

bhavana (loving-kindness) meditation led by Mona Chopra. Several candles rested flush with the wall behind her, forming an altar that suggests the residue of something that transpired before our emergence. Chopra guided us through intention and we endeavoured to be in our bodies despite all mental wanderings and reflexes. I wondered if I was able to emit warmth toward my tormentors. I repeated their names in addition to individuals I barely know. I conjured their images. This task is difficult. I resigned myself to thinking about the cupcakes I was going to eat later with my friend. I returned to this site in my body. I shifted my weight trying to remain centred. I was not certain if I was doing things right. I tried to dispel my skepticism. This task was difficult as I am rooted in being undone with no solace in sight.

Days later, on my way home, leafing through mint-hued newsprint, I find myself moved to tears. The intricacies reveal a fragility I know, and yet I do not have the capacity to contend with the notion that my teachers and maternal figures may leave me. Or that I too will leave this place. So I hold on to them, pulling them out of splits into a form that is beyond human. Sometimes we remain unperceivable even while our tormentors gaze and graze upon our skins. Sometimes we revel within and beyond the frame.

Jessica Karuhanga is a Toronto-based artist working in drawing, video and performance.

Cait McKinney and Hazel Meyer:
Tape Condition: degraded
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by *Genevieve Flavelle*

I don't think I ever watched porn on VHS; I'm too young for that. As my sexuality took shape, amid the early dramas of being a queer teenager, the Internet was already fully accessible to the public. My first curious fantasies were thus nervously typed into a search engine or furtively searched for in library books. The rapid dominance of Internet porn meant that by the time I was 18, daily glimpses of sticker-covered nipples at the corner store and the mysterious curtained-off backrooms of my local video stores had vanished. As these sexual ephemera remain an object of childhood speculation rather than adult consumption, I've learned only through research of the huge impact that obscenity laws and morality brigades had on precarious queer communities. The uncertain digital future of this era of gay porn is one of the subjects of Cait McKinney and Hazel Meyer's collaborative show at the Canadian Lesbian & Gay Archives. Rather than a nostalgia-laden presentation, however, *Tape Condition: degraded* punches a hole in the wall of the archive to bring Toronto's complex queer sexual histories into the present.

Tape Condition: degraded is the product of McKinney and Meyer's discovery that the CLGA holds a collection of over 800 VHS porn tapes. Spending years watching, rewinding and reporting the condition of the tapes, the pair began to fantasize about their dream tapes – homemade tapes, kinky tapes, tapes with women, trans folks, people of colour and people with different bodies. Finding little to none of these dream tapes in a collection that is largely comprised of commercially produced gay male porn from the 1980s and 1990s, McKinney and Meyer turned to the queer imagination and the desire to imagine a different kind of archive. The result is a multifunctional space for watching, archiving and creating queer porn in the CLGA's gallery, accompanied by a free publication detailing the dream tapes of 11 artists, activists and thinkers illustrated in Meyer's signature black-and-white ink drawings.

Requiring visitors to duck through a jagged hole bashed into a false wall built over the gallery's usually generous entrance (the wall once proposed as protection against police raids), *Tape Condition: degraded*

doesn't immediately feel like an art installation. But it doesn't really feel like an archive either. It feels domestic, colourful, welcoming, kitschy and sexy in a secret and seedy way. There is no customary vinyl on the wall proclaiming the title of the show, no works loudly declaring their status as art and no densely packed archive stacks. There are some white gloves, but they are stored on a cute yellow wire rack along with other tools that assist in VHS maintenance. Rather, the colourful space feels like one in which, depending upon the time of day you arrive, you could find people digitizing VHS tapes at the large work table, drawing up sexy porn ideas at the drafting table or pushing aside the furniture to film their very own dream tapes against the vibrant green screen wall.

Auspiciously placed props gesture toward these three uses of the space. The large table is set up as a DIY digitization station – technology that Meyer and McKinney made accessible to the public for the duration of the exhibition. The second fantasy-laden aspect of the show is illustrated in Morgan Sea's commissioned comic, *Transsexual Dream Girls 2*. The comic, which is included in the publication and displayed in the space, is comprised of two parts: first, Sea reviews the only tape with trans women performers that she was able to find in the archive; and second, Sea falls asleep and enters the fantasy-porn-filled world of the *Conceptual Archives of Queer Eros and Ephemera*. Props such as a leather vest, hard-hat, bondage rope and rubber-tipped clothespins are ready on shelves and the pale pink peg board wall, and entice making fantasies porn realities using a casually placed VHS video camera.

As an exhibition, *Tape Condition: degraded* weaves together contemporary contributions with material from the archives and critical content from the publication with considerable care. McKinney and Meyer's lament over the lack of lesbian- and women-produced porn is reflected in clippings on the bulletin board from lesbian feminist activist and hero Chris Bearchell's 1983 *Body Politic* article, "In Search of Lesbian Porn." The bulletin board details the title of the show and its artists, and sets the stage for its themes and issues through small archival clippings about censorship, the persecution of

local gay establishments by police, DIY porn, porn versus erotica and porn appreciation. Contemporary works, including Meyer's original drawings for the publication, are displayed alongside archival items such as a 1993 Rhythms of Resistance poster, which advertises the benefit dance as the "hottest Queers of Colour dance in 1993." The poster is a nod to the legacy of Toronto's very active QTBIPOC communities, which are detailed in Syrus Marcus Ware's contribution to the publication, and represent an act of resistance to the whitewashed grand narratives of gay liberation.

Confronted with an archive collection that depicts and legitimizes a narrow portrait of gay sexuality, McKinney and Meyer have opened up access to representation and commemoration through an act of creative queer world-making, rather than canonizing the CLGA's limited collection. By asking what is missing from the archive, the practices of archiving are queered to take the form of a community hub pulsing with history, politics, desire, fantasy, conflict and intimacy. The show enacts the productive tensions of at once being an archive and a counter-archive, a celebration and a critique. Promoting promiscuous knowledge production in the form of gossip, anecdotes, unofficial histories and dirty desires, the exhibition contributes to an important contemporary questioning of whose knowledge and narratives count in an LGBTQ archive.

Genevieve Flavelle is a writer and independent curator based in Toronto

Hazel Meyer and Cait McKinney, installation view of *Tape Condition: degraded*, 2016. Installation, textiles, found objects, archival materials.
PHOTO: TONI HAFKENSCHIED;
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS

