

RESPONSES BY

Tatiana Luboviski-Acosta

Tara Marsden

Ruth Gebreyesus

sair goetz

el 李

Sarah O'Neal

Tania Butterworth

Wolfman  
Books

RESPONSES TO THE WORK OF  
Lukaza Branfman-Verissimo, Lizania Cruz,  
Miatta Kawinzi, Carnille Lee, Stephanie Lindquist,  
Zach Ozma, and Grace Rosario Perkins  
from *Social Objects* at CTRL+SHT Collective

# WOMEN BOOKS

EDITED BY Tara Marsden + Emilia Shaffer-Del Valle



## Sair Goetz in response to Zach Ozma

### 1. SHORTEN THIER LIVES TO INCREASE THIER IMPACT

When I place fresh cut flowers in a vessel, I see it as a blessing, a sacrifice, and/or a spell cast. I don't do this regularly: it is never maintenance; it is a gift.

Cut flowers are a delicacy, tied intimately to acknowledgement and monetary valuing of psychic need. One summer, my platonic life partner bought a singular flower for herself daily, to make her way through a hardship. Growing up, my parents bought cut flowers for each other out of the blue, for no reason in particular, which was the point. Someone once bought cut flowers for me as apology. I took the flowers, but refused to exchange them for forgiveness.

Every time I see flower arrangements for sale, I stop, I long to care for myself in this way: to see my self-love as worth as much as my daily calories. I then calculate my income. Feeling the usual few pangs of hunger, guilt, or panic, I move on with the day. I put money into things that seem more permanent or more necessary. I tell myself that to spend the time longing for flowers is enough spending on myself.

In including Zach Ozma's *Effeminate Vessels* in the exhibition *Social Objects*, Zach and Emilia asked the members of CTRL+SHIFT to donate time (and money) to the weekly maintenance of flowers in the gallery. In doing so, they insisted to my chosen family that we too give care: to our visitors, our community, and each other.

### EFFEMINATE VESSELS ZACH OZMA CERAMIX 2018

In this act of blessing, these vessels became "vases," in my mother tongue. I worry slightly about such use of language, not being a ceramicist and not knowing how such language

lands in their ears. However, I see this as honor to the object, a rewriting of what "vase" has meant to me. "Vessel" rings of embodied spirits, where "vase" screams of pronunciation battles, of antique stores, of roles my mother reminded me that I didn't have to play. A dear friend and ceramic-based artist once told me that any functional ceramic object necessarily responds to the hand in form and surface. I nodded and said, "Pity the Bathtub Its Forced Embrace of the Human Form"—a poetry book by Matthea Harvey, which I've kept mostly to eye its title. That ceramicist friend then informed me that flowered patterning and material are discursive, the stuff of secret messages, quiet enough to avoid being overheard by those with power to shoot the messenger. These vessels, made into vases for the duration of the show, became another form of gift: they made a flower bearer legible as a book bearer.

A date told me that an ex (a florist) told her that women in harems designed bouquets in order to communicate with only each other. When I tried to find out more, I waded through stories about the "language of flowers" that credited the Victorian Era craze to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, a writer who was able to leave her house and country due to her husbands status as British ambassador to Turkey. I did not find google-able information about pre-colonial origin [a vacancy waiting to be filled]. I did, however, discover a late-capitalist interpretation of the phenomenon: a website and book called Cryptofloricon, which offers to encrypt and decrypt messages, complete with suggested responses.

**LANGUAGES  
SPOKEN FOR AND BY  
THOSE WHO WILL  
LISTEN**

Though I have concluded that to place flowers inside a vessel is to place a conversation inside a conversation, I have still never learned the language of vases, nor the language of flowers. I

can only read the messages of coffee mugs that say things like "Hogwarts mom," "Don't talk to me yet," and "I'm really holding wine." While I might be too high-class and am certainly too low-income to spend money on a mug with text that reads "I'm really holding wine," I took a picture at Ross to savor the built-in pun. "I"—the subject position—could both apply to the mug that holds wine, and the person that holds wine in the mug.

Like the Ross mugs, Zach Ozma's Effeminate Vessels use straightforward English language and illustrative imagery. Unlike the Ross mugs, Ozma's vessels carry Maggie Nelson's *The Art of Cruelty*, Carson Kressley, and the claim that "reality TV is the most ecstatic art form." They are representative of what CTRL+SHIFT's community has come to mean to me: chosen (queer) family. Looking at these vessels, I found myself longing to own them in some of the ways I long to buy cut flowers: to limit their reach and lifespan in hopes of extending my own.

It is my dream to throw a dinner party gathered around the words "his fingers feel so good in my asshole." On the vessel, the text is framed by a hand to the right and left, each with two fingers dipped, tipped, or slipped into gold. Those gold fingertips are the start of or mark the end of a train of...pubic hair? The vapor of a potion? Lining the rim (of the vessel) are small golden stars.

I imagine my chosen family sitting around a table with this joyous and rebellious vessel at its center. In warmth and community, we would cast a spell of resilience through our conversation about the blessed genderlessness of the asshole. We would seek and find solidarity in listing all the other forms of queer love (gardening, cooking...) that require care, attention, and washing up before/ after.

**QUEER CARE THAT  
REQUIRES CLEANING  
UP AFTER**

I imagine too, such polite table conversation becoming a bit more fraught around the vessel "heterosexual women talking to me about their husbands." Here there is both more

and less work to be done. There is less room for pictorial interpretation: it's a cyan version of the image scrawled on every other bus stop, bathroom, and video game (search TTP: "time to penis"). This time, though, the cis-normative man junk parades clearly and neatly, with garnish, around the top of the vessel. A wreath surrounds it, perhaps indicating the penis as the prize of having a husband.

The work for me, and the impolite topic at my imagined table, is the interpretation of the text. The demographically descriptive finger points at "heterosexual women"—alone setting them as "other" to

the "me." This "me" is talked to, not with. Did "me" resent these het-married-women? Those who assume that "me" (non-het? non-woman? non-married?) can relate (because also het? also woman? also married? also cis? also othered?) to their conversations about husbands?

Or maybe it's the way this allows their presumably-cis, presumably-het husbands to take up (even more) space that inspires resentment? Or maybe the frustration is at listening to anything about a man who is (demographically) most likely to cause "me" harm? Or maybe the rancor stems from the foundational fact that women are usually taught that to have a husband and to talk about him is the safest way to hear their own voices aloud? That this is the autopilot? That this is the assumed "neutral topic"? That this is "relatable"?

**2. TIP YOUR FINGERS  
IN METAL ON  
BEHALF OF A LOVE  
YOU SO OFTEN  
NEED TO FIGHT FOR**

My imagined dinner party is in some kind of brooding silence at this point: frustrated at the tracing of harms done; at passing the buck of responsibility for perpetuation of cis-

het- dominance; at making it about gender. We assume at the table that "me" and "the het-women" are probably all white, too, since no one mentioned race? Or maybe the dinner party is silent because I've gotten inappropriately heated and there is a shocked silence.

And as I scramble to bring the mood back up like a good hostess, I offer dessert around and one last thought. Perhaps there was never resentment in this writing, and it is my own resentment that is filling the vessel? Perhaps there was never meant to be a demographically identifiable "I" behind the "me" of the text? Perhaps "me" in this case is like the "I" of the Ross mug announcing its contents' ABV: the subject of the sentence is the object bearing the sentence. It is the vessel itself that is spoken (in)to about het husbands.

Perhaps this one Effeminate Vessel, rather than describing the public sphere in which heterosexual women (only?) feel safe and secure talking about their husbands; rather than a call-out for the heterosexual woman's complicity in cis-het-male dominance/harm;

the vessel becomes for "heterosexual women" what the bouquet was for improperly documented harem women: a location of private thoughts and communications. There, in an innocent, effeminate, domestic object, these "heterosexual women" can talk. The vase itself is a cauldron: to pass (love?) letters, store secrets, and, perhaps, brew rebellion.