

# This Is What a Lesbian Looks Like

Biracial Puerto Rican filmmaker Lares Feliciano is queering the American identity through filmmaking.

▶ **ON NAVIGATING QUEER IDENTITY THROUGH FILM:** Both my queer identity and my biracial Puerto Rican identity have highly influenced my work. Throughout my life I have felt somewhat incomplete. Not brown enough, not white enough, not gay enough. People have always been confused by my light skin and my Latino name. In my first year of college—because I didn't have short hair and wasn't on the rugby team—most gay girls assumed I was straight. Over the years these combinations of assumptions have left me feeling invisible in a variety of communities. More recently I have embraced these complexities and have found myself deeply identifying with the word “queer.” For me queer is a breakdown of assumptions. I am not one thing and I am certainly not the first thing you'd think upon meeting me. This exploration of queerness and all the ways that it can manifest is at the core of the stories I want to tell in my filmmaking.

▶ **ON QUEERING WESTERN CINEMA:** Ever since I first saw John Ford's *The Searchers* I knew I not only wanted to

make Westerns but I wanted to live them—to be the hero, to breathe the landscape, to feel the freedom of the West. It is a potent genre ripe for deconstructing and reshaping, and since the Western has been mapping a history of American identity, why shouldn't it include a queer experience? The Western has asserted an authority over U.S. history and has, since the beginning of the cinema, maintained its status as one of the few truly American genres. It is in this vein that I feel compelled to retell and reshape the Western genre through a radical queer lens.

▶ **ON THE POST-APOCALYPTIC SETTING OF HER FILM, *LAND*:** From my perspective apocalypse is more about a fork in the road than the end of the world. It is about a juncture where we are individually and collectively forced to decide how we are going to coexist in this world in a healthy, nurturing way. It is about change. I want people to feel inspired to reflect on our collective relationship to the earth as well as our relationship to each other. [Emelina Mineró]