



'THEY KISS,' copyright Jan Wandrag; courtesy of Peter Hay Halpert Fine Art, New York.

Bible Study

ARTIST JAN WANDRAG RE-INTERPRETS
KING DAVID AND JONATHAN'S LOVE AFFAIR

By Rafael Risemberg

WITH THE BIBLE-THUMPERS constantly on a rampage against anything gay, it's easy to forget that the book they revere contains one of the world's first—and most impassioned—tales of man/man love. I'm referring, of course, to the King David and Jonathan saga, which is now the subject of gay South African artist Jan Wandrag's video and photography ex-

wonder, greater than the love of women."

Granted, this story could imply no more than a very special friendship, but many biblical scholars assume a homoerotic bond between the two men. Some even interpret a passage involving David's "bowing three times" before Jonathan as a coded reference to oral sex.

In his 15-minute video "David + Jonathan," which premiered as a short at Lincoln

Though technically a video, the work reads as a photo montage and is in fact a sequence of video stills, heavily manipulated and distressed, with a colorfully grainy quality. Many of these stills, mounted on paper, are also displayed on the gallery's walls. Wandrag filmed his scenes in public places in a variety of cities around the world, including New York and Johannesburg. No one who appears in the piece knew they were being taped, and these unprofessional, unwitting "actors" make up the literally dozens of different Davids and Jonathans and Sauls on the screen.

While having multiple actors leads, at times, to confusing viewing (just who is David and who is Jonathan in any particular scene?), it ends up being the most ingenious aspect of the work. Gay people continue to play out the saga of David and Jonathan, the artist seems to be saying, in their epic struggle to reconcile their passions with society's strictures.

Jan Wandrag's video is fresh and inventive, and quite timely. In battling for our freedom to bond, it is important to be reminded of this ages-old story that places our love in a heroic—and, yes—religious context.

Images of David and Jonathan, Mon.-Fri. by appointment (call ahead), until July 15, at Peter Hay Halpert Gallery: 223 W. 21st St., #2G, phh-fineart.com, 646-827-9890. Rafael Risemberg, Ph.D., leads gay & lesbian art gallery tours through New York Gallery Tours, nygallerytours.com, 212-946-1548.

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hibit at Peter Hay Halpert Gallery in Chelsea.

The tale in the Bible goes like this: Jonathan, the son of Israel's King Saul, loves David at first sight, following David's slaying of Goliath. According to the Book of Samuel, "Jonathan's soul became bound to David's soul, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.... Jonathan and David made a covenant because he loved him as himself." Feeling threatened by the upstart David, Saul unsuccessfully tries to have him killed, and he makes clear to Jonathan his disapproval of the youths' close relationship. Jonathan dies fighting the Philistines, after which David says in Samuel, "I am full of grief for you, my brother Jonathan; very dear have you been to me; your love for me was a

Center and was screened last month in the city's NewFest gay film festival, Wandrag takes liberties in interpreting this chain of events. In his modern-day version, David arrives at an unnamed metropolis and ends up foiling an assassination attempt on Saul, a business tycoon whom the tabloids dub "The King." At an event where Saul honors David in gratitude, David meets Saul's son Jonathan, and soon afterward they become physically intimate. We see a surveillance camera taping the lovers' rendezvous, whereupon Saul forbids his son from seeing David again. Against Saul's wishes, surreptitious meetings between the two continue to take place. I won't reveal the ending, but I will say there are no Philistines involved.