



Blake Little, David, ©BlakeLittle2019.

FLUID

Portraits by Blake Little



We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts

UVic Legacy Art Gallery
Distance Education Program
for *FLUID: Portraits by Blake Little*

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

UVic Legacy Art Gallery **Distance Education Program** **for *FLUID: Portraits by Blake Little***

This guide was created to support learning surrounding the exhibition *FLUID: Portraits by Blake Little*, and to provide context for understanding the exhibition in lieu of a class visit. Included in this guide are exhibition text and installation images, as well as a small selection of portraits out of the original 21 featured in the exhibition.

Instructions:

1. Read slides 4 – 8.
2. Take some time to look at the exhibition images and select portraits on slides 9 – 14.
3. Answer the discussion questions and complete the activities on pages 15 – 18.

FLUID

Portraits by Blake Little

Guest Curated by Wayne Baerwaldt

Supported by the Chair in Transgender Studies

As people who identify as trans, gender fluid, non-binary, Two Spirit, and other diverse gender identities face complex and challenging societal responses, the act of representing oneself can be a brave act of defiance. FLUID, a new photographic portrait series by Los Angeles-based artist Blake Little, sets out to collaborate with diverse local, national and international trans and gender fluid people to capture and reflect some of the concerns and potentials of how they choose to represent themselves through photography.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION



Blake Little, *Leo and Nathan; David; Brynn*, ©BlakeLittle2019.

ARTIST STATEMENT

Stories of expressions of trans, gender fluid, non-binary, Two Spirit, and other diverse gender identities circulate widely, adding to a complex and oft-times challenging web of shifting societal responses to gender. My photographic eye is guided by an aesthetic of simplicity, distillation & clarity. I want to make visible the many ways we read photographs and their subject matter (imagined and real) but particularly via a collaborative process as filtered through the voices of the people who posed for these photographs.

Transgender identification, representation and image dissemination increasingly occupies the collective imagination with media headlines. Even as more and more trans, gender fluid, non-binary, and Two Spirit people are coming out, the act of representing/revealing/exposing/exhibiting oneself through photography, moving images, audio recordings, and performance is a brave act of defiance. I would like to thank the many people in Canada and the US who participated in this project and trusted me to represent them well.

--- Blake Little

This exhibition comprises 21 photographic portraits from an ongoing series focusing on people who identify along the trans, gender fluid, non-binary, and Two Spirit+ spectrum. Blake Little photographed people in multiple locations between Los Angeles and Western Canada, including the University of Victoria. In each location, they were interviewed and encouraged to collaborate in the creative process of styling their portraits. Little privileged the clothes people chose to wear, how they fashioned them for the camera lens, and what they exposed of their material culture.

Trans advocate and project mentor, Dr. Aaron Devor at UVic has been an insightful voice in each stage of the production. Dr. Devor has guided the discourse around what it means to be increasingly “in-between”, “out”, or elsewhere on the gender spectrum, especially in front of a camera lens. It is a complicated discourse fraught with the voices of who is able to collect photographic representation and the processes of best practices. He has repeatedly drawn attention to the sensitive and complex markers of lens-based representations which inform and shape viewer perceptions.

CURATOR STATEMENT

CURATOR STATEMENT

Comments by the portrait subjects which accompany the portraits were prepared in consultation with the people in the photographs. Each text reflects on life experiences before, during and/or after transition. The comments allow viewers to reflect on very personal biographical passages while considering the complex issues of lens-based representation impacted by issues of power, visibility, sensationalism and the challenged belief in the photographic archive as accurate historical record.

As a curator producing the correlated text for the exhibition, I focused on people's understandings of their transitions along an expansive spectrum of gender identities. I want to thank Dr. Aaron Devor for establishing a respectful process to comprehend the conflicting discourses around portraits of gender fluidity and identity. I would also like to thank Blake for setting a collaborative pathway to pursue an integrated aesthetic with uncompromising discipline and determination. Moving beyond the aesthetically defunct category of "identity politics" and the fraught gains of visibility, the portraits are a reminder of a gender spectrum of fluid points along an ongoing path to self-identification.

---Wayne Baerwaldt, Guest Curator



EXHIBITION IMAGES

Artist Statement

Stories of expressions of trans, gender fluid, non-binary, Two Spirit, and other diverse gender identities circulate widely, adding to a complex and oft-times challenging web of shifting societal responses to gender. My photographic eye is guided by an aesthetic of simplicity, distillation & clarity. I want to make visible the many ways we read photographs and their subject matter (imagined and real) but particularly via a collaborative process as filtered through the voices of the people who posed for these photographs.

Transgender identification, representation and image dissemination increasingly occupies the collective imagination with media headlines. Even as more and more trans, gender fluid, non-binary, and Two Spirit people are coming out, the act of representing/ revealing/exposing/exhibiting oneself through photography, moving images, audio recordings, and performance is a brave act of defiance. I would like to thank the many people in Canada and the US who participated in this project and trusted me to represent them well.

--- Blake Little





FLUID

Portraits by Blake Liffle

The exhibition comprises 21 photographic portraits from an ongoing series focusing on people who identify along the trans, gender fluid, non-binary and two-spirit spectrum. Blake Liffle photographed people in multiple locations between Los Angeles and Western Canada, including the University of Victoria. In each location, they were interviewed and encouraged to collaborate in the creative process of taking their portraits. Liffle privileged the clothes people chose to wear, how they fashioned them for the camera lens, and what they exposed of their material culture.

Trans advocate, scholar and project mentor, Dr. Aaron Devor at Uvic has been an insightful voice in each stage of the production. Dr. Devor has guided the discourse around what it means to be seemingly "in-between", "out", or elsewhere on the gender spectrum, especially in front of a camera lens. It is a complicated discourse fraught with diverse voices about who is able to collect photographic representation, and about the processes of best practices. He has repeatedly drawn attention to the sensitive and complex markers of lens-based representations which inform and shape viewer perceptions.

Comments by the portrait subjects which accompany the portraits were prepared in consultation with the people in the photographs. Each text reflects on life experiences before, during and/or after transition. The comments allow viewers to reflect on very personal biographical privileges while considering the complex issues of lens-based representation as impacted by issues of power, visibility, stigmatization and the challenged belief in the photographic archive as accurate historical record.

As a curator producing the curated text for the exhibition, I focused on people's understandings of their transitions along an expansive spectrum of gender identities. I want to thank Dr. Aaron Devor for enabling a respectful process to comprehend the conflicting discourses around portraits of gender fluidity and identity. I would also like to thank Blake for setting a collaborative pathway to arrive at integrated aesthetics with uncompromising discipline and determination. Moving beyond the institutionally defined category of "identity politics" and the fraught games of visibility, the portraits are a reminder of a gender spectrum of fluid points along an ongoing path to self-identification.

—Wolfe Rosenwald, Guest Curator

Brynn Hawker, Victoria, British Columbia, 2019
Archival Giclee Print

I identify as non-binary she/her/they/them pronouns. I've been very privileged that my family is very supportive and protective of me. My mom's greatest fear is me being hurt because of my gender identity. I spent years (from the age of 16 onward) trying to come to terms with who I was and how I identified. At 21 I finally started taking hormones and, for the first time in my life, my body started changing in a way that made me happier. It was surreal. If you think you might be trans or non-binary you probably are. And that's okay! Even if there are people in your life who won't be supportive there is a huge queer family out there who loves you already.





K.P Dennis, Victoria, British Columbia, 2019
Archival Giclee Print

I identify as non-binary transmasculine/trans. In an ideal world gender binary would be eradicated and destroyed, no longer a concept taught from birth to uphold capitalist and white supremacist ideals. People would be able to be free in their fluid states of being, with no judgement or fear to their safety. Healthcare would be safe and accessible.

I'm still coming into my true self. I feel so much shame and fear, and I'm unpacking the transphobia I've been taught my whole life. The further along I travel in this journey, the lighter and more myself I feel. But it's tough, especially when traversing the intersections of race and gender. Nothing I do will ever ensure my safety. Perhaps my happiness. But never both.

Everything we've ever been taught about gender is a lie. You know what you are. You know who you are, and you know what you like. Stick to that. You can't be "trans" wrong, or "non-binary" wrong. Be true to yourself, and you'll always do right by you. I also recommend taking your time. There's no rush, and it's okay if it takes a while. This is all really confusing content. Just know you are loved, you are powerful, and you are wanted. However you are, as you are. Always.

Brody Fitzpatrick, Los Angeles, 2018

Archival Giclee Print

I am binary in my gender expression, physical and clothing choices are masculine. I am a dual spirit that is fluid between female and male. It has been an arduous journey seeking emotional sobriety. I repressed the nature of my true self at a very young age. As a teenager into adulthood I didn't feel like I belonged with either sex. I did behave as very masculine and was attracted to females. I resigned myself to identify as a lesbian but was not ever comfortable with my body. I essentially abandoned myself by repressing my truth and adapting to the constructs of society. However, I did extraordinary things as a woman. I am one of 45 women who were the first to be sworn in as firefighters with the NYC Fire Department. I still felt empty or incomplete and not whole. I would say don't do what I did, don't compromise and self-medicate. There is a ton of support today. Avail yourself the opportunity to get it, especially if your parents are having a difficult time understanding. Go online and find LGBTQ centers in your area. Be strong, keep moving forward and trust your instincts. Realize your authenticity and claim your freedom through expression.



In his artist statement, Blake Little states, “Even as more and more trans, gender fluid, non-binary, and Two Spirit people are coming out, the act of representing/revealing/exposing/exhibiting oneself through photography, moving images, audio recordings, and performance is a brave act of defiance”.

Do you agree with Little that representing oneself as transgender, gender fluid, non-binary or Two Spirit is an act of defiance? Why or why not?

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION

In his curator statement, Wayne Baerwaldt references the “complicated discourse” regarding who is able to collect photographic representation. What do you think he is referring to here?

Spend some time examining other photographic work by Blake Little on [his website](#). Does seeing other works by Little influence your perception of the works in *FLUID*? Why or why not?

What are important things to consider when representing the identities of others in artwork?

Brainstorm a list of 5 words or phrases that represent your identity.

Now, take a selfie that reflects those ideas. You may want to take a few and choose your favourite.

Were you able to take a photo that you felt represented your identity? Why or why not? How did you feel about this process?

Activity

CAPTURING IDENTITY

Activity

GENDER METAPHOR

The way we experience our gender and gender expression is very personal and always changing.

If you could describe your gender using a metaphor, how would you describe it? Is your gender serious? Is it silly? Is it colourful, or rebellious?

Write out a metaphor for your gender.

Ex: My gender is a river, it never stays still.

Using the medium of your choice, create an artwork that represents your gender metaphor.

The FLUID exhibition is supported and guided by the University of Victoria Chair in Transgender Studies and displays images loaned by the Transgender Archives. The Chair in Transgender Studies is committed to community building and research to improve the well-being of trans, nonbinary, Two-Spirit, and other gender-diverse people. The Transgender Archives, part of the University of Victoria Libraries, preserves the history of those who have contributed to the betterment of trans, nonbinary, Two-Spirit, and other gender-diverse people.

Learn more [on their website](#).

Visit [their YouTube Channel](#) for more resources on gender diversity.

Special thanks to Kingsley Strudwick at [Ambit Gender Diversity Consulting](#)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



VISIT THE EXHIBITION

**JANUARY 11
- APRIL 11
2020**

FLUID

Portraits by Blake Little

LEGACY ART GALLERY

630 Yates St. // Weds-Sat 10-4
250.721.6562 // legacy.uvic.ca

We acknowledge with respect the Lekwungen peoples on whose traditional territory the University of Victoria stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEC peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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University of Victoria
Legacy Art Galleries



Chair in Transgender Studies
The Transgender Archive



Conseil des arts
du Canada
Canada Council
for the Arts



Arts Board
cultivating
the arts