



The Helix Queer Performance Network is a collaboration between [La MaMa Experimental Theater Club](#), [BAX/Brooklyn Arts Exchange](#) and the [Hemispheric Institute of Performance & Politics](#), seeking to nurture emerging queer performers, empower queer communities, and celebrate the legacy and lineage of queer performance in New York City.
[LA FIN: Mourning the Edgy Women Festival](#)

Edgy Redux

1994-2016

Indisciplinées. Insoumises.
Pratiques artistiques féministes



Fin

Julia Dyck, with T.L. Cowan

June 8, 2016

After over two decades of exploring feminisms through thought-provoking and experimental artistic events, Montreal's Edgy Women Festival has come to an end, of sorts. Founded by Miriam Ginestier in 1994 and produced by Studio 303 as a multidisciplinary and multi-lingual platform for feminist and queer creative experiments, "Edgy" (as its beloveds call it) has featured hundreds of artists and dozens of presentation formats including cabaret, screenings, exhibits, workshops, and zine publications.

Edgy's stages have been a destination and highlight for local and international artists working with feminist and queer aesthetics and themes. Partially due to cuts to arts events and no sustaining funding, and partially due to Miriam's attention shifting elsewhere, 2016 will be Edgy's last year of programming and these final events will give artists and audiences a chance to mourn the end of Edgy together. The 2016 program is focused on saying goodbye and paying respects — a process which involved both mourning and preserving memories through the theme of LA FIN/THE END. Montreal-based events included a funeral-themed video retrospective, "Edgy Redux," hosted by Miriam Ginestier for Montreal's Nuit Blanche (February 27); La Fin/The End Cabaret (March 5), where the audience was hosted through the five stages of grief by Emcees and Edgy muses, Dayna McLeod and Nathalie Claude; an Oral History project through which performers recalled stories and sentiments (conducted by Julia Dyck); and a Wikipedia Edit-a-thon for the archival or "digital interment" of Edgy. The final Edgy event takes place this week in New York City, when the Performance Mix Festival hosts a special NYC-meets-Montreal cabaret-style show [on Wednesday, June 8th](#).



Although Edgy will take a final bow this week at the Abrons Arts Center in NYC, we can be assured that at least some of its life-force will live on in the Edgy Oral History Interviews and in the online media archive now housed on the Edgy Blog (<https://edgywomenblog.com/>). These interviews and media archive let us see that for almost a quarter of a century Edgy stages were a place for experimentation, knowledge production, and personal and professional growth as artists launched careers and friendships in the Edgy line-up. Theatre artist [Nathalie Claude](#) and performance and video artist, [Lamathilde](#) spoke of the great impact their first performances had on their career, and also the strong community that has stemmed from these events.

The festival has been known for its unpredictability, where audiences knew they might be dealing with some challenging content. Pieces touched on themes including death, abortion, assault, murder, and sex work. Venues ranged from classic theatre and cabaret stages, to public ice rinks, sidewalks, and a boxing club. It is this latter venue where the festival celebrated its 20th year under the theme of ART / SPORT / GENRE, which featured feminist hockey, boxing, and bodybuilding.



The Edgy Women Festival has also been subject to the changing social and political climate in Canada and Quebec, and this has been reflected in the performances, as well as in the size and scope of the festival, which varied due to inconsistencies in government support. Edgy persevered through the bleak years of the Stephen Harper Conservative government; after losing heritage funding in 2013, the festival was shortened from three weeks to three events, and it was renamed Edgy Redux with artistic direction by Andrea Rideout. The kind of performers and type of work being exhibited in the festival also needed to adjust to reflect nuanced feminist politics, and work to include the voices of feminists that may not feel initially hailed or welcomed by the anticipated exclusivity of the “Edgy Women” title. As multi-media artist Dayna McLeod notes in her [Oral History Interview](#):

Feminist performance art at its root is using the body. I think the biggest change and challenge to performers and festivals is having the audience, performers, curators, etc. realize that a feminist performer’s body isn’t always necessarily a cis-gendered female body, and that is very exciting to see. I would say that’s been one of the biggest changes, as well as opening the arms of intersectionality.

Due to the cultural shifts initiated and sustained by Edgy and other feminist and queer performance festivals in Canada and elsewhere, the kind of work once showcased at the Edgy Women is now be accepted and even celebrated in a variety of performance festivals, as well as in nightclub settings. That said, as Edgy closes its curtain once and for all, we are reminded of the imperative community-building, knowledge-creation, and scene-transforming political, social, aesthetic and erotic functions served by this festival and other spaces that have cultivated feminist and queer performance over long periods of time. Under the moniker [mimproductions](#), Miriam also initiated, produced, curated and often created work for two other long-running queer/dyke/lesbian events: Meow Mix, a Cabaret “for bent girls and their buddies” (1997-2012) and Le Boudoir (1994-2007), an annual dyke/lesbian/queer theatrical extravaganza, which have also both ended in recent years. Even though we mourn these events and all they have meant to us, Miriam [reminds us](#):

Feminism isn’t dead. There are still really strong arguments for exclusive spaces and highlighting women in art. I think feminism is a super fun lens to look at art through.... Edgy was really the way I explored the contradictions and complexities and strengths and weaknesses of the feminist movement as it evolved over the years.

While Edgy may be dead, the feminist ideas, conversations, and communities generated over the 23 years of the Edgy Women Festival live on. What and who will emerge to fill these roles in Montreal is yet to be revealed. Oral History Interview participants unanimously agreed that there is still a real need for experimental feminist performance, and they will continue to make this kind of work.

Miriam and Studio 303 will move on to focus on new projects and explore other ways to support performers through their programming. Edgy is dead. Long live Edgy!

Edgy NYC+MTL, Curator, Miriam Ginestier, [Performance Mix Festival](#), Wednesday June 8th, 7pm, Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand Street, New York, NY.

Above photos: Emcees Nathalie Claude and Dayna McLeod grieving through anger at the Cabaret, Flyer for the 2007 edition of the festival.