

*Ars Homo Erotica (2010), installation view of the exhibition section 'The Time of Struggle', with installation by David Cerny, Entropa (The Polish Part) (2009). Photo: courtesy Paweł Leszkowicz.*

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## Towards an Intimate Democracy in Europe: Paweł Leszkowicz's Queer Curating

### Abstract

*This interview with Polish curator and scholar Paweł Leszkowicz discusses queer curatorial practice and the rapidly changing landscape for sexual politics and queer artmaking in Central and Eastern Europe. Focusing on his landmark exhibition *Ars Homo Erotica* (2010), Leszkowicz outlines how it traced themes of homoerotic desire and transgender identity through the collection of the Polish National Museum, and juxtaposed historical pieces with queer work by contemporary Central and Eastern European artists. The interview also considers the dynamic relationship between queer curatorial practice and its distinctive local and national contexts around the globe.*

### Keywords

queer curating  
*Ars Homo Erotica*  
national museums  
curating in Poland  
queer art  
queer activism

The practice of Polish curator and art and cultural historian Paweł Leszkowicz spans contemporary art and visual culture, queer studies and activism. Leszkowicz's queer curating is by necessity political: it advances tenets of pluralism and tolerance in a Europe deeply divided in terms of individual nations' recognition of queer rights and visibility of queer cultural production. In his projects, Leszkowicz (2012) boldly explores what he has called 'the possibilities of democratic transformation through queer visual art'. His landmark 2010 exhibition *Ars Homo Erotica* took over the Polish National Museum in Warsaw during EuroPride 2010 and embodies his curatorial mission. Queering the Polish National Museum's collection, the exhibition activated vital legacies of homoerotic and transgender representation from throughout the entirety of the western canon. Leszkowicz

accomplished this by placing historical works of art in dialogue with work by contemporary queer artists, as well as by key countercultural figures from the recent past like 1970s Polish performance artist Krzysztof Jung, immortalized in a suite of sculptures by Barbara Falender. Leszkowicz's take on 'queer' (both here and in other initiatives) asserts the centrality – rather than marginality – of homoerotic and transgender themes in art and culture, conceptualizing sexuality and identity in an expansive, engaged way that implicates everyone. His queering uncovers democratic and pluralistic traditions that have always existed in Eastern Europe, but have been suppressed by authoritarian political and religious forces. I was curious about Leszkowicz's thoughts on trauma and the tragic in queer cultural production, the 'bad' moments and the open wounds of queer history, particularly as a complicating factor towards achieving visibility and equality. I found his focus on affirmation and beauty – rather than on abjection and subversion – quite provocative.

Leszkowicz's next exhibition, *Love Is Love. Art as LGBTQ Activism: From Britain to Belarus* (2011), took place at the Labirynt Gallery in Lublin during the Transeuropa Festival and presented 'artistic/social projects engaged in lesbian and gay rights across today's Europe [...] a European survey of the problematics of equality and diversity' (Leszkowicz 2011). Leszkowicz's partner and collaborator, the writer Tomek Kitliński, addressed the central question animating the exhibition in his text for the publication:

The topical question here is an ethical one: how to be hospitable, live together actively, caring for each other, respecting identity and difference alike? How to enhance our common humanity shared with refugees dying at the borders of the EU and with women, migrants-turned-slaves, Jews, Roma, homeless, unemployed, transgenders, and queers.

(Kitliński 2011)

Specifically interesting is the context of Leszkowicz's work in Poland and in Central and Eastern Europe more broadly. Leszkowicz has written that 'queer' in this region has been shaped by a veritable powder keg of political histories and legacies that distinguish the situation there from western-dominated narratives of 'queer':

[W]e can certainly blame the legacy of the totalitarian system which negated the rights of the individual, various forms of religious fundamentalism, the political power of patriarchal national rightists, the economic collapse combined with the brutality of early capitalism, as well as the lack of a moral revolution in the 1960s and 1970s. Such a conglomeration creates an awful mixture, which, every now and then, is bound to explode.

(Leszkowicz 2010: 27)

While Poland never actually criminalized homosexuality – though occupying powers certainly have – the country 'became the European symbol of homophobia' through the marshalling of populist homophobic discourse by the ruling right-wing parties in the mid-2000s (Leszkowicz

2010: 22). The situation in the East is clearly different from somewhere like The Netherlands where sexual freedom is used to hold up the nation state's 'progressive' values against the supposed threat of immigrants and foreign – typically Islamic – others; in the East the queers are still seen as the threat.

Leszkowicz and I spoke when my exhibition *Coming After* for The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery in Toronto was on view. *Coming After* invoked a kind of queer generational uncertainty when faced with the residue of the first years of the AIDS crisis in North America, and the radical transformations to art history, activism, identity and politics it engendered. I was fascinated by the 'call' that queer artists and others feel from the past, a kind of ethical imperative to activate queer histories for the good of the present. The word 'nostalgia' frequently came up in discussions around the show – debate around whether the radicalism that arose to confront the trauma of AIDS was somehow located in the past, at a remove, where it cast its shadow over queer life and art now. I was eager to hear Leszkowicz's take on queer artistic and curatorial practices in a region that does not benefit from hindsight towards a long-ago 'time of struggle' – as he quite deliberately named the first section of his *Ars Homo Erotica* exhibition, contextualizing the entire project in a contemporary political urgency – but where the lines are sharply drawn in the here and now, with blood being spilled all too regularly. Leszkowicz's work with younger, queer contemporary artists provides a view on what it means for them to 'come after' the end of the Eastern Bloc and the enormous closet it represented. The political urgency of his queer curatorial practice also demands a more central place for queer curating and queer politics in the international art world.<sup>1</sup>

**Jon Davies:** I would like to begin from the idea of fantasy, which is so key to current theories and practices of queer world-making and utopian thinking, and how the work of queer curating connects to the realm of the imagination and the 'what might be'. Thinking in particular about *Ars Homo Erotica*, what does your queer curating try to imagine into being, or even demand that Poland imagine into being?

**Paweł Leszkowicz:** My curating seeks to create in Poland a pluralistic society and culture, but in relation to sexuality and love. I have a long history of curating queer exhibitions in Poland, the first was ten years ago when the far-right party, Law and Justice, was in power. *Love and Democracy* (2006) was exactly about the pluralism of love, and at the same time about democracy and contemporary art as means to foster, represent and visualize the variety of erotic and love stories. This show comprised only contemporary art and intended to create an alternative, queer visual canon, beyond the heteronormative one that exists in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The popular and visual culture of the CEE is not very queer compared to western culture, which offers seductive images of male and female homoeroticism or transgender identity. That is why in my curatorial approach, though I deal with contemporary art, I was never interested in queer art that deals with abjection, the representation of repulsion as a subversive strategy. I wanted to work with artists who present queerness in a way that is friendlier for the general audience because I knew that a positive representation of queerness does not really exist in CEE

1. See Steorn (2012) for a recent example.

culture. Contemporary art is topical for Polish democratic culture – it is very visible and much discussed, not marginalized at all. Often it is at the centre of interest for the media, politicians and the Catholic Church. An exhibition about something polarizing like sexuality will attract a lot of media attention. The subversion exists in the aesthetic dimension of the work, so with *Love and Democracy* my thinking about queer eroticism and love was always connected with creating democratic, pluralistic culture in relation to sexual and gender identity.

**Davies:** How did you apply some of these ideas to *Ars Homo Erotica*, in the context of the National Museum, their collection and what it represents to Poland?

**Leszkowicz:** *Ars Homo Erotica* elevated the discussion to another level. Many of the previous queer exhibitions that I and that others had curated in Poland (there is a twenty-year tradition of queer exhibitions and art – after the collapse of Communism they started immediately) were organized by private galleries or in alternative spaces. I had the opportunity to mount something in a major institution in the very capital of the country: the National Museum in Warsaw is something like the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York or the National Gallery in London. It has physical, geographical and cultural presence and therefore power, and I knew that the show was going to be widely publicized, discussed and criticized. And my intention in this case was to deal with contemporary artists from Central and Eastern Europe who address the subject of queerness via sublimation and aesthetic attitudes – the interrelation between beauty and queerness was very important, even if in a slightly tacky or kitschy way in some of the works.

I also had the opportunity to access the collection of the National Museum, which spans from antiquity to the twenty-first century, so I wanted to show the presence of homoerotic motifs throughout the entirety of cultural history. In this way, I could validate the contemporary homoerotic tradition in art with a long historical and visual tradition to establish a legitimacy, a grounding in cultural history, which is of course important in Europe. This kind of museum collection is associated with high art and cultural values, while in a country like Poland – as in many homophobic or heteronormative countries around the world – queerness is related to the sphere of repulsion. It was a clash of values to bring queerness and especially queer erotics to the museum, to the space of the highest prestige. On the one hand, it was an act to uplift the queer dimension of identity and eroticism and, on the other, a subversive intervention into the traditional concept of the museum. As a curator interested in curatorial methodologies, it was crucial to deal critically with the museum collection. Queering the entire collection of a museum brought out something that was hidden, the museological unconscious. Ultimately, I wanted to use the power of the National Museum as a central institution to show the cultural continuity, history and presence of homoerotic art and identity and to put contemporary art in this validating context.

**Davies:** How did you expand the exhibition beyond the boundaries of Poland and its national collection to take in the full range of queer art practices in Central and Eastern Europe?



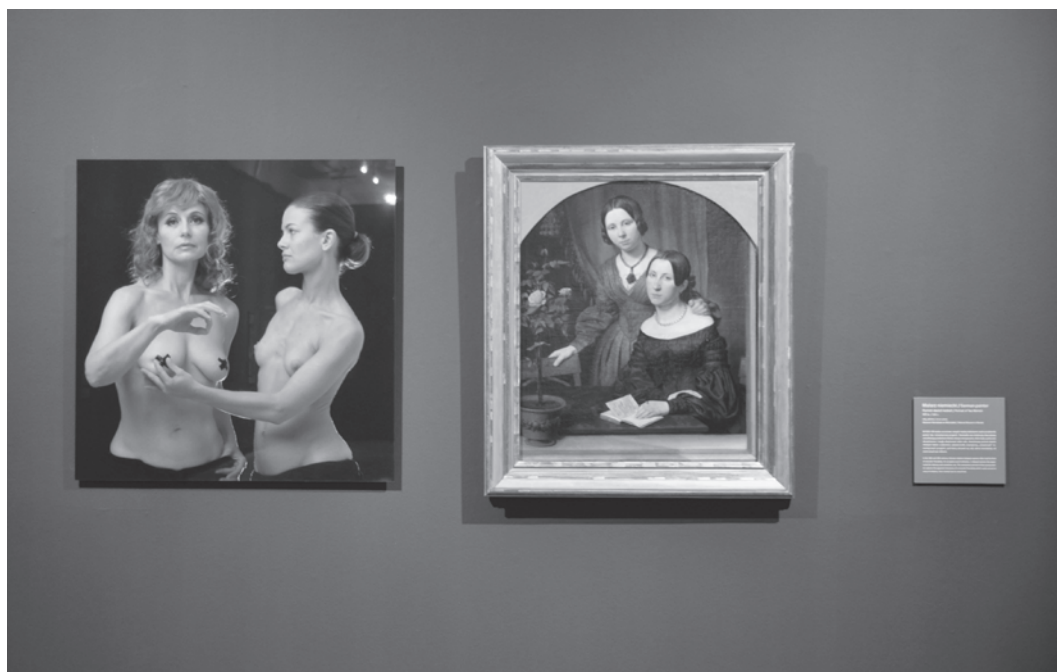


*Ars Homo Erotica (2010), installation view of exhibition section 'Homoerotic Classicism', with Krzysztof Malec, Nude (1994), plaster. Photo: courtesy Paweł Leszkowicz.*

**Leszkowicz:** The exhibition was not only about Poland, but also about queer art from new Central and Eastern European countries that used to be part of the Eastern Bloc. I've noticed during my curatorial research that in the last 10–15 years a New Wave of queer art has developed in these countries, a young queer art by artists who are in their twenties, quite often in art school or just graduated, and I wanted to emphasize this movement. It is true that from the European perspective queer art and rights are less developed in Eastern Europe, especially as the sexual revolution did not happen there in the 1960s and 1970s because everything was frozen under Communism, instead it started to happen in the late 1990s and early 2000s. So all of this development is recent. That is why this part of Europe seems to be (from the stereotypical point of view) a backwater for queer rights, but I see it completely differently. This is the part of Europe where the action is happening right now, which is really exciting, and especially in relation to contemporary art, performance, literature, theatre. This queer expression is at the very forefront: it is politically sensitive and polarizing, and more importantly visible and topical for the development of a democratic culture. I also wanted to show this New Wave of queer art in relation to the long cultural tradition that goes back to Classicism, Baroque, Renaissance and the nineteenth century. My goal was to create a more pluralistic culture in relation to queerness, eroticism and love, and to emphasize that an effervescent movement is thriving in this region.

In my research for the exhibition, I discovered many young gay and lesbian artists but also many straight artists who dealt with the queer subject and who were then included in the exhibition. Their sexual identity was not the key selection criteria, but the content of their work: I was interested in queer subject matter. I used the same approach in my selection of art from the collection of the National Museum. For example, I juxtaposed contemporary feminist video art with Baroque paintings and other objects from the history of art and culture.

One of the heroines of the show was Diana, the goddess of virginity, unmarried women, the moon, the woods, and nocturnal female ceremonies – the symbol of female independence and nature who was frequently seen cavorting with her nymphs. In order to enter the hermetic female world and to approach the nymph Callisto and rape her, the god Jupiter assumed the appearance of Diana. In art, this brutal story is typically presented as a charming and sensual scene involving two half-naked women surrounded by nature, animals and cupids, as in the paintings by Federico Cervelli and Charles van Loo that I included from the National Museum's collection. Early modern erotic iconography of Diana and the nymphs was, of course, created by male artists and usually for the pleasure of other men. However, there are queer/feminist interpretations that suggest that these patriarchal yet homoerotic works – the only available depictions of all-female rituals and courtship at the time – could have been alternatively perceived in women's circles as a source of subversive



*Ars Homo Erotica* (2010), installation view of the exhibition section 'Lesbian Imaginarium', with Tanja Ostojić and Marina Gržinić, *Politics of Queer Curatorial Positions* (2003), photograph (left); Unknown German Painter, *Portrait of Two Women* (19th century), oil on canvas (right). Photo: courtesy Paweł Leszkowicz.

pleasure. This 'proto-lesbian' iconography is a source of inspiration for contemporary feminist artists who intertextually appropriate and reinterpret this imagery. Thus, next to the Baroque paintings was the spectacular video installation *Love (Rose)* (2005) by the doyenne of contemporary Polish video art, Izabella Gustowska. Her projection included various mythological scenes of love or intimacy between women enclosed in a red crystal. These scenes quoted from famous paintings by Raphael, Ingres, Girodet, Manet and the Pre-Raphaelites and featured close-ups of the women's faces in ecstasy. Gustowska's work plays an intertextual game with the history of art, and her visual strategy in *Love (Rose)* perfectly encapsulates women's 'Ars Homo Erotica'.

**Davies:** Your approach seems to be more true to the spirit of 'queer' as an identity and as a theory when it was first being discussed in academia – that it was never supposed to identify a set group of people as much as challenge all of society's binary definitions of male and female, gay and straight. I think including a mix of artists with various, unspecified sexual/gender identities suggests that it is a phenomenon permeating culture as a whole.

**Leszkowicz:** Yes, but in Central and Eastern Europe, these post-Communist societies, it is important to have a pluralistic approach. To hold, on the one hand, the queer approach you talk about – which is useful politically, culturally and aesthetically – but on the other hand, the approach that *is* based on identity (something that tends to be discarded in the West right now), is still vital. This is because there is a fresh generation of openly gay and lesbian artists who identify with and want to express a gay, lesbian or transgender identity; however, they are stigmatized or suppressed not by homophobes but by people who theoretically align with the queer movement and yet comment that we are 'over' the identity politics from the seventies or eighties (in the West). So these artists experience both the repression from the homophobic cultural or political elite, as well as from the queer movement. The queerness that you are talking about can be liberating but can also be something quite oppressive in that it stops artists from being inspired by their identity and personal experiences. We need a pluralistic approach that is more free-style and open both to the 'queer' perspective and the 'gay and lesbian' perspective, in order to keep all the options open.

But a show like this had to have the queer perspective, otherwise it would be impossible to organize – I needed that flexibility. It was important to look at the homoerotic continuity and difference through the ages, which is why from the beginning I had an open approach, looking at the subject matter, and not only the sexuality of the artist. What I'm interested in is the homoerotic visuality that was always present, even when same-sex love was suppressed.

**Davies:** Can you describe the cultural role of the Polish National Museum further, especially in light of the interrelationships between patriotism, chauvinism and homophobia in Poland? What did it mean to have *Ars Homo Erotica* take place at the National Museum, which is tasked with representing the entirety of the nation?

**Leszkowicz:** My exhibition opened in the summer of 2010 and used the National Museum as a vehicle to subvert, to change, to transform the





*Ars Homo Erotica (2010), installation view of exhibition section 'Ganymede', with Barbara Falender, Ganymede II (1987), marble (foreground); Barbara Falender, The Performance Artist Krzysztof Jung Posing with Wojtek Piotrowski for the Sculpture Ganymede (1984) (background).*

*Photo: courtesy Paweł Leszkowicz.*

definition and the understanding of nationalism. Obviously, this kind of transnational, queer show subverts the concept of the national, which is homogeneous, on a deep level. The exhibition could happen only because of the Director of the Museum; it would have been impossible for me as a freelancer to curate this kind of exhibition without his support. Piotr Piotrowski was newly appointed and had a new vision for the National Museum, not as an institution for national heritage but as a critical institution, a museum critically involved in current social and political discussions happening in the region. Of course queer rights is an important part of this political discussion and has a strong connection with contemporary art and art history. For him, my exhibition about homosexuality and art was the first means, the first opportunity, to dismantle the traditional concept of the national museum and to usher in the new era of the critical museum, one actively involved in contemporary social life and self-critical towards its own collection and tradition. An exhibition about homoeroticism radically subverted any kind of nationalist concept, because the notion of nation and nationality is always connected with the heteronormative, patriarchal ideology.

Recently, in Hungary, at the National Museum, another exhibition presented their entire collection to the public. Under the tutelage and inspiration – or demand – of the far-right Prime Minister Viktor Orbán,

they showed art that emphasized the patriarchy and the military history of Hungary, the traditional nationalist position. At the end of the exhibition lay the portrait of the Prime Minister as the great master of this national tradition. These two projects in Central and Eastern Europe could not be more dissimilar: one that re-arranges the national collection from a patriarchal, militaristic and nationalistic point of view, and *Ars Homo Erotica*, which dismantled and subverted the patriarchal notion of the nation through uncovering and celebrating a homoerotic lineage in the national art collection and beyond. These are two completely opposing ways that national museums can be used for political purposes. That is why many critics and theoreticians think that national museums should be autonomous and never be used for political purposes.

**Davies:** Was there resistance to Piotrowski's idea of a 'critical museum'? Did he face negative consequences for supporting and presenting an exhibition like *Ars Homo Erotica*?

**Leszkowicz:** He decided to resign because of conflict with the museum staff, who from the beginning were set against the concept of the critical museum. Afterwards, the museum changed completely. The new director, a feminist – Agnieszka Morawinska – is trying to continue the path of reinventing and changing the National Museum but in a slower, more subtle way. Piotrowski's staging of a homosexual exhibition in the National Museum was just too confrontational for the country's right-wing elite.

**Davies:** Thinking about this belief in the autonomy of the museum or the idea that art can be separate from politics, I had an experience with the *Coming After* exhibition at The Power Plant where somebody who read an early draft of my curatorial essay suggested I was not looking at the artists' works sufficiently in formal or in art historical terms, but more through the lens of queer theory, history and politics. I thought this was perhaps a subtle form of heteronormative thinking. Are these distinctions of concern to you? Does queer curating occupy a marginalized position in the art world because there is still resistance to looking at works of art politically as much as aesthetically?

**Leszkowicz:** The debate about art and politics is constant, a subject that is always present. I believe that the political and the social aspects of art and exhibitions are important but that curators do not have to make exhibitions that are always political and social – it depends on the geographical, historical and cultural context. For example, queer curating depends on the state of queer rights and culture in a particular place, so it is completely different to organize a queer exhibition in Toronto, in Poland or in Russia. In Toronto, it would be part of the cultural landscape, in Poland it would be controversial, and in Russia it would be dangerous and even impossible.

What I have noticed – and I really consider this unfortunate – is that in many Western European countries there is an attitude that because queer rights have been achieved, queer art and exhibitions are no longer needed. The idea that queer exhibitions are dated, that they belong to the seventies, eighties or nineties, is troublesome. Some feel that people in Eastern Europe can advocate for queer art because their quest for rights is just beginning, but for the West that phase is over. This is the worst

attitude, but unfortunately one that is often heard in the contemporary art scene. But being here in Toronto and speaking with young artists, there is a belief that a renaissance of queer art is on the verge; this may be particular to Toronto and Canada but I think it is true internationally as well. A multidimensional renaissance is emerging because, on the one hand, there are queer exhibitions and artists who are working in a strong political context, not because they want to – though some of them do – but because the social situation of queer rights is so difficult, complicated or controversial and people still struggle for basic rights. On the other hand, queer art functions as part of contemporary culture, exploring new forms of eroticism, identity, seduction or bodily representation, and is purely aesthetic without a deeper political dimension. There is thus a variety of queer exhibitions and art on the rise internationally, but the meaning of each is different depending on the cultural context from which they originate, whether it be Egypt, London, Toronto or Texas.

**Davies:** Do you think, then, because queer cultural expression is so specifically located in its cultural and temporal context that this complicates how it speaks to a global queer community or an idea of queerness as a transnational identity or tribe that is somehow beyond nation and locality? For example, at the queer and feminist curatorial conference you organized in Brighton, Civil Partnerships, was communication possible?



*Ars Homo Erotica (2010), installation view of the exhibition section 'Archive', posters for films by Jean Cocteau, Luchino Visconti, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, John Schlesinger, Derek Jarman, Gus Van Sant and Pedro Almodóvar, and plays by Christopher Marlowe, Jean Genet, Tony Kushner and Wojciech Misiuro. Photo: courtesy Paweł Leszkowicz.*

Could people understand each other's projects or were the contexts so different that this proved difficult?

**Leszkowicz:** If there is a global circulation of queer art and images, their reception is still grounded in cultural specificity. Queer exhibitions are important on a local level, but it would be equally significant to queer the Metropolitan Museum in New York or the National Gallery in London. It is also essential to organize an international queer exhibition in global capitals of art and to bring in art from countries or places where queer rights are not respected and criminalized. These shows could have a comparative value and play a political function of fostering human rights on a diplomatic level.

**Davies:** Can you talk further about the work of queering historical archives and national histories and how that relates to curatorial authorship and power in an exhibition?

**Leszkowicz:** Queering big historical collections poses a series of difficult methodological questions. First of all, in my work on *Ars Homo Erotica*, I was inspired by several books on the history of art and homosexuality, such as Dominique Fernandez's *A Hidden Love: Art and Homosexuality* (2002), James Saslow's *Pictures and Passion: A History of Homosexuality in the Visual Arts* (1999) and Emmanuel Cooper's *The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the Last 100 Years in the West* (1986). They emphasized and enumerated all the homoerotic iconography that is based, for example, on Greek mythology, on certain Renaissance and Baroque topics in art, on the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century concept of female friendship. This homoerotic iconography is well-known, described and identified by prominent art historians in compendiums of western queer, homoerotic iconography. When I prepared my exhibition and spoke with the curators of the museum – the keepers of the collection – I already had a series of iconographic subjects to look for, along with a list of historical subjects and figures.

**Davies:** What specific challenges did you encounter following this methodology? Were there unexpected complications in assembling a 'usable past' from the works in the collection?

**Leszkowicz:** There were challenges around the subject of lesbian iconography. Since women were often not permitted to study and practice art until the nineteenth century, it was difficult to find not only lesbian but women artists in general in the fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, or in Roman or Greek times, except for a few. Homoerotic female iconography, then, was mainly created by men. This raised the question: Are these images valid? I decided to use the representations of Sappho, the goddess Diana, Nymphs, and historical figures like Queen Christina of Sweden by male artists, but I juxtaposed them with contemporary feminist and lesbian artists to bring these traditions into dialogue.

The other major methodological question I encountered with queering the traditional museum involved the male nude, because from the Renaissance until the nineteenth century the academic training of (male) artists was based on the study of the male body. Only in the mid-nineteenth century did the study of the female body become introduced into academic practice and training. That is why the collections of many





*Ars Homo Erotica* (2010), installation view of the exhibition section 'Lesbian Imaginarium', with Anna Daucikova, *Kissing Hour* (1997), video (left); Jerzy Hryniewiecki and Stefan Osiecki, *Queen Christina* (1934), coloured lithography (right); *Painter of Sappho*, Kalpis with an Image of Sappho (ca. 510 BC), 'Six' technique, Athens (background). Right: detail of Kalpis with an Image of Sappho; left: detail of *Queen Christina*. Photos: courtesy Paweł Leszkowicz.



European museums feature numerous drawings of male nudes done by male artists. Many of these drawings are incredibly erotic and present full-frontal male nudity, which was then censored in modern times. I decided to show these drawings in the homoerotic context because these are men looking at male bodies and rendering them in an erotic way. I picked the drawings with a strong affect and dimension of eroticism, according to my subjective view, so my authorial presence was quite pronounced. I then juxtaposed these images with contemporary gay art from Central and Eastern Europe. This turned out to be as controversial as the lesbian issue, because many of the academic artists were not gay or queer, but their scrutiny of the male body could certainly be interpreted as erotic.

**Davies:** For many viewers today, the eroticism and desire in those images are obvious, yet the tradition is one of repression and denial. It is thus a major shift in people's understanding to recognize the queer content. Returning to what you said about this moment being dynamic for queer artistic practice in particularly heteronormative and polarized countries like Poland, it reminds me of the first decade of the AIDS crisis in North America when one knew who the enemies were, that the opposition was clearly defined. Do you agree?

**Leszkowicz:** When I was growing up and studying art, my first experience with queer art was the American tradition from the eighties, the time of the controversy around Robert Mapplethorpe and David Wojnarowicz. I wrote my M.A. thesis on this period, which you deal with to some extent in *Coming After*. This was the moment when, because of the political pressure and censorship, queer art became extremely important and political after decades of marginalization and ghettoization. Because nothing was happening in Poland, I consumed this American legacy through exhibition catalogues and the art press. Queer art is undergoing a similar politicization in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in Russia, because of censorship directed towards queer expression and the political opposition towards queer rights. Suddenly, in the twenty-first century, I have become part of an analogous movement by curating queer exhibitions in Central and Eastern Europe, where queer rights are part of a renewed series of Culture Wars.

**Davies:** What would you say are the lessons that queer curatorial practice has learned or can learn from the 1980s Culture Wars? How can those moments of strife and radicalization catalyze an 'intimate democracy' as you've called it?

**Leszkowicz:** First of all, it is important that we are talking about Culture Wars and acts of censorship in democratic societies where free debate is possible. In this context, my position would be to creatively use these times of heightened debate and conflict to promote queer culture, rights and human freedom through my curatorial practice. The Culture Wars are as much a platform for the defenders of freedom of expression and democratic rights, including queer activists, artists and curators, as they are for conservatives and religious fundamentalists. When debates over queer rights ignite and become inflamed, they foster an opportunity to emphasize the importance of queer rights for a truly democratic and pluralistic society; it is also a key time to build alliances with other progressive political forces. One lesson would be that both in the United

States and in Eastern and Central Europe, the Culture Wars have been instrumental for progress in queer issues within art and culture, but not yet within politics or law.

However, the main danger that queer curatorial and artistic practices face in advanced democracies is not from censors and political adversaries, but the indifference of artworld elites who assume that this issue is 'over' and belongs to the past. It is vital to question the popular belief that a queer approach to art is only topical as a socio-political issue within the period of Culture Wars and not during a 'time of peace', because such a time does not yet exist when it comes to human sexuality, love and desire.

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