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THE DARKER
SIDE OF BLACK:
ISAAC JULIEN

FUSE

MAGAZINE

THEME-PARK MANAGEMENT
AT THE CANADA COUNCIL

IMAGE AND REPRESENTATION:
THE CANADIAN AIRBORNE REGIMENT

PLUS REVIEWS OF

bell hooks

Nancy Nicol

Steve Reinke



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Fig. 216. —“Drava.”

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Fig. 205. —“LIFT” (OR “RAISE.”)

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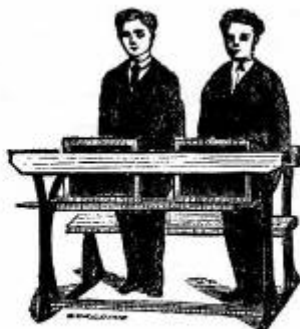
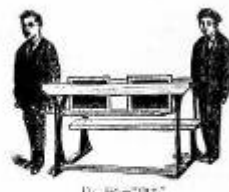


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Cover image: from *Hollow Liberty*, directed by
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Out In Context: Work by Queer students of the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, Vancouver

JANUARY 4–12, 1995

REVIEW BY ANDREA FATONA AND GORDON BRENT INGRAM

The construction of a Queer identity arises from experiences broader than sexual desires alone. The work in this show speaks to the construction of identity from a variety of moments, questioning expectations about dykes, fags and bisexuals that are consistently maintained within a larger cultural and social context. The necessity for providing a Queer context in which to view this work arises from the marginalization of sexual issues—and the invisibility of many non-sexual issues—when work by Queers is presented in a predominantly straight environment.

Exhibition Statement

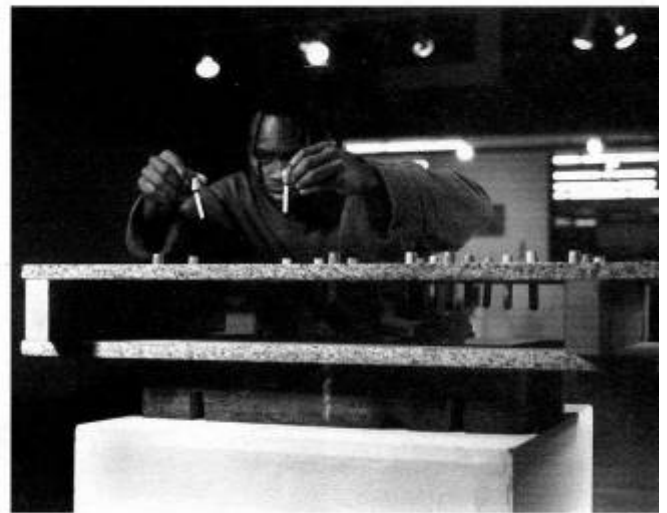
This, my friends, is the psychological equivalent of putting all of your dirty dishes in the oven and pretending that your kitchen is clean.... I am locked in. I am my desires.

J. McLaughlin, from the twenty-minute performance Genderblender, January 5, 1995

Lesbian and gay student group exhibitions have been staged in the art schools of North America for over fifteen years. They have usually had too many political functions within art school academe to be considered seriously for the art *per se*. Shows of the work of Queer students provide a key weathervane for the efforts at building “community” and more squarely confronting homophobia both in educational contexts and local milieus. The uses and functions of such Queer exhibitions, and the interpersonal and political efforts that have produced them, can tell

us much about the ways that the winds of cultural politics are blowing. As we move into the *fin-de-siècle*, “Out in Context” provides a rich and contradictory window into a new group of lesbian, gay and bisexual artists.

“Out In Context” was a vehicle created to consolidate a Queer presence at one of the most experimental and probably least homophobic art institutes in Canada. This student exhibition was due in large part to the establishment of a regular Queer Theory course taught by video artist Cornelia Wyngarden. The organization of this particular Queer show consciously de-emphasized sexuality in deference to various marginalizations only partially derived from the articulation of erotic desires. But it was in the new formations of sexual imagery that the group exhibition had its greatest power. This contradiction between Queerness from the actual articulation of same-sex desire, in contrast to that from marginalization through assertion or lack of vocabulary to do so, dominated this collection, where each artist could only contribute one piece.



Context in this group exhibition seemed to be about giving one auxiliary clue — providing additional evidence that was probably not necessary — and these added objects were often like precious consumer items in drag. There were remarkably few pieces that actually situated experiences either in the geography of the West Coast or in particular cultural, ethnic or historical contexts. For such a multicultural city, there was disturbingly little mention about difference in terms of race, ethnicity or language. This may say more about the institution and its privileged site on the west side of the city. Personal angst is easier to manage than persistent “cultural” inequities in the art politics of Vancouver, which is in such

Kirk Moses with Bryan Langlands' *Untitled*, granite, wood, mirrors, vials of blood, 36"x18"x9".



Stills from *Bed Space*, Eric Rancourt, film, 8 min.

rapid transition from being an overgrown logging town. Oddly, like the lesbian after whom the institute is named, the discourse in this exhibition was formed from the pain of solitude rather than new recognitions of communality.

The strongest statements in "Out In Context" were about the body. The only piece of performance, *Genderblender* by J. McLaughlin, was the most passionate and best situated. McLaughlin worked carefully within the established confines of feminist and Queer testimonial but, in contrast to much of the emotions expressed in "Out In Context," there was a freshness in the humour and personal revelations that went well beyond the discomfort of disclosure.

Bryan Langlands' sculpture of granite, wood, mirrors and movable vials of his own blood, fitting columbarium-like, was the only piece that touched directly on the current phase of subdued terror, paralysis and resignation about the HIV pandemic. Its simplicity was unnerving. Langlands' piece was highly interactive, almost like a board game, with people playfully changing the positions of the taboo substance with the vials having somewhat gendered caps of magenta and blue. He chose blood, granite and mirrors in recognition of the increasing medicalization of both the AIDS crisis and the discrimination around it.

Similarly, Mia Tremblay's mixed-media piece with tampons and Cathy Stryko's *Bed of Nails* subtly engaged in very

private discomfort. Jass Hailley's *Conversations* was one of the few pieces that dealt with the ambivalent space of youthful lesbian identity. Yaana Dancer's superb seven-minute video explored

the reconstruction of body space and sought the classic artistic position when she said, "I was alone and I was free.... A lone figure standing straight ahead, totally focused."

There was little rage in this show. It was much more about nagging pain and cool nausea. There were few solutions offered and there seemed to be little faith in any ideological framework. The depths of some emerging narratives of male sexual alienation and dysfunction, masked, perhaps, in the first decade of AIDS panic, were plumbed in Wade Thomas' *story of two bunnies who want to come out* and Eric Rancourt's *Bed Space*. Rancourt's grainy, eight-minute black-and-white film loop takes the emerging genre of *porn noir*, places it in a claustrophobic peephole, and forces viewers into becoming voyeurs of some rather joyless moments of gay male sex. In the accompanying text, Rancourt writes: "[I]n the privacy of your bedroom, you are still confused by guilt, and my desire to rid you of it.... [T]he

loneliness in my hopeless decision to penetrate your body, if not your soul, and to explore the darkness of your fear, only serves to remember the moment before I leave." The bed, which is too small, is a metaphor for not having enough emotional "space." The result is disorienting and powerful. The importance of *Bed Space* is that emotional realism replaces the banality of pornography, thereby subverting it in order to examine the subtleties of interactions, disparities in power, internalized homophobia and unresolved feelings. At a time of the solidifying of new Queer support and family structures, *Bed Space* is about nagging loss, perhaps even an erosion of identity. It contrasts sharply with the eight-minute video *Frank's Cock* (1993), by Mike Hoolboom. Screened in Vancouver the night of the show's opening, *Frank's Cock* is about understated but deeply loving bonds well-situated in a time of AIDS.

"Out In Context" was a collection of studied angst rather than utopian visions. The polarities of this group exhibition were not rage and pleasure but isolation and loss. "Out In Context" provided neither a map nor a blueprint. But in this "terminal city," the group process allowed for construction of a few more alliances and the tentative creation of some new Queer space on the West Coast.



Andrea Fatona is a video artist and currently the coordinator of *Video In (Vancouver)*. Gordon Brent Ingram is an environmental planner and photographer and is an author of the upcoming *Bay Press* anthology *Queers In Space: Landscapes of Marginalized Sexualities and Communities*.