

SINISTER WISDOM READING GUIDE:

Sinister Wisdom 58: Open Issue

SUMMARY

Sinister Wisdom 58: Open Issue (Spring 1998) features diverse works of narrative, poetry, and visual art concerning a wide range of lesbian themes. *Sinister Wisdom 58* is a transition collection between its departing editor, Akiba Onáda-Sikwoia, and its new editor, Margo Mercedes Rivera. Beginning with notes of goodbyes and introductions, this issue features prose, poetry, and art that both reflect on lesbian pasts and also help construct and imagine lesbian futures. Poetry editor Ekua Omosupe states that “Daily we sound the war cries against misogyny, genocide, poisoned water and food, racism, sexism, homophobia, AIDS, hunger, homelessness, and more, without enough relief in our suffering, yet we survive against the odds” (8). Facing financial hardship between the magazine’s moves across the United States and transitioning editors, this issue of *Sinister Wisdom* covers an array of these topics and through art and writing continues to “survive against the odds” by cultivating a space of lesbian expression and identity within its pages.

sinister wisdom 58



open issue

HISTORY OF SINISTER WISDOM

Sinister Wisdom is a multicultural lesbian literary and art journal that began in 1976 and publishes three to four issues per year. The journal started in Charlotte, North Carolina with Harriett Desmoines (Ellenberger) and Catherine Nicholson as its editors. *Sinister Wisdom* is still published today, and its contents have evolved alongside lesbian identities, politics, theory, and aesthetics. Some issues are organized by a theme, while others, like *Sinister Wisdom 58*, are open issues that feature writing and art across themes.



THEMES AND CORRESPONDING READINGS

In Praise of Lesbians:

- Barbara Lynne Brush “The Sky-Writers” p. 36.
- M.C. Ball “Garden Britomart” p. 49.
- anda d elle “ode to a woman wearing cleats” p. 80.
- Raye Lynn “For the Strong Woman, Nien Cheng” p. 89-90.

Activism and Criticism:

- Elizabeth Clare “Bedrock” p. 19-22.
- Elizabeth Ribet “grrl-story” p. 45-47.
- Margo Mercedes Rivera “Four Directions” p. 83.
- Maria Cecília Santos “Academic Convers(at)ion” p. 84-85.
- Elizabeth Clare “The Terrorist God” p. 109.

Illness and Death:

- Ekua Omosupe “Audre Lorde” p. 64-65.
- Patricia Fontaine “Entering My Days” p. 67.
- Marcia Rose “From Rachel’s Mother” p. 94-95 & “Vigil” p. 96-97.
- tova “lost and found” p. 98-99.
- Raye Lynn “Shadowing” p. 100.

Butch/Femme Identities:

- Mandy Precious “No Weak Swimmers Beyond This Point” p. 54.
- ananda esteva “this is what i’d tell her if we were friends not just lovers” p. 69-70.
- Jean H. Thoresen “Butch Trade” p. 71-72.
- sharon bridgforth “bull-jean & tha wo’mn” p. 73-75.
- Niobé Ngozi “Gender Variant and Available” p. 111-113.



THEMES AND CORRESPONDING READINGS

Multicultural Lesbianism:

- Odilia Galván Rodríguez “Tezcatlipoca” p. 10.
- PHKimura “after a storm” p. 11-13.
- Juanita Chavez “La Evil Woman” p. 37-44.
- ananda esteva “this is what i’d tell her if we were friends not just lovers” p. 69-70.
- Jacqueline Miranda “A Desperate Act” p. 82.
- Margo Mercedes Rivera “Four Directions” p. 83.
- Maria Cecília Santos “Academic Convers(at)ion” p. 84-85.
- Rodrigues “Ponies” p. 101-102.

Disability:

- Margaret Robison “One Small Step” p. 55.
- Cathy Cade “Beijing Images” p. 57-63.

Coming of Age and Coming Out:

- Juanita Chavez “La Evil Woman” p. 37-44.
- Margo Mercedes Rivera “Marlene” p. 42-43.
- Liz Morrison “90 Miles an Hour” p. 50-53.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1

Butch/Femme Expressions and Identity: Many of the pieces in this issue depict variations of lesbian expression and identity, especially within the language of butch/femme dichotomies. How are butch and femme identities depicted in this issue? Is there a value attached to these expressions in regard to conceptions of beauty or desire? How do the writers and artists in this issue expand upon or challenge these categories?

2

Desire and Expression: Throughout this issue, how is lesbian desire understood in relation to growth and self-expression? How do works that depict coming-of-age narratives and coming out depict desire? How do pieces like sharon bridgforth's "bull-jean & tha wo'mn" (73-75) or ananda esteva's "this is what i'd tell her if we were friends not just lovers" (69-70) explore lesbian desire? What is the relationship between each speaker's sense of self-expression and desire?

3

Theory and Practice: Many of the works in this issue illustrate the often complicated relationship between theories of activism within academic communities and grassroots community activist work. How does Elizabeth Ribet's "grrl-story" (45-47) depict this complicated relationship? How does Maria Cecília Santos's "Academic Convers(at)ion" (84-85) depict it? What issues, oversights, or challenges are associated with approaches to lesbian-feminist thought and activism in academic environments? In these pieces or others in *Sinister Wisdom 58*, is there a positive side to mingling theory and praxis? What solutions would you pose to these problems?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



4

Intersectional Identities: Discuss definitions and examples of “intersectionality.” What intersectional identities appear in this issue of *Sinister Wisdom*? How do these identities reveal challenges, opportunities, or oppressions? Choose one to two pieces that illustrate intersectionality and share them with your group. Explain where you see instances of intersectionality in these pieces, and their relevance to lesbian expression.



5

Art and Photography: Analyze Cathy Cade’s “Beijing Images” (56-63) or ananda esteva’s “El Otro Lado de la Jota Chola” (76-79). Describe the images and their connection to the themes of the journal. How do the images in each collection relate to one another? What narratives, experiences, opportunities, or challenges might these images express?

KEY WORD

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a concept developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) that maps varying intergroup identity categories marked by oppression. Intersectionality takes into consideration potential overlapping identities that fall under systems of oppression such as gender, race, sexuality, religion, mental and physical illness, mental and physical disability, class, nationality, or age. This theory emerged within feminism to understand that violence against women can be shaped by other dimensions of identities such as sexuality, race, or class, and by broadening our perspectives of overlapping identities within systems of oppression, we can gain a better understanding of oppressors as well as find better ways to combat them through activism.

To learn more: Crenshaw, Kimberlé. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color.” *Stanford Law Review* 43 (1991): 1241-1299.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about *Sinister Wisdom*, go to: sinisterwisdom.org

To see other *Sinister Wisdom* Reading Guides, go to: sinisterwisdom.org/readingguides

To request a free reading set of *Sinister Wisdom* 58, email Julie at sinisterwisdom@gmail.com with the number of readers and the mailing address.



Sinister Wisdom is happy to provide, free of charge, classroom sets and reading group sets of journal issues. For people who are able to make a contribution to cover the cost of postage, we will provide an invoice; postage reimbursement is voluntary though greatly appreciated.

Sinister Wisdom 58 Reading Guide created by Allison Serreas, July 2017
Designed by Zane DeZeeuw, July 2017
and Edited by LB Johnston, July 2017