

CLAUDE CAHUN & MARCEL MOORE

"In vain [...] I tried through black humor, provocation, defiance to shake my contemporaries out of their blissful conformism, their complacency."

Claude Cahun was born Lucy Schwob on October 25, 1894, in Nantes, France. They were a photographer, a writer, surrealist, performer, and a radical activist working to play with and expand upon ways of thinking about gender and sexuality. In 1919, they adopted the name Claude Cahun, Claude being a gender-neutral name in French.

At age 17, Claude met Suzanne Malherbe and began a lifelong romantic partnership; Suzanne later adopted the name to Marcel Moore, another gender-neutral name. Claude's father eventually married Marcel's mother, making them step-siblings as well. The public perception of them as sisters helped to diffuse much of the homophobia their close relationship may have otherwise encountered.

Both worked in Paris as artists, though Marcel's work is less well-known, and Claude called Marcel "the other me." Marcel worked largely as an illustrator, while Claude's subversive photography questioned gender and self in a society where gender was rigidly enforced. Claude's work is termed as self-portraiture, with costume and self-staging involved, and is considered the forerunner of contemporary artists like Cindy Sherman and Nan Goldin. Much of Claude's work was photographed with the help of Marcel, and in this way the term "self" portraiture applies only as much as Marcel counted as "the other [Claude]". Throughout their lives, they would work together in a model of co-creativity.

In 1937, the couple moved from Paris to Jersey, in the Channel Islands off the coast of France, in hopes of providing a quiet respite for Claude's chronic health problems. They chose to stay there when the Nazis invaded in 1940, and Claude, who was Jewish, avoided the mandatory registration of Jews. As Jeffrey Jackson, a history professor at Rhodes College stated: "They [had] a lot of reasons not to do anything. As lesbians, as French women living in exile, there [were] lots of things to suggest they should keep their heads down. But instead, they [stuck] their necks out."

Claude and Marcel used their artwork to protest Nazi crimes and inspire mutiny among German troops. The two would create anti-German fliers and leaflets, attending military events to place anti-German propaganda in pockets of soldiers, on chairs, and thrown in crumpled balls into windows of cars and homes. All of the pieces were written in fluent German and signed "The soldier without a name." Nazi officers lived in a hotel across the street from the couple, but they successfully hid themselves as two old ladies, presenting themselves only as sisters. In 1944, they were finally caught, arrested and charged with listening to the BBC and inciting troops to rebellion. They were imprisoned for a year and sentenced to death, but were spared when the Allies liberated Jersey.

Claude's already poor health suffered in imprisonment, and they died of a pulmonary embolism in 1954. Marcel committed suicide in 1972. The couple are buried together at St. Brelade's Church.

"Shuffle the cards. Masculine? Feminine? It depends on the situation. Neuter is the only gender that always suits me."

Sources, biographies, and additional reading can be found at hcofpg.org/pride

**HOLOCAUST
CENTER OF
PITTSBURGH**

