

For Immediate Release
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Tuesday Smillie, *Reflecting Light into The Unshadow*
July 1 - August 5, 2018
Opening reception, Sunday, July 1, 7-9pm

From July 1 - August 5, 2018, PARTICIPANT INC presents **Tuesday Smillie, *Reflecting Light into The Unshadow***. The exhibition includes a selection of banners, textile collages, as well as recent prints and works on paper that posit imagination as radical practice. This series takes Ursula Le Guin's 1969 breakout science fiction novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness* as a starting point, charting the subsequent evolution in Le Guin's thinking. In a series of meticulously rendered watercolors, Smillie depicts the covers of the myriad editions of Le Guin's book. One set of prints considers the author's own annotated versions of the text. In another, Smillie extrapolates Le Guin's strategies for potential use, tracing failure as inevitable and even necessary in reimagining social and societal structures. Alongside these, large-scale sewn and painted textile works such as *Sometimes* deploy the form of protest banners, emphasizing learning rather than teaching. As Johanna Fateman has noted of previous textile works in *Artforum*, "Tuesday Smillie's ornate, meticulously sewn and painted trans-liberation banners could not get their radical point across more lovingly."

Offering a form of public auto-critique around gender and identity, Le Guin's novel and subsequent texts stand as a strategic reference point for those attempting to envision and actualize new social and cultural configurations. The story is set on the planet Gethen. In the midst of an ice age, it is home to an androgynous human population in which bodies are inherently gender-fluid; a world without societal gender norms, without racially stratified or sexualized bodies. These subjects periodically go into heat and develop gendered, sexual characteristics in response to their flirtations. This gesture of radical imagining could be described in terms like 'world-making,' 'optimism against exhaustion,' 'minority performance,' 'queer futurity,' 'utopian force,' 'radical attempt,' and 'belonging' – not just words, but a 'not yet here' worth being here for, as described by José Esteban Muñoz.* As a young transwoman, Smillie was happy to fall into this world of malleable bodies, a world devoid of gendered social structures.

With *Reflecting Light into The Unshadow* Smillie claims *The Left Hand of Darkness* as a proto-transfeminist text, acknowledging Le Guin's use of imagination as a radical tool and her earnest attempt to evoke new, undetermined ways of being. Yet *The Left Hand of Darkness* is not without shortcomings. The novel's deconstruction of gender is often awkward and dated, such as Le Guin's insistent use of male pronouns for a world of ungendered people. *Reflecting Light into The Unshadow* acknowledges the simultaneity of these successes and failures, understanding them as a single gesture. Looking to Le Guin's creative practice as a model, *Reflecting Light into The Unshadow* invites a vigorous self-reflexive criticality, underscoring a willingness to imagine, to make mistakes, and to be accountable for those mistakes. Smillie does not ask for a flawless politic. Rather, she dares viewers to imagine how our world could be, to imagine other social configurations, and other ways of being.

Tuesday Smillie lives and works in New York. At the core of her work is a question about the individual and the group: the binary of inclusion and exclusion, and the porous membrane between the two. She has shown at the New Museum, the Rubin Museum, and Artists Space, with a forthcoming solo exhibition at the Rose Art Museum. Smillie is an Art Matters grantee and was inaugurated as the Museum of Transgender Hirstory & Art's first Resident Artist.

* José Esteban Muñoz, "Performing Disidentity: Disidentification as a Practice of Freedom," *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, 1999.

Image: Tuesday Smillie, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, 2010, 2015; 10 ¼ x 6 ½ inches; watercolor, gouache on paper

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PARTICIPANT INC is located at 253 East Houston Street, between Norfolk and Suffolk Streets on the LES, ground floor, wheelchair accessible. Subway: F to Second Avenue, Allen Street exit; or JMZ to Essex/Delancey.

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