



# Art & Queer Culture

The first book to focus on the criticism and theory regarding queer visual art

Writing queer culture into art history means redrawing the boundaries of what counts as art, as well as what counts as history. It means searching for cracks in the partition that separates 'high' art from 'low' culture and in the divide between public achievement and private life. *Art & Queer Culture* accomplishes these tasks by surveying artworks that have constructed, contested or otherwise responded to homosexuality. Not a book exclusively about artists who identify themselves as gay or lesbian, this volume instead traces the shifting possibilities and constraints of sexual identity that have provided visual artists with a rich creative resource over the last 125 years.

*Art & Queer Culture* includes not only pictures made and displayed under the rubric of fine art but also those intended for private, underground or otherwise restricted audiences. Scrapbooks, amateur artworks, cartoons, bar murals, anonymous photographs, activist posters – all appear in its pages, as do paintings, sculptures, art photographs and video installations.

The book's authors, Catherine Lord and Richard Meyer, have assembled a comprehensive overview of the subject in three sections. Their two-part Survey essay examines the interplay between art and dissident sexualities, from the emergence of homosexuality as an identity in the late nineteenth century to the pioneering 'genderqueers' of the early twenty-first. The Works section presents large full-colour images of over 220 key artworks accompanied by informative captions. And the Documents section provides a generous archive of primary and secondary texts, including artists' statements, exhibition reviews, personal manifestos, sociological essays and critical writings. The extensive back matter includes biographies of all the artists and authors.

# Preface

Preface ..... 9

# Survey

Inverted Histories: 1885–1979

by Richard Meyer ..... 17

Inside the Body Politic: 1980–present

by Catherine Lord ..... 29

# Works

A – Thresholds (1885–1909) ..... 53

B – Stepping Out (1910–29) ..... 65

C – Case Studies (1930–49) ..... 83

D – Closet Organizers (1950–64) ..... 99

E – Into the Streets (1965–79) ..... 121

F – Sex Wars (1980–94) ..... 147

G – Queer Worlds (1995–present) .... 187

# Documents

A – Thresholds (1885–1909) ..... 257

B – Stepping Out (1910–29) ..... 265

C – Case Studies (1930–49) ..... 281

D – Closet Organizers (1950–64) ..... 289

E – Into the Streets (1965–79) ..... 305

F – Sex Wars (1980–94) ..... 325

G – Queer Worlds (1995–present) .... 351

Artists' Biographies ..... 375

Authors' Biographies ..... 393

Index ..... 397

# Art & Queer Culture

## Inside the Body Politic: 1980 – present by Catherine Lord

### Mourning and Monuments

Culture is lived experience *and* historical memory. Excluded from, or misfiled in, the archives and institutions that consolidate a historical record, minoritized cultures generally lack access to the very materials that might structure their lived experience.

‘As a woman, as a lesbian, as a Jew, I know that much of what I call history others will not. But answering that challenge of exclusion is the work of a lifetime.’ So wrote Brooklyn’s Lesbian Herstory Archives founder Joan Nestle in 1986.<sup>95</sup> Librarians are the archaeologists of queer culture, retrieving facts, gossip, names and images that would otherwise vanish, cruising and filtering to redistribute our presence in time and space, constructing counter memories through ink on paper and ephemera such as softball uniforms and matchbooks, salvaging what has been excised from the historical inventory. Jeannette Foster worked in some seventeen states to gain access to lesbian publications housed in public and private troves, including Alfred Kinsey’s Institute for Sex Research, before she self-published, in 1956, the annotated

Andrea Bowers  
*Still Life of The AIDS Memorial Quilt in Storage*  
(Blocks 4336–4340)  
2007





David Goldblatt  
*The entrance to Lwandle, Strand, Western Cape  
 in the time of AIDS, 9 October 2005*  
 2005

bibliography *Sex Variant Women in Literature*. It is no coincidence that artist/lesbian/feminist/sex-radical/bibliographer Tee Corinne had a day job as a librarian in the 1970s and 1980s. Guy Hocquenghem's *Race d'Esp! : Un Siècle d'Images de l'Homosexualité* (1979) scavenged German and French archives to collate historical documents of homosexuality, including material drawn from Magnus Hirschfeld's photographs of androgynes and cross-dressers and interviews with surviving models of Wilhelm von Gloeden.<sup>96</sup>

In the transmission of queer culture, then, the archive is both mourning and monument, a site coloured by loss as well as a structure through which the future is inscribed and by which it can be imagined. The destruction of an archive central to a minoritized group is an act of cultural genocide. The Nazi incineration of the contents of Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Research is doubly an act of violence – first because of the destruction itself and second because the specific intent of the act has for the most part been minimized by descriptions of the conflagration as 'Nazi book-burning'. The very precariousness of queer archives unsettles the ways in which the conventional historical narrative opposes the 'public' and the 'private', sets history against gossip, pits stories against shards. Queer culture is necessarily collaged from fragments, animated by back story, mined from close readings and based upon an intelligence and intensity of gaze. 'Many of us', notes artist and writer Martha Fleming, 'must remember and recount at all costs – not in a flurry of induced abreaction, but rather because our realities and experiences are not inscribed in history, our identities and collectivities are fragile rumours composed of flicker and smoke.'<sup>97</sup>

Some queer artists have chosen to supply the archive with what should have been there in the first place. Zoe Leonard's installation *The Fae Richards Photo Archive* (1993–96) displays the forgeries she produced to anchor Cheryl Dunye's film *Watermelon Woman* (1996). In Dunye's mockumentary, Leonard's photographs are used to represent the treasure trove hidden in a private archive that proves the existence of a forgotten Hollywood 'mammy' – a lesbian, naturally. Similarly, Fred Wilson's installation *An Invisible Life: A View into the World of 120 Year Old Man* (1993) introduced a ghost

into the furnishings of a historic Nob Hill home in San Francisco. Through strategically placed artefacts such as paintings and books, Wilson invented one Baldwin Antinous Stein, an African-American compatriot of James and Gertrude, whose middle name just happens to be the young lover of the Roman emperor Hadrian. In *Monument to a Marriage* (2003) Patricia Cronin disrupts another archive, the cemetery. Installed 'for eternity' in New York's smartest necropolis, *Monument to a Marriage* makes pointed feminist reference to the funerary sculpture through which many nineteenth-century women artists supported themselves. Sculpted in white Carrera marble, Cronin and her partner lie entwined upon a modern mattress among the memorials to the partners in and products of state-sanctioned heterosexuality. By taking anticipatory revenge, Cronin out-manoeuvres the reality that she and her partner, Deborah Kass, could not be recognized as a family in the eyes of the American state at the time the work was made. 'If I can't have it in life,' says Cronin, 'I'm going to have it in death.'<sup>98</sup>

Other artists use the archive to dispute the sort of institutionalized memory that archives usually bolster. *The New York Daily News on the day that became the Stonewall Riot reproduced by hand from microfilm records* (1997), an installation by Mathew Jones, buries the record under graphite. By methodically tracing each microfiche page of the newspaper printed hours before the moment gay liberation is said to have commenced, Jones suggests that revolutions neither begin nor end but are invented – and thus, paradoxically, made usable – by documenting an arbitrary slice of time and space. Jones's magnificently ambivalent gesture of copying also reinscribes the backstage labour rendered invisible by fables of revolutionary moments. Gilbert & George's *In Bed with Lorca* alters both domestic space and a group exhibition organized in tribute to a major cultural figure not usually identified as gay. As their contribution to an exhibition installed at the summer house of Federico García Lorca, the artists had their picture taken while wedged side by side in Lorca's bed. Though this work is uncharacteristically modest, the couple wear their signature suits with their expressions set in their trademark deadpan. But despite the title of the work, Gilbert & George are

Patricia Cronin  
*Monument to a Marriage*  
 (installed Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx, NY)  
 2006





Mathew Jones

*The New York Daily News on the day that became the  
Stonewall Riot reproduced by hand from microfilm records  
1997*

pointedly not in bed *with* Lorca. The bed is too small. Instead, this photograph of the couple hangs as a slapstick apparition over Lorca's desk, disingenuously suggesting that Lorca's poetry and plays were written in a homosexual mental space.

Other artists have marked ephemeral sites to register histories of delight that lay claim to public space. Bars, clubs, cruising grounds and beds shift in status from private to public. In queer culture, they are not just addresses but characters. Imagined and policed as sites of resistant identity, they people the accounts of Magnus Hirschfeld and Christopher Isherwood, the case reports of police and doctors, the memoirs of Jean Cocteau and Colette, the photographs of Brassai and Diane Arbus, the drawings of Reginald Marsh and the songs of Suzy Solidor, the pulp novels of Ann Bannon and the allegories of Dennis Cooper. Just as parks are a constant in the work of Jochen Klein, Donald Moffett and Elmgreen & Dragset, bars figure prominently in the work of Dean Sameshima, Kevin McCarty and Tom Burr, among others. (And, arguably, it is the resonance of a long history of gay bars that boosts Stonewall's cultural legibility. Earlier rebellions, like those at the Compton cafeteria in San Francisco and Dewey's cafeteria in Los Angeles, failed to convey the same romance.)

In her epic narratives, Kaucyila Brooke deploys several strategies of archival resurrection to bring into being a specifically lesbian visual history. An early effort to rescue a lesbian past by a kind of salvage ethnography backfired. Brooke's attempt to involve the photographer Berenice Abbott in a discussion of her role in 1920s lesbian Paris generated an exchange of letters that succinctly illustrates the risks of reading history through the perspective of the present. 'I am wondering what satisfaction it can give you to tarnish my name in such a flagrant and libelous fashion,' Abbott retorted:

**I am a photographer, not a lesbian. Your assumptions have given me anguish, which at my age is surely not healthful. [...] If some of the photographs you mention are of 'interesting' women, it is because they were well known and therefore more often used. [...] I hope you realize that the assumption that strong women are lesbians (far from true) is one of the greatest smears for the entire 'women's liberation movement' especially now with a backlash rearing its ugly head.**"

In the more recent *The Boy Mechanic* (1996–present), a project made in and for a very different era, Brooke approaches the issue of nomenclature with a more nuanced attention to the ambiguities of memory and evidence, as well as an explicit attention to histories rendered all the more compelling precisely because they cannot be reclaimed. Brooke's camera images of the facades of buildings that once housed lesbian bars seem at first glance to be an ironic comment on the mishaps of vernacular architecture. At a deeper level, however, they exude a site-specific melancholia for particular locales of lesbian pleasure. Each incarnation of *The Boy Mechanic* mutates with the conditions of the city in which it is researched and installed, thus reflecting the instability that is the real subject of Brooke's piece. Urbanity enables queer culture, but urbanity means change. A landlord's greed or a proprietor's illness can shutter one bar while somewhere else another opens. A politician's hunt for votes can empty one pleasure ground while nearby another gains customers.

#### ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

PATRICIA CRONIN [b.1963, Beverly, Massachusetts, USA] lives in New York, where she manipulates gendered art historical forms, such as watercolour and marble statuary, to address contemporary issues of sexuality, gender, power and class. Solo exhibitions include 'An American in Rome' at the American Academy in Rome [2007] and 'Memorial to a Marriage' at Grand Arts in Kansas City [2002].