

Queer Possibility

Reader Guide

Queer Possibility introduces an interpretive strategy that uplifts the marginalized narratives of LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) historical figures and objects of queer significance. It begins with three unspoken standards that content developers use to determine whether to include queer content in museum exhibits and tours and outlines three alternative queer-positive strategies that prioritize the experience of queer visitors and the telling of queer history.

This reader guide pulls quotes from the article and poses questions to help you reflect on your own practice with colleagues or on your own.

The article can be downloaded here: margaretmiddleton.com/writing

“So we whipped out our phones and stood there in the museum googling the artist in a frustrated attempt to confirm what we already knew: this painting was super gay.”

1. The article begins with an anecdote about the author and their partner visiting a museum and seeing an artwork that looks queer but frustratingly, the label doesn't say anything about the artist's queer life and work.
 - Have you ever had an experience like this in a museum?
 - How did it make you feel about the content? the museum? yourself?
 - Can you recall an experience where the labels did mention the artist's queer life and work? Are there types of museums or types of history that are more likely to discuss an artist's queerness?

“Not only did this exhibition include a photo of Kahlo with her husband, it also featured a love note from Kahlo to a male lover signed with pink lipstick kisses. The inclusion of these two items betrayed a bias that a heterosexual “personal life” is relevant, but a queer one is not; or perhaps that a heterosexual life is not personal, but a queer one is.”

2. What makes a personal life personal?
 - What exhibitions have you seen that include information about historic figures' personal lives?
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- What exhibitions have you seen that divulge “secrets” or information that an historical figure kept hidden during their lifetime?
- When you tell an historical figure’s story in a museum, how do you decide when to disclose such information? Is there anything you would choose to keep hidden?

“Scholar José Esteban Muñoz introduced the idea of ‘queering evidence’ by looking to ephemera and gesture as indicators of queerness. Imaginative queer possibility values queer experience as expertise and gaydar as epistemology.”

3. What is the difference between experience and expertise?
 - What kinds of things in museums tend to ping your gaydar? How might your gaydar differ from another person’s gaydar?
 - How could you use your own gaydar in your work?

“Undoing this erasure challenges museums to prioritize the interests of queer visitors, value queer expertise, and explicitly posit potential queerness in museum interpretation. The result will be a queer-positive visitor experience that will give straight and cisgender visitors a new lens through which to look at the world.”

4. What would it be like to visit a museum that centers queer visitors and queer content?
 - What would it look like? feel like?
 - What would make it different from other museum experiences?