

“What I love about that picture ... is the way the drag queen turns the circumstances of her arrest into an extension of her camp persona.”

official opening of the Fair, Warhol's mural was censored by officials who had it painted over with silver housepaint. Rather than simply allow his “Most Wanted Men” to disappear, Warhol saved the silkscreens from the mural and made large portraits of each outlaw that he used to decorate his famous studio, The Factory, and later exhibited in both Europe and the U.S.

When a work of art is censored, it rarely just vanishes into thin air. More typically, the work is reproduced in the press, remade by the artist, and recirculated by a range of different audiences. I am interested in the “afterlife” of censored works of art, the ways in which they continue to reappear in the wake of their suppression.

TM: Speaking of outlaws, this material is pretty hot subject matter. Did you face any problems with censorship in terms of publishing this book?

RM: Shortly after the book went into production, I was

informed that the London office of Oxford University Press would not distribute the book in England or anywhere in Europe unless I agreed to remove Mapplethorpe's picture of Jesse McBride, a 1976 portrait of a naked little boy. According to a lawyer for the press, the photograph violated two different criminal codes, including the English “Protection of Children” Act of 1978. Because I refused to remove the image from the manuscript, the London arm of Oxford University Press severed all connections to the book. The book remains without a distributor in the U.K. or Europe.

In the passage of my book devoted to Jesse McBride, I look at how those who attacked Mapplethorpe's work in the late 1980s used this photograph to reinforce longstanding stereotypes of gay men as pedophiles. Although no sexual activity is shown (or even suggested) in the portrait, and although the picture was commissioned by the child's mother who was in the room at the time of its taking, the very fact that Mapplethorpe had photographed a naked boy was enough, at least in the minds of Pat Robertson and Jesse Helms, for the photographer to be accused of child molestation. Given this history, I was unwilling to remove the portrait of Jesse McBride from *Outlaw Representation*. I want readers to see that a photograph of a naked body does not automatically constitute pornography, even when the body at issue is that of a child. To allow the portrait to be removed from the book because of a concern about legal liability would have been tantamount to labeling the photograph obscene.

TM: Just to see the beauty and sexy heat of these images assembled in a single book counts as a remarkable achievement. Can you talk about the importance of visual images to this book?

RM: The pictures in the book comprise a visual archive of censored and suppressed art in the 20th century. I fought to include as many images as possible and raised money to print about fifty of them in color so that the pictures could appear in the strongest possible light. In response to the charge that these images are obscene or indecent, I wanted to provide a place where they might be seen again and taken seriously as works of creative achievement and visual complexity. I'm perfectly happy to have readers who primarily want to look at the pictures since, in many ways, the pictures tell the story of gay art and censorship most powerfully.

TM: The images remind us of the huge impact gay artists have had on our culture. How do you think queer culture has contributed to the history of art?

RM: Part of what I'm arguing is that art history cannot be fully understood without taking homosexual culture into account. The career

of a key figure like Warhol doesn't make sense unless you think about the queer worlds of fashion and design in the 1950s, of underground film in the 1960s, and of Studio 54 in the 1970s. The culture of homosexuality is not some sidelight to the main story of art history but an essential part of it.



Weegee (Arthur Fellig), *The Gay Deceiver*, c. 1939.

Above: “The Gay Deceiver” steps daintily out in WeeGee’s famous photograph.