

CONTENT WARNING: Queer, Fat, Sexy

Artist: Connor Ovenden-Shaw

Connor Ovenden-Shaw, Also Known as Foot, is a non-binary queer artist based on Wadawurrung land in Melbourne's outer west. Working within textile, photography and performance they are known for their unique and absurdist take on gender identity, sustainability and beauty standards.

CONTENT WARNING: Queer, Fat, Sexy critically examines the artists' enduring challenges that inform their art making. Through the mediums of photography, textile, sculpture and video we witness them explore, grapple and command topics such as power and vulnerability, rejection, reclamation, isolation and community.

In this exhibition we are presented with what 'queer' means to the artist and how they process and respond to what is regularly granted as 'normal'. That the journey is non-linear and ongoing and is in fact an artform itself.

Opening: Wednesday 18 Jan 2023, 6.30 – 8.30pm
Exhibition: 19 Jan – 19 Mar

'CONTENT WARNING: Queer, Fat, Sexy'

by Simpson Myers

Connor Ovenden-Shaw (They/Them) is a multidisciplinary artist working primarily in performance, photography, and textile. This exhibition is a celebration of all that it means to be queer, fat, and sexy and is a deep exploration of identity. Connor takes the idea of the 'real' and 'performative' self and deconstructs and reconstructs these concepts to blur the lines of self-acceptance, self-knowing, and external perceptions of the self.

Much of how Connor represents himself comes from a rejection of the notion that queer people and fat bodies should make themselves small, unobtrusive, and conform to the bounds that society deems to allow. They take the seeds of self and grow them into a loud, proud, and celebratory statement: I claim space, joy, life -on my own terms.

This is evident in the titular work in the exhibition- in the photograph *Queer Fat Sexy* Connor is adorned with a feather boa and surrounded by colour and joy. We see it again in the image *The Fat Agenda*, where Connor and others are pictured enjoying a day at the beach, no hiding – no minimising of self is happening here. Instead, the self is multiplied and replicated and used almost as an adornment. These acts of maximisation and glorification of the self serve as a powerful antidote to the societal pressure to hide, to apologise, to minimise.

There is also an element in the works of refusal – refusal to justify their existence to those who haven't experienced queer life, fat life, non-binary life. This is a powerful act, as many approaches to combating hate and fear in the world force people to expose or justify themselves to others for that acceptance we all crave. That if only people understood us, they could accept or love us. Connor's work rejects that subservience of self to the ideal of acceptance. We see this so clearly in their work *Secret Genitals*, *What is Non-Beanie?* and in the pageant portrait *Pageant of Gender Confusion*.

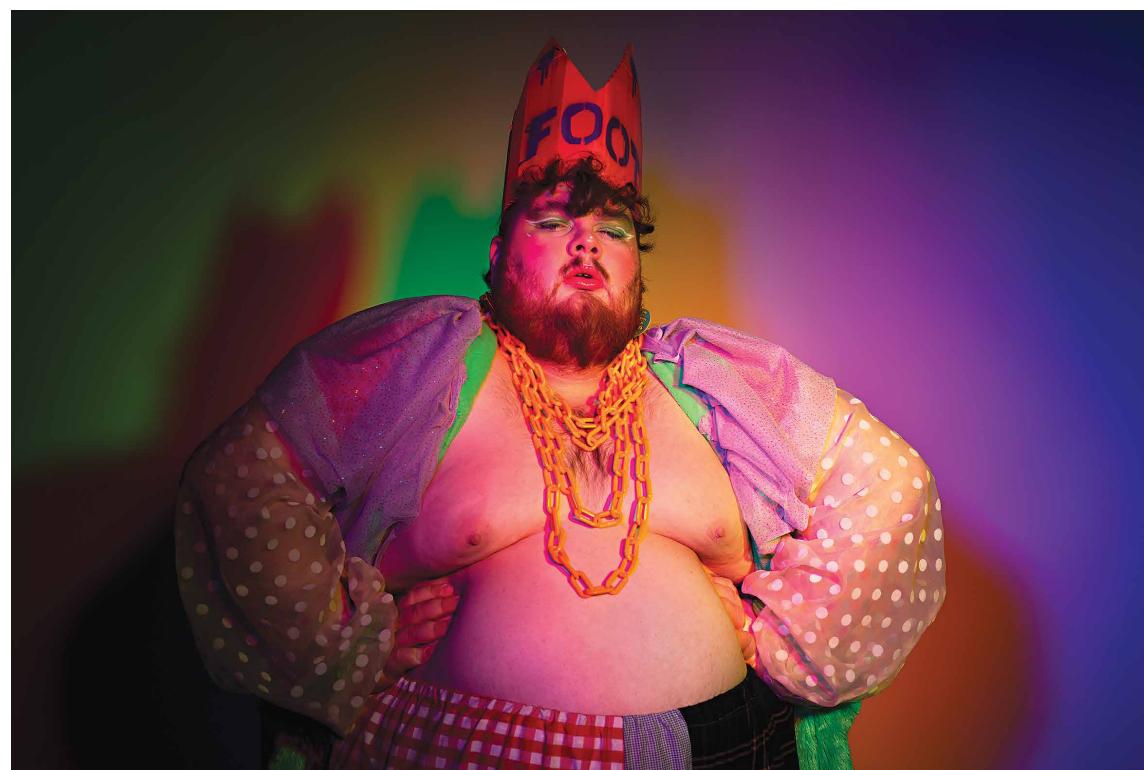
This exhibition also represents a personal vulnerability and intention to interrogate the self at a level deeper than what we have seen before from Connor's work. The video work *Crime of Consumption* is intensely personal, and yet it speaks universally to anyone that has experienced disordered eating. We can all immediately feel and see the work as a battle ground of the deepest self desire vs. insecurity. Showing it to the public is a deep revelation of self which ultimately could only be achieved through self-love and acceptance.

This is a thread of meaning that weaves its way throughout all of Connor's work- the idea that the performative self has a meaningful role to play in the repair and reconstruction of self-identity in defiance of a world that at times can feel unwelcoming.

Ultimately, this exhibition succeeds in turning the narrative of what it means to exist in the world as a queer and fat person into something unequivocally sexy, exciting, and aspirational.

When we experience Connor's work, we experience an invitation to see anew- to feel new ourselves.

Connor says about their work 'Sometimes when I'm creating these pieces, I feel otherworldly,' and I think we can all take a bit of that magic with us to see the world a little more wonderfully through Connor's lens.



Walk a meter in my dress

Like the phrase "walk a mile in my shoes" Connor invites you to step into a new world for a moment and experience their textile creations for yourself. Just like the world is not designed for queer people or fat bodies- these clothes are not designed for you. Experience the magic of Connors textile creations, and the dissonance of having to navigate a space and an outfit that was not designed with you in mind.

Evoking the childhood days of playful identity exploration and yet bringing home the deeper message of Connors work, that they have had to create and claim their own space of belonging in the world.

Saturday 11 February, 2 – 4pm

Wyndham Art Gallery



Front:
Connor Ovenden-Shaw, *Self Proclaimed Enigma* (detail), 2022, C-Type Photograph. Image courtesy of the artist.

Top to bottom, left to right:
Connor Ovenden-Shaw, *The Flamingo I*, 2022, Photograph on Hahnemühle. Image courtesy of the artist.

Connor Ovenden-Shaw, *Earthbound Being*, 2022, Photograph on Hahnemühle. Image courtesy of the artist.

Connor Ovenden-Shaw, *Delicates*, 2022, Photograph on Hahnemühle. Image courtesy of the artist.

Connor Ovenden-Shaw, *The Fat Agenda*, 2022, Photograph on Hahnemühle. Image courtesy of the artist.