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## Does that look gay? Framing Queer Identity in Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art

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Does that look gay? Framing Queer Identity in *Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art*

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Arts  
of Bard College

by  
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
May 2018



“Keys are an understood signifier for homosexual activity. A key chain worn on the right side of the body indicates that the wearer wishes to play a passive role during a sexual encounter. Conversely, keys placed on the left side of the body signify that the wearer expects to assume a dominant position. Keys are also worn by janitors, laborers and other workers with no sexual signification intended.”<sup>1</sup>

– Hal Fischer, *Figure 3*, 1977, photograph.

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<sup>1</sup> Hal Fischer, *Gay Semiotics* (Berkeley, CA/USA: West Coast Printer Center, 1977), 11.

Dedicated to

Mama and Daddy.

Oh, and my twin, Jake, too.

Ok, then, I guess my brother, Zach, also.

And my wife, Abbie Jones

## Acknowledgments

**Laurie Dahlberg**, thank you so much for all of your wisdom and guidance during Sproj, as well as my Bard career overall. Photography is by far my favorite medium of art to study, especially apparent in how much I remember from your classes. The art museum of my brain undoubtedly consists predominantly of photographers. In addition, I am very grateful for how much time and energy you invested in my writing this semester. From now on, if anyone compliments my writing, of course, I will thank that person. More importantly, though, I will thank you. The question that remains is whether I will ever feel like I have thanked you enough. You truly are an angel walking on this earth.

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## Table of Contents

### Introduction

Failing like a Queer, the Right Way.....1

### Chapter 1

We're Out of the Closet—How Do We Look in the Gallery?.....9

### Chapter 2

*Extended Sensibilities*: It's Not that Simple, It's Camp.....26

### Chapter 3

*Hide/Seek*: Let's Get One Thing Straight, This Art is Not.....53

### Conclusion

We're Here, We're Queer. If You're Not Used to it, Too Bad .....67

Bibliography.....76

## Introduction

### Failing like a Queer, the Right Way

“Failing is something queers do and have always done exceptionally well; for queer failure can be a style, to cite Quentin Crisp, or a way of life, to cite Foucault, and it can stand in contrast to the grim scenarios of success that depend upon ‘trying and trying again.’”<sup>2</sup> – Judith Halberstam.

In the *Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam dislodges conventional understandings of success and failure in order to demonstrate how to inhabit the world in more creative, skeptical, and liberating ways. Halberstam believes that standards of success in a heteronormative, capitalist society should be challenged because they are too easily equated with wealth accumulation and are ultimately oppressive. Failing can thus be understood as neglecting to follow hegemonic values, which queer artists often do if their subject matter depicts or alludes to non-normative forms of desire. Queer artists consequentially offer alternative modes of thinking about sexuality that is more complex than the previously established binary model, while also being able to expose absurdities and contradictions of homophobia. Therefore, as queer artists fail, they liberate themselves from hegemonic heteronormativity and grant themselves freedom from the confines of dominant culture. Halberstam’s argument is valuable here because it underscores the importance of the topic of my Senior Project, which explores the subversive qualities of queer art. My discussion, however, also puts into question one component of Halberstam’s argument: How utopian is this prospect? How would a queer artist have approached failing when their form of failure was actually criminal, often punished by shameful and/or serious legal ramifications?

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<sup>2</sup> Judith Halberstam, introduction to *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC/USA: Duke University Press, 2011), 3.

*Does that look gay? Framing Queer Identity in Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art* will attempt to provide an answer. While examining the curatorial methods at the heart of two art exhibitions, I focus on the ways in which queer art can simultaneously follow and subvert values of dominant culture. My examination centers on the 1982 show at the New Museum in New York, entitled *Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art*. Then, I conclude my analysis with a comparison to a more contemporary show in 2010 at Washington D.C.'s National Portrait Gallery, *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*. All of the artists discussed in these shows are subversive for their engagement with subject matter regarding their queer experiences. Most of the artists, however, engage with queer content by implication, rather than, for instance, creating a clear portrayal of someone being intimate with another of the same sex. For example, the queer artist, Romain Brookes, painted a portrait of a lesbian woman entitled *Una, Lady Toubridge* (figure 0:1) in 1924. The woman has short hair and is dressed in masculine garb. In the 1920s, this androgynous appearance was generally not associated with lesbianism, but with the archetype of an autonomous "modern woman." Thus, the gender nonconformity that is presented here communicated to mainstream audiences an independent-spirited woman, while it also signified pride in her lesbian identity to those who knew. Masking queer desire in a generally obscure way like this within the artwork, however, can be seen as contradicting the positive effects of Halberstam's notion of failure. However, I argue that the queer art in *Extended Sensibilities* and *Hide/Seek* fails even more spectacularly because of its ability to simultaneously challenge and persist within mass culture. While the imagery is often perceptible to queer viewers with similar personal experiences and inclinations, it also passes through mainstream audiences unpunished. Even more, the furtive nature of their oppositional critique has allowed



the queer community visibility in dominant forms of representation without relinquishing their unique self-expression.

Before beginning, however, it is important to provide an overview of the various meanings the term “queer” holds, and then describe what I mean by “queer art” as well. First, the Oxford English Dictionary defines “queer” in three parts, including its use as a descriptive word synonymous to “strange,” “peculiar,” “eccentric,” etc. Second, “queer” refers to “being out of sorts,” “unwell,” “faint,” “giddy,” etc. Lastly, it can be used as both a label or a pejorative for a homosexual, while in the 1980s it began to also refer to any “sexual or gender identity that does not correspond to established ideas of sexuality and gender, especially heterosexual norms.”<sup>3</sup> Since the late nineteenth century, “queer” was almost always being used as a derogatory term in reference to homosexual males only, especially effeminate ones. In “Inverted Histories: 1885-1979,” Richard Meyer stated that nations like the United States, Germany, Russia, among others, were still refusing the possibility of a lesbian sexuality throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, it was not until the AIDS epidemic that it began to transcend its pejorative origins. In 1990, the queer activist group, Queer Nation, reclaimed “queer” because of its popularity as a pejorative and its confrontational nature. Contemporaneously, “queer” also began to encompass a multiplicity of sexual and gender identities, which is especially appealing because of its emphasis on inclusivity. However, a substantial portion of the queer community believes that “queer” cannot be separated from its pejorative origins. Therefore, these two

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<sup>3</sup> "queer, adj.1". OED Online. March 2018. Oxford University Press.  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/156236> (accessed April 26, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Catherine Lord and Richard Meyer, *Art and Queer Culture* (New York, NY/USA: Phaidon Press, 2013), 19.

distinct implications of “queer,” both pejorative and inclusive, started coexisting in the 1990s to today.

“Queer art” can also be defined in various ways, and the following chapters include extended examinations of the curators’ perceptions. Here, though, I’d like to describe my personal perspective of what qualifies an art piece as queer. I argue that a work can be queer if the subject matter relates to non-normative forms of desire or gender-identifications, regardless of the artist’s sexuality. In addition, art that expresses a perspective alternative to heteronormative or patriarchal modes of thought can be counted as queer. Lastly, similar to how Halberstam engages “queer” as previously mentioned, I consider queer art to be any form of opposition against hegemonic knowledge or understandings of the world. This interpretation of “queer art” is significant in the way that it poses a contrast to labels like “gay art,” “lesbian art,” “transgender art,” etc., which will always remain associated with particular sexualities and gender identifications.

Thus, queer art is inherently oppositional. Even more, queer artists who are part of museum exhibitions occupy the dominant structures of signification that have historically rendered them invisible. Queer art’s placement inside major museum institutions therefore only enhances its counter hegemonic themes, as these elite institutions have historically marginalized almost all minorities. For this reason, I find the museum institution a particularly interesting location to examine queer art’s oppositional critique. In fact, a panel that was prompted by *Extended Sensibilities* on November 15, 1982 at the New School Auditorium, entitled *Recent Issues and Perspectives: Homosexual Sensibilities: Is there a Homosexual Aesthetic in Contemporary Art?*, explored the subversive elements associated with gay and lesbian art. John Perrault, a fiction writer, poet, and art critic, described the qualities that he thinks a homosexual

aesthetic should have, if, in fact, there is one. He listed a handful of characteristics, including that a homosexual aesthetic “should be against the dull, the drab, the heavy-handed, and the ponderous,” “against the status quo,” and “against good taste,” and that it “should be a critical aesthetic. If we are outsiders we should act like ones.”<sup>5</sup> This response is particularly compelling to me because of the way it supports the idea that counterhegemonic discourse inevitably emerges from a queer context. In addition, it describes the type of discourse as critical instead of confrontational, which is an apt distinction in regards to the nature of most of the art’s critique in *Extended Sensibilities* and *Hide/Seek*.

Furthermore, the foregrounding question of this panel is also crucial to my discussion of *Extended Sensibilities*. If Perrault’s homosexual aesthetic is considered seriously, this thinking can lead to an essentialist perspective of homosexual art. Another panelist, Harmony Hammond, a lesbian artist and writer, disagreed with Perrault and claimed that there is not one homosexual aesthetic, trend, or movement. She argued that discussing the possibility for a homosexual aesthetic is just as nonsensical as discussing the possibility of a straight aesthetic, and that this outlook is basically a homophobic approach to the exhibition. Hammond subsequently clarified her distinction between the terms “aesthetic” and “sensitivity,” ultimately asserting her support of *Extended Sensibilities*’s exploration of a homosexual sensitivity.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to aesthetic, a sensitivity in art describes more what the artist is feeling while contemplating on or making a

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<sup>5</sup> John Perrault, "Recent Issues and Perspectives: Homosexual Sensibilities: Is there a Homosexual Aesthetic in Contemporary Art?," panel discussion, November 15, 1982, audio file, 43:10, *New Museum*, 2013, accessed April 27, 2018, <https://archive.newmuseum.org/sounds/9018>.

<sup>6</sup> Harmony Hammond, "Recent Issues and Perspectives: Homosexual Sensibilities: Is there a Homosexual Aesthetic in Contemporary Art?," panel discussion, November 15, 1982, audio file, 43:10, *New Museum*, 2013, accessed April 27, 2018, <https://archive.newmuseum.org/sounds/9018>.

work of art. Another panel held in response to the show on November 29, 1982 at the New School Auditorium, entitled *Recent Issues and Perspectives: What is the Impact of Homosexual Sensibility on Contemporary Culture?*, elaborates on a homosexual sensibility in very intriguing ways. Bertha Harris, a lesbian novelist and the moderator, actually claimed that all art has somewhat of a homosexual sensibility. Harris supported her statement with the fact that each work of art can be seen as a “refusal to leave the world alone,” and, more importantly, as “a manipulation of things as they appear to be ordained or otherwise until they seem to be something more than the real thing.”<sup>7</sup> It is possible to conclude with Harris’s claim here that making art is queering reality, and this queering of reality is universal by virtually every individual’s highly subjective and individualistic perspective of the surrounding world. Another panelist, Vito Russo, who was a queer activist, film historian, and author, argued a homosexual sensibility more specific to the queer community as one that turns hiding into an art form. To Russo, making the experience of being in the closet poetic and beautiful can be demonstrative of a homosexual sensibility.<sup>8</sup> Conclusively, these two panels prove that the idea of a homosexual sensibility is quite an obscure concept, and that it will also always have a multitude of interpretations attached to it.

Furthermore, these panels reveal how museum exhibitions can provoke crucial and dynamic sociopolitical dialogue. This type of communication is essential because it not only

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<sup>7</sup> Bertha Harris, "Recent Issues and Perspectives: Homosexual Sensibilities: What is the Impact of a Homosexual Sensibility in Contemporary Art?," panel discussion, November 29, 1982, audio file, 56:16, *New Museum*, 2013, accessed April 27, 2018, <https://archive.newmuseum.org/sounds/9018>.

<sup>8</sup> Vito Russo, "Recent Issues and Perspectives: Homosexual Sensibilities: What is the Impact of a Homosexual Sensibility in Contemporary Art?," panel discussion, November 29, 1982, audio file, 56:16, *New Museum*, 2013, accessed April 27, 2018, <https://archive.newmuseum.org/sounds/9018>.

establishes a sense of what participants think and agree on, but these open conversations can also transform conflicts by explaining difference and creating forms of understanding among people following different value-systems. As a result, these actions can move culture as a whole by forming more open-minded and sympathetic mentalities. Furthermore, this Senior Project led me to discover how central the role of a curator is in forming these discussions, which is exciting for me as I aspire to be one. I am therefore also very pleased that the research for this Senior Project has been able to serve as a guide for how to organize a queer art exhibition. Well, more as a guide for what *not* to do as a curator, but sometimes that is even more valuable. In conclusion, I extend my sincerest gratitude to Dan Cameron, curator of *Extended Sensibilities*, as well as Jonathon Katz and David Ward, the curators of *Hide/Seek*, for their courageous initiatives and understandable mistakes while exposing the importance and beauty of queer art.



Figure 0:1. Romaine Brooks, *Una, Lady Toubridge*, 1924, oil on canvas.

## Chapter 1

### We're Out of the Closet—Do We Look Good in the Gallery?

The art that hangs on museum walls often provides compelling visual overviews of time periods, movements, and, most importantly, all different types of communities. Thus, it is important to consider whether or not identity, specifically queer identity, is a useful category around which to base an exhibition. The history of exhibitions reveals the novelty of “identity” as the curatorial concept. The origins of public art exhibitions can be traced to France’s first Impressionist exhibition in 1874. Art historian, Ian Dunlop, describes this show, entitled *Anonymous Society of Artists, Painters, Sculptors, and Engravers*, as a subversive reaction against elitist Salons in Paris. It unfortunately suffered a harsh line of attack from viewers and critics. However, even though it was not successful, this exhibition was a catalyst for the many independent shows that followed.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, it was one of the first exhibitions to be organized around a movement instead of a disparate collection of “Masters.” Organizers began to set aside a diversity of works in order to define and give shows to artists of a similar style. Later, in the early twentieth century, exhibitions made an even stronger social impact when subject matter of the art spoke to the current sociopolitical moment. In *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, Paul O’Neill recounts that in the early twentieth century, various influential museum directors began curating exhibitions consisting of artists, designers, and architects. This new approach consequently transformed the museum from an archive of historical art into a showcase of contemporary art. This change reconfigured the museum “as an extension of the

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<sup>9</sup> Ian Dunlop, *The Shock of the New: Seven Historic Exhibitions of Modern Art* (New York, NY/USA: American Heritage Press, n.d.), 87.

social world outside.”<sup>10</sup> Consequently, the role of the larger community’s participation became considerably more important.

In 1987, Douglas Crimp, in “End of Art and Origin of the Museum,” offers commentary on issues facing art museums in general. In response to a session on representation in the College Art Association in Boston, he raised the question, “Who is given access? What kind of access? And access precisely to what?”<sup>11</sup> Crimp’s questioning here illuminates the influence access has on shaping content and representation in an art exhibition. Many museums require entrance fees, which can deny the participation of less privileged groups. Kevin Coffee, in “Cultural Inclusion, Exclusion and the Formative Roles of Museums,” explores the relationship between elitist museums and their audience. Coffee states that some museum exhibitions in the past were held to celebrate the success of the wealthy, such as *Alexander Hamilton: The Man Who Made Modern America* exhibition at the New-York Historical Society in 2005. Many historians and visitors admonished the New-York Historical Society for excluding narratives alternative to hegemonic discourse. In response, the museum staged the exhibition, *Slavery in New York*, which demonstrated the importance of slave labor and trade in New York. Coffee explains that because this exhibition compelled a wider audience, almost double the amount of visitors came to *Slavery in New York*.<sup>12</sup> Coffee’s discussion here proves how dominant museum institutions were able to disregard perspectives of minority groups. Thus, a lack of participation can not only be caused by financial reasons, but also alienation. These circumstances highlight how these

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<sup>10</sup> Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge, MA/USA: The MIT Press, 2012), 13.

<sup>11</sup> Douglas Crimp, "Strategies of Public Address: Which Media, Which Publics?," *Dia Art Foundation: Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, no. 1 (1987): 263.

<sup>12</sup> Kevin Coffee, "Cultural Inclusion, Exclusion, and the Formative Roles of Museums," *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 2008, 267-268.



institutions can control the ideology that the show is communicating, and consequently who is attending their shows. Ultimately, *Alexander Hamilton: The Man Who Made Modern America* demonstrates the importance of dialogue with the surrounding community to better represent collective identities.

On a more personal level, O'Neill discusses an individual viewer's own relationship to a museum. He stresses the museum's mediation of the viewer's interpretation of artwork. He elaborates on the curatorial practice of Seth Siegelau, a gallerist from New York who is best known for his promotion of conceptual art during the 1960s and 1970s. O'Neill discusses Siegelau's exhibition proposal of 1969, which stated that when an artist makes a painting, it is not the same thing as what the viewer sees. He notes that the artwork can be interpreted in two ways, beginning with "primary information," which is the "essence of the piece." The artwork also holds "secondary information," which depends on its "material information used to make one aware of the piece and its 'form of representation.'" <sup>13</sup> This notion speaks to the importance of curatorial decisions that influence the significance of a certain work within an exhibition. By stressing the impact of presentation, Siegelau and O'Neill demonstrate how curation can play a primary role in dictating how artwork will be perceived. Thus, even when art is put inside of a neutral gallery space, it still cannot stand autonomous from the outside world. Ivan Karp, an art dealer, gallerist, and author in New York, discussed the effects of museum institutions in a theoretical way as well. While writing about exhibitions featuring other communities in *Exhibiting Cultures*, Karp applies Walter Benjamin's theory of the "aura" to describe the institution's effect on artists' work. Karp states that museums inscribe paintings with an "aura," according to Benjamin, which ultimately masks the intentions and meaning of the artist and then

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<sup>13</sup> O'Neill, *The Culture*, 21.

affects the way the art is appreciated.<sup>14</sup> The discussions of O'Neill, Siegelau, and Karp construct a viewer that is susceptible to and unaware of the curator's influence. While these claims frame the viewer as a passive victim, it is significant to consider indirect impacts of an exhibition that is centered on identity. Moreover, the emergence of shows organized on "identity" signifies the increasing pressure on curators to create exhibitions that are conducive to meaningful dialogue surrounding identity politics. Nonetheless, it can be argued that queer artists benefit from such thematic exhibitions, although they may be highly controlled by the curator. While this conflict is always present, these shows provide minority communities a platform to speak their opinions within dominant institutions. Moreover, in the most basic sense, it offers marginalized groups exposure.

Regardless, if the exhibition provides credible exposure, it can raise awareness of certain social or political issues affecting a community, whether they be on a micro or macro level. Art can therefore be employed as a tool for political speech, as it offers the ability to create nuanced expressions of polemical subject matter. Artists have the ability to pose substantive oppositional critique within exhibitions through coded visuals. With this approach, artists insert themselves into hegemonic structures to subsequently subvert them through reverse discourse. For instance, Catherine Opie, an American fine-art photographer, offered a presentation of her lesbian identity in a paradoxical way with *Self-Portrait/Nursing* (figure 1:1). This photograph simultaneously consists of elements of propriety and subversion. Made in 2004, this portrait features Opie seated on a chair, breastfeeding her son in front of a red drapery with gold baroque design. There is a barely visible scarification on her chest of the word "pervert." The fresh cutting, as well as

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<sup>14</sup> Ivan Karp, "Culture and Representation," in *The Politics and Poetics of Museum Display: Exhibiting Cultures*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington D.C., USA: Smithsonian Institute, 1991), 16.

Opie's wearing of S/M gear, parallels the theme of an earlier portrait in 1994.<sup>15</sup> Her short hair, exposed scars and tattoos of S/M history, as well as "pervert," juxtaposed with the traditional mother and child imagery known from Madonna portraiture and European conventions. Most important is her oppositional use of "pervert," which is a term historically targeted at homosexuals. Here, Opie casually wears this pejorative that, although very faintly, looks beautiful and elegantly inscribed on her chest. Overall, Opie's photograph exemplifies art that challenges prejudice through employing its own terms. If an art piece like Opie's photograph is placed within a major museum exhibition, then the show exemplifies how art can counter the institution in which it is situated. Queer artists can therefore empower themselves by engaging the oppressive heteronormative structures that aim to disempower them.

Overall, though, the strategy that confronts hegemony can be seen as a catalyst to create compelling and innovative artistic expressions that are confrontational and, within art exhibitions, inspire viewers to relinquish narrow heteronormative attitudes. Karp also provides a discussion of the magnetic power of politically charged art. Karp describes how works within an exhibition can elicit wonder, inspiring to "stop the viewer in his or her tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention."<sup>16</sup> Engaging art in this manner offers opportunity for a viewer to enrich their understanding of a certain group's politics. In this regard, an exhibition is important for its didactic aspect that can be somewhat hidden.

The educational component of identity-based exhibitions can also provide the audience with a wider range of individual perspectives of the surrounding world. This can result in greater

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<sup>15</sup> Catherine Lord and Richard Meyer, *Art and Queer Culture* (New York, NY/USA: Phaidon Press, 2013), 216.

<sup>16</sup> Ivan Karp, "Culture and Representation," in *The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington D.C., USA: Smithsonian Institute, 1991), 16.

understanding of sociopolitical conditions of communities, ethnicities, and nationalities outside of the viewer's reach within their own daily life. Karp describes this characteristic in his discussion of a Japanese art exhibitions featuring work that represents the "nonempirical imagined world." Explaining that Japanese artists were not historically motivated by the same developmental rubrics as European artists, he notes that "an exhibition of Japanese art that takes as its theme the evolving skills of the artists would miss the Japanese point of view, much as a chronological exhibit of Dutch landscape art would miss the intentions of these artists and their original audience."<sup>17</sup> Karp's argument here is important to consider, as it establishes cultural identity as being fundamental to gaining an understanding of that culture outside of the gallery. On the other hand, Karp also suggests that even when identity is not the basic principle, exhibitions still have a chance to include identity as a major factor of the show. In fact, he asserts that exhibitions can represent identity through implication. These exhibitions thus implicate cultures as "other," and exhibitions become "privileged arenas for presenting images of self and 'other.'"<sup>18</sup> Thus, art exhibitions can be seen as always incorporating identity, whether or not it is the central organizing principle.

Furthermore, Karp's description of displaying the "other" introduces the problem of "identity" representation, which can be reductionist or essentializing. In any case, there would be a limited number of artists, whose work could be erroneously perceived as representative of their entire minority group. Kobena Mercer, in his discussion of queer art and marginality in "Skin Head Sex Thing," elaborates on the problem. Mercer first explains that gays and lesbians are creating important works of art, as their unconventional artistic expressions are rooted in their

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<sup>17</sup> Karp, "Culture and Representation," 20.

<sup>18</sup> Karp, "Culture and Representation," 15.

unique “experiences of marginality.” More importantly, though, he stresses that their restricted access to representation often leads to hegemonic institutions warping their distinct discourses as speaking for a whole. This perspective places tremendous, yet unavoidable political weight on minority subjects’ artistic careers. They must constantly push against majority culture’s almost inexorable attachment to stereotypes, resulting in the assumption that all minority cultures lack heterogeneity.<sup>19</sup> In addition, this phenomenon reflects the ideology of traditional museum institutions, which concentrate on the accumulation of individual pieces that can convey standards of their entire time period, style, community, etc. Traditional museums require art that exemplifies the whole range of variety in many large-scale categories, rather than presenting exceptions or alternatives to dominant conventions. In such a case, institutions present only a homogenous view of the Other. Either way, Mercer suggests both instances portray different cultures to the mainstream audience as barren of a variation of artistic expressions. Karp and Mercer both point to the necessity for curators to acknowledge that a group identity holds many disparate, and often unforeseen, personal variations and political implications, though it will remain impossible to display a community’s entire multiplicity of experiences. Curators therefore take on a difficult task in trying to present the tenets of a whole minority within the confines of one art show. In conclusion, it is considerably easy for curators to oversimplify the unconventional experiences of any subculture or oppressed groups.

Museums can only even go so far in offering adequate representation when curators filter through work with their own understanding. O’Neill, for example, stated that curator is not only “a caretaker of collections,” but also “a behind-the-scenes organizer and arbiter of taste.”<sup>20</sup> Jan

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<sup>19</sup> Kobena Mercer, "Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary," *New Formations*, no. 16 (Spring 1992): 19.

<sup>20</sup> O’Neill, *The Culture*, 19.

Zita Grover grapples with this problem, when she asks lesbians rhetorically, “which representation has greater authority for you: the wanton woman in Victoria’s Secret underwear or leather in *On Our Backs* or the jockettes in photographs of GAA softball players printed in a local bar guide or gay city newspaper? Any of these? All? None?”<sup>21</sup> Grover’s question here speaks to the fact that representations of certain groups, in specific settings, can reinforce dominant stereotypes about them. By framing the question in this manner, it becomes apparent that exhibitions have the power to relay particular notions of gay experience as intrinsic instead of multi-faceted. For example, an exhibition engaging with the struggles during the AIDS crisis can perhaps lead viewers to think that the lives of queer people during the epidemic were exclusively grievous and frightful.

Ultimately, this project will study the question of queer curation while analyzing the show, *Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art*, which took place at the New Museum in New York in 1982. With this exhibition, I hope to demonstrate how thinking around the issue of ‘identity curation’ has changed significantly.

*Extended Sensibilities*’s organizing principle was queer identity, which, in fact, exemplifies all that is at stake in the foregoing discussion. Robert Atkins, in “Goodbye Lesbian/Gay History, Hello Queer Sensibility,” does not acknowledge the New Museum’s show in his discussion on publicizing the queer community. However, his discussion is easily applicable to *Extended Sensibilities*. Atkins wrote about Holland Cotter’s collection of interviews with various queer artists in the art publication, *Art in America*. He stated that the reader longed for Cotter’s response to an important claim made by Hugh Steer, who was a gay artist from

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<sup>21</sup> Jan Zita Grover, “Dykes in Context,” in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (n.p.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1989), 3.

Washington D.C., who provocatively stated his observation that queer art had become a marketing label, and that he believed it was necessary to expose the misconceptions of “lumping” diverse queer artists together.<sup>22</sup> This was one of the problems facing Dan Cameron, that a show highlighting queer artists would be seen as commodifying this particular subculture. Moreover, *Extended Sensibilities* could be interpreted as shallow and possibly exploitative. In fact, on the New Museum’s website, the description of this exhibition described how the New Museum was “the first museum”<sup>23</sup> to explore homosexual presence in contemporary art. This focus on its novelty would seem to underscore the idea of “queer” as a marketing label, and the New Museum’s “advertising” being directed at a market and consumer, transforming queerness into a new product. Thus, as Steers suggested, framing queer experiences for the basis of a show might be problematic because it can entrench queer identity into a niche commercial sphere, which can ultimately lead to a reductive and false perspective of the queer community.

In contrast, some art critics condemned the show for its ambiguous portrayal of homosexuality. In fact, some critics communicated their preference for works which made queer identity more distinguishable. In *The New York Times* article from 1982, Grace Glueck pointed out the problem in Cameron’s description of much of the show’s work. She stressed that ultimately the works in the show do not follow his definition. From his catalogue essay, she picked out his idea that artists can speak gay thoughts which are about other things, works she took to mean that are completely indistinguishable from art done by heterosexual artists, or

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Atkins, "Goodbye Lesbian/Gay History, Hello Queer Sensibility: Meditating on Curatorial Practice," *Art Journal* 55, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 80, doi:10.2307/777660.

<sup>23</sup> "Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art," New Museum Archive, accessed February 18, 2018, <https://archive.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/56>.

artists who do not publicly identify as homosexual.<sup>24</sup> Glueck's statement suggests that some viewers misunderstood Cameron's idea that art can be seen as homosexual even if it does not have to do with sexuality or lifestyle. She implied that the artwork with explicit queer content had more of an impact, such as Charley Brown's "Bi Paintings" that blatantly featured a man in drag. Furthermore, her response to the show also emphasized the limitations of Cameron's decision to base *Extended Sensibilities* on identity, as she framed him as being too cautious to have done so successfully.

Writing on art and gender from a much later date in 2017, Holland Cotter echoed Glueck's perspective. Cotter, on the other hand, is looking retrospectively at *Extended Sensibilities*, comparing it to the New Museum's show in 2017, *Trigger*. Cotter discussed how "it struck some viewers as not explicitly gay enough, as dodging the political issues its title raised."<sup>25</sup> In short, Cotter's reflection implies Cameron's curatorial decisions were hesitant. Nonetheless, in a *Village Voice* article from 2017, Jennifer Krasinski spoke positively in regards to *Extended Sensibilities*. She stated that this was the first museum show in America to address how art "embraced and advanced the visibility of the gay male community..."<sup>26</sup> One therefore presumes from Krasinski's perspective that any type of queer art show is powerful because it offers the community recognition.

Moreover, the stakes involved in representing queer art were especially high when the show took place. In 1982, according to Atkins, the show was also impeded by many artists'

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<sup>24</sup> Grace Glueck, "Art: Botanical Bronzes from Nancy Graves," *The New York Times* (New York, NY/USA), October 22, 1982, sec. C, 13, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic>.

<sup>25</sup> Holland Cotter, "When It Comes to Gender, Let Confusion Reign," *New York Times* (New York, NY), September 29, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Jennifer Krasinski, "What a New Show at the New Museum Gets Wrong about Gender," *The Village Voice*, October 23, 2017.



refusal to out themselves. He points out that it should be remembered that Cameron had to grapple with issues that emerged from closetedness.<sup>27</sup> In fact, 1982 was at the threshold of the AIDS epidemic becoming a national emergency. Nation-wide panic was not featured in the media until after *Extended Sensibilities*. However, even before the show there was already ample homophobic discussion surrounding AIDS, which was first labelled as a “gay disease.” Pat Buchanan, the communications director for President Reagan, described AIDS as “nature’s revenge on gay men” in 1981.<sup>28</sup> In addition, Paul Cameron, an American psychologist and sex researcher, responded to the AIDS epidemic by calling for the extermination of queers.<sup>29</sup> These horrible claims stood in contrast to the increase in public attention given to queers, even while that representation was mostly granted to gay men. Richard Meyer, in his essay, “Inverted Histories: 1885-1979,” demonstrates the emphasis placed on gay males in the 1970s with his discussion of gay-liberation magazines. One such magazine was *Gay Power*, which became a commercial venture in 1973, and not one woman or transgender reporter, artist, or photographer contributed. Furthermore, most likely due to its status as a commercial magazine, the directors ironically chose not to include any radical gay activism either.<sup>30</sup> *Gay Power* exemplifies the reductionist form of representation, as lesbians and transgender people lost influence in the wider presentation of the queer community. Furthermore, this dynamic was strengthened by “clone”

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Atkins, "Goodbye Lesbian/Gay History, Hello Queer Sensibility: Meditating on Curatorial Practice," *Art Journal* 55, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 80, doi:10.2307/777660.

<sup>28</sup> Allen White, "Reagan's AIDS Legacy / Silence Equals Death," *SF Gate* (San Francisco, CA/USA), June 8, 2004, [Page #], accessed March 5, 2018, <https://www.sfgate.com/opinion/openforum/article/Reagan-s-AIDS-Legacy-Silence-equals-death-2751030.php>.

<sup>29</sup> "Anti-gay Quotes from Dr. Paul Cameron." Wired Strategies. Accessed March 5, 2018. <https://www.wiredstrategies.com/cameron.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Meyer, in “Inverted Histories: 1885-1979,” section to *Art and Queer Culture*, ed. Catherine Lord and Richard Meyer (New York, NY/USA: Phaidon Press Limited, 2013), 27.

culture, which focused on codifying gay self-representation. Meyer explained that in 1977, a San Francisco-based photographer, Hal Fischer, published *Gay Semiotics*. This photobook was a satire that diagrammed publicly identifiable signifiers of gay men through clone cultural codes. Fischer's execution did not merely suggest the room for humor against homophobia at the time. In addition, according to Catherine Lord in "Inside the Body Politic: 1980- Present," the 1970s was notable for the expansion of homosexual visibility, as well as a considerable progression in the division between gays and lesbians.<sup>31</sup> This increasing visibility and the heightening separation between gays and lesbians paved way for the intense partition occurring in the 1980s at the outbreak of AIDS.

Lord noted that in 1981 only small groups of white gay men were aware of the announcement that relayed the outbreak of a new disease in San Francisco and Los Angeles, at the time called the "gay flu" or "Gay Related Immune Deficiency Syndrome." A year or so later, the government's conservative and homophobic agenda intertwined AIDS with homosexuals, as well as intravenous drug users, Haitians, and sex workers.<sup>32</sup> Lord highlights the emphasis on gay men as carriers of the disease, further bringing men to the forefront and separating lesbians from public attention. In addition, Lord describes the conservative stronghold over the public perception of AIDS, the lasting influence of which instilled deeper despair onto a community whose population was rapidly collapsing.

Ultimately, while the AIDS epidemic brought on a very palpable feeling of the decimation of the queer community, it also ignited major efforts in the public display of queer

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<sup>31</sup> Catherine Lord, "Survey: Inside the Body Politic: 1980-Present," section to *Art and Queer Culture*, ed. Catherine Lord and Richard Meyer (New York, NY/USA: Phaidon Press Limited, 2013), 27.

<sup>32</sup> Lord, "Survey: Inside," section, 32.

activist art. Gran Fury, for example, was a major art collective that served as an offshoot of ACT UP. Gran Fury led graphic campaigns situated in the streets rather than within art galleries and museums. One of their most famous pieces was posted on city buses and featured three couples, two queer and one straight, kissing under the caption “Kissing Doesn’t Kill: Greed and Indifference Do” (figure 1:2). Interestingly, while the poster is particularly progressive in terms of representing interracial couples along with two queer ones, it still does feature the men in the center. Nonetheless, a quite compelling aspect of this image is how greatly the serious message stands in contrast with the three happy pairs. Furthermore, this poster forced and allowed the public to view a positive representation of queer relationships. Another example of a public display of queer art for AIDS awareness was carried out by Keith Haring, who was already drawing on empty black advertising panels in the NY subway between 1980 and 1985. Activism in queer coalitions intensified the effects of public queer art. Lord notes that in 1981, the coalition, ACT UP, distributed provocative flyers to museum visitors at a Nicholas Nixon exhibition, “Pictures of People,” at New York’s Museum of Modern Art. Their posters were in opposition of the exhibition’s section called, “Pictures of AIDS.” Instead of including photographs portraying diverse groups of people living defiantly with AIDS, Nixon’s “Pictures of AIDS” consisted of homosexuals physically and emotionally suffering while close to death. With tactful insurgence, activists distributed flyers with the statement, “Stop looking at us; start listening to us,” that demanded visibility for “PWAs who are vibrant, angry, loving, sexy, beautiful, acting up and fighting back.”<sup>33</sup> ACT UP and other activist shows expose the way in which the queer community refused to be silent. Thus, queer visibility that emerged in response to the AIDS crisis happened in both positive and destructive ways. As activist campaigns worked

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<sup>33</sup> Lord, "Survey: Inside," section, 33.

to humanize the queer community and elicit compassion, conservative forces further accused queers of a sinful lifestyle that led to the transmission of this fatal epidemic.

Queer fine art in the late twentieth century was not absent completely from the art world, though. For instance, Harmony Hammond curated a show that was dedicated to lesbian art at 112 Greene Street, New York, in 1978.<sup>34</sup> Contemporaneously, a non-commercial gallery in San Francisco, Eighty Langston Street, featured Robert Mapplethorpe's S & M photographs. It was titled, *CENSORED*, in response to censorship by commercial galleries and public museums in San Francisco and New York.<sup>35</sup> Mapplethorpe's art was castigated as 'faggot art,' and he could not enter, as he stated, "'the legitimate art scene.'" <sup>36</sup> Ten years earlier, during the summer of the Stonewall Riots in 1969, life partners Charles Leslie and Fritz Lohman hosted an invitation-only exhibition of homoerotic art in their SoHo loft. It was a major success, and they subsequently became owners of an official gallery in 1975. According to *The Queer Encyclopedia of the Visual Arts*, the Leslie-Lohman gallery inspired others in New York, and by 1980 there were six queer art galleries in the city.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, not without controversy, the Whitney Biennials of 1987 and 1989 indicated a more open stance on queer art. The Whitney's involvement in exhibiting queer art during the 1980s was crucial in the progression of a more pro-queer audience, as major institutions have the authority to establish the importance and market value of artists.

It is now apparent that, in 1982, *Extended Sensibilities* presented a remarkably bold resistance to the confines of heteronormativity in New York. Cameron was clearly taking a risk

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>35</sup> "CENSORED," review.

<sup>36</sup> Lord, "Survey: Inside," section, 31.

<sup>37</sup> Summers, Claude J. *The Queer Encyclopedia of the Visual Arts*. Cleis Press, 2004.

and assuming a role of leadership. His challenge against the hegemonic art world can be interpreted as exemplifying a significant push for queer art in the public sphere. In relation to Cameron's boldness, during the panel at Boston's College Art Association, Crimp also stressed the fact that queer issues have been the most marginal in politics. He stated that it is reflected in the way homosexuality is introduced for discussion, with most people there expressing that "those problems do not concern me."<sup>38</sup> Consequently, Crimp's description reinforces Cameron's bravery in curating *Extended Sensibilities*, ultimately asserting validity and attention to a marginalized group that is often overlooked.

Nonetheless, for all of *Extended Sensibilities* groundbreaking effects, this show and Cameron's essay create a picture of queer art and experience that appears dated to the 21<sup>st</sup> century observer in some respects. The following chapter extensively examines the artwork in *Extended Sensibilities*, which will then be compared to Washington D.C.'s National Portrait Gallery show, entitled *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*. This exhibition opened in 2010, and as a more contemporary show, *Hide/Seek* illuminates some of *Extended Sensibilities*'s significant limitations.

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<sup>38</sup> Douglas Crimp, "Strategies of Public Address: Which Media, Which Publics?," *Dia Art Foundation: Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, no. 1 (1987): 7-8.



Figure 1:1. Catherine Opie, *Self-Portrait/Nursing*, 2004, color photograph.

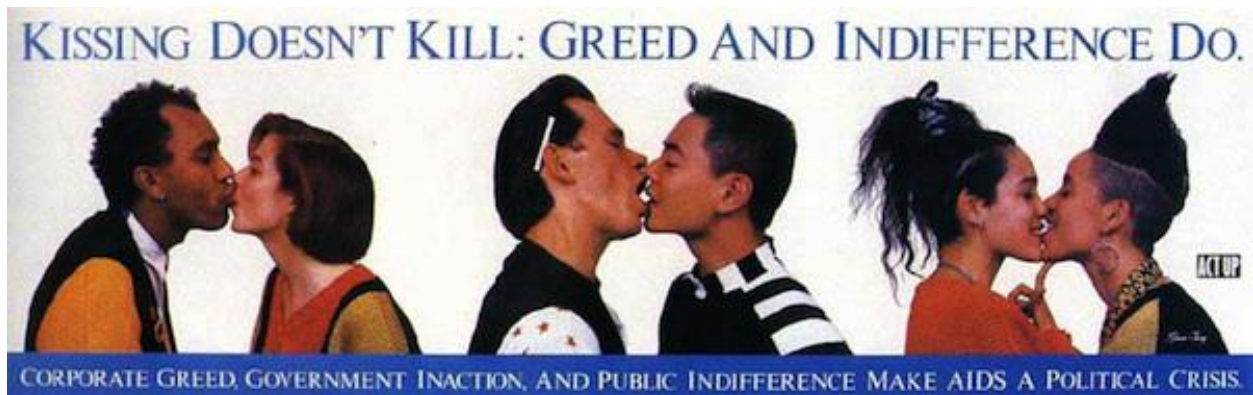


Figure 1:2. Gran Fury, *Kissing Doesn't Kill*, 1989, color offset lithograph.

## Chapter 2

### *Extended Sensibilities: It's not as Simple as it Looks, It's Camp*

Each year, the New Museum chooses a different guest curator to hold a show that initiates a dialogue outside of the discourse of the main curatorial team. For *Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art* in 1982, the New Museum offered their venue to Daniel J. Cameron, an independent curator who then went on to spend eleven years there (1995-2006) as a Senior Curator. In a 2014 interview with Mario Vasquez, the author of the blog, “Super Mario’s Art: Fine Art in the Fast Lane,” Cameron explained how he had been organizing art shows since he was in high school, and decided he wanted to start curating professionally in 1979. He stated that in the beginning stages he had various day jobs and curated his first exhibition in 1981 at the Mint Museum in Charlotte, North Carolina. In 1982, *Extended Sensibilities* was his first show regarding gay and lesbian art. Thus, with the New Museum, even as a relatively unknown curator, Cameron was able to fulfill his vision. *Extended Sensibilities* was the product of Cameron’s mission to hold an exhibition that explored the multivalent presence of the homosexual community within a heteronormative art world.

Cameron recalled to Vasquez that he was being warned constantly that *Extended Sensibilities* would be the last exhibition he would ever curate. His statement here demonstrates how the people surrounding him believed holding *Extended Sensibilities* was a risk not worth taking. Nonetheless, he boldly organized this show when most people in the art world chose to remain safely closeted. While *Extended Sensibilities* was one of the first major museums to display queer art, Cameron explained that it was also one of the last examinations of queer culture to take place prior to the AIDS crisis being seen as an emergency. Cameron also mentioned that once people began to link transmission with sexual promiscuity, colleagues



started advising him to reconsider a work set in a fictional gay bathhouse.<sup>39</sup> This type of advice indicates that the mentality toward a queer art show was characterized by a cautious restraint, rather than being a completely homophobic reaction. Nonetheless, the founder of the New Museum, Marcia Tucker, wrote in the preface of the show's catalogue that she was determined to initiate controversial dialogues with shows at the New Museum. Tucker believed that the dialogue Dan Cameron provoked with *Extended Sensibilities* was a catalyst for the intellectual and aesthetic growth of the surrounding community in the art world, along with showing the museum's determination to challenge the public.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, Michael Brenson, in a 1983 *New York Times* article, explained that the New Museum, at the time of *Extended Sensibilities*, was merely one floor in a space of about 2,500 square feet. The building was owned by the New School Graduate Center at 65 Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. It was not a major art institution at the time, especially when the small space limited the New Museum to one exhibit at a time. Moreover, Brenson recounted that Charles A. Schwefel, the museum's director of planning and development, felt like it was always fifteen people overcrowding the small space.<sup>41</sup> This meager space indicates their inferior status at the time; however, it did offer room to experiment with showing works that major heteronormative art institutions avoided.

In Cameron's case, this lofty task required a multi-faceted understanding of art created by the queer community, as well as a thorough examination of how queer artists had both integrated in and isolated themselves from the mainstream, which he undertook to show in the exhibition's

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<sup>39</sup> Vasquez, "Interview with," *Super Mario's Art: Fine Art in the Fast Lane* (blog).

<sup>40</sup> Daniel J. Cameron, *Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art* (New York, New York/United States: The New Museum, 1982), Preface.

<sup>41</sup> Michael Brenson, "New Museum Given Home in SoHo," *New York Times* (New York, NY/USA), 1983,

catalogue. The words he chose to describe this show, however, did not involve “queer,” but “homosexual.” As previously mentioned, before Queer Nation came to the forefront to reclaim “queer,” this still was perceived as a derogatory term.<sup>42</sup> Also, the only members of the LGBTQ community that were represented in the show were gays and lesbians. Thus, Cameron’s main concern was not inclusivity, but to ask how contemporary art had reflected and responded to the concerns of the homosexual community.

In his essay, Cameron stressed that before *Extended Sensibilities* there was “very little high-quality cultural activity going on”<sup>43</sup> that explored homosexual experiences in a way that gays and lesbians could identify with. Here, his use of the term “high-quality” is important to note, as it perpetuated an elite perspective that delegitimized the queer art formerly entrenched in subculture venues, such as the Leslie Lohman Gallery (now known as The Leslie Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art), which had consistently organized queer art shows since 1969. Furthermore, since some works in the show ran counter to fine art’s traditions and expectations, Cameron thus muddled the value of queer art’s subversion against elite institutions and ideologies. Cameron also stressed that in order for homosexuals to have a meaningful expression of queer art, they did not need to reduce their art to the visible signs of queer desire. This stands in contrast to his discussion on the 1982 film, *Making Love*, which he used as a negative example in the catalogue essay. The movie was written by a gay man, Barry Sandler. This film features a man grappling with his homosexuality while married to a woman. The protagonist, Zack, eventually divorces his wife, and the movie concludes with them meeting years later and

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<sup>42</sup> In the late 1980s, people began to reclaim “queer” for its inclusivity, signifying multiple identities in the LGBT community. When Queer Nation, an activist group formed in 1990, employed “queer” as a means of confrontation against homophobia this reclamation solidified (although not without opposition from a portion of the LGBT community).

<sup>43</sup> Cameron, *Extended Sensibilities*, 7.

reflecting on their newfound happiness after separating. According to Cameron, the director's casting of a straight man playing the role of Zack, "reiterated the false perspective that homosexual people experience the world no differently than heterosexuals."<sup>44</sup> Here, Cameron gave mixed messages, supporting and criticizing art that does not clearly depict a distinct homosexual experience. Instead, Cameron framed his art show as presenting multi-faceted expressions of queer content. At the same time, he neglected to explain how censorship might have affected his curatorial decisions that inhabit a heteronormative public sphere. Although *Extended Sensibilities* focused on work that was not always blatantly homoerotic, the show was still a forerunner among major museums to definitively claim the display of homosexual art. Cameron's careful descriptions in the catalogue demonstrate how difficult it was for him to curate a collection of art that he felt could both satisfy homosexuals and reach a wider audience. In his introduction, Cameron attempted to anticipate and respond to counterarguments while thoroughly elaborating on his conception of homosexual art.

Cameron articulated his perspective in the *Extended Sensibilities: Homosexuality in Contemporary Art* catalogue.<sup>45</sup> In the introductory section, entitled "Sensibility as Content," Cameron aimed to set out a theory of a "gay sensibility" in visual art. He did so by proposing a definition of "Homosexual Content," which includes visual art, film, fashion, music, and other forms of mass media. He suggested three subdivisions of "Homosexual Content," each describing the patterns of viewing and consumption within the communities he assumed it speaks to.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>45</sup> Because I depend very much on Cameron's writing in order to relay thorough and accurate information regarding the show and its pieces, Cameron is referenced from his catalogue consistently throughout this chapter.

The first subdivision he constructed is “Homosexual Subject Matter,” which applies to content and imagery produced for a heterosexual audience. Straight viewers might think the subject matter presents a gay viewpoint, but it is also discriminatory. For instance, here Cameron referenced the movie *Making Love* as an example. He claimed that this movie utilized dialogue that trivialized homosexuals’ experiences, even though it was written by a gay man. According to Cameron, “Homosexual Subject Matter” is also stereotyping, essentializing, and condescending to gay and lesbian spectators. His conclusion was that artists creating this type of art place precedence on the consumer over the quality of their content. It also seems as though Cameron attributed false motivations to these artists, as if they did not mind misrepresenting their own community for the sake of profit. Ultimately, in Cameron’s view, this content employs “queer” as a marketing label, serving to create a product instead of self-expression.

The second subdivision is “Ghetto Content,” which Cameron described as art about homosexuals, made by homosexuals, and for homosexuals. It is identifiable in art, commodities, and mass media that is produced in a culturally separate community. Cameron defined this type of community as a “ghetto,”<sup>46</sup> and used African American ghettos formed during the Harlem Renaissance as an example. He stated that they arose out of the “self-defensive need to vitalize and preserve their cultural interaction” that had been stifled by the mainstream.<sup>47</sup> “Ghettoization” is thus a voluntary act against dominant culture that co-opts minority cultures, so he applied it to the queer community as well.<sup>48</sup> Cameron explained that this form queer art, however, “mocks the

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<sup>46</sup> Cameron, *Extended Sensibilities*, 7. I find this word somewhat problematic, as the term “ghetto” is also used to describe overcrowded and poor districts, as well as the isolated Jewish communities that people lived in due to extreme antisemitism.

<sup>47</sup> Cameron, *Extended Sensibilities*, 6.

<sup>48</sup> Cameron also clarified that, while acknowledging that both communities suffered discrimination, he was not trying to imply that queers suffered the same level of oppression as African Americans.

notion of a true community” because it seems determined to not be recognizable to a wider public. While also stating that Ghetto Content frequently fails, he continued to explain its use within the ghetto. Ghetto Content contains two variations for both lesbian and gay audiences. Cameron explained that gay Ghetto Content includes S & M, gay literature “of any kind,” male pornography, etc. Lesbian Ghetto Content is “less gritty,” and has a wider variation of many art forms, such as fiction, poetry, theater and performance, as well as fashion following masculine stereotypes.<sup>49</sup> Ghetto Content thus adheres with the conventions of the gender binary, with lesbian fashion as the exception. Still, Cameron’s description of gay and lesbian Ghetto Content suggests that queer art, even when created in an isolated community, still has room to follow heteronormative standards.

Lastly, he outlined what he called, “Sensibility Content,” which is the type of content that Cameron pursued for this show. Sensibility Content is primarily art that comes from personal homosexual experiences, including queer art “which is about other things.” Sensibility Content neither aims to reach only a homosexual audience nor market a washed down perspective of homosexuality to a larger group. Cameron also acknowledged that the criteria of Sensibility Content could be troubling for some, as it could be interpreted as concealing the reality of homosexual experiences in order to be accepted by a heteronormative audience.<sup>50</sup> However, he argues against this perspective, noting that most art in the show did not necessarily hide gay and lesbian subject matter. Rather, Cameron stressed that homosexual experiences were portrayed obliquely through coded cultural commentary, stating that queer artists “have become increasingly adept at creating cryptic visual languages.”<sup>51</sup> This concept can thus be viewed as

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<sup>49</sup> Cameron, *Extended Sensibilities*, 7.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 7.

key to the main discourse emerging from *Extended Sensibilities*, provoking a discussion that explores the ways in which artists eschew heteronormative standards to communicate a more genuine representation of homosexuality. In addition, in the Scrapbook section of the catalogue, Cameron asked artists to choose another work of art that is important to them on both a personal and artistic level. Within this section, he stated that the work the artists chose should praise the notion of “gayness as an aura” as a universal concept.<sup>52</sup> Influenced by queer art’s unique expression against hegemonic heteronormativity, this section presents another example of how Cameron’s vision of Sensibility Content within queer art was manifested. Moreover, Sensibility Content and the scrapbook section underscore how a definition of “sensibility” is hard to pin down. In addition, the three subdivisions also reveal the tremendous effort it took to convince a heterogeneous crowd, especially in 1982, that queer art is worth considering.

Cameron’s reference to “cryptic language” in the Sensibility Content section echoes theories on Camp. This reference is so relevant that the absence of the term “Camp” in the catalogue is quite surprising. Nonetheless, Cameron’s framing of language as a site of resistance is reflected in Camp discourse. Although Camp has been explained in a variety of ways, I find that Katrin Horn’s definition is thorough and most reliable. Horn simply states that Camp has its origins in the gay subculture as a means of communication and survival. For the queer community, Camp provides a way to protest their oppression while exposing the ridiculousness and hypocrisy present in American heteronormative values.<sup>53</sup> David Bergman also explores the multitude of meanings attached to Camp in *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*, and in the process cites Jack Babuscio. According to Babuscio, with a love for incongruity, humor,

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>53</sup> Katrin Horn, “The History and Theory of Camp,” in *Women, Camp, and Popular Culture* (n.p.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 16.

excessive style, and theatricality, Camp counters dominant notions of “deviance and normality.”<sup>54</sup> Through irony and parody, Camp became a useful strategy politically, as it offers a way to critique dominant culture with dominant culture’s own terms.<sup>55</sup> Sensibility Content that depicts these codes can thus be interpreted as cultural work that arises from a creative consciousness that subverts mass culture. Queer scholar Richard Dyer, cited by Meyer, explains his perspective of a “gay sensibility” in accordance with Camp ideology. Dyer states gay sensibility is one that unifies elements often perceived as antithetical, engaging with the oppositions that Camp exploits, such as “theatricality and authenticity... intensity and irony, a fierce assertion of extreme feeling with a deprecating sense of absurdity.”<sup>56</sup> Dyer’s definition of Camp resonates strongly with *Extended Sensibilities*. It speaks to the exhibition’s association with Camp in a way that again raises the concept of identity as a dynamic organizing principle. Ultimately, by inserting Camp’s subversive framework and alterity within a hegemonic discourse, I would like to show how *Extended Sensibilities* opposes a narrow and oversimplified understanding of identity.

*Extended Sensibilities* consisted of twenty-one artists, who are listed in alphabetical order without hierarchy: Charley Brown, Scott Burton, Craig Carver, Arch Connelly, Janet Cooling, Betsy Damon, Nancy Friend, Jedd Garet, Gilbert and George, Lee Gordon, Harmony Hammond, John Henninger, Jerry Janosco, Lili Lakich, Jerry Dreva and Bob Lambert (represented as “Les Petites Bonbons”), Ross Paxton, Jody Pinto, Carla Tardi, and Fran Winant. The gender ratio was thirteen males and eight females, a representation that would probably be considered

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<sup>54</sup> Jack Bergman, "Strategic Camp: The Art of Gay Rhetoric," in *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*, ed. David Bergman (Amherst, MA/USA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 94.

<sup>55</sup> Moe Meyer, ed., *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* (London: Routledge, 1994), 188.

<sup>56</sup> Meyer, *The Politics*, 185.

insufficiently balanced today. However, this was quite unique for the 1980s, a time when representation of the homosexual community was focused centrally on gay males. What is significantly unfortunate, though, is that all of the artists in this show were white. This aspect underscores the fact that the emphasis on intersectionalism did not emerge until the twenty-first century. In addition, this show was before there was critical opposition against the concept of “color-blindness,” which began in the late 1990s. While color-blindness technically does attempt to establish equal opportunities under the law regardless of race, it also destabilized the political foundation of integration. The fact that *Extended Sensibilities* was devoid of people of color could have been a product of this mentality in an environment where “race doesn’t matter.” Regardless, Cameron’s decision for this group of artists does suggest his apprehension of adding another minority to a queer art show. Nonetheless, Cameron exhibited queer artists that were not well known, which can be interpreted as either safe or gutsy. In one respect, a queer “hall of fame,” consisting of famous artists, such as David Hockney, is safe because they are well recognized by mass culture. In another respect, if Cameron included well-known queer artists, such as the notorious Robert Mapplethorpe, that would be seen as taking a huge risk.<sup>57</sup>

In his catalogue, Cameron also created various sections to organize the works thematically, which is interesting because the curation in the gallery does not match this organization. Part one is entitled “The Homosexual Self,” with subsections including “Rituals of the Organism,” consisting of Harmony Hammond and Betsy Damon; and “Confrontational Transvestism,” consisting of Charley Brown, Lee Gordon, and Les Petites Bonbons. Part two is “The Homosexual Other,” with subsections including “The Beautiful Lover,” consisting of Janet

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<sup>57</sup> The fact that this show did not include well-known queer artists also could have been because many of them were not out publicly in the 1980s.



Cooling, Jerry Janosco, and Lili Lakich; “The Impassive Double,” consisting of Scott Burton, John Henninger, Ross Paxton, and Jedd Garet; and “Romantic Projections,” consisting of Nancy Fried and Craig Carver. Part three is “The Homosexual World,” with subsections including “Nature Sublimated,” consisting of Jody Pinto and Fran Winant; and “The World Transformed,” consisting of Arch Connelly, Carla Tardi, and Gilbert and George. Cameron does not offer explanation as to why he organized the show this way in his catalogue, but his reasons can be postulated by analyzing themes.

The theme that can be traced through his three sections is the process of constructing identity. This theme, though not articulated as such by Cameron, can be productive, as it further adds relevance to the debate regarding whether or not identity is a viable organizing principle for an art show. Cameron’s first part, “Homosexual Self,” begins with “Rituals of the Organism,” which can be interpreted as the initial step in constructing identity. This examination involves introspection of one’s actions, or “rituals,” to begin understanding oneself. Another important mental operation is locating personal identity in the “Other.” G. W.F. Hegel introduced this concept, explaining that the requirement for defining the “Self” necessitates the existence of the “Other” as the opposite.<sup>58</sup> “Confrontational Transvestism” plays into this dynamic, as transvestism engages the male/female binary to understand it as Self/Other. Also, in relation to “The Homosexual Self” section as a whole, this duality can inform our understanding of the queer community’s feelings of “Otherness” within a heteronormative public sphere. However, the following section, “The Homosexual Other,” confuses this conventional conception of the “Other,” as Cameron uses “Other” to signify another member of the same group. The subsections

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<sup>58</sup> Leo Rauch and David Sherman. *Hegel's Phenomenology of Self-consciousness: Text and Commentary*. SUNY Press, 1999.

“The Beautiful Lover,” “The Impassive Double,” and “Romantic Projections,” do create a sense of distance between Cameron’s conception of “Self” and “Other,” by depicting queer subjects as unattainable. For instance, in the “Beautiful Lover” subsection, Janet Cooling depicts idealized subjects who cannot exist in reality. Moreover, Janosco’s works, consisting of replicas of Michelangelo’s *David*, do not contain implications of a relationship with another person at all. Thus, Cameron’s titles for the subsections within “The Homosexual Other” do not always seem to cohere with the artworks in the show. The last section, “The Homosexual World,” can be interpreted as the final step of self-identification while reflecting one’s position in the world from a micro to macro level. Almost all of the artists in the subsections, “Nature Sublimated” and “The World Transformed,” share an exploration of their interaction with nature and belonging in the physical world. Jody Pinto is another artist in “Nature Sublimated,” and with her works, Cameron clearly implied the material world with the term “nature.” Cameron described her work with earthy language, such as “... the immeasurable fertility of fresh topsoil, moss, riverbeds, or ponds.”<sup>59</sup> Fran Winant’s placement in “Nature Sublimated,” however, exemplifies another incoherence of the show. In contrast to Pinto, the subject matter of Winant’s work is her relationship with her dog, which contains fantasy-like insinuations of romantic intimacy. Perhaps Cameron applied “nature” to Winant’s work to mean a way of being, but he made no distinction. In conclusion, the inconsistencies within the categories and the art reveal that the catalogue and show presented rather different ideas.

Moreover, the organization of the works in the gallery does not coincide with Cameron’s theoretical groupings. This inconsistency suggests that Cameron’s focus during installation was finding the best way the artworks fit together in the gallery space. The show was small,

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<sup>59</sup> Cameron, *Extended Sensibilities*, 33.

consisting of only one floor, but the room still looked respectably spacious in the installation photographs. Furthermore, the room's various partitions effectively provided service for special installations. For instance, there was one partition that created its own corner in which the installation for John Henninger's sculpture, *Lying Man* (figure 2:1), was situated. The structure also allowed for *Lying Man*'s placement in the gallery to be highly conspicuous, as it also occupied its own space quite separate from other works. The attention *Lying Man* garnered was also enhanced by its life-size and surface texture, being a shiny, seemingly gold, satin. The figure's position looks uncomfortable, as he awkwardly rests his head against the tile structure around him. His legs are suggestive, splayed out far apart, as though open to both anal or genital sex, therefore exemplifying a piece that blatantly evokes gay eroticism. Cameron stated that *Lying Man*'s sexual posture had a "peculiar hybrid of complete physical ease and self-conscious masculine primping native to his social territory."<sup>60</sup> Overall, this provocative subject matter is one of Cameron's few choices to present a work in which queer content is immediately perceivable and even confrontational. Furthermore, Henninger can be interpreted as utilizing Camp with *Lying Man*, as his intentionally crude subject recirculates the stereotypical image of a gay male bathroom hook-up. The subject's graceless posture, hackneyed muscular build, partial nudity, clad only in underwear and military boots, and kitsch satin flesh, parodies the tasteful. The negative connotations of this piece were visible through deliberate exaggeration of tasteless characteristics, ultimately creating a comedic effect. *Lying Man* was also situated in a contested space that confused the opposition between theatricality and authenticity. By establishing an association with Camp, *Lying Man*'s parody and incongruity can be interpreted as asserting to the viewer that his appearance was a homophobic projection rather than a true signifier of

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 25.

identity. This frame of mind can be interpreted as assisting Cameron's efforts to prevent oversimplified presentations of the queer community in his show.

Another work in the exhibition that had apparent queer imagery was Lee Gordon's triptych. These pieces depicted him exploring his transsexuality through the display of his feminine garments which also expose his masculine build (figure 2:2). Each work was made with oil on canvas and measured thirty-six by twenty-six inches. Cameron gave Gordon's work its own wall; the isolation that resulted from this placement mimicked Gordon's very small figures centered against a dominant white background. Gordon created a sense of seclusion with white backgrounds barren of context, and his figures' lower bodies fade away into the white which further removes them from reality. The piece that is particularly significant here is *Self-Portrait in Skeleton Mask and Bra* (figure 2:3). In this painting, the figure is wearing a green-tinged skull mask and a black bikini bra. His skull mask evokes the image of death, establishing a dismal tone that is strengthened by his demonic gaze and the rough shading delineating the contours of his body. Cameron described that his engagement with death "ascribes a barren state to the gay male soul."<sup>61</sup> Cameron's description is very dismal, which suggests that he was overlooking the humor present in the painting. The combination of a skull mask and bikini bra should not remain unacknowledged because it adds another theme separate from exploring the gender binary. Here, Camp can be applied to Gordon's depictions of himself when considering his bizarre attire. We know that Camp makes a statement by deliberately challenging hegemonic aesthetics and social tastes. So, by juxtaposing the unattractive grimness of a skull mask with the unflattering frivolity of a bikini bra, Gordon's portrays, as well as appraises, a culturally defined "bad" taste. Even though Cameron was not thinking of Gordon's work in the context of Camp, Cameron's decision

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 15.

to include Gordon in the show was important because Gordon challenged the view of identity as a fixed state. With this framework, Gordon's work relates to Meyer's discussion on the constantly evolving meaning of the term "queer." Gordon's varied engagement with queerness can be interpreted, in Meyer's terms, as disturbing the "bourgeois notion of the Self as unique, abiding and continuous while substituting instead a concept of the Self as performative, improvisational, discontinuous, and processually constituted by repetitive and stylized acts."<sup>62</sup> Through his triptych, Gordon not only repetitively provides three presentations of himself, but also, most notably with *Self-Portrait in Skeleton Mask and Bra*, stylizes his subject as disengaged from the pressure to conform to hegemonic oppressive standards. Moreover, Gordon underscored the validity of identity politics by circumventing the essentialist nature of visual portrayals of identity. His self-portraits illuminate the way in which the viewer can see identity not as monolithic to a group, but as ineffably multifaceted and ever-changing.

Charley Brown, like Gordon, engaged with transgender themes, but in a much more theatrical manner. He had two paintings in the show, *Bi Felt Like Screaming* (figure 2:4), made with acrylic, pins, and felt on cardboard, and measuring thirty-eight by fifty-seven inches. The other painting, *Bi Untitled* (figure 2:5), was made with acrylic and tooth pics on cardboard, measuring forty-five by thirty-eight inches. Both depict his good friend, "Bi," dressed in full drag. With these paintings, Brown actually steered away from his usual abstract style of painting to make facial and full-body portraiture. In *Bi Felt Like Screaming*, Brown depicts Bi with a shockingly combative visage as she screams. The tension is strengthened by the discomfort made visible with her contorted body aggressively dominating the unbalanced composition. The bright

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<sup>62</sup> Peter James Turberfield. *Pierre Loti and the Theatricality of Desire*. No. 309. Rodopi, 2008.

colors and lack of depth further charge the painting with energy. With these formal elements, Brown produced a contentious yet arresting image. In fact, Brown pieced together his work from street debris that was somewhat abused during its development.<sup>63</sup> This highly selective process of using cast out material demonstrates Brown's attentiveness toward depicting Bi's outsider status. Also, Cameron stated that Brown's work could be unintentionally capturing a form of American entertainment that is beginning to fade, i.e., "social transvestism- in a late-blooming glory."<sup>64</sup> Cameron's description, markedly including the word "entertainment," insinuates Brown's flirtation with subaltern popular culture in a bold manner. This characteristic relates to Brown's determination to depict "fun" within his paintings, which he framed as the most important element. *In Politics and Poetics of Camp*, Chuck Kleinhaus discussed parody and Camp humor, which is a strategy echoing Brown's aspirations. Kleinhaus cited Jack Babuscio as well, who described Camp humor as a "strategy for reconciling conflicting emotions: it is 'a means of dealing with a hostile environment and, in the process, of defining a positive identity.'"<sup>65</sup> Brown evokes hostility with Bi's severe facial expression, but ultimately this does not relinquish the painting's playful atmosphere. Camp thus supports identity as an organizing principle while emphasizing the contradictions in the Bi Paintings. This emphasis counters the interpretation of transgender experiences as homogenous, and therefore creates an anti-essentialist representation.

Similar to Brown, Janosco's work here is constructed with material that challenges principles of formal art. Janosco's sculptures in the show consist of ceramic replicas of

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>65</sup> Chuck Kleinhaus. "Camp and the Politics of Parody." *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* (1994): 182.

Michelangelo's *David* in three different variations. Janosco appropriates the elegant classicality of *David* and reframes it into crude, kitsch, and humorous narratives. In fact, these types of narratives are archetypes of Camp, as they challenge elitist aesthetic and social taste as well. In Janosco's framework, dominant museums embody these aristocratic tastes, as his material allowed him, according to Cameron, "to have some fun at High Art's expense."<sup>66</sup> Thus, Camp discourse is referenced here through the humorous insertion of high-brow culture into low-brow. Furthermore, Janosco engages the flexibility of a singular presentation of identity with *Innocence* (figure 2:6), *Narcissus* (figure 2:7), and *Sex Pistols* (figure 2:8). *Innocence* is especially noteworthy here, as it is Janosco's most apparent exploration of gender. A part of this ceramic sculpture, measuring three feet high, is a hermaphroditic figure.<sup>67</sup> The figure's arm crosses over her face to cover her eyes in humility. Cameron described this gesture as exemplifying the romanticized view of a female virgin, as well as a "kitsch personification of innocence."<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, this feminine gesture juxtaposes with the conspicuous penis attached to her pelvis. Advancing this juxtaposition of *Innocence* is David's bust rested on a disc above the figure's head. Janosco painted make-up on this bust, including blue eyeshadow, mascara indicated by long eyelashes, red lips, and blush. This highly conventional make-up is on a mask, though, made apparent by the pink ribbon tied around his neck. Here, Janosco is not only playing with the gender binary, but also an individual's reaction to it. With the mask, Janosco presents a multi-layered form of subordination to hegemonic standards of beauty. Janosco exaggerates the make-up, like drag, to highlight the nonsensical disregard of individualism when following this social construction. Thus, in accordance with Jack Babuscio's discussion on the theatrically of

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<sup>66</sup> Cameron, *Extended Sensibilities*, 20.

<sup>67</sup> Cameron, nonetheless, used she/her pronouns for the figure, which I will use here too.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

Camp, *Innocence* evokes Camp through exaggerated forms of conforming to beauty standards.<sup>69</sup> Janosco's work unveils the irony of conforming to beauty standards by underscoring that this ostensible form of self-expression has become a form of social oppression. It is important to note, though, that this discussion of make-up and conformity might also be offensive to women who enjoy following these rituals.

Winant's pieces are not as confrontational as the other artists' works, but they are just as, or even more, provocative. Winant critiques dominant perceptions of non-normative sexualities by including insinuations of bestial sexuality in her works. Her presence in this show was powerful, as her pieces could be interpreted as establishing a comparison of romantic relationships between people of the same sex and pets. Consequentially, Winant's work could have resulted in parodying the fear of homosexual relationships within the audience by suggesting a more controversial intimacy with her dog. Regardless of her intentions, the fact that this was Winant's first time painting representationally suggests a bold attitude. *The Kiss* (figure 2:9) features Winant cradling her dog, Cindy, who is depicted here as part dog, goat, and fish. More importantly, Winant depicts herself kissing Cindy's mouth. Accompanying this painting is a poem stating that "your mouth is a source of purity."<sup>70</sup> The bestial elements in Winant's work are most compelling, and Cameron surprisingly did not mention this aspect. Instead, he approached Winant's subject matter by describing it as remarkable because it referenced "a pertinent trait" of lesbians, which he claimed is their closeness to animals. He related this to examples of lesbian artists whose work also accompanied close relationships to animals, such as

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<sup>69</sup> Jack Bergman, "Strategic Camp: The Art of Gay Rhetoric," in *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*, ed. David Bergman (Amherst, MA/USA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 94.

<sup>70</sup> Cameron, *Extended Sensibilities*, 35.



Rosa Bonheur, Romaine Brooks, as well as Picasso's painting of Gertrude Stein. Cameron's generalization was more strange than offensive, especially because it was apolitical. Nonetheless, Cameron's sweeping statement essentialized the lesbian community and contradicted his aspirations regarding representation for his show. In response, though, with *The Kiss* Winant may have, intentionally or not, been referencing this stereotype in order to co-opt it and reveal it as ridiculous. With this perspective, Winant successfully used parody, a prominent aspect of Camp, by adopting this stereotype and distorting its meaning for oppositional critique. Camp discourse exposes how Winant's use of satire makes apparent that it is very questionable to assume the relationship between her and Cindy is a reflection of her true identity.

Overall, many of the artworks in *Extended Sensibilities* can be seen as strategically using Camp. The incorporation of this argument strengthens Cameron's focus on Sensibility Content in his show. Camp illuminates that the queer art which poses the strongest opposition to heteronormative culture is queer art that is coded. In fact, the discussion on queer art's use of parody, satire, appropriation, etc., is also explained in depth by the curators of *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*. A discussion on this exhibition follows, which will expose how curators David C. Ward and Jonathon Katz framed *Hide/Seek* to focus on the same type of decoding queer content as Cameron.



Figure 2:1. John Henninger, *Lying Man*, 1978-82, stuffed satin and environment.



Figure 2:1. Lee Gordon, from left to right: *Self-Portrait in Slip*, *Self Portrait in Werewolf Mask*, *Self-Portrait in Mask and Bra*, 1981, oil on canvas.



Figure 2:3. Lee Gordon, *Self-Portrait in Skeleton Mask and Bra*, 1981, oil on canvas.



Figure 2:4. Charley Brown, *Bi Felt Like Screaming*, 1979, acrylic, pins, and felt on cardboard.



Figure 2:5. Charley Brown, *Bi Untitled*, 1980, acrylic, pins, and felt on cardboard.



Figure 2:6. Jerry Janosco, *Innocence*, 1981, ceramic.





Figure 2:7. Jerry Janosco, *Narcissus*, 1981-1982, ceramic.





Figure 2:8. Jerry Janosco, *Sex Pistols*, 1982, ceramic.

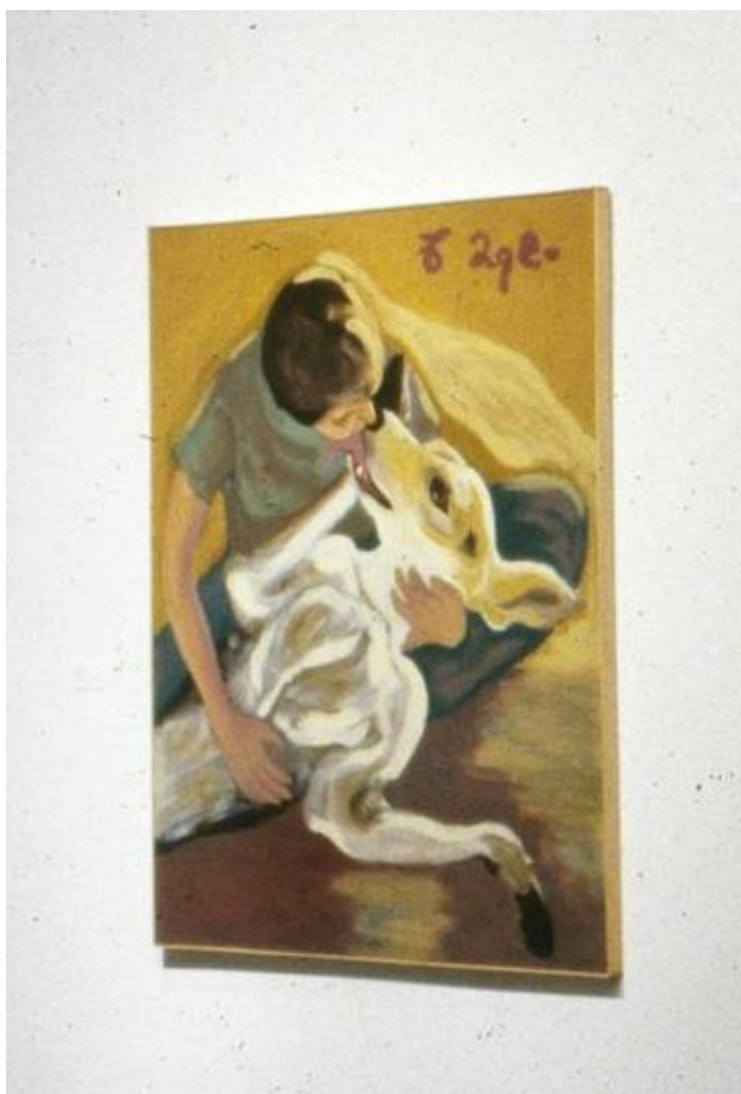


Figure 2:9. Fran Winant, *Cindy*, 1976, oil on canvas.

### Chapter 3

#### *Hide/Seek: Let's Get One Thing Straight, This Art is Not*

After examining Cameron's challenges with *Extended Sensibilities*, I think it is useful to explore a more contemporary queer art exhibition to see how thinking on curation has changed. I would like to make a leap to another exhibition that spoke of queer art fairly similarly, however, almost thirty years later in 2010. With this comparison, I hope to make clear how more inclusive mentalities and a greater sensitivity to identity politics during the twenty-first century affected curatorial methods overall.

Both driven by a passion for revealing the fundamental role of queer artists in American art, Jonathon Katz and David Ward curated *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* at the National Portrait Gallery in 2010. Ward had been a curator for the National Portrait Gallery for thirty years by then, while Katz was serving as a guest curator. Their choice to survey sexual difference through portraiture came from portraiture's unique ability to portray ways in which same-sex desire was alluded to or marked. Portraiture can hold both an intensely private contemplation of character and can form of public record of admiration. Furthermore, in accordance with Katz and Ward's claim that there is no such thing as a "'true' likeness," portraiture was also significant to the show for its ability to conceal as much as it reveals.<sup>71</sup> Ultimately, with *Hide/Seek*, Katz and Ward explored various themes regarding sexuality and marginality, thus exposing the unacknowledged role of gay and lesbian artists within the making of modern American portraiture.

In 1991, Katz became the first American academic to be tenured in the field of gay and lesbian studies at the City College of San Francisco. He also founded and chaired the Harvey

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<sup>71</sup> David Ward, "Hide/Seek," *Portrait*, September 1, 2010, accessed April 19, 2018, <https://www.portrait.gov.au/magazines/37/hideseek>.

Milk Institute in 1994, which is the largest institution dedicated to queer studies in the world. His trailblazing in the art world included founding and chairing the Queer Caucus for Art of the College Art Association in 1997, as well as directing the first National Queer Arts Festival in San Francisco in 1998. Furthermore, Katz served as a member of the Board of Directors and curator of the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Lesbian and Gay Art in 2007. Particularly relevant to the discussion on queer art exhibitions and coded language, Katz also contributed to Camp discourse in 2009 with his book, *The Silent Camp: Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and the Cold War*.<sup>72</sup> He is currently the director of the doctoral program in Visual Culture studies at The State University of New York at Buffalo. In addition, Ward became a historian and curator at the National Portrait Gallery in 1980. Along with *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*, Ward curated *One Life: Walt Whitman: a kosmos* in 2006, and *Dark Fields of the Republic: Alexander Gardner Photographs, 1859-1872* in 2015. He is the author of *Charles Wilson Peale: Art and Selfhood in the Early Republic*, and is also a critic and poet who has been widely published in various American literary magazines.<sup>73</sup> He retired in 2017, after thirty-seven years of work at the National Portrait Gallery.<sup>74</sup>

The National Portrait Gallery is part of Washington D.C.'s larger Smithsonian complex, which offers nineteen museums, galleries, gardens, and a zoo all throughout the city. While the Smithsonian began collecting portraiture in the 1840s, the US Congress did not establish a separate gallery devoted to American portraiture until 1962.<sup>75</sup> Thus, as part of a congressional

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<sup>72</sup> Jonathon D. Katz CV, *Queer Cultural Center*, accessed April 19, 2018, <http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/KatzPages/KatzBio.html>.

<sup>73</sup> Jonathon D. Katz and David C. Ward, *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* (Washington DC, USA: Smithsonian Institution, 2010), book sleeve.

<sup>74</sup> "Thank You, David Ward!," *Face to Face: A Blog from the National Portrait Gallery*, entry posted April 28, 2017, accessed April 19, 2018, <http://npg.si.edu/blog/thank-you-david-ward>.

<sup>75</sup> *The Smithsonian Institution* (Washington D.C., USA: The Smithsonian Institution, 1964).

mandate, the Smithsonian Board of Regents assigned it a specific agenda consisting of two main objectives. First, the National Portrait Gallery should be dedicated to acquiring and exhibiting portraits and statuary for figures who have significantly contributed to American history. Second, the National Portrait Gallery should act as a space for research on American biography, iconography, and history. At that time, however, this mandate considerably restricted what type of portraiture was allowed in the gallery.<sup>76</sup> Even today, in fact, a portrait's historical significance is more important to the Portrait Gallery than the artist's reputation. The restrictions somewhat loosened in 1976, when the Portrait Gallery was granted the ability to collect portraits of all media. Many of the new acquisitions were photography, such as 5,419 glass negatives from the Mathew Brady Studio acquired in 1981.<sup>77</sup> Throughout all of the Portrait Gallery's exhibition history, *Hide/Seek* was the first portrait show to occupy itself so heavily with sexuality of any type. In fact, it is not surprising that the queer community is central to the general art public's interest in sexuality by virtue of its non-normative status. Overall, though, the importance placed on historical significance, especially when considering Washington D.C.'s more conservative climate than New York, presents a notable conceptual shift between *Hide/Seek* at the National Portrait Gallery and *Extended Sensibilities* at the New Museum.

The importance Katz and Ward had to place on historical significance at the National Portrait Gallery actually made for a more unified show than *Extended Sensibilities*. Cameron's catalogue provided mostly formal analysis and some sense of background context, but that mostly pertained to the artists' biographies. In the *Hide/Seek* catalogue, Katz and Ward, on the other hand, provide a lengthy narrative framework for the works which are formatted

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<sup>76</sup> The Smithsonian, "The National Portrait Gallery," The Smithsonian Institution Archives, accessed April 19, 2018, <https://siarchives.si.edu/history/national-portrait-gallery>.

<sup>77</sup> The Smithsonian, "The National," The Smithsonian Institution Archives.

chronologically. *Hide/Seek*'s chronological organization allows for the collection of art to be more readily understood as a unified whole, which created a sense of cohesion that *Extended Sensibilities* lacked. Cameron's catalogue, as we know, had a fairly inconsistent narrative that pieced the works together somewhat arbitrarily.

The catalogue for *Hide/Seek* contains writing from both Katz and Ward, with an introductory narrative by Katz and an analysis of the works by Ward. Katz makes statements about queer art similar to Cameron, both covering the use of code, satire, appropriation, etc., in queer art to pose oppositional critique. Therefore, the two catalogues can easily be framed in direct comparison with one another. Katz's more contemporary discussion reflects the evolving perspectives on gender and sexuality, while also exposing improvements in curatorial practice that were made in response to new inclusive attitudes. With this comparison, I hope to further reveal how the early 1980s influenced Cameron's curatorial decisions, even though the response to *Hide/Seek* was far more repressive, as will be seen.

Examining *Hide/Seek* through Cameron's text, we can see that Katz began the introduction by describing the painting, *The Shower Bath* (figure 3:1), made in 1917 by George Bellows, which immediately echoes Cameron's exploration of hidden language within the history of queer art. Katz stresses that the foreground includes a figure looking suggestively at another man who is covering his erection with a towel, explaining that the enigma of this painting was its critical and commercial success. Scholars have figured both Bellows and his audience ignored the homoerotic imagery, but Katz convincingly proposes that this painting could have fed the desire of closeted homosexuals for gay content. Because Bellow's sexuality is not confirmed, this work's persistence in a heteronormative culture will remain debatable. Ultimately, *The Shower Bath* demonstrates that the transparency of queer content within art

depends on the viewer. Furthermore, Katz concludes his discussion on *The Shower Bath* with a statement that can serve as an extension of Cameron's argument in the *Extended Sensibilities* catalogue. He argues that same-sex desire has often been delineated in painting the same way it has been communicated between people, with "the most subtle gestures, glances, and codes." Also, because homosexual desire was historically illegal, queer content in images like *The Shower Bath* "have passed under our contemporary perception utterly undetected."<sup>78</sup> As Katz explains, this is because the codes that govern representation of sexuality are continuously evolving and changing. Overall, though, Katz's emphasis on uncovering the visual codes within queer art reveals that *Hide/Seek* pursues some of the same goals as *Extended Sensibilities*, but Katz and Ward still incidentally made no reference to Cameron. Even more, Brian Logan, a director at a performance art theater in London, erroneously stated in an article from *The Guardian* that *Hide/Seek* was America's first major museum exhibition to focus on art history with "a homosexual perspective."<sup>79</sup> This false claim is upsetting, as it overlooks Cameron's accomplishment and attempts to garner *Hide/Seek* recognition for something that has already been done. Logan once again focuses on the "novelty" or innovation of queer art exhibitions, even though the claim is unfounded.

Finally, although they examined the same time period, the greatest difference between Katz and Cameron is the confidence and brevity in Katz's language. Katz's text, however, has more conviction than Cameron's, especially when relaying his vision of queer art. For instance, Cameron felt inclined to explain in great length, somewhat unclearly, how heterosexual artists

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<sup>78</sup> Jonathon D. Katz and David C. Ward, *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* (Washington DC, USA: Smithsonian Institution, 2010), 14.

<sup>79</sup> Brian Logan, "Hide/Seek: Too Shocking for America," *The Guardian* (New York, NY/USA), December 5, 2010.

and imagery could be counted as queer art. His sometimes convoluted explanations illustrated his internalization of homophobia in 1982, especially when much of the mainstream audience had barely any exposure to serious analyses of queer art. Katz, on the other hand, more emphatically states that queer art is “even straight artists representing straight figures (when of interest to gay people/culture).”<sup>80</sup> Katz’s succinct clarification here reflects his greater confidence, writing almost a whole thirty years later. More critical engagement with queer art had been exhibited, published, and circulated by that time, which is immediately apparent in the show’s actual description: “the first major museum exhibition to focus on sexual difference in the making of modern American portraiture,”<sup>81</sup> which shows the level of specificity that was required to frame what Katz and Ward was doing as the “first” to do it with queer art by 2010. Furthermore, the conciseness of Katz’s description of queer art also suggests that he was not constrained by a need to appeal the widest possible public, as was Cameron. In fact, Katz’s text overall was much more refined, possessing an inherent snobbism that implies consideration of a mostly educated audience. The elitism of the text further underscores Cameron’s efforts to reach a wider population in 1982, as his articulation of concepts was less ostentatious and more democratic. Nonetheless, one aspect of the *Hide/Seek* show that does reveal some restraint, possibly in anticipation of a heteronormative public, is its title. *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* avoids using a term explicitly connected to non-normative sexualities, such as Cameron’s use of “Homosexual” in *Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art*. Thus, Katz and Ward’s decision to connote queer identity through

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<sup>80</sup> Katz and Ward, *Hide/Seek: Difference*, 15.

<sup>81</sup> Smithsonian Institution, “Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture,” National Portrait Gallery, <http://npg.si.edu/exhibition/hideseek-difference-and-desire-american-portraiture>).



“Difference and Desire” demonstrates the need to appeal to a heterogeneous public, but in a superficial way. Or, perhaps the title’s ambiguity was a way to go unnoticed by a wider public, rather than attempt to please a demographic they presumed they could not. Overall, it seems that this voluntary distance from any blatant advertisement of queer artwork is a product of their status as a gallery that represents the nation.

Another major difference between *Extended Sensibilities* and *Hide/Seek* was Katz and Ward’s heightened attentiveness to inclusivity, although Katz claimed they did not include as much diversity as they could have. Most importantly, *Hide/Seek* included queer art from people of color, including Beauford Delaney, Yayoi Kusama, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Tseng Kwong Chi, Jerome Caja, Glen Ligon, Lyle Ashton Harris, Laura Aguilar, and Anthony Goicolea. The inclusion of people of color in *Hide/Seek* is a tremendous improvement from *Extended Sensibilities*, critical to the twenty-first century’s focus on intersectionalism. Katz, nonetheless, did admit that any priority for inclusivity was compromised by their more urgent objective to prove that same-sex desire is not “tangential to the history of American art,” but is actually essential.<sup>82</sup> In other words, the curators were searching for well-known artists. In fact, every work within the exhibition has been displayed in a museum or gallery before. Thus, Katz makes clear that he and Ward wanted this show to demonstrate how integral queer artists were to the formation of American modernism. Interestingly, Katz also noted that outing artists was often an impediment for them, which reminds us of Cameron’s situation in 1982. Yet this insistence on keeping the artist’s sexuality secret paradoxically supports the idea that same-sex desire *is* tangential to American art history; Katz explains that some artists or estates declined in part

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<sup>82</sup> Jonathon D. Katz and David C. Ward, *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* (Washington DC, USA: Smithsonian Institution, 2010), 15.

because they felt that declaring an artist's sexuality in this way could harm their market. This can only reinforce the dominance of the heteronormative art market, thereby maintaining same-sex desire's tangentiality. Thus, in 2010, assigning queerness still meant placing the work within a small commercial niche. Katz and Ward's choice of canonical artists thus seems more in line with their agenda for the show, which is talking about works of art in a way that has not been done by other museums before. Furthermore, their lack of engagement with artists of "comparatively low profile" also seems to be more indicative of how "queer" was still a loaded category, potentially harmful to an artist who had not received recognition outside of a show like *Hide/Seek*.<sup>83</sup> Or, at least, Katz and Ward's obstacle here undoubtedly indicates same-sex desire's tangentiality within a commercial sphere. Regardless, Katz and Ward's selection of artists demonstrates the frightening persistence of homophobic backlash against groundbreaking queer art exhibitions like this one. In fact, the counterattack they received from the Catholic League pressured Katz and Ward to take actions contradictory to the cause of their exhibition, which was an extremely disheartening experience for the both of them.

The case in point concerned David Wojnarowicz's video, "A Fire in My Belly," that included an image of ants crawling around a crucifix. The Catholic League interpreted this commentary on the AIDS epidemic as an attack on Christians. With the help of a few members from Congress, they pressured the Smithsonian to force its removal from the gallery. Holland Cotter's *New York Times* review of the show sums up this debacle in a powerfully astute and concise way. Cotter stated that having it "removed entirely because of ideological strong-arming was to violate the premise and promise of the show: difference was sent back into hiding."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Katz and Ward, *Hide/Seek: Difference*, 15.

<sup>84</sup> Holland Cotter, "Sexuality in Modernism: The (Partial) History," *The New York Times* (New York, NY/USA), December 10, 2010.

Katz and Ward thus ultimately had to work against their own mission, which Cotter described as a capitulation to the return of the 1980s culture wars. Ironically and luckily, Cameron's *Extended Sensibilities*, which was in the 80s, as we recall, did not face such vicious attacks. It might be supposed that Katz and Ward's response to the Catholic League highlights the different political climates of Washington D.C. and New York, as well as the high stakes involved in being a part of the Smithsonian. Another review of the show in the *Washington Post*, by Phillip Kennicott, explained that when the *Hide/Seek* show went to the Brooklyn Museum, they brought back the Wojnarowicz video. Furthermore, Brooklyn Museum kept it even after vitriolic protest from the right. Kennicott then pointed out a critical difference that also implies the advantage Cameron had over Ward and Katz, even though his exhibition was in the 1980s. Ward has claimed that the Brooklyn Museum was able to prevent that type of censorship because it is neither federally funded nor located in the capital of the nation.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, Katz and Ward's crucial disadvantage was having to work so closely with the federal government, the headquarters of hegemony. Overall, though, their removal of Wojnarowicz gave the Washington exhibition attention from a much larger population than their initial demographic, and highlighted how incredible it was for the Portrait Gallery to greenlight an exhibition on queer art. Here, the use of sexuality as a category around which to base an exhibition was especially fraught. Furthermore, while both shows tried to spotlight the talent of queer artists, *Hide/Seek* explored queer identity as an organizing principle very differently from *Extended Sensibilities*.

Critical analysis of the works in *Extended Sensibilities*, specifically understanding the artwork as Camp, shows how Cameron was able to avoid an essentialist perspective of this

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<sup>85</sup> Philip Kennicott, "Essay," *The Washington Post* (Washington D.C., USA), November 23, 2011.

minority identity. This was extremely important to *Extended Sensibilities*, as Cameron's choice of artists were all contemporary. However, Katz and Ward formed the concept for their show in a deliberate way that minimized this risk in the exhibition. As discussed in Chapter 1, Kobena Mercer stressed the public expectation for minority artists to represent their entire community, which is very difficult and often leads to a reductive understanding of a minority. For *Hide/Seek*, nonetheless, artists were framed as representing their entire community exactly in that way. However, it did not pose the same risk because, first, Katz and Ward focused on historic works of art, introducing queer content instead of reframing it in the way Cameron did. Second, their concentration is on visual analysis, aiming to reveal how sexual difference was being *depicted* rather than expressed. For instance, the iconic image for *Hide/Seek* is Berenice Abbott's photograph of Janet Flanner, which they even used for the cover of the *Hide/Seek* catalogue (figure 3:2). In this portrait, Flanner comedically shows bravado and subverts gender roles by wearing a top hat. Moreover, wrapped around her top hat are two ordinary party masks. These masks evoke the paradox of having to hide in plain sight as a lesbian while dominant culture continuously tried to suppress the homosexual community. In Ward's analysis of this work, he concentrates on Flanner's deliberate employment of the masks and masculine attire in order to provide legible signifiers of her sexuality.<sup>86</sup> By focusing his critique on this aspect of the photograph, Ward relays historical information instead of attempting to describe Abbott's deeper meanings she personally ascribed to the photograph. With this approach, Ward circumvents a generalization of Abbott's personal experiences or outlook coming from a position of being queer herself. In this way, Ward avoids essentializing because he pays attention to technique and impact instead of the artist's message and intent. This strategy thus presents a more careful and

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<sup>86</sup> Katz and Ward, *Hide/Seek: Difference*, 104.

complex way to incorporate queer identity as the basis of an art show. In another part of Cotter's *Hide/Seek* review in *The New York Times*, he also described his definition of the term, "queer." It is important to note that he was writing this in 2010, when the general understanding, and most likely his own, of "queer" was different than it is even in 2018. Regardless, Cotter stated that "gay" refers to sexuality, while "queer" is a person's choice to position themselves outside of the heteronormative mainstream.<sup>87</sup> Ward can be seen as implementing this perspective for his analysis as well. Ward does not attempt to relay the artists' experiences of being queer themselves, but their reaction to it, which ultimately avoids reductionist framework.

Furthermore, Katz's discussion on Berenice Abbott in the catalogue provides a post-script to Mercer's discussion on creating art from experiences of marginality. Abbott took that photograph of Flanner in Paris in 1927, which at the time was a much more open place to be homosexual. Interestingly, Ward mentioned that France was more free partly because Napoleon legalized homosexuality in 1807.<sup>88</sup> When Abbott returned to New York, she stopped photographing the queer community and instead focused more on formal elements of the city, such as its gridwork and city lights. Katz describes this transition as a common move for the queer artists, noticing that once they received fame and the market began to take interest, the queer imagery eventually receded.<sup>89</sup> He also explains that Abbott decried critics who analyzed her body of work according to lesbian tropes. Similar to the struggle Mercer brought up, Abbott

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<sup>87</sup> Holland Cotter, "Sexuality in Modernism: The (Partial) History," *The New York Times* (New York, NY/USA), December 10, 2010.

<sup>88</sup> "Hide/Seek: Portraits of Djuna Barnes and Janet Flanner," video file, 02:11, Youtube, posted by National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, April 8, 2011, accessed April 23, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=47p7Gt5IHc8&index=8&list=PLC271CAFAECCE0917&t=0s>.

<sup>89</sup> Katz stated that other artists who moved away from their initial explicit framing of their sexuality were Agnes Martin, Andy Warhol, and Robert Rauschenberg.

declared “I am a photographer, not a lesbian.” Since Abbott was intimate with women throughout her whole life, Katz interprets this statement as demonstrative of her fear that her queer identity would render the significance of her work “a subcultural document.”<sup>90</sup> This discussion on Abbott echoes Katz’s earlier thoughts on the impediments he and Ward faced while finding artists for *Hide/Seek*. Katz’s acknowledgement of Abbott’s perspective here proves that he is highly cognizant of how an emphasis on a minority identity can be conducive to reductive interpretations of artwork. In conclusion, Katz and Ward leave many questions regarding Abbott’s intentions unanswered, which prevented them from essentializing and made more room for dialogue between viewers. Katz and Ward therefore produced an intriguing exhibition that engaged with queer identity as an organizing principle in an innovative way. By highlighting sexual difference in each of the works, they examined famous art in a way that has never been done before. Moreover, Katz and Ward showed that true understanding of queer art necessitates an “insider’s” knowledge, ultimately allowing for the *Hide/Seek* gallery to offer a space in which a queer’s outsider status was in.

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<sup>90</sup> Katz and Ward, *Hide/Seek: Difference*, 24.



Figure 3:1. George Bellows, *The Shower-Bath*, 1917, lithograph.



Figure 3:2. Berenice Abbott, *Janet Flanner*, 1927, gelatin silver print.



## Conclusion

We're Here, We're Queer. If You're Not Used to it, Too Bad.

Comparisons between *Extended Sensibilities* and *Hide/Seek* allow us to track the shifting perspectives on gender and sexuality. Both shows opposed the historic values of their institutions, but often in furtive ways. In 2018, however, if we return to Halberstam's insistence on the "queer art of failure," at this point in time failing is no longer criminal. The New Museum's queer art show in 2017, *Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon*, revealed that queer content in art no longer needed to be merely implied to remain within mainstream culture. *Trigger's* blatant and radical political messages provided evidence that queerness, although still very discriminated against outside of the art-going public, has been decriminalized. Furthermore, *Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon*, by its very name, demonstrated the fundamental role gender plays in defining queerness. In 2017, gender, instead of sexuality, took center stage.

While there were artists in *Trigger* who eschewed explicit representation, in contrast to both *Extended Sensibilities* and *Hide/Seek*, many of the messages within the art were anything but subtle. According to the curator, Johanna Burton, many artists also created striking political statements by espousing explicit pleasure and lavish visuals. The work in the show explored an extremely wide variety of contemporary issues, all of them uniquely creating intersections between race, class, and/or disability, along with gender and sexuality. *Trigger*, nonetheless, broke down barriers of these previously established categories, and highly intensified the instability of the category: gender.

Gender was presented as so unstable, in fact, that the show's conceptual indeterminacy was echoed in a literal sense within the four floors of the exhibition. Yes, thirty-five years passed since *Extended Sensibilities*, and the New Museum (not so new anymore) gained three more floors. *Trigger's* installation was chaotic all throughout; gallery rooms provided different

compartments and partitions but there was no singular path to follow. This aspect of the show is reminiscent of Dan Cameron's inconsistent and sporadic narrative for *Extended Sensibilities*.

However, it can also be argued, as Holland Cotter did in his review of the show, that this disorienting layout was deliberate. Cotter even stated that requesting cohesion from a show that surveys queer art is wrong.<sup>91</sup> Nonetheless, in an interview with Loney Abrams, a writer from *Artspace*, Burton discussed the thinking behind the show's layout and her perspective of gender. In response to the reception of the show, she insisted on using the word "destabilizing," instead of "confusing," to describe *Trigger*, along with gender. Burton argued that when people use the word "confusing," "they are locating confusion in the object rather than in the viewer. So, if I say that a painting is confusing or gender is confusing, it's not my problem; somehow the thing is being asked to resolve itself instead. I think the opposite is happening and people are being destabilized in terms of their expectations for not just what gender does but what a show about gender should do."<sup>92</sup> Her commentary here is intriguing in the way that it takes away responsibility from the curator and places it back onto the viewer, reasonably and productively. Burton's argument suggests that this type of response to the show could have been a product of the dominant sociopolitical perspective of gender, rather than merely an analysis of the show's disorienting installation. By doing so, her argument also underscores how deeply intertwined curatorial practice and social commentary are. Burton, therefore, reinforced both the importance of the curator and the intricate power of placement.

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<sup>91</sup> Holland Cotter, "When It Comes to Gender, Let Confusion Reign," *New York Times* (New York, NY), September 29, 2017.

<sup>92</sup> Loney Abrams, "'Gender Isn't Confusing, It's Destabilizing': New Museum's 'Trigger' Curator Johanna Burton Discusses Her Mixed Reviews in the Wake of #MeToo," *Artspace*, November 16, 2017.

Furthermore, this attempt to break down barriers is apparent in both the premise of the show and the individual artworks. *Trigger*'s focus on fluidity signaled a marked difference from *Extended Sensibilities*'s conception of trans and queer bodies. Cameron's description of Charley Brown and Lee Gordon's trans works in the show reinforced the perspective of gender as a binary opposition. Some works in *Trigger*, on the other hand, complicated this type of representation, while also incorporating a racial component. For example, Troy Michie utilized collage as a medium to challenge binary frameworks by presenting the body in multiple fragments. His artistic process for this particular show also involved collaging images taken from pornographic magazines to create poly-racial erotic bodies (figure 4:1). Another artist, Christina Quarles, expressed the contradiction between her Black ancestry and fair skin by visually blurring the boundaries between her subject's bodies and their surrounding environments (figure 4:2). Her work consequently forced the viewer to deal with dislocated bodies that surpass usual limits, thereby challenging assumptions of our fixed subjectivity.<sup>93</sup> In conclusion, works like Michie and Quarles's enhanced the show's refusal of social constructs of race, in addition to gender. These forms of abstracting the body in *Trigger* were distinctly contemporary, surpassing not only *Extended Sensibilities*'s absence of racial diversity, but also *Hide/Seek*'s entrenchment within the confines of various social categories. Furthermore, the racial dimension of the show also relayed the concept of "queer's" transcendence from merely sexual and gender identities. Michie and Quarles's artistic processes can be described as "queering," i.e., altering, preconceived notions of multiple hegemonic constructs.

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<sup>93</sup> Christina Quarles, "About," Christina Quarles, accessed April 29, 2018, <http://www.christinaquarles.com/About>.

Hilarie M. Sheets, author of *W Magazine*, also spotlighted *Trigger*'s focus on fluidity in her *New York Times* review of the show entitled, "Gender-Fluid Artists Come Out of the Gray Zone." She stated that grappling with gender-fluidity is extremely relevant today, as seen in young people's social media profiles where they declare their preferred pronouns in college and at work.<sup>94</sup> With the pervasiveness of social media, tackling these issues became even more fraught with tension as information began to circulate at a rapid-fire pace. Popular culture, such as the television shows featuring a trans character, "Transparent" and "Orange is the New Black," is also highly influential in creating trends that art institutions follow instead of precede. Moreover, since social media is *the* cultural innovation of the twenty-first century, it also provides fundamental differences in the messages between *Extended Sensibilities* and *Trigger*. For instance, Mickalene Thomas appropriates the trope of the reclining odalisque in order to explore lesbian desire in *Me as Muse* (figure 4:3). This work consists of a twelve-monitor grid that portrays different parts of her body. On a loop just over one minute long, each screen independently fluctuates from a pixelated pattern or historical image to different parts of her body. This work not only evokes the historic male gaze that infringes upon lesbian desire, but also a more contemporary and highly ubiquitous "digital gaze," evoked by her use of twelve separate monitors.

In addition, the intensely rapid and wide circulation of news that has emerged from social media platforms, including Twitter and Facebook, have offered a plethora of new political sources from which artists and curators can draw information. In contrast, it could be argued that *Extended Sensibilities* was lacking in pungency, relative to *Trigger*, because of Cameron's

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<sup>94</sup> Hilarie M. Sheets, "Gender-Fluid Artists Come Out of the Gray Zone," *The New York Times* (New York, NY/USA), September 15, 2017.

dependence on overly-academic sources. For instance, as we recall, one of his outside arguments was about lesbians' closeness to animals. *Trigger*, on the other hand, reflected the public's constant access to current issues and events, favoring, or even primarily paying attention to, political art. For instance, Cotter pointed out that the entirely abstract works within the show would have been viewed by "1982 audiences," referencing *Extended Sensibilities*, as apolitical. In *Trigger*, on the other hand, he argued they were not. He provided Ellen Lesperance's gouache paintings as an example, with "fine netlike patterns" that were actually derivative of close-up photographs of clothing female activists have worn.<sup>95</sup> While I do not necessarily agree that abstract works in *Extended Sensibilities* were viewed as apolitical, I believe his statement here also reflects the public's increasing desire for political content due to social media's increase in news circulation.

Overall, I argue that social media has elicited a strong drive within progressive spheres to be the most politically conscious, as it widely expanded easy access to information on current affairs. Moreover, as a result of this spike in media coverage, I think it is also somewhat easier for artists to notice connections among issues of gender, sexuality, race, class, etc., allowing for multi-faceted exhibitions like *Trigger* to emerge. Regardless, all of the political components that were present in *Trigger* reflect the increasing gravitation toward intersectionalism. Thus, my sincerest gratitude also extends to the curator of *Trigger*, Johanna Burton. Burton collected forty-two artists who were able to locate a nexus among very different social categories. This improvement from *Extended Sensibilities* was helpful not merely for learning better curatorial approaches. Even more, similar to the impact I would like to make on viewers with my art

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<sup>95</sup> Cotter, "When It Comes to Gender."

shows, it also enriched my understanding of the highly complex issues people of many different identities face today.



Figure 4:1. Troy Michie, *La Bicicleta*, 2015, digital inkjet print collage.



Figure 4:2. Christina Quarles, *Held Up Thru Yew*, 2017, acrylic on canvas.



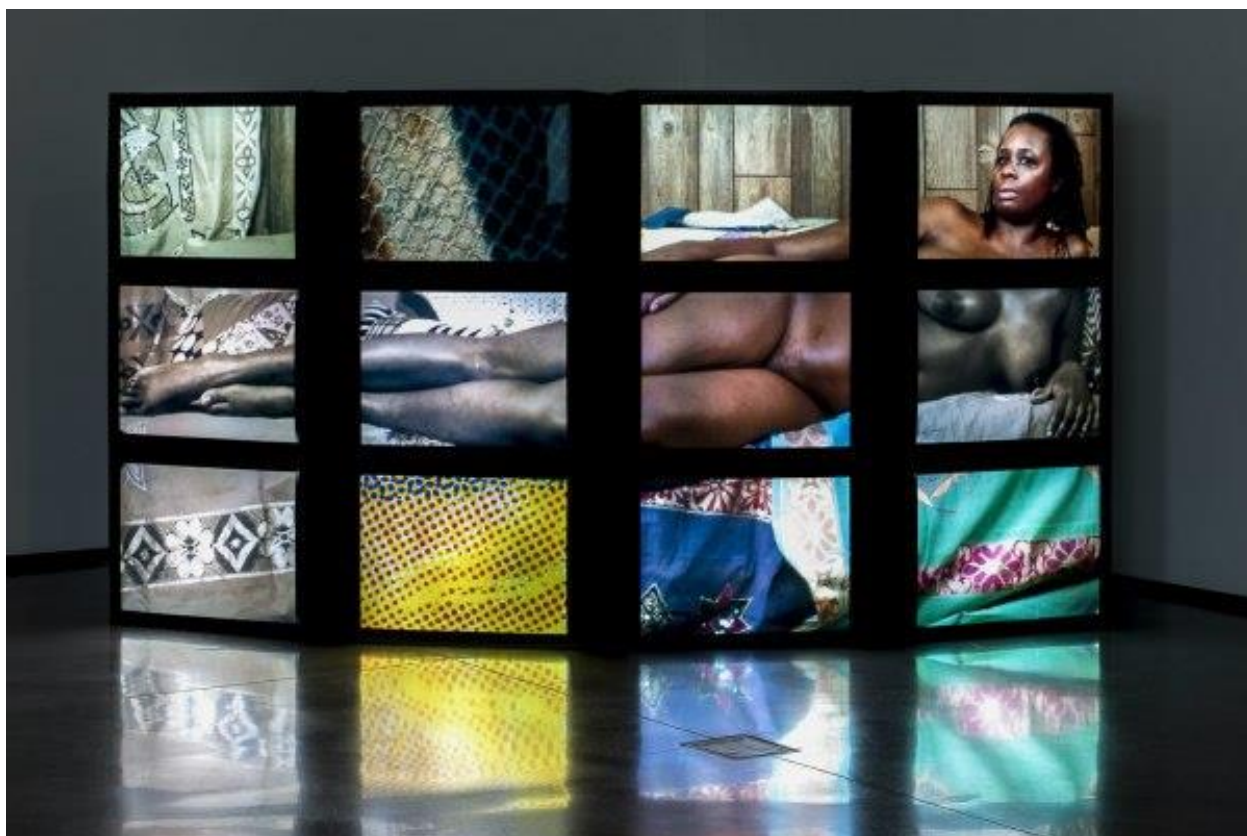


Figure 4:3. Mickalene Thomas, *Me as Muse*, 2016, multi-media video installation.

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