Dissonant Masculinities

BFA Thesis - Riley Rist
Artist Statement

My work is focused on anthropological research of how American/Western masculinity is perceived and assigned. My work explores the connection between gender expression and the stereotyping of sexuality, exploring why effeminate men are labeled as queer. I use my own personal experiences to reinforce those connections in my work as well.

Through materials I convey a physical connection to my research, such as using masculine and feminine materials to produce subverted imagery about masculinie behaviors and appearances. I use materials like glitter, silver, and porcelain to convey my ideas. Specifically I use glitter to make a connection to the long history of LGBTQ night life and activism. I also use porcelain to place my images on for its materiality; porcelain is a historically sought after material by westerners for its beauty and purity. I use silver for similar reasons, more so for its status and beauty. Placing these images on such a valuable material, subverted or not, feels empowering, and in a way it validates my work. I use all of these material connotations to make a statement about Western and American stereotyping of masculinity and gender expression.
Problem Statement:

How does altering traditional masculine motifs affect the perception of masculinity? Why does feminizing masculine motifs alter masculinity’s perception, leading to stereotyping the individual as homosexual, effeminate or queer?
Thesis Statement:

Through my work in ceramics, metals, and enamel I explore the influence of masculinity. My work explores the deeply rooted cultural norms of masculine expression and behavior, particularly when confronted femininity and homosexuality. When the presence of masculinity is challenged with something stereotypically feminine or queer, the individual or object’s connotation is immediately jeopardized. I particularly use the imagery/personas like the cowboy since it has such a rich history of masculinity; any alteration of the cowboy that could be considered “feminine” immediately puts the persona’s gender and sexuality in question.

My work is a reflection of my lived experiences, exploring some of the very things I was picked apart for growing up. I make these works as a way to regain some of my lost personality, my lost experiences, and as a way to represent these stereotypes that I was denied, visualizing them and bringing those images into a personable and intimate view. I find it to be the first step in exploring my identity without dealing with any direct repercussions, and even if I’m in an accepting environment, that trauma still runs deep in me, and I feel it will never leave me. My work is a vehicle to desensitize the deeply rooted stigma associated with feminine masculinity, it is almost a cathartic way to fight back all those years of trauma and abuse for being different.
Figure 1: *Fetish Cowboys*: Porcelain, Underglaze. 5x5x7in
Figure 2: *Fetish Cowboy, Solo: Porcelain, Underglaze. 4x4x4in*
Figure 4: Scale of Perception: Porcelain, Color Decal. 10x3x0.5in
Figure 5: Perception Series; Untitled: Porcelain, Underglaze. 3x3x3in
**Figure 6:** Reclined Male Nudes: Porcelain, Underglaze. 3.5x3.5x3in
Figure 7: Pink Glitter Gun: Porcelain, Glitter, Heavy Body Acrylic. 7x5x1in
Figure 8: Black Glitter Gun: Porcelain, Glitter, Heavy Body Acrylic. 7x5x1 in
Figure 9: Homos on The Range: Silver Plated Copper, Leather. 5x2x3in
Figure 10: *Queen* of The Rodeo, Sterling Silver. 2x2in
Figure 11: There is No Rose Without Thorns, Cast Sterling Silver. 5in Long
Figure 12: Deeply Rooted, Silver Plated Cast Bronze, Fine Silver Wire. 19x1x0.5in
Figure 13: Cowboy Altar (Front): Porcelain, Underglaze. 16x9x3in
Figure 13.1: Cowboy Altar (Back): Porcelain, Underglaze. 16x9x3in
Figure 14: Cathedral Cowboys V.1: Enamel on Nickel Silver, Black Patina. 4.5x3x3in
Figure 15: Cathedral Cowboys V.2: Enamel on Nickel Silver, Black Patina. 4.5x3x3in
Figure 16: Formality of Homosexuality: Enamel on Nickel Silver. 4.5x3x3in
Figure 17: Machismo: Enamel on Nickel Silver. 6x6in
Figure 18: Unification Choker: Leather, Sterling Silver. 5x0.75x1in
Figure 20: Fluid Sailor: Enamel on Copper. 4x4.5in