

28.01 — 11.03.22
The Dax Centre

Presented by
Midsumma Festival

QUEER MY HEAD

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Acknowledgement of Country

This exhibition is presented on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation.

We recognise that LGBTIQA+SGBB First Nations people and their communities have been making art and practicing culture in this place for tens of thousands of years.

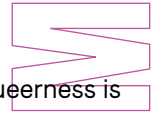
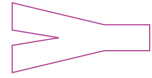
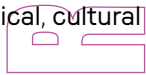
We offer our respect to all First Nations Elders past, present and future, by supporting their call for voice, treaty and truth.

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Queer My Head celebrates the power of queer art-making to clear our heads of the pervasive cis-hetero-normative expectations and biases that contribute to mental health issues for LGBTIQA+ folk.

QUEER is deployed in this exhibition, not merely as a convenient umbrella term for diverse LGBTIQA+ identities, but as a distinct form of political, cultural and artistic practice.



What constitutes queerness is contextual, shifting and evolving, however it is characterised by a refusal to be neatly and compliantly incorporated into normative structures and reductive discourses.

As writer and activist, bell hooks (2014) defined it:

THE ESSENCE OF QUEER... IS ABOUT THE SELF THAT IS AT ODDS WITH EVERYTHING AROUND IT. IT HAS TO INVENT, AND CREATE, AND FIND A PLACE TO SPEAK, AND TO THRIVE, AND TO LIVE.

The Queer My Head exhibition recognises creative 'head queering' as an essential cultural practice of resistance, affirmation and repair, that creates space for the wild and complex spectrum of queer diversity to flourish.

This exhibition features LGBTIQ+ artists with lived experience of mental health challenges, who have utilised their creativity to resist, repair, critique, subvert, survive and queerly thrive in non-normative ways.

These artists represent their lived experience on their own terms; creatively queering the spaces between medical categorisations, social expectations and intersectional identities.

Their artworks offer a vibrant, tender, defiant and uplifting selection of queer stories of survival, expressed via print-making, painting, mixed media, social media, dance, video, installation, collage, street art and embroidery.

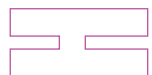
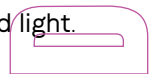
Queer cultural studies scholar, José Esteban Muñoz (2009) conceived of queerness as an ideal belonging to a utopian future, one that queer artists are able to imagine and conjure.

**QUEERNESS IS AN IDEALITY... WE CAN
FEEL IT AS THE WARM ILLUMINATION OF A
HORIZON IMBUED WITH POTENTIALITY.**

The Queer My Head exhibition is optimistically-oriented towards this horizon of queer potential. Through this collection of artworks, the thermodynamic energy of queer futures can be seen proliferating into a rainbow of refracted light.

JAYE HAYES

Curator
Queer My Head



QUEERING THE CUNNINGHAM DAX COLLECTION

JAYE HAYES

Curator
Queer My Head

The Queer My Head exhibition was inspired by a 'queering' of the Cunningham Dax Collection. This Heritage-listed collection comprises over 16,000 artworks created in psychiatric hospitals and community mental health contexts in Australia since the 1940s.

Over the many decades in which artworks have been added to the collection, LGBTIQ+ people in Australia have been subjected to various discriminatory legal, social and medical discourses.

The invisibility of LGBTIQ+ lived experience in the Cunningham Dax Collection tells a story; one that speaks through silence, of queer lives outlawed, obscured, suppressed, denied, forgotten.

I FELT THE PRESENCE OF THEIR GHOSTS, OR RATHER, I HAD A QUEER FEELING OF BEING HAUNTED BY THEIR ABSENCE.

This queer ghost story called out for a response, prompting a search for queer iconography in the Collection database. Two artworks were subsequently selected for 'queer reading'.

THE PRACTICE OF QUEER READING ENABLES LGBTIQ+ PEOPLE TO READ OURSELVES INTO CULTURAL SPACES AND SUBVERT REPRESENTATIONS THAT HAVE HISTORICALLY RENDERED US INVISIBLE OR ERASED OUR PRESENCE.

By acknowledging the significance of the rainbow as part of the lexicon of queer culture, the artworks '**A Broken Rainbow**' (1988) and '**Hold Onto the Rainbow**' (2012) can be read as if they are representations of queer lived experience.

These queered artworks can then be utilised as touchstones to the past, as access points to a liminal queer history. They function as hauntological artefacts that honour lost queer voices.

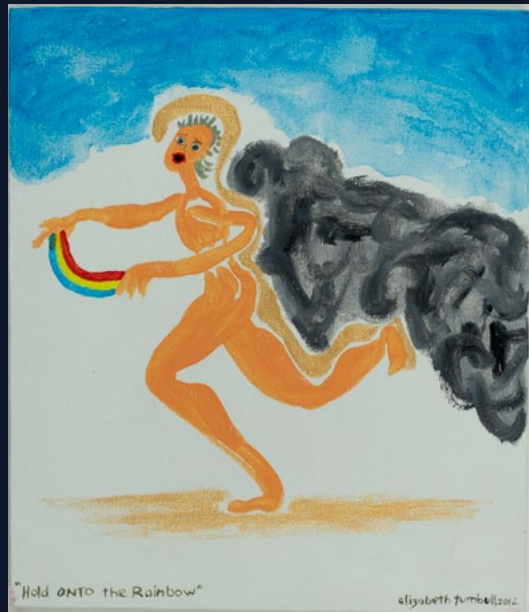
These artefacts enable the contemporary artworks of the **Queer My Head** exhibition to enter into a cross-generational dialogue with the queer ghosts of the Cunningham Dax Collection.



Images of artworks from the Cunningham Dax Collection are presented for queer reading with the permission of the Dax Centre.

'A BROKEN RAINBOW' (1988)

Artist Name Withheld
Gouache and charcoal on paper
33.5 X 42 cm
Cunningham Dax Collection



'HOLD ONTO THE RAINBOW' (2012)

Elizabeth Turnbull
Acrylic and gouache on canvas
30.3 X 22 cm
Cunningham Dax Collection

In '**A Broken Rainbow**' is a portrait of a rainbow interrupted. A jagged intrusion has fractured it, bisecting its arch, yet its structure and form remain intact. It may be muted, but it also endures. By reading this artwork as a story of being broken (by external forces), rather than a depiction of a broken being (individual defectiveness), it offers a story of resilience & survival, that defies the pathologising narratives historically imposed on LGBTQIA+ people.

'**Hold Onto the Rainbow**' features a human figure of ambiguous gender running from a black cloud. The line of gold paint between the body and the cloud, invokes the mythical pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. It appears in the form of a magical forcefield like a shimmering second skin, a golden cloak of protection, a shiny heroic cape, or a big glittery snake, that literally 'has their backs'.

This offers the LGBTQIA+ viewer a representation of

THE PROTECTIVE POWER AND RESILIENCE THAT EMERGES WHEN WE CONNECT WITH OUR IDENTITIES, DRAW STRENGTH FROM OUR HISTORIES, AND FIND SOLIDARITY IN OUR COMMUNITIES.

This is our queer pot of gold, our cultural wealth, our super-power, the source of our shared pride.

The artworks in the **Queer My Head** exhibition all contain some of this precious gold. While many of the artists have experiences of being 'broken rainbows', negatively impacted by a world still coming to terms with expressions of queerness in all its diverse and intersectional forms, they also know the power of connection, validation and collective action.



BURN IT DOWN?
(2019)

Acrylic on canvas
80cm x 80cm

BURN IT DOWN? invokes '*the regenerative process of destruction, release and rebirth*'. It proposes the question: What social and political structures need to be destroyed in order for marginalised individuals to thrive? Ableism? Burn. Racism? Burn. The Cistem? Burn it down.

Colloquially, a 'burn' is a witty and savage insult; a good burn is a very effective take-down. This contemporary reference lends the work a playful and powerful edge, one with sharp political teeth.

This provocative painting reflects the artist's experience of '*destroying internalised societal expectations*' relating to their intersectional identity as a queer, gender non-conforming, Filipino-Australian who navigates chronic illness and mental health challenges.

Cisneros invites us to enter into the restorative process of releasing shame from individual bodies and minds, by collectively questioning the structures that prevent us from being proud of who we are and how we queerly exist in the world.



GAY DEMON (2021)

Linocut print on paper
15cm x 21.3cm

Gay Demon is modelled after the style of medieval European woodcuts that detailed the debauchery of witches and demons. The artist employs this technique to reference the propaganda disseminated by Christian religious authorities and the witch-burning hysteria it spawned.

This work reflects the artist's involvement with a small-town Pentacostal Church, which culminated in their disgraced departure. They were accused of being possessed by "gay demons" after they advocated for the acceptance of LGBTQIA+ young people in the congregation. *Gay Demon* is Tynan's queer reclaiming of this accusation.

'Gay Demon wears its title with raucous delight, in defiance of demands for self-flagellation.'

This artwork is part of a diptych that celebrates what the artist's former church strives to suppress. It is a depiction of Tynan's unrepentant and flamboyant joy, expressed within the safety of queer community.



SELF: ADORNED (2021)

Pages of 'Aboriginal Words and Place Names',
Chinese knotting cord,
bookbinding thread,
entomology display case,
entomology display pins.
Acrylic photo mount
3 x 21 x 29.3 cm

What happens when culture, gender and sexuality have multiple overlapping labels? Jenna Lee is a Gulumerridjin (Larrakia), Wardaman and KarraJarri Saltwater woman with mixed Japanese, Chinese, Filipino and Anglo-Australian ancestry. Lee's objects of self-adornment are self-determined acts; expressions of the artist's individual, intersectional identity.

The blank labels represent the wearer's assertion of *'their own system of self-identification'*. A blank label also has the capacity to evolve and shift fluidly as the wearer determines in different contexts.

'This use of blank labels as material speaks to the power of the individual/minority to challenge and assert their dominance in spaces where the labels have historically been predetermined by the dominant power.'

Pages of so-called 'Aboriginal Word Dictionaries' have been used to create these adornment pieces. Through this material, the artist signals: *'...the importance of agency in determining the language used to label us and the way we choose to express ourselves.'*



This hypothetical depiction of self-care reflects the artist's use of painting as a creative strategy to push back against dark thoughts, depression and dysphoria. By painting soothing scenes of self-care, Baker is able to imaginatively place their body into beautiful and nourishing environments.

This painting emerged after the death of the artist's best friend during lockdown.

**HYPOTHETICAL
SELF CARE (MY PCD
MOMENT)** (2021)

Acrylic and watercolour
on canvas
91cm x 115cm x 2 cm

*'I wanted to soak in beautiful epsom salts
in a pink claw foot bathtub; instead I was
painting in my studio, endlessly avoiding
my grief, slowly learning how to gently
open that door.'*

The gentleness of Baker's depiction of bodily care and the quiet presence of disembodied grief come together in this painting, offering a space to linger, to rest, to be nurtured. This work is a balm to queer, non-binary bodies, that invites the viewer to soak in the tenderness of the image, as though soaking in a tub of warm water.



STITCHES (2021)

Cardstock, mixed
paper, thread
30.5cm x 30.5cm

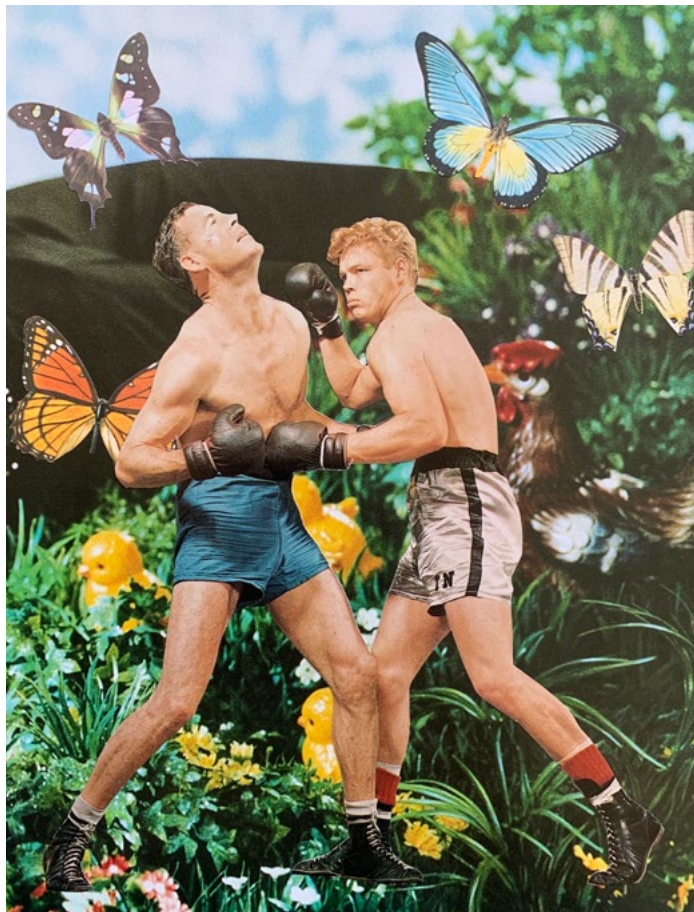
Hand-cut collage offers queer artists a tactile process for deconstructing popular culture and constructing alternative narratives. Creece describes the process of re-purposing visual materials from magazines as a form of analog data corruption.

'I cut, rip and corrupt materials from their intended purpose'

Creece's queer collaging practice transforms world-weariness into a sense of whimsy via the process of decontextualising and recontextualising everyday things. It offers the artist:

'a way to process a world that is often inaccessible to me, and almost always hostile in one way or another.'

In *Stitches*, Creece undermines the coherence of the mass-produced body image by fracturing it and reconnecting the pieces with hand-sewn thread. The resulting artwork resonates with queer experiences of gender deconstruction, the delicate, bespoke process of re-making oneself, and the wild flowering of queer minds.



This hand-cut collage liberates a vintage image of male-coded violence to create an artwork that is tender, complex and hopeful. The artist recalls the personal impact of the strict, cis-heteronormative expectations of his childhood.

'I would play with my sisters' dolls in secret, in fear of being caught...'

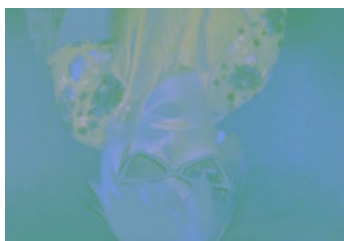
The fear, shame and guilt that Giovanoglou experienced as a child, developed into to a state of hyper-vigilance to the threat of homophobic violence.

'I would check myself to ensure the way I was dressed wasn't going to betray me...'

The swarm of butterflies in this artwork reflects the artist's journey to transcend the fear of expressing themselves beyond normative gender expectations. It celebrates the beauty of queer ways of being, unfolding & taking flight.

MASC4MASC
(2021)

Mixed paper
18cm x 22cm



Indigo Jones, Dante, A, Cameron



Zeth Cameron, MESSY

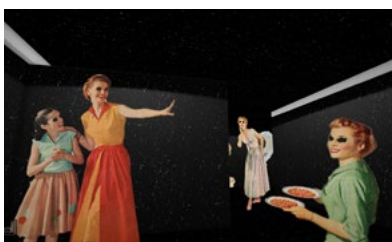
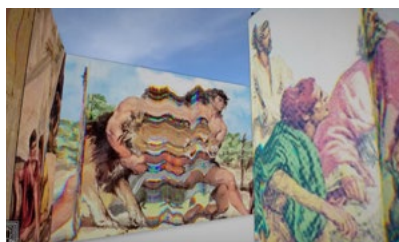
Zeth Cameron, SWIMMING

Vi A, Our Bodies, Ourselves, Our Imminent Collapse

Georgia Indigo Jones, Walk in the Light

Georgia Indigo Jones, Eyes in the Echo Chamber

Shan Dante, Heart My Goes Pop!



RIDE(OVER)SHARE (2021)

Digital video and audio, portable
DVD player, carseat, Melways
70cm x 83cm x 105cm
6 video works, 20 mins 41 secs

ride(over)share is a collection of video works presented on a portable DVD entertainment system attached to the back of a car seat. Referring to the tendency for long road trips to facilitate open conversation and extended cogitation, 'ride(over)share' creates a space that invites audiences into the back seat to listen in on this journey.

'We are driving together. It is impossible to tell if we are leaving or returning, but such binary thinking seems irrelevant anyway when you force a pringle into my mouth and laugh, or when you open up to me about your anxieties with such insight and strength.'

This body of work is emotionally charged and politically savvy, offering a glimpse into each artist's complex relationship with queerness, mental health, chronic illness, and intersecting systems of oppression. It offers an angry, funny, contemplative, vulnerable, ridiculous and revolutionary account of the struggles and delights of queer-crip experience.



MANIC ASPHYXIATION SERIES (2020-21)

Perspex, embroidery
4x 60cm x 45cm

This series comprises 4 perspex panels in the colours of the non-binary flag (yellow, white, purple and black). It speaks from a non-binary perspective about the artist's search for love and self-validation.

Harper uses the practice of embroidery as a tool to calm their mind. The embroideries in this series reflect their experiences of both gender dysphoria and euphoria. They recorded poems about these experiences and listened back to the recordings while they stitched.

The juxtaposition of materials in this series deliberately plays with masculinity & femininity as social constructs.

*'Masculinity and femininity, attributes
always held like a small bird, held in the
hands, safe, vulnerable: yet I woke up,
genderless.'*

Harper's laser-cut text is a poetic intervention into a rigid field that proposes *'a dissolution of gender'* as they find their way towards an authentic sense of self.

*'Don't misgender me, actually don't gender
me at all.... Call me by my name.'*



SWANSTON STREET SERIES (2016-2021)

Lino print on paper
28cm x 28cm

IMAGE

Advanced Care Plan
1 of 15 prints

This series comprises 15 images of tattooed hands that were created over 6 years during the artist's multiple in-patient stays in acute psychiatric facilities and prevention centres. Inspired by the tattooing practices of incarcerated peoples, Armstrong-Porter developed a symbolic language to express the hardships of institutionalisation.

Like pushing ink into skin, the carving of these images into lino blocks, imbues them with the act of bodily self-inscription. The resulting prints offer a visceral document of the artist's encounter with the systemic inadequacies of institutions of 'care'.

The *Swanston Street Series* zine interpolates these images with stark personal narratives to expose what the artist describes as:

'...a flawed and discriminatory public mental health system; one that is unable to meet the needs of the people it serves'

Armstrong-Porter's work bravely illuminates issues for LGBTIQ+ and neurodivergent users of public mental health services, with the hope of instigating change.

73% of LGBTIQ people report having been diagnosed with a mental health condition at some point in their lives*

| | |
|---|--|
| We lie under the covers, trapped under black clouds. | We text our posse to check they're ok. |
| We avoid buses, strangers, and crowds. | We stroke messy hair and promise we'll stay. |
| We wake in the dark, full of memories that haunt us. | We drive housemates to interviews, partners to psychs. |
| We're terrorised by kilojoules. Carbs taunt us. | We lend broke friends money, veggies, and bikes. |
| We're scared of wide spaces, small spaces, doorhandles. | We hold hands in clinics, wards and ED. |
| We are the addicts, the smokers, the vandals. | WE MARCH IN THE STREETS FOR EQUALITY. |
| We fly high, crash low, see things that aren't there. | We bring over Zoloft, burritos, ice-cream. |
| We shrug our stiff shoulders and tug at our hair. | We scoff at the beige, the boring mainstream. |
| We freeze and we flee, withdrawing from sight. | We turn to our queer fam, both near and far. |
| We sob into pillows, keep drinking all night. | Because of them, we know who we are. |

* Hill, AO, Bourne, A, McNair, R, Carman, M & Lyons, A (2020). *Private Lives 3: The health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ people in Australia.* ARCSHS Monograph Series No. 122.

Steph Amir

SEVENTY-THREE
PERCENT (2021)

Digital print on paper
42 x 59.4 cm

Seventy-Three Percent presents a statistic that reveals the high incidence of mental health challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ people, and speaks back to this data from the perspective of lived experience.

Amir's poem aligns with a social model of mental health, in which safety, affirmation, activism and community-based care are understood to be key parts of the collective response required to alleviate individual suffering.

Amir observes that *'while homophobia and transphobia have awful impacts on the mental health of LGBTIQ people, the LGBTIQ community is also a profound source of support.'*

Amir's side-by-side placement of twin texts, invites lateral reading across the lines. This interrupts the familiar structure of the meter and rhyming patterns of each verse, and disrupts the coherence of pathologising narratives of mental ill health that locate the 'problem' within the bodies and minds of queer individuals.



QUEERING THE RITUAL (2022)

Digital print on paper
210cm x 110cm

MacFarlane's street art practice is a creative ritual of self-affirmation and a public celebration of disability pride.

Following a brain injury, the artist's encounters with systemic homophobia within medical and psychiatric contexts, left them feeling straightened. Beginning a handstand practice was the turning point that enabled them to begin to redefine themselves and reassert their identity.

'I became obsessed with learning how to handstand, perhaps intuitively knowing that a daily handstand practice would not only help me rehabilitate my fragmented brain and body, but also facilitate pathways to creatively find my new self.'

MacFarlane's handstand paste ups invert ableist perspectives of disability and reflect their journey from loss and uncertainty, to self-actualisation and community advocacy.



This ongoing series of portraits celebrates some of the queerest and dearest heads of Melbourne's LGBTIQ+ community in the 90s. It is an homage to the influential queer folk who gave the artist a sense of belonging in shared otherness.

*'In a strange utopia at the edges of society
we emerged into our true queer selves.'*

Parsons recalls the solidarity and strength that arose from the shared experience of being disowned by one's birth family, in response to disclosures or discoveries of queerness. In exile, these Gen X outcasts became furiously fabulous and radically queer.

*'We didn't just get mad, we also got
organised. We celebrated inclusion and
built it into our revolution.'*

FACES IN THE STREET (2021)

Paper, contact glitter,
glitter paper, stone
effect paper, textured
leather, block marker,
core foam
42cm x 29.7cm



ACTION ON CITIES (2021)

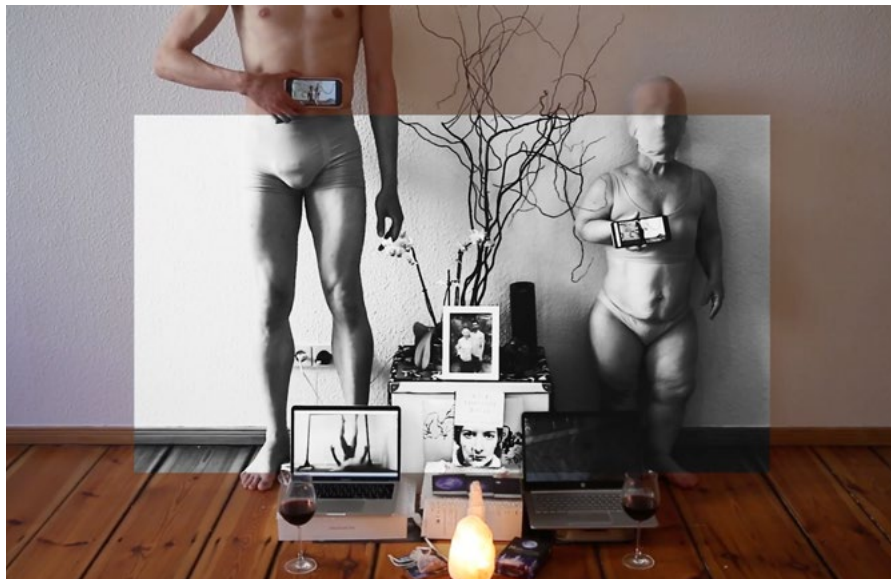
Digital video & audio
3 min, 31 sec

The daily practice of art-making in response to '*the unending frustration of the capitalist paradigm*' offers Horbury a pathway:

'towards another world, towards another imaginary'

In this meditative video work, the artist takes a walk through a city in lockdown, stepping out of isolation for a breath of fresh air, seeking space to clear their head.

Invoking the tradition of the *dérive*, the artist takes their camera on a psycho-geographic wander through an urban landscape, mapping their aesthetic encounters with the terrain. By following their queer yearnings, the artist bends the banalities of their local streetscapes into a captivating phenomenological field. The resulting video work dissolves transactional relations to the architecture of the city and offers a hypnotic, sensory wander into a queerly re-imagined space.



This dance video work is an exploration of how queer identities are embodied, constructed and circulated in the everyday digital world.

The artists inhabit the tension between maintaining a coherent, corporeal sense of self and attending to the digital archives of their bodies, while simultaneously acknowledging the capacity for their past somatic selves to persist as digital anachronisms.

How do queer bodies affirm themselves in the present moment, as former and fluid identity expressions are constantly performed, archived and recalled? In the process of creating this work, Prowd and Tsuki, explored the paradox of:

'who we are, who we were, and who we become'

By speaking through the somatic and spatial sensibilities of dance, they are able to transmit their queerly embodied experiences of digital multiplicity, fearless facelessness and the quest for freedom.

ARCHIVING THE BODY (2021)

Digital video & audio
4 min, 48 sec



FRAGMENTS (2021)

Digital video & audio
3 min, 32 sec

This collaborative work by Ezekiel (video) and Atkins (audio) features everyday footage of the artists as they explore the Australian landscape together. Ezekiel's narration describes his creative process of contemplating beauty in response to their experiences as a queer asylum seeker.

This artwork creates space, for both artist and audience, to appreciate simple '*moments of joy, discovered during a time of hardship*'. Ezekiel's intention is '*to challenge the narrative expectations placed upon minorities*' to centre their storytelling on their trauma. Ezekiel tells the audience:

'Our trauma shapes us, but it's not the only thing that defines us.'

Atkin's composition is partially randomised through code so that human decision-making was relinquished to the automated processes of the computerised system. This references Ezekiel's lived experience. Atkin's score conjures gentle beauty from this process, supporting the *joie de vivre* of Ezekiel's videography.

Fragments combines the poetic and the prosaic to offer an unpretentiously beautiful, life-affirming experience.



This video playfully unravels the socially-entrenched, binary gender expectations assigned to 'girls' and 'boys'. The artist satirises and subverts these gendered categorisations through the use of queer comedy, non-binary drag and the remixing of kitsch images of pink and blue children's toys.

This short and sweet, funny and empowering video is the artist's response to their experience of:

"the suffocating heteronormative status quo, and how this societal pressure becomes internalised and destructive to anyone who doesn't fit the mold."

Stephens rejects this rigid and restrictive paradigm and offers a delightfully cheeky and joyful expression of queerness, that is guaranteed to queer your head in under 1 minute.

TRUE COLOURS (2018)

Digital video & audio
1 min, 01 sec



THE FIGHTERS (2021)

Acrylic Paint on
stretched canvas
100cm x 70cm

This painting is a declaration of the ongoing fight for the recognition and appreciation of queer diversity. The 16 year old artist, from a small town in regional Victoria, courageously declares that:

'We are still fighting and we aren't giving up anytime soon'

The shields carried by the characters in this painting, feature designs based on pride flags, including some that are less well known. Williams notes that these identities are often: *'overlooked, not believed or are completely disregarded'*.

The use of these flags as shields, affirms their protective power, especially for young people who are collectively fighting for the validation and affirmation of their identities.

'All of these flags have played a part in my journey in discovering my gender identity and sexuality and hold a special place in my life.'



This large scale self-portrait is a statement of survival and self-actualisation that radiates joy and pride.

'It is a joy to draw my wide brown nose and full plump brown lips, they are intertwined with my black/brown greatness'

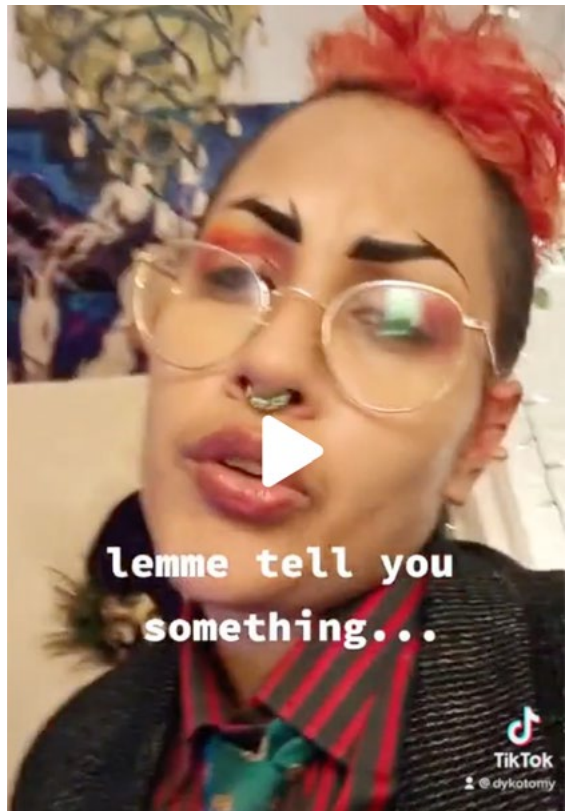
The artist describes their hair as being 'electric'; an expression of the power and beauty of her culture, charged with the energy of history, a current that flows unbroken into the future.

Hickey's work is bold, personal, and politically engaged. Her practice explores her life experiences and ancestral connections to Haiti, interrogating concepts of individuality, sexuality, queerness and black identity.

'I see the black/brown body as representing strength and will, a reflection of power and survival'

SELF, I AM (2021)

Oil pastel, soft pastel,
posca on paper
90.0cm x 152.0cm



**AUTISMO
RAP (2020),
RORSCHACHS
AND BLASPHEMY
(2021), THE
EXISTENTIAL
TATTOOER (2021)**

Tik Tok digital video
and audio
3 videos
36 sec, 53 sec, 12 sec

TikTok offers Sobraty access to the creative zeitgeist of online neuro-queer communities and a global movement of neuro-divergent activism. These short form videos are clever reductions of complex ideas that reflect this contemporary critical milieu.

The Autismo Rap is a succinct critique of the inherent race, class and gender biases in representations of autism, that eloquently affirms the diversity of autistic experience.

Rorcharchs and Blasphemy is a playful double punch of irreverence & fascination, directed at the institutions of Psychiatry and Catholicism. The artist is drawn to the psychometry of leather- bound religious texts, redolent with history; trauma and nostalgia intertwined between the covers. Sobraty's colourful, apochryphal ink blots are a sacrilegious intervention into this space.

The Existential Tattooist is a pithy and darkly funny video that reflects Sobraty's use of nihilistic humour to highlight social and political inequity, and to extract pleasure from dread.



This painting emerged from the artist's experience of the profound healing that can occur in a mutually supportive queer relationship.

'...for many of of us it is through relationship that we can find communion, a way to each other and to our true selves.'

For LGBTIQ+ folk, queer-affirming relationships (personal, professional, cultural and social) are an essential foundation for good mental health, providing a sense of validation and belonging.

This painting is offered by the artist as '*a wish that we all find that place where we are held as we are*' where we are able to find safety in relationship and peace with our own authentic selves.

**I AM MORE
MYSELF WHEN
I AM WITH YOU**
(2021)

Acrylic on canvas
50cm x 50cm

Acknowledgments

Queer My Head

Presented by Midsumma Festival and the Dax Centre

Producer / Curator, Jaye Hayes

Assistant Curator, Camille Heisler

Catalogue Designer, Zoe Tweddle

Midsumma Keynote Program Co-ordinator, Aamer Ahmed

First printed February 2022

Printed by Southern Impact using vegetable-based, low
VOC inks on Ecostar FSC certified paper

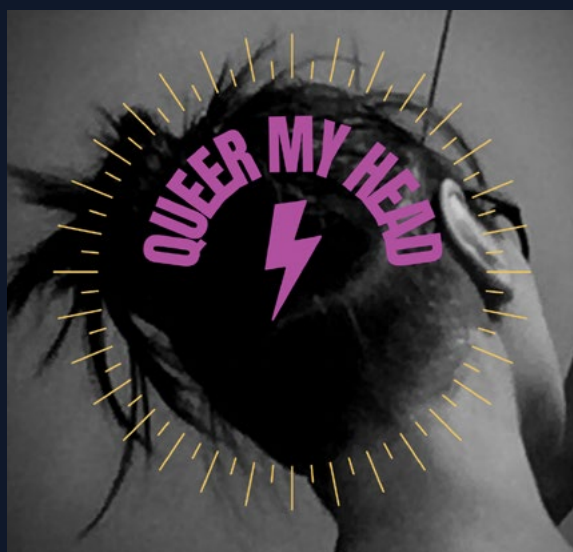
Cover image, Jaye Hayes

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Special thanks to all the Queer My Head artists for
their tenacity in continuing to make inspiring art in
challenging times.

Partners





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