

An Artist in Dialog with a Museum

NEW YORK CITY'S Leslie-Lohman Museum has focused historically on LGBT art since its founding in 1969, when Charles Leslie and Fritz Lohman held an exhibit of gay artists for the first time in their SoHo loft. Today, the museum continues these values by "preserving, diversifying, and making accessible the artworks in its collection, as well as to the representation of an evolving constellation of queer experience," which means expanding LGBT history into the queer intersections we think of today. The Leslie-Lohman even had a name change in 2019, when they dropped "of Gay and Lesbian Art" from their name. Like many LGBT collections, the Leslie-Lohman continues to expand their historical focus from white, cisgender men and women to a wider spectrum.

The exhibition *Coyote Park: I Love You Like Mirrors Do*, curated by Stamatina Gregory, is the inaugural project for an initiative called "Interventions," which "engages queer artists and cultural producers to dive into the museum's extensive collection and creatively present their research, building new narratives and interpretations from diverse subjectivities." Within *Coyote Park*, L.A.-based artist Coyote Park (he/they) brings their vision into the collections to remind us that "we are always looking for ourselves in art." Park brings queer love and intersectional trans futures into their multidisciplinary work while bringing a needed lens from their lived experience as a Two-Spirit, Indigenous (Yurok), Korean-American, transgender person. The exhibit offers a space in which to reflect on the last few years of rapid change in ways that may be unfamiliar or disconcerting for many LGBT people.

Park delved into the Museum's sizeable collection in search



Coyote Park. River and Coyote, 2022. Courtesy Leslie Lohman and the artist.


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TANNON RECKLING

COYOTE PARK
I Love You Like Mirrors Do
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of figurative pairs with themes of togetherness and liberation. Within the show, there are largescale photographs showing queer bodies holding each other. A video piece whispers affirmations into the viewer's ears while imagery of a peaceful day outside plays before them. Works from Park are in dialog with the collection works on display. Work from Marcelina Martin adds a tone of

self-reflection that acknowledges a historic tone of white, cisgender women in landscapes in many classic paintings. At the entrance to the space is a group of photographic works from South African artist Zanele Muholi. This exhibition provides a framework for contemporary queer artists to build culture today while still honoring their predecessors and others surviving outside the visible LGBT world.

At first, I was suspicious of the title's inclusion of "mirrors" in fear of narcissistic sensibilities. However, in 2023, as we see drag performance bans, transgender healthcare bans, and continuous systemic webs of discrimination against people of color, and more, even under a liberal presidency, this metaphor feels correct. Within *Coyote Park: I Love You Like Mirrors Do*, the exhibition asks: We are all in this together, are we not? 

Leyendecker

Continued from page 50

men, one reclined at the feet of another as they look adoringly at one another on a beach. Adolf Treidler's 1926 illustration for Chesterfield cigarettes shows two top-hatted men-about-town, one leaning provocatively into the other to light his cigarette.

We tend to assume that positive gay-themed imagery is a phenomenon of the post-Stonewall world. But to look at these illustrations by Leyendecker and his contemporaries is to see overt depictions of sensual male beauty. A barely clothed young Yale man fills pails of water at the college boathouse; World War I soldiers on leave eye each other over a female figure at their center; a man languorously extends an outstretched gam à la Ann Miller as he admires his new pair of Interwoven Socks. We register these men as beautiful and sexy and often engaged with each other, but is it possible, as Albrecht emphasizes in his show, that ye olde times allowed for more suggestive images of men together and alone than we realize?

How refreshing to see an unabashed celebration of male, masculine beauty that was depicted long ago. Beauty is not entirely subjective; it has a universal dynamic. I think that gay men increasingly are under assault to cede our cultural and societal influence to every nuance of sexuality that someone else claims to possess. We are made to apologize for admiring, adoring, celebrating, even preferring that which is unambiguously male and masculine. Leyendecker clearly loved the faces and physiques of men, and he knew how to depict them with respect and awe, and with a sense of detail and personality that continues to enlighten, if not excite, us still. 