Out on Display

A selection of LGBTQ-related objects on display in the V&A
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) histories can be told through many objects within the V&A collection. This guide highlights 30 objects currently on display which possess a variety of LGBTQ connections and narratives.

The selection aims to reveal how objects can help us to recognise and explore the presence of LGBTQ individuals and communities within different time periods and cultures, encouraging discussion of both gender and sexual identities.

First launched to coincide with the 2014 Pride in London Parade and updated in 2017 to mark 50 years since the partial decriminalisation of male homosexuality in England, this guide is a ‘work-in-progress’ which we are continuing to develop. Please see inside for details of how to let us know your thoughts.

Please pick up a copy of the V&A map to help you locate the objects in this guide.
Contents

**LEVEL 0:**
- *Coin with head of the Emperor Hadrian*
  Room 8, Medieval & Renaissance 300–1500 (page 5)
- *Reliquary of Saint Sebastian*
  After a design by Hans Holbein the Elder
  Room 10, Medieval & Renaissance 300–1500 (page 15)
- *Anthropomorphic jug*
  Room 10A, Medieval & Renaissance 300–1500 (page 18)

**LEVEL 1:**
- *Mask of a Dead Faun*
  Glyn Philpot
  Room 21, Sculpture (page 8)
- *Metamorphosis of Ovid*
  Auguste Rodin
  Room 21, Sculpture (page 9)
- *Scandal*
  Charles Sargeant Jagger
  Room 21, Sculpture (page 10)
- *Evening dress*
  Charles James
  Room 40, Fashion (page 11)

**LEVEL 2:**
- *Hindu God Shiva as Ardhanarishvara (Lord Who Is Half Woman)*
  Room 47B, South-East Asia (page 13)

**LEVEL 3:**
- *Ganymede*
  Guillaume Coustou II
  On display in Room 61, stairwell near Cromwell Road entrance (page 24)
- *Snuffbox associated with Frederick the Great*
  Room 72, Gold, Silver and Mosaics (page 36)
- *Circus chair*
  Designed by Cecil Beaton
  Room 74, 20th Century (page 37)
- *'KISSING DOESN'T KILL, GREED AND INDIFFERENCE DO'*
  Designed by Gran Fury: Published by ACT UP
  Room 75, 20th Century (page 38)
- *Ganymede Feeding the Eagle*
  Richard Evans
  Room 82, Paintings (page 23)
- *Peeling off the bitter rind*
  Keith Lewis
  Room 91, Jewellery (page 25)
- *Sappho, inspired by Love, Composes an Ode to Venus (after Angelica Kauffmann)*
  Room 91M, Jewellery (page 26)
- *Leonide Massine Waiting for his Cue Gluck*
  Room 104, Theatre & Performance (page 27)
- *Costumes for ‘Because We Must’*
  Designed by Leigh Bowery
  Room 105, Theatre & Performance (page 29)
- *Nijinsky as ‘Le Spectre de la rose’*
  Jean Cocteau for the Ballets Russes
  Room 106, Theatre & Performance (page 31)
- *'Patience' by the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company*
  Poster designed by Henry Matthew Brock
  Room 106, Theatre & Performance (page 33)
- *'A Patriot For Me' by John Osborne*
  Room 106, Theatre & Performance (page 35)
- *Lou Reed in Concert*
  Blue Egg Printing and Design Ltd
  Room 106, Theatre & Performance (page 30)
- *Hercules and Antaeus*
  Richard Evans
  Room 111, Sculpture (page 7)
- *Antinous*
  Zoffoli workshop
  Room 117, Sculpture (page 6)

**LEVEL 4:**
- *William Beckford*
  T.A. Dean after Sir Joshua Reynolds
  Room 120, Britain 1760–1900 (page 12)
- *Aesthetic man’s suit*
  Room 125, Britain 1760–1900 (page 34)

**LEVEL 6:**
- *Screen*
  Eileen Gray
  Room 135, Furniture (page 22)
- *Jug fragment*
  Room 137, Ceramics (page 17)
- *Vase*
  Akio Takamori
  Room 142, Ceramics (page 19)
- *Vase*
  Phyllis Keyes and Duncan Grant
  Room 142, Ceramics (page 21)
- *My Heroes*
  Grayson Perry
  Room 142, Ceramics (page 20)
**Coin with head of the Emperor Hadrian**  
About AD 118  
Museum no. A.681-1910  
Bequeathed by Mr George Salting  

On display in Room 8, Medieval & Renaissance  
300–1500, Level 0

This gold *aureus* coin commemorates the Emperor Hadrian. He was known as one of the 'Five Good Emperors' of Ancient Rome, and maintained almost a century of peace for the Empire. A patron of the arts and a supporter of Hellenic culture, Hadrian's love for the Greek youth Antinous was well-known and commemorated in erotic verse.

---

**Antinous**  
Zoffoli workshop  
Late 18th century  
Museum no. A.15-1974  
Given by Professor Benjamin Rowland, Jr, through the Art Fund  

On display in Room 117, Sculpture, Level 3

Antinous came from humble origins, but he was Hadrian’s most favoured lover. During an imperial tour of Egypt in AD 130, Antinous drowned in the Nile. Hadrian is said to have been distraught and ‘wept like a woman’. His devotion to Antinous led him to found a city named Antinopolis in his memory. He also had Antinous made into a god. Hadrian commemorated his lover in huge numbers of statues, portraits and coins. This bronze statuette is an 18th-century copy of the ‘Capitoline Antinous’, a marble statue excavated at Hadrian’s villa believed to be a portrait of the young man.
Hercules and Antaeus
About 1520
Museum no. A.95-1956
Bequeathed by Dr W. L. Hildburgh FSA

On display in Room 111, Sculpture, Level 3

The Greek mythological tale of Hercules and Antaeus bristles with homoerotic symbolism. Antaeus was half giant – the son of Poseidon, god of the Sea, and Gaia, goddess of the Earth. He would challenge any man passing through his lands to a wrestling match. As long as Antaeus remained in contact with the earth he was invincible, but as soon as he was lifted off the ground, his strength began to ebb away. Hercules outsmarted Antaeus by gripping him in a bear hug, holding him aloft and squeezing him to death.

Hercules has been considered bisexual in modern terms, largely because of his love affairs with the youth, Hylas, and the divine hero, Abderus, among others. The wrestling scene between Hercules and Antaeus was an extremely popular subject during the Renaissance, and, like statuettes of Ganymede or David, served as a byword for homosexuality when found in the homes or private collections of gay men.

Mask of a Dead Faun
Glyn Philpot
About 1923
Museum no. A.4-2008

On display in Room 21, Sculpture, Level 1

Glyn Philpot (1884–1937) made his name as a respectable painter of society portraits (including that of Siegfried Sassoon), but in the 1920s he became interested in sculpture and the male nude. This dramatic change of direction was largely due to tensions between his public life of Christian observance and academic painting, and his private homosexuality and desire for artistic experimentation.

Mask of a Dead Faun shows the model George Bridgeman, an ‘affable drifter’ whose good looks and physique represented an ideal for Philpot. From 1919 onwards Bridgeman would model many times for Philpot, who depicted him in a number of striking figurative paintings.

This cast was made around the same time that Philpot was elected a full member of the Royal Academy of Arts. It was the only one of his sculptural works that sold well during his lifetime. In the 1930s Philpot went on to adopt a more experimental modernist style and some of his later works were censured for their overt sexuality.
Metamorphosis of Ovid
Auguste Rodin
1886
Museum no. A.117-1937
Bequeathed by Mr Charles Shannon

On display in Room 21, Sculpture, Level 1

Auguste Rodin (1840–1917) was commissioned to create this pair of embracing female figures for ‘The Gates of Hell’ (the bronze portal and doors for the Museum of Decorative Arts, Paris). The group explicitly depicts same-sex erotic desire. It does not illustrate a specific story, but rather draws inspiration from the epic poems of the Roman poet Ovid, whom Rodin greatly admired.

Referred to as ‘fantasies’ during the late 19th century, these erotic groups by Rodin were often ascribed less importance than other works by the artist. As they challenged contemporary moral values, representations of same-sex desire were habitually misunderstood and thus studied less, sometimes becoming forgotten over time.

Although allegorical, this depiction of a female couple would have implied the fantasies of a male gaze rather than lesbianism. They nevertheless inspired a great many artists and collectors. This sculpture was formerly owned by the painter Charles Shannon, who had a lifelong relationship with another notable artist of the period, Charles Ricketts.

Scandal
Charles Sargeant Jagger
1930
Museum no. A.1-2008

On display in Room 21, Sculpture, Level 1

This sculpted fireplace by Charles Sargeant Jagger (1885–1934) was commissioned in 1930 by the politician and industrialist Henry Mond and his wife Gwen Wilson. It was once situated in their drawing room at Mulberry House, Westminster, which was celebrated as one of London’s most remarkable Art Deco interiors.

The fireplace contains references to the Monds’ controversial ‘ménage à trois’ around ten years earlier with the writer and Bloomsbury figure, Gilbert Cannan. A pair of lovers are shown standing proudly naked before a group of shocked onlookers. Jagger has arranged the figures to adopt a zigzag composition which heightens the feeling of expressive movement. The design challenges conventions and hetero-normativity by criticising and making fun of the gossip and outrage the affair caused.

The Monds were great benefactors of the artist Glyn Philpot. They commissioned him to paint their portraits and decorate Mulberry House with murals of the myths of Oedipus, Leda and the Swan, and a rather muscular Sphinx.
At first glance, the playful print on this vivid evening gown is merely a collection of disembodied faces, tumbling over the fabric in the Surrealist style popular in 1930s couture. In fact, the faces are portraits of the French writer and artist Jean Cocteau, and his lover and muse Jean Marais.

The fabric was designed by Cocteau himself. He was a multi-talented man whose activities spanned the worlds of theatre, film, poetry and visual art. Marais starred in many of Cocteau’s films, including La Belle et La Bête, and they remained close until Cocteau’s death in 1963. Charles James, the gown’s Anglo-American designer, used this fabric to create a subversive and witty love letter to his friends.

Cocteau, Marais and James all moved in the same cosmopolitan, tolerant and sexually liberated artistic circles of the period – as did the photographer and costume designer Cecil Beaton, who donated this gown to the V&A.

Art collecting and ‘deviance’ were often linked in the 18th-century imagination. Many leading collectors, most of whom were wealthy and male, led so-called scandalous lives. William Beckford (1760–1844) was one such personality. A compulsive collector of paintings and furniture, Beckford exiled himself from England when he was discovered having simultaneous affairs with his cousin’s wife and the teenage boy William Courtenay.

After ten years residing mainly in Portugal, he returned to England to create his enormous Georgian ‘Gothick’ home, Fonthill Abbey. Beckford secluded himself there with a veritable harem of young manservants to whom he gave camp nicknames such as ‘infamous poupée’, ‘Miss Long’ and ‘Miss Butterfly’.

Despite his social exile, he led an enigmatic, rebellious and eccentric life, amassing an impressive collection of art and rare books. He also made scrapbooks (now in the collection of the Bodleian Library in Oxford) containing news clippings on homosexuality, cruising grounds, ‘molly-houses’, and a variety of social scandals.
Ardhanarishvara is formed of both the Hindu god Shiva and his female consort Parvati. One side of the deity is masculine, the other feminine. Ardhanarishvara is one of the most popular iconographic forms of Shiva, and can be found in temples and shrines throughout India and South-East Asia.

Shiva is distinguishable by his taut, muscular form and aroused penis projecting from his waistband. Parvati is more curvaceous and displays a single rounded breast. Her hair is shown in the feminine Kushan style with a flat oval bun in front and the remainder pulled back. The figure stands against an upright linga (Shiva’s emblem), with phallic markings on the reverse.

The combined figure is a statement of inclusiveness and completeness beyond gender. It symbolises the combination of masculine and feminine energies of the universe, and reminds us that ambiguities of sex and gender existed even in ancient history.
Reliquary of Saint Sebastian
After a design by Hans Holbein the Elder
1497
Museum no. M.27-2001

On display in Room 10, Medieval & Renaissance
300–1500, Level 0

This reliquary is a particularly powerful representation of Saint Sebastian, a young martyr who lived in 3rd-century Rome. He was condemned to death for his Christian beliefs and pierced with arrows. None of the arrows entered his vital organs, however, and he survived the ordeal. Sensual Renaissance representations of the saint were common. Sebastian’s writhing, near-naked body, the symbolism of the penetrating arrows, and his inviting gaze all readily contributed to the homoerotic appeal.

Since the 19th century, Saint Sebastian has increasingly been regarded as a gay icon. His loin-clad image has been represented in homoerotic contexts by many artists, including contemporary photographers Pierre et Gilles, and Derek Jarman in his 1976 film Sebastiane.
Vessels designed to entertain or puzzle guests were particularly popular during the 17th and 18th centuries. The suggestive position of the spout on this jug in relation to the female-presenting figure was quite deliberate. A combination of different gender traits like this was often employed for the purpose of comic or sexual innuendo.

However crude their initial intention, today objects like this demonstrate a long history of playful challenges to the notion of binary gender.

Anthropomorphic vessels have been popular for centuries, but this early example of a ‘face jar’ is unusual in being decorated with both male and female features. The clay has been pulled outwards to form female breasts with protruding nipples, and the face has a beard made from a strip of applied clay. This unexpected combination of genders was likely intended to cause surprise and amusement at the dining table or drinking establishment where the jug was used.
The Japanese-American ceramicist Akio Takamori (1950–2017) created pieces which drew on traditional Japanese forms to represent the human body in a variety of whimsical and unsettling positions. This vase, in the shape of a flattened oval, represents two nude women embracing each other. Its subject matter recalls erotic shunga prints, as does the style in which the figures are outlined. Meanwhile the shape of the vessel resembles an enlarged netsuke (a type of carved fastener for clothing).

Looking at this vase poses the question, ‘What makes an object “queer”? It undoubtedly has erotic connotations – but for whose gaze and whose pleasure? Does any representation of same-sex nudity or physical intimacy automatically make an object a part of LGBTQ history? Or does it depend upon who is producing, purchasing or viewing the object?

Turner Prize-winning artist Grayson Perry (born 1960) regularly examines subjects of masculinity and transvestitism in his artwork. He often appears in public dressed as his female alter-ego Claire and has spoken frankly about his life as a transvestite. In his autobiography Portrait of the Artist as a Young Girl, Perry describes discovering the existence of transvestitism as a teenager by stumbling across a newspaper article. It discussed transvestites and transgender people, featuring a photograph of April Ashley, a former model, actress and socialite.

April Ashley MBE was one of the first people in the world to undergo pioneering gender reassignment surgery. Her tireless campaigning for transgender equality has made her an icon and inspiration to many. Presenting her on this vase as a personal hero, Perry evokes the tradition of decorating domestic products to celebrate folk-heroes.
Phyllis Keyes and Duncan Grant were both part of the celebrated Bloomsbury Group, some of whom were almost as well-known for their progressive lifestyles as for their artistic endeavours. Keyes was a ceramist while Grant was a painter and designer of textiles, pottery, costumes and theatre sets. This vase is a collaborative work.

Duncan Grant had several affairs with other members of the group including his cousin, the writer Lytton Strachey; economist John Maynard Keynes; and fellow artist Vanessa Bell, with whom he had a daughter, Angelica, in 1918. Although Vanessa was separately married, she had an open relationship with Grant for over 40 years until her death in 1961. Their elaborately decorated home in Sussex, Charleston House, is now open to the public.

Strongly influenced by Picasso and Fauvism, this white glazed vase is painted on the exterior with a sensuous semi-nude female figure.

Born into an aristocratic Irish family, the designer and architect Eileen Gray (1878–1976) lived an unconventional life. A visit to the Paris Exposition in 1900 sparked her passion for lacquerware. By 1906 Gray had apprenticed herself to Seizo Sugawara, a Japanese lacquer master living in Paris.

It was not until her forties that Gray achieved recognition. Her first commission, a Parisian apartment for which she designed now-iconic pieces such as the Bibendum chair, was a critical success, enabling her to open a gallery in 1922. This screen is typical of her aesthetic: minimal and Japanese-inspired.

Living in the avant garde of 1920s Paris, the bisexual Gray was a notable member of Natalie Barney’s feminist salon. Barney, an American expatriate and lesbian, held sway over a circle which included the painter Romaine Brooks and the left-wing writer Elisabeth de Gramont. After the Second World War, Gray’s works faded into obscurity, but enjoyed a resurgence in the 1960s.
The Trojan prince Ganymede was supposedly the most beautiful of all mortals. According to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the god Zeus desired Ganymede and sent an eagle (or disguised himself as one) to carry the youth to Mount Olympus. There, Ganymede was appointed cup-bearer to the gods, rendered immortal and eternally youthful.

In poetry, Ganymede became a symbol for the beautiful young male who attracted homosexual desire and love. The term ‘catamite’ is derived from his Roman name, Catamitus, referring to the younger or passive companion in male relationships.

Artistic depictions of Ganymede have evolved over the centuries. In classical art, he is usually a sensuous youth who looks fully aware of Zeus’s erotic intentions. During the Renaissance, depictions shifted to focus on more platonic interpretations of the story. By the time this sculpture was produced, Ganymede had been heterosexualised as a playful erotic symbol in Rococo art. Here, he places his arm affectionately around an eagle. Compared with earlier representations, this eagle is small, reversing the power dynamic in Ganymede’s relationship with Zeus.
Sappho, inspired by Love, Composes an Ode to Venus
(after Angelica Kauffman)
About 1800
Museum no. M.280-1919

On display in Room 91M, Jewellery, Level 3

Born on the island of Lesbos around 620 BC, not much is known for certain about Sappho’s life. In antiquity she was regularly counted among the greatest of poets. Plato hailed her as ‘the tenth Muse’.

Little of her work survives but the fragments that do express passions for a variety of people of all genders, and include proclamations of love for women and girls. Often held as an icon of the erotic, her attitudes toward love have attracted a great deal of attention throughout history.

Sappho’s name is the origin of the word sapphic and the term lesbian derives from the name of her birthplace. However, both of these terms only came to be applied to developing concepts of female homosexuality in the late 19th century.

Today Sappho’s significance can be regarded as largely formed through the history of her reception; crucially the creation, adaption and appropriation of her reputation by moralists and others in relation to their own beliefs and cultural contexts.

---

Peeling off the bitter rind
Keith Lewis
1993
Museum no. M.2-2014
Given in honour of the Artist by the Porter Price Collection

On display in Room 91, Jewellery, Level 3

Keith Lewis’s jewellery is consciously political and deals mostly with ideas of sexuality and gender identity. This brooch is one of a series he made in the mid-1990s in response to the AIDS crisis, confronting the anguish of survivor guilt.

The brooch shows a stylised torso with a wound of torn skin which has been slashed by a vegetable peeler concealed behind its back. The silver-gilt skin is dotted to resemble citrus peel, while the jagged wound reveals rough and dark metal innards.

Lewis recalls that the title came to him before the piece took form in his mind, from musing on the concept of something bitter masking something that is not. In 2014 he reflected further on the piece, noting the surface allusions to fruit: ‘… citrus in the dimpled yellow rind … apples or pears in the penile stem … and the peach or apricot in the butt-crack along the head.’ But the real concern is the peeling back to what lies within: ‘Of course that interior is about so many types of uncleanness, unworthiness, shame and anxiety.’
Born into a wealthy Jewish family, Hannah Gluckstein (1895–1978) defied conventional roles expected of young women of her class and time. Family wealth allowed her a freer lifestyle and enabled her to pursue a love of painting. She trained at St John’s Wood School of Art and joined the artists’ colony at Lamorna, Cornwall. She painted landscapes, floral-pieces and portraits, but did not identify with any artistic movements.

At 23 she started insisting on being known only as Gluck, cropped her hair and dressed exclusively in men’s clothing. Gluck lived openly with women throughout their life and some of their best known works are stylised floral-pieces inspired by the creations of companion and lover Constance Spry.

Gluck’s friends and contemporaries included Radclyffe Hall, Virginia Woolf, Somerset Maugham and Noël Coward. This painting shows the dancer Massine about to make his first entrance in a revue by Noël Coward and Philip Braham. It is in a ‘Gluck Frame’ – a frame designed and patented by Gluck, which became an integral part of Modernist and Art Deco interiors of the 1930s.
Costumes for 'Because We Must'
Designed by Leigh Bowery
Made by Mr Pearl
1987
Museum nos. S.101&102-2010

On display in Room 105, Theatre & Performance, Level 3

For the maverick gay artist, costume designer, club promoter and poseur Leigh Bowery (1961–94), fashion and clothing were an integral part of his performance art and public persona. Born in Australia, Bowery moved to London in 1980 where he later hosted nights at the infamous Taboo nightclub. He became a leading figure in underground clubbing scenes, infamous for his outrageous performances and flamboyant costumes.

Bowery played a key role in Michael Clark’s post-punk dance company, with whom he performed and designed costumes. These costumes were created for a performance of Because We Must. Their design is based on one of Bowery’s own clubbing outfits. Bowery’s distinctive, androgynous style had an important impact on the development of post-modern drag and the influence of his designs and performances is still visible in the fashion and art worlds of today.

Lou Reed in Concert
Blue Egg Printing and Design Ltd.
1973
Museum no. S.4338-1995
Given by Publicity and Display Ltd.

On display in Room 106, Theatre & Performance, Level 3

Aged 14, Lou Reed was confined to an institution where he endured electric shock treatment to ‘cure’ him of supposed homosexual tendencies. Following university, he gravitated to New York where he rapidly fell into Andy Warhol’s liberated Factory scene as the frontman of pioneering rock group, The Velvet Underground. Their name was lifted from the title of a book exploring so-called deviant sexuality in 1963.

The Factory was bursting with revolutionary figures in gay and trans* liberation, including Holly Woodlawn, Jackie Curtis, Penny Arcade and Candy Darling. Reed surrounded himself with drag queens and transgendered people, and had a seminal relationship with a trans* woman called Rachel Humphreys who accompanied him on tour and appears several times in the lyrics and album artwork of Reed’s mid-1970s career, notably on Coney Island Baby (1975).

Reed can be seen as the first proudly out bisexual mainstream rock star. The exceptional breadth of his work referencing bi and trans* life in the 1960s and ’70s, is nothing short of momentous. He brought diverse characters into the mainstream consciousness through his songs. ‘Candy Says’, ‘Sister Ray’, ‘Lady Godiva’s Operation’ and most famously ‘Walk on the Wild Side’, all have overtly queer lyrics.
Nijinsky as ‘Le Spectre de la rose’
Jean Cocteau for the Ballets Russes
1913
Museum no. S.562-1980

On display in Room 106, Theatre & Performance, Level 3

This poster was made to advertise the 1913 season of Serge Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes in Paris. The legendary ballet dancer Vaslav Nijinsky is depicted leaping gracefully in a body suit designed by Leon Bakst, adorned with chains of flowers. His character is a corsage of roses which has come to life in the champagne-fuelled dream of a young debutante following her first ball.

The ballet is based on a short verse by the French writer Théophile Gautier, known for his novel Mademoiselle Maupin (1833) which explores themes of gender transgression. There are many LGBTQ connections to be found here. Nijinsky and Diaghilev both had relationships with men, including an intense relationship with each other. The drawing is by the film director and artist Jean Cocteau, who had various out relationships with men throughout his life. Cocteau and his muse, the actor Jean Marais, are in fact considered by some to be the first truly modern gay male couple of the 20th century.
‘Patience’ by the D’Oyly Carte Opera Company
Poster designed by Henry Matthew Brock
About 1920
Museum no. S.21-1983
Gabrielle Enthoven Collection

On display in Room 106, Theatre & Performance, Level 3

Created in 1881, the comic opera Patience vividly ridiculed the Aesthetic movement at its cultural peak. The characters parodied the aesthetes, mocking their fey mannerisms and their passionate advocacy of beauty.

This poster introduces the character Reginald Bunthorne, dreamily contemplating a lily while oblivious to the adoration he is receiving from two lovesick maidens. Dressed in a velvet jacket, tight-fitting breeches, white stockings and patent shoes, the style is a parody of Oscar Wilde’s so-called ‘aesthetic suit’. The dandy dress along with the playwright’s mannerisms strongly infuriated many of Wilde’s critics, particularly during his 1882 lecture tour of North America. As the embodiment of the Aesthetic movement, by 1895 this apparent decadency was condemned as immoral when Wilde was arrested for gross indecency following his relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas.

Aesthetic man’s suit
1880–85
Museum no. LOAN:PASTPLEASURES.2-2001
Lent by Past Pleasures Ltd.

On display in Room 125, Britain 1760–1900, Level 4

Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) can be considered one of the first celebrities of the modern age for his awareness of publicity and personal image. He knew that colourful clothes, and breeches such as these would ‘excite a great sensation’. Wilde was caricatured in the opera Patience (1881) for his flamboyant style but retaliated in his American lectures the following year, stating that stiff, traditional Victorian clothes for men ‘add a new horror to death’.
John Osborne’s play *Look Back in Anger* had a radical and transformative effect on the world of theatre, literature, and film in the late 1950s and ’60s. He wrote *A Patriot For Me* in 1965, attracting further controversy as its sexually transgressive themes were censored and the play was denied a performance licence. It is credited for its part in the abolition of censorship laws in British theatre in 1968.

The play is based on the true story of Alfred Redl (1864–1913), an Austrian counter-intelligence officer who became head of his department only to end up turning into a spy for Tsarist Russia. When he was caught, he was encouraged to commit suicide which he promptly did. His motives for treason remain unclear although many experts presume he was being blackmailed over his sexuality. The play features a scene in a drag ball requiring more than 25 male actors in one scene. The requirement of such a large cast is a key reason why productions of the play are rare.

This snuffbox is part of a group commissioned by Frederick II, King of Prussia. Snuffboxes were among the supreme luxuries of 18th-century Europe and were presented as gifts to friends and lovers. Subtle gestures made while taking snuff led to ‘the language of the tabatière’– a secret way of communicating wordlessly using specific gestures involving the box.

Frederick was chastised by his father for his ‘effeminate, lascivious and feminine occupations’. The philosopher Voltaire described the king’s parade of male lovers, who were mostly officers from the Prussian army. During one devastating battle, Frederick led a desperate cavalry charge with the appeal, ‘Boys, don’t leave me, don’t desert me!’ The king was dragged from the field, his life believed to have been saved by a snuffbox in his pocket deflecting a bullet.
Circus chair designed by Cecil Beaton
About 1935
Museum no. W.54-1984

On display in Room 74, 20th Century, Level 3

Cecil Beaton still resonates as one of the most famous names in the history of photography. His talent and flair for design propelled the art form to new heights when he burst onto the scene as a documenter of the in-crowd in the 1920s, nicknamed the ‘Bright Young Things’. The group mainly consisted of flamboyant bohemian aristocrats who had infamous parties. A great many of them identified as gay or bisexual, including historian Patrick Balfour, artist Edward Burra, poets John Betjeman and Brian Howard, designer Oliver Messel, socialite Stephen Tennant, and Beaton himself.

This armchair in the shape of a drum, upholstered in white leather with two crossed drumsticks painted on the seat back, typifies Beaton’s high-camp sense of fun. It was probably made for his circus-themed bedroom which he created in the 1930s at Ashcombe, Wiltshire. The walls of the room were painted with strongmen and harlequins and the bed was encrusted with unicorn motifs.

‘KISSING DOESN’T KILL, GREED AND INDIFFERENCE DO’
Designed by Gran Fury: Published by ACT UP
1989
Museum no. E.472-1993
Given by Shaun Cole

On display in Room 76, 20th Century, Level 3

Gran Fury was a collective of artists and designers dedicated to promoting AIDS/HIV awareness. They used a variety of media in their efforts to undermine the complacency and inaction of authorities and companies in combating AIDS. Their inventive and thought-provoking posters, hung in public spaces usually saturated by commercial media, often appropriated the visual language of advertising. This poster evokes a ‘United Colours of Benetton’ advertising campaign at the time and was designed for display on public transport in New York City and San Francisco. Loring McAlpin of Gran Fury has explained:

‘The press, government and the medical establishment were not delivering information or countering stigma; we wanted our activist voice to fill that void. Therefore, we tried to insert our message seamlessly into those spaces that were normally occupied by authority, and we used whatever we could to grab attention.’

The depiction of couples of different races and genders kissing evokes ‘Kiss-Ins’ – large public gatherings of people kissing to demonstrate their belief that all individuals should be granted the same freedoms to publicly express affection for each other.
Find More LGBTQ Objects with Search the Collections

Search the Collections is an online database that provides public access to over 1.1 million catalogue records and over 400,000 images of objects in our collection. You can search here for more information on the objects featured in this guide and to find other LGBTQ-related objects.

We have implemented revised terminology for the cataloguing of our LGBTQ-related material. To see the broadest overview, it is advisable to enter the term ‘Gender and Sexuality’ when searching for such objects, or ‘LGBTQ’ for a more specific range. We frequently revisit and reassess our collections to identify further LGBTQ-related objects and so the number of results will increase over time. Some objects are not on permanent display, but can be viewed by making an appointment with the relevant collections department.

Search the Collections: collections.vam.ac.uk

Contact V&A collection departments: vam.ac.uk/contactus

LGBTQ Histories at the V&A

The V&A offers a range of LGBTQ-focused events and activities throughout the year, including gallery talks, film screenings and artist performances. Each February we mark LGBT History Month with a day of free activities.

LGBTQ Gallery Tours
Join us on the last Saturday of the month for a free, hour-long guided tour exploring gender and sexual identities through a selection of objects in our collections.

Please see our website for details.

LGBTQ Working Group
Find out more about the Museum’s LGBTQ Working Group and keep up-to-date with our activities through the ‘Out in the Museum’ blog:
vam.ac.uk/lgbtq
vam.ac.uk/blog/out-in-the-museum

Comments
We are eager to hear your thoughts and comments. Please email us at LGBTQ@vam.ac.uk

Black Cracker performing at the ‘Queer and Now’ Friday Late, February 2015
Stick handle
Probably the Netherlands
About 1750
Museum no. 4714-1859