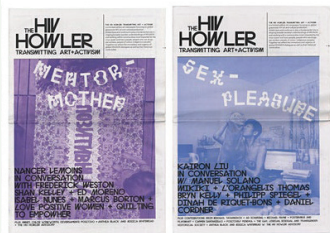


The Howler's Fifth Edition Gets Real with Glammy Rose Spencer and Jacob Boehme

by Sonya Thorne



In Conversation: Glammy Rose Spencer + Jacob Boehme Wednesday, February 10, 2021

Presented by *The HIV Howler* editors Anthea Black and Jessica Whitbread, with Love Positive Women.

Featured *HIV Howler* Issue 5 artists Glammy Rose Spencer and Jacob Boehme come together again for a live conversation on HIV, honouring poz women, and channeling intergenerational ancestry through art and dance. Glammy Rose Spencer is an Oakland-based artist and educator. Jacob Boehme is a Melbourne-based artist of the Narangga and Kurna Nations, South Australia.

In Conversation: Glammy Rose Spencer + Jacob Boehme was an absolutely delightful departure from the stream of endless video meetings set up against boring white backdrops or the strange green screen images of nature we've grown accustomed to in the last year. The event began with a brief introduction to the *HIV Howler*, a limited edition newspaper produced and edited by CCA faculty member and printmaker Anthea Black and social practice artist Jessica Whitbread. The *HIV Howler* centers and uplifts poz (HIV+) voices through cultural production, art, poetry, and activism.

Visual AIDS member Glammy Rose Spencer is an Oakland-based artist, art and sexual health educator, and HIV+ transgender woman. Her work includes murals, printmaking, and bedazzling everything around her. Additionally, she is active in conversations around HIV history, stigma, and justice. Jacob Boehme is an HIV+ artist of the Narangga and Kurna Nations of South Australia. He creates multidisciplinary theater and choreography for the screen, stage, and public festivals, including the critically acclaimed solo work *Blood on the Dance Floor*. As artistic director of the Wild Dog Project, he is reconnecting and tracing dingo songlines between South Australia, Northern Territory, and Queensland. Glammy Rose Spencer and Jacob Boehme began their discussion in *The Howler's* last publication, allowing them to jump right into their conversation on the subject of ancestral practices and their lived experiences as HIV+ artists.

Glammy gave a teaser of a new body of work, explaining that she is developing a villainous wrestler alter ego named Toxic Tammy for herself. I found Glammy's ability to externalize her perceived flaws and elements of self-directed negativity in this capacity exciting. While she is undecided on Toxic Tammy's medium, I can imagine this character developing an influential presence within the larger conversation around HIV+ folks and self-care, which seems prevalent in Glammy's practice. In the last year her practice has revolved around a love for herself and other trans and poz women. She noted that the fantastic makeup look she wore for the call—large glittery red and pink hearts around her eyes with a set of astoundingly long lashes—was inspired by her love of poz and trans poz women.

Jacob Boehme is working on multiple projects at the moment. A follow-up to his successful project *Blood on the Dance Floor* (2016), *Mother's Blood* (forthcoming 2022) tracks the urban lives of three generations of Aboriginal women from one family. Framed as a contemporary drama, this second part of a trilogy exploring HIV in Aboriginal communities explores the contentious history of national identity in Australia. He is also continuing to work on *Wild Dog*

(forthcoming 2021), a film tracing songlines and ceremonies in the Kurna, Narungga, and Ngadjuri communities of South Australia. Jacob highlighted HIV statistics in Australia, noting that Indigenous women are the highest risk group. Despite this fact, there has been an utterly underwhelming response from HIV+ awareness and outreach organizations. He explained that he hopes to use the

lessons he has learned as an Indigenous, queer, and HIV+ person to continue amplifying women's voices in his work.

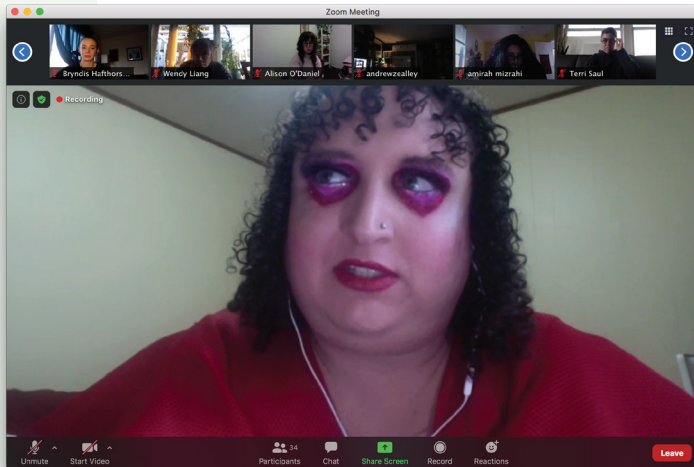
Glammy followed up by noting that 1 in 5 trans women are living with HIV, which is why highlighting HIV statistics about her community of trans women is integral to her practice and life. Both artists emphasized that we know why trans and Indigenous women have a higher risk of contracting HIV, and why receiving care is much more difficult for them. Transgender women face stigma, discrimination, social rejection, and exclusion often preventing them from accessing health care. Even when they can access care, many trans women face ignorance and insensitivity from health care providers to issues in the trans community. Both Glammy and Jacob are looking to effect change within their communities.

Glammy and Jacob acknowledged the struggle of the last 12 months under the COVID-19 pandemic, remarking that this amplified fear of getting sick and being infectious or contagious has been especially triggering for poz folks. Jacob further explained the difficulty of his position as both a poz and Indigenous person, noting that he has been battling with himself about receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. While there is currently no vaccine at all in Australia, Indigenous folks are listed in Stage 1

along with the elderly and front-line workers. Given the long history of medical abuse and racism towards Australian Indigenous communities, many Indigenous folks are skeptical about taking the vaccine when it arrives.

While distrustful of the medical establishment and their motives, Jacob also noted that he takes medication every day and must trust in a doctor's expertise to remain healthy. Glammy also acknowledged the rampant abuse and mistreatment of trans and poz women by the medical establishment even as she hopes to get the vaccine.

The conversation then shifted towards their relationships with their ancestors. Glammy briefly explained that she takes her medication each day in front of a series of home altars dedicated to poz trans women who came before her, a daily ritual practice of honoring her ancestors. She told us about walking with a dog named after one of her friends who had passed away, remarking that it was incredibly healing to spend time in nature thinking about her relationship with that person. Jacob also told a story of returning to his father's ancestral land and placing his feet in the water, wetting his hands and forehead to let his ancestors know he was back. He sensed 1000 generations of his ancestors behind him at that moment and later remarked



to his husband that they might have to relocate to this land. The physicality and ritual nature of the examples of ancestral practice that both artists presented is particularly compelling. So much of both Glammy and Jacob's practice seems rooted in exploring embodiment, in looking to dress or act or move a specific way to honor those who came before them.

Finally, the conversation turned towards representations of HIV in film and television. Jacob wanted to discuss the show *It's A Sin*, which has not yet aired in the US. The show is set in the '80s club scene in London, showing AIDS running rampant in the gay community at the time. Both artists explained their frustration with this type of media and how it frames HIV only in the context of death and trauma. Glammy and Jacob are both great examples of the new conversation around HIV and poz folks; they are both lovely people, intelligent and driven, and focused on living and aging with HIV. The representation of HIV in media does not encompass or even relate to their experiences as people living and thriving with HIV. By honoring and remembering those who have passed they seek to subvert the death and trauma narratives of the '80s.

Over the last 12 months, I've sat through countless Zoom meetings, events, workshops, and talks. *In Conversation: Glammy Rose Spencer + Jacob Boehme* was a stand out bubbly and exciting event. Both artists exuded a sort of pleasantly awkward aura, acknowledging the high strangeness of being an artist with an embodied making practice in a moment of physical distance. As a maker in my own right, I felt strangely at home in this virtual gathering. The conversation's authentic atmosphere overcame the complications that so many artist talks face, inviting the viewers to engage in a wonderfully friendly and organic manner.

Sonya Thorne is an interdisciplinary artist and 2nd year MFA candidate exploring the intersection of queer bodies, abjection, and materiality.



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