It's Not All Rainbows & Glitter

Jerry B. Lockaby
Louisiana State University at Baton Rouge

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IT’S NOT ALL RAINBOWS & GLITTER

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural & Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in
The School of Art

by
Jerry Lockaby
B.F.A., Louisiana State University, 2002
August 2022
To papa. You taught me how to laugh. You taught me the value of friendship. You taught me to be true to myself. You taught me the art of storytelling. You taught me a former “gang member,” marine, and overall tough guy could love and support his son even if that son is a sissy. But most of all you taught me to “never let the bastards get you down.” I dedicate this work to your memory, and I hope you are proud to see me once again bleeding purple and gold. Geaux Tigers!
The unexamined life is not worth living.
—Plato, *Apology*
Acknowledgements

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Andy and Joshua Levin—the brightest stars in my sky and the refuge from my storms—for the adventures and the many, many plans we make and break, thank you from the bottom my heart.

And most of all, thank you to the most amazing family anyone could ever ask for: my brothers, Joseph and James, who sheltered me and protected me and walked with me; my little sister, Jessica Rodríguez, who has also become a safe space for all of her students; my brother-in-law, Orlando Rodríguez; and my nephew, Joaquin Rodríguez.

And to my mother, Maria, words can never express how much your love and support means to me. You have always been, and always will be, my first and greatest inspiration. You are the reason. You are my heart.
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Abstract

The goal of this exhibition is to contextualize the struggles of the LGBTQ+ community by anchoring personal stories with collage and poetry to demonstrate the ongoing difficulties of growing up queer. Mixed media digitized collages have been created and paired with companion typographic treatments of poems and narratives from diverse points of view.

The word queer as a term to describe gay men, lesbians, and other non-conforming sexual identities, has evolved over the past 100 years. This evolution of the word parallels the struggles of LGBTQ+ people to achieve equal rights, marriage equality, protection in housing and employment, and an end to stigmatization, harassment, and oppression.

In the South, queer is still used as a slur, though there is an ongoing reclamation effort to embrace the term as an identifier that began in the mid-20th century. In seeking to define the effect of queer designers on contemporary graphic design and other fine arts, I have undertaken research into the experience of queer artists over the past century. Through collage—combining image-making with poetry, prose, and storytelling—my own experience will be tied to the historical record. The focus of my research will be the impact of queer stigmatization, harassment, and oppression, and an examination of the struggles and progress the queer community has seen over the past century.
Branded a Queer

Growing up queer in the 1970s and 1980s, I was exposed to homophobia and bullying from a young age—before I even knew what queer or gay meant. It was clear to those around me that I was different: sissy, queer, girly, weak, effeminate, dainty. I didn't like to play sports—or with boys for that matter—instead preferring the company of girls. I played with dolls, made mud pies, played the piano, sang, and danced. I preferred to be in the kitchen with my mother learning to cook, rather than outside with my brothers and father throwing a football or baseball or playing basketball.

This caused concerns for my parents. My mother tells the story about calling her mother when I was little, crying because I liked to play with dolls and other “girly” things. My grandmother assured her that I would grow out of that, and it just meant I'd be a good father. A couple of years later, possibly after catching me wearing her tights or shoes or something like that, she called my grandmother again about it. This time my grandmother had to give her some bad news, along with a piece of advice: “You’re just going to have to realize that your son is probably gay. And you must love and accept him and make sure he knows that.”

My mother would soon learn how important that advice would be. She first found out I was being bullied at school when I was in seventh grade (Image 1 & Image 2) but did not know that it was because I was queer until she asked me if I liked boys or girls. Image 2. A Mother’s Story, 2021, tells her story.
I left home at 18 when I joined the Navy, where I met my children's father. I had three sons and a daughter. When my youngest boy was five years old, I became worried because he played with dolls and liked to put on my dresses. I called my mother crying, and she assured me that he would grow out of it. By the time he was 12, not much had changed. He liked to stay inside and play the piano or help me in the kitchen. He refused to do any “boy” things like play sports, so I once again turned to my mother.

She told me, “Mija, you’re going to have to face the fact that he is gay. And you will love him just the same.” She encouraged me to talk to him to let him know I loved him no matter what, but I hesitated, wanting to allow him to decide when he was ready to come out to me.

The first time I learned of him being bullied by other kids was when I was called to his middle school by the nurse. His lip had been split open and I had to rush him to the hospital where they had to stitch up his lip. Since he hadn’t come out to me, I had no idea what to do about it. I was called to the principal’s office at his school, where I was confronted by the bully’s mother! She claimed that my baby bit her son and threatened to sue me. I said to her, “Are you fucking kidding me?! Your son attacked my son unprovoked, punched him in the mouth so badly he had to be rushed the hospital to have stitches in his lip, and now you think you’re going to threaten me?!”

Sadly, this was only the beginning of what would be the worst years of my life. I felt so powerless to help my son, even when he finally came out to me. I felt like a bad mother, and it but a strain on our relationship. He would end up going to live with his father in his sophomore year of high school, which turned out to be the worst idea we had ever had.
Her solution was to send me to live with my dad, who was my first best friend. But he was ill-prepared to deal with having a sissy for a son. I was his youngest boy and his favorite, but I didn’t come out to him until I was 18 years old. Partly because of this, and partly due to my feeling ashamed, I hid a lot of the bullying that I endured from him. High school only got harder in my sophomore year, culminating in one of the most life-changing events of my young life. (Image 3, Image 4, and Image 5)

Image 3. I am a Poem, 2021

I was in fifth grade when I was first called a faggot. I hadn’t even reached puberty yet and didn’t even know myself. I was bullied from that moment until the end of my high school tenure.

A year later, my mom turned to me in the kitchen and casually asked me, “Do you like boys or girls?”

All I could do was break down and cry. She held me while I cried and told me that she loved me no matter what. She has been a fierce ally ever since.

At school, however, things only got worse for me. I was pushed around and called a faggot every single day. Things got so bad, I begged my mom to let me go live with my dad, thinking it would be better there.

It wasn’t.

I attended my sophomore year at Broadmoor High School in Baton Rouge. I was a member of the choir and a show choir that performed for the school often. I was also a member of the marching band—playing the saxophone—as well as the thespians club. I was in every stage production and played the lead in several productions.

I soon learned that even within those groups, I was shunned as a fag. I made friends who were going through similar things, but we rarely spoke about it.

And then the worst day of my life to that point happened.

It almost goes without saying that most of the football team hated me, and I was taunted by one of the star players ruthlessly. One day, after being taunted by him for months, I finally shot an insult back at him after he once again called me a fag.

Turns out, that was not a smart move. Brett (not his real name) announced that he was going to let another football player drive his truck home so he could follow me home on the bus and kick my ass. He lived two blocks from me, and word spread like wildfire.

When I boarded the bus, there he was. He spent the 20-minute ride taunting me and laughing about how he was going to beat me up. Keep in mind, he was a football player and at least twice my size.
I got off the bus two stops before my actual stop, as my stepbrother and I had discovered a path through the woods between there and my house. This caught him off-guard, as his chance to beat me up seemed to be slipping away.

As I arrived at my house, a crowd had gathered. The whole fucking school showed up to watch me get my faggot ass kicked. I tried to run into my house, but he caught me just before I made it and threw me to the ground. In my father’s front yard!

Luckily, we had a cement bird bath right near the front door, which had a cement frog that sat in it. I was finally able to grab the frog, which I then swung with all my might at the assholes who continued to hit and kick me. I managed to get a swipe in, then get away and run inside, locking the door behind me.

I ran into my parents’ bedroom and ran to my stepmother’s side of the bed, where I knew she kept a .38 pistol with silver bullets (for werewolves and what not). I grabbed it and ran back to the front door. As I got there, barely able to see through my tears and rage, the doorbell rang. When I opened the door, expecting another attack, I realized that it wasn’t the terrorists who had attacked me.

It was the bus driver.

As I stood there, confused, she told me that she heard the boys talking about what they were planning to do to me—and their friends laughing and talking about everyone coming to see it.

She told me that as soon as she finished her route, she got in her car and headed back to my house to make sure I was okay.

All I could do was sit there and weep, as she hugged me and told me it was going to be okay. I wept, not from the embarrassment of being humiliated in front of what seemed like the entire school. And not from the fear and terror I felt as I was being attacked, thrown to the ground, and beaten and kicked.

I wept because that was the first time I ever felt like I wasn’t alone.

I wept because an adult had heard—and listened—and did something to protect me.

I wept because someone finally cared.
THE BULLY AND THE BUS DRIVER

PL.1

I am a bully and I am not afraid of anyone. I am the strongest in this school and I will do whatever I want. If you don't like it, too bad. I will make your life a living hell. Your friends will hate you and you will be alone.

Bully

PL.2

As I walked into the bus, I could feel the fear in the air. The other kids were too afraid to speak to me. I made my way to the back of the bus, where I knew I would be safe.

Bus Driver

I am the bus driver and I am responsible for the safety of all the students on this bus. I will not tolerate any bullying or harassment. If you have a problem, you can speak to me.

Bully

PL.3

I will make your life a living hell. Your friends will hate you and you will be alone.

Bully

PL.4

I am the bus driver and I am responsible for the safety of all the students on this bus. I will not tolerate any bullying or harassment.

Bus Driver

I will make your life a living hell. Your friends will hate you and you will be alone.

Bully
Queer Defined

The word *queer*, meaning peculiar, strange, or odd, dates to the turn of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century. By the middle of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, the word evolved to refer to one who was open to suspicion or whose honesty was in doubt. The first publicized account of the term as a pejorative slur for a homosexual was in the libel and subsequent criminal trials of Oscar Wilde, famed poet and dramatist. These trials “represent an important moment in the history of modern male homosexuality, providing for historians a marker to locate the emergence of a distinct homosexual identity.”\textsuperscript{1} Moreover, it created a distinct new meaning of queer identity for generations, while introducing a new and uglier slur with which to shackle those generations by the ideals of heteronormativity.

Briefly, the facts are as follows: On the 28\textsuperscript{th} of February 1895 Wilde received the card that John Sholto Douglas, the 8\textsuperscript{th} Marquess of Queensberry, had left for him at Wilde’s club, the Albermarle, ten days earlier. The card, almost illegible because of the Marquess’ handwriting, read “To Oscar Wilde posing Somdomite [sic]” and was only the latest incident in over nine months of aggressive harassment of Wilde by the father of his lover Alfred, Lord Douglas. Strongly encouraged by “Bosie,” as the young Lord Douglas was called, Wilde brought a suit of libel against the Marquess.\textsuperscript{2}

Though Wilde was the plaintiff in the case, it became clear that he was the one who was on trial, as the Marquess forwarded evidence of young men Wilde had solicited to the authorities who when arrested Wilde. Acquitted of all charges in this first trial, Wilde was

\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., 39.
convicted in the subsequent trial and sentenced to the harshest sentence possible. What emerged from the scandal and intrigue splattered across national newspapers was a homosexual type and a newly elevated slur: QUEER! “The price paid for a gay identity was the culturally damning discourse that ironically birthed it.”

The salacious details of Oscar Wilde’s trial and the hateful discourse it spurned were by no means new. One only need look to dictionaries to find homophobia ingrained within the very fabric of the English language. Dr. Eric Cervini, LGBTQ+ historian, discussed this long, complicated history with dictionaries and queerness with Dr. Stephen Turton, English Research Fellow at the University of Cambridge. Researching the history of dictionaries from the 16th century to the present, Dr. Turton created a database of “queer” dictionary words and discovered apparent biases. One example was an entry from 1593 in an English/French Dictionary, in which the author, Claudius Hollyband, translated the French word “bougre” as “a buggerer,” adding his own instruction to the reader, “Burn them all!”

Present-day dictionaries are not without biases, either. The Merriam-Webster entry for “sexual intercourse” offers “heterosexual intercourse” as its primary definition, with the second being “intercourse (such as anal or oral intercourse) that does not involve penetration

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3 Ibid., 47.
5 Ibid.
of the vagina by the penis.” Queer sex, therefore, has been relegated to a lesser tier and “defined by what it is not: as a kind of absence of heterosexuality, rather than being a thing in its own right.”

If you look up ‘sodomy’ on dictionary.com or lexico.com (which is Oxford University Press’s free online dictionary), they’ll tell you explicitly that it means anal or sometimes oral intercourse,” continued Turton. “But they don’t bother labeling the word as derogatory or offensive, even though most queer people would probably be shocked if someone asked them in casual conversation if they’d committed sodomy recently.

The OED contains an entry for the word “bent,” which has not been revised since 1972. The definition? “Of persons: eccentric, perverted, specifically homosexual.”

I came out to my mother when I was twelve, once the bullying was already under way. She did what she could to try to protect me—I learned while researching this project that my brother went after the bully who cut my mouth open in the library and threatened him to stay away. I also learned that the boy put a gun in his mouth a few years later. I can only speculate as to what could’ve made him do that. Was his treatment of me rooted in his own internalized homophobia? I would learn over the years that the loudest homophobes are sometime fighting something within themselves.

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7 Cervini, op. cit.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
My brother also sat down to regale me with other stories he recalled from those years.

Image 6. Hate More Collage, 2022, and Image 7. Big Brother Bully Protector, 2022, illustrate the one I remember as the day I realized he was a fierce ally:

My brother was always a sissy. He didn’t like to play sports—he played once with my older brother, me, and my dad, but ran off crying when I tackled him. He mostly stayed inside and played his piano, or helped my mom cook. He even liked to play dolls with the girls in the neighborhood. He didn’t really have guy friends, until he got to junior high and met his best friend.

I have to admit I used to tease him about it, but I didn’t realize what an issue it was until he was a freshman in high school. I used to drive him to school, having graduated from high school myself the year before. My older brother and I were jocks all through school, both star football and baseball players, so we were what you would call “popular.” Apparently, my little brother’s experience was a lot different than that, and I soon found out why.

I kinda suspected he was probably gay, but we never really talked about it. And I think I had never really thought about what that meant for him or how other kids might treat him. He was a pretty odd duck who always seemed to not care what others thought of him anyway, but boy was I wrong.

One morning, as I dropped him off for school, I noticed two older kids approach him. I don’t remember all that they said to him, but I’ll never forget hearing them call him a “faggot.”

I immediately saw red. How dare they talk to my little brother like that?! I jumped out of the car; and the next thing I knew, I was fighting the boys I would later find out were my brother’s tormentors. I mean, I beat the shit out of those fuckers. They needed to learn that my baby brother is off limits.

That was the day I found out my brother was indeed gay. And being bullied for it. That was also the day I became an ally. It certainly wouldn’t be the last fight I got into, protecting my little brother, nor would it be the last time I almost got arrested for that little fucker. But I’m proud to be his big brother and bully protector.
Image 6. Hate More Collage, 2022

Image 7. Big Brother Bully Protector, 2022
My research into the experiences of gay artists throughout present history has revealed this fact of living as openly queer and the consequences they also faced for doing so. Tennessee Williams wrote in his journal about the first time he was attacked for appearing queer to another man as a 31-year-old playwright:

Unhappily I can’t go into details. It was a case of guilt and shame in which I was relatively the innocent party, since I merely offered entertainment, which was accepted with apparent gratitude until the untimely entrance of other parties. Feel a little sorrowful about it. So unnecessary. The sort of behavior pattern imposed by the conventional falsehoods... Why do they strike us? What is our offense? We offer them a truth which they cannot bear to confess except in privacy and the dark—a truth which is inherently as bright as the morning sun. He struck me because he did what I did and his friends discovered it. Yes, it hurt—inside. I do not know if I will be able to sleep. But tomorrow I suppose the swollen face will be normal again and I will pick up the usual thread of life.¹⁰

Gay panic as a defense has existed for at least a hundred years and is as dangerous today as it ever was. The idea that queers get what they deserve is evident not only in the acts of aggression against queers, but in the response by law enforcement (or the lack of a response as is often the case) (Image 8). My sister remembers an incident that happened when she and her now husband were still dating. My friends and I came to visit for the fourth of July weekend. The text in Image 9. That’s Not What You Said, 2022, is from a recorded interview I conducted with her:

My brother and a couple of his friends came down to South Padre Island for the fourth of July. My then boyfriend (now husband), and I were working at Blackbirds restaurant. They came by the restaurant at the end of our shift and convinced us to go to Louie's Backyard, a locals' hangout. Of course, because it was the fourth of July, it was jam packed. We had no business being there.

Some of the people from Blackbeard's went, including a good friend of ours, Chilo. And then we start going down the stairs to the local bar. We kind of get lost because we're all trying to leave behind each other downstairs but then we find each other outside. My brother was waiting there with his friends and for me and my boyfriend outside. And then some Coast Guard guys said something to the one with the braids, Autumn. All I heard was, “wouldn’t you like to find out?”

We later learned that the Coast Guard douche asked Autumn, “Are you a boy or a girl?” To which Autumn replied, “Wouldn’t you like to find out?” The Coast Guard mumbled under his breath, “You fucking faggot!”

This stopped my brother in his tracks. He was walking right in front of the Coast Guard and stopped to say, “What did you say?”

No one can remember his reply to my brother, but my brother then said, “That's not what you said motherfucker!”

After that chaos ensued, with my brother and the Coast Guard screaming at each other. I turned around like this is my brother, so I chime in cause I'm fucking drunk. So now I’m in the Coast Guard's face yelling at him, and my husband is trying to pull me away. That’s when my brother walked out and saw what was going on.

So there’s somebody in your face; there’s somebody in Autumn’s face; there’s somebody in James’s face; and there’s somebody in my face. The Coast Guard, who is the one in my face say something to me—I don’t remember what. Anyway, he grabbed my hands—my wrists— because I guess because I was all in his face.

So then I slapped the asshole, and then everybody’s eyes turned towards me because my older brother is about to lose it. You just hear, “Did you hit my sister?!” And the crowd just parts as he rushed over to me. I had to get in front of the guy to protect him, and I said, “No, I hit him.” Because my older brother is ready to whoop his ass, and I couldn’t let him get in trouble for hitting the guy for nothing.

About this time, Chilo starts yelling to us, “The cops are coming!”
Later my older brother gave me his perspective of the events. He said:

“I was the last one to come out, and I saw you and one of the guys in your face and that’s when I pushed you back and I was like, is there a problem here? And the guy goes, I want to kick this little faggot’s ass. And I said, “No, no, no, no. Now we got a problem.” And that’s when sis walked out and saw this guy, these two guys in my face and that’s when sis started with the one guy and I’m arguing with the other guy. And that’s when I heard the smack. And that’s when I was like, ‘Did this motherfucker hit you?’”
Of course, we left before the police arrived. We, the queers from another state, could very easily have been seen as the aggressors by the police. With this we have had plenty of experience. Law enforcement and the queer community have a long and storied history, none of it particularly heartwarming.
Queer Criminals

In 1876, Cesare Lombroso introduced the idea that criminals are born rather than made, which meant that “criminal propensities...” could be predicted merely “by examining certain bodily features.”¹¹ Contemporaneously, mug shots and fingerprints were coming into vogue, which gave rise to the idea that homosexuals “were a class of moral criminals who should be committed to insane asylums, their sexual proclivities an inherent part of their being.”¹² Strangely enough, the idea that homosexuals were born rather than seduced, recruited, abused, or otherwise made that way, had the same effect as the polar opposite arguments made by anti-gay politicians, preachers, and other homophobes make today.

By the 1930s and through the 1940s, “a thinly veiled subtext of sexual deviance that coupled homosexuality with criminality” gave fodder for the press to conflate queer victims of crimes with criminality itself, and thus deserving of such maltreatment. It also illustrates “how violence and prejudice can take hold when you criminalize a group of people, harness the expertise of the medical and legal professions, and circulate these ideas through the press.”¹³ Because queers were viewed as immoral reprobates and believed to deserve institutionalization, violence against them was tacitly condoned if not outright encouraged. Dr. Edward J. Kempf theorized in his study of male sexuality and mental illness that “acute

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¹¹ Polchin, op. cit 23.
¹² Ibid., 22.
¹³ Ibid., 29.
homosexual panic,” “due to the pressure of uncontrollable perverse sexual cravings,” could result in a state of psychosis which leads to violence.¹⁴

Queer artists have responded to this threat in different ways. Oscar Wilde embraced his queerness and was imprisoned for it. Tennessee Williams, who was attacked a second time shortly after the first incident, “did not report either incident to the police, for to do so in 1943 would risk his own arrest for sodomy.”¹⁵

Keith Haring, a queer designer whose life was cut short by AIDS in 1990 at the age of 31 and who was named one of Equality Forum’s 31 Icons of LGBT History Month in 2006, invented a universe inhabited by cartoonish Images made of staccato-like lines.¹⁶ Keith Haring’s meteoric rise in the 1980s was fueled by an instantly recognizable pop art style which helped him rise from the New York Underground art scene to an iconic career working with celebrities such as Grace Jones, Andy Warhol and Madonna.¹⁷

Haring’s work defied heteronormativity and infused his work with a coded queerness that appealed to a community that would be decimated by the AIDS epidemic and an uncaring government and became a rallying cry of queer advocacy.

¹⁴ Ibid., 76.
¹⁵ Ibid., 24.
At a time when white gay men in the United States were seen in gay-ghettoized terms, Haring's art brought attention to other subcultures of gay men and helped to mainstream them into New York's culture. Scott Herring refers to this as “queer xerography,” co-opting the term derived from Xerox, and posits that this confronted the heteronormative audiences with their own stereotypes surrounding non-heterosexual sex. New York gay society in the late 1970s and early 1980s was a product of a sort of cloning of white heteronormative beauty standards, though there simultaneously existed a plethora of subcultures around drag queens, leather-clad muscle daddies, gay rights activists and black ball culture. This “masculine” cloning of heterosexuality developed in response to the feminization of gay men—and the masculinization of lesbians—used to stereotype and subjugate the LGBTQ+ community.

Venezuelan painter Pedro Centeno Vallenilla was another artist whose work has acquired a new significance in the 21st century. Reading his work in its original context and recognizing the existence of a homoerotic aesthetic, which is reflected throughout the various stages of his painting, reveals an artistic manifestation of homosexual desire. His creative contributions to this aesthetic enabled the gay community to win a space within the artistic field.

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Centeno Vallenilla’s work was scarcely commented on within the history of Venezuelan art. A comprehensive study conducted out by Francisco Da Antonio for the only retrospective exhibition for Centeno Vallenilla’s paintings, exposes the contempt and marginalization to which the extensive work of this Venezuelan artist has been subjected, forgotten, and relegated by derogatory qualifiers.\textsuperscript{20} Centeno Vallenilla’s work was qualified with terms such as “genio, amanerado, mariposón, rebelde, (and) kitsch.”\textsuperscript{21} [genius, affected, butterfly-like (a derogatory term used to refer to homosexuals, rebellious, \textit{kitsch}.)

Queer history has often focused on narratives of progress in which sexual minorities prosper despite the social injuries done to them. This progressive and affirmative narrative has made injury and violence historical realities we often write against, through an emphasis on community building, cultural expressions, and political activism. Sexual minorities survived and flourished, the story goes, despite all they had to endure. But there is another story of queer experience, one that tries to recover encounters much deadlier than the ones Williams recorded in his journal. “Modern homosexual identity is formed out of and in relation to the experience of social damage,” Love argues, adding, “paying attention to what was difficult in the past may tell us how far we have come, but that is not all it will tell us; it also makes visible the damage that we live with in the present.”\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 62. \\
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., pp. 75–76. \\
\textsuperscript{22} Polchin, \textit{op. cit.} 24. 
\end{flushright}
Queer Stories

The experiences of other queer artists and the impact those experiences had on their work led me to explore my own personal history. The cornerstone of my professional graphic design practice has been digital image making and branding, which prompted me to explore the digital restoration and manipulation of old photographs with the intent of illustrating personal stories. Of course, I also needed to put the stories down on paper, which inspired me to use my own handwriting for the typography on several of my pieces. (Image 10) I have written poetry as a cathartic release from depression and anxiety, so I started writing poetry about bullying, my family, my friends, and my passions.

Image 10. Drag Queen, 2020

As I began to integrate these handwritten poems into my work, I began to examine and research the history of collage. (Image 11, Image 12 and Image 13)
Image 11. Knocked Down, 2020

Image 12. An Ode to my Icon
Collage within art was first coined by Cubist artists Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso, who were the first pioneers of this movement. Braque and Picasso began their cutting-edge assemblages around 1910. The first example of collage art appeared within Braque's 1912 artwork titled Fruit Dish and Glass, where he glued down imitation wood-grained wallpaper. Picasso began to add newsprint to his oil paintings which referenced the current events that were taking place. He also employed rope, gluing it around the edge of some canvases. Pioneers of the collage art movement, both Braque and Picasso composed their works from glued bits of colored paper, newspaper, and found objects.
The quintessential invention of the European avant-garde, collage was “Modernist” from its inception. It was also intriguingly imposed as a metaphor for postmodernity, its influence and significance impacting the field of cultural studies and being included in the arsenal of postcolonial thought where it is used to denounce postmodern irony and indecision. Collage thus revealed a path for my work that prompted me to explore not only poetry blended with digital images, but to also write down the stories that occasioned my desire to create these collages. Exploring collage works from the past also inspired me to incorporate three-dimensional objects, torn paper, scans of old postcards, and instant film images into my work. As I reflected on the impact that my experiences must have had on those around me, I became interested in the recollection and perspective of others. As a result, I conducted interviews with family members and friends. The result is a collection of writing which illustrates the tremendous impact persecution, cruelty, and hate has on not just the target of this abuse, but also their loved ones. My father passed away in 2013, and I didn’t have a chance to talk to his about his perspective on stories he was involved with. So, I decided to use a poem I wrote about his death. (Image 14 & Image 15)

Image 14. Maybe Love is a Eulogy

-image-

Maybe Love isn't something that can be owned. It can only be given.
And if it takes time to sit and listen
As the days and nights go.

I am a lonely soul.
I thought it would get easier.
The pain would subside.
But every day it hurts you more.
My eyes are a mirror to my pain.

My thoughts play my mind.
The text of the poem in Image 15 is:

Maybe love isn't something that can be earned.
It can only be given.
And if I take the time to sit and listen
As the days stretch to weeks
The weeks to months
I thought it would get easier
The pain would subside
Instead, every day I miss you more
My anguish turns to despair
My grip on reality loosened
My thoughts play my mind

Image 16, Image 17, and Image 18 were created as an homage to one of my closest friends, whom we lost in 2020. I wrote a letter as a eulogy and read it as his memorial:

A letter from those New Orleans Girls

Dear Michael Pyle,

It felt like falling... Like the world had vanished from under our feet... Like plummeting into an abyss. Like a fall that would last an eternity...

As we try to remember what life was like before we met you I saw the empty road below me—the one we'd have to travel down without you. Because every great adventure we've experienced in our lives included you.

Ours was not just a friendship... It was more. It was a kindred spark of an eternal flame which never flickered and which will never be extinguished. It will light our path as we stumble forward without you.

It will appear when we lose our way... when we need your counsel... or to hear your laugh...
We’ll look for you everywhere we go... And I will know that you will still be there. And I will hear your voice whisper from time to time, “I brought something hot up,” when I listen for you.

We will always remember, the greatest adventure began on the day we met you. And It continued from there through Paris, Venice, Buenos Aires, DC, NYC, San Francisco. It saw us through good times and bad. And not matter what, we insisted on making it fun. This road is long... but rest while I walk...

We will all be together there soon. And until then, we will keep you in our hearts—your smile, your laugh, your Country French, “Your fabulous face,” your style, your love for your friends and family.

Goodbye my love...

for now.

All our love,

The New Orleans Girls
Dear Michael Poly,

It feels like falling...
Like the world had reached down under our feet...
Like plunking into an abyss.
Like a shot that would not be scattered.
As easy to remember what the sun felt before we met you.

I can see the empty road below me
The one we once shared right down ahead of you.
Because every great adventure we’ve experienced in our lives included you
There was not just a friendship... it was more.

It was a brotherhood of a distant flame which never dimmed
And which will never be extinguished.
It will light our paths as we stumble forward without you.
It will appear when we fear our way...
When we need your comfort.

To hear your laugh.
We’ll find you everywhere we go...
And we will know that you will still be there.
And we will hear your voice whisper from time to time,
“Thought I heard something out” when we listen for you.
We will always remember, the greatest adventure
Began on the day we met you.

And I can’t afford to close them through Paris, Rome, Buenos Aires, DC, NYC, San Francisco.
It was us through good times and bad. And no matter what, we insisted on making it fun.
This road is long... but not while we walk...
We will all be together there soon. And until then, we will keep your hearts
Your smile, your laugh, your country 1 week... “Forever to mine...
Your style, your love for your friends and family.
Goodbye my love... I love you.
Queer Conclusion

The process of writing, remembering, and curating stories, poems, and photographs from my youth introduced a sense of (surprising) nostalgia for friends, family, and experiences. However, it also harkened to a past filled with melancholic ruminations of a nightmare existence. (Image 19)

Image 19. Family Portrait

Sifting through images created with dated technology presented an opportunity to reflect on the ubiquity of technology that began in earnest in the 1980s, which coincided with my coming of age. Interestingly, instant photography allowed LGBTQ+ people to document their world using Polaroids and point-and-shoot cameras, allowing a freedom to “be themselves and have a lasting memory without having to drop off films to be developed.
by a third party.” It therefore seemed important to include them in my work for this exhibition. (Image 20)

As I pored over these old photographs, I wrote. As I wrote, ideas about deconstructing my past and honoring my present led me to experimentation with techniques I had not used in the past. Photocopies of old photographs and postcards and train tickets were torn and photocopied and then torn and photocopied again. These images were combined digitally with bits of paper painted with abstract colors that represented the neon plasticity of the 1980s.

My research into queer artists, such as Andy Warhol, who “did everything in his power to increase the production of his art and... attracted a ménage of adult film stars, drag queens, socialites, drug addicts and musicians who became known as ‘the Warhol Superstars,’ convinced me to use Polaroids to lend a pop art sensibility to the work. I write my poetry by hand, and a friend who saw an early draft of A Letter from Those New Orleans Girls suggested I include my handwriting. This gave birth to the idea of superimposing my writing onto my collages. The resulting work is both nostalgic and melancholic, and turned out to be a cathartic experience. It also inspired my final thoughts:

If I could go back and talk to that little boy,

I’d tell him how amazing and strong and smart and loved he is.

I’d tell him his brothers and sister and mother and father would love him no matter what and that they’ll always have his back.

I’d tell him that bully in the library will swallow the end of a gun in a couple of years.

I’d tell him the high school jocks who pick on him won’t amount to anything; they peaked in high school.

I’d tell him his friendships will be life-long and enduringly beautiful; they are his family too.

I’d tell him we’re gonna change the world and make it a better place for every other little queer boy who comes after him.

But most of all, I’d tell him that I love him and am so proud of what he will help me become.
Image 21. Photo from Exhibition Reception

Image 22. Photo from Exhibition Reception
Image 23. Photobooth Print from Exhibition Reception

Image 24. Photo from Exhibition Reception
Image 27. Photo from Exhibition Installation

Image 28. Photo from Exhibition Installation
Image 29 Photo from Exhibition Installation

Image 30. Photo from Exhibition Installation
Image 33. Photo from Exhibition Installation

Image 34. Photo from Exhibition Installation
Image 35. Photo from Exhibition Installation
Bibliography


Vitae

Jerry Lockaby is a marketing and graphic design professional experienced in all aspects of branding for business development and public relations, in both traditional and online/social media formats. With a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Louisiana State University, Jerry has spent the last 20+ years honing his creative passion for graphic design and art direction into a highly effective marketing management practice informed by a deep understanding of what creative design experiences sell with consumers.

Mr. Lockaby is an expert in the latest, cutting-edge design software systems (such as Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, Rhinoceros 3D, and others). He has a history of executing award-winning advertising campaigns, while effectively handling brand management, budgets, and media planning and buying. He specializes in corporate identity campaigns, proposal writing, fundraising, and event planning. Mr. Lockaby is English/Spanish bilingual and plans to receive his Master of Fine Arts on August 12, 2022.