

Hard Bodies: Aesthetic, Materiality, and Mediality (Frankfurt, 9–11 Jan 25)

Goethe Universität, Frankfurt am Main, Jan 9–11, 2025

Clara J. Lauffer

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

Goethe-Universität Frankfurt a.M., Renate-von-Metzler-Saal, Casino 1.801, Campus Westend
Norbert-Wollheim-Platz 1, 60323 Frankfurt a.M.

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)
Please register for the conference with your full name at hardbodies.unifrankfurt@gmail.com.

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.

I Thursday, January 9, 2025

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

13.30–14.00

Arrival at Renate-von-Metzler-Saal, Casino 1.801, Campus Westend

14.00–14.30

Welcome and Introduction

14.30–15.15

Anthea Callen, Sallé's Leçon d'anatomie and the Global Circulation of a "British Imperial master-race"

15.15–16.00

Mechthild Fend, Hard Bodies – Inside Out: Joseph Maclise's Anatomical Lithographs

16.00–16.15 | Coffee Break

16.15–17.00

Jonathan Katz, From Soft Boys to Hard Men: How the Changing Definition of Homosexuality Redrew the Male Body

17.00–17.45

Simon Wendt, White Muscular Bodies, Masculinity, and Notions of Physical Perfection in the United States around 1900: Eugen Sandow, Bernarr Macfadden, and Harry Weinburgh

| Friday, January 10, 2025

The Medialized Male Body: Imaging and Imagining

9.30–10.00

Arrival at Renate-von-Metzler-Saal, Casino 1.801, Campus Westend

10.00–10.45

Christiane König, Through the Lens of the Catastrophic: Queer Masculinity/Queer Male Bodies in Films of the Nazi Era

10.45–11.30

Robert Rushing, Revisiting the Muscled Male Body on Screen: The Latest Developments in the Italian Peplum

11.30–11.45 | Coffee Break

11.45–12.30

Thomas Waugh, Harder: Othering Arousal in Pre-Stonewall Gay Male Photo/Cinematic/Graphic Fantasy

12.30–13.15

Maxwell Sutter Zinkievich, Feisty Little Papers: American Erotic Masculine Visual Culture at the Bob Mizer Foundation

13.15–14.45 | Lunch Break

14.45–15.30

Jessica Hanson, *The Greatest, Photographed: Agency and Corporeality in the Rumble in the Jungle*

15.30–16.15

Änne Söll and Florian Freitag, *Kendom: Men's Hard Bodies in Barbie (2023)*

16.15–16.30 | Coffee Break

16.30–17.15

Max Böhner, *Impenetrable and Immersed Bodies: Aquatic Exercises on the Shoreline from Thomas Eakins to Pierre et Gilles*

17.15–18.00

Artist Talk: James Gregory Atkinson on *Black Masculinities*

| Saturday, January 11, 2025

The (Re- or De-)Materialized Male Body: Material and Surface Transformations in Art

9.30–10.00

Arrival at Renate-von-Metzler-Saal, Casino 1.801, Campus Westend

10.00–10.45

Susanne Huber, *Tender Tensions: Violence and Vulnerability in Lutz Bacher's Men at War (1975)*

10.45–11.30

Clara J. Lauffer, *Matters of Masculinities: Hard, Soft, and Dissolved Military Bodies in the Art of the Pictures Generation*

11.30–11.45 | Coffee Break

11.45–12.30

Antje Krause-Wahl, *Hard Bodies in/and Clay*

12.30–13.15

Laura König, *Reflecting Desire: Queering Materiality in Contemporary Sculpture*

13.15–14.45 | Lunchbreak

14.45–15.30

Leoni Huber, *Stitching Queer Masculinity: Textile Bodies, Affect and Disidentification in Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Musalmaan Musclemen (2016–2017)*

15.30–16.15

Jörg Scheller, *Unintentionally Queer: The Irony of the Iron Body*

16.15–16.30

Final Remarks and End of Conference

Reference:

CONF: *Hard Bodies: Aesthetic, Materiality, and Mediality* (Frankfurt, 9-11 Jan 25). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 28,

2024 (accessed Mar 31, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/43253>>.