



Carol Rama
Appassionata (Marta e marchettoni), 1939

MORAL DIS/ORDER

Art and Sexuality in Europe
between the Wars

Organized by
IVAM

Dates
22 DE OCTUBRE DE 2020 AL
21 DE MARZO DE 2021

Curated by
JUAN VICENTE ALIAGA

Coordinator
MARTA ARROYO PLANELLES



GENERALITAT
VALENCIANA
Conselleria d'Educació,
Cultura i Esport

TOTS
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THE EXHIBITION

The goal of the exhibition **MORAL DIS/ORDER Art and sexuality in Europe between the wars** is to examine representations of sexuality in art and in visual culture in Europe during this period. The show brings together 219 works produced in the period between the two world wars, including paintings, drawings, prints, photographs, sculptures, films and documentation, from over fifty artists like Otto Dix, George Grosz, Rudolf Schlichter, Francis Picabia, Man Ray, Claude Cahun, Tamara de Lempicka, Jeanne Mammen, Hannah Höch, Salvador Dalí and Federico García Lorca. During this time span, and despite the reigning repressive public moral, several countries witnessed a number of changes which are directly or vicariously related with the consequences of war.



Claude Cahun
S/T (Autoportrait), ca. 1920

The social norms cemented in nineteenth-century laws and in the influence of religion held a tight grip over the sexual behaviour of individuals, and yet, in the 1920s and 30s a whole series of breaches of the established order took place. In Berlin, where Magnus Hirschfeld had founded the Institute of Sex Research in 1919, there was an unprecedented interest in depicting the erotic activity of a world turned on its head by the trauma of defeat. This is the case of the paintings, drawings and prints by Otto Dix, George Grosz and Rudolf Schlichter which contained abundant representations of prostitutes often subjected to violence. At the same time, many works were produced in Germany that threw light on the homosexual and lesbian subculture, as exemplified in watercolours by Jeanne Mammen and collages by Hannah Höch.

Meanwhile, in France, many meeting places for so-called *inverts* flourished in the city of Paris. Brassai captured some fragments of these lives removed from the heteropatriarchal order. Paris was a locus of many expressions of heterodox sexuality but it would also see episodes of censorship like that of the magazine *Inversions* (1924-1925) which was taken out of circulation for purportedly attacking public decency. A major role was played in this journal by Claude Cahun, author of a splendid set of photographs in which, with the aid of her partner, Marcel Moore, she interpreted herself in different male and female roles, subverting the strict gender binarism prevailing at the time.

France was also the birthplace, during these years, of Surrealism, a movement whose philosophy of life revolved around Bretonian *amour fou*, which actively channelled a whole range of desires that relegated women to a secondary role. However, there were other agents, like the Czech artist Toyen, who forged their own personal path without forsaking surrealist circles, which would engender such unforgettable results in the rendering of erotic obsessions by Hans Bellmer and Man Ray, among others.

During the 1920s and 30s, the *garçon* or flapper phenomenon swept across Europe. Many women broke away from the mould of the *eternal feminine* and started to wear trousers, cut their hair short and smoke cigarettes, openly flouting the hegemonic moral order. Newspapers ran incendiary articles in which they branded them as tomboys; the new woman was also reflected in film and in art.

At the same time, one could also note the appearance of a certain homoerotic male aesthetic that identified with classical culture—one of the few ways of talking about a love that dare not speak its name. This is the case of the works by the Spanish photographer Gregorio Prieto. The “Greek laurel” also inspired Federico García Lorca who started to write his ill-fated *Sonnets of Dark Love* in Valencia.

The 1930s came to a close with the consolidation of Fascist dictatorships (Italy, Germany, Spain, Portugal...) which introduced a political system that pursued dissidents and condemned homosexuality and any hint of freedom in sexual mores.



Duncan Grant
Bathers by the Pond, 1920-21

EXHIBITION SECTIONS

1. CULTURES OF THE BODY

This section takes a look at the various facets of what was known in Germany as *Körperkultur* (nudism). This phenomenon embraced a social desire to return to nature and to ways of life removed from the frenetic pace imposed by industrialization and city life. In that regard, it endeavoured to promote physical exercise and health as evinced in many works of art and indeed cinema, for instance in *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* (Ways to Strength and Beauty), directed by Nicholas Kaufmann and Wilhelm Prager in 1925. At the same time, there was a cult of the athletic body which was somehow coupled with an idealized appreciation of classical cultures, both Greek and Roman. In societies in which the rigidity and constrictions of moral order held sway, the depiction of nudity opened up room for a certain licence and liberty.



Eugène Fredrik Jansson
Flotans Badhus, 1907



Vanessa Bell
Nude with poppies, 1916

2. THE BLOOMSBURY GROUP AND OTHER AESTHETICS

Victorian morals lingered in England well beyond the nineteenth century. The enforcement of strict codes of behaviour entailed the persecution of sexuality, particularly heterodox expressions, as borne out by the sentence of two years' imprisonment handed down to the writer Oscar Wilde in 1895. Religious rules went hand in hand with a strict work ethic in a period in which slavery had already been abolished.

Certain forms of behaviour flourished in intellectual circles in Oxford and Cambridge that exalted the desire for eternal youth adorned with love, flowers and laughter. All of which was stopped in

its tracks by the Great War, as was the case of the poet Rupert Brooke and the so-called neo-Pagans. Fond of bathing in the nude, exploring nature and enjoying life as bohemians following the ideas advocated by the sexologist Edward Carpenter, this group never went as far as the polysexual components of the Bloomsbury group (Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, Virginia Woolf...) who, both in London as well as the protected countryside of Sussex, broke the rules of Edwardian society. At the same time, the Suffragist movement laid bare the narrowmindedness of a profoundly patriarchal society.

3. TRAUMA AND DESIRE

The defeat of Germany in the First World War plunged the country into a psychological trauma. Countless wounded and amputees were readily visible on the streets of its cities while the economic situation merely worsened. The Weimar Republic came into being against this backdrop of profound political instability, and remained in place until the Nazis arrived to power in 1933.

Sexuality in its various forms and expressions is profusely represented by many artists both within and outside the New Objectivity movement (Otto Dix, George Grosz, Heinrich Marie Davringhausen...).

In 1919 Magnus Hirschfeld founded the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft (Institute of Sex Research) in Berlin. It drew people from all over Europe in pursuit of insights into their personal desires.

Hirschfeld supported the campaign to abolish Paragraph 175 of the penal code which criminalized sexual acts between men. Despite living in a society governed by strict Prussian rules and moral repression, Germany saw the rise of a buoyant homosexual and lesbian subculture in which the *different*, especially in cities like Berlin and Hamburg, could live parallel lives as one can see in the works of Hannah Höch and Jeanne Mammen.

On the other hand, violence was most often vented on the bodies of the weakest. There were countless cases of sex crimes, *Lustmord*, with prostitutes bearing the brunt of them.



Steffi Brandl
S/T (Die Bildhauerin und Grafikerin Renée Sintenis), 1929



Man Ray
Barbette Vander Clyde, dit Barbette, 1926

4. UNDER THIS MASK, ANOTHER MASK

The title of this section is taken from some words featured in a photomontage created jointly by the French artist Marcel Moore and romantic partner Claude Cahun in their book *Aveux non avendus*, (Disavowals: or Cancelled Confessions), 1930.

This work is teeming with heads of Cahun allusive to the *different*, changing identities with which she depicted herself in her photos. Likewise, the image also contains allusions to the suffocating weight of religion and the heterosexual holy family, the only one possible at that time.

Paris between the wars was a refuge for French and foreign artists and intellectuals, including many couples of lesbian women like Romaine Brooks and Natalie Barney, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas... who longed to live life by

making their own decisions in a permissive environment away from prying eyes. The French capital was also the place chosen by the Danish painter Gerda Wegener to live with her husband Einar who identified as Lili Elbe, one of the first known transsexual women.

The photographer Brassai also moved between masks and disguises, capturing the secret nocturnal life of Paris in the thirties.



Gerda Wegener
La lecture (Les délassements d'Eros), 1925

5. THE DEPTHS OF SEX

Surrealism made its appearance throughout the twenties. This art movement, which grew up around André Breton and in which numerous dissidences arose over the course of time, made sexuality, seen from the perspective of heterosexual men, its central core. In a misogynous context in which religion and decorum were still very much rooted in social customs, the works of Hans Bellmer, André Masson, Toyen and Salvador Dalí, among others, overthrew all sense of decency with their visual explosion of bodies and sexual organs. Some artistic proposals at the time were influenced by the writings of Marquis de Sade. The Hungarian artist Alexander Gergely, whose work contains symbolist and expressionist influences, translated the sexual drive in violent terms.

In the same period and with other aesthetic criteria, lesbian sex was present both in the work of the German photographer Germaine Krull as well as in the drawings of the Austrian painter Mariette Lydis. Male homosexual subject matters were dealt with by Jean Cocteau and by Roland Caillaux, discreetly, almost secretly. The open-mindedness evinced in these works often removed from avant-garde art should not be confused with absolute freedom. Some artists, like Carol Rama, felt the pressure of puritanism while others focused on the production of erotic ex libris, as was the case of the Austrian artist Michel Fingesten who, years later, would be arrested by a Nazi commando and accused of being a degenerate artist.

6. SALACIOUS TIMES

In Spain, the period of the Second Republic brought with it new airs of freedom which had been hard to find in preceding decades. Prior to this, a number of risqué, libidinous (salacious) illustrated journals had appeared and spread throughout the country since the beginning of the century. Many of them included female nudes.

The weight of Catholic religion and illiteracy hampered the appearance of liberating ideas. Bashfulness, modesty and prudence were the watchword for the majority of cultural and artistic productions. In a country where women were second-class citizens---they were not

entitled to vote until November 1933---a group of intellectuals and artists called Las Sinsombrero (Hatless) who challenged chauvinistic conventions stood out. One of its leading members, Maruja Mallo, explored the few spaces of freedom (festivals, street parties ...) available to women. Federico García Lorca, a target of Spanish conservative tirades, managed to silently capture in his drawings the sensibility of homosexual love while others artists---Néstor from the Canary Islands or Gabriel Morcillo from Granada---used sensuality and eroticism as a way of channelling their tastes and preferences.



Maruja Mallo
Dos mujeres en la playa, 1928

7. VIRILE TOTALITARIANISMS

The First World War cast a very long shadow. From the resentment and humiliation caused by the defeat of Germany, in the midst of an alarming economic crisis, the Nazi discourses of exacerbated nationalism based on hatred of the different (Jews, homosexuals, Gypsies ...) found fertile ground. The cult of strength and the male body in the figure of the soldier and athlete offered the purported guarantee to defeat the believed enemy. This way of thinking, also rendered in art, was at the foundations of Fascism in its distinct national modalities. Every fatherland had to be sustained on the idea of a homogeneous people (farm labourers, workers) with no room for dissent. All the various political forms of totalitarianisms coincided in this.

In Spain, under Franco's regime, religion and the social and gender division of work---a role played by the Sección Femenina (the women's branch of the Falange)---were put to the service of a state which punished the vanquished.



Anónimo
Soldados soviéticos acosando una mujer en Leipzig, 1945

RELATED ACTIVITIES

THURSDAY, 22 OCTOBER 7:00 pm.

Conversation with Juan Vicente Aliaga
curator of the exhibition *Moral Dis/order*

Auditorium

(Conversation prior to opening)

FRIDAY, 23 OCTOBER 7:30 pm.

Guided tour of exhibition *Moral Dis/order*
with the curator Juan Vicente Aliaga

Gallery 1

GUIDED TOURS

OCTOBER

SUNDAY 25

11:00 am. Spanish. With sign-language interpreter.

NOVEMBER

SUNDAY 1

11:00 am. Valencian.

SATURDAY 7

6:00 pm. Valencian.

SUNDAY 15

11:00 am. Valencian.

SATURDAY 28

6:00 pm. Spanish.

DICIEMBRE

TUESDAY 8

11:00 am. Spanish.

SATURDAY 12

6:00 pm. Valencian.

SUNDAY 20,

11:00 am. Spanish.

SATURDAY 26

6:00 pm. Spanish.

THE CATALOGUE

Coinciding with the exhibition, IVAM has published a catalogue with a foreword by José Miguel G. Cortés, former director of IVAM, and texts by Juan Vicente Aliaga (curator of the exhibition and lecturer at the School of Fine Arts, Polytechnic University of Valencia), Simon Martin (Director of Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, UK) and Annelie Lütgens (Head of Prints and Drawings at Berlinische Galerie).



Fratelli Alinari
Stadio dei Marmi, Roma, 1930-32

MORE INFORMATION

COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT
comunicacion@ivam.es

963 176 600

Guillem de Castro, 118
46003 Valencia

www.ivam.es

COVER PHOTO

Carol Rama

Appassionata (Marta e marchettoni), 1939

Watercolour on paper

33 x 23 cm

Private collection, courtesy of

Archivio Carol Rama, Turin

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