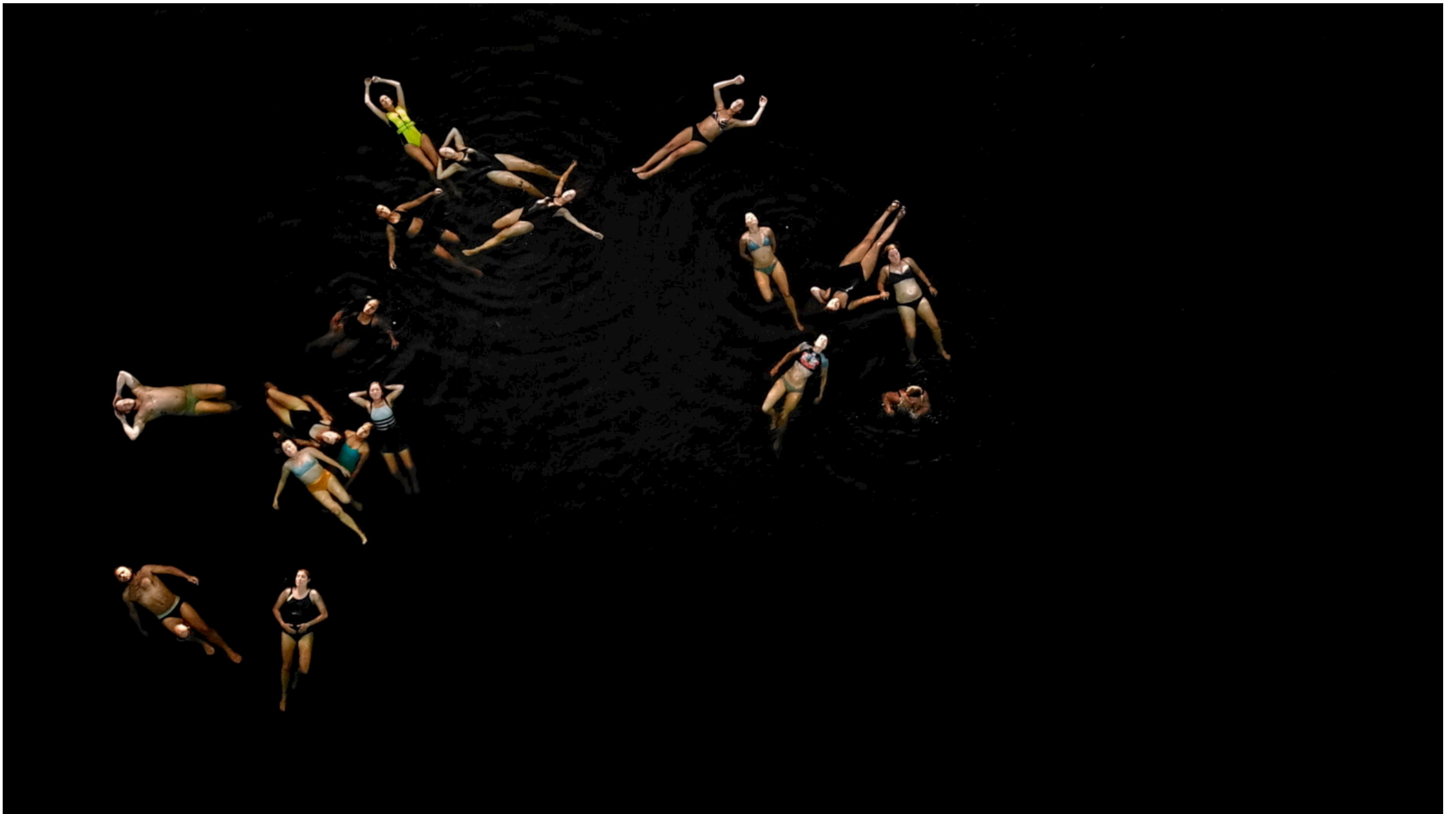




H a r d w a r e
AT ISLAND HARDWARE

May - August 2026



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Erin Johnson's *Lake* observes a calm body of water from above, where a group of artists drift in slow, fluid motion. They gather and separate, sometimes floating with ease, sometimes resisting submersion, their movements shaped by quiet attention to one another. Hands meet, bodies overlap, and space is negotiated through small acts of desire, trust, care, and collectivity. Intimacy unfolds as a shared rhythm, where boundaries soften and connection emerges.

Erin Johnson is an artist and filmmaker based in New York, NY. Johnson was a Lighthouse Works Fellow in 2022. She received an MFA and a Certificate in New Media from the University of California, Berkeley in 2013, attended the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture in 2019, and has participated in residencies at the Jan van Eyck Academie (Maastricht, NL), Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (New York, NY), Hidrante (San Juan, PR), Lighthouse Works (Fishers Island, NY), Pioneer Works (Brooklyn, NY), among others.

Her work has been exhibited or screened at venues including e-flux (New York, NY), BOAN1942 ARTSPACE (Seoul, KR), BOFFO (Fire Island, NY), Rencontres Internationales (Paris, FR / Berlin, DE),

BIENALSUR (Buenos Aires, AR), MOCA (Toronto, CA), Munchmuseet (Oslo, NO), Sanatorium (Istanbul, TR), Times Square Arts (New York, NY), etc. galerie (Prague, CZ), Cinalfama (Lisbon, PT), deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum (Lincoln, MA), Billytown (The Hague, NL), Galleria Eugenia Delfini (Rome, IT), and REDCAT (Los Angeles, CA). Johnson is the Undergraduate Director and faculty member of the Studio Art Program at New York University.

Erin Johnson, Lake, 2020, 4 minute 26 second video played on loop. Directed, produced, and edited by Erin Johnson. Director of photography is Christopher Carroll. Featuring: Shani Ben Simon, Anika Carterfield, Elizabeth Flood, Maria Fragoso, Jessica Fuquay, Meredith Gaglio, Chitra Ganesh, Nasim Hantehzadeh, Raneé Henderson, Bryson Rand, Jinal Sangoi, Hannah Shaban, Saar Shemesh, Sindhu Thirumalaisamy, Maria Tinaut, Lan Tuazon, and Jordan Weitzman. Curated by Lighthouse Works Curator-at-Large Laurel Ptak.

LAUREL PTAK This video strikingly portrays your experience as a resident artist at Skowhegan in Maine, where it was made. *Lake* seems to crystallize something of how dedicated time, space, and freedom to think and make feels; what working in a non-urban context can open up artistically; and maybe most importantly, that crucial support and being-together with other artists that residencies provide. These are of course all things at the core of Lighthouse Works too. Can you speak to this aspect of *Lake*? How did the idea for this video originate for you?

ERIN JOHNSON The residency was built right on the lakefront, so the water was one of the last things I saw before falling asleep and the first thing I saw upon waking. An image of everyone together in the lake started entering my dreams. I was changing a lot that summer—I was meeting people whose work I loved deeply, and I decided to move to New York directly after the residency because so many of them lived there. Maria Fragoso and I met at Skowhegan and became fast friends; her paintings had a huge impact on me. Around that time, I began thinking about videos that were single takes—very little movement, more like holding a single image.

PTAK For me, *Lake* is a brilliant articulation of collectivity and it makes me wonder how you collaborated with its participants and how you understand your role and authorship within it. What invitation and instructions did

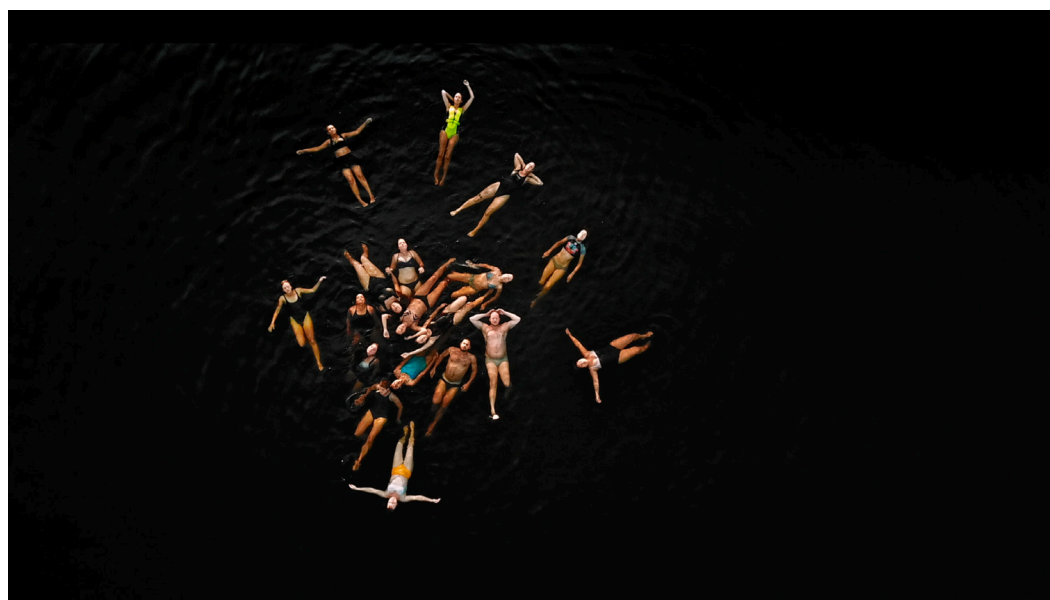
you provide? What happened more spontaneously? How did you decide to be present in the work?

JOHNSON After dinner, I asked anyone who was willing to swim out into the water. The only instruction was to float beneath the camera and try to stay in the frame. Of course, no one knew where the edge of the frame actually was, so I didn't expect the footage to become anything—certainly not a finished work. I just wanted to see whether the image I kept dreaming about could exist in waking life.

PTAK The water itself feels like another important collaborator here. It acts upon and with the bodies floating within it, it is most of what we see within the frame. Across your work there is a careful examination of our relationship to nature as well as the many ways that the human and non-human co-exist. Can you say more about these themes and the ways you've approached them across your practice?

JOHNSON Wherever I am—and whoever or whatever inhabits that space with me—becomes part of the work. I don't work in a studio or on a soundstage, so everything is, metaphorically, done by ear. I studied sustainable agriculture as an undergraduate, which was one of the more formal ways I learned to think through relationships between land, water, and all living things.

PTAK Previously Lighthouse Works exhibited your video *To Be Sound Is To Be Solid* inside the Filling Station in 2025, which fascinatingly builds connections between lesbian, architectural, and environmental histories. You describe *Lake*, in part,



as a portrait of “collective queer and desirous exchanges”. Can you talk a bit about the nuanced ways that queer desire is represented and approached across your works?

JOHNSON In 2021, I attended a residency located in a modernist house designed and built by two women in 1971, who lived there together for over forty years. The house is unmistakably made for two—the long corridor connecting

what are now called Beverly's side and Mary's side is always felt. I spent a lot of time looking through their journals, travel logs, and architectural drawings, searching for proof that they were romantic partners. What I found instead was a slipperiness of language: bedrooms alternately labeled “master” and “guest,” or named after each woman, or sometimes collapsed into a single room altogether.

While living in the house, I was also speaking with an oceanographer working to map the entire seafloor. Despite advanced technologies, much of the ocean remains unmapped—huge areas are known only through sparse, distant measurements called “soundings.” That idea—that things can remain structurally present yet obscured—became a way of thinking about queer desire as something not hidden, but opaque. To be sound, historically, meant to be solid, to hold together. That tension between presence, cohesion, and partial legibility runs through the work.

PTAK The exact bird's eye vantage point of this video feels so precise—just far enough away that we focus on the communal actions of the swimmers and how their bodies are related and entwined, and at the same time, just close enough to also let us glimpse something of their specificity, ie. how they float and move, what their bathing suits look like, how they choose to interact with each other. Can you talk about your specific approach here and how this work thinks about a relation between the collective and individual?

JOHNSON In *Daybook: The Journal of an Artist*, Anne Truitt writes about her time at the artist residency Yaddo: “I have the comfortable feeling of being an inconsequential member of a litter, like a puppy or a kitten... This is a feeling I have always enjoyed enormously. It heals me in some subtle way.”

I was reading her book while at Skowhegan, and the passage matched my feelings exactly. I'm always looking

for that, which is why I'm drawn to working with groups, to collectivity, and to teaching.

PTAK You've described this and other videos you've made as “attempts at thinking about collectivity on a non-narrative, purely visual level”. To me this is a really interesting approach that opens up questions of how art makes meaning both politically and aesthetically. I'm curious what you

think art's role is and how you see the relationship between politics and aesthetics both within and beyond your work?

JOHNSON Much of my political education came through artworks. Sometimes a work communicates something directly, but more often it sends you outward—prompting you to learn about the conditions under which it was made, the time, the place, or the artist. Either way, the work leads you there.

PTAK Many of your videos use documentary, experimental, and narrative filmmaking devices to examine frictions between how we order the world intellectually, scientifically, politically versus what we might know otherwise through lived experience. *Lake* arguably takes another approach—it seems to let us drift in an embodied and liberatory space. How do you see it in relation to your other works?

JOHNSON Sara Ahmed writes in *Living a Feminist Life* about turning concepts “this way and that, like an object that catches a different light every time it is turned,” producing prismatic shifts in meaning. She also refuses to separate poetry from politics. I think of my practice similarly. I'm interested in returning to the same questions and seeing how they change when they're asked through different forms. *Lake* doesn't abandon the concerns I'm usually picking up, so much as approach them differently.

PTAK Before you were an artist you worked as a community organizer for labor issues, queer rights, and food justice. How do these experiences inform your practice? What does filmmaking and the realm of art allow you to do or say that might be different from more activist-oriented approaches?

JOHNSON What carries through is a commitment to values as they're expressed through the acts themselves, whatever form those acts take. Organizing and artmaking each have their own constraints, but both require imagining something beyond the conditions of the present. Art allows me to be in that speculative space and hold contradictions without the immediate demand for resolution—while still remaining grounded in the same ethical commitments that shape my ongoing work as someone engaged in social change movements.

PTAK What did you work on during your fellowship at Lighthouse Works back in 2022 and what are you working on right now?

JOHNSON During my fellowship, I developed sketches for several new films, some of which I haven't yet realized but expect to return to. I also did editing work, alongside extended periods of reading and writing, which are central to how I prepare for whatever comes next. Right now, I'm working toward a solo exhibition at Essex Flowers in New York opening in June 2026, a commissioned project for Light Work in Syracuse that I'll be filming in July 2026, and a mid-career survey at the University of Georgia's contemporary art museum, the Athenaeum, opening in late August 2026.





HARDWARE is a year-round exhibition space for film and video by contemporary artists located in the loose screw section of Island Hardware on Fishers Island.

Every two months a new moving-image work appears, inviting unexpected encounters with contemporary art where the everyday rhythms, textures, and temporalities of a hardware shop frame the work.

Inside Island Hardware at 741 The Gloaming on Fishers Island, **HARDWARE** is programmed by Lighthouse Works and open to the public during business hours, Monday–Friday 8am–4pm and Sunday 8am–noon, or by appointment.

HARDWARE is curated by Laurel Ptak with support from Claudia DeSimone and Eliza Schmidt. Exhibition guide designed by Eric Nylund. Special thanks to Dave Beckwith and the entire team at Island Hardware for their ongoing support.

For further information about these exhibitions contact Nate Malinowski: nate@lighthouseworks.us or (631) 788-7713.

LIGHTHOUSE WORKS

