

Investigating The Role of The Queer Curator and The Queer Inclusive Museum

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BA (Hons) Fine Art and Curating

Contextualising Practice 3: 1G6Z9912

Word Count: 5,833

Over the years as the world has become more accepting of people in the LGBT+ community, we have seen an increase in museums spotlighting queer artists, objects, and themes. Art galleries and museums play a vital role in educating people on heritage- be it their own or other peoples. In the UK, it was not until 2003 that Section 28 was repealed, legislation brought in by Margaret Thatcher's government in 1988 that prohibited schools, museums, and media from teaching about or publishing material that may promote homosexuality. For years queer people were largely left out of educational exhibitions, and artists who may have been queer did not want to disclose that out of fear. Since then, the influx of queer exhibitions has been massive, with popular one-off exhibitions like *Queer British Art* (2017) at Tate Britain being put on, as well as broad exhibitions that include queer themes, for instance *Masculinities* (2020) at the Barbican. There have also been artists retrospectives that specifically highlight the artists queerness and let that inform the curation process, for instance *Protest!* (2022) at Manchester Art Gallery which went through Derek Jarman's artistic career while exploring his role as an AIDS activist. These exhibitions have been an effective way in teaching the general public about queer history as many of them have been put on in well-known museums that gather in a large number of visitors. On top of these one-off exhibitions, a couple of dedicated queer museums/ galleries have been created in recent years- one of them being QUEER BRITAIN opened in 2022, and another being The Museum of Transology, which began in 2011 with its home being at Brighton Museum and Art Gallery. Having these dedicated spaces means that queer people know that there are spaces specifically made for them, it means that they might feel comfortable entering an art establishment when historically they have not felt welcomed. In countries that are less accepting of the LGBT+ community, museum spaces dedicated to queer people have been opened. An example of this is The Museum of Sexual Diversity in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Having a

museum that shows the work of queer artists and functions as a site for education on queer topics has been a vital resource to local people who are queer, questioning, or just curious. Looking at these examples along with others, we can deduce what methods of queer curation work most effectively, and what role the museum plays in creating positive social change. The queer curator is in a unique position of power and must use it to give back to the queer community and educate the public. They must curate in a way that acknowledges the diversity of people within the queer community and consult them throughout the process. Stereotypes must be actively dismantled, and the aim should be to provide an accurate, educational, yet sensitive portrayal of the queer experience. For years white, cisgender, homosexual men have been the most accepted part of the community, and it is vital that we start moving away from maintaining spaces that only benefit them. There are layers upon layers of responsibility that both the queer curator and museum must take on, and in this essay these responsibilities will be explored.

Arguably, when a queer exhibition is being put on, the curator/s should be queer themselves. The curator of any exhibition acts almost as an invisible artist, and they have a level of control over what the visitors will take with them from an exhibition. In any exhibition, regardless of whether it is queer themed or not, the curator should be knowledgeable enough on the topic to handle the subject matter with nuance, or at least have a team of knowledgeable people to get feedback and ideas from. If the curator of a queer exhibition isn't queer, even having a team of queer volunteers or staff that the curator can discuss ideas with can ensure that the exhibition does not pander to a straight audience, and that queer visitors will feel a connection with the work, and comfortable with the way that their community is being portrayed. For a lot of casual visitors that go to see a queer exhibition, the information they read may be some of the first on the topic of queerness. The curator should ideally find a middle ground to

acknowledge and engage with both audiences. If non-queer people learn about the queer experience and history in a museum environment, it could help to prevent inaccurate stereotyping and bigoted ideas about the LGBT+ community. These exhibitions must not only educate present queer people on their history that has been heavily sterilised because of Section 28, and have had so many of the older generation in the community die due to AIDS and violence; they must also show the rest of the population that queer people exist, are proud, and deserve to be treated like human beings. In *Museums, Equality and Social Justice* (2002) Angela Vanegas writes that 'most museum staff have not even attempted to portray lesbian and gay history; Section 28 has protected curators from having to deal with that issue.'¹ When putting on *Lifetimes* (1995) at The Museum of Croydon during Section 28, an exhibition which explores the different people that had been presently and historically tied to Croydon, she decided to include lesbians and gays in the exhibition. She says, 'by including lesbian and gay stories within a broader historical exhibition, sexuality can be seen within its wider social context.'² Vanegas felt that 'it was important to use researchers who belonged to the groups they were investigating'³, and so when curating the queer section of the exhibition, they hired gay men and lesbians to interview people in their own community- 'people who talked about 'us' rather than 'them' when referring to their interviewees.'⁴ This is an excellent example of a non-queer curator finding a team of queer people willing to get involved in the exhibition to make sure that it does not become a study from the outside looking in.

¹ Angela Vanegas. (2002). Representing lesbians and gay men in British social history museums. In: Richard Sandell. (Ed). *Museums, Society, Inequality*. London: Routledge. pp.105.

² Angela Vanegas. (2002). Representing lesbians and gay men in British social history museums. In: Richard Sandell. (Ed). *Museums, Society, Inequality*. London: Routledge. pp.103.

³ Angela Vanegas. (2002). Representing lesbians and gay men in British social history museums. In: Richard Sandell. (Ed). *Museums, Society, Inequality*. London: Routledge. pp.100.

⁴ Angela Vanegas. (2002). Representing lesbians and gay men in British social history museums. In: Richard Sandell. (Ed). *Museums, Society, Inequality*. London: Routledge. pp.100.

Museums are above all else, sites for education. During the AIDs crisis, museums participated in events to educate the public on the epidemic. An example of this was Visual AIDs' *Day Without Art*, which in 1989 'coordinated with approximately seven hundred museums, universities, and galleries to observe the first annual Day Without Art on December 1, World AIDs Day.'⁵ These museums forced the public to learn about the impact of AIDs by 'shrouding artworks and replacing them with information about HIV and safer sex, locking their doors or dimming their lights, and producing exhibitions, programs, readings, memorials, rituals, and performances.'⁶ The arts world has always had a large queer demographic within it, and when AIDs became a prominent killer in the 1980's, it sent fear through the community. Thomas Sokolowski, the founder of *Visual AIDS* said that during that time he 'was living in the Village, and being a gay person and being involved in the art world, [he'd] read about this dancer or that singer dying of AIDS.'⁷ By 1990, two of his close friends had been killed by the virus. By this point, although the US government had finally launched a national education campaign on HIV and AIDS, and AZT, a drug used to treat the disease had been created; the public was still terrified of AIDS victims and many blamed the gay community. Sokolowski and his friends in the art world who felt they had enough popularity took matters into their own hands and began Visual AIDS, 'a group dedicated to using the arts to bring public attention to the AIDS crisis.'⁸ They used their position of power within the arts community to educate and create

⁵ Drew Sawyer, Margaret Rose Vendryes, Anna Conlan, Christopher Reed, Flavia Rando. (2019). *Art After Stonewall 1969-1989*. USA: Rizzoli Electra. pp.233.

⁶ Visual AIDS. (2022). *Day Without Art*. [Online]. Visual AIDS. Available at: <https://visualaids.org/projects/day-without-art> [Accessed 14 December 2022].

⁷ Jane-Ellen Robinet. (2005). *AIDS AND ART: A history of a disease and the arts campaign to stop it..* [Online]. Carnegie Online. Available at: <https://carnegiemuseums.org/magazine-archive/2005/winter/feature3.html> [Accessed 14 December 2022].

⁸ Jane-Ellen Robinet. (2005). *AIDS AND ART: A history of a disease and the arts campaign to stop it..* [Online]. Carnegie Online. Available at: <https://carnegiemuseums.org/magazine-archive/2005/winter/feature3.html> [Accessed 14 December 2022].

social change. *Day Without Art* became so prominent, that it is now what we know as *World AIDS Day*, something that is recognized globally and is represented through a small red ribbon on a safety pin. Without museums, without the curators at each museum participating in *Day Without Art*, the general public may not have been reached to such an extent, and the great resource of information that is *World AIDS Day* would not exist. This proves just how much power museums can have, they are places where people go to learn, and the curators have the power to choose what they teach people.

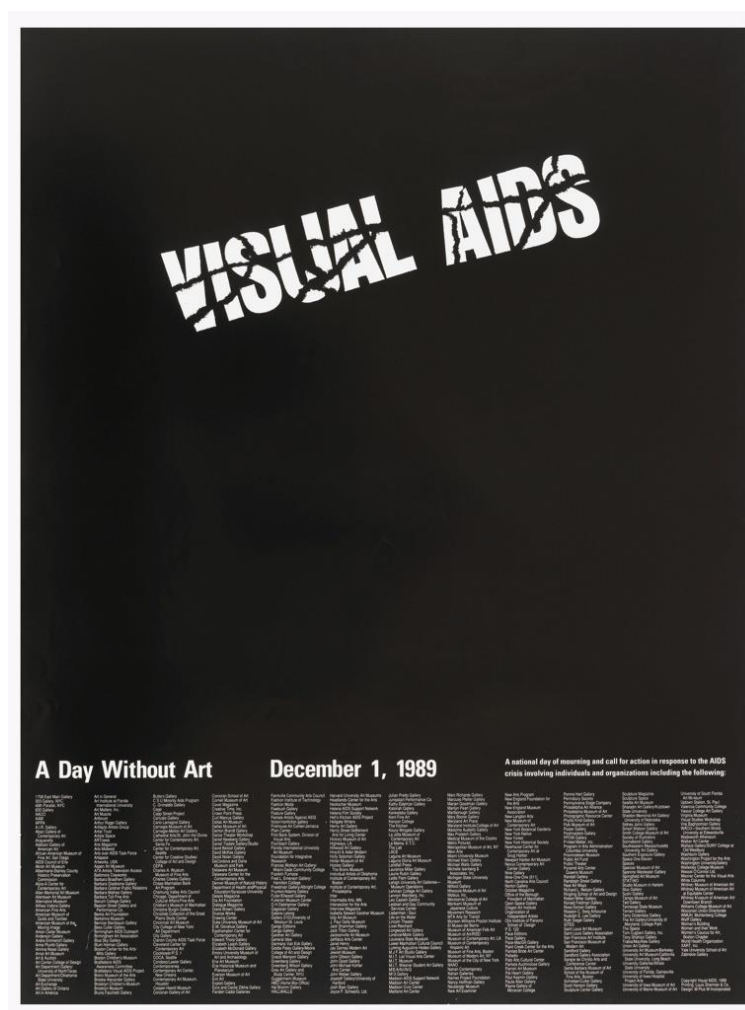


Figure 1

Mistakes of the past in the museum have led to problems for current queer curators; improperly labelled work has led to it being difficult to identify queer artefacts and artwork. Patrik Steorn writes that 'hidden in the collections of any museum might be hundreds of

objects that have immense queer interest or that could be strongly associated with lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and trans-gendered (LGBT) Communities.⁹ This could be because the modern word to describe it did not yet exist; for example, we use the term 'gay' to describe Oscar Wilde, but he would not have identified with that because that is a modern term. This could also be the case due to artists not wanting to out themselves in a bigoted society. Maura Reilly said that the 'fear of being "outed"' can be so intense that some artists have resorted to coded iconographies.¹⁰ Labelling queer art is not as simple as labelling art by race, or by gender, Reilly explains that it 'requires disclosure, a self outing'¹¹ that so many simply did not feel safe in doing. Due to the difficulties in identifying queer objects, it is difficult to curate queer exhibitions from existing collections. The queer curator should strive to change this, and focus on accurate labelling to prevent these problems arising in the future. Patrik Steorn writes 'the act of labelling is also a form of exercising power (...) it is important to keep in mind that reclassifying and tagging objects not only makes them available for database searching, it also adds historical layers and forces objects to fit into established categories.'¹² This is yet another example of the power that the curator/museum worker holds, if they don't

⁹ Patrik Steorn. (2012). Curating Queer Heritage: Queer Knowledge and Museum Practice. *CURATOR: THE MUSEUM JOURNAL*. 55(3), pp.357.

¹⁰ Maura Reilly. (2018). CHALLENGING HETEROCENTRISM AND LESBO-HOMOPHOBIA. In: Lucy Lippard. (Ed). *Curatorial Activism*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd. pp.161.

¹¹ Maura Reilly. (2018). CHALLENGING HETEROCENTRISM AND LESBO-HOMOPHOBIA. In: Lucy Lippard. (Ed). *Curatorial Activism*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd. pp.161.

¹² Patrik Steorn. (2012). Curating Queer Heritage: Queer Knowledge and Museum Practice. *CURATOR: THE MUSEUM JOURNAL*. 55(3), pp.357.

put in the effort to correctly label and organise their collections while putting on an exhibition, there will be future repercussions.

As a result of incorrect labelling and an often-sparse existing collection of queer artefacts and artworks in museums, the queer curator will need to collect items specifically for a new queer collection. Existing museums may use their lack of queer objects as an excuse to not put on queer exhibitions, so there is a need for queer curators to take matters into their own hands and create them. Jonathan Katz and Änne Söll write 'queer curating must necessarily question and challenge the normative structures of the museum itself by addressing a "queer" audience'.¹³ In the UK, it has not been until recent years that there have been queer specific museums, although there have been quite a few queer exhibitions held within major galleries, for example *Queer British Art* at Tate Britain in 2017. This exhibition went through queer history in the UK in chronological order. It was not until 2022 that QUEER BRITAIN was opened in London, the first LGBT Museum in the UK with their inaugural exhibition, *We Are Queer Britain* (2022). *Queer British Art* (2017) and *We Are Queer Britain* (2022) share some artefacts, a notable example being *Oscar Wilde's Cell Door*, a large, yellow door that Oscar Wilde was once kept imprisoned behind for being convicted of sodomy. After visiting both exhibitions and seeing the same artefact in two different contexts, the way it came across was different. At Tate Britain, the door was included in an exhibition that followed a timeline, and it didn't necessarily feel like queer people were the main audience. The exhibition was curated as more of a general historical exhibition that was supposed to take the viewers on an educational journey. As a result of this, the door was amongst artefacts of its time, and felt almost impersonal. In stark contrast, in *We Are Queer Britain* (2022) shown next to *De*

¹³ Jonathan Katz and Änne Söll. (2018). Editorial: Queer Exhibitions/Queer Curating. *ONCURATING*. 1(37), pp.2-4. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-37-reader/editorial-queer-exhibitions-queer-curating.html#.Y598vXb> [Accessed 18 December 2022].

Profundis, the letter Wilde wrote to his lover while behind that very door, in a space that is much smaller than the previous exhibition, the door holds much more significance being one of the largest artefacts in the collection. It is shown alongside more modern queer artefacts, objects that represent revolutionary moments in queer history. In the room there are also personal objects and writing about real, relatable queer people- the space acknowledges the queer audience and as a result, when visiting as a queer person you will likely feel an emotional connection to the artefacts in the collection and the people they were linked to. Next to the copy of *De Profundis* there is writing from Joseph Galliano-Doig, the co-founder of QUEER BRITAIN where he explains the personal significance the book has for him. This means that when looking at the door, instead of seeing the door as just a piece of history long gone, you feel more of an emotional connection to it, seeing Wilde as a person just as real as the people that had a connection with the more modern artefacts.



Figure 2

An example of a curator taking matters into their own hands and creating a queer museum is E.J-Scott and The Museum Of Transology which was founded in 2011. The museum has a large collection of transgender related objects donated by transgender people including medical letters, chest binders, surgery gowns, and preserved breast tissue. Scott explains that he 'had to take direct action to build a collection of material culture reflecting trans lives in [their] own words.'¹⁴ Scott curated the collection by engaging with the trans community and 'allowing trans people to talk for themselves, about themselves, because the materials that exists on record about trans lives inevitably are skewed through a lens of the grotesque or the barely-believable freak-of-nature scenario'.¹⁵ Scott himself is transgender, and he felt that if a collection like this that is 'very much of its time'¹⁶ didn't exist to capture 'this seminal moment in trans history',¹⁷ the existence of trans people and the current major events in the trans community would be looked back on with bias and misinformation. The museum started as a small collection in a glass cabinet that was wheeled around in a flight case. Scott brought it to different events that he knew would have a trans presence, and he built up trust with the trans community through consistently engaging with the them. He explains that the trans community 'had to see it was a trans person they were trusting to do it too, not a cisgender

¹⁴ Birgit Bosold, E-J Scott & Renaud Chantraine. (2020). Queer Tactics, Handwritten Stories: Disrupting the Field of Museum Practices. *Museum International*. 72(3-4), pp.218. [Online]. Available at: 10.1080/13500775.2020.1873525 [Accessed 17 October 2022].

¹⁵ Birgit Bosold, E-J Scott & Renaud Chantraine. (2020). Queer Tactics, Handwritten Stories: Disrupting the Field of Museum Practices. *Museum International*. 72(3-4), pp.218. [Online]. Available at: 10.1080/13500775.2020.1873525 [Accessed 17 October 2022].

¹⁶ Birgit Bosold, E-J Scott & Renaud Chantraine. (2020). Queer Tactics, Handwritten Stories: Disrupting the Field of Museum Practices. *Museum International*. 72(3-4), pp.220. [Online]. Available at: 10.1080/13500775.2020.1873525 [Accessed 17 October 2022].

¹⁷ Birgit Bosold, E-J Scott & Renaud Chantraine. (2020). Queer Tactics, Handwritten Stories: Disrupting the Field of Museum Practices. *Museum International*. 72(3-4), pp.218. [Online]. Available at: 10.1080/13500775.2020.1873525 [Accessed 17 October 2022].

curator with no community affiliation'.¹⁸ The collection grew bigger and bigger, and now operates mainly out of Brighton Museum and Art Gallery. The Museum of Transology has the trans community as the audience in mind, and now exists as an accurate, nuanced, emotional portrayal of the trans experience. Scott has created space for trans people to exist within the context of the museum by inviting the community in and having them be part of every step of the process. Next to many of the objects shown in the museum are brown paper labels with personal writing from the person who donated the object explaining its significance. This gives the objects more emotional depth for those visiting the museum, and therefore arguably helps to teach cisgender visitors that transgender people are human beings just like them.



Figure 3

¹⁸ Birgit Bosold, E-J Scott & Renaud Chantraine. (2020). Queer Tactics, Handwritten Stories: Disrupting the Field of Museum Practices. *Museum International*. 72(3-4), pp.219. [Online]. Available at: 10.1080/13500775.2020.1873525 [Accessed 17 October 2022].

A key role the museum and curator plays is in spotlighting certain artists, communities, and issues and using it's outreach as a way to educate a large amount of people. The museum needs to be accessible, both physically and in terms of the language used. Often, people will feel the museum is not a space meant for them and won't venture inside- museums and galleries have historically been made to impress the upper classes, so nowadays having free, easy access queer exhibitions will connect queer people to their heritage as well as educate the non-queer general public who may wander in. An example of this happening is *Cassils: Human Measure* (2021) at HOME in Manchester which was open from October to December in 2021. This exhibition was free to enter and placed on the ground floor of HOME, right by the entrance, meaning any visitor that may have come for any other reason; be it to go to the cinema, theatre or café, may wander into *Human Measure* and in turn learn about the Transgender community. Cassils is a transgender performance artist, and their retrospect at HOME showcased some of their most iconic work over the last decade, including photography, film, sculpture, and print. Their work delved into issues around social justice in the queer community, and Cassils own relationship with their body and gender. It was highly educational and would likely fill in many gaps of knowledge that someone who isn't trans themselves wouldn't have known.

QUEER BRITAIN is placed a short walk away from Kings Cross Station which attracts tourists, and is neighbour to Central Saint Martins which attracts people with an interest in art. The location along with free entry to the museum means that similarly to *Cassils: Human Measure* (2021), there is an element of people wandering in without originally planning to do so. It also means that queer tourists visiting London do not need to go too out of the way to visit the museum, its accessible in central London. The space is also fully accessible for disabled visitors. If the museum was placed elsewhere in a location more difficult to find, it is likely it

would not be so successful or attract so many visitors- it was predicted that in 2022 alone the museum would 'attract 26,000 people through its doors'.¹⁹ The space itself is small, using only a few rooms to display the collection of objects- most of them being in one room. Journalist Owen Jones writes that 'London lacks a permanent LGBTQ+ community space'²⁰ and that this museum could make it a 'vital hub'.²¹ The museum does not just exist as an educational space, but also an established safe space for queer people to visit and connect with their heritage. The museum has a board to 'make sure that there's proper leadership structures that are diverse in themselves',²² and Joseph Galliano, the director of the museum has said that 'uplifting underrepresented sections of the community is "absolutely written into the DNA"'²³ of this museum. Galliano came up with the idea of QUEER BRITAIN after going to see *Queer British Art* (2017) at Tate Britain, saying he 'realised you could create a blockbuster exhibition around queer subjects'.²⁴ This in turn proves that when effort is made by queer curators and museums to spotlight queer topics, there is a domino effect of sorts. After so many years of silence within museums on explicit queerness it is refreshing to see a museum like QUEER BRITAIN that has mainstream support and success, with support from large

¹⁹ Owen Jones. (2022). *'This is for everyone!': inside Britain's first ever LGBTQ+ museum*. [Online]. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/apr/28/inside-queer-britain-first-lgbtq-museum> [Accessed 27 December 2022].

²⁰ Owen Jones. (2022). *'This is for everyone!': inside Britain's first ever LGBTQ+ museum*. [Online]. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/apr/28/inside-queer-britain-first-lgbtq-museum> [Accessed 27 December 2022].

²¹ Owen Jones. (2022). *'This is for everyone!': inside Britain's first ever LGBTQ+ museum*. [Online]. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/apr/28/inside-queer-britain-first-lgbtq-museum> [Accessed 27 December 2022].

²² Owen Jones. (2022). *'This is for everyone!': inside Britain's first ever LGBTQ+ museum*. [Online]. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/apr/28/inside-queer-britain-first-lgbtq-museum> [Accessed 27 December 2022].

²³ Owen Jones. (2022). *'This is for everyone!': inside Britain's first ever LGBTQ+ museum*. [Online]. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/apr/28/inside-queer-britain-first-lgbtq-museum> [Accessed 27 December 2022].

²⁴ Owen Jones. (2022). *'This is for everyone!': inside Britain's first ever LGBTQ+ museum*. [Online]. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/apr/28/inside-queer-britain-first-lgbtq-museum> [Accessed 27 December 2022].

organisations including the V&A, The British Library, Tate, Science Museum, and The National Trust.

When a museum has an exhibition that delves into queer themes, they can continue educating visitors by putting on events and workshops as part of the exhibition. An example of this is *Trans Vegas: Dandy Style Trans Takeover* that was put on for free as part of *Dandy Style* (2022) at Manchester Art Gallery, hosted by E.J-Scott in November 2022. The exhibition itself is not specifically queer, but ‘focuses on men’s fashion and image from the 18th century to the present day.’²⁵ The one-off event had a line up that consisted of a tour led by E.J-Scott, exploring some artworks and fashion pieces under a transgender and non-binary lens, then moved on to a look book presentation with three speakers who identified with Dandyism: Libro Bridgeman, Krishna Ishta, and a drag king who performed under the name Orlando. At the end of the evening there was a Q&A style talk. Putting this event on was an effective way to invite queer people into the museum, and by collaborating with Transcreative it was clear the event was put on by queer people, for queer people. The topics covered spanned from exploring masculinity through drag, to how dandyism interlinks with trans-masculinity and being non-binary. The evening was filmed and posted online, meaning that the outreach was extended beyond Manchester locals, and has now created a new educational resource.

Societal factors can inhibit the queer curator from properly fulfilling their role and can put off museums from spotlighting queer themes. While for decades in the UK we had Section 28, the USA’s problem with bigotry towards the LGBT+ community a lot of the time stems from religious fanaticism. Jonathan D. Katz co-curated *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* (2010) at the National Portrait Gallery, which ‘considered such themes

²⁵ Manchester Art Gallery. (2022). *Dandy Style*. [Online]. Manchester Art Gallery. Available at: <https://manchesterartgallery.org/event/dandy-style/> [Accessed 27 December 2022].

as the role of sexual difference in depicting modern America'²⁶ and the way artists 'explored the fluidity of sexuality and gender'.²⁷ The exhibition was the first queer exhibition at a US national museum, and Katz has since written that he was 'attacked by Republicans in Congress'²⁸ and as a result he 'got to witness the relative weight of overt and covert censorship first hand'.²⁹ With Christianity being so deeply engrained in American Culture, seeping into congress and influencing laws, it makes it hard for mainstream queer exhibitions to run without major censorship and backlash. Katz and David Ward, his co-curator knew that they would face more attacks on the exhibition as a result of the attention from Congress, so they 'deliberately crafted a relatively restrained exhibition'³⁰ to try and subdue that from happening. They chose to only include nudes by straight artists, 'with one exception',³¹ so they could 'undercut any criticism of homoeroticism'³² by saying the artists were heterosexual. Taking this precaution along with training on how to respond to homophobic questions was not enough to prevent bigoted attacks. The curators were put at real risk, with

²⁶ Smithsonian. (2010). *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*. [Online]. National Portrait Gallery. Available at: <https://npg.si.edu/exhibition/hideseek-difference-and-desire-american-portraiture> [Accessed 27 December 2022].

²⁷ Smithsonian. (2010). *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*. [Online]. National Portrait Gallery. Available at: <https://npg.si.edu/exhibition/hideseek-difference-and-desire-american-portraiture> [Accessed 27 December 2022].

²⁸ Jonathan D Katz. (2018). Queer Curating and Covert Censorship. *ONCURATING*. 1(37), pp.34. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-37-reader/queer-curating-and-covert-censorship.html#.Y4qd-nbP23B> [Accessed 3 December 2022].

²⁹ Jonathan D Katz. (2018). Queer Curating and Covert Censorship. *ONCURATING*. 1(37), pp.34. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-37-reader/queer-curating-and-covert-censorship.html#.Y4qd-nbP23B> [Accessed 3 December 2022].

³⁰ Jonathan D Katz. (2018). Queer Curating and Covert Censorship. *ONCURATING*. 1(37), pp.34. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-37-reader/queer-curating-and-covert-censorship.html#.Y4qd-nbP23B> [Accessed 3 December 2022].

³¹ Jonathan D Katz. (2018). Queer Curating and Covert Censorship. *ONCURATING*. 1(37), pp.34. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-37-reader/queer-curating-and-covert-censorship.html#.Y4qd-nbP23B> [Accessed 3 December 2022].

³² Jonathan D Katz. (2018). Queer Curating and Covert Censorship. *ONCURATING*. 1(37), pp.34. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-37-reader/queer-curating-and-covert-censorship.html#.Y4qd-nbP23B> [Accessed 3 December 2022].

the Catholic League who were 'classed by the Southern Poverty Law Centre as a right wing hate speech group'³³ published Katz's 'personal contact information'³⁴ including his address. As a result of this he received antisemitic hate mail. The Catholic League had a particular problem with *A Fire in My Belly* (1986-1987) by David Wojnarowicz, which used catholic imagery in a distinctly queer piece of art, and the work was pulled from the exhibition by the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution because of the attention, censoring Katz and Ward without even consulting them about it. This shows that although the curator may have some level of power when it comes to educating people, the people that have the real power are the museum bosses. It can be incredibly difficult to exhibit queer themes in an institution that doesn't have queer interests at heart, but instead money and reputation.



Figure 4

³³ Jonathan D Katz. (2018). Queer Curating and Covert Censorship. *ONCURATING*. 1(37), pp.34. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-37-reader/queer-curating-and-covert-censorship.html#.Y4qd-nbP23B> [Accessed 3 December 2022].

³⁴ Jonathan D Katz. (2018). Queer Curating and Covert Censorship. *ONCURATING*. 1(37), pp.34. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-37-reader/queer-curating-and-covert-censorship.html#.Y4qd-nbP23B> [Accessed 3 December 2022].

The Museum of Sexual Diversity in Sao Paulo, Brazil created in 2012 is an example of a queer museum being successful in a homophobic climate. Like *Hide/Seek*, the museum was harassed by conservative groups, calling the museum the ‘museum of immorality’,³⁵ finding it ‘offensive that such a project was to be funded by the Soa Paulo state government and opened on public grounds.’³⁶ The curators and organisers of the museum wanted it to be more than just an art gallery ‘reserved for rarefied social circles’³⁷, they instead wanted it to attract people in the LGBT+ community and ‘discriminated against groups who appeared to feel represented by the images on display’.³⁸ The museum is free to enter with no barriers and is designed with accessibility in mind, making it as easy as possible for people to visit. They saw an increase in queer identifying people and ‘Black, women, indigenous and disabled visitors’³⁹ when during an exhibition exploring diversity in fashion they chose to let the museum’s contents “overflow’ outside the museum walls’,⁴⁰ displaying photography publicly outside the museum allowing people passing by to ‘engage with it’s themes of diversity.’⁴¹ However this visibility that brought in almost 26,000 visitors also opened the exhibition to public scrutiny and harassment that came not just from the media, but also the general public. The museum walls were vandalised with offensive graffiti and there were times when they had to get the police involved to prevent violence. In places where bigotry surrounding the LGBT+

³⁵ Franco Reinaudo (2020) A Strange Queer Body: The Museum of Sexual Diversity in São Paulo, Brazil, Museum International, 72:3-4, 20, DOI: 10.1080/13500775.2020.1873490

³⁶ Franco Reinaudo (2020) A Strange Queer Body: The Museum of Sexual Diversity in São Paulo, Brazil, Museum International, 72:3-4, 20, DOI: 10.1080/13500775.2020.1873490

³⁷ Franco Reinaudo (2020) A Strange Queer Body: The Museum of Sexual Diversity in São Paulo, Brazil, Museum International, 72:3-4, 22, DOI: 10.1080/13500775.2020.1873490

³⁸ Franco Reinaudo (2020) A Strange Queer Body: The Museum of Sexual Diversity in São Paulo, Brazil, Museum International, 72:3-4, 22, DOI: 10.1080/13500775.2020.1873490

³⁹ Franco Reinaudo (2020) A Strange Queer Body: The Museum of Sexual Diversity in São Paulo, Brazil, Museum International, 72:3-4, 22, DOI: 10.1080/13500775.2020.1873490

⁴⁰ Franco Reinaudo (2020) A Strange Queer Body: The Museum of Sexual Diversity in São Paulo, Brazil, Museum International, 72:3-4, 22, DOI: 10.1080/13500775.2020.1873490

⁴¹ Franco Reinaudo (2020) A Strange Queer Body: The Museum of Sexual Diversity in São Paulo, Brazil, Museum International, 72:3-4, 22, DOI: 10.1080/13500775.2020.1873490

community is rife, positive representation like this comes with a risk. The museum perseveres through these acts of discrimination, and has ongoing communication with Brazilian LGBT+ groups who request future projects and offer feedback, acting as 'the museum's council'.⁴² The museum exhibits a diverse range of artists 'without privileging well-known figures and artistic cliques'⁴³, and the curators use their position of privilege to further the careers of artists that haven't exhibited before, and who come from poorer areas. It acts as a space for the local queer community to connect with and has become more than just a museum, setting aside 2 hours at the end of every weekday for local LGBT+ communities to use the space, establishing it as somewhere that is 'welcoming and accepting'.⁴⁴ The Museum of Sexual Diversity has had a positive influence on local LGBT+ communities, and proves that this type of effect is possible in a political climate that is anti-LGBT+.

White, cisgender, homosexual men have been at the forefront of LGBT+ activism for years, and we are now seeing the focus shift on to more marginalised groups within the community. The queer curator must make their exhibition as inclusive and diverse as possible to not only teach the public that queer people exist in every community, but also to uplift the careers of artists who are less likely to be given a chance due to racism, sexism, lesbophobia and transphobia. QUEER BRITAIN have chosen to explore the wider LGBT+ spectrum, having its first project be an 'oral history collection'⁴⁵ on marginalised groups within the LGBT+ community, 'accompanied by focus groups with representation from LGBTQ+ people with

⁴² Franco Reinaudo (2020) A Strange Queer Body: The Museum of Sexual Diversity in São Paulo, Brazil, Museum International, 72:3-4, 24, DOI: 10.1080/13500775.2020.1873490

⁴³ Franco Reinaudo (2020) A Strange Queer Body: The Museum of Sexual Diversity in São Paulo, Brazil, Museum International, 72:3-4, 25, DOI: 10.1080/13500775.2020.1873490

⁴⁴ Franco Reinaudo (2020) A Strange Queer Body: The Museum of Sexual Diversity in São Paulo, Brazil, Museum International, 72:3-4, 25, DOI: 10.1080/13500775.2020.1873490

⁴⁵ Owen Jones. (2022). *'This is for everyone!': inside Britain's first ever LGBTQ+ museum*. [Online]. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/apr/28/inside-queer-britain-first-lgbtq-museum> [Accessed 27 December 2022].

different and often intersecting identities.¹⁴⁶ The best way for the queer curator to accurately portray marginalised groups within the LGBT+ community is by including them in the process, similarly to when a non-queer curator is including queer themes. E-J Scott says that by 'opening [their] museum doors to a wider spectrum of queer experiences and identities, and by proactively offering a space to those who have been marginalised within our already-marginalised community, [they] are embracing and enacting principles of positive action.'¹⁴⁷

The curator has a position of power and is in a sense the invisible artist deciding what work is included and where it goes, how people will see the work and its context. As time goes on, it is becoming more clear that there is not just one way to be queer, nor is there one type of queer person; but due to the focus on white, cisgender, homosexual men a lot of the general public and even people within the LGBT+ community are still bigoted towards other queer identities or queer people that don't necessarily fit the mould. In a political climate where transphobia is rife, with anti-trans legislation being debated and put in place across the world, museums and curators must take their role as educators seriously, sharing accurate information regarding the LGBT+ community, focusing on dismantling stereotypes and destigmatising queer existence.

In conclusion, the queer curator plays a unique role in that they not only must take on the responsibilities typical to a curator, but also additionally must consider how to use their position to give back to the LGBT+ community- providing accurate, well-rounded and informed education to museum visitors. The queer curator must acknowledge that there is

¹⁴⁶ Owen Jones. (2022). *'This is for everyone!': inside Britain's first ever LGBTQ+ museum*. [Online]. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/apr/28/inside-queer-britain-first-lgbtq-museum> [Accessed 27 December 2022].

¹⁴⁷ Birgit Bosold, E-J Scott & Renaud Chantraine. (2020). Queer Tactics, Handwritten Stories: Disrupting the Field of Museum Practices. *Museum International*. 72(3-4), pp.217. [Online]. Available at: 10.1080/13500775.2020.1873525 [Accessed 17 October 2022].

not one single way to be queer, and in turn they must be in active conversation with a variety of people across the LGBT+ spectrum when curating an exhibition. They must not portray queer identities without first speaking to people of that identity. The queer inclusive museum above all else is a site for education, it's role is to invite LGBT+ people inside when previously they may not have felt welcome. It must aim to help queer people connect with their own heritage as well as educate them on their history. Exhibitions that focus on queer topics must cater towards the LGBT+ community as the demographic first and foremost, and avoid the spread of harmful stereotypes and misinformation. The queer curator and queer inclusive museum must learn from the mistakes of the past that have made queer curating difficult in the present and do better going forward. There is a long way to go with LGBT+ rights not just in the UK, but globally and museums must do their part in aiding them.

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Figure 2: Olmos, A. (2022) 'Oscar Wilde's Prison Cell Door', *QUEER BRITAIN* [Photograph].

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Figure 3: Davies, K. (2017) 'OBJECT NUMBER MOT000025'. [Photograph]. Brighton: The

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