

# LISS LAFLEUR

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## *GREENER PASTURES*



## WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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MARCH 11 - APRIL 20, 2017

AUSTIN, TEXAS



*GREENER PASTURES. Leather headpiece, blinders and plumes atop two glass heads, 25" x 20" x 10", 2016*

*Cover: GREENER PASTURES. Gallery view, dimensions variable, 2017*

LISS LAFLEUR  
*GREENER PASTURES*

Essay by Jeanne Vaccaro.

Incorporating photography, performance, sculpture, and installation Liss LaFleur deconstructs, subverts, reclaims, and otherwise queers the hegemonic white masculinity of the cowboy image in her current exhibition, titled *GREENER PASTURES*. Born and raised in Humble, LaFleur finds herself back in Texas, now as an Assistant Professor of New Media Art at the University of North Texas in Denton. Returning to the primal scene of the Southwest is a generative catalyst for much of the work in this series, giving the artist source material from which to activate her body as an archive.

Works in this exhibition mine canonical notions of the male gaze, most notably theorized by feminist filmmaker and scholar Laura Mulvey. Her essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," was published in 1975 in the British film journal, *Screen*. Her ideas have been critically expanded to consider the racial politics of looking including bell hooks' discussion of the specificity of black female spectatorship in "Oppositional Gaze," 1992 and the transgender look examined by J. Jack Halbertam in *In A Queer Time and Place*, 2005. LaFleur's queer and feminist appropriation of the male gaze is not merely about seizing the active subject position; instead she seeks to destabilize the hierarchy of the form altogether. The vision created is thus shared with the audience, an expanded field of vision for bodies, body image, animal empathy, and intersubjectivity.

The first work made in *GREENER PASTURES*, and the exhibition's namesake, is a durational performance co-performed with the artist's wife for four and half hours in a field at a family ranch. This



*SPURS. Still from performance. Aluminum spurs and elastic, 2016*

performance explores ecologies, social conditioning, and intimacy. Wearing handmade leather horse bridles and blinders scaled for humans, the two bodies are attached to one another, restricted. They can only look at each other and into the distance. The performers are naked and work without a choreographed score to pre-determine their gestures. The liveness of the exchange is foundational, and the intensity of their interaction is captured in the documentation of the performance. Through their physical and emotional labor, the two bodies move to role-play, build tension, and exist in synchronicity. Images of this performance are scaled to double the size of the actual bodies, producing a dominant presence within the gallery. The blinders, pink plumes, and bridles are also installed, positioned in the round at the artist's head-height on top of a pair of glass heads.

In another performance, inspired by the cowboy phrase "Don't sit on your spurs," the artist's co-performer is a horse. In *Spurs* (2016) LaFleur enters a horse's

barnyard stall, naked except for handmade aluminum spurs constructed from highly articulated show spurs and tied with pale pink ballet ribbon, takes the horse's face into her hands, and methodically kicks herself for fifteen minutes. Before the performance concludes we can already begin to see bruises forming on her bare behind, but in the photo documentation following this act the cherry reds, deep purples, and brownish-green hues of the bruises evolve and change over time. Referencing the original spurs worn, and the bruises inflicted from them, a single pair of clear glass spurs are also installed with this performance work.

LaFleur's playfulness is on full display throughout the exhibition. *Trousseau* (2017), features a series of top ties that evoke showmanship. These black bows are screen printed with flirty queer sentences like "Made for the cowboi and fit for the open range" and "Yes, ma'am—I'm branded for life." Cowboi is an intentional misspelling that visually and politically disrupts the assumed gender of the cowboy. In other places LaFleur speaks of cowgrlls, a direct

reference to the third wave feminist Riot Grrrl movement of the 1990s. Reclaiming while subverting the so-called innocence of girlishness, Riot Grrrl was known for, as Bikini Kill front woman Kathleen Hanna wrote in 1996, “turning cursive letters into knives.” In LaFleur’s case it isn’t knives so much as guns that she wields.

A staple of the American West, guns are transformed by LaFleur into hot pink pissing pistols for the female body. LaFleur’s pistol is constructed by combining a glass gun-shaped candy dispenser from 1935 with an army issued Female Urination Device. For *Peeshooter* (2017) she performed a direct action on camera, urinating through her hot pink gun-like prosthetic device. Accompanying this looping video performance is a collection of body-less fantasy. Four pink neon strips suspend a row of peeshooters within the gallery as if they are being held at attention absent of the artist’s body. Referencing this work, LaFleur reminds us, “As a queer woman in the South, guns are often considered normal and accepted more than my own body and existence.”

Throughout *GREENER PASTURES*, LaFleur intervenes, plays with, and artistically crosses the material boundaries of cultural signifiers and binaries, bringing out the mutable nature of intersubjectivity and producing a new encounter of self/other for the audience to engage with. In an ongoing series titled “New Frontiers,” she continues exploring these hierarchies using Jell-O as a retro futuristic analog material that references both lineage and longing. Using classic molds that she inherited, LaFleur produces and photographs actual Jell-O dishes, not for consumption but as forms of memento mori, or souvenirs of loss. The title for this body of work, *New Frontiers*, references John F. Kennedy’s 1960’s Presidential inaugural speech in which

he sets our sights on the moon, and asks America to work together to create cultural shifts both domestically and abroad. LaFleur recalls memories of her namesake, a Houston based debutant and upholsterer, who would make Jell-O “desserts for the future” for many space race parties.

One of the photographs included in this exhibition captures an emerald green Jell-O ring in which the artist’s baby teeth and a single hair barrette float freely atop a pink piece of upholstery vinyl. Jell-O dates to the 17th century, and was both an object and status symbol. Gelatin is a powder derived from the bone, ligament, and intestines of horses, cows, and pigs. It is tied to the space race, the construct of the homemaker, and references specific moments in American history. Jell-O as a material references the body, and frames a narrative that is both culturally historical and deeply personal for the artist.

LaFleur’s exhibition reflects a commitment to an exploration of the tension between private desire and public face, as seen in some of the earlier canonical feminist and queer works of artists like Rebecca Horn, Catherine Opie, and Nancy Grossman.

The through-lines connecting all the works in this show reflect LaFleur’s position within her community at this exact moment of time: as a queer woman returning to her homeland. While many of the performances feel daring, they all maintain a cheeky yet vulnerable edge in which the artist performs the world as she knows it directly for the camera.

Of working with horses and their accouterments, LaFleur says, “I wanted to wear the objects that the horses experience, whether it’s the spurs or the blinders, to tame my own body into this narrative.” This is an extraordinary sentiment when we consider the difficulty of decentering human experience. To do so, LaFleur has not so much put herself in the position of the horse or attempted to perform as an animal, but rather she performatively enacts a queer subjectivity within an intimate series of relations. For *GREENER PASTURES*, there is a vibrant exchange in relationality, one that blurs the lines between intimacy and risk, pleasure and danger, seriousness and humor, masculine and feminine, and human and animal. At the core of these binaries is a vulnerability, which LaFleur embraces and manipulates to incite feelings of curiosity, adventurousness, and an expanded mindset within her audience.



*PEESHOOTER. Still from performance. Female urination device and pored resin pistol, 2017*

# LISS LAFLEUR

## SELECTED PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- 2015 Assistant Professor & Program Coordinator, New Media Art  
University of North Texas, Denton, TX
- 2014 Visiting Assistant Professor, Digital Art and Digital Studies,  
Davidson College, Davidson, NC

## SELECTED AWARDS/GRANTS/FELLOWSHIPS

- 2017 Artist-in-Residence, (Invited) Museum of Glass, Spokane, WA  
Artist-in-Residence, (Invited) Fieldwork, Marfa, TX
- 2016 Long List Recipient, Lumen Prize in Digital Art,  
London, England  
Emerging Artist Fellowship, Peripheral Vision Arts,  
Los Angeles, CA  
Creative and Scholarly Research Grant, University of North Texas,  
Denton, TX  
Polaroid Film Grant, 20x24 Polaroid, New York, NY
- 2015 Mellon Digital Initiatives Grant, Davidson College, Davidson, NC  
Artist-in-Residence, Digital Fabrication Residency, Spokane, WA  
Second Place Award, *QUEEN*, "Contemporary South", Visual Art  
Exchange, Raleigh, NC

## SELECTED EXHIBITION RECORD

- 2017 *BABY DON'T GO*, New Museum, New York, NY  
(curated by Heide Hatry)  
*HOLDING NEXT TO KNOWING*, Sister Gallery, Adelaide,  
Australia (curated by Melissa McGrath)  
*GREENER PASTURES*, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX  
*GREENER PASTURES*, B4BEL4B Gallery, San Francisco, CA  
*IN TRAINING*, Salisbury University Galleries, Salisbury MD  
*PLEASED TO MEET YOU*, Open Space Gallery, Dallas, TX  
(curated by Caroline Belanger & Nancy Cohen Israel)

- 2016 *TIPS*, Conduit Gallery, Dallas, TX  
(curated by Danette Dufilho)  
*CHATTERBOX*, CICA Gallery, Gimpo-Si, Gyeonggi-Do,  
South Korea  
*TONGUES, TIES*, Grizzly Grizzly, Philadelphia, PA  
*QUEER BIENNIAL II*, Industry Gallery, Los Angeles, CA  
(curated by Ruben Esparza)  
*CRUISING*, LA Pride Exhibition, West Hollywood, CA  
(curated by Nathaly Charria)

## COMMISSIONS

- 2017 Online Commission, New Hive, online zine with HALT  
Action Group
- 2016 *BEWARE OF DOMESTIC OBJECTS*, Queer Biennial,  
Los Angeles, CA

## SELECTED LECTURES/PRESENTATIONS/ WORKSHOPS

- 2017 Artist Presentation, Salisbury University,  
Salisbury, Maryland  
Panelist, "Queering VR," Queer Performance Art, panelist,  
SXSW, Austin, TX.
- 2016 Lecture & Graduate Critiques, University of Texas @  
Arlington, Arlington, TX.  
Panelist, "BEWARE OF DOMESTIC OBJECTS," Queer  
Performance Art, panelist, Native Strategies, Los Angeles, CA.  
Workshop & Presentation, "A Heroine's Aesthetic," Davidson  
College, Performing Parts, panelist, Davidson, NC.  
Workshop & Presentation, "Claude Cahun: HEROINES,"  
*Being Her Now*, Salisbury Galleries, Salisbury, MD.



*NEW FRONTIERS. Archival inkjet image. Jello, baby teeth and hair barrette, 30" x 40", 2017*

## Women & Their Work

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Known for its pioneering spirit, embrace of artistic innovation, and commitment to Texas audiences and artists, Women & Their Work is now celebrating its 39th anniversary. Presenting over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, and film, the gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1,893 artists in 306 visual art exhibitions, 124 music, dance and theater events, 16 film festivals, 28 literary readings and spoken word performances, and 604 workshops in programming that reflects the broad diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in Art in America, the New York Times, ArtForum, and on National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Women & Their Work reaches over 650 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



women and  
their work

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