Sideways Glance

Alexa Burrell / Sienna Freeman / Barbara Hammer / Daviel Shy

Curated by Elena Gross

October 3, 2026 – February 20, 2027
Opening Reception: Saturday, October 3 | 5-8pm
Curator remarks at 4:30pm

Slash 1150 25th St, Building B, San Francisco
Open Thursday-Saturday, 11am-6pm

Alexa Burrell, *Ambient Cunt*, 2026, 12 Silver gelatin prints, waterfeature video sculpture, dimensions variable. Photo credit: Claire Haughey.

"If the lesbian sees the [woman], the woman may see the lesbian seeing her. The Woman, feeling herself seen, may learn that she can be seen. What lesbians see is what makes them lesbians. Lesbians are woman-seers."
– Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*

What is the *sideways glance*?

A surreptitious look out of the corner of her eye
The ghostlike brush of her fingers against your side
An approximation
Of this and that
This or that
This then that

The *sideways glance* is both ephemeral, fleeting; affected, felt. Bodily.

The *sideways glance* intervenes in the dominant mode of visuality that separates subject from object
He who looks from she who is looked at

Where, then, does the lesbian viewer, the "woman-seer," exist?

Following from the work of lesbian feminist theorist Marilyn Frye, Daviel Shy, a lesbian filmmaker, porn producer, and video artist, argues in her essay, "Women Seeing Women," that the *sideways glance* "re-constitutes the acts of looking and listening in ways that break out of [...] phallocratic dichotomies."

Sideways Glance presents a group of four multidisciplinary artists working across sculpture, collage, photography, and experimental video, producing new ways of looking, feeling, and embracing the lesbian. Each artist plays with the position of beholder & be-held, creating an environment of dynamic, fluid exchange that courses in multiple directions at once.

She tells us: "*A woman pointing the camera at another woman is not enough*" (emphasis mine). By "[i]nhabiting or supposing we can inhabit the position of power (becoming an actor) without changing the structure [...] we are agreeing to the terms of phallocratic reality, which in their operation negate the importance of women as subjects and the existence of lesbians at all."

Alexa Burrell's cinematic centerpiece, *Ambient Cunt*, is a newly commissioned re-examination of the Black bisexual chanteuse and screen star, Josephine Baker as "irresistible femme force." Burrell channels Baker's aura in an hypnotic black-and-white video of the artist using her own body as substitute to reshape "the possibilities of cinematic and political imagination" that is "playful, erotic, and subversive," calling to mind an almost Lynchian mirroring of desired/desirer. The Hasselblad photographs that frame the installation are stills of the digital projection, which is mapped onto a "mist-shrouded" curtain of rain, in which Baker's avatar dances seductively, but elusively, in the fecund damp.

Diving deeper into the wreck, Shy, similarly communes with our queer freak ancestors. Shy's *After the Pleasure Dome* speaks to Kenneth Anger's *The Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954), locating her video's haptic lacunae within an enchanted psychedelic cenote in Chichen Itza, where glittering baubles and gemstones are slowly pulled and purged from within the caverns of the artist's body. Shy, performing as their stage alter ego Burnt Reynolds, transforms herself into a site of pleasure, purging, and sacred purification.

Sienna Freeman's *Bounty, On All Fours* offers silk shrouded, amorphous limbs atop an asymmetrical dining room table bespoke with lashing tongues, bulging

mounds, and venomous fruit. A veritable feast, Freeman's installation, including a series of wall-mounted collage sculptures, draws inspiration from feminist surrealism and the erotic subconscious; slipping between states of tactile and illusory effects, or waking and dreamlife.

In *Available Space*, Barbara Hammer, one of the progenitors of experimental video committed to representing lesbians on screen, drags the shutter cable behind her as she traces glyphic patterns in the sand. Hammer is both performer and maestro, in silent dialogue with herself and the viewer; using her body as writing instrument and language itself.

Far from being conclusive, comprehensive, or prescriptive, *Sideways Glance* is suggestive, responsive, generative, and hopefully, more than a touch stimulating.

Coda: For this and a myriad of reasons, we are thankful for Slash as it is the perfect container for the sideways glance. As Lauren Elkin states, an organizing principle of *Art Monsters: Unruly Bodies in Feminist Art*:

> "[t]he slash provides alternatives, which sit together in an uneasy, impossible simultaneity…"
>
> "the slash joins genres, genders, blurs, blends, invites, marks."
>
> "Across the slash we can find each other / Across the slash [...] we can do some work."

- Elena Gross

Sideways Glance, curated by Elena Gross, is the 21st in a series of exhibitions at Slash, each curated by an independent curator. Elena Gross would like to thank all of the artists of *Sideways Glance*—Alexa Burrell, Sienna Freeman, the Estate of Barbara Hammer, and Daviel Shy; Jess Hubbard, for her excellent craftsmanship and fabrication; the entire team at Slash—Ana Saygi, Maxine Schoefer-Wulf, Efe Özmen, and Tuğçe Evirgen Özmen for their incomparable and unwavering support of this project at every stage; God & country (just kidding, could you imagine?), my friends, family, and my cat Pesto.

Alexa Burrell, AKA LEXAGON, is a multidisciplinary artist and composer whose installations transform light, sound, water, media, and sculpture into atmospheric encounters. Rooted in Black ecology, the gothic, and the uncanny, her work reveals how latent histories reveal themselves within material processes and become physically perceptible through phase changes and weather conditions. She lives and works in San Francisco, CA.

Sienna Freeman is a San Francisco based visual artist and writer. Her artwork has shown across the United States and internationally in Switzerland, London, Belgium, and Canada. Her writing has appeared in Roborant Review, Feral Fabric, ArtPractical.com, DailyServing.com, and more. In 2019 she published a 68-page visual novel titled "Red Gold" with FUZZ press. Freeman holds an MFA in Fine Art and MA in Visual & Critical Studies from CCA, and a BFA in Photography from the University of the Arts.

Barbara Hammer was a feminist filmmaker, visual artist, and lesbian activist with a career spanning over fifty years — constructing revelations on gender, sexuality, community, and later illness and mortality. She produced over 90 films, ranging from experimental shorts to essays, and full-length documentaries as well as performances, installations, photographs, collages, and drawings, that illuminate lesbian histories, lives, and representations. In her work, Hammer explodes traditional notions of female sexuality by showing it for what it is: complex, messy, abstract, human.

Daviel Shy is a writer, filmmaker, and porn producer based in Los Angeles. Her persona, Burnt Reynolds, was a 2025 Playboy Playmate semifinalist. Her feature film, The Ladies Almanack, is the only film adaptation of a Djuna Barnes novel. She wrote, directed, and stars in The Lovers, a seven episode series streaming on Prime Video. She is co-founder of DAYLiGHT FiLMs, named in the top three rising studios of 2025 by Pink Label.tv, the "Criterion Collection" of sexual cinema.

Elena Gross (she/they) is an independent writer and curator living in Oakland, CA. Her research has been centered around conceptual and material abstractions of the body in the work of Black modern and contemporary artists. Her most recent writing can be found in the publication *Blood Sweat & Time: Emerging Perspectives on Mildred Howard* and Adrian Burrell (Sming Sming Books). Elena is the co-editor, along with Julie R. Enszer, of *OutWrite: The Speeches that Shaped LGBTQ Literary Culture* (Rutgers University Press), winner of the 2023 Lambda Literary Awards for LGBTQ Anthologies.

Slash is a nonprofit exhibition space founded in 2018 to advance and promote the expanding field of contemporary art in San Francisco through exhibitions, publications, and public programming.