

Queer Masses

Artist Statement

Sarah Evenson & Jade Juno

Queer Masses is a five issue set of zines by book artist Sarah Evenson and illustrator Jade Juno working together under the shared name of RumTum Press. Our first goal when we began work on this series was to create four interlinking pieces that unabashedly position queerness as an essential site of transformative social resistance and joy. The second was for these pieces to combine the well-crafted physicality of artist books with the affordability and accessibility of zines. Our final goal was to activate the work by including distribution as an intentional part of the project itself.

Narratively, the issues of *Queer Masses* progress from *Opposition to Independence*, with stops at *Comfort* and *Sameness* along the way. This mirrors the path of self-discovery that we, and many other queer people, have taken in the pursuit of an authentic life. Sarah penned short pieces of writing on each of these subjects based on their own research, reflection, and conversations with LGBTQIA+ elders. Jade's illustrations respond to, interpret, and contextualize this writing. In both pursuits, we sought to create imagery that acknowledges the pain and suffering of living truthfully in an antagonistic world while ultimately delighting in queerness as a many-faceted mode of existence. Again and again, we both found ourselves drawn to the idea of the destruction of dominant structures, a subversive and celebratory undoing of the status quo, a rejection of the present condition in favor of a sweeter dream. We thought of this as a "soft apocalypse", a queer and gentle (but necessary!) end to the current oppressive reality in favor of an alternate more loving world.

Our intention was to ground readers in themselves, their bodies, and the present moment as they navigate the work. Thus, the binding structures of each book conceptually reflect the theme of their respective issue in order to create a thoroughly physical reading experience. This physicality and emphasis on presence took on a new and unexpected poignance during the socially-distanced days of the COVID-19 pandemic. When physical closeness with loved ones and new friends was

denied us, we were grateful to be able to send *Queer Masses* as an emissary in our stead.

Printed ephemera as a method of deploying ideas plays a key role in both the history of printmaking and in the Gay Resistance movement. Furthermore, the book as a contemporary art form is only powerful and relevant insofar as it is available to be read and shared. By intentionally including distribution within our community as a part of the project, we wanted to honor these dual legacies and create an active, socially involved body of work. Our wish for *Queer Masses* is for it to be a companion to readers in the broader world, existing primarily outside the rarified settings to which fine art is typically constrained.

Due to restraints placed on us by the pandemic, we chose to begin distribution as a quarterly subscription service delivered by the USPS. To date, *Queer Masses* has been sent from coast to coast across both the United States and Canada and is included in publicly accessible collections throughout the English-speaking world. The disseminated edition serves as a connecting point between people who may never meet but who are intrinsically bound together by their self-identification as a queer person or an ally. Thus, the “masses” referenced in the title of this project does not reference religious services, rather, it signals critical masses of such people and the alternative rituals from which we draw strength.

After completing our initial three goals, we chose to add a fifth volume to the series that serves as a bibliography of a wide-range of inspirational sources. The research we did before and during our creative processes was as much a part of the work as the finished pieces themselves. We see ourselves as being a part of a sprawling continuum of brave, powerful, and gentle queer people that extends into the past, the future, and the present moment. We hope that by reading *Queer Masses* the viewers will be able to locate themselves in this continuum as well.