

Proof 30

Beau Gomez
Michaëlle Sergile
Morgan Sears-Williams



G44 Centre for
Contemporary
Photography

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Cover image

Morgan Sears-Williams, *infinite kiss*, 16mm film still, 2023

Poster image

Michaëlle Sergile, *Untitled*, still from the series *Gesture: Body Movements in Political Discourse*, video, 2020-2024

Beau Gomez is a lens-based artist whose practice is informed by ideas, challenges and conversations around cross-cultural narratives as they relate to positions of community and of otherness. He is interested in activating storytelling and the realm of possibility it offers—as a vehicle for illustrating memory, as an operative point of tension and affect and as a radical exercise in holding space. Traversing visual and verbal material, his work is grounded in image-making as a conduit between individual and collective history, giving permission to shared means of learning, nurturing and renewal.

Michaëlle Sergile is an artist and independent curator working mainly on archives including texts and works from the postcolonial period from 1950 to today. Her artistic work aims to understand and rewrite the history of Black communities—more specifically of women, or communities living in diverse intersections, through weaving. Often perceived as a medium of craftsmanship and categorized as feminine, the artist uses the lexicon of weaving to question the relationships of gender and race.

Sergile has recently exhibited at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, the Musée d'art de Joliette and the Dak'Art Off Biennale. She was long listed in 2022 for the Sobey Award. In 2023, she won Visual Artist of the Year at the Gala Dynastie and started a residency at the Darling Foundry.

Morgan Sears-Williams (she/her) is an interdisciplinary artist and cultivator based in Toronto and Vancouver. Sears-Williams's practice embraces an embodied and personal reflection on the body and queer community while speaking to larger structures of power, oppression and social constructions of space. Investigating the use of analog film as a form of projected image and as a sculptural material she considers space and queerness through analog technologies, creating experimental topographies through photographic film and moving images. Bridging eco-processing, experimental film and queer history (both personal and political) she aims to create intimate experiences for viewers to expand their ideas of queer space and time.

Sarah Edo is a curator, researcher and writer born and based in Tkaronto/Toronto. Edo has curated exhibits and programs with BAND Gallery, Images Festival, Whippersnapper Gallery, Lakeshore Arts and the Gardiner Museum. Her art writing and criticism has been featured in *Studio Magazine*, *BlackFlash Magazine*, *CMagazine*, *Topical Cream* and *1919Mag*. She holds a Masters in Gender Studies at the University of Toronto and Edo is currently a Curatorial Fellow at the Toronto Biennial of Art.

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Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography is an artist-run centre committed to supporting diverse approaches to photographic and image-based practices through exhibitions, education programs and facilitating artistic production. Gallery 44 provides space and context for meaningful dialogue between artists and publics. Together, we offer an entry point to explore the artistic, cultural, historic, social and political implications of the image in our ever-expanding visual world.

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Otherwise Sensibilities

Sarah Edo

In *Proof 30*, three image-based artists invite us to meditate on the interstitial spaces of performance, pleasure and place-making within the landscape of queer interiority and public life. I spoke with Beau Gomez, Morgan Sears-Williams and Michaëlle Sergile, who poetically and sensitively delineate ways of looking otherwise, sensing and feeling queer subjects through image, film and video installation. Each artist's process is research driven, guided by poets, filmmakers and artists that can be traced back to queer feminist artistic production and Black radical traditions. Their works are attuned to embodied sensibilities—whether through quiet movement or the wisdom of fluids, the body is central as a site of sense-making. Through my conversations with each artist, I observed natural overlapping, yet distinct themes—desire, touch, gesture—that shape and unravel in the body of this essay.

On Desire. Drawing from poet Ocean Vuong,¹ when asked to describe his practice, Beau Gomez tells me that it is inherently anchored in vulnerability; he believes that the strongest thing one can do as an artist is collaborate with vulnerability. In the afterlife of an HIV diagnosis, the body transitions into a state of stigmatized illness which jarringly reveals the underbelly of society's regard for 'risk' as it relates to sex. This warps one's sense of identity, and thickens the complex navigation of gay culture, pleasure, surveillance and desire. When trying to get to the root of desire, I often turn to poet Dionne Brand's musing, that perhaps, putting our senses back together is what desire is.² In *Sometimes I wish the mirror would ask how I'm doing*, Gomez's images make a collective experience sensible through the aesthetic terrain of photography and multimedia installation, where he explores queer Filipino subjectivity, both past and present.

Gomez composes a family of images that range from archival childhood photos, public health records, blood, critters, objects, sculptures and screenshots. These works offer an invitation for viewers to step into a queer mode of looking—a way of looking that slows down and imbues mundane objects and moments with significant meaning. In *Modes of Sacrifice* (#1-3), Gomez considers the symbolic hold of plastic containers and the ways these objects are conduits to cleanse and sustain life, with references to himself as a baby being washed, a dead chicken being

washed for a feast and an empty medication bottle holding a single anthurium flower. Gomez's images mystify the structural conditions of queer diasporic life under reductive regimes of public health and lean into the wondrous tenderness of queer intimacy, mangled desire and life's ephemeral nature.

On Touch. Upon meeting Morgan Sears-Williams, she discerns that she's not concerned with creating a perfect image, but rather, images that convey the artist's touch. Echoing Sears-Williams via feminist filmmaker Barbara Hammer, I also ask, what is the *feeling image*?³ Sears-Williams figures the *feeling image* in the making of her 16mm looped film, *infinite kiss*. In and through this film, Sears-Williams draws upon a history of handmade cinema practices, largely shaped by avant-garde woman filmmakers who integrate materiality into their films. Unlike the polished products of commercial film, handmade cinema production is composed of craft-oriented and labor processes, of emulsion and eco-processing. In her film, Sears-Williams brings together experimental handmade cinema practices, queer and trans erotics and place-making in dialogue with the city.

Sears-Williams foregrounds Toronto Island's Hanlan's Beach Point as one of her primary subjects. In a city like Toronto, where queer spaces are almost always fraught and fleeting, Hanlan's plays an important role as not only one of the few remaining public queer spaces, but also in LGBTQ+ history, as the site of Toronto's inaugural Pride celebration in 1971. While Hanlan's beach is beloved across intergenerational queer and trans communities, Sears-Williams's work is not concerned with romanticizing Hanlan's as a queer utopic place, but tending to the transformation of ecological space and belonging in queer communal life in Toronto. In the process of making her film, Sears-Williams incorporates the physical properties of natural sand dunes along Hanlan's coast line, which also sustain the life of the beach, into the analogue film by burying the film in the dunes for days at a time. The sand which holds the remnants of the beach, both natural and imposed, interact and mark the film with its artifacts. Here, sand is not simply the eroded rocks at the edge of the shoreline but a conduit for what anthropologist Vanessa Agard-Jones reminds us as the substance that "gets inside our bodies, our things, in ways

*The essay title, "Otherwise Sensibilities" is inspired by scholar and writer Ashon Crawley, who writes about "otherwise possibilities."

1 Ocean Vuong, "My vulnerability is my superpower," *Louisiana Channel*, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5NuCrAkjGw>.

2 Dionne Brand, *A map to the door of no return: Notes to belonging*, Vintage Canada, 2002. In this book, Brand lists out all the possible interpretations of what desire is in a stream of consciousness. She finally lands on the idea that desire is putting her sense back together.

3 Barbara Hammer, *HAMMER!: Making Movies out of Life and Sex*, New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2020.

at once inconvenient and intrusive. It smoothes rough edges but also irritates, sticking to our bodies' folds and fissures."⁴ In *infinite kiss*, queer figures make out on loop, layered with markings of the artist's touch through hand processing. Sears-Williams's work explores the stretch of queer time, intimacy and filmic form with the infusion of Hanlan's residue imprints on the moving images.

On *Gesture*. Michaëlle Sergile tells me her guiding curiosity for this project: what constitutes a leader? Who is archived as a leader in both western popular discourse and public memory of revolutionary history? On social media, we are inundated with images of critical revolutionary Black writers and artists, regardless of our actual knowledge on liberation movements, we can identify the songs of Nina Simone, the words of James Baldwin and the poems of Maya Angelou because their collective oeuvres are always looming as the sound of resistance. As long as we live within the confines of the of western colonial empire, their artistry will always be relevant and resonant. While their words are ever-present, Sergile shifts focus beyond words and toward movement and body language. Inspired by James Baldwin's 1969 interview on *The Dick Cavett Show*, Sergile became fixated on Baldwin's charismatic demeanor, leading to her ruminations on the relationship between bodily movement and political discourse. While Baldwin is aptly known for naming, with intricate and poetic precision, the material conditions of life under the racist hold of white America, Sergile draws our attention to Baldwin's bodily and non-verbal gestural language as her primary site of inquiry.

In *Gesture: Body movements in political discourses*, Sergile's multi-media installation keenly observes Baldwin's gestural choreography and places it within a broader landscape of socio-political imagery. Taking the form of video, images and textiles, Sergile asks viewers to join her contemplation on Baldwin's forms of expression in her remixed interpretation of the 1969 Dick Cavette interview, and the glitched bridging of image and textiles. In Legacy Russell's *Glitch Feminism*, she notes that "remixing is an act of self-determination; it is a technology of survival."⁵ Through multiple points of entry, Sergile reinterprets Baldwin, an already highly represented figure, through multi-sensorial listening practices that tend to facial and bodily expression and form. Sergile's use of glitch and remix in the material



Beau Gomez, *Modes of sacrifice* (#3), from the series *Sometimes I wish the mirror would ask how I'm doing*, archival print, 2023

and editorial representation of the writer-activist offers an expansive mode of reading gestures that reach towards the liberatory future Baldwin spent his life insisting upon.

Through these works, Gomez, Sears-Williams and Sergile create a visual lexicon of image-making practices through the complexity of desire, the depth of touch and the possibility of gesture. In *Proof 30*, they beckon viewers to orient around images queerly—to look closer and slower, to feel the image and to foreground the body as sources of profound wisdom.

4 Vanessa Agard-Jones, "What the sands remember," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 18, no. 2-3 (2012): 325-346.

5 Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*, Verso Books, 2020.

