



Stonewall National Museum & Archives LGBTQ Visual Art Timeline

Introduction

The United States has had a long-standing discomfort with the transgression of sexual and gender norms. Influenced by religious ideals, society viewed people who had same-sex desires and engaged in same-sex practices to be immoral and sinful. As such, the US has long enacted laws to control and condemn those who betray sexual and gender norms. Since the nation's earliest days, federal, state and local laws punished those who betrayed sexual and gender norms, often as a capital offense.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, commerce and industry flourished, causing people to move from rural communities to more developed urban areas. As a result of these social transformations, same-sex practices increased, as did organized efforts to suppress them. Accordingly, our examination of LGBTQ history in the United States begins after the Civil War and the growth of industrialization and urbanization. Despite insistent homophobia and transphobia in politics, culture, and society over the past 170 years, LGBTQ people have remained resilient, creative, and dedicated to the fight for rights and visibility. Rather than a comprehensive overview, this timeline is intended to provide a snapshot of significant moments in LGBTQ history so as to encourage further engagement and exploration.

Check out other LGBTQ history timeline selections that specifically explore music, theatre and dance, literature, film and television, AIDS, and sports in this series.

Below is a timeline of important LGBTQ visual artists and moments supporting queer art production and presentation. Many thanks to Jackson Davidow for his research on this project.



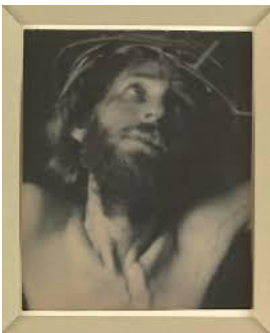
1852 Harriet Hosmer moved to Rome to pursue a career as a sculptor and to live more independently as a woman—and openly as a lesbian. [More](#)



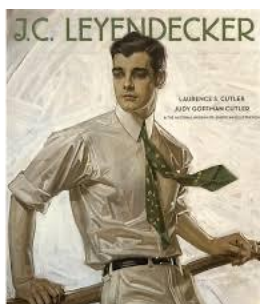
1876 Edmonia Lewis, an African American expatriate sculptor based in Rome, carved her majestic work *The Death of Cleopatra*. Scholars have suggested that, like Harriet Hosmer, Lewis was a lesbian. [More](#)



1885 Thomas Eakins painted his realist masterpiece *The Swimming Hole*, a vivid homoerotic depiction of six men at a lake. [More](#)



1898 Photographer F. Holland Day produced dozens of pictorialist images of the Passion and Crucifixion of Christ—homoerotically featuring himself in the principle role. He also documented many people of color. [More](#)



1899 J. C. Leyendecker designed his first cover of *The Saturday Evening Post*—a publication for which he would produce 322 cover illustrations, many of which had hints of homoeroticism. [More](#)



1915 Marsden Hartley painted *The Iron Cross*, a memorial to his close friend and lover, Karl von Freyburg. [More](#)



1916 Painter John Singer Sargent met Thomas McKeller, who would become the primary model and muse for some of the artist's most celebrated murals and bas-reliefs. [More](#)



1923 Romaine Brooks painted a striking self-portrait, fashioning herself as a confident and androgynous subject of the modern world. [More](#)



1926 A key figure in the Harlem Renaissance, writer and painter Richard Bruce Nugent contributed to two brush-and-ink drawings as well as a story to the groundbreaking journal *FIRE!!*. [More](#)



1926 Georgia O'Keeffe painted *Black Iris*, one of her earliest abstract works of flowers, which many scholars and critics have linked to the artist's sexual identity. [More](#)



1929 Berenice Abbott documented many in her lesbian circle including Jane Heap and others. She later went on document New York. [More](#)



1934 Imbued with homoeroticism, Paul Cadmus' satirical painting *The Fleet's In* captured a wild world of military men and disreputable women. [More](#)



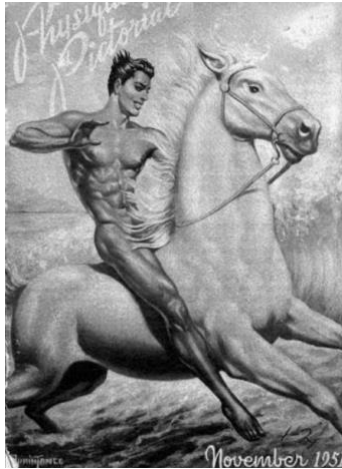
1937 Paul Cadmus, Jared French, and Margaret Hoening French commenced a photographic collaboration called PaJaMa, developing homoerotic images of their queer artistic community. [More](#)



1946 George Tooker painted *Children and Spastics*, a Surrealist work that featured a clique of posing men. [More](#)



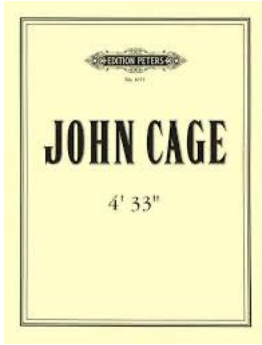
1949 Painter Forrest Bess traveled from Texas to New York City, where he met with art dealer Betty Parsons, who would exhibit his abstract works for the next two decades. [More](#)



1951 George Quaintance illustrated the first cover of the beefcake magazine *Physique Pictorial*. [More](#)



1951 Cy Twombly and Robert Rauschenberg became close friends, lovers, and artistic interlocutors. [More](#)



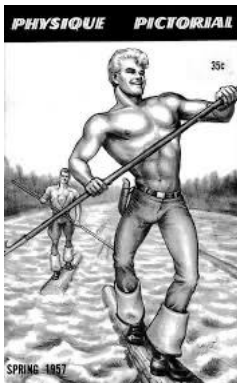
1952 John Cage performed his avant-garde composition 4'33". [More](#)



1954 Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns met, beginning an artistic and romantic partnership that lasted until 1961. [More](#)



1955 Upon the death of photographer George Platt Lynes, his archive of male nudes was acquired by the Kinsey Institute. [More](#)



1957 Tom of Finland's homoerotic illustration debuted on the cover of *Physique Pictorial*. [More](#)



1958

Ray Johnson began utilizing mail as a form of art. [More](#)



1963 With its elaborate portrayals of sex and drag, Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* became a milestone in queer underground film. [More](#)



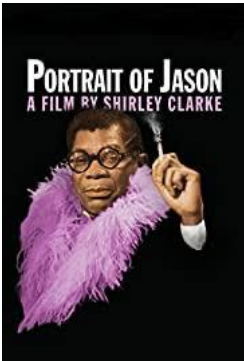
1963 Andy Warhol produced an experimental film, *Sleep*, which portrayed John Giorno, the poet and his lover, asleep for over five hours. [More](#)



1964 Paul Thek commenced his influential "meat pieces," influential mixed-media sculptures that evoked human flesh. [More](#)



1967 Artist and photographer Jim French started Colt Studio, a pioneering gay erotica brand. [More](#)



1967 Shirley Clarke directed *Portrait of Jason*, a cinéma vérité-style film pivoting around gay hustler and nightclub performer Jason Holliday. [More](#)



1969 The Cockettes, a raucous troupe of queer hippies and artists, formed in San Francisco. [More](#)



1971 James Bidgood released his dreamy queer arthouse film *Pink Narcissus*. [More](#)



1971 Four Chicano artists in East Los Angeles formed a collective called Asco. [More](#)



1972 Arthur Tress published his mesmerizing photo book *The Dream Collector*, which investigated the nightmares of children. [More](#)



1973 Abstract painter Ellsworth Kelly had his first American retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art. [More](#)



1973 Harmony Hammond's innovative floor pieces debuted at her exhibition at A.I.R. Gallery in New York City. [More](#)



1974 Inspired by the women's and gay liberation movements, Joan Snyder started making her "stroke" paintings. [More](#)



1974 Barbara Hammer's experimental film *Dyketactics* broke ground with its bold depiction of lesbian community and sexuality. [More](#)



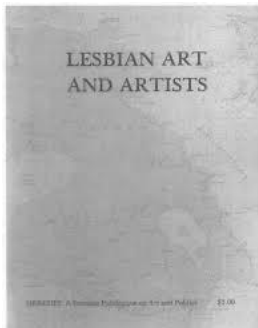
1975 Photographer, artist, and writer Tee Corinne published her iconic *The Cunt Coloring Book*. [More](#)



1975 Alvin Baltrop started photographing gay life and sex along the West Side piers in New York City. [More](#)



1976 Peter Hujar published his first photo book, *Portraits in Life and Death*. [More](#)



1977 The third issue of *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics* centered on the theme “Lesbian Art and Artists.” Due to its lack of racial diversity, the issue sparked crucial debates on the whiteness of the women’s and gay and lesbian movements. [More](#)



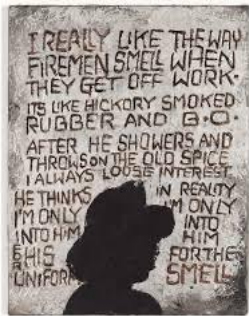
1978 Across sites of gay cruising, David Wojnarowicz photographed men who wore a mask bearing the likeness of gay modernist poet Arthur Rimbaud. [More](#)



1979 In his *East Meets West* series, photographer Tseng Kwong Chi started taking self-portraits in front of American landmarks. [More](#)



1979 JEB (Joan E. Biren) published her path-breaking photo book, *Eye to Eye: Portraits of Lesbians*. [More](#)



1982 Martin Wong moved from San Francisco to New York City, where he painted the shifting social, economic, and cultural landscape of the Lower East Side. [More](#)



1986 Nan Goldin's photo book *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* tenderly documented love, sex, and violence in her queer artistic milieu. [More](#)



1987 Lyle Ashton Harris' photo series *Americas* underscored the social and visual construction of race, gender, and sexuality. [More](#)



1987 Responding to the mushrooming HIV/AIDS pandemic, posters with the phrase “SILENCE=DEATH” appeared on the streets of New York City. [More](#)



1987 William Olander curated *HOMO Video: Where We Are Now* at the New Museum. [More](#)



1989 When Robert Mapplethorpe’s posthumous retrospective *The Perfect Moment* was cancelled at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, it ignited a national controversy about censorship and arts funding. [More](#)



1989 A year before his AIDS-related death, world-renowned artist Keith Haring produced a mural, *Once Upon a Time*, for the LGBT Community Center in New York City. [More](#)



1989 Surrealist sculptor Robert Gober started casting beeswax legs, disembodied with uncanny components. [More](#)



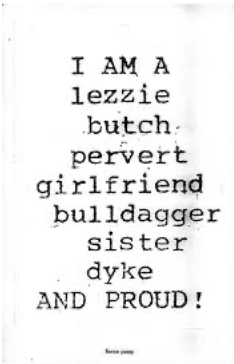
1991 Glenn Ligon started his project *Notes on the Margins of the Black Book*—a powerful critique of Robert Mapplethorpe’s controversial portfolio, *The Black Book*. [More](#)



1991 Felix Gonzalez-Torres devised *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*—a post-minimalist sculpture comprised of a pile of candy—in memory of his lover, Ross Laycock. [More](#)



1991 In her photographic series *Being and Having*, Catherine Opie featured lesbian women wearing mustaches, tattoos, and other accessories of masculinity. [More](#)



1991 fierce pussy, a collective of queer women artists, was born in New York City. [More](#)



1992 Against the backdrop of the AIDS crisis and the struggle for queer rights, Zoe Leonard typed up *I Want a President*. [More](#)



1992 Deborah Kass started “The Warhol Project,” a queer, feminist, and Jewish rereading of Andy Warhol’s Pop Art. [More](#)



1992 Performance artist Ron Athey started his radical “torture trilogy.” [More](#)



1992 In her performance *Rosa Does Joan*, Nao Bustamante crafted an alternative persona, “Rosa,” and appeared on the Joan Rivers Show. [More](#)



1993 Gregg Bordowitz's video *Fast Trip, Long Drip* broached illness, queer identity, and the AIDS activist movement. [More](#)



1995 Artist Nayland Blake and curator Lawrence Rinder organized *In a Different Light* at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive—one of the first comprehensive exhibitions of queer art. [More](#)



1995 Del LaGrace Volcano's *Self-Portrait with Blue Beard* marked a turning point in the photographer's life: coming to terms with being intersex. [More](#)



1996 Greer Lankton's magnum opus, *It's All About ME, Not You*, a multimedia installation her Chicago apartment in miniature, debuted—just before the artist's AIDS-related death. [More](#)



1996 Laura Aguilar's photographic series *Stillness* explored the relationship between landscape, embodiment, and identity. [More](#)



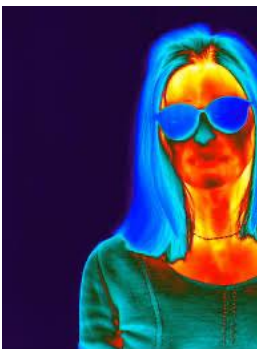
1998 Agnes Martin was awarded a National Medal of Arts for her lifelong achievements in abstract painting. [More](#)



1999 Vaginal Davis produced her film *The White to Be Angry*. [More](#)



2001 An acronym for “Lesbians to the Rescue,” LTTR was formed as a feminist genderqueer arts collective. [More](#)



2004 In her experimental memoir *The Summer of Her Baldness*, Catherine Lord used texts and images to chronicle her experience of breast cancer. [More](#)



2004 Ryan Trecartin’s first major film, *A Family Finds Entertainment*, became a touchstone of queer new media art. [More](#)



2008 Photographers Rhys Ernst and Zackary Drucker started a romantic and creative partnership. [More](#)



2010 Due to its eleven seconds of ants crawling on a crucifix, David Wojnarowicz's video *Fire in My Belly* was removed from the landmark show *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*, curated by Jonathan D. Katz and David C. Ward at the National Portrait Gallery. This act of censorship was sorely reminiscent of the Culture Wars of the late 1980s and early 1990s. [More](#)



2011 Mickalene Thomas' *Three Graces: Les Trois Femmes Noires* reinterpreted a classical iconography through the lens of a Black queer woman. [More](#)



2012 Juliana Huxtable embarked on a series called *Seven Archetypes*, which reflected her experience of gender transition. [More](#)



2012 Carlos Motta's exhibition *We Who Feel Differently* took place at the New Museum. [More](#)



2012 Jacolby Satterwhite's project *The Matriarch's Rhapsody* utilized 3D animation and other media to excavate a personal archive, conjuring up new realms of desire and belonging. [More](#)



2016 The Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art became the first fully accredited LGBTQ art museum in the United States. [More](#)



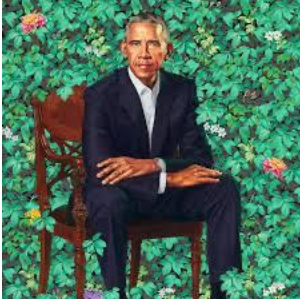
2017 Cassils' project *PISSED* underscored the urgency of transgender rights in the Trump era. [More](#)



2018 The work of Kia LaBeija appeared on the cover of *Artforum*. [More](#)



2018 Wu Tsang was awarded a MacArthur Grant for her work in film, performance, and activism. [More](#)



2018 President Barack Obama selected Kehinde Wiley to paint his portrait for the National Portrait Gallery. [More](#)



2019 Kent Monkman painted two monumental works for the Great Hall of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. [More](#)

(END October 2020)