

### **Liss LaFleur: Artist Statement**

The Sapphic Serenade series explores the act of a serenade to decenter or reconsider queer subjectivity. The title refers to direct actions listed in the 1993 Lesbian Avengers Handbook. To produce this work, I combine performance, sound, and projection technologies, and utilize an absurd slowing of time. Slowness is often used in my practice as a (re)negotiation of spatial desire, or a wrestling and (re)definition of time.

For each video installation, I select a color and a popular love song from 1950 to 1970. In my studio, I record myself lip-synching to an extremely slowed, remixed version of the song directly for the camera. Upon installation, the video is projected through five large sheets of brightly colored fringe (12' tall x 6' wide x 9' deep), forcing the image into a monstrous scale, and to deteriorate along with the lyrics of the song. The act of the serenade creates a tender and nostalgic space, holding attention, while also exploring the relationship between technology, language and identity. Works in this series are often developed for a site-specific installation, and "Don't Worry Baby" was installed at the Contemporary Art Museum of Houston in spring of 2020 by curator Patricia Restrepo.

For "Don't Worry Baby," a single figure is projected through five rows of purple fringe that are suspended from the ceiling. Similar to a bird in a cage, the figure serenades viewers by lip synching the original lyrics from the Beach Boy's 1964 pop song, "Don't Worry Baby" as a looping serenade. For this work, the color purple symbolizes transitions, transformations, and the space in which the masculine and feminine energies combine. With this work I am questioning; what happens when you inhabit other people's materials (specific to this song = queer womxn embodying harmonies originally written and performed by white cis men, who were singing about their hetero loves)? How can lip synching be a form of vulnerable spoken-word performance, one that feels both familiar and foreign? What role does digital looping, or repetition, play in maintaining a state of mind for the viewer?

In conjunction with my ongoing series "Sapphic Serenades," I began researching images in the Lesbian Herstory Archives (the largest of its kind in the world), searching for photographic and ephemeral documentation of queer ancestry between the years of 1960 - 1980. This era references the beginnings of the modern gay rights movement in the United States and the second wave of feminism, and contextualizes -through lived experiences - the faux personas in each of my serenade installations.

Institutional repositories, archives, and museums are tasked with housing cultural collections, framing historical narratives, and creating research opportunities for the future. With this series, I am questioning how to *talk back* to an archive in an attempt to contemporize its objects and images.

Using a flatbed scanner, I create this series by aggressively cropping, scanning at a very high resolution, disassembling, and rescanning archival images sourced from the Lesbian Herstory Archives. Technological mediation becomes a form of digital excavation. By physically editing the images with my hands, I directly intervene with the archive, obscuring the viewer's ability to fully consume the people and faces on display. Layered atop each image in colored neon glass are playful references to phrases, symbols, and designs pulled from the archive's extensive handmade protest button collection.