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RIPSTOP's Transformational Inflatables

Max Adrian's playful interrogations of queer identity explore infrastructure, surveillance, and desire

ASHEVILLE, NC (May 23, 2024) – The Center for Craft is thrilled to announce the opening of *Max Adrian: RIPSTOP*. Adrian (he/they), a textile artist who was awarded a Windgate-Lamar Fellowship by the Center in 2015 and a Career Advancement Fellowship in 2022, will bring the playful, experiential, and provocative solo exhibition of textiles and inflatable sculptures to the Bresler Family Gallery beginning July 26, 2024 through March 29, 2025.

Pieces made from nylon fabric ripstop, which keeps tears from spreading, invite viewers into created, fantastical worlds, only to highlight the complex—even impossible—architectures of their construction. Before the pandemic, Adrian primarily focused on personal experiences and interrogations of queerness, identity, and sexuality. Since then, the work has zoomed out in its scope, still centering identity but placed in larger infrastructure and surveillance systems that mediate, manipulate, and control desire.

Adrian counts queer fiber art, BDSM and kink culture, theatre, camp horror, puppetry, and drag among his many influences. Works in *RIPSTOP*, like the modernist bounce house sculpture *A Fallible Complex* (2021), evoke spaces for play, beckoning visitors in through their alluring aesthetic and then blocking their entrance or revealing structural instabilities, like missing floors. Others, like *The Sensational Inflatable Furry Divines* (2017-19), use sensual materials, like faux fur, spandex, and pleather, which connect to theatrical performance and counterculture. The materials “play on people’s initial associations and serve as a gateway into greater conversations about identity construction, performance, desire, and technology,” he shares.

Pieces also nod to the history of quilting, including the AIDS Memorial Quilt, another influence on Adrian’s work. “Even when pieces aren’t explicitly making quilt references, I want the history of quilting and sewing-based craft to be part of the conversation of the work,” he says. “Craft is so much about the processes and histories behind materials. It’s about connecting with communities of people who practice those techniques. It’s about material and technique being a doorway into a greater relationship with an object.”

Themes of transformation—of structures, identities, and bodies—run throughout the show. “What I love about drag and puppetry is the sense of transformation and play, specifically with bodies,”

Adrian says. “Within these art forms, a body can become mutable and capable of performing and becoming in unexpected states.” The sculptures also transform throughout viewers’ experiences, going through stages of inflation and deflation and existing in many different states.

RIPSTOP’s constant interplay between surface and depth, assumption and reality, are all a part of what Adrian describes as “looking behind the curtain,” which they trace back to the theatre. “When I’m thinking about systems, and the systems desire fits into, I’m thinking of stage construction, the backstage, the things that go on behind the show, and the performance of our desires,” they explain.

As a craft artist, Adrian’s philosophy “comes down to having an intentional relationship with material, process, and technique,” he says. “Those aspects of art making are just as – if not more – important than an intellectualized concept being illustrated by an artwork.”

“Broadened definitions of craft that highlight communities of practice are foundational for the Center for Craft’s new strategic direction,” explains Executive Director Stephanie Moore. “Max Adrian’s work in *RIPSTOP* exemplifies the expansive and meaningful forms craft can take.” The Center for Craft is an institution Adrian credits for their professional growth. “The Center for Craft has felt like such a supporting institution for me specifically and for so many other craft artists I know,” they note. “To be able to bring this amount of work to Asheville is pretty cool.”

See *Max Adrian: RIPSTOP* at the Center for Craft beginning July 26. A reception will be held on August 15. *RIPSTOP* is organized by Houston Center for Contemporary Craft and curated by Sarah Darro.

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ABOUT CENTER FOR CRAFT Founded in 1996, the Center for Craft’s mission is to resource, catalyze, and amplify how and why craft matters. A 501(c)3 national nonprofit, the Center increases access to craft by empowering and resourcing artists, organizations, and communities through grants, fellowships, and programs that bring people together. The Center is widely acknowledged as one of the most influential organizations working on behalf of craft in the United States. For more information, visit www.centerforcraft.org.