

The Opalescent Oracular Bubble

The silhouette of a beautiful young man—“More beautiful than Adonis”¹—looks down onto a tortured Sebastianus in the desert. Wearing the hide of a leopard and with a laurel branch in hand, this amorphic figure fleetingly shields from harsh golden rays: his guardian angel.

TAN FORMOSUS EST QUAM SOL
SOL ME PERMULCENS (PERMULCET if finite)

He is as beautiful as the sun.
This sun which caresses me...²

Dion Smith-Dokkie’s painted textiles, drawings and video meet the eye like a prism, refracting iridescent glimmers, lush pastels, bulbous forms, sparkling gems, deep-sea life, and crinkled oil slicks. A cosmic birth, textures ripple across space and are inherently queer: the palette, an opalescent pansy—both the flower and the effeminate homosexual male—denotes acceptance of, confidence in, and gratitude for queerness, affirmed with each mark made, each star stitched. A healing robe, orb, or sun, emanating protection.

For the ancient Romans

there was no such thing as a single birthday, as humans are never born alone. Every birthday is a double birthday; on that day one not only commemorates the supposedly joyful event, but—even more so—the indissoluble link between the individual and its guardian spirit, [...] which accompanies them as an outer soul in an unbreakable spheric alliance; it is immediately related only to the intimate god who will lead a parallel life in the closest and most intimate position for the full length of the individual’s existence.³

Smith-Dokkie’s opalescent environment expresses that language of autonomy, the “intimate god”: a form of healing conjured through an unbreakable spheric alliance with one’s double. A sun, perhaps an aura, or a bubble, this double is something innate to a queer experience. It is learned from birth, through turmoil, that preservation is often self-reflective, self-reliant. This aura is not easily traced by those who would seek to diminish it (thank you, Muñoz), and the cosmic relationship formed between Smith-Dokkie and his work evokes an embodiment within this healing universe of bubbles, orbs, microbes, anemones.

Derek Jarman’s 1976 film *Sebastiane*—a homoerotic reinterpretation of the Christian Saint Sebastian—portrays the martyr as an exiled Christian sent to a desert outpost exclusively populated by men. Succumbing to lust, these men resort to homosexual acts to fulfil their desires, all but Sebastianus, pious and true to his bitter end.

Except Sebastianus’ heart does long for someone. Not for Christ, but for the Sun, appearing to him as that beautiful man adorned with the hide of a leopard. Throughout the film, Sebastianus knows love only in the Sun’s presence, as it guides him through turmoil, a membrane-being extension of himself. That “intimate god” who radiates. The film grounds Smith-Dokkie’s *sunbeams softer forever*: dialogue excerpts are transmuted into text-based anagram poems that inform the works and provide titles. The presence of Sebastianus’ Sun-Leopard-Lover-Guardian-Angel is reflected in the deep layers of a pastel universe. Here in this dream the artist reveals his own guardian angel, or double, who might wrap itself around the viewer in a constellation of healing protection. Happily, Sebastianus’ Sun also satisfies the erotic desires of the viewer through beauty (a rare opportunity for us queers to be horny for god).

CAPELLES EIS SOLIS RADII
CORPUS EORUM EST SIMILE
AURŌ LIQUIDO

His hair is like the sun’s rays.
His body is golden like
molten gold.⁴

In *sunbeams softer forever*, Smith-Dokkie invokes a haptic eroticism through material and (lack of) image, which invites the viewer to be both close and far, to take in the dapples and shimmers of colour in an oscillatory fashion, always requiring the body to shift *here* and *there*. Marks⁵ notes that this spatially intimate relationship between body and image calls “on the viewer to engage in its imaginative construction. Haptic images pull the viewer close, too close to see properly, and this itself is erotic” (16). It is this kind of intersubjective relationship that Smith-Dokkie’s work uses to caress and capture. The construction of an imaginary lover, a double, a revelation of Smith-Dokkie’s own guardian spirit, becomes a poultice to press into the wounds of isolation, of loneliness, so familiar to queer folks. There is potential here for endless aid and one might find it within these intimate spaces.

Sebastianus kneels, naked, perched on a singular rock. A solitary island surrounded by the calm waters of a small tide pool; he stares at his reflection—*Narcissus*—so generously provided by the light and rays of the sun. He sees his double, the intimate god of his spheric bubble. We catch these glimmers and glints in Smith-Dokkie’s works. A ripple here and a sparkle there, reflecting our own doubles back at us.

Text by Alex Gibson

¹ *Sebastiane*. Derek Jarman, 1976.

² Adapted translation and transcription of *Sebastiane*, Derek Jarman, 1976. Dion Smith-Dokkie, 2020-2021.

³ Sloterdijk, Peter. “Chapter 6. Soul Partitions – Angels – Twins – Doubles.” *Bubbles: Spheres -Microspherology*, Semiotext, Los Angeles, 2011, pp. 417.

⁴ Adapted translation and transcription of *Sebastiane*, Derek Jarman, 1976. Dion Smith-Dokkie, 2020-2021.

⁵ Marks, Laura U. “Video Haptics and Erotics.” *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis / London, 2022.

sunbeams softer forever

Dion Smith-Dokkie

INFO Dion Smith-Dokkie
sunbeams softer forever
June 16-24
Swallowfield Farm, 7296 Telegraph Trail, Langley, BC
fortgallery.ca

EVENTS Opening Reception
June 16, 7pm

Artist Workshop
Sunday June 18, 2pm

Artist Talk and Tour
Saturday June 24, 2pm

All events are free and open to the public

ARTIST BIO My name is Dion Smith-Dokkie and I was born in Fort St. John, BC in 1992. I am a painter and visual artist who lives on Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh territories and homelands in so-called Vancouver. I locate myself as a gay mixed-race European-Indigenous man and am a member of West Moberly First Nations, a Treaty 8 First Nation located in northeast British Columbia. I received an MFA in Visual Arts from the University of British Columbia, having prior to this obtained a BA in Humanities (Women's Studies) from the University of Victoria and a BFA in Painting and Drawing from Concordia University.

Mediation, translation, and interface are key operations in my practice, which centres on painting, drawing, mixed-media and textile art, as well as video, 3D-modelling, and scanner art. Infrastructure provides a central formal principle: aesthetic inquiry emerges from envelopes and satellites, reflections and mirrors, skin and membranes, and foam. Through this I address questions of body, contact, and communication. My research-creation practice is most immediately legible within Impressionist, video-haptic, and techno-feminist paradigms. Fixation on chromatism, haptic fields, and inside-outside fluidity emerges from my standpoint as a queer, mixed-race European-Indigenous artist with mental illness. Ambiguous visibility and mirage vision tint inquiries into home and belonging, atmosphere and information, proximity and distance. My works embody these contingent, liminal zones.

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- WORKS LIST**
1. *how i became sun rays in Italy, 1976.* 2023. Mixed-media on paper. 58h x 38w inches.
 2. *will soften these away – will these soften away II.* 2022. Pastel on paper. 55h x 42w inches.
 3. *will soften these away – will these soften away I.* 2022. Pastel on paper. 54h x 42w inches.
 4. *will soften these away – will these soften away XI.* 2022. Pastel on paper. 30h x 20w inches.
 5. *will soften these away – will these soften away VI.* 2022. Pastel on paper. 48h x 36w inches.
 6. *will soften these away – will these soften away IV.* 2022. Pastel on paper. 42h x 39w inches.
 7. *will soften these away – will these soften away V.* 2022. Pastel on paper. 36h x 45w inches.
 8. *oculi eis caeruleis.* 2021. Digital video. 02:51.
 9. *a silly angel.* Digital video. 2021. 04:09.
 10. *Clouds with chromakey square.* 2020. Digital video. 10:19.
 11. *anemones IV.* 2021. Digital video. 05:26.
 12. *Lares 1.* 2021. Acrylic, false gems and pearls, holographic plastic and glass beads on cotton sheeting. 20h x 18w x 1.5d inches.
 13. *apparent radiant.* 2022. 83h x 60w inches. Watercolour, water-based marker, holographic beads and steel wire on cheesecloth and knit textile.
 14. *window, pink 5am.* 2022. 86h x 60w inches. Watercolour, water-based marker, holographic beads and steel wire on cheesecloth and gauze.
 15. *baby bring me strawberries.* 2023. Watercolour, water-based marker, holographic beads and steel wire on double gauze. 78h x 58w inches approx.

Presented by:

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