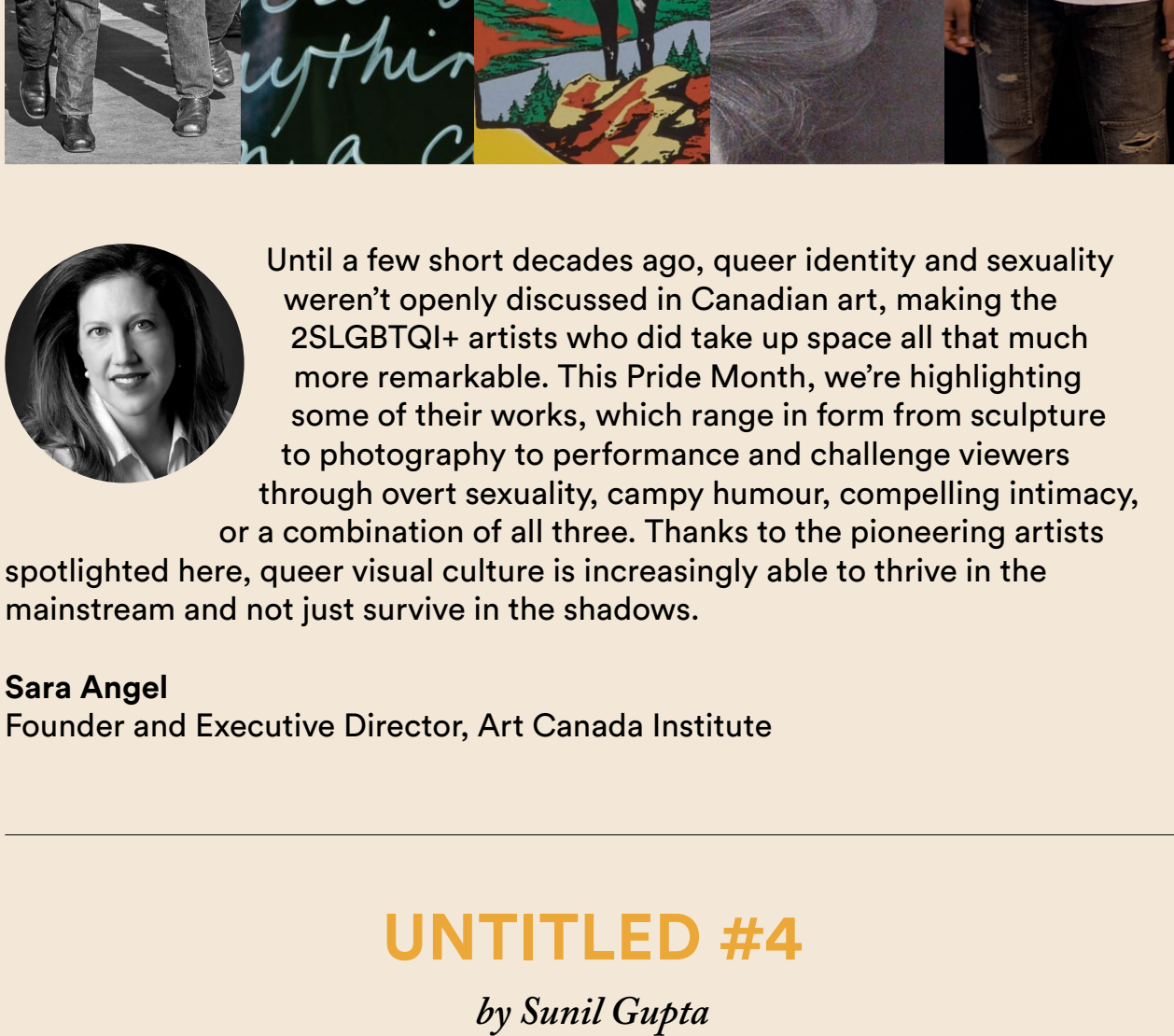


JUNE 2, 2023

QUEER CREATIVITY

7 TRAILBLAZERS IN ART IN CANADA

In celebration of Pride Month, we're showcasing audacious, campy, and romantic works by famed 2SLGBTQI+ figures in Canadian art.



Until a few short decades ago, queer identity and sexuality weren't openly discussed in Canadian art, making the 2SLGBTQI+ artists who did take up space all that much more remarkable. This Pride Month, we're highlighting some of their works, which range in form from sculpture to photography to performance and challenge viewers through overt sexuality, campy humour, compelling intimacy, or a combination of all three. Thanks to the pioneering artists spotlighted here, queer visual culture is increasingly able to thrive in the mainstream and not just survive in the shadows.

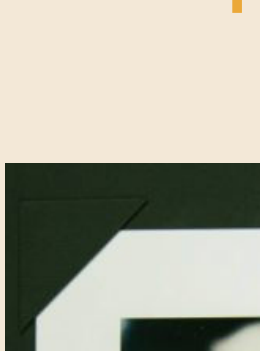
Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

UNTITLED #4

by Sunil Gupta



Sunil Gupta, *Untitled #4*, 1976, from the series *Christopher Street*, New York 1976, courtesy of Sunil Gupta.

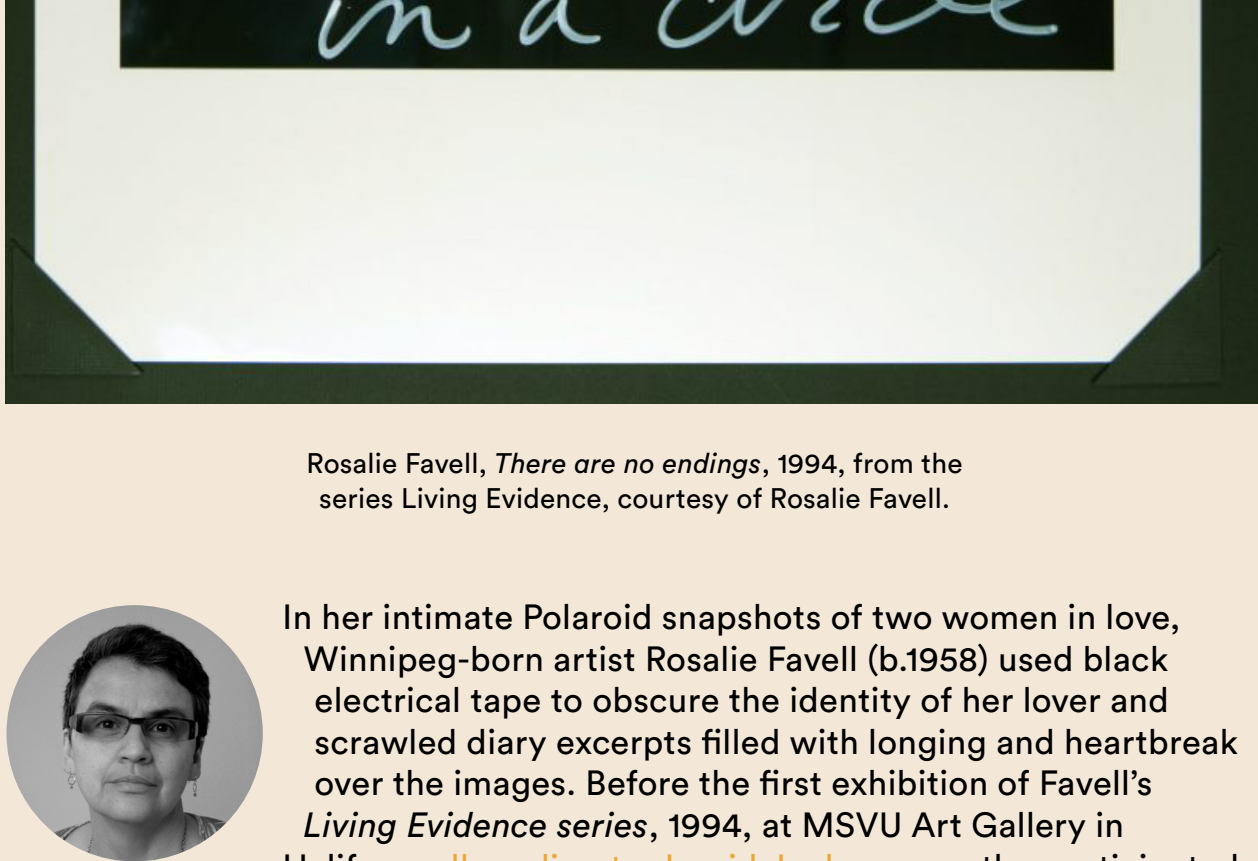


Men stroll down Christopher Street in Manhattan, the site of the June 1969 Stonewall riots, in this shot by Indian Canadian photographer Sunil Gupta (b.1953). Taken in 1976, the photograph captured young people who were “busy creating a gay public space such as hadn't really been seen before,” [says Gupta](#). Taken before the AIDS pandemic decimated New York's queer community—and the queer racialized community most significantly—this series memorializes a turning point for the artist in his personal history and pays tribute to the many who fought on the frontlines for civil liberties.

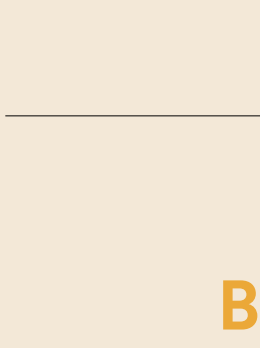
[Learn more about Sunil Gupta](#)

THERE ARE NO ENDINGS

by Rosalie Favell



Rosalie Favell, *There are no endings*, 1994, from the series *Living Evidence*, courtesy of Rosalie Favell.

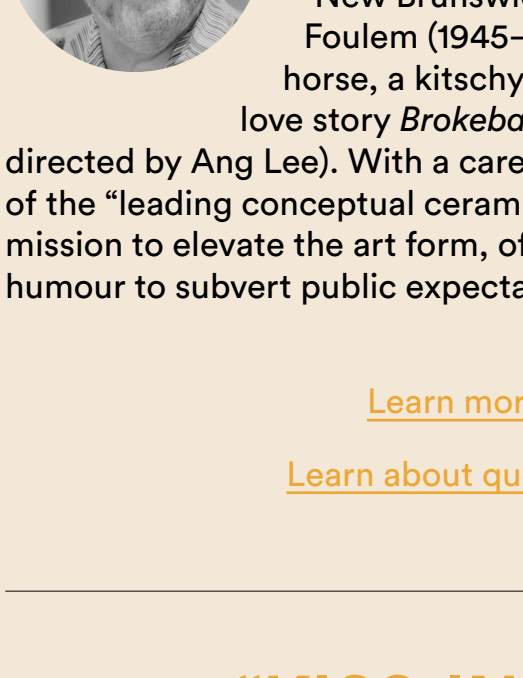


In her intimate Polaroid snapshots of two women in love, Winnipeg-born artist Rosalie Favell (b.1958) used black electrical tape to obscure the identity of her lover and scrawled diary excerpts filled with longing and heartbreak over the images. Before the first exhibition of Favell's *Living Evidence* series, 1994, at MSVU Art Gallery in Halifax, [gallery director Ingrid Jenkner](#) says they anticipated “a homophobic reception,” and “a media-relations staffer wondered whether it was truly necessary to use ‘the L-word’ in publicity.” At the time, publicly identifying as a lesbian, as Favell did, was a groundbreaking act for a two-spirited Indigenous woman in Canada.

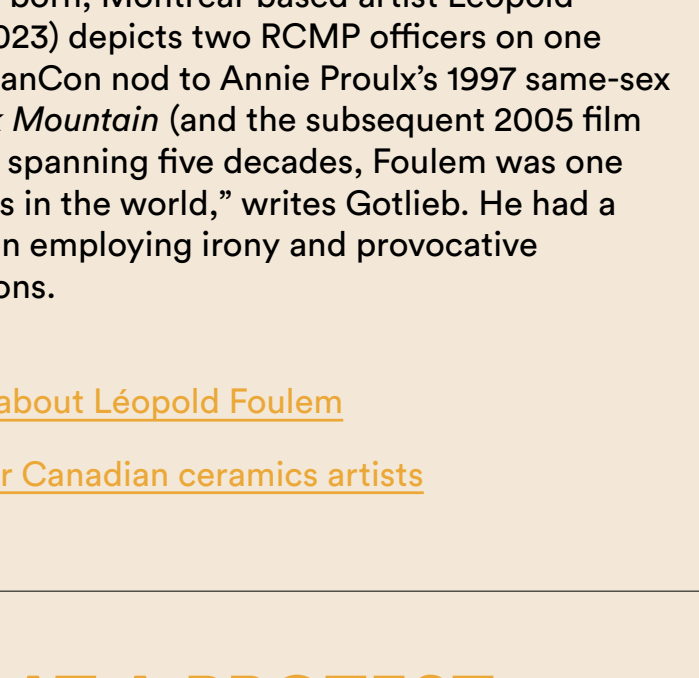
[Learn more about Rosalie Favell](#)

RETURNING FROM BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN

by Léopold Foulem



Léopold Foulem, *Returning from Brokeback Mountain*, c.2006–07, Gardiner Museum, Toronto.



Léopold Foulem, *Returning from Brokeback Mountain* (detail), c.2006–07, Gardiner Museum, Toronto.



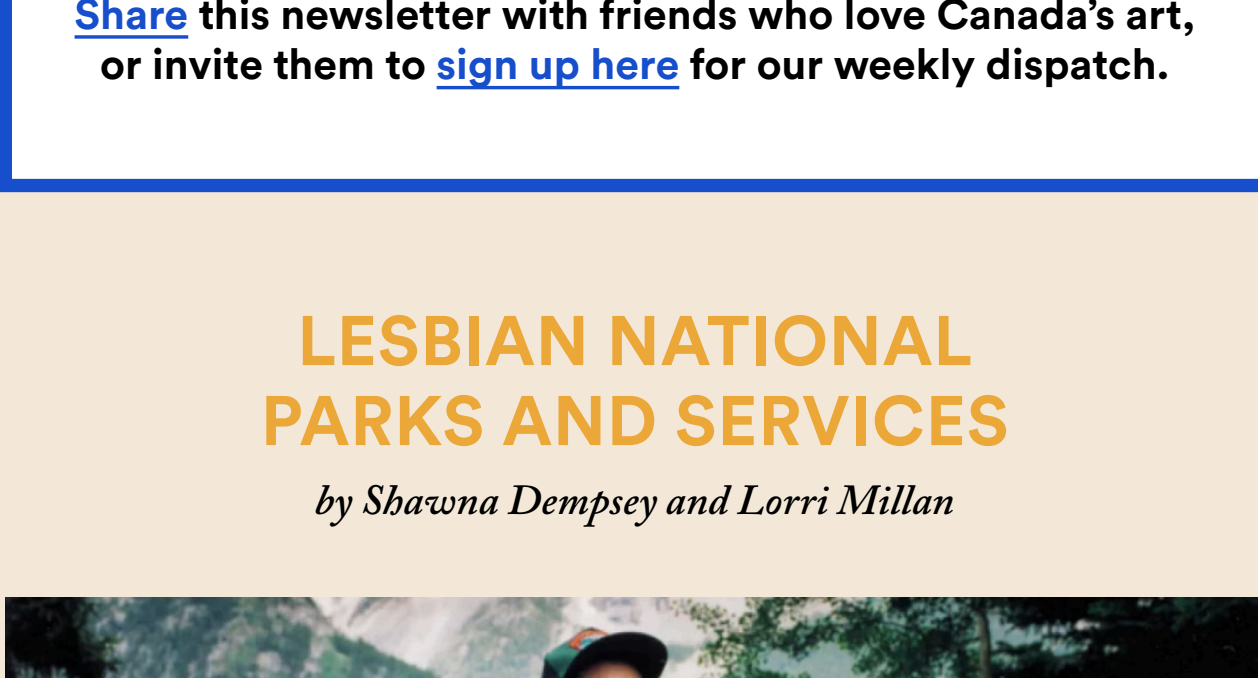
“Mickey Mouse, Colonel Sanders, Santa Claus, Mounties or priests—no image is too sacred for Foulem to apply as weapons for his critique,” [writes curator and ceramics specialist Rachel Gotlieb](#). For this decorative vessel, New Brunswick-born, Montreal-based artist Léopold Foulem (1945–2023) depicts two RCMP officers on one horse, a kitschy CanCon nod to Annie Proulx's 1997 same-sex love story *Brokeback Mountain* (and the subsequent 2005 film directed by Ang Lee). With a career spanning five decades, Foulem was one of the “leading conceptual ceramists in the world,” [writes Gotlieb](#). He had a mission to elevate the art form, often employing irony and provocative humour to subvert public expectations.

[Learn more about Léopold Foulem](#)

[Learn about queer Canadian ceramics artists](#)

“KISS-IN” AT A PROTEST

by Gerald Hannon



People staging a “kiss-in” at a protest against the arrest of two young men for kissing in public, Toronto, July 1976, photograph by Gerald Hannon.



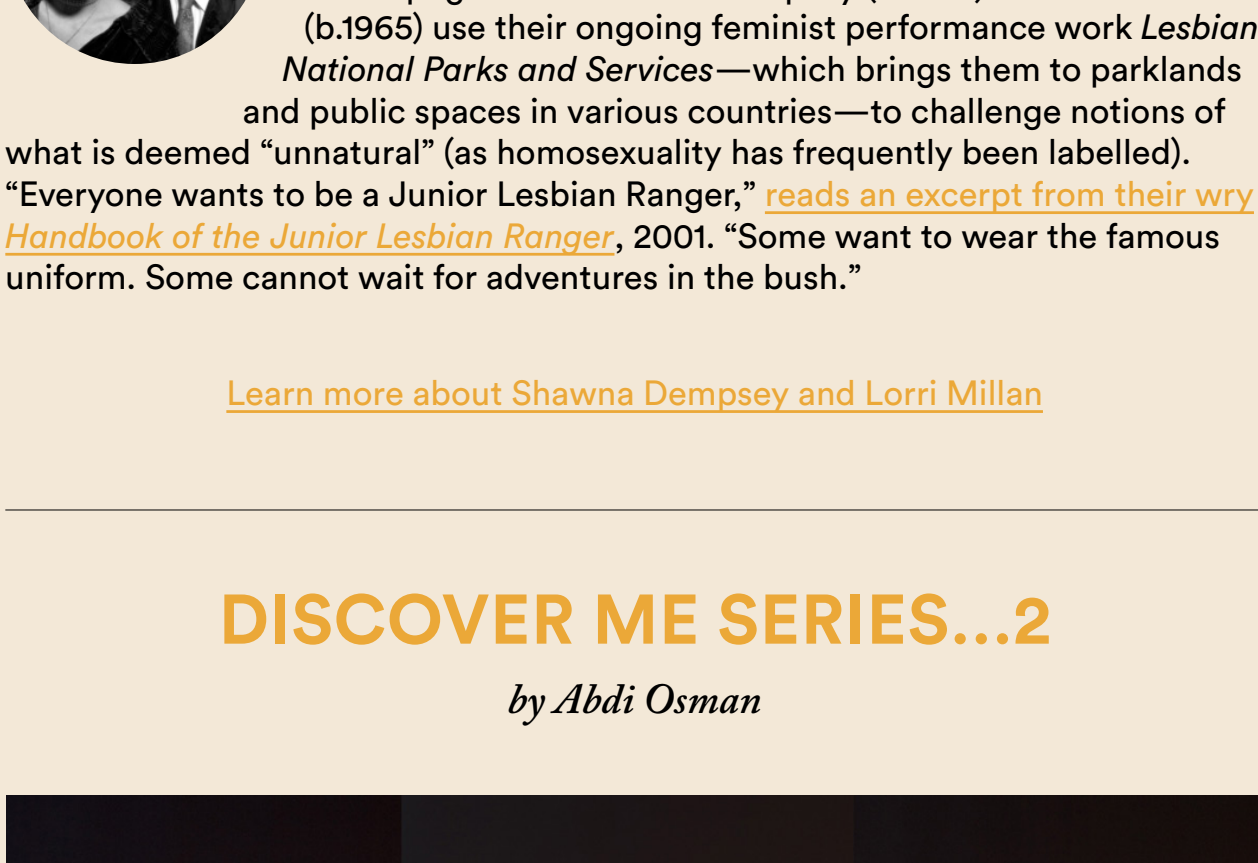
When is affection an act of dissent? At the corner of Bloor and Yonge Streets in Toronto in July 1976, activists from gay liberation movements staged a “kiss-in” to protest the arrest of two men who had been convicted of indecency for locking lips at the same intersection in February that year. Photographer Gerald Hannon (1944–2022), whose work was both journalistic and deeply personal, was there to participate in and document the event. He told the *Toronto Star* in 2015, “You know, [we felt] the exhilaration you get when you go out on the edge of a building, where you're both excited and you feel slightly in danger.” Hannon's photograph is included in the current group exhibition [JOY, SORROW, ANGER, LOVE, PRIDE](#), at Toronto's Collision Gallery.

[Learn more about Gerald Hannon](#)

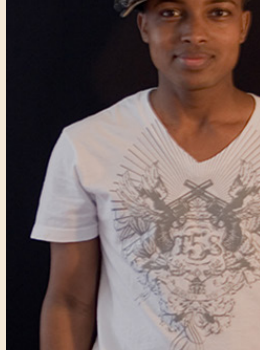
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LESBIAN NATIONAL PARKS AND SERVICES

by Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan



Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan, *Lesbian National Parks and Services*, 1997–2015, photograph by Don Lee, Banff Centre.

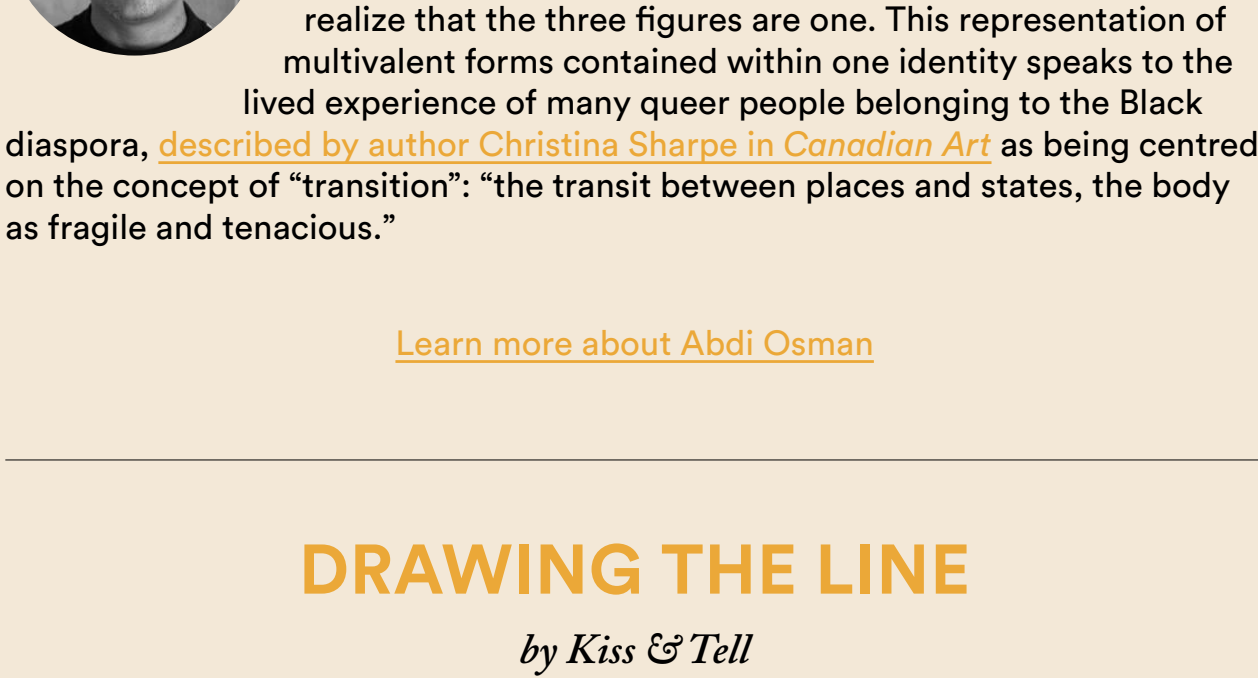


One could argue that the national park is an apt metaphor for heteronormativity: it takes the sprawling metaphor of the natural world and prunes it to fit inside strict, yet largely arbitrary, borders. Blazing a trail for lesbian visibility, Winnipeg artists Shawna Dempsey (b.1963) and Lorri Millan (b.1965) use their ongoing feminist performance work *Lesbian National Parks and Services*—which brings them to parklands and public spaces in various countries—to challenge notions of what is deemed “unnatural” (as homosexuality has frequently been labelled). “Everyone wants to be a Junior Lesbian Ranger,” [reads an excerpt from their wry Handbook of the Junior Lesbian Ranger](#), 2001. “Some want to wear the famous uniform. Some cannot wait for adventures in the bush.”

[Learn more about Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan](#)

DISCOVER ME SERIES...2

by Abdi Osman



Abdi Osman, *Discover Me Series...2*, 2007, courtesy of Abdi Osman.

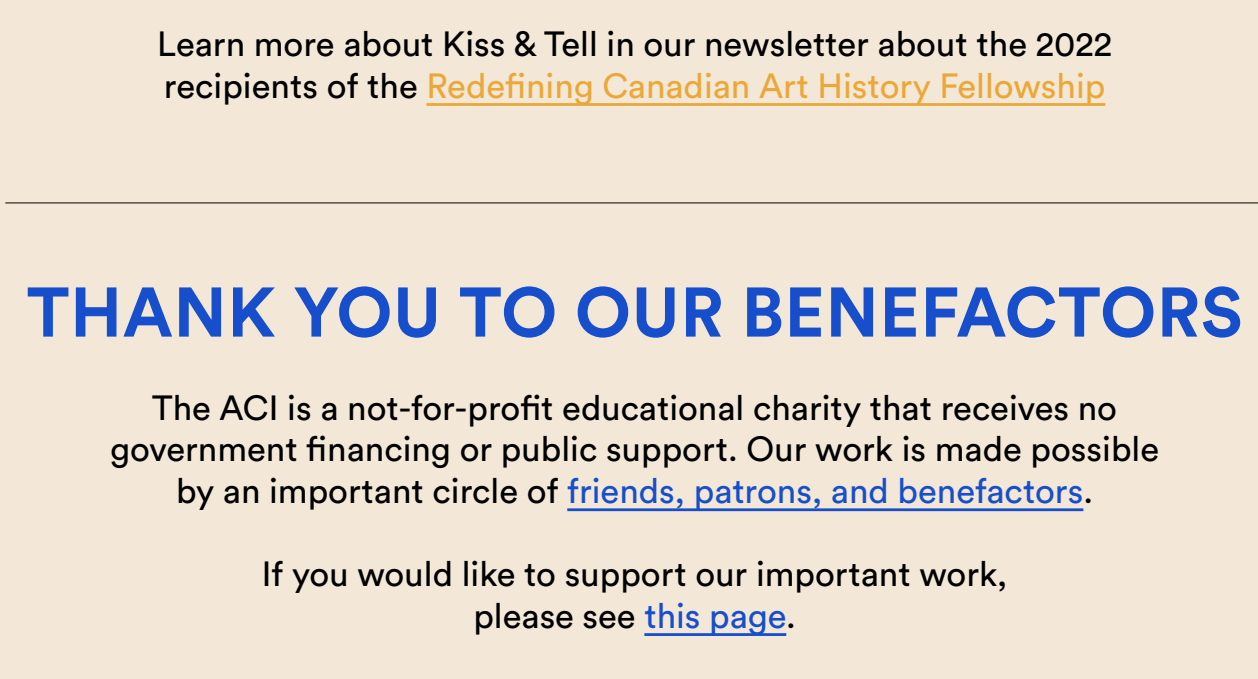


In this three-part work of self-discovery, Somali Canadian artist Abdi Osman wears three outfits: a graphic tee with ripped jeans (left), an abaya with feminine make-up (centre), and traditional Somali men's clothing (right), which includes a sarong. At first glance, viewers may not even realize that the three figures are one. This representation of lived experience forms contained within one identity speaks to the lived experience of many queer people belonging to the Black diaspora, [described by author Christina Sharpe in Canadian Art](#) as being centred on the concept of “transition”: “the transit between places and states, the body as fragile and tenacious.”

[Learn more about Abdi Osman](#)

DRAWING THE LINE

by Kiss & Tell



Kiss & Tell, *Drawing the Line*, 1990, courtesy of Kiss & Tell.

This dreamy, black and white photographic portrait of two women was part of *Drawing the Line*, a revolutionary exhibition of lesbian erotica presented in 1990 by Vancouver art collective Kiss & Tell (1984–present). Viewers were invited to participate by writing directly on the walls and images, commenting on what they found offensive—in other words, where they drew the line. The impact of the group and this exhibition are explored in depth by scholar Kristen Hutchinson, a 2022 recipient of ACI's Redefining Canadian Art History Fellowship, whose “research examines how Kiss & Tell created artworks and spaces that, for the first time, allowed women to see themselves represented in art through a queer female gaze.”

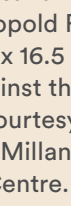
Learn more about Kiss & Tell in our newsletter about the 2022 recipients of the [Redefining Canadian Art History Fellowship](#)

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Image Credits: [1] Sunil Gupta, *Untitled #4*, 1976, from the series *Christopher Street*, New York 1976, archival inkjet print, 27.94 x 19.05 cm. Courtesy of Sunil Gupta and DACS/Artimage 2023. © Sunil Gupta (Copyright Visual Arts-CARCC, 2023). [2] Rosalie Favell, *There are no endings*, 1994, from the series *Living Evidence*. Courtesy of Rosalie Favell. [3] Léopold Foulem, *Returning from Brokeback Mountain*, c.2006–07, ceramic, decals, found metal mounts, 45.7 x 16.5 x 16.5 cm. Collection of the Gardiner Museum, Toronto. [4] People staging a “kiss-in” at a protest against the arrest of two young men for kissing in public, Toronto, July 1976, photograph by Gerald Hannon. Courtesy of the Magenta Foundation, Toronto, and The ArQuives, Toronto. [5] Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan, *Lesbian National Parks and Services*, 1997–2015, performance, photograph by Don Lee, Banff Centre. Courtesy of Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan. [6] Abdi Osman, *Discover Me Series...2*, 2007. Courtesy of Abdi Osman. [7] Kiss & Tell, *Drawing the Line*, 1990, photograph. Courtesy of Kiss & Tell.