

ART & DESIGN

The Museum of the City of New York to Examine a Gay Underground

Inside Art

By ROBIN POGREBIN JUNE 23, 2016

The Museum of the City of New York could not have predicted how timely it would be to mount an exhibition exploring how creativity became both an outlet and a refuge for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender artists in New York.

Now, after the shootings in Orlando, Fla., the show, “Gay Gotham: Art and Underground Culture in New York,” which opens this fall, seems prescient in that it “celebrates the creativity and the richness of the L.G.B.T. community,” said Whitney W. Donhauser, the museum’s director.

The show looks at queer networks that grew in the city around 10 artistic figures: the composer Leonard Bernstein; the photographers Robert Mapplethorpe and George Platt Lynes; the visual artists Andy Warhol, Richard Bruce Nugent, Harmony Hammond and Greer Lankton; the playwright, poet and novelist Mercedes de Acosta; the impresario Lincoln Kirstein; and the dancer-choreographer Bill T. Jones.

“Marginalized people — in the ’20s through the early ’90s, especially — formed

these communities of like-minded individuals that sustained their lives personally and advanced their careers professionally,” said Donald Albrecht, the museum’s curator of architecture and design, who worked on the show. “Out of that oppression and marginalization came a lot of creativity.”

Among the artifacts will be the original designs for “West Side Story,” which Mr. Albrecht said he included because the creators were all gay: Bernstein (music), Stephen Sondheim (lyrics), Arthur Laurents (libretto), Jerome Robbins (choreography), Oliver Smith (scenery) and Irene Sharaff (costumes).

Also in the exhibition will be Bernstein’s copy of “Romeo and Juliet” — the basis for the musical — in which he writes a plea for racial tolerance. At the time, Mr. Bernstein had yet to come out. “One wonders,” Mr. Albrecht said, “if it’s not a plea for tolerance of other types of relationships.”

Sharing 2 De Marias

It may be hard to believe that the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art didn’t own a work by the sculptor Walter De Maria, given its strong holdings in other Minimalists — like Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt and Dan Flavin — and Mr. De Maria’s ties to Northern California.

The Dallas Museum of Art was also once without a De Maria. So when Gavin Delahunty, the Dallas Museum’s senior curator of contemporary art, approached Gary Garrels, the senior curator of painting and sculpture at the San Francisco museum, about jointly acquiring a De Maria piece, Mr. Garrels jumped.

“It’s something that’s been a gap in our collection,” Mr. Garrels said, “something I’ve wanted for a long time.”

The sculpture, “Large Rod Series: Circle/Rectangle, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13” (1986) — geometrically arranged polygonal steel bars — was acquired for the Dallas Museum through its benefit auction fund with the AIDS charity AMFAR and for the San Francisco museum through the Phyllis C. Wattis Fund.

The museums have also jointly purchased Mr. De Maria’s “Pure Polygon Series”

(1975-76), seven works on paper acquired for the Dallas Museum through the Janet Kendall Forsythe Fund and for the San Francisco institution through its accessions committee.

Best known for his “Lightning Field,” a grid of 400 stainless-steel poles in western New Mexico that opened in 1977, Mr. De Maria is widely considered one of the pioneers of Minimal art. (He died in 2013.)

“He had an interest in sumptuous materiality,” Mr. Garrels said. “His works are always ravishingly beautiful.”

The San Francisco museum plans to present “Pure Polygon Series” next spring in each of its three possible configurations over the period of its installation. Dallas will showcase it this fall next to a borrowed El Greco, to highlight the artists’ common interest in mathematics.

“Placing Walter in the context of artists as interested in geometry and the science of looking,” Mr. Delahunty said, “is almost like a time-travel exercise.”

Affirming Ties to Harlem

Before deciding to renovate its building on 125th Street, the Studio Museum in Harlem considered moving to other sites, but ultimately determined that the “in Harlem” was integral to its identity. So in figuring out how to commemorate 50 years of existence — an anniversary coming up in 2018 — the museum has chosen to highlight that connection to the neighborhood.

Beginning this summer, the Studio Museum will start a series of “inHarlem initiatives,” which will include commissioned sculptural works for public spaces: one by Kevin Beasley in Morningside Park; Simone Leigh in Marcus Garvey Park; Kori Newkirk in St. Nicholas Park; and Rudy Shepherd in Jackie Robinson Park.

“We wanted artists for whom Harlem had a role in their work,” said Thelma Golden, the museum’s director and chief curator.

In partnership with the New York Public Library, the museum will also present activities at the George Bruce branch in Harlem, including a Books, Authors & Kids

program and Studio Salon, a series of talks, book clubs and writing workshops for adults.

“We are the Studio Museum in Harlem,” Ms. Golden said, “and this makes that literal.”

Rocky Mountain Highs

Sure, the Performance Ski store in Aspen, Colo., typically sells parkas.

But from July 11 through Aug. 20, it will turn into an art gallery, showing work with a mountain theme by artists like Richard Prince and Sterling Ruby.

Curated by Neville Wakefield and produced by Meredith Darrow, an art adviser, the show includes new work like a mountain painting by Nate Lowman; a painting of a North Face jacket by Mathew Cerletty; and a triptych of cloud paintings by Dan Colen.

The exhibition focuses not just on topography but also on marijuana (legal in Colorado), which represents another way “to get to a higher point,” Ms. Darrow said, “to a more evolved place.”

A version of this article appears in print on June 24, 2016, on page C20 of the New York edition with the headline: The Gay Underground in All Its Invention.