



BEYOND THE BINARY LEARNING RESOURCE

GVAM ART MUSEUM
GRAND VALLEY

INTRODUCTION

Beyond the Binary: Artists Explore the Complexity of Gender is an exhibition that shows how some artists throughout the world have chosen to portray gender and gender expression in different cultures. While this exhibition draws largely from the GVSU Art Museum's contemporary collection of American artists, there is also representation from different cultures throughout time. The binary, or how gender has been largely understood throughout the United States' history, has been the dominant representation of gender through a white, typically Christian lens. However, people and cultures across the world have understood gender in different ways.

Today, the concept of gender can be a contentious subject. Some believe that gender is purely biological, while others believe it is a social construct. Tensions can be high in political, social, and religious debates. This guide does not attempt to solve that tension but hopes instead to be an inclusive resource for the artwork within the exhibition. The use of terms such as "masculine" and "feminine" are taken from the current mainstream understanding of them in their current and historic context within the United States. Any ideas, terms, or definitions come from the lens of 2025, and therefore may not be the accepted ideas or terms of the future.

Tiffany Guzek, *Untitled #8*, chromogenic print, 2004, GVSU Collection, 2005.009.1



This guide uses close-looking prompts for some of the images in this exhibition, but we encourage you to also refer to the labels, which include many open-ended questions that may be useful for tours, gallery guides, and activities.

The GVSU Art Museum promotes the right of each artist and individual to be accepted as they are and for who they are.

SISTER/BROTHER 1

SARAH BETH LAMAN

Take a moment to look at this picture.

Looking at only the left half of the image, what do you notice?

What do you notice about the right half?

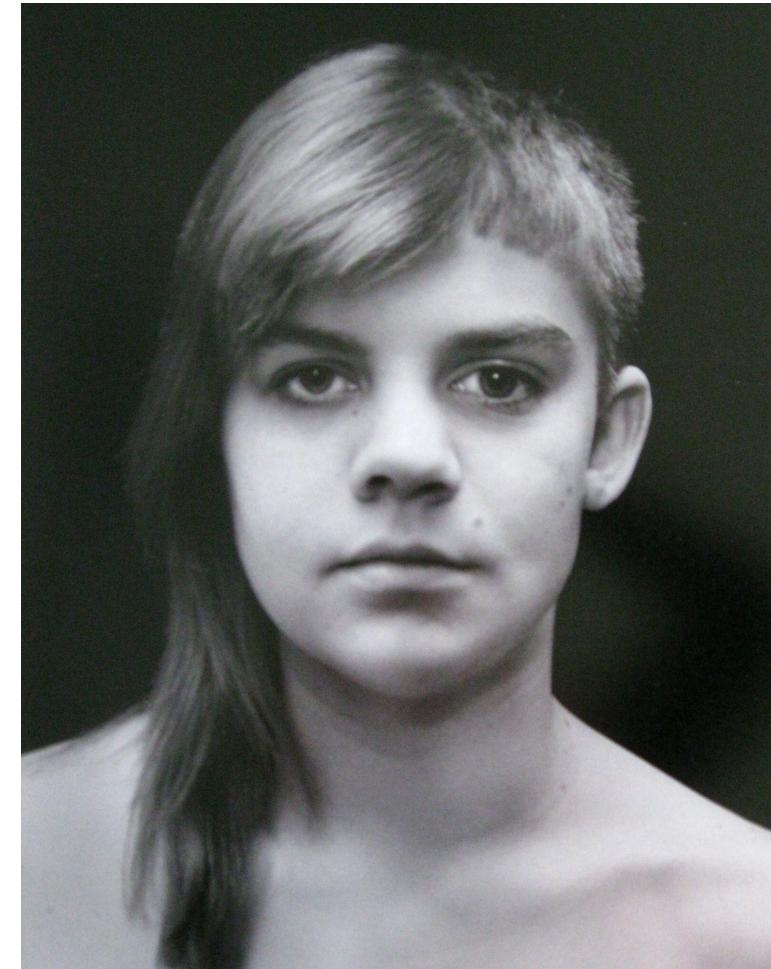
When looking at this image with a group, if you have a large enough piece of paper and assistance, you could have someone hold up the paper to block off each half of the image while doing this exercise.

- Who is this figure?
- What features do you notice that you might understand as being either identified as masculine or feminine? Why?
- Ask yourself how you are identifying this figure / the gender of this figure, and why?

This image is a composite of the artist and her brother merged into one figure. With this new knowledge, does that challenge the ideas/assumptions you made about this figure? If so, how? How do assumptions about gender expression influence how we view others, and how can artworks such as this one challenge us to broaden our understanding with empathy?

(Larger image available on page 9)

Sarah Beth Laman, *Sister/Brother 1*, archival digital print, 2011, GVSU Collection, 2011.43.1



"A traditional portrait is expected [to] reflect something about that person or represent that person in some sort of profound way. I decided to go beyond that definition, by turning two people into one."

Sarah Beth Laman

MARISSA, FEMININE/MASCULINE

Danielle Lutz

Take a moment to look at each artwork. How is each figure presenting themselves?

This is the same figure, viewed from two different lenses – the masculine and the feminine. In what ways does the figure on the left present as feminine? In what ways does the figure on the right present as masculine?

How might Marissa be treated differently in public when dressed more feminine, versus how they might be treated when dressed more masculine? Does the setting make a difference? Would they be treated differently at a bar, in the workplace, or in a doctor's office?

What kinds of gender expectations do you think your/our society has? How do these two images comment on those expectations?

(Larger images available on pages 10-11)

Danielle Lutz, *Marissa, feminine*, digital photograph, 2014, GVSU Collection, 2014.124.1



Danielle Lutz, *Marissa, masculine*, digital photograph, 2014, GVSU Collection, 2014.124.2



SEEN AS FEMININE

- Smiling expression
- Long hair that is down
- Dress and tights
- Posture – legs crossed and compact
- Bracelet
- Lighter colored clothing
- Heels
- Wearing makeup

SEEN AS MASCULINE

- Stern or unsmiling expression
- Pants, blazer, bow tie
- Watch
- Hair is back, presents as short
- Posture – sitting with legs open, taking up space
- Darker colored clothing
- Boots



DAYA M. CHAUNTE JONATHAN ELOI LANTEIGNE

Take a moment to look at this picture.

Look at the angle of the image, as well as the figure's posture and gaze.

How do you think this figure feels? Why?

Drag Kings and Queens often perform, whether for entertainment, satire, empowerment, or political commentary.

How can gender expression be a performance?

How have you felt you've had to perform, behave, or act in a specific way due to how others perceive you?

(Larger image available on page 12)

Jonathan Eloi Lantegne, *Daya M. Chaunte*, photograph, 2023, GVSU Collection, 2023.24.2

Life Size and Other Lies: Three Women

Darlene Kaczmarczyck

(Larger image available on page 13)

In the United States, women have historically and stereotypically been seen as homemakers. This work – physical labor of the home, emotional labor for children and partners – has not been financially compensated, or recognized for its complexity and importance. For some, the idea of the “1950s housewife” has remained alive in America. Others view this as a cute trope or a symbol of inequality. For the majority of the twentieth century, women could not have their own bank accounts, were expected to vote as their husbands dictated, and were pressured to quit or were fired if they were pregnant. Laws had to be passed – such as the 1963 Equal Pay Act, the 1974 Equal Credit Opportunity Act, and the 1978 Pregnancy Discrimination Act – to start women on the path to equality. But the journey is far from over. Women still face inequality in the United States today. Current rollbacks in medical research, the overturn of Roe v. Wade, the new strict legal definition of gender, and the criminalization of gender affirming care, lead to uncertainty about the future of gender equality.

Ask your group to think about what equality means to them, and how this work (and all of the works in the exhibition) ask us to consider what equality can mean and look like.

Take a moment to look at this picture and then ask:

- What is going on in this picture?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can you find?
- How are the figures dressed?
- Where are the figures located?
- What are the figures doing?
- How do you think each figure feels?
- Kaczmarczyk shows three women “playing house” while dressed up in outfits typically associated with the 1950s housewife.
- What does “playing house” mean, and what does this idea make you think of? How does it make you feel?



Darlene Kaczmarczyk, *Life Size and Other Lies: Three Women*, durachrome print, 2005, GVSU Collection, 2021.79.19

GLOSSARY

Gender Non-conforming – Someone who identifies as one gender but does not allow societal concepts of gender to determine their behavior, sense of self, or outward appearance

Gender Roles – The societal expectation of the ways that we will act out our gender in our lives, i.e., girls play with dolls, boys play soldiers, girls wear dresses and boys don't, boys don't cry, men become doctors or scientists, women become teachers or homemakers, etc.

Non-binary – Someone who does not identify as either male or female may choose to identify as non-binary. Non-binary identity can include, but is not limited to, transgender, agender, genderqueer, or gender-fluid identities.

Sexual Orientation – The emotional or romantic emotion that a person feels towards another person

Transgender – A gender identity that is different from the one assigned at birth

Binary – The binary, as it applies to gender, refers to opposites of each other, seen as "male" and "female" (in the Western understanding)

Drag King/Queen – A person who dresses in male or female attire, often for entertainment and performance.

Gender Binary – The idea that there are only two genders – male and female

Gender Expression – The way that a person expresses their gender identity to others

Gender Fluid – An identifier for a person whose gender exists on a spectrum

Gender Identity – The gender that a person identifies as

Gender Neutral – An identifier for someone who doesn't feel they are either masculine or feminine, or fall to one side of the spectrum or the other

For more terms, we recommend you check out the Human Rights Campaign Glossary of Terms: <https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms>

ACTIVITIES

Reflect: Bring in your local LGBTQ+ organization to lead workshops or reflections for your community.

Mindfulness Moments: Promote self-care and reflection by hosting mindful activities such as yoga, meditation, and art-making

Screenings: There are many films that you could screen for your audience. *Miss Representation* and *The Mask You Live In* both explore how societal gender standards in America affect us.

The Gender Unicorn

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TSER
Trans Student Educational Resources

