



UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL

LA PRATIQUE DE LA CO-COMMISSARIAT D'HISTOIRES QUEER :  
UNE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIE SUR LA CRÉATION DE L'EXPOSITION

*TÉMOIGNER POUR AGIR*

THÈSE-INTERVENTION

PRÉSENTÉE COMME EXIGENCE PARTIELLE DU  
DOCTORAT EN ÉTUDES ET PRATIQUES DES ARTS

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JAMIE WILSON GOODYEAR

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UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL

THE PRACTICE OF CO-CURATING QUEER STORIES:  
AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY ON THE CREATION OF THE EXHIBITION

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THESIS-INTERVENTION  
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DOCTORAT EN ÉTUDES ET PRATIQUES DES ARTS

BY

JAMIE WILSON GOODYEAR

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## DEDICATION

To Mom and Dad.

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## ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

ACT-UP	AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power
AIDS/sida	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
ASTTeQ	Action Santé Travesti.e.s et Transexuel.le.s du Québec
ATQ	Aide aux Trans du Québec
CE	Comité d'encadrement
Centre	The Centre for Gender Advocacy
COCQ-SIDA	Coalition des organismes communautaires québécois de lutte contre le sida
CS	Comité des sages
GRIS-Montréal	Groupe de recherche et d'intervention sociale de Montréal
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
HIV+	HIV-positive
ICW+	International Council of Women Living with HIV/AIDS
LGBTQ+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual, non-binary, and pansexual
LRM	The Liverpool Regional Museum, Australia
Maison	Maison de la culture Janine-Sutto (formerly known as Frontenac)
SAC	Le service aux collectivités, UQAM
SSHRC	The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Canada
Stella	Stella l'amie de Maimie
SWANS	Sex Workers Advisory Network Sudbury
TPA	<i>Témoigner pour Agir</i>
Trans	transgender



## RÉSUMÉ

Cette recherche-intervention se penche sur le développement de *Témoigner pour Agir*; une exposition centrée sur des témoignages artistiques portant sur le corps, le genre, le travail du sexe et le statut sérologique au VIH. Cette exposition fut une réponse participative basée sur l'art, à la marginalisation des minorités de sexe et de genre au Canada et à l'international. Sa création et son montage ont activement impliqué des individus provenant de communautés sous-représentées à tous les stades de développement de l'exposition.

Mon étude explore les procédés de création d'une exposition participative du point d'un artiste-commissaire, moi-même, au sein d'un groupe de co-commissaires marginalisés. L'intervention dont il est question dans cette thèse réfère à ma pratique et à mon identité artistique. La composante recherche du projet réfère aux méthodes auto-ethnographiques employées pour étudier l'intervention du commissaire, soit la recherche documentaire, des entrevues individuelles auprès de personnes ayant joué un rôle clé dans le projet d'exposition, ainsi que les observations issues de ma propre expérience à titre de co-commissaire.

Le cadre conceptuel de ce travail doctoral s'appuie sur les théories queer et féministes. De ce point de vue, j'argumente qu'un procédé co-commissariat queer voit les expériences non-normatives et les histoires de communautés marginalisées comme étant des sources significatives de connaissances et de politiques transversales. Des personnes de milieux et d'intérêts diversifiés ont pu de se saisir d'une même position, celle de commissaire, et devenir des auteurs. En tant que co-auteurs ou co-commissaires nous nous sommes éloignés des pratiques traditionnellement oppressives. Nous avons mis de l'avant les expériences personnelles et le savoir marginal, partagé nos connaissances et, par cette entremise, créé un espace politique. La réalisation d'expositions est devenue une sorte de 3<sup>e</sup> espace ; un lieu réservé à l'empathie, au renforcement de l'esprit communautaire, à la solidarité, et à l'activisme.

La transformation de mon identité personnelle et professionnelle, la découverte de ma voix en tant qu'artiste et artisan vivant avec le VIH découlent largement de mon intervention dans ce projet d'exposition. L'immersion dans le groupe de co-commissaires, le Comité des sages, m'a permis de me réconcilier avec mon statut séropositif.

Mots-clés: Autoethnographie, Commissaire, Co-commissariat, Exposition, Vivre avec le VIH, Participative, Queer, Témoignage, Politique transversale.

## ABSTRACT

This study follows the research-intervention into the development of *Témoigner pour Agir*, an exhibition focused on artistic testimonials about the body, sex, gender, sex work, and HIV status. This exhibition was a participatory, arts-based response to the marginalization of sexual and gender minorities in Canada and internationally. This type of exhibition creation actively involved individuals from under-represented communities in all stages of exhibition development.

My inquiry is an exploration into a participatory exhibition process from the standpoint of co-curating — from my perspective as the artist-curator within a co-curatorial group of marginalized people. The intervention discussed in this thesis also refers to my artistic practice and identity. The research component of the project discusses the autoethnographic methods employed to query this curatorial intervention, which include documentation research and review, semi-structured interviews conducted after the exhibition with key project participants, and observations from my own experience as an exhibition co-curator.

The conceptual framework of this doctoral work is based on queer and feminist theory. From that standpoint, I argue that a queer co-curatorial process values non-normative experiences and the stories of marginalized communities as significant sources of both knowledge and transversal politics. As a more socially responsible form of curatorial practice, this allowed people of different backgrounds and interests to claim a curatorial position as authors. As co-authors, or co-curators, we diverged from traditional (oppressive) practices of development and display. We valued personal experience and knowledge from the margins and shared knowledge, thereby producing both agency and a political space. The exhibition realization became a kind of 3<sup>rd</sup> space; a place for empathy, community building, solidarity, and activism.

The transformation of my identity and finding my voice as an artist-craftsperson living with HIV was pivotal in my participation and intervention in this exhibition project. Being immersed in the co-curatorial group known as Comité des sages made it possible for me to reconcile with my HIV status.

Keywords: Autoethnography, Curating, Exhibition, Living with HIV, Participatory, Queer, Testimonial, Transversal politics.

## INTRODUCTION

This doctoral thesis is a step into an expanded field of curatorial practice. At the core of this study is the participatory exhibition *Témoigner pour Agir*, presented by the Testimonial Cultures research group, which took place from November 2017 to January 2018 at Maison de la culture Janine-Sutto (formerly Maison de la culture Frontenac) in Montréal, Canada. In an innovative approach, Testimonial Cultures invited participants from various community-based organizations to fully engage in the development process. Together, as the exhibition development team, they sought out artistic testimonials regarding the body, sex, gender, sex work, and HIV status to inform the creation of the exhibition. However, the exhibition per se is not the primary focus of this study. Rather, this thesis explores the practice of curating and, in particular, my own curatorial practice.

The intervention discussed in this thesis refers to my work as a co-curator with the *Témoigner pour Agir* exhibition development team and how this work transformed the way I perceive living with HIV, as well as my relationship with public and artistic testimonials. This exhibition project was an arts-based response to the marginalization of sexual and gender minorities. Through an active role, I intervened in the co-curatorial process that placed those marginalized voices at the heart of an inclusive cultural product.

The research component of my project refers to the autoethnographic methods employed to query this curatorial intervention. As such, I posit that a queer co-curatorial process values non-normative experiences and the stories of marginalized communities as significant sources of both knowledge and transversal politics through

queer self-representations of experience and identity. Through experiencing, documenting, and reflecting on the exhibition development and the exhibition itself, the goal of this research-intervention is to articulate an autoethnographic standpoint on the process of co-curating queer artistic testimonials. To do this, I established three objectives:

1. To record the principal phases of the co-curatorial and exhibition development process.
2. To explore and reflect on how artistic testimonials can create queer social space.
3. To discuss how this co-curatorial process functioned for the exhibition's marginalized communities in regard to their auto-representation and politics.

Readers will note that this document is written in the first person. This is deliberate and essential for the autoethnographic standpoint as it identifies, without ambiguity, that data has been collected from personal and embodied experience. Moreover, portions of the text throughout this document are linked to my testimonial: reflections on experiences that are directly or indirectly linked to my involvement with this exhibition project and with being queer and HIV-positive. These texts are identified by a change in typeface and their placement within borders.

As a queer HIV+ person, I know, through experience, the hardships of being Othered. Through the telling of testimonials, our experiences become real, tangible, and perhaps relatable to those who would prefer that we remain out of sight and out of mind. For me, our exhibition functioned not only as tool for promoting progressive ideas within the public sphere, but also for creating emotional impacts on our exhibition audience, as well as those involved in its development – including myself as the designated professional curator for the project.

Chapter One presents the conceptual framework for this thesis by examining the historical role of the curator in an effort to provide a foundation for the practice. Next, I explore contemporary transformations in the curatorial field: transformations of authorship, form, and agency that are shifting curatorial practices toward activism, encouraging the examination of inequities and power dynamics at play in exhibition development. For this examination, I apply queer theory and a sociology of testimonials to advance exhibition development toward a transversal approach to politics which unites communities.

Chapter Two establishes the autoethnographic method which combines semi-structured interviews, document-based research, and my personal reflections as research data. Various ethical considerations are described for each technique, including conflicts of interest and limits of this study.

Chapter Three introduces the Testimonial Cultures research group, describing their modes of working and their partnerships. It also chronicles why the group chose to create an exhibition, the preliminary steps in its conception, and the mode of governance established to direct the exhibition development.

Chapter Four illustrates how the development team determined the exhibition parameters through both a review of literature and focus groups. This chapter also provides a description of the role of the curator, the process of venue selection, and, finally, the establishment of the exhibition objectives.

Chapter Five reveals a general interpretation of our co-curatorial experience of collective authorship, the impact of queer knowledge on this process, and the subsequent creation of a sense of community. To conclude this chapter, I specify my definition of co-curating.

Chapter Six describes the co-curatorial process in action by detailing the procedures for framing our call to artists and the selection of artworks. This is followed by a description of and reflection on the selected artworks.

Chapter Seven interprets the selected artworks as a curatorial whole. Furthermore, I consider how the exhibition, as well as some of our adjacent activities, make visible the transversal relationships between artworks and communities. Finally, in this chapter, I advance the notion of a meta-testimonial, which explores the nature of producing testimonials within public space.

Chapter Eight develops the notion of being in the third space (3<sup>rd</sup> space) — the vital setting that modified my role as a curator and shaped our curatorial practice. That environment, guided by ethical principles and an equitable system of governance, made possible the intellectual work for shared authorship and the realization of a co-curatorial standpoint.

Finally, chapter Nine examines my artistic practice and its transformation over time. In recalling two pivotal events, at each end of the exhibition development, I document my coming out as HIV-positive and queer.

## CHAPTER 1 - CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the conceptual framework for this thesis. To begin, I look at curatorial practices, in what manner the field is evolving, and how these changes can reposition curating as a form of activism. Through curatorial activism, authorship, form, and agency become places where expanded ideas of curating can facilitate the integration of non-normative voices into contemporary curatorial practices. Within the field of curating, I explore persistent inequities and the possibility of creating an innovative space for the exchange of experiences as a resistance to discrimination. In this context, the exchange of experiences, through the artistic testimonials of queer people, may be viewed through a sociology of testimonials. By producing and sharing testimonials, I demonstrate that we can come to better understand our own experiences, recognize the intersections of our experiences with others, and discover how such knowledge can contribute to the development of a transversal politics.

### 1.1. The Changing Meaning of Curating Practices

In this section, I explore the meaning of curation as a traditional mode of practice. Afterward, by proceeding to a contemporary expansion of the field, I present authorship, form, and agency as realms in which the conceptualization of a new role for the curator can be realized. These modifications can change, or perhaps are changing, the ways in which we may see exhibitions as places for the exchange of new knowledge and the equitable insertion of marginalized groups into more socially responsible forms of curatorial practice.

The term curator, which is a derivative of the Latin *curare*, signifies the roles of overseer, manager, or guardian. Since the 1660s, it has, in English, conveyed the

meaning of an “officer in charge of a museum, library, or similar institutional collection of objects or artifacts” (Harper, 2016). This definition is evident in the traditional description of an institutional curator as a caretaker of objects working within, for example, a museum in a role that would usually be assigned the overseeing and the interpretation (Acord, 2010; Gaskill, 2011; Muller, 2012; Puwar & Sharma, 2012) of a particular collection and that is likely to be a subject specialist with an in-depth knowledge of the collection in their care. This person possesses the power of determining which beliefs, values, and histories are significant to discuss or omit; they function, essentially, as a gatekeeper of culture.

Within the traditional meaning of curatorial practice, much of the curator’s professional activity is spent researching, interpreting, and writing about the collection in their care. In general, then, a curator enables the distribution and mediation of artworks or artifacts from their place of creation to their public presentation, or from the private to the public. In bringing together artworks, objects and ideas, the curator not only forms interpretations of the artworks and artifacts, but also mediates the inter-relationships on display through the grouping of objects by way of communicating those associations through non-verbal, visual, contextual, or relational dialogues. Thus, exhibition-making becomes a space for education, dialogue, questioning, and provocation.

Sophia Krzys Acord (2010), whose research examines the collaborative production of knowledge in the arts and humanities, emphasizes the making in artistic meaning-making by demonstrating the practical ways in which culture is mobilized in situations of object interaction. She envisions the curator as a kind of “cultural broker” in the art world that constructs artistic meaning through the exhibition. As specialized cultural agents, curators perform a type of artistic mediation that is traditionally structured by



conventions, familiarity with the art world, and knowledge of the artworks or artifacts in their care.

In this traditional position with a museum setting, the curator aspires to unpack and present history guided by their expertise of the collection that they have in their charge. However, Acord (2010) broadens the curatorial definition to include present-day curators with expertise on contemporary subjects. These contemporary curators occupy a role not unlike that of an author, developing “ahistorical” exhibitions that place artworks in dialogue with other artworks and publics. “The artistic value of an artwork resides not in its material properties, but in the individuals, institutions, and processes that mediate between artist and spectator” (Acord, 2010, p. 449). In this way, curators communicate other layers of meaning beyond an artist’s original intent through the complex paths of exhibition interpretation.

In a relatively recent development that is exterior to the museum, curatorial practices no longer only concern collections; they have also recently come to encompass other preoccupations. The curator Laurent Jeanpierre (2013) perceives the term curator as having taken a “twist” — to borrow the term from Stuart Hall (1990). Jeanpierre claims that curating has moved outside of its traditional definition and has emerged in a much broader range of activities and practices. These new curatorial undertakings are often grounded in ideas of social conflict and identity politics. The exhibition, and its development processes, are frequently applied to drive forward movements of positive social change. This twist, or shift, in practice is noted by other authors (Filipovic, 2014; Gaskill, 2011; Muller, 2012; Preston, 2015; Puwar & Sharma, 2012; Reilly, 2018; Sevova & Roth, 2016; Swan & Jordan, 2015; Unruh, 2015) that agree on three main variations: contemporary curators in curatorial practices have shifted in regard to *authorship*, *form*, and *agency*.

### 1.1.1. Authorship

The curator engages in the process of assembling artworks, creating a new narrative from and with existing narratives already embedded within the artworks — perhaps even those of the artwork’s maker, as well as producing an overall “meta-story” (*méta-récit*, Jeanpierre, 2013). The definition of a curator, for our purposes, is that of an author. A curator is someone who contributes substantially to the conception, development, and design of an exhibition, thereby applying their name to the exhibition. Rethinking authorship, or who creates exhibitions, enables a departure from authorities and institutional agents. Thus, contemporary curatorial practices have shifted, in terms of *authorship*, to allow people of diverse backgrounds and interests to claim the curatorial position. As such, we are able to expand the boundaries of exhibitions and the forms of novel social roles they can perform.

#### *Curatorial Authorship as a Creative Activity*

The view of a curator as an author has been addressed by Matt Smith, artist, curator, and professor of craft at Konstfack University of the Arts in Stockholm. In his doctoral thesis, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Art’s use of Craft to signify LGBT identities* (2015), Smith explains that “the role of the curator as an author has increased in significance in Western society in recent years and over the last few decades has come to be seen as a creative activity” (p. 85). Curatorial practices set up a type of narration that puts the object and viewer in dialogue with one another. The curator authors that dialogue through a selection of objects that promote a particular idea. This form of authorship has positioned “curating as an art practice” (p. 85), a notion has been reiterated by other scholars (Acord, 2010; Gaskill, 2011; Jeanpierre, 2013; Preston, 2015; Sevova & Roth, 2016).

In *Curating Performance: Artist as Curator, Curation as Act* (2015), VK Preston asks “who better than the artist-curators to examine the shifting preoccupations, labour practices, and ethics at stake in diverse ways of selecting, creating, and programming [...]?” (p. 76). Yet, the artist, acting as a curator by temporarily adopting a curatorial mode of practice, is primarily an artist. Even if the work of the artist, as curator, is undeniably curatorial — meaning that they use the methods and techniques of curatorial practice such as collecting, preserving, interpreting, and presenting — their work nevertheless involves creation. Some even argue that curating an exhibition is an extension of their artistic practice. Contrary to being considered a behind-the-scenes caretaker of objects, the artist-curator has an “active part to play in the production, mediation, and dissemination of art” (O'Neill in Gaskill, 2011, p. 12).

#### *Curatorial Activism and Authorship*

Maura Reilly, an arts writer, curatorial activist, and author of *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* (2018), views curatorial activism as a practice rooted in ethics that corrects master narratives in order to include marginalized art and artists. The curatorial activist takes on the task of “challenging hierarchies and assumptions, initiating debate, and circulating new knowledge” (p. 215). In her 2017 article, appearing in *ARTnews*, Reilly defines curatorial activism as:

[A] term I use to designate the practice of organizing art exhibitions with the principle aim of ensuring that certain constituencies of artists are no longer ghettoized or excluded from the master narratives of art. It is a practice that commits itself to counter-hegemonic initiatives that give voice to those who have been historically silenced or omitted altogether—and, as such, focuses almost exclusively on work produced by women, artists of color, non-Euro-Americans, and/or queer artists (2017).

Curatorial activism promotes the margins and challenges dominant or hegemonic hierarchies. Exhibitions that take on this standpoint offer hope and opportunity for dismantling discriminatory practices. “The decision to participate in such initiatives is,

in essence, a political act” (Reilly, 2018, p. 215). However, in our participation we must remember where “we are positioned in relation to discourses of power, authority, and privilege” (Reilly, 2018, p. 217). We must be self-reflective, unlearn normative tropes, address inequalities, and, most importantly, learn how to listen to others.

Collective authorship, as a curatorial group, employs these ideas of self-reflection to understand one position in relation to others. By actively listening to others, we can establish connections with our own experiences, practise empathy, and begin to evoke change. Self-reflection and actively listening to others also expose hegemonic hierarchies. In that awareness of self and of the other, we are capable of recognizing the inequalities of dominant culture and of formulating ways to address these disparities.

#### 1.1.2. Form

Within this expanded approach to curatorial practice, curators can use an exhibition as a means by which to disseminate not only art and cultural artifacts, but also to convey conceptual ideas through art. Curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, reputed for pushing the limits of the form of the contemporary art exhibition, asserts that the curator does not only put objects on display in public space, but also “brings different cultural spheres into contact” (Obrist, 2014, p. 24) and, as such, the curator acts as an intermediary between artists, artworks, objects, ideas, and public spaces. Likewise, Acord (2010) states that art can demonstrate the ways in which humans create meaning and can promote an understanding of how “aesthetic objects (as explicit culture) play an important role as arbiters of social relations, meaning, and action” (Acord, 2010, p. 460).

Nevertheless, “What does it mean to shift attention from objects to exhibitions?” (Filipovic, 2014, p. 4). What such a shift necessitates is a refocusing of the importance

of individual objects, resulting from their significance as artifacts of artistic trends or movements, toward the importance of a collection of objects that are assembled thematically on a contemporary subject. The exhibition, thus, becomes a medium of expression with its own qualities of intervention that assembles, through space and objects, the ideas and interests of the curator.

### 1.1.3. Agency

Deviating from the traditional definition of the curator, it is essential to note that there are individuals who lack specialization in the arts but that have “a creative and active part to play in the production, mediation and dissemination of art” (O'Neill 2007 in Muller, 2012, p. 12). Departing from official voices and allowing under-represented communities access to creative control over how they are represented empowers people to act independently in the creation of those representations.

For Lizzie Muller, a curator specializing in interaction, audience experience, and interdisciplinary collaboration, this departure transforms the role of the curator from determining unilaterally *how communities are* to a role in which the curator seeks to understand *how communities see themselves*. Therefore, curating “becomes a social and collaborative practice, based on the brokering the relationships between an artist’s process of making and the audience’s process of experiencing” (Muller, 2012, p. 2).

As such, the practice of curating could be considered as a reflective process, between reflective practitioners who can produce new knowledge — a co-curatorial practice. This power-sharing process, of bringing together art and design, can be the basis of community building and, consequently, can produce new transferable knowledge, including a divergence from the authority of art history and official discourse. Reflective participatory development around the processes of curatorial practice may

also lead to innovations and opportunities; as the practice becomes more open, a more self-conscious activity permits “new forms of social relations between social groups” (Preston, 2015) that enables new voices to be heard.

## 1.2. Seeking Out Marginalized Voices for Exhibition Creation

Having examined curatorial practice and how that practice may extend to a curatorial activism through authorship, form, and agency, the second part of my conceptual framework concerns addressing inequities and power dynamics. These are the fundamental concerns for curators developing exhibitions about marginalized communities. Such concerns enable us to question and reconsider the social role of a curator and the functions of their practice.

I have so many questions. How can organizers of an exhibition seek out marginalized voices? How might we address inequities and foster an environment that gives people comfort and confidence in sharing their experiences? As a curator with the task of developing an exhibition that brings together representations of marginalized groups, how can I put a collection of artworks forward with anything other than my own perspective – even if I consider myself to belong to some of these marginalized groups? How is it possible to accurately represent marginalized people, their experiences, and their communities? Likewise, how is it possible to avoid further ostracizing or overemphasizing difference? If we ask people and communities to participate in exhibition development and, by extension, to imagine their own representations, what would that look like and can it be successful?

### 1.2.1. Addressing Inequities

Daniel C. Swan, a cultural anthropologist and museum curator whose work focuses on documenting and interpreting the cultural history of the Americas, and Michael Paul Jordan, a cultural anthropologist whose work focuses on the ethnohistory and expressive culture of Indigenous peoples, provide in their article, *Contingent Collaborations: Patterns of Reciprocity in Museum-Community Partnerships* (2015), a detailed explication of the processes and products of collaboration and their curatorial role in fostering long-term relationships that address inherent inequities in museum-community relationships. The authors share a specific set of experiences that contribute to the discussion of shifting patterns of power and authority in collaborations between museums and Native American Indigenous communities. In Swan and Jordan's work, there is an acknowledgement of the responsibility of accepting the authority of communities. That acceptance acts as an impetus for new levels of dialogue concerning issues of representation and authority. They suggest a need for more critical analyses of collaborative processes and methods of evaluating success. Such a critical stance, they insist, will promote approaches toward a greater awareness of the complex sets of interrelationships involved in collaborative exhibition development. Furthermore, they assert that "people in museum settings tend to focus on the products of consultation rather than the process itself, although many acknowledge that because there is no single model for such work, process is as important as product" (McMullen 2008 in Swan & Jordan, 2015, p. 56).

Nirmal Puwar, primarily interested in the sociology of post-colonialism, institutions, race, gender, and critical methodologies, and Sanjay Sharma, concerned with the sociology of racialization and difference, cultural politics, and new media, investigate in their article, *Curating Sociology* (2012), the "crisis in representation" that involves the sharing of public space with actors who take on the role of participant. They state

that we must wholly acknowledge each actor's role and subsequently abandon the term "subject" in favour of "participant" as an identifier. This form of acknowledgement permits the integration of life stories and lived moments into the process that utilize imaginative and creative methods of delivering stories of the marginalized.

The omission of marginalized peoples in public institutions does not only signify a brand of moralization, but it classifies other lives as insignificant, invisible, and unintelligible — unreal. The telling of marginalized experiences allows pathways to become visible for the disruption of the representations of socio-sexual assumptions, considering that under- or miss-representations carry social consequences that are often violent for queer people. As a form of resistance to phobias and stigmas, marginalized individuals can develop their own representations and reject misrepresentations through participation in the curatorial process.

#### 1.2.2. Power Dynamics & the 3<sup>rd</sup> Space

Marginalized groups, which have been historically excluded from social narratives, are now increasingly being invited to participate in constructing their own self-representations (Silverman, 2010). These new representations amalgamate different interests, needs, and motivations into exhibition design (Chalmers, 2007; Low, 2016; Mygind, Hällman, & Bentsen, 2015; Puwar & Sharma, 2012; Unruh, 2015).

Lærke Mygind, a researcher interested in social inequality in health; along with curator Anne Kahr Hällman, devoted to innovative museum learning; and Peter Bentsen, a researcher focused on people, places, and pedagogies in relation to health and education; co-wrote the article *Bridging gaps between intentions and realities: a review of participatory exhibition development in museums* (2015). Together, they produced an empirical review of exhibitions that included participant involvement in



the exhibition development. Based on their research they suggest the following definition:

Participatory exhibition development refers to actively involving individuals who are not part of the museum staff in different stages of exhibition development, such as narration and idea generation, object selection, exhibition space and overall concepts and approaches” (Mygind, Hällman, et al., 2015, p. 117).

This method of engaging external participant groups promotes enhanced relevance, accessibility, and personal meaning-making by rendering exhibitions personally relevant, as well as by stimulating the design process.

Moreover, Mygind et al. (2015), in their analysis of participatory exhibitions, establish three rationales for participatory design: 1) *pragmatic*, to improve tools and interactions with participants; 2) *theoretical*, to promote understanding between the participants and the exhibition professionals and to surmount linguistic divides and language-specific semantic differences; and 3) *political*, to give voice to a group of people and, in doing so, create more democratic processes and goals.

Mygind et al. (2015) also provide a taxonomy of involvement in exhibition development: 1) *consultative participation*, in which the participant will provide and receive information regarding the exhibition development and in which the participant can have a certain role or task, but is only permitted to exercise limited influence over the project; 2) *representative participation*, in which participants comment on or select predefined artifacts, concepts, products, or designs on which they provide valuable advice while exercising moderate influence over the project; and 3) *participatory consensus*, in which participants influence and take responsibility for decisions pertaining to the process as a whole, resulting in shared decision-making and active involvement through their articulation of their wants and needs.

As these different levels of involvement can shift and become intertwined, it is important to keep in mind that the:

Background and agenda, and consequently level and modus of engagement — playful (curious), hot (emotional) or cool (intellectual and detached) — all appear to affect the levels of disagreements experienced in the collaborative projects. Therefore, external participants' characteristics and motivations for entering the collaboration also are contributing factors to the success or failure of a participatory development process (Mygind, Hällman, et al., 2015, p. 129).

Different engagement styles present an important consideration regarding which emotions and ideas participants contribute to a project and what is personally, socially, and symbolically at stake for them. As Mygind et al. further state, "A political rationale transcends most reviewed cases and makes attempts at giving voice to, empowering, or representing certain marginalized societal groups" (2015, p. 132).

Likewise, Sharon Chalmers, a researcher concentrated on cultural diversity, health care, gender, sexuality, and community relations; co-curated an exhibition with curator Ricardo Peach by employing methods of participatory engagement, entitled *Edges: Lesbian, Gay and Queer Lives in Western Sydney* (Chalmers & Peach, 2002), which was presented at Liverpool Regional Museum (LMR) in 2002. Chalmers had been invited as an academic to co-curate the exhibition with Peach at the LRM, with the objective of presenting a different dimension of LGBTQ+ life — one in contrast with the spectacle of Sydney's inner-city, over-the-top parties and events. Reflecting on hybrid identities, Chalmers framed the exhibition as queer — or as a queer space — that made use of "marginal status as a way to construct distinct, imaginative and resourceful communities" (Chalmers, 2007, p. 134).

In her efforts to organize the exhibition, Chalmers quickly began to understand that there existed a discrepancy between her academic, intellectual intent and the complexity of interpreting everyday lives. Despite Chalmers' intention to engage in

community consultation, she found herself asking what the purpose of consultation was if everything had been decided beforehand. As she reveals:

Collaborating with others — intellectual strangers — who have very different professional backgrounds, and concerns, fundamentally alters the position and practice of the academic scholar. S/he no longer has the luxury of pursuing, linearly, his or her own interests or 'curiosity,' but has to step into an interdiscursive contact zone, where divergent knowledges are put into sometimes uneasy interaction with each other (Ang, 2006 in Chalmers, 2007, pp. 194-195).

This contact zone aspires to construct a new space, “a ‘third space,’ that is, a culturally hybrid and innovative space where group-specific language and authority is lifted” (Mygind, Bentsen, & Hällman, 2015, p. 132). The concept of a third space (3<sup>rd</sup> space) is critical: it is a dimension in which cultural and social change is facilitated through the creation of hybrid groups between participants and exhibition staff. In fact, it was Homi K. Bhabha who first invoked this concept when he asserted that:

It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew (Bhabha 2004 in Mygind, Hällman, et al., 2015, p. 55).

The 3<sup>rd</sup> space is a situated and contextual space where different social actors can meet and create cultural representations as equals. Although this authority-sharing 3<sup>rd</sup> space may result in lengthy exhibition development processes, Mygind et al. (2015) argue that it contributes greatly to preserving goals of equity in exhibition design and should be seen as an important curatorial tool. In striving for equity, a strong case for adhering to the highest ethical standards in practice is crucial to the negotiation of reciprocal schemes of authority and power in the decision-making processes, which, in turn, is fundamental to the development of participatory exhibitions. This, for example, can include the formation of “an advisory committee to guide the development of the exhibit and associated catalog” (Swan & Jordan, 2015, p. 47). As

an experiment in shared authorship, ideas and drafts can be reviewed and changed by participants through the exchange of criticism. In doing so, the construction of a reflexive and dialogic process emerges.

### 1.3. Queer Theory, Sociology, & Transversal Politics

The third component of my conceptual framework entails contributions from the Humanities: queer theory, sociology, and feminist transversal politics.

#### 1.3.1. Queer Theory: Identities & Positions

Queer, an umbrella term for non-normative identities and positions, by definition, refers to whatever is at odds with the normal (norms), the legitimate, and the dominant (Bourcier, 2006). There is nothing to which it necessarily refers, as it is an identity without an essence (Bourcier, 2006).

For example, David Halperin (1997) argues that queer demarcates not a positivity, but rather a *positionality* vis-à-vis the normative; a queer positionality promotes the idea that identities are not fixed, that they are mobile and multilayered, and that they cannot be reduced to stable labels such as HIV-positive, lesbian, or sex worker. Queer theory articulates that there is an interval between what a subject *does* (repetition or resignification) and what a subject *is* (identity) (Halperin, 2003): what one *does* is performative, whereas what one *is* is comprehensive. In the context of *Témoigner pour Agir*, such a concept is vital as a cultural product that transcends stereotypes in order to acknowledge the complexity of individuals and their identities.

Queer theory is further mobilized in this thesis project through the notions of reclamation and re-appropriation, performativity, and disidentification with the tropes of a normal life — the universalizing ways of living that become clichéd and empty of lived experience.

### *Reclamation & Re-appropriation*

Reclamation refers to the adoption of a negative signifier to alter its connotations (Brontsema, 2004). Re-appropriation refers to the re-evaluation of an externally-imposed negative categorization by deliberately distorting that categorization so that it may be interpreted from alternative viewpoints (Smith, 2015). Philosopher and feminist theorist Judith Butler (2011) states that queer re-appropriation troubles the social order and produces counter-canonical stories. Reclaiming and re-appropriating the term queer, for instance, troubles the meaning of the word. It is re-signified from its prior usage as an insult toward urgent political purpose, as demonstrated during the AIDS crises of the 1980s, thereby reclaimed as a word that is a positive identifier.

The adoption of the term queer occurred with Queer Nation, a derivative of the activist group AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP)<sup>1</sup>. Originally formed in New York City in March 1987, Queer Nation functioned as a discussion group consisting of activists frustrated with the homophobia in AIDS activism and the veiled visibility of gays and lesbians within the movement (Finkelstein, 2013). Initially comprised of ACT-UP members, the group quickly shifted from hosting discussions to engaging in confrontations. With a direct, action-oriented activism inspired by ACT-UP, the new alliance chose Queer Nation as its name, possessing a confrontational spirit that created distance from gay and lesbian identification. For a coalition committed to fighting homophobia and queer-bashing through confrontation, the word queer, as the most popular vernacular term for the abuse of homosexuals, was undoubtedly

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<sup>1</sup> ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) is a diverse, non-partisan group of individuals united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis. The group was established in response to social neglect, government negligence, and the complacency of the medical establishment during the 1980s. As HIV/AIDS is very much present with us, their aim is to fight for sustained investment in research for new medicines and treatments for HIV/AIDS and related co-infections; equitable access to the prevention and care of HIV/AIDS; healthcare, in general; and to tackle the structural drivers of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, such as stigma, discrimination, and poverty (ACT-UP, 1987-2020).

appropriate and, perhaps, the perfect choice for their name (Brontsema, 2004). Rather than acting as a sign of internalized homophobia, reclaiming the word queer highlights “a way of reminding us how we are perceived by the rest of the world” (Kaplan 1992 in Brontsema, 2004, p. 36). To position oneself as queer is, at once, to identify with and revolt against homophobia. With queer theory, the objective is to conceptualize the intersections of identities and their oppression in context (Bourcier, 2006).

### *Performativity*

In Butler’s (2011) opinion, gender is a performative act that has been rehearsed, much like a script to be followed. For her, gender is socially constructed through commonplace speech acts and nonverbal communication that are intrinsically performative. People, much like actors, produce realities through repetitions that are performed as modes of truth. The division between the personal and the political, or between the private and the public, is itself a narrative construct that supports an oppressive status quo. According to Butler, our most personal acts are, in fact, perpetually scripted by hegemonic social conventions and ideologies. Gender, then, is not an expression of what one *is* but rather of something that one *does*.

“[With] politically enforced performativity, gender is an ‘act,’ as it were, that is open to splitting, self-parody, self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of ‘the natural’ that, in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status” (Butler, 2011, p. 146).

*Doing* gender, therefore, is a mode of self-making in which subjects become socially intelligible as they learn to behave in particular ways in order to fit into society. “[However], the reconceptualization of identity as an effect, that is, as produced or generated, opens up possibilities of ‘agency’ that are insidiously foreclosed by positions that take identity categories as foundational and fixed” (Butler, 2011, p. 147). Butler’s theory establishes a premise where the binaries of heterosexuality and

homosexuality or of feminine and masculine are not categorically fixed and can be re-signified in action (doing) and language. In this way, language functions as a form of social action that produces change, permitting us to move away from ready-made subjects toward the construction of politics that subvert a binary system of sex and gender. Queer theory is founded on “confounding the very binarism of sex, and exposing its fundamental unnaturalness” (Butler, 2011, p. 149).

Performativity, in the context of this study, is a force that influences the formation of one's identity, which undergoes continuous redefinition through symbolic communication. The expression of identity through art is symbolic; queer symbolism reconceptualizes what that identity can be.

*Disidentification with the Tropes of a Normal Life*

Disidentification refers to the rejection of a personal or group identity. Cuban-American critical theorist José Esteban Muñoz provides one of the most concise views on the concept of disidentification, explaining that:

Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture (Muñoz, 1999, p. 31).

It is important to note that Muñoz directs his intervention in disidentifications not merely at straight cultural practices, but also toward lesbian and gay practices. He acknowledges that queers of colour frequently identify and disidentify with white-dominated lesbian and gay representational practices and culture. Examining the binaries of black/white, ethnic/non-ethnic, as well as of gay/straight and

female/male, proposes avenues for recognizing the structural and systemic positioning of specific subjectivities, while avoiding their essentialization or naturalization. Muñoz maintains that we must perpetually reflect on subjectivity so that we may appreciate how experiences of sexuality, race, ethnicity, and gender confuse one another where essentialist ideas become invalid.

Queer theory challenges the hetero-centric knowledge-power of “bad subject” (Bourcier, 2006) stereotypes (dirty, diseased, unnatural) to diverge from essentialist identities. “Queer then covers anti-hegemonic and performative practices of resignification and recodification whose aim is to define spaces of resistance to the regimes of normality” (Bourcier, 2006, p. 152). Queer theory allows a passage into marginal territories in which the emergence of new knowledge becomes possible. It is a repositioning in relation to power that changes dynamics and becomes a point of resistance.

For this study, disidentification with stereotypes and stigma permits artists and participants to explore the complexity of identity from within a space of resistance. This exploration ultimately allows for lived experience to disrupt normative ideas about queer lives.

### 1.3.2. A Sociology of Stories: Artistic Testimonials

Like queer theory, sociology offers an important framework for this thesis. As artistic testimonials are the subject of the exhibition, it is necessary to conceptually situate them. This thesis maintains the position that artistic testimonials are symbolic representations of lived experiences within a social world. Such representations are pathways to understanding community building and queer identities, as well as the society in which they exist and the social change that they generate.



According to sociologist Ken Plummer, in his book *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds* (1995), intimate stories that are shared publicly not only provide “narrative truths,” but also the basis for new forms of world-making and the creation of communities. Here, Plummer draws from a symbolic interactionist perspective, a branch of sociology<sup>2</sup> which assumes that “all factual representations of empirical reality, even statistical representations, are narratively constructed” (Plummer, 1995, p. 19).

Intimate stories shared as artistic forms are especially compelling as they can each be regarded as a source of many stories — stories of the artwork’s maker, of its making, of the motives to make it, and of the ways in which individuals and groups of people may interact with it and derive meaning from it. Once we recognize that stories are everywhere, even in the most unlikely places, we can then begin to see the social role of stories in the social work that they perform. Such social work, for example, includes how stories are produced, read by different actors, change over time, shape political processes, and affect the wider social order (Plummer, 1995).

Plummer discusses stories as the basis of identity — both personal and collective — as they provide structures to make sense of the past, the present, and the future. In addition, it is important to note that we tell stories about ourselves in order to represent ourselves through the construction of a sense of self and identity. On a personal level, a story establishes routes toward a coherent past, delineates boundaries, and ensures consistency in the present. On a collective level, sharing an intimate story with the public creates a community of story tellers and listeners,

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<sup>2</sup> The term ‘symbolic interactionism’ has come into use as a relatively distinctive approach to the study of human life and human conduct. With symbolic interactionism, reality is understood as a social construction. Most symbolic interactionists believe that a physical reality does, indeed, exist through an individual's own social definitions and that these social definitions do develop, in part or in relation to, something ‘real’ (Meltzer, Petras, & Reynolds, 1975).

providing “both a channel and shelter for the future” (Plummer, 1995, p. 172) of our intimate selves and the bodies we inhabit.

As a researcher, curator, and artist, I am a producer of testimonials. As an artist, it is my own story that I use for inspiration. However, as a researcher or curator, I inspire others to publicly offer their testimonials. This is what Plummer refers to as “coaxers;” “folk that possess the power, at least momentarily, to provoke stories from other people” (Plummer, 1995, p. 21).

### 1.3.3. Transversal Politics & Identity Work

By introducing transversality into the conceptual framework of this thesis, I aim to invoke standpoint awareness. Feminist scholar Nira Yuval-Davis popularized the idea of transversal politics in the English-speaking world after translating *Politica trasversale* (Yuval-Davis, 1997) from Italian. Published following a 1993 meeting of *Women Visiting Difficult Places*, in Bologna, Italy, her book defines transversal politics as threefold:

- 1) Transversal politics [are based on] standpoint epistemology, which recognizes that from each position the world is seen differently, and thus any knowledge based on just one positioning is ‘unfinished’ – which is not the same thing as saying it is ‘invalid’. The only way to approach ‘the truth’ is by a dialogue between people of differential positionings.
- 2) Transversal politics is the encompassment of difference by equality. [Meaning] on the one hand, that differences are important, but on the other hand, that notions of difference should encompass, rather than replace, notions of equality. Such notions of difference are not hierarchical. They assume *a priori* respect for others’ positioning – which includes acknowledgement of their different social, economic and political powers.
- 3) Transversal politics is based on the conceptual – and political – differentiation between positioning, identity, and values. People who identify themselves as belonging to the same collectivity or category can be positioned

very differently in relation to a whole range of social divisions (e.g. class, gender, ability, sexuality, stage in the lifecycle, etc.). At the same time, people with similar positioning and/or identity, can have very different social and political values (Yuval-Davis, 1999, pp. 94-95).

What does this definition imply for the queer folk at the centre of this thesis project? It permits them to see the co-curatorial group as a site of differential positionings in which difference is recognized and connected through dialogue. For such dialogue, Yuval-Davis suggests that community activists understand themselves not as representatives of a community, but rather as community advocates working in cooperation with communities and their own standpoints. As advocates, they must be conscious of the multiplexity of exchanges within and across relationships and of their specific positioning in relation to other activists, advocates, and participants. Thus, each person becomes an advocate in political dialogue as they acquire the “reflexive knowledge of their own positioning and identity” (Yuval-Davis, 1999, p. 96). Yuval-Davis refers two crucial concepts in transversal politics: “rooting,” the consideration of one’s own position, and “shifting,” the process by which a person places themselves in the situations of those with whom they are in dialogue and with whom they share differences and sense personal growth. Yuval-Davis states that this is a type of identity work that involves the “acknowledgement of the differential power positions among participants in dialogue, but it nevertheless encompasses these differences with equal respect and recognition of each participant” (Yuval-Davis, 1999, p. 98). This rooting and shifting will be a recurring idea as I address my own experience with the exhibition project.

<p>I recognize my participation within several of the targeted communities via my experience as an artist that struggles with identity, sexuality, and my HIV status within my life and artistic practice. As someone who experiences the world in this way, I can empathize with the experiences of the exhibition</p>
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artists, members of our partner communities, and those who wish to advance positive social change. In this identification with others, through my experience, I can rely on my embodied experience as a source of significant data.

Feminist transversal politics and identity work are, thus, a useful component of the theoretical framework of this project. They offer ways to address inequities by consciously recognizing that all knowledge is rooted within a social position. Remembering that queer theory has demonstrated that individuals and groups are positioned along binary identity matrices (man/woman, hetero/homo, etc.), transversality accepts difference and refuses to align with systematic inequality. Encompassing difference through self-awareness and accepting compound positions — or standpoints — enriches discourse by representing the depth and complexity of identity. This enrichment offers new knowledge as well as the possibility for change.

#### 1.4. Conclusion

The conceptual framework for this research-intervention has three components. First, there are the evolutions in curatorial practice that embrace new forms of authorship and that can generate creative methods of exhibition-making. By using objects to support ideas, space may be made for marginalized groups to take authorship and to begin to undo hegemonic hierarchies as a form of activism. Sharing knowledge and power-sharing, in turn, form the foundation of a queer co-curatorial practice. Second, the conceptual framework addresses power dynamics and inequalities by evoking the concept of 3<sup>rd</sup> space, which is both situated and contextual. I attempt to discuss the objectives of equity in exhibition design and in decision-making processes. The third component of the conceptual framework draws on contributions from the humanities. Queer theory is a useful instrument for the necessary task of challenging hetero-centric stereotypes that construct essentialist identities. Influenced by

sociology, a symbolic interactionist perspective allows me to ground artistic testimonials as symbolic representations of lived experience in a social world which is averse to queers. Finally, feminist transversal politics offer the possibility for acknowledging difference and the multiplicity of standpoints. Through dialogue and self-awareness, such difference can be respected.

While 'rooted' in my own story, with a shared experience I am able to 'shift' in order to recognize, acknowledge, accept, and support difference within communities that share common goals and politics.

## CHAPTER 2 - METHODOLOGY: AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF AN ARTIST-CURATOR

### 2.1. Introduction: An Epistemological Standpoint

My participation in the exhibition development of *Témoigner pour Agir* serves as the intervention component of this project, while the research component of the project is realized through the autoethnographic methods employed to collect and analyze data from the intervention. The data collected is derived from multiple sources: from the documents produced by the development process, from interviews conducted after the exhibition development with project participants, and from my own experience as an exhibition co-curator. Together, these constitute an autoethnography of an artist-curator in recognition of my personal position, self-knowledge, and curatorial practice.

Autoethnography operates first, here, as a standpoint on the knowledge produced in the project. Thus, on an epistemological level, it is the idea that, as an artist-curator and a researcher, I am the storyteller; as such, I use, produce, and circulate knowledge. That knowledge is situated and embodied within one standpoint. However, from the autoethnographic perspective and from standpoint epistemology, an inter-subjective discourse is essential. In that discourse, each experience of the world is different and includes the emotions, values, attitudes, and interests of the interlocutor. Therefore, knowledge originates from the position of 'I'. By employing the 'I', this method is coded by embodied affectivity. As all of my interpretations are embodied and in relation to one another, this methodology is consequently political and ethically sensitive to the research context and participants.

## 2.2. Autoethnography as Method

Autoethnography, secondly, also functions in this project as a research method. Rather than offering an explanation, as do quantitative methods, this project provides a qualitative exploration into understanding the participatory perspective of curating and, in that context, illuminates aspects of co-curating.

The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology (Hammersley, 2007) defines ethnography as the study of people and cultures, usually involving detailed small-scale investigations. This method often involves working with data collections that are not organized in terms of analytic categories. With an emphasis on exploring social phenomena rather than testing hypotheses, ethnographic investigations rely on the interpretation of human actions. The products of such research are primarily descriptive accounts, where statistical analysis and quantification often play a lesser role. Therefore, ethnographies tend to prioritize describing the culture of a group in a detailed and complex way. Moreover, this method consists of engaging in field work where data collection is conducted through interviews, observations, the examination of documents, and the interpretation of cultural artifacts. In ethnographic research, the researcher looks for patterns in group activities that reveal ideas and politics as expressed through a group's cultural production, language, or belief systems. How individuals and groups behave, expressed through their actions, is what the researcher will observe as data.

According to sociologist Sarah Wall (2006), whose research is concentrated on marginalized knowledge and epistemic injustice in the postmodern context of doubt which rejects positivism as the only access to true knowledge, *auto*-ethnography can reveal how data is socially constructed and influenced by the researcher's standpoint. Beginning with one's own experience of social phenomena provides a space for other

ways of knowing to emerge and for sharing unique, evocative, and subjective experience and understanding of our social world. It also offers an opportunity, once an interpretive understanding of phenomena is grasped, to reflect on ways in which things could, or should, be different. In other words, autoethnography, informed by the principles of ethnography, is a form of self-reflection and writing that explores the researcher's personal experience by connecting their autobiographical story with wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings. Deconstructed, the word discloses its meaning: *auto-* (self), *-ethno-* (the cultural link), and *-graphy* (the application of a research process) (Reed-Danahay in Wall, 2006, p. 6).

Similarly, sociologist Leon Anderson (2006) proposes an analytic definition of autoethnography. This added analytic element refers to ethnographic work where the researcher is a full member of the research group or setting, visible as a researcher, and committed to an analytic agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena.<sup>3</sup>

The narrative nature of this method is emphasized by Elizabeth Etorre in *Autoethnography as Feminist Method: Sensitising the feminist 'I'* (2017). For her, autoethnography is most importantly characterized as a variation of storytelling that creates “knowledge about an individual’s collective agency” (Etorre, 2017, p. 1). By recounting stories, the autoethnographer begins to “transform personal stories into

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<sup>3</sup> Specifically, Anderson suggests that analytic autoethnography is characterized by five key features: (1) complete member status, as being fully implicated within the group of study; (2) analytic reflexivity, as the researcher’s awareness of their connection to the research situation and their effects upon it; (3) narrative visibility of the researcher’s self, as the incorporation of the researcher’s own feelings and experiences into the research to be considered as vital data for understanding the social world under observation; (4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, as that which the researcher is seeking to understand and make sense of within the complex social worlds that they belong to, in part, as they attempt to broaden their knowledge through dialogue; and (5) commitment to theoretical analysis, as that which grounds personal experience within a larger framework.



political realities by revealing power inequities inherent in human relationships” (Ettorre, 2017, p. 1).

In addition, Ettorre makes an important distinction between biography and autoethnography. Whereas biography places the ‘I’ in a personal context, autoethnography, through theorization, places the ‘I’ within a cultural context in which “the view of the self is enormously complex” (Ettorre, 2017, p. 2). She states that autoethnography is the process of writing “the self-reflective self” (Ettorre, 2017, p. 2), as the researcher is not only recounting their story, but is also attempting to understand that experience through avenues of thought that are “all about describing cultural dynamics that an individual confronts rather than personal dynamics in a traditional autobiography” (Ettorre, 2017, p. 2). Furthermore, autoethnography highlights a “plausible journey of transition of who I was to who I am” (Ettorre, 2017, p. 3), or the idea that “autoethnographers present particular embodied events and emotions with people in time, their social shaping evolutions, and how these events are emblematic of wider cultural meanings and social trends” (Ettorre, 2017, p. 3).

Within this context, Ettorre proposes the following four-point definition of autoethnography:

- 1) Autoethnography creates transitional intermediate spaces inhabiting our crossroads or borderlands of embodied emotions, [where the autoethnographer] becomes an embodied crossroads – who treats others with care, humility, honesty – and political and ethical sensitivity;
- 2) Autoethnography is an active demonstration of the personal is political, [where the autoethnographer] makes her private life public, her personal life political – a process coded by embodied affectivity;
- 3) Autoethnography is feminist cultural writing which is performative that is committed to the future of women [and LGBTQ+ people, where the autoethnographer] is committed to the future of women [and LGBTQ+ people];

4) and, autoethnography helps to raise oppositional consciousness by exposing precarity, [where the person] is a member of the precariat and shares precarity with others (Ettorre, 2017, p. 5).

These four points are recurring themes in the co-curatorial process, in my relationship to that process, and in the artworks that form the exhibition. By employing Ettorre's points as an analytical tool in exploring "my self-reflective self," I was able to process my own experience and to incorporate the standpoints of the study's participants.

As mentioned in the Introduction, sections of this document are written in the first person as a manifestation of the autoethnographic standpoint. Throughout the manuscript, personal reflections linked to my involvement with this exhibition project, as a queer man living with HIV, are presented in a different typeface and placed within borders. The quotes represent my testimonial and contain data from personal and embodied experiences.

### 2.3. Semi-structured Interviews

The autoethnographic method requires searching beyond my own embodied data, as Anderson (2006) and Ettorre (2017) specify. Therefore, my methodology includes semi-structured interviews with other people, namely exhibition development participants, as well as with artists who exhibited their work. These interviews are a means for data enrichment, intended to highlight the dialogical foundations of autoethnography. In this way, dialogue with participants helps to make sense of complex social worlds as a means by which to deepen my understanding and to broaden my knowledge beyond my own conceptions. Combining multiple viewpoints from different people involved at different stages and times of the exhibition project enables a more comprehensive understanding.

Sociologists Rosalind Edwards and Janet Holland, in their book *What is Qualitative Interviewing?* (2013), designate the qualitative semi-structured interview as an

exchange, through dialogue, between two or more participants that follows a predetermined set of questions. Eight such semi-structured interviews were conducted; six were face-to-face in a room located at UQAM, while two took place via video conferencing as the participants did not reside within Montréal. In both cases, audio recordings of the interviews were made for transcription. The interviews ranged from thirty to fifty-five minutes and occurred between April and June 2018.

This interview consisted of four themes (Appendix A: Interview Guide): the first theme was concerned with exhibition development and community, as well as the methods and tools used to encourage participation from the community; the second theme addressed the development process in relation to the exhibition objectives and the final exhibition; the third theme inquired into the lessons learned from this exhibition project and reflections on possible improvements of the process of co-curating; and, finally, the fourth theme served to gather demographic information from the interviewees.

#### 2.3.1. Participant Recruitment

There was one selection criterion for participating in this project: to be an adult with a desire to reflect on or participate in the activities of the planning of the exhibition *Témoigner pour Agir*. Two categories of individuals were recruited for interviews, namely exhibition development participants and artists who exhibited their work.

##### *Exhibition Development Participants*

Recruitment for the study, for both interviews and for the use of archived documents, occurred during meetings of the exhibition development team which comprised of the Comité d'encadrement (CE) and the Comité des sages (CS). For each committee, regular meetings included an agenda item regarding participation in this doctoral project.

An invitation to participate was extended to the committee members in which I explained the nature of participation, advantages, and risks involved. Questions from prospective participants were answered at that time. If a committee member agreed to participate in the study, they were asked to contact me by telephone or email in order to pose additional questions and/or to confirm their interest in participation. Consent forms were signed shortly after, in person at the beginning of the interviews. All CE committee members participated in the study; most of the CS committee members participated as well. A few of the CS committee members did not wish to participate in the research, while others were not possible to contact after the exhibition. If a request was made to withdraw participation, there were no questions or discussions regarding their decision and their data was removed from the study.

#### *Artists Who Exhibited Their Work*

Recruitment for artist interviews and for the use of documents occurred through email. The invitation email included the details of the study along with the nature of participation, advantages, and risks involved. If an artist wished to participate in the study, they were asked to contact the researcher by telephone or email to pose questions and/or to confirm their interest in participation. Consent forms were signed at the time of our next meeting or, in some cases in which the artist lived out of town, they were signed electronically. Only one artist wished to not participate in this study. There were no questions or discussions regarding their decision and their data was removed from the study.

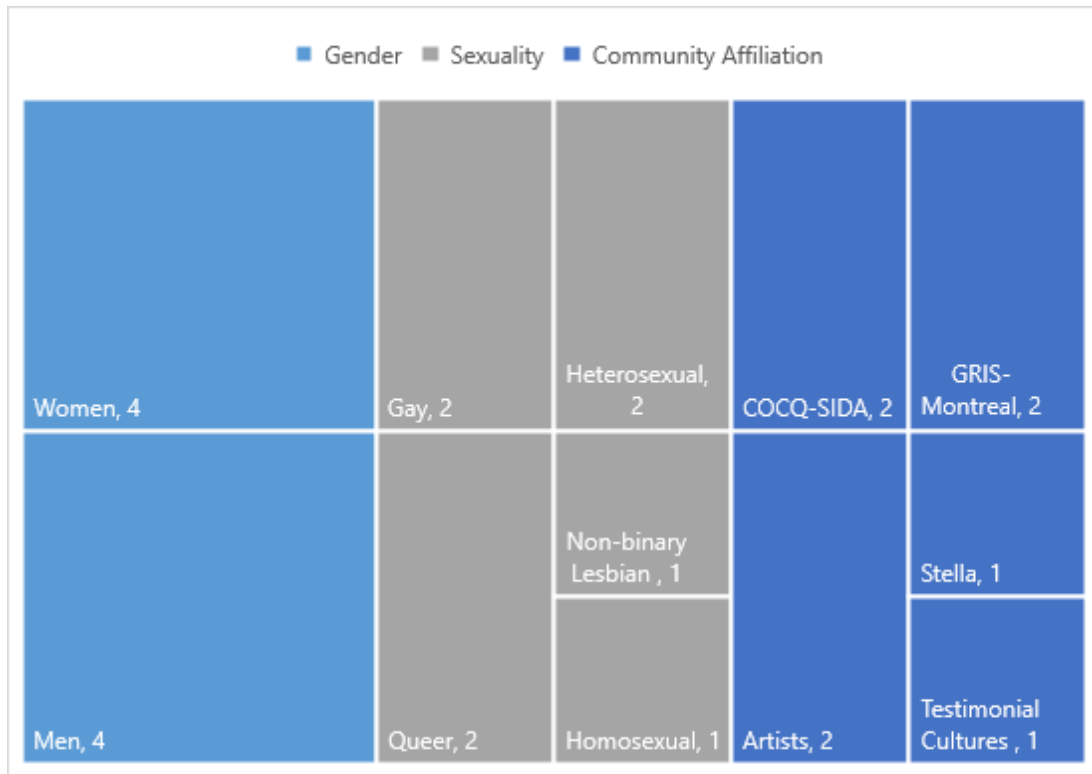
#### 2.3.2. Participants' Characteristics

These interviewees range in age from twenty-eight to forty-nine; four are women and four are men. While all respondents identify as white, several chose to specify their national identities (three Québécois and one French) or ethnic identities (one Jewish). Moreover, six are francophone and two are anglophone. The respondents describe

their sexualities as gay (2), non-binary/lesbian (1), queer (2), homosexual (1), and heterosexual (2). Concerning their community affiliations, two are members of COCQ-SIDA, two are members of GRIS-Montréal, one is a member of Stella, two are exhibiting artists, and one is a former Testimonial Cultures research assistant (see Figure 2.1: Interview Sample). Overall, this group can be classified as well-educated, with a range of educational backgrounds: autodidact artist (1); possessing a bachelor's degree in art history (1), visual arts (1), and social work (1); possessing a master's degree in communications (1 in progress), anthropology (1), and an unspecified field (1 with a doctoral degree in progress); and possessing a doctoral degree in architecture (1). As for their previous experience with exhibitions, three are professional artists — two of which also work as curators, one has worked professionally in exhibition installation, two are active gallery-goers, and two describe themselves as having no previous experience with exhibitions.

Interviewing participants after the exhibition development was completed allowed them to express themselves about the totality of their experience — how they felt about their involvement, their disappointments and satisfactions, and their suggestions for improvements of future collaborative work. Following the interviews, transcripts were made and sent to the interviewees for their comments, additions, or retractions.

Figure 2.1: Interview Sample classification according to gender, sexuality, and community affiliation.



#### 2.4. Document-based Research

Documents produced during the curatorial process were collected and examined (Appendix B: List of Archived Documents). These sources acted as an *aide-memoire* to help recall events, conversations, and decisions made. These include materials such as email correspondence, meeting minutes, and documents generated by the exhibition development process — for instance, materials submitted by artists, selected artworks, public presentations, and documents produced by the Testimonials Cultures research group. This archive of internal and external documents provides a valuable source of information about actions within the curatorial process.

For the use of these documents, permission was requested and granted individually by the participants in their consent forms and collectively by the Comité

d'encadrement, Comité des sages, and Testimonial Cultures research group at an Annual General Meeting.

## 2.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations for this doctoral research-intervention are manifold. To begin, an ethical framework was implemented within the exhibition project itself. Further ethical considerations involve the interviews, the use of internal documents, and the method of autoethnography.

### 2.5.1. Ethical Framework of the Exhibition Project

First and foremost, the exhibition project organizers were mindful of ethics in the development of *Témoigner pour Agir*. As an exhibition of artistic testimonials, “[e]thics and respect for personal testimonials and artists are the foundations of the exhibition project” (Mensah, Gagnon, Fournier, Goodyear, & Chicoine, 2018). These foundations essentially indicated that A) individuals from marginalized communities were given a central role in the exhibition development and curatorial process and that B) the research group pledged to be transparent: “By ethics, we refer to transparency in practices and intentions. To do this, a central place is given to the people involved in the project.”<sup>4</sup>

#### *Dignity and Privacy*

With the above concerns in mind, five measures were introduced to ensure the dignity and privacy of those involved. These are described in the Testimonial Cultures exhibition focus group summary (Focus Group 3: *Points saillants de la discussion du 24 février 2016 sur les précautions éthiques à prendre avant/pendant/après l'expo*):

1. The possibility for artists and persons giving a testimonial to use a pseudonym;

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.culturesdutemoignage.ca/en/exhibition-project/ethics> (29.06.2020).

2. The maintenance of confidentiality and the protection of personal information;
3. A requirement for the exhibition, or for the circulation of works and testimonials, is the written authorization from artists or persons who provide their testimonials;
4. The commitment to the creation of a social action group<sup>5</sup> [what would become the Comité des sages], composed of members from each community, which is mandated to reflect on and discuss the issues, challenges, and opportunities encountered in the process, production, and reception of the exhibition, as well as to make recommendations for action;
5. Concerning the issue of sensitive content, the necessity for the creation of a defined zone within the exhibition space — as well as the implementation of tools (text or otherwise) — devoted to explaining aspects of artistic approaches and realities to the public to promote better understanding rather than shock.

The focus group developed these points to ensure that exhibition participants, and those giving their testimonial, were given the necessary reassurances that their personal and private information would be protected — as one focus group member motioned, so that no one would be outed<sup>6</sup> as a result of their participation. Points four and five demonstrate a concern and a willingness to continue to safeguard people and communities from misrepresentations, as well as to preserve dignity.

Beyond the ethics of the exhibition project, this doctoral research-intervention project also involves human participants in other capacities: directly, through semi-

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<sup>5</sup> Social action refers to the mobilization of people as an attempt to improve their lives and solve the problems that are important in their communities. It can broadly be defined as practical action in the service of others, which is (i) carried out by individuals or groups of people working together; (ii) not mandated and not for profit; (iii) undertaken for the good of others — individuals, communities, and/or society; and (iv) delivers social change and or value (Foundation, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Coming out is the term used to describe the process of personally accepting your sexual orientation or gender identity and revealing it to others. When and to whom someone decides to come out is a personal decision. It can be a freeing experience for some who find they can finally openly acknowledge how they feel and explore deep and meaningful relationships without the fear of being found out. But for others, it can be frightening and potentially dangerous; relationships and friendships may change, harassment or discrimination may occur, and some youth may risk being thrown out of home if their parents are not supportive, meaning they could lose their emotional and financial security. Being 'outed' is the act of disclosing a person's sexual orientation or gender identity without that person's consent.



structured interviews, and indirectly, through the documents produced during the exhibition development process.

To address notions of dignity and privacy for participants, an ethics proposal was submitted and approved by UQAM's Comités d'éthique de recherche pour les projets étudiants (Appendix C: Ethics Certificate). This proposal details the tasks required of participants, the protection of the information collected, the conflicts of interest, and the benefits and inconveniences of participating in the research. Informed consent was obtained by all participants.

#### 2.5.2. Ethical Considerations Regarding the Interviews

Participation in the interview required interviewees to share their views on the planning, design, and evaluation of the participatory development of a public art exhibition. The benefits of participating in the interview are rather indirect; individuals may perceive the interview as an opportunity to participate in a collective discussion around the practical development of this exhibition and to express their perspectives freely and without judgement. The opportunity for this kind of expression can instill positive long-term benefits of personal enrichment, especially for persons who are marginalized due to their gender identity, sexuality, HIV-positive status, or involvement in the sex work industry. The inconveniences of participation in this research project, on the other hand, are more evident. Because the interview documents the different actions taken by the development team, there exists a potential risk of causing participants stress or discomfort (e.g. for sharing an opinion that is controversial or due to the fear of being assessed negatively). It is possible that their interview may provoke emotions, stress, or discomfort (e.g. in connection to a conflict within the group). Moreover, as many of these participants have committed a large quantity of time to the exhibition development, the additional time consumed by interviewing could pose a potential inconvenience and, perhaps, influence their

opinion vis-à-vis my dual status as both researcher and co-curator of the exhibition. Their awareness of my dual status may also produce discomfort in participants expressing views to me, cognizant that the interaction might be used as data for the study.

To minimize these risks, participants were given the option to terminate the interview at any time without prejudice, without being required to provide a justification, or without suffering any consequences if they decided not to answer a question or to leave the place of the meeting. See Informed Consent Forms for more details (Appendix D: Informed Consent Form).

#### *Anonymity*

The identity of the CE and CS members, as well as of the artists exhibiting their work, is public knowledge. It was, therefore, difficult to guarantee their anonymity. In addition, most of the people interviewed are activists<sup>7</sup> and it is meaningful for them to be nominally acknowledged. As bell hooks suggests, there is an importance for marginalized people to “talk back”:

Speaking is not solely an expression of creative power; it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless voiceless [...] To talk back is to liberate one’s voice” (bell hooks in Reilly, 2018, pp. 224-225).

With these concerns considered, two strategies were implemented. First, participants were offered the choice to be identified or to remain anonymous. In either case, participants were informed that it could be difficult to guarantee anonymity. Of the eight people interviewed, only one person requested to remain anonymous. The

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<sup>7</sup>In this case, I am referring to social activism where activists work to promote, guide, or impede changes in government or society and influence the actions of individuals and groups. Activists build connections among groups and communities and disseminate information on specific issues to create awareness and influence social change.

other seven participants wished for their contributions to be nominal. See Informed Consent Forms for more details (Appendix D: Informed Consent Form). Second, interviewees were also able to review and approve the public dissemination of the research data on two later occasions. Here, they reviewed transcripts of their interviews, which were sent to them by email in October 2018. They were additionally provided the opportunity to read a draft version of the thesis before it was submitted for defence. Specific sections in which interviewees are quoted and/or described were indexed in order to aid them in their review of the document. During both of these stages, participants were given the option to maintain or to change their preference of identification or anonymity, as well as the opportunity to modify their statements, if necessary.

### 2.5.3. Ethical Considerations Regarding the Document-Based Research

In order to access internal documents, the same consent form that was used for the interviews was provided and explained to prospective participants. To be precise, it was explained to them that I, the researcher, would have access to all documents produced by the organizing committees since the start of the project, including minutes of meetings, documents submitted by artists, writings and images of selected works, documentation of public presentations, documents from community partners, etc. This also indicated that I would have access to all documents produced by the organizing committees (both the CS and CE) since the beginning of the project.

Ultimately, all reachable committee members signed these consent forms. Two CS members were no longer contactable, while one artist did not wish to participate. These persons are considered *non-participants* and, as a result, the available information pertaining to them was redacted as much as possible. As these non-participants belonged to a group dynamic, it may be difficult to fully exclude their influence or perspectives.

#### 2.5.4. Ethical Considerations Regarding My Autoethnography

The primary ethical consideration regarding my autoethnography concerns the perceived conflicts of interest: I possess the status of both an external researcher and a member of the team, I am queer and involved in the queer communities at the centre of this project, and I was a paid employee of the Testimonial Cultures research group throughout my participation for a period of approximately three years. During my employment with this research group, I first worked as a research assistant for Professor Mensah and then, in the following year, as a professional curator for the exhibition (Appendix E: Designation as Curator).

There may be a perceived conflict of interest in regard to my dual status of researcher and curator, or to the fact that I earned a salary from Testimonial Cultures<sup>8</sup>. This may have interfered with how participants expressed their views — about my contributions to the group, for instance. As a paid employee of Testimonial Cultures, I acknowledge that it may have been perceived, because of my employment, that I was in a position of authority.

During my time of working with members of the CE and CS, I established positive professional relationships with them. As the invited professional curator for the exhibition project, I held authority and influence within each committee. Likewise, I am aware that introducing a research objective into these groups

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that the research participation, that is, the post-exhibition interviews and verification of texts by participants, was voluntary and unpaid according to the ethics certificate issued for the research-intervention. However, for the exhibition project, CE members were paid through employment with their organizations. The CS members were paid either by their employment with their organizations or given honorariums by Testimonial Cultures. The exhibition tour guides were provided honorariums by Testimonial Cultures for training and each gallery tour they gave. Students were paid according to the UQAM student pay scale. Artists were paid CARFAC rates for exhibiting, using their images in publication, artist talks, lectures, and workshops. These fees were paid by Testimonial Cultures and from the exhibition fee I was given by the Maison de la culture. Finally, Testimonial Cultures gave community groups funds as needed to aid in their participation.

may have had implications. For this reason, I stressed that participation in the research project was voluntary. Furthermore, participants were advised that they could request to have data removed from the record, decline to be interviewed, or withdraw their participation at any time and without any reason or explanation. Under these conditions, my hope was that participants would have the liberty of expressing what they wished without feeling any self-consciousness or obligation in doing so, including making comments directly related to my position within the committees.

Another ethical issue raised by the autoethnographic method pertains to the publicization of very private information. As a researcher-participant, I may not have been conscious of the entirety of the potential risks related to my own participation. It is, perhaps, more difficult for me to assess the risks involved in my own participation than to assess risks for others involved in the study. The dual nature of the researcher-participant position blurs boundaries, rendering it challenging to appreciate the emotional risks involved in revealing my story. One such negative consequence was that, at times, this work became emotionally uncomfortable. Another one was that, once revealing my autobiographical experiences, this data became irrevocable from the public domain.

However, as safeguard for my own self-care (Ettorre, 2017), the time I have devoted to write this thesis has allowed me to process the autobiographical information that I reveal in this document. Moreover, this document does not out me, but rather it demonstrates the embodied experience of slowly revealing my story with care.

## 2.6. Review of the Thesis by Participants

For the thesis review process, an invitation was sent to all participants on June 28, 2020. In that email, participants were informed that a link to the document would be forwarded in the following weeks. On July 8, a shared editing link was sent to twenty-seven participants<sup>9</sup> in individual emails containing instructions for editing and commenting, as well as a list detailing on which pages their names and organizations (CE, CS, Stella, GRIS, COCQ, etc.) appear. An initial deadline to submit edits was set for July 17; however, this was extended for the entire group until July 20 at the request of a few participants. A third email was sent on July 17 to participants who had not yet responded, informing them of the new deadline. Of the twenty-seven participants contacted, twenty-four replied. None of the three participants who did not reply are mentioned nominally in this manuscript.

Following the participants' reviews, mostly minor changes were made to the document (i.e. typos were indicated, the professional title of director was changed to coordinator, and names that did not appear in a figure were added in a footnote). In one case, a paragraph in an artist's subsection was altered to provide clarification for an idea, which was resubmitted and approved by the artist. In another case, an interviewee rewrote a portion of their quotations in order to refine their thoughts. And finally, a participant decided to modify their identification from anonymous to nominal, with an affiliation to their organization.

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<sup>9</sup> Three additional emails were sent to non-participants that were previously unreachable. While they are not named in the thesis, they were part of the CS dynamic and I felt that it was important to try, once again, to include them in the process. However, there was no reply.

## 2.7. Limits

Conceived near the end of the co-curatorial process, this thesis project has certain limitations. For instance, I possess very few field notes that one would typically find in an ethnographic study. Despite the well-documented exhibition development, I have been required to rely upon my memory to recall events, a process which may not always be wholly accurate. Furthermore, due to the personal and political investment in my involvement, it was, at certain moments, challenging to maintain my objectivity. As an autoethnographic tool, distinguishing my personal reflections with a different typeface and with borders to separate them from the rest of the text, allows you, the reader, to recognize with which voice I am speaking. When to make this distinction and with which voice to speak was not always straightforward.

The scope of this research-intervention is concerned with the development of the exhibition content. However, the exhibition included other important aspects not addressed in this document. The exhibition required considerable funds, time, and energy. These funds were challenging to secure, in-kind labour from our partner organizations was considerable and demanding, and several community groups simply did not have the capacity to participate fully, or at all. Despite our best efforts, these factors had an impact on exhibition development.

## 2.8. Conclusion

This study presents an epistemological standpoint of autoethnography. Three data collection techniques have been combined in this qualitative approach. First, my own experience in the exhibition development process of co-curating was collected as data. Second, the execution of semi-structured interviews enabled the gathering of perspectives from exhibition participants. And third, an archive of internal and external documents was created. There were ethical concerns for both the exhibition

project and the research-intervention. In this chapter, these are described, and the strategies employed to reduce risks are presented.



## CHAPTER 3 - TESTIMONIAL CULTURES: AN ACTION-RESEARCH GROUP

The exhibition *Témoigner pour Agir* came to fruition as a project within the larger scope of activities produced by the action-research group Testimonial Cultures | Cultures du témoignage. To provide insight into the context within which the exhibition project emerged, this chapter is devoted to the research group itself — their history, governance, parameters, and objectives — and to portraying how an art exhibition came to be established through this organization.

### 3.1. A University-Community Partnership

University-community partnerships are areas of growing academic and social interest (Strier, 2011). They are considered joint opportunities for cooperation and the of sharing knowledge between a university and the citizens of a community of knowledge (de Grosbois, Mauffette, & Lizée, 2013). The latter is often understood to be social groups that do not traditionally have a voice. Community-based groups often consider these initiatives as a means by which to advance social agendas. These kinds of collaborations have “contributed to the implementation [...] of new social policies for the benefit of the entire population” (de Grosbois et al., 2013, p. 2).

In 2010, through a partnership development grant from the SSHRC, the Testimonial Cultures group was founded at UQAM for the purpose of examining public testimonial practices by marginalized communities as an instrument of social change (Mensah & Dirtystein, 2017). Information on the group’s website illustrates the importance of this domain of investigation, especially in regard to sexual and gender minorities:

For sex workers, testimonials have become key tool for advocacy on a community level in contexts where prostitution is criminalized and are useful in raising awareness about working and living conditions. People living with

HIV, who can be subject to criminal prosecution if they do not disclose their HIV status to sexual partners, have also developed a specific ‘testimonial culture.’ Often experienced as a ‘coming out,’ the disclosure of HIV status bears some similarities to disclosure experiences with regards to sexual orientation by people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer as well as to the disclosure of gender self-identification by transgender and intersex people.<sup>10</sup>

Each partnership imparts significant experiences, reflections, and knowledge in regard to the use of testimonials as a strategy for social and cultural intervention. The research group actively analyzes the testimonial culture of people living with HIV/AIDS in Québec, social and educational initiatives developed by and for sex workers, educational strategies for schools to demystify and promote the social inclusion of sexual minorities, supportive queer community spaces that contest forms of oppression and social exclusion. This purpose of this research is to promote a better understanding of the experiences of people displaced by war, genocide, and experience human rights violations (Mensah, 2009).

More precisely, one of the goals of the group is to *develop meaningful partnerships* between researchers and activists from academia, as well as from the community. Other objectives include knowledge mobilization and social change.

Knowledge mobilization is a term that describes a range of activities encompassing “the production and use of research results, including knowledge synthesis, dissemination, transfer, exchange, and co-creation or co-production by researchers and knowledge users” (Council, 2019). By sharing knowledge through discussion, the group is able to improve awareness of the advantages, challenges, and consequences of using testimonials as a strategy for social and cultural intervention. And finally, by generating a cohesive group comprised of various minorities with similar interests and

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<sup>10</sup> <https://culturesdutemoignage.ca/en/about/the-project/> (14.04.2021)

concerns regarding bodily, sexual, or gender experiences and identity, individuals can be empowered to combat the discrimination and stigmatization that they experience (Mensah & Goodyear, 2017). This action aims to transform the realities of exclusion and stigmatization of minorities in our society (Mensah et al., 2018; Mensah & Goodyear, 2017; Mensah & témoignage, 2016; Mensah et al., 2017).

### 3.1.1. Action-Research Perspective

The Testimonial Cultures research group situates itself within the spirit of action-research. Action-research is a systematic cycle of investigation that operates within complex dynamics. As a method, it is designed to reveal solutions that empower people to address problems that they confront in their everyday lives and social contexts (Stringer, 2020). The partners of Testimonial Cultures employ both research techniques aimed at understanding phenomena and action strategies directed toward social change (Mensah, 2009). “From this perspective, it is not enough to simply identify problems: it is also imperative to contribute to their resolution, in collaboration with community stakeholders” (Appendix F: *Témoigner pour Agir* Call to Artists statement).

Testimonial Cultures’ action-research is built on a democratic and consensus-based governance structure. Partners have equal representation on working committees and in decision-making processes via the research group’s Annual General Meeting. For academic and community workers, the project provides an opportunity to share experiences and expertise on an ongoing basis and to participate in projects and cross-community activities. Additionally, partners are actively involved in the development of partnership agreements that define and guide collaboration with members of the research group. I believe that this type of openness, transparency, and collaboration

established over the course of many years is the backbone of Testimonial Cultures.

### 3.1.2 Partners Involved

The Testimonial Cultures partners involved in the exhibition project originate from both within the community and from academia.

#### *Community-Based Partners*

The activities of the **Centre for Gender Advocacy**<sup>11</sup> pertain to two broad categories. The first of these categories consists of services and resources offered free of charge to the Concordia University and greater Montréal communities in the form of peer support and advocacy, safer sex resources, and trans health resources. The second is composed of campaigns and programming designed to demand justice for the numerous missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada and to advocate for improved access to reproductive health services, trans health resources, and a safer community (Advocacy, 2018).

The **Coalition des organismes communautaires québécois de lutte contre le sida [COCQ-SIDA]** brings together thirty-five community-based, AIDS-related organizations located in the province of Québec. The coalition establishes networks; mobilizes people; and combines efforts, actions, and resources in order to respond to the issues that affect people that are living with and that are impacted by HIV. COCQ-

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<sup>11</sup> The Centre for Gender Advocacy played a pivotal role in the development of the exhibition. Gabrielle Bouchard, former coordinator at the Centre, was an integral part of the CE. However, they left their position near the time of the opening of the exhibition and, consequently, were no longer available. The Centre for Gender Advocacy, unfortunately, did not have another person to replace Gabrielle in a timely manner and the organization regretfully withdrew their participation. The team acknowledges their major contribution.

SIDA was founded in 1990, in accordance with the Denver Principles and with the GIPA Principle (Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV/AIDS), to permanently grant key roles to people living with HIV in all its spheres of action. This substantial participation in the coalition of people living with HIV allows members to properly apprehend and target the difficulties and barriers they face (COCQ-SIDA, 2018).

The **Groupe de recherche et d'intervention sociale de Montréal [GRIS-Montréal]** has existed since 1994; however, its origins can be traced to seven years prior, when Jeunesse Lambda, a support organization created by and for LGBTQ+ youth, identified a major need for education amongst thirteen to sixteen-year-olds questioning their sexual orientation. To meet this large demand, a social intervention committee was created to organize interventions in the form of testimonials in high school classrooms. Following the success of their formula and a growing demand for these interventions, the committee officially established itself as GRIS-Montréal in 1994. Since then, the GRIS mission has been to foster a greater awareness of gay, lesbian, and bisexual lives, as well as to facilitate the societal integration of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people (GRIS-Montréal, 2018).

**Stella, l'amie de Maimie (Stella)** is an organization developed by and for sex workers. Their mission is to inform and support sex workers in order to improve their living and working conditions, as well as to raise society's awareness of the various manners in which sex work manifests and about the lived experiences of sex workers so that they might also benefit from the same rights to health and safety as the rest of the population. More specifically, Stella seeks to offer support and information to sex workers so that they can work and live in safety, in good health, and with dignity; to counter threats toward sex workers, including violence and the various factors that put sex workers at risk of contracting HIV and STBBIs (sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections); to fight the discrimination, stigmatization, and social isolation of

sex workers; to promote the decriminalization of all forms of sex work; to support the community participation and collective action of sex workers; and to encourage the creation of platforms and forums to discuss sex work on municipal, provincial, national, and international levels. Stella's team works toward these goals by promoting solidarity amongst sex workers and by creating spaces where sex workers can access power as members of society. Stella also takes part in the international sex workers' rights movement (Stella, 2018).

#### *Academic Partners*

As for academic partners, the three following UQAM professors contributed diverse and complementary expertise:

**Maria Nengeh Mensah** (PhD Communication), the project director and a Professor of Social Work and Feminist Studies, is a specialist in the dynamics of social exclusion and stigmatization related to gender and sexuality. She possesses an in-depth understanding of knowledge mobilization in multidisciplinary and intersectoral contexts. Mensah provided intellectual and organizational leadership for the exhibition project.

**Janick Bastien Charlebois** (PhD Sociology), a Professor of Sociology and Cultural Action, is a specialist in the fields of social justice, radical democracy, and community building. She is an academic and community advocate for sexual minorities and is one of the few Canadian academics working with intersex people.

**Julie Lavigne** (PhD Art History), a Professor of Sexology, is a specialist in the re-appropriation of artistic and pornographic conventions in feminist art, as well as in ethical issues related to queer, lesbian, and alternative representations.

### 3.2. Why an Exhibition?

The motivations for producing this exhibition were varied and refined during a development period in excess of five years. I was curious to determine how the idea of an exhibition arose. Below are the details of a conversation that occurred between myself and Maria Nengeh Mensah on July 5, 2018:

**MNM:** So [the Oral History Lab<sup>12</sup>] was an initial partner in the partnership funding we got that became the Testimonial Cultures group [...] We had really started working on things in a really fun way with the staff person [at the Oral History Lab], a museologist.

**JWG:** Okay.

**MNM:** [...] And so, she was the coordinator there and she was like, “Oh my God, you know an exhibition is the thing to do!” So that was, really, what gave us really that idea. They had just finished an exhibition called *Histoires de vie de Montréal* which was at the Centre d'histoire de Montréal<sup>13</sup>, in Vieux-Montréal. This was the result of an eight-year-long project of collecting stories of people who were in diaspora [in] Montréal because they had fled armed conflict. So, it was like the first and first-and-a-half [generations] to the region. So, Cambodia, Vietnam, Haiti, Rwanda... I think those are the major ones. So, it's an amazing project. They took all these people [and] collected their stories. They made little stories together and then they infiltrated this museum with them, and it was a really neat show... The whole Testimonial Cultures team, we went to see the show, we had guided tours, and you know, and I remember

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<sup>12</sup> The Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS) explores the connections between oral history, digital media, and the arts. As a centre of production, it shares its findings with diverse audiences, both within and beyond academia. COHDS serves as a point of convergence for collaborative research, teaching, and publishing among faculty and students at Concordia University, as well as for community-based projects. COHDS was one of the founding partners of Testimonial Cultures.

<sup>13</sup> *Histoires de vie de Montréal / Montréal Life Stories* is an oral history project exploring Montréalers' experiences and memories of mass violence and displacement as a result of war, genocide, and other human rights violations. From 2007 to 2012, a team of both university and community-based researchers of the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling recorded life stories by conducting interviews with more than five hundred Montréal residents. The resulting *Nous sommes ici* exhibition showcased the results of the project and was presented at the Centre d'histoire de Montréal from March 8, 2012 to April 14, 2013.

Ken [Monteith, at COCQ-SIDA] was just like, “Oh my god I want to do this!” ... Yeah, and I think that's when I, too, was like, okay, this could really be [the direction] we should go in.

**JWG:** Cool. That, I didn't know.

**MNM:** Yeah. So, I don't know what you can, you know, get from that. You know what I mean? But that was at the AGM (Annual General Meeting) in, like, 2012 or 2013 or something [when the exhibition was first presented].

**JWG:** Maybe 2013.

**MNM:** Yeah. Because its [name of the research assistant], his report there [was written during that time].

**JWG:** Yeah, I've got that.

**MNM:** ...do you think you're missing much, just, like, “inside stories,” you know? But it really is about who sits around the table.

**JWG:** Yeah.

**MNM:** You know, maybe if it had been [another member of the group], we would have made a movie, you know.

It is the phrase, “But it really is about who sits around the table,” that resonates most with me in this conversation. It underlines the organic nature of a project such as this one — one that demands input from many perspectives. It emphasizes and reinforces ideas of authorship (Preston, 2015; Reilly, 2018), form (Acord, 2010; Filipovic, 2014), and agency (Muller, 2012; Preston, 2015) as each person at the table expresses their pragmatic, theoretical, and political concerns. As the group sits at the table, they fold together their explicit and tacit knowledges to propel ideas and produce common goals.

Once the idea of an exhibition was conceived, the partners of Testimonial Cultures set forth in earnest to define the conceptual rationale for the exhibition. Eventually, those concepts and intentions were illustrated in their definitive formulations by Professor Mensah in the exhibition catalogue:

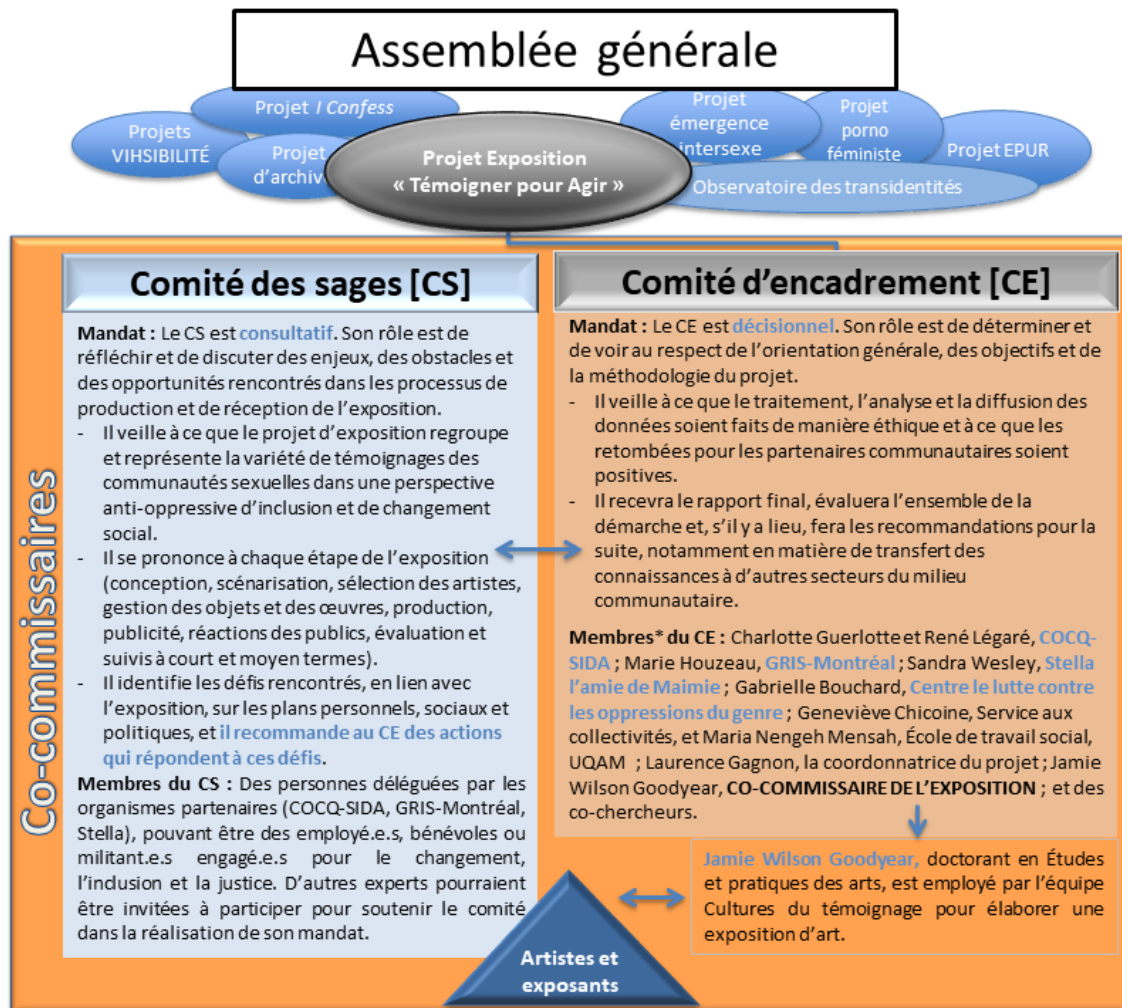


Several elements motivated the choice to create an art exhibition. Firstly, we reflected on the importance of diversifying our popular education and awareness-raising methods, and we opened up to the idea of using artists' work to reach the maximum possible number of people. The medium of a visual art exhibition, in particular, seemed to us to be a perfect communication tool for "colonizing" public space with our communities' concerns and to demand an end to stigmatization. Concretely, creating an exhibition together made it possible to present a nuanced look at our realities in a non-linear fashion and from multiple points of view. The association between the messages and the art objects would also foster the creation of political discourse (Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 8).

It is, at times, difficult for community organizations, or for marginalized people, to trust beyond their own communities because of experiences with past injustices, suspect motivations, or malicious intent. I think that an art exhibition, as a known setting, can be a focal point where people of diverse backgrounds connect, relax amid peers, and candidly produce a cultural product that is accessible to them and to the general public. An exhibition is also a place where such an ambitious goal can coalesce with a specific physical location and moment in time. I observed that in this case, it was also a place where people of different political, intellectual, and creative foundations could unite to find commonalities as they each took a seat at the table.

### 3.3. Exhibition Project Governance

The governance (Fig. 3.1) of *Témoigner pour Agir* was informed by a dynamic exchange between the various people involved in the project. This fostered a systematic and continuous process of co-construction and of the sharing of knowledge and expertise within the work of the two committees. These instances collectively defined the exhibition objectives, message, selection of artists, target audiences, and programming of secondary activities.

Figure 3.1: Governance Organigram for Témoigner pour Agir<sup>14</sup>

### 3.3.1. The Comité d'encadrement (CE)

The mandate of the Comité d'encadrement (CE) was to ensure that the concerns and interests of marginalized sexual and gender communities remained at the centre of all of our decisions. The CE was conceived as a decision-making body to manage the human and financial resources of the exhibition project. Moreover, the CE determined the general direction, objectives, and methodology for the exhibition. A

<sup>14</sup> René Légaré, in February, along with Charlotte Guerlotte, in March, assumed the responsibilities of Aurélie Hot as representatives of COCQ-SIDA in 2017.

core objective was to “ensure that the concerns and overall direction identified by the CS [were] realized and to manage the project's human and financial resources” (Mensah et al., 2018).

The CE was composed of Professor Mensah, the representatives from the four community partner organizations, a UQAM Community Service Development Officer<sup>15</sup>, the research assistants, the project coordination team, and myself. The research assistant Laurence Gagnon, whose role was to comprehensively assess the steps required in ensuring that the exhibition and its activities took place, developed the timelines and coordinated the work of the other research assistants, Laurie Fournier and Laura Gagnon. Laura Gagnon's role was a coordination support role, in which she performed logistical tasks, made notes at events, and reviewed texts. Laurie Fournier was assigned to the communication subcommittee, where she wrote and translated promotional plans and press releases and effectuated other logistical tasks, including note-taking at events.

In total, fifteen CE meetings took place during the exhibition development stage.

### 3.3.2. The Comité des sages (CS)

The mandate of the Comité des sages (CS) was to reflect on and discuss the issues, obstacles, and opportunities encountered in the production and reception of the exhibition. The members of the committee ensured that the exhibition project accurately unified and represented the variety of testimonials from an anti-oppressive

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<sup>15</sup> Geneviève Chicoine, Community Service Development Officer of le Service aux collectivités was instrumental to the exhibition project organization. With the Service's support, we were able to reach an agreement with two Montréal cultural outreach and mediation organizations, the Maison de la culture Janine-Sutto and the Bibliothèque Frontenac. As their mission, the Service performs community outreach to groups that are not traditionally served by universities. They do so by partnering with the community to share knowledge and skills as a means by which to collectively produce new knowledge that can lead to social innovations.

perspective of inclusion and positive social change. The members were critical in identifying potential personal, social, and political challenges that the exhibition project and its participants would encounter. As challenges were identified, the CS made recommendations to the CE for which actions could be undertaken in response.

The concept for the Comité des sages emerged at the end of the third, and final, focus group, which is describe in the next chapter. There was a desire for the members of the focus group to continue their work by guiding the direction of the exhibition.

I remembered the moment when the focus group, which was more of a research method, became a committee. It was really not you or Maria who were like, “So let’s do it,” it was, rather, us who were, “Well, we don't want to stop there — you're going to have to listen to us again.” I remembered that moment and I thought it was really cool because it seemed like it was really unexpected [...] And it was embraced right away; there were no questions, no resistance. “Okay, you still want to be here? Okay, we're going to take your participation — we certainly want it. We're just going to find a way to organize it in a logistical way, but we're sure as hell not saying no.” And I remember that moment and I found it very powerful because it was the most vulnerable people — the volunteers, the members, the activists — who were the first people to say that they did not want to stop. I found that even more magical in a way, you know? “This exhibition speaks to me, this idea speaks to me, so I want to keep getting involved,” which I found quite nice (Amélie Charbonneau, GRIS-Montréal, interview April 17, 2018, my translation).

The CS was asked to guide the decisions at each stage of the exhibition development from its conceptualization to the selection of artworks and projects, the exhibition design, the development of a visual identity, catalogue production, the organization of guided tours, and exhibition promotion.

The committee operated as an open group that met approximately once per month during the year prior to the exhibition opening, as well as throughout the duration of the exhibition. The open nature of the group meant that its composition and size varied from one meeting to the next. The majority of CS members were delegated by

partner organizations: they consisted of employees, volunteers, activists, or of those otherwise attached to the organization. The Testimonial Cultures group also invited other community organizations to participate in discussions and to provide advice related to the needs of trans communities in the exhibition project; namely, Aide aux Trans du Québec (ATQ) and Action Santé Travesti.e.s et Transexuel.le.s du Québec (ASTTeQ). Each group meeting was moderated by Professor Mensah, acting as the team director, and/or myself, as the artist-curator of the exhibition. The facilitator's tasks were to establish the democratic functioning of the meetings; determine the agenda in relation to the concerns and interests of the members; facilitate discussions; and, for research purposes, to document the experiences, challenges, and actions of the members in each session.

The CS members were regarded as citizen experts who possessed an intimate knowledge of the experience of public testimonials — some of whom had provided their personal testimonials in various media or public places, while others had accompanied their peers during their testimonial processes. The group participants also consisted of members of one or more sexual or gender communities represented in the exhibition. More specifically, they were lesbian, bisexual, gay, queer, non-binary, and/or trans people — some of whom were living with HIV or had experience in sex work. Finally, the group participants had a distinct interest in artistic testimonials and in the arts, in general.

The CS meetings were held eleven times between September 2016 and January 2018. Each meeting took place over the span of approximately two hours and, often, tasks were assigned and performed by the members between meetings.

### 3.4. Conclusion

The dedication of university-community partnerships and the long-term formation of trust allowed a project like *Témoigner pour Agir* to be possible. As such, the exhibition was the product of nearly a decade of reciprocal collaboration and confidence in the methods, objectives, and goals of the collectivity that informed the research group. That infrastructure and trust would eventually shape the governance of the exhibition project. Consequently, that governance would enable the co-construction of knowledge and methods that promote the value of experiential knowledge of community groups and participants, fulfilling an anti-oppressive perspective required to support queer communities.

## CHAPTER 4 - SETTING THE EXHIBITION PARAMETERS

To ground the exhibition project, both scientifically and within the community, our initial task was to conduct a review of literature. The purpose of this review was to support us in understanding how the development of participatory exhibitions has been previously approached by other individuals, groups, and organizations. This information was subsequently used to prepare focus groups in an attempt to guide the structure of our development processes, to determine the specific themes of the exhibition, to envision the potential audience for the exhibition, and to consider the ethics of the exhibition.

### 4.1. Review of Literature

As a preliminary action, Professor Mensah and I conducted a review of literature (Mensah et al., 2018) that would reinforce the overall framework and theme development for the exhibition project. During the months of July and August 2015, we identified scientific literature that explored testimonials from people living with marginalized sexual identities (LGBTQ+, HIV-positive, and sex workers) that appeared in public art exhibitions from approximately 2000 to the present. This research was conducted across various disciplines, but was primarily focused in the fields of the arts and of sociology. During the literature review, citations from other marginalized communities were included as references to help guide the development of the exhibition. Moreover, other sources were taken into consideration, such as exhibition reviews, news articles, and publications from exhibition organizers.

We identified fifty-eight exhibitions that had been held in the West between 2008 and 2014 by artists, community organizations, and private or public galleries on themes

related to personal testimonials and sexual and gender communities (twenty-six on HIV/AIDS, twenty on LGBTQ+ issues, twelve on sex work). However, during this period, no exhibitions were identified that united all of these communities in a transversal way (Mulhearn, 2015).

Furthermore, the field of museology was recognized in a body of literature that explored collaborative exhibition development (Acord, 2010; Baker & Zuk, 2003; Ballard, 2008; Murray & Murray, 2006; Mygind, Hällman, et al., 2015; Reichard, 2012; Swan & Jordan, 2015; Thomas, 2010; Unruh, 2015). Museological texts typically address the production of artistic meaning from works brought together in exhibitions. Queer exhibitions, which often struggle with tensions between artistic canons and identity politics, are described in these texts as sensitive, aesthetic, and dynamic (Atkins, 1996; Davies, 2013). Our review found that some authors are particularly interested in the exhibition of sensitive content and the representation of violence and trauma (Petry, 2007; R. I. Simon, 2011).

Oral histories also provided relevant insights for our research (Beim & Fine, 2007; Bennett, 2011; Blatti, 1990; Bornat, 1993; Carr, 2007; Chew, 2002; Dean, 2010; Decoteau, 2008; Doyle, 2001; Gilmore & Marshall, 2010; Green, 1997; Lowry & Duke, 2012; McAllister, 2012; McSkimming, 2013; Raphael, 2006; Reichard, 2012; Tamboukou, 2015; Thomson, 1998; Wlodarski, 2010). Here, artistic testimonials are perceived as avenues for connecting both generations and subjectivities. In this context, the museum is considered as a vehicle for the dissemination of these unifying stories. Yet, there is also awareness of the limitations of memory and its capacity for inaccuracy (Blum, 2010; Haswell, 2005; Lomsky-Feder, 2004; Patel, 2012; Shopes, 2002; Tamas, 2012; Thacker, 2005), as well as a cognizance of the role of the archive and of new technologies in the preservation of a community's history (Crawford & Herland, 2014; Flinn, 2010; Jones, 2015; Soukup, 2014).



Discussing the social role of art (Bartlett, 2013; Bennett, 2011; Blanckenberg & McEwen, 2014; Brook, 1981; Griswold, Mangione, & McDonnell, 2013; Hanquinet, Roose, & Savage, 2014; Korom, 1999; Lamoureux, 2009; Layton, 2003; Martini Pandozy, 1986; Nagam, 2006; O'Neill, 2008; Osborne, 2015; Pullen & Matthews, 2006), authors examine its potential as a didactic vehicle for social change both methodologically, as a means of transforming social relationships, and politically, as a commitment to criticizing dominant representations. In these writings, the museum is identified as a “cultural broker” which promotes dialogue with the public (Muller, 2012).

Between the 1980s and 1990s, exhibitions that presented testimonials from sexual and gender minorities concentrated mainly on themes of gay male sexuality. However, since the 2000s, the focus has shifted toward exhibitions that reflect on the experience and representations of trans people by portraying sexualities, gender, and subjectivity in more intricate manners that require a transcendence of such categories in order to account for the complexity of these identities (M. P. Allen, 2007; Boyce & Hajra, 2011; Dansky, 2015; Grey, 2009; Halberstam, 2000; Harrison, 2009; Noble, 2005; Roux, 2012; Schewe, 2011; Taylor, 2004; Thorstad, 2013).

Among the numerous works on the extensive artistic response to the HIV experience (R. Allen, 2009; Bray & Sankar, 2001; Decoteau, 2008; Fenoglio, 2014; Kelly & Kerner, 2004; Lyle, 2014; Lynch, 2000; Martin, 2000; O'Donnell, 2014; Powelson, 2003; Richard Sawdon Smith, 2013; Siskin, 2006), many focus on the pandemic in Africa, black male bodies, and the intersection of race and class (Alexander, 2000; Belton, 1992; Bleiker & Kay, 2007; Kirkwood, 2007; Manion & Morgan, 2006). It is also noted that many exhibitions have been devoted to HIV prevention with a public health focus (Campbell, Bath, Bradbear, Cottle, & Parrett, 2009; George, 2004; Hicks, 2013;

Menzies, 1980; Nambiar, Nguyen, Giang, Hirsch, & Parker, 2013; Rhodes, Hergenrather, Wilkin, & Jolly, 2008; White, 2006).

In regard to representations of people working in the sex industry, the works examined reveal the predominance of negative representations, whether from media, political, or scholarly sources (Hallgrímsdóttir, Phillips, Benoit, & Walby, 2008; Hubbard, 2003; Lay, 2008; Nikunen & Paasonen, 2007; O'Neill & Giddens, 2001; A. Simon & Frances, 2003; Small, 2012). Such literature also reveals an interest in the self-representation practices that sex workers adopt in order to counter these negative representations and to provide themselves with creative methods to share their experiences (Cheng, 2013; Kim, 2012; O'Neill et al., 2002). It is important to note that this review illuminated an under-representation of male sex workers.

#### 4.2. Focus Groups

The Comité d'encadrement (CE) arranged three focus group meetings during the winter of 2016. These focus groups were held to provide direction for the exhibition development by requesting that members of the partner communities' groups share their views on the exhibition design and themes. The focus groups also served as a space for reflection on the practical and ethical dimensions of displaying their community's testimonials to the public through an art exhibition.

The specific themes of each focus group were determined by the CE based on the review of literature. Each focus group brought together two to three members of each partner organization who had the opportunity to express themselves freely regarding the modalities of the conceptualization and development of the exhibition. Specifically, the members were asked: Which stories should be told? Which objects and works should be chosen? Which means or media should be used in this selection process? Who are the target audiences? How can we assess the impact of drawing

attention to them as a community or as individuals? How can we assess this impact on the research group itself? What ethical precautions should be implemented throughout the process? And which resources should be invested in such a project? Ultimately, the group interviews identified the democratic, inclusive, and participatory aspects of the project; its links to intervention strategies to reduce stigma for sexual and gendered communities; and its impact, in regard to social change, on the role of testimonies and their public perception.

#### 4.2.1. Group 1: Which Stories to Tell?

In the first focus group, participants were introduced to the project, the context of the exhibition, and the perceived objectives of the research groups. Next, the meeting delved into three areas of questioning: 1) the profile of the artist, 2) the type of works to be included in the exhibition, and 3) the inclusion of sensitive content. This first focus group took place on January 6, 2016. Eight participants were in attendance — three men and five women aged twenty-nine to fifty-five — with affiliations to COCQ-SIDA (3), Stella (3), and GRIS (2).

##### *About the Artist's Personal Profile*

A key condition for which the first focus group advocated was the need to prioritize the standpoint that the exhibition would be by and for the communities involved. This position was intended to maintain the importance of the experience of marginalized people and to demonstrate how that experience would convey a positive message. It was also expressed that, while artists may be sensitive to the collective realities of their communities, they would be required to present works that represent their personal experiences. However, they did not intend to exclude allies of various communities whose artwork integrates third-person testimonials or that features a direct testimonial from the artist about marginalization — such as an artist who shares their story of the experience of living with HIV. Moreover, there was a strong

consideration for artworks from diverse artists who are recognized supporters of community struggles. There was also an explicit desire to invite artists to participate who are in solidarity with and who show respect for each of the communities addressed in the exhibition, whose artworks strive to give a voice to common efforts.

To summarize, this focus group expressed an unambiguous desire to feature creators with reputations for commitment and involvement in the community as artists or activists. They also wished to promote a diversity of profiles to include local, national, and international artists. And finally, there was a fervent requirement to ensure that the anonymity of artists who are not 'out' to be respected and to offer the possibility for participating artists to use pseudonyms in order to protect their identities.

#### *Concerning the Message or Themes Addressed*

The focus group sought artworks that demystified the realities of their communities, as well as those which exhibited the potential to dismantle prejudices. They were adamant that artworks should not propagate prejudices, nor should they oppose the actions of community activism. Additionally, artworks were expected to suggest non-victimizing messages that support the objectives of the community partners and the research group. It was also emphasized that artworks should address critical responses to the criminalization of communities. Overall, the focus group insisted that messages of strength, empowerment, and the capacity to act and speak out be given priority in the exhibition.

#### *About the Types of Media*

The focus group saw no reason to place restrictions on the type or form of the artworks. They invited all forms of visual art (painting, video, sculpture, photography, book arts, etc.), performances (performance art, burlesque, spoken word, slam,

poetry, dance, etc.), or any other form of creative expression that used testimonial at its core.

#### *On the Issue of Sensitive Content*

The focus group was aware that some of the artworks in the exhibition would contain sensitive content that may not be understood, be a point of confusion, or create tension with the exhibition visitors. To avoid this, it was suggested that the exhibition organizers provide tools to properly explain the artworks and to inform the public of the approaches or realities of the people offering their testimonials in order to promote understanding rather than shock. As an additional precaution, it was advised that artworks which may be particularly difficult for audiences be placed in enclosed spaces designated by warnings about the sensitive nature of the work.

#### 4.2.2. Group 2: Publics

The second focus group<sup>16</sup> was convened to inquire about the type of publics or audiences that could be imagined, or desired, to attend the exhibition. This was divided into two different areas of questioning: determining potential audiences for an art exhibition dedicated to personal testimonials and methods for reaching those target audiences which had been identified in the first round of questions. This second focus group took place on February 10, 2016; in attendance were ten participants (six women and four men) between twenty-two and fifty-five years of age and with affiliations to COCQ\_SIDA (3), Stella (3), GRIS (2), and ASTTeQ (2).

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<sup>16</sup> The second focus group was devoted to two topics of discussion: 1) which publics should be solicited to attend the exhibition and 2) the reception of the exhibition by those publics. The latter is outside of the scope of this study. However, the report *Étude de la réception de l'exposition d'art Témoigner pour Agir* (2019) produced by Testimonial Cultures on the reception and impact of the exhibition can be found at: <https://culturesdutemoignage.ca/app/uploads/2020/11/TpA-Etude-de-la-reception.pdf>

### *Potential Audiences*

When the focus group was asked to imagine the audience for the exhibition, they considered a vast range of visitors. The first audience identified was the public that regularly visits the Maison de la culture Janine-Sutto. The Maison's embedded public, mainly comprised of residents from the Hochelaga/Maisonneuve and Centre-Sud districts, are familiar with the Maison as the cultural hub of these neighbourhoods. Furthermore, as a result of its prominent status within Montréal's overall cultural community, the Maison attracts people who are interested in culture and art and that are continually seeking out interesting exhibitions and experiences throughout the city's cultural landscape.

Hochelaga/Maisonneuve and Centre-Sud, in a more general sense, are historically working-class neighbourhoods of Montréal. Because of their lower socioeconomic statuses, marginalized people have been drawn to these areas for the lower costs of living. Two of our partner organizations have offices located in these areas. Moreover, Montréal's Gay Village is situated in the south-western corner of Centre-Sud. Therefore, considering the location of the exhibition, activists and individuals in our partner organizations' respective networks were easily identified as potential audiences.

It was deemed that an openness to all would be the most effective method for targeting audiences who are not already aware of the struggles of these marginalized people and groups. Such audiences could include families, the young, the old, and, in general, curious individuals who do not come from marginalized backgrounds. This would undoubtedly include people who are not necessarily in favour of the causes we are defending, which could attract those who disagree with the social and political objectives of the exhibition. The group expressed the importance of implementing tools needed to explain or defend the exhibition.

### *How to Reach the Audiences?*

By using tools available to the groups involved in the exhibition organization, such as mailing lists from our partner organizations and from the Maison de la culture Janine-Sutto, it was determined that social media platforms, such as Facebook, be used to craft a message that would convey a more general or universal concept to attract people from all walks of life. In other words, themes that evoked such sentiments as ‘we are people with a life and we are part of society like everyone else,’ would engage a wider audience. Thus, the exhibition would represent a diversity of lives lived and express that we all have a right to exist, no matter who you are. These kinds of statements could attract the curious, as well as those inclined to see the world differently.

There was also a strong desire for children and families to attend the exhibition. As marginalized peoples have families, there was a strong emphasis on promoting the exhibition as an important idea in development.

Although a play on sensationalism could attract audiences, the focus group believed that some caution should be exercised in its use. Focusing on ensuring playfulness and interactivity in the exhibition, according to the group, could be a better direction to explore.

### *What Impact are we Looking to Have?*

The group felt that the principal objective of the exhibition should be to educate and sensitize the general public to the issues faced by marginalized people and communities. Thus, audiences visiting the exhibition could examine the world through different perspectives by experiencing the stories of these marginalized communities — of their lives, discrimination, marginalization, and stigma. It would also be an opportunity to portray these communities in a different light, not only through the

artworks on display, but also by giving visitors an occasion to meet someone from the LGBTQ+, HIV, or sex work communities, in an effort to make labels become people and to make visible the lives lived.

The focus group also expressed the hope that visitors would participate in the exhibition through interactive experiences, on-site creative activities, or a space for children. This was seen as a chance for the audiences to have fun, reflect, question, and feel in an attempt to demonstrate how attitudes could and do change.

#### 4.2.3. Group 3: Safeguarding the Privacy & Dignity of Participants

The third and final focus group deliberated on the possible ethical issues and precautions that could be taken before, during, and after the exhibition. This topic was introduced to the group with the idea that ethics is based on transparency in practices and intentions. More specifically, for Testimonial Cultures, ethics also signifies providing the necessary space and support — socially, politically, and in regard to mental health — for people who offer personal testimonials. This should be done in a safe and gratifying manner by involving participants as much as possible in the processes and methods that the research group employs for the research and diffusion of personal testimonials. The third focus group gathered on February 24, 2016; in attendance were six participants (four women and three men) between twenty-nine and fifty-two years of age and with affiliations to COCQ-SIDA (2), GRIS (2), Stella (1), and ASTTeQ (1).

#### *Concern for the Well-Being of the People Involved*

In response, the focus group reiterated that there must be a high degree of respect toward the participant in regard to their terms of visibility or disclosure of personal details. Unless they do it themselves, we must take great precaution not to out anyone, whether as a sex worker, an HIV-positive person, homosexual, bisexual, or



transgender, amongst other intimate personal details. The group further suggested that as organizers we should initiate a discussion with each artist on this issue in order to clarify how they wish to present themselves in public. Moreover, as an organization, we must offer support and guidance to people who are out so that they may assess the risks and benefits of participating in the exhibition. In all cases, everyone involved in the exhibition development and presentation must be comfortable with their participation by giving their informed consent. Furthermore, regarding artworks that use testimonials from people other than the artist themselves, it is critical in all circumstances that the artist obtains permission through informed consent.

Concerning the management of negative public comments, the focus group recommended forming a social intervention support unit to aid participants with the reception of any negative feedback, comments, or abuse. Such support could include debriefing after a delicate situation or modes of interventions designed to deconstruct prejudice. The group also advised that the protection unit conduct practice scenarios for receiving and dismantling prejudices prior to the exhibition. It was noted that our community partners have experience and expertise with this type of training — for example, the ‘QPSP’ data base or the Most Frequently Asked Questions, which are at the heart of GRIS-Montréal’s volunteer training.

#### *Respect Human Dignity*

To respect the dignity of those who provide their testimonials, the focus group considered it important to avoid victimizing messages and imagery that represents complacency with the misfortune of being a victim. However, they specified, if this type of representation is present, it must be framed through the necessary contextualization (e.g., history, an artistic movement, the artist's intention). Likewise, the group noted that the ideas expressed in the artworks are subjective and,

therefore, not an objective representation of the community. They felt that this point should be made clear to the visitor. As a possible solution to ensure this, they proposed that the nuances of the work and its context should be available to the public to avoid identifying people as victims — “as they are not victims but are victimized by a situation.” The focus group identified that it would be the responsibility of the organizers and participants, in relation to the communities they represent, to present a positive and constructive message and to avoid re-stigmatizing or ridiculing people or communities.

*Establishing Justice, Equality, and Solidarity*

Following a discussion within the focus group, it was determined that establishing justice in the exhibition process implies valuing the views of sexual and gendered communities, which are often hidden by society. Making those views visible and audible can necessitate, at times, tempering or reining in the views of the general population. However, the group believed that each community represented in the exhibition project should be equal, in terms of space and importance, based on the principle of equity in which due importance is given to each community. It was suggested that this sense of equity forms solidarity between members of a community, between communities, and between communities and society. The group believed that this kind of ethical intersection promotes respect for everyone and helps build bridges toward justice. Furthermore, the group imagined that the exhibition would be precisely the appropriate occasion to initiate discussions regarding the particularities of personal testimonials in which marginalized communities could intervene, the public would have the opportunity to ask questions and learn to be supportive, and the best methods for offering support could be determined.

The group also suggested the idea of forming a permanent advisory committee that would meet regularly during the development process, could resolve ethical questions, and would track how the exhibition is being developed. It was recommended that the committee be composed of members from each partner group.

#### 4.3. The Role of Curator

My worldview is queer and, as an artist-curator, I see myself as a queer storyteller. In this sense, I see stories of identity as ways to confront stereotypes and stigmas in non-normative communities and, by acknowledging them, transpose and subvert them into new modes of identity. Queer, being an emancipated term of degradation, becomes a way to describe fluid and endless configurations of identities that assert the non-normative other into a position of empowerment. *Témoigner pour Agir* overtly expresses this view and allows the various participants to claim a position of empowerment.

As a queer storyteller, I am interested in non-normative stories of identity. With this research-intervention, I am particularly interested in how one can bring forth queer stories within curatorial practice in a manner that nurtures participation, social justice, and due representation under common social goals. Likewise, I am interested in how these ideals and politics are present in the artworks selected for the exhibition and how, collectively, the artworks 'speak' about the intersections of identity.

As described previously, curatorial work was historically carried out by a single person with a singular authoritative perspective. However, for the framework of this exhibition project, the curatorial work was achieved collectively and with a

continuous exchange between three distinct working bodies: the Comité des sages (CS), the Comité d'encadrement (CE), and the project coordination team. This method of operating created not only a mode of governance, but also a critical space for the emergence, display, and discussion of artistic testimonials. This approach allowed for the development and confrontation of ideas. It demanded that all decisions were made by consensus while using a transversal and inclusive process. This co-curatorial process, as we named it, was put into practice by “forging a common voice that brings together the knowledge and perspectives of citizen experts, artists, and community organizations involved in the project” (Mensah et al., 2018). As expressed by a CS member:

I think that for many people, even for me, there have been many small personal benefits — positive reinforcements of certain aspects, people's skills. I felt that the people who were in the focus group and who also continued in the Comité des sages, they were happy, I think, to be told: yes, your opinion is good, it is relevant, and it will take us somewhere (Amélie Charbonneau, GRIS-Montréal, interview April 17, 2018, my translation).

There were times when I was at my most curatorial, sans the 'co,' because of my knowledge of the artist, of their past work, and of having a personal connection to the content being proposed. This was particularly the case with one artist, who I was insistent on having in the exhibition. I knew them, their work, and how to 'coax' them to a place in which they felt comfortable with themselves and the apprehensions they had with their work — apprehensions that were sensed by the CE in the artist's proposal. Yet, while my passionate advocacy for this work did at times did create a tension, I still operated within our structural boundaries for artist selection.

#### 4.4. Venue Selection

During the ninth Testimonial Cultures General Assembly, held on February 17, 2015, discussions began on the criteria and selection of a venue. There were several criteria raised, such as physical accessibility to the exhibition space; the openness and politics of the gallery administration toward sexual and gender minorities —especially sex workers; and the possible intimidation of participants by an institutional, university, or formal gallery space.

Moreover, discussed at this meeting were the many sites proposed at the beginning of the development process, such as an apartment, a café, a park (like Parc Émilie Gamelin located next to UQAM and near the Gay Village), a public place (like Complex Desjardins, Eaton Centre, a cinema, or a public market), the Écomusée du fier monde, or one of Montréal's Maisons de la culture. This final option was welcomed unanimously.

In the end, the Maison de la culture Janine-Sutto was selected because of their enthusiasm for the project, its location, and its connectedness to the community. The Maison naturally attracts a wealth of people not only from the area, especially since the district's public library is housed in the same building, but also from across the city of Montréal for its three-hundred-seat theatre and two galleries. Annually, more than one hundred fifty events are presented — shows, concerts, screenings, and exhibitions — in all artistic disciplines. The Maison de la culture Janine-Sutto is affiliated with and promoted by the Accès Culture Network, which brings together twenty-four performing and visual arts venues across Montréal (Montréal, 2018).

The Maison de la culture Janine-Sutto, a Montréal city-run cultural centre founded on principles of accessibility, seemed to us the perfect place and was accepted unanimously by the CS during their first meeting (CS minutes June 10, 2015). Since exhibition spaces such as museums and public art galleries are generally considered

as bearers of “truth” (Golding, 2014), presenting an exhibition in such a space would contribute to the social validation of an alternative discourse in the hopes of countering stigmatization and prejudice. Thus, the exhibition’s subversive potential lies in its ability to provoke discussion and to produce destabilizing effects for audiences, encouraging them to abandon their prejudices. Our focus groups and CE believed that its location in the heart of this Montréal Hochelaga-Maisonneuve neighbourhood strengthened that potential.

#### 4.5. Exhibition Project Goals

The aim of *Témoigner pour Agir* was to stimulate dialogue in the public space and to promote empowerment, meaningful participation, and social justice. From our focus groups, we established four main themes: testimonials, activism, sexuality, and media; and three sub-themes: undoing prejudices, sharing realities, and claiming rights. Consequently, the exhibition project goals were to:

1. Educate audiences by introducing them to the plurality of experiences and stories (individual and collective) among communities that are stigmatized due to their sexual or gender identity, their sexual practices, or their bodily or gender expression;
2. Bring together scientific expertise, the knowledge of artists and practitioners from community groups, and the experiential knowledge of audiences;
3. Create an ethical, aesthetic, historical, political, and polyphonic discourse on the issues, challenges, and benefits of publicly telling the story of one’s sexuality, gender, work, body, and HIV status; and
4. Support the social integration of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, non-binary, intersex, who live with HIV, or have experience with sex work by helping to create favourable conditions for self-disclosure and for the improvement of their quality of life (Mensah & Goodyear, 2017).

#### 4.6. Conclusion

This chapter sets out the process of establishing the exhibition parameters. A review of literature supported an initial understanding of participatory exhibitions. This review informed the three focus groups, who then explored the types of stories to tell, the artists' profile and the types of artworks to exhibit, the potential audiences to consider, and the makeup of the exhibition project's guiding ethical principles. Next, a description of how the curator's role transformed into a co-curatorial standpoint. The rationale was established for the selection of Maison de la culture Janine-Sutto as an established community institution with the potential to validate artistic testimonials of marginalized communities and provoke dialogue. And finally, the exhibition parameters were presented with a goal to educate audiences, to bring together diverse sets of knowledge, to create a polyphonic discourse on testimonials, and to support the social integration of marginalized individuals and communities.

## CHAPTER 5 - CO-CURATORIAL STANDPOINT

This chapter presents a general interpretation of our co-curatorial experience. The co-curatorial standpoint was responsible for developing a practice of collective authorship that used queer identity and knowledge as a site for cooperation between communities. As mentioned in the second chapter, the four qualities that make for *good* autoethnography, according to Ettorre (2017), are the inhabitation of crossroads, the representation of the personal as political, a commitment to the future, and the raising of consciousness. These qualities, I believe, are also a firm foundation for a co-curatorial process. With queer folks as co-authors whose authorship is informed by queer knowledge and a social sensibility toward ethical usages of content as a form of care, a sense of belonging and community is strengthened. Our co-curatorial standpoint, subsequently, emerged from this queer knowledge, social sensibility, and community.

In my previous experience as a curator, I was singularly responsible for creating an exhibition by determining its themes, its messages, which objects I would display, and which style of discourse I would present to an audience – my name was attributed to the exhibition, I was the author. Coming into this project, I was 'rooted' in that bed of knowledge. It was, after all, the reason I was asked to be part of the project. I remember attending the first CS meeting, confident about approaching my task as curator. Although, I must admit, at that point I did not really know how Testimonial Cultures functioned or what to expect from this experience as a member of the organizing committee. However, I do remember leaving this first meeting thinking that the group operated in a very unusual way compared



to my previous experiences. This would challenge my own way of functioning as a curator. For each successive meeting, thereafter, that feeling grew stronger – so much so that I remember saying at one meeting, “Wow, you folks do things differently!”

To apply Yuval-Davis’ (1999) terminology, while I was still “rooted” in my own experience and knowledge of exhibition making, I had also “shifted.” That shift occurred as we were deliberating on the exhibition content — which artworks to include and why. Whose responsibility was it to make those decisions?

A particularly thought-provoking thing happened when we set out to establish my position as the designated artist-curator. I was first invited to the project as a research assistant who had professional experience with putting an exhibition together. I was tasked with producing a review of literature and beginning to define a budget. Rather quickly, however, I started being referred to as ‘the curator.’

As we commenced the Comité des sages (CS) meetings, I had started to feel uncomfortable with the ‘title’ of curator. I was recognizing that my experience as an exhibition creator – i.e. its traditional meaning – did not at all align with what was happening with this project. More and more, the control over creative content and decision-making were being assumed by the entire group – not just one person. Ultimately, this completely made sense as I began to better understand the group’s position of dedicating a substantial place for communities within the project and of asking them how they wished to be represented. I was beginning to recognize that the curation of ideas and artwork was the CS’s work – it was their exhibition. I thought of myself as a coordinator, perhaps.

As we were in the process of choosing the works for the exhibition, I was, in fact, doing more than coordinating. I still had to employ my 'curatorial' abilities to present work to the CS and to defend specific works that I felt passionate about including in the exhibition, as well as to manage the relationships with the artists and to communicate information between the CS, CE, and the artists. It was eventually suggested that, I too, was a co-curator. Queer, HIV+, and present in the CS, I 'shifted' again. And for the first time, I understood myself as a full member of the organizing committee – as an equal voice at the table.

I realized that this same 'shift' was experienced by other members of the CS as they began to understand their roles as co-curators.

I can recall a specific moment during a CS meeting in which a participant insisted that I make a decision regarding the selection of artists. Perhaps it was the organic nature of the project or my own developing understanding of the exhibition, but this moment marked the first time that we explicitly defined the concept of co-curating as a group. This moment unequivocally gave the members of the CS the power to curate the exhibition and allowed them to 'shift' into their role.

The participatory approach was our model for producing creative content – the selection of artists, the production of the exhibition catalogue, the programming of events, guided visits of the exhibition, and even our approach to our communications and media relations. The more input we received from our partners and community participants, the more confident we could be with the direction the project was taking.

### 5.1. Collective Authorship by Way of Queer Sensibility

A collective shift occurred within the group of organizers; no longer mere observers of the curatorial process, they became active participants. This collective role of curating emerged over time and this perception was generally shared within the CS:

In reality, [at first], I felt that all [my thoughts and ideas were] going to be used — it was transcribed and everything — but I had more of a feeling of being in a consulting role, less involved, really. With the Comité des sages, it seems that I did not immediately understand that we were becoming co-curators. I think it happened afterwards (Amélie Charbonneau, GRIS-Montréal, interview April 17, 2018, my translation).

For some participants, the idea of co-authorship materialized during the task of reviewing artworks and proposals. As another co-curator explained, the group dynamic of the CS was built on mutual respect, which encouraged the various authors to listen to one another:

I found the dynamics very interesting — extremely constructive — based on ‘this is what we, as LGB representatives, trans people, sex workers, and people living with HIV, are experiencing,’ and with great respect. From the discourses presented, from the [artist] proposals made, everything was really analyzed according to ‘you propose something, do we agree with that, the whole group, and what do we do from there’[...] Everything was always well-presented, processed, and synthesized, and the opinions respected. I would also say that I really felt that it was a co-curation — the Comité des sages was truly the co-curator [...] So this dynamic of respect led to respect between all the parties, all the players in the project [...] That was the strength of the project. If our project had an impact in the communities, it was because of the structure it was built on — in a way that listened, respected, heard, and acted (René Légaré, COCQ-SIDA, interview April 17, 2018, my translation).

This statement brings forth an important point: by constructing shared authorship, participants claimed agency. The level of respect for and between participants formed what Mygind et al. (2015) refer to as a 3<sup>rd</sup> space: an embodied crossroads at which

participants could exercise their agency free from the usual threats and dangers to which they are accustomed.

Matt Smith (2015) posits that a queer aesthetic may be an appropriate approach in this context. Focusing on hidden histories, a queer aesthetic could reveal “themes of visibility, invisibility, and coding” (Smith, 2015, p. 78) which queer people have not historically had the privilege of defining themselves. However, social “groups are not based on aesthetic sensibility, but rather [come] together and are identified by social sensibility” (Smith, 2015, p. 93). This sensibility is inherently social because it is created from a collective of personal experience. This experience may not have to do with sexuality or lifestyle; in contrast with (homo)sexual content, cultural material about sexuality — or ghetto content — is that in which artist and audience are both gay, for example. Social sensibility is a departure from stereotyping and reminds us that artists — and people — are not just a gender, a sexuality, an illness, or a type of work.

Social sensibility is about reorienting and refocusing on shared experiences of queer people. Harmony Hammond reiterates this while reflecting on her 1978 groundbreaking exhibition, *A Lesbian Show*. She recalls that the exhibition was:

Not a distinctly lesbian aesthetic sensibility, but rather the revelation of a broad variety of shared thematic concerns including issues of anger, guilt, hiding, secrecy, coming out, personal violence and political trust, self-empowerment, and the struggle to make oneself whole (Rinder, 1995, in Smith, 2015, p. 4).

One effect that social sensibility produces is the detachment of highly-charged normative labels, motivating us to find common ground and to stimulate an understanding of our collective common goals and the issues that preoccupy us. For example, in the focus group that addressed sensitive content, there were comments about “not [being] sensational,” using care and caution around certain subjects, and

a desire to explain controversial topics in greater depth. In the meetings of both the CE and CS, there was an inclination not only to represent individual causes, but also an awareness and openness in defining and defending collective goals in order to transcend stereotypes and dismantle prejudices. It was understood that this would have a mutual benefit for everyone involved.

In fact, there are advantages and disadvantages [of working together], but [...] The advantage is what is called the convergence of struggles. Of course, I am talking about a subject that I know well, to recognize myself in the different struggles regarding sexuality that is outside heteronormativity and homonormativity. Yes, there are advantages because there are common points — that's obvious [...] The levels of importance are not the same. For example, gays and lesbians, compared to people with HIV, compared to trans people; even at the legislative level, we are not at the same level [...] Even within the groups concerned, i.e. among gays, there are people who also have HIV, or among trans people. So, [...] there are also intersectionalities that come into play here. I think it is a richness to make the struggles converge to see the common points. What is the system to question in relation to these groups? What are we questioning together as a group? And here, each group has additional questions to put into play (Alain Ayotte, Testimonial Cultures Research Assistant, interview April 23, 2018, my translation).

This convergence of struggles is most vivid and relatable when the content is intimate and personal. The artistic testimonial is an opening to connect with others beyond our communities. These social sensibilities about and toward personal experience enable awareness and can serve as the building blocks for positive social change. As an exhibiting artist expressed:

Having an exhibition that is so explicitly intimate in that way — so explicitly personal — and addressing, but also going *beyond*, the politics that the communities represented here are constantly having to negotiate, [...] I hope, is a unique — and potentially transformative — takeaway for people. I don't know how the experience of seeing the work will translate into the viewers' day-to-day lives, but I can only hope that it prompts a humanizing rethinking along the lines of, "Sex workers are worthy and complex people just like me and my loved ones. I know more now what that job can look like, what that

life can look like, how it impacts those individuals, and what it can mean to them on a deeper level. So, maybe now I can better relate to that and to them” (Grace Van Ness, Artist, interview April 19, 2018).

Through social sensibility we can begin to understand each other through our own experiences in the stories we tell of ourselves. “[Y]ou can have that sensitivity. [...] I think that's the contribution of the project, what it has brought me personally, and even as a community researcher” (Charlotte Guerlotté, COCQ-SIDA, June 5, 2018, my translation).

## 5.2. Queer Identities & Knowledge

As stated in the first chapter, queer theory supports identities that are not fixed. Queer identities are mobile and multilayered and cannot be reduced to labels such as HIV-positive, lesbian, or sex worker as a sufficient means of identification. In the practice of co-curating this exhibition, this was a notion that we continually confronted and negotiated. For instance, here is how one early organizer recalled their approach to framing the exhibition:

There were sex workers, intersex people, people with HIV, then LGBT communities and trans people who joined — which is a lot. It's quite a complex subject. [...] It was [necessary] to find the common point; for me what was most obvious was the theme of sexuality. To make these issues known to the general public, to perhaps popularize them. A form of pedagogy through this exhibition, which was necessary, was one of the objectives, in my opinion. [But] without watering down the discourse either, so that it is not too standardized, and being too nice in the representations (Alain Ayotte, Testimonial Cultures Research Assistant, interview April 23, 2018, my translation).

As a way of recognizing sexual and gendered communities, queer theory offers the possibility of subverting stereotypes and reclaiming identities. As one artist stated, “I identify myself as queer because of the breadth of possible definitions that could entail” (Kevin Crombie, Artist, interview April 16, 2018). Everybody seated at the

tables of the CE and CS meetings has felt the impact of being relegated to the margins of society. As an enclave of queer people, it was imperative to highlight the unstable and multivalent nature of identity, language, culture, and community. Such a mutual understanding allows us to recognize — and affirm — that the personal is political; we are aware that each thing we do as queer people has a political impact. By telling our stories, we are asking the rest of society to, as one CS member said, “...take the time to look at us.” They continue, stating:

I think there was a political message. We are revealing ourselves to you, to make you understand what our lives are like, our realities. So that you learn to interact with us with respect. [As] aesthetic speech, I can say that it was beautiful, that it allowed to reflect, to experience emotions [...] From a historical point of view, I think there was something unique about this exhibition; I have the impression that people could feel the unique side and [the] special space of revealing stories that we don't often hear (Amélie Charbonneau, GRIS-Montréal, interview April 17, 2018, my translation).

The ideas expressed in regard to this “special space of revealing” reinforce Ettorre’s (2017) concept of an embodied crossroad, at which we not only ask the exhibition viewer to reflect on queer stories and lives, but also where, as participants, we reflect on our own experiences as queer people as we reveal ourselves. Through such reflections, we are able to more accurately apprehend the impacts of actions, to raise consciousness, and to produce a commitment to the future and to the progression of positive social change as we better understand ourselves and one another.

As detailed in the third chapter, the CS was formed to reflect and discuss the issues, obstacles, and opportunities encountered in the production and reception of the exhibition. Despite this mandate, they were ultimately asked to do much more:

The exhibition, the content itself — we all had a role to play in it, the Comité des sages. Some of the works I knew I had helped to choose them, which was quite cool, but above all I had the feeling of effective teamwork. We didn't do so much in terms of administrative tasks (calling, arranging with the Maison

de la culture, etc.). That's not what we did with the Comité des sages; it was more in terms of clearing the land. I still felt that the teamwork had been fruitful. With my background in social work, I found it beautiful to put everyone together, the energies in common (Amélie Charbonneau, GRIS-Montréal, interview April 17, 2018, my translation).

The CS members engaged their queer identities and common energy to secure a space for initiating conversations, reflecting on themselves, and, ultimately, better understanding their communities. In short, they used their queerness as a pole to gather knowledge about one another — to curate content that represents this community of communities and the values that they collectively hold dear. One CS member's reflection on the knowledge that derives from queer experience produced a core value of the co-curatorial group:

I still think it allowed something for the support of the communities because it still feels good to see each other — just that. To see oneself, but also to be valued in one's own words. It just feels good not to be invisible to the mainstream eyes, of people who don't know the communities and who are more in their judgments. It feels different. It was not 'staged,' either, by a corporate company which makes a TV series for example, where we see lesbians or trans people who are played by cis actors. There was no larger-than-life entity that would shape how we would talk about it; it was really more 'by and for' (Amélie Charbonneau, GRIS-Montréal, interview April 17, 2018, my translation).

The strongly held value of by-and-for authorship was a driving force in the development of content — not only for the artworks in the gallery, but also in the development of the exhibition catalogue, the guided visits, and the peripheral events surrounding the exhibition. This standpoint also underlines the notion that experience is knowledge. By stating what we know of ourselves, as experts on queer experience, we subvert essentialist notions of our claimed identities. This aspect of by and for proved to be essential for the exhibition artists, as well:

The relationship between the different sexual and gender communities that took part in this exhibition and its organizing was important to me and, as a queer person and a sex worker, was important in informing my relationship to



the space. Sex work and those that do sex work are not only often underrepresented in these spaces, but when they are represented, [they are] often misrepresented. We — and when I say we, I mean each of us individually because there is not just one kind of sex work or sex worker — need to be given the opportunity to represent ourselves (Grace Van Ness, Artist, interview April 19, 2018).

This disidentification with how the mainstream perceives the marginalized, if we recall Muñoz (2009) from the first chapter, gives the marginalized an opportunity to not only dissociate themselves from stereotypes, but also to expose their personal truths through representations of experience which account for and include them in society. These acts of self-disclosure through the expression of artistic testimonial are empowering for both the teller of the story and for the community to which they belong, leading to a generally improved social integration.

I think that was the goal, a primary goal of the exhibition [was social integration], so everything was done to ensure that it happened at all levels; that is, that the communities participated at all levels. Whether it is the Comité des sages, whether it is the artists, whether it is the people in the community or the organizations, [everyone was] so included into this project. And then, the inclusion of the people from these communities who participated in this project in an environment such as the Maison de la culture, then in all your projects at the University, conferences, etc. So, I think that was the primary purpose of the [exhibition project] (Chloé Surprenant, Artist, interview April 30, 2018, my translation).

As an artist-curator with a viewpoint into a creative community, seeing what propels artists to create and which stories they wish to tell about themselves and others allows an insight into how artists — and communities — process their worlds as they express themselves through stories. These stories establish links between artists and practices, between communities and society. Likewise, as an artist-curator, I too produce stories. With this exhibition, and with the telling of its creation, a

dynamic dialogue unfolds between my inner world and the folks who gathered to create this exhibition together – and vice versa.

### 5.3. Sense of Community & Belonging

The concept of community is, perhaps, problematic; yet, certain ideas about community — and about a sense of community — were evident as interviewees often insisted that they belonged to a community.

Notions of community can evoke hard and fast categorization — you are in-side (pure, authentic, normal) or out-side (impure, in-authentic, queer) (Young, 1990). Much of this idea originates from a body of research that emerged in the mid-twentieth century, in which subcultural categories were developed as labels of pathology and social deviance (Haig, 2001) or as stories of decadence and disease (Plummer, 1995, p. 123). This kind of thinking consistently defines that which is outside of the norm as weak, unfulfilled, and frustrated. It denies difference and alienates individuals as they are seen as an ontological entity.

For Iris Marion Young, an American political philosopher well-known for her work on oppression and group differences and for her critiques on the concept of community, the acceptance of difference and the use of our experiences of life leads to un-oppression and un-assimilation. According to her, the abandonment of the concept of community in favour of a “politics of difference” (Young, 1990, p. 2) can offer emancipation from normative and oppositional social relations. This emancipation occurs through “face-to-face” or personal relations and through the giving and receiving of social and aesthetic products (Young, 1990).

Nevertheless, for Thomas Haig, a community-based researcher specializing in gay men’s health and HIV, “community is an important factor [...] that cannot easily be abandoned” (Haig, 2001, p. 54).

People turn to each other not simply to satisfy needs or exchange information, but for support and responsiveness [...]. [O]ther people ground us, and this grounding is in fact crucial to making the rationalized activities of daily life possible and bearable” (Haig, 2001, p. 80).

Haig suggests that we can observe a community from a “conversant” (Haig, 2001, p. 55) perspective.<sup>17</sup> A conversant community is “a community considered in its ethical dimensions as dialogical action rather than ontologically as an entity: community as a form of social action, a conversing, collective subject” (Haig, 2001, p. 55). Conversation, dialogue, and storytelling are means for communities to talk themselves into being and to define boundaries as they converse and learn from each other.

How can we identify this conversant community in action? Community psychologist David W. McMillan (1996) offers four elements – spirit, trust, trade, and art – which I have used to more thoroughly understand the sense of community in this co-curatorial process. McMillan proposes that a community’s stories represent “values like courage, wisdom, compassion, and integrity” (McMillan, 1996, p. 323). To summarize, he defines each as:

1. *Spirit*: membership and a feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness.
2. *Trust*: an authority structure that can be confided in and influenced, that makes a difference to the group, and whose members value the group.

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<sup>17</sup> Testimonial Cultures views itself as an ‘interpretive community’ as defined by Stanley Fish (1981). In this thesis, however, I address the assemblage of communities in the exhibition project as a conversant community. These two approaches to the notion of community — interpretive and conversant — are not contradictory.

3. *Trade*: mutual benefit derived from being together through the reinforcement, integration, and fulfillment of needs (what I will be calling sharing).
4. *Art*: shared emotional connections that are expressed in art.

#### 5.3.1. Community Spirit: Establishing a Larger Queer Community

Emotional safety, boundaries, and a sense of belonging characterize the idea of spirit. Membership in a community opens doors and allows its members to have a sense of confidence through “acceptance, empathy, and support to speak their truth and be themselves” (McMillan, 1996, p. 316). This confidence creates “emotional safety that encourages self-disclosure and intimacy” (McMillan, 1996, p. 315). As it takes courage to speak one’s own truth, a community should receive that personal truth with care, compassion, and understanding.

In my interviews with the exhibition participants, I could discern how members of individual communities were reflecting on possibilities for establishing a larger queer community and for representation of that larger community in an art exhibition. This is how one of the exhibiting artists contemplated the idea of an LGBT community:

I think this is a fiction, the LGBT community, because, other than for bureaucrats, it's not a real community. It's a community of communities [...] I think it's a euphemism for people who don't fit in and I think I'm old enough to remember when gay men and lesbians used to have serious conversations about whether or [not] we could realistically form a community. The only thing that we really had together was the fact that we were marginalized for our sexual practices. And it's not enough to build a community on. And so, flash forward to the present time, and you have a variety of communities that I don't feel strong links to because my experiences are not the same as theirs. I believe [that] mutually understandable experiences can form the basis of community. So, I was really trying to see what happened in the actual exhibition, whether we could speak to each other and share shared experiences to the extent that you could actually make and say, “Yes, this is a community!” [Because] we have some common ground based on our shared

experience of being and marginal because of either our sexuality or the way we express sexuality (Kevin Crombie, Artist, interview April 16, 2018).

Here, we can see this artist struggling with how he might have membership within the larger queer community that the exhibition aims to construct. As one participant stated in the previous section, it is our expression of sexuality that unites us. This reflection is not unique, as one of the members of a partner organization conveys:

I have been in the Testimonial Cultures Group since its very beginning [...] so I had the opportunity to reflect on this question for a while, on why we were all together. From my point of view, which was somewhat the point of view we developed as an organization in relation to this, it was that even though we had very different situations from one community to another, we shared a certain desire to reflect on how we present ourselves in order to dispel prejudices, in different contexts, of criminalization, of discrimination (Olivier Vallerand, GRIS-Montréal, interview April 17, 2018, my translation).

In each interview extract, the participants attempt to develop boundaries that will enable their membership into a new community which transcends the boundaries of their original communities.

McMillan defines boundaries as “the logistical time/place setting for a group to be a group [and that] can distinguish the appropriate subject matter for the group discourse” (McMillan, 1996, p. 317). In the formation of a new community, this time/place setting and discourse must be considered and negotiated with the absolute understanding that each member is “one of us” (McMillan, 1996, p. 317) and is ready to converse. Ken Plummer evokes a similar idea stating that, “There is usually no point in telling a tale without a receptive and appreciative listener, and one who is usually part of a wider community of support” (Plummer, 1995, p. 120).

### 5.3.2. Queer Belonging

Community spirit must also promote some faith in belonging. “When we believe that we will be welcome, that we fit or belong in a community [...] we have a stronger

attraction to that community” (McMillan, 1996, p. 317). This belief in belonging and acceptance is witnessed in a reflection from one of the exhibition artists:

[I decided to be part of the exhibition] with a lot of trepidation, to be honest, because I wasn't sure that there was lots of common ground between the different communities — and I add to that, white gay men have gone out of fashion right now. And, in the sense that we've lost a certain legitimacy to speak about oppression, which would be wrong because [gay] men are still oppressed. But there's a lot of pushing of white men out of the public space to allow other voices. So, I wasn't sure exactly [how] I would be perceived and how I would fit in. But overall experience was very positive because... I've learned lots of things. It was a good experience and I think it demonstrated to me, personally, that there is a common ground for a community (Kevin Crombie, Artist, interview April 16, 2018).

This truth-telling, the expression of emotional safety, the crossing of boundaries from *them* to *us*, and a sense of belonging are ultimately achieved by what Plummer describes as “creating social worlds” (Plummer, 1995, p. 128). Sharing one’s testimonial, telling one’s truth, and, moreover, telling one’s truth publicly propels the story beyond the individual teller and into a community of reception (Plummer, 1995). This gives the teller a sense of entitlement, status, and respect within the community. Furthermore, this spirit and sense of community is also founded on friendship and an understanding that “we have a setting and an audience to express unique aspects of our personality” (McMillan, 1996, p. 315) — “a sense of unity yet difference” (Plummer, 1995, p. 128). In this position, the teller can be themselves and see themselves mirrored in the responses of others.

### 5.3.3. Community Trust

The exhibition not only portrays the expression of identity and a vindication of rights as a community organizing factor, but also serves as a device to express the desire for, and subsequent action toward, a change in perception from the general public regarding gendered and sexual communities. For queer people, the exposure to

mainstream hierarchical systems of oppression is a source of distrust; historically, academia has not always been a safe place and, even today, queer people still “face harassment, discrimination and other obstacles to full inclusion” (Renn, 2017). The following statement conveys one participant’s reflection on the allocation of power within the context of university research:

[T]he origin of the project started from a university project. But is it hierarchical? I see it more as circles, not as floors; consultation circles where each circle questions, precisely, the question of hierarchy. We must always ask ourselves where we start from and how we fit into the project. Because I can have my university discourse with my background in LGBT and HIV issues, but, well, other people don't have these tools. They have experience in the field, in their lives — I have it too, but I don't have everything and the idea is to have different experiences and for each person's point of view to be heard and valued (Alain Ayotte, Testimonial Cultures Research Assistant, interview April 23, 2018, my translation).

It is certain that there was a hierarchy within the exhibition project. We did, after all, develop an organizational governance, but the curatorial process was cultivated through these “consultation circles” with multilateral discussions between focus groups, the CS, the CE, and exhibition artists. The participatory nature of the exhibition project and careful planning and commitment fostered trust between researchers, students, organizations, and participants. Essentially, a climate of trust was created, as observed by an exhibiting artist that was also avidly involved with Stella:

I may have seen people who were afraid of certain problems. For example, I saw people from the community of Stella who were afraid of being put aside by the fact that another community was going to take up more space — and all that did not happen. [...] I witnessed solidarity (Chloé Surprenant, Artist, interview April 30, 2018, my translation).

This solidarity cultivates trust and cohesiveness as participants begin to recognize what to expect from each other. While the decision-makers may exert authority over

the group, the “concept of authority can serve many rather than the self” (McMillan, 1996, p. 319). This reciprocal act of influence on both leaders and participants forms cohesiveness, as one community researcher recalls:

The first CE [meetings], I very quickly — and that's a lot thanks to Nengeh — I felt very comfortable talking, even if, deep down, I felt that I didn't have enough experience yet. However, I felt comfortable developing my ideas and that is thanks to this remarkable researcher. At each committee meeting, even the main facilitator [from the SAC] was very inclusive, let everyone speak; we could develop our ideas. All the staff, all the people on the CE too, were very attentive and very respectful. It was always a space where I was happy to come, comfortable — it was pleasant (Charlotte Guerlotté, COCQ-SIDA, June 5, 2018, my translation).

This trust — and comfort — are rooted in the organization’s ethical principles of dignity, respect, and transparency, contributing to an atmosphere of cohesion and the fluid exchange of power. The amalgamation of these factors cultivated a sense of equality and equity within the communities and between participants.

#### 5.3.4. Community Sharing

Trade is the development of an economy that occurs when a community exists “with a live spirit and an authority structure that can be trusted” (McMillan, 1996, p. 320). In other words, members of a community “discover ways they can benefit one another and the community” (McMillan, 1996, p. 320). Members of a community can trade — or share — resources, ideas, and rewards from association, including protection from shame and stigma. In the context of a community of communities, the search for such similarities is essential:

I understood the interest of putting people with different, but similar, experiences together to talk about different topics. But, there with the exhibition, I was even more aware of how many meeting points jump out at you. By putting the testimonials side by side, you can't pretend to ignore that the commonalities that are there; they're obvious. I better saw the importance of Testimonial Cultures with the exhibition. I thought to myself, “It's not just



separate people talking together because they use a method, it's also because they have experiences that will look for the same reactions in people, that can be explained, said in a similar way, that can talk about the same values, the same ways to get out when it's not easy" (Amélie Charbonneau, GRIS-Montréal, interview April 17, 2018, my translation).

This participant highlights the importance of sharing. By coming together, we can find strength and power in our common struggles and goals through the discovery of our similarities during social exchange. As Plummer (1995) would assert, by telling stories of experience we make place for other similar stories to be told, which, in turn, constructs a social space and permits an increased liberty for exchange. Through friendship, trust, and protection from shame, the idea of trade is established, and we can perceive similarities between members, as well as what they can exchange and develop:

The advantage of working together is that you can get to know each other. [...] I realized that the realities of sex work are so close to those of gay men! So much! We get told how to have sex; we keep getting told we're not correct! I don't know if you remember that conference on sex work with that extraordinary performance. I remember [a member of Stella] saying that "everyone tells us what to do; everyone knows what sex is, everyone knows what sex work is, nobody listens to us!" I think that what the structure [for the exhibition] has allowed us to benefit from is that we have all listened to each other; we have seen that there are many connections to be made between what everyone is experiencing. I think it has helped to build bridges between groups working with individuals and to create links between these individuals (René Légaré, COCQ-SIDA, interview April, 17 2018, my translation).

As indicated by this participant, the medium of exchange is self-disclosure via testimonial. Self-disclosure is the riskiest, but also the most valuable, form of trade (McMillan, 1996). When members reveal their greatest commonalities and, subsequently, establish a base of support, "members can begin to share criticisms, suggestions, and differences of opinion" (McMillan, 1996, p. 321). However, these social exchanges must always be fair and protected from shame. Such interactions

can generate deeper understandings because of what each member offers in exchange.

[With] Testimonial Cultures, it was to try to have the same objectives with very different contexts. The advantages were a bit like making people think of things that we hadn't really thought of. On the other hand, for example, I think of discussions we had on the whole issue of [having] consent to present things — the issue of anonymous testimonials versus testimonials with a name, a face [...] I think that on this point, we ourselves have thought about it, pushed questions with my organization. Let's say that we take a testimonial. Does the testimonial belong to the organization or not? I think it is very interesting to discuss this between us precisely because of the different legal contexts and the different contexts of discrimination and prejudice (Olivier Vallerand, GRIS-Montréal, interview April 17, 2018, my translation).

This kind of exchange, developed in a supportive environment, presented an opportunity to negotiate ideas and to produce a consensual validation for stimulating trust and cohesion. A community economy is based on intimacy and safety from shame, in which people can work, learn, and grow in their social exchanges.

#### 5.3.5. Community Art

Community art, defined as a “shared emotional connection in time and space” (McMillan, 1996, p. 322) combines the previous elements examined — respect for a shared authority, trust, and the creation of a social economy — and is the site at which a community can begin to express shared histories. These shared histories become symbolized by “represent[ing] the transcendent values of the community” (McMillan, 1996, p. 322). One of the fundamental elements of art is the expression of experience. This is no truer than with art that sources testimonial as its genesis. It is here that the shared affective connection occurs, through a mutual emotional response that is triggered by a community’s aspiration for their highest ideals, the confrontation of their darkest moments, a battle with their conflicts, or any other transcendent

expressions that may be conveyed in a work of art. Art, then, becomes the epicentre for empathy. As an exhibiting artist reflects:

I think the exhibition opened possibilities for sharing and seeing how those things are. For example, there was a text from the artist that talked a lot about doctor's visits and there were some drawings and text — and it was because the artist was [intersex] and was talking about hormone treatments and some of the medical experiences that go along with that. I immediately flashed to experiences a lot of HIV-positive people [had] twenty years ago and treatments were clearly less sophisticated and your whole life was getting blood tested and there were some awful common experiences happen in the emergency room. But it was a way of excluding [their] sexuality that's mediated through medicine — that was happening. This dialogue was happening right in the gallery. And that's just one example of what I was seeing. Where I... we can find these common experiences that are being shared and that make sense to each other because we had them (Kevin Crombie, Artist, interview April 16, 2018).

This is but one example of how one community's story converges with another's.

At the location of convergence, there is empathy, understanding, and care. This intensifying sentiment brings us closer together. Art can emphasize such convergence as it connects representations of values like courage, wisdom, compassion, and integrity. These noble values are what bind a community together.

Artistic expression, thus, wields the power to engage with and foster empathy between communities and, ultimately, within the general public:

I am convinced that it has an even greater impact, or at least an alternative to text or poster in a conference — or that kind of thing — because it comes with the emotions, something that a text does not develop. [...] It's like a more universal communication [...] a person who has no idea of these realities is immersed directly, in a few minutes, in the realities of another person and I think art has that strength other methods would not have (Charlotte Guerlotté, COCQ-SIDA, June 5, 2018, my translation).

Art has also provided the occasion for each community group to diverge from their daily functions and struggles — to step back and reflect. As one community artist noted:

[W]hat I find interesting is that these organizations and people work together in a community way, but in the context of art, of an art exhibition, there is another sensitivity that happens — there is something beyond “we are offering services, what can we do together?” or “we’re in the middle of political battles” (Chloé Surprenant, Artist, interview April 30, 2018, my translation).

This opportunity to reflect on and to witness others coping with the same struggles and holding the same values, while all pushing for positive social change, can have a dramatic impact on communities. This idea was supported by a member of the CS:

I am thinking of GRIS, where we have become more aware that we have links with these communities on several aspects. Those who came to visit, I think, felt that. I think that's the first thing that came out of that — is to realize that there are links that can easily be made between experiences and communities (Amélie Charbonneau, GRIS-Montréal, interview 17 April 2018, my translation).

In this way, art can function as the site of that impact as it reinforces the spirit of community, connectedness, and solidarity. Art consists of the symbolic expressions that represent these community bonds, becoming integral to their memory and history — inspirational, transcendent, and timeless.

#### 5.4. Conclusion

To ground the approach of co-curating, one must consider the histories and cultures of communities. This encompasses the stories and knowledge of multiple experiences, including those from within the under-represented communities, as well as from those external to the communities and publics that attend exhibitions. It requires an openness to the curatorial process

that embraces collaboration, in which the exhibition building is process-based rather than solely output-based.

Co-curating requires going beyond objects themselves, toward a process, by focusing on the exhibition as a space for sharing knowledge and memory, in which counter stories can emerge through the development of spirit, trust, trade, and art. “It is reframed as an active, generative process that can help us speak and imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities, official discourse, and the perceived inevitability of partisan political conflict” (Unruh, 2015 in Kester 2004, p. 8).

“Dialogical practices should be seen as a positive alternative that, while asking the curator to re-imagine his/her position, does not negate the role of the curator” (Unruh, 2015, p. 79). Through a receptivity toward otherness, by avoiding a controlling curatorial position, and by becoming accustomed to using the pronoun ‘we’ when speaking of the exhibition project, an opening for a plurality of voices emerges in an effort to blur boundaries between intellectual and creative labour.

With all of the above notions considered, the definition of co-curating for this intervention involves:

- A 3<sup>rd</sup> space, in which equity in the exhibition design is an important curatorial tool — encouraging respect, adherence to the highest ethical standards, and the negotiation of reciprocal schemes of authority and power in decision-making processes. This refers to the formation of an advisory committee to guide development and welcome the exchange of criticism;
- A commitment to collaborative knowledge production and engagement which is embraced at all input stages, from concept building to development to actualization;

- A social sensibility toward personal politics and a willingness to witness stories with respect and recognition, as well as a consideration of the emotions and ideas of participants;
- A focus on ideas from communities themselves and an openness to those ideas that form not one point of view, but a collective voice based on a shared knowledge of queer experience;
- A transversal framework in which the co-curators can connect the intersections of lived experience, common goals, and politics between communities; this implies being conscious of different positions in relation to a range of social divisions.

## CHAPTER 6 - THE CO-CURATORIAL PROCESS IN ACTION

The *Témoigner pour Agir* exhibition was characterized by the involvement of the community partners throughout the entirety of the curatorial process, through collaboration and consensus. These organizations and individuals were fully engaged in the selection of the works presented, the commissioning of the artworks, collaborative projects with the partner organizations, the creation of the exhibition catalogue, and even the guided visits in the gallery during the run of the exhibition. In this chapter, I describe the central process of selecting the artworks for the exhibition. Afterward, I contextualize the works with reflections from the exhibiting artists and from the Comité des Sages, as well as with my own reflections.

### 6.1. Selecting Artworks: A Process of Consensus Building

As many of our participants were not familiar with exhibition development or curatorial processes, it was necessary for us to develop tools to help them approach the tasks in a way that was manageable and that negated barriers to their success as a curatorial group. Two of these tools were:

1. The *Submissions evaluation form* (Appendix G) for ranking proposals. This form facilitated the contextualization of proposals and guided the participants in examining the proposed artworks; and
2. A *post-selection form* (Appendix H) used to highlight aspects of the artworks deemed to be important. This information supported the exhibition team in writing the exhibition catalogue, developing the guided tours, and for producing media and communication tools.

As a member of the CS with previous professional experience as an artist-curator, I received, organized, and presented each submission to the group. It was a delicate

line between contextualizing the works in terms of the exhibition objectives, listening to the opinions of the other participants, and promoting works I personally perceived as essential for the exhibition. Remaining objective and sensitive to the participants' view of the submissions, in terms of the social sensibility defined in the fifth chapter, was one of the greatest challenges of my position.

It was easy to reach a consensus for many of the artworks proposed, regarding both their acceptance or rejection. However, there were a few proposals that were not so easy as they, perhaps, had strong conceptual foundations but deficient aesthetics, or, strong visual material but tenuous links to the exhibition themes. In those cases, it became vital to listen attentively, analyze what was being said, and refer back to the group the concerns in a clear manner by re-examining the exhibition objectives. Whenever we began to stray, we were always able to reorient ourselves and to achieve consensus with the use of the exhibition objectives (Section 4.5) — a pillar of the co-curatorial process.

Even regarding the artworks I advocated for, it was always within the framework of the exhibition objectives. This was important for the integrity of the process. I had to realize that I was in a privileged position within the curatorial framework, being a member of the CE, CS, and as the professional curator. I believed that I had to use care so as not to overstep my role as one of the 'co' — part of a group working toward consensus. I was aware that in our CS committee, other group members saw me as a leader — as the curator and a co-facilitator of the meetings — and it took time for them to see themselves as an equal 'co' in the curatorial process. Crucial to sharing the curatorial role was my ability to simply sit back and hear what others were saying, strip away the urge to be defensive of my ideas, and find pathways to consensus.



### 6.1.1. Submissions

With the ideas gathered from the three focus groups, we developed a profile of the artists we were interested in for the exhibition. Under the premise that the exhibition would be by and for<sup>18</sup> the communities involved, searched for artists that displayed a sensitivity toward their communities, conveyed positive messages, and, most importantly, used testimonial at the core of their work. In order to be completely inclusive, we accepted proposals from both professional and non-professional artists, community organizations, those who identity as belonging to the communities involved, and/or allies of those communities. If artists did identify as allies, we requested that they specify why they identified with the theme and, if so, why they considered themselves an ally. We also clearly explained to all artists that it was not necessary to disclose themselves nominally, offering each contributor the possibility of using a pseudonym.

We approached the submissions in two stages: 1) with pre-selected artists from our community groups who were invited to submit a proposal, and 2) with a general call to artists (Appendix F: Call to Artists). With the information gathered from the three focus groups, the CE analyzed this material and developed a list of potential artists as we began to more firmly grasp what we were looking for thematically in the exhibition. As we were building the criteria for the call to artists, we stumbled upon a question: While, generally, testimonials refer to statements made in the first person, what might a testimonial expressed visually look like? We concluded that there is no unanimity to this definition as it may be perceived and understood in different ways. Moreover, testimonials are personal declarations that connect shared experiences more broadly within a community's past, present, or future. As a result, we left the

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<sup>18</sup> This was a stance taken by the co-curators, as mentioned previously, despite the research group's ambition for an exhibition targeted toward the general public.

exploration of artistic testimonial open to interpretation, allowing the artists to characterize the concept, without prescribed limits. There was also a sense that we, both committees, would recognize, through our own experience, that diverse manifestation of artistic testimonials as a driving factor in the selection of artworks.

As a result, we determined that the exhibition would feature artists who identified themselves as belonging to a sexual or gender minority, those living with HIV, or who had sex work experience, as well as works of art created by artists who identified themselves as close, or allied, to these communities and that used testimonial as a stimulus for art-making.

#### *Invited Artists*

As an artist profile was developed before the general call to artists was made, the CE asked itself (that is, each community group was asked) if there might be artists that fit the themes of the exhibition within their networks of contacts. As a way of prioritizing members of their community groups in the call for artworks, the CE compiled a list of artists that would be specifically asked to propose projects or works. Moreover, members of the CE approached various people with expertise in queer art and artists, such as local art historians, queer theorists and historians, local artist-run centres, as well as other personal and professional contacts in order to obtain the names of artists that might be interested in proposing work to the exhibition project.

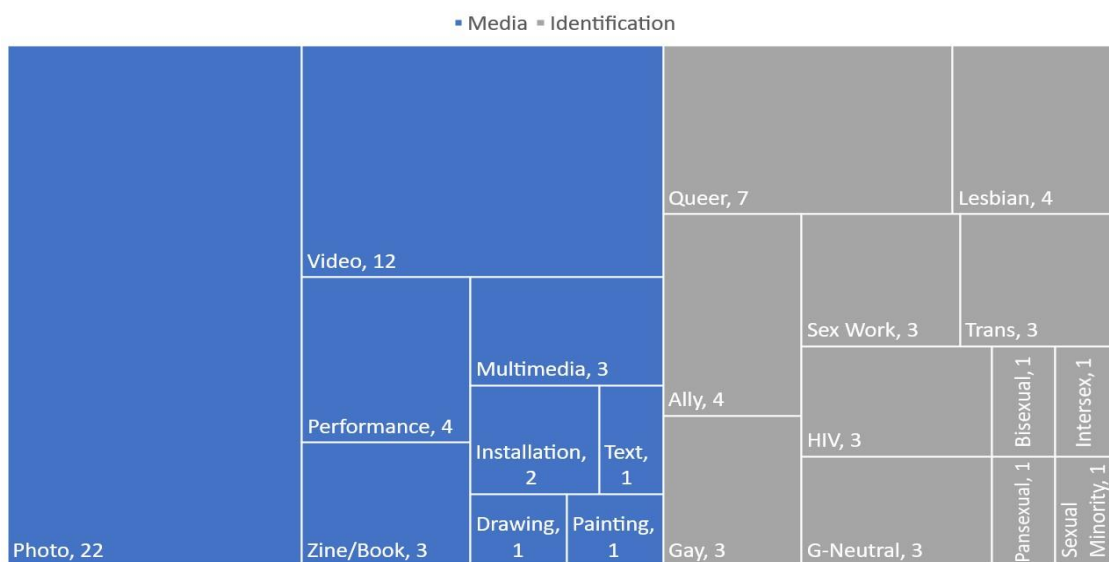
As a result of this canvassing, thirty-four artists and community art projects were identified and added to a list of potential contributors. Next, a formal invitation was sent to these artists, encouraging them to submit a project or artwork.

#### *General Call to Artists*

From July to October 2016, the general call for artists was open. With the heading, “Through the power of testimonials, our experiences, our expertise, our differences,

our voices change the world,” we invited artists (including those whom we had preselected) to submit projects and works that explored the use of testimonies, sexualities, activism, and the media. We were also looking for artworks and projects that expressed a willingness to refute prejudices and stigma about unknown realities or to claim their rights.

Figure 6.1: Submission received according to media and community identification



For a proposal to be considered, the submissions were required to include standard items such as an artist CV and biographical information, examples of previous works, and a description of the proposed work(s) with a specification of technical requirements, if any. In addition, we asked artists to provide a statement on the artistic approach that explained how the proposed work(s) related to the exhibition's themes. From this general call, we received a total of twenty-six submissions in a variety of media and from diverse community identifications or affiliations (Fig. 6.1), thirteen of which were submitted by our preselected artists.

### 6.1.2. Selection of Works

To ensure the different wishes expressed in the focus groups were addressed, the CS was consulted on the proposals in a structured manner. They were asked to reflect on the artists' proposals with a precise list of questions that helped to decide which artworks and projects best aligned with the exhibition. Once that analysis was complete, the results were forwarded to the CE for approval. Alternatively, the CE could ask the CS to respond to questions about particular artist or artwork.

#### *Process of Selecting Works by the CS*

As many members of the CS were not familiar with artistic proposal evaluation, the CE developed an evaluation form that would aid the co-curators in their work. The form essentially allowed folks to rate each proposal, in a quantitative manner, with points allocated for each element and thematic criteria that would result in a total score (Appendix G: Submissions Evaluation Form). These scores became a quick reference for the overall compatibility of the work(s) with the exhibition criteria by simplifying the task through standardized evaluation. These submission evaluation criteria were divided into four parts:

- Part A (5 points) was concerned with the profile of the artist, which inquired about their self-identification within the community groups involved, their status as an artist,<sup>19</sup> how they wished to be identified, previous experience with personal

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<sup>19</sup> In S-32.01, the *Act respecting the professional status of artists in the visual arts, arts and crafts and literature, and their contracts with promoters*, in chapter II, division I, item 7, a professional artist is defined as, "Every creator in the field of visual arts, arts and crafts or literature has the status of a professional artist if (1) he declares himself to be a professional artist; (2) he produces works on his own behalf; (3) his works are exhibited, produced, published, presented in public or marketed by a promoter; (4) he has been recognized by his peers as a professional artist by way of an honourable mention, an award, a prize, a scholarship, an appointment to an adjudication committee or an invitation to participate in a salon or by any other similar means" (Québec, 1988).

testimonials, and their engagement in or advocacy for the recognition of one or more of the represented communities.

- Part B (15 points) was concerned with artistic approach, posing questions regarding the conformity of the artist's approach to the exhibition's vision of promoting empowerment, civic participation, and social inclusion; the artist's exploration of one or more of the exhibition themes (testimonials, activism, sexuality, media, undoing prejudices, sharing realities, claiming rights); the degree of interest expressed by the evaluator toward the artist's approach; and evidence in the artist's approach to ethical considerations toward people and issues of well-being, respect, social justice, and equity.
- Part C (50 points) was concerned with the proposed artwork or project, with questions regarding the visual references provided by the artist; the submitted text with relevant descriptive information that indicated their message and interest in one or more of the central themes of the exhibition; the manner with which the submission addressed the central themes of the exhibition with creativity and originality; the potential of the proposed works to stimulate and enrich the public; and, finally, the evaluator's general impression of the submission.
- Part D asked the evaluator if they would globally recommend the proposal to the CE for the exhibition, notwithstanding the evaluated score of the proposal. This is also where the evaluator was able to offer their comments about the submission.

During the first CS meeting regarding artist selection, Professor Mensah and I presented the twenty-three proposals received from the professional artists, both from the invited artists and from the general call to artists. As a formative exercise, the CS evaluated four submissions collectively during the session. Of the four submissions, two files were explicitly related to the exhibition. The two other

submissions were more difficult to evaluate because they either corresponded insufficiently to the themes or because the form of the work was problematic. The remaining nineteen submissions were then distributed among the CS members, in an effort to ensure that each project was assessed by at least two evaluators. From these assessments, the responses were compiled into a document summarizing the comments and ranked according to the evaluation scores allotted. At a subsequent meeting of the CS, two more community art projects were evaluated.

#### *Validation and Final Selection*

After the CS had performed their evaluations, the results were presented to the CE. In that meeting, a summary of the projects received was presented. Proposals that had been deemed problematic by the CS were rejected outright. Of the twenty-three artist proposals, the CS rejected seven because they did not fit the exhibition criteria. The remaining highest-rated proposals were presented in order of ranking, from highest to lowest. Since there were more accepted files (17) than we could keep, it was decided by the CE to focus on the top twelve projects. From this first meeting, six artists were accepted for the exhibition without hesitation and two were placed in reserve for further clarification from the artist or the CS.<sup>20</sup>

One artist's proposal was not viewed as strong enough by the CE. However, I deeply supported this artwork. But, I was familiar with the artist's past work, its impact, their commitment to activism, and their ability to express their testimonials in an evocative manner. The artist himself even had doubts that, as a gay white male, he had much to offer – or even if he should have

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<sup>20</sup> There were several video projects and performance submissions that could not be accommodated in the gallery. Only artists to be exhibited in the gallery were evaluated. Video submissions are not discussed in this thesis as they were not included in the exhibition or considered in its development. A parallel video and performance event was planned, however this event was eventually cancelled because funds were not in place to hold the event.

a place in this exhibition. I took the time with the artist to help him improve the proposal and, in effect, improve the artist's own clarity regarding their work. Eventually, with an improved proposal, the artist's work was accepted into the exhibition.

During the next meeting, we re-evaluated one of the reserve proposals, with an update from the artist following questions from the CE. The re-evaluated proposal convinced the CE that the artist had sufficiently replied to the questions raised, with new visual material, and was accepted. We also reviewed an exceptional proposal concerning sex work that was submitted after the submission deadline. With this submission, members expressed reservations regarding a possible BDSM-related message in the work. This made some of the CS participants uncomfortable, prompting them to ask, "Is this the 'positive' message we wish to put forward to the public?" The artist did not present any visual material in the proposal, only a written statement, which did clearly indicate the message she wished to convey about her experience of sex work. This description of the yet-to-be-rendered visuals was controversial. However, it was important for Stella, as a sex work organization, to support the artist and their work because of the importance of this testimonial in its complex representation of sex workers. This was one of the two moments in the exhibition project when the CE accepted the submission despite concerns raised by the CS. In this case, it was Stella's politics and activism that advocated for the artist.

At a later meeting, the CE participated in reviewing two community art proposals, as well as the last-minute submission of a unique piece created by Indigenous sex workers. One of these projects, particularly appreciated by both the CS and the CE, was accepted into the exhibition. However, once the project was confirmed, the exhibition coordination team was no longer able to contact the artist and the project was regretfully withdrawn from the exhibition.

In regard to the other proposal where the CE overruled the CS, several CS participants indicated that the subject matter was, perhaps, too limited to a single medical issue of HIV medication side-effects. However, from the perspective of the CE, issues of HIV drug therapies were absent from the works selected thus far, which was especially worrisome as these concerns are little known to the public. That sentiment was deepened by the fact that these were testimonials from women with HIV, testimonials which is very rarely available to the public. Nevertheless, some ethical concerns were raised by CE. As the work was never intended for public display, the CS wished to ensure that the participants in this project were well aware of the presentation of their artwork in an exhibition, requiring informed consent from the artists to exhibit and offering the possibility to remain anonymous or to use a pseudonym. Once these conditions were met, the project was accepted into the exhibition.

A final community project was added after the deadline and after many of the exhibition content decisions had already been made. This particular proposal was, in fact, suggested by a member of Stella after seeing the community-based project in person. Stella considered the artwork to be very poignant and valuable as it was developed by a community of women Indigenous sex workers, a group which is highly marginalized and correspondingly underrepresented. Because they appeared so late in the curatorial process and, thus, decisions had to be made quickly, it was necessary for us to circumvent our structured method of artist selection. As a result, several miscommunications occurred, arising from some confusion about what exactly the community group was proposing and regarding what would be on display in the gallery. At times, this led to frustration. As we worked through these frustrations, we learned that their community organization was undergoing an upheaval which had preoccupied the organizers and their membership. However, because of our posture of openness and willingness to provide opportunities to groups such as this one, we



resolved these difficulties in a respectful and flexible manner. In the end, we accepted the proposal into the exhibition without consulting the CS. Here, we had to rely on our intuition that the CS would approve the proposal and that the artwork would come together in the gallery.

Each irregular proposal challenged us in its own way. These challenges, however, ultimately reinforced our ideas about social sensibility through advocacy, flexibility, and having the confidence that people who are passionate about their art and their community would deliver if given support and encouragement. While we had developed a process that would treat all proposals in a fair manner, at times it was necessary to go beyond that process in order to arrive at a level of equity.

#### 6.1.3. Selected Artworks: Demographics & Media

The selected artworks displayed a range both in form and in content. We gathered a diversity of perspectives in a variety of media which satisfied our desire to be as inclusive as possible of marginalized communities. In that sense, we had materialized an expression of transversal politics. To that effect, both the CS and the CE often echoed the request of the focus groups — that the overall impression for the spectator be a positive one. Through a reflective process effectuated by both committees, we brought together a collection of artworks that were thought-provoking and that represented relevant voices for the just representation of their respective communities.

From the classification of professional artists, there were eight artists<sup>21</sup> presenting ten works with local, national, and international profiles. These artworks comprised of

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<sup>21</sup> It is important to note that one of these artists did not wish to be included in this thesis project. Therefore, to respect their wishes, I will not be discussing their contribution to the exhibition.

photography, drawings, video work, installations, sculpture, artist books, and textual work (Fig. 6.2).

Figure 6.2: Participating Artists & Groups

Selected Artist	Gender	Projects & work(s)	Community	City of residence
<b>Professional Artists</b>				
<b>Eloisa Aquino</b>	Woman	<i>Pajubá</i> , 2014-17. Fanzine on plinth with illustrations.	queer, trans	Montréal
<b>Ianna Book</b>	Woman	<i>Ok Lucid</i> , 2015. Multimedia installation.	trans	Montréal
<b>Kevin Crombie</b>	Man	<i>Gloss</i> , 2017. Softcover artist book in slipcase.	queer	Quyon, Québec
<b>Shan Kelley</b>	Man	<i>Count me out</i> , 2014. Hand-painted wall text. <i>Growing Concern</i> , 2013. Photo & print media.	HIV, queer	Montréal
<b>Ins A Kromminga</b>	Intersex	<i>Ancestors</i> , 2017. Wall installation of drawings.	intersex	Berlin, Germany
<b>Grace Van Ness</b>	Woman	<i>How Sweet the Sound</i> , 2017. Video & audio installation.	sex work	New York, USA
<b>Richard Sawdon Smith</b>	Man	<i>Eating the Ribbon</i> , 2008. Photo triptych. <i>The Anatomical Man</i> , 2009. Photo triptych.	HIV, gay	Norwich, UK
<b>Community-based Projects</b>				
<b>Collective of Women Living with HIV</b>	Women	<i>My Body, My Story</i> , 2016. Multimedia drawings.	HIV	Produced in Toronto & Ottawa
<b>ArmHer Collective</b>	Women	<i>Land of My Body</i> , 2017. Multimedia installation.	sex work	Sudbury, Ontario
<b>Community Partner Projects</b>				
<b>COCQ-SIDA</b>	Mixed	<i>Je t'aime</i> , 2007. Tempera on canvas.	HIV	Montréal
<b>GRIS-Montréal</b>	Mixed	<i>Une histoire à la fois...</i> , 2017. Multimedia installation.	LGBTQ+	Montréal
<b>Stella</b>	Women	<i>The Pink Room</i> , 2017. Multimedia installation.	sex work	Montréal

These eight professional artists included one intersex person, four women, three men, two people living with HIV, one trans person, two sex workers, three queer people, and one gay person. It is important to note that many these classifications intersect. As they are personal identities, it was difficult to ascertain or describe the groups of artists with traditional labels such as gay or lesbian. This became apparent when,

during a CS meeting, the lesbian community seemed to be poorly represented. This may have been the case because, where once identity descriptors such as lesbian, bisexual, or gay were used, many of our artists simply described themselves as queer. Furthermore, in some cases, the identity of the artist did not directly correspond with the subject matter of the artwork they presented in the gallery. Despite the potential of this in strengthening our transversal standpoint, it was very clear, especially in the CS meetings, that not all communities were ready to completely relinquish the LGBT moniker. Even though they may see themselves as queer, it was still very much a part of their individual identities.

Another realization that occurred after the artist selection was that we seemed to have little representation of racialized communities. It was noted, however, that this issue was not addressed in the selection process — we did not specify this in the call for submission. We therefore did not know if we had made a racially diverse selection. It was consequently decided that each of our community partner groups should pay particular attention in the preparation of their artworks that were being developed for the exhibition, in an attempt to balance cultural diversity. In our selection of professional artists, we did, by chance, have one racialized artist. Work from our community groups projects, on the other hand, were diverse in the representation of cultural communities.

There were three community-based art projects in the exhibition, although, as mentioned previously, one project withdrew their participation (Fig. 6.2). The two remaining projects were both from women's community groups — one addressed the experience of living with HIV with large scale drawings developed through a process called body mapping, and the other represented the lived experiences of sex workers and their allies with a video and sculpture installation. Demographically, many of these women were from Indigenous communities.

Beyond the professional artists and community projects, we had allotted space for each of the exhibition partners to present works. COCQ-SIDA exhibited a painting created at the “*Forum entre nous*”<sup>22</sup> by people living with HIV/AIDS. GRIS-Montréal exhibited an installation that illustrated the mission of their organization. Stella chose to co-create a community work with the artist Chloé Surprenant, which became an installation of sex workers’ personal artifacts (Fig. 6.2).

## 6.2. Contextualizing: The Art, Artists, & Experience

As you examine the descriptions of the artworks, you will notice diverse representations of people from different socio-economic, racial, and cultural backgrounds who are living with HIV, who are sex workers, intersex, trans, bi, lesbian, gay, non-binary, and/or queer people. As a group, they unite disparate communities and highlight their common interests, struggles, and politics. It is the coalescence of these different experiences and these varied voices that asserts, through the collective curatorial statement placed in the entry of the gallery (Fig. 6.3), that:

*‘Through the strength of testimonials, our experiences, our expertise, our differences, our voices change the world’*

*Témoigner pour Agir* brings together a plurality of individual and collective experiences and stories. These are the stories of our communities — communities that are discriminated against because of their sexual or gender identity, sexual orientation or practice, of their serological status, of their body or gender expression. We are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer, non-binary, people living with HIV, or with experience in sex work.

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<sup>22</sup> Under an initiative of COCQ-SIDA and organized by and for people living with HIV, the *Forum entre nous* offered informative meetings followed by group discussion workshops. This gave participants the opportunity to get involved, to be part of the discussions and to take a stand on important issues such as serophobia, criminalization, prevention, and global health. The first edition in 2004 launched the movement by enabling participants to break their isolation and establish support networks. The second Entre-nous Forum in 2007 provided a forum for exchange on accessibility of care and respect for rights.

*Témoigner pour Agir* invites us to reflect on the issues raised by public testimonials about sexuality, gender, work, body, HIV status, and the social struggles that these personal disclosures make visible.

We have favoured artists who tell their personal stories through their art and demonstrate an unequivocal commitment to the diversity and plurality of marginalized voices.

We have also selected works that do not perpetuate prejudices, that offer non-stigmatizing representations, and that reinforce our desire to transform society into a more inclusive world.

Signed: The Co-curators.

Figure 6.3: Guest of the exhibition opening reading the curatorial statement



### 6.2.1. Professional Artists

After the selection process, eight professional artists were chosen for the exhibition. Following the selection deliberation, an understanding emerged on how each individual artwork may fit together within the exhibition. The CS felt confident that it

had made a strong selection of artists that would deliver a thought-provoking and dynamic exhibition. Below are descriptions of the artworks that appeared in the exhibition, reflections on the works by the artists, and the reasons for which the CS selected these works (Appendix H: Post selection Form), along with personal reflections from myself.

*Eloisa Aquino*

***Pajubá*** (Aquino, 2014-17) (Fig. 6.4) is a fanzine — a small illustrated book — presented by queer zine artist Eloisa Aquino. *Pajubá*, the title of the work, is the name of a popular language created by the insertion of numerous words and expressions from Western African languages into Portuguese. It is widely used by the Santo people of Brazil, but has also been adopted by many in Brazil's LGBTQ+ community. *Pajubá*, meaning gossip, novelty, or news, is a feminine, aggressive, sweet, and witty mode of expression. It is a cultural response to oppression. Aquino, a former journalist, linguist, researcher, illustrator, and zinester, seeks to document and tell the stories from this linguistic community that are untold, forgotten, or invisible. As she states in the exhibition catalogue:

I grew up and came of age in the diverse and intense metropolis of São Paulo in the 1980s and 1990s. As a middle-class adolescent and young adult of that time, I was not too sheltered, and could experience with my friends and by myself a culture that was very mixed in terms of class, preferences, race and sexual orientation. In other words, the places and spaces we used to frequent were a healthy and chaotic mix of queer and straight, punk, new wave and samba, white and black, rich and poor, and so on. It was at the corner bars where we used to drink that I heard the language of the travestis (people who identify either as a separate gender or as transwomen), *Pajubá*, for the first time, and I was amazed (Aquino in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 31).

Figure 6.4: Eloisa Aquino, *Pajubá*, 2014/17. Fanzine with illustrated plinths



Intrigued, Aquino began to learn this underground dialect. While she never became fluent, she remained captivated with it and with the people who spoke it. For her, speaking Pajubá was an access to another realm of the world that surrounded her. “To live along and to know and connect with and befriend *travestis* at that time was an incredible privilege, and helped me to understand better both queerness and myself as a gay woman” (Aquino in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 31).

As expressed by Aquino in her exhibition proposal, “Queer and trans folk in Brazil, despite a strong presence in culture and society, still suffer of the highest rate of violence against LGBTQ people in the world.” For the Brazilian *travesties*, there is a necessity for this dialect; it is a means for survival as they occupy a paradoxical space. “They are desired and hated in equal enormous measures, yet their culture is ignored, dismissed or disdained, even within LGBTQ communities” (Aquino, exhibition proposal). In its ability to evade comprehension by the general population as a cryptolact, or a kind of anti-language, Pajubá is a “rich and strong cultural manifestation in [the] face of oppression” (Aquino in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p.

31). Aquino characterizes the Pajubá performative nature with its outrageous inflexions, humorous vocabulary, and extravagant gesturing. Her zine reveals a little-known aspect of Brazilian queer culture in this “homage to those fabulous people” (Aquino in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 31) and their instinct for survival in the margins.

The co-curators chose this work for its representation of the reality of non-binary/trans people within their socio-cultural spheres. The work emphasizes that this is not simply a term that labels these people, but that also reveals their lived experiences. By describing this anti-language and its importance, Pajubá demystifies the reality of trans people in Brazil. While the co-curators identified a possible dissonance or confusion between the meaning of the word *travestis* and the word transvestite, it was recommended that the meaning of *travestis* be explained to the gallery viewer<sup>23</sup>.

In addition to the specifics of the artwork, the co-curators believed that the neighbourhoods between which the Maison de la culture is located, the Gay Village and Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, are areas linked by their richness of socio-cultural diversity, as well as by very large LGBTQ+ and itinerant populations. Consequently, it was determined that this was the perfect venue to exhibit this work as the Maison de la culture offers a safe place for people who experience realities completely incongruent from that of the mainstream.

In a pop culture style, *Pajubá* also has an informative approach that reminds me of academic, scientific, or journalistic methods of definition, observation, and explanation. As a zine on a pedestal, it is a surprising counterpoint between the

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<sup>23</sup> To achieve this, in the gallery each artwork was accompanied by a panel with text that gave context to the work.



marginalized subject, the pop object, and the formal space. The very trendy zine has a style that provides easy access to an education on an unknown culture through an entertaining, light-hearted, and colourful medium. A simple yet effective representation melding image and word, the zine was expected to provide this access by catching the eye of many. Its style disarms viewers and introduces a hidden world in an accessible way – a memorable way. I think Eloisa's approach to art-making or message-making is a manifestation of her world; it is a blending of ideas, types, and techniques, much like her distinctive and vibrant upbringing in São Paulo.

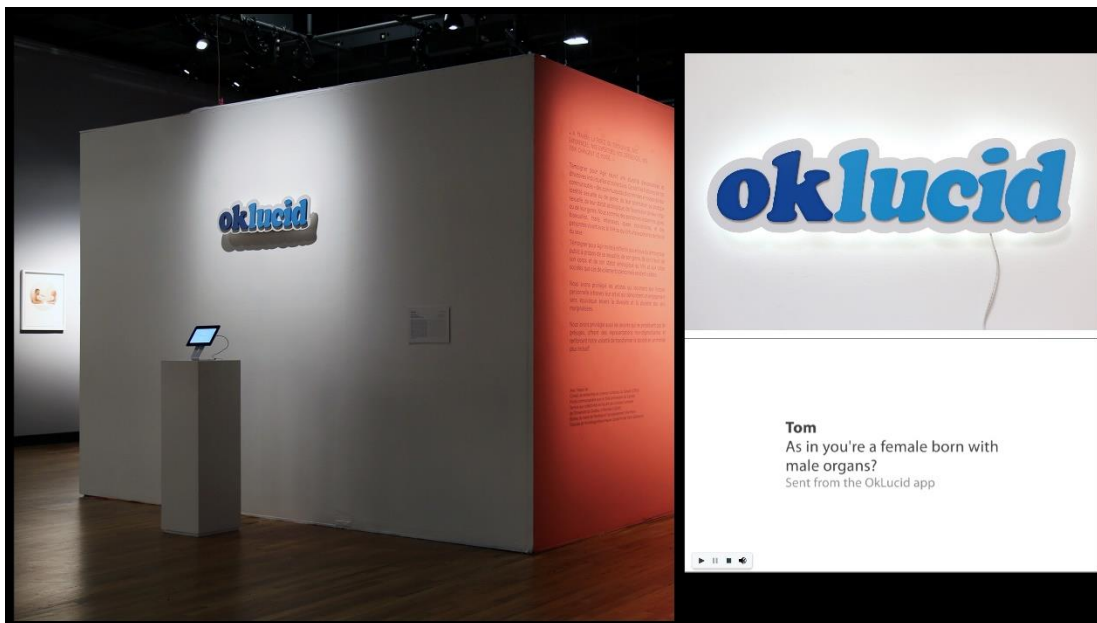
*Ianna Book*

**Ok Lucid!** (Book, 2015) (Fig. 6.5) explores public perceptions of the artist's transsexuality through interactions she experienced while using online dating apps. In the gallery was an installation with an iPad on a plinth, located under a commercially-styled sign with the text, "Ok Lucid!" Displayed on the iPad was a collection of messages that Book had collected from interactions with men online while using these dating apps. As the screen scrolls through these messages, their sexual nature apparent, she is first perceived as a cisgender woman. However, by using an experimental methodology in "an aesthetic study" (Book, exhibition proposal), the artist discloses herself as a transsexual woman to gauge the men's reactions: "50% of them stopped communicating, 20% were curious, 10% were confused, 10% were turned on, 9% responded negatively, and 1% had another reaction" (Book in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 34). This interactive installation provides a candid snapshot of the ways in which men approach trans women and exposes the social perception that these men have of women in general. For her, "This is a moment of lucidity" (Book in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 34).

For Book, this is her lucid reality; yet, for the viewer, it also offers a moment of lucidity. *Ok Lucid!* displays social attitudes around difference in plain sight. The viewer is forced to acknowledge that which is not often said in public, but which remains, indeed, a latent attitude that many people harbour toward trans people and women. Bringing light to these mindsets and attitudes by forcing the viewer to confront them is Book's objective, as she states in the exhibition catalogue:

I have always felt the need to create thought-provoking visual arrangements in public spaces. My aesthetic research is centred on a critical appraisal of both the norms of the human landscape and the conservative status quo, opening the way to new cultural elements. It is by rearranging our surroundings and various aspects of the "spectacle" that I push the spectator to question their own conditions and remember they are a social actor able to progress (Book in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 34).

Figure 6.5: Ianna Book, *Ok Lucid!*, 2015. Multimedia installation



Book prompts the viewer to become reflective, in much the same way she herself has become in her own journey of self-realization. She tells her story not only to inform and educate, but also to self-understand. "Indeed, ever since my inner state became

an outer reality, I have been more motivated than ever to create, express various feelings related to my unconventional existence, and understand how it fits into the current social context” (Book in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 34).

Book’s work was appreciated by the co-curators for its evocative testimonial from a trans woman. Through this work, Book depicts the encounter between two worlds that coexist and that do not know each other — two worlds with unequal relationships: male heterosexuality and female transsexuality. It was believed that this work perfectly presented the reactions perceived by transsexual persons. In Book’s work, she is able to bear witness to her feelings in relation to the comments made toward her and to unpack their judgments. This work demonstrates what trans identities experience daily in their interpersonal and intimate relationships. With high quality artistry and clean and efficient aesthetics, the work demonstrates, through digital media that plays on the OkCupid<sup>24</sup> application, how people interact with a trans person in an intimate virtual space. It is a direct and dynamic testimonial.

The adage, ‘Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me,’ is not true. Words do hurt. I watched people engaging with Ianna’s work, I have seen the expressions on their faces, their jaws drop in disbelief, anger, and sadness. Her work creates tension and insists on a reaction from the viewer. This is even more so true as these small digital screens are ubiquitous in our lives — perpetually at hand, ready to use, anonymous. The unassuming iPad — the peak of our design and

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<sup>24</sup> OkCupid was founded by Harvard math majors in 2004 and shot to fame with the promise of pre-assured romantic compatibility with one’s top matches because of its computational approach to matchmaking. OkCupid’s algorithm calculates match percentage by comparing answers to ‘match questions,’ which cover topics such as religion, politics, lifestyle, and sex. OkCupid’s algorithm then assigns a numerical weight to each question that corresponds to your importance rating and compares your answers to those of potential matches in a specified geographic area (Poulsen, 2014; Winterhalter, 2016).

technological culture – with its approach to human relationships based on algorithms, is the slick setup for her shock content. Ianna’s pseudo-scientific approach to art-making, a kind of clinical method, is detached. The words on the screen are detached from their speaker, detached from our social norms of kindness and empathy. Words do hurt. However, with this work, she shows us her shield – how she detaches these words from the hurt they cause. It is her method for coping with and navigating an insensitive digital world in her ‘unconventional existence.’ Through her reality that she reveals – how men react and interact with her – I am able to see my own story, make connections, and find solidarity and compassion with her and her work.

*Kevin Crombie*

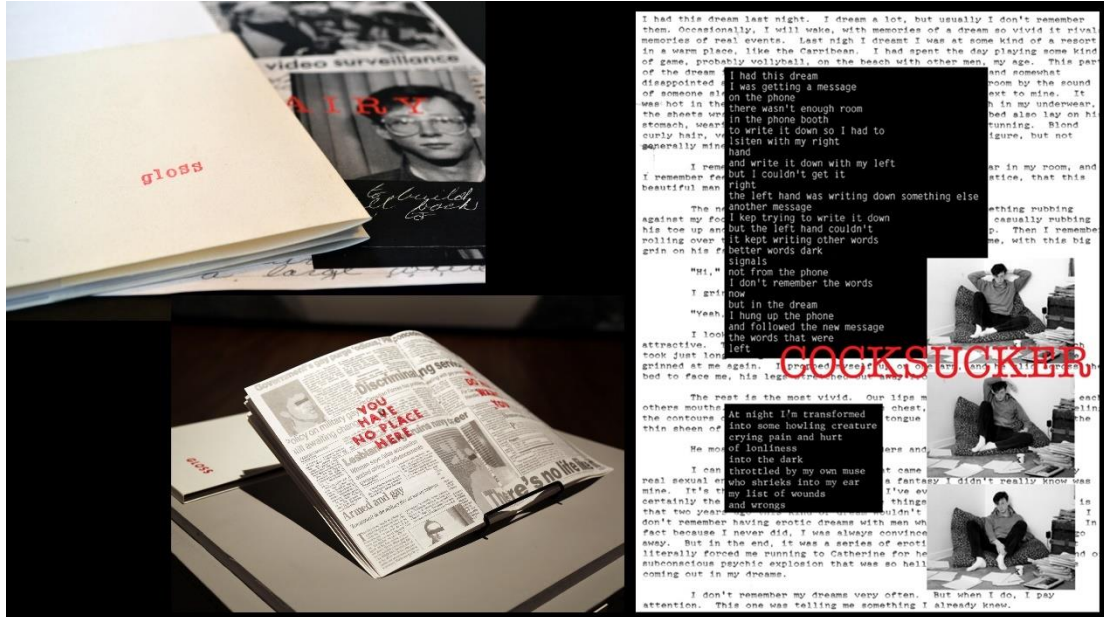
**Gloss** (Crombie, 2017) (Fig. 6.6) is an artist book by artist and writer Kevin Crombie that, as he explains, “juxtaposes a State and socially sanctioned narrative about marginalized sexuality against a personal narrative arc, from self-rejection to self-acceptance” (Crombie in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 37). Crombie’s art is primarily concerned with text and narrative. In this work, he articulates this through pages of muted tones that are covered in newspaper clippings from the 80s and 90s expressing the debates and discomfort with the emergence of LGBTQ+ rights, paired with his intimate photographs, writings, and journal entries. Each folio has bold blood-red text stamped across the pages that screams “FAGGOT,” “FAIRY,” or “COCKSUCKER.” These sources of image-texts come from a specific period in Crombie’s life, as he states in the exhibition catalogue:

The newspaper clippings were collected as research material when I wrote regularly for queer magazines, such as *Rites* out of Toronto and the *Gaezette* in Halifax, and are representative of a period where I was particularly angry. I have never been able to bring myself to throw them away; flipping through the file still fills me with rage. All of the autobiographical texts are

contemporaneous with the clippings. However, the challenge in curating them was to allow the emotionally tormented young man who wrote them to speak with his own flawed voice, and to allow the resulting portrait to testify on its own, without qualifiers and without apologies (Crombie in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 37).

This work serves to remind those who fought the battles for the lives and dignity of people dying of AIDS and for the rights of the LGBTQ+ community not to forget, or to gloss over, as Crombie declares, our Queer History, now that we are considered “respectable.” For Crombie, there is a necessity for queer people to continue to tell their stories. “We must never stop doing this, telling stories about ourselves, that we are what our experiences are [...] it’s critical for survival as communities and as individuals who live on the margins, we’re pushed out onto the margins” (Crombie, interview, 16 April 2018).

Figure 6.6: Kevin Crombie, *Gloss*, 2017. Softcover artist book in slipcase



The co-curators understood that his testimonial, his personal story, belongs to the history of the media coverage of homosexuality, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and the fight

for LGBTQ+ rights. Collages of newspaper clippings reveal the social mechanisms that support compliance; these articles continuously spread messages of intolerance, supported by repeated threats of physical violence. His personal texts, essays, poems, short stories, letters, and diary pages trace a personal narrative tinged with fear, loneliness, and suffering. Despite the ground gained over the last few decades, *Gloss* forces us to realize that the lives of homosexuals have not always been so rosy. Remembering through testimonial can give courage to others in their fight and the hope that things do get better. Telling our stories also reminds those of us who have won ground not to be complacent and to recollect how our lives were not so very long ago, so that it may encourage us to help others in their struggles for positive social change.

I am emotionally involved in this work. Kevin is one of my oldest friends and I like to take credit for starting his artistic career. I encouraged him to take part in this exhibition after a lull in his studio work. I have always encouraged him to make art. We were lovers a long time ago. I didn't see it right away, but when I looked at the proposal, there it was: a polaroid photo of me, or at least a part of me, taken from when we lived in Halifax or maybe just after we moved to Montréal. After a quick moment of anxiety, realizing that only two people know who is in the photo, I let go of my trepidations of being included in the work. Kevin needed to make this book to reconcile with the fraught young man that he was. He also had to make this book for others in similar struggles today to let them know that it gets better, that we know what it is like, and that our experiences can help them understand their own. I am emotionally involved in this work as well because it reminds me of a younger me that was fearful that, I too, would be rejected, unloved, and alone.

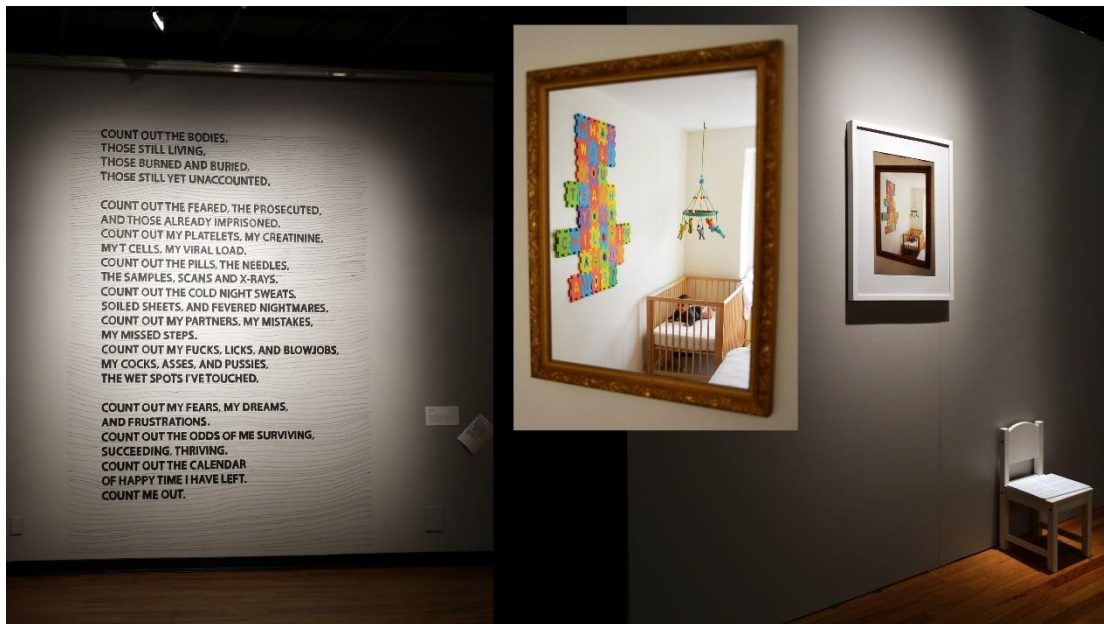
*Shan Kelley*

***Count Me Out*** (Kelley, 2014) (Fig. 6.7 left) and ***Growing Concern (to my daughter)*** (Kelley, 2013) (Fig. 6.7 right) are the two works by Shan Kelley in the exhibition. An HIV-positive artist, Kelley has a fascination for language and the ways in which identity, risk, health, body, and belonging to a community or to communities are interconnected. His practice “sits somewhere amidst the slippery intersections between art and activism” (Kelley in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 41). After an HIV-positive diagnosis in 2009, Kelley became increasingly inspired to find his voice within the context of disease and adversity; “I pushed forward using art as action against apathy or surrender” (Kelley in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 44).

*Count Me Out* (Kelley, 2014) is a textual artwork, hand-drawn in black paint on the gallery wall. Large in scale, the work is confrontational and was motivated by Kelley’s belief that every day should be World AIDS Day.

While December 1<sup>st</sup> is marked internationally as the day of remembrance for people living with HIV and those who have died from AIDS related complications, much of the attention, ceremony, and remembrance is simply a placeholder and placebo for real action. It is a footnote into a history that WAS, rather than a history which IS. AIDS has become a dangerously marketed political photo-op in which smiling heads exchange profitable handshakes, while overcrowded super-prisons and entire communities bleed, suffer, and die (Kelley, exhibition proposal).

Figure 6.7: Shan Kelley, *Count Me Out*, 2014. Hand-painted wall text / *Growing Concern*, 2013. Photo & print media.



The artwork contains a highly intimate text centred around the things we enumerate when talking about HIV — the dead, the living, the undiagnosed — as we count bodies and not lives; our interactions with the medical and pharmaceutical industries that claim that a good life is measured by a set of medical parameters which exclude emotional well-being; and our sexual partners, stigmatized for promiscuity and often reproached for living with the infection. Despite this, Kelley remains hopeful; in the last stanza of the artwork's text he re-humanizes himself, and others, as an individual with fears, hopes, and dreams — which we all have. As Kelley expresses in his exhibition proposal:

To exist as a being with emotions, urges, desires, needs, and HIV, I endeavor to construct and deconstruct ideas of the self, maintaining an instability to my identity by carving out a spaciousness required to be human, while broadcasting a stable idea of myself associated with fallibility, humor, the inhumane, death, and risk (Kelley, exhibition proposal).



*Growing Concern (to my daughter)* (Kelley, 2013) consists of a photo of his daughter reflected in a mirror with a text on the wall, “WHAT WILL YOU TEACH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT AIDS?” This photograph is accompanied with a letter Kelley wrote to his daughter, placed on a child-sized chair (Appendix I: *To My Daughter* Letter). The artwork is a testimonial of his serodiscordant relationship and the events surrounding the birth of their child. It is an honest statement to his daughter about that struggle, but it also questions what we pass on as knowledge and interrogates the shifting realities of living with HIV. In his exhibition proposal, he writes about the decision to have a child:

On the second night we met, I told my Moroccan-born Canadian wife [...] that I was HIV positive and she cried lovingly in my arms before we kissed. In hindsight, falling in love was the easy part. Our decision to create a child was unfortunately met with incredible apprehension, cynical judgement, and ostracized us from people I expected would support us. From veteran HIV practitioners, medical staff, even people we called friends. Immediately after our daughter was born, many people congratulated us and celebrated her negative status as a great achievement. As if she would be worth less to us if she had been born HIV+. Would we then have failed as parents, as humans? (Kelley, exhibition proposal).

With this work, Kelley challenges our assumptions about HIV and urges us to learn more about living with the infection. What does living with HIV mean? He refers not what it was, but to what it is now. He tasks us with discerning the difference between perceived risk and real risk and, in doing so, challenges the stigmas attached to HIV/AIDS.

The co-curators valued this deeply personal, honest, and direct testimonial. They supported the capacity of his story to raise awareness of experienced rejection and/or self-exclusion. We can empathize with his story of a serodiscordant relationship, as well as with the events surrounding the birth of the couple’s child. It is a sincere statement to his child about this struggle and about living with HIV. It is also a message

to all of us about the transmission of knowledge, prejudice, and stigma relating to HIV and the changing realities of people living with HIV.

I find Shan to be fearless. I have followed his art practice for many years, and I have been struck by his commitment to be so direct about his life and experiences as an HIV+ man. He shows a willingness to be honest with himself, with his family, with others who are HIV+, and with the viewer of his works. His is a flawed life, as all lives are, but he sees his flaws as the richness of being – things to be celebrated and cherished. Working with Shan in the gallery, I began to understand the breadth of his convictions and the dignity of his activism; an activism that strives to deconstruct his world in order to rebuild a healthier relationship with his body, with his family, and with society.

*Ins A Kromminga*

***Ancestors*** (Kromminga, 2017) (Fig. 6.8) is a large-scale drawing installation by intersex activist, visual artist, and cultural producer Ins A Kromminga. The work combines a large visceral amorphous charcoal drawing, marked directly onto the wall, with dozens of small, intimate, sometimes humorous, sometimes heart-wrenching drawings superimposed onto the charcoal drawing. As Kromminga states in the exhibition catalogue:

These delicately drawn, and often small-scale, works on paper offer an intimacy that requires close observation. This close-up view allows the observer to find and decipher my integrated texts, which accompany, comment or subvert my poetic, fantastic, magical and implicitly brutal images of multi-headed beings, mutated angels, extraterrestrials, monsters, freaks, hybrid forms between humans, animals, hermaphrodites (Kromminga in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 47).

What results for the viewer is a kind of macro versus micro vision of Kromminga's world. This type of interplay between scales and imagery forms a standpoint for the work. The artist states:

The interconnection of scale variations of the small sized works and their clustering within the wall filling drawing respond to my expectation of reading apparently personal or private issues within a social context and thus to always understand them as politically relevant" (Kromminga, 2019).

Ultimately, Kromminga's work asks us to go beyond the medical imagery, the obsession with genitalia, and the categories of dysfunction or disorder. They wish for us to see past the abject and to see intersex folk as part of the range of human existence. By sharing their story and the stories of their community, Kromminga also expresses that, "Language and visual art can be tools to tell different narratives, thus creating empowering spaces for yet untold Hermstories"<sup>25</sup> (Kromminga in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 47).

Figure 6.8: Ins A Kromminga, *Ancestors*, 2017. Drawing installation



<sup>25</sup> 'Herm' is one who has both male and female sex organs.

The co-curators recognized this artwork as a focal point of the exhibition that brings forth political concerns about physical diversity and the visibility and acceptance of intersex people, their rights, their empowerment, and their self-determination. It was evident that Kromminga's artwork and practice was not merely an extension of their activism, but rather part of a greater whole. As one co-curator reflected:

I also really liked the militant side of Ins' work [...] We are so 'focused' on testimonials and the social change that is achieved through them, that the militant side is not really part of our work. We are activists, but we don't go out on the street with signs, we don't get angry at things, or, we try to do it... quietly, and that's part of me, wanting to be angry, to make people understand [...] There was a little bit of that side in Ins' work [...] of political demands, of mixing up social norms [...] to make people understand that these norms are not nature (Amélie Charbonneau, GRIS-Montréal, interview April 17, 2018, my translation).

I was a bit nervous meeting Ins. They had come all the way from Germany to be part of this exhibition, they had a massive drawing and installation to undertake, and I wanted everything to go just perfectly. I was worried about navigating pronouns. I knew that they preferred 'them/they' as I had been addressing them as such in emails and in committee meetings for months. But would my mind make that leap in person? I have many friends and acquaintances that are non-binary, trans, or genderfluid. I am used to being pronoun-aware, although my mind resists at times and I slip up and use the wrong term.

Observing Ins install their work in the gallery, I witnessed a fluidity in their gestures with paint, charcoal, and paper. Even on such a large scale, there was a refined sensitivity to the materials and the subject. But what is the subject of their work? The surreal quality of these sensitive portraits – cherubs with bursting innards, amorphous rhizomes that could be body parts or that could be animal – demands that one spends time in attempting to decipher it. What is this world, how do these

things fit together? I think that is the subject of their work, to be less concerned with categorizations and more concerned with the human quality of the work. 'How do intersex people fit into our society?' is the question this work asks.

After meeting Ins, my nervousness dissipated. Their quiet charisma, warmth, and talent allowed me to forget about labels. I was able to get to know Ins during the few days we spent together in the gallery – and without labels, without categorization, I found an extraordinary human being.

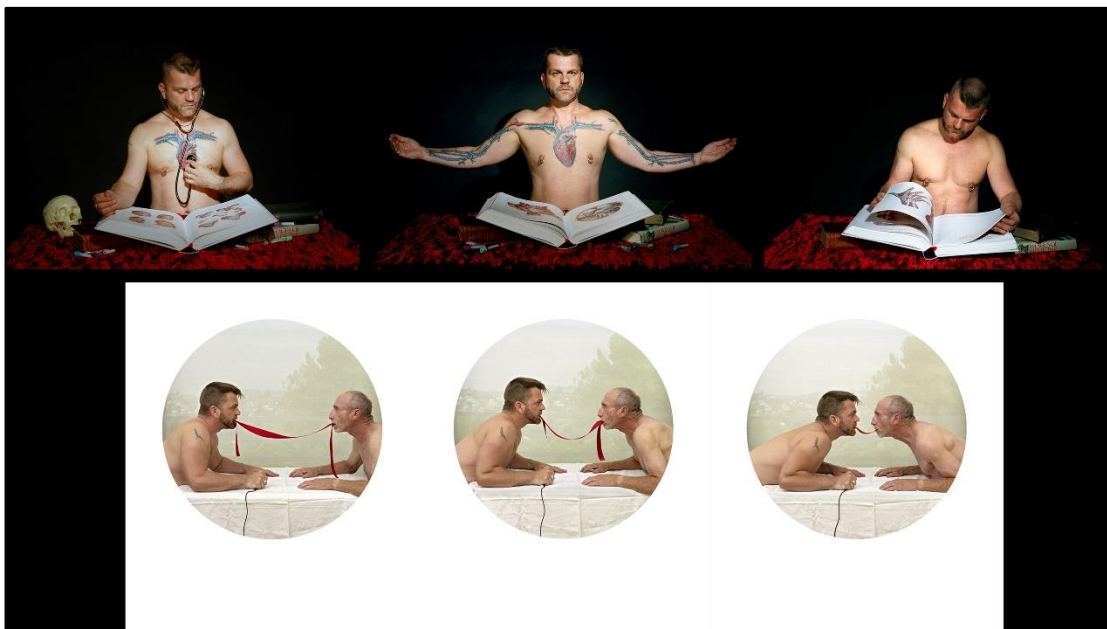
*Richard Sawdon Smith*

***Dialogue (eating the red ribbon)*** (Richard Sawdon Smith, 2007) (Fig. 6.9, bottom) and ***The Anatomical Man*** (Richard Sawdon Smith, 2009) (Fig. 6.9, top) were the two works presented by Richard Sawdon Smith in the exhibition. Sawdon Smith creates photographic self-portraiture that could be described as autobiographical in its articulation of his perspective of living in the world as an HIV-positive gay man.

*Dialogue (eating the red ribbon)* (Richard Sawdon Smith, 2007) is a collection of photographs that belong to a broader body of work entitled *The Damaged Narcissist*. This triptych was produced in the context of the artist's collaboration with HIV-positive American photographer Albert J. Wynn. The photographs portray the artist, pre-tattoo, with Wynn, in which they are literally eating a red ribbon. The red ribbon has appeared as a recurring motif in the artist's work, in part as a remembrance to those who have died of AIDS. However, Sawdon Smith questions such symbols and offers a critique of how the red ribbon has been institutionalized and appropriated as a potentially insincere shorthand for institutions and businesses to appear as caring while neglecting the lives of those who live with HIV or who have died from AIDS.

*The Anatomical Man* (Richard Sawdon Smith, 2009) presents a photographic series of his post-tattoo self-portraits that highlight a fundamental shift not only in the artist's perception of himself, but also in others' perception of him — a change almost proportionate in magnitude to that of his HIV diagnosis. Since 1994, the artist has been documenting the blood tests he undergoes, a necessary yet intrusive skin piercing procedure. From this ongoing project, he had anatomical drawings of veins and arteries tattooed onto his skin with a similar process of using a needle. "The work creates a relationship between the permanent marking of the body by a process that draws blood and an incurable illness transmitted through blood, collapsing the internal and external onto the surface of the skin" (Sawdon Smith in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 51). As Smith expresses in the exhibition catalogue:

Figure 6.9: Richard Sawdon Smith, *The Anatomical Man*, 2009. Photo. / *Dialogue (eating the ribbon)*, 2008. Photo.



Like many other HIV+ people, life can often be divided into pre- and post-diagnosis — so fundamental is the shift in perception of ourselves. This isn't a negative but a new perspective on our identity and to a certain extent our subjectivity — how we know, see, feel our body. I developed a series of self-portraits that explore this reforming and emerging new identity. To control

one's concerns about an illness, to decipher this diseased and once potentially damaged body and make sense of a virus invisible to the naked eye (Sawdon Smith in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 51).

The co-curators valued this complex representation of the Self, a testimonial that exposes the general population to a critical examination of the perceptions of what it means to live with HIV. It was, therefore, considered a socially relevant testimonial that attempted to facilitate reflection and dialogue.

The co-curators reflected on Sawdon Smith's work from a social point of view; they believed that making this work accessible to the residents of the surrounding neighbourhoods was an effective means for raising awareness about HIV, stimulating questioning and reflection, and destabilizing common beliefs. They also believed that this kind of artistic testimonial could positively impact perceptions of the realities of living with HIV. Therefore, Sawdon Smith's work had the potential to be a powerful instrument for combating the discrimination and stigmatization of people living with HIV.

Moreover, this work prompted the co-curators to reflect on the current context of general disengagement in the fight against HIV. They recognized that this work demonstrates that people living with HIV and all those fighting this epidemic are subject to silence and that the red ribbon is losing its symbolic value. "It is clear to me that Richard Sawdon Smith's approach is totally in line with the vision of this exhibition; a vision that seeks to demonstrate that testimonial is a vehicle for individual and social change" (CS submission evaluation grid, my translation).

I have followed the work of Richard for some time, first finding his work on the Artist+ Registry on the Visual Aids website. His work makes the invisible visible, even in his earlier work in which his photographs are double exposures showing the locums of safe sex – oneself. Perhaps these photos are narcissistic,

but for me they reveal a truth: gay men are often solitary. What we do with our bodies singles us out; we must invent ways of interpreting sexuality, social interaction, and self-interaction. We are always negotiating these things and, with the weight of an HIV infection, stigma is added. Stigma is a strange thing as it presents genuine dangers. However, the most dangerous thing is when we are feeling the hurt of stigma in isolation. That is where fear grows as you strain to suppress aspects of your life, limit possible exposure to the shame, and curb the pain.

I read an essay of Richard's about re-coming-out as HIV+ each time he speaks of his HIV status. I read that around the same time that I was deciding to come out with my own positive status. I realized that it was not just a one-time thing; it must be done again and again. I will have to negotiate this for the rest of my life. I think that kind of negotiation of public/private, of what is real/imagined, is apparent in Richard's work. In feeling a connection with his work, as well as with the works of others, I have found the courage to live a more open life and to not allow the fear that stigma breeds to control me.

*Grace Van Ness*

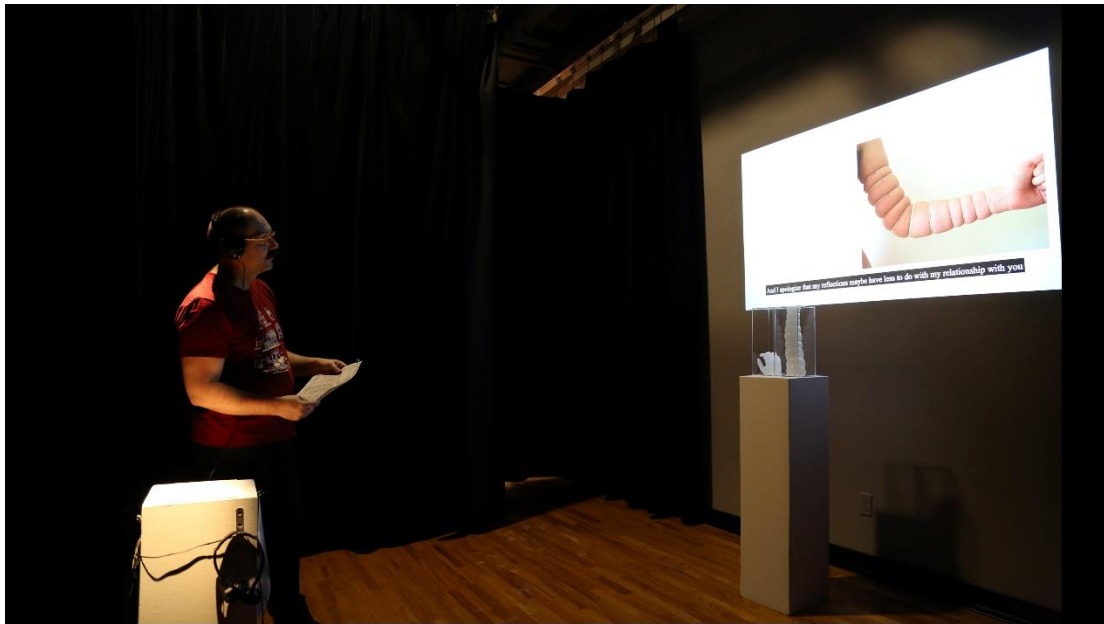
***How Sweet the Sound*** (Van Ness, 2017) (Fig. 6.10) is a video installation by pornographer and multimedia artist Grace Van Ness. The installation examines the different facets of Van Ness' identity as a woman that was once a child, as a daughter, and as a sexually adventurous adult. According to Van Ness:

[T]hese Graces are no different. I am a singular individual, whose existence from day to day forms the connection between my experience as a child and my expression as an adult. To presume that the two cannot exist simultaneously is to deny my complete personhood. Because my work is sex? Because my sex is kinky? Stigmatization, necessarily, requires a failure to



acknowledge wholeness, deepness, and a human complexity. It becomes much more difficult to criminalize the existence of those who are fully seen (Van Ness in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 54).

Figure 6.10: Grace Van Ness, *How Sweet the Sound*, 2017. Video & audio installation



“With a particular interest in intimacy, connectedness, and social justice, Van Ness seeks to explore the ways we tell ‘our’ own stories, blending documentary with memoir with porn” (Van Ness in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 52). In this artwork, the artist layers levels of information that are extraordinarily juxtaposed. The images of the video are a diptych: her masturbating with a Magic Wand<sup>26</sup> in one half of the screen and her snapping elastic bands wrapped around her arm in the other. The soundtrack (Appendix J: *How Sweet the Sound* Transcription, G. Van Ness) is a conversation between her mother and herself discussing the moment when her

<sup>26</sup> The Magic Wand is an AC-powered wand vibrator originally manufactured for relieving tension and relaxing sore muscles. However, it is most famous for its use as a sex toy. The Japanese company Hitachi has sold the device in the United States since 1968 to the present day. Sex educator Betty Dodson popularized its use as a vibrator and masturbation aid for women during the sex-positive movement in the late 1960s (Trout, 2014).

mother discovers that she does pornography, with the tune from a childhood music box playing *Amazing Grace*<sup>27</sup>.

The video articulates the strata of identity that Van Ness internalizes, with the total complexity and depth of a full life and of a life being lived.

Thus, in its fullness, its messiness, and its many layers, I offer myself and my experience as an answer to this stigma. The base: a visual display of pleasure and pain that is simultaneously self-care and self-harm [...] Each layer seemingly disjointed, but necessarily unified (Van Ness in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 54).

Translated through others, sex workers' stories are often sensationalized and simplified, moulded into the same clichéd narratives. With *How Sweet the Sound* (Van Ness, 2017), the artist offers her own story — a human experience that is abundant, complex, and multi-layered. Her testimonial addresses stigma and seeks to expel, viscerally, the narrow perception of sex workers and kink.

The co-curators agreed with the artist's confrontation of a common dominant narrative, in which she exposes the reductive perception of sex work through the

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<sup>27</sup> Written in 1772, this hymn comes from the heart, mind, and experiences of John Newton. Having lived through a troubled childhood, Newton spent years fighting against authority, going so far as trying to desert the Royal Navy in his twenties. Later, abandoned by his crew in West Africa, he was forced to be a servant to a slave trader, but was eventually rescued. On the return voyage to England, a violent storm hit and almost sank the ship, prompting Newton to begin his spiritual conversion as he cried out to God to save them from the storm. However, Newton did become a slave ship master, bringing slaves from Africa to England over multiple trips. In 1754, after becoming violently ill on a sea voyage, Newton abandoned his life as a slave trader and seafaring, altogether, wholeheartedly devoting his life to God's service. He was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1764 and became quite popular as a preacher and hymn writer, among them *Amazing Grace*. In later years, Newton fought alongside William Wilberforce, leader of the parliamentary campaign to abolish the African slave trade. Newton described the horrors of the slave trade in an article he wrote supporting the campaign and lived to see the British passage of the Slave Trade Act of 1807. The song was used at marches during the civil rights movement of the 1960s and gained popularity among those protesting the Vietnam War. Over the years, musicians and singers, from Elvis Presley to Destiny's Child, have performed this timeless song. Even former US President Barack Obama gave a powerful rendition during his eulogy for reverend and state senator Clementa Pinckney, a victim of the Charleston church shooting in 2015.

many layers of her own experience in this very intimate testimonial. While some caution was raised by a few co-curators concerning the content of the work, it was finally accepted that the artist's intention was to combat the sensationalist and simplistic ideas of sex work and to confront stigma by portraying the full depth of her human complexity. Through an assessment of the sensitive nature of the work, and under the recommendation of the focus group, it was decided that this artwork would be displayed in a curtained-off area of the gallery with a notice to visitors of its explicit nature.

Grace's work was surprising and difficult to view. Particularly because her proposal had provided little visual information. Even her catalogue image, that was submitted three months before the exhibition opening, did not prepare me for her work. I was not really sure what would be in the gallery until it was installed. As her proposal was vague, I had to rely on the intuition of the others that the work would not only materialize, but that its message would integrate into the collection of works.

The work was sexually explicit, so we took precautions suggested by the focus groups to inform and warn the viewer of this by sectioning it off behind a black velvet curtain. This practical solution became an integral aspect of the work – we, the viewers, were required to enter her space and understand her life, sexuality, and her (sex)work on her terms. Yes, we were voyeurs, but she also placed us in the position of her mother trying to understand and reconcile the many layers of Grace – the strata of human existence in this one person.

We are different things to different people – we have histories. We can tell these stories, yet we are not merely these moments, but rather the sum of them. Grace compiled just a few of her

stories to show her fullness, the complexity of life, and her humanity. *How Sweet the Sound* denies us the ability to reduce Grace to one label – both the person and the idea of grace.

#### 6.2.2. Community & Socially Engaged Art

Despite the requirement of the Maison that no less than seventy percent of our artists be recognised as professional artists, as mandated by the provincial act, we felt it was important to support and accept creative endeavours that did not conform with that designation. The following two projects are collective works that encourage therapeutic means of expression for art-making. While not professional, these works are highly creative, emotive, and excellent examples of other forms of artistic testimonial, which do often have the opportunity to be recognized in a formal space like a public gallery.

##### *Collective of Women Living with HIV*

***My Body, My Story*** (Collective, 2016) (Fig. 6.11) is the result of a research project developed by Marilou Gagnon with her colleagues Carmen Logiea and Jessica Whitbread and in collaboration with the International Community of Women Living with HIV (ICW+). Gagnon hosted two body mapping workshops encouraging women living with HIV to share their experiences with antiretroviral treatments, specifically about how the side effects of these drugs have impacted their lives. Body mapping is a participatory arts-based method that uses a life-sized outline drawing of the body as its starting point. This kind of creative activity can be used in different ways: to assist personal reflection, for therapeutic purposes, and/or for research. It is particularly useful for developing a better understanding of complex and meaningful experiences, such as the realities of being ill, taking medication, living with side effects, and going through significant life events (Gastaldo, Magalhães, Carrasco, & Davy, 2012).

On display in the gallery were four of these body maps. Each body map was arranged into zones in order to illustrate each woman's respective story by exploring and illuminating the issues, challenges, and difficulties associated with taking antiretroviral treatment for HIV. As Gagnon expresses in the exhibition catalogue:

These maps help us understand these four women's trajectories: where they come from (the feet), what their aspirations are (the head), what their path has been (the path connecting the feet to the head), and what their experience has been with the side effects of antiretrovirals (the body). We can see that the side effects themselves are only one component of their personal stories — albeit a major component, it must be situated in a larger context to be understood and heard (Gagnon in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 56).

Figure 6.11: Collective of Women Living with HIV, *My Body, My Story*, 2016. Multimedia drawings



These honest and straightforward life-sized drawings give us access to the inner worlds of these women through the act of processing their lives and surpassing sometimes real, sometimes perceived limitations. “The creation process allowed women to tell their stories in another way, not only drawing on their artistic side, but also by proposing an alternative way for them to tell their stories and put forth their experience as women living with HIV” (Gagnon in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 56).

These drawings are intimate and personal. They were not conceived to be presented in a gallery. However, by placing these non-professional works within the gallery space, we were able to uplift these women, make known their stories, validate who they are, and acknowledge the struggles and the triumphs they live through.

The co-curators recognized this work as a crucial contribution to the exhibition. Not only do the body maps express the issues, challenges, and difficulties associated with taking antiretrovirals, but the creative process allowed these women to offer testimonials in a unique way. By using their creativity, body mapping offered an alternative technique for telling their stories and sharing their experience as women living with HIV — to give their testimonials. It was also noted that we do not often see public testimonials from women with HIV, especially not from racialized and Indigenous women. While the work may not have satisfied the criteria of ‘made by a professional artist,’ it was important for the co-curators to provide the opportunity for these voices to be heard.

Many of our artists have been thinking about their stories for years and creating artworks with a skill set that has been developed and nurtured through specialized training, professional experience, and critique. The women that created these works may not even consider themselves as artists — what they did was spontaneous. These creations were not concerned with artistic technique, but rather with a rawness of the story and the immediacy and intimacy of the work. In the context of an imposed bureaucratic framework, we classed these women as non-professional. However, they are experts in their own experiences and, given the tools and the confidence to do so, they can share these experiences and positively affect others through this sharing. Telling our stories about who we are

connects us to other people, makes us feel that we belong to something larger, and makes us feel less alone.

I was thrilled to have these works in the exhibition. Their presence added another layer of meaning to what we were doing. No matter who you are or what level of skill you may or may not have, you can use your creativity to communicate beyond words through visual and evocative expression. Although I never met these women, I felt like I knew them, in a way – I understood their struggles slightly more. I recognized how I have had similar anxieties in my life (especially at the start of my antiretroviral treatment), how I felt in that moment, and how we surmounted these struggles.

*ArmHer*

***Land of My Body*** (ArmHer, 2017) (Fig. 6.12) was created by the ArmHer Collective, based in Sudbury, Ontario. In partnership with the Sex Workers Advisory Network Sudbury (SWANS) and Myths and Mirrors, the ArmHer Community Art Project tells the stories of women and their experiences in the sex trade. Some twenty women had met weekly over a period of several years to share their knowledge and heal from violence by creating art. Through performances, films, installations, and interactive workshops with the public, this project aims to address the barriers to protection and risk reduction in a straightforward manner. Who is protected? Who is not? And, why is that? “We draw on courageous voicing, deep listening, and active responsiveness that each raise the idea that sexual violence is everyone’s concern” (ArmHer in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 60).

The multimedia installation consists of a video, a spoken word audio track, plaster cast body parts swathed in birch bark, branches, twigs, sage, river pebbles, felt, silk, and velvet. All of these elements form a landscape with a symbolic body of water, the

video screen at its centre. The video begins from the perspective of a person wandering the streets as the audio starts with, “They say that you are not responsible for any violence visited on your body...” (Appendix K: The Land of My Body Transcription, ArmHer). As the project creators collectively state in the exhibition catalogue:

Here female bodies emerge in ceremony with each other and the land, creating a sacred and dynamic [experience]. Our audience is invited to share in reverent ceremony with the life giving water present in our bodies and lands, to sit within the sacred circle in order to connect with the still forms of our anthropomorphized landscape and experience the words and imagery of our film *The Land of My Body* embedded into the lake/water that the ceremony surrounds. (ArmHer in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 60)

As many of these women are of First Nations ancestry, the connection between the body and the land is paramount, transcendent, and sacred. The violence they have experienced on their physical bodies is entangled in colonial violence and the theft of Indigenous lands:

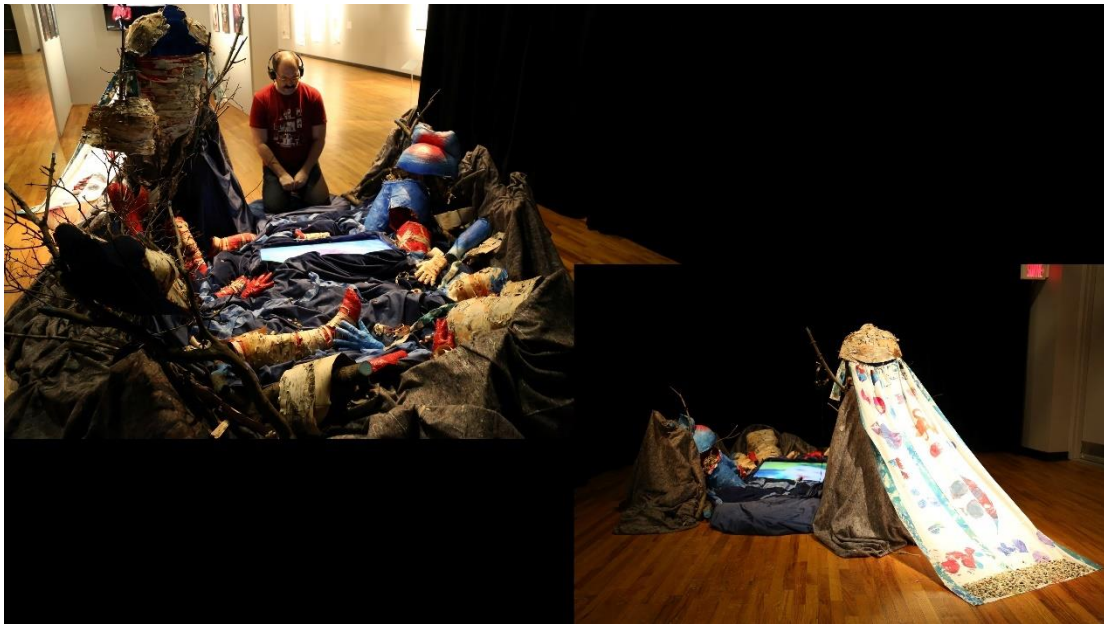
This work speaks to the inextricable sacred ties we feel to the earth and within our bodies, the scars left by violence and the resilience of both our spirits and our earthly forms. This installation is born out of a longing for reclamation, healing and community, the experience of the fragmentation of our Selves in our lives and work, and our lost connection to the land. Together we powerfully demand our presence in all things related to our lives and our work. We are not responsible for any violence that has been visited on our lands (ArmHer in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 60).

This is the one work that did not pass through the CS review process, but was accepted into the exhibition by the CE. As explained before, this divergence of established procedures was a question of timing. In addition, the importance of the message and the rarity of this type of testimonial made the CE steadfast in its desire to include this work. Our partner organization, Stella, argued strongly for this project to be presented because the work addressed a need for healing. The testimonial from the ArmHer collective, as well as the message of the artwork, articulate eloquently that sexual



violence concerns everyone, that individuals are not responsible for the violence they have endured, and that the artwork is a claim of perseverance in all elements related to the women's lives and work. Once this work was presented to the CS, it was unanimously appreciated for its powerful message.

Figure 6.12: ArmHer, *Land of My Body*, 2017. Multimedia installation



With ArmHer, I thoroughly recognized the difference between equality and equity. There were many miscommunications between us regarding how they were going to participate in the exhibition and what they would be showing in the gallery. As they did not submit to the call for artists, there was no formal proposal explaining the project and what they intended on exhibiting, no technical details for the gallery installation. I made assumptions about the work and what it would be from secondary sources and from the collection of photographs that were eventually submitted. In short, what was to appear in the gallery was vague. To add to the confusion, the exhibition dates

coincided with the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers, engaging ArmHer in two major commitments at the same time and, moreover, their parent organization, SWANS, was undergoing a substantial restructuring. They had the bigger picture in mind. There was a clash between my organizational self – *well, if you want to be in the exhibition, show some effort* – and their critical preoccupations and hesitations – *well, if you want us in the exhibition, show some effort*.

Access to the process was critical. After voicing my frustration with ArmHer to Maria, she asked me to take a moment to reflect on what was happening from their perspective and to understand how they may be approaching the exhibition. I think that the conflict was rooted in my strong sense of equality; of being treated equally and treating others equally – that's fair. As a gay white man, this has kind of been our slogan to society for a generation. Despite my marginalization based on my sexuality and health, I must remind myself that I am situated in a place of privilege, one that carries its own set of biases; an insistence on equality can, in the end, be a bias. If I wanted them in the exhibition, I had to check my biases and ask myself questions. How can I make this happen? What do they need? How could I give them equitable access?

First, I apologized to the organizers from ArmHer for my inflexibility. I showed them that we wanted them to take part. And I asked them how we could make their participation materialize. There were matters of logistics – what they had to exhibit, how much space they needed in the gallery, how to bring the work and their members to Montréal, and how to install the work in the gallery. For this, they needed financial resources, so we found extra money for them. More importantly, however, I had to understand their process of decision-making, through

consensus, and time it required. I saw this in our own organization; now I had to recognize it in theirs.

I am so very glad that we, as an organization, made this happen because we had an extraordinary collection of objects in the gallery that told the poignant story of these women. I had the opportunity to get to know two of the project organizers, Tracy and Sarah, while they installed in the gallery. Before they started to install the work, they performed a smudging<sup>28</sup> ceremony to purify the body, aura, energy, and the gallery as a ceremonial space. They invited me to take part. I was honoured by their invitation and deeply moved by the experience and their acceptance of me.

### 6.2.3. Community Partner Organization Projects

With the community partner organization projects, there was no direct consultation with the CS, even though many members of the CS were involved in the partner organization's decisions as members of these organizations. The idea behind these artworks was for our community organizations to have an opportunity to present creations that expressed some aspect of their work in the community and within society in general. Each of our three exhibiting partners approached the problem differently, but all had elements that encompassed public testimonials: the didactic, the emotional, the communal, and the intimate.

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<sup>28</sup> The word "smudging" comes from "smudge," which is English in origin. However, the term has been used widely to refer to the smudging ceremonies of Indigenous peoples, in which sacred herbs and medicines are burned as part of a ritual, for cleansing, or for health purposes. Indigenous peoples have their own terms and phrases for smudging, including *atisamânihk* (Cree for "at the smudge") and *nookwez* (Ojibwe for "smudge medicinally") (Robinson, 2018).

*Stella*

***The Pink Room*** (Surprenant & Stella, 2017) (Fig. 6.13) was a collaborative artwork between the community group Stella l'amie de Maimie and artist Chloé Surprenant. Influenced by the 'Pink Room' in David Lynch's 1992 film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, Surprenant states the inspiration for the installation:

In the film, the physical back room of the bar is where women go to engage in what Lynch suggests is clandestine activity. Through this room, sex workers are invited to redefine popular notions of clandestinity, by making "same" and mundane the idea of the pink room itself with all of its objects, and simultaneously placing objects that belong to them in focus. Using a collection of personal artifacts from sex workers, *The Pink Room* showcases the personal and political realities of people who work in the sex industry. While the pink may create an uncomfortable sense of monotony or strange fascination, it acts like a flashlight that blinds us in the night, allowing the viewer to refocus on what is primordial in the piece when thinking about sex work: the intimate lives and realities of sex workers (Stella & Surprenant in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 27).

With over two decades of sex work activism and community organization, Stella has used art as a part of their strategy to share the stories of their members, to bring them together, and to provide education about the realities of sex work. They actively organize art-making activities for their community as:

An opportunity for us to express, through art, our experiences of the stigmatization and judgement we live with, and to demonstrate its impacts on our safety and our dignity. However, above all, it's an opportunity for us to make visible the strong, nuanced, and courageous women that prejudice tries to mask" (Stella in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 25).

Surprenant has collaborated with Stella several times over the years. In this instance, to create the work commissioned for the exhibition, Surprenant reached out to the community that Stella supports to gather objects that carry personal meaning for each individual: Melissa Gira Grant's 2014 book *Playing the Whore*, a burner cell phone, a price list, a letter from a client, and small bags of rice, among many others.

All of these items have a contextual explanation of the object's significance printed to the wall next to it, allowing insight into that person's work and their world. During the gallery installation process, Surprenant invited the participating sex workers to come to the gallery to install their objects themselves. The artist saw this as an empowering moment for these women, as they displayed their stories in a formalized public space.

Figure 6.13: Stella, *The Pink Room*, 2017. Multimedia installation



Chloé had submitted a proposal to the open call for artists and her work was well-received by the CS. However, because of her past work with Stella, it was suggested that it would be fitting for her to work directly with Stella to develop a commissioned artwork for the exhibition. Chloé accepted and cast herself into the project with immense enthusiasm. She and I consulted with each other often during this period and we mused about ideas and approaches. From the very beginning, Chloé wanted to involve Stella's membership. Initially, her idea was to collect shoes from members and to place them on a wide stairway in the lobby

of the Maison Janine-Sutto. However, because of renovations in that area during the duration of the exhibition, she had to shift her ideas to the gallery space. During a brainstorming in the gallery between us, I suggested the more general idea of the personal artifact placed in a room that we could construct in the middle of the gallery. The concept clicked with Chloé and she ran with the idea.

The result was one of the most evocative works in the gallery. These personal artifacts, both intimate and mundane, coaxed the gallery viewer to overcome categories and labels. These private items portrayed sex workers as intelligent, savvy, funny, and compassionate people living their lives to the fullest. This work provided an occasion to see sex workers as more than an abstract label, to render them human and relatable to our own experiences and desires.

Being with Chloé in the gallery during the installation, I saw how these women appreciated taking part, being present in this gallery – in this exhibition, and having their story seen and heard.

#### *COCQ-SIDA*

***Je t'aime (I Love You)*** (Gendron & COCQ-SIDA, 2007) (Fig. 6.14) is a painting belonging to the collection of COCQ-SIDA. This diptych was painted, under the guidance of artist Daniel Claude Gendron, by several people living with HIV who participated in the 2007 forum *Entre-nous, on se dit tout (Between us, we talk about everything)*. The forum provided a space to rest, mingle, and create and was ideal for art-making. The painting workshop facilitated by Gendron gave participants the opportunity to communally produce a painting. “The concept allowed people to express their emotions in the moment about their lives and HIV, both individually and collectively. The project was

a stunning success for the forum, and for those involved, as well as a community-building activity” (COCQ-SIDA in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 20). The participants collectively reflected on the work, as relayed to us from the COCQ-SIDA organizers in the exhibition catalogue:

The diptych [...] presents an eclectic world of abstract forms and figurative elements. The canvas is split into three distinct zones. The central zone seems to want to stretch out over its neighbouring spaces. An element draws our attention: a wine cup spills into the lower zone. The cup is falling through a whirlwind of colour and bubbles, as if the participants wanted to emphasize the festive aspect of the meeting. The party takes over a dark zone sprinkled with squares, while in the cup’s background, several eyes look in all directions. Some felt it symbolizes the ‘pills cocktail’ they need to take every morning, others thought the painting symbolizes the meeting of friends (COCQ-SIDA in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 20).

Figure 6.14: COCQ-SIDA, *Je t'aime*, 2007. Tempera on canvas



COCQ-SIDA understood that personal testimonials are an important mode of self-expression for people living with HIV/AIDS. For that reason, the organization offers opportunities, space, and support for those who wish to express their experiences with living with HIV/AIDS. “In our work, from the moment a person living with or

affected by HIV wishes to speak out publicly [...] they will be supported through every step of their testimonial, so that they get the desired benefits from their experience” (COCQ-SIDA in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 19). They go on to state that, “In response to this discrimination, rejection, and stigma, public testimonials have been a way to fight, to inform, and to raise awareness about how people living with HIV are like everyone else and have their place in society” (COCQ-SIDA in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 19). The painting in this exhibition is but one powerful example of that work.

This painting embodies a sense of community – spirit, trust and sharing – that converged through art. It is also evidence of a need to co-produce a collective story and say, “I took part, I left my mark.” The allegorical interpretation of the work is evidence to support this view of the necessity to tell a story and to be recognized both as individuals and as a community.

I avoided these kinds of gatherings when I received my HIV diagnosis. The stigma of an HIV infection gave me the feeling that if I took part, there would be a kind of ‘guilt’ through association – someone would see me and figure it out: “He’s poz!” I look back on this now as see how fear controlled me for such a long time. That feeling of avoidance, in regard to coping with both my sexuality and my HIV infection, has been one of the hardest feelings to overcome. Even today, I recognize this in myself. Working with this exhibition project has helped me move past that engrained shame and fear – I took part, I left my mark, I am part of a community.

*GRIS-Montréal*

***Une histoire à la fois... (One Story at a Time...)*** (GRIS-Montréal, 2017) (Fig. 6.15) is an installation by a group of GRIS-Montréal volunteers. The installation offers a glimpse



into the discussions that take place between the volunteers who offer public testimonials in classrooms and the school groups they visit. It presents the faces of some of the organization's volunteers who, one story at a time, dismantle prejudices against gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and, more recently, trans people. The installation places these volunteers in dialogue with the portraits of youth encountered at these workshops. Quotes from volunteers and participants are paired with the photographs. These quotes and stories were gathered from questionnaires given at the beginning and end of each testimonial delivered in the classrooms by GRIS volunteers. Testimonials are an important method for the organization, so much so that they have compiled a database of these testimonials for research and education. "While the questions asked in classrooms have evolved, the method, based on personal narrative delivered by one gay or bisexual man and one lesbian or bisexual woman, has remained unchanged,<sup>29</sup> and remains a very effective tool for awareness-raising" (GRIS-Montréal in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 21).

For GRIS, this installation encapsulated not only their mission, but also represented the real people behind their campaign for positive social change. "The portraits and quotes show some of the diversity of our volunteers and of the people the organisation meets. Their conversations enrich all concerned by presenting real-life models and a rich diversity of life experiences" (GRIS-Montréal in Mensah & Goodyear, 2017, p. 23). All of these combined underline the impact of GRIS's work in society.

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<sup>29</sup> In 2017, the integration of trans issues became part of the GRIS-Montréal mandate (Charbonneau et al., 2017).

Figure 6.15: GRIS-Montréal, *Une histoire à la fois...*, 2017. Multimedia installation.



The GRIS installation was an intriguing one. A few people from the organization were disappointed with it, stating that it wasn't 'artistic' enough. Several of them voiced the opinion that amongst a gallery of very expressive works, this installation seemed a bit too formal – too 'design.' I had several conversations with some of the creators, sharing my interpretation of the installation.

Their organization is didactic, so it makes sense that the work expresses that quality. They are organized, professional, and promote the idea that, "We LGBTQ+ people are to be taken seriously, we have something to say." They use fact-based information, research, and statistics to propel social change. That is the format of the installation.

The content consists of personal testimonials from both their participants and their volunteers, which softens the formal elements. The real-life experiences that are on display are touching and life-changing. I think that the work perfectly presents the organization. Analogous to scientific posters, they displayed to the viewer what the organization does, how they do it, and what their results are – tangible social change and acceptance of difference throughout our communities.

### 6.3. Conclusion

By inviting participants into the co-curatorial process, we had to develop means to solicit their knowledge of queer communities. In a continual invitation to provide information, expertise, and feedback to the co-curatorial method, the co-curators became fully engaged in the process. In more than a year of regular meetings, we asked for ideas about artists they were familiar with in their communities, how they envisioned the exhibition, how they imagined the nature of an artistic testimonial, the content of the artworks, and the kind of the artists we wished to present. When it was time for artist selection, the co-curators reviewed and reflected on each submission in a structured way. The result was the selection of eight artists, two community-based art projects, and three community partner projects — all of which represented a diversity of people from different socio-economic, racial, and cultural backgrounds who are living with HIV, who are sex workers, intersex, trans, bi, lesbian, gay, non-binary, and/or queer people. This group united their different experiences and voices to highlight their communities' common interests, struggles, and politics.

## CHAPTER 7 - THE EXHIBITION *IN SITU*

In this chapter, I examine the organization of the works in the gallery, offering possible relationships between the artworks. Assembling the individual artworks within the space created a curatorial narrative whole, a sort of meta-testimonial, that provided connections between the individual themes of each work on display. Afterward, I offer a tour of the exhibition, reviewing specific works which articulate some of the possible relationships between the creations and their communities. Finally, I explain the development of our guided tours in the gallery and how they were prepared and conducted.

### 7.1. Assembling a Common Message

Reflecting on the exhibition, I have realized that our objectives were extremely ambitious. With such a diversity of voices in the gallery, it was critical that we make sense of the artworks spatially for the viewer, to present not only the individual works and themes, but to communicate a coherent *méta-recit* (Jeanpierre, 2013). As Laurent Jeanpierre (2013) from the first chapter asserts, the task of curating is also one of creating a new narrative from the assembled artworks in order to produce an overall meta-story.

This is addressed in Elena Filipovic's (2014) notion of a message constructed thematically through space and objects that emphasizes a shift from discrete objects toward exhibition themes. Thus, does bringing these artworks together, as a curatorial whole, achieve more than simply presenting each individual artistic testimonial? I contend that, yes, it does. By gathering together these artworks and making connections between common themes of experience illuminated by artistic

testimonials, a discourse on the personal testimonial is created — a kind of meta-testimonial. This curatorial narrative concerns experiences of marginalization, the ways in which we tell our stories, and our concerns about telling these stories.

The parallel activities that occurred during the exhibition also emphasized this overarching narrative (Appendix L: Exhibition Catalogue with Parallel Programming on p. 289).<sup>30</sup> These events reinforced the ideas and objectives of the exhibition. However, they also provided moments to reflect on and with the artistic testimonials as a method for effecting change. These moments served as additional opportunities for our audience to enter further into dialogue with the issues experienced by people who are marginalized because of their sexuality, gender, HIV status, or work, as well as the challenges surrounding the public presentation of testimonials.

Therefore, understanding each artwork and each artist's approach in order to assemble the collection as a curatorial whole, as an oeuvre in it of itself, was perhaps my most important and challenging task. Yet, there was also an extra layer of difficulty to this endeavour. Arranging the artworks based on collective agreement and involvement by each partner organization was also my task. While I did not realize it at the time, there was an incredible amount of trust and responsibility placed in my hands for this critical process of staging the exhibition. I was given considerable autonomy to plan the space, with the CS and CE intervening only to review and approve these plans at the beginning and near the end of the process. Ultimately, this

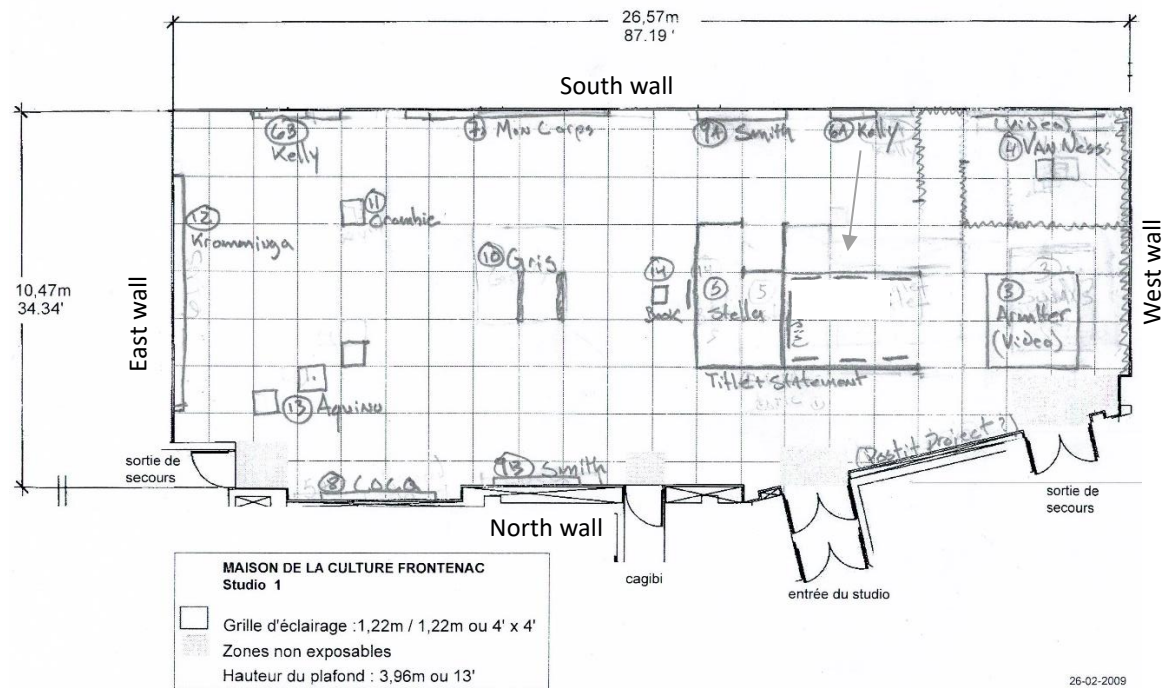
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<sup>30</sup> Establishing the programming of these activities was executed with the same principles of the exhibition development. These activities included the diffusion of a catalogue, lectures, artist talks, guided tours, panel discussions, and study days, as well as activities produced with the Frontenac Library, such as creative workshops, the acquisition of books thematically relevant to the exhibition, and a selection of recommended titles displayed during the exhibition. Each of these occurrences promoted discourse about testimonials.

arrangement of the exhibition fostered a dialogue between artworks, constructed a message, and nourished an emerging queer curatorial narrative.

## 7.2. An Exhibition Tour

Figure 7.1: Planned Layout of Works



During the process of designing the gallery space, the two aspects that were most important in my mind were the relationship between works and the flow of the space. As the viewer entered the gallery, I wanted them to take a journey through the works. As suggested by Hans Ulrich Obrist, in the first chapter, this was an opportunity to “bring different cultural spheres into contact” (Obrist, 2014, p. 24). This journey was intended to help the viewer see individual communities, but also to understand the exhibitions as a collection of works that represented this community of communities with common goals, concerns, and struggles. The process of spatially organizing the works involved a combination of intuition, in service of the practical, and

thoughtfulness, in deference to the artworks. Dividing the substantial gallery space — its dimensions 26.5 by 10.5 meters (Fig. 7.1) — into sections allowed the viewer to engage with different levels of intimacy as they moved both metaphorically and physically from the private to the public. As the viewer progressed through the exhibition, they moved in and out of these different spaces; explored art objects; experienced different ideas, voices, and attitudes that the artists were offering; and absorbed the standpoint of the co-curators.

Coming down the ramp from the lobby of the Maison, toward the gallery, passing through the dimly lit gallery entrance, the viewer turned into the gallery space. They were bathed in a warm orange glow radiating from the entrance as they arrived at the curatorial statement displayed on an orange wall. This warm wall — brilliant and bright — set the tone for the exhibition, especially in the dark days of December. I wanted to create an inviting atmosphere as visitors entered the space. Taking a moment to read the collectively written curatorial statement provided the gallery-goer with a sense of focus, an invitation to open their mind in order to absorb the experiences of these communities as they navigated the gallery. I hoped that they would see not an exhibition about sex workers or transgender folk, gays and lesbians, or people with HIV, but rather a cohesive message about social issues that emerged from all of these communities. I hoped that they would also see the courage of these artists in sharing their artistic testimonials in such a public way.

### 7.2.1. Entrance & West Side

I was conscious of a likely footpath<sup>31</sup> and of a natural flow that people would gravitate toward as they moved through the gallery. This flow promoted the unification of our different communities as the viewer progressed through the exhibition. As such, the viewer would be in a better position to discern different aspects from each community and to perceive the similarities that exist across these communities.

Figure 7.2: Gallery entrance with curatorial statement, with ArmHer's *Land of My Body* to the right.



Anchoring the west end of the gallery, to the right of the curatorial statement, was the ArmHer installation (Fig. 7.2). Because of gallery restrictions and artist preferences, the west side of the gallery was the most challenging space to arrange. All of the artworks produced by sex workers required specific installation and the

<sup>31</sup> Habitually, a Western gallery-goer will move from left to right as they explore a gallery (Bayer, 1961).



majority of them necessitated enclosed spaces. For example, with the *Pink Room*, providing the artists with their own room to create their immersive environment was integral to their concept. Likewise, *How Sweet the Sound*, because of the sensitive nature of the piece, was required to be enclosed as a condition of the Maison. *Land of My Body*, initially intended for the centre of the gallery, was moved to an anchor<sup>32</sup> position at the entrance of the gallery, imbuing the work and exhibition with an enticing drama.



Figure 7.3: ArmHer's *Land of My Body*, followed by Kelley's *Growing Concern* & Stella's *The Pink Room*. *Land of My Body* sat in the middle of a large space lined with black velvet curtains and stage lighting, imparting a theatricality that drew attention to their installation. Separate from the busy gallery, the viewer could have a private moment with the piece. Not only could people walk around this installation, but ArmHer had also

<sup>32</sup> An anchor piece is usually the largest or strongest piece of an exhibition.

created a place for an individual viewer to kneel in front of the video screen, put on a headset, and listen to the video and the words of the women who created this work. This sense of peacefulness and contemplation was one of the work's strongest components, transporting the viewer into the artists' world. Locating the voices of Indigenous sex workers at the entrance of the exhibition was vital since they are a community with which many people do not experience social contact. Such visibility enabled this community of women to reveal themselves prominently, poignantly, and powerfully through a placement that offered the first act of the exhibition.

Continuing through the exhibition, the next work was Grace Van Ness' *How Sweet the Sound*. As stated before, the sensitive content of the work required it to be separated with a curtain from the rest of the gallery. We did this with the black velvet curtains supplied by the gallery, which, perhaps, granted the work another layer of dramatic meaning. A sign indicating the nature of the work allowed the viewer to decide whether or not they wished to enter to view the work. If they did enter, they were closed off and muted from the rest of the gallery within this private space. Putting on the headphones and observing the large video projection on the wall, despite the sexually explicit images which made many uncomfortable, provided a kind of intimacy — a safe, secret place within the gallery. Returning to the main space, the next work presented was *Growing Concern* by Sean Kelley (Fig. 7.3). This work defended his relationship with his daughter in the context of his new family and HIV status. The piece was situated in a corner between the constructed walls of other pieces and the black curtains of Van Ness' work; it was an intimate area, not entirely exposed to the rest of the gallery. This kind of intimacy complemented the work and reinforced the artist's message. The relationship between the works of Kelley and Van Ness was intriguing. Van Ness addressed her childhood and adulthood in a continuum represented in conversation with her mother, while Kelley confronted the

relationship between himself and his future, perhaps adult, daughter about her birth. Both works contended with the complexities in the arc of life and the wholeness of our ever-changing identities across time.

Figure 7.4: Sawdon Smith's *Dialogue (eating the ribbon)* on the south wall.



On the opposite wall (Fig. 7.4) was the piece by Richard Sawdon Smith, *Dialogue (eating the ribbon)*. Here, there is a critical examination of the relationship toward a symbol. As the symbol of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the red ribbon as an artifact is one of empowerment. However, Sawdon Smith seized on a kind of cynicism toward its use. He warned of an iconographic drift<sup>33</sup> and slipperiness of meaning with symbolic objects as he asked: What does this symbol mean now? Opposite of Sawdon Smith's work was, in a walled-off area, the *Pink Room* (Fig. 6.13) by the members of Stella. Once again, colour served to draw the viewer in with a pink glow emanating from the

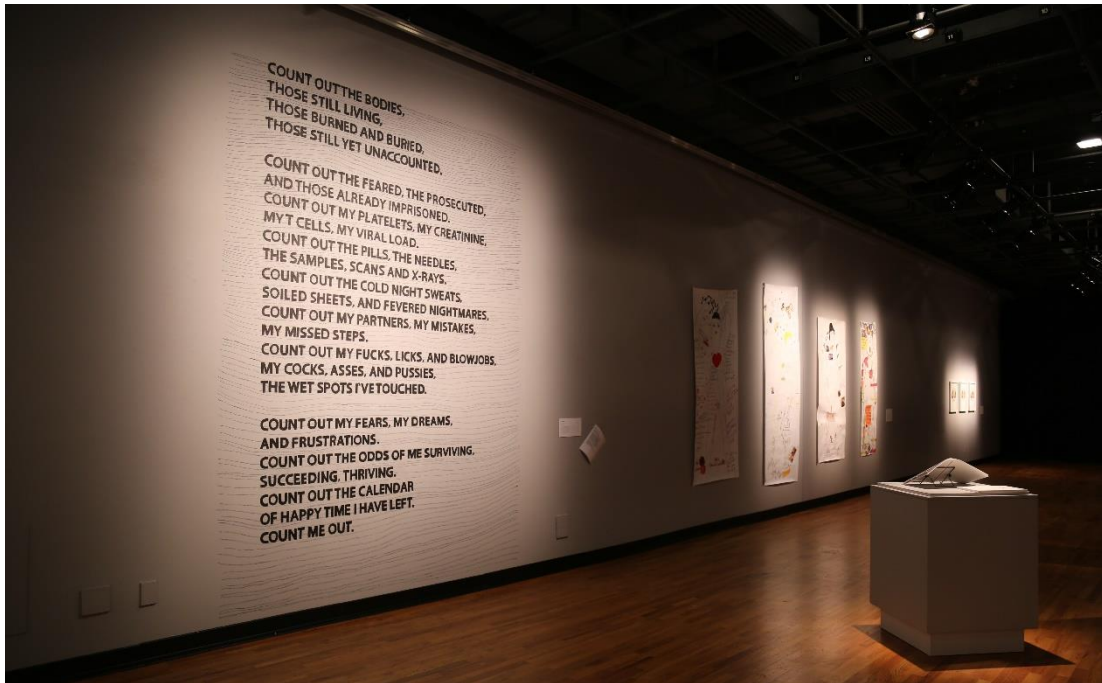
<sup>33</sup> Art Historians refer to iconographical drift as symbolic associations that shift depending on how a symbol is used, who is using it, and what purpose it is used for (E. Simpson, 2017).

space. However, the viewer was greeted with a warning written on the wall upon entrance: *“Rien pour nous sans nous,”* or in English: nothing for us without us. The text, a last-minute addition rendered by one of the sex workers installing the work, provides the viewer context and sets the tone of the work. Once in this space, the viewer was confronted with a riot of vivid pink: pink floor, pink walls, pink string holding the personal artifacts and ephemera in place. This sensory overload of pink highlighted each individual personal artifact as they adopted a new level of importance — a new level of meaning — as the viewer discovered these objects and their accompanying testimonials. In a similar fashion to Sawdon Smith, the Pink Room asked the viewer not to take these artifacts at face value, but rather to understand them as objects with layered meaning that is implicit, potent, and emotive, with robust connections to identity and the telling of testimonials.

I have been interested in the idea of personal artifacts for a very long time. A photographic series I made in the 90s consisted of portraits produced by using only a grouping of personal objects to describe a person. I subscribe to the idea that the objects we surround ourselves with help describe us, our circumstances, and whom we wish to be: veneered birchbark body casts, elastic bands, a letter, a red ribbon, or a burner cell phone. We load these items with symbolic value and meaning. The artist can contextualize these objects to reveal the layers of meaning that would otherwise remain veiled and elusive. Using artifacts, or art, to communicate a story is at the core of exhibition-making. For social anthropologist Daniel Miller, artifacts as objects “continually assert their presence as simultaneously material force and symbol. They frame the way we act in the world, as well as the way we think about the world” (1994, p. 105).

### 7.2.2. Moving Along

Figure 7.5: Kelley's *Count Me Out* and the Collective of Women Living with HIV's *My Body, My Story* with Sawdon Smith's *Dialogue*, south wall view to the west.



Leaving the pink room and continuing into the main gallery area (Fig. 7.5), the next piece was one by the Collective of Women Living with HIV. Illuminated with theatrical lighting, these large drawings not intended for public display attracted the viewer's eye, giving them prominence within the space. The spotlight was symbolic, highlighting the testimonials of these women, their lives with HIV, and their hopefulness for a future. Further down the gallery, Sean Kelley's textual piece, *Count Me Out*, was painted directly onto the wall. Once more, the effects of theatrical lighting allowed the work to emerge from the darkness. There was a contrast between the open space of the gallery and this very intimate text — a contrast between the public and private. The vindication of rights and the creation of social space necessitated this disclosure of our intimate selves.; only through such a revelation can we be seen, heard, and recognized within society. Both Kelley and the Collective of

Women Living with HIV have intimately examined themselves in such a way and asserted their intimate citizenship.<sup>34</sup> By both presenting unfiltered and honest statements on life and the experience of living, these works offered an example of the creation of social space that can provide courage to others who are hesitant in revealing themselves.

The wall at the east end of the gallery featured the imposing mural *Ancestors* by Ins A Kromminga (Fig. 7.6). Occupying the entire wall, this was the other anchor piece of the exhibition. It was essential to give prominence to this work, not only for its aesthetic quality, but also because of the significance of its message. Intersex identities are not visible in our society. Making the installation so acutely present in the space gave the work equity within this group of works. It urged the viewer to learn about and to grasp these realities and to empathize with the traumas of intersex people. Positioned in front of Kromminga's work were the artist books by Kevin Crombie and Eloisa Aquino (Fig. 7.6). I had anticipated a perceived dialogue between these works. Crombie's book addressed the history of queer people in Canada — a North American experience — while Aquino's book depicted a subversive expression of queer people in South America. On the other hand, Kromminga's work exposed the contemporary struggles of intersex people in a European context. Despite a dialogue between the contrast of these pieces in their physical forms and artistic approaches, they were united by a common message. Crombie's carefully made handbound book was introverted and angry, overwhelmed by negative missives on the emergence of LGBTQ+ identities — his identity — in the mainstream. Aquino's mechanically reproduced zine, however, presented a coping mechanism formulated by the forgotten and invisible. Meanwhile, Kromminga's transitory, site-specific installation

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<sup>34</sup> Intimate citizenship implies a field of new communities and politics that allow control over one's body and feeling; give access to relationships, representations, and public spaces; and are socially grounded in experience (Plummer, 1995).

used fantasy and satire to navigate the pathologization of their identity. These tactics became markers of identity and strategies of existence in an unaccepting world as the artists used their work and the overlapping themes to fight for their existence, rights, and political gains. The intersecting themes of these complex works provided knowledge and history for each community's struggles, informing other geographic and socio-political communities who continue to struggle.

Figure 7.6: Aquino's *Pajubá* & Crombie's *Gloss* (front), Kromminga's *Ancestors* (east wall).



Located on the final wall was COCQ-Sida's piece, *Je t'aime*, and in the centre of the gallery was *Une histoire à la fois...*, the piece by GRIS-Montréal (Fig. 7.7). These two works were both produced by collectives — one expressive and the other didactic. Nonetheless, both works served the same purpose of uniting people through dialogue and discovery. These works underlined the importance of collectively coming together and, through dialogue, creating social space.



Figure 7.7: COCQ-Sida's *Je t'aime* (north wall) & GRIS-Montréal's *Une histoire à la fois...* (centre)



What was most striking about these works was the need to document experience – to provide evidence, to record the things that have happened to us, and to witness the things that happen to our communities. Kromminga's and Crombie's works archived thoughts, emotions, and ideas about their perceived abject identities; Aquino's and GRIS-Montréal's works described the realities of marginalization; and COCQ-SIDA recorded an empowering moment in time shared by a stigmatized community. Witnessing these things, providing our experiences, giving testimonials, and making art with the traces of our social actions makes proof of our existence. These artworks – these documents – educate and change attitudes and minds.

### 7.2.3. Ending

Returning to the entrance of the gallery, the tour of the exhibition led to Ianna Book's *OK Cupid* (Fig 25). Book's work was slick and commercial, but paradoxically it



demanded an intimacy. To view the work, the viewer was required to closely approach it in order to examine the screen and enter her world. The messages from the men she is in conversation with were challenging. The viewer's consumption of these private messages in a public space was voyeuristic. The viewer could leave the work once they surpassed their level of comfort with the messages, but would you? Book dared us to endure her reality, if only for a brief moment, as we constructed our perception of her and of these men. The final piece before leaving the gallery was *The Anatomical Man*, the second piece by Richard Sawdon Smith (Fig. 7.8). Once more, this work was a matter of perception. Sawdon Smith had literally imprinted his interior onto his skin, making the invisible visible, causing us to look at him differently. In this act, he was asking us to see his inner workings, the system that distributes the virus throughout his body, signifying that, this too, is who he is. While Book revealed the external forces on her identity, Sawdon Smith showed us the internal workings that have shaped his identity. Both approaches are interfaces between the Self and the perception of others. Neither artist has full control of these factors, but they demonstrated to us how to not only cope, but also to flourish within their circumstances.

Art creates empathy. The Portuguese proverb, *O artista é a voz do povo* – or, in English, artists are the voice of the people – describes how artists focus expression on what needs to be seen or heard. Artists reflect the inequities of society to make emphatic connections between people. In this way, I can see my experience in yours.

Figure 7.8: Book's *Ok Lucid!* (centre) & Sawdon Smith's *The Anatomical Man* (north wall)



### 7.3. The Relationship Between Communities in the Gallery

The relationships between the works also exposed the transversal relationships between these communities. These works addressed layered and complex identities and social realities “as arbiters of social relations, meaning, and action” (Acord, 2010, p. 460). By displaying artistic testimonials, these artists united communities through a shared history and intimate citizenship. The exhibition was a physical representation of the often-intangible aspects of being marginalized and the lengths that the marginalized must go to in order to make their lives worthy and valuable. By revealing their intimate selves, these artists also revealed the communities they represent.

As a viewer of the exhibition walked through the gallery, they were encouraged to make these links between the artworks, the artists, and the communities. The relationships between these

constituent qualities encouraged empathy with the potential for individuals to find and shared a common experience. Our hope, with this confluence of artists and communities, was to strengthen their positions in the social space, as we fight for rights, visibility, equity, and social and political gains.

The artistic value of the exhibition resides “in the individuals, institutions, and processes that mediate between artist and spectator” (Acord, 2010, p. 449). These artworks and this exhibition acted as tools for dialogue to demystify the lives of queer people by portraying their venerability and humanity. The viewer was invited into their intimate worlds where “new forms of social relations between social groups” (Preston, 2015) could form.

Designing the space, I sought to convey the sense that there was not one particular community being represented, but rather a community of ideas symbolized and supported across various communities. Balancing the physical space with the works was an intellectual process, but also an intuitive process. By interspersing the themes, the viewer was able to see the interrelationships between sex work and HIV, between trans realities and intersex realities, between realities of women with HIV and queer communities and activism, and countless other relationships beyond my imaginings.

### 7.3.1. Organizing & Presenting the Guided Tours

The CS initiated a program of guided tours that, through tailored explanation, made the exhibition more accessible and informative for the general public. The tours were both educational and political (Mensah et al., 2018). The educational objective of the tours was to break down prejudices and enhance the artistic testimonials, while the political objective was social inclusion. The hope was to arouse the visitor’s

enthusiasm, curiosity, and interest in the works of the exhibited artists, as well as to develop visitors' comprehension of the issues and their critical thinking regarding the social inclusion of sexual and gender communities in all their diversity.

To extend the transversal objective of the exhibition, the guided tours were conducted in teams of two — one guide from a partner organization and another with experience in cultural mediation. These pairings encouraged a system of support between the guides as they shared their own knowledge and experiences, supplementing the materials prepared for them by the CS for the tours. The interactive sharing of different perspectives on the works, artists, and message of the exhibition provided the visitors with a point of view from someone familiar with the issues of testimonials, with insight into these sexual and gender communities, as well as with perspectives from the visual arts.

Recruited by the CS, nine people became tour guides for the exhibition. With an interactive approach, the guides presented and shared the prepared content as well as personal experiences and knowledge, encouraging discussion, questioning, and interaction with the public. However, because of the complexity and breadth of the exhibition, the guides were able to adjust tour presentations according to the duration and rhythm of each visit. They were also able to adjust their presentations in regard to their own personal experiences and knowledge. As a result, the guides enthusiastically and knowledgeably helped visitors to better grasp the significance of the artworks, which led to greater understanding and interest in these marginalized groups and the community organizations that support them.

The collective construction of the tours, produced through consensus, engaged the tour guides on a personal level. Relying upon their personal experience and knowledge not only gave the guides flexibility in this task, but also encouraged them

to integrate their own personal stories into the exhibition context. Pairing the guides, with their different sets of knowledge, was a way of recognizing the different positions of the participants of the exhibition project. Embracing and encompassing differences, as well as using difference to inform and educate, supported our transversal standpoint.

I feel represented by the exhibition. I can see myself in the stories of many of the artists' works and personal histories. Because of this, I do believe that the exhibition raised awareness about sexual and gendered communities and their untold stories. The exhibition produced poignant moments for myself, for our exhibition development team, and, I hope, for the general public. This exhibition made issues evident, addressed the intersections of those issues, and proposed a common front to make social space for our identities. It was exciting to see these artists interpret what they had been fighting for, in loud and quiet ways, over the years and to witness these heartfelt and poignant visual representations of their personal realities perform social work.

#### 7.4. Conclusion

This chapter explores the assembling of artworks to produce a common message. While each artwork and personal testimonial represented an artistic voice, they were also adopted to serve a community of ideas. Additionally, I propose that these united artistic personal testimonials generate a new narrative, a queer curatorial narrative (a meta-testimonial), incorporating the concerns of marginalized communities above and beyond the individual artist's intentions.

Through a tour of the exhibition, I explore possible relationships that existed in the gallery space between artworks. These descriptions emphasize connected ideas not only between the works, but also between communities and their shared struggles and realities. The spatial relationships between objects and the organization of the gallery rendered those relationships visible.

Organizing and presenting guided tours advanced the combined objectives of the exhibition project: the social integration of people by creating conditions favourable for participation and self-disclosure. By bringing together artists, communities, and academic expertise, we created a discourse that educated audiences, introducing them to the plurality of experiences provided by testimonials from these marginalized sexual and gendered communities.

## CHAPTER 8 - BEING IN THE 3<sup>RD</sup> SPACE

This chapter addresses my experience in the 3<sup>rd</sup> space. Here, I examine my participation and intervention in the co-curatorial group, the Comité des sages, which was an environment conducive to the transformation of my role and curatorial practices. This environment, guided by ethical principles and an equitable system of governance, permitted the intellectual work necessary for shared authorship and a co-curatorial standpoint. By stepping up and stepping back, each member of the CS, including myself, had an opportunity to apply their experiential knowledge, allowing for full participation and integration into the co-curatorial group.

The relationships between the different community partners were well-established long before I arrived. I very much felt like an outsider at first and very unsure of myself in this position. That sensation persisted until I met with the third focus group. By the end of that meeting, I had the feeling of being amongst peers. I eventually felt valued as a member of both committees and as a part of this emerging community of communities. This provided me with a kind of reassurance. Although there was much responsibility placed upon me, I did not feel that burden because I knew I had this incredible team of equals around me.

### 8.1. Stepping Up & Stepping Back

In this section, I explore the concept of stepping up and stepping back in the 3<sup>rd</sup> space in terms of intellectual work, ethical principles, and governance. The intellectual work involved making sense of our shared roles as the CS. The ethical principles provided our co-curatorial group with boundaries that preserved the dignity of those involved

in the exhibition project. Our system of governance created a structure of dialogue that allowed us to achieve consensus in decision-making to produce an exhibition that was meaningful and relevant to participants.

#### 8.1.1. Intellectual Work of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Space

The evolution of this idea of sharing the curatorial role involved making sense of our common roles and responsibilities in order to make connections and judgments regarding the content and, therefore, the nature of the exhibition. This was the intellectual work of the 3<sup>rd</sup> space. This work in dialogue made it possible to recognize our roles in relation to others, resolve how to represent ourselves collectively, and achieve agency in our contributions, ultimately fostering “a social and collaborative practice” (Muller, 2012, p. 2).

In this way, the idea of collective authorship became transformative for me. There was a space for myself, and for others, to shift expectations of what a curator is and the that work they do. I understood, in time, how to best use my voice, my creativity, and my tacit artistic knowledge. This also meant understanding when to let others contribute by integrating their voices, creativity, and tacit experiential knowledge. There was a lot of stepping up and stepping back — knowing when to step into the role with my experience or to step back and allow someone else to use their experience to fill in the gaps that needed to be addressed.

Determining my title was only possible by understanding the shifting nature of the role. The CS was engaged in the process of finding a role, as well; they evolved from a focus group to a social action group to an advisory committee to, finally, their configuration as the Comité des sages. Only after a process of reflection could we see ourselves as co-curators, with each of the many members possessing an equal voice. By understanding



our position – our responsibility – we were able to be sensitive to knowing when we were needed, in which ways we were needed, and to intuitively do the right thing. Helping others, likewise, with understanding their roles was one of my responsibilities. Motivating them to participate fully and to intellectualize the 3<sup>rd</sup> space gave participants agency and authorship of the exhibition.

#### 8.1.2. Ethical Principals of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Space

The evolution of this idea of sharing the curatorial role was also structured by a set of guiding ethical principles that were always available for reference in order to generate reflections during decision-making processes. This was a way to *check* oneself, to stop and to ask, is this the best way to do this? Is this respectful? Does it preserve the dignity of the participants? What do the other participants think?

In this kind of environment, one could see the ideas of equality, but more importantly, the ideas of equity, within this shifting authority. Groups, or individuals, that were typically less visible were lifted up, included, and valued. Understanding each community's specific needs and desires enabled them to present themselves equitably. The Comité des sages itself, including the respect and the consensus produced by them, reinforced this sense of equity by promoting an understanding of one another and by encouraging us to balance our own needs and desires with those of the others at the table.

Writing the curatorial statement was the culmination of the CS's work. After Maria and I produced a draft, the CS jointly rewrote and revised the text. Each participant and community was engaged, attentive, and considerate toward the reflections of one another as we cooperatively solidified our collective voice.

Each one of us 'owned' this text, just as each one of us 'owned' this exhibition as authors – as co-curators.

### 8.1.3. Governance of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Space

The evolution of the idea of sharing a curatorial role was supported by the two committees, as a checks-and-balances system of governance. The CS, comprised of community participants, as a co-curatorial body, reviewed materials, made suggestions, assessed ways of working, produced and edited materials, and made approvals through consensus. We worked reflectively through discussions that built new links between the members of the CS and the CE, the researchers, community organizers, and the artists. The CS and the CE proposed new avenues of dialogue, structured by our ethical principles, that stimulated the evolution and growth of these shared frameworks of authority and power within the decision-making process. This process encouraged a dynamic exchange between the various people involved and was crucial for generating personal meaning and relevance of the exhibition for participants on all levels.

New connections and novel relationships between the groups began to form, while new ideas of partnerships materialized between individuals and community groups. There was much excitement between our community partners about future projects and about how they could continue to work with each other more closely beyond the exhibition. The ideas and experiences of one community were no longer tangential, but rather animated by the discovery of a transversal politics in which new and more complex dialogues could form.

I witnessed conversations between community group organizers determining their common goals and the ways in which they could work together outside of this exhibition experience. I saw

different moments when the light bulb lit up between communities. No longer did they know each other from the periphery, now they were really working together, better understanding each other, and seeing how their different preoccupations overlapped. I think the best example of this was certainly between Stella and COQC-SIDA. By the end of the exhibition development, they were saying, "yes, let's work together again" and finding other ways to collaborate with these fresh transversal connections and knowledge that had been created together.

## 8.2. Conclusion

In this chapter, I explore the concept of stepping up and stepping back in the 3<sup>rd</sup> space. The fluidity of my role was understood over time and in conjunction with the other members of the CS. We all had to engage in the intellectual work and immerse ourselves to fully assume our roles as co-curators and to take ownership of the exhibition. Stepping up to the role of co-curator also involved knowing or feeling when to step back to let other members of the CS employ their knowledge and experiences in guiding the development of the exhibition. Our stated ethical principles provided our co-curatorial process with a framework of awareness to work within, ensuring the dignity of artists, participants, and communities. Our system of governance created a structure of dialogue that permitted us to produce the exhibition through consensus in the decision-making process. This approach gave the exhibition meaning as it developed relevance to participants, communities, and, eventually, viewers of the exhibition. Through the exchange of ideas and experiences, new links between communities emerged, solidifying their transversal politics.

## CHAPTER 9 - THE TRANSFORMATION OF MY ARTISTIC IDENTITY

This chapter presents the evolution of my artistic practice, over time, as I struggled to find my voice as an artist-craftsperson and to live openly with a queer HIV-positive identity. Here, I examine previous studio work that I produced about my identity, as well as the search for a comfort zone in regard to living with HIV. I compare my position vis-à-vis public disclosure before, during, and after exhibition development. The ultimate expression of this evolution was the commissioned work *Stigma memoria*, which conveyed the theme of living with HIV today. Through pivotal events, at either end of the exhibition development, I track the transformation of my artistic practice. Finally, in this chapter, I ask myself: am I an activist?

### 9.1. My Artistic Practice

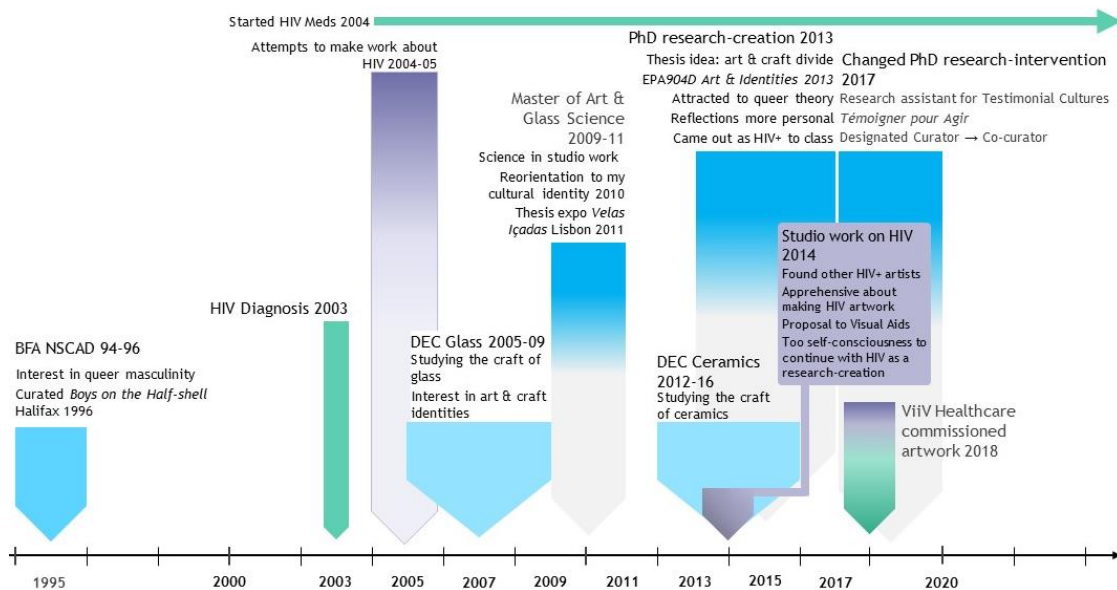
I arrived at this doctoral research-intervention serendipitously.

Venturing into academia as an artist-craftsperson, as a maker that has roots in both conceptual art and craft traditions, I was interested in the social and conceptual divisions between craft and art. During my course work, I happened upon the notion of identity as a fertile field and began to think about what identity theorists, such as Sam Bourcier (2006) and Stuart Hall (1990), could offer to me and my creative practice. I was becoming re-familiarized with the fields of cultural studies, queer theory, feminism, and the bravery of artists that have used identity to stimulate social change, such as General Idea and their *One Day of AZT* and *One Year of AZT* (1991) and Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1974–79). These ideas and artists had not been an integral part of my scholarly work to date.

Stimulated by these thinkers and makers, I was “coaxed” (Plummer, 1995) toward aspirations of integrating suppressed parts of my autobiography into my studio research and work. I began to see a space for my story to exist. After years of trepidation and concealment of my HIV-positive status, I orientated my initial research-creation toward my coming out as HIV-positive.

In the following sections, I wander around my personal timeline as I describe events that helped shape my coming out as positive and queer. To follow my story, below is a timeline (Fig. 9.1) to place these events in context and relationship with each other.

Figure 9.1: Personal Timeline 1994 - 2020



#### 9.1.1. Coming Out as Positive & Queer: Event 1

I have wanted to make work about HIV for years, but I was unable to because of fears of stigma. In 2013, I participated in Professor Thérèse St-Gelais' course (EPA904D Arts,

*cultures et sociétés*, UQAM<sup>35</sup>) as part of foundation studies for this Ph.D. This seminar had a special theme that year, “*Art & Identities*,” focusing on the construction of identity and various aesthetic propositions that either aim to affirm or challenge identity. The seminar attempted to address the main theoretical approaches to political, cultural, sexual, and gender identities. Attracted to queer theory, with its usefulness as a tool to describe and unpack marginalization and, thus, my own experience in the world, my reflections became more personal. How, as an HIV-positive gay man, do I fit into the world? How is my experience like that of others living with HIV? How is it different? What role has stigma played in the construction of my personal and professional identity? Can my art be about HIV? Should it be?

At the end of the trimester, students were asked to present their session’s research to the class. My presentation argued against Robin George Collingwood’s (1938) theories of “art proper” and the authenticity of craft, with support from James Clifford’s (1996) theories of authenticity, Howard Risatti’s (2007) theory of craft, and Sam Bourcier’s (2006) use of queer theory as an analytical tool in what I called queer craft. By looking at craft through a queer lens, I was attempting to understand my identity as a maker, an artist-craftsperson, that uses craft techniques beyond form and function. This research allowed me to realize that if I were to theorize my art practice, I would have to more accurately understand my relationship with HIV and

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<sup>35</sup> As a course with variable content, this seminar dealt with the relationship between art, society, and culture. It addressed issues related to the status of the arts in culture, as well as the dynamics between artistic expression and cultural and social development. Issues relating to cultural and artistic intervention, action, and dissemination were addressed, as well as their specific strategies. Cultural institutions as a mode of existence and reproduction of artistic practices were analyzed. The relationship between art, education, and society; the role of art in the educational process; and art as a means of expression were also addressed (“EPA904D - Séminaire thématique IV. Arts: cultures et sociétés,”).

attempt to come out as positive. I was entering an intermediate space, an embodied crossroads (Ettorre, 2017), that would alter my identity.

So, there I was, in a classroom at UQAM, having my intellect aroused by identity theory and fatigued by hiding my HIV status; an occasion had presented itself and I took the opportunity to slowly start revealing my truth — to give my testimonial. At the end of the oral presentation of my research project, I disclosed my HIV-positive status to the class of some twenty people. This was a safe place to come out, with a group of progressive people, many of whom were queer. Unsurprisingly, they were accepting and supportive; despite being very nervous, this was why that event was a less intimidating first step. But now, after a decade of keeping it undisclosed to all but a few, I decided that, from this point forward, I would tell my truth. Part of this truth-telling was to study my art practice as someone with HIV who uses this part of their identity as a catalyst for artmaking — a “shifted” standpoint (Ettorre, 2017).

When I came out as HIV+ to the class, I started to look at artists who make or have made work about HIV. I discovered Visual Aids online, and I began to explore their *Artist+ Registry*, the largest database of works by artists with HIV/AIDS ("Visual AIDS," 2020). It was there that I first found Richard Sawdon Smith and Shan Kelley. I had an instant affinity with their artworks. Having a connection to their works was an essential part of the process of coming out as positive. In contrast, Gregg Bordowitz was suggested to me as an artist that was doing similar things that I wanted to do in my work — in particular, the video *Fast Trip, Long Drop* (1993). I did not feel any rapport with his work, his story, or his atheistic. It felt historical and disconnected from living with HIV today. Seeing ourselves in an artwork establishes a connection, creates empathy, and helps us to understand the work, the artist, and ourselves.

### 9.1.2. Previous Artistic Work on Identity

Art has served as a place for me to work out ideas without using words. It is a place in which I can be daring and push the boundaries of who I am and where and how I belong. Art-making is a place in which I can work things out before I speak.

Making art that was catalyzed by a part of my identity was not wholly new. Before focusing on the craft disciplines of glass and ceramics, I was a conceptual artist working in photography and video. As such, I had extensively used notions of identity and sexuality in my artistic practice. This work, in fact, led me to curate my first exhibition, entitled *Boys on the Half-shell: a look at queer masculinity* (Anna Leonowens Gallery, NSCAD, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1996) based on concepts of identity construction and questions of queer representations of masculinity. The book of essays by Mark Simpson, *Male Impersonators: Men Performing Masculinity* (1994), was very influential on my work as I challenged stereotypes of homosexuality and what masculinity signified to me as a young gay man. From this work, I understood that gay or masculine had no fixed definitions; as Simson suggests, I could invent and perform these notions. In another instance, it was with my master's exhibition, entitled *Velas Içadas* (Museu da Água, Reservatório da Patriarcal Lisbon, Portugal, 2011), that I used artistic testimonial to explore my cultural identity. For me, as a Newfoundlander in Portugal, exploring the common history between these lands became a conduit for my emotional state about life in Portugal, my psychological and physical distance from Newfoundland, and the ways in which being a Newfoundlander was present in my life and art. Reading the accounts of early Portuguese explorers and combining them with my stories of Newfoundland helped me better comprehend my connection to my culture as an expatriate, whether that be in Portugal or Québec. These artistic acts were testimonials that provided a



coherent past, marked off boundaries, and created consistency for my present (Plummer, 1995) identity.

I had found comfort in my cultural identity, my gay identity, and my identity as an artist. However, making art about HIV and contending with my relationship to my HIV status was long and arduous. I did make a few early attempts at producing video works about HIV, but I was never able to talk about them in regard to HIV.<sup>36</sup> I was not able to come to terms with that kind of exposure of my HIV infection and my vulnerability due to the stigma involved in making that work public. I wonder, sometimes, if this artistic block is the reason I then went on to study glass and ceramics for the following decade — to avoid conceptual work and embrace the comfort of formalism and craft. Nevertheless, I found myself weaving over the line between craft and art, as I needed to express more than form and function. I also became privy to an often-heated debate of what the nature of craft is and how art could or should be different.<sup>37</sup> As my craft work became more and more conceptual, my personal dilemma developed surrounding questions of craft and art. I now see that those questions were not simply about the nature of making, but also questioned the nature of the maker — my identity as a maker.

Those questions of art and craft were disrupted<sup>38</sup> by new questions of my identity as a maker with HIV. After I came out to my classmates, I began volunteering at AIDS

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<sup>36</sup> A work that I did show to a small group of people was a video that I made about taking medication for the treatment of HIV. In 2005, when I started studying glass, I showed it in a class. The video showed HIV medication quite abstractly, and I remember being paralyzed as I tried to explain to my new classmates what the video was about. I did not have the courage to say HIV.

<sup>37</sup> The Canadian artist Léopold L. Foulem is a vocal advocate for the consideration of ceramics, a craft medium, as an artistic discipline unto itself rather than a process, material, or utilitarian object. Attending a lecture by Foulem in 2007 at Concordia University was the catalyst for my musings on the separation of craft from art and the implications on my identity as a maker.

<sup>38</sup> I still question the art and craft division, but I believe that Howard Risatti, in his book *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression* (2007), deconstructs the issues with persuasive arguments.

Community Care Montréal. I also joined and created an artist's profile on the Artist+ Registry on Visual AIDS<sup>39</sup> as I began to reshape and reclaim my identity.

However, I was already feeling apprehensive about the decision to make artwork about HIV. This feeling inspired me to start thinking curatorially about art, identity, HIV, and the medium of exhibition-making. Curating was one step removed from my studio work and could be a less daunting outlet for identity expression. Shortly after I joined Visual Aids, there was an opportunity for a curatorial residency with them. I applied with the following exhibition proposal:

Montréal, 4 November 2014

Curatorial Proposal for a Visual Aids Residency (excerpts)

Less than a year ago, I decided to come out as HIV+. After ten years of keeping that secret and fear of the associated stigma, I finally found the courage to start telling my whole story – to express my complete identity. Identity, one's sense of Self, is a construction, a summation of events, thoughts, emotions, and experiences. It is also how we position ourselves within our circumstances and relate to the external world. To question identity is a process of self-awareness. Those thoughts of self-awareness, for many years, have been about HIV and the relationship I have to my own HIV infection. I am interested in looking at how artists have responded to this question of identity, their HIV infections, and the stories they have told through art.

My research is an element of a more extensive process of coming to terms with my own HIV infection and turning my inward experience of illness toward an outward expression. Now my own

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<sup>39</sup> <https://visualaids.org/artists/jamie-goodyear> (07/07/2020)

autobiography, or a formerly hidden aspect of it, is surfacing. This will affect not only the work I produce, but also how I choose to present my work and talk about my life; it is a repositioning of my internal and external worlds.

I use storytelling, through visual art, as a means of expressing identity. I am interested in the capacity of cultural objects to express identity and construct narratives. I interpret objects to support both physical form and conceptual content. My interest in content concerns questions of a multi-faceted identity, in particular with artists that deal with questions of queerness, stigma, and HIV in the context of an overall personal narrative.

Ortega y Gasset's (1960) core axiom, "I am I and my circumstance," is the essence of the narratives of our lives – from where our stories come. It is a recollection of the choices made to produce evidence of lives lived, but also a projection of the lives we wish to have. By choosing to live as queer or out, both in regard to sexuality and HIV, a position is taken as one aspires to produce a life project in an active, decisive, and creative way.

As a curator, I am first and foremost a communicator and a storyteller. I use exhibitions to depict those who struggle to overcome adversity and to show people in the process of determining what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles. An exhibition is a narrative that reconstructs experience, in which people can find meaning and, through that meaning, can prosper within their fate. With this stance, I wish to contribute to a dialogue about the realities of sex between men and those deep and complex complications of something like

an HIV infection within the most intimate human relations and their collateral effects upon daily life.

Despite the rejection of this proposal, the concept of an exhibition of other artists' works seemed safe; I would not be required to expose myself or artwork about myself, but instead I could reappropriate other voices to speak for me. I was beginning to grasp the complications of self-disclosure in my artwork and realized that I had not assessed the risks of a research-creation autoethnography in regard to self-care (Ettorre, 2017). For example, one complication lay in the possibility that intimate information about myself and my personal life would be under review, under the pressures and scrutiny of a Ph.D. program.

There are complex social processes involved in telling public testimonials. Coming out, as revealing one's sexuality or one's HIV status, manifests as a voyage of discovery in being true to the inner self and in committing to the task of making this inner being more and more the outer being. The coming out process has different stages, although not necessarily in a fixed sequence: coming out personally, in which a self-conversation emerges that clarifies who one is; coming out privately, in which the first steps are made to tell selected others; coming out publicly, in which many others are told and the story become public knowledge as one relinquishes control of the story; and coming out politically, in which the story is used to stimulate social change (Plummer, 1995).

I was becoming increasingly self-conscious. I could not answer the questions I was asking myself. How much do I reveal about my intimate Self? How public do I want to be? How do I express my experience within the world as a gay HIV+ man? How deep do I delve into my fallibility, my shame? How do I theorize my life? Choosing to work within an academic program-imposed deadlines

on these questions, I felt as if I had lost control of my story, what I wanted to tell, and the way I wanted to tell it – I could no longer express my personal truth on my own terms.

I had been having my self-conversation for years. My family and close friends knew my HIV status and now my classmates and professors knew as well. However, the situation became too much and too fast as I placed myself at risk ethically. I would have to make public the information about my personal identity that I was not yet ready to fully embody in my academic identity. *Témoigner pour Agir* was an opportunity to redirect the story.

#### 9.1.3. Coming Out as Positive & Queer: Event 2

More recently, another public coming out opportunity presented itself. Mere days before installing this exhibition in the gallery, I was commissioned by ViiV Healthcare Canada<sup>40</sup> to make an artwork about “living with HIV today.” The timing of this commission could not be more perfect; after my immersion into a world of others processing their lives in the face of marginalization and stigma, the ideas and emotions that I could not previously reconcile in my studio practice were now much more apparent. By working with these community groups and participants, I was now able to process my feeling of discomfort as I became more comfortable with my HIV status as a part of my identity and my art practice. The exhibition project instilled in me a fearlessness in the face of stigma, incentive to stand up and be visible in my art, and motivation to expand my social space and the social space of others.

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<sup>40</sup> ViiV Healthcare Canada is an independent pharmaceutical company completely focused on HIV/AIDS. Established in 2009, they have a portfolio of 12 HIV treatments and are engaged in fighting HIV/AIDS over the long-term by providing quality products, services and programs, as well as building long-term partnerships with communities.

The commissioned artwork, a ceramic mosaic entitled *Stigma memoria* (Goodyear, 2018) (Fig. 9.2)<sup>41</sup>, evokes the relationship between stigma and memory — how the two can be imprinted upon a life, both in mind and body. To conceive the work, I developed a set of conceptual symbols. On the right side of the image is a representation of the interior functions of the body: the vascular system — the flow of blood circulating through the body — as a biological system. On the lower right, a black tile represents the foreign object — the HIV virus. In the upper left of the geometric maze, a red tile leaks into the black ground of the figure, symbolizing the presence of medical interventions and constant testing due to the infection — the sociomedical system that the HIV-positive body must navigate. A figure floats over the black ground or void and, despite its outward physical appearance, is in a posture of self-protection.

Statement about the inspiration of *Stigma memoria* for ViiV Healthcare, March 2018:

Stigma records itself into the memory of people who experience it. It makes them question their worth, stops them from doing things, for being included, and living full lives. It is a kind of psychological violence that has an emotional impact on people and communities. To be 'out' as HIV+ takes courage. It is not only an affirmation of identity but also a political act.

That is why making work about HIV and speaking about my own experience with HIV is important to me. By telling our stories, what our realities are, we can support each other. In that supportive environment, we can build strong communities and undo stigma together.

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<sup>41</sup> This artwork was donated by ViiV Healthcare to the Community-Based Research Centre for Gay Men's Health in Vancouver.

Figure 9.2: *Stigma memoria*, 2018. Glazed earthenware, 130 x 140 cm.



This work placed me in a political dialogue that connected my reflexive knowledge of my own positioning and identity within a larger community. And, in the terminology of Yuval-Davis (1997), the identity work in the exhibition caused me to “shift” and situate myself in the position of those with whom I was in dialogue. It is the discovery

of myself within an epistemological community that acknowledges difference, in which our value systems overlap and our politics become aligned transversally.

## 9.2. Am I an Activist?

Am I an activist? I have often thought of myself as a hesitant activist. I am not one to march in the streets. However, I have come to understand that activism is not always loud. Taking a position and making that position public is just as important. As an HIV-positive-gay/queer-white-male-researcher-curator-artist-craftsperson, I have realized that, from each of these standpoints, the world is perceived differently. We can pivot our stances and use the facets of our Selves and our knowledge to juxtapose our perceptions of the world, imagining new ways of 'doing' and 'being' (Butler, 2011). As marginal status is situated and contextual, testimonials about personal experiences are essential for self-expression, identity construction, and the ability to understand oneself within the shifting context of society. The ability to understand others and to recognize the commonalities between 'my' experience and 'your' experience is exceedingly vital for us in order to exist in a peaceful and accepting society.

My experience with participating in the exhibition and its development reinforced my sense of identity as queer and HIV-positive, my identity as a creative person free to express myself, and my identity as a person who advocates for the rights of the marginalized. To be able to participate in an exhibition like this made me feel like part of a larger community. In many moments, my assumptions (the work of a curator, my role in the exhibition project, how to use my voice, coming out publicly) were challenged by the process. Each challenge "shifted" (Yuval-Davis, 1997) my



perspective into a renewed productivity with these questions of identity. I was shifted into a place in which I saw my own experience as a valuable contribution toward positive social change. I had asked earlier, “Should I make art about HIV?” My answer is now an emphatic “yes!” Telling my story, *our* stories, is activism. Part of that activism lies in the recognition of my own prejudices so I could do the work of undoing them, find empathy over discomfort, make connections, and belong to a community. In that process, this self-knowledge has allowed me to be less apprehensive about my visibility as HIV-positive. In this work, I began to disidentify with normative categorizations of living with HIV and the invasive stigma enabled by those categorizations. Co-curation with community participants and artists has led me to a sense of empowerment in my multi-faceted identity and with my own sense of Self. My art, by challenging assumptions and seeking to counter, is political. It is my activism.

### 9.3. Conclusion

In this chapter, I describe the transformations in my artistic identity. By rediscovering personal identity as a sphere of reflection, I found opportunities to come out publicly as queer and positive. The preparatory coursework for this thesis directed me toward theories of identity and toward artists that have applied ideas of identity in their work as a means of stimulating positive social change. The exhibition development immersed me into a similar process, as well as in a complex and multi-layered group of people and testimonials. Co-curating *Témoigner pour Agir* gave me the space to address emotions and anxieties about coming out as HIV-positive.

I have come to recognize that speaking about HIV through my art practice is a political act. Exhibiting artwork about being marginalized, whether my own art or the work of other queer artists, has the power to invalidate prejudice and stigma and the power

to transform those involved. Telling my story — *our* story — in my art practice is activism because it makes a marginal experience visible. That visibility disrupts mainstream representations of sociosexual assumptions. Through activism, through my visibility, I am empowered as I strengthen my voice and sense of identity.

## CHAPTER 10 - FINAL CONCLUSIONS

This doctoral research-intervention focuses on the participatory exhibition development of co-curating the exhibition *Témoigner pour Agir*, organized by the Testimonial Cultures research group. This co-curatorial process was an arts-based endeavour grounded in inclusiveness, transversality, and the equitable representation of marginalized communities through their participatory involvement. The exhibition aimed to provide these communities with an opportunity to present artistic testimonials that highlighted non-normative, or queer, identities to raise consciousness about marginalization based on sexuality, gender, HIV, and sex work.

The objectives of this research-intervention are to document the principal phases of the co-curatorial and exhibition development process. As a co-curator, within the co-curatorial group, I explore and reflect on how artistic testimonials create queer social space, as well as the ways in which this co-curatorial process functioned for the exhibition's marginalized communities in their auto-representation and politics. Intervening in the exhibition project also transformed how I think about and engage with issues of (being) a marginalized identity (gay/queer and HIV-positive) in my studio work.

There are four principal conclusions derived from this research-intervention. First, queer artistic testimonials offer knowledge about queer experiences and queer communities. Second, participatory projects that value personal experience and knowledge from the margins produce new communities that expand the social space, enabling a visibility that disrupts representations of sociosexual assumptions by mainstream society. Third, collaborating in this co-curatorial space has granted me an

identity expression that encompasses my experiences as a queer HIV-positive person, which deepens my story both personally and artistically. And fourth, as this intervention encouraged me to tell my story, I can envisage how others may embrace their identities as catalysts for the creation of artistic testimonials or spaces in which to present artistic testimonials.

Queer artistic testimonials offer us knowledge, through lived experience, about queer lives and queer communities. Acquiring that knowledge opens possibilities for questioning essentialist notions of otherness in order to form hybrid, or queer, identities (Bourcier, 2006). By shifting away from official expert voices to art-based personal accounts — of living as a sex worker or an intersex activist for example — queer people, as citizen experts (Plummer, 1995), can imagine new ways of engendering and displaying artistic testimonials from the margins. For *Témoigner pour Agir*, participatory methods were incorporated in the formation and the functions of the Comité d'encadrement (CE) and the Comité des sages (CS). Both of these committees carried out practical work in collaboration, with consensus-building, to create a shared space — a 3<sup>rd</sup> space (Mygind, Hällman, et al., 2015) — that allowed queer people to author an exhibition about their lived realities.

In addition, queer artistic testimonials encourage the dissemination and circulation of knowledge about queer lives that are rooted in the complex social experience of marginalization and stigma and also of resilience and pride (Mensah et al., 2017). Curating as a creative act (Smith, 2015) challenges and reimagines ways of telling our stories, making visible the tropes of a normal life to disrupt misrepresentations and sociosexual assumptions by a normative society.

Simultaneously, as a result of this of shared authorship, participants claimed agency and were able to address a broader community. The selected artworks supported the

co-curators' desires to be as inclusive as possible of marginalized communities, providing insight into both our partner communities and queer identities. The exhibition showed audiences diverse representations of people from different socio-economic, racial, and cultural backgrounds who are living with HIV or who are sex workers, intersex, trans, bi, lesbian, gay, non-binary, and queer people. As a collection, the artworks united these diverse identities and made them visible.

Together, the artistic testimonials also made visible the transversal relationships between queer identities. As exhibiting artist Grace Van Ness suggests, revealing our intimate selves and the communities they represent uncovers layered and complex identities, as well as the often-intangible aspects of being marginalized. For me, this has helped me reimagine how to resolve my issues of identity as a professional artist. Collaborating in this co-curatorial space has granted me an identity expression that encompasses my experiences as a queer HIV-positive person, which deepens my story both personally and artistically.

Present in the development and co-curatorial process, and articulated in the post-exhibition interviews, was a desire to gather knowledge about one another to not only represent specific community concerns and causes, but also to create awareness. In the materialization of these goals, the exhibition brought together a collection of artworks that were stimulating, challenging, and provocative from queer voices that justly represented communities, offering an expression of transversal politics to audiences. That transversality (Yuval-Davis, 1999) represented by the artworks shared issues about our fight for rights, visibility, equity, and commonalities, as witnessed from different standpoints, between communities in their struggles for social and political gains. Through this representation and display of queerness, it was possible to raise consciousness about the future of sexual and gendered communities. As such, the exhibition — a meta-testimonial — also created a space for discourse on public

testimonials regarding the importance they have in identity formation, precautions to take in giving them, and the social work they do in changing normative views.

“Shifts” (Yuval-Davis, 1999) in perception allowed us to experience firsthand the evolution of the curatorial role. Through this experience, the rewards of sharing authority fortified our identities as we each stepped up when needed and stepped back to allow space for others to engage their experience. This inhabiting of crossroads (Ettorre, 2017) strengthened our — my — sensibilities toward other experiences and toward a sense of belonging.

*Témoigner pour Agir’s* mode of governance was fertile ground for ideas to forge a collective voice that brought together the knowledge and perspectives of academics, artists, community organizations, and people with lived experience (Mensah & Goodyear, 2017). A sense of a broader community motivated our co-curatorial process as we sought to organize and present stories of layered marginalized experiences. Collaboration, consensus, and community leadership drove a process-based development, rather than solely the output of an exhibition (Swan & Jordan, 2015). As such, the exhibition and its development became a space for sharing knowledge and memory, as well as for countering normative narratives through community spirit, trust, sharing, and art (McMillan, 1996).

Through interviewing exhibition participants, I observed members of individual communities reflecting on how to establish a wider queer community. They asked, “how might we represent a queer community in an exhibition?” It was over the course of the exhibition development that participants formed their connection to this new community of communities, encompassing the boundaries of their original communities.

This intervention encouraged me to tell my story. I witnessed how others embraced their identities as a catalyst for creating artistic testimonials and spaces to give testimonials. The exhibition project placed my experience and story amongst those of others. By being present in this community of communities, absorbing queer strategies of living one's own truth, and immersing myself in and empathizing with other stories of queer experience empowered me to find resolve in my trepidations toward my perception of stigma and my life with HIV. However, as exhibition artist Richard Sawdon Smith (2013) suggests, coming out publicly as positive and queer is an ongoing process.

So, am I an activist? The answer is yes. Telling my story and using my experience in my art practice is political. My art allows me to come out to new audiences and to disidentify (Muñoz, 1999) with the prejudice and stigma that is placed onto my queer identity. My empowered voice enables others to see and understand queerness through the knowledge of a life lived that is not much different from theirs — a view employed by many of the exhibition artists. This knowledge creates empathy (McMillan, 1996) and possibilities for positive social change. *Témoigner pour Agir*, with its co-curatorial standpoint and its equitable development process, cultivated my activism through an immersion into a complex and multi-layered discourse on artistic testimonials. This exhibition made it possible for me, and many others, to speak and become visible.

As an experience, both professionally and personally, my involvement with this exhibition has reshaped how I understand curating, my artistic practice, and my awareness of communities. To that end, and to paraphrase exhibiting artist Kevin Crombie, we must never stop telling stories of our existence. The survival of our communities depends on our stories being heard — being seen. Our stories make our lives significant, visible, intelligible, and real. Through art, we are able to see ourselves

in others and to see others as our role models. By encountering art, we confront and gain understanding about our social world, how we fit into the social fabric, and ways in which we can foster empathy between our fellow human beings.



## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

### Interview guide

**Titre du projet de recherche :** Étude de la pratique du co-commissariat des histoires queer : une autoethnographie sur la création de l'exposition *Témoigner pour Agir*

**Nom de l'étudiant :** Jamie Wilson Goodyear  
**Programme d'études :** Doctorat en études et pratiques des arts (3761)  
**Adresse courriel :** goodyear.jamie@courrier.uqam.ca

### INTRODUCTION

This interview will ask question about you and your participation in the exhibition *Témoigner pour Agir*. The interview will last about an hour and will consist of four themes: Exhibition Development and Community; Exhibition goals and expectations; The Future: lessons learned, improvements and suggestions; then finally the collection of some demographic information. This interview will be recorded. If you wish to not answer a question, please let me know and we will move on to the next. As well, if at any time you wish to end the interview, we may do so without a reason or explanation.

May I begin recording?

### **Theme 1 Exhibition Development and Community**

This section is about the development of the exhibition and the methods and tools used to bring about participation from the community.

1. Can you describe the relationship between the different communities or groups that are brought together in the exhibition *Témoigner pour Agir*?
  - a. Relationship between sexual and gender communities: LGBTQI, HIV, SW
  - b. Relationship between stakeholders: university, community-based-organisations, artists and individual storytellers (personnes-témoins)?
  - c. Advantages of working together?
  - d. Disadvantages or problems raised when working together?
2. How would you describe your experience in taking part of the exhibition and/or its development?
  - a. Your participation and your own sense of identity or your identity within a community?
  - b. Your participation and your own lived experience? What impact might this have had on you?
  - c. Did you feel empowered by your participation? How?
3. How were your ideas and experience valued and taken into consideration during the exhibition development process? (question only for CS & CE members)
  - a. Did you have a sense of a sharing to the role of curator during the committee meetings?

- b. Can you give me an example of this?
4. Did you feel represented in the exhibition?
- a. If so, how? If not, how did you feel?
  - b. How is this useful or important for your quality of life?

## **Theme 2: Exhibition goals and expectations**

In this section, we will address the development process in relation to the exhibition objectives (see hand out) and the final exhibition.

### **Exhibition Objectives**

*Témoigner pour Agir* aims to bring about a dialogue, in a public space, that promotes empowerment, meaningful participation and social justice for sexual and gender communities. This exhibition is also a unique opportunity to activate such a dialogue in a public and multidisciplinary gallery, whose primary mission is the accessibility to culture for all.

The project objectives are to:

1. raise public awareness about the plurality of sexual and gender communities' experiences and stories (individual and collective);
2. Bring together scientific, artistic and community expertise and knowledge, as well as common perceptions acquired by the public;
3. Create an ethical discourse highlighting the aesthetic, historical and political issues, and challenges, generated from artistic testimonial about sex, gender, work, the body, and HIV-status;
4. Support the social integration of sexual and gender communities by contributing to the establishment of an environment which is conducive to personal disclosure as well as to improving their overall quality of life.

1. In your opinion, in what ways did the exhibition raise public awareness?
  - a. About sexual and gender communities' experiences and stories?
  - b. About individual and collective issues, challenges and problems?
  - c. About community actions, solutions and accomplishments?
  - d. About art?
  - e. About something else?
2. How would you describe the 'discourse' or public message created by the exhibition and by the artistic testimonials about sex, gender, work, the body, and HIV-status?
  - a. Describe the artistic and aesthetic discourse/message?
  - b. Describe the historical and political discourse/message?
  - c. Other?
3. In your opinion, did the exhibition support the social integration of sexual and gendered communities? If so, how? If not, what do you think it supported / promoted?

### **Theme 3 The Future: lessons learned, improvements and suggestions**

In this section, we will address the lessons learned from this exhibition project and think about how the process of co-curating development may be improved.

1. Think of an aspect of the exhibition (or connected events) that you felt was particularly successful: Why do you feel that this aspect worked so well?
  - a. How did this destabilize stereotypes or stigma?
  - b. How was this related to community participation?
  - c. Other?
2. Think of an aspect of the exhibition (or connected events) that you felt was particularly bad/failed/went wrong: Why do you feel that this aspect worked so badly?
  - a. How did this destabilize stereotypes or stigma?
  - b. How was this related to community participation? ...
  - c. If you were to redo that aspect how would you go about it?
  - d. ...other?
3. Beyond what we have discussed, do you have any other suggestions to how the processes of co-curating an exhibition of this nature could be improved?
  - a. How could the development of an art-exhibition be improved to be more inclusive?

### **Theme 4 - Demographic Information**

1. Age
2. Gender identification
3. Community affiliation: Stella/COCQ-SIDA/GRIS-Montréal
4. Ethnicity
5. Education
6. Sexuality
7. Previous experience with exhibitions

### **CONCLUSION/termination of the interview**

1. Would you like to add anything beyond what we have discussed?

Thank you.

## APPENDIX B: LIST OF ARCHIVED DOCUMENTS

Artist submission package: description of proposed work, C.V., images of work  
 proposed work, images of past work, artist statement, technical requirements.  
 Call to artists and community art projects  
 Comité d'encadrement minutes  
 Comité des sages minutes  
 Comité des sages post-selection evaluation forms  
 Comité des sages submission evaluation forms  
 Coordination team minutes  
 Documents cataloguing the description and classification of the artists  
 E-mail correspondence as designated exhibition curator  
 Exhibition comment book  
 Exhibition partner commitment letters  
 Exhibition photography (photo credit: J. W. Goodyear for Testimonial Cultures)  
 Exhibition Technical Specifications document for the Maison de la culture Janine-  
 Sutto  
 Exhibition wall cards with artwork descriptions  
 Focus Group minutes and summaries  
 Governance organigram  
 Mandate statements of the Comité des sages and Comité d'encadrement  
 Package for tour guides: description of their task, tour plan with description of  
 artworks  
 PowerPoint presentations use at the Comité d'encadrement, Comité des sages, and  
 focus group meetings  
 Summaries of the three focus groups  
*Témoigner pour Agir* exhibition catalogue  
*Témoigner pour Agir* exhibition final report  
*Témoigner pour Agir* Exhibition project review of literature  
*Témoigner pour Agir* exhibition website  
*Témoigner pour Agir* research report for Programme d'aide financière à la recherche  
 et à la création  
 Testimonial Cultures Annual General Meeting minutes  
 Transcript of exhibited videos

## APPENDIX C: ETHICS CERTIFICATE



No. de certificat: 2248  
 Certificat émis le: 15-11-2017

## CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche pour les projets étudiants impliquant des êtres humains (CERPE 2: communication, science politique et droit, arts) a examiné le projet de recherche suivant et le juge conforme aux pratiques habituelles ainsi qu'aux normes établies par la *Politique No 54 sur l'éthique de la recherche avec des êtres humains* (Janvier 2016) de l'UQAM.

Titre du projet:	Étude de la pratique du co-commissariat des histoires queer : une autoethnographie sur la création de l'exposition Témoigner pour Agir
Nom de l'étudiant:	Jamie GOODYEAR
Programme d'études:	Doctorat en études et pratiques des arts
Direction de recherche:	Maria Nengeh MENSAH

## Modalités d'application

Toute modification au protocole de recherche en cours de même que tout événement ou renseignement pouvant affecter l'intégrité de la recherche doivent être communiqués rapidement au comité.

La suspension ou la cessation du protocole, temporaire ou définitive, doit être communiquée au comité dans les meilleurs délais.

Le présent certificat est valide pour une durée d'un an à partir de la date d'émission. Au terme de ce délai, un rapport d'avancement de projet doit être soumis au comité, en guise de rapport final si le projet est réalisé en moins d'un an, et en guise de rapport annuel pour le projet se poursuivant sur plus d'une année. Dans ce dernier cas, le rapport annuel permettra au comité de se prononcer sur le renouvellement du certificat d'approbation éthique.

Mouloud Boukala  
 Président du CERPE 2 : Facultés de communication, de science politique et droit et des arts  
 Professeur, École des médias

## AVIS FINAL DE CONFORMITÉ

Titre du projet:	Étude de la pratique du co-commissariat des histoires queer : une autoethnographie sur la création de l'exposition Témoigner pour Agir
Nom de l'étudiant:	Jamie GOODYEAR
Programme d'études:	Doctorat en études et pratiques des arts
Direction de recherche:	Maria Nengeh MENSAH

Objet : Fin du projet

Bonjour,

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche pour les projets étudiants impliquant des êtres humains (CERPE plurifacultaire) a bien reçu votre rapport éthique final et vous en remercie. Ce rapport répond de manière satisfaisante aux attentes du comité.

Merci de bien vouloir inclure une copie du présent document et de votre certificat d'approbation éthique en annexe de votre travail de recherche.

Les membres du CERPE plurifacultaire vous félicitent pour la réalisation de votre recherche et vous offrent leurs meilleurs vœux pour la suite de vos activités.

Cordialement,



Raoul Graf  
Président du CERPE plurifacultaire  
Professeur, Département de marketing

## APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

### INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

#### **Study of the practice of co-curating queer stories: an autoethnography on the creation of the exhibition *Témoigner pour Agir***

**Researcher:** **Jamie Wilson Goodyear, Doctoral Candidate**  
 Doctorat en études et pratiques des arts  
 Université du Québec à Montréal  
 Tel: 514-690-1842  
 Email: goodyear.jamie@courrier.uqam.ca

**Research Director:** **Maria Nengeh Mensah, PhD**  
 École de travail social  
 Université du Québec à Montréal  
 Tel: 514-987-3000, ext. 1723  
 Email: mensah.nengeh@uqam.ca

### **INTRODUCTION**

You are invited to participate in a doctoral research-intervention project that documents the development of the *Témoigner pour Agir* art exhibition. Before agreeing to participate in this project, it is important to take the time to read and understand the information below. If there are words or sections you don't understand, feel free to ask questions.

### **OBJECTIVES & RESEARCH METHODS**

This study aims to follow and analyze the practice of the curators for the exhibition of *Témoigner pour Agir* from the point of view of the principal artist-curator (the researcher) and those of others, such as you, who contributed to its conception and presentation at the Maison de la culture Frontenac. The study is first and foremost an ethnography of the researcher's practice: the gathering of reflections on his own practice of co-curating with a research team and community organizations.

In addition to the ethnographic documentation, the researcher will use two data collection methods that are relevant to the research:

- 1) Document analysis: The researcher will have access to all documents produced by the organizing committees since the start of the project, including minutes of meetings, documents submitted by artists, selected works, public presentations, documents from community partners, etc. The researcher will also have access to all documents produced by the organizing committees since the beginning of the project.
- 2) Individual Interviews: The researcher will conduct semi-structured interviews with 10 people involved in the exhibition development process to document their views on the development of the exhibition and the community, the objectives and expectations of the exhibition, and lessons learned, improvements and suggestions for future collaborative work. The interviews will last one hour and will take place in a meeting room at UQAM.

You are one of the people with whom we hope to obtain permission to access project documentation and interview you once the exhibition is over.

#### **NATURE OF THE PARTICIPATION REQUESTED**

Your participation consists of allowing us access to the documentation you have produced for the exhibition.

We would also like you to give us an individual interview after the exhibition ends in the winter of 2018. The interview will focus on the following topics:

- Theme 1: Exhibition development and community
- Theme 2: Objectives and expectations of the exhibition
- Theme 3: Future, lessons learned, improvements and suggestions
- Theme 4: Demographic information

#### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS**

You will not benefit directly in providing feedback as part of the research interview. However, you may benefit indirectly from having had the opportunity, in a non-judgmental setting, to freely express your point of view regarding the development of the exhibition in which you have been heavily invested. This opportunity for self-expression could have long-term positive results in terms of personal or professional development, particularly for community organizations and artists.

You could also play a role in understanding participatory co-curating experiences and practices. Finally, your participation could contribute to community action that combats stigmatization of sexual and gender minorities.

#### **RISKS & INCONVENIENCES**

There may be a risk associated with the researcher's dual status as a doctoral researcher and member of the organizing committees (CE and CS). Also, since the identities of the artists, members of the CE and CS are publicly known, it is difficult to guarantee that you are not recognized.

In order to reduce these risks, the researcher will ensure the confidentiality of the data collected and will propose a list of support resources (e. g. CSSS Jeanne-Mance, Gai écoute) if you are disturbed in any way by your participation in this study. In addition, the research is interested in your perspective on the development of the exhibition and not in personal information about the participants.

#### **Compensation**

No remuneration or compensation will be provided to you as a result of your participation in the research.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY & ANONYMITY**

The identity of CE and CS members, as well as the artists exhibiting their work, is public information. In addition, most of these individuals are activists, and it is important for them to be recognized nominally. Therefore, you will have the choice of being identified (Option 1) or remaining anonymous (Option 2). In both cases, it can be difficult to guarantee anonymity.



**Option 1 - Nominal Identification:** Your name will appear in the publications resulting from this research. Once the interview is transcribed, you will have the opportunity to read the transcript of the interview to review it and reconsider if you prefer to use a pseudonym.

**Option 2 - Anonymous:** you will be identified by a pseudonym and your identity will only be known to the researcher who will conduct the interview and the person transcribing the recorded interview. The interview will be transcribed and any information that could identify you (personal names, place names, dates, etc.) will be omitted from the transcripts. Once it has been edited in this way, you will receive a copy of the interview transcript to review and reconsider whether or not you would prefer to use your real name.

#### **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION & RIGHT OF WITHDRAWAL**

Your participation in this project is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time, decide not to answer a question, or leave the place where the interview is conducted without prejudice, without having to provide a reason and without consequence. If you withdraw from the research project, the researcher will delete your research data (consent form, transcript). However, because of the group dynamics involved, it may not be possible to completely eliminate your contribution and your influence in from the workings of organizing committees or as an individual artist in the study.

#### **DATA STORAGE & DISSEMINATION**

Research materials (correspondence, digital recordings and transcripts) and consent forms will be kept separately. The only people who have access to this data are the researcher and his supervisor. The data collected will be stored temporarily with the researcher on a separate, encrypted and password-protected hard drive located at the researcher's residence until the final deposit of the doctoral thesis. At that time, the files will be erased from the hard disk, with specialized software for data deletion, and the paper documents will be destroyed. Only the final version of the transcribed interview will be retained. Data likely to enable the interview participants to be identified will be coded and/or deleted. This data will be protected against the risk of accidental reproduction or distribution by using encryption. The data and information collected during the study will be disseminated in global terms, so as not to focus on an individual participant, in different types of publications or public presentations by the researcher. In all cases, the researcher will work in good faith to ensure that the archived material is used in a manner consistent with the interests of the participants and within the limits set out in this consent form. The main purpose of this research-intervention is the publication of a doctoral thesis. This thesis will be available electronically and publicly on *Archipel* ([archipel.uqam.ca](http://archipel.uqam.ca)). Research results may also be presented at conferences, workshops, and meetings on Cultural Studies, Testimonial Cultures, Curatorial Studies, and may also be published or disseminated on the Internet.

#### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

There may be an apparent conflict of interest related to the researcher's dual status as a doctoral researcher and member of the exhibition development team (CE and CS). This could

interfere with participants expressing their views to the curator knowing that the interaction can be used as data for the study. However, this conflict is reduced because the research focuses on group dynamics and community perspectives, not personal points of view.

Another feasible conflict of interest can be seen as a professional artist-curator of the exhibition, the researcher is also a paid employee of the research group Testimonial Cultures (Prof. Mensah). This double statue of researcher-employee should not affect the study. The paid work (the intervention) consists of helping to develop and present the exhibition. This study involves a step back from the intervention and the examination of the processes involved after the fact and paid work (as curator) is completed.

### QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PROJECT OR YOUR RIGHTS?

The CERPÉ (Research Ethics Committees for Student Projects) at UQAM has approved the research project in which you are invited to participate (Certificate No. 2248). For additional information on the researcher's ethical responsibilities regarding research involving human subjects or to file a complaint, you can contact Geneviève Garneau at 514-987-3000, ext. 2432 or by e-mail at [garneau.genevieve@uqam.ca](mailto:garneau.genevieve@uqam.ca). Complaints, concerns or requests for information may also be addressed to the researcher or his supervisor.

### CONSENT & SIGNATURES

Please review and verify each of the following.

Do not hesitate to ask the researcher to answer any questions you may have.

<b>READ AND CHECK ALL LINES</b>	<p>_____ I understand that the researcher will have access to documents related to exhibition development for the purposes of this study.</p> <p>_____ I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent during the course of the study and, subsequently, to discontinue my participation at any time without adverse consequences.</p>
<b>READ AND CHECK ONLY ONE OPTION</b>	<p>_____ I would like to be contacted for an interview. I understand that the recording and _____ transcript of my interview will remain in the sole possession of the researcher (J. W. Goodyear) in accordance with the terms and conditions set out in this form.</p> <p>_____ I do not wish to be interviewed.</p>
<b>READ AND CHECK ONLY ONE OPTION</b>	<p>_____ <b>Option 1 - Nominal Identification:</b> I understand that once the interview has been _____ transcribed, I will receive a copy of the transcript that I can review and comment on, _____ and _____ reconsider whether I would prefer to use a pseudonym.</p> <p>_____ <b>Option 2 - Anonymous:</b> I understand that once the interview has been transcribed, I _____ will receive a copy of the depersonalized transcript that I can review and comment on, _____ and _____ reconsider if I prefer to use my name.</p>

**Signatures**

I have read this consent form and voluntarily consent to participate in this research project. I also confirm that my questions have been answered and that I have had sufficient time to reflect on my decision to participate.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name (print clearly): \_\_\_\_\_

I explained the purpose, nature, benefits and risks of this project and answered all the questions asked to the best of my knowledge.

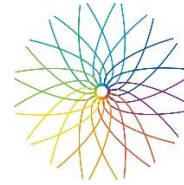
Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\* Please keep a copy of this form once signed. \*\*\*

## APPENDIX E: DESIGNATION AS CURATOR



Cultures du témoignage | Testimonial Cultures

Jamie Wilson Goodyear  
1586, rue de Champlain  
Montréal QC H2L-2S4

Montréal, le 24 février 2016.

**Objet : Votre désignation à titre de commissaire professionnel de  
*Témoigner pour Agir*, une exposition d'art et d'histoires au sujet des  
communautés sexuelles et de genres au Québec**

Cher Jamie W. Goodyear,

J'ai le plaisir de confirmer, par la présente, votre désignation à titre de commissaire professionnel de l'exposition *Témoigner pour Agir*, une exposition d'art et d'histoires au sujet des communautés sexuelles et de genres au Québec, qui sera présentée à la Maison de la culture Frontenac, à Montréal, du 29 novembre 2017 au 21 janvier 2018. Ce projet original est le fruit d'une collaboration entre mon équipe de recherche et quatre partenaires des milieux de pratique du témoignage. Il s'appuie sur les principes de la co-construction des connaissances ainsi que la valorisation des savoirs minoritaires.

*Témoigner pour Agir* vise à permettre aux organismes communautaires et aux groupes sociaux qu'ils représentent de : 1) prendre place dans l'espace public, 2) promouvoir le renforcement de la capacité d'action des citoyen.ne.s et l'inclusion sociale de tous.tes, 3) sensibiliser le public et faire connaître une pluralité d'expériences et d'histoires, individuelles et collectives, 4) créer un discours éthique, esthétique, historique, politique, polyphonique sur les enjeux, défis et retombées du témoignage de sa sexualité, son genre, son travail et son statut sérologique; et 5) mettre en commun les expertises et les savoirs d'artistes professionnels et du milieu associatif en regard du témoignage comme levier pour le changement.

Le rôle du commissaire professionnel de *Témoigner pour agir* est en fait celui de co-commissaire, puisque toutes les décisions de fond seront prises par vous en collaboration étroite avec les représentant.e.s d'organisations qui ont recours au témoignage public en vue de provoquer un changement social menant à une plus grande inclusion des communautés sexuelles et de genre dans la société québécoise. Or, cela implique, qu'en plus des tâches habituelles du commissaire (choix des œuvres, gestion des prêts, soutien aux artistes, recherche de financements, arrangement de l'espace, transport, montage, mise en scène, catalogue, etc.), vous vous engagez à :

- animer des rencontres avec des individus minorisés en raison de leur sexualité et de leur expression de genre ou du développement de leur corps sexué – personnes

lesbiennes/gaies/bi/trans/queer/intersexe (LGBTQI), personnes vivant avec le VIH et personnes ayant une expérience de travail du sexe – ainsi que leurs intersections ;

- préserver la confidentialité des renseignements personnels dévoilés par ces individus ainsi que l'anonymat des personnes impliquées qui souhaitent rester anonymes ;
- respecter les missions des organisations partenaires du projet, soit celles de la Coalition des organismes québécois de lutte contre le sida, du Groupe de recherche et d'intervention sociale, de Stella, l'amie de Maimie et du Centre de lutte contre l'oppression des genres de l'Université Concordia ;
- partager vos préoccupations artistiques et logistiques avec les représentant.e.s de ces organisations tout au long du projet ; et
- recevoir et intégrer les préoccupations des communautés dans la mise en œuvre de l'exposition, notamment sur les plans de leur participation active et significative à toutes les étapes de la conception, de l'implantation et de l'évaluation de l'exposition, ainsi que du processus de co-commissariat en lui-même.

Au nom de tous les membres de l'équipe du groupe Cultures du témoignage, je me réjouis de votre désignation à titre de commissaire professionnel et de co-commissaire de cette manifestation artistique unique, et si importante. Il me fera plaisir de travailler avec vous au fil des prochains mois.

Dans le cas où vous auriez besoin de toute autre information au sujet de votre désignation, n'hésitez pas, Monsieur Goodyear, à me joindre.

Salutations cordiales,



Maria Nengeh Mensah, PhD  
Professeure titulaire

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## APPENDIX F: CALL TO ARTISTS

***Témoigner pour agir***  
**An art exhibition on**  
**testimonial cultures**

Call for projects and works of art  
**Submission deadline: October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016**



Cultures du témoignage | Testimonial  
 Cultures

The exhibition *Témoigner pour agir* wishes to feature communities that use public testimonial as a social and cultural intervention strategy - those who identify as gay, lesbian bisexual, trans and intersex people, people living with HIV, or those with sex work experience. Organized by the research group Testimonial Cultures, UQÀM, the exhibition will be presented at the **Maison de la culture Frontenac, in Montreal, from the 29<sup>th</sup> of November, 2017, to the 21<sup>st</sup> of January, 2018.**

**Testimonial Cultures** invites artists to submit projects and works that explore the use of public testimonial, sexualities, activism and the media, and that ALSO expresses a desire to undo prejudices and stigma or sharing of overlooked realities as a way to claim rights. Although the concept of testimonial generally refers to first-person narratives, there is no universally-accepted definition and testimonials can be thought about in a variety of ways. Moreover, public testimonials are personal declarations that often link to experiences shared more broadly within a community, past or present.

### **Our Organization**

**Testimonial Cultures** is an action research and knowledge mobilization project. From this perspective, identifying problems is not enough. It is also vital to address these problems with community stakeholders. To this end, the research group includes both academic researchers (college and university) as well as community researchers (Centre for Gender Advocacy, Coalition des organismes communautaires québécois de lutte contre le sida [COCQ-SIDA], Groupe de recherche et d'intervention sociale de Montréal [GRIS-Montréal] et Stella, l'amie de Maimie).

Individuals and organizations gathered in this team share their ideas and fields of expertise to better understand how the use of the testimonial can drive social change moving toward greater inclusion of diverse sexual communities in Québec.

*"Through the strength of testimonials, our experiences, our expertise, our differences, our voices change the world."*

### Exhibition Objectives

The exhibition aims to allow a dialogue to take place in the public space, to promote empowerment, meaningful participation and social justice. This exhibition is also a unique opportunity to activate this dialogue in a public and multidisciplinary gallery, whose primary mission is the accessibility to culture for all. Moreover, the research team considers that the exhibition can sensitize the general public to the plurality of our experiences and stories, individual and collective, both in terms of form and content. The exhibition is an opportunity to establish an ethical discourse highlighting the aesthetic, historical and political, issues and challenges that arise when we deliver a testimonial about sex, gender, work and HIV-status. Ultimately, the exhibition *Témoigner pour agir* will be a focal point to pool together the expertise from professional and non-professional artists, academics and community-based organisations around this theme.

Therefore, this exhibition will feature artists who identify themselves either as belonging to a sexual or gender minority, or those who live with HIV, or who have experience in sex work, as well as artworks by artists who identify themselves as loved ones or allies of these communities.

### Submissions

Submission deadline: October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016

To be considered, submissions must include the following:

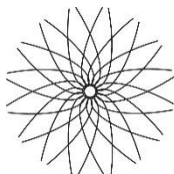
- CV and bio
- Description of the proposed work
- Artist statement that explains how your proposal suits the theme of the exhibition
- 8 examples of previous works
- Description of technical needs (if any)
- Send all required information in 1 PDF file (maximum 1.5 MB) to: [exposition@culturesdutemoignage.ca](mailto:exposition@culturesdutemoignage.ca)

The privacy of your personal information will be strictly respected. If you have questions about your participation in this project, please visit our website [www.culturesdutemoignage.ca](http://www.culturesdutemoignage.ca) or contact Jamie Wilson Goodyear at [exposition@culturesdutemoignage.ca](mailto:exposition@culturesdutemoignage.ca)





## APPENDIX G: SUBMISSIONS EVALUATION FORM



Cultures du témoignage | Testimonial Cultures

Grille d'évaluation des soumissions d'art reçues  
*Témoigner pour agir*

NO. de la soumission : \_\_\_\_\_

**Partie A - Profil de l'artiste (CV et notice biographique)****1. Comment l'artiste s'auto identifie-t-il.elle ?**

- ☐ Minorité sexuelle et de genre (1)      ☐ Vivant avec le VIH (1)  
☐ Expérience de travail du sexe (1)      ☐ Proche ou allié.e (1)      ☐ Aucune affiliation (0)

**2. S'agit-il d'un.e artiste professionnel.le ?**

- ☐ Oui (0)      ☐ Non (0)

**3. L'artiste souhaite-il.elle que son appartenance/identification à une communauté demeure confidentielle?**

- ☐ Oui (0)      ☐ Non (0)

**4. L'artiste a-t-il.elle des expériences de témoignages artistiques ou autres ?**

- ☐ Oui (2)      ☐ Non (0)      ☐ Peu clair (1)

**5. L'artiste est engagé.e ou milite pour la reconnaissance d'une ou de plusieurs communautés ?**

- ☐ Oui (2)      ☐ Non (0)      ☐ Peu clair (1)

Total = \_\_\_\_\_

5

**Partie B - La Démarche artistique****6. La démarche de l'artiste s'inscrit-elle dans la vision de l'exposition ? (Objectifs : favoriser le pouvoir d'agir, la participation citoyenne et l'inclusion sociale)**

- ☐ Oui (2)      ☐ Non (0)      ☐ Peu clair (1)

**7. L'artiste aborde-t-il.elle un ou plusieurs thèmes exigés?**

- ☐ Oui (2)      ☐ Non (0)      ☐ Peu clair (1)

**8. L'approche de l'artiste vous apparaît intéressante et elle vous interpelle ?**

en désaccord					---	totalemt d'accord				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

Thèmes
• Témoignage
• Militantisme
• Sexualités
• Médias
Sous-thèmes
• Défaire les préjugés
• Partager les réalités
• Revendiquer des droits

**9. L'artiste fait-il/elle preuve de considérations éthiques à l'égard des personnes/sujets de ses œuvres (bien-être, respect, justice sociale et égalité)?**

☐ Oui (1)

☐ Non (0)

Total = \_\_\_\_\_  
15

### **Partie C – Proposition d'œuvre ou de projet d'art (images et textes)**

**10. L'artiste fournit des images de qualité indiquant clairement son message et son intérêt pour un ou plusieurs des thèmes centraux de l'exposition?**

en désaccord					---	totalement d'accord				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

**11. L'artiste fournit des informations descriptives pertinentes indiquant clairement son message et son intérêt pour un ou plusieurs des thèmes centraux de l'exposition?**

en désaccord					---	totalement d'accord				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

**12. La soumission aborde avec créativité et originalité les thèmes centraux de l'exposition ?**

en désaccord					---	totalement d'accord				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

**13. Les œuvres proposées ont le potentiel de stimuler et d'enrichir le public ?**

en désaccord					---	totalement d'accord				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

**14. Quelle est votre impression générale de cette soumission ?**

Faible			---	---	---	Excellente			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Total = \_\_\_\_\_  
50

### **Partie D – Évaluation globale du dossier**

**15. Recommandez-vous au Comité d'encadrement de retenir cette soumission ?**

Oui (1)

Non (0)

**Note globale sur 70 points =**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Partie A (\_\_\_\_) + Partie B (\_\_\_\_)  
+ Partie C (\_\_\_\_)



## APPENDIX H: POST-SELECTION FORM

<b>Name of Artist, Medium, &amp; Title of Artwork</b>
<b>In my opinion, the work is in line with the objectives of the exhibition in that:</b>
<b>Commentary on the relationship between the work and the "place" of the exhibition (i.e., the time, neighbourhood, institution, society within which the exhibition takes place):</b>
<b>Commentary on the artist's approach in the context of the exhibition.</b>
<b>Other comments on the work (artistic, aesthetic, political, social, historical qualities).</b>

# APPENDIX I: *TO MY DAUGHTER* LETTER, S. KELLEY

++

To my daughter Seva,

I became your father 5 years after a positive HIV diagnosis.

On the second night we met, I told your Moroccan born, Canadian mother Samia that I was HIV-positive and she cried lovingly in my arms before we kissed.

In hindsight, falling in love was the easy part.

It wasn't long before our decision to create a child would be met with incredible apprehension and cynical judgment, which ostracized us from people we expected, would be supportive. Making a political statement wasn't the impetus of your creation, but rather the consequence of that causal relationship between love and the defiant resilience of our partnering.

We understood that my negligible viral load (undetectable status) meant we could conceive without risk of transmission <sup>[1]</sup>. More importantly, your mother championed vehemently for autonomy, to speak for herself, and to make decisions about her body which meant forgoing the insistence of sperm washing, or doubling down unnecessarily with PrEP<sup>[2]</sup>- the panacean virtues of which were only beginning to be extolled <sup>[3]</sup>.

Instead we were lectured on the ethical implications of supposed risk. Because of the complexity in scientific data interpretation, a common obstacle in public health and HIV has been the (confidence interval <sup>[4]</sup> assumption that there will always be a measure of risk simply because someone is in fact HIV-positive.

On more than one occasion your mother was even told by health "professionals" to reconsider our relationship altogether, and leave to preserve her safety.

Some of our close friends said outright they could never feel safe with me near their children, even one that had no children at the time.

Stigma and ignorance fuels fear.

Immediately after you born, many of these same people congratulated us and celebrated your HIV negative status as a great achievement, as if you would be worth less to us had you been born HIV+.

Would we then have failed as parents, as humans?

Today, as your proudly queer identified poz dad, in serodifferent loving romance, marriage and partnership with your mother, choosing to grow and raise you under the auspice of our inherent dynamics has unquestioningly amplified my responsibility to teach you truth, compassion, and resolve.

My fears and preoccupations with prejudice and discrimination have largely shifted away from self-perception, and have since matured into fears of hiv-criminalisation, and concern with how others who are dear to me, especially you, might be treated and discriminated in light of their proximity to my HIV.

You've been my muse since before you were born. You've been my light, and my hope.

Although I don't wish upon you the burden of ongoing struggle, you carry with you the inheritance of our lives, and our battle. You're made of my blood, and you're soaked with my experience.

You are my legacy, my vengeance, my justice.

You will be raised a stateless warrior in the fight against the systems that created conditions for AIDS to flourish. Maybe I'm just dreaming once again, but not so long ago, you were only just a dream I held.

Yours with love from here and beyond,

S.

## NOTES

1) Known as HPTN 052. Results from a Swiss trial showing that antiretroviral treatment prevents HIV from being passed onto uninfected partners, presented at the Sixth International AIDS Society Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention (IAS 2011) in Rome.

2) PrEP acronym for HIV Pre-exposure prophylaxis drug Truvada

3) Although Truvada had been prescribed for off-label use, it was widely approved as prophylaxis by FDA in 2012 and by Health Canada in 2016

4) Confidence interval. Interval estimate of a population parameter. It is an observed interval calculated from the observations, that frequently includes the value of an unobservable parameter of interest if the experiment is repeated. In <http://www.thebody.com/content/77904/qa-on-the-partner-study-how-to-interpret-the-zero-.html?getPage=2>

APPENDIX J: *HOW SWEET THE SOUND* TRANSCRIPTION, G. VAN NESS

*How Sweet the Sound* video transcription

(phone ringing)

**Mother:** Hi, sweetie.

**Grace:** Hi, how are you?

**Mother:** I'm good. How are you?

**Grace:** I'm good....

**Mother:** Yeah?

**Grace:** Uh-huh.

In 2016, my mother found porn I'd performed in online, and sent the following email to my work persona's account:

"This is awkward, but I feel you should know that surfing Instagram led me to your collection. I'm guessing that's unexpected since there's clearly more to your work than editing as I've been led to believe. Two things came to mind, and as I run them in my head, they sound pretty momish.

The first: I hope your dad doesn't follow you on Instagram. The second: I wish I'd been the sort of person that you could've been honest with, and I hope we'll have that someday."

**Grace:** Well, thanks for letting me call you to talk about this. I'm curious what you first thought when...I texted you about it.

**Mother:** When you texted me about having this conversation?

**Grace:** Yeah.

Mother: Well...you know, I think I had packaged some of that up and just set it aside and hadn't really processed it. So...uhm...at first I was sort of trying to remember how I felt, and I remember some of the circumstances. And then, over the next week, I

found myself getting really upset as I was exploring some of the reasons why that was such a hard conversation for me...with you. And, uhh, what I came up with was upsetting, and I had to work through it. A lot of it was about...my upbringing and how I was made to feel that my sexuality was both something to be ashamed of and hidden, but also the thing that was going to be most salable about me. And I apologize that my reflections maybe have less to do with my relationship with you, but I think a lot of times when we have a strong reaction to what's going on with somebody else it's because of what we've been through ourselves.

**Grace:** Yeah.

**Mother:** There are several...stories from my early teenage years when Granny made me feel really ashamed that my body was changing. And I found that really confusing and hard because I didn't have any control over it. At the same time, I felt like I didn't have any control over other people's reactions. Like my.... When my cousin, David...uhm...groped me a couple of times. I really didn't have any...anyone that I trusted that I could go to with that. He was 21, I was 14, and I idolized him. This was the first time he paid any attention to me at all, and it was because he had a sexual attraction to my body. Uhm.... Three times in my life I've been sexually assaulted. One of those was rape. And, uhm...those are really hard things to.... Nobody's ever attacked me and tried to get all of my knowledge. (laughs) It's like, "Tell me your feelings about life!" And then there were times as I grew up.... When I was in college and I was hurting for money, the person that I felt was my very best friend in the world - who valued me in lots of ways including the sexual relationship that we had - suggested that I be a stripper. And I was pretty devastated by that because I had been taught growing up, you dismiss compliments that you're pretty. So, for this friend to suggest that the most lucrative thing that I had to offer was my body was deflating. Since I work mostly with women now, it's been very interesting. It's taken a decade of working with women to come to value women. I myself was misogynistic in thinking that somehow I was a different kind of woman because I had all these other things to offer. I bought in to the idea - which is probably a lot of conflict that I had with my own self-value - that women don't have that much to offer. We're so caught up with making babies and attracting men that we neglect the other parts of ourselves and that doesn't happen to be true.

**Mother:** So...I'm setting the stage for you so that you understand some of the conflict that I've tried to piece together and overcome as my sexuality has become a lesser attractive part of me. There is definitely something that happens as you grey and grow older. And there's an invisibility that comes with that, which just reinforces the idea that our sexuality is the piece of us that everybody wants. I found it very hurtful



until I used it to find the parts of myself that I felt were most valuable. Which doesn't take away from how much I value my sexuality, but it just...it's a part of the whole. Nobody seems to want the whole. And that is...where my reaction to what was going on with you begins. I didn't want you to have to...have the sorts of experiences that told you that that was the best part of you. And...it's a good part of you. And I think that there were times in my life that I felt like I had to reject that in order to value other parts of myself. Just because, you know, that's what I'd been told - that there wasn't room for both. Another thing that...uhm...was really tough about hearing your story was that it didn't come directly from you, so it felt like there was some pain that you were hiding. I didn't want you to be in a position where you felt like you...you had to do something that compromised your own image of your value in the way that my friend had told me to go be a stripper. In and of itself, if somebody makes that choice...I...that's up to them. I think a lot of my preconceptions, though, are wrapped around.... You know, I was in a really tough financial place and to think that that's an option for women who are in a tough financial place but other options are not available - or as available - that still makes me uncomfortable. Anyway, that's a lot. But those are the things that...uhm...have come to mind as I've been thinking about what you were asking.

**Grace:** I remember when you first wrote me an email about it and you said that you were glad that my dad didn't know or that, you know, that he wouldn't find out and I'm curious if you think that's something that I could ever tell him about.

**Mother:** Well...you have to understand, I haven't interacted with your dad for a very long time. My memory of your father - and I have no idea what sorts of things he's gone through in his life that might affect this - I remember him being judgmental and rigid. I think I also remember him being very threatened by my independence...and outspokenness. I suspect that that was a cause of friction between us. If I had to tell him something like that about myself, it would reinforce his negative opinion of me. I hate to think that you could never talk with him about...such things. Because I want you to have a relationship where you can be real with each other. But knowing his upbringing and knowing the influence that his parents had, and knowing how different it was from the influence that my parents had on me, and knowing that my reaction to talking with you about this was...way more panicked than I would have wanted in retrospect. I think it would be hard. I think it would be hard. I don't think there's a way to make that an easy conversation with him. I think if it's important to you that he know you completely...uhm...that you find a way to have that conversation before he gets old and dies. There are a lot of things that I wish that I had come to terms with with my parents before they were not able to have those kinds of conversations. It may be hard for him, but in the same way that you don't

want to necessarily protect your kids from everything that's hard, maybe you don't protect your parents from everything that's hard either.

**Grace:** I go back and forth about it a lot. I think it would be sad for him to...to not know me as I am. But I think what's harder for me is just the, like, having to lie about different little parts of my life and, like, it comes to be very simple, very practical. I just don't like lying about all these little things and I'm sort of worried that.... Kind of like you were saying, you don't want to find out from a stranger and I just feel like it...becomes a bigger possibility the more I am deceptive about it and...am not perfect about being deceptive about it. I don't know.

**Mother:** Yeah...I can see that. I don't...I don't know what to tell you. When it all comes down to it, that's not the...the thing that.... You know, at the moment, it was tough because I interpreted finding out not from you to mean that it was something you were ashamed of. So, that's where that came from. I...I think it shows in your person and how you are that you feel like you have...uhm...control and you value yourself. And those are the things that I was afraid that you had lost. Because I think those are the things that a lot of people that get into a desperate situation and sell the thing that society tells them is worthwhile about them.... That's why they're there! So...it's a huge hairball.

**Grace:** It didn't feel like such a huge hurdle because I felt like I was smart and I felt like I had all these wonderful things to offer and I didn't question that. And that made it a lot easier for me to not feel as though what society was telling me was, you know, the truth. I knew that it was this outside pressure that was wrong.

**Mother:** That's...that's...uh...it's good to hear because I feel like I didn't get that message. Which is kind of weird when I think about it because Granny was smart and self-assured and rejected messages that it was her reproductive or sexual offerings that were important. And yet, I came out of having her as a mother feeling pretty damaged around those issues. And that's something that I really struggled with and a lot of that struggle was during the time that you were growing up, so I'm glad that you felt supported for the range of who you are.

**Grace:** Do you...do you feel like it's something that.... I mean, I think parents who hear their child has done porn is not...uhm...is not the proudest moment. Do you feel like it's something that you can be proud of or have found ways to be proud of?

**Mother:** Uhm.... I'm proud of you being a strong and complex person. I'm proud of you...uhm... Your internal locus of control and I'm proud of you taking matters in your

own hands. You know, society gives you all these messages - gives us all these messages - that our sexuality belongs to other people. I think it takes strength to say, "This is mine and I'll damn well do what I please with it. I don't care if you like it or not."

**Grace:** I think I wonder sometimes if I need to have everything figured out in order to make my case for why it's an important part of my life because I think I spend a lot of time justifying that to people.

**Mother:** At least in some fashion I get it. Because I don't think it's hard to relate to my being in your position of having to tell the story. Obviously, circumstances are different, but...I can put myself in your shoes of having to tell a story that.... About my sexuality that people just aren't going to get.

APPENDIX K: *THE LAND OF MY BODY* TRANSCRIPTION, ARMHER**THE LAND OF MY BODY***excerpt from ArmHer by Sarah Gartshore*

They say, you are not responsible for any violence that has been visited on your body.

You are not responsible for any violence that has been visited on your body. They say.

The residue of rape tells another story. It whispers to me, when I am about to trust a man.

(chorus whispers) Don't.

You are not responsible for any violence that has been visited on your body. They say. The remembrance of the assault that took place in the back of a police cruiser tells another story. It whispers to me, when I am about to call the police.

(chorus whispers) Don't.

You are not responsible for any violence that has been visited on your body. They say. The betrayal of my man, who promised never to judge me by my past and always walk along side my soul, when he finally accepts my body as it is portrayed in the movies and on tv, as a place where violence is accepted, asked for, expected. The betrayal of that man whispers to me, when I am about to ... about to ... about to fall in love.

(chorus whispers) Don't.

You are not responsible for any violence that has been visited on your body. They say. The shame in the teachers knowing glances tells another story. It whispers to me, when I start to believe that I am a good mom.

(chorus whispers) Don't.

You are not responsible for any violence that has been visited on

your body. They say.

Well, 'they' have never

visited... (chorus)...The

Land Of My Body. If they

visited ...

(chorus)...The Land Of My Body...

...they would see The Great River of Memory and they would see Healing paddling hard upstream, swimming against the current. Swimming for its life. They would see Mountains of Remembrance with the words 'To Protect All But You' carved into their sides. They would see these Mountains of Remembrance standing strong against the Winds of Trust blowing with all their might, trying, trying to move the mountains. If 'they' visited...

(chorus) ...The Land Of My Body...

...they would see Blades of Betrayal covering the land like beautiful blades of grass that sway in the wind, inviting you in, inviting you to run through the lush soft green with all the trust and hope of a child, only to cut your feet, the soles of your feet, your soles, your soul, with their razor sharp edges. If 'they' visited the Land Of My Body they would see Shame rising in the east, heating every moment below as Forgiveness floats by in the sky, soft and fluffy and calm.

They would see Radical Self-Love gathering the soft, calm, fluffy bits of Forgiveness into a storm, the only way. They would see the soft, calm, fluffy Forgiveness turn grey and heavy and blot out the Shame's rays high in the sky. They would see the Great River Of Memory overflow its banks, as Healing rides it's waves, head thrown back, laughing. They would see the Winds Of Trust blowing with a strength that surprises even itself. They would see the mountains move. They would see the storm open up in a torrential downpour of Forgiveness that flattens the Blades of Betrayal and heals the soles. The soul.

The violence that has been visited on my body, on your body, was never our fault. But it isn't about fault.

It's about the body, the land itself, that didn't crumble, didn't open up and swallow itself whole, but remains. When the visitors of...

(chorus)...The Land Of My Body...

...have all left, the land remains. I remain. Changed, as landscapes do. Always growing, as lands do. The remaining Land Of My Body, by all definitions, is a protest.

(chorus) Radical Self - Love.

And I know this – *you* are not responsible for any violence that has been visited on *your* land.

APPENDIX L: *TÉMOIGNER POUR AGIR* EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

**29 NOVEMBRE 2017  
AU 21 JANVIER 2018**

**NOVEMBER 29<sup>TH</sup>, 2017  
TO JANUARY 21<sup>ST</sup>, 2018**

**MONTRÉAL**



Témoigner pour Agir  
Voir S'engager Changer  
Watch Witness Change

Maison de la culture Frontenac, Montréal,  
du 29 novembre 2017 au 21 janvier 2018  
November 29th, 2017, to January 21st, 2018

Catalogue sous la direction de Maria Nengeh  
Mensah & Jamie Wilson Goodyear  
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JAMIE WILSON GOODYEAR

Mettre au monde une exposition d'arts et d'histoires est un travail formidable. Selon le proverbe africain, il faut tout un village pour élever un enfant. Et dans le cas de l'exposition *Témoigner pour Agir*, cela est vrai aussi. Tant de personnes et d'organisations ont donné leur temps, leur énergie et leur passion pour assurer le succès de l'exposition. Nous souhaitons souligner l'importance qu'ont eue un grand nombre de collaborateurs et de collaboratrices sans lesquelles ce projet n'aurait pu voir le jour.

Nous adressons nos plus vifs remerciements à toutes les artistes et à tous les artistes présents. Merci de ce partage. Votre capacité remarquable à vous dévoiler, dans vos œuvres comme dans la vie, nous aura donné l'élan nécessaire à la concrétisation d'une idée, celle d'une exposition de témoignages artistiques, et à la mise en valeur de nos voix dans l'espace public.

Merci aux organismes communautaires et aux personnes qui les représentent d'avoir été des partenaires indéfectibles du projet, et ce, depuis ses débuts. Votre contribution est sans égale! Merci à Gabrielle Bouchard du Centre de lutte contre l'oppression des genres de l'Université Concordia; à Aurélie Hot, Charlotte Guerlotti, Ken Monteith et René Légaré de la Coalition des organismes communautaires québécois de lutte contre le sida (COCQ-SIDA); à Marie Houzeau, Amélie Charbonneau, France Lord et Olivier Vallerand du Groupe de recherche et d'intervention sociale de Montréal (GRIS-Montréal); à Louis Dionne; à Sandra Wesley, Alexandra de Kiewit, Lyne Séguin-Corriveau, « Véro » et Jenn Clamen de chez Stella l'amie de Maimie; à Julien Leroux, Stéphanie Gravel et Gary du groupe Aide aux Trans du Québec (ATQ); et à Frank, James et Farah du projet Action Santé Travesti.e.s et Transexuel.le.s du Québec (ASTTeQ). Votre engagement, votre candeur et votre intégrité ont été les principaux facteurs de réussite derrière l'exposition *Témoigner pour Agir*. En particulier, nous remercions chaleureusement les membres du comité des Sages, qui se sont impliqués à toutes les étapes du projet, et dont les réflexions sur le témoignage continueront de nous inspirer.

Nous souhaitons remercier le Service aux collectivités de l'UQAM d'avoir mis Geneviève Chicoine sur notre route. Son dynamisme contagieux et son professionnalisme assuré nous ont sans cesse propulsés vers l'avant. Merci à Louise Matte, Myriam Lavoie et au

## Acknowledgements

MARIA NENGHEH MENSAH AND  
JAMIE WILSON GOODYEAR

Bringing an art and testimonial exhibition into the world takes considerable work. As the African proverb goes, it takes a village to raise a child, and this is also true in the case of the *Témoigner pour Agir* exhibition. Many people and organisations gave their time, their energy and their passion to make the exhibition a success. We'd like to take a moment to underscore the significant contributions made by many collaborators, without which this project could not have happened.

Our biggest thanks go to all the artists represented here. Thank you for sharing. Your remarkable capacity for self-revelation, in your works and in your lives, gave us the inspiration we needed to bring an idea to fruition: that of an exhibition of artistic testimonials, and of showcasing *our own voices* in the public sphere.

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Enfin, notons que la réalisation de ce beau catalogue a pu bénéficier de plusieurs appuis financiers - le Programme Connexion du Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada (CRSH), le Fonds communautaire pour le 150<sup>e</sup> anniversaire du Canada (une collaboration entre les fondations communautaires du Canada, la Fondation du Grand Montréal, le gouvernement du Canada et des leaders extraordinaires de l'Atlantique au Pacifique à l'Arctique), la Faculté des sciences humaines et le Service aux collectivités de l'Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), le Bureau du maire de Montréal, Denis Coderre dans l'arrondissement Ville-Marie, la Députée de Hochelaga-Maisonneuve au Parti Québécois, Carole Poirier, et la Maison de la culture Frontenac, dont la contribution à la diffusion des témoignages artistiques est inestimable. Nous comprenons ces appuis comme un geste de solidarité.

Votre collaboration à toutes et à tous nous a été très précieuse.

Frontenac for believing in this project. Thanks to the Bibliothèque Frontenac and its employees, who, through their support, made it possible not only to have a creation space for the exhibition's visitors, but also to open up an entire cultural mediation aspect by holding workshops and developing a collection of books addressing the exhibition's themes. Thanks to Caroline Désy of UQAM's Institut de recherches et d'études féministes for her administrative support. Let's also note the assiduous work of the student assistants, Laura Gagnon, Laurence Gagnon, Myriam Pomerleau, Laurie Fournier and Isabelle Robichaud, who provided high-quality logistical and coordination work for the exhibition and the catalogue. It has been a pleasure to work with you.

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Your collaboration, each and every one of you, has been priceless.

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## Introduction : des origines d'une exposition communautaire par et pour la diversité sexuelle et de genre

MARIA NENGH MENSAH

Si des voix différentes pouvaient partager l'autorité « interprétative » dès le début du processus de création de l'histoire, il y a espoir qu'un terrain d'entente pourrait aussi être forgé et des méthodes développées pour soutenir de multiples points de vue.

— L. Silverman, *The Social Work of Museums*. NY : Routledge, 1993, 9-10.

Que peuvent bien avoir en commun les minorités sexuelles, les personnes vivant avec le VIH ou le sida et celles qui ont une expérience de travail du sexe ? Voilà, une question qui m'est souvent posée. À part le constat sympathique qu'il s'agit des groupes de personnes avec qui je ressens le plus d'affinités, tant sur le plan personnel que sur le plan politique, réunir ces personnes sous une même enseigne vient avec son lot de questionnement. En guise d'introduction de ce catalogue, je propose donc de retracer l'historique des processus réflexifs et collectifs ayant mené à la l'exposition *Témoigner pour Agir*.

### Le témoignage public comme stratégie d'intervention sociale

Les personnes lesbiennes, gaies, bisexuelles, trans, queer et en questionnement, intersexes, qui vivent avec le VIH ou qui ont une expérience de travail du sexe doivent composer avec la stigmatisation et les préjugés sociaux. Voilà le lien qui les unit : un savoir d'expérience, partagé, celui d'être relégué.e à la marge à cause d'idées toutes faites, de la peur ou de l'ignorance.

En 2017, au Canada, les jeunes de ces communautés sont plus à risque que les autres jeunes, d'être victimes d'un crime haineux ou de s'enlever la vie. Ce risque devient exponentiel lorsque la personne appartient à un groupe racisé ou autochtone. Oui, en 2017. Car dans leurs interactions quotidiennes, ces personnes sont souvent réduites à un stéréotype, font l'objet de mauvaises blagues, de harcèlement et d'intimidation, et ce, malgré des avancées sociales majeures en matière d'ouverture à la diversité, et à la diversité sexuelle et de genre en particulier.

Ajoutons à cela les nombreux défis et obstacles qu'elles connaissent au niveau structurel. Les pratiques

## Introduction: On the Origins of a Community-Based Art Exhibition By and For Sexual and Gender Diversity

MARIA NENGH MENSAH

If different voices were to share "interpretive" authority from the start of the process of creating history, there is hope that common ground might also be forged and methods developed for supporting multiple points of view.

— L. Silverman, *The Social Work of Museums*. NY: Routledge, 1993, 9-10.

What could sexual minorities, people living with HIV or AIDS, and people with experience in sex work have in common? It's a question people often ask me. Apart from the friendly observation that these are all groups of people for whom I feel strong affinities, both personally and politically, bringing them together under a single title raises a lot of questions. As an introduction to this catalogue, then, I will retrace the history of the reflective and collective processes that led to the *Témoigner pour Agir* exhibition.

### Public Testimonial as Social Intervention

People who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer or non-binary, intersex, or who live with HIV or have experience in sex work, must often deal with stigmatization and social prejudices. This is the tie that binds them together: experiential and situated knowledge — a shared experience — of being relegated to the margins because of preconceived notions, fear or ignorance.

In 2017, in Canada, young people in these communities are at higher risk than their peers of being the victims of hate crimes and of committing suicide. This risk multiplies exponentially for people who are racialised or Indigenous. Yes, in 2017. Leading up to these outcomes, in their everyday interactions, these individuals are often reduced to stereotypes, made into the butt of mean-spirited jokes, harassed and bullied—all this despite major social progress in regard to society's openness to diversity, and to sexual and gender diversity in particular.

To this we must add the many challenges and obstacles they face at a structural level. Judicial action has criminalized the non-disclosure of HIV-positive status and the purchasing and advertising of sexual services. Medical practices impose a pathologising framework

de judiciarisation criminalisent le non-dévoilement du statut sérologique positif au VIH et l'achat et la publicité de services sexuels. Les pratiques médicales portent une conception pathologisante des transidentités, soumettent les corps à des chirurgies non-consenties, à des dépistages obligatoires, ou encore ne reconnaissent pas l'expérience des effets secondaires des traitements pharmacologiques. Puis, perdurent encore des pratiques de discrimination systémique envers les minorités sexuelles et de genres sur le marché du travail, aux frontières du pays, dans nos organisations et dans nos écoles.

Les journaux à grand tirage, les plateaux de télévision, les émissions radiophoniques et les réseaux socionumériques relayent ces sujets « sensationnels ». Ils produisent une grande part des récits personnels qui circulent publiquement. La visibilité naît, la plupart du temps, dans l'engrenage des médias de masse et de la culture populaire éphémère. Tout compte fait, dans ce contexte, les personnes concernées ont peu de place pour témoigner d'histoires de vie complexes, exposer leurs résistances et célébrer la diversité.

Or, si intervenir socialement par le biais d'un témoignage public pour changer les mentalités est une pratique courante, pour certaines personnes le témoignage devient même une stratégie importante pour exister. Le vécu des personnes intersexes, par exemple, était jusqu'à récemment passé inaperçu, indigne ou instrumentalisé comme « preuve » de la construction sociale des sexes. Depuis les dernières années, leurs réalités émergent dans les discours sociaux, un peu partout sur la planète. Leur « réalité collective alternative » est maintenant incontournable, selon l'artiste et activiste Ins Kromminga. En effet, en témoignant publiquement, elles ont le sentiment de mieux contrôler le propos, de défaire les préjugés sociaux et de participer à l'expansion d'un discours sur la justice sociale.

Dans ce contexte, de plus en plus sollicitées par différents médias pour livrer un récit à la première personne, les organisations communautaires ont acquis une expertise en la matière, et développé une réflexivité par rapport aux pratiques testimoniales.

on trans identities, submit bodies to non-consensual surgeries and mandatory testing, and fail to recognize the experience of pharmaceutical treatment side effects. As well, practices of systemic discrimination against sexual and gender minorities are alive and well in the job market, at the national border, in our organisations and in our schools.

Major newspapers, TV broadcasts, radio programs and social media networks talk about these "sensational" subjects. They provide a platform for a large portion of the personal stories that circulate publicly. Visibility is born, most of the time, in the workings of the mass media and ephemeral popular culture. Considering all this, within this framework, the people in question have little space to inject their narratives of complex life stories, to show their resistance and to celebrate diversity.

While it is common practice to use public testimonials as a form of social intervention to change mentalities, for some people, telling their stories is also a key strategy for existing. The lived experience of intersex people, for example, was until recently unseen, unsayable or co-opted for use as "proof" of the social construction of 'sex'. In recent years, their voices have emerged in social discourse all over the world. Their "collective alternative reality" now cannot be ignored, according to artist and activist Ins A. Kromminga. By telling their stories publicly, they feel more in control of their message, able to dismantle social prejudices and help expand the social justice conversation.

In this context, increasingly solicited by various media to deliver first-person accounts, community organisations have acquired expertise in the area, and have developed hands-on knowledge in regard to testimonial practices.

#### **Testimonial Cultures, An Action-Research Team**

The research team I lead was founded in 2011 as part of a partnership development project.<sup>1</sup> It is made up of Québec organisations and individuals who are interested in the potential of social intervention by means of public testimonials. We share a feminist and anti-oppressive vision of social change. We even have a consensus-based governance model!



### Cultures du témoignage, une équipe de recherche-action

L'équipe de recherche, dont je suis la directrice, a été fondée en 2011 dans le cadre d'un projet de développement de partenariat<sup>1</sup>. Elle est composée d'individus et d'organisations québécoises qui s'intéressent au potentiel de l'intervention sociale par le témoignage public. Nous partageons une vision féministe et anti-oppressive du changement social. On s'est même doté d'un mode de fonctionnement par consensus !

La perspective anti-oppressive nous stimule à interroger la manière de mener des projets « par et pour » des communautés marginalisées sans les opprimer davantage, et tout en leur permettant de se donner les moyens de lutter contre leur oppression. Dans cette optique, les activités réalisées par l'équipe de recherche se veulent émancipatrices pour tous ceux et celles qui y participent. La vision féministe, elle, nous donne les balises nécessaires pour comprendre et amenuiser les rapports de pouvoir spécifiques, telles ceux se rapportant au sexe et au genre, à l'âge ou à l'appartenance ethnoculturelle.

Ainsi, les membres de l'équipe ont réalisé la documentation des usages et l'évaluation des retombées du témoignage public dans différents contextes d'intervention, selon les types de témoignages et les publics visés.

### Pourquoi choisir de faire une exposition d'art ?

Plusieurs éléments ont motivé le choix de faire une exposition d'art. Premièrement, nous avons réfléchi sur l'importance de diversifier nos méthodes d'éducation populaire et de sensibilisation, et nous nous sommes ouverts à l'idée de passer par le travail des artistes pour rejoindre un maximum de gens. L'exposition d'art visuel, en particulier, nous est apparue être le médium parfait pour « coloniser » l'espace public des préoccupations de nos communautés et pour revendiquer que cesse la stigmatisation. Concrètement, réaliser ensemble une exposition nous permettrait de faire une présentation nuancée de nos réalités, non-linéaire et de plusieurs points de vue. L'association entre des messages et des objets artistiques favoriseraient également la création d'un discours politique.

Deuxièmement, nous avons convenu que puisque les espaces physiques d'exposition comme les musées et les galeries d'art sont généralement considérés comme étant porteurs de « vérité », la présentation d'une exposition dans un tel lieu contribuerait à la validation sociale d'un discours alternatif à la stigmatisation. Le potentiel subversif de l'exposition est de provoquer des contextes de discussion dont les effets sont déstabilisants pour les publics, et les amènent à défaire

This anti-oppression perspective motivates us to consider ways to carry out projects "by and for" marginalized communities without further oppressing them, while making it possible for them to acquire means to combat their oppression. From this angle, the research team's activities aim to be emancipatory for their participants. The feminist vision, in turn, gives us the markers we need to understand and reduce specific power relationships, such as those related to sex and gender, age and racialised identity.

As such, the team members have documented the uses and evaluated the benefits of public testimonial in various usage settings depending on the type of stories and the target audiences.

### Why Choose to Do an Art Exhibition Project?

Several elements motivated the choice to create an art exhibition. Firstly, we reflected on the importance of diversifying our popular education and awareness-raising methods, and we opened up to the idea of using artists' work to reach the maximum possible number of people. The medium of a visual art exhibition, in particular, seemed to us to be a perfect communication tool for "colonizing" public space with our communities' concerns and to demand an end to stigmatization. Concretely, creating an exhibition together made it possible to present a nuanced look at our realities in a non-linear fashion and from multiple points of view. The association between the messages and the art objects would also foster the creation of political discourse.

Secondly, we agreed that because physical exhibition spaces such as museums and art galleries are generally considered as being the bearers of "truth," to present an exhibition in such a space would contribute to the social validation of an alternative discourse to that of stigmatization. The exhibition's subversive potential lies in its ability to provoke discussion whose effects may be destabilizing for audiences, and lead them to relinquish their prejudices. The Maison de la culture Frontenac, a Montreal city-run cultural centre founded on accessibility, seemed to us to be the perfect place.

To sum up, the *Témoigner pour Agir* exhibition objectives are:

- educate audiences by introducing them to the plurality of experiences and stories (individual and collective) among communities that are stigmatised due to their sexual or gender identity, their sexual practices, or their bodily or gender expression;
- bring together scientific expertise with the knowledge of artists and practitioners from community groups and the experiential knowledge of audiences;

leurs préjugés. Les maisons de la culture de Montréal, fondées sur l'accessibilité, nous sont apparues comme l'endroit idéal.

En somme, les objectifs de l'exposition *Témoigner pour Agir* sont de :

- sensibiliser les publics en faisant connaître la pluralité des expériences et des histoires (individuelles et collectives) des communautés stigmatisées en raison de leur identité sexuelle ou de genre, de leurs pratiques sexuelles, de l'expression de leur corps ou de leur genre ;
- mettre en commun les expertises scientifiques, les savoirs d'artistes et de praticien.ne.s des milieux communautaires ainsi que les acquis expérimentiels des publics ;
- créer un discours éthique, esthétique, historique, politique et polyphonique sur les enjeux, les défis et les retombées du témoignage de sa sexualité, son genre, son travail, son corps et son statut sérologique au VIH ; et
- soutenir l'intégration sociale des personnes lesbiennes, gaies, bisexuelles, trans, queer et en questionnement, intersexes, qui vivent avec le VIH ou qui ont une expérience de travail du sexe, en permettant la création de conditions favorables au dévoilement personnel et à l'amélioration de leurs conditions de vie.

Notre démarche de co-commissariat conduit ainsi à une valorisation des savoirs expérimentiels et communautaires, à la plus grande participation des communautés marginalisées et à la matérialisation de notre perspective féministe et anti-oppressive.

#### **Voir, s'engager, changer**

Le catalogue que vous avez entre les mains est divisé en quatre parties. Premièrement, Jamie Wilson Goodyear, co-commissaire professionnel de l'exposition, exprime ses réflexions à propos du « co-commissariat queer » et de sa pertinence pour la réalisation de *Témoigner pour Agir*. Deuxièmement, les contributions artistiques des organismes partenaires du projet (COCQ-SIDA, GRIS, Stella) ainsi que leurs missions respectives sont décrites. Leurs œuvres ont été créées spécialement pour l'exposition, grâce à la collaboration soutenue entre des membres de ces organismes et des artistes engagé.e.s. Troisièmement, les œuvres sélectionnées par un comité d'expertes et d'experts citoyens (le comité des Sages) sont présentées par les huit artistes invité.e.s qui les ont créées. Enfin, la quatrième partie est réservée aux deux projets d'art communautaire également exposés dans le studio 1 de la Maison de la Culture Frontenac.

En guise de conclusion, il importe de mentionner comment la sélection de l'ensemble des œuvres

- create an ethical, aesthetic, historical, political and polyphonic discourse on the issues, challenges and benefits of publicly telling the story of one's sexuality, gender, work, body and HIV status; and
- support the social integration of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and non-binary, intersex, or who live with HIV or have experience with sex work, by helping to create conditions favourable to self-disclosure and to the improvement of their quality of life.

Our co-curation process thus leads to the showcasing of experiential and community knowledge, to the greater participation of marginalized communities and to the materialization of our feminist and anti-oppressive perspective.

#### **Watch, Witness, Change**

The catalogue you are holding is divided into four parts. First, Jamie Wilson Goodyear, the exhibition's professional co-curator, provides his reflections about queer co-curation and its usefulness in creating the *Témoigner pour Agir* exhibition. Second, the works exhibited by the project's partner organisations, COCQ-SIDA, GRIS-Montréal and Stella, l'amie de Maimie are presented. The pieces were created specially for the exhibition, thanks to the sustained collaboration between the members of these organisations and socially engaged artists. Third, the works selected by a committee of citizen experts, the comité des Sages, are presented by the eight guest artists who created them. The fourth and last part is set aside for the two community art projects that are also featured in Studio 1 at the Maison de la culture Frontenac.

To conclude, I must mention how the works were selected for the exhibition. As a group, in 2015, the comité des Sages first set out the exhibition's ethical principles and our governance model. One of the core concerns was to respect each person's self-disclosure process. In this sense, we recognize that not everyone wishes to have the same public visibility, and we committed to respecting the limitations that might place on each person's type of involvement with the exhibition, including that of the artists. As well, in taking a long-term view of a society we hope will feature more justice and equality, we wanted to ensure that each of the marginalized communities involved in the exhibition could benefit from equal space and importance at every step of the exhibition's creation.

Then, in 2016, the comité des Sages determined selection criteria regarding the artist profiles, the message and themes addressed in the works, and the media used. We favoured artists who tell their personal stories through their art and who show unequivocal engagement with the diversity and plurality of marginalized voices. We also favoured



exposées a été faite. En groupe, le comité des Sages a d'abord défini, en 2015, les principes éthiques de l'exposition et nos façons de faire. Le respect du processus de dévoilement de soi de chaque personne a été une des préoccupations principales. En ce sens, nous reconnaissons que tous et toutes ne désirent pas avoir la même visibilité publique et nous nous sommes engagés à respecter les limitations que cela peut engendrer dans le type d'implication de chaque personne au sein de l'exposition, y compris les artistes. De plus, dans une visée à long terme d'une société davantage empreinte de justice et d'égalité, nous voulions s'assurer que chacune des communautés marginalisées impliquées dans l'exposition, puisse bénéficier d'un espace et d'une importance égale à toutes les étapes de la mise en œuvre de l'exposition.

Puis, en 2016, le comité des Sages a déterminé des critères de sélection concernant le profil de l'artiste, le message ou les thèmes abordés dans ses œuvres et le média utilisé. Nous avons privilégié les artistes qui racontent leur histoire personnelle à travers leur art et qui démontrent un engagement sans équivoque envers la diversité et la pluralité des voix marginalisées. Nous avons privilégié aussi les œuvres qui ne reconduisent pas de préjugés, offrent des représentations non-stigmatisantes et renforcent les objectifs de l'exposition. Aucune restriction touchant le média n'a été posée. Chacune des 24 soumissions de projets artistiques reçues a été évalué par au moins deux membres du comité des Sages et quatre dossiers ont été évalués en réunion plénière. Toutes les décisions ont été prises par consensus.

C'est donc avec grande fierté et en toute solidarité que je vous invite à parcourir ces pages, voir la force du témoignage, vous engager dans le dialogue et à participer au changement.

Bonne lecture !

works that refuse to reproduce prejudices, that offer non-stigmatizing representations and that speak to the exhibition's objectives. We placed no restrictions on the type of media. Each of the 24 artistic project submissions we received was evaluated by at least two members of the comité des Sages, and four dossiers were evaluated in plenary meetings. All decisions were made by consensus.

It is with great pride and deep solidarity that we invite you to browse these pages. In feeling the strength of these testimonials, you are engaging in dialogue and taking part in change.

Happy reading!

#### NOTE

[1] Le projet a d'abord été financé par le Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada (CRSH), de 2011 à 2014, puis par le Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture (FRQSC) et le Programme d'aide financière à la recherche et à la création (PAFARC) de l'UQAM.

#### NOTE

[1] The project was first funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), from 2011 to 2014, then by the Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture (FRQSC) and UQAM's Programme d'aide financière à la recherche et à la création (PAFARC).

## Le co-commissariat de témoignages artistiques queer

JAMIE WILSON GOODYEAR

### Le pouvoir des histoires et le rôle social de l'art

Dans leur rapport au monde, les artistes remodelent la matière en messages adressés à un public qui pourra alors, peut-être, s'imprégner d'idées neuves, y réfléchir et s'ouvrir à de nouvelles conclusions sur nos univers sociaux communs. L'art peut constituer un outil social pour explorer des idées, autant pour l'artiste que pour le spectateur. En tant qu'élément éloquent, l'art clarifie le sens de l'espace social et la place de chacun dans cette société. En racontant leurs histoires, les artistes réaffirment, créent et redirigent les relations sociales. Les histoires permettent aux gens concernés par ces dynamiques de mettre leurs préoccupations de côté pour projeter leur réalité personnelle et la reformuler. Ainsi, ces histoires deviennent les expressions du moi profond : celui que nous sentons être et celui que nous espérons être.

Dans son livre *Telling Sexual Stories : Power, Change and Social Worlds* (1995), Ken Plummer suggère que les histoires sont perçues comme des clés pour comprendre la culture : « [...] toutes les représentations factuelles de réalité empirique, même les représentations statistiques, sont des constructions narratives. » (Plummer, 1995, p. 19) En acceptant l'idée d'une omniprésence des histoires même dans les lieux les plus improbables, nous sommes en mesure de reconnaître leur rôle social. Plonger dans les histoires nous permet de donner un sens au passé, de concevoir des vérités narratives et de fonder les bases de nouvelles formes de création de monde et de développement de communautés. De son côté, le sociologue Arthur Frank (2000) rajoute que les histoires seraient non seulement des actions de narration, mais aussi des relations. L'acte du récit consolide l'identité de l'artiste et permet à d'autres d'entrer en contact avec une expérience possiblement comparable à la leur. Ne plus se sentir seul à vivre certaines réalités crée des liens en rassemblant les gens et forme aussi des communautés.

Les histoires, dont les artistes s'inspirent, aident à trouver une conscience de soi et d'identité au sein des univers sociaux et entre ces mondes. Ces récits, qui tracent les lignes d'un passé cohérent, circonscrivent les limites et rendent le présent encore plus cohérent. Ils procurent à la fois un médium et une protection pour l'avenir d'un soi intime et le corps que nous habitons. En représentant le corps et le soi intime par le récit personnel, les artistes proposent des symboles, des significations sur nous-mêmes, notre situation et la culture dans laquelle nous évoluons. Ces expressions artistiques remplissent un rôle à la fois de fenêtre sur d'autres façons de vivre et de miroir où se reflète notre vision de nous-mêmes dans le monde.

## (Co) Curating Queer Artistic Testimonials

JAMIE WILSON GOODYEAR

### The Power of Stories and the Social Role of Art

Artists process the world through the shaping of materials into messages for viewers who can then perhaps absorb new ideas, contemplate them and arrive at new conclusions about our shared social worlds. Art as a social tool can be a means to work out ideas, for both the artist and the viewer, as a potent element for making sense of social space and one's place within it. In the stories they tell, artists reaffirm, create and redirect social relationships. For those in the experience of these relationships, stories can provide some distance from whatever preoccupies them to project and reformulate a personal reality. As such, stories are expressions of our inner selves, who we feel we are, and how we wish to be in the world.

According to Ken Plummer, in his book *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds* (1995), stories are seen as pathways to understanding culture. Plummer suggests that "all factual representations of empirical reality, even statistical representations, are narratively constructed" (Plummer, 1995, p. 19). Once we recognize that stories are everywhere, even in the most unlikely places, we can then begin to appreciate the social role of stories. Delving into stories allows us to make sense of the past, provide narrative truths, and found the basis for new forms of world-making and the creation of communities. Also, as sociologist Arthur Frank (2000) suggests, stories are not only acts of telling but are also relationships. Telling allows people to enforce their identity and allows others to come in contact with experience that can parallel their own. This feeling of not being alone in one's circumstance brings people together in relationships and establishes communities.

Artists draw on stories. These stories can help gather a sense of self and identity within and between social worlds. By laying down routes to a coherent past, marking off boundaries, and giving consistency in the present, stories provide both a channel and shelter for the future of an intimate self and the body we inhabit. Artists representing the body and the intimate self, using personal narratives in their artworks, give us insightful and symbolic models of human interaction to reveal meanings and meanings about ourselves, our circumstance, and the culture in which we live. These artistic expressions work both as a window, onto other ways of existing, and a mirror, reflecting how we may see ourselves in the world.

Consequently, the work of art itself is compelling, as it can be regarded as a source of many stories; that of its maker, it being made, why it was made, how each person and groups of people may interact with it

L'objet d'art ne pourrait être plus investi de sens, en considérant qu'il est la source de plusieurs histoires : celle de son créateur, celle du processus de création, celle de la raison d'être de l'œuvre, celle de l'interaction entre chaque individu ou groupe avec l'objet exposé et les interprétations de l'œuvre. L'objet d'art en tant que représentation artistique d'un témoignage personnel, expression d'une voix intime, peut nous faire penser à nous-mêmes et aux autres sur plusieurs niveaux interreliés. La dynamique de l'œuvre qui nous renvoie notre propre regard crée le processus narratif qui structure l'histoire de l'œuvre devant nous. L'art devient un catalyseur pour se souvenir, raconter et partager de façon hautement symbolique ce reflet des réalités sociales. Il exprime aussi parfois un besoin de réformes sociales.

#### **Des œuvres en tant que témoignage**

Pour l'élaboration et la sélection d'œuvres, *Témoigner pour Agir* a rassemblé des artistes se servant du témoignage comme moteur de création à travers des récits exposant une grande diversité d'expériences de vie. L'expérience au sein de l'exposition est cruciale. Le témoignage de ces artistes permet de découvrir des façons d'être différentes dans la représentation de leurs difficultés, leurs triomphes, leurs préoccupations et leurs objectifs communs. Les œuvres exposées nous révèlent les motivations de cette communauté d'artistes et les histoires qu'ils désirent partager pour parler d'eux et de leurs relations sociales. L'ensemble de ces créations offre un aperçu de la vision du monde de ces artistes qui s'expriment par le biais du témoignage personnel. Puisque des membres d'organismes partenaires, à travers notre comité des Sages, étaient responsables de la sélection des œuvres et du co-commissariat de l'exposition, il existe un lien entre les artistes, la façon dont les communautés se perçoivent, les relations revendiquées et les œuvres présentées. Ces témoignages artistiques s'inscrivent dans les histoires et les récits de ces communautés tout autant qu'ils appartiennent à la trame d'une société. En observant ces œuvres, nous pouvons identifier des liens entre les artistes, leurs démarches artistiques, les communautés et la société que l'artiste a choisi de révéler et d'examiner par le témoignage.

#### **Participation et sensibilité queer**

Dans cette exposition, nous voulions représenter les réalités et les relations du point de vue des communautés queer. À cet égard, nous avons favorisé une pratique collaborative, c'est-à-dire un co-commissariat avec des rôles et des responsabilités partagés entre les chercheurs, les organismes communautaires et les individus des communautés sexuelles et de genre.

Le projet d'exposition collaborative a pour objectif d'impliquer les membres des communautés représentées aux différentes étapes de réalisation de

thereafter and derive meaning from it. The work of art, as an artistic representation of personal testimonial, an expression of a personal voice, can, therefore, make us think about ourselves and others on a variety of interrelating levels. This reflective position that artworks place us in, forms the narrative processes that shape the story of the artwork before us. The artwork becomes a catalyst for remembering, telling and sharing in powerful symbolic ways that reflect social realities, and sometimes, the need for positive social change.

#### **Artworks as Testimonials**

*Témoigner pour Agir*, through its development and selection of artworks, has brought together artists who use testimonials to drive their creative work in addressing a wide variety of experiences. Experience here is crucial. With these artists sharing their experience, we can begin to know other ways of being in the world – peoples' struggles and triumphs, their preoccupations and shared aims. With the works on display, we can begin to see what propels this community of artists to create, what story they wish to tell about themselves and their social relationships. This group's works offer an insight into how these artists are processing their world as they express themselves through personal testimonial. As the works collected here have been selected and co-curated by a group of community participants, with our *comité des Sages*, there is a rapport between the artists, how communities see themselves, the relationships they defend and the artworks on display. These artistic testimonials are part of the communities' stories and histories, but they are also part of a societal narrative. If we look across these pieces, we can actively make the links between artists and practices, communities, and society that need to, and have been chosen by the artist in the form of artistic testimonials to be revealed and examined.

#### **Queer Participation and Sensibility**

As an exhibition, we wanted to represent these circumstances and relationships from the point of view of queer communities. In so doing, we ventured into a collaborative practice of curating, a co-curation, with shared roles and responsibilities among researchers, community-based organisations and individual members of sexual and gender communities.

Participatory exhibition development refers to actively involving individuals from the represented communities in different stages of the exhibition development, such as narration and idea generation, object selection, the design of the exhibition space and overall concepts and approaches. This process of engaging multiple contributors helps enhance relevance, accessibility, and personal meaning-making by rendering the exhibition as personally relevant, as well as invigorating the design process with a diversity of viewpoints. As a



l'exposition : dans la scénarisation et la formulation des thèmes, la sélection des œuvres, la configuration de l'espace d'exposition, les concepts clés et dans le choix des approches à privilégier. La mobilisation de multiples collaborateurs donne encore plus de crédibilité à la pertinence du projet, à l'esprit d'accessibilité et à la construction intime de sens. Dans cette exposition à dimension personnelle, l'apport de diverses perspectives étoffe l'élaboration du projet. En tant qu'individu queer séropositif, je me suis entièrement investi dans l'approche et les thèmes de l'exposition. Ainsi, je suis arrivé dans ce projet non seulement comme le commissaire professionnel désigné, mais aussi comme quelqu'un qui se situe à l'intérieur d'une perspective queer et intersectionnelle.

L'omission de personnes queer dans les institutions publiques classe la vie de ces « Autres » personnes comme étant insignifiante, invisible et inintelligible, voire irréaliste. S'inspirer des théories queer pour comprendre et démanteler cette compartimentation permet aux membres de cette communauté de devenir visibles et aide à combattre les présomptions courantes à leur sujet. Révéler l'expérience queer permet de voir que la sous-représentation de cette communauté et ces fausses images créent des blessures. Ce phénomène a des conséquences sociales souvent très violentes pour les personnes queer. La perspective queer est importante : « un statut marginal peut édifier des communautés distinctes, créatives et aptes à s'accomplir. » (Chalmers, 2007, p.134) Pour lutter contre la phobie du queer, les personnes queer sont les mieux outillées pour créer leur propre image et rejeter les fausses représentations de leur communauté en participant à l'organisation d'expositions.

Une esthétique queer est-elle en jeu dans ce contexte ? Puisqu'au cours de l'histoire, les personnes queer n'ont pas eu le privilège de se définir, les œuvres mettent l'accent sur les histoires cachées et les thèmes de visibilité, d'invisibilité et de normes. Par contre, « les groupes [sociaux] ne se fondent pas à partir de leur sensibilité artistique. Ils se rassemblent plutôt sur la base de leur sensibilité sociale, par laquelle ils sont identifiés. » (Smith, 2015, p.93) Cette sensibilité s'exprime quand les artistes génèrent du contenu à partir d'expériences personnelles sans qu'elles soient nécessairement liées à la sexualité ou au mode de vie. Présenter un contenu touchant certaines sensibilités, comme Daniel J. Cameron dans son exposition de 1982, *Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art* (Sensibilités élargies : la présence homosexuelle dans l'art contemporain), est un geste contre les stéréotypes. Cette vision nous rappelle que l'identité des artistes et des gens dans la population en général ne repose pas simplement sur leur genre, leur sexualité, leur maladie ou leur travail. Exposer une matière touchant les sensibilités permet d'échapper,

queer HIV-positive individual, I was fully implicated in our exhibition themes and approach. As such, I have personally come to the exhibition's development, not only as the designated professional curator, but also as someone who is situated within queer and intersectional positions.

The omission of the queer in public institutions classifies the lives of 'Others' as insignificant, invisible and unintelligible – unreal. Drawing on queer theory to understand and dismantle this classification can allow queer people to become visible and help disrupt the predominant assumptions about queers. Through the unwrapping of queer experience, we begin to see the under- or miss-representations as damaging, which have social consequences, often violent, for queer people. Thinking from a queer perspective, "marginal status [can] construct distinct, imaginative and resourceful communities." (Chalmers, 2007, p. 134). As a type of resistance to queer-phobia, queer folks are best equipped to form their own representation and reject misrepresentations in the participation of exhibition building.

Might a queer aesthetic be at play in this context? As queer people did not historically have the privilege of defining themselves, a focus on hidden histories and themes of visibility, invisibility, and coding are present in the works. Though, social "groups are not based on aesthetic sensibility, but rather [come] together and are identified by social sensibility." (Smith, 2015, p. 93) This sensibility is active as artists generate content from personal experience that may not have to do with sexuality or lifestyle. *Sensibility content*, as coined by Daniel J. Cameron back in his 1982 exhibition *Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art*, is a move from stereotyping and reminds us that artists, and people, are not just a gender, a sexuality, an illness or a type of work. Sensibility content is about getting away from the representation of sex acts, for example, and move toward the shared experience of queer people. This kind of sensibility is vividly pointed out by Harmony Hammond while reflecting on her 1978 ground-breaking exhibition *A Lesbian Show*. She recalls that the exhibition was:

Not a distinctly lesbian aesthetic sensibility, but rather the revelation of a broad variety of shared thematic concerns including issues of anger, guilt, hiding, secrecy, coming out, personal violence and political trust, self-empowerment, and the struggle to make oneself whole. (Rinder, 1995, p. 4)

Sensibility content detaches highly charged labels so that we may begin to find common ground and stimulate understanding of our shared collective goals. In that understanding, stronger communities are built and maintained through knowledge and empathy.

par exemple, aux représentations d'actes sexuels pour se rapprocher de l'expérience commune des personnes queer. Harmony Hammond évoque cette sensibilité sociale dans sa réflexion sur son exposition avant-gardiste de 1978 : *A Lesbian Show* (Un spectacle lesbien). Elle rappelle ce qu'était l'exposition :

Sans esthétique lesbienne précise, c'était plutôt une révélation de la diversité des préoccupations thématiques partagées, notamment des sentiments de rage ou de culpabilité, des dissimulations, des secrets, des sorties du placard, de la violence personnelle et une confiance envers la politique, de l'affirmation de soi et la difficulté de se construire. (Rinder, 1995, p. 4)

L'expression de la sensibilité permet de se détacher des étiquettes trop lourdes pour trouver des points communs et participer à l'effort de mieux faire comprendre nos objectifs collectifs. Dans un milieu plus compréhensif, des communautés plus fortes se développent et perdurent par la connaissance et l'empathie pour leur réalité au sein de cet environnement.

#### La méthode de co-commissariat

Depuis plus de deux ans, je suis membre du comité responsable de la conception et de l'organisation logistique de l'événement, le comité des Sages.

Notre volonté de fonctionner en co-commissariat a demandé une ouverture et une approche ne s'arrêtant pas aux œuvres ou à l'installation finale de l'exposition, mais qui s'inscrit plutôt dans un long processus collectif. En choisissant cette approche, les réunions de travail sont devenues un lieu de partage de connaissances et de mémoire où des histoires se sont matérialisées. Au-delà de créer un événement où les membres des communautés peuvent s'exprimer et avoir un effet sur notre communauté urbaine élargie, le développement de l'exposition a permis de rassembler plusieurs communautés marginalisées, de créer des liens de solidarité entre elles et, possiblement, de changer les mentalités, stéréotypes et préjugés, y compris ceux qui existent au sein des groupes eux-mêmes. Comme Grand H. Kester le mentionne, l'organisation d'exposition « a été redéfinie en tant que processus actif et générateur ayant le potentiel de nous aider à parler et à imaginer au-delà des limites de nos identités fixes, du discours officiel ou de l'inévitable perception d'un conflit de partisanerie politique. » (Kester 2004, p. 8 dans Unruh, 2015)

Être ouvert à l'altérité, éviter une attitude contrôlante dans les pratiques commissariales et tendre vers l'utilisation du « nous » pour discuter du projet de l'exposition, ont donné la parole à une pluralité de voix et ont brouillé les frontières entre le travail intellectuel et créatif. Cette approche s'est avérée idéale « pour

#### Co-Curating Method

My role, for more than two years now, has been as a member of the committee responsible for organizing the event, conceptually and logistically, the comité des Sages.

Our approach to co-curating required going beyond objects or the end result of an art show, to that of a process. How we went about making the exhibition was just as important as the exhibition itself. Committee meetings were a space for sharing knowledge and memory, and where stories could emerge. Exhibition development became a means for community participants to express themselves in a way that could have an impact in our larger urban community. It also helped bring several marginalized communities closer together. In that expression, they might have the chance to reach out to others in solidarity and possibly change minds away from stereotypes and prejudices even between communities. As Grant H. Kester states so adeptly, exhibition building "is reframed as an active, generative process that can help us speak and imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities, official discourse, and the perceived inevitability of partisan political conflict." (Kester 2004).

In being open to otherness, avoiding a controlling curatorial position and tending towards using the pronoun 'we' when speaking of the exhibition project, we left openings for a plurality of voices, and blurred boundaries between intellectual and creative labour. This approach was ideal "to address a multiplicity of contemporary social and political concerns vis-à-vis dialogic and creative collaborations." (Puwar & Sharma, 2012, p. 59) This methodology, for us, has translated into an engagement of all communities involved, at all stages of the process - from concept building to development to actualization, as well as a focus on ideas from communities and a willingness for those ideas to form a collective voice.

We created an environment where there was attentiveness toward participants and their personal politics. So when witnessing their stories, we could better appreciate and consider their emotions and ideas, as essential nourishment for exhibition development. In working this way, an intersectional framework emerged where the co-curators acted as community building enablers, joining the intersections of lived experience and common goals between communities.

*Témoigner pour Agir* has been an excellent opportunity to dive into the process of co-curating with researchers, community partners, and community participant. Being part of this endeavor, as an artist-curator and a member of several sexual and gender communities involved in the project, has offered me a fertile terrain from which to experience

aborder une multitude de préoccupations sociales et politiques contemporaines dans des collaborations dialogiques et créatives. » (Puwar et Sharma, 2012, p. 59) Cette méthodologie s'est actualisée à chaque étape du projet et nous a amené à privilégier les propositions venant des communautés et à favoriser l'ouverture dans les échanges d'idées pour constituer une voix collective. Nous avons créé un environnement où une grande attention était portée aux participant.e.s et à leurs allégeances personnelles. Ainsi, en découvrant leurs histoires, nous pouvions mieux recevoir leurs émotions et leurs idées, et reconnaître l'importance de ces contributions dans l'élaboration de l'exposition. Dans ce cadre collectif et intersectionnel, les co-commissaires ont été les facilitateurs d'une vision commune, identifiant les points d'intersection entre les expériences vécues et les objectifs de chaque communauté.

*Témoigner pour Agir* a été le tremplin idéal pour se lancer dans un projet de co-commissariat entre chercheurs, individus de diverses communautés et membres d'organismes partenaires. Cette collaboration, en tant qu'artiste-commissaire et membre de plusieurs communautés sexuelles et de genres liées au projet, m'a fait vivre l'expérience de co-commissariat d'une exposition collaborative dans les meilleures conditions. Sur le plan personnel, cette expérience a changé ma conception des expositions et de leur mise en œuvre. Pour organiser des expositions socioculturelles, les commissaires doivent non seulement consulter les communautés, mais activement chercher leur contribution et leur engagement afin de considérer l'entièreté de leur réalité.

co-curating and participatory exhibition development. On a personal level, it has changed the way I think about exhibitions and how they are developed. With social-cultural exhibitions, curators must not only consult communities but actively seek out their input and involvement if we are to appreciate their circumstance thoroughly.

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**Œuvres des  
partenaires du projet**

**Artworks from the  
Project's Partner  
Organisations**



## JE T'AIME

COALITION DES ORGANISMES COMMUNAUTAIRES  
QUÉBÉCOIS DE LUTTE CONTRE LE VIH/SIDA ET  
DANIEL-CLAUDE GENDRON

### Mission

La Coalition des organismes communautaires québécois de lutte contre le sida (COCQ-SIDA) regroupe les organismes communautaires québécois de lutte contre le VIH/sida afin de favoriser l'émergence et le soutien d'une action concertée. La coalition solidarise et mobilise les gens, unit les démarches, les actions et les ressources impliquées pour répondre aux enjeux qui touchent les personnes vivant avec le VIH ou affectées par le VIH.

### La participation significative des personnes vivant avec le VIH

Créée en 1990, COCQ-SIDA a comme prémisses, de par son adhésion aux Principes de Denver<sup>2</sup> et au Principe de la participation accrue des personnes infectées ou affectées par le VIH/sida (GIPA), de toujours accorder une place importante aux personnes vivant avec le VIH dans l'ensemble de ses sphères d'action. Cette forte participation des personnes vivant avec le VIH permet à la coalition de bien cerner et saisir les difficultés et les barrières auxquelles ces personnes sont confrontées.

Malgré les avancées scientifiques et thérapeutiques qui font en sorte que les personnes séropositives peuvent vivre en santé et avoir une espérance de vie aussi longue que celle d'une personne séronégative, elles continuent de subir les affres de la stigmatisation et les contrecoups des discriminations. Encore aujourd'hui, l'épidémie du VIH est perçue, dans la population générale, comme la maladie de l'autre, des tenues pour compte, des minorités. Ainsi, en 2017, il est encore courant que des enfants séronégatifs d'une mère séropositive soient renvoyés d'une garderie, ou qu'un individu perde son emploi, car son supérieur découvre qu'il est séropositif. S'ajoute le rejet par les partenaires

## I LOVE YOU

COALITION DES ORGANISMES COMMUNAUTAIRES  
QUÉBÉCOIS DE LUTTE CONTRE LE VIH/SIDA AND  
DANIEL-CLAUDE GENDRON

### Mission

The Coalition des organismes communautaires québécois de lutte contre le sida (COCQ-SIDA) brings together Québec's community-based organisations working to end HIV/AIDS in order to foster concerted community action. The coalition creates ties, mobilizes people, and unites efforts, actions and resources in order to respond to the issues that affect people living with and are affected by HIV.

### The Significant Participation of Persons Living With HIV

COCQ-SIDA was created in 1990, in accordance with the Denver Principles<sup>2</sup> and with the "GIPA Principle" of Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV/AIDS; always grant a key place to people living with HIV in all its spheres of action. This strong participation of people living with HIV allows the coalition to properly understand and target the difficulties and barriers they face.

Despite the scientific and therapeutic advances that have allowed HIV-positive people to live in good health and enjoy a life expectancy as long as that of HIV-negative people, persons living with HIV continue to suffer the stress of stigmatization and the backlash of discrimination. Still today, the general population perceives the HIV epidemic as being someone else's illness, the people we take for granted, minorities. As such, in 2017, it is still common for HIV-negative children of women living with HIV to be turned away from daycares, and for people to lose their jobs when their supervisors discover they are HIV-positive. To this we must add rejection from sexual partners and, in extreme cases, accusations and convictions for aggravated sexual assault for having not disclosed an





*Je t'aime (I Love You)*, 2007. Peinture à la détrempe  
(gouache) sur toile / tempera (gouache) on canvas,  
243.8 x 182.9 cm.

sexuels et à l'extrême des condamnations pour agression sexuelle grave du fait de ne pas avoir dévoilé son statut positif au VIH à un partenaire sexuel. Devant ces discriminations, ces rejets, cette stigmatisation, le témoignage a toujours été un moyen de lutter, d'informer, de sensibiliser au fait que les personnes vivant avec le VIH sont comme tout le monde et qu'elles ont leur place dans la société.

COCQ-SIDA accorde une place importante au témoignage des personnes vivant avec le VIH. En fait preuve, la campagne « Je suis séropo » ([www.jesuissieropo.org](http://www.jesuissieropo.org)), lancée en 2012, où cinq personnes vivant avec le VIH ont affirmé publiquement que « C'est le sida qu'il faut exclure, pas les séropositifs ». Conscient que témoigner publiquement de son vécu avec le VIH, dans le contexte social actuel, nécessite une dose importante de volonté et de force, COCQ-SIDA est sensible à toutes les formes d'expression personnelle telles que le témoignage écrit ou oral, la peinture, la poésie, etc. Du moment qu'une personne vivant avec ou affectée par le VIH veut s'exprimer publiquement, son choix de médium sera respecté et elle sera accompagnée durant toutes les étapes du projet pour qu'elle retire de cette expérience les bénéfices désirés. En raison de cet intérêt au témoignage, COCQ-SIDA est depuis longtemps impliquée dans les projets de recherche de Maria Nengeh Mensah sur ce sujet. Ce qui explique pourquoi COCQ-SIDA est l'un des organismes organisateurs de ce projet d'exposition.

L'une de ses implications consiste au prêt d'un diptyque, œuvre peinte sous la direction de l'artiste Daniel Claude Gendron, par un grand nombre de personnes vivant avec le VIH ayant participé au Forum 2007 « Entre-nous, on se dit tout ».

Bien connu dans le réseau VIH/sida pour son implication depuis 15 ans, Daniel-Claude Gendron a participé à différents événements en lien avec l'art-témoignage. Illustrateur pour le collectif d'artistes *Art Positif 2005*, coordonnateur des ateliers d'art *Zone +* en 2008, il publie en 2010 une bande dessinée : *Super-Séropo*. Plus récemment, il organisa une levée de fond au profit du Camp Positif : les soirées *Hope and Mic* où l'on pouvait y présenter un numéro

HIV-positive status to a sexual partner. In response to this discrimination, rejection and stigma, public testimonials have been a way to fight, to inform, and to raise awareness about how people living with HIV are like everyone else and have their place in society.

COCQ-SIDA allots significant space to the stories of people living with HIV. Case in point: the "Je suis séropo" campaign ([jesuissieropo.org](http://jesuissieropo.org)) launched in 2012, in which five people living with HIV publicly stated that we must fight AIDS, and not fight HIV-positive people ("C'est le sida qu'il faut exclure, pas les séropositifs"). We are also aware that to publicly tell your story of living with HIV in the current social context requires a heavy dose of courage and will. There should be space for many forms of personal expression, including written and oral storytelling, painting, poetry and more. In our work, from the moment a person living with or affected by HIV wishes to speak out publicly, their choice of medium is respected, and they will be supported through every step of their testimonial, so that they get the desired benefits from their experience. Because of this interest in public testimonial, COCQ-SIDA has long been involved in Professor Maria Nengeh Mensah's research projects on the subject. And that is how we got involved in the creation and organisation of this exhibition project.

Our submission to the exhibit is a diptych, painted by a large number of persons living with HIV at the 2007 forum « Entre-nous, on se dit tout » (*Between Us, We Talk About Everything*).

Well known in the HIV/AIDS worlds for his involvement over the last 15 years, Daniel-Claude Gendron has taken part in various events related to testimonials by persons living with HIV using art. He was an illustrator for the Art Positif artist collective in 2005, and coordinator of the Zone + art workshop in 2008. In 2010 he published a comic book called *Super-Séropo*. More recently, he organized a fundraiser to benefit Camp Positif: Hope and Mic nights where people could give an artistic performance. The artist is aware that his art works are often the result of collective thinking. He uses lively and vibrant colours that represent a strong commitment to his community.

artistique. Conscient que l'expression de ses œuvres est le résultat d'une réflexion collective sur les idées qui circulent, les œuvres de l'artiste sont de couleurs vives, enrobées de féerie et témoignent de son engagement au sein de sa communauté.

#### On se dit tout

L'œuvre de COCQ-SIDA a été créée par les personnes vivant avec le VIH ayant participé, en 2007, au forum provincial « Entre-nous, on se dit tout ». Pour cette deuxième édition de ce forum, la COCQ-SIDA avait mis à la disposition des personnes vivant avec le VIH un espace exclusif pour se reposer, discuter et échanger. De plus, ce lieu comportait un espace d'expression artistique dont la direction avait été offerte à Daniel-Claude Gendron qui, à l'époque, était intervenant responsable des ateliers d'art *CAPSULE* à la Maison Plein Cœur, un organisme-membre de la coalition.

Daniel-Claude Gendron a obtenu carte blanche pour le choix des activités, l'organisation et l'animation de cet espace. Avec l'aide des personnes participant aux ateliers *CAPSULE*, il a concocté une liste d'activités artistiques incluant la création d'une œuvre peinte par les personnes vivant avec le VIH inscrites au forum. Le concept était de permettre à ces personnes d'exprimer leur émotion du moment. Cette activité a connu un fort succès. Les personnes vivant avec le VIH ont participé en grand nombre et le résultat est ce grand et magnifique diptyque.

Ce grand diptyque, essentiellement peint à la gouache, présente un univers éclectique de formes abstraites et d'éléments figuratifs. La toile est divisée en trois zones distinctes. La zone centrale semble vouloir empiéter sur ses voisines. Un élément attire notre attention : une coupe de vin se déverse sur la zone du bas. La coupe chute dans un tourbillon de couleur et de bulles. Comme si les participant.e.s avaient voulu nous souligner le côté festif de la rencontre. La fête envahit une zone sombre, parsemée de cases, alors qu'en arrière-plan de la coupe, plusieurs yeux regardent dans toutes les directions. Certains y ont vu le cocktail de pilules à prendre tous les matins, mais à la fin, les participant.e.s se sont entendus.e.s finalement sur le symbole de la rencontre entre ami.e.s.

cocqsida.com  
metabolisme.ca

#### NOTE

[2] Une déclaration d'autodétermination du mouvement de lutte contre le sida, écrit en 1993 : [www.actupny.org/documents/Denver.html](http://www.actupny.org/documents/Denver.html)

#### We Talk About Everything

The artwork that the coalition contributed to the exhibition was by a large group of people living with HIV who took part, in 2007, in a provincial forum entitled "Entre-nous, on se dit tout" ("Between us, we talk about everything"). For this second edition of the forum, COCQ-SIDA decided to have, onsite for people living with HIV, an exclusive space to rest, mingle and create. The space was ideal for artmaking, under the supervision of Daniel-Claude Gendron, the artistic program coordinator at the time of the CAPSULE's workshops' at Maison Plein Cœur, a member organisation of the coalition in Montreal.

Daniel-Claude Gendron was given carte blanche to choose the activities, organize it and facilitate this space. With the assistance of CAPSULE workshop participants, he was able to concoct a list of activities, which included the production of a large canvas painting by persons living with HIV registered at the Forum. The concept was to allow people to express their emotions, in the moment. The project was a stunning success. People living with HIV took part in great numbers. The result was this large diptych.

The diptych, mostly painted in gouache, presents an eclectic world of abstract forms and figurative elements. The canvas is split into three distinct zones. The central zone seems to want to stretch out over its neighbouring spaces. An element draws our attention: a wine cup spills into the lower zone. The cup is falling through a whirlwind of colour and bubbles, as if the participants wanted to emphasize the festive aspect of the meeting. The party takes over a dark zone sprinkled with squares, while in the cup's background, several eyes look in all directions. Some felt it symbolizes the "pills cocktail" they need to take every morning, others thought the painting symbolises the meeting of friends.

cocqsida.com  
metabolisme.ca

#### NOTE

[2] A declaration of self-empowerment for the AIDS movement written in 1993 : [www.actupny.org/documents/Denver.html](http://www.actupny.org/documents/Denver.html)



## UNE HISTOIRE À LA FOIS...

GROUPE DE RECHERCHE ET D'INTERVENTION SOCIALE  
DE MONTRÉAL

Le Groupe de recherche et d'intervention sociale de Montréal (GRIS-Montréal) existe depuis 1994, mais ses origines remontent à sept ans plus tôt, alors que Jeunesse Lambda, un organisme d'entraide créé par et pour les jeunes LGBTQ+, identifie un important besoin d'information chez les 13-16 ans en questionnement quant à leur orientation sexuelle. Pour répondre à cette large demande, un comité d'intervention sociale est mis en place pour organiser des interventions sous forme de témoignages dans des classes d'écoles secondaires.

### Se raconter pour démystifier

Face au succès de la formule et à la demande grandissante, le CIS devient officiellement le GRIS-Montréal en 1994. Depuis ce jour, la mission du GRIS est de favoriser une meilleure connaissance des réalités homosexuelles et bisexuelles ainsi que de faciliter l'intégration des personnes gaies, lesbiennes et bisexuelles dans la société. Si les questions posées dans les classes ont évolué, la méthode basée sur le témoignage d'un homme et d'une femme homosexuels ou bisexuels, elle, est restée inchangée et demeure un outil de sensibilisation très efficace.

Au fil des années, le GRIS a mis en place des ateliers de démystification de l'homosexualité et de la bisexualité auprès de clientèles de plus en plus larges. Les bénévoles se rendent en effet dans les écoles secondaires et primaires principalement, mais également dans les milieux universitaires, professionnels et, depuis 2015, dans les résidences pour personnes âgées. L'organisme compte aujourd'hui dans ses rangs pas moins de 250 bénévoles gais, lesbiennes et bisexuels de tous âges et tous horizons. En livrant leur vécu et en répondant ouvertement à toutes les questions posées, ils et elles mettent ainsi un visage sur une réalité homosexuelle et bisexuelle souvent mal comprise. Leurs témoignages créent ainsi un espace où l'ignorance cède la place à la connaissance, et le rejet à l'acceptation.

Dans bon nombre de milieux de vie ayant une grande importance pour les personnes qui les fréquentent, l'hétérosexualité est encore bien souvent considérée comme la norme et la diversité des orientations sexuelles est tue. En témoignant des réalités qu'ils vivent au quotidien, nos bénévoles contribuent à faire disparaître l'inconnu, à rendre visibles les vies des personnes non hétérosexuelles et à bâtir des milieux moins hétérosexistes, et où l'homophobie est combattue. En étendant notre mission à une clientèle de plus en plus large, nous souhaitons ainsi contribuer à ce que le plus grand nombre possible de milieux

## ONE STORY AT A TIME...

GROUPE DE RECHERCHE ET D'INTERVENTION SOCIALE  
DE MONTRÉAL

While the Groupe de recherche et d'intervention sociale de Montréal has existed since 1994, its origins date back seven years earlier, when Jeunesse Lambda, a support organisation created by and for LGBTQ+ youth, identified a major need for information among 13- to 16-year-olds questioning their sexual orientation. To meet this large demand, a social intervention committee was created to organize interventions in the form of testimonials in high school classrooms.

### Telling Our Stories to Debunk Prejudices

Faced with the formula's success and the growing demand, the CIS officially became GRIS-Montréal in 1994. Since then, the GRIS mission has been to foster a better understanding of gay, lesbian and bisexual lives and to facilitate the integration of gay, lesbian and bisexual people into society. While the questions asked in classrooms have evolved, the method, based on personal narrative delivered by one gay or bisexual man and one lesbian or bisexual woman, has remained unchanged, and remains a very effective tool for awareness-raising.

Over the years, GRIS has given workshops to demystify gay, lesbian and bisexual lives for an ever-wider range of clientele. Volunteers still mostly visit high schools and elementary schools, but they also speak in universities and workplaces, and, since 2015, in seniors' homes. Today, the organisation has no less than 250 gay, lesbian and bisexual volunteers of all ages and all walks of life. By speaking about their lives and openly answering all questions, they put a face to a gay, lesbian and bisexual reality that's often poorly understood. Their stories create a space where ignorance gives way to knowledge, and rejection to acceptance.

In many living environments, heterosexuality is still often considered the norm, and the diversity of sexual orientations is silenced. By talking about their everyday lives, our volunteers help to shed light on the unknown, to make visible the lives of non-heterosexual people and to build environments that are less heterosexist, and where people fight homophobia. By extending our mission to an ever broadening clientele, we aim to help make the largest possible number of living environments safer for gay, lesbian and bisexual people.

Since public testimonial is at the heart of GRIS's mission, the organisation is one of the founding partners of the *Témoigner pour Agir* exhibition. Our participation in this project has allowed us to share



*Une histoire à la fois... (One Story at a Time...), 2017.*  
Médias mixtes / mixed media, 120 x 120 cm.

deviennent des milieux plus sécuritaires pour les personnes gaies, lesbiennes et bisexuelles.

Le témoignage public étant au cœur de la mission du GRIS, l'organisme est l'un des partenaires fondateurs de l'exposition *Témoigner pour Agir*. Notre participation à ce projet nous permet de partager nos expériences liées au témoignage et d'apprendre des points communs et des différences des expériences de témoignage vécues par d'autres groupes minorisés. Si notre travail se concentre surtout dans les milieux scolaires, notre mission est de démystifier l'homosexualité et la bisexualité auprès de tous et cette exposition représente donc une occasion parfaite de rejoindre de nouvelles personnes.

#### Installer le dialogue

L'installation du GRIS offre un regard sur le travail de l'organisme et sur les échanges privilégiés entre les bénévoles et les groupes scolaires visités. Elle présente les visages de quelques-un.e.s des bénévoles de l'organisme qui défont, un à un, les préjugés sur l'homosexualité et la bisexualité, et les met en relation avec des portraits de personnes rencontrées lors de nos ateliers. Ces portraits sont accompagnés d'exemples de récits livrés par nos membres, ainsi que de témoignages de participant.e.s qui ont eu l'occasion de questionner nos bénévoles afin d'en savoir plus sur leur vécu. Ces témoignages ont été recueillis par le biais des questionnaires distribués au début et à la fin de chaque intervention afin de mesurer l'impact de notre travail sur la société.

Les portraits et citations présentent une partie de la diversité des bénévoles et des personnes rencontrées par l'organisme. Leurs échanges et discussions enrichissent chacun.e en présentant des modèles réels et des expériences de vie diversifiées et riches. L'installation *Une histoire à la fois...* est accompagnée de quelques-uns des outils développés par le GRIS à travers les années et permettant de prendre connaissance d'autres récits et expériences.

[gris.ca](http://gris.ca)

our experiences of personal narrative and to learn about both the common ground and the differences in personal testimonial experiences as lived by other minoritized groups. While our work mostly focuses on school settings, our mission is to demystify gay, lesbian and bisexual lives for everyone, and this exhibition represents the perfect opportunity to reach new people.

#### Setting Up Dialogue

The GRIS installation offers a glimpse of the organisation's work and on the discussions that happen between the volunteers and the school groups they visit. It presents the faces of some of the organisation's volunteers who, one story at a time, dismantle prejudices against gays, lesbians and bisexuals, and places these volunteers in dialogue with the portraits of people we meet at our workshops. These portraits are accompanied by examples of the stories told by our members, as well as the stories of participants who have had the opportunity to ask our volunteers questions in order to learn more about their experiences. These personal narratives were gathered by means of the questionnaires we distribute at the beginning and end of each school visit in order to measure the impact of our work on society.

The portraits and quotes show some of the diversity of our volunteers and of the people the organisation meets. Their conversations enrich all concerned by presenting real-life models and a rich diversity of life experiences. The *Une histoire à la fois...* installation also features some of the tools GRIS has developed over the years and allows visitors to learn about other stories and experiences.

[gris.ca](http://gris.ca)

## LA PIÈCE ROSE

STELLA, L'AMIE DE MAIMIE AVEC CHLOÉ SURPRENANT

### Mission

Stella, l'amie de Maimie est un organisme par et pour les travailleuses du sexe. Nous avons pour but d'informer et de soutenir les travailleuses du sexe afin d'améliorer nos conditions de vie et de travail, et de sensibiliser l'ensemble de la société aux différentes formes et réalités de ce travail afin que les travailleuses du sexe aient les mêmes droits à la santé et à la sécurité que le reste de la population.

Plus spécifiquement, Stella a pour objectifs :

- D'offrir du soutien et de l'information aux travailleuses du sexe afin qu'elles puissent vivre et travailler en sécurité, en santé et avec dignité
- De contrer la violence et les différents facteurs qui les mettent à risque de devenir infectées par le VIH et d'autres infections transmissibles sexuellement et par le sang (ITSS), et qui représentent des menaces pour elles
- De combattre la discrimination et la stigmatisation faites aux travailleuses du sexe ainsi que leur isolement social
- De promouvoir la décriminalisation des différentes formes de travail du sexe
- De soutenir la participation des travailleuses du sexe à la communauté et dans la mise en œuvre d'actions collectives
- De favoriser la création de plate-forme d'échange sur le travail du sexe aux niveaux municipal, provincial, national et international.

L'équipe de Stella réalise ces objectifs en favorisant le développement de la solidarité et l'appropriation du pouvoir par les travailleuses du sexe en tant que membres de la société. Stella participe également au mouvement international de défense des droits des travailleuses et travailleurs du sexe.

### Histoire

Le mouvement de défense des droits des travailleuses du sexe existe sous diverses formes depuis plus de 50 ans. Il se situe au sein des mouvements des droits du travail, tels les mouvements syndicaux, des mouvements LGBTQ, des mouvements féministes et des mouvements de lutte contre les ITSS.

Stella est née en 1995 au cœur de la pandémie VIH/SIDA, comme beaucoup d'autres groupes de défense des droits des travailleuses.eurs du sexe et autres communautés rendues vulnérable aux ITSS par la marginalisation ou la criminalisation.

## THE PINK ROOM

STELLA, L'AMIE DE MAIMIE WITH CHLOÉ SURPRENANT

### Mission

Stella, l'amie de Maimie is an organisation by and for sex workers. Our mission is to inform and support sex workers in order to improve our living and working conditions, and to raise society's awareness of the various ways that sex work happens as well as about our lived experiences as sex workers so that sex workers might also benefit from the same rights to health and safety as the rest of the population.

More specifically, Stella seeks to:

- Offer support and information to sex workers so that sex workers can work and live in safety, in health and with dignity.
- Counter threats to sex workers, including violence and the various factors that put sex workers at risk of contracting HIV and STBBIs (sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections).
- Fight discrimination against and stigmatization of sex workers as well as their social isolation.
- Promote the decriminalisation of all forms of sex work.
- Support the participation of sex workers' involvement in the community and in taking collective action.
- Encourage the creation of platforms and forums to discuss sex work on the municipal, provincial, federal and international levels.

Stella's team works towards these goals by promoting solidarity amongst sex workers and by creating spaces where sex workers can access power as members of society. Stella also takes part in the international sex workers' rights movement.

### History

The sex workers' rights movement has existed in various forms for more than fifty years. It is positioned within workers' rights movements, such as union movements, as well as LGBTQ movements, feminist movements and movements to fight STBBIs.

Stella was born at the early days of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, in 1995, like many other sex workers' rights groups and groups working toward the rights of other communities made vulnerable to STBBIs by marginalization or criminalisation. Public authorities were, at the time, debating the idea of introducing and imposing medical exams and mandatory HIV tests of sex workers. In response to this social and medical



Les autorités publiques étaient, à cette époque, en plein débat pour introduire et rendre obligatoires, pour les travailleuses et travailleurs du sexe, les examens médicaux et les tests de dépistage du VIH. En réaction à cette mesure de contrôle social et médical et face au besoin urgent d'actions par et pour notre communauté, nous avons commencé à nous organiser.

Au fil de ses 22 ans d'existence, Stella a produit une panoplie de documents d'information pour notre communauté et pour divers publics. Nous avons participé et organisé de nombreux événements d'envergure internationale et avons ainsi continué à bâtir la réputation internationale de Montréal comme leader de militantisme et d'organisation communautaire.

#### **Témoigner pour Agir**

L'art a toujours fait partie de notre mouvement et de nos pratiques militantes et communautaires. Que ce soit dans la production d'art par nos membres dans l'élaboration de campagnes publiques, dans la production d'outils d'éducation, la réalisation d'œuvres collectives par les femmes de notre communauté que nous visitons en prison et d'autres projets encore, la production artistique demeure un moyen privilégié de partager nos réalités et nos revendications.

Nous espérons que cette exposition saura vous sensibiliser sur les réalités vécues par les travailleuses du sexe dans un contexte de criminalisation.

Il s'agit d'une occasion pour nous d'exprimer à travers l'art la stigmatisation et le jugement que nous vivons, de démontrer ses impacts sur notre sécurité et notre dignité, mais surtout une occasion de rendre visibles les femmes fortes, nuancées et courageuses cachées derrière les préjugés.

control measure, and faced with the urgent need to take action by and for our community, we began to organize.

In our 22 years of existence, Stella has produced panoply of information documents for our community and for various readerships. We have taken part in and organized many international events, and in so doing, we have continued to build Montréal's international reputation as a leader in activism and community organisation.

#### **Témoigner pour Agir**

Art has always been part of our movement and our activist and community practices. Our members produce art as part of developing public campaigns; the organisation creates educational tools; the women in our community, whom we visit in prison, make collective art. Through these and other projects, artistic production remains a key means by which we share our stories and demand our rights.

We hope this exhibition will expand your understanding of the realities experienced by sex workers in the context of criminalisation.

This is an opportunity for us to express, through art, our experiences of the stigmatization and judgement we live with, and to demonstrate its impacts on our safety and our dignity. But above all, it's an opportunity for us to make visible the strong, nuanced and courageous women that prejudice tries to mask.





*La pièce rose (The Pink Room)*, 2017. Installation, 243.8 x 365.8 cm.

### La pièce rose

L'installation présentée par Stella pour cette exposition s'inspire de la scène de la « Pink Room » (pièce rose) du film *Twin Peaks : Fire Walk With Me* de David Lynch (1992). Dans le long métrage, cet espace est une pièce réelle située à l'arrière du bar, où les femmes se livrent à ce que Lynch suggère être des activités clandestines. À travers cette pièce, les travailleuses du sexe sont invitées à redéfinir les notions populaires de clandestinité en rendant semblable et terre à terre l'idée de la pièce rose dans tout son décor. Aux côtés d'objets incarnant cette pièce, elles placent en évidence des choses leur appartenant. La collection d'objets apportés par les travailleuses du sexe expose les réalités personnelles et politiques des personnes travaillant dans l'industrie du sexe. Alors que le rose peut créer une monotonie un peu dérangement ou une étrange fascination, la couleur agit comme une lampe de poche qui éblouit dans la nuit. Le rose permet au spectateur de reporter son attention sur l'élément fondamental de la pièce quand il est question de travail du sexe : les vies et les réalités intimes des travailleuses du sexe.

[chezstella.org](http://chezstella.org)  
[chloesurprenant.com](http://chloesurprenant.com)

### The Pink Room

Stella's art installation is inspired by the "Pink Room" in David Lynch's 1992 film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*. In the film, this space is a physical back room of the bar where women go to engage in what Lynch suggests is "clandestine" activity. Through this room, sex workers are invited to redefine popular notions of clandestinity, by making "same" and mundane the idea of the pink room itself with all of its objects, and simultaneously placing objects that belong to them in focus. Using a collection of personal artefacts from sex workers, our pink room showcases the personal and political realities of people who work in the sex industry. While the pink may create an uncomfortable sense of monotony or strange fascination, it acts like a flashlight that blinds us in the night, allowing the viewer to refocus on what is primordial in the piece when thinking about sex work: the intimate lives and realities of sex workers.

[chezstella.org](http://chezstella.org)  
[chloesurprenant.com](http://chloesurprenant.com)

**Œuvres choisies et  
artistes invité.e.s**

**Selected Works and  
Guest Artists**

## PAJUBÁ

ELOISA AQUINO

Eloisa Aquino, artiste queer créatrice de zines, vit et travaille à Montréal. Originnaire du Brésil, Eloisa crée des zines depuis bientôt presque trois décennies. En 2009, elle commençait avec sa partenaire Jenny Lin, la publication d'*Art micro press B&D Press*, un magazine à diffusion restreinte consacré à des sujets queer non romanesques comme des essais, des mémoires ou des biographies. Elle est plus connue pour sa série : *The Life and Times of Butch Dykes* (Des épisodes de vie de butchs). Son attachement à sa terre natale se perçoit dans son œuvre puisqu'elle s'efforce de raconter des histoires de queer du Brésil ou d'ailleurs en Amérique latine. Eloisa a présenté ses œuvres à Montréal, Vancouver, New York et Los Angeles en plus de participer au Canada et à l'étranger à plusieurs salons et foires du livre.

## PAJUBÁ

ELOISA AQUINO

Eloisa Aquino is a queer artist zinester who lives and works in Montreal. Originally from Brazil, Eloisa has been making zines from almost three decades now. In 2009, she started with partner Jenny Lin the art micro press B&D Press, which is devoted to queer non fiction topics, such as illustrated essays, memoirs, and biographies. She is best known for her series *The Life and Times of Butch Dykes*. She maintains a strong connection with her homeland in her work, striving to tell the stories of Brazilian and Latino queers. Eloisa has shown her work in Montreal, Vancouver, New York, and Los Angeles, and has travelled extensively for book fairs in Canada and abroad.



Pajuba, 2014/17. Fanzine, 30 x 30 cm.

J'ai grandi et vécu durant les années 1980 et 1990 dans la métropole effervescente de São Paulo, au cœur d'une population diversifiée. Adolescente, puis jeune adulte et venant d'un milieu aisé, je n'étais pas trop surprotégée et j'ai pu découvrir au fil de mes amitiés et de mes expériences, une culture très mixte sur le plan des classes sociales, des préférences, des races et des orientations sexuelles. En d'autres mots, dans les lieux et les espaces que nous fréquentions, se côtoyait un mélange chaotique et sain de queers et d'hétérosexuels, de punk, de nouvel âge, de samba, de Noirs, de Blancs, de riches, de pauvres, et ainsi de suite. C'est dans les bars du quartier où j'avais l'habitude de prendre un verre que j'ai entendu pour la première fois le langage des trans : le *pajubá*. (Les trans sont des personnes ayant une autre identité de genre que celle d'homme ou de femme, ou bien elles s'identifient comme femme trans.) J'étais captivée. Le langage *pajubá* était beau, féminin, agressif, mignon et drôle. Avec le temps, j'en ai appris un peu plus, mais je ne l'ai jamais entièrement maîtrisé. J'ai toujours la même fascination. Vivre auprès d'elles, connaître des trans, développer des liens et me lier d'amitié avec elles étaient un incroyable privilège, à l'époque. Ce contact m'a aidé à mieux comprendre l'identité queer et la mienne en tant que femme gaie.

Dans mon travail, j'ai essayé de documenter et de raconter des histoires qui n'étaient jamais racontées, oubliées ou invisibles. Les trans au Brésil occupent un espace paradoxal dans la société. Ils inspirent autant de désir que de haine dans des mesures extrêmes et leur culture est ignorée, exclue ou dédaignée, même dans les communautés LGBTQ. Le *pajubá* est une manifestation culturelle riche et forte face à l'oppression. Je voulais l'illustrer. En plus, le langage en soi est magnifique dans ses inflexions outrageuses, l'humour de son vocabulaire et sa gestuelle extravagante. Mon zine est un hommage à ces femmes fabuleuses. C'est aussi l'occasion idéale de mettre à profit mon expérience d'ancienne journaliste, de linguiste professionnelle, de chercheuse, d'illustratrice et de créatrice de zines.

[banddpress.blogspot.ca](http://banddpress.blogspot.ca)

I grew up and came of age in the diverse and intense metropolis of São Paulo in the 1980s and 1990s. As a middle class adolescent and young adult of that time, I was not too sheltered, and could experience with my friends and by myself a culture that was very mixed in terms of class, preferences, race and sexual orientation. In other words, the places and spaces we used to frequent were a healthy and chaotic mix of queer and straight, punk, new wave and samba, white and black, rich and poor, and so on. It was at the corner bars where we used to drink that I heard the language of the *travestis* (people who identify either as a separate gender or as transwomen), *Pajubá*, for the first time, and I was amazed: it was beautiful, feminine, aggressive, sweet, funny. With time, I learned a bit of it, but I never became fluent. The fascination never diminished, though, and to live along and to know and connect with and befriend *travestis* at that time was an incredible privilege, and helped me to understand better both queerness and myself as a gay woman.

In my work, I try to document and tell stories that are untold, forgotten or invisible. Travestis occupy in Brazil a paradoxical space in society: they are desired and hated in equal enormous measures, yet their culture is ignored, dismissed or disdained, even within LGBTQ communities. *Pajubá* is a rich and strong cultural manifestation in face of oppression, and I wanted to show that. Also, the language itself is a thing of beauty, with its outrageous inflexions, humorous vocabulary, and extravagant gesturing. This zine is my homage to those fabulous women. It is also presents an ideal opportunity to make use of my skills as a former journalist, professional linguist, researcher, illustrator, and zinester.

[banddpress.blogspot.ca](http://banddpress.blogspot.ca)

**OK LUCID!**

IANNA BOOK

Ianna book est une artiste multidisciplinaire qui vit et travaille à Montréal. Elle a étudié en arts plastiques au Cégep du Vieux-Montréal, ainsi qu'en arts visuels et médiatiques à l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Elle a travaillé comme designer graphique et illustratrice éditoriale. Ses œuvres ont été présentées dans le cadre de plusieurs expositions collectives depuis 2001. En 2011, elle présenta à la Radical Queer Semaine sa première œuvre en tant que femme trans. Au cours de sa période de transition (2010-2013), elle a publié *Trans Avenue*, un essai photographique jumelant transsexualité et urbanité. Elle a commissarié TRANS TIME, une exposition internationale d'artistes trans, présentée à Montréal (2014) et Paris (2016). Ianna s'est aussi mérité une exposition solo au Leslie & Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art, à New York au printemps 2016, et elle fait actuellement partie de la sélection du Elisabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art du Brooklyn Museum.

**OK LUCID!**

IANNA BOOK

Ianna Book is a multidisciplinary artist who lives and works in Montréal. She studied fine arts at Cégep du Vieux-Montréal and visual and media arts at Université du Québec à Montréal. She has worked as a graphic designer and editorial illustrator. Her works have been shown in many group exhibitions since 2001. In 2011, she presented her first work as a trans woman at Radical Queer Semaine. Throughout her transition period (2010-2013), she published *Trans Avenue*, a photographic essay linking transsexuality and the urban context. She curated TRANS TIME, an international exhibition of trans artists presented in Montréal (2014) and Paris (2016). Ianna was also given a solo exhibition at the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art in New York in spring 2016. Her work currently features in the Brooklyn Museum's Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art.



*Ok Lucid!*, 2015. Installation multimédia / multimedia  
installation, logo 61 x 20.3 cm + iPad.



OK Lucid! est une recherche esthétique dans laquelle j'explore les perceptions du public sur ma transsexualité par l'entremise d'un site de rencontre en ligne. Il s'agit d'un moment de lucidité. L'interaction prend forme dans l'espace de séduction par de nombreux messages reçus en tant que femme à priori cisgenre. L'expérience consiste par la suite à me dévoiler en tant que femme trans. Sur l'ensemble des hommes qui m'ont contactée : 20 % se sont montrés curieux, 10 % ont été confus, 10 % ont été séduits, 9 % ont été négatifs et 1 % ont eu d'autres réactions. Ce projet interactif donne l'heure juste sur la façon dont les hommes m'appréhendent et porte un regard plus général sur la conception sociale qu'ils se font de la femme. Afin de respecter l'anonymat, tous les noms présentés dans cette œuvre sont fictifs.

J'ai toujours eu envie de créer différents agencements visuels dans l'espace collectif pour susciter des réflexions. Ma recherche s'inscrit dans une esthétique critique remettant en question les normes du paysage et de l'immobilisme conservateur pour donner place à de nouveaux éléments culturels. En réaménageant le décor et divers aspects du spectacle, je pousse aussi le spectateur à se questionner sur ses propres conditions et à se rappeler qu'il est un acteur social pouvant progresser. Cette démarche prend tout son sens depuis que ma plus grande source d'inspiration et de motivation artistique réside dans ma condition transsexuelle. Effectivement, depuis que j'ai matérialisé mon état intérieur, je suis davantage motivée à créer, à exprimer différents sentiments liés à ma réalité non conventionnelle et à comprendre comment celle-ci s'inscrit dans le contexte social actuel. Cette expérience m'apporte une autre vision du monde, une vision que je souhaite partager en tant qu'artiste.

iannabook.com

*OK Lucid!* is an aesthetic study in which I explore the public perceptions of my transsexuality by means of an online dating site. This is a moment of lucidity. The interaction takes shape in sexually charged messages I received as a woman perceived as being cisgender. The experiment progressed when I disclosed myself as a transsexual woman. From the group of men that contacted me: 50% ceased responding, 20% were curious, 10% were confused, 10% were turned on, 9% responded negatively and 1% other. This interactive project gives an accurate picture of how men approach me and takes a more general look at the social understanding they have of women. To respect anonymity, all the names included in this work are fictional.

I have always felt the need to create thought-provoking visual arrangements in public spaces. My aesthetic research is centred on a critical appraisal of both the norms of the human landscape and the conservative status quo, opening the way to new cultural elements. It is by rearranging our surroundings and various aspects of the "spectacle" that I push the spectator to question their own conditions and remember they are a social actor able to progress. This approach came into its own as my transgender state became my greatest source of artistic inspiration and motivation. Indeed, ever since my inner state became an outer reality, I have been more motivated than ever to create, express various feelings related to my unconventional existence, and understand how it fits into the current social context. This experience makes me see the world in a new light, and as an artist, I want to share what I see.

iannabook.com

**VERNIS**

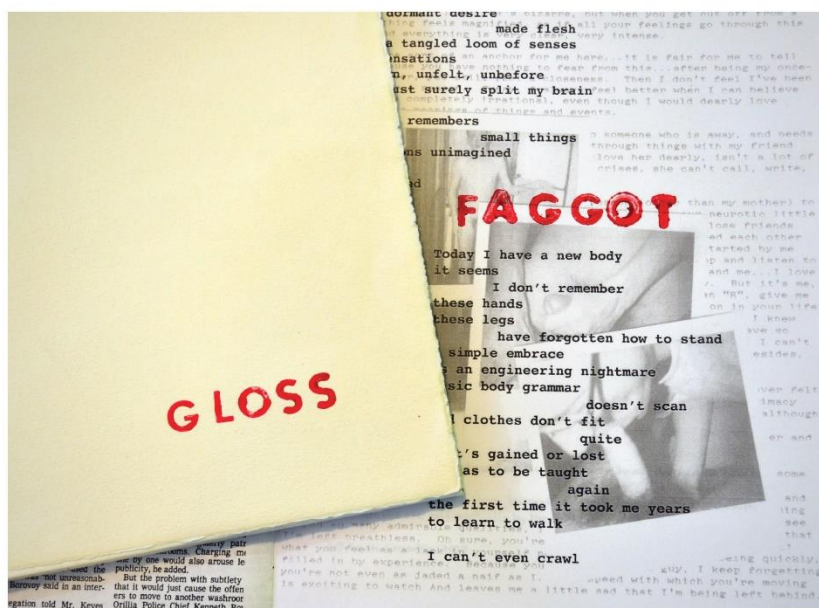
KEVIN CROMBIE

Artiste visuel et auteur, Kevin Crombie vit en région rurale au Québec. Il y élève des coqs. D'un milieu aisé et blanc, il a grandi dans une petite ville au centre de l'Ontario, puis il a déménagé en Alberta pour ses études secondaires. Il s'est lancé dans le militantisme queer à Toronto et à Halifax durant les années 1980 et 1990, avant de s'installer à Montréal où il a concentré son activisme dans ses livres d'artiste. Dans son œuvre, il aborde la construction de la masculinité, du désir et du pouvoir. Il aime le pénis.

**GLOSS**

KEVIN CROMBIE

Kevin Crombie is a visual artist and writer based in rural Quebec, where he raises roosters. He grew up white and middle class in a small, central Ontario town and moved to Alberta in high school. He threw himself into queer activism in Toronto and Halifax in the 1980s and 90s before moving to Montreal and channeling his activism through his bookwork. His work is concerned with constructions of masculinity, desire, and power. He likes dick.



*Gloss (Vernis)*, 2017. Livres d'artiste / artist book, 22.9 x 29.2 cm.

*Gloss* (Vernis) juxtapose un discours cautionné socialement et par l'État à propos de la sexualité marginalisée et un récit personnel, le mien, allant du rejet de soi à l'acceptation. Des collages de coupures de journaux révèlent les mécanismes sociaux qui confortent la conformité. Ces articles propagent continuellement des messages d'intolérance, appuyés par des menaces répétées de violence physique. Sur cet arrière-plan, des fragments de témoignages écrits sont plaqués : essais, poèmes, nouvelles, lettres ou pages de journal intime. Ces textes tracent un récit personnel teinté par la peur, la solitude, la souffrance ou des pensées suicidaires.

Mon œuvre interroge fondamentalement la question du texte et du récit. Initialement, j'ai choisi les livres d'artistes pour avoir un autre regard sur les textes que j'écrivais. Au début, j'explorais les limites de la construction de récit par les fragments, mais les dimensions tactile et spatiale des livres d'artistes m'ont permis quelque chose d'incroyablement plus riche qui allait au-delà de ce que j'avais pu ressentir simplement en écrivant. De manière générale, habituellement dans une juxtaposition multiple de couches, je place les fragments de textes et d'images pour qu'ils s'interrogent entre eux, puis, autre chose émerge produisant différents niveaux de signification.

J'ai découpé ces articles de journaux comme matériel de recherche à l'époque où j'écrivais des articles pour des magazines queer comme *Rites* à Toronto et *Gaezette* à Halifax. Je n'ai jamais réussi à les jeter. Ils marquent une période où j'étais très en colère. Feuilletter le dossier me remplit encore de rage. Tous les textes autobiographiques ont été rédigés à cette même époque. Le défi en les exposant est de permettre au jeune homme tourmenté qui les a écrits de s'exprimer avec sa voix imparfaite et de laisser le portrait final témoigner sans le qualifier ou l'excuser.

Le titre, *Gloss* (Vernis), est délibérément ambivalent. Il souligne que rien de ceci n'est faux ou que tout ceci peut l'être, ou du moins être trompeur. Une des intentions de cette œuvre est de remettre en cause le vernis du discours dominant sur l'histoire queer : nous sommes « respectables » maintenant, alors toutes les mauvaises choses doivent être oubliées. Les récits que nous nous fabriquons — même ceux qu'on ne fait que se chuchoter à soi-même — sont toujours vernis d'une façon ou d'une autre.

*Gloss* juxtaposes a State and socially sanctioned narrative about marginalized sexuality against a personal narrative arc, from self-rejection to self-acceptance. Collages of newspaper clippings are used to reveal broad social mechanisms that enforce conformity through persistent messages of intolerance, underscored by repeated threats of physical violence. Against this background are placed testimonial fragments of texts – essays, poems, short stories, letters and diary entries – that suggest a corresponding personal narrative of fear, loneliness, suffering and thoughts of suicide.

My work is fundamentally preoccupied by text and narrative. I initially started exploring artist books as another way of looking at the texts I was writing. At first, I explored the limits of constructing narratives out of fragments, but the tactile and spatial dimensions of artist books opened something incredibly rich that I never felt about the writing alone. In the most general way, I place fragments of text and images in a way that they interrogate each other, usually across multiple layers, and something emerges that produces other levels of meaning.

The newspaper clippings were collected as research material when I wrote regularly for queer magazines, such as *Rites* out of Toronto and the *Gaezette* in Halifax, and are representative of a period where I was particularly angry. I have never been able to bring myself to throw them away; flipping through the file still fills me with rage. All of the autobiographical texts are contemporaneous with the clippings. However, the challenge in curating them was to allow the emotionally tormented young man who wrote them to speak with his own flawed voice, and to allow the resulting portrait to testify on its own, without qualifiers and without apologies.

The title, *Gloss*, is deliberately ambivalent and insists that any or all of this may be untrue or at least misleading. One intent of the work is to challenge the mainstream's gloss on queer history: we're "respectable" now, so all of the bad stuff must be forgotten. The narratives that we stitch together – even the ones we only whisper to ourselves – are always gloss in some form or another.

## ET J'EN PASSE

ADDÉLI FALEF

Addéli Falef est une artiste française polyvalente dont les créations s'élaborent à travers de nombreuses disciplines. Elle peut donc utiliser l'écriture, l'illustration, la photo, la vidéo, le chant ou le théâtre physique pour matière première à son expression. Aujourd'hui, elle articule principalement ses projets autour de la problématique des stéréotypes à travers les médias dominants. Elle travaille avec l'association Lallab ([www.lallab.org](http://www.lallab.org)) dont le but est de faire entendre la parole des femmes musulmanes et, et réalise, en parallèle, un web-documentaire intitulé « Et j'en passe ». Celui-ci comprend une série de photographies artistiques et un recueil de paroles de travailleuses du sexe, dont une partie sera présentée dans le cadre de l'exposition *Témoigner pour Agir*.

## AND THAT'S NOT ALL

ADDÉLI FALEF

Addéli Falef is a versatile French artist whose creations stretch across multiple disciplines. She uses writing, illustration, photography, video, song and physical theatre as the raw materials for her expression. Today, she mainly articulates her projects around the question of stereotypes in the mainstream media. She works with the Lallab association ([www.lallab.org](http://www.lallab.org)), whose aim is to help amplify the voices of Muslim women. In parallel, she is producing a web documentary entitled 'Et j'en passe' (*And That's Not All*), which includes a series of artistic photographs and a collection featuring the words of men and women who do sex work. A sample of this project is presented in the *Témoigner pour Agir* exhibition.



*Et j'en passe (And That's Not All)*, 2017. Vidéo et photographie / Video & photography, 65 minutes, photos 40 x 60 cm chaque / each.



Je me nomme Addéli Falef et je ressemble la plupart du temps à une femme blanche d'une trentaine d'années. Je suis née en France, où il fait souvent beau, où on y mange très bien et où le Front national a concouru au second tour des présidentielles cette année.

Mes travaux se penchent sur un sujet central : en quoi les stéréotypes véhiculés par les médias dominants écorchent-ils la réalité de personnes concernées ? C'est en partant de ce questionnement que je suis allée à la rencontre des individu.e.s personnes particulièrement persécuté.e.s par les clichés du fait des représentations que l'on s'en fait : les travailleuses et travailleurs du sexe.

Il y a des lois qui font la nique aux voix des personnes qu'elles concernent. Une insolence vulgaire et pudibonde, un déni de grossir les traits, les courbes, de taire la parole des vivant.e.s. Les écrans dégueulent d'interventions de spécialistes, bouches faméliques, en ascèse du plus nourrissant : les témoignages des personnes concernées. Un exemple : les travailleuses et travailleurs du sexe du sexe. Leur voix à elle, à eux, on les leur a bien enfoncées dans leur gorge prétendument profonde, planquées aux quatre coins de la toile ou sous un journal de treize heures. Dires soigneusement évités, des fois qu'on comprendrait que les personnes publiques dont parlent les personnes connues sont des personnes. Le seul guide ici est assumé par le plus grand créateur de convictions sous vide : ce célèbre Fantasma.

Partie de ce constat, je suis donc allée rencontrer des personnes témoins de leur propre vie.

Pour les laisser gérer le curseur de leur intimité, vous ne trouverez pas d'intitulé sous leur visage. Sauf volonté de leur part, vous ne saurez donc pas qui fait quoi. Mais vous ne trouverez pas non plus de discours purement théoriques, tous s'appuient sur l'expérience d'une réalité. Les portraits sont le fruit d'une collaboration avec chaque participant.e. Fuyant les clichés ambiants, les images se concentrent sur la singularité de leur modèle. Enfin, les entretiens sont sans intervention de ma part, et sans temps imparti. Tous.tes répondent à un sujet donné en amont : déconstruire un stéréotype, subi ou constaté, sur les travailleuses et travailleurs du sexe.

lafalef.com

Avec la participation du Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée.

My name is Addéli Falef and most of the time I look like a white woman in her thirties. I was born in France, where the weather is often nice, where we eat very well and where the Front national, a far-right populist and nationalist political party, ran in the second round of the presidential election this year.

My work looks at one central theme: the ways in which the dominant media stereotypes are cut off from the realities of those people they are representing. From that point on, I reached out and met with individuals who are particularly persecuted by the clichéd ideas people hold about them: sex workers

Some laws screw people out of their voices. A vulgar and prudish insolence, a denial that exaggerates the lines, the curves, that silences living people's speech. Our screens are bursting with specialists making statements out of mouths that are starved for that which is most nourishing: the stories of the people concerned. An example: male and female sex workers. Their voices have been shoved far back down their own supposedly bottomless throats, buried on the margins of the canvas or on daytime TV news. Carefully avoided, for fear that we might learn that these public women and men that well-known people talk about are in fact people themselves. The only guidance here is provided by the greatest creator of baseless convictions: pure fantasy.

With this observation as a starting point, I went to meet with individuals who are witnesses to their own lives.

To let them control the extent of their intimacy, you will find no titles under their faces. You will not know who does what unless they chose to tell. But you will also not find a purely theoretical discourse; all of this rests on lived experience. The portraits are the result of a collaboration with each participant. Avoiding common clichés, the images focus on the singularity of the models. Lastly, the interviews took place with no intervention on my part, and without a set time frame. Everyone responded to a topic provided ahead of time: deconstructing an experienced or observed stereotype about sex workers.

lafalef.com

With the support of the Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée.

**COMPTE-MOI ET PRÉOCCUPATION  
CROISSANTE (POUR MA FILLE)**

SHAN KELLEY

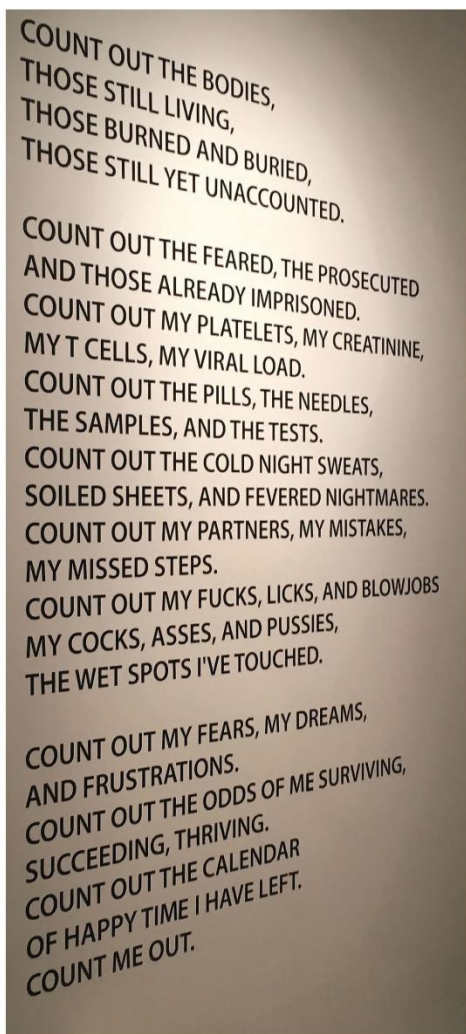
Shan Kelley a été élevé en Alberta, la prairie derrière les montagnes Rocheuses, terres du pétrole et du bœuf canadiens. Artiste membre de Visual AIDS, il a présenté ses œuvres au Canada, aux États-Unis et en Espagne. Il combine plusieurs médiums dans sa pratique artistique en utilisant le texte, la photographie et la peinture. Sa démarche s'inscrit quelque part dans l'intersection glissante entre l'art et le militantisme. Kelley a une fascination pour le langage et la façon dont l'identité, le risque, la santé, le corps et le sentiment d'appartenance sont déconstruits, créés et exposés.

**COUNT ME OUT AND GROWING  
CONCERN (TO MY DAUGHTER)**

SHAN KELLEY

Shan Kelley was raised in Alberta, the rocky mountain prairie backdrop of Canada's beef and petroleum heartland. A Visual AIDS artist member, he has shown work in Canada, the USA, and Spain. His mixed medium practice - which uses text, photography, and painting - sits somewhere amidst the slippery intersections between art and activism. Kelley has a fascination for language, and the manner in which identity, risk, health, body, and belonging are deconstructed, created, and curated.





#### COMPTE-MOI

COMPTE LES CORPS  
CEUX ENCORE VIVANTS,  
CEUX BRÛLÉS ET ENTERRÉS,  
CEUX QUI N'ONT PAS ENCORE ÉTÉ RETROUVÉS.

COMPTE LES CRAINTS, LES POURSUIVIS EN JUSTICE,  
ET CEUX QUI SONT DÉJÀ EN PRISON.  
COMPTE MES PLAQUETTES, MA CRÉATININE,  
MES CELLULES CD4, MA CHARGE VIRALE.  
COMPTE MES PILULES, MES AIGUILLES,  
MES ÉCHANTILLONS ET MES TESTS.  
COMPTE LES SUEURS FROIDES DANS LA NUIT,  
LES DRAPS SOUILLÉS, LES CAUCHEMARS ENFIÉVRÉS.  
COMPTE MES PARTENAIRES, MES ERREURS,  
MES TRÉBUCHEMENTS.  
COMPTE MES BAISES, MES COUPS DE LANGUE ET  
MES PIPES,  
MES QUEUE, MES CULS ET MES CHATTES,  
LES ENDROITS HUMIDES QUE J'AI TOUCHÉS.

COMPTE MES PEURS, MES RÊVES,  
ET FRUSTRATIONS.  
COMPTE MES CHANCES DE SURVIE,  
DE SUCCÈS, DE MIEUX-ÊTRE.  
COMPTE LE CALENDRIER  
DES MOMENTS DE BONHEUR QU'IL ME RESTE.  
COMPTE-MOI.

*Count Me Out (Compte-moi)*, 2014. Texte /  
text, 152 x 244 cm.



*Growing Concern [To My Daughter] (Préoccupation croissante [Pour ma fille.]), 2013. Photographie / photography, 61 x 91.4 cm.*

Après avoir été diagnostiqué séropositif en 2009, j'ai été de plus en plus inspiré à trouver ma voix dans la réalité contextuelle de la maladie et de l'adversité. J'ai poussé l'utilisation de l'art comme forme d'action contre l'apathie et la capitulation. Pour cette exposition, je présente deux œuvres *Count me Out* (Compte-moi) et la lettre à ma fille qui accompagne *Growing Concern* (Préoccupation croissante). Ci-dessous, un extrait de cette lettre.

Extrait de *Pour ma fille* :

Tu as été ma muse bien avant ta naissance. Tu as été ma lumière et mon espoir.

Même si je ne souhaite pas te remettre le fardeau de ce combat, tu portes avec toi l'héritage de nos vies et de notre bataille. Tu es faite de mon sang et tu baignes dans mon expérience. Tu es ma succession, ma vengeance, ma justice.

Tu seras élevée comme une guerrière apatride dans le combat contre les systèmes qui ont créé des conditions propices à la propagation du SIDA. Peut-être que je rêve une fois de plus, mais il n'y a pas si longtemps, tu n'étais qu'un rêve que je portais.

shankelley.com

After an HIV+ diagnosis in 2009, I became increasingly inspired to find my voice within the context of disease and adversity. I pushed forward using art as action against apathy or surrender. For this exhibition I present two works: *Count Me Out* and the letter to my daughter that accompanies the piece called *Growing Concern*.

Excerpt from *To My Daughter*:

You've been my muse since before you were born. You've been my light, and my hope.

Although I don't wish upon you the burden of ongoing struggle, you carry with you the inheritance of our lives, and our battle. You're made of my blood, and you're soaked with my experience.

You are my legacy, my vengeance, my justice.

You will be raised a stateless warrior in the fight against the systems that created conditions for AIDS to flourish. Maybe I'm just dreaming once again, but not so long ago, you were only just a dream I held.

shankelley.com

## ANCÊTRES

INS A KROMMINGA

Activiste intersexe, artiste en art visuel et responsable de productions culturelles, Ins A Kromminga détient une maîtrise en beaux-arts de l'Université Tulane à la Nouvelle-Orléans. Depuis 2000, sa pratique artistique et ses œuvres combinent son militantisme et sa réflexion sur la culture pour dénoncer le traitement réservé aux personnes intersexes dans la société en Allemagne et ailleurs. Ses œuvres ont été exposées dans plusieurs pays. Ins a fondé l'Organisation Intersex International Europe (OII Europe) et OII Allemagne, en plus d'être membre du conseil exécutif des deux organismes qui siègent à Berlin en Allemagne.

## ANCESTORS

INS A KROMMINGA

Ins A Kromminga is an intersex activist, visual artist and cultural producer, and holds a Master of Fine Arts from Tulane University, New Orleans. Since 2000, their art practice and works have combined awareness-raising and cultural reflection, to address the social treatment of intersex people in Germany and abroad. Their work has been shown internationally. Ins is a founding and Executive Board Member of Organisation Intersex International Europe (OII Europe) and OII Germany, both based in Berlin, Germany.



*Ancestors (Ancêtres)*, 2017. Installation: dessin in situ et travaux sur papier / in situ drawing and works on paper 900 x 300 cm.

Mon art ne s'arrête pas aux sphères personnelles. J'exprime des préoccupations politiques au sujet de la diversité des corps, de la représentation mentale, de l'acception des personnes intersexes et de leur droit à l'égalité et à l'autodétermination émancipatrice. Les représentations historiques, les références du domaine médical et des sciences naturelles, les images dans les magazines, les bandes dessinées, l'univers visuel des films, la science-fiction et la culture de tous les jours me servent d'inspiration dans mon œuvre.

Mes dessins sont souvent commencés au crayon, à l'extérieur de mon atelier, et je les termine aux crayons de couleur, à l'encre ou à l'aquarelle dans mon studio. Je travaille habituellement sur plusieurs créations en même temps dans une pratique artistique ouverte non hiérarchique qui permet des rétroactions et des références croisées dans la création visuelle et narrative de mes œuvres. Ces œuvres sur papier méticuleusement dessinées, et souvent de petit format, offrent une intimité qui demande une observation de près. La distance réduite entre l'œuvre et le public permet à celui-ci de repérer et de décrypter mes textes qui accompagnent, commentent ou subvertissent mes images poétiques, fantastiques, magiques et implicitement brutales d'êtres à plusieurs têtes, d'anges mutants, d'extraterrestres, de monstres, de créatures, de formes hybrides entre humains et animaux et d'hermaphrodites.

Pour cette installation, j'ai disposé mes dessins par groupes sur le mur de la galerie dans une œuvre étendue. Ce genre de composition permet la découverte de nouveaux liens narratifs se tissant entre les petites œuvres individuelles de matière intime pour s'inscrire dans un contexte plus large. Les traits esquissés et inachevés des dessins font intégralement partie de l'œuvre — un commentaire sur les changements sociaux et une stratégie contre la clarification, la standardisation et la fixation.

Les normes sont celles du discours dominant qui régularise la « normalité » et la célèbre aussi, en la validant par une série infinie de répétitions. Le langage et l'art visuel peuvent être des outils pour raconter des histoires différentes, créant ainsi un espace d'affirmation de soi pour des histoires d'hermaphrodites encore jamais exposées. En partageant nos témoignages, nous ne sommes plus invisibles et abjects, mais plutôt, je l'espère, reconnus comme faisant partie du spectre de l'humain.

[abject.de](http://abject.de)

Avec la participation du Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen.

My work goes beyond the personal sphere and pursues political concern of body diversity, the visualization and acceptance of intersex people, the right to equality and emancipatory self-determination. Historical representations, sources from the medical and natural sciences, imagery from magazines, comics, the visual worlds of films, science fiction, and everyday culture serve as inspirations and sources for my work.

My drawings are often started in pencil out of the studio, and later completed in the studio with coloured pencils, ink wash, and watercolour. I usually work on several pieces at the same time as a type of open, un-hierarchical process, which allows for feedback and cross-referencing within the design process and narrative of the works. These delicately drawn, and often small-scale, works on paper offer an intimacy that requires close observation. This close-up view allows the observer to find and decipher my integrated texts, which accompany, comment or subvert my poetic, fantastic, magical and implicitly brutal images of multi-headed beings, mutated angels, extraterrestrials, monsters, freaks, hybrid forms between humans, animals, hermaphrodites.

For this installation, I have arranged the drawings in groups on the gallery wall within an expanded drawing. This type of composition allows for the discovery of new narrative connections that moves between the smaller individual works of private content toward an expanded context. The sketched and unfinished qualities of the works are an integral part of the piece – a comment on social change and an important strategy against disambiguation, standardization, and fixation.

Norms are those of the mainstream story-telling, used to regulate and to celebrate the 'normal', validated through endless repetition. Language and visual art can be tools to tell different narratives, thus creating empowering spaces for yet untold 'Hermstories'. By sharing our testimonials, we are no longer invisible and abject, but rather, hopefully, and acknowledged as part of the human spectrum.

[abject.de](http://abject.de)

With financial support from the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen.



### **DIALOGUE (EN MANGEANT LE RUBAN) ET L'HOMME ANATOMIQUE**

RICHARD SAWDON SMITH

Artiste britannique primé de réputation internationale, le professeur Richard Sawdon Smith est connu pour ses photographies et ses autoportraits. Dans sa démarche créatrice, il utilise aussi la vidéo, le film, la performance, l'écriture, le dessin, l'impression, le tatouage sur lui-même et, plus récemment, la réalité virtuelle. Son art peut être décrit comme autobiographique puisque ses œuvres abordent la perspective d'exister en tant que personne gaie séropositive. Il est le Doyen de la Faculté des arts et médias à la Norwich University of the Arts au Royaume-Uni. Ses photographies et ses écrits ont été largement publiés.

### **DIALOGUE (EATING THE RIBBON) AND THE ANATOMICAL MAN**

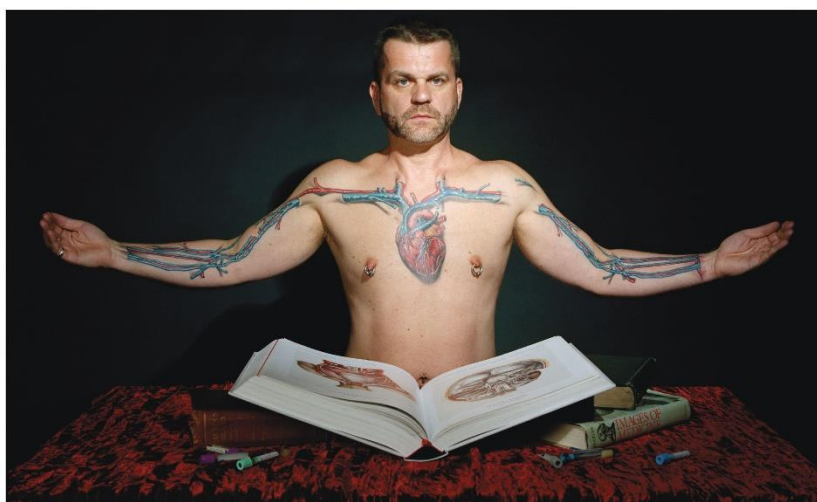
RICHARD SAWDON SMITH

As an internationally exhibiting and award-winning British artist, much of Professor Richard Sawdon Smith's artwork is photographic self-portraiture. His practice also includes video, film, performance, writing, drawing, print, being tattooed and most recently virtual reality. His practice could be described as autobiographical as he creates work that articulates a position of living in the world as a HIV+ gay person. He is Dean of Arts & Media at Norwich University of the Arts, UK. His photographs and writing are widely published.



*Dialogue [eating the red ribbon] (Dialogue [en mangeant le ruban]), 2007, Épreuves Giclée Prints, Triptyque / Triptych : 41 x 51.75 cm chaque / each.*





*The Anatomical Man (L'homme anatomique)*, 2009.  
Épreuves Giclée Prints, Triptyque : gauche et droite / left  
& right 50.8 x 33, centre 55.1 x 33 cm.

Pour l'exposition, je présente deux triptyques de différentes œuvres ou, comme je préfère les appeler, différentes « personas ». Le premier triptyque, *Dialogue [Eating the Ribbon]* (En mangeant le ruban), a été créé en 2007 en collaboration avec un collègue photographe américain séropositif, Albert J. Wynn. Cette photographie s'inscrit dans mon travail avant que je sois tatoué et la persona s'appelle *The Damaged Narcissist* (Le narcissiste brisé). La seconde série d'images s'intitule *The Anatomical Man [Triptych]* (L'homme anatomique [triptyque]) : et cette persona porte le même nom.

Puisque pour plusieurs personnes séropositives la vie est coupée par un avant et après diagnostic, le changement de la perception de soi est fondamental. Ce n'est pas une perception négative, mais une nouvelle perspective sur notre identité et jusqu'à un certain point sur notre subjectivité – la manière dont on connaît, voit et sent notre corps. J'ai développé une série d'autoportraits qui explorent cette nouvelle identité réformatrice et émergente pour contrôler les préoccupations liées à une maladie, décrypter cette maladie et ce corps possiblement déjà abîmé, en plus de donner un sens à ce virus invisible à l'œil nu. Le ruban rouge a été un motif récurrent de mon œuvre, autant en souvenir de ceux qui sont morts du SIDA que pour critiquer la récupération et l'institutionnalisation de ce symbole par des organismes et des entreprises. C'est en effet un geste facile manquant probablement de sincérité pour s'afficher comme tenant à la cause. Le thème du ruban interroge aussi cette tendance à ne définir une personne que par sa maladie.

Quand je compare ma vie avant et après mon tatouage, il s'est opéré un autre changement fondamental presque aussi important qu'au moment du diagnostic du VIH : non seulement ma perception de moi-même n'est plus la même, mais le regard des autres sur moi non plus. Depuis 1994, je fais des recherches sur la procédure des tests sanguins, un perçage de peau essentiel, mais toujours intrusif, qui m'a inspiré ce projet démarré en 2009. Le dessin anatomique de mes veines et de mes artères a été tatoué sur ma peau : un processus similaire à celui de la piqûre. L'œuvre crée un lien entre les marques permanentes sur mon corps par le dessin du sang tatoué et une incurable maladie transmise par le sang faisant basculer l'interne et l'externe à la surface de ma peau.

richardsawdonsmith.com

For this exhibition, I present two triptychs from different bodies of work, or as I prefer to call them 'personas'. The first triptych *Dialogue (Eating the Red Ribbon)* was made in 2007, in collaboration with a fellow HIV+ American photographer Albert J. Wynn, and part of a wider body of work pre-tattoos entitled *The Damaged Narcissist*. The second set of images, called *The Anatomical Man (Triptych)*, 2009, is from the post-tattooed persona of the same name.

Like many other HIV+ people, life can often be divided in to pre- and post-diagnosis so fundamental is the shift in perception of ourselves. This isn't a negative but a new perspective on our identity and to a certain extent our subjectivity – how we know, see, feel our body. I developed a series of self-portraits that explore this reforming and emerging new identity. To control one's concerns about an illness, to decipher this diseased and once potentially damaged body and make sense of a virus invisible to the naked eye. The red ribbon has been a recurring motif in the work, as much a remembrance to those who have died of AIDS as it is a critique of how this symbol has been institutionalized and appropriated too as a potentially insincere shorthand for institutions and businesses to appear as caring, while at the same time questions the definition of a person solely by their illness.

Now I look at my life pre- and post-tattoo as it has created another fundamental shift not only in my perception of self, almost as much as the HIV diagnosis but how others perceive me as well. Since 1994, I have been documenting the blood test process, a necessary yet still intrusive skin piercing procedure, which led to a project started in 2009 where the anatomical drawings of veins and arteries were tattooed onto my skin, a similar process using a needle. The work creates a relationship between the permanent marking of the body by a process that draws blood and an incurable illness transmitted through blood, collapsing the internal and external on to the surface of the skin.

richardsawdonsmith.com

## COMME LE SON EST AGRÉABLE

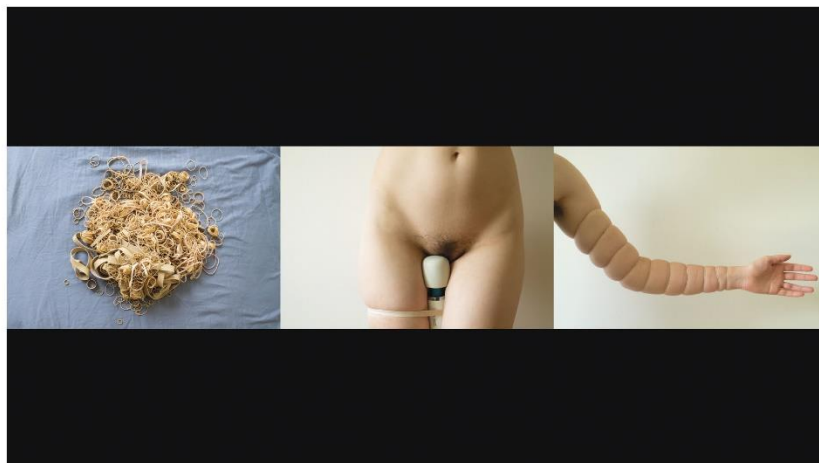
GRACE VAN NESS

Grace Van Ness est pornographe et artiste multimédia avec une expérience dans le film documentaire expérimental et la photographie. Avec un intérêt particulier pour l'intimité, la connectivité et la justice sociale, elle cherche à explorer des façons de raconter « nos » histoires, en mélangeant le documentaire avec les mémoires et le porno. Ses œuvres ont été diffusées dans des publications comme Playboy, sur le web et dans des festivals, et ont reçu de nombreux prix pour le montage vidéo et le design graphique. Elle est directrice artistique de Failed Films, une initiative visant à soutenir les artistes locaux.

## HOW SWEET THE SOUND

GRACE VAN NESS

Grace Van Ness is a pornographer and multimedia artist with a background in experimental documentary film and photography. With a particular interest in intimacy, connectedness, and social justice, she seeks to explore the ways we tell "our" own stories, blending documentary with memoir with porn. Her work has appeared in a number of film festivals and publications, winning several awards. She serves as the artistic director of Failed Films, an art and film event aiming to support local artists.



*How Sweet the Sound (Comme le son est agréable)*, 2017.  
Video Installation Vidéo, 23 minutes, 304 x 427 cm.

Je m'appelle Grace. Comme dans *Amazing Grace*, la chanson que tous s'empressent de nommer au moment des présentations<sup>7</sup>. Effectivement, bébé, cette mélodie s'est taillée une place dans chaque moment éveillé ou endormi de ma routine de vie structurée. En me couchant pour une sieste, en m'éveillant d'une sieste, en me donnant le sein, en me baignant, ma mère remontait la poignée de ma petite boîte à musique au peigne métallique, avec ma photo dessus, et la paix s'en émanait en tintant.

Je m'appelle Grace. Comme dans : « As-tu besoin qu'on ajuste ces cordes, Grace ? », la question de chaque dominant ou dominatrice à leur soumis ou soumise. Parler en simultané de mon érotisme et de mon enfance est souvent jugé comme choquant et pervers – un signe évident d'un passé troublé. « Où ai-je fait une erreur ? » se demande maintenant ma mère.

Oui, ces Graces ne sont pas différentes. Je suis un individu singulier dont l'existence d'un jour à l'autre développe le lien entre mon expérience en tant qu'enfant et mon expression en tant qu'adulte. Présumer que les deux ne peuvent pas coexister simultanément est nier l'entière de ma personne. Parce que mon travail est le sexe ? Parce que mon travail est érotique ? La stigmatisation implique nécessairement d'avoir échoué à reconnaître l'être dans son tout, sa profondeur et sa complexité humaine. Il devient bien plus difficile de criminaliser l'existence de ceux qui sont vus dans leur totalité.

Ainsi, dans cette plénitude, ce désordre et ces nombreuses couches, je m'offre moi et mon expérience en réponse à la stigmatisation. La base : une présentation visuelle de plaisir et de souffrance qui est en simultané un acte de bienveillance envers soi et de violence auto-infligée. Y est superposée une conversation audio intime enregistrée au sujet de la découverte accidentelle de ma pornographie par ma mère — aussi un moment de bienveillance envers soi et de violence auto-infligée. Par-dessus, le pincement délicat, mais d'une forte résonance, de la mélodie d'*Amazing Grace*, interprétée à la bande élastique. Chaque couche paraît détachée l'une de l'autre, mais inévitablement unifiée.

Le résultat de cette installation est un rejet viscéral du manque d'ouverture d'esprit, de la perception trop étroite qu'on a des personnes qui exercent le travail du sexe et envers la porno, ainsi que la démonstration de l'entière de ceux et celles dont la sexualité est publiquement exposée et jugée. Nous n'entrons pas dans la boîte à « choses sexuelles » que vous gardez sous le lit. Nous aussi avons déjà été des enfants. Nous aussi sommes des personnes aujourd'hui. Et nos voix, nos expériences, nos témoignages — dans toutes leurs richesses et leurs diversités — méritent d'être entendus.

gracevanness.squarespace.com

NOTE :

[7] Le célèbre cantique chrétien, *Amazing Grace*, est l'une des chansons anglophones les plus populaires du répertoire états-unien.

My name is Grace. As in "Amazing Grace," the song that everyone makes a pun about when we're introduced. And indeed, as a baby, this melody wound its way through every waking and sleeping routine of my structured little life. Laying down for a nap, waking from a nap, nursing, bathing, my mother would crank the handle of the tiny steel comb music box with my picture on the face and peace would come tinkling out.

My name is Grace. As in, "Do you need those ropes adjusted for you, Grace?" the question that every practiced dominant asks their submissive. To speak simultaneously of my kinkiness and my childhood is often perceived as shocking, perverted – a clear indication of a troubled past. "Where did I go wrong?" my mother now wonders.

Yet, these Graces are no different. I am a singular individual, whose existence from day to day forms the connection between my experience as a child and my expression as an adult. To presume that the two cannot exist simultaneously is to deny my complete personhood. Because my work is sex? Because my sex is kinky? Stigmatization, necessarily, requires a failure to acknowledge wholeness, deepness, and a human complexity. It becomes much more difficult to criminalize the existence of those who are fully seen.

Thus, in its fullness, its messiness, and its many layers, I offer myself and my experience as an answer to this stigma. The base: a visual display of pleasure and pain that is simultaneously self-care and self-harm. This is layered underneath an intimate, audio recorded conversation about my mother's accidental discovery of my porn. Atop, plinking lightly but with driving force, is the rubber-band-snapped melody of "Amazing Grace." Each layer seemingly disjointed, but necessarily unified.

The result seeks to viscerally expel the narrow, sensationalized perception of sex workers and kink, demonstrating the wholeness of those whose sexuality is publicly witnessed and judged. We do not fit neatly into the box under your bed labeled "sex stuff." We, too, were children once. We, too, are people now. And our voices, our experiences, our testimonials – in all of their richness, diversity, and complexity – deserve to be heard.

gracevanness.squarespace.com

**Projets d'art  
communautaire et  
art engagé**

**Community Art  
Works and Socially  
Engaged Art**



## MON CORPS, MON HISTOIRE

COLLECTIF DE FEMMES VIVANT AVEC LE VIH

Dans le cadre d'un projet de recherche impliquant des professeures d'université et un collectif des femmes vivant avec le VIH, le recours à des ateliers d'art visuel a permis à des femmes vivant avec le VIH de témoigner de leurs expériences avec les médicaments antirétroviraux et leurs effets secondaires.<sup>8</sup> La cartographie corporelle est une approche connue dans le domaine du VIH pour recueillir des témoignages par le biais de créations artistiques. Toutefois, elle demeure sous-utilisée.

Nous avons organisé deux ateliers de cartographie corporelle, à Toronto et à Ottawa. Chaque atelier s'est déroulé sur deux jours. La première journée avait pour but de créer la cartographie corporelle et la deuxième de permettre à chaque femme de présenter son œuvre et de raconter son histoire.

Chaque cartographie corporelle raconte une histoire particulière en faisant ressortir les enjeux, défis et difficultés associés à la prise des antirétroviraux. Le processus de création permet aux femmes de livrer un témoignage autrement – non seulement en faisant appel à leur côté artistique, mais aussi en proposant une autre façon de raconter son histoire et de faire valoir son expérience en tant que femme vivant avec le VIH.

Les quatre cartographies corporelles exposées ont été réalisées par des femmes aux parcours différents, mais tout de même semblables. Ces cartographies nous permettent de comprendre la trajectoire de ces quatre femmes : d'où elles viennent (les pieds), quelles sont leurs aspirations (la tête), quel est leur cheminement (chemin rattachant les pieds à la tête), et quelle est leur expérience avec les effets secondaires des antirétroviraux (corps). On constate que les effets secondaires ne sont, pour elles, qu'une composante de leur histoire personnelle. Une composante importante, qui doit être située dans un contexte plus large pour être comprise, entendue. Nous espérons qu'en regardant ces cartographies, le public comprendra, à travers les images, couleurs, représentations et symboles, comment les effets secondaires des antirétroviraux affectent bon nombre de personnes vivant avec le VIH.

icwglobal.org  
marilougagnon.com

### NOTE

[8] La recherche a été subventionnée par le Women's College Hospital (Women's xChange funding competition).

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## MY BODY, MY STORY

COLLECTIVE OF WOMEN LIVING WITH HIV

As part of a research project involving university professors and a collective of women living with HIV, visual arts workshops gave women the opportunity to share their experiences with antiretroviral medications and their side effects.<sup>8</sup> Body mapping is a well-known approach in the field of HIV for gathering stories through artistic creation. However, it remains under-used.

We organized two body mapping workshops, one in Toronto and one in Ottawa; each workshop took place over two days. The first day aimed to create the body map, and the second day provided space for each woman to present her work and tell her story.

Each body map tells a specific story, highlighting the issues, challenges and difficulties associated with taking antiretrovirals.

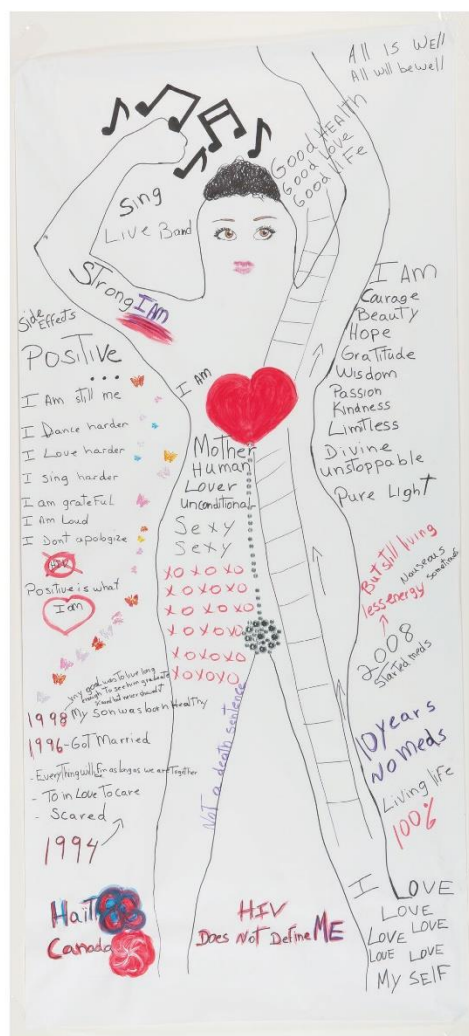
The creation process allowed women to tell their stories in another way, not only drawing on their artistic side, but also by proposing an alternative way for them to tell their stories and put forth their experience as women living with HIV.

The four body maps on display were created by women with different life experiences that nonetheless share similarities. These maps help us understand these four women's trajectories: where they come from (the feet), what their aspirations are (the head), what their path has been (the path connecting the feet to the head), and what their experience has been with the side effects of antiretrovirals (the body). We can see that the side effects themselves are only one component of their personal stories—albeit a major component, it must be situated in a larger context to be understood and heard. We hope that by looking at these body maps, the public will understand, through the images, colours, representations and symbols, how the side effects of antiretrovirals affect people living with HIV.

icwglobal.org  
marilougagnon.com

### NOTE :

[8] The study was subsidized by the Women's College Hospital (Women's xChange funding competition).



*Mon corps, mon histoire (My Body, My Story)*,  
2016. Dessin multimédia / multimedia drawing,  
121.9 x 182.9 cm chaque / each.



## TERRITOIRE DE MON CORPS

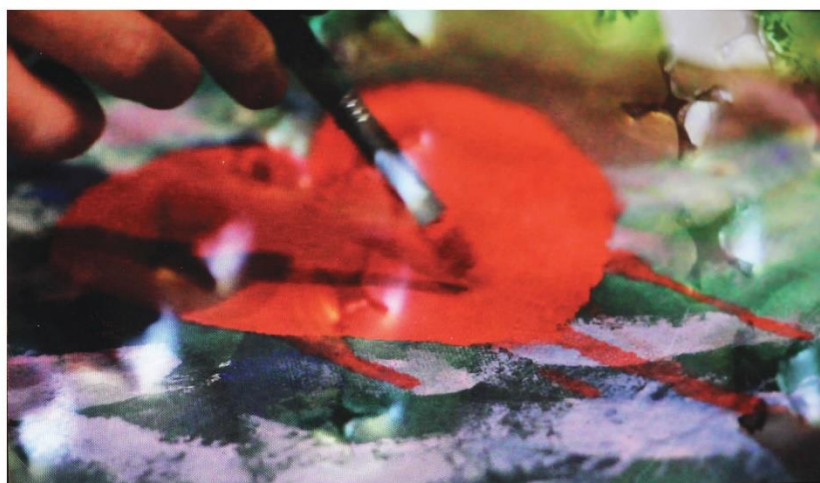
ARMHER

En partenariat avec Sex Workers Advisory Network Sudbury (SWANS) et l'organisme Myths and Mirrors, le projet d'art communautaire ArmHer raconte les histoires de femmes et de leurs expériences dans l'industrie du sexe. Par le biais de performances, de films, d'installations et d'ateliers interactifs avec le public, ce projet vise à questionner sans détour les obstacles à la protection et à la réduction des risques. Qui est protégé ? Qui ne l'est pas ? Et, pourquoi ?

## LAND OF MY BODY

ARMHER

In partnership with Sex Workers Advisory Network Sudbury [SWANS] and Myths and Mirrors Community Arts, Project ArmHer tells the stories of women with lived experience in the sex industry through performance, film, installation and audience engaged workshops. ArmHer is a community art that aims to boldly question barriers to protection and to harm reduction: who is protected? who is not? and why?



*Land of My Body (Territoire de mon corps)*, 2017.  
Installation multimédia / multimedia installation, 5:52  
minutes, 243 x 243 cm.

Les créatrices et l'équipe artistique de Project ArmHer ont travaillé ensemble pour concevoir cette œuvre en portant une attention particulière au processus de sensibilisation dans la création et la réalisation et par l'écoute attentive de ses voix courageuses dans une attitude très réceptive. Cette volonté approfondissait l'idée que la violence sexuelle concerne tout le monde.

Les créatrices de Project ArmHer et l'équipe facilitatrice présentent dans cette exposition une installation multimédia colorée et puissante composée de moulages peints et de sculptures modelées, d'art textile et de vidéo. Des corps de femmes émergent dans une cérémonie avec la terre, création de sacré et de mouvement. Notre public est invité à participer à cette cérémonie révérencieuse avec l'eau, source de vie, présente dans nos corps et nos terres en s'asseyant dans le cercle sacré pour entrer en contact avec les formes immobiles de notre paysage anthropomorphisé et vivre l'expérience des mots et des images de notre film *The Land Of My Body* enfoncé dans le lac/eau que la cérémonie entoure.

Cette œuvre parle de liens sacrés inextricables que nous avons avec la terre, dans nos corps et les cicatrices laissées par la violence et la résilience de nos esprits et de nos formes matérielles. L'installation est née d'un besoin de revendication, de guérison et de communauté et de l'expérience de fragmentation de nos êtres dans nos vies et notre travail, tout en soulignant notre lien perdu avec la terre. Ensemble, nous revendiquons puissamment notre présence dans tous les éléments liés à nos vies et à notre travail. Nous ne sommes pas responsables des violences sur notre territoire.

Les créatrices de Project ArmHer :

Tam-Tam B  
Marie Pollock  
T.S.  
Susie Carrier  
Kathy S.  
Anne Dutrisac  
Kayla Closs  
Shelly Grigg  
Ally Wood  
Carrie S.  
Tammy D.

L'équipe artistique du Project ArmHer :

La fondatrice de SWANS : Tracy Gregory  
L'artiste en chef : Sarah King Gold  
La scénariste : Sarah Gartshore  
La spécialiste de la production multimédia : Cait Mitchell

[mythsandmirrors.org/portfolio/project-armher/](https://mythsandmirrors.org/portfolio/project-armher/)

The Armher Collective, ArmHer Creators, the Artistic team and others, have worked together to uniquely develop a body of work using profoundly conscious processes of creation, consultation and production. We draw on courageous voicing, deep listening and active responsiveness that each raise the idea that sexual violence is everyone's concern.

In this exhibit, a colourful and powerful multimedia installation comprised of painted casted and hand formed sculpture, textile art and video. Here female bodies emerge in ceremony with each other and the land, creating a sacred and dynamic. Our audience is invited to share in reverent ceremony with the life giving water present in our bodies and lands, to sit within the sacred circle in order to connect with the still forms of our anthropomorphized landscape and experience the words and imagery of our film "The Land of My Body" embedded into the lake/water that the ceremony surrounds.

This work speaks to the inextricable sacred ties we feel to the earth and within our bodies, the scars left by violence and the resilience of both our spirits and our earthly forms. This installation is born out of a longing for reclamation, healing and community, the experience of the fragmentation of our Selves in our lives and work, and our lost connection to the land. Together we powerfully demand our presence in all things related to our lives and our work. We are not responsible for any violence that has been visited on our lands.

Project ArmHer Creators:

Tam-Tam B  
Marie Pollock  
T.S.  
Susie Carrier  
Kathy S.  
Anne Dutrisac  
Kayla Closs  
Shelly Grigg  
Ally Wood  
Carrie S.  
Tammy D.

Project ArmHer Artistic Team:

SWANS Founder: Tracy Gregory  
Lead Visual Artist: Sarah King Gold  
Film Script: Sarah Gartshore  
Media Artist: Cait Mitchell

[mythsandmirrors.org/portfolio/project-armher/](https://mythsandmirrors.org/portfolio/project-armher/)

## Programmation

**29 NOVEMBRE 2017 AU 21 JANVIER 2018**  
**MONTREAL**

### **Mercredi 29 novembre 2017**

17h00 à 19h00

#### **VERNISSAGE**

Ouverture officielle de l'exposition et lancement du catalogue, suivie d'une réception.

**Maison de la Culture Frontenac, Studio 1.**

### **Samedi 2 décembre 2017**

13h00 à 14h45

#### **VISITE COMMENTÉE SUIVIE D'UN ATELIER DE CRÉATION**

Visite commentée de l'exposition permettant des échanges autour des messages proposés par les œuvres exposées. Cette visite sera suivie d'un atelier de création avec une artiste médiatrice à la Bibliothèque Frontenac.

**Maison de la Culture Frontenac, Studio 1.**

15h00 à 16h30

#### **CONFÉRENCE D'OUVERTURE**

***Immersion dans le corps séropositif, politique et représentation: une perspective personnelle*** avec Richard Sawdon Smith (Norwich, Royaume Uni)

Témoignant de sa propre histoire à travers des autoportraits photographiques, Richard Sawdon Smith présentera des œuvres récentes qui permettent aux publics, par le biais d'une technologie de réalité virtuelle, de voyager à travers son corps séropositif dans l'objectif de contrer l'un des plus importants enjeux auxquels font face les personnes séropositives : la stigmatisation.

**Maison de la Culture Frontenac, Salle de spectacle.**

### **Mercredi 6 décembre 2017**

17h30 à 19h00

#### **ACTIVITÉ À LA BIBLIOTHÈQUE**

***La réalité LGBT*** avec des bénévoles du GRIS-Montréal  
Échange avec des personnes issues des communautés LGBTQ afin de mieux comprendre leurs réalités et défaire des préjugés.

**Bibliothèque Frontenac.**

### **Jedi 7 décembre 2017**

17h30 à 19h00

#### **LANCEMENT DE LIVRE**

***Le témoignage sexuel et intime, un levier de changement social ?***

Cet ouvrage collectif, dirigé par la professeure Maria Nengeh Mensah, réunit des textes qui mobilisent des savoirs scientifiques et du terrain ainsi que des extraits d'entrevues menées avec des personnes ayant témoigné publiquement qui sont issues des communautés sexuelles et de genres au Québec. Les auteurs, provenant de milieux variés, exposent les jalons théoriques et méthodologiques du récit personnel et intime comme ceux d'un important levier de changement social.

**UQAM, Salle DS-1950.**

## Program

**NOVEMBER 29<sup>TH</sup>, 2017, TO JANUARY 21<sup>ST</sup>, 2018**  
**MONTREAL**

### **Wednesday, November 29th, 2017**

5:00 to 7:00 p.m.

#### **OPENING**

Official exhibition opening and catalogue launch followed by a reception.

**Maison de la culture Frontenac, Studio 1.**

### **Saturday December 2nd, 2017**

1:00 to 2:45 p.m.

#### **GUIDED TOUR AND CREATIVE WORKSHOP**

Guided tour of the exhibition, with time for discussion about the messages of the exhibited works. The tour will be followed by a creative workshop with an artist mediator at the Bibliothèque Frontenac.

**Maison de la Culture Frontenac, Studio 1.**

3:00 to 4:30 p.m.

#### **OPENING LECTURE**

***Immersion into the HIV-Positive Body, Politics of Representation: A Personal Perspective*** with Richard Sawdon Smith (Norwich, UK)

Richard Sawdon Smith will tell his own story through recent works of self-portrait photography that allow audiences to use virtual reality technology to travel through his HIV-positive body as a way to counter one of the most important issues faced by people living with HIV: stigmatization.

**Maison de la culture Frontenac, Salle de spectacle.**

### **Wednesday, December 6, 2017**

6:00 to 7:00 p.m.

#### **TALK AT THE LIBRARY**

***"La réalité LGBTQ"*** with volunteers from GRIS-Montréal

Discussion with two people from the LGBTQ community to better understand their realities and break down prejudices. Led by GRIS-Montréal. In French only.

**Bibliothèque Frontenac.**

### **Thursday, December 7th, 2017**

5:30 to 7:00 p.m.

#### **BOOK LAUNCH**

***Le témoignage sexuel et intime, un levier de changement social?***

This collection, edited by Professor Maria Nengeh Mensah, features texts that mobilize scientific and field knowledge as well as excerpts from interviews carried out with people from sexual and gender communities, in Québec, who have given public testimonials. The authors, from various milieus, set out the key theoretical and methodological elements of personal and intimate storytelling as major levers of social change.

**UQAM, room DS-1950.**

**Dimanche 17 décembre 2017**

14h00 à 14h45

**VISITE COMMENTÉE**

Visite commentée de l'exposition permettant des échanges autour des messages proposés par les œuvres exposées.

**Maison de la Culture Frontenac, Studio 1.**

15h00 à 16h30

**TABLE-RONDE ET PERFORMANCE*****Après C-36 : toujours en lutte contre la violence envers les personnes qui exercent le travail du sexe***

À l'occasion de la Journée internationale pour mettre fin à la violence envers les travailleuses du sexe, le 17 décembre, *Témoigner pour Agir* réunira des expertes des milieux artistiques, communautaires et universitaires : Jenn Clamen, Viviane Namaste, Grace Van Ness et Sasha Van Bon Bon. Elles livreront un message phare pour en finir avec la violence depuis l'entrée en vigueur de la loi C-36 [Loi sur la protection des collectivités et des personnes victimes d'exploitation (2014)] et, en particulier la violence qui s'exprime envers les femmes, les personnes trans et les personnes racisées qui exercent le travail du sexe au Canada. Une discussion en table-ronde sera suivie de la performance intitulée *Monologues choisis de 'Les Demimondes' et 'Neon Nightz'*.

**Maison de la Culture Frontenac, Salle de spectacle.**

**Samedi 6 janvier 2018**

15h00 à 16h30

**RENCONTRE D'ARTISTES*****Le livre d'artiste queer avec Eloisa Aquino et Kevin Crombie***

Cette rencontre sera l'occasion de discuter avec les deux artistes exposant des livres d'artiste lors de *Témoigner pour Agir* : Eloisa Aquino et Kevin Crombie. Le public pourra entrer en dialogue sur ce thème et approfondir sa connaissance du témoignage artistique et des enjeux vécus par les personnes minorisées en raison de leur sexualité, de leur genre ou de leur corps.

**Bibliothèque Frontenac.**

**Mercredi 11 janvier 2018**

10h00 à 16h00

**JOURNÉE D'ÉTUDE*****Perspectives émergentes en recherche***

Cette journée d'étude s'adresse aux étudiant.e.s et chercheur.e.s investis dans l'étude des cultures du témoignage en contexte de diversité sexuelle et de genre.

**UQAM, Salle D-R200.**

**Sunday, December 17th, 2017**

2:00 to 2:45 p.m.

**GUIDED TOUR**

Guided tour of the exhibition, with time for discussion about the messages of the exhibited works.

**Maison de la culture Frontenac, Studio 1.**

3:00 to 4:30 p.m.

**PANEL DISCUSSION AND PERFORMANCE*****After C-36: Still Battling to End Violence Against Sex Workers***

On December 17th, International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers, *Témoigner pour Agir* brings together experts from the arts, community, and university milieus: Jenn Clamen, Viviane Namaste, Grace Van Ness, and Sasha Van Bon Bon. They will deliver a key message toward ending violence since Bill C-36 (the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act, 2014) became law, speaking in particular about violence against women, trans people and racialized people who practice sex work in Canada. A panel discussion will be followed by a performance entitled *Selected Monologues from Les Demimondes and Neon Nightz*.

**Maison de la culture Frontenac, Theater**

**Saturday January 6th, 2018**

3:00 to 4:30 p.m.

**MEET THE ARTISTS*****The Queer Artist Book with Eloisa Aquino and Kevin Crombie***

This artist talk will provide an opportunity to meet the two artists who are exhibiting printed matter at *Témoigner pour Agir*: Eloisa Aquino and Kevin Crombie. Audiences can enter a dialogue on the topic and deepen their knowledge of artistic storytelling and the issues experienced by people who are marginalized for their sexuality, gender or body.

**Bibliothèque Frontenac.**

**Thursday, January 11th, 2018**

10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

**STUDY DAY*****Emerging Perspectives in Research***

This study day is intended for students and researchers who are devoted to the study of testimonial cultures in the context of sexual and gender diversity.

**UQAM, room D- R200.**



**Samedi 13 janvier 2018**

15h00 à 16h30

**RENCONTRE D'ARTISTES***Le travail textuel artistique avec Ianna Book et Shan Kelley*

Cette rencontre sera l'occasion de discuter avec deux artistes exposant des œuvres au travail textuel lors de *Témoigner pour Agir* : Ianna Book et Shan Kelley. Le public pourra entrer en dialogue sur ce thème et approfondir sa connaissance du témoignage artistique et des enjeux vécus par les personnes minorisées en raison de leur sexualité, de leur genre ou de leur corps.

**Bibliothèque Frontenac.****Dimanche 14 janvier 2018**

13h00 à 14h45

**VISITE COMMENTÉE SUIVIE D'UN ATELIER DE CRÉATION**

Visite commentée de l'exposition permettant des échanges autour des messages proposés par les œuvres exposées. Cette visite sera suivie d'un atelier de création avec une artiste médiatrice à la Bibliothèque Frontenac.

**Maison de la Culture Frontenac, Studio 1.****Jeudi 18 janvier 2018**

15h00 à 21h00

**JOURNÉE D'ÉTUDE***L'art communautaire : actions culturelles, sociales et politiques*

Cette journée d'étude s'adresse aux intervenant.e.s, aux artistes, aux militant.e.s, aux étudiant.e.s et aux chercheur.e.s, curieux, curieuse, ou d'expérience. À partir des projets artistiques mis en valeur dans l'exposition, nous réfléchirons aux processus de production et de réception de ces œuvres, ainsi que sur leurs retombées culturelles sociales et politiques.

**UQAM, Salle DR-200.****Vendredi 19 janvier 2018**

19h00 à 20h30

**CONFÉRENCE DE CLÔTURE***Voix intersexes : s'élever de la honte, du stigma et du mutisme par Ins A Kromminga*

L'activiste et artiste intersex Ins A Kromminga explorera l'émergence dans l'espace public de voix, de langages et de témoignages des personnes intersexes. Par la mise en relation de ses propres œuvres et d'exemples de projets stimulants au sein du mouvement militant intersex, Kromminga analysera comment ces voix, ayant été historiquement et socialement réduites au silence par la prédominance d'une approche médicale, qui voit les personnes intersexes comme des pathologies ou des êtres exotiques, peuvent être à la source d'un mouvement mondial.

**UQAM, Salle Marie-Gérin-Lajoie.****Saturday, January 13th, 2018**

3:00 to 4:30 p.m.

**MEET THE ARTISTS***Textual Art Work with Ianna Book and Shan Kelley*

This artist talk will provide an opportunity to meet the two artists who are exhibiting textual works at *Témoigner pour Agir*: Ianna Book and Shan Kelley. Audiences can enter a dialogue on the topic and deepen their knowledge of artistic storytelling and the issues experienced by people who are marginalized for their sexuality, gender or body.

**Bibliothèque Frontenac.****Sunday, January 14th, 2018**

1:00 to 2:45 p.m.

**GUIDED TOUR AND CREATIVE WORKSHOP**

Guided tour of the exhibition, with time for discussion about the messages of the exhibited works. The tour will be followed by a creative workshop with an artist mediator at the Bibliothèque Frontenac.

**Maison de la culture Frontenac, Studio 1.****Thursday, January 18th, 2018**

3:00 to 9:00 p.m.

**STUDY DAY***Community-Based and Socially Engaged Art: Cultural, Social and Political Actions*

This study day is intended for workers, artists, activists, students and researchers who are curious or experienced. Starting from the artistic projects showcased in the exhibition, we will reflect on the production processes and reception of these works as well as their cultural, social and political effects.

**UQAM, room DR-200.****Friday, January 19th, 2018**

7:00 to 8:30 p.m.

**CLOSING CONFERENCE***Intersex People Finding Their Voice: Rising From Shame, Stigma and the Speechlessness with**Ins A Kromminga*

Intersex activist and artist Ins A Kromminga will explore the emergence into the public sphere of the voices, languages and stories of intersex people. By placing their own works in dialogue with projects that have emerged from within the intersex movement, Kromminga will analyze how these voices, which have been historically and socially reduced to silence by the predominance of a medical approach that pathologizes and exoticizes intersex people, can give rise to an international movement.

**UQAM, Salle Marie-Gérin-Lajoie.**

## Bailleurs de fonds



## Partenaires



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