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ART REVIEW

How Can Queer Artists Escape the Trap of Tokenization?

Amid pervasive uncertainty, queerness emerges as a deliberate unraveling of solidity across the diverse works of eight artists.



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Detail of Andrius Alvarez-Backus, "Warming Into My Entry Wounds" (2025) (all images Ho Won Kim/*Hyperallergic* unless otherwise noted)

The recent rise of queer figurative painting has illuminated previously marginalized dimensions of intimacy. Yet visibility, however necessary, can inadvertently constrain; legibility risks solidifying into static symbolism, trapping identities within tokenized forms. *The Unruly Dance of Form* at Fragment Gallery navigates this tension, pivoting toward incompleteness and indeterminacy across multiple mediums and embracing ambiguity to explore queer politics beyond defined representation.

The exhibition stages an intentional collapse of certainty. Forms emerge as fragments — never whole, never stable. Familiar objects such as table legs, chairs, and window bars are displaced and stripped of utility, suspended between functionality and ruin. Human bodies are glimpsed mid-motion or precariously balanced, as if improvising meaning in real-time. Amid pervasive uncertainty, queerness emerges as a deliberate unraveling of solidity across the diverse works of eight artists.



Installation view of Gordon Hall, "Graphite Covered Leg (Turned)" (2024), cast concrete, graphite

Consider Gordon Hall's "Graphite Covered Leg (Turned)" (2024), a single cast concrete table leg coated with graphite. Rather than supporting weight, it leans uneasily against a wall, resembling more a shaman's staff than structural support, stripped entirely of its intended function. Cameron Patricia Downey's "Bass" (2024) gathers debris from a shuttered department store into an uncanny monument. These reclaimed fragments, marked by mundane traces such as gum stuck to surfaces, bear witness to intersecting temporalities, simultaneously embodying intimate memory and ideological rupture. Together, these works invoke [Jack Halberstam's notion of anarchitecture](#), a purposeful dismantling of built forms that seeks to unsettle norms around gender, power, and ownership. By explicitly referencing architecture, the exhibition sharpens its critique of normative frameworks, illuminating how queer lives reshape

physical and ideological terrains, disrupting the structures governing embodied experience.

In Young-jun Tak's video "LOVE YOUR CLEAN FEET ON THURSDAY" (2023), Spanish Legion soldiers solemnly hoist a life-sized crucifix while dancers gently support and balance one another's bodies in a Grunewald forest in Berlin, a spot for cruising. By juxtaposing militarized religious ritual with choreographed movements, Tak exposes the fragility inherent in rigid ideological binaries — masculine versus feminine, sacred versus profane — highlighting how they collapse under embodied expressions of care and interdependence. Extending this inquiry materially, Andrius Alvarez-Backus's "Warming Into My Entry Wounds" (2025) interweaves flesh-toned fabrics, straps, and a window bar into a charged tableau of open wounds and watchful gazes. Repurposing Catholic devotional imagery and shapes evocative of gloryholes and fetish gear, Alvarez-Backus reexamines and unsettles intertwined public and private narratives that simultaneously discipline, eroticize, and fracture queer embodiment.

Crucially, the exhibition resists privileging any singular form. Queerness and formalism share a fraught historical relationship: Postwar formalism, with its insistence on aesthetic autonomy and purity, became a contested site through which queer artists simultaneously disrupted established paradigms and inscribed queer sensibilities. Yet these interventions occasionally generated unintended consequences, inadvertently reinforcing the normative frameworks they sought to dismantle. In response to this tension, the restless heterogeneity of *The Unruly Dance of Form* remains intentionally indecisive — not through indifference, but rather an active suspension of judgment. This space for contemplation without judgment feels increasingly urgent today, as queer art faces rapid commodification and reactionary politics. By staging collapse without resolution, the exhibition asserts that queer existence draws strength

precisely from instability. To linger among fragments is to remain attentive to fracture, to possibility. Ambiguity itself becomes an act of care, pointing queerness toward transformative potential.



Installation views of Cameron Patricia Downey, "Bass" (2024), steel, chrome, bench, film



Installation view of *The Unruly Dance of Form*, featuring works by Young-jun Tak (left) and Andrius Alvarez-Backus, "Warming Into My Entry Wounds" (2025), reclaimed textiles, reclaimed iron window bar, charcoal, colored pencil, tempera on pine wood panel (photo by Daniel Greer, courtesy the artists and Fragment Gallery)



Installation view of *The Unruly Dance of Form* (photo by Daniel Greer, courtesy the artists and Fragment Gallery)

The Unruly Dance of Form *continues at Fragment Gallery (39 West 14th Street #308, West Village, Manhattan) through May 10. The exhibition was organized by the gallery.*