Kinfolk Reimagined: Black Queer Bonds & Belonging
At Lichtundfire Gallery

Myles Fucci

Kinfolk Reimagined seeks to illuminate the ways in which Black queer kinship operates as a site of both resistance and care. This exhibition explores how Black queer individuals cultivate belonging beyond normative family structures and within chosen communities, by actively collecting and preserving memories and transforming them into tangible, lived realities. In doing so, Kinfolk Reimagined reframes collecting not as a detached or institutional act, but as a deeply personal, relational, and often urgent practice, one rooted in survival, self-definition, and the affirmation of presence. By engaging with works that center on lived experience, the exhibition foregrounds how captured moments of expression can act as vessels of history and carriers of intergenerational dialogue.

Audre Lorde's essay, *The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action*, provides a theoretical underpinning for how Kinfolk Reimagined emphasizes the act of speaking, remembering, and reclaiming historical narratives. Lorde's insistence on the necessity of self-expression as a mode of survival informs how the exhibition conceptualizes storytelling, which happens through realistic and evidential descriptions of relationships with oneself and within the community. In the text, Lorde states, "What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence?" (Lorde 41). Inspired by Lorde's call to break silence and assert presence, Kinfolk Reimagined seeks to create a space where Black queer voices, stories, and artifacts affirm existence and resistance, while also challenging conventional understandings of what it means to collect, preserve, and hold memory within marginalized contexts.

Kai M. Green's essay, *In the Life: On Black Queer Kinship*, explores how Black queer kinship is shaped by shared experiences of marginalization and joy rather than biological ties.

Green describes "kindom" (a kingdom of kin) building as harnessing creative power to redefine family beyond the limits imposed by the neoliberal capitalist state. For example, Green challenges biologically determined notions like "blood is thicker than water," and they propose "play cousin" as a generative, self-determined concept of family (Green 100). Similarly, in Kinfolk Reimagined, Derek Dumas' piece *Sacred Kinship I* emphasizes the sanctity of Black queer kinship, reinforcing the idea that familial love extends beyond blood ties. Dumas uses black-and-white imagery to strip away distractions, focusing on form, emotion, and lived experience. The Victorian-inspired fashion in his work nods to a time when family photographs documented lineage, but through his reinterpretation, he honors those legacies while infusing them with contemporary meaning. By depicting a "mother" figure, he highlights the nurturing roles that chosen families create out of necessity and intention.

This same imaginative Black queer family appears in Zella's work, *Chosen Family I*. Arranged in a nontraditional, multi-colored chain, the oval frame depicts two Black figures, one blue figure, and one white figure all embracing. Zella offers an imagined vision of queer family, one that embraces all, regardless of color, gender, or form. They describe their work as an exploration of freedom, reflecting Black queer beauty, divinity, and the boundless worlds we have always inhabited. Fritz Von Eric creates a similar effect, offering a more intimate view of his vibrant, imagined queer world. His work depicts two stylized Black figures lying together, cuddling, while their dog rests nearby. By portraying queer intimacy between two anonymous figures, Von Eric expands on Kai Green's idea of kindom, using imagination to envision relationships beyond a heteronormative framework.

In her essay *Discursive Object*, sociologist Edwina Taborsky argues that museum objects are dynamic symbols, their meaning shaped by the interplay between the object, the viewer, and

the broader social context. She identifies three realities that inform an object's significance: the material reality, the group reality, and the individual reality (Taborsky 54). These layered meanings come to life in Cristina Wright's *Home Sweet Home*, which reimagines traditional narratives of the Black experience through references to the American South and the comfort of home. Drawing from 20th-century log cabin quilts, Wright constructs the piece on a reclaimed wooden pallet, layering and texturing the wood grain through weaving, dyeing, and printing. In line with the quilt tradition, a red center anchors the work, symbolizing warmth and the heart of a home. Taborsky's framework reveals how *Home Sweet Home* carries layered meaning: its material reality emerges through the tactile processes of quilting and woodwork; its group reality draws from shared Black Southern cultural memory; and its individual reality invites viewers to bring their own personal associations of home and belonging.

Dyllan Gabriel Larmond also takes from Taborsky in the presentation of his work Rush, where the simple depiction of a popularized gay sex drug takes on a larger social context while also being endowed with a personal connection to Larmond. Larmond's *Rush*, provides social context to an item in the gay community that has re-emerged as a pop culture object within the last decade. The "poppers" bottle is very well known for its alternative use of making it easier to facilitate penetrative sex as well as its light-headed, pleasure-providing qualities. Rush is not only a figurative depiction of a material object; rather, it functions as an unspoken indicator of pleasure and sex within queer communities. In addition to these meanings, when the item enters a gallery space, it forces us to question what new meanings are being highlighted or lessened. Does the commercialization of this object change its context in any capacity, or does it still silently retain its sociological underpinnings within the gay community? The question of how an object's meaning can shift across varying contexts takes on a different dimension when

considered through Sylvia Wynter's 'On Being Human as Praxis' in relation to the work of artist Derek Anthony Holland.

When assessing Derek Anthony Holland's work *Concessions of (Person) Being*, it is essential to draw from Sylvia Wynter's foundational text *On Being Human as Praxis*. Wynter's theory of the "overrepresentation of Man" critiques the dominant Western construction of the human, one that emerged from colonialism, capitalism, and racial hierarchy, and exposes how this category excludes racialized, gendered, and marginalized people from fully experiencing humanity (Wynter 31). Holland's piece engages this critique head-on, both in form and concept. The work consists of the artist's own hair and a hidden personal letter, enclosed within a wooden box, materials that operate simultaneously as object, body, and archive. The title itself offers a direct challenge to humanist ideals, with "Person" acting as a critical marker of the failed promises of modernity. Holland pushes back against the anti-Black underpinnings of identity formation, suggesting that current frameworks of personhood do not work for Black queer individuals, as they are built on colonial violence and exclusion. The hair, letter, and box, each deeply intimate and materially charged, embody the energy of nonbeing and being, of inhumanity made visible. The letter speaks to the struggle of existing in a world that renders Black queer life as object rather than subject, echoing the idea of the "Black technical object," where even identity itself becomes a site of labor. This speculative, energy-rich object refuses legibility, refuses commerce, and insists on its own terms within the gallery space, a transgression that reclaims space without offering itself up for sale.

A similar refusal is seen within Mathieu Magliore's work, where multiplicity of meaning and the assertion of Black queer interiority stand in direct opposition to the overrepresented figure of Man. In *Ribbed Cotton*, a 12-foot ladder with various screen-printed images cascading

down its rungs, Magliore engages deeply with the Black queer body and its desires, turning inward to examine how our wants and needs are shaped by histories of love, speed, friendship, trust, reciprocity, and pleasure. In opposition to this dominant figure of Man, which defines who is legible as fully human, Magliore's work insists on a different modality of being. *Ribbed Cotton* embraces the fluidity and complexity of Black queer life, presenting identity not as fixed or singular, but as constantly refracted through shifting personal and collective histories. Through Wynter's lens, Magliore's practice emerges as a form of refusal, one that challenges the overrepresented human norm and instead stages the Black queer body as a site of ongoing reinvention, material resonance, and epistemic possibility.

Similarly, Mori Anderson Hitchcock's work grapples with the complexities of Black queer identity and perception, using hybrid figures created from cutouts of gendered magazines to represent the dissonance and cohesion of being both Black and queer, as well as masculine and feminine. These hybrids explore the contradictions inherent in Black nonbinary lives, confronting societal expectations rooted in colonial and patriarchal structures. In *Under the Knife (Butterfly Affect)*, *I'm Everything*, & *Communication Is The Key*, Hitchcock delves into the violence, scrutiny, and expectations placed on Black queer bodies while also offering catharsis through self-expression. Through their collage work, the "hybrids" created within their work represent the dichotomy of being both black and queer, masculine and feminine, and how those aspects of life are taken for granted. The constrained figures in the works symbolize the lack of access and the objectification that comes with being on display, challenging misperceptions of family, community, and existence. This exploration of Black nonbinary subjectivity resonates with Sylvia Wynter's concept of the "overrepresentation of man," which critiques the idealized, colonial construct of "Man" as the universal human. Wynter argues that those who do not fit this

mold, such as Black, queer, and nonbinary individuals, are denied full humanity. The series calls attention to the limitations of traditional identity markers and aligns with Wynter's call for a more inclusive understanding of humanity, one that acknowledges the multiplicity of experiences beyond colonial and racialized norms.

In his book *Museums Without Collections*, Malcolm McLeod reflects on how the Ashanti people of West Africa selectively share their culture within institutional contexts while continuing to embed culturally significant objects into their daily lives. This duality of resisting the museum's tendency to isolate memory from lived experience resonates with the sculptural practice of Ethiopian artist Bereket Adamu. Like McLeod's case study, Adamu's work resists traditional archival frameworks by allowing myth, memory, and material to coexist. Central to their sculptures are childlike figures who carry the weight of time, embody inherited histories, and negotiate kinship across land, animals, revolution, and one another. These figures do not seek reverence but recognition, mythologizing their presence in acts that are both spiritual and material. Their gestures echo the themes of chosen family, forming bonds beyond biology and grounding identity in shared memory, care, and survival. Adamu's use of ትዝታ (Tezeta), or nostalgia, reframes remembrance not as a static return to the past but as a charged, active space where the old and new collide. This form of nostalgia, a longing that resists resolution, becomes a mode of resistance against dominant modes of archiving, instead offering a living archive shaped by resilience, queerness, and personal agency.

Manar Ramadan Balh's figurative practice deeply resonates with Matt Richardson's framework in his book *The Queer Limit of Black Memory: Black Lesbian Literature and Irresolution*. Like Richardson's assertion that Black queer life refuses the tidy resolutions demanded by dominant narratives, Balh's paintings embrace the fragmentation, longing, and

complexity inherent to Black queer subjectivity. In works such as *For Aslima and A Redemption (Reaching for the Horizon)*, Balh uses the body as both text and site, reclaiming the other and reimagining it as a living, self-actualized subject. Their commitment to depicting Black queer futurity is not rooted in a simplistic hope for betterment, but in an imperative to exist fully and imperfectly amid heartbreak, marginalization, and resistance. By foregrounding community, chosen kinship, and the ongoing tension between objectification and subjecthood, Balh's work embodies the very irresolution that Richardson identifies as crucial to Black queer memory: a refusal to be contained, concluded, or made palatable, and instead a continual reaching for life beyond the horizon of normative structures. While Balh's figuration grounds this refusal in the embodied self, Sykoria's abstract painting channels these same tensions through materiality and gesture.

Sykoria's practice, rooted in abstract expressionism, closely echoes the tensions Matt Richardson outlines in his text, *The Queer Limit of Black Memory: Black Lesbian Literature and Irresolution*. Richardson emphasizes that Black queer memory is often shaped through fragmentation, longing, and a refusal of neat narrative closure, a truth that Sykoria's gestural and intuitive work powerfully embodies. In pouring, spilling, and throwing paint onto the canvas, Sykoria externalizes the chaos and fog of profound personal grief, crafting a visual language that resists tidy healing arcs and instead honors the irresolution that accompanies loss. Her paintings become both memorial and living archive, capturing the emotional fragments that linger when final conversations and gestures remain forever unfinished. Much like Richardson's framing of queer memory as a space where the unresolved is not a failing but a form of survival, Sykoria's work offers a space where grief and love coexist without needing to be reconciled. Through vibrant palettes and physical, cathartic movement, she transforms personal mourning into

collective reflection, insisting that light and chaos, memory and loss, can live together on the same canvas, unresolved but radiant.

When we look at Terrance Dean's article, *A Queer Homiletic Futurity: The Radical Sexuality of James Baldwin*, we can start to understand Kariyana Calloway Scott's work. James Baldwin's writing, deeply rooted in Black Theology, uses the language of God to reflect the complexities of Black life, identity, and resistance. As James Cone explains, Black Theology is a theology of and for Black people, focusing on their lived experiences and stories. Baldwin's use of biblical scripture to explore Black beauty, intelligence, pride, and resistance connects sacred language with the everyday struggles of Black existence, drawing from his roots as a preacher. His sermons encapsulate the idea that God's word is more than divine speech; it's a poetic expression of human reality, intertwining spirituality with Black life.

Similarly, Kariyana Calloway-Scott's interdisciplinary practice examines race, gender, colonialism, and class, critiquing systems of power that distort or erase Black experiences. Inspired by bell hooks' "oppositional gaze" (hooks 125-126), Calloway-Scott uses film, performance, and installations to challenge these perceptions and reimagine Black memory and history. Projects like *Shake What Yuh Mama Gave Yuh* explore Black maternal legacies, focusing on sound, movement, and Black spiritual technologies. Central to her practice is a deep engagement with the Black Southern Church, which she sees as an essential cultural and spiritual force in Black communities, particularly in the ways that Black women and femmes have fortified their practices of self-design and community-making. By centering the church's aesthetic performance, especially its music and rituals, Calloway Scott honors the emotional and spiritual dimensions of Black life, using it as a site for healing, resistance, and the transmission of ancestral knowledge. Her work reimagines memorialization, offering alternative narratives

that reflect Black and queer experiences while honoring the strength and resilience rooted in the Black Southern Church. When we continue to analyze Cone's work, we can see the connection between his work and the artist Tahir McKenzie.

Similar to Calloway-Scott's work, when we analyze Tahir McKenzie's work, we can see a similar embrace of religion, but in this case, it is not the Black Southern Church but Islam. Tahir McKenzie's work, grounded in personal memory and spiritual exploration, echoes James Cone's *Black Theology*, which frames religious experience as deeply embedded in the everyday lives and struggles of Black people. Drawing from McKenzie's personal narrative centered on his late grandmother Ummy, a devout Muslim who offered unconditional love and spiritual affirmation, when he came out as queer to his grandmother, she openly embraced him and gave him Allah's blessing. In *Meditations*, *Stoicism*, and *Divinity*, we see the artist reimagining faith as a space of acceptance rather than exclusion. By photographing a white jilbab to honor their grandmother, the artist constructs a visual theology that speaks to Cone's assertion that God's word is "a poetic happening," emerging through Black life, storytelling, and love. Like Baldwin's sermons embedded in prose, this work sermonizes through image, memory, and fabric, weaving together queerness, lineage, and the divine. In doing so, the artist expands the frame of what spiritual devotion can look like, positioning queerness not in opposition to faith, but as part of a sacred continuum of Black familial and ancestral connection.

Nyia Sissac's photographic practice embodies the ethos of Thelathia Young's *Black Queer Ethics*, which argues that Black queer people and families have long resisted the confines of heteropatriarchal, capitalist definitions of family by forging creative, adaptive, and affirming ways of living and loving. By centering intimacy, texture, and relational trust, Sissac's portraiture archives the spiritual and cultural specificity of the African American diaspora, affirming a

legacy shaped by generational memory. Her series *90% of Me is You* becomes a visual testimony of this reimagined kinship, celebrating the enduring presence of her grandmother and the spiritual and sonic imprints she left behind, from "G Music" and two-stepping to the Commodores, to inherited wisdom like "You can't pray and panic." In line with Young's framework, Sissac's work demonstrates how Black families, particularly those that embrace queerness, create spaces of belonging that transcend normative structures.

Similarly, Young's *Black Queer Ethics* also applies to artist Tyler Andrew "6" Nelson and his work presented within the exhibition. In Thelathia Young's *Black Queer Ethics*, which foregrounds how Black queer individuals creatively reimagine family, kinship, and survival outside heteropatriarchal capitalist structures, Nelson constructs visual safe spaces through staged self-portraiture and found artifacts. Through staged self-portraiture and the intentional incorporation of found artifacts and family photographs, Nelson constructs visual safe spaces that question who is granted belonging and who is excluded. In this act of visual inquiry, Nelson mirrors Young's assertion that Black queer people, shaped by dual marginalization, develop unique forms of moral agency and relationality. Their work redefines the boundaries of family and home not as fixed or normative but as evolving and deeply personal. By presenting themselves in fragmented or obscured forms, Nelson resists singular narratives of identity and instead offers a nuanced exploration of visibility, care, and memory. Much like the generative resistance described in *Black Queer Ethics*, their practice becomes an act of reclamation of space, of self, and of legacy, one that transforms isolation into intimacy and affirms the fluid, radical potential of Black queer kinship.

Last summer, while reflecting on what I wanted to do for my senior thesis project, I stumbled upon a talk between Zakiya Collier, Stephen Fullwood, and Amy Sall titled “Memory

Work as Care Work | Black Archives and Archival Practice." In this conversation, they explored the significance of Black archives and archival practices, emphasizing their role in preserving the complexities of Black life. What struck me most was their discussion of how memory work transcends traditional archival labor and how it becomes a form of care that nurtures both community and identity. As I watched, I paused the video and immediately began conceptualizing an exhibition idea on highlighting the nontraditional ways in which black queer people archive their experiences. A rush of questions came to mind: How could this concept be applied to the creation and preservation of queer art in a way that is visible yet obscure? How could one build a living archive within an exhibition space? How might I center the narratives of Black queer individuals, whose lives are frequently underrepresented in traditional records, through creative expression rather than solely evidential means?

Almost ten months later, that idea has come to life. In the words of Audre Lorde, "And there are so many silences to be broken." I want this exhibition, Kinfolk Reimagined, to be a testament to breaking those silences, silences so many of us have been forced to live in. Black queer people are at the forefront of redefining what it means to be human, constantly reshaping our existence through persistence in a world that so often marginalizes and silences us simply for being. My hope is that Kinfolk Reimagined shows how Black queer people continue to navigate and transform the world and affirms that archiving your experiences, culture, and life can be done in whatever way you see fit. Thank you to everyone who contributed to the creation of this project, especially Zakiya Collier, Stephen Fullwood, James Rodges Powell, NYU Steinhardt, Jennifer Babcock, Robert Curcio, Priska Juschka, my family, and the Black queer community.

Bibliography

hooks, bell. “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators.” *Black Looks*, 2nd ed., Routledge, 2015, pp. 115–31, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315743226-8.

Green, Kai M. “In The Life: On Black Queer Kinship.” *Women, Gender, and Families of Color*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1 Apr. 2019, p. 100, https://doi.org/10.5406/womgenfamcol.7.1.0098.

Lorde, Audre. “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action.” *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, Crossing Press, 1984, p. 41.

McKittrick, Katherine. *Sylvia Wynter : On Being Human as Praxis*. Duke University Press, 2015. p.31