

Using Wanderground Heartifacts for Inspiration and ArtPlay: A Workshop

Overview

In December 2024, Wanderground offered its first on-site workshop titled, Using Wanderground Heartifacts for Inspiration and ArtPlay, facilitated by local artist, Thea Ernest. Participants were invited to spend a relaxing afternoon browsing at Wanderground and making their own artistic expressions. We acknowledged that Lesbians created the many objects in the collection with love and dedication, expressing power and pride in being Lesbian. Participants were encouraged to draw on that energy and the daring of those individuals and use the **Heartifacts** (heart filled artifacts) to create their own expressions about being Lesbian or other memories.

Summary

Participants entered the archives filled with a variety of art supplies: papers, glue, markers, crayons, colored pencils, glue guns, pipe cleaners, colorful foam shapes, etc. After introductions, Thea gave some general directions about art and inspiration. She stressed the importance of play and self-expression; and to avoid self-censorship and ignore artistic insecurities. Also important was to know this wasn't a formal art class, but rather an opportunity to explore the archive and find something that spoke to their heart, or mind, or memory – or was simply intriguing.

After browsing the archive for some time, participants were encouraged to select one item and to create their own artistic expression based on that object. While they were using the supplies to make their creations, a tape recorder was placed in the center of the work table to record the random bits of conversation and story-telling. This was an intergenerational group so many questions and stories were exchanged.

Conversations included “rules” about being Lesbian, especially the “dress codes” of late 1980s (for example, short hair, flannel shirts, white sleeveless T's, no brand-names clothes, etc.).

Though some chafed at these parameters, others found them comforting for being able to identify each other and feel a sense of community – and safety. But there was also an irony as women in Midwest or rural communities also wore this type of clothing, complicating to dykes trying to identify each other.

Other topics included: the Lesbian “dyke” discount at Womancrafts bookstore in Provincetown, use of hankies (not so much a Lesbian thing), S/M (Sadomasochism), specific jewelry (friendship bracelets, pinkie ring, red necklace if menstruating, etc.), and the “Lesbian perfume,” Patchouli. There was also talk of butch/femme and the ways Lesbians bars would attract different “types” of Lesbians; academic/up-scale, college kids, “scary” bars with fighting, working class, bikers, etc. As the dykes worked on their art projects, some reminisced about their art classes in school or their general anxieties about creating art, lack of creativity, or sense of inadequacy or failure.

Thea assured them there were no rules or failures, but rather the opportunity to express their thoughts, memories, and/or feelings in whatever ways they were inspired to do so. She then asked each person to hold up their artwork and to tell the group about what she/they had been doing. Participants were asked to share what in the archive was inspiring and what story they were portraying in the artwork.

The stories included:

- Two participants focused on a t-shirt that says “Tomboy” and focused their art end experiences on being tomboys; one who saw a picture of herself as a gardener, the other mimicking her father shaving.
- Reflections on a curfew poster; inspiration from a little butch cork, impact of Meg [Christian] & Cris [Williamson], a Queer Flavored Collage
- Inspirations of buttons and posters in the archive - Dyke-tionary; a booklet in the shape of vulva hands; journal entry collages about dykes and baby butches

- One who did not do art work but spent the time leafing through the book *Coming Out More Lesbian Fun 'n' Games - Cut-outs And Cut-ups*. She talked about being a widow and feeling ready to get back into another relationship.

Components of the Workshop as developed by Thea Ernest

A large supply of art materials was provided - paper, markers, crayons, glue, scissors, old magazines for collage making, stickers, foam shapes, poster board, etc.

Thea encouraged participants to spend some time wondering around the archive and to select something that specifically inspired something in their memory or feelings. They would then use that item to make an artistic expression of their own. Thea assured them there were no rules or failures, but rather the opportunity to express their thoughts, memories, and/or feelings in whatever ways they were inspired to do so.

During the art-making time, the digital recorder was placed on the table to capture the relaxed conversations happening

After the art-making session, each participant showed her “Heartifact” and shared what inspired her to make create the expression.

Audio Quotes from Discussion

🔊 — indicates sound clip available

🔊 Reflection 1 on Tomboy T-shirt by D.D. (1:57)

So I saw the t-shirt over there, hanging up on the top rack there, “Tomboy,” and, um, recently I happened to see a photograph of myself that I had never seen before, myself as a child, maybe seven or eight years old, in my family’s garden. I grew up on my grandparents’ farm, so I’ve had a garden every year of my entire life. And I look at that picture and it was, it really struck me because I thought, “that is *exactly* who I am.” I had on my little jeans and my wide, 1970s belt, and I think it was a *Happy Days* t-shirt, like, and, uh... my classic was my baseball hat worn on backwards... And I was hammering in a stake for tomatoes. And I saw that picture and I thought, “what the hell happened to her?” you know, what you’re allowed be and what you’re not allowed to be? And for the younger people here, you know, my young adulthood in the ‘80s, my girlfriend had a hidden—had a separate, separate room, a fake bedroom... All of the, you know, everything hidden, and, you know—a hidden life, and so, it’s hard to see, but the little, um—the letters on the top had that paper backing, and the paper backing, I pasted down



underneath there, you can barely see it, because it's like invisible life, right? But, um, boy, like, I don't know, something, I'm just too old for this shit now, I guess— Why should I have this invisible life? So, that's kind of what came to me and that t-shirt really kind of sparked it off in connection to that, uh, that photo I happened to see recently that really kind of stunned me.

📌 Reflection 2 on Tomboy T-shirt by R.H. (:59)

So, I did "tomboy" also, and I saw that and I was like, "that's great." Um, so... yeah, I mean since I was a—I grew up on a little farm—and since I was a little girl, I mean I always did "boy things." It's just how I lived, you know, I mean I had my own little pond, my brother hunted, and my father had gardens. That, the middle piece is the, um, an old schoolhouse because my dad had me very late in life (he was born 1910), so, um and I was gonna ask you if you knew how to make- draw, uh, a razor? You know the safety razors men used to use?

-- Straight razors! Sure!--

Because when my, when I was little my dad bought me a plastic razor with actually paper little, you know, razor blades in it, so when he would shave with his cup, I would do the same. And so, they didn't push back on me then. They left me and let me do what I wanted.



📌 CURFEW by J.G. (1:20)



So, what spoke to me out there was "curfew," 'cause, um, I love the idea of men having a curfew.

....

I brought Take Back the Night to Rhode Island in 1979 and, um, we did that for many, many, many years and it—I put "for your peace of mind," and your peace of body and soul and spirituality. So, um, and like Martha was saying, I don't have an artistic stitch in me, so I said, "Rhode Island—" (I'm from New York) "Rhode Island is the Lesbian paradise," and yes, it is, and I found my love of 43 years here— So, and that women's music makes me feel loved, happy, and safe. But mostly, let's put a curfew on men.

.... Oh! And I left out one of the most important parts! The pink triangle, meaning— for what women had to wear—actually, that's for men to wear, in Nazi Germany.

(another speaker) And the women wore the black one.

Lesbians wore black triangles. Thank you!

📌 Meg + Cris by M.Y. (1:25)

Okay, let's see. So, oh, I was inspired by the music albums over there, Meg Christian was, and Cris Williamson, which is represents the M and the C are two of my absolute favorite musicians.



Um, and, yeah, I feel like if there was a tape of Meg and Cris at Carnegie Hall, I had, I had two copies of it in college, which I completely like wore out. That was a thing that you could do back

then, and it's now out of print - So that kind of kills me, but they were really instrumental, I'm sorry, *[participant: check it out Spotify, or even just want to stream it]* like I've seen, like some other, like the songs within it, but like getting the whole thing together. I mean, I just played, yeah, oh gosh, it was. So I was an R.A in my last two years of college, so I had my own room. Somebody come knock on the door - shut it off - but they were really instrumental in, you know, my coming out in my, like, college years so and music, like women's music, was just, it just kind of tied together everything that I was experiencing in college and kind of gave me a voice and safety.

Queer Poster by Y.W. (1:59)



I was inspired to do something themed as, like, yes, a collage, but I also want it to do something in the theme of, like, the Pride flag, so I grabbed a bunch of different, like, little rectangles and squares, like from the collections. And so I wanted to have the progress flag for Black and Brown people, I wanted to have the trans flag because I also identify as trans and nonbinary, and then the Queer flag, but I also wanted to have a couple extra colors to try to symbolize the lesbian flag in there, so basically all the Queer flavors I resonate with. Um, and I just kind of added things that stood out to me, so like we have different phrases, we have this person with the “dyke” tattoo, um... I very much identify as a dyke, and I just love the name and the identity, um... the pink triangles, actually that gave me an idea of kind of putting the pink *and* the back ones as, like, solidarity. Um, I thought this one was interesting, ‘cause even though it’s like, it’s a man, but a gay man, so I feel like this is, like, a nice representation, too, of like, you know, just queerness, gayness, and then these are all different excerpts that I took from, um, the *Lesbian Connection*, so this is one that talks about standing with, like, our trans siblings, and in particular our trans sisters; this one was about, like, past relationships and sort of, like, overcoming that; this one was “my sisters, you really did choose to be a lesbian before you were born,” and I think that’s especially powerful, ‘cause I am also someone who came into my sexuality, um, very late in life; I identify as “queer” more so, um, but I do embody the sapphic experience and, um, so I felt like this was very affirming. But yeah, and so just different little clips and words and things that just stood out to me or resembled something gay. Um, and so yeah, so I’m going to be taking this home and adding more things to it, but I think it’s gonna be a cool little poster on my wall. Well, cool *big* poster on my wall!

📌 **Butch collage** by K.B. (:55)



Um, so I'm also inspired by all the little buttons out there, um, and then I also like the buttons and stuff in here, where things are overlapping and, and I already like collaging, so. Um, I put, you know, standard things, like "I'm a butch dyke" and, you know, whatever, "live life loud," but I love the *Dykes to Watch Out For*, and I was inspired by... um, the buttons out there that are

really funny, so I love "The ties that chafe" —

'Cause I have thunder thighs, so... [laughs] But then I have, like, a lot of hands and florals and stuff because... hands are important for Lesbians...

Um, and so I just, I don't know, I was inspired by imagery and silly sayings, and stuff like that because I'm—I haven't been out for that long, so I'm trying to be a little, like, more present and more into it, and being just silly with it, so...

Lesbian Space – Mev (:41)



... I saw this picture and I was really inspired by the initial conversation we were having about Wanderground being Lesbian space, and, you know, making this kind of community happen, sort of thing. And so I just grabbed stuff that, you know, "Lesbians Connect," and then I put in here *Dykes to Watch Out For*, "Dykes gonna dyke,"

And the labrys and, you know, just some pictures. But this sort of— imagine all of this is happening here in Wanderground....

And this woman here, I don't know who she is, but she very much reminds me of a friend of mine, so I just liked that picture ...

Vulva shaped hand book by Thea - Clip for Buttons artwork too noisy & hard to hear speaker
"So I thought this was going to be some kind of three-dimensional, like... Like an ornament that could hang, but it didn't work out that way, so it turned into a little book. And I- this, so if you open it up, every page is like this, (shows image of two hands connected in vulva shape)."

Buttons & artwork include:

- Dyke to Watch Out For
- Lavender Menace
- Be Kind to Your Genitals Week
- I Own My Body but I Share
- I'm the Person Your Mother Warned You About
- I Like Older Women

Dyke-tionary – A.B.

Also not sound for the person who made a small little dictionary (hard to hear her words) – a little it is a dictionary – work in progress she will continue at home.

“So it’s two pictures, I just took here in the other room, um, and it is a dictionary—well, it’s like Lesbian words that I got out of a copy of Lesbian Connection. ...I have plans for these tags; I’m gonna age them and stamp on them, like, “Dyke Dictionary.” and then this one folds out paper—I’m gonna put something else... uh, I did the wrong direction—now the picture and, um, more like another—the other half of the dictionary.

Dyke-tionary, yeah!...just about the idea of, like, little treasures, finding little treasures, and like, information and words... I don’t know, like squirreling away words... little library, like making our own little, like, library-to-go...”

Pocket Dykes – J.J.

Another on with too much back chatter...

I was inspired by the little—by that little [butch cork] —yeah, so I made a matching little, like butch-femme couple. One of them has the little yarn buzz cut, and the other has the, you know, dressed in her best, and I couldn’t find any plaid, but this was the closest—

.... when I get home I have some scraps of leather and I’m gonna give her a little biker jacket.

.... inspired by that little [butch cork] who I just, I adored that idea, so I decided to steal it

[other participants They might need to get together, They’re all going to go on adventures!...

Ooh, a threesome!Menage à trois!]

But I’m also going to go to work after this so I’m just going to put them in my pocket and they can just be little pocket dykes for me. Keeping me company for my shift at work.

Emotional support pocket dykes!

Related Items in Wanderground Collection

The entire archive was available for participants to explore. These are the items that were chosen by workshop participants for artistic inspirations:

- Tomboy t-shirt
- Curfew poster from New Haven CT
- Buttons:
 - Dykes to Watch Out For
 - I Know You Know
 - Lavender Menace
 - Be Kind to Your Genitals Week

- I Own My Body but I Share
- I'm the Person Your Mother Warned You About
- I Like Older Women
- Dyke to Watch Out For
- I know You Know
- Ring of Keys
- I Was Once a Tomboy, Now I'm a Full Grown Lesbian
- Vulva Bumpersticker
- Meg Christian & Cris Williamson at Carnegie Hall - Album
- Cork screw butch
- Issues of Lesbian Connection

Details

- Conversation by: Participants of Workshop
- Topic(s): Lesbian codes, appearance styles (rules?) in the 1970s/80s/90s, hanky codes, Lesbian bars
- Date & How Recorded: December 7, 2024, Digital Recorder
- Interviewed by: Informal conversation recorded by Mev Miller
- Edited Transcript: Juli Anna Herndon with edits by Martha Young
- Summary Prepared by: Mev Miller with edits by Martha Young