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Lez Con

Exhibit playfully investigates lesbian content in Canadian gay archives

By [Carolyn Yates](#) • January 31, 2012 7:00 pm EDT



A fictional map of Gayside, an actual town in Newfoundland. Credit: Provided by Cressida Frey of the CLGA.



Images like this appear in Lez Con. Credit: Provided by Cressida Frey of the CLGA.



The Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives boast more than 5,000 vertical files; about 7,000 individual periodical titles; thousands of photographs, videos and tapes; and a

“There is a noticeable imbalance in our collection, and, I would suspect, in other LGBT archives. Maybe 25 percent,” estimates Kate Zieman, an archivist and CLGA volunteer. “There just hasn’t been the same volume of material created for queer women as there has been for men . . . If we don’t make the effort to recover and preserve our stories, it makes it that much easier to ignore our existence and the incredible gains that we’ve made.”

the CLGA, seeks to correct this imbalance. *Lez Con*, named for a play on the term Can Con, playfully investigates lesbian content in the archives.

“There are a lot of personal histories and narratives in the *Lez Con* exhibition – some of them accessible to the public, some of them not . . . Anyone who’s LGBT can donate to LGBT archives. That’s a pretty unique premise for collecting,” says Hogan-Finlay.

The exhibition features materials from the 1980s and onwards, including posters, books and paraphernalia such as a Hitachi Magic Wand, reusable menstrual pads and handkerchiefs – objects that are associated with lesbian culture but that might not be visible in any other exhibition. It also includes elements from Hogan-Finlay’s personal narrative. One section is also dedicated to Will Munro, a gay artist and activist known for supporting the lesbian community. Several of Munro’s vinyl records are on display, along with a jacket he stitched for Hogan-Finlay.

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“I really wanted to focus on lesbian representation and ideas about regulated representation,” says Hogan-Finlay. “Displays of archival material can help resonate the richness and variety, but also lack thereof, that exists.

“The histories of trans people or intersex people, people of colour and lesbians are not the majority of the holdings.”

Lez Con also offers a different perspective by showcasing queer women’s views of their own culture.

“In addition to highlighting lesbian sexualities, eroticism and lifestyles, it effectively challenges the heteronormative gaze instead of portraying the typical pornography or sex shops that we’re confronted with, which are usually pretty degrading to women and limiting to sexuality in general,” says Cressida Frey, the CLGA’s new exhibition coordinator.

Lez Con is presented parallel to *Coming After*, an exhibition at the Power Plant that focuses on the transformation of gay and lesbian identity into queer identity and culture, as well as the practices of queer artists who came of age after the 1970s.

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