

“Who is the fairest one of all?” This phrase continues to hold power over us. Who is the most beautiful, who is the most desirable, who is the most worthy of love?

*Mirror Mirror* toys with these hierarchies through challenging representations of the self and identity in collage, film, and photography. The title refers to the well-known query of the evil stepmother in the *Snow White* fairy tale. The full phrase “Mirror mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?,” is steeped in racial and gender politics. For us, the word “fair” implies the superiority of light skin and physical beauty as a woman’s highest achievement. With the works in this exhibition, we aim to counter and open up a dialogue about these embedded values.

Román Anaya uses photography and photo sculptures to address their own queer identity, Mexican-American culture, Catholicism, and illness. Their *ISMO* series enshrines masculine-presenting Latinx individuals in church and idyllic natural settings, using costuming to bend gendered fashion norms and posit their own vision of queer beauty. Looking directly at the viewer, the subjects seem to assert that they are “the fairest one of all.”

Paula Gillen creates collages with photographic imagery that spotlight women, question gender norms, and place women in positions of power. In her series *Superpower Women in Space*, she combines found images with her own photographs to fashion surreal complex landscapes where women dominate. Many of these images prominently feature women of color—though in real-life very few have had the opportunity to travel to space—and posit how much representation truly matters, while envisioning a world where women’s strengths and bravery are prized above their physical appearance.

In her series *The Shotgun Diaries*, Stacy J. Platt produces a constructed documentary series of black and white photos with handwritten texts describing her job working in a

nightclub while going to college, as well as the experiences of fellow female employees. In these works she interrogates female beauty, her own identity as an Asian American woman, her transformation into a sexually-alluring persona in order to earn money, and her co-workers' experiences of dealing with male bar-goers. In her photographs, women exploit idealized beauty for earning potential, becoming the "fairest" they can be for weekend work shifts, all the while aware of the ruse.

Photographer Gabby Recny collaborates with Co-Director, Producer, & Designer, Violet Kayaga, to capture members of the local performance group House of Flora, staging them in full costume and makeup in an empty field in industrial Denver. The subjects look back at the viewer and challenge dichotomies of female/male stylings and self-presentation. With eyeshadow, stylish clothing, fashion model poses, and luscious bouquets of flowers, these individuals of color present themselves as powerful and alluring icons, leaving us with little choice but to believe that they really are the fairest of them all.

Emily Van Loan makes films and videos about personal history, constructed narratives, and layers of identity. In her digital video *Van Loan et al.*, she combines MRI images of her own body with her voiceover narration describing neurological states and reflections. Here, the mirror she provides is one looking into her body's physical and mental interior. Her 16mm film *In Collaboration* focuses on romantic relationships as a component of identity and includes contributions from her partners. The artist describes her super 8mm film *Who Wants to Fall in Love?* as "an exercise in introspection" and the work paints a portrait of the protagonist without showing their face.

In her series *Familiar Limbs*, Lauren Wings overlays white, line-art drawings of plants onto black and white photos of almost disembodied arms and hands, evoking a metaphor and making female bodies anonymous and, arguably, less-easily objectified.

The plant imagery and titles suggest that the subjects sought to imitate and evoke certain species with their poses, and the desire for transformation and to escape the limitations and usual connotations of the feminine-presenting body comes through with these gestures.

Through confronting the viewer with idealized masculine and non-binary beauty, featuring people of color as superstars, bending gender norms of self-presentation, revealing the artifice of feminine perfection, exploring inner realities, and transfiguring into other life forms, these artists present us with alternate views of what it means to be attractive and what a mirror held up to our selves—in this case, the camera as our mirror—can disclose and proclaim. We hope you enjoy these powerful visions of a more inclusive beauty and varied forms of gender, race, and subjectivity representations.