



Contemporary Art

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From one perspective, contemporary art is the art of the immediate present. However, in the institutional settings of the museum, the art market, and academia, contemporary art designates new currents in art since 1970. Its history is identified with postmodernism, a later phase of modern art. During this period, an art addressing gay and lesbian identity emerged.

Modernism versus Postmodernism

Literary and art criticism has set postmodernism in theoretical opposition to twentieth-century modernism, a tradition dominated by white and heterosexual men. For modernism, oil painting was the preferred medium in the fine arts. It carried the history of modern art. Writers framed modernist art theory in terms of formalism, a critical approach that prized the visual or formal elements of style over content. They conceptualized art history as linear and progressive and, by mid-century, declared abstraction to be modernism's consummate form.

Political protest and the call for social reforms in the United States and France in the 1960s had a tremendous impact on western culture, including notions of what art should be. The challenges to authority in America made by the civil rights, anti-war, and feminist movements, and in Paris by the 1968 May riots, contributed to a climate of opinion in which modernism in the arts could no longer survive. Modernism, as the standard for twentieth-century art, was discredited by new voices.

Although the term postmodernism did not become current until the early 1980s, it is descriptive of the course contemporary art has taken from the early 1970s to the present. Although postmodern critics acknowledged the achievements of modernist artists, they undermined the exclusivist nature of modernism by recognizing and championing a plurality of interests.

In postmodern art, women, non-white, and homosexual artists gained fresh authority. Race, ethnicity, and gender were seen as legitimate foundations for art. Figurative and narrative art, which best served these concerns, became viable alternatives to abstraction. The hegemony of oil painting gave way to equal respect for photography, sculpture, installation art, video, and electronic-based media. All of these developments were the crucible in which a gay and lesbian art took its distinctive forms.

The inclusiveness of contemporary art enabled art to become a significant forum for artists who wished to speak to gay and lesbian identity. Following the formation of the feminist and gay liberation movements, the latter in the wake of the Stonewall Riots of 1969, the doors opened for the creation and institutionalization of gay and lesbian art. Although frequently controversial with the general public, gay and lesbian art ultimately entered the mainstream of high culture.

The 1970s

Modernist critics saw the history of modern art as a sequence of exclusive art movements. They

marginalized all other directions, notably realism, social activism, and untutored art. This exclusivity changed during the 1970s, primarily in the United States. The decade was dense with the preoccupations of a younger generation of artists who investigated a wide variety of subjects with traditional and innovative media.

The pluralism of the period included new formats (conceptualism, performance art, and installation art); realist styles (photorealism); expressionist styles (traditional figuration, Pattern and Decoration, New Image); and new media (earthworks and video art).

Lesbian Artists

In this environment of change, American lesbian artists began to assert themselves in a rich history of exhibitions and public manifestations: for example, the Feminist Lesbian Art Collective (FLAC), a support group and exhibiting society for lesbians living on the lower east side of New York that was active in the early 1970s; the "Great American Lesbian Art Show"--a series of exhibitions that appeared nation-wide (Los Angeles, 1980); "A Lesbian Show," organized by Harmony Hammond for the Green Street Workshop in New York (1978); and, in literary form, a special issue of *Heresies*, a leading American feminist journal, that was devoted to lesbian art and artists (New York, 1980).

Lesbian art of the 1970s was inseparable from the women's movement and was allied in expression to the work of non-lesbian women artists who pursued feminist agendas. The most important cities for the advancement of lesbian art were New York and Los Angeles. The inseparability of lesbianism and feminism in the 1970s may be illustrated in the dual career of Kate Millett. As a literary critic, she wrote one of the most important feminist studies, *Sexual Politics* (1970); as a lesbian artist, she expressed herself in sculpture and mixed media installations.

Harmony Hammond, a prominent feminist writer, was also an abstract sculptor. (In 2000, she published *Lesbian Art in America: A Contemporary History*, the first survey of the subject ever written.)

In lesbian art of the 1970s, there was very little specifically lesbian subject matter, with the exception of works of photographers such as Joan E. Biren (JEB) and Tee Corinne. Photography emerged in the decade as the medium most preferred by lesbian artists, a preference that resulted in some striking work throughout the period.

Generally, however, in the 1970s lesbian experience was coded in feminist imagery and the intimate experiences of women apart from men. This was the case for Hollis Sigler, whose bittersweet art gathered women's clothes and household furniture as proxies for the artist. Louise Fishman, an active lesbian and feminist in her politics, was neither explicitly lesbian or feminist in her art--although her bravura expressionist abstraction can be linked to an assertive "masculine sensibility" in modern art..

Joan Snyder combined words and expressionist style in her lyrical paintings and works on paper to track private memories and relationships. In the 1980s, she began to honor the fate of women in history in a more polemical spirit. Snyder is arguably the most important feminist artist of the period. She has figured significantly in the history of contemporary art to the present.

Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979) is a paradigm of lesbian art for the decade. It is a mixed-media installation that consists of a triangle of joined banquet tables that rest upon a tile floor base. The triangular format represents what some artists and writers saw as the centralized and vaginal imagery of a true feminist abstraction.

Calling upon crafts associated with women's history--needlework and porcelain painting--*The Dinner Party* presents thirty-nine stitched and embroidered table settings dedicated to famous women writers, artists, and reformers, with 999 women's names inscribed in gold on the white porcelain tiles below.

Judy Chicago's roster of famous women included lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual women. This mix was also reflected in the women she gathered to help implement her design. She thus created an ecumenical community effort that suggested the traditional collaborative nature of women's work.

As an important representative of the Pattern and Decoration movement, Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* was also symptomatic of a new feminist point-of-view in which decorative forms, previously marginalized in their association with home crafts, took on a new cultural significance as artists absorbed them into the realm of high art. The feminist questioning of traditional gender roles was also posed by the inclusion of male artists in the fabrication of *The Dinner Party*.

Gay Male Artists

In contrast to a vital tradition of lesbian art during the 1970s, there was no counterpart for gay male artists. This is ironic in light of the gay sensibility that was a hallmark of Pop Art during the preceding decade. Of the most influential artists associated with Pop Art, the majority were gay men: the Americans Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Robert Indiana, and the Englishman David Hockney.

Joining the heterosexual Pop artists in ambivalent critiques that both celebrated and questioned the American Dream, these men could also draw gay identity into their art. However, they veiled their gay identity in the indirect language and idiom of camp.

The exception to this generalization is David Hockney, who was explicit in portraying same-sex love and sensuality, particularly in his prints. Yet, Hockney and the other gay Pop artists never gave their art the polemical edge that would come to mark gay and lesbian art of the postmodern period.

Within the younger generation, the only gay male artists of the 1970s to gain important recognition were Gilbert and George, a British performance team. Their most significant work was large-scale color photography in the form of screens of multiple backlit photographs and text panels. Later, this work became more frank in its explorations of lower-class youth, boy-sex, and the AIDS epidemic.

One explanation for the dearth of gay male art as compared with the efflorescence of lesbian art during the 1970s may be that gay male artists lacked the kind of support that lesbian artists received from their affiliation with an active feminist movement. The emergent Gay Liberation movement was less public and less accepted than the feminist movement. Benefiting from the feminist movement, women artists entered the art market's mainstream for the first time, an economic reality that encouraged lesbian artists.

The 1980s

By the end of the 1970s, modernist aesthetics and theory still dominated discussions of contemporary art. A decisive break, however, came in the 1980s, spurred by French critical theory and the poststructuralist and deconstructivist writings of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes. The term "postmodernist" came to describe the shift. Henceforth, it would be interchangeable with the word "contemporary" to characterize current developments in the visual arts since 1970.

At the core of postmodernist criticism was the rejection of modernism's assumptions concerning subject, style, and media, and its domination by male artists. In postmodernist criticism, writers attempted to explain why specific groups and works of art had been marginalized. They made intense efforts to elucidate and to value "difference" and the "Other."

The most important strategy for correcting past inequities was "naming": identifying and giving voice and image to what had been dismissed. The full impact of these ideas would not be felt in contemporary art until the early 1990s.

In the meantime, postmodernist art of the early 1980s was manifested in a series of revival styles that appropriated the high styles of modernism for personal and ironic commentary: neo-expressionism, neo-Pop (graffiti and cartoon art), neo-Surrealism, and neo-abstraction.

One clue to the fact that these revival styles were essentially conservative was that large-scale painting was their primary medium. This phenomenon was made obvious in "A New Spirit in Painting," an important exhibition in London at the Royal Academy of Art in 1981. The "retro" movements were linked to the cultural conservatism of President Ronald Reagan, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and the bull market and rush of new money associated with investment banking and market speculation. Moreover, despite their links to postmodernist theory, the retro movements were dominated by male artists.

Mostly personal, the new art in revival styles carried little polemical edge or analysis of difference. There were notable exceptions, including, in terms of gay identity, the German neo-expressionist Rainer Fetting and the neo-abstractionist Ross Bleckner and neo-Pop artist Keith Haring, both American.

"Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art"

The exhibition "Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art," organized by Daniel Cameron for the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York in 1982, was of great historical importance. It was the first exhibition in the United States to examine issues raised by contemporary gay art and homosexual identity. It was also the first exhibition to bring gay and lesbian artists together.

Although conservative in subject matter and in the prominence of traditional media (with no photography, video, or installation art, which would become the primary vehicle for gay and lesbian art in the next decade), the exhibition did attempt to identify the nature of gay and lesbian art in regards to content and sensibility from both personal and political perspectives.

Reactions in the gay community to this major exhibition were mixed. Some artists were ambivalent about coming out in their art and others questioned the validity of any universal gay sensibility. For many, these attitudes would dramatically change with the AIDS crisis, which became acute by mid-decade. Society's repression of its realities galvanized the gay artistic community.

The Impact of AIDS

In 1987 a group of gay artists and critics founded ACT-UP/New York (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power). Although it organized public demonstrations, its first gesture was a shop-window display at the New Museum of Contemporary Art that featured AIDS activist posters and broadsheets. Reviving the Pop Art styles of Andy Warhol and Robert Indiana, these materials, especially their typography and layout, became immediately associated with gay activism, public declarations of gay identity, and proactive campaigns to gain access to political power.

Gay art came of age in the late 1980s. Keith Haring, who until this time had avoided his gay identity in his colorful cartoon caricatures, stepped forward to be counted. One of his most moving works of art is a screenprint he made in 1989 for an ACT-UP fundraiser. Its title, *Silence = Death*, was the organization's motto. On a square black field, dozens of intermingled figures, outlined in silver, sob and grieve. Over this image, Haring centered a large pink triangle in defiant and elegiac protest against indifference.

ACT-UP and other gay and lesbian groups adopted the pink triangle to reclaim the symbol used by the Nazis to identify homosexuals in the death camps during World War II. Haring, who was HIV-positive, died in 1990.

In addition to ACT-UP/New York, this period saw the organization of other artists' collaboratives that functioned as activist organizations, such as Group Material and Gran Fury, which wished to initiate social

reform through art.

In 1989, Gran Fury produced a special side panel for New York City buses. Appropriating the graphics and photography of commercial advertising, Gran Fury presented three racially intermixed couples kissing: boy and girl, girl and girl, boy and boy. Admonishing the public's irrational fear of the AIDS virus, the simple caption under the young and attractive couples read: "Kissing Doesn't Kill."

In 1990, at the Venice Biennale, an international venue for modern art since the early twentieth century, Gran Fury erected billboards lambasting the Catholic Church's condemnation of homosexuality.

The 1987 and 1989 Whitney Biennials

The 1987 and 1989 Whitney Biennials in New York were significant indications of the increasingly more open stance of gay art. Since 1935, the prestigious annuals and biennials organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art have been curatorial summaries of what was considered to be the best in American art. Not without their controversy, given the authority of a major museum to establish the historical importance and market value of artists, these exhibitions have always been keenly awaited and discussed.

The 1987 Whitney Biennial was striking for the inclusion of gay artists whose works of art were explicitly gay in content. The exhibition included a large-scale painting by David McDermott and Peter McGough, *A Friend of Dorothy, 1943* (1986), a whimsical and chilling study in postmodernist "naming." In a florid and delicate black script, the artists wrote slur words for gay men in a graffiti-like fashion: faggot, homo, fairy, cocksucker, queer, pansy, Nellie, and fem.

The name Mary, painted in red, and the title "Friend of Dorothy" distinguished themselves from the other terms as positive references for gay men. Shocking to see in an oil painting in a major museum, the invectives made public the hushed language of hate. With affectionate wit, the painting checked the foul words with the gay community's own terms.

Among the other gay artists represented in this turning point exhibition was Ross Bleckner, a painter whose earlier work in the decade borrowed and personalized 1960s minimalist abstraction. The more recent paintings on view at the Biennial were from the artist's series of "trophy paintings." Under densely clear-varnished and reflective surfaces, Bleckner scattered colorful emblems of love, death, and redemption on dark grounds, among which were flowers, funeral urns, and radiant streaks of light. Although universal in their lamentations, these paintings were conceived by Bleckner as personal memorials to the casualties of AIDS.

The 1989 Whitney Biennial would again include Bleckner and also Robert Gober, who, invited back for the 1991, 1993, and 2000 biennials, would become one of the most honored of living American artists at the end of the final decade of the twentieth century.

Culture Wars

With gay artists more willing to declare their sexual identity in their art, a conservative reaction was probably inevitable. Gay identity art contributed to polarizing certain segments of the general population into what became the "culture wars."

On one side stood the religious right, given license by the conservative presidency of Ronald Reagan. To the other side were the social minorities of gays, African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics who became all the more defiant and determined to defeat conservative agendas of exclusion and hate.

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was the target of such conservative and homophobic activists as United States Senator Jesse Helms and fundamentalist evangelist Rev. Donald Wildmon. In the name of the

Christian Right's morality, they attacked federal funding of what they labeled pornography and obscenity.

These activists determined to destroy the NEA, whose budget President Reagan had attempted to diminish earlier in the decade in the wake of growing contempt for contemporary art, particularly public sculpture that the government was asked to subsidize.

The focus of Helms and Wildmon's ire was the Cuban-American Andres Serrano and the gay American artist Robert Mapplethorpe, both photographers whom the religious right made scapegoats in their crusade against "degenerate art." Other artists eventually caught up in the culture wars included performance artists Holly Hughes and John Fleck.

The largely successful efforts to curtail the activities of the NEA and demonize contemporary art were thinly veiled reactions, in the name of "family values," against growing ethnic populations, demands for gay rights, and an increasing social tolerance of Americans towards minorities.

The undermining of contemporary art by religious and political conservatives was countered in important ways by institutional endorsements in the late 1980s, notably those of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

But the stock market crash of October 1987, which brought the economic juggernaut of the decade to an abrupt end, had an enormous impact on the art market. It further demoralized the art community. Many artists who had gained initial recognition during the decade all but disappeared.

Despite these reverses, however, younger artists gained additional resolve to make racial, ethnic, and gender identities the basis of their art.

For all the advances of the 1980s, there was much to be done and many more voices to be heard. In 1992, with economic recovery at hand and Bill Clinton in office as the new president, the climate for gay men and lesbians in contemporary art was becoming more hospitable. With two major exhibitions as overtures for the new decade, "The Decade Show" (1990) and the 1991 Whitney Biennial, the last years of the century were auspicious for continuing a tradition of art based on gay identity.

The 1990s

As was the case in the 1970s and 1980s, no single style or medium characterized contemporary art at the end of the twentieth century. Photography and video art were in the ascendancy, aided by technological advances and an increasing emphasis on their importance in commercial art galleries and museum exhibitions and permanent collections. Pluralism thrived, permitting a gamut of art that ranged from traditional realist styles to electronic-based art.

Realism, which underwent a revival of interest in the 1970s as a bona-fide contemporary style, had been the established basis for earlier twentieth-century art depicting homoerotic subject matter. For example, a "gay realism" characterized the art of the American Paul Cadmus and the sexualized drawings of Tom of Finland and gay comic-book illustrations.

In contemporary art of the 1980s and 1990s, a resurgent gay realism ran parallel to more innovative styles and media that addressed gay themes. Even within this category, which mostly addressed the male nude, there was a considerable range of expression, from the sadomasochistic essays on love, hate, and sexuality in the work of the Canadian Attila Richard Lukacs to the studio-based neoclassicism of Michael Leonard (Britain) and Luis Caballero (Colombia).

There were two developments that gave coherence to the decade: the dominance of installation art (site-specific, multi-media works); and the preoccupation of artists with race, ethnicity, and gender.

Many artists still felt that cultural and social identity had not been sufficiently endorsed by the art world. This neglect had its initial correction in a landmark exhibition of 1990: "The Decade Show," which, organized by the New Museum of Contemporary Art, the Studio Museum in Harlem, and the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art in New York, provided a stage for black, Hispanic, Asian-American, and feminist artists. It set the tone for the decade, one in which gay art would reach new heights of exposure and acknowledgment.

Gay and lesbian art thrived in the United States during this period in contrast to Europe, which had no counterpart in terms of exhibition histories, critical attention, and market viability. A number of factors contributed to this disparity, including the more conservative nature of European culture and its persistent nationalism, which in many countries inhibited cultural diversity.

The sustained history in the United States of social reform and struggles for enfranchisement, although not without its complexities, contributed to a multicultural society. Moreover, major American institutions, especially the New Museum of Contemporary Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art, played central roles in validating a contemporary art of gay identity.

The 1991 Whitney Biennial

The multiculturalism of American art was nowhere clearer than in the 1991 Whitney Biennial. In a review of the best of contemporary American art, the curators made a generational selection--early, mid, and late-career artists. Of the seventy-five painters, sculptors, photographers, installation artists, and artists' collaboratives represented, seventeen were gay male artists, the majority of whom focused on gay themes.

Although lesbian artists were not represented in the 1991 Whitney Biennial, lesbian artists did have renewed and important exhibition exposure during the decade. "All but the Obvious: A Program of Lesbian Art" opened in 1992 in Los Angeles. It was the first exhibition devoted to lesbian art in over ten years. In 1996, "Gender, fucked," one of the most significant exhibitions of lesbian artists during the 1990s, was curated by Harmony Hammond and Catherine Lord for the Center of Contemporary Art in Seattle.

In a joint show, reminiscent of the "Extended Sensibilities" exhibition of 1982, lesbian and gay artists joined forces in "Situations: Perspective on Work by Lesbian and Gay Artists" in San Francisco in 1991; and, again, in "2 Much: The Gay and Lesbian Experience" at the University of Colorado at Boulder in 1993--in reaction to a state constitutional amendment that denied lesbians and gay men protection from discrimination.

In the 1991 Whitney Biennial, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, now among the most celebrated of American artists, were included. Lovers in the 1950s, they number among the most famous artist couples in twentieth-century art. McDermott and McGough returned with platinum prints of staged recreations of nineteenth-century scientific experiments.

Glenn Ligon made his first appearance in this Whitney Biennial with oblong paintings of stenciled lines of repeated text that chanted his alienation as an African-American. Although Ligon made his debut as a Black artist, he was candid about his sexual orientation. In *Notes on the Margin of the "Black Book,"* a mixed-media installation in the 1993 Whitney Biennial, he paired family photographs with gay pornography and Robert Mapplethorpe's nude photographs of black men.

Thomas Lanigan Schmidt, also new to the Biennial but with a long history of exhibition at the Whitney and elsewhere, offered commentary in his decorative mixed-media paintings on his Catholic and gay identities.

Haring had died the year before, but was remembered in the Biennial with two large-scale paintings depicting an engorged penis, a Minotaur, an impaled globe, and a foot that invoked violence and bodily harm in an emphasis on the human body and its vulnerability.

The Body's Vulnerability

A concern for the body's vulnerability became almost a fixation in contemporary art at the end of the twentieth century. The obsession has been variously attributed to the anxieties of a dominant and aging baby-boomer generation, to a traditional preoccupation with mortality by Western artists at the end of centuries (exacerbated now by the approach of the millennium), and to the AIDS crisis, which deeply affected the art community.

The AIDS crisis is a particularly trenchant factor in the character of gay art during the early 1990s. The theme of physical frailty informed some of the most plaintive works of the decade. They were created by both gay and straight artists, many of whom were represented at the 1991 Whitney Biennial.

Group Material, an artists' collaborative of four gay artists, active since the early 1980s, installed an AIDS Timeline in the lobby of the Whitney that traced a history in images and words of society's obliviousness to the plague of the century. Nayland Blake assembled non-functional steel contraptions, one with hanging meat cleavers that conveyed imminent threat.

David Wojnarowicz, who died in 1992 of AIDS, worked in a wide range of media including painting, installation art, video, film, and the written word. He was vocal in his condemnation of such homophobic figures as John Cardinal O'Connor, Senator Jesse Helms, and the Rev. Donald Wildmon.

In a gelatin silver print of human skeletons, whose arrangement suggests an ancient burial ground, Wojnarowicz lamented the loss of physical intimacy between human beings and the wasting away of the physical self. In his own text, overprinted on the photographic image, he wrote: "All these moments will be lost in time like tears in the rain."

Robert Gober, sculptor and installation artist, began his career in the 1980s. He received critical acclaim for his handcrafted facsimiles of dollhouses, baby cribs, and porcelain sinks--objects, often distorted in shape, that sprang from his childhood memories. As his work evolved, it took on more specific reference to Gober's Catholicism, gender ambiguities, gay identity and mortality.

In *Untitled, 1990*, included in the 1991 Whitney Biennial, a wax effigy of a naked male figure, still wearing shoes and socks, lies prone on its stomach, truncated at the waist to appear as though it is half-embedded in the wall. A musical staff with the rising and falling notes of a melody is imprinted across his exposed buttocks. The effigy is Gober's body, the hair on its legs his own.

Félix González-Torres, a Cuban-American artist who died of AIDS in 1996, was also represented in the 1991 Biennial. He was an installation artist and maker of mysterious objects. He is perhaps best known for the strings of naked light bulbs with which he would festoon gallery spaces. Electrified, the light bulbs were allowed to burn out during exhibitions. Recalling Bleckner's "trophy paintings," these draped light strings became lyrical memorials. They played upon the symbolism of the low-burning or extinguished candle, which in traditional western art served as a reminder of the brevity of life and the inevitability of death.

The theme of human vulnerability and mortality also figured prominently in the 1991 Whitney Biennial in the art of Kiki Smith, John Coplans, Jennifer Bartlett, and the artists' collective known as Tim Rollins + K.O. S., as it had in the art of other established artists not included, notably Andres Serrano and the English painter Lucien Freud. All of these artists are heterosexual, suggesting the universality of the theme, which may have been inspired or made urgent by the AIDS crisis, but which also stemmed from an irrefutable fact of human existence.

The Retreat of Gay Identity Art

The 1991 Whitney Biennial may mark the apogee, in terms of exhibition exposure, of a contemporary art speaking to gay identity. The early 1990s were exceedingly important for letting informed general audiences know that gay artists could make great art deriving from gay experience. And yet, after this moment there would be little representation. The Whitney Biennials of the rest of the decade do not have a notable gay presence. Of the artists preoccupied with gay identity, only Gober appears in the 2000 Biennial. What happened?

The retreat of gay identity art raises some interesting questions. After a first generation of concerted and successful efforts to declare social and sexual self-worth in their art, are gay artists now free to go their own way, without obligatory pressures to be combative and make sexual orientation the center of their creativity? Has Western society's relative acceptance of homosexuals made gay identity art unnecessary? What about non-Western cultures where homosexuality is persecuted and punished?

Perhaps the most profound question for glbtq artists at this stage of art history is whether the label of gay and lesbian art is limiting. What about gay artists who express themselves in abstraction? Is gay and lesbian identity art a historical phase similar to the social realist and activist art of the 1930s? What comes next? Will it be a period that the African-American installation artist Adrian Piper refers to as "post-ethnicity?"

One of the great achievements of gay and lesbian art was to free sexual energies, to unfetter the self to make art that does not deny sexual integrity. The art of Peter Paul Rubens and Pablo Picasso is unimaginable without its intense heterosexual charge. Yet this art speaks to all humanity, including glbtq individuals. Many of the artists who have figured in the history of contemporary gay and lesbian art have similarly created works of art that are at once individual and universal. While grounded in sexual identity, it ultimately speaks to people of all sexual orientations who are able to see and experience what is human in all of us.

Robert Gober, Joan Snyder, David Wojnarowicz, Judy Chicago, Félix González-Torres, Keith Haring, Glenn Ligon, and Ross Bleckner, among others, are now entrenched in the history of art. Grounded in personal identity, their art reaches out to move us all in its sensuousness and resonance.

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Richard H. Axsom is Senior Curator of Prints and Photographs at the Grand Rapids Art Museum. He is Professor Emeritus of Art History at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, where he taught courses on the history of modern and contemporary art. His extensive publications on contemporary prints include catalogues raisonnés for Ellsworth Kelly, Claes Oldenburg, Frank Stella, and Tony Winters.

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