

Crawford College of Art & Design

The Relevancy of Queer Visual Culture in Western Society and Modern Russia

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Chapter 1: An Introduction to Queer

'Queer' has an ongoing political and cultural currency that continues to prove catalytic to artists and thinkers. It signals a defiance of the mainstream and an embrace of difference, uniqueness, and self-determination. Still contentious today in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) politics and culture, the defining trait of 'queer' is its rejection of attempts to enforce normalcy. To declare oneself queer is a recognition that the fear of the abnormal is also a source of power. Such a defiant self-nomination disarms those who seek to use it to shame and silence. However, this declaration of identity can put oneself in harm's way when met by disgust of the nature. The fear of homosexuality is conditioned into society from an early age. A reaction to the unknown or what is perceived as different in human nature has often been met by hostility. On a visit to Moscow, arguably one of the most hostile places on the planet to identify as queer, it became apparent that those living there were merely surviving in comparison to what is typical to in western society. The reasoning behind choosing Russia as an example in this text is to give an example of current extreme circumstances regarding homosexuality. The LGBTQ community is not subject to a specific geographical location. It is a global struggle which is shared by everyone within that community. The purpose of this written body is to discuss the existence of queer culture in society and how that translates to visual culture. To fully analyse the imagery one must comprehend homosexuality and the history behind it. Art reflects culture and to deliberate on such a topic, one must debate the times which inform the context of the imagery.

The word 'homosexual' is defined as being sexually attracted to one's own sex. Being described as a homosexual is a way of stating one's sexual identity. This part of one's identity is as much a definitive characteristic as one's skin tone or height. Over the years this principle has been debated. Many people believe being gay is a choice and can be due to environmental factors, psychological or

physical abuse and even punishment from a deity. The variation of views on the people of the LGBTQ community is an interesting phenomenon that everyone seems to have an opinion on. It is arguably the greatest liberation movement of the 21st century. Social policies which have been altered over the last century, as well as the work of artists who have reacted to the developing system regarding LGBTQ culture will be considered and examined. Most western societies have adopted gay rights to some degree through the years, largely as a result of efforts made by those who had endured years of segregation. Current Russian culture, by contrast, has led to the introduction of strict legislation to protect children from non-traditional relationships, to uphold tradition and maintain family values. The artists who have taken inspiration from the gay rights movement will be used as a visual reference to document cultural shifts of their times. The aim is to provide an expanded account of the manifestations of queer artistic practice.

To this day, the question of why people are gay, or “turn” gay, remains relevant. The science behind it is theoretical as scientists have only been considering this area of research since the 20th century, however, work to date has outlined potential answers. The focus of research has been on Genes, Hormones, and Birth Order, but most of this research is specific to male homosexuality. Scientists theorise that when a woman is pregnant, a male foetus can be perceived by the female body as a foreign object, leading to the foetus being attacked with antibodies and antigens.¹ The more boys a woman has, the more adept she becomes at feminising the foetus. Therefore, with each successive son, the chances the child will be gay, dramatically increase. Simon LeVay was one of the scientists researching the origins of homosexuality. His findings showed that the hypothalamus, the area of the brain directly responsible for sexual behaviour showed difference between heterosexual and

¹ Daniel G. Karlslake, *For The Bible Tells Me So* (Netflix, 2007, Posted 2016) <https://www.netflix.com/watch/70059383?trackId=14170032&tctx=1%2C0%2Cea33b3e5-dee2-4997-b988-875a7aafdd83-18851819>. (Accessed 11th October 2016).

homosexual men.² The interstitial nuclei of the anterior hypothalamus (INAH) 3 was twice as large in heterosexual men as homosexual men. From these findings, we can conclude that homosexuality is predetermined and not something that can be altered or changed. Granted these are not conclusive findings, yet they certainly point to homosexuality being a natural occurrence in nature.

Homosexuality is certainly not exclusive to Human Beings, it is also found in dolphins, lions, elephants, horses, cats, and the list goes on.³ Our closest animal relatives, the Great Apes, and more specifically, bonobos, often provide examples of same sex relationships. This species of ape engage in female to female and male to male sexual intercourse as a way of “cementing social bonds”⁴. This indicates that there is more than physical enjoyment from these actions between them, there is a level of care and respect for the other members in the group. Human beings are more socially complex than apes but it does point to a biological explanation yet to be discovered.

Up until the late 20th century homosexuality was considered a mental illness and the treatment for such a disorder was shock therapy or chemical castration. These typically involved showing a man pictures of naked men (same procedure for women) and shocking or drugging them until their grip on reality was askew. This was ineffective and rather than ‘curing’ anyone it often left ‘patients’ anxious, depressed and in some cases suicidal⁵. It was only in 1992 that the World Health Organisation removed homosexuality as a mental disorder. Even today there is good reason to feel this fear in many countries, for example in South Africa a fifteen-year old boy was tortured and murdered at Echo Wild Gamers Rangers, a ‘gay conversion therapy course,’ by one of the course

² Simon LeVay. *A Difference in Hypothalamic Structure Between Heterosexual and Homosexual Men* Vol. 253 of JSTOR (www.JSTOR.org), Issue 5023. n.p., 1991. <http://postcog.ucd.ie/files/sciencearticle.pdf>.

³ Daniel G. Karlslake, *For The Bible Tells Me So* (Netflix, 2007, Posted 2016) <https://www.netflix.com/watch/70059383?trackId=14170032&tctx=1%2C0%2Cea33b3e5-dec2-4997-b988-875a7aafdd83-18851819>. (Accessed 11th October 2016).

⁴ Melissa Hogenboom, *Are There Any Homosexual Animals?* BBC. (February 6, 2015). <http://www.bbc.com/earth/story/20150206-are-there-any-homosexual-animals>. (Accessed 3rd November 2016).

⁵ Gabriel Arana. 2012. *My So-Called Ex-Gay Life* American Prospect 23, no. 4: 50-57. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (Accessed October 2, 2016).

generals, with the intention of making him a man. A witness to how the boys were treated there commented, ‘they tied them to a chair naked with his head covered in a pillowcase, would beat him with planks and hosepipes, and would electrocute him with a stun gun’⁶. The harsh reality is that this boy’s parents were so afraid of their son being effeminate that they sent him to a conversion therapy camp or as they have come to be called ‘straight camps’. This was what the child’s guardians believed was best for his wellbeing. The idea that sexual orientation can be conditioned is a continual belief of many and the presence of these camps for these people are detrimental. The belief in this principle justifies the decision to send possible gay teenagers to places such as this with little regard for the methodology behind it. The results of these circumstances often mirror the results of shock therapy and leave victims with similar afflictions and in some cases, such as this one, even death.

Regardless of why, gay people do exist, and how one chooses to react to the gay lifestyle is often influenced by environment and teachings. Homophobia is something that is learned and can often hide behind religion or politics. In most countries, the topic of homosexuality exists only in civil liberties and many extreme religious groups will be the loudest voices opposing the very idea of allowing gays to have any rights. Again, and again one can witness these groups of people protesting at gay pride events all over the world, repeating bible verses and sharia law, often claiming to be there to save the souls of all those committing sins. This behaviour is not very surprising when one takes into consideration that these views are not simply something these groups decided on when one contemplates that religious individuals have spent most of their lives putting faith into a higher power and the LGBTQ community undermine this belief. One of their core beliefs is that, one’s actions are being judged by God and one will be punished for committed sins. When the scripture

⁶ Joe Morgan. *People Are Joking about ‘gay cure therapy’ but This Is the Reality*. GayStarNews. <http://www.gaystarnews.com/article/people-joking-gay-cure-therapy-reality/#gs.5gYEpE4>. (Accessed 23rd November 2016).

that one believes in has been passed down from God declares that ‘you shall not lie with a man as one lies with a female; it is an abomination’, is it any wonder that so many grow up fearing it? It could be argued that Christians, Muslims, Protestants etc. are shielding themselves with these verses because of what truly disgusts them, which is the intimacy of two men. It is the engagement in anal intercourse or buggery that is the root of opposing homosexuality and reduce homosexuals down to this one action, and by doing so it is easier to see them as something lesser than human. To say religion has been a major force in restricting equal rights is a fair statement. ‘During 2014 Liberian religious leaders, including the Council of churches and the catholic archbishop Lewis Zeigler, suggested Ebola was God’s punishment for acceptance of homosexuality’.⁷ Yet, can one stamp them as religious fanatics who take the bible too literally, or are they victims of national identity that has no room for anything beyond tradition?

For some Japanese, whaling has taken on a symbolic significance as an expression of Japanese national identity and resistance to western domination. In many parts of the world repression of homosexuals may be acquiring a similar symbolism as an expression of national identity and defiance.⁸

⁷ Dennis Altman and Jonathan Symons. *Queer Wars*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press, 2016. Pg. 100

⁸ Ibid., Pg. 26

Chapter 2: The Queer Artists and their Work

When thoughts of national identity and voyeurism come into frame, the works of Patrick Hennessey tackle the isolation of sexual minorities in a country heavily gripped by religion with great subtlety. His work blends the realms of realism and surrealism. Critics at the time refused to acknowledge the symbolism within the work and took it at face value. Paul Henry wrote about how Ireland in the 1920s regarding art in general, “how deep rooted was the ignorance and prejudice which existed at that time against any form of art which savoured, even remotely, of modernism”.⁹ Hennessey was born in 1915 in Cork.¹⁰ He was the youngest of six in a traditional Roman Catholic family. After his father’s death in 1917, his mother moved the family too Scotland. When Patrick Hennessey attended secondary school, he showed potential in his artistic ability and his family helped fund his tuition at Dundee College of Art.¹¹ After eventually arriving back on Irish soil the painter began to get recognition after making a living on his work commercially for several years. In 1941 he exhibited his work in the Royal Hibernian Academy and made associate in 1948.¹² Hennessey had the ability to depict queer culture and reflect the issues surrounding it in a profound way, yet, covered it with hidden symbolism that would only become apparent to those that already knew the language. For example, the red neckerchief Hennessey portrays himself wearing in ‘*Portrait Figures (Self-Portrait), 1972*’ (Fig.1) has more meaning than one might think. During the 1970s within the gay community there were certain ‘signifiers.’ The use of handkerchiefs could imply different interests or behavioural tendencies through both colour and placement. There was no universal code but “a blue handkerchief placed in the right hip pocket serves notice that the wearer desires to play the passive role during sexual intercourse”.¹³ The red neckerchief Hennessey wears has been the original code for

⁹ Paul Henry, *Further Reminiscences* (Black staff Press, Belfast, 1973), p.65

¹⁰ Sean Kissane, ed. Patrick Hennessey - *de Profundis*. Ireland: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2016. Pg. 15

¹¹ Ibid., Pg. 15

¹² Ibid., Pg. 31

¹³ Catherine Lord and Richard Meyer, eds. *Art and Queer Culture*. Berlin: Phaidon Press, 2013. Pg. 27

homosexual identity since the 1920s. The Tuileries Gardens in Paris, the location of the figures in the piece, was a notorious cruising area in the 1960s for male prostitutes.¹⁴ The implication is that the figures situated there are soliciting themselves. Loitering in behaviour and their body language, engaging the viewer through eye contact, indicating sexual interest.

Another piece in which Hennessy discusses voyeurism or ‘cottaging’ so evidently is a piece completed a bit earlier in his career, *Men Bathing, Etretat, 1954* (Fig.2). The French landscape shown is being dominated by the connection between the two figures in the frame stretching from one male in the foreground, all the way back to the other on the horizon line. There is a dialogue here between the environment, which could be a metaphor for society, and the homosexual sub-culture represented by the figures. This recurring concept in Hennessy’s work reflects homosexual intimacy during that time, as vulnerable, cold and detached. The fact that the men have no identifiable features and the viewer is left with just the physical form to look at indicates a sense of emotional detachment. The greys and blues in the sky indicate a sense of insecurity. The weather appears to be quickly changing, from a clear sky to dark clouds rolling onto the shore. The viewer is left contemplating that this backdrop is an extension to this commentary. This public display of sexual desire is not restricted to homosexuality alone but having it resort to this primal physical urge so blatantly is a result of social pressure. “Homosexual acts made it difficult for men to form and maintain consensual relationships”¹⁵ Not feeling as though it would be acceptable to be seen with someone of the same sex in a casual setting in trepidation of arrest or assault resorts to voyeurism and emotional disinterest. This phenomenon still exists, yet it has transported onto social media and applications such as grindr, hornet, tinder and so on. This correlation and morphing to adapt the 21st century shows that this anonymity still has a presence in our culture. While it’s true that these apps

¹⁴ Sean Kissane, ed. Patrick Hennessy - *de Profundis*. Ireland: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2016. Pg. 96

¹⁵ Ibid., Pg. 98

are used as dating apps, many men use them to stay anonymous and use it to fulfil physical sexual needs and refrain from any emotional attachment. This secret identity is to prevent being 'outed', because of this fear of getting backlash from friends, family, or the larger community. This negative stigma associated with being gay hasn't faded out. The secretive symbolism associated with queer culture has morphed to adapt to modern civilization. One is left to conclude that even with so called progressive thinking, modern society has a deep seeded intolerance within its nature.

The difference between western countries and Russia is that in Russia, these apps are being used as homophobic weapons. Many homophobes lure in gay people through profiles proclaiming they are interested in sexual intercourse or dating and arrange to meet at a location where the gay individuals are beaten, raped, humiliated or blackmailed and it is portrayed as a form of vigilante justice.¹⁶ Many of these people post videos of what the vigilantes do to homosexuals online after so everyone knows who they are, too publicly 'out' them. This can result in eviction from their tenants, continual assault, being fired from their place of work or abandonment by friends and family.

Voyeurism as Hennessy has portrayed, was avid amongst homosexuals and known by law enforcement. As an example of measures taken by officials to counteract this kind of loitering in public toilets, The Florida Legislative Investigation Committee's, *'A homosexual act being performed in a public restroom', 1964* (Fig. 3), is a photo of a reoccurring act performed by men in these restrooms.¹⁷ Considering that the practice and homosexuality had been classified as sinful or a mental illness, can one be surprised that this section of society be so flagrant in their actions? There was no safe social space available to homosexuals at the time without the looming possibility of the police bursting in at any moment. There was no option but to avoid any connections to one's personal life and this meant being cautious. If one wanted to prevent being outed, then meeting men in one's home was

¹⁶ "Russia Anti-Gay Violence Full Documentary." YouTube. December 9, 2015. Posted September 4, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZuR7heWgN-8>.

¹⁷ Lord and Meyer *Art and Queer Culture* Pg. 123

too much of a risk, which meant cottaging was the only remaining option. This led to the disregard of public decency which is so evident in the photograph. It made no difference that the state removed the doors of the public restroom¹⁸ because there was nowhere left to go. Homosexuals were reduced using these restrooms which hurt their public profile and made it easier to demonise them in the newspapers. One can see why gay men were categorised as prolific sex offenders and regarded in the same context as paedophiles.

This is not a comparison unique to western culture, it has also been adapted into Russian culture. Paedophiles and homosexuals are one in the same, there is no distinction between these people. It has been global knowledge that this classification has been acknowledged and indorsed by conservative politicians such as the deputy of St. Petersburg, Vitaly Milonov. Deputy Milonov has sanctioned a policy regarding gay propaganda, it states that one cannot advertise non-traditional relationships to anyone under the age of eighteen, i.e. a minor.¹⁹ Milonov has not been shy of his opinions and has even been quoted into saying that “this law was to make sure that some inadequate individual doesn’t invade kindergartens and tell minors that they should identify their sexuality (in accordance with homosexuality)”.²⁰ A laughable concept to most but it is clear from his actions that these ‘occurrences’ are a serious concern for him and many others. In the deputy’s interview with Stephen Fry on the documentary series ‘out there’, Milonov had no evidence to back up these claims. When the subject of LGBTQ citizens being assaulted and not being taken seriously by the police when they went to file a report was raised, Milonov went on to state that “it’s a fairy tale,

¹⁸ Ibid., Pg. 123

¹⁹ ———. “Russia Anti Gay Violence” [Full Documentary] YouTube. December 9, 2015. Posted September 4, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZuR7heWgN-8>.

²⁰ Stephen Fry. “*Out There: Episode 2.*” BBC. YouTube. October 16, 2013. Posted July 8, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tc19KxerK7U>.

because gay people, most gay people are lying about their problems because they would like to be favoured and become famous victims of medieval Russia”.²¹

Even works of art are subject to this law. In the case of Konstantin Altunin, a Russian painter, his painting of Vitaly Milonov was removed from the Museum of Authority’s ‘Rulers’ Exhibition by Police in August 2013.²² It depicts the deputy’s face on a rainbow, which has a well-known correlation to gay pride (Fig. 4). The seizing of the piece might in some ways have activated the work and it could be argued that without the attention of the authorities the work would not have truly achieved the artist’s intention. It provoked those against whom the works were rebelling. Some might say that the work was highly successful in its objective. After viewing the exhibition, Deputy Milonov said that he did not want to be painted “with a flag brandished by perverts and HIV sodomites”.²³ He went on to describe the work as “tasteless, at the same level as a job from a vocational college who scribbles in a toilet at a bus stop”. Not an entirely shocking view point from the deputy when even one of the most iconic sculptures in existence, the statue of David by Michelangelo, was subject to his editing (Fig, 5).

Elena Zach, one of the individuals I met with during my time in Russia, also a member of the Moscow Community Centre spoke about her girlfriends organisation, Art Play Media which facilitates art exhibitions in St. Petersburg. One of the projects they were dealing with was the ‘Michelangelo. World Creation’ exhibition commencing in May 2016.²⁴ A member of the orthodox church found out about the display, complained to Deputy Milonov that the figure was naked and

²¹ Stephen Fry. “*Out There: Episode 2*.” BBC. YouTube. October 16, 2013. Posted July 8, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tc19KxerK7U>.

²² “*Russian Art Exhibitions and TV Channel Under Pressure, Accused of ‘gay propaganda’*.” Queer Russia 2013. <http://queerrussia.info/2013/09/16/1729/#sthash.1DaMQ3X7.dpbs>. (Accessed 8th November 2016.)

²³ 24, FRANCE. “*‘Putin in underwear’ Artist Flees to France*.” August 29, 2013. <http://www.france24.com/en/20130829-vladimir-putin-underwear-artist-flees-russia-france-konstantin-altunin>. (Accessed 12th October 2016).

²⁴ Artplay Media. “*МИКЕΛΑΗΔΑΚΕΛΟ. Κομποεινε μωρα*.” 2016. <http://www.greatmichelangelo.com/>. (Accessed 11th November 2016)

spoils the city's historic appearance and warps children's souls. The MP then directly contacted the organisation stating that they needed to alter David's appearance. Art Play Media had no choice but to take some sort of action to adhere to the issue. They made a public poll, edited David in various outfits and left it to the people to decide which they would prefer to see on the sculpture. Some of the outfits included casual clothes as well as giving the option to leave the statue as it is.

This iconic sculpture was subject to vandalism because there now exists a very fine line between what is considered art and what is a clear projection of sexuality. The borders seem to have become blurred perhaps this is the result of a decade's subjection to hysteria surrounding homosexuality. Admiration of the human form no longer exists. It is now entirely sexualised. This irony of it all is that those who complained about the statue being so close to a church have forgotten that it was originally commissioned for the Opera del Duomo, a cathedral in Florence. Arguably a time when the church had far more power yet there was still a high appreciation for the arts. It would seem that people are so afraid of corrupting the minds of the youth with gay culture that they believe merely witnessing the image of a penis will in some way cause deep seeded perversion. It is strange to think that all it takes to alter one of the worlds most renowned pieces of art is one individual making an unfounded complaint to their local MP, and it being taken seriously.

The culture that exists in Russia is dedicated to keeping its traditions alive. Western cultural influences are projected through the media and it has never been more difficult to retain its heritage. This 'invasion' so to speak, includes social issues. The Russian Embassy took a stance on this matter very recently on social media with a comic strip illustration that depicted pigs in a pen with a rainbow flag in the background and "€ Zone" written above the area. It also featured a bear flexing his muscles wearing a shirt that has an image of Russia on it (Fig.6). The text below it read as follows; "If Russia is in decline, why worry? Maybe, real worry is West's decline and that we manage

things better?'. This indicates that queer culture is viewed as a declining feature in the views of the Russian Embassy and that the West could learn from them in this matter. The bear is a symbol long associated with Russia. This makes the double entendre even more amusing if they didn't realise it. The bear has more layers of symbolism than may have been intended by the Embassy, for example in gay culture a bear is a large hairy gay man. In many ways, this is a perfect representation of queer culture in Russia. Those in power believe all the right steps have been taken and their society is relatively free of gay lifestyles. Yet, it does very much exist, their knowledge of the people and the ethos the LGBTQ community is lacking to say the least.

Through a personal pilgrimage to the country and conversing with gay men and women about these 'fairy tales' as deputy Milonov puts it, were far from fantasy. While homosexuality is not criminalised in Russia, it doesn't strictly uphold this criminalisation law. 'The real significance of the anti-gay laws in Russia over the past few years has been the apparent signal they have sent to hooligans to attack those perceived as gay, and to police to ignore such attacks'.²⁵ From witnessing those who have grown up in the capital and how they construct their behaviour in accordance with public surveillance is contrasting to their conduct in domesticated settings. Their true nature is affectionate and open and positive. It is intriguing that queer artists can amplify the stigma and act as a defiant force for homosexuality. Certainly, someone who understands the need to be so blatant in his message is Slava Mogutin, a Siberian-born contemporary mix media artist and writer exiled for his outspoken writings and activism. He became the first Russian to be granted political asylum in the US on the grounds of homophobic persecution in 1995.²⁶ If anyone truly understands the complexity in transforming this specific social political condition of the country into a visual format, it is Mogutin. His works are deeply sexually charged with continual reference to discriminatory

²⁵ Altman and Symons *Queer Wars* Pg. 101

²⁶ Slava Mogutin. *Food Chain*. Houston, TX, United States: Itna Press, 2014.

behaviour. Mogutin is showing the viewer an unapologetic view point on his orientation, some might even say to an uncomfortable degree, as is the intention one would suspect. From the repetitive imagery of sexual positions, prolific language, and a disregard for social protocols, this is all meant to incite a reaction from the viewer. This approach in engaging the viewer could be said to be deliberately crass without any intention beyond getting a reaction. Shock art for the sake of shock art. What separates this work from simplistic scandalisation is only so shocking because society is unaccustomed to seeing same sex relations dealt with deliberately. If the work was an amalgamation of males and females performing similar sexual acts, would it be as taboo? Perhaps Mogutin believes that by making these images, the average person will incorporate it into the everyday and consider it in the same way one does when one sees images of a similar kind regarding heterosexual couples. Denaturing the public by continual association.

Mogutin exploration of visual imagery and the written word are based on an autobiographical format. His experiences directly influence his work, and overlap between these mediums as we see text introduced to a lot of Mogutin's mix media pieces. For example, the artist writes about his association with his friend and occasional lover, 'Misha Beautiful'.²⁷ Mogutin had heard that his friends had been arrested for exposing themselves in front of tanks for their self-published magazine *ME* (used to publish queer propaganda) and decided to go in and save them, Misha accompanied him. While they were on route a protest had descended into anarchy outside the Russian Parliament and they decided to engage in public sexual intercourse, getting caught on several occasions. Mogutin describes that moment as "baptism by fire" and goes on to say "Thanks to Misha, I will always remember that sharp feeling of sex in the midst of street fighting, shooting, general civil unrest and disobedience...".²⁸ While reading this passage, there were similarities apparent in a piece

²⁷ Ibid., Pg. 127.

²⁸ Ibid., Pg. 134.

of his entitled '*Order and Chaos, 2007*' (Fig.7). There are definite correlations between the segment mentioned above and the scenario depicted in the art work. There is an element of sexual provocation depicted by the figure on the right whose shorts are flirtatiously slipping off his waist and his reluctance to care who sees. The officer collapsed on the ground could symbolise how the protesters distracted the police thus paralysing them from intervening as they fornicated nearby. The phrases mentioned 'Tough Boys in Trouble' could be Mogutin and Misha, 'Fetish Me This' is discussing the voyeurism of that night backed up by the fact that the drawing is over a 'men seeking men' article in a newspaper.

The final phrase 'Order and Chaos', which is positioned in the centre is not really speaking of a specific thing that occurred on that night possibly about an overall commentary Mogutin is making about current social standings. The so-called order is a concept that people have confused with upholding blind patriotism and ignoring the clear presence of a sexual revolution on their doorstep. The chaos is this sexual repression being released in the hopes of being seen in the same light as everyone else and not as perverts. The way the artist lays out this play has an aggressive undertone, we are left wondering if these sexual pleasures or the "sharp feelings" as Mogutin puts it, are because he considers them his right as a peaceful protest? Or is it more rash than that, is it a personal disregard for the system, why respect the social structure if it doesn't respect every individual?

Mogutin isn't the only gay artist from Russia who has made work discussing queer culture. One of the first people to debate the topic of a gay lifestyle indirectly but inescapably is the neo-romanticist painter, Pavel Tchelitchev. He was born on the 21st of September 1898 in the Kaluga province.²⁹ Tchelitchev grew up in a very privileged household, his bloodline can be traced back to royalty in the 13th century. His father was a man of high education as a professor in mathematics with a

²⁹ Alexander S. Kuznetsov. *Pavel Tchelitchev: Metamorphoses*. Stuttgart: Arnoldsche, 2012. Pg. 6

competing interest in philosophy. He encouraged the exchange of ideas and information at home and conversed in multiple dialects including French, German and English. From a very early on age, Tchelitchev showed a strong interest in the arts, and not just the visual arts but the performing arts also. Yet his direct focus was within the fine art practice and he went on to study at the Ukraine Academy of Arts.³⁰ Tchelitchev left Russia for Berlin in the 1920s like many other Russian refugees, all of this occurring during a developing German movement *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objective) “which was a natural reaction to the dominance of Expressionism in the second half of the 1910s”.³¹ This movement’s purpose was to show isolation of an individual from the soulless, merchandised reality that was felt as a result of previous art movements. This isn’t something that Tchelitchev particularly acknowledged as a legitimate movement and he spent most of his time working for the theatre where the Neo-Expressionism style was still being practiced.³²

Eventually Tchelitchev moved on to Paris where he painted subject matter not unlike most painters, such as “flowers, fruit, life models, sailors, circus acrobats, caberet dancers”³³ but what separated him from the rest was his use of hues. He had a very vibrant pink tonal palette associated with his work and attracted the attention of a large audience. It was later that this palette would associate him as a romanticist and the fact he was a surrealist or neo-expressionist cemented his specific allocation in being a neo-romanticist.³⁴ From observing the artist’s work, it becomes very apparent that he has an interest in the figure and portraiture but more specifically the male figure. It is an obvious statement to make, that there is a correlation between his sexual orientation and his subject matter, even the hues he uses add to the queer undertone being discussed so loudly in retrospect of the time.

³⁰ Ibid., Pg. 9

³¹ Ibid., Pg. 10

³² Ibid., Pg. 10

³³ Ibid., Pg. 16

³⁴ James Thrall SOBY, *Pavel Tchelitchev*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1942, p.14

Chapter 3: A Reflection on Queer Culture

Like Mogutin, the work can bring the homoerotic into frame. In fact, there is a lot of similarity between the two artists despite the seventeen-year gap between Tchelitchev's death and Mogutin's birth. Observing both artist's works over an eight-month period, similar patterns became more apparent. The way they have deconstructed and constructed the male figure in of itself and give it the appearance of kissing or embracing oneself is a statement of pride in their sexuality. The particular works being referenced here is Mogutin's *'Kiss and Tell, 2007'* (Fig.8) and Tchelitchev's *'Untitled (Seated Man, Multiple Images), 1927'* (Fig.9). As one can see from the two images there is a remarkable similarity between them. Through this research, there wasn't any direct statement from critics, curators or Mogutin himself (including emailing him directly) that has confirmed any influence in the making of his work that derived from Tchelitchev's painting. This is interesting when one considers how such a peculiar abstraction could be repeated without one informing the other. The only real difference that separates the two is their choice of medium to depict the subject matter. What are we to take away from these almost identical pieces? This reappearance of an image nearly a century later in visual queer culture must have a significance or a commentary on sexual orientation and its place in civilisation. This dialogue the artists are having about homosexuality between 1927 and 2007 is a conversation that seems to reflect a society that continues to repeat itself. It could be argued that time doesn't seem to have relevance when the topic of homosexuality comes into frame. Society is compelled to continually confront this issue and to slowly make any progress in the quest for equality. This is a possible explanation as to why artists will continue to repeat images such as these, because an artist's job is to reflect the times and with time seemingly standing still on this social issue the public is left with a new way of looking at the same thing.

Over the last century there have been strides made in political reform amongst many regions around the world against criminalisation of homosexuality, yet there is still a long way to go on a social level. The reason we might see more imagery in visual culture of a similar tone to Mogutin and Tchelitchev is that the issue has stayed the same since and will continue to do so until religious leaders and governments alter their view towards LGBTQ rights. Yet, this does follow social revolutionary pattern to equality, the unfortunate side to this pattern is that it will get worse before it gets better. ‘The vast inequalities between nations mean that the political demands of comparatively affluent gay communities are deeply unpopular – or perhaps incomprehensible – to many people in developing countries’.³⁵ The problem with this arrangement is that it becomes a cycle, the system will influence and shape those who grow up inside it and in turn renew the authoritarian influences exploiting fear and prejudice and the cycle begins again. Holding the stance, that homophobes are maintaining tradition and family values as the crux of their argument. Those who identify as LGBTQ are roughly ten percent of the population. In sheer numbers, the hope of convincing people that this minority have human rights are stacked heavily against. ‘The current growth of fundamentalist religiosity in many parts of the world makes it difficult to assume progress is easy or even inevitable’.³⁶ With the continued force behind projecting homosexuality into the public sphere under the categorisation parallel to ethnic minorities, it causes the public to become more aware of the human rights issue that it is. In reflection on the work by Hennessy and Tchelitchev, the idea of hidden symbolism, obscure references and fear of discovery is not something that has become irrelevant. While in some places the risk of discovery is more treacherous than others it is saddening in some ways to consider that these artists’ works are still as important as they once were.

³⁵ Altman and Symons *Queer Wars* Pg. 156

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Pg. 157

The mix of concealed symbolism and outlandish visual statements the works project reflect present social commentary. Which articulates the paradoxes of toleration that have become increasingly apparent. The exploration of homosexuality in visual culture is only beginning to find its voice and with more acceptance come more platforms to express itself and the complexity that exists within it.

In conclusion, the progressive nature of art is moulded by society. Artists like Hennessey, Mogutin and Tchelitchev portray what their understanding of this culture is through their work. Yet, queer art has a specific exception to this rule. Much how queer culture exists beyond the perimeters of heteronormativity so too does any work relating to it. As long as there is a need of homosexuals to fear their existence in society, there will be a need to convey a sense of secrecy around the true nature of the work. The undertone to these pieces of art however is one of pride. The core principle in the LGBTQ community. The progression of the commentary within this genre of art is gaining momentum as modern culture marches forward through the 21st century.

Illustrations



Fig. 1: *Portrait-Figures (Self-Portrait)*, 1972, Patrick Hennessy. Kissane, Sean, ed. Patrick Hennessy - de Profundis. Ireland: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2016.



Fig. 2: *Men bathing, Etretat*, 1954, Patrick Hennessy. Kissane, Sean, ed. Patrick Hennessy - de Profundis. Ireland: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2016.

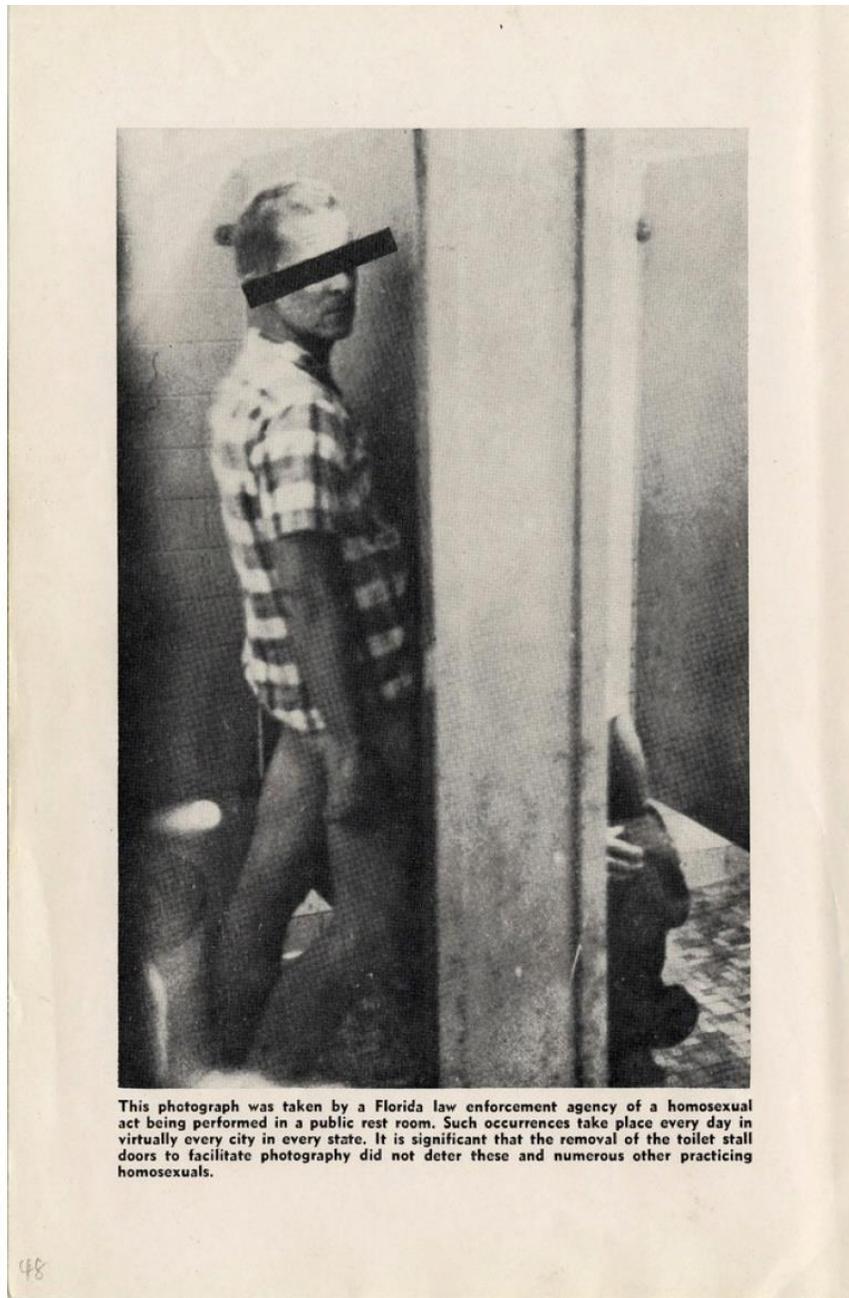


Fig.3: Florida Legislative Investigation Committee, *A homosexual act being performed in a public restroom*, 1964, Black and white photograph. Lord, Catherine and Richard Meyer, eds. *Art and Queer Culture*. Berlin: Phaidon Press, 2013.



Fig.4: Vitaly Milonov, Konstantin Altunin, 2013. “*Russian Art Exhibitions and TV Channel Under Pressure, Accused of ‘gay propaganda.’*” Queer Russia 2013,. Accessed November 8, 2016. <http://queerussia.info/2013/09/16/1729/#sthash.1DaMQ3X7.dpbs>.



Fig. 5: Claire Voon. “*Russians Vote to Dress up ‘David’ Replica to Appease Local Prudes.*” July 29, 2016. Accessed November 11, 2016. <http://hyperallergic.com/314651/russians-vote-to-dress-up-david-replica-to-appease-local-prudes/>.

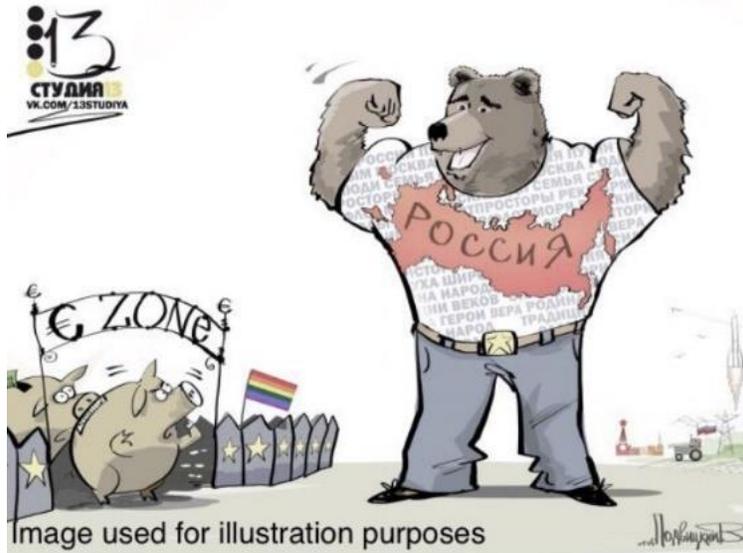


Image used for illustration purposes



Russian Embassy, ...
@RussianEmbassy



If Russia is in decline, why worry? Maybe, real worry is West's decline and that we manage things better?

7:58 PM - 22 Oct 2016

↩️ ↻️ 1,201 ❤️ 1,214

Fig.6: Russian Embassy, *Illustration*, 2016. Twitter.

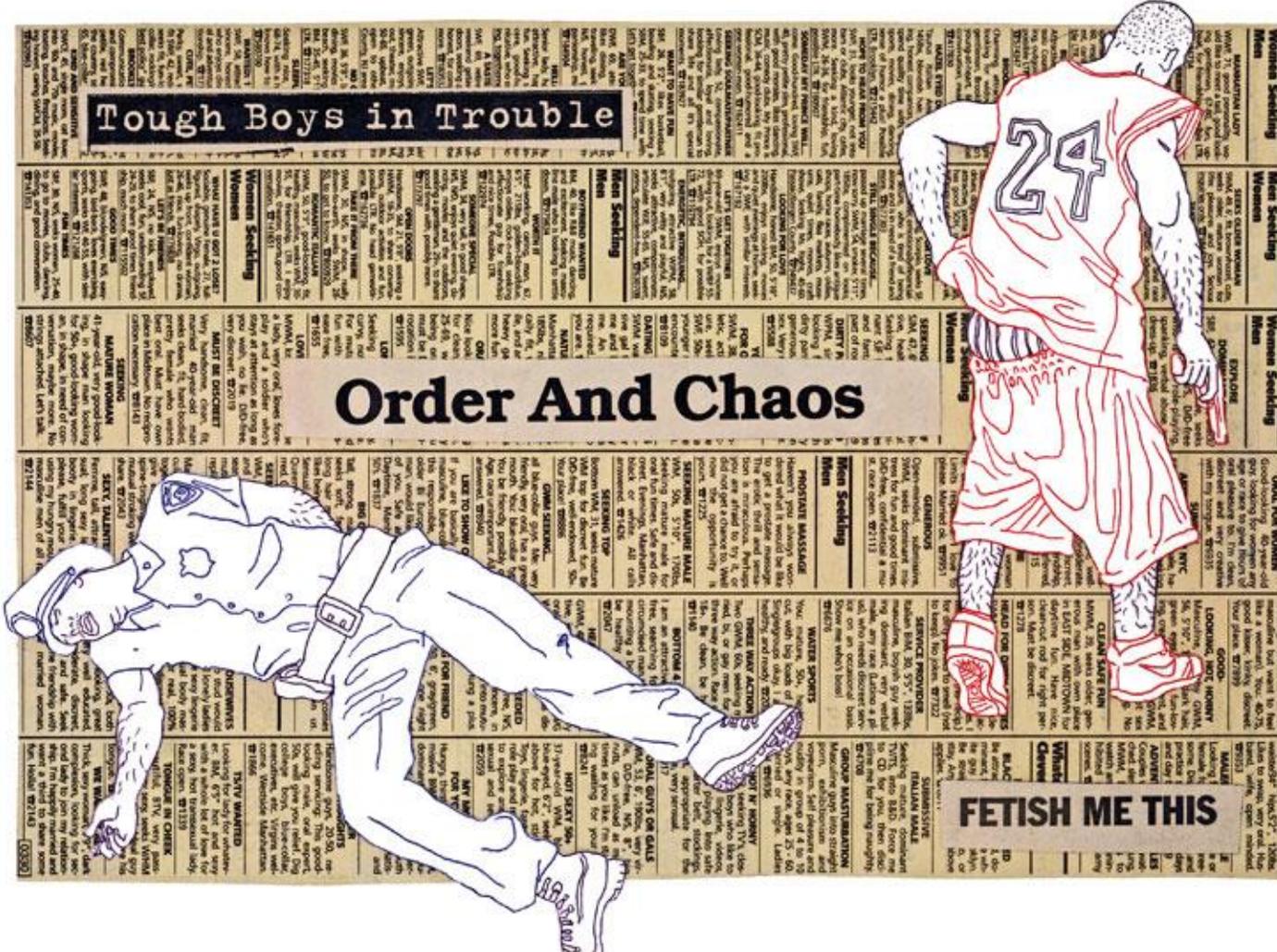


Fig.7: *Order and Chaos*, Slava Mogutin, 2007. Mogutin, Slava. Food Chain. Houston, TX, United States: Itna Press, 2014.



Fig.8: *Kiss and Tell*, Slava Mogutin, 2007. Mogutin, Slava. Food Chain. Houston, TX, United States: Itna Press, 2014.



Fig.9: *Untitled (Seated Man, Multiple images)*, 1927. Kuznetsov, Alexander S. Pavel Tchelitchew: *Metamorphoses*. Stuttgart: Arnoldsche, 2012.

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