to bring

currently working queer artists into conversation with these histories and narratives, exploring their own relationship to them, their own relationship to queer spaces and aesthetics, and those stories' relationships to the queer experiences and communities of today. The questions we pose to participating artists and to the project's public are: how do we relate to the precarity, politics, and potential for comfort and joy of intentional queer spaces? What is our role in remembering and recording those spaces once they're gone, and what might we owe to the particular queer histories of the spaces we occupy?

## **List of Works**

Kameron Neal and Shayok Misha Chowdhury  
*Theater Kids*, excerpt from *MukhAgni*, 2019  
Multi-Channel Video

*Kale Salad*, 2019  
Single-Channel Video

*Make Out/Break Out*, 2019  
Single-Channel Video

Kameron Neal and Shayok Misha Chowdhury  
*The Odd Throuple*, 2019  
Multi-Channel Video

*Watch Me Grow*, 2019  
Single-Channel Video

*Untitled*, 2017  
Single-Channel Video

*FLAKE*, 2018  
Single-Channel Video

*Color Test #6*, 2019  
Single-Channel Video

*Groundwater Vol. III*, 2019  
Single-Channel Video

*Untitled*, 2017  
Single-Channel Video

*Liquid Love*, 2016  
Single-Channel Video

Prices of video works are available upon request.

Limited editions of still prints based on several exhibited works are available for \$200. Please enquire for works and edition numbers.