

# Queer Holdings



LESLIE-  
LOHMAN  
MUSEUM  
OF GAY AND LESBIAN ART

HIRMER

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## A Survey of the Leslie-Lohman Museum Collection

### Preface

Gonzalo Casals and Noam Parness

*Queer Holdings* grew out of *Expanded Visions*, the Leslie-Lohman Museum's 2017 exhibition surveying its permanent collection, which opened on the occasion of Leslie-Lohman's physical expansion. This spatial growth coincided with an expansion of the Museum's mission, leading the institution to reflect on its past and possible futures. *Queer Holdings* aims to examine the shifting history of the Museum's collection—its origins, changes, and continued investments—over fifty years since our founders, Charles Leslie and Fritz Lohman, first began exhibiting and collecting "homoerotic art" in June of 1969.<sup>1</sup>

Counter-intuitive to what a collection survey usually aims for, this book is not about perpetuating a particular set of an institution's ideas, but about opening up conversations and creating new ways of engaging or thinking through our collection. This book invites contributing artists, scholars, archivists, and curators to join us in imagining possible future priorities for the Leslie-Lohman Museum's collection. The texts gathered here touch on prominent artworks and artists, buried and unknown histories, and gaps in this Museum's collection. This assemblage of images and texts is a way to show how our Museum collection aims to mirror our various LGBTQ communities—their connective threads, their fractures, and their brilliant complexities.

We are producing this publication at a moment of increased accountability toward museums, requiring them to practice institutional critique, acknowledge their privilege, and decolonize their collections. This moment creates opportunities for cultural organizations to question their authenticity, credibility, and power. With these practices in mind, this book attempts to critically engage the Museum's permanent collection.

The implications of a collection are among the longest lasting aspects of museology. A collection canonizes, calling for the preservation of particular objects and artists in the material sense, as well as through collective memory. It shapes the perception, both real and imagined, of an institution's legacy. Many of the contributors grapple with the desire to work against the structure of an art canon for its inherent problems of racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia—and yet we find that many of these authors have been drawn to the same works, in effect creating knowledge around the same figures, some of whom are already canonized, and others who are in the process of canonization. Though not always explicitly discussed in this book, we see this as a tension in producing knowledge about histories, objects, individuals, and communities that might otherwise be forgotten.

How do we create and focus knowledge on some, without burying the work of others? This book does not necessarily provide an answer, but presents this question as an ongoing project to our readers, our communities, and our Museum. The images of artworks in this book are, with rare exception, ordered according to their date of accession into the Museum's collection, from oldest to most recent.

Given how much this book focuses on the collection's evolution, we feel that it is relevant to visualize the institution's collecting practices over time.

We should note that as editors we have given our authors the freedom to decide what writing styles best express their scholarly frameworks. For example, the decision to capitalize or de-capitalize "white" in reference to race might change depending on the essay. Some prefer to de-capitalize whiteness as a way to de-center its power, while others prefer to capitalize Whiteness to acknowledge its structural power and open up space for critique. We have also chosen against formal standardization for references to queer communal identities (i.e. LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQI, trans, trans-gender, gay, lesbian, queer, etc.) as a way to allow for multiple perspectives to speak to the fact that we are many communities, generations, languages, and histories intersecting through queerness. As Gayle Rubin thoughtfully pointed out in 1992: "Categories like 'woman,' 'butch,' 'lesbian,' or 'transsexual' are all imperfect, historical, temporary, and arbitrary. We use them, and they use us. We use them to construct meaningful lives, and they mold us into historically specific forms of personhood. Instead of fighting for immaculate classifications and impenetrable boundaries, let us strive to maintain a community that understands diversity as a gift, sees anomalies as precious, and treats all basic principles with a hefty dose of skepticism."<sup>2</sup> Queerness has taught us the power of language, while emphasizing its malleability. We hope that these texts make room for such complexities.

Finally, we write this during a political climate, national and global, that is growing even more hostile to many in our communities, in a world that is already largely in-tolerant, if not explicitly oppressive, toward LGBTQ people and sexual and gender minorities. While the Museum's collection does not claim to be rooted in visual representations of formal activism (i.e. marches or protests), the collection serves more as a testament to different types of queer bonds, intimacies, erotics, entanglements, and affiliations. They are works that can show us the ways that LGBTQ individuals and communities have visualized and shaped themselves and their desires over time, despite the world's insistence that we do no such thing. Unfortunately, the act of presenting, archiving, and collecting queer art is still a political act. In this context, there is a renewed sense of urgency for queer visibility, but this context simultaneously opens opportunities for critical conversations and visualizations toward more expansive forms of visibility. This book presents just a sampling of these possibilities, and hopefully inspires new visions of queer futures.

1 The text from Leslie and Lohman's first art show invitation in 1969 was for a "homoerotic art exhibition" held at their SoHo loft.

2 Gayle Rubin, "Of Catamites and Kings: Reflections on Butch, Gender, and Boundaries," in Joan Nestle (ed.), *The Persistent Desire. A Femme-Butch-Reader*, Boston 1992, p. 466.





**Patricia Cronin**

Untitled \*108, 1994  
Watercolor on paper  
20x26in.