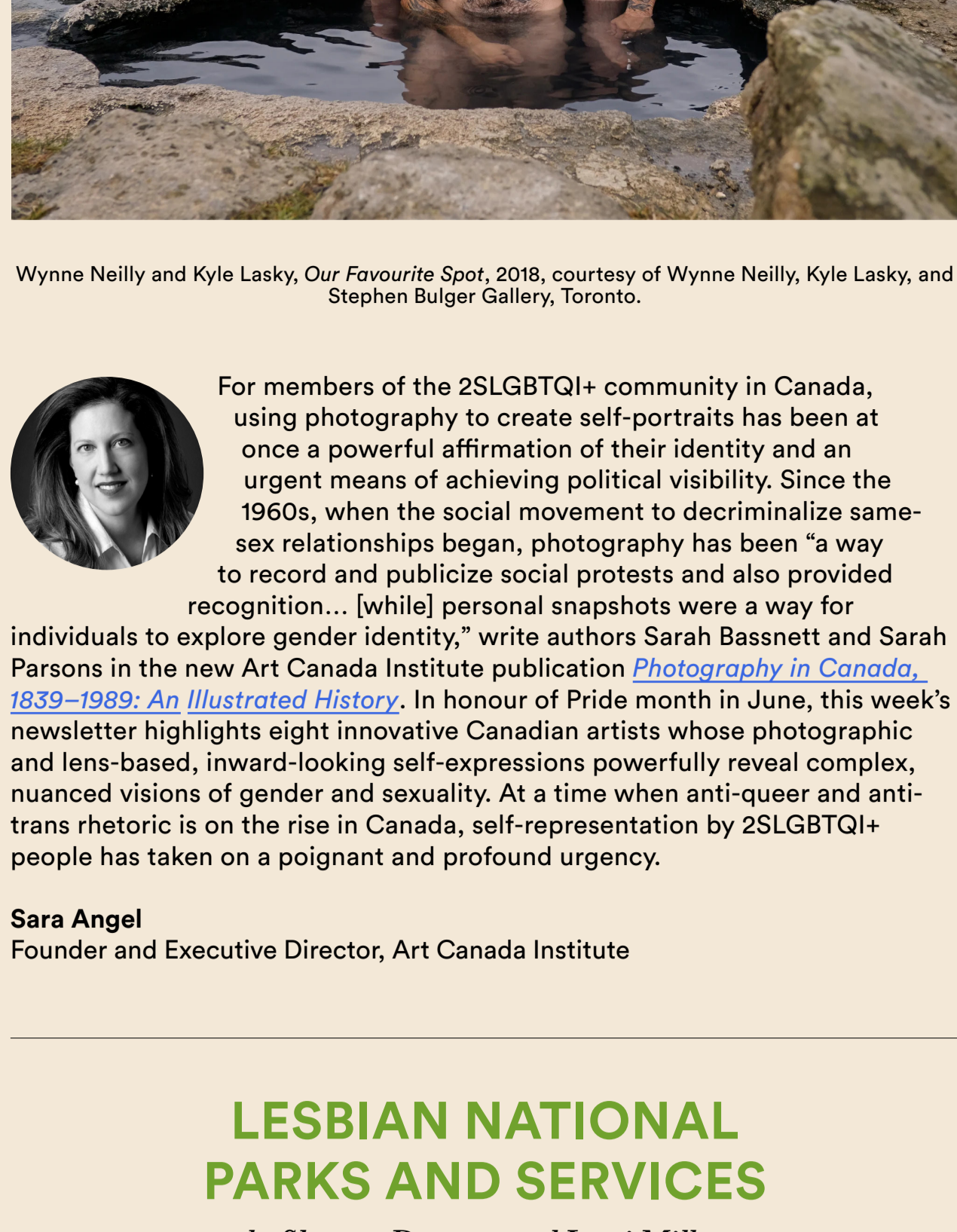


MAY 31, 2024

## PICTURING PRIDE: PHOTOGRAPHIC SELF-PORTRAITS BY 2SLGBTQI+ ARTISTS

Canadian artists whose use of photography and other lens-based media explores sexual and gender identities through portraiture.



Wynne Neilly and Kyle Lasky, *Our Favourite Spot*, 2018, courtesy of Wynne Neilly, Kyle Lasky, and Stephen Bulger Gallery, Toronto.



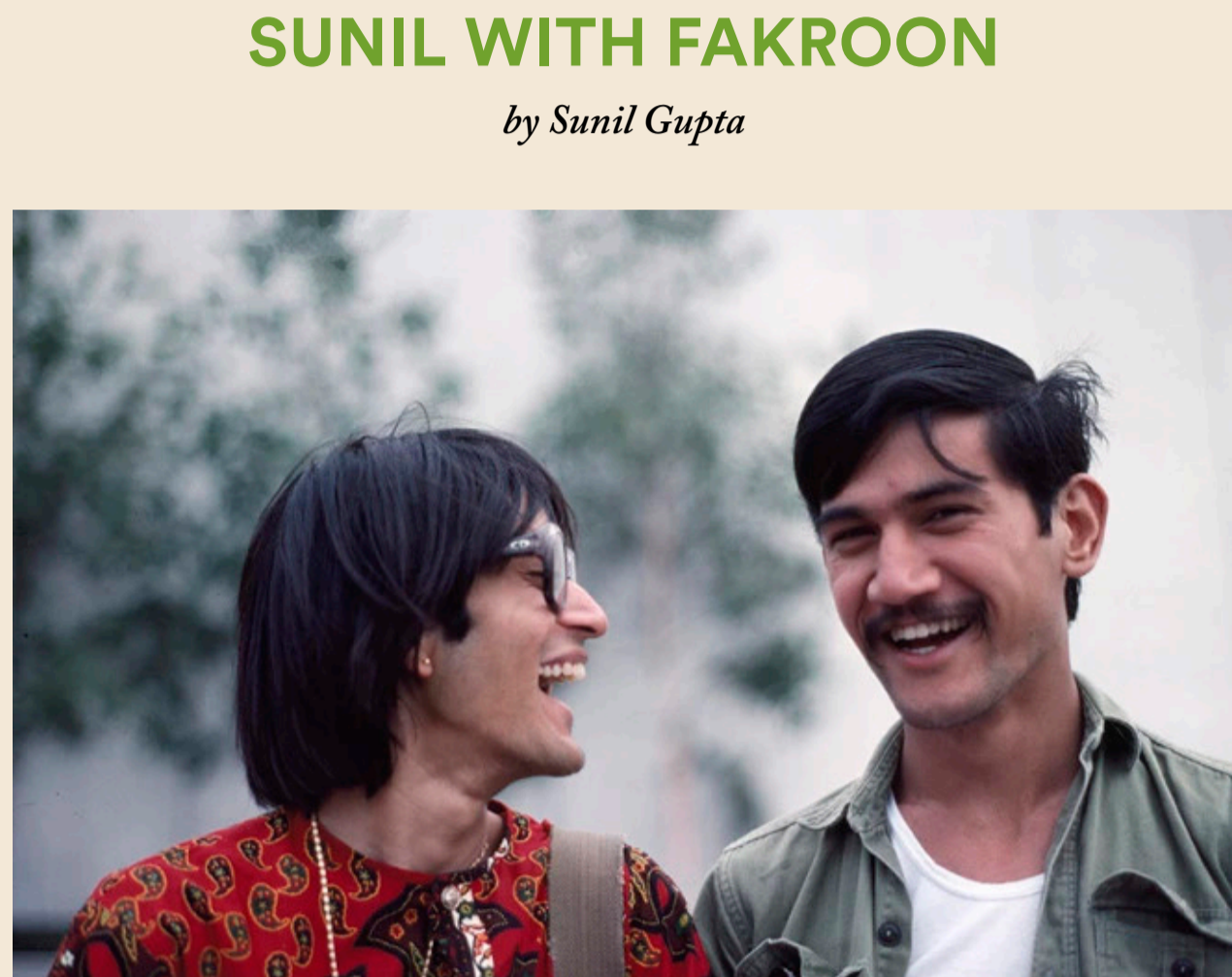
For members of the 2SLGBTQI+ community in Canada, using photography to create self-portraits has been at once a powerful affirmation of their identity and an urgent means of achieving political visibility. Since the 1960s, when the social movement to decriminalize same-sex relationships began, photography has been "a way to record and publicize social protests and also provided recognition... [while] personal snapshots were a way for individuals to explore gender identity," write authors Sarah Bassnett and Sarah Parsons in the new Art Canada Institute publication *Photography in Canada, 1839–1989: An Illustrated History*. In honour of Pride month in June, this week's newsletter highlights eight innovative Canadian artists whose photographic and lens-based, inward-looking self-expressions powerfully reveal complex, nuanced visions of gender and sexuality. At a time when anti-queer and anti-trans rhetoric is on the rise in Canada, self-representation by 2SLGBTQI+ people has taken on a poignant and profound urgency.

**Sara Angel**

Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

## LESBIAN NATIONAL PARKS AND SERVICES

by *Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan*



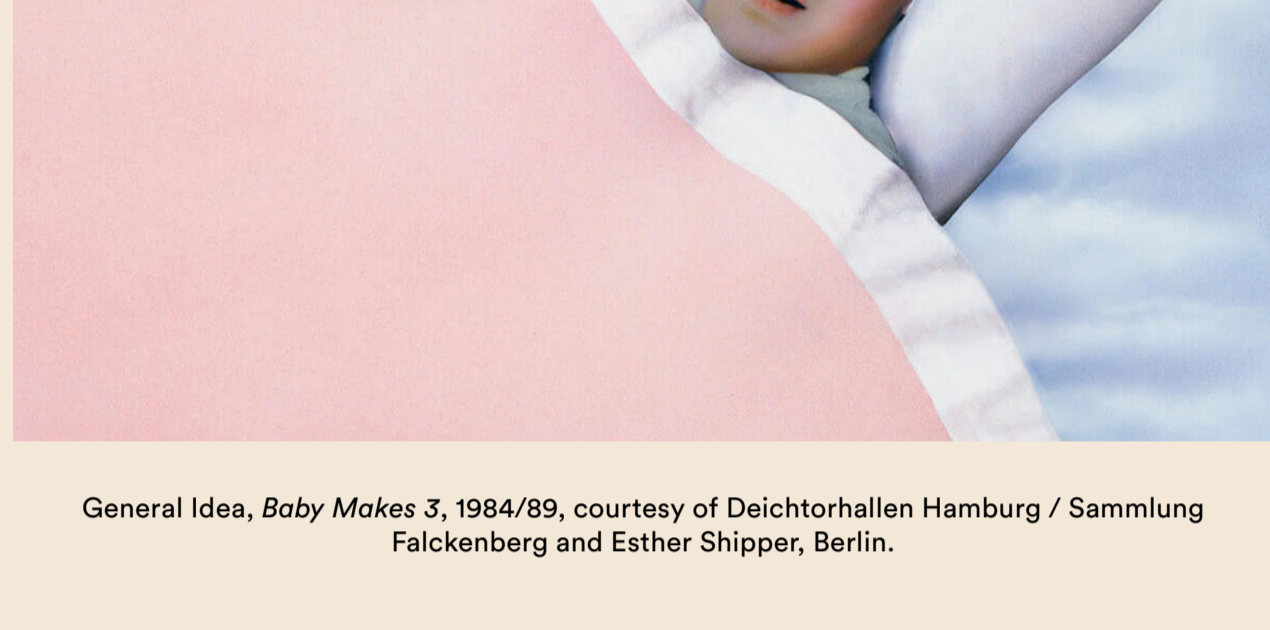
Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan, *Lesbian National Parks and Services*, 1997–2015, photograph by Don Lee, Banff Centre.

One could argue that the national park is an apt metaphor for heteronormativity: it takes the sprawling diversity of the natural world and prunes it to fit inside strict, yet largely arbitrary, borders. Blazing a trail for lesbian visibility with parklands and public spaces in various countries as their backdrop, Winnipeg artists Shawna Dempsey (b.1965), who appears on the right of this photo, and Lorri Millan (b.1965), who appears on the left, use their ongoing feminist performance work *Lesbian National Parks and Services* to challenge notions of what is deemed "unnatural" (as lesbian and gay relationships have frequently been labelled). "Everyone wants to be a Junior Lesbian Ranger," reads an [excerpt](#) from their wry *Handbook of the Junior Lesbian Ranger*, 2001. "Some want to wear the famous uniform. Some cannot wait for adventures in the bush."

[Learn more about Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan](#)

## SUNIL WITH FAKROON

by *Sunil Gupta*



Sunil Gupta, *Sunil with Fakroon*, 1975, courtesy of Design and Artists Copyright Society, London, U.K. © Sunil Gupta / DACS London / CARCC Ottawa 2024.

Celebrated New Delhi-born photographer Sunil Gupta (b.1953), on the right of this photo, immigrated to Montreal in 1969 and documented his friends and lovers in the city as he and many others were in the throes of coming out. In this self-portrait, Gupta captures a decisive moment in 2SLGBTQI+ history but, more importantly, beautifully conveys what it felt like to build a chosen family and political community during the heady days of the gay liberation movement. Living and working over the decades in Canada, India, and the U.K., Gupta is a crucial figure in transnational, grassroots queer and postcolonial representation through art—which he also curates and studies—as well as in cultural organizing in the face of systemic homophobia and racism.

Read more in ACI's [Photography in Canada, 1839–1989: An Illustrated History](#) by Sarah Bassnett and Sarah Parsons

## BABY MAKES 3

by *General Idea*



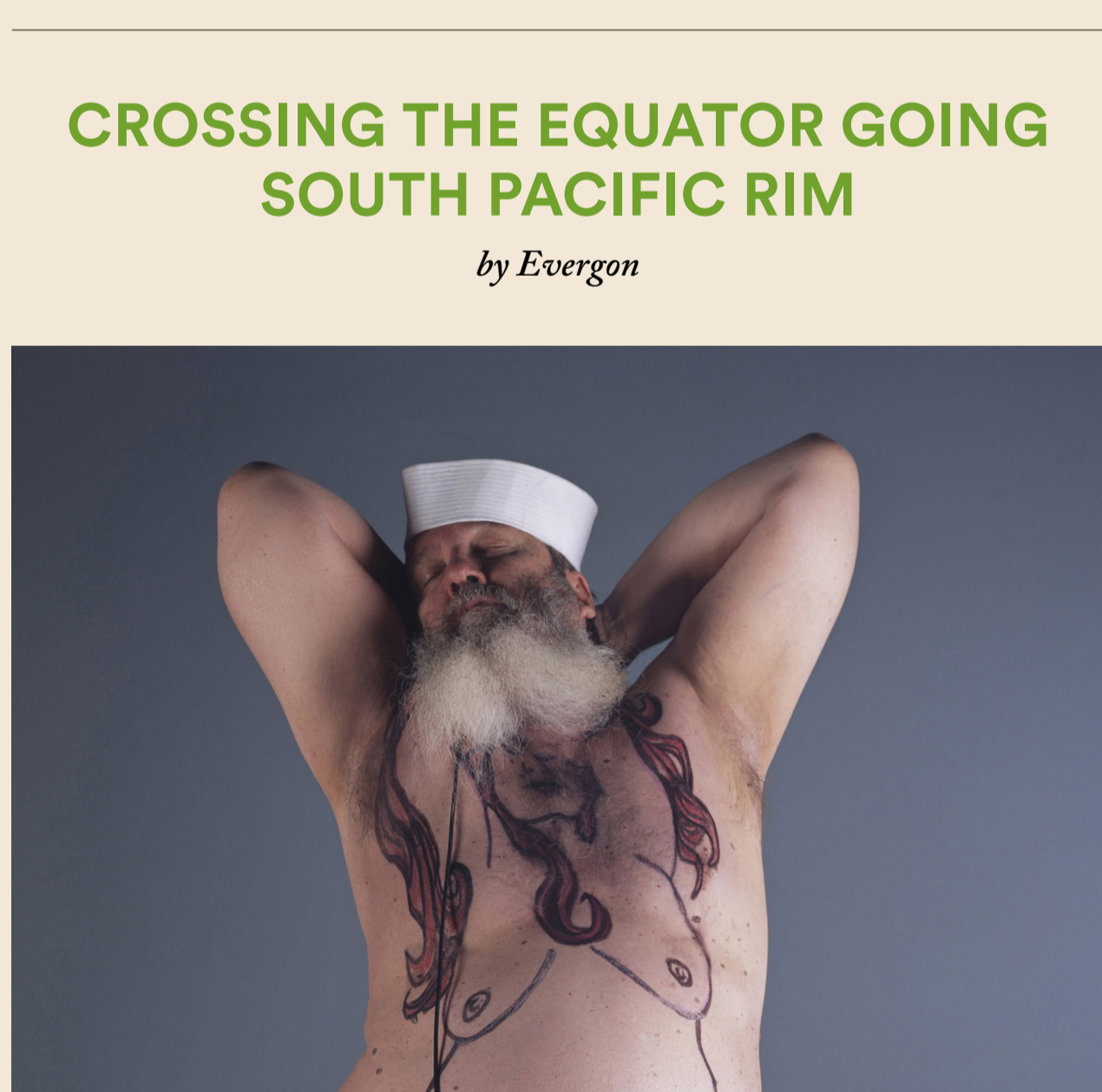
General Idea, *Baby Makes 3*, 1984/89, courtesy of Deichtorhallen Hamburg / Sammlung Falckenberg and Esther Shipper, Berlin.

In the 1980s, renowned Toronto-based artist trio General Idea (AA Bronson, at the centre of this photo; Felix Partz, right; and Jorge Zontal, left) created works that addressed the construction of images by the mass media. Self-mythologization was a key aspect of their practice, and they often depicted themselves in different guises, including as poodles, scientists, and in *Baby Makes 3*, 1984/89, babies. This work is a queer critique of coupledom, and it is unclear which of the youthfully rendered figures tucked into the heavenly bed is the baby and which are the parents. General Idea's triple self-portraits have an added pathos, given that Zontal is the only surviving member: both Partz and Zontal died of AIDS in 1994.

Read more in ACI's [General Idea: Life & Work](#) by Sarah E.K. Smith

## OUR FAVOURITE SPOT

by *Wynne Neilly and Kyle Lasky*



Wynne Neilly and Kyle Lasky, *Our Favourite Spot*, 2018, courtesy of Wynne Neilly, Kyle Lasky, and Stephen Bulger Gallery, Toronto.

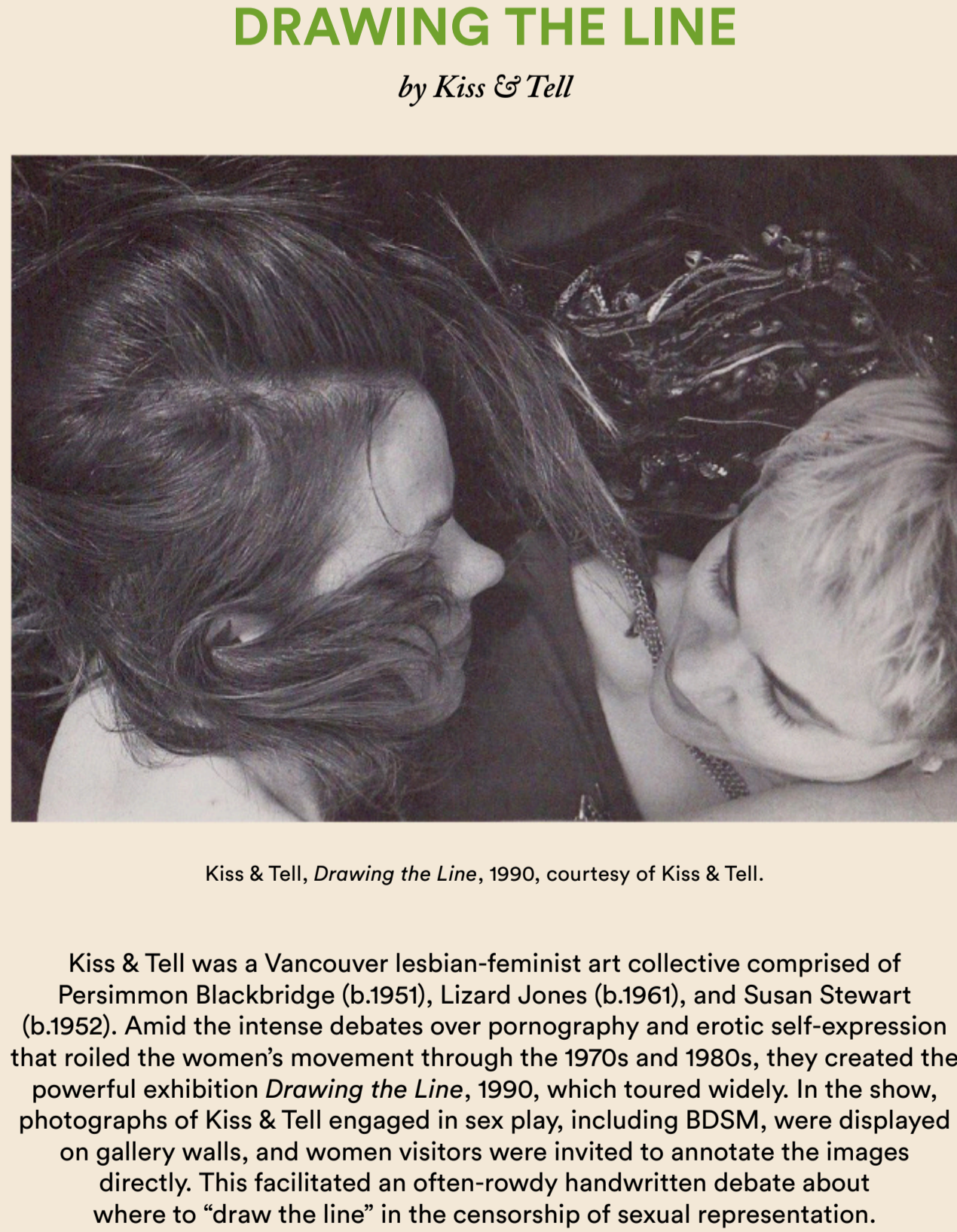
Two trans men gaze out at the camera, their bodies intertwined in a primordial pool. The title, *Our Favourite Spot*, 2018, speaks in the first person plural and keeps the location secret. Wynne Neilly (b. 1990), at the back in this photo, and Kyle Lasky (b.1989), at the front, met in 2009 at Toronto Metropolitan University when they were young, butch women and supported each other through their gender transitions. They began documenting a friendship so close that they are often mistaken for lovers, and they accentuate this tension in their photographs. As they [point out](#), "[The images in [The Have / Hold series] frustrate an erotic expectation while creating space for a new truth—a representation of erotic intimacy that has not been seen before."

[Learn more about Wynne Neilly](#)

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## BUFFALO BOY INDY LAKE

by *Adrian Stimson*



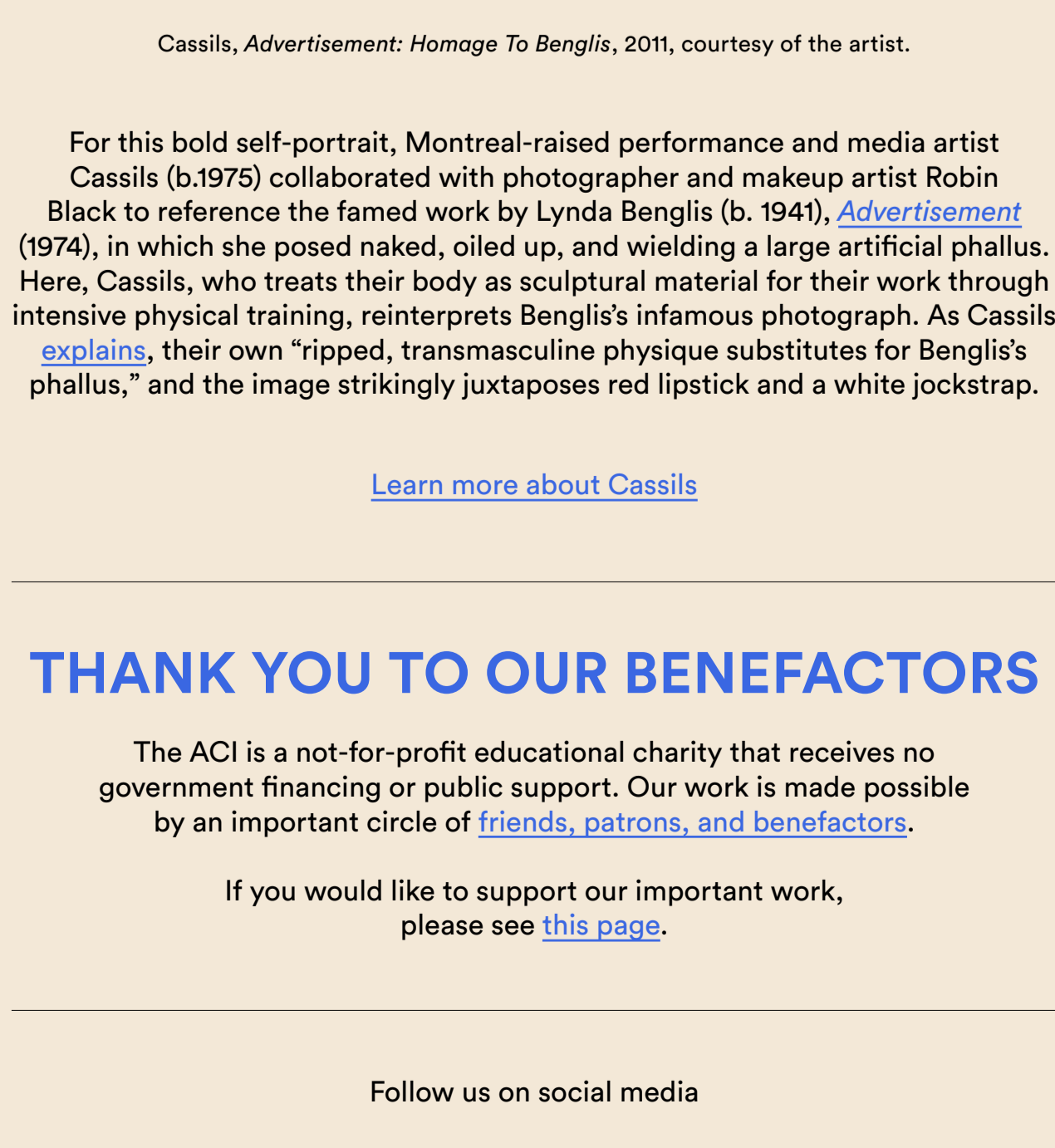
Adrian Stimson, *Buffalo Boy Indy Lake*, 2004, courtesy of Adrian Stimson, Siksika Nation.

In this self-portrait, interdisciplinary artist Adrian Stimson (b.1964) of the Siksika (Blackfoot) Nation in southern Alberta presents himself as his artistic persona of [Buffalo Boy](#). Equal parts dandy and warrior, the striking figure clad in furs, boots, a buffalo hat, as well as a whip and pearls, Buffalo Boy gazes off into the distance. The photograph's black-and-white tone gives it the distinct look of a historical image. Stimson's performance art examines the construction of self through hybrid figures such as the Indian, the cowboy, the shaman, and the Two-Spirit being. Stimson as Buffalo Boy regularly attends Burning Man, the annual festival in the Nevada desert, an anything-goes stage for shifting and fluid identity.

[Learn more about Adrian Stimson](#)

## CROSSING THE EQUATOR GOING SOUTH PACIFIC RIM

by *Evergon*



Evergon, *Crossing the Equator Going South Pacific Rim*, 2009, courtesy of Evergon.

Desire, dress-up, mythmaking, and play are central to the often-homoerotic work of the legendary Montreal-based photographer and educator Evergon (b.1946), who was recently celebrated with a large-scale retrospective at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec. Charged with a sense of wildness in *Crossing the Equator Going South Pacific Rim*, 2009, the shirtless artist wears a grass skirt and a sailor hat, appearing lost in reverie as he mimics the pose of the mermaid that is drawn on his torso. He becomes a living work of art, embodying a queer gender performance that references fantasies of the South Pacific.

Read more in ACI's [Photography in Canada, 1839–1989: An Illustrated History](#) by Sarah Bassnett and Sarah Parsons

## DRAWING THE LINE

by *Kiss & Tell*



Kiss & Tell, *Drawing the Line*, 1990, courtesy of Kiss & Tell.

Kiss & Tell was a Vancouver lesbian-feminist art collective comprised of Persimmon Blackbridge (b.1951), Lizard Jones (b.1961), and Susan Stewart (b.1952). Amid the intense debates over pornography and erotic self-expression that roiled the women's movement through the 1970s and 1980s, they created the powerful exhibition *Drawing the Line*, 1990, which toured widely. In the show, photographs of Kiss & Tell engaged in sex play, including BDSM, were displayed on gallery walls, and women visitors were invited to annotate the images directly. This facilitated an often-rowdy handwritten debate about where to "draw the line" in the censorship of sexual representation.

Learn more about ACI's forthcoming book [Kiss & Tell: Lesbian Art & Activism](#) by Kristen Hutchinson

## ADVERTISEMENT: HOMAGE TO BENGILIS

by *Cassils*



Cassils, *Advertisement: Homage To Bengilis*, 2011, courtesy of the artist.

For this bold self-portrait, Montreal-raised performance and media artist Cassils (b.1975) collaborated with photographer and makeup artist Robin Black to reference the famed work by Lynda Benglis (b. 1941), [Advertisement](#) (1974), in which she posed naked, oiled up, and wielding a large artificial phallus. Here, Cassils, who treats their body as sculptural material for their work through intensive physical training, reinterprets Benglis's infamous photograph. As Cassils [explains](#), their own "ripped, transmasculine physique substitutes for Benglis's phallus," and the image strikingly juxtaposes red lipstick and a white jockstrap.

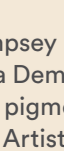
[Learn more about Cassils](#)

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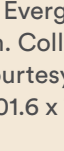
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