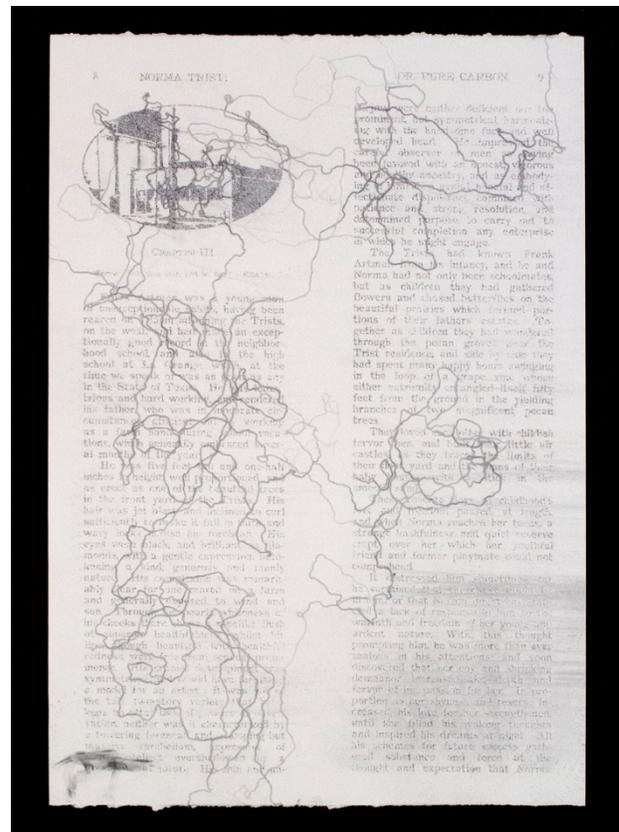


# 50 STATES NICK VAUGHAN & JAKE MARGOLIN

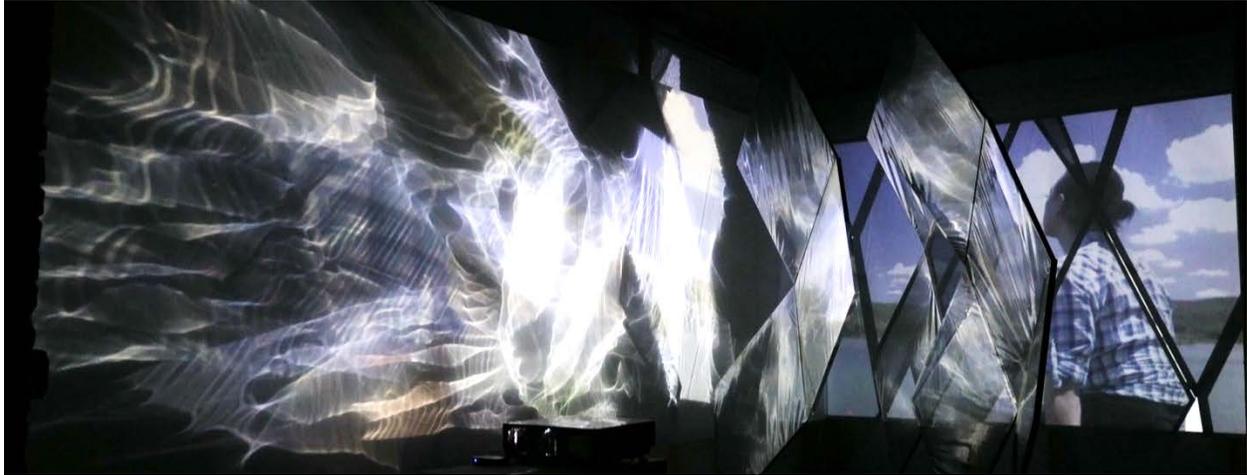


Interdisciplinary artists Nick Vaughan & Jake Margolin explore the connections between LGBTQIA+ histories and contemporary experiences in the United States. Their life's work *50 States* is an ongoing series of installations made in response to little-known LGBTQIA+ histories from each state predating the 1969 Stonewall riot that launched the modern queer rights movement. This multi-decade endeavor engages critically with perceptions of history and community in a time when American views of gender and sexuality progress at an astonishing pace while provoking deeply troubling social and legislative backlashes. Their research draws from recent groundbreaking academic work, the artists' own archival research, and significant time spent learning from and collaborating with local LGBTQIA+ community members.

Nick & Jake began *50 States* while living in New York with *50 States: Wyoming* in 2013. In 2014 they moved to Houston to research *50 States: Texas*, where they have stayed, building their studio practice, their home, and a family. They have completed six *50 States* installations: *Wyoming* (2013), *Texas* (2016), *Colorado* (2016), *Oklahoma* (2016), *Arkansas* (2019), and *Louisiana* (2020). Additionally they have created projects that pick up research begun during *50 States* including *The Scene (Houston: 1969-1981)* and *A Landing on the Bayou* which explored Hosutons' legendary drag scene (both 2017); *Political Gestures*, a multi-channel film made with drag queens and activists in Oklahoma (2018); *Norma Trist*, a limited edition livre d'artiste co-published with Austin's Flatbed Press (2020), and *Wayfinding* (2022) and *Rizomorph* (2024), two series of "wind drawings" inspired by *50 States: Arkansas* depicting what now stands in formerly queer spaces in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, and Wyoming.



Nick & Jake are currently developing *50 States: Utah, Illinois, and Kansas*, and are embarking on a four year community organizing project, *Town Meeting 1978-2028* to commemorate an often overlooked landmark 1978 convening of four thousand queer Houstonians at the Astro Arena.



*50 States* and its ancillary projects have been exhibited at Blaffer Art Museum (Houston), Contemporary Art Museum Houston, Oklahoma State University Museum of Art (Stillwater), Oklahoma City University Norrick Art Center, Diverseworks (Houston), Art League Houston, The Alley Theatre (Houston), The Invisible Dog Art Center (Brooklyn), McClain Gallery (Houston), Devin Borden Gallery (Houston) and many community spaces including public and university libraries, queer bars, pride festivals, and community colleges. These projects have been supported by grants from The Mid America Arts Alliance, Houston Arts Alliance, and the Idea Fund (a regrant program of the Andy Warhol Foundation), a Tulsa Artist Fellowship and a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship, and many individual donors. Works from these projects are in permanent public collections including the Getty Research Institute (Los Angeles), the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, the TransArt Foundation (Houston), the Texas A&M Cushing Library Special Collections, the University of Houston MD Anderson Library Special Collections, and the Houston Civic Art Collection. These projects have been written about in ArtForum (Critics Pick for *50 States: Louisiana*), Texas Art & Culture, The Houston Chronicle, OutSmart, Glasstire, and Terremotto.

Nick & Jake are represented by McClain Gallery Houston.

Following are brief descriptions of each completed project with images. More in depth descriptions of each project can be found at Nick & Jake's website:  
[www.nickandjakestudio.com](http://www.nickandjakestudio.com)



**50 States: Louisiana**  
***Cabin Boy Blue***  
**2020**

*50 States: Louisiana* tells the true history of an 18th century ship captain and his lover in colonial Louisiana who piloted a ship carrying the colony's first commercial shipment of indigo before wrecking it off the coast of present-day Alabama.

The project connects their story to the colonial indigo trade and the 20th century emergence of queer Krewes of Mardi Gras. The installation comprises three functional main sails, hand dyed in organic indigo with engine oil resist "call numbers", and a six-channel video installation with a 60-minute audio track in which the artists explore these histories. This project was commissioned by DiverseWorks (Houston).



Full link to audio track and one of the six video channels: <https://vimeo.com/398620653>



**50 States: Arkansas**  
***The Ballad of Jesse***  
***and Steve***  
**2019**

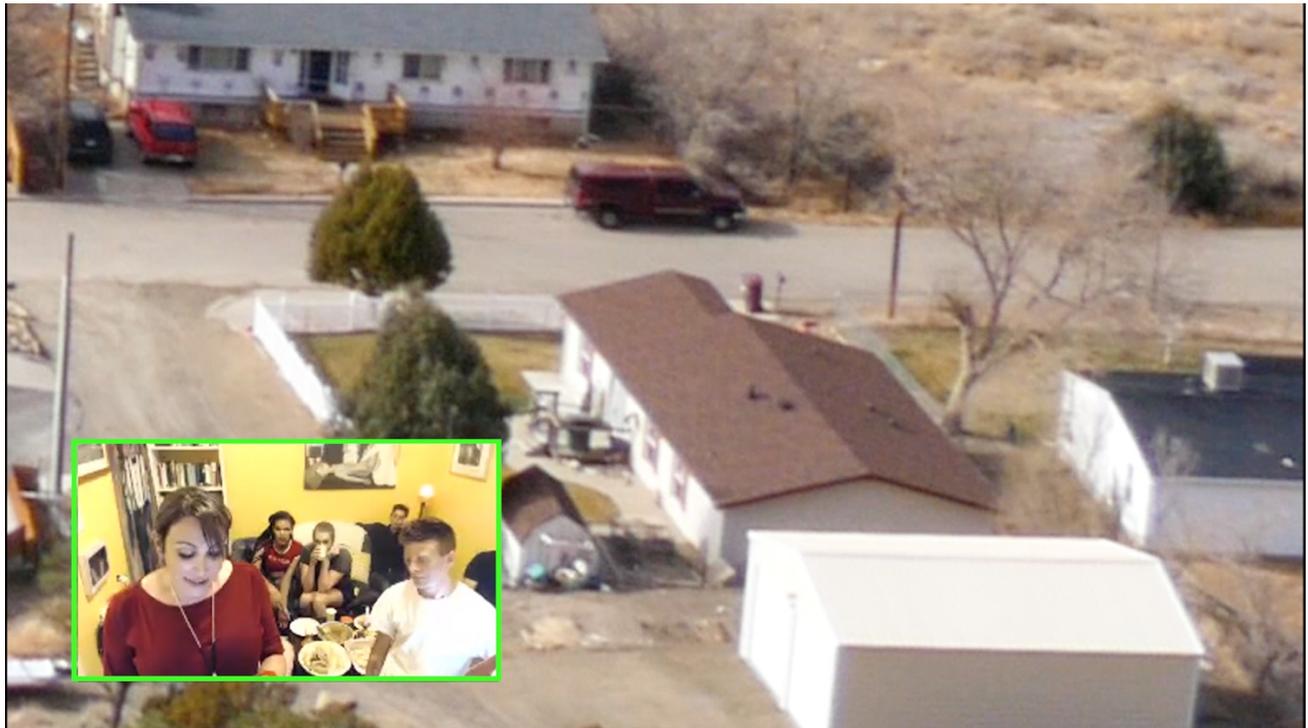
*50 States: Arkansas*, is a ballad in charcoal powder, wind, and text inspired by a 1920s history of an interracial gay couple who lived in a converted luxury railroad car in Harrison Arkansas, and whose lives intersect with many of the great forces that shaped the identity of the state. The murkiest and most ambiguous of

the histories that *50 States* has engaged with, Jesse and Steve's story led to a method of drawing with charcoal powder and wind in which the artists construct elaborate stencils through which they sift loose charcoal powder onto paper, and then blow the powder away, leaving a ghost print. The drawing is only made through this act of erasure, of 'blowing away' – the wind's force embedding the charcoal powder into the tooth of the paper, capturing the ephemerality, mystery, and wonder of these long-lost histories.



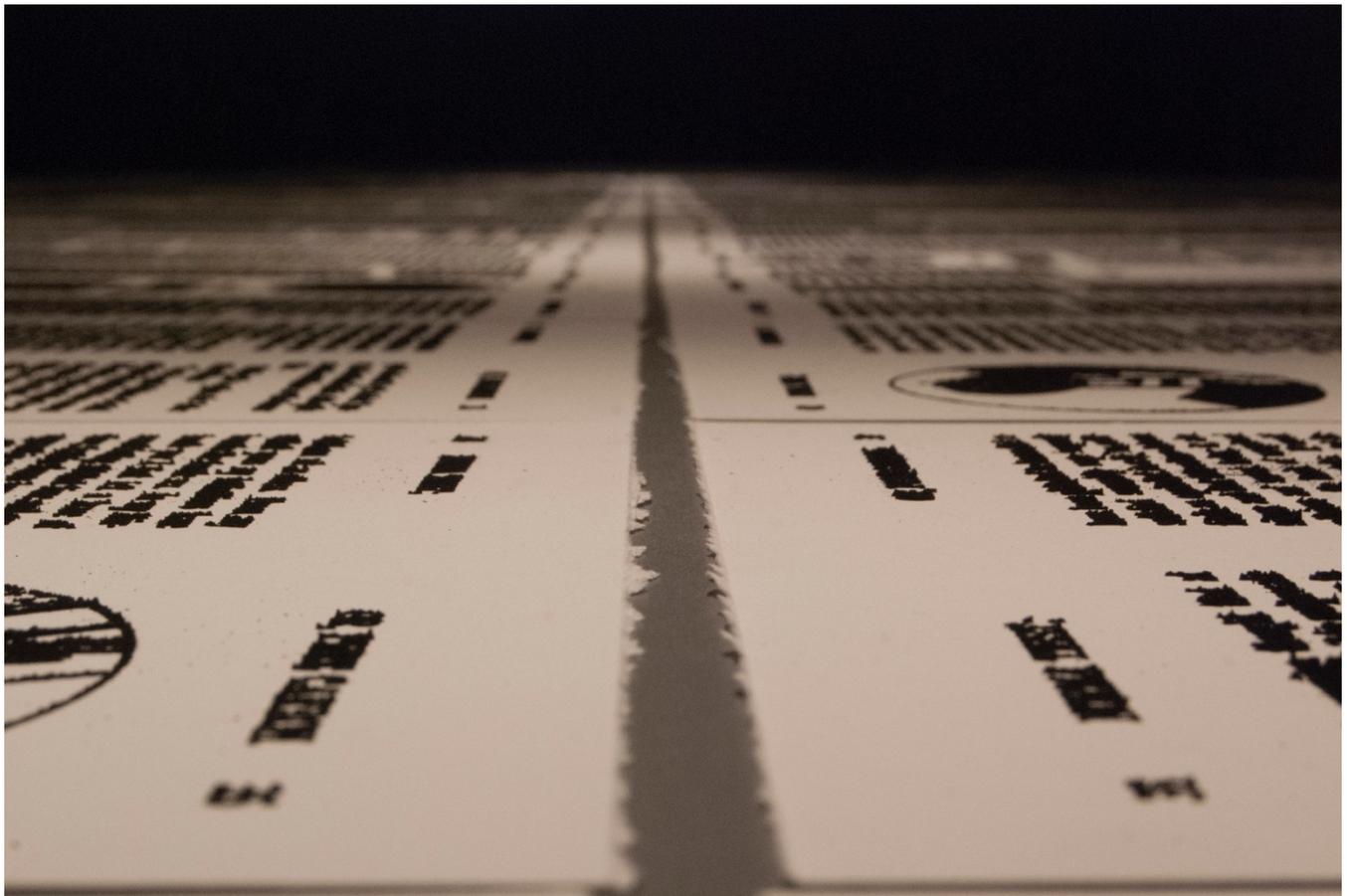
**50 States: Colorado**  
***For Frenchy***  
**2016**

This installation pays tribute to Charles “Frenchy” Vosbaugh, someone we would now refer to as a transgender resident of a small coal mining town, Trinidad, Colorado, in the 1880s. His story resonates through the next century when Trinidad’s Catholic hospital, where Frenchy lived his final years as an openly male-presenting orderly, came to house one of the nation’s first gender affirmation surgery clinics. This complex story is digitally captured and celebrated through the eyes of transgender and gender-nonconforming writers and activists in five U.S. cities who the artists commissioned to compose eulogies to Frenchy which they delivered at simultaneous community potlucks linked by video conference.



**50 States: Texas**  
***Pure Carbon***  
**2016**

This installation recognizes an early example of LGBTQIA+ literature by a Texas doctor, *Norma Trist, or Pure Carbon: a Story of the Inversion of the Sexes* (1895), which features the first unambiguously lesbian protagonist in American fiction as well as exceedingly progressive defenses of same-sex desire. Nick & Jake reprinted the novel for the first time since 1895 by stenciling the complete text of *Norma Trist* in unfixed powdered graphite on one hundred linear feet of paper. Left open to the elements over the course of exhibition gusts of wind disturbed the graphite and insects left elaborate tracks through the text. Each chapter of the novel is illustrated with a stenciled image of the former sites of gay and lesbian bars across the state of Texas, linking the erasure of LGBTQIA+ spaces with the fragility of queer historical text and archives.



**50 States: Oklahoma**  
***For Lynn***  
**2016**

A multi-channel film projected through a reflective sculpture of two-way mirror film, *Oklahoma* explores daily life of the vibrant LGBTQIA+ community of Tahlequah, Oklahoma. It is inspired by a pioneering experimental documentary about Santa Fe by the gay, Cherokee playwright Lynn Riggs. An Oklahoma native, Riggs is best known for his 1930 play *Green Grow the Lilacs*, which inspired Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical and film "*Oklahoma!*". Mirroring Rigg's film structure shot-for-shot Nick & Jake filmed the lives of two drag performers and a transgender activist in Tahlequah and reactivated a deserted amphitheater where "*Oklahoma!*" had been performed every summer for decades. The film, which is exhibited synched with Rigg's original documentary, culminates in lip-synched renditions of numbers of *Oklahoma!*



## 50 States: Wyoming *Prairie and Mountain Sketches* 2014

*Wyoming* remembers an extraordinary cross-country excursion culminating in a six week party in 1843. A homosexual Scottish lord-turned-fur-trader and his Cree/French-Canadian lover, a celebrated hunter, trekked 1,200 miles from St. Louis to a remote Wyoming lake in the company of 100 like-minded men. There they threw a six-week bacchanal replete with liquor and Renaissance costumes. Nick & Jake retraced their journey, stopping every sixty miles to create sculptural records in wax and soil of their progression along this queer pilgrimage. Video documentation of their journey is presented as a four-channel installation.

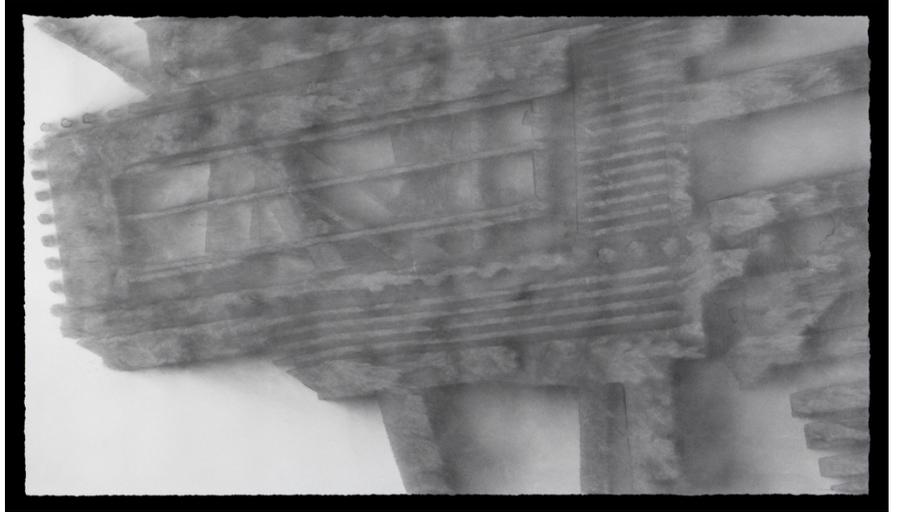
The experience of walking along the frozen banks of the North Platte River, early one morning in November 2013, armed with the knowledge that this path had been traveled by a band of queer men 170 years prior had an profound corporeal and visceral effect on both artists. The agency that this queer history provided, the sense of belonging, the permission to inhabit the seemingly uninviting landscapes of Wyoming, inspired Nick & Jake to embark on their *50 States* project, to find queer histories in each state and bring them to light through interdisciplinary installations.



## RELATED PROJECTS

### **Wayfinding (2022) and Rhizomorph (2024) *Wind Drawings***

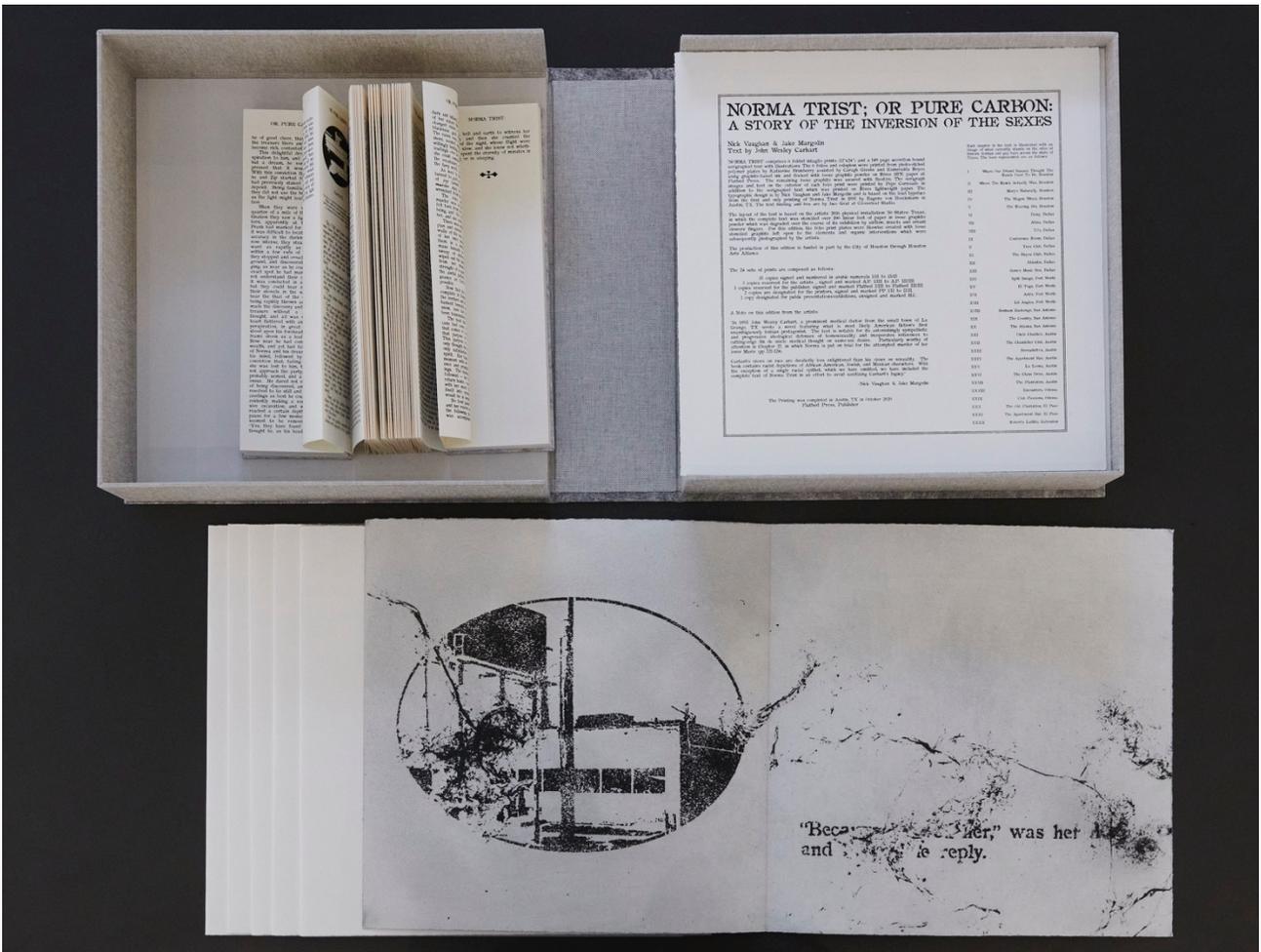
Building on the practice of drawing with charcoal powder and wind developed for *50 States: Arkansas* Nick & Jake have created two bodies of works depicting what now stands where there used to be queer spaces in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, and Wyoming. Ranging in scale from intimate 15.5"x45" drawings of details of vanished queer bars to monumental 62"x312" images of landscapes encountered while retracing an 1843 queer expedition to Wyoming, these drawings explore the ephemerality of histories that themeselves have been scattered to the winds. These projects were commissioned by the Blaffer Art Museum (Houston) and the Oklahoma City University Norrick Art Center, respectively.



**Norma Trist: A livre d'artiste**  
**Edition of 15 with 3 artist proofs, 3 publishers**  
**proofs, 2 printers proofs, 1 hors commerce.**  
**2020**

A co-publication between the artists and Flatbed Press (Austin) this livre d'artiste marks the first reprinting of the landmark 1895 novel explored in *50 States: Texas*. Written in LaGrange Texas, *Norma Trist* features astonishingly progressive defenses of homosexuality and likely the first unambiguously lesbian heroine in American fiction. Paired with images of what now exists in locations where there used to be queer bars across the state, *Norma Trist* stands as a record of Texas's underappreciated queer history.

The livre d'artiste comprises 6 folded intaglio prints printed by Katherine Brimberry and a 149 pages accordion bound serigraphed text printed by Pepe Coronado. The binding and box were made by Kaoru Y. Perry at Cloverleaf Studio. The typographic design is by Nick & Jake and is based on the original lead typeface from the first and only printing of *Norma Trist* in 1895 by Eugene von Boeckmann in Austin, Texas.



## Political Gestures 2018

Political Gestures is a five-channel video installation featuring overtly political drag performances created in collaboration with drag queens from Oklahoma. Celebrating the historical and underappreciated role of drag in the struggle for LGBTQ+ progress Political Gestures incorporates speeches from the 1979 March on Washington For Gay and Lesbian Rights, radically political queer music, and interviews with Carden Crow, founder and director of Tahlequah, Oklahoma's pride organization Tahlequality.



**Conceived, directed, and edited by:** Nick Vaughan & Jake Margolin

**Featuring performers:** Nikki La'Vie (Mercy Monroe), Gizele Monáe, Anita Richards & Josie Lee Turrelle.

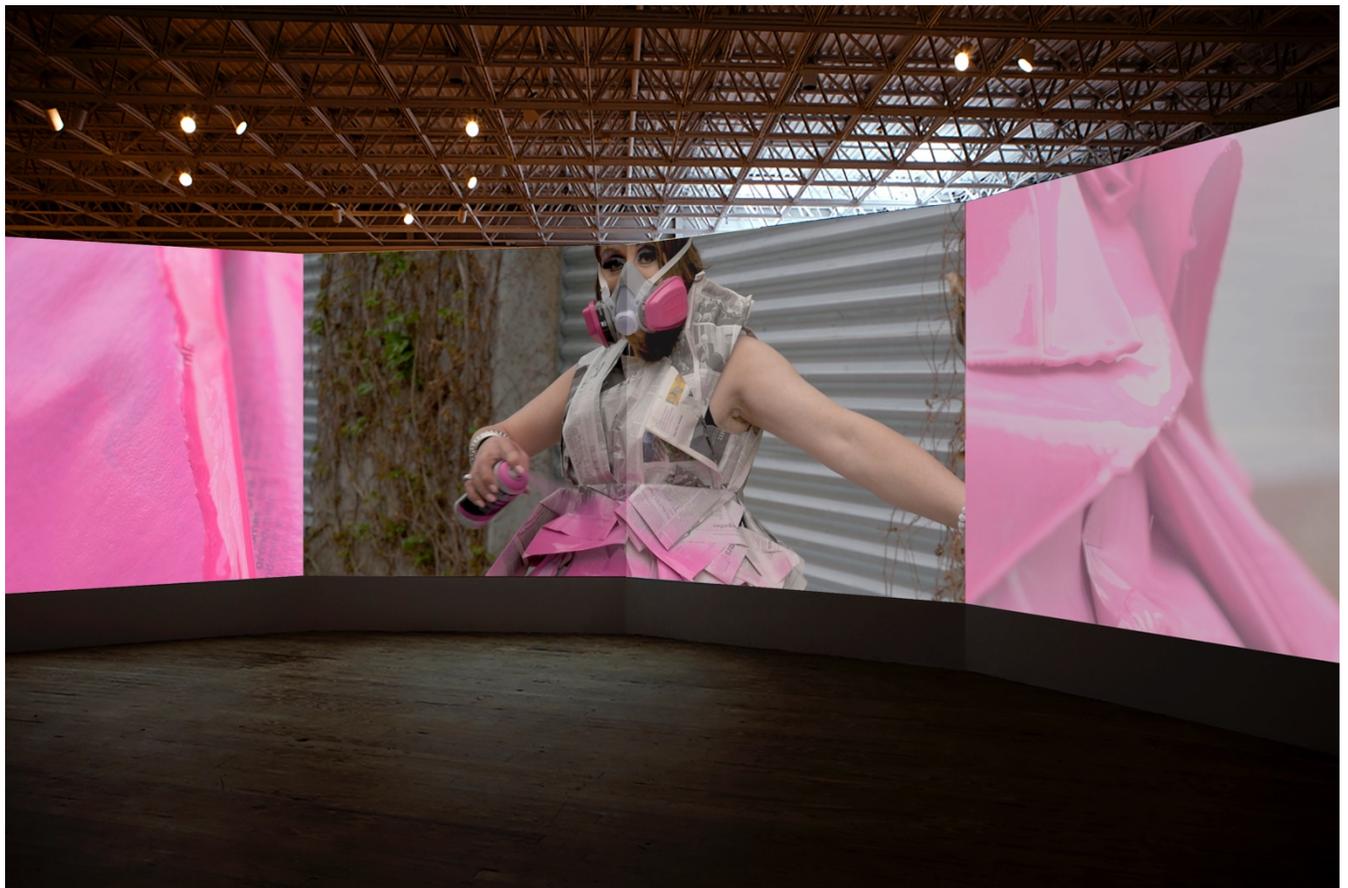
**Interviews and Facebook posts:** Carden Crow (founder and director of Tahlequality)

**Director of Photography:** Andrew Schneider

**Footage shot by:** Andrew Schneider, Nick Vaughan & Jake Margolin

**Additional sound by:** Charles Wiese

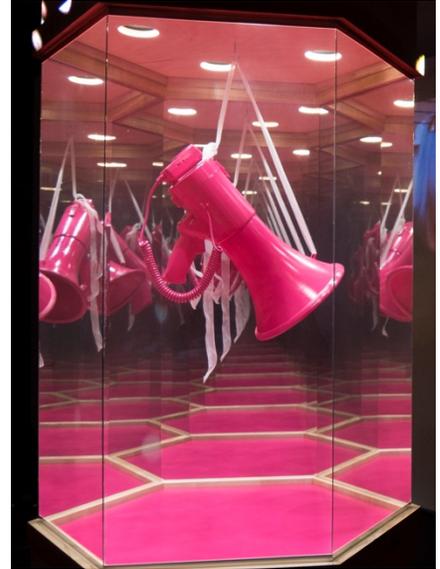
Link to full document of Political Gestures: <https://vimeo.com/278250717/bf624f560b?share=copy>



## The Scene (Houston 1979-1981) and A Landing on the Bayou 2017

A body of work focused on the importance and political effect of Houston's storied drag scene between the years of the Stonewall Riots and the beginnings of the AIDS crisis, *The Scene* reflects on the city's historic and underappreciated role as a destination and refuge for LGBTQ citizens in the Gulf Coast region and celebrates the importance of Houston's drag community in the LGBT rights movement.

Created in conjunction with *The Scene*, *A Landing in the Bayou* is a multi-media artist lecture based on interviews with drag queens, activists, and community members who experienced the Houston drag scene in the years between Stonewall and the beginning of the AIDS crisis including Hot Chocolate, Tasha Kohl, Kelly Lauren, Ray Hill, and Mary Hooper.



## CONTACT INFORMATION

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