



Smithsonian American Art Museum

## **The Silent Camp: Sexuality and Resistance in Cold War American Art and Culture**

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Sexual difference remains the great unthought in postwar American art. The abstract expressionists—not only almost uniformly heterosexual, but often the very embodiment of the Cold War’s highly anxious gender tropes—were challenged less than ten years after their first emergence by a remarkable generation of American artists. As a cohort, the group was remarkable for many reasons, not least because it contained so many closeted gay and lesbian artists. That this new generation, which included Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Cy Twombly, Agnes Martin, Andy Warhol, and John Cage, achieved its first critical and commercial success in the most homophobic decade of the twentieth century demands explication. The anti-authorial aesthetic strategies of this group—born of the specific social conditions of constraint faced by lesbians and gay men—rapidly advanced over a more traditionally expressive aesthetic as emblemized by abstract expressionism. This is the chief concern of my project.