

SURFACE

ARTIST STATEMENT

A Monumental Photobooth That Captures Queer Intimacy

Drawing from coexisting feelings of anxiety and catharsis, Chloe Chiasson ruminates on what was missing from her Southern upbringing by building intimate escapes where queer people feel a sense of safety and belonging.

BY RYAN WADDOUPS

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"Sunday Confessions" (2022) by Chloe Chiasson.
Photography by Thomas Mueller

Here, we ask an artist to frame the essential details behind one of their latest works.

Bio: Chloe Chiasson, 28, Brooklyn (@chloechiasson_)

Title of work: Sunday Confessions.

Where to see it: "Fast Hearts and Slow Towns" at Albertz Benda Gallery (515 W 26th Street, New York) until June 25.

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Three words to describe it: Rite of passage.

What was on your mind at the time: The privacy and safety—and often lack thereof—of queer spaces in the South. More specifically, where I'm from and what such a space looked and felt like for me growing up with the religious undertones/comparisons of every setting I found comfort, privacy, and safety in.

Historically and now, the photobooth was and is a safe space for queer people as it allows you to be the subject, the photographer, and the developer, thus eliminating any third-party involvement. Much like a Catholic confessional, though fundamentally different in purpose, the photobooth holds your secrets. This piece serves as a metaphor for the narrow space for queer life in religion-dominated places, structured for secrecy, protection, and escape, with its inhabitants refusing the narrow confines to which they've been relegated.

An interesting feature that's not immediately noticeable: The photo strip that sits in the photo dispenser shows the flash of the photos still being taken, but no people/person in the photos. This was meant to suggest that in the very short amount of time the photobooth was snapping photos (usually 10 seconds or less), the people/person fled quickly.

How it reflects your practice as a whole: Right now, I'm deeply invested in the spaces and places of where I'm from: the South. I'm trying to engage imaginatively and combatively in the remaking of these spaces and places that built me—the values, traditions, and religious upbringing that I'm a product of—but that, as a lesbian, I contradict the destructive parts of. I'm trying to find personal freedom through reconstructing these spaces, both metaphorically and materially. Though I'm critiquing and challenging, I'm also sort of creating a South I didn't have to leave.

One song that captures its essence: "Shallow Be Thy Game" by the Red Hot Chili Peppers.