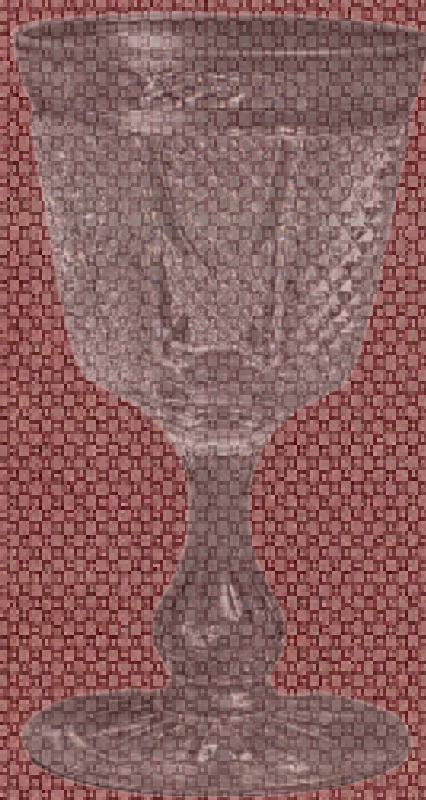


Singers



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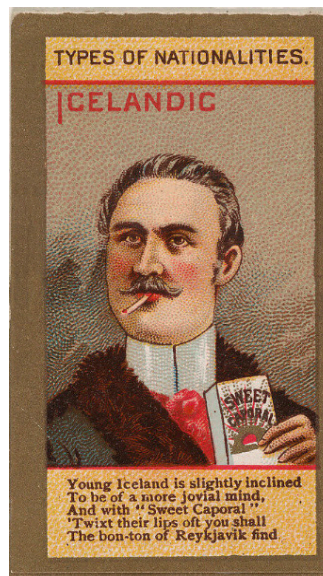
WHAT THE SINGERS?

Singers popped up in Bed-Stuy in May 2022. The bar's exterior was minimalistic, with a subtle line of green text that merely read "Singers." Despite its unassuming appearance, Singers has become known for its unique and unconventional events, from sauna raves to pop-up petting zoos and even cigarette races. On August 30, 2023, Singers was featured in *The New York Times*.



CHILLIS





Cigarette Races, etc.

Singers sits at 30 Kosciusko Street in Brooklyn. It has 4.6 stars on Google Reviews. "Brooklyn love is not dead. Just when I thought all bars in this city had become watered down caricatures of themselves, I find myself in a safe haven for people to be their most authentic selves," writes Emily Forsyth, a presumed Google Reviews connoisseur. Although it's seen as a hangout spot for mostly queer clientele, the bar transcends definition in both its

exterior and interior. Its exterior is nondescript, bearing no distinctive LGBTQ markers like rainbows or transflags, but word of mouth has lured a growing pool of regulars. The diverse crowd that Singers attracts can be partly attributed to its branding--or rather, lack thereof. It's not a lesbian bar or a gay bar or a trans bar so much as it is a bar run by lesbian, gay and trans people. The bar doesn't cater to only one type of LGBTQ+ customer. Singers' non-identity is what exactly what defines it. It is a space where there aren't necessarily any markers of identity. You can be whoever you are. And internally, Singers is just

as moving. Viral videos from a cigarette marathon have repeatedly courted engagement over social media. Yes. A dozen or so people tightly packed and shrouded in a smoky haze, racing to finish their cigarettes. It's not always cigarette contests and lubed-up wrestling matches when you walk through Singers' doors.

Sometimes it's a sauna rave. Other times, a pop-up petting zoo or a screening of "Paper Moon," followed by a show and tell featuring a can of beans signed by Burton Gilliam, an actor who played a minor role in the film. Singers cannot be defined by its exterior, interior or clientele. Singers embodies

the notion that a queer space cannot and should not be strictly defined. Non-branding allows for fluidity and inclusivity, and arguably has its origins in 70s queer zine and bar culture. In a world where LG-BTQ+ spaces are increasingly commodified and segmented, Singers stands out by remaining free from the constraints of labels.





The Games We Play

Is it Even a Bar?



Singers can't be defined by location, by design, or by the games played (not even the trivia nights). Locating a permanent, stable and material queer space may not even be possible. But that's the point. It's in the revisiting of these pasts and presents, through a variety of strategies that allow a glimpse of the potential queer futures--Singers is part fo that future. "There is no queer space," claims historian George Chauncey. "There are only spaces put to queer uses." And as we begin to slowly enter the world after sheltering in place, witnessing ongoing anti-Black and anti-trans violence, it has never been more importat to remind ourselves exactly whose uses these spaces are being put to. The beauty of Singers is that it transcends definition. It is therefore a space that can be used by anyone that needs it. Throughout history, gay bars have been spaces for political futures central to understanding new ways of thinking, living, loving, meeting and belonging.

Since at least the 1880s, the centre of queer communal and economic life in the United States was the drinking institution, whether it was a bar, saloon, or dance hall. By the 1920s, bars and cafes that catered exclusively to queer consumers began to appear in bohemian districts throughout the U.S. For most of their history, queer bars were but one segment of larger red light districts--which included brothels, burlesque theatres, peep shows, and shops selling erotic literature and apparel.

"There is no queer space"

But bars provided institutional context for socialising and establishment of relationships that endured one-night stands. Queer bars were established to cater to a specific clientele, though often simply because they were willing to pay higher prices and repreented easy marks for extortionists. Queer bars were the only economic institution that linked

those who bore the visible stigma most bars purposely avoided attr-



acting and the attention of the police and moral crusaders attempting and often failing to maintain the balancing act between shunning the police and attracting customers. The pressures of stigmatization meant that queer economic life took to the secretive and duplicitous characteristics of an illicit market, particularly with regard to information about customers,



locations of bars, or even the number of bars in a particular area. Customers, like bar owners, had a vested interest in discretion, since rairds inevitably meant arrest. As a result, information about potential customers were not easily availale to businesses to provide goods and services. The necessary secretiveness of much of queer life limited the information necessary for economic markets to operate efficiently.



How do you Identify?



In 1993 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick wrote: “A lot of the most exciting recent work around ‘queer’ spins the term outward along dimensions that can’t be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: teh ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these and other identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourse.” That is the spirit of Singers. A wandering and searching that may not result in clear answers, but could open up space for community and conversation. Queerness is difficult to define in formal terms,

but it might involve a stance, a particular position, an attitude. Radical publications in the 70s and 80s were all very different from each other but there is a kind of approach and some fairly consistent design and typographic methods taht are in direct contrast to the slickness and corporate control of mainstream graphic design at the time. There’s a predominant use of DIY techniques that worked well with Xerox machines and mimeograph printers, where duplicates could be made directly from an original master.

Queerness in the scrappy ad hoc, and sometimes homemade designs that were directly related to the urgency of protest and activism and survival. Perfect typography means predicting and idealized reading experience and a very particular power dynamic, involving knowledge, manipulation and control. Singer’s social media presence mirrors the radical publications of the 70s and 80s. Closer to a shitpost than the usual NYC bar promos, Singer’s Instagram is packed with absurd memes found from the depths of the Internet. The barrier to legibility here is reminiscent of the deliberate ambiguity found in 80s queer typographical design.

