



- This is a glazed earthenware bowl made in Cyprus c.1300 by unknown artists.
- The design on it is made by scratching through the glazed surface to reveal the reddish-brown clay underneath.
- It depicts a double-headed figure, who appears to be a conjoining of a masculine and a feminine person.
 - This has been interpreted as a representation of a married couple, hence its title here 'Bowl with betrothed couple').
 - On the left side (which the V&A Explore the Collections webpage says is more feminine), the garment comes down to the feet and a long braid hangs down, whereas on the right side (the more masculine, according to the V&A's cataloguing), the garment stops at the calves and the hair is wrapped in a turban.
 - Equally, though it has also been interpreted as a 'hermaphrodite', including by the auction house who sold it to the V&A in 1933. This is a historical term used to describe intersex people, but it is not commonly used today as it is considered to be stigmatising. However, some intersex people today have explored reclaiming the term.
 - Despite this problematic terminology, it is interesting that this bowl has been identified as gender non-conforming.
 - I personally think, especially since the label here does not acknowledge this potential interpretation, it is important for platforms like this tour to raise the visibility of this possibility.
 - Whether it is a married couple or an intersex person remains unclear, but I think it's important to emphasise the lack of clarity, because this maintains the possibility of this person being intersex, or perhaps transgender.
 - Personally, I find the binary gendered interpretation not that convincing - have a look here, does the right head really look like they're wearing a turban, or rather do the stripes extending from the scalp imply tied back hair? Perhaps these two heads have their hair tied together?
 - Perhaps, then, this is a lesbian couple? Again, their gender remains unclear, but that's what I find so exciting about interpreting this object.



- This is a glazed stoneware pot made in 1985 by the Japanese American artist Akio Takamori.
- It has been shaped and painted to depict two nude women embracing.
- Her practice often draws upon traditional Japanese forms to represent the human body in variety of positions. In this context, the subject matter of this vase seems to relate to Japanese erotic prints, known as 'Shunga'.
 - Shunga translates as 'spring' which is a common euphemism for sex in Japan - I wonder, does this work look to you like a flower bud about to bloom? It does to me.
 - Moreover, Shunga is also understood as an abbreviation of the title of a Chinese set of scrolls depicting sexual acts that the crown prince would perform as an expression of yin yang.
 - Again, this context conjures interpretations of this object's form, which now seems to me like a yin yang symbol. Perhaps, like Shunga, this object reflects the dignity of sexual interconnection. Moreover, like many examples of Shunga, this dignity is not reserved for heterosexual couples, but rather is extended to queer couples too. I recommend going on the V&A website and requesting to view one such lesbian Shunga in the Print Room - E.1205-1931 was part of an album made in 1801 called Pure Drawings of Female Beauty, it features two women embracing with a special kind of sex toy called a taigaigata.
- The overall irregular oval shape as well as the ivory and brown colours make it seem like an enlarged version of netsuke, which are small Japanese carved buttons, often made of ivory or wood. The fact that they were often used to attach ornaments to kimonos makes me think of this object as producer of exciting additions to the way we present ourselves. From this perspective, we could see object as emblematic of how lesbian love adds to the richness of our social fabric, just as a netsuke button enriches the garment it is affixed to.



- This is an earthenware ladle overlaid with coloured enamel for decoration. It was made in 1987 in London by the queer artist Angus Suttie
- I love its wiggly handle and bright rainbow of colours. It's just so playful, and this is reflected in how it's not really functional, since its enamelled surface is too brittle for it to be used as a ladle.
 - I must admit though, I'd love to serve my partner soup of this. How very camp!
- The wonderful leader of the V&A LGBTQIA+ Staff Network, Zorian Clayton, has recently been talking with colleagues at V&A Dundee about exhibiting queer works from this artist there, and he shared with me some of the context about Suttie's life which he was developing through conversations with V&A Dundee.
 - Alongside the likes of Peter Tatchell, he was a key member of the UK Gay Liberation Front, which was a queer activist organisation based in London in the early-1970s, influenced by the Stonewall Rebellion in the US. They carried out a series of high-profile direct actions, including interrupting the opening of the British Christian Nationwide Festival of Light, whose agenda included homophobia.
 - Suttie's work was inspired by his own life and relationships, especially the difficult and often lonely years of his growing up as he struggled to come to terms with himself, and the experience of his failing health as he dealt with and ultimately succumbed to an HIV-related illness at 47, a few years after this ladle was made.
 - Writing in the short-lived late-1970s queer socialist journal called Gay Left, Suttie said that "I know that I am lucky and fortunate that I was in a large city and came in contact with GLF and people who helped me...Gays all over the country live lives completely untouched by GLF or the 'sexual revolution' as it is called. And while some gays fight for further rights it is necessary too to fight for a basic feeling of gay pride"
- From its rainbow colours and its gay artist to its playful phallic form, I feel this sculpture goes some way towards celebrating gay pride.



- This is a glazed porcelain sculpture manufactured in London c.1750s by the Charles Gouyn Factory.
- It features the figure of Ganymede, seated and bending forward with one leg thrust out, which I see as quite a Camp pose. He gazes into the eyes of an eagle, with his left hand holds the back of its neck.
- Ganymede, according to Greek mythology was a young man who was abducted by the bisexual Jupiter, in the form of an eagle, and carried up to Mount Olympus to be the cup-bearer of Jupiter and serve as his catamite (which meant a boy kept for homoerotic acts).
- In C18th London, Ganymede was a common slang for the younger partner in sexual relationships between men. In two C18th glossary entries for 'Ganymede' identified by the brilliant queer historian Rictor Norton, this term is framed as explicitly negative, through phrases like 'sin of sodomy' and 'contrary to nature'.
- This interestingly contrasts to what I see as a very sympathetic portrayal of Ganymede here. The two figures seem are locked in a loving gaze, and rather than Ganymede seeming unsettled at his abduction by Jupiter, he seems to be happily entwined with him - rather than representing Ganymede straining away from the claws of Jupiter, the artist chose to represent Ganymede leaning towards Jupiter and holding him, their bodies so aligned that Ganymede's leg and Jupiter's wing form a line leading our gaze up to their embrace.
- This reminds me of another drawing of Ganymede and Jupiter embracing and sharing a loving gaze, this time made by the High Renaissance artist Michelangelo, who had relationships with men and women. Here is an image of a print version of the drawing (the original is now lost). Like in our sculpture's context, 'Ganymede' was also slang term for young gay men in Renaissance Florence. Michelangelo made this in the 1532 along with an array of love letters for the Roman nobleman Tomasso de Cavalieri. Here's a little taste of two love poems Michelangelo wrote for Tomasso, which this sculpture reminded me of:
- "my phoenix love, that in his blazing gaze, // as in a myth, my self should be upraised // ... // for my flight // he gives me wings to share in his elation."
- "if one same fortune by two lovers dared, // if one the grief but two the pain it shared, // if one will rules two hearts whose souls agree, // if bodies doubled set one spirit free // and both to heaven rise on quick wings paired; // ... its wealth // would be a hundredth of the love I claim // is ours, which disdain only could bring low."

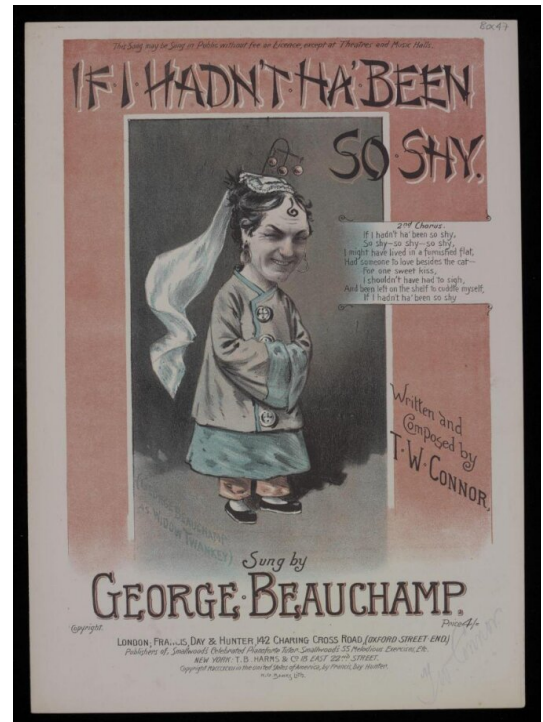


- Painting on plaster (originally a section of a larger wall painting), made in 1632 for the Cambridgeshire house of William Sparrow, a prosperous farmer. This is a rare example of a dated English wall painting of the period.
- There have been multiple interpretations of this painting, which leaves open trans possibility
 - One view put forward by the V&A since 1956 is that the two figures are allegories of **Taste and Sight**. The left figure is depicted tasting tobacco from a pipe and the right figure is shown looking at themself in the mirror.
- Another interpretation (which was held by the owners of the house from which it came) is that these two figures represent different versions of Moll Cutpurse, a **gender non-conforming celebrity** of early-C17th London, who was **charged** several times for theft, being drunk and disorderly, and for dressing in male attire.
- From the church court transcripts, we know that in **1611** Moll performed in masculine attire at London's second-biggest playhouse and spoke about how many think they are a man. In the same year, a play was performed at this playhouse which has a main character inspired by Moll. In this play - Dekker and Middleton's *The Roaring Girl* - Moll refuses the sexual and marital propositions of men, and they defy gendered categorisation, being described as "a thing/ One knows not how to name" and as "woman more than man, / Man more than woman".
- The court transcript also tell us of how Moll in the galleries of St Paul's on Xmas eve, wore a **skirt** like the one in this painting and do this [show images] - bent over, reached back to pull the back of the skirt up between their legs, and tucked it in their waistband (underneath the base of their bodice) to form makeshift men's breeches.
- In the context that it was a taboo for women to drink or smoke, **at first glance** the left figure seems more like the male persona, while the right figure with the hand mirror might seem more feminine. On closer inspection, though, we realise that both contain **multiple gendered emblems**. As well as the masculine pipe, the left figure wears a feminine cream bodice and skirt, meanwhile the right figure accompanies their blue and green skirt with a masculine broad-brimmed hat.
- Perhaps my favourite part of this work is the whimsical rhyming couplets that are inscribed beneath each figure. One of these reads "**Non sence** is non sence, though it please my mind, and is not proper for this sex and kind" (which relates nonsense to incense, in reference to the social non-normativity of women smoking pipes).

- A whole bunch of **drag kings** have been working over the past few years to make theatrical performances inspired by the fragmentary archival record of Moll. Some of this involves dress-up activities like I did (in the pictures I showed you), some involve working with the Globe on professional costuming to embody Moll's ghost, and one, called MATFK, involved improvised performances at the globe, which ended with a song with the lines "10,000 years, of living queer, we're everywhere, look there's one there! [gestures to audience]... There's a bit of Moll in you and you and you There's a bit of Moll in you!"

- In my research at the Victoria and Albert Museum, I have been studying a highly provocative object entitled *If I Hadn't Ha' Been So Shy* (1897). This music sheet was published in 1897 by Francis, Day & Hunter (1877-1972), whose founders often performed in blackface, and whom in 1897 became one of the founding publishing houses of London's Tin-Pan Alley.

- The frontispiece is a chromolithograph by Harry Générés Banks (1869-1946), the song was composed by Thomas Widdecombe (1865-1936) who hand-signed this copy. Banks's frontispiece illustrates George Beauchamp (1862-1900) in the character in which Beauchamp sang the song—Widow Twankey, an aged Chinese woman who mothered Aladdin in his eponymous pantomime. This character continues to be often played by white actors in theatres today.



- I am struck by the many inequities of this image, especially regarding a white person donning yellowface. This reminds me of the Orientalist analyses of theatre historian Dongshin Chang, who argues that there is a distinct lack of Chinese agency in the creation of pantomimes like *Aladdin*. I am also reminded of present-day Asian drag performers like River Medway who have argued for the cruciality of casting Asian people in *Aladdin* pantomime productions:
 - Yet, in addition to analysing the discrimination imbued in this object, my research has attempted to slightly nuance Chang's historical interpretation by identifying marginalised voices in the production and reception of *If I Hadn't Ha' Been So Shy*. This does not in any way forgive the discrimination strongly imbued in this object, but it does provide an important reminder that if we look closer at inequitable objects such as *If I Hadn't Ha' Been So Shy*, we can find many traces of marginalised voices.
- There are many more examples of marginalised agents imbued in this object than can be mentioned here, but some key ones are:
 - The intra-Oriental nature of the tale of *Aladdin*—a Syrian tale of Chinese and African travellers.
 - The Chinese musicians in the Chinatowns of London and New York whom Widdecombe and Beauchamp may well have encountered.
 - The potential transgender identity of Beauchamp, which can be understood through reading historians like Kit Heyam and applying their theories of trans possibility to cross-dressing performers like Beauchamp.
- Crucially, there are also many agents who can't be neatly placed as either appropriative or marginalised. For example, on the one hand, Beauchamp was a renowned white comic performing as an Asian character who made to be ridiculed—for example, the name Twankey was a sinophobic joke aimed to make her character seem poor, weak and haggard, since it sounds like Tunxi (a brand of Chinese green tea that at the time was known for its cheap, mild-tasting, ragged leaves).
 - On the other hand, Beauchamp came from a working-class background, may have been transgender, and performed very queer-resonant scenes as Widow Twankey—such as 'tubbing and dressing' the Vizier (played by a man) in a way that was deemed by a contemporary reviewer to be 'amusing' but so sexually subversive that it 'would be better omitted'.



- Porcelain vase made c.1770 by the French royal manufacturer, Sèvres Porcelain Factory.
- This erotically charged scene explicitly depicts two nude women embracing.
 - It is achieved with enamelling, and was painted by Charles Nicolas Dodin
- Rodin sought to evoke the spirit of Ovid's epic poem, *Metamorphoses*, when creating these embracing female figures. The tales of gender transformation and queer love in *Metamorphoses* have inspired many depictions of LGBTQIA+ people.
 - This particular depiction references the passage of Ovid's text in which Jupiter disguising himself as the goddess Diana in order to seduce her beautiful Nymph called Callisto
 - Hence, this image represents this lesbian union following Jupiter's transition. Jupiter is the top-most figure, signified by Diana's symbolic crescent moon.
- I'm interested in how the figures are posed. Upon first glance, it seems like a loving embrace, but upon looking more closely, Callisto seems to be reaching for an arrow, as if she's about to stab Jupiter. In the context that it references a lesbian trans woman, this unsettles me as it reminds me of the media propaganda being spread at the moment about trans women transitioning in order to enter women's spaces, 'trick' women, and sexually predate on them women. I don't want to see us go back to the times when this type of thinking led to legislation requiring trans women to wear male clothing or somehow identify themselves as AMAB in order to simply be in public.
 - This idea of getting ready to stab your fellow woman just because she's trans reminds me of the upsetting phenomena of Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminism
- At least, for now, suspended in this moment of Ovid's tale, these two women remain embracing, lounging together and gazing into each other's eyes.



- This is a jasperware relief in a black wood frame, manufactured in Tunstall c.1800 by William Adams & Sons.
- It features the figure of Ganymede, seated under a tree to the right and holds a two-handled cup from which the eagle is drinking. He gazes lovingly into the eyes of an eagle and holds underneath its head with his right hand.
- Ganymede, according to Greek mythology was a young man who was abducted by the bisexual Jupiter, in the form of an eagle, and carried up to Mount Olympus to be the cup-bearer of Jupiter and serve as his catamite (which meant a boy kept for homoerotic acts).
- By 1800 in Britain, Ganymede was a common slang for the younger partner in sexual relationships between men. In two C18th glossary entries for 'Ganymede' identified by the brilliant queer historian Rictor Norton, this term is framed as explicitly negative, through phrases like 'sin of sodomy' and 'contrary to nature'.
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- Plaster model of a statue made c.1886 by the French sculptor August Rodin.
- This erotically charged plaster model explicitly depicts same-sex desire
 - Here we can see two nude women embracing.
- Rodin sought to evoke the spirit of Ovid's epic poem, *Metamorphoses*, when creating these embracing female figures. The tales of gender transformation and queer love in *Metamorphoses* have inspired many depictions of LGBTQIA+ people.
 - In this way, rather than being a direct reference to a specific aspect of Ovid's writing, Rodin's sculpture is more of a general evocation of the queer spirit of Ovid's text.
 - Here are two examples of Ovid's narrative that it could be interpreted as referencing:
 - It could be seen as the prelude to a gender transition in one of the figures, in the context of the story of the love between the mythological figures Iphis and Ianthe. Iphis transitioned into a man so they could marry a woman.
 - It could be seen as following a gender transition in one of the figures, in the context of the story of Jupiter disguising himself as the goddess Diana in order to seduce her beautiful Nymph called Callisto
- I'm interested in how the figures are posed. Upon first glance, it seems like a loving embrace, but upon looking more closely, one of the figures seems to be shielding her face with her arms in a very defensive pose, while the other figure grabs them. In the context that it could partially reference a lesbian trans woman, this unsettles me as it reminds me of the media propaganda being spread at the moment about trans women transitioning in order to enter women's spaces and sexually predate on un-consenting women. I don't want to see us go back to the times when this type of thinking led to legislation requiring trans women to wear male clothing or somehow identify themselves as AMAB in order to simply be in public.
- To finish on a more positive note, this sculpture was originally owned by the painter Charles Shannon, who had a lifelong loving relationship with the artist Charles Ricketts.



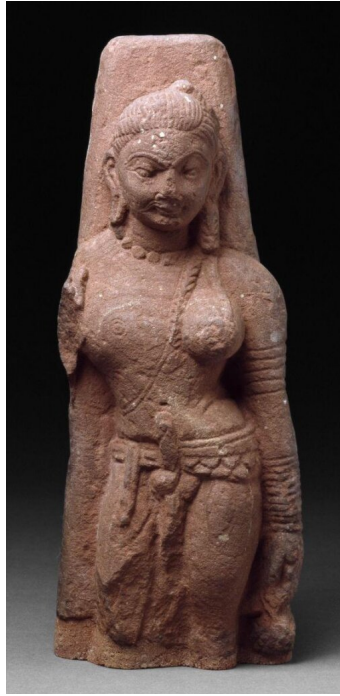
- Bronze, London, c.1923 by the artist Glyn Philpot
- Philpot made his name as a painter of society portraits (including that of the gay poet Siegfried Sassoon), but in the 1920s he became interested in sculpture and the male nude.
- This dramatic change of direction was largely due to tensions between his public life of Christian observance and academic painting, and his private homosexuality and desire for artistic experiment.
- Mask of a Dead Faun shows the model George Bridgeman, whose physique Philpot highly admired, returning to George as a model again and again from 1919 onwards.
 - Philpot depicted George in large-scale conventional paintings as well, which was the medium Philpot specialised in.
 - This sculpture represents somewhat of an anomaly in Philpot's practice, being one of his few sculptural works, and the only one that sold successfully during his lifetime. It represents a stage in his life in which his lesser-known homosexuality and artistic experiments began to creep out of the shadow of his success as a conventional Christian portrait painter.
- Looking beyond this work's completion, when the 1930s came around, Philpot went on to adopt even more of an experimental approach and some of his later works were even censured for depicting overt sexuality.
- Last year, I was delighted to see the V&A loan such queer works, including several drawings, to Pallant House Gallery for their exhibition on Philpot
 - When I saw the other bronze heads he displayed there, and learnt that they were also of models he appreciated the physique of, I started to think of these as almost like trophies, like a BAFTA, but then again when looking at the downcast expression on the face they feel more like memorials. Certainly, there's a sense of remembrance and intense reflection on the form of the faces of these men Philpot admired.



- Cotton sweatshirt with silk applique, made in 2013 in London by James Long
- Features Divine, the American actor, singer and drag performer. Divine is best known for her role in several films by the radical queer film-maker John Waters in the 1960s,70s&80s
 - This jumper was one of James Long's John Waters collection
 - Waters lived down the street from Divine as a teenager, and they supported each other through their homophobic context, and Waters was particularly supportive of Divine's career, adopting her as his partner in crime with whom he wanted to make delightfully trashy films.
 - Some of my favourite quotes from Divine in John Waters's films include "Filth is my politics. Filth is my life.", as well as "I love you! I love your sickness! Oh, Divine! I love your twisted mind!" and lastly, "I can feel exhibitionism throbbing in my veins"
 - Divine also cultivated a career as a recording star and club attraction. Starting with a couple of camp rock songs for legendary label Wax Trax, Divine went on to record a bevy of 80s gay disco songs with New York producer Bobby Orlando, famous for giving Pet Shop Boys their first break. After Orlando, Divine worked with the Stock-Aitken-Waterman team who's roster later included Kylie Minogue.
- Like me, James was a student at the Royal College of Art, and it was here that he met the collector, Charlie Porter, who donated this jumper to the V&A. I love what Porter says about this collection – "It's meant to look like it's for some dirty old pervert – quite the most admirable inspiration for a garment ever"



- This is a fan depicting pansies, which is made from painted silk, lace and mother-of-pearl sticks. It was made in the 1890s by Ronot-Tutin, a French fan painter who specialised in floral fan leaves.
 - He painted these pansies in a very realistic fashion, in keeping with their size and bright colour. As a result it was not in keeping with French fashions of the time, and so the V&A's catalogue suggests that it may have been made for an English customer
- I've picked this object in part because it feels quite Camp and fabulous, but also because the term pansy has historically been used to refer to queer people.
 - Although this object was created before the 'Pansy Craze' of the 1920s that popularised pansy as a queer term, this phenomena of floral-wearing drag performers and queer men stretched back at least as far as C19th, such as the green carnation that Oscar Wilde popularised as a gay symbol in 1892 when he instructed his friends to wear them on their lapels to the opening of his play *Lady Windemere's Fan*
- The main reason this stuck out to me, though, was that it was mentioned by a wonderful queer artist I've worked with called Paul Harfleet. Paul has been working for almost twenty years on their Pansy Project, in which they document themselves planting pansies at sites of homophobic and transphobic abuse. I love how like this fabulous, yet formal fan, the Pansy Project has been able to traverse serious concepts of art, protest and discrimination, while also bringing communities together in a celebration of the beauty of pansies, seeming to miraculously turn a location of violence and hate into one of healing and hope.



- Sandstone, Northern India, c.175
- Hindu God Shiva in form of Ardhanishvara
 - One of the most popular forms of Shiva – this kind of image found in temples and shrines dedicated to Shiva throughout South-east Asia
 - Fusion of Shiva and his consort Parvati – symbolising the divine union of masculine and feminine energies
 - Right side – Parvati’s more curvy form, with a breast and widened hips, as well as hair in a feminine bun hairstyle.
 - Left side – Shiva’s muscular form, with an aroused penis projecting from his waistband.
- I have worked previously with a non-binary student from India who was very interested in the various non-binary Hindu figures. They enlightened me as to how Ardhanishvara is far from the only gender non-conforming Hindu deity. For example, the genderfluid Vishnu took the form of a woman called Mohini and became pregnant, and then there’s Bahuchara Mata whose tale of transition has led her to be seen as the patron goddess of trans and intersex Hindus.
- They stand against a shaft of sandstone, which is a representation of Shiva’s phallic emblem of divine generative energy. The back is said to look like a penis, but also the face above the two ‘balls’ seems to me like it could also be a breasted woman.
 - This millennia-old object’s notion of a positive divine union of genders in one form reminds us that non-binary gender expressions have not only existed but have been valued for a long long time.