

# ERIC ANTHONY BERDIS

## ARTWORK

*Don't let them clip your tiny little insect wings*, Eric Anthony Berdis' solo exhibition, celebrates LGBTQ+ folks, reflects on the historical struggles of the community's past, and encourages allyship. Comprised of elaborate sculptures, quilted fabric collages, a large-scale wallpaper installation, and two public performances, this exhibition memorializes LGBTQ+ people who persevered in the past, while acknowledging those who persist today. Derived from his own childhood fantasies, Berdis' work explores themes of becoming; his personal, yet familiar, struggle with body acceptance; and the importance of inclusive conversations and spaces.

Berdis describes his work as embracing “a maximalist aesthetic of archival research, personal secrets, and gay boy glamour,” while aiming to “create a world that is both familiar and inherently strange.” Ornate and sequined handmade quilts hang throughout the exhibition, decorated hobby-horse sculptures lean playfully against the walls, and a wallpaper installation—complete with personal photos, Band-Aids, stickers, rhinestones, and faux flowers—scales the walls. The wallpaper acts as a theatrical backdrop for one of the public performances and includes repeated drawings of a nonviolent homophobia-fighting superhero, a character Berdis channels while performing. Occupying the window gallery is a selection of lavishly embellished ghost-like sculptures draped in sequins and colorful woven afghans—a response to the depersonalized and stereotypical ghost costume consisting of a bedsheet with cut-out eye holes. Closely aligned with the anniversary of Matthew Shepard's horrific death and 2018 memorial, Berdis ponders the “identities of the ghosts of queer history,” reflecting on the lives of artists David Wojnarowicz, Keith Haring, and Félix González-Torres.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Berdis received his BFA from Slippery Rock University in Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania, and an MFA in Fiber, Craft & Material Studies from Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. His work has been exhibited at Bunker Project, Pittsburgh; Random Access Gallery, Syracuse, New York; The Second Floor, Karachi, Pakistan; and Little Berlin, Baltimore, among others. In 2017, Berdis was a Visiting Artist at Syracuse University and Bunker Projects. He recently participated in “Abandoned Practices” at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Berdis holds the title of LGBTQIA+ Service Coordinator at Virginia Commonwealth University.



Installation view of *Don't let them clip your tiny little insect wings* at University Galleries of Illinois State University, 2019.

## subjective frame

- What is your immediate emotional response to Berdis' work?
- Considering Berdis' use of subject matter, what imagery resonates most with you? Why?
- Do you find anything about Berdis' use of materials surprising?
- Is there anyone in your life that Berdis' work reminds you of?

## structural frame

- What materials has Berdis used in his work?
- How has Berdis used formal elements to emphasize certain areas within each work?

## cultural frame

- In what ways do the artist's use of subject matter and formal qualities reference childhood and play?
- How do the titles affect the way you interpret Berdis' work?
- What do you associate with the materials Berdis has used in his work?
- How does your perception of craftsmanship affect what you determine has value?

## VOCABULARY

### CONTEXT

the situation in which something happens

### INSTALLATION

artwork that responds to and alters a space

### SUBJECT MATTER

what is being depicted in an image or artwork

### SUBJECTIVE

something that is open to interpretation; up to the viewer to decide

### FORMAL QUALITIES

refers to elements and principles of design such as line, shape, color, texture, balance, contrast, and unity

### PERSONAL PRONOUN

the pronoun a person uses for themselves and prefers to be addressed with (he, she, him, her, his, hers, they, their)

### PERFORMANCE ART

the act of performing live through use of gestures, costume, sound and/or movement

### CRAFT

a broad term for handmade objects that can be functional, sculptural or conceptual in nature<sup>1</sup>

### CRAFTIVISM

craft art that challenges injustices in our world<sup>2</sup>

### LGBTQ+

an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, plus the wider community, including allies

### SYMBOLISM

expressing an idea or quality through an image or design

<sup>1</sup> Home. (n.d.). Retrieved October 18, 2019, from <https://craftivist-collective.com/>.

<sup>2</sup> Lovelace, J., & Fernandez, F. (n.d.). Craft: Seriously, What Does the Word Mean? Retrieved October 18, 2019, from <https://craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/craft-seriously-what-does-word-mean>.

## ART-MAKING ACTIVITIES

- As a class, analyze Berdis' ghost sculptures. What would your ghost look like?
- Read *Sunflower Sutra* by Allen Ginsburg (or selections depending on audience). Compare and contrast the poem with Berdis' wallpaper design for *Don't let them clip your tiny little insect wings*. Create an artwork inspired by a poem of your choice.
- Consider Berdis' homophobia-fighting superhero. If you were a superhero, what would you fight for? Create an artwork inspired by your superhero. Project ideas: stop-animation short film, flip-book, comic book cover, sculpture, collage, or cape.
- Examine Berdis' quilts. Collaboratively choose a theme and individually create a quilt square. Add embellishments related to your theme. Sew individually designed squares together to create a class quilt. This could also take the form of a paper quilt.
- Discuss and analyze gender-stereotyped images. What thoughts are supported by these images? Create an artwork that challenges gender stereotypes.
- Inspired by Berdis' *Hobby Horses*, combine two of your favorite childhood games to create a new game. Design an integral piece for the game.



*Smiling left, right, and all over*, 2018. Dyed and quilted fabric, found textiles, embellishments, and trims. Courtesy of the artist.

## EVENTS

- **Wednesday, October 23 at 5:30pm:** Participatory performance with Eric Anthony Berdis
- **Oct. 25 - Dec. 15:** Satellite exhibition at Milner Library
- **Friday, October 25 from 5-7pm:** Opening reception at University Galleries
- **Monday, October 28 at 9am:** Artist talk at Milner Library
- **Monday, October 28 at 12pm:** Panel discussion with Eric Anthony Berdis
- **Monday, October 28 at 3pm:** Performance by Eric Anthony Berdis: *Flower, When Did You Forget You Were A Flower?*

Field trip program, curator-led tours, and workshops available by appointment. Please contact University Galleries at <https://galleries.illinoisstate.edu/> or 309.438.5487 to schedule an appointment.

\*Field trip stipends are available thanks to a Town of Normal Harmon Arts grant.

**ALL EVENTS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**