

MANCHESTER
1824

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MANCHESTER MUSEUM

Collection Bites: LGBTQ+ History Month

Whose stories do museums tell?

Museums, Queer Theory and Belonging

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Whose stories do museums tell?

- Why is representation important for LGBTQ+ people?
- What stories do museums tell?
- How are things changing?
- What do we mean by 'Queering'?
- What does it mean to belong?

Why is representation important for LGBTQ+ people?

- Importance of representation
- Visibility of LGBTQ+ people and stories is an important part of constructing identity and finding validation
- Exclusion of LGBTQ+ from the narratives in which objects are displayed
- Museum displays privilege world views that do not represent diversity



What stories do museums tell?

- Museums are perfectly placed to tell **all** our stories
- Choices are made by collectors, curators and directors
- Stories form our 'museum-habit'
- Places for the physical representation of social and political ideas, especially empire building
- Public museums have always been places of education
- Museums formed part of the cultural production of gender
- Presentation of humans and animals legitimised heteronormativity and binary gender as 'natural'

How are things changing?

- Museums are starting to reflect on their own histories
- Move towards cultural institutions taking ownership of how they amassed and have displayed collections
- Change is a process and the direction not always straightforward
- For inclusion, museums need to understand how they have excluded people.
- Queering the Museum



What do we mean by 'Queering'?

- 'Queer' is the 'Q' in LGBTQ - reclaimed but for some it still a site of trauma
- 'Queering' is an important theoretical concept
- Challenges heteronormative assumptions, revealing socially constructed nature of gender norms
- Modern identity has been considered in terms of binary
- This also extends to ethnicity, race and class
- 'Queering' is a political act
- Disruptive framework to highlight difference and multiple ways of representing people and things
- Queer theory challenges the binary view of natural / socially and culturally constructed
- Reveals the ways in which identity is acquired through performance
- Queering the museum brings multiple voices and stories, which are all valued equally
- Creating a safe space where everyone feels like they are seen, their voice is heard and that they belong



What does it mean to belong?

- Belonging is a part of the human condition, with kinship groupings since Upper Palaeolithic
- LGBTQ+ people have been made to feel like they do not belong, that their bodies and experiences are 'unnatural'
- Finding queer people and their stories in the collection brings validity to experience
- Many representations of difference in sexuality and gender identity perpetuate unhelpful models of patriarchy, suppression and 'Otherness'
- Recognition that queerness is not a new phenomenon
- Important that it is not queerness that is on display
- Queering the Museum should bring multiple different voices and interpretations
- Presenting objects through different LGBTQ+ experiences is a powerful tool to start deconstructing privilege that has been afforded to one story over another



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