

Midway Contemporary Art

Tee A. Corinne: Selections from the Lesbian Herstory Archives
Curated by Jenni Crain
February 8 – March 28, 2020

It is difficult to quantify the legacy of the late artist, activist, historian, writer and educator Tee A. Corinne (1943 FL – 2006 OR) due to the sheer expanse of her prolific career. Despite Corinne's significant contributions to and influence within the development of the lesbian activist and arts movements in the US in the 1970s, '80s, and following, a comprehensive retrospective exhibition of her work has yet to be organized. The presentation on view here at Midway Contemporary Art offers a selective but intimate glimpse into Corinne's extensive practice.

Comprised of materials loaned from the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York, the exhibition features a selection of the solarized black and white photographs depicting women in Sapphic sexual relationships for which Tee A. Corinne may be most recognized. Corinne's photographs emphasize and celebrate the promotion of sensual lesbian pleasure and were created to counter the lack of such representations in the art world and beyond. In addition to the technique of printing in verso, Corinne frequently cut and compiled her photographs into kaleidoscopic collages; she maintained that this format makes comprehension of the works more complex by slowing down the viewing process and encouraging viewers to stay with them for longer periods of time. Her subjects were almost always lesbian women whose body types and postures challenged ideals of the female nude in order to, in Corinne's words, "expand the boundaries of erotic participation." In an artist statement entitled 'On Sexual Art' from 1993, Corinne contextualized her images, and her use of labial imagery specifically, as a route towards claiming personal power for women.

Adjacent to these examples of Corinne's photographic works presented within the gallery is a selection of ephemeral materials such as exhibition and event announcements, greeting cards, publication maquettes, lecture outlines, and newspaper clippings, which offer further insights into Corinne's career, as well as other pursuits that paralleled her work as an artist. Continuing into the library, drafts of Corinne's publications and slide presentations are installed alongside editions of lesbian journals to which Corinne contributed, like *Sinister Wisdom* and *WomanSpirit*, or cofounded, as in *The Blatant Image: A Magazine of Feminist Photography*. Tee A. Corinne herself donated the majority of these photographic and ephemeral materials to the Lesbian Herstory Archives directly, and in doing so, acknowledged the potential of their consequence in illuminating, preserving, and influencing a dynamic account of lesbian history by and for those who live through it.

Joan Nestle and Deborah Edel established the Lesbian Herstory Archives in 1974 with the collaboration of three other women in order to confront the precariousness of lesbian culture that had, by and large, been positioned, ignored, and made invisible through patriarchal perspectives. Beginning in Nestle's apartment on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, a group of women gathered on a weekly basis in order to preserve voices that were being both silenced and lost, and to promote the particularities of lesbian-feminism and political lesbianism. Their motivation was to redefine attitudes surrounding lesbianism,

changing sources of shame into causes of celebration. The archive was unique in its intent to gather and protect records of lesbian lives and activities, and has gone on to amass the world's largest collection of materials by and about lesbians and their communities. Housed in a brownstone in Brooklyn's Park Slope, the organization continues to accept chronicles of lesbian experience including but not limited to books, magazines, journals, news clippings, bibliographies, photographs, historical information, tapes, films, diaries, oral histories, prose, biographies, autobiographies, posters, graphics, and artworks. Thousands of materials remain available and accessible to researchers of all ages and interests in order to analyze and reevaluate the trajectory of lesbian experience. The materials are not for sale, and the organization does not collect government funding. The Lesbian Herstory Archives is operated on a volunteer basis and relies on contributions from the lesbian community and its allies.

This exhibition would not be possible without the tenacity of a courageous community of women who have dedicated their lives to presenting, protecting and advancing the research of a living history that was denied for far too long.

Midway Contemporary Art and Jenni Crain would like to thank the Lesbian Herstory Archives and Saskia Scheffer, the University of Oregon and Linda Long, Joan E. Biren, and all those who made this exhibition possible.

Tee A. Corinne was raised in South Florida and later moved to New Orleans where she began her artistic studies at Newcomb College, Tulane University between 1962 and 1963. She transferred to the University of South Florida from which she received her BA in printmaking and painting with minors in English and art history in 1965. In 1968, Corinne received her MFA from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York, and she later moved to San Francisco in 1973. There, in the early 1970s, Corinne took classes at the Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality, where she learned to organize her thinking through erotic imagery. It is around this time that Corinne began to draw other women's genitals after drawing her own since 1970. In 1974, *WomanSpirit* Magazine published a selection of these drawings within their second edition. In 1975, Corinne's now iconic *Cunt Coloring Book* was first published. Corinne considered the coloring book as a resource for sex education. It is complete with forty-two pages of line drawings of women's genitals created by the artist between 1973 and the year of publication. Also in 1975, Corinne began photographing women engaging in the midst of sexual intercourse, often printing through the solarized process that she learned while a student at Pratt Institute. One such photograph was included on the cover of Volume 3 of the lesbian journal *Sinister Wisdom* in 1977. A supplementary poster of the photograph was included within the pages of the journal, and it would go on to become a hugely successful, almost emblematic, image within the lesbian liberation movement throughout the Bay Area. Corinne began to experiment with two-dimensional constructions built up of repeated images in 1979. *Yantras of Womanlove: Diagrams of Energy* was published by Naiad Press, one of the first publishing companies dedicated to lesbian literature, in 1982. The publication includes thirty-four photographs and photographic collages created by Corinne between 1975 and 1982, alongside stanzas of Jacqueline Lapidus's poem "Design for the City of Woman." From 1979 through 1981, Corinne was a co-facilitator of the Feminist Photography Ovulars, which was a seasonal series of workshops and seminars that took place each summer to offer support and community to female photographers, especially those working remotely. Corinne was the cofounder of *The Blatant Image: A Magazine of Feminist Photography* that

produced three editions between 1981 and 1983. Corinne won a Lambda Literary Award in 1990 for her work as editor of the erotic anthology *Intricate Passions*. She was a cofounder and co-chair of the Gay & Lesbian Caucus, and she also cofounded the Women’s Caucus for Art and the Lesbian & Bisexual Caucus. In 1991, Corinne was chosen by the Lambda Book Report as one of the fifty most influential lesbian/gay individuals of the preceding decade. She received the Women’s Caucus for Art President’s Award for service to women in the arts in 1997. In 2000, Corinne received the Abdill-Ellis Lambda Lifetime Achievement Award. In the last years of her life, Corinne created the photographic series *Cancer in Our Lives*, which was comprised of portraits of lesbian writers and artists and documented the impact of their experiences with terminal cancer. Corinne herself was diagnosed with cancer just months after the passing of her partner Beverly Brown in 2005. Corinne passed away in 2006.

Jenni Crain is a New York-based artist and curator. In August–September of 2019, Crain organized *Tee Corinne: Bodies of Work* at *MBnb* in New York. Further recent curatorial projects include a solo exhibition of works by March Avery at Barnard College’s Louise McCagg Gallery in the Spring of 2019, as well as exhibitions and programming at 55 Walker, New York; Pratt Institute, Brooklyn; and Shanaynay, Paris; among others. Crain is currently pursuing her MA in Curatorial Studies at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College.

Generous support for Midway’s 2020 exhibitions is provided by the VIA | Wagner Incubator Grant

