

# ALIVE

## ‘Art After Stonewall’ honors 50th anniversary of 1969 uprising

By

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Following stops in New York and Miami, the art exhibit comes home to the Columbus Museum of Art

Daniel Marcus had a lot on his mind in the lead up to the New York debut of “Art After Stonewall, 1969-1989.”

He thought about the layouts of the two museums — the Grey Art Gallery at New York University and the Leslie Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art. He thought about how the art, more than 200 pieces, would look in the spaces. He thought about which pieces should be next to each other in order to spark conversation. He thought about what art critics and historians would say about “Art After Stonewall,” the first national museum exhibit examining the impact of LGBTQ liberation on the art world. One thing he didn’t think about was the emotional effect the show would have on the artists featured.

Before the New York opening, Marcus did a walkthrough with Harmony Hammond, one of the exhibited artists. Hammond wanted to make sure her sculpture looked, in her words, “perky.” Marcus assumed she would fuss over everyone else’s artwork after she finished with her own, but that’s not what happened.

“Instead she was just like, ‘We look so young!’” Marcus said. “She just kept seeing people she knew, or seeing work that she half remembered, or remembered in an art historical way. That was a response that I somehow hadn’t factored in. Just to see that the exhibition felt like, in Harmony’s case, a kind of homecoming or a family reunion. That was just so special.”

“Art After Stonewall” was curated by artist and art historian Jonathan Weinberg with help from Tyler Cann, CMA’s head of exhibitions and Pizzuti curator of contemporary art; Drew Sawyer, the Phillip Leonian and Edith Rosenbaum Leonian curator of photography at the Brooklyn Museum; and Marcus, CMA’s Roy Lichtenstein curatorial fellow. The exhibition, which was organized by CMA, traveled to the Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum in Miami before returning to Columbus for a two-month run that starts Friday, March 6.

The New York debut coincided with the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots, the pinnacle moment in the modern LGBTQ rights movement. However, in 2012 when the exhibit was first discussed, those involved expected it to happen long before the landmark anniversary.

“We thought we would do something before it because we probably wouldn’t be able to get any loans of major works before the 50th anniversary. We just assumed somebody else was going to take on a project of this scope and scale,” said Cann, who started at CMA in 2013. “At a certain point, we realized that the big historical show was going to be our show.”

“Art After Stonewall, 1969-1989”

Columbus Museum of Art

480 E. Broad St., Downtown

March 6–May 31

columbusmuseum.org

The exhibit consists of seven sections — Coming Out, Sexual Outlaws and AIDS and Activism among them — but those titles are more fluid than concrete. Many pieces would have been at home in several categories. The theme that connects the pieces is visibility. In many ways, it was the overarching theme of the Stonewall riots, too.

“Stonewall marks a moment where the politics of queer activism really coalesces around the call to make oneself visible,” Marcus said. “You have to come out. It’s really the key idea for this exhibition as a whole, the sense that it’s now necessary to declare oneself openly gay, lesbian, trans, queer, etc.”

The exhibit is unique in that it focuses on work from both LGBTQ artists — Robert Mapplethorpe, Keith Haring and Catherine Opie among them — and straight artists who were engaged with queer subcultures. Sawyer, who previously served as the curator of photography at CMA, said the reasoning behind that has a lot to do with identity.

“Including people that are straight-identified within the exhibition problematizes the binary between straight and gay or heterosexual and homosexual, so we wanted to complicate that,” he said. “If you’re really talking about impact, and part of the exhibition is about how did the gay liberation movement from the Stonewall riots impact the art world more broadly, it meant we would have to include all artists that we thought were engaging with subculture or iconography of the LGBTQ+ community. And that’s true of so much of our history.”

“Art After Stonewall” is a tribute to the Stonewall uprising, but it’s scope is much larger than one six-day event. It’s also about what came after the first brick was thrown. For Cann, the piece that best illustrates this is Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt’s “Allegory of the Stonewall Riot (Statue of Liberty) Fighting for Drag Queen, Husband and Home” (1969). Lanigan-Schmidt, who was at the Stonewall riots,

actually made the piece before the protests, but it reminded him of the Statue of Liberty so he renamed it.

“I think it really shows the aspirations or imagination of a queer culture that was marginalized,” Cann said. “As Lanigan-Schmidt recalls, the Stonewall Inn was just a place where they could dance, that they could be themselves. That interruption of saying, anyone should be able to enjoy [themselves] without the intervention of the state was something that really kicked off the resistance.”