

PLATFORM

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PHOTOGRAPHIC
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To be
3 JULY-15 AUGUST, 2026
a
Flamingo

Sink or Swim:

Arjun Lal doesn't quite know what the future holds, but knows that it should be queer in form and function, a place where straightness is no longer the default. They believe this can be done through roleplay, as society actively requires us to participate in social structures and conditions in which we perform every day. The issue however, is that these structures currently function colonially, with the state demanding we uphold roles of oppressor (military, colonizer, etc.) or oppressed (poor, racialized, etc.). We are forced to embody the characteristics and dress of militant oppressors, specifically in how we police ourselves and each other. An important tool of the Western imperialist project is that it demands we obey and perpetuate these roles as truth rather than question them. This is what Lal's exhibition, *To Be a Flamingo*, asks of us: what role are we willing to play in the present and the future? Furthermore, what can we begin to awaken in ourselves when the active rejection of social expectations is achieved through the pedagogies of performance?

For Lal, that manifests in inhabiting the form of a flamingo, a wading bird characterized by its grandiose and sprawling pink body — a creature worthy of celebration. Clad in oversized inflatable pink latex and rubber flippers, Lal creates an environment where the divide between their human body and this character become indecipherable. These elements act as body modifications or a second skin; an extension of Lal's creaturehood, with the materiality of these costume elements flagging to the aesthetics of queer latex kink. Rather than relegating the aesthetics of kink to the shadows, they attempt to swim and float in public water. Boggled down by the weight of their flamingo fetish wear, they are overjoyed by the agency to embody their own surrealist fantasy. Despite the canonical focus on the aesthetics of darkness and brutality, routinely expected from marginalized artists, Lal intentionally reminds us that these decisions to roleplay can be inherently liberating, especially when we use humour as a catalyst rather than solely focusing on collective suffering.



Inspired by the historical and metaphysical significance of the bird, Lal draws upon a story from 1977 of two flamingos that touched down onto a Newfoundland beach in Woodstock. After making human contact, one of the birds was shot dead by a duck hunter and the other flew away, never to be seen again.¹ In addition to a story of a flamingo from 1969 who would meet a similar fate on a beach in Pictou County/Cape John, Nova Scotia, which Lal learned about at the Museum of Natural History in Halifax while conducting research for the project.² Additionally they draw upon a 2007 incident of two queer men who were brutally murdered by a man experiencing religious psychosis at a popular cruising site on a lake in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.³ There are parallels between these stories, the most obvious being the environments in which they took place, Atlantic Canada—with Lal's homebase being Halifax, Nova Scotia. More importantly however, these stories force us to grapple with the brutal colonial instinct to inflict violence upon beings we have deemed as foreigners.

These stories further mirrored the immigrant experience on colonial lands, and by extension, embodied in the use of Lal's body within the performance, as a queer diasporic Indian person. The performance creates an active symbiotic relationship between their body and the symbol of the flamingo, as they complete the task of swimming freely in the same body of water in which those two queer men were murdered, haunted by the ghosts of their past. The uncanniness of Lal's work suggests that queer performance can be more than a holding place for society's brutalities, and can furthermore be a mediation on what may come of the detritus of the current world. The characteristics of their inflatable latex-donning, kink-coded spectacle reminds me of late-cultural theorist Mark Fisher's theory that postmodern culture continuously seeks more comfort in "demons than angels," because "the demonic appears cool and sexy, [while] the angelic is deemed to be embarrassing and sentimental".⁴ *To Be a Flamingo* functions as an acknowledgement of this theory and works to create a synthesis based in pleasure, and imbeds itself in many historical frameworks such as queerness, belonging (or at times, the lack thereof), roleplay, and the material language of kink. This work is thus confrontational in nature, asking the viewer to interrogate their inner creativity, to assume a role of whatever their heart desires, and to demand they step outside of the systemic flow and begin to create a friction that seeks out an alternative. Whether this is embodied through Lal's performance as a flamingo, or VALIE EXPORT's *Action Pants: Genital Panic*⁵ (1969), provocative performance that engages structural critique through choice and absurdity is our guiding light to something more than this. In abstract, queerness can not only be characterized by an active othering, but more importantly, a speculative embodiment of possibility.

1 Andrew Sampson. "An Unlikely Oddity: Flamingo That Landed in N.L. on Display at the Rooms." CBC, 9 Apr. 2017

2 Robie W. Tufts, *Birds of Nova Scotia* (Halifax, N.S.: Nimbus Pub., 1986), 68–69.

3 CBC News. 2013. "Glen Race to Plead Guilty to Murdering 2 Men in 2007." CBC, September 28, 2013.

4 Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Zero Books, 2014), 16.

5 VALIE EXPORT (1940–2026) was an Austrian avant-garde performance artist whose performance piece *Action Pants: Genital Panic* (1969) consisted of the artist walking the aisles of a cinema in Munich, while wearing crotchless pants with her genitalia exposed. The artist was actively attempting to challenge the notion of the female body's relationship to images of women on screen.

Biographies

Arjun Lal



Arjun Lal is an interdisciplinary artist based between Kijipuktuk and Berlin. Through playful and otherworldly explorations of identity, experience, and cultural trajectory, Lal uses sculpture and performance to fuel cultural critique, shifts, and possibilities for new ways of being.

In response to their experiences navigating contemporary queer culture as a person from Indian ancestry, Lal's works are confrontational. Driven by an ongoing desire for a queerer world, his works equip audiences with symbols, colours, shapes, actions, perspective, gestures... fragments of conversations and dreams carefully assembled into social/cultural abstraction.

Lal is fascinated by the roles we inhabit—whether inherited, assigned, assumed, or chosen. They explore the choreography of expectation, sensation, and liberation from the unspoken repetitions of role-specific instructions.

Christina Oyawale



Christina Oyawale is a queer disabled interdisciplinary image artist, curator, and writer from Toronto, currently based in Winnipeg. Their practice maintains an autotheoretical approach with ties to leftist-political economy, social identity theory, and cultural studies. Their goal is to make present the inherent absurdity and spectacle attached to hegemonic social structures, such as the family, whiteness, and heteronormativity. Their work continues to be influenced by punk culture, the failures of Occupy Wall Street, 2010s Tumblr, and anti-aesthetics.

Christina has exhibited, curated, and written works for galleries and publications such as Gallery 44, Esse arts + opinions, and C Magazine. They recently finished their MFA at the University of Manitoba, and hold a BFA in photography with a minor in music and culture from Toronto Metropolitan University. They are currently the Curator-in-Residence at PLATFORM centre for photographic + digital arts where their curated group exhibition will open in 2027.

PLATFORM is an artist-run centre dedicated to considering the expanded role of photography in contemporary art. We are a multidisciplinary centre that supports and showcases local, national and international artists and are committed to supporting marginalized and BIPOC voices. Through exhibitions, lectures, workshops, production facilities and publications we aim to foster and sustain a critically engaged community of artists.

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