EMERGENCE: Intersections at the Center brings together artists who have relationships to the South Side Community Art Center, from the institution’s inception until the present day. Curated by zakkiyyah najeebah dumas o’neal and LaMar R. Gayles, Jr., the exhibition includes a wide range of mediums such as painting, sculpture, photography and drawing. EMERGENCE is a beautiful opportunity to highlight and reflect on Black queer life, while recognizing the important role of the Center as a site for these artists to learn, connect and share their work. This syllabus brings together readings, films, lectures and music as a meditation both on the nuances of Black queer life and “queer” as an expansive framework that interrogates oppressive power structures and conceptions of normativity. The texts are divided along different themes: Intimacy, Queer as a Politic, Nightlife, Black(queer)ness, Interior Lives and Towards Liberation. The texts are not in a specific order and should be viewed as part of a collective conversation, with resonances echoing across the different themes.
This section thinks about Chicago as a site for Black queer life, both historically and in the contemporary moment. The texts reflect on the geographic landscape of the city, periods of migration to the Midwest and the structures of racial and class segregation that shape queer communities in Chicago. This section also highlights key figures in Chicago Black queer life, with a focus on the city’s South Side. Together, the texts present a larger perspective to think about the socio-cultural and political environment that the artists in the exhibition navigated in Chicago, and how this may have influenced their work. Artworks
from EMERGENCE to consider in relation to this section include drawings by Berry Horton and photography by Mikki Ferrill.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does Black queer life impact the way we think about “place” and “space” within the city?
2. How might the visual narration or representation of Black queer life shift the ways we see and look at these works of art?


For many queer people, nightlife spaces, whether they are juke joints, nightclubs, cabaret bars or drag balls, provide a chance to be in community, make a living, experience intimacy and perform aspects of oneself that may be obscured during daily life. It can also be a contentious site, where Black queer folks see the beginnings of gentrification, sexual
violence and fights over the few resources that circulate amongst nightlife communities. In this section, the texts delve into nightlife as both a space of entertainment and ritual, recognizing that the environment is shaped by cultural backgrounds of those who attend them. With the migration of Black folks from Southern States to the Midwest, Chicago provided an array of queer nightlife venues that for many had been previously non-existent. Several of the artists in EMERGENCE both worked and drew inspiration from nightlife, either making costumes for performers or focusing on scenes they witnessed. These texts highlight the centrality of nightlife, in a variety of forms, to Black queer life. Artworks from EMERGENCE to consider in relation to this section include drawings by El Roi Parker and Bobbe Cotton.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does nightlife provide generative spaces for queer folks to express themselves in ways that exceed the limits often imposed on their understandings of gender and sexuality by society?
2. Have you been impacted, influenced, or embraced by Queer nightlife spaces?
3. What are the difficulties that face nightlife spaces? (Ex: gentrification, increasing police presence)


Films

Jake Sumner, director. *I Was There When House Took Over the World*. Channel 4, May 9, 2017.


Video Clips/Music
*Ernestine “Tiny” Davis- A Short Biography*

Honey Dijon is an acclaimed DJ, electronic musician and producer from Chicago. In this video, she discusses Early Chicago House, First Record & Being A Party DJ

Frankie Knuckles was a DJ and record producer from Chicago who played a major role in developing and popularizing House music in the city during the 1980’s. He is often referred to as the “Godfather of House Music."

*This is a video clip of Frankie Knuckles live at the Warehouse in Chicago, 1981*

*Video Footage from the opening of Frankie Knuckles Power House club, 1986*
Nightlife Performers from Chicago 1930’s-1960’s

Performers are integral to nightlife spaces, often the primary reason patrons visit a particular bar or club. Chicago continues to be a major location of various forms of queer nightlife performance. Below are a few nightlife performers who left an indelible mark on Chicago’s queer history.

- **George Hannah** was an openly gay Blues singer, who made his debut in Chicago 1926. Many of his songs discussed sex, queer intimacy and gambling. His song “The Boy in the Boat” was recorded in 1930.

- **Petite Swanson** was a member of Valda Gray’s troupe of female impersonators, who were the main attraction at Joe’s Deluxe Club in Chicago during the 1940’s. She recorded four records with the Sunbeam label.
Sepia Gloria Swanson (1906-1940) was a female impersonator who was well known in Chicago’s Drag Ball scene. She worked as a hostess at the Book Store, a speakeasy in Bronzeville, before moving to the Pleasure Inn on East 31st Street. Swanson later opened her own club on East 35th Street, before moving to New York.

https://zagria.blogspot.com/2019/06/gloria-swanson-1906-1940-performer.html#YhQXRZP MK3I

**Nightlife Venues on the South Side**

- Joe’s Deluxe was a club on Chicago’s West Side, owned by Joe Hughes. Hughes saw the success of Chicago’s Drag Balls and realized a female impersonation show could be a lucrative business, opening the club in 1938, at 5524 South State Street. Hughes became a well known businessman in Bronzeville, and Joe’s Deluxe attracted an array of clientele, from the working class and elite members of the Black community as well as white folks who mostly came from Chicago’s North Side.

- Club DeLisa (1933-1958) was a nightclub and music performance venue on the South Side of Chicago that catered mostly to Black communities. It was considered one of the most popular and prestigious venues in the city, alongside the Regal Theater and the Rhumboogie Café. The club was owned by the DeLisa brothers and during the 1930’s and 40’s the club would remain open 24 hours a day, featuring musicians, dancers and vaudeville acts. At the end of the 1930’s, some of the most popular gay cabarets took place at the nightclub. Several of the artists in EMERGENCE frequented Club DeLisa, including Allen Stringfellow, whose father worked as a manager for the club.

- The Cabin Inn was a nightclub that opened in 1933 on Cottage Grove Avenue in Bronzeville, Chicago. The owner, Nat Big Ivy, sought to attract working class Black and White patrons. The club was known for featuring female impersonators and singers, such as Gilda Gray, Luzetta Hall and Brown Mae West. In the mid 1930’s, when then mayor Joseph Kelly began increasing policing of gay and lesbian bars on the Northside of the city, patrons from that area made their way to Bronzeville. In 1938 the club relocated to South State Street, with the female impersonation shows being led by a new hostess, Valda Gray.

- The Plantation Cafe was a nightclub on the South Side of Chicago that operated in the 1920’s and 1930’s. The Cafe was known as a “black and tan” club because it catered to both Black and White patrons. Though not as well known as explicitly queer venue, the club attracted a mixed crowd.
- Finnie’s Drag Balls began in 1935 and were organized by a Black gay street hustler named Alfred Finnie. The Balls were hosted in a basement tavern on 38th Street and Michigan Avenue. The Ball was held 5 times a year and also featured a cabaret.

- Jeffrey Pub opened in the 1960’s on the South Side as a straight bar, with a gay bar across the street named Maxine’s. When Maxine’s closed, the gay patrons made their way to Jeffrey Pub and it became a predominantly Black gay and lesbian bar ever since. Still in operation, Jeffrey Pub is one of the longest running Black gay and lesbian bars in the country and remains a vital community space for queer folks living on Chicago’s South Side.
What does it mean to identify as queer? Can we think of queer as a framework to understand other societal structures? How might queerness apply to ways of being that aren’t limited to sexuality and gender? This section explores the term “queer” expansively, recognizing that it both refers to sexuality, gender and desire, and also a larger political framework that interrogates systems of oppression and ideas of the norm. Positioning queer as an anti-oppressive politic connects groups of people who may otherwise be left out of narrower definitions of the term. These texts asks us to envision what taking queer as a way of thinking, as a political stance and applying it to different societal structures can make possible. How does a queer politic critique capitalism, the prison industrial complex or xenophobic immigration laws? Artworks from EMERGENCE to consider in relation to this section include the collages by Ralph Arnold.


**Films/Videos**

*bell hooks - Are You Still a Slave? Liberating the Black Female Body* | Eugene Lang College

Billy Porter gives a Brief History of Queer Political Action. 
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoXH-Yqwyb0&ab_channel=them
This section reflects on the intersections of being both Black and queer, and how those interwoven identities shape one’s experience. How do Black queer folks navigate the various communities they are connected to and the politics of inclusion/exclusion? What insights emerge from experiencing the world as a Black queer person? Many of the artists in exhibition grappled with queerness while being firmly rooted in community with other Black folks. How may that have influenced the work they created? Artworks from EMERGENCE to consider in relation to this section are the sculpture *Untitled* (St. Sebastian) by Richmond Barthé and *Self-Portrait* by Juarez Hawkins.


Ellis Wilson letter to Rex Goreleigh. (1945)

“A letter from Huey to the revolutionary brothers and sisters about the women’s liberation and gay liberation movements.” *The Black Panther* (August 21, 1970)

![Juarez Hawkins. Self-Portrait. Oil pastel, 1992.](image)

**Films/Music**

[David Arnold featuring David McAlmont - Diamonds are Forever](http://example.com)


[Audre Lorde: To be young, lesbian and Black in the '50s](http://example.com)

How do we think about our emotional worlds, those thoughts and feelings that move through our minds in daily life? How might visual references of interiority encourage us to look inward? Interior life refers to the emotional worlds that we each possess, which impact our understanding of self and the societies we navigate. So often, a demand is placed on Black artists to create representational and explicitly political work as “proof” of their racial experiences. By affirming the rich interior lives of the artists in EMERGENCE, we can attend to the depth each piece may hold, such as Still Life by Jonathan Green and the abstract paintings by Allen Stringfellow.


Films/Videos

*Signified: Jacqui Alexander* 2012

*Rita Dove reading her poem “Canary”*


*Audre Lorde reading “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power” at the Fourth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Mount Holyoke College (1978).*

Cai Thomas, director. *Queenie*. 2020

### Towards Liberation

How do we understand liberation? What does it mean to get free? Are there tangible steps we can take towards enacting self and collective liberation? The texts in this section envision
lives beyond oppressive systems of oppression and emotional confines, providing roadmaps towards other worlds that can be built. How can we approach the artwork in EMERGENCE as texts that imagine possibilities for liberation? What are the roles of poetics and interiority within the space of Black queer life and being?


Films:
Glossary

This section outlines a few of the terms used in the syllabus.

Queer:
A term used to refer anyone who is not heterosexual and/or cisgender (identifies with the gender they are assigned at birth). In the past, queer was a negative or pejorative term for people who are gay. However the term is increasingly being used to describe all identities and politics that go against normative beliefs. As such, the term is valued by many LGBTQ+ people for its defiance and by others who find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities.

Interiority:
This term refers to the understanding that each person possesses an expansive emotional world. Our interior selves comprise of the thoughts, feelings and experiences we hold inside, much of which is often kept to oneself.

Representation:
The description or depiction of someone or something, usually with the intention of providing some form of meaning to what is being represented. An artistic likeness or image.

Sexuality:
The desire one has for emotional, romantic, and/or sexual relationships with others based on their gender expression, gender identity, and/or sex. Many people choose to label their sexual orientation, while others do not.

Binary:
A classification system consisting of two genders, male and female. A concept or belief that there are only two genders and that one’s sex or gender assigned at birth will align with traditional social constructs of masculine and feminine identity, expression, and sexuality.

Intersectionality:
This term refers to a framework of understanding that each person has multiple connected identities that shape the ways they navigate the world and their experiences of privilege and discrimination. Coined by Black feminist legal scholar Kimberléé Crenshaw, the term develops from the work of the Combahee River Collective as described in the group’s 1977 statement. Examples of potentially intersecting identities include age, race, gender, sexuality, disability and class. Crenshaw used the term to highlight that discrimination against Black working class women, drawing on the case of DeGraffenreid v. General Motors, cannot be separated into either racial or sexual discrimination alone, since Black women experience both forms. Intersectionality is a call to interrogate generalized frameworks and acknowledge how intersecting identities shape the experiences of the individual.

Female Impersonator:
A term that is no longer widely used, it referred in the early to mid-twentieth century to cisgender men (born biologically male) who dressed and performed using a feminine persona, usually in a nightlife space. The term is used historically to identify cross-gender performance and not to describe one's gender identity, though some trans women may have also worked as performers in this context.

Fairy:
Among other terms that originated in the early twentieth century, this was a slang term for gay men. It later became popularized as a derogatory stereotype used to describe effeminate men. Like other derogatory terms used against members of the LGBTQ+ community, it has at times been reclaimed as an affirmative term.