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Queer British Art

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In 1861, the death penalty was abolished for sodomy in Britain; just over a century later, in 1967, homosexuality was finally decriminalised. Between these legal landmarks lies a century of seismic shifts in gender and sexuality for men and women. These found expression across the arts as British artists, collectors and consumers explored transgressive identities, experiences and desires. Some of these works were intensely personal, celebrating lovers or expressing private desires. Others addressed a wider public, helping to forge a sense of community at a time when the modern categories of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender were largely unrecognised. Ranging from the playful to the political, the explicit to the domestic, these works showcase the rich diversity of queer British art. This publication, the first to focus exclusively on British queer art, will feature sections on ambivalent sexualities and gender experimentation amongst the Pre-Raphaelites; the new science of sexology's impact on portraiture; queer domesticities in Bloomsbury and beyond; eroticism in the artist's studio and relationships between artists and models; gender play and sexuality in British surrealism; and love and lust in sixties Soho. It features works by major artists such as Simeon Solomon, John Singer Sargent, Clare Atwood, Ethel Sands, Duncan Grant, John Minton, Angus McBean, David Hockney and Francis Bacon, alongside less well-known material, such as ephemera, personal photographs, film and magazines. This diversity of material is matched by diversity of experience, with key works highlighting differences of class, gender identity and ethnicity. Coinciding with the fiftieth anniversary of the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Britain, and against a backdrop of recent gains in gay rights (with the legalisation of gay marriage in the UK and the wider world), Queer British Art is a timely survey of the seismic shifts in gender and sexuality that took place between the 1860s and the 1960s.

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