



BROOKLYN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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NEW EXHIBITION, *ON THE (QUEER) WATERFRONT*, OPENS MARCH 5 AT BROOKLYN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Based on years of research, exhibition showcases the early history of LGBTQ life along Brooklyn's waterfront

[February 13, 2019] Brooklyn, NY— On March 5, 2019, Brooklyn Historical Society (BHS) will open *On the (Queer) Waterfront*, an exhibition which describes the largely forgotten LGBTQ communities that thrived along Brooklyn's waterfront in the 1800s and through World War II.

On the (Queer) Waterfront is the first exhibition ever to focus explicitly on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer history of Brooklyn. Since at least 1855, when Walt Whitman published his epic poem *Leaves of Grass* at a print shop in Brooklyn Heights, there has been a significant – if often overlooked – LGBTQ presence in the borough, much of it clustered along the waterfront, where industrial jobs, cheap housing, and urban anonymity life provided unique opportunities for queer people to explore their own desires and discover one another.

By profiling the many queer individuals who have lived in or passed through Brooklyn in the last 150 years, *On the (Queer) Waterfront* shows both the changes and continuities in our ideas and experiences of sexuality in Brooklyn. In particular, the exhibit examines five types of work that proved specifically welcoming of or interesting to LGBTQ people: artist, entertainer, sex worker, sailor, and factory worker.

The exhibition is co-curated by Hugh Ryan and Avram Finkelstein. As the 2015-2016 Martin Duberman Fellow at the New York Public Library, Ryan conducted new, original research on the subject. His book, *When Brooklyn Was Queer*, (St. Martin's Press, March 2019), will be released on the same day. A joint exhibition, opening reception, and book launch will be held at Brooklyn Historical Society on Tuesday, March 5 from 6:30 to 8:30. The event is free and open to the public.

The exhibition is designed by Avram Finkelstein, a founding member of the Silence=Death and Gran Fury collectives.

On the (Queer) Waterfront will feature evocative photographs, ephemera, and artifacts, while a reading and discussion area will offer visitors a space to view relevant books – including Ryan’s - and discuss with one another.

On the (Queer) Waterfront compliments Brooklyn Historical Society’s long-term exhibition and multi-media experience *Waterfront*, which is located at BHS’s second location in DUMBO’s Empire Stores in Brooklyn Bridge Park. *Waterfront* explores the vibrant history of Brooklyn’s coastline through interwoven stories of workers, industries, activists, innovators, families, neighborhoods, and ecosystems.

The run of *On the (Queer) Waterfront* coincides with the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Stonewall riots, and New York City’s World Pride Month in June. In connection with the exhibition, Brooklyn Historical Society is offering multiple public programs and a podcast:

- On Monday, April 1, Ryan will discuss the intersection of LGBTQ identity and creativity with historian Daniel Hurewitz and author Sherill Tippins in a program titled, [The Queer Creative Impulse: Artistic Expression and Gender Identity](#).
- On, Monday, April 15, George Chauncey, DeWitt Clinton Professor of History at Columbia University and author of the trailblazing book *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, will [present a lecture examining NYC’s post-war gay culture and politics](#).
- In addition, Brooklyn Historical Society’s podcast series, *Flatbush + Main* will focus on this history in an episode to be released in March, following the opening of the exhibition.

On the (Queer) Waterfront will be on display at Brooklyn Historical Society (128 Pierrepont Street, Brooklyn, NY), from March 5, 2019 until August 4, 2019.

BHS is open to the public Wednesday to Sunday from 12pm to 5pm. Suggested admission is \$10 for adults, \$6 for seniors and teachers, and free for members and students of all ages.

On the (Queer) Waterfront is made possible through the generous support of the Cezanne Studio, Jonathan Arnold & Stephen B. Soba, John Caldwell & Zane Blaney (through the Horizons Foundation), Daphne Philipson, Kathleen Behrens, V. Hansmann, Ken Lustbader, Lori Metcalf, John P. Ryan, Louis Wiley, Jr., and Roy E. Eddey & Joel E. Hershey, Lizanne Fontaine and Bob Buckholz, Marj and Bill Coleman, Roy R. Eddey and Joel Hershey, Michael Gillespie and Lauren Glant, Chris Kelley and Stuart Post, Jane Melnick and Eileen Willenborg, Ward Mintz and Floyd Lattin, Audra and Robin Ottaway, Susan and William Rifkin, Nick Vaughan & Jake Margolin, and Lucien Zayan.

[About Brooklyn Historical Society](#)

Founded in 1863, Brooklyn Historical Society is a nationally recognized urban history center dedicated to preserving and encouraging the study of Brooklyn's extraordinary 400-year history. Located in Brooklyn Heights and housed in a magnificent landmark building designed by George Post and opened in 1881, today's BHS is a cultural hub for civic dialogue, thoughtful engagement and community outreach. In May 2017 BHS opened a second site in DUMBO’s Brooklyn Bridge Park.

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