

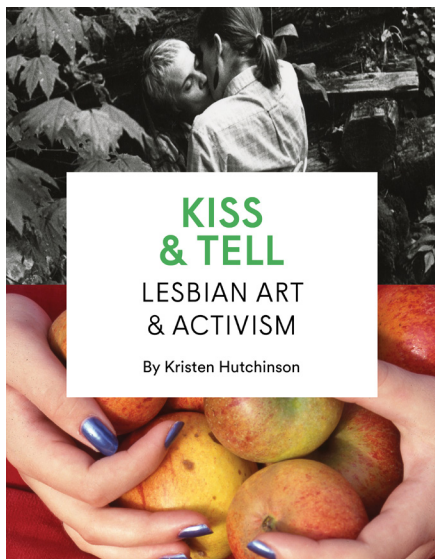
## Kiss & Tell broke barriers with their fearless focus on queer art, sex, activism, and the fight against censorship

### *Kiss & Tell: Lesbian Art & Activism*

The new open-access online art book by Kristen Hutchinson  
Publishing on June 4, 2025

*Kiss & Tell: Lesbian Art & Activism* by Kristen Hutchinson is the latest open-access book from the Art Canada Institute. Available online in English and French, it chronicles the work of Kiss & Tell, the Vancouver collective that brought lesbian sexuality out of the closet through their innovative use of photography, video, and performance, and their unerring commitment to rejecting the art world status quo, no matter the consequences.

*A selection of press images is available through the link at the end of this release.*



LEFT: Cover of *Kiss & Tell: Lesbian Art & Activism*. RIGHT: Portrait of Kiss & Tell.

**June 4, 2025, FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**—The last thing Kiss & Tell expected from their inaugural 1988 photography exhibition, *Drawing the Line*, was a queue stretching down three city blocks. More than thirty-five years on, the appeal of the Vancouver collective is crystal clear: they were offering up lesbian-made art in an era that was sorely lacking in that type of representation. Kiss & Tell's unabashedly transgressive work did not go unnoticed by the pundits and policymakers of the time. Photographs from *Drawing the Line* were seized on multiple occasions at the Canadian border, as were magazines featuring articles about the exhibition.

***Kiss & Tell: Lesbian Art & Activism***, a free, open-access online art book, published in both English and French by the Art Canada Institute, examines the legacy of this collective of women who, against the odds, issued a fierce challenge to queer invisibility. As author Kristen Hutchinson writes, "The artworks of Kiss & Tell were an antidote to the misunderstanding, stereotyping, misinformation, and vilification of queer people. They asked questions without providing answers so that audiences were compelled to reflect on what was happening around them."



## Pushing Boundaries

Already artists and activists when they met in the 1980s, Persimmon Blackbridge (b.1951), Lizard Jones (b.1961), and Susan Stewart (b.1952) came together to create socially engaged art in response to the backlash against queer people in Canada. Their first and most famous work, the photography exhibition *Drawing the Line*, was inspired by debates among feminists about the ethics of pornography. When the exhibition premiered in Vancouver in 1988, it sparked conversations about female sexuality and lesbian representation. By 1990, *Drawing the Line* had travelled to fifteen cities across North America, Australia, and the Netherlands, bringing Kiss & Tell's art to an international audience.

Between 1992 and 2002, Kiss & Tell created four multimedia performance works that consistently pushed social and aesthetic boundaries. Mixing monologues, confessionals, and humorous anecdotes with visuals (often projected photographs and multi-channel videos) and music, the works explored sexuality, politics, class issues, disability, and more. The members of Kiss & Tell mined their personal lives for material and were unafraid to tackle taboos involving censorship, trauma, and queer rights. Their style was both conversational and confrontational, compelling audience members to connect with the material, the performers, and each other.

## Censorship and Persecution

As they had with *Drawing the Line*, the collective prompted outrage with a 1992 multimedia performance, *True Inversions*. The show inspired headlines in newspapers, debates about the morals of lesbian sexuality on radio shows, and denunciations from politicians in Alberta, where the performance had premiered. Throughout their fourteen-year existence, Kiss & Tell repeatedly faced persecution and consistently turned that hardship into art (case in point, 1999's censorship-focused *Borderline Disorderly*).

## An Indelible Legacy

Kiss & Tell's strategy of creating provocative and evocative art, most often outside traditional gallery spaces, was part of their larger critique of oppression and their continual questioning of who gets to hold power. Their subversive works have inspired generations of artists and activists to follow suit.

"More than two decades after the production of Kiss & Tell's final work, the collective's influence is undeniable. A detailed look at these trailblazing artists is long overdue," says Sara Angel, Founder and Executive Director of the Art Canada Institute. "[\*Kiss & Tell: Lesbian Art & Activism\*](#) is a compelling corrective to art world scholarship—and a broader culture—that consistently overlooked the contributions of lesbian art and activism."

[\*Kiss & Tell: Lesbian Art & Activism\*](#) advances the Art Canada Institute's mission to create a central digital resource to share Canada's most important artists, and their works, with the world. To date, ACI has published sixty-eight expert-authored digital books that are available online free of charge. As well, ACI develops Canada's only comprehensive art education guides for teachers and students from kindergarten to grade 12—content that is free and available online and serves more than 700,000 educators.

To explore the Art Canada Institute's open-access digital book *Kiss & Tell: Lesbian Art & Activism* by Kristen Hutchinson, please visit: <https://www.aci-iac.ca/art-books/kiss-tell/>.

For media requests or for interviews with:

- Kristen Hutchinson, author of *Kiss & Tell: Lesbian Art & Activism*
- Sara Angel, Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

please contact: [media@aci-iac.ca](mailto:media@aci-iac.ca)



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### **About the Author**

Kristen Hutchinson is a queer and gender-fluid (they/she) visual artist, cultural critic, curator, writer, editor, and adjunct professor of art history, feminism, media studies, and popular culture. She received her PhD in the History of Art from University College London in 2007 and has taught at numerous universities and colleges in Canada, the US, and the UK. She also teaches independent seminars in person and online. Hutchinson is the author of two other books: *Monsters No More: How We Came to Love the Denizens of the Dark* (2025) and *Prairie Tales: A History* (2017). They have been a nationally syndicated art and popular culture columnist at CBC Radio and the editor-in-chief of *Luma Quarterly*. Hutchinson is the co-founder of fast & dirty, a Montreal- and Edmonton-based curatorial and artist collective that creates projects challenging curatorial methods, as well as exhibitions and art events for short durations in unusual environments. They recently participated in a research residency focusing on Canadian lesboqueer artists and curated an exhibition titled *We're Here. We're Lesboqueer. We're Still Fabulous* at Artexte in Montreal.

### **About the Art Canada Institute**

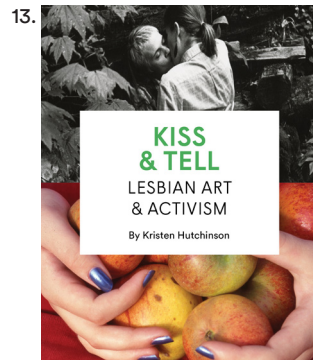
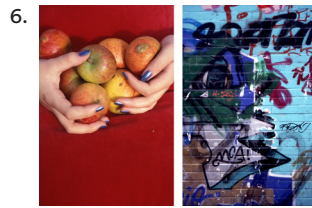
The Art Canada Institute is the only national institution whose mandate is to promote the study of an inclusive, multi-vocal Canadian art history to as broad an audience as possible, on a digital platform, and free of charge in both English and French, across Canada and internationally. To accomplish this, ACI works with Canada's leading cultural institutions, art historians, curators, and visual culture experts, and is dedicated to the creation of authoritative original content on the people, themes, and topics that have defined Canadian art history.

To learn more about ACI and to access our free digital library, please visit us! [aci-iac.ca](https://aci-iac.ca)

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Download image files [here](#).







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3. Installation view of visitor engagement with *Drawing the Line* exhibition at Cameraworks, San Francisco, 1991. Kiss & Tell Fonds, Special Collections and Rare Books, Simon Fraser University Library, Burnaby (MsC-165). Courtesy of Simon Fraser University Library. © Kiss & Tell. Photo credit: Isa Massu.
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12. Kristen Hutchinson, author of *Kiss & Tell: Lesbian Art & Activism*.
13. Cover of *Kiss & Tell: Lesbian Art & Activism*.