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This presentation discusses an ongoing practice-led thesis that uses exhibition-making to surface and reframe Queer histories in Aotearoa New Zealand. Through the design of a low-cost, travelling exhibition, the project examines how curatorial practice can serve as a critical intervention into archival silences and structural absences. Despite increasing institutional commitments to diversity and inclusion, many Queer histories remain fragmented, contested, or invisible within public museum collections. This research asks: how might exhibition design help visitors engage with these stories in ways that are public, affective, and open-ended?

Drawing on contemporary and historical taonga held in public collections across the whenua, the project foregrounds archival gaps not as deficits to be filled, but as sites of inquiry. Many taonga in museum collections are not explicitly Queer, and few were collected with Rainbow Communities in mind, yet they can still be activated through community knowledge, visitor interpretation, and critical design. This design-led embraces contradiction, plurality, and affect, acknowledging that Queer histories resist linearity or closure.

The project contributes to a broader Queer and decolonial museological shift: one that challenges traditional institutional authority embraces participatory, visitor-centred approaches. Informed by critical scholarship, the project is grounded in creative practice, consultation, and iterative prototyping.

This presentation outlines the project's research questions, evolving methodology, and current state of development. It also reflects on the ethical and emotional complexities of working with institutional collections as a Queer researcher – seeking to honour community memory without appropriation or over-claim. The resulting exhibition will offer not answers, but provocation.

**Keywords**

Queer history, Aotearoa New Zealand, Practice-led research, Exhibition design, Museum collections