

Artist Statement: Queer Trans Jewish Futures

Hani Esther Indictor Portner

In the workshop on “Queer Trans Jewish Futures” that I hosted at the conference in May 2023, a group of queer and transgender Jewish people gathered in cyberspace to discuss what our lives and current realities are like in this time and place. It was a community-centered space of reflection, validation, and learning. We came together to form connections across multiple countries and voice our experiences when we are the only Jewish queer/trans person in the room. After facilitating this space it really made me understand how deeply necessary these identity-based spaces are for multiply-marginalized people so that we can relax in each other’s presence.

In the painting I created to process this conversation, I sat with symbols of transgender pride and joy and Leslie Feinberg’s words and activism to create a collage of plants, mushrooms, quotes, and portraits, all in a very magical, perhaps futuristic landscape. In the bottom right you can see two questions that we explored together: How will we show each other kindness? What shall we create together?

In community, we talked about what Feinberg’s work and presence can teach us as the next generation of Jewish queer and trans community builders. We discussed Jewish queer futures in terms of spaces of oasis, daily language shifts, and broader queer and Jewish community education. I wanted to center conversations and exchanges with other Jewish people involved in the conference, as I have found there are not enough spaces to embrace and celebrate being Jewish and queer and trans, and be honest about our struggles in academia, in the broader LGBTQ+ movement, or in the cisgender-heterosexual Jewish world. For many people, it is difficult to exist in our multiplicities and intersectional identities, facing questions like “How can you be queer/transgender if you are Jewish?”, as well as being forced to be educators on antisemitism or transphobia when you just want to be present like everyone else in the room.

Leslie Feinberg’s writing and activism allow for revolutionary dreaming and creating a better world by providing us contemporary queer people with a vision of what can be possible if we speak on our truths and build community with other marginalized groups.

For the painting, I used dark blue ink to bring attention to the occasion of the conference being the 30th anniversary of the publishing of *Stone Butch Blues*. I created a rainbow from the word 'Queer' with bright colors – red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. Next to the rainbow is a butterfly, a symbol of transformation and freedom with hearts and peace signs on the wings. Over one of the wings drapes a tallit. Mushrooms are growing from the top of the page, surrounding the message "we have a right to thrive." A portrait of Feinberg is drawn in the right corner of the page from the cover of *Stone Butch Blues*. A garden of flowers grows to his left and below on rolling hills. A halved pomegranate with its many seeds floats above the word 'Jewish' with a hanukkah over the letter 'i'. On the bottom left corner, a smiling sunshine emerges from a grassy mountainous landscape – with 'FUTURES,' written in capital letters, resting below two fluffy clouds and more butterflies. On a plant with a large and geometric root grows *Dioscorea mexicana*, one of the first plants synthesized into progesterone. It reaches up to touch the rainbow. Throughout the piece, I've hidden treasures for the delight of those who know. It was a joy to create this painting and continue to think more deeply about this workshop – a very special moment in queer/trans Jewish spacetime.