

John Guest Phillips Memorial Travelling Scholarship 2018/19
Report By Daniel Fountain

The £500 scholarship was used in combination with a departmental prize to cover the cost of travel and accommodation for a research trip to New York. This took place over five days in June 2019 with the aim to conduct research relating to my practice-led PhD research on the relationship between queer identity and craft.

The majority of the time was spent conducting archival research on the AIDS Memorial Quilt, as well as various queer artists who's practices have often gone overlooked in academic scholarship. Firstly, I visited the Billy Rose Theatre Division of the New York Public Library to view photographs of the San Francisco drag troupe, The Cockettes, and also studied documents relating to the performance artist Jack Smith. Secondly, I visited the LGBT Community Center National History Archive to view their New York Memorial Quilt Records as well as photographs by Leonard Fink of New York's pier subculture. Last but not least, I was lucky enough to gain access to the Jack Smith Archive, which forms part of the Gladstone Gallery's private collection. Gaining access to this material was perhaps the most significant as many of Smith's films and costumes for instance not available for public viewing and are rarely displayed in exhibitions (especially outside of the USA). Although these activities provided specific benefits to my research, exploring the subjection and history of the LGBTQ community, of which I am a part of, was personally illuminating and moving.

Whilst in New York I was able to conduct an interview with John Chaich who curated an influential exhibition exploring the intersections between textile art and queer identity entitled *Queer Threads*. John kindly answered a variety of questions relating to my own research and offered me recommendations for exhibitions to see, artists to research, and contacts to network with. Whilst this interview could certainly have been conducted via a platform such as Skype, having the opportunity to meet John in person was invaluable and will hopefully prove beneficial to my future career.

In addition to *Queer Threads*, another key case study used in my thesis is the AIDS Memorial Quilt. The Quilt was conceived in 1985 and was designed as a memorial, providing people the opportunity to remember and celebrate lives lost to AIDS. The Quilt is maintained and displayed by The NAMES Project Foundation and is predominantly stored in a warehouse in Atlanta. As a result, it is quite rare that large sections are put on public display, let alone outside of the USA. This is predominantly due to the ephemerality of some materials and given the vastness of the collection. During my stay The Lincoln Center were hosting several panels and so after arranging a meeting I had the opportunity to view panels in person, record the materials used and take high-definition photos of sections. This was particularly important for my research as although most of the Quilt's panels have been digitised, the images are incredibly low quality and it is difficult to discern particular materials.

This has enabled me to talk about the project with much more conviction and observing the materiality of the Quilt panels inspired the creation of new artworks.

Aside from these research-related activities being awarded the scholarship meant that I was able to truly immerse myself in the vibrant cultural scene New York has to offer. I was able to visit key art institutions such as MoMA, the Whitney Museum and The Metropolitan Museum of Art to name but a few examples. Most notably, I was able to visit the Leslie-Lohman Museum; the only dedicated art museum in the world to exhibit and preserve artwork that speaks about the LGBTQ experience.

I wish to thank the Prize Committee for awarding the scholarship, without which these activities would not have been possible. Much of this research has now furthered multiple academic projects including conference papers, journal articles and book reviews.

Daniel Fountain
PhD Researcher
School of Creative Arts
Loughborough University
www.danielfountain.com

