

S2E2: Expressing Queerness (Part 2) w/ matteline devries-dilling of Lite Brite Neon

Trudy Poux: I'm Trudy Poux and I use they them pronouns. My fellow podcast producer Frankie Gunn and I had a chance to sit down with queer business owner Madeleine de Vries Dilling. They, she, Madeleine is a partner at Lightbright Neon Studio and community arts organization Cygnets Way Both located on the unceded lands of the Lenape peoples in what is currently referred to as Kingston, N.Y. Lite brite Neon Studio specializes in the production, conservation and development of neon artworks and designs that the focus on works by underrepresented and underserved communities and makers, including the LGBTQ and bipoc communities, for almost 25 years.

Frankie: I'm feeling queer today.

Trudy Poux: matteline thanks for joining us today. First of all, how did you end up working with neon as a medium in the mid-1990s? There's an artist named Felix Gonzales Torres, who had a rather large show up at the Hirshhorn Museum in D.C. and it was one of the first museum shows I saw and was so moved by that work. Felix died in 95. Seeing that work was extremely inspiring and connecting. And I'd been working for an electrician at that time and had been sort of exploring making works myself, visual works. And then I learned from my sister about someone who taught neon in dc, an artist named Craig Kraft. And he's still there, still makes his own work. I ended up taking some workshops from him, working for him, and one thing led to another and really led to sort of the beginning of Lite Brite

Frankie: I'm so excited to be here talking to you because I think not only is it so fulfilling to talk to queer business owners, but also interesting. I want to know more. Do you feel

like your path to where you are now in your business, do you feel like it was difficult or more intuitive?

matteline: Yeah, I feel like those things go together. Right. The intuitive path is not the easy path. Definitely not in the current late capitalism era that we're in. And I think in many ways what you're saying there touches on something that for, me is a hallmark of queerness, which is ability to sort of surpass a given system and have insight into a truth that exists beyond that. And I think for many of the queer businesses that we get to work with or queer folks that we get to engage with, there's a certain understanding that, by having to walk a path that's more difficult one, you know, has more connection kind of to their own inherent power, their own inherent gifts that aren't necessarily validated in other systems, we're see mirrored Back culturally as just.

Frankie: A person who, you know, is in a specifically capitalist Western culture that is saying productivity is the goal as much as you can create is the goal at the expense of self. How do you find balance between that?

matteline: Yeah, I mean, I think a lot of times for me it's actually looking at what are you modeling off of. And for many people that are queer, very blessed in this generation that there's eldering and that there's places where you can look for that. But inherently, because it's not the dominant model, I think one of those gifts is you start to look at what are other models. And for us, a large part of the model we're looking to is actually the mycelium network, the way that decomposition and nature works to renew itself. And without a doubt we're going through this time where there's ample suffering. So if we have skillful techniques for composting those things, we can take what's not actually serving us culturally and we can work with it in order to renew and nurture that which is. And that's again the idea here of creating a non binary business model is that allowing

yourself to not fall into this binary trap around stories in the story, like of course those of us who have an awareness of the level of suffering that capitalism perpetuates, have an understanding of any kind of focus on false sense of scarcity or holding of resources when so many people of great need are around. These are ways of. Rather than just trying to burn it all down or label certain people as good and certain people as bad, work to create a model that presents a different path.

Frankie: I think what you're articulating so wonderfully that I would really just like to go back to for a minute is that, you know,

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Frankie: it's history and when you deny access to information, you're denying people to themselves almost. And it reminds me of how books and media, that is how many, many people find that there are other people who are similar to them. Increasingly lately there have been more bans in places of various things. Whether it's book bans or like in quotes, I would say drag bans, where it's much more widespread than that. How would you say that that has been kind of reflected in the work you feel compelled to create?

matteline: I mean, I think it really speaks to what I feel is the importance of doing the work that we can do for as long as we can do and however we can do it. I think an attribute of trans joy is understanding how interconnected we are with these histories that have been held from us. And I think in many ways it informs what we do with the artists we work with. In part, we're the fabricators. So I don't really drive the ideas. I work with the folks who that sort of comes through. I think of us more. There's a Hafiz poem that says, know I'm a flute that the divine breath moves through. And that's kind

of know our goal is like, that's all well and good, but what songs do we want to have playing right now as the world burns? But I think it's actually where there's this depth, Right. That I think queer folks have access to, of understanding. And it's not to say that it's not available to folks who might identify outside of that. But I want to speak specifically to the queer community in that way. And I think one of those gifts is this insight of not necessarily needing a certain validation, you know, not needing to be in the center in order to know one's truth. And I think a lot of the work that the artists we work with do is they help connecting to ancestors, to ancestral knowledge, to ancestral wisdom. And they also help bring forth those voices that are voices of younger generation, voices that have wisdom from having different life experience. That's actually what I feel like the artists that we work with do was.

Speaker D: So interested to hear you use the metaphorical language of the systems of nature as it pertains to business. And also just got me thinking about, know, how nature is a community in and of itself and how that pertains to art. And I guess I'm just curious, like artistry and queerness has a, really unique, relationship to each other. And I'm curious how all that has kind of manifested together.

matteline: It's been so organic. Right. You've may heard that term. We make this path by walking.

Speaker D: Yeah.

matteline: And the thing about artists in the natural world and queerness in the natural world is there's a lot of authenticity there. There's a lot of not coming through a system. There's a lot of just actually working with what's arising. And I think about this a lot. Right. Because what we identify as a weed is merely a plant that's growing where we

don't want to grow in the natural world is so queer. Is so queer.

Speaker D: Yeah.

matteline: We talk about this a lot within our company. Behind everything is a mystery, you know, and we can subscribe to whatever systems of beliefs we want, but ultimately, if we accept our consciousness within its limited perception, it's so humbling. Right. There's just so much vastness beyond it.

Trudy Poux: Ah.

matteline: That we. We can try and name. And I think the best names for that vastness are spoken through poetry, are created through art. So in a lot of ways what I think the natural world is doing is it's reflecting the great mystery. And what folks making art are makers of objects. To quote sister kariita Kent, makers of objects or makers are a sign of hope is that we are actually seeing into that great mystery, that these are portals and openings and gateways. Creativity, queerness, expression, representation, actually through this organic process of pulling from the great mystery and putting forth into the known world.

Speaker D: Yeah, that's just so fascinating because I'm also an artist. I love making things. You also said something earlier about we are the whistle that the divine breath goes through or something like 'not flute that.

matteline: The divine moves through.

Speaker D: Yeah, that point also really intrigues me because when I make things,

sometimes it feels like it's not me, that it's just pouring through me. I'm the vessel to create stuff. And I'm also very curious about your experience with that explicitly. If there have been any times in your life where you've been that vessel and what it has been that you created

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Speaker D: and what that experience feels like.

matteline: I would say it's like an ongoing experience. I don't know that I've had necessarily specific, you know, sort of these mythological, like, numinous experiences that people speak to. But I would say that a lot of that is when you get quiet, the external and internal noise starts to silence itself.

Trudy Poux: Thank you for joining us. I'm Trudy Poux and you've been listening to I'm Feeling Queer Today. If you like what you hear, please read us and share the show with your friends or family or both. And don't forget to ask yourself, how am I feeling queer today? For more information and resources about this episode, check out the show notes or visit the episode page at, thefutureperfectproject.org podcast. We want to hear from you. That's why we set, up our very own online voicemail box for you, our listeners, to leave us recorded messages, let us know what you think of the latest episode or share topics that you'd like us to cover on the pot. Go to speakpipe.com/ifqt to make your voice heard. And who knows, your response might just end up in a future episode. If you were a, young person, you know, between the ages of 13 to 24, is currently in crisis, check out the TrevorProject.org for LGBTQIA support through text and chat or call 1-866-488-7386. We will also include this information in the show notes as resources. To learn more about the Future Perfect Project and all of our free arts

programming with LGBTQIA Youth, visit thefutureperfectproject.org or find us on social media, at the FuturePerfect project I'm feeling Queer Today is produced by the Future Perfect Project with support From Radio Kingston WKN, Kingston, NY. This episode was produced by Frankie Gunn and Meet Trudy Poux Thank you to matteline devries-dilling of Lite Brite Neon for joining us for this episode. Visit litebriteneon.com to learn more about this studio. Additional thanks to the rest of the IFQT production team Lily Muller, Alex Masse Eric Eubank, Claire Florence Wallace, Zorian Edwards, Sam Smalls, Soniyamia Blanco and Ari. Our theme song was composed and performed by Alex Massey and produced by Emma Jayne Seslowsky M Episode mixing and mastering by Julie Novak with assistants from Emma Jayne Seslowsky Special thanks to executive producers and mentors July Novak and Celeste Lecesne as well as Future Perfect Project team members Ryan Amador, Kiko Wan and Aliya Jamil.

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