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AGO Exhibit Documents America’s Outsider Culture

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World's Fair by Gary Winogrand.

By: Jenn Reid
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The Art Gallery of Ontario is looking back at American history with *Outsiders: American Photography and Film, 1950s – 1980s*. The expansive new exhibition features the work of photographers Diane Arbus, Nan Goldin, Danny Lyon, Gordon Parks, Garry Winogrand and the anonymous photographers from Casa Susanna, and video from filmmakers Kenneth Anger, Shirley Clarke, Marie Menken, Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie.

Outsiders is the largest photo exhibition since the AGO reopened in 2008. Over the past few years, the AGO has been increasing their photo and film collections and focusing on

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grand scale exhibits that speak to world issues, like 2013's *Ai Weiwei: According to What?* and last year's *Basquiat retrospective*. *Outsiders* fits right alongside them, with hundreds of photos that examine the changes in, and rejection of, American culture.



The exhibition starts with a series of photos by Garry Winogrand, which depict events big and small over the course of decades. A timeline shows when and where the photos were taken, and it offers a unique perspective on American life at the time. Photos of Richard Nixon and glamorous political events, students protesting at Kent State, family trips to the zoo, war vets and dance parties all hang side by side, showing the diversity of life at the time.



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Gordon Parks, the first African-American to work as a staff photographer for Life magazine, photographed striking images of racism, poverty and social unrest in Americas. His Life spread documenting one struggling family in Harlem in the 1960s is on display in full.



Noted photographer Diane Arbus was known for her photos of marginalized people on the fringes of society, such as transgender individuals, circus performers and nudists. The provocative images were often polarizing to the viewers – some see them as unapologetically celebrating the so-called “freaks,” and others found them to be cold or mocking the subjects.





A portion of the exhibition is dedicated to the photographs from Casa Susanna, a resort for cross-dressers in upstate New York during the 1950s. Married couple Susanna and Marie ran the resort, which became a safe haven for the cross-dressing men and transwomen who frequented it.



Casa Susanna

Whatever your secret fantasies were you were meeting other people who had similar ones and you realized, "I might be different but I'm not crazy." — Sandy, Casa Susanna visitor

From the mid-1950s until 1969, Susanna and her wife Marie operated a resort for cross-dressers in upstate New York, in two locations – Chevalier d'Eon from about 1955 to 1963 and Casa Susanna from 1964 to 1969 – and hosted soirées in their New York City apartment. The pair provided a safe haven for visitors – some of whom were heterosexual men, while others would later identify as Trans women – to revel in expressing their femininity.

These snapshots, taken by Casa Susanna visitors, are candid and full of camaraderie. Many feature individuals vamping for the camera as they play different female roles, highlighting a keen awareness of image, appearance and gender. The playful quality of these photographs stands in opposition to the ridicule and risk the cross-dressers would have faced in the outside world. Not initially created for public exhibition, these images are a rare example of photography used during this time to foster queer community, before the gay rights movement had gained momentum.



Subculture is a large theme in the exhibit, from queer and transgender to punks and bikers. Co-creator Jim Shedden notes the exhibitions name, Outsiders, comes not from the artists being on to outside of society looking in, but rather the notion of people creating their own community or family of outsiders that rejected the mainstream together.





Five short films are shown during the exhibition, including *Pull My Daisy*, the first film from Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie, narrated by Jack Kerouac, and socialite turned experimental filmmaker Marie Menken's *Go Go Go*, a time lapsed portrait of New York City. There will be an [additional 13 screenings](#) at Jackman Hall during the course of Outsider's run.

[Outsiders: American Photography and Film, 1950s – 1980s](#) runs at the AGO from March 12 to May 29, 2016.

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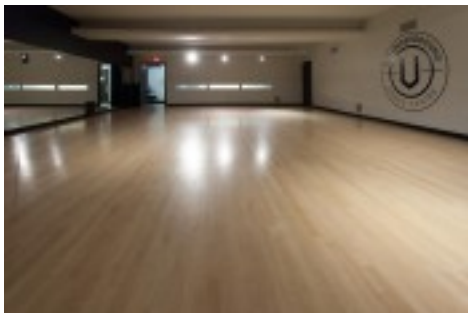
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