## Queer Spirituality in the Visual Arts

Iliff School of Theology, Fall 2018

Justin Tanis, PhD

jtanis@iliff.edu

The visual arts offer a lens to see the rich spirituality that queer peoples have developed both within and outside of religious institutions. In this course, we will explore themes of queer spirituality, as expressed in art, including embodiment, liberation, (in)justice, sexuality, pleasure, and gender, in a variety of cultural contexts. We will consider how artists’ expression of spirituality relates to written queer theology and how these works of art can expand our perception of the sacred. The focus of the course will be mainly on contemporary art, which examples drawn from a number of countries and contexts. No previous knowledge of art or art history is necessary.

**Learning Objectives**

*Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:*

* Recognize key figures in the development of queer art in the modern and contemporary world, particularly those who explore and employ religious imagery.
* Describe central themes that relate spirituality, sexual orientation, and gender identity as expressed through the visual arts in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.
* Articulate the roles of the visual arts in liberation movements and theologies, particularly as it relates to the LGBTQ communities.
* Reflect on the spiritual nature of these works of art, including the ways in which they may inform the student’s own spiritual life.
* Understand methods and be able to use visual works as part of religious practice individually and in community, as tools for prayer and meditation, and as inspiration for learning and preaching.

**Required Texts**

* Getsy, David, ed. *Queer*. Documents of Contemporary Art. London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-262-52867-2. This text offers excerpts from a wide range of artists speaking in their own words. While these do not address religious issues, they will help you put the artists in context.
* Reed, Christopher. *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-19-539907-3. This text provides an overview of queer art history.
* Additional articles and videos as assigned, with links or PDFs provided.

**Methodology**

The course will focus on visual works of art, primarily paintings, photographs, and prints, with a few films. We will include readings from art historians, theologians, and other scholars, as well as artists’ statements and writings, and newspaper/magazine reviews of art shows, to place these works in perspective and context. We will use videos to hear directly from the artists themselves whenever possible. Students will also be asked to select one work of art from each week for personal reflection/prayer/meditation.

Engaged participation is key to success in an online class. Students should plan to schedule regular times each week to interact with the material. The course will include self-guided materials as well as the opportunity to dialogue with other students and the instructor.

**Evaluation/Grading**

Students will complete:

* Three quizzes on the material (at the ends of weeks 3, 7, and 10); the quizzes will ask students to identify themes, art works and artists, and reflect on the material. The goal of the quizzes is to ensure that students have understood the content studied. The quizzes will include multiple choice, short answer, and brief essay questions.
* One visual art project, to be graded entirely on content (no artistic skills needed); the student will create one work of art, using any medium the student desires (collage, digital art, photography, painting, drawing, ceramics, etc.) that reflects on the intersection of sexuality and spirituality. The purpose of this assignment is to understand the communication of spiritual and theological ideas through visual media. By creating a work of art for themselves, students will better understand the artists’ processes.
* Weekly discussion questions to be posted on Canvas

**Course Outline**

Week 1: Introductions

Topics:

* Using the visual arts to study spirituality
* Introduction to queer art
* Art created for the LGBTQ communities vs. for the general public
* “Queer” art prior to the understanding of “homosexuality”

Preparation/Readings:

* “Introduction: Queer Intolerability and its Attachments,” pp. 12-23 and Nayland Blake, “Curating ‘In a Different Light’,” pp. 120-121 in Getsy, *Queer*
* Introduction, “Art and Homosexuality: An Overview,” pp. 1-9,” Chapter 1, “Varieties of ‘Homosexuality,’ Varieties of ‘Art’,” Chapter 2: “Before Modernism,” pp. 11-67 in Reed, *Art and Homosexuality*
* Glenn, Clinton. “The Queering of St. Sebastian: Renaissance Iconography and the Homoerotic Body.” *Concordia Undergraduate Journal of Art History*, July 24, 2013. <http://cujah.org/past-volumes/volume-ix/essay-4-volume-9/>.
* Visit the Jesus in Love blog and look at the list of artists: <http://www.jesusinlove.org/artists.php>. Explore several of the links that interest you.

Week 2: Modern Art in the Early – Mid Twentieth Centuries

Topics:

* Does identity matter? The connection between identity and art, and identity and spirituality
* Early generations of out artists
* The Harlem Renaissance

Preparation/Readings:

* Chapter 3, “Inventing the Modern: Art and Sexual Identity in the Late Nineteenth Century,” Chapter 4, “Secrets and Subcultures, 1900-1940,” and Chapter 5: “The Short Triumph of the Modern,” pp. 69-178, in Reed, *Art and Homosexuality*
* Richard Bruce Nugent, “You See, I am a Homosexual,” p. 27-28 in Getsy, *Queer*
* McBreen, Ellen. “Biblical Gender Bending in Harlem: The Queer Performance of Nugent’s Salome.” *Art Journal* 57, no. 3 (1998): 22. doi:10.2307/777966.

Week 3: Lesbian feminist art

Topics:

* Utopian art works
* The Goddess as an expression of women’s spirituality
* Role of women artists
* Function of artistic communities within women’s land/space

Preparation/Readings:

* Harmony Hammond, “Class Notes,” p. 41-44, Lesbian Avengers, “The Lesbian Avenger Handbook,” pp. 81-82, Carrie Moyer and Dyke Action Machine! “Do You Love the Dyke in Your Face: Lesbian Street Representation,” pp. 95-98, Hanh Thi Pham “Statement,” pp. 98-99, Catherine Lord, “Their Memory is Playing Tricks on Her: Notes toward a Calligraphy of Rage,” pp. 99-103 and Tee Corinne, “On Sexual Art,” pp. 114-116 in Getsy, *Queer*.
* Chapter 6: The Avant-Garde and Activism, in Reed, *Art and Homosexuality*, pp. 179-206
* Motta, Carlos. “Interview with Harmony Hammond.” *We Who Feel Differently*. Accessed January 1, 2017. <http://wewhofeeldifferently.info/interview.php?interview=109>. This is available in audio, visual, and written form.

Week 4: Political realities and activisms

Topics:

* Reaction/responses to political and religious oppression
* Development of queer culture and aesthetics

Preparation/Readings:

* Marlon Riggs, “Black Macho Revisited: Reflections of a Snap! Queen,” pp. 70-75, David Wojnarowicz, “Close to the Knives,” pp. 77-80, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Public and Private: Spheres of Influence,” pp. 85-90 in Getsy, *Queer*.
* Galloway, David. “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.” In *Keith Haring: Heaven and Hell*. Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany : New York, N.Y: Hatje Cantz, 2001. [http://www.haring.com/!/selected\_writing/the-marriage-of-heaven-and-hell#.WYT5SIQrJhF](http://www.haring.com/%21/selected_writing/the-marriage-of-heaven-and-hell#.WYT5SIQrJhF) .
* Phillips, Natalie E. “The Radiant (Christ) Child: Keith Haring and the Jesus Movement.” *American Art* 21, no. 3 (2007): 54–73. doi:10.1086/526480.
* “Queer Corpses: Grupo Chaclacayo and the Image of Death - Journal #44 April 2013 - E-Flux.” <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/44/60146/queer-corpses-grupo-chaclacayo-and-the-image-of-death/>.

Week 5: Art of AIDS

Topics:

* Role of art as activism
* Humanizing the AIDS crisis
* Themes of life, death, suffering, health, survival—how can art and faith address the ultimate questions of meaning?

Preparation/Readings:

* Chapter 7: “The AIDS Decade,” Reed, *Art and Homosexuality*, pp. 207-228.
* Rotimi Fani-Kayode, “Traces of Ecstasy,” pp. 45-47, Gregg Bordowitz, “Picture a Coalition,” pp. 75-76, Assotto Saint, “No More Metaphors,” pp. 83-84, Roberto Jacoby, “I Have AIDS,” pp. 84-85, and Gran Fury, “In Conversation with Douglas Crimp,” pp. 90-94, in Getsy, *Queer*.
* Fani-Kayode, Rotimi, and Alex Hirst. “Metaphysick: Every Moment Counts.” In *Ecstatic Antibodies: Resisting the AIDS Mythology*, edited by Tessa Boffin and Sunil Gupta, 78–84. London: Rivers Oram Press ; Winchester, Mass. : Unwin Hyman, 1990.
* “Albert Winn’s Photography Captures the Intertwining Influences of Judaism and Illness — Jewish Journal.” <http://jewishjournal.com/culture/arts/64097/>.
* Choose one: *United in Anger: A History of ACT UP*, <https://youtu.be/MrAzU79PBVM>, a history of the activist group or Derek Jarman, *Blue*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yVX8DZ_CZXg>, which is an art film about the experiences of living with AIDS (note: while this is technically a film, the screen remains blue throughout because the artist lost his sight while making it)

Week 6: Art and culture: Mexican and Chicana/o art

Topics:

* Role of Catholicism
* Use of traditional techniques/imagery to express queer sacred reality
* Specific visual imagery of Mexican/Chican@ art

Preparation/Readings:

* de Jesus Douglas, Eduardo. “The Colonial Self: Homosexuality and Mestizaje in the Art of Nahum B. Zenil.” *Art Journal* 57, no. 3 (1998): 14. doi:10.2307/777965.
* Testigo del Ser
* Calvo, Luz. “Art Comes for the Archbishop: The Semiotics of Contemporary Chicana Feminism and the Work of Alma López.” In *Our Lady of Controversy: Alma López’s “Irreverent Apparition,”* edited by Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Alma López, 96–120. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011.
* Lopez, Alma. “Queer Santas, Holy Violence.” Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, CA, October 14, 2014.https://clgs.org/gallery-items/2015-harkness-lecture-alma-lopez/

Week 7: Contemporary images of a queer Christ

Topics:

* Use of Jesus and the Christ figure as queer
* Revolutionary aspects of claiming a queer Christ

Preparations/Readings

* Pui-lan, Kwok. “Engendering Christ: Who Do You Say That I Am?” in *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005, pp. 168-185.
* Strong, Lester. “Coloring the World Queer Delmas Howe’s Stations: A Gay Passion.” *Leslie Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art - THE ARCHIVE*, no. 22 (Winter 2007). https://www.leslielohman.org/the-archive/no22/delmas-howe\_strong-22.html.
* Cheng, Patrick, “Art, Censorship, and the Scandal of the Cross,” HuffPost, January 10, 2011, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-patrick-s-cheng-phd/art-censorship-and-the-sc_b_806402.html>
* Cherry, Kittredge, “Gay Jesus art sparks violence … and hope,” <http://jesusinlove.blogspot.com/2007/08/gay-jesus-art-sparks-violence-and-hope.html>, “Gay Passion of Christ series starts Sunday at Q Spirit,” <http://qspirit.net/gay-passion-of-christ-intro/>, “Gay Jesus painting shown in New Zealand: Christopher Olwage paints LGBT Christian scenes,” <http://jesusinlove.blogspot.com/2015/02/gay-jesus-painting-shown-in-new-zealand.html>, and “Protests end gay Jesus exhibit in Spain,” <http://jesusinlove.blogspot.com/2010/11/protests-end-gay-jesus-exhibit-in-spain.html>.

Week 8: Living spiritually

Topics:

* Creating a queer space
	+ Contemporary queer global contexts

Preparation/Readings

* Johnson, Ken. “Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, at MoMA PS1.” *The New York Times*, December 6, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/07/arts/design/thomas-lanigan-schmidt-at-moma-ps1.html>.
* Toxic Titties, “The Mamaist Manifesto”, pp. 136-137, Gilbert & George, “In Conversation with Slava Mogutin,” pp. 142-146, and Giuseppe Campuzano, “Is a Bicentennial Possible without Sex,” pp. 158-160, in Getsy, *Queer*.
* Chapter 8: “Queer and Beyond,” Reed, *Art and Homosexuality*, pp. 229-255.

Week 9: Expressing identity as sacred subject

Topics:

* Art as advocacy
* Intersectionality
* Sacred bodies of People of Color
* Gender identity

Preparation/Readings

* Emily Roysdon, “Queer Love,” p. 178-9, Sharon Hayws, “Revolutionary Love: I Am Your Worst Fear, I Am Your Best Enemy,” pp. 179-181, Allyson Mitchell, “Deep Lez,” Prem Sahib, “To Make Queer Art Now,” pp. 194-195, and Carlos Motta, “We Who Feel Differently: A Manifesto,” pp. 196-197 in Getsy, *Queer*.
* The Greater New York Smudge Cleanse: <http://nycsmudge.com/>
* Watch documentary: *Kehinde Wiley: An Economy of Grace*. PBS, 2014. <http://www.pbs.org/video/2365311240/>

Week 10: Conclusion

* Student projects
* Concluding thoughts