

Leslie Foster Artist Statement

I see my practice, which folds experimental film into installation space, as a gentle invitation into turbulent places. If I tried to encapsulate my practice in a single sentence, it would be "I'm trying to praise the mutilated world and practice resurrection." Somewhere in that collision of Adam Zagajewski and Wendell Berry's poems is the frustrating, beautiful thing I strive to capture in the work I create. That work, which often utilizes ritual and movement, seeks to embody emotions for which most of us have never found words, asks how we can queer current power structures, and challenges viewers to slip into discomfort and then stay there for a while. Heavenly Brown Body is a natural continuation of those ideas.

In 2012, Mark Aguhar (she/her) published the poem Litanies to My Heavenly Brown Body, which immediately sent ripples through queer online spaces, to her blog Cultural Disruptions. The poem subverts or perhaps reveals, the underlying subversion of the Beatitudes, creating a psalm that serves as a call to action and blessing for marginalized queer people of color. Mark died that same year but the poem and her work have continued to be a beacon for queer and trans, Black, Indigenous, and people of color (QTBIPOC). I discovered the poem in 2013, thanks to Tumblr and like so many others, was deeply moved and inspired by the piece. As I revisited the words over the years, I began to imagine them as the basis for a queer rite and, in 2017, began planning in earnest.

The piece, which is typically displayed as a four-screen installation in art spaces, is a challenge and a comfort. It is a ritual of discomfort and of soothing all at once. I'm incredibly grateful to my thought partner Jessi Knippel (she/her), my cinematography Avery Holliday (they/them), and the amazing performers, Rawiyah Tariq (they/them), Jade Phoenix (she/her), and Tas Al-Ghul (they/she) for joining me in the creation of this piece.

Artist Bio

Through his work with experimental film and installation, Los Angeles-based artist Leslie Foster (he/him) seeks to create fleeting pocket universes and contemplative ecologies that explore Black and queer futurity through the lens of dream logic. Leslie's aesthetic sensibility comes from a childhood spent growing up in Southeast Asia, straddling multiple Asian cultures and his own American roots. His work, which has been exhibited internationally and includes two solo shows, is designed to quietly subvert existing power dynamics while inviting viewers into challenging dialogs through the beautifully strange. Leslie is currently pursuing an MFA in Design Media Arts at UCLA and is the Director of Art Residency for the LA-based arts nonprofit Level Ground. In his spare time, he occasionally fantasizes about running away with a sea-faring band of nomadic artists.