

Photography Personal Study (Liam Moore)

Introduction

The focus of this essay is to explore photographers who have documented the LGBTQ community in their work and to discuss these artists, Mainstream media often depicts marginalised communities in a negative context whereas these artists (Nan Goldin, Matt Lambert) humanized them and showed the realities, struggles, and the successes.

The Ballad of Sexual Dependency – Nan Goldin

One Month After Being Battered (1984)



This self-portrait (a segment from Goldin's series "The Ballad of Sexual Dependency" titled "Nan One Month After Being Battered, 1984") captures the aftermath of the abuse Goldin experienced from her former boyfriend. The image shows Nan Goldin, positioned in the middle of the frame, looking blankly into the camera, with bruises plastered over her eyes. The title notes this was one month after the event, showing the severity and slow healing of her injuries. The flash used in the photograph creates an almost 'deer in headlights' feeling. She is wearing a bright red lipstick which matches the redness of her eye, a detail that makes the image feel deliberate rather than a casual snapshot. It is also a juxtaposition for delicate femininity and the savagery of violence. In the film, Goldin tells the story of a night in a hotel room where she succumbed to abuse at the hand of her ex-boyfriend.

Goldin describes the image as the 'central image' of the series, making the series feel like a powerful and personal experience. For her, taking the picture was not a glamorisation of violence but a refusal to be ashamed by it. The photo is an honest and raw depiction of her life, something that runs through the entire series of photographs. It is a powerful statement about domestic abuse, as Goldin chose to share a deeply personal experience. It challenges viewers to face the realities of violence in relationships that are often kept hidden and made taboo to talk about.

The photograph broke boundaries in art and documentary photography by showing intimate, and raw moments of life and love.

Misty and Jimmy Paulette in a Taxi, NYC (1991)



The two subjects, Misty and Jimmy Paulette, are sat in the back of a taxi facing the camera. The tight frame creates a sense of intimacy, placing the viewer in the shared space with the drag queens. Both of the queens stare directly at the lens with blank expressions. Goldin used a flash, which illuminates the subjects faces and highlights the textures of their makeup, hair, and clothing. The light from the city outside the windows created a cool toned background with pops of yellow where taxis are parked on the road.

The camera picks up a range of textures: the smooth vinyl and the leather of the taxi seats, the powerful makeup and the grand hair. The textures add to the images authenticity and removes itself from traditional airbrushed glamour shots.

At the start of Goldin's career, she became captivated by men in drag. She said she understands their identities and a "third gender" that escaped the narrow confines of men and women. Her photographs are meant to portray her friends how she sees them rather than the "true" person underneath. Her photography was revolutionary for its time as she documented the lives of her LGBTQ+ friends with empathy, love, and respect. Unlike the media at the time, she treated them as people and showed the raw reality of these people and humanised them.

By making the private lives of a marginalized community public, Goldin made a political statement. The decision to document her friends as they lived and died often from AIDS or drug overdoses, was a way to make sure they would not be forgotten.

“My work was all about homage, because I thought they were the most beautiful people I’ve ever met” – Nan Goldin

“My pictures were always misunderstood as having a sexual theme.” – Nan Goldin

“Every time I go through something scary, traumatic, I survive by taking pictures.” – Nan Goldin

‘There is a misunderstanding that my work is about marginalized people. But we were never marginalized, because we were the world. We didn't care what straight people thought of us.’ – Nan Goldin

Matt Lambert – ‘If You Can Reach My Heart, You Can Keep It’



This photograph is titled ‘Sophie’ from the book ‘If You Can Reach My Heart, You Can Keep It’. The frame is positioned close to Sophie’s face showing texture and detail, giving this image a raw and intimate feeling, something that Lambert aims to achieve in all of his work. The big lashes, long nails, full glam, and big hair create a dramatic portrayal of femininity, playing with the expression of gender. Sophie is licking her lips whilst looking directly into the camera, creating an erotic and playful feeling. The image also possesses an archival feel with a nostalgic colour palette.

The book ‘If You Can Reach My Heart, You Can Keep It’ serves as a log and a “love letter” to a decade of Matt Lamerts work. The work is a rich archive that compiles of unreleased set photography, film stills, behind the scenes, and more. It continues lambert’s exploration of queer history, identity, sexuality, and blurring the boundaries between sex, theatre, and art. The books art direction draws inspiration from vintage queer adult magazines and VHS tapes of the 1980s and 1990s. The book features many of Lamberts long time collaborators and figures from the art, porn, and fashion worlds, including musician Christeene, designer Michele Lamy,

fashion designer Rick Owens, Performance artist Taco Guillen, Sean Ford, Joey Mills, and The Cock Destroyers.

“I think the photography I do really mimics the film making process” – Matt Lambert

Conclusion

Photographers such as Nan Goldin and Matt Lamber have utilised their cameras not to observe the LGBTQ+ community, but to document the reality of it. By capturing moments of joy, struggle, vulnerability, and intimacy, these artists have subverted the often negative or stereotypical views found in mainstream media.

Overall, their work goes beyond simple representation, it is an act of humanisation and historical preservation. Through their images, these two artists have not only provided a safe space for the LGBTQ+ community but also offered the world a realistic and empathetic glimpse into the world of this marginalised community.