

Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture

David C. Ward

Jonathan D. Katz

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Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture, a survey of portrait art by and about lesbian and gay artists, ably addresses questions of disclosure and revelation in the work of twentieth-century artists. The book was published to accompany the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery exhibit of the same name (October 2010 to February 2011); besides the visual delight of seeing works by some of this country's most acclaimed artists, the exhibit and book unveil and decode the contributions of lesbian and gay artists to American modernism, offering a new way of thinking about American portraiture of the past hundred years.

One of the ways in which a society invalidates the experience, and even the lives, of its marginalized members is by obscuring or destroying the history and stories of those lives. Jonathan D. Katz and David C. Ward show how American society has attempted to do so with the history and stories of the lesbian and gay community, creating a situation in which its members are seen as "other," and demonized for their difference. Especially moving is the Annie Leibovitz photographic portrait of Ellen DeGeneres, a study at once conflicted and beautiful in its "carnival of visual signs." Coming out, said DeGeneres, was a freeing experience, "because people can't hurt me anymore."

Authors Katz and Ward bring these stories to light and return them to the history of American art and culture, thus enriching it by calling it to recognize, if not yet wholly embrace, all of its members. They say of Walt Whitman in his time that, "It was Whitman's essence as a gay man that allowed him to ask American democracy to fulfill its promise." This important and compelling work demands the same of our country today. It goes a long way toward restoring the history, narrative, and legacy of artists who, in spite of being marginalized, have made lasting contributions to American art and culture.

Katz founded and directed the Larry Kramer Initiative for Lesbian and Gay Studies at Yale University and is director of the Visual Studies doctoral program at SUNY–Buffalo. Ward is a historian at the National Portrait Gallery, and the author of *Charles Willson Peale: Art and Selfhood in the Early Republic*. He is also a poet and critic.

KRISTINE MORRIS (November / December 2010)

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