

Glendale  
**News-Press**

Glendale sponsors exhibit exploring queer representations



Mixed-media work “Purple Storm” by Devan Shimoyama will be on display in the exhibit “Body Politics,” opening Oct. 12 at Glendale’s Downtown Public Library. (Courtesy of Ara Oshagan)

By LILA SEIDMAN

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Four years ago, a Glendale utility box painted with an androgynous form — which was commissioned by the city to be created by local queer artist Grey James — was completely obscured by silver spray paint in an act of vandalism.

After cleaning the utility box, the city ultimately hired a different artist to paint a new mural in its place. James declined to re-paint it.

Documentation of the incident will be featured as part of a city-sponsored exhibit that opens tomorrow at the Downtown Central Library in Glendale — a testament to the show's emphasis on queer bodies as a catalyst for, and reflection of, political change.

“Body Politics,” presented by Glendale's Library, Arts & Culture, is part of a “general transformation in Glendale,” according to Ara Oshagan, who co-curated the show at the library's ReflectSpace and PassageWay galleries with his wife, Anahid, as well as Anahid Yahjian.

“Part of that [transformation] is accepting different ways of life and different ways of being,” Ara Oshagan said.

Launched on National Coming Out Day — which technically runs for two days, today and tomorrow — and running through Nov. 21, the show juxtaposes contemporary visual art and archival material to illustrate the collective political force of queer physical forms, whether they're photographed, painted, dissected, documented — or obscured, as in the case of the defaced utility box mural.

One featured artist, Annie Tritt, creates portraits of LGBTQ youth via photographs and quotes from both the subjects and their parents.

Two other artists, Nicole Kelly and Phoebe Unter, who go by Bitchface, created a sound installation that creates an imagined conversation between Oprah Winfrey and a feminist speaker through strategically spliced audio recordings.

Oshagan called artist Devan Shimoyama “the crown jewel of the exhibit,” with two of his mixed-media works and a photograph of one of his past performances slated to be on display.

The identity of an Armenia-based female photographer also featured in the show was withheld at her request because of threats she's received in the past for depicting assigned-male-at-birth-Armenian sex workers, Oshagan said.

Contextualizing the contemporary work will be a James Wentzy looped movie about the AIDS advocacy group ACT UP, formed in 1987, and informational panels showcasing the history of LGBTQ civil rights activism compiled by the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at USC.

The ReflectSpace and PassageWay galleries are located in the Downtown Central Library, 222 E. Harvard St., Glendale.

For more information, visit <https://bit.ly/2IX5jQ2>.

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