50 STATES: OKLAHOMA

For Lynn

50 States: Oklahoma honors the gay Cherokee playwright Lynn Riggs who most famously wrote the 1930 play Green Grow the Lilacs on which Rogers and Hammerstein based their iconic musical Oklahoma.

Born in Claremore, Oklahoma in 1899 Riggs had a complicated and embattled relationship with his home state, living primarily in self-imposed exile in Santa Fe, New York, and Los Angeles where he was able to live, semi-closeted, with multiple lovers over the years. While Green Grow the Lilacs contains few hints of homoeroticism, many of his other plays feature overt gay themes. Riggs wrote that Green Grow the Lilacs was an attempt to capture luminously, through the simplest of stories, his nostalgic memories of his Oklahoma childhood.

In 1931 Riggs made an experimental film, A Day in Santa Fe in which he captured daily life in his adopted city. In response, Nick & Jake created an experimental documentary depicting a day in Northeastern Oklahoma. Following the exact shot structure of the original film, 50 States: Oklahoma (For Lynn) is comprised of original footage documenting scenes of daily LGBTQIA+ life in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, the seat of the Cherokee Nation; filmed video portraits of members of the LGBTQIA+ community in Tulsa and Tahlequah standing in front of locations of key importance to their LGBTQIA+ Oklahoma identities; footage of the artists taking on the narrator role embodied by the mule delivering firewood in Riggs’ film; and found archival footage of Two-Spirit gatherings projected onto trees at Discoveryland, a deserted outdoor amphitheater in Sand Springs where Oklahoma was performed for decades.

The video is projected through an arrangement of two-way mirrored panels which reference the gay Oklahoman architect Bruce Goff. In 1949, six years before he would be forced to resign from the University of Oklahoma for being homosexual, he proposed a spectacular Crystal Chapel of diamond-shaped glass panels for the University’s student religious center. Though the design was never realized, Frank Gehry later wrote that Goff’s chapel “would have been the purest, most elegant embodiment of the metal and glass Crystal Palace fantasies that captivated architects from the nineteenth century onward.”
OUR PARTNERS

Oklahoma State University: Gender and Women’s Studies, Department of History, School of Architecture, Department of Art, Graphic Design, and Art History, Oral History Project, Office of Multicultural Affairs, EQuAL, OSQ&A and GSSO.

Community: Tulsa Equality Center/OKEQ, Payne County PRIDE Fest, PFLAG Stillwater, Living Arts Kitchen, University of Central Oklahoma Melton Gallery, University of Central Oklahoma Women’s Research Center and BGLTQ+ Student Center, Herland Archive, Living Arts Tulsa and Tulsa Artist Fellows.

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