

Tourmaline

born 1983, Roxbury, Massachusetts

lives and works in Miami, Florida

Pollinator 2022

single-channel video with sound, 5:08 mins

Score by Danni Venne

Courtesy the artist and Chapter NY, New York

Pollinator invites audiences to become calibrated to the ‘ongoingness’ of life. The metaphor of a pollinator as both a generator and receiver is carried by Tourmaline’s recurrent presence throughout the work that otherwise weaves together archival and contemporary footage.

Pollinator opens with the artist walking, reflectively, through the Brooklyn Botanic Garden and the Edwardian period rooms at the Brooklyn Museum, New York, before seamlessly introducing archival footage from July 1992 of Marsha P. Johnson’s memorial, and excerpts from home videos by Tourmaline of her late father, George Gossett, singing The Cisco Kid 1972 by War. Together, the layering of footage and score, which uses the reverberations of NASA designed turning forks to implicate the body, presents concepts of transference, interconnection, and transcendence.

The raw energy from the footage of Johnson’s widely attended memorial following her death on 6 July 1992, invites reflection on her legacy. Johnson’s lifeforce is beautifully reflected in the closing prayer offered by Reverend Karen Ziegler;

Marsha taught us not to be ashamed, and Marsha taught us to turn up the volume. Our hope is that as we go from this place. We will not be ashamed of who we are, we will turn up the volume, and we will be more fully ourselves. We pray that you open up your hearts and minds more and more, because of who she was and who she will always be.

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Transcendent series 2022–2025

far right to left: coming about 2022–25, a flower that lives forever is a flower inside of me 2022–25, just here for the party 2022–25, Calibrated. 2022–25, Clock Those Dreams 2022–25

dye sublimation print

79.5 × 80.0 cm (framed)

Courtesy the artist and Chapter NY, New York

Commissioned by the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), Melbourne, 2025

Transcendent series is a new suite of seven photographs shot in Venice, Italy, created in dialogue with the new video, A Flower That Lives Forever 2025. The series reimagines the spiritual power Marsha P. Johnson harnessed from the entity of the river throughout her life.

Johnson often referred to her afterlife as ‘crossing the River Jordan’—which is a reference to a Biblical story signifying new beginnings—and she sought out rejuvenating moments along the river systems of New York City. The necessity of finding a grounding presence is revealed through Tourmaline’s research that situates Johnson’s lived experience within interlocking systems of oppression—racism, transphobia, ableism and economic injustice—and the lengthy historical context of slavery, whereby Black people’s value has been judged through a narrow lens of productive versus lazy.

Channeling Johnson’s defiance in prioritising joy and freedom, Transcendent series depicts the artist in gorgeous fashion-forward, custom looks, owning her moment. Styled by longstanding collaborator, Claire Sullivan—who has worked with artists including Lady Gaga, Charli XCX and Rosalía—Tourmaline asserts beauty as a powerful tool for sustaining the energy to meaningfully change with the world, as well as a context where hopes and dreams can play out immediately. She depicts herself enlivened in states of bliss, serenity, joy and relaxation, continuing the artist’s interest in dually conveying and practicing the values that inform her work.

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Transcendent series 2022–2025

left to right: Far and Away 2022–25, Not the star on the chart

2022–25

silver gelatine print

79.5 × 80.0 cm (framed)

Courtesy the artist and Chapter NY, New York

Commissioned by the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art

(ACCA), Melbourne, 2025

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Transcendent series 2022–2025

right to left: Not the star on the chart 2022–25, Far and Away 2022–25

silver gelatine print

79.5 × 80.0 cm (framed)

Courtesy the artist and Chapter NY, New York

Commissioned by the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art
(ACCA), Melbourne, 2025

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A Flower That Lives Forever 2025

single-channel video with sound, 5:39 mins

Courtesy the artist and Chapter NY, New York

Commissioned by the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), Melbourne, and the Rob Gould Foundation, 2025

Presented as a cinematic experience, A Flower That Lives Forever invites audiences to slow down to encourage what Tourmaline calls ‘receptive mode’. The value of ‘receptive mode’ is at the heart of the work, which reimagines a story about Marsha P. Johnson told directly to the artist by Agosto Machado, a performance artist, activist and friend to Johnson, who also features in the film.

In New York City across the late-1960s and 1970s, Machado and Johnson would hustle together. They shared in their experience of a life filled with many different contradictions—exhaustion to joy, violence to exuberance. Johnson’s strength through joy is captured in Machado’s recollection of Johnson rallying their friends on a day when they were all particularly exhausted. Tourmaline retells the story:

Marsha was like, ‘Come on, girls, we’re going on a cruise’, to which Augusto said, ‘a cruise?’ People were very skeptical, but Marsha doubled down, ‘yes, a cruise!’ Without faltering, she brought them down to the free commuter ferry to Staten Island, where they all boarded, and took the Marsha P. Johnson cruise. Leaving Manhattan, they waved goodbye to the skyline and waved hello to the Statue of Liberty. They disembarked on Staten Island where they truly were the first flowers of their iteration to pollinate the otherwise conservative, white, and strait-laced island off Manhattan. On Staten Island, people had an abundance of different reactions—as they do—to seeing such beauty for the first time. They eventually turned around and went back. But they returned with a feeling of replenishment from the mental shift of being in a receptive mode. They transmuted something that was mundane and ordinary into this larger-than-life experience.

ACCA has engaged florist Emma Dorward to create a site-specific arrangement out of Marsha P. Johnson's favourite flower, Baby's breath, presenting audiences today with the same beauty Johnson enjoyed. Tourmaline writes about the significance of flowers in her biography, MARSHA: The Joy and Defiance of Marsha P. Johnson 2025:

These flowers, like much of Marsha's fashion, are deeply tied to her spirituality. Some Christians associate Baby's breath with purity and the Holy Spirit, while Sylvia [Rivera] taught Marsha that the flower was also entwined with Yoruba-based traditions, by way of Cuba.

Always one to take pride in her appearance, Johnson would often wear the flower in her styled hair. The daily ritual of adornment can be seen as a practice of reconciling the inner and outer worlds, and an expression of her commitment to showing up as the most fully alive version of herself.