



CASSILS HUMAN MEASURE

GALLERY
GUIDE

FIRST UK SOLO
EXHIBITION

CURATED BY
BREN O'CALLAGHAN

SAT
2 OCT
— SUN
12 DEC
2021

HOME

HOME
MCR.
ORG

VISIT [HOMEMCR.ORG](https://www.homemcr.org)

Image Bonny Taylor courtesy of artist

CASSILS: HUMAN MEASURE

SAT 2 OCT –
SUN 12 DEC 2021

Debut UK solo exhibition

FREE

Curated by Bren O'Callaghan

Room 1

Human Measure is the first UK solo exhibition and survey of screen and print-based work by Cassils, a visual artist who makes their own body the material and protagonist of their performances. For Cassils, performance is a form of social sculpture: drawing from the idea that bodies are formed in relation to forces of power and social expectations. Their work investigates historical contexts to measure the present moment.

CASSILS: HUMAN MEASURE

"For over fifteen years, Cassils's work in performance, installation, and video has tackled the complicated politics of transgender visibility and its intertwinement with the politics of form. They use their own body as material, transforming it through training, nutrition, and the acquisition of athletic skills, while also exploring the body's mediation via photography, video, sound, and sculpture. In some performances and photographs, Cassils has defiantly exposed their body, knowing this will solicit viewers' intrusive gazes and suffering the voyeuristic objectification that many viewers unquestionably perform. The artist does this to short-circuit the lurid, diagnostic fascination that has historically shadowed the visibility of the transgender body. Cassils's work incites voyeurism to subvert it."

David J. Getsy, Cassils

We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts.
With thanks to Wellcome Collection, London.

Human Measure (2021) was developed with the support of the Paul D. Fleck Fellowship residency at Banff Centre, and with support from Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre, initiated by Carol A. Stakenas and Jacqueline Bell.

With additional thanks to Canadian Stage for their continued assistance.



Sponsored by:



ABOUT CASSILS



Photo: Robin Black

Cassils is the recipient of the USA Artist Fellowship, Guggenheim Fellowship, a 2020 Fleck Residency from the Banff Center for the Arts, a Princeton Lewis Artist Fellowships finalist, a Villa Bellagio Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship, the inaugural ANTI Festival International Prize for Live Art, California Community Foundation Grant, Creative Capital Award, MOTHA (Museum of Transgender Hirstory) award, and Visual Artist Fellowship from the Canada Council of the Arts. Cassils's work has been featured in The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, NPR, Wired, The Guardian and Art Forum.

Cassils is also Co-founder of the feminist performance troupe the Toxic Titties (2020-2008) and [In Plain Sight](#), a coalition of 80 artists and 17 immigration justice organisations, united to create an artwork dedicated to the abolition of immigrant detention and the United States culture of incarceration. [Click here for full CV.](#)

www.cassils.net

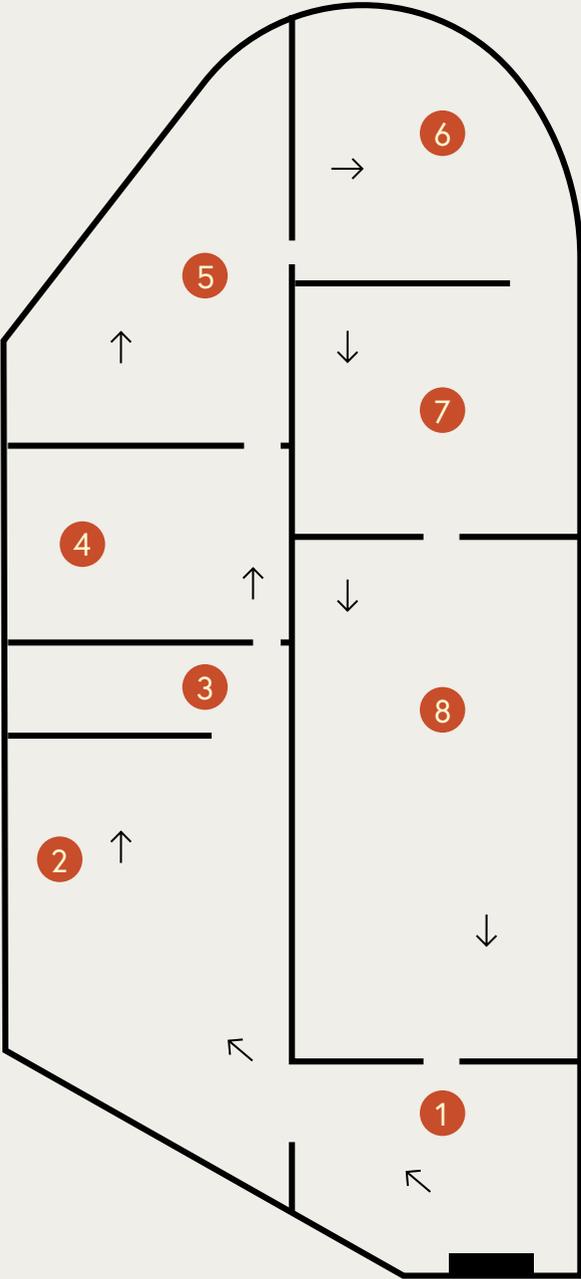
Click [here](#) to read our newly commissioned texts by Dominic Johnson, Libro Levi Bridgeman and Jay Bernard.

BREN O'CALLAGHAN

Bren O'Callaghan is an independent curator, producer and artistic director based in Manchester, UK. His interests lie in dismantling barriers to cultural participation and working with artists who sit at the crossroads of art, counterculture and activism. A champion for emerging to established artists, he has curated, produced and commissioned new work by the likes of Rachel Maclean, John Walter, Peaches Christ, Bruce LaBruce, AL+AL, Lauren John Joseph, David Lynch, Joy Yamusangie and Maurice Vellekoop.

www.brenocallaghan.com

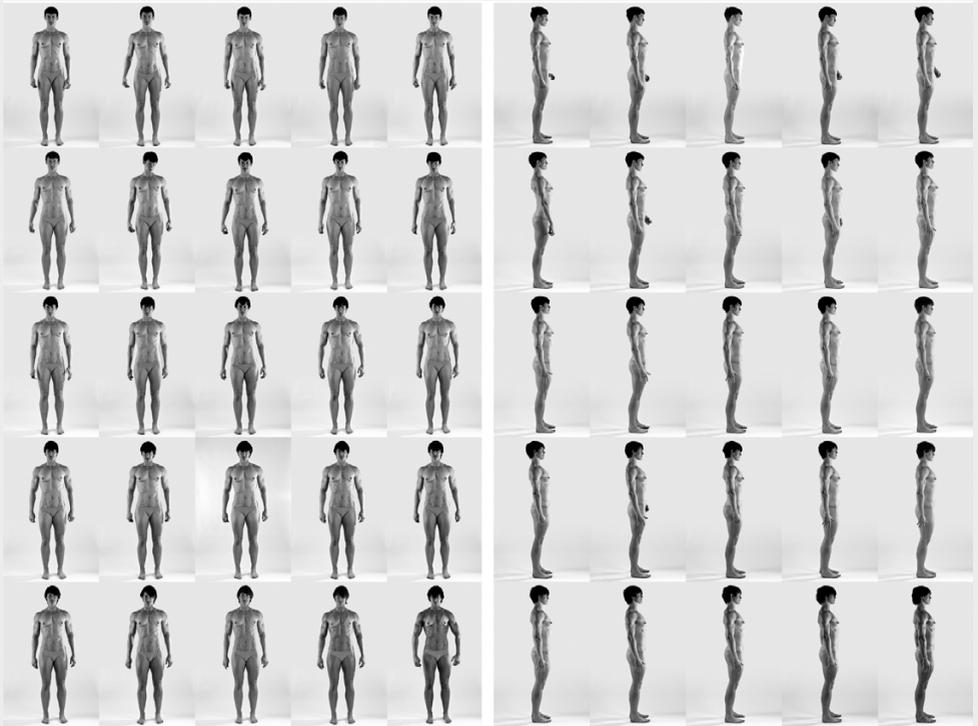
GALLERY MAP





Cassils *Human Measure (Exposure) No. 4*, 2021
Archival Pigment Print 20 x 30 in.
Photo: Bonny Taylor

The exhibition begins and ends with *Human Measure (Exposure) No. 1 - 5*. These photographs document the making of a massive cyanotype, developed live during the performance of *Human Measure* (2021). Taken during the first week of L.A. Pride, on a hot summer day, when mask mandates were lifted and all were vaccinated, these images depict a 20-minute solar exposure. Capturing a moment of intimacy, endurance, and touch after months of isolation, the silhouettes of 20 transgender/nonbinary/gender non-conforming bodies are etched by sunlight: a faithful index of everybody that falls or flies in the choreography.



Cassils, Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture: Time Lapse (Front) & (Right), archival pigment prints, 2011. Images courtesy of the artist.

Room 2

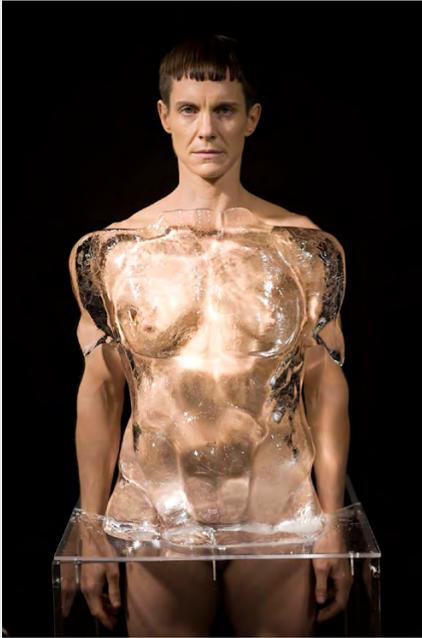
Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture (2011) is a six-month durational performance which consisted of a regimen of force-feeding the calorific intake of a 180-pound male athlete, gruelling workouts and six weeks of steroids. Cassils reinterprets Eleanor Antin's *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture (1972)*, in which Antin crash diets for 45 days and documents her body daily through stark full-body photography. In *Time Lapse (2011)*, rather than the feminine act of wasting, Cassils inverts Antin's process, using their mastery of bodybuilding and nutrition to gain 23 pounds of muscle over 23 weeks.

On the 160th day of *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture*, Cassils collaborated with photographer and makeup artist Robin Black to create *Advertisement: Homage to Benglis* (2011). In this photograph, Cassils stages an homage to Linda Benglis's historic feminist intervention *Advertisement* (1974). Unlike Benglis's male colleagues, Benglis's work was never covered in Artforum magazine, the most revered arts magazine of its time, despite her merit and worth as an artist. To point out this inequity Benglis subversively purchased a centerfold of advertising space in Artforum, which featured her posing with a double-ended phallus. Cassils's homage features their ripped, transmasculine physique which substitutes for Benglis's phallus. In addition to pointing to the glass ceiling of the art world, Cassils's work also speaks to the policing of gender.

In May of 2016, an advertisement poster for an exhibition shown at the German Historical Museum which featured *Homage to Benglis* was censored by the Deutsche Bahn, controlled by the German Government, for being "shameful, pornographic and sexist". They deduced that Cassils was assigned female at birth and therefore their chiselled chest was actually pornographic breasts. With this essentialist, binary viewpoint the poster was removed to protect the public from its "shamefulness". The photograph is hung over dualing press releases, by the Schwules Museum (Berlin's gay museum) and from Cassils studio, which illustrate how even the institutions (allegedly) supporting Cassils did not comprehend the difference between gender and sexual identity.

"I do not want the female gender that was assigned to me at birth. Neither do I want the male gender that transsexual medicine can furnish and that the state will award me if I behave in the right way. I don't want any of it."

Paul Preciado



*Cassils Room 3, Tiresias, video still no.4,
Performance for Camera, 2013.
Photo: Clover Leary*

Room 3

Tiresias (Performance for Camera, 2013) is a durational performance in which Cassils melts a neoclassical Greek male ice sculpture with pure body heat.

The mythological figure of Tiresias, known as the blind prophet of Thebes, was transformed from a man into a woman for seven years. By pressing their body against the ice torso, Cassils demonstrates both the instability of the body and desire for a certain unsustainable physique. Recasting the myth of Tiresias as a story of endurance and transformation, Cassils performs the resolve required to persist at the point of contact between masculine and feminine.

Sound design is made in conjunction with Kadet Kuhne, with vocals performed by the artist's brother, Matthew Cassils, a classically trained opera singer.



Cassils, *Becoming an Image*, performance still No. 5, 2019.
Photo: Manuel Vason

Room 4

In the live performance *Becoming an Image* (2012 - present), Cassils unleashes an attack on a 2,000-pound clay block in total darkness. The spectacle is illuminated solely by the flash of a photographer, burning the image into the viewer's retina.

Becoming an Image was originally conceived as a site-specific work for the ONE Archives in Los Angeles, the oldest active LGBTQ archive in the United States. This installation is from a performance at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts with photographs made in collaboration with artist Manuel Vason.

Each live performance generates a series of still images. Large scale colour photographs depict Cassils sweating, grimacing, and flying through the air as a primal force - pummelling the one-ton clay obelisk. Here, Cassils installs these performative photographs atop custom wallpaper of the audience watching the performance - formally turning the lens of the camera back on the viewers.

The Resilience of the 20% is a sculpture cast from the bashed clay remnant of Cassils's *Becoming An Image* performance, and acts as a monument to the resilience of queer communities. The title underscores a sickening statistic: in 2012, murders of trans people increased by 20% worldwide. Cast in bronze and weighing nearly two tons, this massive sculpture forms the centrepiece of *Monument Push*.

Monument Push (2017) is an edit of a four-hour performance of collectively pushing the 1,900-pound bronze *Resilience of the 20%* sculpture through the streets of Omaha, NE in tribute to its LGBTQ history. Together with the Bemis Center of Contemporary Art and members of Omaha's LGBTQI+ community, Cassils worked with allies and advocates to choose local sites of trauma, violence, celebration, resistance, and resilience. Selected sites included the largest prison in the Midwest and the site of Omaha's first Pride parade.



Cassils, *Inextinguishable Fire*, *Burn for Portrait*, 2007-2015. Photo: Robin Black

Room 5

Inextinguishable Fire (2007-2015) features Cassils engaged in a treacherous fire stunt. Using techniques borrowed from Hollywood stunts, Cassils experiences the very real human terror of being lit on fire. Using a Phantom camera that shoots at 1000 frames per second, the 14-second full body burn is extended to 14 minutes of slow-motion flame.

The title of the piece references Harun Farocki's 1969 film of the same name, which approaches the impossible task of effectively depicting the horror of napalm on film. Cassils's gesture of self-immolation speaks to both the desire for – and the impossibility of – knowing such horror, even while decisively aiming to approach it. Though the stunt is a simulation of violence, it still presents real danger. This possibly volatile situation, and the attempt to control it, is captured to create an image where danger, empathy for those experiencing violence, and the privilege of removal from such circumstance operate simultaneously in one transparent performance.

"When we show you pictures of napalm victims, you'll shut your eyes. You'll close your eyes to the pictures. Then you'll close them to the memory. And then you'll close your eyes to the facts."
Harun Farocki, *Inextinguishable Fire*, 1969

The film projection is accompanied by *Burn Suit* (2015), a ghostly residue of immolation, and *Encapsulated Breaths* (2017), 14 glass blown sculptures which capture a single breath. The objects resemble fragile speech bubbles and speak to the precarity of the voice and political expression. Each glass sculpture is created from 14-seconds of exhaled breath, which during the precarious duration of the live burn is necessary to prevent the oesophagus from irreparable damage.



Cassils *The Powers That Be*, Performance Still (*The Broad*, Los Angeles, California), 2016
photo: Cassils with Leon Mostovoy Courtesy of the artist

Room 6

The Powers That Be (2016) is exhibited as a six-channel video installation designed to be viewed and recorded with mobile phones. Cassils collaborates with fight choreographer and artist Mark Steger to stage a brutal two-person fight. Lit by car headlights and performed in the depths of a parking garage, Cassils is the sole figure, left to spar with invisible forces. A score, composed of static noise and samples found on the Los Angeles radio dial and designed by Kadet Kuhne, is amplified by the surrounding car stereos.

"The Powers That Be challenges us to examine our various modes of participation in repeated scenes of violence, as victims or instigators, as bystanders, as witnesses and as consumers of mass media. As an artist Cassils creates a rupture in these routine processes of identification, objectification, and abjection, putting pressure on empathy and its failures. The brutalization of black bodies has become such a horrifically habitual feature of our news feeds: Cassils's calculated posing of their white body in that pornotropic position suggests a perceptual and affective recalibration. In this moment of intensified responsibility for artists concerned with the burden of representation,

The Powers That Be makes a powerful contribution to exploring the often-subterranean circuits of racism and xenophobia as they move through the media, the everyday, impulses in the moment of conflict and unconscious mental life. Who and what are the The Powers That Be and how do they operate?"

Julia Steinmetz, *The Powers That Be*



*Cassils 103 Shots, Video Still, 2016 photo:
Cassils with Zen Cohen Courtesy of the artist*

Room 7

Following the recent mass shooting at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, Cassils was struck by the testimony of one of the survivors, a man who said one of the reasons he did not react immediately to the gunshots was that he initially perceived them at first as the celebratory noises of "fireworks or balloons popping." They took this narrative as the starting point for *103 Shots* (2016), a short film shot at San Francisco Pride with the help of over 200 volunteers. Filmed in Dolores Park, the footage presents stark black and white imagery of a series of pairs of couples and friends bursting a balloon between their bodies with the pressure of an embrace; reminiscent of gunshots, the soundtrack was created using foley recordings of balloons popping in a cement room.

The film references the visual style of Gran Fury's "*Kissing Doesn't Kill*" campaign and the signature typography of Queer Nation. The faces of the film's participants register affection, surprise, pain, discomfort, and laughter; each embrace is a minor enactment of the disorienting effect of violence in the space of intimacy.



Cyanotype Advisor: Bonny Taylor: Bonny Taylor Courtesy of the artist. With Cyanotype Advisor: Bonny Taylor / Image: Bonny Taylor courtesy of the artist.

Room 8

Upon the occasion of the exhibition, HOME is delighted to have co-commissioned the world premiere of Cassils' first piece of contemporary dance, *Human Measure* (2021). Working with renowned choreographer, Jasmine Albuquerque, this work builds upon Cassils's knowledge of kinesiology, martial arts and sports science to reinterpret Yves Klein's *Anthropometries* paintings. In *Human Measure* Cassils transforms the theatre into a photographic dark room, lit by dim, red safety lights. The empowered labour of an all trans/ nonbinary/ gender non-conforming cast is jarringly exposed in blinding flashes of photographic light. The end result of the dance culminates in a making of a massive cyanotype.

This one-night only performance will be captured for later presentation via Homescreen, HOME's online platform, for a limited duration. See our website for details or speak to gallery staff.

This film is a 6-minute edit of the 40-minute piece which captures the development process from a technical residency with L. A. based performers, and was held at the Roy and Edna Disney CalArts Theater (June, 2021).

Human Measure (Developed) No. 1 (2021) is a cyanotype developed during the course of the performance of *Human Measure*. Each mark is an indexical record from the movements present in the choreography, frozen in place by blasts of photographic light, present in the live event. Leaning into abstraction, these bodily silhouettes are suggestive of the outlines from ACT UP and Black Lives Matter protests, shadow-burns of victims caught in atomic blasts, traces of lives lived, but simultaneously reflect a gentle sensuality and even care, of floating, resting, in tenderness.

EVENTS AND COMMISSION PROGRAMME

Find out more about Cassils and their work. Accompanying Human Measure, we're delighted to present our specially curated events and commissions programme with free and ticketed events. Join us to explore more about the exhibition through artist and curator tours, interviews, artist performances and film screenings.

Fri 1 Oct

Exhibition Preview: Cassils: Human Measure

18.00 - 21.00

HOME Gallery

FREE - no booking required

Thu 7 Oct

[Human Measure Live \(world premiere\)](#)

HOME Theatre 1

20.00 - 20.45

£10-15

Sat 2 Oct

[Cassils: In Conversation](#)

With Curator Bren O'Callaghan

HOME Event Space

15.00 - 16.30

£5 / £3 concessions

Thu 4 Nov - Sun 12 Dec

[Homescreen: Human Measure \(Recording\)](#)

Watch online via Homescreen

£10 / £5 concession

Sun 3 Oct

[Cassils: Short Films](#)

Marina's Cinema

13.15 - 14.30

Fri 8 Oct

[Cassils: Artist and Curator Exhibition Tour](#)

HOME Gallery

18.00 - 19.00

£5 / £3 concessions

*A one-hour programme of artist shorts together with related documentary and wider archival material, upon the occasion of Cassils' first UK **solo exhibition** at HOME.*

Sat 6 Nov, 14.00 – 15.00

Thu 2 Dec, 18.00 – 19.00

[Curator Exhibition Tour](#)

HOME Gallery

FREE, booking required

Wed 24 Nov, 18.00

Screening / From Dysphoria to Euphoria: A thin line between love and hate

Marina's Cinema

£ standard prices apply

A sizzling, diverse and defiantly unapologetic short film programme which explores trans joy, love, desire, and sex, by trans, non-binary and gender non-conformers filmmakers, both in front of and behind the camera. Curated by filmmaker Campbell X.

Fri 26 Nov

Audio Described Exhibition Tour
HOME Gallery

17.00 – 18.00

FREE, booking required

Please call 0161 200 1500 or email access@homemcr.org

Sun 28 Nov, 15.45

Screening / Transfinite with Dir. Q&A

Marina's Cinema

£ standard prices apply

Dir. Neelu Bhuman

Transfinite is a sci-fi omnibus feature film composed of seven standalone short stories where supernatural trans and queer people from various cultures use their powers to protect, love, teach, fight, and thrive. With Dir. Neelu Bhuman in attendance in conversation with filmmaker Campbell X.

Thu 9 Dec

[Human Musings](#)

HOME Gallery

18.00 - 19.00

£5 / £3

Maz Hedgehog and mandla rae create a live, one-night only performative response to Human Measure by the ground-breaking artist Cassils, weaving in and amongst the gallery exhibition.

COMING SOON

THE
MANCHESTER
OPEN 2022

FRI 21 JAN -
SUN 27 MAR
2022

FREE

CURATED BY
BREN
O'CALLAGHAN



EVERYONE'S AN ARTIST.

Everyone's an artist. Our open call exhibition returns to celebrate the artistic talent of Greater Manchester residents. Featuring entries in all artforms, from people of any background and level of experience, including established professionals, new and emerging talent, enthusiastic amateurs, and first-time artists.

The first Manchester Open 2020 was the most successful exhibition in HOME's history and saw over 33,000 visitors enjoying artworks by 451 artists working, studying, or affiliated with Greater Manchester.

HOME

