

Facing Claude Cahun & Marcel Moore

Featuring the Work of Cara Tierney, Claude Cahun, Dayna Danger, Laura Taler, Marcel Moore, August Klintberg, Sarah Pucill, and Zanele Muholi¹

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“Shuffle the cards.

Masculine? Feminine? It depends on the situation. Neuter is the only gender that always suits me. If it existed in our language no one would be able to see my thought’s vacillations.”² —Claude Cahun, *Aveux non avenues*, 1930

1. *Facing Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore* was presented at the Ottawa Art Gallery September 14, 2019 – February 9, 2020 and in a modified form at Peel Art Gallery, Museum & Archives, November 19, 2022 – April 9, 2023. 2-D and 3-D views of the 2019 exhibition were featured in the project *Conflated Views*, as part of DesignTO, 2021. See: <https://oaggao.ca/whats-on/exhibitions/facing-claude-cahun-and-marcel-moore/>; <http://pama.peelregion.ca/exhibitions/facing-claude-cahun-marcel-moore>; <https://elson-studio.com/conflatedviews-facing>

2. Claude Cahun, *Disavowals or Cancelled Confessions*, trans. Susan de Muth (London: Tate Publishing, 2007) 151–152. “Brouiller les cartes. Masculin? Féminin? Mais ça dépend des cas. Neutre est le seul genre qui me convienne toujours. S’il existait dans notre langue on n’observerait pas ce flottement de ma pensée.” François Leperlier, ed., *Claude Cahun: Écrits* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 2002), 366.

3. Peter Sokolowski quoted in Amy Harmon, “‘They’ Is the Word of the Year, Merriam-Webster Says, Noting Its Singular Rise,” *The New York Times*, December 10, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/10/us/merriam-webster-they-word-year.html>

In December of 2019, Merriam-Webster announced the pronoun “they” as its choice for English-language “word of the year,” noting that there was a surge in searches for this utilitarian word. Editor-at-large Peter Sokolowski noted that while the pronoun is “...one of the building blocks of language...with nonbinary usage, people are sensing that it means something new or different... [w]hen you see lookups for it triple, you know that ‘they’ is a word that is in flux.”³ Two and a half months earlier, the Ottawa Art Gallery opened *Facing Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*, a project that put six contemporary artists’ work into conversation with the historical work and legacy of Claude Cahun (1894–1954) and their lesser-known partner, Marcel Moore (1892–1972). Nonbinary gender expression and the always-in-flux nature of identity itself were at the heart of the project. Conceived as a trans-generational dialogue that also delved into art as activism, the exhibition put Cahun and Moore’s work in conversation with artists who likewise play with language, performance, and materials to trouble gender norms. The exhibition charted a continuum of visibility, using a critical curatorial strategy similar to the one employed by *The Baroness Elsa Project* (Carleton University Art Gallery, 2021), where contemporary artists were asked to respond to overlooked artists from the past.⁴

The presentation of historical work by Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore alongside newly commissioned and existing contemporary works speaks to an increasingly diverse and public challenge to the status quo. Audiences were asked to consider how everyday gestures, language (including the commandeering of “they/them” as nonbinary pronouns), objects, and clothing all serve to construct and dismantle our sense of identity and belonging.

Although it is anachronistic to refer to either historical artist using present-day gender-neutral pronouns, it is also fitting to do so, given that both Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore chose to work under gender-non-specific names. Furthermore, Cahun actively changed their appearance in the celebrated photographs for which the duo is now best known. These strategies of self-fashioning resonate with current transgender modes of expression. Cahun was vocal about gender, sexuality, and religion, albeit in a subversive and cryptic manner that was in keeping with an artistic strategy that I would classify as an aesthetics of refusal or negation.

In their lifetime, Cahun was recognized as a writer and not a photographer. However, the substantial body of experimental writings Claude Cahun produced has been largely overlooked in contemporary scholarship, perhaps because of the difficult, fragmentary nature of the texts, as well as the literary references and historical specificity of much of this work. Cahun's major work, an artist's book entitled *Aveux non Avenus* (1930; published in English translation as *Disavowals or Cancelled Confessions* in 2007), which circulated in a limited edition, is themed around ideas of alterity and negation.⁵ This challenging text is an attempt by Cahun—in collaboration with Marcel Moore, to whom the photomontages that illustrate each chapter are attributed—to propose alternatives to both the dominant and avant-garde cultures of the 1920s. Only someone who embraced their own position on the margins of the artistic avant-garde could have produced this re-imagining of gender, sexuality, and religion. As an artist who was marked by their position as a lesbian and a Jew, Cahun was able to propose novel ways of thinking about hierarchies and power that centred on unraveling binary oppositions and other barriers that preclude difference. Thus, a historically grounded analysis of both the written and visual aspects of this shared practice reveals that Cahun's poetics was one of alterity and negation.

Facing Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore introduced both artists through a pair of early photographs, dated ca. 1915, included in a wall-length timeline. One of these features Lucie Schwob—who would settle on the gender-ambiguous artist name Claude Cahun in 1918. Dressed in a school uniform, a young Schwob is seated at a desk reading Armand Dayot's compendium *L'Image de la femme* (1899) | fig. 1 |. Dayot's books celebrated idealized images of femininity from antiquity to the end of the nineteenth century. A box camera sits on the desk, showing us the tools that these artists will use to reimagine gender and culturally entrenched yet oppressive stereotypes. The companion photograph shows a young Suzanne Malherbe (who began signing drawings "Moore" as early as 1915) standing against the same makeshift backdrop, left hand firmly on the hip | fig. 2 |. Placing these two photographs together restores Moore's role to the creative partnership. It would appear that the artists photographed each other posing alternately in the same tableau.

Conceived equally as part feminist recovery project, part provocation to contemporary artists working in the same vein as Cahun and Moore, *Facing Cahun & Moore* deliberately included photographs exposing their collaborative processes. For the historical work, curatorial choices were made to

4. See: Heather Anderson and Irene Gammel, "The Baroness Elsa Project" in *RACAR* 47, no. 1 (2022): 94–112.

5. See Claude Cahun, *Aveux non avenues* (Paris: Éditions Carrefours, 1930).



Left
Figure 1. Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, *Untitled (L'Image de la femme)*, ca. 1915. Courtesy of Jersey Heritage Collections.

Right
Figure 2. Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, *Untitled (Marcel Moore)*, ca. 1915. Courtesy of Jersey Heritage Collections.

expose Moore's pivotal role behind the camera. In fact, it is difficult to disentangle Marcel Moore from their artistic project, which involved multiple overlapping disciplines. The practice of taking photographs was one that appears to have been entwined with their daily lives. Both the celebrated and lesser-known photographs from the 1920s were intimately staged, most likely in the couple's apartment. It appears that the camera was an ever-present aspect in their shared domestic life, as well as an intellectual/artistic pursuit. It was with this theory in mind—that theirs was a shared life and art project—that this exhibition actively sought to restore Marcel Moore's work to the creative partnership and give equal billing to this overlooked artist.

As a call and response between the past and the present, the exhibition design imagined what an artist's studio might look like. The installation made use of moveable walls | **fig. 3** |, where exhibition prints of both well-known and obscure work by Cahun/Moore—including Marcel Moore's graphic work in fashion, illustration, and theater design—were displayed nailed to the wall. These arrangements were presented as source material, such as one might find in an artist's studio, on walls facing the contemporary work.

The decision to use exhibition prints as opposed to borrowing archival photographs was both a practical and aesthetic choice. With the exception of one published photograph, Cahun/Moore's work was not shown publicly during either artist's lifetime.⁶ These are the images that are now revered and displayed in museums, reproduced in books, or projected on screens in university lecture halls. In actuality, the photographs were used in collages

6. This photograph is usually referred to as "self-portrait," although I prefer not to call these images self-portraits given that Moore was likely the photographer. The image appeared in the Surrealist journal *Bifur* vol. 5 (April 1930). The Getty has a copy in their collection: <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/104HMY>.

attributed to Moore to illustrate Cahun's most important and fully realized work, *Aveux non avenus*. It is my belief that certain photographs served as preparatory material for Cahun's writing, and also documented their acting roles during their involvement with experimental theaters such as *Le Plateau* (1929) and *Théâtre Ésotérique* (1925–1928).⁷ Similarly, early photographs of Cahun were used as source material for watercolours produced by Marcel Moore. There is no evidence to suggest that the now-celebrated photographs were intended for exhibition in a gallery. It is also possible that the images could have circulated amongst the artistic and intellectual circles of interwar Paris as a form of *cartes de visites*.

One gelatin silver print of Marcel Moore, on loan from the Art Gallery of Ontario, was included in the exhibition, giving visitors a sense of the small scale of the photographs Cahun and Moore would have possessed. It seemed fitting to retain the intimate nature of the historical object. Small exhibition prints (5 × 7") were created and displayed to generate a dialogue between the historical and the contemporary. However, a choice was made to enlarge eight of the couple's photographs in order to integrate them with the contemporary art, which is produced at a much larger scale. Nailing the smaller exhibition prints to the wall was intended to offer these images in such a way that, rather than view them as revered collected objects, viewers might think *with* them, as Cahun, Moore, and the featured contemporary artists had. In this way, Cahun and Moore's works were presented as propositions or provocations.

The impact of the ca. 1920s images of Claude Cahun lies not only in the performance of alterity through the repudiation of gender norms, achieved by head-shaving or donning decidedly unfeminine attire, but also in the force of a brazen gaze; all of which, combined, bring an implicit transgender critique more sharply into focus. Quebec-based artist, activist, and educator Cara Tierney⁸ helped me to recognize the transgender signals in Cahun and Moore's work. Tierney's work interrogates and explores the ways in which gendered language both structures our interactions and signals our relationship to power. This allowed me to recognize that Cahun's project shared an affinity with current transgender practices. Tierney wanted to pay homage to Claude Cahun as a transgender writer who underscored language's revolutionary potential.

It was Tierney's work as a performance artist that initially prompted the invitation to contribute to a transgenerational dialogue with Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore. Tierney decided to tackle Cahun's manifesto *Aveux non avenus*. Written and illustrated in the 1920s and published in 1930 as a 500-copy, limited edition artist's book, Cahun conceived of the text as transformational. A first edition copy of this book was included in the exhibition. Cahun described their intention in a letter, dated 1950, as wanting "...to force [their] contemporaries out of their sanctimonious conformism, out of their complacency."⁹ Although Cahun wrote *Aveux non avenus* for their peers—engaging with the specifics of the interwar period, drawing heavily on literary references, and referencing the cultural context of 1920s

7. For more on Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore's work in the theater, see Miranda Welby-Everard, "Imaging the Actor: The Theatre of Claude Cahun," in *Oxford Art Journal* 29, no. 1 (March 2006): 1–24.

8. For more information on Cara Tierney, see <https://www.caratierney.com/>.

9. Claude Cahun, "Lettre à Paul Lévy," in *Écrits*, 710. Translation my own.



Figure 3. Installation view, *Facing Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, 2019–2020*, Ottawa Art Gallery. Photo: Justin Wonnacott. Courtesy of Ottawa Art Gallery.



Paris—Tierney recognized that Cahun's text and Moore's imagery could be transformational for us, too.

Cahun's project is evident in *Aveux non avenue*s: proposing an entirely new way of thinking about the relationship between self and other that breaks down hierarchies, barriers, and binary oppositions. There is a call to action articulated in the final section of *Aveux non avenue*s: Cahun instructs readers to actively think for themselves, to question and to imagine alternatives. Struck by Cahun's ability to poetically articulate genderqueer experience, Tierney selected two of the book's phrases that felt "...incredibly salient and pertinent to today's realities and to [their] experience as a queer, non-binary person."¹⁰ Produced in white oak and installed in a gallery, Tierney's wall works give weight to Cahun's words, and make phrases such as "...I should only, because I can only, connect with, change, myself"¹¹ | **fig. 4** | accessible to a broad public, who might otherwise be unaware of Claude Cahun as a writer. Giving Cahun's sometimes-cryptic aphorisms, an afterlife creates space to consider both their literary legacy and the meaning of the specific French and English passages selected by Tierney. While it is true that one can only change oneself, others come into relation with the individual, providing opportunities for self-understanding and transformation.

Visitors also encountered the relational aspect of identity formation through two works by Tierney and Cahun/Moore, respectively. In each photograph, the artist performs as their father. Tierney's *Back and Forth*, 2011, was created after a performance where the artist had their hair styled to match their father's. Tierney's photograph echoes the polycephalic composition by Cahun/Moore that first appeared as a cover illustration for Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes's 1929 novel, *Frontières humaines*, and was subsequently repurposed by Marcel Moore in a photo-collage that opened chapter III of *Aveux non avenue*s. This photomontage was enlarged in the exhibition to visually introduce the dialogue between Cahun/Moore and Tierney.

The other parallel teased out in this section of the exhibition was achieved by including an exhibition print of Cahun with a shaved head produced ca. 1928, the year of their father Maurice Schwob's death. The portrait of Cahun is a near replication of a similar portrait of Maurice Schwob taken in 1920, and clearly reveals the artist playing with identifications. The relationship between these two photographs is one of likeness. We can also read this photograph as a self-conscious insertion by Cahun of their own image into the patrilineal Jewish intellectual tradition, with which they strongly identified. The connection is further suggested as profile portraits of authors were commonly used as frontispieces of many early twentieth-century novels written by Jewish intellectuals. Women were rarely represented in this way, however.¹²

Collaboration, as well as proposals of alternatives to creativity and kinship, mark the dialogue between Two-Spirit, Métis/Saulteaux/Polish artist Dayna Danger¹³ and Cahun/Moore. "Under this mask, another mask; I will never finish removing all these faces,"¹⁴ the often-quoted phrase written into the photo-collage opening the ninth and final chapter of *Aveux non*

10. In conjunction with the exhibition, PAMA produced a series of interviews. See "Artist Interview: Cara Tierney, Part 1," Peel Art Gallery, Museum, and Archives, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A76Ctigh9GI>.

11. Cahun, *Disavowals*, 200. "...je ne puis, toucher, transformer, que moi-même." Cahun, *Écrits*, 427.

12. Whitney Chadwick suggests that these portraits signal "...a broader dialogue with representations of Jewishness as otherness in the 1920s." See Whitney Chadwick, "Claude Cahun and Lee Miller: Problematizing the Surrealist Territories of Gender and Ethnicity," in *Gender, Nonconformity, Race and Sexuality: Charting the Connections*, ed. Toni Lester (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 141–159.

13. For more information on Dayna Danger, see <http://www.daynadanger.com/>.

14. "Sous ce masque un autre masque. Je n'en finirai pas de soulever tous ces visages." *Aveux non avenue*s.



Figure 4. Cara Tierney, *Que moi-même*, 2019. White oak, tung oil. Installation view from *Facing Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*, 2019–2020, Ottawa Art Gallery. Photo: Justin Wonnacott. Courtesy of Ottawa Art Gallery. © Cara Tierney

avenus, amplifies the thematic of plurality that runs through Cahun/Moore's oeuvre. Using similar visual strategies as Dayna Danger to claim space, Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore critiqued how women were depicted as powerless by their Surrealist colleagues who had a theoretical interest in BDSM (Bondage Discipline Sadoomasochism). Cahun and Moore subverted avant-garde tropes—often sexual in nature—by featuring Cahun, sometimes masked, refusing to make indicators of sex or gender visible. In a 1928 photograph, a masked Cahun appears kneeling on a blanket, their knees together, so that only the slightest bit of pubic hair is visible. Their arms are folded over their chest, denying any gratuitous gaze that might objectify their body for sexual pleasure or consumption. With knees together and chest covered, it is also impossible to categorize this body as “male” or “female.” It is *neuter*. Dayna Danger similarly refuses to pander to a lascivious gaze in their large-scale photographs, where collaborators are shown wearing beaded BDSM masks. For this exhibition, Danger turned the camera upon themselves to create *Dayna*, 2019, a self-portrait. All of Danger's portraits in this exhibition focus on masked faces and stop at the collar bone of each figure | fig. 5 |.

Danger's beaded BDSM fetish masks boldly and unapologetically claim space for gender-variant and sexually diverse realities. *Danger's Mask*, 2016, and *Kandace's Mask*, 2016, feature the labrys, a double-bitted battle-axe associated with goddesses that signals the memory of pre-patriarchal/colonial culture. The artist beaded the masks with the help of Indigenous collaborators in communities in and around Tiohtiá:ke/Montréal, where they currently live and work. Danger's way of working within intimate networks of care, which include Indigenous and non-Indigenous women and non-binary



Figure 5. Dayna Danger, *Adrienne*, 2017; *Dayna*, 2019; *Kandace*, 2016. Installation view from *Facing Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*, 2019–2020, Ottawa Art Gallery. Photo: Justin Wonnacott. Courtesy of Ottawa Art Gallery. © Dayna Danger

folks, is an articulation of a decolonized form of sovereignty. *Kinship Masks* is an ongoing body of work that responds to the frequent equation of Indigenous and Black bodies with histories of colonial and sexual violence. *Kinship Masks* also reclaims culturally specific and self-determined ways of exploring complicated relations of gender, sexuality, power and consent.

Consent is a key aspect of Danger's practice. In addition to undermining the sitter/portraits dynamic with their collaborative way of working, Danger views the completed objects in a manner that is in keeping with an Indigenous worldview. They describe the masks as "belongings," and treat them with care and respect, seeking permission from the recipient of each mask before agreeing to display it for the public in the context of an exhibition. This method of displaying the masks also deliberately underscores the fact that they are to be understood neither as contemporary art nor artifact. Installed on plinths without a case at the approximate height of the artist, the masks imbue a relational quality. This is a direct challenge to museum practices that have historically confined Indigenous objects under glass cases, stripping them of their power and simultaneously divorcing them from any utilitarian function. It becomes impossible not to recognize that these masks have been worn by those with whom Dayna engaged to create the collaborative portraits; the artist and their collaborators are each invested in claiming space publicly for those who have been marginalized as a result of colonial practices.

Speaking one's mind is a dangerous game. It requires the courage to differentiate oneself from others, to stand in opposition, and often in confrontation, with other opinions. Cahun frequently engaged in exactly this type of confrontation. Ottawa-based multidisciplinary artist Laura Taler¹⁵

15. For more information on Laura Taler, see <https://laurataler.ca/>



Figure 6. Laura Taler, *HEX: Begin Again*, 2019 (film still).
Courtesy of the artist.

offers the filmic collage *HEX: Begin Again* (2019), a playful installation conceived to echo Cahun/Moore's aesthetics of cryptic provocation. Taler, an artist who explores memory and history as embodied knowledge and often mobilizes performance, film, and sound, was invited to create new work for this transgenerational dialogue. Drawing upon the writings of Claude Cahun, Maya Deren, and Susan Coolidge, Taler stitches together a script for her character to perform at a fortune teller's table | **fig. 6** |. It is now well-established that Cahun/Moore frequently used strategies of doubling, collage, and citation in their critical project. Cahun's writing also consistently reveals an individual unafraid to use darkly humorous tactics like hyperbole and irony, which Taler deploys as well. Using a simple mirror trick paired with strategies of masquerade and repetition, Taler creates a world of ritual and séance while exploring movement and text to form a sophisticated and playful language of resistance.

"Every day is a fresh beginning," Taler's character intones, either for an audience of viewers, or for the multiple selves that appear in the work. This spoken passage from Susan Coolidge's 1899 poem, "New Every Morning," provides an opening for Taler's meditation on themes of technology, history, and gender that suggests a phenomenology of embodiment. These fragments of text, coupled with Taler's delicate choreographed gestures, reflect a bodily awareness. References to early modern technologies, such as the airplane, radio, and photography, highlight how such processes influenced not only our way of experiencing and thinking about the world, but also our relationships to one another. The multigraph, which Taler uses to create multiple images of herself in *HEX: Begin Again*, enables self-scrutiny. A subject can see themselves represented from every angle. For women especially, lens-based technologies have both impacted how they are perceived and perpetuated certain standards against which they are measured. Technology has also impacted our sense of time and place; "...a chronology of past, present, and future has also increasingly lost its meaning...we have come to understand the continuity of the past with the future," Taler states,

reminding viewers that we are all implicated in histories whose effects we carry with us. Yet there remains a possibility for change: “Take heart with the day and begin again.”

Historical context is paramount when considering Claude Cahun’s writing. Cahun occupied a particular position in interwar France: born female, a lesbian, highly educated, and considered Jewish.¹⁶ Taler was drawn to Cahun the outsider, and to the dark humour and pointed critique levied at their peers that comes through in their writing. Taler was also intrigued by Cahun’s ambiguous position within male-dominated artistic and intellectual circles of the time. Although Cahun and Moore participated in the Parisian avant-garde, they did not fit the Surrealist ideal of feminine model/mistress/muse (or wife). The couple participated in Parisian lesbian cultural circles as well as the male-dominated avant-garde, yet Cahun in particular remained an outsider. In 1934, Cahun published a polemical piece entitled *Les Paris sont ouverts*—a play on an expression that translates to “all bets are off,” making use of the homonym between “bets” and “Paris”—urging the artistic community to take a stance against the rise of fascism in Europe. It is from this lesser-known text that Taler borrows to create an installation that pays homage to the women—such as Cahun and Deren—who occupied marginal positions vis à vis the Surrealist movement during their lifetime, largely as a result of gender dynamics. Deren and Cahun were also socially conscious artists who both grappled with the identities of “artist” and “Jew” in contexts where both positions were culturally loaded, defined by ideas of inclusion or exclusion from cultural life. This position of alterity—Jewishness—was not lost on Taler when creating *HEX: Begin Again*.

In March 1937, Cahun and Moore relocated from Paris to the Isle of Jersey (UK), for fear they would be further attacked as Jewish lesbians. In 1940, the Nazis occupied the Channel Islands. Instead of evacuating to England, Cahun and Moore opted to stay in Jersey. It was there that they decided to mount their own anti-propaganda campaign. Using artistic strategies such as performance, parody, irony and exaggeration, the artists actively resisted the Nazi occupation of Jersey, with real repercussions; both were arrested and stood trial for distributing written tracts and leaflets to undermine the morale of the German forces, jailed, and sentenced to death (though their sentences were commuted).

In 1945, following the artists’ release from prison and the liberation of Jersey by allied forces on May 9, Claude Cahun began working on an autobiographical text dedicated to Marcel Moore. Structured in a similarly fragmented way as *Aveux non avenus*, once again mining the tropes of mirrors, masks, metamorphoses, and deploying doubling as a theme, this work remained rough and unfinished. Published posthumously in 2002 using Cahun’s working title *Confidences au miroir*, the unedited text reads in part as a meditation on freedom. It also attends to Cahun and Moore’s imprisonment. London-based filmmaker and photographer Sarah Pucill¹⁷ draws upon *Confidences au miroir* to script the voice-over narration in her installation *Garden Self-Portraits* (2019). Re-editing short segments from her feature

16. I have written on the Jewish dimensions in Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore’s work, an under-researched aspect that was incorporated into the exhibition *Facing Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*, notably in the reading of the photocollage frontispiece of *Aveux non avenus*. See Michelle Gewurtz, “Equivocally Jewish: Claude Cahun and the Narratives of Modern Art,” 2012, The Donna Sudarsky Memorial Working Papers Series, <https://www.brandeis.edu/hbi/research-projects/legacy-projects.html>; and, “A Poetics of Alterity: Explorations of Jewish Narratives in the Work of Claude Cahun,” conference presentation, Society for French Historical Studies, Colorado College, April 16–19, 2015.

17. To learn more about Sarah Pucill, see www.sarahpucill.co.uk



Figure 7. Sarah Pucill, *Garden Self-Portrait*, 2019. Installation view from *Facing Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, 2019–2020*, Ottawa Art Gallery. Photo: Chris Snow. Courtesy of the Ottawa Art Gallery.

length film *Confessions to the Mirror* (2016), Pucill created a diorama drawing upon elements from the photographs Cahun and Moore produced after they relocated to Jersey. Many of these photographs were taken in the garden of the couple's Jersey home, *La Rocquaise*. Recognizing that the couple's archive offers great potential to tell different stories, Pucill's installation cast a spotlight on the couple's anti-Nazi activism, Cahun's later writing, and these outdoor images taken prior to and following the occupation.

With *Garden Self-Portraits*, Pucill imagines collaborating with Cahun and Moore to make an experimental film. A seven-minute loop drawn from *Confessions to the Mirror* is projected onto a makeshift screen—a nod to Cahun/Moore's method of staging their backdrops—installed just above a small pool of water that evokes the trays used in a darkroom to develop film. The effect is one of doubling as the film loop is reflected in the darkened water. Surrounding the water are facsimiles of objects used in Cahun/Moore's photography from the late-1930s to the mid-1940s | **fig. 7** |. Pucill includes a beige trench coat, a floral dress, mannequins donning headscarves, wigs, plaster ovals, leopard print fabric, a small cat sculpture, and a replica of the Nazi insignia—which Cahun was gifted by a German officer whom they had befriended while in prison. Installed opposite Pucill's installation were reproductions of material from Cahun and Moore's resistance campaign. Also featured opposite Pucill's installation was a photograph taken in May 1945, after Cahun and Moore's release from prison. Here, Cahun wears a trench coat, their hair covered by a kerchief, holding the insignia

upside-down between bared teeth | **fig. 8** |. The images from the 1930s and 40s and the anti-propaganda material were presented to underscore the idea that the many tracts, montages, and objects Cahun and Moore made were not only tools of activism, but works of art.

Similarly, Zanele Muholi¹⁸ defines the work that they do as visual activism. Three photographs from Muholi's ongoing series *Somnyama Ngonyama* (Hail the Dark Lioness) collide with the work of Cahun and Moore. For Black artists like Muholi, portraiture is a way to configure new roles and ways of understanding their own lives and histories. In the series, Muholi uses their body to confront and rearticulate representations of the Black body. The artist's intent behind *Somnyama Ngonyama* is "to rewrite a Black queer and trans visual history of South Africa for the world to know of our resistance and existence at the height of hate crimes in South Africa and beyond."¹⁹

The titles of Muholi's photographs specify locations where they have encountered racism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, and sexism. Each location also has its own particular relationship to colonialism. Muholi plays with signifiers of identity and familiar tropes of both ethnographic imagery and high-fashion photography. Increasing the contrast in post-production, the dark complexion of Muholi's skin stands out in each image. In *Paphama at Cassilhaus, North Carolina* (2016) | **fig. 9** |, scouring pads in place of hair become historically loaded signifiers, referencing both the derogatory "wooly hair" slur and histories of domestic servitude and enslavement. *Thuleleni, Bijmer, Amsterdam* (2017) features Muholi costumed as Dutch folklore character *Zwarte Piet* (Black Pete), who was often shown as a minstrel and was a foil to *Sinterklaas* (St. Nicholas/Santa Claus) who punished disobedient children. Each photograph signals racialized forms of discrimination. However, by positioning themselves as something necessarily "other," the artist gains distance—and by extension, freedom—to imagine who they are or could be. Gazing directly at the camera, Muholi firmly asserts their identity on their own terms—and, like Cahun, challenges viewers' perceptions.

Intrigued by an untitled ca. 1935 Cahun/Moore photograph and the idea of creating a portrait through only the suggestion of a body, August Klintberg²⁰ pays homage to trailblazing queer artists with *Garment (for Claude)* (2019) | **fig. 10** |. In Cahun/Moore's ca. 1935 photograph, the artists create a portrait only through the corporeal trace. They present viewers with a series of objects in a composition—a sun hat, a slip dress, and a photographic portrait mirrored in dark waters below—arranged in a rocky seaside landscape. This "portrait" was enlarged to introduce a dialogue with Klintberg's work. Referencing an iconic photograph taken ca. 1928 by Marcel Moore of Claude Cahun wearing a checkered jacket, Klintberg hand wove seven metres of textile and then silkscreened a graphic pattern onto the fabric. While creating the textile, Klintberg commissioned a fashion designer to consider Moore's photograph and draft a pattern of Cahun's jacket. Klintberg then transferred the pattern by hand in ink onto thin paper, producing drawings recalling commercially produced sewing patterns. When taken as a whole,

18. To learn more about Zanele Muholi, see <https://www.yanceyrichardson.com/artists/zanele-muholi>

19. The Tate Modern presented a major survey of Zanele Muholi's work in 2020–2021. See Tate's online exhibition guide, <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/zanele-muholi/zanele-muholi>.

20. For more information on August Klintberg (formerly Mark Clintberg), see <https://cargocollective.com/markclintbergcom> and <https://www.pfoac.com/en/artists/37-august-klintberg/overview/>.



Figure 8. Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, *Untitled (with Nazi Badge between Teeth)*, 1945. Courtesy of Jersey Heritage Collections.



Figure 9. Zanele Muholi, *Phaphama at Cassilhaus, North Carolina*, 2016. © Zanele Muholi. Courtesy of the artist, Yancey Richardson, New York.



Figure 10. August Klintberg, *Garment (for Claude)*, 2019. Silkscreen on cotton-linen blend, ink on paper. Installation view from *Facing Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*, 2019–2020, Ottawa Art Gallery. Photo: Justin Wonnacott. Courtesy of the Ottawa Art Gallery, the artist, and Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain.

the handmade textile and pattern function as a conceptual piece. At once elegiac and in-keeping with the spirit of Cahun and Moore's political activism and queer aesthetic, Klintberg offers his own fragmentary portrait of an individual.

Klintberg's monumental *Garment (for Claude)* contributes to a continuum of visibility—by queer artists of queer subjects—honouring gender-queer experience. The ideas of visibility and acceptance have long been tied together for those in queer communities. Recognizing the importance of a queer visual record, Klintberg's piece pays tribute to these historical artists who challenged themselves to “exist in another way.”²¹ Cahun and Moore approached their work of self-imaging with subversive intent. A small-scale exhibition print of Cahun wearing the checked jacket and looking away from a mirror was displayed opposite Klintberg's work and alongside a companion photograph of Moore looking into the same mirror. Making connections through a magic mirror—the camera—allows for recording more expansive art histories.

Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore were previously “invisible” artists who are now considered genderqueer canon. Placing their work in conversation with art of this century highlights recurrent themes in queer and feminist projects. Visibility and the importance of being seen emerge clearly through exhibitions such as *Facing Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore* and *The Baroness Elsa Project*, both of which trace connections among the artists. Both exhibitions take up such issues as why artistic recognition eluded certain artists and why their work is only just becoming visible. As a recovery project, *Facing Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore* also attempted to restore Cahun's writing to the narrative. Each section or conversation was framed by a Cahun quote, chosen to compliment the artworks. Assembling this dialogue between historical and contemporary art across a range of media in the Cahun/Moore project served to bring to light a sense of collective characteristics, experiences, and ambitions for queer and feminist communities.

It is also worth noting that Cahun and Moore's work was produced in Europe in the early decades of the twentieth century, a period which was followed by a wave of political repression, nationalism, homophobia and xenophobia. Similarly, since “they” was named word of the year in 2019, a backlash against “woke” culture has taken hold, and a resurgence of anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric is more widespread, globally. Those who feel uncomfortable with such subject matter now are emboldened to speak out. A familiar refrain is that such content is not appropriate for children. Such an objection echoes the rhetoric of conservatives across the United States and Canada, who have complained that drag contributes to the “sexualization” or “grooming” of children. These are the stakes for all the artists involved in this exhibition. The sociopolitical context that each artist finds themselves working in often stimulates creative production that redefines practice. This exhibition argues for the continued validity—necessity, even—of making queer people visible, collectively and individually. ¶

21. Cahun, *Disavowals*, 12. “...j'existe autrement.” Cahun, *Écrits*, 191.