

COOL HUNTING®

"Sadie Barnette + madison moore Recreate the Magic of Queer Nightlife"

By Kelly Pau

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Installation view of Sadie Barnette: The New Eagle Creek Saloon, The Kitchen, New York, 18 January—6 March 2022

Photo: Adam Reich

At NYC's The Kitchen, "The New Eagle Creek Saloon" Resurrects San Francisco's First Black-owned gay bar and more

For queer people, is there a more spiritual yet sacrilegious place than the nightclub? "As someone who grew up in the midwestern United States in a Black Baptist household, the club was an oasis," says Assistant Professor of Gender and Sexuality Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University and nightlife resident at New York's [The Kitchen](#), [madison moore](#) (whose pronouns are she/he/they). "It's a place where I couldn't feel the pressure of the fire and brimstone that I was surrounded by. The club becomes a kind of refuge, a space of possibility and emergence." To be at a queer club is to be united under sweaty, gyrating flesh, in communion with the DJ's set, faithful in the righteousness of the moment—in spite of the threat of violence (from the public or police) that has continually haunted queer spaces.

JESSICA
SILVERMAN

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

These dichotomies of queer nightclubs (spaces that have been steadily [declining](#)) foregrounds [Sadie Barnette's](#) *The New Eagle Creek Saloon*, a new installation presented at The Kitchen in collaboration with [The Studio Museum of Harlem](#) which reimagines the first Black-owned gay bar in San Francisco. The installation (on view now until 6 March) operates in conjunction with moore's residency and centers on the bar that was owned in 1990 to 1993 by the artist's father, Rodney Barnette, who also founded the Compton chapter of the Black Panther Party.

Far from an exact replica, the artist's recreation transforms her familial history into a pink, glittery fantasia that simultaneously honors her own personal archive while creating a collective one. The installation glows—physically through neon-lit signs and figuratively through the photos from Barnette's own archive, enshrined in the shimmering countertop. While sitting at the bar—surrounded by the sparkly tape player, beer cans and stereo equipment—guests are to wonder: who came before? Who were the Black and queer activists who paved the way for this barstool to be available?



Sadie Barnette's "The New Eagle Creek Saloon" (detail), photo by Robert Divers Herrick, courtesy of The Lab, 2019

"This light shines for my queer 'elders,' especially the ones who roll their eyes at that title, who waged love and fought fiercely to create the world I now walk in," says Barnette. "I am introducing *The New Eagle Creek Saloon* into the channels of existing queer histories, but I am also manifesting its own archive, which recognizes the limits of official histories and celebrates the unknown and unknowable. This archive is alive." Holographic and magical, the installation conjures history while transcending it, resurrecting it like a Frankenstein of all the bar's former and lost patrons to set a new, otherworldly tone for the present and future.

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Photo: Adam Reich

These “ghosts of nightlife past,” as moore calls them, are further resurrected during her [Saturday Sessions](#), intentionally curated rave environments, replete with fog, projections and DJs (including Shaun J Wright, Nita Aviance, Juana and TYGAPAW) to activate and respond to the installation. Open each Saturday that the *Saloon* is on view, these sessions “respond to [Barnette’s] exhibit in a way that articulates the necessity of queer nightlife spaces, queer of color nightlife spaces and Black queer nightlife spaces, while also trying to lay out a tapestry of contemporary queer nightlife landscapes,” moore tells us.

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Photo: Adam Reich

Each Saturday Session features a different DJ representing a different geography and thus different nightlife history. During the daylight sessions, the artists moore selected will talk about queer night-scapes—especially the role gentrification plays in shutting down many queer spaces run by people of color. “There’s no national repository for queer nightlife, no National Archives. Because it’s a culture that is ephemeral, that trades in the ephemerality, sometimes these histories go untold. They just go missing, so I really wanted to bring in people who are able to bring up the ghosts of previous venues, DJs or girls,” moore continues.

Over the weekend at the installation’s first Saturday Session, DJ Shaun J Wright’s performance pulsed over 10th Avenue, enchanting unsuspecting pedestrians from the street and beckoning the guests dressed in glam. Entering The Kitchen from the sunny sidewalk to the installation’s black, dimly-lit room was akin to intentionally falling down the rabbit hole. The vestiges of a nightclub—of people voguing, dancing alone or strutting across the floor—await on the other side. In the black box, time loses meaning.

For moore, there couldn’t be a better way to honor queer nightlife. Moving the body provocatively in ways or with people “you’re not supposed to” has historically framed dance as rebellious. “Dance represents what people fear. When you look at the early 20th century and the dawn of the nightclub as an institution, you start seeing these kinds of class wars where a venue has working class folks dancing and grooving. That becomes fearful because of the way that it mixes classes,” moore explains.

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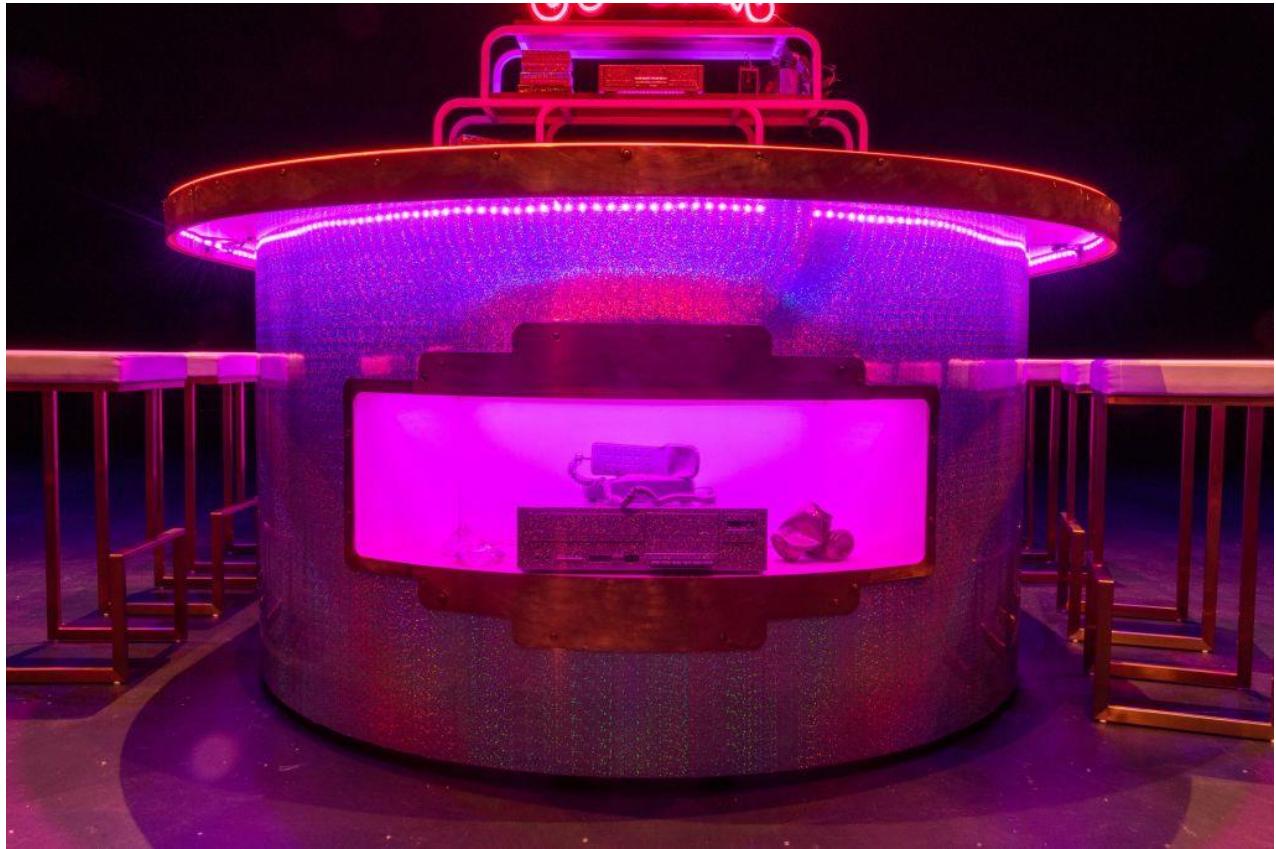
Photo by Paula Court

"The battle for queer nightlife is really the battle to dance in a space. That is what the fight for queer nightlife from the 20th century 'til now has been about: literally to be in a space to dance," they tell us. "That is reflected not only in the reality of the space but also in the lack of them, because of the speed at which any space gets co-opted by capitalism. So dance is really at the center of all of those things."

"The club is one of the most interesting ways that we allow ourselves to, as Maxine Waters would say, reclaim our time," he says. Contrary to the capitalist impulse to work and be productive, the club—as well as the Saturday Sessions—are all about pleasure, play and performance.

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Together, Sadie Barnette's installation and madison moore's activation work in concert to excavate the traces of queer nightlife history in order to celebrate and recreate the real magic of these spaces. Whether on Saturday during a session or on any other day of the week (where a glimmer of the DJ performances can be felt through captured audio), the installation honors the club as the ultimate creative hub or "laboratory," as moore calls it. Walking among the light of the bar and the remnants of last weekend's festivities, the exhibit recalls the nostalgia of kisses in the dark, and nights of unabashed confidence, euphoria and freedom— fleeting yet pivotal moments that all happened at the club.

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