

RYAN MANGIONE

"STILL ILL?"



„Against Nature“ (Arnold Fern), Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, 1989, installation view / Ausstellungsansicht

Academic historians have come to recognize and chart the significance of AIDS activism, and now major museums and galleries in New York, Berlin, and elsewhere are dedicating large retrospectives to the creative protagonists of AIDS crisis culture on a regular basis. Ryan Mangione considers these developments in light of contemporary debates over the importance of representation and notes that both strive for historical realism. Political value, in this perspective, is a function of literal explicitness, also and especially in the representation of homoerotic desire. For an alternative vision, Mangione turns to the history of the exhibition “Against Nature” (1989), which undercut the logics of representation proposed by Douglas Crimp and other theorists.

To quote a controversial homosexual, “stop me if you think that you’ve heard this one before.” AIDS is back. I don’t mean to sound melodramatic – it never left us. Yet, it doesn’t take a trained eye to notice a shift has taken place over the course of the past decade, particularly regarding the position AIDS crisis culture occupies within debates surrounding the value of “politically engaged” art. A bit of necessary housekeeping: I use the term AIDS crisis culture, or simply crisis culture,¹ to refer to the visible height of the epidemic in the US (roughly 1987–1996; “visible” due to the collected energies of countless activists, artists, and cultural theorists). AIDS is not over, and