

ASH HUSE

NOW YOU'RE HERE



DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

October 2-December 12, 2023

NOW YOU'RE HERE

In their thesis work *DEADNAME*, **Ash Huse** explores concepts of identity, queerness, self-image, and mental health. Subverting photographic portraiture, Huse creates images of their own body using music software, changing the code of digital files, and rephotographing images on screens. Huse investigates ideas of bodily metamorphosis by using a process of corruption and digital abstractions, moving past binary or traditional views in portraiture. The chaos conveys a sense of anxiety and depression attached to their own sense of queerness. Combining these elements, they seek to have a larger discussion about gender dysphoria and unease of not feeling wholly male or female but nonbinary. This series showcases how both revealing and concealing can act in a transformation of self. By performing for the camera and experimenting with a distorted process in the images, Huse seeks out new ways to tell the story of how queer bodies can be a site of transformation and self-discovery.

Their other project, *Now You're Here*, is a series of intimate portraits with their long-distance partner, Jamie. Huse has been creating portraits of Jamie and them in a Virtual Reality game called VRChat since 2020. These portraits have given them a way to have those intimate moments with one another and to document their existence as a couple that people may otherwise shrug off as not being real due to them being in another country and online. Just as a society might tell Huse their relationship is not valid due to distance, the same one would invalidate their identity because it does not adhere to society's sense of gender. People neglect to talk about how online communities, especially queer online communities, can save lives for people and give them a safe space to express themselves.

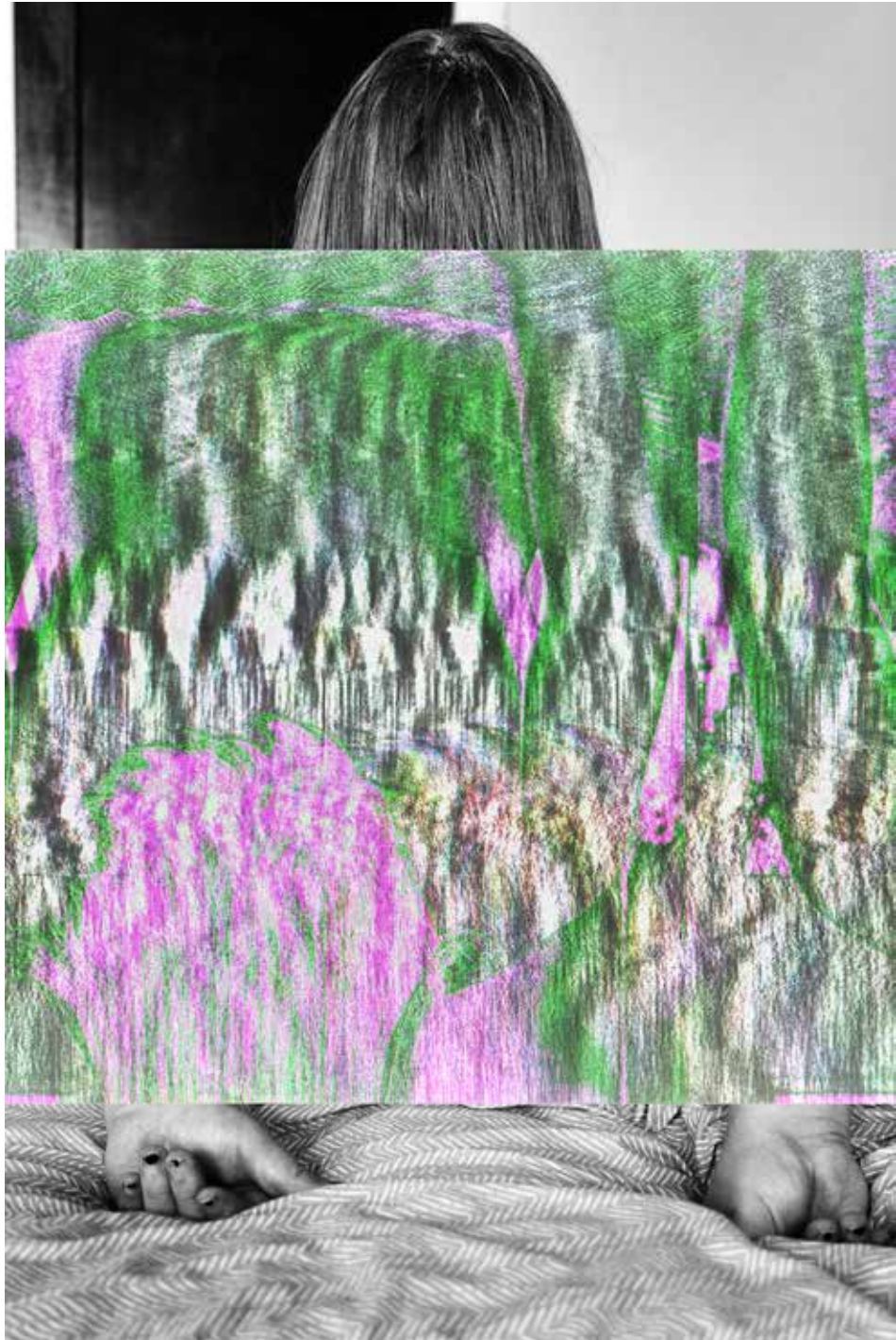
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Through the Stuart Abelson Research Fellowship, Huse finally met Jamie for the first time. Just as they had been photographing one another virtually for years, being in person allowed Huse to create these intimate portraits with them, appreciating the long road it took to be together. It was Huse taking that leap of faith in talking to a stranger online that allowed them to start this internal dialogue with themselves about their identity and to feel the freedom to love unconditionally.

Ash Huse (They/Them) (b. 1997) is a queer-lens-based artist established in Chicago, Illinois. Ash's body of work surrounds LGBTQ+ identity through portraiture. Their work also explores themes of queerness, transformation, and mental illness through abstract and experimental photographic methods using music software, text/hex editing, and rephotographing images on screens. They obtained their Bachelor's Degree in Photography at Columbia College Chicago, where they are currently pursuing their MFA in Fine Art Photography. Their work has been featured at Filter Space in Chicago and the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design.

Website: <https://www.ashhuse.com/>

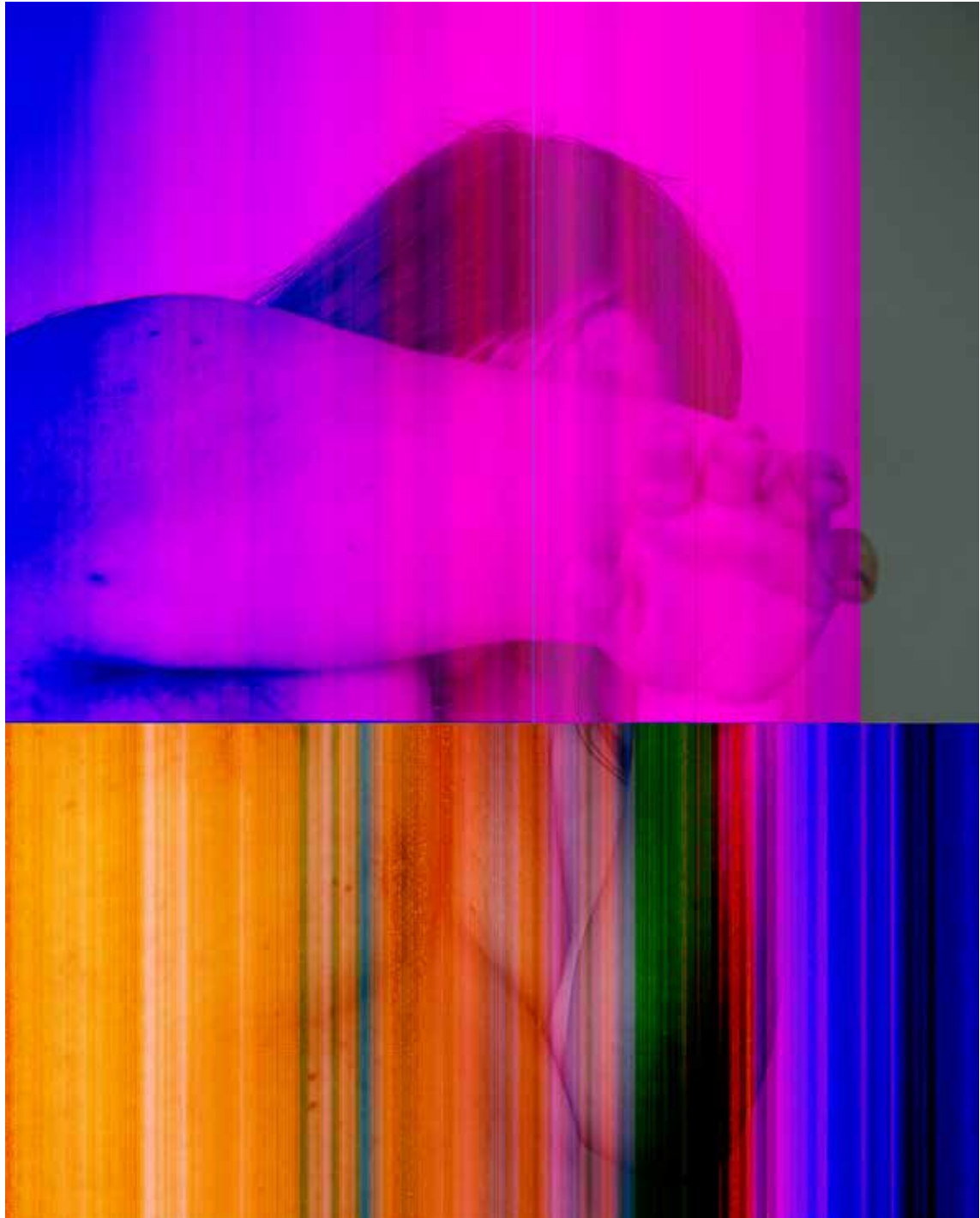
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/ash.huse/>



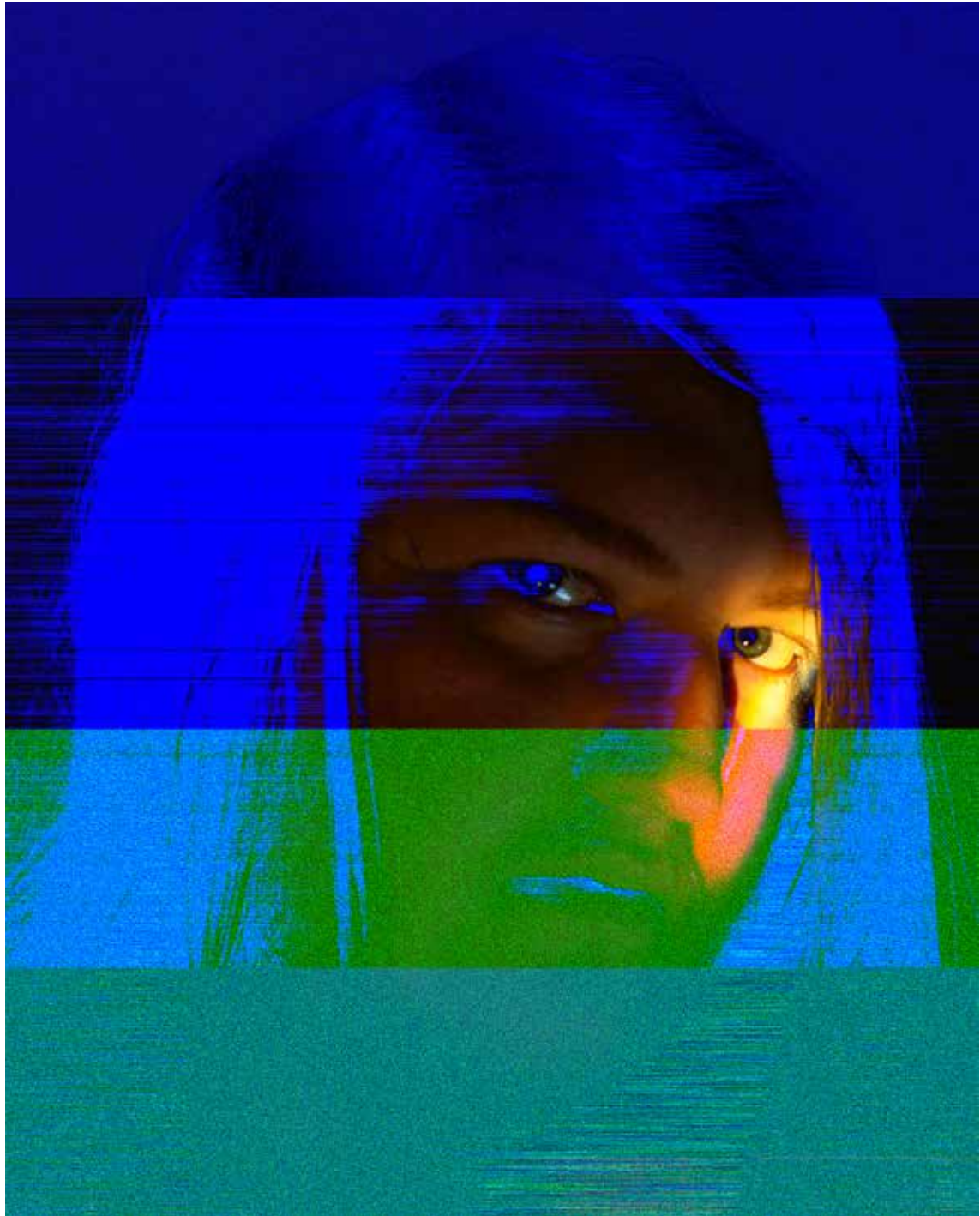
Self Corruption 3, 2022, Inkjet Print, 60" x 44



Self Corruption 11, 2022, Inkjet Print, 43" x 25"



HAR to ASH 1, 2023, Inkjet Print, 42" x 28"



DEADNAME, 2023, Inkjet Print, 30" x 20"



WILL THEY ALWAYS LOOK AT ME?, 2023, Inkjet Print, 20" x 30"



Jamie Hiding Behind Their Hair, 2023, Inkjet Print, 19.5" x 13"



We Will Become Silhouettes, 2023, Inkjet Print, 13" x 19.5"



In The Evening Sun With Jamie, 2023, Inkjet Print, 19.5" x 13"



Wild Rose, 2023, Inkjet Print, 13" x 19.5"



Toy Lynx, 2023, Inkjet Print, 13" x 19.5"

INTERVIEW WITH ASH HUSE

Conducted by Rachel Manlubatan

Rachel Manlubatan: What feelings do you hope audiences experience when they view your use of digital corruption, music software, and rephotographing images on screens? How did you first start incorporating these techniques into your photos, and what other experiments do you hope to make in the future?

Ash Huse: I first started creating these image corruptions from the desire to destroy past works. This desire to destroy was in response to the anger, anxiety, and extreme depression I was experiencing during the early years of the COVID-19 pandemic. Because I struggled with mental illness, lack of a job, and the loss of a community, it was hard for me to pick up the camera to make new work. The work I created, I had a hard time feeling good about. From there, I decided to bring my photos into music software (Audacity) after looking at manually corrupted images on Instagram and from other artists. It was a way for me to create new work through destruction. Funnily, this was therapeutic for me and allowed me to have a deeper dialogue with myself about my sense of self and identity that I had suppressed for years. It was in May of 2021 that I officially came out as Non-binary, due in large part, to this process and talking with Jamie (my partner) during quarantine. From there, I experimented more in graduate school- as to how I could talk about these issues I had felt, the sense of chaos and internal dialogue that started from this idea of representing the self through portraiture. It was a way for me to protect myself while also finding this reclamation act to take control of the narrative of queer bodies through a lens. I want my viewer to experience that sense of internal turmoil that I had felt, the dysphoria and euphoria of being free to express myself, not being bound to the cis-heteronormative definition of who I am. During my last year at Columbia, I hope to experiment more with

sound and text. During my first year, I wanted to nail down the visual thematics that I desired, and now that I feel comfortable in that, I need to break out of that comfort zone and work on aspects of art and photography I've been too afraid to work on.

RM: How did using VRChat as one of your main creative platforms impact your artistic process?

AH: It was a way for me to make work and a way for me to share my passion with my loved ones. When I first started taking photographs in Virtual Reality and VRChat I had no intention of putting them in exhibitions. I just wanted a way to capture the moments and remind myself of what I have. It was my love language I could share with my partner, Jamie. This shared experience allowed us to get closer than ever before and even actually led to us dating. Before I received the Stuart Abelson Research Fellowship, Jamie and I had never met in real life before. We made plans before the pandemic started, but that fell through. Having this constant connection to them allowed us to have that deep dialogue with one another and better understand our own identities. We both came out as Non-binary and started dating as a result. I was so honored to receive the fellowship to travel and work with Jamie in real life.

RM: How do you decide what colors and compositions inhabit each piece? What is your reasoning behind transforming certain photos or sections of photos into black and white?

AH: Funny enough, I don't decide the colors of the images. I give up a little bit of that control to the process. I enjoy letting go in some ways as it adds to that therapeutic way of making art. By trusting the process, I'm able to feel a sense of self-expression and not be bound to how an image needs to look according to personal taste. I feel like taking all of the

INTERVIEW CONTINUED

control robs me of being able to be surprised and appreciate the spontaneous nature of how images are read. For the longest time, I was afraid of color in my work. I made exclusively black and white images, wanting nothing to do with color, which I viewed as distracting from what was happening in the scene (which, of course, people perceive B&W in their own way.) What I loved about corrupting images is that I didn't have to worry about colors. I wanted to express the chaos, uncertainty, and visual noise that came from it. A harsh explosion of shapes, colors, forms, etc. Much like those optical illusions that make your eyes hurt if you look at them too long since the patterns dance. And with the upcoming semester, I hope to activate that even further with sound.

RM: How has creating art about your identity affected how you see yourself and the world around you?

AH: I've always thought of myself as more of an observer. It could be my anxiety or imposter syndrome speaking, but it's an interesting push-and-pull effect I feel when I create such personal works surrounding identity. When I started talking more about how being nonbinary is this nebulous spectrum and the work I then create is hard to parse through visually, some people tend to have a hard time with that. It's crazy how we as humans feel this extreme desire to identify everything so we can categorize everything. Some people have a hard time grasping these concepts that I too, sometimes struggle with, of gender, sex, and identity as a whole. It's such a fluid and ever-changing theory that it's hard for some people to catch up. From a more personal standpoint, and as I've alluded to earlier in the Q&A, making work about identity has allowed me to work through my identity. It's my form of therapy, and it has helped me tremendously in being the person I am today. Will that change

tomorrow? Maybe, but I'm open to the change and invite it in so I can better understand myself and be happier with myself. The camera and art making is the tool that allows me to talk with myself when I have a hard time doing it verbally.



THE DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

The DEPS Artist Profile Series presented by Columbia College Chicago's Department of Exhibitions, Performance and Student Spaces (DEPS), is a virtual publication on select artists involved with the DEPS Galleries and the Columbia College Chicago community. Our goal with this series is to connect artist and viewer on a deeper level, and to highlight the amazing works and thoughts of our featured artists through interviews, artist biographies, and catalogs of work. Art has always been a way to connect with others, no matter where one may physically be. We hope by presenting the creativity and insights of the people involved in the DEPS Artist Profile Series that viewers may have one more way to stay in touch with and support the arts community. The DEPS Artist Profile Series and graphic design is managed by DEPS Exhibitions Assistant Rachel Manlubatan. This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

Learn more at: colum.edu/deps

Contact information: Mark Porter, mporter@colum.edu / 312.369.6643

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The Arcade: 618 S. Michigan Ave., Second Floor, Chicago, IL 60605

Gallery Hours: Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.