

## Queering the Museum

How do queering strategies in museums change the representation of queer people?



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## Introduction

Multiple museums in Amsterdam have been busy with *Queering their Collections*. The movement with the same name, Queering the Collections, has voiced the concern that museums are too heteronormative and argues that museums should include more queer stories.<sup>1</sup> During Euro Pride 2016 in Amsterdam, Queering the Collections worked together with multiple museums to put extra effort in placing queer subjects in the spotlight. The various strategies they used for this aim have had different effects on the representation of queer people. Representations convey deeper meaning in several ways, such as through words, imagery, and emotional associations (Hall, Evans & Nixon, 2013, p.xix). The representation of a group of people can change wider perceptions of that group and influence acceptance levels. With queer people being a minority that experiences structural discrimination it is necessary to analyze factors that may positively influence the way queer people are represented. This thesis seeks to address this need by examining how different queering strategies in museums change the way queer people are represented to visitors.

The term queer has changed radically from its former meaning; while it was previously used as pejorative slang for homosexuals, it has been reclaimed as a powerful “umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications” (Jagose, 1996). Beside being a term of identity, the term “queer” has evolved to inform the theoretical model of “queer theory,” which seeks to transgress, transcend, and problematize the distinctions that come with “lesbian and gay” or “gay and lesbian” studies (De Lauretis, 1991, p.v). With the term “queer,” this model attempts to go beyond binary conceptions of gender, sexes, and sexuality. It is based on the feminist idea of the social construction of gender and seeks to disrupt gendered assumptions assigned by society. Both definitions of “queer” are used in this thesis. One application is to describe people who identify as non-heterosexual, non-cisgendered, or both, and thus have marginalized sexual and gender identities. The other use of the term “queer” is in the verbal sense of “queering,” which describes the practice of contesting stable sexes, genders, and sexualities. “Queering” is the location and exploitation of incoherencies in those three terms in order to destabilize heterosexuality (Jagose, 1996). In this thesis, the practice of queering is applied to museums, and more specifically to their

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ihlia.nl/queering/>

collections. Artifacts carry certain meanings and “truths,” which can be queered. As will be shown, queering objects can be done in a variety of ways. However, the main meaning of queering in this text is to uncover meanings and information about artifacts that do not perpetuate conservative ideas, but rather present an artifact in a way that contests heteronormative ideas about sexes, gender, and sexuality.

The importance of queering museums stems from a common tendency to view museums as places that provide truthful information about history, culture, science, and other fields. However, museums are not objective places that simply deliver facts. Instead, museums are institutions that are influenced by people who make subjective decisions about “mission statements, architecture, financial matters, acquisitions, cataloguing, exhibition display, wall texts, educational programming, repatriation requests, community relations, conservation, web design, security and reproduction” (Marstine, 2008, p. 2). Queer people are often underrepresented (Smith, 2005) and may be falsely represented through stereotypes, both positive and negative (Tsai, 2010). As a result, museums are representing only a part of society. Considering the lack of complete and diverse LGBT stories in many heritage institutions and the implicitly heteronormative tendencies of museums (Mills, 2006), it is crucial to find ways in which museums can be more inclusive. Heteronormativity reestablishes social acceptance of binary ideas about gender and sexuality and opposes the acceptance of queer people and other marginalized groups (Yep, 2003, p.18). Due to their influence on perceptions of history and culture, museums have a social responsibility to represent society and marginalized groups in a way that promotes social acceptance for these groups. Chapter 1 will elaborate more on the positive effects of inclusion for queer people. Queering a museum collection challenges heteronormativity and promotes the inclusion of queer people in the social imaginary. This can be done in a multitude of ways, each of which brings its own benefits and drawbacks. Author, reader in *Medieval Art*, and director of LGBTQ Research Network, Robert Mills (2008) describes museums as normalizing, meaning-making entities and concludes that norms in museums must be contested by including queer history. However, this requires awareness of the risk of normalizing queer history. Queering has the potential to destabilize ideas surrounding sex, gender, and sexuality, but it loses this power if it is normalized. The acceptance of queer people through their inclusion in museums is not without its dangers. One of these dangers is the potential for exclusion. It is possible that focusing on gender and sexuality may cause stories to be simplified, which could result in ignorance of the complexity of intersectional axes of identity, such as race, class, and ability. This could perpetuate exclusion. Focusing on and

accepting only homonormative queer people (i.e. those who uphold such heteronormative ideals as monogamy, marriage, and gender roles) reinforces the oppression and discrimination of non-homonormative queer people, who are often trans, non-binary, and from non-Western cultures. Meanwhile, society claims that it is becoming more inclusive and accepting. The debate around homonationalism is another example of excluding certain groups while including others. Queer theorist Jasbir K. Puar (2007) described this term in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, explaining that inclusion of homosexual citizens is tied to nationalism through the exclusion of racial and class “others.” This is a misguided form of queer acceptance which ignores the need for representation of many non-Western and working-class queer people. Museums must be aware of this and strive for as much intersectionality as possible by not focusing only on white, middle-class, Western queer people. This requires a careful approach, because as James H. Sanders (2007) argues, queering a museum is not just about putting marginalized sexual subjects into the focus of the curator. Rather, the aim of queering a museum collection should be:

to disrupt those socio-sexual assumptions that have been thoughtlessly reenacted. Through this repeated practice of queerly (un) naming and opening history and artworks to multiple readings, one may reinvest in the museum as an institution and its objects' ongoing (re)production, relevancy and vitality. (Sanders 2007, p.3)

The power of the museum must be used to disrupt heteronormativity, fight exclusion, and ultimately stop the reproduction of harmful socio-sexual assumptions.

Establishing the need for an inclusive museum is a good first step, but realizing it is quite difficult. Each strategy yields different results and affects how visitors perceive certain groups of people. In this thesis, I will analyze three queering strategies and the effects they have on representations of queer people. In Chapter 1, I will consider how the museum as an institution influences visitors, particularly in terms of the power relations it produces and reproduces in art spaces and the effects these have on visitors. This analysis argues that museums are places that have the social responsibility to accurately represent society.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 offer case studies of three museums: the Museum of Bags and Purses, the Amsterdam Museum, and the Rijksmuseum, respectively. Each museum uses a different queering strategy to make their collection more representative of queer people. These strategies include highlighting the sexual orientation of artists, setting up a queer exhibition, and using a queer perspective as an interpretation tool. In these chapters, I will

examine how each strategy influences the representation of queer people and how it impacts the queer community.

This thesis employs critical discourse analysis (Frost and Elichaooff, 2013, p.49) to explore queering strategies and their functionality. It incorporates discourse analysis in order to observe cultural and societal influences on subjective experiences (Frost and Elichaooff, 2013, p.46). Critical discourse analysis requires analysis at the level of discursive practice, including the investigation of linguistic construction and the systematic study of social practice (Jørgensen, Marianne and Phillips, 2002, p. 167). Michel Foucault's theoretical framework on discourse, knowledge, and power is especially relevant to representational practices and offers the possibility to analyze how power structures within a museum and society influence the representation of queer people. This requires consideration of the discourses and discursive formations operating in these museums. Foucault's understanding of discourse is not purely linguistic; it is about language (what one says) and practice (what one does – for example, how ideas are used to regulate the conduct of others) (Hall, Evans & Nixon, 2013, p.29). All statements are contextualized, and these contexts influence knowledge production. A discourse is necessary to speak meaningfully about a topic. Rather than being just one statement, a discourse is seen through a variety of texts, forms of conduct, and institutional sites (Hall, Evans & Nixon, 2013, p.29). Nothing meaningful can exist outside of discourse because it is discourse itself that instills meaning. These strategies provided by the museum are giving the artifacts a new context and they have a different they convey knowledge in. To analyze the strategies this thesis will analyze how the texts that are accompanying the artifacts is changing the representation of queer people. The analysis is theory based and that means that the assumed effect of the strategies on representation is supported by research and literature. The main things that will be analyzed are the texts that come with the queer tours that are provided by the museum. Each museum has made a queer audio tour were these strategies can be found, these audio tours are one the multimedia platform izi.TRAVEL with an exception for the Amsterdam Museum, they have a part of the tour on the platforms and the other part is on their own website<sup>2</sup>. Besides this other parts that came with the strategies, like weekly meetings at the Amsterdam Museum, will also be analyzed. Using queer theory and theory about representation this thesis will research the kind of language that is used, the content of the stories and the context the artifacts are placed in by this strategy. This thesis

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<sup>2</sup> <http://hart.amsterdammuseum.nl/nl/page/51989>

will analyze the discourses present within museums, evaluate how queering strategies change these discourses, and determine the effects of these representations on queer people.

## Chapter 1: Museum and Power

### 1.1 Museology

New museology deals with questions about the contextual meaning of museum objects and how visitors perceive museums (Macdonald, 2011, p.2). It also considers the representational power of museums and how they can use this power to influence the general public. For example, the deconstruction of exhibitions is part of showing the contextualization that takes place in museums and shows certain knowledge is privileged above others (Macdonald, 2011, p.3). The museum is an institute with implicit power and assumptions, the effects of which can be positive and negative. The use of power by a museum needs to be questioned and challenged in order to ensure some groups are not privileged above others. The critiques of new museology are incorporated in the queer strategies used by museums. They are attempts to have a positive effect on representation of queer people and the inclusiveness of museums. Before analyzing the strategies using the case studies, it is necessary to evaluate the general influence of museums on their visitors.

Museums have a lot of power, and all individuals who work with them should be aware of this power. The medium and message are not separate, and the museum itself largely determines the messages and objects it presents (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, p.15). When art is displayed in a museum, its influence on society intensifies because art is taken more seriously when it is located in a museum. The type and reputation of a museum plays a key role in the perceived value of art. Art in a high-end museum will be perceived as high-end itself. Stephen E. Weil, a legal expert in the arts and a museum official, wrote about how museums were once considered superior institutions and were used to teach the “inferiors.” However, this is now slowly changing (1997, p.257). Weil envisioned a change that entails that the public would become the superior entity and make the decisions about the uses of museums (1997, p.260). This change is already visible in some ways and will be discussed in the case studies in this thesis.

Another change in museums is the social change and with that the museological paradigms (Beier-de Haan, 2006, p.186). Museums and history are “intimately intertwined” (Beier-de Haan, 2006, p.186) and the switch in historical interest is also seen in museums. Museums and history are becoming less conventional by following the social changes instead of holding on to the historically given position of the museum. International history has made

a switch in focus, since the 1970s it has switched toward cultural and micro-history. The context and emotions tied with and artifacts have become more important and inspiration, empathy, and understanding have become sources of scientific analysis (Beier-de Haan, 2006, p.187). More often you can find autobiographical stories in the museums besides just historical objects. This switch has also raised questions about inclusiveness and representation.

Museums privileged certain information above others and are not inclusive enough. Big parts of society are not or hardly represented by most museums, like queer people. Museums have a social responsibility towards society and marginalized groups to represent them. The representation of a group of people in a museum can influence the way this group is perceived by society. This is due to museums being normalizing institutes (Mills, 2008). Dennis Atkinson (2012), professor and writer of multiple books about art, writes about the reforming power of the museum over existing frameworks and to ability it has to create new knowledges. This means that if certain groups are more represented in museums and their history and culture appear to be more important in museums this will affect the general idea society has of these groups of people. On the other side this also means that museums have the power to change these ideas people have of certain groups and ideas these groups have about themselves. Three aspects where the power of the museum can be observed and that will be discussed in this chapter are education, framing, and communities. These are also going to be used as tools to analyze the strategies in the coming chapters.

## 1.2 Education

Museums have certain social responsibilities because of the knowledge and norms they produce. Museums influence perceptions of art, history, and culture and shape common assumptions about them (Marstine, 2006, p. 1). Most people are unaware of this and perceive museums as institutions that display the truth. The educational purpose of museums has become more important (Hein, 2006, p.342), as schools take children to museums to see examples of the truths they have learned in class (Marstine, 2006, p. 2-4). This results in an early understanding among children that museums present objective truths. As there is no such thing as an objective truth, museums should make their visitors aware of this fact. Audiences must realize that all stories are biased and that there is always another perspective that is being left out.

Philosopher, psychologist and education reformer John Dewey wrote about education being a social function, and that a society that wants to change have different educational methods than a conservative society (2004, p.85). Dewey believed in participatory democracy, it entails that people must together build communities by participating in political, social and cultural life that allow every one to get the opportunities and resources to fulfill their potential (Westbrook, 1993, p.xv). Education thus has the possibility to make a more democratic and improved society.

The practical execution of this educational aspect in the museum can be different in every museum. There are different ways to set up an exhibition where the educational part attempts to give the visitors to form their own understanding of what they see, for example; allowing visitors to leave their own comments or labels with an artifact, asking provocative questions, or giving visitors multiple interpretations with an artifact (Hein, 2006, p.347). These approaches all attempt to make people think about what they encounter instead of blatantly assuming what they see and read to be true. It can make people rethink the assumptions they have about people or societies, it can question the stereotypes they have and it can allow other voices to be heard besides the curator. The three strategies in this thesis are educational strategies about the queer scene and might lead to museums being more democratic.

### 1.3 Framing

How objects in museums are framed depends on many factors, such as the type of museum, other objects there, information plates, and audio tours. Framing places objects in certain “frames” that “provide an ideologically based narrative context” (Marstine, 2006, p. 4). Framing consciously and unconsciously influences a visitor’s perception of an object. It is a way to normalize certain thing while excluding others, this happens in society and in museums. By changing the frames in a museum is might make people think and realize how these frames are subjective and other perspectives are just as relevant as the ones they already know.

Framing also informs how people are represented. People ascribe meaning to “things” that do not have fixed meanings in themselves as a way of better understanding the world (Hall, Evans & Nixon, 2013, p.xix). For example, a long rectangular table is not in itself a place for having dinner, but social context has established that association. The way in which an object is represented gives that object meaning, and culture guides interpretations of these

meanings (Hall, Evans & Nixon, 2013, p.xix). Objects displayed in museums are no different in that they produce meaning about the things they represent (Hall, Evans & Nixon, 2013, p.xxi). Museums are meant to represent the culture and history of a society, but this purpose has not yet been fully achieved, as some groups are still being excluded. Because representation is about “given” meaning, it is not fixed and therefore can be changed. Museums can place objects in different contexts or expand their collections to show a more inclusive side of society.

#### 1.4 Communities

Museums are redefining themselves from “disciplinary spaces of academic history” to “places of memory, exemplifying the postmodern shift from authoritative master discourses to the horizontal, practice-related notions of memory, place, and community” (Andermann & Arnold-de Simone, 2012, p.3). Memory and community are becoming more important, both the way communities are perceived by outsiders and the relationships within the communities.

The museum can have an influential role in community building. Museums are no longer just for the elite, they belong to communities as well. New groups coming to the museum will result in new questions for the museum about what they collect, what they display, what they mean to the community, and what the fundamental role of the museum is (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, p.132). Representation of a community in museums is important for the education of visitors that do not belong to the community but also for those that do.

A museum can be a place where people can commemorate their lost communities, so after losing a place to come together they have a new place where they can rebuild what they have lost. It can function as a new space for a community to come together, and can even be part of rebuilding a community (Crooke, 2006, p.175). Museums have been recognized as institutions that can help with problems concerning social exclusion and have a positive effect on community participation (Crook, 2006, p.181). Museums can be places of learning that “empower users, celebrate and reflect diversity, forge new partnerships, and maximize the learning potential of their collections” (Crook, 2006, p.181). Museums can thus empower communities and bring them together to result in positive relationships among community members.

## 1.5 Summary

This thesis is concerned with the representation of queer people in museums and what the effects are of certain strategies. Representing marginalized groups can be done in different way and it can affect different aspects of society. In this chapter it was set out that museums have a social responsibility that comes with the normalizing power they have. What is displayed in museums is perceived to be the norm and becoming more socially and culturally aware of how some groups in society are not represented in museums confirms the idea that their history and culture is not perceived to be as important as the heteronormative one that is privileged now.

In each strategy this thesis will analyze how the power of the museum as an institute plays a role. This mean looking at the educational aspect of the strategies and how and what kind of knowledge they generate about queer people and how this could potentially change society's general perspective of queer people. Framing will also be taken into consideration when analyzing the effect of the strategies on representation, to analyze how these strategies give artifacts a different frame and context and therefore a different meaning. The representation of queer people not only effects the knowledge and perspective of non-queer people, but it can also effect the community itself. It can have a positive effect on the members of the community and can build positive relations between them.

In the following chapters I will be looking at the Museum of Bags and Purses, the Amsterdam Museum, and the Rijksmuseum. The used different queering strategies and each has its own effect on all the aspects that are influences by the power of museum. These aspects like education, framing and communities are used as tools to reflect on the impacts these strategies have on representation.

## Chapter 2: Sexual Orientation of the Artist

This chapter examines how the act of queering influences representations of queer people in the Museum of Bags and Purses. This museum has used the strategy of highlighting the sexual orientation of queer artists. This chapter analyzes the effect of this queering strategy in regards to the museum as an influential institute where role models can have a positive effect on queer identity.

### 2.1 The Strategy

Museums are often divided in a permanent collections and temporary exhibitions. The strategy of highlighting the sexual orientation of artists can be applied to both. The goal of this strategy is for the museum to increase the prominence of artifacts that are made, designed, or crafted by queer people. This means that the artifacts themselves are not the most important aspect of this strategy. Rather, it shows visitors that queer people are important in the creation of culture, history, science, and other fields. Queer people are in every layer of society, even though it might not always be visible. For queer visitors, it can be empowering to see successful queer people who can serve as role models. Studies have shown that female role models have a positive impact on women because they expect more gender-related obstacles, especially stereotypes, and these role models show that it is still possible to achieve success (Lockwood, 2006, p. 43-44). Research has also shown that GBL people benefit from visible GBL role models (Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011). Queer people content with many stereotypes in media, at the workplace, and in other areas of their lives (Chung, Sheng Kuan, 2007; Eliason, Michele J., et al., 2011). Thus, successful role models have the potential to make a positive impact on the self-perception of queer individuals.

### 2.2 Case Study: Analysis of the Museum

The Museum of Bags and Purses has applied the strategy of highlighting the sexual orientation of artists to their collection. For the EuroPride event in 2016, the museum picked some items from their collection that have queer implications. Most of these items were bags designed by gay designers. The focus of queering the items was thus not the artifacts

themselves or their designs or messages, but rather the designer behind the objects. They queered eight artifacts that were designed or worn by famous people. The stories told were very different. Some were personal and about relationships, while others were about achievements. For example, image 1 presents a bag from the Louis Vuitton line by Marc Jacobs with the story from the audio tour:

**Image 1 Louis Vuitton line by Marc Jacobs**

<sup>3</sup>Here you see a bag from the Limited edition Louis Vuitton line: “Conte De Fees Musette Owls”. Marc Jacobs and artist/illustrator Julie Verhoeven design this line of bags. In 2010 Jacobs was on the list of the 100 most influential people in the world by magazine “Time”. In 2012 the magazine “Out” ranked him 14th on the list of the 50 most powerful gay men and women in America. (Amsterdam Museum, 2016)



This story is about the achievement of Marc Jacobs as an openly gay designer. It emphasizes his success and how he has been praised for his power and influence. Power and influence are seen as masculine traits, and the stereotype of gay men often attributes gay men with opposite-gendered traits (Blashill, Aaron J., and Kimberly K. Powlishta, 2009). This story defies the stereotype of gay man having feminine traits by emphasizing the masculine traits of Marc Jacobs like power and influence. There is nothing about his relationships or his own ideas and beliefs about relationships, he is described as a successful gay designer but there is nothing personal about him in the text. This makes it hard for people to relate with him as a role model because he is not represented as a gay man someone can empathize with. The text does not say anything about how he got to the position where he is now or how being gay has influenced his life, designs, or career. The kind of information about the effect of being gay on his life is what makes it possible for visitors to be educated on what it means to be queer and how it influences your life. It does not show a unique human perspective and therefore does not contribute to showing the diversity of queer people. Jacobs success seems unattainable and will not likely achieve self enhancement in queer visitors (Lockwood, Penelope, and Ziva Kunda, 1997).

Because the potential of a whole strategy can not be analyzed by looking at just one artifact the next part will be about a different bag of which the text has a different approach. Image 2 shows the bag designed by Alexander McQueen and story that accompanies it:

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<sup>3</sup> Digital image. <https://izi.travel/nl/390a-queering-tassenmuseum/nl>. Izi.TRAVEL, n.d. Web. 12 Nov. 2016.

### **Image 2 Bag by Alexander McQueen**

Known for his superb craftsmanship and chic street fusion designs, Alexander McQueen (17 March 1969 – 11 February 2010) contrasts feminine versus masculine, gentleness versus power, and tradition versus innovation. McQueen said that he realized he was gay at the age of 6: "I was sure of myself and my sexuality and I've got nothing to hide. I went straight from my mother's womb onto the gay parade". In the summer of 2000, McQueen had a wedding ceremony with his partner George Forsyth on a yacht in Ibiza. It was not an official wedding because same sex marriage was not legal in Spain yet. His outstanding work got him the "British Designer of the Year Award" four times and the "International Designer of the Year Award" from the CFDA. In 2010 McQueen committed suicide; he was 40 years old. (Amsterdam Museum, 2016)



The text for McQueen is both a story about achievement and a personal story. It mentions McQueen's love life and sexual orientation and includes a personal quote, which was possible to use because of his openness about his own sexuality. The level at which a designer speaks out about their sexual orientation has a great impact on the stories that can and will be told, especially when museums are limited in time and resources to provide these queer stories. His quote about him always knowing that he was gay can be very familiar for some queer visitors and therefore it can be really relatable. The issue around marriage might also move many queer visitors as it has been a problem for the queer community for a long time and it is a part of the fight for equality. Still in many countries same-sex marriage is not recognized and illegal, and in some countries even same-sex intercourse is illegal. McQueen's problems with equal rights to marriage can also be relatable, because even though this right exists in the Netherlands most queer people are aware of the fight that preceded this right and how this fight is still going on in other places in the world. For non-queer visitors it shows an example of one of the struggles queer people come across in their lives that they as non-queer people might not realize that often. McQueen's work itself is described as contrasting "feminine and masculine, gentleness versus power, and tradition versus innovation" (Amsterdam Museum, 2016), in itself that might already be a form of queering by playing with binaries and using it the show that there is no hard line between the two. His achievements are mentioned but also his suicide, even though he had great success he did not seem to be truly happy. Alexander McQueen might be way more relatable than Marc Jacobs based on these texts, but McQueen's story is not one that might ultimately make queer people feel really positive and hopeful because of the sad ending.

There are two exceptions in the collection wherein the museum queered artifacts by focusing on who wore them rather than who designed them. One of them is a bag worn by Elizabeth Taylor, who was a gay icon and was committed to the struggle against HIV/AIDS. The other artifact was a bag worn by Madonna and designed by Versace. Madonna is perhaps one of the most legendary gay icons, which warranted her feature in this queer story. Sadly, there was no mention of Versace being openly gay himself. However, this bag is the only one that is included in another tour. Most bags in the museum only have a small sign with minimal information, usually the name of the designer, the name of the bag, and the name of who wore the bag. However, there are other tours by the Museum of Bags and Purses and one of them includes one bag that was also in the queer tour, it is the bag worn by Madonna and designed by Versace. The other tours are about the different parts in the museum, the first one is 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century bags, the second is 20<sup>th</sup> century bags, and the last one is a tour about the highlights and this is the tour the Madonna bag (see image 3) is part of. These are the two separate text descriptions that come with the bag:

#### **The Story from the General Tour**

The museum also has bags in its collection that were once carried by famous movie and pop stars. A price example is the green evening bag produced by the Italian fashion brand Gianni Versace carried by Madonna at the London premiere of the film *Evita* in 1997. The museum purchased the bag at an auction in New York where several stars sold their bags for the good cause.

#### **The Story from the Queer Tour**

Madonna is considered a big gay icon and the gay community has widely accepted her as a pop culture icon. The LGBT magazine, "The Advocate", named her the biggest gay icon ever. During the premiere of the movie *Evita* in London in 1997, in which she played the lead, she wore this night bag made out of textile. Gianni Versace specially designed it for her, also her dress and shoes were made out of the same fabric.



**Image 3 Bag by Versace, worn by Madonna**

Commented [V1]: format them as long quotes

The first story explains how the bag was acquired by the museum and its relevance. The most important role, the subject, seems to be the museum. It does not say anything about the design or the designer, but merely mentions the brand, the star who wore it, and to which event it was worn. Madonna exists in the story only as "a famous pop star." It seems to be of

higher importance that the bag was worn by “a star” than who that star actually was. By showing that a famous person has carried the bag, the artifact gains value and gives the museum, the subject, a level of specialness. By having this story it is now possible to analyze what has been changed to queer this artifact.

The first thing that has changed is the subject of the story, it is no longer the museum but has become the ‘star’ Madonna. The story starts with introducing Madonna as a big important gay icon, and it seems that the fact that she wore the bag is the most interesting aspect of the artifact. Madonna is the subject in this story and it mentions her involvement in the queer scene. Madonna is probably far from relatable to most queer people, she is not queer herself, she is extremely famous, and her success is not attainable for most people. Madonna being the subject of a story in a queer tour is not that strange seeing how popular she is in the queer scene, but it is weird that the queer sexual orientation of the designer itself is not mentioned at all. Gianni Versace was openly gay and had a long-term relationship of 15 years with Antonio D'Amico until Versace's death. By telling the story of Madonna and not of Versace it seems that even in this queer tour in some places straight people take the attention away from queer people.

### 2.3 Impact on Representation

Emma Waterton and Laurajane Smith argue that white and non-feminine heritage is prioritized over other communities, which is part of the heteronormative tendencies of museums. The authors explain that “here, reified and unreflexive notions of community have been conveyed across the sector, constructing and dividing society into seemingly homogenous collectives defined by ethnicity, class, education or religion and so forth” (2010, p.5). The prioritizing of white and non-feminine heritage is the effect of heteronormative ideals that favor straight, white, cis-gendered men above others. This excludes many groups that do not fit these heteronormative ideals, and this exclusion will continue when people are not represented in places that are normalizing and meaning-making entities (Mills, 2008). These groups will continue to be the “others” in society. Highlighting the sexual orientation of artists is an attempt to include queer people in the museum.

The stories about queer artists generate knowledge about the individuals and about what it means to be queer for many visitors that are not queer themselves and might not know much about being queer. Of course, being queer is different for every individual, and this is exactly what stereotypes ignore. To deconstruct these stereotypes, it can be effective to show

how different these individuals actually are. Presenting queer people as diverse and unique human beings who can be successful and influential destabilizes the idea of heterosexuality being the only way to live a fulfilling life.

Analyzing the text about Madonna, there is nothing that contests mainstream ideas about gender, sex, or sexuality. For that reason, this is not a fully-queered artifact. However, there is still a clear distinction between the two texts. The first text generates knowledge about the Museum of Bags and Purses. This information is unique in that the museum is not a typical museum and is the biggest and most specialized in its field. The second text generates knowledge about the person who wore the bag and her connection to the queer lifestyle. The difference is in the point of view; the first text is from the perspective of the museum, while the second text is from the perspective of the queer community. The other two artifacts, the bags by McQueen and Jacobs, are more inclined to qualify as being queered. They refer to the success of the queer subjects and the struggles they encountered in their love lives, such as marriage inequality. However, they still do not disrupt socio-sexual assumptions that have been thoughtlessly reenacted (Sanders III, 2007, p.3). For example, the stereotype of gay men being feminine is not fully challenged, as they work in the stereotypically “feminine” field of fashion.

Although this strategy offers the opportunity to create queer role models, role models must be somewhat relatable in order to have a positive effect on the self-image of visitors. Queer visitors require role models who have achieved success that seems attainable and realistic. If this is not the case, it will result in self-deflation rather than self-enhancement (Lockwood, Penelope, and Ziva Kunda, 1997). The queer artists in the Museum of Bags and Purses are rich and famous, and therefore they are not likely to be relatable to the visitors.

There are some critical points to be made about this strategy in regards to intersectionality, which refers to the overlapping social and cultural categories that can lead to oppression and discrimination. The application of the strategy is focused on the sexual orientation of artists, which might lead to the exclusion of other dimensions of queer experience and desire (Mills, 2006). When using this strategy, it is crucial to portray an intersectionally-diverse group of queer artists considering such factors as race, age, class, and ableism. In The Museum of Bags and Purses, the artists were all white, male, cisgendered, physically able, upper class, and generally seen as successful people. This is not strange considering they are world famous designers with other aspects of their identities that align them with social norms and increase their likelihood of success. However, it does limit the inclusiveness of the strategy. A way to resolve this at this museum could be by expanding a

collection with bags from artists with various intersectional axes of identity. Getting a more diverse collection by expanding it means actively collecting, in this case, bags designed by for example queer females, trans people, people of color and lower class designers. It is possible to collect bags by a diverse group of famous designers or to create a space where people from marginalized groups like queer people get the opportunity to display their designs. This way the museum uses its power as an educational institute to represent a multifaceted collection of designers and give unprivileged designers a chance to display their talents. The Museum of Bags and Purses is the only museum in the world that has a collection this big focused specifically on bags, they could use this position to create awareness of the limited diversity that is seen in famous designers. At the moment the museum might be representative of the high-class fashion world and shows who is famous in this world, but that does not mean there are not many talented designers with success from minority groups that should not be displayed in an important museum like this one.

## Chapter 3: Queer Exhibition

The previous chapter offers an analysis of one queering strategy. However, this is not the only strategy. Chapter 3 analyzes how setting up an exhibition with a topic related to the queer scene influences the representation of queer people. The subject of the case study is the Amsterdam Museum and its exhibition, *Transmission*. The effect of this queering strategy will be examined in regards to the museum as an influential institute that can foster community empowerment.

### 3.1 The Strategy

This strategy is about exhibitions that destabilize sexes, genders, and sexuality by focusing on queer topics. They offer information and create awareness about queer people and their lives. While the previous chapter discussed a strategy that can be applied to either the permanent collection or exhibitions, the next strategy up for discussion only concerns the exhibitions. Exhibitions are displays of artifacts that are put together to become meaningful in a aesthetic or informative way (Burcaw, 1997, p.15). Objects are often are grouped together based on a certain theme, topic, or person. For example, there are often big exhibitions about artists or other famous people a short time after their death. Exhibitions are displays of a part of the museums collection, the objects collected, acquired and preserved by the museum (Burcaw, 1997, p.14).

Exhibitions can be a tool of queering. This can be done by setting up an exhibition about a topic or person significant in the queer scene. For an exhibition to become a queering strategy, it has to contest heteronormative standards about sexes, gender, sexuality, or all three. Stereotypes about groups of people often arise out of a lack of knowledge. A lack of mainstream understanding of queer people and queer lifestyles results in the construction of stereotypes. By educating people about queer lifestyles and the struggles that come with them, people could start to understand that queer people are human beings just like themselves and can become more empathetic towards their lives and situations.

The following case study concerns an exhibition about a queer topic: the *Transmission* exhibition in the Amsterdam Museum. A primary focus of this chapter is the effect of the

strategy of setting up a queer exhibition on representation, rather than the effect of single artifacts and the events that can accompany such an exhibition.

### 3.2 Case Study: Analysis of the Museum and Its Strategy

The Amsterdam Museum holds a collection that is owned by the city of Amsterdam. A new project entitled “Meet Amsterdam”<sup>4</sup> has started in this museum. In this project, people from Amsterdam work closely with the museum to tell their story and emphasize the diversity of the citizens of Amsterdam. The result is several different exhibitions, of which *Transmission* is the first. This exhibition addresses stories by and about trans people. It is accompanied by weekly conversations where people could tell their own stories and discuss their own problems. The artifacts in this exhibition are diverse, but they all belong to or are about trans people. In this exhibition, the artifacts are accompanied by an extensive audio-tour. Everything in the exhibition has a story. The people who own, have made, or are portrayed by the artifacts tell many of the stories. Some of the stories in this tour are also part of a larger LGBT tour in the museum and are voiced by Ellie Lust. Lust is the spokesperson of the police force in Amsterdam as well as a member of a group that encourages and helps LGBT police in Amsterdam.

The exhibition started with Miep and a photo series that was made of her. Image 4 is one of her portraits and the story that is told by Ellie Lust:

#### **Image 4 Portrait of Miep**

Miep is the one that came up with the name *Transmission* which is a photoexhibition with her as the subject. The pictures are made by Koos Breukel and Milette Raats. Amsterdam museum saw this as an opportunity to create a space to offer more stories from and about transgenders.



This artifact and story are not only part of the exhibition, they also visualize the origin of the exhibition. This story itself is not really educational in regard to trans lives but is focused on explaining how this exhibition came about. This picture is one of a series of photographs of Miep and the others tell more about her life and ideas. The exhibition started with Miep’s photo series but grew when the Amsterdam Museum gave

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<sup>4</sup> <http://hart.amsterdammuseum.nl/nl/page/51831>

other transgendered people a chance to tell their story as well. This gives the visitor a better view of the trans community because it allows for differences between individuals and show how everyone's experiences are different even though you might belong to the same community. By presented multiple diverse individuals it also becomes clear that there are structural problems that trans people have to deal with, like discrimination, body dysmorphia (image 6), and exclusion, that need to be changed by collectively fighting them. This exhibition not only shows and educates people about trans lives but also calls for action.

The photo series of Miep has shown that artifacts can be used to tell somebody's life story. Another example of an object being used to tell the story of an important trans woman is shown in image 5, the coat from Aaicha Bergamin:

**Image 5 Aaich Bergamin's fur coat**

This is Aaicha Bergamin's fur coat. She was born in 1932 as a boy and had first-hand knowledge of how it was to grow up in an era in which transgender people could not be themselves. She became a well-known personality in the Red Light District and had, among other things, her own night club.



This story sadly does not go in depth in the life of Bergamin, but this could partially be because she is not alive anymore to tell her own story. Bergamin was born in a time were it was a lot more difficult to be a trans person. This educates people on how time has changed society's idea and attitude against trans. In combination with the other pieces in the museum that displays the existing struggle in the lives of trans people this artifact shows the progress that has been made and what still needs to change. It gets people thinking about what seems normal to them and how this is not the case for many trans people. Trans lives are not much talked about and are still relatively unknown to most people and that results in people making general assumptions about trans people and falling into stereotypes. Of the queer community trans people are least understood and have the most problems when it comes to acceptance, they sometimes even experience exclusion from within the queer scene. By giving visitors a new perspective on what trans lives are like it gives them the chance to create a new framework (Marstine, 2006, p. 4) to think about trans people and to realize what people can do to become a supportive allies; cis people that are supportive of trans people. Bergamin can also be a role model to trans people, she has shown that being that does not mean you are not able to achieve great and beautiful things. She is a local hero and can lead to self-

enhancement for trans people (Lockwood, Penelope, and Ziva Kunda, 1997). This exhibition gives trans people a place to commemorate the accomplishments of trans people and can bring the community together (Crooke, 2006, p.175).

Both of these tell something about a specific person, but there are also objects in the exhibition that display issues many transgender people face. For example, image 6 shows underwear with packing, packing is something trans men can put in their underwear to fill it and make it look like they have a penis. The one in the exhibition that is seen in image 6 does not belong to a certain person but it was borrowed from a store that sells them. This item helps trans men who have not had a reassignment surgery but want to feel and look like they have a penis. The exhibition also contains other objects that represent the personal struggles many transgender people experience. For example, binding materials, shaving supplies, a t-shirt, and hormones are representative of issues like body dysphoria and can offer solutions to insecurities trans people have about their bodies.



**Image 6 Underwear with packing**

Beside people and objects of personal struggles, there are also objects that show communal struggle, such as flags and a collecting-box, which have been used in activism and protest. People brought in their own objects to be displayed and told their own story about it. It is a bottom-up approach and the process of the exhibitions is led by what the communities needs and desires (Crooke, 2006, p.177). *Transmission* is an example of how museums reach out to communities and give communities control of the way they are represented. The museum empowers them by giving them a stage where they can show their history and cultural value. It is a step toward the public being the superior instead of the museum (Weil, 1997, p.260). People of the community are representing the bigger group. They are responsible for giving visitors a look into their lives and educating them about trans experiences. Letting people from the community itself choose the artifacts combined with the weekly trans talks where people are given the chance to speak and ask questions gives trans people the power to reshape people ideas about trans and create new knowledge that can result in reforming existing frameworks (Atkinson, 2012). The community itself is in control over the insight and knowledge the visitors are able to acquire by setting up a space where they are ones that decide the content of the exhibition. This allows visitors to take a very personal peek into the lives of trans people in a way that is only possible when trans people themselves give it.

### 3.3 Impact on Representation

First of all, *Transmission* does contest the normative beliefs about gender and therefore qualifies as an effectively queered exhibition. It represents non-binary and queer people in many different ways, including personal and political. It defies the idea that cis people are normal and trans people are not. The representation power of the museum is used here to present a diverse image of trans people and show they are each unique persons. This can lead the visitors to have less stereotypes and more understanding view of trans people. Representations show the deeper meaning and this reveals it through words, imagery, and emotional associations (Hall, Evans & Nixon, 2013, p.xix), Changing the representation of trans people in the museum might change the associations and assumptions people have about trans people.

Exhibitions by and about minorities have shown that these spaces can become a place for people to encounter like-minded others and generate positive relationships (Chalmers, 2007; Herle, 2001). *Transmission* has done this by accompanying the exhibitions with weekly talks about trans issues where everyone is welcome to discuss, share, and ask questions. Additionally, the exhibition allows for personal interpretations of the artifacts because there is not one big chronological story, but many small ones that relate to each other and the visitor in different ways.

I argue that this strategy is useful to educate people in depth about certain topics and make them think about issues they might normally not come across. Atkinson (2012), argues that art can reform existing frameworks and create new knowledges. A queer exhibition can highlight relatively unknown topics; *Transmission* does this with the topic of trans and lets transgender people explain it themselves. It empowers trans people by giving them a stage to tell the story about their history, culture and personal lives. These stories that so little people know can change the way people will perceive trans people. Exhibitions like this can challenge taboos by vocalizing issues that many people do not often encounter, but which others contend with on a daily basis.

Although this strategy has had some positive effects on the representation of queer people in museums, is not without its problems. For one, this exhibition is temporary, which means that these stories are there for a certain amount of time. The artifacts will eventually leave the museum, taking the queer stories with them. This exhibition represents queer people, but this representation disappears the moment the exhibition closes. Thus, the

museum must make it a permanent part of the museum in order for it to have long-term effects and continue to provide knowledge about trans people.

Furthermore, exhibitions are subject to bias from curators. Emotional attachments influence which works of art will and will not be displayed. Even a curator's knowledge about art is affected by personal interest (Steorn, 2012, p.355-356), especially when dealing with personal topics. Nonetheless, the curator and museum must always strive to create an exhibition that is respectful to diversity of queer people and will show this in their exhibition.

## Chapter 4: Queer perspective as interpretive tool

In the previous chapters, I analyzed two queering strategies and their effects on the representation of queer people in museums. These strategies have shown to have the ability to produce positive self-image for queer people by offering role models and supporting the building of a strong community. They increase knowledge about queer people and their lives, but they might not be the most effective in disrupting heteronormative tendencies. This chapter will evaluate if the strategy of a queer perspective as an interpretive tool of artifacts has more disruptive power. The case study for this strategy is the Pink Tour by Arnout van Krimpen, available in the Rijksmuseum. The effect of this queering strategy will be analyzed with regard to the museum as an influential institute that can disrupt norms around gender, sex, and sexual orientation.

### 4.1 The Strategy

Artifacts are framed in a museum and these frames can change the meaning of the object, to become aware of this process a museum can show this effect. They can do this by offering more than one story per artifacts and each story must have a different perspective. It allows the visitor to contemplate the subjectivity that comes into play when an object is placed in a museum, every thing surrounding the objects changes its context and therefore its meaning. The context of objects in a museum is not fully visualized by the previous strategies. This strategy of the queer perspective tries to visualize this subjectivity by offering multiple stories for one artifact. These stories offer various perspectives and approaches to a single object, which leads to insights into how multiple people can perceive the same thing differently. Queer people do not often encounter stories they can relate to in museums because the majority of stories are about straight white men and their accomplishments. However, this is not necessarily because the artifacts in the museum do not lend themselves to these stories. The curator Patrick Steorn writes about alternative archives in museums for queer art which are not actually about different objects and artifacts, but about “different emotional and political attachments to the object” (2012, p. 357). This is why, even without changing the collection, it is possible to enlighten visitors about the meanings an artifact can

have to different groups of people. This strategy is about showing there is a queer story to an artifact that is normally displayed with a non-queer story.

This chapter will analyze this strategy using the Rijksmuseum as an example. Every year during the Gay Pride, Arnout van Krimpen gives personal tours through this museum, showing the history of homosexuality using painting in the museum. Since this year, a short audio tour version of this tour has been made available for free on the izi.TRAVEL mobile application. This audio tour is a useful tool for comparison with the regular stories provided by the Rijksmuseum, which are also available for free on the Rijksmuseum website<sup>5</sup>.

#### 4.2 Case Study: Analysis of the Museum

The Rijksmuseum is one of 16 national museums in the Netherlands. Construction started in 1876 and it was finished in 1885. The Rijksmuseum is housed in a large building which was specially designed to become the Rijksmuseum. It is arranged chronologically, with every floor assigned to a later time period. The collection starts with the 12<sup>th</sup> through 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and ends with modern art on the top floor.

Every year, the Rijksmuseum hires Arnout van Krimpen to give “pink tours” through the museum during the Gay Pride festival. He tells the history of homosexuality using some of the paintings in the museum. Each painting also has a story that is provided by the museum, which allows for a comparison between the stories of the museum and those of the Pink Tour for two artifacts. Image 7 shows the first artifact, it is a stained-glass representation of the burning of Sodom and these are the texts of the pink tour and the website of the Rijksmuseum:

##### Pink tour

The term sodomy is derived from the biblical city of Sodom, a city in Canaan west of the Dead Sea. The inhabitants were guilty of immorality, fornication and all that God had forbidden. In the sixteenth century the offense of sodomy, derived from Sodom, was written down for the Holy Roman Empire and therefore to the Netherlands as part of that empire. Emperor Charles V signed this law in 1532, it remained valid until the end of the eighteenth century: "Article 116: Punishment for adultery which is against nature. Further, when a man with a beast, a man with a man, a woman with a woman play the harlot, they have forfeited life and they will be brought to death by fire. "The term mietje, Dutch for sissy, which now often used as a term of abuse for homosexuals, is another derivative of sodomite.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/>

#### Website information

Round window of stained glass with a representation of Abraham witnessing the burning of Sodom. On the right we see Lot the son of Abraham's brother, who lives in Sodom. He is visited before the gate by two angels, who will liberate him, his wife and his two daughters from the threatened city. Pictured on the foreground is Abraham, hands folded, watching this terrible fire. The seated bearded man and the two women on the left in the background are Lot and his daughters, who had settled in the mountains after their escape.

The information from the website describes the material of the artifact and the scene that is pictured. It does not give any context on why the fire is happening or why these people are liberated. The Pink Tour is almost the direct opposite; it is not descriptive of the situation, but it explains why Sodom is on fire and how this scene has influenced the words we use today. Sodom is



**Image 7 Sodom**

linguistically significant for the queer community because of the effects it has had on the derivation of terms of abuse and sexual categorizations. The queering of this artifact has been achieved by pointing out to visitors what this story portrayed on this glass-stained window has meant for queer people in history and how its influence is still found in language. In society language maintains and changes power relations (Fairclough 2001.p. iix) but this often happens implicitly and people are not aware of it happening. By knowing the history of words and certainly words that are used as terms of abuse one can be aware of its power and what its symbolic meaning is. Sodomy is one of those and the story of Sodom is the origin of the word and the meaning it has been given, the pink tour reveals this to the visitors. The pink tour frames this story differently and the results are a historical lesson on what words have derived from this biblical story.

The next artifact is a painting of Jupiter dressed as Diana as seen in image 8:

#### *Pink Tour*

Peculiar is the fact that in the 18th century, when homosexuality was being treated with such hostility, the art and fashion scene was highly effeminate. In this painting, which you can find in room 1.2, of Jacob de Wit from 1727 you see Jupiter, disguised

as Diana, who is seducing the nymph Callisto. Jupiter chooses travesty to seduce Callisto, but Callisto does not know that she is actually being seduced by a men and gives in to the lesbian love.



#### *Website Information*

Jupiter and Callisto. In a landscape Jupiter seduces the nymph Callisto disguised as Diana. Behind Diana an eagle with lightning bolts, on the left playing putti. On the right in front of Diana are the hunting attributes and some hunting dogs. Belongs to SK-A-3886. Part of the room decoration, painted in commission by John Baptist de Surmont, lord of Vlooswijk for his house in Loenen aan de Vecht. Fragment of a room decoration.

The website information is again descriptive of the situation. It does not give any context, just the names of the people portrayed and what is visible in their surroundings. The cross dressing of Jupiter is not explicitly mentioned, only that he is disguised as a person named Diana. The Pink Tour grabs exactly this point to elaborate upon because this picture does not only display a transvestite, but also, from Callisto's point of view, a lesbian love. The act of Jupiter dressing up as a woman does not seem to be weird or strange in any way and as the pink tour mentions there the 18<sup>th</sup> century was full of effeminate art. Men are often wearing make up and wear outfits that would now be labeled as feminine, like skirts or lace. This shows the visitor how gender attributes are socially constructed and change over time. Many masculine and feminine acts and fashion are seen are normalized and people do not question them, the perspective of the pink tour might make people think again about whether what they perceive to be normal is really the only thing that should be normal. Fashion especially is linked to culture and with each culture there are different norms, our museums should show these differences in order to normalize them.

The perspective from which both of these artifacts are described are clearly drastically different in the Pink Tour than in the website information. The latter is far more descriptive of the situations being portrayed on the artifacts, while the Pink Tour places the situation in a queer context, which involves different information, and knowledge about the situation portrayed artifacts. By highlighting queer aspects of the artifacts, it constructs a whole different meaning and reveals extra information about the artifacts that is not commonly

known. The educational strategy of providing multiple stories (Hein, 2006, p.347) is here executed with two different stories and it reveals how frames give a completely different story about the exact same object.

#### 4.3 Impact on Representation

I argue that this strategy is the most effective one of the three. It is a way to break a framework by educating the public through art by giving a queer perspective. Steorn (2012) did this as well by giving tours about this queer perspective in the permanent collections of the National Museum of Fine Arts. He uses the term “queer” as “an interpretive tool to problematize the display and narrative of the museum, revealing how non-heteronormative sexual and erotic desires have influenced the creation, interpretation, collection, and exhibition of artworks, as well as the production of art history and research in museums” (Steorn, 2012, p. 355). Queerness as an interpretive tool means looking at these artifacts from a queer perspective, where heteronormative ideas about sex, gender, and sexuality are contested. It means looking at an object and knowing the meaning is subjective rather than there being any fixed meaning. These examples in the Rijksmuseum show that there is queer history in more places than people realize, and that by not showing this, feminist critics Luce Irigaray and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak were right in saying that most museums fail to rethink misogyny and heteronormativity (Sanders, 2007, p.3).

As discussed in previous chapters objects change their meaning when they enter into the museum because their meaning changes with their context, which refers to framing. A downside of framing is that queer objects might lose their disruptive power when placed in a museum and start to reproduce the normativity the strategy seeks to contest (Steorn, 2012, p.363). The queer perspective as interpretive tool can be used to defy this. Instead of just adding queer object to the collection of the museum, it seeks to find queer aspects in seemingly non-queer artifacts. It is the act of reframing the artifact as queer that is disruptive to the idea of objectivity and heteronormativity.

The Rijksmuseum is one of the largest and most famous museums in the Netherlands, which comes with power and responsibility. This already influences the way visitors see the objects (see chapter 1). It attracts many visitors including teachers with their students, but also many issues of management and bureaucracy. Every decision must be approved by multiple groups of people. Having so many different people involved in decisions that have a big influence on the representation of people in the museum creates difficult power structures.

The status of the museum also gives the museum power of which all people working it should be aware. Being a national museum, the Rijksmuseum holds artifacts owned by the land and should represent the country and its history, including its queer history. The Pink Tour is a step in this direction, but some critical points remain.

Pink tours, like the one from Krimpen, could exclude certain groups of queer people that might not be “decent” enough to elaborate upon in a prestigious museum like the Rijksmuseum. Homonormativity can come into play and result in the exclusion of non-Western, non-binary and lower-class queer people, for example. The queer scene has many sides, and some are seen as promiscuous and vulgar, especially these sides are prone to exclusion in places that are perceived as high-end. When creating these kind of tours, people must be aware of what the effects are on the ones being represented and how this information is used.

## Conclusion

The representation of queer people is often missing or skewed (Smith, 2005; Tsai, 2010) and this is no different in museums. The exclusion of marginalized groups is an effect of the heteronormative tendencies that exist in museum (Mills, 2006). Art has the power to change existing frameworks and create new knowledges (Atkinson, 2012) and can therefore have a positive effect on societies ideas about queer people. With the museum being a powerful medium to convey knowledge about history and culture they need to take this responsibility of being inclusive representative of the whole society, not just the ones that fit the heteronormative ideal. Being inclusive is difficult but there are multiple ways to try and accomplish it. This thesis set out three strategies and analyzed the effect they had on the representation of queer people.

The three different strategies for queering museums have all had positive but varied effects on representation. The first strategy involved highlighting the sexual orientation of artists, using the Museum of Bags and Purses as a case study. Displaying queer artists like this shows a positive and respectful image of queer people and is a positive representation of queer people. It also creates awareness of the diversity of artists that are part of the museums. This strategy can affect queer visitors by offering queer role models, and role models can result in self-enhancement of the visitors as long as they are relatable. The case study revealed that the artists were most likely not relatable enough for most visitors in this execution of this strategy. Furthermore, the artists are all white cisgendered males and non-homonormative groups were thus still excluded. By including homonormative queers there are many queer people that are still excluded and the museum must be aware of intersectionality and gather a diverse group of queer artists. This would result in a representation of queer people that shows they are all just humans like everyone else with different backgrounds and qualities. It can result in queer visitors being able to relate to the artist and non-queer visitors to gain knowledge about the queer scene and empathize with queer people. There is potential for this strategy, but its practical realization needs to be handled with care.

The second strategy, setting up a queer exhibition, was evaluated with the exhibition *Transmission* in the Amsterdam Museum as its case study. A queer exhibition provides stories to visitors that are not often heard in museums and offers knowledge about queer people and their lives. It creates an opportunity to foster empathy in people with limited knowledge about trans people. This can result in the reformation of existing frameworks and create new

knowledges. Probably the strongest aspect of *Transmission* was the opportunities it presented for community building. Besides the community itself setting up the exhibition, it offered a weekly meeting where people could talk about their experiences, share their stories, and ask questions about the topic of trans. This can create positive relations among the people in the trans community. Letting people from the community itself create the exhibition it was a bottom-up procedure and it offers them a space where they can share their own story. This is beneficial for the community because it allows for them to be heard and it can bring people from the community together because they have a space where they can come together, especially during the weekly talks. It is however also beneficial to non-queer visitors, they heard and see what it is like to be trans and have the chance to become more empathetic towards trans people.

The last strategy consisted of using a queer perspective as interpretative tool. I argue that this is the most effective queering strategy because it has the potential to expose the work of “frames” by switching the perspective on the object and offering multiple meanings behind the object. It offers a queer perspective of seemingly non-queer artifacts and therefore shows that queer people, stories, and objects are everywhere. Some help in changing the perspective of the visitors by giving them a queer lens through which to view the content of the museum. This proved to be the most contesting strategy of the three because it has the disruptive power to break down the reproduction of heteronormative tendencies that are so often seen in museums. It opens a world of new opportunities and views in what is seemingly a one-sided institute.

Every strategy has the potential to have positive effects on the representation of queer people in the museum, as they create more inclusive museums and strive to dismantle existing heteronormativity. Heteronormativity exclude those that do not fit those norms, it privileges the straight, white, cis gendered male and keeps minorities disadvantaged. Even though these strategies have the potential to fight heteronormativity, all of them also have the possibility to promote homonormativity if the people executing these strategies do not pay attention to creating an intersectional display of queer people. All of the museums have shown that even though these strategies revealed queer stories they all seems to be telling the stories of white queers. In the Museum of Bags and Purses they were not only all white, they were also all male and upper class. This is not at all a representative image of queer people; queer people exist in different parts of society. In the Amsterdam Museum they had the most divers representation of queers, the people where from different ages, some were quite famous and

other not at all, they had different backgrounds and had different problems they encountered in their lives.

Museums must thus reflect on their own collections and the possibilities they have within each of these strategies to execute them with care. Future research could benefit this topic by examining the intersectionality of each executed strategy in more depth. This research has shown there are multiple ways to increase the diversity in a museum, but that being inclusive of everyone in society is challenging. The role of the museum is changing and becoming aware of perpetuating norms and exclusion is an important step in being more inclusive. Museums must reflect on their own inclusiveness and try to see their collection from multiple perspectives. They must offer visitors a multilayered collection of stories and artifacts.

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