Guaranteed Beard Growth or Your Money Back 04

On ‘Queering’ the Business of Photography 10

Feature Artist: Evenings in Rosegardens | Seamus Lee Hayes 16

Q&A with NBQHI Founder Dusty Green 22

In the News 30
Not something you see every day, a bottle marked “Testosterone.” Stranger still, the disclaimer printed on the back of the bottle. This handmade ceramic curiosity, a play on the ‘miracle cures’ of old, reveals a hidden aspect of its maker, Chase Benjamin Plourde.

Plourde is a young man. You can tell just by looking at him. There is nothing to give away the fact that, up until four years ago, he was perceived as a young woman. His transition gives him a special window into the gender norms of our culture. One of the side effects listed on the bottle is “increase in privilege.”

“It’s weird having both experiences,” says Chase. “You can talk about how men are treated differently or how women are treated differently, but you never really have both experiences. I have that now. The saddest thing was that I couldn’t interact with kids the same way. I’ve worked in summer camps, I’ve worked with kids for a long time, but now there is that added barrier, that they think because I’m a man I could have bad intentions. And I can’t just walk up to girls and say hi so easily, because they think I could be a creep and trying to hit on them. It’s weird because that’s never what I’m doing.”

Being treated differently is one thing, but Plourde was also intrigued to find that even his own emotions were effected. When he started taking testosterone to transform his body, an injection process he repeats on a weekly basis, it changed the way his emotions are embodied and expressed. While his observations are not reflective of the lived experiences of all men and women, they could shed light on where some gender-based expectations come from. On the bottle, he includes inability to cry as a side effect of testosterone.
DISCLAIMER

Being transgender is different for each person. This is the story of one trans man from NBCCD.
“I was never one to cry a lot before testosterone, but I experienced emotions completely differently than I do now. When I was upset, it was all in my head. I’d think a lot about whatever was upsetting me, blaming myself, becoming anxious or sad. Eventually, I would end up crying and releasing that negative energy. In turn, making myself feel better. A few months into taking testosterone, I noticed a complete shift in how my body was experiencing anger or frustration. It was no longer in my mind, but in my physical body. My muscles would tense, I’d start sweating, and my face would get beat red. I felt like my whole body was under an incredible amount of pressure. In that case, all you want to do is find a way to release the pressure. So, I had to do physical things to release that energy. Go for walks, exercise, take a break from what I was doing to calm myself down. Since that first year, I’ve gotten used to experiencing my emotions more physically, than mentally.”

This bottle was made for the recent Liquids, Creams & Gels online ceramics exhibition curated by Mariko Paterson of Forage Studios, and co-hosted by Danielle Hogan with the Gynocratic Art Gallery. This wide-open theme got Plourde thinking, and as is often his way, he landed on vintage imagery as a way to tell his story.

“I am very drawn to the vintage male figure – men and moustaches. I think I relate, or I wish I could be like that – a cool guy with a cool moustache. I would love to one day own an antique/oddity shop and wear suspenders and bowtie everyday.”

It is little wonder that Plourde has a fascination with gender depictions of different eras. This interest comes across in the transfer art he designs for his pottery and in his related collage work, including a recent series that portrays the stages of life. “Puberty” and ‘Second Puberty’ tell the story of the changing of the body, something Plourde has undergone twice in his life.

Many of the changes Plourde has experienced have been to his body – the position of mass on his torso and face has shifted, his voice has deepened, hair has grown on many parts of his body. It is hard to imagine what it would feel like from the inside to watch your body transform. Nonetheless, we can observe the positive changes in the individual as their body moves into closer sync with their identities.

“Over the past three years,” says Plourde, “I’ve gotten much better at accepting what I look like, and how to work with that. I have gotten so much more confident in myself. It’s a complete 180 from where I was.”
In the recent NBCCD Faculty Exhibition, Personna, Plourde showcased a clay sculpture which boldly deals with this sensitive subject-matter. “Self-Made Man” is about building an exterior form which more closely matches the heart of the person, and about shifting ideas of gender identity and sexual orientation that can occur over the course of a life. It also speaks to the limitations.

“On the back it says ‘You Can’t Change Your Bones.’ No matter how much I work out, and even though my shoulders have gotten bigger – I can’t change my bones, my DNA, the way I speak,” says Plourde. “That’s a big part of that sculpture. It also has words, like ‘Tranny,’ crossed out. And then it just says ‘Man.’ Then there’s the chemical makeup of testosterone, that’s on it, and then the scars are there. I hadn’t had top surgery when I made it, but it’s to represent that. It’s also about stitching yourself together as who you are supposed to be.”

For those of us who have never felt an aversion to the gender-specific parts of our own bodies, it is difficult to relate to the dysphoria felt by some trans people before and during transition.

“It’s the feeling of knowing that certain body parts are not supposed to be there. It’s like if you woke up one day and you had a penis growing out of your elbow. You would be worried about it, you would try to hide it, you wouldn’t want it dangling from your body. It’s like that.”

Plourde’s successful and accepted transition is a testament to our times. He has had the chance to build his own identity as a trans man, and find ways to contribute to his community so that he feels respected and supported. First as a student in the NBCCD Ceramics program, and now as the Studio Technician for Foundation Visual Arts and a manager of The Craft & Design Shop, Plourde plays an assertive role in the culture of our community.

“I find people are super scared to ask questions, because they’re afraid I’ll get angry because it’s such a personal subject,” says Plourde. “When someone has a question, I’ll answer them. It’s kind of cool to me that people are interested. They only hate you when they don’t understand you. I don’t like fighting hate with hate, and I would much rather sit down and have a conversation. I don’t think I’ve ever had an experience when someone said something mean about the fact that I’m Trans to my face. Being at the school has been really great.”

This is not the experience of every trans person, and there is still more to be done to fortify the framework of acceptance in our society. Each time Chase Benjamin Plourde shares a piece of himself with his work, there’s always a chance it may rub someone the wrong way. But his work is an offer to help us understand. Art has a vital role to play by creating opportunities for asking questions and challenging assumptions, and providing a more visceral, visual way of explaining outside perspectives.
“Art makes certain topics easier to digest. Instead of reading a book, you can look at art and see and experience something you can relate to. It’s the exact same difference between a novel and a storybook – it makes the concept easier to understand.”
on ‘queering’ the business of photography
When we think of “queer art,” we typically think of art being a vehicle for expressing our identities, experiences, and unique ways of being in the world. When I entered the world of professional wedding, portrait, and family photography, I really didn’t think my identity as an out lesbian who smashed those closet walls a good 17 years ago would shape my art, my creativity, and my business in many – if any – ways. Yet it did, it does, and will continue to do so each and every time I pick up my camera and look through the lens.
Being a wedding and family photographer can sometimes feel like the most heteronormative job out there. Frame by frame, I craft a story about what “love”, “commitment”, “family”, and “togetherness” look like. I photograph pretty brides and handsome grooms; energetic little boys and sweet little girls. I tell awkward groomsmen to stand closer together, and ask bridesmaids to hold their flowers “right there.” I try to photograph the mother-of-the-bride in the most flattering angle, and watch her dad “give her away.”

Yes, weddings in particular are perhaps one of the most prominent displays of heterosexuality out there (other than The Bachelor of course). Historically, they’ve been that place that us queers have been banished from. Our love, our commitment, our chosen families, and our togetherness were for a long time not just absent from the greeting card aisle but actually invisibilized, banished, and shamed. Yes, we’ve sure come a long way. But many would agree that we’ve also got a long way to go. Some of us opt out of the institution of marriage altogether. Some of us opt in, often feeling the sting of otherness when cards and cake toppers must be special ordered and the relentless questions of “Who is going to walk who down the aisle? Who wears “the” dress?” remind us that this tradition wasn’t meant for us. It’s a shirt that doesn’t fit quite right but gives us oh so many compliments on the street. Lucky for us though, clothes stretch.

So to put it simply, us queer folks can have complicated relationships with weddings. And so it warms my heart to see so many more of us demanding a seat at the head table and changing the face of marriage and family while we do it. In my rather short career thus far I’ve been extremely lucky to photograph handsome brides and elegant grooms. I’ve captured “first look” moments between two giddy brides and wept during a father’s speech to his son and new son-in-law.

Yes, for me, queering photography is about photographing queer people and challenging that narrative of the “normal” wedding and “typical’ family. But it’s about more than that too. See, as photographers, we use our cameras to tell stories and we have all the power to determine what story we will tell. My time at NBCCD taught me this: That every photograph we take is a self-portrait. Even when we photographers think we are capturing life as it is, we are capturing a particular person’s life as it is being impacted by our presence. And a person with a huge camera is certainly a presence!

What I’ve realized – almost accidentally – is that I don’t just queer my photographic practice by photographing queer people. I often queer my photos of straight people too. When a family stands in front of me and says, “What do you want us to do?” I try to challenge the societal and photographic norms that tell me to put “the man” here, and “the woman” here.
I explore those moments in a couple’s or a family’s story that challenge the way we think things are “supposed” to be. As artists in general and photographers in general us queer folks have an opportunity to help reshape what is “beautiful” and worth capturing. Whether our work is part of a personal creative project, a commissioned piece for a client, or a simple family portrait, we have the chance to use our somewhat “outsider” position to offer a unique insight into the stories we tell.
Evenings in Rosegardens
SEAMUS LEE HAYES
MODELLED BY
HAYDEN RICHARDSON
When I create, my goal is always towards understanding the complexity of the queer narrative. The representations of queer bodies that I’ve been given makes it so that our identities and the spaces that we occupy (our own, and those around and between us), become sterile; they’re politicized and they’re clinicalized. There is something so tender about being queer that gets missed completely when all you hear about is how much our surgeries cost, or the bathroom bill, or the negative repercussions of being gender non-conforming. I want to create work that would have given me permission to explore my gender and my sexual identity; work that would have given me permission to love my body when I was coming into my queerness.
In the series Evenings in Rosegardens (2017), I photographed several queer-identifying men (gay/bi/pan/queer/trans/gnc) in a way that reflected how they individually relate to femininity. Taking from stage design and fashion photography, there is a link drawn between identity and performativity. The compositions take advantage of the gendered expectations of design elements such as form and colour, and their relationship to the subject.
Meet Dusty Green, founder and researcher for New Brunswick Queer Heritage Initiative. We sat down with him to discuss the role of his organization, the challenges of archiving an under-represented community, and some of the queer history he has unearthed in New Brunswick.
“After I graduated, I did contract work for a little while, I was working at Moksha Yoga doing their marketing, and I was working at the provincial archives for a bit. When I was working at the archives, I came across some photos that really caught my eye because they were strange. They were photos that would have been from WWI, from an internment camp in Amherst, Nova Scotia. There were a surprising number of men in drag in the photos – like POWs in mop top wigs and dresses. It didn’t seem like a traditional internment camp. They had acting clubs and gardening clubs. It was very, very strange. I’m sure it wasn’t glamorous, but it certainly isn’t what we would think of these days.

I started asking around the archives to see if there were other examples of that. I wasn’t even trying to suggest any kind of queer nature by seeing those men in drag, because I’m just interested in changing ideas of gender roles, and the gender binary, and what is expected of people. I think it’s important when you see old examples of men in drag, that it’s not specifically queer or gay. But it certainly challenges our perceptions of the past, I think, and what they would have meant back then, versus what they mean now.

In some ways, we’ve sort of tightened up gender roles. I really think that the 80s and 90s reshaped gay identity, basically the AIDS crisis happened, so there became this stigmatization of being gay, so you saw a lot less playing around with gender, and people being more concerned with being perceived as gay or queer.

So I started asking around the archives, and I came across a really amazing collection of these two guys named Len and Cub. Leonard Olive Keith, and the other, for a long time, was just known as Cub, but in the last couple of months we’ve unearthed his real identity - Joseph (Cub) Austin Coates.”

That’s really exciting!

“It is really exciting, because I’ve been working on Len and Cub stuff, for, probably years, and then a fresh set of eyes, an intern up at the provincial archives, was going through it and noticed a couple of things because she had been to places that he had been to, and it sort of blew things open again.

So Leonard was the photographer in this case, and the photos were donated by a mutual friend of theirs, who described the couple as boyfriends, and that may not be a huge deal except for the time period. The photos span
from 1905 to 1940. A good chunk of it is Leonard taking photos in his formative years of things that would have been important to him, and it is very clear that there is a man that is very important to him, that is Cub. There’s a massive amount of photos of them together, in varying states of undress and affection.

Len and Cub broke things open for me, and got me really excited about queer history. Most provinces have an organization that actively seeks out queer content, because it’s important. It’s been actively suppressed by institutions and society at large for a really long time, so special archives or community archives have had to really come in and pick up the slack. It’s an identifiable hole in our history and our heritage that I saw and wondered why no one was talking about this, and why no one was doing this.

Archives are meant to represent the whole of a place. Queer people have always been here, and trying to fill those gaps is tricky work. I’ve had a lot of support from the Council of Archives of New Brunswick, and the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick have been hugely, hugely helpful. Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives too, in Toronto.”
WHERE DOES YOUR GRAPHIC DESIGN TRAINING FIT IN?

“While I was at the College, I did my independent study in small publishing. I was trying to marry my two interests - doing graphic layouts and designs, with my interest in queer history. My idea that I proposed to [Dale McBride, Coordinating Instructor, Diploma in Graphic Design] was that I would make a photo book that would really let the photos speak for themselves, and not give a lot of context, beyond saying ‘this is who these people are, here are photos of them together. Call it what you will, I’m calling it beautiful.’

After that I applied for a grant from Library & Archives Canada (LAC). They have a program that is money set aside for people doing research on under-documented communities. So I applied for that, and that’s what I’ve been doing for the past couple of months - doing primary research, and trying to build a chronological timeline with records and photos that represent important bits of New Brunswick’s queer history.”
“Our first wave of queer activism came a little bit later than the rest of Canada, which is kind of to be expected. It wasn’t decriminalized until 1969, being a homosexual, and it took a little while after that, it wasn’t until the late 70’s, that some of the first major gay organizations in the province really started to crop up.

Right now I’m digging into the more niche organizations. I’ve got the really big ones down, and the really important things, like Fredericton Lesbians and Gays (FLAG), which was the province’s first real organized queer organization. They started with dances, but then they developed and got a help phone line, because there was literally no one you could talk to. You couldn’t talk to your doctor, you couldn’t talk to your priest, so people were feeling extremely isolated and alone. So, dances, phone line, and then, around 1985, Fredericton’s first gay bar opened, Dance Trax.

The NB Coalition for Human Rights Reform, they took on a more political focus, such as protections for employment and housing. It was 1992 before we got those protections. Finally, you couldn’t be fired for being gay, and you couldn’t be refused buying a home or renting an apartment or lodging.

[Citation: “on Wednesday, May 13, the New Brunswick legislature gave third reading to a bill outlawing anti-gay discrimination in private and public sector employment, housing, public services, and professional associations and signs. The amendment came into effect May 20.” ///// Source: University of Southern Maine USM Digital Commons, Northern Lambda Nord Communique Vol. 13, no. 6 (July / August 1992]

When you hear some of the dates, it blows your mind. It’s so recent. A lot of people just don’t care about history. It’s like, queer history isn’t just part of the past, it’s happening right now. We’re not out of the woods. Look at the lives of so many queer people in our city and they are made more difficult by institutions that just don’t recognize their identity. We have a long way to go.”
WHAT ARE YOU PLANNING TO DO WITH ALL THIS HISTORY THAT YOU’RE COLLECTING?

“The most immediate plan, sometime in 2018, I plan on launching a website. It’s basically going to be a hub for New Brunswick Queer Heritage Initiative, which will have a link to our Access to Memory (an online records management system) so the public will be able to go to the website, and go through records, or search time periods.

And then, I would also very much like to provide a continuously updated list of queer resources for queer people living in NB - so that could be anything from social and support resources to community groups, and also medical resources, for counsellors and clinics and doctors that have the training to adequately provide service to queer people, and advertise that they do so.

That’s the most immediate project - the website. I haven’t figured out exactly how I’m going to do it - to break it down by decade, or New Brunswick’s queer history in a hundred records. Some sort of a timeline with actual records that you can pull up, with citations and photos. It’s in the works. I’m in the writing phase of it right now. “

That must take a lot of work. It seems like, with historical research, you would have to be constantly fact-checking everything.

“Doing community archiving, it’s curious work, because a lot of time you’re not dealing with actual records, you’re dealing with people’s stories. And stories are awesome, because more than anything they provide for you an emotional context of what these people have gone through and are going through. So, in that, you have to fact check everything, because people are not infallible, they mix up dates, or misremember an event.

That’s not to say that oral history is not a good form of archiving, of narrative building, for our cultural identity. It’s become a really important part of queer historian’s and queer archival work. A lot of times those records don’t exist, they were suppressed or not collected at all, so literally all we have is people that lived through it. While it doesn’t necessarily provide an infallible version of a point in history, oral histories show us the emotional impact and the lived experience of queer people who went through active homophobia and heterosexism.”
Amanda Smith, graduating Textile Design student, won Honourable Mention in International Textile Alliance Virginia Jackson Design Competition for her delightfully colour woven pattern. The Virginia Jackson Design Competition recognizes the most talented students in the field of textile design and creates a vehicle to bring new talent into the design industry. A felt costume created by Smith was also selected for the $1000 NBCCD Acquisition Award and added to the permanent collection.

Several of our alumni and other local artisans have teamed up to open Art400², a new gallery of handmade art in St. Andrews By-the-Sea. Matt Watkins, Patty Goodine, Juliette Scheffers, Steve Jones, and Sara Brinkhurst are heading this new collective, while representing several other artists in the shop.
The Creativity & Social Engagement course, an exciting new component of the Foundation Visual Arts curriculum, encouraged students to engage and interact with their community. Their #communityboxproject involved interactive, themed boxes placed throughout the city, while The Wishing Tree at The Charlotte Street Arts Centre created an opportunity for visitors to share their wishes by tying them to a tree. Students even hosted a candlelight vigil, and created handmade zines with Open Your Art’s Angela Black, an NBCCD alumna.

On June 15th, Convocation was held, graduating just over 150 students from NBCCD’s Certificate and Diploma programs at the Fredericton Playhouse. These talented designers and artisans have been incredibly busy these last few months, preparing for exhibitions even in the midst of the 2018 flood. The NBCCD Diploma Exhibition is on at The Beaverbrook Art Gallery until September 23rd. Momentum, an exhibition of work by Advanced Studio Practice (ASP) students opened at Gallery 78, as well as a second Advance Studio Practice (ASP) exhibition at Gallery on Queen. Sterling, with work by Jewellery/Metal Arts students, opened May 23rd and will run until July 3rd. The first annual NBCCD Craft & Design Exhibition opened at the Saint John Arts Centre on May 4, and featured work from all of our studios, with a special focus on Foundation Visual Arts.

Congratulations to alumna Samaqani Cocahq (Natalie Sappier), the new Creative Director at Mawi’art Wabanaki Artist Collective.