

# British Journal of Photography

BOOKSHELF, GENDER & SEXUALITY, IDENTITY POLITICS — 18 HOURS AGO

## Benjamin Wolberg's vast and vibrant anthology seeks to redefine queer representation

by ROSIE SKELTON



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10 Photos

Through the lenses of over 50 different photographers, *New Queer Photography* traverses a heady mix of identities, experiences, dynamics and aesthetics to counter "one-dimensional" perceptions of queerness

Growing up in Bavaria throughout the 80s and 90s, Benjamin Wolberg visceraly recalls the way that traditional beauty standards and perceptions of masculinity made him feel: pervasive imagery of handsome, chiseled, muscular men that cast a perpetual shadow on his own pubescent body. "I couldn't accept, much less embrace or celebrate, my individual way of looking," says the art director and editor, now based in Berlin.

Wolberg's latest anthology, *New Queer Photography: Focus on the Margins*, richly – and, at times, raucously – rejects these ideals, specifically their implications for those whose sexual and gender identities deviate from the status quo. Today, while popular culture might have us believe that Western society has embraced the queer community, much of its visibility still lies in the hands of white, cisgendered men. And still, around the world, many LGBTQ+ people live with the constant threat of violence, persecution, imprisonment – even capital punishment.



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Across 304 pages, *New Queer Photography* traverses a vast and heady mix of queer identities, experiences, dynamics and aesthetics: fleshy, distorted bodies glisten with sweat and semen; trans lovers steal quiet moments of tenderness, while working-class Black and brown drag performers dominate frames. Through the lenses of over 50 contemporary photographers, we see that art, above

anything, presents a seemingly infinite world of possibilities for playing with gender, sexuality, beauty, and desire; and crucially, that both queerness and love look different for everyone.

In France, Alexandre Haefeli captures male bodies withing in surreal, lavender-hued fields, 6,000 miles away in Vietnam, Maika Elan's soft, understated images depict queer couples engaging in an act that is paradoxically rebellious: relaxing. Bradley Secker's rough and shadow-rich polaroids amplify the voices and experiences of refugee sex workers in Istanbul, while Julia Gunther joyously celebrates Black lesbians defying homophobia and apartheid in South Africa.



© Alexandre Haefeli

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© Maikoly Malamed



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"The most important thing," says Wolberg, "was to tell these stories through the queer gaze, without any preconceptions, and without reproducing stereotypes or any clichés." The project took him four years to produce and, after being rejected by countless publishers for its explicit nature and "narrow" market, nearly didn't happen at all. But it comes at just the right time, as conversations about queerness continue to bloom, and more and more voices – bolstered in large part by social media – come to the fore to break barriers, push boundaries and make history.

"I wanted to focus on the margins of society, sensitising people to all the injustice, discrimination and oppression that is happening," muses Wolberg. "But I also want to celebrate pure joy, freedom and the unique creativity that – under different circumstances – can also happen within the margins."

*New Queer Photography: Focus on the Margins* by Benjamin Wolberg is published by Verlag Kettler, available to purchase [here](#).

