

Hard Bodies (Frankfurt a.M., 9–11 Jan 25)

Goethe-Universität Frankfurt a.M., Jan 9–11, 2025

Deadline: Jul 15, 2024

Max Böhner (Humboldt-University of Berlin/University of Potsdam), Antje Krause-Wahl (Goethe University); Clara J. Lauffer (Goethe University); Simon Wendt (Goethe University)

Hard Bodies: Aesthetic, Materiality, and Mediality of Masculinity in American and European Art and Visual Culture, c. 1900 – today

Description:

The hard body is omnipresent in contemporary culture. It evokes purity, whiteness, and resistance to cracking or contamination. It is the result of disciplined self-optimization (physical training, a strict diet, dietary supplements, and/or surgery) and part of the iconography of white supremacy. Contemporary artists only refer to the hard male body to destroy it – like Candice Lin in her installation *A Hard White Body* (2017).

So, why should we revisit the hard male body, with its undeniable hegemonic bias? Why not dismiss it, and look at the fragmented, performative, vulnerable, and transformative male body instead?

This conference argues that the study of the hard male body is crucial to understand constructions of masculinities (straight and queer) in the art and visual culture that have developed in constant exchange between Europe and the US since the 19th century. Klaus Theweleit's psychoanalytic study of masculinity, *Männerphantasien* (1977/2019), serves as the conference's primal inspiration: His term "body armor" delineates the function of muscles as a protective barrier against physical threats and any sexual and emotional destabilizations originating from women.

However, art and visual culture represent the hard male body as an ambiguous figure: neither solely hegemonic or heteronormative nor solely white but part of queer desire and potentially queer itself. Taking the intertwined European and American emergence of fitness and bodybuilding culture as well as representations of muscular men in art and mass media since the late 19th century as a starting point, this conference will reconstruct the ambivalent history of an abiding fascination with the hard male body.

Three main strands include:

1. The Muscular Male Body: Biopolitics, Cultural Practices, and Discourses

The hard body's renaissance across Europe and the US in the 19th and early 20th centuries as well as the biopolitics, cultural practices, and discourses that shaped it.

2. The Medialized Male Body

The muscular male body's medializations from the early 1900s to today. The eroticism, ambiva-

lence, and spectacle of the muscular male body in the imagery representing as well as shaping this ideal or bodies directly.

3. The (Re- or De-)Materialized Male Body

Appropriations of the hard male body in contemporary art, its re- and/or dematerializations and surface transformations.

We will seek contributions that investigate the following questions:

- How was the hard male body established as the primary image of modernist masculinity?
- What role did art, art education, and mass media play in this process?
- How are the muscular male body's appeal and glamor enhanced (or even created) by medialized, circulating images?
- How are Black muscular men eroticized – in media directed at Black and white beholders, respectively?
- How are Asian muscular men represented throughout this period, for example in white homoerotica and pornography?
- Why is the hard male body's eroticism overlooked even in queer studies?
- How is the hard male body transformed or seen from a feminist perspective?
- What are the materials and techniques used to aestheticize or optimize hard bodies in contemporary art, sports, fitness culture, and homoerotica as well as pornography?
- What are the materials and surfaces that (de-)stabilize or transform muscular male bodies in contemporary art?
- What are the visual and/or artistic strategies behind it?

This international conference seeks to connect established scholars and young researchers from America and Europe. We therefore look for early career researchers at the final stages of their PhD or in the postdoc phase to present papers on one of the related topics outlined above. In order to establish equity, all travel and accommodation costs for inner-European travel will be covered.

Proposals should include the paper's title (max 15 words), an abstract (max 500 words) and a short CV. Please send your material to: hardbodies@uni-frankfurt.de

Proposal deadline: July 15, 2024

Notification date: July 31, 2024

Organized by Max Böhner (Humboldt-University of Berlin/University of Potsdam), Antje Krause-Wahl (Goethe University); Clara J. Lauffer (Goethe University); Simon Wendt (Goethe University)

Reference:

CFP: Hard Bodies (Frankfurt a.M., 9-11 Jan 25). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 6, 2024 (accessed Mar 29, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/42046>>.