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Photo: Linda Simpson

NYC Drag Scene Explodes Into Regina in Photographic Exhibition

Guest curator Gary Varro pays tribute to iconic Queer City Cinema's Roots and the Evolution of Queerness in America with Expansive Exhibition of Photographs by Linda Simpson at the Art Gallery of Regina

Regina, SK:

Experience the landmark and paradigm-shifting New York City drag scene of the 1980s and 1990s through the lens of Linda Simpson, an integral member of this scene, in the exhibition *The Drag Explosion*. Guest curator Gary Varro brings forty diaristic snapshots by Simpson to the Art Gallery of Regina in the first-ever exhibition of these photographic prints. Simpson's photographs are not nostalgic images of outsiders, but frank accounts of

love, resistance, pride and pain in which gallery visitors may recognize themselves and their own experiences.

Bringing Simpson's *The Drag Explosion* to Regina enables Guest Curator Varro to pay homage to the fruitful overlap between the drag and the art scenes in New York. In particular, Varro points to the formative influence of MIX NYC, a queer experimental film festival run by and made for queer artists that inspired him to bring this same joyful, experimental, activist spirit to the Queen City. For nearly three decades, Varro, as Executive Director, Artistic Director and founder of Queer City Cinema (and the performance art festival Performatorium), has presented a diversity of queer stories to audiences in Regina and across Canada. For those who recognize their desires, struggles and triumphs projected in cinemas and voiced in the words of LGBTQ+ artists, the festival provides a much-needed antidote to feelings of alienation.

Says Varro, "*The Drag Explosion*, Linda Simpson's photo documentation - shown here at the AGR for the first time as an art exhibition — is a tribute to the drag scene in New York in the '80s and '90s, and in turn, to the evolution of queerness in North America. Her images capture queer creatives carving out an indelible presence through performativity in the context of drag, performance art, film, music and more — all from the perspective of her analog camera. Artists exploring, questioning, and fucking with expectations were her subjects; gender, race, art, and queerness became her playground."

Similar to a family album, Simpson's candid images of drag queens, club kids and celebutantes provide intimate glimpses into these elaborate and imaginatively constructed identities. Backstage, onstage, meticulously posed or caught unaware, each snapshot offers up a new, unexpected and deeply human image. Miss Understood's tower of hot pink and acid green ringlets reads as a brash embodiment of aspirational desires — Marie Antoinette's celebrated excesses in neon. A pair of nebbish spectacles undoes the over-the-top glitz of Zandra's animal print and black lace ensemble as she lounges in a tiny bed. A couple making out in a bathtub escape into the excitement of their connection; their dazzling glamour transcends the stained and peeling plaster wall behind them.

Preceding the selfie era of relentless self-documentation, Simpson reveals a grittier and more loving world than the slick reality TV version of drag culture portrayed by major entertainment properties like *Ru Paul's Drag Race*. "During the years covered by *The Drag Explosion*," recalls Simpson, "I hobnobbed with a camera, which was a rare thing to do back then. Although I was a complete amateur, I got tons of great shots—wild nightlife, queer activism, pop-culture moments and all sorts of colourful characters. Ultimately, my photos document the rise and fall of a golden era that paved the way for today's drag renaissance."

Explaining the enduring relevance of *The Drag Explosion* to present-day Saskatchewan, Varro elaborates, "Consequently, (and directly and indirectly) Linda's New York images are part of QCC's experience and the impact '90s NYC had in forming and nurturing a uniquely queer project in and for Saskatchewan."

Join the Art Gallery of Regina and Gary Varro to celebrate this milestone exhibition of Simpson's photographs of her peers - icons and legends - and their powerful legacy of defiantly gorgeous difference at the opening reception for *The Drag Explosion* from 7-9 PM on August 11. *The Drag Explosion* runs from August 11 - September 28.

Admission to the Art Gallery of Regina is always free; we request that visitors wear medical masks. We acknowledge the City of Regina's support for our accessible programs.

Located on Treaty 4, traditional territory of the Cree, Saulteaux, Nakota, Lakota and Dakota peoples, and the homeland of the Métis people, the Art Gallery of Regina (AGR) is a dynamic cultural hub, promoting the development and appreciation of contemporary art, primarily created by Saskatchewan artists. AGR provides a range of opportunities for Regina's citizens and visitors to engage with contemporary art through its free exhibitions and artist talks, critical writing and educational programming.

Media contact:

Sandee Moore

Curator of Exhibitions and Programming, Art Gallery of Regina

306-522-5940

curator@artgalleryofregina.ca

Contact Moore for images and other promotional materials. Please note that this email contains a link to a GoogleDrive folder of images that may be reproduced.

The artist and curator are available for interviews in English by phone or email. Please contact the guest curator Gary Varro for in-person interviews with Linda Simpson.

ARTIST: Linda Simpson

EMAIL CONTACT: linda@lindasimpson.org

GUEST CURATOR: Gary Varro

EMAIL CONTACT: projects@qcitycinema.ca

Links:

[reproducible images](#) photo credit: Linda Simpson

[artist's website](#)

[project website](#)

For Calendar Listings:

Exhibition title: *The Drag Explosion*

Artist(s): Linda Simpson

Curator: Gary Varro

Dates: August 11 - September 28, 2022

Opening reception: August 11, 7-9 PM

Related events: August 25, 7:30 PM, Live Performance of *The Drag Explosion* with Linda Simpson at MacKenzie Art Gallery. (Email projects@qcitycinema.ca for information.)

Location: Art Gallery of Regina (2420 Elphinstone Street), Main Gallery

Short description:

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Website: <https://www.artgalleryofregina.ca/upcoming-exhibition>

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