

The Body as Memory

HOUSTON (DECEMBER 18, 2021) — Foto Relevance is pleased to present *The Body as Memory*, a group exhibition that brings together the work of three artists—Nick Simko, Gabriel García Román, and Caleb Cole—who each work with concepts of identity and queerness, both reaching into the past and looking toward the future. The group show, curated by Suzanne Zeller, Assistant Director, will run from January 15, 2022 through March 19, 2022.

The Body as Memory investigates the ways in which the body interacts with the environment around it—the cultures it is born into, how it is viewed, how it views itself within that context, and how it imagines itself. Each artist uses the visual form of the body to explore personal and collective identity and memory. The figure serves as a vessel that tells only fragments of a story, working within a culture where queer and minority histories are systematically erased by those who control the larger narrative.



Nick Simko, *The Power to Choose*, 2015, tapestry fragments woven from digital composite file on a computerized jacquard loom

That which is absent from Nick Simko's (he/him) tapestries and prints is equally as profound as that which remains visible. Through carefully tattered and torn contemporary weavings, Simko's *Fragmentia* series examines the fragmented, often fabricated narrative of Eurocentric history that is offered to us as truth. Each tapestry in this series is composed to create allegorical narratives—some rooted in art historical precedent, some imagined. These compositions are woven into a finished piece, and then torn and reassembled, leaving gaps which may be integral to fully comprehending the symbolism. This process mimics the passing down of history where vital information is lost to memory, or intentionally removed by those who wish to alter the narrative, resulting in a fragmented understanding of our past.

In his *Queer Dimensionalities* series, Simko explores the visibility of queerness within popular culture. Created during the initial lockdown in 2020, these images are a deeply personal exercise in exploring one's own identity in isolation, taking a step outside of society in order to understand it, and the self, better. These images are a collaboration between the artist and technology, using digital tools and chance to remove the form of the shadow of the body, leaving behind textures, space, and emptiness even where gaps do not visually exist.

Gabriel García Román's (he/him) *Queer Icons* series seeks to honor under-represented queer beings, who are so often relegated to the outskirts of society, and elevate them through the visual language of saintly icons, looking toward a divine future. Taking inspiration from the historical iconography of Renaissance, Flemish, and Christian Orthodox paintings, the series elevates individuals in the queer community—friends, organizers, activists, and creators—to a saintly status. Framed in precious metal leaf, the portraits highlight beings that reject traditional Western ideals of beauty and thought.

Going a step beyond visual language, the inclusion of text written by the subject of each portrait is integral to the work. García introduced this aspect in an effort to amplify their voices in the face of a history that systematically silences them, whether for their gender, sexuality, race, or ethnicity. He creates handmade dimensional frames, influenced by the beautifully framed icons he sees when returning home to family in Mexico, adding a sense of care and reverence to each portrait.

Caleb Cole's (they/them) work addresses holes in collective memory, alongside a deep desire to connect with our histories, however fragmented they may be. Community is, and has always been, an integral aspect of the queer experience. Cole's work investigates "the opportunities and difficulties of queer belonging, aiming to be a link in the creation of that tradition, no matter how fragile or ephemeral or impossible its connections" (Cole).

Cole creates visual connections with a lost history through secondhand objects, antique photographs, pressed flowers found in books that have long since left the hands of those who once cherished them. In their *Traces* series, the artist physically removes figures from the sourced images, collaging over and rephotographing, leaving behind only an outline, and echo. This visual reference to the loss of countless members of the gay community during the AIDS epidemic is a powerful visualization of the loss of both human life and all the memories they carried with them, memories that were never passed down to a new generation.

ABOUT FOTO RELEVANCE:

Since 2016, Foto Relevance cofounders Geoffrey C. Koslov and Bryn Larsen have focused on the exhibition and acquisition of museum-quality, contemporary fine art photography and photography-based work. Foto Relevance is dedicated to providing a platform for an innovative selection of American and international photographic artists pushing the boundaries of photography. In addition to promoting the work of artists, Foto Relevance provides guidance, educating individual collectors and corporations in the acquisition and sale of art. Foto Relevance is a member of the Houston Art Gallery Association (HAGA). The gallery is located in the historic Museum District in Houston, Texas in close proximity to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Menil Collection, and the Houston Center for Photography.

Foto Relevance is currently open for walk-in hours Tuesdays through Saturdays from 11 am - 5 pm, or by appointment. Please call (713) 505-1499 or email info@fotorelevance.com for press and other inquiries.