

Degenderettes Antifa Art Exhibition Label Text

Degenderettes Protest Artwork

“Tolerance is not a moral absolute; it is a peace treaty.”

Yonatan Zunger wrote these words in the weeks leading up to the first Women’s March in 2017. In the same article he suggested that the limits of tolerance could best be illustrated by a Degenderette standing defiantly and without aggression, pride bat in hand.

Throughout this exhibit you will see artifacts of that defiance, some more visceral or confrontational than others, but all with the same message. Transgender people exist and we are a part of society’s peace treaty—but we are also counting the bodies (at least seven transgender people have been killed in the United States since the beginning of 2018).

We Degenderettes are present at shows of solidarity such as the Trans March, Dyke March, Women’s March, and Pride. We endeavor to provide protection for transgender people at rallies and marches in San Francisco, Oakland, and Berkeley.

We show up in opposition to people who seek to harm the transgender community—people like Milo Yiannopoulos, whose track record of outing transgender students and doxing immigrants inspired a contingent of Degenderettes to protest his fateful visit to U.C. Berkeley in February 2017.

It was in the wake of the confrontation at U.C. Berkeley that shields were identified as weapons by the Berkeley Police Department and banned from all subsequent protests in the city. These guidelines have been adopted throughout the rest of the Bay Area.

To us, the shields and everything else in this exhibit are still a type of armor. Sometimes symbolic, sometimes practical, always declaring: we are here, we are queer, and we will live unafraid and visible.

The Degenderettes of Northern California are an art and advocacy club of trans and queer members who aim to support and uplift our communities. We attempt to fill unfilled needs as best we can until more permanent and funded organizations can be built for them. In addition to protest art, our work currently includes radical visibility, interpersonal support, lgbtqia self-defense training, practical community protection, and connecting people to resources.

Note: This exhibit contains strong language, blood, and mentions of transmisogyny and police violence.

Above: Degenderettes Color Guard performing the halftime show at the Bay Area Derby season opener at 16th Street Station in Oakland, California. Photo by Tristan Crane.

Exhibition Mission Statement By the NorCal Degenderettes

We sympathize with anyone who saw photographs of our work with someone else's narrative and was led to believe we are something other than we are. Because this is an exhibit of event artifacts rather than stand-alone artwork, each of these pieces is meant to be taken in its original context, which we have provided in the exhibit's text. Our hope with this show is to give a glimpse of our experiences to a non-trans audience, while signaling solidarity to trans people who may feel alone and unsupported.

Undead Warrior Puppet

from Trans March and Dyke March 2017

This parade puppet is a cardboard body with salvaged aluminum frame. It requires 6 puppeteers to operate (1 body, 1 head, 2 arms, 2 legs), with 2 puppeteer alternates and 8 shield-bearers for crowd control. The puppet is fully articulated for walking (or dancing), has a head-nodding articulation inspired by Japanese ningyo-joruri design, and can open its mouth in a silent scream. Because of the tight schedule of political puppetry, this was entirely built in the last month before Trans March, and the puppetry team walked it across San Francisco (twice) after only two rehearsals.

The blue goblin puppet holding the "Monster Pride" banner in the 2016 Trans March (see photographs) was designed & built by Neil Bean with words by Io and rigging by Scout Tran. It is wire & paper maché, and only requires 3 puppeteers (1 head, 2 arms).

"Queers Never Die" — and the undead skeleton in general — is a proclamation of solidarity and resilience within a community that has lost so many members to suicide and murder that it has become hard for the living members to picture themselves growing old. As a result of Reagan era domestic policy, HIV/AIDS killed nearly the entire adult population of trans women of the 80's & 90's, now referred to as "the Missing Generation," so it is extremely ironic for queers to declare immunity to death. But because queers are born into every family, straight or gay, liberal or conservative, coastal or midwestern, there is no feasible way to kill us off entirely, even if culturally we have to start over from scratch every generation. Like re-animated skeleton warriors from the fantasy RPGs where so many of us first explored our genders, even though queers live so close to death, even though we are written into popular fiction as the villains, queers will never die. Sensing the fear in isolated youth across the country during the current anti-trans climate, the Degenderettes endeavored specifically to create the biggest, most photographable image of queer fearlessness that they could, to propagate hope across the internet to people who need strength to survive another day.

Puppeteer Scout Tran (MFA School of the Art Institute of Chicago) was an apprentice of the Blair Thomas & Co. visual theater, has performed at the Chicago MCA, the Field Museum and the Pritzker Pavilion, and has been commissioned by the SF MOMA and the Exploratorium. She dropped out of theater in 2011 for gender reasons, until building this puppet for the Degenderettes.

“Trans Dykes: Still Here” Banner

Painted for the 2016 Dyke March, carried at subsequent marches to create a rallying point for trans women who might not feel safe in a crowd of cis women. Although not antagonized in person, photographs of this banner at 2017 Women’s March attracted national harassment, widespread banning of trans women’s social media accounts, and eventual doxing of Degenderettes members. This banner has since appeared in comics & writing as an icon of trans rights protest.

Monster Pride Banner

by Io & Neil Bean, first carried at Trans March 2016

Degenderettes Pennants

Brought with us to every protest, rally & march since June 2016 as a visible rallying point for trans attendees who may not feel safe among the other attendees.

Bloodied Shirt

Yolkai LeFierce

“Your Apathy is Killing Us”

The "your apathy is killing us" shirt is displayed, bloodied during a die-in performance at SF Pride 2017 intended to bring awareness to the staggering number of trans people who commit suicide or are murdered each year. The “apathy” shirt was originally made as a response/commentary on the Pulse shooting.

To quote Brandon Wolf at a #neveragain rally this Feb 21, 2018:

After 1st graders were gunned down at Sandy Hook, what did you do? Not a damn thing. [...] After 49 people, including my two brothers, were murdered at Pulse, what did you do? Not a damn thing. You plugged your ears and turned your eyes and hoped that we would stop talking. And now we're here again [...] and what did you do yesterday when given the chance to do something about it? Not a damn thing.

The Blood Jacket

Club jacket dyed with the menstrual (and venous) blood of Degenderettes members. First displayed at the Degenderette Art Show at Mission Comics Gallery, June 2015, along with tampon guns, tampons-for-boys, an inaccessible women’s restroom door, a smashed urinal, and a birth certificate shredder.

Trans Labrys (Axe):

The double-bitted axe (labrys) is an icon that became popular with the Goddess movement,

second wave feminism and as lesbian code. These feminist communities, like the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, are well known to have overtly or covertly excluded trans women based on their biologically essentialist idea of gender. For trans women going back to the 1973 Gay Liberation it has been a preindication of danger — feminist communities and services that use the glyph should be avoided, and people with a labrys tattoo should be feared. We first started painting our trans flag onto modern day labryses (woodcutting axes) to aggressively reclaim this historical women's symbol that our detractors have held so dear. The Trans Labrys has since become a recognizable symbol of strength for trans women beyond the Degenderettes, as tattoos, in illustrations, and as with our own skeleton warrior puppet.

Femme Sledgehammer

The umbrella term “trans” (as derived from “transgender”) does not fairly represent many people who are alienated for gender variance. While Trans has become the easy political category, other—often older—terms see continued usage, like Genderqueer, Gender-Non-Conforming, or Transsexual. It is important to the Degenderettes to keep all these terms alive, especially if they fall out of fashion, as they represent important marginalized groups that are even now being ignored by broader trans activism, just as transgender people have been ignored by broader LGB activism.

To recognize one such group, Femmes, we painted this otherwise-masculine-coded sledgehammer to accompany our Trans Labrys. Besides it's historical use in 20th century lesbian culture, “Femmes” is also used to self-describe an overlapping section of trans women, non-binary people, and feminine men, that are particularly subject to the effects of societal transmisogyny. Because of this persecution, this group is arguably more at risk than trans people in general.

Color Guard Bats

After the 2016 shooting at the Pulse nightclub a wave of insecurity swept the LGBT world. Some community centers hired militarized guards, gay clubs started frisking customers, and many trans people considered becoming invisible or even detransitioning for their own safety. The Degenderettes had been a largely anonymous group focused on local interpersonal support, but after Pulse we felt that we had to be the ones to stand up, to be visible where not all trans people could afford to be visible, and to broadcast a message of fearlessness in the face of a deteriorating social climate.

The queer color guard is formally a ritual performance to honor the identity flags of the marginalized groups of LGBTQIA+. Instead of rifles or sabers, we use the much more humble icon of diy-home-security: the ubiquitous baseball bat. The batons we spin are painted to simultaneously be the flags (colors) we are guarding: we're not guarding the banners of abstract nations, we are guarding our own communities, our own identities, our selves. But most importantly, the Degenderettes Color Guard is a demonstration of extreme confidence during a terrifying time. We perform our routines on the street, at unsanctioned marches, with armed

police all around, and our only defense is that we are dancers, well choreographed, confidently in control of our batons. Though we are admittedly terrified of arrest at each performance, our hope has been that images of our color guard would inspire a confidence in queers around the country. We want to let them know that while things feel grim, there are people ready to stand up in their name.

It warms our heart every time an artist sends us an illustration inspired by one of our bats, because we know our performances are doing exactly what they were meant to.

bat flags in these photographs:

Bisexual (pink, purple, blue)

Non-binary (yellow, white, purple, black)

Queer Anarchy (pink & black)

Genderqueer (purple, white, green)

Femme (pink)

Trans (blue, pink, white)

Trans Dykes are Good and Pure (shields)

These shields debuted at the February 2017 protest against UC Berkeley hosting Milo Yiannopoulos, a former Breitbart editor known for attacking trans and immigrant students. The Berkeley community pressured the UC administration to cancel Yiannopoulos in the weeks leading up to the event, but in a dangerous move the University announced that they would cancel only if violence occurred. A last-minute protest was organized to attempt to blockade the building.

Knowing that trans people would want to attend the protest, and nervous about the violence that was in the air (surreptitious stabbings of anti-nazi protesters in Sacramento, a shooting by a Yiannopoulos supporter in Seattle), the Degenderettes cobbled together shields to offer some protection to trans attendees. The Good and Pure slogan was a throwaway line from an east-coast Degenderette, and was functionally just a cute phrase to suggest that the shields were purely protective.

Because of national news coverage of the event, in which the shields were incessantly featured, the Good and Pure slogan not only became notorious with Breitbart (a photo was even used on their online store), but also with trans activists. While in previous generations some trans women found relatively proud community as drag queens, our extremely transmisogynistic society has always shamed those who were mere transvestites and crossdressers—a stigma that has unfortunately carried on to modern trans lesbians. Before UC Berkeley, trans lesbians still seemed like a cowed and isolated demographic, used to being typecast as the embarrassing creepy cousins of the rainbow movement. Because of the overwhelming response to these shields, though, we discovered that many trans lesbians are actually proud, defiant and very willing to be visible. Trans Dykes are quickly coming into their own as the brave paladins of trans rights.

Defend the Black Pride Four (shields)

Activists peacefully blocked the Pride parade in Columbus, OH to raise awareness “about the violence against and erasure of black and brown queer and trans people, in particular the lack of space for black and brown people at pride festivals.” Police immediately attempted to remove the demonstrators, who describe being “assaulted with bicycles, sprayed with mace, jumped on, pushed, pummeled, and chased with horses.” Four Black protestors were targeted and arrested. Three were charged with misdemeanors and released on bail, while one was charged with aggravated robbery.

Stonewall Columbus, the organization behind the Pride festivities, came under heavy criticism for their lack of support for the demonstrators. The Stonewall Program Coordinator resigned in protest over this lack of meaningful response, while supporters around the world rallied under the hashtag #FreeTheBlackPride4.

Degenderettes carried these shields through San Francisco’s 2017 Trans March, Dyke March, and corporate Pride March both in order to raise awareness of this event and as a statement of solidarity with the Columbus demonstrators.

RIP Brandi Seals (shield)

Brandi Seals was a black trans woman murdered in December 2017. This shield was painted by a trans woman the day after Brandi’s death and taken to an anti-Trump march in San Francisco. The use of shields in Degenderettes artwork instead of standard protest signs is a call for people to actually stand up and defend our communities, rather than just shout slogans into the night.

Merit Badges

Designed in 2014 as a reward system for Degenderettes club members to earn, later made available to the public at degenderettes.com. The collection is continually evolving based on the needs of this community.

Broken Police Toys

Benevolently-coded police toys are misrepresentative of the actual relationship between communities & police. Because of the measurable harm that police departments are doing to our communities, we are antagonistic toward all police propaganda, but especially when they are directed at young children. Where possible we confiscate cop propaganda from children’s play collections (and then repurpose them as slingshot targets). The plastic cop cars are a project by our siblings at Silver Sprocket Bicycle Club, who let children at comic book conventions smash cop cars using a giant bronze 20-sided-die.

Anti-Catcalling Slingshot (one of 22)

Custom made by Stelth Ulvang for the DG Artillery Crew

Queer parade banner

Created for the J20 / inauguration day protests, 2017

Degenderette Art Zine

The Degenderettes started in Oakland in 2014, but quickly spread to other cities. This 2016 zine was the first all-chapter collaboration, involving Degenderettes artists from a dozen chapters across the country, Canada, and the UK.

No Gods No Dungeon Masters comic book

Written by Io, illustrated by Rae Dukes. 2014.

Failing Sky (comic book)

Scout Tran, 2013-present, readable in full at failingsky.com. This was a project to create a narrative that included trans characters but didn't center on their trans-ness. In order to be a healthy population, trans people need to have their own stories that resemble the structure of stories told for and about cis people.

How Loathsome (comic book)

Written by Tristan Crane in 2003, a seminal comic book about trans characters, that influenced the work of the now-rampant trans independent comics community

Alphabet Comics Anthology

A huge LGBTQIA+ comics anthology by Stacked Deck Press from 2016. In addition to many amazing trans artists, this anthology included work by three Degenderettes members: Dylan Edwards (Transposes), Mel Gillman (As The Crow Flies), and Scout Tran (Failing Sky).

Accessories

By Trash Bandicute. To help you tell the world how you really feel with angsty flair. Rings are a classier way of declaring your pronouns than wearing a nametag sticker; wear it on your middle finger for every time someone misgenders you. Novelty flip coins are for tough decisions.

Skin A Catcaller patch

Illustration by Rae Dukes for the first Degenderette Art zine (2016), reproduced as a patch by Silver Sprocket Bicycle Club

May Terfs Wither Cold and Alone watercolor

By Scout Tran, as an evolution of the Trans Dykes are Good and Pure slogan, suggesting that Trans-Exclusionary-Radical-Feminists are even now being abandoned by their friends and partners as payback for calling for the exclusion of trans women.

Tamper-Resistant Bathroom Stickers

Released in June 2016, these were made available for people who wanted to alter their business's bathroom signage to make them non-exclusive to trans, gender non-conforming and

non-binary people. It was simultaneously a publicity campaign to pressure institutions to change their gendered bathrooms, especially multi-occupancy bathrooms. Since 2016, because of this project and others like it, many institutions have volunteered to de-gender their multi-occupancy bathrooms.

In September 2016 Governor Jerry Brown signed AB 1732 into law. It mandated that all “businesses, places of public accommodation, or state or local government agencies that offer a single-user toilet facility to be designated as an all-gender toilet facility.” Although the law came into effect a year ago, countless facilities across the state have not complied. These stickers can be used to temporarily update those single-occupancy bathrooms until permanent signage can be installed.

**This Org Hates Queers:
stickers for labeling transphobic/homophobic organizations**

The Williams Institute estimates that roughly 3.8% of the US population identifies as part of the LGBTQ+ community, yet LGBTQ+ youth make up anywhere from 11%-40% of the homeless youth in this country. Social services (both public and private) are immensely important to the LGBTQ community, especially given the lack of support that many receive from their own families.

And yet there are organizations which ask for donations each year to help the hungry and destitute yet embrace policies which turn away queer youth, subject them to greater scrutiny, house them among populations of a different gender, or isolate them entirely. These stickers could be used to help others identify these organizations where they advertise.

(2 photographs of people with chalk outlines, 23x26, lower cabinet)

“Proud Trans Foot Soldiers Dying For Your Assimilation”

Degenderettes performance at SF Pride 2017

In 2007, the Human Rights Campaign, an organization that claims funding for general LGBT lobbying, allowed trans rights to be cut in order to attempt to pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. Compromises to trans rights were also made in the pursuit of marriage equality, and even for the fight against bathroom bills. Despite continually using trans people as tokens and foot soldiers in the fight for gay rights, mainstream LGBT organizations are notorious for not standing up for trans rights. Trans services scrounge for support while “Pink Dollar” money continues to throw lavish gay pride celebrations and build enormous community centers in stable gay neighborhoods.

As such, the Degenderettes avoid attending the official SF Pride Parade because it does not represent our club’s or our community’s needs—in fact, we assumed we would never be able to afford to walk in the parade even if we wanted to, given how it centers heavily funded organizations and corporations. In the wake of the inauguration, we were asked by SF Pride

leadership to help lead the parade as part of a general “Resist” contingent, which we assumed was yet another ploy to use trans people’s backs to legitimize mainstreamed gay celebrations. We elected to use our position at the front of the parade to have our Color Guard perform a silent die-in around a banner that read “Proud Trans Fights Soldiers Dying For Your Assimilation.” We drew chalk outlines in trans-flag colors around the fallen bodies of the Color Guard, and after we left, the entire parade was forced to walk over those outlined bodies.

(poster)

No Gods No Dungeon Masters

design by Andy Warner, color by Hannah Templer
cover of comic book by Io & Rae Dukes

(villainette comic w/ spray paint can)

“Who’s March Our March”

strip.villainette.com January 23rd, 2017

(villainette comic w/ trans dyke banner in march)

“j/k That Would Be Wrong”

strip.villainette.com February 6th, 2017