

Union College Visual Arts is proud to present

Matthew Leifheit: Gay Archive

Crowell and West Galleries | Feigenbaum Center for Visual Arts
Curated by Rachel Stern, Assistant Professor of Photography

September 4th - November 12th 2024

Reception—October 3rd, 4:30 - 6:30PM
Artist Talk—October 3rd, 12:50PM VART 204

Since 2021 Matthew Leifheit has traveled the country visiting and photographing in queer archives. Leifheit describes: “During the 1970s and 80s, independent archives were established by LGBTQ Americans to collect materials that major institutions would not. These materials—pictures, letters, T-shirts, protest signs, ephemera, and the like—document queer culture and identity in the 20th century, in relation to the rise of the US gay rights movement. More importantly, they contain the evidence of many peoples’ lives who would otherwise be lost to history, for reasons ranging from homophobia to racial prejudice, sexism and AIDS.”



*Pedro Zamora Capitol Hill November 1st 1993 (VHS Recording)
GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 2024*

Embracing the slow-moving and highly detailed eye of a large format camera, Leifheit brings the archives to life; asking us to consider not only their contents, but the painstaking and love-fueled labor of maintaining them. Looking at the archives as an artist rather than an historian, Leifheit’s *Gift Images* imagine a way for the materials to exit their vitrines and archival boxes. Printed on newsprint (a material that rejects longevity) and offered in a magazine rack in the gallery they invite visitors to take home, live with, and disseminate the contents of the historical constellation Leifheit has arranged. Mirroring these ephemeral images are pictures printed using an extremely archival process on sheets of metal. In one photograph we encounter the photo archives of Lorraine Hurdle, a black queer woman serving in the US military during WWII. In another a pair of apparently blood stained underwear belonging to Harvey Milk. In a third, every image of Judy Garland at the Stonewall National Archives.

Throughout the gallery drifts the audio from *Sad Songs*, a looping video projection tucked inside a curtained chamber. Leifheit describes this video as a, “recital drawn from an ever expanding archive of gay men’s chorus performances from the decade before effective HIV/AIDS treatments became available in the United States, 1985 —1995.” The materials of the original recording is worn in places; distorting the audio and video and illustrating this emotional, social, and actual breakdown within the queer community.

Leifheit’s *Gay Archive* asks us to consider what is worth keeping, how histories are made and told, who gets to hold them, and who is able to seek out and find them. These photographs dramatize the limits of immortality as we attempt to access it through media. It is a repositioning of the ways in which we access materials allowing them to be seen from multiple vantages (see *Castro Camera Sign, 2024*, which both images and recreates the neon sign for “Foto Service”) and in varied contexts (see the *Gift Images*, which can be taken home). Leifheit debuts this work for a student audience with particular enthusiasm. It suggests creative approaches to historical research and illuminates queer histories and questions critically important to today’s discourse. Through this work students will experience the deeply personal and subjective nature of history-making and be asked to consider their experience of the past and their potential to structure their own movements, narratives, and archives in the future.

Matthew Leifheit is an American photographer, magazine editor, and professor based in Brooklyn, New York. A graduate of Rhode Island School of Design and the Yale School of Art, Leifheit is Editor-in-Chief of MATTE Magazine, the journal of emerging photography he has published since 2010. Leifheit's photographs have appeared in publications such as The New York Times, The New Yorker, Aperture, TIME, and Artforum, and have been exhibited internationally. His work has been supported by residencies at the Corporation of Yaddo and The Watermill Center, receiving grants from the New York State Cultural Council and the Fund for Lesbian and Gay Studies at Yale, where he was awarded the Richard Benson Prize in 2017. He is currently full-time faculty at Massachusetts College of Art and Design in Boston.



The archives referenced in this exhibition include:

GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco
The Watermill Center Collection, Long Island
The Chelsea Hotel, New York
Darrell Crawford and David McConnell Collection, Key West
Stonewall National Archives & Museum, Fort Lauderdale
Gerber-Hart Library, Chicago
Key West Museum of Art & History, Key West

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