The Laws for Falling Bodies: A Queer Print Media Exhibition  
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Text by Lex Morgan Lancaster

We exist in relation. We participate in caring communities, extended histories, expansive galaxies, new worlds yet to be imagined and created. The title of this exhibition curated by printmakers Shawn Bitters and Matthew Willie Garcia, *The Laws for Falling Bodies*, is inspired by Galileo’s law of falling bodies, which dictates how gravity affects objects on earth as well as the pull of celestial bodies in orbit. This concept offers an analogy for queer relations and orientations: we are drawn together and pulled apart; we enter collective orbits of thinking and feeling; we love human and non-human beings with deep urgency and tenderness; we create new spaces and realities beyond the given, universes for things to happen otherwise. It is a hopeful theory (we are brought together across time and space) that also acknowledges the gravity of queer conditions (we are coerced to behave according to normative laws of gender and sexuality). Moving beyond notions of queerness as a singular identity, this exhibition foregrounds queer as a force of action, working against the powerful currents that seek to abolish queer lifeworlds, and demonstrating creative tactics that envision new worlds into existence.

Queer relations emerge in response to a social order that punishes difference, disdains those who do cohere according to limited categories, and rejects ways of living and loving that do not serve heteronormativity and racial capitalist (re)production. The work in this exhibition generates queer orbits of belonging, honoring the everyday and domestic traces of our lives, including traces of loss and harm, and also transforming those familiar things beyond their assumed meanings and contexts. In this work, we glimpse the interconnections between ourselves and the vastness of the universe; small gestures of care and intimacy in relation to the world beyond ourselves. We sense our orientations shift, our spatial and corporeal boundaries become uncertain, our self-reflections incorporate the people and things and environment around us. We move in relation to interconnected terrestrial and celestial bodies and events. There is both an unsettling discomfort and a deep hope excavated from these queer experiences.

Printmaking is a queer medium with a queer history. Artists such as Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg brought printmaking into the mainstream art world in the mid-twentieth century to disrupt traditional categories of “high” vs. “low,” which we now understand to be a queer tactic. Artist-activists such as David Wojnarowicz and collectives such as Gran Fury and Fierce Pussy used print media to protest injustice and inform the public about AIDS in the 1980s and 90s. Printmaking is a crucial medium for queer visual cultures due to its affordability and capacity for reproduction and dissemination in the public sphere on posters, billboards, signs, and buttons. The artists in this exhibition represent a current generation of queer artists who use printmaking in the most expansive sense, embracing the multidisciplinary capacities of the medium to create work that defy binaries of two versus three dimensions, painting versus sculpture, singular objects versus installations and environments. Printmaking practices depend on community, rejecting the fiction of a
singular genius artist in favor of collective production and participation. In the context of this exhibition, multidisciplinary printmaking practices are queer utopian worldmaking gestures.

We cannot create new worlds unless we can envision them. The works in this exhibition embody what queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz considered to be utopia’s queer aesthetic dimension, a great refusal of a stagnant here and now, a queerness that is “not yet here.” For Muñoz, queer aesthetics can inspire the political imagination to reject a repressive social order, offering “new ways of perceiving and acting on a reality that it itself potentially changeable” (Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity, p. 135). Queer utopian visions in art might manifest new forms and spaces into being, or everyday objects and familiar materials recreated and made anew. The work in this exhibition similarly does not settle for the known or given, but often disrupts our immediate comprehension. Assumptions are made when we interrogate surfaces of objects and beings—this is the process by which we think we understand gender and sexuality and race—and this work plays with notions of the “real” to suggest that perhaps everything is a mimicry that also fails. Nothing passes. This work does not represent queerness, rather, it uses processes of abstraction to contest the persistent promise of proof, undermining our interrogating gaze to render every surface a space for play. Looking at this work is not a passive endeavor. In these encounters, our bodies become another surface, and we are implicated in our own acts of looking and perceiving. Often, our perceptions are shown to be false. Things we think we know are transformed via abstraction, patterning and repetition, reflection and projection. Everything contains a deeper significance; everything contains the capacity for transformation.

You are now entering a queer world—a multidimensional space-time where bodies collide, where different times and histories are urgently pulled together, where new realities take shape but never settle. You are not alone. Enter this portal to a queer dimension, and allow yourself to be transformed.

**Featured Artists:**

**Ruben Bryan Castillo** creates archives of relationships, tracing queer intimacies and histories through a process of ambiguously built narratives—persistently pulling together everyday ephemera as documents for what often goes unspoken or unrecorded. Castillo’s queer archival practice does not record direct representations of couples; rather, impressions of contact in domestic contexts shows us how ordinary things around us can contain charged traces of love and loss. These wild juxtapositions pull together people, objects, and environments to suggest that queer worlds are built from small, everyday, minor gestures.

**Erin Zona** explores shared experiences of love and desire that are fleeting and yet connect us across time and space, using abstraction to communicate the unrepresented and unrepresentable trajectories of queer history that would otherwise go unseen. Zona’s drawings capture the intensity of this connection by producing a difficult and unsettling
encounter—patterns that never fix in our vision, and yet connect us to the vastness of the universe. Her work connects momentary intimacies to mythic narratives, traces and documents of the queer things we know have existed and yet remain undeveloped as clear images.

**Ash Armenta** visualizes moments of tenderness and affective interactions between bodies. Figures are present but abstracted into spatial topographies, mirrored reflections, fluid surfaces and depths that map spaces for queer touch. Bodies and spaces are unfixed, transitional, and yet relate in tender community with the viewer, whose body contributes an undetermined gesture in this multidimensional space. Armenta’s work blurs the past, present, and future of queer being in relation, suggesting collective experiences of utopia that are not there and then, but here and now.

**Kat Richards** prompts us to see our bodies as abstractions, disrupting taxonomies and systems of classification through ambiguous and uncanny forms. We move close in order to interrogate the object for signs of something we recognize, something we aren’t sure is real, and in the process the failure of mimicry is revealed. Richards created a cloak from thousands of small pin back buttons, reflective surfaces on which a print is potentially placed and worn to signal political alliances. Here, the collective buttons become an ambiguous surface for the reflection of the viewer’s body and environment. In turn, the cloak becomes a space itself in which multiple viewers may be together, or under which someone may arm themself against the fixing gaze.

**Shawn Bitters** conveys geological forms and processes to create spaces for viewers to occupy. His work prompts us to reflect on our relationship to space, and the multidimensionality of queer experience. Rocks, meteors, volcanic eruptions, and crystalline formations are represented in flattened cutout shapes and assembled into stage sets in which the viewer becomes the actor. Scientific systems of classification and identification are suggested and yet experienced as arbitrary when we are faced with natural forms on the border between reality and fantasy.

**Matthew Willie Garcia** uses printmaking to explore processes inspired by quantum mechanics, cosmology, and astrophysics. Blurring science with science fiction, Garcia reflects on our unknowable place within the vastness of the universe. Brightly colored celestial bodies fly across space, exploding off the pages of prints. Garcia’s digital video projections allow the viewer to map our bodies in relation to moving quantum ribbons—cyberspaces in which we meditate on the queerness of our orientations in time and space.