

I Know Who I Am by Being With You Bex Wade

25 April - 17 May 2025



Bex Wade, *Public Assembly Pride* (2012), Archival Pigment Print

“This work is a love letter to the queer nights that held me. Under the strobes and amongst the sweat, we found each other. We made ourselves visible, irrepressible, undeniable.”

- Bex Wade

SLQS Gallery presents *I Know Who I Am by Being With You*, an exhibition of early works by trans non-binary photographer Bex Wade, which captures New York’s queer nightlife in the early 2010s, and marks Wade’s first solo show.

Starting out in the underground club scenes in the UK and New York, Wade documented queer nightlife as a radical space of expression. Later, they turned their lens to the streets, capturing global Pride movements and acts of protest. With a background in performance, they approach image-making as a dialogue between bodies and space, capturing movement and energy as it plays out across a make-shift stage, be it the dancefloor or the street.

Wade’s documentation of spaces of queer gathering archive moments where LGBTQIA+ people come together to celebrate, resist and redefine belonging. For Wade, “these images are an offering - to remember, to reclaim, and to carry forward the legacy of our collective becoming.”

Arriving in New York in 2010, Wade spent years living in the city seeking out spaces where queerness, gender fluidity and community could be explored without constraint. Their lens became an extension of that search, capturing the underground dance floors where self-expression reigned supreme.

From Brooklyn warehouse Pride parties to the infamous *Van Dam* at Greenhouse, and the extravagant spectacles of Susanne Bartsch and Amanda Lepore’s *Bloody Mary*, each photograph pulses with the unfiltered exuberance of a time and place that can never be replicated.

I Know Who I Am by Being With You is a meditation on performance as an art form and as a survival strategy. The nightclub becomes a stage where identity is not just expressed but constructed, negotiated and reimagined with every movement. Wade’s lens captures this ritual of queer becoming, the way bodies transform under the lights, the defiant theatrics of self-presentation, the silent exchanges that signal belonging. These moments are ephemeral, yet their impact lingers, shaping what it means to be seen.

Similarly to Nan Goldin’s *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1979-1986) and Wolfgang Tillmans’ evocative documentation of queer nightlife as a living archive, Wade’s work is steeped in the formative yet fleeting moments of intimacy specific to the nightlife experience. Unlike the detached gaze of nightlife chroniclers, such as Brassai or Bill Brandt, Wade was immersed - dancing alongside their subjects, absorbed in the euphoria of a pre-algorithmic era where identity was performed and redefined in real-time.

According to Wade, “the subjects of my images - drag queens, club kids, gender rebels - embody a freedom that existed before fluidity became marketable, before digital platforms reshaped queer visibility.”

This body of work is a testament to the urgency and performance of queer presence. It asks: How do we preserve the fleeting moments that bind us? How do we build futures that honour the ways we have lived, loved and survived when history has shown, and continues to show, that hard-won freedoms can never be taken for granted?

The exhibition was created with the support of art consultant Anna Smithson.

Bex Wade (they/them) is a UK-based trans non-binary artist and photographer. Wade documents queer lives with a focus on power, complexity and defiance, capturing moments of joy, rage, communion and resistance. Their practice builds an archive of contemporary queer experience that insists on visibility, survival and self-determination.

Wade's work seeks to challenge dominant narratives of gender and identity, explicitly highlighting how queer people reshape their worlds. Their images resist the assumptions of cis-heteronormativity, offering a vision of multiplicity, kinship and refusal. Their current focus is documenting overlooked queer narratives, centering trans lives and communities who are marginalised within LGBTQIA+ spaces.

Wade is the first trans artist to be displayed permanently by the Victoria & Albert Museum, after five of Wade's photographs were acquired by the V&A in 2023.

Wade's photography has been featured in *Dazed & Confused*, *Huck*, *VICE*, *British Vogue*, *BBC*, *The New York Times* and *The Observer*. Their work also appears in recent publications; *Calling the Shots: A Queer History of Photography* by Zorian Clayton (Thames & Hudson / V&A, 2024) and *Queer Art: From Canvas to Club, and the Spaces Between* by Gemma Rolls-Bentley (Frances London, 2024).

Previous group exhibitions include: *Design Gives Us a Voice*, Young Victoria & Albert Museum, London (2023); *Grown Up in Britain: 100 Years of Teenage Kicks*, MOYC, Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry (2023); *Reframe the Movement*, Shambala Festival (2023); *Photographing Protest: Resistance through a Feminist Lens*, Four Corners, London (2022); *Protest to Progress*, POW Thanet, Margate (2021); *Why We Shout: Art and Protest*, VOMA (2021); *Art & Protest*, GIANT, Bournemouth (2021); *NY Nights*, Margate Arts Club, Margate (2021); *THERE CAN BE NO LOVE WITHOUT JUSTICE*, QueerCircle & Buildhollywood, Billboards across the UK (2021); *GIRL TOWN*, Photomonth East London International Photo Fest, London (2016); *Perform*, View Art Gallery, Bristol (2009).

SLQS Gallery is a contemporary art gallery committed to platforming women and queer artists across generations. Founded by Sarah Le Quang Sang, SLQS Gallery emerges at a pivotal cultural moment when the need for unapologetic spaces for women and queer voices has never been more urgent. Through a considered and targeted programme, SLQS Gallery aims to foster an inclusive and intentional ethos. The gallery looks to disrupt outdated frameworks, such as neatly defined industry classifications “emerging” and “mid-career”, which often exclude artists balancing caregiving responsibilities or working outside conventional timelines.



Bex Wade

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