

Close to You





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Kinship is a feeling of intimacy. In its most ubiquitous and traditional form, “kinship” describes the bonds of a family, privileging relationships born of biology and of blood. *Close to You* adopts a more generous and fluid framing of the term, expanding its boundaries to account for queer, amorphous, and solitary forms of closeness.

As a mode of survival, kinship acknowledges our interdependence, cultivates connection, and provides refuge. A nurturing and restorative force, it fosters feelings of belonging that sustain us as we move through the world. At its best, kinship is a practice of care that enables renewal.

The six artists in *Close to You* recognize kinships that we feel with people, places, materials, and histories. Their work foregrounds affinities found within disparate conditions, including the desert landscape of the American Southwest, the warmth of bodily embrace, and the absence in an archive. These artists mine the emotional potential of painting, sculpture, photography, and installation, probing the capacity of the visual arts to conjure feelings of proximity — both to others and to ourselves.

In the United States, attention to kinship is critical given its historic inaccessibility to queer people and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color).¹ In light of these inequities, this exhibition centers the practices of queer and BIPOC artists, who envision forms of intimacy that exceed the limits of heteronormativity, government recognition, and — in certain instances — even sociality.

Close to You was organized during the earliest months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Opening a year into this crisis, the exhibition invites audiences to reflect upon kinship in the wake of loss — of life, of normalcy, of togetherness — with the hope of providing a space for respite and renewal, even if only for a moment.

— Nolan Jimbo, M.A. 2021
Williams College Graduate Program
in the History of Art

¹ For queer people, the right to marry was long denied while public displays of affection continue to provoke resistance and violence. For Black people, the American legal system's disavowal of kinship ties between enslaved people resulted in the chronic dismantling of Black families. For people of color, communities have been fractured by racist immigration policies, ranging from the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 to the more recent construction of a border wall between the United States and Mexico.



Laura Aguilar

Laura Aguilar once described her body as a “vast untouched landscape.” Posing nude in her photographic series *Stillness* and *Center*, she blends the textures and folds of her skin into the stones and vegetation of the surrounding landscape, rendering herself nearly indistinguishable from the terrain of the American Southwest. This fluid interchange between the artist and the environment conveys the feeling of belonging that she experienced within the desert, a safe space in which she sought refuge from the challenges of daily life. As a Chicana lesbian with auditory dyslexia (a learning disability impeding the processing of language), she endured discrimination on multiple levels, including exclusion from standards of white feminine beauty and dismissal as incompetent by educators and peers. Her struggles with body image and language led Aguilar to fully invest in her photography practice, which afforded her the agency to visually assert her presence in the world and to work towards self-acceptance. In *Stillness* and *Center*, Aguilar mobilizes photography to articulate her identification with the landscape — a kinship that unfolds between self and place.

Laura Aguilar, *Center #100*, 2000–2001. Gelatin silver print.
Courtesy of the Laura Aguilar Trust of 2016.



Chloë Bass

Between March 2016 and March 2017, Chloë Bass photographed the sky on cloudless days, testing her iPhone’s capacity to register subtle shifts in the color blue. She then posted each image on Instagram with the hashtag “#sky #nofilter.” This ritual of documenting the sky soon became a method of chronicling a tumultuous year that saw the artist, as a Black woman, grow increasingly distraught with the American political and criminal justice systems. As the election of Donald Trump and police violence towards unarmed Black people gripped the United States, Bass’ monochrome photographs marked the passage of time and signaled her own continued presence in the world. This installation of *#sky #nofilter* presents a video compilation of the sky images alongside two texts written by the artist, challenging the assumption that we experience anything — even the sky and the color blue — in the same way. Bass reframes kinship as something that cannot be presumed, no matter what we might share.

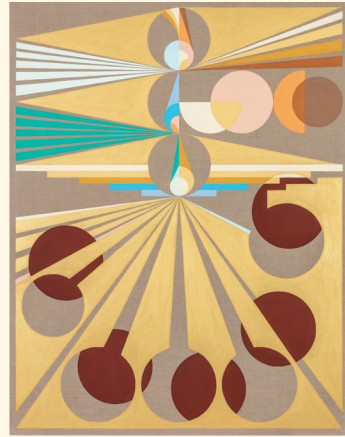
Chloë Bass, *#sky #nofilter*, 2017 (detail). Digital video. Courtesy of the artist.



Maren Hassinger

Since the 1970s, Maren Hassinger has repurposed manufacturing materials to build sculptures that resemble organic forms. By manipulating mass-produced materials like steel chains, wire rope, and newspapers in this way, Hassinger underscores the intimate connection between humans, industry, and nature, as well as our capacity to pollute the environment. *Love* consists of bright pink plastic bags, which have been inflated by breath and filled with notes imprinted with the word “love.” While the installation provides a welcoming and introspective space for its viewer, it also embodies the paradox between beauty and toxicity found throughout Hassinger’s work. As soft and fragile containers of oxygen, the pink plastic bags approximate lungs, pointing to an uncanny kinship between a synthetic material and a body part. *Love*’s connection to lungs also gestures towards the COVID-19 pandemic, which has called renewed attention to the precarity of breath — particularly within Black and brown communities, which have been disproportionately affected by the virus.

Maren Hassinger, *Love*, 2008/2021 (detail). Pink plastic bags inflated with human breath and filled with love notes. Courtesy of the artist and Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC.



Eamon Ore-Giron

Eamon Ore-Giron has lived in the American Southwest, Los Angeles, Mexico, and Peru. His experience across geographies informs his painting practice, which visualizes processes of transmutation — the migration of ideas, narratives, and aesthetics across temporal, spatial, and cultural boundaries. Ore-Giron’s *Infinite Regress CXXV* draws from a transnational and transhistorical selection of sources ranging from Brazilian Neo-Concretism and Italian Futurism to Incan jewelry design. Melded into a network of vibrantly hued shapes and golden fields, these distinct visual histories become kindred, simultaneous, and intimately connected within the painting. Ore-Giron also explores the psychological and emotional potentials of abstraction, arranging the geometric forms and colors in *Infinite Regress CXXV* to create an introspective space for each viewer.

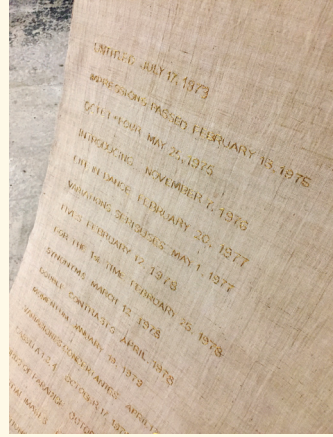
Eamon Ore-Giron, *Infinite Regress CXXV*, 2020. Mineral paint and Flashe on linen. Courtesy of the artist.



Clifford Prince King

Clifford Prince King photographs scenes of Black queer intimacy. A visual diary of the friends, spaces, and activities that animate his daily life, King's work imbues the seemingly mundane — styling a friend's hair, painting a bedroom, dancing in a kitchen — with poetry and mystery. Shades of beige and brown suffuse these images, bathing the artist's subjects in the warm glows of daylight and candlelight as they inhabit moments of quiet, comfort, and repose. By centering kinship as it unfolds in the everyday, King evades hyperbolic expectations of uplift and tragedy that accompany representations of Black queer masculinity. Instead, he offers understated images in which his subjects maintain the nuance and ambiguity of personhood, rendered as vulnerable as they are opaque, as natural as they are posed. The artist's closeness to his subjects comes across in their unselfconscious relationship to the camera. In King's hands, the camera portrays these individuals as they view themselves. What is kinship, after all, but feeling seen by another?

Clifford Prince King, *Safe Space*, 2020. Archival pigment print on Rag Photographique paper. Courtesy of the artist.



Kang Seung Lee

Within Kang Seung Lee's practice, kinship takes the form of care. By excavating and preserving cross-cultural queer histories, Lee meticulously tends to the legacies of queer people of color. *Untitled (List)* serves as a monument to Goh Choo San, an internationally renowned Singaporean-born choreographer, who died in 1987 of an AIDS-related illness at thirty-nine years old. Although Goh performed and choreographed for prominent ballet companies throughout Europe, Asia, and the United States, his legacy remains largely absent from queer cultural and dance histories. Shaped like a hammock and made of sambe — a hemp fiber found in traditional Korean funerary garments — *Untitled (List)* provides a metaphorical resting place for Goh, whose bodily presence is implied by the curvature of the sculpture. On the surface of *Untitled (List)*, Lee embroidered a list of the choreographer's work in gold thread, rendering the sculpture an archival testament to Goh's accomplishments.

Kang Seung Lee, *Untitled (List)*, 2018–2019 (detail). 24k gold thread on sambe, hemp rope, wood. Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles.

Laura Aguilar
Chloë Bass
Maren Hassinger
Eamon Ore-Giron
Clifford Prince King
Kang Seung Lee

On view beginning April 3, 2021
Curated by Nolan Jimbo

Close to You is made possible by the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in support of MASS MoCA and the Williams College Graduate Program in the History of Art.

Cover: Chloë Bass, *#sky #nofilter*, 2017 (detail). Digital video.
Courtesy of the artist.

Interior Flap: Eamon Ore-Giron, *Infinite Regress CXXV*, 2020 (detail). Mineral paint and Flashe on linen. Courtesy of the artist.

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