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A *Golden Artist*: Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt's
Life and Art During the Stonewall Era

"We make art, we make music, and things like that. It's just a basic, human thing. And the more desperate the situation, if a person has the talent and ability to articulate that desperation into a moment, bang, there's art. That's it" -Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt.¹

This paper explores queer artist Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt (b. 1948) and his piece titled *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot (Statue of Liberty Fighting for Drag Queen, Husband, and Home)* (1969). I take a biographical approach to the paper, dissecting Lanigan-Schmidt's childhood and young adult life living as a queer street kid in the 1960s. I follow him to New York City, where he continued creating his kitsch style art and started getting recognized for it. Outside of his artistic endeavors, Lanigan-Schmidt would catch himself hanging out at The Stonewall Inn, a gay bar on Christopher Street. In the early hours of June 28, 1969, The Stonewall Inn was unexpectedly raided by the police. At a time when being queer was criminalized, the patrons of Stonewall had had enough and fought back against the police, sparking a riot² that turned into a weeks-long protest. Lanigan-Schmidt was in attendance that night and joined the fight for gay liberation. It was this night that inspired his creation, *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot (Statue of Liberty Fighting for Drag Queen, Husband, and Home)*. By analyzing

¹ Jonathan Weinberg, *Art After Stonewall 1969-1989* (Columbus, Ohio: Cmoa, Columbus Museum of Art; New York, New York, 2019), 256

² Although famously known as The Stonewall Riots, some veterans of the night prefer to call it The Stonewall Uprisings, Library of Congress, "Research Guides: LGBTQ+ Studies: A Resource Guide: Stonewall Era and Uprising," guides.loc.gov (Library of Congress, 2019).

the contextual importance of The Stonewall Inn and the riots that ensued, I show how *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot* reflects queer life in the 1960s. In the art historical canon, queer art is largely underrepresented. However, in this paper I show how Lanigan-Schmidt and *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot* deserve a place in the art historical canon.

Allegory of the Stonewall Riot was first featured in the 2019 exhibition *Art After Stonewall, 1969-1989*, which was organized by and shown in The Columbus Museum of Art, as well as travelling to The Grey Art Gallery, New York University and Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art, and The Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum, Miami.³ The piece is currently on view in The Columbus Museum of Art. *Art After Stonewall* spans two decades between Stonewall and AIDS, and “celebrates the passion, inventiveness, and fierce solidarity of the first generation of ‘out’ artists and activists. Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt was interviewed by one of the exhibition curators Jonathan Weinberg, and an edited version of it was featured in the exhibition’s published book *Art After Stonewall, 1969-1989* (2019), for which he was an editor. This is the main source for this paper regarding this specific artwork for this paper, however not much about the piece itself is highlighted. I wondered why such a highlighted sculpture in this exhibition did not have much information about it, so I researched the piece and found that it is a common occurrence in other research of Lanigan-Schmidt, and I found there were no sources specifically studying *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot*. Most scholar’s research of Lanigan-Schmidt’s art are based on his other works, such as those displayed in the 2012 exhibition *Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt: Tender Love Among the Junk* at MoMA PS1. Most of my research of Lanigan-Schmidt’s life and *Allegory of*

³ Weinberg, *Art After Stonewall*, 6.

the Stonewall Riot came from first-hand accounts from interviews. In my research, I only found Lanigan-Schmidt mentioning the *Allegory* once, in his interview with Jonathan Weinberg. Most of his interviews about the exhibition or his experiences during the riots. In the interview, we hear more about Lanigan-Schmidt's upbringing and his experience at the Stonewall Inn. He brought up his memoir *Mother Stonewall and The Golden Rats (Fig. 2)* along with his *Golden Rats (1966-1967) (Fig. 3)* which are both highlighted later on in the essay and are relevant to his work during the Stonewall Era.

With the piece being made by a gay artist and reflecting queer history, I take a dive into queer art's role in the art historical canon, using Jennifer Doyle's essay *Queer Wallpaper (2006)* as a basis to my understanding. In this, Doyle asks why queer art is so hard to define throughout art history and writings, as well as giving a personal narrative of a challenge she faced as a scholar focused on queer art and artists. I give this paper a similar format, inserting my story of when my interest in the Stonewall Era started and how it led to finding Lanigan-Schmidt's *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot*.

In 1969, the same year of the Stonewall Riots, Lanigan-Schmidt created *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot (Statue of Liberty Fighting for Drag Queen, Husband, and Home)*. The small-scale statue, measuring twelve inches tall, is made of foil, plastic wrap, pipe cleaners, linoleum, glitter, acrylic paint, acrylic floor shine, food coloring, staples, wire, printed material, found objects, knick knacks from his previous pieces, and other media. In the label at the Columbus Art Museum, the piece is described as a statue that "represents American suburbia as a site of queer fantasy, populated by a bare-chested boxer with his cartoon faced wife, a drag queen." The piece is brilliant and vibrant, consisting of all colors of the rainbow, and covered with glitter and shiny

materials that reflect brightly with a light source directed onto it. The base of the statue is a round, glittery, blue meadow. Blue flowers and green plants grow from the ground, and wire and plastic wrap are visible along the outer edge. The primary focus of the piece is the drag queen. She wears a sparkly green dress made of an iridescent foil or fabric, with gold foil detailing around the waist that seamlessly flows up her torso to become her arm. She wears a large wig made of dyed plastic and foil that extends inches from her head. One bee that is made up of black and white pipe cleaners lay on the skirt of her dress. Another bee made of brown and yellow pipe cleaners rests on the bouquet of yellow flowers she is holding in her right arm. Her face, made of yellow dyed plastic wrap looks like a classic painted smiley face; two circle eyes, a circle nose, and a smile that almost reaches to her eyes. Behind the queen, to the right, is a sepia-toned photo of her husband; a strong male boxer, posed shirtless with boxing shorts on and his fists up. He is surrounded by large staples, and spills of red and yellow dye spot the photo. A bundle of wire, foil, glitter, and other found objects rest on top and surround the photo. The surrounding materials trickle down to the drag queen and husband's home which is a real, mini doll-house. The house has an orange facade with drawings of windows and doors. The middle window is open and shows two human silhouettes, representing the couple. Moving to the back of the piece (Fig. 4), the back of the house and husband are covered by a large foil piece dyed with yellow, black, and blue ink and paint. There is a painted image of a religious figure's head wearing a biretta with a cross. The back side of the drag queen exposes her golden foil legs and left arm wrapped around her husband. The composition of the statue reflects drag itself— an exaggerated performance rooted in LGBTQ+ culture. Lanigan-Schmidt did not make the sculpture with the intention of calling it *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot (Statue of Liberty Fighting for Drag Queen,*

Husband, and Home). The origin of the title, in Lanigan-Schmidt's words to Jonathan Weinberg, "I didn't make it and call it that (title)... although when it was made – it is all those things, it is in the name...it was that before it had the name."⁴ It looks very similar to the Statue of Liberty, which is why he added that part in the name.⁵ It is a direct reflection of the events that took place during the Stonewall Riots in which Lanigan-Schmidt was in attendance. It is a truth told through art, a historical story, an *allegory*. There is no denying that during the riots drag queens were taking to the streets to fight for their husbands and homes but more specifically, they were joining the fight for gay liberation in the United States.

Much of the materials used to make *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot*, as well as some of the iconographical allusions are reflected from Lanigan-Schmidt's upbringing. Lanigan-Schmidt was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey in 1948 and grew up in Linden, New Jersey⁶, about thirty minutes outside of New York City. It is crucial to remember that he grew up in a time where being gay was criminalized and largely illegal in the United States. He grew up lower class, and lived in a neighborhood that was an in between of a black and white neighborhood⁷ that was being redlined.⁸ Lanigan-Schmidt was aware of his queerness from a young age, as early as fifth grade.⁹ He did not hide his queerness throughout his youth, however it was not something he would talk about much with his family, who were highly religious, and he was made fun of in school. As a highschooler, he started creating small collages made from cut-outs of stolen magazines,

⁴ Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, *Maximalist Art*; an interview with Thomas Lanigan Schmidt, interview by Jonathan Weinberg, March 19, 2018.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Weinberg, *Art After Stonewall*, 75.

⁷ Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, *Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt*, interview by Ra-ey Saleh, *The Outwords Archive*, October 5, 2024, 01:00.

⁸ Redlining was the practice of denying monetary services to neighborhoods with a primarily black population.

⁹ *Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt*, 1:00.

some even of his face atop stylish dresses.¹⁰ At sixteen years old, he set out to New York City to be with a man for the first time, and after his experience, he kept going back to meet other men and continue exploring his identity¹¹, all the while making friends and falling in love with the city. In 1965, Lanigan-Schmidt graduated high school and went to Pratt Institute in New York City to study art. He struggled financially as going to college is not a cheap endeavor, living in New York City was expensive, and he was financially on his own after already growing up in the working class. However, he managed to figure out how to survive by panhandling¹² and using that money to stay in hotel rooms for a few months, until he made enough to find himself an apartment in the Lower East Side and then eventually getting a job as a messenger boy.¹³ He created a lot of art in his new apartment, including his collages out of gay magazines, and he started creating knick knacks made from found objects and materials from around his home and the city. It was during this time in his first apartment, making knick knacks and collages, when he first met Christopher Scott and Henry Geldzahler, two gay art-conossieurs, who he grew to become close friends with. He would visit their apartment which was full of art, books, and had a record player which they played pop records on often while dancing together. It was Scott and Geldzahler who gave Lanigan-Schmidt the resources and advice to apply to Cooper Union¹⁴, which he ended up getting denied from. This rejection sparked a new idea for Lanigan-Schmidt to put his art out into the world. He created an alter ego, Ethel Dull,¹⁵ and led tours of his art around his apartment as her. His works mainly consisted of found objects, trash, and

¹⁰ Weinberg, *Art After Stonewall*, 76.

¹¹ *Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt*, 1:00.

¹² Asking people for money in the street.

¹³ *Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt*, 13:00

¹⁴ Jonathan Weinberg, *Maximalist Art; an interview with Thomas Lanigan Schmidt* (2018).

¹⁵ Lanigan-Schmidt's Alter Ego based on art collector Ethel Scull

cheap craft materials including foil, dye, markers, paint, glitter, and magazine trimmings. He used these objects because he was poor and could not afford fancy materials from art stores, reflecting class struggle. The materials also reflected his religious upbringing, as “glitter and sparkle have a theological basis. It’s supposed to be the energy of God’s grace.”¹⁶ His financial circumstances, from his childhood to early adult life, ultimately gave his art a signature look— an eclectic bundle of organized garb. Outside of creating art and giving tours of his apartment in drag, Lanigan-Schmidt often found himself in the queer streets and night life of New York City, including The Stonewall Inn.

To understand the multi-layered significance of *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot*, it is important to consider the full context of The Stonewall Inn and the night of the riots. On June 28th, 1969, after centuries of oppression to the queer community, patrons at The Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City, fought back. The Stonewall Inn, located on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village stood as a safe space for the local LGBTQ community. At the time, there were laws in place that made it illegal for LGBTQ people to express their identity, such as the “three garment rule” which stated if someone was wearing three pieces of clothing or jewelry that didn’t match the gender stated on their ID, they could get arrested. Gay marriage was not legal at the time either, and outside of these laws the queer community faced decades of attacks and discriminatory actions. However, The Stonewall Inn was a place where the queer community to openly be themselves, and Lanigan-Schmidt highlighted that it was the only place the gays could slow dance with each other.¹⁷ Although the bar seemed like an oasis for the queer

¹⁶ Kendall DeBoer, “Jewel-Encrusted Rats in Ecclesiastical Garb: Art and Treasures for You, Honey,” *Decoratingdissidence.com*, August 22, 2023.

¹⁷ Weinberg, *Art After Stonewall*, 75.

community to dance together and express themselves, it was not clean, nor was it protecting them from legal repercussions. The bar was owned by the mafia, who was mostly in it for the money grab, and also made deals with the NYPD's 16th precinct to keep the bar open even though illegal activity was taking place (i.e. three garment rule). Many of the glasses were washed in the same bucket of dirty dish water, and bathrooms were not maintained. Several patrons of The Stonewall Inn even reported being harassed or assaulted by mafia affiliated workers of the bar. There were different rooms of the bar where people would congregate and dance. The white room was where most of the upper class patrons would hang out, and the black room was where the poor street kids, such as Lanigan-Schmidt, would hang out and dance. In there, the jukebox blasted hit songs over the speakers and is where Lanigan-Schmidt spent most of his nights at the bar, drinking, socializing, and more importantly to him, slow-dancing with his friends and other people.

Routine police raids occurred almost every week at The Stonewall Inn. The bar flashed red lights when the staff was notified that the police would be coming. This served as a quick warning for patrons to leave, or change their clothing to avoid getting arrested for cross dressing. Part of the mafia and the police's deal was that they would only perform these raids during the weekdays at times where the bar was not busy. However, on June 28, 1969, a lively Saturday night, the police came unexpectedly. Lanigan-Schmidt was in attendance that night, and was dancing in the black room when all of a sudden the red warning lights flashed. Patrons, who packed the bar that Saturday night, were shocked about the raid that was going to take place. Some patrons started getting frustrated, including Marsha P. Johnson.¹⁸ Now, from when the police

¹⁸ Marsha P. Johnson was a black transgender woman who is known as the leading figure during the Stonewall Era and protests

raided the bar to the first instigation of a riot, the story has been told in several ways. Piecing together what historians have collected about the night, the story tells that Marsha threw the first shot glass towards the police, shattering it and igniting a fight between the police and patrons. At a time when technology was not advanced, word spread fast about the Saturday night raid at The Stonewall Inn. In less than an hour, hundreds of community members gathered on Christopher Street and around The Stonewall Inn, fighting for gay liberation. In attendance was photographer Fred W. McDarrah, who captured a photo of Lanigan-Schmidt and other patrons in front of the bar hours into the riots, which became an iconic historic photo of the event (Fig. 5). Lanigan-Schmidt recalls the riots lasting hours and time moving on its own terms.¹⁹ By the time the sun went up, only a dozen or so patrons were arrested, and the police took refuge inside of the Stonewall Inn, as protesters erupted in chant outside, a perfect juxtaposition of the initial cause of the riots. For the following six days, protests led by Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera²⁰, and several other trans women of color, continued fighting for queer liberation. *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot* was created by Lanigan-Schmidt as his own reflection of the night of the riots.

Twenty years after the riots, in 1989, Lanigan-Schmidt wrote a one-page memoir *Mother Stonewall and the Golden Rats*, about his experiences before and during the Stonewall Riots. In quotes to summarize the memoir, Lanigan-Schmidt writes,

“We sat on the curb-gutter around the corner from a Dance-Bar called the STONEWALL.... We lived in cheap hotels, broken down apartments, abandoned buildings or on the streets. Home was where the heart is... WE WERE STREET RATS. Puerto Rican, BLACK, Northern and Southern whites... WE ALL ENDED UP TOGETHER AT A PLACE CALLED THE

¹⁹ Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, 36:00

²⁰ Sylvia Rivera was a transgender woman who was another leading figure during the Stonewall Era and protests. She co-founded Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) with Marsha P. Johnson to support un-housed transgender youth.

*STONEWALL. SAFE and sound...We DANCED... We were happy... THAT NIGHT the (STREET) "Gutter Rats" shone like the brightest Gold!... the mystery of history happened again in the Least likely of Places..."*²¹

Although the Golden Rats were featured in works Lanigan-Schmidt created before the night of the Stonewall Riots, in this memoir he gives us their "origin story". The rats represented the street queens, and are "suggestive of divinity and miracles, gold and glistening."²² The rats had something to do with Stonewall, but they also had to do with a lot of things; they had to do with street life before Stonewall.²³ Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt was one of those street rats, shining gold that night, and he's continued to shine gold ever since.

Queer art changed after the Stonewall Riots, and so were the ways it was interpreted and defined by art historians. It is largely underrepresented in art history canon and unrecognized in museums across the world unless a specific, rare, queer exhibition is featured. In an interview with Hyperallergic, an online art publication, Lanigan-Schmidt discusses the impact of the Stonewall Riots on the art world. He says that the art world took decades to recognize the Stonewall Riots, and they finally did it when it seemed forced to do so... It is like they have to pay mouth-service to its history."²⁴ This is still showcased in the art world today, as queer art and topics are only highlighted in museums during specific events such as pride month, or only showcased in queer spaces. Jenifer Doyle's 2009 essay *Queer Wallpaper*, pushes the idea of where queer art is shown and that is what makes queer art, queer art. She says "you can take a

²¹ Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, *Mother Stonewall and the Golden Rats*, 1989.

²² Kendall DeBoer, "Jewel-Encrusted Rats in Ecclesiastical Garb: Art and Treasures for You, Honey," *Decoratingdissidence.com*, August 22, 2023.

²³ Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt: The Story of One of the Few Artists at the Stonewall Uprising, interview by Hrag Vartanian, March 21, 2024.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

class on the history of art since 1945 and never hear a word about sexuality... the full discussion of sexuality and art is a very recent development in art history— as central to art history as queer people are, the subject of sexuality still remains outside the official boundaries of the field.”²⁵ There is an ongoing struggle with LGBTQ+ recognition from art historians and large institutions when discussions of queer art are brought up. Queer art is argued, more than most art, in talks of high art and low art. Many scholars label and see high art as valuable art, made with valuable materials that is shown in world-class museums for everyone to be mesmerised by and think critically about their meaning. Some scholars that have studied Lanigan-Schmidt’s work have labeled his art as Kitsch style, which is defined as “art objects, design styles, or entertainment media that is generally of low quality, overly sentimental, and lacking in artistic merit.”²⁶ Yes, his art was made of found objects, cheap materials and trash, and described as an eclectic bundle of “garb”, but the works themselves are the complete opposite of the materials they are made up of. *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot* was created using kitschy found objects, such as glitter, foil, pipe cleaners, and food coloring, purposely used as an ode to the street kids who courageously fought against the police and years of harassment the night of the riots.²⁷ He has also stated that he uses these items because he was one of those street kids who barely had enough money to support themselves, so that was all he could afford to create his art. *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot* is crucial in understanding the history of queer art after Stonewall.

²⁵ Jennifer Doyle, “Queer Wallpaper,” in *The Art of Art History* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 391–401.

²⁶ Annie Schultz, “Kitsch Life: Aesthetics of Misinformation,” *Philosophy of Education* 80, no. 2 (2024): 29–44.

²⁷ Christina Dideriksen, “US: Stonewall Changed the Course of Queer History. These Artworks Captured the Aftermath”, Equal Eyes, April 24, 2019.

Jennifer Doyle acknowledges Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's²⁸ research about how people can become attached to certain artworks "because they seem to speak to us, to speak about us— and because they seem, in particular, to speak to the experience of living at odd angles to dominant culture."²⁹ My interest in the history of the Stonewall Era started last summer, July of 2025. I was exploring New York City alone on a random Tuesday. I was on the 1 Train heading towards midtown Manhattan. A couple stops into the ride, by chance, I looked down at my phone and saw The Stonewall Inn in pink letters on my map. In a matter of milliseconds it felt as if I floated out of my seat and into the station. I followed the directions for a few minutes, leading me straight to The Stonewall National Monument (Fig. 6 ,and Fig. 7). Now, as a lesbian, I of course knew about the history of Stonewall and its importance to the queer community. However, I finally felt the weight of the movement when I was immersed in the space. I saw George Segal's *Gay Liberation*³⁰ statue (Fig. 8), and photographs documenting Stonewall's past. I was entranced by the art that was already inspired by this sacred queer space. Across the street is The Stonewall National Monument Visitor center. With only 15 minutes until close, I stepped into the space and felt even more pride and the weight of Stonewall's importance. I read anecdotes from patrons of the night and members of the queer community. Tears filled my eyes as I was overwhelmed with emotion. I was standing on the shoulders of giants that have paved the way for me to have a place in this world. I signed my name on the wall, wrote in the visitor book, headed out of the visitors center, walked to my right and opened the doors to The Stonewall Inn. It was

²⁸ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick is a scholar and writer of *Queer and Now* (1993), Doyle, "Queer Wallpaper," 395.

²⁹ Doyle, *Queer Wallpaper*, 395.

³⁰ "This sculpture by George Segal (1924–2000) honors the gay rights movement and commemorates the events at the Stonewall Inn opposite this park that gave rise to the movement", "Christopher Park Monuments - Gay Liberation : NYC Parks," www.nycgovparks.org, n.d.

the middle of the day, so not many people were there. Art, photographs, and rainbow decor covered the walls, and *Bring It On!* Was playing on the small TV behind the bar. I got The Stonewall IPA and started chatting with the man sitting next to me, who, long story short, has dressed celebrities like Rhianna and worked on famous TV show sets. After my interactions with The Stonewall Inn and other places on Christopher Street, I could not stop thinking about how I have never been in a space quite like it. I was standing on the shoulders of the gay giants who paved the way for me to find a place in the world. I took my interest in The Stonewall Inn to an extreme, listening to every podcast and video essay I could on the events, and filled my Letterboxd with queer films. I used my hyper-interest later on towards a class project, creating a mock exhibition of art inspired by Stonewall, where I first came across *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot*. Every other artwork I could find was made by queer artists who were inspired by the riots, or made decades after them. Although they were powerful in nature, they did not grasp my emotions in the way *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot* did. I was immediately drawn to the piece as it was the only artwork I could find, besides photographs, that was made by an artist who was in attendance the night of the riots. I felt as if it was an authentic telling of the riots. When I look at the piece, I see it come to life. I see a drag queen with a large wig with her husband by her side., chanting on Christopher Street the night of the riots. I see them going home together after hours of fighting for their rights, and standing in their home looking over a New York sunrise. *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot* gave queer audiences hope during the time of the gay rights movement, but it also gives hope to contemporary queer viewers who are still fighting for gay rights and visibility as they are actively being stripped away from history.

I argue that *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot* by Thomas Lanigan Schmidt deserves a place in the art historical canon. Yes, some queer art and artists such as Frida Kahlo and Andy Warhol are icons in the art world and canon, however I believe Lanigan-Schmidt's work is even more impactful to queer art history and deserves more recognition. He is a humble, gay artist who was in attendance during one of the most pivotal nights in queer history, and used found materials to create art that reflected the realistic side of queerness during a time where it was largely illegal in the United States. *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot* is a unique piece in the realm of queer art. As a piece that has been recognized and put on display for a Stonewall exhibition, there is not much information about it besides the background of the riots inspiring its creation and title. Being the only more-known artwork that was made by someone in attendance during the Stonewall Riots, the piece is not showcased in art history textbooks that mention queer art. His work is missing in the crucial education of queer art history. The Stonewall Riots were a pivotal moment in history, not just for queer people, but for the art world. I see them as the awakening of LGBTQ+ history and art in the United States. It gave queer people, thus giving queer artists, a larger space in the modern art world, and Lanigan-Schmidt created *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot* during the beginnings of the awakening and deserves its own spotlight in its history, and art history.

Allegory of the Stonewall Riot (Statue of Liberty Fighting for Drag Queen, Husband, and Home) by Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt is a unique piece showcasing the impact of the Stonewall Riots on the queer community. He used his artistic platform to showcase and immortalize the real and raw beauty of the LGBTQ+ community in the 1960s, which was rough and beautiful all at once. Through my life experiences as a lesbian and a recent patron of The Stonewall Inn, I have been incredibly moved by

Thomas-Lanigan Schmidt's life and find a deep connection to *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot*. The Stonewall Riots' importance to queer history is inevitable, so queer art created during that time, such as *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot*, deserves recognition in the art historical canon where it has largely been underrepresented. I hope for queer community members and artists to feel inspired by Lanigan-Schmidt, and continue to shine gold while creating art and advocating for LGBTQ+ rights for generations to follow.



Fig. 1, Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, *Allegory of The Stonewall Riot (Statue of Liberty Fighting For Drag Queen, Husband, And Home)*, 1969, foil, plastic wrap, pipe cleaners, linoleum, glitter, acrylic paint, acrylic floor shine, food coloring, staples, wire, printed material, found objects and other media, 12 X 7 X 4 inches

THE STONEWALL. He had wounds sutured up and down his arms. The army had rejected him for being a queer. His father had thrown him out of the house through a glass door. I'd left home for the last time too. I was supposed to be on a ditch-digging, road repair, summer job crew with a bunch of jerks I'd gone to school with (they would've buried me alive, just for the fun of it). So, I up and went to New York City with just the clothes on my back. One Queen had an enormous burn-scar covering her face and most of her body. Her mother didn't want men to be tempted by her son's beauty. We lived in cheap hotels, broken down apartments, abandoned buildings on the streets. Home was where the heart is. Some were able to get menial jobs. Some of us were on welfare. Some of us hustled. And some of us pan-handled (begged for money in the streets). Food was where you found it. Many of us had gotten thrown out of home before finishing high school. WE WERE STREET RATS. Puerto Rican, Black, Northern and Southern whites, Debby the Dyke and a Chinese queen named JADE EAST. The sons and daughters of postal workers, welfare mothers, cab drivers, mechanics and NURSES Aids (just to name a few). Until properly introduced it was de rigueur argot to call everybody "MISS THING" (after this, it was discretionary USAGE). I strongly objected when a queen called "Opera JEAN" called me "MARY" (but I'm a MAN!?) "MARY, GRACE, ALICE, whats the Difference, Afterall, we're all sisters? Aren't We?" (ONE in Essence and undivided). She was head-strong, so I stopped complaining. I ended up being named "VIOLET" by a black queen named NOVA.

WE ALL ENDED UP TOGETHER AT A PLACE CALLED THE STONEWALL. SAFE and sound. ALL you had to do as find an empty beer, so the waiter would think you bought a drink, and the night was yours. A replica of a wishing well stood near the back bar of one of the two large rooms painted black. The juke box played a lot of Motown music. We DANCED. THE AIR CONDITIONERS seemed not to work at all because the place was ALWAYS so crowded. We were happy. This place was the "ART" that GAVE form to the feelings of our heartbeats. Here the consciousness of KNOWING you belonged nestled into that WARM feeling of FINALLY being HOME. And Home engenders Love and Loyalty quite naturally. SO, We loved the Stonewall.

The cops (singular and Plural) were generically known as "Lily Law", "Betty Badge", "Patty Pig" or "The Devil with the blue Dress on". That night Betty Badge got carried away. It was not only a raid but a bust. Mother STONEWALL WAS being VIOLATED. They forcibly entered her with NIGHTSTICKS. The lights went on. It wasn't a pretty sight (How would children feel seeing their mother raped right before their eyes? Their home broken into and looted!? The Music Box Broken. The DANCING stopped. The replicated Wishing Well SMASHED?). No, this wasn't a 1960's Student Riot. out there were the streets. There were NO Nice Dorms for sleeping. No SCHOOL CAFETERIA for certain food. No affluent PARENTS to send us checks. The was a ghetto riot on home turf. We already had our WAR WOUNDS. This was just another battle. Nobody thought of it as History, Herstory, MY-story, Your-story or our-story. We were being denied a place to dance together. Thats ALL. The total charisma of a revolution in our ~~consciousness~~ CONSCIOUSNESS rising from the gutter to the gutt to the heart and the mind was here. Non-existence (or pre-existence) was coming into being, and being into becoming. Our Mother Stonewall was giving birth to a new ERA and we were the midwives.

THAT NIGHT THE ^(STREET) "Gutter RATS" shone like the brightest Gold! And like that baby born in a feed-troff (a manger) or found by Pharo's daughter in a basket floating down the river Nile, the mystery of history happened again in the Least likely of Places.

* She

* "Queen" argot, generic pronoun, in this case refers to a male person.

Please Xerox a few copies and give to friends

Fig. 2, Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, *Mother Stonewall and the Golden Rats*, 1989. Xerox photocopy.



Fig. 3, Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, *The Gilded Summer Palace of Czarina Tatiana*, 1969-72, East Fourth Street Gallery, New York, NY.



Fig. 4
Queen
acryli
4 inch

Drag
t,
2 X 7 X



Fig. 5, Fred W. McDarrah, *Celebration after Riots at Stonewall Inn, Nelly (Betsy Mae Koolo), Chris (Drag Queen Chris), Roger Davis, Michelle, And Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt June 1969*, New York City, 1969, gelatin silver print.



Fig. 6 and Fig.7, *Stonewall National Monument*, taken by author, July 10 2025



Fig. 8, *Gay Liberation*, George Segal, 1980, bronze cast with white lacquer, dedicated 1992, Christopher Park, New York City, Gift of the Mildred Andrew Fund to the City of New York.

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