



Rare & Raw



February 15, 2013- March 31, 2013
Co-curated by Steph Rogerson and Kelly McCray.



Leslie + Lohmar
museum
of Gay and Lesbian Art

Thank You

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Estate of William G. Munro

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Cover Images:

Zoe Leonard (American, b. 1961)
The Fae Richards Photo Archive, 1993-1996
Photograph, detail from installation
Collection Eileen Harris Norton

William E. Jones (American, b. 1962)
Tearoom, 2006
Video still
Courtesy David Kordansky Gallery

Greetings

As demonstrators raged in front of the Stonewall Inn in the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, they could have hardly imagined that 44 years later gay rights would be the topic of a presidential inaugural address and more than 45 million citizens in nine states throughout the US would have the freedom to legally marry as part of a same-sex couple.

Without homage to our past, we cannot imagine how to forge the future.

The Leslie Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art is pleased to present two exhibitions that explore the role of queer history in our present-day lives. With the exhibition *Making History, Making Art: The Work of Jonathan Ned Katz*, thoughtfully curated by a renowned expert in queer theory, Jonathan David Katz, we look at the importance of art making through the eyes of an individual who authored nine books, several seminal titles in gay history. Through his work, we examine how art making came to this West Village icon as a child, who then, three decades later, made pictures of men, both nude and clothed, because, he says simply, “I could.”

Rare & Raw, expertly curated by Steph Rogerson and Kelly McCray from Toronto, explores queer history through contemporary art practices by pairing pieces of work, one which could not have existed without the other. The works allow us to examine notions of power, sexuality, history, and the queer gaze. Older and younger artists are compared to each other, allowing us to examine how our history directly informs what is made today. The exhibition demands we pause and ask, “How has queer history shaped our current discourse on queer representation? How have contemporary queer artists responded to queer historical material?”

These exhibitions are why our Museum exists: It is our opportunity to use our own experiences to inform those around us. Enjoy.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, staff, and volunteers of Leslie Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art,

Hunter O'Hanian
Museum Director

Rare & Raw: *Exhibiting Contemporary Queer Art Practices and The Archive*

Steph Rogerson

“Politics and feelings are very different kinds of things: the public sphere is big, feelings are small; social life happens out there, psychic life, somewhere inside; public time is collective time, measured by the clock, whereas in psychic life the trains hardly ever run on time.”

Heather Love

Kelly McCray and I spent three years researching archives, galleries, foundations, and artists for the exhibition *Raw & Rare*. The exhibition explores queer history through contemporary art practices that intentionally reference the historical. In the process of researching and creating the show, we had the opportunity to connect with archivists, librarians, artists, dealers, academics, curators, and others working in the arts. These people welcomed us with generosity and facilitated our work by making archives, galleries, and libraries accessible to us. The list of people to acknowledge is too long for this brief essay, but without their help this exhibition would not have been possible. This network of people helped us understand that by unveiling queer histories and hidden narratives every attempt at queer discourse has the possibility to inform queer communities. By relating the past through contemporary discourse, each artist in this exhibition addresses and challenges the complexity of historical queer representation. The works of Tom of Finland, G.B Jones, Nina Levitt, Kent Monkman, Will Munro, William. E. Jones, Tara Mateik, and Zoe Leonard contribute to the creative process and critical discourse that are so valuable to *Raw & Rare*.

In *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, Heather Love considers the tension between queer subjects as “both abject and exalted” (3). The tension of the abject coupled with the exalted arises from the historical damage of social stigma and violence, and the countervailing “progress” of queer visibility and the acknowledgement of queer

existence. This tension between “then” and “now,” between damage and reclamation, is at the heart of all of the works in *Rare & Raw*. In this essay I focus on the works by Zoe Leonard, William E. Jones, Kent Monkman and Nina Levitt to reflect the wounds of historical queer presence through cultural erasure, racism, colonization, and surveillance.

Los Angeles-based artist William E. Jones' video, *Tearoom* (1962/2006), speaks directly to histories of homophobia, police surveillance, entrapment, as well as gay sex, cruising, and the queer gaze. The 1962 police surveillance footage, on which this piece is based, was shot concealed behind a two-way mirror in a public washroom during a raid. In *Tearoom*, slow pans and camera tilts show undercover cops preparing for the ‘crackdown,’ while gradually revealing the homoerotic possibilities between undercover cops and those cruising. What begins as a stake-out by law enforcement officers unfolds into anonymous blow jobs, backward and solicitous glances, and taboo sex. *Tearoom* does not bask in the glow of gay liberation, but exposes historical damage through an empowered and creative queer lens. By appropriating footage intended to incarcerate the subjects, Jones created an extraordinary piece that comments on the public and private, and the possibilities of a reverse gaze or reinterpretation of pain and trauma.

New York-based artist Zoe Leonard demonstrates the significance of queer history in art production with *The Fae Richards Photo Archive* (1993/1997). *The Archive* is a large installation comprising seventy-eight gelatin silver prints, four chromogenic prints, and a notebook of seven pages of typescript on paper. *The Fae Richards Photo Archive* is based on the life of the fictional black actress and singer, Fae Richards (1908-1973). The photographs taken by Leonard are based on a character conceived by filmmaker Cheryl Dunye, which were used in Dunye's iconic film, *The Watermelon Woman* (1996). While Fae Richards is fictional, her story unfolds, allowing us as viewers to imagine the lives of others who have been erased and hidden from history. In narratives, such as that of Fae Richards, love, loss, and subjugation are met with perseverance and determination. The speculative nature of LGBT history through Leonard's work, as well as her acknowledgement of historical loss, illustrates both social inequality as it existed in the past and suggests the presence of social exclusion in a contemporary context.



Kent Monkman (Canadian, b.1965)
Vaudeville Star, from the *Emergence of a Legend Series*, 2006
Chromogenic print on metallic paper,
5.75 x 3.75"
collaboration with Christopher Chapman
Courtesy Museum of Contemporary
Canadian Art

Canadian Cree artist Kent Monkman's *Emergence of a Legend* (2006) is a series of photographic chromogenic prints that emulate 19th-century antique daguerreotypes. His photographs, featuring the artist's alter ego, *Miss Chief Eagle Testicle*, recall the history of early photographic portraiture and the Wild West and colonization.

Emergence of a Legend is a phantasmagoric series, built on former technologies and ideologies. His works are tender, exquisite, and, most notably, mischievous. This series of photographs is playful, kitschy, honorific and reverent. Monkman's drag is both exaggerated and profoundly subtle in the gestures and various guises moving from aboriginal drag queen extraordinaire to a stately, yet caged, subject.

For Toronto-based artist Nina Levitt, Wild West lesbian icon Calamity Jane is positioned across a diptych. *Calamity* (1991) are two photographic panels, one featuring the sitting figure of Calamity Jane with spheres of black exposed photographic paper masking part of her gun, knee and foot, while the second panel is entirely black exposed photo paper with portholes highlighting only those three areas. The black spheres imitate large bullet holes or portholes to peep through. They unnerve this seemingly traditional portrait by adding both something that hides and reveals the subject as well as creates a collage-like, hand-made aesthetic. *Calamity* appears in this image as neither a hero nor villain, rather as someone who was rugged, butch, and contentious.



Nina Levitt (Canadian, b. 1955)
Calamity, 1991
Diptych, 24 x 40" each cut and dry-mounted
chromogenic photographs on paper
Courtesy the artist

In our desire to recoup queer history and explore complex legacies, *Rare & Raw* attempts “to engage with the past without being destroyed by it” so that queers can “face backward toward a difficult past, and simultaneously forward.” The preservation of queer history supports the possibility of queer memory and helps in understanding the complexities of such history, regardless of how emotional, affective, and sensory it can be. As curators, our practice of looking at the past through the lens of contemporary art has aided us in forging new emotional knowledge that will inform several future projects. Loss and grief are feelings that queer communities have and continue to experience because of repressed and obscure histories, gay bashing, HIV/AIDS, cancer, or random acts of loss. Yet, we persist.

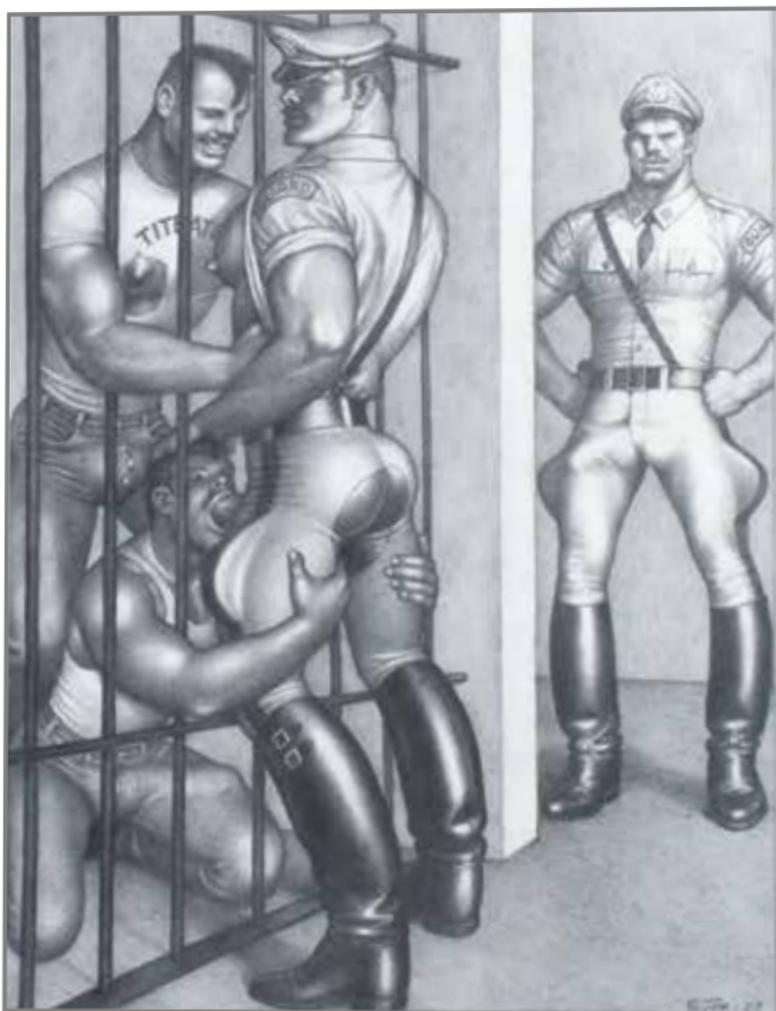
I would like to dedicate this essay to one of the artists Will Munro (1975–2010). Will was an artist, deejay, social critic, community activist, and friend. His queer spirit thrives, although he is no longer with us. We deeply miss him.

Excerpt from *Converging Trails*

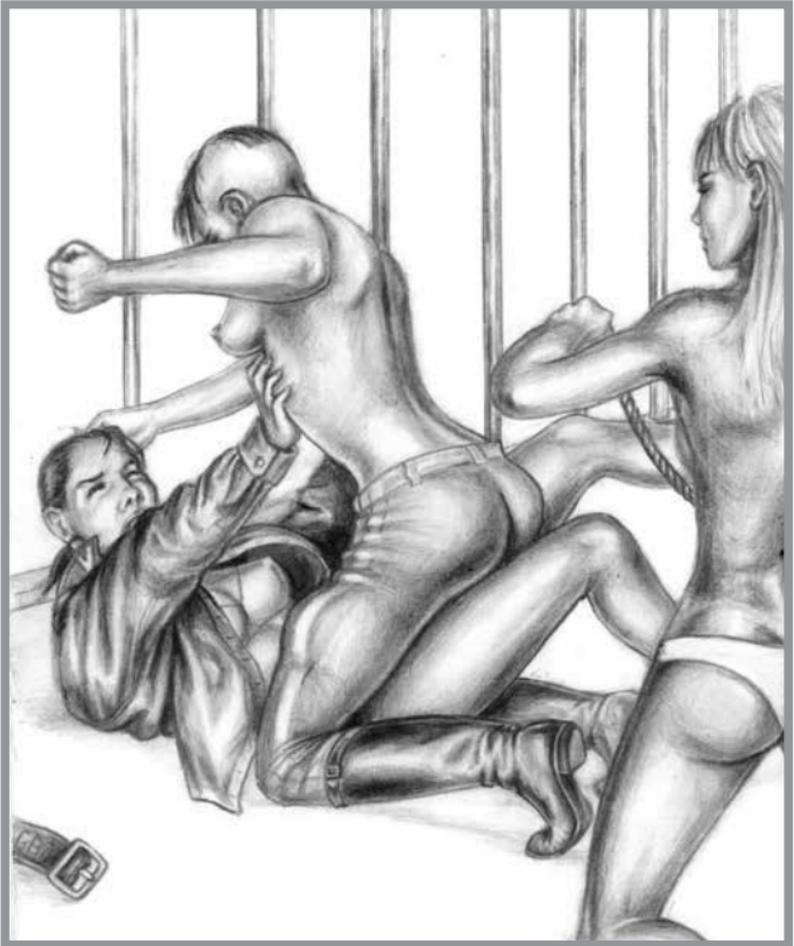
by Kelly McCray

As the curators of this project for more than three years, Steph Rogerson and I have been fortunate to research queer histories in numerous North American archives that have led directly and indirectly to the conceptualization of the *Rare & Raw* exhibition. Through *Rare & Raw*, we are searching for artists who present work that references plausible gestures from the past, while concurrently addressing issues of the present.

We chose to exhibit the Tom of Finland prison drawings from 1987 alongside the GB Jones, (the “female Tom”) 1991 *Prison Breakout* series to draw attention to her referencing of Finland scenes as stereotypical gay male erotica in order to challenge this idolization of men with overt lesbian content. In this second generation revision, viewers are confronted with a contemporary transgression of pioneering role reversal through GB's candid lesbian erotica.



Tom of Finland, (Finnish-American, 1920-1991)
Untitled, from the Jailhouse Series, 1987
Graphite on paper, 11.9 x 9.5"
Copyright Tom of Finland Foundation



G. B. Jones (Canadian, b.1965)
Prison Breakout #6, 1991
 Graphite on paper, 10.4 x 8.75"
 Courtesy the artist and Paul Petro Contemporary Art

In his videos and performances, Tara Mateik self-defines as “theoretical and cultural transvestites from pop music, competitive sport and weird science.” His 2005 *Zurück an Absender* explores history and gender identity in a small intimate piece based on the story of the 1936 German Olympian, Hermann Ratjen/Dora Ratjen. Mateik’s fabricated postage



Tara Mateik (American, b.1974)
Zurück an Absender
(Return to Sender), 2005
 Fabricated commemorative stamp
 and cancellations on 1936
 Olympic postcard, 4 x 5.75"
 Courtesy the artist

Tara Mateik (American, b.1974)
Detail of Zurück an Absender
(Return to Sender), 2005
 Courtesy the artist



stamp features Dora Ratjen's high jump, captured in Leni Riefenstahl's 1938 documentary *Olympia*. The hand stamped marking "*Zurück an Absender*" translates to "Return to Sender." In 1957 Hermann Ratjen admitted to having been persuaded by the Nazi Party to compete in the 1936 Olympics as a woman named Dora. The returned postcard discloses the Nazi Party's willingness to exploit gender fluidity at the 1936 Olympics. This seemingly insignificant image of a female high jumper throws an enlightening spark on the hidden history of sport and gender reversal.

Los Angeles-based William E Jones in his video, *Tearoom*, shows original footage of 1962 police surveillance film surreptitiously shot with a movie camera concealed behind a two-way mirror in a public wash-room in the American Midwest. The footage captures poignant elements of the intimate male gaze through a mirror surface as well as the consensual sexual activity between men of every race, religion, and class. What is not evident through the moving images is that the men depicted in the film—the soon to become "defendants"—were all found guilty of sodomy, which at that time in that state, carried a mandatory minimum sentence of one year in the state penitentiary. The publication of the men's names in the newspaper had a harsh impact on their lives that would stain them well into the future. Through *Tearoom*, Jones reminds contemporary viewers that the forest floor has often been littered with precarious societal repercussions that communities have struggled to overcome through the courts, the bars, back rooms and bathhouses; the schools, parks and streets.

In the gallery setting of the *Tearoom* video, we felt it essential to install the Will Munro mirrors which glisten with pink silkscreened surfaces in direct opposition to the clandestine activity in Jones's video. Our gaze is returned alongside brilliant crimson text/imagery that pays homage to the iconic underground club scenes decimated by time and the catastrophic march of AIDS. In the 2005 *Blank Generation* series, Munro gestures symbolically to the past through re-appropriated iconic imagery and club names such as *Vaseline*, *Squeeze Box*, *Mudd Club*, and *The Pyramid* on intimate 12" x 12" square mirrors.

The life work of the recently deceased Toronto-based Munro is not readily apparent in this exhibition; he was a leading innovator, activist, and queer arts community builder. I refer to him as a life curator who united performance artists, fashion designers, musicians, and visual artists. Anyone who had a creative impulse or who wanted to experience a celebration of inclusive diversity congregated to follow Will's contagious pied-piper lead in a host of courageous missions.



William G. Munro (Canadian, 1975-2010)
 Nine selections from the *Blank Generation* series, 2005
 Silkscreen on mirror, 12 x 12" each
 Courtesy Munro Estate and Art Metropole

A most significant statement that seems to position mandates of queer archives and motives of the *Rare & Raw* exhibition comes from the Canadian-based *Xtra* "Letters to the Editor" section. While reflecting on the Toronto bathhouse raids of 1961 in a 2011 commentary letter, Mark Kedrick from Toronto reminds readers that the

"Knowledge of history is essential to protect and maintain rights obtained in political struggle. It is important to the new generation to empower themselves with knowledge so that the clock cannot be set back in time. The freedoms enjoyed today can easily be turned back if the guards on them are let down."

Letters To The Editor, *Xtra*, Feb 24, 2011, p. 6

The North American forest trails are not as precarious as they once were, however, it is essential to heed Kedrick's advice to arm ourselves and our youth with one of our more valuable renewable resources; our need to share, reconsider and redefine the blaze of the forest paths.

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Leslie + Lohman
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The Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art is the first and only dedicated LGBTQ art museum in the world with a mission to exhibit and preserve LGBTQ art, and foster the artists who create it. Accredited by the New York State Board of Regents, the Museum has a permanent collection of over 12,000 objects, spanning more than three centuries of queer art. The Leslie-Lohman Museum hosts six to eight major exhibitions annually, artist talks, film screenings, panel discussions, readings and other events. In addition, it publishes THE ARCHIVE –a quarterly art newsletter–and maintains a substantial research library. The Museum is the premier resource for anyone interested in the rich legacy of the LGBTQ community and its influence on and confrontation with the mainstream art work. There is no other organization in the world like it.

The Leslie-Lohman Museum is operated by the Leslie/Lohman Gay Art Foundation, a non-profit organization founded in 1987 by Charles W. Leslie and Fritz Lohman who have supported LGBTQ artists for over thirty years. The Leslie-Lohman Museum embraces the rich creative history of the LGBTQ art community by informing, inspiring, entertaining and challenging all who enter its doors.



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