

Painted Gender

Bux Dhyne

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- ❖ Introduction
- ❖ The Role of Post War Consumerism
- ❖ The Women’s Work Series
- ❖ Homosexual Representation During the Post-War Era
- ❖ Gay Cultural References & Gender Signifiers in My Work
 - ◆ *LQBTGIA+ Connection*
 - ◆ *Gender Identities and External Influences*
 - ◆ *Makeup*
 - ◆ *The Art of Drag*
- ❖ Sexuality and the Role of Feminism
 - ◆ *Advertised Objectification*
 - ◆ *Sex as Power*
- ❖ Sexuality & Seduction— Feminine Power in My Work
- ❖ Marginalized Arts & Conclusion
- ❖ Image Appendix

Abstract:

This paper examines gender representation prepared by Bux Dhyne as part of their Master of Fine Art in Painting. It explores the history that built the concepts of what gender means today and discusses how these ideas are explored in their artwork. Specifically concerning post-WWII consumerism, gender roles in advertising and media, representation of the LGBTQIA community, and its connection to Feminism. This examination connects their extensive research on gender to their body of work that explores and aims to dismantle existing stereotypes.

Introduction

What if there were only ever two options, a reduction to complete binary thinking? What would be missing? We would lose so much color, diversity, and beauty that lies in those spaces in the middle. These are the world's nuances that bring it to life, and yet our societies have spent history creating a binary system for our genders. Through a litany of stereotypes, advertising, media, and naivety, society has tried to boil our gender identities down to two simple ideas, Male and Female, Boy and Girl (and in Western Society), Blue and Pink. My paintings and research are focused on unweaving the threads that created the convoluted yet shallow sense of gender that society has built since World War II¹. This idea presents an imbalanced gender hierarchy and the emphasis it plays in our acceptance of humanity.

I do not believe in the gender binary system and the constructs that it perpetuates; therefore, I identify as Genderqueer². The preconceived notion that your gender is decided by your external sexual organs' appearance is antiquated and has scientifically been proven to not be what determines our gender³. It only has an increased likelihood of what our role in reproduction will be, and it causes erasure for millions of people born with ambiguous genitalia that fall into the Intersex category⁴. To say there are only two genders is naïve and effacing. Gender is a performance, as gender theorist Judith Butler states in her book *Gender Trouble*: "*Masculine and feminine roles are not biologically fixed but socially constructed.*"⁵ Gender expression should not be limited to or defined by what our societies have deemed feminine or masculine. Those ideas are tropes, stereotypes, and fallacies that carry an obstructive set of rules and definitions that we have unwittingly subscribed to for over seven decades now.

In my graduate studies, I created a body of work that investigates the rigid gender roles defined in everyday American society, the sociological impact of these roles, how they have perpetuated, and how we can dismantle these beliefs and ideas. Through research regarding the cosmetic, advertising, and fashion industries, gender, sexuality, and feminist theory, I have created illustrative paintings that contain a variety of hidden narratives. They are meant to be representations of realistic queer bodies

¹ I specifically focused on post WWII because of the coinciding push for women to return to the home and rebuild the American family and the introduction of gendered toy lines. Although the division of genders has maybe always existed, there was a finite set of rules that became more rigid because of advertising and media are emerged at that time.

² Genderqueer: of, relating to, or being a person, whose gender identity cannot be categorized as solely male or female – (Miriam-Webster Dictionary)

³ Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviors and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time. (World Health Organization)

⁴ "Total number of people whose bodies differ from standard male or female one in 100 births" There are 15 different genetic identities that fall within the category of intersex. (<https://isna.org/>)

⁵ Butler, Judith P. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990

and gender expressions. I use an assortment of playful gender signifiers to provoke a more significant discussion about the human condition, asking questions like:

- ◆ Whose job is it to keep the house tidy, the kids fed, the grass mowed, the car fixed?
- ◆ Why are women held to such ridiculous beauty standards?
- ◆ Can we rebuild a non-binary world where all members of society are treated equally?

The objective of my work is meant to break down this socially architected binary gender system. I often mix imagery related to both male and female stereotypes by juxtaposing visual information and coaxing the viewer to reconsider what they *think* they know about gender and gender roles. Posing a “man” “dressed” as a “woman” doing work/behavior that society has assigned to a female role and vice versa makes the viewer ask questions about our beauty standards, roles in society, and how gender defines much of our behavioral positions. Society does not only expect women to do *all* the dirty housework; but to be beautiful, glamorous, and charming while they do it. The intent behind placing an alluring male in this role is to contextually compare our ideals with our representations and question why we have built such binary (blue and pink) thinking.

The Role of Post War Consumerism

Post-war consumerism and the golden age of advertising placed some of the most profound ideas about gender into motion. In 1947, the Frankfurt School director, Max Horkheimer, and colleague Theodor Adorno published their book “Dialectic of Enlightenment.” They presented the argument that totalitarianism, established during the enlightenment, was becoming prevalent in Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, and the democratized regions such as America. They wrote that the culture industry emerging had the same infectious and numbing results and that the goal was simply to make money. The culture industry focused on creating media that would please as many people as possible, as much of the time as possible. Horkheimer and Adorno theorized that this robbed people of their individualism and imaginative thoughts.⁶ The nuclear family was promoted as the ideal and dominant social model. This family dynamic is built on heteronormative, monogamous marriage with rigid gender roles.⁷ After the war, the women working in factories to cover for the deployed male population were encouraged to return to the homestead, so the returning veterans would have their jobs back and improve economic

⁶ Nicholas, Thomas. “The Frankfurt School: From a Failed Revolution to Critical Theory | Tom Nicholas - YouTube.” [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6g5_tuXwOUg&t=1302s). Accessed December 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6g5_tuXwOUg&t=1302s.

⁷ Aldrich, Robert. *Gay Life and Culture: A World History*. New York, NY: Universe, 2006.

conditions. The women were encouraged to raise children, clean the house, and bake cookies.⁸ The Stay-at-home mom stereotype was promoted; shows like “Leave it to Beaver” and “Father Knows Best” perpetuated a culture where there was an increased emphasis on restarting and maintaining a family. Print ads and television programming were notorious for posing glamorous housewives doing menial household tasks, often depicted with their hair and makeup done and, in a dress, with a frilly apron, pearls, a matching set of elegant high heels. These ads were often paired with a message that questioned her intelligence or competence. In 1987 Gloria Steinem, a prominent feminist, spoke about the way gender depictions pushed their way into everyday life:

“Most of us probably were raised by women when we were babies and little children. We saw women as loving, nurturing, powerful, visceral, and emotional because that’s the stage of life we were in. We probably saw men a little later in life in jobs outside the home. Therefore, we saw men as more appropriate to authority outside the home, less nurturing, less loving, but more rational. All this, incidentally, is a libel on men; men are just as loving and nurturing as women, but we had ingrained in our earliest upbringing this idea that women and men were different. We were taught that women were loving and nurturing and that their power was appropriate to childhood and the home, while men were rational and authoritative, and their power was appropriate outside the home. We were encouraged to divide ourselves up; if we were men, we thought we couldn’t be as nurturing and as loving as women, and, if we were women, we couldn’t be honored in authority outside the home as were men.”⁹

The American housewife idea took on a new prestige that included a high level of perceived perfection in both maintenances of home and appearance.

The Women’s Work Series

Although most Americans can reflect on the ads from that era and scoff, these ads and caricatures of American life continue to have a lasting impression on how we view the gender divide and what we consider ‘traditional and acceptable’ in the American family and has damaged representation(s) of female responsibility for many generations.

⁸ Meyerowitz, Joanne J. *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006. Books.Google.com.

⁹ Steinem, Gloria. “Humanism and the Second Wave of Feminism.” *TheHumanist.com*. March 09, 2018. Accessed February 17, 2019. <https://thehumanist.com/features/articles/humanism-and-the-second-wave-of-feminism>.

The first series I painted in graduate school was my Women's Work Series. Inspired by the post-war advertisements aforementioned and my connection to the queer community. This group of paintings looks at the tropes of what it means to be female in a heteronormative relationship and the continued pressure to uphold the perfect archetypal family's illusion. It is my experience that many middle-class girls are still raised to maintain these standards today. My upbringing presented one road to me, and that was to get married, have kids, keep the house clean, learn to cook, do art as a hobby, and be a 'good girl.' The pressures of maintaining a spotless home, being an involved parent, making decisions for your children over yourself, and all the other 'mom' tropes that came from the Post-War era still exist in a significant way. When I asked a group of my peers (that identify in various ways) what the term "women's work" meant to them, they responded with jobs like cooking, cleaning, and childrearing. I took inspiration from that list of replies and examples from vintage advertisements to focus on this set of paintings.

The women's work series featuring Ironing, Dishes, and Grocery Get'er (figures 1-3) look at gender norms and questions these ideals. The main character of each of the three paintings are portrayed by Drag Queens. By using drag queens as proxies in these paintings, I am making comments on a variety of issues; what is still perceived to be the woman's responsibilities in the home, the absurdity of hyper-femineity in these bygone advertisements, and the myth that drag is female impersonation (this idea will be discussed in more detail later in this text). In all three of the Women's Works paintings, the figures' facial expressions and clothing give essential context to the examined ideas. They are all seemingly overdressed for their tasks. Feathers, sequins, pearls, and perfect makeup are all details meant to call back to the advertising and television tropes mentioned. The facial expressions each emote a different attitude. The "come hither look" portrayed by the figure depicted within "Dishes," and the bad-ass sass portrayed in "Grocery Get'er," are meant to give further insight to the breadth of female personality and help eliminate the one-dimensional "mom" stereotype. These characters are intended to be recognizable and intriguing.

Using drag queens—a cultural adjunct in the queer community—menial tasks connect these themes to queer culture. While the stereotypical American family was being sold and advertised as a product in the early post-war period, homosexuality was merely an under-represented and suppressed subculture, and as a result, all western societies in the 1950s witnessed an increase in homophobia.¹⁰

¹⁰ Marcus, Eric. *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945-1990: An Oral History*. New York, NY: Harper perennial, 1993.

In addition to the many nods towards advertising in my works; the “Grocery Get’er” and “BreastFed (figure 4),” characters also take on classic mothering roles of keeping the household fed, as both breastfeeding and grocery shopping are jobs that typically fall to the female half of a relationship. Although there are seemingly physical barriers to a father breastfeeding, there are other options to make sure a child is fed and taken care of, hence the text featured in this piece: “Fed is Best.” This piece also opens a more extensive discussion around queer society raising children and the barriers and challenges that are faced by queer families.

Another significant theme in the “Women’s Work” paintings is the backgrounds. The floral patterns were chosen to mimic the busy floral wallpapers that were popular in the early 20th century. Perfecting the method for these paintings took trial and error which is evident when observing the images. “Ironing,” the first in the series, was painted on wrapping paper, but because it was not a reliable resource and I was not happy with the smooth texture, I moved on to adhering fabric to my surfaces and painting on that. The 100% cotton that “Dishes” and “Grocery Get’er” are painted on are attached to their surfaces using PVA glue and then are sealed with an additional medium (which also took some trial and error to perfect). Repurposing these fabrics traditionally used for quilting, a particularly feminine art form, adds another layer of interest to the gender signifiers and exploration done in these pieces.

Homosexual Representation during the Post-War Era

Gay culture and history are incredibly tumultuous topics. It is the subject of many scandals; its personal nature makes it all the more volatile. Although there is significant documentation that the same-sex relationship model has existed for the better part of modern history— religion, politics, and the medical field have worked to keep the community oppressed. And despite Freud’s opinion and other public fights for the legitimacy of homosexuality, it was indexed as a mental illness for thirty-five years. While women were being pushed into the kitchen, gay men¹¹ and their culture were being pushed into the closet.

In 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-Wisconsin) made an inflammatory claim that card-carrying Communists had infiltrated the U.S. State Department. John Peurifoy, the Deputy Undersecretary at the time, denied any proof that there were any actual Communists found but did confirm that several suspected “security risks” had been pushed out of their positions, among them

¹¹Lesbianism at this time has a completely different history and although it was not ‘out in the open’ women were allowed to have much closer relationships, and the companionship was viewed completely differently.

ninety-one homosexuals. This claim and rebuttal launched a series of debates, investigations, newspaper articles, and White House meetings that became known as the “Lavender Scare.”¹² Historically the Lavender Scare is skimmed over when the related attempted coup the Red Scare is discussed. More recent investigations into the history of these events by David K. Johnson show that at the time, the consensus was that homosexuality was considered a more significant threat than Communism by those making the accusations. Johnson attributes the gaps in historical accuracy to the vague language used in the events’ documentation and the fact that newspapers did not discuss sexual issues.

As a result of the oppression and secrecy of gay culture, countless men of the 50s and 60s discovered their first introduction to the gay community through magazines focused on the male physique. These Homoerotic periodicals of the 1950s and 60s had a significant hand at flipping the gay male stereotype from the dandy to “handy.” Appropriating many of the masculine stereotypes from heteronormative society, making them the subject of the male gaze for other men. This expression of male homosexuality in mainstream discourse quietly built new stereotypes and fetishes. Covered with confident musclemen, showing off attitude, a sassy wink, and a genuine smile, they were a way for a gay man to build solidarity in the virtually nonexistent LGBTQIA+ community.¹³ The “secret public” and “the gayness of these magazines was an open secret that everyone shared but no one articulated.”¹⁴ Erotic art became more than an imagined community; it was a form of mail-order activism.¹⁵ One of the more prolific artists of the time was Tom of Finland. This selection from the MOCA Pacific Design Center’s 2013 Exhibitions of Bob Mizer¹⁶ (Physic Pictorial Magazine) and Tom of Finland’s work, called The Tom-Tom Club, perfectly describes how Finland’s work transformed these stereotypes: “He produced thousands of images beginning in the 1940s, robbing straight homophobic culture of its most virile and masculine archetypes (bikers, hoodlums, lumberjacks, cops, cowboys, and sailors) and recasting them through deft skill and fantastic imagination as unapologetic, self-aware, and boastfully proud enthusiasts of gay sex (McGruder).” We have the work of such groups and individuals to thank for laying the groundwork that eventually led to the Stonewall riots of 1969 and the gay liberation movement that followed.

¹² Johnson, David K. *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government*. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

¹³ Johnson, David K. *Buying Gay: How Physique Entrepreneurs Sparked a Movement*. New York Columbia University Press, 2019.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Bob Mizer was the publisher and editor responsible for printing Tom of Finland’s first works in *Physique Pictorial Magazine*.

Gay Cultural References and Gender Signifiers in My Work

LGBTQIA+ Connection

Although my work directly speaks to gender issues, sexuality is closely related and has been forced into the same category of “otherness” known as the LGBTQIA+ Community. Modern studies on Gender and Sexuality will put the two topics on different scales, often with overlapping segments of the population. The variations are as wide as the rainbow, and labels and identities are ever evolving. It is for these reasons that I personally prefer the term queer. Freud’s theory of the subduction of homosexuality proves correct, and a counter-reaction or “reverse discourse” emerges. A reclamation of words like “queer” and “faggot,” became words of empowerment and validity.¹⁷

In many of my paintings, there are nods to gay culture, the most obvious examples being the eggplants and peaches in the grocery basket in Grocery Get'er. More examples include the White Claw beverage between the figure's legs in Lazy Boy (figure 5), whipped cream in Under the Hood (figure 6), and the various representations of facial and body hair in the paintings. Indeed, all of my models identify under the umbrella terms of gay or transgender and are a mix of assigned female at birth and assigned male at birth. The gender ambiguity is intentional and the overall central theme of my work.

Gender Identities and External Influences

It is standard in everyday Heteronormative society to assign gender before birth and even throw ‘gender reveal parties to celebrate having a boy or a girl. This “gender reveal,” typically based on ultrasound pictures, is then observed in one of two ways; with blue or pink. However, we are starting to experience a gender revolution and a push back on the binary gender system that aligns with Judith Butler’s gender theory in which she explains, “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender... identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.”¹⁸ That is to say, gender is determined by repetitive acts that have been assigned by society as being male or female. Gender is a cultural construct and is not predetermined by biology. More and more people come forward to identify as transgender or non-binary. In 2016 the American Journal of Public Health reported that 1 in every 250 adults in the U.S. identifies as transgender, and they estimate that the number will continue to rise (Meerwijk). More significant numbers mean more substantial audiences and more calls for action and equal rights.

¹⁷ Nicholas, Thomas. “The Frankfurt School: From a Failed Revolution to Critical Theory | Tom Nicholas - YouTube.” [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6g5_tuXwOUg&t=1302s). Accessed December 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6g5_tuXwOUg&t=1302s.

¹⁸ Butler, Judith P. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Kate Bornstein, a transgender actress, and writer states the following about fitting into heteronormative society: "All the categories of transgender find a common ground in that they break one or more of the rules of gender: what we have in common is we are gender outlaws, every one of us. To attempt to divide us into rigid categories ... is like trying to apply the laws of solids to the state of fluids: it's our fluidity that keeps us in touch with each other." "I would really like to be a member of a community, but until there's one that's based on the principle of constant change, the membership would involve more rules, and the rules exist around the subject of gender are [not] rules I want to obey."¹⁹

As someone who identifies with the non-binary movement and considers myself between genders, I appreciate the phrase "assigned female at birth" to describe my life experience. This statement draws attention to the fact that a doctor looked at the external set of genitalia I was born with and decided that I was female. From there, my family raised me to be a woman, and I was subject to the legacy of misrepresentation of gender and the gender divide.

Being born in 1980 did not mean I was immune to the gender divide imprinted on our society. It continued to be perpetuated through the 80s and was hyper-focused on our toys and television programming's being gendered. While the evening news was being dominated by the volatile stock market and the AIDS epidemic, children's; programming was focused on love, friendship, and acceptance. Through shows like Mr. Rogers, the Care Bears, and Rainbow Brite, we saw an influx of bright colors and rainbows. The Saturday Morning Cartoon block was filled with colorful characters representing various personality archetypes that kids could relate to and taught how we should accept each other as we are, be good friends, and spread love. However, despite all of the goodwill instilled, we also saw the gender divide perpetuated by these same cartoons and advertising. Shows and toys were divided and specifically geared toward one gender or another; if there was a boy version, the girl version wasn't far behind, and there were notably fewer female characters depicted in ensemble casts than male. A few examples that immediately come to mind are He-Man and She-Ra, My Buddy and Kid sister dolls, and the character of Smurfette on the Smurfs. Fortunately, the parts of this that stuck with me were the messaging and not misrepresenting genders and gender diversity.

Makeup

The paintings are loaded with a multitude of gendered visual signifiers. The most obvious and one of the main ligatures in my images is makeup. Although historically, makeup is not a gendered

¹⁹ Bornstein, Kate. *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of us*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

product. For example, in nineteenth-century England, Queen Victoria referred to makeup as vulgar and 'un-ladylike,' causing a backlash against its use, which lasted until the early twentieth century.²⁰ When makeup finally started to come back into fashion, it was marketed to women only, and the modern, gendered idea of makeup took its place in society. These thoughts on gender and identity have finally started to shift commercially, and we are beginning to see large corporations such as Cover Girl, Maybelline, ASOS, and other major makeup brands embracing the male makeup model.²¹ They are producing makeup lines that are designed for men, have more neutral packaging, or at a minimum, are not so polarized to the gender binary.²² There has been a big enough shift that journals such as Forbes, The Wall Street Journal, CNN, The Financial Times, and many others have started to cover the trend. The Financial Times reported that these men in makeup and the beauty products geared toward them have grown the male grooming industry to a whopping \$50 billion industry.²³

The Art of Drag

The makeup represented in the paintings is a specific style known colloquially as 'drag makeup.' Drag is often mis-defined as "female impersonation" when there are many forms of drag, and the overarching theme is self-expression. Drag quite often involves a mix of gender identities, although hyper-femininity is the most represented form. This hyper-female form is often inspired by the extreme representations in advertising and pop culture media. If we believe Judith Butler's gender theory, the idea of female impersonation is moot. You can only present what society has deemed a set of tropes that we label as feminine. The female identity, as we standardly see, is just as constructed as is the male gender. I think drag does not exist to continue the fallacies in female representation, but changing its presentation, location, and purpose is actually doing the opposite. It asks the viewer to consider these tropes in a new way and point out the absurdity of the hair, makeup, nails, dress, and heels that have been hyper-feminized and sexualized in female representation.

²⁰ Montell, Amanda. "From 4000 BCE to Today: The Fascinating History of Men and Makeup." Byrdie. June 04, 2018. Accessed November 04, 2018. <https://www.byrdie.com/history-makeup-gender>.

²¹ The Ellen Show. "First Male CoverGirl James Charles Meets Ellen." YouTube. November 14, 2016.

²² Jones, Vivien. "Makeup Is Changing the Meaning of Masculinity." CNN. March 16, 2018. Accessed November 06, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/14/health/makeup-skincare-male-masculinity-intl/index.html>.

²³ Whipp, Lindsay. "Made-up Men Reflect Changing \$50bn Male Grooming Industry." Financial Times. February 04, 2017. Accessed November 06, 2018. <https://www.ft.com/content/825e520c-c798-11e6-8f29-9445cac8966f>.

Sexuality and the Role of Feminism

Advertised Objectification

The post-war consumer society displayed a distinctive form of advanced capitalism that relied upon media, advertising, fashion, and the public image. As it continued to fold over on itself, it became more intense over time. Although these aspects of mass culture were first articulated by the Frankfurt school of thought developed in the 1930s, the fifties and sixties are the years that these concepts really gained momentum."²⁴ At this time, we see an increase in misogyny and the sexualization of women's bodies, especially with the premiere of the most popular men's magazine of all time, Playboy, in 1953.

With the increase of women's objectification, a new focus on body shape developed in the late '60s and early '70s. Women started to show more skin and wear less. A slim, athletic body type became increasingly desirable. These body ideals evolved from the silhouette that was created wearing corsets or other undergarments. Still, to keep that shape, as foundation and shapewear became less popular, women started to control their bodies with diet and exercise.²⁵ This aesthetic was exacerbated by modern breast implants beginning in 1962 and then the development of Liposuction and the "Tummy Tuck" in the late 1970s.²⁶ "[The] women's sense of liberation from the older constraints of fashion was countered by a new and sinister relationship to their bodies."²⁷

In Gail Faurschou's 1987 article *Fashion and the Cultural Logic of Postmodernity*, she states: "Postmodernity then is no longer an age in which bodies produce commodities, but where commodities produce bodies: bodies for aerobics, bodies for sports cars, bodies for vacations, bodies for Pepsi, for Coke, and of course, bodies for fashion—total bodies, a total look. The colonization and appropriation of the body as its own production-consumption machine in late capitalism is a fundamental theme of new socialization."²⁸

As postmodern philosophy and Feminism start to change the landscape in the sixties, we begin to see critical movements, including the women's and gay liberation movements. In 1963 Betty Friedan released her book "The Feminine Mystique"; women were urged to find their voice and start questioning the social structures and injustices that had let discrimination become commonplace. The book sparked Second Wave Feminism and the contemporary women's movement. They wanted more

²⁴ Nava, Mica. "Consumerism and Its Contradictions." *Cultural Studies* 1, no. 2 (1987): 204–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502388700490151>.

²⁵ Steele, Valerie. *The Corset: A Cultural History*. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2011.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Faurschou, Gail. "Fashion and the Cultural Logic of Postmodernity." *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* XI, no. 1-2 (1987): 66–82. (pdf)

rights, they wanted to be seen, they tried to have equality. Mary Tyler Moore caused a stir of her own on evening television, becoming known for her character Laura Petrie's appearances in pants. It causes controversy with the advertisers who were still pushing Christian Dior's New Look (which premiered in 1947 and is the common housedress with a full skirt, design specifically to encourage fabric sales). She wanted to represent the 'real' housewife. "No one was really wearing dresses at home anymore," she is quoted as saying. There was an increasing divide between the advertised world and reality that was starting to grow.

As gender portrayals in advertising have been examined extensively in the last five decades, it has been noted that there is somewhat of a culture lag. The genders/sexes for an extended time were depicted in advertising in more traditional roles. Women were presented in an inferior manner relative to their potential and capabilities, while the data indicated a shift towards more positive role portrayals.²⁹ "Changing role structure in the family and in the labor-force has brought significant variation in male and female roles and subsequently reflected in advertising. [As well] ...companies and the media are beginning to pay attention to a once largely ignored segment, the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender ... consumer."³⁰

Sex as Power

Although views on pornography, sex-work industries, and the sexualization of women's figures are controversial, I think it's an essential part of the conversation. Bunny Yeager states in her book [Pin-up Girls of the 1950s](#): "This book is a celebration of all the emancipated young women with beautiful faces and figures who posed for a time in the 1950s, just as I embarked on my exciting, lifetime career as a professional photographer."³¹ In a 2014 interview with XOJane.com, Bella Knox adds to this notion stating:

"We play around with roles and identities while we are working out issues that are long buried in our subconscious. I'm an ambitious young woman. I'm a student at Duke. I'm a slut that needs to be punished. Feminism means I can take ownership of what I enjoy sexually, and that sexuality does not have to determine anything else about me. Because Feminism is not a one size fits all movement."³²

²⁹ Nermin ALKAN, "New Trends in the Representation of Women in Contemporary Media Culture: A Critical Analysis of Three Women Empowering Advertising Campaigns," *Galatasaray Üniversitesi İletişim Dergisi* 0, no. 24 (October 27, 2016): 119–19, <https://doi.org/10.16878/gsuilet.258974>.

³⁰ Stacy Landreth Grau and Yorgos C. Zotos, "Gender Stereotypes in Advertising: A Review of Current Research," *International Journal of Advertising* 35, no. 5 (July 11, 2016): 761–70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2016.1203556>.

³¹ Yeager, Bunny. *Bunny Yeager's Pin-up Girls of the 1950s*. Atglen (PA): Schiffer Publ., 2002.

³² Trier-Bieniek, Adrienne M. *Feminist Theory, and Pop Culture*. Boston: Brill, 2019. Brill.com.

There are situations when the subject feels in control and finds power and freedom to explore these aspects of “female humanity.” In short, *Playboy* may not be as misogynistic as it inherently seems, there are two sides to every coin, and this one is no different.

It’s my personal belief that sex positivity is an increasingly essential conversation. When sex and sexuality are discussed in an open and accepting way, it develops more successful, balanced, healthier people. When we have a good grasp on our sexuality, as a whole, the less shaming our society does and the more resistance we see of rape culture and overtly misogynist advertising, we are starting to realize we can do better. My personal belief is that masturbation, pornography, sex, all these forbidden topics should not be taboo. It is a part of our human nature, and the more we can openly discuss and talk about sex and sexuality in safe spaces, the more that we find out that we are all trying to make it in our lives and in the world. We have more in common than we realize, even when it comes to sex.

Sexuality & Seduction— Feminine Power in My Work

Although all my paintings feature a mix of gender signifiers, they all feature femininity as the star; however, unlike mainstream advertising tropes, these figures have the power. All of the characters, whether examining the “Women’s Work” series or the new body of work, these ‘feminized’ characters are not the demure and powerless housewives; they are independent, intense, and slightly seductive in that power. The demeanor that I hope to portray in these paintings is unabashed confidence. Whether the figure is draped over a toilet, as in “Stalled Out (figure 7)” or relaxed on the couch with a White Claw as in “Lazy Boy,” these figures seem to be comfortable, bold, and self-reliant.

One of the more powerful paintings, loaded with imagery and mixed significance, is “Under the Hood.” This painting breaks the conventions that are mentioned prior and that are thematic throughout my work. It has the additional implications of the history of pinup models with cars and the inclusion of the whipped cream. The cultural references in this painting are vast and rapidly alternate between masculine and feminine more than any other painting that I’ve made so far. Common themes are repeated; large wig, drag makeup, and a cheeky expression; this time with added levels of masculine signifiers; facial hair, cover-all’s, and the implication that the figure is working on a car. However, when we examine the work being done on the car, to the viewer’s surprise, the figure is not working on the vehicle but indeed spraying a pile of whipped cream under the hood, which is absurd. The slightly phallic can shape and the emission of the cream are both signifiers loaded with sexual connotation. Whipped cream has been used in popular culture as a pleasure enhancement device and has commonly become recognized as a symbol of sexual arousal.

Finally, despite what my figures are wearing, I see them all as presenting more female than male. I believe this comes from the cultural ideas that girls can dress like boys, but boys cannot dress as girls. Given this societal rule, although many of the figures have facial hair, the addition of wig and makeup give these characters an overall feminine presence and power.

Marginalized Arts & Conclusion

The postmodern art world has allowed women, non-white, and homosexual artists to gain new authority. Race, ethnicity, and gender have become favored foundations for the production of art. Art started to change as figurative and narrative genres helped to advance the under-told stories of these groups. Furthermore, new art forms began to emerge and gain respect equal to traditional oil painting, such as photography, sculpture, installation art, video, and electronic-based media. These developments were crucial in the way gay and lesbian art took on its distinctive forms. The inclusiveness of contemporary art enabled artists who wanted to speak about gay and lesbian identities a place to do so. No doubt, the erotic drawings of Tom of Finland helped to crack these doors. Following significant protests and social upheavals in the 60s, opportunities arose to create and exhibit gay and lesbian art. Although frequently controversial with the general public, gay and lesbian art ultimately entered the mainstream of high culture.³³

As I now start to move into a more intimate look at other social issues in queer society, I feel my work continues to hold similar messages. The more recent series that includes "Stalled Out," "Under the Hood," and "Lazy Boy" maintains a mix of gender signifiers and continues to tear apart expectations. I plan to continue using a mixed media approach that moves beyond traditional oil painting and brings in unexpected elements such as fabric, glitter, sequins, and decoupage into my work—all crafting items that are traditionally feminine or related to women's hobbies.

Societally we have no business dividing the world into 'blue' or 'pink.'. I believe that art can bridge the uncomfortable gaps between understanding and action and the gap between the educated and uneducated. In a Kate Bornstein quote that sums up my feelings on introducing non-binary gender to a mass audience, Bornstein says, "*Traditional form permits an audience to experience non-traditional content in relative safety.*"³⁴ It is my intent that when my art is viewed, regardless of one's level of art education, each viewer can enjoy the art and relate to it. The audience should consider their life and the

³³ Axsom, Richard. "Contemporary Art." *GLBTQ*, 2002. http://www.glbqtarchive.com/arts/contemp_art_A.pdf.

³⁴ Bornstein, Kate. *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of us*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

lives of their fellow humans profoundly. Art is the bridge between our mental world and our physical one. It's how we can communicate our pain without spreading it. It's how we learn we are not alone. It's how we move on and up.

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Image Appendix



Figure 1:
Bux Dhyne
Women's Work: Ironing
2018



17 Figure 2:
Bux Dhyne
Women's Work: Dishes
2018



Figure 3:
Bux Dhyne
Women's Work: Grocery Get'er
2019
Oil & Glitter on Cotton Fabric
36" x 60"



Figure 4:
Bux Dhyne
BreastFed
2019
Acrylic, Oil & Glitter on Cotton Fabric
64" x 40"



Figure 5:
Bux Dhyne
Lazy Boy
2021
Mixed Media
34" x 64"



Figure 6:
Bux Dhyne
Under the Hood
2021
Mixed Media
34" x 64"



Figure 7:
Bux Dhyne
Stalled Out
2020
Mixed Media
34" x 64"