
Curating Gay Art

Mikhail Osadchiy

Master in Art Markets

Supervisor:

PhD António Alexandre Melo
Auxiliar Professor
Iscte - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

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HISTORY DEPARTMENT

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Acknowledgements

This work represents much more to me than just a dissertation. It marks a new chapter in my life. In February 2022, the war between Russia and Ukraine began, an event that brought an abrupt end to my successful career in linguistics, and to the security and well-being I once knew. For ethical and political reasons, I could no longer live in Russia and made the decision to leave.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the curatorial challenges and strategies involved in the curation of gay art, focusing on how LGBTQ+ themes are represented and received in both liberal and authoritarian contexts. Using the *Expelled* exhibition in Lisbon as a case study, this research examines the role of the curator as a mediator between marginalized voices and public audiences, navigating political, social, and aesthetic considerations. The study analyzes the impact of political repression on gay art in authoritarian regimes, highlighting how curatorial practices can serve as forms of resistance and advocacy. Through qualitative methods this thesis offers insights into the complexities of curating LGBTQ+ art. The findings emphasize the importance of maintaining the authenticity and diversity of queer voices in the face of societal pressures.

Key Words:

Gay Art, Curation, LGBTQ+ Representation, Political Repression, Advocacy

Resumo

Esta tese explora os desafios e estratégias curatoriais envolvidos na curadoria de arte gay, com foco em como os temas LGBTQ+ são representados e recebidos em contextos liberais e autoritários. Utilizando a exposição *Expelled* em Lisboa como estudo de caso, a pesquisa examina o papel do curador como mediador entre vozes marginalizadas e o público, navegando por considerações políticas, sociais e estéticas. O estudo analisa o impacto da repressão política na arte gay em regimes autoritários, destacando como as práticas curatoriais podem servir como formas de resistência e defesa. Através de métodos qualitativos esta tese oferece insights sobre as complexidades de curar arte LGBTQ+. Os resultados destacam a importância de manter a autenticidade e a diversidade das vozes queer diante da comercialização e pressões sociais. O futuro da arte gay e sua curadoria reside em modelos éticos que equilibrem a proteção da identidade e expressão LGBTQ+.

Palavras-chave:

Arte Gay, Curadoria, Representação LGBTQ+, Repressão Política, Defesa

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*Art should comfort the disturbed
and disturb the comfortable*

Banksy, 1997

Introduction

Background and Context

Art has always served as a mirror to society, reflecting its values, conflicts, and aspirations. However, for marginalized communities, art has often become a more complex and subversive tool—a means of both expressing identity and challenging the status quo. For the LGBTQ+ community, gay art has long functioned as a form of both coded communication and overt protest. Throughout history, the LGBTQ+ community has been subjected to suppression, censorship, and erasure, and yet, despite these forces, gay artists have continuously found ways to express their identities and experiences. Whether through the use of symbolism in more repressive times or through overt declarations of identity and sexuality in more liberal periods, gay art offers a unique lens into the intersection of art, identity, and society.

Gay art has historically followed cycles of suppression and blossoming, where periods of repression, censorship, and criminalization of homosexuality have led to more covert and coded artistic expressions. Artists, restricted by societal norms, often embedded their works with hidden symbols or subtle hints at same-sex love and desire, allowing those "in the know" to recognize the meaning while avoiding punishment. In contrast, periods of social liberalization and political upheaval have provided artists with more freedom, allowing them to create works that more openly express LGBTQ+ experiences.

In this thesis, the focus will be placed on the curation of gay art—an act that extends beyond simply displaying artwork to serve as a political and cultural intervention. Curating gay art requires navigating a series of challenges, including censorship, marginalization, and societal resistance, while also ensuring that the diversity of the LGBTQ+ community is fully represented. Moreover, curators face the complex task of presenting gay art to audiences that may be unfamiliar with, or even hostile toward, LGBTQ+ themes, making the act of curation not just an artistic challenge but a socio-political one.

This thesis will explore the evolution of gay art within different political contexts, particularly in authoritarian and liberal regimes. It will delve into how curatorial strategies can respond to these varying contexts, with a special focus on the exhibition I curated, *Expelled*, in Lisbon, Portugal. The exhibition addressed the intersection of identity, exile, and marginalization, drawing on the experiences of two artists—one a refugee from Ukraine, the other an exile from Russia—both of whom were impacted by political and social forces that affected their ability to express their sexual identities.

Research Objectives and Questions

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the intricate relationship between gay art, politics, and society, with a specific focus on the role of the curator in shaping how gay art is viewed, understood, and received. Several key objectives guide this study:

- To understand how political and social repression influences the creation and curation of gay art in authoritarian regimes.
- To identify the challenges that curators face when working with LGBTQ+ themes, including censorship, societal backlash, and representation issues.
- To explore the role of the curator as an advocate for LGBTQ+ visibility and to examine how curatorial practices can serve as forms of activism.
- To reflect on how curatorial strategies can engage diverse audiences, including those outside the LGBTQ+ community, and provoke dialogue around queer identity and representation.

The central research questions that frame this thesis are:

- How have periods of political repression and liberalization influenced the creation and public reception of gay art?
- What curatorial approaches are most effective in promoting the visibility and authenticity of LGBTQ+ voices in both conservative and liberal societies?
- How can curating gay art be seen as a form of political and cultural resistance?

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the broader understanding of gay art and its critical role in challenging societal norms and advocating for LGBTQ+ rights. By focusing on the practice of curation, this thesis sheds light on the pivotal role that curators play in shaping how LGBTQ+

art is understood, consumed, and discussed within both mainstream and underground spaces. The act of curating gay art goes beyond the logistical elements of selecting and arranging works for public display; it is a politically charged process that involves confronting censorship, navigating complex social dynamics, and advocating for greater representation within the broader art world.

Curators hold the power to bring marginalized voices into the center of cultural discourse, highlighting the importance of diversity and inclusivity in the arts. This thesis will explore how curators can not only amplify LGBTQ+ voices but also engage audiences—particularly those who may not be familiar with or comfortable with gay art—in a meaningful dialogue. By focusing on curatorial practices, this research will also offer practical insights for professionals working in the field of LGBTQ+ art, providing strategies for overcoming the challenges associated with representing and exhibiting marginalized identities.

Scope of the Study

This thesis focuses on curatorial practices related to gay art, with particular emphasis on two distinct socio-political environments: authoritarian regimes, where LGBTQ+ identities are often criminalized and censored, and more liberal contexts, such as Portugal, where LGBTQ+ rights are legally recognized, but social conservatism still poses challenges. The comparative nature of this research aims to explore how different political climates influence both the creation and curation of gay art. In authoritarian regimes, where censorship and repression dominate, curatorial strategies often involve subtle or covert means of presenting gay art, while in more liberal environments, curators may face challenges related to commercialization and the risk of depoliticizing gay art.

This thesis will also provide a detailed case study of the *Expelled* exhibition in Lisbon, focusing on the curatorial challenges, strategies, and provocations employed to engage both LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ audiences. This exhibition, held during Portugal's Gay Pride, presented a unique opportunity to explore themes of exile, marginalization, and identity through the lens of two artists who were forced to flee their homelands due to political and social repression.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into three main chapters:

Chapter 1: Gay Art, Society, and the State

This chapter will explore the historical relationship between gay art and political power, with a focus on how cycles of suppression and blossoming have shaped the creation and public reception of gay art. It will examine the specific case of gay art in Russia, where periods of repression and brief windows of relative freedom have influenced both the production and curation of LGBTQ+ works. Through historical examples, this chapter will highlight the tensions between state control, societal norms, and artistic expression.

Chapter 2: The Complexities of Curating Gay Art: Challenges and Considerations

This chapter will analyze the challenges faced by curators working with gay art, including issues of representation, censorship, and marginalization. It will examine how curatorial approaches can either reinforce or subvert societal norms, as well as how curators can engage with a diverse audience without compromising the authenticity of LGBTQ+ voices. Special attention will be given to the political and religious provocations that often arise in exhibitions of gay art.

Chapter 3: Curatorial Experience at a Gay Art Exhibition in Lisbon

This chapter will present a case study of the Expelled exhibition, detailing the curatorial strategies, challenges, and audience engagement techniques employed in the exhibition. It will explore how the use of provocation—political, religious, and aesthetic—was central to the exhibition's impact, and how curatorial decisions were informed by both the local context of Lisbon and the broader political landscape.

Methodology

The methodology of this thesis is designed to explore the curatorial practices surrounding gay art and to understand the challenges and complexities involved in exhibiting LGBTQ+ themes in diverse socio-political contexts. This research employs a qualitative approach, combining case study analysis with critical discourse analysis. The qualitative nature of this study allows for a deep exploration of the cultural, political, and social factors influencing curatorial decisions, as well as the audience's reception of gay art.

The first step involved an extensive review of existing literature on gay art, curatorial practices, LGBTQ+ representation in the arts, and the impact of political repression on artistic expression. Key sources include academic books, journal articles, exhibition catalogs, and

critiques, which provide a foundation for understanding how gay art has been historically shaped by socio-political forces.

The core of the methodology is a detailed case study of the *Expelled* exhibition held in Lisbon. This case study approach is particularly suited for investigating contemporary curatorial strategies and their effectiveness in dealing with LGBTQ+ themes.

To enrich the analysis, one semi-structured interview with the venue director (gay art collector) was conducted.

In addition to the case study and the interview, a critical discourse analysis (CDA) was applied to reviews, media coverage, and exhibition materials (catalogues, posters, online discussions) surrounding gay art exhibitions. This method was used to uncover the implicit biases, societal norms, and political pressures reflected in the language used by critics, media, and institutions when discussing LGBTQ+ art.

CDA helps in understanding how discourse shapes and is shaped by social power relations, particularly in terms of how gay art is framed within both conservative and liberal environments. It allows for an examination of how language either reinforces or challenges the marginalization of LGBTQ+ identities in public cultural spaces.

Chapter 1.

Gay Art, Society and the State

1.1. Cycles of suppression and blossoming

The cyclical nature of suppression and blossoming has significantly influenced the type of work produced by gay artists. During periods of suppression, artists often used coded language and symbolism, and their work often reflected themes of secrecy, longing, and repression.

On the other hand, periods of blossoming have allowed for more open and diverse expressions of gay identity and experience. Artists have been able to explore themes of love, desire, and identity more openly. Moreover, these periods have seen a proliferation of different artistic styles and mediums, from painting and sculpture to photography and performance art. This diversity reflects the diverse experiences and identities within the LGBTQ+ community.

Historically, societal norms and laws have often suppressed homosexuality, influencing the creation and public view of gay art. The criminalization and stigmatization of homosexuality have led to clandestine expression, often manifested in coded language and symbolism in art. In Ancient Greece, for example, homosexual relationships were a part of society and often depicted in art, especially pottery (Dover 1978). However, with the rise of the Roman Empire and later Christianity, these representations became less prominent and eventually almost disappeared (Veyne 1985; Bullough 1979; Boswell 1980).

During the Victorian era, morality laws severely restricted expressions of homosexuality. Gay themes in art had to be hidden or coded during this period. For instance, many gay artists chose to express their sexuality through subtle symbolism, such as the use of flowers in Oscar Wilde's 'The Green Carnation.' These coded messages were often only understandable by those familiar with the specific symbols, allowing artists to express their identities and desires without explicitly breaking societal norms (Prager 2020).

Blossoming periods are characterized by greater acceptance and visibility of the LGBTQ+ community in society. These periods often coincide with broader social changes

and movements, such as the sexual revolution in the 1960s and the modern gay rights movement. During the Weimar Republic in Germany (1919-1933), for example, there was a significant blossoming of gay culture and art. Berlin, the capital, was a particularly vibrant center of gay culture. The city was home to many gay bars, clubs, and theaters, and had a vibrant scene that was largely open and accepting. The atmosphere was conducive for many gay artists, writers, and intellectuals, who thrived in this environment and contributed to a flourishing gay culture (Beachy 2014; Marhoefer 2015).

During this period, Magnus Hirschfeld, a prominent sexologist and gay rights advocate, established the Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin. The Institute served as a research center, a counseling center, and a gathering place for the LGBTQ+ community. It also housed a museum displaying works related to the history and culture of homosexuality.

Art and literature of the Weimar period reflect the liberal attitudes of the time. Some works openly addressed homosexuality, breaking away from the more secretive and coded depictions of gay relationships that were common in previous periods. For example, painters such as Christian Schad and Otto Dix included in their works scenes from Berlin's thriving nightlife, with some paintings subtly including figures from the LGBTQ+ community. Filmmakers, too, started exploring themes related to homosexuality. The 1919 film "Different from the Others", co-written by Hirschfeld, is considered one of the first sympathetic portrayals of homosexuality in cinema.

Sadly, this period of openness ended with the rise of the Nazi party in 1933. The Nazis persecuted homosexuality, with thousands of gay people being targeted, arrested, and sent to concentration camps. Art and literature that portrayed homosexuality were banned and destroyed, and the Institute for Sexual Science was ransacked, and its library burned.

The sexual revolution in the 1960s and 1970s brought about a sea change in attitudes towards sexuality, including homosexuality. In the arts, this meant that more artists felt comfortable expressing their sexual identities in their work (Kilian 2011). The work of David Hockney and Andy Warhol, for example, often contained explicit gay themes. This period also saw the establishment of the first gay art galleries and exhibitions, providing a platform for gay artists to share their work with a broader audience.

More recently, the growing acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community has seen an explosion of gay art. Artists such as Kehinde Wiley and Zanele Muholi have been able to

openly explore themes of gay identity, love, and desire in their work. Gay art has also become more diverse, reflecting the wide range of experiences within the LGBTQ+ community.

1.2. Inconvenient Art in an Authoritarian State: Gay art in Russia

The attitude towards gay art changed in a similar way in Russia, where periods of repression were replaced by relative tolerance. Russia has never been a gay-friendly country in its history, but there were periods when the state and society did not interfere with the work of gay artists, giving them freedom.

The early Soviet period, particularly after the 1917 revolution, initially presented a relatively liberal environment for queer individuals, allowing for a flourishing of artistic expression that included homosexual themes. However, this liberalism was short-lived, as the Stalinist regime imposed strict controls over personal and artistic freedoms, leading to a significant decline in the visibility and acceptance of LGBTQ+ art and culture. This trajectory mirrors patterns observed in other authoritarian regimes where state control over cultural narratives often results in the suppression of marginalized identities.

In the early years following the Bolshevik Revolution, there was a notable attempt to redefine sexual norms and embrace a more progressive stance towards homosexuality. Scholars have documented how the Soviet state initially legalized homosexuality in 1922, reflecting a broader commitment to modernity and individual rights. This period saw the emergence of queer artistic expressions that challenged traditional norms and explored themes of sexuality and identity. However, as the political landscape shifted towards authoritarianism under Stalin, these freedoms were curtailed, and homosexuality was criminalized again in 1934, leading to a climate of fear and repression for LGBTQ+ individuals and artists (Priestley, 2023).

The cultural policies of the Stalinist regime were characterized by a strict adherence to socialist realism, which prioritized art that glorified the state and its ideals. This ideological framework marginalized any form of artistic expression that deviated from the prescribed norms, including gay art. Artists who sought to explore queer themes faced severe

repercussions, including censorship, imprisonment, or worse. The state's control over artistic expression not only stifled individual creativity but also perpetuated a culture of silence surrounding LGBTQ+ identities (Priestley, 2023). This suppression of gay art during the Stalinist era is emblematic of broader authoritarian practices that seek to control cultural narratives and eliminate dissenting voices.

The legacy of this repression has had lasting effects on the representation of LGBTQ+ individuals in Russian art and culture. Contemporary discussions around gay art in Russia often reference this historical context, highlighting how the remnants of Soviet-era homophobia continue to shape societal attitudes towards queer identities. Research (Zorina et al., 2015) indicates that public acceptance of homosexuality in Russia remains low, with significant portions of the population holding negative views towards LGBTQ+ individuals. This societal prejudice is often reinforced by state policies that criminalize and stigmatize queer identities, creating a hostile environment for artists who wish to explore these themes in their work.

In examining the evolution of gay art in the post-Soviet era, it is essential to consider the impact of neoliberalism and globalization on artistic expression. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 opened new avenues for artistic exploration, allowing for a resurgence of queer visibility in the arts. However, this newfound freedom has been met with resistance from conservative elements within Russian society, leading to a complex landscape where LGBTQ+ artists navigate both opportunities and challenges (Kondakov, 2017). The emergence of grassroots movements and independent art spaces has provided platforms for queer artists to express their identities and challenge prevailing norms, yet these spaces often operate under the threat of state repression.

During the 1990s, there was a notable shift in the perception of homosexuality within Russian society. The removal of male homosexuality from the Russian Criminal Code in 1993 and its subsequent declassification as a psychiatric disorder in 1999 were pivotal moments that facilitated a more open dialogue about LGBTQ+ identities and experiences (Moreno et al., 2019). Notable figures from this period include Igor Kon, a prominent sociologist and sexologist whose advocacy played a crucial role in advancing LGBTQ+ rights and visibility in Russia (Moreno et al., 2019).

However, the optimism of the 1990s was short-lived. The early 2000s saw a resurgence of conservative values, culminating in the enactment of the "gay propaganda" law in 2013, which effectively criminalized the promotion of LGBTQ+ rights and visibility. This legislative shift not only stifled artistic expression but also fostered an environment of fear and repression for LGBTQ+ artists and activists. The impact of this law has been profound, leading to increased censorship of LGBTQ+ themes in art and culture, as well as a chilling effect on public discourse surrounding queer identities. The law has been used to justify the closure of exhibitions, the banning of films, and the harassment of artists who dare to challenge heteronormative narratives (Ociepka & Arendarska, 2021).

The challenges faced by LGBTQ+ artists in Russia are compounded by the lack of institutional support for queer art. Unlike in some Western contexts where LGBTQ+ art is increasingly recognized and celebrated, Russian artists often find themselves isolated and without access to resources or platforms to showcase their work (Priestley, 2023). This lack of support is indicative of a broader trend in authoritarian regimes, where state-sanctioned art often excludes marginalized voices and reinforces dominant narratives. As a result, many queer artists are forced to operate in underground spaces, relying on informal networks to share their work and connect with audiences.

Moreover, the intersection of queer identity and national identity plays a crucial role in shaping the discourse around gay art in Russia. The state often employs nationalist rhetoric to frame LGBTQ+ identities as foreign or incompatible with traditional Russian values, further entrenching societal homophobia (Kondakov, 2017). This narrative not only serves to justify state repression but also fosters an environment where LGBTQ+ individuals are seen as outsiders, leading to increased stigmatization and discrimination. The struggle for visibility and acceptance within the arts is thus intertwined with broader questions of national identity and cultural belonging.

Despite these challenges, a resilient underground art scene has emerged, characterized by a commitment to subverting oppressive narratives and creating spaces for queer expression. Artists such as Andrei Bartenev have utilized performance art and installations to address issues of identity, visibility, and resistance.



Andrey Bartenev, Russian artist
 Early 1990s
 Photo by Oleg Chumachenko



Botanic Garden
 Performance by Andrey Bartenev
 Photo by Hans-Jürgen Burkard
 Moscow, 1992

Their work often critiques the socio-political climate in Russia, employing humor and satire to engage audiences while navigating the precarious landscape of censorship. Furthermore, curators and activists have played a vital role in organizing exhibitions that showcase LGBTQ+ art, often in clandestine settings to avoid government scrutiny (Stella, 2015).

The current state of gay art in Russia reflects a dichotomy of repression and resilience. While mainstream institutions may shy away from LGBTQ+ themes due to fear of backlash, alternative spaces and online platforms have become crucial for the dissemination of queer art. Digital platforms, in particular, have allowed artists to reach wider audiences, circumventing traditional censorship mechanisms (Horne, 2020). This shift highlights the adaptability of LGBTQ+ artists in the face of adversity, as they continue to explore and express their identities through innovative means.

Moreover, the international community's response to Russia's treatment of LGBTQ+ individuals has also influenced the discourse surrounding gay art. Global advocacy efforts have brought attention to the plight of LGBTQ+ artists in Russia, fostering solidarity and support networks that transcend national boundaries (Jansen, 2016). Events such as the "Квирфест" ("Queer Art Festival") in Moscow have garnered international attention, serving as a platform for artists to showcase their work and engage in dialogue about LGBTQ+ rights and representation (Stella, 2015). These festivals not only celebrate queer art but also challenge the prevailing narratives that seek to marginalize LGBTQ+ voices.

The role of international art events, such as the Venice Biennale, has also been significant in promoting queer art from post-Soviet contexts. Exhibitions featuring LGBTQ+ themes have garnered attention and sparked dialogue around issues of identity, representation, and human rights. However, the reception of such works is often polarized, with conservative factions in Russia vehemently opposing any representation of queer identities in public discourse (Taavetti, 2021). This tension reflects broader struggles over cultural representation and the right to exist within public spaces, echoing similar dynamics observed in other authoritarian regimes where LGBTQ+ identities are marginalized.

The situation of gay art in Russia reflects broader patterns observed in other countries governed by authoritarian regimes, where state repression, cultural censorship, and societal prejudice converge to create a hostile environment for LGBTQ+ expression. Research (Ndanyi, 2021) indicates that authoritarian regimes often utilize cultural censorship as a tool to maintain control over societal norms and values, particularly regarding sexuality and gender identity. For instance, in countries like Uganda and Kenya, similar laws have been enacted that criminalize homosexuality and suppress LGBTQ+ representation in media and art. In Kenya, the government has banned films that depict LGBTQ+ themes, reflecting a

broader trend of using censorship to enforce heteronormative values and suppress dissenting voices in the arts. This pattern of repression is not unique to Russia; it is evident in various authoritarian regimes where the state seeks to control cultural narratives to align with its ideological stance.

The relationship between authoritarianism and societal attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals is complex and multifaceted. Studies have shown that higher levels of authoritarianism correlate with increased prejudice against gay individuals, suggesting that authoritarian regimes not only suppress LGBTQ+ art but also foster an environment of hostility towards LGBTQ+ communities (O'Brien et al., 2012; Crawford et al., 2016; Goodnight et al., 2014). This hostility is often rooted in traditional gender norms and masculinity, which are reinforced by authoritarian ideologies that prioritize conformity and suppress diversity (Goodnight et al., 2014; Oyamoto et al., 2016). As a result, artists who challenge these norms through their work may face backlash not only from the state but also from the broader society, which is often influenced by authoritarian values.

In examining the role of art in authoritarian regimes, it is crucial to consider the broader implications of censorship and repression on cultural production. The suppression of gay art not only affects the artists themselves but also has significant repercussions for society as a whole, stifling dialogue and understanding around LGBTQ+ issues. In countries like Russia, where the state actively seeks to erase LGBTQ+ identities from public discourse, the absence of diverse representations in art perpetuates ignorance and prejudice (Klimovich, 2023). This cultural vacuum can lead to a lack of empathy and understanding, further entrenching societal divisions and reinforcing the authoritarian status quo.

The dynamics of state control over artistic expression in authoritarian regimes often lead to a dichotomy between state-sanctioned art and underground movements. In Russia, while the government promotes a specific narrative that aligns with its nationalist and conservative values, many LGBTQ+ artists resort to subversive methods to express their identities and experiences. This underground art scene, while vibrant and resilient, operates under constant threat of censorship and persecution, mirroring similar movements in other authoritarian contexts where artists navigate the fine line between expression and repression (Hale, 2010).

The international community's response to the repression of gay art in authoritarian regimes varies, with some countries taking a stand against such practices while others remain complicit or indifferent. The global LGBTQ+ rights movement has increasingly highlighted the plight of artists in repressive environments, advocating for greater visibility and support for marginalized voices (Lindstaedt, 2024). However, the effectiveness of these efforts is often hampered by the entrenched nature of authoritarianism, which is characterized by a reluctance to engage with external pressures and a commitment to maintaining internal control over cultural narratives.

1.3. Problem of Censorship and Marginalization

Censorship has been one of the most pervasive challenges for gay artists, beginning from times when homosexuality was considered immoral or illegal in developed western countries. The penalties for overt expression of homosexuality could range from social ostracization to imprisonment. One example of this can be seen in Oscar Wilde's trial in the late 19th century. His writing, while not explicitly gay, was used against him in court due to the homosexual undertones. This trial demonstrated the lengths society would go to censor and silence those expressing homosexuality.

Even in more recent times, censorship continues. For instance, there have been instances of exhibitions or performances featuring gay themes being shut down, altered, or denied funding. Artists and curators continue to navigate complex social, political, and cultural landscapes when attempting to exhibit works featuring gay themes. Here are some notable examples.

Robert Mapplethorpe was a renowned American photographer known for his controversial, provocative works, many of which explicitly depicted male nudity and BDSM. His 1989 exhibit, "The Perfect Moment," was due to be shown at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., but was cancelled because of its explicit sexual content and concerns about public and political backlash.

The cancellation led to an outcry from the art community, with protests against the decision. The Washington Project for the Arts, an alternative art space, decided to show the exhibition in defiance of the Corcoran's cancellation. The exhibition was later displayed at the

Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center, where the center's director was charged with obscenity. However, the jury found him not guilty, marking a victory for artistic freedom (Atkins 1991).

David Wojnarowicz was a gay artist known for his poignant works addressing the AIDS crisis. In 2010, his video "A Fire in My Belly" was removed from the "Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture" exhibition at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery. The video, a tribute to his partner who had died of AIDS, contained a brief image of a crucifix with ants crawling on it, leading to an uproar from religious and political groups. The Smithsonian's decision to remove the video was widely criticized as capitulating to political pressure and was viewed as a significant instance of censorship. In protest, several art institutions, including the Tate Modern and the New Museum, screened the video in solidarity with Wojnarowicz (Fire 2010).

One prominent example of censorship is the demonetization of gay-themed content on platforms like YouTube. The study (Wilkinson & Berry, 2020) argues that recent policies aimed at protecting advertisers have led to a disproportionate impact on gay content creators, effectively censoring their work under the guise of financial prudence. This form of censorship by proxy highlights how economic motivations can stifle artistic expression, particularly for marginalized communities. The authors contend that such actions represent a broader trend of silencing LGBTQ+ voices in popular media, which can limit visibility and representation in the arts.

In educational contexts, censorship often manifests through self-censorship among educators and librarians. Note that there has been a rise in the censorship of books that portray LGBTQ+ characters or themes, reflecting societal discomfort with these narratives (Leland & Bangert, 2019). This self-censorship can restrict access to diverse perspectives and limit students' exposure to important social issues. Similarly, discuss how preemptive censorship occurs when educators avoid certain literature due to anticipated controversy, thereby infringing on students' intellectual freedom (Kimmel & Hartsfield, 2018). Such practices not only diminish the richness of educational resources but also perpetuate a culture of silence around LGBTQ+ topics.

The role of libraries as sites of censorship is also significant. The study (Stevens, 2020) highlights how LGBTQ+ materials are often subject to censorship within library collections, impacting the availability of resources for marginalized communities. Librarians, as gatekeepers of information, may face pressures that lead to the exclusion of LGBTQ+

content, further entrenching societal biases. This censorship can have profound implications for the visibility and accessibility of queer narratives, limiting opportunities for education and understanding.

Moreover, state intervention can play a critical role in the censorship of gay art. The study (Fang, 2024) discusses how state mechanisms can both support and suppress artistic expression, often leading to the exclusion of LGBTQ+ themes from public discourse. This duality reflects the complex relationship between art and politics, where state-sponsored narratives may prioritize heteronormative values while marginalizing queer expressions. Such censorship not only affects individual artists but also shapes the cultural landscape, influencing what is deemed acceptable in public art.

Within the art world itself, gay artists and their works have often been marginalized or overlooked. The narratives of mainstream art history have often erased or downplayed the contributions of gay artists. This invisibility is part of a broader pattern of marginalization that affects many artists from historically underrepresented groups.

Despite this, gay art has found a home in counter-culture and underground movements, which have often been more accepting of diversity and non-conformity. The use of alternative spaces such as nightclubs, community centers, and independent galleries has provided platforms for the display and celebration of gay art.

The Stonewall riots of 1969, a turning point in the fight for gay rights, spurred a surge in LGBTQ+ artistic expression. In the aftermath of Stonewall, the 1970s saw an explosion of gay art collectives, galleries, and zines. These spaces not only showcased gay art but also fostered a sense of community and resilience.

A significant example of this is the emergence of the "Queercore" scene in the 1980s, a punk-inspired movement that embraced LGBTQ+ identities and openly challenged homophobia. Queercore zines, films, and artworks provided a platform for gay artists to express themselves without censorship or marginalization.

The rise of the internet has also provided a new platform for gay artists. Social media and online galleries allow artists to share their work with a global audience, beyond the restrictions of traditional art institutions. However, even in these digital spaces, censorship and marginalization persist. Content moderation policies can often result in the removal of LGBTQ+ content, echoing the challenges faced by gay artists in physical spaces. Instagram,

for example, has been criticized for its community guidelines that result in the removal of LGBTQ+ content, particularly when it relates to nudity or sexuality. Many artists argue that these guidelines disproportionately target and censor queer content.

The study (Duguay et al., 2018) examine how algorithmic governance on platforms like Tinder and Instagram can lead to the marginalization of queer voices, as users often self-censor to avoid harassment. This dynamic creates an environment where LGBTQ+ individuals may feel compelled to conform to dominant narratives, further limiting the diversity of expressions in digital spaces.

Chapter 2.

The Complexities of Curating Gay Art: Challenges and Considerations

2.1. Gay Art Themes and Representation

Gay art, as diverse and complex as the community it represents, has developed a myriad of themes reflecting the experiences, struggles, and celebrations of queer lives. Key recurring themes include the exploration of identity, self-expression, love, desire, and the ongoing struggle for acceptance and rights.



David Hockney
Domestic Scene, 1963

Identity is a central theme in gay art, as artists navigate the intricacies of their sexual orientation and its intersection with other identities. David Hockney's paintings, for instance, offer a candid exploration of his identity as a gay man. His dual-portrait "Domestic Scene, Los Angeles" (1963), portrays an intimate moment between two men, a theme largely unexplored at that time.

Zanele Muholi's photography also tackles identity, highlighting the often overlooked narratives of black lesbian women in South Africa. Their work seeks to document and affirm

the existence of these marginalized identities in a society fraught with homophobia and racism.

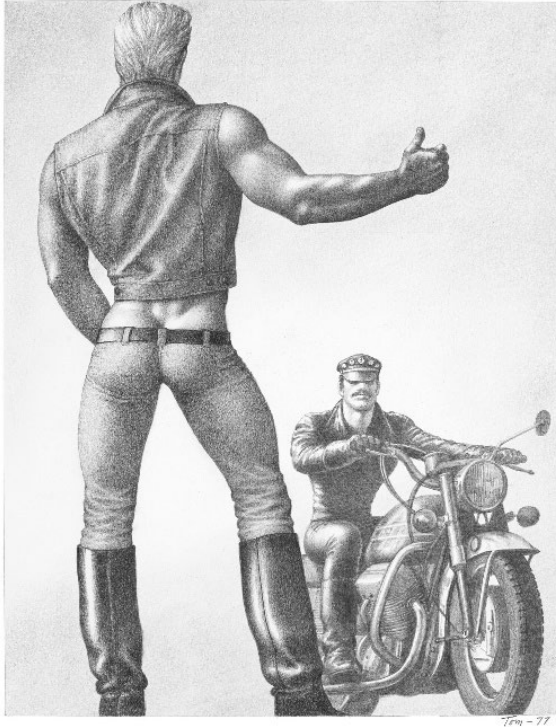
Self-expression is an integral part of queer art, offering a platform for artists to portray their experiences, desires, and emotions. This theme transcends across different mediums and styles. For example, Keith Haring's pop-infused graffiti art often conveyed messages of love, desire, and the fight against AIDS. His unique style, drawing from street art and popular culture, made his work both highly recognizable and accessible.



Keith Haring
illustrated announcement for Gay/Lesbian
Pride Day, New York, 1986

Performance art, too, has served as a potent vehicle for self-expression. Artists like Leigh Bowery and David Wojnarowicz used their bodies as canvas to challenge norms and provoke thought.

Themes of love and desire frequently surface in gay art. This was often expressed in coded forms when homosexuality was criminalized, but with changing societal norms, more explicit representations have emerged. Tom of Finland's illustrations are iconic for their unabashed depiction of male desire and sexuality. His hypermasculine, erotic images challenged the then-stereotypes of gay men, reclaiming and asserting gay desire.



Tom of Finland

Untitled, 1977

Many queer artists have used their work as a form of *activism*, voicing their struggle for acceptance and rights. The art collective Gran Fury, affiliated with the AIDS advocacy group ACT UP, used graphic design and public art installations to demand government action during the AIDS crisis. Gilbert Baker's creation of the rainbow flag, now a universal symbol of LGBTQ+ pride, is another key example. Initially a political symbol, it has evolved to represent the diversity, unity, and acceptance within the LGBTQ+ community.

The representation of these themes is not confined to any one style or medium. Queer artists have employed a wide array of artistic forms, from painting, photography, and sculpture to performance art, installation art, and digital media.

For instance, *painting* has been a traditional medium for exploring themes of identity and desire. *Photography* has also been instrumental in capturing the realities and narratives of the LGBTQ+ community. As it was said earlier, Robert Mapplethorpe's controversial black and white photography celebrated the male form, BDSM, and gay subculture. Nan Goldin's snapshot-style photography documents her personal life, including her friends in the LGBTQ+ community, offering intimate insights into queer lives in the 1980s.

Installation and performance art have been used to challenge norms and engage viewers in dialogue. Felix Gonzalez-Torres' installations involving piles of candy or strings of light bulbs subtly explore themes of love, loss, and his experiences as a gay man during the AIDS crisis.



Felix Gonzalez-Torres

Untitled (Portrait of Ross), 1991

In digital media, queer artists are breaking new ground. The rise of *queer gaming*, for example, challenges heteronormative narratives, offering games centered on queer themes and characters. In the past decade, the gaming industry has seen a gradual but definite increase in the representation of queer themes and characters. This shift towards inclusivity reflects the medium's growing recognition of its diverse audience and the importance of portraying a variety of experiences and identities.

Historically, the representation of queer characters in video games was often stereotypical or problematic. Early games often portrayed queer characters as villains, punchlines, or as victims of violence. An example of this is the transgender character Poison from the 1989 game "Final Fight," who was initially designed as a cisgender woman but was made transgender to avoid controversy around violence against women.

Over time, however, games started to incorporate more nuanced and diverse portrayals of queer characters. In Bioware's "Dragon Age" and "Mass Effect" series, players are given the option to engage in same-sex relationships. These games, along with others like "The Last of Us," "Life Is Strange," and "The Witcher 3," feature queer characters in prominent roles, giving players the opportunity to explore a variety of queer narratives.

The rise of independent (indie) game development has significantly contributed to the increase in queer representation in gaming. These smaller, often personal projects, are more likely to take risks and explore niche themes compared to large, profit-driven companies. Games like "Gone Home" and "Firewatch" tell deep, emotional stories about relationships and

identity. "Gone Home," for instance, is a first-person exploration game where you play as a young woman returning to her family home, gradually uncovering her sister's journey towards realizing her sexual orientation. "Dream Daddy: A Dad Dating Simulator" is another indie game that has gained popularity. This light-hearted game allows players to explore various romantic storylines between different "dads," providing a fun and affirming portrayal of queer relationships.

Queer developers have also started creating games that reflect their experiences and identities. Robert Yang's "Radiator 2" is a collection of three short games, each one exploring different aspects of gay culture and sexuality. Mattie Brice's "Mainichi" is a personal game that explores the daily experiences of a transgender woman.

Virtual Reality has provided a new platform for exploring queer themes and spaces. "Queerskins: A Love Story" by Cyril Tsiboulski and Illya Szilak is a VR experience where players explore the story of a young gay man who dies of AIDS, through the perspective of his parents. The narrative, which unfolds through objects in a rural Missouri home, provides a poignant exploration of love, loss, and acceptance.

Despite the progress in queer representation, challenges persist. Censorship can be a significant issue, particularly in regions with strict regulations around LGBTQ+ content. Queer games are also often subject to online harassment and backlash.

However, the future of queer representation in games looks promising. More queer developers are entering the field, and there is a growing audience for games that explore diverse identities and experiences. As the gaming industry continues to evolve, it is likely that we will see even more innovative and diverse portrayals of queer characters and themes.

2.2. Curatorial Challenges and Approaches

One of the principal challenges in curating gay art is the issue of representation. There's a risk of portraying the LGBTQ+ community as a monolithic entity, overlooking the rich diversity within the community. Gay art isn't just about male homosexuality; it also encompasses the experiences of lesbians, bisexuals, transgender individuals, queer people of color, and those who identify as non-binary or are still exploring their identities.

Another challenge arises from the historical suppression and censorship of gay art. Many works of art were destroyed, hidden away, or never labeled as 'gay' due to societal pressures. This can make it difficult for curators to source artworks or provide accurate context.

Potential controversies can also pose challenges. As it was shown, art that depicts nudity, sexual activity, or challenges societal norms can lead to censorship or public backlash, as evidenced in numerous exhibitions around the world. Curators must navigate these potential controversies while still preserving the integrity and purpose of the art.

With the challenges come opportunities to employ innovative curatorial approaches. One crucial approach is to prioritize diversity and inclusivity. Recognizing that the LGBTQ+ community comprises individuals with varied identities, experiences, and perspectives, curators can seek to showcase a broad range of artworks reflecting this diversity. This might include works from artists of different races, genders, ages, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Inclusivity also extends to the audience. Successful exhibitions often consider a wide audience demographic, not limiting themselves to the LGBTQ+ community alone. Interactive and educational components can be incorporated to engage a broader audience, stimulate dialogue, and foster understanding.

Another approach is to focus on narratives and stories. Since the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals are often deeply personal and intertwined with societal contexts, exhibitions that center on narratives can provide richer, more relatable perspectives. This could mean curating works around themes such as identity, love, oppression, activism, or community.

Contemporary curators can also leverage digital platforms to overcome traditional constraints. Online exhibitions, augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR) can bring gay art to a global audience, facilitating interactivity, engagement, and learning.

Collaborating with the LGBTQ+ community itself is a valuable approach. By involving artists, activists, and community members in the curation process, exhibitions can ensure authenticity and respect for the represented experiences. It also encourages community ownership and engagement with the exhibition.

In the face of potential controversies, curators need to adopt a respectful yet firm approach. This involves acknowledging the potential for differing viewpoints, but standing strong in the face of attempts to censor or suppress the expression of the LGBTQ+

community. Transparency about the content and intention of the exhibition can help in managing potential controversies.

The role of curators is pivotal in creating a dialogue around gay art and highlighting its importance within cultural history and contemporary society. They shape how we view and understand art and therefore, have the power to validate and illuminate the experiences and narratives embodied in gay art.

Curators as Facilitators of Dialogue

The first step towards fostering a dialogue around gay art is to present it in an accessible and engaging way. This involves not only the physical arrangement of artworks but also their contextualization. Curators must provide historical, cultural, and artistic context to help viewers understand the significance of the artwork, the artist's intention, and the circumstances under which the art was created. For example, an exhibition on the AIDS crisis in the 1980s might include artworks created during that period, supplemented with information about societal attitudes, government policies, and the impact on the LGBTQ+ community.

Curators also play a vital role in promoting engagement with the artwork. This could involve organizing artist talks, panel discussions, or workshops related to the exhibition theme. Interactive elements such as audience participation installations or digital engagement tools can also encourage viewers to actively engage with the exhibition, fostering a deeper understanding and stimulating dialogue.

Curators as Highlighters of Cultural History and Contemporary Society

Curators have a responsibility to highlight the importance of gay art in understanding both our cultural history and contemporary society. They do this by carefully selecting and presenting artworks that shed light on the experiences, struggles, and victories of the LGBTQ+ community throughout history and today.

Curators can choose to focus on historical periods significant to the LGBTQ+ community, such as the Stonewall Riots, the AIDS crisis, or the legalization of same-sex marriage in various countries. By doing so, they can showcase how art has been used to document, critique, and respond to these pivotal moments. This not only helps to preserve cultural history but also illuminates the ongoing struggle for LGBTQ+ rights.

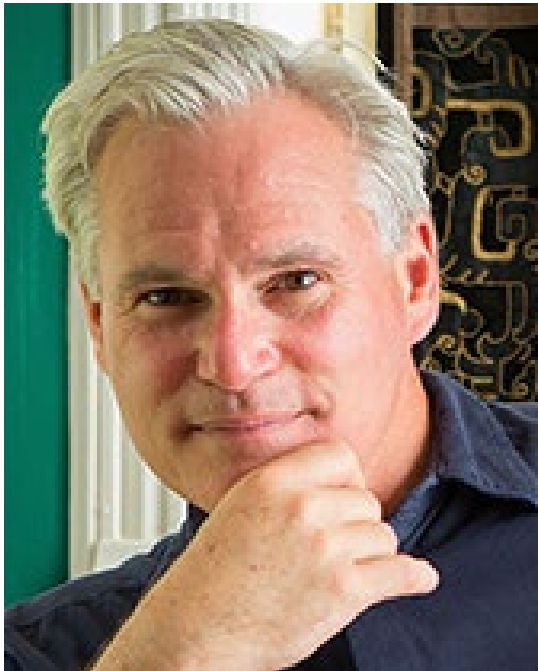
On the other hand, curators can also choose to focus on contemporary issues facing the LGBTQ+ community, such as the fight for transgender rights or the representation of queer people of color. This can highlight the diversity of the LGBTQ+ community and underscore the ongoing challenges and debates within contemporary society.

Curators can further emphasize the cultural importance of gay art by drawing connections to broader artistic movements or societal trends. For instance, they might illustrate how gay art has influenced or been influenced by movements like pop art or postmodernism, or how it reflects societal shifts in attitudes towards sexuality and identity.

Curators as Advocates

Lastly, curators can serve as advocates for the importance and legitimacy of gay art. By choosing to exhibit gay art in museums, galleries, and other public spaces, they affirm its value within the wider artistic canon. They also counteract the historical marginalization of gay art and artists by bringing their work into the public eye and acknowledging their contributions to the artistic field.

2.3. Curatorial practices



Jonathan D. Katz is a renowned scholar and curator whose pioneering work has been instrumental in shaping the field of queer art history. He has been at the forefront of recognizing and celebrating the contributions of LGBTQ+ artists, curating landmark exhibitions that have made strides in the visibility and acceptance of gay art in the broader art world.

Born in 1958, Katz's academic journey led him to Harvard, where he became the first tenured faculty in queer studies in the US. He is a co-founder of the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art in New York City, the world's first museum dedicated to preserving and exhibiting artwork that speaks about the LGBTQ+ experience.

One of Katz's most significant contributions as a curator is the groundbreaking exhibition "Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture," which he co-curated with fellow scholar Richard Meyer. This show, presented at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery in 2010-11, marked the first major museum exhibition to focus on themes of gender and sexuality in American art.

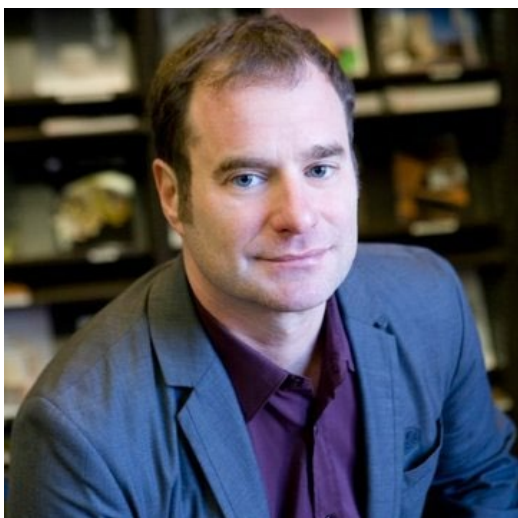
"Hide/Seek" brought together works by renowned artists such as Thomas Eakins, Georgia O'Keeffe, Andy Warhol, and David Wojnarowicz, revealing the often overlooked or deliberately obscured queer themes in their work. The exhibition was both a celebration of the LGBTQ+ community's contributions to American art and a critique of the art historical establishment's consistent avoidance or negation of these themes (Logan 2010).

The exhibition generated controversy when a video installation by David Wojnarowicz, "A Fire in My Belly," was removed due to pressure from religious and political groups. Katz strongly opposed the removal, arguing that it represented an act of homophobia and censorship. Despite the controversy, "Hide/Seek" was hailed for its scholarly rigor and its unprecedented exploration of LGBTQ+ themes in American art.

Katz also curated "Art AIDS America," an exhibition that traveled to multiple locations in the United States. The show examined how the AIDS crisis influenced American art and culture, focusing on the period from the early 1980s to the present. Through this exhibition, Katz highlighted the crucial role of art in documenting and responding to the epidemic, promoting greater public understanding of its impact on the LGBTQ+ community (Moulthrop 2016).

In addition to his curatorial work, Katz's scholarship has greatly expanded understanding of queer themes in art. He has published numerous essays and books exploring the intersections of sexuality, gender, and art, demonstrating the inherent queerness of modernism and critiquing the heteronormative biases of traditional art history.

Jonathan D. Katz's work as a curator and scholar of gay art has significantly expanded the field's horizons, asserting the relevance of queer themes in understanding art's past, present, and future. His exhibitions have not only challenged societal norms and prejudices but have also enriched our understanding of the diverse experiences that constitute the human condition. Through his tireless advocacy and pioneering curatorial approach, Katz continues to cement the importance of gay art in the broader art historical canon.



Another example of curator contributed a lot in gay art development is a co-author of Jonathan D. Katz - **Richard Meyer**. Meyer is a professor in the Art & Art History Department at Stanford University, where he teaches courses on twentieth-century American art, the history of photography, censorship and modern art, and gender and sexuality studies. His research interests are wide-ranging, exploring intersections of contemporary art, gender and sexuality studies, and issues of artistic censorship and preservation.

Possibly Meyer's most notable contribution to the curation of gay art is the co-curation, with Jonathan D. Katz, of "Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture." Following the exhibition, Meyer co-authored a book with Katz, also titled "Hide/Seek" which expands on the themes of the exhibition and further explores the impact of gay and lesbian artists on American art. The book is considered a landmark work in the field of art history, offering valuable insights into the complex interplay between identity, sexuality, and artistic creation.

In 2002 Meyer published a book "Outlaw Representation: Censorship and Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art (Ideologies of Desire)". The book offers a comprehensive examination of the intersection of censorship, homosexuality, and art in 20th-century America (Meyer 2002).

Meyer carefully constructs a narrative that connects a wide range of artistic practices and debates on representation. He delves into specific instances where artists' works were met with censorship due to their exploration of homosexuality. The book chronicles artists' efforts to resist and navigate such constraints, oftentimes employing what Meyer refers to as an "outlaw" stance — deliberately choosing to operate outside mainstream art institutions to evade censorship and represent their identities more freely.

This publication offers invaluable insights into the challenges and complexities artists have faced in representing gay and queer experiences in their work. It demonstrates how the societal and institutional marginalization of homosexuality has significantly influenced the trajectory of American art throughout the twentieth century.

Meyer doesn't just highlight the artists' struggles; he underscores their resilience and creative strategies in working against and around censorship. This perspective offers a nuanced understanding of the powerful interplay between art and social norms, conventions, and taboos.

In his analysis, Meyer also introduces an array of influential artists whose works were deemed controversial or confrontational due to their explicit or implied homosexual themes. These artists range from canonical figures like Marsden Hartley and Jasper Johns to less widely recognized artists including Harmony Hammond, Tee Corinne, and others.

As a resource, "Outlaw Representation" is an essential text for understanding the development and challenges of LGBTQ+ representation in American art. It provides a valuable framework for considering how broader cultural and social attitudes towards homosexuality have shaped the creative and professional landscape for artists.

In 2013, Meyer published another critical book, "What was Contemporary Art?" In it, he challenges the conventional narratives of contemporary art history and theory by exploring overlooked artists and artworks, particularly from marginalized communities, including LGBTQ+ artists (Meyer 2013).

Another noteworthy aspect of Meyer's work is his commitment to the preservation and celebration of queer art. He's part of the advisory board of the Queer Cultural Center in San Francisco and works closely with the Archives of American Art's research collections on LGBTQ+ history.

As an academic, Meyer's work emphasizes a cross-disciplinary approach. He often incorporates aspects of gender studies, queer theory, and critical race theory into his exploration of American art. His teachings and writings have illuminated the inherent queerness within many areas of modern and contemporary art, thus expanding students' and readers' understanding of the breadth and diversity of artistic expression.

One of the most well-known women curating gay (and wider LGBTQ+) art is **Hanne Tierney**. She is an established puppeteer, artist, and curator, recognized for her dedicated work in promoting underrepresented voices in the art world, including LGBTQ+ artists. She is best known as the founder of FiveMyles, a gallery and performance space located in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, which has become a significant platform for diverse artistic expression (Rodney 2021).



Although Tierney's own artistic practice centers around her unique, avant-garde puppetry work, her curatorial influence through FiveMyles cannot be overstated. After tragically losing her son during the Sierra Leone Civil War, Tierney transformed a dilapidated garage into an art and performance space, naming it FiveMyles in honor of her son. Since its establishment in 1999, FiveMyles has been dedicated to showcasing the work of emerging and established artists alike, with a particular focus on providing a platform for underrepresented artists, including those from the LGBTQ+ community.

Tierney's commitment to inclusion extends beyond merely featuring diverse artists; it is also reflected in the wide range of styles, themes, and mediums she curates. The exhibitions at FiveMyles often encompass contemporary art, installation, performance art, and more. This multidisciplinary approach ensures a vibrant, dynamic conversation within the gallery space that invites artists and audiences to engage with a multitude of perspectives and artistic languages.

Notable queer-themed exhibitions and performances have graced the FiveMyles space. For example, "Don't Look Now," a group exhibition curated by Jonathan Durham, explored themes of queerness and the black male body. Similarly, the performance piece "Vestige," by Asif Mian, touched on themes of masculinity and identity within a South Asian and queer context. These are just a couple of instances reflecting Tierney's commitment to promoting a wide range of voices and experiences, including queer narratives.

In addition to her curatorial work, Tierney is also a staunch advocate for artists' rights and community engagement. She often collaborates with other cultural institutions and community organizations to produce cultural events that engage the local community, fostering a more inclusive, accessible, and diverse art scene in Brooklyn.

As an artist herself, Tierney's puppetry performances often blur the lines between theater, installation, and visual art, and she brings this innovative, boundary-crossing spirit to her curatorial approach at FiveMyles. Her performances have been featured in prestigious

institutions such as The Whitney Museum and the Guggenheim, and they reflect a complex exploration of themes including identity, loss, and human relationships.

Of course, the US is the country where gay art is developing most intensively, also due to political freedoms and developed society. However, Asian countries are now becoming points of growth of interest towards to gay art, thanks to talented curators working despite difficult political and social conditions.



Chatvichai Promadhattavedi is a prominent curator, writer, and artist in Thailand's contemporary art scene. His work emphasizes the importance of inclusivity and the exploration of societal themes, particularly those pertaining to the LGBTQ+ community. Promadhattavedi's curatorial practice seeks to highlight diverse voices and challenge traditional norms, providing a platform for discussions around identity, sexuality, and human rights (Chandran 2019).

Among his notable accomplishments is co-curating "Spectrosynthesis - Asian LGBTQ Issues and Art Now," an exhibition that marked a milestone in the representation of LGBTQ+ narratives in the region's art landscape. First shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Taipei in 2017 (Li 2017), and later at the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre (BACC) in 2019 (Wah 2019), "Spectrosynthesis" was the first major museum exhibition in Asia dedicated to LGBTQ+ themes.

"Spectrosynthesis" presented the works of 22 artists from various Asian countries, providing a platform for exploration and discussion around LGBTQ+ issues. Promadhattavedi and his fellow curators placed a strong emphasis on local contexts, selecting works that spoke to the diversity of experiences within the LGBTQ+ community across Asia. The exhibition received international acclaim for its groundbreaking approach and made significant strides in the visibility and acceptance of LGBTQ+ art in the region.

Promadhattavedi's work extends beyond his curatorial endeavors. He is a respected writer and lecturer, often contributing to publications and forums on contemporary art. He is also an advocate for greater LGBTQ+ rights in Thailand, using his public platform to address societal biases and promote greater understanding of the LGBTQ+ community.

Additionally, as an artist, Promadhattavedi explores themes of sexuality and identity in his work. His understanding and experience as an artist enrich his curatorial practice, enabling him to approach art with a holistic perspective. His diverse body of work - as an artist, curator, and activist - contributes to a multi-faceted dialogue around LGBTQ+ issues in Thailand and beyond.

Chatvichai Promadhattavedi's contributions to the field of gay art are a testament to the power of art as a platform for societal commentary and change. His curatorial work pushes boundaries, challenges conventional norms, and highlights underrepresented voices, paving the way for a more diverse and inclusive art landscape. Despite societal and cultural challenges, his dedication to advocating for the LGBTQ+ community continues to shape the discourse of contemporary art in Asia.

However, it's important to note that the curation of gay art is not limited to exhibitions explicitly centered on LGBTQ+ themes. Promadhattavedi's curatorial practice, like many others, involves a nuanced approach to showcasing a diverse range of artists and narratives, including but not limited to LGBTQ+ experiences. His work underscores the importance of intersectionality in understanding the complexity and diversity of human experiences, encouraging viewers to engage with art on multiple levels.

Chapter 3.

Curatorial Experience at a Gay Art Exhibition in Lisbon

3.1. Liberal law and conservative art in Portugal

The exploration of gay art in Portugal reveals a complex interplay of cultural, social, and political dimensions that shape the artistic landscape. Portugal has made significant strides in LGBTQI+ rights, boasting some of the most progressive legislation in Europe. However, this legal advancement has not been fully mirrored in the practices of art institutions, particularly museums, which have historically adhered to heteronormative narratives.

While there is a slow emergence of gender museology in Portugal, it remains timid compared to the legal progress made in LGBTQI+ rights, indicating a disconnect between societal changes and institutional practices (Grácio et al., 2020). This gap highlights the need for a more inclusive approach within the art world that actively engages with queer narratives and perspectives.

The evolution of queer art in Portugal can be traced through various artists and curatorial practices that challenge traditional representations and narratives. Artists are increasingly reclaiming queer histories and identities, often subverting dominant cultural norms. The study (Delille, 2024) emphasizes the importance of recognizing and reinvesting in queer genealogies that have been marginalized or pathologized, suggesting that a queer history of art is essential for understanding contemporary practices. This reclamation is not merely an academic exercise but a vital aspect of cultural production that seeks to redefine and expand the boundaries of artistic expression.

Curators play a pivotal role in shaping the visibility of queer art in Portugal. They are tasked with the responsibility of creating spaces that not only exhibit queer art but also foster dialogue around LGBTQI+ issues. European society discusses the necessity of curating queer heritage, arguing that museums must confront their implicit support of heteronormative narratives and instead embrace a queer perspective in their collections and exhibitions

(Steorn, 2012). This shift is crucial for legitimizing queer identities and experiences within the broader cultural narrative, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of art that reflects the diversity of human experiences.

Scandals and controversies surrounding queer art in Portugal often reflect the tensions between progressive movements and conservative backlash. The regulation and normalization of same-sex sexualities have been contentious issues, as highlighted by (Roseneil et al., 2013), who discuss the historical transformations in institutional norms regarding LGBTQI+ identities in Portugal. These tensions are often manifested in public reactions to queer art, where conservative factions may attempt to undermine or censor artistic expressions that challenge traditional values. Such controversies underscore the ongoing struggle for recognition and acceptance of queer identities within the cultural landscape.

The role of queer public sociology, as proposed by (Santos, 2012), is instrumental in understanding the intersection of art, activism, and scholarship in Portugal. By adopting a critical framework that accounts for sexual diversity, queer public sociology seeks to dismantle prejudices and foster a more inclusive society. This approach is particularly relevant in the context of art, where the act of creation and exhibition can serve as powerful forms of resistance against societal norms. The integration of queer perspectives into public discourse not only enriches the artistic landscape but also contributes to broader social change.

In examining the contributions of queer artists and curators in Portugal, it is essential to recognize the collaborative nature of these efforts. The interplay between artists, curators, and activists creates a dynamic environment where queer art can flourish.

This collaborative spirit is evident in various initiatives that seek to amplify queer voices and narratives, fostering a sense of community and solidarity among LGBTQI+ individuals. The importance of such collaborations cannot be overstated, as they provide a platform for marginalized voices to be heard and celebrated.

Moreover, the impact of queer art extends beyond the confines of traditional art spaces. It permeates various cultural practices, including literature, performance, and digital media, creating a rich tapestry of queer expression. The emergence of queer game studies and design, as discussed by (Shaw et al., 2019), illustrates how queerness can inform and transform

creative practices across different mediums. This interdisciplinary approach not only broadens the scope of queer art but also invites new audiences to engage with these narratives.

As the landscape of queer art in Portugal continues to evolve, it is crucial to remain vigilant against the forces that seek to undermine its progress. The co-optation of queer narratives by conservative political actors, as explored by (Burke & Bernstein, 2014), serves as a reminder of the fragility of these advancements. The ongoing struggle for visibility and acceptance necessitates a commitment to advocacy and activism within the art community, ensuring that queer voices remain at the forefront of cultural discourse.

Notable figures include João Pedro Vale and Nuno Alexandre Ferreira, whose collaborative works often intersect art, identity politics, and sexuality. Their film "Hero, Captain, and Stranger" (2009) is a homoerotic adaptation of Herman Melville's "Moby-Dick," which confronts various aesthetic and political taboos, thereby challenging societal norms surrounding queer identities (Marques, 2024). Their work exemplifies the potential of art to engage with complex themes of sexuality and representation.

Additionally, artists like Julião Sarmento have made significant contributions to the Portuguese art scene, often exploring themes of sexuality and identity in their practices. Their works serve as important touchstones for understanding the evolution of queer representation in Portuguese art.

The role of art institutions in Portugal is also evolving, with a growing awareness of the need to address historical exclusions of queer narratives. Institutions such as the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the National Museum of Contemporary Art have begun to incorporate queer perspectives into their programming, signaling a commitment to inclusivity and representation. This shift is crucial for legitimizing queer identities within the broader cultural narrative and fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the artistic landscape.

An important milestone in the realm of queer art, this exhibition brought together artists and curators exploring the complexities of gender, marking a significant contribution to contemporary discussions on identity and diversity. Curated by Aida Rechená and Teresa Furtado, the project exemplifies the role of museums as spaces for critical inquiry, far from neutral institutions. Through a collection of works by Portuguese artists—including Alice Geirinhas, Ana Pérez-Quiroga, Ana Vidigal, Carla Cruz, Cláudia Varejão, Gabriel Abrantes,

and others—the exhibition challenges traditional gender norms and fosters a dialogue on the fluidity and sociocultural construction of gender.

Gender, as highlighted by this curatorial approach, is not a fixed attribute but an evolving identity continuously shaped through social interaction, thought, and action. The exhibition underscores how gender roles, often imposed through societal expectations, have real and tangible effects on individuals' access to wealth, power, and recognition. However, it also celebrates gender as an arena of personal expression, freedom, and diversity, encompassing a wide spectrum of identities, including heterosexuality, homosexuality, transgenderism, and bisexuality.

By engaging with themes such as body, sexuality, identity, and resistance, the exhibition deconstructs stereotypes and encourages critical reflection on the intricacies of gender identity. It situates itself at the intersection of art and social commentary, offering a platform for both personal and collective expressions of identity and resistance against normative constructions of gender. In this way, the exhibition contributes to a broader cultural discourse on gender as a continuous, dynamic process, enriched by individual experiences and societal exchanges.

If we talk about the evolution of gay art and the exploration of queerness in Portuguese art, one of the most significant recent events is the project "1983" by João Pedro Vale and Nuno Alexandre Ferreira. The project serves as both an artistic exploration and a political statement, addressing issues of identity, sexuality, and marginalization within the context of the historical and social struggles of the LGBTQ+ community. This project unfolds as a performance and installation set within an urban landscape of Lisbon, reflecting one of the most tragic chapters in LGBTQ+ history: the AIDS crisis of the 1980s.

The year 1983, chosen as the title of the work, is no coincidence. It marks the moment when Portugal first encountered the global epidemic of AIDS, which threatened the lives of many people, particularly within the LGBTQ+ community. At that time, LGBTQ+ activist movements were already forming worldwide, including in Portugal. However, the Portuguese context was distinct in that open discussion of LGBTQ+ rights was practically non-existent, and visible gay culture in art was rare. This was due to the lingering effects of António Salazar's long dictatorship, which ended in 1974, and the deep conservatism of Portuguese society, heavily influenced by the Catholic Church. The news of AIDS exacerbated the situation, revealing entrenched homophobia both among the population and in political

circles, which hindered the implementation of preventative measures. This, in turn, sparked a wave of activist movements aimed at defending LGBTQ+ rights and combating discrimination (Melo, 2022; Marques, 2024).

Vale and Ferreira's "1983" project immerses the viewer in the atmosphere of that time, creating a space where a scene from Lisbon's urban life is recreated. The central element of the installation is a bus stop where two men sit waiting for a bus at night in the rain. This image can be interpreted as a metaphor for waiting for change, uncertainty, and the social isolation faced by members of the LGBTQ+ community during those years. The symbolism of rain and night adds a sense of bleakness and oppression but also suggests cleansing and the possibility of renewal, hinting at future resistance and movement toward freedom.

The project also incorporates numerous cultural and political references, such as newspapers from that era with the headline "Sida já chegou" ("AIDS is here"), reminding viewers of the real panic and fear that gripped society. A leather jacket adorned with razor blades references the harsh realities of street life and the violence faced by LGBTQ+ people, as well as the need for self-defense. Other items, such as a bag with grenades and a reproduction of a painting by Portuguese ballet dancer Valentim de Barros, highlight the themes of personal struggle and self-expression under societal pressure (Melo, 2022).

Vale and Ferreira's artwork emphasizes the importance of remembering those who suffered during the AIDS crisis and whose lives were destroyed or lost. One of the critical aspects of their art is drawing attention to those whom society prefers to forget, and this is reflected in their work as a way of fighting against this collective amnesia. The "1983" installation not only recalls how the AIDS crisis affected the LGBTQ+ community but also asserts the importance of preserving the collective memory of those times as part of a broader struggle for human rights.

It is interesting to note that, in the context of Portuguese art, Vale and Ferreira's project is unique. As Alexandre Melo points out in his essay on the project (Melo, 2022), there is no clearly defined lineage of gay art in Portugal, particularly in the 1960s, due to the political dictatorship and the dominance of conservative Catholic values. Despite this, the works of João Pedro Vale and Nuno Alexandre Ferreira, such as "Vadios" (2018), "Ama Como a Estrada Começa" (2019), and "1983" (2022), explore themes of sexuality, sexual identity, camp culture, and queerness, thus creating a unique space for gay art in Portugal. Their art can

be seen not only as a form of artistic self-expression but also as a political act against heteronormative totalitarianism and the resurgence of neo-fascist populism across the globe.

A key theme running through their works is the body and its interaction with public space. In "1983," Vale and Ferreira explore how public spaces, such as bus stops and street scenes, become sites of encounter but also places of social control and surveillance. This work contains references to gay cruising culture, which often developed in shadowed spaces, away from society's gaze, but was always under threat of police raids and public condemnation. The installation recreates this sense of duality—a space that is simultaneously safe, where one can be themselves, and dangerous, where one can be punished for it.

The "1983" project can also be viewed as part of the broader queer art movement, which explores the issue of self-identification and political visibility. The work itself can be read as a challenge to heteronormative standards dictating what is acceptable in public and private spaces. João Pedro Vale and Nuno Alexandre Ferreira create a space where the theme of identity is central, exploring how societal power and norms shape the perception of sexuality and gender, and how resistance to these norms can be expressed through art.

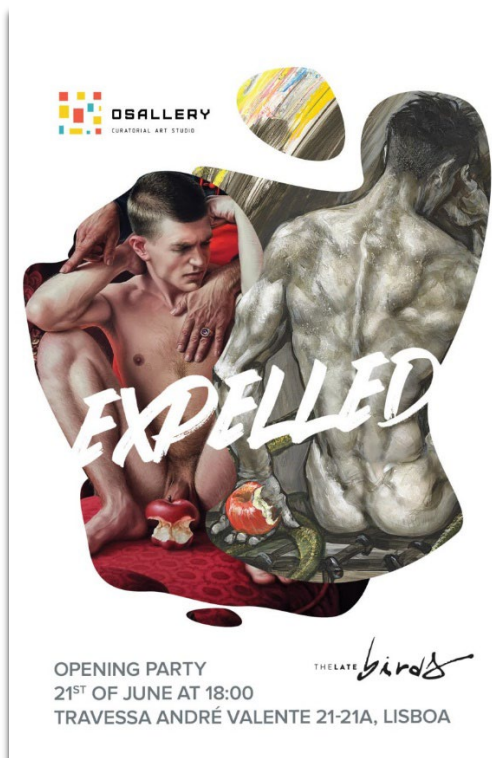
An essential aspect of the project is its performative element, in which participants appear "frozen" in anticipation, creating living sculptures. This can be seen as a reference to figures like Gilbert & George, whose works also address issues of identity, repression, and visibility in society. In this context, Vale and Ferreira's "1983" continues the exploration of how the body can be not just an object of art but an active participant in political and social struggles (Melo, 2022).

Thus, João Pedro Vale and Nuno Alexandre Ferreira's project "1983" is not only a significant artistic event but also an important contribution to the development of gay art in Portugal. It reminds us that art can be a powerful tool for discussing complex topics such as sexual identity, public space, and political repression. In the context of Portuguese history, where open discussion of LGBTQ+ rights was long suppressed, this project becomes a critical step in creating visibility for marginalized communities and advancing the fight for human rights.

3.2. Expelled³: Marginality Cubed — Migrants, Outcasts, and Gays

In June 2024, the opening of the gay art exhibition *Expelled* took place, coinciding with the start of Portugal's Gay Pride. I contributed as the conceptual author and curator of the exhibition. Through this project, I had the opportunity to practically apply many of the curatorial approaches previously discussed and to determine which of them are most effectively suited for working with queer art.

The title *Expelled* resonates not only with the content of the works but also with the fates of the two artists. Both were exiled from the places they considered home, where they were born, grew up, and planned to continue living and working. The terrible year of 2022 made them refugees and exiles. Kirill Fadeev was forced to flee Ukraine due to the Russian military invasion, and Igor Sychev had to leave Russia to escape the war declared on LGBTQ+ culture. Right now, as I write this essay, bombs are exploding in Ukrainian cities, and in Moscow, raids are being conducted at the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art. Someone reported that the museum staff had hidden queer literature in the archives.



Poster of the exhibition



The last moments of preparation
Photo by Maria Malko

Both artists found their new home in Portugal. At the beginning of 2022, these artists could not have imagined that they would soon, involuntarily, become part of the absolute trend in the development of contemporary art. The *Venice Biennale 2024* is dedicated to the art of foreign artists and queer identities. The authors of this exhibition embody both these personas. These remarkably different artists are strikingly similar. Their similarity is largely due to both having an academic art education, which pushes them towards a dialogue with aesthetic traditions and codes. Kirill and Igor openly exploit the aesthetics of *socialist realism*, taking the clichés of this artistic style to the point of absurdity and blatant irony.

In the aesthetics of socialist realism, the male body was one of the main heroes, symbolizing revolution, industrialization, the working class, achievements, heroism, and the building of communism. The semi-naked male body was a staple of Soviet artistic propaganda for most of the USSR's existence. However, there was occasionally a subtle emotional aestheticization of the male body in the work of Soviet artists, as seen in the works of Alexander Deyneka. The state-sponsored promotion of physical culture and the idealized human form provided a socially acceptable framework through which artists could explore themes of physical beauty and eroticism, albeit indirectly.

This context allowed artists like Deyneka to celebrate the male body without overtly contravening societal norms. This insight allows us to see how the internal conflict in the work of two artists born in the USSR is realized. We see a liberation from the shackles of the homophobic reality of the USSR through the artistic analysis of the aesthetics of socialist realism and the parodying of Soviet artistic practices. This method of liberation through scandal and parody is not new to art and has roots in the aesthetics of carnivalization. However, queer art explores this method particularly meticulously.

In 2022, a project by Portuguese artists João Pedro Vale and Nuno Alexandre Ferreira, titled *1983*, emerged, referring to a time when Europe was as homophobic as Russia and Ukraine are now. “1983 is also the year when the first news about AIDS reaches Portugal. An impending global crisis would reveal – just as today the climate emergency or COVID – the vulnerability of life, and of our human freedoms. AIDS also revealed the structural homophobia behind the politicians’ odious stalling in implementing essential precautionary measures, and which set in motion a wave of militant resistance movements that today, 40 years later, have led to significant changes in the way people engage in anti-racist or feminist

rights protest, as well as against heteronormative totalitarianisms, together playing decisive roles in the struggle against the fresh wave of neofascist populism (from Trump to Bolsonaro)” – says Dr. Prof. Alexander Melo regarding the project *1983* (Melo, 2022).

Like the authors of the exhibition *Expelled*, the Portuguese artists used scandalous and kitsch images as a way to objectify the great internal work that every queer person undergoes, desiring to defend their right to be different, be *not of this world* in the world of *heteronormative totalitarianisms*.

The relationship between totalitarianism and homosexuality warrants separate discussion due to its typically complex nature. If we were to imagine a totalitarian mindset embodied in a single individual, we might conclude that this person would require psychological assistance. The state of such an individual could be described as a schizotypal disorder, characterized by an intense love and hatred for the same object.

The European audience is well-acquainted with the flourishing of homoeroticism in Nazi Germany up until the late 1930s. However, not everyone is aware of a similar period of fascination with the male body in Soviet art during the same decade. Earlier, I mentioned Alexander Deyneka; here, I will provide examples of his works in comparison with those of Kirill Fadeyev and Igor Sychev. Researchers of gay art note (and members of the gay community are well aware) that the space of the public restroom is semantically significant in gay culture.

In times of repression, the toilet remains a space for personal freedom. As Professor Melo states, "Why public urinals become places rife with homosexual activity is historically what happens when political repression meets moral transgression" (Melo, 2022). By the principle of contiguity, artistic plots can unfold in the space of a shower room, where the contact of naked bodies of the same sex does not face social condemnation. This is precisely the plot we see in the works *After the Battle* and *After the Shower*.



Alexander Deyneka
After the Battle, 1937 – 1942



Kirill Fadeev
After the Shower, 2023

These works are connected not only by their plot (athletes in the shower after training) but also by the highly accurate psychological depiction of restrained mutual interest between men, evident in the characters' glances and poses.

Gay art shows a similarly strong interest in the theme of manual labor, which requires the display of male strength and the potential of the male body. Images of physical labor form complex yet enduring associations with images of roughness and dominance, leading us into another significant theme in gay art.



Alexander Deyneka
The Team on Vacation, 1937 – 1942



Igor Sychev
Idlers, 2021

The works *The Team on Vacation* and *Idlers* fundamentally differ in their depiction of homoerotic elements. I am not referring to the depiction of penises, but to a much more expressive subtext. The plot of Deyneka's work is rather banal: young builders swimming in the sea. I would even say that there is little homoeroticism in this piece, except for one detail—the title. Doesn't it raise the question of why seven grown men are vacationing together? *Homosocialization*, common in traditional conservative societies where men and women spend their leisure time separately, often becomes material for gay artists.

Let's turn to another layer of traditional culture that has been reinterpreted by gay culture. Two works that are featured on the cover of the catalog show that both artists use biblical and religious contexts. The reference to well-known emotionally charged images and plots allows the authors to explain in clear language to the viewer what a person who has consciously violated a taboo feels, having accepted the fate of an exile, simply to be themselves and live as they wish.

Despite this inner drama, the exhibition is very optimistic. The central section of the exhibition is called “The Savior” and is dedicated to the theme of overcoming crisis. The artists lead the viewer from despair and fear to an emotional surge and salvation in love.

This exhibition is being held at *The Late Birds*, the oldest gay resort in Portugal. The choice of venue is driven by several factors. Despite the proclaimed tolerance, the art world, even in Western Europe, remains conservative. Not every gallery or museum agrees to host an exhibition of queer artists. The reasons may be subjective (such as the homophobia of the owner or curator) or objective, related to uncertain sales prospects.

It is no surprise, then, that queer artists find support and assistance within the queer community. The gay hotel has become not only a comfortable space for displaying our work but also a relevant meeting place with a sympathetic and understanding audience. When selecting a venue, it was important to us that *The Late Birds* has been developing as an art residency for several years, supporting young queer artists.

3.3. Provocations and Contexts

In curating the exhibition, I actively employed the technique of provocation, aimed at pushing the audience out of their zone of comfortable perception and into a realm of experimentation and emotional response. To summarize, I can identify three main directions of provocation that I explored: political, religious, and aesthetic. Each of these provocations was implemented with consideration for the specific characteristics of the primary target audience — queer individuals. Consequently, the composition of provocative elements was, in some cases, unconventional.

Political Provocation

The concept of political provocation is deeply rooted in the historical struggles of the LGBTQ+ community, particularly in urban settings where gay identity has been both celebrated and marginalized. For instance, the commodification of gay culture has led to a tension between authentic representation and commercial interests, as noted by (Nash, 2006), who discusses how urban gay spaces can reinforce elitist notions of identity while simultaneously providing a refuge for self-expression.

This commodification often results in a sanitized version of gay culture that prioritizes marketability over radical political engagement, a phenomenon termed "homonormativity" (Bracke, 2012). This shift reflects a broader societal trend where political activism is increasingly replaced by consumerist practices, undermining the foundational goals of the gay liberation movement (Barrett & Pollack, 2005).

Moreover, the intersection of political beliefs and attitudes toward homosexuality plays a crucial role in shaping public discourse around gay art. Research (Tomei et al., 2017; Salerno et al., 2015) indicates that conservative political orientations are associated with negative

perceptions of gay identities, which can manifest in legal contexts such as the gay panic defense. This defense strategy, which has been critiqued for reinforcing homophobia, illustrates how political ideologies can influence judicial outcomes and public attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals. The acceptance of such defenses by conservative jurors highlights the ongoing struggle against entrenched prejudices that gay art seeks to challenge (Michalski & Nunez, 2020).

In addition to legal frameworks, the global context of LGBTQ+ rights further complicates the landscape of gay art. The rise of conservative movements worldwide, often fueled by evangelical ideologies, has led to a backlash against gay rights, as evidenced by analysis of the politicization of sexual politics in sub-Saharan Africa (Kaoma, 2014).

This global struggle reflects a transnational dimension of queer activism, where local movements draw inspiration from global networks while also responding to specific cultural and political challenges (Binnie & Klesse, 2012). The interplay between local and global dynamics underscores the necessity for a nuanced understanding of how political provocation in gay art can serve as both a form of resistance and a means of asserting identity in the face of oppression.

However, at the *Expelled* exhibition, the technique of political provocation was employed in a different context, beyond the usual discourse on minority rights. The political provocation was embodied in the collaboration between Ukrainian and Russian artists. In the context of ongoing war between their countries, such an alliance was intended to emphasize the notion that art transcends politics, is more powerful than weapons, and louder than propaganda.

While this message might appear clear and socially acceptable in theory, in practice, the collaboration between Ukrainian and Russian artists sparked protests and objections from those who believed that such projects contribute to the "normalization" of the war and shift attention away from military actions toward peaceful initiatives, which some argued were premature.

This political provocation tested one of the foundational values of the gay community—pacifism and a commitment to complete tolerance. Gay individuals, having historically been victims of political aggression, theoretically declare a total rejection of all forms of violence, including state-sanctioned violence. However, the exhibition revealed that, in some cases,

queer individuals, under the influence of propaganda, are inclined to reproduce the discourse of aggression, relying on stereotypes and labels propagated by the media or their national communities.

Religious Provocation

Religious provocation in gay art serves as a critical lens through which the intersections of faith, sexuality, and identity can be explored. This phenomenon is particularly relevant in contexts where religious beliefs are often at odds with LGBTQ+ identities, leading to complex negotiations of self and community. The representation of these tensions in art not only reflects personal struggles but also critiques broader societal norms and religious doctrines that marginalize queer identities.

One significant aspect of religious provocation in gay art is the internal conflict experienced by individuals who identify as both religious and gay. Many gay men grapple with the teachings of their faith, which often condemn homosexuality. For instance, the study (Anderson & Koç, 2020) highlights that negative religious coping can lead to distress among religious gay men, suggesting that the integration of their sexual and religious identities is fraught with challenges.

This struggle is echoed in the experiences of gay Catholics, who often face "double stigma" from both the LGBTQ+ community and their religious institutions, as discussed by (Pietkiewicz & Kołodziejczyk-Skrzypek, 2016). Such narratives are frequently depicted in art, where artists use their work to express the pain of rejection and the quest for acceptance within both their religious and sexual identities.

Moreover, the role of religious fundamentalism in shaping attitudes toward LGBTQ+ individuals cannot be overlooked. Research (Vincent et al., 2011; Barron et al., 2008) indicates that higher levels of religious fundamentalism correlate with increased prejudice against gay men and lesbians. This antagonism often manifests in societal attitudes that view homosexuality as a moral failing, as seen in the studies by (Hooghe et al., 2010; Chandra et al., 2022), which illustrate how religious teachings can foster negative perceptions of LGBTQ+ individuals. Artists responding to these societal pressures often employ provocative

imagery and themes to challenge these entrenched beliefs, aiming to confront and dismantle the narratives that perpetuate discrimination.

The intersection of race, religion, and sexuality further complicates the discourse surrounding religious provocation in gay art. The appropriation of racial identities in gay rights campaigns can obscure the unique struggles faced by LGBTQ+ individuals of color, particularly in religious contexts (Stone & Ward, 2011).

This intersectionality is crucial in understanding how different identities interact and how art can serve as a vehicle for expressing these multifaceted experiences. For instance, the work of artists who identify as both gay and Muslim often reflects a deep engagement with their faith while simultaneously critiquing the homophobia prevalent in many religious communities (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2013). This duality is a powerful form of provocation that seeks to reclaim space for queer identities within religious narratives.

The religious provocation at the *Expelled* exhibition lay in the active highlighting of religious subtext within homoerotic artworks. It is important to note that the religious theme had never been consciously addressed as a standalone subject by any of the artists participating in the exhibition. They had not previously considered it relevant to problematize or emphasize this theme. My curatorial decision was to gather all the works that incorporated religious motifs into a single space. Once these pieces were brought together, they gained a new resonance and became more powerful in their impact.

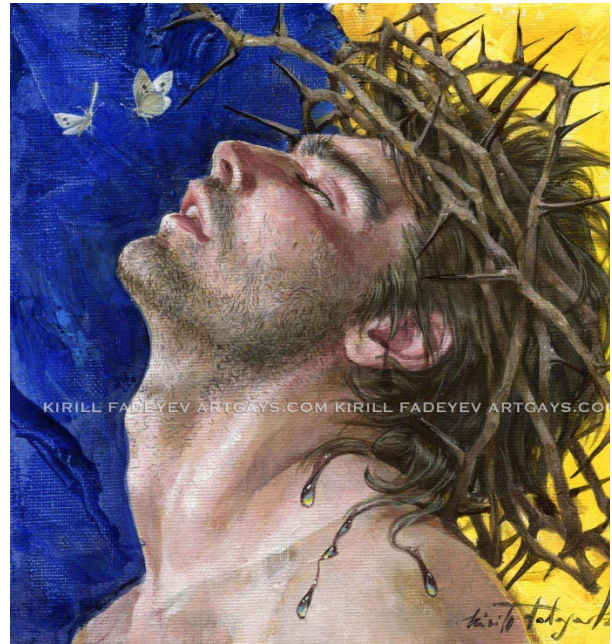
This section of the exhibition evoked a strong response from Carlos Sanches Ruivo, co-founder and director of *The Late Birds* and a noted collector of gay art:

“I believe that religion, fortunately, is no longer untouchable in our 21st century, but it's essential to be cautious because you could offend someone. I would never exhibit a work depicting Jesus in a sexual context. However, I would not condemn someone who created such a work; I simply would not appreciate it. There are unwritten but perceptible limits to what is acceptable in free art, and similarly, there are limits to acceptable responses to art.

*No religious feelings can justify the murder of a satirical magazine's cartoonist, which deeply affected me as I grew up with Charlie Hebdo”.*¹



Igor Sychev
Chastity Apple



Kirill Fadeyev
The Savior

Viewers found themselves confronting their own boundaries of acceptance regarding erotic or overtly sexual motifs in the context of religious imagery. This prompted discussions of recent sex scandals in the Catholic Church and debates on the appropriateness of combining depictions of saints with national symbols.

Aesthetic Provocation

Aesthetic provocation in gay art serves as a powerful medium for challenging societal norms, exploring identity, and expressing the complexities of queer experiences. This form of artistic expression often employs provocative imagery and themes to confront traditional notions of beauty, sexuality, and morality, thereby creating a space for dialogue and reflection on LGBTQ+ identities.

One of the foundational aspects of aesthetic provocation in gay art is its ability to reclaim narratives that have historically been marginalized or pathologized. The study (Delille, 2024) emphasizes the importance of writing a queer history of art, which involves uncovering and

¹ Full text of the interview can be found in the Annex.

reinvesting in queer genealogies that reveal the complexities and tensions inherent in artistic practices. This reclamation actively challenges the dominant narratives that have often excluded or misrepresented queer identities in the art world. By doing so, artists can provoke audiences to reconsider their preconceived notions of beauty and identity, fostering a more inclusive understanding of art.

Moreover, the concept of aesthetic hedonism plays a significant role in the creation and appreciation of gay art. Hedonistic attitudes, which prioritize pleasure and beauty, have influenced artistic practices, particularly in the context of restoration and preservation (Farhangpour, 2018). This perspective aligns with the goals of many gay artists who seek to create works that not only challenge societal norms but also evoke pleasure and joy in their audiences. The aesthetic experience becomes a site of resistance, where the enjoyment of beauty is intertwined with the celebration of queer identities.

The psychological mechanisms underlying aesthetic appreciation also contribute to the provocative nature of gay art. Leder (Leder et al., 2004) proposes a model of aesthetic appreciation that involves multiple stages, including perception and evaluation, which can lead to varying emotional responses. This model suggests that the way audiences engage with art can elicit strong emotional reactions, prompting them to confront their biases and assumptions about sexuality and identity. The interplay between aesthetic pleasure and cognitive processing can thus serve as a catalyst for deeper understanding and acceptance of LGBTQ+ experiences.

In addition, the role of cultural context in shaping aesthetic experiences cannot be overlooked. Cultural, historical, and individual differences influence aesthetic appreciation, suggesting that beauty is not a universal concept but rather one that is shaped by societal norms and values (Jacobsen, 2010). This notion is particularly relevant in the context of gay art, where artists often navigate and subvert cultural expectations to create works that resonate with queer audiences while challenging heteronormative standards of beauty.

Furthermore, the concept of queer curating, as discussed by (Bao, 2022), emphasizes the importance of exhibiting queer art in ways that resist traditional categorizations and power dynamics. This approach not only enhances the visibility of queer artists but also invites audiences to engage with the art on a deeper level, fostering a more nuanced understanding of

queer identities and experiences. By curating art that challenges fixed identity categories, queer curators can provoke critical discussions about the intersections of art, identity, and societal norms.

At the *Expelled* exhibition the aesthetic provocation tested the queer community's liberal attitudes toward art. For this purpose, I included works in the exhibition that did not contain the typical depictions of the male body usually associated with gay art — such as still lifes and landscapes. My goal was to observe how the audience would respond to these works. Would they attempt to find "gay" content within these pieces, reading and imposing queer meanings onto them, or would they accept these works as non-gay?



Kirill Fadeyev
Etude "Strelitzia spray"



Kirill Fadeyev
German life awakening

This provocation raises an important theoretical question: what exactly is gay art? Is it art created by gay individuals, or art about gay subjects? What better fits the concept of "gay art"—an abstraction painted by a queer artist, or a depiction of men kissing, painted by a heterosexual artist? Or perhaps neither?

During the exhibition, it became apparent that there is a latent conservatism within the queer audience, which is resistant to compromises and experiments with the boundaries of gay art. Queer individuals reacted rather indifferently to the non-gay works, deeming them irrelevant. However, it is crucial to note that this stance was justified not by aesthetic or taste-based considerations but by social and practical arguments. The queer audience argues that art without gay motifs, as well as the work of heterosexual artists, is already institutionalized and well-represented in public and private collections. Society faces no barriers to accessing this

type of art, whereas gay art, and queer art in general, remains marginalized even in liberal countries.

As Carlos Ruivo observed, this conservatism reflects an understandable frustration within the queer community regarding the limited visibility and representation of their art in mainstream institutions:

“Art, in general, can be found in many places, but there are few venues dedicated to gay art, which is why I believe it is essential to provide a platform for queer artists.

It can be a queer artist, meaning the art itself may not explicitly depict queer themes. However, it's the artist's queer perspective that influences their work, even if the subjects aren't overtly gay. Thus, a gay artist is interesting to me if they are gay and if their work offers a queer viewpoint on non-queer reality.

It's always challenging to judge art. If an exhibition consisted solely of landscapes, it might not resonate with me as deeply. It's always about balance. If a queer artist from Milwaukee struggled significantly just to be an artist because of their sexuality, their journey to the point where they can finally exhibit their work is as important as the art itself”.

It also underscores the critical need for spaces dedicated to queer perspectives and the preservation of marginalized voices in the art world.

Paradoxically, the methods of provocation, which were originally intended primarily as a means of engaging with the audience, unexpectedly sparked intense and vivid communication with the artists themselves. Some of the participating artists did not immediately agree with the curatorial recontextualization of their works. As a result of this disagreement, a few pieces were withdrawn by their creators from the exhibition.

This reaction from both viewers and artists highlighted the strength and importance of curatorial work. It demonstrated the curator's ability to create new meanings, influence tastes, and shape the beliefs and behaviors of individuals. By orchestrating these provocations, I was able to experiment with the boundaries of queer art and challenge both the audience and the artists to reflect on their own assumptions, pushing them into new territories of understanding and discourse.

Conclusion

Key Findings

One of the central findings of this research is the crucial role of the curator as an advocate for marginalized communities, particularly in contexts where LGBTQ+ identities are subject to censorship and repression. Curators working with gay art must navigate complex socio-political landscapes, balancing the need for visibility and representation with the risks of censorship and backlash. The study has also demonstrated the importance of diverse curatorial strategies, which include:

- Embracing provocation to disrupt normative views on sexuality and gender.
- Engaging with both LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ audiences to foster dialogue and mutual understanding.
- Ensuring that the diversity within the LGBTQ+ community is represented, reflecting a wide range of experiences and identities.

Furthermore, this thesis has shown that the curation of gay art can serve as a form of resistance against authoritarian regimes, where LGBTQ+ voices are often silenced. By examining historical cycles of repression and blossoming in gay art, the research underscores how art—and its curation—can function as a means of survival, self-expression, and protest in hostile environments.

Prospects and Directions for Research

As LGBTQ+ rights continue to evolve globally, the future of gay art and its curation presents several promising directions for both practice and research.

Globally While this thesis has focused on both liberal and authoritarian contexts, there is significant room for future research into the globalization of queer curatorial practices. As more countries begin to embrace LGBTQ+ rights, curators have the opportunity to expand the reach of gay art to new regions and audiences. This will require an adaptive approach, taking into account the local cultural, social, and political dynamics of each region. Future curators must be prepared to engage with emerging queer movements in regions such as Africa, Asia,

and the Middle East, where LGBTQ+ communities are gaining visibility but still face significant repression.

The rise of digital platforms and virtual exhibitions presents new opportunities for the dissemination and curation of gay art. Online spaces allow curators to bypass some of the physical and political barriers faced in more traditional exhibition spaces, creating a global network for LGBTQ+ artists to share their work. However, these digital spaces are also subject to their own forms of censorship, particularly on social media platforms that enforce restrictive content guidelines around sexuality and nudity. Future research could explore how digital curation can be optimized to ensure that gay art reaches a wider, global audience without compromising on its authenticity.

The intersection of art with other disciplines, such as performance studies, activism, and queer theory, presents exciting possibilities for future curatorial projects. Interdisciplinary approaches that incorporate elements of performance, digital media, and community engagement could broaden the scope of what constitutes a curated exhibition. Additionally, the inclusion of academic and activist voices in the curatorial process could further enrich the narratives presented in gay art exhibitions, offering new perspectives on identity, resistance, and community-building.

As seen in the case of the *Expelled* exhibition, curators can play a pivotal role in advocating for LGBTQ+ visibility even in conservative or repressive environments. There is great potential for curatorial practices to evolve into more community-centered advocacy, where exhibitions not only showcase art but also serve as platforms for LGBTQ+ activism. Future research could investigate how curators in conservative regions manage to work within and against the limitations imposed by society, and how their efforts influence public opinion and policy.

Lastly, the future of curating gay art will depend heavily on the support of art institutions and educational initiatives. Museums, galleries, and cultural institutions need to continue evolving their practices to include more diverse representations of LGBTQ+ art. This requires curators to work in collaboration with institutions to push for more inclusive policies and to create educational programs that help the public better understand and appreciate the significance of gay art. Future studies could focus on how institutional frameworks can be shifted to better support the inclusion of LGBTQ+ themes in mainstream art programming.

Final Thoughts

The curation of gay art is, at its core, an act of cultural resistance—one that pushes against the boundaries of societal norms, challenges political repression, and advocates for the visibility of marginalized identities. As society continues to evolve, so too will the curatorial strategies employed to showcase gay art. The findings of this thesis underscore the importance of the curator's role as both an artist and an activist, one who must balance the demands of artistic integrity with the broader goal of social change.

The future of curating gay art is filled with potential for further exploration and innovation. Curators who embrace the challenges and opportunities of this field will play a pivotal role in shaping the future of LGBTQ+ representation, ensuring that queer voices remain central in the ongoing cultural conversation. As art continues to be a reflection of human experience, the curation of gay art will remain a vital tool for both expressing and shaping the future of LGBTQ+ identity and visibility.

As the visibility and acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities increase in many parts of the world, the commercialization of gay art has emerged as a significant trend. While the commercialization of any art form presents opportunities for broader recognition and financial sustainability, it also poses challenges, particularly in balancing the authenticity of LGBTQ+ expression with market demands. The future of gay art and its commercialization brings both opportunities and potential pitfalls, and it is important for curators to navigate these carefully to preserve the cultural and political significance of the art.

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Annex.

Expelled. Exhibition Catalogue

Structure of the Catalogue

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Artists' biographies (pages 9 – 11)

Interview with the pop-up venue director (gay art collector and activist) (pages 12 – 18)

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18+



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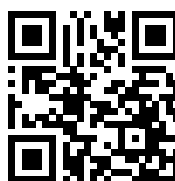
EXPELLED

Edited by Mikhail Osadchiy.
Lisbon, 2024.

This publication is a catalog of the exhibition of gay artists
Kirill Fadeyev (Ukraine) and **Igor Sychev** (Russia),
which opened in Lisbon in June 2024
during the celebration of Pride Month.

The exhibition is curated by **Dr. Prof. Mikhail Osadchiy**.

To learn more or purchase the artworks,
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“I am not of this world”

John 8:23

“Looking for fun. Jonny”

On the wall in a public WC

LOST AND FOUND

The title *Expelled* resonates not only with the content of the works but also with the fates of the two artists. Both were exiled from the places they considered home, where they were born, grew up, and planned to continue living and working. The terrible year of 2022 made them refugees and exiles. Kirill Fadeev was forced to flee Ukraine due to the Russian military invasion, and Igor Sychev had to leave Russia to escape the war declared on LGBTQ+ culture. Right now, as I write this essay, bombs are exploding in Ukrainian cities, and in Moscow, raids are being conducted at the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art. Someone reported that the museum staff had hidden queer literature in the archives.

Both artists found their new home in Portugal. At the beginning of 2022, these artists could not have imagined that they would soon, involuntarily, become part of the absolute trend in the development of contemporary art. The Venice Biennale 2024 is dedicated to the art of foreign artists and queer identities. The authors of this exhibition embody both these personas. These remarkably different artists are strikingly similar. Their similarity is largely due to both having an academic art education, which pushes them towards a dialogue with aesthetic traditions and codes. Kirill and Igor openly exploit the aesthetics of *socialist realism*, taking the clichés of this artistic style to the point of absurdity and blatant irony.





ALEXANDER DEYNEKA
After the Battle
 1937 – 1942

In the aesthetics of socialist realism, the male body was one of the main heroes, symbolizing revolution, industrialization, the working class, achievements, heroism, and the building of communism. The semi-naked male body was a staple of Soviet artistic propaganda for most of the USSR's existence. However, there was occasionally a subtle emotional aestheticization of the male body in the work of Soviet artists, as seen in the works of Alexander Deyneka. The state-sponsored promotion of physical culture and the idealized human form provided a socially acceptable framework through which artists could explore themes of physical beauty and eroticism, albeit indirectly.

This context allowed artists like Deyneka to celebrate the male body without overtly contravening societal norms. This insight allows us to see

how the internal conflict in the work of two artists born in the USSR is realized. We see a liberation from the shackles of the homophobic reality of the USSR through the artistic analysis of the aesthetics of socialist realism and the parodying of Soviet artistic practices. This method of liberation through scandal and parody is not new to art and has roots in the aesthetics of carnivalization. However, queer art explores this method particularly meticulously.

In 2022, a project by Portuguese artists João Pedro Vale and Nuno Alexandre Ferreira, titled *1983*, emerged, referring to a time when Europe was as homophobic as Russia and Ukraine are now. “1983 is also the year when the first news about AIDS reaches Portugal. An impending global crisis would reveal — just as today the climate emergency or COVID —



KIRILL FADEEV
After the Shower
2023

These artists could not have imagined that they would soon, involuntarily, become part of the absolute trend in the development of contemporary art.

the vulnerability of life, and of our human freedoms. AIDS also revealed the structural homophobia behind the politicians' odious stalling in implementing essential precautionary measures, and which set in motion a wave of militant resistance movements that today, 40 years later, have led to significant changes in the way people engage in anti-racist or feminist rights protest, as well as against heteronormative totalitarianisms, together playing decisive roles in the struggle against the fresh wave of neofascist populism (from Trump to Bolsonaro)" — says Dr. Prof. Alexander Melo regarding the project 1983.*

Like the authors of the exhibition *Expelled*, the Portuguese artists used scandalous and kitsch images as a way to objectify the great internal work that every queer person undergoes, desiring to defend their right to be different, be *not of this world* in the world of *heteronormative totalitarianisms*.

* Melo, A. (2022). Panic Bed. In J. P. Vale & N. A. Ferreira (Eds.), 1983. Catalogue. Lisbon.



The relationship between totalitarianism and homosexuality warrants separate discussion due to its typically complex nature. If we were to imagine a totalitarian mindset embodied in a single individual, we might conclude that this person would require psychological assistance. The state of such an individual could be described as a schizotypal disorder, characterized by an intense love and hatred for the same object.

The European audience is well-acquainted with the flourishing of homoeroticism in Nazi Germany up until the late 1930s. However, not everyone

is aware of a similar period of fascination with the male body in Soviet art during the same decade. Earlier, I mentioned Alexander Deyneka; here, I will provide examples of his works in comparison with those of Kirill Fadeyev and Igor Sychev. Researchers of gay art note (and members of the gay community are well aware) that the space of the public restroom is semantically significant in gay culture.

In times of repression, the toilet remains a space for personal freedom. As Professor Melo states, “Why public urinals become places rife with homosexual activity is historically what hap-

The central section of the exhibition is called “The Savior” and is dedicated to the theme of overcoming crisis. The artists lead the viewer from despair and fear to an emotional surge and salvation in love.

pens when political repression meets moral transgression.” By the principle of contiguity, artistic plots can unfold in the space of a shower room, where the contact of naked bodies of the same sex does not face social condemnation. This is precisely the plot we see in the works *After the Battle* and *After the Shower*.

These works are connected not only by their plot (athletes in the shower after training) but also by the highly accurate psychological depiction of restrained mutual interest between men, evident in the characters’ glances and poses.

Gay art shows a similarly strong interest in the theme of manual labor, which requires the display of male strength and the potential of the male body. Images of physical labor form complex yet enduring associations with images of roughness and dominance, leading us into another significant theme in gay art.

The works *The Team on Vacation* and *Idlers* fundamentally differ in their depiction of homoerotic elements. I am not referring to the depiction of penises, but to a much more expressive subtext. The plot of Deyneka’s work

is rather banal: young builders swimming in the sea. I would even say that there is little homoeroticism in this piece, except for one detail—the title. Doesn’t it raise the question of why seven grown men are vacationing together? *Homosocialization*, common in traditional conservative societies where men and women spend their leisure time separately, often becomes material for gay artists.

Let’s turn to another layer of traditional culture that has been reinterpreted by gay culture. Two works that are featured on the cover of the catalog show that both artists use biblical and religious contexts. The reference to well-known emotionally charged images and plots allows the authors to explain in clear language to the viewer what a person who has consciously violated a taboo feels, having accepted the fate of an exile, simply to be themselves and live as they wish.

Despite this inner drama, the exhibition is very optimistic. The central section of the exhibition is called “The Savior” and is dedicated to the theme of overcoming crisis. The artists lead the viewer from despair and fear to an emotional surge and salvation in love.



IGOR SYCHEV
Idlers
 2021

This exhibition is being held at *The Late Birds*, the oldest gay resort in Portugal. The choice of venue is driven by several factors. Despite the proclaimed tolerance, the art world, even in Western Europe, remains conservative. Not every gallery or museum agrees to host an exhibition of queer artists. The reasons may be subjective (such as the homophobia of the owner or curator) or objective, related to uncertain sales prospects.

It is no surprise, then, that queer artists find support and assistance within the queer community. The gay hotel has become not only a comfortable space for displaying our work but also a relevant meeting place with a sympathetic and understanding audience.

When selecting a venue, it was important to us that *The Late Birds* has been developing as an art residency for several years, supporting young queer artists.

In conclusion, I would like to express my profound gratitude to *The Late Birds* board and its founder Carlos Sanches Ruivo and his husband, Heber Charles, for their philanthropic approach, altruism, and fervent support of this project. I am also deeply thankful to Dr. Luis U. Afonso, Dr. Alexandra Fernandes, and Dr. Alexandre Melo for their support and valuable insights. Additionally, I extend my sincere thanks to the artists, Kirill and Igor, for their courage and trust in such a complex political context.

Mikhail Osadchiy

MEET THE ARTISTS:

KIRILL FADEEV



Kirill Fadeyev, born in 1977 in Odessa, Ukraine, is a distinguished painter and sculptor known for his mastery in easel painting and graphics. As a member of the National Union of Artists of Ukraine, Fadeyev has made significant contributions to the fields of realistic painting and erotica through his plot-thematic artworks. He is also the first artist in the history of Ukraine to openly work in queer art.

“The interest in drawing the male body first arose during evening drawings at an art college, when boys of 16 — 17 years old stayed in the evening in a huge cold studio and drew each other in turns,” the artist recalls: “It was very beautiful and sensual, youthful bodies were illuminated with the warm light of a homemade spotlight against the backdrop of the twilight of the evening studio, I remember how I posed myself and climbed onto the cold podium, stood in an absurd pose and froze, and my youthful penis lived its own life and either shrank from the cold, or tensed from the grad-

ual warmth of the heater. I know what my fellow students experienced, but for me these evening drawings were the most powerful sexual experience. In order not to show my excitement to others, I poured out all my passion into the drawings. Unfortunately, those drawings were not saved. At that time the Soviet Union had just collapsed, and the country was very poor. It was impossible to buy paper, paints and pencils, so we painted on scraps of wrapping paper, made charcoal ourselves, primed the canvases ourselves, and mixed the paint with simple sunflower oil. But there was some special sense of significance as an artist in this!”

Fadeyev embarked on his formal education in the arts at the Grekov Art College in Odessa, graduating in 1997. He further honed his skills and understanding of art at the National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture in Kyiv, where he completed his education in 2003. His early recognition came during his studies when he won

the city sculpture competition in Odessa consecutively in 1996 and 1998, showcasing his talent and promise as a sculptor.

His professional achievements include becoming a member of the National Union of Artists of Ukraine in 2009, a testament to his skill and dedication to his craft. Notably, his work “Defending Kyiv from the troops of Batu Khan. 1240” — an oil on canvas painting measuring 340×160 cm, created in 2003 — is permanently exhibited at the City Hall of Kyiv. This piece reflects his deep engagement with historical themes and his capability to capture intense, dynamic scenes on canvas.

Fadeyev has also been active internationally, with personal exhibitions at the Adonis Art International Gallery in London in 2010 and 2013, and at the Art:EGO gallery in Kyiv in 2014. He has also participated in numerous joint Ukrainian and international exhibitions. These exhibitions have helped him to establish a reputation beyond Ukrainian borders, appealing to a global audience.

Beyond his individual creations, Fadeyev has been involved in numerous community projects. In 1997, he co-authored the Humor Carnival in Odessa, and in 2004, he founded the ArtOk studio, which focused on the development of design projects and the creation of sculptures. His significant contributions include authoring the monument “Soldiers of the Second World War” in Kyiv in 2012, which is listed in the registry of national cultural monuments protected by the state.

Kirill also has a major achievement in developing and implementing a project for the decoration and design of the largest shopping mall in the country, covering an area of 167,000 square meters. The enormous building was divided into ten three-story atriums, each styled to represent different parts of the world. This creative solution caused a sensation among residents and visitors of the capital and became a favorite spot for photography.

The funniest part of this project was that Kirill got the owners to approve a logo and initial letter that looked like the LGBT flag. After the grand opening, which was attended by government and city officials, the media jokingly reported that a big gay party had happened. In this homophobic country, Kirill somehow managed to survive by convincing the angry owners that he didn’t know the logo resembled LGBT symbolism!

In 2015 he initiated the Internet gallery “Artgays”, which promotes exhibition activities across various online platforms.

However, Fadeyev’s career faced a significant upheaval in 2022 due to the military invasion of Ukraine by Russia, forcing him to leave his studio and home in Kyiv. Currently, he resides and works in Portugal, continuing his artistic endeavors in a new environment. This transition reflects not only the resilience required to adapt and thrive in new circumstances but also underscores the often profound impact of geopolitical events on individual lives and careers.



MEET THE ARTISTS:

IGOR SYCHEV



Igor Sychev, born in 1987 in Siberia, Russia, hails from the remote and unforgiving landscapes of Siberia, situated beyond the Arctic Circle. The region's extreme conditions, characterized by long, harsh winters spanning eight months and a near absence of light for half the year, make it an unlikely birthplace for an artist specializing in queer art. Despite these challenging conditions, or perhaps because of them, light plays a central role in most of Sychev's works, embodying a significant thematic element.

Sychev's artistic journey began in earnest after he graduated from the Novosibirsk State University of Architecture, Design, and Art in 2009. His technique of easel painting and his adherence to realistic painting allow him to explore intricate themes through his genre of choice: plot-thematic pictures, particularly focusing on erotica.

By 2014, Sychev had gained enough recognition to hold a personal ex-

hibition in Moscow, followed by another in 2017. His unique expression of themes, often centered around LGBT meanings and values, resonates with audiences internationally, leading to his works being featured in private collections across the USA, UK, France, Denmark, Germany, and Spain.

However, the reception in his homeland contrasts starkly. In Russia, any public expression of LGBT themes is deemed an act of extremism, rendering Sychev's art illegal. This restrictive and oppressive environment led to a pivotal decision in his life. Following Russia's attack on Ukraine, Sychev left Russia in protest. He relocated to Lisbon, Portugal, where he continues to create and exhibit his art. Grateful for the shelter and hospitality provided by Portugal, Sychev's experience underscores the often complex relationship between an artist's environment and their creative output.

HOW HAS ART NESTED IN THE LATE BIRDS?

A STORY TOLD BY THE FOUNDER

Interviewed by Mikhail Osadchiy



Carlos Sanches Ruivo is the founder and general manager of *The Late Birds*, a philanthropist, and an art collector.

Carlos was born in Alcains, Portugal, and spent his childhood and youth in the western area of Paris, where he earned a degree in engineering and pursued a career in telecommunications. Since 2011, he has dedicated himself to creating and developing the first establishment of the Gay Urban Resort concept in Lisbon, *The Late Birds*. In 2017, he collaborated with like-minded entrepreneurs to found the LGBTI Chamber of Tourism and Commerce in Portugal — *Variações* — and launch the brand and campaign ***Proudly Portugal*** to promote Portugal as an LGBTI friendly destination to Visit, Live and Invest. This organization is co-organizer with ILGA Portugal of the *EuroPride 2025*, which will be held in Lisbon.

Carlos, you received an excellent engineering education and had a successful career at one of France's largest technology companies. What led you to make a dramatic change in 2011 and start a business catering to a gay audience?

Indeed, I was an engineer for most of my life, for about 20 years. Initially, I was a research and development engineer then I led a group focused on digital broadcast (DVB-T and H) and later became the Corporate Key Account Manager for Orange France Telecom Group in the same tech company.

At 39, I began an Executive MBA, which completely reset everything for me. We had study modules at different universities around the world. I travelled to Stellenbosch University in Cape Town, Baruch College in New York, and the Schools of Business and Economics in Tsinghua and Shanghai, China, finish-

When considering a gay guesthouse in a city centre, one might think of Berlin or Paris. However, I was more inclined towards Lisbon.

ing at Macquarie University in Australia. At the end of the MBA, I had to present a business plan, which became a pivotal moment in my story.

While in Cape Town, where I turned 40, I stayed in a gay guesthouse — *The Decks* — with my boyfriend, where I realized the potential for a similar business in Europe. This experience planted the seed for ‘The Gay Urban Resort Concept’, lately ‘*The Late Birds*’. Our professors encouraged us to create business plans that were as personal as possible because the more personal the plan, the deeper we would delve into marketing and all other aspects.

My personal life also played a crucial role. Although I was gay, the ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy at my company meant that being open about my sexuality could potentially harm my career, even though the company was not homophobic. Thus, I couldn’t fully be myself even in a supportive environment. These experiences prompted me to explore the idea further.

Another motivation was my desire to return to Portugal. I always tried to move back with my boyfriends, and

although there were opportunities for me as an engineer, the moves never materialized for various reasons. The gay urban resort concept helped make this dream a reality. When considering a gay guesthouse in a city centre, one might think of Berlin or Paris. However, I was more inclined towards Lisbon because a gay urban resort would benefit from the competitive advantages of Lisbon: building with large garden and sunlight all year long.

How did the concept of displaying queer art pieces in the hotel arise? How does this align with the concept of an urban gay hotel?

When conceptualizing *The Late Birds* and thinking beyond just profitability to include design. I wanted our social areas to be worthwhile, so I envisioned a breakfast room with a beautiful view of the garden. In this room, guests wouldn’t see the neighbours; they would see the garden and the pool, creating a resort-like, intimate atmosphere in the city centre.

As we developed the lounge and lobby, we decided to incorporate many personal items. We tasked Marco Sou-

It's always about balance. If a queer artist from Milwaukee struggled significantly just to be an artist because of their sexuality, their journey to the point where they can finally exhibit their work is as important as the art itself.

sa Santos from *Branca Lisboa* with designing a project that felt less like a typical hotel and more like a home where I could display my personal belongings. At the time, I had moved all my possessions from France in two trucks. The idea of using bookshelves designed by Marcos Sousa Santos appealed to me because it helped transform the hotel space into a home. It's an amazing thing; I hadn't thought about it before. Books transform a space into a cozy home in a remarkable way.

The focus on design was the starting point for introducing artworks into the interiors. Our first art project took place right after the hotel's official launch, in the second building that will later be connected to the one just finished and that was still empty. We hosted a pop-up event with two artists, Vadim Cesar and Helio Bray, the latter of whom created *The Late Birds* logo and is now a renowned street artist.

At that time, I owned many artworks, and my rooms were filled with paintings. This led to the idea of creating

a space where art is born, understanding that a hotel cannot be a gallery but can serve as a venue for temporary art projects. This concept led to exhibitions, with Vadim's first exhibition at our hotel selling almost 80% of his art.

How did the idea of art residencies come about? What were the criteria for selecting residents? How has the project evolved over time?

The concept of art residencies emerged more recently, during COVID crisis, when we realize that residency could be a good option to help artists, not only to work and to show their art, but also showing support to a community that has been through hard times.

Since then, every February, we invite artists for a long weekend to create and exhibit their work. Paco and Manolo from *Kink* magazine were our first art residents, hosting a significant photographic exhibition. They took many Polaroids here, some of which appeared in *Kink* magazine a few months later.



We host residencies annually without any formal selection process or public announcements. Artists often come into our lives unexpectedly, sometimes among the hotel guests. We have welcomed guests of 103 different nationalities since we opened, providing a rich environment for discovering talent.

We typically offer residencies to three very different artists. The idea is for them to create and exhibit simultaneously, fostering a dynamic atmosphere that works exceptionally well with artists like Paco and Manolo, who never ask anyone to pose for pictures. Sometimes, they find subjects for their photos among the guests, including in their rooms, and

occasionally, artists venture into the city or even to a local nudist gay beach for inspiration. The crucial aspect is that they come to Lisbon, stay with us, work here, and present their work here.

Then there was a project with *Fado Bicha*. “Bicha” means “queer” in Portuguese. This queer group features Tiago Lila as vocalist and João Caçador, the guitarist who is also a fado singer. They formed the *Fado Bicha* group, which highlights the queer aspects of fado, transforming lyrics to reflect queer narratives, particularly those originally written by gay lyricists with underlying meanings. We hosted performances for about 50 people weekly, who were deeply moved by the queer fado, en-



hanced by explanations that made the performances profoundly impactful. *Fado Bicha* has since gained significant fame, even competing in a *Eurovision* casting in Portugal.

Art experts often debate the definition of “gay art,” whether it pertains to art by gay artists or about gay themes. However, my practical question is: Suppose a queer artist created a series of landscapes or abstract works. Would such an exhibition be appropriate in your hotel? Would it interest a gay audience?

I aim to present what I would personally enjoy in my space. Regarding gay art, we appreciate it because we are gay, and it resonates with our identities. Art, in general, can be found in many

places, but there are few venues dedicated to gay art, which is why I believe it is essential to provide a platform for queer artists.

It can be a queer artist, meaning the art itself may not explicitly depict queer themes. However, it's the artist's queer perspective that influences their work, even if the subjects aren't overtly gay. Thus, a gay artist is interesting to me if they are gay and if their work offers a queer viewpoint on non-queer reality.

It's always challenging to judge art. If an exhibition consisted solely of landscapes, it might not resonate with me as deeply. It's always about balance. If a queer artist from Milwaukee struggled significantly just

We typically offer residencies to three very different artists. The idea is for them to create and exhibit simultaneously, fostering a dynamic atmosphere that works exceptionally well with artists like Paco and Manolo, who never ask anyone to pose for pictures.

to be an artist because of their sexuality, their journey to the point where they can finally exhibit their work is as important as the art itself.

I provide a space for creativity even for artists whose work I personally might not enjoy but see value in. Once, I allowed an exhibition that I didn't particularly like, but it was a worthwhile experiment. It pushed me out of my comfort zone, and although the art didn't speak to me, the artist was pleased because he sold some of his works. It also proved that I'm not the only judge of what constitutes good art.

Why did you decide to support the “Expelled” exhibition project?

Firstly, the works touched me deeply. If they speak to me, I hope they will speak to many others. Another reason is that the theme of the exhibition and the artists themselves resonate with me, especially because I come from an immigrant family and understand the challenges and experiences of immigrants.

Being an immigrant in the seventies was tough; I remember that people were often dismissive, calling us “fucking immigrants.” My parents took

a significant step by leaving Portugal during the dictatorship to start from scratch in a new country, knowing they couldn't return until the dictatorship ended.

Similarly, both artists featured in the exhibition suffered under the dictator's acts (in different ways) and were forced to leave their homes. Their stories are very familiar to me. They came to Portugal, considering it a safe country, but we must acknowledge that racism exists everywhere, including Portugal, where there is typical racism, not only towards people from Portuguese speaking countries, which previously were (and still considered by some people) our former colonies, but also against immigrants from other parts of the world, mostly from poorer areas. This posture is still predominant in Portuguese culture and, as previous immigrants ourselves, we must be part of the education campaign against this racist vision, the same one we've suffered of many years ago abroad.

Those who have never had to leave their homeland or felt out of place cannot fully understand this experience unless they have lived it. But we try to convey this feeling through these artworks.



I know you were born into a religious family; in one of your television interviews, you even referred to your parents as “pillars” of the religious community. How do you feel about the works and the theme of religion in queer art in general?

I believe that religion, fortunately, is no longer untouchable in our 21st century, but it's essential to be cautious because you could offend someone. I would never exhibit a work depicting Jesus in a sexual context. However, I would not condemn someone who created such a work; I simply would not appreciate it. There are unwritten but perceptible limits to what is acceptable in free art, and similarly, there are limits to acceptable responses to art. No religious feelings can justify the murder of a satirical magazine's

cartoonist, which deeply affected me as I grew up with *Charlie Hebdo*.

Religious culture, like gay art, often explores the male body. There is a church ritual associated with honouring Saint Francis of Assisi that involves disrobing to symbolize poverty, selflessness, detachment from worldly wealth and pleasures, and purity.

Do you remember the controversial Benetton advertisement where a man with AIDS, which could be gay, was depicted dying in his bed surrounded by his family? Some priests saw this as a parody of the scene of Christ being mourned and condemned the ad. In my view, such a stance contradicts the mission of a priest, who should instead support people in such situations.



IGOR SYCHEV
IDLERS, 2021
Canvas oil, 105 x 85 cm

AVAILABILITY:
Original
Full size signed print
Small size signed print



IGOR SYCHEV
CROSSING PARALLELS.
Part 1, 2015
 Canvas oil, 55 x 60 cm

AVAILABILITY:
 Original
 Small size signed print



IGOR SYCHEV
CROSSING PARALLELS.
Part 2, 2015
 Canvas oil, 55 x 60 cm

AVAILABILITY:
 Original
 Small size signed print



KIRILL FADEYEV
*SPRING SHOWER
CELEBRATION, 2024*
Thick paper, acrylic
33 x 48 cm

AVAILABILITY:
Original
Full size signed print
Small size signed print



KIRILL FADEYEV
*ETUDE "STRELITZIA SPRAY",
2023*
Thick paper, acrylic
33 x 48 cm

AVAILABILITY:
Original
Full size signed print
Small size signed print



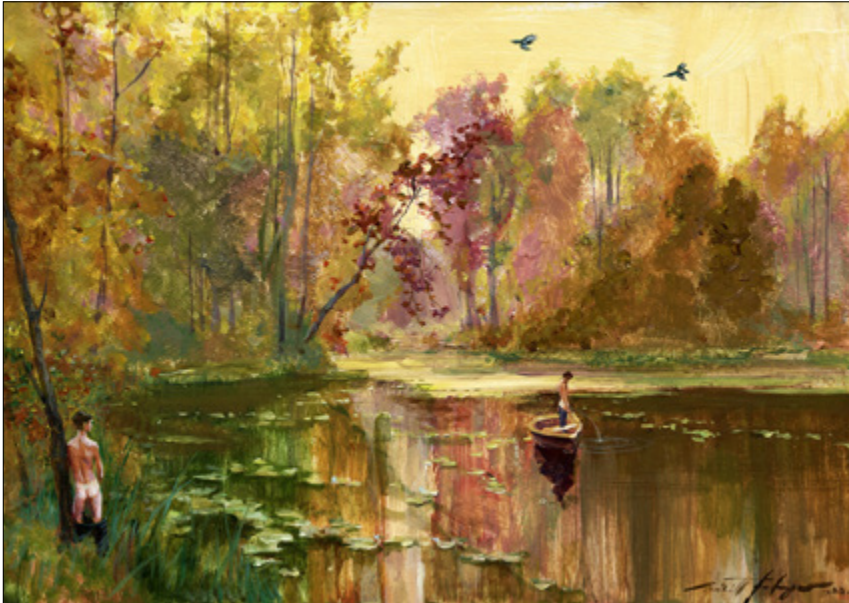
KIRILL FADEYEV

MAGIC BUD, 2023

Thick golden paper, acrylic
30 x 40 cm

AVAILABILITY:

Original



KIRILL FADEYEV
CIRCLES ON THE WATER,
2023

Thick paper, acrylic
30 x 42 cm

AVAILABILITY:

Original
Full size signed print
Small size signed print

IGOR SYCHEV
EARLY MORNING AFTER,
2023

canvas oil, 92 x 73 cm

Private collection, London, UK

AVAILABILITY:

Small size signed print





IGOR SYCHEV
SOLSTICE, 2021
canvas oil, 105 x 75 cm

Private collection, NY, US

AVAILABILITY:
Full size signed print
Small size signed print

KIRILL FADEYEV*CHERRY, SHUTTLECOCK,
AND A LOT OF SUN, 2023*Thick paper, acrylic
33 x 48 cm**AVAILABILITY:**

Original

Full size signed print

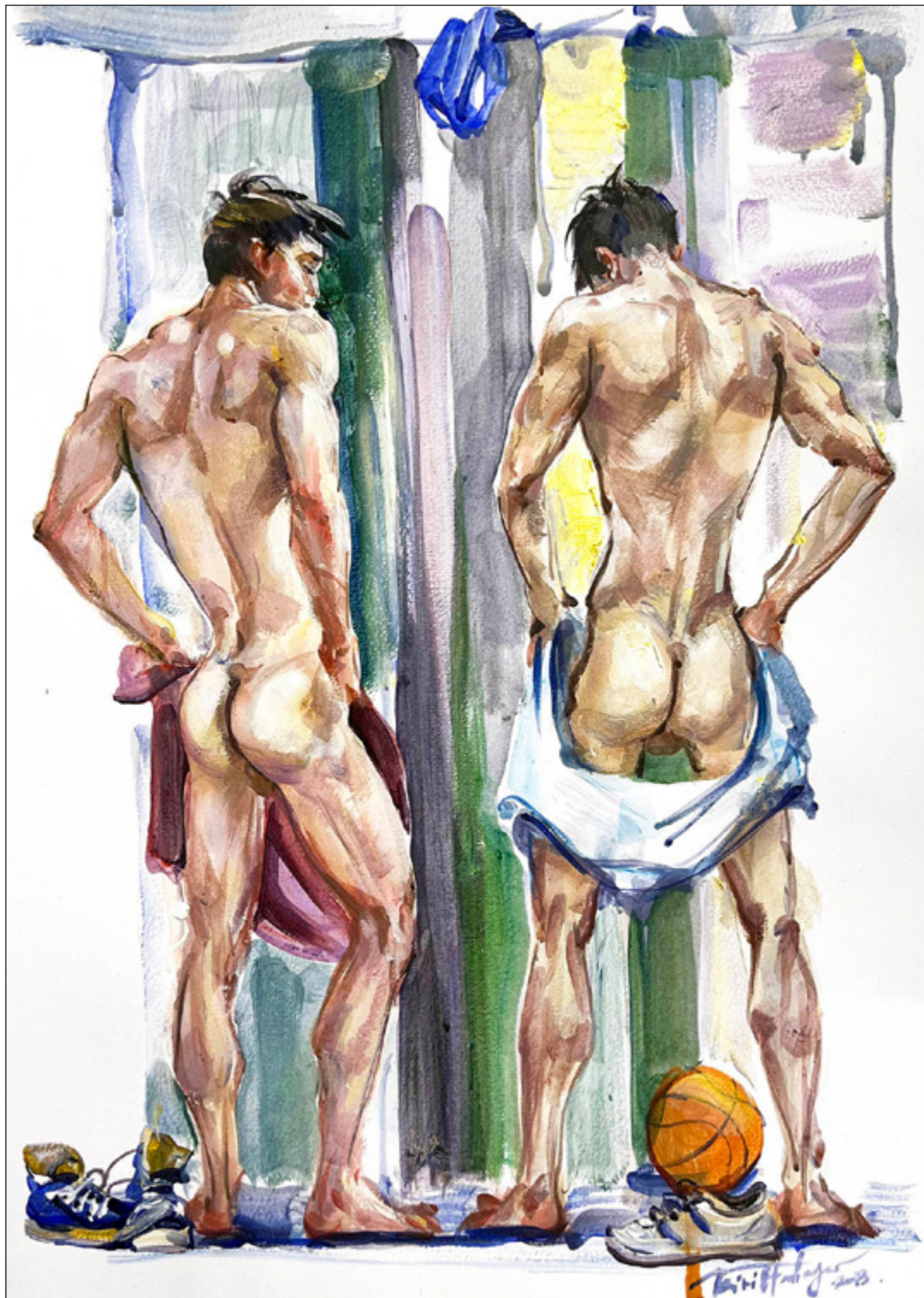
Small size signed print

**KIRILL FADEYEV***BROTHERS, 2023*Thick paper, acrylic
33 x 48 cm**AVAILABILITY:**

Original

Full size signed print

Small size signed print



KIRILL FADEYEV
AFTER THE SHOWER, 2023
 Watercolor paper, acrylic
 30 x 42 cm

AVAILABILITY:
 Original
 Full size signed print
 Small size signed print



IGOR SYCHEV
HIGH HOPES, 2023
Canvas oil, 110 x 92 cm

AVAILABILITY:
Original
Small size signed print



IGOR SYCHEV
CAPTIVE, 2024
 Canvas oil 80 x 80 cm

Private collection, Cheshire, UK

AVAILABILITY:
 Small size signed print

KIRILL FADEYEV
SHADOWS, 2022
 Thick paper, mixed media
 32 x 45 cm

AVAILABILITY:
 Original
 Full size signed print
 Small size signed print





KIRILL FADEYEV
PARADISE LOST, 2023
 Thick paper, acrylic
 33 x 48 cm

Private collection, Germany

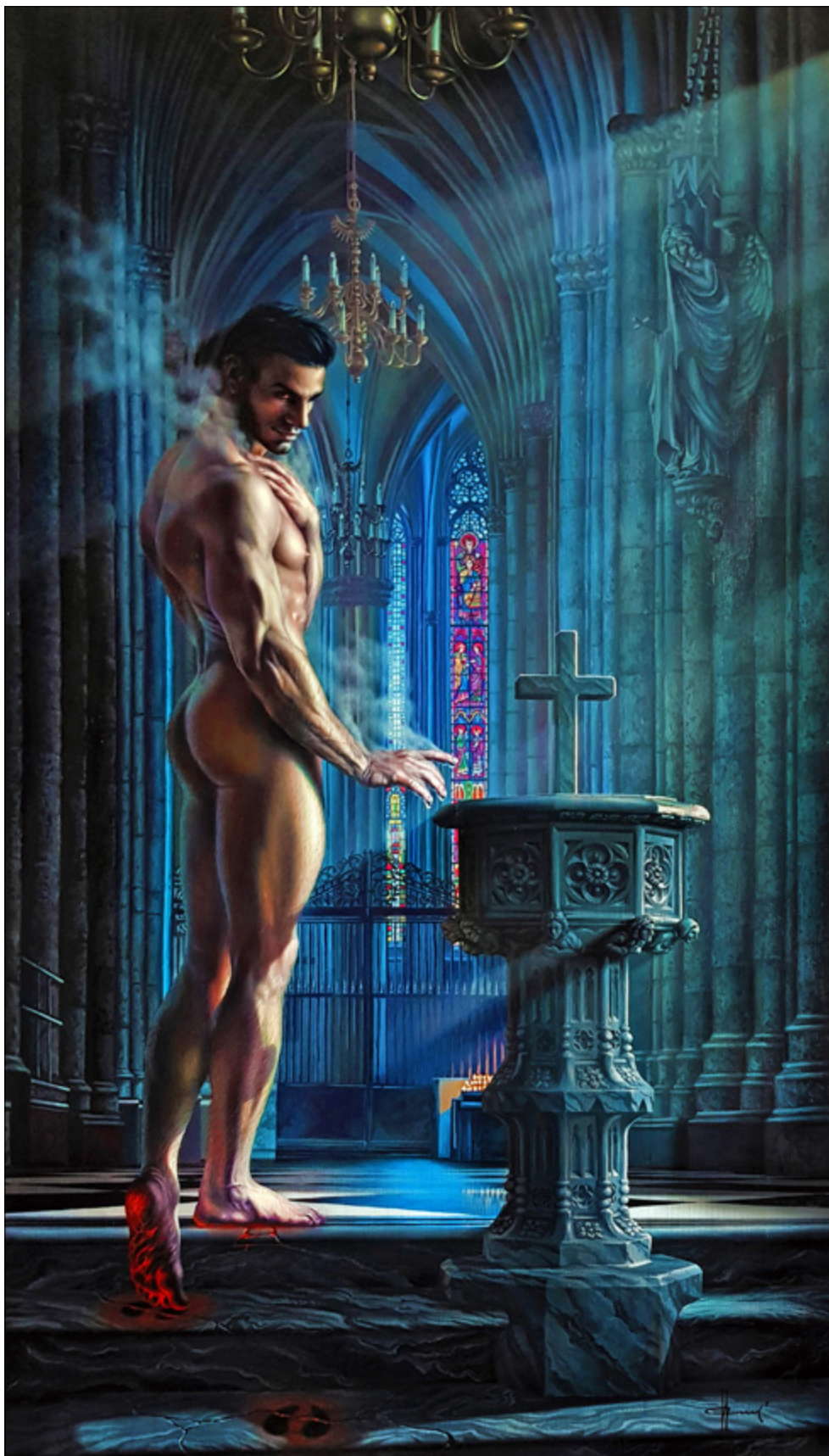
AVAILABILITY:
 Full size signed print
 Small size signed print

IGOR SYCHEV
CHASTITY APPLE, 2023
 Canvas oil,
 50 x 61 cm

Private collection, Denmark

AVAILABILITY:
 Small size signed
 paper print







IGOR SYCHEV
DARKEST DAYS, 2023
Canvas oil, 30 x 30 cm

Private collection, Florence, Italy

AVAILABILITY:
Small size signed print

IGOR SYCHEV
MEMORY TRAP, 2023
Canvas oil, 91 x 60 cm

AVAILABILITY:
Original
Small size signed print

IGOR SYCHEV
THE VISITOR, 2018
Canvas oil, 60 x 105 cm

Private collection, NY, US

Availability:
Full size signed canvas print
Small size signed paper print





KIRILL FADEYEV
RESSURECTION, 2022

AVAILABILITY:
 Full size signed print

IGOR SYCHEV
PYROCLASTIC FEELING, 2017
 Canvas oil, 120 x 70 cm

AVAILABILITY:
 Original
 Small size signed print





IGOR SYCHEV
NARCISSUS REJECTED
AMEINIAS, 2019
 Canvas oil, 105 x 105 cm

Private collection, NY, US

AVAILABILITY:
 Small size signed print

IGOR SYCHEV
COMING OUT, 2020
 Canvas oil, 75 x 105 cm

Private collection, NY, US

AVAILABILITY:
 Full size signed print
 Small size signed print



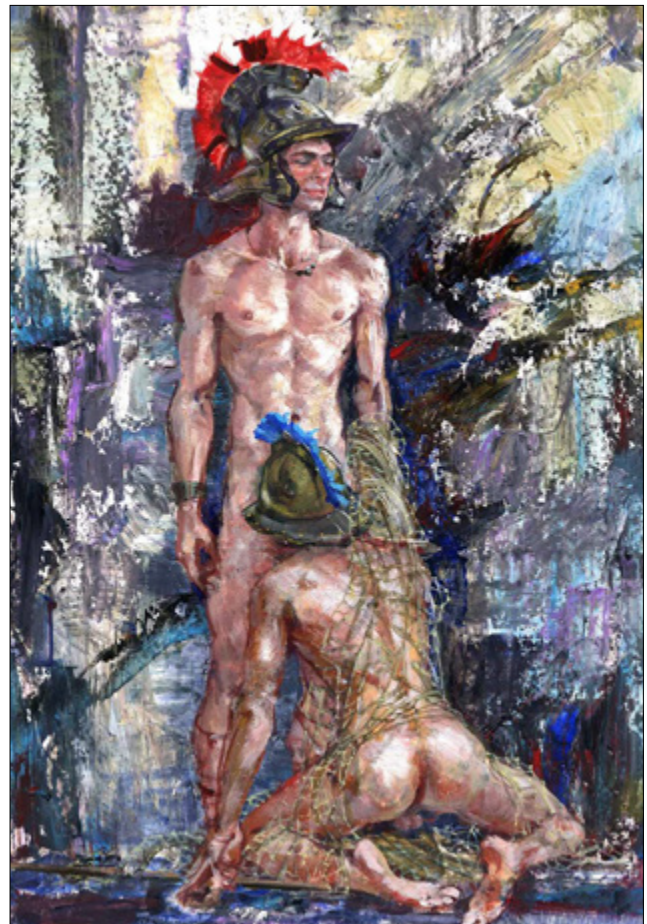


IGOR SYCHEV
MOLE ON THE CHEEK, 2023
 Canvas oil, 40 x 40 cm

AVAILABILITY:
 Original
 Small size signed print

KIRILL FADEYEV
THE SECRET TACTICS OF COMBAT, 2024
 Thick paper, acrylic
 33 x 48 cm

AVAILABILITY:
 Original
 Full size signed print
 Small size signed print





IGOR SYCHEV
DREAM TEAM, 2020
Canvas oil, 105 x 105 cm

Private collection, NY, US

AVAILABILITY:
Small size signed print



IGOR SYCHEV
TURBIDITY, 2023
Canvas oil, 116 x 81 cm

AVAILABILITY:
Original
Small size signed print



IGOR SYCHEV
THE TIME IS NOW, 2018
Canvas oil, 80 x 90 cm
Private collection, NY, US

AVAILABILITY:
Small size signed print





IGOR SYCHEV
BALANCE, 2020
Canvas oil, 65 x 105cm

Private collection, NY, US

IGOR SYCHEV
LEAF OF SANCTIMONY, 2019
Canvas oil, 70 x 105 cm

Private collection, NY, US

AVAILABILITY:
Full size signed print
Small size signed print

AVAILABILITY:
Full size signed print
Small size signed print



IGOR SYCHEV
THREE WISE MONKEYS, 2015
 Canvas oil, 55 x 75 cm

AVAILABILITY:
 Original
 Small size signed print

IGOR SYCHEV
DEEP BREATH, 2014
 Canvas oil, 100 x 80 cm

AVAILABILITY:
 Original
 Small size signed print



IGOR SYCHEV
HUNGOVER MORNING, 2016
Canvas oil, 100 x 60 cm

AVAILABILITY:
Original
Small size signed print



IGOR SYCHEV
NAIAD BOY, 2017
Canvas oil, 65 x 50 cm

AVAILABILITY:
Original
Small size signed print



KIRILL FADEYEV
CUCUMBER HARVEST, 2023
 Canvas, acrylic
 20 x 30 cm

AVAILABILITY:
 Original
 Full size signed print

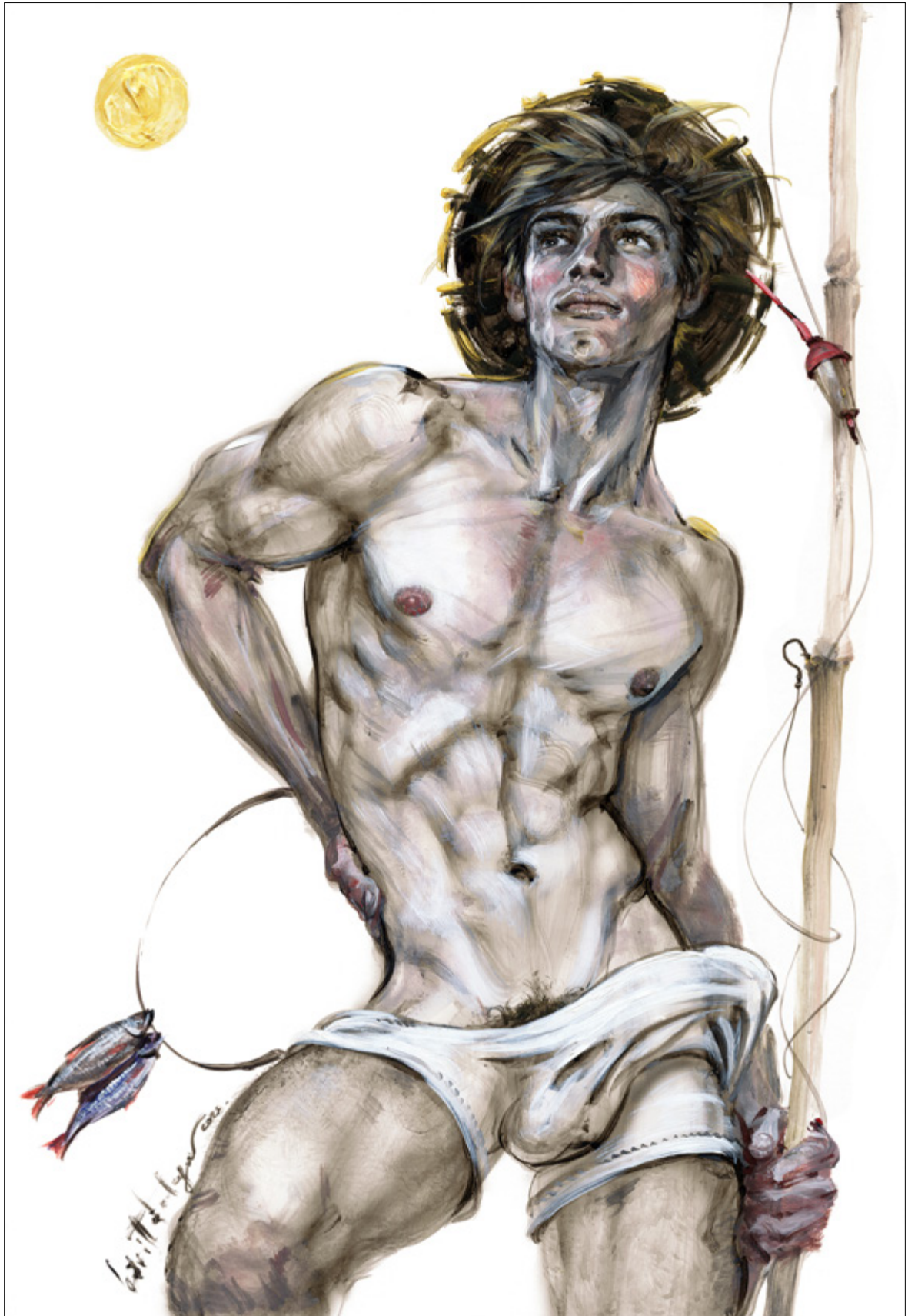


KIRILL FADEYEV
DANGEROUS FISHING, 2023
 Canvas, acrylic
 30 x 40 cm

AVAILABILITY:
 Original
 Full size signed print
 Small size signed print

KIRILL FADEYEV
*FISHERMAN DREAMING
 OF A BIG FISH, 2023*
 Thick paper, acrylic
 33 x 48 cm

AVAILABILITY:
 Original
 Full size signed print
 Small size signed print





KIRILL FADEYEV

MOWER, 2022

Watercolor paper, acrylic
30 x 42 cm

AVAILABILITY:

Original

Full size signed print

Small size signed print

KIRILL FADEYEV

NICE SHOWER TIME, 2024

Sketch paper, acrylic
30 x 42 cm

AVAILABILITY:

Original

Full size signed print

Small size signed print



KIRILL FADEYEV
REFLECTION OF YOUTH,
2023

Thick paper, acrylic
33 x 48 cm

AVAILABILITY:

Original
Full size signed print
Small size signed print



KIRILL FADEYEV
A NEW STAR IS BORN, 2022

Thick paper, acrylic
50 x 70 cm

AVAILABILITY:

Original
Full size signed print
Medium size signed print
Small size signed print

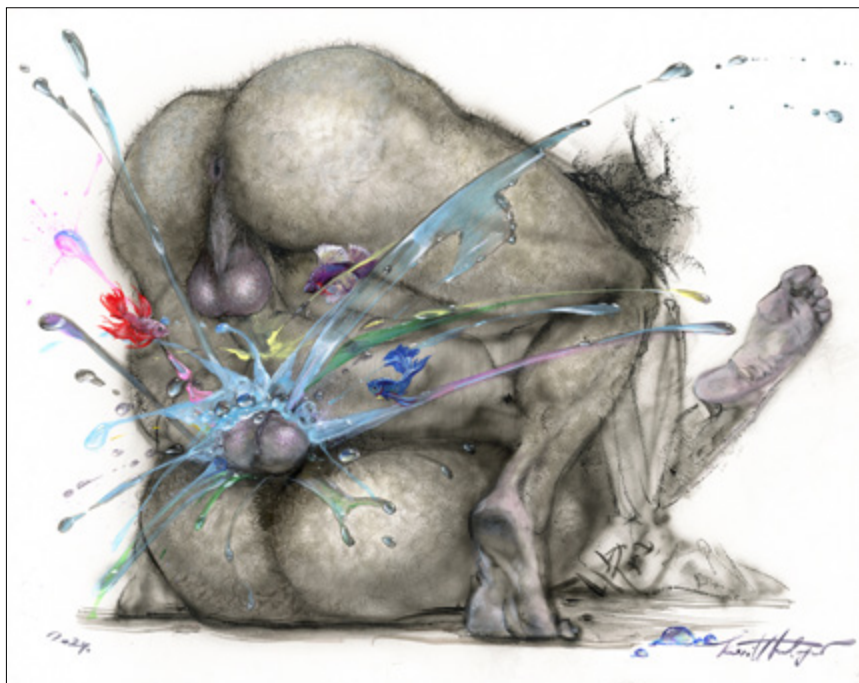


KIRILL FADEYEV
MUSHROOM HUNTING, 2021
 Watercolor paper, acrylic
 30 x 42 cm

AVAILABILITY:
 Original
 Full size signed print
 Small size signed print

KIRILL FADEYEV
THREE FISH ARE PLAYING, 2024
 Thick paper, acrylic
 40 x 50 cm

AVAILABILITY:
 Original
 Full size signed print
 Small size signed print





KIRILL FADEYEV
GOOD MORNING! 2023
 Canvas, acrylic
 30 x 40 cm

Private collection, Germany

AVAILABILITY:
 Full size signed print
 Small size signed print



KIRILL FADEYEV
TRY TO TAKE HIS BALL AWAY, 2024
 Thick paper, acrylic
 33 x 48 cm

Private collection, USA

AVAILABILITY:
 Full size signed print
 Small size signed print



KIRILL FADEYEV
AFTER SHOWER, 2023
 Watercolor paper, mixed media
 30 x 42 cm

AVAILABILITY:
 Original
 Full size signed print
 Small size signed print

KIRILL FADEYEV
EXQUISITE WASHCLOTH SHELF, 2023
 Watercolor paper,
 mixed media
 30 x 42 cm

AVAILABILITY:
 Original
 Full size signed print
 Small size signed print



KIRILL FADEYEV
LANDING ON THE SHORE,
 2023

Thick paper, acrylic
 30 x 42 cm

AVAILABILITY:

Original
 Full size signed print
 Small size signed print

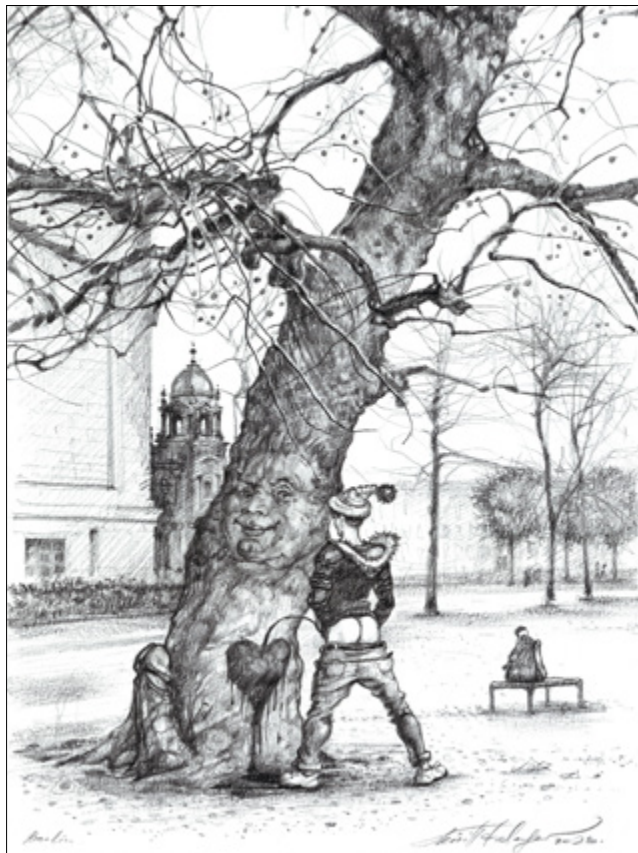


KIRILL FADEYEV
MARINE FANTASIES, 2022

Thick paper, acrylic
 33 x 48 cm

AVAILABILITY:

Original
 Full size signed print
 Small size signed print



KIRILL FADEYEV
ECHOES OF BERLIN,
UNAPOLOGETIC YOUTH, 2023
 Graphic on paper, A4

AVAILABILITY:
 Original
 Full size signed print

KIRILL FADEYEV
SEDUCTIVE FULL MOON,
2023
 Graphic on paper, A4

AVAILABILITY:
 Original
 Full size signed print



KIRILL FADEYEV

BEFORE THE RAIN, 2024

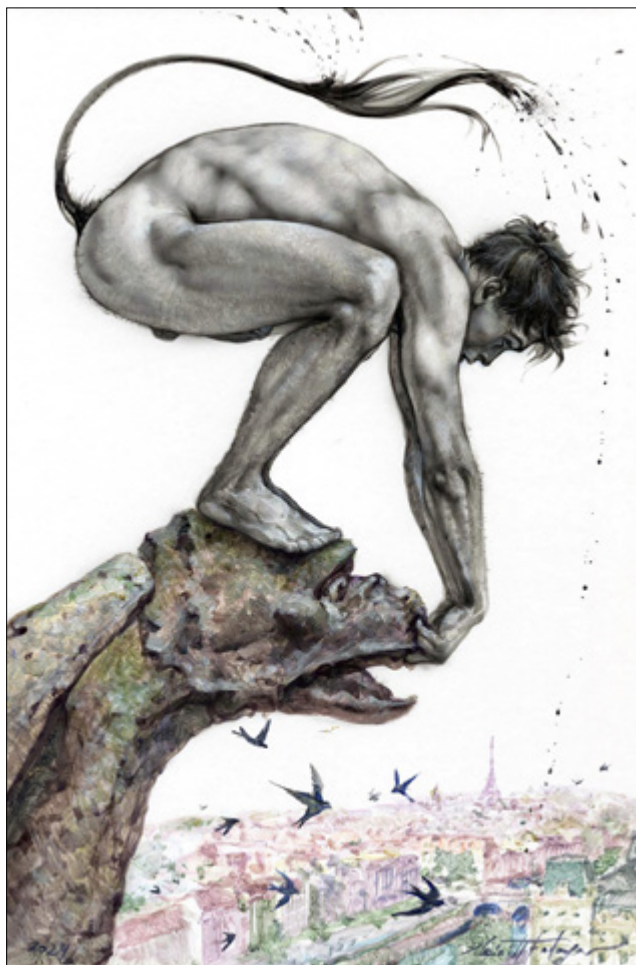
Thick paper, acrylic
33 x 48 cm

Private collection, Germany

AVAILABILITY:

Full size signed print

Small size signed print



KIRILL FADEYEV

DEFEATED MINOTAUR, 2023

Graphic on paper, A4

AVAILABILITY:

Original

Full size signed print





KIRILL FADEYEV
GAMES OF MERRY HUSSARS, 2023
Thick paper, acrylic
30 x 42 cm

AVAILABILITY:
Original
Full size signed print
Small size signed print



KIRILL FADEYEV

NAUGHTY DOLL, 2023

Thick paper, acrylic, 30 x 42 cm

AVAILABILITY:

Original

Full size signed print

Small size signed print



KIRILL FADEYEV

CORNFIELD MONSTER,
2017 – 2024

Thick paper, acrylic, 50 x 70 cm

AVAILABILITY:

Original

Full size signed print

Medium size signed print

Small size signed print



KIRILL FADEYEV

FAIR WITH BALLOONS, 2023

Watercolor paper, acrylic, 30 x 42 cm

AVAILABILITY:

Original

Full size signed print

Small size signed print



KIRILL FADEYEV
STRANGE VISIONS
OF KING HENRY III OF VALOIS, 2023
 Wood panel, acrylic, 28,5 x 36,5 cm

AVAILABILITY:
 Original
 Full size signed print
 Small size signed print



KIRILL FADEYEV
CIRCUIS, 2017-2024
 Thick paper, acrylic, 50 x 70 cm

AVAILABILITY:
 Original
 Full size signed print
 Medium size signed print
 Small size signed print

KIRILL FADEYEV
CIRCUIS SECRETS, 2019
 Thick paper, acrylic, 30 x 42 cm

AVAILABILITY:
 Original
 Full size signed print
 Small size signed print



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