2024

Beyond Walls: The Artwork of Women and Queer Artists in Interior Spaces

Sabina C. Ward

Beyond Walls: The Artwork of Women and Queer Artists in Interior Spaces

and

Beyond Walls: Artistic Reflections on First Apartments, Finding Identity, and Community Bonds

Beyond Walls: The Artwork of Women and Queer Artists in Interior Spaces

Sabina Ward
University of Vermont
College Honors Thesis
Spring 2024

Table of Contents

Section 1: Introduction

Virginia Woolf

Rumor has it that it all began in a bathtub. In 1931, Virginia Woolf had an epiphany the day before delivering an address to the London and National Society for Women's Service.[1] Her epiphany centered on the significance of "experience" for writers; she believed that writers draw inspiration from their experiences for their work, but she felt that societal constraints, epitomized in the "Angel in the House" archetype,[2] hindered women from gaining these experiences and expressing their opinions based on them. This was not new to Woolf, who had struggled with her own gender in relation to her career as a writer; her 1929 book A Room of One's Own has become a cornerstone for feminist theory. In it, Woolf argues that women need a dedicated space for writing and financial independence from men to reach their full creative potential.[3] These conditions were necessary to Woolf's own self-actualization as a writer and should be accessible to all women. Woolf's experiences highlight the role that interior spaces play in the actualization of the creative self. For Woolf, these interior spaces encompass mental and emotional realms and physical surroundings.

In contrast, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1892 short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" illustrates the perils of being forced into an interior space without autonomy. The story's protagonist is a woman vacationing with her husband after the birth of her daughter. She slowly

---

[1] Carina Chocano, "Why Suppress the 'Experience' of Half the World?," *The New York Times*, October 23, 2018, sec. Magazine, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/23/magazine/why-suppress-the-experience-of-half-the-world.html.

[2] The "Angel of the House" was the role that women were supposed to take on in the domestic interior; they were supposed to be loving mothers and doting wives, all while prioritizing the wellbeing of their husbands and sons over their own and never expressing discomfort or discontent.

[3] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 3.5.2012 edition (Lightning Source Inc, 2012).

descends into madness as she convinces herself that she is trapped in her room's yellow wallpaper, and that her husband is to blame for her predicament. Her husband believes her passion for writing exacerbates her mental state and forbids her from continuing, but she secretly writes, detailing her descent into madness as she hallucinates images in the patterns of the wallpaper. The pivotal image that drives her to madness is that of a woman imprisoned behind bars, reflecting her own sense of entrapment in the house by her husband and within her marriage to him.[4]

What Woolf and Perkins Gilman express are two facets of the same issue, distinguished by consent. Woolf willingly withdraws into her own space to seek creative greatness and access her full potential. Conversely, Perkins Gilman's protagonist is forced into seclusion and the sensation of confinement leads to her mental unraveling. In a society that rigidly prescribed "proper" conduct for women, the interior space held the potential for boundless creativity or a gradual descent into madness, depending on agency and autonomy.

The prescribed conduct for women dictated their experience in exterior spaces in a way that men did not experience. As such, the experience of interior and exterior spaces is different for those who have a prescribed role in the exterior. The perception of the difference between interior and exterior is dependent on an understanding of the other, and so the understanding of "interior" is dependent on regular exposure to the exterior. It is this idea of "experience" that Virginia Woolf is writes about.

Female artists Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt, contemporaries of Perkins Gilman and Woolf, use their art to confront the interior space imposed by their gender and transform it into a

[4] The most succinct and poignant analysis of "The Yellow Wallpaper" I have ever read is written in three hands on the bathroom wall in Williams Hall and reads: "Read the Yellow Wallpaper, and tell me what it told you" "That the prison of domesticity that men lock women in slowly drives us insane" "So dump him <3"

source of creative inspiration, defying its potential to drive them to madness. They reclaim this space and utilize it within their paintings to comment on the condition of womanhood. Building upon Morisot and Cassatt's legacy in the mid to late 20th century, Alice Neel elevates the interior from mere setting to a theatrical stage in her portraiture, granting her subjects the space to assert their individuality, reflecting both the sitter and the artist.[5] In contrast, contemporary painter Jenna Gribbon abandons staged settings and instead paints intimate domestic scenes that celebrate the joy and banality of interior space.

Queer artists have similarly either chosen or been forced into interior spaces due to the public perceptions of their sexuality and have utilized the interior in a manner similar to female artists. In Alison Bechdel's comic strips of interiors feature domestic scenes that normalize and destigmatize the lives of lesbians. Félix González-Torres employs the interior as a canvas for portraying his life and the constraints imposed upon him by contemporary politics. Doron Langberg's works explore his queerness and the infinite possibilities of queerness shaped by changing political ideology.[6] Through individual artistic expression, these artists create a nuanced dialogue around interior spaces, and explore their potential and limitations within the context of queer identity.

As evidenced in the works of Woolf and Perkins Gilman, the concept of the interior poses a is dual in nature. For those with access to the public sphere, historically and predominantly men, the "inside" represents a haven to relax and seek comfort. In *At Home: An*

[5] I am aware that there is roughly hundred years between Morisot and Cassatt and Alice Neel, and while the early 20th century was rife with creative development, the traumas surrounding WW1 and WW2 drove art movements towards Abstraction and more technical investigations. While important to art history, these concepts are not relevant to this paper.

[6] There are earlier artists whose work is largely perceived as "queer", but to avoid retroactively assigning sexuality to those who never explicitly defined it for themselves, I chose artists who have spoken explicitly about their sexuality.

Anthropology of Domestic Space, Irene Cieraad argues that the notion of "privacy" is intrinsically linked to the idea of the "public."[7] Individuals who are not frequently in public spaces do not experience "privacy" in the same manner as those that are. Understanding one concept necessitates an understanding of the other, as they are interdependent.

I argue that the concept of "interiority" operates similarly. The perception of the "interior" varies depending on one's regular exposure to the exterior. Individuals who effortlessly navigate these realms often view the exterior as a space of productivity, whether in artistic pursuits or traditional career fields. Conversely, for those who find the exterior less welcoming, their identity is intricately linked to their perception of interior space and the environments they cultivate, rather than what lies beyond their reach.

In the art of women and queer artists, the concept of interiority expands into a multifaceted world as complex as any exterior world. Artists such as Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt, both working during the Impressionist era (1860s-1880s),[8] delve into the roles women adopt when confronting the boundaries between interior and exterior spaces. The Impressionists enjoyed unprecedented artistic freedom. The advent of photography relieved artists of the obligation to produce strictly "truthful" representations of reality, enabling them to experiment with style, medium, and location. Artists were liberated from the studio and no longer beholden to commissioner demands. This, coupled with the invention of the French easel- a small, portable easel equipped with straps and compartments for paint and brushes – and tubed paint, which

[7] Irene Cieraad and John Rennie Short, "Introduction: Anthropology at Home," in *At Home*, ed. Irene Cieraad, An Anthropology of Domestic Space (Syracuse University Press, 1999), 1–12, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1w36pj9.6.
[8] "Impressionism Movement Overview," The Art Story, accessed April 10, 2024, https://www.theartstory.org/movement/impressionism/.

eliminated the need for manual mixing and facilitated easy transport,[9] mean that artists could venture out of the studio and paint en plein air, capturing contemporary subject matter from life.

While male Impressionists like Edouard Manet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir painted multiple studies of the same exterior scenes, focusing on capturing changing light throughout the day, social conventions limited the access of female artists like Morisot and Cassatt. Despite their ability to paint landscapes and outdoor scenes, they predominantly depicted domestic interiors. French society remained far from "feminist" enough to grant Morisot and Cassatt the same freedom to paint in the same public spaces as their male counterparts, in spite of many advancements in women's rights throughout the 19th century.

Berthe Morisot's *Artist's Sister at a Window,*[10] 1869,[11] serves as a poignant illustration of the tension between interior and exterior realms. While the artist hints at an exterior scene through the view beyond the window, the subject remains confined within the interior world. In contrast, Mary Cassatt's *Reading "Le Figaro",*[12] 1878,[13] exemplifies the complexity of women's interior worlds. Le Figaro is a French newspaper with a history of publishing political satire and is now a center-right leaning publication.[14] The painting serves as a testament to women's capacity for engaging in complex intellectual pursuits, explicitly highlighting their academic and intellectual potential. In by the late 20th century advancements in social and civil liberties, such as the right to vote, property ownership, and financial independence- all concepts Virginia Woolf

[9] "From the Archives: The History of the Metal Paint Tube," Winsor & Newton - North America, accessed April 10, 2024, https://www.winsornewton.com/na/articles/art-history/history-metal-paint-tube/.
[10] See Appendix of Images: Figure 1
[11] Berthe Morisot, *The Artist's Sister at a Window,* 1869, oil on canvas, overall: 54.8 x 46.3 cm (21 9/16 x 18 1/4 in.), framed: 74.93 × 67.31 × 10.8 cm (29 1/2 × 26 1/2 × 4 1/4 in.), 1869.
[12] See Appendix of Images: Figure 2
[13] Mary Cassatt, "Reading Le Figaro by Cassatt," World History Encyclopedia, accessed April 6, 2024, https://www.worldhistory.org/image/15908/reading-le-figaro-by-cassatt/.
[14] "Le Figaro - Actualité En Direct et Informations En Continu," Le Figaro, April 6, 2024, https://www.lefigaro.fr/.

championed as early as the 1920s- allowed female painters even more freedom. This allowed painter Alice Neel to build upon the legacies of Morisot and Cassatt. Neel's portraits create a pictorial space in which her subjects confront the viewer directly. Their gaze is candid and, although somewhat stylized, refuses to succumb to idealization. This is most poignantly demonstrated in her piece *Marxist Girl (Irene Peslikis),* 1972.[15] While Morisot and Cassatt's subjects do not confront the viewer, Neel's representation of Peslikis unflinchingly stares at the viewer. The freedoms afforded by second wave feminism and shifting societal roles enable Neel's subject to fully inhabit her space. Contemporary painter Jenna Gribbon further builds upon the groundwork laid by Morisot, Cassatt, and Neel in her piece *Pollyanna Wrestlers,* [16] depicting two women locked in a wrestling match within a decorated interior space. There is evidence of individuality in the setting- the space has been decorated with furniture and art. In this piece, the interior space is no longer a stage on which the female subject is laid out for consumption or confrontation of the viewer.

Unlike in Morisot's and Cassatt's pieces, where subjects seem visually consumable, Neel's piece creates a confrontational atmosphere with its direct gaze. However, in Gribbon's paintings, while the subjects do not address the viewer directly, their engagement with each other shifts the focal point away from the viewer-subject dynamic. The primary interaction lies between the two subjects within the painting, rather than between subject and viewer.

The tension between interior and exterior spaces is also evident in the works of queer artists such as Alison Bechdel, Félix González-Torres, and Doron Langberg. Bechdel's comic

[15] See Appendix of Images: Figure 3
[16] See Appendix of Images: Figure 4

strip *Dykes to Watch Out For*[17] serves as both a record of lesbian life in the 1980s and 1990s[18] and as an argument for the importance of a queer archive.[19] In a society where marginalized groups are excluded from mainstream narratives and historical documentation, community-driven archives become essential. Bechdel's *Dykes to Watch Out For*[20] employs interiors to underscore the significance of mundane moments in lesbian live, highlighting the vitality of community archiving.

Félix González-Torres's work, created during an era of government indifference to the devastation caused by the AIDS crisis within the queer community, was often relegated to interior spaces. While González-Torres did not explicitly portray his queer relationships, his work *Untitled (Billboard of an Empty Bed),*[21] 1991, embodies the tension of an artist wanting to publicly portray a private relationship. [22]

Doron Langberg's contemporary portraits exist in a place of unreality, oscillating between sketch and complete painting multiple times in the same work. This liminal quality captures a sense of transition and possibility. In *Louis, Tristan, and Sarah,*[23] 2017, the interior becomes a space of endless possibility. Its lack of stage-like presentation and incomplete rendering allow for countless interpretations, scenarios, and resolutions to unfold.

[17] See Appendix of Images: Figure 5
[18] "Dykes to Watch Out For » Frivolous, Aimless Queries," accessed April 6, 2024, https://dykestowatchoutfor.com/frivolous-aimless-queries/.
[19] Margaret Galvan, "'The Lesbian Norman Rockwell': Alison Bechdel and Queer Grassroots Networks," *American Literature* 90, no. 2 (June 1, 2018): 407–38, https://doi.org/10.1215/00029831-4564358.
[20] See Figure 5
[21] See Appendix of Images: Figure 6
[22] "MoMA | Print/Out: Felix Gonzalez-Torres," accessed April 6, 2024, https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2012/04/04/printout-felix-gonzalez-torres/.
[23] See Appendix of Images: Figure 7

Section 2: Definitions

Queerness and Womanhood

It is crucial to have working definitions of "queerness" and "womanhood" due to the fluid and evolving nature of these concepts. Both terms encompass a multitude of meanings, and their interpretations vary across different contexts and time periods. In this paper, I acknowledge that our modern understandings of sexuality and gender may not fully capture the complexities of historical materials. Therefore, my analysis relies on the social norms prevalent at the time of a piece's creation.

For the purposes of this discussion, I define "womanhood" as the state of being a woman, with a "woman" being anyone who identifies as such. Similarly, "queerness" encompasses non-heteronormative sexual orientations and gender identities, acknowledging the shifting definitions and perceptions of queerness throughout history, particularly in contrast to contemporary understandings. Queerness in particular has shifted massively in its definition, as recently as the 1980s. In this paper, I discuss materials to which our modern understandings of sexuality and gender are simply not applicable. My analysis is based on definitions of the period in which a piece was created.

Many theorists, including prominent figures such as Judith Butler and Susan Sontag, have grappled with defining queerness. However, Warren Hedges succinctly captures its essence by saying, "to say that someone is "queer" indicates an indeterminacy or indecipherability about their sexuality and gender, a sense that one cannot be categorized".[24] Hedges suggests that

[24] Warren Hedges, "Howells's 'Wretched Fetishes': Character, Realism, and Other Modern Instances," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 38, no. 1 (1996): 26–50.

queerness implies an ambiguity or incomprehensibility regarding sexuality and gender, rendering individuals uncategorizable. Ironically, the most defining aspect of queerness is its indefinability. Painter Doron Langberg further expands the definition of queerness by saying, "Once you try to pinpoint exactly what makes the painting queer, it dissolves… It's not that this brushstroke is gay, and this one is not, but that the slippage is echoed in the way the paintings are made."[25] Queerness, as described by these two writers, encompasses an element of "un-categorize-ability"- a tangible yet elusive quality that defies easy definition.

While modern definitions of sexuality and gender cannot be retroactively applied to the past, this definition of "queerness" can shed light on historical figures who defy categorization. Although they may not have been explicitly labeled as queer in their time, the experiences of figures such as Oscar Wilde, Rosa Bonheur, and Alice Austen exemplify the notion of indecipherability and resistance to categorization.

British writer Oscar Wilde was deemed overly feminine,[26] and convicted of "gross indecency" and sodomy in 1895.[27] Similarly, French artist Rosa Bonheur described themselves as "the husband" in their relationships and frequently dressed in masculine clothing and sought special permission from the French government to wear pants in public.[28] American photographer Alice Austen lived and worked in New York City between 1884 and 1952, and

[25] Jennifer Samet, "Beer with a Painter: Doron Langberg," Hyperallergic, August 17, 2019, http://hyperallergic.com/513615/beer-with-a-painter-doron-langberg/.
[26] "Femininity and the Female Presence in Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Grey," accessed April 6, 2024, https://diposit.ub.edu/dspace/bitstream/2445/170821/1/BRIAS%20ALIAGA%2C%20Nu%CC%81ria%20TFG.pdf.
[27] History com Editors, "Oscar Wilde Is Sent to Prison for Indecency," HISTORY, accessed November 7, 2022, https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/oscar-wilde-is-sent-to-prison-for-indecency.
[28] "The Life of Rosa Bonheur," National Museums Liverpool, accessed April 6, 2024, https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/stories/life-of-rosa-bonheur.

lived with a woman until she was 84 years old, yet there was no mention of her life partner when their home was turned into a museum to memorialize Austen's work.[29]

While it would be inaccurate to impose modern labels of sexuality and gender onto these historical figures, it is apt to describe them as existing within a space of "indeterminacy." Moreover, the interaction between public and private space played a significant role in shaping the perception of their sexuality. Wilde's offense was not merely sodomy, but his public expression of his private sexual desires. Bonheur's need to seek special permission to publicly wear pants, highlights the contrast between public and private acceptance. The erasure of Austen's life partner from public memory underscores the complexities of navigating public and private realms in relation to sexuality and identity.

There is also an inherently communal nature to both womanhood and queerness. Marginalization and exclusion from mainstream culture creates a void of community that must be filled. Regarding queerness, this community is not one of blood, but rather one that is self-determined. Womanhood is less nebulous in its community, but that does not negate the chosen family aspect of womanhood. In both cases there is safety to be found in community.

Ways of Seeing

John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* is comprised of a series of seven short visual essays that were originally aired by the British Broadcasting Corporation in1972.[30] Within the series - and his seminal text - Berger explores the multifaceted nature of seeing, asserting that the act of

[29] Sabina Ward, "Keith Haring, Queer Temporality, and Art During AIDS," n.d.
[30] "Ways of Seeing by John Berger," accessed April 6, 2024, https://www.ways-of-seeing.com/.

viewing involves not only observing an object but also interpreting it in relation to oneself. He goes onto argue that this process is inseparable from the awareness of being seen by others Berger posits the idea that the act of "seeing" is never just one thing because, when we are looking at an object, we are also understanding it in relation to ourselves. In other words, an object cannot be separated from our perception of it. Furthermore, he argues that this process is inseparable from the awareness of being seen by others. Berger suggests that there is a gendered division between seeing and being seen, by positing that men predominantly engage in seeing, whereas women navigate both seeing and being seen, subjected to external and internal scrutiny. Margaret Atwood also echoes this sentiment, articulating that even the act of disavowing male fantasies is itself a male fantasy.[31] Women, she suggests, are constantly conscious of being observed, both externally and internally, navigating a reality where they are simultaneously the observer and the observed. I argue that queer people are also subject to the scrutiny of both seeing and being seen. Being visibly queer is both an act bravery and defiance. While Atwood and Berger both focus on the performance of womanhood, I argue that all gender involves some degree of performance. This concept extends to manhood as well since societal norms dictate certain behaviors and appearances associated with masculinity.

Sexuality falls into this framework, with heterosexuality often considered as the default. As a result, non-heterosexual individuals are immediately subjected to speculation and scrutiny when their sexuality is visible. The scrutiny exists even within progressive and accepting communities, highlighting the perpetual otherness experienced by queer people and the self-scrutiny that they undergo.

[31] GILLIAN ME ALBAN, "Medusa as Female Eye or Icon in Atwood, Murdoch, Carter, and Plath," *Mosaic (Winnipeg)* 46, no. 4 (2013): 163–82, https://doi.org/10.1353/mos.2013.0045.

Because of this, both women and queer individuals find solace in interior spaces where they can abandon the performance of self and escape scrutiny. These spaces offer a respite from the constant gaze of society, allowing individuals to simply exist without the pressure of being looked at. This dynamic is reflected in the works of artists who create environments free from scrutiny, where viewers can engage in looking rather than being looked at.

Women in the Picture

In *Women in the Picture,* art historian Catherine McCormack examines the roles that women have occupied in art history orders them into four distinct archetypes: "Venuses," "Maidens," "Mothers," and "Monsters."[32] These involuntary characterizations reduce women to mere subjects of the male gaze and consumption. For instance, in the portrayal of Ophelias, a subset of Maidens, the female subject is depicted in a literal state of death, emphasizing her lack of agency and position as an object purely for visual consumption. Depictions of the figures such as the Virgin Mary serve not only to be viewed but also to nurture and support male figures within the artwork, such as Jesus. Even in cases where women are portrayed as "Monsters," potentially possessing mythological power and therefore agency, their presentation is often framed in a way that caters exclusively to the male viewer's gaze. Any semblance of power or agency is overshadowed by the emphasis on their perceived feminine allure and sexuality. The auto-representation of women often defies these tropes, and understanding of women *in* the picture is crucial context with which to examine the women *painting* the pictures. Berthe

[32]Catherine McCormack, *Women in the Picture: What Culture Does with Female Bodies* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2021).

Morisot, Mary Cassatt, Alice Neel and Jenna Gribbon disrupt art historical iconography and reclaim power from the viewer.

Section 3: The Girls

Artists Sister at a Window, Berthe Morisot

Berthe Morisot, French painter active in the late 19th century, was born into privilege in 1841 and relocated to Paris at a young age. Encouraged by her parents, Morisot's first exhibition was in the Salon de Paris when she was 23 years old. While her early works were meticulously rendered, her later works reveal more visible brushstrokes and glimpses of the canvas at the painting's edges. Morisot's preferred subjects often included women and girls in domestic settings, with a notable focus on capturing their enigmatic expression, which frequently bordered on boredom or irritation.[33]

. In Berthe Morisot's 1869 painting, *Artist's Sister at a Window*,[34] the figure has a serene and tranquil comportment. The painting depicts a central figure, seated in an armchair and holding a fan. Dressed in white, her hair falls down her neck in in thick curls that are tied with a black bow. Behind her stands a small writing desk. Through the window there is a view of a balcony with an arched railing, lush greenery, and another building across a tree-lined street. The central figure occupies the foreground, framed by the large window which dominates the visual space of the painting.

[33] Paul, "Berthe Morisot: A Woman Artist in a Man's World," 1000Museums, January 5, 2021, https://www.1000museums.com/berthe-morisot-paintings/.
[34] See Figure 1

The painting's color palette is predominantly subdued, with neutral light blues and ochers overwhelming the composition. The choice of colors contributes to an overall atmosphere of stillness and tranquility. The composition skillfully guides the viewer's gaze, with lines like those formed by the figure's knee, the frame of the window, and the arm of the chair guiding attention towards her hemline. The very tip of a red shoe can be seen delicately perched on the windowsill. This unexpected pop of color creates a moment of visual dissonance within the otherwise harmonious palette of the painting. The contrast of the red shoe against the subdued tones of the rest of the composition disrupts the flow of the dress's hemline, adding an intriguing element of tension and intrigue to the scene. This minute detail shifts the interpretation of the painting from one of a quiet interior scene to a critique of gender roles. Through this one action of placing her foot on the windowsill, the figure in this painting is "toeing" the line of acceptability. The red shoe subtly transforms the interpretation of the painting from a simple depiction of a quiet interior scene to a critique of gender roles. The act of placing her foot on the windowsill serves as a symbolic gesture, challenging the boundaries between the interior and exterior, as well as the traditional division between the domestic and public spheres.

Public and private spaces have not always been subject to such rigid divisions- in *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space,* Irene Cieraad explores the historical origins of the division between the interior and exterior spaces, tracing its roots to the urbanization of cities in the Netherlands during the 17th and 18th.[35] As cities rapidly expanded, there arose a moral imperative to separate the public and private spheres, which manifested in the architectural

[35] Irene Cieraad and John Rennie Short, "Dutch Windows: Female Virtue and Female Vice," in *At Home*, ed. Irene Cieraad, An Anthropology of Domestic Space (Syracuse University Press, 1999), 31–52, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1w36pj9.8.

layout of the buildings and homes. The emergence of smaller, compartmentalized rooms facilitated this division between the inside and the outside worlds.

This transition was further influenced by scientific discoveries regarding disease transmission and germs, which were particularly relevant in densely populated urban environments. Women felt the impact of this shift, as their removal from the public view became not only a moral necessity, but also a matter of health. However, the ability to retreat from society varied across social classes, with only the upper classes having the means to afford homes with sufficient space for such privacy. However, this retreat became tenuous around the windows. Less permeable than the door, the window remained a point of transition between the inside and the outside, the public and private, the interior and exterior realms. While windows were integral to domestic duties and housekeeping, they also posed risks to women's health and social standing.[36] Actions visible through the window could potentially compromise one's virtue and societal standing, highlighting the delicate balance between maintaining privacy and navigating social expectations. Morisot's painting captures a figure existing within the liminal space between the public and private spheres. The woman depicted in *Artist's Sister at a Window*[37] occupies a position that challenges traditional notions of femininity and domesticity. Instead of retreating from the division between these spaces, she boldly straddles both worlds. Moreover, the painting invites viewers to contemplate the complexities of identity and self-expression within restrictive social frameworks. The figure's enigmatic expression and poised demeanor suggest a sense of introspection and resilience in the face of societal scrutiny. In Morisot's portrayal, the window becomes a metaphorical threshold, representing the blurred boundary between public visibility and private autonomy. The figure's presence in this liminal

[36] Cieraad and Short.
[37] See Figure 1

space speaks to the nuanced experiences of women navigating between societal expectations and personal freedom.

Reading Le Figaro, Mary Cassatt

Like Berthe Morisot, Mary Cassatt was a prominent figure in the Impressionist movement in France. Although she was American born, Cassatt moved to Paris to pursue her artistic studies, and became deeply involved in the Impressionist movement. Renowned for her sensitive and empathetic portrayals of women, as well as command of color and light, Cassatt's paintings are a testament to her commitment to celebrating the individual and interior lives of women. At the heart of Cassatt's work is a dedication to centering women and their relationships, offering a voice to a generation of women who were often relegated to supporting roles in art and society. Despite facing criticism during her lifetime for her use of models considered "ugly" or unconventional, Cassatt remained steadfast in her determination to create stunning works of art that transcend societal norms of beauty. Her insistence on portraying women authentically, regardless of conventional standards of attractiveness, speaks to her unwavering commitment to capturing the truth and complexity of the female experience. [38]

In Cassatt's *Reading "Le Figaro,"*[39] from 1878,[40] the focal point is a woman engrossed in reading a newspaper. Seated on a patterned chair in a white walled room, she is framed by a mirror behind her that reflects a corner of the newspaper and the back of her hand. Perched on

[38] "The Women Impressionists Forgotten by History," accessed April 8, 2024, https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20180807-the-women-impressionists-forgotten-by-history.
[39] See Figure 2
[40] "Mary Cassatt Reading Le Figaro, 1878 Painting Reproduction | Marycassatt.Org," accessed April 8, 2024, https://www.marycassatt.org/Reading-Le-Figaro-1878.html.

her nose is a pince-nez, and her hair is elegantly gathered into a knot at the nape of her neck. Her demeanor exudes confidence, suggesting a maturity and wisdom acquired through experience in middle age.

In a manner reminiscent of Morisot's *Artist's Sister at a Window*,[41] Cassatt's *Reading Le Figaro*[42] also confronts the gendered dynamics of space and place. Unlike the fan held by Morisot's sister, the newspaper in Cassatt's painting carries masculine connotations and is an object that enters the house from outside. Its inclusion within the interior space of the painting suggests a crossing of the divide between the public and private realms, as discussed in *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space*.

As in Morisot's *Artist's Sister at a Window*,[43] the figure in Cassatt's painting is clad in white, symbolizing purity both in herself and the reputation of her family. This absence of tarnishing suggests a metaphysical purity as well – her engagement with an object traditionally associated with the masculine realm has not diminished her virtue. Cassatt's choice to depict her subject engrossed in Le Figaro, a satirical publication, conveys a subtle yet significant message about the intelligence and sophistication of the figure. By suggesting that the woman not only understands satire but also engages with current events and politics, Cassatt elevates her subject's intellectual prowess. This portrayal challenges traditional notions of women's roles and suggests a broader engagement with the external world.

Moreover, Cassatt's interest in Symbolism adds another layer of depth to the painting, as she employs symbolic elements to enhance its meaning. The warm-off-white color of the wall behind the figure's head, combined with her engagement with the intellectual newspaper,

[41] See Figure 1
[42] See Figure 2
[43] See Figure 1

symbolizes academic enlightenment and curiosity. Despite her engagement with an object associated more with the outside world, and with intellectual pursuits, there are no visible ink smudges on the figure's dress or fingers, indicating that she is physical unsullied by this interaction. In essence, her interaction with the external world has not compromised her inner purity or domestic integrity. Cassatt's painting not only captures a moment of quiet contemplation but also challenges societal norms and celebrates the intellectual capacity of women. Through nuanced symbolism and careful composition, Cassatt invites viewers to reconsider traditional gender roles and appreciate the complexity of the female identity.

The figure in this painting is taking up more space than that in Morisot's work. She occupies almost the entire picture plane- her skirt extends off the bottom left edge about where her knees would be, her head reaches diagonally up into the upper right corner, and her straight posture gives the distinct impression that she is not at all concerned by the amount space that she is taking up. Her reflection in the mirror alludes to an "other side" of her- showing that there may be something that may not meet the eye. It also visually extends the space; there is an implication that there is a space beyond that which is initially shown in the painting. This implication of more space represented the unseen of the domestic interior that women were responsible for. Upon first entrance into a home, there are entire sections that visitors are not invited to engaged with, on account of social norms, and like the mirror in the painting, are only alluded to by closed doors.

In Morisot's *Artist's Sister at a Window*,[44] the background and the figure are both rendered in hazy brushstrokes. There are no harsh lines or concrete definition between objects; they fade in and out of each other. The palette of the painting is made up of in desaturated mid-

[44] See Figure 1

tones with few instances of highly saturated dark colors. Taken together, these elements give the impression that the figure in Morisot's painting is indistinguishable from the background. Rendered with the same treatment as the chair and the writing desk, she becomes another element of furniture in the room. This is juxtaposed against Cassatt's painting, which is a study in contrast- the white dress and cream-colored walls stand out against the darkness of the figure's hair, the shadows in the mirror and the botanical patterns on the chair. The representation of the figure in Cassatt's piece causes the figure to stand out against the background and brings her into focus. Although she is seated in the same position as Morisot's figure, she is the central focus of the painting. This treatment of subject matter distinguishes Morisot's figure- who becomes part of the landscape of the painting- from Cassatt's figure, changing the genre of the painting from a simple interior scene to a true portrait.

Marxist Girl, Alice Neel

Born in Pennsylvania in 1900, Alice Neel was a trailblazing artist who championed "women's lib before there was women's lib."[45] Formally trained in figure painting, she married and briefly lived in Havana before returning to Philadelphia, where tragedy struck with the loss of her first daughter to diphtheria. From there, Neel had one more daughter with her husband, who returned to Havana in 1930, and whom she would never see again. She had two more sons,

[45] Denise Bauer, "Alice Neel's Feminist and Leftist Portraits of Women.," *Feminist Studies* 28, no. 2 (June 22, 2002): 375–89.

and settled in Spanish Harlem, where she painted friends and neighbors. She rarely worked on commissions, and rarely sold her work.[46]

Renowned for her unflinching portraits, Neel captured the essence of her subjects with a depth that went beyond mere representation. Dubbed a "collector of souls,"[47] she delved into the inner selves of those she painted, using the physical form as a gateway to the hidden layers of the human experience. Her portraits serve as both a reflection of the individuals she portrayed and a chronicle of her own life's journey, documenting her struggles, growth, and evolution as both an artist and as a person.[48] Her works are simultaneously portraits of the sitter and portraits of the artist.

In her 1972 work, *Marxist Girl (Irene Peslikis)*,[49] Alice Neel delivers another striking portrayal characterized by its raw honesty and unapologetic realism. The subject, a woman in her late teens or early twenties, is depicted reclining in a purple armchair wearing a black tank top and very dark blue jeans. Against a background of soft green and lavender hues, her piercing gaze meets the viewer's eyes with an intensity that is almost palpable. Despite the casual nature of her pose, there is a sense of melancholy in the woman's expression, evident in the slight crease between her eyebrows and the downturn at the corners of her mouth. Small details, such as the dark patch of armpit hair peeking out from her tank top, add to the paintings sense of authenticity and vulnerability. Neel's portrayal of Irene Peslikis captures not just her physical likeness, but also hints at the complexities of her inner world. Through her unflinching gaze and

[46] "Neel, Alice Hartley (1900-1984), Painter," American National Biography, accessed April 9, 2024, https://www.anb.org/display/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.001.0001/anb-9780198606697-e-1701262.
[47] The Editors of ARTnews, "The Risk-Taking Portraitist of the Upper West Side: On Alice Neel's Tense Paintings, in 1962," *ARTnews.Com* (blog), February 27, 2015, https://www.artnews.com/art-news/retrospective/the-risk-taking-portraitist-of-the-upper-west-side-on-alice-neels-tense-paintings-3639/.
[48] Carolyn Kinder Carr, *Alice Neel: Women* (New York: Rizzoli, 2002).
[49] See Figure 3

subtle emotional cues, Neel invites viewers to contemplate the human condition and the often-hidden struggles that lie beneath the surface.

Painted roughly a century after Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot's works, *Marxist Girl* canonizes a distinctly different visual language for female portraiture. Writing about feminist art, in her book *Art Monsters: Unruly Bodies in Feminist Art,* Lauren Elkin proposes the idea of the "Art Monster," who is an artist, or a muse, or a subject that occupies space without consideration for public scrutiny, especially that which comes from the male gaze.[50] Following the theoretical base of *Art Monsters*, the figure in Neel's painting is allowed to occupy more space- not literally; the woman in Cassatt's piece occupies more of the picture plane, but the woman in Neel's work, Irene Peslikis, spreads across the canvas in a way that neither Cassatt nor Morisot's figures do. The toe of her right foot extends beyond the boundaries of the picture plane and into the undefined space beyond, progressing past Morisot's subject whose foot simply rests on the window frame. Peslikis's legs are spread in what could be interpreted as a more "masculine" pose- she is almost "manspreading." She appears comfortable in her chair- not at ease, there is a distinct sense of worry or sadness in the lines of her face- but she is able to occupy this space.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Neel's art was shifting distinctly- previously working in a variety of locations, in the '60s and '70s she relocated her studio to her own apartment, where she had resided after moving away from Philadelphia shortly after the loss of her daughter.[51] During this period she was gaining global recognition and developing friendships with a younger generation of artists and activists. Peslikis, the sitter for this portrait, was one of these new friendships. Upon graduating high school in 1962, Peslikis studied at the Pratt Institute, an art school located in New York City, but she soon broke away from Pratt and instead co-founded the New York

[50] Lauren Elkin, *Art Monsters: Unruly Bodies in Feminist Art* (Macmillan Publishers, 2023).
[51] Carr, *Alice Neel*.

Studio School. She was also instrumental in the founding of the journal *Women & Art,* and her writings on art and activism span from 1957 to her death in 2002.[52]

Given Neels habit of painting in her own apartment in the 1960s and 1970s, Peslikis is likely portrayed in this space. This setting makes Peslikis's pose even more significant. Sitting for a portrait is an intimate and vulnerable act, as the artist visually dissects the sitter, and Peslikis is displays no discomfort, despite her expression of concern. Her pose suggests she is not only comfortable in the portrait's location, but also with Neel herself, and that there is a relationship upon which this painting is built. If this piece is truly set within Neel's own apartment, it exemplifies the creative potential that Woolf articulate in *A Room of One's Own*- Neel's space becomes a source of inspiration for her portraiture, and a space within which community between the artist and the sitter can be built.

Neel's works perpetually emphasize the faces of her subjects, enlarging them disproportionately to the bodies of the figures, and making them the focus of the gaze of the viewer. This allows Neel to meticulously render the expressions of her sitters, imbuing them with their own distinct personalities. Her refusal to idealize form, portraying wrinkles, stretch marks and body fat also alludes to a relationship between artist and sitter. For the sitter to trust the artist with the elements of themselves that they have been told are unfit for public consumption the subject must trust the artist and feel at-ease within the space. Most notably, Neel painted a self-portrait in 1980 at 80 years old.[53] In it she portrays herself nude, depicting her aging body- her sagging breasts and stomach, the lines of her face- with extreme candor. Neel's wiliness to depict herself in the same manner as she depicts her subjects creates a reciprocal relationship between

[52] "Irene Peslikis Papers, 1957-2002 and Undated - Archives & Manuscripts at Duke University Libraries," David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, accessed April 9, 2024, https://archives.lib.duke.edu/catalog/peslikisirene.
[53] See Figure 8

artist and sitter, and those relationships were fostered within her community of friends and family in Spanish Harlem.

Following Neel's propensity for self-reflecting portraiture, *Portrait of a Marxist Girl*[54] suggests that Neel is embracing her own rebellion; it is explicit in the title. No attempt is made to soften Peslikis's nature, her pose is fully present and her gaze confrontational, and Neel's choice of title makes no attempt to hide her potentially polarizing politics. Even small details, such as Peslikis's visible armpit hair, something that has been linked to the bra-burning second wave feminists of the 1960s and 1970s,[55] display political rebellion.

The interior of Neel's portrait is a marked departure from that of Morisot and Cassatt. In place of the neutral pallet of the earlier works, Neel's interior is rendered in shades of lavender, light green and ochre. These colors create a greater impact than the subtle pallets of Morisot and Cassatt. Additionally, the chair that Peslikis sits on is rendered in a dark purple and creates a visual mid-tone between the pastels of the background and the void of Peslikis's clothing. However, the chair is not rendered in accurate perspective. For example, the line of the arm of the chair that would extend from Peslikis's extended right arm breaks beneath the knee that she has thrown over it, and the arm of the chair that emerges is shifted unrealistically to the right. The right arm of the chair is subject to the same treatment, and the shadow of one of the legs of the chair has been omitted from the shadow painted underneath it. Subtle at first glance, these details create a sense of unreality withing the pictorial space, leading the viewer to the subconscious assessment that something is not quite right within the picture. The choice to

[54] See Figure 3

[55] "100 Women: The Truth behind the 'bra-Burning' Feminists," accessed April 9, 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-45303069; Rebecca Tuhus-Dubrow, "The New Feminist Armpit Hair Revolution: Half-Statement, Half-Ornament," *The Guardian*, June 24, 2019, sec. Life and style, https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/jun/24/feminist-armpit-hair-revolution-half-statement-half-ornament.

include these details exposes the artist as an active creator in the painting and creates a sense of unreality. The painting feels contrived.

While the positioning of the figure in a chair is evocative of the earlier works of Morisot and Cassatt, Neel's *Portrait of a Marxist Girl (Irene Peslikis)*[56] exemplifies a departure from a previous canon of portraiture that was concerned with idealized representation into a new canon that allowed for an honest representation of the subjects and created space for the artist to become a visible participant in the work.

Pollyanna Wrestlers, Jenna Gribbon

From young age, contemporary painter Jenna Gribbon was artistically inclined. Raise in Georgia, she was disciplined for drawing in the margins of her papers after she had finished her schoolwork. In university she studied painting and film, and, following her graduation, moved to New York City where she continued her education as a studio assistance to Jeff Koons.[57] When she initially moved to New York City, figurative art was largely unpopular, and she had difficulty finding gallery representation as they were interested in the minimalist and conceptual art that had captured the cultural zeitgeist and maintained popularity after the decline of movements like Abstract Expressionism.[58] Gribbon began attracting a following in 2006 with her portraits of Marie Antoinette, commissioned by Sofia Coppola for her eponymous film about the

[56] See Figure 3
[57] Dodie Kazanjian Pascal Clément, "Jenna Gribbon's Pursuit of Pleasure in Queer Portraiture," Vogue, November 15, 2022, https://www.vogue.com/article/jenna-gribbon-profile.
[58] "Key Art Movements from 1910s - 2000s," Ode To Art, accessed April 9, 2024, https://www.odetoart.com/blog.php?p=36%2CKey%20Art%20Movements%20from%201910s%20-%202000s.

former French queen. In August of 2017, Gribbon met musician Mackenzie Scott, who would become her partner and her muse. Gribbon's current work almost exclusively features Scott and their life together, highlighting mundane moments withing their home and relationship. Her son Silas is also a common subject.[59] Gribbon's work ranges in scale from postcard size 4"x6" panels to larger than life 13-foot-long portraits of Scott, who frequently appears nude within the domestic setting of their house.

Painted in 2018, Gribbon's piece *Pollyanna Wrestlers*[60] features two women amid a fight. One of them is fully nude, standing and grappling with the other, who is on the ground on one knee, wearing a pair of white pants and a single sock. The background of the work is a lavender toned room, decorated with a divan and a large armoire.

Gribbon's painting is a distinct departure from that of Cassatt, Morisot, and Neel. Not only are her figures unclothed, but they are also not occupying passive roles in the painting. In *Ways of Seeing,* John Berger makes the distinction between being "naked" and being "nude"[61]- being "nude" is being without clothes and being aware that one is being visually consumed, being "naked" is simply to exist without clothes on, without the element of visual consumption. Berger uses the examples of Venuses to demonstrate this point- regardless of if they are directly engaging with the viewer (as in Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus),*[62] or unaware of scrutiny (as in Alexandre Cabanel's *Birth of Venus)* [63] Venuses are presented for visual consumption.[64] Catherine McCormack also uses the example of Venuses to represent a passive and stereotyped

[59] Pascal, "Jenna Gribbon's Pursuit of Pleasure in Queer Portraiture."
[60] See Figure 4
[61] "Ways of Seeing by John Berger."
[62] See Appendix of Images, Figure 9
[63] See Appendix of Images, Figure 10
[64] "Ways of Seeing by John Berger."

category of female representation.[65] Gribbon's painting exemplifies the difference between "naked" and nude"- the figures in the work are portrayed as "naked" not "nude." They are in their own world, engaging with one another, and not engaged with the viewer. In many portrayals of nude women, by men, such as in Cabanel's *Venus,*[66] the central figure is ignorant of the (implied) male viewer. In Gribbon's work, the figures are ignoring the viewer. The viewer is unable to directly engage and visually consume the painting because the figures are not posed for visual consumption and are engaged with one another. In the foreground of the painting there is a chair, a motif that is seen in the works of Cassatt, Morisot, and Neel, positioned in such a way that it further impedes the viewer access to the pictorial space. It places a visual and physical barrier between the viewer and the subjects of the painting, preventing entrance into the space. The only way to enter the room that the subjects occupy is through a door in the far wall of the piece. This door is only accessible through the invisible space behind the painting, suggesting that the viewer must be granted permission to enter the space.

In the works of Cassatt, Morisot and Neel, the viewer is allowed unrestricted access to the space that the sitter occupies- there are no open doors through which the viewer is unable to pass, and in Cassatt's piece, which features an open window, the exterior is rendered as clearly as the interior, allowing the viewer access to it as well as to the interior. Neel's *Marxist Girl*[67] is an initial investigation into restricting the access of the viewer- her inclusion of closed doors in the background of her painting implies space that is inaccessible to the viewer, however the doors are closed, leaving no unrealized space behind the pictorial place. Gribbon's rendering of

[65] McCormack, *Women in the Picture*.
[66] See Figure 6
[67] See Figure 3

the interior in *Pollyanna Wrestlers*[68] marks a departure in the access that the viewer is granted to the interior space portrayed in a painting.

The figures in Gribbon's piece are engaging in an activity that is largely regarded as more masculine- wrestling. Her positioning of the subjects is evocative of ancient Hellenistic sculpture, creating more visual distinction between her work and those of Cassatt, Morisot, and Neel. In contemporary culture, many Hellenistic representations are regarded as homoerotic, and Gribbon's insertion of women into the roles most associated with men creates a dialog around assumptions of sexuality. Throughout her body of work, Gribbon explores queerness and queer relationships between women, and as such, the position of her subjects in a pose that is often regarded as homoerotic raises questions about her intentions in doing so. Is she commenting on the sexuality of these figures? Alternatively, is she commenting on the historical erasure of female/female relationships? For example, Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West famously penned hundreds of romantically and sexually charged letters to each other, and yet there are still some who deny their relationship. With Gribbon's intense knowledge of history and art history, she could very well be commenting on this.

In *Pollyanna Wrestlers,*[69] Gribbon captures both a moment of movement and a moment of stillness. The action of the figures is implied in their positions- the angle from the top of the left figure's head to the bottom of the right figures leg creates a visual line that suggests that the right-hand figure is about to pull the left one down to the ground. However, neither of the figure's hair is moving in the direction of implied motion, which gives the piece a sense of stillness, a posed nature. Gribbon is known to pose and photograph her close friends as figure references for her paintings. The lack of movement in the figure's hair and the precision with

[68] See figure 10
[69] See Figure 4

which the limbs are painted implies that *Pollyanna Wrestlers*[70] was painted directly from the photo, as a painting done from life would have included movement in the hair of the figures. Gribbon's treatment of figures is like Neel's treatment of space- both are constructed by the artist to fit a very particular vision, and neither tries to disguise the indexical marks of the artist in the construction of the pictorial space.

The intentionality with which these figures and space are structured can also be interpreted as an allusion to queer construction of space. For artists such as Gribbon, Neel, Cassatt, Morisot, and many others, who have been excluded from the dominant narrative of art history, the interior becomes a space of endless possibility and constructed realities. Not only does Gribbon's use of models follow in the legacy of the artistic tradition of using live models as anatomy references, it also constructs a reality behind the painting. By posing real people as a reference for the painting, Gribbon has created an interpretation of reality which she re-interoperates through painting. In taking a photograph of her staged models, she has created an indexical record of the reality that she has constructed, further affirming its reality, beyond that which would have existed had she exclusively painted the scene. This translation of reality into photograph into painting, which is a reoccurring technique used in many of her paintings, (*Pollyanna Wrestlers*[71] is just one in a series of figurative works featuring wrestling figures), speaks to a continued contemplation about the possibilities of a constructed reality.

If *Pollyanna Wrestlers*[72] captures the dissonance between movement and stillness, Gribbon's work *Me looking at her looking at me,*[73] 2018, embodies stillness. This painting is a tangle of limbs that represent two figures sprawled out on a couch with their legs intwined. Two

[70] See Figure 4
[71] See Figure 4
[72] See Figure 4
[73] See Figure 11

of the limbs belong to the primary subject- a dark haired woman who is looking at the painter and by extension, the viewer- and two belong to the painter/viewer. The dark-haired figure is holding a pen and a piece of paper. The background of the painting is made up of fields of blue and green that suggest the setting of a couch, a lamp, and abstract floral wallpaper that bleeds down onto the couch. The living room/sitting room is the same space is employed in the works of Morisot and Cassatt, but Gribbon shifts not only the perspective of the viewer, but also their interaction with the space. This painting insinuates that the viewer on the couch looking at the subject, with their legs extended into the space of the other figure in the work. The title of the piece- *Me looking at her looking at me*[74] creates a relationship dynamic between the viewer, the painter, and the subject that situates the viewer as viewer, painter, and subject. With this, the piece takes on an element of self-portraiture. Compared to *Pollyanna Wrestlers,*[75] the inclusion of the viewer in the painting as a subject creates a more intimate space that, because of the subverted relationship between painter and subject, remains devoid of the voyeurism that is present in Botticelli or Cabanel's representations of nudity. The legs in the painting that belong to the viewer force self-reflection and an imagining of the viewer in the same position as the piece's subject. In reviews of the painting, critics have said that it is reminiscent of their time in college and being in similar situations with their own partners. The viewer's knowledge that the painter and the sitter are both female and the ability to see one's own relationship in this image normalizes lesbian relationships and demonstrates that the same intimacy that is present in heterosexual relationships can be present in sapphic ones. In *Me looking at her looking at me,*[76] Jenna Gribbon's intimate use of interior space creates an empathy between the viewer and the

[74] See Figure 11
[75] See Figure 4
[76] See Figure 11

subjects of the painting and involves the viewer in the work as much as *Pollyanna Wrestlers*[77] ignores them. The stages nature of *Pollyanna Wrestlers*[78] and the subversion of the expectation of viewer/subject/artist relationships in *Me looking at her looking at me*[79] addresses the goal of queering the canon of art history. This is an act which not only includes more visual representations of queer people in artwork, but also include the subversion of mainstream cultural norms and diversification of manners in which the viewer interacts with a piece of artwork. In the space of unrealities created by Gribbon's interiors, and the undefinable space that queerness creates, these paintings represent a new generation of queer female artists who are exploring liminal space and dissecting not only the relationships between subject in a work but also the work's relationship to the viewer.

Section 4: The Gays

Giovanni's Room, James Baldwin

"Once you try to pinpoint exactly what makes the painting queer, it dissolves. I love the idea that the form itself, the lens, is queer. It's not that this brushstroke is gay, and this one is not, but that the slippage is echoed in the way the paintings are made."

-Doron Langberg

[77] See Figure 4
[78] See Figure 4
[79] See Figure 11

James Baldwin's 1956 book *Giovanni's Room* provides a poignant narrative demonstration of the vital role that interiors play within the queer community. Set in the mid-20th century in Paris, the book centers two men, Giovanni and David, as they navigate the trials and tribulations of their sexuality. Paris in the mid-20th century was partially known for its emerging art and culture, but chiefly the city was known for its intellectual underbelly rather than its high fashion. Unlike in America of England, French national law did not explicitly criminalize homosexuality and sodomy, and as such France became a haven for queer artists and intellectuals unable to live openly in their native countries; France allowed them to openly pursue academic interests that would have been illegal in America and England.[80]

Excluded from Paris society on account of their sexuality, the main characters in Baldwin's novel, David and Giovanni retreat into Giovanni's room, a single bedroom that contains everything Giovanni owns and becomes their entire world. Within those walls, David and Giovanni experience the full breadth of their relationship- they quarrel and reconcile, they uncover truths about themselves, and when the conflict becomes too much to bear, they separate. Serving as the central location of the book, "The Room" is as much a character in the book as David and Giovanni are. Central to this story is the tension caused by the inability to be oneself in public- Giovanni wishes that David was more only affectionate with him, David refuses to interact romantically with him in public for fear that his masculinity will be questioned. When it is impossible to be truthful in public, it is crucial to have an interior space where that is possible, but David's discomfort with his own sexual identity makes it impossible for him to be fully present in Giovanni's room, and ultimately, it is this denial of identity and refusal of authenticity that leads to their separation.

[80] andrew, "Gay History in Paris," *Oscar Wilde Tours* (blog), July 8, 2014, https://www.oscarwildetours.com/gay-history-paris/.

In the case of Giovanni and David, it is the space of The Room that facilitates authenticity, but locations that function similarly can be seen in physical spaces, such as the infamous Stonewall Inn[81] in New York City, or Compton's Cafeteria[82] in San Francisco. New York based artist Keith Haring (1958-1990) recognized the need for physical space in his diaries- he wrote that, in the 1970s and 1980s, the East Village, where the Stonewall Inn was located, had become a place of community for those who had been rejected by their own. According to Haring, it was common practice to arrive at someone's apartment without warning at which point the keys would be thrown down to street level in a sock. Guests stayed for anywhere between 15 minutes and multiple days.[83] These East Village artist's apartments became essential places of community gathering. Following the Stonewall Uprising and the subsequent fight for gay rights, public spaces became exclusionary to the queer community for fear of altercations resulting in violence. This tension was exacerbated by the AIDS crisis, also known as the "Gay Flu", as it was believed that the disease could be transmitted through touch with an infected person.

As in the 17th century in the Netherlands, the exterior world became dangerous for privileged people with an interest in preserving their social status and health, but instead of retreating inside, as was done in the Netherlands, they forced the queer community out of public spaces. The intentional exclusion and marginalization of queer people forced the community to create autonomous spaces where their culture could continue to exist. The concept of

[81] The Stonewall Inn was a gay bar in New York City that was the site of the Stonewall Riots in 1969. Before the riots The Inn was a common gathering place for the city's queer and trans community. Famously, the management of the bar would bribe the police to ignore the bar's clientele when they raided the bar, but in 1969 a police raid turned violent, and served as a catalyst for nationwide protests in favor of gay rights.
[82] Compton's Cafeteria was the site of riots in 1966 in response to constant harassment of the establishments trans and drag queen clientele by the police. Three years before Stonewall, the Compton Cafeteria Riots are regarded as the beginning of San Francisco's trans activism movements. The Compton Cafeteria Riots are occasionally cited as the watershed moment in national consciousness that led to the Stonewall Uprising.
[83] Keith Haring, Robert Farris Thompson, and Shepard Fairey, *Keith Haring Journals:*, Deluxe edition (New York, N.Y: Penguin Classics, 2010).

manufactured space is pervasive throughout much of queer art and can be seen in the works of artists like Jenna Gribbon, as well as that of Alison Bechdel, Felix González-Torres, and Doron Langberg.

Constructed space can be seen throughout Jenna Gribbon's work- *Pollyanna Wrestlers*[84] features an interior that has been carefully decorated in a way that is absent from the works of Neel, Cassatt, and Morisot, and the intentionality of the room creates a space that feels truly occupied by the inhabitants. This choice begins to allude to the agency of the figures in the painting, moving them beyond subjects and burgeoning on personality. Is also creates an interior space that can be edited and transformed by its inhabitants. This assertion of control over the interior is particularly relevant to communities who have had power removed from them in public spaces- the construction of space becomes a reclamation of agency.

Historically, the decoration of the home has been in the purview of women, as suggested in *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space*.[85] Cieraad addresses the fact that there is an unequal division in the expectation of who is responsible for the decoration of a space- it is believed to be an innate talent of women, when in actuality it is something that must be cultivated. From a young age, girls are taught aesthetic values, trained through their exposure to targeted pop culture. The female painter has aesthetic power twofold- not only does she have control over the physical space of her domestic interior, but she also exerts control over the pictorial space in her paintings. There is a reason that it is only recently that it has been acceptable for women to paint subjects other than still lives- the power of painting is that of creation, and that edges too close to the power of God for the comfort of many.[86]

[84] See Figure 4
[85] Cieraad and Short, "Introduction."
[86] Elkin, *Art Monsters: Unruly Bodies in Feminist Art*.

This power is also dangerous in the hands of queer people. If there is fear that women have unequal aesthetic power in the household, that fear is exponentially increased when the relationship within the domestic space does not fit into heteronormative standards. Queer creation has the potential to create a reality that is outside of that which the dominant cis/het culture deems acceptable, and to challenge what is thought of as appropriate. Often it presents an alternative reality that has a sense of magical realism- within queer created spaces, what *is* and what *can be* blur and run together. Magical realism appears in the interior spaces created by queer artists. It can be seen in Alison Bechdel's imaging of scenarios in *Dykes to Watch Out For,*[87] in Félix González-Torres's mundane minimalism, and in Doron Langberg's portraiture which oscillates between finished and unfinished.

Both celebrating the mundanity of daily life, and imaging what the documentation of queer lives might look like if it was held to the same standards as cis/het lives, Alison Bechdel's *Dykes to Watch Out For*[88] comic acts as a queer archive. The title, *Dykes to Watch Out For*[89] is a double entendre- it could mean both to be cautious of- the implicit approach of dominant culture to anything non-conformist, especially the gender subversion of "dyke", or to "keep an eye on" in the way that suggests one has great potential. The works of González-Torres use this fiction as a form of protection- the plausible deniability granted by the subtlety of his work allowed him the freedom to create in an era of intense censorship. Langberg's interiors appear to be fictitious themselves- it is often deeply unclear where the works are located, as the paintings fade in and out of layers of paint and fully and partially rendered objects.

[87] See Figure 5
[88] See Figure 5
[89] See Figure 5

Dykes to Watch Out For, Alison Bechdel

Alison Bechdel's comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For*[90] acted as a chronical of lesbian life, focusing on the social and political movements happening locally and nationally in the pre-internet era. The plot intersects with conversations around generational debates and politics- each comic strip centers a mundane moment in the lives of the main characters living in a mid-sized American City (it is unspecified where). It is "half op-ed column and half endless serialized Victorian novel", according to Bechdel, and deals with everything from relationships to academics to parenting to sex.[91] This comic strip acts as a snapshot of this movement in lesbian history and proves the necessity of archives when it comes to reconstructing histories of queerness. Similar to Baldwins novel, *Dykes to Watch Out For*[92] is a testament to the importance of queer art by queer people: neither are sensationalized, and both deal with the nuance of being queer in their respective times and places. They also both address the importance of interior spaces; joining Giovanni's room are the living rooms, kitchens, bathrooms, and bedrooms of Bechdel's cast of characters.

In the queer community, which is largely not documented in the same way that mainstream culture is, the expansion of what is considered a "valid archive" is necessary to the understanding of the past. Queer comics and art serve this purpose, as do gay newspapers. In the case of *Dykes to Watch Out For*,[93] Bechdel was regularly rejected from larger publishers, and self-publishing allowed the comic strip to expand, but also gave her one on one connection the people who were circulating the publication. This one-on-one connection also meant that she was

[90] See Figure 5
[91] Galvan, "'The Lesbian Norman Rockwell.'"
[92] See Figure 5
[93] See Figure 5

able to reach out to this network for financial support when *DTWOF* was in a place of financial uncertainty. The continued existence of *DTWOF* demonstrates not only the importance of this network but also the role that private communities can play in the long-term sustainability of queer documents.

It was Bechdel herself who said that she would like to be a "lesbian Norman Rockwell,"[94] bringing visibility to various contemporary subjects. These comic strips serve as a way of chronicling and archiving the daily interactions of her community. Bechdel cites archived documents as inspiration for her development as an artist. Later in her career she donated her own files to Smith College for safekeeping, merging domestic and institutional storage. This allows for new concepts of what an archive should hold but also new ways to analyze the archive itself. The concept of a queer archive decentralizes the individual artists and instead honors the history of collaboration that is shared in the queer community.

Untitled (Billboard of an Empty Bed), Felix González-Torres

Born in Cuba, Félix González-Torres was an artist active in New York City between the years of 1979 and 1995. He went to university in Puerto Rico.[95] González-Torres' work is largely allegorical and minimalist and uses everyday objects such as reams of printer paper and wrapped candy. He was active in New York City during the AIDS crisis and was involved in various

[94] Galvan, "'The Lesbian Norman Rockwell.'"
[95] "Felix Gonzalez-Torres | MoMA," The Museum of Modern Art, accessed April 10, 2024, https://www.moma.org/artists/2233.

social and political causes. He was out as a gay man, and his experiences fostered an interest in artwork that studied the intersection of the public and private.[96]

His interest in the intersection between public and private can be seen in his 1991 work *Untitled (Billboard of an Empty Bed)*.[97] This piece is a photograph that features the top half of a mattress against a blank grey wall. The mattress is covered in white sheets, and there is the corner of a white quilt in the bottom right corner of the piece; both pillows have indentations on them suggesting that they have been slept on recently. This photograph was enlarged and printed on billboards displayed across New York City.

Although deceptively simple, this work is a defiant piece considering contemporary Reagan-era censorship laws and policy. This piece was created during the height of the HIV-AIDs crisis in New York city, which was decimating the city's gay population. In both the United States, led by Ronald Reagan, and the United Kingdom, led by Margaret Thatcher, the government refused to implement public policy to address the crisis. The CDC refused to declare AIDS a public health emergency.[98] Both governments supported policies like "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" which forbid the discussion of non-heterosexual identities in the US Military.[99] The Government's position was one of censorship and shame, and Reagan believed that if someone contracted HIV-AIDS, it was either divine punishment, or deserved for living a dissonant life. They went so far as to call it the "gay plague".[100] This inaction on the part of the Reagan

---

[96] "Felix Gonzalez-Torres," The Guggenheim Museums and Foundation, accessed April 10, 2024, https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/felix-gonzalez-torres.
[97] See Figure 6
[98] Stephen F. Knott, *The Reagan Years / Stephen Knott and Jeffrey L. Chidester.*, Facts on File Library of American History (New York: Facts On File, 2005).
[99] "Repeal of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' - Human Rights Campaign," accessed April 10, 2024, https://www.hrc.org/our-work/stories/repeal-of-dont-ask-dont-tell.
[100] "The Reagan Administration's Unbelievable Response to the HIV/AIDS Epidemic - Vox," accessed April 10, 2024, https://www.vox.com/2015/12/1/9828348/ronald-reagan-hiv-aids.

administration was exacerbated by the fact that the two other populations disproportionately affected by the AIDS crisis were sex workers and intravenous drug users, both groups of people condemned by Reagan and Thatcher's conservative governments.

This culture of silence created a space where it was difficult to share experiences of living and dying with AIDS, and a practice of censoring artists who were creating work around this subject. Because of this, there were two approaches that artists took to creating work. The first was communal work- protest art and works like the "Silence=Death"[101] signs were not attributed to a single artist, and were mass produced at such volume that one person could not be targeted for their creation and they could not be eliminated. These works were able to directly address the AIDS crisis.[102]

The other route that artists took was to make work that clandestinely addressed the AIDS crisis. This allowed them to create work that was deeply political and addressed current issues, but also to avoid censorship, and the potential consequences that came with that, such as social ostracization or the loss of the public or grant funding that allowed them to create work. In line with his minimalist aesthetics, González-Torres's work exemplifies the second approach. His minimalism and his use of common objects allowed him to confront the lived realities of the AIDS crisis and allowed him to explore the confrontation between public and private when his identity condemned him in the eyes of the government and some of the public.

---

[101] See Figure 12

[102] Colleen Hochberger, "8 Iconic AIDS Activist Artworks That Changed the Trajectory of the Epidemic," Artspace, accessed October 21, 2022, http://www.artspace.com/magazine/news_events/8-iconic-aids-activist-artworks-that-changed-the-trajectory-of-the-epidemic;
Sarah Schulman, "Making Love Making Art: Living and Dying Performance in the 1980s.," *This Will Have Been: Art, Love, & Politics in the 1980s*, 2012;
Josh Weiner, "The Art of the Aids Crisis: Cautionary Oeuvres From the 1980s | CCTP 802 – Art and Media Interfaced," accessed October 21, 2022, https://blogs.commons.georgetown.edu/cctp-802-spring2018/2018/05/04/the-art-of-the-aids-crisis-cautionary-oeuvres-from-the-1980s/;
Lindsay T. Hager, "United in Anger: A History of ACT UP," *The Oral History Review* 42, no. 1 (April 1, 2015): 134–38, https://doi.org/10.1093/ohr/ohv014.

In *Untitled (Billboard of an Empty Bed),*[103] González-Torres creates a portrait of absence. The two impressions on the bed hint that two people recently slept in it, but neither is present now. The bed in the photograph is González-Torres's own bed in the home that he shared with his partner, Ross Laycock. Laycock is an enigmatic figure- he attended the Fashion Institute of technology in the 1980s, and was integral to González-Torres's artwork, and an artist in his own right, but few pictures of him survive. The two met in 1983, and in January of 1991, Laycock passed away from AIDS related complications.[104] With this background, *Untitled (Billboard of an Empty Bed)*[105] takes on a new meaning- it becomes not only a portrait of absence because the subjects are missing; it is also the double portrait of a couple that is missing half. It is a celebration of the bed that Laycock and González-Torres shared, and by extension their relationship, and it is also a memorial.

González-Torres is known for this type of portraiture. His work *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in LA)*[106] consists of a pile of wrapped candy that weighs the same as Laycock, before he began to die of AIDS. Viewers of the work are invited to take a piece of candy, slowly depleting the pile, just as pieces of Ross were lost as his disease progressed. The manner of interaction of the viewer with the piece also highlights the public's interaction with the AIDS crisis- either through direct interference (taking a piece of candy), or indirect interference, the public was complicit in the AIDS crisis, and general lack of action from people outside of directly affected communities resulted in massive loss of life.

---

[103] See Figure 6
[104] "Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Ross Laycock & Carl George: An...," Visual AIDS, accessed April 10, 2024, https://visualaids.org/blog/carl-george-fgt-ross-laycock.
[105] See Figure 6
[106] See Figure 13

The choice to enlarge *Untitled (Billboard of an Empty Bed)*[107] and place it on billboards elevates it to monumental scale[108] and forces the viewer to confront this private space. The monumental scale equates the importance of this scene to that of military monuments and war memorials. It is also a critique of the "behind closed doors" approach to sexuality- there is no overt sexuality in this piece, but to those who knew the context behind it, it was as clear as if González-Torres had printed a photograph of him and Laycock on the billboard. About González-Torres's symbolism, Carl George, the friend of the couple who introduced them, said, "There are coded signifiers in his work that are meant for gay people… Straight people might not understand this, might even find it repulsive."[109]

Knowing González-Torres's penchant for allusion, the bed becomes a synecdoche for the interior lives of queer people during the AIDS crisis. Like Giovanni's room in Baldwin's book, González-Torres's portrayal of his bed represents the intimacy and comfort of interior in which the gay population could be fully themselves. The display of this photograph on a billboard forces a confrontation between public and private space. In an era when the interior was intensely political, the billboard pushes this interior into the public view and does not give the viewer an opportunity to look away. Similar to Gribbon's work, *Me looking at her looking at me*,[110] the viewer cannot help but imagine their own relationship in González-Torres's work, and through this, he creates empathy with an indifferent public.

[107] See Figure 6
[108] "Felix Gonzalez-Torres."
[109] "Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Ross Laycock & Carl George."
[110] See Figure 7

Louis, Tristan and Sarah, Doron Langberg

Born in Israel, contemporary artist Doron Langberg has established himself as one of the giants of contemporary figure painting (literally- his works often reach upwards of 14ft.) Educated at the University of Pennsylvania and the Yale University School of Art, Langberg's art resides in the collections of multiple museums from the Baltimore Museum of Art to the Swiss Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain.[111] Langberg is known for using color to represent the formal qualities of a painting- figures, perspective, light- and emotional and atmospheric qualities. Langberg's paintings are complex and layered, often juxtaposing raw canvas with moments of photographically intense rendering.

Langberg captures a feeling of liminality in his paintings. His works exist in the indeterminacy or indecipherability of queerness. In his work *Louis, Tristan, and Sarah,*[112] 2017, three figures exist in the hazy space of a living room. Two of the figures sit on the couch, one with their head in the other's lap, and the third rests on the red, blue, and white rug that occupies the bottom of the painting. The faces of the figures have been rendered in transparent layers that create visually distinct features but also show the subject matter underneath the heads, creating an almost ghostly effect. The most clearly rendered element of the painting is the rug that provides the stage for the subjects- the perspective is tipped slightly forward, and it looks like the figures might slide off the tilted ground at any moment. The couch is an area of negative space- it is largely underpainting, with slightly darker but still transparent blues and purples suggesting the front of the couch is in shadow.

[111] "Doron Langberg - Kunsthal," accessed April 10, 2024, https://www.kunsthal.nl/en/plan-your-visit/exhibitions/doron-langberg-part-of-your-world-en/.
[112] See Figure 7

Langberg's painting is a succinct visual representation of the aesthetics of a "queer" space. The movement of this piece in and out of opacity and varying levels of rendering contribute to the impression of indecipherability- he plays with perceptions of perspective and concrete objects. This causes the painting to exist in a place that cannot be defined, much like Warren Hedges definition of queerness as something that cannot be labeled.[113] The walls and the rug are the most definitely rendered, suggesting that this is the most concrete space and the elements of this room that are least likely to change. While the figures may mutate and shift, the rug and walls will not. This contributes to the stage-like nature of the setting; it is a space that can be utilized by whichever indefinite figures occupy it, and regardless, it will remain the same.

This mutability of space plays into notions of queer temporality, where time is not always linear, and multiple truths must be allowed to exist at the same time.[114] Because the queer community is one of choice, and of found connections and family, and often of oral and non-linear history, linear time is not always applicable, and the rendering of this painting conveys that impression. This indeterminacy also comes with the implication of change- because these figures are undefined, they are allowed to shift and change, and that fluidity that they are allowed is a large part of queer identity.

The idea of immovable space as a backdrop is also present in James Baldwin's work *Giovanni's Room*. In Baldwin's work, the titular room functions as a space for the main characters- Giovanni and David- to be their truest selves, with all the good and the bad that comes with that. The Room, which is as much a character as David or Giovanni, allows David to rediscover and explore his previously repressed sexuality, and it allows Giovanni to be happy

[113] Hedges, "Howells's 'Wretched Fetishes.'"
[114] Dustin Goltz, "Queer Temporalities," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.1182.

with someone that he genuinely likes. However, it also is a place of turmoil- David is uncomfortable with his sexuality, which angers him, and Giovanni wants more from David (for him to leave his fiancé and commit to Giovanni) than David is willing to give. The Room allows them to transform. The setting in Langberg's piece is the same- it captures the figures as they are in this one moment, with no guarantee that they will remain the same. At the same time, the concrete nature of the background of the painting implies that it exists to support the figures and provide them with a framework in which to change.

Conclusion:

When Virginia Woolf wrote *A Room of One's Own*, it is unlikely that she thought she would inspire hundreds of years of writers and artists to examine the roles that interior spaces played in their work. And yet she wrote a text that provides a central framework to analyzing the ways in which interiors manifest in the work of artists who depend on a room of their own. While Woolf offers the perspective of a woman, James Baldwin's novel *Giovanni's Room* offers a queer perspective on the role of space within a relationship. Although imperfect, David and Giovanni's relationship would not exist without the space that they have available to them within Giovanni's room. Together, along with Lauren Elkin's *Art Monsters,* Irene Cieraad's *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space*, John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, and Catherine McCormack's *Women in the Picture,* these pieces of writing provide a framework for the analysis of the works of female and queer artists.

Spanning almost 150 years and three continents, the works of Berthe Morisot, Mary Cassatt, Alice Neel, Jenna Gribbon, Alison Bechdel, Félix González-Torres, and Doron Langberg are united by the importance of the treatment of interior spaces in their work. While none of their works deal with explicitly political subject matter, each one includes subtle moments of transgression of contemporary social norms into their art.

The prowess and recognition that these artists have received prove that works that are centered around interior spaces are just as vital as works that have historical, mythological, or religious subject matter. The mundanity of the interior does not negate their value and their ability to hold stories and meaning. Painted by members of the communities portrayed these artworks also serve as a form of internal documentation and self-archiving for groups of people who have, historically, not been in control of their own narratives. To dismiss these works as uninteresting because of their mundanity is to fundamentally misunderstand the context of their creation.

Devoid of context, these paintings are strong pieces of art, but with the additional understanding of contemporary politics, their power expands infinitely. Additionally, the understanding of contemporary politics reaffirms the groundbreaking nature of these works to audiences who may be generations removed and living in era that the artists could not possibly dream of. It is not the responsibility of queer or female artists to cater to the aesthetic whims of the mainstream culture, they are free to develop their own artistic language and conventions that cater specifically to the lived experiences of their in-group- like Carl George said of Félix González-Torres's work, "Straight people might not understand this, might even find it repulsive."[115] In fact, people who are part of the "in-group" that benefits from the dominant

[115] "Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Ross Laycock & Carl George."

social structures may never fully understand these works- like Virginia Woolf's idea that "experience" was necessary to the creativity of the writer and Irene Cieraad's thesis that an understanding of the "public" is necessary to an understanding of "private," and understanding of the necessity of interior spaces may be necessary to complete appreciation of female and queer artists.

It is this shared experience that caused me to investigate the works of female and queer artists together. Individuals who effortlessly navigate these realms do not have the same relationship with those who have been limited in their access to the exterior world. As communities, both the identities of women and queer people are intrinsically lined to their perceptions and experience of safety and acceptance within any given space. Because of the constant auto-scrutiny that results from being in a public space, the cultivation of an interior space is necessary for community bonds to form. For artists who draw from their experience, naturally the interior manifests in the artwork of queer and female artists. Within the art historical canon, which does not often regard works like these as "mainstream" or "groundbreaking, it is important consider accessibility when narratives are being written. Artists who were not able to paint in exterior spaces should not be disregarded for the lack of landscape paintings in their portfolios. Artists whose work takes on an unconventional form, like a comic strip or a billboard should not be penalized for their lack of oil paintings. The creation of art is an intensely personal act, and it is unreasonable to expect all artists to conform to a monolithic definition of what art "should" be. The future of the art world is not within the aesthetic conventions of the past; it is in the hands of artists like Jenna Gribbon and Doron Langberg whose mundane subject matter is transformed by their technical prowess and humanizing approach to the spaces that they are

painting. Too look at the work of Gribbon and Langberg is to look at their subjects with the same love that the artist feels for them.

From Berthe Morisot's painting of her sister to Jenna Gribbon's painting of her lover to Félix González-Torres's photograph of the absence of his partner, queer and female artists explore the well of inspirations born from the interior. Their pieces address both the joys of having a space which is fully your own, the limitations of being forced into that space, and center the relationships that are forged in those interior spaces. Excluded from exterior spaces, all these artists, and numerous more, have found power in the representation of interior spaces. Their art is a reclamation of the autonomy that is not afforded them in public, it is an act of manifesting the potential of a space, and an act of truth-telling. It is the creation of their own world. It is a room of their own.

Appendix of Images

Figure 1: Berthe Morisot's *Artist's Sister at a Window*, 1869

Figure 2: Mary Cassatt, *Reading Le Figaro*, 1878

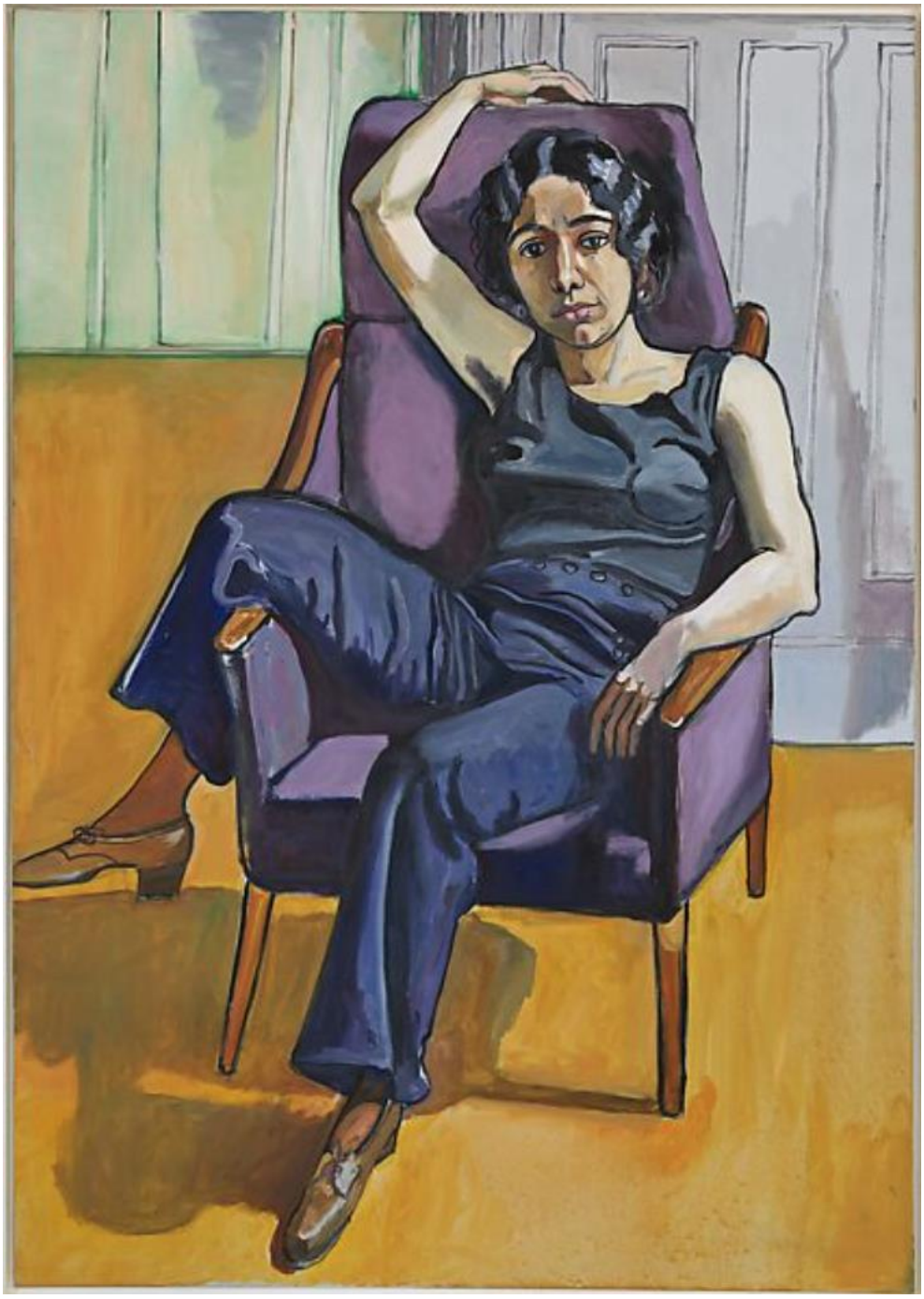

Figure 3: Alice Neel, *Marxist Girl (Irene Peslikas*), 1972

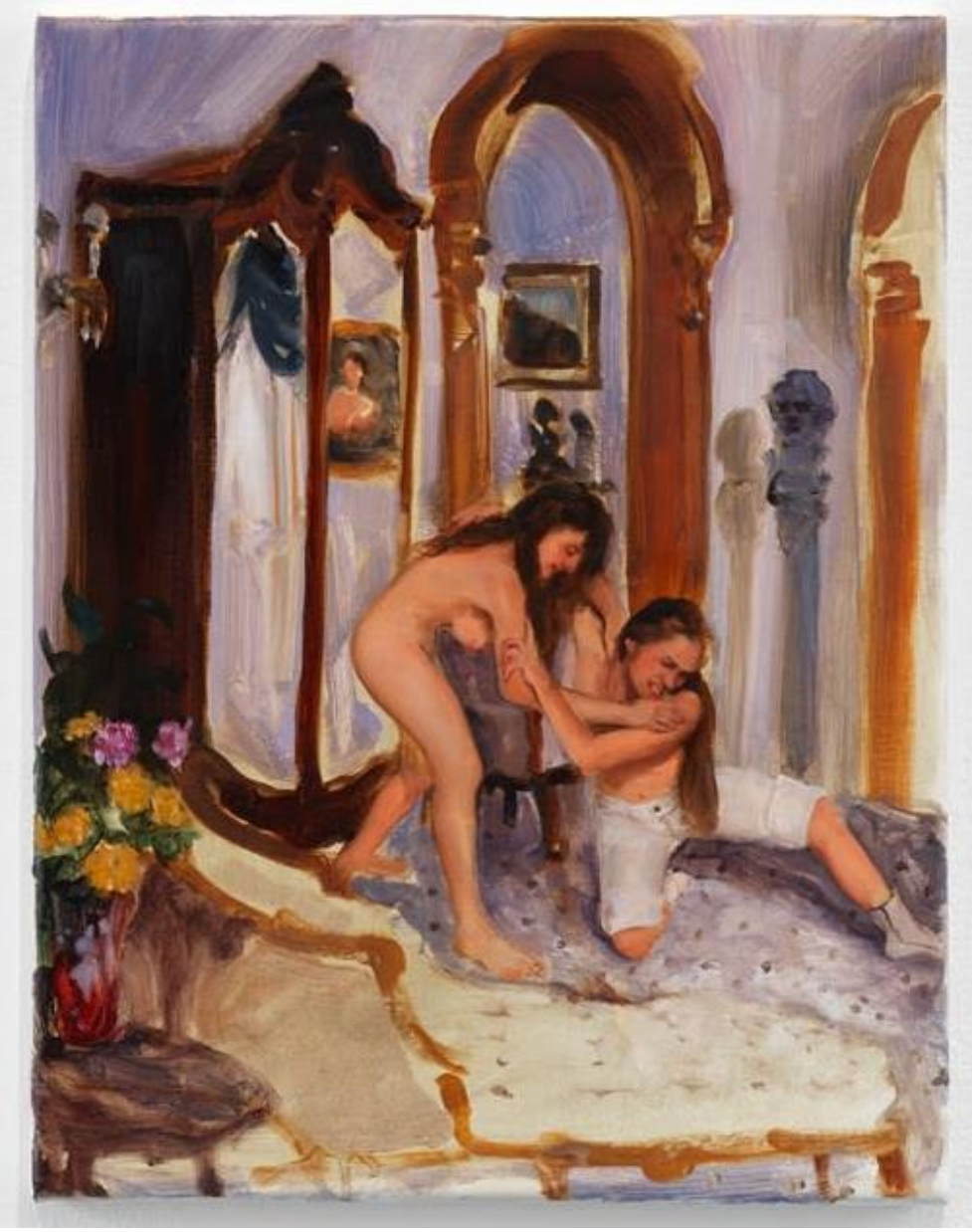

Figure 4: Jenna Gribbon, *Pollyanna Wrestlers,* 2018

Figure 5: Alison Bechdel, *Dykes to Watch Out for Archive Episode #003*, 1987

Figure 6: Felix González-Torres, *Untitled (Billboard of an Empty Bed*), 1991

Figure 7: Doron Langberg, *Louis, Tristan, and Sarah*, 2017


Figure 8: Alice Neel, *Self-Portrait*, 1980

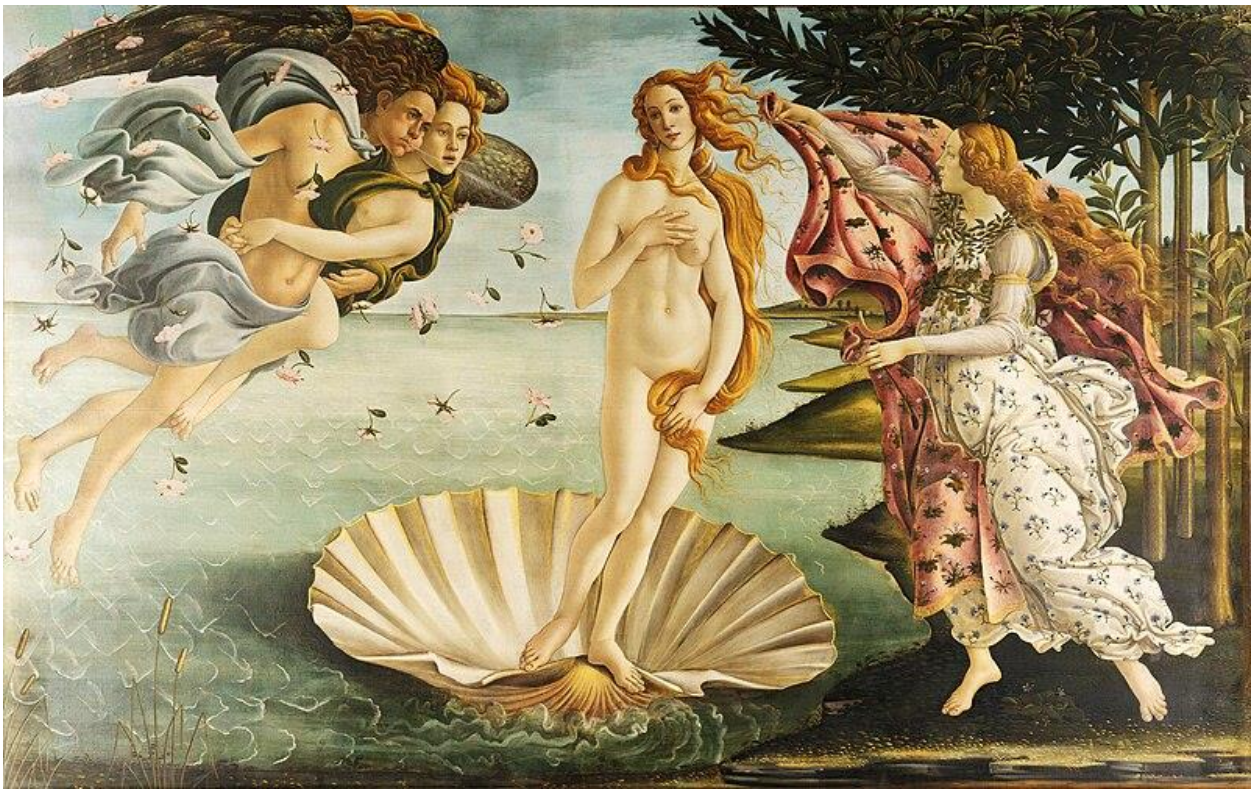

Figure 9: Sandro Botticelli, *Birth of Venus*, c. 1484-1486


Figure 10: Alexandre Cabanel*, The Birth of Venus,* 1863

Figure 11: Jenna Gribbon, *Me looking at her looking at me*, 2018

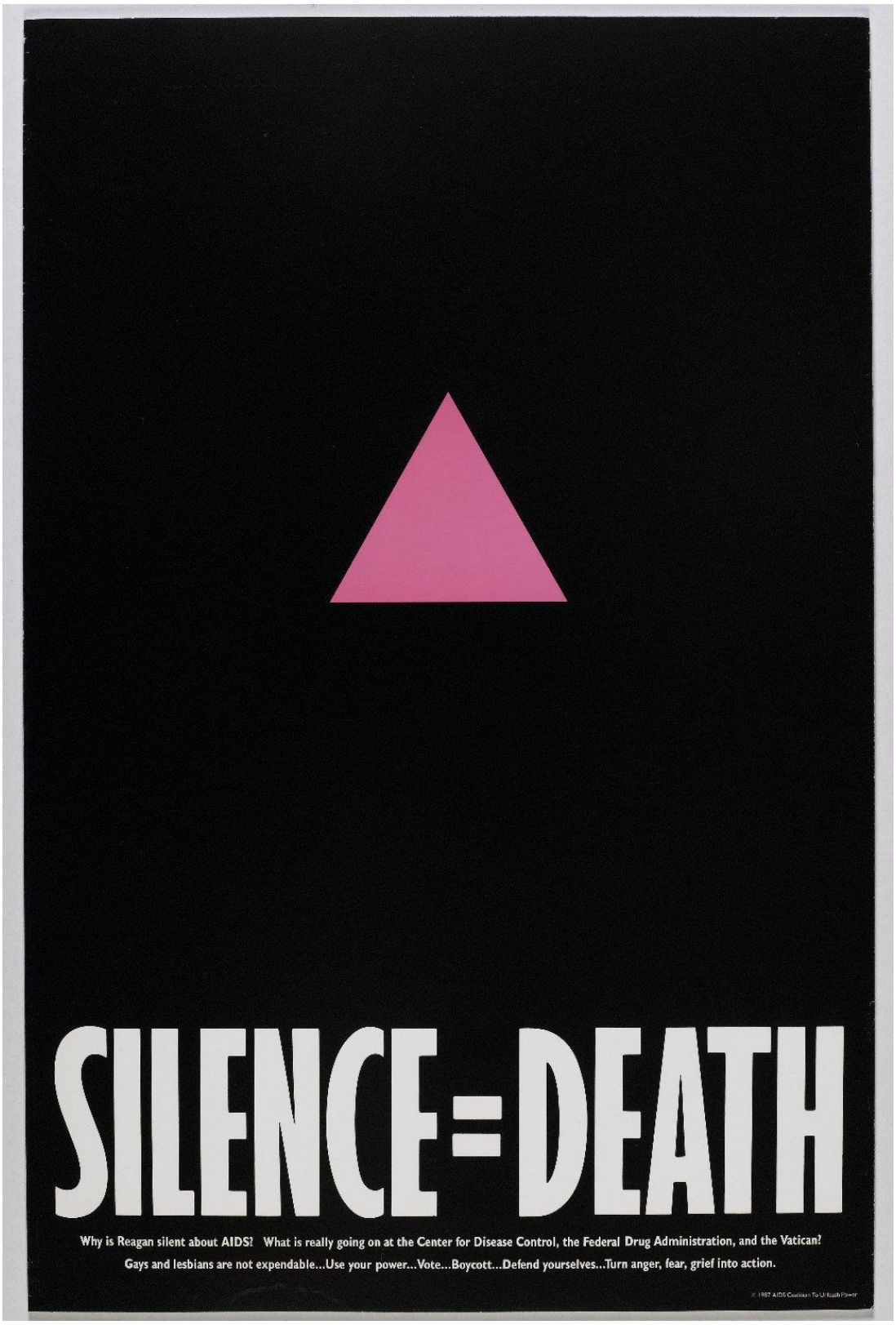

Figure 12: Avram Finkelstein, Brian Howard, Oliver Johnston, Charles Kreloff, Chris Lione, and Jorge Socarrás, *Silence=Death,* 1987

Figure 13: Félix González-Torres, *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.),* 1991

Bibliography

"100 Women: The Truth behind the 'bra-Burning' Feminists." Accessed April 9, 2024. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-45303069.

ALBAN, GILLIAN ME. "Medusa as Female Eye or Icon in Atwood, Murdoch, Carter, and Plath." *Mosaic (Winnipeg)* 46, no. 4 (2013): 163–82. https://doi.org/10.1353/mos.2013.0045.

American Alliance of Museums. "Moments That Matter: Toward a Visitor-Centered Understanding of Belonging in Museum Spaces," October 26, 2023. https://www.aam-us.org/2023/10/26/moments-that-matter-toward-a-visitor-centered-understanding-of-belonging-in-museum-spaces/.

American National Biography. "Neel, Alice Hartley (1900-1984), Painter." Accessed April 9, 2024. https://www.anb.org/display/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.001.0001/anb-9780198606697-e-1701262.

andrew. "Gay History in Paris." *Oscar Wilde Tours* (blog), July 8, 2014. https://www.oscarwildetours.com/gay-history-paris/.

ARTnews, The Editors of. "The Risk-Taking Portraitist of the Upper West Side: On Alice Neel's Tense Paintings, in 1962." *ARTnews.Com* (blog), February 27, 2015. https://www.artnews.com/art-news/retrospective/the-risk-taking-portraitist-of-the-upper-west-side-on-alice-neels-tense-paintings-3639/.

Bauer, Denise. "Alice Neel's Feminist and Leftist Portraits of Women." *Feminist Studies* 28, no. 2 (June 22, 2002): 375–89.

Block, Writer's. "Margaret, the Males Aren't Gazing: The Man in My Head Keeps Torturing Me." *Writer's Block Magazine* (blog), June 24, 2022. https://writersblockmagazine.com/2022/06/24/margaret-the-males-arent-gazing-the-man-in-my-head-keeps-torturing-me/.

Carr, Carolyn Kinder. *Alice Neel: Women*. New York: Rizzoli, 2002.

Cassatt, Mary. "Reading Le Figaro by Cassatt." World History Encyclopedia. Accessed April 6, 2024. https://www.worldhistory.org/image/15908/reading-le-figaro-by-cassatt/.

Chocano, Carina. "Why Suppress the 'Experience' of Half the World?" *The New York Times*, October 23, 2018, sec. Magazine. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/23/magazine/why-suppress-the-experience-of-half-the-world.html.

Cieraad, Irene, and John Rennie Short. "Dutch Windows: Female Virtue and Female Vice." In *At Home*, edited by Irene Cieraad, 31–52. An Anthropology of Domestic Space. Syracuse University Press, 1999. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1w36pj9.8.

———. "Introduction: Anthropology at Home." In *At Home*, edited by Irene Cieraad, 1–12. An Anthropology of Domestic Space. Syracuse University Press, 1999. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1w36pj9.6.

Cohen, Cathy J. "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies* 3, no. 4 (October 1997): 437. https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-3-4-437.

David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library. "Irene Peslikis Papers, 1957-2002 and Undated - Archives & Manuscripts at Duke University Libraries." Accessed April 9, 2024. https://archives.lib.duke.edu/catalog/peslikisirene.

"Doron Langberg - Kunsthal." Accessed April 10, 2024. https://www.kunsthal.nl/en/plan-your-visit/exhibitions/doron-langberg-part-of-your-world-en/.

"Dykes to Watch Out For » Frivolous, Aimless Queries." Accessed April 6, 2024. https://dykestowatchoutfor.com/frivolous-aimless-queries/.

Editors, History com. “Oscar Wilde Is Sent to Prison for Indecency.” HISTORY. Accessed November 7, 2022. https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/oscar-wilde-is-sent-to-prison-for-indecency.

Elkin, Lauren. *Art Monsters: Unruly Bodies in Feminist Art*. Macmillan Publishers, 2023.

“Femininity and the Female Presence in Oscar Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Grey.” Accessed April 6, 2024. https://diposit.ub.edu/dspace/bitstream/2445/170821/1/BRIAS%20ALIAGA%2C%20Nu%CC%81ria%20TFG.pdf.

Ferrer, Eloisa. “Art Outside the Box: Traditional Art in Non-Traditional Spaces.” TheatreArtLife, August 29, 2020. https://www.theatreartlife.com/artistic/art-outside-the-box-traditional-art-in-non-traditional-spaces/.

Fitzpatrick, Tracy. *Art and the Subway: New York Underground / Tracy Fitzpatrick.* New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2009.

Galvan, Margaret. “‘The Lesbian Norman Rockwell’: Alison Bechdel and Queer Grassroots Networks.” *American Literature* 90, no. 2 (June 1, 2018): 407–38. https://doi.org/10.1215/00029831-4564358.

Getsy, David, ed. *Queer*. Documents of Contemporary Art. London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2016.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *The Yellow Wallpaper*, 1999. https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1952.

Goltz, Dustin. “Queer Temporalities.” In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*, 2022. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.1182.

Guinness, Harry. “Get the Most Out of a Visit to the Museum.” *The New York Times*, November 1, 2019, sec. Smarter Living. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/01/smarter-living/get-the-most-out-of-a-visit-to-the-museum.html.

Hager, Lindsay T. “United in Anger: A History of ACT UP.” *The Oral History Review* 42, no. 1 (April 1, 2015): 134–38. https://doi.org/10.1093/ohr/ohv014.

Haring, Keith, Robert Farris Thompson, and Shepard Fairey. *Keith Haring Journals:* Deluxe edition. New York, N.Y: Penguin Classics, 2010.

Hedges, Warren. “Howells’s ‘Wretched Fetishes’: Character, Realism, and Other Modern Instances.” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 38, no. 1 (1996): 26–50.

Hochberger, Colleen. “8 Iconic AIDS Activist Artworks That Changed the Trajectory of the Epidemic.” Artspace. Accessed October 21, 2022. http://www.artspace.com/magazine/news_events/8-iconic-aids-activist-artworks-that-changed-the-trajectory-of-the-epidemic.

Holland-Muter, Susan. “Making Place, Making Home: Lesbian Queer World-Making in Cape Town.” *Estudos Feministas* 27, no. 3 (2019): 1–14.

Home Away From Home. “Home Away From Home.” Accessed December 18, 2023. https://www.homeawayfromhomechicago.com.

Kentlyn, Sue. “The Radically Subversive Space of the Queer Home: ‘Safety House’ and ‘Neighbourhood Watch.’” *Australian Geographer* 39, no. 3 (September 1, 2008): 327–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/00049180802270523.

Knott, Stephen F. *The Reagan Years / Stephen Knott and Jeffrey L. Chidester.* Facts on File Library of American History. New York: Facts On File, 2005.

Le Figaro. “Le Figaro - Actualité En Direct et Informations En Continu,” April 6, 2024. https://www.lefigaro.fr/.

"Le Figaro - Actualité En Direct et Informations En Continu." Accessed April 8, 2024. https://www.lefigaro.fr/.
Mare, Heidi de, and John Rennie Short. "Domesticity in Dispute: A Reconsideration of Sources." In *At Home*, edited by Irene Cieraad, 13–30. An Anthropology of Domestic Space. Syracuse University Press, 1999. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1w36pj9.7.
"Mary Cassatt Reading Le Figaro, 1878 Painting Reproduction | Marycassatt.Org." Accessed April 8, 2024. https://www.marycassatt.org/Reading-Le-Figaro-1878.html.
McCormack, Catherine. *Women in the Picture: What Culture Does with Female Bodies*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2021.
"MoMA | Print/Out: Felix Gonzalez-Torres." Accessed April 6, 2024. https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2012/04/04/printout-felix-gonzalez-torres/.
"MoMA | Print/Out: Felix Gonzalez-Torres." Accessed April 8, 2024. https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2012/04/04/printout-felix-gonzalez-torres/.
Montez, Ricardo. *Keith Haring's Line: Race and the Performance of Desire*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020. https://muse.jhu.edu/book/77180.
Morisot, Berthe. *The Artist's Sister at a Window,*. 1869. Oil on canvas, overall: 54.8 x 46.3 cm (21 9/16 x 18 1/4 in.), framed: 74.93 × 67.31 × 10.8 cm (29 1/2 × 26 1/2 × 4 1/4 in.).
National Museums Liverpool. "The Life of Rosa Bonheur." Accessed April 6, 2024. https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/stories/life-of-rosa-bonheur.
Ode To Art. "Key Art Movements from 1910s - 2000s." Accessed April 9, 2024. https://www.odetoart.com/blog.php?p=36%2CKey%20Art%20Movements%20from%201910s%20-%202000s.
Parkinson, Alan. "Everyday Geographies: The Power of the Quotidian." *Teaching Geography* 47, no. 2 (Summer 2022): 53–55.
Pascal, Dodie Kazanjian, Clément. "Jenna Gribbon's Pursuit of Pleasure in Queer Portraiture." Vogue, November 15, 2022. https://www.vogue.com/article/jenna-gribbon-profile.
Paul. "Berthe Morisot: A Woman Artist in a Man's World." 1000Museums, January 5, 2021. https://www.1000museums.com/berthe-morisot-paintings/.
Peacock, Charlotte. "Where Writers Write: Virginia Woolf's Writing Room." Charlotte Peacock Writer, January 2, 2021. https://charlottepeacock.co.uk/2021/01/02/where-writers-write-virginia-woolfs-writing-room/.
"Repeal of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' - Human Rights Campaign." Accessed April 10, 2024. https://www.hrc.org/our-work/stories/repeal-of-dont-ask-dont-tell.
Rudnick, Ashley Dunn, Constance McPhee, Allison. "Art, Protest, and Public Space." The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Accessed December 13, 2023. https://www.metmuseum.org/perspectives/articles/2021/10/art-protest-public-space.
Samet, Jennifer. "Beer with a Painter: Doron Langberg." Hyperallergic, August 17, 2019. http://hyperallergic.com/513615/beer-with-a-painter-doron-langberg/.
Schulman, Sarah. "Making Love Making Art: Living and Dying Performance in the 1980s." *This Will Have Been: Art, Love, & Politics in the 1980s*, 2012.
Sheff, David. "Keith Haring, An Intimate Conversation." *Rolling Stone*, August 10, 1989.
Sutphin, Eric. "Doron Langberg." *ARTnews.Com* (blog), May 1, 2018. https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/aia-reviews/doron-langberg-62512/.
The Art Story. "Impressionism Movement Overview." Accessed April 10, 2024. https://www.theartstory.org/movement/impressionism/.

The Guggenheim Museums and Foundation. “Felix Gonzalez-Torres.” Accessed April 10, 2024. https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/felix-gonzalez-torres.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art. “Alice Neel | Marxist Girl (Irene Peslikis).” Accessed April 6, 2024. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/830557.
The Museum of Modern Art. “Felix Gonzalez-Torres | MoMA.” Accessed April 10, 2024. https://www.moma.org/artists/2233.
“The Reagan Administration’s Unbelievable Response to the HIV/AIDS Epidemic - Vox.” Accessed April 10, 2024. https://www.vox.com/2015/12/1/9828348/ronald-reagan-hiv-aids.
“The Women Impressionists Forgotten by History.” Accessed April 8, 2024. https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20180807-the-women-impressionists-forgotten-by-history.
Thierry Goldberg Gallery. “Jenna Gribbon, Pollyanna Wrestlers, 2018.” Accessed April 8, 2024. https://thierrygoldberg.com/exhibitions/31/works/artworks-93-jenna-gribbon-pollyanna-wrestlers-2018/.
Tuhus-Dubrow, Rebecca. “The New Feminist Armpit Hair Revolution: Half-Statement, Half-Ornament.” *The Guardian*, June 24, 2019, sec. Life and style. https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/jun/24/feminist-armpit-hair-revolution-half-statement-half-ornament.
Visual AIDS. “Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Ross Laycock & Carl George: An….” Accessed April 10, 2024. https://visualaids.org/blog/carl-george-fgt-ross-laycock.
Ward, Sabina. “Keith Haring, Queer Temporality, and Art During AIDS,” n.d.
“Ways of Seeing by John Berger.” Accessed April 6, 2024. https://www.ways-of-seeing.com/.
Weiner, Josh. “The Art of the Aids Crisis: Cautionary Oeuvres From the 1980s | CCTP 802 – Art and Media Interfaced.” Accessed October 21, 2022. https://blogs.commons.georgetown.edu/cctp-802-spring2018/2018/05/04/the-art-of-the-aids-crisis-cautionary-oeuvres-from-the-1980s/.
Winsor & Newton - North America. “From the Archives: The History of the Metal Paint Tube.” Accessed April 10, 2024. https://www.winsornewton.com/na/articles/art-history/history-metal-paint-tube/.
Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One’s Own*. 3.5.2012 edition. Lightning Source Inc, 2012.

Beyond Walls: Artistic Reflections on First Apartments, Finding Identity, and Community Bonds

Sabina Ward
University of Vermont
College Honors Thesis
Spring 2024
Curator's Note

This show is the culmination of my time at UVM and part of my College Honors Thesis. The thesis explores interior spaces, and how they manifest in the artworks of artists who have been historically excluded from exterior spaces, such as women and queer artists.

The works themselves began as experimental pieces. I was feeling confined by stretched canvases, feeling like they created an intense divided between me as the painter and the viewer. I attempted to remedy this with different perspectives- photo within a painting, or the viewer as the subject- but there was still a disconnect between the painting and the audience that mirrored the division between public and private. This led to the large-scale paintings on raw canvas. The lack of hard edge created by stretched canvas blurs the lines between where the painting ends, and the gallery begins. The large format- right around life size- invites the viewer into the painting.

After spending nine months thinking about interiors and the integration between public and private, I didn't feel like it was appropriate to display this work in a plain white gallery. The "White Cube" gallery isn't something that responds to the work that is in it; it doesn't converse with the work or enhance the experience of the viewer at all. And most importantly, it actively excludes those who do not have prior knowledge of museums and gallery spaces. Because of that, I decided that I needed to take a different approach to curating this show. In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger writes that true curation is instinctual, and that a scrap book or a collection of magazine clippings is just as curated as an exhibition at a major museum.[116] I wanted to make this exhibition space feel as welcoming and homey as possible, and a space that everyone would feel comfortable in. I also wanted to embrace the imperfections that are present in the paintings and celebrate the coming-of-age of college. The furniture was acquired the same way that I furnished my apartment- borrowed from friends, found on Facebook marketplace, or handed down.

[116] "Ways of Seeing by John Berger," accessed April 6, 2024, https://www.ways-of-seeing.com/.

Figure 5: Max at Higher Ground, Oil on Panel, 2024

Figure 6: R. in the ADKS, Oil on canvas, 2024

Figure 7: R. in my room, Oil on canvas, 2024

Figure 8: l & s getting ready, Oil on canvas, 2024

Figure 9: l cooking in her apartment, Oil on canvas, 2024

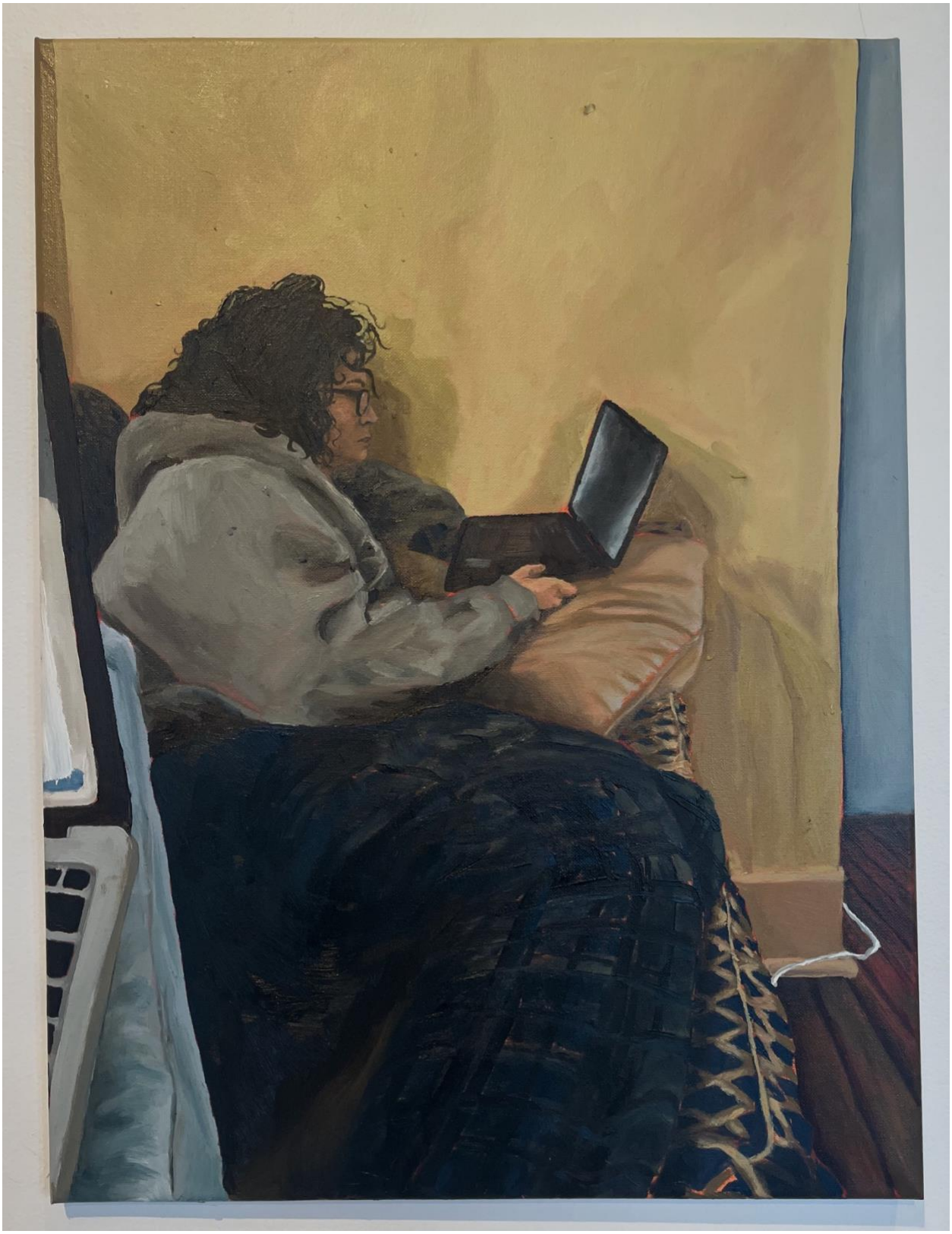

Figure 10: e on the couch in boston, Oil on canvas, 2024

Figure 11: e in boston, Acrylic on panel, 2023

Figure 12: m & j at a birthday, Oil on canvas, 2024

Figure 13: window still life, Acrylic on panel, 2023

Figure 14: r, l, a, s & j at dinner, Oil on canvas, 2024

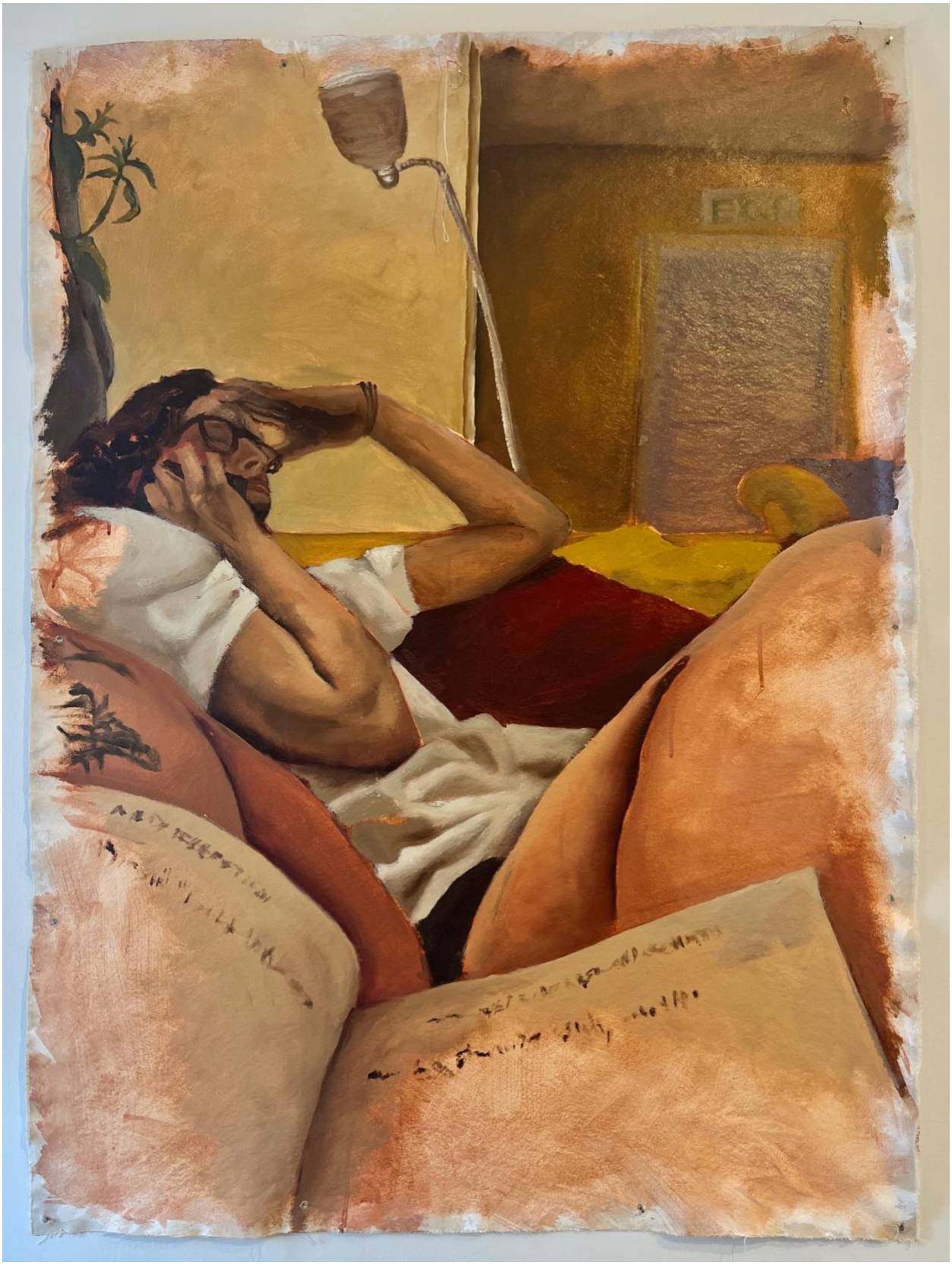

Figure 15: j in the first apartment, Oil on canvas, 2024

Figure 16: yung gravy at fallfest, Oil on panel, 2024