Queerskins: a love story the first episode of a much anticipated LGBTQ centered interactive cinematic virtual reality experience will premiere at The Tribeca Film Festival.

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Today the Tribeca Film Festival announced that Queerskins: a love story, a groundbreaking interactive cinematic virtual reality experience, will be featured in the VR Arcade in the Storyscapes Competition as part of the 2018 Festival. In this haptic experience for Oculus Rift, a diary and a box of belongings offers visitors and a devoutly Catholic mother living in rural Missouri a chance to know Sebastian, the estranged son she has lost to AIDS.

Awarded an All Access grant from The Tribeca Film Institute/MacArthur Foundation and The Sundance Institute/Arcus Foundation to create a virtual reality experience adapted from their innovative multimedia online narrative Queerskins (www.queerskins.com), (2013), artistic director and interactive designer Cyril Tsiboulski and writer/director, Illya Szilak began work on an ambitious trans-media project, one which combines cutting-edge technology and intimate, lyrical storytelling.

For Tribeca Immersive, visitors are seated in the back seat of a photorealistic vintage 1986 Cadillac Sedan DeVille, behind the two grieving parents, Ed (Drew Moore) and Mary-Helen (Hadley Boyd), as they take a magic realist journey down a country road, a memory lane populated with scrapbook artifacts from their son’s peripatetic life.

Cyril Tsiboulski: “Not only does the drama unfolding in intimate proximity reveal the person Sebastian (Michael DeBartolo) was, but, by interacting with a collection of personal belongings visitors reconstruct the story of his life. Was he "a disgrace" as his father says or a "good man" like his mother wants to believe? Or, maybe, like the rest of us, just human?”

Although, Queerskins can be appreciated as a stand-alone artwork, for Storyscapes, it is housed in an immersive interactive installation: a hybrid space of memory and imagination that invokes Sebastian's childhood attic bedroom. Visitors become collaborators in this storytelling experience as they discover hidden memorabilia, climb over and under furniture, rearrange collections, read Sebastian's diary, write messages on a mirror, and play records. The objects in the installation are a mix of curated vintage items as well as anonymous contributions from prior "players" who, asked to imagine their idea of a perfect lover—someone who would always accept and love them, offer a meaningful personal object with a short description of its significance. Visitors to the VR Arcade can donate and/or choose an object that resonates with them. On site, a collaborating artist will photograph the visitor anonymously (no faces) in communion with the chosen object. These photographs will then be posted to Instagram (@queerskins) during the Festival.

Illya Szilak: “The material reality that LGBTQI people experience every day is not something we can wish away, even with VR. This work allows YOU to create the main character. Who was he, what was his life? Was he worthy or respect and love? Maybe
you will hate that he is Christian or maybe you will hate that he has sex with men, wherever you come from, you will construct him a different way. As a woman, trained as a physician specializing an HIV and a gay man (Tsiboulski), we have our own answers, just as you will have yours. Our hope is that, in helping construct the story both in the VR experience and in the installation, you'll learn something important about yourself and your limits. It's a gift to understand this. Because, only in seeing it, can real change happen.”