

## ***this house, made and mended by unbelonging hands***

Curated by Dallas Fellini and Karina Iskandarsjah

From 1992-1994, a series of four novel-sized zines titled *Mousie* was circulated in Massachusetts.[1] Each issue was an anthology of queer, trans, and racialized creative writing and art, as well as calls for gathering and collaboration, bound together by photocopy paper and staples. Self-published and distributed by Anna Rampage, an anonymous Asian-American woman, *Mousie* spotlighted voices and topics still lacking from mainstream media today, including the complexities of interracial desire, as well as racism and anti-Blackness in queer communities. Today *Mousie* is made available to the general public through QZAP, a digital archiving effort by queer activists.

Throughout history, queer people, and especially queer people of colour, have turned to the sort of uninstitutional space-making that *Mousie* exemplifies in order to create their own communities and their own systems of documenting their stories. While attempted eradication of queer histories from historical canons has created difficult circumstances of systematic exclusion for queer people, it has also necessitated a culture of queer DIY practices. Queer people have built their own spaces, their own histories, their own archives, and their own communities. *this house, made and mended by unbelonging hands* brings together works by queer artists that take on expansive approaches to craft and zine practices, speaking to this legacy of queer-spacemaking, kinship, and continual resistance across time. In this exhibition, Dayna Danger, Akash Inbakumar, Kaythi, Vincy Lim, Yahn Nemirovsky, and Cleopatria Peterson present works that engage the longstanding tradition of queer craft as something that connects us to past and future queer ancestors.

Like Anna Rampage, many queer and trans artists of colour remain anonymous because there is safety in obscurity. Combatting the trauma of violence and rejection within familial, professional, and recreational spaces, craft practices – especially zine making – continue to form life-affirming bonds between 2SLGBTQ people. Vincy Lim's comic, *The Devil Haunts Us All*, depicts healing from such types of trauma and finding acceptance for the self on one's own terms. It is a compilation of narrative fragments that follow characters named Lilith, Ying, and Mia. Roughly based on the artist's personal experiences and the experiences of their close friends, *The Devil Haunts Us All* accounts difficult tales of abuse, disability, body dysphoria, and social pressures. However, as Lim writes, the comic combines these darker themes "with the theme of love, especially self-love at it's very core." [2] The comic panels of *The Devil Haunts Us All* comprise a mixture of hand-drawn and computer generated textures that imitate the look of an analogue zine – the "immediately intimate, handmade, stapled hunk of photocopied papers, filled with handwritten notes and paper collages" [3] that make you feel close to the creator.

Similarly, Cleopatria Peterson delves into creative forms of autobiography and processes of healing in *Binder Series*. This artwork is part of a larger project titled *We Didn't Exist In Your World, So I Made My Own*, exploring print and objecthood in relation to expressing trauma from transphobia and racism. *Binder Series* is an assemblage of paper-cut chest binders onto which the artist has written down personal experiences, revelations, and affirmations. Pattern paper is sewn together to form 3-dimensional binders adorned with loose thread, pencil drawings, and childhood photographs. Peterson's binder pattern becomes a set of

guidelines through which new garments can be assembled, allowing a reproduction of the artist's personal narratives and identity that mirrors the functionality of personal zines. These binders act as a monument to trans feelings of belonging and safety, signaling the importance of binders as a carrier of gender euphoria. Towards this, their paper chest binders exist as a comforting, affirming presence and metaphorical protection. Reminiscent of both the intimate nature of a self-published zine as well as the boldness of assemblages and stream-of-conscious markings well known in postmodern paintings, Peterson's *Binder Series* experiments with hybridity in form and materiality, ultimately expanding possibilities in the realm of personal zines.

The form and materiality of what constitutes a zine is further distorted and queered in the work of Yahn Nemirovsky. In their series *Sloppy Craft is Archival Love*, Nemirovsky transforms the familiar genre of the perzine, an intimate zine that documents the author's own personal experiences. They remove the idea of the perzine from its traditionally paper, codex format, where narratives are metaphorically collaged in a way that corresponds to the author's identity, and reconstruct it as a series of hybrid paper-textile works in which this metaphorical action of collaging is materialized. Exhibited alongside *Sloppy Craft is Archival Love* is Nemirovsky's needlepoint zine *Words on Objects & Places of LGBTQ2+ Meeting*, a second edition of a work originally created in 2018. Stitched into the first page of this zine are the words "Jerald Moldenhauer has gay books in his backpack. In 1970, his books become a place of meeting." This statement refers to the founding of Glad Day Bookshop (the first queer bookstore in Canada) and reminds us of the generations of labour that have gone into crafting communities and systems of knowledge that guarantee the survivance of queer histories.[4] Nemirovsky's expansive approach to craft and queer community making problematizes the way that craft is traditionally made subject to rigid classifications and assignments of value, instead framing it within legacies of continual transformation.

*Our Lady of Profound Failure* by Kaythi is the direct result of a community gathering with the intention of sharing narratives and perspectives through craft. Originally part an exhibition titled *Productive Discomfort* at Xspace Cultural Centre, whereby selected artists were invited to learn rug-hooking through a feminist, anti-racist lens,[5] the work positions craft as an aperture through which future connection and community organizing can be imagined. *Our Lady of Profound Failure* fuses an array of brightly-coloured yarns to form a hooked rug, featuring the text "DYKES ONLY" strewn across a contorted, ruby figure. This assertion of exclusivity calls into question lesbian separatist projects of the past, inquiring into the legacies of racism and transmisogyny within these movements. Kaythi allows viewers to consider how these movements have failed queer people, and envisions a future that nurtures intersectional spaces, especially pertinent in a moment where we are witnessing the rapid disappearance of spaces for queer women. Craft practices are often sustained by intergenerational pedagogy, mirroring the sort of intergenerational conversations queer communities need in order to avoid reproducing past failures. Kaythi calls to queer ancestors in order to shepherd present and future queer kin to anti-oppressive and inclusive frameworks. Her rug acts as an archive of past failures that simultaneously carries a hope for future rectifications and vision of a flourishing community.

Similarly, Dayna Danger uses craft to speak to a resurrection of culture and community. Danger's *Kinship Masks* series acts as a testament to queer community-making and queer Indigenous resurgence. Danger, who is Métis/Saulteaux/Polish and Two-Spirit, embellishes

leather BDSM fetish masks with traditional Indigenous beadwork, and then photographs these masks being donned by their own queer Indigenous community. Beyond just being worn by community members, these masks were also created with support from and in direct dialogue with Danger's queer Indigenous kin. Danger's images capture distinctive details including personally meaningful symbols beaded onto the masks, as well as their collaborators' tattoos. Danger's masked kin meet the viewer's gaze, establishing a sense of agency and individuality, but also firmly grounding this work in the community whom it was meant for and made by.

Danger's work speaks to a unique queer Indigenous positionality and emphasizes chosen kinship as a part of that experience. This experience inherently leads them to a craft practice that has been erased and delegitimized by the colonial museum collection and presentation conventions that surround Indigenous art. This erasure directly parallels the censorship of queer BDSM practices and the delegitimization of queer histories. Despite the rampancy of lost or intentionally destroyed queer Indigenous histories, Danger is able to connect to their queer Indigenous ancestors through craft and community, simultaneously resisting this erasure and unfolding new queer Indigenous legacies.

In contrast, Akash Inbakumar approaches craft as a way of forming intimacy with non-human subjects. Through sculptures, wearable art, and hybrid objects, Inbakumar explores ideas of queerness and race, presenting an installation of vessels and hand-woven wearables that are framed as unidentified objects in an unexcavated landscape. Referred to as "cyborgs," the objects' specific formal qualities connote material symbiosis with different kinds of non-human entities, for example, body-shaped vessels akin to raw earth, and a mask that transforms your face into a rocky lunar surface. These hybrid objects speak to the unique positionality of racialized queer people, who find themselves between two locations in the ways that they are doubly othered. Here, craft is a tool for community maintenance and legacy, creating distortions that celebrate this supposed otherness.

Through atmospheric story-telling, these curious objects of an unfamiliar time and place provide a starting point for re-imagining our relationship to the planet, one void of the implicit destruction of European colonialism and capitalism. By prioritizing our relationship to natural resources as a deep bond – as opposed to a relationship of extortion – Inbakumar's ambiguous speculative fiction is intended to be distortions and interjections into contemporary colonial cultures and systems, providing new means to imagining power structures and queer kinship.

Craft and zine practices form a far-reaching tradition of uninstitutional space-making and intertemporal conversations – reaching back to queer ancestors who left relics of their life, thought, and creativity for us to maintain and build upon. In digitally clicking through the pages of zines like *Mousie* from decades past, we are enacting intergenerational queer gathering and situating ourselves in community with those voices who dauntlessly came before us, whether or not their messages were tactically veiled in anonymity. This anonymity, mirrored in the way that craft works have historically skirted recognized authorship, is then propelled forward into the arms of future queer ancestors. These ancestors, while currently unknown to us, are undoubtedly bound to interact with the narratives and systems of documentation that we offer today, including those in *this house, made and mended by unbelonging hands*. These works by Vincy Lim, Cleopatria Peterson, Yahn Nemirovski,

Kaythi, Dayna Danger, and Akash Inbakumar act as an archive of contemporary queer storytelling and community-building, drawing from rich histories of self-publishing and queer crafts-making, and projecting new histories, new legacies into an undetermined future.

#### Footnotes

1. QZAP, "Mousie," *QZAP*, February 28, 2016, <https://qzap.org/v9/index.php/80-mousie>.
2. Vincy Lim, *The Devil Haunts Us All*, Self-Published, 2019.
3. Alenka Figa, "Our Queer Older Siblings Will Guide Us: An Interview with the Queer Zine Archive Project," *WWAC*, January 22, 2020, <https://womenwriteaboutcomics.com/2019/07/qzap-interview>.
4. Gordon Richardson, "What's in the Archives? Glad Day Bookshop Signs," *The ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2S+ Archives*, July 16, 2013, <https://arquives.ca/latest-news/whats-archives-glad-day>.
5. Xpace Cultural Centre, "*Productive Discomfort* curated by Lauren Cullen," Xpace Cultural Centre, accessed February 10, 2021, <http://xpace.info/exhibition-event/productive-discomfort-curated-by-lauren-cullen>.