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Patrice Aphrodite Helmar, *Polaris*
June 30 - August 18, 2024
Opening Sunday, June 30, 5-7pm

From June 30 through August 18, PARTICIPANT INC presents Patrice Aphrodite Helmar, *Polaris*, a solo exhibition of gelatin silver prints from Helmar's ongoing series, *Polaris* (2015-present).

"These photographs explore the dramatic potential and complexity of returning home: characters, archetypes, and landscapes of 50 miles on a road to nowhere. As a child in a working-class family growing up on a twenty-six-foot hand troller, my parents taught me where the north star was in the night sky. This constellation alluded to in literature, myth, and song has guided seafaring people for time immemorial. These photographs were made in my hometown of Juneau, Alaska. One of the few capital cities in the United States without a road to the outside world."

The exhibition brackets a fragment of this larger series of portraits and landscapes with a focus on a two-year span of time between 2020 and 2023 during which Helmar assigned themself the project of self-portraiture, uncommon for the artist, during a time of isolation and extended periods of darkness. In these photographs, Helmar places themself, often accompanied by their dog, Dolly Girl, into scenarios, unbidden, within otherwise vacant landscapes. The majority of these photographs were made with the "unapologetically photographic" Graflex, a view camera from the 1950s, and utilize medium- and large-format film, interchangeable formats with the same aspect ratio (6x7 and 4x5). The large-scale black-and-white gelatin silver prints utilize the formal restraints of photography, its 'event-ness,' to depict solitary encounters and landscapes.

PARTICIPANT INC
116 Elizabeth Street, Floor one, NY NY 10013

“The history of photography is rife with work made by the upper classes. These visitors often have little connection to people and places they image. In my work, I'm not attempting to document or sensationalize working class and queer life. I'm authoring what I would like to exist about my communities in contemporary culture.”

Helmar's photography and installation-based work more generally captures the quotidian in dreamlike landscapes and utopic communal spaces such as bars, alluding to the failed American dream and all of the fantasy associated with its “dark mythology and the timeless story of returning home.” Helmar references their own background growing up in Juneau, presenting the characters and archetypes of small-town America – queer, working class, ordinary and unusual – to address the sensationalizing of working-class America, giving their portraits an authorial framing that counters often distancing portrayals.

Patrice Aphrodite Helmar is an artist who was born in Juneau, Alaska, and lives and works in Juneau, AK; Cambridge, MA; and New York, NY. They worked in their father's small-town camera shop and darkroom growing up and they continue to work in photography. In continuing to make photographs and conduct research in archives, they aim to increase the visibility of the work of queer, non-binary, and female-identifying photographers while also continuing to author their own work. Helmar's multidisciplinary work is concerned with issues of labor, class, queerness, and the politics of representation. Helmar's photography is engaged in the poetics of lived experience and everyday life. Helmar received an MAT from the University of Southeast Alaska in 2013, an MFA in Visual Art from Columbia University in 2015, and studied at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 2022. Their solo exhibitions include Ortega Y Gasset Projects, NY; Gaa Gallery, Provincetown, MA; and Mom's Gallery, NY. Helmar is currently a Lecturer on Art, Film, and Visual Studies, 2023-25 at Harvard University and Adjunct Assistant Professor at Columbia University.

Image: Patrice Aphrodite Helmar, *Shaft*, 2021, Gelatin silver print, 20 x 24 inches

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PARTICIPANT INC is located at 116 Elizabeth Street, floor one, in Chinatown, between Broome and Grand Streets. The closest trains are the J/Z (Bowery) and the B/D (Grand); the closest wheelchair accessible stop is the 6 (Canal). Entry is on grade and the gallery is barrier free throughout with an all gender, wheelchair accessible bathroom. Service animals are welcome.