

Archie Barry  
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 Western Front  
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Canada

# Try Keeping an Open Channel

Western Front is pleased to present *Try Keeping an Open Channel*, a solo exhibition by Australian artist Archie Barry. Featuring three new video works and an artist's book, the exhibition reflects on themes of death, disembodiment, and transness to consider modes of perception and connection that exceed rationalism.

The “channel” of the title conjures multiple forms: a video signal, a waterway, a dream, or an altered state of consciousness. Each video similarly serves as a portal to a minor history. *Second Line Work* revisits Barry's childhood within The School of Practical Philosophy; *Dream for Reed* reflects on the inner life of pioneering trans philanthropist Reed Erickson through his archives of writings, self-portraits, and poetry; and *Water Builds Bridges* draws on Barry's own memories of loss and near-death experience.

Across the works, Barry engages technologies that evoke states of being out-of-body or out-of-time—green screen compositing, psychotropic substances, astral projection, and Erickson's fictional ASCID (Altered State of Consciousness Induction Device) imagined as a rotary telephone in a garden—to shape trans visions that resist the framework of visibility. By prioritizing sensing over explaining, Barry inquires into the limits and possibilities of representation and corporeality, giving new expression to the vibrancy, uneasiness, and complexity of trans life and loss.

The videos in *Try Keeping an Open Channel* play on loop with a total duration of 62 minutes. The works contain mature content including descriptions of traumatic events, death, mental health, and sex acts.

## ABOUT THE WORKS

### *Second Line Work*

*Second Line Work* (2025) is set in Mahratta, an Art Deco mansion in Sydney's northern suburbs, owned and operated by the local chapter of the global spiritual organization, The School of Practical Philosophy, in which the artist was raised. Over its ninety-five-year history, the school has blended teachings from Gurdjieff, Ouspensky, and Swami Shantananda Saraswati with strong Christian moralities. Mahratta has historically been a site of both spiritual awakening and coercion, where Barry was initiated into transcendental meditation, performed dance routines as a child, and later participation in residential retreats involving cleaning, cooking, and meditation.

Today, Mahratta hosts weekly classes, community events, meditation initiation ceremonies, residential retreats, and is occasionally used as a film set. Central to The School of Practical Philosophy's teachings is "second line work": a meticulous cleaning practice framed as service to the community and a means of connecting with the divine, historically assigned with both practical and punitive intentions.

In this work, Barry's body is digitally split into two headless halves performing second line work within Mahratta, while architectural elements, sculptures, and paintings are collaged to form surrogate heads. *Second Line Work* interrogates how ideologies of transcendence, mediated through these cultural artifacts, can be recontextualized to expose the complex dynamics of service, obedience, and power embedded within institutional and spiritual structures.

### *Dream for Reed*

Reed Erickson, an American transgender man and philanthropist, played a pivotal role in shaping transgender healthcare between the 1960s and 1980s, funding early medical research and founding the Erickson Education Foundation (EEF). The EEF produced newsletters connecting trans people across the United States to crucial support services. Beyond organizing, Erickson engaged deeply with New Age spiritual practices—meditation, telepathy, and animal communication—reflected in his funding programs, writings, and the EEF archives.

Many of his creative experiments were produced under ketamine, viscerally expressing spiritual ecstasy, paranoia, and encounters with otherworldly beings. *Dream for Reed* explores Erickson's visionary mental technologies for imagining new worlds. References to an "Altered State of Consciousness Induction Device," never realized, are interpreted here as a rotary telephone, staging a surreal conversation with wild dolphins and acting as a portal into Erickson's inner life.

The voiceover, delivered through burping, evokes both the overwhelming intensity of Erickson's archive and the bodily effects of ketamine. Collaged phrases from Erickson's notes and letters create a vibrant, disorienting world, while scenes of singing to and drawing over his self-portraits offer an uneasy reading of this important and complex figure of trans history.

## *Water Builds Bridges*

Comprising a video and an artist's book, *Water Builds Bridges* recounts Barry's experiences of proximity to death and near-death encounters between 2020 and 2023. Written over three years, the book features a diaristic text that shifts between present and past tense, blending factual, poetic, and intimate writing styles that mirrors Barry's changing mental states during this period. The writing addresses deeply sensitive moments, including a drowning accident, two miscarriages, the suicide of a friend, and episodes of mental health rupture. Interspersed within these narratives are insects and human friends, appearing at critical moments of connection, with recurring thematic currents of youth, death, and water binding the stories together.

The accompanying video uses iPhone footage Barry captured over five years in spontaneous locations: visiting a seal colony, lying in a hospital bed, observing the moon reflected on a river through a telescope while talking with friends, and accidental footage captured by a baby Barry helped raise in their queer, non-biological family. The montage stitches together extraordinary and everyday experiences, with select passages from the book scrolling up from the ocean's horizon. Its deliberate pacing and quiet atmosphere offer space to breathe within trauma, creating a meditative engagement with life, mortality, and fragile connection.

## Biography

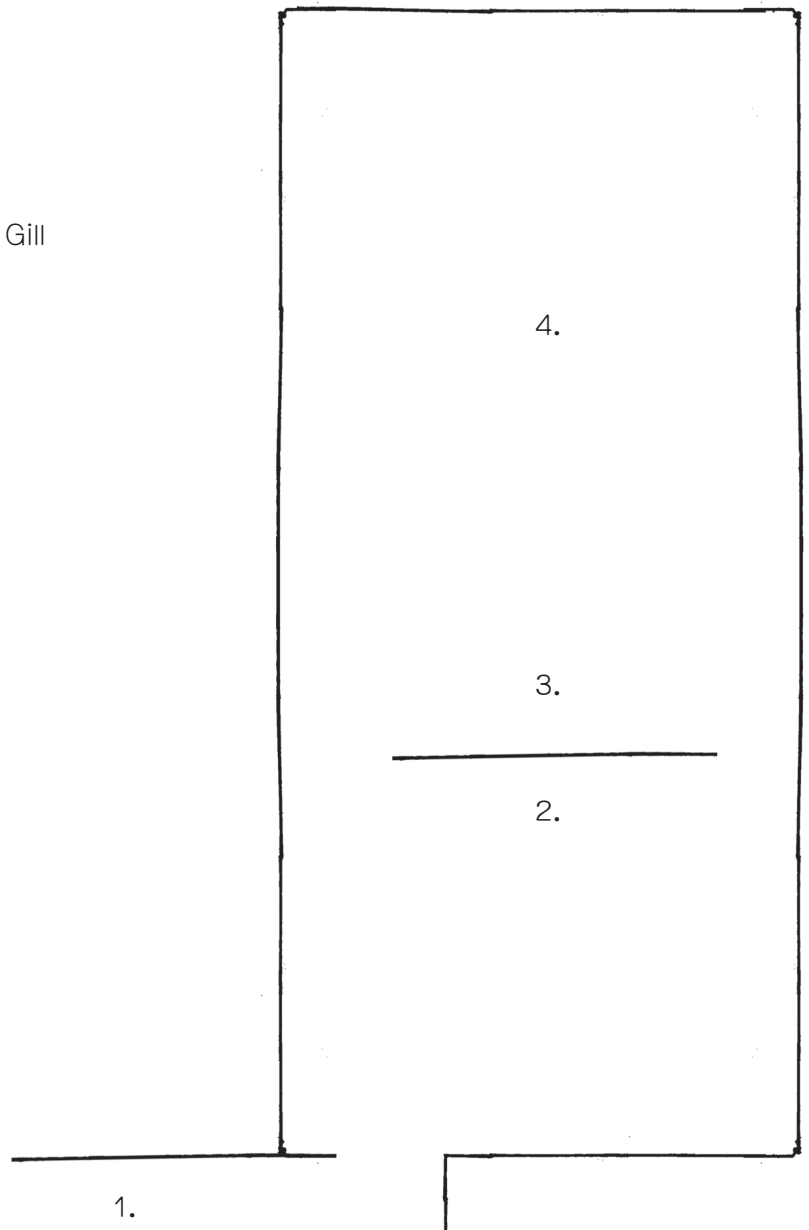
Archie Barry is a visual artist based in Melbourne, Australia, who works primarily with video, performance, and music composition. They are drawn to time-based mediums to induce moments of affective intensity, drawing from lived experiences of loss, near death, and a politics of trans liberation. Attuned to histories of knowledge making and connection that do not easily map onto the "seen" or the rational, Barry's practice questions dominant representations of selfhood as singular, stable, legible, and sequential. Their works have been exhibited widely in Australia, including at The Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Samstag Museum of Art, The National Gallery of Victoria, Museum of Contemporary Art, Contemporary Art Tasmania and Artspace, amongst other spaces.

## List of Works

All works by Archie Barry  
and courtesy of the artist.

1. *Second Line Work* (2025)  
4K video  
10 min. 27 sec.  
Camera, lighting, sound: Emmett Aldred, EO Gill  
Hair and makeup: Laila el Rayes  
Audio mixing: Daniel Jenatsch  
Colour grade: Peter Hatzipavlis  
Project assistant: Sean Lowry
2. *Dream for Reed* (2025)  
4K video  
26 min. 9 sec.  
Camera: Rachel Chen  
Sound: Alex Shamku  
Audio mixing: Daniel Jenatsch  
Colour grade: Peter Hatzipavlis  
Project management: Susan Gibb
3. *Water Builds Bridges* (2025)  
Artist's book, risograph print on paper  
20 x 13 cm  
Copyeditor: River Halen  
Designer: Rio Ramintas  
Printer: Moniker Press
4. *Water Builds Bridges* (2025)  
HD video with cushions.  
27 min. 17 sec.  
Audio mixing: Daniel Jenatsch  
Colour grade: Peter Hatzipavlis  
Soft sculpture fabrication: Ava Katz

## Floorplan



## Project Team

Curator: Susan Gibb  
Assistant Curator: Kiel Torres  
Design: Line-Gry Hørup  
Technicians: Devin Chambers, Ben Wilson



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THE AUDAIN FOUNDATION

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