

BOOKS

PICTURING MEN: A CENTURY OF MALE RELATIONSHIPS IN EVERYDAY AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHY

by John Ibsen; Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002; \$32.99 hardcover

Nine years ago, John Ibsen, a gay professor of American studies at California State University-Fullerton, began collecting historical photos of two or more men together, without women. In a more-or-less chronological fashion, *Picturing Men: A Century of Male Relationships in Everyday American Photography* draws on his now nearly 5,000-piece collection to illustrate an interesting evolution of masculinity.

"I do not see this book as a venture in gay history, but rather a men's history; not a work in the history of sexuality, but in the history of intimacy," writes Ibsen. "In spite of today's homophobic equation of same-sex affection with sexual interest, affection between men need not involve sex any more than sex between them is necessarily a sign of affection. Indeed what actually constitutes 'intimacy' may vary across time."

An early chapter produces studio portraits in which men hold hands, sit on laps and otherwise

touch. Another chapter features photographs as something of a performance, in which scenes are staged—often with props—ranging from cowboys and Indians to mock weddings.

Candid snapshots offer an informal glimpse of men with men, while

war photos depict arm-in-arm camaraderie that has noticeably dissipated since the first half of the 20th century.

Even without repeated disclaimers, it's obvious that not all of these photographs have a queer bent, but that only goes to support Ibsen's thesis: There was more intimacy, tenderness and affection among men, sexual or otherwise. And, as evidenced by this portfolio, that intimacy did fade. So much so that these images evoke a longing for that bond rarely available today.

Perhaps especially for gay men, relationships with other men often are one extreme or the other: hands-off or jack-off. Did the rise of a distinct out-and-proud gay identity—and parallel homophobia—create these walls of insecurity between men?

Although interesting to ponder, the photos themselves are the strength of *Picturing Men*, not anecdotal academia. "Things were once different," reminds the author. And it's nice to see that he's right.

—Timothy Krause

PAUL CADMUS: THE MALE NUDE

by Justin Spring; Universe Books, 2002; \$49.95 hardcover

Paul Cadmus, who died in 1999 at the age of 95, gained notoriety when, in 1934, his bawdy oil painting "The Fleet's In" was pulled from a WPA exhibition by the assistant secretary of the Navy because it defamed U.S. sailors. The piece featured muscular men in various stages of drunkenness being courted by feral women. Off to the side is an

overly groomed man in a tell-tale red tie.

Like Charles Demuth (1883-1935), Cadmus portrayed ways gay men found sex before there were established



Picturing Men documents how male intimacy was once more commonplace

Candid camera

From pencil to ink to film—this collection of books proves the queer body is in fine form

places to cruise. But Cadmus, unlike Demuth, displayed his work to the public in a series of highly contentious showings.

Paul Cadmus: *The Male Nude* is a collection of 70 drawings created from 1930 to 1998. Most are gentle, beautifully rendered meditations in which a lone, classically proportioned naked man is drawn in repose against a neutral background. The artist's most frequent model was his partner, Jon Anderson, and it is fascinating to follow the changes in Anderson's body as Cadmus documents his aging.

Included with the plates are five essays by noted art historian Justin Spring. These easily digested essays provide everything you need to know to fully appreciate Cadmus' work.

Cadmus was always open about his sexuality, and his art was always very sensual. Yet he didn't like to be referred to as a gay artist and, unlike Tom of Finland (whose work is clearly inspired by Cadmus), most of his images do not carry a particularly erotic charge. But they also can't help but express sexuality, love and friendship; this book is a testament to Cadmus' power as an artist.

—Floyd Sklover

OUT/LINES: UNDERGROUND GAY GRAPHICS FROM BEFORE STONEWALL

by Thomas Waugh; Arsenal Pulp Press, 2002; \$19.95 softcover

Thomas Waugh loves illustrations of naked men, and he's turned his passion into

Out/Lines: Underground Gay Graphics from Before Stonewall. Culling chiefly from his own private collection of more than 500 graphics, he has chosen 200 explicit gay images and written a series of essays exploring his obses-

sion with such artists as Tom of Finland, Neel Bate (known as Blade) and Dom Orejudos (known to fans as Etienne).

All of these hardcore works of art were created from the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s. Many were originally secretly disseminated via photographs, mimeographs and hand (or even traced) copies. Yet, despite the suppression of the times, their sexuality and eroticism are potent with graphic depictions of oral sex, anal sex, glory holes, interracial coupling, bondage, transsexuals and orgies.

Clearly, some of today's gay artists working in pencil or ink (such as Glen Hanson of *Chelsea Boys*) have been influenced by these masters, and this collection is a wonderful way to explore the passions of an earlier time. (Not to mention it's really hot.)

The same, however, can't be said of the essays. Overwritten, pedantic and downright dull, these dreary dissertations are sometimes unreadable and leave the reader wishing that Waugh's ardor for his collection had been reflected in his writing.

—FS

CROSSING THE LINE

by Sara Davidmann; Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2003; \$28 hardcover

Joan: "I am so fascinated by women and find women such magical creatures that I want to try and taste some of that magic."

Zsarday: "Without a doubt I was born with the wrong body, the wrong gender. I'm making myself become what I should have been in the first place."

Celeste West: "It's not enough just to be a woman—I want to be a superwoman. I want to push glamour and glitz to its very limits."

Joan, Zsarday and Celeste West are three of the subjects of Sara Davidmann's loving visual tribute to London's tranny community. The photographer and sculptor became entranced by this subculture almost upon contact.

"I cruised London's gay bars and cross-dressing clubs to learn about cross-dressing,"

she says in her introduction. "Drag was just one area. Others I discovered are classed as transvestites, transsexuals, shemales, inbetweenies—with many others defying any classification. Once people got to know me and trust was established, they were happy to talk to me and include me in their world."

Crossing the Line documents more than three years of "their world." There's very little text here, no more than an introduction and brief comments by three or four of the subjects. The color images are the draw, running the gamut of types from the satirical faux-mom to the toweringly bewigged performer to the naked naif unabashedly showing tits and a penis.

The aspirations of these queens are literally displayed in Millie Mopp's enormous blond bouffant, which adds a good foot to her height. Ashleigh, mistaken for a girl even from childhood, perfects a punky look. Celeste West shows the drag as captivating trickster, appearing in every imaginable guise from muscular beauty queen to black-lipsticked performance artist.

Davidmann breaks no new ground here, despite the sometimes arresting images. Anyone looking for a deeper understanding of drag and genderplay will not be satisfied by *Crossing the Line*. And overpriced at \$28 for a mere 96 pages (you could call it a small coffee table book), only the better-heeled trannies and their fans will be likely to pick this one up. At least until it appears, inevitably, on the discount tables at Borders for a more reasonable, say, \$9.95.

—Gary Morris



A loving tribute to the wide spectrum that is trans London, *Crossing the Line* bursts with colorful photos

