

The image features a central purple circle surrounded by a thick, multi-layered rainbow border. The text is centered within the purple area.

Queer Community &

Kindred Solidarities

Chosen Families



Solidarity: In and Through the Work of Kinship

In *Blue Mountains and The Stain of William Thomas Beckford* (2017), a pair of glistening, shirtless Black men casually lie in each other's embrace in front of palm trees and tropical flowers; they look into the distance with what appears to be anticipation. They have an easy intimacy, but the blood on their bodies and the white hand reaching between the palms toward them complicates things. In the historical referents Christopher Udemezue offers—maroon communities of Jamaica's Blue Mountains and William Beckford's plantation economy—there are many ways for this interracial narrative to come together,



Christopher Udemezue, *Blue Mountains and The Stain of William Thomas Beckford*, 2017. Digital print. Courtesy of the artist.



Christopher Udemezue, *Untitled (In a trance, she walked out onto her reflection, closed her eyes and received a plan from beyond the mountains)*, 2017. Digital print. Courtesy of the artist.

but the photograph illuminates his choice to present a disarmed whiteness and center the beauty of Black queerness. In lieu of offering a narrative of white savior and Black victim, Udemezue emphasizes Black power in and through connection and the desperation of isolation—produced in this context by Beckford’s flight to Jamaica after being exiled for queer

activity. The structural violence of homophobia simmers beneath as a grammar of shared oppression, offering an invitation to consider the conditions that enable solidarity. Although that precise relation hovers just beyond the frame, the artist makes it felt. We imagine a world where these men might learn from their disparate experiences and endeavor to co-create a different world.

Documenting the narratives of a walking tour led by FIERCE (Fabulous Independent Educated Radicals for Community Empowerment) *Parallel Lines*’ (David Kelley, Jeannine Tang, Mike Cataldi, Hans Kuzmich, and Jens Maier-Rothe) *Neither Forever Nor Instant* (2013) highlights yet other possibilities for another world. In the video, members of the group describe histories of queer actions in the West Village, as well as uses for their proposed youth community

center on Pier 40. In addition to bringing solidarity explicitly into a contemporary framework, the collective’s two-channel installation makes vibrant the links between aesthetic and activist forms of solidarity, both of which hinge on the ability to make oppression into something else.



Parallel Lines (David Kelley, Jeannine Tang, Mike Cataldi, Hans Kuzmich, and Jens Maier-Rothe) and *FIERCE, Neither Forever Nor Instant*, 2013. Two-channel video installation, sound. 14:18 min. Courtesy of the artists.

The Black feminist poet Audre Lorde had her own understanding of these processes of transformation, arguing that they are one of the most important elements in any struggle, writing, “One of the most basic Black survival skills is the ability to change, to metabolize experience, good or ill, into something that is useful, lasting, effective.”¹ While Lorde is specifically referring to the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, the ability to take the specter of death and combine it with possibilities of love, care, and knowledges of survival is central to solidarity. Then and now, what is crucial to this “metabolization” is the production of collectivity. Using feminist theorist Donna Haraway’s parlance, we can understand this enactment of plurality as a process of “making kin,” a phrase that she uses to describe strategies of attachment in the face of profound

precarity. Elaborating further, she says, “Making kin seems to me the thing that we most need to be doing in a world that rips us apart from each other, in a world that has already more than seven and a half billion human beings with very unequal and unjust patterns of suffering and well-being.”² Haraway is not talking about biological lines of relation, but queer kinships produced electively and maintained by practices of accountability and care in the service of solidarity. She expands: “By kin I mean those who have an enduring mutual, obligatory, non-optional, you-can’t-just-cast-that-away-when-it-gets-inconvenient, enduring relatedness that carries consequences. I have a cousin, the cousin has me; I have a dog, a dog has me.”³ Kinship, in this context, is political.

Adding the language of kinship to solidarity is about understanding the complex dynamics that emerge when one is entangled with others. A discourse of kinship makes evident the time and effort behind producing affiliation, even as it lays bare the ways that the idea of kinship can be (and has been) weaponized to discourage coalition—think of the current moments’ activation of various factionalisms. *The History of the Harmonie Family Portrait* (2008) lays bare this dichotomy by showing how quickly strangers gathered in a hotel room assume the posture of a family. At the beginning of Jamie Diamond’s video, people stand apart, unsure of what to do. In minutes, they have situated themselves within familial roles, performing familiar tropes of relation. In showing us the power of kinship as structure, we see both the overdetermined narratives of normativity and the potential of kinship to incite enmeshment and intimacy. By the end of the video, one cannot discern prior non-relatedness, speaking to

the world-making possibilities of kinship, but also inviting more specificity about the particular politics of making kin.

Thinking with kin allows us to see the range of affective entanglements within solidarity. The family is not a utopia; there may be jealousy, disappointment, or rivalry. Kinship, however, might also lubricate difficulty by insisting on an affective and structural tether even in these situations—remembering that kinship is a choice, an enactment. I also use the word ‘lubricate’ here to remind us that kinship offers an embodied form of endurance, such that its formations may bolster us against numerous forms of threat, by augmenting the breadth of possibility, even as one may need survival strategies for being kin.



Jamie Diamond, *The History of the Harmonie Family Portrait*, 2008. Single-channel video. 2:12 min. Courtesy of the artist.

Kalup Linzy's long-standing preoccupation with the internal dynamics of the Queen Rose family, assembled for posterity in the *Resemblance* series captures the complex dynamism of kinship as site, in order to come together despite differences. Since the characters are all portrayed by the artist, the resemblance is unmistakable, but his practice emphasizes threads of difference and moments of discord. The short film, *OK* (2020/2021) highlights this in its narrative of members of the family working together to resolve a problem. In the piece, amid exasperation and misunderstanding, underscored by lip syncing and



Kalup Linzy, *OK*, 2020/2021. Single-channel video, sound. 10:55 min. Courtesy of the artist and David Castillo Gallery.

lo-fi aesthetics, there are chords of tenderness in the collective commitment to collective action. Importantly, their resolve produces a wider sense of solidarity that ricochets outward, enabling the family to survive while also bolstering others.

Moreover, we might consider the density of affect and connection within the chosen familial as a form of love, thinking alongside Jennifer Nash's argument that Black feminist politics of love demand "a significant call for ordering the self and transcending the self, a strategy for remaking the self and for moving beyond the limitations of selfhood."⁴ This movement beyond the self takes effort requiring what Nash describes as an "ethical management of the self," "pushing the self to be configured in new ways that might be challenging or difficult."⁵ This is to say that the enacting of solidarity might begin with the self and expand outward. Larry Krone's *It Gets Better* (2011), literalizes this idea in its use of an antique mirror, featuring a drawing of him as a pin-up in underwear at the center, with the words "It Gets Better" written across the bottom. Krone's piece highlights the importance of vulnerability and self-knowledge as part of an approach to others. In lieu of framing the examination of the self as a narcissistic endeavor, the mirror is populated, showing the stakes of self-reflection. *It Gets Better*—fabricated before Dan Savage's campaign to speak to queer youth—might refer to the ongoing labor required to maintain the vibrancy of solidarity's interpersonal dynamics.

One does not make kin to blanket the world in sameness, but instead to extend outward so as to live with and through the possibilities of difference. Lorde, for example, does not offer kinship as a form of homogeneity or dwell on it as a

comfortable form of collectivity. Instead, she finds power in friction, arguing that difference is actually the condition of being in solidarity because it allows one to acknowledge interdependence. Lorde writes, “Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek out new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters.”⁶ The act of coming together



Kalup Linzy, *Resemblance*, 2018. Mixed media on canvas. Courtesy of the artist and David Castillo Gallery.

through difference adds strength to the collective and enables the possibility of survival.

As Udemezue and *Parallel Lines*' work on imagined pasts and futures illustrates, establishing cross-temporal connections is one form of making kin. But there are other ways to generate intimacy and solidarity with others. We might, for example, consider portraiture as its own practice of making kin, because it requires an approach to difference filled with care, respect, and openness. Nan Goldin's *Kenny putting on make-up, Boston* (1973) uses the camera's lens to provide a tender friendly embrace. We catch Kenny in a personal, unguarded moment made accessible to us because of the trust and friendship that exist between Kenny and Goldin. The photograph reflects a solidarity that is already present.



Nan Goldin, *Kenny putting on make-up, Boston*, 1973. Archival pigment print. Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery. © Nan Goldin. Collection of Steve Shane.



Andrea Geyer, *Constellations (Jessie Redmon Fauset)*, 2018. Hand-cut archival print on rag paper. Courtesy of the artist and Hales Gallery, London and New York. © Andrea Geyer.

Andrea Geyer's *Constellations* series activates similar dynamics in approaching photographs of others. These are not images of people who the artist knows—they are early 20th century figures in queer cultural and activist circles, but they are connected to Geyer in their politics and affinity for collectivity. This form of affective proximity and historical distance is cemented aesthetically by her personalization of archival photographs, with complex geometric cuts and rearrangements to announce a kinship beneath the surface. *Constellations (Jessie Redmon Fauset)*, 2018, for example, transforms Fauset's seated body through the addition of vertical

cuts, so that part of a pearl necklace interrupts legs and a watch appears twice. The effect underscores the multiple dimensions of her life, so as to hail the different ways that she emphasized the heterogeneity of the Black



Carlos Motta, *Narrative Shifter: A Portrait of Julio Salgado from We Got Each Other's Back*, 2020. Four-channel video, sound. 50 min. (approx.). Courtesy of P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York. Installation view from *Soft Power* at SFMOMA, 2019-2020. Photograph courtesy of SFMOMA.

community—in her position as editor of *The Crisis* and in her own writings on race and gender. In Geyer's emphasis on a fractured and multiple gaze, we feel Fauset's affective labor of assembling heterogeneous ideas and people as well as the artist's connection to these projects of producing solidarity.

Likewise, Carlos Motta and Julio Salgado's installation *We Got Each Other's Back* (2020) presents three video portraits of queer undocumented artists/

activists. Each chapter focuses on different elements of each person's story—emphasizing not only their various hardships, but their joys, talents, and intimate relations with others. One chapter, shows Salgado, creator of the “I am UndocuQueer!” project, talking about his art practice, cooking with family, discussing the DREAM Act and DACA. By working with the artists, Motta reorients the audience's perspective, through providing undocumented people with a platform to discuss what is important to them, rather than what the media would like to see. This is a representational strategy that is not premised on mobilizing sympathy or empathy, but on mutual respect and shared agency. In Motta's emphasis on the fullness of these artists' lives, he allows us to feel the emotional, physical, and aesthetic exertions of solidarity through directorial and cinematic operation.

In these different orientations toward solidarity, we see the power of considering its overlap with the politics of making kin. Solidarity, like kinship, contains processes of affiliation and care, which themselves include aligning through a valuation of difference and the possibility of its frictions, and choosing actively to stay embedded for a long durée—who, after all, is kin for a day? Each of these artists' explorations make palpable the strength that emerges from chosen affiliation. They show us how these queer kinships rooted in abundance offer possibilities for joy and resistance in solidarity.

—Amber Jamilla Musser
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Kindred Solidarities: Queer Community and Chosen Families is curated by George Bolster and Anjuli Nanda Diamond. October 21, 2021–January 22, 2022. *Kindred Solidarities* features works by Jamie Diamond, Andrea Geyer, Nan Goldin, Larry Krone, Kalup Linzy, Carlos Motta, Parallel Lines (David Kelley, Jeannine Tang, Mike Cataldi, Hans Kuzmich, and Jens Maier-Rothe) and FIERCE, and Christopher Udemezue.

Endnotes

¹ Audre Lorde, “Learning from the 60s,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* by Audre Lorde (New York: Crossing Press Feminist Series, 2007), 134-144; 137.

² Steve Paulson, “Making Kin: An Interview with Donna Haraway,” *LA Review of Books*, December 6, 2019. <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/making-kin-an-interview-with-donna-haraway>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Jennifer Nash, “Practicing love: Black feminism, love-politics, and post-intersectionality,” *Meridians* 11.2 (2013): 1-24; 10

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Audre Lorde, “The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* by Audre Lorde (New York: Crossing Press Feminist Series, 2007) 110-113;111.

Image Credits

Inside Cover: Larry Krone, *Then and Now* (Cape Collaboration), 2012, (Reverse). Found embroidered fabric, sequins, beads, yarn, fabric, embroidery floss. Courtesy of the artist. Photograph by Adam Reich.

Back Cover: Larry Krone. *Then and Now* (Cape Collaboration), 2012, (Detail). Found embroidered fabric, sequins, beads, yarn, fabric, embroidery floss. Courtesy of the artist.

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