

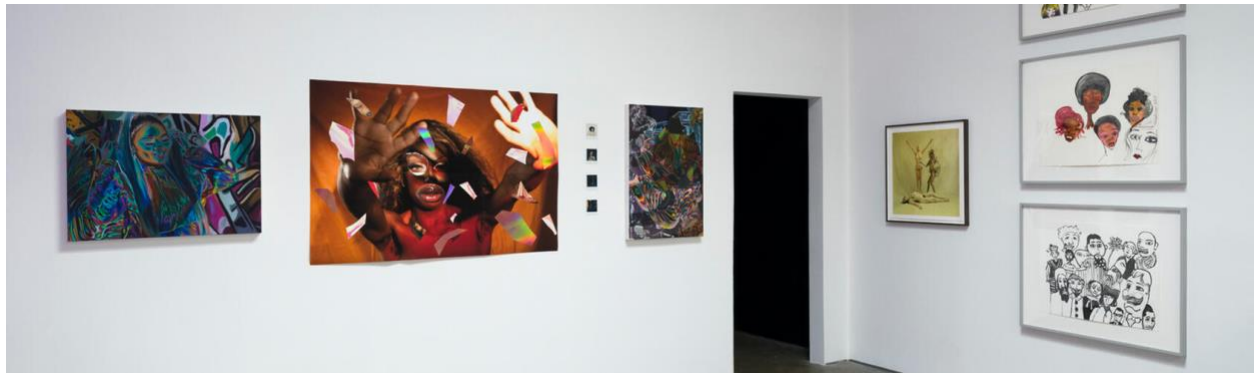
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## FRIEZE

# Glitching Bodies and Virtual Worlds: Queer Creation in ‘Make Me Feel Mighty Real’

A group show at Honor Fraser, Los Angeles, explores how queer strategies have undergirded art and technology in the past five decades

BY ALICE BUCKNELL IN EXHIBITION REVIEWS, US REVIEWS | 20 APR 23



From the aberrant splotches of 1970s screenprints to incandescent virtual worlds built by contemporary artists, ‘Make Me Feel Mighty Real: Drag/Tech and the Queer Avatar’ at Honor Fraser tracks how the tactics of queer creation – to ghost, glitch, infiltrate, speculate – move across time and technology to serve as scaffolding for much of today’s art practice. By framing drag itself as a kind of technology – an encrypted intelligence archived and activated across generations and cultures – the exhibition hones in on the role of the avatar in queer world-making. Understood both as otherworldly manifestation and, in more recent years, as digital surrogate for online interactions, the avatar becomes a prismatic interlocutor among the dazzling array of more than 40 artists on show.

Echoing the maximalist mantra of Sylvester’s 1978 disco track from which it draws its name, ‘Make Me Feel Mighty Real’ materializes in drag, morphing from archival presentation to intimate, internet-age mid-section before capping out as a queer nightclub for contemporary creations, complete with a tinsel-encrusted stage. Across the walls, a dreamy wash of postinternet purple – buzzing lavender like a backlit screen – weaves these worlds together.



‘Make Me Feel Mighty Real: Drag/Tech and the Queer Avatar’, 2023, installation views. Courtesy: the artists; photograph: Jeff McLane

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The first section unfolds chronologically, flowing from Andy Warhol's screenprint series 'Ladies and Gentlemen' (1975) into shimmering paintings completed this year by Devan Shimoyama (*The World*) and Caitlin Cherry (*Girl Money*). Running the gamut from painting to polaroid, video to stereo slides, highlights include the fuzzy silliness of Tom Rubnitz's video *Pickle Surprise* (1989) and Max Colby's quietly startling *Shrouds* (2022): gossamer, mixed-media funerary tableaux that merge 1900s quilts with glittery flourish. The works, including vitrines filled with queer ephemera, straddle the line between art and artifact, revealing the queer archive as a tactic of collaborative world-making. Two, high-volume drag wigs by celebrated designer Perfidia careen their rainbow locks over the vitrines' glossy surfaces, playfully glitching the idea of a static, self-contained archive.

Next, the exhibition bifurcates into two blackout zones: one hosts a trio of postinternet videos; the other an intimate homage to AVALON – one of LA's legendary queer nightclubs. In the former, viewers can slip on headphones to enter the spectacular world of Dynasty Handbag's *Garbage Castle* (2019), a soapy satire critiquing Big Tech's commercialization of the home via a speculative P2P rental site called 'Air Pee-n-Pee'. Next door, two video works by the collective behind AVALON offers a more generous view of the home, with 3D scans of their domestic space and a brain-shaped collage of inspirations serving as an intimate portrait of everyday life.



'Make Me Feel Mighty Real: Drag/Tech and the Queer Avatar', 2023, installation views. Courtesy: the artists; photograph: Jeff McLane

Contemporary practices collide within the show's final room, offering a kaleidoscopic array of avatars, virtual worlds, video games and intergalactic fashion. Here, Angela Washko hacks into the multiplayer landscape of *World of Warcraft* in *The Council on Gender Sensitivity and Behavioral Awareness in the World of Warcraft: Playing a Girl* (2013), ambushing players with unexpected salons on gender and digital identities, while Jacolby Satterwhite's stunning, two-channel film *Avenue B* (2019–20) meditates on digital camouflage and love amidst Black violence. From the glitchy Zoomspace of Wesleigh Gates's *A/B Machines* (2020) to Huntrezz Janos's motion-capture avatar installation *H@UNTRO.US LIVE* (2023) (and Enrique Agudo's immersive *Pantheon of Queer Mythology* (2020), the digital body gets closest to the avatar's original meaning: an infinitely mutable container to storytell and to dream.

'To glitch the body requires the simultaneous occupation of some-where and no-where, no-thing and every-thing,' suggests curator and writer Legacy Russell in her 2020 manifesto, *Glitch Feminism*. Onboarding Russell's concept of glitch, the exhibition cruises the concept of utopia as less of a place than a process, one held together by material artifacts and virtual worlds. In 'Make Me Feel Mighty Real', glitching moves between bodies and environments, reframing machinic error as a tactic for opacity, emancipation and, ultimately, a space for queer survival against the violence of the present.

*'Make Me Feel Mighty Real: Drag/Tech and the Queer Avatar' is on view at Honor Fraser, Los Angeles, until 27 May.*