GAY ART

James Smalls

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Author: James Smalls

Page 4:
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio,
The Musicians (detail), c. 1595.
Oil on canvas, 92.1 x 118.4 cm.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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Introduction

Art and homosexuality may seem like a strange combination, but both phenomena have been part of human history from the beginning of time, or at least from the beginning of recorded civilisation. Bringing together two large concepts – art and homosexuality – is nevertheless difficult and challenging. Both categories raise a host of conceptual problems and pose a series of unresolved nagging questions.

The primary question, "What is art and what purpose does it serve?", has preoccupied humankind for centuries and has yet to find a definitive answer. There exists as many views and definitions about what art is (and is not) and its significance as there are individuals in the world. In the context of *Gay Art*, I am using the term "art" in a broad sense as human creation and communication within a visual field. Although the majority of the images here were produced in traditional media such as painting, sculpture, graphics, and photography, art would also include images and forms of production associated with, for example, popular culture, advertising, film, performance, conceptualism, or computer-generated imagery. Ultimately, it is up to the reader of this book to decide what to accept or reject as art.

Unlike "art," the other term in this book's title, "homosexuality," can be defined more specifically. Homosexuality and its emotional aspects have existed in all cultures and in all time periods long before the invention of the term. It is and always has been one aspect of the very complex domain of human sexuality. The way homosexual love and sensibilities are visually expressed is often a reflection of the status of homosexuals themselves within their particular cultures. These images are an indication of either the degree of tolerance in those societies, or the sign of an increasingly restrictive prejudice fostered by traditions and religion.

Before 1869, the words "homosexuality" and "heterosexuality" did not exist. The former was coined and first put into use by the German-Hungarian writer and translator Karl Maria Kertbeny (1824-82). He also invented the latter term in 1880. Kertbeny's purpose for using the word "homosexuality" was in response to an article of the Prussian penal code that criminalised sexual relations between men. Kertbeny wanted the article omitted, but was unsuccessful. The code became part of Prussian law in 1871 and was upheld and then strengthened by the Nazis in 1935, and retained by West Germany until 1969 (Haggerty, p.451). Kertbeny had his own specific views on human sexuality. Although there may never have been a coherent theory of homosexuality for him, he did divide homosexuals into specific categories: those who are "active," "passive," and "Platonists," or those who love the company of their own sex without wanting to have sex with them. The designation "homosexuality," then, started out as a term of sympathy and political activism to change a repressive law. However, over the years the word evolved into a concept that came to describe an individual's sexual preference. The word and its evolving concept took some time to enter into European languages and thought patterns.

In the 1880s, Kertbeny's catchy new term attracted the attention of Richard von Krafft-Ebing, a noted sexologist who used the word in his vastly popular 1886-87 *Psychopathia Sexualis*, a massive encyclopaedia of sexual deviance.

01. Greek painting representing a couple, 480 BC. Museum of Paestum, Italy.

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It was through this and subsequent works by noted sexologists of the late nineteenth century that the term "homosexuality" acquired its medical and clinical connotations. Sexology refers to the study of human sexual behaviour before the codifications of modern psychology and psychoanalysis generated by the thoughts and writings of Sigmund Freud (see Gregory W. Bredbeck, "Sexology," in Haggerty, p.794). It was not until the 1950s that "homosexuality" entered popular English and American usage, largely as a result of the Kinsey reports of 1948. Alfred Kinsey (1894-1956) was an American sex researcher whose scientific data on human sexuality challenged the prevailing notion that homosexuality was a mental illness.

As a concept, "homosexuality" encompasses a variety of conflicting ideas about gender and same-sex sexual attraction. Its broad range of possible meanings is what makes it such an irresistible, powerful, and ambiguous term nowadays. In its modern sense, "homosexuality is at once a psychological condition, an erotic desire, and a sexual practice" (David Halperin, "Homosexuality," in Haggerty, p.452). All three senses can and are expressed in artistic or aestheticised form. Homosexuality or, to employ a term of more recent invention, the "homoerotic," can be understood as an actual or potential element in everyone's experience, whatever the sexual orientation of the individual. The homosexual and the homoerotic frequently overlap but are not necessarily the same. Many of the images in this book might be classified as homoerotic rather than homosexual. "Homosexual" and "homoerotic" differ only in the root meanings of the terms "sexual" and "erotic". Whereas "sexual" encompasses the physical act of sex, "erotic" is a concept that incorporates a range of ideas and feelings around same-sex wants, needs, and desires. It does not always culminate in the sexual act. The homoerotic, unlike the homosexual, legitimates erotic desire between members of the same sex by placing that sentiment in a context which rationalises it – such as in classicism, military battle, or athletic activities. Thus, in many situations the homoerotic is veiled and perceived as non-transgressive behaviour. Whereas all homosexuals experience homoerotic desire, not all who experience and, indeed, appreciate homoerotic desire are necessarily homosexuals. The homoerotic can sometimes be a frightening prospect for some heterosexuals to such a degree that it sometimes incites virulent homophobic responses. The "homoerotic" is also linked to the more recent idea of the "homosocial". Male homosociality refers to all-male groups or environments, and is a means by which men construct their identities and consolidate their privilege and social power as males usually through and at the expense of women (see Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1985). Indeed, female homosociality also exists, but the dynamics of it in relation to patriarchal culture are quite different.

Although male and female homosexuality are often treated separately, both are considered in this book. Throughout, the term "homosexuality" refers to male homosexuality unless "female" is specified. This is so because most societies are male-dominated and male-oriented, giving primacy to the sexual activities and development of men over women. In relationship to art about and by homosexual men, the "scarcity of art about or by lesbians reflects male domination of the cultural record" (Saslow, p.7). All of the art and literary evidence we have was the work of males and bear mostly on male activities.

The definition of homosexuality is further complicated by the differences between modern and pre-modern notions of the concept. There is considerable disagreement in contemporary literature on homosexuality over use of the word "homosexual" for same-sex relationships in non-Western, pre-modern and ancient periods. The word

02. **Albrecht Dürer**, *Self-Portrait* or *Portrait of the Artist Holding a Thistle*, 1493. Oil on parchment mounted on canvas, 56.5 x 44.5 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

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"homosexuality" is relatively young. Like the word "sexuality" itself, it describes a culturally determined and culturally constructed concept born of recent Western society. Thus, applying the concept "homosexuality" to history is bound to force modern and Western concepts of self and other onto the ancient and pre-modern world. In most pre-modern and ancient cultures, there is no word to denote a state of being homosexual or to describe a homosexual act.

Any attempt to fit male representations in ancient art or texts with the status or practices of modern-day homosexuals would be anachronistic. Also, the modern notion of "homosexuality" is loaded with a negative moral stigma that clouds any positive or pleasurable appreciation of male-male or female-female sexual culture in pre-modern societies. However, even though the ancients may not have had in mind the modern concept of "homosexual" and "homosexuality," this does not negate the fact that homosexuality and indeed homophobia did exist.

03. **Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio**, *Ecstasy of Saint Francis*, c. 1594-1595. Oil on canvas, 92.5 x 128 cm. Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford (Connecticut).

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In the modern West, homosexuality is often thought about in binary notions of sex and gender. The very notion of homosexuality in the West implies that same-sex feeling and expression, in all the many different sexual and erotic forms they take, constitute a single thing, an integrated phenomenon called 'homosexuality', which is distinct and separate from heterosexuality. However, in the ancient, pre-modern, and non-Western societies presented in this book, the sameness or difference of the sexes of the persons who engaged in a sexual act was less important than the extent to which sexual acts either violated or conformed to the rules of religion or to the norms of conduct or tradition deemed appropriate to an individual's gender, age, and social status. For this reason, discourses of pederasty (from the Greek meaning "love of boys") and sodomy (anal sex) as these related to class, age, and social status were more significant than the fact that the two partners were of the same sex. Concerns over the morality of homosexuality or sexual inversion are typical of modern rather than pre-modern approaches. What we call homosexual behaviour was not frowned upon, for example, in ancient Greece.

04. **Thomas Eakins**, *The Wrestlers*, 1899. Oil on canvas. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.

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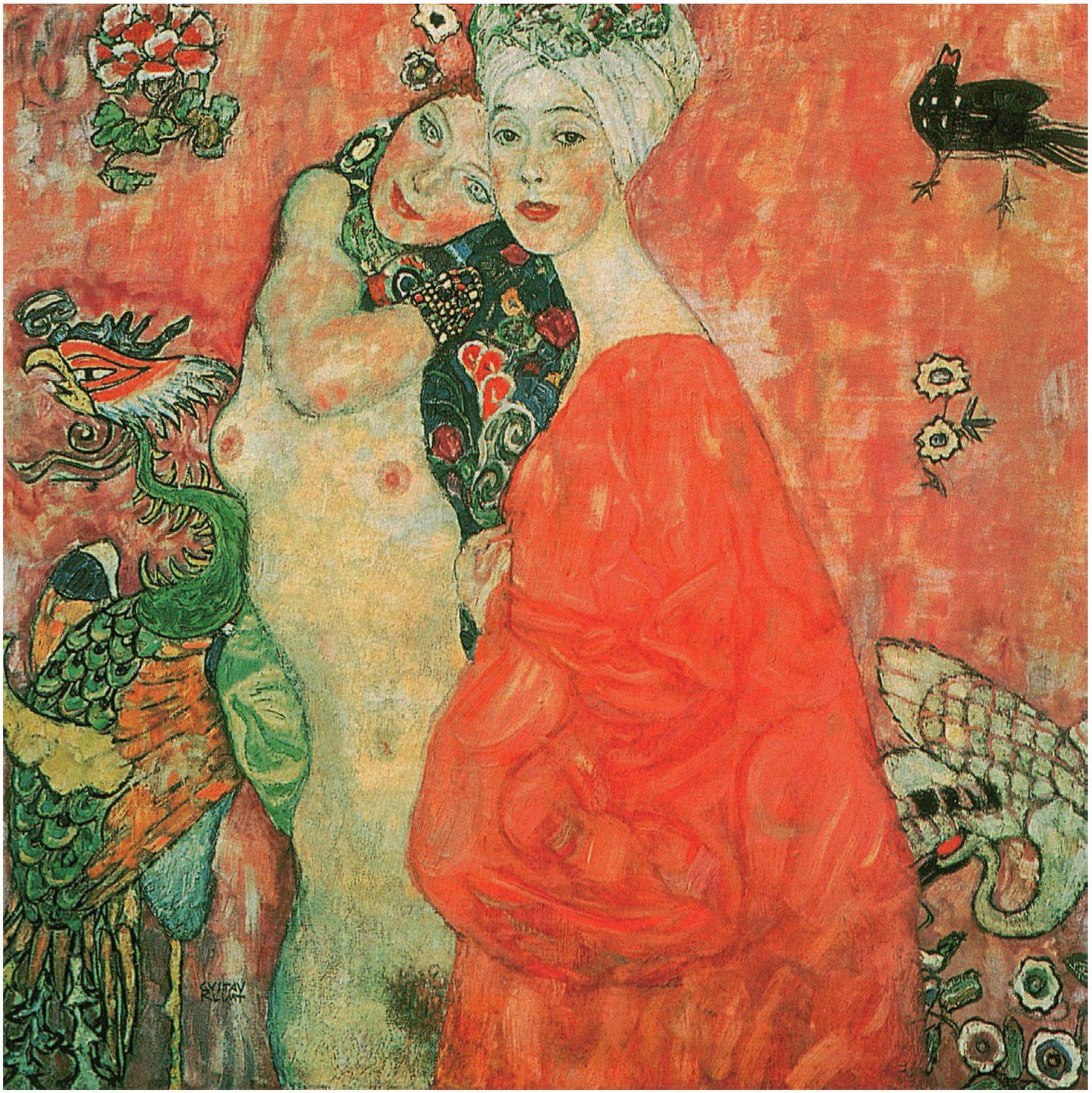

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However, there were strict social rules that governed such behaviour. In ancient Athens, a homosexual relationship between a teenage boy and a mature man was generally regarded as a positive phase of a young man's educational and social development. Indeed, such relationships were celebrated in the various dialogues of Plato, in vase and wall paintings, and in lyric poetry. At a certain point in his development, however, the adolescent was expected to marry and father children. What was frowned upon in such intergenerational sexual relationships was passivity and eager compliance in anal copulation. It should be stressed, however, that for the ancient Greeks, there was no underlying moral, religious, or social basis for censuring the erotic relationship between males that conformed to the expected hierarchical arrangement involving an adult male and an adolescent boy.

Homosexuality in the art of the non-Western world operated along the same lines as in ancient Western cultures. However, it was due to territorial expansion and campaigns of conquest beginning in the sixteenth century that Westerners forged contacts with previously unknown peoples and cultures in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and the Arab world. The moral values of the West were soon imposed upon those who were conquered. Cultures that had celebrated homosexuality in their past art, rituals, and native traditions, were soon forced not only to abandon them, but to perceive them as evil and morally reprehensible (see Saslow, p.109-11).

The complex historical and social development of homosexuality in the Western world indicates that it is more than simply a conscious sexual and erotic same-sex preference. It has evolved into a new system of sexuality which functions as a means of defining the individual's sexual orientation and a sexual identity. Homosexuality came to be associated with how individuals identify themselves. As such, it has "introduced a novel element into social organisation, into human difference, into the social production of desire, and ultimately into the social construction of the self." (David Halperin, "Homosexuality," in Haggerty, 454-55).

One significant aspect of the history of homosexuality is that of language and labelling. It was the change from the use of the word "homosexual" to "gay" that best exemplified the importance of the political dimensions of individuality and identity as important components in how homosexuals viewed themselves.

In the 1960s and 1970s, 'gay' replaced 'homosexual' as the word of choice because many gay activists felt that 'homosexual' was too clinical and associated with medical pathology. By the time of the Stonewall riots in 1969, 'gay' was the dominant term of expressing sexual identity for a group of younger, more overtly political homosexual activists. In contrast to 'homosexual', 'gay' was thought to express the growing political consciousness of the gay liberation movement. 'Gay', like 'homosexual' can refer to both men and women. However, some women have taken issue with their implied exclusion from the category 'gay' and have preferred the designation 'lesbian'. This haggling over names and labels is a very significant part of the history of homosexuality. The 'lesbian' over 'gay' debate reveals that the relation between homosexual identity and gender identity has always been vexed. In this book, I refrain from using the word 'gay' until after 1969 and the rise in political awareness over these terms.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the use of the word 'gay' increased. Almost every political and social organisation that had anything to do with the gay liberation movement used the word 'gay', or a variation thereof, in their

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05. **Gustav Klimt**, *Friends* (detail), 1916-1917. Oil on canvas. Destroyed in the Immendorf Castle fire in 1945.

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organisation's title. In recent years, some members of the gay community have rejected the designation 'gay' in favour of 'queer' – a term of inclusivity that refers to all non-heterosexual persons and categories. [For a history of change in name designation from 'homosexual' to 'queer', see Haggerty, pp.362-63; for summary of the word 'queer', see Daniel F. Pigg, 'Queer', in Haggerty, pp.723-24]. The word 'queer' had existed and had been used as a term of ostracism and pathology against homosexual men since the 1910s. It was during the 1990s that 'queer' was appropriated by some gay men who wanted to set themselves apart from a gay culture that they believed had sold out to the status quo and had become accommodationist.

Now that I have familiarised the reader with certain definitions, terms, and concepts associated with homosexuality, some other important and difficult questions relevant specifically to homosexuality in art still remain. For instance, on what basis do we decide that a work of art is about homosexuality? For example, is an image of two male nudes or two female nudes standing in close proximity to one another about homosexuality? Is it necessary that works of art exhibit overt or explicit homosexual themes to be about homosexuality? Is it the subject matter or is it the sexual orientation or identity of the artist that is crucial to an understanding of his or her art? What is the role of the viewer in determining if a work of art has a homosexual theme? What is the significance and underlying 'message' of homosexuality in art across cultures and across centuries? Does homosexuality confer upon artists a different vision of the world, perhaps with its own sensibilities? Although these questions are important, it is unwise to seek a single definitive response to them, for homosexuality as both label and idea is much too diverse, complex and varied to be reduced to one answer. Homosexuality "crosses all borders and is included in a range of visual and physical objects that symbolise and communicate feelings and values" (Saslow, p.2). Homosexuality is a diverse concept that refers to a range of feelings and emotions. Its meaning will vary for different people at different times and in different cultures. What is clear is that homosexuality can not and should not be minimised or limited to sexual behaviour alone.

Although there are many images in this book of men and women engaged in explicit same-sex acts, it is not intended simply as a picture-book of sexual activities. Indeed, the complexity of homosexuality as a term and concept reveals that it is more than purely the physical sex act. *Gay Art* ventures beyond images of sex. It is simultaneously centred on the multitude of emotional and psychological feelings, needs, and desires between members of the same sex. As art historian James Saslow has noted, "homosexuality" is as ambiguous and flexible as the term "love" (Saslow, p.7). The images in this book expose some of the ways that these acts, feelings, needs, and desires are manifested visually.

Because of the breadth of cultures and art represented here as well as the cultural and social complexities associated with homosexuality as label and concept, *Gay Art* is only able to give a broad overview of homosexuality in visual culture and an impressionistic sweep of images across centuries and regions. It is not intended as a comprehensive written or visual text on the topic. However, even cursory treatment of the subject should interest anyone and everyone who cares to delve into the complicated and inextricably linked worlds of human sexuality and human creativity.

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06. **George Platt Lynes**, *Nicholas Magallanas and Francisco Moncion in Poses from Orpheus*, 1948. Photograph. Ballet Society.

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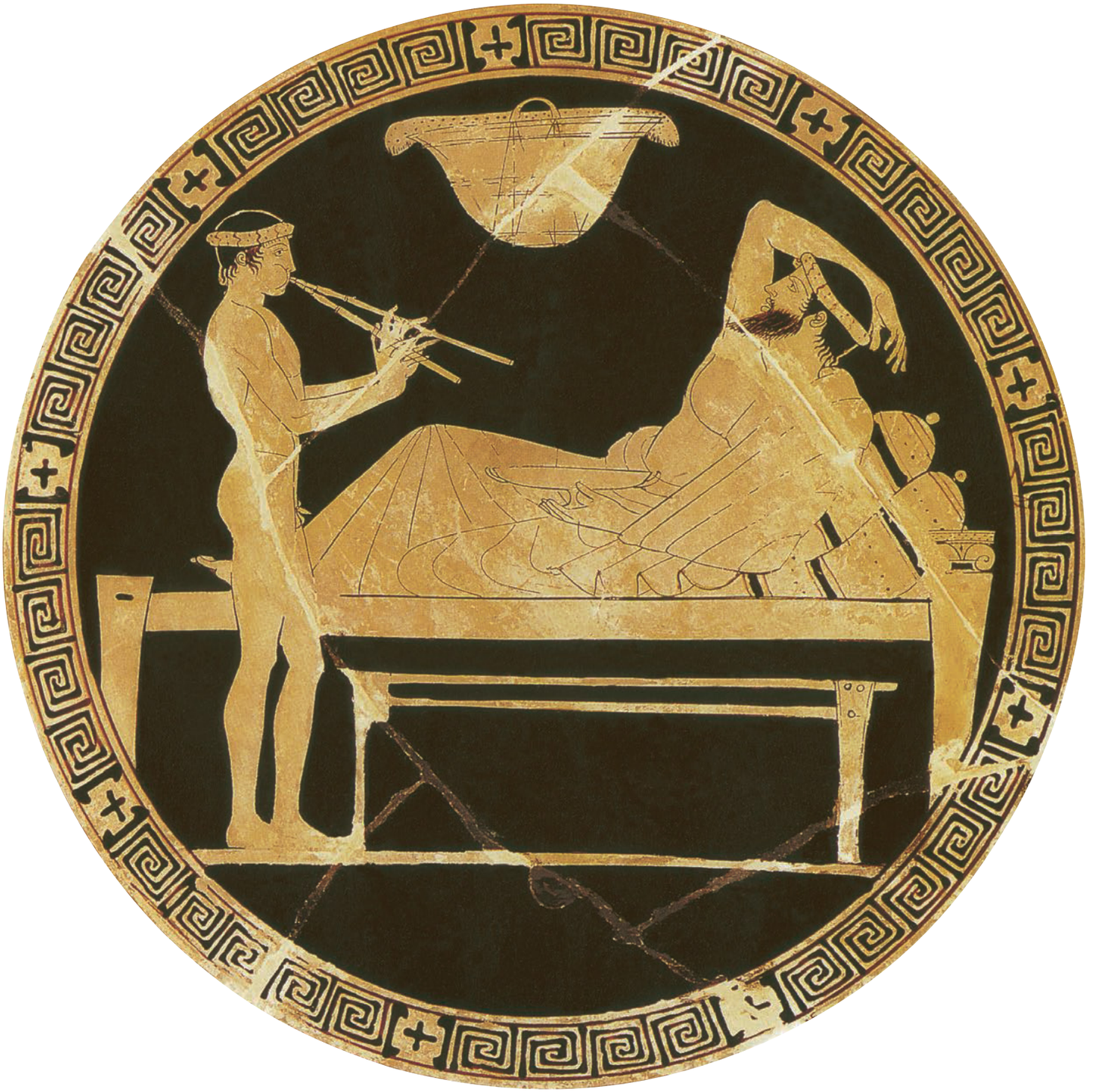

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Chapter 1

Homosexuality in Western Antiquity (from Ancient Greece to the Roman Empire)

The earliest Greeks were a loose band of rural tribes who eventually settled into small enclaves known as city-states. The practice of overt homosexuality was already widespread in the Greek city-states by the early part of the sixth century BC and became an integral part of the Greek archaic and classical traditions. Male homosexuality, or rather pederasty, was linked with military training and the initiation of young boys into citizenship. Most of our information about Greek homosexuality is based on the art, literature, and mythology from the city-state of Athens. Exactly why the Athenians of the fourth century BC accepted homosexuality and conformed so readily to a homoerotic ethos is a question difficult to answer. Although each city-state imposed distinct laws and practised different mores, Sparta, Thebes, Crete, Corinth and others all bear visual and literary evidence of homosexual interests and practices. The earliest evidence of homoerotic relations in ancient Greece comes from a fragment written by the historian Ephorus of Kyme (c.405-330 BC) telling the story of an ancient ritual that took place on Dorian Crete in the seventh century BC in which older men initiated younger men into manly pursuits like hunting, feasting, and presumably, sexual relationships as well (Lambert in Haggerty, p.80).

The extent to which homosexuality in the ancient world was a significant aspect of Greek culture can be found in their myths, rites and rituals, legends, art and literature, and in the customs of society as a whole. The major artistic and literary sources on Greek homosexuality are found in late archaic and early classical poetry, the comedic plays of Aristophanes and others such as Euripedes, Aeschylus, and Sophocles; the dialogues of Plato, and paintings on Greek vases (Dover, p.9). It was in the writings of Plato (c.429-347 BC) above all where the topic of homosexual love was debated most vigorously. In his dialogues, Plato focused on male homosexuality, seeing it as a higher spiritual goal than heterosexual physical contact and procreation. The three famous dialogues of Plato – the *Lysis, Phaedrus*, and *Symposium* – narrate imaginary and sometimes ironic conversations about male sexual and erotic relations (Jordan in Haggerty, p.695). Many of the passages in these dialogues describe male love as *paiderasteia* (pederasty) – that is, the erotic, active love of an adult man for a beautiful, passive adolescent [the word *paiderasteia* is derived from *pais* (boy) and *eran* (to love)]. In the *Lysis* and *Symposium*, Socrates (a protagonist in the dialogues) is characterised as the active pursuer of adolescent male beauty. For Socrates, (homo) eros was the search for noble aims in thought and in action. Exactly how the practice of pederasty developed in ancient Greece is disputed, but the surviving mythology from antiquity suggests that Minos, the king of Crete, introduced it to avoid overpopulation of his island.

Athenian society viewed *paiderasteia* as a principal means of education and socialisation of young free-born boys into manhood and citizenship. As an institution, it served as a complement, not a rival, to heterosexual marriage.

Although the term 'pederast' is today pejorative and refers primarily to sexual predators, in ancient Greece the term carried no such negative connotation and was employed in the context of the *erastes-eromenos* relationship. In this relationship, an older man (the *erastes* or lover ['inspirer' in Sparta]), usually bearded and of high social rank,

07. **Euaion Painter**, *Erastes and a Young Musician*, c. 460 BC. Red figure dish. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

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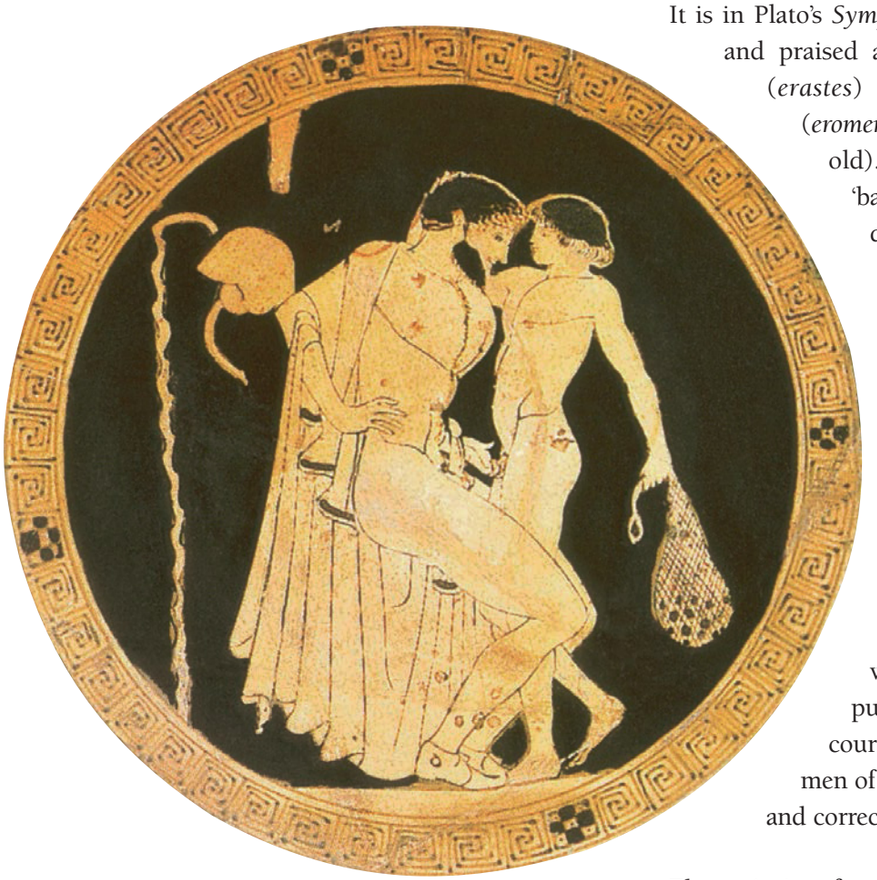
was expected to actively seek out, then win over a youth (an *eromenos*, or the beloved [the 'hearer' in Sparta]) and instil in him an understanding and respect for the masculine virtues of courage and honour. Such attributes would, of course, not only become useful to Greek social stability, but would also help guarantee acts of bravery and loyalty when asked to defend the city-state on the battlefield.



It is in Plato's *Symposium* where homosexual love is expressed and praised at length between an older, bearded lover (*erastes*) and a younger, hairless beloved youth (*eromenos*: aged from puberty to seventeen years old). The *Symposium* is part of what is called 'banquet literature' or a collection of informal discussions on various topics, including the philosophical and moral merits of love and the delights of young men and boys. There are many vase paintings illustrating what went on at these banquets or symposia in which young boys often served as cupbearers for invited guests.

Plato's *Symposium* describes the strict rules of courtship and love governing the *erastes* and *eromenos* relationship. There were many taboos. For example, under no circumstances was a boy allowed to take the role of aggressor, pursuer, or penetrator. Also discouraged was the courtship or sexual activity between two boys or men of the same age or social rank. Intergenerational and correct class courtship was the expectation.

The majority of our primary visual information on the customs and habits of homosexual courtship and sexual practices in ancient Greece comes to us from vase paintings. Greek vases, used for carrying water, storing wine and olive oil, and serving food and drink, were produced in large quantities by local craftsmen and exported all over the Mediterranean region. Many were sold to middle- and upper-class clientele and often carried hand-painted scenes of gods, myths, heroic deeds, or images of everyday life. Many vases, dating from the sixth and fifth centuries BC, show older males conversing with younger males, offering gifts, touching their genitals, or embracing. Also commonly depicted were vignettes of males engaged in athleticism, courtship and graphic sexual acts. Quite often, an *erastes* would have a vase made specifically for his *eromenos* to be presented to him along with other courting gifts such as a hare, a cockerel, or a stag. These offerings were standard and associated with the hunt, further underscoring the function of pederastic courtship as a rite of passage. Sometimes, short inscriptions were applied or the word '*kalos*' (is beautiful) would appear preceded by the name of a favourite boy or adolescent youth.

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08. **Brygos Painter**, *Erastes Soliciting an Eromenos*, c. 500-480 BC. Attican cup. The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

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09. *Man and Ephebe*, end of 6th Century BC. Attic vase. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

10. *Pan Pursuing a Young Shepherd*, c. 470 BC. Ceramic. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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11. **Apollodoros**, *Two Hetaerae*, c. 500 BC. Attic red-figure cup. Archaeological Museum, Tarquinia.

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At around age eighteen, an *eromenos* became an *erastes* and was expected to marry, father children, and take an active role in the pursuit of younger men. However, the imposing of such strict social rules often invited transgressions. These were sometimes depicted on vase paintings and could be linked with Plato's frequent admonitions and warnings against sexual overindulgence by Athenian males. Although of concern to the ancients, these transgressions were minor compared with the gravest taboos of all – oral and anal sex. These activities were regarded as beneath the dignity of the Athenian male citizen and were reserved for women, male and female prostitutes, foreigners (called barbarians by the Greeks), and slaves.

Along with female passivity, anal penetration and oral sex were associated with bestial activity commonly represented on vases showing satyrs or other mythological creatures. Satyrs (mythological beings who are half-man, half-goat) are symbols of the conflict between civilised man and his uncontrollable animal passions and desires. Their virility was insatiable and they are typically shown inebriated, with enormous genitals, copulating, or masturbating.

Despite the social and moral prohibition against oral and anal sex between same-sex partners, these activities did indeed occur in private. So, although scenes of anal sex between men and boys are relatively rare in Greek art, they are not entirely non-existent. On the other hand, scenes of men and women performing anal sex are quite common. Most Athenian vase paintings of homosexual courtship show *erastai* [plural of *erastes*] fondling the genitals of *eromenoi* [plural of *eromenos*] or the accepted standing position, face-to-face intercrural intercourse (mutual masturbation in which the erect penis is thrust between the partner's thighs).

Anal sex was lampooned by many playwrights, who used it as a gauge by which to judge a person's morality. The ambivalent social and sexual roles played out between *erastai* and *eromenoi* in courtship is implied in some of the comedies of Aristophanes, where the anally penetrated man becomes a target of ridicule and abuse. There are corresponding images on vases in which the anus becomes the site for launching insults or jokes. To be passive and penetrated was a mark of shame and immoral behaviour. Although young boys and men practised homosexuality as a form of initiation into the privileged status of citizenship, the prevailing concept of an active and dominant masculinity had to be maintained. Giving in too quickly to advances was viewed as a sign of weakness and made one ineligible as an upstanding citizen and warrior. It is partly for this reason why many vase paintings show youths rebuking or resisting the advances of their older suitors.

12. *Men Courting a Youth*, c. 6th century BC. Staatlichen Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek, Munich.

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13. **Euaichme Painter**, *Man Offering a Gift to a Youth*, c. 530-430 BC. Athenian red-figure vase. The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.
14. *Satyrs' Orgy with Balancing Act*, c. 500-470 BC. Wine-Cooler.
15. *The Kissing Competition*, c. 510 BC. Attic red-figure dish. Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.

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16a and 16b. *Men and Youths Engaged in Oral and Anal Sex*, 6th century BC. Attic red-figure. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

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Comrades in Arms and the Body Beautiful

Ancient Greek culture was male-centred. Men and boys held privileged status over women and girls. The correct education of boys was of primary concern, for the future of the city-state was at stake. The aim of the Greek educational system – called the *paideia* – was to attain male perfection by attending to the cultivation of the male body, mind, and soul. Pederasty, and its purpose of promoting the erotic love between men and youths, was seen as an effective way of fostering this ideal. The education of youths took place in the gymnasium. The gymnasium was not a single building, but rather a complex of structures situated in the centre of every Greek city-state. Here, men, boys and *ephebes* (adolescents aged eighteen to twenty-five) spent many hours per day engaged in physical and intellectual exercises. Also present were philosophers, poets, and artists of various ages, all gathered in an all-male environment to discuss, debate, and contemplate the moral and philosophical virtues of the male form and character.

The gymnasium literally became "an epicentre of erotic energy". Bronze statues of athletes, gods, heroes, and warriors (such as Hermes, Apollo, Herakles, and Eros) were set up in various locations throughout the gymnasium complex. Daily exposure to these artistic displays of male bodily perfection was intended to instil in young viewers the desire to attain such perfection.

Two types of subjects abounded in Greek male statues (known today from later Roman marble copies of Greek bronze originals) within the gymnasium – warriors and athletes. The *Doryphoros (Spear Carrier)* by the Greek sculptor Polykleitos is a prime example of the Greek worship of the male nude body. The *Doryphoros* represents an *ephebe* who, although beardless, is on the transitional border from *eromenos* into *erastes*. At the gymnasium, he trains for superior strength, agility, bravery, and skill (Saslow, p.31). With this statue, male beauty is elevated to nearly divine status. Because the Greeks saw the male nude form as the outward sign of perfection, they customarily exercised and fought battles in the nude. Nudity itself carried with it a metaphysical significance. Physical perfection on the exterior was matched with spiritual and moral perfection within.

One of the practical advantages of the Greek system of pederasty was its military usefulness. The Greeks of several city-states often went into battle in *erastes-eromenos* pairs. The bravery of pederastic couples, such as that of the 150

17. *Satyrs Masturbating*. Antique Greek vase. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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pairs of lovers called the Sacred Band of Thebes, was renowned throughout ancient Greece and was an important factor in boosting morale for Greek victory over their enemies. Couples often fought in the nude, for the ability to see metaphysical worth in nudity was what the Greeks believed separated them from uncivilised foreigners or barbarians. Some of these warrior couples became known as tyrannicides (killers of tyrants). The best known of such couples is Harmodius and Aristogeiton.

In interpreting the images on vase paintings, some knowledge of Greek mythology is indispensable. Greek mythology was, as was Greek society in general, extremely anthropocentric or man-centred. It was through myths that the ancient Greeks linked themselves with the cycles and seasons of nature and rationalised the world of emotion and sensation. Greek myths usually focus on the powerful, heroic, and grandiose aspects of the gods. But they also address the sexual appetites of the gods and their union with heroes and mortals. Greek gods were personifications of nature and often engaged in various sexual adventures – homosexual, heterosexual, intergenerational, and bestial. Myths of ill-fated love between gods, heroes, and handsome youths abound on vase paintings, statuary, and wall frescos. The myths that most commonly address the theme of Greek pederasty and homosexuality include Zeus and Ganymede, Apollo and Hyacinth, Apollo and Zephyr, and Achilles and Patroclus.

The story of Zeus and Ganymede is perhaps the most frequently-depicted scene of homosexual desire on vases, floor mosaics, and in statuary. The myth exemplifies one of several divine courtships extolled by the Greeks as

18 and 19. *Warren Cup*, 1st century AD, Augustan period. Silver. The British Museum, London.

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explanation for the origins of the cosmos and the workings of nature. With this myth, the gap in age and status between the god and his young minion reflects the inequalities in the hierarchical and rigidly structured relationship between *erastes* and *eromenos* in classical Athenian society.

In the eighth-century-BC epic verse of Homer called the *Iliad*, we find the most celebrated of all male-male unions in the comradeship of Achilles and Patroclus during the Trojan War. In the story, Homer glorifies the friendship between the two but does not mention that they were lovers. The classical Greeks themselves interpreted Homer as referencing their own social practice of pederasty and claimed Achilles and Patroclus as a pederastic pair. Achilles, a young warrior described as the most handsome and noblest of the Greeks, fell into profound grief when his companion Patroclus was slain by Hector, son of the Trojan king Priam. Achilles and Patroclus first appear in art toward the end of the sixth century BC on Athenian black-figure vase paintings (Saslow, p.16). Several red-figure vases from the late sixth century BC to the fourth century BC show the loving bond between the two warriors.

The Hellenistic Period: The Age of Dionysos

Given the Greek structure of initiation into citizenship and the world of warriors, it should come as no surprise that many Greek military commanders were notorious for their sexual and erotic desires for other men. The most famous was Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) who made no secret of his intense love for a young commander

20. **Euphronios**, *Ephebes at the Bath*, c. 500-505 BC. Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.

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named Hephaestion. It was Alexander the Great who ushered in the Hellenistic period. Both before and during Alexander's reign, Greek influence spread far and wide through trade and foreign conquest. As Greek culture came more and more into contact with other peoples, its own ways of thinking and doing things began to show signs of foreign influence. A change in social conditions, coupled with the influence of Eastern philosophies and religious practices, resulted in changed attitudes towards sexuality. In this period, pederasty was still practised, but its importance as a social institution for grooming boys to become citizens had waned. Instead, a growing hedonism and tendency toward materialism and excess developed. Physical pleasure was enjoyed for its own sake and bisexuality reigned. Hellenistic sensibilities toward sex were to later influence Roman culture which was, during this same period, expanding militarily and advancing into Greek territory. By the beginning of the Hellenistic period, the production of Greek vases and vase paintings had already declined significantly. The Hellenistic Greeks turned their attention to the creation of statues of marble and bronze in which the physicality and pleasurable experiences of the body were of primary focus. During the classical period, the Greeks had been renowned for the celebration of male physical beauty, an aesthetic which held a fundamental position in educational thinking of the period.

Unlike classical Greek statuary in which the quiet contemplation of male physical beauty was paramount, most sculpture from the Hellenistic period is turbulent and trivial, often requiring that the viewer psychologically and physically participate in the activities presented. One such statue is *The Sleeping Hermaphrodite*. The image of the hermaphrodite became very popular in Hellenistic times and was the outgrowth of the period's tolerance and experimentation with sexual variations that deviated from the standard. Hermaphroditus was a minor deity, an offspring of the gods Aphrodite and Hermes, who exhibited characteristics of both sexes. In the Hellenistic period, the hermaphrodite was worshipped as an embodiment of bisexuality and as a god of marriage (Saslow, p.41).

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21. *Scene of Coupling with a Horse*, 6th century BC. Greek vase. The British Museum, London.

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22. **Berlin Painter**, *Men and Boys*, c. 540 BC. Attic black-figure vase. The British Museum, London.

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The Sleeping Hermaphrodite is only vaguely part of what is called Dionysian art (see R. R. R. Smith), which refers to art produced during the Hellenistic period that has as its subject a variety of mythological creatures such as satyrs, fauns, female bacchants, centaurs, nymphs, and Pan. Besides the fact that these personages are all followers of Dionysos (Bacchus to the Romans), god of agriculture and wine, what most of them have in common is that they are wild, frolic outdoors in wooded areas, and have a lustful nature. Like Dionysos, they are associated with drunken abandon and orgiastic release. Their sexuality was oftentimes excessive and sometimes ambiguous. These Dionysian characteristics carry over into the Roman period and are particularly visible in the art discovered at Pompeii (Saslow, p.38).

Greek Influence Abroad

The Greeks were avid traders, explorers, and conquerors. For centuries before and after the classical period (fifth century BC), the Greeks imported their ideas and experiences to other countries and cultures. When they arrived in what is now Italy, they encountered the native Etruscans who had occupied the central and northern areas of that land between the ninth and third centuries BC. Our knowledge of the art and origins of the Etruscans is very limited, but what is certain is that they practised very different customs from the Greeks and held specific views about death. Prior to contact with the Etruscans, the concept of life after death was alien to Greek thinking and practice. The *Tomb of the Diver* at Paestum in southern Italy and *Tomb of the Bulls* in Tarquinia near Rome are just two examples of decorated tombs that show the extent to which the Etruscans utilised a large amount of sexually charged symbols and figures in their funerary art.

23. *Doryphoros* (*Spear-Carrier*), c. 440 BC. Marble, h: 196 cm. Copy after a Greek original by **Polykleitos**. The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis.
24. **Circle of the Nikosthenes Painter**, *Satyr Scene*, c. 5th century BC. Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.

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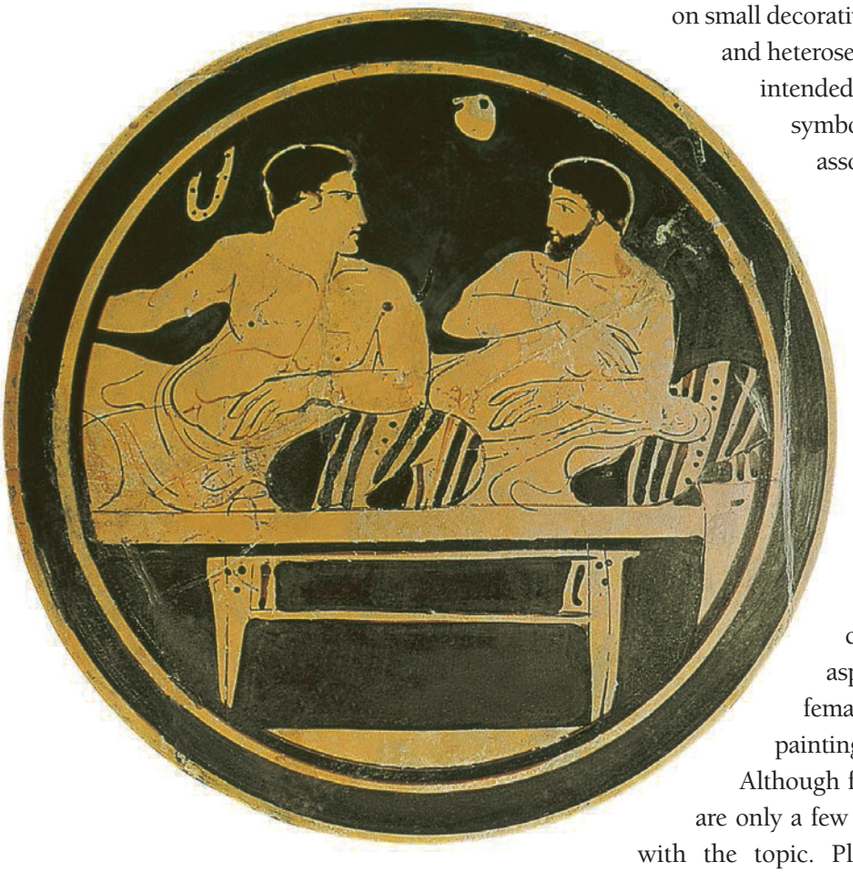
The strong mutual influence of the Greeks and Etruscans was to have a significant impact on the art and experience of the Romans who eventually conquered and absorbed aspects of both cultures. However, despite the influence, many Greek and later Roman writers, including Plato, referred to the Etruscans as immoral because of their seemingly wanton and unusual sexual practices. Roman sources accused the Etruscans of sharing women in common, engaging in homosexuality without philosophical justification, participating in orgies, and showing a lack of shame regarding sexual intercourse and the naked body. Indeed, homosexually suggestive scenes are found in many Etruscan tomb frescos, sculptures, pottery, ash urns, sarcophagi, and on small decorative objects. It is believed that scenes of homosexual and heterosexual intercourse in Etruscan funerary art were not intended as reflections of actual activities, but served symbolic metaphors to either ward off evil or were associated with rituals or religious festivals.



The Disenchantments of Sappho

In antiquity, males dominated society and women were segregated from men in almost all of the Greek city-states. Unlike boys and young men in classical Athens, women were completely absent from public life. Most women were not allowed an education and were kept in virtual seclusion from everyone but their immediate families. Because Greek society was male centred – that is, as a society created by and for men who took part in the public aspect of society (e.g. art, poetry, literature, politics), female homosexuality is all but invisible on vase paintings, in lyric poetry, and on the dramatic stage. Although female homosexuality did exist in antiquity, there are only a few writers and artists in the Greek world who dealt with the topic. Plato did make a passing reference to female homosexuality in his writings, presenting it in abstract philosophical terms through a parable about primeval androgynes, but saying nothing of its daily practice in society (Saslow, p.29). Aristophanes, too, also avoided the topic by collapsing it into a discussion of the role of women as *hetaerae*, or professional entertainers/courtesans in Greek society. There is a rare vase painting by Apollodoros showing two *hetaerae* in sexual intimacy. There is also one extraordinary vase painting showing two women in gestures of courtship.

Although Athenian men were thoroughly disinterested in the sexual life of women, Greek law did permit a form of institutionalised female homosexuality in Sparta. It was within the *thiasoi*, or an educational and social community of women and girls, that female homosexuality was most prevalent. *Thiasoi* were schools where "older women trained teenage girls in music and dancing, charm and beauty" (Saslow, p.19-20). Like boys with their *erastai*,

25. *Man and Ephebe Having a Conversation*, c. 420 BC. Red-figure dish (detail). Musée municipal, Laon.

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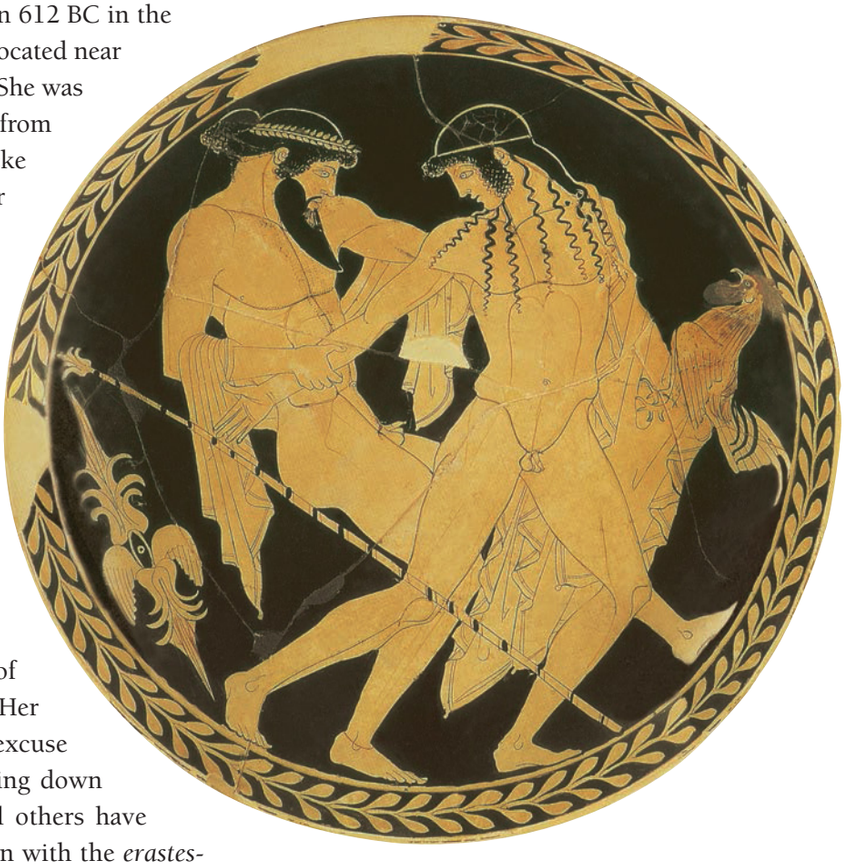
girls of high social standing were segregated from society and took part in rituals worshipping Diana, goddess of virginity and the hunt. Theoretically, *thiasoi* were schools to prepare young girls for marriage, but the woman-centred nature of their environment also fostered intimate emotional and sexual relationships among them. As part of a refined yet limited education, many girls were trained in the writing of poetry. The lyric poems (poetry accompanied by a lyre) of Sappho are the most famous and known for extolling the passionate love of women for one another.

Sappho's influence was so profound that Plato dubbed her as "the tenth Muse". She was born during the archaic period in 612 BC in the city of Mytilene on the Aegean island of Lesbos, located near the western coast of what is today called Turkey. She was a *thiasos* educator of girls who came specifically from Lesbos and the Ionian coast. Her lyric poems spoke of the many loves in her life, including love of her own pupils. Her words are of longing and despair – extolling passion and jealousy driven by desire. Most of the poems are fragmentary and available only in ancient copies. Only one poem survives completely intact.



Despite the obvious homoerotic nature of her poetry, most ancient writings about Sappho's life only sporadically mention her homosexuality. During the Hellenistic and Roman periods, she was promoted as a married bisexual woman. The story of her dramatic suicide over a man named Phaon, a ferryman of great beauty, became legendary (Dover, p.174). Her suicide has given some writers a legitimising excuse for foregrounding her heterosexuality and playing down or completely ignoring her homosexuality. Still others have compared her intimate relationships with women with the *erastes-eromenos* setup in ancient Greece – a point that also shows to what extent women's sexuality was seen only in relationship to that of men.

There is no visual or verbal evidence recounting exactly what Sappho looked like. Her image on vases appears at least one hundred years after her lifetime and none of these, it has been observed, bear any resemblance to one another (Snyder, p.31). No identifiable statues of Sappho survive. There does exist, however, a red-figure vase dating around 450 BC that supposedly shows Sappho seated between two standing female figures, one of which holds up a lyre, the other, a garland.

In addition to the person of Sappho as a legendary figure whose work acknowledges the presence of female homosexuality in antiquity, there is also mythology. Although Amazons are a myth about women created by men,

26. **Penthesilea Painter**, *Zeus and Ganymede*, c. 530-430 BC. Attic red-figure vase.

27. *Zeus and Ganymede*, 470 BC. Museo Archeologico di Ferrara, Ferrara.

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they do speak to the existence and viability of female sexual independence apart from men in antiquity. The Amazons were a legendary tribe of equestrian women warriors who shunned the company of men and lived, hunted, and went into battle together in an all-female environment. Mythology has it that they were from Asia Minor, near the Black Sea, and that they worshipped Diana, goddess of the hunt. In art, Greek males are often shown fighting against the Amazon who was a useful manifestation of barbarism and the sexual threat of women. In myth, the Amazon subverts the 'natural' order by rejecting marriage and maiming or practising infanticide on her male children.

Rome from Republic to Empire

Both the Etruscans and Greeks were eventually conquered and absorbed by the advancing forces of Rome in the second century BC. The Romans, attracted to Greek art and culture, absorbed some Greek and Etruscan practices into their own art and culture; in particular, their polytheistic religions, gods and goddesses. The Roman approach to sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular was, however, quite distinct.

Under the Romans, male sexual dominance over both women and other men was taken for granted: wealthy Roman men frequently kept mistresses, slaves, and boys for sexual pleasure, and both male and female prostitution were legal. Ancient Roman men could have sex with their male or female slaves without fear of social marginalisation or rebuke. What was important to a Roman man's sense of self was maintaining the semblance of an active masculinity which, in essence, meant that it was preferable to always be the 'inserter' rather than receiver. Roman men were preoccupied with maintaining a public façade of masculinity that was predicated on

28. *The Tyrannicides Harmodius and Aristogiton*, c. 477 BC. Marble, h: 195 cm. Copy after a Greek original by **Critios**. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples.
29. *Scene of Kottabos*, end of the 5th century BC. Ceramic. The British Museum, London.

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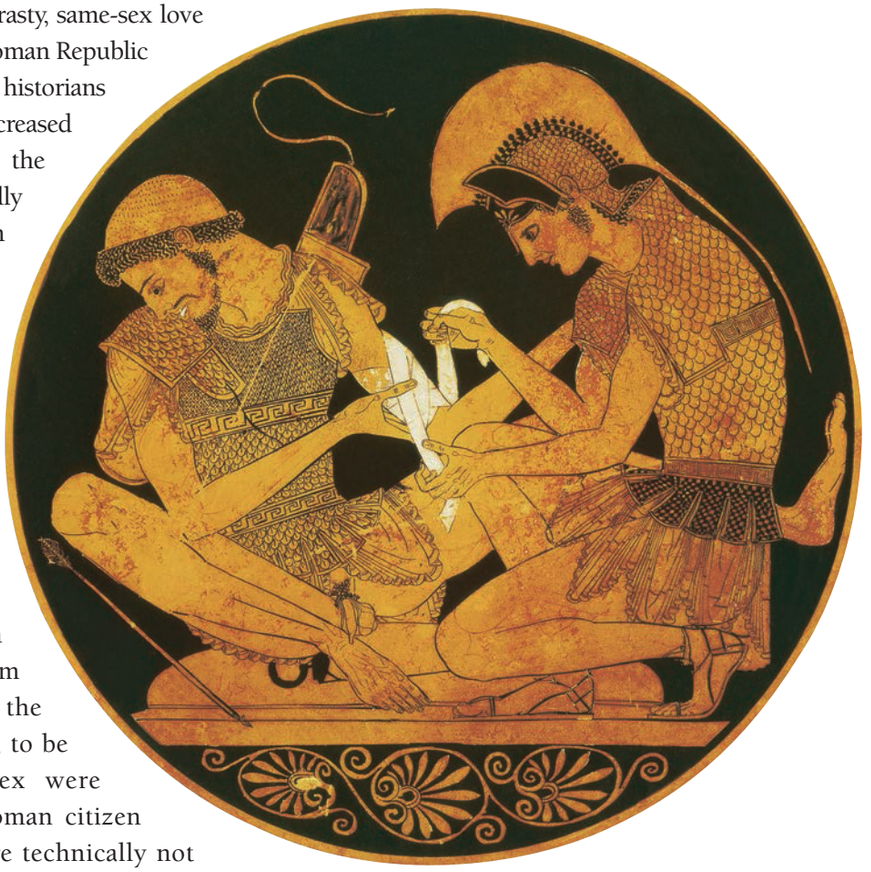
the power of the penis to penetrate another. So, whether one's sex partner were male or female was irrelevant. Homosexuality was not technically punished unless it violated strict class structures or social roles.

One's class, social status, and civic responsibility were adhered to more strictly by the Romans than by the Greeks. Roman society tended to be more misogynistic than its Greek predecessor and therefore developed a sexual system by which both women and slaves were viewed as male property and denied any bit of freedom. While most acts of homosexuality by the Romans were confined to encounters between masters and their slaves, and while many philosophers cautioned against pederasty, same-sex love was common enough during the periods of the Roman Republic and Empire to be documented by several Roman historians and biographers. Fuelling homosexuality's increased practice in imperial Rome was the fact that the majority of the Roman emperors were sexually ambivalent and practised bisexuality. Based on ancient writings and art, homosexuality was not as important a philosophical issue for Romans as it had been for the Greeks. However, many Roman writers did write disapprovingly of it and yet they themselves sometimes engaged in the very act of 'Greek love' that they publicly condemned.



Most mentions of homosexuality in the Roman world uphold a firm belief in the value of maintaining social decorum. When homosexuality is discussed, it is used to confirm social stigmas against male passivity and the corrupting influences of sodomy. As in Greece, to be anally penetrated or to perform oral sex were unbecoming of a potential or confirmed Roman citizen and were acts reserved for women (who were technically not considered citizens), male and female slaves and prostitutes. The taboo against anal sex was so strong that, contrary to its practice in ancient Greece, pederasty was strictly forbidden in ancient Rome. Visual imagery of intergenerational courtship and consummation associated with the Greek notion of idealised male love was banned in Roman art. According to John Clarke, however, it is debatable as to what extent the Romans of the late Republic and early Empire actually followed the Greek practice of homosexuality (Clarke, p.291). Although there is far less visual information for male-to-male sexual and erotic activity in Roman art than in Greek art, images of sexual activity – both heterosexual and homosexual – do form a large part of the visual record of Rome.

Roman artists did not create homoerotic genre scenes or scenes of frank eroticism so popular on Greek vases. A sober morality characterised the Republican period. With the advent of the Roman Empire and influence and wealth

30. *Achilles Binding the Wounds of Patroclus*, 6th century BC. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin.

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31. *Pan Teaching the Flute to Olympos*, 4th century BC. Marble. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples.

32. *Barberini Faun*, c. 200 BC. Marble, h: 125 cm. Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek, Munich.

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from other cultures, Roman Republican morality soon gave way to a kind of sexual permissiveness. By the beginning of the first century AD, the strong taboo against passive men had eroded, and laws against sex with citizen boys were virtually ignored (Saslow, p.44). Many of the emperors of the empire openly indulged these and other sexual urges. Augustus and Nero are just two who readily come to mind – the latter being the most notorious. We are told that Emperor Tiberius, who reigned from 14-37 AD, installed a collection of erotic paintings, sculptures, and sexual manuals in a special suite at his pleasure retreat on the island of Capri. These were used as 'training tools' for his entourage of female prostitutes and harem of boys.

Hadrian became legendary as a married Roman emperor who fell passionately in love with an extraordinarily handsome young Bithynian man named Antinous. On a journey to Egypt in 130 AD, Antinous drowned under mysterious circumstances in the Nile. Distraught over his death and having been chastised by several Roman writers for "weeping like a woman", Hadrian deified him, founded an Egyptian city in his honour (Antinopolis), and immortalised his sensual beauty in many commissioned statues, coins, and medallions that were scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Hadrian's deeds took place during a time when mutual love within a heterosexual marriage was growing in importance and homosexual relationships seemed to be confined to sexual passions for slave boys. In this sense, Hadrian's relationship with Antinous harks back to an earlier period of classical Athens in that the story is basically a real-life counterpart to the myth of Zeus and Ganymede – a myth (Jupiter and Ganymede or Catamitus) that was adopted and appreciated by the Romans.

Most of the statues created to immortalise Antinous are beardless *ephebes* heavily influenced by classical Greek art. Hadrian himself admired Greek culture so much that he grew a beard in emulation of Greek philosophers. Towards the end of the Roman Empire, engagement in sexual practices of all kinds became outlets for an increasingly debauched and materialistic society that would gradually decline and eventually come to an end. There were Roman writers such as Juvenal, Horace, and Martial who railed against the abuses of sexuality, but they were largely ignored. Increased tolerance of homosexuality and other forms of sexual practice was one of several effects, not the cause, of the decline of Roman influence and power.

Pompeii

Our knowledge of Roman provincial and domestic art, architecture, and aspects of daily life, comes primarily from the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum – both of which were preserved under volcanic ash from the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD. Although Pompeii was not a Roman city, per se, it fell under the jurisdiction of Roman control. Pompeian civilisation and approaches to sex and love were an offshoot of Hellenistic Greece – a focus on sensuality and hedonism devoid of the earlier Greek notions of virtue, beauty, and form. The pottery, graffiti, and mural art discovered at Pompeii provide some evidence that there was indeed a visible homosexual subculture. Pompeians were notorious for celebrating sexuality as a source of strength and fertility. In Pompeii, the cult of Dionysos and the cult of the phallus were widespread and there are many walls carved with or otherwise decorated with disembodied erect phalluses (as signposts of brothels) and scenes of group sex. The phallus was taken as a divine symbol, associated with Hermes, the god of fertility and good fortune. It appeared often in sculptures, as fountain ornaments, or as decorative architectural detailing. Phalluses were most frequently found on herms or rectangular pillars surmounted by a human head and intended to ward off evil and bring prosperity.

33. *Banquet Scene* from North Wall of the *Tomb of the Diver*, c. 480 BC. Museum of Paestum, Italy.

34. *The Tomb of the Bulls*, c. 550-500 BC. Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Tarquinia.

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35. *Statue of Antinous, Favourite of Emperor Hadrian*, 130-138 AD. Archeological Museum of Delphi, Delphi.

36. *Belvedere Antinous*. Marble. Museo Pio-Clementino, Vatican.

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It is on the frescoed and graffiti-filled walls of public buildings and in the private homes of Pompeii where we get a glimpse into the sexual preferences and activities of common culture. It was during the Augustan period that a "domestication of desire" had occurred both in Rome and in its provinces. That is, both upper class (including the emperor himself) and lower class people possessed and displayed little paintings, wall frescos, and decorative objects in their homes that showed mythological characters (e.g. satyrs, nymphs, Pan, hermaphrodites) and human couples engaged in a variety of sexual acts and positions (Clarke, pp.286-87). The representation of sex in its multiple aspects had become fashionable in Pompeii. In the first century AD, scenes of lovemaking of varying quality could be found in Pompeian bedrooms, dining rooms, or in public baths, hotels, and brothels.

The erotic functions and décor of Pompeian buildings, from private homes to bordellos, were complemented by the decorative arts used inside them. Wealthy patrons commissioned silver or gold drinking vessels and serving pieces, illustrating many kinds of scenes, sometimes erotic, to amuse banquet guests. The most striking example of this kind of homoerotic decorative art is the *Warren Cup*.

The *Warren Cup* is a luxury drinking vessel made of silver and created for use in a provincial home of the early Roman Empire. It would have been used in specific decorative architectural spaces (personal homes of the wealthy) in which vessels with scenes of lovemaking (usually heterosexual) were found. They were meant to entertain the guests with their engaging imagery and fine craftsmanship (Clarke, p.279). Because of its high quality and unique subject matter, the *Warren Cup* has challenged "the modern viewer to consider a broad range of artistic, cultural, and social issues" concerning male homosexuality in Roman times (Clarke, p.277).

37. *Tripod with Ithyphallic Young Pans*, c. 1st century AD. Bronze from Pompeii. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples.
38. *Pan with Hermaphroditus*, reign of Nero. Wall painting from House of the Dioscuri (atrium) in Pompeii. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples.

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Chapter 2

Homosexuality in the Middle Ages

Unlike antiquity, the Middle Ages has been the period least studied for signs of Western homosexuality in art. The rise of Christianity and the increasing influence on the daily lives of people accounts for the near invisibility of homosexuality in the art of this period. Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in 381 under Theodosius the Great (346-95). Emperor Constantine (274-338) had legalised Christianity in the fourth century AD. The death penalty for male homosexual acts was first imposed in 342 by Emperors Constantine and Constans, and then again by the *Theodosian Code* of 390 (Warren Johansson and William A. Percy, "Homosexuality," in Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage, eds., *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, New York, Garland Publishing, Inc, 1996, pp.160-61). Theodosius decreed death by burning for homosexuality. Lesbian behaviour had been similarly proscribed in the Middle Ages through a law in 287 AD imposed by Diocletian (245-313) and Maximianus. The death penalty for both male and female homosexual acts was not repealed in civil law until the late eighteenth century in most Western European countries.

The extreme measures taken by these rulers were justified by theological rationalisations on sexual ethics ranging from Saint Paul to Saints Augustine and Jerome. Of all the church fathers, it was Saint Augustine who held the longest influence over sexual attitudes in the Christian West. Around 400 AD, Augustine launched an attack against classical myth and attempted to 'correct' its immoral pagan aspects. Relying heavily on the Old Testament, he insisted that all non-procreative forms of sexual gratification were wrong because their sole goal was pleasure and not propagation of the species.

Between the fourth and fifteenth centuries, most art was produced under church patronage, and even private commissions were often mandated to have religious themes (Saslow, p.56). All representations of sexual acts, especially homosexuality, were discouraged and later attacked by the church. Christian intolerance against homosexuality resulted primarily from reaction to the hedonistic legacy of Greco-Roman paganism where homosexual practices were, in many instances, encouraged. Christianity set out to deny the body and all forms of earthly pleasures. When erotic themes do appear in medieval art, they tend to be couched in "solemn spirituality and ineffable mysteries" (Saslow, p.56). During the medieval period, homosexuality was split into two polarised camps: the classical ideal of *amicitia* (a chaste, intimate friendship), and *sodomia* (an unstable term condemning a range of sexual acts from anal sex, to masturbation and bestiality) (Saslow, pp.56-57). As invading 'barbarians' (mainly Germans and Celts) increasingly overwhelmed the Western Empire, many of the stringent anti-homosexuality measures initiated by Christian emperors became impossible to enforce.

Those who eventually took control remained respectful of Christianity but were less inclined to invest so much energy into criminalising homosexuality. The last of the Church fathers, Pope Gregory the Great (590-604), did attempt, however, to convert the barbarians and came up with new ways to enforce the previous ban on homosexuality. One of the more effective means was through issuing penitentials, or manuals designed to instruct

39. *The Destruction of Sodom*, c. 1170-1190. Monreale Cathedral, Sicily.

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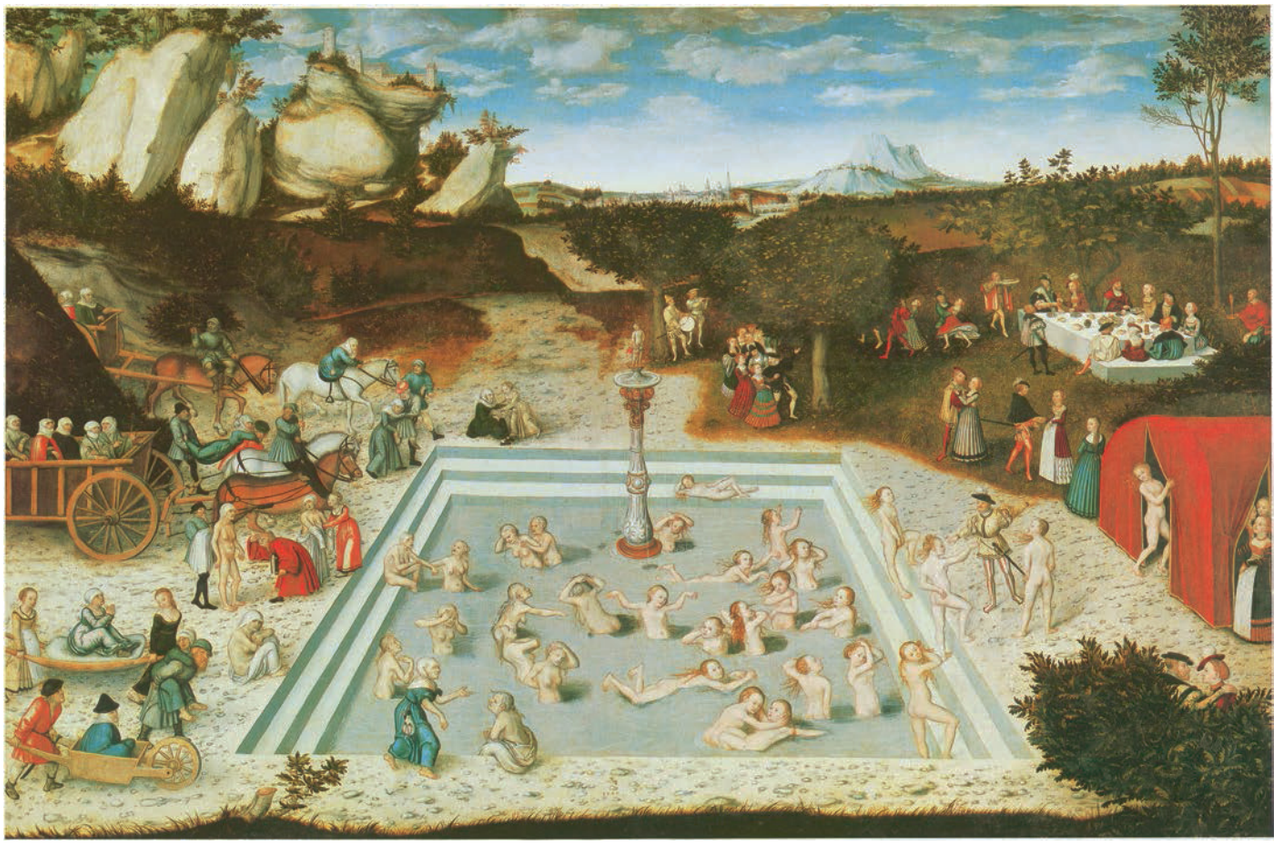

and aid priests in giving spiritual guidance to the laity. Penitentials first appeared in Ireland and England, and later spread to the European Continent. These manuals categorised sins according to their severity and assigned specific penances for absolving them. Without exception, all of the penitentials condemned sodomy, intercrural intercourse, and masturbation. Although the penitentials stressed penance over punishment for most sins, they did treat homosexuality more severely, especially where oral and anal sex were involved. Under Charlemagne (768-814), penances for sodomy were applied to the laity, but its practice was condemned and deemed unpardonable for monks (Johansson & Percy, p.166). The penitentials were primarily directed at men since lesbian sexual relations in general were scarcely mentioned.

The Unspeakable Vice

During the Middle Ages theologians applied the term 'sodomite' to those whose sexual acts went "against nature". Homosexuality was not, however, the only unnatural sin. Bestiality and all heterosexual acts that did not lead to procreation were also included. The legal definition of a sodomite was restricted to anal intercourse with a man or woman, or vaginal penetration of an animal. The sodomite was also reviled because he committed sacrilege in terms of marriage and did not honour his vow of chastity. The connection between sodomy and bestiality was a carryover from antiquity – times in which Christians associated pagan practices with sodomy and satyrs. In several encyclopaedias of animal lore (called *Bestiares*), science was used to condemn sexual variety. These books were

40. **Lucas Cranach the Elder**, *Fountain of Youth*, 1546. Oil on lime panel, 122.5 x 186.5 cm. Staatliche Museen, Alte Meister, Berlin.
41. **Hieronymus Bosch**, *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (detail of centre panel of the triptych), c. 1504. Oil on panel. Museo nacional del Prado, Madrid.

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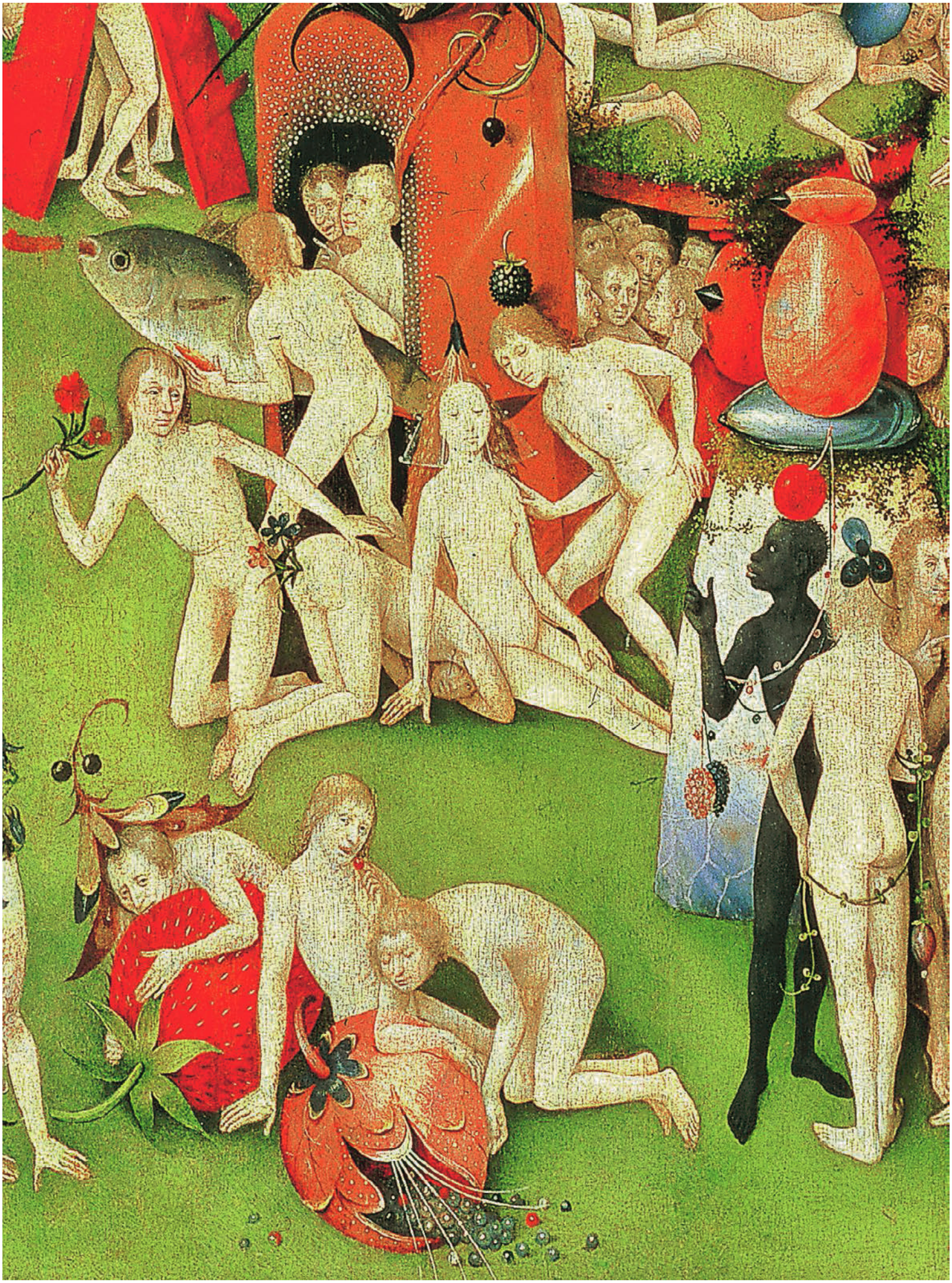

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very popular and drew upon authoritative classical writers such as Aristotle or Pliny, both of whom described the unusual sexual traits of certain animals. Church fathers associated these deviations in nature with homosexuality. The most reviled creatures in this lore were the hyena and the weasel, the former of which was believed to have the ability to change its sex and grow alternate genitalia once a year (Saslow, p.60).

Once theologians defined all sexual relations between partners of the same sex as "sins against nature", condemnation and repression by clerical and civil authorities followed. Sodomy was deemed more than just sinful, it was downright criminal.

Along with Christianity, Judaism also played a role in criminalising homosexual acts and behaviours. The Old Testament books of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, as well as Deuteronomy 22:5 and 23:18, were interpreted as expressly forbidding male homosexuality, transvestism and prostitution (Johansson & Percy, in Bullough and Brundage, p.160). In the early church, before tradition or canonical texts became fixed, most people accepted the Judaic view that homosexuality, like infanticide, was a very grave sin (Johansson & Percy, p.161). The epistles of Saint Paul, heavily influenced by Judaic thought, comprise one third of the New Testament and are the earliest of preserved Christian writings. In them, Paul was explicit about sexual matters, categorically forbidding all sex outside marriage. He singled out homosexuality, even between females, for special condemnation, as well as transvestism of either sex, masturbation, long hair on males and other signs of effeminacy or softness.

The early Middle Ages ended with an intense new wave of invasions that resulted in the dissolving of the Carolingian Empire in 817. Around the middle of the eleventh century, the Church reorganised itself and fervent clerics launched a vicious attack against sodomites. As had been the case earlier, homosexuality, bestiality, and masturbation were considered sodomitical acts "against nature" because they excluded the possibility of procreation, the touchstone of marriage and sexual morality. Sodomy was especially condemned among members of the clergy who had, by that time, gained a reputation for indulging in such activities. Sodomy, a vice ascribed mostly to clerics at the time, was repeatedly linked with heresy. Under Pope Gregory VII (1073-85), clerical celibacy was mandated. The drive to ensure conformity was relentless and gave rise to a moral purity crusade directed against Orthodox Christians, Muslims, and Jews, as well as heretics and sodomites (Johansson & Percy, p.168). After 1250, severe penalties for homosexual acts were ordained and became part of canonical law. By the mid-thirteenth century, the church had become obsessed to the point of paranoia with the topic of sodomy.

Fire and Brimstone

The medieval notion of sodomy and justification for its condemnation originated in particular interpretations of the biblical source Genesis, where the destruction of Sodom is described.

Enraged by the sodomite's sin, God destroyed the city of Sodom with flaming rain. The plot of the story suggests retribution for a variety of sexual offences by both men and women of all sexual persuasions. Sodomy's prohibition, no matter if the act were hetero- or homo-sexual, was based on its non-procreativity. Although sodomy also applied to heterosexual anal sex, the term had a stronger application to homosexuals. The "sin of Sodom" gradually became

42. *The Rape of Ganymede*, 850-1120/1150-1190. Column capital. Saint Mary Magdalene Church, Vézelay.

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the standard euphemism for male-male intercourse. Later theologians and lawmakers combined the biblical reference to the destruction of Sodom with classical allusions that left its homosexual meaning unmistakeable. Around 1170-1190, a mosaic decorating the cathedral at Monreale in Sicily was created that centred on the story of the destruction of Sodom. Art historian James Saslow has recently commented that homosexuality and sodomy were so chilling as both act and thought during the Middle Ages that it was not only morally unspeakable, but also visually unimaginable. This explains why homosexuality is never explicitly depicted in medieval art (Saslow, pp.57-8). There were ways, however, of getting around this, especially for those interested in expressing homosexual emotions and behaviour.

Medieval society, like societies of classical antiquity, glorified intense emotional bonds between men and, less widely, between women. During the medieval period, emotional bonding remained a potent ideal in both the realm of the secular and the sacred. In the realm of the sacred, homosexual desire was secretly fostered in monasteries, places in which people of the same sex lived together and swore fraternal links as well as celibate lives. In real life, medieval men and women found it difficult to adhere to such ideals of intimate, non-sexual bonding.

Sacred Pairings in the Byzantine World

In the fourth century AD, Constantine founded a new Eastern empire at Constantinople (now Istanbul in Turkey). Strict proscriptions against homosexual acts were incorporated into the *Byzantine Code* of Justinian I (483-565) in 529, 534, 538, 544, and resurrected in the West beginning in the eleventh century. Justinian outlawed all male prostitution and condemned to death both partners in any homosexual act. Despite these drastic measures, homosexuality was widespread in the Byzantine world, and it was in Byzantium where a tradition of sacred 'marriages' sanctioned by the church emerged that celebrated the spiritual union of two people of the same gender.

The late historian John Boswell has written books about Church toleration, if not sanction, of homosexuality in this period. His views remain extremely controversial and continue to stir up much debate over the issue. In his writings, Boswell discusses Christian same-sex unions in both canonical texts and in secular laws as they had been previously

43. *The Visitation*. Relief.

44. *Jonathan, David and Saul* from *Somme le roi*. Illuminated manuscript. The British Library, London.

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sanctioned by the Church. It has been argued, however, that "not a single Christian father, Penitentialist, Scholastic or Canonist, Protestant Reformer or Catholic Counter-Reformer or even any Orthodox, Coptic, or Nertorian ever wrote even a neutral, much less kind, word about sodomites." (Johansson & Percy, p.179). Many scholars of medieval art and history agree that Boswell has distorted our understanding of Christian marriage in that he attempted to make a modern-day gay marriage out of the medieval practice of asexual same-sex spiritual bonding.

The earliest examples of homosexual sacred marriages are Byzantine devotional pictures of Saints Sergius and Bacchus, both Roman soldiers martyred around the year 300. Many icons were produced depicting the two together as physically and spiritually united. By the 600s the couple enjoyed a huge cult following in the eastern (later Orthodox) church. Sergius and Bacchus were the best known of several "paired saints" whose mutual devotion epitomised the ideal of self-sacrifice. These couples are often shown in tender embrace and are essentially a transposition of the pagan theme of committed lovers like Harmodius and Aristogeiton or Achilles and Patroclus onto a Christian image. Such pairings at times also included women like Perpetua and Felicitas.

The biographer of Saints Sergius and Bacchus wrote that "being as one in their love for Christ, they were also undivided from each other in the army of the world" (quoted in Saslow, p.61). When Bacchus refused to recant his beliefs, the emperor ordered him flogged to death. Sergius lamented his lost comrade as a "brother", a term then charged with sexual potential. Later, Bacchus appeared to Sergius in a vision, prophesising that after Sergius' death he would receive Bacchus as a heavenly reward for this suffering.

The blessing of Sergius and Bacchus was invoked in a religious ceremony performed frequently throughout the Middle Ages. The ceremony between two people of the same sex paralleled heterosexual marriages in that its purpose was also the joining together of two people in a sacred bond of mutual affection and support. After the ceremony, each would set up house and share their lives together (Saslow, p.61). Boswell has discovered dozens of texts verifying the existence of such same-sex unions. Some of these texts describe the rituals as involving certain aspects that resemble contemporary heterosexual orthodox marriages. The Greek ritual manuals for these ceremonies were widely copied, some well into the fifteenth century. Some accounts record that same-sex unions were even performed in Renaissance Italy until they were outlawed in the 1600s.

Same-sex unions in the Byzantine world stimulated in the West a similar ambiguous conflation of spiritual and physical desire. In the year 800, the Frankish king Charlemagne attempted to revive a Christianised "Holy Roman Empire" with its capital at Aachen in Germany. He modelled his new empire on Byzantium. Charlemagne's courtiers wrote lyrically about male friendships. Many of their stories were full of quotes from classical authors recounting nostalgic moments of temptation by pederasty (Saslow, p.62). As a result of this return to Latin sources for inspiration, these authors began to blur the boundaries between what was permissible and what was forbidden in terms of the physical expression of same-sex love. The medieval church continued to grapple with issues concerning the carnal expressions of these lofty desires.

The Romanesque Period (1000-1200)

Between the time of Charlemagne to the year 1000, Western Europe had recovered from most of its social and economic problems resulting from internal and external strife, invasions and anarchy.

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45. *David and Jonathan*, 13th century. Illuminated manuscript. The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

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Food became more plentiful once again, wealth expanded, and populated urbanised centres sprang up. During this period, homosexuality was more widely reported among all classes of society – nobility, clergy, and commoners. Increasingly, the urban centres began to rival the aristocracy and the monastery as centres of culture. In the cities, same-sex social networks developed. Secular urban authorities cultivated an atmosphere of liberty and tolerance, turning a blind eye to an increasingly visible subculture of male prostitutes, bordellos, and taverns. By the twelfth century, there was an unprecedented flowering of homoerotic poetry, mostly written in Latin.

Most of these authors were churchmen who, in addition to writing on standard religious themes, also wrote works boldly celebrating love between men. Although a significant amount of literature resulted from this homosexual subculture, very little visual art was produced. Saslow has suggested that this was due to differences in patronage and audience for visual material, for whereas poems were private (easier to hide), inexpensive, and more accessible to the average sympathetic reader, paintings and sculptures were costly and required collective workshops that functioned in public view (Saslow, p.63). Moreover, the majority of artists were patronised by the church and any visual expression of homosexual feelings would have been frowned upon. An exception to this, however, is found in Romanesque architectural sculpture of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The best known carving of this period containing homosexual content comes from the pilgrimage church of La Madeleine at Vézelay, built between 1096 and 1137. A capital from one of the church's nave pillars shows the rape of Ganymede story (Saslow, p.64).

In addition to the designs on the church of Saint Madeleine at Vézelay, other architectural sculptures of the eleventh and twelfth centuries in both France and Spain provide additional graphic illustrations of homosexuality.

In Romanesque Spain and at Sémalay in south-western France, for example, there exist architectural details showing male couples performing sodomy. At La Chaize-le-Vicomte, a column capital shows a pair of copulating monkeys to symbolise the bestiality associated with sodomy. At Châteaumeillant, another sculptured capital depicts two bearded men embracing and kissing, one with his erect penis exposed. Carved above this latter couple is the Latin phrase *bac rusticani mixti* (loosely translated as "Look at these crazy peasants"). At Cahors, sodomy is among the sins depicted in the blocks carved over the door ways. All of these works are unique compared to other medieval sculptures and have long intrigued and puzzled scholars (Saslow, p.65). Because these images were all depicted in pilgrimage churches leads many to believe that they most likely functioned as moralising sculptures intended to warn pilgrims against such sins.

Intolerance and Repression (1200-1400)

Despite church invectives against it, sodomy had become so visible by the late 1100s that church and state authorities felt compelled to root it out entirely. A series of heavy-handed reforms followed. In 1123, the Roman Catholic Church formally demanded celibacy of all the clergy who had, by that time, gained a notorious reputation for engaging in sodomy. The Third Lateran Council of 1179 specifically condemned sodomy and decreed excommunication for any member of the clergy or laity found guilty of this "crime against nature". Heterosexual marriage was also strictly regulated and divorce was forbidden. In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council required every believer to make regular confession to a priest. The Papal Inquisition was made permanent in 1233 to target all heretical acts and beliefs. By 1300, a slew of new civil laws decreed the death penalty for sodomy. Also, homoerotic

46. *Jesus and Saint John the Beloved*, c. 1300. Painted and gilded wood sculpture. Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.

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poetry almost entirely disappeared. Art during these trying times was used primarily as propaganda in reinforcing the anti-sodomy message.

There were several forces besides religious and moral ones that contributed to the crackdown on sodomy during this period. For example, there was a growing fear of low birth rates and diminishing population. Hence an intolerance of non-procreative sex resulted. Another force was religious pietism spearheaded by monks of the Franciscan and Dominican orders. Lastly, feudalism began to break down and harsh political rivalries developed. An accusation of sodomy was one sure and effective way of eliminating one's political enemy.

The single greatest religious force during this period was Saint Thomas Aquinas, whose thirteenth-century *Summa Theologica* (1267-73) reigned for centuries as the standard authority on Catholic moral theology. This text reinforced Saint Paul's strictures against homosexual behaviour as it had been noted in Romans 1:27. His strict moral sanctions were based not only on the *Bible*, but on a distortion of Aristotle's ideas regarding pederasty in antiquity and on his own understanding and acceptance of biblical tradition (Johansson & Percy, p.175). In the *Summa*, Aquinas put forth arguments directed specifically against sodomy, ranking it as a crime second only to murder (Saslow, pp.67-8). Aquinas was a member of the Dominican order which orchestrated the Inquisition and took an aggressive stance against heresy and sin. The Dominicans had expressed vehement opposition against same-sex marriages and, in fact, destroyed many pages that described such ceremonies.

David and Jonathan

Despite disdain for same-sex unions by Aquinas and the Dominicans, the story of David and Jonathan appeared regularly during this period in a popular spiritual manual called the *Somme le roi* and was illustrated numerous times throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In it, vices were listed and paired with their virtuous opposites. The *Somme le roi* was originally assembled for the French king Philip III and served as a layman's guide to moral issues (Saslow, p.73). The story of David and Jonathan served as an example of chaste same-sex friendship.

The special relationship between David and Jonathan was narrated in the biblical First Book of Samuel and tells the story of Jonathan, the son of King Saul, who formed an intimate friendship with David, a handsome shepherd who played the harp and who later became a soldier and slew Goliath. In 1 Samuel 18:1, the narrator proclaims that "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David," and that "Jonathan loved him (David) as his own soul". Jonathan's father, Saul, disapproved of the special bond between his son and David and forced the latter to flee the court. The two friends embraced and then parted sorrowfully. The biblical narration describes how "they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded" (1 Samuel 20:41). Jonathan then went into battle alongside his father and was killed by the Philistines. David was then crowned king. Upon hearing the news of Jonathan's demise, David lamented: "The beauty of Israel is slain upon the high places; how are the mighty fallen! … I am very distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love was wonderful, passing the love of women." (2 Samuel 1: 19-26). David's elegy for Jonathan has been put to use as a religiously sanctioned means of expressing male same-sex desire. The sad moment of their parting has been iconographically related to Saint John the Evangelist's (also known as "the beloved disciple") tenderly laying his head on Jesus' bosom – a scene that has allowed for the representation of physical and emotional intimacy between

47. *Group of Christ and of Saint John of Sigmaringen*, 1330. Polychrome and gilded walnut. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin.

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men in religious art. The pairing of Jesus and Saint John had been frequently represented in manuscript illuminations one century before that of David and Jonathan. As a couple, they became very popular in German sculpture after 1300.

Moralising Manuscripts

Despite the proliferation of images of spiritual love between same-sex couples, there also arose at this time in France, Italy, and England, stories of homosexual love in vernacular writing that began to supplement biblical writings. At the time, works of both ancient mythology and biblical scripture were translated and adapted with commentaries and illustrations intended to reinforce orthodox interpretations (Saslow, p.69). Titles like the *Ovide moralisé* (moralised Ovid) and the *Bible moralisée* (moralised Bible) attempted to "purify" or "moralise" ancient sources by condemning their previous sexual ethic and employing allegory (Saslow, p.69). The *Bible moralisée*, a compendium of texts and images compiled by thirteenth-century French royal theologians, and revised and copied throughout the fourteenth century, was amply illustrated. Twin illustrations were typically paired in circular frames to highlight a particular moral. In one edition, now located in Oxford, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah is linked with two homosexual couples: a monk kissing a layman, and two women embracing. Both scenes locate the protagonists in the mouth of Hell by the presence of devils. The inclusion of lesbianism here is unique, perhaps reflecting concerns over sexual aberrations to the increasingly problematic "special friendships" among nuns in convents.

The *Ovide moralisé* is a secular version of the *Bible moralisée*. Its primary function was to re-evaluate the pagan elements contained in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In one fourteenth-century manuscript located in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, a page devoted to the story of Jupiter and Ganymede accurately illustrates Ovid's conception of Jupiter as an enthroned king of heaven awaiting the eagle's delivery of Ganymede. The text below the image chastises Jupiter for giving in to a desire that was "against law and against nature". Such a rebuke against a powerful deity suggests that artists and authors were no longer interested in ancient literature for its philosophical content, but as a source for didactic rhetoric against its pagan and carnal elements (Saslow, pp.70-1).

Descent into the Inferno

One of the most popular and recognisable moralising texts of the Middle Ages was Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*. Dante (1265-1321) is considered one of the greatest of the medieval poets and one of the founders of Italian literature. His *Divine Comedy*, the premier epic poem of Christianity, envisions Dante's pilgrimage through hell, purgatory, and heaven. In the poem, the damned are subdivided into five groups according to the severity of their transgressions. Along his journey, Dante twice encounters sodomites. In Cantos 14 through 16 of the Inferno (Hell), the sodomites are confined to the seventh circle or the circle of the violent. Sodomy is understood here as violence against God's creation. Those guilty of it are lumped together with blasphemers who do violence to God in speech, and with usurers who commit violence against the nature of money. Sodomites are sentenced to run naked over burning sand and under a steady rain of fire – a punishment reminiscent of the biblical destruction of Sodom itself. Due to suggestions of a non-committal stance against sodomy on Dante's part, it is believed that he did not outright condemn it as vice. In Cantos 14 through 16 of the *Divine Comedy*, Dante seems to soften his stance on

48. *Adam and Eve and Sodomites*, 13th-14th century. Illuminated manuscript from *La Bible Moralisée*. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.

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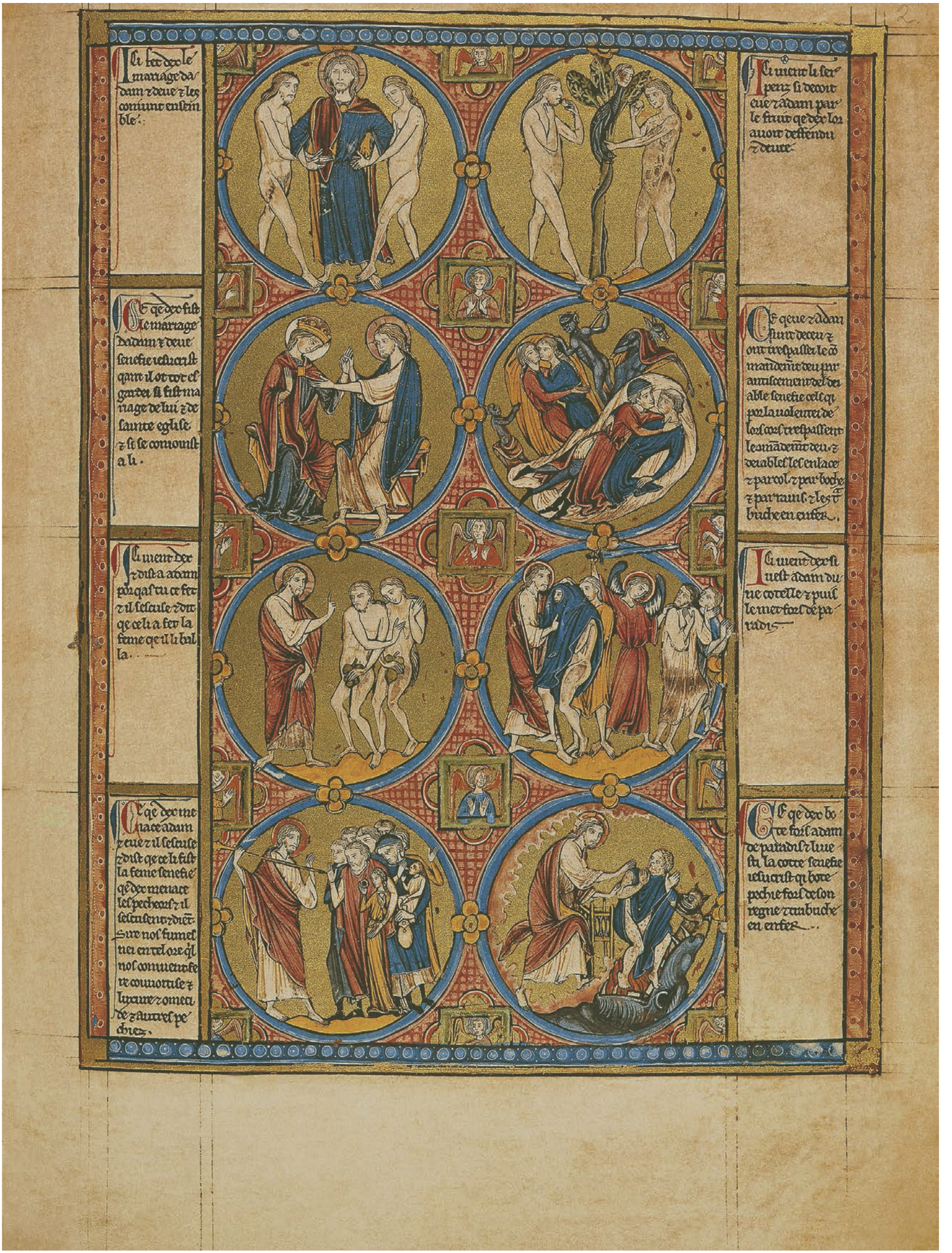

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49. **Guido da Pisa**, *Dante and Virgil Meet the Sodomites*, inspired by *Inferno*, Canto 15, c. 1345. Illuminated manuscript. Musée Condé, Chantilly.

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sodomy – seeing it as a sin positioned only one step below salvation. In his journey through purgatory, Dante encounters penitent sodomites (Purgatorio, p.26). The sodomites and those guilty of other "unnatural" heterosexual activities move in two interlocking groups, each calling out the name of his sin. More than sodomy, heterosexual lust and its penance are prevalent throughout the *Divine Comedy*. This suggests that Dante wanted to minimise sodomy as an evil and felt no need to join in the exaggerated denunciations of it by many of his contemporary theologians (Mark D. Jordan, "Dante Alighieri," in Haggerty, pp.242-3).

Dante's *Divine Comedy* also shows sensitivity to the emotional and spiritual rewards of male friendship (*amicitia*). Along his journey, Dante is accompanied by an escort identified as the Latin poet Virgil. This, plus the fact that Dante references many mythological creatures and joins them into a grand religious synthesis, indicates that he was well-versed in classical literature. The largest illustration of Dante's poem is a fresco by the fourteenth-century artist Nardo di Cione, located in Santa Maria Novella in Florence. The fresco dates from the 1350s and labels the individual compartments of the Inferno (Saslow, p.70). Nardo's illustration for the seventh circle is vague in that where the sodomites should be the artist only shows generic sufferers and omits the one incriminating caption, "Violent against nature". Saslow has suggested that the artist's evasiveness regarding the sodomites may reflect growing revulsion against even the mention of the vice in the wake of the Black Plague that was devastating Europe in 1348 (Saslow, p.71).

Despite downplaying the severity of sodomy as sin, the reference to sodomy at all in Nardo's large-scale fresco cycle is rare in the history of art. Sodomy and sodomites were more frequently illustrated in smaller, private manuscript copies of Dante's poem. In fact, the vast majority of the art of the Middle Ages was restricted to manuscript illustration and other minor art forms, which in turn were typically commissioned by nobles and churchmen, both of whom had been especially targeted as suspected practitioners of sodomy. Back in the fourth century, Saint Basil had admitted that homosexuality was a particular problem among monks. It was, however, the nobility that had the leisure and wealth to indulge in any and all hedonistic appetites. In addition to the numerous illuminated manuscripts produced from the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, warnings about sodomy were directed specifically at monks and aristocrats in church architecture and furnishings. The carved capital showing the Rape of Ganymede at Sainte Madeleine in Vézelay is one such example.

The Late Middle Ages

The Middle Ages technically ended in 1492, when Ferdinand and Isabella re-conquered Spain from the Muslims and sponsored Christopher Columbus' voyage to the Americas. At this time in Italy, Renaissance humanism and neo-Platonism began to spread, thus altering perceptions of human indulgences. As laws against sodomy increased in frequency and severity during the late medieval period, more sexual subcultures appeared and more clandestine sexual encounters occurred in many European cities, especially in London, Cologne, and in many Italian urban centres. The combination of sodomy as a religious taboo along with an increase in the number of underground sexual practitioners provoked an "administrative process of repression" and innovative policing procedures (Johansson & Percy, p.177). Alarmed by an increase in secular knowledge and a rebirth of paganism, a waning medieval society doubled its efforts to eradicate sodomy. In places like Germany, however, the persecution of sodomites and those accused of witchcraft increased with a vengeance. Enthusiasm for public executions and public

50. *Templar Embracing a Cleric*, c. 1350. Illuminated manuscript from Jacques de Longuyon, *Les Vœux du Paon*. The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.
51. *Richard Puller and His Page Burned at the Stake in Zurich, 1482*, c. 1483. Illuminated manuscript from Diebold Schilling, *Die Grosse Burgunder-Chronik*. Zentralbibliothek, Zurich.

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humiliation of homosexuals increased. Burning at the stake remained the most spectacular form of capital punishment for sodomy.

The problem of successfully regulating sodomy became most apparent in fifteenth-century Florence, where a crackdown on homosexual activity was unsuccessful due to its widespread practice among young males. In Florence, the penalties for sodomy were gradually reduced as the number of those convicted increased (Johansson & Percy, p.177). However, strategies of repression mounted and manifested themselves in the form of mutilation, exile, fines, and other drastic measures including being burned alive.

Female Homosexuality in the Middle Ages

Of all the minority groups within medieval society it was women who were, according to Jacqueline Murray, the "twice marginal and twice invisible" (Jacqueline Murray in Bullough and Brundage, p.191). When it came to a consideration of women's sexuality, medieval culture was as misogynistic as Roman society.

Men's behaviour seemed to have mattered more since, as Augustine noted: "The body of a man is superior to that of a woman as the soul is to the body." (Saslow, p.60). Saint Paul spoke of the "vile affections" among women before those of men. Saint Augustine condemned "the things which shameless women do even to other women," specifically pointing an accusatory finger at "maidens, nuns, wives, and widows" (Saslow, p.60). As with male homosexuality, female homosexuality was, when discussed at all, denounced by clerics and theologians. As time passed, however, later clerics paid even less attention to female homosexuality than did their predecessors.

Our primary knowledge of the existence of female homosexuals and female homosexuality during the Middle Ages comes from ecclesiastical discourses of canon law and theology. Even with most of these, lesbian sexual activity was frequently ignored, marginalised, or subsumed under categories of male homosexual sins (Murray, p.197). In some of these discourses, however, same-sex emotional attachment and sexual practice was consistently condemned. The only hint of "lesbian" activity as "unnatural" found in either Jewish or Christian scripture is contained in Romans 1: 26-27. As already mentioned, this text formed the foundation of an important theological discourse that began with the church fathers and continued through Thomas Aquinas and after.

Although some scholars interpret this passage as condemning heterosexual women's sexual perversions, most believe that it specifically makes reference to lesbian sexual activity. It has been pointed out, however, that Saint Paul was writing during a time when Roman society condemned female homoeroticism as a reaction against women's perceived refusal to remain subordinated to men (Murray, pp.194-5).

In addition to Saints Paul and Thomas Aquinas, Saint Augustine also specifically condemned female homosexuality in a letter written around 423 to a community of nuns. The letter is significant because in it Augustine distinguishes between homoerotic activities and homosocial or "spiritual" relationships between women. Similar attempts to eliminate the fine line between amicitia and sodomia had been directed towards monks. By the thirteenth century, female homosexual activity was subsumed under the broad category of sodomy, which came to include all manner of sexual activity "against nature", both heterosexual and homosexual.

52. *The Visitation*, from *Book of Hours*, known as *Book of Hours of Mary Stuart*, last quarter of 15th century. Illuminated manuscript, 25 x 17.5 cm. France.

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53. **Valerius Maximus**, mid-15th century. Illuminated manuscript *Factorum et dictorum memorabiliorum libri novem.* Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin.

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54. Illuminated manuscript, Middle Ages.

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Unlike male homosexuality, female homosexuality was infrequently listed in the penitentials and penalties for engaging in it were generally less severe than those inflicted on male practitioners. A couple of the penitentials of the period, such as the *Penitential of Theodore* and the *Penitential of Bede*, do make specific reference to female homosexual activity. These penitentials were written by men and they highlight a male-centred understanding of human sexuality (Murray, pp.198-9).

For men of the Middle Ages, sexual activity without a penis was difficult to imagine. Male writers often assumed that because women lacked penises, they used sexual instruments such as dildos to replicate heterosexual intercourse and in doing so they challenged the 'natural' hierarchy of sexual relations. Female sexuality was not taken seriously except insofar as it threatened male privilege or the primacy of the male sex organ. In the mid-ninth century, Hincmar of Reims did concentrate on female homosexuality and asserted that lesbians were "reputed to use certain instruments of diabolic function to excite desire" (Murray, p.193). Even in later centuries, it was only the use of a dildo (single or double penis substitute) that warranted the intervention of the authorities.

Visual art containing even cursory reference to female homosexuality in the Middle Ages is scarce. Beginning in the ninth century, however, an image began to circulate throughout Europe of the Visitation that shows Mary and Elizabeth physically intertwined, cheek-to-cheek, in a moment of great emotional effusion. In terms of iconography and its relationship to a suggestion of homosexuality, this theme serves as a kind of female parallel or counterpart to the story of David and Jonathan.

55. *Annunciation and Visitation*, late 8th century. Ivory bas-relief. Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels.

56. *Mary and Elizabeth*, 15th century. Ivory panel. Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich.

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Chapter 3

Homosexuality in the Italian Renaissance

The word 'Renaissance' means rebirth. It refers specifically to a rebirth of Greek and Roman art, literature, philosophy, and science and, more broadly, a thirst for secular and empirical knowledge. The Renaissance is a kind of reversal of medieval goals in that artists of that period focused on the natural rather than the supernatural world. The individual and his experience were considered more important than the cultivation of a purely spiritual life. This change was due to the impact and influence of Humanism on the late fourteenth century in Europe.

Humanism began with the classically-trained writers Francesco Petrarch and Giovanni Boccaccio, both of whom focused on human affairs and looked into the classical past for inspiration. In doing so, they took an interest in homosexuality given its prominence in pagan myth, chronicles, mores and art. The humanists insisted on reuniting classical forms and subjects with their original pederastic meanings (Saslow, *Pictures and Passions*, p.79). Not every humanist was a homosexual, but many did sympathise with a desire to express homoeroticism. These humanists often mingled with members of an increasingly visible intellectual and homosexual subculture. In the Renaissance, the private and public confessions of homoerotic desires by artists such as Michelangelo and Il Sodoma in major centres of artistic and homosexual activities such as Florence and Venice, speak to an "early modern" individual and group homosexual identity. Saslow notes that during the period: "Some men seemed to have understood themselves to possess a distinct personality type – or at least they knew that others thought they did." (Saslow, p.101).

The high point of Italy's Renaissance began in the late 1490s and lasted until the 1530s. Classical humanism was everywhere and the hedonism associated with it, which included bisexuality, was tolerated. The central tension during the period was in attempting to reconcile a strong Catholicism with the knowledge and values found in paganism and science. Many humanists raided classical mythology to dignify their own homosexual preferences. It is important to note that as homosexuality increased in visibility, so too did its repression by state power through police surveillance.

From court records, we know that sodomy cut across all classes, from royalty to clerics to writers and artists (Saslow, pp.80-1). As had been the case during the Middle Ages, sodomy in the Renaissance referred not only to anal sex, but to all varieties of sexual practices that were considered against nature. This included masturbation, intercrural sex, bestiality, and the violent rape of boys. Anal sex remained, however, the primary concern. Although prominent in the public imagination of the Renaissance, sodomy remained a taboo punishable by burning alive – a fate associated with the biblical burning of Sodom and Gomorrah. The outbreak of the plague underscored sodomy's connotation as a destructive act worthy of the wrath of God.

57. **Giovanni Bazzi** (**Il Sodoma**), *Saint Sebastian*, 1525. Oil on canvas, 206 x 154 cm. Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.

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Cases of sodomy often occurred between an older and a younger man, with the former as active partner. In both Venice and Florence, the active partner in anal sex was deemed more culpable. The distinction between passive and active sodomy began to appear in the records of the mid-1440s (Ruggiero, p.119). In Venice, it was the Signori di Notte in the fourteenth century and the Council of Ten in the fifteenth century that tried and prosecuted all crimes. These were made up of important men from important Venetian families. It has been argued that during the Renaissance, sodomy came to be considered an horrific crime likened to treason and heresy (Ruggiero, p.124).

Both Venice and Florence are similar in that there seems to have been an emergence of a homosexual subculture in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. As time passed, this subculture became more public and more widespread, and involved all classes of people ranging from peasants to nobles. A burgeoning homosexual subculture, and its upper-class participation, was perhaps "due to the growth of humanist studies" and a desire to emulate the thoughts and actions of the ancients (Ruggiero, p.135).

An important distinction must be made between the social view of same-sex relationships in the Italian Renaissance and the literary and artistic expression of those relationships during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Since the end of the thirteenth century, sodomy was considered a crime and its practice was blamed for a series of natural plagues that ravaged Western Europe. In the fifteenth century, the state stepped up the policing of moral conduct in both Florence and Venice. In 1432, the Florentine authorities created the Office of the Night – a special commission charged with the prosecution of increased charges of sodomy.

Between 1424 and 1425, San Bernardino of Siena delivered four famous sermons in Florence in which he gave a horrifying description of the sodomite as a murderer whose "stench had reached heaven" (Armando Maggi, "Italian Renaissance," in Haggerty, p.487). He charged subversive fraternities with promoting sodomy along with political factionalism and sedition. As the number of cases of sodomy rose after 1400 in Florence and Venice, the church tried to control the damage by promoting more aggressive anti-sodomy rhetoric.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Florence was one of the most dynamic cultural centres of Europe. It had gained a reputation as a city hospitable to homosexuality. The Florentine proclivity for sodomy became so familiar to Europeans in the sixteenth century that in Germany a popular term for 'to sodomise' was *florenzen,* while a sodomite was dubbed a *Florenzer* (Michael Rocke, "Florence," in Haggerty, p.330). Florence was not alone in its almost paranoid response to an increased visibility of homosexuality. The seeming frequent practice of sodomy and other homosexual acts were also of concern to fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Renaissance Venice. Sodomy in Venice was referred to as "that most infamous deed", "the most foul crime", "the most famous sin" (quoted in Ruggiero, p.113).

Renaissance Neo-Platonism

In their art and lives, Renaissance artists such as Leonardo, Michelangelo, Cellini, and others were heavily influenced by Neo-Platonism. Homosexual desire acquired a philosophical status with the birth of Florentine Neo-Platonism thanks to Marsilio Ficino's (1433-99) groundbreaking interpretations of Plato's dialogues.

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58. **Donatello**, *David*, c. 1440-1443. Bronze, h: 158 cm. Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

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Ficino was a philosopher and translator whose reinterpretation of those dialogues constituted one of the central features of Renaissance culture in Europe. Most Renaissance poetry and a good deal of its art were shaped by Neo-Platonic ideas. Ficino and his Neo-Platonic Academy also played a major role in setting the homoerotic tenor of the European Renaissance.

In his commentary on Plato's *Symposium*, Ficino developed a complex theory concerning the relationship between desire, sexuality, and religious contemplation. Following Plato, Ficino stated that love is a desire for beauty, and that because sight and hearing are our two most dominant physical senses, gazing at and listening to the beloved will lead the subject to ascend to a profound contemplation of divinity. Desire, brought about by beauty, has thus a strongly religious connotation. For Ficino, a man is more "naturally" drawn toward another man than he is toward a woman because the male reminds him of the "idea" of his own inner beauty. Divine contemplation is spurred by another man's beautiful forms. Ficino's work helped legitimise homosexuality as a worthy topic of artistic and philosophical investigation, prompting other Renaissance philosophers to legitimise or at least recognise the idea of a man's desire for another man as a noble endeavour. These figures constituted a search for the androgyne and revealed a balanced combination of masculine strength and feminine tenderness. Artists focused their art on handsome youths such as David, John the Baptist, and Jesus.

Ficino's pupil, Angelo Poliziano (1454-94) was perhaps the most influential Neo-Platonist for artists. He was Michelangelo's mentor and, along with Leonardo and the other artists discussed here, all were heavily influenced by Ficino's Neo-Platonic ideology (Armando Maggi, "Renaissance Neo-Platonism," in Haggerty, pp.741-2). Poliziano was a poet and dramatist whose work, based on Greek gods and myths, espoused the virtues of homosexual desire. Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Cellini exemplify the homosexual aspect of humanism and Neo-Platonism. They all carried on sexual affairs with men younger than themselves, kept journals, and wrote poems and autobiographies leaving evidence of homosexual themes related to their lives, their art, and their patrons' and audiences' lives.

Along with Leonardo, the Florentine artist Donatello was perhaps one of the earliest artists of the Italian Renaissance influenced by Ficino's ideas about male-to-male beauty and desire. Donatello is cited as one of the "first modern artists known to be homosexual, in a city (Florence) where homosexuality was infamous among artists, patrons, and audiences." (Saslow, p.82). He was at work on his famous bronze statue of *David* when the Florentine magistrates set up the Office of the Night.

This statue issues from the artist's deep-seated homoerotic desires as they had been fuelled by the apprenticeship system. This structure of learning involved adolescent boys who were taken in as student assistants and cared for by craftsmen who passed on their artistic and worldly knowledge. Donatello, like Leonardo, tended to choose their apprentices based primarily on good looks rather than on talent.

There is a sensual element in Donatello's statue of *David* that goes beyond a masterful display of beautiful bodily form and approaches abstract Neo-Platonic thought. The feather of Goliath's helmet caresses the inner right thigh of David. This detail brings to mind Jupiter's eagle, as the boy himself makes one think of Ganymede. Metaphorically, Goliath, like Jupiter and Donatello, has "lost his head" over a beautiful youth (Saslow, p.83).

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59. **Albrecht Dürer**, *Death of Orpheus*, c. 1494. Pen and ink drawing, 128.9 x 22.5 cm. Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg.

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In 1423, the Florentine chancellor Leonardo Bruni, published a translation of Plato's dialogue on love, *Phaedrus,* which characterises the human soul as winged and compares its reaction at the sight of a beloved to a phallic erection: "The lower end of the wings begins to swell and grow from the root upwards," like Goliath's rising helmet feathers. In 1425, another humanist named Antonio Beccadelli dedicated his bawdy poem, *The Hermaphrodite,* to Cosimo. In it, Beccadelli spoke of the power of a handsome youth to "hold me captive and press his foot on my neck," just as Donatello's David does to Goliath (Saslow, p.84).

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519)

Leonardo has long been considered the epitome of the universal genius for his achievements in the arts and sciences. He is, along with Michelangelo, the most written-about figure of the Italian Renaissance. Many writers and scholars have taken a keen interest in Leonardo's sexual orientation and its effects on his artistic and scientific works.

Interpreters of Leonardo's art and life have used fragmentary notebook jottings, his choice of shop assistants, the androgyny of some of the figures he painted, and his reputation among his contemporaries, in evaluating his homosexuality. Leonardo's attraction to very young males is part of a reputation generally held about most sixteenth-century Florentine men of learning at the time. Twice in 1476, while he was an apprentice in Andrea del Verocchio's Florentine workshop, Leonardo was accused by the Office of the Night – the special magistracy set up to police homosexual activity – of committing sodomy with a seventeen-year-old apprentice named Jacopo Saltarelli. Leonardo and the two other men were acquitted and the charges were later dismissed. In 1568, Leonardo's reputation was again compromised when a derisive sonnet, written by the art theorist Gian Paolo Lomazzo, appeared on the subject of *l'amore masculino*. The sonnet referenced Leonardo as boasting of sodomising his beautiful, teenage apprentice "many times". The assistant in question was Gian Giacomo de' Caprotti, who possessed blond curly hair and androgynous features and may have served as Leonardo's model for *Saint John the Baptist*. De' Caprotti was only ten years old when Leonardo took him on as apprentice in 1490. In his notebooks, Leonardo referred endearingly to de' Caprotti as "*Salai*" (little devil) because he was, according to Leonardo, a "thief, liar, pighead, glutton". Despite the young apprentice's dubious character, Leonardo kept Salai on as his assistant for twenty-five years and obsessively drew his soft features and blond curls (Saslow, p.89). Leonardo lavished Salai with fine clothes and jewellery and took him on several travels through Europe.

Salai was not the only one. Leonardo took on several young men as apprentices based on their looks rather than on their talents. These included Cesare de Sesto, Boltraffo, and Francesco Melzi. Despite his love of boys, Leonardo was by no means a swashbuckling libertine. His life and aesthetic choices were a painful struggle to achieve reconciliation between his homosexual tendencies and his lofty moral demands ignited by his belief in the ideas of physical beauty and spirituality found in Ficino's Neo-Platonism. Leonardo's *Saint John the Baptist*, *Bacchus*, and the *Mona Lisa*, are examples of works that reveal a sublimated homosexuality and passionate search for the androgyne in angels, saints, and images of Christ.

The first major psychological work to stress the significance of Leonardo's enigmatic sexuality to an understanding of his creativity was Sigmund Freud's *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood* (1910). Leonardo left nearly two thousand pages of notes and from these Freud argued that the artist was a sublimated homosexual.

60. **Leonardo da Vinci**, *Portrait of Lisa Gherardini, Wife of Francesco del Giocondo*, known as *Mona Lisa*, c. 1503-1506. Oil on poplar wood panel, 77 x 53 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.
61. **Workshop of Leonardo da Vinci**, *Saint John the Baptist-Bacchus*, 1510-1515. Oil on wood transferred onto canvas, 177 x 115 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.
62. **Leonardo da Vinci**, *Saint John the Baptist*, 1513-1515. Oil on wood, 69 x 57 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

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He attributed the artist's homosexuality to a mother fixation and retarded development in the Oedipal process. Although Freud never denied that Leonardo had sexual relations with his young shop apprentices, he did believe that Leonardo was in a state of "platonic, solitary, and tragic homosexuality" from which came great things befitting a genius. In Freud's view, Leonardo's platonic homosexuality was an obsession that may have been an obstacle to his inability to finish many of his artistic projects (De Beck, p.117). Freud's interpretation has been much disputed for years ever since its publication. Many view it as a flawed and inconsistent study, whereas others see it as having at least some merit by which to judge Leonardo, his time period, and his works (cf. William B. MacGregor, "Leonardo da Vinci," in Haggerty, pp.535-6).

Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564)

One of the pre-eminent artists of the High Renaissance in Italy was Michelangelo. He was a prolific and accomplished sculptor, painter, architect, and poet. His passion for expressing homoerotic desire is revealed throughout his long life in his art and in his lyrical and passionate poetry. Unlike Leonardo's platonic homosexuality, which tended to promote the more tranquil and feminine side of the androgynous divide, Michelangelo's search for beauty and lofty thought in the beautiful male form resulted in works of exasperated virility (De Beck, p.118). His famous *David*, the *Rebellious Slave*, and the *Ignudi* on the Sistine Ceiling exemplify his goals as an artist. These figures tend toward muscularity and intensity of expression. By painting men in this fashion, Michelangelo tried to reveal a kind of uncompromising truth symbolised by heroic nudity (De Beck, p.119).

Michelangelo was born in Florence, a city renowned for its permissiveness as far as homosexuality was concerned. Early in his career, he was patronised by Lorenzo de' Medici (Lorenzo the Magnificent), whose family played a significant role in the development of Michelangelo's career. His homoerotically-inspired masterpieces – specifically, the *Bacchus* and his *David* – were created around 1500 in Florence.

Michelangelo's *David* was created in Florence from 1501-1504 and has become the premier example of the Renaissance ideal of the beautiful male form coupled with Neo-Platonic thought. Even before the statue was made, David was Florence's favourite symbol of triumph over its enemies. However, since the appearance of Donatello's version, Michelangelo's *David* has "resonated erotically" by way of epitomising male beauty and unrestrained physicality. It is rumoured that the sexual nature of the statue was strong enough to compel the city fathers to order a fig-leaf put on the statue soon after it was erected in the town square (Saslow, pp.96-7). Around the same time Michelangelo was putting hammer and chisel to work on the *David*, he painted his *Holy Family* (also called the *Doni Tondo*). In this work Michelangelo visualises the lifelong conflict he suffered over the religious and the sexual.

Around the time the *Doni Tondo* was painted, Michelangelo started writing poetry which provides a window into the artist's inner life and his homoerotic feelings. His poems reveal an irresolvable dilemma between his passionate pagan side and his equally passionate Christian leanings. This division into two combating halves was to remain the driving force behind the creation of many of his masterpieces that combined the most heartfelt Christianity with a suppressed homoeroticism. Michelangelo's creativity was nurtured by his tormented and introspective nature.

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63. **Michelangelo Buonarroti**, *David*, 1501-1504. Marble, h: 434 cm. Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence.

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Michelangelo expressed a tortured view of love, divided between an intense homosexual desire and awareness of Catholicism's denial of it. Taking its cue from Neo-Platonism, Michelangelo's poetry theorised the necessity of transcending carnal desire to attain a glimpse of divine love. In his art, he attempts spiritual transcendence through the male body by revealing its beautiful 'forms'. These forms triggered an inherently painful desire, forcing the lover to question his whole identity. In this way, a homosexual drive became a fundamental source of introspection for Michelangelo. Rather than denying the reality of homosexual desire, Michelangelo and Ficino dissect it in an extraordinarily modern manner (Maggi in Haggerty, p.488).

In 1508, Michelangelo was summoned to Rome by Pope Julius I and began work on several projects at the Vatican. His most celebrated work of this period was his mammoth project for the *Sistine Chapel*. On the ceiling, he surrounded many of his famous biblical scenes with ornamental figures of powerfully twisting athletes called *Ignudi*. Among a series of large nude figures for Julius' tomb, including the *Dying Slave* and *Rebellious Captive* of 1513-1515 he "fused the heroic ideal of David and the languorous passivity of Bacchus into an allegorised exaltation of pagan eros" (Saslow, p.97).

In 1532, Michelangelo met and became intimately involved with a young aristocrat and politician named Tommaso Cavalieri. Cavalieri was thirty-four years younger than Michelangelo. The relationship between the two men was emotionally intense. However, whether or not they were sexually involved with one another remains a matter of conjecture. What is certain is that it was to Cavalieri that Michelangelo wrote his most impassioned poetry and some very intimate letters. In these, he pays homage to the multi-layered dimensions of Neo-Platonic ideals. Michelangelo also presented to Cavalieri a series of drawings (mostly of Ganymede) that contained erotic overtones.

Not every artist kept their agonising torment quiet while trying to reconcile homosexual proclivities with religiosity. Giovanni Antonio Bazzi (1477-1549), also called Il Sodoma, was a Renaissance painter whose nickname indicates his renown more for his scandalous homosexual proclivities than for his artistic prowess. Although he was married, Bazzi associated with an entourage of foppish boys and because of this, he received the nickname "*Il Sodoma*" (the sodomite).

64. **Michelangelo Buonarroti**, *Holy Family* (*Tondo Doni*), c. 1506. Oil on wood panel, diametre: 120 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

65. **Michelangelo Buonarroti**, *Ignudi* (Ceiling of Sistine Chapel), 1508-1512. Sistine Chapel, Vatican.

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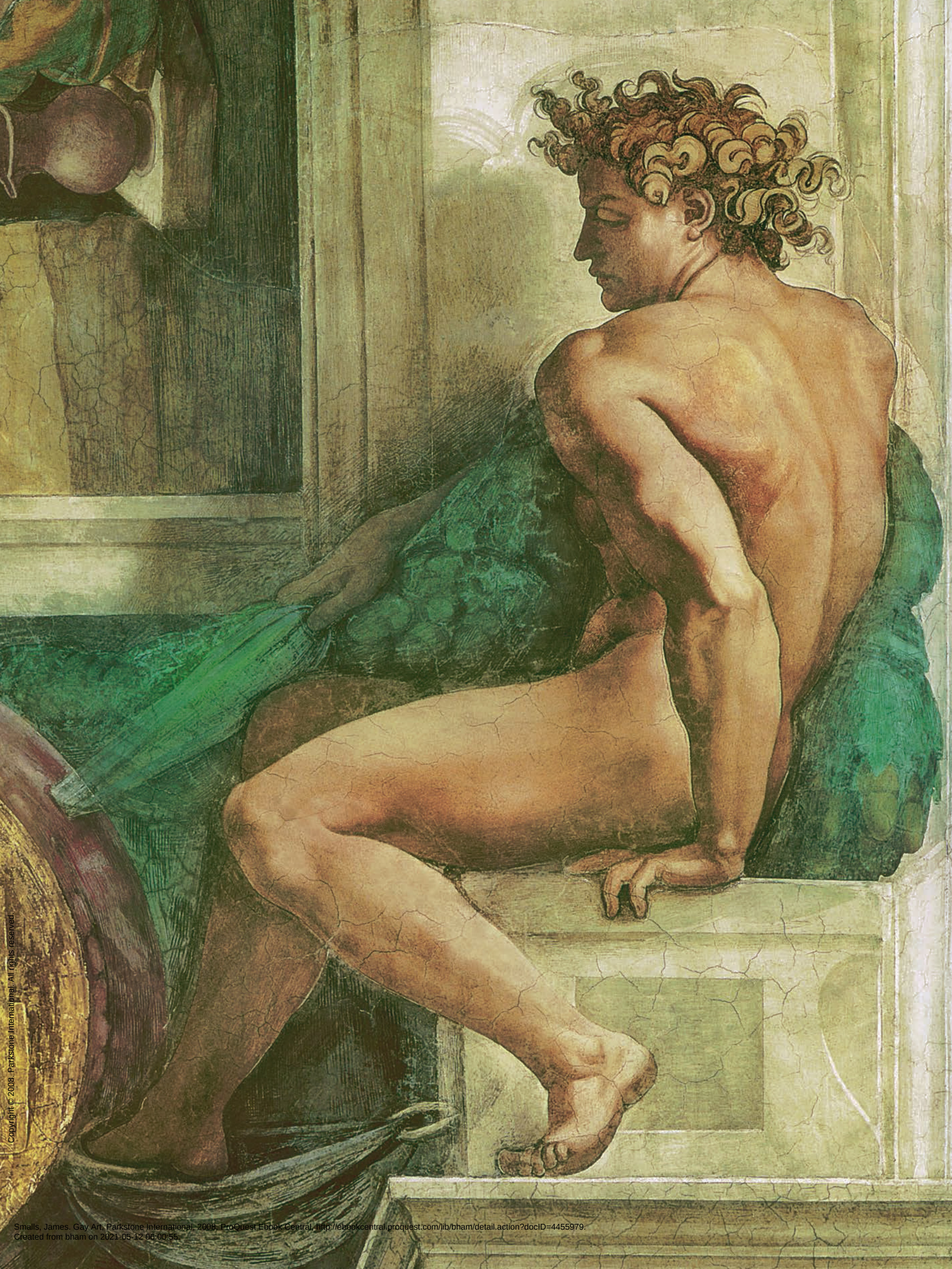

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66. **Michelangelo Buonarroti**, *The Dying Slave*, 1513-1516. Marble, h: 229 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.
67. **Michelangelo Buonarroti**, *The Rebellious Slave*, 1513-1516. Marble, h: 229 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.
68. **Michelangelo Buonarroti**, *Bacchus*, 1496-1497. Marble, h: 203 cm. Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

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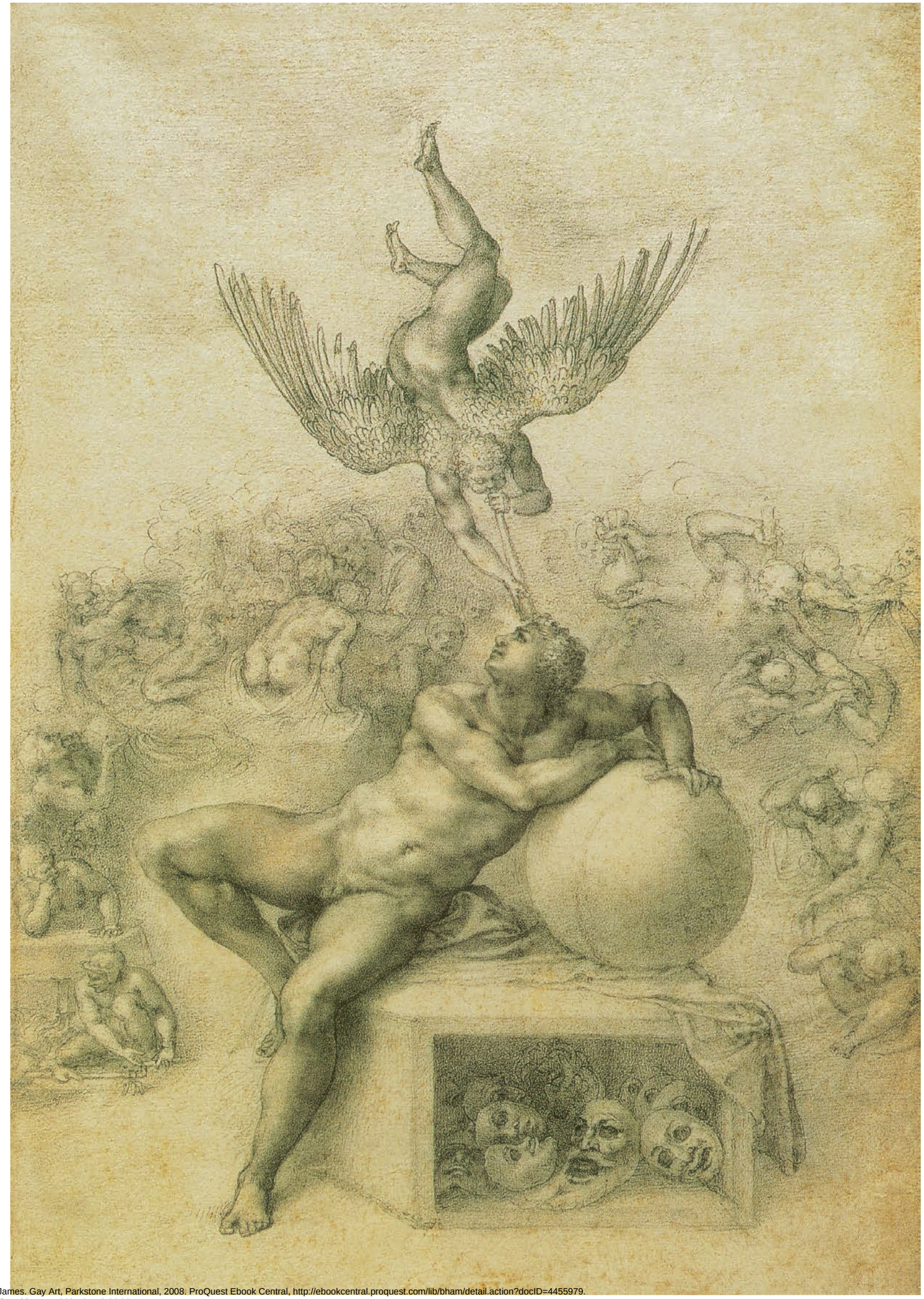

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He made little excuses for his desires and was outspoken against those who found him contemptible. He is credited with contributing to the flowering of Sienese art in the sixteenth century by introducing the more cosmopolitan lessons of Leonardo and Raphael. Art historians have tended to classify Il Sodoma as a minor figure, as someone who never mastered fully the influences and ideas of his many illustrious contemporaries. It is suspected that knowledge of his homosexuality has played a major part in negatively assessing his achievements. Be that as it may, however, the strength of Il Sodoma's work is clear. His depiction of the male figure is bold and realistic (Derek Duncan, "Sodoma, Il (Giovanni Antonio Bazzi)," in Haggerty, p.828). Among other things, Bazzi is known for exploiting the nude beauty of Christ and male saints (Saslow, p.99).

Despite his brash and swashbuckling libertinism, the works of Il Sodoma were relatively tame as compared with the blatant eroticism of Guilio Romano, a pupil of the great Renaissance painter Raphael. In 1524, Romano produced a series of erotic drawings of positions of heterosexual intercourse called *I Modi*. These were engraved and published in Rome by Marcantonio Raimondi. Each engraving was accompanied by a humorous sonnet from Pietro Aretino. Included with these were some erotic prints based on mythological themes that commanded a growing market throughout the sixteenth century. One such scene shows an ephebic Hyacinth in the arms of Apollo. The painter and art biographer, Giorgio Vasari, as well as the Pope, Clement VII, were offended and the latter had many of the more

69. **Michelangelo Buonarroti**, *The Dream of Human Life*, c. 1533. The Courtauld Gallery, London.
70. **Michelangelo Buonarroti**, *The Rape of Ganymede*, 1532-1533. Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge (Massachusetts).

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pornographic prints destroyed and the engraver imprisoned. Woodcut copies after the *I Modi* prints and Aretino's sonnets did survive in a bound edition dating from the 1520s. Romano's drawings were offensive not because they were erotic, but because they were not mythological and depicted scenes of everyday people in contemporary bedrooms.

Benvenuto Cellini (1500-71)

Cellini was the premier mannerist practitioner of goldsmithing and sculpture in sixteenth-century Italy. He worked under successive popes, the king of France, and Cosimo de' Medici. We know quite a bit about Cellini's same-sex attractions and affections thanks, in part, to the uninhibited life he led. Official court documents record his conviction for sodomy in Florence on two separate occasions – in 1523 and 1557. He received a lenient sentence for his first offence, but his second conviction (in which he pleaded guilty to habitually sodomising his young apprentice over a five-year period) occurred during the stricter morality of the later Renaissance.

For his latter conviction, he was condemned to four years house arrest. It was at this time that he dictated his famous autobiography (first published in the eighteenth century) to a fourteen-year-old assistant. The autobiography is written in a colloquial style and says nothing about his acts of sodomy. Numerous passages do indicate, however, that Cellini's attractions to and relations with his young male shop assistants figured prominently not only in his private life but in his public reputation at the time.

Cellini restored an antique marble male torso and proposed it to Duke Cosimo I de' Medici as a Ganymede. Perhaps out of jealousy, one of Cellini's artistic rivals, Bandinelli, publicly accused him of being a sodomite. Cellini responded to the accusation by stating in public: "I wish to God I did know how to engage in such a noble practice; after all, we read that Jove enjoyed it with Ganymede in paradise, and here on earth it is the practice of the greatest emperors and kings." (Quoted in Saslow, p.113). This retort was more than a public acknowledgement of his sexual proclivities, for it also implicated the sympathies of his patron, Duke Cosimo, toward such behaviour. Cellini was imprisoned for his indiscretion.

There are noteworthy male nude figures carved in marble by Cellini that play with the homoerotic theme. His *Narcissus* and a life-size group of *Apollo and Hyacinth*, both in the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, are two examples (cf. William B. MacGregor, "Benvenuto Cellini," in Haggerty, pp.177-8).

71. *Monk and Youth*, early 6th century. Ceramic Plate. Musée national du Moyen Âge - Thermes et hôtel de Cluny, Paris.

72. **Benvenuto Cellini**, *Apollo and Hyacinth*, 1545-1548. Marble. Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

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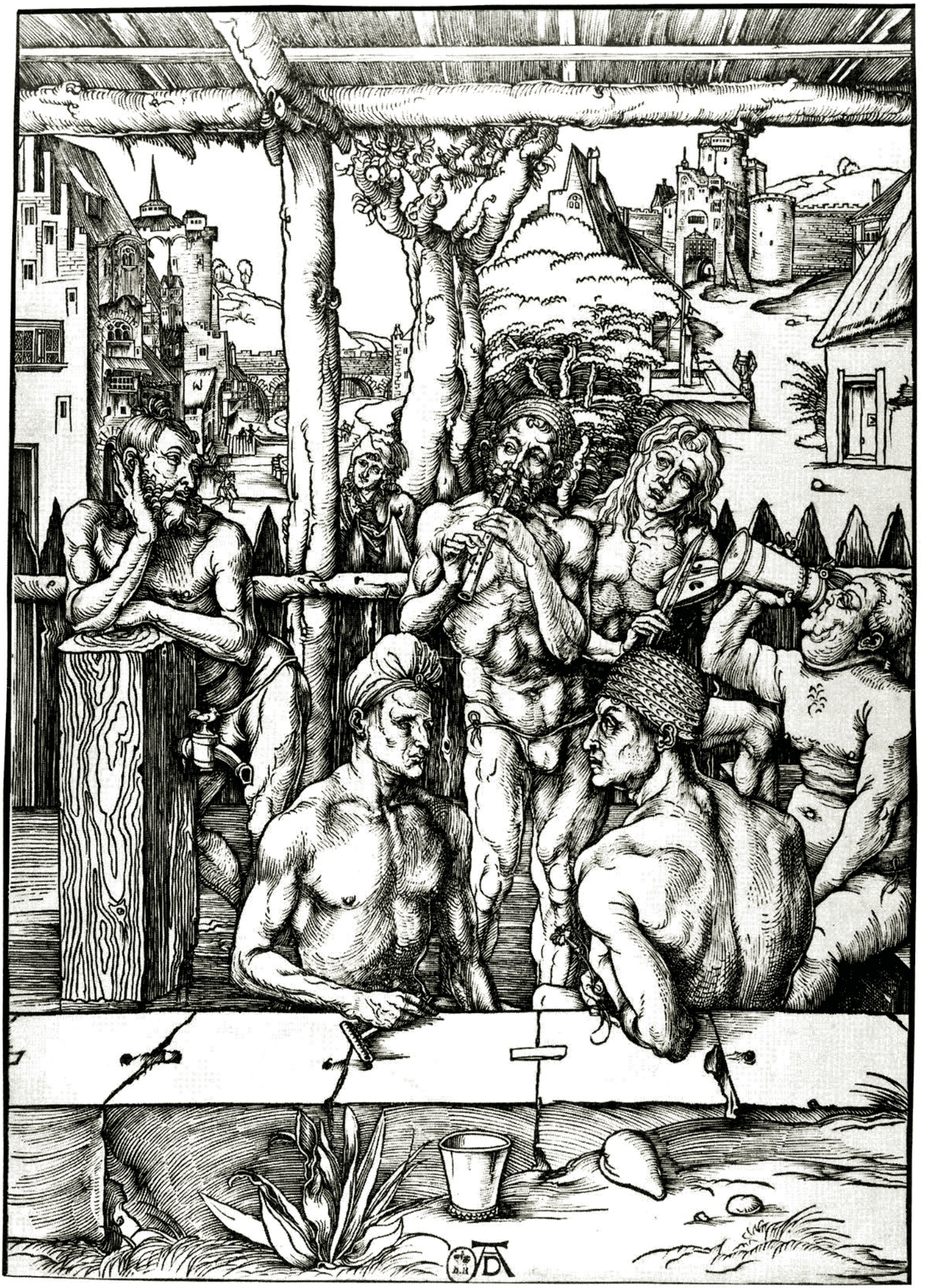

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The Northern Renaissance

Italian Renaissance art and ideas spread north of the Alps and into other parts of Western Europe. Although many northern European artists did admire and study Italian classicism, few of them let it overwhelm their regional traditions and approaches to art. Northern artists of this period tended to adhere to a strict graphic realism and preferred caricature and images of the grotesque. Also, social issues were usually placed in familiar genre scenes rather than in scenes of symbolic myth (Saslow, p.92). As was the case in Italy, sodomy in Northern Europe was not tolerated. In the north as in Italy, the more prevalent cases of sodomy became, the more they were severely prosecuted.

Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) was one of the more noteworthy German artists of northern Renaissance Europe. He was from Nuremberg and has been called the "Leonardo of the North". Although he was married and never publicly acknowledged homosexual desire or exhibited homosexual behaviour, some of his works do contain homoerotic undertones. It is likely that Dürer, the son of a goldsmith, was introduced to the possibility of "learned homosexuality" by his friend Willibald Pirckheimer, a humanist scholar from Nuremberg who had studied in Italy. Several comments in letters between Dürer and Pirckheimer indicate a penchant for bisexuality and misogyny. Dürer often poked fun at Pirckheimer's dual fondness for German girls and Italian soldiers. Pirckheimer in turn noted on one of Dürer's drawings, "with erect penis, into the man's rectum". In addition to Pirckheimer, Dürer may have also been influenced by humanist thought during two visits to Venice – the first time in 1494-5 and again in 1506-7.

It is possible that homosexuality for both Pirckheimer and Dürer was more a matter of expressing misogynist wit and sophisticated mythological allusions than expression of any 'genuine' homoerotic desire on their parts (cf. Christopher S. Wood, "Albrecht Dürer," in Haggerty, 262-3).

In addition to his reputation as rake and misogynist, Dürer was also known for his vanity, boasting often of his good looks. During the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, he created a series of self-portraits that, at times, appear dandyish and narcissistic.

73. **Albrecht Dürer**, *Bathhouse*, c. 1496. Woodcut. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

74. **Albrecht Dürer**, *Self-Portrait (Nude)*, c. 1505. 29.2 x 15.4 cm. Kunstsammlung, Weimar.

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The Later Italian Renaissance

Agnolo Bronzino (1503-72), court painter to Duke Cosimo I de' Medici, was one of the premier portrait painters in mid-sixteenth-century Florence. Like Michelangelo, he too was an accomplished poet whose verses were filled with homoerotic overtones and allusions. He produced some striking portraits of eroticised male sitters, young and old. Among his more provocative portraits are his *Andrea Doria as Neptune* and his *Cosimo I de' Medici as Orpheus* (Philadelphia Museum of Art).

Florentine humanism continued to blossom under Cosimo de' Medici's grandson, Lorenzo the Magnificent, and classical antiquity continued to provide ample subject matter for homoerotic expressions. Many of Lorenzo's closest artist friends exhibited homosexual tendencies in both their art and lives. These included Donatello, Michelangelo, Benvenuto Cellini, Angelo Poliziano, and Leonardo da Vinci (Maggi in Haggerty, p.487). Ironically, under Lorenzo's government, the Office of the Night condemned and executed almost a thousand men for acts of homosexuality.

In their works, various artists beginning with Donatello, illustrated the popular mythic lovers Apollo, Narcissus, Bacchus, and especially Ganymede, who best fit the Florentine version of Greek pederasty (Saslow, p.87). One late fifteenth-century artist whose work was particularly inspired by a combination of humanist thought and Neo-Platonic ideas was Sandro Botticelli. Botticelli is known for creating poetic fantasies for the Medici family. These included his *Primavera* (c.1482), and *The Birth of Venus* (c.1482).

He was the quintessential Neo-Platonic painter but avoided allusions to homoerotic myths (Saslow, pp.87-8). His homoerotic sensibility surfaces, however, mainly in religious works where he imbued such nude young saints as *Sebastian* with the same androgynous grace and implicit physicality as Donatello's *David* (Saslow, p.88).

In 1494, a popular uprising caused the expulsion of the Medicis from Florence. A crusading Dominican monk named Girolamo Savonarola ruled the city and started a fierce campaign against what he considered to be carefree sexual and artistic license. He threatened artists as well as clergymen with the wrath of God if they did not give up their profligate ways. His warnings were taken seriously by many people including Botticelli who, like Leonardo, was denounced for practising sodomy.

To protect himself, he burned many of his earlier paintings and produced only sacred and mystical subjects (Saslow, p.89). As Savonarola's brash style struck terror in the hearts of many, it also produced many enemies and his reign was short-lived. After only four years of fire and brimstone, he was condemned and burned alive in 1498.

In 1564, partly as a response to the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Council of Trent sought a return to medieval purity and monastic simplicity through a series of moral and doctrinal reforms (Saslow, p.112). Artists were put under surveillance by their local bishops. The Council saw the pagan aspects of antiquity and the Renaissance revival of these as a threat.

Neo-Platonism, with its combined religious and homoerotic dimensions, became particularly worrisome. In the religious art it patronised, the church forbade nudity or pagan subjects. Mythological subjects gradually began to

75. **Sandro Botticelli**, *The Birth of Venus*, c. 1484. Tempera on canvas, 173 x 279 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.
76. **Sandro Botticelli**, *La Primavera: Allegory of Spring*, c. 1482. Tempera on wood panel, 203 x 314 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

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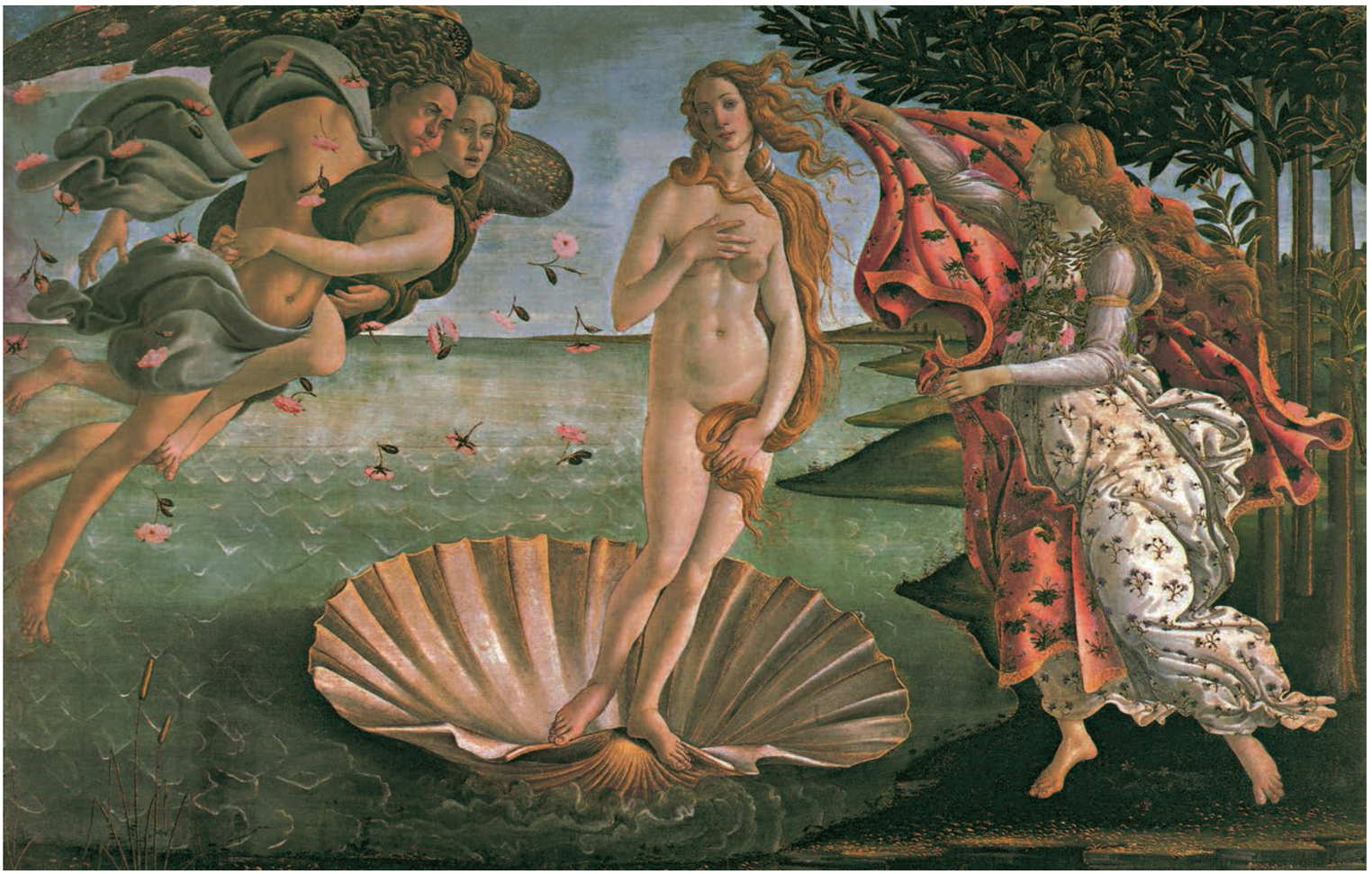

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decline in number to "a set of conventional fairy tales suited for minor decoration" (Saslow, p.112). Responding to a threat of Protestant subversion, the church formalised print censorship in 1557. Controls that had applied to Romano's *I Modi* were now extended to printed and painted images.

The Baroque Period

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610) is the most noteworthy artist of the late Renaissance period and laid the artistic foundations for the seventeenth-century Baroque style. Much of his life and the nature of his sexuality remain clouded in ambiguity and controversy. There is, however, a strong presence of homoeroticism in much of his work. Caravaggio's reputation was set when he was commissioned to paint, in 1597, a cycle of the life of Saint Matthew in the Contarelli Chapel in Rome.

These paintings were to signal his signature subject matter and style: a contemporary, unidealised depiction of the subjects with emphasis on coarse and muscular figures presented in ungainly, inelegant poses. He became known for his virtuoso use of a sharp demarcation of lights and darks (known as chiaroscuro). He exploited homoerotic mythology and genre, and also used self-portraiture to make veiled statements about his own sexual nature. Despite his celebrity and reputation, Caravaggio's personal life suffered from bouts of violence due to an uncontrollable temper. He was arrested several times for brawling, libel, and assaults with weapons. In 1606 he was wounded and had to flee Rome after the murder of an opponent in a sports game. He died in 1610, perhaps of pneumonia at the Port' Ercole.

Sometime after 1588, Caravaggio left his native city of Milan for Rome and acquired the patronage of Cardinal Francesco del Monte. It was during this period that he produced many celebrated paintings of young sensual and androgynous street youths he employed as models. The homoerotic nature of Caravaggio's early paintings was due to their patronage by the cardinal, a known admirer of young men and admittedly a strong influence on Caravaggio's choice of subjects. The cardinal was one of a circle of wealthy churchmen and nobles with pederastic tastes.

For these patrons, the artist produced a few religious themes with potential for homoerotic and spiritual meaning. For example, his *Saint John the Baptist* communicates a sensual relationship between the saint and the ram. He also created many mythological scenes of scantily clad ephebic youths offering the viewer fruit or wine, or playing music. It has been suggested that some of the figures in these images might be self-portraits of the artist (Saslow, 115).

Although Caravaggio's early works are clearly homoerotic in nature, his own sexual orientation is difficult to determine precisely. In 1603, Caravaggio was put on trial for libel. In the trial, one Giovanni Battista is described in an account as Caravaggio's *bardassa* (kept boy). Art historian Howard Hibbard has commented on Caravaggio's sexuality in a biographical and critical study of the artist. He observes: "Whether Caravaggio was essentially or exclusively homosexual is far from certain … Although we do need to presume that Caravaggio's pictures with homoerotic content are necessarily more confessional than others, there is a notable absence of the traditional erotic females… In his entire career, he did not paint a single female nude." (Howard Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, New York, Harper and Row, 1983, p.97).

With the late Renaissance and Baroque periods, a distinct male homosexual subculture became more visible and more active especially as cities grew in population (David Garnes, "Caravaggio (b. Michelangelo Merisi),"

77. **Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio**, *Bacchus*, c. 1596. Oil on canvas, 95 x 85 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

78. **Peter Paul Rubens**, *Jupiter and Callisto*, 1613. Oil on canvas, 202 x 305 cm. Staatliche Museen, Kassel.

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Haggerty, pp.170-71). Those who patronised art and artists were part of a learned elite who became increasingly visible and important even as they intermingled with the middle and working classes (Saslow, 117). Despite the relatively liberal attitude towards homosexuality in Italy during this time, homosexuals in other countries such as Spain and Portugal continued to be burned at the stake.

Female Homosexuality in the Renaissance

During the Italian Renaissance, female homosexuality was largely relegated to the background of art and literature. As had been the case in ancient Greece, men's sexuality seemed to have mattered more than women's. Renaissance society segregated women at home or in convents and they were allowed only minimal education. Men did concede, however, that enforcing the chastity of women while confining them to all-female environments like convents could lead to homosexual activities (Saslow, 90-1). There are a few scenes in art that depict physical intimacy between women. One of the earliest is an engraving by the North Italian printmaker Zoan Andrea entitled *Woman and Her Maid* (c.1500).

The pretexts used by many Renaissance male artists for bringing together women in representation were bather scenes and mythological subjects. The former category typically included scenes of Diana (goddess of chastity, the moon, and the hunt) or Venus (goddess of love) bathing with nymphs. These subjects were depicted mostly in paintings and prints. It was during this period where prints showing mostly women supplied a growing market for both heterosexual and homosexual erotica.

In Italy, bath scenes were frequently mythological in nature and filled with clinging groups of female nudes for the sexual titillation of the heterosexual male viewer. Images of women bathing together have a long history in the history of art and were often produced for male heterosexual pleasure. In the 1540s, Jean Mignon engraved such a scene after a painting by Luca Penni. Here, we have entered inside the private world of women bathing with approximately a dozen languorous nudes shown eating, drinking, and fondling one another. The seated couple at the far right embrace intimately with hands placed at their crotches (Saslow, p.105).

As Saslow points out, the flurry of imagery based on bathing scenes and the myth of Diana did not mean that there was an increased visibility of female homosexuals in Renaissance society (Saslow, p.106). These kinds of scenes were typically patronised by heterosexual men to satisfy their own sexual wants and they say little about tolerance towards women engaging in actual homosexual practices on their own. Misogyny reigned strong in Europe and women's sexual gratification was, if not for serving the purpose of men's delight, then completely ignored.

During the Renaissance, the pleasure that two women could experience by close physical contact was not recognised as sexual. Female homosexual behaviour was unimaginable in the minds of most men because the obligatory phallus was absent. Even masturbation among women was unimaginable for many Renaissance men, for sexual pleasure, they believed, was only attainable with a penis. As had been the case during the Middle Ages, female homosexual behaviour during the Italian Renaissance became a threat and abomination only when an artificial phallus (dildo) was used because this was seen as co-opting the penetrative and reproductive primacy of the male sex organ (Simons, p.87).

79. **Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio**, *Victorious Amor* or *Cupid*, 1601-1602. Oil on canvas, 156 x 113 cm. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.

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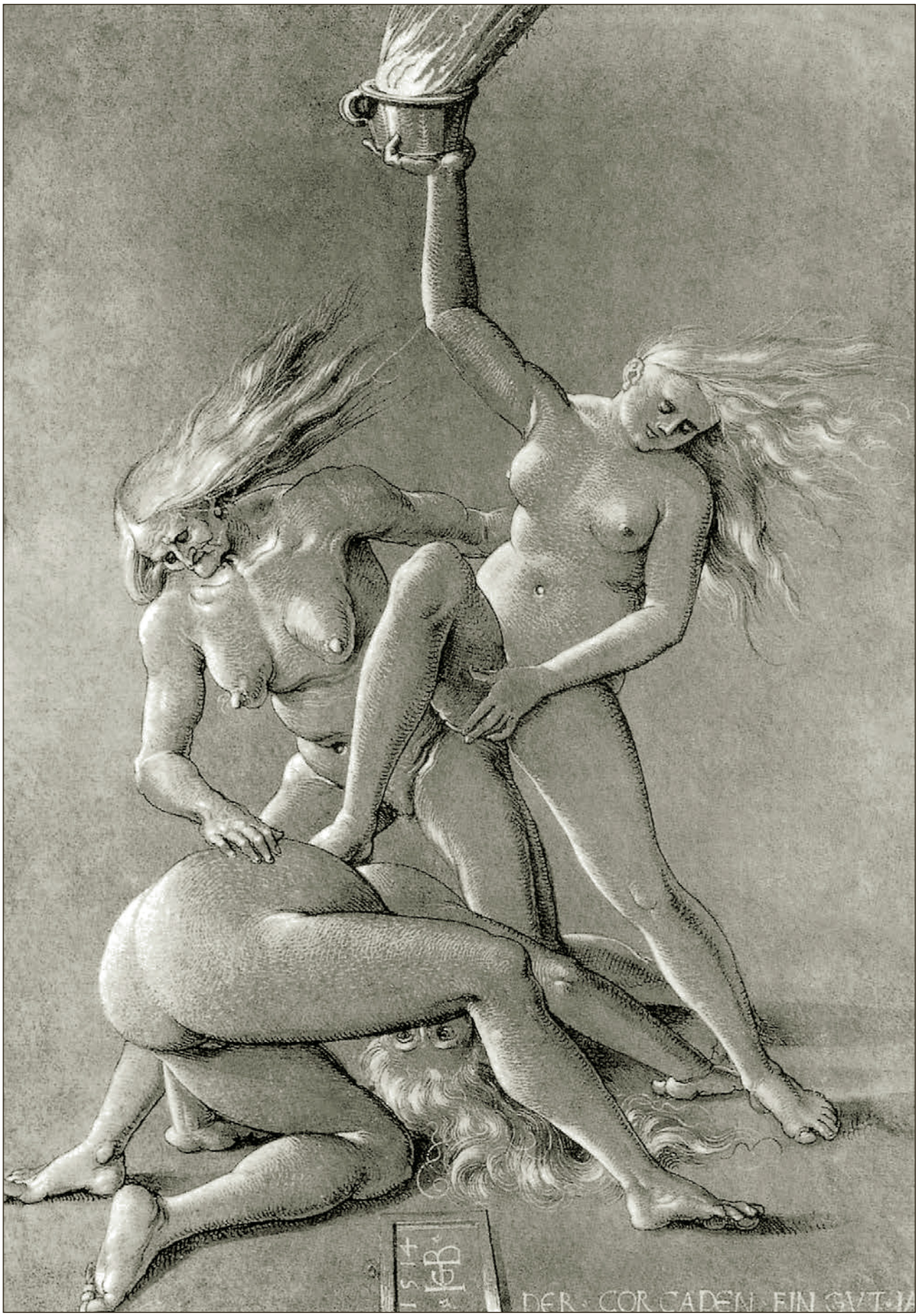

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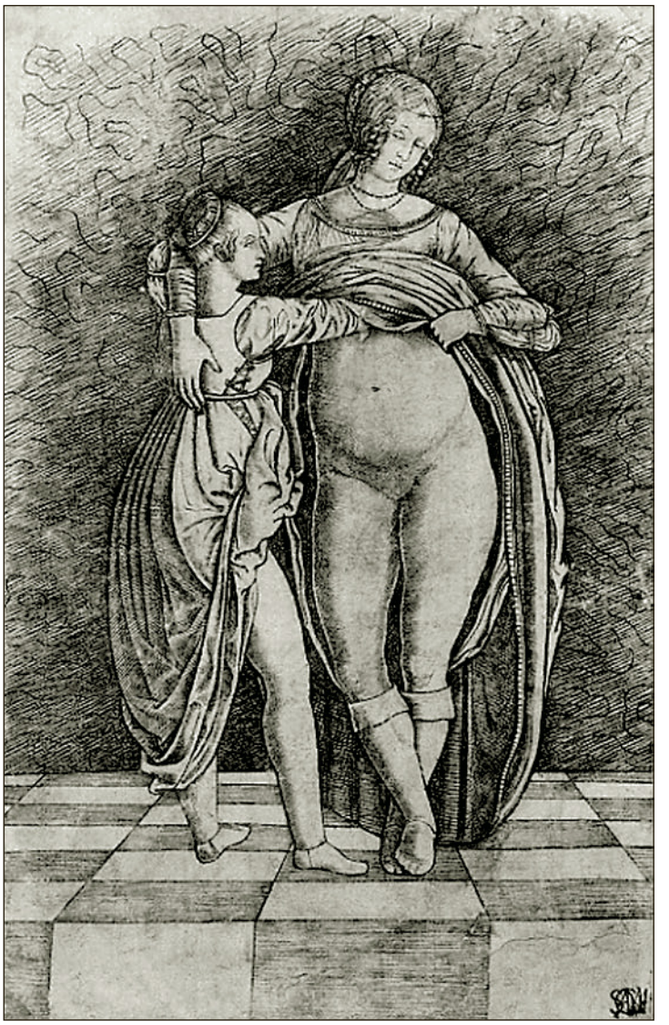

One area of concern in which women's sexuality was demonised was witchcraft. In many countries of the north during the Renaissance, witchcraft was associated specifically with "mannish women". The focus on witchcraft was fuelled by late medieval superstition and intolerance. The belief swept Europe from the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries. Witchcraft and homosexuality were linked with heresy and both were prosecuted severely. Women, mostly powerless spinsters or widows, were the overwhelming targets of such accusations.

In art, diabolical heresy was associated almost exclusively with female bacchanales. Simons has noted: "Many of the illustrations of witches produced in sixteenth-century Europe bespeak patriarchal fears of female sexuality outside masculine control." (Simons, p.88). Women and rarely men were considered witches because it was believed that "all witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is, in women, insatiable" (Simons, p.88).

80. **Hans Baldung**, known as **Baldung Grien**, *The Witches' Orgy*, 1514. Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna.
81. **Zoan Andrea**, *Woman and her Maid*, c. 1500. Engraving. Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan.
82. **School of Fontainebleau**, *Supposed Portrait of Gabrielle d'Estrées and her Sister the Duchesse de Villars*, 1594. Oil on wood panel, 96 x 125 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

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Chapter 4

Homosexuality in the Art of The Non-Western World (Asia and Islam)

Homosexuality and homoerotic desire were not confined by any means to the art of the Western world. Homosexuality as well as art-making are international phenomena. Both continue to exist in all cultures at all times in history. The status of homosexuality as acceptable or as taboo depends, in large part, on the society concerned and its historical and cultural circumstances. The art of each non-Western society presented here – India, China, Japan, Persia, and Turkey – present unique limitations due to the fragmentary and oftentimes inaccessible visual evidence. Clearly, more work needs to be done in the area of homosexuality and art in the non-Western world. However, with each society there is a very rich literary tradition in which the homosexual and the homoerotic are treated in ways that range from veiled innuendo to the graphically pornographic.

It may come as a surprise to many Westerners to learn that the ancient cultures of India, China, Japan, Persia, and Turkey produced a large amount of hetero - and homo-erotic art based on the recognition that sex in human life was of vital importance to a culture's survival. Such beliefs also became part of the religious and philosophical systems of these societies. Hinduism, Islam, and Taoist philosophies, for instance, all recognise basic sexual relations as natural and beautiful. Contrary to the West with its religious and moral strictures against pleasures of the body, the Hindu, Islamic, and Taoist philosophers of days past respected human sexuality as a means of joining the physical and the spiritual to achieve an enlightened state (Saslow, p.125). The automatic relationship between sexual desire and evil found in the Judeo-Christian worldview was less potent and less guilt-ridden in most pre-modern Asian and Islamic traditions. Eros in all its variations was cultivated as an art form. However, with the majority of these cultures, there was more to sex than simply satisfying carnal lust. The sexual act itself became part and parcel of myth, ritual, and art.

In the stories and myths of ancient India, China, and Japan, the gods themselves were described as sexual beings that experienced or embodied both male and female tendencies and preferences. Their creation of the world is imagined as "a cosmic copulation, the ideal primal unity of body and soul, matter and spirit" (Saslow, p.126).

The love of sex was not, however, a free-for-all. In most non-Western cultures during the earliest period, family, state, and religion were deemed more important than one's private life. The focus on eros had to be channelled into socially acceptable outlets. There were taboos, but these mostly centred on the participants' gender, class and age Marriage and the siring of children were still expectations demanded by society. So, as had been the case in the West, for anyone with homosexual desires the only realistic outlet was bisexuality, more available to men than to women (Saslow, pp.126-127).

From as early as the eighth century onward, Islamic poetry celebrated male love for boys. This tradition continued in Persian literature by personages as exalted as Babur, founder of the Mughal dynasty, and was depicted by Persian illuminators (Saslow, p.127). Chinese and Japanese literature pioneered prose fiction of male lovers, actors, and bordellos. The illustrated versions of these stories became immensely popular thanks to the invention of new

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83. *Scene of Women Having Group Sex* from the Western group of temples in Khajuraho, 11-12th centuries AD.

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printing techniques. Beginning in around 1500, these traditions were altered by increasing contact with Westerners, who were both outraged and titillated by ancient practices of homosexuality.

As the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries progressed, the political and economic domination of Europe over Eastern societies pressured the latter "to conceal or deny their long-standing homosexual traditions" (Saslow, p.127). Western homophobia was introduced to India and China by way of cross-cultural visual propaganda. As well, direct missionary work contributed to the imposition of 'Victorian' sexual mores in India, Communist China, and the Islamic world (Saslow, p.128). Fear of homosexuality and the taboo against it also resulted from forces within these societies as well. There were indigenous movements for sexual austerity, for instance among the puritanical Indian Brahmins and Chinese neo-Confucians. At a certain point in its history, Japan completely shut out Western influences until the mid-nineteenth century when a strict reforming regime came to power just before the country reopened to foreign influence.

India

India is renowned for its sexually explicit temple paintings, sculptures, illustrated sex manuals, novels, and poetry. It was in the arts of India that "the spiritual acceptance of eros" found its most carefree expression. In India, life revolved around time-honoured religious beliefs and customs and within those traditions male and female sexuality played important roles. The sexual force, what we would call the libido, is the basic driving energy that lies behind all imagery in Indian art. This world view comes out of Hinduism, one of the two major religions of India (the other is Buddhism; Islam was later introduced in the fifteenth century). Hinduism is among the world's oldest living religions dating back four thousand years.

Adherents to the Hindu faith believe in reincarnation, revere the early scriptures known as Vedas, and view the sex act as a sanctified act – as part of religion (see Peter Webb, *Erotic Arts*, p.73; Saslow, p.129). Early Hindu society was tolerant when it came to sexuality and love. Most of the Hindu religious and classical texts do not mention homosexuality, and the *Laws of Manu* (written around 200 BC) only prohibited male and female sexuality when partners violated the rules of caste and kinship.

In the Hindu pantheon, gods always have a dual sexual and emotional nature. Certain Hindu divinities, such as Shiva-Parvati, were bisexual and depicted as half-man, half-woman. This union of male and female tendencies held spiritual meaning and approximated the significance of the androgyne in the West. The dual sexual nature of the god reflected an attempt to transcend "the earthly illusion of two fixed and opposite genders" (Saslow, p.129). The androgynous character of the god-goddess often encouraged rituals in which transvestism and homosexual acts were sometimes performed.

The visual expression of combined spirituality and sexuality in Hindu art is most frequently found in high-relief architectural sculpture located on temples or other places of spiritual worship. These carvings of sacred or loving couples, called mithuna or maithuna, show partners engaged in a variety of sexual positions recalling those of the *Kama Sutra* sex manual. There is some debate over the exact purpose of these images.

Some believe that they function as protective vehicles or as lessons in morality and prudence for the devotee. Because they are located on buildings associated with spirituality and the gods, it seems correct to assume that they are representations of ritualistic sex acts whose purpose is to join and harmonise the universal physical with the

84. **The Rajasthan School**, *Two Women Making Love*, late 18th century. Collection Giti Thadani.

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universal spiritual. Most maithuna scenes are heterosexual, but a small percentage of them do depict male couples or all-female groups in lesbian unions. The symbolism of divine sexuality, of the sex act as a gathering and channelling of spiritual energy, remains the same no matter the gender of the partners.

For both monks and nuns, the monastic life provided the opportunity to engage in intimate relations with same-sex partners. The same-sex environment of the monastery fostered a preponderance of homosexual relationships between the working monks, especially between those assigned to large monasteries. However, homosexual relations were by no means restricted to this segment of the religious population.

In the seventeenth century, an anonymous Persian miniaturist produced an image intended to illustrate a translation of a thirteenth-century Indian sex manual called the *Koka Shastra*. The miniature was made for the Mughals or Moguls, who had conquered India and introduced Islam into that country under Babur (1483-1540). It was in Mughal India where aristocratic pederasty was recorded in beautiful and enchanting poetic verse. *Lesbian Allegory* was printed in multiple copies as a popular handbook and came long after the older and renowned *Kama Sutra*. Indian, Chinese, and Japanese patrons often commissioned such how-to books featuring both words and pictures.

85. *Lesbian Allegory*, Mughal India, 17th century. Illuminated manuscript from *Koka Shastra*.

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The *Kama Sutra*, written in the fourth century by the Hindu sage Vatsyayana, has become the most famous work on all types of sexuality and forms of erotic desire. It was also at this time when the birth of secular art and literature began to flourish in India. Although most of the sexual activities described in the *Kama Sutra* are heterosexual, its aim was to discuss all kinds of sexual inclinations as "finality in itself" (Alain Danielou, *The Complete Kama Sutra*, Rochester, Vermont, Park Street Press, 1994, p.29; Ruth Vanita, "Vatsyayana's Kama Sutra," in Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwal, eds., *Same-Sex Love in India*, New York, St Martin's Press, 2000, p.46). The *Kama Sutra* text consists of a series of brief and almost cryptic statements written in Sanskrit about "the arts of life and love" (see Kumkum Roy, "Unravelling the *Kama Sutra*," *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 3, no.2, 1996, pp.155-170). Because of its nearly indecipherable nature, many scholars beginning with Richard Burton have attempted to interpret specific passages of the *Kama Sutra* on anal sex, oral sex, third-gender sex, and homosexuality. Many of the Sanskrit words used to describe these activities or the types of people associated with them, are often vague or ambiguous.

Although Vatsyayana wrote about a variety of erotic techniques and positions, he was, for the most part writing for a heterosexual audience and from a male point of view. As the social structure dictated, women were consigned to an inferior status while men were allowed to enjoy as many wives and concubines as they could afford (Saslow, p.131). By contrast, women were not allowed to engage in any form of sexual activity they desired. The control over women and their bodies was codified in the *Laws of Manu* (see Giti Thadani, Sakhiyani: *Lesbian Desire in Ancient and Modern India*, New York and London, Cassell, 1996, pp.53-4) Within these laws, lesbian sexuality was also circumscribed.

In some passages, Vatsyayana speaks of women pleasuring each other with dildos. However, his descriptions can not be taken literally because it was required that an unmarried women not be deflowered before marriage; moreover, charges of adultery could be brought against a married woman who engaged in such activity. Therefore, the *Lesbian Allegory* from the *Koka Shastra* can not be taken literally, but is simply "an extravagant variation on Vatsyayana's frequent metaphor of lovemaking as a playful form of war, in which 'attacks' with stimulating 'weapons' might lead both combatants to the pleasurable 'victory' of orgasm" (Saslow, p.131).

Buddhism, which grew out of Hinduism, became a viable religion around 500 AD with the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, a prophet honoured as Buddha, the enlightened one. As a religion, Buddhism is extremely varied and there is no one single point of view regarding homosexuality. There is, however, a fundamental ambivalence on the issue of

86. *Body Massage with Aromatic Oils*, 18th century. Gouache on paper, 22.8 x 17.8 cm. Collection Ajit Mookerjee, Rajasthan.

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87. *Two Men Making Love on a Terrace*, Qing Dynasty, 18-19th centuries. Painting on silk.

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homosexual love. Central to the tenets of the religion is the belief in the importance of moral discipline. The ordained Buddhist monk or nun was held up as the ultimate role model for leading a life that is supposed to include, among other things, strict celibacy.

Sexuality plays little role in Buddhist art outside Tantrism. As an esoteric belief system, Tantrism, a cult within Buddhism, promoted rituals that "aimed at harnessing erotic energy for spiritual transcendence" (Saslow, p.131). Tantrism is a special yoga that requires preparation through specified rituals, mantras, and meditation. It is a "cult of ecstasy" whose goal is to "propel the consciousness towards blissful enlightenment" (Webb, p.80). However, as with Hinduism, Tantrism is not a cult of free-for-all sexual indulgence. The capture and release of this erotic energy had to be properly controlled and channelled.

The ritualistic and sacred nature of sexual intercourse found in the *Kama Sutra* is also manifested in album miniature paintings popular at the courts of India. The small works often show couples of aristocratic status engaged in acrobatic positions while conducting sexual intercourse. Heterosexual scenes often show a prince with his palace consort. These miniatures also relate in concept to the sexual symbolism of the maithuna. Many such erotic album paintings refer to Tantric practices in their depiction of sexual intercourse, treated as it is with ritualistic precision as both sex instruction manual and paradigm for the divine sex act or symbol of divine bliss. These are earthly manifestations of heavenly activities, depicted in a poetic manner developed through delicate and yet powerful design.

The art of India developed a Puritan strain when, by the end of the eighteenth century, the conservative Brahmin sect, who exerted a dominating influence over religious practices and social mores, put an end to any and all practices and imagery of an erotic nature. As well, foreigners from Great Britain, who wanted to expand their colonising and imperialist influence throughout the world, arrived in India in the nineteenth century and imposed their own Victorian moral standards on Indian society. They convinced the Brahmins to persecute other Hindus and close down the erotic temples. To this day, India has never really recovered from the stultifying effects of this wave of Puritanism.

China

An important, yet neglected aspect of Chinese history is its long and viable tradition of homosexuality in both art and letters. Homosexuality in China dates as far back as the Bronze Age (c.1100-256 BC). Literary and physical

88. *Prostitution Scene*, Qing dynasty, late 19th century. Ink and colour on paper.

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89. *A Young Actor and a Young Scholar-Patron*, Qing Dynasty, 18-19th centuries. Oil on silk painting.

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90. *Two Men Having Sexual Intercourse*, Qing Dynasty, 18-19th centuries. Silk painting.

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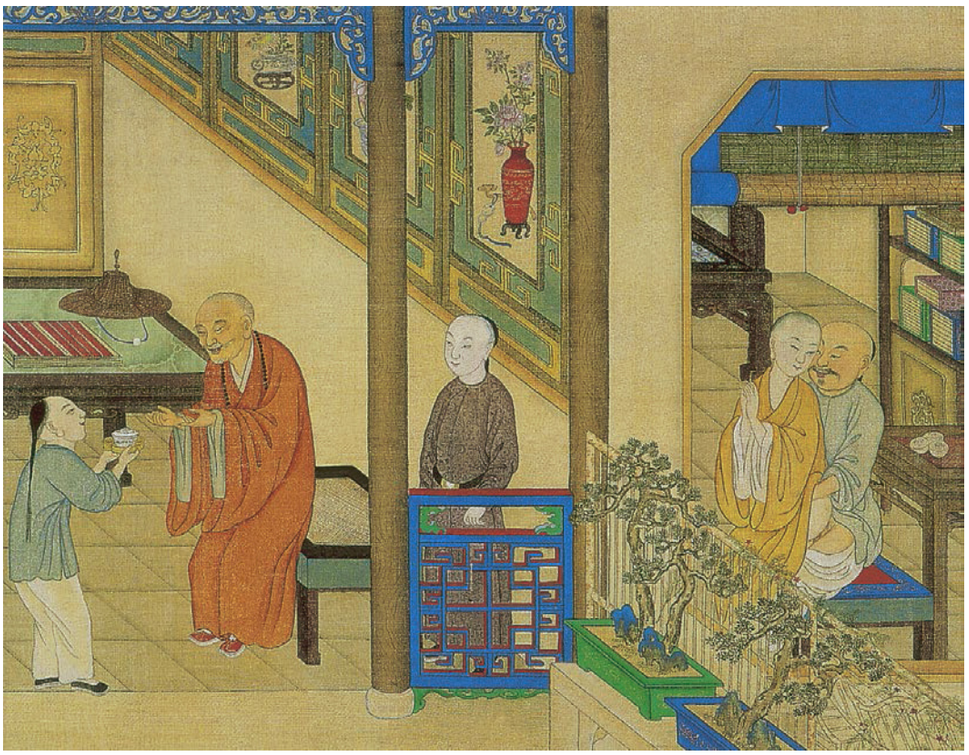

evidence supports the conclusion that homosexuality was acceptable, even common, among different classes and occupations. However, tracking homosexuality in the early periods is difficult due to the fragmentary nature of the sources, the bias of these records toward the experience of a privileged social elite, and the lack of pronouns in the Chinese language to differentiate gender (Bret Hinsch, "China," in Haggerty, p.184). The historical record also reveals that although homosexuality was tolerated, it was still required that an individual eventually marry and procreate. Heterosexuality was the ideal because it embodied the Taoist principle of yin (the feminine principle) and yang (the masculine principle) as representative of a cosmic harmony between opposites. As a compromise, however, bisexuality became preferable over exclusive homosexuality.

Throughout most of early Chinese history, educated officials or literati were notorious for practising pederasty and consorting with male prostitutes. There were laws enacted during the Song Dynasty (960-1280) that attempted to prohibit male prostitution because it went against the effort to strengthen the family as the basic unit of society. Laws against male prostitution peaked during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), when the last emperor took steps against sexual procurement of young boys, homosexual rape, and even consensual homosexual acts. Enforcement of these laws was weak and after 1690, "homosexuality continued as an open and prominent sexual force in Chinese society" (Hinsch in Haggerty, p.186).

The Han Dynasty (206 BC-9 AD) was the high point of homosexual influence at the Chinese court. For more than 150 years of this period, bisexual or homosexual emperors ruled China. These emperors often amassed a stable of young male favourites and eunuchs who frequently attained considerable wealth and influence. To gain the emperor's attention and material favour, many male consorts competed against one another through the wearing of ornate clothing.

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91. *Old Monk Visiting a Rich Man's House*, mid-19th century. Silk painting.

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92. *Rich Man Making Love to a Young Man, Holding Another Man's Arm*, mid-19th century. Silk painting. Collection F. M. Bertholet.

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93. *Scene of Group Sex in a Brothel*, Qing Dynasty, late 19th century. Painting on paper.

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94. *Couple of Actors*, Qing Dynasty. Silk painting.

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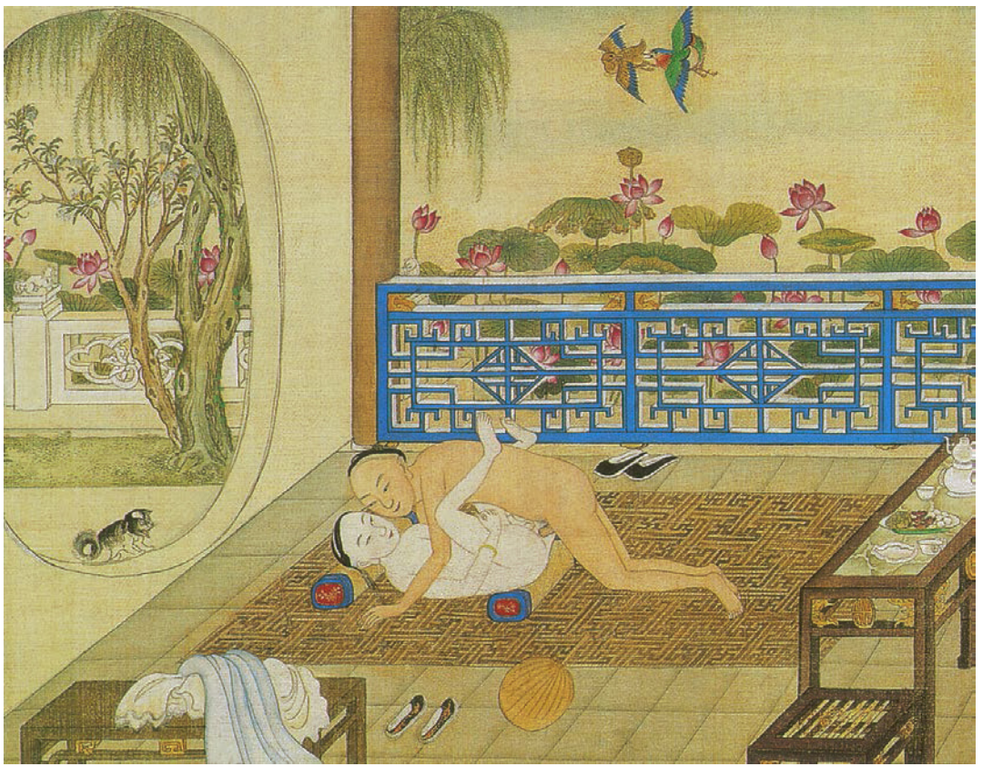

An incident in the life of Dong Xian, a favourite of Emperor Ai, the last adult emperor of the Han Dynasty, exemplifies the extent to which fashion and homosexuality were linked during this period. The story, involving the emperor cutting the sleeve of his robe so as to not wake his beloved who was reclining across the emperor's arm, became so well known that later Chinese authors have used the term "cut sleeve" as a code term for homosexuality (Hinsch in Haggerty, p.185).

Although literature provides most of our evidence for discerning the importance of homosexuality in early Chinese culture, visual art representing same-sex attraction became more common as centuries passed. Few visual images survive intact attesting to the proliferation of homosexuality in China prior to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), when advances in printing technology ushered in the golden age of erotica and printed books. It was during the late Ming period that many watercolours and oil paintings on silk were created that graphically depicted acts of same-sex love. These works not only "crowned a long tradition whose earlier prototypes were all destroyed by the Qing invaders, " (Saslow, p.137) but provide evidence of a large and viable public interested in collecting such works. Many of these were in the form of colour-printed multiples as individual sheets or as illustrations for erotic books, albums, or scrolls. They were often delicate in drawing and design.

As a result of updated printing techniques, the Ming period also witnessed an increase in literacy whereby more people became aware of the long tradition of homosexuality in China's past and used this history to justify their own sexual practices. Most Ming period hetero- and homo-erotica was produced in the southern art centre of Nanjing. Only a very small percentage of these were of lesbian love and only a handful show male homosexual relations. More so than erotica, Ming Dynasty texts provide an historical record of homosexuality in China. They speak constantly of its

95. *Rich Man Making Love to a Boy*, mid-19th century. Silk painting.

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practice not only among the court and literati of previous dynasties, but also among all classes of people throughout all regions of China. Its practice was, however, most frequent in major cities. During this period, homosexuality was celebrated mainly by poets and other men of letters who wrote constantly about the beauty and allure of young male prostitutes.

Although homosexuality flourished in Ming period China, it was not tolerated by everyone. Many Buddhists, for example, saw homosexuality as one part of a more general "sin of sensuality" and campaigned to bring an end to it. Buddhists had a right to be concerned, for it was in the Buddhist monasteries and nunneries where most homosexual activities took place. If one were not part of the monastic tradition of Buddhism, then marriage and continuing the family line were considered one's duty and responsibility.

Even more so than Buddhism, Confucianism, which became the official state religion after the second century BC, was intolerant of all sexual practices that did not adhere to moderation and strict obligations to family, state, and gods. Despite Buddhist and Confucian proscriptions, male homosexuality was, for most of Chinese history, tolerated "provided it was neither exclusive nor permanent, and as long as active and passive sexual roles mirrored the social hierarchies of gender, class, and age" (Saslow, p.133).

As China entered the Qing era, homosexuality continued to maintain a high profile. It was during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) that Chinese theatre, opera, and drama flourished. The theatre and Chinese opera were dominated by popular boy performers, some of whom were transvestites. These performers usually supplemented their incomes by engaging in prostitution with older members of the literati. They constituted a specific class of young men and

96. *The Isle of Women*, c. 1870.

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boys who did not adhere to the Confucian mandate to marry and procreate (Saslow, p.137). In addition to male favourites kept by the emperors, there arose in China a flourishing network of male brothels that catered specifically to these actor-prostitutes and their literati patrons. These male actor-prostitutes are featured in many Qing period paintings. Paralleling these images were several love manuals depicting the gamut of homoerotic scenarios.

Also prevalent were literary works that dramatised the romantic intrigues of these actor-prostitutes and patrons, the most famous of which is *A Precious Mirror of Ranking Flowers* (Pinhua baojian), published in 1849 by Chen Sen. However, by the time Chen Sen wrote this, China had already broken with its past indigenous history of homosexuality. The "flowers" in Chen Sen's title refer to the actor-prostitutes of nearly two centuries earlier. Homosexuality was seen nostalgically, as part of China's past rather than its future. In essence, the Chinese homosexual tradition ended with Chen Sen's story and has yet to be revived. Given the rich history of homosexuality's hand in revitalising the artistic, social, and cultural life of China, it is ironic that today, as one contemporary scholar has noted: "The native homosexual tradition has been virtually forgotten and homosexuality is seen as a recent importation from the decadent West." (Hinsch in Haggerty, p.187).

Traditional Chinese society viewed male homosexuality and lesbianism very differently. Thus, their histories tend to be separate. Female homosexuality was depicted in early Chinese imagery, but the creators of these images were, as in the art of other Western and non-Western cultures, frequently men. There are a few scenes of lesbianism from the Ming period in which women of palace harems are shown amusing themselves and each other with dildos. Most images of all-female sexual activity were intended for illustrated love manuals used by men for their own sexual arousal.

It was due to Western influence that China, within the span of a few generations, shifted from a relatively tolerant society to one openly hostile to homosexuality. It was when the Qing conquered China in 1644 that sexual art declined under dual pressures of Western homophobia and the rise in Confucian asceticism. Also, the Qing reformers began to see that any divergence between their own society and that of the West was a sign of Chinese backwardness. The Qing rulers gradually outlawed all homosexual sex and Chinese ideas about marriage and sexuality were restructured along Western lines.

Japan

The history of homosexuality in Japan has a link with the history of homosexuality in China in that the Japanese, generally speaking, tended to borrow their cultural sources and forms from Chinese literature, religion, writing, and painting. In Japanese history, homosexuality was seen more as one of many activities people chose to engage in than a characteristic of particular individuals (Wim Lunsing, "Japan," in Haggerty, p.493). Legend has it that homosexuality or, more precisely, "boy-love" was imported into Japan by the founder of Japanese esoteric Buddhism, Kobo Daishi, also known as Kukai, (774-835), upon his return from studying Buddhism in China around 800 AD. There is reason to believe, however, that homosexuality existed in Japanese monasteries long before Kukai supposedly imported it from China.

Monastic homosexuality in Japan seems to have had a greater prominence than in China (Murray, *Homosexualities*, p.70). There exists clear evidence in monastic texts that male-male sex proliferated in monasteries especially from the fourteenth century on. Unlike Chinese Buddhism, the ethos of Japanese Buddhism was more favourable to

97. **Kitagawa Utamaro**, *Client and Male Prostitute*, end of 18th century.

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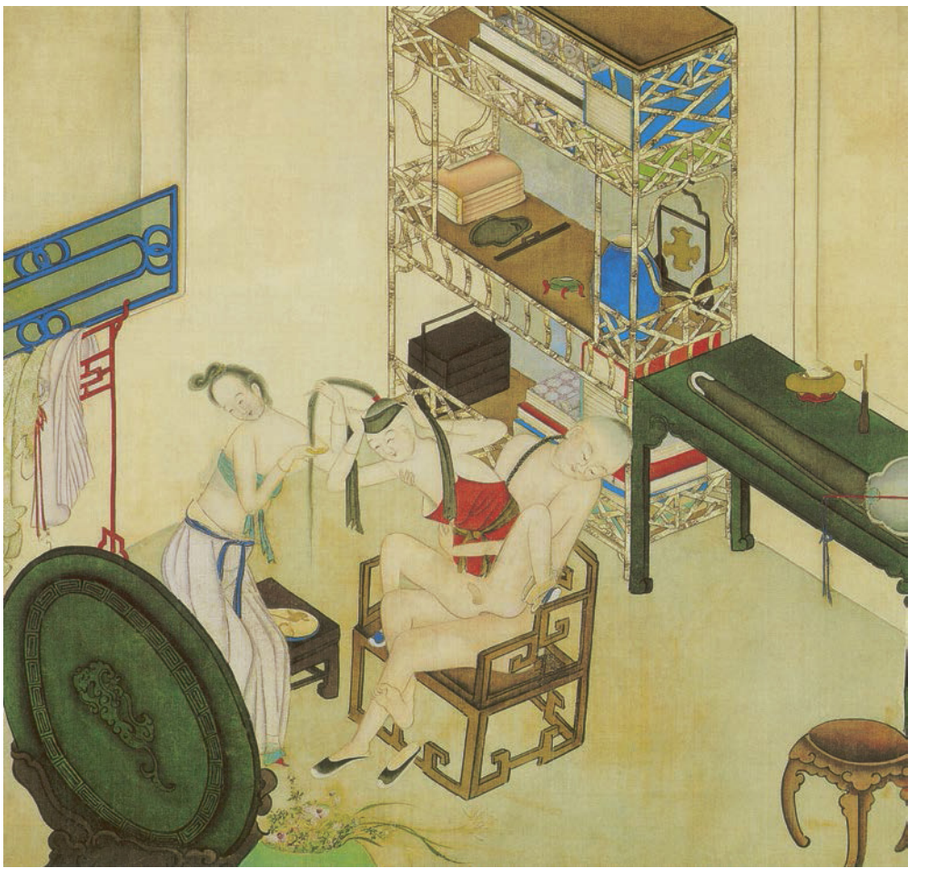

same-sex love, as exemplified in the texts and images regarding the relationship between older monks and young temple acolytes (Cabezón in Haggerty, p.147).

In most of the religious and philosophical traditions of pre-Western influenced Japan, there was little moral sanction against boy-love. This form of sexual indulgence came to be known as the "beautiful way" and seems to have been a compromise between heterosexual overindulgence and complete sexual abstinence. It is within the context of religious belief and monastic practice where homosexuality in Japan developed. In the creation myth of Shinto, the Japanese native animist religion, the world was created by the union of male and female deities. The Shinto gods and goddess were described as bisexual fertile deities with oversized genitals.

There seems to have been considerable tolerance of varied forms of sexual behaviour in the Shinto tradition. As well, Japanese Confucian scholars, unlike their Chinese counterparts, appear to have had little concern over homosexuality and, in the Tokugawa period (1603-1868), some Confucian scholars were believed to have been sexually attracted to male prostitutes (Leupp, p.33).

As in other areas of East Asia, the concept of yin and yang influenced Japanese views about sexuality. Although it was a man's duty to eventually marry and produce children, bisexuality did become the familiar norm in Japan. However, in male same-sex relationships, sexual activity was regulated by strict codes of age and status. Active and passive roles

98. *Love Scene in Front of a Mirror*, 18th century. Silk painting.

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were assigned to partners based on age. The preferred sexual act was anal sex with the older partner designated as penetrator, while the younger one was receiver. Japanese scenes of male eros are referred to generally as *nanshoku*.

These range in subject matter from the subtlety of men or adolescents kissing or fondling fully clothed boys, to explicit portrayals of anal sex. Curiously, there are no scenes of oral sex between men or between men and women. It has been suggested that the reason for this may be that with fellatio the passive and active roles are ambiguous and therefore more difficult to discern (see Leupp, pp.191-4).

Shunga, or illustrated erotic books (also called "spring pictures"), were produced for all sexual orientations beginning in the seventh century. These "pillow books" were viewed as instructional manuals and even physicians were advised to consult them. *Shunga* were explicitly erotic paintings on silk, bound together in albums or continuous scrolls. Sometimes they were given as gifts to future brides or to young men before marriage.

Many of the earliest *shunga* albums and scrolls have deteriorated due to overuse. There is one surviving series consisting of a ten-panel scroll published by Tsuneo Watanabe and showing prostitutes, *samurai*, and other men in a variety of erotic positions, including voyeurism and a *ménage à trois*. Unlike Chinese erotic prints that tend to show the sex act in a relatively poetic and subdued manner, these Japanese scenes often show the figures in the highly passionate throes of erotic abandon sometimes to the point of comical exaggeration. Japanese erotic prints

99. **Isoda Koryūsai**, *Two Women Making Love*, 18th century. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

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100. **Suzuki Harunobu**, *Shunga* from a series of 24 erotic engravings, c. 1750. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

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101. **Kitao Masanobu**, *A Woman and two Men*. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

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tend to be more graphic, colourful, and expressive in nature than their Chinese counterparts. They are characterised by close attention to detail and realism. Enlarged genitals are a unique characteristic of Japanese erotic prints that distinguish them from Chinese depictions. They are the focus of sensation and attention.

Enlarged genitals, perhaps even grotesque for some, work in relation to the voluminous fabrics worn by protagonists and the surface patterns to intensify the dramatic and extravagant effect. Much of the script that accompanies the works suggests a great deal about sexual behaviours and attitudes of the time. *Nanshoku* typically depict teahouse scenes in which *samurai*, commoners, or monks engage in sex with boy-prostitutes. Sometimes, the presence of a girl or woman creates a bisexual atmosphere (Leupp, p.79). Most of the erotic paintings and prints show both partners partly clothed. In some prints, the one penetrated often wears female kimono, sports a female hairstyle and would, but for his prominent genitals, be taken for a woman. Without the discernment of genitals, the gender of the figures is ambiguous and the work becomes indistinguishable from scenes of male patrons and female courtesans. In other prints, the one penetrated is dressed, coiffed, and appreciated sexually as a young man. These popular erotic scenes were paralleled by an equally popular barrage of erotic literature.

Little evidence of Japanese interest in female homosexuality exists prior to the seventeenth century except for occasional stories of female intrigue in erotic fiction written by men. As Saslow notes, this long silence is curious given that it was mostly women who pioneered Japanese vernacular literature (Saslow, p.140). The most famous female writer of popular literature was Lady Murasaki Shikibu, whose eleventh-century masterpiece *The Tale of Genji* recounted numerous court intrigues including several episodes of deep male affection, but none between women (Saslow, p.140). It was, perhaps, the blatant misogyny associated with Buddhism that may account for apparent disinterest in women's sexuality and the near obsession with the system of boy-acolytes (*chigo*) in Buddhist monasteries used for domestic chores and for sexual outlet by older monks.

Pre-modern Japanese history (i.e., pre-1868) falls into three overlapping periods. The first concerned itself with court interests and with the Buddhist monastery. The second period was a time in which same-sex passion was practised by a class of feudal knights known as *samurai*. And the third corresponds to the beginning of the Edo period (late seventeenth century) when a middle class rose to support an early modern commercial culture of bordellos and popular entertainment (Saslow, p.140). All three categories correspond to specific historical periods and have in common printed books of stories about the loves of young acolytes involved with the established elites of monks and *samurai*.

The court of early Japan was highly educated in Chinese literature and Buddhism. Monks, who were forbidden to consort with women, often had sexual liaisons with their young assistants, who were called *chigo* or acolytes ranging in age from 11 to 16. The monks usually formed a strong bond of brotherhood with these *chigo* who also worked as servants within the monasteries. Many poems were written by monks during this early period called "acolyte tales". These poems were exaltations of the passionate love monks held for their youthful apprentices. Many of them were illustrated by paintings and prints. The *Acolyte Scroll* (*Chigo no soshi*) was produced in 1321 and shows five scenes painted and inscribed on paper. It is Japan's earliest surviving erotic scroll. The scenes all involve young acolytes who go to extraordinary measures to sexually please their monk masters. Unlike the *erastes-eromenos* relationship of ancient Greece, anal sex was the norm in monk-*chigo* relationships. The pleasure of anal eroticism for both partners was, in fact, the topic of many poetic and visual works of the period.

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102. **Utagawa Kunisada**, *Two Men and a Woman Smoking*, mid-19th century.

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During the Kamakura and Muromachi periods (thirteenth through sixteenth centuries), centralised imperial authority lost power, due to warring factions headed by warlords or *daimyo*. The *daimyo* headed a warrior class of *samurai* fighters who fostered a martial culture based on a strict code of male honour and loyalty. The *samurai* "way" considered love between an adult warrior and a youth (*wakashu*), a noble form of attachment and in the literature it is often compared to the system of ancient Greek pederasty.

The sexual relationships among males in this martial or *samurai* class were modelled, at least in part, on earlier monastic and courtier traditions. The monastic and *samurai* tradition of boy-love co-evolved with the former tradition having a dominant influence until the fifteenth or sixteenth century (Leupp, p.47). The *samurai* class generally respected the Buddhist clergy and embraced many of their values. The monastic homosexual tradition encouraged *samurai* warriors to regard role-structured homosexuality with tolerance and sympathy. The *samurai* soon incorporated elements of the monastic homosexual tradition into their own evolving warrior culture (Leupp, p.51). As had been the case with monastic homosexuality, there was a clearly defined hierarchy of age and class that defined active and passive roles.

Unlike the passive acolyte (*chigo*), however, *wakashu* were encouraged to exhibit honour and courage through combat. The older lover often served as a role model for the youth and in return the *wakashu* willingly submitted to his master's desires. Once the *wakashu*'s apprenticeship ended, he was expected to take a *wakashu* of his own and then, when he reached twenty years of age or so, he was expected to marry a woman and father children.

Although violent fighting between factional warlords characterised this period, it was also a time in which the arts flourished, in particular, Japanese theatre. Many *Noh* and comic plays were written with homoerotic content. Also, a rich literature emerged that included advice manuals for *wakashu* in the art of lovemaking and intimate bonding. Some of these stories were accompanied by prints that illustrated a range of courtship activities between *samurai* and *wakashu*. Such martial devotion was paralleled in the *eromenos* and *erastes* relationship of ancient Greece. Both *samurai* and youth swore total devotion and loyalty to one another.

In 1549, the Portuguese Jesuit missionary, Saint Francis Xavier, entered Japan and foisted his moral indignation against the homosexuality he encountered. He was eventually thrown out of the Japanese court, but not before he managed to convert a large number of Japanese warriors to Catholicism. Warring factions were then unified under one powerful *shogun* forming the Tokugawa Dynasty in 1600. The *shoguns* then banned all foreigners from entering Japan, effectively isolating the country from the outside world. Those who clung to the then outlawed Christian faith were massacred in 1637. It was perhaps due to this exclusion of foreign influence through isolation that the Japanese developed a highly elaborate and extensive documentary record of a homosexual subculture that linked the monastic and warrior traditions.

The art and literature of Tokugawa Japan reveal that not only was homosexuality discussed openly, but it was a common occurrence. There are, of course, several factors that made this so, such as "Japan's relations with China, religious and philosophical trends, folklore, the status of women, monasticism, feudalism, lord-vassal relationships, and urban demographics" (Leupp, p.198). The *shoguns*, who grew in power and influence in the seventeenth century, selected the warlord Tokugawa Ieyasu as emperor and figurehead in the capital of Edo (modern-day Tokyo). The Tokugawa Shogunate was a period of peace and prosperity that lasted until the mid-nineteenth century. At this time, Japan's isolationism created a situation which led to tremendous domestic growth. Increased urbanisation produced a development in sexual customs in which love between men shifted from an idealised and personal bond to one based

103. **Suzuki Harunobu**, *Love Story under the Verandah*, 1767-1768. Woodblock print, 26 x 19 cm.
Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo.

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on cash transaction. The *samurai*, whose power began to decline by the beginning of the nineteenth century, were a group of men who associated with monks and commoners, partaking in the "floating world" of a commercial sex culture based on entertainment and prostitution. Same-sex love during this period was noted in various art forms, including haiku poetry, Kabuki theatre, and ukiyo-e prints ("pictures of the floating world"). This term is of Buddhist origin and originally connoted the transient material world. During the Tokugawa period, the term lost its religious connotations and became associated with the fashionable, the contemporary, and the erotic [see Leupp, p.78]. It was during this Edo period that Kabuki theatre became very popular with all classes and sexual orientations, but especially with the Japanese middle class. It has been suggested that the association of Kabuki theatre with homosexuality and prostitution perhaps has its roots in the earlier customs of China and Korea. In Japan, however, government regulation of the art form "indirectly strengthened the association between actors and male prostitution" (Leupp, p.90).

Female impersonation and gender role reversal were significant aspects of Kabuki theatre and were often interwoven into the main plots. The storyline of many Kabuki plays confirm that "sexual relationships between high-ranking *samurai* and their menservants were common" and tolerated (Leupp, p.92). These relationships were affirmed in much of the literature from the period and did not preclude male-female couplings. Kabuki male actors took on many roles – playing the parts of men and women. Many of them became very famous and were sought after by wealthy, usually older patrons for sexual favours. This "eroticised demimonde" was visualised in many ukiyo-e prints. These prints were fairly inexpensive and found a ready market among the middle class. Although the majority of ukiyo-e prints are of heterosexual activity, almost all of the artists of this art form created, at least once in their careers, an image of homosexual love. Indeed, there was a lucrative market for it.

Male actors of female roles, who were frequently shown in ukiyo-e prints along with popular courtesans and geishas, often wore their hair in a distinctive manner with long forelocks. The gender ambiguity of these youths attracted both monks and *samurai* alike, and provoked rivalries and small battles among the various warring factions so much so that the *shogun*, after 1652, ordered all female-role actors of Kabuki theatre to shave their foreheads in the manner of adult men (Leupp, p.92). However, this mandate was never really enforced. Although homosexuality and prostitution played significant roles in the history of Kabuki theatre, same-sex erotic activity in Tokugawa Japan was "essentially part of a bisexual eros. The structure of these relationships mirrored not only male-female relationships, but also relationships between older and younger, superior and inferior, master and servant stressed in the neo-Confucian tradition." (Leupp, pp.94-5). Much of the erotic art of the period shows the bisexual *ménage à trois* as "the ultimate fantasy of many Tokugawa men" (Leupp, p.99).

It was with Admiral Matthew Perry's invasion of Yokohama in 1854 that the free expression of homosexuality in art and life ended. Along with the influx and acceptance of Western ideas and approaches into Japan, homophobia and sex as a moral dilemma also entered. It was with the overthrow of the last *shogun* by the Emperor Meiji in 1868, thus founding the modern period known as the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912), that the Tokugawa era officially ends, and with it, a vibrant history of homosexuality in Japanese art. After 1868, Japan became concerned with its international reputation and public appearance. New laws were enacted that banned *shunga* prints and all nudity in art. Male prostitution in the theatre was also abolished. Homosexuality was no longer celebrated in art, literature, or theatre. It was, instead, demonised and considered as "a national embarrassment" (Leupp, p.204). Stringent measures did not eradicate sexual expression, however, but merely drove it underground.

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104. **Isoda Koryūsai**, *Two Women Making Love*, 18th century. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

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105. **Eugène Delacroix**, *Algerian Women in their Chamber*, 1833-1834. Oil on canvas, 180 x 229 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

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Islam

The Muslim religion was founded in Arabia by the Prophet Muhammad early in the seventh century. When the Prophet died, Islam was spread by word of mouth and by sword to Africa into southern Spain; eastward into Persia (Iran), and from there into India and southeast Asia; and north into Turkey. As Islam expanded its influence, it also encountered and clashed with civilisations that had, historically, exalted pederastic love or manifested some aspect of gender variance in art, literature, and social and/or religious customs. Unlike other Asian cultures, Islamic cultures are made up of a conglomeration of eclectic, assimilated peoples from all over the world who are united by the holy book of Islam, the Koran (*Qu'ran*) and its teachings. In the Koran, Muhammad regarded sex as "good-in-itself" as both a means to procreation and as an act of "prefiguring paradise which is believed to be staffed with beautiful serving boys (*al-fata*) as well as girls (*houri*)"(Murray, *Homosexualities*, p.130). As time passed, however, Islam became more and more intolerant when it came to both homosexuality and improper sexual relationships between men and women. The injunctions against homosexuality were based on interpretations of Koranic passages that referred to Lot and his family who fled Sodom before that city was destroyed for its sins. The nature of the punishment for the "sin of Sodom" (*liwat*) was not, however, clearly indicated in the Koranic texts, leading many interpreters to believe that the Prophet considered homosexuality to be a lesser crime than say, for instance, heterosexual 'fornication' outside of marriage. However, according to Islamic tradition (sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, known as hadith), all sexual acts between males (and between females) are criminal, although the punishment and severity of punishment for offence are not set explicitly, but are dependent upon factors such as one's status as free or unfree, married or not (Prods Oktor Skjaervo, "Islam," in Haggerty, p.478). Within these distinctions, punishment ranged from one hundred lashes to death by stoning.

Despite the stringent laws governing behaviour in Islam, the Arab world has produced a fair amount of erotic art and literature. Unfortunately, most of it has been destroyed over the centuries by "waves of Puritanism" and iconoclasm. Despite the paucity of physical examples, erotic art, including homoerotic art, did form a major part of medieval Arab and Persian painting and poetry. On average, Islamic societies viewed sex as natural as long as it did not violate strict laws governing marriage and social order. Concerning homosexuality, it was Herodotus who noted that it was a common and accepted activity in the Arab world.

In classical Arabo-Islamic societies, recognition of male beauty in the eyes of other males and the power of that beauty to cause "disorder," was commonplace (Frédéric Lagrange, "Arabic Literature," in Haggerty, *Gay Histories and Cultures*, p.63). Common in many Islamic societies is the understanding that a grown man's attraction for a handsome adolescent is a naturally occurring tendency, and that the unforgivable sin lies in its consummation as a sexual practice. In this way, male-to-male attraction is legitimated and satisfied as part of abstract sentiments of love and passion, not brute physical sexuality. The boldest expressions of homosexual love in the Islamic world are found more in the literary rather than visual arts. One of the most celebrated poets of the Abbasid age was Abû Nuwâs (c.747-62 to c.813-15). Abû Nuwâs was born in present day Iran and died in Baghdad. It is believed that in his youth, he was an escort for rich and refined literati (Frédéric Lagrange, "Abû Nuwâs," in Haggerty, p.1). His poems revolve around three of his own scandalous indulgences: wine, hunting, and libertinism. He has become an emblem of the classical figure who is ribald and an active dominant sodomist.

In many of his poems, Abû Nuwâs portrays himself as a man attracted to adolescent youths with slender waists, to whom he gives only the passive role in a sexual encounter (Lagrange in Haggerty, p.1). As evidenced by his poetry,

106. *Djalal Al-Din Rumi, Founder of the Order of Whirling Dervishes, Expressing his Love for a Young Follower Hussam Al-Din Chelebi*, c. 1594. The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

107. **Muhammad Qasim**, *Shah Abbas I with a Page*, 1627. Ink, gouache and silver on paper, 25.5 x 15 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

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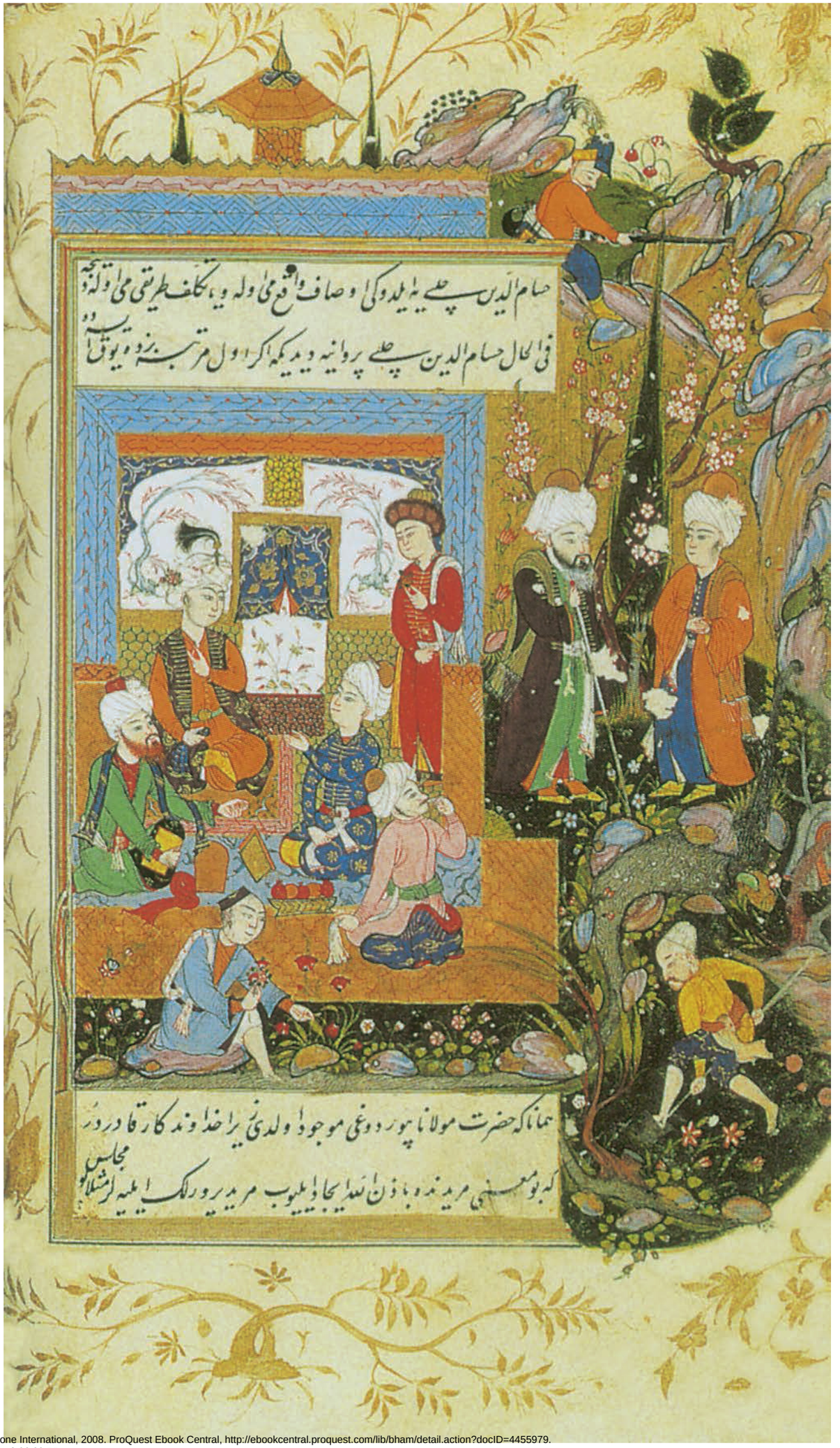

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he is less interested in possessing the male body and more concerned with praising androgynous beauty. The boys he writes about are usually court servants and sometimes Christians of Arab or Byzantine descent.

His writing sometimes borders on blasphemy, particularly when he exploited his devotion to Islam in assimilating the idea of penetration of a Christian boy as an act of *jihâd* (holy war) against the infidel (Lagrange in Haggerty, p.2).

Along with the more abstract literary works extolling male and female beauty, sex manuals were also very popular up until the nineteenth century. The best-known example is *The Perfumed Garden* by Sheikh Nefzawi, translated in the late nineteenth century by Sir Richard Burton. It is referred to as the Islamic counterpart to the *Kama Sutra*. In it, the Nefzawi devoted one chapter to male homosexuality, viewing it as part of normal and natural human sexual activity. The scenes of male love are described in a poetic and colourful manner. Favourable mention of homosexuality is also evidenced in *Thousand and One Nights*, and in the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyém (died 1132). Passages from these texts were romanticised in that they speak of the androgynous beauty of a beloved youth. In chapter fifteen of the mid-eleventh-century *Book of Counsel* by the Emir Kai-Ka'us ibn Iskander, one passage devoted to "the pleasures of love" advises that: "In summer, devote thyself to boys, and in winter to women." (quoted in Peter Webb, *The Erotic Arts,* New York, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983, p.83).

In many Islamic societies penetration of a non-Muslim or non-believer was not considered a sin and was rationalised in the name of Islam. Forcing non-believers into submission by way of penetration was a means of "glorifying the superiority of Islam" (Murray, p.133). The act was considered more a duty than a sin. Contrary to the situation in ancient Greece, there was no pedagogical or military purpose for men's sexual relations with boys (Murray, p.133). Nor was there a rite of passage to manhood of the one penetrated. Male slaves (usually pale Christian boys sold by their parents but occasionally stolen) were sometimes transported by Christian merchants to Egypt, Syria, or Turkey and kept for sexual purposes. This was especially the case in late eighth-century Persia (Iran) (Murray, p.134). The seemingly obsessive preoccupation with the anal penetration of a youth in many Islamic societies has been viewed as "a natural outgrowth of a sex-positive, sex-segregating religion in which women had little status or value" (Murray, pp.138-139; quoted from Vern L. Bullough, *Sexual Variance in Society and History*, New York, Wiley, 1976, p.238). In most Islamic cultures, male abstinence from sexual activity and ejaculation is something to be avoided. The availability of boys' anuses and effeminate men thus protected and made it possible to guard and control the sexual virtue of women (Murray, p.139).

From a Western perspective, the misogyny of most Islamic cultures explains why female homosexuality is largely ignored in art, literature, and social practice. The apparent need men had to control and cloister women was used to justify polygamy and the establishment of harems. Women who violated Islam's proscribed rules regarding sexuality were usually given the death penalty. Sex between women was frowned upon as adultery, but the very act of sequestering women within the household's numerous wives, concubines, female relatives, and servants, created an environment that encouraged intimacy among women. The intimacy was so marked that Western visitors to Africa and Persia often remarked on the ubiquity of Sapphism in harems (Saslow, p.148).

The discrete and secretive nature of homosexuality in many Islamic societies creates a serious problem in terms of the availability of visual imagery related to homosexuality. As Saslow notes, there is a dearth of surviving homoerotic imagery that goes beyond Muhammad's ban on figurative art. Book illumination and miniature painting,

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108. **Rizi-i-Abbasi**, *Two Lovers*, 1630. Miniature, tempera and gilding on paper. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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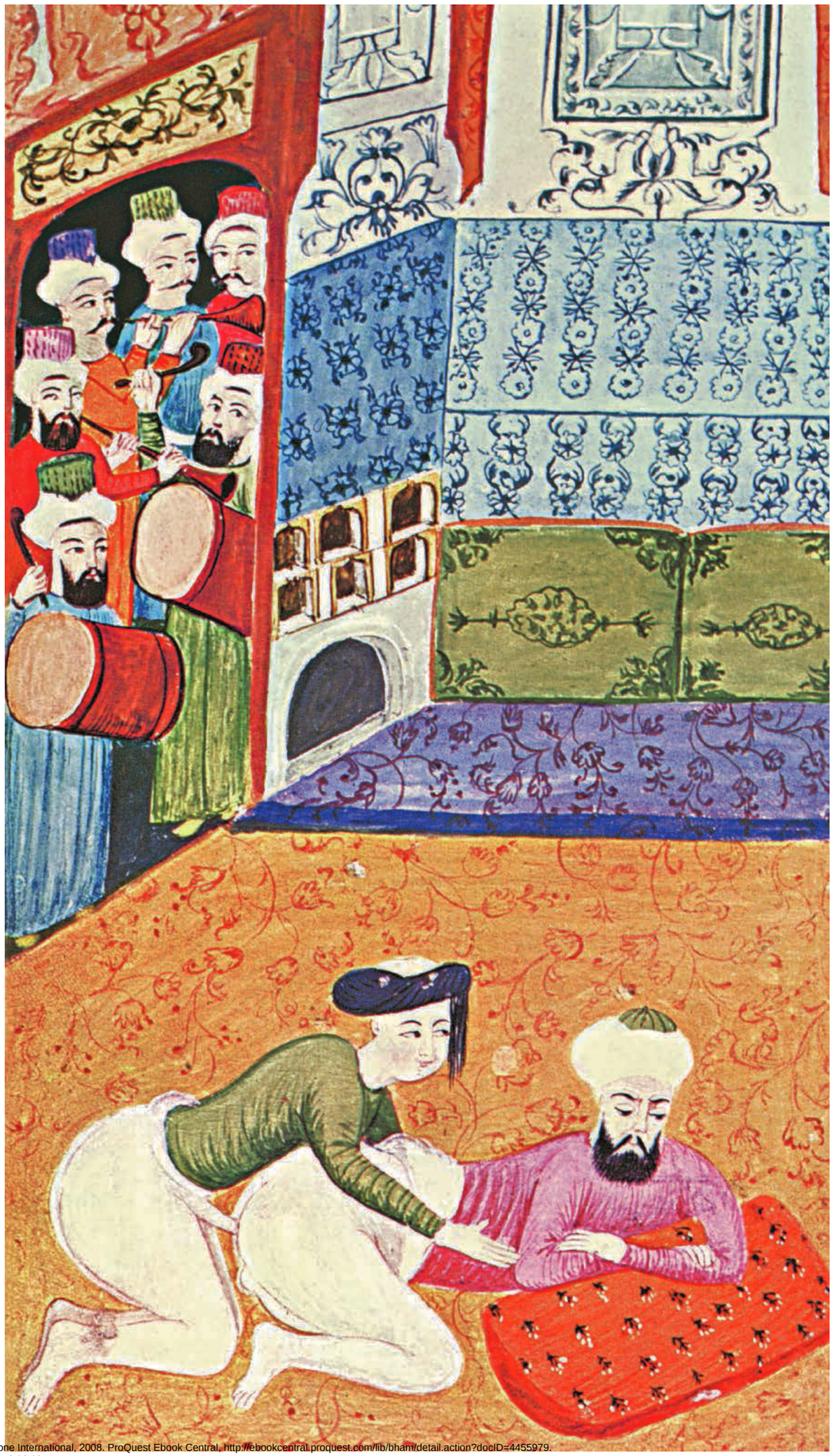

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which flourished in Persia, India, and Turkey, all have in common the use of "Arabic script, calligraphic line, and flattened space enlivened with the stylised floral ornament called "arabesque" (Saslow, p.148). By far, Persia (modern-day Iran) was the most active and renowned art centre.

Arab armies converted Persians from Zoroastrianism to Islam by 637. Zoroastrianism was a powerful and influential sect that promoted heterosexual procreation and condemned homosexuality. Despite this, it was Persia under the eighth-century Abbasid caliphate that gained a reputation among Arabs for the 'habit' of pederasty and male-male intercourse (Murray, p.131). The small amount of Persian homoerotic art that has surfaced comes from the Safavid dynasty in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This was a period of great creativity and influence in Islamic art. The period was unsurpassed in the production of richly coloured and calligraphically superb miniature paintings of "beloved women, boys, and dervishes" (Saslow, p.149). The master artist of this genre was Riza-i-Abbasi, who "specialised in vignettes of young men responding to the polite advances or crudely graphic come-ons of older men or, on occasion, to each other." These scenes were often lyrical in their delicate calligraphic line, "gentle mysticism" and "emotional subtlety" (Saslow, p.149).

Perhaps even more so than Persia, Ottoman Turkey has a history of a vibrant, yet hidden homosexuality. A succession of conquerors and artists indulged in homosexuality but kept their activities behind closed doors. In 1453, Mehmed the Conqueror wrested control of Constantinople from the Byzantines. As reward to himself, he kidnapped the most beautiful boys from the conquered Byzantine nobility for his own harem. As well, the Ottoman poet Mehmet Ghazali (d.1535) wrote praises to male beauty and love and built a palace in Istanbul where he filled it with youths to indulge his aesthetic and sexual appetites.

The apogee of the Ottoman Empire in Turkey was during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent between 1520 and 1566. However, it was not until the nineteenth century when the visual expression of homoeroticism was revealed in a manuscript called the *Khamsa* or "Five Poems" by Nevi Zade Atai. It was also at this time that the Ottoman Turks gained a reputation, in the eyes of many Westerners, as having an unusual appetite for sodomy used for both pleasure and as a means of sealing the fate of a conquered enemy. Two images from the *Khamsa* depict graphic scenes of male-to-male sexual activities. As far as is known, these are the only illustrations of this kind. It is difficult to say if other images like these existed and were subsequently destroyed by a more conservative and intolerant brand of Islam that followed.

As late as the seventeenth century, Islam's cosmopolitan culture took a laissez-faire attitude toward homosexuality, but as time passed most Muslim countries came to view it as incompatible with Islamic tradition and law. Despite the visibility of same-sex relationships in classical Arabic poetry and literature, those same relationships seem to be almost entirely absent from modern Arabic literature in which 'homosexual' characters are rare. There is an explanation for the absence of homoerotic themes in modern literature (as well as visual art) as compared with classical. In Arab societies, exposing one's inability to conform to standards, or, demanding a space of freedom to practise one's own moral standards apart from the group is a far greater offence than discreetly satisfying one's taste as long as one keeps quiet about it. This is what author Stephen O. Murray has rightly called "the will not to know" (see Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe, *Islamic Homosexualities*, New York and London, New York University Press, 1997, pp.14-54). In most Islamic cultures, it is not that homosexuality in and of itself necessarily presents a problem but rather, it is its degree of visibility that is often at issue. In both Persia and Ottoman Turkey, men engaged in same-sex activities frequently but kept these activities secret so to allow them greater sexual freedom in private. This strategy partly accounts for the paucity and subtlety of most works of art with homoerotic undertones.

109. Persian Miniature, 19th century.

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110. **François Boucher**, *Erigone Defeated*, 1749. Oil on canvas, 100 x 136 cm. The Wallace Collection, London.

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Chapter 5

1700–1900: Towards a Homosexual Identity

The process of increased visibility of homosexual subcultures that had started during the Renaissance and increased throughout the Baroque, began to pick up speed and eventually mushroom with rapid changes in the social, economic, and political domains of many countries. At the very beginning of the eighteenth century, art in Europe was reshaped by radical intellectual, scientific, political, and economic changes sweeping all of Western Europe. These radical changes in the structure of societies and cultures brought forth what we refer to as the visual and verbal language of modernity – a world founded on "the birth of bourgeois capitalism, urban industry, mass culture, and contentious pluralism" (Saslow, p.151). Art split into many factions with many different stylistic movements that not only overlapped but frequently opposed one another.

It was beginning in the late eighteenth century and lasting until the late nineteenth century that three broad art movements emerged – Neoclassicism, Romanticism, and Realism. Neoclassicism tried to carry on the language and values of antiquity and the Renaissance, while Romanticism turned against traditional authority and contemporary upheaval to seek out the exotic inner world of individual emotion (Saslow, p.151). Realism differed from Neoclassicism and Romanticism in that it rejected the classical and Renaissance past to preach an empirical and seemingly more truthful study of the here and now.

This was a period that gave rise to a new homosexual identity forged on one end by Johann Joachim Winckelmann and on the other by Oscar Wilde. Both male and female homosexuals gradually became more visible and vocal in social life and expressive in the arts. Also, the outcomes of these movements and individuals would result in what we consider today modern homosexuality.

The eighteenth century was a period known as the Enlightenment which set out to sweep away the authority of the church and state by "applying a new standard of empirical objectivity to sex, politics, and religion" (Saslow, p.152). There was a marked shift away from religion to a secularism based on science and knowledge. A focus on reason and self-determination replaced the notion of the divine right of kings. Enlightenment ideas were promoted by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Denis Diderot, and François de Voltaire – philosophers who did not approve of homosexuality, but whose belief in privacy and individual freedom ruled out state interference. During this period, the focus on science as a means to know the world and to promote social progress gave birth to the Industrial Revolution.

Machine and steam power replaced some human and animal labour. Factories increased in size and capital, causing a mass migration of people (homosexuals among them) from rural villages to more densely populated cities. It was England that led the way in the Industrial Revolution. Between 1750 and 1800, London's population doubled to more than a million and became home to a large homosexual subculture.

At the same time as the Industrial Revolution, a political revolution was taking place in France which has significantly added to our understanding of the modern world. A growing and prosperous middle-class began to

111. Illustrations for *La Nouvelle Justine* of the marquis de Sade, 1797. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

112. **Bornet**, Engraving for the first publication of the *Histoire de Juliette* of the marquis de Sade, 1797.

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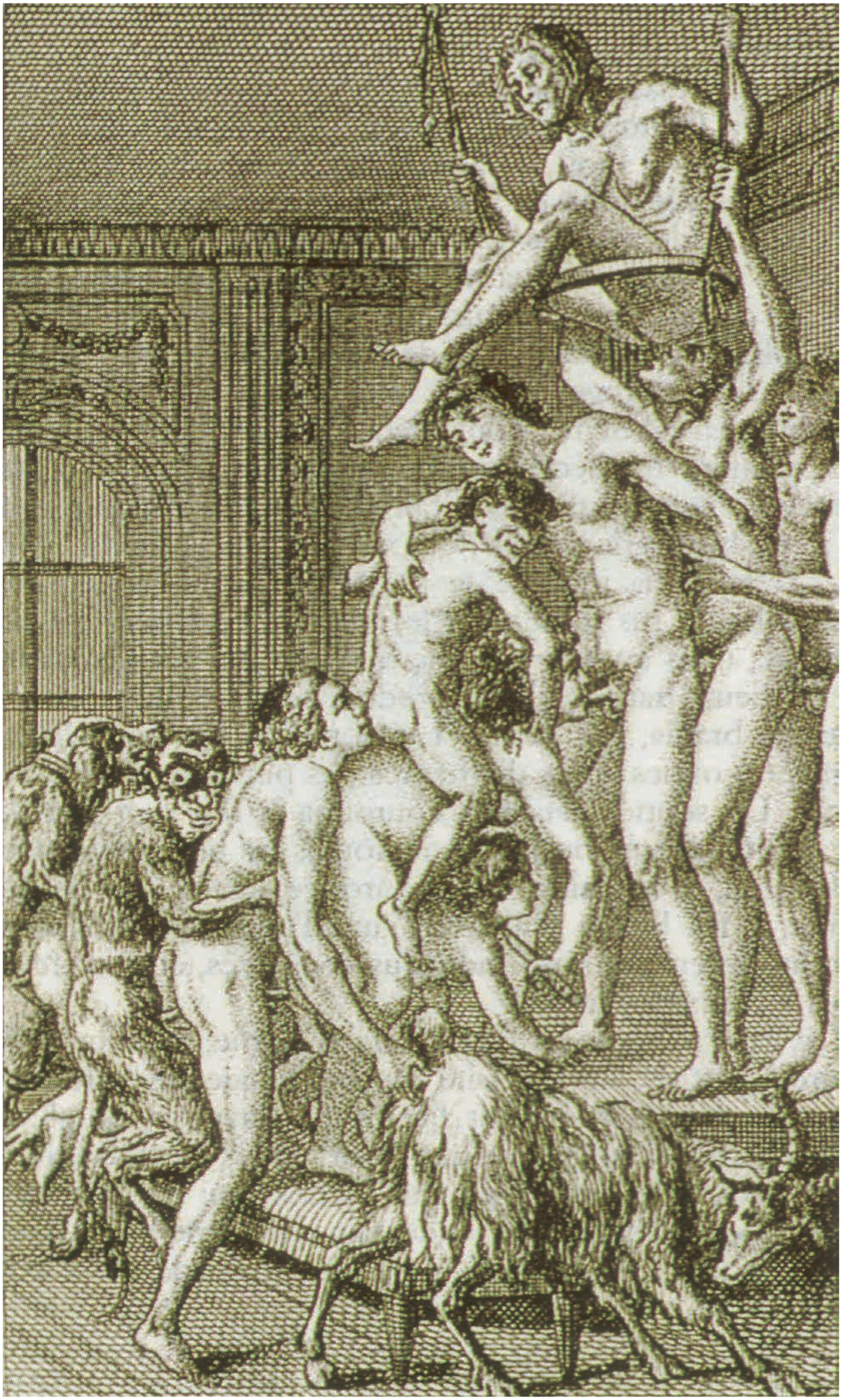

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show resentment toward those associated with the aristocracy and the old elite. The American War of Independence and the French Revolution became the culminating events of this heated resentment. The sense of individual liberty and prosperity fostered by these events fuelled an optimism that soon gave way to an age of anxiety triggered by the instability that came with rapid change (Saslow, p.153).

As homosexuals became more visible in society, the old notion of men's dominance over women and boys gave way to a new kind of sexual coupling – that between grown men of approximately the same age. Homosexuality, cross-dressing, and subversive frivolity known as camp, became more visible and frequent, especially in the urban enclaves of London and Paris. In these places, certain men (known as mollies in England and *pédés* in France) took up women's names, spoke in slang, wore women's clothing, and thumbed their noses at heterosexual proprieties by calling sexual couplings 'marriage'. These roles are recognisable as the beginnings of modern gay culture. The effeminate homosexual type became the butt of many jokes. It was also a time when gender boundaries were being transgressed, resulting in much social anxiety.

The overall mood in the waning years of the aristocracy was characterised by the Rococo style, a late Baroque variant that became popular from the early 1700s to the eve of the French Revolution in 1789. The medium of choice was pastel chalk and the style reflected a lifestyle that focused on erotic flirtation and nervous frivolity. This was the period of the erotic novel, pictures of the boudoir, printed pornography, art collection and connoisseurship. Although François Boucher's playful quasi-lesbian illustrations of Diana and her nymphs and Jean-Honoré Fragonard's similar themes from this period show a decline in the seriousness of classical myths, their appeal and popularity indicate that a less serious and more playful attitude had become the norm. The frivolous and profligate way of life was simply a distraction for a nobility that was slowly losing its influential power on the social and political stage.

During this period, male homosexuality was especially attacked as a vice associated with an indolent and corrupt upper class even though police criminal records of the period indicate that homosexuality was practised not just by the aristocracy, but by members of all social levels (Saslow, p.153). Throughout this difficult transitional period, however, homosexuality continued to be demonised and treated as a disease. Later on, as homosexuals and homosexuality became more visible in people's everyday lives, the middle-class reacted through desperate attempts to impose its moral order of family, patriarchy, and self-denial.

Libertines and Libertinism

Libertinism flourished in sixteenth and seventeenth-century France and England, encouraged by the rise in atheism in France and by the restoration of the English monarchy in 1660. This restoration ushered in an era of materialism and consumption that contrasted strongly with the Puritan rule of Oliver Cromwell.

The concept of libertinism developed in sixteenth-century France and was originally used to describe religious non-conformism but later came to encompass a range of social misconduct, especially sexual misconduct. Generally speaking, the term relates to the idea of personal freedom and to the development of modern concepts of the self. Libertines were represented as rakes who corrupted married women and ruined virgins (Vincent Quinn, "Libertines and Libertinism," in Haggerty, pp.540-1). Libertinism was also linked to fashion, the stage, and the rise of

113. **Anton Mengs**, *Jupiter and Ganymede*, 1758-1759. Fresco. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Palazzo Barberini-Corsini, Rome.

114. **Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres**, *Achilles and Patroclus Receiving the Ambassadors of Agamemnon*, 1801. Oil on canvas, 110 x 155 cm. École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris.

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pornography. It emphasised consumption, whether of risqué plays, erotic prints, or expensive clothes. Because of its association with the theatre, libertinism carried with it playful, performative qualities (Quinn, p.540).

Libertines were nonconformists. They usually sought out scandal, showing their dissatisfaction with existing cultural norms. The blasphemy and sexual freedom associated with libertinism was a challenge to a restrictive society that emphasised class obligations over individual pleasures. Libertines sought self-gratification and often indulged in sexual pleasure as a way to combat social conventions and traditional morality. They asserted an individual's right to forge a unique identity centred on personal inclinations. This attempt to forge a unique identity based on one's sexual preference connects libertinism to the evolution of modern homosexuality (Quinn, p.540). Although the majority of libertines were heterosexual or bisexual, homosexuals and homosexuality were very much part of libertinism. For the true libertine, however, these divisions of sexual preference were irrelevant, for their actions often originated from a desire to repudiate middle-class respectability. However, some did have strong ties to homosexual subcultures.

Libertinism is class-biased, available only to a small minority who relied upon their class position and their gender. Libertines tended to be aristocratic men as opposed to the working-class women who were usually their victims. Even the language used in libertine texts is often misogynistic (Quinn, p.540). Despite the gender bias, there were female libertines among the upper classes. Libertinism reached an end in the late eighteenth century with the notorious antics of perhaps the most famous libertine of them all – the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814). De Sade produced four major novels, many short stories, dialogues, plays, pamphlets, letters, journals, and a number of still unpublished works (Stephanie Hammer, "Sade, Donatien-Alphonse-François, Marquis de," in Haggerty, pp.761-2). De Sade was condemned by both royal and revolutionary authorities. However, his writing is now recognised as crucial to the development of erotic discourse. He invented a philosophical system based on perversion. He carried ideas of the Anglo-European Enlightenment to their ultimate extreme.

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As with his contemporaries Diderot and Voltaire, de Sade was profoundly anti-Christian. His writings functioned as exhaustive catalogues of sexual deviance. In his fictional worlds, virtue is always punished and vice is rewarded; self-interest and the will to power alone guarantee a person happiness and spiritual serenity. De Sade engaged in a series of increasingly violent orgies that resulted in scandal, complaints, and eventual imprisonment. He was incarcerated in 1777 without trial. The year after he escaped, only to be discovered, rearrested, and imprisoned again for the next eleven years. It was while he was in prison that he wrote his most important works – *The 120 Days of Sodom, Justine*, and *Aline and Valcour*. He was released in 1790 only to be arrested again in 1793 as a suspected enemy of the Revolution. He was released in 1794 only to be arrested in 1801 by the police for illustrated editions of *The New Justine* and *Juliette* found in his publisher's office. He was then transferred to Charenton Asylum in 1803, where he died. The Marquis de Sade's behaviour and writings were the last gasp of the libertine spirit. Besides decimating the aristocracy, the French Revolution marked an irreversible trend toward democracy and the assertion of middle-class values. Neither libertinism or homosexuality disappeared, however, but rather they took on different and altered forms of expression. Although Neoclassicism and Romanticism used distinct aesthetic and social languages as a reaction against the libertine spirit, a spirit that had been most clearly expressed in Rococo art and literature, they still managed to refashion vestiges of the libertine spirit.

Libertinism found its most vivid expression in sexually explicit novels and pornographic prints produced after 1740. Although both male and female homosexual pornography was produced, most involved two or more females involved in sexual relations. The reason for this is that pornography in general was created by and for heterosexual male viewing pleasure. Print sellers increasingly engaged in the commercialisation of pornography and supplied their exclusive clientele with images of all kinds of imaginable and unimaginable sexual activities.

By the end of the eighteenth century, lesbian eros had surfaced in the arts as shocking and libertine. Many times, however, it was used as a weapon against women whose power was deemed uncontrollable. There were several attacks during the revolutionary era on the self-indulgent queen Marie-Antoinette who was often caricatured as a lesbian nymphomaniac. At the same time, works by outspoken feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft in England and Olympe de Gouges in France began questioning strict gender roles and sought to empower women both politically and sexually.

Neoclassicism and Romanticism

From the middle of the eighteenth century until the middle of the nineteenth century, a community of intellectuals and artists throughout Europe will "marshal history and aesthetics as a means to self-understanding and justification. Homosexual painters, poets, and theorists played prominent roles in creating both neoclassicism and romanticism, the twin artistic movements that would dominate the century between 1750 and 1850." (Saslow, p.158). Neoclassicism was a movement of classical revival in the arts in most countries in Western Europe. In France, it was a sobering response to the suggestively erotic and perfumed art of the previous Rococo period. In England, it became part of an entire network of art collecting, forgery of the antique, and dissemination for both capitalist gain and to promote British dominance in industry and empire. In general, neoclassicism sought moral uplift and used a combination of sentiment and rationalisation to accomplish its goals. The movement was fostered by the discovery of artefacts from the Roman city of Pompeii beginning in 1748, which had been covered and preserved under ash and lava with the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD. These discoveries as well as the discovery of Latin texts

115. **Jacques-Louis David**, *Leonidas at Thermopylae*, 1814. Oil on canvas, 395 x 531 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

116. **Anne-Louis Girodet de Roucy** known as **Girodet-Trioson**, *Endymion. Moonlight*, known as *The Sleep of Endymion*, 1791. Oil on canvas, 198 x 261 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

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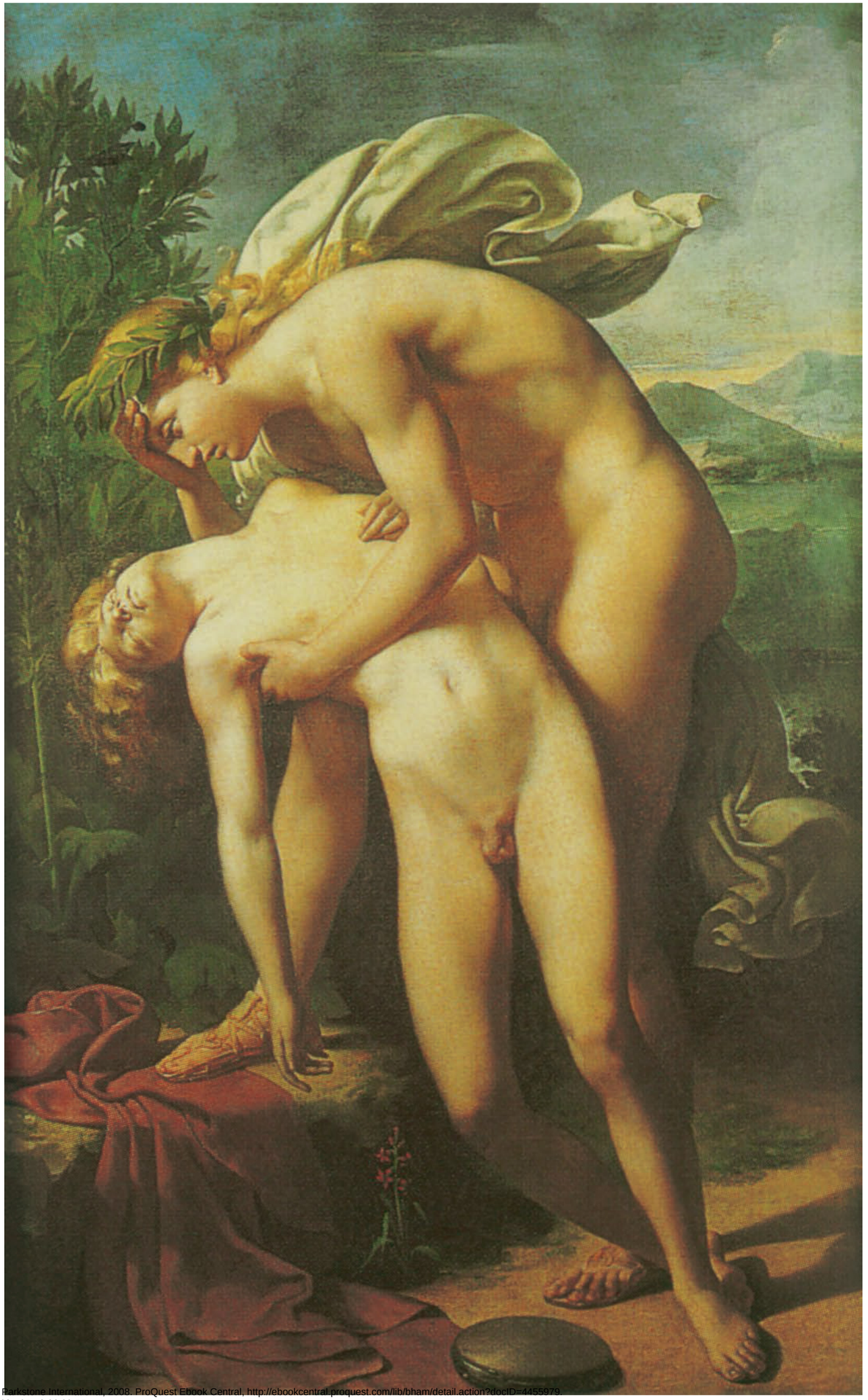

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indicated that the ancients lived by an admirable moral code that encouraged not only civic responsibility among its citizens, but also gave primacy to the power of art as a didactic tool in promoting good taste and behaviour.

The neoclassical program adhered to approaches to nature and the antique as part of the education of a male artist. Perhaps the most important influence in the development of a homoerotic aesthetic within neoclassicism was the aesthetic philosophy of the German art historian, archaeologist, and head librarian of the Vatican, Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-68). Winckelmann, a passionate admirer of the art and social structure of the ancients, subsumed his own homoerotic propensities into florid descriptions of classical Greek art. Interestingly, he has been dubbed the founding father of modern-day art history and archaeology. Winckelmann was attracted to androgynous-looking younger men and transferred this infatuation into his passionate obsession with Greek male statues. For example, of the corporeal beauty of the *Apollo Belevedere*, he effused: "An eternal springtime like that which reigns in the happy fields of Elysium, [that] clothes his body with the charms of youth and softly shines on the proud structure of his limbs." Winckelmann's major work was his *History of the Art of Antiquity*, published in 1764. This book constituted "a compendium of individual artworks, placing them in the service of aesthetic, art-historical, and cultural observation and theorisation" (Simon Richter, "Johann Joachim Winckelmann," in Haggerty, p.957). The central statue of *History* is the *Laocoön* which is described in highly erotic terms as the ideal of male beauty. Winckelmann's general erudition and immense knowledge of antiquity earned him a prestigious post as librarian and confidante to Cardinal Alessandro Albani. At Albani's Roman villa, Winckelmann catalogued the cardinal's vast collection of art and archaeological artefacts. While in Rome, he also indulged in discreet sexual and erotic acts with young men and youths.

By praising the androgynous male as beautiful and desirable over the female, Winckelmann was not only following the sensibilities of the ancient Greeks themselves, but was also infusing modern art history with a homoerotic sensibility. The effects of this are still felt today, even though many art historians choose to deny or reject homosexuality and/or homoeroticism as legitimate forces in artistic creativity. By 1768 Winckelmann had achieved great fame and was visited by members of royal courts, luminaries, and dignitaries from all over the world. He was murdered in Trieste in 1768 at the hands of a young love interest set on robbery. Winckelmann became an important role model for subsequent artists and critics who privately identified with being homosexual. Both in his life and in his florid prose, Winckelmann gave voice to homoerotic desire.

Before, during, and after the time Winckelmann's theories caught on, many young male artists embarked upon the mandatory Grand Tour to Italy to learn firsthand about ancient art and lifestyles. Completion of the Grand Tour was expected as a way of rounding out a young gentleman's education. Not only were original works of antique sculptures, paintings, and ruins readily available for study, but so too were opportunities available for homosexual and homoerotic exploits. The Italian portrait painter Pompeo Batoni made a fortune from painting portraits of young aristocratic men posing beside ruins or indoors leaning against antique vases or columns. These portraits functioned as mementos of a young man's experiences brought back to their native countries and hung on the walls of their country estates. One such typical portrait shows a young wigged noble, looking like a bookish dandy showing off a copy of the *Antinous* relief then in Cardinal Albani's villa.

Male homosexuality and its erotic currents played a major role in the formation and content of neoclassicism as an aesthetic (Smalls in Haggerty, p.637). The pent-up undercurrents of homoerotic desire were perhaps most strongly felt

117. **Méry-Joseph Blondel**, *The Death of Hyacinth*. Oil on canvas. Musée baron Martin, Gray.

118. **Gustave Courbet**, *Sleep*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 135 x 200 cm. Petit Palais – Musée des beaux-arts de la Ville de Paris, Paris.

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119. **Gustave Courbet**, *Three Bathers*, 1865-1868. Oil on paper mounted on canvas and oil on canvas, 126 x 96 cm. Petit Palais - Musée des beaux-arts de la Ville de Paris, Paris.

120. **Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres**, *The Turkish Bath*, 1862. Oil on canvas, diametre: 108 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

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in France, where Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) and his pupils dominated the content and dissemination of neoclassicism. French neoclassicism is linked with combined political and moral considerations arising out of specific historical events – namely, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. David's most famous neoclassical paintings with homoerotic content include the *Oath of the Horatii* (Louvre, Paris, 1784), *Death of Socrates* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, 1787), *Death of Bara* (Musée Calvet, Avignon, 1794), and *Leonidas at Thermopylae* (Musée du Louvre, Paris, 1814). These and other works tend to sharply divide the appearance and role of the sexes, underscored in terms of style. Davidian neoclassicism is often referred to as a masculine art form in terms of subject matter and style. Stylistically, there is a stress on linearity, direct lighting, rational composition, and sharp coloration. Male figures are typically shown in public roles and are given qualities of heroism, resolve, physical and moral strength. Conversely, female figures and those qualities deemed feminine are relegated to the realm of the private, domestic, and passive. Male figures are often given hard, angular, and sculptural qualities, whereas women and children are rendered in soft, melting, curvilinear forms. These works are concerned with the male nude as a site of a combined interest in heroic action and erotic contemplation. The male body and masculine deeds and desires are put forth as the critical site for a variety of meanings ranging from the political to the sexual or erotic (Smalls, "Neoclassicism," in Haggerty, pp.637-8).

In 1791, against the backdrop of a turbulent political scene, the national assembly lifted all legal prohibitions of consensual sodomy, relegating it to the archaic category of witchcraft and blasphemy. A similar laissez-faire animated the *Code Napoléon* of 1804, a systematic revision of French law carried out at the new emperor's behest by his chancellor Jean-Jacques Cambacérès, whose closeted homosexuality exasperated both Napoleon and the public. Popular broadsheets caricatured the minister's foppish effeminacy. Cambacérès attempted to censor them (Saslow, p.169). Cambacérès authored parts of the Code to not deal at all with homosexuality. It was simply not mentioned. Under Napoleon, what was not forbidden expressly by law was technically permitted. The entire Code, and this permissive aspect of it in particular, was extended to many of the nations Napoleon conquered. France's pioneering decriminalisation turned Paris, "the culture capital of the nineteenth century," into a "Mecca for generations of sexual expatriates" (Saslow, p.170).

David was not a homosexual nor was he keen on any outward displays of homoerotic desire not couched in classical aesthetics. The homosocial nature of his studio workshop did foster homosexual and homoerotic sentiments among his students who all vied for his attention and favour. David was a kind of father figure to many of his young students and competition for the father's love fuelled a competitive spirit and stirred bitter rivalries. In David's studio, there were two young students in particular who showed extraordinary promise – Jean-Germain Drouais and Anne-Louis Girodet de Roucy Trioson. The former died young and the task of passing on the grand tradition to the next generation was left up to Girodet. Girodet and other young men who came out of David's studio had other plans, choosing to completely separate themselves from David's teaching and aesthetic. These artists, known today as pre-romantic artists, set out to deliberately subvert David's classical teaching and began experimenting with rounded, curvilinear forms and strange lighting effects to achieve "an ideal of feminised male eroticism" (Saslow, p.171). Girodet's personal quest for originality was founded on a combination of classical training and romantic desires. The earliest result was his highly imaginative *Sleep of Endymion* (1791).

Girodet was not the only artist to exploit the emotional effects of homoerotic desire as one way to effect changes to artistic practice during this period. Around 1799, there developed in David's studio a breakaway sect known as

121. **Frederic Leighton**, *Jonathan's Token to David*, c. 1868. Oil on canvas, 171.5 x 124.5 cm.
The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis.

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122. **Jacques-Louis David**, *The Death of Socrates*, 1787. Oil on canvas, 129.5 x 196.2 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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123. **Jules Robert Auguste**, *The Friends*, 1835. Watercolour and gouache. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

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124. Attributed to **Achille Deveria**, sequence of lithographies for the obscene novel by Alfred de Musset, *Gamiani or a Night of Excess*, c. 1848.

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the Barbus (the Bearded Ones) composed of young male students led by a charismatic leader named Maurice Quai. The Barbus were dissatisfied with David's artistic direction and called for a purification of art by concentrating on the delicate linearity and lightness of form and colour exemplified in Greek vase painting and in the works of the Italian Primitives. Instead of taking their material from Roman histories, these artists insisted on Greek themes and preferred to illustrate homoerotic myths. In around 1817-8, Girodet produced a series of illustrations that accompanied a translation of *The Odes of Anacreon*. Anacreon was an ancient Athenian poet whose lyrical hymns celebrated both heterosexual and homosexual love. Much of his poetry was an impassioned eulogy to youthful male beauty.

The swooning ephebes of Girodet and Broc exerted a tremendous influence in ushering in the varied aspects of homoerotic desire into Romanticism. As an art movement, Romanticism embraced both physical and mental experiences that could not be explained or codified by Enlightenment rationality. In both painting and literature, the movement opened new arenas for the play of the homoerotic imagination (Saslow, p.158). In England, the situation was very different. None of the better-known artists of the period – William Blake, Henry Fuseli, and Joseph Wright of Derby – took an interest in incorporating homo-desirous interests in their work. However, some English poets, such as John Keats, Percy Shelley, and Lord Byron did find room in their writings for praise of the homoerotic. Of the three, Lord Byron was the most notorious. In his ambiguous poems, Byron played with gender ambiguity. In his life, he travelled to countries such as Portugal, Spain, Greece, and Albania where he indulged his appetite for both women and young boys (see Louis Crompton, *Byron and Greek Love: Homophobia in Nineteenth-Century England*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985).

In France, the homoerotic aspects of the romantic spirit found expression in the virile and tumultuous pictorial world of Théodore Géricault. Géricault's art uses the heroics and vulnerability of men to glorify the irrational, the subjective, and the emotionally intense side of male desire. Géricault is most famous for his large-scale canvas *Raft of the Medusa* (1819) showing the aftermath of a contemporary tragic and scandalous event at sea that brought into serious doubt the ethics and politics of the government. The painting consists of a sprawl of semi-nude men in various states of suffering, death, despair, and hope. The artist used an all-male universe to pit the physical against the psychological.

Classically formed male bodies are presented in an array of positions that evoke both despair, hope, and desire. A homoerotic charge connects all of the men on this raft that, metaphorically speaking, symbolises the future of mankind. The erotically suggestive, the heroic, and the morbid are linked in an image that juxtaposes masculine brawn with limp enervation. Although Géricault's own sexual identity has not yet come under scholarly scrutiny, there does appear to be a homoerotic subtext that runs throughout many of his works.

Realism

The revolutions of 1830 and 1848 in France exerted a tremendous social, political, and psychological impact on the rest of Europe. Many artists working between these dates became aware of the needs and desires of all classes of people. With the harsh realities of social change going on all around them, it was difficult for most artists to continue to rely on elaborate allegory or to take their subject matter from classical history. Artists were compelled to document their own social reality. Even within this gritty mandate, the impulse to express homoerotic desire did not disappear, but rather, took alternate and sometimes "schizophrenic" forms (Saslow, p.174).

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125. **George Hare**, *The Victory of Belief*, 1891. Oil on canvas. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

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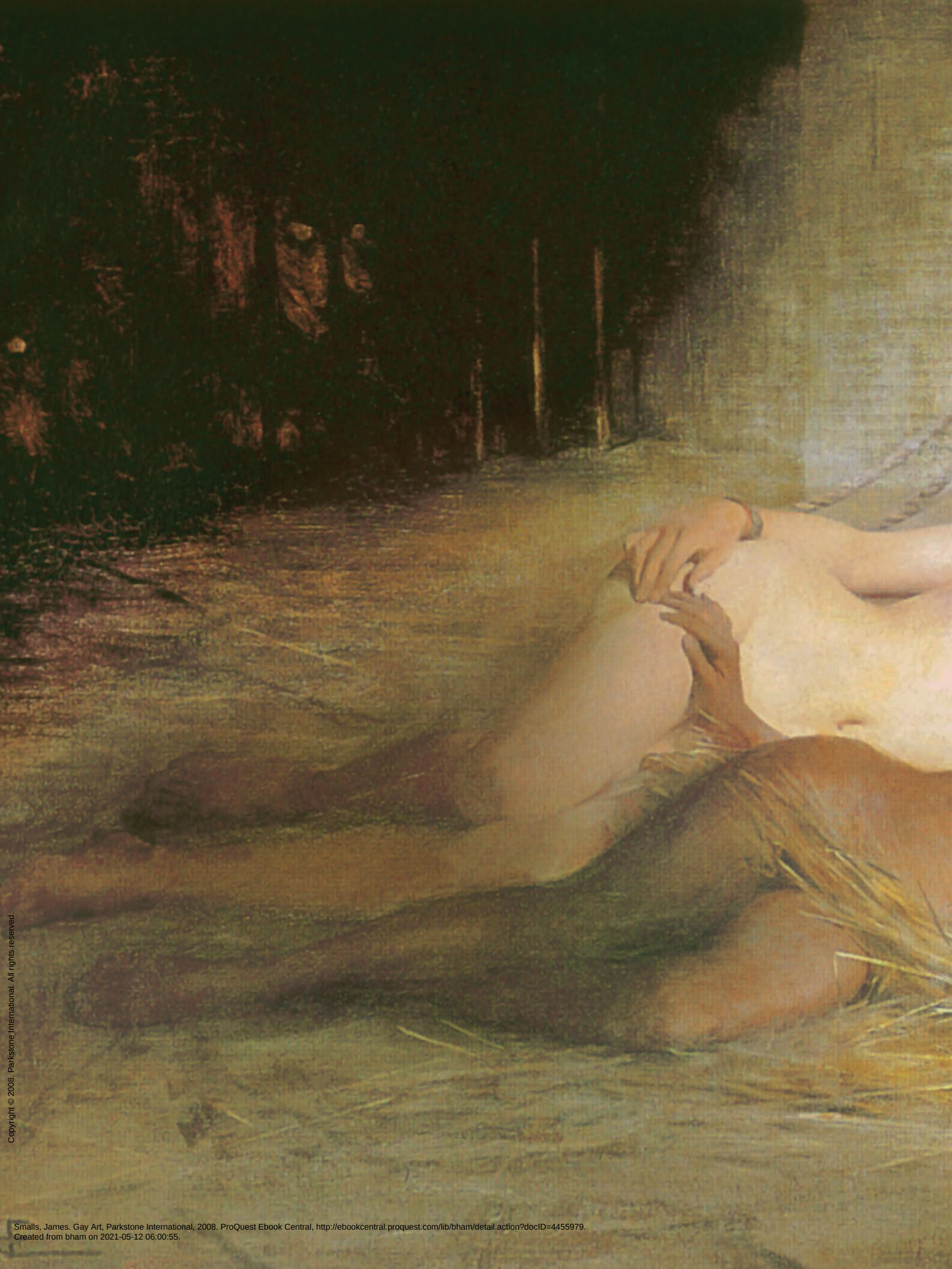

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126. **Thomas Eakins**, *Arcadia*, c. 1883. Oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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127. **Thomas Eakins**, *The Swimming Hole*, 1885. Oil on canvas. Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.

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It is nearly impossible to define realism with any degree of accuracy, for everyone experiences reality differently. However, within this art historical category, visual representations of male homoerotic desire appear less frequently than do images of lesbianism produced by men. Some scholars believe that voyeurism and the sexualisation of women was a psychological response by some male artists and their patrons to the increased political voice and presence of women on the social scene. In the 1860s, the Turkish ambassador to France, Khalil Bey, commissioned the artist J. A. D. Ingres to produce two paintings in which an all-female world was visualised for erotic delectation.

Although the paintings by Ingres and Courbet are important for broaching lesbianism as viable subject matter for art, they nevertheless depict the love between women from a male perspective. The French animal painter Rosa Bonheur (1822-1899) was the first artist to picture lesbian life from an insider's point of view (Saslow, p.175). Unlike the radical realist Courbet, Bonheur was a consensus realist whose works, for the most part, fed into an officially-sanctioned brand of realism. It was Bonheur's radical behaviour more than her work that has positioned her as one of the more important women artists of the nineteenth century.

In order to become a successful artist and compete on an equal footing with her male counterparts, Bonheur took on the physical and attitudinal attributes of a man. She embraced a lifestyle with elements of a masculine guise. She wore men's clothes in public, rolled her own cigarettes, chain-smoked in public, and she engaged in typically male activities such as hunting and shooting. As Saslow noted: "Drag was a weapon in her battle to claim masculine prerogatives and create an androgynous, proto-lesbian visual identity." (Saslow, p.176). Wearing drag was also illegal and Bonheur had to obtain a police permit to do so. She despised cowardliness and admired heroic actions. Although she identified almost always with the masculine point of view, she viewed the female sex as superior. She was also, ironically, politically conservative. She maintained a 'butch-femme' relationship for many years with her biographer and fellow artist, Anna Klumpke.

Rosa Bonheur served as an example to burgeoning women artists who wanted to engage in art and in the art world on their own terms. In the 1850s in Rome a group of independent women sculptors appeared who specialised in neoclassical sculpture with themes relevant to women. These women, derisively called by author Henry James "the white marmorean flock", broke out of the stereotypical female role by leaving home and taking up public sculpture – activities deemed unsuitable and undesirable for women. The group was also a haven for romantic friendships and same-sex couplings.

Unlike Rosa Bonheur, these women invested ideas about their sexual and social roles as women into their works (Emmanuel Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the Last 100 Years in the West*, New York and London, Routledge, 1986, p.55). The leader of this group of expatriate women artists was the American sculptor Harriet Hosmer (1820-1908), who had been raised as a boy in Massachusetts by her father. During her childhood she was encouraged to engage in activities such as rowing, horse riding, shooting, and climbing trees. Her upbringing in an environment where strict gender roles were ignored, forged a streak of toughness and independence. In Rome, Hosmer became part of an exclusive artistic and literary circle. She became friends with the Victorian artist Frederic Leighton who remembered her as the "queerest, best natured little chap possible" (quoted in Cooper, p.56).

Bonheur's example as an "out lesbian feminist" inspired many other women to take up the cause of women's equality and independence. One such inspired woman was Louise Abbema (1858-1927), who lived in Paris and

128. **Frank Meadow Sutcliffe**, *The Water Rats*, 1885. Photograph. The Sutcliffe Gallery, Whitby.

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had heard of Bonheur's talents and fame since she had been a little girl (Cooper, p.52). Like Bonheur, Abbema set out to become "a celebrated woman painter" (Cooper, p.52; Karen Petersen and J. J Wilson, *Women Artists*, London, The Women's Press, 1978, p.78).

As male homosexuality grew more visible in the late nineteenth century, cultural representations of it became more precise, incorporating references to classical antiquity, the Middle Ages, and mysticism. Also of importance were the academic study of the nude and the use of photography to inspire an art that was by and large set outdoors. Frederic Leighton (1830-96), a Victorian painter knighted in 1878 and the first painter given peerage in 1896, and close friend of Harriet Hosmer, remained a more traditional artist by carrying academic classicism to the close of the century. Leighton held the prestigious post as president of the Royal Academy of Arts and promoted his interest in the antique past and in a Renaissance revival. He incorporated into these areas his own pederastic attraction to young boys. In his private correspondence, he was referred to by many by the feminine nicknames 'Fay' and 'Bimbo' (Cooper, p.26). In public life, he maintained a persona of a sophisticated and dandyish aesthete. Leighton's paintings often combine a unique brand of Victorian realism with focus on technical excellence and a classical theme.

The sexuality of Leighton and his contemporaries Thomas Eakins, John Singer Sargent, and Henry Scott Tuke are difficult to define precisely. These artists were producing work during a period when modern homosexuality was just forming and had not yet been given a precise name. None of them can be seen as homosexual in the modern sense of the word. Leighton's biographers warned that we must be careful in labelling the artist a homosexual (see Leonée and Richard Ormond, *Lord Leighton*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1975). Despite Eakins' marriage to a woman, and that the others were on intimate terms with women at various points in their lives, all did have significant emotional and sometimes physical relationships with men and produced work that expressed powerful homoerotic sentiments (Cooper, p.25).

American expatriate artist John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) was a close friend of Leighton. Like Leighton, Sargent was a world traveller who eventually settled in London. Also like Leighton, Sargent marshalled in erotic emotions and feelings for the male body in his art (Cooper, p.29). By 1890, Sargent had gained a considerable reputation as a portrait painter for the fashionable elite.

Sargent was very cautious to protect his privacy and offered little information about his sexual preferences. He did remain a lifelong bachelor with a private personal life. He was especially sensitive to public comment and for this reason he declined to become a regular contributor to *The Yellow Book* out of fear of being too closely associated with Aubrey Beardsley (Cooper, p.30). Nevertheless, he did

129. **Giovanni Boldini**, *Portrait of Robert de Montesquiou*. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges-Pompidou, Paris.

130. **Simeon Solomon**, *The Bride, Bridegroom and Sad Love*, 1865. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

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cultivate strong associations with notorious aesthetes and dandies like Oscar Wilde, Robert de Montesquiou, and Henry James. His papers were destroyed by his family at his death and little is known about the artist's twenty-five year relationship with his Italian valet Nicola d'Inverno (Michael J. Murphy, "John Singer Sargent," in Haggerty, p.775).

Sargent and his family have made certain that his sexual orientation would remain a mystery. Even during his lifetime, he took care to guard his private acts and emotions carefully. This led his biographer, Evan Charteris, writing in 1927, to cite "a network of repressions". After Sargent's death, the artist Jacques-Émile Blanche spoke of Sargent's active sexual relations with men.

The more blatant homoerotic aspects of Sargent's work are found in his genre paintings and in his preparations for a large-scale mural commission for the new Boston Public Library. He worked on the mural for almost three decades and produced many charcoal and painted sketches of male nudes for it. The mural remained unfinished at the time of his death in 1925.

131. **Aubrey Beardsley**, *The Lacedaemonian Ambassadors*, 1896.

132. **Aubrey Beardsley**, Drawing for *"Lysistrata"* by Aristophanes, 1896. Lithography.

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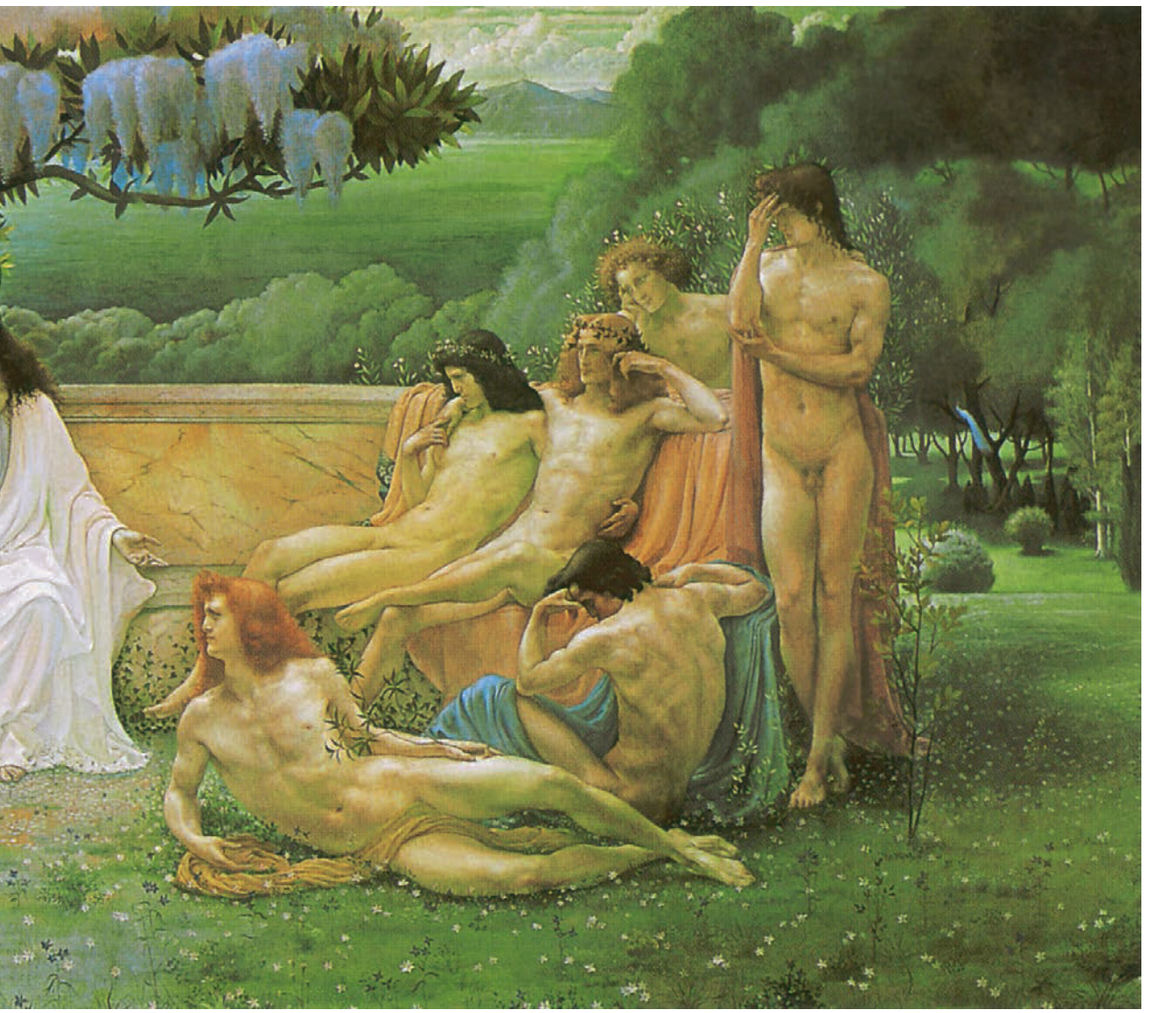

Unlike England, where a homoerotic aestheticism reigned in the guise of classicism, in the United States it was scenes of everyday life cast in a realist mode that predominated. It was also a time and place where photography was used as a pedagogical tool in painting. American realism sought to make art more accessible and speak to the common man. It disdained artifice and classicising mysticism that was predominant in Europe. One artist who combined his concerns about realism and American manhood was Thomas Eakins. His works sought a vision of robust virility and concentrated on the athlete rather than the aesthete. He is particularly known for his outdoor scenes involving the male body in action (Saslow, p.197). Following the example of the Greeks and the Renaissance painters, Eakins was attracted to the male nude placed in contemporary realist settings. Eakins was familiar with the poetic works of his friend and neighbour Walt Whitman and may have been influenced by the poet's vision of a new America based on veiled homoerotic feelings.

Throughout his texts, Whitman stressed the importance of male comradeship in reference both to America's pioneering past and to the ancient Greeks (Cooper, p.31). Although Whitman denied in public that his writings acknowledged homosexuality in any form, in private the emotions he describes were undeniably homoerotic.

133. **Jean Delville**, *Plato's Academy*, 1898. Oil on canvas, 206 x 605 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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As a teacher and director of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Eakins cultivated friendships with his students. Beginning in the 1880s, he took a keen interest in photography and began using the photograph as a pedagogical tool at the Academy. Almost all of his images are based on photographs and often show an all-male world of hunters, rowers, wrestlers, bathers, and boxers. He encouraged his male students to pose nude out of doors in woodland glades, "sometimes pretending to play the classical pipes" while photographed or painted (Cooper, p.33).

Eakins' desire to represent the male nude figure outdoors in nature was also an obsession for the English artist Henry Scott Tuke (1858-1929). As with Sargent and Eakins, Tuke's sexual orientation is difficult to establish conclusively. He did vow never to marry and he knew many men who were confirmed homosexuals, the most famous of which was John Addington Symonds (1840-93) – a late-Victorian man of letters, art historian, classicist, literary critic, poet, and aesthete. "[He] served as midwife during the birth of 'the homosexual' in late nineteenth-century England." (Leland Monk, "John Addington Symonds," in Haggerty, p.859).

Tuke was part of a rarefied group of artists who travelled to Mediterranean cultures in search of material for painting. He found his subject in pre-pubescent boys depicted on the beach or in boats off-shore.

The willingness of young Italian boys to pose naked for a small amount of money, and the tacit social tolerance or encouragement of such exchanges, added to the attraction of places like Naples, Sicily and Sardinia. Photographs by von Gloeden and Plüschow record these interests. Based on similar poses seen in his figures, it is possible that Tuke was familiar with these photographs.

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134. After **Hyppolyte Flandrin**, Advertisement for "Solitude", 1906.

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135. **Hippolyte Flandrin**, *Young Man Naked beside the Sea*, 1836. Oil on canvas, 98 x 124 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

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The label 'homosexual' can be more assuredly applied to the most 'out' of nineteenth-century artists, Simeon Solomon (1840-1905). Solomon's sexual tastes were well-known among the Chelsea set of aesthetes who gathered around the pre-Raphaelite painter and poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Ancient Greece was a source of inspiration for Solomon and the circle of homosexuals he frequented. This circle included Algernon Swinburne and Walter Pater. Classical antiquity provided a legitimate social and artistic model of love between men. "Male fellowship and loyalty in Greek society, and acceptance of homosexual love, suggested idealistic, democratic values at a time when Britain was redefining its constitutional boundaries." (Smith, p.157). Solomon became increasingly reckless in his sexual exploits. The permeation of Solomon's sexual identity into his exhibited art works began to be publicly noted by critics and commentators.

The troubled nature of Simeon Solomon's art was reflected in his life. On the night of 11 February, 1873, he was arrested in a public restroom in London and charged with indecent exposure. He was found guilty and sentenced to prison for eighteen months. Solomon's family and friends came to his aid and he was released. From this point on, he became more and more reclusive, separating himself from the art world. However, he did continue to produce art and sold numerous pastel drawings, mostly to galleries.

136. **Wilhelm von Gloeden**, *Hermaphrodite*, c. 1900. Photograph.

137. **Wilhelm von Gloeden**, *Two Young Men*. Photograph.

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Eventually, he was denounced by his closest friend Swinburne as a "catamite" and follower of John Addington Symonds (Cooper, pp.68-9). Not long after, other friends and acquaintances followed suit and distanced themselves from him. Their actions resulted in Solomon's turning to drugs and alcohol as a form of escape and consolation. Although it was unfortunate what happened to Solomon as a result of social intolerance and ignorance about homosexuality, Solomon did work tirelessly at publicly projecting himself as the eternally suffering artist.

Artists such as Solomon and others in the nineteenth-century decadent circle of aesthetes found the concept of the androgyne and the effeminate male highly attractive (Cooper, p.70). Montesquiou lauded the effeminate and wrote: "In himself the effeminate contains more than one race. Yes, more than one sex also. He is indefatigable when others are exhausted. And deceit and anxiety only lend him strength." (Quoted in Cooper, p.70; see Philippe Jullian, Robert de Montesquiou, *A Fin-de-Siècle Prince*, London, Secker & Warburg, 1967).

During the 1890s (also called the "Gay Nineties"), "aesthetes and realists flourished side by side," complementing one another while promoting a 'gay' sensibility (Saslow, p.185). Indeed, one could find a relationship between the frolicking male nudes of Thomas Eakins and the delicate yet irreverent and sometimes comical line drawings of Aubrey Beardsley (1872-98). Beardsley's career was short but dramatic. His drawings and illustrations for erotic books would influence future artists for years to come. He is also known for having questioned conventional sexuality by celebrating sexual excess.

An interesting marriage between aesthete and realist can be witnessed in the association of Oscar Wilde with Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Toulouse-Lautrec is known primarily as a poster artist of the late nineteenth century whose subject matter focused on the people and events in cabarets, dance halls, and brothels of the Montmartre working-class section in Paris. Montmartre was the area where homosexuals and bisexuals of all classes and nationalities congregated to indulge their wants and desires. Toulouse-Lautrec himself was considered as socially marginal due to his short stature and crippled leg. He was one of those rare artists who observed the life around him by uninhibitedly indulging in it. He was fascinated by the extremes of behaviour and experience, seeking out sexual perversion and extravagant sensations. Although both male and female homosexual activity occurred within the bohemian world of Montmartre, literary and visual references rarely speak of desire between men.

Society's fear and regulation of male homosexuality can be seen in some *fin-de-siècle* literature, particularly in the poetry of Jean Lorrain and Paul Verlaine. Whereas bohemian male homosexuality seems to have provoked anxiety and hostility, the case was less so with lesbians. Bohemian discourse around lesbianism was primarily literary and pictorial while the discourse around male homosexuality was principally scientific or medical (see Wilson, pp.204-5). Bohemian journals are filled with stories and poems concerning Sappho and Lesbos.

Like Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec often frequented brothels in search of subject matter for his paintings and prints. But unlike Degas who remained detached and aloof from the prostitutes themselves, Toulouse-Lautrec cultivated intimate relationships with the prostitutes who treated him as a member of their outcast family. Gaining the trust of these prostitutes, Toulouse-Lautrec produced many paintings, drawings, and lithographs showing the private and intimate moments between the prostitutes themselves. The fact that these intimate events take place within the private domain of the maison closes indicates that Toulouse-Lautrec was perhaps aware of the marginality of

138. **Wilhelm von Plüschow**, *Two Women*, c. 1900. Photograph.

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these women and their affection toward one another. The private nature of the images – the figures are usually in bed and are covered over with voluminous bedding – indicates a desire to show these women's intimacy but not to invade their privacy. Toulouse-Lautrec observes, but not in the exploitative voyeuristic sense that was usual for Degas. Toulouse-Lautrec's awareness of the marginal status of the prostitute and the lesbian is underscored by the fact that the gender of the figures in bed is rendered ambivalent.

Symbolism and the Leap of Imagination

Unlike the Barbus, who created their art in a post-French Revolution context, the Rosicrucians and Idealist painters espoused their ideas about life and art within a much more complex social context resulting from the second Industrial Revolution in France, the 1870 Franco-Prussian War and the 1871 Paris Commune. These latter events seriously threatened the stability and strength of the middle class. At the end of the nineteenth century a group of young painters belonging to the Rosicrucian or Idealist school of art became popular in both France and Belgium.

It was in France where the leader of a cult of Idealist painters named Joséphin Péladan (called Sâr Péladan) provided the intellectual background for the formulation of the subject matter in Delville's Plato's Academy. Péladan is associated with the esoteric and mystical literature of the turn of the century. It was Péladan who elaborated upon the conception of the sacred nature of art as revelation and the male artist as mediator between society and the divine. Like Maurice Quay before him, Péladan's idiosyncratic behaviour accentuated his eccentric theories which were essentially a bringing together of Eastern mysticism, homoeroticism, and androgyny. Péladan's Idealist cult believed in a mystical notion of Beauty and banned all women from its exclusive circle. They made an art of blending mysticism and eroticism. Like the Neo-Platonists before them, the Symbolists/Idealists believed that the mechanics of sensual desire paralleled those of spiritual desire. The androgyne and the attainment of androgynous perfection was, in particular, one of Péladan's principal aesthetic obsessions and the major inspiration for the perpetuation and elevation of the androgynous and homoerotic theme in late nineteenth-century art.

From Aestheticism to Sexology

The exposure of a growing homosexual underworld to the bourgeois public actually occurred in England with the famous trials of Oscar Wilde. For some scholars and observers, it was Oscar Wilde's prosecution and conviction for "posing as a sodomite" with the son of Lord Queensberry, Alfred Douglas, that galvanised and propelled 'gay' culture into an awareness of itself as a potentially political and social force (see Saslow, pp.202-3). The scientific community soon joined this growing social awareness of homosexuality, encouraging further "political activism, scientific study, and historical research" (Saslow, p.203).

The late nineteenth century is known for the rise of sexology, that is, the study of sexual practice and behaviour prior to psychoanalysis and other significant contributions of Sigmund Freud. Sexology attempted to systematise and give scientific legitimacy to the physical and psychological dimensions of homosexuality. Sexology heavily influenced the works of visual artists and writers of the late nineteenth century. Some of the key players in sexological theory include Karl Maria Kertbeny (1847-82), Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-95), Magnus Hirschfeld

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139. **Wilhelm von Gloeden**, *Two Young Men*. Photograph.

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(1868-1935), and Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902). These men varied in their theories regarding the physical and emotional expression of human sexuality, but all of them held in common the idea that sexual orientation was complex and ambiguous. The ideas of these men regarding sexuality as a diverse phenomenon contributed significantly to what we now refer to as a modern homosexual identity.

For Kertbeny, sexual instincts are innate and not chosen. He divided homosexuals into subcategories, which included those who only masturbate each other, those who attempt the "natural coitus between man and woman in an unnatural manner", those who are "active" and "passive", and "Platonists", who love the company of people of the same sex without wanting to have sex with them (Udo Schüklenk, "Karl Maria Kertbeny," in Haggerty, p.514).

Ulrichs is most noted for coining the term 'Uranianism' to denote homosexuality. This term and its meaning were used only in the nineteenth century and influenced numerous homosexual writers who came to be known as the Uranian poets. The term 'Uranian', borrowed from the speech by Pausanias in Plato's *Symposium*, was adopted by poets in late nineteenth-century England to designate homosexual and pederastic love (Ed Madden, "Uranianism," in Haggerty, p.907). Beginning in 1864, Ulrichs developed a theory of 'Uranian' love, or sexual love of men for men. He called men who loved men Urnings. Urnings constituted an intermediary or 'third' sex distinct from both male and female. By Ulrichs' way of thinking, homosexuals possessed a feminine soul trapped in a masculine body and vice versa. Sexual attraction towards a member of the same sex was seen as innate and therefore, natural. It was the idea of homosexuality as a natural rather than learned or acquired expression that contributed most significantly to our contemporary ideas about modern homosexual identity.

Hirschfeld, another pioneering German sexologist, spent most of his career fighting social and legal strictures against homosexuality in Germany. His significance lies in his challenging the notion of homosexuality as deviant and pathological. Hirschfeld became famous in 1896 when he published a work called *Sappho and Socrates*. This treatise was designed to "increase public awareness and acceptance of homosexuality" (Nancy San Martin, "Magnus Hirschfeld," in Haggerty, p.440). From 1899 to 1923, he published the *Yearbook for Sexual Intermediaries* (*Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen*), which "provided materials of interest to homosexuals, transvestites, androgynes, hermaphrodites, and other sexually marginal types".

Hirschfeld's theory of sexual intermediaries drew from Ulrichs' ideas. Both researchers suggested that: "The homosexual was an intermediary type between male and female heterosexuals, exhibiting the physical characteristics of one sex while manifesting the emotional characteristics, behaviours, and drives of the other." (Martin in Haggerty, p.440).

It was a combination of the Wilde trials and advances in sexology that brought homosexual voices and knowledge about homosexuality to the larger populace. One result was that entrepreneurs began exploiting the commercial and entertainment potential of homosexuality. Images in magazines and inexpensive art reproductions began to increase. It was through these more popular media that the aestheticism of Wilde and company began to trickle down to the new mass urban society (Saslow, pp.202-3). Organisations and publications soon developed around homosexuality and were marketed first to mostly men, then later to homosexual women.

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140. **Wilhelm von Gloeden**, *Three Young Men*. Photograph.

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The aesthete photographer Wilhelm von Gloeden (1856-1931) helped close the nineteenth century with imagery that set out to reinvent the classical Golden Age of ancient Greece for "the special interests of a libertine, cosmopolitan, and largely homosexual audience" (Ellenzweig, p.35). Von Gloeden is known for his pictures of nude Sicilian youths posed in imitation of the antique style. Like Toulouse-Lautrec, von Gloeden was of aristocratic lineage and considered himself exempt from bourgeois social and moral expectations. He was part of a group of artists, writers, and aesthetes who, having the means, travelled to the sunny and sensuous Mediterranean area for aesthetic and sexual release. It was in Taormina, a Sicilian city strewn with Greek and Roman ruins, where he found handsome young men willing to pose nude for a fee. His clients for these photographs were "an informal network of aristocrats, artists, libertines, clerics…" (Ellenzweig, pp.35-6).

Von Gloeden's counterpart in America was the photographer F. Holland Day (1864-1933) whose works also attempt to recreate a classical past, but did so "with an elegant, more self-consciously 'pictorialist' style" (Saslow, p.194). Day was a "flamboyant decadent aesthete" whose photographic work carried the homoerotic interests of the 1890s decadents into the twentieth century. He was born into a wealthy Bostonian family and idolised Oscar Wilde, whom he befriended among other Decadent aesthetes such as Lord Alfred Douglas, George Santayana, and Aubrey Beardsley during an extended stay in England.

Upon his return to the United States, Day introduced the works of these aesthetes to the American public. It was at this time that Day started toying with photography and also took under his wing a young Lebanese writer named Kahlil Gibran. The two not only became collaborators on projects, but also had a passionate love affair. Before he took up photography, Day already had credentials as a mover and shaker in the domain of culture. Along with a friend, he published the works of young experimental authors and illustrators from Great Britain and America. He privately published Wilde's *Salomé* along with Beardsley's salacious illustrations for it. He was a collector of Keats memorabilia and was obsessed with the works of Honoré de Balzac (Ellenzweig, p.47). More significant for his work was his interest in mystical religions which informed his eventual forays into Christian iconography.

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141. **Boris Orlovski**, *Faun*, c. 1820. Marble. The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

142. **Fred Holland Day**, *Young Man with a Lyre*, 1907. Photograph. The Royal Photographic Society.

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Chapter 6

Homosexuality in the Art of Modernism and Postmodernism (1900–2000)

I. From Modernism to Stonewall (1900-1969)

The twentieth century is a period loaded with artistic and political movements. Writers, artists, and other people as well as events have had a tremendous impact on fostering a conscious identity for male and female homosexuals. The history of homosexuality in twentieth-century Western art is extensive, thus a process of selection is necessary.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, homosexuality was a term used to define one's sexual behaviour and one's sexual identity. The definition of homosexuality sprang from both a desire by heterosexuals to control those they deemed 'different', and a desire by homosexuals to liberate themselves and to create a sense of self. As had been the case in the late nineteenth century, science, medicine, and sexology were crucial to the definition of and critical discourse around homosexuality. The writings of Krafft-Ebing, Ellis, and Freud all worked to support and reinforce the notion of homosexuality as a pathological state or a potentially contagious symptom that could be 'cured'. The view of homosexuality as deviant behaviour was reinforced by the trial and imprisonment of Oscar Wilde in 1895 – a trial that placed homosexuality in public view and under public scrutiny. Interestingly, lesbianism was completely ignored. For most of the population, sex between women was unimaginable and simply did not exist. Thus, it could neither be criminalised nor medicalised.

In 1899, an aesthete of Baltic aristocratic ancestry, Elisar von Kupffer (1872-1942), became popular in homosexual circles with the publication of an anthology of homoerotic literature spanning from antiquity to his own time called *Lieblingminne und Freundesliebe in der Weltliteratur*. Von Kupffer, a poet and painter, hoped to create a conceptual and visual counterbalance to the medical theories of homosexuality of the period, especially those of his fellow German countrymen Hirschfeld and Krafft-Ebing. Von Kupffer rejected the terms 'homosexuality' and 'uranism' because these pathologised homosexuality, assuming that the person was diseased, deviant, and suffering from effeminacy as an illness. Instead, von Kupffer preferred to employ the terms *Lieblingminne* (chivalric love) and *Freundesliebe* (love of friends) to designate same-sex love. He saw homosexuality not as a medical condition, but as an important aspect of cultural and social practice that had only to be recognised as such (Harry Oosterhuis, "Elisar von Kupffer," in Haggerty, pp.524-525). Von Kupffer saw merit in Greek boy-love, pedagogical eros, and the cult of romantic friendship. He promoted these ideas in his writings and in a series of paintings that set out to elevate "androgyny as a state of human perfection" (Oosterhuis, p.525).

In these works, eros spanned the gulf between the masculine and the feminine. Together with a fellow German friend, Eduard von Mayer, von Kupffer contrived an esoteric doctrine called *Klarismus*, for which he built the Sanctuarium Artis Elisarion in Minusio (Locarno) in Switzerland. This was to be a physical space, a combined temple and museum dedicated to his mystical ideas around androgyny and boy-love. The Sanctuarium consisted of

143. **Léon Bakst**, Drawing of the costume of Vaslav Nijinsky in *Sheherazade*.

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decorative wall paintings by von Kupffer that represented eighty-four strikingly similar naked and half-naked ephebic youths in various positions and enigmatic scenarios. To a contemporary audience, these images may appear campy and kitsch-like in their subject matter and manner of presentation. For von Kupffer, however, they constituted evidence of a serious conviction on his part to the realise his esoteric doctrine.

Von Kupffer's fantasy world of androgyny and ephebic youths moved into the realm of photography with the works of Wilhelm von Gloeden and F. Holland Day. Both photographers relied on classical themes to inform and heighten the homoerotic tenor of their works. At the same time, they and others considered what they had produced as modern. It was through introspection and veiled homoerotic imagery that both used art as subterfuge in seeking a public identity. Their kind of classicised art, fused with a homoerotic sensibility, would give way to a new ethos – that of a vanguard modernism formed by dramatic changes in the very fabric of late nineteenth-century European and American culture.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, art and homosexuality were plunged into a barrage of challenges that eventually took shape as a movement and outlook called modernism. 'Modernism' is a Western European term, idea, and movement whose birthplace was at first Paris and later New York. The "Buddha of modernism" in Europe was Gertrude Stein who believed in cubism as a new way of seeing, as an art form that forces us to question what the eyes see. Einstein's theory of relativity revealed what we could not see – "a hidden atomic structure, graspable only through mathematics".

At the same time, Sigmund Freud exposed the workings of unconscious motivations as more powerful determinants than outer actions. The result was a restlessness and inkling for experimentation, especially with the new visual language of abstraction, "which aimed to elevate art above mere objects and anecdote, to express universal truths of pure form" (Saslow, p.208). Testing Freud's theories and applying them to the world of the visual was Marcel Duchamp who, among other things, "redefined image making as a conceptual game, driving a wedge of ironic self-consciousness and erotic ambiguity for camp subversion" (Saslow, p.208).

The "heyday of modernism… overlaps the formative gay period from Hirschfeld to Stonewall," from sexology to Freud to the 1969 Stonewall rebellion. But during these years: "Western culture was itself deflected by a breakdown

144. **Elisar von Kupffer**, *Tre Anime: Antiquità, Oriente e Tempi Moderni*, 1913. Tempera on canvas. Centro Culturale, Museo Elisarion, Minusio.

145. **Léon Bakst**, Drawing of the costume of Vaslav Nijinsky in the role of Iskender in *La Péri*, 1911. Watercolour, 67.6 x 48.9 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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146. **Elisar von Kupffer**, *Narcissus*, 1927. Tempera on canvas. Centro Culturale, Museo Elisarion, Minusio.

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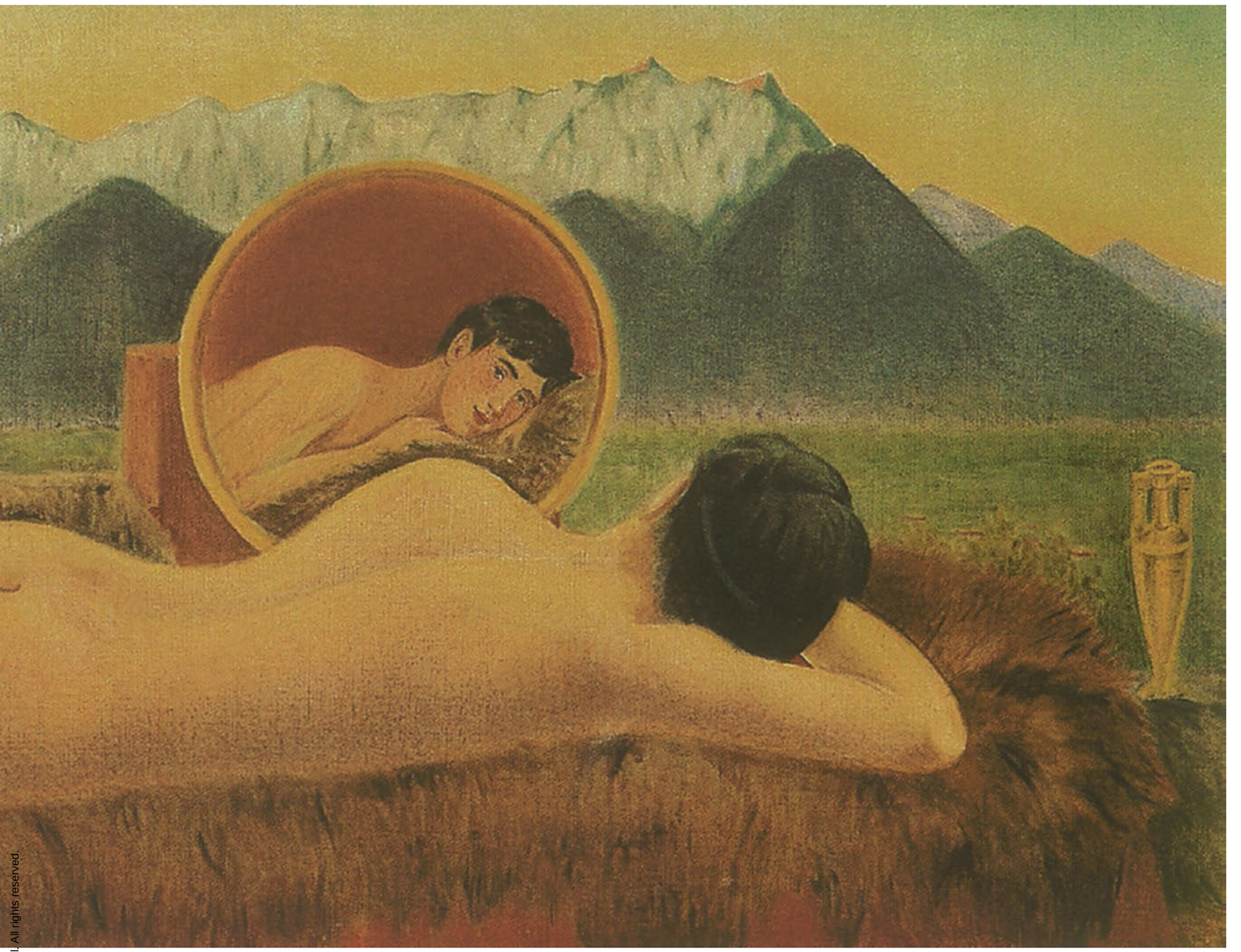

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of old boundaries amid increasing globalism." This process seems to have had little effect on Africa, Islam, and India who were "preoccupied by struggles against colonial domination. China was too wracked by successive revolutions to innovate in the arts. Only Japan, already enthusiastic about the foreign culture that occupied it after World War II, showed the first clear signs of gay cross-fertilisation" (Saslow, pp.208-9).

Sappho on the Left Bank

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Paris slowly began to decline in deference to New York as the centre for Western art and culture. Nevertheless, artists from all over the world continued to flock to the City of Lights in search of new ideas and inspiration. Already before World War I, there existed an expatriate community of artists and writers in Paris whose indulgence in a free and open lifestyle influenced the content and quality of their work. The most influential visual artists, whose works bridged the visual and literary, were young female expatriates. In Paris a group of wealthy and talented women who identified themselves and each other as lesbian, pooled their intellectual resources and formed a formidable subculture "whose favourite gathering places were private salons and the cafés and bookstores of the bohemian Left Bank" (Saslow, p.209). These women gained Paris a reputation as a "'Sapphic capital' whose originality and patronage reigned over the birth of modern art" (Saslow, p.209). The "women of the Left Bank", as they were called then, were also supported by the Bloomsbury circle of writers, artists, and other intellectuals from England. It was, in fact, the Bloomsbury group who dubbed these women 'Sapphists' and recognised the significance of their attempts to declare themselves as modern-day followers of the ancient poet Sappho of Lesbos. Most of the women who participated in the Sapphic movement were writers and included Natalie Clifford Barney, Colette, Gertrude Stein, Alice B. Toklas, Djuna Barnes, and Radclyffe Hall. These women were complemented by a very small number of visual artists who included Gluck (Hannah Gluckstein), Romaine Brooks (1874-1970), and Alice Austin (1866-1952).

Although public displays of homosexual affection remained taboo for both women and men in the early decades of the twentieth century, lesbian circles became more visible and previously closeted lesbians became more daring in public displays of their sexual preference. At the turn of the century, lesbianism was not forbidden by law, but it was not officially condoned either. Legislators refused to believe that it existed and feared that public discussion would only draw more attention to it (Cooper, *The Sexual Perspe*ctive, p.86). When public attention was directed at it, lesbianism was thought of as a passing phase, or a woman's last resort "when a husband failed to materialise" (Cooper, p.86). In other words, a woman's sexuality was not taken seriously especially when it deviated from the norm.

Prior to the notoriety of the Parisian Sapphists, there was little or no lesbian visibility in art except for *Sleep* by Courbet and a few lesbian scenes by Toulouse-Lautrec. These, however, were images of women produced by men for male consumption. One lesbian painter who was determined to draw upon her own experience as both a woman and a lesbian for her art was Romaine Brooks. Brooks was financially independent and decided to leave the United States to indulge in an eccentric lifestyle abroad and to cultivate her art. She was an active member of not only the few lesbian circles then forming in Paris, Florence, and Capri, but also the Aesthetic Movement. When she arrived in Paris at the beginning of the century, she became fast friends with the aesthete Robert de Montesquiou and with Gabriele d'Annunzio, the latter of whom dubbed her a "thief of souls" able to "pierce her subjects' personalities" and reveal the truth of her sitters' character (Cooper, p.94; Saslow, p.209). She was resolute and extremely forthright about her sexual orientation and produced androgynous images of women approximating a style close to that of the Aesthetic Movement. Her goal was to provide affirming images of lesbians which did not caricature or sensationalise them.

147. **Kouzma Petrov-Vodkine**, *The Bath of the Red Horse*, 1912. Oil on canvas, 160 x 186 cm. The State Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow.

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Many of her paintings show women like herself – resolute and independent – wearing clothes and sporting haircuts that were considered 'mannish'. The visualisation was underscored by Radclyffe Hall's explicitly lesbian novel of 1924 called *The Well of Loneliness* in which she attempted to "break out of the asexual model of romantic friendship" (Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1986, p.173). Brooks' works fall into three main categories: self-portraits and non-commissioned portraits of friends; thematic paintings of young androgynous women; and 'stream of consciousness' line drawings (Cooper, p.91).

Images of lesbians by other lesbians attempted to forge a public lesbian identity based on the fabrication of an outward appearance that some viewed as 'mannish'. In contrast to the bold and daring works by Brooks and her contemporary Gluck (Hannah Gluckstein), images of women painted by other lesbians tended to be more cautious, "reflecting their reluctance to identify their relationships as lesbian" (Cooper, p.97).

The works of Brooks, and those produced by some of her lesbian contemporaries, were works that reflected the interests of a particular circle of privileged women, their friends and acquaintances. After World War II the works of Brooks and her contemporaries fell out of favour and were considered old-fashioned.

During the time Brooks and others were attempting to forge a public lesbian identity on canvas, Gertrude Stein and her companion Alice B. Toklas were organising their own avant-garde literary and artistic salon and making quite a stir in Paris. At one point, Brooks did meet Stein but the two never became close friends due to their very different personalities. Stein was an 'out' lesbian who became influential in both the artistic and literary worlds of Paris. She invented a "fragmented, repetitive, often barely comprehensible narrative style" that supposedly paralleled cubism (Saslow, p.211). She was also important because of her critical and financial support of avant-garde artists and writers. Her support helped usher in a progressive wave of modern art and writing which earned her the distinction as the "midwife of modernism".

Despite Stein's position in the minds of her contemporaries, she held an unsympathetic and bigoted view of male homosexuality – referring to homosexual men as a bunch of promiscuous, alcoholic, drug addicted, and eternally unhappy losers. Contrary to her ideas about gay men, however, Stein held a very idealistic view of lesbians. She wrote: "Women do nothing that they are disgusted by and nothing that is repulsive and afterwards they are happy and can lead happy lives together." (Quoted in Cooper, p.112). Stein's opinion held some hint of truth, for it pointed out the difficulties homosexual men faced in leading "happy lives" particularly in a society that was intolerant and homophobic. Despite her harsh view of men in general, Stein never held it against the male members of her fashionable inner circle. Her favourite artists were Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, both of whom were fascinated by the world of lesbians to which Stein and Toklas exposed them. Picasso was so fascinated by Stein that he painted her portrait in 1906.

Artistic and literary salons like the one established by Stein and Toklas, sprang up in other parts of Europe and America. These enclaves sparked creativity in works that sometimes juxtaposed a strong sexual identity with an avant-garde visual or verbal language. Across the English Channel in London, there were forward-thinking artists forming their own cliques whose work brought together issues regarding creativity, sexual identity, and the avant-garde. Collectively these circles of artists and critics were known as the Bloomsbury group. Among its contingent of homosexual writers and critics there was only one noteworthy painter among them, Duncan Grant (1885-1978). Grant, the youngest of the founding generation of Bloomsbury, was the only one of the bunch not to attend Cambridge University. His initial connection with the group was fostered through his cousin, the biographer Lytton

148. **Georg Pauli**, *Young Men Bathing*, 1914. Oil on canvas. Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.

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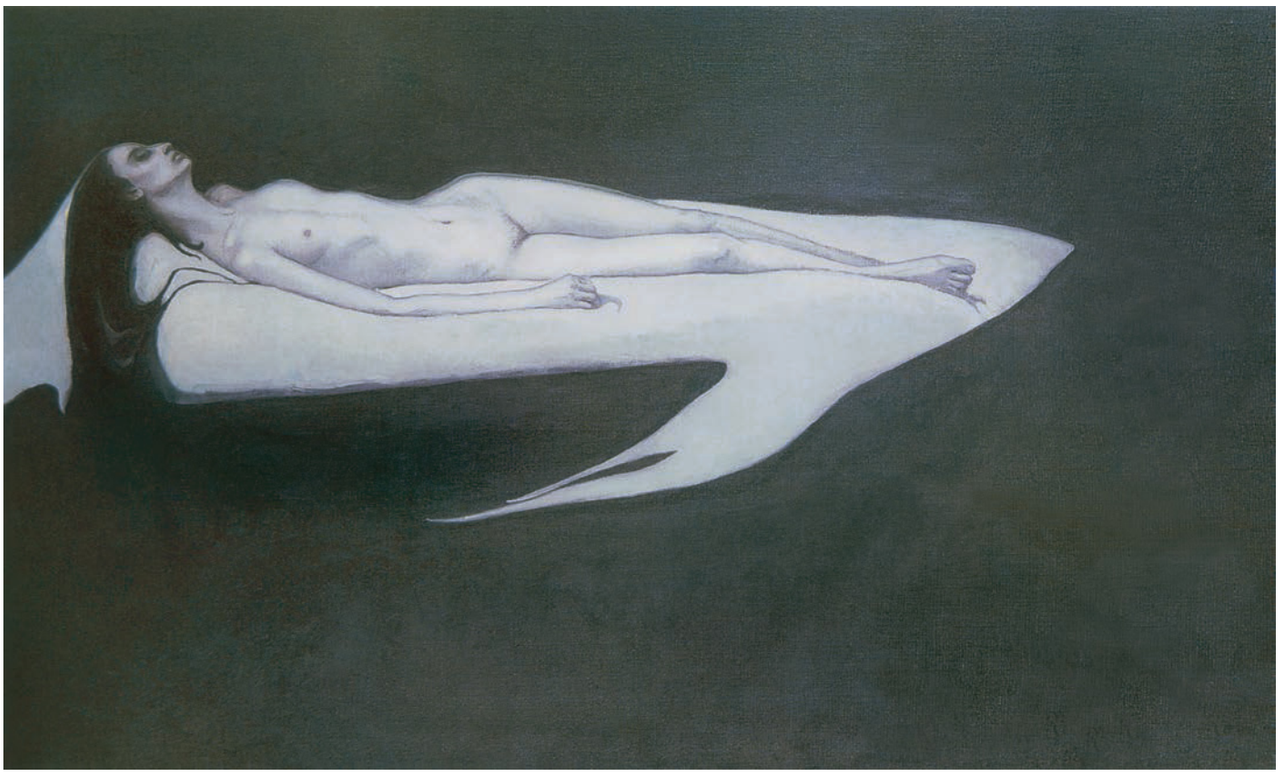

Strachey, who was also a member of the group (see Christopher Reed, "Duncan Grant," in Haggerty, p.415). Grant forged an intimate bond with Strachey's friend, the renowned economist John Meynard Keynes. Grant, Strachey, and Keynes were central to Bloombury's initial cohesiveness. They were joined by Vanessa Bell (Grant became her life-long domestic companion) and Clive Bell, a prominent art critic and Vanessa's husband.

All of the initial members of the Bloomsbury group were influenced by the aesthetic ideas and theories of Roger Fry, who dismissed Victorian narrative painting in favour of modernist styles that evoked freedom and sensuality. Fry's aesthetic ideas were first published in 1910.

Grant's exhibited works were subtle on the themes of male sensuality and homoerotic desire. However, he did produce many sketches and paintings throughout his long and prolific career that combined Fry-influenced modernist aesthetics with bold homoerotic, sometimes pornographic, themes.

As had been the case in both France and England, the United States also founded its own share of literary and artistic salons. The salon of New York socialite Mabel Dodge Luhan and that of the society hostess and spinster Florine Stettheimer were perhaps two of the most popular. Although they themselves were heterosexual, both of these women demonstrated a strong attraction for homosexual men. They showered their favourites with gifts, money, and precious commissions. In addition to fashionable literary and artistic salons, other activities also paved the way for American participation in modernist trends. New galleries such as Alfred Stieglitz's 291 Fifth Avenue Gallery (established in 1908) catered its services to the promotion and selling of art by radical artists working in contemporary styles.

149. **Romaine Brooks**, *Una*, *Lady Troubridge*, 1924. Oil on canvas, 127.3 x 76.8 cm. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

150. **Romaine Brooks**, *Le Trajet* (*The Crossing*), 1911. Oil on canvas, 115.2 x 191.4 cm. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

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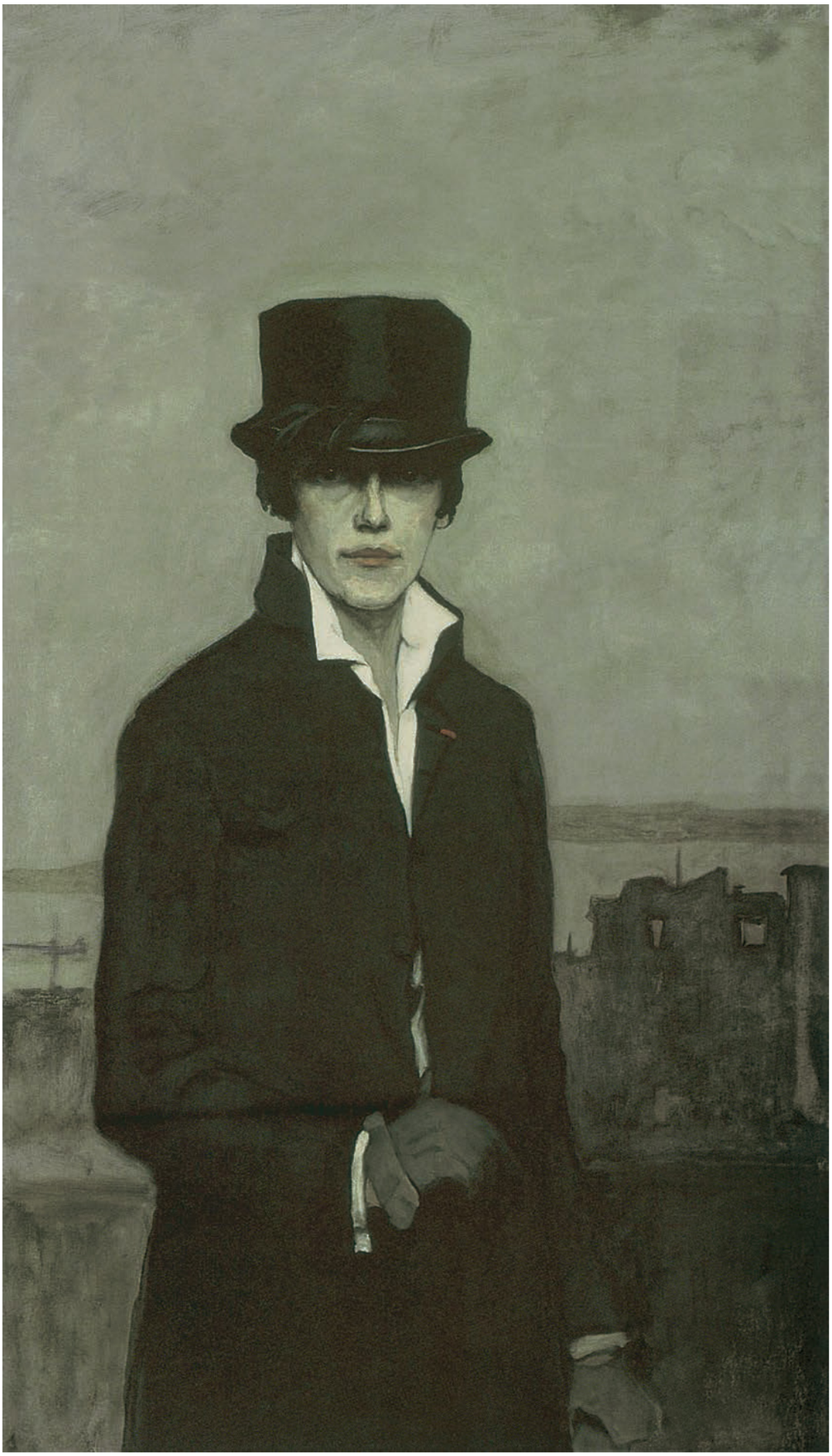

151. **Romaine Brooks**, *Self-Portrait*, 1923. Oil on canvas, 117.5 x 68.3 cm. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

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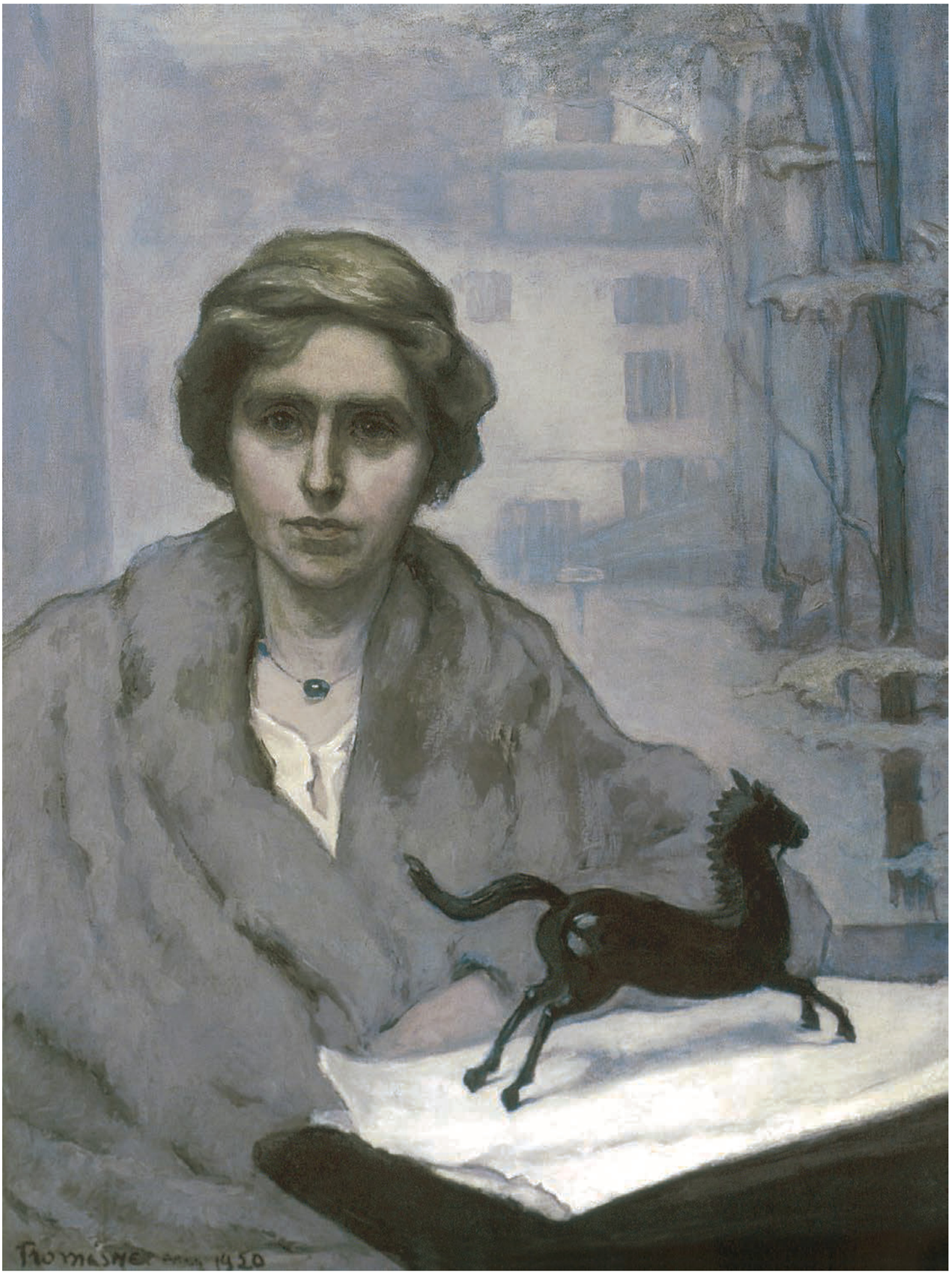

152. **Romaine Brooks**, *Portrait of Miss Natalie Barney "L'Amazone"*, 1920. Oil on canvas, 86 x 65 cm. Musée Carnavalet, Paris.

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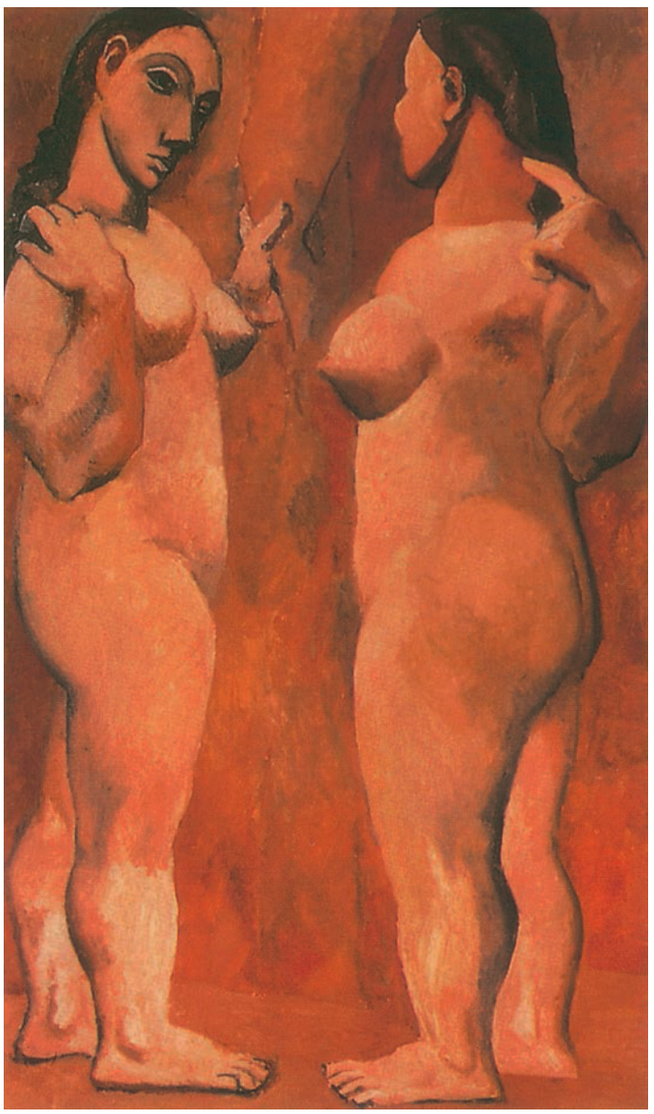

Major exhibitions in London (Roger Fry's Post-Impressionists, 1910 and 1913) and New York (the Armory Exhibition, 1913) brought developments in French avant-garde painting to new audiences whose sole experience had been with academic and traditional art (Cooper, p.113). In the context of these developments, some artists were able to express individualised homosexual identities in works of art albeit in limited and 'coded' ways. Many of these artists were inspired by the brilliant strategies of homosexual coding in the works of Oscar Wilde and J. K. Huysmans. Others, such as Charles Demuth and Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) linked themes of sexuality with the vogue for Freudian psychology in order to deliberately shock and outrage their conformist middle-class audiences.

Duchamp, who was not homosexual, fled the turmoil of World War I in Europe and arrived in New York in 1915. He had already made his mark with his notorious painting of a *Nude Descending a Staircase* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1912), exhibited at the Armory Show. In Europe, Duchamp was the leader of an iconoclastic art movement known as Dada. When he arrived in New York, he continued to initiate new approaches to art-making with his "readymades" and his alter ego "Rrose Sélavy". His approach to these two artistic practices resonated with lesbian, gay, and other sexually dissident cultures already in place in New York (Alex Robertson Textor, "Marcel Duchamp," in Haggerty, p.261).

Duchamp's most notorious "readymade" was his 1919 spoof on French art called *L. H. O. O. Q.* The concept of the "readymade" challenged traditional definitions of art. For Duchamp, the "readymade" was "a work of art without an artist to make it". Physical objects are 'already' made and are appropriated and transformed into works of art by mere say so of the artist. With *L. H. O. O. Q.*, Duchamp has taken a reproduction of Leonardo's masterpiece and given the model a goatee and moustache. Below, he has captioned the work with the five letters of its title. These letters, when read out loud in French, translate into "she has a hot ass" ("*elle a chaud au cul*"). Such irreverent graffiti gesture was at the very heart of Dada – a movement that sought to critique, subvert, and annihilate both the idea of gender difference and art hierarchies.

The forging of a homosexual identity affected the subject matter chosen by two American artists who are typically discussed together – Charles Demuth (1883-1935) and Marsden Hartley (1877-1943). Although Demuth and

153. **Pablo Picasso**, *Two Nudes,* 1906. Oil on canvas, 151.3 x 93 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

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154. **Duncan Grant**, *Bathing*, c. 1920-1921. Oil on canvas. Pallant House Gallery, Chichester.

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155. **Marcel Duchamp**, *Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette,* 1921-1966. Collection of Michael Senft, New York.

156. **Marcel Duchamp**, *Fountain*, copy of the original made in New York in 1917, 1917-1964. White porcelain with ceramic glaze and paint, 63 x 48 x 35 cm. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges-Pompidou, Paris (France).

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Hartley were friends and occasional lovers, they had different interests and temperaments. Demuth, an artist from Pennsylvania, studied art at the Pennsylvania Academy of Art. Early in his career he visited Paris where he met Hartley and frequented Gertrude Stein's salon (Jonathan Weinberg, "Charles Demuth," in Haggerty, p.250). Upon his return to the United States, he became associated with Stieglitz's circle. He was friendly with Duchamp and was influenced by his Dadaist gestures and Freudian associations with phallic imagery. Demuth's works are full of homoerotic codes decipherable only by a select few.

According to Jonathan Weinberg, Demuth addressed three different audiences with three different genres of work: small figure paintings (including literary illustrations, erotica, and vaudeville studies), still lifes, and large semi-abstract pictures in a combined cubist and precisionist style (Weinberg in Haggerty, p.250). Between 1915 and 1918, Demuth produced a watercolour series of bathhouse images in which sexual glances between men are explicit. He also produced a series of images in which sailors or soldiers are shown urinating or performing sexual activities with each other on secluded beaches. As Weinberg notes, Demuth's erotic scenes are generally pessimistic about love. They are concerned with the destructive and unhappy consequences of homosexual relationships. However, his scenes of urinating men – men in the act of bodily release in each other's company – also express the liberating potential of homoerotic desire (Weinberg in Haggerty, pp.250-1).

Unlike Demuth, who "looked for physical beauty and sexual attraction in conventional stereotypes such as sailors", the American painter and poet Marsden Hartley was more interested in seeking out true spiritual fulfilment. Before the outbreak of World War I, he travelled to Berlin where he not only fell deeply in love with a German officer, but also developed a fetish for military uniforms, boots and other insignia. His "orgasmic enthusiasm" over military processions has been documented as one of several spiritual journeys to finding true love (Saslow, p.215). He also sought spiritual fulfilment in the mountainous outdoors, in folk art, religion, and in the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, and Henri Thoreau. Hartley's spirituality spilled over into his homosexuality and his search for the idealised love of individual men. The desire for spiritual and sexual attainment is detected in his poetry in which he periodically refers to the need for male love.

In 1914, Hartley spent some time in Berlin before the outbreak of World War I. While there, he met Karl von Freyburg, a German officer who introduced the young painter and poet to the mystical aspects of German art. He was particularly drawn to the spiritual ideas of the *Blaue Reiter* group led by Wassily Kandinsky. The Berlin of pre-World War I, where Hartley fell in love, was prosperous, male-oriented, and relatively open to homosexuals despite an intense crackdown on 'deviant' morality accompanying a rise in nationalism. Inspired by his emotional involvement with von Freyburg, the mystical theories of Kandinsky, and with the homosexual life of Berlin, his paintings took on a unique compositional and spiritual strength and intensity while embracing a style that has been labelled "Cosmic Cubism," "Intuitive Abstraction," or "Subliminal Cubism" (Cooper, p.122). After von Freyburg's death, Hartley returned to the United States where he suffered at hearing anti-German sentiment launched by Americans. At this point, he abandoned paintings with military references and concentrated on still-lifes and two-dimensional expressive portraits. He spent some time in Provincetown amidst a group of artists vacationing from New York. He then travelled to Bermuda with Demuth. He eventually made his way back to Germany after the war. In 1930 he returned to America and then moved to Nova Scotia where he once again fell in love, this time with a man named Alty. As fate would have it, Alty drowned along with the other members of his family in a North Atlantic storm. Hartley, deeply affected by the loss, could not bring himself to deal with it in his art until two years later, when he produced a series of portraits. Although Hartley was a sensitive man

157. **Charles Demuth**, *Distinguished Air*, 1930. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

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158. **Herbert List**, *Wrestling Youths II, Baltic*, 1933. Photograph. Magnum photos. Paris.

159. **Herbert List**, *Greece*, 1937. Photograph. Magnum photos. Paris.

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aiming to tap into the mystical and spiritual aspects of his homosexuality, he was reluctant to fully acknowledge his sexual preference in his art. He had mixed feelings about his homosexuality and its constant force in affecting subject matter (Cooper, p.126).

After World War I, most of Europe lay in physical, economic, and political ruins. Over ten million people had died and countless others had been displaced. The cost of rebuilding was astronomical and took its toll on European economies. The war also fostered a heightened sense of nationalism and political unrest that was manifested in the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the rise of Fascism in Italy, and the National Socialist movement in Germany. The United States, entering the war late, recovered from the shock of it all by overindulgence in any and all things available to a newly affluent consumer society. In the decades following the war, the United States expanded its industry and fostered an increased demand for mass-produced consumer goods. Artists were brought on board to effectively package and market these goods to the public. It was during this period that fashion design and graphic illustration, along with photography, became very popular. These new fields attracted the talents of many homosexual artists who were drawn to the glamour and glitz associated with the fashion and advertising industries. One of the more successful illustrators of the period was the German immigrant Joseph C. Leyendecker (1874-1951) who, along with his brother, Frank Leyendecker, became best known for creating an American male icon known as the *Arrow Collar Man*, modelled after Joseph's stunningly beautiful Canadian lover, Charles Beach. Of the two brothers, Joseph was the most prolific. He also designed the covers of magazines such as *Boys' Life*, *Collier's*, and *Saturday Evening Post*. His illustrations were "narratives of heroic men, perfect family life, and traditional American values embodied in pristine WASP individuals" (Richard Martin, "J. C. Leyendecker," in Haggerty, pp.538-9).

Leyendecker's men are always well-dressed and virile. The suave, debonair, sophisticated and aloof man was promoted as the ideal of American masculinity. The sex appeal of the *Arrow Collar Man* was directed at both women and men, for the goal was to sell as many Arrow Collar shirts as possible. Through this American icon of masculinity, Leyendecker understood how to "visualise and orchestrate" the "flaming allure" of masculine charm and beauty for both women and men (Saslow, p.234).

160. **Georges Brassaï**, *Young (Male) Couple at the Bal de la Montagne Sainte-Geneviève,* 1931. Photograph. Foundation Brassaï, Paris.

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Around the same time that Leyendecker, Demuth, and Hartley were making their own significant contributions to the formation of twentieth-century modernism in America, a cultural and artistic resurgence was underway in New York's African-American community. This flowering of creativity, called the Harlem Renaissance, occurred between the two world wars and was dominated by the works and personalities of gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals. The Harlem Renaissance was the result of a mass migration of African-Americans looking for jobs from the poor rural areas of the south to the urban centres of the north. It was the northern section of Manhattan known as Harlem that became the Mecca for African-Americans of all intellectual, social, and sexual persuasions who settled in New York. The list of African-Americans who contributed to black cultural life during this period and who were known to be homosexual or bisexual include, among a host of others: Richmond Barthé, Richard Bruce Nugent, Gladys Bentley, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Alain Locke, Claude McKay, and Wallace Thurman.

From this list it is clear that the Harlem Renaissance was basically a literary movement. Homosexuality in most African-American fiction of this period was subtle and often coded with hidden meaning. The most explicit homosexual story was written by Richard Bruce Nugent, whose piece entitled *Smoke, Lilies, and Jade*, along with Nugent's openly flamboyant personality and 'out' behaviour, scandalised the black intelligentsia. Alain Locke and W. E. B. Du Bois, both African-American intellectuals and spokespersons for the movement, called for racial uplift and modernist engagement in black art and writing. Although Locke's own sexual orientation has been called into question, both he and Du Bois were embarrassed by Nugent's public displays of homosexuality. In 1930, Nugent produced a series of drawings based on Oscar Wilde's play *Salomé*. These and other works were in keeping with Nugent's personality in that they were "tinged with camp theatrics".

Unlike Nugent, the behaviour and art of the handsome and mild-mannered sculptor Richmond Barthé (1915-80), met with the approval of both the black and white middle classes. Ironically, Barthé and Nugent were close friends who had been lovers at one point. Although his subjects were varied, Barthé specialised in sculptures of male and female figures in the act of dancing. These pieces appealed to whites and African-Americans, modernists and primitivists alike.

161. **Berenice Abbott**, *La Princesse Murat,* 1929. Paris.

162. **Leonor Fini**, *Phoebus Fallen Asleep*, 1967.

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At the same time that those of the African-American middle class in New York tried to promote publicly an image of black respectability through visual art and literature, some of those same black New Yorkers mingled with those in the homosexual subculture by participating in rent parties, going to illegal speakeasies, and attending drag balls. For many whites, Harlem and its black inhabitants constituted a primitive Eden, a welcoming haven for escape into all kinds of alcohol, drugs, jazz music, and sexual activities that were seen as liberation from the constraints of white bourgeois propriety. Unfortunately, the party ended in 1929 with the sobering collapse of the stock market and the economic depression that followed. Although African-Americans were the most negatively affected by the situation, the collapse merely slowed down, but did not halt, the incredible outpouring of creativity by African-Americans.

Art and life outside the business of fashion and design may have been less sophisticated and chic than Leyendecker's world, but it was just as extravagant. Even the prohibition against alcohol failed to quell the hedonism of what has been called the 'Roaring Twenties' and the 'Jazz Age' of the 1920s in America. This was the time of the frivolous flapper and the dapper gentleman. The licentious and permissive aspects of this period were to have a profound effect on both women and men. Many American expatriates, including lesbians and homosexual men, travelled in droves to war-torn Europe in search of artistic and sexual freedom. American expatriates in Paris were, no doubt, also taking advantage of the strong United States dollar and favourable exchange rate.

This group of pleasure-seeking artists and writers earned the collective title of the 'Lost Generation', whose most famous members included Ezra Pound, James Joyce, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway. Although the majority of these folks were heterosexual, the times encouraged experimentation in both the sexual and the artistic avant-garde. Also noteworthy is that these literary emissaries tended to flock around the salons of Gertrude Stein and Natalie Barney. The literature produced in France during this period, such as Proust's *Sodom and Gomorrah* (1921) and André Gide's *Corydon*, published in 1924, broached openly the topic of homosexuality. It was in this environment as well that a different and reborn woman, called the 'New Woman', emerged and blossomed.

Many male writers and artists were often dependent on the burgeoning community of creative American and European lesbians in Paris. These included: Adrienne Monnier and Sylvia Beach (publisher of James Joyce's *Ulysses*), Natalie Barney, Hilda Doolittle, Nancy Cunard, and Djuna Barnes (see Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank*). These women comprised part of the 'New Woman' who was intelligent, competent, competitive, and who took

163. Photograph of Leonor Fini in 1982.

164. **Claude Cahun**, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1928. Photograph. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes.

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control of her self-liberation through sexuality. The confidence of the 'New Woman' was expressed in how she chose to dress – with short hair, trousers, shirt, tie, and cigarette in hand or mouth. Images of these 'New Women' were depicted by Djuna Barnes, Tamara de Lempicka, and Jeanne Mammen. As had been the case with her pre-war sisters, the 'New Woman' of the interwar years donned male outfits "as part of a statement of sexual and social identity" (Cooper, p.156). However, after World War II, the wearing of male clothing became associated more with fashion and posturing than with asserting a sexual identity. However, it was due to this fashion trend that lesbianism became more visible. Lesbian clubs flourished in Paris and Berlin in the 1920s and 1930s. In Berlin, two new lesbian journals were published and a lesbian magazine, *La Vie Parisienne*, was published in Paris in 1934. As well, Djuna Barnes, Compton MacKenzie and Radclyffe Hall wrote novels with unapologetic lesbian themes.

Not all of these 'New Women' agreed on issues around lesbian visibility. Some felt neither shame nor remorse about their sexual preference, whereas others took offence at defining themselves in homosexual terms. Natalie Barney, for example, publicly stated her belief that lesbianism was neither a vice nor should it be hidden. Djuna Barnes took an opposite approach and felt critical of the conventions and posing often associated with being openly lesbian (Cooper, p.157). When Radclyffe Hall's lesbian novel *Well of Loneliness* appeared in 1928, there was a moral outcry against it, indicating that for all its fashionable visibility, lesbianism still remained a taboo.

165. **Tamara de Lempicka**, *The Green Turban*, 1929. Oil on canvas, 41 x 33 cm. Private collection.

166. **Tamara de Lempicka**, *Perspective (Two Friends)*, 1923. Oil on canvas, 130 x 162 cm. Musée du Petit-Palais, Geneva.

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Djuna Barnes' first publication, *The Book of Repulsive Women* (1915), contained eight poems and five line drawings executed in a Beardsley-esque style. The drawings and the poems only indirectly expressed a concern with lesbianism. Before she arrived in Paris just after World War I, Barnes had been married and had love affairs with other men and with some women. When she finally moved to Paris, she met and fell in love with the sculptor Thelma Wood. Their relationship, which lasted until 1931, was passionate and intensely domestic. In Paris, Barnes moved directly into the lesbian circles around Natalie Barney. She met Gertrude Stein, Marsden Hartley, Carl Van Vechten and Marcel Duchamp amongst others (Cooper, p.158).

During the interwar years, the photographer Berenice Abbott (1898-1991) took compelling photographs of many of these 'New Women'. These photographs are valuable documents of a specific time in which the so-called 'crowd' of lesbian and homosexual artistic circles of New York and Paris were immortalised on photographic film. In her quasi-official capacity as portraitist of the lesbian circle of artists and writers of the time, Abbot was never forthcoming about her own closely guarded lesbian life. Her talents as a photographer were sought after by many in the Parisian circle of lesbians as well as homosexual men such as Jean Cocteau and novelist René Crevel. Abbott's images of Sapphic Paris vary one from the other and illustrate the multiplicity of styles and opinions surrounding lesbian visibility and 'cosmopolitan chic' that dominated the period.

In the 1930s, the Surrealist movement was launched by the writer André Breton. Breton wrote in his 1924 manifesto that: "[surrealism] carried forward the liberating experiments of its older sister dada with all experience that seems random or irrational, seeking to express 'the real functioning of the mind'." (Quoted in Saslow, p.224). Through free association and automatic writing and painting, the surrealists produced fantastic imagery germinating in and springing from the imagination, dreams, and desires. It was also a movement based on Freud and the psychology of the mind. The big male names of the movement – Duchamp, Salvador Dali, Max Ernst and Man Ray – were interested in eros of the unconscious mind, but had a tendency toward misogyny and the denigration of women.

Despite all of his forward-thinking intelligence, Breton turned out to be a notorious homophobe who held a vicious contempt for homosexuals. He banished them from the movement, even though surrealism itself was an artistic and literary movement that focused a lot on sex. Clearly, in Breton's mind, there was no room in the movement for homosexuality as subject matter. He made certain of this when he ousted the homosexual novelist René Crevel from the group. Pushed over the edge, Crevel later committed suicide. Jean Cocteau, a surrealist sympathiser and acknowledged homosexual, survived continued association with the group by keeping his distance. Although he and Breton were proclaimed enemies, Cocteau managed to stay connected with the movement and foster many friends from other high-profile homosexual writers and artists of his day. Cocteau became famous as a versatile filmmaker, playwright, draughtsman, and poet. His literary and theatrical talents brought him into the company of Marcel Proust, Vaslav Nijinsky, Colette, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Satre, and Amadeo Modigliani. He managed to incorporate many of his homoerotic interests into his writings and drawings.

Although the majority of surrealists seem to have come out of France, other parts of Europe did produce their own idiosyncratic adherents to the movement. Across the English Channel, Great Britain was home to several surrealists whose work had something important, or at least interesting, to say. Glyn Philpot (1884-1937) and Edward Burra (1905-76) are just two of many English artists whose works combined inward journeys with stylish eccentricity.

167. **Frida Kahlo**, *Two Nudes in the Wood* or *The Earth* or *My Nanny and I,* 1939. Oil on metal, 25 x 30.5 cm.
Mary-Ann Martin / Fine Arts Collection, New York.

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Early in his career, Philpot was not at all attracted to modernist styles and preferred the aestheticised literary and decorative approach of his fellow countrymen Charles Rickets and Charles Shannon. As time passed, Philpot sought more spiritual rather than purely decorative themes. In the early 1920s, he made a visit to North Africa and was influenced by the art, environment, and availability of sexual activity there. He then became a full member of the Royal Academy and garnered public and private commissions. Although popular and successful throughout the 1920s, Philpot was dissatisfied with the conservative nature of his painting and began to question his role as an artist. During the 1930s, he began to take an interest in politics, in particular, the effects of the Great Depression at home and the rise of Fascism in Europe. He then moved to Paris and made frequent trips to Germany. While in Paris, he frequented many of the nightclubs where homosexuals gathered and partook of a very active sex life. In his art, he continued working on combining his interests in politics with suggestively spiritual and explicit homoerotic imagery. However, his work started to rely more and more on allegorical and religious themes influenced by the styles of Picasso and George Grosz. His works became more and more inward and psychological.

Edward Burra, Philpot's artistic counterpart, was less interested in classical or classically-inspired themes and more directly attracted to the ideals of surrealism, "its involvement with the subconscious mind and its questioning of the notions of 'reality'" (Cooper, p.196). Beginning in 1936, Burra exhibited regularly with the surrealists in London and Paris until 1940. His works are surreal in that they bring together the unlikely and unreal.

Burra painted mostly watercolours of typical subjects drawn from his daily experiences and "included night-time street encounters in the red-light districts of continental cities such as Marseilles and Paris in France, and Harlem and St Louis in America. His scenes are set mostly in water-side cafés and raunchy sailors' bars". Many of Burra's images describe an interest in depicting the life of the underworld, the outcast, the marginal, and the unconventional (Cooper, p.198). Many of his works have a surrealistic edge in that they combine genre with "the menace of evil intent" (Cooper, p.198). The heightened and exaggerated sense of unreality often emphasises nightmarish qualities (Cooper, p.198). Although surrealism is an artistic movement associated primarily with males, there were very influential women artists who were attracted to many of the tenets of surrealism, but who disliked and reacted against its misogynistic aspects. Meret Oppenheim, for example, criticised the movement's sexual absurdity with her infamous fur-lined teacup. However, few women were welcomed

168. **Richmond Barthé**, *Feral Benga*, 1935. Bronze, 47.6 x 17.6 x 11.1 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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into the surrealist circle of men. There were women who tried to tear down this wall of exclusion by demonstrating the sexual and creative powers of women.

Argentine-born artist Leonor Fini came to Paris where she met and tangentially worked with the surrealists. Although Fini is identified with the surrealist movement, she was distrustful of Surrealism's oppressive and reactionary attitudes towards women. She claims to have painted directly from her unconscious mind, tapping into the "throbbing aspect of being" (Cooper, p.170). She produced startling and mysterious images of strong and stoic women who reject the power and influence of men. Some of her women are femme fatales or dangerous women who threaten the destruction of men. Many of her figures are androgynous or lesbian. She produced imagery in which women are protagonists, often involved in some complex drama or sinister ritual in which they are in charge. Fini's women are strong while her men tend to be passive, helpless, or completely dismembered. Fini sometimes makes ample use of ancient goddesses and references to sorcery as a way to empower women (Cooper, p.168). Her women tend to be pale with white faces and full sets of hair. Although Fini's women appear to exist in a dream-like and unreal state, they also serve to question traditional representations of women as compliant, passive, and always giving in their relationships (Cooper, p.168).

Fini was not the only female artist to exploit the language of surrealism to make pointed commentary about gender and the power of women. The Frenchwoman Claude Cahun (1894-1954) linked her writing and photography to surrealist ideas but was not an official member of the group. In 1929, Cahun wrote and illustrated an autobiographical book called *Aveux non avenus* ("Cancelled Confessions").

169. **Jeanne Mammen**, *Two Women in a Club*, c. 1928.

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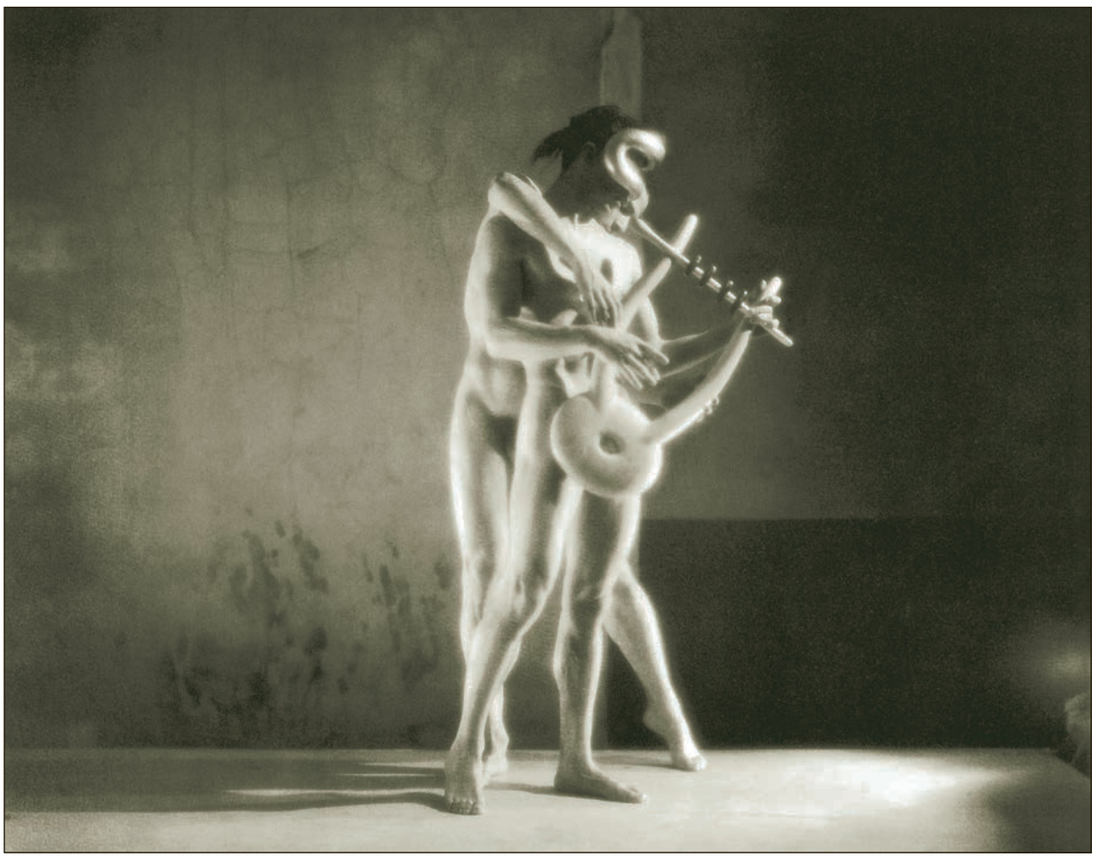

The book marked the culmination of Cahun's interest in self-portraiture as a means of communicating major ideas. The book contained a series of photomontages made in collaboration with Cahun's lover Suzanne Malherbe (who signed her own work with the male name "Marcel Moore") (Saslow, p.226). Photomontage, the art of piecing together, like a collage, bits of photographic materials, had been an effective means of creative expression before Cahun and was perfected by Hannah Höch, herself a bisexual. Photomontage makes use of unusual and mysterious symbols whose associations tease out dream-like visions. Cahun exploited this approach, creating profound meaning related to pressing issues of gender and identity.

Following Duchamp's lead, Cahun attempted to shed her Jewish and gender identities, first by adopting a series of pseudonyms and later by taking on different personae. She settled on the first name Claude because it was, in French, gender neutral (her given name was Lucie Schwob). She photographed herself several times in a variety of guises and alter egos. At various times, she has presented herself as a "coquette, bodybuilder, skinhead, vamp and vampire, angel, and Japanese puppet" (Katy Kline, "In or Out of the Picture: Claude Cahun and Cindy Sherman," in Whitney Chadwick, ed., *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation,* Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, The MIT Press, 1998, p.67). She also took on the personae of several male types as well. Cahun saw life as performance and in many of her self-portraits, she made use of masks, disguises, and mirrors. Masks signified "the inner mystery of the psyche and the need for public role playing" (Saslow, p.227). The purpose of her various personae was to search

170. **George Platt Lynes**, *Russell Thompson*, c. 1938. Photograph.

171. **George Platt Lynes**, *Nicholas Magallanas and Francisco Moncion in Poses from "Orpheus"*, 1948. Photograph.

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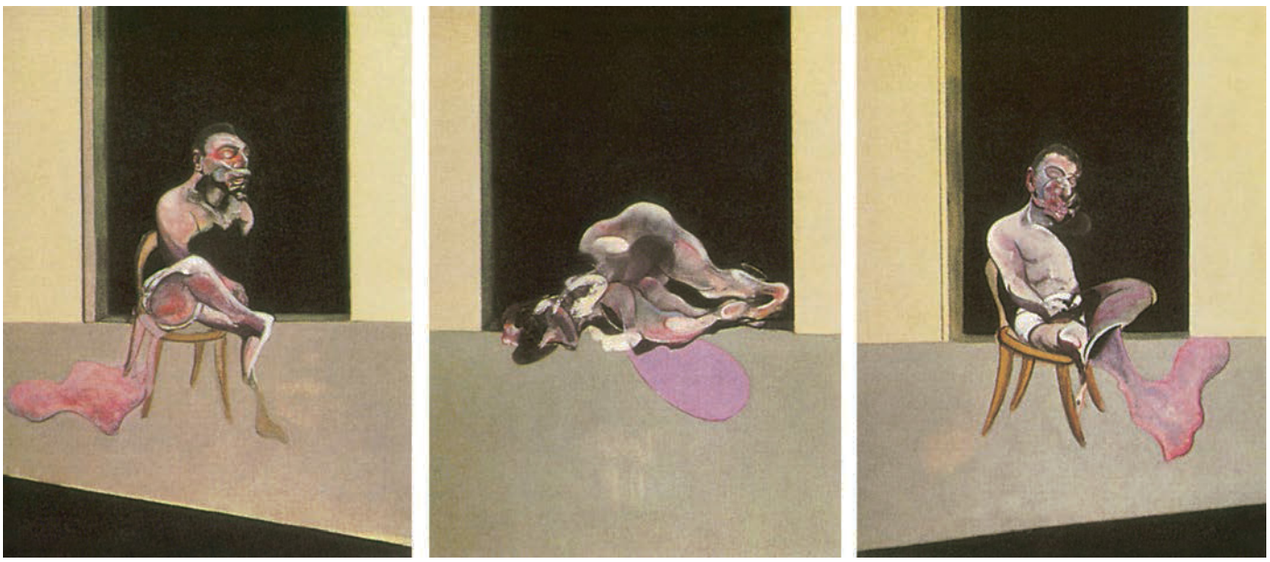

for authenticity, especially relevant for women who were navigating the male-centred worlds of art and society. In *Aveux non avenus* she wrote: "I shall never finish lifting off all these faces." (Quoted in Saslow, p.227). The importance of performative role-playing for Cahun was made clear when her life was put in danger during the Nazi occupation of France. When the Nazis marched on Paris, Cahun could not get out in time and was trapped. Drawing upon her expertise in performance, she convincingly played the role of a member of the resistance movement.

The works of the Polish émigré Tamara de Lempicka are closer to those of Fini than they are to Cahun. De Lempicka produced images of the 'New Woman' who was stylish, wealthy, desirable and desired, and very much in command of her own life (Cooper, p.157). Like Fini, Lempicka rejected the stereotyped passive role of women and used men's fantasies of female beauty to empower women. Unlike Fini, however, Lempicka was not a surrealist. She was aware of her own appearance and groomed herself as a cosmopolitan, elegant, and beautiful woman of glamour and "hard sophistication" during the 1920s and 1930s. She became a symbol of the 'New Woman' during the 'Roaring Twenties' (Cooper, p.172). Her paintings matched her life – both were daring, dramatic, and theatrical.

Lempicka was born near Warsaw, Poland. She married and had two daughters. She lived with her family in Saint Petersburg until the Russian Revolution of 1917, when she moved to Paris. While there, she studied art with Maurice Denis and André L'hôte. L'hôte was a pioneer of Synthetic Cubism and became a commanding influence on de Lempicka's later style. She then divorced her husband and married Baron Kuffner, a wealthy aristocratic Hungarian.

She established her reputation in the 1920s and 1930s in Paris as a fashionable painter. Her subjects were of people and events from aristocracy and royalty. She surrounded herself with the most fashionable and handsome men and women of the time. Her work is stylistically based on elements of Cubism in which the forms are geometrical, giving a classical and academic feel. The works tend to be highly decorative and mannered. When she paints men, they are typically very handsome and feminised, "shown as 'chic' fashion models wearing well-tailored suits, tuxedos, and full dress uniform" (Cooper, p.172).

172. **Francis Bacon**, *Triptych August*, 1972. Oil on canvas, 198.1 x 147.3 cm each. Estate of Francis Bacon, New York.

173. **Francis Bacon**, *Two Men on a Bed*, 1953. Oil on canvas, 152.5 x 116.5 cm. Estate of Francis Bacon, New York.

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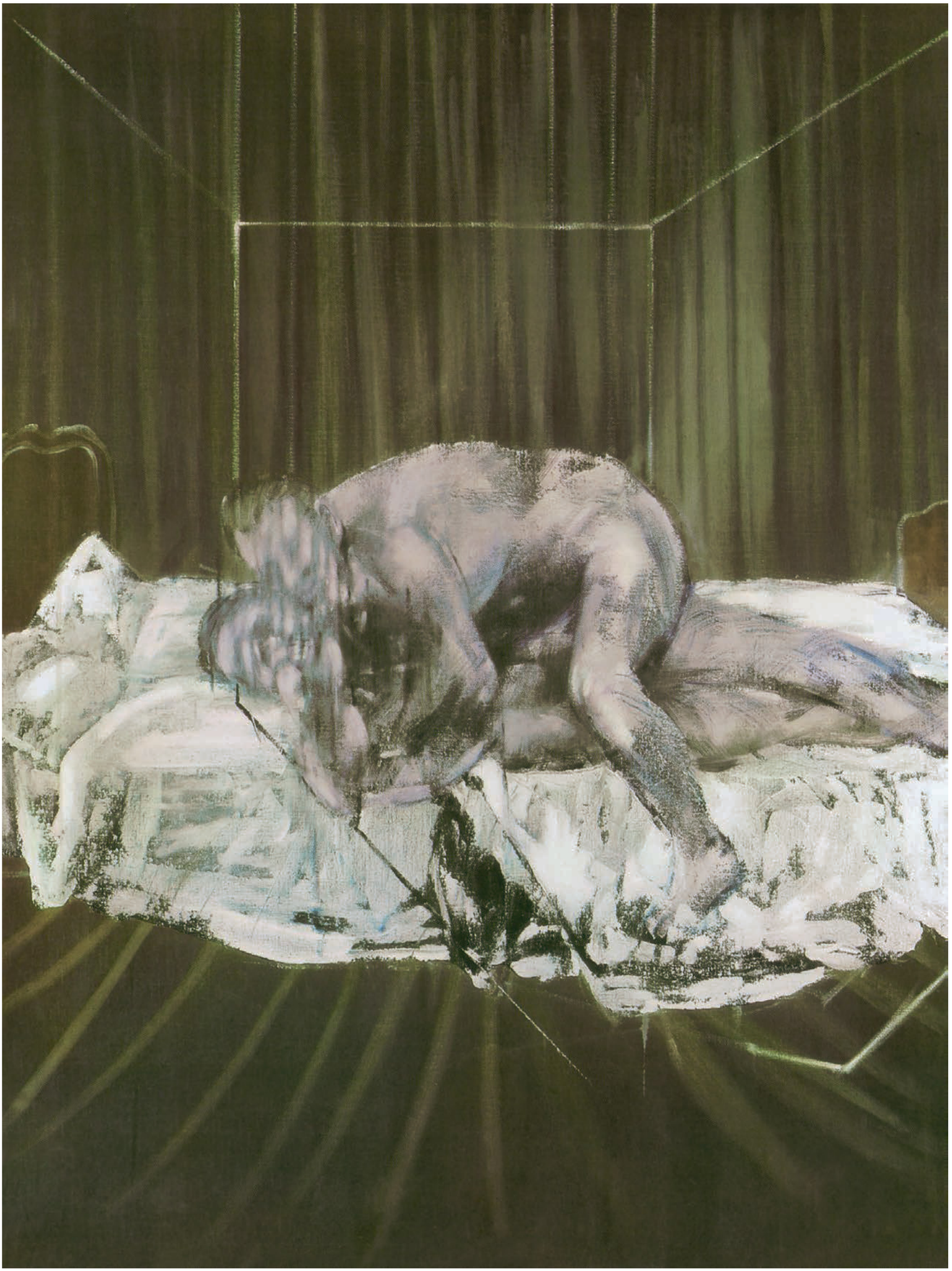

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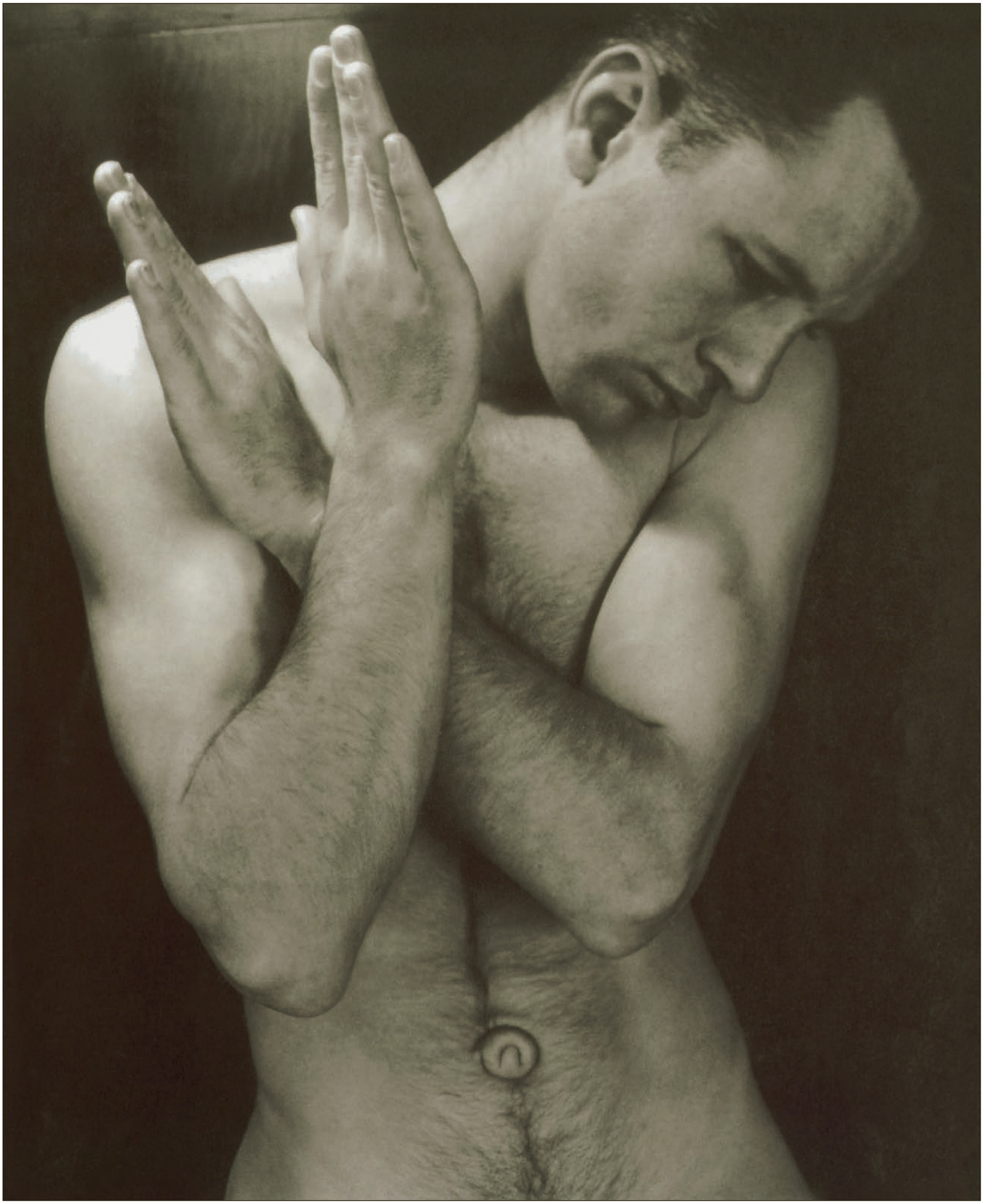

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Her works emphasise stylish yet superficial posturing and inflated vanity. In contrast, her women are sensual and voluptuous. They display a powerful sexual desire and allure for each other and for the viewer. Her women are, like the men, sophisticated and chic, reflecting the exclusive and fashionable world Lempicka herself frequented during the inter-war years in Paris.

At the start of World War II in 1939, Lempicka had to quickly flee Europe to avoid the Nazis. She moved with her husband to the United States and continued to paint scenes of sophisticated and erotically alluring women. Her works soon fell out of favour as abstract art became popular.

Paris was not the only locale in which homosexuality or bisexuality was expressed through Surrealism. Latin America, known for its "imported Mediterranean machismo" was also influenced by it. Perhaps the most famous exponent of its use was the bisexual female artist Frida Kahlo (1907-54). Kahlo is most closely associated with and frequently overshadowed by her husband of many years, the revolutionary Mexican muralist Diego Rivera. Kahlo herself was politically active and very outspoken about causes that mattered most to her. Unlike her politics, however, her art is extremely private and personal rather than public and political. When she was a child, Kahlo suffered from polio and later from numerous operations, miscarriages, and abortions as the result of a bus accident. She produced a lot of work that is autobiographical in nature. Many of her sketches and paintings were dream-like self-portraits that functioned to allegorise and exorcise her pain and suffering (Saslow, p.237). Her works draw upon a surrealist visual language and tend to juxtapose the ambiguous and the unlikely. The conflicting themes of chaos and order dominate. She often uses symbolic twins or hermaphrodites as vehicles to resolve the conflict. In addition, she often appropriates various signs and symbols from Mexican folklore. The interest in bisexuality and androgyny were manifest in her art and life, and fit in with her ideas about conflict caused by bringing opposites together. In some of her self-portraits, she exaggerates her feminine side by way of her clothes, jewellery, hairstyle, and other 'feminine' accessories. In others, she underscores her masculine side by donning certain attributes associated with masculinity and power such as men's suits, a moustache, heavy eyebrows, and sideburns.

Although Paris could still boast of being host to an impressive culture of artists, writers, and intellectuals between the two world wars, it was Berlin that took the prize as the city with the most vibrant homosexual subculture. Under the Weimar Republic, Berlin had become a homosexual paradise of publications, bookstores, nightclubs, bathhouses, and bars – all catering to an exclusively homosexual and lesbian clientele. Within the lesbian circuit, the cross-dressing actress Marlene Dietrich figured as one of its most illustrious patrons. Dietrich had immortalised lesbianism and androgyny in her films, of which *The Blue Angel* is perhaps the best known.

The liberal attitude of Berlin attracted numerous tourists who desired to partake in the hedonistic and open homosexual scene. Artists and writers flocked to Berlin from all over the world and used their art to make reference to this homosexual Mecca with all its indulgent vices and deviances. Among them were Sir Francis Rose, Christian Schad, Marsden Hartley, George Grosz, Otto Dix, and the British writer Christopher Isherwood, who would later chronicle his experiences in *Berlin Stories* which, in turn, would inspire a Broadway musical and film called *Cabaret*.

A woman artist of the period living inside the Berlin homosexual subculture was Jeanne Mammen (1890-1976). Mammen was concerned with the world of women rather than men. She was a staunch socialist who had lived and

174. **Bruce of Los Angeles**, *Man with a Sword*, 1951. Photograph. Throckmorton Fine Art Inc., New York.

175. **Minor White**, *The Temptation of St Anthony*, 1948. Photograph. The Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton.

176. Tom of Finland 1986 © Tom of Finland
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studied in Paris. Mammen had been a successful commercial artist who, between 1924 and 1933, provided drawings and watercolours for lesbian publications as well as mainstream books and fashion magazines (Saslow, p.228).

Although Mammen painted and drew other subjects, it was women's status in society that preoccupied her creative thoughts. Many of the women she painted and drew came from the diverse lesbian subculture of Berlin. These women were stylish and often sported the 'new look' of the period – wearing their hair short-cropped with men's suits and formal neck ties. Mammen's studies of women were often executed in watercolour and showed everyday activities of these women such as "buying a hat, sitting in a café, having a manicure, or dressing" (Cooper, p.174). Some of these images showed women of vastly different ages socialising together. In many of these, it is difficult to distinguish whether these female pairs are mistress and servant, mother and daughter, or older and younger lovers. She often visually cast these women in the roles of 'femme' and 'butch'.

In 1930, Mammen received a commission to produce ten colour lithographs on "Variations of Lesbian Love" for a proposed book '*Lieder der Bilitis*' (The Songs of Bilitis) by Pierre Loüys. The lithographs were not destined to illustrate the text, but rather, were "intended as original works on the theme of contemporary love relationships between women" (Cooper, p.177). The book was never published. The Nazis banned the project in 1933. All the designs and drawings for it were destroyed. Some of Mammen's other work did, however, survive the Nazi onslaught. These were images of explicit eroticism between women and they show "how social patterns of wealth and power influence sexuality" (Cooper, p.178).

Although Berlin is documented as having the largest homosexual subculture in Europe prior to the menace of the Nazis, there did exist a vibrant male homosexual subculture in Paris. This underground world was documented by the Hungarian-born photographer Brassaï (Gyula Halász, 1899-1984). The context in which Brassaï captured the working class homosexual world of pre-war Paris was one which included the profound influence of both the psychoanalytic ideas of Freud and the advent of new technical improvements in photography. Smaller cameras, more sophisticated lenses, and improved shutter technology allowed for feasibility of use and ease of documentation. Brassaï's work documents the nightlife of 1930s Paris – a world full of prostitutes, pimps, thieves, drug addicts, and transients. Unfortunately, the homosexual subculture was part of this underworld. After gaining access to this world and the trust of the community he documented, Brassaï shot his subjects in ways that evoke sympathy and candour, poignancy and pathos. In 1933 he published in Paris and London his *Paris de nuit* – a collection of photographs taken of the seedy Parisian underworld. Of the spots he documented, Brassaï himself commented that "every type came, faggots, cruisers, chickens, old queens, famous antique dealers, and young butcher-boys, hairdressers and elevator boys, well-known dress designers and drag queens… the cream of Parisian inverts… without distinction as to class, race, or age" (quoted from Brassaï, *The Secret Paris of the 30s*, trans. Robert Miller, New York, Pantheon, 1976), in chapter "The Ball at Magic City"; also see Ellenzweig, *The Homoerotic Photograph: Male Images from Durieu/Delacroix to Mapplethorpe*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993, p.66).

Brassaï's outside status as a Hungarian in Paris made him sympathetic to the outside status of the subjects he photographed. His photographs empower the viewer as a visitor and voyeur, giving him or her a chance to peep into this otherwise hidden bohemian world. His images of the homosexual subculture are sensitive and sympathetic even though in the end, they do objectify and distance homosexuals from the heterosexual population. However, Brassaï's photos also present the members of this particular subculture as distinctive and 'normal' within the confines of their world. His images constitute public exposure of private expression between partners of the same sex.

177. Tom of Finland 1979 © Tom of Finland 2008 wwww.TomofFinland.org

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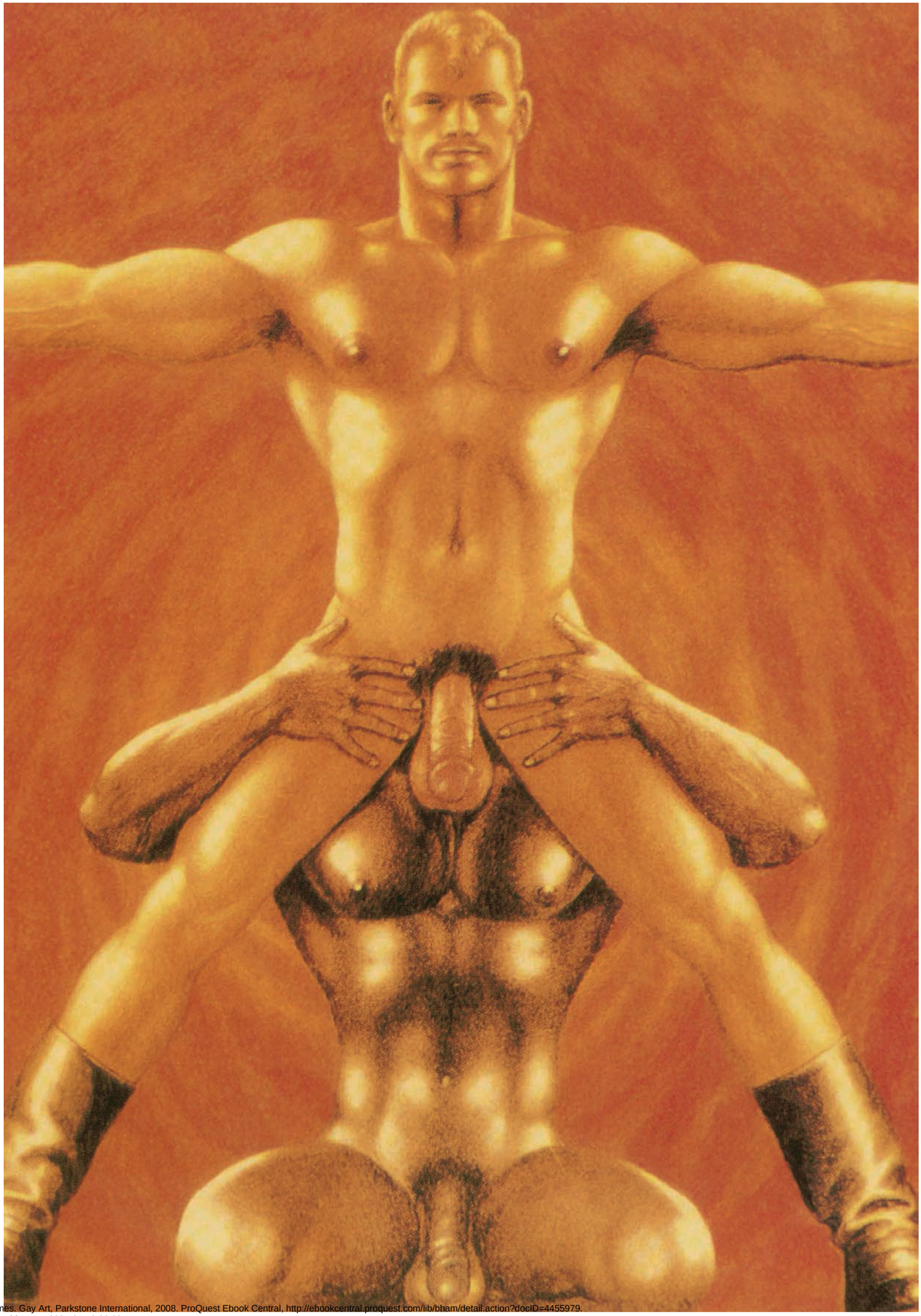

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Although on the one hand, Brassaï's photographs of the Parisian homosexual subculture can be said to promote stereotypes of homosexuals as effeminate and as maladjusted cross-dressers, they are not, on the other hand, about "the 'morality' of this oddly fascinating group of social 'misfits' and their ambiguously private/rhetorical rites, but the democratic spirit among them and their aesthetic vision, which breaks down conventional class divisions based on economic or social standing, ethnic heritage, or religious belief" (Ellenzweig, p.72). Unlike the works of F. Holland Day or Wilhelm von Gloeden, Brassaï does not rely on the formal mannerisms of aestheticism. His style is photojournalistic and in keeping with the technical advancements of modern photography. Although documentary, Brassaï's images do not document the everyday side of homosexual life in 1930s Paris. Rather, they document its more picturesque and journalistic aspects. The casualness of Brassaï's images, however, impart a candid snapshot effect. His photos are important for what is going on between the subjects of the photographs, not between what is happening between the photographer and the people he photographs. In fact, unlike Day and von Gloeden, Brassaï's own sexual feelings and interests did not motivate his photographs (Ellenzweig, p.74). It was due to the stock market crash in 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression during the 1930s, that prompted many artists to record the devastating effects of economic deprivation on all classes and races of people in a sobering realist style. At the same time, an array of social welfare reforms were initiated. The most notable social realists were heterosexual and expressed little interest in providing a voice for the plight of homosexuals and their concerns.

The exceptions were artists Jared French (1905-1988), Paul Cadmus, and photographer George Platt Lynes – all three of whom were friends and knew each other's work.

French was one of many artists who participated in the Federal Art Project (FAP) of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). These programs were part of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal initiatives for economic recovery set up to provide government-sponsored employment to artists. Most of the art produced under this program consisted of murals painted in various post offices, train stations, and other public venues throughout the country.

Cadmus is one of the few realist artists of this period who "made his own gay surroundings a central theme of his career" (Saslow, p.238). He specialised in genre scenes of young men engaged in enigmatic scenarios. He uses mostly satire and sometimes caricature to bring meaning to his works about the imperfect nature of human beings. His highly detailed realism was due mostly to his adoption of the old master medium of egg tempera.

The works of French and Cadmus were complemented by the photographic interests of George Platt Lynes (1907-55). Unlike the painters, Lynes, born into privileged circumstances, demonstrated no interest in depicting vulgar working-class types or the labouring poor. His photography reflects his interest in being surrounded by glamour and celebrity. In 1925, Lynes travelled to Paris and met Gertrude Stein, Jean Cocteau and anyone else he considered as an important cultural icon. His earliest ambition was to become a famous writers. In 1928 in Paris, he met the writer Glenway Wescott and Monroe Wheeler. It was at this time that he purchased a portable camera and began a lifelong love affair with photography. His first celebrity portraits were those of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas. Throughout his career in the U.S., he would shoot hundreds if not thousands of photographs of celebrities. His works were exhibited alongside those of Man Ray, Alfred Stieglitz, and Cecil Beaton.

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178. **David Hockney**, *We Two Boys Together Clinging*, 1961. Oil on board, 121.9 x 152.4 cm. Private collection.

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179. **Man Ray**, *Ady and Nusch Eluard*, 1937. Photograph.

180. **Man Ray**, *Untitled*, 1936. Photograph.

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Lynes became famous for his expressionistic lighting techniques and use of surrealistic props and settings. His reputation as a glamour and celebrity portraitist earned him an impressive clientele of famous writers, artists, dancers, and actors. In tandem with his celebrity images, Lynes was also producing very provocative male nudes. He would continue producing these homo-eroticised nudes into the 1950s. Unlike his celebrity images, however, most of these were never publicly exhibited.

At the time that Lynes was creating both his glamorous celebrity photos and male nudes, he was also producing a series of male nudes that show male couples and groups engaged in acts of sexual foreplay resulting in the actual sex act. Toward the end of his life, when he was diagnosed with lung cancer, Lynes destroyed many of these erotic negatives but gave some of the prints to his friend, the famous American sexologist Alfred Kinsey, who then used them as visual evidence to support his scientific ideas about masturbation, sodomy, and homosexuality.

The period in which Lynes was creating his homoerotic photography was one in which American culture became nearly schizophrenic in its materialistic wealth and consumer confidence coupled with its intense anxiety over a perceived threat from the Communist regime of the Soviet Union.

Homophobia became part and parcel of the anti-Communist paranoia. Homosexuals were targeted as a threat to national security because, so the reasoning went, they could easily be blackmailed and forced to give away government secrets. In 1950, the person leading the charge against the Communist and homosexual threat was Senator Joseph McCarthy who accused the Truman administration of "harbouring sex perverts in government". His remarks set off a wave of witch-hunts against suspected Communists and left-wing conspirators, who included homosexuals. Censorship once again reared its ugly head in America. There was an intense "campaign to erase homosexuality from art and history by whitewashing the art and behaviours of past artists known to be homosexual" (Saslow, p.244). Figurative artists and photographers had to temper their subject matter for fear of being labelled subversive. In such a climate, many artists turned to abstraction as an alternate form of expression. As Saslow has noted, the "triumph of abstract art set back gay expression by rigorously excluding any narrative subject, or fragmenting found objects to deny their meanings." (Saslow, p.245). The period was dominated by abstract expressionists who concentrated on the formal aspects of art such as colour, size, and composition. The goal was to apply paint to canvas spontaneously as a means to stimulate "unconscious feelings". The most famous abstract expressionist was Jackson Pollock, whose art and behaviour promoted a heterosexual masculinity of cowboy-like swagger that perhaps served to overcompensate for his sporadic homosexual encounters. Pollock is known for action painting – a technique in which he would use his whole body to drip paint in energetic swirls and splatters on a flat surface. This ejaculatory gesture served to mask rather than reveal Pollock's inner needs and desires. Later, Pollock would, in collaboration with some of his contemporaries, demonstrate the brutish and territorial rituals of masculinity by urinating on paintings and allowing the oxidation patterns to serve as splashes of masculine expression.

Two very important American artists whose careers took off in the 1950s are Jasper Johns (born 1930) and Robert Rauschenberg (born 1925). These two artists created a movement known as junk art or proto-pop art. They often exhibited together and had the same art dealer. The two were lovers and shared a studio in New York between 1954 and 1961. Before meeting each other, Rauschenberg had been deeply involved with a group of gay men at the avant-garde academy Black Mountain College. The men he met there went on to become some of the most important figures in art of the Cold War period. They included Cy Twombly (Rauschenberg's first lover), John Cage, and Merce Cunningham.

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181. **Andy Warhol**, *Querelle de Brest*. Serigraphy in colour. Private collection.

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Although Johns and Rauschenberg were considered by many as an artistic pair, they have been seldom written about as a romantic pair. It has been argued recently, however, that their emotional and physical relationship was just as important to their art as was their public artistic relationship in that their personal relationship provided a link to a "'community' that was denied them by the insistent heterosexuality of Abstract Expressionism and the intense homophobia of Cold War America" (Pohl, *Framing America*, p.446; Jonathan Katz, "The Art of Code: Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg," in Whitney Chadwick, ed., *Significant Others*, New York, Thames and Hudson, 1993). The works of Johns and Rauschenberg reveal a pictorial dialogue between them by way of coded signs and symbols that reference a mutually understood homosexual culture. Their works also operate as ironic critique of Abstract Expressionism's focus on heterosexual masculinity.

During the 1950s, the United States was not the only country to boast of an influential group of bohemian avant-garde artists who set out to defy artistic expectations. Great Britain's most successful and notorious artist during this period was Francis Bacon (1909-92). As was the case in the United States, abstraction reigned as the dominant approach to artistic expression in England in the 1950s. In this respect, Bacon, a realist, was out of step with contemporary art. Also, like in America, 1950s England was homophobic and persecuted homosexuals by legalising and enforcing very strict and repressive sodomy laws.

Bacon's reputation was based on his images of "expressionistic brutality" in which vaguely discernible human figures are put under a myriad of stressful situations – as crucified, deformed, amputated, captive, bound, flayed, tortured, and screaming (Andre Dombrowski, "Francis Bacon," in Haggerty, p.87). Most of his paintings are peopled with friends and lovers. They are essays on the dark side of the human condition, focusing on elements of horror, pain, death, and homosexual lust. His figures and scenes communicate a tortured anguish that has been considered in the context of post-war existential angst and the worry over potential nuclear annihilation and the continuation of various forms of destructive violence (Saslow, p.249).

Although many of Bacon's works draw upon veiled homoerotic themes of same-sex coupling, the artist himself never publicly acknowledged his homosexuality. His reticence to reveal his personal life to the public persisted into the 1970s even when it was publicly announced that his lover, George Dyer, died of a drug and alcohol overdose. What is important about the homoerotic aspects of Bacon's work is that it "challenges the image and power of the masculine, revealing hesitancies and insecurities foreign to traditional representations of maleness." In his art, opposites merge and conflict: the real and the iconic, love and violence, heterosexuality and homosexuality (Dombrowski in Haggerty, p.87).

Despite McCarthyite repression and the liberating attempts of the above-mentioned artists of the 1950s, it was the actions and writings of a group of bohemian artists who travelled between New York, San Francisco, Paris, Tangier, and Mexico known as the Beat Generation that would plant the seeds of the sexual and social revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s. The key players were the writers and poets Jack Kerouac (1922-69), Alan Ginsberg (1926-97), and William Burroughs (1914-97). Although all three had different temperaments, each of their works expressed an intolerance of 1950s bourgeois social mores and expectations and a tolerance for alternative sexual and aesthetic perspectives. They were considered as "visionaries, romantics, who saw themselves as heirs to poets like Whitman and Rimbaud and whose aim in life was 'to heighten experience and get out of one's usual self'" (quoted in Neil Miller, *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present*, New York, Vintage Books, 1995, p.298).

182. **Pierre Molinier**, *Big Effigy on a Stool*, 1970. Photograph. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges-Pompidou, Paris.

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Of the group, Ginsberg and Burroughs were the most openly homosexual. Although largely heterosexual, Kerouac was a "fellow traveller of homosexuals" who acknowledged having same-sex encounters while in the merchant marine.

The Beats saw themselves as social, political, aesthetic nonconformists as opposed to deviants. For this reason they attracted a large homosexual and liberal following. Although their attitude towards sex was liberal and important to their aesthetic and literary quest, their views of gender were antiquated. The combination of unfettered creativity and sexuality did not allow for the participation of women. This position would be challenged and later changed in the subsequent two decades. That challenge, along with a commercialisation of the movement into "a diluted model of bohemia that reverberated through both jazzy urban 'beatniks' and rural countercultural hippies," was mostly responsible for the splintering of the group by 1960. It was partly due to the bold and expressive exploits of artists and writers already mentioned that many lesbian and homosexual men began organising politically to counter the barrage of negative and belittling social criticism against them as deviant, abnormal, and socially irresponsible.

As repression increased, more and more homosexuals became angry about their treatment under so-called democratic governments. Slowly, social and political awareness began to rise in many of the urban areas of Western societies about the potential for homosexuals and homosexuality to make significant changes for the better. Across Europe and America, many homosexual communities began organising and networking with other sympathetic groups and organisations. Europe's first post-war gay group, the Centre for Culture and Recreation (COC) formed in the Netherlands to foster political action. They published a journal called *Vriendschap* beginning in 1948. In Germany, the homophile organisation *Der Weg* was founded in 1952 and, one year later, Arcadie was established in France (Saslow, p.252). These organisations and journals catered to a homosexual community that became bolder in demanding social and political respect.

In 1950 in the United States, the Communist Party organiser and cultural worker Harry Hay decided to organise a homosexual rights group to combat anti-Communist forces who were using homosexuals as a scapegoat. The organisation was called the Mattachine Society and is considered to be the first 'gay rights' organisation in North America. The goal of the organisation was to unify isolated homosexuals and create "an ethical homosexual culture… paralleling the emerging cultures of our fellow minorities – the Negro, Mexican, and Jewish peoples" (quoted in Neil Miller, *Out of the Past*, p.334).

The Society used the language of Stalinism in describing homosexuals as one of the largest repressed minorities. This view was powerfully revolutionary at a time when homosexuals were portrayed as 'sick' and deviant individuals. The ideas and tactics of the Mattachine Society were influential to its lesbian counterpart, the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), first established in San Francisco and considered to be the first organised group of feminists in the United States. Initially, the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis collaborated, but as time passed, the two groups went their separate ways. There were periodicals that covered the arts and cultural events associated with these two organisations. The house organ of the DOB was *The Ladder*, published between 1956 and 1972. The journal served as an arena for lesbian writing. It also solicited "theoretical and critical appraisals of the visual arts" and was illustrated with drawings, photographs and cartoons. The goal was to portray a positive lesbian iconography. However, postal censorship assured that images remained more suggestive than explicit. *One*, the magazine associated with the Mattachine Society, was founded in Los Angeles in 1953 and was promoted as America's first gay male journal (Saslow, p.252). In 1954,

183. **Pierre Molinier**, *Grande Mêlée*, c. 1966-1969. Wooster Gardens, New York.

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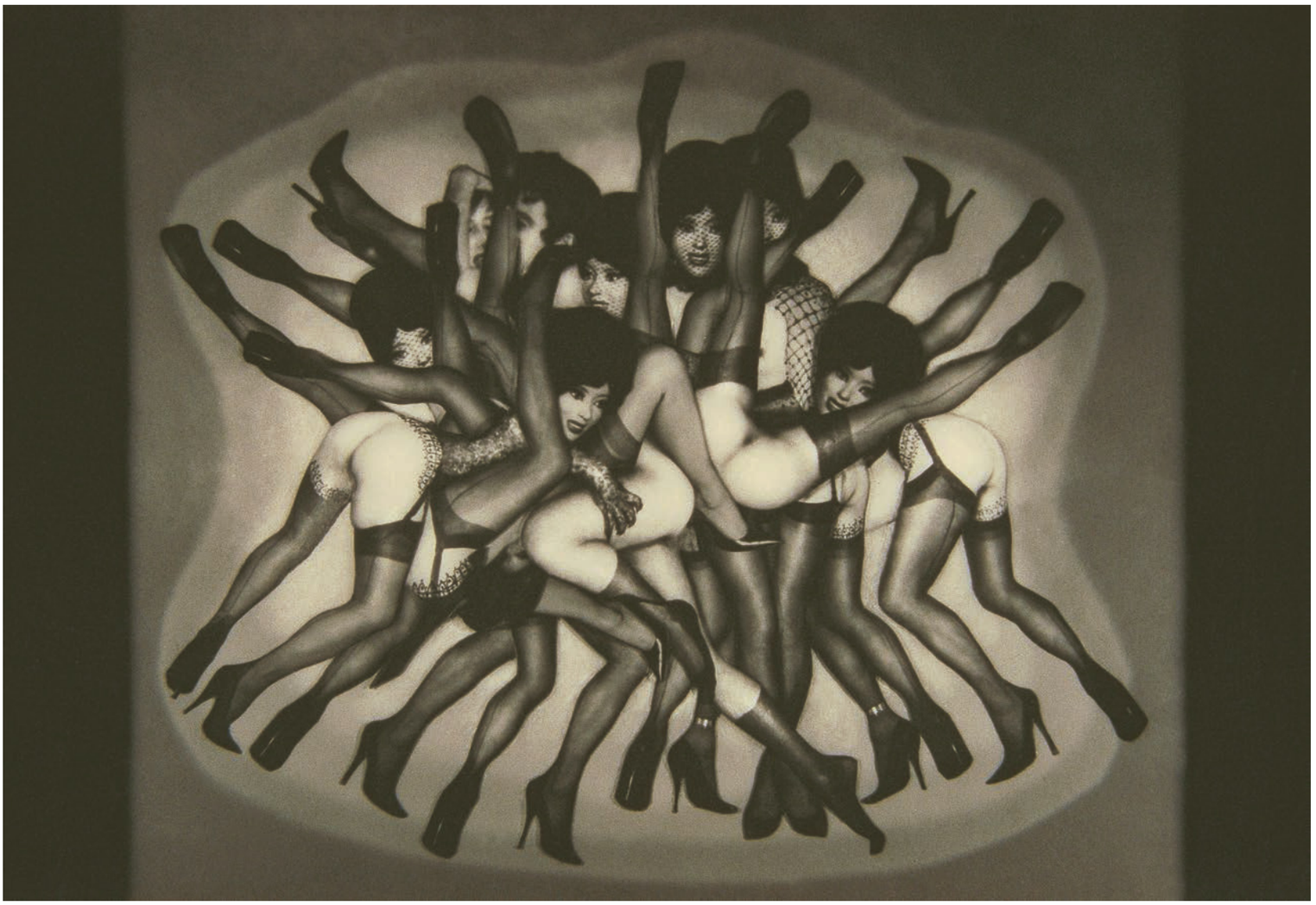

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the magazine sued the US Post Office for censorship of some of its materials. The case was taken all the way to the Supreme Court who ruled in the magazine's favour in 1958. The landmark case opened the mails to explicitly gay materials (Saslow, p.252). Along with the increase in organisational activities within homosexual communities, there arose a mass popular audience who demanded more explicitly erotic male images. The demand sparked a debate around the wisdom in the mixing of politics with erotics. Those less political were pleased by commercial adventurers who readily supplied the increasing public demand for images of male nudity and erotica.

Physique magazines became extremely popular, especially in Los Angeles where Hollywood glamour and a venerable physical culture movement blended. Photographs and drawings of bodybuilders, sailors, cowboys, bikers, wrestlers and sportsmen in scanty G-strings were in high demand and could easily pass the mail censors. The first physique magazine to be published was *Physique Pictorial*, which was marketed to "artist appreciators" and health enthusiasts. Other physique magazines soon appeared whose discreet imagery of male nudes was now directed specifically to homosexual audiences. Many of these images featured nude men in classical settings of ancient Greece or Rome and were obviously contrived and saturated with hidden visual homosexual codes.

One artist whose work heavily relied on the imagery and pleasures gained from physique magazines was the Finnish commercial artist Touko Laaksonen (1920-92), better known as Tom of Finland. Tom of Finland's notoriety was established with a series of drawings based on a lumberjack character named Kake (Finnish for 'butch') and his sexual adventures. He published his first drawing in the United States on the cover of *Physique Pictorial* in 1957. From there, he created series of his own books and drawings to supply a homosexual image factory based in Los Angeles. Although he was European, the high quality of his meticulous drawing and his distinctive style came to be known as particularly American. He created stereotyped masculine icons that included: truck drivers, leather-clad bikers, denim-clad cowboys, soldiers, and policemen.

Tom of Finland's works are about celebrating gay fantasy and were marketed specifically at a homosexual audience. His works are unique because his figures are happy, carefree, and enjoy the activities in which they engage. The message is clear: being gay and having gay sex is good and fun. The elements of humour and enjoyment are shown in the most uninhibited of sexual situations (Cooper, p.236). Tom of Finland's popularity within homosexual communities in the United States continued throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. However, his advocating of uninhibited sex had to be re-evaluated in the 1980s as a result of the onslaught of the AIDS epidemic. From that point on, most of Tom's images became more suggestive and sensual rather than explicitly sexual and pornographic. Nevertheless, his popularity continued until his death in 1992. Without a doubt, his work has set the standard for subsequent gay erotic art.

One of the reasons why Tom of Finland's works are so memorable is because they appeared at an important point in the history of homosexuality in America – during the 1950s when the word 'gay' came into use for labelling homosexuals. The exact origin of the term is uncertain, but it had been used after World War I by homosexuals to define themselves. The word was seen as neutral and, at the same time, ambiguous – as neither glorifying nor condemning homosexuality. As well, the increased visibility of homosexual men and women into discernible communities during the late 1950s and early 1960s fostered a political awareness among gay men and lesbians about pride and identity that grew bolder and eventually asserted itself in 1969 with the Stonewall riots.

184. **Harmony Hammond**, *Speaking Braids* (detail), 2001-2002. Bronze, acrylic, hemp, wax.
Art © Harmony Hammond/ Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

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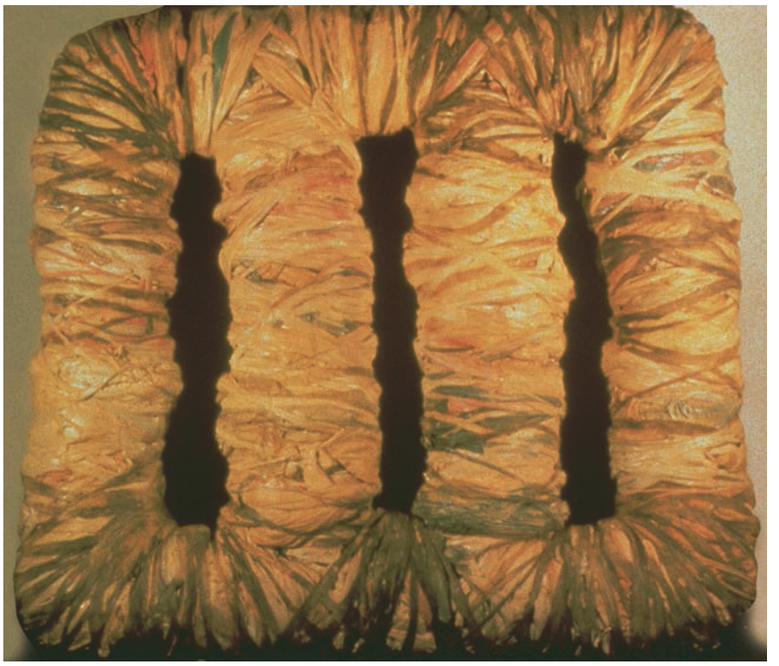

II. From Stonewall to Postmodernism (post-1969)

It was during the tumultuous 1960s that gays and lesbians became a threatening social and political force in the eyes of the status quo. The fear of the McCarthyites of the 1950s had come to pass – gays and lesbians had infiltrated the world of art and culture (music, dance, theatre, art) – and were now demanding to be recognised and their voices heard. In 1964, a small group of activists launched the first gay and lesbian demonstration in Philadelphia's Independence Hall (Saslow, p.258). In 1967, the gay magazine *Advocate* was founded and became the "national gay newsmagazine". In 1968, Vietnam protesters and the uprising of students in the United States and Europe gave the mainstream a wake-up call that some serious changes were on the way.

The 1960s was a turbulent and yet watershed decade for gays and lesbians. It was a period of rebellion against conventions, but culture itself became the weapon used by bourgeois conservatives against political and cultural dissidents of all kinds. As the assault against homosexuals increased, gay and lesbian resolve to combat it also increased. The police raid of a gay bar called the Stonewall Inn in New York City in 1969 brought an end to gay and lesbian complacency in their repression and oppression by the larger culture. What has come to be known as the Stonewall Riots and the subsequent resurgence in gay and lesbian pride did not happen in isolation. The time had been ripened by other political and social events taking place throughout Europe and the United States. In America, for example, the Civil Rights Movement witnessed African-Americans' demand to end racism and other forms of repression against minority groups. Martin Luther King Jr's non-violent approach to change and his 1963 March on Washington campaign set the standard for other minority groups to follow. Feminists, Vietnam War protesters, and counterculture hippies all banded together to demand social change. There were conflicts, but the general message remained the same.

Overseas in England, the Gay Liberation Movement was underway with the founding in 1970 of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF). In France, the toppling of the government as a result of the student revolts of 1968, called the 'May Days', forged the establishment of the Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire (FHAR) whose influence spread to Belgium and Northern Italy.

During this tumultuous decade, the arts reflected opinions just as diverse and pluralistic as were the social and political movements. In the visual arts, abstraction still held strong as the creative style of choice. However, it was the impersonal universality of abstraction that was ineffective in communicating the political interests of many gays and lesbians.

185a and 185b. **Harmony Hammond**, *Swaddles*, 1979. Cloth, latex, rubber, gesso, wood.
Art © Harmony Hammond/ Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

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Alternative art styles emerged, such as 'happenings' and pop art through which anarchic tendencies could be communicated. Gay sensibilities infiltrated British and American pop art and culture with the works of artists like Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg (Saslow, p.255). In England, the British artist David Hockney (born 1937), a generation younger than Francis Bacon, became recognised as the first Western artist to use his work as a tool for 'coming out' openly as a gay man. Although he was born in England, Hockney has spent a large part of his artistic career in the United States and drew much of his early imagery from the freeways, swimming pools, and gardens of Los Angeles, where he settled in 1963. While there, he joined the life of Hollywood jetsetters with their outdoor swimming pools, perpetually shined cars, and sun-drenched interiors. It was from this environment that he would draw most of his subject matter. Boys and men splashing about in outdoor swimming pools – alone or in combination – became the hallmark of Hockney's subject matter throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s (Mark Steinbrink, "David Hockney," in Haggerty, pp.442-3). These works are important in that they serve as expressions of homosexual self-acceptance. Their candour and openness about homosexuality gave confidence to a subsequent generation of gay artists.

While Hockney was busy indulging his desires on the west coast of the United States, Pop Art's guru Andy Warhol (1928-87) was occupied in New York with a group of young bohemians in his infamous New York Factory, an enclave "where the peak of cocky American influence fed an anything-goes scene of drugs, androgyny, and polymorphous perversity" (Saslow, p.256). Warhol started his career as a commercial artist. He rejected expressionist techniques and adopted an impersonal and mechanical style of painting. He is known for appropriating icons of the everyday – Brillo boxes, Campbell's soup cans, and mass-produced images of film stars like Marilyn Monroe. His medium of choice was silkscreen – a medium capable of numerous reproductions. By using multiples of prints and photographs – Warhol exploited the commodity aspect of art and art-making. He took advantage of consumer goods and media-manipulated celebrity (Saslow, p.257).

Warhol's celebration of the ordinary and everyday helped to break down the barriers between high and popular art. He is perhaps the most influential artist of the twentieth century. He uses consumer culture as a form of critique. Not only did he exploit commodity, but he took delight in packaging and marketing his own life as a commodity. In 1967, he is quoted as saying "everyone should be a machine… If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There's nothing behind it" (Andy Warhol, *From A to B and Back Again*, London, Cassell, 1975). Even when he became world famous, Warhol never tried to hide his homosexuality. In his autobiography titled POPism, he referred to himself as a "swish" (an effeminate homosexual). Unlike the aggressively

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macho world of art that Jackson Pollock created, Warhol surrounded himself with almost the opposite – with drag queens and other effeminate men and youths. This very gay world, however, still remained curiously closeted about its homosexuality. His refusal to engage the matter made him even more attractive to the public. Although he publicly demonstrated that he was a queen, he also demonstrated that he was not political or, in fact, sexual. He liked the idea of sex more than the reality of it. This was part of the Warhol mystique that contributed to his fame.

Stonewall invigorated many homosexuals to fight for a positive 'gay' identity and insist that gays and lesbians come out of the closet. The potential political power of a viable gay and lesbian movement caused many to become more outspoken activists. The closet door had not only been opened wide, but its hinges had been removed. News of Stonewall also invigorated some Europeans in stepping up their own activism. By the beginning of the 1970s, Britain, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and the British Commonwealth had linked up with their American counterparts. The Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement had become international. Many gay and lesbian artists became politicised, joining forces with others championing civil rights and feminism. They began expressing their new social convictions in their art. The world had become more pluralistic and this continued to upset many political and cultural conservatives who vehemently resisted change.

Artists like Dubsky caused the "art establishment" to wake up and take notice of the many gays and lesbians worldwide whose work was propelling them and the liberation cause into international visibility. Although social attitudes toward homosexuality did not change overnight, there was an increasing frankness about the subject that had begun during the 1960s. This process was stimulated as well by a resurgence in cinema of gay- and lesbian-based themes coupled with social issues around sex, race, politics, and class. Whether they liked it or not, the public slowly reconciled themselves to the fact that a vocal gay and lesbian community was here to stay and would never retreat into the closet.

During the 1970s in the United States, gay men were coming out and proclaiming proudly to the world their sexual preference. Along with a sense of pride and search for identity, a carefree and experimental attitude towards sex developed. It was a period in which gay sexual encounters were believed to be "acts of liberation" that broke down barriers of race and social class. Gay liberation was promoted as "profoundly democratising" and homosexual promiscuity was "the lingua franca, the Esperanto of the male homosexual community" (quoted in Neil Miller, *Out of the Pas*t, p.423). It was a time of building an urban gay ghetto with "restaurants, discos, boutiques, softball and bowling leagues, marching bands and choral groups, churches and synagogues" (Neil Miller, p.422). A new openness about homosexuality and the diminishing of police harassment contributed to the establishment of a commercial world catering specifically to gay male sexual activity: bathhouses, porno theatres, the 'backroom' of bars. No one suspected that one decade later, the party would end on a very sad note and the rules would change considerably.

As gay men were becoming more and more confident in 'coming out' after Stonewall, for certain prominent feminists 'coming out' as a lesbian remained a frightening prospect. In 1969, the feminist and lesbian author Kate Millett wrote *Sexual Politics*. Millett was best known as the author and founder of the National Organisation for Women (NOW). She was also a practising visual artist and denounced "sexist oppression through text and images" (Saslow, p.268). As lesbians increasingly moved toward identification with feminist issues, heterosexual feminists began joining ranks with them. The goal of this new generation of women was to make visible the achievements and potential of women from all walks of life. Lesbianism and feminism became linked. A burgeoning of lesbian creativity, sparked by a

186. **Robert Mapplethorpe**, *Self-Portrait*, 1978. Photograph.

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newfound sense of mutual purpose among women, occurred in art and literature. In 1979, artist Judy Chicago created her sculptural installation *The Dinner Party* which soon became a visual icon of the feminist movement. The thirty-nine guests to be seated at the triangular table (a shape reminiscent of the pink triangle and referencing the female genitalia) included mythic and historic lesbians such as Sappho and Natalie Barney.

Although feminism was attractive for many lesbians, it also put them in an awkward situation. Lesbians were forced to choose between siding with some homophobic heterosexual women or with some misogynistic gay men. When Millett publicly came out, NOW was wracked by this dilemma, for many heterosexual feminists felt that a movement full of visible lesbians would do more harm than good to further the cause of women's rights. Also, it turned out that lesbians had their own agenda apart from the feminists.

Lesbian artist Harmony Hammond became disillusioned with the feminist movement because of its lack of Sapphic cohesion among artists within it. As a curator for the 1978 "Lesbian Art and Artists Issue" of *Heresies*, a feminist journal, Hammond selected and organised a group of seventeen diverse lesbian artists to complete the project. The group included women whose works "ranged from geometric abstraction to hand-sewn agitprop" (Saslow, p.268). Hammond's herself specialises in abstract sculptures in which she uses 'women's' materials and craft techniques such as fabric, pottery, and basketry.

Her goal was to express "female presence" in her work. Her early works did not aim at direct lesbian subject matter, but instead, they "questioned sex and creativity through media and symbolism" (Saslow, p.269). By her own admission, she conceded that: "Neither feminism nor lesbianism determine the form and content of my work yet it was only with the security of the former and the coming to terms with the latter (the muse) that my life and art began to be uniquely and overtly me." (Harmony Hammond, *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics 1*, issue 3, New York, 1977, p.11).

Also during the 1970s photography became the medium of choice for artists interested in expressing their political and/or erotic opinions in art. Photography was immediate and could give the desired results in less the time than painting, sculpture, or graphic media. Robert Mapplethorpe (1946-89) emerged in the mid-1970s as one American artist whose strong homoerotic photographs would not only shock the status quo, but set the foundations for the future political impact of homoerotic imagery with strong sexual content. Mapplethorpe studied art at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York. He became an independent photographer in 1972. During the 1970s, he moved into a notorious hang-out for artists, the Chelsea Hotel in Manhattan, and became involved in the bohemian life around it. During this period, he produced photomontage and collage work that made use of pornographic gay sex magazines. He would soon abandon this kind of work and concentrate strictly on photography.

Mapplethorpe never played down the physical and sexual aspect of his work. His work had a shocking quality both for its choice of subject matter and its clear realism. His work was based on pornography, an area of expression that fascinated him. His goal was to elevate commercial pornography to the level of aesthetically beautiful high art. Mapplethorpe developed a personal style that emphasised "formal symmetry, intricate gradations of black and white, and the utter clarity of texture and visual detail" (Richard Meyer, "Robert Mapplethorpe," in Haggerty, 561). His dispassionate eye set up his models in carefully arranged composition, photographing himself and his friends

187. **Robert Mapplethorpe**, *Man in a Polyester Suit*, 1981. Photograph.

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in frank sexual positions/activities. Many of these activities are disturbing for some. They range from hardcore scenes of sadomasochism, fist-fucking, genital mutilation, to drinking another man's urine. His added care in lighting, clarity, texture, and shutter speed, resulted in photographs of beautiful objects. As well, Mapplethorpe's images force the viewer to mull over notions of "sex as power, sex used to promote pain, sex as a flirtation with death" (Allen Ellenzweig, *The Homoerotic Photograph*, p.127).

During the 1980s Mapplethorpe's art became associated with issues of censorship and art photography. In 1989, the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington DC cancelled a planned retrospective of Mapplethorpe's work. The cancellation occurred during Republican Party's attacks on Mapplethorpe's work and the National Endowment of the Arts, which had partially funded the retrospective. The cancellation and attacks started a national controversy over censorship and federally funded art. Mapplethorpe died of AIDS in 1989, three months prior to the Corcoran cancellation. By the time of his death, he had become one of the most successful American art photographers of the post-war era whose work still stirs controversy over censorship and homosexuality. His work continues "to test the limits of artistic freedom and creative expression" (Richard Meyer, "Robert Mapplethorpe," in Haggerty, pp.560, 562).

Mapplethorpe was not the only photographer whose works dealt with hardcore homosexuality. In the late 1970s, Arthur Tress (born 1940) began to explore the theme of sexuality between men in a photographic series of "homosexual fantasies". These images were dream-like, surreal, and paradoxical. They combined sexual allusion with "personal experiences, Buddhism, Shamanism, and Jungian psychology" (Cooper, p.288).

His interest in these themes was a result of a world tour he took to North Africa, Europe, South America, India and Japan. Through his travels, he came into contact with "Japanese Zen gardens, Buddhism, African tribal culture, documentary filmmaking, and hepatitis" (John Beynon, "Arthur Tress," in Haggerty, p.897). After these experiences, Tress' aim was to give form to the male subconscious. His works "pursue the psychological, political, and social meanings behind phallic adoration and sexual rituals between men" (Ellenzweig, *The Homoerotic Photograph*, p.140). The images place men in odd sexual situations and in unusual places. His homoerotic scenarios explore the impulses and meanings behind oral sex, anal sex, sadomasochism, and athletic competition between men (Beynon in Haggerty, p.897). Tress explains his intent: "To get down to what my photographs are about and what I think homosexuality for me is… and for male sexuality in general: there's a lot of it that deals with power, power relationships, power exploitation in both negative and positive ways." (quoted in Ellenzweig, p.140). Unlike Mapplethorpe's work, Tress is less interested in the glossy surface or soft lighting of the photograph. Instead, he focuses on the metaphoric and symbolic even when cartoon-like elements are added. The works are more suggestive than pornographic, more meditative than explicit.

Whereas the photographic works of Mapplethorpe and Tress were focused on the homoerotic related to a specific gay subculture and individual fantasies and experiences, the works of Duane Michals (born 1932) focus on the broader human context of homoeroticism. Michals works in serial or narrative format and has as his protagonists an older and younger man. Unlike Mapplethorpe, Michals has no interest in producing a beautiful print or aestheticising the photograph. He avoids the tricks of commercial photography – no dramatic compositions or fancy lighting effects. Scenes are kept simple and models are employed. Because his photographs are non-pictorial in emphasis, they tend to break all the rules of 'high art' photography. His images are usually placed in numbered order and tell stories with a specific plot from beginning to end. In the mid-1970s, he started incorporating

188. **Pierre et Gilles** (active since 1976), *The Cowboy – Model: Viktor*, 1978. Unique hand-painted photograph framed by the artists. Photo: 41.4 x 28.8 cm / Framed: 57.3 x 44.7 cm. Private collection.
© Pierre et Gilles. Courtesy of Galerie Jérôme de Noirmont, Paris.

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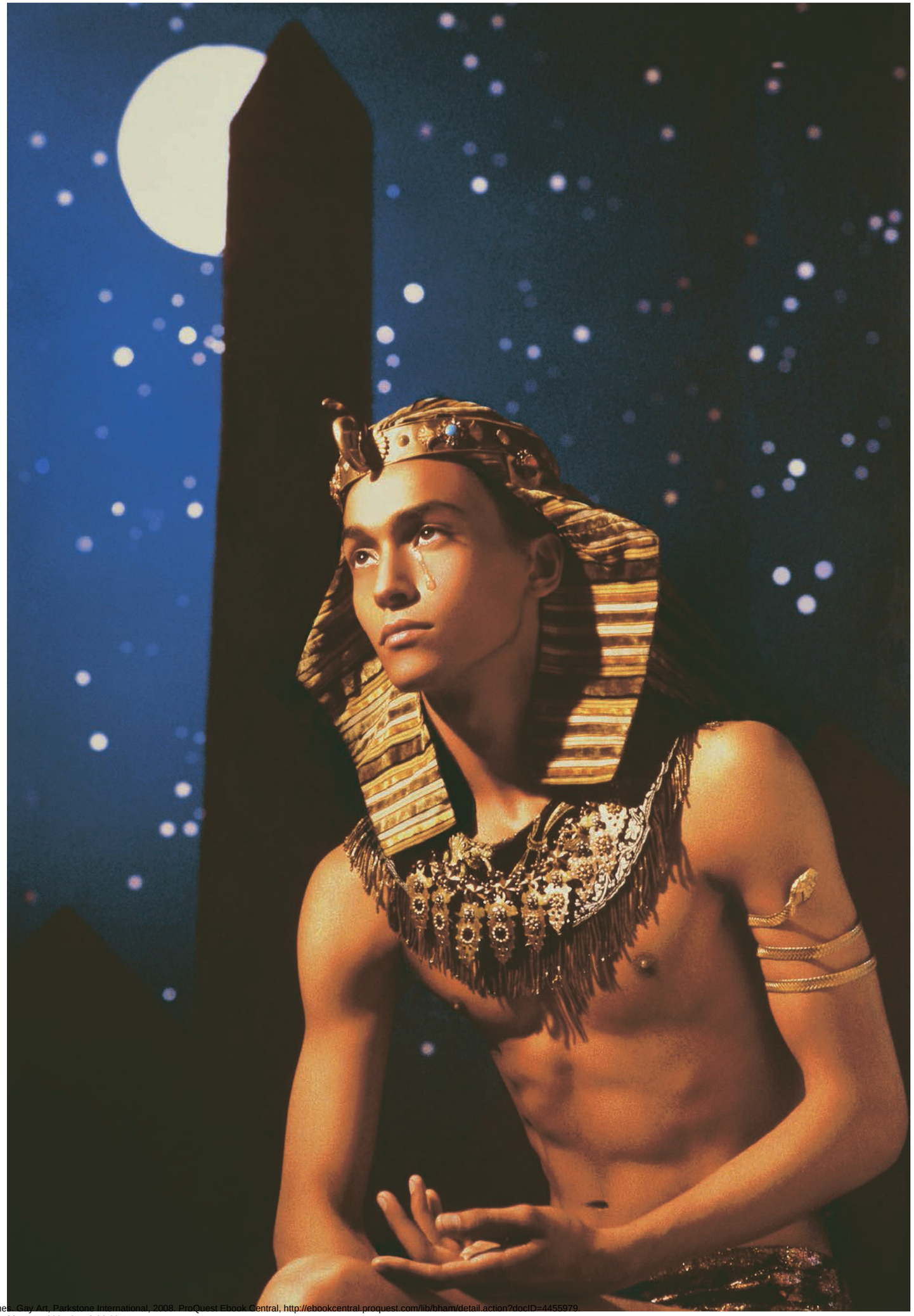

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handwritten captions to the prints. The stories told were human stories of "love, pain, fear, anxiety, death, loneliness" (Ellenzweig, p.149). As a group, the images are treated as universal dramas of the human condition. The works do tend to be literary, narrative, and allegorical.

Michals' stories all relate to human relationships and the passage of time. He attempts to 'unfreeze' still pictures by blurring figures in motion, creating a storyboard sequence, and placing text in margins (F. Valentine Hooven III, "Duane Michals," in Haggerty, p.593). The viewer is encouraged to surmise the outcome of a story or conjecture at what has happened.

In 1976, Michals began an eleven-picture sequence called 'The Enormous Mistake'. The scenes are both enigmatic and homoerotic. Tension and vulnerability are conveyed in an implied erotic relationship between an older and younger man, where the latter is being sexually initiated. This tension between older and younger men travels throughout many of Michals' homoerotic narratives, whether the pair in question be father and son, teacher and student, or perfect strangers. 'The Enormous Mistake' recounts the thoughts and emotions of the younger man as he is being initiated into sex. The handwritten captions tell part of the story, and the viewer is asked to fill in the gaps. There are elements in the images that demonstrate the influence of European Surrealism on Michals and its "playing with puzzles of appearance and reality, spirit and matter" (Ellenzweig, p.156). The most homoerotic of all Michals' photographic sequences was created for a 1978 deluxe edition portfolio of ten poems and ten captioned photos entitled *Homage to Cavafy*. This has been called Michals' formal 'coming out' project. Cavafy was a twentieth-century Greek poet whose words addressed the emotional joys and turmoil of the homoerotic.

Michals found Cavafy's poems as evocative of the world of "homosexual allegiances and apprehensions; the needs, compromises, prospects, and demands of the night; fear of aging and regrets over misspent youth; nostalgic longing for a lost romance; and the highly charged, sensually alive experience of first meetings" (Ellenzweig, p.157-58). Michals' photographs are not illustrative of Cavafy's poems. Instead, "they are separate and sympathetic". In this series, Michals is very sensitive to the transitory yet irresistible pull of youthful male beauty. He explores "desire and love, youth and age, conveyed with a subtle eroticism" (Cooper, p.288). Ordinary everyday scenes are given an almost ritual significance of great intensity. There is a strain of melancholy in the pull of youthful male beauty – something detected in the Cavafy group of photographs. Many of the images affirm an unbridgeable gulf between the isolation of old age, symbolised by the older man's introspection, and the future prospects of youth.

The idea of ritual and homoerotic desire also permeate the photographic work of Jean-Marc Prouveur (born 1956), a French-born artist living and working in England. Prouveur's work combines images of the mystical with implied violence. In the late 1970s, Prouveur produced many disturbing images of gay sadomasochistic ritual. Much of his work is preoccupied with death – a preoccupation that gives many of the works a near religious intensity. Prouveur used the image "as a means of analysis of behaviour and identification" (Cooper, pp.291-2). In one series, he photographed nude men in various sexual positions and then drew on the print a series of mathematical circles and lines to delineate the movement and action depicted. The goal of his diagrammatic approach was to heighten the erotic content while giving the work a scientific, objective, almost medical sense of cool detachment. This aspect of the work comments on the mechanical and distant nature of sex. By distancing the erotic subject, one can objectively analyse it. In the early 1980s, Prouveur changed his focus and produced a series of works called Altar-pieces.

189. **Pierre et Gilles** (active since 1976), *The Young Pharaoh – Model: Hamid*, 1985. Unique hand-painted photograph framed by the artists. Private collection.
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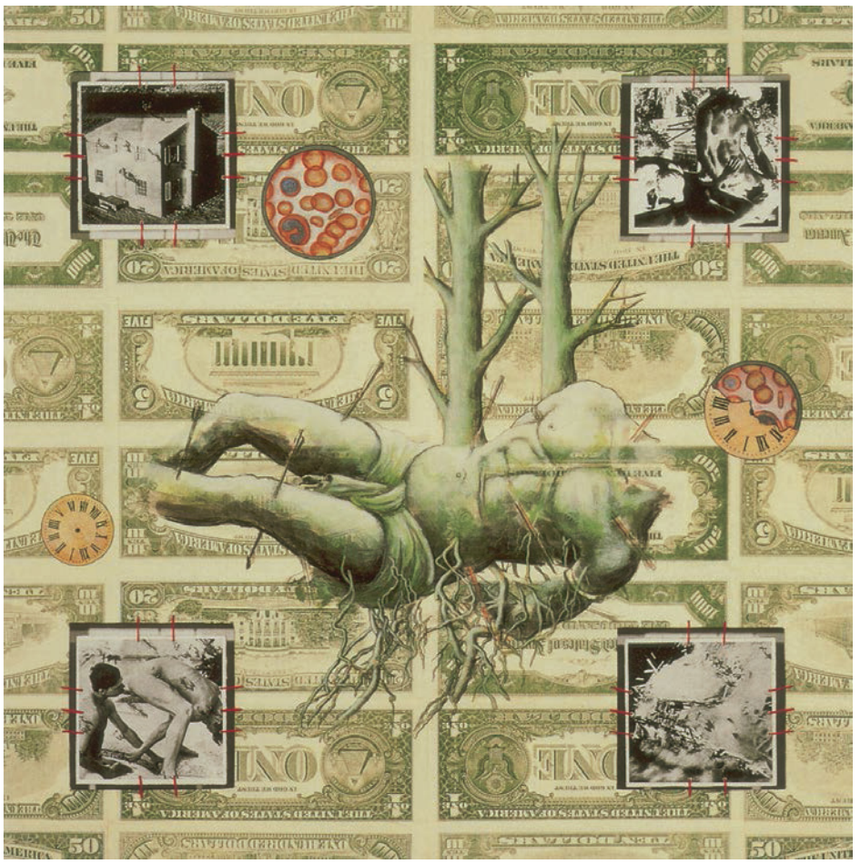

With these, he used the format of the triptych, giving the work a quasi-religious feel. These works relate to and critique the guilt brought on by the artist's homosexuality in relation to his strict Roman Catholic upbringing.

The irreverent mixture of homoerotic sexuality and religiosity was very much a part of the work of Gilbert Proesch and George Passmore (known as Gilbert and George). Their work combines photography with performance as a way to make pointed contemporary social and political statements about art and homosexuality. The two artists met in 1967 while students at St. Martin's School of Art in London. After graduating, they both collaborated on artistic projects. They soon became a couple and an artistic team, Gilbert and George. They adopted a uniform style of dress (both wear non-matching business suits), began staging a series of theatricalised performances, and declared themselves "living sculptures".

While they produce a variety of works – artists' books, postcard assemblages, films, and performances – Gilbert and George are perhaps best known for their distinctive photographic pieces, which they began producing in the 1970s.

These hand-tinted photographic collages are very large and consist of broad areas of flat primary colour reminiscent of stained glass. The images are usually divided into geometric sections. The photo pieces depict the two artists in a

190. NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt, 1987. The NAMES Project Foundation.

191. **David Wojnarowicz**, *Bad Moon Rising*, 1989. Photograph and Collage. Estate of David Wojnarowicz and P. P. O. W., New York.

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variety of stylised scenes that treat issues of politics, religion, and sexuality. The themes are usually homoerotic and sometimes combine an aestheticised youthful male beauty to the coupling of the artists themselves (Michael Lobel, "Gilbert and George," in Haggerty, p.402). Some of their more controversial pieces, such as *Cock*, *Arse*, and *Coming* have been banned from public exhibition. Whatever their medium, Gilbert and George are "deadpan clowns" who "jumble the cosmic with the mundane, beautiful boys with bathroom humour" (Saslow, p.281). In 1977, they created a scatological series known as Obscenity. Such themes carried over into their work of the early 1990s.

The irreverence in the art of Gilbert and George took on a distinct non-political gay sensibility in the work of another European dynamic duo of art – Pierre et Gilles. Pierre et Gilles exploit kitsch and camp in a chic manner to communicate ideas about homoeroticism and aesthetics. The two first met in 1976. Pierre is a photographer and Gilles is a painter. The two combined forces, becoming artistic partners and eventually lovers who set out to test the very limits of painting and photography. The result was over two and a half decades of some of the most unusual dream-like images ever created. Through years of honing their art, Pierre and Gilles have devised an aesthetic based on a specific kitsch and camp sense of beauty coupled with a distinctly gay sensibility. Because of the commercial dissemination of their work on album covers, calendars, magazines, postcards, and music videos, and because their work is said to elevate kitsch and bad taste, many critics have dismissed them as irrelevant to the history of contemporary art.

192. **George Segal**, *Gay Liberation*, 1980. Bronze figures, metal benches.

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To create their imagery, Pierre et Gilles go through a painstaking and elaborate process of selection, treatment, and production of their prints. Models are carefully chosen and are usually named in the title. Although each image is manipulated and sanitised, the result is unique and cannot be duplicated. Their earliest works were portraits of friends and celebrities (major and minor) from the exclusive world of glamour, fashion, and chic in which they circulated during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Throughout the 1980s, they expanded their subject matter to include mythological scenes (Venus; Bacchus; Leda and the Swan), Western and Eastern religious themes (Adam and Eve, Satan, saints, Shiva, Krishna), and figures who represented secular ideologies like Communism or the nuclear family. In many of Pierre et Gilles' works of this period, elaborate settings and props are used sometimes to extreme comic effect. Pierre et Gilles have carried over many of the unforgettable themes and images of the 1980s into the 1990s. One noted change is that many more of their images focus on melancholy as an overriding theme. The images still remain just as ethereal, mysterious, and strangely peaceful as before, but now, as a result of the ravages of AIDS and a *fin-de-siècle* malaise, with a heavier touch of irony.

As the decade of AIDS wore on and as more and more gay men were dying, anger took hold within the gay community at the seeming uncaring attitude of the Reagan administration toward both the disease and the plight of the gay community. The larger culture was indifferent to the fact that mostly gay men were dying from the disease. Some conservatives were advocating that it was divine retribution for a promiscuous lifestyle. Both inside and outside the gay community, a wave of anger and protest slowly erupted. Anger and frustration was not only directed against those outside the gay community, but also against some of those within whose apathy was apparent as many gay men continued to drop like flies in the face of the epidemic. For many post-Stonewall gay men, gay identity and culture had been expressed entirely in sexual terms. AIDS now threatened to cut at the very heart of gay liberation, for it menaced an entire way of life. Many from within the gay community and without made a conscious commitment to stem the tide of the disease by insisting on public awareness. Many became extremely politicised over the issue. Outraged that virtually nothing was being done to curb the disease, the New York playwright and activist Larry Kramer organised a group of gay men to form the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) – an organisation committed to educating the gay community about the disease, taking care of the sick, and fighting for the rights of people with the virus.

As organisations like GMHC sprang up all over the nation, the issue of gay men using condoms and refraining from having sex altogether sparked heated debate. A safe-sex campaign soon swept the nation, especially in those major urban areas (New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles) where the crisis had been most strongly felt. Those who had made sex and sexual encounters the key ingredients of who they were and how they thought about themselves were now compelled to refashion their lives, to find new areas of meaning. There were some artists whose work assisted others in this difficult task.

Despite the negative social impact of the epidemic and the increase in violence against homosexuals, AIDS actually helped give the gay community increased visibility. As vehemently as the religious Right launched attacks against gays, gays made strides in making the disease, not gay people, the target of eradication. It was only with the death of actor Rock Hudson from AIDS in 1985 that the public rhetoric over AIDS changed, designating it as the "number-one health priority". It was in this same year, five years into the epidemic, that President Ronald Reagan delivered his first policy speech on AIDS (Neil Miller, pp.451-2). However, intimidated by the Religious Right, Reagan refused to allocate any significant resources or funding to fight the disease. Each year of his administration, he attempted to reduce the amount

193. **Catherine Opie**, *Bo*, 1994. Chromogenic print. Courtesy Regen Projects, Los Angeles.

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over the objections of Congress. The devastating effects of the epidemic, coupled with the Reagan administration's neglect helped strengthen the gay community as a political force during this period (Neil Miller, p.452).

On Columbus Day weekend in 1987, hundreds of thousands of gay people marched on Washington D.C. in a dramatic show of solidarity and strength. The event featured the AIDS Memorial Quilt (Saslow, colour plate 28) composed of almost two thousand square panels commemorating people who had died of AIDS. The quilt, a brainchild of San Francisco political activist Cleve Jones, was an impressive symbol of the gay community pulling together to mourn and commemorate those who battled and succumbed to AIDS. The quilt is the most visible and powerful memorial to people who have died from the disease. The quilt goes beyond a memorial in that it "incorporates processes of public mourning, remembrance, action, education, and AIDS/HIV fundraising causes" (Michael J. Murphy, "NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt," in Haggerty, p.629). The quilt consists of individual cloth panels, each of which remembers the life of someone who has died of AIDS-related illnesses.

The squares were put together by friends and loved ones of the deceased. Each panel is adorned with all kinds of objects, ephemera, mementos, and personal effects of the mourned individual. After a panel has been made, it is hemmed and stored by the San Francisco offices of the NAMES Project. Portions of the quilt are periodically displayed at various venues. The squares of celebrities (such as Rock Hudson) are placed alongside those of non-celebrities, emphasising the democratic nature of the disease and respect of the mourned.

By 1997, the quilt included over 43,000 panels from countries all around the world. Today, there are forty-four NAMES Project chapters in the US and thirty-nine international Quilt affiliates (Murphy in Haggerty, p.630). Since 1987, over nine million people have visited the quilt at displays worldwide. The NAMES Project Foundation has raised over $1.7 million dollars for AIDS service organisations throughout North America. The quilt will continue to be displayed until the epidemic is over.

As a memorial and as art, the quilt serves as a quiet counterpart to the cacophonous yet important street activism of Gran Fury, Queer Nation, and ACT UP, fulfilling Douglas Crimp's observation that what is needed is "mourning and militancy" (quoted in Jonathan Weinberg, "The Quilt: Activism and Remembrance," *Art in America 80*, December 1992, pp.37-9.). The quilt serves as a visual metaphor of the AIDS epidemic, conveying the enormity of the loss, not as medical statistics, but as a personal and immediate experience (Murphy in Haggerty, p.630). As Larry Kramer's battles with GMHC continued, some critics observed that there needed to be another organisation to carry on the street-activist work and demonstrations surrounding AIDS issues that GMHC was ill-equipped to handle. So, in 1987, the same year in which the AIDS quilt was first exhibited, Larry Kramer led a group of young angry gay men and founded ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power). Kramer envisioned this organisation as revolutionising not only AIDS research but the way activists worldwide now look at medical research (Lawrence D. Mass, "Larry Kramer," in Haggerty, p.523). The organisation was self-described as "a diverse, non-partisan group of individuals united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis. We meet with government and health officials; we research and distribute the latest medical information. We protest and demonstrate; we are not silent." Within a short period of time, there were ACT UP chapters in cities all over the country and in Europe, Australia, and Canada (Brett Stockdill, "ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power)," in Haggerty, p.4).

194. **Marsden Hartley**, *Adelard the Drowned, Master of the "Phantom"*. Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

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Since its beginnings in the late 1980s, ACT UP has utilised creative, confrontational, direct-action tactics targeting various aspects of the AIDS crisis, such as exorbitant drug prices, inadequate government funding for research and prevention, inaccessible clinical drug trials, negligent AIDS service organisations, and biased media coverage. Many artists became active in the organisation and their talents were put to use. In assisting the group's causes, artists produced a lot of art, video, street theatre, and agitprop (agitation propaganda) to call attention to the inequities of the AIDS crisis (Stockdill in Haggerty, p.5). Members of ACT UP realised that to fight AIDS, they would also have to fight the homophobia that undergirded the epidemic. They embraced the right to be queer and often spoke out openly and explicitly about lesbian and gay male sex, publicly displaying homosexual affection, distributing thousands of condoms and dental dams, and unfurling banners promoting safer sex at all kinds of venues, even at the Republican national convention.

ACT UP has often used video and art to expose the injustices of the AIDS crisis and boldly promote positive images of homosexuality. One aspect of visual culture affected by ACT UP was the popularising of the pink triangle, which homosexuals were forced to wear in Nazi German concentration camps during the Holocaust, as a symbol of gay pride.

195. **Ajamu Ikwe Tyekimba**, *Body Builder in a Bra*, 1990. Photograph.

196. **Ajamu Ikwe Tyekimba**, *Self-Portrait*, 1993. Photograph.

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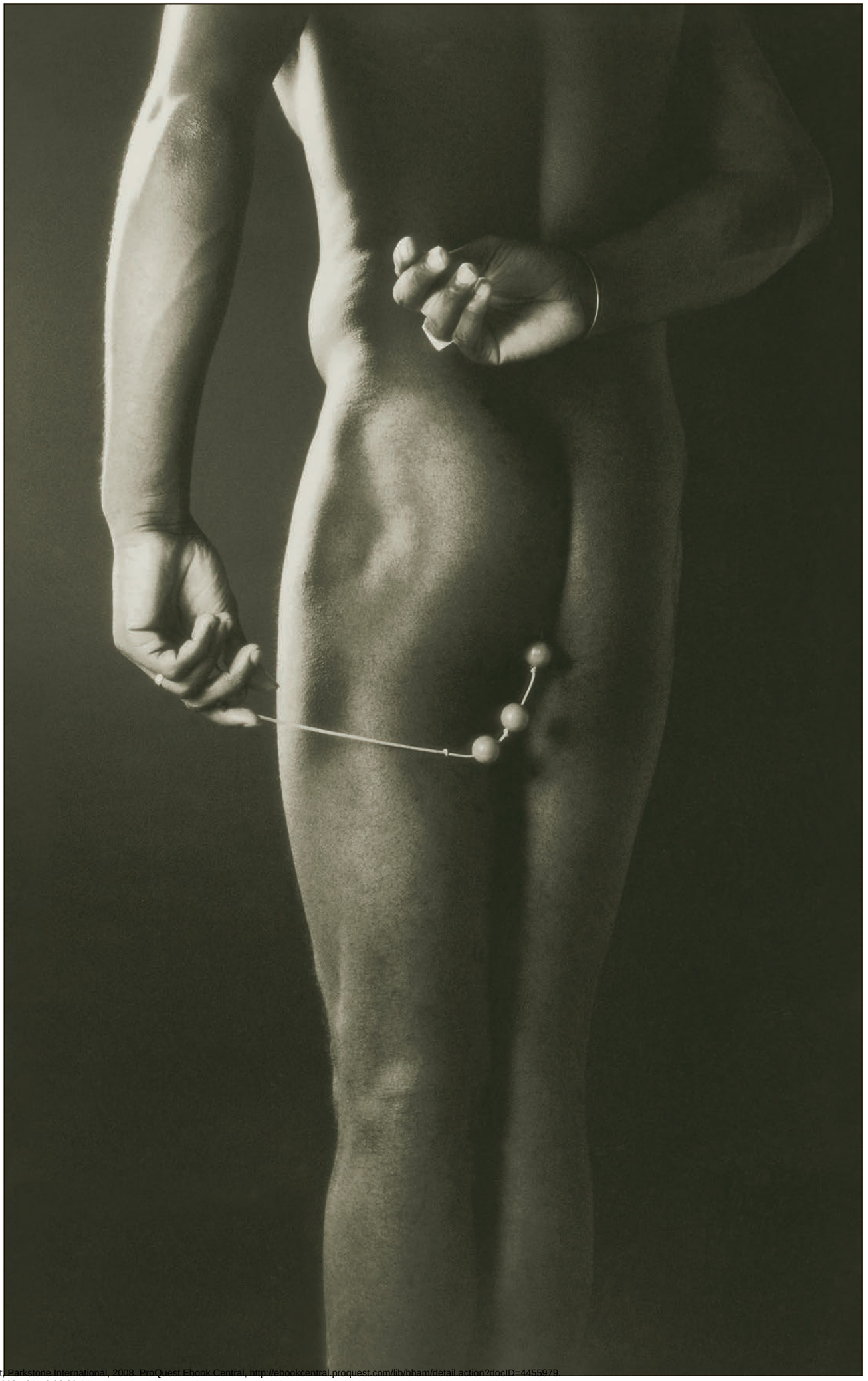

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The pink triangle has been changed to point upward as a symbol of hope and resistance (Stockdill in Haggerty, p.5). ACT UP's mission to emphasise the value of gay lives and vocally defy the status quo is encapsulated in the slogan SILENCE=DEATH, which appears below the pink triangle.

It was the AIDS crisis and social apathy, combined with his own life experiences that directly stimulated David Wojnarowicz (1954-1992) to create a politically engaged art. Wojnarowicz was a New York City photographer, painter, film and video maker, writer, and activist who died of complications from AIDS at the age of thirty-eight. Wojnarowicz came from an abusive background and lived on the streets. Despite this, he managed to become a highly educated, well-read, and talented artist whose energies were directed at investing his art with the personal and public politics of an angry gay man who was dying of AIDS (Michael J. Murphy, "David Wojnarowicz," in Haggerty, p.959). His art, personal life, and his politics were all linked and can not be separated. He was a close friend with many contemporary New York-based artists of the 1980s and 1990s. Some of these artists he collaborated with on various projects. Some of the artists he knew included Karen Finley, author Fran Lebowitz, photographers Peter Hujar and Nan Goldin, and performance artist Kiki Smith. Wojnarowicz is best known for successfully spearheading attacks against homophobic religious conservatives who were bent on using his art as an example of the pornographic aspect of contemporary gay and lesbian art.

Wojnarowicz's art demonstrates "an uncanny sense of the post-modern and the mythopoetic" (Murphy in Haggerty, p.959). He used photography, collage, painting, and multimedia to juxtapose explicitly sexual imagery with anatomical diagrams, animal imagery, and institutional symbols. He developed a highly personal iconography that engaged issues of illness, politics, and homophobia, and communicated these in a poetic and visceral way. His works seethe with anger and frustration not only for himself as an individual gay man, but for an entire generation of gay men whose sexual desires ran up against AIDS, ignorance, homophobia, and unfeeling religious and governmental institutions (Murphy in Haggerty, pp.959-60).

As had been the case with Wojnarowicz, the art of Keith Haring (1958-90) lent itself to the social and political causes of the period surrounding AIDS. Haring, born in Pennsylvania, began his formal art training in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He then moved to New York City in 1978 to study at the School of Visual Arts. It was during the 1980s that he developed a unique style that used thick and heavy contour lines to create simplified, cartoon-like forms. His style was graphic and

197. **Rotimi Fani-Kayode**, *Golden Phallus*, 1989. Photograph. Estate of Rotimi Fani-Kayode and Autograph, London.

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his figures were highly expressive but hieroglyphic. He is especially known for his barking dogs, glowing babies, flying saucers, and dancing, gesticulating figures (Matthew Nichols, "Keith Haring," in Haggerty, p.426). Haring's figures are both primitive and futuristic. They are heavily influenced by graffiti art and downtown dance clubs of New York City. Haring is credited with expanding the tradition of Pop Art by synthesising fine art with urban street culture. He gained notoriety by scribbling his drawings on walls, the sidewalk, or on whatever surface of the urban environment he could find. His style was instantly recognisable to a broad audience. By the mid-1980s his underground work had caught the attention of many art dealers and collectors. His art was promoted as a pop variation of the neo-expressionist movement. He rose to fame and wealth very quickly and exhibited in galleries and museums world wide. The immense popularity of his art lent itself to numerous social and political causes that the artist advocated throughout his career. The causes he chose to connect himself with, such as drug treatment and prevention, benefited the community. In 1987, Haring learned that he was HIV-positive. Much of his later work was fuelled by this awareness and awareness of the fact that a large number of AIDS deaths occurred in New York City. His legible and expressive style was used for AIDS public awareness purposes. ACT UP used many of his graphics for AIDS awareness and prevention. Haring died of AIDS-related complications in 1990 at the age of thirty-one.

The AIDS crisis sparked an increased interest in producing public art. Individual artists such as John Lindell, Barbara Kruger, Keith Haring, Cindy Sherman, Laurie Simmons, and artists' cooperatives such as Gran Fury, Group Material, and Australia's F. A. G. S. (Fucking Angry Gays) banded together to promote AIDS awareness in the streets. The artist collective, Gran Fury, was founded in 1988 and described itself as a "band of individuals united in anger and dedicated to exploiting the power of art to end the AIDS crisis" (quoted in Richard Meyer, "Gran Fury," in Haggerty, p.414). The collective consisted of a variety of fine and commercial artists who worked very closely with the New York chapter of ACT UP. They produced imagery and agitprop to accompany ACT UP's many provocative street demonstrations. Gran Fury produced "protest work in a variety of media, including billboard signs, bus shelter advertisements, mock newspapers, and music videos" (Meyer in Haggerty, p.414). The idea was to shock and surprise the public so that they might be motivated to not only recognise the crisis, but to act. They "exploited the force of art and graphic design to propel its activist message into the public sphere". Although effective, the collective disbanded in 1992.

198. **Rotimi Fani-Kayode**, *Every Moment Counts,* 1988. Estate of Rotimi Fani-Kayode and Autograph, London.

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The devastation of AIDS not only affected all areas of gay artistic and social life, it also created a stir in intellectual life as well. Compounding the disorienting effects of the disease during the 1980s was the shift from modernism to postmodernism. Part of postmodernism's definition involves repetition and re-appropriation of past signs and symbols to create new and different meanings. The post-modern in terms of gay culture was signalled by the changing preference by many intellectual and cultural leaders for the word 'queer' over 'gay' to self-identify oneself as an 'out' homosexual. Just as African-Americans had taken the previously racist term 'black' to describe their newfound sense of pride and self-assertion, some gay men re-appropriated the negative term 'queer' to signal their own sense of self-pride and self-assertion (Neil Miller, *Out of the Past*, p.370). But 'queer' was also employed to break down the strict dichotomy between the unstable categories of men (gays) and women (lesbians). 'Queer' came to refer to anyone of either gender whose sexual orientation and/or preference was not that of the heterosexual norm. Hence, transvestites, transsexuals, bisexuals, as well as gays and lesbians, would be included under rubric 'queer'. The change from 'gay' to 'queer' was part of the aims of a younger generation of post-modern intellectuals whose ideas would come to legitimise gay and lesbian studies and queer theory as viable academic areas of study within the universities during the 1990s. Post-modern theory, although not completely giving up its modernist aspects nor directly affecting the everyday gay man and lesbian, "radically expanded the boundaries of what artists can make, and what critics can say about it" (Saslow, p.275).

By the beginning of the 1990s, the socially committed art of the late 1980s was joined by art produced by new emerging groups of gays and lesbians of different races and cultures who wanted their voices included. These included African-Americans, Latino and Chicano-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Native Americans. Although mainstream art critics and theoreticians embraced multiculturalism, those same artists of colour were often subjected to suspicion and ideological 'flip-flopping'.

Bolstered by the triumph of postmodernism, the 1990s became known as the decade of queer theory and identity politics. Much of the art produced was "coolly cerebral," "historically and aesthetically self-conscious," and "conceptual or literary" (Saslow, pp.276-7). Photography and text-based work, along with performance and installation became the media of choice for many artists. These media allowed for an ease and speed of production and were more immediate in their effectiveness. Since most of the art produced dealt with issues of identity, much of it, though not all, focused on the nude body and new forms of its representation. However, the pluralist dimensions of the decade do not allow for any quick and easy categorising of the art.

The Cuban-born American artist, Felix González-Torres (1957-96), is a good example of a post-modern queer artist. González-Torres was an artist whose works were conceptual in nature. He was born in Guaimaro, Cuba and moved to New York in 1979 where he studied and gained degrees in photography. While a student, he was exposed to the theoretical ideas of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. He also came to deeply understand the inner workings of the political power of advertising and visual art. In 1987, González-Torres joined the collective Group Material, which "organised huge group exhibitions devoted to themes of homelessness (1988) and AIDS (1988-9)" (Robert Atkins, "Felix González-Torres," in Haggerty, p.410). González-Torres' art took many forms but was united by a minimalist visual language and conceptual content. Viewers are invited, sometimes physically, but many times intellectually, to participate in giving meaning to the work.

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199. **Sunil Gupta**, *Untitled Nr. 5. Series Trespass*

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The 1990s have been dubbed the decade of culture wars and identity politics. Throughout the decade, art and culture have been both used and targeted as weapons against queer visibility. Due to the influence of postmodernism, the definition of 'art' expanded to include all forms of visual culture, including television, film, video, and digital imagery. The buzzwords in culture at large resulting from the trend in political correctness were 'inclusion' and 'diversity'. Queer became a trendy part of the mix. Although most issues concerning the rights of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender persons might not have been fully accepted in society, increased media coverage assisted in an increased visibility of queer issues and ideas. The hope is that increased visibility will lead to familiarity, which will lead to tolerance.

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200. **Nan Goldin**, *Gilles and Gotscho Kissing*, *Paris*, 1992. Photograph. Matthew Marks Gallery, New York.

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In tandem with a movement by queer artists to gain respectability in the eyes of the larger culture, several queer artists and their followers who desired to push the envelope of gender and sexual fluidity arose and have become minorities within a minority. David Wojnarowicz fits this category along with a close-knit group of popular erotic artists whose subjects range from "stippled drawings of ultra masculine bodies" to leathermen, sadomasochists, hairy men, gay skinheads, and gay punk-rockers (Saslow, p.291). The works of these artists address issues of gender, desire, the body, loss, and cross-cultural/cross-racial models of queer identity. The majority of them use graphic media and photography for immediacy of effect and to more effectively question society's attitudes and values.

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201. **Nan Goldin**, *Jimmy Paulette and Tabboo! In the Bathroom*, 1991. Photograph. New York.

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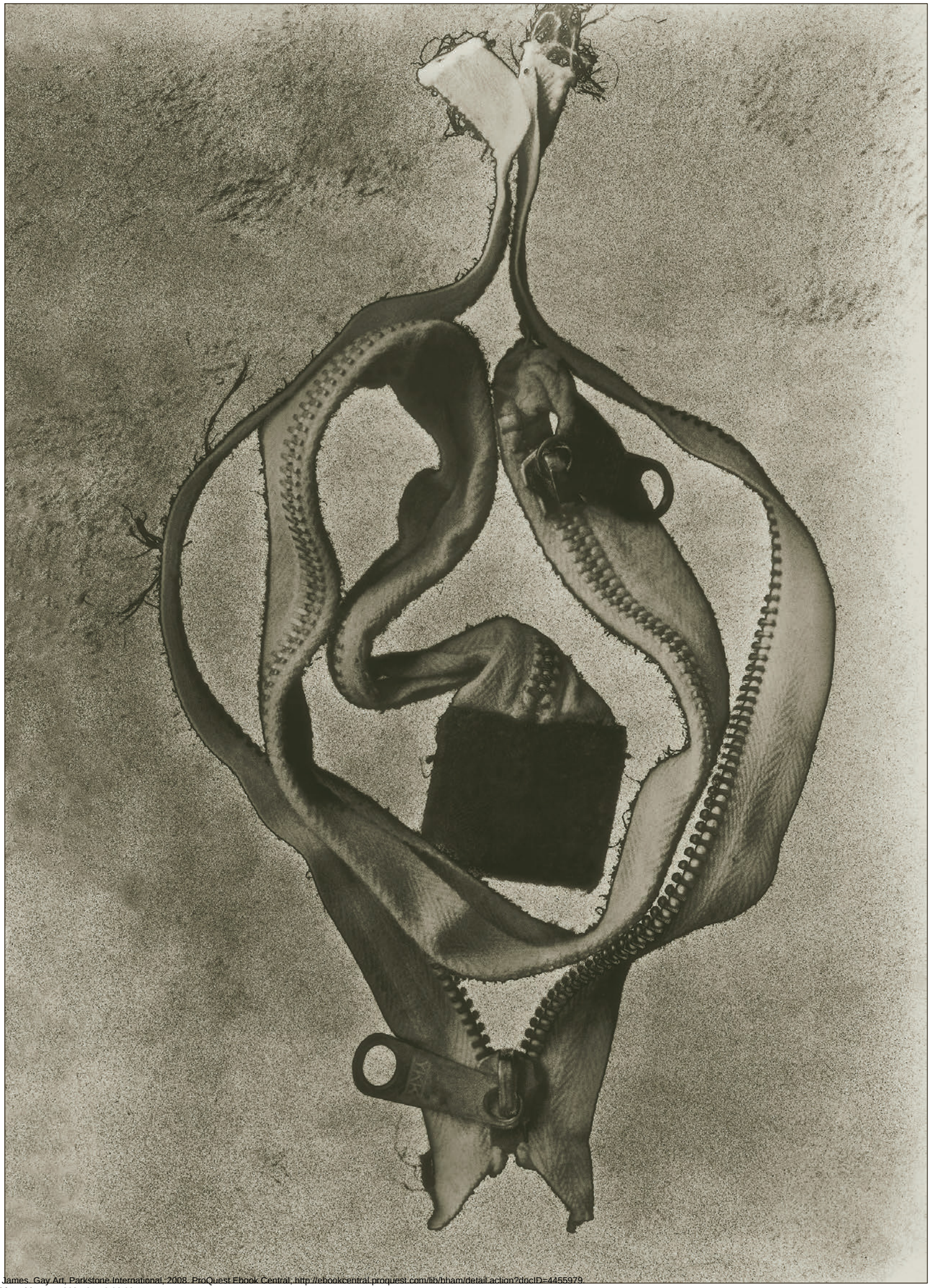

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Conclusion

In 1994, New York City celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Stonewall riots – the rebellion that launched the gay and lesbian liberation movement as a viable political and social challenge to decades if not centuries of repression and persecution. The anniversary marked the beginning of what is called the 'Gay Moment II', that is, the revitalisation of the political spirit that sparked the initial riots. The major focus of 'Gay Moment II' was to call attention to the abuses of gay and lesbian human rights across the globe. Despite an unprecedented degree of media coverage of that event and gains on a number of fronts throughout the twentieth century, the overall situation for gays and lesbians today remains precarious. Increased visibility of homosexuality in all of its permutations will not necessarily lead to acceptance, but it will lead to familiarity and hopefully greater tolerance.

From the moment 'homosexuality' came into existence as a word and later as a concept and marker of identity, queer folks have enjoyed political victories and have suffered numerous defeats and setbacks. The development of homosexual community and identity over the past 130 years or so and the strides of political movements before and since Stonewall have led up to the moment when homosexuality has arrived as an important aspect of world politics and multicultural life. The contributions of courageous individuals – writers, thinkers, artists, activists – have all contributed to the increased visibility and viability of homosexuality in the lives of human beings.

The contemporary arena of popular culture and the medium of cyberspace take forms that promise to alter the very nature of gay and lesbian visibility in the future. Cyberspace allows for the flow of culture in multiple directions simultaneously and promises to provide access to infinite amounts of visual, verbal, and aural information across the planet. It also has the effect of confusing the separation of culture and commerce and blurring the lines between 'low' art forms and 'high culture'. However, because the internet breaches national borders, it has become a formidable threat provoking the restriction of access to it. The worldwide web continues to grow exponentially and with that there are increased attempts at regulation and control, specifically where issues of sexuality and queer visibility are concerned.

The rise of gay, lesbian, and queer identity, politics, and culture, appears inevitable given the interconnectedness between different peoples and cultures that typify the globalisation process. There will continue to be resistance to difference, but it remains up to the visual artists of the twenty-first century to keep us on track and remind us of what has been accomplished and what still remains to be done.

202. **Tee Corinne**, *Zippered Metaphors*, 2002. Gelatin silver print from a solarised negative.

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This book is not a panegyric of homosexuality. It is a scientific study led by Professor James Smalls who teaches art history at the prestigious University of Maryland in Baltimore.

His work examines the process of creation and allows one to comprehend the contribution of homosexuality to the evolution of emotional perception. In a time when all barriers have been overcome, this analysis offers a new understanding of our civilisation's masterpieces.

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