Gabriel Torres, Artist Statement:

I was born in the most conservative “Big City” of Colombia, as I grew up, I was constantly bullied by the femininity of my being, and the queerness of my expressive thought, which I know, is not, so indifference in feeling to most of us in our community; nonetheless, acting school marked a stop to the flow of the river where my gayness lived, at the age of sixteen, in acting conservatory, my acting teacher decided it was his job to make “a man out of me”, a year of psychological abuse later, he succeeded, not in making a man out of me, but rather in making of me, a man like him. A man who utilized of his physical appearance all Privilege and opportunity given by the society we are part of, a man who grew fond of such Privilege, of a voice in a room, of an opportunity to speak out, even when he wasn’t the most knowledgeable or the most adequate for. Subconsciously, this conflicted with the bearing of my own being, I also come from a town, where women are called “ Angry women” as to say, they are the ones who “Wear the pants of the house. I also come from the sacrifices of an undocumented immigrant who works as a demolition worker (And who joyfully enjoy such arduous physical labour), I come from sixteen women who raised children with incapable husbands, all with the discipline of vulnerability and love. As I grew older, and as most of us, encountered myself untangling the strings of my childhood, the strings of all altercations I’ve lived as a gay and queer individual, I grew more dissatisfied with the appearance of the man who I was made to be.

Last year marked a new cycle in my life, a cycle of difficulty, expansion and change, a year of unknotting rather than untangling; creating Haus of Dust to learn deeper about my history of substance abuse and the meaning of such in our community at large, well… broke me, it molded me like iron cast to blue fire… but it also healed me, it cracked open paths of my brainy labyrinth I have once closed hard because of fear and shame, and it brought a deeper question I had always asked, but never allowed myself to report upon: Why am I a man? And how and why do I live with the privileges of a man? What is my gender? And who am I to claim I am not a man, after I’ve taken so much Privilidge from such, who am I to ask these questions when so many of us in our community suffer from physical, sexual and psychological violence, who am I to do so
ilidge away from my “manly” role, when under such social constructs. Then a memory arrived, the memory of, ironically, the first monologue my abusive acting teacher ever made me perform, Ay Dias Chiqui, a show where Jose Manuel Freidel, one of the founders of Colombian Theater, An irreverent wild and free queer man, denounced the Colombian Government for the kidnappning and disappearing of our Drag Community, and for the violence and pain inflicted upon our trans community.

Living in a world where every day trans sex workers dissappear, living in a world where shame consumes our queerness leading us into substance abuse and disconnect, living in a world where sexuality deeply determines our behavior and relationships, and where those who look like me receive all privileges from the marginalization of queerness and the privilidges of such commodities of manhood, Ay Dias Chiqui is relevant. In this world we live in, I have to accept I am not fit to be this character, it is at the end, as bell hooks expresses in one of her essays, me wearing the divinity of such femininity, while being able to go back to all the comfort of my masculinity, and this I accept, and this I challenge, as to how and when, as a cisgender passing man, I can aid and serve, rather than absorb, queerness. So this brings me to why I am performing Ay Dias Chiqui, I am performing Ay Dias Chiqui, because it is time for me to put on the uncomfortability of unwinding all that was given in both blessing and curse to me, through the masculinity taught by my acting teacher. It is time to unwind and heal, open and construct, and release in such, the ability of my being to bear not the extremities of binary but the completeness of my identity, and because it is time that people like me, make acts to place in the shoes of those who are not like us, so that we may better serve, so that we may better aid, so that we may transform.

In times when the world is in deep chaos, when the void consumes us, when darkness stretches beyond horizons, the tiniest lights shine with the strength of a thousand suns, this I believe, and in this I trust, and so is the light of queerness, it is a small light, as potent as the universe itself, condensed and held, and waiting for the day, when either system or individual releases it in the celebration of all its decentralized colors, even then, the darknesses is still perceivable, it does not disappear, it is not romantic, it is rather more pressing, more present, and in these moments, I believe, is when the light consumes the darkness, and grows into nature. In Ay Dias Chiqui, we don’t escape the
e we are inflicted upon, but we also celebrate that even in such, we will be victorious, we will be glorious, we will be and will always be, by the power of love and integrity, wildly queerly free. I am willing and going through the process of acceptance I once needed to, the process of unwinding the systems of manhood passed upon me, I am willing to entangled the privileges of this, and reencounter the non-binary, non-gendered feminine present child I was once, the performance of this act, is an invitation to all of us, to inquire in these moments of turbulence, what the world is teaching us, and why it is asking of us expansion, why it is taking us through such deep waters, and what reflections we must make, and what privileges we must strip of, and how we may celebrate while observing in reality, the complexities of suffering as celebration encounters it.

Lastly, I want to deeply say, I am sorry, as a cisgender gay man I am sorry, that even though I am an immigrant and I am queer and I come from alternations of society, I have been oblivious to the sacrifices the radicality of freedom and queerness has given to my some of my friends, I also want to say in no way, I will commodify of the presentation of this project, neither during this reading or in any future presentations. This performance will be, in a very grateful way, an opportunity for those who look like me, to accept and release, for those who are like Chiqui, to purify and dream, and for myself to jump into the void and encounter who I truly am, and for me to finally break the chains of the manhood forced upon me, a manhood based in violence and rigidness, and not in the kindness of human tenderness and love.

* The fee given for this presentation will be split evenly to Scout Davis, our director and the other half to support an organization aiding a trans community. By presenting this project and acknowledging the privileges I hold as an artist and a maker, I am also vowing that in any iteration this project takes in the future and as an act of retribution and payment, I will donate any stipend, salary or profit made to organizations supporting the trans community. At this moment, I am extremely aware of my position as a trans body in a cisgender passing body, and I do not take this lightly.

Gabriel Torres