

***imago of a queer artist\****

Levani (Levan Mindiashvili)

Commissioned by Artists Alliance Inc, with support from VIDA SIGNS

Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space

On View March 17 - May 13, 2023

***Education Materials***

**Exhibition Overview**

*\*imago of a global south-born, lenapehoking-based queer artist to investigate the material, cosmological, and psychological dimensions of existence; to collapse dichotomies and identity categories; to offer an iconography of pluriversal belonging; to inspire empathy, solidarity, and care.*

Created through a series of drawings, paintings, sculpture, and personal objects, *imago of a queer artist\** offers space for an expanded notion of queerness as the capacity for porousness, fluidity, and transformation. The exhibition's title is a deliberate tool providing a conceptual framework for the show and responding to overwhelming systems of categorization used in the art world (and in larger discussions around identity politics). The need to assign labels within conversations around representation, while sometimes intended to improve clarity and communication, often creates rigid and pre-conceived images to which one is forced to adhere.

Drawing upon their own research, as well as the work of writers, scientists, theorists, and thinkers who have served as companions along the way, Levani re-imagines, in community, a more holistic way of being in the world. As such, the story of *imago of a queer artist\**, will be told through a polyphony of voices that move between borders, generations, traditions, and time to propose a new state of existence—shifting, breaking down, reconstituting—to become whole.

A multitude of perspectives will be shared through documents, book launches, talks, and poetry readings brought together by the artist as a series of public programs, offered free of charge, within the space of the exhibition at Cuchifritos Gallery. A full calendar of events is available on the Artists Alliance website.

**Reference Terms**

**Imago:** i·ma·go /i' māgō, i' māgō/

noun

1.

ENTOMOLOGY

The final and fully developed adult stage of an insect, typically winged.

2.

## PSYCHOANALYSIS

An unconscious idealized mental image of someone, especially a parent, which influences a person's behavior.

**Global South:** Countries of the world that are regarded as having low-income, dense population, poor infrastructure, often political or cultural marginalization, and are typically located to the south of more industrialized nations. Most of humanity resides in the Global South.

**Lenapehoking:** The Lenape name for Lenape homeland, which spans from Western Connecticut to Eastern Pennsylvania, and the Hudson Valley to Delaware, with New York City at its center.

**Pluriversal:** A theory that reality is composed of a plurality of entities. Jakob Johann von Uexküll, a Baltic German biologist from the late 19th to 20th century published the book "Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere" (1909), introducing the idea that animal species perceive their environments subjectively and implying that there are multiple subjective realities coexisting in an ecosystem.

**Queer Ecology:** A perspective that views nature, biology, and sexuality through the lens of queer theory. It objects to what it considers heterosexist notions of nature, drawing from science studies, ecofeminism, environmental justice, and queer geography.

**Instar:** A developmental stage of arthropods, such as insects, between each molt until sexual maturity is reached.

**Pupa:** An insect in its inactive immature form between larva and adult, e.g. a chrysalis. "When a caterpillar enters its cocoon, it releases enzymes that dissolve most of its bodily tissues, liquifying itself to be rebuilt; a body breaks down and a new one forms from the same material. Liquidity, of course, has an economic association, referring to assets being made liquid in times of crisis, or growth." (from "Metamorphosis," a film series by the Institute of Queer Ecology). Depending on the species, the pupa may be suspended under a branch, hidden in leaves, or buried underground.

**Syzygy:** The nearly straight-line configuration of three or more celestial bodies. The full moon and new moon phenomena occur when the earth, sun, and moon are in syzygy.

**Q000\_C43H66N12O12S2:** The molecular formula of Oxytocin.

**Oxytocin:** A hormone released in response to the activation of sensory nerves during labor, breastfeeding, and sexual activity. In addition, oxytocin is released in response to low-intensity stimulation in response to touch, stroking, and warm temperature.

## **About the Artist**

**Levani (Levan Mindiashvili)** is a Tbilisi-born, New York-based transdisciplinary artist. They hold MFA from Buenos Aires National University of Arts (IUNA) and BFA from Tbilisi State Academy of Arts. Levani's previous exhibitions include "Nested in a Place of Becoming" at Kunsthalle Tbilisi, Georgia; "what color is the Black Sea?" at Marisa Newman Projects NY; "Levani's Room: HOME," at Spring Break Art Show NY; "I should have kissed you longer" at TAF Tbilisi; "Here" at the Georgian National Museum, Mestia; "in-Between" at Silk Museum, Tbilisi; "In Search of the Miraculous" at NADA Miami; "WHO IS PLUTO" at SubtitledNYC, Brooklyn; "The earth leaked red ochre" at Miriam Gallery, Brooklyn; 5th AIM Biennial at the Bronx Museum of the Arts; Fridman Gallery, NY; "Sanctuary" at the Socrates Sculpture Park, Queens, NY; 1st Immigrant Artists Biennial at Elizabeth Foundation for Arts, NY; Below Grand, NY; 7th Beijing Biennial at National Art Museum of China; "two trees and a leaf" at East Slovak Gallery, Kosovo; "Aesthetics of Repair" at Tartu Art Museum, Estonia; BRIC Biennial, Vol 3.; and others.

Levani is a recipient of the Artist Alliance Inc. LES Studio Program residency, Two Trees BSI fellowship, Socrates Sculpture Park Fellowship, Peter S. Reed Foundation Grant, NYFA IAMP fellowship, AIM Fellowship of the Bronx Museum of the Arts, Creative Times X Summit Grant, NARS Foundation Studio Residency, FABLES Commission grant for Public Art Projects from National Endowments for Arts, and Movistar Arte Joven emerging artist prize. Their work was featured in publications Frieze, Art in America, BOMB, Brooklyn Rail, HYPERALLERGIC, ArtAsia Pacific, ARTPAPERS, The Art Newspaper, Pin-UP Magazine, OSMOS, Observer, Art Margins, Cool Hunting, Artnet, Vogue Ukraine, Forbes Ukraine, Baltic Worlds, and others.

Levani's work is in public collections of the National Art Museum of China, Beijing; Georgian National Museum, Mestia; and Tbilisi Silk Museum, Georgia.

## **Recommended Questions for Discussion**

### ***Before Your Visit***

- (1) What are a person's evolution phases? What separates them from each other? And what stage are you in now?
- (2) What factors and/or individuals have influenced your evolution?

### ***During Your Visit***

- (1) When a caterpillar enters its cocoon, its body breaks down, and a new one forms from the same material during its pupa phase. Have you had a pupa phase? What would a pupa phase look like for you?
- (2) What do you think the artist is trying to say about desire?

### ***After Your Visit***

- (1) Has this show challenged your assumptions about the nature of human interaction and evolution?
- (2) Are your thoughts about change and growth the same as before you came to the show? Or is it different?

- (3) Is there any new information you learned from the show?
- (4) Is there anything the show made you question, or want to know more about?

**Artist Narrative**



***epilogue:prologue***, 2021 color pencil, pen, ink, marker on newsprint, walnut frame.

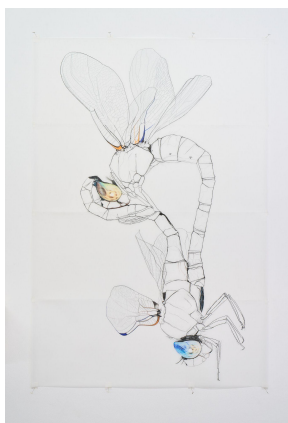
I made that drawing on January 1st of 2021 while spending semi-lockdown in Florida with Lucas. It's a drawing of two palm tree buds knocked down by the wind right when they were about to start blooming. A friend of ours suggested we be more intentional on the first day of the new calendar year - what would your first artwork of the year be? She asked.

I found them lying on the ground while walking in the sunset, and they absolutely looked like two alien eggs hatching. Witnessing that moment of opening - frozen in time-was something that deeply struck me and became the beginning of everything I have made since. It's very much linked to COVID - which to me is also the beginning and the end at the same time.



***instar***, 2023 stainless steel sanitizing box, syringe and glass beakers from 1980's, gauze, dry flowers, aragonite, snowflake obsidian, faux pearl, atlantic ocean red algae, soy wax casts of human genitalia, stone shelf.

An instar is a developmental stage of insects, between each molt, until sexual maturity is reached. Arthropods must shed the exoskeleton in order to grow or assume a new form. It's a regular feature of their life cycles - this in-between, transitional state. Objects that constitute my sculpture are from this transitional time-state: from late Soviet-era stainless steel medical objects (when I was born) to current wax casts of human genitalia, from crystalizing stones to drying algae from the Atlantic Ocean. This sculpture - as the entire exhibition - invokes this expanded idea of humans as a complex ecosphere of the material and the affective; "instar" is basically my way of showing what "human" means to me.



***imago of dragon flies mating***, 2023 color pencil on mylar.

When discussing the imaginal stage, the first examples are always the butterflies. I wanted to explore past the obvious and started looking into other winged insects.

Fascinating facts about dragonflies are endless, and I'll share a few: Fossils of very large dragonfly-like insects (wings spreading over 70 cm), sometimes called griffinflies, were found 325 million years ago (Mya); even there's another theory believing those are the actual dragonflies of today - reduced in size because of the environmental adaptation. Dragonflies are aquatic nymphs for almost two years before moving to the

ground to reach adulthood. They are predatory both in the aquatic nymphal and adult stages. And because their entire structure is a true wonder of engineering, their hunting success rate is over 95% - higher than any other predatory organism.

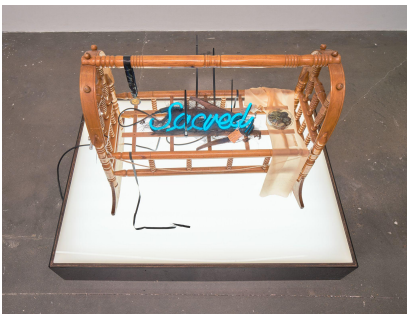
Talking about the image - there's no contemporary technology (at least publicly accessible) that can recreate their vision. Each of their eyes is a compound of over 20,000 eyes covering almost the entire head surface, giving them two almost complete 360-degree vision. Males have two genitalia - primary and secondary- and their mating process starts with self-insemination. And aesthetically speaking, mating of the dragonflies is an incredibly compelling ritual to witness.



**emergence**, 2023 violet neon.

The color violet is reached by mixing two primary colors - red and blue - into the new one with the vast possibility of the spectrum. That's exactly how I see transitioning from the exhausted binary systems into the new way of being. Interpretations of the symbol itself by the viewers ranged from the unknown alphabet and explosion, to the sign of aries, moon, the fountain, and culmination... And all of them are true to me.

The literal translation of "lullaby" in Georgian is "the song of violets." Violets are also the first sign of spring, the time when exhibition takes place.



**pupa**, 2023 Georgian crib, aqua neon "Sacred," artist's birth tag, The Year of Children Medallion on iridescent latex, latex fabric, Black Sea shore palm tree skin, glass petri-dish with black sea sand and shells, artist's wisdom tooth, golden rutile quartz, shungite, pyrite, rough black tourmaline, selenite, "infinite" and asterite serpentines, turquoise, blue calcite and fern, zip-ties, stainless steel lab-hardware, aluminum rod, LED light tubes, plexiglass, plywood.

To me, the sacred is this awareness of the continuum where the burdens and weights of the "past" and "future" collapse into the wholeness of being. It is the awakening of one's entire constitutive matter - all visible and invisible particles - into its most primal state. And if one accepts being part of its unstoppable current, one can step into the joys and wonders of the preciousness of their own being - of being alive. Accepting the sacred is a very courageous and liberating act of belonging. It's like dying and being born over and over again into the present moment of the continuous expansion of being.

*pupa* follows the same logic as *instar*: time-space-cultural specificity of the objects, a hand-carved crib, for example, or the hospital tags of the newborn, the wisdom tooth (DNA), or the sand from the Black Sea shore adds the historical, political, psychological, geographical specificity to the work, which many viewers can relate to. For me, it's not about sharing "my" experience; it's more about sharing this collective experience. Important fact is, of course, that a pupa is an insect in its cocoon phase when almost all the larval tissue is liquified, and the new body is regenerated. We all who find ourselves at the fringes of patriarchal normativity are continuously going through the same process of re-inventing ourselves. What was interesting for me, though, are these sac-like structures within the larva called imaginal discs - that, in the process of regeneration, become external structures of the head, thorax, limbs, and genitalia. All the objects in *pupa* - including the sacred- are these fundamental, imaginal discs that make one's existence possible.



*imago (syzygy\*)*, 2023 ink and black pencil on paper, mylar, 22 square feet of latex fabric, acrylic, enamel, liquid mirror, violets, pyrite, mirth, incense, blue calcite, blue kyanite, black sea sand and shells, earth, tape, aluminum frames.

Adult humans, on average, carry some 22 square feet of skin. *imago (syzygy\*)*, and every piece in the show, reimagines the "humannes" liberated from the heteronormative concept of gendered, racialized, and politicized bodies. I'm attracted to the idea of "human" as a continuously changing complex compound of multiple intelligences and matter, inhabited by and within millions of life forms. Just the fact that the human body contains only ten percent of the human cells, and the rest

of the ninety percent of our body are fungi and bacteria that exists in the world outside of the body as well, is truly fascinating to me.

### **Syllabus**

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands = La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books, 2022.

Metamorphosis (film). Institute of Queer Ecology, 2020.

Lispector, Clarice, et al. *The Passion According to G.H.* Penguin Books, 2014.

Lispector, Clarice. *The Hour of the Star*. NEW DIRECTIONS, 1977.

Lorde, Audre. *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*. Kore Press, 2000.

Miller, Alice. *The Body Never Lies: The Lingering Effects of Cruel Parenting*. W.W. Norton, 2006.

Pollack, Rachel. *The Shining Tribe Tarot*. Llewellyn Publications, 2001.

### ***Accessibility Information***

#### **Visitors Who Are Deaf or Partially Hearing**

Most of the exhibition is made up of physical, visual artworks that do not incorporate audio as part of the viewing experience and should be able to be enjoyed by all audiences.

#### **Facility Accessibility**

Baby strollers are welcome in Both Essex Market and Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space. Both facilities are wheelchair accessible and service animals on a leash are permitted.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about accessing Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space or attending programs, please contact Jodi Waynberg at [jodi@artistsallianceinc.org](mailto:jodi@artistsallianceinc.org) or call 212-420-9202.

#### **Restrooms**

Restrooms for visitors are located on the second floor of Essex Market, which is accessible via elevator or stairs.

### **Visitors on the Autism Spectrum**

The current exhibition gallery includes the main room and a smaller room that can be accessed through the opening in the left-hand corner of the gallery. Both spaces include large street-facing windows. In the gallery, there are artworks that implement visual and auditory, interactions.

Please refer to the following pages for a visual guide to accessing Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space.

## Visual Guide: Accessing Cuchifritos Gallery

Hello, today we will be going to visit the Cuchifritos Gallery in Essex Market at 88 Essex Street in New York City. Walking down the street, you may be able to recognize us! At Artists Alliance Inc., we show contemporary artworks by new and emerging artists.



Our Cuchifritos gallery is located inside Essex Market, where there are a lot of shops indoors. This means that there are many people walking and touring the shops, as well as the people who run them. You will most likely hear the sounds of chopping from the vendor's food prep, the smell of food, and the voices of people talking and interacting with the stores. It is a comfortable social space, and entering our gallery is just as open and welcoming.



This is the entrance to the Essex Market facing Broome Street between Essex and Norfolk streets.



Once we enter through the glass doors, we should head to the right. We can check if we're heading in the right direction by following the vendors: Top Hop, Peasant Stock, Puebla Mexican Food, Cafe D'Avignon, Dominican Cravings, and Zerza (in that order). Once you hit Zerza, you can take a left turn and we should be right next to the gallery!



Now, we can enter the gallery through the glass doors (which are always open during visiting hours!). There will be someone at the desk to greet you, but we can freely walk around the space to see what we like. On the desk you will find a stack of documents, which you are welcome to take with you or use while you're in the gallery. This print-out includes background information about the exhibition, the artist's name, and details about the work on view.

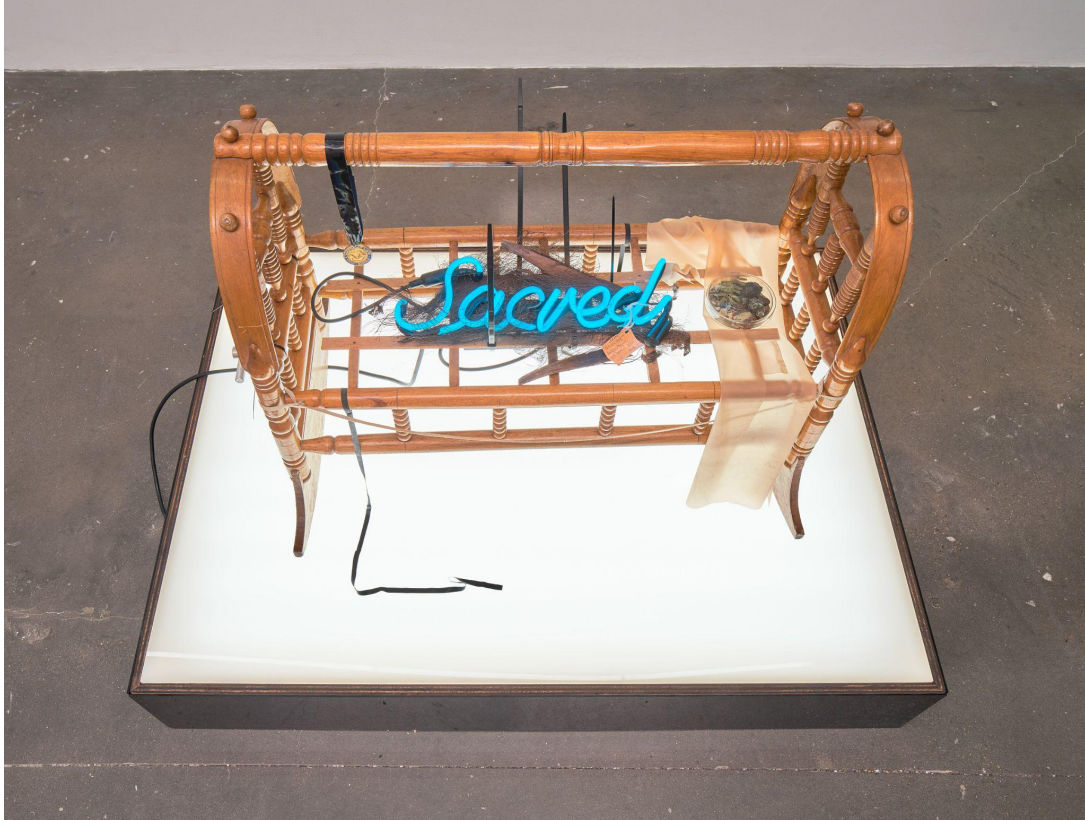
When you enter the gallery, you may notice the bright lights shining from some of the works in the show.





When you first enter the room, we're greeted by *emergence* by Levani. This work is a 20 x 20 inch, violet neon light in the shape of the Aries zodiac symbol to honor the moon and its importance to the artist's cosmology (branch of physics and metaphysics dealing with the nature of the universe); Levani was born under a full moon and their moon is in Aries, the first astrological sign in the zodiac, spanning between March 21 to April 19.

The neon light might be a little too overwhelming at times, and when that happens we can move on to the other artwork or take a few steps back and take a quick break outside before we explore the rest of the gallery.



To the right of *emergence*, we can see *pupa*, a piece by Levani that features a Georgian crib on top of a light box with an aqua neon “Sacred” sign on top. In addition to the sign on top of the crib, we can see miscellaneous objects that relate to Levani’s childhood.

The light box or the neon blue “sacred” might be a little too overwhelming at times, and when that happens we can move on to the other artwork or take a few steps back and take a quick break outside before we explore the rest of the gallery.



When first entering the smaller room in the gallery, we can see the reflection of another neon work in Levani's *Q000\_C43H66N12O12S2(\*)*, a hand-painted liquid mirror and enamel piece. *here* is a yellow neon light in the shape of the word "here" in Georgian.

The neon light might be a little too overwhelming at times, and when that happens we can move on to the other artwork or take a few steps back and take a quick break outside before we explore the rest of the gallery.

## Guide to the Bathrooms

To enter the bathrooms, we can head back toward the entrance we came through in the very beginning. Just beyond that, we should be able to see a staircase leading up to the mezzanine. We can walk up these, or...

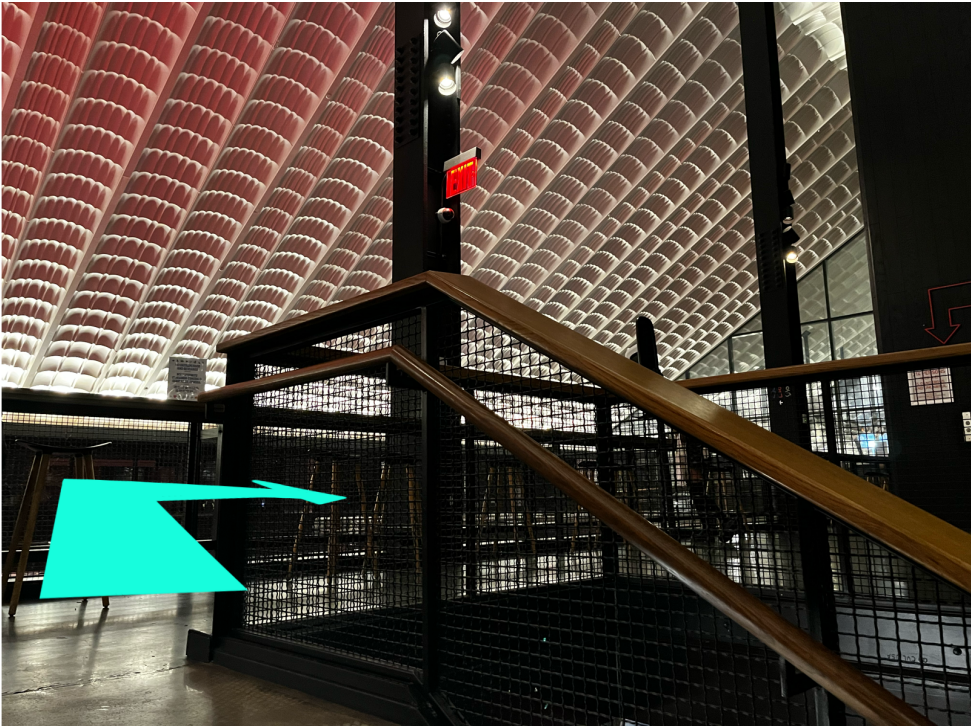


We can use the elevators, which you might have noticed on the right side when we first entered the market.

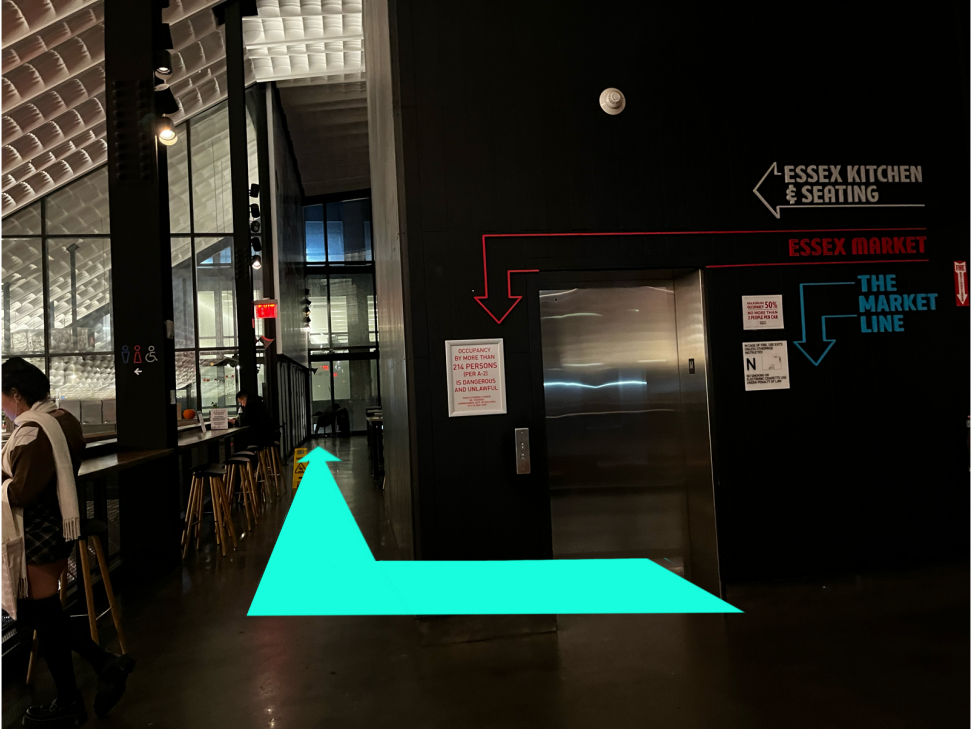




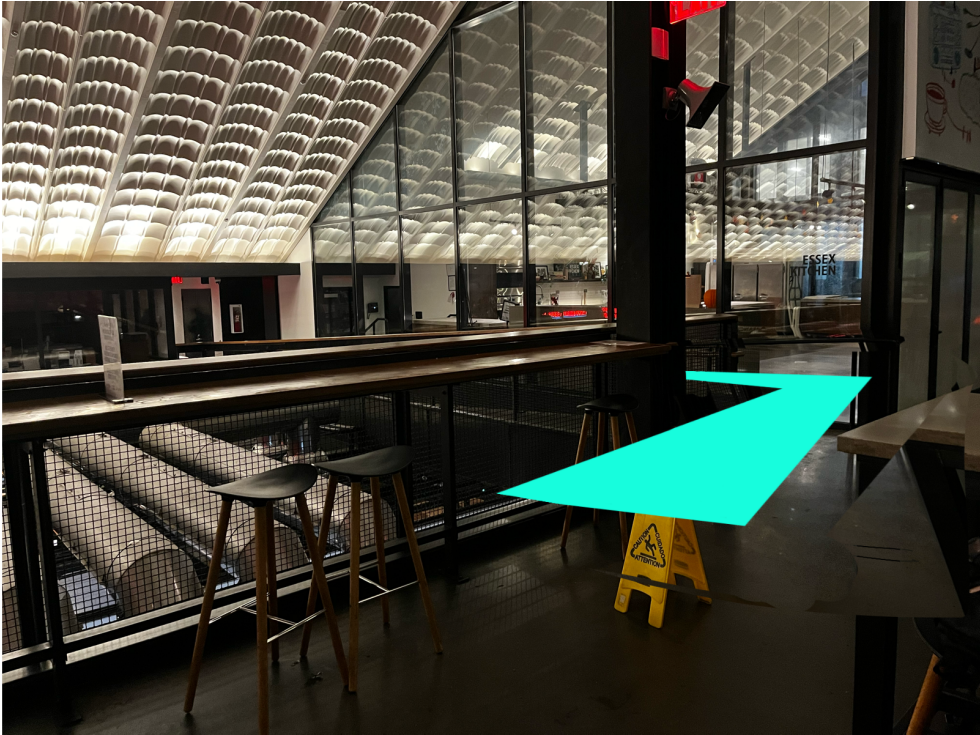
If we take the stairs up to the mezzanine, we can head toward the right.



If we take the elevator, we should make two right turns



Then, we should keep walking along the counters and stools to the left, until we see a long, declining ramp. We can follow it straight down until we reach the end of it by the multiple doors and a glowing exit sign overhead.



Once we reach this area, you can take a right turn toward the hand sanitizer dispenser.



There are the bathrooms! The one on the left with red is for women, and the one on the right with blue is for men. To use them, you will need to put in the bathroom code: 80220#



When we're ready to leave, we can exit through the gallery doors and retrace our steps to the large glass doors of the market. Or you can explore the rest of the amazing Essex Market shops and installments as well!

I hope we can meet again at the Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space.

