

Media Release

NSW State Library stages one of Australia's largest ever queer exhibitions

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Queer curators, creatives and activists have come together to produce a major exhibition — opening Saturday 18 February — that shines a spotlight on little-known LGBTQI+ heroes and stories drawn from the Library's vast collection, alongside subversive voices of today.

Pride (R)evolution celebrates the lives, loves and works that have historically been overlooked or hidden, through an immersive display of 250 photographs, posters, letters, scrapbooks, clothing, film and sound — as well as newly commissioned pieces from queer and trans writers and artists.

According to exhibition co-curator Catherine Freyne: "This is a chance to encounter some of the characters and dynamics that have shaped Sydney's queer history — from hook-ups to ACT-UP, Ballroom to ball sports, fag hags to radical drag, and coalition to intersectionality."

"The exhibition resembles a kind of queer smorgasbord," she says. "With the space organised according to stages of the day — from twilight to night to dawn to day — visitors can expect an embodied, sensory, immersive experience."

Exhibition visitors will meet LGBTQI+ pioneers including:

- Doris Fish (1952–1991), aka Philip Mills, the legendary performer, artist and writer who pioneered radical drag in Sydney and San Francisco and starred in the cult sci-fi drag film *Vegas in Space*. Read Doris' personal letters to Danny Abood (1954–2021), her Sylvia and the Synthetics co-member.
- Allan Booth (1959–1990). His poster designs were familiar to those who attended early Mardi Gras, but little is known about his private, illustrated diaries where he detailed his fight with HIV/AIDS, including notes on blood results, intrusive treatments and the precariousness of living. The diaries will go on public display for the first time.
- Barry Kay (1932–1985), a London-based Australian stage designer whose work with the Australian Ballet will be celebrated in May 2023. The *Pride (R)evolution* exhibition includes over 100 photographic portraits by Kay of transgender women and drag queens in mid-70s Sydney that have never before been published or displayed.
- Nellie Small (1900–1968), a cross-dressing vaudeville star and jazz singer from Darlinghurst who played with identity markers around both gender and race.
- Ida Leeson (1885–1964), a State Library hero who became the first female Mitchell Librarian in 1932. Her appointment faced some opposition due to her gender, working-class background and 'unorthodox' choice of partner in Florence Birch, a YWCA official.

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First Nations icons such as Malcolm Cole, and blak pride events including Koori Gras are represented in newly acquired photographs (by Jamie James), and the work of First Nations queer poets and writers is showcased throughout the exhibition.

Visitors will also learn about *Gaywaves*, Australia's first lesbian and gay radio programme (1979–2005); early queer hotspots like Ruby Reds, Sydney's first lesbian bar; landmark campaigns such as the rights of lesbian mums; Boys will be Boys, Australia's first known support group for transmen, and much more.

Queer life — then and now — is reflected in a number of creative commissions, including a captivating video essay with House daughter Tashinga Sle in conversation with photographer Alia Ardon about the history and future of Ballroom as a QTBIPOC scene in Sydney's western suburbs.

There's a digital map of lesbian sport and fitness culture in 20th century Sydney by queer historian Rosa V Campbell.

Queercrip writer, artist and historian Robin Eames interprets the archival traces of gender transgressors from the 1860s to 1930s — including Edward de Lacy Evans and Bill Edwards.

Rainbow History Class's *Mother Tongue* video project offers an alphabet of words relating to LGBTQI+ life from *Ace* to *Ze*.

And Todd Fuller's hand-drawn animation *No use crying over ripped lace* recounts the story of three Sydney drag stars (Ivy League, Coco Jumbo and Vybe) who, post-performance in 2017, intervened in a gay bashing.

"The exhibition is part of a collecting drive to ensure the contemporary voices and experiences of LGBTQI+ people and communities are available in the State Library's collection," says exhibition co-curator Bruce Carter. "Our stories have a right to be visible here."

In March the State Library will launch a campaign inviting the people of NSW to add their Pride story to the collection.

Pride (R)evolution is a free exhibition at the State Library of NSW until 9 July, presented as part of Sydney WorldPride 2023. See the Library's Pride program sl.nsw.gov.au/pride

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