

## ***the story of you + me***

Does a love letter require language to be legible? How many ways can I show you I love you?

To offer time is to convey devotion. Art is both a vehicle and product of time spent. When I refer to time in art, I mean both the complete accrual of skill over an artist's practice, as well as the specific degree of effort given to applying those skills in a particular work. Time spent is a difficult, if not impossible, thing to approximate in a physical work of art. Every individual mark or gesture is a moment in time. More marks. Smaller marks. Careful marks. Invisible marks. Marks that mesh so well with other marks you don't even realize the marks are separate. Any action frozen within the medium is time dedicated to a subject and an audience. A timestaking painting or drawing is a handwritten book, though in this instance, the reader can access every page at once. A time-based work such as a video is a prayer to be repeated.

As an observer, one can certainly appreciate economy. Though, in devotional works, sharing evidence of time is a direct means of communicating significance to an audience. The creation becomes an undeniable exhibition of love—and even beyond communicating love, it is a deep act of intimacy to translate the sense or likeness of a lover. Moments spent creating those devotional works are an extension of the physical moments from which we muse.

The artists included in this exhibition create work about and inspired by their intimate relationships—with others, with themselves. The devotion is evident and the intimacy is undeniable. These works are documentation of the quieter and sometimes deeper moments of the love and light in their lives. I've assembled a cohort which I admire for its indulgence in earnestness and sentimentality.

Tender scenes comprise the core of Erickson Díaz-Cortés' (he/him) practice. As the artist explains, "the back of a lovers' head, velvety sheets, and resplendent flowers are all tethered together to reveal moments of compassion, introspection, and self-discovery." Díaz-Cortés draws from memories and experiences, bringing into focus "the various ways in which queerness presents itself through color, place, and figuration." It is clear in experiencing Erickson Díaz-Cortés' work that the scale is as intentional as the caring marks he applies. These works invite the viewer close—not unlike the flame of an oil lamp—casting a warm glow upon the single individual before them, and the employed spatial intimacy evokes a deepened experience of gentleness within the imagery.

Jordan Ramsey Ismaiel's (they/them) self portraiture expands notions of queer intimacy and figuration. "I examine concepts of disidentification and world-making as actions of radical self-care that are conveyed through self-provided partnership," explains Ramsey Ismaiel. The artist employs touch as mark-making, and one can understand the sense of feeling for the likeness in viewing these portraits—the artist plotting out the topography of their own portrait.

Often, comprehension and depictions of queer intimacy feel reliant on sexualization and clearly-disclosed partnerships, but tenderness can be self-inflicted, and there is an immense purity to self-love.

Em Van Loan's (they/them) experimental films are autobiographical. The artist describes their practice as diaristic, which feels ultimately becoming in that the films often present delicate and inquisitive vignettes with vulnerable captioning. Van Loan's T4T is simultaneously a document, portrait, and proclamation in which a trans couple shares a soft and private intimacy. The film honors a found safe-ness and comfort through a mutually understood existence. Formally, its visual language feels cemented in a tradition/history. In addition to the film's black and white frames, the yellow captioning feels timeless and certain... definitively here... undeniable.

In my own practice, I return to the image of my partner more than any other particular subject. These works have rarely been exhibited, if ever, but I feel they are their own necessary declarations. As José Esteban Muñoz writes in *Crusing Utopia*, "Queerness is rarely complemented by evidence, or at least by traditional understandings of the term. The key to queering evidence, and by that I mean the ways in which we prove queerness and read queerness, is by suturing it to the concept of ephemera. Think of ephemera as trace, the remains, the things that are left, hanging in the air like a rumor." As artists, the thought of what is left beyond our existence is pervasive and constant. I can say that my portfolio is positively littered with these rumors, and I am, at least, certain that the afterglow of my love will be blinding.

— Robert Martin