

THINGS TO DO > LIFESTYLE

# Novato artist elevates queerness in his Homosocial artworks

By **VICKI LARSON** | vlarson@marinij.com | Marin Independent Journal

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Brian Van Camerik had been collecting vintage photos by unknown photographers that he'd find at garage sales and in antique shops for a while when he realized the images that most compelled him were of same-gendered couples being intimate with each other — sitting close, holding hands, hugging, draping an arm over a shoulder.

The Novato native saw himself in them.

“When I started finding little snippets of two men, two women or people in between being affectionate toward each other, I thought, ‘Oh, this is so sweet,’ and I don’t see this in collections. I don’t see this in galleries. And I felt like there was a real visual vacuum of images like that that resonated with me,” says Van Camerik, who began his career photographing museum collections.



That's when he started to seek out those photos in earnest and turn them into artworks for a project he calls Homosocial, which he started in 2022. Several of his pieces are included in "Pride Not Prejudice," an exhibit of various art forms, including photography, reliquaries and film by 28 LGBTQIA+ California artists at the Sausalito Center for the Arts to mark Pride month. The exhibit runs through July 4.

Although his Homosocial project celebrates queer culture, it doesn't necessarily mean homosexuality per se, he says. Instead, homosocial is defined as a closeness, intimacy, or tenderness between two people of the same gender — the kind of intimacy you see between women in "Thelma and Louise" or between men in "Fight Club." And he's particularly interested in images that show queer existence before that imagery was readily visible in popular media, in the years before the 1950s and 1960s. It's proof, he says, that queer people have always existed, even if they weren't acknowledged.

### Seeking specialness

"I saw what past generations and current generations saw was valuable and special. I want to invest this kind of specialness in this photography and by extension, queer people," he says. "The queer sensibilities in these images is something of note and should be given attention to."

Van Camerik uses some of the images he's collected to create reliquaries, receptacles for sacred items, typically religious. He sees them as a way to offer the people in the images the reverential attention he believes they deserve.

He also also combines his images with elaborate papers and text to capture the aesthetic of microprocessing circuit boards, what he calls his "processing" pieces, that are reminiscent of scrapbooking.

Van Camerik was slow to create the "processing" pieces but he's quick to explain why — internalized misogyny.

He didn't realize that until he joined his mother and his aunt in making boxes for his cousin's wedding rehearsal dinner and his mother brought out her cricut, a machine that's used for scrapbooking, long considered a female art form. "The internal thought was, oh that's what my mom and other women use. I'm not allowed to use that. This is something gendered and not part of my sphere," he says, even though he identifies as non-binary.

“Making these works has been so cathartic for me. It was really me coming into my own,” says Van Camerik.

Despite growing up in Marin in the 1990s, Van Camerik says he didn’t feel free to be who he was. He was homeschooled and attended programs for homeschooled children that he found socially conservative and overwhelmingly devout. It wasn’t until he attended the Marin School of the Arts that he finally felt at home.

### **Finding his ‘tribe’**

“I found my ‘tribe’ by going to the Marin School of the Arts and finding other kids who didn’t care that I was queer or gay. In fact, they enjoyed it,” he says. “The intense way I had to hide when I was younger really fueled the way I came out in an artistic sense with Homosocial. With my art I’m kind of able to reclaim my youth in that I feel more comfortable being who I am.”

The “Pride Not Prejudice” exhibit is the first major of his Homosocial work.

Beyond making art he hopes others find aesthetically pleasing, he’d like Homosocial to “elevate and educate and make something special out of queerness that has existed for decades.”

The educational aspect and thought-provoking nature of his work was important in including Homosocial in the exhibit, according to Louis Briones, co-executive director for the Sausalito Center for the Arts.

Van Camerik also hopes other queer people see themselves in his work and feel welcome to discuss their sexuality or gender openly, and that other queer artists add to Homosocial and use it to create their own works of art that celebrates queerness.

“I’d love to introduce to a very dominant straight community in Marin that homosociality and by extension queerness has a permanence that extends beyond just the modern day, but throughout generations, throughout decades past that we need to realize, acknowledge and accept,” he says. “Not only are we here, but we have been here. We have been hidden and hurt and destroyed and ostracized, but we will always been here.”

## **IF YOU GO**

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**What:** “Pride Not Prejudice”

**Admission:** Free, donations suggested

**Information:** [destinationsausalito.com/event/pride-not-prejudice](https://destinationsausalito.com/event/pride-not-prejudice)

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## Vicki Larson | Lifestyles Editor

Vicki Larson is an author and has been an award-winning lifestyles editor, writer and columnist at the IJ since 2004. She has worked as an editor in Santa Rosa, Petaluma, Walnut Creek, San Francisco, Napa and Miami.

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