

TRANS HISTORY IN 99 OBJECTS

THE UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA
TRANSGENDER ARCHIVES MEETS
THE MUSEUM OF TRANSGENDER
HISTORY & ART (MOTHA)

FOREWORD

MARY JO HUGHES

DIRECTOR, UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA LEGACY ART GALLERIES

Collaboration is at the root of what we do at the University of Victoria Legacy Art Galleries. We are a public gallery in a prime location in downtown Victoria and, as such, a valuable benefit we offer our campus and community partners is broad public exposure to their research and ideas through exhibitions.

Trans Hirstory in 99 Objects is a collaboration with the University of Victoria Transgender Archives which is held within UVic Libraries. This partnership is a natural fit, given the individual missions related to service to society that Legacy and the Library share. Legacy seeks to encourage dialogue through art around issues that matter and the Library is dedicated to creating transformative experiences through its collections. In our various activities related to research, teaching, learning, and engagement, we share a commitment to affording views into the broader world through a diversity of lenses.

Since 2007, UVic Archives has built a world-renowned Transgender Archives with the goal of ensuring the history of those dedicated to non-binary gender activism is preserved and made available for research. Together we have created an exhibition drawing from this trove that brings to light art and archives that are not necessarily part of the mainstream canon but that are an essential contribution to deeper understandings of transgender experiences. The decision to invite Bellingham, Washington-based artist Chris E. Vargas, Director of the Museum of Transgender Hirstory & Art (MOTHA) to curate the project has been an exciting way to explore the growing Archives. Chris's idea to include contemporary artists in the exhibition allows the historical archives to engage audiences on a deeper level with current trans politics. We are pleased to be the latest venue for MOTHA ideas and to highlight the huge potential for further research that lies in the Transgender Archives.

INTRODUCTION

AARON DEVOR

CHAIR IN TRANSGENDER STUDIES, FOUNDER & ACADEMIC
DIRECTOR, THE TRANSGENDER ARCHIVES, UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

You would not be alone if you felt inundated lately by media stories about trans people, many of which are stories of hope and promise. Of course, it has not always been this way. Indeed, today's young people in this part of the world are the first generation of trans folks to be growing up without the terrifying experience of thinking that they might be the only person in the world who feels the way they do. Most middle-aged and older trans adults alive today, and certainly those of previous eras, spent all of their youth, and many of their adult years either totally alone with their secret identities and thinking themselves to be sick and sinful; or furtively and guiltily expressing their identities while shrouded in fear of what would happen to them should anyone know; or doing their best to live their true identities while barely eking out an existence on the extreme margins of society.

While gender variant people have existed in every society throughout human history, the Transgender Archives looks to preserve documentation of the work done by those brave souls who attempt to understand these experiences. They fight for the right to dignity for people who have felt that the sex and/or gender assigned to them at birth was not right for them. The Transgender Archives takes as its focus the history of transgender research and activism.

The collections in the Transgender Archives begin with sexuality researchers in Germany and the UK at the end of the 19th century who were the first to note that not everyone who dressed or acted in a gender atypical way was simply expressing an extreme form of homosexuality. By the 1930s, some of these researchers were interacting with small groups of people in Germany who considered themselves to be male and female transvestites and who were beginning to quietly campaign for civil rights. Unfortunately, we do not hold any of this material as very few records from this period in Germany survived the Nazis. We do, however hold newspaper clippings files from the 1920s onwards. Such files are an example of how trans people



WAYNE COUNTY AND THE ELECTRIC CHAIRS
THINGS YOUR MOTHER NEVER TOLD YOU, 1979.
LP COVER

searched the limited media of their day for *anything*, however sensationalist and denigrating it was, that might indicate that they were not the only ones who harboured the feelings that they did.

At the Transgender Archives, our records of transgender activism begin in the US in the 1960s with the work of Virginia Prince, and continue to today. Our records of research look to fill in some of the background to major works in transgender research, and the stories of those who did the work.

With one very small exception, all the holdings of the Transgender Archives have come to us as generous donations from their original collectors, or their heirs. Thus, while extensive, our collections reflect the interests and realities of those people who had the foresight and the resources to enable them to collect and donate to us. As such, they are fascinating, varied, and far from comprehensive, and, yet they are extensive. If everything in our collections were placed on one long shelf, it would measure more than 320 linear feet/98 m (the length of a football field), making it the largest trans-focussed archives in the world. Our collections, held by the University of Victoria Libraries' Special Collections and Archives, include more than 1000 books dated from 1893 onward; newsletters and magazines from 18 countries, on five continents, in ten languages; educational pamphlets starting in the 1970s; activist organizational records going back to the 1970s; personal papers of trans activists and researchers; newspaper clippings files starting in the 1920s; files from key court cases; audio recordings on tape and vinyl; Hollywood movies; community-made limited-distribution VHS and DVD video productions; audio and video recordings and programs of conferences, speeches and television and radio shows; professional art and amateur photographs; audio and print erotica; original visual art works; trophies and awards; ephemera and memorabilia.

Once you have whet your appetite for the history of trans, non-binary, and two-spirit people by experiencing this exhibition, you are invited to visit the Transgender Archives at the University of Victoria. We are open to the public so please come see us and take this rare opportunity to put your hands on history.



DEBBIE HUMPHRY

GENDER CROSSINGS: PHOTOGRAPHS EXPLORING THE BOUNDARIES OF GENDER, 1993-1996.

TRANS HIRSTORY IN 99 OBJECTS

CHRIS E. VARGAS

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MUSEUM OF TRANSGENDER HIRSTORY & ART (MOTHA)

Trans Hirstory in 99 Objects is a multi-exhibition project at multiple venues that brings archival materials together with works by contemporary artists to narrate an expansive and critical history of transgender and gender-variant communities. Acknowledging that the term “transgender” is relatively new and specific to an Anglo-Western context, the project takes an inclusive approach to transgender, gender non-binary, two-spirit, and gender transgressive identities and expressions. The project is also engaged with the gaps in archival collections and unknowable aspects of our under-historicized community.

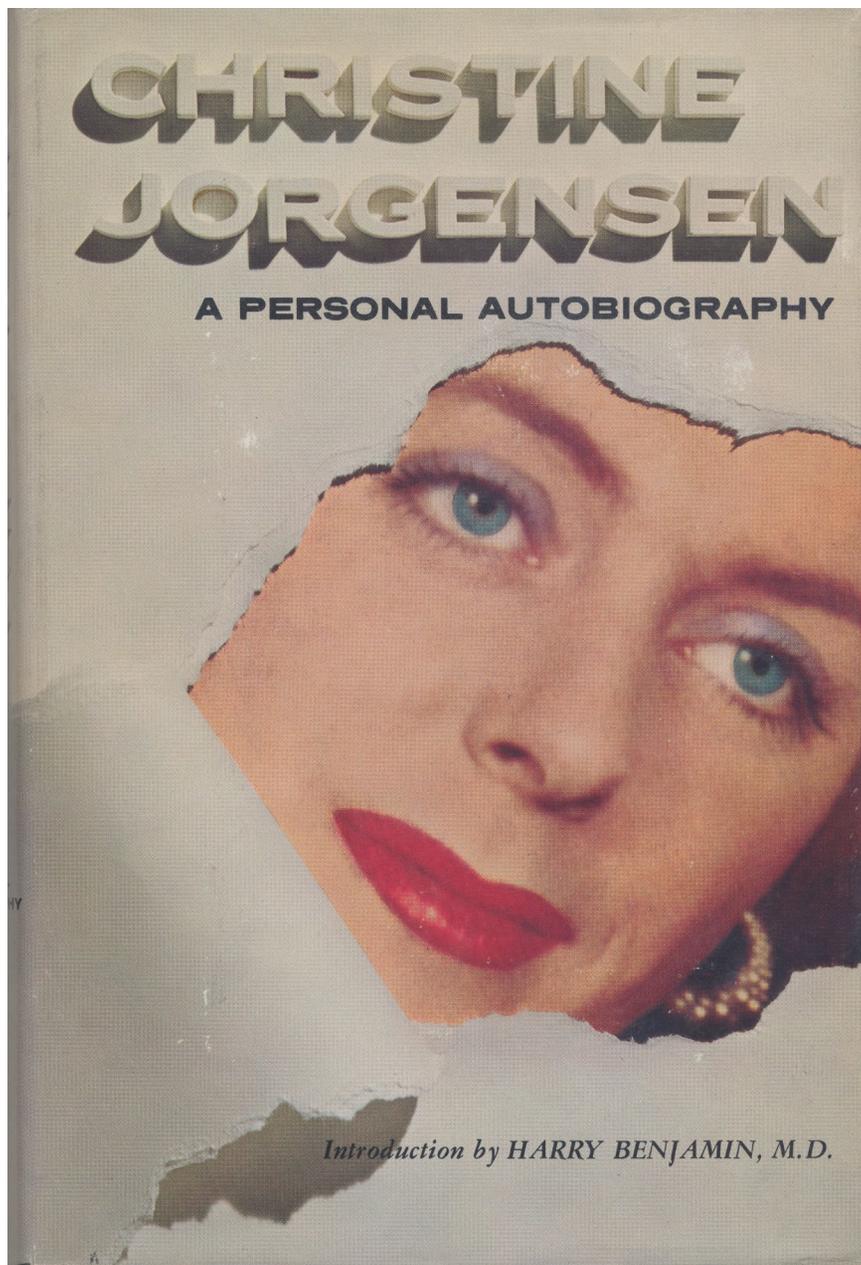
The project, *Trans Hirstory in 99 Objects* riffs on *The Smithsonian’s History of America in 101 Objects*, which took its inspiration from *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, a joint project of the BBC and the British Museum. The number 99 in the title acknowledges the conceptual challenges and institutional roadblocks inherent to preserving trans stories. Each of the exhibitions in this multi-year series will build toward the accumulation of 99 objects. *Hirstory* is a term that pays homage to a feminist reclamation of *herstory*, and attempts to neutralize the gendered term by applying the lesser-used possessive pronoun *hir*, a hybrid of his and her.

This third iteration in the *99 Objects* project presents archival materials from the University of Victoria’s Transgender Archives alongside work by contemporary artists from both inside and outside the collection. Unique in that it contains not only documents and publications, the Transgender Archives also has an immense collection of visual art, including work by world-renowned artists and art made by, and featuring, important trans historical figures. The Transgender Archives, launched in 2011, started collecting in 2007 and continues to collect personal papers, publications, and documents that tell the important tales of early trans culture and activism.



NAN GOLDIN

MISTY AND JOEY AT HORNSTRASSE BERLIN, 1992.



PHOTOGRAPHY

The University of Victoria Transgender Archives contains an impressive number of photographic works in a variety of genres from fine art, to journalistic photography, to medical-education images. One of the most high-profile examples is *Misty and Joey at Hornstrasse, Berlin, 1992*, a print by NYC-based artist **Nan Goldin**, who famously chronicled the queer and punk countercultural scenes of downtown New York City in the 1970s and 80s. Her snapshot style only barely conceals beautifully composed photos, made even richer by her intimate relationship with her subjects. Another important photographer's work that appears in the collection is **Del LaGrace Volcano** with his portrait of writer and activist **Kate Bornstein** (1996), a self-portrait with multi-disciplinary artist **Harry Dodge** (1996), and the photograph titled *Aphra and Skeeter* (1992); these later two images appear in *The Drag King Book* (1999). This book, a collaboration with trans theorist Jack Halberstam, documents and pays tribute to the drag king communities in the US and UK in the late 1990s. Additionally, Debbie Humphry's photojournalistic series *Gender Crossings: Photographs Exploring the Boundaries of Gender*, a photo project made between 1993 and 1996, explores the parameters of gender and documents a wide range of people both inside and outside queer communities. In addition to these fine art photographs, the Transgender Archives also contain the original negatives, prints, and photographic mock-ups for Dr. Harry Benjamin's groundbreaking 1966 book *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, an important text that was the first book to describe and outline supportive treatment paths for people seeking gender-affirming surgeries.

OPPOSITE: CHRISTINE JORGENSEN

CHRISTINE JORGENSEN: A PERSONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY, 1967.

BIOGRAPHY

Other material in the show points to some of the important historical figures who established the early groundwork for our contemporary trans movements. **Reed Erickson** (1917-1992), a wealthy transsexual businessman, founded the Erickson Education Fund (EEF) in 1964. The EEF was a philanthropic organization that provided support for causes related to homosexuality, transsexuality, and new age spirituality.¹ Erickson's EEF was the major source of information for transsexual people and of financial support for researchers throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. He was also a key donor to the homophile organization ONE Inc. founded in 1952 which was the predecessor to the ONE LGBT archive in Los Angeles, CA.² Erickson was also drawn to the esoteric, and his **psychedelic paintings** in the exhibition point to these later personal interests.

Also well represented in the archives is **Virginia Prince** (1912-2019), an early transgender activist who balanced her studious professional side with a gregarious, outgoing personality, as seen in the many photographs of her posing in stylish outfits and socializing with friends. Prince founded *Transvestia* magazine in 1960 as a way to advocate on behalf of, communicate with, and build a community of cross-dressers from all over North America and beyond. She published the magazine for 20 years, and later passed it on to Carol Beecroft who published it until 1986, for a total of 111 issues. Prince's collections also contain photo albums with **snapshots from Casa Susanna**, a private country gathering place for heterosexual cross-dressers, founded by Susanna Valenti and her wife Marie. Casa Susanna was more recently made famous by a book of the same name³ and the Broadway play *Casa Valentina*.⁴

Additionally included in the show is a pastel portrait of **Betty Anne Lind** (1931-1998), an early board member of the International Foundation of Gender Education and co-founder of Fantasia Fair. This event started in 1975 and is the longest continually-running annual gathering of trans folks. It was originally for heterosexual male cross-dressers, later became inclusive of trans women and, most recently, individuals on the trans masculine spectrum.

Over six decades before the current trans media moment, **Christine Jorgensen** (1926-1989) became a huge media sensation as the first widely-known person to undergo gender-affirming surgery after she traveled to Denmark to do so. *The New York Daily News* ran a front-page story on December 1, 1952 under the headline "**Ex-GI Becomes Blonde Beauty.**" Her story became the subject of a movie, promotional materials for which are included in the exhibition. The feature length film, a fictionalized retelling of Jorgensen's story is a questionable and troubling representation of her, and trans people's experience, indicative of the ways Hollywood has misrepresented and sensationalized our lives. The inclusion of an autographed copy of her book, *Christine Jorgensen a Personal Autobiography* (1961), in the exhibition helps to set the record straight. In her later years, she became a night club entertainer, regaling crowds by telling her story with wit and grace. The book and nightclub act are examples of strategies that trans people have deployed to reclaim and self-determine our own lives' narratives.

Christine Jorgensen was also one of Dr. Harry Benjamin's patients. After her story got picked up by the media, many people from across the world contacted the doctor, seeking his treatment for medically assisted transitions. In the preface of Christine Jorgensen's autobiography, Dr. Benjamin gives her credit for the advancement of his studies and fame.

1. Devor, A.H. & Matte, N. (2007) "Building a Better World for Transpeople: Reed Erickson and the Erickson Educational Foundation." *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 10(1), 47-68.

2. <http://one.usc.edu/about/history/>

3. *Casa Susanna* (2005). Michel Hurst & Robert Swope. NY: PowerHouse Books

4. Written by Harvey Fierstein



CASSILS

BECOMING AN IMAGE PERFORMANCE STILL NO. 4,
(NATIONAL THEATER STUDIO, SPILL FESTIVAL, LONDON), 2013

ARTWORK FROM INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE TRANSGENDER ARCHIVES

The contemporary artists in the show engage with current trans politics, as well as missing or more difficult aspects of historical archives. In Cassils' photographic work, *Becoming An Image* (2012-current), the performance artist pushes their body to the extreme and attacks a 2,000-lb heap of clay. In the original performance, which will be re-staged in Victoria as part of the exhibition programming, the artist went head-to-head with this inert material in total darkness, while the action was revealed in intermittent strobes from a photographer's bulb.

In **Vivek Shraya's** photo essay project, *Trisha* (2016), the artist restages photos from the family archive, specifically snapshots of the artist's mother, in which the artist steps into the role of their own mother, thereby reckoning with familial legacies as they are passed down via gender expectations.

The Transgender Archives at UVic is honored to maintain the collection of the late multi-disciplinary artist and self-described "sovereign Haudenosaunee woman" **Aiiyana Maracle** (1950-2016). Through her performance and video work, the artist offered an alternate perspective on a White Euro-centric understandings of gender. In the exhibition, there are examples of objects from her collections alongside videos of her performance work, courtesy of grunt gallery, Vancouver BC, where she worked and performed for many years.

The Transgender Archives is also steward to binders and binders of illustrations by Barbara Jean (1926-2014), or BJ, a fetish illustrator in the tradition of "petticoat punishment," where a masculine individual is made to dress up in hyper-feminine attire, usually by a female authority figure. BJ also illustrated a handful of publication covers on the subject, including *Fated for Femininity* and *American Crossdresser*. In a statement about their work, the artist confessed, "I hope you enjoy my doodles as much as I enjoy my incurable (I hope) compulsion to draw them!"



POP AND ACTIVIST CULTURE

Scattered throughout the exhibition are materials that show the diversity of trans presence in pop culture, including mainstream Hollywood movies, trading cards, and popular music. On view one can find a pair of queerly-gendered **Garbage Pail Kids**, from the popular trading cards released in the mid-80s, made to poke fun in some silly or gross way at the wildly popular Cabbage Patch Kids dolls; a few of the many **VHS tapes** and **DVDs** from the library's collection; a record album from the collection by punk performer **Wayne County and The Electric Chairs** (1979); and, examples of wearable activist culture **t-shirts** and **pins** that reveal some of the ways that trans people can assert our presence in public, show our participation in larger trans movements, and display our varying political concerns and affinities.

CONCLUSION

The collections held by the Transgender Archives at the University of Victoria show many of the different forms and strategies that trans people have used to become self-actualized individuals and to assert our contributions to culture. While the collections at UVic are large, they are not exhaustive. These gaps still exist in the archive that reflect the inequities of society itself. There are many life circumstances related to those societal inequities that stand in the way of people holding onto their papers and belongings long enough for them to find their ways into archives. These gaps serve as a reminder that many voices are still missing to history, the most marginalized among already marginalized and historically persecuted communities. There is still much to do. Many contemporary artists, scholars, and archivists stand in a great position to respond to these gaps and to make room for those missing histories.

OPPOSITE: TOPPS CHEWING GUM, SERIES 3, 1986.
GARBAGE PAIL KIDS - GLANDULAR ANGELA 18B.

LIST OF WORKS

1 BJ (Barbara Jean), American, 1926-2014
Illustrations for Petticoat Punishment, c. 1940s
Paper, ink and pencil
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives
Anonymous donor

2 Cassils, Canadian
Becoming An Image Performance Stills No. 1, 2, 3, 4, 2013
(National Theater Studio, SPILL Festival, London)
C-print, 22 x 30 inches, edition of 5
photo: Cassils with Manuel Vason
Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York

3 Cassils, Canadian
Monument Push, Performance Document (Omaha, Nebraska), 2017
Video, 3:15 minutes
On loan from the artist

4 Published by Chevalier
Transvestia, Various dates
Periodical
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives
Gift of Rikki Swin

5 Reed Erickson, American, 1917-1992
I AM Fire I am Wind I am BEING ALL that you IS SEEING; JOYLOVE, #58, n.d.
Acrylic on canvas
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives
Gift of Monica Erickson

6 Reed Erickson, American, 1917-1992
La Curacion del Hombre; The Salvation of Mankind; The Golden One, #62, 1977
Acrylic on canvas
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives
Gift of Monica Erickson

7 Reed Erickson, American, 1917-1992
Untitled, #69, n.d.
Acrylic on canvas
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives
Gift of Monica Erickson

8 Nan Goldin, American, b. 1953.
Misty and Joey at Hornstrasse, Berlin, 1992, 1992
Photographic print
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives
Gift of Richard Ekins

9 Debbie Humphry, British, b. 1960.
Gender Crossings: Photographs Exploring the Boundaries of Gender, 1993-1996
Digital slides from 35mm slides
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives
Gift of Richard Ekins

10 Christine Jorgensen, American, 1926-1989
Christine Jorgensen, A Personal Autobiography, 1967
Book
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives
Gift of University of Ulster TGA collection

11 Aiyana Maracle, Haudenosaunee, 1950-2016
Gender Mobius, 1995
Video, 32 minutes
On loan from grunt gallery

12 Aiyana Maracle, Haudenosaunee, 1950-2016
Untitled, n.d.
Blue wool cape with white painted feathers and text
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives
Gift of Jaret Maracle

13 Aiyana Maracle, Haudenosaunee, 1950-2016
Untitled (Basket containing animal bones), n.d.
Basket, bones and owl skeleton
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives
Gift of Jaret Maracle

14 Aiyana Maracle, Haudenosaunee, 1950-2016
Untitled spoken word from Two Spirit Cabaret Queer City Series, grunt gallery Vancouver, BC, 1993
Video, 8 minutes
On loan from grunt gallery

15 Irving Rapper, American, 1902-1999
The Christine Jorgensen Story, 1970
Film still, lobby card
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives
Gift of University of Ulster TGA collection

16 Vivek Shraya, Canadian, b. 1981
Trisha, 2016
Text, photographic prints
On loan from the artist

17 Topps Chewing Gum, Series 3, 1986
Garbage Pail Kids – Half Nelson 18a, Glandular Angela 18b
Trading Cards
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives
Gift of University of Ulster TGA collection

18 Unknown
First Red Wig, First Easter Outfit (Virginia Prince), 1951
Photographic print
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives
Gift of Rikki Swin

19 Unknown
Photograph mock-ups for the monograph for 'The Transsexual Phenomenon', c. 1966
Photographic prints
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives
Gift of Rikki Swin

20 Unknown
Snapshots from Virginia Prince photo album, n.d.
Photographic prints
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives
Gift of Rikki Swin

21 Unknown Artist
Untitled (Portrait of Betty Anne Lind), c. 1992
Pastel on paper
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives
Anonymous donation

22 Various
Christine Jorgenson related newspaper article
1949-1959
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives
Gift of University of Ulster TGA collection

23 Various
Various buttons, n.d.
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives
Gift of University of Ulster TGA collection and on loan from collection of Dr. Aaron Devor

24 Various
Various t-shirts, n.d.
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives
Gift of University of Ulster TGA collection
Gift if Christine Milrod

25 Various
Various videos
Various Dates, 1935 - 2005
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives

26. Del LaGrace Volcano American, b. 1957
Del and "Harry", San Francisco, 1996
Photographic print
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives
Gift of Richard Ekins

27 Del LaGrace Volcano, American, b. 1957-
Portrait of Kate Bornstein, 1992
Photographic print
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives
Gift of Richard Ekins

28 Wayne County and The Electric Chairs
American
Things your mother never told you, 1979
LP
University of Victoria Libraries, Transgender Archives
Gift of University of Ulster TGA Collection



VIVEK SHRAYA
TRISHA, 2016.

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