

# Lisa Cooley (/)



Josh Faught; *Winter (Ann Rule)*; 2011; Aromatic cedar, lavender, potpourri pies, hand felted wool, glue, the entire oeuvre of Ann Rule to date, ceramic book ends, Jacquard woven PFLAG newsletter, political

pin, josh's home made lavender lip balm; 66 x 51.5 x 37 inches



Josh Faught; *Winter (Ann Rule)*; 2011; Aromatic cedar, lavender, potpourri pies, hand felted wool, glue, the entire oeuvre of Ann Rule to date, ceramic book ends, Jacquard woven PFLAG newsletter, political pin, josh's home made lavender lip balm; 66 x 51.5 x 37 inches





Josh Faught; *Winter (Ann Rule)*; 2011; Aromatic cedar, lavender, potpourri pies, hand felted wool, glue, the entire oeuvre of Ann Rule to date, ceramic book ends, Jacquard woven PFLAG newsletter, political pin, josh's home made lavender lip balm; 66 x 51.5 x 37 inches

Winter is a weave. Well, at least it is a component of a technique developed in Colonial American days. Its cozy companion technique is called summer. The origin of the summer and winter weave, according to early-twentieth-century-weaving expert Mary M. Atwater, a proto-Martha Stewart who popularized American crafts for homemakers in the first half of the twentieth century, is “Possibly the fact that a piece woven in this manner is usually dark on one side and light on the other may have seemed to some fanciful person to suggest the seasonal changes.”[1]

Fanciful is such a conspicuous term, one that suggests how the seemingly harmless arena of the handcrafted is capable of powerfully elastic meaning. Josh Faught has used the textile technique metaphorically—not figuratively—to title a pair of sculptures. *Winter (Ann Rule)* (2011), which is the subject of this writing, and *Summer (Dona Z. Meilach)* (2012). These works are abundant, furniture-like, mixed-media projects that interlace conceptual and emotional associations. Light and dark are moods as well as visual motifs. Summer and winter aren’t opposites, but seasons that simply recalibrate the material and psychological mixtures of how we negotiate warmth and chill.

Each of these sculptures, which are essentially multi-sided armoires—or in the parlance of their queer subtext, closets—aggregates a wide variety of elements that recuperate and question the value of craft techniques and homespun means of emotional support.

After the custom-made wooden structures themselves, the largest components of these works are textile panels woven on jacquard looms. (They don’t actually employ the summer and winter technique.) The panels are enlarged cover pages of 1995 newsletters from PFLAG, a national organization founded in 1972 as a support group for Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.[2] This stalwart organization endures into the era of marriage equality, yet its role in gay culture is currently less urgent. Its role now is a homespun, localized, community-based support network, a subject that echoes in Faught’s work.

The artist, who chose the 1995 newsletter because it was the year he came out, is interested in a sense of ambivalence about the organization. He went to meetings himself, “and it was my worst nightmare,” he recalls. “It was a support group that caused more ennui and self-loathing than fostering self-love.” [3]

*Summer* (Dona Z. Meilach), which features the June PFLAG newsletter, is the dark side—the text reverses out of black—while *Winter* (Ann Rule), which features the January 1995 newsletter, came first, and features black type on a white ground. The content is standard newsletter stuff—new member welcomes, neighborhood news items—though the specifics are redacted with ominous black bars, as if the material were incriminating evidence. This visual decision evokes homosexuality’s outsider position and history in relation to the law, as well as a sense of public humiliation. It’s sensitive stuff.

This dynamic of positive and negative, hope and disappointment, courses through the piece. The seasonal reference to winter suggests both the harshness of weather and the coziness of a home interior. The parenthetical reference to the author Ann Rule, whose entire oeuvre of crime books is arranged on a shelf within the piece, suggests curling up by the fireplace under a homemade afghan blanket with a page-turner. Rule is legend for her true detective skills. She wrote for the like-titled magazine and also worked for the Seattle Police Department. But she is most famous for her bestselling 1986 biography of notorious serial killer Ted Bundy. That book, *The Stranger Beside Me*, stemmed from her experience innocently working alongside the murderer at a suicide prevention hotline, and finding him to be “kind, solicitous, and empathetic.” [4]

Faught taps the narrative power of this deception—the not-so-fictional idea that your seemingly sweet next-door neighbor is actually a monster. Early in his career, Faught utilized stacks Agatha Christie mysteries, tales of murder within genteel settings, as another example of this duplicity, to create sculptural forms. These were pillars that have a core of despicable acts, murder among them.

The mannered milieu of these books is expressed in *Winter* with objects associated with the American middle class. Since all of Rule’s novels are contained in the armoire, it becomes something of a literary emergency kit, with plenty to read in a pinch. Faught tucks in bonus gift items that

can actually be used in case of disaster. There is a fabric-topped pot of homemade lip balm and a jar of “Russian Tea,” an aromatic blend of Tang, unsweetened powdered tea, and Crystal Light lemonade—add hot water (and a shot of bourbon) and it becomes a fortifying beverage. He similarly uses other aromatic elements of the cedar chest and lavender, here stored in stacks of fabric “pies,” a scented craft innovation that you can make yourself, in the comfort of your own home.

Cedar and lavender are natural means of warding away pests, a homey defense against an insect infestation. (The artist, it seems, had a moth problem around the time he made this piece.) There’s a secret drawer that extends from the base of *Winter* full of cedar chips, a storehouse of scent. The sculpture even comes with a vial of lavender oil to maintain its utilitarian effectiveness.

Faught taps the sense of generosity communicated by various crafted objects, yet for art audiences trained to look for deeper meanings, these also communicate a sentimentality that is viewed as naïve. Potpourri pie is only so effective, and harsher odors of daily life, of killers, inevitably poke through.

*Winter (Ann Rule)* was part of Faught’s 2012 exhibition at Lisa Cooley called *Longtime Companion*. The title refers the first mainstream movie release to address the effects of AIDS. The plot of the maudlin 1989 film concerns a group of gay men, white and privileged, whose seemingly idyllic lives are interrupted by the virus—another version of a seemingly stable social world pierced by a horror. In the course of the feature-length, most of the characters succumb to complications of the disease.

The film’s narrative’s aims might be viewed as a tidy package to contain unseemly conditions and emotions. Yet there are pitfalls. Vincent Canby reviewed the film in *The New York Times*, calling it “instructional, mannerly and, with the exception of a couple of scenes and performances, insipid.” He goes on to suggest that the film might be a deflecting device: “It’s a film for people who believe that it’s enough that the subject has been raised. Let the fury, outrage and sense of desolation be expressed by others.”[5]

Faught was ten years old when the film came out, and he saw it not long before he created the exhibition. His interest in was in the euphemism “longtime companion,” a phrase that would essentially out a person when used in an obituary. The idea resonated for Faught’s generation,

which entered the world with AIDS an established component of sexuality. The virus also injected a sense of fear into popular forms. “Lifetime movies are always about worlds falling apart,” he says.[6]

## WINTER (ANN RULE)

By Glen Helfand

The sculpture fits on that equation. The custom unit is body-like, a self-contained universe, a structure that can fit two, maybe three. It’s about relationships between people, and objects. There’s the shelf for Ms. Rule and her library, and the felted wool representations of two flannel shirts in the closet. This is a solid object that stakes its place in the center of the room, emitting its powerful, prophylactic scent. *Winter*’s fanciful provocations and textures generate more than enough heat to survive the season.

[1] Atwater, Mary Meigs. “‘Summer-and-Winter’ Weave on Six Harnesses.” Nd.

[https://www.cs.arizona.edu/patterns/weaving/articles/tw\\_3\\_1-02.pdf](https://www.cs.arizona.edu/patterns/weaving/articles/tw_3_1-02.pdf)  
(<http://t.ymlp73.com/umqsaraejubsaaawmsaaaue/click.php>)

[2] <http://community.pflag.org/>  
(<http://t.ymlp73.com/umquapaejubsavawmsanaue/click.php>)

[3] conversation with the artist, 9 November 2015

[4] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ann\\_Rule](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ann_Rule)  
(<http://t.ymlp73.com/umqealaejubsazawmsapaue/click.php>)

[5] Canby, Vincent. “Manhattan’s Privileged and the Plague of AIDS.” New York Times, 11 May 1990. Web 10 November 2015.

[http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?](http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9C0CE6DD103CF932A25756C0A966958260)  
[res=9C0CE6DD103CF932A25756C0A966958260](http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9C0CE6DD103CF932A25756C0A966958260)  
(<http://t.ymlp73.com/umqmaoejubsaxawmsacaue/click.php>)

[6] Conversation with the artist, 9 November 2015

## Lisa Cooley (/)