

What are you? Queer?!

Data Visualization of Contemporary Queer Political and Social Issues through
the medium of Textile Art

By

Paul Edwards

May, 2026

Director of Thesis: Robin Haller

Major Department: School of Art and Design

Abstract

This paper and the accompanying exhibition focus on textile art designed and created around truths in the world that threaten our prosperity as queer people. Having had a lifelong interest in politics, a bachelor's degree in its study, and a propensity towards activism, the central theme of the work and the advocacy it intends are personally important to me as a queer person. The work began from my distress at watching our trans siblings in the community come under unfounded and heavy attack in recent years, and an interest in creating a body of work around these issues lead to further research and study of statistical data around queer political issues of the present day. The body of work supported by this paper and presented in the exhibition *What are you? QUEER?!* were all designed and created using data and numerical sets found in the research to include the representation of the issues within the materials and basic construction of each piece.

Data Visualization of Contemporary Queer Political and Social Issues through the medium
of Textile Art / What are you? Queer?!

A Thesis

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Art

By

Paul Edwards

May, 2026

Director of Thesis: Robin Haller, MFA

Thesis Committee Members:

Angela Wells, MFA

Lisa Beth Robinson, MFA, MLIS

Consultant:

Rose Bogue, BFA

Table of Contents

Title	i
Copyright.....	ii
List of Plates	v
Chapter 1: Writing on Exhibition Origins and Inspiration	1
Chapter 2: Individual Piece Statements.....	13
Conclusion	35
References	36
Appendix 1- Pride Flags referenced in the work	38
Appendix 2 – Parker Parenti statement and bio.....	41

List of Plates

1. Art Attacks AIDS, Keith Haring	7
2. Silence Equals Death, Keith Haring.....	8
3. 900 Bill Count, Parker Parenti	10
4. Left Hands, Paul Edwards	14
5. Droplets (detail), Paul Edwards	15
6. Droplets, Paul Edwards	16
7. Droplets (detail), Paul Edwards	16
8. Ribbon (detail), Paul Edwards.....	18
9. Ribbon, Paul Edwards	19
10. Ribbon, Paul Edwards	20
11. Community, Paul Edwards	23
12. Community (detail), Paul Edwards.....	24
13. Community (detail), Paul Edwards.....	25
14. Plateau, Paul Edwards	27
15. Plateau (detail), Paul Edwards	28
16. Joy, Paul Edwards	30
17. 1,000 Bill Count, Parker Parenti	42

Chapter 1: Writing on Exhibition Origins and Inspiration

Queerness has existed within nature since before recorded history. It is seen in over 1,500 species on our planet (Yeoman), and these findings are not limited to mammals as commonly assumed. Though, in this document we will be focusing on human beings who are queer. As long as LGBTQIA+ individuals, who will hereinafter be referred to using umbrella terms of “gay” or “queer,” have existed on our planet, they have faced discrimination and prejudice. The existence of gay people in society is documented through art dating back to ancient Egyptian culture with frescos depicting two men coupled in a way that was typically only seen between heterosexual spouses. Ancient Greek society held well-documented attitudes towards queer relationships, often considering them a natural part of the world – as is the truth of the matter (“Stonewall 50: Art in Queer Activism”). Despite this innate presence of queer people on our planet, trends in intolerance towards us have emerged within human societies over time.

As evolution marched forward and our species emerged to dominate the planet, humans and their societies spread across the face of the world, and thus our culture has been imposed upon all the other species on the Earth. This hegemonic act has seen our species change the planet and the course of its future forever. While our physical evolution slowed, human cultural evolution continued to grow and change, and eventually it splintered into more localized iterations of past societies. While each societal enclave or human settlement is unique through its particular customs and culture, we are all held together through threads of commonality. One of those common features is the existence

of queer people within every society that has ever formed. Due to largely unchecked reproduction, human population figures continued to climb, resulting in a parallel increase in the number of queer people born into the world alongside the heterosexual members of our species. The exact moment of the emergence of gay culture can be difficult to pin down, but just as the dominant culture of straight society continued and grew, so has our own gay culture. In contemporary times, queer culture is extremely niche and nuanced as a reflection of all the members of our rainbow community, but one thing that we all have in common is existing on the face of this planet facing discrimination, oppression, and prejudice.

My research focuses on textile art designed and created around truths in the world that threaten our prosperity as queer people. Having had a lifelong interest in politics, a bachelor's degree in its study, and a propensity towards activism, the central theme of the work and the advocacy it intends are personally important to me as a queer person. The work began from personal distress at watching the trans siblings in our community come under unfounded and heavy attack in recent years, and an interest in creating a body of work around these issues lead to further research and study of statistical data around queer political issues of the present day. The body of work supported by this paper and presented in the exhibition "What are you? QUEER?!" were all designed and created using data and numerical sets found in the research to include the representation of the issues within the materials and basic construction of each piece.

One of the more noble quests of humanity is scientific research and the pursuit of the truths, both seen and unseen, within our world and the wider universe. The scientific

method still used today was first conceptualized during the Scientific Revolution (1500-1700), and its beginnings are frequently credited to Francis Bacon who advocated for a more systematic and empirical system for studying science. The scientific method was embraced by many thinkers, but it was not formally institutionalized until the establishment of scientific academies in mid-seventeenth-century Italy, England, and France (Cartwright). The scientific method values deductive reasoning, objectivity, and facts above all. Despite the adaptation of this methodology purported to be rooted in the pursuit of fact-based knowledge, humans are imperfect and we often fall short of our own goals and standards. As such, homophobic attitudes sponsored by the dominant culture are clearly shown in some of the scientific publications even 350 years after said adoption of this scientific method. It is astounding that scientific publications purported to be based in fact and objectivity as ruled by the scientific method would include subjective and homophobic attitudes within their pages. The inclusion of such types of language, as described below, demonstrates the truly difficult task of separating fact from fiction and truth from hate that queer people and their allies have been fighting for centuries.

Scientific research from the early 1900s through as late as the 1980s has been laden with disparaging remarks about the queer creatures within the animal kingdom. The behavior of a group of gay ruffs (showy shorebirds) was referred to as “perverted sexuality” in 1906 by Edmund Selous (Selous). The impacts such linguistic choices continue to have on society is immeasurable. Many trust science and scientific reporting and frame their world view around the facts scientists report. The normalization of the use of such partial and homophobic language contributed to the continuation of homophobia in the dominant

culture. Even nearly a hundred years later in the 1980's, subjective and homophobic language can be seen in scientific reporting. In 1986, after witnessing a group of male Mazarine blue butterflies vying for the attention of another male, entomologist John Tennent described the entire biological order as having an "apparent lowering of moral standards" and further used "horrific sexual offences" to describe what he had perceived to be occurring in nature (Tennent). These incidents are not isolated but are merely highlights of some of the improper application of the scientific method and the insertion of societal – and possibly personal – bias into scientific writing against clear standards of impartiality. This is an example of the way that homophobic ideation has become an acceptable part of human culture for at least the past century, but for it to be engrained within the society to the point where language representing such attitudes can be printed in scientific journals and reports, it is reasonable to assume that the attitudes have existed within the culture for a longer period of time.

There is research that links the rise of homophobia to the fall of the Roman Empire and Constantine's attempts to prolong it through unification under religion. The pronouncements against homosexuality within the Christian text influenced the state to make some of the first sets of homophobic policies; in this particular case, the Theodosian Code prescribed death for men engaging in homosexual acts (Parkes). The legal lineage from the Theodosian Code to the Corpus Juris Civilis and, later, to the common law traditions of Western societies demonstrates the lasting impact of this historical moment. It also reveals a long and tormented connection between queer people and homophobic policies rooted in religiously motivated bigotry and intensified by efforts to consolidate

imperial power. There exists a long list of different societies and the rules that they have made to persecute and punish queer people, but in lieu of a recitation of such laws and the torments that our queer forebearers endured, the point should be sufficiently made by illuminating the fact that around 69 countries in the world today, which is more than a third of all countries on the planet, have active laws that ban any sexuality other than heterosexuality (“A Quick Summary on the History of Homophobia in the West”).

Considering the integral way that homophobia has been plied into the fabric of our society, it is easy to understand how queer people as an oppressed group have had and continue to have to fight for their rights and prosperity. The struggle of queer people is documented through both our own histories and the history of the dominant culture, but the documentation of history through art is also an important subject to consider in the context of my research. There have been any number of queer artists in the world working in their practices to document homophobia or to create pieces representative of their feelings and own place within a society in which they are not fully accepted as they are. Thinking about the work created for this thesis, its intended purpose, and the methodology through which the pieces were designed and brought into existence, reviewing the work of an artist with historic success and a more contemporary artist working in the arena of queer activist art will help to achieve some context for the work in the exhibition.

The work of Keith Haring is iconic, and his artistic style is familiar to a very large portion of global society. As a queer artist in the 1980s, the AIDS epidemic impacted Haring directly through the loss of friends and loved ones, and eventually his own contraction of HIV in 1987. Haring described the list of people he knew who had died from AIDS as

“...incredible, amazing, a long list of people” following the first time that AIDS touched his circle in 1983 with the passing of Klaus Nomi. After his seroconversion, Haring began working at a much more intense pace and painted work about HIV and AIDS all over the world and began several campaigns attempting to increase AIDS awareness in the general population (de Souza). Two key pieces from Haring’s activist art that seem relevant to this thesis and my artistic purposes would be his works *Art Attack on AIDS* (Plate 1) and *Silence Equals Death* (Plate 2)



Plate 1. Haring, Keith. *Art Attack on AIDS*. 1988, Private Collection. Screenprint on oak veneer plywood.

(source: <https://www.myartbroker.com/artist-keith-haring/artwork-art-attack-on-aids-signed-mixed-media>)



510 K. Haring 89/0

Plate 2. Haring, Keith. *Silence Equals Death*. 1989, Private Collection. Screenprint. (source:

<https://www.myartbroker.com/artist-keith-haring/collection-pyramids/artwork-silence-equals-death-signed-print-1989>)

A more contemporary artist making textile art in a similar conceptual space to myself is Parker Parenti who came to my attention because of a group show that we were in together at the gallery Not Shock Boxx called “Pray the Gay Away.” Parenti’s work entitled *900 Bill Count* (Plate 3). was work made surrounding a count of anti-trans bills proposed during 2025. The bills were designated by name on individual pieces of fabric that were red or white. The fabric elements representing the bills were then stitched together into the form of an American flag using a supplement of blue fabric with a field of stars upon it. The purpose of this work and the source for the data (Translegislation.com) that it is based upon is the same as the first piece in the body of work presented for my thesis: *Left Hands* (Plate 4). While it is somewhat comforting to know that other artists are looking at the same information and having similar reactions to it causing them to make art for the purposes of awareness and advocacy, the existence of the data itself is a heartbreak. It is a net positive to see artists like Parenti and myself using our talents to bring awareness to issues that are important to us and to our community.



Plate 3. Parenti, Parker. *900 Bill Count*. 2025, Cotton, felt pen. (source:

https://www.instagram.com/p/DPamCWODjRQ/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==)

The commitment to using art as advocacy for one's community has shaped much of the work in this thesis. The crisis facing the queer community at the time that Haring was making and advocating through art was the AIDS epidemic which robbed our community of nearly an entire generation. Through time and dedicated research much progress has been

made in the prevention and treatment of HIV and AIDS, and it must be acknowledged that without artists and activists like Haring speaking out about the pain within their communities, the progress in these areas would likely have been slower than it has been.

In these more contemporary times thanks to those advancements, HIV and AIDS, while still health concerns, are not the most prominent issue facing our community. Transphobic and anti-trans sentiments as they influence culture and politics are the most serious danger facing all LGBTQIA+ people at present. The first piece completed in this body of work, *Left Hands*, has a weave structure designed considering the 538 pieces of anti-trans legislation within the United States that were being monitored in the fall of 2023 by the Trans Legislation Tracker website. This number was shocking and sparked motivation for this entire thesis exhibition. After a return visit to the Trans Legislation Tracker in the spring of 2025, it was saddening but not surprising that the figures had increased considering the political and social climate of the time. The figure had increased to 823 pieces of legislation that were being tracked. These figures are counted annually by this organization, and the counter resets in January, so the 53% more anti-trans pieces of legislation being tracked in the spring of 2025 compared to the fall of 2023 demonstrates a severely drastic increase in the hatred towards our queer siblings in this time. A look at the figures again in the late fall of 2025 shows that there are over 1,000 items being monitored currently which is a number that represents a doubling of the volume of legislative hatred first witnessed in the fall of 2023 when this work began. This is a crisis for our community fueled by hatred and unfounded fears of diverse gender expressions. The attempts of conservative and regressive segments of our society to erase and legislate away gender

diversity are truly scary behaviors to behold, and it is the duty and responsibility of all of those not under attack within the community to speak out and shine light on the hatred being directed at our trans siblings. All queer people have a right to exist, as they will, unencumbered by the pressures of the dominant culture and its narrow view of acceptable expression and existence.

Raising awareness of issues is the first step towards liberation. Though there are many further steps to pass along the way such as acknowledgement, tolerance, and acceptance, it is always important to maintain a voice of advocacy for those on the margins and those under clear attack. This desire to advocate for others and for the betterment of the world has been a constant theme influencing art created not only for this thesis, but through my entire life. This desire for advocacy was largely influenced by my own experiences being a young gay person coming of age and to terms with my own queerness in the 1990s. The rejection that I perceived from society and that I received from my own family caused much heartache and emotional turmoil. While the pain has largely subsided, the anger persists, and the most productive expression of that emotion that I have been able to identify is this pursuit of advocacy. Years of protesting and advocating have brought attention to issues affecting the various communities that I have been a part of, and as I continued to expend my energy on behalf of others, I found myself able to release more and more from concerns related to the self. It is this viewpoint and desire to support and speak out for others that inspired the path of this exhibition, “What are you? QUEER?!”, which focuses on issues in a way that is outside of myself and intended to shine light on our community and the hardships unnecessarily imposed on it from outside forces.

Chapter 2: Statements for Individual Pieces

Left Hands
92" W x 58" H
Cotton
March 2024



Plate 4: *Left Hands*, Paul Edwards, 2024

In American society today, youths who do not conform to a prescribed gender binary are under direct legislative attack. As of its last update on March 15, 2024, the ACLU (2024) reported that it is tracking 484 anti-LGBT bills across the country. The Trans Legislation Tracker (2024) website reports the number at a slightly higher level of 538 bills as of early April. Considering the nature of these bills as proposed laws that are not in support of gender diversity, but that are instead attempts to legislate the very act of being trans into criminality, both of these organizations present an issue that deserves serious discussion: the vulnerability of trans people and particularly trans youth.

Before looking into the current issues faced by gender diverse individuals, we should take time to define some of the gender identities involved and the proper terminology used

around those identities. It is important to keep in mind at all times that these identities and terms are more than mere words – these words represent people. People using these terms to define their gender identities deserve respect and have the right to live their lives with liberty as they pursue happiness because trans people are people.

In this writing, I will use the word trans and trans umbrella interchangeably. The trans umbrella is an inclusive term for all people who identify in a way other than cis gender which is an identity wherein the sex that one was assigned at birth matches with their gender identity. There are many different ways in which people identify that fall under the trans umbrella: transgender, gender fluid, nonbinary, agender, bigender, two spirit, genderqueer, and gender nonconforming. Within this text, the term trans inclusively refers to any person who identifies with one of these gender identities or anything identity that falls under the trans umbrella.

Now that there is a clearer understanding of who it is exactly that is being targeted by the aforementioned legislative actions, let's look at some of the population statistics regarding the youth within the trans population. Do be aware that the data available is only based upon self-reported demographic information related to individual gender identities, and thus the numbers likely underrepresent the truth of our society. Research conducted in 2022 by the Williams Institute (Herman) suggests that less than 1% of the population identifies as trans, but this data is not noted as including trans umbrella identities as the only mention of any gender identity diversity is in a pie chart breaking down the gender identity of adults who identify as transgender in the United States by using the three categories of transgender women, transgender men, and transgender gender nonconforming. Considering the self-reported nature of the data and the ambiguity of the inclusion of trans umbrella identities, the figure of 0.6% of the population must be assumed to be a minimum percent of the population.

The data in this report that is a likely catalyst for all the current legislation efforts against trans individuals is the section where the youth categories are analyzed and are shown to have doubled in the five years between this report in 2022 and the previous iteration of the

research five years prior in 2017. The findings showed that 1.4% of 13- to 17-year-olds and 1.3% of 18- to 24-year-olds identify as transgender when in 2017 both age groups stood at 0.7%. These numbers also represent a shift in the make-up of the trans population as a whole with these two categories comprising 18% of the total population, up from the 10% listed in the 2017 report. The resulting conclusions from taking in these data points is to see that the identified trans population is growing and growing younger at the same time. These two ideas are clearly threatening to a certain segment of our society who is interested in maintaining the status quo and preventing any further progress in the arena of LGBTQIA+ rights. As our society is rooted in capitalism, traditional gender identities and couplings are essential to continue to pursue the dream of endless economic growth. Consequently, it is my belief that these laws targeting trans people, and trans youth in particular, are motivated by fear of economic penalty and also by bigoted transphobia that is likely rooted in religious ideology.

While I do not identify as being under the trans umbrella, the trans population is part of my community. As a gay youth in the 90s, coming out was not easy, but it was certainly easier than it was for those who came before me as I experienced life as I did thanks to their efforts and actions. In the same vein, when I look at my community today, it is very clear that the portion of our rainbow under the most scrutiny and faced with the most hardship in the current world are trans people. It is a duty for all responsible members of the community to not only identify themselves as a safe place for those individuals who find themselves being targeted by lawmakers, but to also speak out on their behalf when able.

As a continuation of my previous efforts in the arenas of queer advocacy and radicalism, I began researching the work at hand by first looking into alginate molding and plaster casting. Through discussions with colleagues in ceramics and independent research into the process, I acquired the necessary materials and began practicing the process on my own hands. The intention of this research was to use plaster casts of hands under textile while applying textile stiffener to capture dimensional forms. The left hands were chosen for this process due to a comparison I came across in my research into trans identities that placed the results of rescinding 20th century education policy mandating right handedness

next to data about trans youth coming out. Kentucky State Senator Karen Berg (2023) made the point on Pod Save America that left-handed students did not increase in number at that time due to promotion, recruitment, or indoctrination, rather they always existed alongside right-handed students. The comparison provided to trans students is exactly the same: trans people and trans youths are not present due to promotion, recruitment, or indoctrination; rather they have always existed alongside cisgendered students.

Considering the intended use of the plaster casts of left hands of gender diverse students at East Carolina University in the final piece, it seemed natural to begin planning the work utilizing all the data that I had collected while looking into gender diversity issues. Thus, the decision-making process proceeded by looking at the data as a guide for the parameters of the textile art. The data showing the doubling of the percentages of trans youth from 2017 to 2022 was used to determine the double weave structure. The number of anti-trans laws actively being legislated at the time when the research began informed the total number of threads across each layer of the weaving to be 347. The breakdown of those 347 ends into four weaving blocks was guided by the age group breakdown in the Williams Institute report into four categories. A total of 83 blocks along with 16 transition threads were assembled to meet the pre-determined 347 ends needed and were assembled in such a way as to create cloth resembling static noise. With the width determined by the thread count, the length woven was enough to create a 1:3 ratio representing the third of the trans population that is now in the most vulnerable youth category which is defined as 13-24. The size of the supplemental cloth for the physically dimensional part of the work was created at to be 18% of the total surface area of the finished cloth based on the youngest and most vulnerable trans population (13-17) being 18% of the total trans population. The placement of the plaster hand casts was made to reflect the upward trend in the graphs about both left-handed students and transgender youth.

The finished textile art is my artistic response to the current state of society and governance as it relates to LGBTQIA+ issues and specifically about trans youth and the necessity of protecting them. Trans people exist in the world today and have always existed. Their lives matter, and Trans Rights are Human Rights.

Droplets
50" W x 47" H
Cotton, glass beads
July 2025



Plate 5: *Droplets* (detail), Paul Edwards, 2025



Plate 6: *Droplets*, Paul Edwards 2025



Plate 7: *Droplets* (detail), Paul Edwards, 2025

After the completion of the work *Left Hands*, there was almost 5 yards of warp left for other pieces of planned textile, but I took a long rest from creating these visual representations of the hate-filled truth of the data behind the designs.

The warp waited ten months for me to return to it to complete the other projects planned for the remaining warp thread. After finishing the second project, which was a blanket for my personal use, I continued with the conceptual weavings related to transgender issues. A way to think about making something comforting from the warp that represented data surrounding anti-Trans legislation. I have not used this blanket yet, but I do enjoy looking at it and feeling its texture.

The final piece of the warp was dedicated to creating a piece that did not get woven for further months as every time I set at the loom, I became too distraught to think about my queer siblings' suffering at hate-filled hands. I didn't throw a single pick until after learning about the death of Sam Nordquist in February of 2025.

This work, *Droplets*, utilized the same warp as its pieces of sister cloth mentioned above, and with some changes to the treadling sequence conducted with the feet, the blocks were updated to reflect the 53% increase in anti-Trans legislation that translegislation.com reported from Fall of 2023 when the warp was wound until weaving on *Droplets* began in Spring of 2025. This increase in attempts to legislate against trans people, coupled with the ever present and seemingly ever-increasing transphobic violence in our society, and with the catalyst of the torture and murder of our sibling, Sam Nordquist, the creation of this work stands to speak against violence against transgender people.

Trans people have always existed in our world. Trans Rights are Human Rights.

Ribbon

33" W x 95" H x 60" D

Cotton/Rayon yarn, Eri Peace Silk, fiber reactive dye

Fall 2025



Plate 8: *Ribbon* (detail), Paul Edwards, 2025



Plate 9: *Ribbon*, Paul Edwards, 2025



Plate 10: *Ribbon*, Paul Edwards, 2025

As pattern drafting began, thoughts about the risks that young people with gender diverse or gender nonconforming identities face in the world consumed my thoughts. Becoming overwhelmed with empathy and sadness at what faces people who are trying to live as themselves led me to some suggested support methods for these young queer people who are at great risk of being abused by the world. The suggestions included listening to youth and validating their experiences, being patient with and encouraging of the fluid nature of their identities as they seek their most authentic gender expression, supporting their informed decision-making around gender affirming care, and trying to connect them with support resources and community so that they can communicate with others of similar experiences (Katz-Wise).

While reading reports about the health challenges that gender fluid individuals face that are unique and different from their transgender binary siblings (trans masc and trans fem – those with nonbinary identities were counted in a separate category), the author reported that 29% of the study population, which was reported as being nearly 84% white, changed

their gender identity at least once over the year and a half of the study. The results of a study with a more ethnically diverse population, 34% non-Latinx Black, 38% Latinx, show that 77% of its study population changed their gender identity at least once during the two years of the study period (Ocasio and Isabel Fernández).

Thinking about these members of our community and the impact that their identity can have on their quality of life due to fear of discrimination, humiliation, or worse offenses, is a grave task. The specific area of the aforementioned report that my attention continually returned to was in the discussion around abstaining from health care visits. Many gender fluid and gender consistent transgender people report stigmatizing experiences in health care settings. These experiences are caused and contributed to by a number of factors which result in a wide range of experiences for those seeking medical care. A number of these experiences could broadly be classed as dysphoric for the individuals seeking care, but it is important to note that there is no consideration given within the research to the intentions of the health care providers involved. This is of secondary importance though, as the dysphoric experiences of patients is what ultimately leads to their decreased medical care.

Focusing more specifically on our gender fluid siblings, the report indicated that those with gender fluid identities were nearly 6 times more likely to not attend health care visits either through not making an appointment when it is due or by not presenting after setting an appointment schedule. This likelihood of non-attendance is worrisome to start, but when it is considered that this number is stacked on top of the pre-existing 33% statistical chance that any person with a transgender identity (transgender fluid, transgender binary, or transgender nonbinary) is to not attend a medical appointment, we can see how the gender fluid individuals within the transgender community are at even greater risk for health-related issues because of their potential medical self-neglect (Casas-Ramírez et al.). Some detailed caveats in the report explain that this 5.9 percentage chance was not statistically significant within the context of the study population, but the analysis revealed the potential for this to be more significant were the sample size increased. It is this 5.9 that began to influence the design of the cloth. Using a variable amount of echo in the threading design across the warp to achieve the exact 5.9, the cloth itself represents the chance that one of our gender fluid siblings is not caring for themselves as we all wish they would. The number of them that we must lose prematurely annually is a figure I ponder frequently, but I have not researched deeply to find that number. I will let it elude me and just acknowledge the truth of its existence.

To see truly wholistic care for queer people and specifically for people with a transgender identity, and in an even more focused way, for people with a gender fluid identity as the

most vulnerable for medical self-neglect, an increase in inclusivity and gender affirmation trainings are necessities in all medical and care-related programs and professions.

Community
48" W x 48" H
Glass seed beads
January 2026

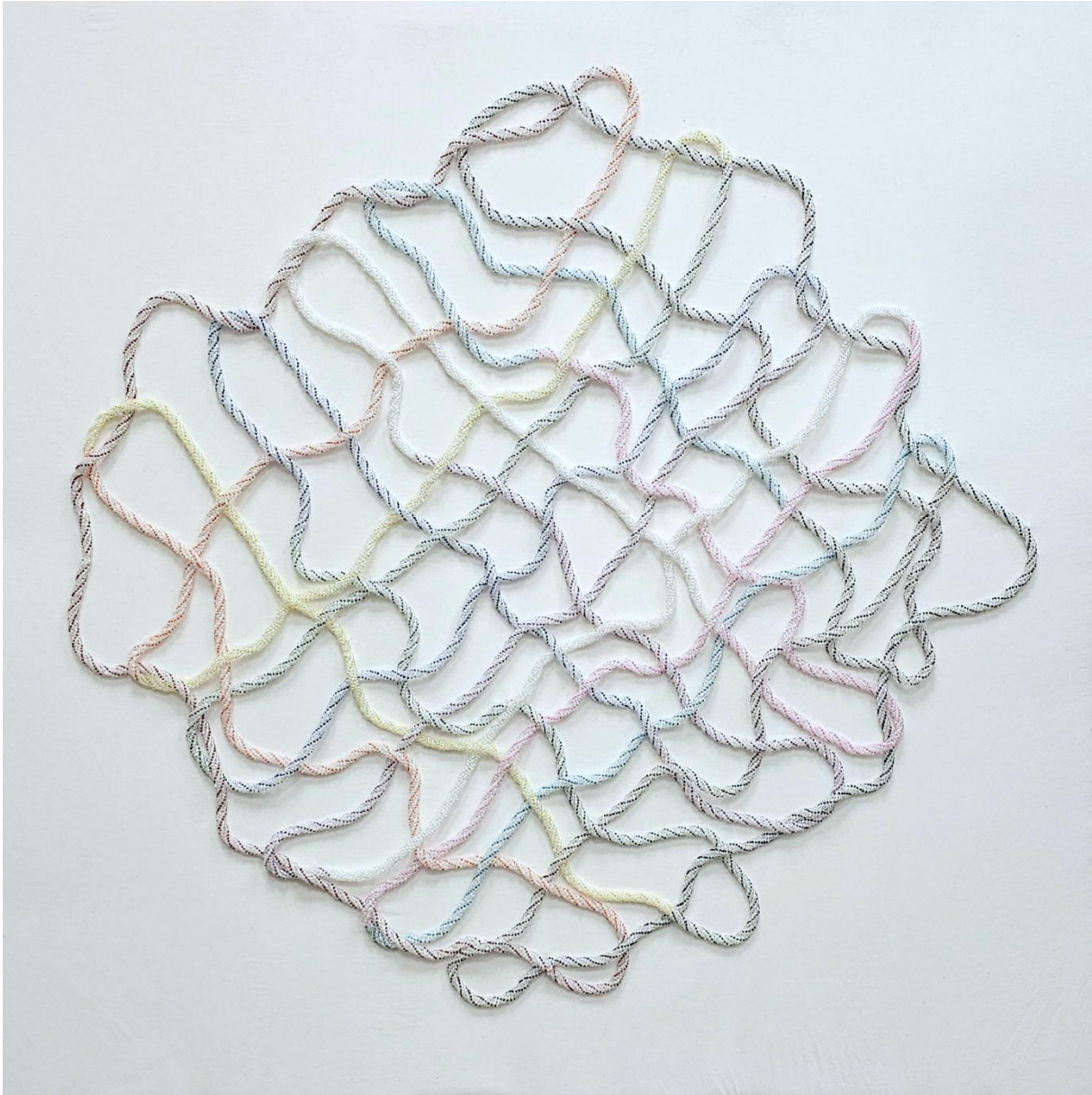


Plate 11: *Community*, Paul Edwards, 2026



Plate 12: *Community* (detail), Paul Edwards, 2026



Plate 13: *Community* (detail), Paul Edwards, 2026

One of the ways in which marginalized people are made to feel powerless is through isolation. Many queer people are made to feel isolated and alone through false narratives and suggestions about being shunned or having a lonely future. This prevents some queer people from ever coming out, which is in and of itself an act of queer activism that helps to grow and strengthen our culture. These suggestions and words that I have heard myself, from my own family, and from other queer people I have been fortunate enough to connect with in my life, are transparent with the clear vision of hindsight. These sentiments are offered maliciously to vulnerable queer people from those who would reject them for being gay. These words are used in an attempt to keep queer people quiet and in line with straight culture. This hate is used to separate us.

“If you are gay and have sex, you will get AIDS and die.” My mother said to me once when I was 15. Her voice was so angry and harsh – it still strikes me how that moment was one of anger and hatred for her and not a time that she was concerned about or worried for her only son. The conversation, which was my second coming out, was not allowed to conclude until I had repeated the words out loud as she has framed her truth:

If I am gay and have sex, I will get AIDS and die.

The isolation I experienced after that day as an attempt to break my spirit and take me to rock bottom so I could be rebuilt as they wished me to be, was the start of a long search for my own community, my own people, my queer circle. The individual lives we lead as queer people within a wider world that is controlled by people who often hate us just for being, are diverse and amazing, and while we might feel alone or lonely at times, we are legion and we are full of love.

Each bead in this piece that comes from a color of the Progress Pride flag represents 1,000 queer people in the United States. Together, each individual stitch and each individual bead weaves together to represent our community within this nation – all 13,900,000 of us (Flores and Conron).

You’re not alone, dear one.

We are all together.

We are all connected.

We are each other’s community.

Plateau
30.5" W x 320" H
Bamboo
2026



Plate 14: *Plateau*, Paul Edwards, 2026

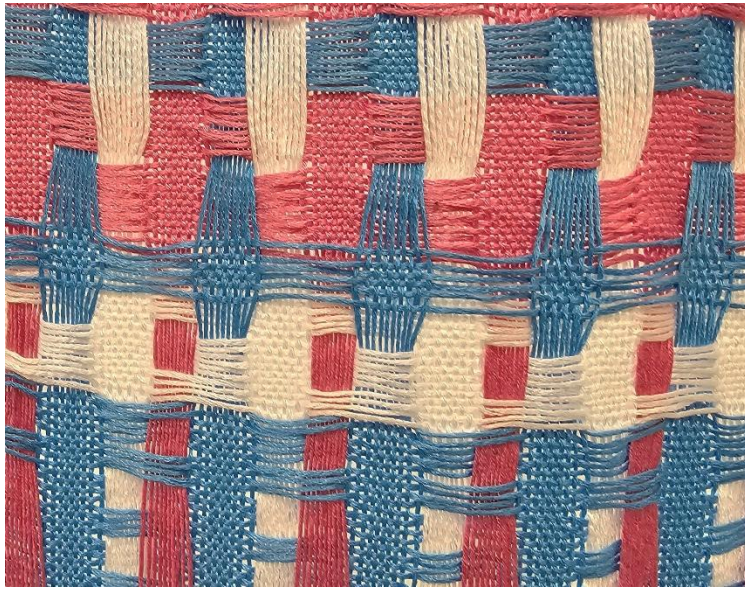


Plate 15: *Plateau* (detail), Paul Edwards, 2026

Thinking back to the very first piece made for this body of work, *Left Hands*, and the data and trends that it represents and embodies, there was more to say on the subject. The data used to look at the percentage of students identifying somewhere within the trans umbrella is incomplete because the figures are still trending upward. The trend is along a very similar trajectory taken by those left-handed students in the latter half of the 20th Century, but the journey is not complete. I began to wonder if there was some way to look at the numbers to try and see when the climb might level out and reach stasis within our population. Those calculations are very complex, and the resulting estimates are somewhat unreliable given my only rudimentary mathematical abilities, but the implications of the data still points to the same conclusion of a natural balance coming about within the gender identities of the population. Once outside religious and cultural influences stop interfering with the natural order of humanity, this plateau will emerge.

Current statistics that reflect the age distribution of trans people show us that the majority of people with an identity falling within the trans umbrella are below the age of 25 (“Study Shows Significant Increase in Transgender Population among Younger Generations | Institute of Living | Hartford HealthCare | CT”). Considering that identity traits such as gender identity should appear evenly distributed among all age brackets, the existence of a majority of trans-identified people being found within such a young age bracket indicates a skewing of the data.

The reflection of this data and the hope that it brings about the continual movement of trans populations towards natural stasis is placed within the weaving blocks themselves. On the edges of the cloth, the widest block exists only once, and blocks of increasing narrowness occur with more frequency showing the increased presence of people with younger ages within the trans community. The three individual layers of cloth all begin as separate layers before beginning to interweave with and deflect from the other layers. All three dependent upon each other to form a complete cloth.

The implication and interpretation of this data set taken by myself and expressed through this triple deflected weave is that the population figures are showing us a closer glimpse of the truth of the gender identities of the entire nation and by extension, the world. The young people who are coming out now with trans identities need to be nurtured, protected, and most importantly validated. These actions will help us, as a society, to see the emergence of the plateau within this population data. We will know that the figures of leveled off and the plateau has been achieved when the distribution of trans people across age blocks is more consistent; indicating that people are coming out at the same rates despite age and position.

This will bring us closer to the kind of inclusive society that queer people long for. For me personally, I hope to see in my lifetime a world in which someone's gender identity is considered with as much concern as which hand someone writes with.

A world without trans people has never existed. A world without trans people will never exist. Trans people are people. Trans Rights are Human Rights.

Joy
9.5" W x 12" L
Glass seed beads
2026



Plate 16: *Joy*, Paul Edwards, 2026

As the planning for the individual pieces in the show was winding down, there seemed to be a piece missing. The issues affecting us that are represented in the art all echo harsh truths of the world that is faced by queer people, but the truths referenced here are all external and while acknowledging their truth is simple, it is not the entirety of truth as it relates to life as a queer person.

I spent a long time thinking about what would aid the work in showing more completely how queer people feel about our queer lives. What is it that makes our lives different and special?

It is our joy – our Queer Joy.

There was a Queer Joy Survey created by me specifically to help harvest some data for the creation of a final piece for my thesis. As the survey was posted and distributed organically through my own queer network, the resulting data set was anecdotal so focusing on the actual numerical data would have resulted in art based on inaccuracies or misrepresentations due to the sample size of the survey work. Despite this, the information gathered was so interesting and useful. The section of the results that kept drawing my attention were the categories of Queer Joy submitted by the participants.

Participants were asked to list activities that brought them Queer Joy, and then were tasked with choosing categories that those joyous activities could be classified into. In addition to the 9 categories that were supplied with the survey, participants suggested 11 unique categories in their submissions. Taking these 20 total categories, I began to develop a form for the work.

Seeing Queer Joy as the part of our culture that keeps us safe and assured within ourselves, I began to think of the representation of that work as being some sort of shield or protective object. While thinking about these thoughts and sampling bead forms, I settled on the idea to create a small section of scale armor using 20 individual dimensional beaded forms to represent all the joyous activities that keep us as queer people safe and secure in our identities and culture.

Queer Joy exists in many forms and categories. This work is considering categories of Queer Joy as:

Community	Literature
Exercise / Sports	Friendships
Romance	Talking Shit
Music	Animals
Sex	Education
Activism	Self-Expression
Nature	Gaming
Art	Love
Spirituality / Religion	Fashion
Fandoms	Acceptance

Conclusion

Reflecting on this research, this body of work, and this paper, the feelings I'm left with are largely mixed. There is a sense of relief that the work has been completed and hung in the gallery successfully. There is also a sense of fear for my community when reflecting on the issues covered within the work. Ultimately, I suppose that I walk away from this project with a sense of hope for the future of the queer community to sustain itself and grow in influence and power. I dare to hope for a future for us, free from persecution and restriction.

Researching these topics and issues has been a kind of emotional pain that was nearly unbearable to think about at times. The force that helped to keep me active at the pursuit of the work was the idea of the LGBTQIA+ youth that are coming of age now and will do so in the near future, and how they deserve better than what my generation and even the current generation have had in their lives. They deserve lives in a world without bigotry where their sexual and gender identities are not something that hinders the success of their lives as it should only bring them queer joy.

The world can be cruel, and it is a tendency of our society to other people we find different from each other. The problems experienced by queer people and many minority groups in general are rooted there in those tendencies. There is such a strong desire within me to try and advocate for and contribute to a brighter future for the queer youth, but it is difficult and discouraging at times. Despite the difficulties, I am sure that further advocacy for queer people and queer culture is in my future, and those actions will inevitably show up in my further weavings and textile art.

References

“A Quick Summary on the History of Homophobia in the West.” *Out Leadership*, outleadership.com/news/a-quick-summary-on-the-history-of-homophobia-in-the-west/.

“Art Attack on Aids.” *MyArtBroker*, 2026, www.myartbroker.com/artist-keith-haring/artwork-art-attack-on-aids-signed-mixed-media. Accessed 18 Feb. 2026.

American Civil Liberties Union. “Mapping Attacks on LGBTQ Rights in U.S. State Legislatures in 2024.” American Civil Liberties Union, 2024.

Berg, Karen. POD SAVE AMERICA LIVE WITH SPECIAL GUESTS PERRY BACON, REP. MORGAN MCGARVEY, AND STATE SENATOR KAREN BERG.

Cartwright, Mark. “Scientific Method.” *World History Encyclopedia*, 7 Nov. 2023, www.worldhistory.org/Scientific_Method/.

Casas-Ramírez, Margarita, et al. “Trans People Perceptions of Care Received from Healthcare Professionals — a Phenomenological Study.” *Heliyon*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1 Jan. 2024, pp. e23328–e23328, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e23328>.

Flores, Andrew R., and Kerith J. Conron. “Adult LGBT Population in the United States.” *Williams Institute*, Dec. 2023, williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/adult-lgbt-pop-us/.

Herman, J.L., Flores, A.R., O’Neill, K.K. (2022). How Many Adults and Youth Identify as Transgender in the United States? The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law www.aclu.org/legislative-attacks-on-lgbtq-rights-2024.

Katz-Wise, Sabra L. “Gender Fluidity: What It Means and Why Support Matters.” *Harvard Health Blog*, Harvard Health Publishing, 3 Dec. 2020, www.health.harvard.edu/blog/gender-fluidity-what-it-means-and-why-support-matters-2020120321544.

“Not Shockboxx Gallery | Tonight Was Emotive. A Perfectly Queer Opening Reception. If You Missed It, It’s Open Daily 9-9. #Queerart #Losangelesart... | Instagram.” *Instagram*, 2017, www.instagram.com/p/DPamCWODjRQ/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==. Accessed 18 Feb. 2026.

Ocasio, Manuel A., and M. Isabel Fernández. "The Association between Gender Identity Fluidity and Health Outcomes in Transgender and Gender Diverse People in New Orleans and Los Angeles, USA." *Preventive Medicine Reports*, vol. 42, June 2024, p. 102735, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC11059450/, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmedr.2024.102735>.

Selous, Edmund. "Observations Tending to Throw Light on the Question of Sexual Selection in Birds, Including a Day-To-Day Diary on the Breeding Habits of the Ruff (*Machetes ugnax*).". *The Zoologist*, vol. X, no. 119, 785, 15 Nov. 1906, pp. 419+. Nineteenth Century Collections Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/KGYBYBN455929946/NCCO?u=duke_perkins&sid=bookmark-NCCO&xid=0196b003. Accessed 21 Dec. 2022.

"Silence Equals Death." *MyArtBroker*, 2026, www.myartbroker.com/artist-keith-haring/collection-pyramids/artwork-silence-equals-death-signed-print-1989. Accessed 18 Feb. 2026.

de Souza, Isabella. "Keith Haring's AIDS Activism | MyArtBroker | Article." *MyArtBroker*, 31 May 2024, www.myartbroker.com/artist-keith-haring/articles/keith-haring-aids-activism.

"Stonewall 50: Art in Queer Activism." *Artfinder*, 2025, www.artfinder.com/blog/post/stonewall-50-art-in-queer-activism/?srsltid=AfmBOorE2u-v-SJJnEUkj7sJ3Q85m-cKaRhoaPwcFbLc2PKoVpN87l8#/. Accessed 30 Sept. 2025.

"Study Shows Significant Increase in Transgender Population among Younger Generations | Institute of Living | Hartford HealthCare | CT." *Instituteofliving.org*, instituteofliving.org/health-wellness/news/newsroom-detail?articleId=42505&publicid=461.

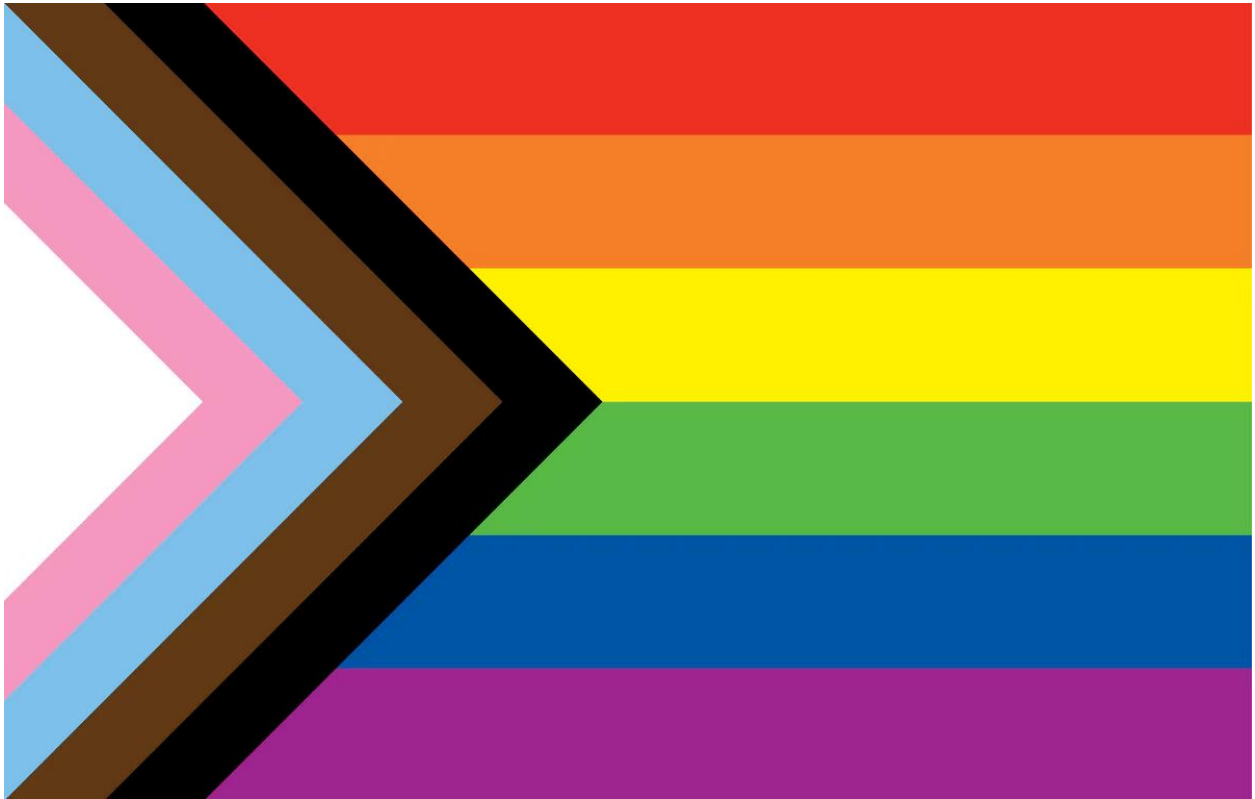
Trans Legislation Tracker. "2024 Anti-Trans Bills: Trans Legislation Tracker." *Translegislation.com*, 2024, translegislation.com/.

Yeoman, Barry. "Same-Sex Behavior among Animals Isn't New. Science Is Finally Catching Up." *National Wildlife Federation*, 4 July 2023, www.nwf.org/Magazines/National-Wildlife/2023/Summer/Conservation/Same-Sex-Behavior-Animals-Science.

Appendix 1 – Pride Flag imagery and explanation

1. Progress Pride Flag

The Progress Pride flag evolved from the 2017 Philly Pride flag which was the first flag to include Black and Brown as stripes to include communities of color that are often overlooked in white-dominated queer culture. The Progress Pride flag continued this inclusion and appended the flag further with the colors of the Trans Pride Flag. The designer of the Progress Pride flag, Daniel Quasar, introduced these new colors into a chevron shape on the side which included the black and brown stripes as well.



Progress Pride flag. (source:

https://progress.gay/?srsltid=AfmBOorl0BsuzYdba8elcb0yQmoXrXYJ2U6y4LgYL_HA0Ztm39Utx5Tc)

2. Trans Pride Flag

In 1999, Monica Helms designed the Trans Pride flag, and the flag was then premiered at the Phoenix Pride Parade during Pride 2000. The flag contains three colors that represent gender: blue for masculine gender identities, pink for feminine gender identities, and white for non-binary and gender non-conforming identities.



Trans Pride flag (source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transgender_flag#/media/File:Transgender_Pride_flag.svg)

3. Genderfluid Pride flag

The Genderfluid Pride flag made its debut in 2012 after being designed by JJ Poole. The flag features five different colors used to represent various types of gender expression and representation. The number of stripes and the broad inclusive nature of their meanings help the flag to fit within the meaning of the Genderfluid identity that is key to many: flexibility in identity.



Genderfluid flag (source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_fluidity#/media/File:Genderfluidity_Pride-Flag.svg)

Appendix 2 – Parker Parenti *1,000 Bill Count* statement and Bio

Parker Parenti

1,000 Bill Count, 2026

Ink and ballpoint pen on repurposed fabric

For this piece, I used data collected by translegislation.com and fabricated the United States flag in pink, white, and blue with a square of fabric for each individual piece of anti-trans legislation that was introduced in 2025, and a star for each state in which they were introduced. The LGBTQ+ community has historically utilized textiles and fiber art to express identity, as well as to document or respond to current events and issues affecting our community, and this piece is my contribution to this practice. I wanted to show the scale of the attacks on the trans community and add to the broader ongoing conversation regarding who and what the United States flag really represents. While the year 2025 is complete, the flag is not, signifying the ongoing push to ostracize and harm the trans community through legislation.

Artist Bio

Parker Parenti is an interdisciplinary artist based in Shirley, New York. He primarily works in oil paint, collage, and other mixed media to explore themes of my own trans and queer identity, belonging, and memory. Whether engaging with current events or past spaces, he loves to learn and experiment with new mediums to bring each piece to its fullest potential.



Plate 17. Parenti, Parker. 1,000 Bill Count. 2025, Cotton, felt pen.