The background of the poster is an abstract artwork consisting of numerous vertical stripes of varying widths and colors, including black, white, grey, and yellow. Some stripes feature a halftone dot pattern, while others are solid or have subtle textures. The stripes are set against a dark background, creating a complex, layered visual effect.

AMANDA CURRERI: THE CALMEST OF US WOULD BE LUNATICS

JANUARY 22 – MAY 8, 2016

BURTON AND JUDY ONOFRIO GALLERY

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CLAIMING SPACE, PERFORMING THE SELF

SUSANNAH MAGERS, CURATOR OF ART AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Collecting is a habitual, and often ritual, practice. The significance of holding on to an object may not be immediately known to us, filed away for an unknown future function. I am an ephemera junkie: a keeper of napkins, drink stirrers, postcards, and matchbooks, their dispensable connotation a challenge to preserve. I met artist Amanda Curreri as she was preparing for a 2013 show called *The Aunque*, at Romer Young Gallery, in San Francisco, CA. At the opening, I became enamored with a stack of unassuming, canary yellow napkins, printed with the word 'Feminist' (it is now framed in my office). Hearing the story of how the napkins came to be, she told me that while on residency in South Korea, she found a bar called Feminist, which in addition to the term had appropriated American visual culture in the form of a sort of country theme, complete with red gingham.

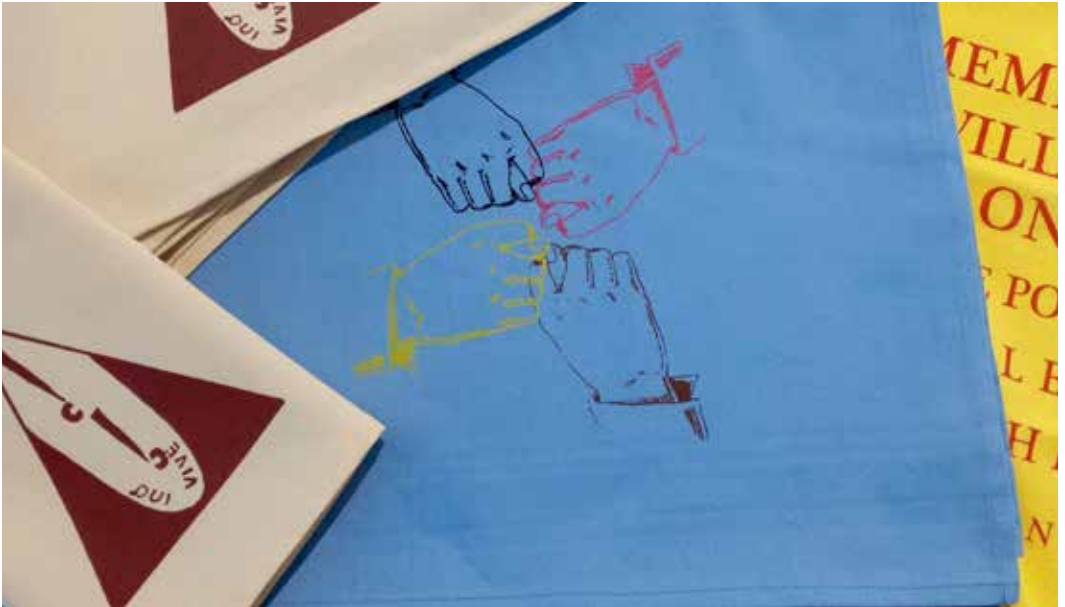


Amanda Curreri. *Feminist Napkins*, 2013. Printing ink on paper, 5 x 5 inches. Courtesy of Romer Young Gallery.

During this time, searching for gay or queer traces within South Korean culture, Curreri discovered a Korean TV show (cancelled the summer before her residency) *Club Daughters of Bilitis*. The show had invoked the name Daughters of Bilitis (the first lesbian civil and political rights organization in the United States, founded in 1955) as an intentional way to align with the legacy and purpose of the group. This led to Curreri's *Rescreening of KBS's Cancelled 'Club Daughters of Bilitis,'* 2011, a 60-minute looped video, which she screened continuously as an exhibiting artist in the 2011 Incheon Women's Biennale. Similarly, the adoption of the word 'feminist' for the napkins had perhaps attempted the same appropriated objective. The

tragic humor of the term applied to such a disposable object struck Curreri, and indeed it has stuck with me, too. *Feminist Napkins* reaffirms the notion that we are not post-*anything*—post-feminist, post-racist, or post-identity politics.

Acknowledging this, what does it mean to claim or create intentional space? Disrupting an implied hierarchy by shifting the scale of how we typically experience an archival document, Curreri's larger-than-life artistic interpretations of archival documents from the Jean-Nicklaus Tretter Collection declare their presence and command attention. Throughout *The Calmest of Us Would Be Lunatics*, colors and symbols repeat, signifying historical moments.



Detail of napkins in *CLAMS*, 2015 and on-going. Napkins screen-printed acrylic on fabric, Edition of 10 each of *Protection*, *Qui Vive*, and *American Anarchists*. Courtesy of the artist.

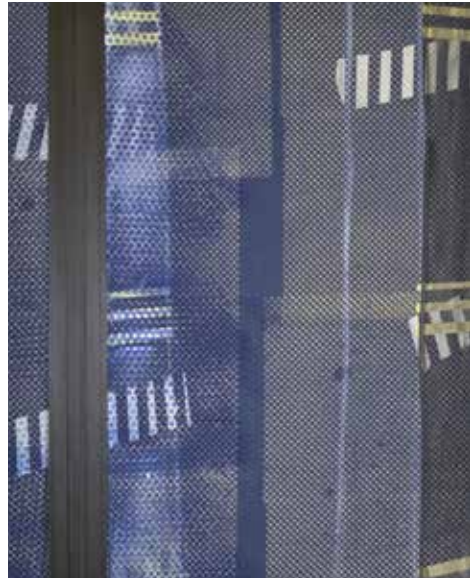
What prompts us to consider other perspectives? One aspect of Curreri's practice—and, I would argue, a strength—is the evolutionary, additive, and mutable quality. Invoking color as a metaphor for difference, Curreri provokes unlikely compatibility through juxtaposition, re-contextualizing information with attention to nuance. For example, the lavender color of the title vinyl, and the cover of this gallery guide, is a nod to “the lavender menace”, feminist activist Betty Friedan's term for the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) fearing the group would derail then-second-wave feminism's momentum.

The color teal, painted on and immersing nearly half the first gallery, and half of gallery four, represents a color removed from the original Pride flag. Designed in 1978 by Gilbert Baker in San Francisco on the occasion of the first Pride to include eight colors, in 1979, hot pink and turquoise were omitted from the flag due to the commercial printer's inability to reproduce those colors. Turquoise represented art and magic, while hot pink represented sexuality. Taken together with works such as *Wallet Bags*, 2016, or the napkins in *CLAMS*, 2015 and on-going, an overall reliance on color as both visual cue and symbolic reminder conveys a sense of continuity and unification.

An on-going series of dinners, in which the artist invites the audience to sign up for a dinner of mussels cooked by Curreri herself, *CLAMS* provides an opportunity to directly engage with the artist and the ideas of self-determined world-making and community-building within the exhibition space—situating these concepts within a real-world setting.



Amanda Curreri. *Wallet Bags*, 2016. Flame Red, Royal Blue, Jade Green, and Jet Black fabric, thread, zippers 9 x 6 inches each. Courtesy of the artist.



Amanda Curreri. *Eff (Leather)*, 2015. Leather, acrylic, on dyed, discharged, and printed fabric, 25 x 19 inches. Courtesy of Romer Young Gallery.

Similarly to her employment of color, naming functions as a key conceptual element in reading Curreri's work, particularly the works in the *Eff* series. In her words: "When you read *Wild Patience*, Rich pulls people up, and weaves them into her constellation. It's instinctual, and tempered with strategy, this way of performing myself at the core of the work. The work that acknowledges the performance itself implicates the person making it, but it's also inviting one to step into that space of identity being a work in progress, and a necessary one." Within this context of exploring the performance of self, Curreri asks the viewer to consider the performative elements of the work, and the ways in which we all perform our own sense of self—mirroring her own artistic and personal process.

Curreri's work *Warning—Graphic...¹*, was created in response to the events on November 15, 2015, in which Jamar Clark, a 24 year-old black male, was shot by Minneapolis police, and died the next day. The blurry image, bathed in the purplish red and blue glow of police car lights, could reference any crime scene. We see the back of what looks to be a police officer, while in the top right corner, two people with their arms around each other, presumably bystanders, look on. The image is a still from a video—taken from the perspective of an observer, standing across the street—and Curreri identifies this event through titling the work with the caption Black Lives Matter Minneapolis used when posting the video. The placement of *Warning—Graphic...* in a similar relative proximity, and facing *Jury Box*, 2010, echoes this visual relationship. *Jury Box*, two large canvases with screen-prints of the 12 chairs found in a typical jury box, implores an examination of our justice system, civic participation, and civil disobedience. Placed in context with *Warning—Graphic...*, the outcome of Jamar Clark's case still undecided, the work takes on a renewed urgency.



Amanda Curreri. *Eff (Adrienne Rich)*, 2015. Fabric dye and discharger, acrylic on canvas, 26 x 21 inches. Courtesy of Romer Young Gallery.

These works embody a central conceptual thread: to engender an everyday activism. Curreri's practice is marked by a distinct generosity while inviting further inquiry. It is in this participatory spirit that a robust, production-focused auxiliary programming schedule throughout the exhibition extends the exhibition's curatorial premise, theories, and concepts, and puts them into practice. In this ideological space of inquiry, the viewer might consider the following questions: what narratives might be uncovered as you discover these names, places, and histories? How can archival knowledge inform our present, and how might you act as a steward of history? For marginalized communities specifically, looking to the archive as a guide, or mentor, can provide a site and opportunity for locating self.

Much like exploring an archive, perhaps the desire and action to collect brings us closer to defining a sense of self. Without that collecting instinct, archives wouldn't exist. What would our world look like without everyday activism? Like Barbara Gittings,

the late former *Ladder* editor, and American Library Association activist, where can you turn when the references don't exist? Curreri's work challenges us to create our own narratives, to be agents of change and active participants in our societies, and gives us permission to do so—always *qui vive*, or on alert.

¹The full title of this work is: *Warning—Graphic: We have uncovered video of Jamar Clark moments after he was shot in the head by Minneapolis Police. At the 29 second mark you can see Jamar's body appears to be lifeless on the ground with his hands in handcuffs, just as numerous witnesses have reported from day one*, 2016, Digital print on paper and plywood, 72 x 39 x 18 inches.

DIGGING QUEER ART

SHAWN(TA) SMITH-CRUZ IN CONVERSATION WITH AMANDA CURRERI DECEMBER 3, 2015
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIBED BY SUSANNAH MAGERS, AND COMMISSIONED FOR THE EXHIBITION

Emily Dickenson's 1877 letter to Elizabeth Holland has a line that reads, "Had we the first intimation of the Definition of Life, the calmest of us would be Lunatics!" I came across this line only after seeing Curreri's solo exhibition title, *The Calmest of Us Would Be Lunatics*, January 22 – May 8, 2016, at Rochester Art Center. At the prompting of Susannah Magers, RAC Curator of Art and Public Engagement, I was asked to wear my lesbian/librarian/archivist hat to provoke a lens of feminism, queerness, and radicalism when applying the archival function to art. To me, Curreri's exhibition title referenced a calm that we're in *now*, or a resolved space in queerness—like we have arrived.

Whether responsive to marriage equality, or how we're managing current movements like the Black Lives Matter movement, or the criminalization or death of women of color—we're being very calm. Before, the calmest of us would have been lunatics; now, we're tweeting. Curreri digs through the archival collection of the Daughters of Bilitis, the first lesbian organization in the country, and their journal, *The Ladder*, at the Tretter Collection in LGBT Studies of the University of Minnesota, to pin the present with the past, and charge our own radicalisms. Her cell recorded my landline with Google Talk.

- Shawn(ta) Smith-Cruz

AC: Before going into the Tretter Collection, I got up early. It was freezing out, but I went for a run along the Mississippi River. Running for me is a way of getting to know a place, opening up my heart and my eyes. Going into archives is heavy. Some of the material I saw brought on tears. I needed to prepare my whole body. It's a physical endeavor, digging through files for eight hours. And then I need to be emotionally responsive so I'm not just looking with my brain.

SSC: Was it what you expected it to look like? Did you find anything surprising?

AC: I've been working with *The Ladder*, and the Daughters of Bilitis, for a while, but this has been the first opportunity that I've had to pull actual documents into an artwork. I didn't know what I would find at the Tretter; it's just one box they have for Barbara Gittings, [the founder of the NYC chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis and editor of *The Ladder*]. I had my nose in the box, and when I was finally speaking to Lisa Vecoli, whose amazing job it is to run this archive, she said, "I don't know what your point of interest is with Barbara, but I have some things in my office I could show you."

SSC: Were you actively considering what this would become on the other side once the digging was completed?

AC: I think it's the difference of digging and being interested in archives, and then having it turn on, or become alive specific to a moment in time and place. For example, Lisa being a living person, and me intersecting with her knowledge and experience I was able to access important Minnesota histories of LGBTQ activism that were new to me. I was trusting that the work would turn on, transforming from documents into site-based, lived artwork.

SSC: Do you feel pressure to create the archival as potential art objects?

AC: Archival materials are already objects. I don't want to just replicate them, and call them art. For example, [the exhibition has] representations of digital prints, scans, actual items on loan from the Tretter, and even a re-creation of these wild early 1970's "wallet bags" from an ad in the DOB newsletters. The objects are on display for people to experience the archive outside of the archive and in new arrangement. It's also about public access, bringing libraries and learning into an art context.

SSC: Do you find that a simple shifting in location and naming would make the archive art?

AC: Yes, but then I also hope the archive stays an archive. I'm hoping to blow-up some 8½ x 11 inch documents, as they exist in the folders, to be banner-sized on the wall, using art to affect the body. Usually, there's a hierarchy between a person and an object: we're way bigger than a letter-sized piece of paper. In the gallery space, I want to make this letter-sized document exceed the height of anyone that comes into the room and use formal qualities like color and pattern to announce these documents in a manner akin to a skewed-version of traditional Icon painting.

SSC: Tell me more about your vision for the exhibition, *The Calmest of Us Would Be Lunatics*.

AC: The title references Emily Dickinson and a literal female voice announcing the show and evoking feelings of disquiet and contradiction. I have been using effigies as the underlying metaphor for an ongoing series of paintings and a dinner series called *CLAMS*. The dinner series evokes past histories through the use of printed materials, such as napkins, which have different documents from the past on them. The work has to serve a function if I'm going to put it in public, and that usually means I want to connect with people. There's something about the gallery space: it's private, it's public. I can't get beyond the fact that somebody is giving me this space that people will cross the threshold to get into,



Eff (Tommie Smith), 2015. Fabric dye and discharger, digital print on fabric, 27 x 22 inches. Courtesy of Romer Young Gallery.

and using that in a somehow exceptional way. To make an experience for both myself and the people that will go in there in a way that doesn't exist otherwise.

SSC: Since you're talking about space, tell me about location. I like how you were focusing on the gallery as a threshold, and a private and public space. In Adrienne Rich's essay, "Notes Towards a Politics of Location," 1984, she writes,

A movement for change lives in feelings, actions, and words. ...abstract thinking, narrow tribal loyalties, every kind of self-righteousness, the arrogance of believing ourselves at the center. Yet how, except through ourselves, do we discover what moves other people to change? (Rich, 1984)

AC: I really like how within that one quote, Rich doesn't choose sides. She talks about the problems of tribalism, but also, how else can we deal with this, unless we do it from inside, from the center, from the self. Within that, there's this calm lunatics contradiction thing going on, where it's both a visceral, lived intentionality and still an experiment.

SSC: So true.

AC: Adrienne Rich is one of the effigies in the *Eff* series of paintings. The painting for her is from her book, *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far: Poems 1978-1981*. Rich pulls people up and weaves them in her constellation. It's instinctual, and tempered with strategy, and then instinctual again: this way of performing myself at the core of the work. It just is. I'm not interested in making a painting that talks about the aesthetics of painting. I'm interested in art as a way of understanding the world through a body, and through community.

SSC: Which people are you making your work for? Are you making work for people that mirror you?

AC: There's a show I did a few years ago called *The Aunque*, where a lot of the work was about queer outlaw figures. It was a process of recognizing for me. I had a late official coming out, with my friends and in my private life. I've always identified as queer, but I've had a pretty long relationship with a man. I never had to negotiate it publically, or make any kind of statement. I never came out until more recently. That process paralleled [*The Aunque*], and that idea of starting to choose audience. When I was invited to do a show in Korea, I explicitly wanted to make a work that was in conversation, with me, and the Korean audience.

SSC: How do you think the conversation shifts with an audience in Minnesota?

AC: One thing that's kind of exciting is that I'm going to try and conflate a different work that I did in Korea called *Re-screening of KBS's Cancelled Club Daughters of Bilitis*, 2011, which will be showing in the galleries at Rochester Art Center, because it relates to the archive. It's a ripped YouTube video that I screen, on a 60-minute loop, of a TV show that was cancelled in Korea. It was cancelled the summer before I was headed there to be in their 2011 International Incheon Women Artists' Biennale.

SSC: Tell me more about this dig!

AC: I was digging, and I find this TV program in Korea, that's using Daughters of Bilitis in their title, re-appropriating for their needs, to make their first kind of *The L Word*, their first lesbian drama for TV. The piece I ended up showing at the biennale was a re-screening of Club Daughters of Bilitis on a loop. The sponsor of the biennale was the same TV channel, KBS, that cancelled the TV show. It's a fascinating 'archive-alive' moment where a culture took an archive and put it to use.

Works Cited:

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Shawn(ta) Smith-Cruz is a separatist, zinester, archivist, writer, and black-dyke-participant of intentional, community-specific, collective spaces. A coordinator at the Lesbian Herstory Archives, and collective member of WOW Cafe Theater as producer of women of color theater, namely, Rivers of Honey, Shawn(ta) is a librarian appointed as Assistant Professor at the Graduate Center, CUNY. From (the people's republic of) Brooklyn, Shawn(ta) founded the Queer Housing Nacional List, and has since purchased a home designated for queer women of color (QWOC) with her wife in the Bronx. A board member of Fire & Ink, a national organization for LGBT writers of African descent, and founder of Lambey Press, independently publishing QWOC, Shawn(ta) is a co-editor of an upcoming special issue of Sinister Wisdom, a lesbian literary and art journal, on honoring the Michigan Women's Music Festival.



AMANDA CURRERI

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Boston, MA, Amanda Curreri is an interdisciplinary artist and educator currently teaching as a faculty member at the School of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning at the University of Cincinnati, in Cincinnati, OH. Her practice focuses on presenting personal and social histories regarding public experiences of intersubjectivity. Informed by social activism and built within the vernacular of visual language, her work creates frameworks for re-thinking power relationships.

Curreri has recently exhibited at the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, CA; Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA; Ortega y Gasset Projects, NY; and the Incheon Women's Biennale, Korea. She is a recipient of a Joan Mitchell Foundation Fellowship (2009) and a SF Guardian Goldie Award (2010). Curreri holds an MFA from the California College of the Arts, a BFA from The School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and a BA from Tufts University in Sociology and Peace and Justice Studies.

Curreri is represented by Romer Young Gallery in San Francisco, CA.

Cover: Amanda Curreri. *Coraje, Conejo*, 2015. Acrylic on canvas, zebra wood and stretcher bars, 61 x 45 inches. Courtesy of Romer Young Gallery.

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