

Art

Chitra Ganesh's Coloring Book Resists Queer Erasure

Queer Power! A Time Travelling Coloring Book honors LGBTQI+ activists and cultural icons.



Rhea Nayyar April 4, 2023



A cropped illustration from page 16 of Chitra Ganesh's *Queer Power!* coloring book (all images courtesy the artist)

Artist Chitra Ganesh's [*Queer Power!*](#) coloring book encourages us to work mindfully and remember who we love, who we have lost, and who we can look to for guidance during this legislative siege that's chipping away at trans and women's rights with each passing day. Using black and white illustrations, Ganesh manifests queer futurities through an examination of resistance, activism, and connectivity within New York's marginalized communities and beyond.

Queer Power! was born from the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art's (LLM) annual **QUEERPOWER installation commission** curated by Riya Lerner in October 2020. Ganesh installed illustrative panels in the windows of the museum's façade that celebrated NYC's queer histories and paid homage to the Indigenous stewards of Lenapehoking (now the greater tristate area, spilling over into Delaware and Connecticut) as well as the 19th-century Black settlement of Seneca Village (now Central Park). The research-based installation was organized while people were still avoiding museums and other indoor venues due to COVID-19. Therefore, Ganesh and the LLM's staff opted to activate the museum's exterior with historical and political context and complimented the window panels with audio interviews from the historical figures and contemporary activists represented in the project.



An installation view of Chitra Ganesh's *A city will share her secrets if you know how to ask* (2020) in the windows of the Leslie-Lohman Museum's façade

“The coloring book came out of a desire to share that work — that historical information and research that inspired the installation — with a wider audience including an audience of queer youth who may or may not be interested and comfortable going to or have easy access to museums,” Ganesh explained to *Hyperallergic* in an interview.

“It was really important for me to include characters that were both iconic but also anonymous — some that were better remembered than others,” Ganesh continued. “So in certain scenes you’ll see recognizable figures, politicians, icons for activists, but then there are also other people who have been iconic in their participation that may not be publicly recognizable. It was a way to mix that and to mix my intimate queer family with and relate them to the larger social movements or cultural moments.”



Portrait illustrations of Ronica Mukerjee (page 118) and Ruth Bader Ginsburg (page 122)

When paging through the coloring book, one can expect to see portrait illustrations of known figures such as Marsha P. Johnson, Stormé De Larverie, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg interspersed with images of more local activists and community members like Ronica Mukerjee, Javid Syed, and Saul Silva, whose contributions are listed in the index. Ganesh also honors several transgender people, primarily trans women of color, who were **murdered between 2020 and 2021** including Dominique Rem'mie Fells, Brayla Stone, Chae'Meshia Simms, Lexi "Ebony" Sutton, and sadly many more.

"I was thinking how important it was to account for material inequalities and state-sanctioned racial violence as a part of how the pandemic flourished," Ganesh said. "And thinking about how one of the shadow narratives in that crime of the pandemic year, the increase in known, documented killings of trans women and the way in which certain queer bodies have more access to liberty and autonomy and safety than others."



An illustration of Collect Pond (page 94) and an illustration of 1930s Chinese actress LiZhu Wu riding a motorcycle (page 88)

Queer Power! is dedicated to resisting erasure by means of connecting the dots between different histories at their points of intersection. Beyond the dedicated portraits of activists and community members, Ganesh populated the book with holistic imagery of the past, present, and future, using motifs of local flora and fauna, intentionally anonymized figures, and references to her personal experiences and her research.

Ganesh also left several pages intentionally blank, inviting viewers to become authors and contribute to the book as a living document, expanding the communal knowledge and bringing more attention to queer activists and allies who may have been overlooked or not recognized in the public eye for their advocacy. Featuring a forward by Erica Cardwell and essays by Jeannine Tang and Riya Lerner, *Queer Power!* is available for purchase on [Ganesh's website](#).