

# BG

Nan Goldin, *Slobhan in my mirror*, Berlin, 1992, © Nan Goldin, Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery



# Out and About

---

**Queer Visibilities in the Collection of  
the Berlinische Galerie**

**BERLINISCHE  
GALERIE  
MUSEUM OF  
MODERN ART**

# BG

Many objects in the collection of the Berlinische Galerie have direct or indirect connections to queer subject matter: because the artists are or were members of the community, or because their art navigates issues of gender identity and sexual orientation. For example, works by Nan Goldin (\* 1953), Hannah Höch (1889–1978) and Herbert Tobias (1924–1982) represent perspectives of the LGBTQI\* (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and inter\*) communities that are too often overlooked.

The online project “Out and About”, initiated by trainees of the Berlinische Galerie, investigates the queer legibilities of photographs, paintings, works on paper and pieces of video art. Giving voice to a diversity of perspectives, outside authors were invited to respond to selected objects. Their contributions enrich and supplement the texts by the team of trainees, who are predominantly white and heterosexual. The project considers the artists’ relationships to their artworks as well as social and historical references to queer lived realities. The title “Out and About” is in part a literal invocation of the idiom – the act of openly inhabiting the public sphere – often after an extended period of not being able to do so. It also alludes to “coming out of the closet”, a phrase many LGBTQI\* individuals use for moments when they have claimed their queer identities both for themselves and in front of others.

In addition to presenting the works on the website and in the online collection, the gallery will be organising a varied programme of associated events, including a film day curated in cooperation with the “XPOSED Queer Film Festival Berlin”.

With “Out and About”, the trainees hope to raise the visibility of alternative walks of life within heteronormative social structures – in the 1920s, the Nazi era, Germany’s postwar period and the present day. By doing so, they are advocating for greater queer visibilities within the collection of the Berlinische Galerie.

# BG

Rolf von Bergmann, Ohne Titel (Selbstporträt mit Salomé), 1977, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2020



## Rolf von Bergmann Untitled (Self-portrait with Salomé), 1977

Author:  
Hanna Vogel  
Trainee  
Pronoun: none, she/her

Rolf von Bergmann (1953–1988) and Salomé (\* 1954) style themselves in salacious poses: Salomé in a blond wig and long fake eyelashes, von Bergmann with expressive makeup and a feather boa. Standing on a pile of fur coats in glittering heels, they hold court like statues atop marble pedestals. The camera position chosen by the photographer, Rolf von Bergmann, forces the viewers to look upward at the two subjects. This extravagant duo of artists looks boldly and coquettishly into the lens. What resembles a snapshot at first glance has in fact been deliberately staged.

Von Bergmann uses photography to fortify his own queer identity. Portrayals of himself in drag are a running theme across his early photographs. His self-portraits attest to a queer self-confidence that was far more unusual at the time and required a difficult struggle to achieve. With the lesbian and gay liberation movement, associations such as Homosexual Action of West Berlin (HAW) and the first Berlin Pride March in 1979, West Berlin too showed signs of a queer emancipation that was starting to assert itself in the 1970s.

Rolf von Bergmann's "Self-Portrait with Salomé" was taken in 1977 at the Galerie am Moritzplatz. This "self-help gallery", co-founded by Salomé, Rainer Fetting (\* 1949), Rolf von Bergmann, Helmut Middendorf (\* 1953) and Bernd Zimmer (\* 1948), not only hosted the beginnings of German neo-expressionist painting (also known in German as "heftige Malerei"). Artists working in the factory turned studio space also explicitly addressed themes of homosexuality in their work. More than anyone, Rolf von Bergmann and Salomé subverted prescribed gender constructs both through their visual art and through their performances as the drag duo Transformer Company.

Tabea Blumenschein, Dixie Marine, 1995, © Townes / Shoko Kawaida / Harald Blumenschein



## Tabea Blumenschein Dixie Marine, 1995

Guest Author:  
Max Weiland  
Founder of the LGBTQI\* talent agency  
uns\* and freelance curator  
Pronoun: they/them

Tabea,

When I saw your piece “Dixie Marine”, I found myself thinking at length about the representation of LGBTQI\* people.

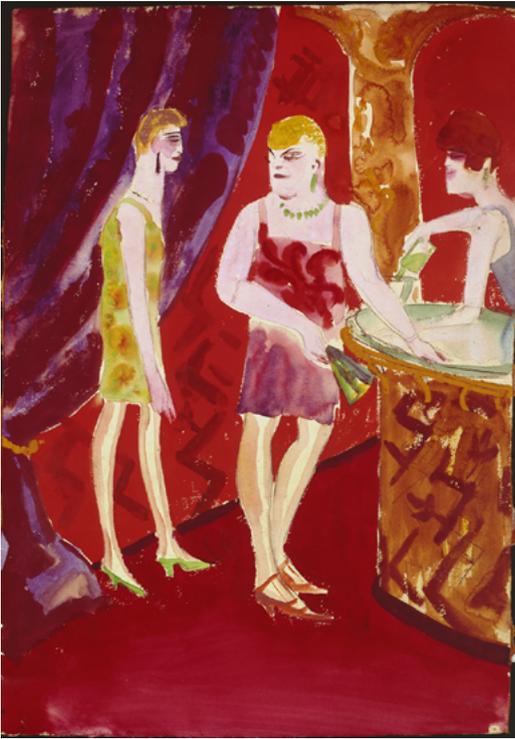
The drawing shows a masculine-presenting individual who does not correspond to conventional notions of masculinity. You show us a member of the navy covered in tattoos. If I take a closer look, I see that the tattooed images are very playful, some of them apparently homoerotic. His soft features give a femininity to his face. I can see that your depiction draws on the aesthetics of the queer scene.

My eyes wander further and I notice the brown dildo in his hand. His trousers are unzipped, but his crotch is hidden by a shark tugging a fish off a fishing line. I briefly think of 1950s “Beefcake Art”, which portrayed muscular male bodies for gay viewers, and in which sailors became a particular trope. I get the impression that your aim is not to arouse viewers, but to alert them to the iconography of the gay community’s sexualisation of the gay body.

You are well-known for making space in your art for marginalised, non-normative figures. I am delighted to see a representation of a queer body. Where I struggle is when I look across your oeuvre and ask myself why there isn’t more space for Black people, Indigenous people and other People of Colour (BIPoC). The image we have built of our communities is characterised by whiteness and the white gaze. I believe that if we incorporate BIPoC voices more actively in our representations, or allow them space to represent themselves, we can create a new “we” and thus bring visibility to BIPoC people who have done crucial work all along in the fight for LGBTQI\* rights.

Thank you,  
Max

# BG



Otto Dix, Eldorado, 1927, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2020

## Otto Dix

### Eldorado, 1927

Guest Author:  
Mark Kuhrke

Art historian and student assistant at the Institute of Art and Image History of the Humboldt University of Berlin. Part-time work as a Drag Queen performance artist with own band

Pronoun: he/him (Mark), she/her (in Drag)

When the curtain opens, women in brightly patterned dresses, accessorised with fans and jewellery, step into the deep red lounge bar. Because of their high-heeled shoes and false lashes, their Adam's apples and broad shoulders – stereotypically masculine body features – are only noticeable on second glance. Men enjoyed appearing at Eldorado, a Berlin nightclub, in makeup with extravagantly styled short hair.

The three figures in the watercolour "Eldorado" embody an enticing interplay between the fetishisation of women's clothing and the professional art of female impersonation (better known nowadays as drag). The relationship between drag and transvestism – in other words, between transformation and fetish – plays a significant role in gay entertainment to this day. Although the term 'transvestite' historically included transgender individuals, today it implies taking pleasure in wearing clothing associated with the other gender. 'Drag Queens' usually view their appearances as a performative and provocative art practice. Both aspects came together in the cross-dressing of the 1920s and early 1930s.

As Berlin grew into a metropolis, the city became a magnet for many people who wished to escape the social pressures of the countryside. Despite the criminalisation of male homosexuality, these gay, lesbian and transgender people formed a multifaceted subculture with an unmistakable impact on the city's public life. People compelled to lead double existences found longed-for safe spaces for 'sexual development' in the city's nightlife. The two Eldorado dance clubs, touted as 'transvestite bars', were smashing successes from the start. Touring purportedly 'gay establishments' soon became a fashionable pastime. Art by queer performers increasingly turned into evening entertainment for a heterosexual audience. Curt Moreck praised the establishment in his 1930 "Guide to 'Depraved' Berlin" and points out: "The scenery [...] leaves one wondering: is it a man, a woman?" Berlin's queer culture was framed as disreputable, but certainly interesting, and thus became a fascinating subject – even for heterosexual artists.

Otto Dix's (1891–1969) interest in portraying the wildness of the urban jungle struck a rich vein in the voyeurism of Eldorado's heterosexual audience. His chosen medium of watercolours was ideal for rapidly recording his impressions of the colourful bar.

Rainer Fetting, Selbst als Gustaf Gründgens, 1974, © Rainer Fetting



## Rainer Fetting Self as Gustaf Gründgens, 1974

Author:  
Rebecca Kruppert  
Trainee  
Pronoun: she/her

Using crude, expressive brush-strokes, Rainer Fetting (\* 1949) depicts himself in a nearly life-sized portrait. The title says it all: the artist is styling himself, in a confident pose, as Gustaf Gründgens (1899–1963). This controversial actor-director was celebrated on the German stage during the Nazi regime despite his homosexuality, which was public knowledge. In the painting, the monocle is the only reference to the historical figure – the haircut and clothing are typical of the 1970s. Fetting had a strong interest in theater and film and a specific fascination for this glamorous figure, with whom he grappled – partly due to his own homosexuality. “Self as Gustaf Gründgens” takes overt liberties with semantic and aesthetic points of reference, an approach that would continue to characterise Fetting’s later work. Self-portraits in which the artist adopts other roles would also remain a recurring theme.

This painting was made in the same year Fetting met the artist Salomé (\* 1954); the two moved in together in 1975. While studying at Berlin’s University of the Arts, they both become active in the gay and lesbian liberation movement, which began its activism in the early 1970s. The desire for social change and public acceptance of their homosexuality was also reflected in both artists’ work. Fetting’s work on paper, “Figure at the Wall” (1987), for example, presents a homosexual eroticism combining a muscular body with a suggestively made-up face. As they dealt with identity and sexuality in their art, Salomé and Fetting made important contributions to the queer discourses of the period. In 1977, together with other artists, they co-founded the Galerie am Moritzplatz, which became the primary platform for their artistic positions. In their painting and performance art, they sought to bring greater visibility to contemporary subcultural themes.

Nan Goldin, Siobhan in my mirror, Berlin, 1992.  
© Nan Goldin, Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery



## **Nan Goldin**

### **Siobhan in my mirror, 1992**

Author:  
Luise Wengerowski  
Trainee  
Pronoun: she/her

The photograph depicts Siobhan Lidell (\* 1965), with whom Nan Goldin (\* 1953) was in a romantic relationship for several years. With the title “Siobhan in my mirror”, the artist reveals something of herself: the image gives us a glimpse into her bedroom, a deeply private space. In the mirror, we see an image of a feminine-presenting nude body: a clue as to the artist’s sexual desires? Is Goldin ironically reclaiming the male sexualised gaze at female-presenting bodies? We also see a bed in the background, various make-up products in the foreground – and Siobhan in the middle. Thus, the photograph also speaks to the intimate relationship between the two women.

Siobhan appears twice in the image: On the left, she evades Goldin’s camera as a blurry background figure. The photographer has focused her lens on the mirror image, in which Siobhan is scrutinising herself with intense concentration. The photographic subject is simultaneously observer and observed. With this, Goldin subverts conventional hierarchies of gaze. In the mirror, we see Siobhan as she sees herself. Her short dark hair and her classic men’s suit – markers of stereotypical masculinity – stand in sharp contrast to the feminine-presenting torso taped to the mirror: a naked body at the mercy of the viewer’s gaze.

Nan Goldin spent four years living in Berlin, where she became part of the lively queer subcultural scene of drag artists, trans people, gay men and lesbians. She lived with the protagonists of her photos and took their portraits from non-voyeuristic vantage points, often in the aesthetics of a snapshot. In the process, she frequently interrogated notions of binary genders and fixed sexual identities. In 2001, she told an interviewer: “At a party last night, when someone asked me if I was a lesbian, I answered that I’m always a real lesbian when I’m sleeping with women, and bisexual when I’m also with men.”

Werner Heldt: Meeting (Aufmarsch), 1933-1935,  
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2020



## Werner Heldt

### Meeting (Parade of the Zeros), 1933–1935

Guest Author:  
Stefanie-Lahya Aukongo  
Artist and poet  
Pronoun: none, she/her

The crude crowds are deafening despite their silence: they are silent as charcoal pencil. This is not the Love Parade or some Fridays for Future demonstration. And nevertheless, or perhaps all the more, I am screamed at by whiteness, normativity. It is overpowering, it holds privilege – even the outcry and the condemnation directed at the crowd in this work of art. Even the body drawing these lines has permission to simply observe. Is that easy? Probably not. Is it intentional? I cannot say.

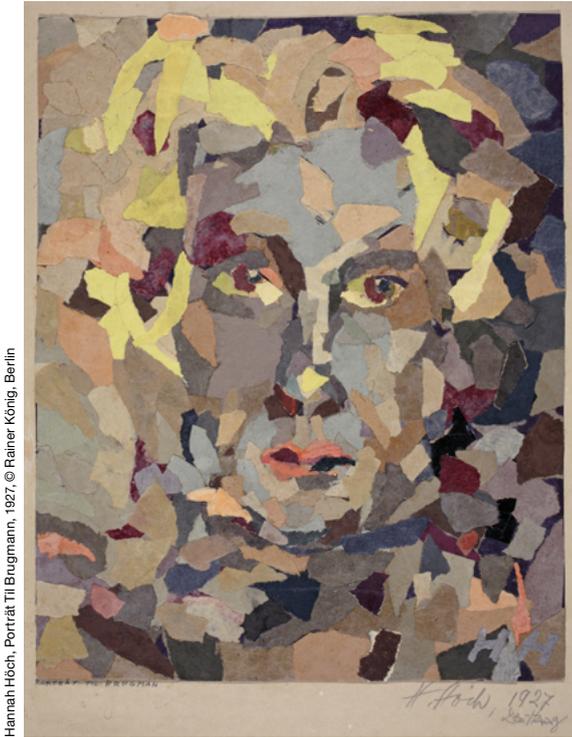
I move along the margins of the image. The façades of buildings, an enormous city square and throngs of people who, as they paper the walls of my perceptions, only do so less abstractly upon a closer look. The zeros emerge. I see black flags weaving like shark fins through the sea of human beings. I see banners that require no inscriptions because the message is plain. But what is Werner Heldt saying?

Zeros upon zeros – anything else ought not to exist in that era, or is unwanted. The binarity and banality just will not stop. Have they resumed? If I were there back then, I could not have scraped by as an invisible zero, would never have become one, and the same holds true today. Which of these zeros describes Heldt's own privilege to be permitted or compelled to observe the viciousness? From which vantage point is the artist gazing upon this destructive scenario?

And so many, so many questions: Where would I be in this artwork? I go looking for my people. I search the image for non-normativity or for intersectional sociopolitical elements. Where are the multilayered ones, the resistant ones? Is it enough just to render the shock, the disgust, palpable in art? What comes next? What is hidden, transformatively, underneath? Where are Heldt's deep sense of weight and his fear that his own position will be exposed, a state of mind that accompanied Heldt nearly his entire life? They are nowhere to be found. And nevertheless, I search for them with the greatest of longing.

One last glance at the procession. I am still searching for myself, startling myself continually, as I consider the perspective from which Werner Heldt is drawing. Is he on a roof, on a stage, in some hiding spot? Would that be my place too?

# BG



Hannah Höch, *Portrait Til Brugman*, 1927, © Rainer König, Berlin

## Hannah Höch Til Brugman's Portrait, 1927

Author:  
Denise Handte  
Trainee  
Pronoun: she/her

Lost in a daydream, the portrait of writer Til Brugman (1888–1958) gazes past us. Humorous or even satirical references from the time, which are otherwise commonplace in the work of Hannah Höch (1889–1978), are absent here. Instead, the artist has torn up coloured paper and rearranged it into a picturesque collage in which the individual scraps, configured into a sculptural and mosaic-like whole, resemble thick brush-strokes on paper.

Over the course of her career, Höch, a Dadaist, used collage to critically portray and deconstruct perceived societal ills, including the institution of marriage. Using her tool – a pair of scissors – she cut up images or texts from contemporary media and assembled the pieces into new, seemingly deformed portraits. The figures' identities are often unknowable: Whom or what are we looking at here? These portrayals resist the viewers' desire to classify what they see into stereotypical categories.

The portrait of Brugman functions differently. Instead of destruction, Höch opts for assembly as a form of expression. Her tools are her hands. Composed using soft colours, the image demands a vivid and sensitive exploration of what it portrays: we attempt to grasp this and piece it together from its individual fragments. Out of many small pieces, Höch constructs the whole that Brugman embodies for her.

Höch created this portrait of her partner in 1927. At the time, the couple was based in The Hague, where, from 1926 to 1929, they resided with Höch's cat "Ninn". Höch had previously grappled with female stereotypes, but her relationship with Brugman now led her to deeper examination of heteronormative gender roles. Höch's collages are diverse, for they disrupt gender classifications.

Gertrude Sandmann, Gruppe IX, 1922, © Berlinische Galerie



## Gertrude Sandmann Group IX, 1922

Author:  
Anna-Maria Nitschke  
Trainee  
Pronoun: she/her

This 1922 study by Gertrude Sandmann (1893–1981) depicts two nude women with their backs turned to us, their faces out of view. Seated closely side by side, their heads angled towards one another, they appear deep in conversation. With a few spare lines, Sandmann encapsulates the intimate atmosphere between the two women. The artist uses the medium of drawing – well-suited for capturing fleeting, momentary impressions – to portray the encounter’s intimacy.

The identities of the models for Sandmann’s drawing are unknown. The rear view preserves the two women’s anonymity while faithfully recording the shapes of their bodies. Drawings were Gertrude Sandmann’s primary medium for expressing the seen and the unseen, visual thinking and perception, within an image. Until late in her life, the artist produced a great many drawings, including nudes and portraits of women of all ages. Numerous depictions by her of nameless female couples date back to the 1920s. At the time, there were discussions about criminalising lesbian women, who, unlike gay men, were not at risk of persecution under Paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code, but were nevertheless subject to discrimination in a heteronormative society. At the same time, Germany was home to a diverse and vibrant homosexual subculture that included social clubs and associations as well as queer venues such as pubs, bars and cabarets.

Despite living in a heteronormative society, the Jewish artist considered herself fortunate to be what she called a “lesbarian.” Under the Nazi regime, when repressive treatment of Jewish people was growing increasingly unbearable, her life partner of many years, Hedwig “Jonny” Koslowski, became her primary caregiver. In 1974, with the rise of the queer liberation movement in West Germany, Sandmann joined L74 (Lesbos 1974), one of the first postwar organisations for older lesbians.

Herbert Tobias, Ohne Titel (Selbstporträt), 1952, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2020



## Herbert Tobias

### Untitled (Self-portrait), 1952

Author:  
 Antonia Wolff  
 Trainee  
 Pronoun: she/her

Two men in Paris's Jardin du Luxembourg, 1952. One of them is the photographer, Herbert Tobias (1924–1982). He is sitting casually in his chair, his arms dangling, his head leaning back. The other man keeps his identity to himself. Hidden behind a column, the stranger puts his hand on the thigh of Tobias, who cherishes the touch with eyes closed. The camera, at knee height in the shade of the column, is an unseen observer in this configuration. Tobias has carefully staged the scene, however. His use of a cable release to activate the shutter gives the composition its intimacy. Thus, the photographer casts the viewers as seemingly furtive witnesses to a covert dalliance.

In the 1950s, such encounters were criminalised in many places. In Germany, Herbert Tobias and his American partner Richard (known as Dick) were prosecuted under Paragraph 175 of the Criminal Code, resulting in Dick's deportation and the couple's emigration to Paris. Laws in France were more liberal. Although, in the repressive mid-century climate, gay socializing had mostly been driven underground there as well, gay life was not confined to private spaces. The Jardin du Luxembourg, which remains a Parisian cruising spot to this day, was already a popular meeting place for gay men, including those seeking sex. The image speaks to the tension between secrecy and the public sphere that characterised such encounters.

Today, Tobias's photograph can be read as documentation of an alternative, gay public sphere. In numerous photographic portraits, we not only come across the photographer's friends, partners and lovers – recurring characters such as Claude or Dick – but also see passing acquaintances from the street. Titles such as "The Boy at 'Hotel Metro'" (1954) and "The Boy from East Berlin" (1957) suggest the fleetingness of these encounters, while the nudity of the bodies these photographs depict implies the episodes' intimacy.



## Klaus Vogelgesang Hairy Underarm, 1971

Author:  
Julia Miriam Strauß  
Trainee  
Pronoun: she/her

Klaus Vogelgesang (\* 1945) moved to West Berlin in 1965. At the time, the divided city still bore the scars of war, which would continue to mark it for many years to come. The Berlin Wall constituted a further wound within the city. Yet Berlin's abiding brokenness also made alternative ways of living possible there. An independent art scene blossomed in West Berlin and gave Klaus Vogelgesang the opportunity to develop his visual vocabulary. The artist's work to this day explores themes of sexuality, body image and gender roles.

The art print "Hairy Underarm" from 1971 places an emphasis on concepts of femininity and masculinity. A delicately outlined human figure can be seen at the centre of the cardboard lifting their left arm in a casually pose. Their hand is obscured behind their head, presumably having just run their fingers through their hair. A hairy underarm is exposed. The person's facial features are pronounced and angular; their upper arms and shoulders are heavily muscled. Arched eyebrows and full lips complete the depiction. The figure is wearing a tight, strapless spandex top that hugs their torso, pressing their breasts upward. A scattering of playful symbols and emblems decorate the fabric of the garment. The subject's breasts, neck, lips and lower eyelids are visibly wrinkled. The person is framed and flanked by mythical creatures, flora and fauna stylistically reminiscent of Hieronymus Bosch.

To comment upon the social status or gender identity of the person portrayed here would amount to assigning a generalised label. Why should it be necessary to impose a common standard when identities are complex and, therefore, ought not to be treated universally as binary? By leaving the sexual and gender identity of his portrait subject open-ended, Klaus Vogelgesang underscores the constructedness of social categories. He juxtaposes and interposes gender stereotypes, enabling diverse and gender-queer readings that transcend cis-heteronormative imaginaries. The work's ironic title scarcely adds any information to the portrait. Yet it draws our gaze to a much-discussed patch of human body hair that, in many cases and places, remains taboo.

# BG



Ming Wong, Kontakthope, 2010, Film still, © Ming Wong

## Ming Wong Kontakthope, 2010

Author:  
Marie Newid  
Trainee  
Pronoun: she/her

The video and performance artist Ming Wong (\* 1971) restaged selected scenes from Pina Bausch's (1940–2009) Tanztheater piece "Kontakthof" (1978) as a new work of video art, featuring artists and curators from Wong's own professional community in Berlin. Wong reapplies extracts of Bausch's choreography. She originally used it to describe dynamics of proximity and distance in couples' relationships. Wong relates them to power dynamics within the art world.

The video depicts two different sections of the choreography side by side in a split-screen. On the left side, dancers dressed in sportswear perform everyday gestures, dance steps and interactions. On the right side, they conduct the same scenes in festive evening wear. Thus, performers in colourful clothing are juxtaposed against performers in dark suits. This can also be taken as an allusion to the gender binary.

During the choreography, gender roles appear to be equitably represented. Thus, some scenes are dominated by female-presenting figures, others by male-presenting ones. This impression is only broken in the final scene: at the centre, a performer presented as female stands motionless as more and more male figures approach and touch her pliant body. These gestures are not explicitly violent, but they do not appear to take place with mutual consent. The structures of male dominance, rendered explicit in this setting, are implied by the soundtrack from the start. Masculine-coded voices sing lyrics such as "Madame, you are so beautiful." The dancers enact these words grotesquely, situating them in the context of the male gaze.

In his cinematic reinterpretation of Pina Bausch's piece, Wong associates gender relations with dynamics within the art industry, raising questions about who holds agency and decision-making power over whom. This video piece highlights Wong's interest in aspects of gender identity, an interest that pervades his body of work.



## **Imprint**

### **Out and About**

## **Queer Visibilities in the Collection of the Berlinische Galerie**

### **A project of the trainees 2019/2020:**

Denise Handte  
Rebecca Kruppert  
Marie Newid  
Anna-Maria Nitschke  
Julia Miriam Strauß  
Hanna Vogel  
Luise Wengerowki  
Antonia Wolff

### **Guest Authors**

Stafanie-Lahya Aukongo  
Mark Kuhrke  
Max Weiland

### **Editing and proofreading**

Carina Klugbauer (Schwules Museum)  
Antonia Wolff

### **Translation**

Jacob Daniel Schneider

Berlinische Galerie  
Berlin's Museum of Modern Art,  
Photography and Architecture  
Alte Jakobstraße 124–128  
10969 Berlin  
Tel +49 (0)30 78 902 600  
berlinischegalerie.de

### **Social Media**

#outandaboutBG  
#berlinischegalerie

The project was critically accompanied by the network "Museen Queeren Berlin" and was kindly supported by Schwules Museum. The Film screening is organised in cooperation with and kindly supported by "XPOSED Queer Film Festival Berlin".