

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 4, 2019



University Galleries of Illinois State University is pleased to present *Eric Anthony Berdis: Don't let them clip your tiny little insect wings* from October 25 through December 15, 2019.

- October 23 at 5:30: Artist performance
- October 25 through December 15: Satellite exhibition at Milner Library
- Friday, October 25, from 5 to 7pm: Artist reception
- Monday, October 28 at 9am: Artist talk at Milner Library
- Monday, October 28 at noon: Public panel discussion
- Monday, October 28 at 3pm: Artist performance
- Monday, December 2: Film screening observing Day With(out) Art and World AIDS Day
- Free curator-led tours and workshops available by appointment throughout the exhibition

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.

The public performances on October 23 and October 28 are participatory. The first performance will begin at University Galleries, where Berdis will invite participants to march with him in a parade-like manner to the University's Quad where they will have a race using the artist's hobby horses. The term “race” is used loosely, as participants are encouraged to cheer for one another as they gallop up and down the sidewalks *fabulously*. Berdis' second performance, *Don't forget you are a sunflower*, is informed by Allen Ginsberg's poem, “The Sunflower Sutra.” During each performance Berdis will introduce himself using his name and pronouns, then will invite participants to do the same. The personal introductions will initiate a broader conversation about safe and inclusive spaces.

The panel discussion with Eric Anthony Berdis will feature Emily Patterson (Pride at ISU President); Nadia Stiegman (artist and Illinois State University alumna); and Alexander Martin (Central Illinois Friends Outreach Coordinator and Educator). Panelists will share their personal experiences as they discuss pronouns and name changes, the importance of allies, and how to end homophobic and transphobic language. A takeaway poster will be available throughout the exhibition featuring a conversation between Berdis and exhibition curator Jessica Bingham.

University Galleries is collaborating with Milner Library and Pride at ISU for programming related to Berdis' exhibition. All events are free and open to the public. Contact [gallery@ilstu.edu](mailto:galleries@ilstu.edu) or 309.438.5487 to schedule exhibition tours.

Events

- Wednesday, October 23 at 5:30pm: Performance
Artist Eric Anthony Berdis invites viewers to participate in a free public performance beginning at University Galleries and culminating in the Quad.
- October 25 through December 15: Satellite exhibition at Milner Library
Eric Anthony Berdis: remember you are a sunflower: drawings, artifacts, and scores for a performance will include performance ephemera and a selection of related publications from Milner's Collection. This exhibition will be on Milner Library's sixth floor.
- Friday, October 25, from 5 to 7pm: Artist reception at University Galleries
- Monday, October 28 at 9am: Artist Talk at Milner Library, sixth floor.
- Monday, October 28 at noon (brown bag lunch): Panel discussion
Free public panel discussion featuring artist Eric Anthony Berdis, Emily Patterson, Nadia Stiegman, and Alexander Martin.
- Monday, October 28 at 3pm: Performance
Artist Eric Anthony Berdis will give a free public performance of *Flower, when did you forget you were a flower?* Viewers will be invited to participate.
- Monday, December 2: Film screening
All-day film screening observing Day With(out) Art and World AIDS Day
- Field trip program, curator-led tours, and workshops are available by appointment throughout the exhibition. Contact galleries@ilstu.edu or 309.438.5487 to schedule a visit.

Eric Anthony Berdis: Don't let them clip your tiny little insect wings is organized by University Galleries' Curator Jessica Bingham. The exhibition and programming are sponsored in part by grants from the Illinois Arts Council Agency and Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts. Field trip support is provided by a grant from the Town of Normal Harmon Arts Grant Program.

Berdis' work and performances have been exhibited at: Bunker Project, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Random Access Gallery, Syracuse, New York; The Second Floor, Karachi, Pakistan; and Little Berlin, Baltimore, Maryland, 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. He is the LGBTQIA+ Service Coordinator at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia, where he lives and works.

University Galleries, a unit in the Wonsook Kim College of Fine Arts, is located at Uptown Station at the corner of Beaufort and Broadway streets. Parking is available directly above in the Uptown Station parking deck, and the first hour is free, as well as any time after 5:01pm. If you need special accommodations to participate in any event, please contact University Galleries at 309.438.5487 or galleries@IllinoisState.edu. All events at University Galleries are free and open to the public.

For more information, visit galleries.IllinoisState.edu or call 309.438.5487. Find us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Sign up to receive emails by clicking the Newsletter link on our website.