



FEATURE

Art and Pride: LGBTQ+ Artists Who Have Made an Impact

03 Jul 2018

by [Sandy Di Yu](#)

In celebration of the enormous strides that LGBTQ+ civil movements have made, and to recognise the challenges that the community have been historically faced with and still face today, we've gathered a few of our favourite artists who have furthered these important movements and conversations.

June and July see the celebrations of Pride around the globe, and in London, this culminates in the iconic [Pride Parade](#) on the 7th of July. Amidst the rainbow paraphernalia, exuberant performances, and unabashedly targeted merchandise appropriated by marketing departments across the nation, there lies a rich history of the struggles and triumphs that painted the lives of the LGBTQ+ community.

While we at ArtRabbit are hopping with pride for the victories that these movements have garnered, we know that it hasn't always been rainbow confetti and positivity. In celebration of the long way that civil rights have come for members of the LGBTQ+ community, and in commemoration of the hardships that they have faced (and many still face today), we've gathered our favourite artists, both past and present, who have in their own ways contributed to these movements at large.

Berenice Abbott

1898-1991



Man Ray, *Portrait of Berenice Abbott*, 1925. Collection Hank O'Neal, New York. © Man Ray Trust / ADAGP Paris 2011

Once a studio assistant for [Man Ray](#) before becoming an influential photographer herself, Berenice Abbott was a staple in the 20's Parisian scene. She is known for her inter-war portraits of cultural figures (including James Joyce) as well as her astute portrayals of New York architecture and urbanism. While she had several documented relationships with well-known women in the scene, Abbott kept her private life to herself and rarely spoke of her orientation. Regardless, her legacy remains as a strong female figure in the arts in the earlier parts of the century, whose personal life was kept away from the scrutiny of puritanical judgment.

A collection of her works are on show, along with several other artists of the era, at [HackelBury Fine Art](#) in London.



EXHIBITION

HackelBury: Twenty

14 Jun 2018 – 10 Aug 2018

HackelBury Fine Art

London, United Kingdom

Robert Mapplethorpe

1946-1989



Robert Mapplethorpe, *Self Portrait*, 1980, gelatin silver print. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Gift, The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, 1993

Perhaps one of the first names that comes to mind when mentioning artists and gay identity is Robert Mapplethorpe. A celebrated photographer known for his often divisive subject matter, his work ranged from portraits of socialites, statuesque figures of nudes, and scenes from underground BDSM gay scenes in New York. Constantly at the forefront of controversy, his work has sparked public debate about censorship and art funding, as well as the objectification of black men in the gay community for his solo exhibition *Black Males* and subsequent book *The Black Book*.

Regardless of the problematic nature of certain aspects of his work, Mapplethorpe was a seminal figure in the gay community and the arts from the 1970's until his death in 1989. He undeniably pushed the boundaries in art, and consequently in visual culture as the shift from a heteronormative male gaze gave way to a more inclusive take on eroticism. His death due to complications of HIV/AIDS is one of countless casualties that arguably resulted from the United States government's then disappointing and unsympathetic response to the epidemic. After his death, the [Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation](#) raised millions in funds for medical research of the infection.

Keith Haring

1958-1990



Keith Haring, *Pop Shop*, 1986. Keith Haring Foundation Photo by Tseng Kwong Chi, 1986, Muna Tseng Dance Projects, Inc., New York.

Another queer-identifying artist whose life was lost at the hand of HIV/AIDS, Keith Haring was an artist whose pop aesthetic and playful designs led him to international acclaim. His work wears down the white cube model of the contemporary gallery, with murals and sculptures that take up public spaces as well as his *Pop Shop* which sold his designs in the form of everyday commodity. While the shop was criticised by the art world elites, Haring defended it in saying that this was yet another way in which his work attempts to break down the barriers between high art and low art.

Proliferating ideas of sexual identity and gaining positive awareness for the struggles of being gay, Haring has been prominently noted as an influential figure in queer communities. In his later years, upon being diagnosed with HIV, Haring dedicated his work to combating the infection. He did so by establishing the [Keith Haring Foundation](#), which provided funding to research initiatives that were largely underfunded by an uncaring government, as well as outreach to targeted youth for the awareness of HIV/AIDS.

Oreet Ashery

Born 1966



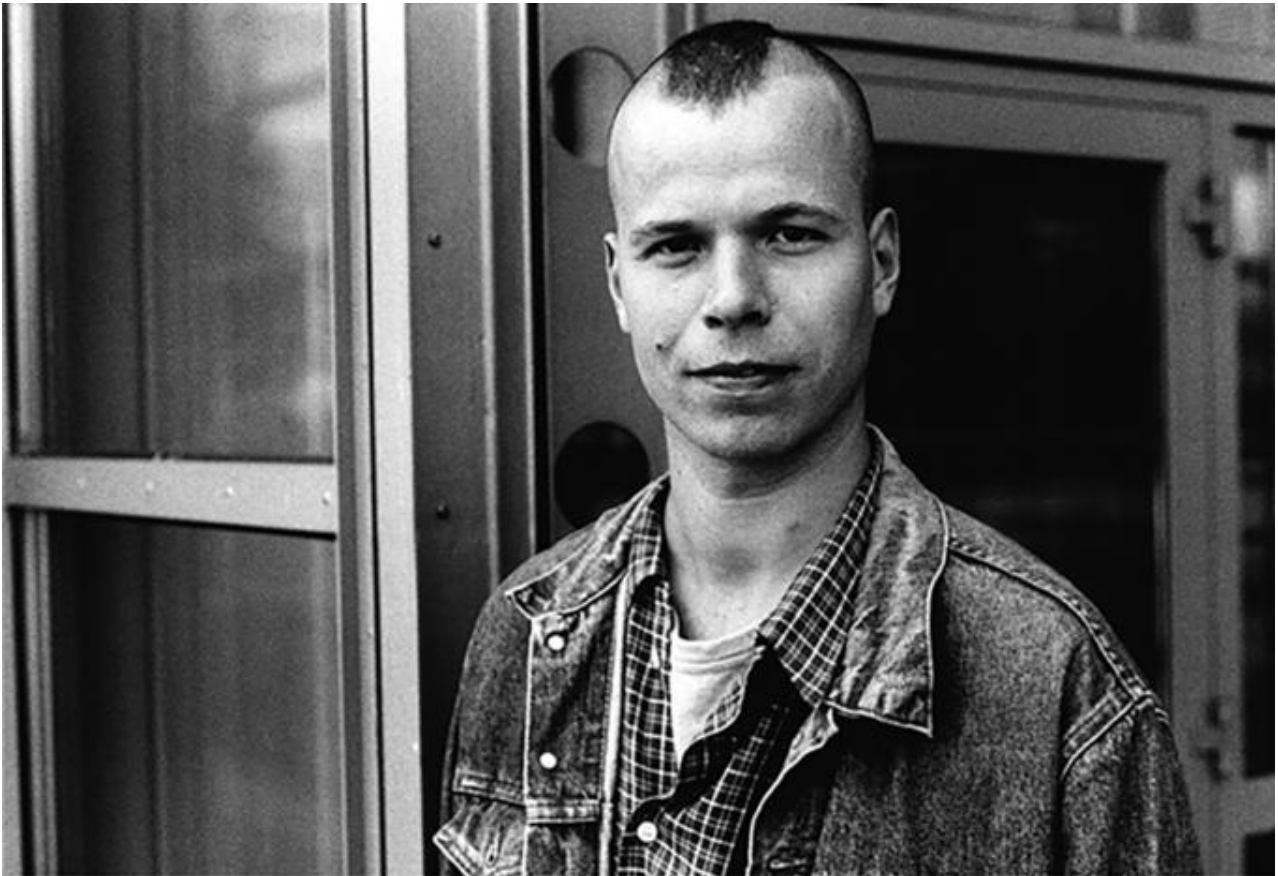
Oreet Ashery, *Hairoism*, 2011, 6-hour Durational performance and video.

London-based artist Oreet Ashery works with performance, film, installation, and a cohort of other media to produce critically acclaimed works that deal with gender relations, cultural identity, and more recently of death and the digital afterlife. Her previous work sees her playing the role of a male figure, sometimes as her alter ego Marcus Fisher, an orthodox Jewish man, sometimes as political leaders, as in her 2011 performance *Hairoism*. She worked in collaboration with several groups including the UK Lesbian & Gay Immigration Group for her 2014 performance *The World is Flooding* at Tate Modern. In an [interview](#) in 2016, Ashery explains that her art deals with biopolitics and queer feminism, the academic influence of which can be felt throughout her expansive repertoire of works.

Her web-series *Revisiting Genesis* explores digital afterlives, and is available to be viewed online.

Wolfgang Tillmans

Born 1968



Stuart Mentiply, *Portrait of Wolfgang Tillmans*. Wikimedia Commons.

The first photographer and non-British recipient of the Turner prize, Wolfgang Tillmans is known for his culture-shaping photography and prominent activism. From photographing the underground rave scenes of 90's Berlin to launching a poster campaign for the Remain vote during Brexit, Tillmans is an outspoken left-leaning artworld celebrity whose concern for social progress has often spilt over into his practice. He has been described as ground-breaking for his use of photographic form and abstraction, videos, and more. As a gay-identifying man living with HIV, he has addressed the embodiment of these experiences through his art, including his design of the AIDS memorial for the city of Munich, and his portraits and profiles of Russia's queer community after his participation in St. Petersburg's [Manifesta 10](#) in 2014.

Tillmans gives talks frequently in London and beyond, and his work is widely exhibited throughout the contemporary art world. You can catch his work in solo shows listed below:



EXHIBITION
Wolfgang Tillmans: Fragile
09 Jul 2018 – 30 Sep 2018

Johannesburg Art Gallery
Johannesburg, South Africa



EXHIBITION
Wolfgang Tillmans: What is different?
04 May 2018 – 16 Sep 2018

Carré d'Art - Musée d'art contemporain
Beaulieu, France

Zanele Muholi

Born 1972



Zanele Muholi, *Ntozakhe II, Parktown*, 2016, silver gelatin print. Courtesy of Stevenson, Cape Town/Johannesburg and Yancey Richardson, New York.

Hailing from South Africa and self-described as a visual activist, Zanele Muholi works in photo and video to create vivid imagery focusing on black queer embodiment, including that of black trans and intersex individuals. Their art has worked to shed light on issues such as corrective rape and HIV/AIDS, and has documented the journey of often excluded voices of black lesbians in South Africa. Muholi's most recent ongoing series, *Somnyama Ngonyama* (meaning *Hail, the Dark Lioness*) uses the artist's own body as a canvas, an act to reclaim their blackness. Ready-made objects are used to make commentary on specific events and alluding to acts of violence of recent years in South Africa, turning the everyday into the politically charged.

Kehinde Wiley

Born 1977



Kehinde Wiley, *Anderson Romualdo Cordeiro*, 2008, oil on canvas, 48" X 36".

The first black man to be commissioned to paint a presidential portrait, Kehinde Wiley creates portraits that are naturalistic with an air of regality, often taking inspiration from the old masters. Earlier this year saw the unveiling of his painting of former president Barack Obama, which was met with controversy as he received criticism for a painting exhibited in 2012 that referenced the Caravaggio painting *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, featuring a black woman having beheaded a white woman. Regardless of these images of violence, the portrayal of men alluding to homoerotic qualities and his use of historically oppressed bodies in reference to classic European aesthetics has propelled him to the upper echelon of contemporary painters.

Zach Blas

Born 1981



Zach Blas, *Jubilee 2033*, film still, 2018.

Technologically and aesthetically impressive and always with a wry humour, Zach Blas creates work in video and other mediums that play with an extensive range of ideas, including queer futurism, bodily surveillance, and the conflation of data and mysticism.

His short film *Jubilee 2033*, part of his work *Contra-Internet*, features characters including Alan Greenspan and Ayn Rand, the latter of which succumbs to seduction by Nootropix, a contra-sexual, contra internet prophet whose sexually ambiguous figure sports a squirting dildo as he dances to an instrumental rendition of Andrea Bocelli's *Con Te Partiro*. An accompanying text published on e-flux, also titled *Contra-Internet*, gives context to this work, which like all of Blas' other works is intellectually rigorous and well-researched.

Wu Tsang

Born 1982



Wu Tsang, *Duilian*, Film, 2015. Photo: Courtesy the artist, Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin.

A filmmaker, artist, and performer bending the use of mediums to rewrite overlooked histories, Wu Tsang documents queer spaces and their intimate stories, creates films about non-occidental queer stories, and uses performances as a way into bodily research. While her own embodiment of a trans woman of colour sets the tone of her work, the films and performances that Tsang produces touch on aspects of sociality, community practices, and movement. It is about finding and making images that are not simply reactionary or of a refusal, but to discover new ways of existing that might be outside of this paradigm.

Her past critically acclaimed works include the film *Duilian* (2015) featuring frequent collaborator Boychild, exploring the life and writing of Chinese feminist revolutionary Qin Lin with a focus on her queer relationship with calligrapher Wu Zhuying, and *Wildness* (2012), a deep insight into the delicately balanced ecosystem of protected environments that LA's Silver Platter trans bar experienced.

Cassils



Cassils, *Tiresias*, Performance Still from ANTI Festival, Kupio, Finland, 2011. Photo by Annie Sprinkle.

Using their body to do violence against ice, clay, and gender binaries, Cassils' performances create new realities of the gendered body. Their art addresses topics varying from the fluidity and instability of the body to the violence done to trans, non-binary and other queer peoples throughout history. Their performance has involved the gruelling discomfort of melting a torso-sized block of ice with nothing but body heat, the fervent attack of raw clay in between flashes of strobe, a solo fight scene against the radio sounds of trauma faced by governed bodies, and the durational performance of transforming their body as a sculpture through steroids. From an initial desire to be stronger for the sake of personal wellness to becoming a statement of strength in the face of systemic adversity, Cassils has pushed the boundaries of both gendered physicality and the medium of performance.

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For more events happening in and around London during Pride, be sure to check out the following:



EVENT

Fugitive Feminism

18 Jul 2018 – 22 Jul 2018

ICA (Institute of Contemporary Arts)
London, United Kingdom

TALK

'From A Place of Abundance': An Intergenerational Conversation

28 Jul 2018

Gasworks

London, United Kingdom



EXHIBITION

Everyone Is Divine

01 Jul 2018 – 14 Jul 2018

The Horse Hospital
London, United Kingdom



EXHIBITION

Queering the Art Classroom

02 Jul 2018 – 13 Jul 2018

Sutton House

London, United Kingdom



TALK

Queertopia

03 Jul 2018

Somerset House

London, United Kingdom



EXHIBITION

Evan Ifekoya

05 Jul 2018 – 02 Sep 2018

Gasworks

London, United Kingdom



ART TOUR

Pride, Power and Politics: LGBT+ tour

08 Jul 2018

London, United Kingdom

About the writer:

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