

**Maxwell Cloe:** *Forest cruise*. Cool. Let me pull this up. All right. Can you see everything okay?

**Carmelo Amenta:** I can, yes. Awesome.

**MC:** All right. So tell me more. I'm just gonna, I'll just kind scroll through as we talk, but just tell me more about *forest cruise*. How did this come together? What were your thoughts behind it? Anything extra?

**CA:** Yeah. so this was kind of the first major body of work that I made in grad school. It kind of has a funny story from how it started. I started it probably around late Fall of 2018. Before then I was doing these self-portraits and like starting to do still life again and I had a studio visit with this artist that I like love so much. I mean, I have multiples of their books and I was like showing them like the, some still lifes that I made and I showed them like my BFA thesis still life. That was like, at the time, like this Magnum Opus that I made and he said, "I hate this, get it outta my face." And I was like, "oh my God." And like, looking back at it now, it's super funny. And I, I think the photograph isn't as strong as I thought it was, and there's like really big issues with it. That was really humbling to hear and kind of made me think of what was working in that photograph, what wasn't working, and what can I do to make it better? It had these like tiny paper cutouts of myself that were like creating like these weird depth perceptions. I was like, "alright, let's do these." So I cut out maybe 10 body cutouts that you see and was like, "alright, what am I gonna do with these?" And like, I was reading about the, the *Mansfield Tearoom* at the time. It's this film by William E. Jones that was in the 1960s in Mansfield, Ohio, which is like fairly close to where I live. There was like this cruising site in this underground bathroom in like the center of the city. And there was this police bus that busted 67 men because there's like this like illegal policing where they recorded people hooking up to bust them and seven of them ended up killing themselves. Fifteen moved out of the state with their families. Like ten went to jail.

**MC:** Oh, wow.

**CA:** And it resonated with me a lot. I remember thinking about cruising spots and like how they're not really used as much anymore for like gay men and I was like, "that's really interesting. Like I wanna start taking - I'll take my photographs." I'm a queer body, right. Going into these like historical places where queer bodies would meet. So I would take these and go into these like cruising sites, following these notes that were left on like these old websites, seeing how they kind of worked and putting these paper cutouts, like into the trees, into the branches, folding them in on themselves. Muddy and dirty. I think this one that we're on right now is like probably one of my favorite ones from the series. And it's up in Toledo. I remember the spot distinctly, because there's like this weird story to it and I remember when I was making this work, I was like, "this is like the one place that I really wanna photograph." It's kind of changed since the last time I've been there. The only time I was there was like the day of like my senior prom and I hooked up with a guy there and I was like, "wow!" It would feel weird making work about a cruising site and not going to a cruising site. All the cruising I've actually ever been to, I was 18 years old. And like, before your prom, it's like your night of sex, but as a queer person - like I wasn't out at the time - it felt validating at the same time it felt scary. And I think this photograph kind of encapsulates the, the feelings that I felt at the time. It's like intimate, but it's closed off. It's kind of scared and it's doing everything I wanted to do. And, I think it's such a great photograph. It's doing everything that I wanted the work

to do. And like, I think some of the photographs in this body of work, aren't doing it just yet and maybe they never will.

**MC:** Very interesting. Very, very cool. Now these are excellent. And just the way it engages with the natural world is so interesting. That's something that's always been on my mind recently is how do humans interact with nature that isn't human. And it's neat because none of your things are like, they're like stark against the landscape, but I can also tell they've been molded in some ways to fit that the landscape they're in.