



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 2023

Contact: Aneesa Shami Zizzo

Email: [info@thestudio203.org](mailto:info@thestudio203.org)

### ***Non-Binary Code***

Solo exhibition by Ben Cuevas

Curated by Aneesa Shami Zizzo

### **Studio 203**

3440 Motor Ave STE 203

Los Angeles, CA 90034

September 16–November 4, 2023

Open Saturdays, 1PM–4PM and  
by appointment

Opening Reception:

Saturday, September 16, 2023

from 3PM–7PM



Los Angeles, CA—Studio 203 is thrilled to announce Ben Cuevas’ first Los Angeles-based solo exhibition, *Non-Binary Code*, opening this September 16, 2023. This exhibition explores gender identity, textile-based practices and coded meaning through several large-scale knitted wall hangings and an interactive installation. In their latest series, Cuevas plays with the binary nature of the knit/purl stitch inherent to knitting. Translating the word “non-binary” into literal binary code, Cuevas then attributes the knit stitch to “1s” and the purl stitch to “0s,” creating a knitting pattern that forms the basis of each piece’s textural composition. This pattern is expanded upon and intuitively applied to each piece, becoming a mantra for Cuevas to follow while meditating on gender identity. The act of knitting both imbues and obscures the meaning of the word “non-binary” into the subsequent compositions, the literal translation passing through Cuevas’ subconscious, through their hands and into the work itself, manifesting the artist’s desire to transcend these binaries. Each of these pieces stands as a testament to non-binary voices; visual metaphors re-coding the concept of non-binary identity and gender itself.

The use of binary code also has an especially poignant connection to the history of textile production, in which the jacquard loom and punch card knitting were both used to develop the first computer languages. Using neutral-colored acrylic (yarn) on canvas for this series, Cuevas brings the work into dialogue with white paintings in minimalist abstraction. Inspired by the white grid paintings of Agnes Martin and her own resistance to the label of “female artist,” Cuevas embeds similar sentiments of transcending binaries in their own work. This series of stretched, handknit fabric offers a meditation on non-binary identity, and when hung collectively in a white-walled gallery, provides a pensive environment for viewers to gather. Cuevas has also constructed an interactive lounge of sorts, where viewers are invited to physically lay in a large pile of handknit pillows in the center of the gallery surrounded by the wall hangings. These pillows are rendered in the same non-binary stitch pattern and material as the wall hangings, further complicating the



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relationship between art object and functional object. Participants must don white hooded coveralls over their clothing when activating the lounge, neutralizing their own gender identity and providing a safe space for dialogue and contemplation. This literal resting place creates a neutral ground for viewers to take part in re-coding perceptions of gender—including the odalisque figure in Western painting.

*Non-Binary Code* is a queering of many binary hierarchies, complicating and challenging distinctions of art and craft, digital and handmade, male and female. Its social impact functions in several ways: to make non-binary and gender-nonconforming people feel seen, to educate cis folks on gender beyond the binary, and to facilitate conversation about gender identity.

This exhibition has been fiscally sponsored by SIMA Studios.

### **About Ben Cuevas**

Born in Southern California in 1987, Ben Cuevas is an artist whose work is rooted in concepts of otherness and intersectionality, inspired by their queer, non-binary, HIV-positive, and Latinx lived experience. Cuevas received their B.A. in mixed media, installation, and photography at Hampshire College in 2010. Cuevas' work has been shown across the US with exhibitions held at The Craft and Folk Art Museum in Los Angeles, Museum of the City of New York, The Leslie-Lohman Museum in New York City, and others. Several books and publications feature Cuevas's work, such as *DUETS: Ben Cuevas & Annie Sprinkle in Conversation*, published by Visual AIDS; *Queer Threads: Crafting, Identity, and Community*, edited by John Chaich and Todd Oldham. Acclaimed as a public speaker, Cuevas has given talks at institutions including, Brown University, Ohio State University, The Museum of Sex (NYC), and the Fire Island Artist Residency.

### **About Aneesa Shami Zizzo**

Aneesa Shami Zizzo (she/her) is an artist and arts-based researcher in Los Angeles upcycling materials to create fiber art. Her work references the sublime and world mythologies to evoke a sense of the collective unconscious within her imagery. Zizzo holds Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees in both Fiber and Art History from the Kansas City Art Institute. She is the co-owner and director of Studio 203, an artist-run space in Los Angeles promoting fiber art, craft-based work and social practices.

### **About Studio 203**

Studio 203 was established in February 2020 to collaborate with forward-thinking individuals and support fellow artists. We are an artist-run project space offering thoughtful programming through exhibitions, workshops and performances. Our mission is to provide a platform for artists that thrives beyond the sphere of traditional art hierarchies by featuring fiber art, craft-based work and social practice artists.