



Queer Eyes, Queer Lives:

A collection of photographs
contributed by 2SLGBTQIA+
youth about substance use,
homelessness, and resiliencies

CURATED BY

Trevor Goodyear,
Christian Barborini,
and the Substance Use
Beyond the Binary Youth
Action Committee

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Queer Arts Festival 2024

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Since becoming the artistic director of the Queer Arts Festival + SUM gallery in 2021, I've been continually surprised, inspired, and moved by people who use art as a means of creating and strengthening the communities around them. Often enough these people are practising artists themselves, but in December 2023 we were approached by two UBC researchers, Trevor Goodyear and Christian Barborini, who were leading separate arts-based studies with local 2SLGBTQIA+ youth. From our very first meeting with them I knew that this was a special project that we wanted to support, but I wasn't prepared for how deeply connected Christian and Trevor were to this community of youth. By working together with the Substance Use Beyond the Binary Youth Action Committee (known by the acronym YAC), they've created an environment for dialogue, creativity, inclusivity, and agency — something we talk about a lot in the arts but seldom achieve.

As you'll see, these photos are at turns sincere, raw, funny, and unsettling. Moreover, they provide insights into the issues that queer, at-risk youth face every day. Goodyear, Barborini, and the YAC have given us an invaluable glimpse into queer experiences that are often overlooked by society in general and even within our own queer communities. I'm deeply grateful to them for reaching out to us and allowing their exhibition to be a part of the 2024 Queer Arts Festival – and I'm extra thrilled that this exhibition has the opportunity to live on in the form of this catalogue.

Mark Takeshi McGregor
Artistic Director
Queer Arts Festival + SUM gallery

Approval for the research studies behind this booklet was obtained by the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board (#H21-01203; #H22-02910).

The *Queer Eyes, Queer Lives* team acknowledges with gratitude that these photographs were taken on the traditional and unceded territories of First Nations across so-called British Columbia. Many of us live and work on the unceded territories of the Coast Salish Peoples, including those of the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səl̓ílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

FOREWORD

This photo booklet follows a June 2024 exhibit held with Vancouver's Queer Arts Festival and showcases photography from over 60 2SLGBTQIA+ youth who participated in UBC research studies on drug use. These young artists, aged 14 – 29, have created a body of work that largely centres around identity, substance use, housing, and mental health – the results are powerful and challenging, providing a visual snapshot of how 2SLGBTQIA+ youth grapple with these issues. Participation in these research studies was confidential and the artists consented to these photographs being shared, with many adopting pseudonyms or fake names. Coordinated by university researchers Christian Barborini and Trevor Goodyear, together with the Substance Use Beyond the Binary Youth Action Committee, *Queer Eyes, Queer Lives* offers a visual reflection of how 2SLGBTQIA+ youth in Vancouver are building homes and lives of substance for themselves despite overlapping injustices faced.

ABOUT THE CURATORS:

The Substance Use Beyond the Binary Youth Action Committee is a group of nine transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming youth who use(d) substances. Members include Alec N, Apollo Collin-Gray, Charlie, Evergreen, Mazal J, P.T., Reid G, Rio B, and Toby. The committee was established in 2022 and is co-led by University of British Columbia researchers Christian Barborini (they/them) and Trevor Goodey (he/him). Their work together embraces the power of queer worldmaking in producing more emancipatory approaches to research and advocacy within the realm of substance use, mental health, and housing. They prioritize community voices and mobilize engaging and creative research methods such as participatory photography.

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE



Plate 1: Roots. Axel, April, 2023.



Plate 2: *Be Kind.* Trey, March, 2023.

Facing page:

I love going out into nature when I smoke... I really like nature because it has been something that's very constant. It doesn't matter how I am, or how I look, or whatever. I get out there, and it's – it's the same feeling. It's always been the same kind of feeling, of just kind of, like ah, it's nice and peaceful.

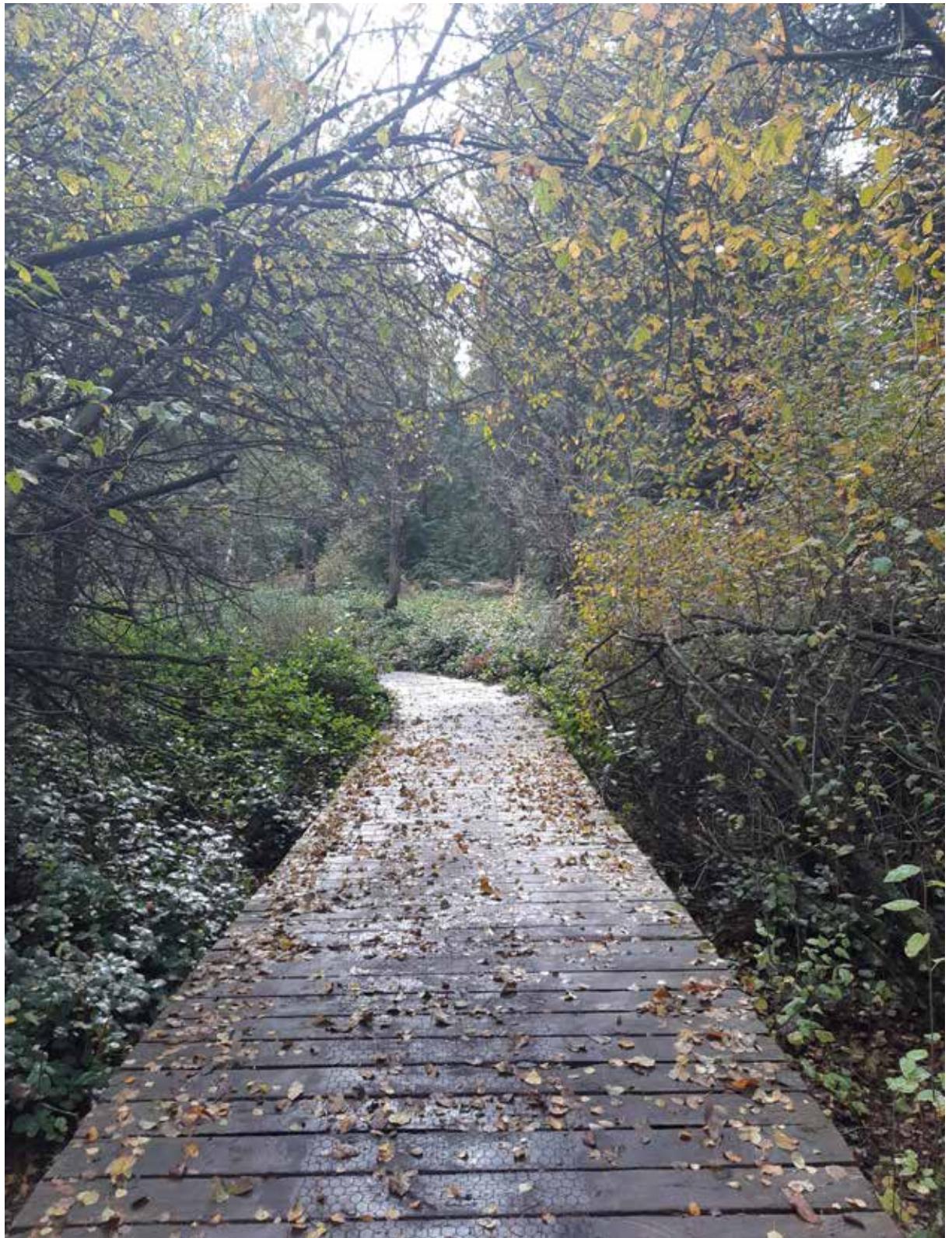


Plate 3:
Untitled. Panda, December, 2021

I just want everybody to be happy and healthy and, you know, living a good life. Yeah. But that's a lot to apparently ask for. [...] But I mean, having a roof over your head, and food in your stomach is a basic human right. Which isn't a basic human right, if it's not provided.



Plate 4: Aspiring New York. CJ, March, 2023.



Plate 5: Idea. Matthew, May, 2023.



Plate 6: Euphoria. Jamal, June, 2023.

I was on the beach... It looks nice, but deep down, you're just doing harm to yourself. You gotta think long term, you gotta think about your mental health, how it's gonna affect your mental and physical health. [...] I do plan on dealing with it [my substance use]. It's just, I kind of want to live a bit <laugh>!



Plate 7: *Lost in Colour*. Star, September, 2023.



Plate 9: *Energy*, Kyrie, June, 2023.



I didn't really grow up in a household where [acceptance of my queerness] was like completely denied to me. But also there was that constant pressure that I was told that I should be straight. It was very confusing. Cuz I felt like I was allowed to, but they were constantly telling me that I should be straight. So they made it think that it was my choice.

Plate 8: *Innocent; Two in the Pink*. Axel, April, 2023.



Plate 10: *Refocus*, Lucifer, June, 2023.

It's the enjoyment I'm going to get, like, to live in the moment. And to just accept what's going on and enjoy and have fun. I feel like that's right now, that's what I'm trying to get accomplished.



Plate 11: Fishy. Ace, June, 2022.

The fish just kind of reminds me that while I'm on cannabis, I'm more out there. I'm more prone to dangerous situations, and I am also more prone to exploring new things. There has been a time or two where I've been high and just looking in the mirror and feeling a wave of radical acceptance for how I look despite it not being the way I feel, just accepting that I [am] kind of masculine built. It's whatever. I am currently about to take hormones, and cannabis, I think, has also helped me come to that decision, because I found my gender through cannabis. I have explored the way I dress more and more as I've smoked more cannabis, and I am just really clear, and smoking has helped me realize that.



Plate 12: Untitled. Jupiter, May, 2022.

I was spending some time with my mom. We actually went on a little local travel together for a week and she doesn't know I'm a chronic weed user. She actually doesn't know I smoke pot. I'm sure she does to some extent, but we've never discussed it, and I continue to hide it from her, which is also just a very like – cultural thing, almost, that I've been taught, that it's shameful if I – for instance, if it's cigarettes. If I have a smoking habit, it's impolite to show my mom I have a smoking habit. It's actually more polite to hide that fact. Which isn't exactly the healthiest, you know, mode of communication, but that's just kind of something that's been embedded in me. So I hung out with my mom for a week, and I had to find a way to get high all the time without her knowing.



Plate 13: Untitled. Carrot, October, 2021

...Just vivid colours. Last year I didn't even notice that we had a fall, because I was so in my head. I was not noticing my environment. Like I have no recollection of the leaves changing..



Plate 14: Untitled. Plokis, June, 2022.

When I smoke cannabis, I find I have less anxiety about going out wearing the clothes that I'm comfortable wearing, because I definitely do – not frequently, but I do get people using slurs at me and things like that when I am dressed like that. So... But, it helps me not worry about those possible encounters that may come up when I am out in public.

[This represents] the stillness, I guess. Like, just the isolation of drugs. Of how isolating it is, sometimes. For me. [...] When you're too deep into your addiction.



Plate 15: *Nobody*. Edgar, June, 2023.

it was a rainy day. And that's how I feel with my identity. Like, I don't, I'm not able to fully feel pride, prideful about it. And I think it's, it's something I, I think I should work with. As a matter of fact, I am working with it.



Plate 16: *Cloudy Identities*. Xavier, November, 2023.



Plate 17: *Untitled*. Carrot, October, 2021.

I think what cannabis does is since all of my senses are so heightened, it allows me to focus all my focus on one sense. So I can just look, or I can just play music, or I can just think, and it's like so powerful, I can – but and now I can do that without the cannabis as well.



Facing Page:

Plate 18: *Untitled*. Panda, December, 2021.

Plate 19: *Empty*. Apollo, May, 2023.

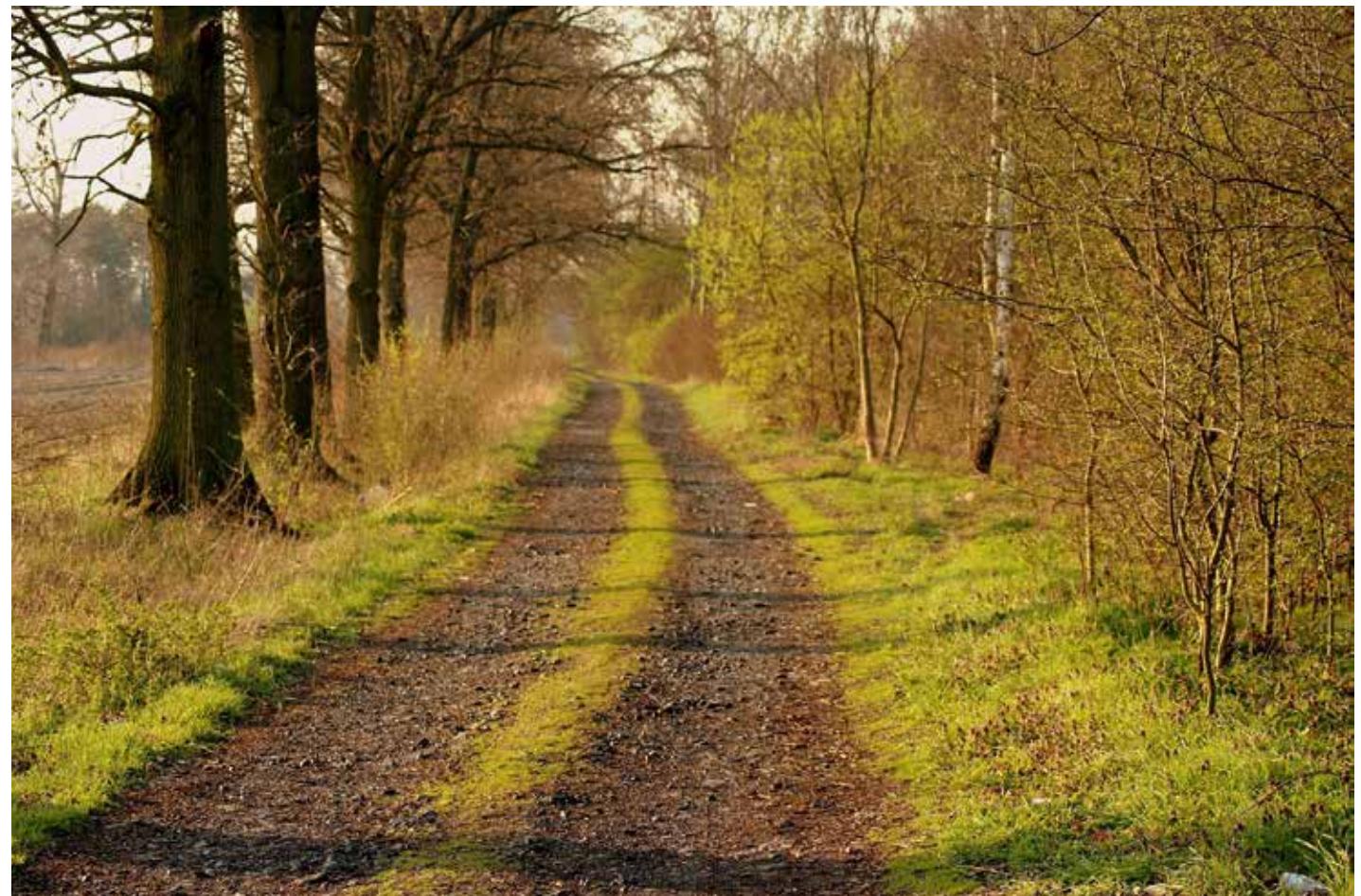


Plate 20: *Be Outside*. Aspen, June, 2022.

Cannabis is an accessibility tool, almost, for me, because I can't be myself without it, because I tend to mask a lot, where I usually talk in a lot more feminine of a voice, and I hide a lot of my mannerisms, because I've been told by a lot of people that they aren't okay to present to people,

and that's not how regular people act. And in – especially in like a workplace setting, I feel very pressured to put on this certain face where I do not seem autistic in any way. And that can be really impossible to let go of without cannabis.



Plate 21: *Untitled*. Panda, December, 2021.



Plate 22: *Don't Worry Pretty Baby*. Lauren, June, 2023.



This is every single thing I almost always have in my backpack. [...] Whenever I was in bad situations, it was really nice to know that I had everything I needed to spend somewhere, spend a place for the night, in my backpack.



Plate 24: *Untitled*. Jamie, November, 2022.

This shows a little bit of a progression, because it's like you can kind of tell with some of them that are lower down on the bongs are the older ones. And, you know, I used to be into more just the darker colours of stuff, and then as it kind of goes up they're more, you know, they become kind of brighter, prettier colours. Sometimes I do prefer just, you know, to be in my bright, pretty colours and have a lot of like attention drawn towards me and all that and then, you know, on other days I would prefer to just wear all black and

kind of a – you know, have just more of the low-key masculine energy, and not be kind of at the centre of everything... A lot of the people I've met through smoking weed are more – more so the people who have helped me realize that it's okay, and that, you know, it's kind of more important to be myself than to try to please everyone.



It was a way to connect with things that had been silenced and a way to learn to quiet the noise a little bit, then make some sense of it, because all the noise that goes on in my head, all of it is useful information, it is just that it [comes] all at once, so it is white noise, and my initial impression of cannabis was 'wow now I can hear all of these individual things.'

Plate 25: *Take a Deep Breath.* Toby, April, 2022.



Plate 26: *Reading Outside.* Aspen, June, 2022.

I'd just realized that reading outside was something that I stopped doing like pretty early on into when I hit puberty and I started experiencing what I now realize were feelings of gender dysphoria, and because I hated kind of being in like a public eye where I could be perceived. And that was one of the things that I really enjoy, is reading, especially reading outside. And once I started consuming cannabis, that was one of the first things that I quote-unquote "got back," so to speak, because I realized that I could just focus on the book instead of everything going on around me.



Plate 27: *Untitled*. Bees, December, 2021.

This is essentially what it looks like every single time I go to smoke. It's all set up, really organized, perfectly ready to go. All I really have to do is throw on some music, just kind of get myself comfy, and then I just have my own little sesh.



Plate 28: *Untitled*. Lynn, July, 2022.

Since legalization and more and more after, it [cannabis use] is seen as pretty much like a joint is equivalent to a couple glasses of wine, just to chill out, relax after work, to have some fun before you go to bed.



Plate 29: *Untitled*. Jamie, November, 2022.

I do have a lot of like kind of different styles that I dress in, and they're kind of more alternative like gothic style is one that I – I do really prefer. And yeah, the whole kind of idea behind the picture is just like smoking weed helps me manage the anxiety enough that I can fully relax enough to express myself and be, you know, the little, small extra things I want to do, and just make myself look exactly how I want to.



Plate 30: *Peering at the Park*. Christopher, August, 2023.

I'd rather take it up with a bear in the woods than the people on the street, and in a homeless environment. [...] The privacy was safety to me, almost, while being homeless. Just being alone, completely. [...] Outness has a huge impact. Because it's like a target, almost, if you're noticeably queer or noticeably different. It's a target. People are just gonna find something to pick on you about, like blood in the water with sharks.

The night is a big thing for me in terms of weed and my use, and like being alone. And yeah, kind of going back to that whole ritual thing, like just having the lighting and setting the whole mood for it. I've chosen this photo, because I liked how it kind of captured the chaos of it [cannabis use], in a way. Like it was blurry, because it's kind of yeah, I am under the influence of this thing, and I felt like this photo kind of represented a bit more like just my mindset, just, you know, because it does – like, you see all this light and this colour, and it's beautiful, but at the same time, it's kind of like blurry, and it's a little foggy, and it's a little hazy.



Plate 31: Untitled. Prince, June, 2022.

[This is] just beauty. I mean each color is different and it can represent whatever. Like, it can represent people, it can represent things, it can represent anything, you know what I mean? All coming together to make something beautiful. [...] [This is a reminder] that there may be hard times and stuff, but everything happens for a reason. And in the end hopefully they'll see the beauty in it.



Plate 32: Beauty. Munchkin, April, 2023.



Plate 33: Untitled. Prince, June, 2022.



Plate 34: Nostalgia Vibes. Billy, May, 2023.

I just loved this photo, because it kind of represented just the peacefulness and the mindfulness of weed sometimes too, and I think for this, it was like really getting out of my body. I was able to just like be so present. Or maybe I was in my body. I don't know, but I was able to just be so present when I'm like blowing these bubbles and just looking at the beauty of them, and seeing how they reflect, and seeing where they pop. I could just spend hours being mindful with it, which is something that is very hard for me, just to be alone with myself in my body sometimes.

They're very sentimental to me. And I find that while being homeless, it's the little bits of comfort, like the blankets, the stuffed animals. And also colorful, fun. And also like, stressed out? Just hug a teddy bear. Feel alone? Hug a teddy. <Laugh>. [...] But it's just, they're very important to me. Especially cuz in my childhood teddy bears were always big thing, so.



Plate 35:
Spark. Zak, July, 2022.

Normally, when I'm sober, I get really – I get really, really anxious, and I'm a lot more quiet...I feel very like weak and small, especially compared to cis guys, because they're – I'm quite short, and like very small, so then when I'm high – I can put out my bigger personality, and then it feels a lot more – a lot bigger, and I feel like I fit in more.

Plate 36: *Untitled*. Lux, June, 2022.

There's something about going somewhere alone and sort of taking yourself in as part of the scenery, taking in all of the nature and the people. And I say nature, but – it's not deep in the woods or whatever. Like people pass these spots, and see me, and I see them. And but I'm still by myself, and there's something about sort of processing yourself as part of the environment that lets you look at yourself in a way that you don't usually. There was something freeing about the way I would dress just to go to the other end of the street, or like there's – there is an increased confidence that comes with – or at least for me, there is an increase in, it feels like, handle on what I want.

**Plate 37:**
Tripping Talks.
Kat, June, 2023.**Plate 38:** *Abundance, Wishes*. Lucifer, June, 2023.**Plate 39:** *Untitled*. Racoon, October, 2022.

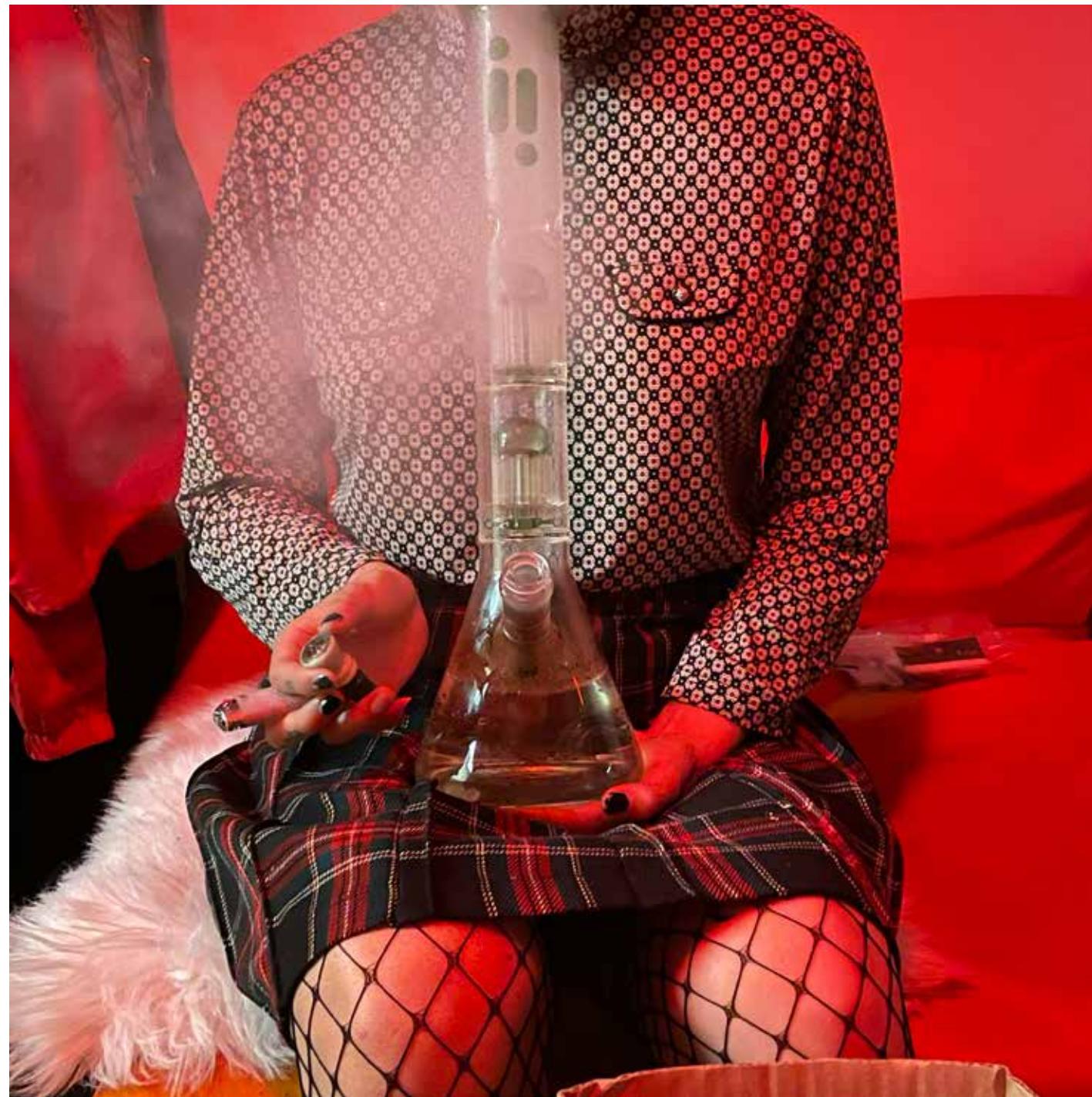


Plate 40: *Untitled*. Prince, June, 2022.

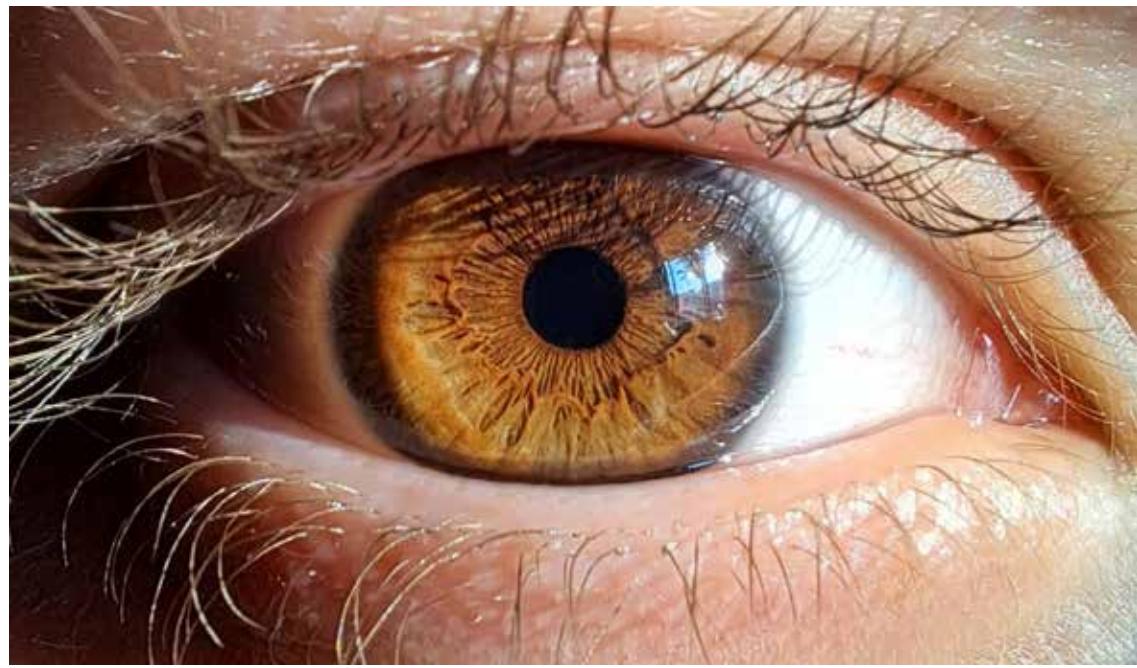


Plate 41 *Mesmerized*. Micah, October, 2022.



Plate 42: *A Bag*. Edgar, May, 2023.

Plate 43: *Untitled. Dawn, September, 2022.*

It [cannabis] helps put me in a mindset where I can practice whatever skills I need to sort of release that pressure for myself, I guess. I can take a deep breath and let go for a minute, you know. It helps in that sense.



Plate 45: *Untitled. Nick, July, 2022.*



Plate 46: *Lauren's Weed Tray. Lauren, June, 2023.*



Plate 47: *Pride. Lauren, July, 2022.*

I would say being queer comes with a lot of anxiety, and the cannabis just helps alleviate some of the anxiety and makes it a little bit easier when it's already like so difficult, I would say. It [cannabis] does help me feel like I'm able to express that more, my queerness, and be proud of it.

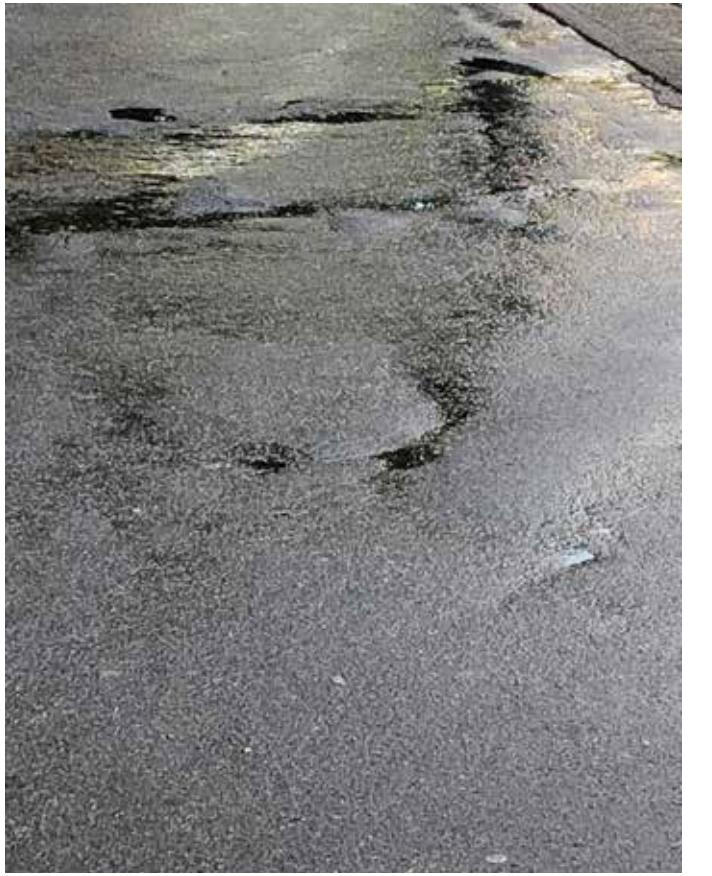


Plate 48: Untitled. Lauren, July, 2022.

I really wanted to capture the water in the cracks in the ground, and I just thought that it – it reminded me of how like basically, I saw myself and my body as the whole mound, and the cracks are new receptors I have for my body. And that when cannabis goes into me and they kind of sit in the cracks. So they bind to my receptors, and they kind of fill up parts of me to make me whole, in a sense, which means they – like the cannabis allows me to be my whole self, with less anxiety. When I am at that baseline of [reduced] anxiety, I feel like I can explore my gender more and also do things that make me feel affirmed in my gender, such as make appointments with the trans specialty team, and also... also purchase like a binder, or get a really short haircut. It just makes me feel like doing those things are not as like scary.



Plate 49: Untitled. Nick, July, 2022.

I started like smoking to go to school, which isn't exactly ideal, but it helped me kind of cope. When it came to, you know, elementary school and high school, people underestimate how traumatizing it can be. [Laughs] It's insane, the shit that some kids get away with just because they're kids. They're still like sentient. They know right from wrong, but they do terrible things, especially to queer kids and stuff like that.



Plate 50: Untitled. CJ, March, 2023.

When I go in for apartment viewings, I experience a lot of homophobia now, because I'm very masc[uline] presenting and I'm very clearly not straight. And, unfortunately, a lot of landlords are very homophobic.

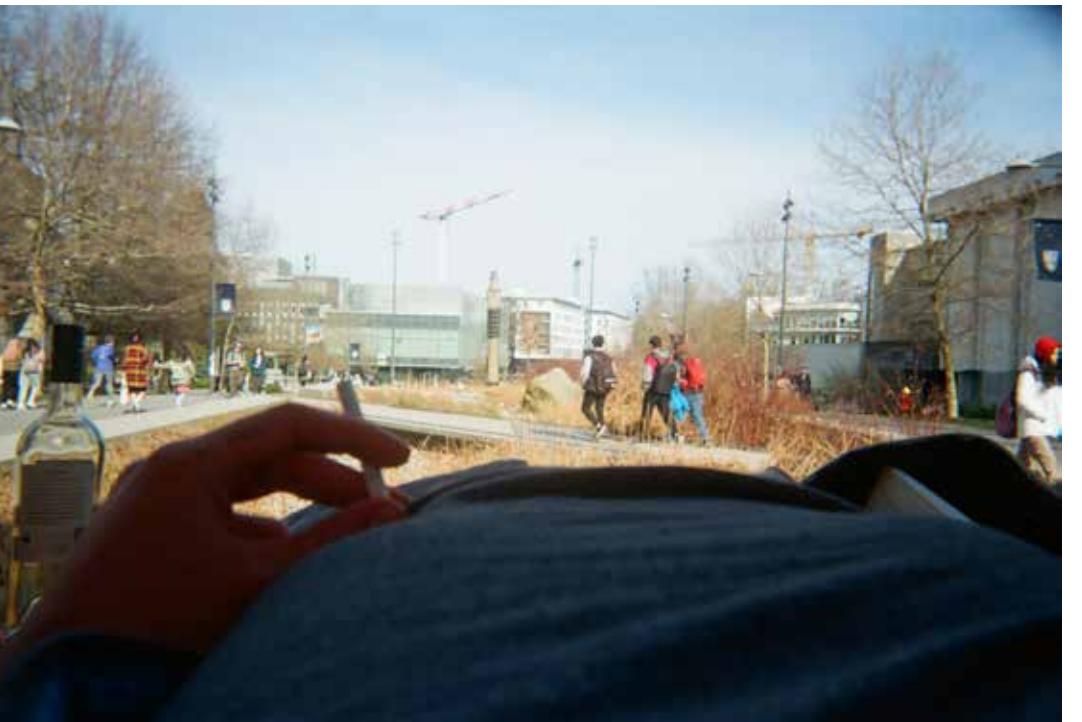
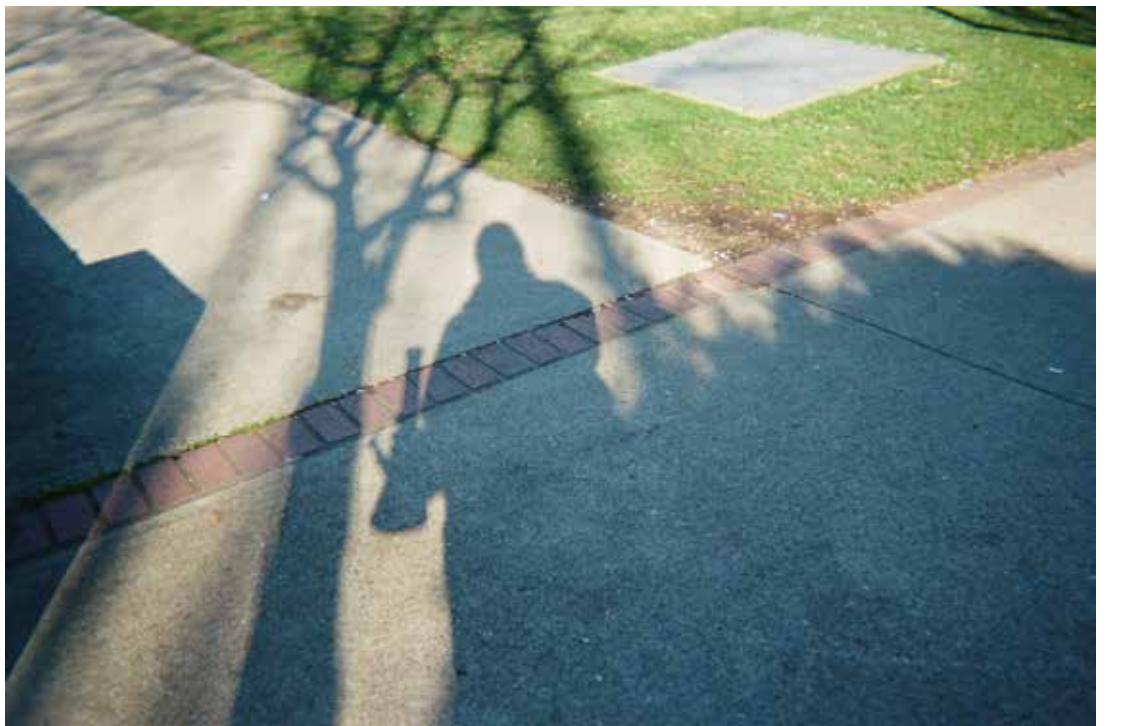


Plate 51: Smokes. Morgan, March, 2023.

You have the kind of university life, in the background where I kind of quote unquote "should be." But this is kind of the view of just you know, the actual, the harsh reality of my life.

Plate 52: Smokes. Billy,
May, 2023.



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Plate 53: Hoops. Kyrie,
June, 2023.

[My photographs are] showing the routine of somebody that wants to enjoy the city. [...] There's so much to do, and so many people to meet. And everyone's smoking and drinking, like, everyone that's **young**.



Plate 54: Redbull.
Trey, March, 2023.

Me and the bro are like, let's pretend we're drinking with him. I was just like, oh, okay, that sounds cool! That's funny. That's a picture of like me and Taylor [Lautner], I guess. <Laugh> and, and a drink. [It shows] that it can be okay to, I guess, have pictures [of other guys], you can be okay with that, I guess.



Plate 55: Untitled.
Shuri, March, 2023.

Plate 56: *Doorways*. Xavier, November, 2023.

*Second chance. Leaving.
Hope. Mercy. Doorways.*



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Plate 57: *Uncomfortable Comfort*. Billy, May, 2023.

It just really shows like how important [it is], finding comfort in the most uncomfortable situations. [...] Being homeless on the streets, the amount of uncomfort [sic] that can cause! [...] [I use cannabis] literally like to just survive and to be able to go around, even falling asleep.



Plate 58: *Choices*. Micah, October, 2022.

Either there's a bunch of like prescriptions and hospital visits, or I can like be smoking weed and hopefully be lessening everything that I have to be doing and taking and stuff like that, because hospitals aren't particularly fun. I'd rather stay at home.



Plate 59: *Untitled.* Michael, December, 2021.

A lot of my cannabis use has been directly related to my transition, because I started using cannabis around the time that I started to transition and I've used it since, in like surgical recovery, rather than using narcotics. And so that, it's always been – for a long time, cannabis use has been quite intertwined with it, with transitioning..



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Plate 15: *Nobody.* Edgar, June, 2023.

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Plate 18: *Untitled.* Panda, December, 2021.

Plate 19: *Empty.* Apollo, May, 2023.

Plate 20: *Be Outside.* Aspen, June, 2022.

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Plate 22: *Don't Worry Pretty Baby.* Lauren, June, 2023.

Plate 23: *Life in the Backpack.* Star, September, 2023.

Plate 24: *Untitled.* Jamie, November, 2022.

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Plate 50: *Untitled.* CJ, March, 2023.

Plate 51: *Smokes.* Morgan, March, 2023.

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Plate 53: *Hoops.* Kyrie, June, 2023.

Plate 54: *Redbull.* Trey, March, 2023.

Plate 55: *Untitled.* Shuri, March, 2023.

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Plate 58: *Choices.* Micah, October, 2022.

Plate 59: *Untitled.* Michael, December, 2021

The Pride in Art Society (PiA) presents and exhibits with a curatorial vision favouring challenging, thought-provoking art that pushes boundaries and initiates dialogue. As producers of the Queer Arts Festival (QAF) and SUM gallery, PiA brings diverse communities together to support artistic risk-taking, and incite creative collaboration and experimentation.

Pride in Art was founded in 1998 by Two-Spirit artist Robbie Hong, Black artist Jeffery Gibson and a collective of visual artists mounting an annual art exhibition in Vancouver, BC, Canada. Spearheaded by Jewish artist SD Holman and Nikkei-Danish artist Rachel Kiyo Iwaasa, Pride in Art incorporated as a nonprofit in 2006, mounting their first multidisciplinary Queer Arts Festival in 2008. In 2018, Artistic Director SD Holman founded SUM gallery as a permanent space presenting multidisciplinary exhibitions and events. In 2021 Mark Takeshi McGregor succeeded Holman as artistic director of Pride in Art.

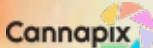
QAF is an annual artist-run transdisciplinary art festival in Vancouver. Each year, the festival theme ties together a curated visual art exhibition, performing art series, workshops, artist talks, panels, and media art screenings. QAF has incited dozens of artistic milestones, notably the commissioning and premiere of Canada's first lesbian opera *When the Sun Comes Out* by Leslie Uyeda and Rachel Rose in 2013; *TRIGGER*, the 25th-anniversary exhibition for Kiss & Tell's notorious *Drawing the Line* project; Jeremy Dutcher's first full-length Vancouver concert; Cris Derksen's monumental *Orchestral Powwow*; and the award-winning premiere of the play *Camera Obscura (hungry ghosts)*, Lesley Ewen's fantastical reimagining of multimedia titan Paul Wong's early career.

Recognized as one of the top 2 festivals of its kind worldwide, QAF's programming has garnered wide acclaim as "concise, brilliant and moving" (*Georgia Straight*), "easily one of the best art exhibitions of the year" (*Vancouver Sun*), and "on the forefront of aesthetic and cultural dialogue today" (*Xtra*).



QUEER ARTS FESTIVAL

The Queer Arts Festival (QAF) is an annual artist-run multidisciplinary arts festival in Vancouver, BC. Each year, the festival theme ties together a curated visual art exhibition, performing arts series, workshops, artist talks, panels, and media art screenings. Recognized as one of the top 2 festivals of its kind worldwide, QAF's programming has garnered wide acclaim as "concise, brilliant and moving" (*Georgia Straight*), "easily one of the best art exhibitions of the year" (*Vancouver Sun*), and "on the forefront of aesthetic and cultural dialogue today" (*Xtra*).

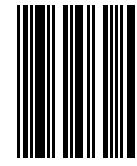


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SUM GALLERY



PRIDE IN ART SOCIETY
celebrating queer art and artists

