



May You of a Better Future

17 February – 12 March 2022

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Holly Buckle
Sunil Gupta
Emil Lombardo
Joseph Wilson

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PV 17 February, 18:00 – 21:00

As part of LGBTQIA+ History Month, *May You of a Better Future* brings together the work of four artists in an exhibition exploring themes relating to Section 28 and its legacies through photography, film, and installation.

Introduced by the Thatcher government, Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 came into force on 24 May 1988 and was eventually repealed in Scotland in 2000 and in England and Wales in 2003. It provided that:

A local authority shall not -

- (a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality;*
- (b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.*

Purposefully ambiguous, critics argued that the formulation of the clause involved '*logical impossibility*' and was so flawed that '*in reality there is little to fear from Section 28 but fear itself*', that its most potent effect was a symbol of the prejudice of the UK Parliament. This however underestimated the impact it would have on local authorities across the country, with councils forced to close LGBTQIA+ support groups, libraries removing gay and lesbian themed literature from their collections and public venues avoiding LGBTQIA+ related programming. Its most insidious and perhaps immeasurable impact occurred however in the classroom. Although it was suggested that nothing in the clause was intended to stop teachers from discussing homosexuality with pupils objectively, it legitimised homophobia and prompted self-censorship in state education.

Whilst Section 28 is an example of a law too vague to be enforced on a widespread basis, the inherent danger was always its scope for non-legal impact. The product of ignorance, fear and hate, the legislation symbolised not only the prejudice of the UK Parliament but more widely a system of moral prejudice codified in law, deeply embedded within our society.

In her essay on paranoid and reparative reading, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, writes that paranoia is *anticipatory*, *reflexive* and *mimetic*, and places its faith in *exposure*. To read from a reparative position, she argues, is to recognise in paranoia its anticipatory nature and its aversion to surprise and surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination to foresee (however unthinkable) all possible eventualities. For the generations who lived through the beginnings of a fragmented process of decriminalisation in the UK, the shift in societal attitudes towards homosexuality in response to HIV/AIDS, and a sharp deterioration in LGBTQIA+ civil liberties under Section 28, perhaps a paranoid position is inevitable. Sedgwick notes that *'it is sometimes the most paranoid-tending people who are able to, and need to, develop and disseminate the richest reparative practices'*.

May You of a Better Future brings together a group of artists who embrace reparative practices. Holly Buckle's work creates a safe space for us to piece together LGBTQIA+ history, to reflect upon it, to lay with it, to open up a conversation and educate ourselves in relation to it. Sunil Gupta's series *'Pretended' Family Relationships** focuses on the gay and lesbian communities' vigorous response to Section 28 at the time it came into force, each photograph a document of love and a reminder of the power in protest. Emil Lombardo's work, concerned with body politics and gender, representation and visibility of dissident identities, counters the legacy of the legislation in our collective unconscious. Whilst Joseph Wilson's film reimagines the lives of queer people in the late 80s and 90s had we instead been banished from the UK under Section 28, the work's title *Il-Widna* referencing sound mirrors developed between the World Wars, significant in the film as they amplify our collective queer voice.

Section 28 was effective as an alienating and oppressive form of censorship in creating a culture of silence around sexuality and gender identity in public institutions and in state education. Yet it somehow slipped from the public consciousness upon its repeal. Its legacy lives on and its enduring impact is felt by the generation in state education whilst it remained in force and by subsequent generations, unaware of its existence.

Sedgwick concludes her essay by suggesting that *"what we can best learn from reparative practices, are, perhaps, the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture - even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them."*

May You of a Better Future is a reflection of this, serving as a point of departure for discussion and forming part of a wider project of education and repair.

**work represented by Hales (London/New York), Stephen Bulger Gallery (Toronto) and Vadehra Art Gallery (New Delhi).*

Image: *Il-Widna* (2020)
courtesy of Ro Murphy and Joseph Wilson. © Ro Murphy. All rights reserved.

Holly Buckle

Holly Buckle (b. 1992 Reading, UK) is a London-based artist and activist whose practice is rooted in research from Queer pasts, centering around queer bodies, for action today, towards queer futures, with an emphasis on collaborative group work often manifesting as a multi-sensory installation using visual, participatory, performative, haptic, olfactory, and audio elements. They have a BA in Photography from Arts University Bournemouth (2013) and an MFA in Fine Art Media from the Slade School of Fine Art (2021). Recent exhibitions include, *GLF at 50 The Art of Protest*, Platform Gallery, London, *Intimacy Spills*, Barbican Arts Trust, London and *Act Up London (Fight Back Fight Aids)* at Dalston Superstore, London. In 2021 they were selected for the 2021/22 Adrian Carruthers Award.

Sunil Gupta

Sunil Gupta (b. 1953 New Delhi, India) has been involved with independent photography as critical practice in a career spanning more than four decades. He has an MA in Photography from the Royal College of Art (1983) and a PHD from the University of Westminster (2018) and his diasporic experience of multiple cultures informs a practice dedicated to themes of race, migration and queer identity. His work is held in many public collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, NY, USA; Tate Britain, UK; Museum of London, UK; Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA, USA; Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Japan; the Royal Ontario Museum, Canada; George Eastman Museum, NY, USA; Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi, India; Arts Council, UK; Government Art Collection, London, UK; and Harvard University, MA, USA. He has also published and edited a number of books including *London 1982* (2022), *Lovers: Ten Years On* (2020), *Christopher Street* (2018); *Delhi: Communities of Belonging* (2016); *Queer* (2011); *Ecstatic Antibodies* (1990); and *An Economy of Signs* (1990), among others. In 2020, he was included in *Masculinities: Liberation through Photography* – an expansive exhibition at the Barbican, London, UK (2020). He is also the subject of a major touring retrospective, *From Here to Eternity* (2020-2022) – a collaboration between The Photographers' Gallery, London, UK; and the Ryerson Image Centre, Toronto, Canada.

Emil Lombardo

Emil Lombardo (b. 1981 Buenos Aires, Argentina) is a London-based photographer. He has an MSc in Computer Graphics from Université Pierre et Marie Curie (2010) and MA in photography from the Royal College of Art (2021). His work embodies both documentary and activist notions, using the camera as a tool for promoting equality and positive change. Recent exhibitions include *An Unending Sunday Morning* at Safehouse 1, London as part of Peckham 24, *London Grads Now* at Saatchi Gallery, London, *PHOTO IS:RAEL 2021* and *Tomorrow 2021* at White Cube, London. In 2021 he was selected for *Carte Blanche*, an installation of his work at Gard du Nord, Paris as part of Paris Photo and was also selected as a winner at the Budapest Foto Awards. More recently, his work was shortlisted for the 4th volume of *Portrait of Britain*.

Joseph Wilson

Joseph Wilson (b. 1988 Aldershot, UK) is a queer drag performer, artist and moving image creator and has been working with and documenting the eclectic East London queer scene for the past six years. He graduated from University of the Arts London with a BA in Fine Arts (Print and Time-based media) (2015) and has since gone on to write and direct a series of films amplifying marginalised voices in the LGBTQIA+ community. His work has been shown at *BFI Flare: London LGBT Film Festival*, *The East End Film Festival*, global arts video channel *NOWNESS*, and the *Fringe! Queer Film & Art Festival*. In 2020 he was selected as one of *The FLAMIN Fellowship* artists and most recently won the *CIRCA x Dazed Class of 2021*.