(Re)Connecting

THE HISTORY OF ART STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION'S

ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM JOURNAL 2021

HISTORY OF ART
STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

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We wish to acknowledge the sacred land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. This territory is subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Confederacy of the Ojibwe and allied nations to peacefully share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes communally. Today, this land is still home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island. We are grateful to have the opportunity to work and connect on this land.

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The History of Art Students' Association 2020-21 team is thrilled to present *(Re)Connecting* – a volume comprising the papers presented at the 2021 History of Art Undergraduate Symposium.

Many of us probably feel now, more than ever, the need for connection. A need to witness, feel, and understand the spaces within and between ourselves, others, and the world around us. Art is unique in its ability to foster and propagate connection despite limitations of space or time. Artists, artworks, material culture, and museum/gallery spaces exist as spaces of connection, be it through individuals or collectives. This year's theme invites exploration into the ways that art does not exist inside a vacuum. We pose the questions: how do *connections* exist in the matrix of art, and how does art *(re)connect* us in the absence of connection? Essays in this edition by our seven thoughtful contributors broadly consider relationships between artists and/or art movements or focus on particular artworks or objects and their meaning/reception.

Needless to say, our symposium could not have been possible without the help of our various supporters. Thank you first and foremost to the faculty and administration of the Department of Art History at the University of Toronto, we as HASA literally wouldn't exist without you, and neither would this event without all of your incredible and generous support. Thank you also to Associate Chair and Director of Undergraduate Studies, Phil Sapirstein, for being our faculty advisor in the editing of our journal papers and for supporting HASA outside of this event as well.

Thank you Dr. Jordan Bear for honoring us with his keynote titled *Beyond Our Eyes: Images at a Distance in 19th-Century Visual Culture*. Dr. Bear's lecture focused on the range of 19th-century strategies for representing phenomena that were too distant or too vast or complex for any single individual to observe with her own eyes. These developments required a different way of assessing the reliability of information received not through

face-to-face interaction with a known individual, but through an abstracted set of institutional authorities. An exploration of representations of a subset of inaccessible and counterfactual dimensions of the natural world—of exotic flora, the planet Venus, and sea serpents—helps to clarify the uneven historical ground upon which the trust of mediated representations has been tenuously erected. Thank you, Professor Bear for taking the time to share your research on this truly fascinating topic with us.

We had also been very lucky this year to be able to host an additional special guest speaker segment, so thank you to 1919 for joining us! 1919 is an independent arts and cultural production platform designed for Canada's Black and racialized communities. Founded in 2017, 1919 organize and produce transformative works across their platform through a lens that is radical, honest, and grounded in the rejection of oppressive institutions. 1919 is a magazine, a radio, and an arts platform that organizes and produces works across their multi-disciplinary platform that transforms spatial, physical, and digital boundaries through a lens that is radical, honest, and grounded in the rejection of oppressive institutions. The direction of each print issue, civic project, and community event that they organize is informed by a unique conceptual understanding that is reinforced and made up of historical precedents, legacies of international struggle, reimagining, and dreaming. 1919 grounds itself in anti-capitalist and anti-racist systems of thought, which lie at the foundation of their revolving and multi-disciplinary publication. Their presentation discussed their platform, the black printing press, and grassroots art and movement building. Thank you 1919 for taking the time to share about these important topics with us.

A deep thank you to all of our panelists, for joining us to deliver their excellent presentations. We appreciate your all your time, hard work, and patience in the editing process of the journal.

Last but certainly not least, thank you to those in virtual attendance of our seventh annual symposium and for those reading our journal; your interest in and engagement with our selection of papers is infinitely appreciated.

It has been our delight and privilege to continue this tradition and we hope the perspectives in this journal provide insight into how art participates in creating, upholding, or dissolving connections between both individuals and communities.

The History of Art
Students' Association
2020-2021

The History of Art Students' Association is proud to introduce our seven contributors who presented their papers at the 2021 History of Art Undergraduate Symposium – *(Re)Connecting*.

MEGAN KAMMERER (she/her) is an undergraduate student at the University of Toronto, doubling majoring in art and world history. As a Toronto-based researcher and arts administrator, she has held various positions with the Jackman Humanities Institute, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, and the Blackwood Gallery among others. Her current research explores the visuality of modern social history and intersectional identity construction, often navigating issues of collection, exhibition, and display as she works to expand her curatorial practice.

ELIZA LAFFERTY (she/her) is interested in the intersections between art, culture, and government; as a member of Georgetown University's Class of 2021, Eliza graduates with degrees in Art History and Government and a minor in History. She aspires to be a community lawyer and advocate for minoritized populations in art institutions, and in the fall, Eliza will matriculate into Georgetown Law. Her paper, "From Misrepresentation to Public Memory: Tracing Filipinx American Visual Cultures and Curating the Vernacular Archive," is the culmination of a nine-month research initiative as a Lisa J. Raines Research Fellow and is part of her Art History thesis. She has shared her research at forums hosted by Georgetown University, The University of Arizona, and Brown University.

SASHA CARNES (she/her) is a sophomore at NYU majoring in data science and art history. Academically and professionally, she seeks out the intersections between these two fields, using the principles of data science to inform her approach to art historical inquiry and research. In future work, she hopes to continue examining the culture and practices of today's art world.

MARI OTSU (she/her) is completing her undergraduate studies in Art History, French, Global Studies (Arts & Literatures), and Psychology, with a minor in Studio Art at New York University. As an aspiring art historian on the academic track, Mari's primary research interest is in Asian art, particularly the art of Japan. Secondarily, she is interested in the classical oil painting techniques of the European Old Masters, namely in the genres of portraiture, still life, and landscape. Thirdly, she is interested in 19th and 20th century French and American art, especially that of the (Post-) Impressionists and the Hudson River School. Thematically, Mari is drawn to the potential and quality of art historical writing, artists' inner lives, the materiality of objects, psychological presence in art, the role of time in the interpretation of art, and the culminating layers of interaction between subject, object, artist, and perceiver.

FARID DJAMALOV (he/him) is a rising senior at Yale University, studying the History of Art. He is interested in queer theory, post-Soviet art and performance and photography. Farid hopes to become a curator that surfaces marginalized narratives.

NICHOLAS MARKOWSKI (he/him) is in the final year of his Honours Bachelor of Arts program at the University of Toronto with majors in art history and history. He is particularly interested in late-nineteenth-century European culture, and especially in the interactions between art, visual culture, science, and literature at the fin de siècle. He plans to pursue graduate studies in the future.

KAYLA CONKLIN (she/her) is a senior undergraduate student at the University of Maryland, College Park (in the U.S.). She majors in art history and anthropology, and her general academic interest is artistic activism and protest art. More specifically, she loves learning about queer and feminist protest art from the 1980s. In the future, Kayla hopes to attend graduate school to pursue a Ph.D. in art history. She is currently awaiting responses on her graduate school applications. Kayla's dream is to land a job similar to that of a museum public programs director at the National Museum of Women in the Arts.

MEGAN KAMMERER (SHE/HER)
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

In Defence of Bananas and Duct Tape: Conceptualism and Cattelan's *Comedian*

ABSTRACT: Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan became the talk of Miami Beach—and soon of the international arts community—when he stuck a ripe banana to the wall of Gallerie Perrotin's exhibition booth at the notorious *Art Basel* in December of 2019. With a single strip of standard issue hardware store duct tape and a piece of fruit plucked from the local supermarket, Cattelan sparked a discussion that led art lovers and haters the world over to question the fundamentals of contemporary art. Though it may prove impossible to reconcile with critical discourses lofted against this artwork, this paper aims to deconstruct its denigrations through its connection to modern art histories. It navigates the intense readership and media presence of Cattelan's *Comedian* while situating the work within larger conceptual art frameworks from the late twentieth century. Links are found between Cattelan's seemingly insignificant, though strange, sculpture and its pioneering predecessors, such as Sol LeWitt and Lucy Lippard, in conceptualism. The paper navigates *Comedian*'s interconnected relationship with these late-twentieth century cultural theorists to expound its position at the intersection of high art theory and conceptual art practice. A defence for the Basel banana's rightful, and respectable, position within Western art history.

INTRODUCTION

In December of 2019, Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan became the talk of Miami Beach—and soon of the international arts community—when he stuck a ripe banana to the pristine walls of Gallerie Perrotin's exhibition booth at the Florida-based *Art Basel*. With a single strip of standard-issue hardware store duct tape and a piece of fruit plucked from the local supermarket, Cattelan sparked a discussion that led art lovers and haters the world over to question the fundamentals of contemporary art.

With the banana-duct-tape combo trending on Twitter after just three short days on display, the controversial work was publicly debated by prominent critics and amateurs alike. Out of nowhere, the piece became

a defining object of 2019. Among the many extravagant fine artworks on display at the exclusive art fair, the spectrum of praise and criticism that was lofted toward the work eclipsed all discourse in the history of the event. Today, a quick scroll through the top comments on this iconic plastic-produce pairing continues to reveal a whirlwind of responses: "What a pitiful place art is headed;" "A slap in the face to the many struggling artists of true integrity and merit;" "The wall deserves better;" "Pathetic;" "Ridiculous;" "Lazy;" "Shit;" "Genius;"[1] Cattelan's display is polarizing, to say the least.

Though it may prove impossible to reconcile with such discourse, this paper aims to examine and deconstruct these criticisms. Its objectives will be twofold; to navigate the intense readership and media presence of Cattelan's *Comedian*, and to situate the work within early conceptual art frameworks from the late-twentieth century. *Comedian* will be placed in conversation with foundational theorists from the movement, such as Sol LeWitt and Lucy Lippard. The sculpture expands upon their definition of "concept" as a tool for cultural criticism and artwork marketability. The paper intends to navigate *Comedian*'s connection with these late-twentieth century ideas to expound its position at the intersection of high art theory and conceptual art practice to defend the *Basel* banana's rightful position in Western art history.

ART BASEL AND THE SALE OF SPECTACLE

The American iteration of *Art Basel*'s renowned international art fairs has been held annually in *Miami Beach* since 2002. Hundreds of commercial galleries from around the world descend upon the city come the first weekend of December, all vying for a position among rows of convention centre exhibition booths. Affluent crowds of patrons and art enthusiasts are quick to follow when doors open to the public for the fair's four-day-long festivities. Over the years, *Miami Beach* has become a cultural event that is as well known for its poolside parties and cocktail fueled evenings as it is for the sale of contemporary art. That is to say, a dressed-up banana is perhaps less out of place than it appears when its point of sale is rightfully recognized for its inherent spectacle. Cattelan's installation is well-situated in such an environment — an object exhibiting critique and marvel in *Art Basel*'s freakish wrap to the North American commercial year.

Cattelan fulfilled *Miami Beach*'s defining sense of spectacle when *Comedian* joined the thousands of works on display in 2019. The artwork was affixed to the wall of booth D24 by Cattelan's primary commercial representative, Gallerie Perrotin. The gallery listed three editions of the work whose initial pairing quickly sold to private buyers for $120,000 during the event's early hours. Crowds gathered and social media feeds

ignited as curious news surrounding the work spread online. David Datuna, a Georgian performance artist, plucked the banana straight from the wall by Saturday night and consumed *Comedian* in a defiant intervention, cheekily titled Hungry Artist. Datuna's performance was swiftly recorded and posted to Instagram.[2] His actions worked only to increase the media hailstorm that quickly enveloped the controversial piece. *Comedian* had caught the digital world's attention and went viral.

Curatorial staff called for the removal of *Comedian* as notice of the installation grew. Workers reported that uncontrollable crowds surrounding the piece had compromised the safety of neighbouring artworks.[3] *Comedian* was pulled from the show by Sunday morning. Despite its premature removal, the value of the artwork had swelled as the weekend's theatrics increased. Stories ascribed to the object had bolstered its commercial significance, allowing Perrotin to increase the artwork's final price. Its third edition was sold for $150,000.[4] With a commercial story that was nearly as bizarre as the artwork itself, this iconic sculpture became a masterful player in *Art Basel*'s defining spectacle.

COMEDIAN'S CONCEPTUAL GROUNDINGS

Comedian confronted spectators with many questions during its brief stint at *Miami Beach*. Perhaps the biggest of all was how someone could justify spending such a hefty sum on a seemingly mundane collection of objects? What does it mean to buy a banana and duct tape in this context? The purchase of *Comedian* is an investment into its authenticated idea; the physical form of the artwork is of limited relevance. This principle is grounded in twentieth-century theories of conceptualism—a modern cultural movement that was largely pioneered by American artist Sol LeWitt throughout the 1960s. LeWitt was an advocate for ideas. Although he worked predominantly in painting and drawing, unlike Cattelan's basis in sculpture, his theories strove equally toward a non-physical understanding of art via its concept.

LeWitt's seminal text, titled "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," defined the foundation of conceptual practices in the late-twentieth century. Published in 1967, the essay outlines intellectual content as the true basis of great modern artworks; "I refer to the kind of art in which I am involved as conceptual art. The idea of concept is the most important aspect of the work… [A]ll of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes the machine that makes the art."[5] Therefore, conceptual artworks of this kind are ideas; they are not physical in form and they do not require manual skill. The artwork is defined by its concept. Conceptual pieces of this type are often disseminated through a certificate of authenticity.

The concept of the work—its intellectual content—is transferred to paper. Such certificates act as a physically marketable object, a document of special permissions or detailed instructions laying out how the work can be licensed and displayed. Anyone can make art under this ideology, but the artwork's true value and originality ultimately lies in its authenticated idea.

The installation of *Comedian*, for example, is quite simple once a $150,000 certificate of authenticity is in hand. Measure and cut a twenty-centimetre-long segment from a standard issue roll of duct tape, position the chosen banana one hundred and seventy-five centimetres above ground level, and affix fruit to the wall with the tape positioned at a forty-five-degree angle from the floor.[6] The process repeats every seven to ten days, give or take any unforeseen interventions by rogue performance artists while the artwork is on display. If the banana is removed and eaten, as was the case with its original iteration, no need to fear! It is the authenticated *concept* of the work that is on view and not its material form. The artwork cannot be harmed by the dangers of digestion and its fruity components can be replaced without loss in value.

Lucy Lippard was another theorist that outlined the ideals of conceptualism by the end of the 1960s. The American art critic famously defined the dematerialization of art wherein developing practices were said to be entering a period of pure intellectualism. For example, Joseph Kosuth's *Titled (Art as Idea as Idea)* (1968) had already begun exploring immaterial ties between art and language, alongside John Baldessari's *What Is Painting* (1968), which reconsidered the definition of art-making by incorporating word and language into his practice. Lippard suggested that similar trends were causing a profound dematerialization of modern art objects during this period in the Sixties, so much so in fact that objects held the potential to become a wholly obsolete aspect of artmaking.[7] The physical presence of a conceptual artwork under this ideology acts as a mere jumping-off point for deeper immaterial experiences of an installation. The artwork is its own intellectual content as much as Sol LeWitt's work is powered by the machinery of ideas. Now, some fifty years later, these pillars of conceptualism give *Comedian* its own footing within the contemporary market.

The conceptual underpinnings of the *Basel* banana are what make the work equally fascinating and maddening to viewers in that such a simple object can have a variety of interpretations running the gambit between superficial gags and complex critique. The former can seem quite shallow. Like its namesake, *Comedian* is, in part, an irritating joke. The artwork teases many art enthusiasts who believe so-called "good" art should depend on tactile skill. It is not a highly technical work. It is just a

banana and duct tape. These concepts support common discourses against contemporary art: that it is unskilled, absurd, degenerate, and superficial. *Comedian*'s supposed lack of integrity in this way is infuriating to many viewers, yet perhaps that is the entire point of the joke. Cattelan mocks traditional audiences and laughs in the face of methodical artmaking.

Comedian is also a complex critique against the contemporary art market. It pokes fun at how susceptible buyers are to name recognition and hype. This artwork could not have been made by any average individual. The marketability of *Comedian* is aligned with the established status of its creator in the business—a prankster of sorts in the contemporary art scene. Cattelan has positioned provocative materials in contexts that spark social commentary throughout his career. He is the same artist who placed a replica of Adolf Hitler kneeling in repentance in Stockholm's Färgfabriken and a golden toilet titled *America* in the halls of the Guggenheim. Cattelan is aware he can exhibit *Comedian* through sheer will and social clout, that the work's value is bolstered by his familiar and comical canon. Consequently, *Comedian* questions the type of objects that audiences and buyers value. It puts the absurdity of the art market, those who participate in it, and those who become financially successful because of it into stark relief against those who have been traditionally excluded from these spaces. *Comedian*'s installation of superficial objects reflects the superficiality of the market as well as those who engage with it. It is a funny banana that can sell for six figures simply because of hype and clout.

Amidst its varied interpretations, the conceptual underpinnings of *Comedian* become quite cyclical. The absurdity of the piece draws an audience, the audience's intrigue and frustration draw media attention, the media questions the artist, the artist's history of commercial success exposes the flawed market, the market becomes interested in the work because of all its attention, the work is sold for a large sum of money, and the cycle continues again. *Comedian* is a conceptual merry-go-round of criticisms, jokes, and contradictions; a collection of mental acrobatics that are practically vertigo-inducing, ridiculous, confusing, and frustrating. However, that is also the point of the work, and explains why it is considered ingenious to some. It is not simply a banana and duct tape, but the satirical idea of bolstering the value of mundane objects by positioning them within a very specific, elevated commercial environment.

Though at times absurd and outlandish, *Comedian* is undoubtedly grounded in major histories of twentieth century conceptualism. The artwork is validated by the theories of Sol Lewitt and powered by the nature of its idea rather than its physical form. On the other hand, the installation is not entirely dematerialized. It is unlike Lippard's predictions for the future of modern art in this way, but it continues to connect with

the theorist's core themes. The artwork challenges its audience to turn inward and reflect upon the intellectual underpinnings of the installation. The spectator is invited to look beyond the work's physical context toward its commentary on the art market. It is an artwork that is deeply rooted in conceptual art histories, celebrating the legacies of past theorists by putting their ideas to use against prevailing social problems. *Comedian* can be defined, and should be celebrated, for its intellectual content rather than criticized for its mundane materiality.

CONCLUSION

The outcry caused by this strange sculpture in the present art market offers numerous avenues of inquiry into the position of conceptualism in contemporary art theory. *Comedian* becomes an opening for disputes on satire versus critique, on funny versus serious, on bad versus good. It activates its spatial context to reveal the absurdities of Western culture and the nonsensical inflation of commercial value among other intriguing debates. Amidst this intellectual whirlwind, *Comedian* is grounded by its position in the history of modern cultural theory. It is interconnected with the pillars of conceptualism outlined by Sol LeWitt and Lucy Lippard in the late-1960s, demonstrating the intellectual basis of art by expanding its content beyond its physical form. Its conceptual content also comments on the flaws and susceptibility of contemporary art buyers, a critique that plays into the commodification of name and the promotion of recognized authorship. *Comedian* is a defendable player in contemporary art because it is conceptually all of these things. Of course, that does not mean it is any less ridiculous or that viewers should halt their long-winded rants against its absurdity on social media. The artwork is an open-ended reflection of the art world back onto itself, revealing the pitfalls of social clout turned capital. It is an intriguing critique of the contemporary market; calling out, and working alongside, the breadth of players that are engaged with it. *Comedian* is a strikingly plain object turned into a well-considered critique, and all the more defensible because of it.

NOTES

1. Galerie Perrotin, *Instagram*, December 8, 2019, https://www.instagram.com/p/B50RWWHlzRl/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link.
2. david_datuna, *Instagram*, December 7, 2019, https://www.instagram.com/p/B5yI4FKB-Lb/.
3. Bonnie Stiernberg, "The $120,000 Art Basel Banana Has Been Taken Down," *InsideHook*, December 8, 2019, https://www.insidehook.com/daily_brief/arts-entertainment/the-120000-art-basel-banana-has-been-taken-down.
4. Kelli Kennedy, "Price Hike: Spotty Banana Duct-Taped to a Wall Now Costs US$150,000," *CTV News*, December 9, 2019, https://www.ctvnews.ca/entertainment/price-hike-spotty-banana-duct-taped-to-a-wall-now-costs-us-150-000-1.4721608?cache=.
5. Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," reprinted in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* [Cambridge: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, (1967) 1999], 12.
6. Graham Bowley, "It's a Banana. It's Art. And Now It's the Guggenheim's Problem.," *The New York Times*, September 19, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/18/arts/design/banana-art-guggenheim.html.
7. Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art," reprinted in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, [Cambridge: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, (1968) 1999], 46.

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ELIZA FAYE LAFFERTY (SHE/HER)
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

From Misrepresentation to Public Memory: Tracing Filipinx Visual Cultures and Curating the Vernacular Archive

ABSTRACT: For Filipinx Americans, connection to cultural histories and to community-based aesthetic practices is often kept private; meanwhile, in the public realm, Filipinx art and histories are subject to public amnesia—a historical process of forgetting that characterizes Filipinx narratives in art historical canons. Despite Filipinx American artists' contributions to 20th and 21st century movements in the United States, little scholarly attention has been given to Filipinx American visual art before the contemporary era; in addition, federal, historical, and cultural institutions charged with compiling national histories often disregard Filipinx narratives. In response, I propose an archival intervention that focuses on elevating vernacular (i.e., homemade, everyday) images that capture previously private memories. Connecting otherwise piecemeal, fragmented, and unseen aspects of Filipinx livelihood in the United States, the vernacular archive adds to existing art historical imagery. The archive builds on theories from Roland Barthes' poststructuralist approach to coded imagery, Tina Campt's insistence on the vernacular for minoritized populations, and Okwui Enwezor's analysis of archival interventions. I consider: what is the relationship between religion, labor, and modern Filipinx American living? How can we employ vernacular art and archival collections in the creation of spaces for maintaining and building Filipinx American public memory? What languages for discussion, critique, and remembering does each artwork elicit? How should we approach these aesthetic forms? Forging connections in response to historical misrepresentations and misreadings, the vernacular archive organically creates community understanding and provides new opportunities for elevating Filipinx narratives in the public realm.

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Art historical canons require new vocabularies and a variety of images to express Filipinx American living.[1] Existing archives present images of Filipinxs as the Other—racial and ethnic "alien subjects," formed against standards of U.S. citizenship, capital, and whiteness.[2] These representations do violence to Filipinx subjects, and current interventions by Filipinx American artists do not directly address the archival form. These established renderings and their colonial residues drive me to consider the transpacific journeys of Filipinx American subjects and artists and their cultural productions. In particular, I ask: What is the relationship between religion, labor, and modern Filipinx American living? How can we employ vernacular art and archival collections in the creation of spaces for maintaining and building Filipinx American public memory? What languages for discussion, critique, and remembering does each artwork elicit? How should we approach these aesthetic forms?

Responding to these questions, I developed a community archive, The Pakinggan Archive, which is accessible at pakingganarchive.omeka.net.[3] In Tagalog, *pakinggan* translates to "listen." I began researching and creating the archive as a Lisa J. Raines Fellow in May 2020, and I was driven by a goal of listening: to the images, the oral histories and stories accompanying the photographs, and the greater themes attached to the archival materials. As a digital archive, the space is fluid, adaptable, and accessible to meet the needs of the community. The Pakinggan Archive continues to grow and informs my research. This paper centers around the vernacular archive, which celebrates quotidian, homemade, and seemingly commonplace imagery. By themselves, the images are piecemeal, sometimes blurry, torn, or worn photographs. Together, the images—assembled and collected with care—are curated with social and historical consciousness. With detailed captions and cross-referenced themes, the archive provides insight into Filipinx American living in the late 20th century. As an art form, the images collectively respond to historical representations, misrepresentations, and lack of representations of Filipinx Americans in archives and artistic institutions.

This paper is in conversation with art historical canons, poststructuralist theories, women of color feminist theory, and critical race theory. My underlying approach is a Barthean reading of visual codes. As Barthes writes in "Myth as a Semiological System," a historical dialectic reformulates codes into "myth," apart from the original "history." Barthes guides my study of underlying codes that enable readings of archives to transverse archives, borders, and time. My visual analysis of the archival images involves understanding the codes and historical context. This original, vernacular archive is the first to offer localized, common, and

everyday signals to orient the viewer and reshape vocabulary around Filipinx Americans. My archival intervention contends that quotidian images are forms of art that support public memory.

Throughout the waves of immigration, representations and images of Filipinxs have remained limited. In *Filipino Americans: Transformation and Identity*, Maria P.P. Root speaks to the unique experiences of Filipinxs in representations in media from the past and in present (i.e., art, television, news) media. She writes:

> People of Filipino heritage have experiences very different from those of other Asian American groups who are a part of this country…intersected and invaded by seafarers, traders, military, missionaries, and colonizers, Filipinos of Americas are seldom accurately situated in history or culture and are therefore often misrepresented.[4]

The misrepresentation of Filipinxs is closely related to the lack of accurate Filipinx narratives in public spaces. Filipinx Americans often do not have agency to present themselves in public cultural and historical institutions. There are no federally-funded Filipinx museums in the United States, the National Archives and Records Administration historically disregards Filipinx perspectives, and public high schools often frame U.S.-Philippine relations as peaceful and mutually-beneficial.[5] The violent, paternalistic influence of the U.S. and other empires in transpacific Filipinx narratives have become lost and forgotten.

The Pakinggan Archive pieces together individual and familial narratives about travel from the Philippine Islands to Southern California. Contributing everyday imagery to the study of Filipinx Americans, The Pakinggan Archive centers individuals as artists and determiners of their own narratives. The full archive offers photographs of and from the Villapando, Reyes, Elegado, Samodal, Hayag, and Obille families. The families are mostly from urban areas including Cavite City and Manila; many subjects received various degrees and professional opportunities in the States. All the members in the archive immigrated post-World War II and are in ways connected to military and labor recruitment. The digital archive provides a framework for close analysis and focused readings of the images and their impacts. The familial strands connect and diverge, creating multifaceted and prismatic views of Filpinx American living.

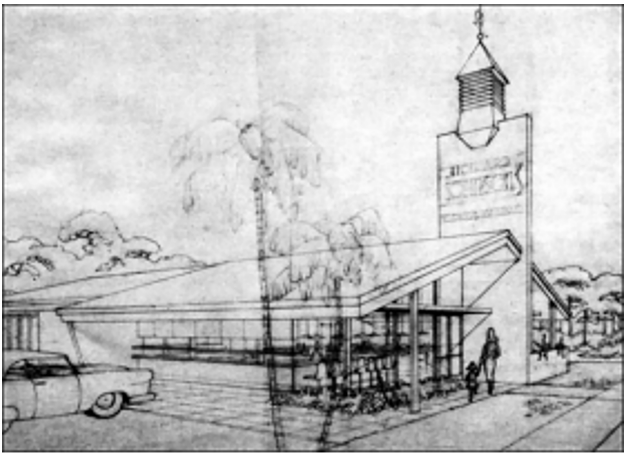
Artists and individuals may recode vernacular images to create counter-images and positive representations. Tina Campt, a professor of Humanities and Modern Culture and Media at Brown University, writes in *Image Matters: Archive, Photography, and the African Diaspora in Europe* about the power of photographs as "counterimages." She determines that photography provides "a means of creating an image of our lives and selves

as we would like to be seen."[6] Together, the homemade photographs of The Pakinggan Archive are an artistic intervention to foment public memory. Artist and theorist Okwui Enwezor writes in "Photography Between History and the Monument," that archives "become and form a logic of domiciliation and consignation (gathering together signs that designate the artist's oeuvre), as well as a condition of reality of the statements of each of the individual works, the narrative it has to convey, the a *priori* archive of the artist's practice."[7] Thus, the dynamic portfolio of quotidian images develops Jacques Derrida's concept of "domiciliation."[8] The Pakinggan Archive specifically carves out institutional and historical space to build up self-representations and cultural memories.

The First Baptist Church in Cavite City, where Ate Luzing took her Reyes siblings when they were teenagers—the location where Marietta and Teofilo Obille married in 1964.[9]

The archival intervention creates space for close and personal analysis, which is evident in photographs of families who grew up between the Catholic and Evangelical Christian Churches. The Reyes family, in particular, was raised in the First Baptist Church in Cavite City. The photograph that documents the church shows a small crowd of attendees lined up outside the church, either before or after the service. The church is a non-intrusive, white structure with slick, slanted walls and a tilted roof that meets in a short steeple. It appears both formal and informal, traditional and reformed. As a post-WWII building, a sweeping gable marks the entrance to the building and escalates in a central steeple. Beneath the steeple is a long rectangle of square geometric patterns and vertical ridges

on the sides. Together, this form rests on a small triangular pediment. Additionally, the central entrance includes a projecting cantilevered roof. While a unique form in the Philippines, the model of the First Baptist Church is also reminiscent of commercial architecture such as the Howard Johnson chain hotels and restaurants from the 1950s and 1960s. Plans for the Howard Johnson chain hotels illustrate the parallels between the structures, as both structures adopt the signature steep, angled roof.[10]



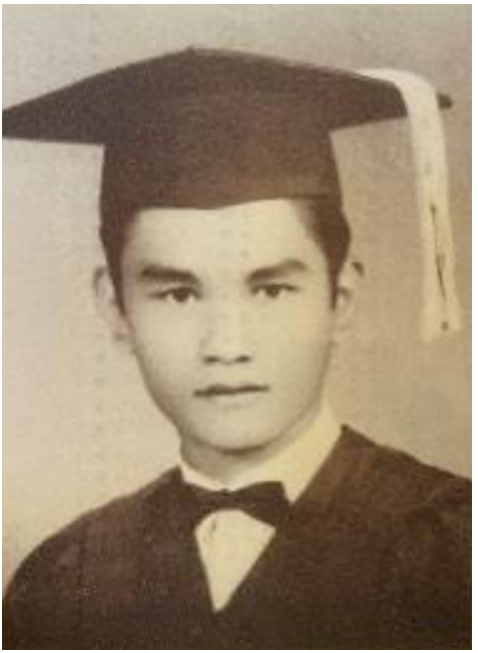
Howard Johnson Hotel Plan, *Architectural FORUM,* March 1955, p. 165- 167: Kummerlowe. [11]

Howard Johnson's buildings commercialized the steep roofs and steeple as a mechanism to brand their businesses across the United States. The staple architectural elements are evident in marketing slogans for the business: "Howard Johnson's—An American way of life—convenience, comfort and hospitality for the entire family, at home and away from home."[12] Howard Johnson's common American building seems closely related to the architecture in the First Baptist Church, but the First Baptist Church's geometric patterning and cantilevered roof distinguish it from Johnson's unadorned buildings. The First Baptist Church's close yet divergent connection to highly reproduced and commercialized American buildings represents its convergent and differential relationship with American culture.

Crucially, The Pakinggan Archive offers information and context about the individuals in the images. In conjunction with images of religious buildings, The Pakinggan Archive visualizes Filipinx members as agents in their own religious practices. The subjects in the archive's photographs appear joyful and engaged in the church community.

"First Baptist Church: Youth Outing," Youth outing to Lido Beach, Noveleta outside of Cavite City.[13]

The "First Baptist Church: Youth Outing" captures three rows of young and smiling members of the church's youth group. They pose in front of Lido Beach, Noveleta—a town right outside of Cavite City. In the background, behind the figures, the horizon line is just visible above the shoulders of the members in the back. The subjects appear to be around the same ages, likely in their mid-teens. One significantly younger subject is held up by her older brother in the back row. The subjects smile with toothy grins, wrap their arms around each other, and rest their arms on their neighbors. The Pakinggan Archive identifies subjects and details in the composition, including Cesarlito Reyes in the upper left corner, as the boy holding up his younger sister. While his right hand holds up his sister, he makes "bunny ears" behind his brother Naphtali on the left. Naphtali, in turn, places his right hand on the person's head in front of him. The three boys grin and seem to be laughing in the picture. The picture is energetic and vibrant—it captures a happy moment in time for the youth community. Decades later, in the 1970s, Cesalrito Reyes immigrated to Southern California. He continued his education, worked as an accountant, and also became a preacher in the community. The image shows the start of Cesalrito's transpacific journey from the First Baptist Church in Cavite City to a Southern Baptist Church in Southern California.



"DG Elegado: born in 1937, graduated from Agricultural Engineering in the Philippines. The United States sent for 125 graduates to come, all expenses paid, to work. My dad was excited and envisioned working in Corporate America. Unbeknownst to him, they put him to work picking vegetables in the crop fields of Salinas, in association with Ceasar Chavez and the movement." - Aileen Elegado Catapusan, daughter of DG Elegado[14]

The Pakinggan Archive includes images of the workers and personal narratives behind their immigration paths. One of the photographs reveals a striking and underrepresented narrative regarding the forced and misled labor pathways to the States. DG Elegado's portrait is from the early 1960s and is black-and-white. He wears a cap with the tassel on his left, a black, crisp bow tie with a white button down, and a graduation robe. DG stares directly into the camera. His gaze is confident and calm. His graduate cap—with the tassel on the left to represent his graduation—demonstrates the Western influence in convention and education in the Philippines. DG appears to be proud and accomplished, prepared to use his education. He graduated with a degree in Agricultural Engineering in the Philippines. His academic pursuits are not visible to the viewer, but his confidence, youth, and accomplishments translates to the photograph.

The photograph is from a few months before DG's immigration to the States. Shortly after his graduation, the U.S. government selected 125 graduates to immigrate, with all expenses paid, to work in America. In

the caption of the photograph, DG's daughter, Aileen Elegado Catapusaun, explained DG's anticipation: "My dad was excited and envisioned working in Corporate America." However, upon arrival to the States, DG and other graduates were put to work picking vegetables in the Salinas crop fields despite their degrees. DG worked in the same field that participated in the labor movement, and he fought alongside Larry Itlong and Cesar Chavez. Filipino workers are often forgotten from the movement, and the American public furthermore forgets the imperialist origin of their labor in the fields.

DG's portrait is a significant interjection in the canon of existing imagery of Filipinx laborers. Rather than the dehumanizing, decentralized image of workers in the field, DG's image is a posed portrait. Historically, portraiture was reserved for wealthy and white individuals. The three-quarter pose, in tandem with his gown and cap, are codes for DG's intelligence and power.

Emmanuel Villapando and his co-workers as jet engineers in the U.S. Airforce.[15]

Another example of labor in The Pakinggan Archive is of Emmanuel Villapando and his co-workers in the U.S. Airforce. Emmanuel kneels in the front of the photograph, with one arm resting on his leg. He and seven other colleagues stand around a jet engine. They wear clean, zippered jumpsuits with sharp collars matched with black shoes. Emmanuel is the only visibly Filipino man; the majority appear to be white. Three men sit atop the engine while two stand to its side and the bottom row sits

beneath. They pose in close proximity and press against the cool metal of the engine. All have happy and proud expressions on their faces. Emmanuel tilts his chin to the side with a nonchalant, subtle sideways smile. He seems quietly pleased with his work and occupies an important and prominent part of the composition. Emmanuel's photograph operates on the same register as DG's portrait. DG's image invites the viewers to complicate American imaginaries surrounding labor. Similarly, Emmanuel's photograph centers the people behind the labor. These photographs offer visual evidence of Filipinx American people and histories—rather than just their labor.

The threads of individual narratives and photographs develop the archive into a powerful addition to art historical vocabulary in the digital realm. Together, the pieces engage themes of religion and labor in nuanced ways to tell a dynamic story about immigration and livelihood in the States. Rather than relying on flattening and predetermined archival forms, The Pakinggan Archive develops localized, dynamic, and prismatic images for public memory.

CONCLUSION

The Pakinggan Archive provides a diverse and layered approach to answering questions about power, religion, and labor. The archival intervention is a flexible model that creates space for restorative histories and new information. The digital platform allows the archive to expand and become an intervention in more cases—in classrooms, historical houses and museums, community organizations, and commonplace conversations. Ideally, the work of this paper and the archive will grow beyond current institutions. The Pakinggan Archive should become a replicable and usable mode for intervention and narrative that supports public memory and reimagination around Filipinx American cultural histories.

Development of the archive will include collection and curation of more images; the archive's goal to present multidimensional views of Filipinx American living relies on building and growing content around individuals willing to share their stories. Future collections must also be mindful to provide ample histories, context, and identifications. The Pakinggan Archive responds to past archival images of Indigenous Filipinxs. Members of different Filipinx ethnolinguistic groups, especially Indigenous peoples, carry unique and localized histories. Expanding the photographic portfolio will be an essential step to center Indigenous voices.

While The Pakinggan Archive addresses how vernacular imagery may support and add to existing art historical vocabularies, is it possible that these images can also facilitate the breakdown of previous archives? Given a poststructuralist reading, would careful curation afford the dismantling of colonial signs of empire? I suggest we continue to add to these new forms

of representation and pursue the possibilities of deconstructing colonialist systems through vernacular images—moving towards the remembering of Filipinx pasts, a keen attunement to the multiple modalities of transpacific living, and the creation of more ethical, antiracist futures.

NOTES

1. Filipinx refers to people with ancestral roots to the Philippine Islands; the "x" de-genders the term.
2. Here, I refer to the Other in the Levinasian ethical sense; in that by defining the self in regard to the Other, one does violence to that Other.
3. This paper is a selection from a larger Senior thesis. For my Senior thesis, I explore the histories and representations of immigration from the Philippines to Southern California, existing archival records of Filipinxs for American audiences, and modern Filipinx artists.
4. Maria P. P. Root, *Filipino Americans: Transformation and Identity* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2012).
5. The National Archives includes limited publicly accessible information about Filipinx Americans; there is no detailed, personalized information about Filipinx leaders or community organizers. Instead, the archive mostly includes broad, historical information and data points.
6. Tina M. Campt, *Image Matters: Archive, Photography, and the African Diaspora in Europe* (Durham: Duke University, 2012), 5.
7. Okwui, Enwezor. "Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art." (2008), 18.
8. Ibid.
9. "First Baptist Church," *The Pakinggan Archive*, accessed November 20, 2020, https://pakingganarchive.omeka.net/items/show/10.
10. "America's Landmark: Under the Orange Roof," America's Landmark: Under the Orange Roof, accessed November 22, 2020, http://www.orangeroof.org/.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. "First Baptist Church Youth Outing," *The Pakinggan Archive*, accessed November 20, 2020, https://pakingganarchive.omeka.net/items/show/11.
14. "125 Graduates," *The Pakinggan Archive*, accessed November 20, 2020, https://pakingganarchive.omeka.net/items/show/44.
15. "At Work," *The Pakinggan Archive*, accessed November 21, 2020, https://pakingganarchive.omeka.net/items/show/79.

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Progressive Deaccessioning: A Step Towards Museum Parity

ABSTRACT: In the last three years, several American museums have turned to the practice of deaccessioning as a method of increasing the diversity of their collections, responding to a growing awareness of the systemic inequities within the traditional canon of art history, alongside those more directly perpetrated within artistic institutions. As a result of their actions, however, the deaccessioned pieces risk disappearing from public view forever, which has drawn severe criticism and resistance from many across the art world. But despite this onslaught of controversy, these few instances of "progressive deaccessioning" have largely been carried out within the purview of industry norms and have allowed institutions to acquire significantly more work than what was originally sold. These resulting acquisitions, mostly authored by women and people of color, have meaningfully expanded the museums' abilities to offer visitors a more complete and equitable narrative of art history. Diversity and equity-oriented initiatives have become increasingly relevant in the wake of racial reckonings across the U.S. and within the museum industry. This, coupled with a recent loosening of AAMD restrictions around deaccessioning, suggests that the practice of progressive deaccessioning will persist throughout the years to come. This essay will examine two instances of "progressive deaccessioning" at the Baltimore Museum of Art to argue the merit of selling artwork into private hands to increase institutional diversity. In the process, the connections and relationships between the public, museums, and museum art will be analyzed and challenged, advancing a more thoughtful and inclusive framework for their interconnection.

PART 1: DEACCESSIONING AND DIVERSITY IN THE AMERICAN ART MUSEUM

Despite their broadly progressive inclination, art institutions have not escaped the systemic racism and sexism that pervades culture and society in the United States, categorically excluding women and people of color from their collections, exhibitions, and staff throughout much of the 20th century. In the present day, this habitual practice of discrimination has resulted in museum collections that convey a predominantly white male perspective of art, ubiquitously championing the same heroes and reinforcing a strikingly narrow canon of art history. Of the many steps institutions have recently taken to begin remedying this legacy, deaccessioning with the explicit goal of improving collection diversity has been the most controversial. Nevertheless, looking to the increasingly existential need for institutional equity and inclusion, the utility and merit of so-called "progressive deaccessioning" is abundantly clear.[1]

From the beginnings of the modern museum, deaccessioning has been an essential practice, ensuring that collections do not exceed the physical capacity of institutions to house them. However, to deaccession is to risk removing a work from public view forever, inherently contradicting the museum's raison d'être. As such, it is something to be treated thoughtfully and systematically, taking a broad spectrum of factors into account. The formation of organizations like the American Association of Museum Directors (AAMD) and the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) in the middle of the century brought about the establishment of industry-wide standards, expectations, and regulations. Around deaccessioning, the AAMD now mandates that the decision to deaccession "is made solely to improve the quality, scope, and appropriateness of the collection, and to support the mission and long-term goals of the museum," encouraging the development of individualized collection management plans and policies.[2] More specifically, the organization advises that museums weigh an object's physical quality and condition, redundancy in the collection, authenticity and attribution, aesthetic merit, and historical importance when considering if the object should be deaccessioned. A museum must also consider how the object's ownership will be transferred by working in compliance with the wishes of the object's donor, if the work was donated, alongside those of the object's creator.

In the last decade, however, the rigidity of these guidelines has been called into question amid an industry-wide reckoning on the art world's long and terrible legacy of discrimination against women and people of color. Several recently conducted studies and surveys have revealed the staggering inequalities that continue to define art institutions across the country, projecting a distant path to true equity and inclusion. For one, 85% of the artists represented in the collections of the 18 most influential

art museums in the US are white, and 87% are men, an overwhelming majority that remained consistent across the surveyed institutions.[3]

The glaring inequalities do not end there. A survey of 179 American art museums in 2018 showed that while museum staff have become more racially and ethnically diverse over the last five years, people of color still make up just 28% of art museum employees, and only 12% of museum leadership.[4] A report issued by the AAM in 2017 revealed that nearly half of American museum boards are exclusively white, with only 10% of the surveyed museum directors indicating they had a plan in place to increase board diversity[5] All of these facets of inequality have converged to create a museum environment in which many potential visitors do not feel comfortable. Small-scale studies across the industry have found that as much as 40% of the American population does not feel welcome in art institutions, a sentiment overwhelmingly held by people of color and of lower socioeconomic status.[6]

Though problematic on an ethical level, this sweeping disillusionment across large sectors of the American population could pose a major threat to the survival of art museums going forward.[7] Providing equal staffing opportunities for people of color within an institution is of vital importance to any improvement, but exhibiting artists traditionally left out of the art historical canon is also imperative. Only then will museums begin to reflect the true scope of artistic brilliance demonstrated by artists throughout history and appeal more broadly to the varied makeup of the specific communities they serve.[8]

Acquiring new art by women and people of color naturally displaces other elements of the museum's collection. In recent years, some institutions have made this exchange explicit by deaccessioning and selling off works by well-known artists to specifically finance the acquisition of lesser-known artists from minority backgrounds in a practice termed 'progressive deaccessioning.' Though these actions have predominantly fallen well within the bounds of the standard industry guidelines around deaccessioning, they have nonetheless attracted considerable media attention and controversy, sparking much reflection on the purpose of museums in American society, the value of art, and the practice of deaccessioning itself. Looking to the two instances of progressive deaccessioning at the Baltimore Museum of Art, this essay defends the practice, demonstrating its merit in the movement towards art historical and institutional equity and inclusion.

PART 2: PIONEERING PROGRESSIVE DEACCESSIONING AT THE BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART

The first major institution to take up progressive deaccessioning was the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA). In April of 2018 the BMA auctioned

off seven works from their collection with the expressed goal of acquiring more art by women and people of color. The process began in 2017 when newly appointed BMA director Christopher Bedford instructed curator Kristen Hileman to examine the museum's collection of contemporary art and identify candidates for deaccessioning. Bedford was recruited to the BMA from the Rose Art Museum in 2017 largely on the basis of his proven commitment to social justice and his expansive vision of what the BMA could be to the communities of greater Baltimore. From the outset, he sought to bring about swift and radical changes by working to implement "a rapid, very aggressive, maybe reparations-based change agenda," informed by themes of social justice at every step of the way.[9]

The demographics of Baltimore made this prioritization rooted in the spirit of social justice particularly necessary. Over 60% of the city's population is Black and the median household income of $50,000 falls well below the national average of over $68,000.[10] Recalling the studies mentioned before, it is exactly these sectors of the population that often feel least welcome in art institutions, a finding that is reflected in the BMA's disproportionately small percentage of Black visitors. Though there has been marked improvement in recent years, the latest publicly available figure, 13% in 2015, is staggeringly low in comparison to the Black population of the city.[11] Without making sweeping changes to the BMA's programming and community outreach, it was clear that museum attendance would continue to falter, and the BMA would fall out of relevance with the currents of the city.

However, the changes mapped out by the BMA's leadership could only be executed at considerable expense. Deaccessioning became a critical tool for the BMA to advance its other social justice-oriented initiatives while also continuing to build a collection that improves minority representation and better reflects the constituents of the city it serves. Without deaccessioning, Bedford shared, "I did not see a way to fulfill all of our capital aspirations, exhibition-making aspirations, and raise money to be competitive in the contemporary art market. It wasn't a possibility."[12]

The works ultimately chosen to be deaccessioned were created by artists well represented in the BMA's collection who all identified as white men. Though deaccessioned with the overarching goal of funding the acquisition of new work by artists from diverse backgrounds, each individual artwork sold fulfilled the AAMD guidelines without this broader justification, chiefly on the grounds of their redundancy within the collection. *Hearts* (1979) and *Oxidation Painting* (1978), the two works by Andy Warhol chosen for deaccessioning, were among 89 created by Warhol in the BMA's collection, and were rarely exhibited following their donation by the Warhol Foundation and collector Richard Pearlstone in 1994. In

accordance with the AAMD's guidelines, the BMA sought out the explicit permission of the Warhol Foundation and Pearlstone when considering the two paintings for deaccessioning, receiving an emphatic positive response from both parties.[13] Franz Kline's *Green Cross* (1956) was seldom shown in favor of another, similar color painting from 1961, and numbered among approximately 12 works by Kline in the collection. Likewise, Robert Rauschenberg has over 20 works in the BMA's collection. The work selected for deaccessioning, *Bank Job* (1979), was difficult to care for and exhibit because of its massive size, spanning the length of an entire wall. Three lesser-known paintings, two by Kenneth Noland and one by Jules Olitski, were respectively part of the color field and abstract expressionism movements, both of which are widely represented in the BMA's collection, making these three paintings redundant as well. Following unanimous approval from the Board of Trustees, five of the deaccessioned paintings were successfully sold at auction through Sotheby's in May 2018, while the remaining two larger canvases were sold privately.

The proceeds of the sale were split into two acquisition funds, in strict adherence to AAMD policy. The resulting fund devoted to shorter-term acquisition efforts found almost immediate use in the purchase of nine works that had been selected and approved prior to the deaccessionings. Effectively, the work of the five well-represented white male artists was exchanged for a new collection of works that are both more relevant to the communities the BMA serves and representative of voices traditionally left out of the museum space, continuing the long process of righting institutional wrongs. The new acquisitions included work by seven celebrated Black artists, including Jack Whitten's *9.11.01* (2016), a monumental work that director Christopher Bradford deemed, "the most significant acquisition I'll ever make for a museum."[14] Many of the artists targeted by this initiative entered the BMA's collection for the first time. Their purchase markedly expanded the museum's ability to convey a more complete narrative of contemporary art while making strides towards the rightful recognition of minority voices in art.

Despite the traditionally justified basis for the deaccessionings and the inarguable positive outcome of the new acquisitions, this move garnered considerable attention throughout the art world and beyond it, with mixed responses. Many influential artists and curators of color publicly commended the decision. Dr. Leslie King Hammond, the celebrated artist and founding director of the Center for Race and Culture at the Maryland Institute College of Art, wholeheartedly praised the move, writing, "You have to step forward and make what are sometimes misconstrued as radical decisions, when in fact it's just addressing the overall quality, content, and intent of the institution's role in community." Still, others condemned the

BMA, concerned about the displacement of prominent work and troubled by the open motivation of improving the collection's diversity.[15] Looking back to the continued strength of the BMA's collection in the movements embodied by the deaccessioned works, alongside the institution's strict adherence to industry policy, these frustrations register as misplaced and uninformed. The cogent justifications for the decision, compounded with the clear financial and moral impetus of improving the institution's equity and inclusiveness, frame this act of deaccessioning as a critical step in the right direction. Through deaccessioning, the BMA was able to invest in the art of our current moment while introducing much needed and long excluded diversity and perspective to the museum's narrative of the history of art.

PART 3: THE BMA'S DEACCESSIONING PROJECTS CONTINUE

Perhaps the most controversial instance of progressive deaccessioning was announced by the Baltimore Museum of Art in October 2020. Spurred by the nation's reckoning with the murder of George Floyd and the temporary suspension of AAMD sanctions enacted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the museum's board approved the deaccessioning of three paintings—*3* (1987-88) by Brice Marden, *1957-G* (1957) by Clyfford Still, and *The Last Supper* (1986) by Andy Warhol—expecting a return of roughly $65 million. The proceeds were to be allocated to three initiatives. The majority of the funds would go into the direct care of the collection, including support for the salaries of museum staff, with plans to increase the pay of traditionally undercompensated front-of-house workers. Another $10 million would be invested into the museum's acquisition fund, supporting the museum's commitment to radically improve its holdings in art by women and people of color. A final portion was to be devoted to diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, including the elimination of museum admissions fees to reduce barriers of entry to people of lesser means.[16] However, despite the indisputable value of the outcomes of the deaccessioning, many prominent figures were angered by the method, inciting a media firestorm that ultimately led to the annulment of the planned sales and the re-accessioning of the works in question.

Critics most objected to the prominence of the respective works chosen. In a letter to Attorney General Brian Frosh and Secretary of State John Wobensmith of Maryland, former BMA director Arnold Lehman wrote, "These three works are central to the museum's collection and to the cultural patrimony of the State of Maryland, as they represent the monumental achievement of three of the world's most important 20th century artists."[17] An online petition also directed to Maryland's state government implied that the BMA "breached the public trust in choosing

works of such iconic status for deaccession."[18] In response to these concerns and accusations, the BMA's curators asserted that this deaccessioning was "not a judgment about individual art objects, but an assessment of *context*, the way they function in a collection."[19] Though *3* and *1957-G* were the only two paintings by Marden and Still in the collection, the BMA's holdings are rich in other representations of the Minimalism and Abstract Expressionism movements with increasing depth in abstract art made by women and people of color, allowing curators ample choice in how to present, juxtapose, and complicate those narratives. Similarly, Warhol's late work is very well represented in the collection, occupying wall space and utilizing resources that effectively reduce the BMA's ability to accommodate new works. Deaccessioning a third Warhol would allow the institution to support a multitude of new accessions without affecting the museum's capacity to exhibit Warhol's work and engage with his legacy.

Indisputably, these works were of more value—both sentimental and curatorial—than the ones the BMA had chosen for deaccessioning two years prior, and the case for their sale was harder to argue under the traditional deaccessioning decision-making framework. However, looking again to the pronounced disparity between the representation of white male artists and artists of all other backgrounds in museum collections, it is clear that nothing short of radical action can begin to change it. Centuries of work by women and people of color has gone unknown or undervalued by the public on the basis of race and gender, projecting a clear message of exclusion to visitors and budding artists aligned with those identities. To not include these long-ostracized voices is to risk losing the interest of an increasingly diverse American populace, and in the case of the Baltimore Museum of Art, continue to fail the majority Black population the museum was chartered to serve. Though the BMA was not ultimately successful in this deaccessioning, the museum's initiative marks a vital step into the next frontier of progressive deaccessioning, moving beyond the current guidelines and towards a greater prioritization of diversity, equity, and inclusion within museum collections.

CONCLUSION

Reaching a place of relative parity will require sacrifices. Whenever possible, museums must work to ensure their collections remain publicly accessible. However, continuing to propagate a narrative of art history that excludes the many women and people of color who deserve to be a part of it is deeply damaging, both to our collective canon of art history and to the future of museums. The industry must instead work to uncover and elevate talented artists past and present who have been ostracized and erased because of their identities and ensure that their art is recognized in museum

collections and available to a public far more diverse than most institutions themselves. To avoid these efforts is to seriously risk losing connection with the communities museums serve, debasing the collective doctrine of access and education that defines the American art museum and jeopardizing the survival of museums as we know them. Progressive deaccessioning is just one of many tools to help implement the necessary institutional changes, but perhaps the most pragmatic, especially following the debilitating reverberations of the coronavirus. Despite the onslaught of controversy, it is a practice that will likely grow and evolve in its use throughout many years to come, helping to define a more diverse, inclusive, and sustainable art world of the future.

NOTES

1. As collections have continued to drastically increase in size, the proportion of works actually exhibited has shrunk, with over half of American art museums exhibiting less than 5% of their full holdings at any particular time. Liam Sweeney and Jennifer K. Frederick, "Ithaka S+R Art Museum Director Survey 2020." *Ithaka S+R. Ithaka S+R,* "Collections."
2. Association of Art Museum Directors, "Art Museums and the Practice of Deaccessioning," July 2011, 1, 1.
3. Chad Topaz, "Diversity of artists in major U.S. museums," *PLoS One* 14, no. 3, (March 2019): Table 2.
4. Andrew W. Mellon Foundation with Ithaka S+R, "Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey 2018," (2018), 9.
5. American Alliance of Museums, "Museum Board Leadership Report 2017," (2017), 5.
6. Johanna Jones, "Quantifying Our Museum's Social Impact," *Medium*, May 14, 2020. https://medium.com/new-faces-new-spaces/quantifying-our-museums-social-impact-e99bff3ef30e.; Colleen Dilenschneider, "Why Cultural Organizations Are Not Reaching Low Income Visitor," *Know Your Bone*, May 18, 2016. https://www.colleendilen.com/2016/05/18/why-cultural-organizations-are-not-reaching-low-income-visitors-data/
7. Over the last two decades, art museum attendance has substantially declined, with a recorded 30% decrease in the number of U.S. art museum and gallery visits between the years 2002 and 2012. However, there are signs that attendance is beginning to improve. In 2017, the percentage of Americans who had visited an art museum or gallery in the last year rose to 23.7% from 21.0% in 2012, but was still below the attendance recorded in 2002 and 1992. National Endowment for the Arts,"A Decade of Arts Engagement: Findings from the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, 2002-2012," https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/2012-sppa-feb2015.pdf.; American Academy of Arts & Sciences, "Art Museum Attendance," https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/public-life/art-museum-attendance.
8. Several museums that have very intentionally advanced initiatives to diversify their staff, collection, and programming have had marked success in increasing attendance from people of color. The Oakland Museum reported an increase of 10% from 2017 to 2019, mostly driven by the local community. Lori Fogarty, "Our Museum Is Considered a

Leader in Equity and Inclusion. Here's What We've Done—and Why We Have a Long, Long Way to Go," *Artnet News*, June 12, 2020. https://news.artnet.com/opinion/lori-fogarty-oakland-op-ed-1885446.

9. Gabriella Souza, "Change Agent: BMA director Christopher Bedford bring artistic fervor to his new position," *Baltimore Magazine*, April 2017. https://www.baltimoremagazine.com/section/artsentertainment/bma-director-christopher-bedford-brings-artistic-fervor-to-new-position/; and "At the Baltimore Museum of Art, Christopher Bedford Creates a New Kind of Institution," Andrew Russeth in *ARTnews*, both accessed Nov. 2020.

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11. The BMA has shared that the proportion of Black visitors to the museum increased from 3% to 13% between 2002 and 2015, and that the average visitor's age has decreased 12 years, from 56 to 44. Mary Carole McCauley, 'Free admission hasn't stopped attendance slide at Baltimore art museums,' *The Baltimore Sun*, January 16, 2018. https://www.baltimoresun.com/entertainment/arts/bs-fe-museum-attendance-solutions-20180111-story.html

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13. Joe Wachs, president of The Warhol Foundation, confirmed in an interview that he was "happy to support the request because the funds will be used for a commendable purpose, and the Baltimore Museum will still have significant Warhol holdings which they have regularly exhibited," a sentiment shared by the Pearlstone family. Amy Elias, Richard Pearlstone's wife, shared, "It took us about 30 seconds to say yes." Halperin, "Unusual and Radical Act."

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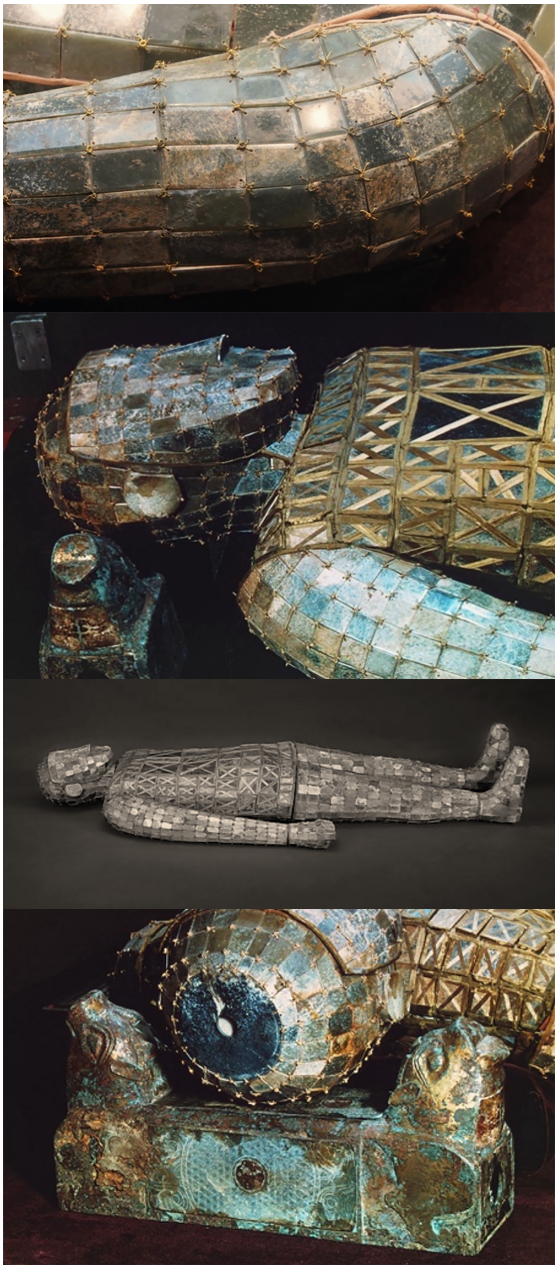
Becoming Eternal: Bodily Metamorphosis in East Asian Corpse Chrysalides

ABSTRACT: The art historian George Kubler wrote evocatively: "The historian's special contribution is the discovery of the manifold shapes of time…He is committed to the detection and description of the shape of time." This is vividly illustrated in the tombs of East Asia, where time alternates between lived and cosmological, from time as we experience it to an eternal time that has no end and no beginning. In these private spaces meant only to be inhabited by the deceased are found extraordinary creations, which in idiosyncratic ways resist the capricious character of time. By investigating three corporeal objects found in tombs – the jade body of Liu Sheng, the cypress manikin of Zhang Shiqing, and the silver mesh shroud of the princess of Chen – three different processes of becoming eternal will be illuminated. The first deceased person transformed into stone becomes immortal, the second person is transformed through fire into a sentient cypress being, and the third person ascends into an immortal embryo. Each of these case studies will proceed from the body of the deceased outward. Because tomb objects must be interpreted within their contexts in order for their meaning to be fully understood, the discussion will begin with the treatment of the bodies of the deceased, then radiate to their immediate surroundings: the materials that enshroud their corpses.

> The historian's special contribution is the discovery of the manifold shapes of time. The aim of the historian, regardless of his speciality in erudition, is to portray time. He is committed to the detection and description of the shape of time.[1]
>
> – George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things.*



Figs. 1.1–1.4. Jade bodies of Prince Liu Sheng and Princess Dou Wan from Mancheng tombs 1 and 2, Western Han, 113 BCE.
(Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Michele A. Matteini).

In the tombs of East Asia, time alternates from lived to cosmological, from time as we know it to eternal time, a time that has no end and no beginning. In these private spaces meant only to be inhabited by the deceased, extraordinary creations have been discovered, each an idiosyncratic testament to the resistance of the capricious character of time. By investigating three corporeal objects found in tombs—the jade body of Liu Sheng, the cypress manikin of Zhang Shiqing, and the silver mesh shroud of the princess of Chen—three different processes of becoming eternal will be illuminated. The first deceased person is transformed into stone to become immortal; the second person is transformed through fire into a sentient cypress being, and the third person ascends into an immortal embryo. Each of these case studies will proceed from the body of the deceased outward. Because tomb objects must be interpreted within their contexts in order for their meaning to be fully understood, the discussion will begin with the treatment of the bodies of the deceased, then radiate to their immediate surroundings: the materials that enshroud their corpses.

The nephrite burial shrouds sewn with gold wire from Mancheng tombs 1 and 2 (ca. 113 BCE) transform the corpses of Prince Liu Sheng and his consort, Princess Dou Wan, into immortal jade bodies, defying the corporeal constraints of time (figs. 1.1-1.4). Through three layers of intricately carved jades, the vulnerable flesh, ligaments, skin, sinews, tendons, and every remnant of the royal duo's embodied existence are sealed and ossified into eternal stone bodies able to withstand the vicissitudes of time.[2] The innermost layer of jade consists of nine plugs that seal the couple's bodily orifices, a custom thought to magically facilitate the body's resistance to decay.[3] Following the jade stoppers, *bi* discs of varying sizes were placed on the body's most vital areas.[4] Atop the *bi* discs, Liu Sheng's shroud is made of 2498 plaques of speckled green nephrite knit together by 1100 grams of gold filament, a lustrous culmination that metamorphoses Sheng into a jade prince, his new casing iridescent and shimmering like fish scales.[5] Dou Wan's jade body is only slightly less extravagant, composed of 2160 plaques and 700 grams of gold thread. Unlike the earlier jade burial shroud of Zhao Mo,[6] which counterfeits a jacket and pair of trousers, Liu Sheng's encasement simulates his nude body, furnished with firm buttocks, the beginnings of a paunch, and genitals, enabling the prince to procreate in perpetuity.[7] Sheng and his wife's jade faces have plaques hewn and fitted together to create a three-dimensional nose, three slits indicating the eyes and mouth, and two additional curved jades representing ears. When the Mancheng tombs were excavated in 1968, teeth and a few disintegrated bones were all that were left of the royal pair's bodily remains. In the Mawangdui tombs, however, the corpse of Lady Dai miraculously survived the passage of 2200 years by being swathed in twenty layers of garments,

girdled with nine knotted sashes, and enfolded in additional fabric.[8]

The comparison between the two Western Han tombs is meaningful because it reveals that the preservation of flesh was not the priority at Mancheng. Instead, the jade burial shrouds (hereafter, jade bodies) serve as catalysts, means, and ends of an occult transmutation of the otherwise perishable human body; Liu Sheng and Dou Wan's mortal forms are changed by and into the magical stone. Evidence for a symbolic and literal connection between jade and the eternal is found in contemporary historical records indicating that Liu Sheng's half-brother, Emperor Wu, regularly drank an elixir of jade powder mixed with sweet dew (*ganlu*) in an endeavor to invoke immortality not through longevity but by becoming the stone he religiously consumed.[9] Another clear indication of the meaning of jade originates in the liminal space between Liu Sheng's inner and outer coffin, where there is an opalescent jade figurine of a kneeling young man.[10] The chiseled, robed figure's hair is arranged neatly in a high bun, his elegant hands poised on a low bench, with large, doe-like almond eyes and an inscription on his base identifying him as an immortal "jade gentleman of antiquity."[11] Wu Hung draws a connection between Liu Sheng's jade gentleman and Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi's description of "Divine Gentlemen": ageless men unaltered by time, whose gentle complexions are "like ice or snow."[12] Thus, just as his jade gentleman remains ever impervious to time's corruptible nature, so too does Liu Sheng in his transformed jade body. Wu writes that the lyrics of the Han dynasty folk song "Strolling Out the Western Gate" seem especially relevant in the Mancheng tombs: "No one is made of gold and stone; / How could one escape death?"[13] However, given that the sepulchers are carved out of Mount Lingshan, ensconced in a rock crevice of the mountain, and that the bodies of the departed have transformed into jade, Wu rightly states that a line of the Han ballad "Walking Out of Hsia Gate" is more appropriate as a reversal of the first premise: "At death he has attained the way of holy immortals."[14]

The life-sized manikins (figs. 2.1-2.3) discovered near Xuanhua at the Song-Liao frontier represent a syncretic treatment of the body that the Han Chinese, exclusively in the geographical context of the Liao dynasty, invented as an innovative way of transcending death.[15] Hsueh-Man Shen draws attention to three features of these manikins that make them especially remarkable: they have joints that permit free movement and articulation of the body, their chests carry the cremated ashes of the departed, and each of the manikins has individualized facial features that allow them to be identified as the deceased.[16] Made of perishable cypress wood, a material which in several traditional texts is referenced as being used as a surrogate for a real person, the manikins are replacements for the body and spirit of the deceased, not mere effigies or representations.[17] The vibrantly painted

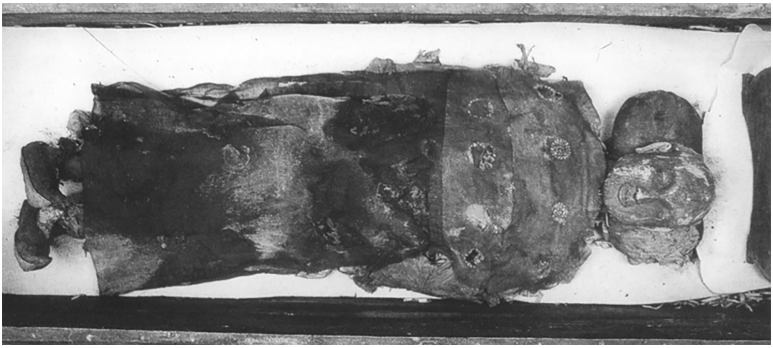


Fig. 2.1-2.3. Cypress wood manikins: **Top:** from a tomb in Balin Left Banner, Inner Mongolia. **Left two:** from tombs in Xuanhua, Hebei Province. Liao dynasty, 11th – 12th centuries CE. (Source: Hsueh-Man Shen, "Body Matters," *Gilded Splendor*).

Fig. 3. Cypress wood face of Zhang Shiqing excavated at Xuanhua, Hebei, Liao dynasty, 1116 CE. (Source: Hsueh- Man Shen, "Body Matters").

cypress head of Zhang Shiqing (d. 1116 CE) (fig. 3) is striking in its lifelike immediacy; Zhang, who was 74 when he died,[18] looks directly at the viewer with a tranquil expression on his face. The sculptor of Zhang's manikin simulates the fragile, tissue-like skin stretching across Zhang's eye sockets and accumulating in wrinkles across his zygomatic bones, painstakingly observed signs of advanced age. Careful attention is paid to the way in which Zhang's upper lip and the skin covering his glabella seem to pucker, as if blood is pulsating through the veins of the cypress wood, giving quivering movement to the life nestled in the motionless wood.

In a new tradition that fuses the religious and ritual rites of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, the cypress manikins of Xuanhua incorporate *huo hua*, or "transformation by fire" by containing within their hollowed torsos the deceased's cremated remains.[19] Patricia Ebrey, citing the Southern Song Confucian scholar Hong Mai (1123–1202), elucidates how *huo hua* was perceived as a symbolic means of purification: "Once the Buddhist theory of transformation by fire arose, there have been people everywhere who burn the corpse on death."[20] Further evidence of this syncretism is pointed out by Shen, who draws attention to Sanskrit inscriptions on the wooden coffins in which the dressed manikins are laid to rest; aside from the underbelly of these boxes, all of the sides of the coffins bear ink letterings of the Buddhist *Heart Sutra* and *dhāranī* spells.[21] Additionally, the epitaphs express that the departed was "entombed" or "buried" (*zang*), thus not differentiating between the manikins and the deceased, despite the fact that their only bodily remains are ashes.[22] Shen writes that Zhang's epitaph explicitly makes the hybridity of his religious practice known, beginning with a quote from a Daoist text, "Human beings are born in the middle of the two extremes [*yin* and *yang*] and hold the *qi* energy of the Five Elements,"[23] and then continuing with a list of faithful duties that Zhang performed during his lifetime as a man who "admired Daoism, promoted Confucianism, and venerated Buddhism."[24] Through these cypress manikins, the loved ones of the deceased were able to honor their newly departed by clothing them and providing them with food and drink, thereby engaging in ancestral worship through post-mortem rites that would not have been possible had the bodies only been cremated.

The third and final example of the transition to cosmological time exemplified in the materials and processes of East Asian tombs is found in the tomb of the princess of Chen (d. 1018 CE) and her husband, Xiao Shaoju (d. 1016 CE) (henceforth, Chen tomb) at Qinglongshan, Naiman Banner in Inner Mongolia.[25] By the era of the Chen tomb, the nomadic Qidan people of northern China, Mongolia, and southern Siberia had united in a politically ambitious confederation of tribes, calling themselves the Liao dynasty.[26] Together they defeated the neighboring Song dynasty

(960–1279) in 1004, signed the Treaty of Chanyuan in which the Song agreed to send an immense amount of silver and silk to the north every year, and exchanged gifts with the Goryeo dynasty (938– 1392) in Korea.[27] In contrast with the Zhang family tombs, wherein a synthesis of belief systems led to a burial practice that reconciled cremation with embodied relics and bodily restoration for ancestor worship, the Chen tomb employs a different (although conceptually analogous) process of transforming the corpse into an eternal body.[28] Where the Han Chinese in the context of the Liao used transformation by fire, the Qidan people, as reflected in the Chen tomb, employed a process of embalming whereby the corpse's organs were removed, its insides washed and filled with aromatic herbs, its skin sewn up with five-colored thread, and bled with needle-like reeds until it became an "imperial dried meat" (*di ba*).[29] The princess of Chen, who died at the age of 17, was found next to her husband (who was also embalmed) (fig. 4), recumbent on a floral gold and silver pillow (fig. 5), and dressed in a silver mesh body netting (fig. 6), crown, gold face mask (fig. 7), silver boots with gilded phoenixes (fig. 8), and jewelry made of amber, agate, pearl, jade, gold, and silver.[30]

Qidan rulers were loyal supporters of Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, as well as their own tribal religion, and this syncretism, as in the Zhang family tombs, is evident in the objects buried in the Chen tomb.[31] At the crest of Chen's gilded silver crown (figs. 9.1-9.2) is a Daoist figure[32] sitting cross-legged, hands clasped at his chest, eyes peacefully closed, robes cascading gracefully over his knees, atop an open lotus flower with a mandorla behind him. Although a Daoist figure, its characteristics, such as the lotus petal base, aureole, and seated position are meant to remind one of Buddha Amitābha, whose depiction is commonly found on the crown of Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara.[33] Furthermore, the crown, gilded boots, and pillow all illustrate fiery phoenixes ascending, which may represent the embodied Daoist tradition of inner alchemy (*neidan*), wherein a person's internal energies are gradually refined to the original cosmic energy, pure *qi*.[34] Several other Daoist figures relating to inner alchemy are present in the tomb, including eight amber cicada amulets, depicted in their chrysalises (fig. 10), found on the right thigh of the princess.[35] Carved in the round, each chrysalis is rendered with striking faithfulness to reality. The *Michuan dadan zhizhi* (Secretly Transmitted Direct Pointers to the Great Elixir), a 13th century imperial text written by Qiu Chuji (1148–1227), describes the body's transformation as the spirit exits into the celestial realm thus: "As your perfect *qi* rises, your ears will hear the sounds of wind and rain. Then inside your head there will be the sounds of harps and gold and jade […] Or you may hear […] the chirping of the cicada."[36] Qi Lu draws attention to another 13th century text that uses the metamorphosis of cicadas to

Fig. 4 and 5. Left: Aerial view of burial chamber of the princess of Chen (d. 1018 CE) and her husband Xiao Shaoju (d. 1016 CE). **Right:** Gilded silver pillow of Princess Chen. Excavated at Qinglongshan, Naiman Banner, Inner Mongolia, Liao dynasty, early 1018 CE. (Source: Hsueh-Man Shen, *Gilded Splendor. Treasures of China's Liao Empire*).

Fig. 6. Silver wire burial shroud of Princess Chen. (Source: *Gilded Splendor*).

Fig. 7 and 8. Left: Gold burial mask of Princess Chen. **Right:** Gilded silver boots of Princess Chen. (Source: *Gilded Splendor*).

Fig. 9.1–9.2. Left: Gilded silver crown of Princess Chen. **Right:** Detail of Daoist figure on peak of crown. (Source: *Gilded Splendor*).

symbolize spiritual purification during inner alchemy: "Similar as the shelling of the golden cicada, a new body emerges from the old body."[37] Thus, when viewed within the context of other Chen tomb objects, the princess's silver mesh shroud becomes meaningfully distinct from the jade body of Liu Sheng and the manikin of Zhang Shiqing. Just as the exoskeleton of the cicada allows for the lime green insect to pulsate through its shell, so too does the silver mesh allow the princess of Chen to exit her casing, reaching mystical attainment – an experience that involves a bodily reorganization of the self into a reborn cosmic entity.[38]

In the tombs of Liu Sheng, Zhang Shiqing, and the princess of Chen, time is made visible in its transition from lived to cosmological, finite and corruptible to everlasting. Although time is an abstract concept which cannot be represented visually in a straightforward manner, in the tombs of East Asia, a resistance to the vicissitudes of time is clearly embodied in the "cocoons" of the deceased's remains, which simultaneously embrace the departed's ephemeral fleshly remnants and transform the person into a being whose existence is not limited by time's constraints. This corporeal journey from mortal to timeless is best illustrated in the metamorphosis of the cicada from larva to adult, a metaphor that allows us to conceptualize the jade body, cypress manikin, and silver mesh as corpse chrysalides; both means and ends to bodily and temporal eternity.

Fig. 10. Top Right: Amber cicada chrysalis pendants of Princess Chen, excavated at Qinglongshan, Naiman Banner, Inner Mongolia, Liao dynasty, early 1018 CE. **Bottom Left:** Real cicadas for comparison. (Source: *Gilded Splendor*; householdpests.org).

NOTES

1. George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962), 11.
2. Hung Wu, *The Art of the Yellow Springs: Understanding Chinese Tombs* (United Kingdom: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 135. Wu writes that "at least four layers of jades were found above Liu Sheng's and Dou Wan's bodies." However, in his following description, I was only able to discern three typologically distinct layers of jades that enshrouded the corpses of Liu Sheng and Dou Wan: the jade plugs, the *bi* discs, and the outermost burial suit knit together with gold wire. Perhaps Wu was distinguishing between shapes of jades; for example, the plugs for the ears and nostrils are not of the same shape as the amulet for the mouth. Alternatively, Wu might be referring to the other jades,

notably the elaborate *bi* disc in between Liu Sheng's inner and outer coffin or the 192 rectangular jade tiles that line Dou Wan's coffin as the fourth layer of jades. However, since the object under consideration for this essay is itself the jade burial suit, I will limit my inclusion of "layers of jades" to the jades that comprise this object. I consider the plugs and *bi* discs important aspects of these multilayered suits because they function differently from the outer encasement, that which is most commonly referred to as the jade burial shroud.

3. Robert L. Thorp, "Mountain Tombs and Jade Burial Suits: Preparations for Eternity in the Western Han," in *Ancient Mortuary Traditions of China: Papers on Chinese Ceramic Funerary Sculptures*, ed. George Kuwayama (United States: University of Hawai'i Press, 1991), 34. Thorp cites Ge Hong's *Baopuzi* (ca. 320) to illustrate how this deep-rooted alchemical belief permeated ancient Chinese thought, persisting throughout the post-Han era: "When gold and jade are inserted into the nine orifices, corpses do not decay."
4. Wu, *The Art of the Yellow Springs*, 135. Liu Sheng had 18 *bi* discs placed on his upper body.
5. Gao You, commentary on *Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals*, cited in Thorp, "Mountain Tombs and Jade Burial Suits," 35. Thorp writes: "The text *Lu shi chun qiu* (Master Lu's *Springs and Autumns*, circa 240 B.C.) seems to make reference to such predecessors in a passage noting that the well-to-do use 'pearl mouth amulets and scale coverings.' The commentator Gao You (flourished 205–12) glosses the latter phrase as, 'to place jades like fish scales on the body of the dead.'"
6. A king of the Southern Yue in Guangzhou (175–124 BCE), reigned 137–124 BCE.
7. Wu, *The Art of the Yellow Springs*, 134.
8. Ibid., 136.
9. *Hou Wei shu*, cited in Li Fang, *Taiping yulan* (Imperially Reviewed Encyclopedia of the Taiping Era) (Beijing, 1960), 3572, cited in Wu, *The Art of the Yellow Springs*, 137.
10. Wu, *The Art of the Yellow Springs*, 138.
11. Ibid., 137. The inscription on the figure's base reads "*gu yu ren*," which translates to "jade gentleman of antiquity."
12. Translation from B. Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York, 1968), 33, cited in Wu, *The Art of the Yellow Springs*, 137.
13. Wu, *The Art of the Yellow Springs*, 138. The Han dynasty folk song is entitled "Bu chu Ximen xing."
14. Anne Birrell, "The Elixir of Life," in *Popular Songs and Ballads of Han China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993), 53, cited in Wu, *The Art of the Yellow Springs*, 138.
15. Hsueh-Man Shen, "Body Matters: Manikin Burials in the Liao Tombs of Xuanhua, Hebei Province," *Artibus Asiae* 65, no. 1 (2005): 102.
16. Shen, "Body Matters," 101.
17. Wu, *The Art of the Yellow Springs*, 145. Wu writes: "An important clue is that the Xuanhua manikins were all made of cypress wood. Significantly, several stories in traditional texts reveal that cypress figures were used to substitute for real persons. One of the stories in *A New Account of Tales of the World* (*Shishuo xinyu*) relates that Wang Dao (276–339), Chancellor of the Eastern Jin (317–394), asked Guo Pu (276–324) to tell his fortune. A noted master of esoteric learning, Guo decided that Wang would soon meet a fatal calamity and gave him this advice: 'Order your carriage and go out of the city toward the west several *li*. There you will find a cypress tree. Cut it off to the same length as yourself and put it on the bed in the place where you usually sleep, and the calamity may be minimized.' Wang followed Guo's instruction. Not long after, a thunderbolt shattered the cypress figure. But he survived." Wu also draws attention to a Tang tomb north of Nanchang that was excavated in 1973, within which was found a

bai ren (cypress person) carved from a single piece of cypress wood.

18. Shen, "Body Matters," 100.
19. Patricia Ebrey, "Cremation in Sung China," *American Historical Review* 95, no. 2 (April 1990): 406–428.
20. Hong Mai, *Rongzhai suibi* (The Writings of the *Rong* studio) (Shanghai, 1987), 274, translation from Ebrey, "Cremation in Sung China," 410.
21. Shen, "Body Matters," 101. Shen includes a quote from Zhang Shiqing's epitaph, which directly expresses that he was cremated in the Buddhist method: "At his death bed [Zhang] ordered a cremation in accordance with the Indian Buddhist rite. After cremation, his scalp and tongue were retrieved. That they did not burn is indeed a manifestation of the good deeds accumulated through his life."
22. Ibid., 101; Wu, *The Art of the Yellow Springs*, 142. Wu writes about possible sources of inspiration for the development of the Zhang family funerary manikins: "The first [source of inspiration] is the so-called 'ash icon' of an eminent monk, which gained currency among certain Buddhist communities during and after the Tang. Often representing the subject in a surprisingly realistic manner, such statues were either made of clay mixed with cremated ashes (called *xiangni* or 'fragrant clay'), or contain cremated ashes in their hollowed bodies. The earliest surviving example of such a statue belongs to Hongbian (d. 962), the head of the Buddhist community at Dunhuang in the first half of the tenth century. The many parallels between this type of statue and the Xuanhua manikin, including the association with Buddhist cremation, the 'embodiment' of relics and the restoration of the physical body of the dead, has led some scholars to identify it as the origin of the Liao custom."
23. Daoist *Taiqing shen xian Zhong jing yaolüe* (Summary from Scriptures of Supreme Clarity Immortals), cited in Shen, "Body Matters," 110.
24. Shen, "Body Matters," 110.
25. Valerie Hansen, "The Kitan People, the Liao Dynasty (916–1125) and their World," *Orientations* 42, no. 1 (January/February 2011): 36.
26. Named after the Liao River, the most important water source in the native land of the Qidan people.
27. Michele A. Matteini, "New Directions in the Study of the 10th Century," East Asian Art I (class lecture, New York University, New York, NY, November 30, 2020); Hansen, "The Kitan People," 34–35.
28. Wu, in The Art of the Yellow Springs, 144, calls what was found of the deceased in the Zhang and Chen tombs "incorruptible bodies."
29. Wu, *The Art of the Yellow Springs*, 143–144. Wu cites Wen Weijian, a Song author who visited the north and wrote about the Qidan burial tradition: "The Qidan have the following very strange custom. When a man from a rich or noble family dies, they cut open the abdomen and remove the intestines and the stomach. After washing it they stuff the body with fragrant herbs, salt, and alum. Afterward they sew it up again with five-colored thread. They prick the skin with sharply pointed reeds in order to drain off the fluid and blood until it is all gone. They use gold and silver to make masks and they wind copper wire around the hands and feet. When Yelü Deguang [the Liao emperor Taizong] died, this method [of embalming] was used. The [Chinese] people of that time call the corpse 'Imperial dried meat' (*di ba*). These are the true facts."
30. Sun Jianhua, "The Discovery of and Research on the Tomb of the Princess of Chen and Her Husband, Xiao Shaoju," in *Gilded Splendor: Treasures of China's Liao Empire (907–1125)*, ed. Hseuh-man Shen (Asia Society, 2006), 72.
31. Hsueh-man Shen, "Religious Life," in *Gilded Splendor: Treasures of China's Liao Empire (907–1125)*, ed. Hseuh-man Shen (Asia Society, 2006), 235.

32. Hseuh-man Shen ed., *Gilded Splendor: Treasures of China's Liao Empire (907–1125)* (Asia Society, 2006), 102.
33. Ibid.
34. Livia Kohn, "The Subtle Body Ecstasy of Daoist Inner Alchemy," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 59, no. 3 (2006): 329.
35. Shen, *Gilded Splendor*, 166.
36. Kohn, "The Subtle Body Ecstasy of Daoist Inner Alchemy," 335.
37. Qi Lu, "The Concept of 'Tomb' Under the Nomadic Traditions: Redefining the Tombs of Khitan Nobles in the Liao Empire (907– 1125 CE)" (MA thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2014), 36.
38. Kohn, "The Subtle Body Ecstasy of Daoist Inner Alchemy," 334.

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Queer Gazes: Thomas Eakins' *Taking the Count* (1898)

ABSTRACT: The idiosyncratic, pugilistic subject matter in Thomas Eakins' *Taking the Count* (1898) is noteworthy in establishing a visual record for homosexuality as an identity. Eakins' work gives dimension to our understanding of American Realism, as it puts his work in dialogue with the development of queer history. In his book *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault points out that the concept "homosexuality" as an identity, rather than a discrete act, emerged only in the nineteenth century. The scandalous trials of Oscar Wilde's "gross indecency with men" in 1895 – which must have resonated with Eakins, who was indicted for his homosexuality earlier in his career – demonstrate how the mediatization of gayness broke the silence around the topic. The emergence of an identifiable homosexual identity through publicity revealed it to be a social reality that could disrupt social order. *Taking the Count* implicates the viewer in a play of gazes that encourages an exploration of the viewer's sexuality.

In genteel Victorian America, representations of prizefighting were reserved almost exclusively to prints and the press, rather than academic or "high art" oil paintings.[1] Thomas Eakins' substantial oil on canvas painting *Taking the Count* (1898), which measures roughly a meter in width and height, therefore stands out with its unusual subject of boxing.[2] Part of the artist's 1898 series of pugilistic paintings, *Taking the Count* depicts the conclusion of a historical 1898 boxing match in Philadelphia between Jack Daly and Charley McKeever (see Figure 1). The idiosyncratic subject matter in Thomas Eakins' *Taking the Count* (1898) is noteworthy in establishing a visual record for homosexuality as an identity. In this paper, I will unpack Thomas Eakins' painting by applying a queer methodology to analyse the inherent homoeroticism of the painting.

In the painting, the pallid, crouching Jack Daly cocks his head defeatedly as he gazes at his contender. The diagonal composition created by the body of the fallen boxer accentuates the tense exchange of glances,

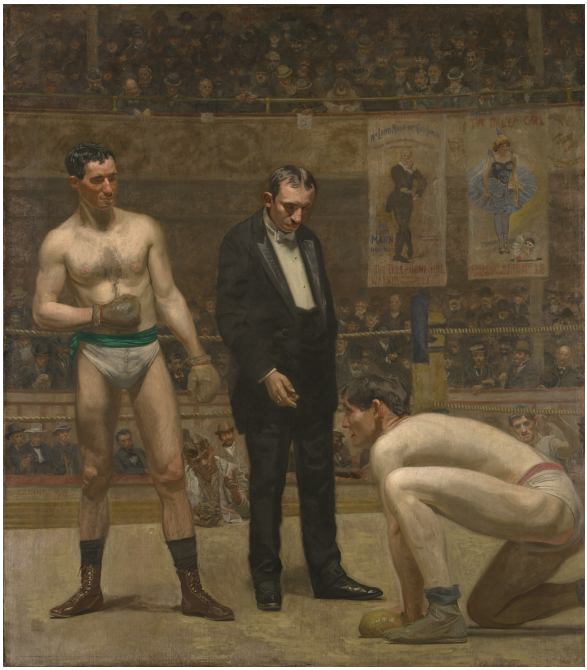

Figure 1. Eakins, Thomas, *Taking the Count*, oil on canvas, 1898, (Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven), https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/5463.

Figure 2. Eakins, Thomas, *Study for Taking the Count*, oil on canvas, 1898, (Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven), https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/34823.

which is intercepted by the hand of the referee Walter Schlichter. The referee counts down the seconds marking Daly's defeat, clad in a three-piece tuxedo. Eakins' detailed inclusion of a large, exclusively male crowd heightens the spectacle of gazes. The variety in top hats, bowler hats, and fedoras highlights the socioeconomic diversity among crowd members, all bound by their pugilist fascination. Posters of female and male archetypes are prominently placed in the background above the kneeling fighter. This juxtaposition suggests a tension between the heteronormative and the homoerotic. The expected victor stands with his well-defined musculature. Rather than appearing like an unblemished and dignified Roman marble sculpture—the only other art historical references to athletes in high art being Greek and Roman—the only other McKeever evinces his humanity in his reddened face, shaggy body hair and his socks sliding down to his timeworn boxing boots. Classicized bodies are traditionally admired for beauty rather than sexuality, while these unidealized bodies are transgressively sexual. This humanizing depiction of the two boxers can therefore be read as encouraging the viewer's scopophilic objectification of their bodies. The near-nudity of the boxers appears circumstantially appropriate, thereby naturalizing the viewer's erotic gaze that is implied also to be masculine, given the all-male setting.[3] In a preparatory sketch for the painting, which is also at the Yale University Art Gallery, Eakins depicts the two boxers fully naked (Figure 2). While Eakins attended boxing fights in 1898, he also had fighters pose nude for him in his studio through his connection to Walter Schlichter, the referee standing between them in the painting.[4] By asking models to remove their loincloth for the sketch, one wonders what the study of the genitalia and pelvis offer the painter, especially when the referee remains clad in his tuxedo. In the sketch, the defeated boxer assumes a different pose, which reveals more of his face, yet in both renditions his eyes are fixated on the victor's phallus. By depicting the boxer in profile in the final painting, Eakins ambiguates the direction of Daly's glance, heightening the homoerotic drama. Daly's gaze encourages the viewer's voyeurism, thereby threatening repressed male viewers with the pleasure of gazing at the victor's body. Eakins used a similar technique in his other boxing painting *Salutat* (1898) (see Figure 3). As the near-naked victor Billy Smith stands with his back to the viewer and his profile hidden, the stare of a boxer assistant directs the viewer to the Smith's exposed buttocks. By restricting the *Taking the Count* sketch and its final painting to dominantly fleshy colours, Eakins reimagines the scene as reflecting male psychological interiority, wherein the match represents an inner tension of homoerotic impulses.

Eakins' controversial biography gives a new dimension to the homoeroticism of *Taking the Count*. Born in 1844, Eakins spent the majority of his life in Philadelphia, his hometown, where he attended the

Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts while also sitting in on anatomy lectures at Jefferson Medical College. The artist returned to teach at the Academy in 1876, transforming his alma mater into the leading art school in America. Eakins' teaching methods drew great controversy when he infamously removed a loincloth from his male model to demonstrate the model's pelvis to his female students.[5] This controversy was compounded by claims that Eakins had an affair with a male student.[6] When the artist was fired from the Pennsylvania Academy, thirty-eight of his male students joined him to form the Art Students' League of Philadelphia, where he was able to follow a more experimental curriculum that explored male nudity unabashedly.[7] Eakins claimed that there was "no impropriety in looking at the most beautiful of Nature's works, the naked figure."[8] He went on to photograph and sketch naked men, but he always avoided depicting phalluses on large canvases—even in his most provocative painting, *The Swimming Hole* (1884–1885). While the New York court ruled in 1884 that "mere nudity in male painting or sculpture is not obscenity," organizations like the Woman's Christian Temperance Union continued to pressure art institutions to not display any artworks bearing nudity.[9] This might have impacted Eakins' willingness to display nudity in his own works.

Eakins claimed that he explored nude male bodies to approach art from a scientific perspective. He vocalized this in his address to a scientific body:

> On the lines of the mighty and simple strains dominating the movement [of a man or animal], and felt intuitively and studied out by him, the master artist groups, with full intention, his muscular forms. No detail contradicts. His men and animals live. Such is the work of two or three modern artists. Such was the work of many old Greek sculptors.[10]

While the artist aligns his belief of a logical, scientific art with the lineage of Ancient Greek sculptors' admiration of male nudes, his fantasy of Ancient Greece has far-reaching implications. Eakins and his suspected life-partner Walt Whitman had both expressed their admiration for Greek culture. They believed that the ancient Athenian and Spartan respect for the male body—in battle, gymnasium, and life—was the key contributor to their intellectual and philosophical success.[11] These idealized conceptions of Greece influenced by Winckelmann and later historians of ancient art spilt into Eakins' homoerotic fantasies of pederasty and paideia, as evidenced by his aforementioned relations with his pupils at the Arts League.[12] Eakins' interest in Ancient Greek culture and style of depiction, therefore, has a homoerotic facet that extends beyond the scientific quest to perfection.

Taking the Count is revolutionary in the way that it elevates "low culture" themes like boxing into the realm of fine arts. Eakins transgresses

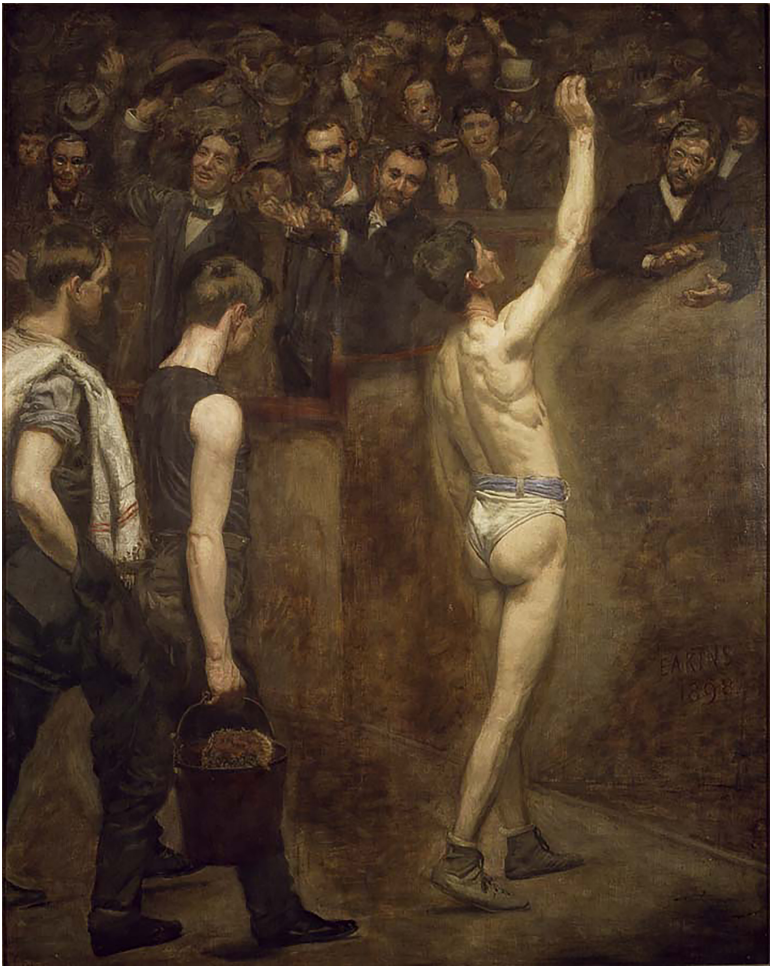

Figure 3. Eakins, Thomas, *Salutat*, oil on canvas, 1898,
(Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA),
http://accessaddison.andover.edu/objects-1/info?query=Exhibition%3D%221891%22.

traditions of history painting and presents boxers stripped of mythologies and idealizations that complicate the constructed binaries of nudity and nakedness, sensuality and pornography. The queer facet to Eakins' version of Realism, however, makes our understanding of the movement more dimensional, as it puts his work in dialogue with the development of queer history. In his book *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault points out that the concept "homosexuality" as an identity, rather than a discrete act, sin, or crime, emerged only in the nineteenth century.[13] The scandalous trials of Oscar Wilde's "gross indecency with men" in 1895—which must have resonated with Eakins, who was indicted for his homosexuality earlier in his career—demonstrate how the mediatization of gayness broke the silence around the topic. The emergence of an identifiable homosexual identity in Europe and the United States through this publicity revealed it as a reality that could disrupt social order. Although the boxers might not be queer themselves, this painting taps into homoerotic energy that legitimizes the homoerotic gaze and contributes to the larger social conversation as a result through its play of gazes.

NOTES

1. Even historically, the only precursor that comes to mind of an artwork depicting a pugilist scene is the Hellenistic Greek bronze sculpture of *Boxer at Rest*.
2. His other boxing paintings include *Between Rounds* (1898-99), which is now at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and *Salutat* (1898), which is now at the Addison Gallery of American Art.
3. The assumed masculine viewer refers to the onlooker at the boxing rink who frames the perspective of the painting. The viewer outside of the painting observes Eakins' painting through that masculine lens.
4. Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* (Harvard University Press, 1933), Volume II, 144-5.
5. H. Barbara Weinberg, "Thomas Eakins (1844–1916): Painting," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (October 2004).
6. Emily B. Collins, "An Actress (Portrait of Suzanne Santje): Thomas Eakins," *JAMA Facial Plastic Surgery* (2014),16 (1): 5-6.
7. H. Barbara Weinberg, "Thomas Eakins (1844–1916): Painting."
8. Hélène Gaillard, "Singing and Painting the Body: Walt Whitman and Thomas Eakins' Approach to Corporeality," *Miranda* (2017).
9. Ibid.
10. Lloyd Goodrich, "Thomas Eakins, Realist," *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum* 25, no. 133 (1930): 11.
11. Griffin C. Randall, "Thomas Eakins' Construction of the Male Body" *Oxford Art Journal*

18, no. 2 (1995): 71. Whitman even wrote "Probably the whole curriculum of first-class philosophy, beauty, heroism, [and] form, illustrated by the old Hellenic race the highest height and deepest depth known to civilization in those departments - came from their natural and religious idea of Nakedness."

12. Francis Moulinat, "Les Amours grecques: homosexualité et représentations, du Léonidas de Jacques-Louis David (1799-1814) au Swimming Hole de Thomas Eakins (1885)," *Romantisme*, no. 159, (2013): 82. "Le référent grec qui est convoqué par l'artiste, dans un désir d'émulation avec les Anciens et la volonté d'importer dans la vie moderne certains de leurs idéaux, comme celui de la paidéia, en l'occurrence Eakins et ses élèves."

13. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1980), Volume I, 159. He claims that: "As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their author was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage a past, a case history and a childhood, a character, a form of life; also a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing in his total being escapes his sexuality. Everywhere in him it is present." (translation considerably modified).

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The Lonesome Decadent: Art, Literature, and the Formation of a *Fin-de-Siècle* Archetype

ABSTRACT: In Europe, the late nineteenth century bore witness to a flourishing of interacting movements that cultivated connections between literature and art. One such *fin-de-siècle* movement was Decadence, whose adherents valued artificiality and hallucinatory, morbid, sickly, erotic, or otherwise transgressive subjects. This taste for the macabre set the Decadent apart from bourgeois society, with the eccentricity of this figure reaching its most influential realization in Joris-Karl Huysmans's 1884 novel *À Rebours*. Its central character, Des Esseintes, is an anemic and aristocratic aesthete who retreats from society to quarantine on the outskirts of Paris. Huysmans defines Des Esseintes through his collections, using these objects to repeatedly draw attention to his otherness, his alienation, and his embrace of the artificial. The novel's treatment of Decadent lonesomeness is informed by the artists Odilon Redon and Gustave Moreau, both of whom are highly esteemed by Des Esseintes. The two artists occupied singular niches in the artistic milieu of the 1880s while visualizing loneliness, solitude, and disconnection in their artworks. Alienation thus blossomed across Decadence, forming mediated connections between artists, authors, and audiences. This essay examines how the Decadent, as a key archetype of the late-nineteenth century, was defined as a solitary creature through the collaboration of visuals and texts, particularly those of Redon, Moreau, and Huysmans. Isolation is thus shown to be a cornerstone theme of the Decadent aesthetic and of the related *fin-de-siècle* condition through its resonance in both art and literature.

A man retreats from society into a secluded estate, which he leaves only very rarely. There, he gorges himself on the objects he has fanatically collected, including plants, books, and artworks, among other things. He suffers from frequent illness, whose symptoms vary but at times manifest a painful, dry cough.[1] Although this may all sound a bit uncomfortably familiar from the vantage point of 2021, what I have briefly described is the influential 1884 novel *À Rebours* by Joris-Karl Huysmans, in which the author puts forward the character Jean des Esseintes as the exemplary Decadent. Related to Aestheticism and Symbolism, Decadence was a *fin-de-siècle* literary and artistic movement defined by its cherishing of the sickly, the morbid, the artificial, and the sexually transgressive; it began in France before infecting other nations.[2] Jean Baudrillard reminds us that in collecting things people are truly collecting themselves, and revealingly Des Esseintes does not, by his own admission, "enjoy the pleasures other people enjoy!"[3] His taste in flora refutes the common houseplants, instead inclining flowers of evil "ravaged by syphilis or leprosy," while in literature and visual art he relishes "erudite fancies, complicated nightmares, [and] suave and sinister visions."[4] Huysmans dedicates a chapter of *À Rebours* to describing Des Esseintes' art collection, with particular attention directed towards the works of Odilon Redon and Gustave Moreau. By analyzing these artists alongside Huysmans's writing, this essay will examine how the interplay of visual and literary sources identified singularity as an important characteristic of the Decadent individual and the Decadent aesthetic, thereby connecting artists, authors, and audiences through their shared isolation.

On the topic of sociability in late-nineteenth-century art, art historian Bridget Alsdorf has highlighted the issue of reconciling the individual and the group as a dilemma of both the Impressionist avant-garde and the bourgeoisie. She identifies group portraits of artists as a particular site of this problem, with the genre further complicated by the artists' varying degrees of identification with that class.[5] Decadents' own avant-garde hostility to bourgeois culture is signalled by their focus on the individual and their social stratum of choice. They foregrounded not middle-class modernity—as the Impressionists famously did—but instead the peculiar fantasies and indulgences of the aristocracy. To cite a few examples from literature: Des Esseintes is an infertile Duc, the men of Oscar Wilde's 1891 novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* are of British high society, and the Decadent woman at the heart of Rachilde's 1900 novel *La Jongleuse* (or, *The Juggler*) is the daughter of a marquis.[6] Such characters were not bound by middle-class norms, but neither were they exempt from critiques rooted in their paradigms. The physician Max Nordau, in his attempt to pathologize the culture of the *fin de siècle*, described the situation among

the upper classes as being one of most dire straits. To him, the wealthy elite had become so decadent as to be facing a "*fin-de-race*," whereas the middle and lower classes remained predominantly healthy.[7] Artists associated with Decadence did not themselves have to be doomed nobility, though they courted identifications as oddities or hermits. Redon considered himself to be an outsider among artistic circles while Moreau developed a unique style that was neither Impressionist nor conventionally academic and, from 1880 on, he only exhibited publicly on a few occasions and never again at the Salon.[8] These idiosyncrasies were celebrated in Huysmans's reception of the artists, as he ordained the former "the prince of mysterious dreams" and poeticized the latter as a "mystical pagan" alone "in the heart of present-day Paris" who was "haunted by the symbols of superhuman passions and superhuman perversities."[9] Beyond Huysmans's prescribed Decadent personae, these artists' oeuvres further parallel or illuminate Des Esseintes's condition. Taken alongside *À Rebours*, they illustrate how loneliness, solitude, and artificial substitution contoured this *fin-de-siècle* archetype.

Among Des Esseintes's collections are a number of Redon's *noirs*, artworks of black charcoal, chalk, graphite and lithography which he produced from the 1870s to the 1890s. According to Huysmans, some pictures of the artist's "seemed to be borrowed from the nightmares of science, to go back to prehistoric times… [depicting] bipeds with apish features…[thereby] creating a new type of fantasy, born of sickness and delirium."[10] Redon, indeed, was deeply inspired by contemporary notions of evolutionary theory. His oeuvre is teeming with chimerical creatures imagined to occupy various branches of the evolutionary tree, with some works such as *The Eternal Silence of These Infinite Spaces Makes Me Afraid (Pascal)* (fig. 1) featuring beings with simian physiologies that accord with Huysmans' description.[11] Alone in a desolate landscape, the creature seen in *The Eternal Silence of These Infinite Spaces* looks upwards from its perch above a blackened chasm. Though this gaze may at first seem hopeful, the line of sight is deflected downwards by the diagonal lines of the cloud and the slope, guiding the viewer into the darkness and suggesting the creature's moribund state. The melancholy of the scene is heightened by the sense that this being is aware of its situation; with its humanoid face that punctures the contours of the cloud, there is a suggestion of consciousness. Art historian Martha Lucy of the Barnes Foundation has accurately summarized its disposition as one of "existential anxiety."[12] Des Esseintes, too, stands before the chasm of extinction as he is both impotent and the final living member of his house. The solitude facing both these figures transcends typical loneliness and has a particularly bleak quality, for they both seem to be the last of their kinds.

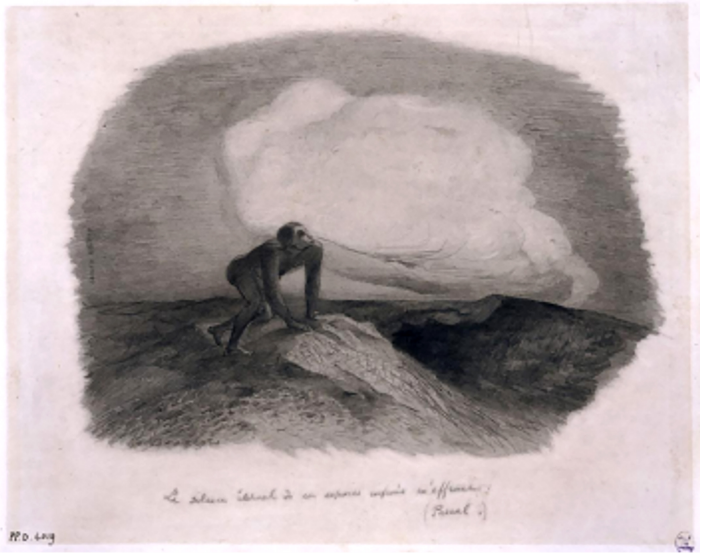

Fig. 1. Odilon Redon, *The Eternal Silence of These Infinite Spaces Makes Me Afraid (Pascal)*, c. 1870. Graphite on paper, 22.3 x 27.2 cm, Musée du Petit Palais, Paris.

Fig. 2. Odilon Redon, *Cell*, n.d. Charcoal, chalk, and pastel, on wove paper, 50.8 x 37.8 cm, Art Institute of Chicago.

Redon's foray into contemporary science plumbed natural history to times even before such complex organisms came into existence. It was in the nineteenth century that the cell was recognized as the origin of life on an individual and evolutionary scale, and images of such microscopic forms abound in Redon's oeuvre, as in a drawing held by the Art Institute of Chicago fittingly titled *Cell* (fig. 2).[13] Although these artworks are not referenced in *À Rebours*, they resonate with the novel strikingly and so highlight the role of visual art in affirming solitude as a quintessentially Decadent theme. Cell, in English, like the French *cellule*, refers both to the basic unit of which an organism is comprised and to a room within which someone is sequestered.[14] This double meaning is conveyed in Redon's artwork, in which the head of a young person of indeterminate gender appears contained within the titular entity—apparently without cellmates. Visually cut open to reveal the thickness of the membrane, the interior of this biological chamber is smooth and rendered in an evenly hued grey. This contrasts with the space outside the sphere, which is instead textured, diffused in its degrees of darkness, and inhabited by vegetal forms that seem to probe as well as frame the organism. As a result, the exterior world appears chaotic and unruly in comparison to the inner world of the cell. The face is kept apart from this environment and also from the viewer; shown from the side—as if emulating the profile of a monarch shown on a coin, or perhaps a circular portrait surrounded by flowers—it is rendered inaccessible. There are thus notable correlations between *Cell* and *À Rebours*. The aristocratic mode of representation coupled with the being's hermitage in *Cell* renders it highly comparable to Des Esseintes, who likewise quarantines himself in upper-class luxury. The messiness of the world shown in *Cell* also accords with *À Rebours* as Des Esseintes abhors nature—he views the world in cruel terms infused with social Darwinism[15]—and consequently privileges art and artifice. Redon visually evokes this worldview in the juxtaposition between his cell-portrait and the untameable environment within which it finds itself, pitting a solitary, artificial individual against the darkness of the natural world.

Another artist whom Des Esseintes greatly admires is Moreau, with the Duc seduced by the visual splendour of two 1876 artworks he has collected: the oil painting *Salome Dancing Before Herod* (fig. 3) and the watercolour *The Apparition* (fig. 4). In the oil painting, Salome dances before her stepfather, King Herod, seducing him into acquiescing to her demand for the head of St. John the Baptist, who then appears decapitated and fantastically floating in *The Apparition*. Moreau's relationship to Decadence was coloured with ambivalence; an older artist, he somewhat appreciated the new interest in his work but continued to consider himself principally an academic history painter.[16] Nonetheless, his person and oeuvre resonated

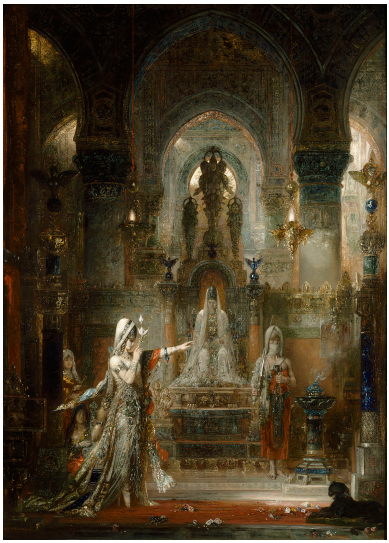

Fig. 3. Gustave Moreau, *Salome Dancing before Herod*, 1876. Oil on canvas, 143.5 cm × 104.3 cm, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles.

Fig. 4. Gustave Moreau, *The Apparition*, 1876. Watercolour, 106 x 72.2 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

with the younger Decadents and reveal their interpersonal disconnection and subsequent embrace of artificial substitution. For Baudrillard, collecting is intimately related to sexual activity (or lack thereof) and Des Esseintes's relationship to Moreau's artworks buttresses this assertion.[17] The paintings are described in frenzied, run-on sentences; Herod, enthroned in both *Salome Dancing* and *The Apparition*, "immobile and statuesque," is framed as the figure of the Decadent's self-identification while the figure of Salome becomes the focal point of his excitement, sexualized as "the Goddess of immortal Hysteria [sic]," "a true harlot, obedient to her passionate and cruel female temperament" who poisons "everything that sees her, everything she touches."[18] Huysmans's description of the biblical princess corrupting what she touches reveals close engagement with the painting *Salome Dancing*, as her extended hand indeed broaches the contour of Herod. Moreover, his reading in fact aligns with the artist's intention. Moreau's preliminary sketches of Salome place her alongside Cleopatra and Eve, confirming her identity as a *femme fatale* ("the eternal woman" in the artist's words) while he envisioned Herod as both a mummy and an idol.[19] The painted woman is a vehicle for both Moreau and Des Esseintes's misogyny, but she and the artfulness of her representation also excite the Duc insomuch as she disgusts him. This is evident by his frenetic speech pattern, his identification with

Herod, and his objectifying description of her body. This turn to art for erotic simulation in place of real relations—another manifestation of the preference for artifice over nature—was importantly not limited to male Decadents, and neither were the objects of passion necessarily figurative. In Rachilde's *La Jongleuse*, Eliante Donalger's beloved is a Tunisian vase that is "by turns a 'he' or a 'she'" whose surface causes Eliante to give "a small groan of imperceptible joy, the very breath of orgasm."[20] Whether bereft of, incapable of maintaining, or simply uninterested in human relationships, Decadents' disconnection caused them to turn to *objets d'art* for affairs in which the borders between sexual and aesthetic pleasure were increasingly muddled.

Just as Huysmans brought art into literature, so too did literature penetrate Moreau and Redon's works. Moreau regarded himself as a poet-painter—perhaps further endearing him to well-read Decadents—while Redon would also court a literary reputation magnified by his contribution of images in accompaniment of Symbolist, and other, texts.[21] For *À Rebours*, Redon provided an 1888 frontispiece (fig. 5) that translated Des Esseintes into an image just as Huysmans had translated Redon's visual aberrations into writing four years prior. The anemic aesthete here appears slumped in an upholstered chair while his eyes glaze over towards his left, rendering him disconnected from the viewer. Behind him are lightly sketched bookshelves and curtains, providing some pretext of environment but ensuring the viewer's attention is drawn to the man. He is contained within the confines of his chair, whose right side is closed in by a thick, continuous arm that recalls one of the artist's cellular membranes. Darkness covers him, seeming to both emanate from his body and dissolve it. Redon has reduced Huysmans's archetypical Decadent to his essentials: alone, leaking ennui, languishing in luxury. Having been previously defined by his possession of Redon's artworks, he has now become one himself – epitomizing the interplay of art and literature in crystallizing Des Esseintes's person.

The solitary visions that permeate these artworks collaborated with literature to define the Decadent as a solitary eccentric, liberated from middle-class conformity but simultaneously subjugated to aristocratic caprices and inevitable extinction. Des Esseintes's beloved blossoms, after all, are "princesses of the vegetable kingdom, living aloof and apart, having nothing whatever in common with the popular plants or the bourgeois blooms."[22] This self-conscious alienation and upper-class posturing could, understandably, read as self-obsession. Max Nordau certainly interpreted it as such in his medical musings, describing egomania as a key symptom of the *fin-de-siècle* disposition and one particularly rampant among Decadents and Aesthetes who are said to be pathologically antisocial and who perceive themselves as being "alone in the world."[23] Although Nordau's clinical gaze

manages to overlook Redon and Moreau, it is evident that their artworks went hand-in-hand with literature in shaping a Decadent aesthetic in which a singular, sickly sense of self was pictured alone, comforted by artifice at the end of the century.

Fig. 5. Odilon Redon, *Des Esseintes, Frontispiece for À Rebours by J.-K. Huysmans*, 1888. Lithograph in black on light gray China paper laid down on white wove paper, 12.8 x 9 cm, The Art Institute of Chicago.

NOTES

1. "Then a nervous cough, a dry, racking cough, always beginning at the same time and lasting precisely the same number of minutes, woke him as he lay in his bed, seizing him by the throat and nearly choking him." Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature (À Rebours)*, trans. Robert Baldick (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2003), 80.
2. For more on the characteristics of Decadence in French literature, see Jean Pierrot, *The Decadent Imagination, 1880-1900*, trans. Derek Coltman (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981); Regarding Decadence and (Belgian) Symbolism in visual art, see Ralph Gleis, "Between Morbidity and Decadence: Belgian Symbolism," in *Decadence and Dark Dreams: Belgian Symbolism*, exh. cat, ed. Ralph Gleis (Munich: Hirmer, 2020), 18-33.
3. Jean Baudrillard, "The System of Collecting," in *The Cultures of Collecting*, eds. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 7-12; Huysmans, À Rebours, 196.
4. Huysmans, *À Rebours*, 50, 84; Moreover, the singularity of Des Esseintes is reflected in the title of the novel and its formal qualities. Though the title is typically rendered as *Against Nature* in reference to Des Esseintes' preference of the artificial over the natural, it is perhaps better translated as "against the grain," alluding to his contrarian tastes, and its working title was *seul* (alone). Lacking a traditional narrative structure and populated with strange, obscure words, it was a novel much unlike many of its contemporaries in 1884. Patrick McGuinness, Introduction to *Against Nature (À Rebours)*, by Joris-Karl Huysmans, trans. Robert Baldick (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2003) xiii-xv, xxi-xxiii, xxxiii.
5. Bridget Alsdorf, *Fellow Men: Fantin-Latour and the Problem of the Group in Nine teenth-Century French Painting* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), 5.
6. The novel begins by describing the deterioration of the Floressas Des Esseintes family, terminating in the enfeebled and impotent Decadent; Huysmans, *À Rebours*, 1; See Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Rachilde, *The Juggler*, trans. Melanie C. Hawthorne (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990).
7. Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (New York, NY: D. Appleton and Company, 1895), 2, 7.
8. Douglas Druick et al., *Odilon Redon: Prince of Dreams, 1840-1916*, exh. cat. (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1994), 3; for a discussion of Moreau's unique artistic style, see: Peter Cooke, *Gustave Moreau: History Painting, Spirituality, and Symbolism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 5-11, 13, 111.
9. Druick et al., *Odilon Redon: Prince of Dreams*, 31; Huysmans, *À Rebours*, 56.
10. Huysmans, *À Rebours*, 60.
11. Barbara Larson, *The Dark Side of Nature: Science, Society, and the Fantastic in the Work of Odilon Redon*, (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 49-69; Martha Lucy, "Into the Primeval Slime: Body and Self in Redon's Evolutionary Universe," *RACAR: revue d'art Canadienne / Canadian Art Review* 34, no. 1 (2009), 18-29.
12. Lucy, "Into the Primeval Slime," 22.
13. Larson, *The Dark Side of Nature*, 59.
14. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "cell" (accessed January 4, 2021), Https://www-oed com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/view/Entry/29468?rskey=ymcNcK&result=1&isAdvan ced=false; *Le Robert Dico en Ligne*, s.v. "cellule" (accessed January 4, 2021), https://dictionnaire.lerobert.com/definition/cellule.

15. For example, upon seeing a group of boys fighting in which the weaker ones are losing, he reflects "on the cruel and abominable law of the struggle for life… he could not help feeling sorry for them and thinking it would have been better for them if their mothers had never borne them." Huysmans, *À Rebours*, 83, 154-155.
16. Cooke, *Gustave Moreau*, 12-14, 151-177; for additional discussion of Moreau's relation ship to Decadence and Symbolism, see Peter Cooke, "Symbolism, Decadence and Gustave Moreau," *The Burlington Magazine* 151, no. 1274 (May 2009), 312-318.
17. Baudrillard, "The System of Collecting," 9-10.
18. Huysmans, *À Rebours*, 51-56.
19. Cooke, *Gustave Moreau*, 88-89.
20. Rachilde, *The Juggler*, 23, 58.
21. Cooke, *Gustave Moreau*, 3; Druick et al., *Odilon Redon: Prince of Dreams*, 175-194.
22. Huysmans, *À Rebours*, 82.
23. Nordau, *Degeneration*, 258, 296-337.

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Excerpt from:

Treacherous Intimacy: Nan Goldin's Photography from the AIDS Epidemic

ABSTRACT: Inspired by the loneliness of COVID-19-era identity-based discrimination and social distancing, this paper offers selections from Nan Goldin's *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, a series of photographs from the 1980s, as a response to the loneliness of physical distancing in times of disease. My central argument is that in Nan Goldin's *Nan and Brian in Bed* (1983), the stark contrast of light, asymmetric composition, and physical distance between the two figures represents how disease obstructs intimacy Nan Goldin's photography reflects the nature of isolation and intimacy in the queer community in 1980s New York City. This paper argues that the current pandemic that we find ourselves in is not as unprecedented as often assumed. More importantly, it offers Nan Goldin's *Ballad of Sexual Dependency* as a potential response to the pervasive loneliness of disease-related physical distancing. In Nan Goldin's *Nan and Brian in Bed* (1983), the stark contrast of light and asymmetric composition, evident in the way Goldin depicts one figure in light and the other in darkness, and the physical distance between them, represents the ways in which disease obstructs intimacy.

How many emails in your inbox start with the phrase "unprecedented time?" While many refer to the era of COVID-19 in this way, how "unprecedented" is it? This thesis looks at another moment of viral outbreak, the 1980s AIDS epidemic, for points of similarity between then and now. In both moments we find isolation caused by physical distancing and identity-based discrimination; in the 1980s, the perceived threat was queer men and drug users, while in 2020, people of color, especially Asian bodies, are targeted due to misinformation. A close reading of Nan Goldin's slide show titled *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* supports my argument that Goldin's photography responds to the ways in which illness obstructs

intimacy. First, I will provide contextual information about the isolating nature of 1980s homophobia, the period in which Nan Goldin created *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*. Second, and most importantly, I offer a close reading of a selection from Goldin's *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*. My close reading results in an understanding that formal elements of contrast and asymmetry produce an iconography of disease and isolation. Lastly, I conclude by grounding my analysis in the contemporary moment.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE 1980S

In March 1983, when "Gay Cancer" and "Gay Plague" were popular terms (popularized by the July 3, 1981 New York Times Headline: "Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals" and the Reagan administration respectively), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended that "sexual contact be avoided by persons known or suspected to have AIDS."[1] Many misinterpreted this as "keep a distance from queer people," which led to widespread violence against the queer community. In addition to the isolation and physical distancing that illness demands, placing homophobic identity-based blame deepened these *us versus them* schisms. These CDC guidelines, in addition to the homophobic misconceptions of the time, had a profound impact on queer people's ability to maintain intimate partnerships, an essential element to emotional wellbeing. In the 1980s, when sex had the potential to be deadly, many were forced to renegotiate what intimacy meant to them.

NAN GOLDIN'S *THE BALLAD OF SEXUAL DEPENDENCY*

Nan Goldin (she/her) is a New York based photographer who began her career in the early 1970s when she received a Polaroid camera from her Boston high school.[2] Having been introduced to photography at just fifteen years old, Goldin has had a lifetime career as a photographer, and continues to be an artist and activist in our contemporary moment.[3] Since graduating with a BFA from Tufts University in 1977, Goldin has voraciously photographed her surroundings, her friends, and herself.[4] She exclusively photographs loved ones, and often called *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* "the diary I let people read." Many scholars commend Goldin for her positive and progressive representation of transgender bodies, images of intimate moments between lovers, and countless self-portraits. According to Jay Prosser's "Testimonies in Light: Nan Goldin: Devil's Playground," Goldin is remarkable for her ethnographic, testimonial approach to representing marginalized people.[5] The stripped down and raw quality of Goldin's images offers an impression of authenticity in her images.

The Ballad of Sexual Dependency slideshow addresses the question: what does it mean to get intimately close to another person, in the context

of viral threat? Goldin wrote in her 1986 book titled *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, "I often fear that men and women are irrevocably strangers to each other, irrevocably unsuited."[6] Goldin's slideshow engages deeply with this concept of distance between different genders and their (socially constructed) irrevocable misalliance, especially in the context of AIDS. Thus, I argue that Goldin's slideshow, especially in the context of the 1980s AIDS crisis, is engaged with the topics of closeness and isolation as they relate to intimate relationships.

I offer the photograph titled *Nan and Brian in Bed* (1983) as paradigmatic of the entire slideshow, and thus it is especially worth focusing on. The image was selected as both the cover of Goldin's *Ballad of Sexual Dependency* book as well as the header on the MoMA webpage for *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* slideshow. The formal elements of light and contrast in this image make it a standout representation of the isolation felt during the 1980s AIDS epidemic.

Recognizing the way light, contrast, and shadow operate in Goldin's *Nan and Brian in Bed* is vital in reading the image as a response to isolation. There is a visible tension in the image that is exacerbated by Goldin's use of light. The stark contrast of light and dark, as seen in the line of contrast against the back wall in the photograph, produces a dichotomous image. Goldin, the darkly robed figure, resides in the light side of the room, and Burchill, the glowing figure, resides in the dark side of the room. The light literally isolates the figures from one another. The duality of the lighting in *Nan and Brian in Bed*, alludes to disharmony of gender and the imbalance of energy. The light splits the composition starkly down the center, producing two opposing planes of light. On the right, the light bathes Goldin in a warm yellow hue and leaves Burchill to occupy the left half of the frame alone in darkness. There is a palpable sense of separation and loneliness produced by this dichotomous lighting effect.

Furthermore, the composition is noticeably asymmetric and unbalanced. Considering Goldin's pessimistic reflections on the "irreconcilable unsuitability" of coupling, the asymmetry of the photograph may be read as a response to the isolating nature of sex and love in the 1980s.[7] In the photograph, Burchill sits near the camera taking up much more of the composition than Goldin. Meanwhile, Goldin is relegated to the bottom right corner, as she shrinks herself to about half the size of Burchill. Asymmetry functions to create a hierarchy of importance in the image, which results in further allusion to isolation and distancing.

Throughout the canon of art history and visual culture, the male gaze has typically been foregrounded, enforcing heterosexist patriarchal ideas about male power. However, such hierarchies are flipped in Goldin's image, which privileges the woman's gaze not only as a subject but as a

Fig. 1. Nan Goldin, *Nan and Brian in Bed, New York City*, 1983, Photograph, MoMA.

Fig. 2. Nan Goldin, *Self-Portrait in Kimono with Brian, NYC*, 1983, Photograph, Matthew Marks Gallery.

photographer as well. Goldin glowers at Burchill with skepticism and resentment, but Burchill's gaze is obscured and turned away from her. Her furrowed brow and focused glare suggest an air of distrust and displeasure toward Burchill. This is not a photograph of a couple embracing and visibility connecting. Especially in the context of the AIDS epidemic, having only broken out two years before this image was captured (with the causative human immunodeficiency virus being discovered the very same year this image was captured), it makes sense that intimate partners like Nan and Brian may have had sexual experiences that were laced with skepticism and distrust.[8] Therefore, the asymmetry of the gazes that privileges Goldin's frustrated and skeptical gaze highlights the themes of isolation and distance between couples and lovers in the AIDS outbreak.

A comparison between *Nan and Brian in Bed* (1983) (fig.1) *Self-Portrait in Kimono with Brian* (1983) (fig. 2), another image from *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, reinforces my claim that Goldin's photography reflects the loneliness and isolation of intimacy amidst viral threat. The same formal elements of contrast and asymmetry from the previous image are in effect here. Likely captured within moments of the first image, *Self-Portrait in Kimono with Brian* features the same two figures in the same room, but in a slightly different composition.

Once again, the light splits the composition in half, isolating each body on either side of the starkly lit room. The brightest part of the image is again Burchill's face. However, his facial expression is now legible and reads as equally disappointed and frustrated as Goldin's. These are not two lovers reveling in each other's company, but rather two people struggling to connect. The compositional and emotional opposition isolates these figures from one another, underlining the irrevocable misalliance and separation between these lovers.

The isolating and uneasy nature of AIDS (the illness), AIDS politics, and gendered power struggles are most evident in the asymmetric composition that Goldin produced. The most notable difference between the two images is that in *Self-Portrait in Kimono with Brian*, Goldin sits up, bringing herself up to the same height as Brian. Goldin occupies the majority of the image, crowding Burchill off the left side. This shift in balance suggests Goldin may be reclaiming some space and power, as she no longer sits in the background, shrinking herself down. A tension is visible between these two figures who are visibly struggling to connect with one another. The couple in this image, while physically together, have an immediately recognizable distance from each other. This image, when compared to *Nan and Brian in Bed*, raises the question: had politics not permeated queer bedrooms in the 1980s, would connection have been easier?

Fig. 3. Mashael Al Saie, *Don't Be a Fucking Xenophobe*, 2020, photograph. Photo courtesy www.filmbymashael.com.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

In an interview with David Wojnarowicz for Interview Magazine and Brant Publications in 1991, Wojnarowicz asked Nan Goldin, "How do you tell a twenty-year-old kid who's diagnosed HIV-positive that he *can't* have desire?"[9] This was the question on many queer people's minds in the 1980s as disease pervasively obstructed intimacy. Intimacy and close connection are critical aspects of the human experience and emotional wellbeing, even in moments of viral threat that demand physical distancing. However, as evident in Goldin's *Nan and Brian in Bed*, disease-related physical distancing obstructs our ability to find true intimacy, leaving us isolated from others. While some sought out creative ways to access safe physical intimacy, the discrimination, rampant misconceptions, and government-sanctioned violence against queer people made the 1980s an exceptionally lonely time

to be queer.[10] Goldin's photography reveals that disease has a persistent way of isolating us from each other. Nan Goldin's work provides contemporary viewers living through the Coronavirus pandemic a reminder that we are not so alone in our loneliness.

Unfortunately, loneliness as a product of disease is no new phenomenon, nor is it likely to be extinguished in a post-COVID world. Drawing through lines between Goldin's photography from the AIDS epidemic and contemporary work like Mashael Al Saie's *Don't Be a Fucking Xenophobe* (2020) (fig. 3) may provide contemporary viewers with a mode of reflection as we consider which parts of disease-related suffering is entirely human-made and which parts are inevitable. Al Saie's work foregrounds sinophobic hate crimes that victimize Asian people seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, Goldin's photography from the AIDS epidemic operates against the homophobic backdrop of the 1980s. So, as contemporary readers understand that Goldin's photography responds to the pervasive loneliness that is coupled with disease, allow us also to reflect on which aspects of illness-caused-loneliness we have the power to eradicate.

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The History of Art Students' Association (HASA) is a student-run organization based at the the University of Toronto, St. George campus. HASA strives to enhance the experiences of undergraduate students in Art History, and is dedicated to providing a stimulating and interesting forum for art-related subjects.

We hold seminars, speaker series and more!
Find out about upcoming events and opportunities:

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