

***HotHouse* is an ongoing curatorial project exploring current queer creators' relationships to queer history, space, and memory. How do we relate to the precarity, politics, and potential for comfort and joy of intentional queer spaces? What is our role in remembering and recording those spaces once they're gone, and what might we owe to the particular queer histories of the spaces we occupy?**

Scott Swoveland was a part-time barback in Mary's, Naturally Bar, a cornerstone institution in the historically LGBT neighborhood of Montrose in Houston, when he began painting window murals for the bar. Erasing and re-painting them every week, he painted at least five hundred different murals between 1990 and 1999, alongside a number of other art and decorative projects for the bar celebrating the LGBT community of the neighborhood. The murals were frequently unrepentantly sexual, when nascent and limited representation of gay men and women in popular culture was frequently sanitized and sexless.

Swoveland faced threats of violence from anti-gay passers-by regularly while he painted, repeatedly, onto the bar's plexiglass windows - real glass could not be used because of the perpetual danger of damage from anti-gay vandals. The murals reflected the ever-evolving social and political life of Montrose's LGBT community, celebrating social events, anniversaries, individuals, and mourning the frequent loss of Mary's regulars to the AIDS epidemic. The ashes of countless numbers of these community members were scattered in Mary's back lot. Swoveland also painted an unapologetically gay permanent mural depicting a typical night in Mary's on the outside wall of the building, which became an icon of Montrose LGBT culture.

Swoveland's work is an example of the ways, both provocative and subtle, in which for centuries the LGBTQ+ community has used art, decorative arts, and design to designate space as non-hetero-dominant. In addition to the connotations of home, community, and sexuality present in the title of *HotHouse*, it is from this tradition of subtle queer signifying that the project derives its name. Charles Baudelaire, Joris-Karl Huysmans, and other 19th century Decadent and Aesthetic Movement thinkers frequently linked hothouses and the exotic flowers they housed with decadence, dandyism, and the non-heterosexual and non-traditional sexuality and gender identity with which these movements were often linked.

As a defiant queer signifier, Swoveland and Mary's use of public art articulates a sense of community grounded in the confident ownership of locale. As Swoveland's murals sprung up again and changed every week, it was an active and perpetually ongoing, self-rejuvenating message of support to the LGBT community and statement against the many vocal threats of violence, erasure, and suppression. Mary's closed in 2009, and Swoveland's iconic mural painted over. Varying efforts have been made to commemorate and preserve the space and artwork. Artist Cody Ledvina repainted the mural in 2011, until it was defaced and then painted over by city ordinance.

HotHouse exists in response to this particular history and in acknowledgment of the many other regional queer histories and community stories yet to be shared. It aims to bring

currently working queer artists into conversation with these histories and narratives, exploring their own relationship to them, their own relationship to queer spaces and aesthetics, and those stories' relationships to the queer experiences and communities of today. The questions we pose to participating artists and to the project's public are: how do we relate to the precarity, politics, and potential for comfort and joy of intentional queer spaces? What is our role in remembering and recording those spaces, and what might we owe to the particular queer histories of the spaces we occupy? *HotHouse* aims to use these questions as starting points for unique curatorial and creative experiments into understanding queer relationships to the past and present.

The first iteration of *HotHouse*, in collaboration with video artist Kameron Neal, took place at Detroit Art Week's Young Curators, New Ideas V in July 2019. As the artist's first solo exhibition, the project was an individual and vulnerable exploration of his relationship to his own queerness, Blackness, intimacy, and queer spaces and stories. As a queer Black creator, Kameron engaged directly with the complex relationship queer spaces have had and continue to have with queer people of color. The exhibition was a success in engaging a diversity of viewers and stimulating conversations around queer stories and Black and queer experiences. Read more about one critic's experience of the show in [Forbes](#).

[Gary Cruz's *I'll Take You There*](#), the second iteration of the project, is on view at [The Olympia Project](#) January 10 - March 10, 2020. Texan-born, New York-based artist Gary Cruz explores the potential for almost painterly formal and emotional abstraction in iPhone shot and edited works. *I'll Take You There* documents the interiors of gay bars he's frequented across the country and the world, reflecting on queer space, community, and history. Cruz's project opened to a strong reception January 10, with a fantastic multi-generational turn out on opening night and engendering a breadth of interesting conversations about our varying relationships to queer stories, publics, and aesthetics.