



## SCENE REPORTS

## You Need to Check Out Kansas City's Madcap Queer Party Scene

Young artists are building an inclusive oasis deep in conservative "flyover country."

By Blair Schulman; photos by Patricia Bordallo Dibildox | Oct 17 2018, 12:02pm

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Late one night this summer, at a warehouse in the city's industrial district, Kansas City's **queer youth** gathered for a funeral. But the costumed guests filing through a loading dock weren't there to mourn someone who's passed. They'd turned out in their morbid finest for the very last **Alter** party, a monthly event thrown by two young local artists, **Boi Boy** and **Bo**

Inside, the vast warehouse had been broken into curated party zones stuffed with furniture that looked plucked from a dead grandmother's living room. A couple of partiers reclined in a claw foot tub; an abundance of houseplants conjured a garden in hell. Cordoned off by black plastic, the dance floor resembled a serial killer's murder room—but with **way better, bisexual lighting**.

One partygoer wore a gas mask in tribute to auto-erotic asphyxiation, and black lace *mantillas* were abundant. Destry, 20, a soft-spoken attendee wearing green pigtails and a black latex smock, sat with their friend Kennedy, 21, in one of the breakout zones. For them Alter felt like “such a queer atmosphere. I feel 100 percent accepted. It's a place to just be myself.”



Christopher Ford





Guests at Alter "Death"



Bo Hubbard (left), Boi Boy (right)

explain. “Alter” was also a nod to altars in a religious context. Over the phone, Boi Boy (who uses they/them pronouns) said they think about clubs and nightlife as queer churches and sacred spaces, where people can gather around shared beliefs and worship their idols—even if those idols happen to be the Golden Girls, Beyoncé, and Lady Gaga. To fund Alter, the duo applied for and received a **Rocket Grant**, a local program supporting under-the-radar public art in Kansas City. They also received unrestricted funding from **MeowWolf**, the New Mexico art collective known for their **wild, Instagrammable “fun houses.”**



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At Alter’s “Death” party, Boi Boy and Hubbard stood nearly seven feet tall in their sky-high heels, donning getups that looked like a cross between deranged Kabuki and Victorian funeral. The party featured a lineup of performances curated by Zoey Shopmaker, aka **Btrfly**, and when it was Boi Boy’s turn to take the stage, they performed a lip sync to “Pure Imagination,” from the 1971 film *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. Boi Boy said they’d chosen the song because it’s simultaneously sad and happy, and its lyrics captured Alter’s spirit: “Come with me and you’ll be / In a world of pure imagination.”

The final party had the feel of a ritual cleansing. Boi Boy said it seemed like they “got spit out of a dream and need to take a breath, process what happened, and go forward.” They mused, “What is the direction of my studio practice, having spent a year in this unreal existence that’s physically and emotionally exhausting? How do I process this? How do I pass it off, taking me into whatever is next?”



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Bo Hubbard (left), Boi Boy (right)





Nat Harvie

Boi Boy grew up in Kansas City's Brookside neighborhood, a gentrifying enclave filled with grand old houses, and attended Catholic school (mostly because public schools in Kansas City, Missouri, **lost their accreditation**). Their mother works for the FBI, their father is retired from a job at a non-profit that revitalizes urban neighborhoods. It was a fairly typical white, middle class upbringing. But Boi Boy stood out from a young age. "I was a rather weird child," they say. "Anytime we had guests over, I would put on a blue silk nightgown, sit on a rocking horse made by my father, covered in mink, and [just] stare at everyone. I wouldn't talk, just silently judge everyone."



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One summer, Boi Boy's parents let them build a massive, 15-foot-tall sculpture out of garbage around a tree in their yard. It had a busted washer and dryer at its base and an old TV in the branches, plus an assortment of junk collected from

backyard sculpture and encouraged them to apply.

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In 2016, Boi Boy graduated from KCAI with a BFA in Fiber, and the tactile nature of that discipline bleeds into their other performance, event, and installation work: you want to touch everything. The idea for a big, public experience sprang from Boi Boy's undergraduate thesis, *Hole*, centered on 90s club kid culture. It was a yearlong process spent building different art installations, and it culminated with an exhibition-turned-party. People stuck around, and it became an opportunity "to interact with art, instead of hanging out for 15 minutes, then going on to the next show," Boi Boy said.





OhChristopher (Chris Bender)



Guests at Alter "Death"





Scott Knettle

Kansas City is the largest metropolis in Missouri, located on its western edge, straddling the border with Kansas and spilling city into both states. The surrounding region skews **older, whiter, and more Republican** than the nation at large. It's not the place you might expect to find a young, vibrant queer scene.



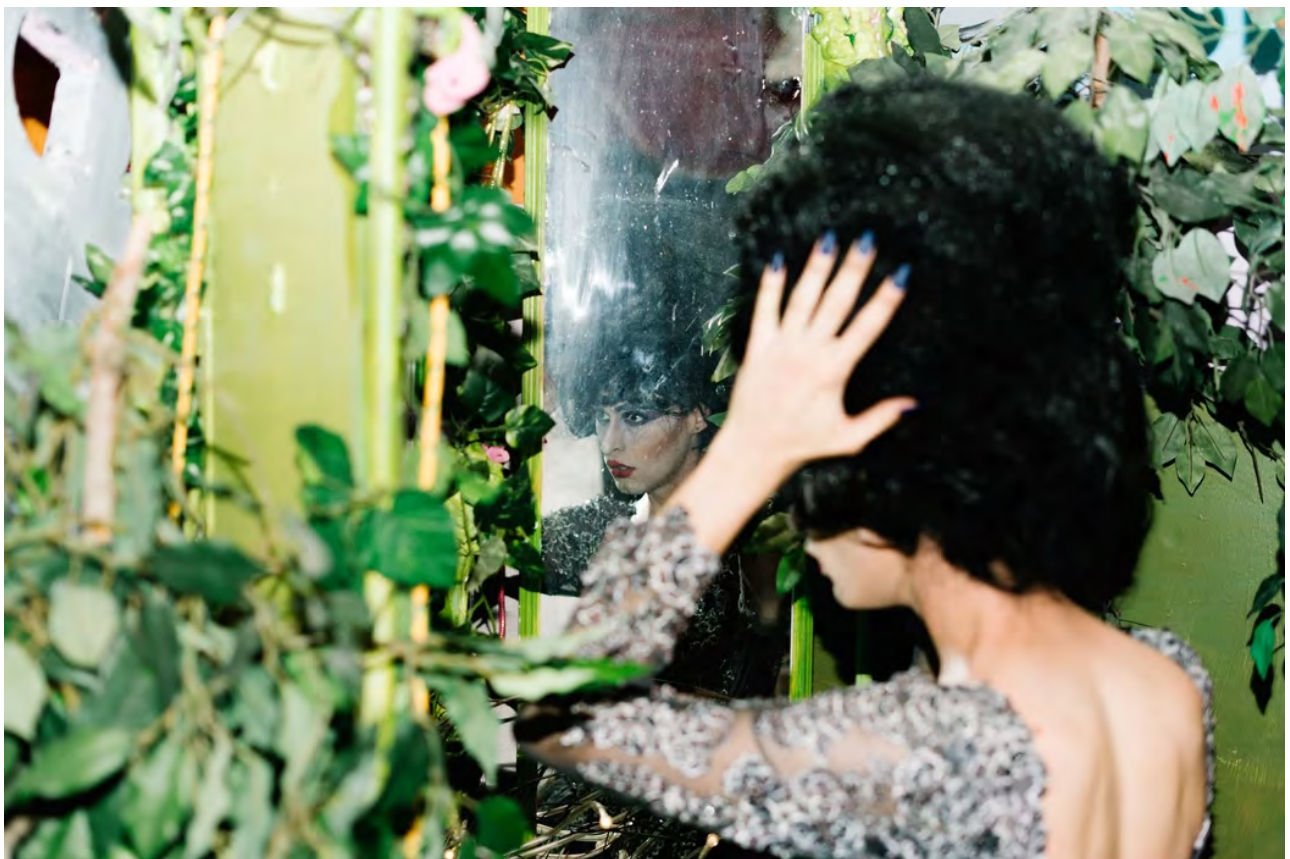
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"One interesting thing about Kansas City is that we have always had a wild, queer art scene beating under the surface, due in part to having [KCAI] in our backyard," actor and **Late Night Theatre** director **Ron Megee** explains. "We used to hide out in an abandoned bathhouse in the 1980s creating art."

He said what has changed, however, is that "LGBTQI artists can be out and loud, and they are raising the roof on the future of our city. This next generation of

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As with a lot of American cities, Kansas City has a history of discrimination and segregation. “Like this city, the queer community decided to draw a line down the middle and refused to erase it,” Megee added. The challenge for today’s queer youth is dismantling this legacy to fight for a more intersectional future.



Bo Hubbard





OhChristopher (Chris Bender)



Lueking Knabe

Boy said. “If you want to come to Alter and you’re sober, you’re more than welcome. [...] There’s no pressure to drink.”

Between Alter’s “Birth” and “Death,” the duo threw an alien-themed fete (with the tagline “Cum get abducted”); a party called “24/24,” where 24 artists were given 24 hours to transform the warehouse, all documented reality TV-style complete with confessionals; and a “Trash Ball,” decorated with all the garbage accumulated from previous events.



Partygoers at Alter "Death"



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Bo Hubbard



A guest at Alter "Death"

installations, so we created Alter,” Boi Boy said, adding it’s about “creating a space for yourself, and knowing more people will support that.”

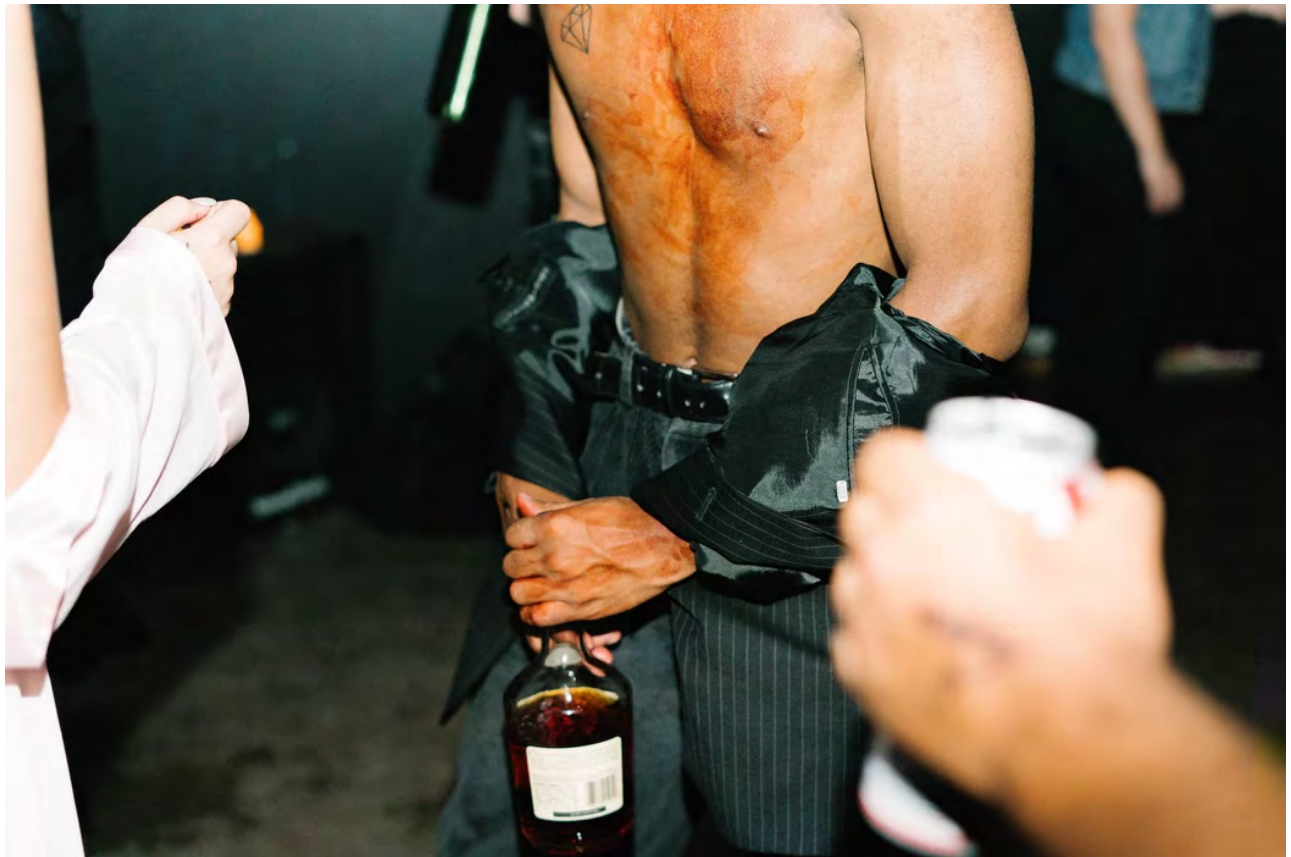


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In 2018, it’s easier to seek out an artistic tribe than it was in, say, the 1970s, when creatives flocked to coastal cities like New York and LA to find like-minded souls. Making friends all over the world is as easy today as opening Instagram. But IRL enclaves, like the one cultivated by Boi Boy and Hubbard in Kansas City, feel special and a little magical—especially in the “flyover states.” Boi Boy, in particular, seems a little like a modern Midwestern Rumpelstiltskin—a sprite with a knack for turning dust into glitter.









Boi Boy



Maura (Mar) Cecilia (center), BoiBoy (right)



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A guest at Alter "Death"



A guest at Alter "Death"

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2007, a guest at Alter "Death"



Guests at Alter "Death"





Bo Hubbard



Bo Hubbard (left), Pup Jenkins (right)



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