



## ARTISTS ARCHIVES OF THE WESTERN RESERVE

1834 East 123<sup>rd</sup> Street ▪ Cleveland, Ohio ▪ 44106-1910

The Artists Archives of the Western Reserve Gallery

1834 E 123<sup>rd</sup> St Cleveland, OH 44106

[www.ArtistsArchives.org](http://www.ArtistsArchives.org)

216.721.9020 / [info@ArtistsArchives.org](mailto:info@ArtistsArchives.org)

**Title of Exhibition:** *CONVERGE*

**Dates:** August 26 - October 16, 2021

**Venues:**

- **Artists Archives of the Western Reserve** | 1834 East 123rd Street, Cleveland, OH 44106
- **LGBT Center of Greater Cleveland** | 6705 Detroit Ave, Cleveland, OH 44102
- **Lake Erie College** | Royce Hall | 391 W Washington St, Painesville, OH 44077
- **Cleveland MetroHealth** | 2500 MetroHealth Drive, Cleveland, OH 44109
- **Judson Manor Retirement Community** | S. Concourse Gallery | 1890 E 107th St. Clev., OH 44106

**Receptions:**

- Artist Archives Opening Reception | Thursday, August 26 | 6:30 – 8:30pm
- LGBT Center Reception | Friday, September 17 | 6:30 – 8:30pm
- Cleveland MetroHealth Reception | Date TBA
- Lake Erie College Closing Reception | Thursday, October 14 | 4:30 – 7:30pm

**AAWR Virtual Programs:**

- *Un(masc)ing Drag History* with Dr. Lady J | Tuesday, September 14 | 7:00 – 8:00pm
- Art and AIDS Panel Discussion | Date TBA

**LGBTQ history is our history, and the story of the community is the story of our region. Behind the jubilant parades and rainbow flags which blossom along porches in June, is a proud and diverse population who live, work, and contribute mightily to the creative culture of Northeast Ohio.**

**This August, the Artists Archives of the Western Reserve presents *CONVERGE*, a massive visual art exhibition held in partnership with the LGBT Center of Greater Cleveland, Lake Erie College, Judson Manor Retirement Community, and Cleveland MetroHealth. Shown across 5 venues, *CONVERGE* brings together the stories of the LGBTQ community, including the historically underrepresented voices of women, transgender people, and people of color.**

***CONVERGE* features 71 regional artists of all ages, backgrounds, and identifications, creating a vibrant cross-section of the LGBTQ experience. Conceived by Kelly Pontoni, and co-curated by artists Sam Butler, Tony Williams, and Mark Yasenchack, with assistance by Mary Proctor, over 140 pieces were selected in a staggering array of media including painting, photography, textiles, glass, fashion, assemblage, and immersive installations which transport the viewers while transforming their perspective.**

**In a sense, Chief Curator Kelly Pontoni’s whole life has informed the exhibition. Pontoni, a print maker and painter who identifies as lesbian, is a recent graduate from Cleveland Institute of Art. “As a non-traditional student in my late 40’s, I found myself surrounded by a new generation of LGBTQ+ students. I wondered where I as a lesbian fit into an increasingly non-binary world...but instead of holing up in my comfort zone I asked questions. I listened... and over many, MANY cups of coffee, I gained perspective.” Inspired by these café conversations, *CONVERGE* was created “to open people’s minds, facilitate real dialog, and to honor the unique identities that come together to form our community.”**



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**United by themes of pride, protest, transformation and celebration, the art in each venue honors the past while looking to the future of the community. In the work of M. Carmen Lane, for example, the region's rich LGBTQ history is not only powerfully presented, but preserved.** On view in *CONVERGE* is Lane's poignant photographic triptych *Children Wade In!*, which documents the former Allen-Sullivan House on Euclid Avenue. Once known as *The Colosseum*, the site held "house balls," and served as a Black gay afterhours space until the late 1990s. As Lane describes, "this work is a gesture to acknowledge and honor Cleveland's underground Black ball culture and the Black queer histories that are hidden or erased by time and place." Demolished in July of 2021 to make way for a housing complex, all that remains are Lane's images and their frames, created from materials repurposed from the historic structure.

**Another important theme in *CONVERGE* is the exploration of identity, particularly trans and non-gender conforming identities in all their rich variations.** This is the case with Violet Maimbourg's mixed media installation *Wholeheartedness* which features fleshy, silicon sculptures lounging about a suburban interior. At once alarming and endearing, the eerily organic figures reflect the artist's own experience as a transgender woman. As Maimbourg explains, "Being in a body that is not congruent with your mind is a distressing, life altering experience... [These] creatures are more self-portraits than figments of my imagination... By removing body parts from the context of my own body, transforming them into art, they seem less intimidating."

***CONVERGE* is also honored to feature work from Cincinnati photographer Arykah Carter's *Black Trans Project*. In a series of elegant portraits, Carter creates dignified and relatable representations of the "everyday existence of black trans bodies."** As she explains, "Trans people of color often navigate away from mainstream Cis-Society and Trans community organizations because of a lack of trust, lack of individuals that resemble them... The [project] started off as a tribute to Black Trans Women seeks to make Black Trans Women, Trans Men, and our Non-Binary siblings more visible, and the normality of our lives more relatable."

**As colorful as a rainbow flag and just as joyful, a spirit of pride and celebration courses through the exhibition.** Nowhere is this better seen than in Susan Farone's *Efflorescence: A Lesbian Garden*, lush abstract triptych which jubilantly celebrates her lesbian identity as well her relationship to self, nature, and the universe beyond. "A garden is a wonderful metaphor for Lesbian lives - soil rich with great writers, change makers, artists, poets, singers, teachers, thinkers, and bad ass movers and shakers," Farone shares. "I have been OUT since 1984 and have loved my LESBIAN Garden of DYKE-o-dils, LEZBO-gonias, AMAZinnias... and FEMINations. I thank God every day that I am a Lesbian... SHE just smiles."

**A highlight of *CONVERGE* is painter Melissa Bloom's series of 71 miniature portraits which lovingly document the show's exhibiting artists.** Created from the artists' headshots, each 5 x 5" panel features the creators on jewel-toned rainbow backgrounds, ringed by golden byzantine inspired halos. Displayed at the LGBT Center of Greater Cleveland, it is hoped that the portraits will be purchased by a generous donor and added to the Center's growing collection of regional art.

***CONVERGE* is proud to display sections of the National AIDS Quilt which memorialize midwestern lives lost to the disease.** Founded in San Francisco, CA in 1987 by Cleve Jones, today the AIDS Quilt is composed of more than 49,000 panels on over 6,000 twelve-foot square blocks which are continuously exhibited around the country. MetroHealth, which has displayed the Quilt bi-annually since 2009, has planned their display to coincide with the show. MetroHealth will also hold a one-day workshop in partnership with Stitch Cleveland and local sewing volunteers to make new panels with local families, partners, lovers & friends of people who died of AIDS-related illness.

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**Work reflecting the impact of the AIDS epidemic will be reverently displayed throughout the partner venues. On view in the LGBT Center are the assemblage sculptures of Akron artist Bret Hines, created in remembrance of his brother, Rodney Hines, who died of AIDS in the 90s.** Chief Curator Kelly Pontoni describes, “Rodney lived in San Francisco and when he died, Brent and his family wanted to bring him home to bury him, but they couldn’t fly his body back because he died of AIDS. It was heartbreaking for the family. They had to cremate him... It’s been 20+ years since his brother passed away, and he still just holds so much of that with him and his art.”

**In addition to its support of local LGBTQ artists, *CONVERGE* also marks the first effort to extensively document their contributions to the important visual culture of Northeast Ohio.** As AAWR Executive Director Mindy Tousley explains, “It is our hope that holding this exhibition, producing a catalog, recording the artists oral histories, and supporting their stories in a series of virtual programs, will begin the process of historical documentation, and add to valuable insight addressing the extent of their work.” To this end, the Artists Archives is raising funds to archive their first lesbian artist in honor of the tireless efforts of curator Kelly Pontoni and her wife, Martha. Donations can be made on [artistsarchives.org](http://artistsarchives.org) or by calling the Archives directly, 216-721-9020.

**Receptions will be held at 4 venues, beginning with an opening reception at the Artists Archives on Thursday, August 26<sup>th</sup> featuring an appearance by Veranda L’Ni Cleveland’s Tallest Drag Entertainer.** Additional receptions will follow at Cleveland MetroHealth (Date TBA), the LGBT Center of Greater Cleveland on Friday, September 17<sup>th</sup>, and a closing reception will be held at Lake Erie College on Thursday, October 14<sup>th</sup>.

**On September 14<sup>th</sup>, the Archives will host *Un(masc)ing Drag History* with Dr. Lady J, a non-binary trans woman who holds a doctorate from Case Western Reserve University and is “the world’s first drag queen with a PhD dissertation on drag history.”** During this 1-hour virtual program, Lady J will reveal the real roots of drag, highlighting the overlooked contributions of cisgender women, trans and gender non-conforming people, and people of color to an art form. Please register on [artistsarchives.org](http://artistsarchives.org) to attend

**The Artists Archives will also be partnering with Cleveland MetroHealth to present a panel discussion on the relationship between art and the AIDS epidemic,** including Daniel Marcus, co-curator of the powerhouse exhibition *Art After Stonewall*, as well as Gil Kudrin, an exhibiting *CONVERGE* artist and the longest surviving AIDS patient in the United States. The panel will be moderated by Martha Pontoni, historic LGBTQ activist and former publisher of the Gay People’s Chronicle.

**For more information, a preview of the exhibition, and a full schedule of accompanying events and programming, please visit [artistsarchives.org](http://artistsarchives.org).**

***CONVERGE* Exhibiting Artists:** Amie Albert, Denise Astorino, Mark Badzik, Tom Balbo, Karen D. Beckwith, Roy Bigler, Melissa Bloom, Kat Burdine, Sam Butler, Arykah Carter, Ray Caspio, Cathy Clerk Dully, Terry Durst, Andrew Emel, Paxton Enstad, Gene Epstein, Susan Farone, Chuck Fischer, Christa Freehands, Matthew Gallagher, Trey Gehring, Jim George, Nancy Halbrooks, Cassie Harner, Alex Heard, Michael W. High, Bret Hines, Rodney Hines, Mark Howard, William Martin Jean, Harper Jenkins, Robert Jergens, Jackson Kennedy, Drew King, Gil Kudrin, M. Carmen Lane, Rowan Leek, Tracey Lind, Meg Lubey, Violet Maimbourg, Max Markwald, Randy Maxin, Charles Mayer, Scott Miller, MANDEM (Moco/Maize/Kiki), Ben Oblivion, Wendy Partridge, Jessica Pinsky, Kelly Pontoni, Mary Proctor, Andrew Reach, Laurie Reydman, Christopher Richards,

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Thomas Roese, Rick Rollenhagen, Dan Rothenfeld, John Saile, Ron Shelton, Kevenn Smith, Lo Smith, Elle Strong, Aaron Swank, Dan Tranberg, Anthony Trausch, Arnold Tunstall, Shawny Walthaw, Daiv Whaley, Tony Williams, Charlie Wirfel, Mark Yasenchack, Jan Zorman.

**About the Artists Archives:** The Artists Archives of the Western Reserve (AAWR) is a unique archival facility and regional museum created to preserve representative bodies of work by Ohio visual artists. Through ongoing research, exhibition, and educational programs the AAWR actively documents and promotes this cultural heritage for the benefit of the public. The Artists Archives of the Western Reserve would also like to thank Ohio Arts Council, Cuyahoga Arts & Culture, the people of Cuyahoga County, the George Gund Foundation, the Bernice & David E. Davis Foundation, the William Bingham Foundation and the Zufall Foundation for their continuing support.

*Thank you for your consideration! For more information images, please contact: Megan Alves. Marketing and Program Manager [info@ArtistsArchives.org](mailto:info@ArtistsArchives.org) or Mindy Tousley. Executive Director [mindy@ArtistsArchives.org](mailto:mindy@ArtistsArchives.org)*