

We're Here.

We're Lesboqueer.

We're Still Fabulous.

Canadian lesboqueer artists  
(1988-2002)

An exhibition curated by  
Kristen Hutchinson

April 18 to June 21, 2025

# Foreword

*I like the word lesbian because it is a repository  
of images of women and feminists—the complexity  
of their desire and their specific energy.*

— Nicole Brossard<sup>1</sup>

When we received Kristen Hutchinson's exhibition proposal regarding the invisibility of lesboqueer artists in Canadian art history, I thought it was essential to open a space to highlight the wealth of their contributions to art. Hutchinson's research led me to discover some key moments in the lived history of the gay and lesbian communities in Québec and Canada during the last century. Although it may be inconceivable to us today to think of homosexuality as deviancy – even a social scourge – the current situation among our neighbours to the south proves the fragility of these gains. History seems to want to repeat itself. Not so long ago, being in public with a same-sex lover was considered gross indecency and could lead to arrest. Secrecy was the rule; people had to know where they could gather without fear of reprisals. Unfortunately, police raids were all too common in Montréal's clandestine gay and lesbian bars in the 1950s, and even after 1969 – the year when Act C-50, decriminalizing homosexual acts, was passed – in official establishments.

Hutchinson's exhibition acts through duty of memory. They create a private space with dim lighting, adding a few everyday elements that soften the gallery's austerity. The presentation of *We're Here, We're Queer, We're Fabulous*, a documentary made by Danielle Comeau and Maureen Bradley in 1990, is the core of the exhibition. The events that it shows are shocking to today's sensibilities. Police raided a party at a warehouse known as Sex Garage, clearly targeting the LGBTQ2S+ communities and injuring many people. The immediate reaction was a sense of revolt, a need to gather and hold demonstrations protesting against the unfounded police brutality

1 Nicole Brossard, "Corps ravis et renouveau d'équations," *Lettres québécoises*, No. 178, fall 2020: 26. [Our translation]

and against homophobia. Through Hutchinson's research, the vitality of the lesboqueer community from the 1980s to the 2000s is illustrated by a selection of posters from the Archives lesbiennes du Québec. Their messages foreground lesbians' reality, enabling them to identify as a group and to be informed of the places and events created by and for them. A few copies of the magazine *Treize* are available for consultation. Founded in 1984 and published until 2000, this periodical had the mandate of supporting the lesbian community's engagement. Documents from both Artex's and Hutchinson's collections complement this historical record. The period that Hutchinson studied can be considered effervescent, as it led to the emancipation of many women, including artists and authors who spoke about the lesbian body in their works.<sup>2</sup> The Centrale Galerie Powerhouse artist-run centre, for instance, shared the lesbian movement's spirit of emancipation in its own contribution to the recognition of women artists. As a document published in 1979 said,

*Bringing women together is not a new phenomenon but a consequence of feminist consciousness-raising movements around shared issues and problems, such as childcare, isolation, and lack of confidence. Today, as we enter the fray, working together enables women to discover, document, and disseminate their accomplishments. Powerhouse grew out of the idea that a friendly environment is not a refuge but a generator of creative energy.*<sup>3</sup>

To this day, La Centrale is pursuing its mandate of supporting interdisciplinary and underrepresented feminist practices. In 2008, it presented *;;KUMBIA QUEERS!! Rein-scribing Lesbian History on the Dance Floor*, an event

2 Hutchinson is curating a video program in partnership with the Groupe Intervention Vidéo (GIV). The program brings together works by Dayna McLeod, Maureen Bradley, Jenny Lin and Anne Golden. Among the writers, I think of Nicole Brossard, Anne-Marie Alonzo, and Marie-Claire Blais and, more recently, Marie Darsigny, Julie Delporte, and Obom.

3 Nell Tenhaaf, Untitled text, *Powerhouse*. Montréal: Powerhouse, January 1979, n.p. [Our translation]

highlighting queer utopias through the cultural production of groups such as the punk collective Las Kumbia Queers (Argentina and Mexico) and Lesbians on Ecstasy (Montréal). This information made me realize how important and unifying dancing is: it frees the female/lesbian/feminist body of all context and lets it relate to others.

Today, the lesboqueer community is dispersed because lesbian bars at street level don't exist anymore. Encounters via apps don't provide the same experience of going out somewhere to fully express one's queerness or to feel free, especially important to young people in the midst of building an identity.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, a few initiatives enable lesbians and queer people to get together at events, including *Queen & Queer* (Lesbo-Queer Dance Party) and Quartz lesbian evenings, and in a few bars, such as Champs and L'Idéal. Hutchinson's exhibition *We're Here. We're Lesboqueer. We're Still Fabulous* pays tribute to the resilience of all the people who fought for their rights and to those who are continuing this quest for affirmation and healing. Activism is still alive and kicking, and I hope that new venues devoted to lesboqueer people will emerge to bring us together and carry the flag for those who follow.

— Manon Tourigny

Translated from the French by Käthe Roth

4 Sandrine Côté, "Où sont passés les bars pour lesbiennes?," *Radio-Canada*, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/info/long-format/2093622/bar-lesbiennes-montreal-disparition>. Accessed March 4, 2025).

# We're Here.

# We're Lesboqueer.

# We're Still Fabulous.

The protest chant “We’re here. We’re queer. Get used to it” emerged during the late 1980s as a rallying cry for LGBTQ2S+ activists in North America. Queer Nation, founded in 1990 by members of ACT UP,<sup>1</sup> reclaimed the word *queer* as a badge of honour, a political identity that critically challenged heteronormative and trans/homophobic societal ideas about gender and sexuality. Created in reaction to increased homophobia in the media and the escalation of anti-gay and -lesbian violence on New York City’s streets, Queer Nation were non-hierarchical and decentralized. Anyone could become a member and have a voice. They “agreed to stage visibility actions—everywhere—that would mystify, terrify and enchant.”<sup>2</sup>

The positive positioning of the word *queer* in the early 1990s was shocking at first for some, as it had been a derogatory term since the late nineteenth century. Gay lore has it that *queer* was first employed to describe certain persons during Oscar Wilde’s trial in 1895. A letter read in court called Wilde and other homosexual men “Snob Queers.”<sup>3</sup> The famous trial was written about internationally and *queer* thereupon spread to North America as an offensive slur. However, due to the reclamation and celebration of *queer* in the 1980s and 1990s, by the early 2000s *queer* had become an accepted and acclaimed term for self-identification.

This exhibition is comprised of documents by and about Canadian lesboqueer artists from 1988 to 2002 from the

1 ACTUP = AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power. See: <https://www.actup-oralhistory.org>

2 Queer Nation NY History. <https://queernationny.org/history>

3 See: <https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/queer-history-a-history-of-queer>

Artexxe collection, as well as posters and journals from the Archives lesbiennes du Québec. The term *lesboqueer* emerged in the 1990s as a less-used umbrella term that continues to embrace a myriad of identities including lesbians, bisexual women, dykes, butches, femmes, studs, women loving women, stems, futches, vagatarians, black cats, golden retrievers, celesbians, bois, sapphics, bykes, trixics, trans women, non-binary folx, and queer women. I initially chose to focus on this time period to coincide with research for my book *Kiss & Tell: Lesbian Art & Activism*, about a lesbian art collective.<sup>4</sup> However, the more I delved into this era, the more I realized how often we wrongly pigeonhole social activist movements and historical events within the confines of a single decade. This particular era of queer activism, which I refer to as “the birth of queer,” emerged in the late 1980s and continued into the early 2000s.

The title of the exhibition is a play on the title of the documentary *We’re Here, We’re Queer, We’re Fabulous* (1990). Created by Maureen Bradley and Danielle Comeau, the film drew attention to the police brutality and harassment that occurred following a warehouse party called Sex Garage in the summer of 1990. As a description of the film by Groupe Intervention Vidéo (GIV) reports: “In the wake of the unnecessary brutality of the police officers, the gay and lesbian community(ies) undertook a series of actions. Their peaceful means were met with more violence and massive arrests.”<sup>5</sup> Sex Garage, often referred to as “Canada’s Stonewall,” was a watershed moment for queer activism in Montréal and across Canada.<sup>6</sup> Thankfully, Linda Dawn Hammond photographed the raid and the police violence; absent that, no record of the event would exist today. The Sex Garage protests brought gay and lesbian, and anglophone and franco-

4 Forthcoming in June 2025 as an open access, online book. See: <https://www.aci-iac.ca/art-books/kiss-tell>

5 See: <https://www.givideo.org/products/we-re-here-we-re-queer-we-re-fabulous>

6 For timelines of Canadian queer history, see: <https://docslib.org/doc/13158670/queer-canadian-history-timeline-pre-colonization-to-present>; <https://nelliganlaw.ca/a-legal-timeline-of-lgbtq-rights-in-canada>; and <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/timeline/lgbtq2>

phone activists together in a united front. Bradley and Comeau's documentary is included in the exhibition.

*We're Here. We're Lesboqueer. We're Still Fabulous* seeks to bring the works and lives of Canadian lesboqueer artists into greater visibility, as we are often not included within the overly restrictive, traditionalist confines of the canons of Canadian art history. During my research for my residency at Artex, I discovered many lesboqueer artists that I had never heard of—despite having taught Canadian art history for many years. I have chosen to transform the white cube of the exhibition space into a nineties-inspired living/reading room so that visitors can take off their shoes, turn off their cell phones, and take a comfy seat to peruse the materials on display. Take a break and learn more about this important era of queer Canadian art and activism through articles, exhibition catalogues, reviews, pamphlets, press releases, magazines, books, festival guides, artworks, postcards, artist statements, and more. A QR code and media players are provided, so that visitors can listen to a playlist I created of Canadian lesboqueer musicians from the 1980s until today.

Sadly, the united queer front of the Sex Garage protests is still needed today, as we face increased misinformation and hatred toward, and legislation against, our trans and queer communities. We need to remain vigilant in protecting our rights as the current horror show of fascism in the US could also happen here in Canada. For example, a 2024 Ipsos survey of Canadians found that support for queer people being open and visible had dropped by twelve percent.<sup>7</sup> In January 2024, the Alberta government announced policies limiting gender-affirming health care for youth, making it impossible for youth to alter their names or pronouns in school without parental consent and requiring parental consent and the education ministry's approval for any discussion of gender identity, sexual orientation, or sexuality in schools.

7 Justin Ling, "Queer rights are in danger in Canada. Pierre Poilievre owns some of the blame," *Toronto Star*, February 19, 2025. [https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/queer-rights-are-in-danger-in-canada-pierre-poilievre-owns-some-of-the-blame/article\\_4704f472-3b08-11ef-9162-f325f25bdb13.html](https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/queer-rights-are-in-danger-in-canada-pierre-poilievre-owns-some-of-the-blame/article_4704f472-3b08-11ef-9162-f325f25bdb13.html)

This exhibition asks viewers to consider what can be learned from earlier Canadian lesboqueer art and activism. Remember the lessons of our Canadian queer forefolx! Continue to use time-tested protest tactics in our continued battles for inclusion, equity, diversity, and queer rights. Organize.<sup>8</sup> Support and care for each other. Embrace queer joy. Refuse to be silenced and erased!

As part of the exhibition, we invite LGBTQ2S+ Canadian artists to submit documentation of their artistic practice to increase queer visibility within the Artexpte collection.<sup>9</sup> I have also curated a screening of Canadian lesboqueer short films and videos from the archives of Groupe Intervention Vidéo (1990–2001) to be held at GIV on May 14 at 7:00 p.m. A panel on censorship and lesboqueer activism past, present, and future, featuring Montréal queer activists, community workers, and artists, will be held at Artexpte on June 14. A brainstorming session on queer events that you would like to see in Montréal, as well as the formation of organizational working groups, will take place after the panel. Join us!

– Kristen Hutchinson

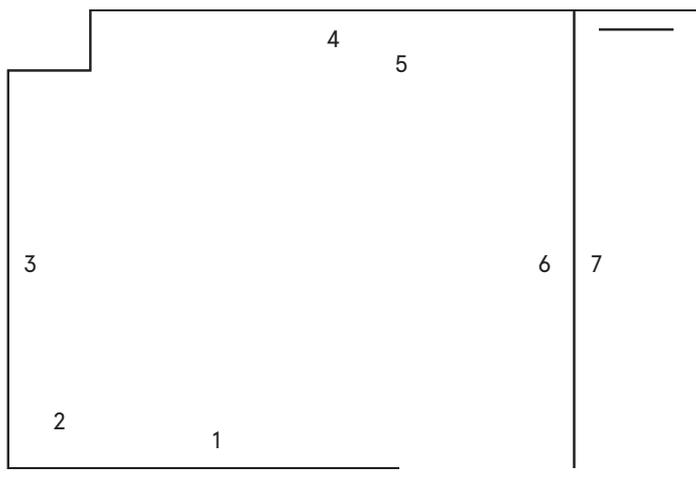
8 Check out Lou Legay's "Le militantisme lesboqueer à Montréal : analyse des stratégies collectives et de l'engagement individuel en 2023." See: <https://archipel.uqam.ca/18255/1/M18751.pdf>

9 Please see the submission guidelines: [https://artexpte.ca/app/uploads/2022/06/2019\\_file\\_submission\\_guidelines\\_artist.pdf](https://artexpte.ca/app/uploads/2022/06/2019_file_submission_guidelines_artist.pdf)

# Canadian lesboqueer musicians, from the 1980s to the present playlist

Listen to the playlist curated by Kristen Hutchinson as you visit the exhibition. Scan the QR code below to access the Spotify soundtrack bringing together songs by Canadian lesboqueer musicians, active from the 1980s to the present day. Media players are also provided in the gallery space.





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| <p>1. <b>Artexxe Collection</b><br/>c. 1988-2002<br/>Exhibition catalogs</p> <p>2. <b>We're Here, We're Queer, We're Fabulous</b><br/>Maureen Bradley and Danielle Comeau<br/>1990<br/>Documentary video<br/>27 min</p> <p>3. <b>Artexxe Collection</b><br/>c. 1988-2002<br/>Publications and exhibition catalogs</p> <p>4. <b>Archives lesbiennes du Québec Collection</b><br/>c. 1982-2000<br/>Posters and magazines<br/>Various dimensions</p> | <p>5. <b>Kristen Hutchinson Private Collection</b><br/>c. 1988-2018<br/>Publications</p> <p>6. <b>Artexxe Collection</b><br/>c. 1988-2002<br/>Artist files</p> <p>7. <b>Artexxe Collection</b><br/>c. 1988-2002<br/>Posters<br/>Various dimensions</p> |
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# Biography

**Kristen Hutchinson** is a queer and gender fluid (they/she) visual artist, cultural critic, curator, writer, editor, and adjunct professor of art history, feminism, media studies, and popular culture. She received their PhD in History of Art from University College London in 2007 and has taught in numerous universities and colleges in Canada, the US, and the UK. They are the author of three books: *Monsters No More: How We Came to Love Denizens of the Dark* (Leanpub, 2025), *Prairie Tales: A History* (Alberta Media Arts Alliance Society, 2017) and *Kiss & Tell: Lesbian Art & Activism* (Art Canada Institute, June 2025). They have been a nationally syndicated art and popular culture columnist at CBC Radio and were the editor-in-chief of *Luma Quarterly*.

In her artistic practice, she uses collage, photography, video, installation, and performance art to investigate the realms of memory, beauty, mortality, embodiment, the environment, urban space, queerness, and the macabre. Kristen is the co-founder of fast & dirty, a Montréal and Edmonton based curatorial and artist collective that creates projects that challenge curatorial methods and exhibitions and art events for short durations in unusual environments. She also teaches independent seminars in her living room and online.

For their latest book, visit:  
<https://leanpub.com/monstersnomore>

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Artexpte supports artists, researchers and curators in a collective effort that involves our entire team, including external collaborators who participate in the success of each project. In alphabetical order:

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