

Images on which to build, 1970s–1990s

March 10–July 30, 2023



Top: Diana Solis, *Self Portrait on Greenview Street, Lakeview Neighborhood, Chicago, IL*, 1982. Archival Piezography print, 30 × 40 inches. Courtesy of the artist. Bottom: Morgan Gwenwald, *Lesbian Herstory Archives Darkroom*, 1990. Archival inkjet print, 20 × 24 inches. Courtesy of the artist

LESLIE-LOHMAN MUSEUM OF ART

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Images on which to build, 1970s–1990s offers a range of photographic practices that used the medium as a tool for self-determination within interconnected feminist, trans, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer grassroots organizing. These efforts are inextricable from the Black Power, Chicana, multiracial, anti-imperialist, and labor movements of the late 20th century. Presenting trans and queer image cultures from this time creates spaces beyond the visual, where felt experiences of affirmation, recognition, and connection form legacies to shape our present and future.

The exhibition is organized around six sections that highlight photographers, artists, activists, archivists, and collectives who produced influential projects from the 1970s through the 1990s. In these decades, alternative schools, workshops, slideshows, study groups, and community-based archive projects generated and circulated images that ignited knowledge production and sustained belonging, resisting a status quo hostile to trans and queer existence. From fine art photography to personal snapshots, protest documentation to support group newsletters, the layers of trans and queer image cultures presented here invite us into the ongoing educational work of liberation movements.

Images on which to build, 1970s–1990s is curated by Ariel Goldberg. The exhibition is co-organized with the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, and was originally presented as a FotoFocus exhibition on the occasion of the 2022 FotoFocus Biennial, *World Record*, which was on view from September 30, 2022–February 12, 2023.

ARTISTS, ARCHIVISTS & COLLECTIVES: ART+Positive, Allan Bérubé, Georgia Brooks, Digital Transgender Archive, Lola Flash, Allen Frame, Frank Franca, FTM International, GLBT Historical Society, Nan Goldin, Paula Grant, Morgan Gwenwald, Aldo Hernández, JEB (Joan E. Biren), Lesbian Herstory Archives, Leon Mostovoy, Mujeres Latinas en Acción, Oikabeth, Ben Power Alwin, Hunter Reynolds, Loren Rex Cameron, Saskia Scheffer, Sexual Minorities Archives, Diana Solís, Lou Sullivan, and Visual AIDS

CURATOR: Ariel Goldberg, Independent Writer and Curator

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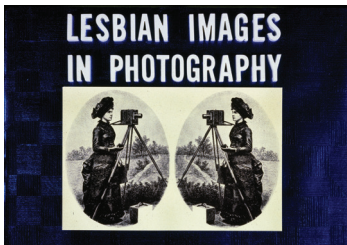
www.leslielohman.org

Wed: 10am–5pm,
Thurs–Sun: 10am–6pm

Free to the public

FOTOFOCUS

**THE
DYKE
SHOW**
by JEB (Joan E. Biren)



JEB (Joan E. Biren)
Lesbian Images in Photography Title Slide, 1979–1984
Image from *The Dyke Show*
Courtesy of the artist
© JEB (Joan E. Biren)



JEB (Joan E. Biren)
Connie Panzarino, New York City, 1979
Photograph from *The Dyke Show*
Courtesy of the artist
© JEB (Joan E. Biren)



JEB (Joan E. Biren)
Delaware Dykes for Peace, Jobs, & Justice, c. 1979
Photograph from *The Dyke Show*
Courtesy of the artist
© JEB (Joan E. Biren)



JEB (Joan E. Biren)
Dyke Show Sign, c. 1979–1984
Cardboard, paint, foil
24 x 36 inches
Courtesy of the artist
Papers of Joan E. Biren,
Sophia Smith Collection



JEB (Joan E. Biren)
Jane Litman at the Jewish Feminist Conference, San Francisco, CA, 1982
Photograph from *The Dyke Show*
Courtesy of the artist
© JEB (Joan E. Biren)



JEB (Joan E. Biren)
The Ladder: A Lesbian Review (with Activist Ernestine Eckstein on cover), June 1966
Image from *The Dyke Show, 1979–1984*
Courtesy of the artist

**LOLA
FLASH**
In and Alongside ART+Positive



Lola Flash
Vikster, c. 1993
Archival inkjet print
24 × 20 inches
Courtesy of the artist



Lola Flash
Clit Club Series, c. 1989–1990
Color C-print
5 × 7 inches
Courtesy the ART+Positive Archives,
Collection of Dr. Daniel S. Berger



ART+Positive
*"Militant Eroticism (Art+)" 1990
Calendar*, 1989
Bound off-set prints
12 × 9 inches
Courtesy the ART+Positive Archives,
Collection of Dr. Daniel S. Berger



ART+Positive
"Mapplethorpe Standoff in Cincinnati,"
image from *This Up Against That*
Slideshow, 1989–1990
Courtesy the ART+Positive Archives,
Collection of Dr. Daniel S. Berger



Lola Flash
Clit Club Series, c. 1989–1990
Color C-print
5 × 7 inches
Courtesy the ART+Positive Archives,
Collection of Dr. Daniel S. Berger



Lola Flash
AIDS Funding Now, 1989, image
from *This Up Against That*
Slideshow, 1989–1990
Courtesy the ART+Positive Archives,
Collection of Dr. Daniel S. Berger

DIANA SOLÍS
Intimacies in Resistance



Diana Solís
Tepotzlan, Morelos, Mexico, 6 women surrounding radio at an outdoor dining table, 1982
Archival piezography print
16 × 20 inches
Courtesy of the artist



Diana Solís
Women Free Women in Prison, March on Washington, 1979
Archival piezography print
16 × 20 inches
Courtesy of the artist



Diana Solís
Flexing our Muscles: Gathering of Friends, Greenview Street, Lakeview, Chicago, IL, 1981
Archival piezography print
30 × 40 inches
Courtesy of the artist



Diana Solís
Summer Youth Program Students of Diana Solís in front of Casa Aztlan, Chicago, 1986
Archival piezography print
16 × 20 inches
Courtesy of the artist



Diana Solís
Rally after 1980 Gay Pride March, Chicago, 1980
Archival piezography print
20 × 24 inches
Courtesy of the artist



Diana Solís
IV Encuentro Feminista Latinoamericano y del Caribe: Taxco, Mexico, 1987
Archival piezography print
16 × 20 inches
Courtesy of the artist

KEEPIN' ON
 Images of African American Lesbians



Ira Jeffries Sixteenth Birthday, 1942
 Black-and-white photograph
 11 × 14 inches
 Courtesy The Lesbian Herstory Archives



Saskia Scheffer, *Snapshot documenting Keepin' On NYC opening* (l-r: Paula & Morgan near copy of Dyker Union vest artwork on wall), 1991
 Color Xerox
 6 × 4 inches
 Courtesy The Lesbian Herstory Archives



Morgan Gwenwald
Mabel Hampton and Georgia Brooks (Preparing to march on 5th Avenue during NYC Lesbian and Gay Pride Day), 1982
 Archival inkjet print
 11 × 14 inches
 Courtesy of the artist



Morgan Gwenwald
Working on the "Keepin' On" exhibition (l-r: Paula Grant, Jewelle Gomez, Georgia Brooks), 1991
 Archival inkjet print
 16 × 20 inches
 Courtesy of the artist



Mabel Hampton Collection
Portrait of Mabel Hampton [1902-1989], c. 1920s
 Black-and-white photograph
 11 × 14 inches
 Courtesy The Lesbian Herstory Archives



Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter #12, Published 1991
 Newsletter
 Courtesy The Lesbian Herstory Archives



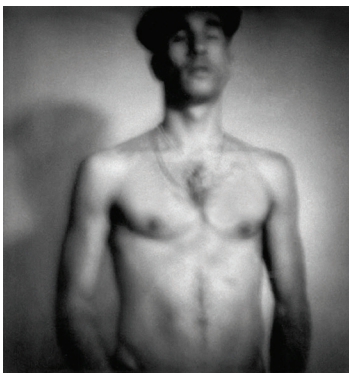
Allen Frame, Frank Franca, and Nan Goldin, sponsorship by Visual AIDS, 35mm Title Slide for *Electric Blanket: AIDS Projection Project*, 1990–2002
 Courtesy Visual AIDS



Allen Frame
Documentation of Electric Blanket: AIDS Projection Project, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA, 1993
 Silver gelatin print
 Courtesy of the artist



Allen Frame
Documentation of Electric Blanket: AIDS Projection Project, Dupont Circle, Washington, D.C. Eddie Marookian by Robert Williams on screen, 1993
 Silver gelatin print
 Courtesy of the artist



Frank Franca
Electric Blanket: AIDS Projection Project, photo of Jose Luis Cortes, with the original caption: “Jose Luis Cortes is an HIV + Artist living in New York City,” 1995
 Courtesy of the artist



Allen Frame
Electric Blanket: AIDS Projection Project, photo of Darrel Ellis, 1981
 C-print
 11 × 14 inches
 Courtesy of the artist



Stephen Barker
Electric Blanket: AIDS Projection Project, photo of “Funeral March” Nov 2 1992: The 9th photo in a series of 25 images of the election eve political funeral of ACT UP member Mark Fisher (1953–1992) [In the foreground: Joy Episalla]
 Courtesy of the artist

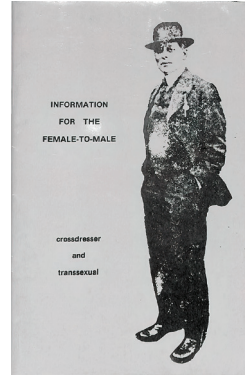
LITTLE GEMS
Trans Image Networks



Portrait of Bet Power (now Ben Power Alwin), April 1990
Archival inkjet print
Courtesy of Sexual Minorities Archives, Miscellaneous Photography Collection and Digital Transgender Archives



Lesbian Masquerade Slideshow flyer, 1979
Allan Bérubé Papers (1995–2017)
Courtesy of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society



FTM International Papers
Cover for Lou Sullivan's *Information for the Female to Male Crossdresser and Transexual*, 1985 Pamphlet
Louis Graydon Sullivan Papers (1991–2007)
Courtesy of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society



Allan Bérubé
Snapshot of pride parade [FTM Contingent], 1994
Color photograph
4 × 6 inches
Allan Bérubé Papers (1995–2017)
Courtesy of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society



Still of Loren Rex Cameron introducing "Transsexuals Speak Out!" Panel Discussion as part of Cameron's "Our Vision, Our Voices: Transsexual Portraits and Nudes," produced by Loren Cameron and Tony Boersma, June 1994
Digital color video, with sound, 52 min.
Courtesy Cornell University Library, Loren Cameron Papers, #7677.
Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections



Cover of *On Our Backs* (photo by Chloe Atkins), Volume 11, #1, Jan/Feb 1995 Issue, Published 1995
8½ × 11 inches
Courtesy of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society

Images on which to build, 1970s–1990s

Ariel Goldberg

I.

Where and how people learn is one of the most contested questions in public life. City, state, and federal legislatures here in the United States have been defunding education for decades. While student debt rises, police and military budgets expand.¹ State legislatures are banning public schools from teaching about structural—and individually experienced—racism, sexism, transphobia, and homophobia.² Free and safe abortion is nearly impossible to access in over a dozen states—the same states where trans people’s access to bathrooms, sports, and gender-affirming healthcare is restricted and criminalized. Yet, people find ways of gathering to share and sustain information for day-to-day survival, resisting these ruling orders. Collective learning generates power.

Photography helps us travel to other times to better understand this familiar tide of repression as well as modes of resistance. *Images on which to build* takes us to the near past because today’s movements for justice persist in imagining futures beyond a reality of excessive policing and violence. Images are one tool activists and artists use to dismantle the coexisting structures of settler colonialism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. One of the greatest successes of the trans and queer liberation movement thus far has been the visual assertion that trans and queer folks exist.

The processes of growing political consciousness and self-determination also happen in ways that are less visible. Trans and queer image cultures create spaces beyond the visual, where experiences of affirmation, recognition, and connection form legacies that shape our present and future. This exhibition re-introduces us to the material forms of slideshows, correspondences, sex-positive magazines, grassroots archives, and exhibitions that grew out of trans and queer organizing in cities across Turtle Island in the 1970s–90s. This was a time when rent was cheaper in places like New York and San Francisco, and trans and queer social worlds were folded into participating in overlapping social justice work. Relatedly, in photographic history, the late 20th century is marked by a shift to incorporate liberation movements’ ethos—which emphasized holding photographers accountable to the goals of the

movements, as opposed to replicating power structures of the patriarchy and the state.

This exhibition sets out to study the moment right before photographic technologies began the switch to digital and became more accessible to the general public on a mass market scale. Despite the relative slowness of analogue formats—from shooting black-and-white film at protests that needed to be processed in a darkroom to making copies of artist portfolios through copy-standing with slide-film—the 1970s–90s was a bountiful time of subcultural media production. My definition of imaging practices include the many processes that bring images into existence, decentralizing the photographer by highlighting participants and necessary resources—such as those who make themselves visible and enable the printing and circulation of the image. Trans and queer culture workers were particularly devoted to the interpersonal processes of image-making that were laborious, protracted, and depended on relational and often collective practices. To become known as trans and queer in any visual or textual media incurred a great deal of risk and was a political act. Therefore, much of the photographic activity featured in this exhibition happened covertly, in darkrooms built by hand, and sent through the mail in discreet envelopes.

Studying image cultures offers key strategies of the steady, everyday work of culture workers—not just from the now celebrated dramatic scenes of street rebellions—but in the daily grind of struggle, when alliances and fractures played out. Embedded in our inheritance of trans and queer image cultures are the ways people connected, gathered and collectively educated one another. A queer art museum marks a departure from the grassroots spaces where most of these projects were produced. I welcome the opportunities and tensions that this shift in venue and audience instigates. Especially in a time when trans and queer images themselves may appear easier to find, and major institutions begin to hang rainbow flags, images from the 1970s–90s call on us to trace their raucous contexts, to wonder, how were images made and circulated?

II.

One of the most influential subcultural spaces for learning during the 1970s–90s was the slideshow event. Slideshows were announced with fliers in community spaces that invited audiences to view one-off presentations of art, political issues, or queer history lessons. Typically, slideshow events involved showing hundreds of still images from a carousel loaded with slides enlarged through a portable projector and accompanied by a live or pre-recorded narration. Photographs appeared and disappeared at a large scale in a darkened room. The format of the analogue slideshow is a predecessor to digital softwares such as PowerPoint and even the sequential scroll of Instagram.

From 1979–84, JEB (Joan E. Biren, b. 1944) presented *The Dyke Show* at least 80 times to audiences at community spaces and universities in the US and Canada. Originally titled *Lesbian Images in Photography: 1850–1984*, *The Dyke Show* comprises over a hundred years of photographic history from a lesbian feminist perspective, peppered by JEB’s humorous live commentary on patriarchal fantasies of lesbians. *The Dyke Show* tour was conceived as a promotional book tour for her self-published *Eye to Eye: Portraits of Lesbians*, the first print run of which quickly sold out.³ JEB introduced viewers to underrecognized photographers from previous generations, such as Berenice Abbott (1898–1991), whose lesbian life was embedded in codes. JEB also celebrated her contemporaries who embraced erotica, such as her mentor Tee A. Corinne (1943–2006). JEB solicited dozens of contemporary photographers’ work to include in the slideshow, which evolved over the tour’s five-year run.⁴ With these slide-shows, JEB encouraged her audiences to document, save, and share their own images of their lives. One of the first hosts of *The Dyke Show*, Carol Seajay (b. 1950) co-founder of Old Wives’ Tales Bookstore in San Francisco, enthusiastically reviewed the slideshow in the March 1980 issue of the long-running feminist newspaper *off our backs*. Seajay wrote that JEB’s slideshow provided “Images on which to build a future.”⁵ Her words are borrowed as the title of this exhibition.

JEB’s archival records, housed at the Sophia Smith Collection, include thousands of audience response

cards from the live performances of *The Dyke Show*. JEB received praise, testimony, historical information, critique of her political analysis and use of nude imagery, as well as suggestions about improving representation of all lesbians in the slideshow. JEB began the slideshow by stating “certain kinds of lesbians are less visible than I wish they were, particularly lesbians of color and working class lesbians.”⁶ The historical section of the slideshow in particular revealed the impacts of structural inequalities in the US on the emergent lesbian image culture, as her research at the time only turned up white photographers who typically (though not always) had the financial means to go into photography. JEB’s own photographic practice as a white, Jewish, middle-class documentarian has been motivated by the need for authentic and ethically produced representation of lesbians across race, ability, class, and gender expression.

JEB considers *The Dyke Show* to be the most important work of her life because it was educational, participatory, and fun. Instead of merely promoting her own work, she sought to share her skills as a photographer to implicate every viewer of *The Dyke Show* as a participant in making lesbians more accurately represented in their immediate lives, and larger society, as people who appreciate and preserve photographs, appear in them, or those who stand behind the camera. While in a given town to present the slideshow, JEB held a sliding scale “non-technical” photography workshop open to local amateurs and professional women photographers. In a time when photo labs, camera clubs, and art schools were often hostile places for out lesbians, JEB fostered emerging collectives and individual young photographers, such as Del LaGrace Volcano (b. 1957).

JEB’s influence in building a lesbian image culture was informed by her participation in two lesbian collectives in the 1970s: The Furies, which produced an influential newspaper that first published JEB’s work, and Moonforce Media, a feminist film distributor that built the National Women’s Film Circuit from 1975–80. She eventually pivoted from slideshows to filmmaking in the early 1990s. Her feature-length documentary *No Secret Anymore: The Times of Del Martin and Phyllis*

Lyon tells the story of the lesbian couple who co-founded Daughters of Bilitis in 1955. JEB's work is now represented in many collections, including the National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution, The J. Paul Getty Museum, the National Civil Rights Museum, and the Academy of Arts in Berlin.

The Dyke Show was not alone in igniting audiences with a life-changing experience of viewing a history to which you might belong. Self-taught archivists repurposed slide projectors commonly found in classrooms, offices, and homes to reverse the marginalization and erasure of trans and queer histories. Also in 1979, Allan Bérubé (1946–2007), a white, cisgender, gay male community-based historian, premiered *Lesbian Masquerade: Some Lesbians in Early San Francisco Who Passed as Men*, a talk with slides, at the Women's Building in San Francisco. Bérubé's original research for *Lesbian Masquerade* featured clippings from a scrapbook he found at the San Francisco Public Library, donated by a detective who, in the early twentieth century, compiled sensational news stories of men who were "discovered" to be assigned female at birth, rendering them as instant criminals in the eyes of the state. In attendance at this first screening was Louis Sullivan (1951–1991), a white, trans gay male activist and writer who would go on to promote and screen the slideshow within trans support groups throughout the 1980s.

The slideshow began with Bérubé but it was a collective endeavor. Volunteers with the Lesbian and Gay History Project helped with ticketing, promotion, and hosting of the first slideshow screening. Bérubé passed the slideshow on to a group of lesbian volunteers who retitled the slideshow *...She Even Chewed Tobacco*, designed to be a rental with a script, carousel, and cassette tape.⁷ The narrative of the slideshow came to include the refrain "but were they lesbians?" to question the organizer's own longing and fantasies about historical figures one attempts to connect with across life and death.

III.

Trans activist and archivist Ben Power Alwin (b. 1950) wrote to his new friend Sullivan about the transformational experience of screening the rented version of *...She Even Chewed Tobacco* for his community at the New Alexandria Lesbian Library in Northampton in the late 1980s.⁸ Power Alwin's narrative of encountering historical images of passing men inside this traveling slideshow illuminates how intertwined self-image-making was to the personal correspondences that sustained networks of emerging trans communities at this time. Power Alwin sent Sullivan snapshots of himself in the mail, creating an intimate audience for his process of becoming an FTM transsexual without hormones or surgery. Their friendship was further stitched together by exchanging news clippings, what Sullivan described as: "little gems...hidden in history that we need to preserve for future female-to-males who think they're 'the only one.'"⁹

Their correspondence began in 1986, with the donation of Sullivan's self-published pamphlet "Information for the Female-to-Male Crossdresser and Transsexual" to Power Alwin's grassroots archive, now named the Sexual Minorities Archives (SMA). Sullivan and Power Alwin's brief but powerful friendship, cut short by Sullivan's death from AIDS-related complications at the age of forty, is documented through their correspondence. In 1991, Power Alwin would go on to organize the East Coast Female to Male Group (ECFTMG), which still meets to this day at his home, which doubles as the SMA. Power Alwin has lived with the archives since the late 1970s. Reversing inequities in race, class, and ability, deeply motivates how Power Alwin catalogues and makes accessible the holdings of the SMA: the original materials remain at the archives and travel only digitally through their website and the Digital Transgender Archive.¹⁰

Building on his frequent communications through the mail, in 1987 Sullivan began to edit, with other volunteers, FTM Newsletter, which grew networks of trans men seeking and offering peer-to-peer support in a time when gender-affirming medical care was nearly impossible to access. While the newsletter began to

travel internationally, Sullivan also gathered San Francisco-based FTMs in a support group. Loren Rex Cameron (1959-2022), a white bodybuilder and active member of this FTM group, decided to become a photographer after disliking how he was represented in a 1991 feature story in the popular sex-positive magazine *On Our Backs: Entertainment for the Adventurous Lesbian*.¹¹ Cameron taught himself photography to make images of trans people from an embodied and knowing approach that normalized and celebrated the process of hormones, surgeries, and the non-medical ways trans people come to live and love in their bodies. The press release for his first photography exhibition in 1994, *Our Vision, Our Voices: Transsexual Portraits and Nudes*, in San Francisco, at 848 Community Space, proclaimed: "Transsexuals rarely have a chance to represent themselves in their own terms, but FTM transsexuals are especially invisible. Many people don't even know we exist. I want my photographs not only to move my audience as art, but to educate them about the diversity and complexity of the transsexual experience."¹² *Our Vision, Our Voices* was so well attended that the gallery needed to hold a second opening to accommodate the crowds.

Cameron's photography was a critical tool for confronting transphobia and transmisogyny within the lesbian and gay community of San Francisco throughout the 1990s. In 1995, *On Our Backs* featured a selection of Cameron's photographs from *Our Vision, Our Voices* alongside an insert essay by Susan Stryker, who narrated her experience of being photographed by Cameron to the readership of the popular lesbian sex magazine. Stryker was at the time beginning her career to help create, with a consortium of other activists and scholars, the academic discipline of Transgender Studies. Cameron's photography, excerpted in this issue of *On Our Backs*—with a distribution of 10,000—traveled outside the local scene of the San Francisco Bay Area. The next year, Cameron's first monograph *Body Alchemy: Transsexual Portraits*, was published by Cleis Press in 1996 (and is now out of print). Adorning the cover of *Body Alchemy* is Cameron's most well-known picture: a self-portrait as he injects testosterone into his glute while, with his other hand, he squeezes a cable release bulb, a

mechanism that opens and closes the shutter remotely so the subject can photograph themselves.¹³ Much like JEB's *Eye to Eye: Portraits of Lesbians*, Cameron's *Body Alchemy* is thought to be the first of its kind in terms of trans self-representation in the US. JEB and Cameron displayed portraits alongside a text written or spoken by those they photographed, following the documentary photo-essay tradition as popularized by LIFE magazine photographers.

Images on which to build traces dissonant and overlapping threads of popular print media and seemingly niche photographic histories. Trans and queer community-based archive projects have relentlessly collected images across categories imposed by traditional art historical narratives, such as fine art, vernacular, and journalism. The Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA), for example, has an incredible repository of 12,000 photographs available to researchers, including clippings from mainstream media. LHA's collection empowers those who have lived within lesbian and gay worlds who came to identify as transsexual, transvestite, or cross-dresser, now popularly named, trans and non-binary. Exhibited in *Images on which to build* is a 1954 issue of *Ebony* magazine that featured a photo essay on James McHarris/Annie Lee Grant. The photographs of McHarris/Grant from this news story have circulated as a part of LHA's photography collection.

McHarris/Grant passed as a Black trans man in the South and Midwest in the mid-century. In 1954, after being pulled over for a minor traffic violation in Kosciusko, Mississippi—a form of state sanctioned racial terror that persists today—McHarris/Grant's gender was questioned by the police. He was then arrested for cross-dressing and served a 30-day sentence in the nearby jail. Due to the local and national news stories that sensationalized his gender reveal, McHarris/Grant was no longer safe to remain in the town in which he lived and worked. Meanwhile, his images and story continue to travel through lesbian and trans historical networks looking for evidence of courageous people who lived and loved in their gender. In more recent years, McHarris/Grant has been celebrated by journalist Monica Roberts

and studied by scholar C. Riley Snorton.¹⁴

The photograph of McHarris/Grant striking a match on the sole of his shoe in *Ebony* appears within three projects in this exhibition: *The Dyke Show*, *Lesbian Masquerade*, and “*Keepin’ On*”: *Images of African American Lesbians*. The latter project was one of the Lesbian Herstory Archives first traveling exhibitions, co-curated by LHA members Georgia Brooks (1943–2013), Paula Grant (b. 1945), and Morgan Gwenwald (b. 1952), with technical support from Saskia Scheffer (b. 1950). For the original exhibition statement, Grant wrote that “*Keepin’ On*” “was created to celebrate and honor the creativity and strength of the African American Lesbian community. The title comes from a phrase Mabel Hampton (1902–1989) used to say when she was working with us at the Archives, ‘Keep on Keepin’ On.’”¹⁵

The exhibition “*Keepin’ On*” first opened in February 1991 at the Lesbian & Gay Services Center in New York and travelled to community centers and universities for over ten years. “*Keepin’ On*” featured roughly a hundred images from the LHA collection reproduced in high quality color xeroxes and mounted onto fourteen foam core boards. Like the other traveling exhibitions that LHA coordinators began to produce in the 1990s, “*Keepin’ On*” was designed with practicality and accessibility in mind: to easily be packed, mailed, repaired, and re-installed. “*Keepin’ On*” served as an educational resource to reverse the white-washing of lesbian and feminist herstories. The exhibition showcased the prolific cultural and political work of Black lesbians over a hundred years through a range of photographic genres.

In the 1970s, two decades before “*Keepin’ On*” was created as a portable exhibition, co-curator Georgia Brooks began a Black Lesbian studies group at the Archives. Traveling exhibitions featuring their collections continue to be a touchstone of LHA’s educational work. Current LHA co-coordinator Shawn(ta) Smith-Cruz (b. 1983) has curated several exhibitions featuring the Salsa Soul Sisters Collection, which was a group for African American Lesbians, also open to Asian American, Latina, and Native women that began meeting in 1974, and in 1976, they published a statement and invitation

for others to join as The Third World Gay Women’s Organization Salsa-Soul.¹⁶ Transition of Salsa Soul Sisters’ archival materials began with a donation to LHA by Brooks in 1983 and continued in 2016 when Salsa Soul Sisters members Cassandra Grant, Imani Rashid, Nancy Valentine, and Brahma Curry worked with Smith-Cruz to process more Salsa Soul materials. As LHA continues to produce metadata for this collection, Smith-Cruz meets with Salsa Soul members to collectively caption the hundreds of photographs in the Salsa Soul archives. Starting in 2018, Smith-Cruz created an exhibition based on the Salsa Soul Sisters archival materials that has traveled to the EFA Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop Program, Brooklyn College Library, The Studio Museum in Harlem, and the New York Historical Society.¹⁷

IV.

Images on which to build proposes that many archives documenting queer life in the 1970s–90s are only recently coming into wider circulation. This is certainly the case with the archives of artist, photographer, educator, and Mexicana-Chicana activist Diana Solís (b. 1956). Solís’s photographs from the late 1970s to the late 1990s take us to a number of grassroots educational projects, mostly in Chicago and Mexico City. Solís’s archive of this period is wide-ranging as she was working as a photojournalist, educator, and organizer, offering a reference point to the scope of possible places learning happens within social movements.

Solís came of age in the late 1960s, a time of student- and parent-led protests in Chicago Public Schools that demanded educational funding, renovations, and Chicano and Black studies classes. “Intimacies in Resistance,” the selection of Solís’s archive for this exhibition, represents a fraction of Solís’s photographic archive of the late 1970s–90s—over 8,000 mostly black-and-white, 35mm images. Solís began studying photography at Columbia College Chicago in the late 1970s while working part-time as a photojournalist for local newspapers, such as the *Chicago Tribune* and the *West Side Times*, which covered her neighborhood of Pilsen. She always had her camera on hand and often photographed late night gatherings with friends and protests against

the Chicago police.

Solís was born in Monterey, Nuevo León, Mexico, and came to Chicago as a young child. While growing up, she visited family in Mexico frequently and returned to Mexico City through the 1980s to study, live, and work as a photographer for mainstream news outlets, like *Televisa*, and the feminist press with *FEM* magazine. Solís documented the explosion of lesbian feminist organizing in the Americas. She participated in and photographed public demonstrations against gender-based violence and US imperialism. The exhibition features this work, as well as photographs she took as a member of collectives like Oikabeth.

Founded in the late 1970s and first led by painter, organizer, and curator Yan María Yaoyótl Castro (b. 1952), Oikabeth was the first feminist, lesbian group in Mexico that attended demonstrations with huge banners proclaiming their lesbian politics, as inextricable from their revolutionary politics. Other members of Oikabeth featured in Solís's photographs include Leticia Armijo (b. 1961), a composer, singer and feminist music scholar, and Patria Jiménez (b. 1957), a politician and head of the lesbian rights group *El Clóset de Sor Juana* (Sister Juana's Closet). In 1997, Jiménez became the first out gay member of Mexico's legislature in the country's history—the first in any legislature in Latin America.

Solís participated in and documented several occurrences of Encuentros Feminista Latinoamericano y del Caribe (EFLAC), an international conference that began in Bogotá in 1981 and continues to bring together thousands of Latin American women across different race and class backgrounds—writers, artists, workers, and scholars who have been variously fighting sexism and the violence of authoritarian governments. Solís's photographs of the 1987 IV Encuentro in Taxco, Mexico, show performances, consciousness raising groups, and workshops where participants discussed experiences of homophobia, colonialism and capitalism in their shared resistance work against patriarchy. Another topic for debate was the different lived realities between women from Caribbean and Latin American countries and occupied territories such as Puerto Rico, as well as the small

number of Latinas present who grew up in the diaspora of the US and Canada. At the IV Encuentro, Solís created dialogue across state-enforced borders by exhibiting her work from the Mexican and Latinx communities of Chicago and teaching a photography workshop.

Solís's work visualizes how learning happens intergenerationally, in intimate and collective formations of social movement life. *Mujeres Latinas en Acción* (Mujeres) in Chicago was just one site for Solís's work in photography and education. In 1979, Solís built a darkroom at *Mujeres* and taught black-and-white photography in the organization's Women's Education Program. In the course, she designed an assignment to document "our mothers and ourselves," which became the seed for her own ongoing project *Mothers and Daughters*, resulting in Solís's first solo show in Chicago in 1987. Solís has taught in numerous grassroots educational projects in Pilsen, such as the Latino Youth Alternative High School, Jane Adams Hull House, and the Summer Youth Program at Casa Aztlan. She is currently a teaching artist for the National Museum of Mexican Art and in the Chicago Public Schools through the Changing Worlds Organization and Urban Gateways programs. In the late 1990s, after completing her BFA at University Illinois at Chicago, Solís began to work in illustration, murals, and large-scale public art to preserve the stories of the thriving Latinx and queer communities as they fight gentrification. She has exhibited at the National Museum of Mexican Art and DePaul Art Museum in Chicago and the Museo Nacional de Culturas Populares, Toluca, Mexico. In 2020, several years into digitizing her archive of documentary photography and portraiture, Solís returned to photographing her neighborhood of Pilsen and making portraits in her community.

Artist Nicole Marroquín, who has been working with Solís on making her archives accessible, taught a course in 2021 at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago on the process of digitizing and historicizing Solís's archive. "Art in Communities: Activating a Queer Latinx Archive" hosted ten guest lecturers who have collaborated with Solís over the course of her career, including scholars like Deanna Ludezma, who has done several public programs with

Solís on her artist book *Luz*, and Pau Nava, who has been the principal cataloguer for Solís's work to be featured online at the Chicana por mi Raza Digital Memory Collective.¹⁸ Solís's life and work is emblematic of the major tools of sustained participation across interconnected generations and intersectional social movement work through image-making.¹⁹

V.

Learning through and with photography became increasingly insurgent within photographic projects from the late 1980s and early 1990s, as the HIV/AIDS epidemic raged. Artists began to use a combination of every possible visual media strategy at their disposal to quickly and forcefully organize direct actions to pressure the government to fund research and treatment to stop HIV/AIDS. Lola Flash (b. 1959), who has been working at the forefront of genderqueer visual politics for more than four decades, brought their skills as an image-maker to direct action organizing. Flash was active in the New York chapter of AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and the affinity group ART+Positive, where they joined more than a dozen artists to fight AIDsphobia, homophobia, and censorship in the arts.²⁰

Over three short years, 1989–1992, ART+Positive planned demonstrations, letter-writing campaigns, made a slideshow, calendar, video, large-scale collage, curated an exhibit, and participated in numerous HIV/AIDS related group shows. ART+Positive was in part mobilized by the 1987 Helms Amendment that prohibited federal funding for HIV/AIDS educational materials that referenced homosexuality. Named after Republican Senator Jesse Helms, the legislation, which was overwhelmingly passed in the Senate, became representative of a conservative backlash against the social movements of the previous decades that imagined a world without white supremacy and patriarchy. The Reagan administration's homophobic panic in response to HIV/AIDS catapulted a right-wing fear-tactic campaign to defund the National Endowment for the Arts and restrict resources for HIV/AIDS research and treatment.

Flash's photographic work began in the late 1970s at the Maryland Institute College of Art with experiments in

the darkroom by printing color transparency slide film on more affordable paper made for color negatives. Flash soon realized this cross-color process reversed skin tones, offering a visual language to challenge received stereotypes about race. Flash's photographs from the 1980s–90s also came to electrify scenes of sex and gender expression, while bringing anonymity to those who dared to pose for them. As portals of resistance and survival, their photographs blur the lines between queer sex, activism, caretaking, and grieving as HIV/AIDS took hold of daily life. Flash's visual experiments from this time evoke a mood of life turned upside down, of club lighting washing the pain away from young people suddenly dying and government negligence toward HIV, while also providing disruptions to expectations of photo-visual information: with all colors activated through their opposites, viewers are invited to challenge their own assumptions that are often transmitted and reinforced through images.

Featured in this exhibition are printed photographs first shown in Flash's Clit Club slideshow. Slideshow projections were fixtures in queer clubs as visual entertainment for regulars to delight in seeing pictures of themselves, friends, crushes, and lovers. The Clit Club, founded in 1990 by artists Julie Tolentino (b. 1964) and Jaguar Mary X (b. 1962), was a weekly club that began in the Meatpacking District of Manhattan and travelled to other downtown venues over the next decade, centering lesbian and queer women of color and those who might now identify as genderqueer, nonbinary, and trans.²¹ Flash did not photograph inside the Clit Club because it had a no photography rule to protect those who attended. Working as a bartender in the club's first year, Flash approached denizens to photograph, inviting them to the apartment they shared with their partner at the time, Tolentino, who brought her skills as a dancer and choreographer to Flash's photoshoots. For the past two decades, Flash has been working in more traditional color large-format portraiture centering Black and Brown queer and trans people and women. Flash's revelatory and insurgent modes of image-making are now being celebrated by major art institutions: their work has recently entered the permanent collection at MoMA, the Whitney

Museum, Brooklyn Museum, and the National African American Museum of History and Culture.

VI.

The slideshow, through its impact in building political consciousness and through its form as a collectively produced educational material compiling dissonant photographic genres, begins and ends this essay that weaves together only a selection of works featured in *Images on which to build*. *Electric Blanket: AIDS Projection Project*, an epic public-art slideshow projection of photographic representations of HIV/AIDS, took on a similar ethos of urgent interventions that characterized ART+Positive's disruptions of political and social complacency with HIV/AIDS illness and death. Structured by refrains, titled "Memorial," "Action," and "Document," the slideshow mixes portraits of loved ones who had died, records of demonstrations, protest slogans, statistics, photo-journalistic, and other photo essays that feature those living with HIV/AIDS. Created by Allen Frame (b. 1951), Frank Franca and Nan Goldin (b. 1953), with administrative support from Visual AIDS, *Electric Blanket* joined the 1990 line-up for the second annual Day Without Art, a thriving international call for events on December 1st to stimulate remembrance and calls for action to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic. *Electric Blanket* had an approach to partnerships with museums, city governments and local organizations that followed Day Without Art's invitation for participation from institutions large and small to host events activating AIDS education as it related to the arts. While some prestigious museums did host *Electric Blanket*, they were not privileged destinations over explicitly queer, grassroots spaces for the slideshow-event.²²

Frame and Franca, with the continuing support of Visual AIDS, coordinated, revised, updated, and toured the evolving slideshow fifty-two times nationally and internationally for over a decade. Typically the slideshow was a live, one-hour, large-scale projection with musical soundtrack in outdoor public spaces, but it was also adapted for indoor display as extended, self-playing installations in art spaces and museums. Tours in the United States and Western Europe for *Electric Blanket*

subsided when protease inhibitors—the drugs that came to save people's lives—became widely available in 1996, while invitations to show *Electric Blanket* continued from Russia and New York academic venues in the early 2000s. *Electric Blanket* sustained global and local networks of mourning while fighting HIV/AIDS criminalization, stigma, and the social and economic inequities fueling the virus to this day. Roughly 38.4 million people across the world are still living with HIV/AIDS.

Images on which to build features over a dozen practitioners who defiantly oppose the limited presence trans and queer culture workers occupy in mainstream art and documentary photography histories of this era. Urgently produced and transformatively received, the image cultures conjured herein highlight the sheer range of practices, geographies, and intentions of how photography was being used and envisioned. This exhibition stages a "mise en abyme," a recurring image-within-an-image as a way to activate powerful historical documents and to produce those very documents. The common technologies for making and circulating pictures in the late twentieth century—slideshows, letters, magazines, portable exhibits, calendars—can teach us how trans and queer people were actively learning and attempting to provide information to each other and those allied with their movements.

Images on which to build honors the work of both traditional and non-traditional educators. Solís and Flash, for example, have had distinguished careers teaching art in public schools. Frame and Franca are longtime adjunct professors in photography programs in New York City. Georgia Brooks was the Academic Lab Manager at Hudson Community College and the long term advisor for the college's Gay-Straight Alliance. JEB, whose career has operated outside of traditional educational institutions, proposes a model for educational work residing in the photograph itself. The Lesbian Herstory Archives, GLBT Historical Society, and Sexual Minorities Archives continue to be educational hubs for all ages and types of researchers. Many of the volunteers within these organizations are archivists, librarians, social workers, artists, and writers in their day-jobs.

Ben Power Alwin envisions his life's work of securing archival resources for future generations as a matter of life and death, reflecting on his own empowerment as dependent on learning: "I knew that I was... not going to survive, unless I *got all the education I could get*".²³ By highlighting photographers, archivists, and artists' bodies of work through this lens of education as a tool of survival outside and beyond institutional structures of schools, this exhibition offers spaces of learning as ongoing and interconnected, across generations.

The curator would like to thank their partner Dan Paz and all those who supported this project along the way: Aviva Avnisan, Jess Barbagallo, Alexis Clements, Gabe Beckhurst Feijoo, Daniel S. Berger, Karisa Butler-Wall, Aaron Devor, Danielle Durchschlag, Allison Elliott, Deborah Edel, Dia Felix, Dan Fishback, Estelle B. Freedman, Chris Giarmo, Elliana Goldberg, Laura Guy, Rabbi Matt Green, Tara Hart, Maia Ipp, Colleen Keihm, Koyo Kouoh, Lazz Kinnamon, Youna Kwak, Oraison H. Larmon, Kristen Lubben, Joan Lubin, Nicole Marroquin, Brenda Marston, Katie Miles, Saretta Morgan, Caitie Moore, Victoria Munro, Pau Nava, John Neff, Joan Nestle, Oluremi C. Onabanjo, Lana Povitz, Thea Quiray Tagle, Lynne Reynolds, Nora Rodriguez, Rasha Salti, Drew Sawyer, Shawn(ta) Smith-Cruz, Sara Jane Stoner, Susan Stryker, Jeanne Vaccaro, Deborah Willis, Leslie M. Wilson, Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa, Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant, Kolot Chayeinu, LATITUDE, Magnum Foundation, New Jewish Culture Fellowship, and the Rooted Refuge. This exhibition is dedicated to journalist Monica Roberts (1962–2020), of the TransGriot Blog, and Ellen Melamed (1953–2021), co-founder of Jewish Lesbian Daughters of Holocaust Survivors.

NOTES

¹ The Debt Collective is a debtors' union fighting to cancel debts and defend millions of households. Join us to build a world where college is publicly funded, healthcare is universal and housing is guaranteed for all. <https://debtcollective.org/>

² African American Policy Forum's Truth Be Told Campaign is tracking the states that have fully passed racial and gender equity prohibitions with over a dozen state legislatures considering similar bans. <https://www.aapf.org/truthbetold> documents the teachers being fired and courses canceled

in real time. Gender affirming health care is being made illegal by conservative state legislatures at a rapid pace. To stay informed, I follow Imara Jones of Translash media, Jules Gill-Peterson and Chase Strangio, among others. thetrevorproject.org and translifeline.org are two frontline crisis support hotlines and services organizations that need volunteers and donations to combat anti-trans legislation and violence.

³ In March 2021, Anthology Editions released a reissue of JEB (Joan E. Biren's) *Eye to Eye: Portraits of Lesbians* to wide international acclaim. JEB's second book, *Making A Way: Lesbians Out Front* (1987), which features many photos she made on *The Dyke Show* tour, is forthcoming from Anthology Editions.

⁴ Additional contemporary photographers featured in *The Dyke Show* included (but were not limited to): Cathy Cade, Tia Cross, Honey Lee Cottrell, Diana Davies, Bettye Lane, Kay Tobin, Carol Newhouse, Cynthia MacAdams, Lisa Szer, Morgan Gwenwald, Jane Cleland, Katie Niles, Leigh Mosley, Sharon Deevey, Lynne Reynolds, and Irene Young.

⁵ Carol Seajay's review, "Visual Conceptions: Dyke Cream/Eye to Eye: two slide shows JEB'S (Joan E. Biren) Lesbian Images in Photography: 1850–1980 & Tee Corinne's Erotic Images of Lesbians in the Fine Arts" originally appeared in the March 1980 issue of the long-running feminist newspaper *off our backs*.

⁶ On February 9, 2023 in New York City, for the occasion of the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art's version of *Images on which to build*, JEB performed a live version of the slideshow at The Center, giving a brief introduction on lesbian photographers—historical and contemporary—she has learned about and built community with *since* she stopped touring and updating *The Dyke Show* in 1984.

⁷ Estelle B. Freedman, Elizabeth Stevens, Amber Hollibaugh, Honey Lee Cottrell supported the slideshow which was a rental through Iris Films, which was absorbed by Women Make Movies, who still distribute the slideshow today, with royalties going to the GLBT Historical Society.

⁸ Ben Power Alwin (formerly Bet Power) "Letter from Bet Power to Lou Sullivan (March 4, 1987)." Correspondence, 1987, Digital Transgender Archive, <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/1c18df895>

⁹ Lou Sullivan, "Letter from Lou Sullivan to Bet Power (August 31, 1990)." Correspondence, 1990, Digital Transgender Archive, <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/5425k9845>

¹⁰ Out of the Archives Podcast with host Sean Donovan, "Ben and the SMA," April 12, 2020. <https://www.buzzsprout>.

com/1005022/3336484; Jess T. Dugan and Vanessa Fabbre, *To Survive on this Shore: Photographs and Interviews with Gender Nonconforming Older Adults*, Heidelberg, Kehrer Verlag, 2018
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¹¹ Susan Stryker, 'Loren Cameron: This Guy is Hot', *Anything That Moves*, No. 9, (San Francisco, Bay Area Bisexual Network, 1995): 32–33.

¹² Loren Rex Cameron papers, 1961–2008, 1993–2003, Collection Number: 7677, Box 1, Folder 9, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library

¹³ Cameron's accompanying exhibition for *Body Alchemy* toured nationally, including to Clement Gallery at the University of Toledo in Ohio in 2001.

¹⁴ C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pgs. 166–175; Monica Roberts TransGriot, "Black Trans History-Jim McHarris," 12 Sept. 2012.

¹⁵ Mabel Hampton was one of the featured figures in Saidiya Hartman's celebrated 2019 book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*.

¹⁶ In 1976, the group was incorporated as Third World Wimmin. Salsa Soul Sisters eventually changed their name to African Ancestral Lesbians United for Social Change (AALUSC), which is active today.

¹⁷ <https://lesbianherstoryarchives.org/salsa-soul-sisters/>

¹⁸ Started by Professor Maria Cotera and filmmaker Linda Garcia Merchant in 2009, Chicana por mi Raza Digital Memory Collective is a group of researchers, educators, students, archivists and technologists dedicated to preserving imperiled Chicana and Latinx histories of the long Civil Rights Era. <https://chicanapormiraza.org/>

¹⁹ The Poetry Center in Chicago hosted *Diana Solís: Encuentros Photographs of Chicago Poetry Communities, 1978–1994* in 2022. Curated by Oscar Arriola and Nicole Marroquin, this exhibition featured books, photographs, and ephemera that explore this unique moment in Chicago's literary history, illuminating the legacy of Solís's life in arts and literature.

²⁰ For a complete list of the artists involved in ART+Positive, see Dr. Daniel S. Berger & John Neff's book *Militant Eroticism: The ART+Positive Archives*. Alongside Flash during this time, active members included Aldo Hernández (b. 1956), Ray Navarro (1964–1990), Hunter Reynolds (1959–2022), Leon (Tracy) Mostovoy (1961–), Julie Tolentino (1964–), David Wojnarowicz (1954–1992), and Dennis Davidson.

²¹ Tolentino, Julie, Vivian A. Crockett, Tara Hart, Amira Khusro,

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²² Just between 1992–1993, *Electric Blanket* traveled to the Boulder Art Center in Colorado, St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Jackson Mississippi, The March on Washington, Rutgers University, Henri Onstad Kuntsenter in Høvikodden, Norway, and a Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in Budapest, Hungary.

²³ Evan Taylor and Ben Power Alwin. "Ben Power Alwin Full Interview." *Oral History, 2020, Digital Transgender Archive*
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The exhibition *Images on which to build, 1970s–1990s* and this essay are based on research for a book-in-progress, supported by a 2020 Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant. This research would not be possible without the ongoing conversations with the artists and archivists featured in this exhibition, to whom I am grateful beyond words. Below is an abbreviated bibliography, organized by sections of the exhibition, to offer further resources.

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**IMAGES
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1970s – 1990s



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