

Event Report

Exploring Non-Normative Desires in Art and Literature

Coordinator: Anna TATTON

(Research Institute Assistant, CGS)

On June 29th, 2025, the Center for Gender Studies hosted *Exploring Non-Normative Desires in Art and Literature*, a JICUF-supported symposium that invited international artists and scholars to reflect on how desire—particularly queer and non-normative desire—is represented, challenged, and reimagined through literature and visual media. The event featured a presentation by Spanish poet and novelist Sara Torres on her novel *La Seducción*, a screening of video art by French artist Théophylle DCX, and a participatory workshop led by Sara Torres and facilitated by Cleo Verstrepen on desire, narrative, and audience.

Held across two rooms in the Main Building, the symposium fostered intimate and dynamic exchanges between students, faculty, and members of Tokyo's broader queer cultural networks. Discussions explored the intersections of aesthetics, power, gender, and intimacy, asking: how do we write, visualize, and imagine desire beyond heteronormative constraints?

Dr. Torres's talk illuminated how queer desire can be woven into text, demonstrated through a reading of her own work and an analysis of the frustrated desires evident in letters by lesbian authors. She then invited participants to write their own love letters to an imagined lover, prompting reflection on how desire is expressed through a medium that takes days to reach its recipient. This activity inspired strong audience engagement and received highly positive feedback.

This was followed by two screenings of works by Theophylle Dcx, which

explored the body of an HIV-positive person—someone who, though taking daily medication and having become medically “untraceable,” is still denied the ability to desire. These works questioned how the so-called “infected” body becomes suspect in its expressions of desire.

The event concluded with a Q&A session between the speakers, coordinated by Cleo Verstrepen and Anna Tatton.

Successes & Challenges

A major success was the collaboration between artistic experimentation and academic reflection. All three guests brought distinct approaches that made the event accessible and impactful for participants from diverse backgrounds.

Challenges included managing simultaneous screenings, presentations, and group discussions across two rooms, and addressing multilingual needs (Spanish, French, and English). These were overcome with financial support from CRPS and JICUF which allowed for careful planning, bilingual facilitation, and printed materials.

Community Building at ICU

The symposium created a joyful space for ICU’s queer and feminist community, bringing together students, alumni, faculty, and CGS members. It fostered lasting connections and marked many students’ first experience of a queer academic arts event, which they described as deeply meaningful.

Engagement with Society

The event engaged Tokyo’s wider queer cultural networks, attracting participants from outside ICU and strengthening links between the university and local artists, grassroots organizations, and independent cultural spaces. It helped position ICU as a site for creative and critical queer exchange in Japan.

Personal Growth

Organizing the event strengthened my leadership, multilingual communication, event facilitation, and grant management skills, and built my confidence in curating spaces where academic theory and queer life intersect.

For the guest speakers, presenting their work in a new cultural and academic context informed their ongoing projects. The success of this symposium has also laid the foundation for future collaborative programming at ICU.

