



## Patronage II: The Western World since 1900

by Richard G. Mann

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Patronage--the sponsorship of artists and the commissioning of works from them--has remained a significant factor in the creation of queer visual culture in the modern era. Despite its relevance and importance, this topic has been largely neglected by scholars, but some representative case studies illustrate its centrality to glbtq art history.

### Background

Since 1900, many artists have preferred to sell their works on the open market (for instance, through galleries) rather than to fulfill commissions. Increasingly, patronage has been regarded negatively because of perceived restrictions on an artist's independence. However, in reality, the commercial system can be more restrictive than traditional methods of patronage. In attempting to sell their works through galleries, artists often have had to modify their imagery or style in order to appeal to common denominators of taste and ideology. In the pre-Stonewall era, queer artists, especially those who developed provocative imagery or utilized unconventional styles in their work, had virtually no opportunities in the commercial art world.

Largely excluded from the gallery system, some queer artists resorted to "self patronage" in order fund their creative endeavors. Although these self-supporting artists generally were overlooked in their lifetimes, their accomplishments and dedication have inspired later generations of queer artists.

Other artists benefited from interaction with wealthy patrons who fostered the creation of work that would be both distinctly queer and emphatically modernist. In the decades following the Stonewall Rebellion, large-scale public commissions have radically transformed the circumstances and character of queer art patronage and production.

### Self Patronage: Alice Austen

Throughout the modern era, women have had considerably fewer opportunities than men to exhibit and sell works through mainstream venues. Among the many women artists who relied upon their own financial resources is Alice Austen (1860-1952), who produced an inspiring, comprehensive photographic record of lesbian life.

One of the first American women to become a photographer, Austen challenged stereotypes in many aspects of her life; for example, as an enthusiastic athlete, she won many prizes as she traveled throughout the country to compete in tennis matches during the 1890s. In 1876, her uncle gave her a large format camera, and she quickly mastered all current photography processes, including the development of bulky glass plates. By 1929, she had produced over 8,000 photographic plates.



Two important queer patrons of twentieth-century art:

**Top:** Gertrude Stein in 1934. Portrait by Carl Van Vechten.

**Above:** Carl Van Vechten in 1934 (self-portrait).

Images courtesy Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

Anticipating the genre of documentary photography, she preferred a sharp focus to the "blurry," picturesque effects of then fashionable photographers. She not only depicted the privileged lifestyle of her family and friends, but she also recorded many facets of New York that were considered inappropriate for a genteel Euro-American woman, including harbor activities and African-American neighborhoods. In 1896, she published a selection of these photographs in her book, *Street Types of New York*; in the same year, she provided illustrations for *Bicycling for Ladies*, a book by her friend, Violet Ward. By this time, she also had sold a significant number of images to popular magazines.

However, able to use income from stocks to support herself, Austen had resolved by the end of the 1890s to abandon commercial photography and to devote her energies to recording the private world that she shared with Ward and other women. Many of her images of friends are homoerotic in tone--for instance, *Julia and I in Bed* (1890) and *Julia Martin, Julia Brendt, and Self Dressed Up as Men* (1891). Included in her photographs by 1899 is Gertrude Amelia Tate (ca 1871-1962), who quickly became her life partner, although she did not move into the Austen family home, Clear Comfort, on Staten Island, until 1917.

The crash of the stock market in 1929 forced Austen to abandon her photography and to support herself by turning her home into a boarding house and tea shop. Evicted from Clear Comfort in 1945, the impoverished Austen and Tate were forced by Tate's relatives to separate in 1950. However, the art historian Oliver Jensen helped raise funds to provide Austen with a comfortable residence, where she was reunited with Tate for the last few months of her life. In addition, Jensen secured the preservation of 3,000 of her photographic plates by the Staten Island Historical Society. This archive of photographs has stimulated many recent lesbian photographers.

### **Self Patronage: Romaine Brooks**

Another self-supporting artist, the painter Romaine Brooks (1874-1970, born Beatrice Romaine Goddard) created portraits of many of the leading figures in the expatriate colony of American lesbians in Paris. Born in Rome, Brooks grew up in a privileged but traumatic family atmosphere in various European and American cities, including Paris, Geneva, and New York. Although she revealed a precocious artistic talent, she did not begin studying art until 1898.

Inheriting a large family fortune in 1902, she moved to London, where she married the pianist John Ellingham Brooks, whom she divorced after a year. Subsequently, her most important relationships were with other women, most notably, the American writer Natalie Barney (1876-1960), her life partner for nearly five decades. While living in London, Brooks developed her distinctive artistic style, modeled in part upon that of the expatriate American artist, James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903).

Brooks adopted Whistler's subtle colors and shades of gray; precise outlining of forms; and simplified, atmospheric handling of backgrounds. Moving to Paris in 1905, she utilized this manner in her portraits of expatriate American lesbians and others. Within the context of an art world dominated by cubism and other avant-garde styles, Brooks's adoption of an obviously retrograde and then unfashionable style actually was quite daring.

In her *Self Portrait* (1923, National Museum of American Art, Washington, D. C.), Brooks utilized the guise of the dandy, as had been defined in such portraits of gay men as Whistler's *Arrangement In Black And Gold: Comte Robert De Montesquiou-Fezensac* (1891-92, Frick Collection, New York). Her portraits of other women--including *Una, Lady Troubridge* (1923) and *Peter, a Young English Girl* (a depiction of the British artist Gluck, 1923-1924)--also challenge gender and sexual stereotypes of the era. Although some of her paintings were exhibited occasionally at prominent London and Paris galleries, Brooks generally refused to sell any works, retaining them in her possession until her death.

### **Self Patronage: Elisàr von Kupffer**

Although Elisar von Kupffer (1872-1942) was largely overlooked in his lifetime, his achievements as a painter, writer, and philosopher finally began to attract the attention they merited near the end of the twentieth century.

In 1900, he published at his own expense *Leiblingminne und Freundesliebe in der Weltliteratur* (The Admiration of Beautiful Youths and the Love of Friends in World Literature), an anthology of mainly Western literature, from the ancient through modern periods. One of Kupffer's primary goals was to counterbalance the biomedical explanations of homosexuality (a term Kupffer rejected) by demonstrating the historical and cultural aspects of same-sex love.

After extensive travels in western Europe, the Estonian-born Kupffer settled in 1915 at Minusio, near Lucerne, Switzerland, with his life partner, Eduard van Mayer (1873-1960). Together, Kupffer and Mayer devised an esoteric philosophy, called Klarismus, which elevated androgyny as the ideal of human perfection.

Designed and built by the couple in 1927, their villa, "Sanctuarium Artis Elisarium," was intended to serve as the international headquarters for the promotion of their doctrine. At the center of this building, a large round room was covered by eighty-four paintings by Kupffer of languorous naked youths with longing expressions. Believing that homoerotic images could help forge unity among peoples, Kupffer and Mayer reproduced these paintings in their publications.

Klarismus did not have the influence that Kupffer and Mayer intended, and their sanctuary was allowed to decay after Mayer's death. However, in 1981, their villa was restored and opened as a museum; in 1998, the mission of this institution was considerably expanded by the community of Minusio. In addition to functioning as a museum, Elisarium now serves as a multipurpose cultural center, sponsoring various musical and theatrical events, and it houses an extensive research library on Kupffer and his doctrines. Furthermore, since 1998, some of Kupffer's paintings have been used to create soothing, beautiful environments in hospices for the care of AIDS patients in the environment of Lucerne.

### **Prominent Queer Patrons: Gertrude Stein**

American writer Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) was one of the most prominent and perceptive supporters of avant-garde art in the early twentieth century. In Paris, Stein and her life partner, Alice B. Toklas (1877-1967), welcomed individuals of all sexual orientations and genders. Discussions in their salons helped to nurture many aspiring writers and artists.

Beginning shortly after she settled in Paris in 1902 and continuing for the rest of her life, Stein eagerly acquired works by progressive visual artists, including Pablo Picasso (1881-1974), Henri Matisse (1869-1954), and Juan Gris (1887-1927), among many others. She thus developed a remarkably comprehensive and cohesive collection of modernist painting. After Stein's death, her art was entrusted to Alice B. Toklas; upon Toklas's death, these works were purchased by a consortium of American collectors on behalf of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and other American museums.

In the endeavors of avant-garde painters, Stein found parallels to her goals as a writer. For instance, her rejection of traditional methods of sentence construction and of naturalistic conventions of narrative and character development can be related to the recognition of paintings as flat surfaces (rather than windows into illusory worlds) and to the innovative and expressive handling of pictorial elements in works by Picasso, Matisse, and others.

Created over a period of several months in 1905-1906, Picasso's *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) exemplifies the bold and innovative art works favored by Stein. In her book on the artist, Stein maintains that this commission was instrumental in motivating Picasso to devise a modernist equivalent of the monumental pictorial style of the Renaissance. As she explains, this

development culminated in Picasso's *Desmoiselles d'Avignon* (Girls of Avignon, 1907, Museum of Modern Art, New York), widely regarded as one of the seminal works in the history of modernist art. Endorsing Stein's account, most art historians agree that the process of creating her portrait was essential to Picasso's formulation of the early and aptly named heroic phase of Cubism.

In the *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*, Picasso abandoned traditional formulae for the depiction of women and destabilized gender categories in the way that Stein did in her life. Picasso endows Stein with a forceful, Amazonian presence through several devices, including the large, heroic scale and the simplified, faceted forms.

At a late stage in the production of this image, Picasso erased the naturalistic face he had initially created and replaced it with a stylized visage, ultimately inspired by African and Iberian sculpture; a line across the neck confirms that Stein's face has been covered by a mask. The result of Picasso's transformation of the head was to create a portrait that seems "strange" and thus queer. Further, the representation of masquerade visualizes the complex process of performing lesbian identity in a society that refuses to acknowledge alternative sexualities.

### **Prominent Queer Patrons: Serge Diaghilev**

Serge Diaghilev (1872-1929, born Sergey Pavlovich Dyagilev), was a Russian collector, patron, and impresario, best known today as the director of the Ballets Russes. The significance of his patronage to the history of modernism cannot be overestimated. He fostered the creation of art that would be as bold and extravagant as his own personality.

The son of a famous Russian general and an aristocrat, Diaghilev had cultivated a flamboyant, dandyish persona by 1890, when he went to St. Petersburg, supposedly to prepare for a career in law. Preferring music, he studied under Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908), who discouraged his creative ambitions. After completing his studies in 1894, Diaghilev cultivated friendships with the painter Léon Bakst (1866-1924) and other artists, writers, and musicians, involved in the progressive association *Mir Iskusstva* (World of Art). In 1898, with his cousin, the painter Dmitry Filosofov, who was his first lover, Diaghilev founded a magazine named after this group, and he edited and published it at his own expense until 1904.

Also between 1897 and 1906, he organized eleven major art exhibitions in St. Petersburg, including seven under the auspices of *Mir Iskusstva*. Three of these exhibitions introduced Whistler, Renoir, and other recent British and French artists to Russian audiences. Appointed assistant to the Director of the Imperial Theaters in 1899, he edited its journal and staged several operas until 1901, when he was dismissed because his plans for a production of the ballet *Sylvia* (in collaboration with *Mir Iskusstva*) were considered too extravagant.

In 1906, feeling increasingly oppressed by homophobia in Russia, Diaghilev emigrated to Paris, where he organized an installation (designed by Bakst) of Russian art at the Salon d'Automne, Paris. In 1908, at the Paris Opera, he staged the opera *Boris Godunov*, with sets and costumes by colleagues from *Mir Iskusstva*; this production anticipated the spectacle and visual richness that later became a hallmark of the Ballets Russes.

Due to the success of this event, Diaghilev was invited the following year to present an entire season of Russian dance at the Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris. This series, which featured startlingly erotic choreography as well as bold and colorful set designs by Bakst and other Russian painters, introduced to the western European public such brilliant, young Russian dancers as Tamara Karsavina (1885-1978) and Vaslav Nijinsky (1890-1950). Employing Nijinsky and others from this series, Diaghilev founded his own traveling company, the *Ballets Russes*, in 1911.

Bold and unconventional, many of Diaghilev's presentations--most notably, his staging of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre*

*du Printemps* (Rites of Spring) in Paris (1913)--provoked uproar and controversy. With choreography by Nijinsky and others, the Ballet Russes literally reversed established gender conventions by giving male dancers a predominant (rather than simply supporting) role in productions and by devising aggressive and forceful steps for ballerinas. Through his overtly sensuous movements, Nijinsky (Diaghilev's lover, 1908-12) seemed to be enacting homosexual fantasies on stage.

For many of the Ballets Russes productions between 1909 and 1921, Bakst created colorful and voluptuous costumes for both male and female dancers, and he designed equally lavish stage sets, visualizing western European fantasies of Russia and Asia. Bakst revolutionized the use of color in Western design by employing exceptionally brilliant hues of red and orange, blue and green, side by side.

Increasingly fascinated by western European art, Diaghilev sought out the services of leading avant-garde artists, and he was able to inspire collaboration among them. In 1917, he presented the première of *Parade*, with choreography by Léonide Massine (1896-1979), script by Jean Cocteau (1889-1963), set and costume designs by Picasso, and music by Erik Satie (1866-1925). Picasso's first public departures from Cubism, his designs incorporated found objects and references to popular art. This visual element, together with Satie's interjection of the sounds of typewriters, pistol shots, and ships' sirens into his jazz-influenced score, incited loud protests from the audience.

*Parade* and other later Ballets Russes productions realized the avant-garde goal of fusion of art and life. Until Diaghilev's death in 1929, the Ballets Russes remained a vital and dynamic force in the worlds of dance and art. Numerous commentators have suggested that Diaghilev's determination to influence the course of twentieth-century art may have been rooted in the desire to demonstrate to a homophobic world the superiority of gay male culture. His sexuality was manifested in the emphasis placed upon the voluptuous beauty of male dancers in his opulent productions.

### **Prominent Queer Patrons: Lincoln Kirstein**

Inspired by performances of the Ballets Russes in London (1929), Lincoln Kirstein (1906-1997) became determined to promote the development of avant-garde art in the United States. As a patron, Kirstein was able to draw on financial resources inherited from both of his parents. His father was chairman of Filene's Department Store, Boston, and his mother was the daughter of a successful clothing manufacturer in Rochester, New York.

In 1927, while a student at Harvard University, he founded the influential literary magazine, *Hound and Horn*, which published work by Ezra Pound, John Dos Passos, and e. e. cummings, among others. Funding and editing this magazine throughout the course of its run until 1934, Kirstein also wrote theatrical and dance reviews for it.

While traveling in Europe in 1933, Kirstein was impressed by productions of the avant-garde dance company *Les Ballets*, and he invited founder and director George Balanchine (1904-1983) to come to the United States. The following year, the two men established the American Ballet company, as the resident dance company of the Metropolitan Opera in New York, and the School of American Ballet. The arrangement of the American Ballet with the Metropolitan Opera proved unsatisfactory because the Opera would not allow Balanchine and Kirstein artistic freedom. Therefore, in 1946, Balanchine and Kirstein founded the Ballet Society, renamed the New York City Ballet in 1948. Together, Balanchine and Kirstein made this one of the most innovative dance companies in the world.

Director of the New York City Ballet until 1989, Kirstein commissioned and helped to fund its physical home: the New York State Theater building at Lincoln Center, designed in 1964 by gay architect Philip Johnson (1906-2005). Despite its conservative modernist exterior, the glittery red and gold interior recalls the imaginative and lavish backdrops of the Ballets Russes.

In addition to dance, Kirstein also was interested in the visual arts. After graduating from Harvard in 1930, he assisted in organizing exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art. In 1937, Kirstein met and fell in love with the painter Paul Cadmus (1904-99), who did not encourage his advances. In what Cadmus described as an effort to keep him close, Kirstein married the artist's sister, Fidelma Cadmus, in 1941. Although Kirstein and his wife enjoyed an amicable relationship, he continued to pursue affairs with other men. His homosexuality was an open secret in the New York art world, although he did not publicly acknowledge his sexual orientation until 1982.

Becoming the primary patron of Cadmus, Kirstein purchased many of his paintings and subsidized his living expenses. Because Cadmus's erotically charged depictions of working and middle class men provoked great controversy, he had difficulty selling his work through galleries. Kirstein's support made it possible for Cadmus to devote himself to the creation of a distinctly American form of gay male visual expression--simultaneously modernist, naturalistic, and heroic. Profoundly admiring Renaissance art, Cadmus utilized the time-consuming technique of egg tempera, as well as classical compositions and figure poses. Such large paintings as *Y.M.C.A Locker Room* (1933, John P. Axelrod, Boston) and *Sailors and Floosies* (1938, Whitney Museum of American Art) are infused with homoerotic feeling.

Among other visual artists, Kirstein also fostered the photography of George Platt Lynes (1907-1955). From 1934 onwards, Kirstein commissioned Lynes to create an ongoing photographic record of the dancers and productions of the American Ballet Company and, subsequently, of the New York City Ballet. In many cases, Lynes worked closely with Balanchine to create original tableaux that would convey the intentions of various ballets without replicating specific performances. In his photographs of Balanchine's *Yankee Clipper* (1937), Lynes conveyed the eroticism often associated with sailors in gay culture. The photographs of Balanchine's *Orpheus* (1950) are even more daring; these depict the virtually nude lead dancers (Nicholas Magallanes and Francisco Monicon) in sensuous caresses.

### **Prominent Queer Patrons: Carl Van Vechten**

During much of the twentieth century, European-American patrons seldom extended support to minority artists. Virtually unique among white, gay male patrons of the pre-Stonewall era, Carl Van Vechten (1880-1964) fostered the endeavors of African-American writers, musicians, and artists. Yet, Van Vechten remains a controversial figure, at least in part because many of his writings characterize African-American life in exotic terms.

Van Vechten's interest in African-American culture probably was encouraged by his father, who was one of the founders of a school for African-American children in rural Mississippi. While studying at the University of Chicago (1899-1903), Van Vechten became fascinated with ragtime and other African-American music. Moving to New York in 1906, he began writing regular columns on music, literature, and other arts for the *New York Times*, *Vanity Fair*, and other publications. After 1922, when he published his first novel, *Peter Whiffle: His Life and Works*, he wrote criticism on a more sporadic basis in order to devote more time to his own literary endeavors.

Although homosexual, he was married twice. In 1907, while on leave from the *Times* in England, Van Vechten married Anna Snyder, a childhood friend from Cedar Rapids; they were divorced in 1912. In 1914, he married Russian actress Fania Marinoff (1890-1971), and they remained together for the rest of Van Vechten's life. Their home quickly became a popular meeting place for prominent black and white writers, artists, intellectuals, and patrons.

Vechten found freedom from the constraints of mainstream white society in Harlem, where he frequently was seen in the company of handsome young African-American men. In the controversial novel *Nigger Heaven* (1926), he depicted Harlem as a place of sexual pleasure; both the title and content of the book aroused the anger of W. E. B. DuBois (1868-1963) and other African-American social and cultural leaders.

In the early 1930s, Miguel Covarrubias (1904-1957), a colleague at *Vanity Fair*, introduced him to the 35mm. Leica camera, and he began photographing his extensive circle of acquaintances, including many prominent figures of the Harlem Renaissance. The archive of nearly 1,400 photographic portraits by him at the Library of Congress constitutes a visual record of prominent figures in American cultural life from the early 1930s through the early 1960s.

Although the significance of Van Vechten's artistic patronage is often noted, his interactions with visual artists still have not been analyzed in the same detail as his relations with writers and musicians. Especially during the 1920s and early 1930s, Van Vechten encouraged his wealthy white friends to purchase works by African-American artists, and he helped to fund exhibitions of African-American art in New York. During the 1940s and 1950s, as Chairman of the Fine Arts Commission of Fisk University, Nashville, a historically African-American institution, he helped Fisk secure the Alfred Stieglitz Collection of modern art. At his death, he left Fisk a substantial endowment, which still helps fund its arts programs.

Among the artists whose work Van Vechten personally favored and collected extensively was the closeted gay artist James Richmond Barthé (1901-1989). Although utilizing traditional techniques, Barthé explored complex contemporary political and racial issues in his statues. Encouraged by Van Vechten and other homosexual patrons, Barthé infused many of his depictions of African-American men with profound homoerotic feeling.

Richard Bruce Nugent (1906-1987)--the only emphatically "out" gay artist and writer associated with the Harlem Renaissance--was photographed by Van Vechten, who showed him gazing at a bust of Antinous. However, Van Vechten never supported Nugent's artistic endeavors.

Utilizing a modernist style, Nugent fused diverse cultural traditions in his homoerotic illustrations. He provoked the anger of DuBois and other moralistic African-American cultural leaders because of his very frank representations of black gay sexuality. Numerous scholars have suggested that the explicitness of Nugent's sexual imagery disconcerted Van Vechten and prevented him from offering patronage. However, this explanation overlooks the graphic sexuality of *Nigger Heaven* and other works by Van Vechten himself. In a statement indicating the problems and limitations of patronage, Nugent stated that he never received support from Van Vechten simply because he refused to pay homage to him.

### **Prominent Queer Patrons: Betty Parsons**

Prominent New York gallery owner, Betty Parsons (1900-1982) fostered the work of gay and lesbian artists during the era of sexual repression following World War II. Raised in a wealthy New York family, she married Schuyler Parsons (1892-1967), a rich socialite, in 1919, but she divorced him in 1923 in Paris. Until dwindling financial resources forced her to return to the United States in 1933, she remained in Paris, where she studied painting. Friendly with Romaine Brooks and other leading figures in the American expatriate lesbian community, she was open about her romantic relationship with the Anglo-Irish painter, Adge Baker. However, in the more conservative environment of America, Parsons retreated into the closet and concealed her affairs with women from public view.

In 1936, Parsons had her first solo show at the Midtown Galleries, New York, the first of ten exhibitions there over the next 20 years, and she subsequently worked at this gallery, selling art on commission. In 1944 she was asked by dealer Mortimer Brandt to start a contemporary art section for his gallery, which until then had specialized exclusively in Old Masters. During the next two years at the Brandt Gallery, she exhibited such artists as Hans Hofmann, Ad Reinhardt, and Mark Rothko.

When Brandt decided to withdraw from the field of modern art in 1946, Parsons established her own gallery, the Betty Parsons Gallery, which became one of the most prestigious venues for progressive American art by 1950. Between 1946 and 1952, her gallery annually exhibited works by Jackson Pollock as well as Hofmann, Barnett Newman, Rothko, Clyfford Still, and other leading figures of the Abstract

Expressionist movement. However, Parsons never focused on only one kind of art and always tried to show many different interesting and provocative works. As Gibson has suggested, Parsons' insistence upon diversity may be correlated with her lesbian identity, which inherently involves rejection of dominant, monolithic social and sexual categories.

In 1952, the newly famous Pollock, Rothko, and Still presented Parsons with an ultimatum, demanding that she exhibit only Abstract Expressionist paintings if she wished to retain them as clients. Because Parsons refused to cede to this demand, the three artists severed their connections with her gallery, which had established their artistic reputations. Publicly, Pollock and his colleagues insisted that they objected only to the stylistic diversity of Parsons' gallery. However, it has been suggested that Pollock and others were disturbed by her inclusion of gay male and lesbian artists.

Among the artists to whom Pollock objected was Alphonso Ossorio (1916-1990), a gay painter, who, already during the 1950s, challenged Abstract Expressionism by creating opulent, decorative abstract paintings, which foreshadowed his later work in collage. Also represented by Parsons, Forrest Bess (1911-1977) created whimsical paintings with transsexual themes, such as *Untitled* (ca 1950, private collection, New York), which combines stylized phallic and vaginal references.

Struggling for mainstream success in a male-dominated art world, Parsons did not wish her gallery to be identified exclusively as a woman's gallery. Nevertheless, she represented numerous women artists, including the openly lesbian Sonia Sekula (1918-1963). Such works as *The Sun Room* (1948, Kunstmuseum, Winterthur, Switzerland) and *Give Me* (1948, private collection, New York) exemplify Sekula's imaginative version of the Abstract Expressionist style. Bright colors, decorative flourishes, and intimate scale distinguish her paintings from those of Pollock and some of the other leading male artists associated with Abstract Expressionism. Incorporating words and biomorphic shapes, Sekula's paintings of the mid-1950s, such as *Read Look* (1956, private collection, New York), foreshadow the development of Pop Art and, thus, exemplify the boldness and inventiveness, characteristic of the artists encouraged by Parsons.

### **Public Commissions in the Post-Stonewall Era**

Following the Stonewall Rebellion on June 28, 1969, the Gay Liberation movement helped to create new circumstances for the production of queer art. For the first time in the western world since the ancient Greek and Roman periods, organizations developed large-scale public art commissions that explicitly celebrated same-sex love and otherwise commemorated the experiences of glbtq people.

### **The Gay Activists Alliance Mural**

One of the first major undertakings of this type was the commission given in 1971 by the Gay Activists Alliance to John Button and Mario Dubsky, who created a forty-foot long, mixed mural at the New York Firehouse, the first headquarters of the organization.

The GAA was founded in New York City in December of 1969 by activists who wanted to work in a forceful, but non-violent, way for gay civil and social rights. Rented in 1971, the firehouse served not only as a center for political activities but also as a community meeting place. Popular weekly dances increased GAA membership, but also provoked discord as some members felt that these social events diluted the political goals of the organization. In 1974, the firehouse was burned down; it has never been determined whether homophobes or disgruntled members were responsible for this arson. The sudden destruction of the mural emphasized the tentative nature of gay communal visual expression in the early post-Stonewall years.

Very optimistic in spirit, the mural by Button and Dubsky provided an effective background for the diverse activities of the GAA. Visualizing the unity of gay liberation with other social causes, the mural included photographs of anti-war and civil rights demonstrations alongside images of gay marches. Furthermore, the civil rights activist Huey Newton and other leaders of various political struggles were represented in



photographs and paintings, as were such gay cultural icons as Plato and Whitman. Evoking the social functions of the center, the mural also included photographs of people enjoying communal interaction (socializing in bars, playing baseball in a park, etc.). Shown moving from darkness to light, painted nude male and female figures visualized the transition from oppression to liberation. "Gay Pride" and other slogans were painted in large capital letters over the entire surface.

Appropriately for a commission by an organization that sought to foster cooperation among individuals of varied backgrounds and perspectives, the mural project involved the collaboration of artists of different generations. Prior to undertaking this project, John Button (1929-1982) had gained mainstream success through his brightly colored landscapes and elegant portraits, although he occasionally discreetly produced male nudes for private clients. As a result of his work on the mural, Button publicly acknowledged his homosexuality and increasingly utilized his art in support of gay political causes.

Raised as a child of immigrants in London, Mario Dubsy (1939-1985) was aware of the significance of difference from an early age, although he did not come to grips with his homosexuality until the 1960s. With a Harkness Fellowship, he arrived in New York a few days before the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969, and he quickly became involved in gay political activities. However, prior to his work on the GAA mural, he primarily had produced abstract paintings, unconnected with social causes.

Influenced by his interaction with Button and with various representatives of GAA, Dubsy later focused upon figurative narratives of gay political struggle (for example, *Tom Pilgrim's Progress Among the Consequences of Christianity*, 1977-78). Thus, fulfilling the highest ideals of patronage, the GAA commission not only celebrated the purposes of the organization, but it also impacted the artists' careers.

### **Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center, NYC**

By the 1980s, increasing numbers of major art projects were being undertaken in glbtq communities. Among these, the art pieces sponsored in 1989 by the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center in New York City attracted national media attention.

In an effort to counter the sort of divisiveness that had afflicted the GAA, the Center, established in 1983, was intended to bring together a wide variety of different organizations. This concept proved to be successful, and, by 1989, the Center's ever-expanding membership had become discontented with the dismal conditions of its headquarters in Greenwich Village. To foster the creation of art responding to the diverse interests of its varied constituency and thereby improve the climate and decor of the building, the Center's board of directors invited fifty artists and artist groups to install pieces throughout the Center.

Although many of the projects were temporary, the mural created by Keith Haring (1958-1990) still decorates the second floor men's rest room. It has, in fact, become one of the most famous landmarks of gay culture in New York. Although Haring had become an international art star by 1989, he remained deeply suspicious of the capitalist system (including its art markets) and intensely committed to such political causes as AIDS activism and opposition to homophobia and to racism. His lively and deceptively simple pictographs combined inspiration from such diverse sources as graffiti, comic books, and various nonwestern artistic traditions.

Above the toilets and sinks of the Center men's room, Haring depicted greatly enlarged penises and stylized figures engaging in sex play with the same exuberance and ingenuity as Hieronymus Bosch did in the famous Renaissance masterpiece, *Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490s, Prado Museum, Madrid). Haring's mural more directly evokes the blunt homoerotic images that spontaneously appeared throughout the twentieth century on the walls of public men's rooms--places of surreptitious homosexual encounters that may have constituted the earliest public "gay spaces" of the modern era.

Many of the temporary installations presented at the New York Community Center stimulated viewer

interactions in exciting and innovative ways. For instance, Kiss-and-Tell, a three-woman collective from Vancouver, created *Drawing the Line*, which consisted of 100 photographs of two women, engaged in a range of sexual activities, from tender kissing to S/M. Visitors were asked to record their responses by writing on the wall, and these became part of the exhibition. These comments raised a variety of provocative issues about the relation of sexual acts to glbtq political movements.

**Bruce Voeller and the Mariposa Foundation**Commissioned in 1979 by the Mariposa Education and Research Foundation, the *Gay Liberation* sculptural monument, executed by George Segal, provoked intense controversy. Both this monument and a series of painted portraits for the foundation by Don Bachardy reflect the aspirations of the deeply committed gay activist, Bruce Voeller (1934-1994), one of the cofounders of the Mariposa Foundation.

Before his work in gay causes, Voeller had a distinguished career in developmental biology and biochemistry; in 1966, he became the youngest person in the history of Rockefeller University, New York, to attain the rank of Associate Professor. Married and the father of three children, he acknowledged his homosexuality at the age of 29. Following his divorce, he fought for child visitation rights in court and ultimately won a landmark decision from the U.S. Supreme Court on this matter. The experience of fighting that legal case convinced him of the importance of gay political action and led him to abandon his academic career in order to devote his energies to gay causes.

One of the founders of the GAA, he became disillusioned with the street protests increasingly favored by that group. Resigning from the GAA in 1973, he established the National Gay Task Force (later National Gay and Lesbian Task Force) to work for change within the mainstream political system. He forged important alliances with officials in the administration of President Jimmy Carter and helped to develop a broadly based national gay and lesbian rights organization. Despite these achievements, he left the Task Force in 1978 in order to establish the Mariposa Foundation for the study of sexuality (especially homosexuality) and the distribution of objective information about it. At the Foundation in the 1980s, he utilized his scientific knowledge to conduct many studies on the effectiveness of condoms and spermicides in preventing AIDS.

One of Voeller's first undertakings at the Mariposa Foundation was the project for a monument to *Gay Liberation* in Sheridan Park in Greenwich Village (NYC), directly opposite the Stonewall Inn. Expecting that the project would be completed before end of 1979, Voeller intended that it would mark the tenth anniversary of the Stonewall Rebellion. If it had been finished as Voeller initially planned, *Gay Liberation* also would have been the first monument to gay political struggles in the world.

Early in the planning stages, Voeller secured the financial support of eccentric philanthropist Peter Putnam (1925-1987), who had established the Mildred Andrews Fund, a foundation dedicated to funding public art, in honor of his mother. Putnam specified that the work "had to be loving and caring, and show the affection that is the hallmark of gay people. . . . And it had to have equal representation of men and women." In addition, the memorial had to be installed on public land.

However, Voeller had no success in his efforts to find a qualified gay or lesbian artist willing to undertake this community project. In particular, he devoted much time and energy to a futile attempt to persuade Louise Nevelson (1900-1988), a deeply closeted lesbian, to design the monument. Because Nevelson worked exclusively in an abstract style, Voeller must have been open to various approaches to sculptural design.

After several lesbian and gay artists had turned him down because they feared that association with a gay monument would hinder their career in the mainstream art world, Voeller offered the project to George Segal (1924-2000), who had shown a willingness to tackle controversial topics in his work.

The year before accepting the *Gay Liberation* commission, Segal completed *In Memory of May 4, 1970: Abraham and Isaac*, which honored the victims of the Kent State University slayings. Although Voeller is credited with suggesting Segal for the project, Putnam, who had funded Segal's Kent State sculpture

through the Mildred Andrews Foundation, certainly would have endorsed this choice. Furthermore, Segal had depicted lesbian couples sensitively in *The Girl Friends* (1969) and other works, and he had included a gay male couple in the installation piece, *Diner* (completed 1968). Believing that a gay artist might be better suited for the project, Segal hesitated to accept the commission. However, Voeller convinced Segal that the deep human sympathy that he had revealed in his previous works made him ideally suited to carry out *Gay Liberation*.

Like Voeller, Segal came to his vocation relatively late in life. Although he had received a degree in art, Segal primarily worked as a chicken farmer until 1958 when he decided to devote himself to art. By 1960, he began producing the kind of work for which he became famous--life-size unpainted plaster figures, usually combined with real objects to create expressive tableaux. The figures were made from casts taken from family and friends. In 1971, he devised a new technique, known as double casting, in which molten metal is poured into the interior of the plaster cast. This technique enabled him to create durable works, such as *Gay Liberation*, which could function as outdoor monuments.

Employing life-size bronzes (painted white), Segal devised an ensemble, consisting of a standing male couple and a female couple seated on a park bench. The couples were intended to look ordinary and, thus, to emphasize the normality of same-sex relationships. The poses are subtle rather than dramatic, but they eloquently suggest tender love. One man places his hand on the shoulder of his companion, and one of the women touches the thigh of the other.

The project involved two castings of *Gay Liberation*--one for Sheridan Square, the other for a location (to be determined) in Los Angeles, where the Mariposa Foundation was based. By the time that Segal finished the castings in 1980, the monument had provoked fierce opposition in both New York and Los Angeles.

Claiming that it was inappropriate in design and scale, Greenwich Village residents objected to the placement of the monument in Sheridan Square, and Catholics from throughout the metropolitan area protested it as a glorification of immorality. Furthermore, numerous gay and lesbian individuals and groups harshly criticized aspects of the project. Overlooking Voeller's intensive efforts to assign the monument to a gay or lesbian artist, many condemned the use of a "straight" artist. Perceiving the figures as sad, some claimed that the group did not provide a positive affirmation of gay life. In addition, many protested that these four European-American figures could not represent the cultural diversity of the glbtq community.

Although several New York City boards had granted permits for Segal's group, the city government prevented its installation by refusing to authorize needed landscaping in Sheridan Square. Similarly, Los Angeles refused to accept the sculpture for any site. The casting, intended for New York, was installed in a park in Madison, Wisconsin, and the version made for Los Angeles was accepted as a long-term loan by Stanford University, Palo Alto, California. Still on display on the Stanford campus, *Gay Liberation* has been badly damaged by vandals three times (1984, 1986, 1994), requiring that it be removed and restored. The profoundly disturbing attacks mobilized students and stimulated discussion about issues of sexual equality.

The version intended for New York was finally installed in Sheridan Square on June 23, 1992. Once again, protests were made about the sculpture on the same grounds that had been cited in 1980. In addition, some younger viewers found that the monument was too bound into the ideology of the era in which it was created. However, many individuals--both within and outside the glbtq communities--have come to appreciate *Gay Liberation* as an important and effective monument to same-sex love.

In contrast to the Segal project, the commission to Don Bachardy (b. 1934) was straightforward and free of controversy. In the late 1980s, Voeller asked Bachardy to produce portraits of twelve leaders in the struggle for sexual freedom--including, in addition to Voeller himself, Elaine Noble, Frank Kameny, Phyllis Lyon, Del Martin, Morris Kight, Charles Bryden, James Foster, David B. Goodstein, Jean O'Leary, Rev. Troy Perry, and Barbara Gittings.

Bachardy's direct, honest, and insightful style of portraiture seems in keeping with the ideals that Voeller embraced throughout his career. In 1995, Richard Lucik, Voeller's life partner and associate at the Mariposa Foundation, entrusted the portraits to the Human Sexuality Collection of Cornell University Library, the repository of Voeller's papers and other foundation documents.

### **The Homomonument**

Designed by Karin Daan (b. 1944), the *Homomonument* (1987) in Amsterdam has become one of the most widely recognized and admired of all public memorials to gay and lesbian struggles.

This project was not marred by the sorts of protests that inhibited the realization of the *Gay Liberation* monuments in New York and Los Angeles. Several factors may explain the differences in the evolution of these undertakings. First of all, the *Homomonument* benefited from the general tolerance of sexual diversity that has prevailed in Amsterdam in recent decades. Furthermore, the monument is based upon widely recognized, abstract symbols, rather than figures representing particular racial and cultural types. In addition, from the beginning, interaction with diverse community groups was made an essential part of the process of creating the monument. Daan is an "out" lesbian, but her sexual orientation was not an issue in her selection, which was based on a competition, involving many different types of individuals.

The monument is composed of three polished pink granite triangles--each measuring 10 x 10 x 10 meters--placed some distance from one another. Each of the elements can be appreciated individually, but, together, they define a large triangle (36 meters on each side). A series of pink granite steps lead down to one triangle, which extends out into the canal. Another triangle is raised as an impressive dais. A third, which is contained within the pavement of the city square, is inscribed with a line from Jacob Israel de Haan (1881-1924), a gay Dutch poet: "Such an endless desire for friendship." Because urban life carries on among the dispersed elements, one might not immediately recognize them as a cohesive monument, but when one does, one is impressed by the scale of the whole.

Used by the Nazis to identify homosexuals in concentration camps, the pink triangle commemorates the sufferings of the Holocaust; the location of the monument near the Anne Frank House reinforces this meaning. The effectiveness of the memorial is indicated by the floral tributes that are spontaneously (and continuously) laid on the triangles by visitors. However, because an inverted version of the pink triangle was adopted as a symbol by the Gay Liberation movement in the 1970s, the predominant design element also affirms recent struggles for freedom. The openness of the monument to the surrounding city emphasizes its relevance to the present and the future.

Beginning shortly after World War II, Dutch gay and lesbian groups discussed creating a public monument to Holocaust victims, but the idea had been allowed to languish. The immediate impetus for the project was the arrest in 1970 of gay activists who attempted to place a lavender wreath on the Dam Monument during the annual national memorial. Support for a glbtq Holocaust memorial grew throughout the 1970s.

Reflecting this sentiment, Bob Van Schijndel, a prominent member of the Pacifist Socialist Party, wrote a public letter in May 1979 to Mayor Polak, asking that he authorize a monument for the 200,000 gay and lesbian victims of the Holocaust. Although some members of the city council initially opposed this proposal, the pressure exerted by a coalition of Dutch gay and lesbian organizations helped to secure its approval later in 1979. Authorized by the city council, a committee (with representatives of various gay and lesbian organizations, the city government, and design professionals) devised a competition for the monument and unanimously selected Daan's design in 1981. Over the next several years, 180,000 euros were raised, primarily from individual donors, although the Amsterdam city council authorized 50,000 euros for the project. The *Homomonument* was unveiled on September 5, 1987, exactly 100 days after ground had been broken for it.

### **Cathedral of Hope, Dallas**

With a ceiling one hundred feet above the altar, the Cathedral of Hope will be the largest glbtq memorial structure in the world, when completed according to the plans prepared by Philip Johnson in 1998.

This two-thousand seat sanctuary was commissioned by Dallas's Cathedral of Hope, then a congregation of the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), a glbtq Protestant denomination, established in 1968 in Los Angeles. Founded on July 30, 1970 by twelve individuals meeting at a private house, the Dallas congregation grew rapidly. In July 2003, when the Dallas congregation voted to leave the MCC and to become an independent, liberal congregation, open to all the faithful, it numbered more than 2,000 members and supported an extensive program of social and health care services, as well as ministries to various Dallas communities. In 2006, the Cathedral affiliated with the United Church of Christ, one of the most gay-supportive of mainstream Christian denominations in the United States.

Philip Johnson was an appropriate choice for this important commission for several reasons. On a personal level, it is significant that he had acknowledged his homosexuality publicly only two years previously, after a lifetime of hiding in the closet. Although Johnson had long been a proclaimed agnostic, he had become increasingly involved with religion as he sought a way to cope with guilt relating to his support of Nazism during the early 1940s.

In the final years of his career, Johnson was becoming increasingly bold in his conception of forms; utilizing computer design, he was able to envision for the Cathedral an imaginative structure with great freedom of shape. Designed without any straight or parallel lines, the Cathedral incorporates many varied forms, which represent the diversity of the membership of the church. Creating an organic whole, the walls merge into floors and ceiling. The boldness and strength of the shapes of the Cathedral are intended to evoke the power of Spanish colonial missions without imitating them.

The congregation has made some important steps to realizing this structure (which will cost over \$20,000,000), including acquiring twenty acres of land for its construction. Two components of Johnson's design have been completed: the seventy-eight foot tall John Thomas Memorial Bell Wall, dedicated to individuals who have died of AIDS (inaugurated 2000), and a two-story counseling and social center (completed 2002). With its enormous scale and inspiring design, the Cathedral of Hope well exemplifies the radical transformation of glbtq art production and patronage since the 1900s.

In the decades prior to Stonewall, queer artists, subsidizing their own careers, and queer patrons, encouraging the work of others, strove to produce visual expressions of lifestyles and aspirations that were denied by the mainstream. In the process, these artists and patrons made significant contributions to the general development of modernist art. However, the queer meanings of their endeavors were not explicitly acknowledged in public contexts.

A new era of queer art was initiated by the Stonewall Rebellion. From the earliest stages of the liberation movement, organizations and individuals have commissioned large-scale visual arts projects to commemorate the struggles and celebrate the achievements of the glbtq communities.

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### **About the Author**

**Richard G. Mann** is Professor of Art at San Francisco State University, where he regularly offers a two-semester multicultural course in Queer Art History. His publications include *El Greco and His Patrons* and *Spanish Paintings of the Fifteenth through Nineteenth Centuries*.