



## Blooming Archive

4 October – 3 November 2024,  
IHLIA LGBTI Heritage, OBA library (3<sup>rd</sup> floor),  
Oosterdoksstraat 110, 1011 DK Amsterdam

Exhibition organised by PERCOL (Mapping Europe's Queer and Trans Archives) in collaboration with IHLIA LGBTI Heritage. PERCOL is a joint research project between the Universities of St Andrew's, Maastricht, and Murcia. Project lead: Prof. Glyn Davis, Principal Investigator (NL); Prof. Eliza Steinbock, Principal Investigator (ES); Prof. Juan Antonio Suárez. PERCOL is funded by the Joint Programming Initiative Cultural Heritage and Global Change (JPICH); the project consortium is financially supported by the AHRC (United Kingdom), NWO (Netherlands), and the AEI (Spain). For more information visit: [www.percol.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk](http://www.percol.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk)

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Editor & curator:  
Dr Sandro Weilenmann

Designer:  
Valentin Duduk

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## INTRODUCTION – BLOOMING ARCHIVE

First there were three, and then it grew into many. In 1991, IHLIA LGBTI Heritage emerged from the unification of an activist university archive (Homodok) and two lesbian archives (the Lesbian archives of Leeuwarden and Amsterdam, respectively). Today, the archive hosts numerous collections of trans and queer histories, making it one of the largest and most well-equipped places to study LGBTQIA+ heritage in Europe. Their repository stretches countless meters of boxes brimming with evidence of trans and queer lives, increasingly digitized and complemented by the vastness of a specialized library. Apart from safeguarding a fragmentary and still underresearched past, this archive is also subject to continuous transformations and fierce debates. Triggered by discussions over categorizations and nomenclature, it had to repeatedly adjust and recalibrate its outlook. What kinds of evidence need to be stored in order to show that ‘we’ should not be persecuted? How does the archive for the future look and feel like? In light of a growing understanding of the variety of different gender expressions as well as of intersectional forms of oppression, archives keep wrestling with questions over who continues to be marginalized within their collections. From this perspective, archives such as IHLIA are not at the sidelines of the politics of gender and sexuality, but rather at the center of them.

This exhibition features works by seven Dutch and international artists who have researched IHLIA’s collection through their respective practices. Each piece is driven by

a different approach to dealing with archival documents: Some of them creatively reframe archival objects to reconstruct and revitalize fragmented histories, forgotten figures, and activist strategies. Others apply montage and collage strategies based on archival holdings, highlighting questions surrounding the ordering and preserving of subaltern heritage. Together, the works engulf a wide medial range, spanning from textiles and books to sculpture, sound, and video installation. All displays date from the last few years, reflecting the continuously growing relevance of archival art. The exhibition thus offers an insight into contemporary artistic discourses renegotiating art's access to and participation in LGBTQI+ history. This is the first time that these works, which are all connected through their reference to the same archive, are exhibited together. Their return to the initial archive illuminates the mobility as well as malleability of archival records, as they smoothly pass through different media, materialities, and institutional contexts. At the same time, their juxtaposition highlights the variety of creative tactics modifying archival material. These works thus signal the question of how far records can be transformed without hollowing out the messages which they are transporting from the past.

In a similar vein, the exhibition departs from the established format of IHLIA shows, which typically focus on holdings from their own collection. The shift away from what is already present on site to more experimental and speculative forms of archival processes questions what alternative forms of preserving and displaying historic artefacts are

viable and productive for the future of heritage making. This exhibition makes the argument that archival art is not merely extracting from existing collections, but actively involved in co-producing them. For artistic interventions such as the ones on display here actively interrupt or interrogate the archive's materials and functions, often unlocking new perspectives on what usually goes unnoticed. Artistic practices have a specialist arsenal of form, colour, surface, and materiality at their disposal, which can cross through the boundaries of established modes of archiving. This sensibility can make tangible evasive aspects such as the plentitude and abundance of non-heteronormative sexualities. We hope that this exhibition will inspire you, the visitor, to continue exploring the voluminous cosmos of trans and queer heritage.

*Blooming Archive* was developed within the framework of the *Perverse Collections: Building Europe's Trans and Queer Archives* research project (PERCOL). The two-year project, funded by the Joint Programming Initiative in Cultural Heritage, is a collaboration between the Universities of St Andrews, Maastricht und Murcia. It tackles the historic evolution of LGBTQI+ archives across Europe from the early 1970s to the present day with specific interests in the ethics and politics of collecting and preserving, artistic participation, as well as questions of regionalism. It aims to gain a more nuanced understanding of the network of relationships that exists between different organizations, institutions, community members, and other stakeholders. Illuminating the different tactics and strategies of queer

and trans archives, the project analyses what is necessary to safeguard non-heteronormative heritage and what makes it resilient against ever changing political tides. For more information and resources please visit our website:

*www.percol.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk.*

The exhibition project would not have been possible without the generous collaboration of the institutional partner IHLIA LGBTI Heritage. We are especially grateful to Fleur Jacobs, exhibition manager, and Dewi Vrenegoor, public program coordinator, who have facilitated the exhibition with their expertise and different inputs. Furthermore, our thanks go to the director Lonneke van den Hoonard and the head of collections Wilfred van Buuren for supporting our research and exhibition. Similarly, we are indebted to all participating artists, invited guests, and contributing authors that have added their unique insights to the show. We extend our warm thanks to BQ gallery for their loans and all PERCOL members – Alberto Berzosa, Glyn Davis, Layan Nijem, Juan Antonio Suárez, and Sarah Frankowski –, whose discussions have inspired this project. In addition, we would like to thank the graphic designer Valentin Duduk for creatively giving form to the exhibition booklet and all other print material. Further thanks go to Wim Kuipers for printing as well as Ilya Malafei, Clemens Wagner, Eugenie Brinkema, Tricia Griffin, and Mia Kovačić for their external advice.

*Sandro Weilenmann*

Post-doctoral researcher & curator of the exhibition,  
Maastricht University

*Eliza Steinbock*

Professor in Transgender Studies, Art and Cultural  
Activism, Maastricht University

## CURATORIAL VOICES

*What does exhibiting queer and trans art mean to you? And how can creative tactics shift our understanding of LGBTQIA+ heritage?*

*Noor Bhangu,*  
Nasjonalmuseet Oslo

My curatorial work exists at the intersection of sexuality, historiography, and responsibility. For me, curating the work of racialized queer and trans artists is a way of thinking collaboratively across histories of abundance, ruptures and initiate a sense of responsibility to others and otherness, across diverse geographies and time periods. Exhibitions, thus, serve as an ideal ground on which to stage such connections and responsibilities. Through their prioritization of objects and visual art practices, exhibitions remind us that queerness is not isolated, but ongoing.

*Anna T.,*  
artist, lecturer, curator

Exhibiting queer and trans art, or rather art made by— and perhaps about—queer and trans lives means taking into account as many hierarchies as possible, whether linguistic, related to space and artwork accessibility, or deriving from aesthetic norms. I feel it comes with a responsibility to represent that which in some ways you know and in others you don't but there is relationality even within ambiguity. I would consider this allowance of ambiguity (opacity, unknowability) a queer-feminist epistemological approach borrowed from decoloniality. I see art exhibitions and events as important sites of education, ones that, hopefully are not didactic but generously invite audiences to establish points of entry and connection with artworks, artists, and contexts which they will carry over and use to further “read” works prompted by LGBTQIA+ people and communities in the future. Thus both the creativity of the artists and that of audiences become part of a larger LGBTQIA+ heritage.



Exhibiting both historical and contemporary queer and trans art demonstrates how art and life are intertwined, and how queer and trans lives are inextricably interwoven with (art) history. Queer people, trans people and drag artists have always existed and their presence and stories are represented in objects kept in all kinds of museums. Detecting these narratives – by unfortunately often still having to search using outdated terminology under which they're classified - and presenting these narratives can have the potential to recognize and acknowledge queer and trans communities in the museum space, hopefully resulting in reinsuring their broader historical legitimacy at a time when their very existence is sadly still regularly undermined. To tell stories of queer and trans people before us and in contemporary culture is to take care of their social, cultural and political legacies, inspiring this and the next generation. Ultimately, it means contributing to a more representative and widespread understanding of queer and trans culture and histories.

*Anton Shebetko,*  
artist and curator

The work with queer art and queer archives is an opportunity to talk about the hidden and erased parts of history. There is an unbeatable sense of urgency and discovery in it, especially given the unstable times we are living in. Flipping through the pages and sometimes reading between the lines is a chance to see and feel differently. Only the embrace of a new perspective and openness can move us forward, so I think it's very difficult to overstate the importance of such exhibitions and work with archives.

*Jennifer Shearman,*  
Queer Britain

Plasticity is the quality or state of being plastic, the capacity for being moulded or altered. To me exhibiting queer and trans art means knowing plasticity. The acknowledgement that seemingly rigid state and cultural histories might be understood as movable and infirm. It means knowing our bodies, lives, experiences, and personal histories are not fixed. LGBTQ+ heritage mostly exists in a context that has not prioritised it. Through creative tactics that centre queer and trans stories we might both reshape our understanding of LGBTQ+ heritage and our broader cultural heritage/s.

*Jim van Geel,*  
Vleeshal Center for Contemporary Art

Exhibiting queer and trans art allows for the transformation of overlooked, underrepresented and marginalised histories into powerful counternarratives. Curating Pablo Lerma's *Breath Between* at Kunstfort Vijfhuizen, where he reinterpreted the Gerrit Jan Vos Collection of vernacular WWII photography, revealed how art can unearth latent queer stories. By creatively engaging with archival material, contemporary art has the potential to poetically reimagine and fabulate queer histories through a radical approach to heritage. These creative tactics offer a tender approach to history, allowing us to explore what has been forgotten or hidden, thereby reshaping our understanding of the past. This can be an affirming, formative, and even emancipatory experience in the present.

*Silje Gaupseth,*  
The Polar Museum

A main ambition of the exhibition project *Queering Polar History* (2022) was to challenge the kind of materiality which lies at the basis of history narration in our museum – to identify and exhibit a history of the polar regions that deviates from traditional scripts of western male heroic conquest of virgin lands. The works of Sami multimedia artist Gjert Rognli, spread out as queer lacunae throughout the museum's permanent exhibitions, opened that space for productive speculation about same-sex desire, gender nonconformism and indigeneity in the past which our archives and collections seemed to close. Creative tactics can shift the focus of history narration in both mainstream historical museums and LGBTQIA+ heritage work from grand to micro-histories, from center to periphery, and by alluding to other pasts pointing to other futures.

*Grant Watson,*  
Royal College of Art

My relationship to exhibiting queer art comes from ten years or more of working on the archival project *How We Behave*. It is animated by the idea of non-fascist living, through experimental, countercultural, and political practice, queer study and self-work, and draws on the idea of the bios as material for a work of art; of life as something that can be shaped according to ethics and aesthetics. *How We Behave* has come together from over one hundred conversations, driven by curiosity, and the need to know what it means to have agency in times of crisis and transformation. The diverse, intergenerational character of these narratives encourage cross referencing, the transfer of knowledge and the potential for solidarity. They explore how the personal can be deindividuated, radicalised and linked to sites of struggle.

*Tomka Weiß, Luan Pertl, and Alex Giegold,*  
artists and community organizers

Connecting allies and the intersex community has always been an important aspect of our activism, to get more work done, to reach more people, to support each other, recognising the connections of the struggles. Especially with the trans\* community it is important to emphasise this connection, as our communities are always facing attempts to divide us through medicine and legislation, and even if we have different intermediate goals in some areas, our big goal is self-determination. With 'Mercury Rising - Inter\* Hermstory[ies] Now and Then' we contributed to altering the pathologised image of intersex people. We collaborated with international intersex artists and allies who, in strong artistic positions, drew an empowered, self-confident picture on inter history visually and via audio; a change of perspective to create a form of safe space for intersex people. Especially in the artwork "Future Spaces/Zukünftige Räume" by Giegold & Weiß + Luan Pertl, we created a space through an intersex only audio track in which intersex people globally could listen to the same soundtrack at the same time and feel connected to each other. There were people who had arranged to meet globally to listen to this audio together and experience empowerment together.

*Gin Müller and Tomka Weiß,*  
artists and curators

To exhibit queer and trans art implies beauty, culture, existence, but also empowerment, research with unusual means, activism. Our lives were/are systematically made invisible, and the stories are erased, distorted, told from a medical or otherwise horrifying perspective. Talking to tin (trans, inter, non-binary) people from different backgrounds and intersectionalities and listening carefully to how archiving and heritage could work is crucial. It might turn out to not be a linear, functioning archiving that can be utilised according to capitalist standards. It is important for a tin archive not only to document for subsequent generations, but also to simply exist in the moment with open arms, strength and solidarity.



During the preparation for this exhibition project, I have asked an international group of curators, artists, and educators to provide a statement regarding the following question: “What does exhibiting queer and trans art mean to you? And how can creative tactics shift our understanding of LGBTQI+ heritage?” The respondents have all worked on queer and trans exhibition projects, albeit in different institutional contexts. Some have curated shows in established LGBTQI+ spaces such as Queer Britain or Berlin’s Schwules Museum. Others have seized the opportunity to highlight non-heteronormative topics in more mainstream institutions such as the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem or the Polar Museum in Tromsø. On the one hand, the publication of these statements in the exhibition booklet strives to platform the different curatorial voices speaking to the topic, trying to conceive of them not as unrelated agents but rather as a dynamic community working towards greater visibility and recognition of queer and trans subjects.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the collection’s purpose is to situate this exhibition within a broader conversation about non-heteronormative cultural production. One aspect from the compilation of replies that has been particularly interesting to me is the idea of art and art exhibitions initiating different kinds of conversations surrounding historical narratives, community, and political activism that go beyond secured information and tangible artefacts. Rather than offering finalized visions

of queer and trans identity, these projects have sought to counter institutional hierarchies in favor of a more plastic, revolutionary, and accessible LGBTQI+ heritage.<sup>2</sup>

The *Blooming Archive* exhibition project connects to these efforts by exploring how queer and trans archives offer highly fertile grounds for artistic research and practices. As the international selection of artists and works in this exhibition illustrates, archives such as the Amsterdam-based IHLIA LGBTQI Heritage collection are not only relevant to specific national and cultural contexts but also interesting and productive to outside visitors. The show's selection of works highlights how artists find the transformative power of trans and queer discourses not in the speculative articulation of potential futures, but emerging from a turn to the past, unsettling what has been thought of as fixed and immutable. Gaining growing popularity as an artistic genre since the 1990s, archival art engages with artefacts and frameworks of historic collections devising them as "productive spaces of conflict."<sup>3</sup> Documents, sources, and testimonies that have been preserved by archivists provide a stage for dispute and struggle, and individual artistic research practices that centralize these materials become channels through which our understanding of existing narratives transforms. In this sense, archival documents, as the literature and media scholar Ariella Azoulay reminds us, "are not items of a completed past, but rather active elements of a present."<sup>4</sup>

Archives hold a particular relevance for the LGBTQI+ community. For this community, my community, emanci-

patory politics have inextricably been linked to a push for the epistemic right to record and preserve our suppressed history; a trend which can be observed in the recent rise and institutionalization of non-heteronormative archives across different geographical regions. Furthermore, texts by key queer theorists such as José Esteban Muñoz, Heather Love, and Elizabeth Freeman have triggered an archival turn in trans and queer studies, researching the "past as a future-building practice," as Daniel Marshall and Zeb Tortorici write.<sup>5</sup> Archival organizations confront us with a host of problems such how cataloging and preservation processes exacerbate social mechanisms of inclusion versus exclusion, the loss of individuality and specificity, or the latent danger of pigeon-holing.<sup>6</sup> How do we bring back the ghost of the past? And, as the Belgian artist collective loup et nour have recently drawn out, do the traces and individuals they concern even want to be found?<sup>7</sup>

Like most archives, IHLIA does not keep a comprehensive and publicly available list of artists who have worked with their collection. Contemporary art is rarely a priority on the archivist's mind, ever preoccupied with questions of storage, restoration, digitization, or the next round of financing. But it is not only constraints in resources that often push artistic experiments to the sidelines. For the artistic use of archival documents often ties into new and thorny questions such as ownership and copyright issues, specific to each subcollection. Artistic participation in archives thus requires the archivist to think along such experiments, negotiating the assumed rules and processes

of their stewardship. What is more, granting access to often fragile archival materials requires a degree of trust, in turn putting pressure on the idea of the visiting artist's perceived credentials. Does a freshly minted Visual Arts BA student get the same level of access as an established name? Or put differently, whose expertise unlocks the archival vaults and who is allowed to contribute and criticize? The flimsiness of these questions is further accentuated by the lack of readily available codes of conduct or a shared policy paper and care instructions, therefore redirecting the potential collaborators to the unpredictability of interpersonal negotiations.

The collaborative difficulties that emerge when artists enter archives raise the question of what art can offer in terms of changing cultural heritage practices. Which conversations can the artist as a "critical visitor" start in order to enrich our grasp of history?<sup>8</sup> Which creative processes enable the archive to become productive? As art contributes to the multiplication of images, can it equally contribute to the multiplication of discourses surrounding sexualities?<sup>9</sup> Reflecting on the question of what art 'does' to the archive, the art historian Christophe Kihm has cautioned against an overreliance on established theoretical frameworks.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, theories surrounding archival power and dominance (Foucault), the interplay between destruction and construction (Derrida), canonization (Assmann), affect and trauma (Cvetkovich), fabulations (Hartman) – to name a few – have heavily influenced archival art's analysis. Yet how do artistic sensibilities and expertise in form and color differ from such notions? What can they make tangible with

their specific arsenal of tools that evades the constrictions of discursive texts? As the selection of works in this exhibition illustrates, the responses to this line of inquiry are as varied as they are compelling. Some artists restage objects and documents from the archive, others draw on their archival research in a more abstract or indirect manner. While the "archive effect" resulting from these different strategies differs significantly from case to case, they are united by their genuine interest in engaging with and contributing to the shared heritage of LGBTQI+ history.<sup>11</sup>

#### TEXTURING, MANIPULATING, AND REPERFORMING THE ARCHIVE

Departing from IHLIA's extensive collection of gay magazines from the 1970s-1990s, artist Pablo Lerma collected a vast array of mostly amateur photographs. Subsequently, he rearranged reproductions of the images into cluster-shaped formations according to new subjective categories. Titled *It does not stop at Images* (2019–), the installation's blurry maze of figures and objects breaks with archival chronology and speculatively lifts the separation between them under the sign of a greater emphasis on affect and desire highlighting the exuberance of what the feminist scholar Ann Cvetkovich has called the "archive of emotion."<sup>12</sup> Conversely, the composition lays bare the narrow editorial focus on white and athletic bodies, complicit in the construction of an exclusionary type of gay masculinity. A similar approach

marks Lerma's multi-media installation *Breaths Between* (2023) which repurposes images from IHLIA's Gerrit Jan Vos collections, encompassing over 4000 photos of men in military uniform. Incorporating different materialities, the composition reinforces the underlying eroticism and potential romantic relationships between the photographed men. The work tests the limits of what ephemeral postcards, often anonymous and lacking context, can offer to us by speculative recombining and filling the voids between them.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast, artist Christian Friedrich stages photographs from the same collection in a tri-part installation piece consisting of large-scale prints titled *Sailor*, *Screw*, and *Snow* (all 2024) that draws attention to the Vos collection's formal qualities. As the artist manipulates images by editing out certain parts, duplicating, or changing size and color, their multi-layered meanings come to the fore. Consider the image of a young man leaning over the giant trifoliated blades of a ship's turbine, multiplied by the many and arranged into a rectangular grid. Seen from afar, the steely machinery turns into orchid-shaped leaf patterns, evidencing the striking geometry already inherent to the original photograph. The hardness plays off against the decorative floral motif and thus destabilizes any one-dimensional interpretation of the Vos collection as a mere testimony of homoerotic desires and objectifying fantasies. In this regard, both Friedrich and Lerma's works turn the instability and haziness of such collections. How can we relate to the depicted experience and companionship between soldiers at war? What was the driving motivation

behind collecting them? – from an archival weakness into an archival strength. While not detaching the erotic features and the stigma and shame of social deviance associated with them, the two artists illuminate the transformational energy and creative opportunities siloed in such private archives.<sup>14</sup> They do so not only by recycling and reframing archival images but by exploiting what the US-American photographer and author Allan Sekula calls the “semantic availability” that pictures hold to change archival meanings over time.<sup>15</sup>

Oscar Eriksson Furunes' light installation *night watch* (2023/2024) revolves around an owl-shaped perfume lamp found in one of Amsterdam's earliest gay bars known as Cafe t'Mandtje, between the 1920s–1960s. Multiple porcelain reproductions of the lamp's owl-shaped figurine softly glow up one after another, creating a simultaneously beautiful and eerie wall of light. When it was turned on, the lamp functioned as a warning signal to patrons for a potential police raid. The object makes evident a trace of queer resilience and mutual protection against social marginalization. (The Netherlands revoked article 248bis criminalizing same-sex physical relationships before 21 years of age only in the year 1971.) Signaling both surveillance and subversion, the pulsating parliament of owls ambivalently hovers between looming danger and communal relationality. Here, reproduction supplants the idea of the archival original to create an environment that lets the viewer experience the charge and ambiguity inhabiting such objects. In parallel, Furunes' artwork titled *red* (2023) addresses queer nightlife by way of reworking an archived series of photographs of the open-

ing of a women's dance party taken by the activist feminist photographer Gon Buurman in 1986. The artist selected cropped reproductions of the photographs, at times only depicting someone's resting elbow or a hand causally holding a lit cigarette. Subsequently, he altered the images by placing them behind a matte cast of polyester and dyeing them in different shades of red. The artistic intervention does not uncover, identify, or locate the individual attendants, grouped in loose clusters, but rather reinforces their inaccessibility and opacity. Furunes' attention and redirection to the surface connect to the broader idea of minorities strategically resisting the demands of transparency. Similar to what the Martinican philosopher Édouard Glissant called the empowering "right to opacity," the photographs come to life precisely through their resistance to the gaze of the interrogating spectator.<sup>16</sup>

In parallel to Furunes' approach, artist Pauline Agustoni takes archives of lesbian lives and activism in public space as her object of inquiry. Titled *L As In Walking* (2021), her audio-visual installation displays black-and-white photographs of street views in Berlin and texts along with recorded audio-tracks. The latter features interviews that the artist conducted with queer women walking to public places of their choosing and asking them about their personal significance. Listening to these private accounts, which often revolve around ideas of being visible and claiming space, imbues the cool anonymity of the grey-scale urban views with the colors of intimate experience and a variety of narratives. Emerging from Agustoni's research at IHLIA

and the Spinnboden Lesbenarchiv, the installation privileges the ordinary, personal, and subjective, because its plentitude often cannot find entry into the archive.<sup>17</sup> The literary scholar Anjali Arondekar has cautioned against over-privileging narratives of loss and death in trans and queer archives and instead has suggested a turn to the joy and "radical abundance" that deviant sexualities offer.<sup>18</sup> By feeling out the variety of queer experiences on the move rather than historicizing materials in the archive, *L As In Walking* gives form to this idea of plentitude, resonating with their inherent mobility and potentialities rather than contributing to fixed historiographies.

Expanding on such considerations on a material level, artist Philipp Gufler's intricate textile works offer portraits of significant queer and trans figures of the last two centuries. Stemming from a longer artistic practice of researching LGBTQI+ (tr)ancestors, two translucent quilts are dedicated to the feminist doctor and sexologist Charlotte Wolff and the German-Jewish lawyer and wine dealer Leopold Obermayer (2022, 2023). The two figures bear testimony to the budding emancipation of same-sex love in pre-war Germany, brutally cut short by the rise of Nazi terror in the 1930s. Gufler scours archives and libraries for traces of these past lives, such as accounts of Obermayer's imprisonments, his hand-written letters or newspaper headlines from his sensationalized trial, subsequently reproduced as silk screen prints on multiple overlaid pieces of fabric. By way of such combination, the quilts narrate not strictly despairing nor joyous-heroic tales but rather showcase

how different meanings of archival documents overlap and change depending on standpoints – an impression aesthetically intensified by the quilts' transparency.<sup>19</sup> However, the textile materiality also threads these works into a broader history of feminist and queer art experimenting with the political and activist dimensions of textiles practices, such as the AIDS quilts in the late 1980s or works by the queer Latin American artists Jorge Eielson or Hélio Oiticica in the 1960s and 1970s. "Textile politics," as the art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson has claimed, strive to make politics material by weaving uneven and multi-layered textures into politics.<sup>20</sup> Seen from this perspective, Guffer's quilts materialize a refusal of easy binaries and an acknowledgement of the complications of making the archive synchronize with contemporary political aspirations.

In a similar vein, artist Tabea Nixdorff's mixed-media installation *Wording (Feminist Design Strategies)* (2021-2024) stages textile materiality in relation to feminist organizing and intersectional political strategies. Several fabric panels weave through a wooden loom, painted with black 'meta-texts' derived from different texts discursively reflecting on what kind of critical and activist labor is necessary for the archive. The piece is part of the larger installation *Feminist Design Strategies* (2021-2023, first shown at the Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam), which repurposed reproductions of archival documents and texts, loosely placed between strings of several vertical looms. Nixdorff constructed a complex network of feminist initiatives and working groups active in the Netherlands in the 1960s-1980s in the field of

urban planning, design, literature, and architecture, visualizing their entanglement as part of a larger cultural tapestry. The work reflects a distinct interest in multitude and intersectionality, specifically regarding overlooked Dutch Black feminist movements, which in turn resonates with Bryan-Wilson's notion of "queering" as an intentionally open-ended engagement with artworks.<sup>21</sup> The mobile and communal looms, being both tool and work, give expression to a historiographical model that is unfixed and where readings (and writings) can attach themselves belatedly, or as a constant process. This approach also marks Nixdorff's publication series *Archival Textures* (2023–), featuring collaborative editions revolving around themes, or strategies, such as the (re)claiming of symbols such as the triangle, the amplification of marginalized voices, or the posting of activist messages. In comparison to Guffer, Nixdorff's projects explore a similar notion of texturing politics, yet they also stress how such endeavors historically draw on and depend on community-based and collaborative actions and organizing.

Finally, BSDWCORP/yazija's (founded by J.G. Basdew) music video *Only You* (2021) shows the story of an intimate relationship between two queer Black bodies.<sup>22</sup> Two performers gently embrace each other while a velvety singing voice lyrics pertaining to desire, connection, and loss of control. The video gives expression to the bonds between queer BIPOC men and thus speaks to a sexual minority, that according to authors such as Derek Conrad Murray always stands apart from "the auspices of normative

blackness,” ever striving for a new visibility and questioning established forms of subjectivity and gendered difference.<sup>23</sup> The performance draws on works by the African-American poet Essex Hemphill and filmmaker Marlon Riggs as well as the aesthetics of artists such as Isaac Julien or Ajamu X. Dealing with this closely-knit net of referentiality to a previous generation, the performance forcefully centers a set of questions that connects all the works in this exhibition: How does one inscribe oneself into the archive of the past? What kind of reenactment do trans and queer archives ask for? According to the documentary film scholar Bill Nichols, performative reenactment conjures “the ghost of the absent subject,” evoking a simultaneous appearance of past and present bodies.<sup>24</sup> Contemporary actors can exploit this notion of the overcrowded room in order to demonstrate how figures and traces of the past can be joined and mingled. *Only You* underscores the inevitable physicality and vulnerability of this engagement, pointing to the fact that any such reunion depends on our willingness to feel along this affective dimension.

#### FOREIGN BODIES AND CRITICAL CONDUITS

In conclusion, the specificity of queer archival art lies in the capacity to occupy two positions simultaneously: being of the archive and being a foreign body within it. While these artworks are molded from the resources provided by the archive, they also sit uncomfortably within such

collections. On the one hand, artistic research traces and reconstructs dormant figures and stories shrouded in the depth, dryness, and density of archival collections. Restaging historic artefacts infuses them with vitality and presence, rendering tangible the exuberance and abundance underpinning past trans and queer lives. On the other hand, the artist’s aesthetic intervention and interest in terms of color, surface, and form infringe upon the supposed veracity of the archival artefact, thus going against the very foundational rules of historical documentation and preservation. By way of creatively trespassing against the archived document’s integrity, they push open the door for the speculative, experimental, and playful. Accordingly, artistic participation never amounts to full belonging. Reflecting on the problem of generic membership, the French philosopher Jacques Derrida described how “there is no genreless text.” For Derrida, a text cannot be outside genre(s), but it also does not fully belong to it as it remarks on its belonging – an impurity that lies in the demarcating “trait” of participation.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, artistic practices cannot fully integrate into the archive, nor can there be any archiveless art. Art can participate in archives, but such taking part does not build up to being part of it.

In this regard, archival art’s liminality replicates a duplicity that many trans and queer people experience in their lives, namely in growing up in a heteronormative environment while at the same time being outside of and antithetical to it. The realization, as the novelist David Levitt put it, that one’s kind of love “couldn’t be easy, that one must suffer



more than one had.”<sup>26</sup> In consequence, LGBTQI+ subjectivities are bound to a particular process of (re-)negotiating their relationship to the heteronormative mainstream: How far can one engage with a predominantly straight culture without being fully assimilated into it? When is it necessary to take an antagonistic stance and when is a more bated strategy of ambiguity and ambivalence more efficient? Queer theorists such as the philosopher Antke Antek Engel have argued that the latter can be a particularly productive, albeit only temporary, tactic to unseat ‘common’ sense and inculcate values in favor of a more critical intersectional analysis.<sup>27</sup> Refusing to seamlessly fit into existing narratives and systems of ordering, the works in this exhibition resonate with this method of going against singular meanings. As artists approach trans and queer heritage, they do not sew their works smoothly into the archival collection, nor do they position them in opposition to it.<sup>28</sup> Instead of assimilating to or rejecting the past, their practices articulate different ways of moving between these poles, repeatedly testing the potentialities of reworking and reactualizing a submerged history. Accordingly, they propose an alternative way of relating to the past, which revolves around processualism based on constant revisitation and exploration.

Reflecting on his experience of receiving a heart transplant, the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy described the persisting foreignness – or *étrangeté* – of an organ that even after being absorbed into another body never completely vanishes. This intruding object produces an unsettling strangeness that disturbs the familiarity and inti-

macy of our bodies and known environments. Yet for Nancy, this interruption and perturbation of habit is not in opposition to the self and to autonomous subjectivity. Rather, intrusion provides an opportunity to think about how we can construct identities not against, but constitutively in exchange with the strange and foreign. Importantly, this process requires us to constantly reckon with our own exoticism, cultural superiority, racial or sexual othering, and forced integration.<sup>29</sup> From this perspective, archival art’s encroaching gesture not only connects to the ambivalence of queer experience but also signals more profound questions concerning the archive’s identity and its structures. The characteristic *étrangeté* marking these works is evident from the way that artistic practices do not correspond to the archive’s established categories and key denominators. Artists are not archivists, nor strictly public visitors, and their works represent neither records nor reproductions, as they confound provenance and origin by way of appropriation of re-inscription. Instead, such practices produce mingled forms between such oppositions. Accordingly, artistic participation requires us to think about what new vocabulary might be necessary to describe and reflect on the novel dynamics of the archive, inadvertently tied to broader questions concerning access and ownership.

In an interview with the poet Maya Angelou in 1975, the writer and Black rights advocate James Baldwin cautioned against the limitations of seeking to define and enclose non-heteronormative sexual identity. For “if you categorize the world in that way, then you lock yourself out from



so much.”<sup>30</sup> Instead, Baldwin argued for a more transitive interest in different gender expressions, recalibrating the essentialist focus on the *being* to the much richer canvas of *doing* and *feeling* in human experience. In a similar vein, the works in this exhibition propose different ways of activating LGBTQI+ heritage that go beyond the mere factuality of archival documents. Refraining from fixing singular meanings or affects to these artefacts, they shine a light on the possibilities that the archive can offer once we venture out to engage with it. Artistic archival practices thus work towards an articulation of how we can acknowledge the trauma, fragmentation, and oppression enmeshed in trans and queer archives not as a final destination – or even more tragically, as something that could be overcome – but rather as a multi-valent point of departure. For theorists such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick “truly” queer politics (as opposed to strictly gay ones) funnel the inhabiting of a spoiled identity into a “experimental, creative, and performative force.”<sup>31</sup> Art carves out a privileged site for such rechanneling as it repurposes, reframes, recontextualizes, manipulates, and vexes the archive. In this process, art does not only sound out the abundant potentialities nestled in non-heteronormative collections but also stokes curiosity about how the archive is in constant development; a perpetual coming-in-to-being encouraging us to visit its domains and materials again and again.

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>For a survey of recent queer and archival exhibition projects see Bas Hendriks, ed., *Queer Exhibition histories* (Valiz, 2023); Sarah Callahan, *Art+Archive* (Manchester University Press, 2022).
- <sup>2</sup>The move away from single curatorial authorship has been described as the rise of the postcuratorial. See Simon Sheikh, “From Para to Post: The Rise and Fall of Curatorial Reason,” *Springerin*, no. 1 (2017): <https://www.springerin.at/en/2017/1/von-para-zu-post/>.
- <sup>3</sup>Yann Chateigné and Markus Miessen, eds. *The Archive as a Productive Space of Conflict* (Sternberg Press, 2016).
- <sup>4</sup>*Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon*, “Archives” by Ariella Azoulay, accessed 25.09.2024, <http://www.politicalconcepts.org/archive-ariella-azoulay/>.
- <sup>5</sup>Daniel Marshall and Zeb Tortorici, eds., *Turning Archival: The Life of the Historical in Queer Studies* (Duke University Press, 2022), 15.
- <sup>6</sup>Ernst van Alphen, ed., *Productive Archiving. Artistic Strategies, Future Memories and Fluid Identities* (Valiz, 2024), 10-29.
- <sup>7</sup>Loup Kass and Nour Outojane, *His/Her/Their Stories project*, 2021-2023.
- <sup>8</sup>Eliza Steinbock and Hester Dibbits, eds., *The Critical Visitor: Changing Heritage Practices* (Maastricht University, Reinwardt Academy, and Wereldmuseum, 2023).
- <sup>9</sup>Nicolas Liucci-Goutnikov, “J’avais été damné par l’arc-en-ciel,” in *Over the Rainbow* (Centre Pompidou, 2023), 10.
- <sup>10</sup>Christophe Kihm, “What Art Does To Archives,” in *The Archive as a Productive Space of Conflict* (Sternberg Press, 2016), 428-429.
- <sup>11</sup>Jaimie Baron, *The Archive Effect Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History* (Routledge, 2013).
- <sup>12</sup>Ann Cvetkovich, “Ordinary Lesbians and Special Collections: The Junes L. Mazer Lesbian Archives at UCLA,” in

*Turning Archival: The Life of the Historical in Queer Studies* (Duke University Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478022589-006>.

<sup>13</sup>For a discussion on the relation between the speculative and the archive see Tavia Nyong'o et al., "Queering Archives: A Roundtable Discussion," *Radical History Review*, 122 (May 2015), 211-232; Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (Norton, February 2019).

<sup>14</sup>See Heather Love, *Underdogs. Social Deviance and Queer Theory* (The University of Chicago Press, 2021) for a study of social deviance in queer theory and activism.

<sup>15</sup>Allan Sekula, "Reading an Archive: Photography Between Labour and Capitalism," in *The Photography Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 443-52.

<sup>16</sup>Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (University of Michigan Press, 2010), 189-194; For a broader discussion regarding queerness and opacity see Nicolas de Villiers, *Opacity and the Closet: Queer Tactics in Foucault, Barthes, and Warhol* (University of Minnesota Press, 2012) & and Anna T, *Opacity – Minority – Improvisation, An Exploration of the Closet Through Queer Slangs and Postcolonial Theory* (transcript, 2020).

<sup>17</sup>Diana Taylor has stressed the importance of archiving embodied knowledge and highlighted the problems of privileging text as the most trustworthy archival material. See Diana Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire* (Duke University Press, 2003) and for a discussion of the queer ordinary see Thomas Osborne, "The Ordinarity of the Archive," *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 12, no. 2 (1999), 51-64; Allyson Nadia Field, "Site of Speculative Encounter," *Feminist Media Histories*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2022), 1-13.

<sup>18</sup>Anjali Arondekar, *Abundance: Sexuality's History* (Duke University Press, 2023).

<sup>19</sup>Karolina Kühn, "Becoming. Philipp Gufler's Artmaking and

Research Practise," in *Dis/Identification. Philipp Gufler* (Kunsthalle Mainz, 2024), 88-91.

<sup>20</sup>Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Fray: Art and Textile Politics*, (The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 6-7.

<sup>21</sup>Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Queerly Made: Harmony Hammond's Floorpieces," *The Journal of Modern Craft*, no. 1 (March 2009) cit. In Daniel Berndt et al., eds., *Ambivalent Work \*s. Queer Perspectives and Art History* (diaphanes, 2024), 45-46.

<sup>22</sup>*Only You* has been conceived by BSDWCORP in collaboration with Kevin Osepa and Clifford Prince King Yazija is a long-duration performance piece which lays at the centre of BSDWCORP, the artistic practice founded by J.G. Basdes. "Yazija" stands as a testament to the power of collective endeavor, drawing on varied perspectives and disciplines to enrich the conversation around art and its societal impact.

<sup>23</sup>Derek Conrad Murray, *Queering Post-Black Art: Artists Transforming African-American Identity After Civil Rights* (Tauris, 2016), 2.

<sup>24</sup>Bill Nichols, "Documentary Reenactment and the Fantasmatic Subject," *Critical Inquiry* vol. 35, no. 1 (2008), 72-89.

<sup>25</sup>Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 7, no. 1, (Autumn 1980), 65, cit. In Eugenie Brinkema, *Life-Destroying Diagrams* (Duke University Press, 2022), 28.

<sup>26</sup>David Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes* (Bloomsbury, 2005), 61.

<sup>27</sup>Antke Engel, *Wider die Eindeutigkeit. Sexualität und Geschlecht im Fokus queerer Politik der Repräsentation* (Campus, 2002). For a recent discussion of queer ambivalence in relation to art see Daniel Berndt et al., eds., *Ambivalent Work \*s. Queer Perspectives and Art History* (diaphanes, 2024).

<sup>28</sup>In this regard, the artworks express a refusal of futurity that connects to a broader debate surrounding queer ontological exclusion and the argument for queer negativity that centers non-normative experiences at its core. See Lee

Edelman, *Bad Education* (Duke University Press, 2023);  
Mari Ruti, *The Ethics of Opting out: Defiance and Affect in Queer Theory* (Columbia University Press, 2017).

<sup>29</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Intruder* (Fordham University Press, 2024).

<sup>30</sup> "Assignment America; 119; Conversation with a Native Son," 1975-05-13, Thirteen WNET, American Archive of Public Broadcasting (GBH and the Library of Congress), Boston, MA and Washington, DC, accessed September 25, 2024, <http://americanarchive.org/catalog/cpb-aacip-75-48sbchq4>.

<sup>31</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer Performativity: Henry James's The Art of the Novel," *GLQ*, 1, no. 1 (1993), 4.

## ARTIST BIOS

*Pablo Lerma* is a hispanic queer research-based artist and educator based in Amsterdam (NL) and Barcelona (ES). His artistic practice and research is developed at the intersection of image & text with a focus in visual archives and vernacular materials dealing with notions of collective memory, representation and queerness. His work takes various forms from photographic installations to publications.

*Pauline Agustoni* is a Swiss designer based in Berlin. After her graduation from Design Academy Eindhoven in 2019, she developed her own practice focussing on conceptual and research design. Her varied projects stem from a common base: her fascination for manufacturing processes, and how we shape goods and spaces that in return shape us. Through diverse and immersive projects, her work delves into understanding a topic from the inside out, allowing material properties and processes to inspire her creations. Her physical presence on the field and her hands-on approach places encounters with people and materials at the center of her work. She is the co-initiator of the project Craft Portrait, in collaboration with Satomi Minoshima, a series of projects aiming to revisit contemporary crafts and highlight their core values for design.

*Christian Friedrich* is a German artist who lives and works in Amsterdam. In a range of media including video, sculpture, audio and scent, he explores the relationships of corporeality, the physicality of communication and the provisional nature of meaning and existence. Friedrich's work has been exhibited, among others, at Haus Mödrath, Kerpen; Haus N, Athens; KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin; Cabinet Gallery, London; Chapter Arts Center, Cardiff; NYU, New York; PS120, Berlin; Cobra Museum for Modern Art, Amstelveen; Goethe-Institut Amsterdam; Grazer Kunstverein; De Hallen, Haarlem; De Appel, Amsterdam; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Städtische

Galerie Karlsruhe and Kunsthau Baselland. In 2017, Friedrich received the Cobra Art Prize.

*Philipp Gufler* lives and works in Amsterdam (NL) and Munich. Between 2008 and 2014, he studied at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste München and at Hochschule für Gestaltung Karlsruhe. Alongside his extensive work at the archive of Forum Queeres Archiv München e.V. since 2013, the artist participated in the Residency Program „De Ateliers“ Amsterdam 2015-2017. For his artistic practice, which ranges from prints and performances, research and video works to artist books and installations, he received the Advancement Award HIV/AIDS of the German AIDS Foundation. Philipp Gufler's work is part of institutional and private collections and has been on show at Kunsthalle Mainz, DAS MINSK Kunsthau Potsdam, Bundeskunsthalle Bonn, NS-Dokumentationszentrum München, the Kunstmuseum Bonn, the Haus der Kulturen der Welt Berlin, Kunstverein Kevin Space Wien (AU) as well as Marwan Amsterdam (NL), the Centraal Museum Utrecht (NL) and Haus der Kunst München among others. In 2021, Gufler was awarded with the *Dutch Royal Award for Painting*.

*Tabea Nixdorff* is an artist, typographer and researcher currently based in Arnhem. Her artistic practice involves (self)publishing, writing, sound and language based performances, collaborative learning and social gatherings. Often working with/in archives or libraries, Nixdorff's works delve into micro-histories while touching upon broader themes such as omissions and distortions in historical narratives, embodied knowledges, queer belonging and a feminist poetics of error. In 2023, Nixdorff founded the publication series *Archival Textures*.

*Oscar Eriksson Furunes* is a Norwegian/Swedish artist living and working in Malmö, Sweden. Through his work he seeks to complicate the boundaries and entanglements between what

we see as personal history and public history, as well as points of identification with historical subjects and events. His working method is based on collaging, turning, skewing, amplifying or fragmenting parts of the stories or material he chooses to work with. While reworking historical material he also implements personal points of reference, gestures and codes into the work. With the second version (2/3) of *night watch*, Oscar was awarded the Autumn Exhibition Prize 2024 at Høstutstillingen, a national juried exhibition curated by artists at Kunsternes Hus (the Artists' House) in Oslo, Norway.

*J.G. Basdew* is the founder of *bsdwc corp.*, an artistic and social practice focused on interdisciplinary collaboration and innovation. The platform transcends traditional art forms, encompassing a wide range of creative disciplines, such as visual art, theater, audiovisual works, and curated exhibitions. Through this versatile approach, Basdew contributes to important social and cultural conversations, with a focus on themes like social justice, identity, and inclusivity. At the core of Basdew's work is the emphasis on social progress. *bsdwc corp.* seeks to use art as a tool for societal change by connecting diverse communities and addressing complex issues. Basdew works both collaboratively and on solo projects, where art functions as a powerful means to contribute to a more just society.

## LIST OF WORKS

### *Philipp Gufler*

*Quilt #47 (Charlotte Wolff)*, screenprint on fabric, 180 × 90 cm, 2022

*Quilt #53 (Leopold Obermayer) [Mit Albert Knoll]*, screenprint on fabric, 180 × 90 cm, 2023

### *Oscar Eriksson Furunes*

*red*, casted polyester, pigments, steel, photographic prints, variable dimensions, 2023

*night watch*, perfume lamps, mdf, DMX light system, light installation, 2023/2024

### *Tabea Nixdorff*

*Archival Textures*, books, dimensions vary, 2023 – ongoing

*Wording (Feminist Design Strategies)*, wooden vertical loom, painted textiles, 2,4 × 1m, 2021-2024

### *J.G. Basdew*

*Only You*, conceived by *yazija* / BSDWCORP. in collaboration with Kevin Osepa and Clifford Prince King, music video, 3:08 min., 2021.

### *Pablo Lerma*

*Breaths Between*, acetate prints and concrete sculptures, size variable, 2022

*It doesn't stop at images* (Homologie & San Francisco Sentinel, Gay List), archival prints, sizes vary, 2019 – ongoing

### *Christian Friedrich*

*Screw*, inkjet print on wallpaper, sizes vary, 2024

*Sailor*, inkjet print on canvas, aluminum stretcher frame, 157 × 142 × 2,7 cm, 2024

*Snow*, UV-cured print on grouted ceramic tiles (glazed ceramic tiles, construction board, plywood, dispersion adhesive, grout, acrylic modified plaster, pigment, glass fiber, metal mounts, UV-cured print), 60,2 × 75,3 × 4 cm, 2024

### *Pauline Agustoni*

*L as in Walking*, photographic reproductions, sound installation, sizes vary, 2020

Texts by Eliza Steinbock, Sandro Weilenmann, Noor Bhangu, Jennifer Shearman, Anna T., Manique Hendriks, Gin Müller, Maaïke Rikhof, Jim van Geel, Anton Shebetko, Silje Gaupseth, Grant Watson, Tomka Weiß, Luan Pertl, and Alex Giegold. Works by Philipp Guffler, J.G. Basdew, Pablo Lerma, Christian Friedrich, Pauline Agustoni, Tabea Nixdorff, and Oscar Eriksson Furunes.

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