

# Collecting Queer

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In collaboration with



## Exploring Museum Queering at the Burke Museum Collections

### THE PROBLEM

The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) has spent considerable effort in the past two decades creating top-level policies which acknowledge queer audiences. Their *Welcoming Guidelines* document is a result of one such policy, which interprets national ethics guidelines, as well as other best practices, through the lens of queerness. Many of these documents, though, do not provide the step-by-step directions necessary for museums to implement these policies effectively, especially within collections.

As a result, museum personnel do not have the requisite knowledge, or support, to create institutions which honor their queer communities.

Workshop attendee Kelly Lindhardt considering a queer object



### THE "SOLUTION"

To better support museum professionals in supporting queer communities, this project offered a toolkit guide, alongside a professional development workshop, to collections staff at the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture. The guide outlines distinct steps to create more considerate collections policies and to practice bringing queer objects into the museum mainstream. In doing both, professionals dignify queerness, and validate its importance as a cultural and academic partner.

### THE THEORY

Museum queering, a movement to reimagine the museum using queer, gender, and feminist studies as lenses, does not have a large corpus of work. The first monograph on the topic, *Queering the Museum* (Sullivan and Middleton), was only published in 2020. This project synthesized its approach from multiple sources, namely Sullivan and Middleton, and Sarah Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*. The project considers queerness in the museum through a phenomenological and constructivist lens.

### THE PRACTICE

The guide (and workshop which iterates on it), focus on:

#### Identifying Queer Objects

Queer objects are carriers of intangible histories. If we can't often "see" queer, how do we know it's there? Community partnerships, relationship building, and visibility with the public are the best ways to get to know queerness in the collection. The historical relationship between museums as heteronormative institutions cannot be ignored!

#### Outlining Best Practices

Policies in museums often skip over the "queer issue," and this erasure can be destructive. It is not enough for museums to practice blanket "inclusivity," but also specifically address the needs of queer audiences and the policies which address them. For example, providing registration support for family structures not recognized by law.

#### Changing Existing Practice

Change in the museum, like in any institution, requires holistic, top-down support to be long-lasting and far reaching. At the collections professionals level, however, important changes on the day-to-day can be made. Professionals can consider what preventative conservation, acquisition, routine care, display, and loans look like when queerness as a lifeway is recognized, and the conversations that thought process inspires!



Workshop attendees working with an object, left

#### References

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