

Visual Essay

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A BATTLE WITH ACCEPTANCE

A Visual Essay

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Art throughout the years has been a source of escapism for many marginalised groups in our society. Artists have used art as a defence mechanism to liberate individuals especially those of colour. Bringing forward issues that may be difficult to discuss in the past, but as the medium creates an educational as well as an impactful message to the audience about the battles against injustice that marginalised groups face.

Art comes in many forms from painting to performance; an expressive outlet that allows the individual to escape the burdens of reality. For the LGBTQIA+ community art and performance has been a safe haven to unveil their true identity that society has suppressed for years.

The Battle for equality is not over, 156 years later since 'The 13th Amendment' was established and slavery was abolished; individuals of colour still face discrimination and are killed by the very own people that are meant to serve and protect all members of the community. While the LGBTQIA+ community celebrates their 51st anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising, the question that rises to the mind is - how many more decades will have to pass for the battle of equality to be over?

This visual essay will reflect upon the works of different artists and how their art form acknowledges: rebellion, representation and exercise of power, a form of liberation of those who were not accepted in our past or in the current society. This essay shall blur the lines of gender orientation while intersectioning issues of race to uncover the love, the beauty and the pain of a subculture.

Opposite page: Photography by Kay Tobin "Men kissing under a tree in Philadelphia" 1977. From 'Love & Resistance: Stonewall 50' exhibition at the New York Public Library, 2019.



Photography by Fred W. McDarrah
*"Gay Pride and Stonewall, Through the Eyes of
 Fred W. McDarrah"*

American photographer and activist Fred W. McDarrah captured a freeze-frame within a moment of chaos; capturing both the joy and the pain of New York City during Stonewall. With his photography, he was able to provide an outlet for the community and show the world its true colour.

Capturing activists such as Marsha P. Johnson, a self-identified drag queen and Andy Warhol muse. Johnson's iconic stonewall moment of climbing a lamppost and dropping a weighted bag onto the hood of a police car shattered the norms of police brutality.

To of page: Photography by Kay Tobin Lahusen “*Barbara Gittings at Third White House picket*” 1965. From The New York Public Library.

Here we see a pre-Stonewall act of activism by Barbara Gittings. During the 1950s and onwards, the communities right to employment was slowly deteriorating. Organizations like the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis challenged the ideology that lesbians and gay men were sick and argued instead that homosexuals were an oppressed minority.

After the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the minority began their dedication in asserting their rights to employment.

Bottom of page: Photography by Demetrius Freeman for The New York Times 2020.

The Brooklyn Liberation a silent march held after the killing of George Floyd. West Dakota a Brooklyn drag queen was inspired by the 1917 ‘Silent parade’ where 10,000 people silently marched down Fifth Avenue in New York, pleading to stop the violence against black people.

The police have been a burden to the Black transgender community for decades, yet they also face high rates of violence and harassment on the street. The National Centre for Transgender Equality has released that 38% of Black trans people report having been harassed by police, and 15% report having been assaulted by police.

The Queer community push forward The police abolition movement’ as they believe that the system needs to dismantled, as it longer serves its purpose to protect but hold the power and to control the minorities into compliance.



Photography by Robin Hammond, “*Where Love is Illegal,*” 2015 for The Witness Change Project.

Robin Hammond has spent his career documenting Human Rights issues. His latest project captures the stories of 65 LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex) individuals. These individuals have to live across 16 countries in secrecy; due to the torment they received from their government.

As the western world slowly progresses,

there are just under 80 countries where same-sex marriage is illegal and being of different sexual preference could be a death sentence.

Top of page : Tiwonge Chimbalanga’s story was told from Malawi. In 2009 Tiwonge and her husband Steven were arrested and sentenced to 14 years in prison due to buggery and indecent practices between males. Their case caused an international debate, leading them to be being pardoned, on the condition that they never see each other again. Fearing for her safety, Tiwonge fled to South Africa.



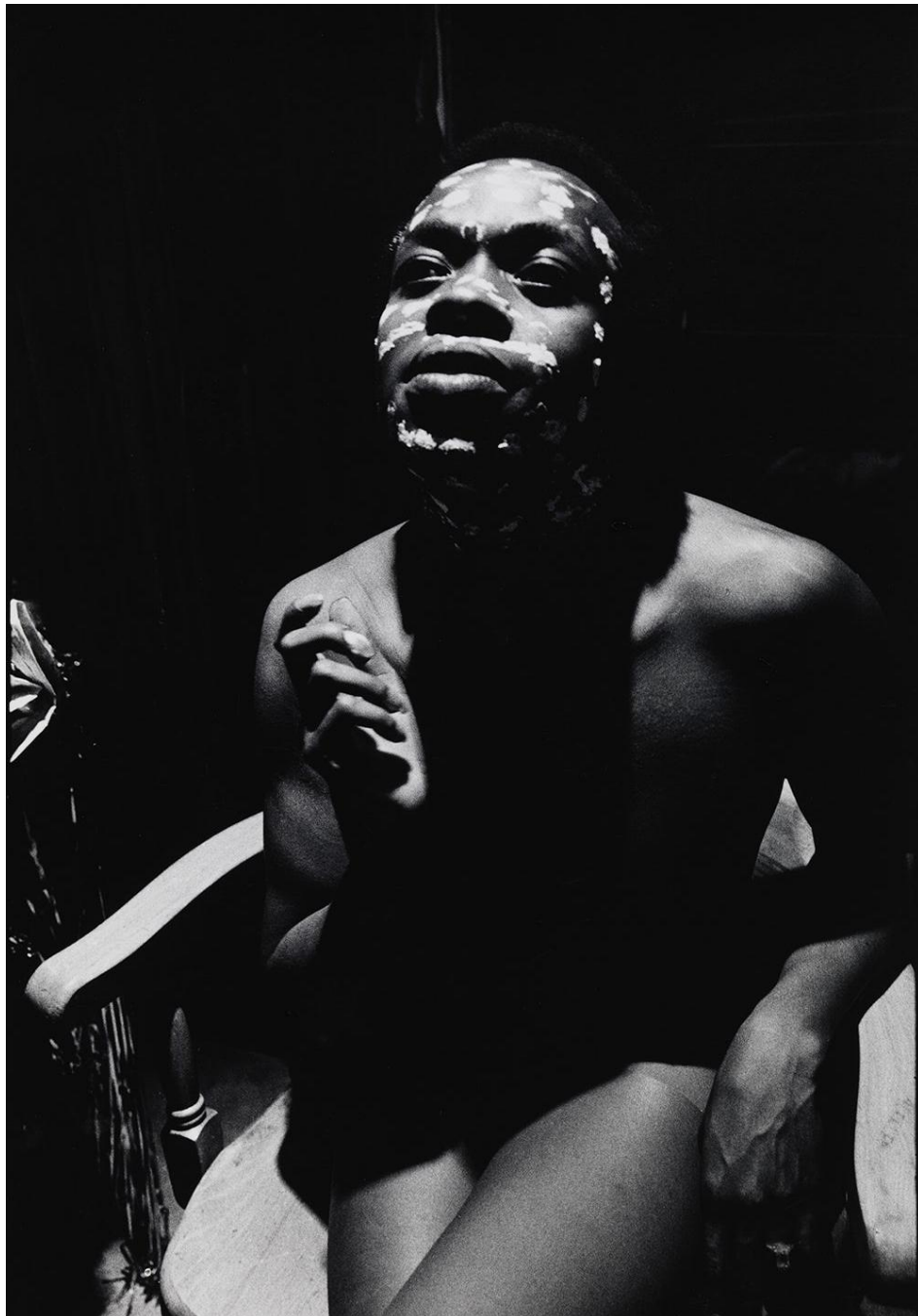
Photography by Anthony Friedkin *"The Gay essay"* 1972 .

Anthony Friedkin as a young man started his career with 'The Gay Essay ' which perfectly coincided with The Stonewall riots. In his prime, he gave up four years to dedicate himself to submerging in a subculture new to him.

Friedkin stayed away from conventional ways of shooting the community, such as focussing on photographing law enforcement, scandal, spectacle or satire. His attention was drawn to the ignored parts of the community,

the private moments; the empty bar, the street corners, the rest-rooms and the backstage of club dressing rooms.

Through his explorations, he subtly captured the struggle, defiance and solidarity of the gay liberation movement. Capturing the essence of pathos within an individual which evoked an intimate and emotive connection between the viewer and subject.





Opposite page: Photography by Nan Goldin
“The Ballad of Sexual Dependency” 1985.

Nan Goldin’s photography is as real as they get, experiencing the lawlessness, the struggles, the heartbreak and the pain alongside her subjects; they became family.

As their lives unfold, so do the photographs, as they get deeper and more real, the realities of the real world come crashing down. Love, fluid sexuality, glamour, beauty, death, intoxication and pain are a running theme in her work, mirroring herself, as well as the world in the 1980s.

The powerful imagery Goldin photographed brought an uncompromisingly honest view on the AIDS epidemic as Goldin brought awareness, and a change of perceptions of the disease. No longer did the community feel like they were alone, their pain was understood and projected to the world.



Image below: Photography from the Bettmann Archive, March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay rights in October 1987.

Up until the 1980s, there was no record of how many people were infected with HIV or developed AIDS. In the space of seven years (1987) there were 71,751 cases of AIDS, that were been reported to the World Health Organization, with 47,022 cases being in the USA. The WHO estimated 5-10 million people were living with HIV worldwide.

As the disease grew, so did the hate towards a community who were suffering across the world; with shocking headlines of “The gay plague” which circulated from the media fuelling the homophobia. In many countries, the hate crime towards gay men escalated as they were frequently singled out and seen to be responsible for the transmission of HIV. In a 1986 survey, 150 homosexuals reported being physically assaulted by attackers who shouted insults related to the disease, and a 23 percent increase over such assaults since 1985.

Below, we see AIDS victims and their supporters take a stand against AIDS and the government’s lack of support.





Art by Andy Warhol, “*Ladies and Gentlemen*” 1975

Andy Warhol is known for capturing the biggest celebrities in America in bright and eccentric fashion. With the same passion and attitude, he created 500 Polaroids of 19 transgender women of colour and produced 268 canvases. He painted them as icons, while the flawless feminine prints include the

finer details of economic struggle; run-down clothing and jewellery, ill-fitted wigs and even missing teeth. Capturing the imperfections, he manages to produce a poignant story between aspirations and reality. His use of disconnected pigments and deliberate layers of paint smudging anticipates a spirited view on the theatricality of drag.



Image Stills from ‘*Paris is burning*’ Jennie Livingston 1991.

Jennie Livingston’s documentary gave the world a vibrant time capsule of New York city’s ballroom subculture in the 1980s.

A vital aspect of the film is that the knowledge of drag culture comes from the Queens themselves. Twisting the truths of life into dangerously stimulating intimate fantasies.

The documentary is fueled by race and class inequalities while battling the AIDS epidemic; it uncovered the Ballroom scene as an outlet of oppression and a safe place where their identities are not stripped away from them.



Around Harlem—Teddy Shearer



Gosh . . . Babes—I'll sure miss you when you go join up with them Waacs!

Page Left: Art By Teddy Shearer 'Around Harlem', 1942. Published in the Amsterdam News.

Teddy Shearer was a black cartoon artist who felt that he had the responsibility to use humour as a force to bring forward the sincerity of what is to be young, poor and black, as challenging as it was.

Page right: Photography by Aaron Siskind 'Savoy Dancers' from the series 'Harlem Document' 1936.

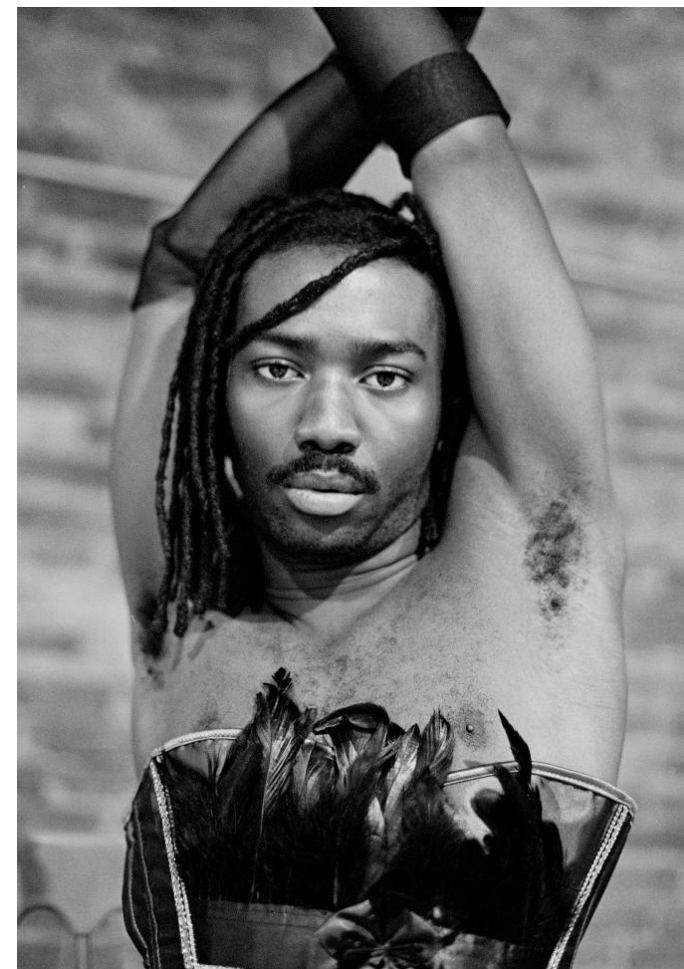
Harlem Renaissance also known as The Great Migration flourished New York City with art, music, dance, poetry, entrepreneurship, and fashion, setting the tone for black culture onwards.

Hoping for a better life, people of colour were welcomed with low wages or unemployment and rent prices were out of budget. While overcrowding and racial discrimination was the norm. Dance became a source of escapism from harsh economical realities and the drudgery of earning a living doing monotonous tasks. Places like The Savoy Ballroom allowed the ethnic minority to deconstruct current realities, just like ballroom did for the LGBTQIA+ community.



Photography by Kamile Kakyte 'A Dance with Acceptance' 2021.

A documentary project that used performance as a medium to produce an emotive narrative for its performers; while liberating them in the process. The project consisted of an eight-minute documentary that brought awareness to issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation. While the candid black and white film photography that goes alongside, creates a creative agent for a sincere and buoyant escapism for the youth of the LGBTQIA+ community today.

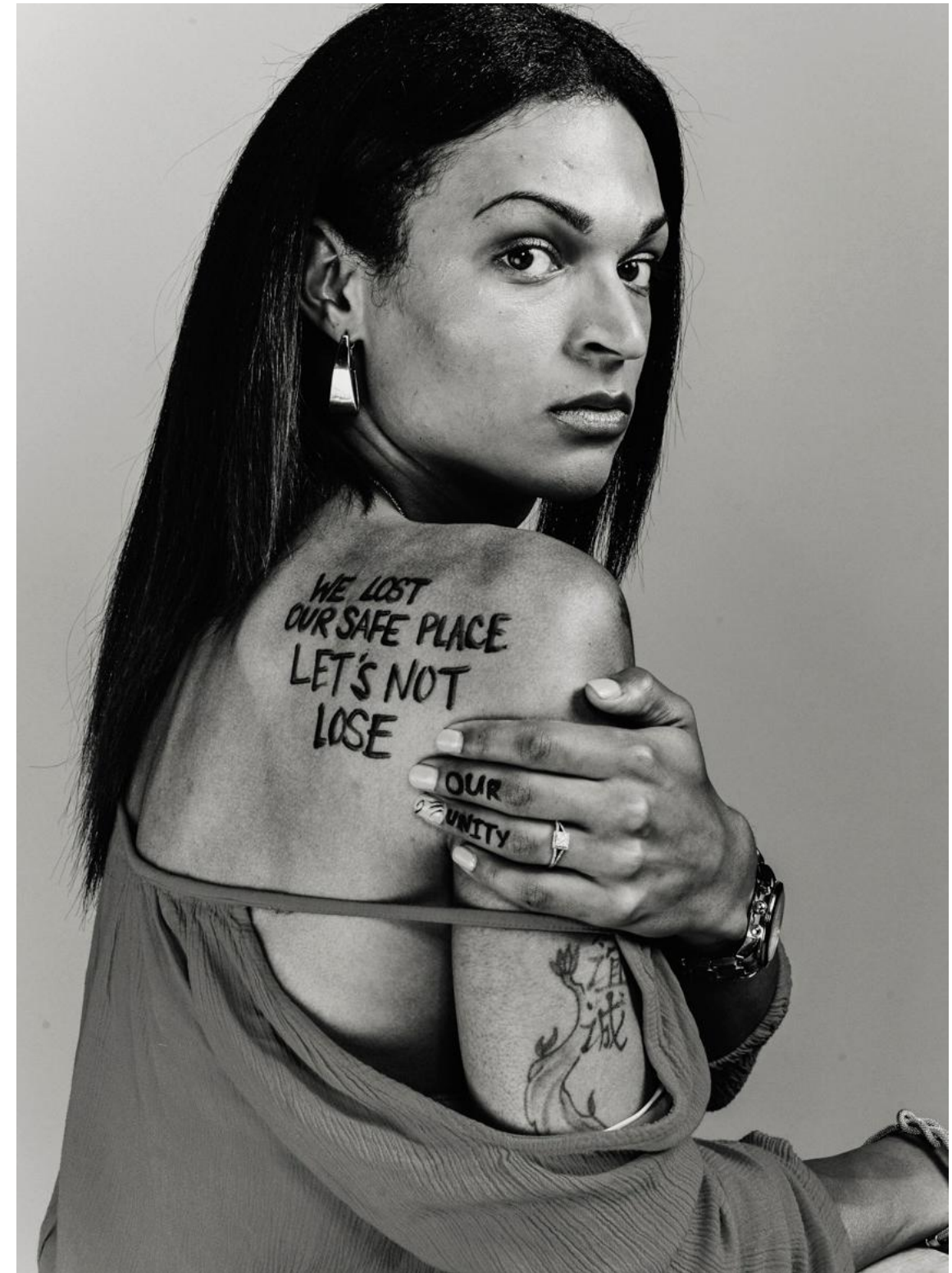




Photography by Daymon Gardner 'Dear Orlando', 2017, for *Dear World* group.

'*Dear Orlando*' is a moving photo series, released as a one-year anniversary after the Pulse gay nightclub shooting. It features survivors, family members, and first responders giving their own accounts of what happened, and how their lives have changed in the wake of that night.

That Night as Pulse hosted "Latin Night", 49 people lost their lives and 53 were wounded. The incident was deemed a terrorist attack by FBI investigators and it being labelled as the deadliest incident in the history of violence against LGBT people in the United States.



*“I love being me,
I love being queer,
I love being black.
Its such an exhilarating
feeling knowing that I
am part of such a rich
community.”*

Photography by Kamile Kaktyte '*A Dance with
Acceptance*' 2021.
Quote By Luke Osay From *A Dance with
Acceptance*' 2021.

