

T41L COD3

Ryan Arthurs

The work in this exhibition, T41L COD3, is a series of collages, printed on aluminum. The work continues my exploration of coded queer language and the U.S. military, focusing specifically on the tail code markings found on the rear stabilizer of aircraft. The work probes the particularly American mythos of the fighter pilot as a perpetually young male figure of desire, subverting military iconography to at once obscure and highlight a queer tension within a set of idealized imageries.

The military employs a unique language – verbal, written, visual – to communicate and describe their rituals, routines and traditions. This is true within each branch, each division, and each unit. Queer servicemen likewise, used a coded language to seek one another out and develop their community under the surface of strict military rule.

Language is my weapon of choice. Sometimes it's stealthy, cloaked in the familiar and other times it's more obvious to communicate the point. I've been creating coded phrases using military aircraft magazines from the 1950-80s. The collage elements have been scanned and printed on aluminum, via a dye sublimation process, as to mirror the materials of the aircraft. The coded, queer phrases, are familiar to explicit vanity license plates and message boards of the gay community. These phrases have evolved with digital technology and hook-up apps, like Craigslist, Grindr, etc. Text speak, or leet talk, has become apart of our vernacular language IRL. I'm using the alpha-numeric style of military tail codes to form the phrases that contain multiple meanings, while also being visually obscured within the elements of the collage.