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Art of Political Resistance

Miklos Legrady

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PURPOSE Pablo Halguera
'SICK AND DIRTY' QUEERNESS IN HOLLYWOOD'S GOLDEN AGE Scott Sublett
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HOLLYWOOD PRIDE: Scott Sublett
SPEAKEASY: THE CHRIST OF LECCO Thaer Ghali

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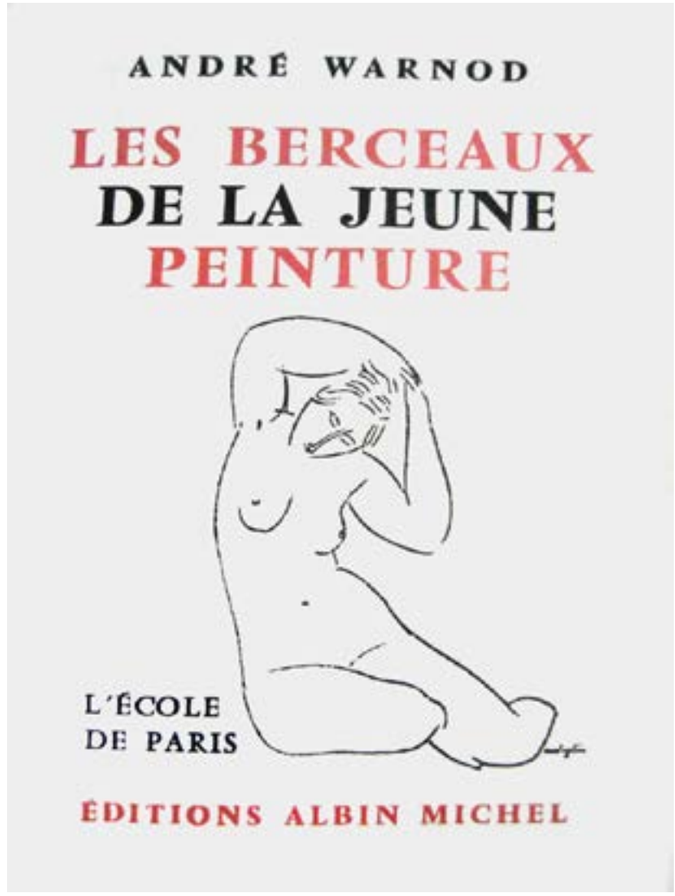
Tablet of pre-cuneiform script. South Mesopotamia.
Uruk 111: end of the 4th millennium BC



André Warnod: The Cradles of Young Painting, Paris, 1925
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Illustration : Amedeo Modigliani.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The New Art Examiner is a not-for-profit organization whose purpose is to examine the definition and transmission of culture in our society; the decision-making processes within museums and schools and the agencies of patronage which determine the manner in which culture shall be transmitted; the value systems which presently influence the making of art as well as its study in exhibitions and books; and, in particular, the interaction of these factors with the visual art milieu.

The *New Art Examiner* welcomes reviews on books of visual cultural significance.

Please send your review 500- 800 words per book to:

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Subject headed BOOK REVIEW

Please include the full details of the title, author, publisher, date and ISBN.`

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February 5th, April 5th, June 5th, August 5th, October 5th, December 5th

QUOTE of the MONTH:

The discussion of art is itself an art

Richard McKeon

NEW ART examiner CiC

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EDITORIAL

Matthew Arnold (1822 – 1888), Walter Horatio Pater (1839 – 1894) and Oscar Wilde (1854 – 1900).
George Orwell writing in 1941, suggests that art for art's sake emerged with the thinking of these men or at least, in their times. He writes from the perspective that 1939 had changed everything more absolutely than 1914 ever did, and that 'mental honesty' had become markedly more difficult.
The phrase 'art for arts sake' was used in my family to mean you dedicated your entire life to your art so that relationships took second place, but it has been perverted since the second world war and the alignment of art with propaganda, that 'anything and everything is art'. I would not blame the war for this, propaganda has always existed. But this argument is the reason why Duchamp managed to persuade weak thinkers like Peggy Guggenheim that his merest thought was art. These poor thinkers and their inheritors today cannot comprehend that if everything is art then we have lost definition and nothing is art,
This alignment can clearly be seen in the woke agenda which perfectly correctly informs us to be aware of all the differences in all the native species of the planet, and our conduct unbecoming with other species is savage and horrendous; calling for us to change. While also making demands it has no right to make most notably in sport, of all things. But then even a brief survey or the lives of artists in the past eight hundred years would show you they were woke before medical science had even caught up with the many characteristics of human gender and behaviour. Social wars are no less dangerous than hot wars and trying to propagandise your space in society so as to enrich yourself at the expense of others, is also socio-political warfare. None of this, of course, concerns Orwell in his thoughts which centred on literature not visual arts – though his dissertation on Dali is a doozey. But this must concern us.
Finance is running out of New York and since New York became the avant garde because it had the money to attract artists we must now watch to see if the flow of investment out of New York is enough to apply the coup de grâce on its pre-eminence and wonder where the new avant garde will appear. If it's money then the obvious places are China, India or the Emirates. The Emirates are definitely making a play for it. And it won't be arts for arts sake in the definition of the last two generations. Maybe AI for AI sake.

Daniel Benshana

SPEAKEASY

Each issue, the New Art Examiner invites a well-known, or not so well-known, art world personality to write a speakeasy essay on a topic of interest.

Thaer Ghali is an artist and art critic, specializing in Renaissance arts. He is an Arts collector and Art dealer. He lives in Dubai. He is the Consiglio Internazionale di Cooperazione Italo Arabo delegate in the UAE.

The Christ of Lecco: When Hidden Truth Speaks and Awakens History from Its Slumber

In a time clouded by doubt, where bold discoveries are often stifled by the clamor of skepticism and hesitation, there must rise among us those endowed with both courage and vision. Such was the journey of attorney Avv. Massimo Mazzoleni and his wife, Mrs. Silvia Gallo Mazzoleni , with the exceptional artwork known as *The Christ of Lecco*: a journey spanning years, marked by patience and perseverance, standing firm against waves of denial and rejection.
This drawing executed in red chalk on treated paper and now at the heart of wide-ranging scholarly and cultural debate has faced, since its first appearance, a torrent of doubt and dismissal from certain voices within the European art world. Yet, the couple did not waver. They clung to their profound belief that what lay in their hands was no ordinary sketch, but a cultural treasure radiating intellectual and historical light, one that reignites appreciation for the genius of Leonardo da Vinci and provokes a new question about the boundaries of discovery.
Their immeasurable passion, and their unwavering scientific and ethical commitment, transformed this project into an open platform for researchers, historians, and art enthusiasts alike. It sparked a wave of interest and investigation, ignited by the scholar Professor Rolando Bellini Professor of Art, Graphic Arts, Museology, and Aesthetics at the Academy of Fine Arts of Brera (Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera) in Milan who, in October 2022, after a

rigorous academic study, attributed *The Christ of Lecco* to Leonardo da Vinci, thus laying the scientific foundation for the entire course that followed.
Over time, this light began to draw the attention of renowned scholars historians, artists, and leading academics united by a noble aim: To serve and safeguard humanity's heritage, whatever the cost.
Among the prominent names who joined this path are :

- Annalisa Di Maria, an international expert on Leonardo da Vinci, specializing in Florentine art and Neoplatonism, as well as an author and art consultant ;
- Andrea da Montefeltro, a molecular biologist and contemporary sculptor who blends artistic sensibility with scientific inquiry, known for his symbolic and religious works showcased in venues such as the Vatican and Urbino;
- And, notably, the distinguished scientist Pascal Cotte , one of the foremost figures in modern art analysis and a global authority in multispectral imaging technologies.

As the Chief Technical Officer (CTO) of Lumiere Technology, Cotte contributed significantly through LAM (Layer Amplification Method) multispectral imaging, revealing minute artistic details in masterpieces like the Mona Lisa. Through his LAM analysis of *The Christ of Lecco*, Cotte uncovered a stunning detail that reshaped the entire discourse: A hidden signature within the left eye of the Christ figure, inscribed with exceptional precision, reading:

L + da Vinci

This is no visual illusion, no case of pareidolia. It is a deliberate, authentic, and meticulously executed signature one that could only come from a genius like Leonardo. This signature was compared with a similar hidden mark found in another confirmed Leonardo drawing, *The Head of Christ Holding His Hair*, preserved in the Accademia of Venice, where a matching signature appears also in the left eye:

L + Vinci

With a striking similarity in style, curvature, and calligraphic flow. Two portraits of Christ, Two hidden signatures, One singular genius.
James Constable, a distinguished American scholar specializing in Leonardo da Vinci, with advanced degrees from Harvard University, Boston College, and the The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), and a Senior Fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School Executive Education and Harvard Art Museums, has strongly supported the attribution of *The Christ of Lecco* to Leonardo da Vinci.
Dr. Erica Tamborini, who contributed insightful analytical investigations; Luciano Buso, whose expertise brought forth specialized interpretations of symbolic language; Dr. Rosetta Savelli, award-winning author (Kafka Italia 2015), and contributor to the UNESCO Centre in Bologna and Juliet Art Magazine. As well as researchers Luigi and Alessandro Nicola, Dr. Giuseppe De Girolami, and Dr. Cinzia Paraboschi.
The project has further attracted a group of esteemed professors and researchers, including: Roberto Manescalchi , Marco Marinacci, Xante Battaglia, Jean-Pierre Isbouts, Christopher Brown, Nicola Barbatelli, Max Sukharev, Maike Vogt-Lüerssen, Jean Charles Pomerol, Nathalie Popis, and Átila Soares da Costa Filho
The convergence of this remarkable intellectual and artistic constellation around *The Christ of Lecco* has given the work an unprecedented international dimension. Elevating it beyond a case study to a philosophical movement and a collective cultural mission, transcending academic boundaries and becoming a global stance in defense of artistic truth and human conscience.
From here, from my region, the Middle East, and from the United Arab Emirates, where I currently reside, and from my homeland Iraq, the land of Mesopotamia and my ancestors, from the ancient city of Uruk, my birthplace and the beginning of my story,
I renew my support for this noble cultural project, which I see as part of a global intellectual and scientific battle in pursuit of truth, awareness, and human memory.
As a member of the Consiglio Internazionale di Cooperazione Italo Arabo in Rome, and as the Council's delegate in the UAE for cultural and artistic affairs, this role entrusts me with both a moral and professional responsibility: to build genuine cultural bridges between the two shores of the Mediterranean, and to contribute to the protection of our shared human heritage.
I stand, with unwavering clarity and resolve, beside the Gallo Mazzolini family, and with every thinker and scholar who has chosen to walk this enlightened path, bearing the banner of truth and creativity in the face of adversity.
I offer my heartfelt thanks to Mrs. Silvia Gallo Mazzoleni, Mr. Avv. Massimo Mazzoleni, and all those who have walked this road, a road truly worthy of honor and noble minds.
For truth, when it walks with steady steps, no shadow can conceal it.

Public and Private Purpose

Pablo Halguera

An urban legend has circulated for years about Diane Arbus's Guggenheim Fellowship application (Arbus is top of mind right now due to the current survey of her work at the Park Armory in New York (Constellation, ended August 17th). According to that story, in the section of the grant where one is asked to state their statement of intent, she submitted a one-line proposal arguing that she deserved the grant "because I am Diane Arbus."
While the story is apocryphal , her actual proposal was thoughtful and articulate, I think it continues to resonate because it captures the bureaucratic demand that artists translate their work into institutional language. It rewards those who are eloquent or strategic over those whose strengths lie elsewhere. More importantly, the anecdote reflects a quiet rebellion among established artists; the belief that self-description should not be an obligation placed upon the artist, but a task left to the viewer.
I relate deeply to this resistance. Most of the time artists statements are superficial, rhetorical, written by someone who is trying to guess what the reader wants to hear from them while the reader tries to see through the rhetoric to understand who the author really is; usually with not much success. They are pieces that no one wants to write and no one wants to read but that we regard as crucial to key things like grant applications. I usually detect MFA language in those statements, kind of like the spiels one gets when one does studio visits in art schools. At times, the language tends to a Hallmark-version of art theory, sometimes it reads like a gallery press release; at its worst it is pedantic, overwrought and pretentious.
Partially because of the feeling that it is a vacuous exercise of contrived professional courtship, I abhor having to write these statements.
The implicit common professional wisdom that statements of purpose are largely a rite of passage—something for the early stages of an artist's development. Part of being established, in fact, often includes no longer needing to explain or justify one's ideas or methods to others (as the Arbus urban legend illustrates). The expectation of reducing an entire practice into three Wikipedia-length paragraphs or a digestible sound bite can feel not only reductive, but vaguely insulting.
And yet, lately I have also realized that my abhorrence tends to mask a certain anxiety that paralyzes me: being able to summarize, in four or five paragraphs, what my true sense of purpose is. This is not to mean that I don't feel I have a sense of purpose in life, but I struggle to commit it into words. I have been trying to examine this very anxiety over the past few days.

Contemporary culture tends to romanticize nihilism as a mark of intellectual sophistication, while dismissing proactive or hopeful thinking as simplistic or naïve.

This paralysis probably has roots to which every artist can relate. One is the pressure (and the related reward and ease) to identify ourselves through negation; in other words, be ourselves by rebelling against something, that is easier than stating what we are for. Being proactive is always a way more vulnerable place to be at than being against something. Contemporary culture tends to romanticize nihilism as a mark of intellectual sophistication, while dismissing proactive or hopeful thinking as simplistic or naïve. Yet this posture of negation often conceals a deeper intellectual insecurity, a reluctance to engage with the risk and responsibility that come with constructive thought. This is a baggage that we continue dragging from modernism and of which we have not gotten ourselves entirely unburdened. And amidst this negation and excessive baggage, one can reach artistic maturity and realize that one still does not know what their artistic purpose is.
I have been reflecting on the fact that even young artists recognize that the statement of purpose is a mere rhetorical tool – a strategic performance – than a genuine expression of intent. I had a graduate student once tell me that he knew how to game the academic process, that is, he knew what to say and do in order to get an A. He did not think that his cynical approach meant that he would be only playing the game of performing knowledge instead of actually

bothering to learn anything.
The obsession with declaring an artistic purpose as supporting something like market utility sometimes confuses purpose with product. I started thinking about this many years ago, when, as a grantee retreat for a major fellowship, I joined a professional development workshop sponsored by the granting foundation where the workshop leader took us through the process of creating a scrapbook where we would visualize things that we wanted to accomplish in our career: in her case, it was owning a house, having a fancy car, and being on the cover of Art in America, so she had cut and paste magazine photos of a fancy home, a car and a photo of herself collaged on top of an Art in America cover (so far she had purchased the car). The 'artist as brand' exercise repelled me, and eventually made me allergic to success coaching and motivational psychology that focus on overtly material outcomes. Instrumentalization of the self, anyone?
In trying to better understand this problem, and the broader question of what my purpose might be, I've recently been reading extensively on the subject. One challenge I've encountered is that the discourse around purpose is largely dominated by self-help psychology, hollow professional development rhetoric, and Christian life-coaching, most famously represented by Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life* (2002). The difficulty lies in the fact that writing about purpose almost inevitably risks falling into platitudes or sentimentality. Still, I believe that art careerists can take away at least one enduring insight, one that has been consistently emphasized by psychologists over the past century; from Viktor Frankl (*Man's Search for Meaning*) to Victor Strecher (*Life on Purpose*): the idea that true purpose is not merely about personal fulfilment, but about striving toward something greater than ourselves—a self-transcendent purpose. This shift in perspective not only makes us better human beings, but also helps us shed much of the performative posturing that often plagues the pursuit of artistic success.
Another one of the overall commonalities that I have found among these various books and publications, from the high to the low brow, is that once you find your sense of purpose and/or your mission in life, you need to declare it publicly; shout it to the four winds, publish it like a manifesto, let the whole universe know. But here is a controversial idea: what if we were to keep our sense of purpose to ourselves?
I fully understand the need to make a goal public: it raises the public pressure to succeed (I have undergone many such processes, from announcing marathon-like artworks that would bring me great shame

"My strategy is to never reveal my true artistic intentions and aspirations so that I can fail in peace."

it they failed and motivated me to complete them, to a journey a decade or so ago to lose weight, where making the goal public significantly raised the stakes).
The problem, however is this: in a culture obsessed with self-disclosure, articulating one's purpose has become an act of public branding rather than private reckoning. But there is a quiet integrity in cultivating a sense of purpose that remains unspoken; a compass that guides without needing to be announced. Paradoxically, this discretion can protect us from the dissonance of performing commitments we have not yet fully embodied. Put in the terms of the Artoon above, if you fail in your goals without no one knowing, then you are not really facing the agony of failure.
But private statements of purpose are not for beginners. The danger is that being honest with oneself requires practice. And further: they also present a challenge for those of us who are more experienced, as we might not entirely know how be honest with ourselves, nor might we have the right mechanisms to keep ourselves on track. So here is a brief thought about that:
When I wrote my first book, *The Pablo Helguera Manual of Contemporary Art Style*, which was a satirical social etiquette manual for the art world, I studied the social etiquette manual of Manuel Antonio Carreño, a Venezuelan diplomat and author of the *Manual de Urbanidad y Buenas Maneras*, a 19th century social etiquette book that is still widely used as reference in Latin America. The book is of course old fashioned and I emulated the rigid structure of its rules for humorous effect. The book has a somewhat perplexing section in the first chapter, titled 'the

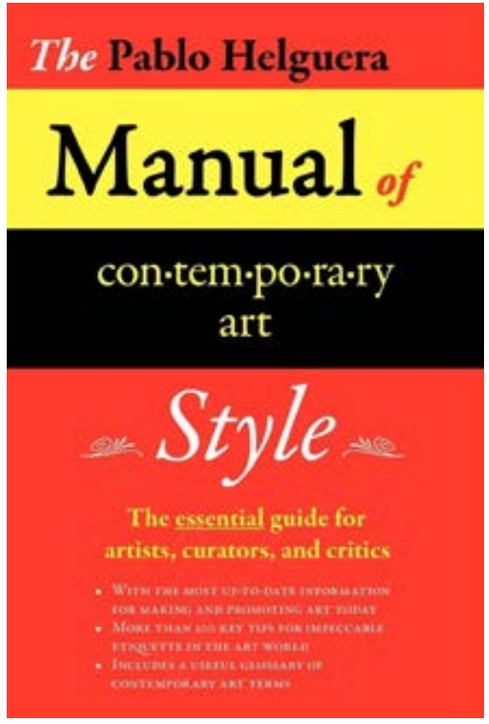
But private statements of purpose are not for beginners. The danger is that being honest with oneself requires practice.

moral duties of man', where the author writes the following:

'Urbanity should not be regarded as a vain system of formulas and conventional practices, but as the expression of the respect we owe to ourselves and to others. Even when we are alone, we should behave as if in the presence of others, for personal dignity must never be abandoned.'

In other words, while Carreño focuses mostly on how we must behave with others, but argues that in order for our behavior to transcend its performative nature we need to assume that same commitment and set of values in our private life.
I think of this in terms of artists whose work most admire. I feel I can't ever prove the following, but in any case: I feel certain that there is a perceptible difference between art that emanates from an artist's inner convictions and world-view, and art that merely performs the gestures of meaning without living them. While interpretation is always subjective, we often sense, almost intuitively, when a work carries the weight of real experience, curiosity, and struggle, versus when it is a hollow imitation crafted for approval, trend, or opportunism. Authenticity in art reveals itself not by style or medium, but by the coherence between the artist's questions and their way of working. Charlatanism, by contrast, tends to overstate, over polish, or borrow sincerity in an attempt to simulate depth.

Now, going back to our dilemma: while a private sense of purpose preserves the freedom to evolve, it can lack the structural and emotional support that public commitment brings.
The challenge might be to find a space between isolation and exhibition, where purpose is shared not as a performance, but as an invitation to grow alongside others. I have detected this in the support systems that I have seen artists often have; whether it is their family, significant others, a community of loyal supporters and friends, and more. Within those inner circles the artist can be freer to share and find support toward their sense of purpose.



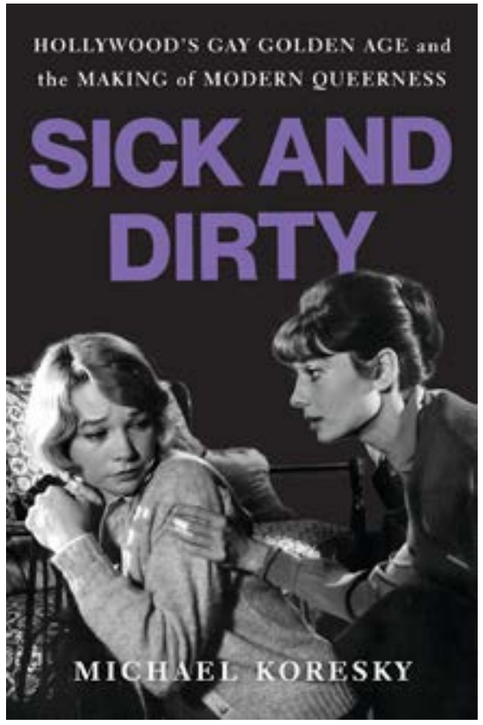
Last but not least, it is important to emphasize that a private sense of purpose does not enter into conflict with what I believe is the ultimate aim of most artists: a self-transcending purpose, which is what psychologists have argued for nearly a century: ultimately, we want to be remembered as someone who contributed to something larger than ourselves.
So, with that in mind, my recommendation is that you tell no one that you read this text, that you keep it to yourself, and that you quietly consider your own purpose. Feel free to tell only your inner circle, or not. Mostly, make sure that you tell it to yourself. I will be right there with you, in the solidarity of collective solitude. We might then hopefully achieve self-transcendence, even if we are not Diane Arbus.

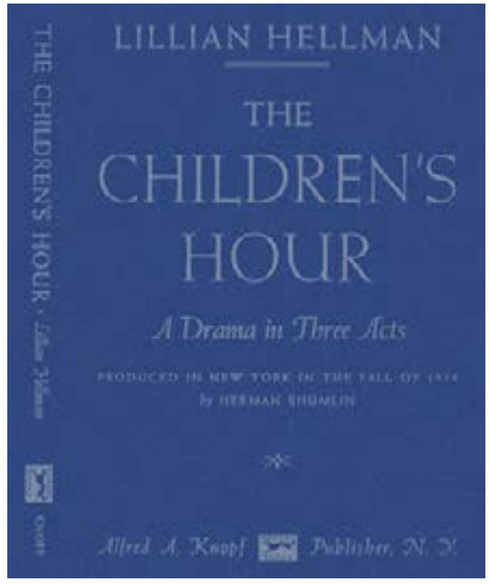
Günther Uecker :
Hommage à Paul Scheerbart (“Scheerbartwesen”), 1960

Censoring “Sick and Dirty” Queerness in Hollywood’s Golden Age

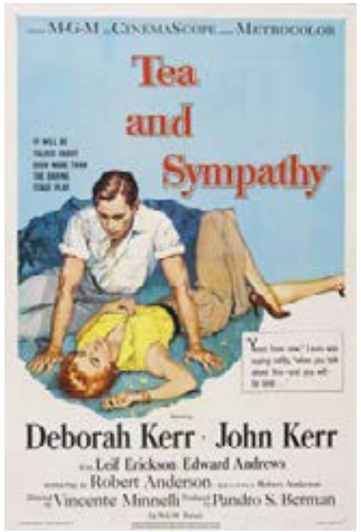
Scott Sublett

BOOK REVIEW: “SICK AND DIRTY: HOLLYWOOD’S GAY GOLDEN AGE AND THE MAKING OF MODERN QUEERNESS” BY MICHAEL KORESKY, 320 PAGES, BLOOMSBURY PUBLISHING





In 1934, when Lillian Hellman finished her play *The Children’s Hour*, homosexuality on Broadway was unthinkable, yet somehow the play got on. Her villain was a conniving little rich girl who doesn’t like her boarding school and invents a story that the two women who run it are lesbians. The lie destroys their lives, and is exposed too late to save the school. And here’s where we give away the surprise ending that made the play really pop: one of the women confesses that although nobody did anything actually ‘lesbian,’ in her heart she in fact had those feelings, and now she feels so “sad and dirty” that she better go upstairs and kill herself. Hellman would later change the line to “so damned sick and dirty.”
The playwright claimed that the play that launched her career was “not about lesbianism” but about “lies.” Then again, as novelist Mary McCarthy famously said about Hellman on “The Dick Cavett Show”: “Every word she writes is a lie, including ‘and’ and ‘the.’” Hellman sued, died before the case was settled, and while McCarthy’s remark was hyperbole, Hellman, a master of dramatic construction, tended not to let facts get in the way of a well-told story. Michael Koresky, in his astute yet tender new book *Sick and Dirty: Hollywood’s Gay Golden Age and the Making of Modern Queerness* speculates that, in fact, Hellman based the character of the lying child on herself. Of course, lesbianism was central to the play, made it a cause célèbre and then a huge hit: the fifth longest running Broadway show of the 1930s. The New York intelligentsia judged it a brave and progressive treatment, and if the queer doesn’t make it out of act three alive, well, sick and dirty thoughts are often punished if you speak them aloud.



From the perspective of the present, justly or not, there's a whiff of appropriation about *The Children's Hour*. Nowadays, a straight woman could write the play (who's to stop her?) but good luck getting it produced. Lillian Hellman, whose lover was detective writer Dashiell Hammett, was not a lesbian and didn't want any misapprehensions about it. When an interviewer described her as "butch," she tartly replied that she got the implication and didn't like it. Risky subject matter had made her play a buzzy hit and eventually a classic, but she kept saying, decade after decade, the play is not about lesbianism, as though the nature of the lie was a mere dramatic device. And perhaps to her it was, much as to another master storyteller, Alfred Hitchcock, the actual nature of the "McGuffin" – microfilm? industrial diamonds – didn't matter, just so long as everyone chased it. In any case, in 1934 the play had to be written by a straight or not get written, since homosexuals had to lie low. Koresky mentions some evidence that Hellman was casually homophobic, in the way even progressive people sometimes were in those days. Yes, she leaned Communist, bravely so during the Red Scare (her lover Hammett was officially a Party member and did five months in federal prison for refusing to name names), but communism and homophobia have not always been mutually exclusive.

It's surprising that Hollywood wanted the rights. It was banned in Chicago, Boston and, by royal edict, London, where it wasn't performed until the 1950s. But in New York it was a proven hit. So, in 1935 the colorful producer Samuel Goldwyn bought the screen rights for a lot of money. Told that the subject matter was problematic, he supposedly said, "They're lesbians? That's all right, we'll make them Americans." Like so many Goldwynisms, the malaprop makes crazy sense, since 'lesbian' derives from the Isle of Lesbos, home of the homoerotic poet Sappho. The censors demanded that "all possible suggestions of Lesbianism" be excised (back then, "Lesbian" was capitalized) and so Hellman, a realist about Hollywood who had been a screenwriter for Goldwyn before she became a playwright, uncomplainingly changed the little girl's lie to something more heteronormative: one of the women was dallying with the other's fiancé. Under the Production Code, dallying was about all you could do. The title became *These Three*. It was directed by the great William Wyler, and starred Miriam Hopkins and Merle Oberon, an actress who knew something about secrets, because she had to conceal her mixed British and Sri Lankan ethnicity to work in movies. The bowdlerized picture worked fine, maybe better than the subsequent, much more faithful 1961 film adaptation of *The Children's Hour* that starred Audrey Hepburn and Shirley MacLaine (also directed by Wyler).

In his watershed 1981 history of queerness in cinema, *The Celluloid Closet*, Vito Russo famously called out the stereotype of the doomed homosexual and

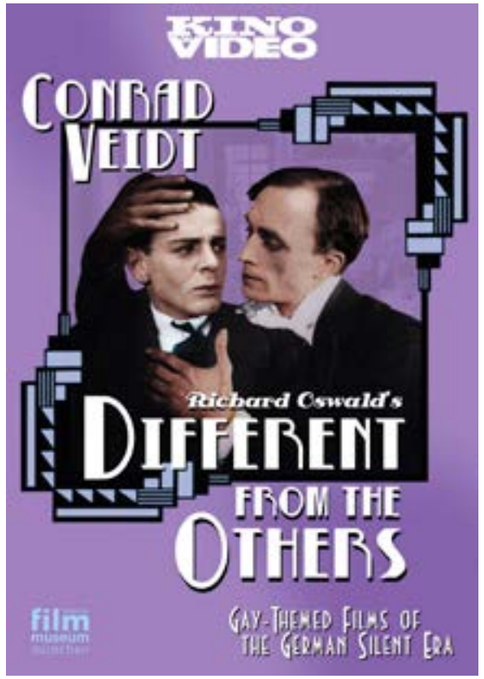
condemned the 1961 remake. To be fair, the trope of the homosexual hounded into suicide wasn't invented by Hellman – it appears at least as early as the 1919 German silent *Anders als die Andern* ("*Different from the Others*"), a film meant as a plea for tolerance and understanding, co-written by Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, the gay sexologist who was later labeled by Nazis "the most dangerous Jew in Germany," and whose books were burned.

The 25-year span of time between the heavily censored screen version of the play released soon after the Production Code took hold in 1934, and the 1961 remake, which arrived as the Code was crumbling, is the organizing principle of 'Sick and Dirty.' Mr. Koresky, Editorial Director of New York's dazzling Museum of the Moving Image, uses the two film adaptations of the play as bookends for his examination of how Hollywood depicted homosexuality during its Golden Age. Unlike *The Celluloid Closet*, rather than encyclopedically addressing any and all Hollywood representations of queerness, Koresky digs into just a handful of movies, finding meaning in how they omitted homosexuality, or dealt with it in coded ways, or struggled to get as much as they could past the censors. Among them: Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948), Vincente Minnelli's *Tea and Sympathy* (1956), and Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959). A great virtue of Koresky's book is that he has real affection for these movies, seeing them not as crippled by censorship but rather as having another layer of interest, conferred by the necessity of addressing homosexuality indirectly.

The mechanism that prevented the pollution of good Americans was the Motion Picture Production Code. It started with the alleged misbehavior of silent comic 'Fatty' Arbuckle, who did nothing wrong but was smeared, causing conservative elements to rise up in outrage. Hollywood did what they do when afraid of outside censorship: they promised to police themselves. The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (later renamed the Motion Picture Association of America and now known as the Motion Picture Association) was founded in 1922 and headed by political fixer Will Hays. In 1926 the "Hays Office" came up with a remarkably specific list of "Do's and Don'ts," among them adultery, interracial marriage, and "sexual perversion," the last mostly meaning 'gay.' White slavery was out. Black slavery was fine. The Hays office was a fig leaf and producers treated its proscriptions as suggestions. Then came the stock market crash of 1929. To boost ticket sales Hollywood turned to sexier stories – the so-called "pre-Code movies" – so the Catholic Church's Legion of Decency threatened a boycott by

all

Catholics, which would devastate the industry. To placate them, influential Catholic layman Joseph Ignatius Breen was appointed to head the Hays Office's Production Code Administration. Breen gave the Code teeth. He rigorously scrutinized productions,



starting even before the first draft of the screenplay was written. For example, if a producer so much as acquired the screen rights to a controversial play such as *The Children's Hour*, the Breen office would start hurling memos. Breen would show those 'lousy Jews' and 'kikes,' as he referred to the studio moguls in letters. Koresky points out the irony that an industry invented by Jews and dedicated to presenting a white, Protestant America was being strictly censored by Catholics, but perhaps the moguls had the last laugh, because in 1934, coincident with the implementation of the Code, box office recovered.

When it came time in 1961 to do a remake of *The Children's Hour*, the Code was already wounded. As far back as 1953, the long-time Code warrior Otto Preminger had made *The Moon is Blue*, a romantic comedy in which a woman forthrightly discusses love, marriage and virginity – that's right, you couldn't say "virgin" in 1953 – and when Preminger went ahead and released it without the Code Seal of Approval, it was a hit. That was the beginning of the end for the Code, but acceptance of queer content would take much longer.

For "sexual perversion," the worm turned on May 10, 1961, when Arthur Krim, President of United Artists, wrote the MPAA that his company was contemplating 'several pictures in which references to homosexuality are made.' Two were smart political dramas, both of which would star Henry Fonda and include subplots about politicians with gay secrets: a screen adaptation of Gore Vidal's witty play *The Best Man*, and Otto Preminger's superb, sprawling story of a senate confirmation hearing, *Advise and Consent*. The third was a new adaptation of *The Children's Hour*. But when the film was released, it wasn't as popular with the public as the first version, and while anyone who was alive at the time can tell you that gays were very far from "liberated" in 1961, a number of important critics found it mild and old-fashioned (perhaps, Koresky suggests, denigrating the movie to underline their own hipness).

Koresky sincerely loves these films that tried to represent queerness within the limits of a time that forbade its mention, and he excuses the moviemakers: "The grandstanding moral righteousness of business-minded figures like Krim, Preminger, and Wyler would lead to films that sought to humanize gay people the only way they seemed to know how: by casting them as sad, desperate, suicidal outcasts." That was progress, for as Oscar Wilde once said, "The only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about."

The Shrouds

Frances Oliver

I am fortunate in belonging to a small film club mainly featuring old films; its weekly shows take up most of my movie-going. I am also partial to – not too gruesome – horror movies; so when I saw our Newlyn cinema was showing a David Kronenberg film, *The Shrouds*, I thought I should go and find how the old Hammer classics have evolved.

Evolved they certainly have. In his luxurious dark emporium we meet Karsh, a fabulously rich and successful tycoon, inventor of a special high-tech shroud. A shroud for which that absurdly abused adjective 'incredible' could be employed with justification. The shrouds are designed and wired so that the living mourners can, on screens or smartphones, watch their loved ones decay.

And the shrouds have gone viral. Karsh has provided graveyards with standard identical tombstones, numbered for identification, for the dead in their shrouds. All the world's major cities now have such a cemetery. And why has Karsh devised this bizarre invention? As he explains to a puzzled and rather unappreciative internet date, he loved his young wife's body so much he couldn't bear to stop contemplating it. Even in decay.

It's an interesting black comedy idea, an inversion of the zombie movie, not the dead coming back to feed on the living but the living, through their morbid voyeurism, feeding on the decaying dead. But Karsh, not totally satisfied by contemplation of the adored corpse, still has some normal urges, as internet dates would imply, and covets the healthy body of his pretty dog-groomer sister-in-law (where have we seen pretty dog-groomers before?).

Yet all is not well in this ever-growing, financially booming necrophilic empire. Karsh's own pioneer graveyard, where he lives in a black apartment and presides over a sinister black restaurant, is vandalised. Who is behind it? Karsh consults his nerdy but brilliant bespectacled partner, the classic Clark Kent type of old Hollywood, recently divorced from Karsh's sister-in-law. Karsh being so infinitely wealthy decides not to contact the police or insurance company, just to have it all put right again. But wait – why were only certain graves vandalised? And why are there suddenly mysterious little growths visible on some of the corpses? Are they some kind of information-gathering device aimed at the

corpse-watching living, and who is behind that? Is it the Russians? Is it the Chinese? Worse – is it an insider? (Not a corpse, because they really are dead.)

And the pretty sister-in-law – why did she ever marry the nerdy genius? She too is not normal – her great turn-on is hearing conspiracy theories. She married the inventor for his paranoia. Tell her a conspiracy theory and she demands sex – to Karsh's delight; but even during the obligatory bonking scene they continue to trade speculations about who might be behind it all… and the dead wife's oncologist who she worshipped, was he experimenting on her? And did she sleep with him? Etc, etc.

Then, the movie's most startling and certainly most tasteless scene – Karsh's faithful blonde confidante screen avatar appears suddenly stark naked and with the same surgery scars as Karsh's dead wife. The avatar is not what she seems. And who is behind her? Is it the Russians? Is it the Chinese – or even the CIA? Just in case you have the stomach to see this, I won't give the denouement away. Let me just say that

Still from movie
©David Cronenberg

Karsh is eventually borne off to Hungary by the glamorous black-haired wife of a terminally ill Hungarian tycoon who wants Karsh to establish a new graveyard near Budapest where this wealthy man plans soon to lie. “You’ll love Transylvania,” purrs the glamorous wife over their in-flight champagne (now where have we heard of Transylvania before?).
This is actually a very cunning and political satire. You could say it lays bare the growing decay of our information and conspiracy obsessed society in picturing dissolution itself as another entertainment… for the rich. It’s a movie almost better in retrospect, where the cleverness is more evident than the corpses; after and hour and a half I found myself getting tired of the unending dark atmosphere, debates and speculations, or maybe it’s all just that bit too gruesome and far out.
Yet some issues ago, I wrote, as a satire, an advertisement for a disaster tourism website. Disaster tourism exists, and my satire itself was inspired by Pendery Weekes’s article (NAE issue 33, Vol 5) on something real, jewellery made from human embryos. Maybe - though we don’t yet have the actual invention or the Elon Musk to produce it – Karsh’s shroud is not so far out after all. So keep an eye on big planning applications.
The next necrophile empire could begin near you.

The New Art Examiner accepts movie reviews email to:

ukeditornewartexaminer.net

We do not accept reviews from any members of the production company, crew or actors in the movie.

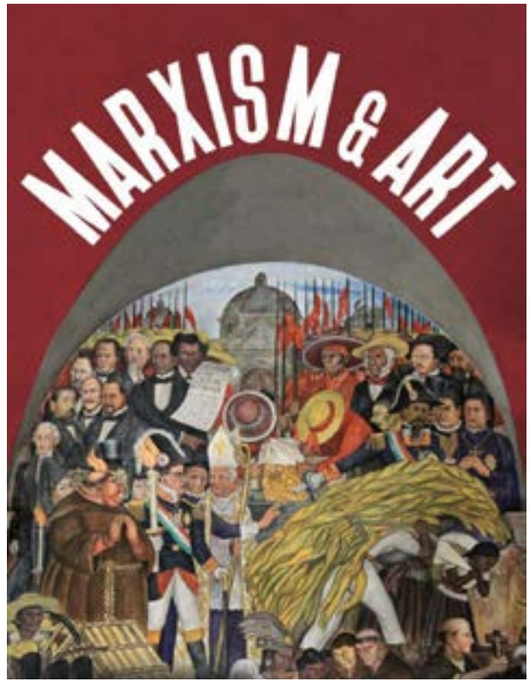
Art History and Karl Marx

Nicole Bennett

“When communist artisans associate with one another, theory, propaganda, etc., is their first end. But at the same time, as a result of this association, they acquire a new need — the need for society — and what appears as a means becomes an end. ... the brotherhood of man is no mere phrase with them, but a fact of life, and the nobility of man shines upon us from their work-hardened bodies.”

Karl Marx, Human Needs & the Division of Labour (1844)

Art History has evolved beyond a singular interest in the aesthetics or form of a work of art; the examination of the history of a work has become perhaps as important as the artwork itself. The term itself implies a two-pronged concept, whereas the art as the subject of study is apprehended through its origins, contexts and perceptions. The aim of the art historian is to answer various questions surrounding the historical framework of a work of art, such as who,



The work of art is effectively a document of its time, responding to and reflecting its socio-historical context.

when, where and how it was created. There is no doubt that stylistic traits are directly tied to assorted aspects of history and culture; artists themselves are direct products of their time, and their art becomes a manifestation of everyday experiences.
Social art history increases the chances of answering these questions in full scope, and addresses each of them effectively. The social history of art explains the history of artworks and artistic practice by means of the social, political and economic contexts within which works were conceived, produced, perceived and used1. The term social art history came to refer to the various theories that accounted for the historical appearance of works and their political environments during the latter third of the twentieth century. The social art historian is primarily concerned with an artist’s response to the values and ideas of society, which in turn are determined by historical conditions. The social history of art is by and large the study of a society and its determinants. From this perspective, the art historian must study the complex relation of the artist to the total historical situation, especially the traditions of representation available to him. Within the sphere of the social history of art, the means are as significant as the end.
A wide variety of ‘contextualist’ explanatory models were developed in the late 20th century to account for the socio-historical factors that influenced artistic production, whereas Marxist art history began to surface as perhaps the most radical sect. Marxism, as an application of art historical discourse, developed as one branch of social art history devoted to articulating ways in which the thesis of Karl Marx (1818-1883) applied to the modes of economic production in material life, and their determinant relationship to the character of social, political and spiritual experience. Marxism provided a useful methodological paradigm for the apprehension of the place and role of art in society and culture. The

Marxist art historian sought to convey ways in which the economic social 'base' and its artistic and cultural 'super-structure' could be related in a causal manner. Marxist's art historical tendencies heightened during a time when art and politics could not escape each other. During the nineteenth century, the state, public and critics all agreed that art had a political sense, one in which artists themselves were well aware. Marxism, as a critical approach, aimed to expose the exploitation of the working class and represent historical materialism and public false consciousness. The art historian's goal was to exhibit how art interacted with active political structures, especially how it represented different social classes and embodied their struggle. Marxist art history attempts to show how certain images contain information about the political and economic climate, as well as the portrayal of ideologies. Marxist theory, particularly the doctrinaire first generation of Marxist scholars and art historians, adhered strongly to the fact of art as the product of society, particularly within the economic class from which it was produced. The Marxist art historian, as a faction of social art history, seeks to resolve the same questions; whereby the answers are all politically motivated. From this perspective, the artist is inescapably conditioned by the society in which he develops, destined to create works of art that represent societal classes and their inherent struggles. Marxist art history seeks to expose and recover ideologies of the past and proletarian exploitation. The rendering of workers' oppression in art propagandizes the working class against the state, becoming a 'call to action' against the repressive class.

Through a social historical perspective, and through Marxism as well, the art historian gains deep insight into the affect time and place has on artistic production and creation. Both practices de-emphasize personal preference – whether or not a work of art is aesthetically pleasing or correct in form is irrelevant inasmuch as it does not affect the work in light of its own historical premises. The work of art is effectively a document of its time, responding to and reflecting its socio-historical context.

Where Marxist art history indeed explores the important historical and political factors underlying artistic production, one must be careful as not to reduce art simply as an expression of immediate political and practical needs of the working class; many other confounding factors are not taken into consideration from a Marxist viewpoint, as they do not serve their primary interest. The omission of variable details becomes a problematic aspect for the study of artworks, creating a speculative biopic theory with a distinctive focus on only the certain features of art that advances Marxist theory. A key problem with Marxist art history in this century has been to find a way to conceptualize the factors that have made capitalism so resilient. Rather then disregard societal contradictions such as the lack of a unified revolutionary class, relative affluence of the working class and the diversification of wage earners in capitalist societies; Marxists ought to seek explanations for these phenomena and correlate them within alternate structural ideals.

Whether or not Marxist art history has a future within art historical discourse is irrelevant.

Whether or not Marxist art history has a future within art historical discourse is irrelevant. Leftist tendencies and Marxist ideals will always have a stronghold in the study of history, as present in academic pursuit today as they were fifty years ago. For every aspect of a field of study, there are conflicting sides and members of each to study them; Marx himself would agree, as internal tensions embody the driving force behind all history. Art history should aspire to be more attentive to its role within a larger picture of knowledge; it must be sensitive to the contradictions of culture, acknowledging aesthetics in the realm of ideology and cognition, social power plays and the utopian possibility. There are innumerable applications for the study of art history, and as long as the art historian remains self-reflective, objective and thorough, their labors will never be fruitless.

Ernst Wilhelm Nay:
Scheiben und Halbscheiben, 1955.

Basil Dress

David Goldenberg

UNMAKING AND REMAKING THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF WESTERN ART

Basil Dress: installations view

The British/Indian UK based artist Peter Fillingham has for some time been recognized as an exceptional artist, curator and teacher. Who has, unlike few artists in the UK, risked being ambitious, which we could see in the collaborations with the artist, curator, writer and executive editor of /seconds, Peter Lewis, specifically in the show's *Host, Tramway* Century City, Tate Modern, Sharjah Biennale. Asks questions which need to be asked. Fillingham has also been recognized for his long-term work and collaborations with leading artists of the day, Derek Jarman, Tacita Dean, David Medalla, and Rasheed Araeen.
The exhibition could be seen as a focal point for a conversation. In that respect l want to offer a close reading of the exhibition combined with my thoughts and mental imagery triggered by the exhibition. And above all that, Fillingham is interested in forms and thinking behind Western art structures, which means that to understand the exhibition it is necessary to think into the ideas behind the exhibition on both a formal and cognitive level, which demands that we test the thinking that we possess and search for new ways of thinking.

There are several reasons why we should pay attention to Peter Fillingham's work and take time to methodically think through his recent show at Marian Goodman's Gallery, Paris.
Fillingham asks important about the condition and state of art today:

- What is possible in contemporary art?
- What is the status of the object of art?
- What is Colonialism and who is actually registering and actively engaging in this fundamental problem?
- What is the status of art and culture in the UK?
- How and in what way is it possible to register and address questions that require to be asked "within the current state of contemporary western mainstream culture?"

These essential questions are posed within the status of the object of art, fabrication, thinking process, displaying and curatorial decision making, seen from multiple positions, destabilizing fixed positions and thinking, on view throughout the recent exhibition.

To understand the ideas behind the exhibition it is necessary to read the press release by Marian Goodman Gallery, notes by Tacita Dean, specifically ideas behind the title of the show and the use of clothes in the exhibition inherited from Basil Dean, Tacita Dean's Grandfather. Aware of Fillingham's work related to work in the show, Fillingham's astute way of talking about art which hasn't, as far as l am aware, been recorded or printed apart from a recent podcast.
The first overall impression of the exhibition is of an accessible, uncluttered, well-organized show, comprising small to medium-size color sculptures, prints and fabrics, clothing, and letters of the British alphabet. 3 distinct bodies of work produced between 2020-2025, although the prints refer to works and exhibitions of the 1990s.
The second impression is that there is a dialogue between diagonal and vertical/horizontal forms, disintegration, a transformational process that change the original base form. Seductive colour drawing in the viewer in while unifying the exhibition.
On a rudimentary level they refer to elements across society that assemble society itself. The structuring of the social and the structure behind art, where art refers to western mainstream art, class, power, civilization, secret languages, mainstream Language, High/Low culture. In effect, isolating key 'elementary' components – clothes as manikins, colour, material, elementary forms, strips of fabric, letters of the alphabet – molecular symbolic particles hidden behind existing structures
The process of disintegrating what is fixed, solid and there and process of transformation to forms throughout the exhibition, opens-up a space where room for thinking is made possible. The space of thinking, and the conditions of possibility, as opposed to replicating the thinking that you have inherited and remains un-thought, Post-World War 2 narratives and dogma. Anchored around two historical moments, the two world wars – [the relationship of art to war, art as mass entertainment] - and the event Helter Skelter that signalled the end of the counter-culture at the end of the 1960s, with reference to music by the *Who* and the *Beatles* and their idea of dirty sound.
On entering the space, the eye is attracted to two objects. One towards the end of room one, and the other on the wall at the far end of the gallery in room two. The first object is comprised of three parts, two coats and a folded pair of trousers on hangers, attached to a stand. The second object at the end of room two, a wall mounted collage of multiple juxtaposed vertical lozenges and rectangles of hot and cold monochromatic colored materials.

Basil Dean's Clothing

To the bottom right on the inside of the entrance, at waist height, extending along the right-hand wall, running along room one and two, a series of related small-scale works. Between the work to the right and series of works, there is a wall mounted print in multiple colours, comprising lozenger and rectangular shapes.
In the second room this pattern of works is repeated. A small wall mounted print, the 4th in the series of waist level objects, a large industrial bolt shape, although l am not exactly sure what it is. Next the wall mounted densely colored image seen from the entrance, and to the left, occupying a spacious wall area, letters of the alphabet attached to pins on the wall, next to a similar space where the audience can select and rearrange the lettering.

Pause for thought
On what level are the works operating on? And how to classify the range of works given the diversity of materials, works and themes?
Are these works of art in themselves or are we witnessing something at another level? I mean that the

sequence of works, although surprising and unexpected, are something we see, but we don't know exactly what we see. So, there is a difficulty in describing and identifying the category of this 'thing'. By 'thing' l use the definition from Wittgenstein and Heidegger. Existing on the level of the unrecognizable, below conscience. Something that we see but we don't know cannot name or describe. Even recognizable elements, clothing, lettering, colour work samples, although functional and familiar, are subjected to the 'procedure of unmaking and remaking' where recognizable forms and objects are rendered unknown.
Key to this thinking is a recognition of the grammar of mainstream pictorial logic, and how and in what way thinking in the west and western colonialism are embedded within mainstream art forms, structure and pictorial logic.

Secondly how is colour and material used in Fillingham's practice?
We can identify several processes: colour applied to material to measure and occupy the space of a venue in that immediate time and place.

- Emptying out the space of art
- Colour and material as the sign of art
- Colour coding
- Attaching colour to things
- Locating/identifying different colored cultural objects

Attaching signs of art to a structure in the process of being constructed or disassembled, which we can walk into and view from behind, which is equivalent to standing inside a gallery space, then walking behind the gallery space. This can be seen as a model for the exhibition.
In the exhibition there are examples of colour or colored material attached to objects in the form of colour coding* - class, working class objects, food as culture, fashion as positions in society and hierarchical ordering, geographical and temporal space.
Color functions alongside the other "central pictorial grammatical element", the diagonal in juxtaposition to the upright, the vertical, horizontal and rectangle.

Moving behind the existing structure of mainstream Western art.
How and in what way is it possible to register and understand the hidden structure of Western thinking and pictorial logic that Fillingham brings to light in the works that make up the Exhibition?
We can recognize a similar thread of enquiry in Rasheed Araeen's sculptural works based on Islamic

Small Drop

patterns and Beuys chaotic fat wedges questioning the rigidity of geometric shapes.
Each cluster of works reveals not only Fillingham's thinking process, but also strategies to make material more than visible. A fullness, care and attention to detail that shifts pictorial material into another area that demands attention, move out of the ordinary and banal into fine art objects, taking the form and ideas to another level, whether through refined workmanship, or material that is 'more than', an irritant that sticks in the mind, in excess of the objects and materials – which we find in the clothes and the series of objects focusing on diagonals
The exhibition works as both a critique of art today and to camouflage the works and objects in the space as objects and sculpture of art, whereas they exist as something else. Here we can see recognition of current problems and censorship through an evaluation of the radical contraction to art over the past 25 years as part of the conservative revolution in art, squeezing out alternatives to mainstream art.
How is it possible to manifest something that escapes categories, that is of a completely different order? That escapes neoliberal logic the banality of colonialism as assimilation through mainstream western art, as appropriation within commodity art, as guilt, as confession, as documentary, as dogma, within the poverty of representation and 'something fixed?' – escaping the logic of neoliberal appropriation? Released from the existing order where rupture and a glimpse of other possibilities, manifests an en-

Black

try point into an entirely other order becomes both possible and actual.
We gain a glimpse of this where the unmaking and remaking with the transformation of all elements, in a space and volume that is impossible to gauge and measure with the complete relativization of all parts and structures of art, are set in motion and seen as a unified whole.

Examining the works in detail
At the start of the exhibition, to the right of the entrance are two works, a sculpture titled short drop and on the wall a print titled Black. I see this as a coda to the exhibition, which is repeated in room 2, and in the arrangement of clothes.

Small drop
The first work *Small drop* is one of two works devoid of colour, in black and white, along with the pair of folded trousers.
The structure as an absent structure and work, appears to show two upright white box pedestals or architectural models, set at a distance. Across the gap between the pedestals are a number of thin strips, from which forms are suspended by cord and thin rods at different diagonals. It is not clear what these suspended forms are or why they are suspended. The point is that we need to look down and into the structure. Yet the organization of elements is evocative and triggers mental images circumventing obvious iconography and references. I have a strong sense that the work as a whole presents an open form, suggesting a gallery space and works appearing in that volume of space, with echoes of a 3-d printing chamber and a computers virtual space. The constellation of suspended diagonal forms suggests the process of entropy, disintegration and falling, acting out the process of unmaking and remaking. It is also possible to imagine the work upside down, so the black Criss crossing bars can be seen as handles for a puppeteer to manipulate his puppets.
At the same time l equate this physical process to mirror mental processes and thinking, both a frozen moment of dissolution and the unfreezing of thinking trapped in stasis, the unfreezing of form and culture trapped in the prison of mainstream culture.

First print: *Black*
The 2 prints develop ideas going back to 1994 and printed in 2020. Produced by tracing architectural interiors of gallery spaces, as a template for students to understand how to locate their work in gallery spaces. Exhibited in both the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art (now Kunstinstituute Melly) and the Kunsthal Rotterdam for the exhibition *Watt* in 1994.
I understand the prints position within the context of the exhibition in two ways. Within the sequence of the developing forms on the plinths, and as a historical document that condense ideas and processes in time. The prints refer back to the constructed sculptural collaged colored textile work on the wall in room 2. so, the prints can be seen as flattened static versions of these works.
On looking at both prints l understood these less than any other work in the exhibition. But my first thought on seeing the work was that the prints momentarily freeze an operation or process that is taking place in the sculpture series, the conflict between diagonals, verticals and horizontal. The failure of comprehension is correct, because if they are turned 90 degrees it is obvious what they are depicting, gallery spaces, so the prints are themselves undergoing the same process works throughout the exhibition are undergoing. It makes sense to have a print of exhibition and gallery spaces turned 90% so the spaces are rendered unfamiliar, changed into something else, expanding what is taking place in the short drop.
The two works *Short drop* and the print of exhibition/gallery spaces trigger thinking at the start of the exhibition on the material form of the exhibition space itself. The *Short drop's* void dissolves and re-

17s Strip

Helter Skelter

configures forms in a potential new gallery space. I would say this idea of thinking of an exhibition as a totality is what makes this exhibition important for understanding correctly how critique and analysis of art takes place today as a complete structural whole idea of how culture works to open new possibilities.

17s, Strip (2025).
In the next work, a diagonal display case on top of a white plinth, present a row of diagonal bars, in a moment of rest, and an opportunity to look at the bars in detail, before the next formation in the next iteration of the work. I see this piece as transitional, moving towards something else, in terms of manifesting a fuller physical form. It is the quality and delicacy of the craftsmanship and use of bands and quality of colour. What l also find interesting here, is the incomplete half box which the mind wants to complete, which can also be seen to reference a gallery sliced in half. The size and thickness of each bar, the strange, sweet candy colours, the delicacy of the wrapping, the juxtaposition of colours clashing against each other can be seen as both a display of seaside rock and fine art works, working class culture and places juxtaposed against bourgeoisie high art and space.
It is only at this level of craftsmanship and resolution that a work not only commands space but also comes into itself as a work. For a work, argument, thinking to function and contest on the same level dominant, familiar and fashionable forms, there needs to be a command of cultural forms to compete with coexisting forms and narratives.
The issue here as with all the objects is how to register, acknowledge and describe what is visible?

8s, Helter Skelter (2025)
There are three installation shots of the work, two shots which don't work, and the final installation shot shown in the exhibition which does work, so it is interesting to work out why this version works. I would say that in this configuration and presentation there is a focus which the other presentation fails to achieve.
With *Helter Skelter* problems of registering objects and its description are at their most acute. In this instance the presentation is far more complex, housed in an open box structure. However, what we actually face is the outside surface of the box. Here as in the previous two examples, the question of scale is problematic. Is this the actual work, a model for a larger work or a model for something that cannot be shown?
The bars appear to be suspended, thrown in the manner of the I-Ching, criss-crossing, suspended

Here

and occupying an enclosed architectural model. From each bar, wooden extensions pass through holes in 2 vertical sheets at the front and back. Face on you only see the extension passing out into a new space and space of you the viewer. So the front panel obscures and closes off the internal space, breaking and breaking open another space, dimensions, and the initial container, alluding to juxtaposing multiple spaces and dimensions. On another level we can see this operation as the perforating and drilling through to break open a white cube and space of art.
The title and work collide together multiple references and allusions, working class culture and aesthetics, violence, collisions and explosions, thrills. How and in what way the work embodies the full set of references is not entirely clear, other than to hint at the end of an era, a new language and idea for a challenging aesthetic. But maybe the correct question is how is it possible for an object to embody this complexity and function as a whole?
Helter Skelter refers to *Charles Mansion, Fair Ground Slide, The Beatles* music reference to *The Who.*
Paul Sérusier's oil painting *The Golden Cylinder* from 1910

Fruit Salad
Fruit salad is the 3rd suit that Fillingham made coming after Rainbow Suite, The King of Kings (things that you do not know about the English) 2017

Fruit Salad is an army term referring to the collection of medals and ribbons worn by a soldier. The new work continues a series of wearable art works and research into English culture.
Fruit Salad is situated next to *Helter Skelter*, and like *Helter skelter* poses considerable problems with the complexity of its references and processes that the material has been subjected to. The work comprises 3 pieces, two coats and a folded pair of trousers, hanging on clothes hangers attached to sculptures that closely resembles clothes stands. Three uprights and at the bottom, feet in the form of diagonals. The uprights mimic the uprights of the plinths and delineate an undisclosed open shape.
The clothes were donated by the artist and friend of Peter Fillingham, Tacita Dean, and belonged to her Grandfather Basil Dean. Before the exhibition l had never heard of Basil Dean, but it doesn't take very long to realize how important Basil Dean was, as a writer, establishing Ealing Studios, work in theatre, Ballet, and the war effort through the organization ENSA. The Basil Dean clothing was intended to give members of the ENSA status and acceptance within the armed forces.
But why would this extensive area of engagement with cinema and the entertainment industry interest Fillingham and feed into the work? Maybe this is reflected in the excessive baroque operations, which reflects the restlessness of Fillingham's mind and desire to understand a problem and object of art from multiple directions, refusal to take things for granted and refusal to acknowledge that an idea and set of concerns are finished.
The work appears to organize at least three operations. A gentleman's country clothing as a backdrop or background, with the additions of horizontal and vertical-colored strips of material, maybe flags and military ribbons, rosette and ruff type forms made from multiple colours. Referencing the large wall work in room 2 and to the candy-colored seaside rock. With obvious reference to fashion, class, football, political parties, war, court jester and Pierrot. In keeping with the mounting hints it is useful to keep in mind Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*. Why do l say that? Maybe we need to acknowledge the necessity of a similar disruption and fundamental shifting of pictorial grammar that Schoenberg's work ignited in music history. In the same vein of thinking what is also obvious is excess and constructing the model of something that goes beyond what exists, forms and models that are unfamiliar and rejected by puritan codes and fashions of the West, pointing outside Western values?
Here

The Alphabet

Here presents the clearest complete form in the show as an idea of a satisfying object, scaled up from a small object. Is it a coincidence that the object is derived from a pot of colored pigment, raw material before it is used to make art works? Granular particles behind appearance. The presentation reinforces the impression in confrontation with the majority of the works, “What is this and what am l seeing?” As a further meditation on the idea of the open form of the two up right plinths, miniature architectural buildings, the space of a gallery, or even an unknown ground for a new type of art form, an apparition materializing in the ether of this unknown space.

The Backdrop, 2025, wood panels, fabric
The work *Backdrop* comprises strips of colored fabric on wood, made of vertical squeezed shapes, sitting next to the English alphabet, in relationship to the prints. I thought the work was an anomaly, in the same way that on first sight the alphabet appeared to be an anomaly. But l am wrong, the two works function in the same way. The strips of material appear to be taken from this work and attached and rearranged in different patterns on the clothing or to make up the prints.

BF,RE,FW,DJ,CG,GJ,GB,MJ, 2024
The Alphabet reveals the abstraction that shapes the social, that guides and positions peoples and cultures within the taxonomy and epistemology of Western global colonialism and neoliberal logic. Yet in this manifestation there is an acting out the possibility of breaking and reordering this naming, ordering of categories, hierarchies and positions, rearranged into arbitrary chaotic patterns, crystalized as condensed bits of information as visual signs.

Backdrop, The Alphabet, Here reinforces the possibility of a new language and language in the making. The collected material as a skeleton, covering and skin. With a series of 4 models to rethink the gallery and how art manifests in that space, with examples of art embodying society and history in its complexity and as a totality.

“Basil Dress”; Peter Fillingham
Marian Goodman Gallery, Paris, France, between 22nd May – 18th July 2025.
Photographer: Rebecca Fanuele
Images Courtesy of the artist and of Marian Goodman Gallery. All other images copyright Peter Fillingham

Ydessa Hendeles’s: Grand Hotel

ART OF POLITICAL RESISTANCE

Miklos Legrady

Gabor Podor

Ydessa Hendeles, Grand Hotel, *2022–2024 (detail)*
Photo: Elad Sarig. Courtesy the artist.
© Ydessa Hendeles

Ydessa Hendeles’s newest work, *Grand Hotel*, shares common ground with Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Both mine the past to prevent its repetition.
While Atwood’s tale describes a futuristic puritan state, Hendeles’s *Grand Hotel* is a documentary recalling the past to prevent its recurrence. Hendeles’s history as the only child of Auschwitz survivors inevitably informs her artwork. We cannot help but observe how today’s political events follow the stages that led to the horrors presented in the artist’s Notes for this artwork. Atwood is an author while Hendeles, previously known for her curatorial work, established herself in the last few decades as an important internationally exhibited artist.
Neither originally meant their work to specify today’s political state even though the similarities force themselves upon us. Atwood describes her 1985 novel as a potential cover story for how someone might seize power in the United States. Such a situation, argues Atwood, would "need only the opportunity of a period of social chaos to reassert itself.” (*Margaret Atwood on How She Came to Write The Handmaid’s Tale. Literary Hub. Retrieved 8 June 2025.*)
Hendeles, in a private email to this reviewer, addressed her own intent, writing, "My only caution is to avoid specific current politics. I avoided any mention of the conflicts anywhere in the current world, in order to have people think about human nature, and not get distracted by the specific points of outrage. My work is an allegory. Anti-Semitism is an important underpinning in this exhibition. But I cannot hope … but to talk about the past to warn about the future."
Grand Hotel consists of an exhibition and a book of the artist’s Notes. An enormous amount of research required for her Notes spotlight a wide range of history otherwise lost in the shadows, but they are inherently bound to the pieces included in *Grand Hotel*. The artist asked they not be quoted separately; they should be experienced with the work.
Hendeles also addressed the important aesthetics of the work. As a reviewer, I see aesthetics as the vocab-

The artist's parents, Jacob Hendeles (1916–1987) and Dorothy Hendeles (née Dworja Cwajgiel, 1916–2012), seated on the front bumper of their recently purchased used pre-war automobile, pose with family, friends and pet dogs on a motoring trip in Germany.
Dorothy's older brother, Karl Cwajgiel (1912–1988), is standing on the far right.
*Family-album photograph, gelatin silver print, with hand-written annotation, "*Sommer 1946,*" in ink, 6 x 9 cm*

ulary and grammar of the non-verbal language of art, which express what cannot be put in words. In an earlier email, the artist herself wrote:
'When I compose a piece, I'm thinking not only of the references but also about how the colours work together. I am painting in space with volumes and with colours. I want the hues to be harmonious and for people to immerse themselves in the composition I have presented for them. I work hard for it to be lit theatrically and also cinematically – pulled from scene to scene. I hope for their minds to transcend; in the way one dreams when peering into a store window or the vitrines in luxury hotels. The tourists need not be staying there. They can come in for tea as they can in high-end hotels like the *Windsor Arms* in Toronto or *Claridge's* in London or *The Gritti Palace* in Venice…. My works are not symbolic. I am trying to encourage people to take a journey in a parallel world of dreams. ...I am not an activist. I am a story teller.'
Hendeles's political statement is subtle rather than didactic, woven into a tale of history uniting royalty and riches, poverty and oppression. The exhibition is a visual art installation; an installation in shades of beige and brown, as though we were walking across the pages of an antique book.

Grand Hotel
Grand hotels were a European concept. As the noble classes dwindled, their palaces were turned into luxury hotels. In another email to this reviewer, Hendeles explained:
'The dynamic of all my work is that it appears to be one thing, but then mutates, or is 'revealed' to be something else. For example, Nicholas I is presented as Prince Charming, but then, on a deeper dive, historically, he turns out to be a terrible, terrorizing, unappealing person. Everything (in *Grand Hotel*) is crafted to dissolve or mutate. Just when you think it is one thing, it becomes another. (In the exhibition itself), there is the materiality in the construction of the spaces, the theatrical lighting and the composition of the pieces. Also important are the cultural references. When building a work, I think of it as three-dimensional chess on glass chessboards. Everything is deliberately complicated (complicated, as an active verb).'

Ydessa Hendeles, Grand Hotel *(detail), 2022*
Photo: Ricardo Okaranza Sáez de Arregi.
© Richardo Okaranza Fotograf

For this reviewer, a work of art is layered and primarily non-verbal, a visual language accompanied by print in this case. It speaks through our feelings to tell a story that we would miss if it were only put into words. Then it would be too abstract and intellectual. It would lack the necessary feelings that make this aesthetic a work of art, just as this review barely does justice to the magnificence of the original exhibition and Hendeles's intensive research published in the Notes.
Grand Hotel was exhibited in Venice at Spazio Berlendis, in 2024, as a Collateral Event of the 60th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia. It was presented by the *Art Museum* at the University of Toronto and curated by Wayne Baerwaldt, working in collaboration with project producer Barbara Edwards. The book that accompanied the show was prescient in warning us that current political events mirror those referred to in *Grand Hotel*. While Atwood's book is a narrative, Hendeles's work is a documentary, seemingly presenting interesting, fascinating, or terrifying facts in separate parts or layers. The curatorial statement in the Notes introduces the viewer to the content of the exhibition:
Grand Hotel is set in a country emerging from the wreckage of war. The scenario envisages a family or group of close friends who are on the road like tourists. The objects in *Grand Hotel*, despite the opulent origins of some, are almost all re-purposed salvage – poignant relics of a bygone era positioned to limn a contemporary story about identity, loss and a yearning for a safe space ….
The main aspect of the exhibition, which forms the third part of the book seem to present a sort of Neiman Marcus holiday catalogue showing luxury items only the wealthy can buy. Hendeles wrote about this in an email:
'The piece is constructed as if the lobby of a grand hotel. It is cinematic – moving from the deep past to a fable inside the lobby. … Grand hotels show painted portraits of the original aristocratic owners of

Ydessa Hendeles: Goose! *(still), 2023. Video with sound.*
Found documentary footage, March 1939, from Munkács, Hungary. Sequence of moving images, looped and paired with a recording of "Oyfn Pripetchik," a Yiddish folksong published in 1899 by Mark Warshawsky (1848–1907), performed by Michał Hochman (Polish-American, 1944–2024).
Display dimensions: 36 x 65 cm (14 x 25 inches).
Courtesy the Artist. © Ydessa Hendeles

historic buildings that were later converted into hotels. They also feature in vitrines, glamorous items for sale in neighbouring shops in and around the hotel to entice people to go to the stores. That is, they are 'advertisements' to tourists of jewellery and other luxury items. (My work is not literal, but those ideas are strung together in a kind of 'follow-the-dots' way).

The passport to this exhibition is also its starting point: a photograph of a family posing in front of their car as they set out seemingly on a tourist vacation. This is such a normal event we are jolted awake when we learn that 15 months previously, these people, which include the artist's parents, were rescued from Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. In her Notes, Hendeles wrote:

'The picture is a record of a group of young people – all of whom were bereft of family members, of parents and grandparents, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, children and extended family–doing their best to rebuild their lives.'

Privately, in an email to this reviewer, Hendeles wrote,

'for the exhibition, I was trying to flesh out the Romanov family in the context of the war in Gaza with an oblique reference to my own story ... different than the ordeal of Gaza refugees. I was trying to present an aspirational family after the Second World War, at a time when nobody wanted to hear anything about the Holocaust."

The entrance to the exhibition is then the family photograph which includes her parents. In her Notes, Hendeles wrote of their experience of concentration camps, where, if the guards thought you looked too weak and sickly, they would shoot you on the spot. The exhibition then takes us to a late 19th-century painting of Jewish merchants in a small village on the edge of the Russian empire. The Russian royalty, the Romanovs, who sought power by killing members of their own family, persecuted the Jews for their refusal to assimilate and accept eastern orthodox Christianity.

In the exhibition, following the painting of the Jewish merchants, there is Hendeles's video composition titled *Goose!* Using found documentary footage, dating from March 1939 and shot in Munkács, Hungary, Hendeles presented a sequence of moving images, looped and paired with a recording of '*Oyfn Pripetchik*,' a Yiddish folksong written in 1899 by Mark Warshawsky, performed by Michal Hochman. (Michal Hochman - Oyfn Pripetchik, youtube here)

Ydessa Hendeles: Grand Hotel, *2022–2024 (detail)*
Fully articulated mannequin of an infant, c. 1900, hand-carved wood with wooden ball joints and dowels,
48 x 18 x 12 cm

At the time the footage was shot, almost half of the inhabitants of Munkács were Jewish. Not long after, they were removed and sent to die in the concentration camps by the Hitler regime.

Then comes royalty and wealth with three portraits of the Russian imperial family, their jewellery including magnificent pearls. Then we move closer to the present with the Volkswagen, the car created to allow Germans, even those of modest means, to tour their country. We then encounter the prestigious touring luggage of the wealthy. Through this exhibition we ourselves tour the oppressed in their poverty and the rich, with their opulent treasures and possessions, as though drawing a link between the rich and their oppression of the poor, lines drawing linking the from exquisite jewels of the rich linked to the suffering in the death camps. The exhibition ends with a hint of rebirth.

The hardwood child

This model of an infant recalls the familial groups of articulated wooden manikins that populated Hendeles's 2013 artwork From her wooden sleep … . The hardwood child is approximately the size of a mature newborn and also its weight. In her Notes, Hendeles wrote tha:

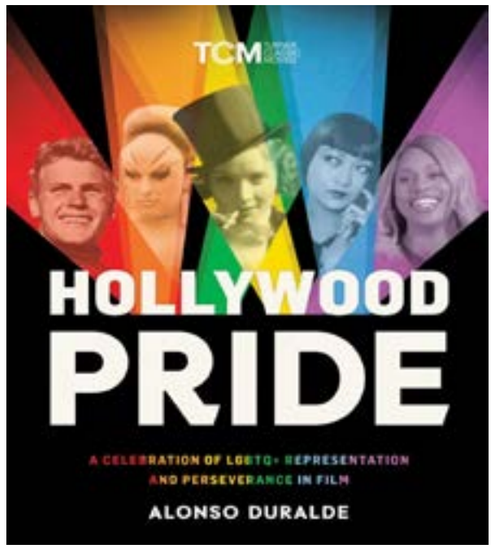
'for survivors of displacement, there is the aspiration for a better future.'

She expanded on this point in an email:

'As for the 'baby,' it is not specifically me or my son or my grandson. It hearkens to the notion of continuance, which is a universal. It was a driving force for my father, who died in 1987. The birth of a child brings with it promise, but the reliance on a new generation is uncertain.'

Hollywood Pride: A Celebration of LGBTQ+ Representation and Perseverance in Film

Scott Sublett



Film critic Alonso Duralde's "Hollywood Pride: A Celebration of LGBTQ+ Representation and Perseverance in Film" covers the waterfront of queer cinema, starting with "Dickson Experimental Sound Film," W.K.L. Dickson's 1894 experiment in synchronous sound that has two male Edison employees dancing together as Dickson saws the violin. Duralde then carries the reader through all the way to "Moonlight", the first openly gay love story to win a Best Picture Academy Award, and then beyond that to an explosion of independent queer cinema lasting virtually up to this minute. It's one of those rare works that speaks to both experts and fans.

And worry not, there's plenty of dish. Even if you consider yourself completely in-the-know as to Who Was, Who Wasn't, and Who Did What to Whom, there are shockers. Everyone knows about Cary Grant and Randolph Scott. And Ismail Merchant and James Ivory? Well, all those E.M. Forster novels. But Tyrone Power and Cesar "The Joker" Romero? Monty Clift and Jack Larson, the actor who played Jimmy Olson on "The Adventures of Superman"? How about Spring Byington, the character actress who from the 1930s onward held the franchise on endearing WASP mothers, for instance in "You Can't Take It with You" and the 1933 "Little Women", starring lesbian Katherine Hepburn and directed by gay George Cukor. Miss Byington, it turns out, cohabited with Marjorie Main, who played the slatternly Ma Kettle in the hugely popular Ma and Pa Kettle films of the late 1940s through the mid '50s (a series that saved Universal from bankruptcy). "It's true," said Main, "she didn't have much use for men."

Queer artists are film history: Murnau, Eisenstein, Valentino, Nazimova, Ramon Navarro, George Cukor, Marlene Dietrich, Garbo, Vincente Minnelli, John Schlesinger, Cole Porter, Barbara Stanwyck, Claudette Colbert, Tennessee Williams, Rock Hudson, Pedro Almodóvar, James Dean, Noël Coward, Fassbinder, Pasolini, Derek Jarman, Tony Richardson, and Lindsay Anderson, to name a few of the hundreds in Duralde's book.

But legends aren't the whole story—the books also celebrates "below the line" artists such as hair stylist Sydney Guilaroff, who invented Louise Brooks's bob, Lucy's red dye job, Claudette Colbert's bangs, and Dorothy's pigtails in "The Wizard of Oz." One comes away from "Hollywood Pride" understanding that the cinema as we know it does not exist without the contributions of queer artists, but ironically, as queers were creating the art of cinema they were simultaneously excluded from representation in it.

The book skews Hollywood, but includes many international entries such as Jaques Demy, Rosa von Praunheim and Céline Sciamma. Experimentalists, too, get their due, with Jack Smith, Kenneth Anger, Warhol, John Waters, the Kuchar Twins, and Bruce LaBruce. And of course, Chantel Akerman, whose minimalistic "Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles" (1975) was named the greatest film of all time in the most recent "Sight & Sound" Critics' Poll, displacing Hitchcock's "Vertigo," which itself had deposed "Citizen Kane" after Orson Welles's masterpiece reigned for 50 years. With the democratization of the means of production, latter chapters of the book are loaded with examples of queer indies made possible by cheap new technology and the consequent lower budgets, such as "Tangerine," the award-winning 2015 indie about a trans

The Mummy with Brandan Fraser and Rachel Weiz has a cult status in the bisexual community.

woman on Christmas Eve, shot entirely on iPhone.

Duralde also touches on how queer cinema existed in the context of world history, for example Paragraph 175, the German law criminalizing male homosexuality, made even more draconian by the Nazis in 1935 (now even tendencies were illegal), and not fully rescinded until 1994. It meant that the men Hitler sent to Buchenwald and Dachau in pink triangles were, when the camps were liberated, sent to German prisons to serve out their "sentences." Meanwhile, in the United States, homosexuality was considered merely a moral failing until military psychiatrists starting screening men for service in World War II, and thereafter it was categorized a mental illness; in 1952 homosexuals became officially sick when it was included in the American Psychiatric Association's first Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. It was not removed until 1973, which means that queer baby boomers grew up told that they were mentally ill, while watching sad, self-destructive, pathologized homosexuals in Hollywood movies.

But then there was "Victim," the 1961 British drama in which matinee idol Dirk Bogarde (closeted, but everyone knew his roommate Anthony Forwood wasn't his "manager") courageously played a married barrister facing blackmail. "Victim" was the first English language film to use the word "homosexual," and its effect on public opinion contributed to the decriminalization of homosexuality in England in 1967.

All in all, Duralde's richly comprehensive book is a considerable work of scholarship and could creditably serve as a textbook for a University course on queer cinema—or just a birthday gift for a movie buff. So many films, actors, and filmmakers that even the most learned scholar will find something new, and so bounteously illustrated that one could relish it just for the pictures. The subtitle says it all—a "celebration," and while it doesn't ignore the bigotry and tragedies of queer film history, it's heartening that 44 years after Vito Russo's justifiably enraged ur-text of queer film history "The Celluloid Closet", there is now so much to celebrate.

Hollywood Pride: A Celebration of LGBTQ+ Representation and Perseverance in Film" Running Press, 321 pages.

But I'm a Cheerleader (1999) still image
Ahead of its time in dealing with conversion therapy

Two Recent Art Controversies

Marcel van den Haak

Over the past few years, there have been many examples of progressive art criticism that caused heated debates, eventually resulting in 'cancellation' or – a moderate solution – contextualisation. This essay shows the similarities between two cases that differ in three significant aspects: country, art discipline and type of moral issue.

Chronologically, the first case is the novel *American Dirt* by Jeanine Cummins, released in January 2020. It tells the story of a Mexican woman and her young son who are taking on a highly dangerous migration route by train to the United States, on the run from a local drug lord. The author intended to educate American readers and let them empathise with Mexican immigrants, who are often perceived as a 'faceless brown mass', as she states in her epilogue. However, the novel was criticised heavily by Mexican-American and other Latinx writers for using one-dimensional stereotypes, telling a migration story in the genre of gruesome thrillers and portraying the US as the promised land. Moreover, the novel was perceived as an act of cultural appropriation, as it was written by a white woman, who – despite years of research – was accused of including many factual errors on life in Mexico. Cummins, who self-identified as Latina due to her Puerto Rican grandmother, admitted her limitations in her epilogue by stating she wished 'someone browner than me' had written the book. However, these disclaimers further contributed to the uproar. A month prior to publication, Latina writer Myriam Gurba opened the debate with a scathing online review. This was followed by other Latinx writers on social media, in blogs and in op-eds in established newspapers.

Had it been a modestly published novel, the backlash would not have been as harsh. However, the manuscript had been acquired by Flatiron Books (an imprint of Macmillan) for an alleged 'seven-digit sum' after a bidding war between nine publishers. Flatiron promoted it as the novel on migration and as a literary masterpiece; a blurb on the cover compared Cummins to renowned author John Steinbeck by calling it '[t]he *Grapes of Wrath* of our time'. But despite their inside knowledge or even lived experience, Latinx writers do not receive equal opportunities to publish work on similar topics, let alone to be massively promoted. Gurba (2019) therefore accused Cummins of operating 'opportunistically, selfishly,

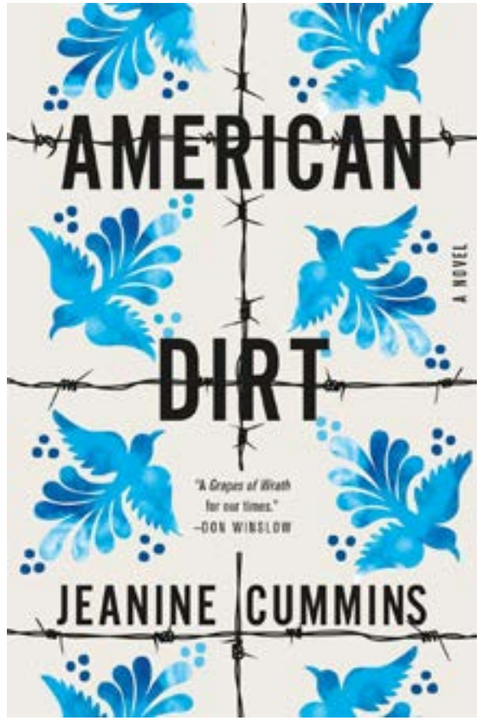
Cummins' book tour was cancelled due to unspecified threats. There were also more constructive responses: publisher Macmillan promised to more actively recruit Latinx writers and editors in order to prevent future mishaps, while Oprah Winfrey hosted a discussion on the issue that had a broader scope than initially intended.

and parasitically'. However, she and other critics mainly targeted the publishing industry rather than the author. Writer Reyna Grande (2020), for instance, wrote in The New York Times:

'It took me three tries to cross that geographical [US-Mexico] border. It took me 27 attempts to get past the gatekeepers of the publishing industry who time and time again make Latino writers feel that our stories don't matter. '

When Oprah Winfrey selected *American Dirt* for her influential Book Club, a group of 82 Latinx writers signed a petition, asking her to withdraw the book. They warned for the novel's potentially harmful effects for the 'depiction of marginalized, oppressed people' in politically conservative times. Many of them organised themselves in the collective DignidadLiteraria. Cummins' book tour was cancelled due to unspecified threats. There were also more constructive responses: publisher Macmillan promised to more actively recruit Latinx writers and editors in order to prevent future mishaps, while Oprah Winfrey hosted a discussion on the issue that had a broader scope than initially intended. Cummins herself apologised for several mistakes. The turmoil did not prevent *American Dirt* from becoming a best seller, though.

The second case regards the art installation *Destroy My Face* by Dutch artist Erik Kessels, which opened in September 2020 in Breda, the Netherlands. As part of the photography biennial BredaPhoto, he covered a local indoor skate rank with sixty large algorithm-generated pictures of women's faces that had been 'deformed' by excessive plastic surgery. In order to criticise such 'Insta-perfect' beauty ideals and promote self-acceptance instead, Kessels invited skaters to ride over these pictures, which would



gradually erase them and hence 'destroy the destruction'. Though intended as a socially critical artwork, it received immediate criticism on social media. Skating over women's faces and finally erasing them was considered an act of misogyny and objectification, particularly within the predominantly masculine skate world, in which female skaters do not always feel safe.

The (initially anonymous) artists' collective *We Are Not a Playground*, wrote an open letter to BredaPhoto and the skate rank, accompanied by a petition that quickly gained a global following of both artists and skaters.8 They argued that Kessels 'completely disregards any of the social, cultural and/or patriarchal implications of why more female-presenting people decide to have plastic surgery'. Similar to the first case, though, the petition was directed towards the organisation rather than the artist.

The collective, run by young artists, later turned into a more sustainable group that calls for changes in the art world in general, particularly regarding diversity and inclusion:

'We would like to acknowledge the work and effort that goes into creating projects like these and know all too well how long it takes for a work to be greenlit, researched, conceptualised, produced and ultimately become suitable for visitors. It, therefore,

'Shakespeare should not have written *Othello*, Joyce *Ulysses,* Flaubert *Madame Bovary* or George Eliot *Silas Marner*. Everyone is condemned to write autobiographies.'

feels incredibly jarring that this conversation was not held internally. We think that this speaks volumes not only about Kessels' practice but about the field he exists and functions in.'

Within a week, the skatepark removed the artwork due to the backlash by its own followers and sponsors. BredaPhoto did not applaud this cancellation but did later organise an open debate on the issue and on inclusion in the art world, featuring both Kessels and critics. Kessels himself was asked to withdraw from a photography jury in the UK, even though 'cancelling' the artist himself had never been the petitioners' intention. Also, he received many hateful e-mails.

Hence, in both cases, artists aimed to create a socially critical work of art, intended to spark a debate on a social issue or to invoke empathy with a marginalised group. However, they both received objections regarding the content of the works, potential unintended social effects for which the artist did not take responsibility, and the lack of diversity and inclusion in the institutions involved. A further striking similarity is that the most vocal critics are artists and writers themselves, showing serious institutional critiques from within the artistic and literary field beyond unfounded protests by social media crowds.

Although both *American Dirt* and *Destroy My Face* were rarely defended with aesthetic arguments, unlike in many other cases in recent years, the autonomy of art does come forward strongly. The Dutch case shows the most straightforward form, by means of angrily written newspaper pieces. For instance, columnist Elma Drayer writes: "Once upon a time, the art world was a free place where artists could do their divine thing. And that's how it's supposed to be" (my translation). Others refer to the freedom of speech in general, while Kessels himself argues that, "as an artist you have your boundaries, of course, but you should feel an enormous freedom to do things" (my translation).

On Kessels's work, not one aesthetic judgement is made in the public debate, whereas Cummins's novel is mainly praised with a – in terms – popular aesthetic, particularly its page-turning quality. Several reviewers do criticise the novel with aesthetic criteria (writing style, narrative clichés, lack of complexi-

ty), often complementary to their moral critique.
In the American case, this narrative comes to the fore in rejections of the cultural appropriation argument: writers should be able to write about whoever they wish, regardless of their own identity. Despite her openness to criticism, Oprah Winfrey opened the Cummins episode of her Book Club with: "I fundamentally, fundamentally believe in the right of anyone to use their imagination and their skills to tell stories and to empathise with other stories." Cummins herself and others ridicule accusations of cultural appropriation in a slippery slope type of rhetoric:
Jeanine Cummins wrote: 'Would that mean therefore that I am only allowed to write stories about Irish Puerto Rican girls who were born in Spain and grew up in Maryland? Others wrote:
'Shakespeare should not have written *Othello,* Joyce *Ulysses,* Flaubert *Madame Bovary* or George Eliot *Silas Marner.* Everyone is condemned to write autobiographies.'
'[W]e will end up with nothing but novels about novelists, and there are quite enough of those already.'
Related to the autonomy of art is the idea that art is supposed to provoke or to incite debate, which is particularly salient in the case of *Destroy My Face*. At several instances, BredaPhoto director Fleur van Muiswinkel emphasised the difference between serious criticism and calls for removal:
'That one of our works elicited a reaction, we really liked. That's what we stand for. That's why we display work in which photographers and artists take a stance and provide the audience with a mirror. We precisely want images to encourage reflection. But please then start a conversation [rather than a call for removal' (my translation)
A second line of defence regards the discrepancy between the artist's intentions and the audience's interpretations. On the one hand, some argue that there cannot be a fixed or correct interpretation, as it is up to the public to decide what a work means, in line with Barthes's ideas on the 'death of the author'. Erik Kessels maintains that his work was supposed to raise questions, but: 'Which ones? Everyone can decide for themselves. I don't judge, I only bring an issue to attention' (my translation).
On the other hand, those who freely interpret the work are criticised for their incorrect interpretations. Erik Kessels contradicts himself, backed by festival director Van Muiswinkel and others, by complaining in several media outlets that his critics did not dive into the work to understand what it is 'really' about and to detect the intended irony.
Such discrepancies also occur in the Cummins case, yet in a different way. The author intended to let (non-Latinx) American readers empathise with Mexican migrants but was criticised by members of that very community. Many readers and reviewers who like the book, however, emphasise that the intentions worked for them. When Oprah Winfrey asked her audience whose views on migrants had been positively altered, many raised their hands.
Finally, and most vocally, the critics are accused of 'cancel culture'. In the public eye, substantiated criticism by writers and artists is often conflated with calls for boycotts by masses external to the artistic field, who show a lack of cultural capital by quickly liking or sharing social media posts without properly informing themselves. Hence, art's defenders accuse critics of a 'vicious backlash', 'sadism' or 'fascism' while associating them with a 'mob mentality'. Note that some of these accusations compare critics with ultra-conservative groups (fascism, Taliban) that were usually associated with moral art critique. Some artists fear a future of self-censorship, which would run counter to the artistic ideal of autonomy.

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Destroy My Face Erick Kassel
BredaPhoto