

(GENDER | 16 mei t/m 20 juni 2026)

CELESTIAL BODIES

QUEER TRANSFORMATION THROUGH TIME

PART I

Pre-3000 BCE – ~500 CE

DIVINE INTERMEDIARIES

CINDY - THE EARLY BLOOM

Across ancient civilizations - from Mesopotamia (c. 3000 BCE) to Greece and Rome (c. 800 BCE - 400 CE) - gender and desire were not fixed identities. They appeared through ritual, through roles, through belief.

In the temples of Inanna (a major Mesopotamian goddess associated with love, beauty, sex, and fertility, worshipped in Sumer, modern-day southern Iraq, and later linked to Ishtar), *gala* priests - assigned male at birth - lived and worked in feminine roles. Followers of Cybele (an ancient Phrygian mother goddess associated with fertility, nature, mountains, and wild animals, originating in Anatolia, modern-day Turkey), known as the *galli*, altered their bodies and expression as part of religious practice.

Later mythology references Hermaphroditus, the child of the Greek gods Hermes and Aphrodite. According to myth, Hermaphroditus, born a boy, merged with the female nymph Salmacis, combining both sexes in one body. Hermaphroditus, along with their divine parents, became associated with marriage rituals, fertility, sex and the blending of male and female in Greek cultural imagination.

Nature is fluid, blurring the lines between genders and resulting in diverse and beautiful flora and fauna. Lilies possess six stamens to spread their pollen, as well as a superior ovary for fertilization. Their beauty and scent are designed to attract.

The Early Bloom celebrates seduction, sensuality, and the beauty of nature. In essence, biology does not care about gender. From the dawn of life, it has relied on evolution for life to bloom - never judging, always flowing into something new.

While humans argue and contemplate the meaning of gender, nature simply continues to evolve.

PART II

~500 CE – 16TH CENTURY

PILLARS OF COMMUNITY

PALOMA - THE WISTERIA RITUAL

After early civilizations formed, belief systems became religion. Rituals became rules.

Across cultures, gender and sexually non-conforming individuals were given roles within religious and social structures. In South Asia, Hijras were recognized as a third gender, performing blessings and sacred rites within religious life. In Hawai'i and Tahiti, Māhū embodied both masculine and feminine spirit, serving as teachers, healers, and keepers of cultural and spiritual knowledge. They were part of society but only within boundaries defined by religion and tradition.

This look draws from the wisteria tree: a living system of hanging clusters, all connected through a single root. Like the queer individuals it reflects, this body exists between worlds - spiritual and physical. Through ritual, they connect the community to their traditions. They are the bridge between people, religion, and belief.

In this time, queerness is not rejected but permitted, as long as it serves a function.

PART III

16TH - 20TH CENTURY

UNDER CONTROL

OKLA - THE MYCELIUM NETWORK

Before queerness was pushed out of public life, it was gradually rewritten - through law, monotheistic religion, and medicine - into something to be controlled, corrected, or erased. From early modern laws such as England's Buggery Act of 1533 to later systems like Germany's Paragraph 175, same-sex desire became subject to punishment, surveillance, and silence. Yet it did not disappear.

Across the 18th and 19th centuries, queer life reorganised itself beneath the surface. In England, Molly houses offered spaces where men gathered in private rooms, adopting names, roles, and rituals that could not exist openly. Across Europe, masquerade balls and coded social circles allowed for recognition without declaration - where identity was not spoken, but read through gesture, dress, and behaviour. These were not isolated acts. They formed networks.

This character comes from that condition: not visible, but not absent. Like mycelium beneath the forest floor, it spreads through connection rather than exposure - linking individuals, carrying knowledge, sustaining life in ways that cannot be easily seen or removed.

The garment reflects this system. The body is held, contained, forming a composed silhouette. The translucent textures gather and expand at the edges like spores. What cannot exist openly does not disappear; it transforms. Like spores, it lives on - carried through time, settling, re-emerging, and continuing to grow where it can.

PART IV

20TH CENTURY - NOW

RECLAMATION & ASCENT

JENDA - THE LOTUS RISING

After centuries of control, something shifted. In 1969, the Stonewall uprising in New York became a visible rupture. What had been hidden, punished, or controlled began to resist - publicly.

From the 1970s onward, queer communities organized, protested, and created space for themselves. Pride emerged not only as celebration, but as a statement of presence. Visibility grew, but it came with risk. During the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s, queer communities faced loss, stigma, and neglect - yet also built networks of care, activism, and solidarity that reshaped the movement.

Towards the end of the 20th century and into the present, shifts accelerated. Legal recognition expanded in many parts of the world. Language evolved. Identities multiplied. Queerness moved from something defined by others to something increasingly defined from within.

Today, identity is no longer something imposed. It is something explored and expressed.

The Lotus Rising stands in this moment, fully realized. They carry the history of restriction, but are no longer shaped by it. Their presence is deliberate. They choose to be visible, reclaiming the right to define themselves. A shift from survival to authorship.

The look is inspired by the lotus flower. A lotus grows from mud, rises through water, and opens into light. Layers of fabric expand outward from the body, creating a sense of openness and light. Gold elements trace the surface like something formed over time, a history carried rather than hidden.

PART V(IDEO)

CELESTIAL BODIES

film by Peer van de Kam

The film by Peer van de Kam moves through four periods in queer history.

As definitions and perceptions shift, one thing remains constant: queer people have always been part of human culture - at times sacred, at times hidden, at times pushed to the margins, and at times brought into the light.

From early ritual and mythology, through periods of control and erasure, to moments of resistance and visibility, queerness continues to transform alongside the world around it.

Here, queerness is not treated as performance, but as something ritualistic and recurring - a presence that moves between shadow and spotlight.

What connects these histories are shared human desires: for love, community, protection, and hope.

EPILOGUE

At the end of the exhibition, you are invited to complete the ritual. Take a moment to reflect on what you need most right now - love, community, protection, or hope.

You may leave a message, a wish, or a question.

The Celestial Bodies are not here to give answers, but to hold space - as figures like them have done across time.

Across different lives and histories, the need to adapt, to endure, and to reach for one another has always been there.

This is the way to recognise it.

BIO OF CONTRIBUTORS

OKLA is a Russian-born drag artist and multidisciplinary maker based in Eindhoven. Performing since 2015, their practice spans performance, fashion, exhibition-making, and education, using drag as a tool to explore transformation, identity, and the fluid relationship between self-authorship and public image. OKLA's work bridges artistic research and community engagement, positioning drag within contemporary art and cultural discourse.

Selected roles & projects: Curator — *Metamorphosis in Motion* (2025, Pennings Foundation, Eindhoven); Host — *Epson Design Award* (2024, Eindhoven); Educator — *Drag.Laboratory* (2022, Dynamo, Eindhoven); Co-producer — *Come as Sensitive as You Are* (2022, Parktheater Eindhoven).

Cindy van der Loan is a drag artist, producer, and community builder based in Eindhoven. Performing since 2015, her practice combines performance, education, and cultural production, with a strong focus on creating accessible spaces for drag, queer expression, and emerging talent. Cindy's work positions drag as a social, artistic, and civic practice embedded in the city.

Selected roles & projects: Artist in Residence — *Cindy's CUNTAINER* (2022, Plug-In City / Philippa Horgan Agency, Eindhoven); Producer & Educator — *Drag.Laboratory*

(2022, Dynamo, Eindhoven); Producer & Actor — *Come as Sensitive as You Are* (2022, Parktheater Eindhoven); Core member & performer — *DayDayGay* (2018–present, Eindhoven).

Paloma Lust is a Malaysian-born drag artist based in the Netherlands. Performing since 2015, her work weaves traditional Malay cultural references with contemporary glamour. Through drag as storytelling and cultural reclamation, Paloma brings Southeast Asian narratives to international stages, re-examining myth, femininity, and identity through performance.

Selected roles & projects: Winner — *Miss Travestie Holland* (2022); Representative of the Netherlands — *Helsinki Drag Fest* (2023); Representative of Malaysia & the Netherlands — *Miss Continental Pageant* (2024, Chicago); Producer — *Pontianak, The Drag Opera* (2026, Theater De Regentes, The Hague).

Jenda Benda is a French-born drag artist based in the Netherlands, working at the intersection of femininity and masculinity. A multi-faceted creator, she designs and produces her own garments, hairstyles, and choreography with strong attention to craftsmanship. As a gender-bending shape-shifter, Jenda's work moves between beauty and discomfort, fantasy and the uncanny.

Selected roles & projects: Cast member — *Shrek, The Musical* (2026, Het Amsterdams Theaterhuis, Amsterdam); Cast member — *La Cage aux Folles* (2025, CC Amstel, Amsterdam); Fashion Award Winner — *Superball* (2023 & 2024, Amsterdam); Winner — *Drag My Vision* (2021, Eindhoven).

Jelle Pieter de Boer is a Dutch portrait and documentary photographer based in Amsterdam. His work combines observational depth with strong visual storytelling, capturing identity, intimacy, and cultural context. De Boer's photography has been widely exhibited and published internationally.

Selected projects & exhibitions: *DRAG POWER: Gender, Pride & Glamour* — CODA Museum, Apeldoorn (2019–2020); *IDA / Reines* — Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam (2018) & Fotogalerie Objektief (2018); *IDA* — Groninger Forum, Groningen (2017); *IDA* — DENF Coffee (2019).

Peer van de Kam is a Dutch cinematographer whose work spans music videos, narrative film, and visual storytelling. Known for his collaborative approach and strong cinematic voice, he blends technical precision with expressive, character-driven imagery.

Selected roles & projects: Director / Cinematographer — *Throwaway Lives* (music video, 2025); Director of Photography — *Buiten Beeld* (2025, dir. Mijn Wanjon & Kai Pulles); *Best Dutch Short* — Roze Filmdagen (2023); *Special Jury Award* — Perth Queer Film Festival (2023).