

JJ Levine

Queer Photographs



Miwa 2021, © JJ Levine

Press Release

JJ Levine: Queer Photographs

An exhibition questioning sexual and gender normativity

Montreal, February 17, 2022 – The McCord Museum will be hosting *JJ Levine: Queer Photographs* from February 18 to September 18. Presented by the TD Bank Group, the exhibition invites visitors to discover the work of Montreal photographer JJ Levine via a selection of portraits drawn from three different series. In staged photographs of queer subjects in intimate, domestic settings, Levine questions, and challenges viewers to question, the representation of traditional binary gender roles.

Composed of 52 large format photographs, including several that have never been exhibited, the compelling exhibition is complemented by a video illustrating the artist's creative process. Actually a retrospective of Levine's portraiture work that he began in 2006, it borrows from the studio portrait tradition to celebrate people who self-identify as queer.

The portraits on display are grounded in a radical opposition to sexual and gender normativity. This omnipresent theme introduces visitors to people in the artist's circle of friends who express a variety of gender identities, while exposing them to issues affecting the trans community in Montreal and elsewhere. JJ Levine is part of a broad sociopolitical protest against all forms of oppression related to the body. By playing with received ideas about gender, his work challenges the patriarchal gaze along with mainstream notions of domesticity and the nuclear family.

Queer: According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word 'queer' goes back to the 17th century and was originally used to describe someone who was "strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric, in appearance or character." The word was then reclaimed in the 1990s, first in English and then in French, by the LGBTQ+ community (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, plus other gender and sexual minorities like non-binary, two-spirit, intersex and asexual) as a self-affirming term for those whose sexual orientation or gender identity does not conform to societal norms.

“Photography has always played an important role at the McCord Museum, and this is particularly true in 2022. We’re very pleased to start the year by presenting the work of JJ Levine. These portraits illustrate the talent of this young Montreal photographer and express the reality of transgender people. As the city’s museum of social history, it is essential for us to present multiple perspectives on life in Montreal. Our aim is to foster reflection and, more importantly, encourage interaction among the city’s various communities to enhance mutual understanding and promote inclusion for everyone,” noted Suzanne Sauvage, President and Chief Executive Officer.

“As LGBTQ2+ communities continue to foster change all around us, we know everyone’s help is required to pursue this journey. Through the TD Ready Commitment, TD’s global Corporate Citizenship Platform, we are proud to support the McCord Museum as it helps pave the way to a more inclusive and durable future.” Sylvie Demers, Chair, Québec Market, TD Bank Group.





Felix 2015, © JJ Levine



Julie Nursing Casper, 2020, © JJ Levine



Alone Time 11, 2015, © JJ Levine

Three portrait series

In three series of photographs, JJ Levine, a trans man himself, portrays his friends in his queer community as members of an extended chosen family.

The series *Queer Portraits*, started in 2006, is composed of portraits of individuals, couples and children chosen by the artist from among his queer friends. Veritable mises en scène of daily life, these photographs, usually taken in the models' homes, aim to define the personal identity of the subjects. The artist considers this ongoing series a "life project."

The second series, *Alone Time*, depicts heterosexual couples sharing intimate moments, primarily in domestic settings. However, each couple is in fact composed of only one model playing both the male and female characters. To construct these portraits, the artist layers several different negatives together. This ongoing project began in 2007.

Finally, at first glance, *Switch* appears to be a series of portraits of heterosexual couples dressed up for a special occasion, like a prom. However, upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that each diptych is composed of two people rather than four. Each model is dressed as a man in one photo and as a woman in the adjacent one. This project was completed in 2009.

Artist biography

JJ Levine is an images-based artist living and working in Tiohtià:ke/Montreal known for his compelling body of work in portraiture. He holds a Master's of Fine Arts in Photography from Concordia University. Currently represented by Montreal gallery ELLEPHANT, JJ Levine has had his work exhibited in museums, galleries and art festivals in Canada, the United States, Mexico, and numerous countries across Europe. His artwork and writing have been published in academic journals, including *Photography and Culture* (United Kingdom), as well as in art magazines and newspapers internationally, such as *CV Photo* (Canada), *Esse* (Canada), *Slate* (United States) and *The Observer* (United Kingdom and United States). In 2015, Levine self-published two artist books: *Queer Portraits: 2006-2015* and *Switch*. In 2019, he was a finalist for the Prix Découverte Louis Roederer at the Rencontres d'Arles photography festival in France.

Exhibition-related activities

Several free cultural activities are being organized for visitors and photography fans, both in person and online. Other activities will be announced in the coming weeks on the Museum's [Website](#).

Round table: *Supporting a loved one's coming out* Thursday, March 10, 5:30 - 6:30 pm **online**



Fondation Émergence and the Museum invite the public to a virtual panel following the première of two short films, *Anik et Carole* and *Dalal et Mounir*, to address the topic of supporting friends and family during the coming out process.

Participants:

- Anna Lupien, director
- Bill Ryan, professor at McGill University, therapist and international expert in sexual and gender diversity
- the four individuals featured in the short films

Free activity, in French.

McCord Discoveries: *Trancestors : Challenging the gender binary in the 19th century* Friday, April 8, 12 pm **online**

Although there is a lot of talk today about gender fluidity and identity performance, this talk by Hélène Samson, Curator, Photography, looks into the past to spotlight cases of gender change documented in 19th-century photographs.

Free activity, in French.

Discussion with artist JJ Levine Wednesday, April 27 **at the Museum**

Let's Talk! Saturdays April 24, May 22 and August 28, 1 pm to 2 pm **at the Museum**



Discussions on the themes addressed in the work of JJ Levine.

In collaboration with Les têtes bien faites and GRIS Montréal.

Free activity, in French.



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Credits

An exhibition organized by the McCord Museum.

Artist: **JJ Levine**

Curatorship: **Hélène Samson, Curator, Photography, McCord Museum**

Project manager: **Caroline Truchon, McCord Museum**

Exhibition design: **Principal**

Museum hours and fees

Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, 10 am to 6 pm | Wednesdays, 10 am to 9 pm
Saturdays and Sundays, 10 am to 5 pm

Adults: \$19 | Seniors: \$17 | Students (ages 18-30): \$14 | 17 and under: free

Indigenous people: free

Wednesday evenings: \$9.50 for *JJ Levine: Queer Photographs* and *Parachute: Subversive Fashion of the 80s*.

First Sunday of the month: free for Quebec residents

The McCord Museum sincerely thanks BMO Financial Group for free admission on Wednesday evenings, the Fondation J. A. DeSève for free admission for children 12 and under, and the Rossy Foundation for free admission for teens ages 13 to 17 for the next year.

Covid-19: new measures for a safe visit

The Museum follows strict hygiene measures to ensure a safe and pleasant visitor experience. To visit the Museum, people must first reserve a spot by purchasing a ticket online, even when these tickets are free of charge. A vaccination passport is not currently required to visit the Museum's exhibitions. However, it must be presented, along with photo ID, by those ages 13 and up who wish to take part in cultural activities held in the Theatre. For more information about the measures in effect, see the [Museum's Website](#).

McCord Museum: museum of photography

The McCord Museum's photography collection encompasses over 2.15 million photographs that primarily document the social history of Montreal, but also that of Quebec and Canada. Ranging from a series of daguerreotypes created in the 1840s-1850s to contemporary digital images, the collection illustrates the development of the art of photography along with the great transformations that have marked the city over the last two centuries. The Notman Photographic Archives constitute the core of the collection with some 450,000 photographs from the Montreal studio founded by William Notman (1826-1891) in 1856 and run by his sons until 1935 under the name Wm. Notman & Son. In the fall of 2019, the Notman archives were listed in the prestigious Canada Memory of the World Register of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO.

About the McCord Museum

The McCord Museum celebrates life in Montreal, its people and communities, past and present. Reaching beyond the city to the wider world, the Museum creates and presents engaging exhibitions, educational programming and cultural activities with a critical and inclusive take on social history. Its collections of Archives, Documentary Art, Dress, Fashion and Textiles, Indigenous Cultures, Material Culture and Photography comprise 200,000 objects and works of art, 2.15 million photographs, 3,500 rare books and 340 linear metres of textual archives. Founded on October 13, 1921, the Museum is celebrating its 100th anniversary with special programming until fall 2022. McCord Museum: Our People, Our Stories.

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[Click here to download high-resolution images](#)

Source: McCord Museum

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