

# It's Nice That

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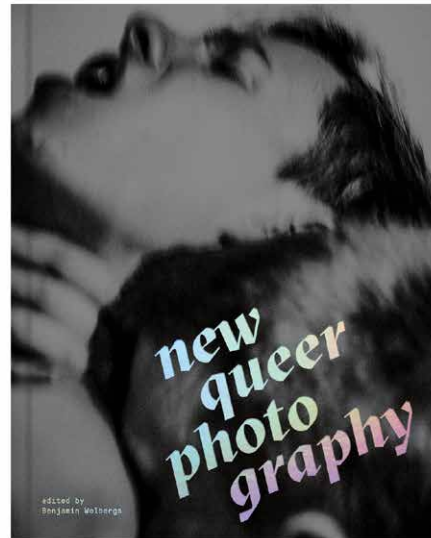
## Benjamin Wolbergs' photo book is an inclusive representation of the queer community

The Berlin-based editor and art director talks us through his mammoth project, *New Queer Photography*, featuring works from Dustin Thierry, Mohamad Abdouni and many more.

Words Ayla Angelos

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Work Photography Publication Book  
Diversity



Four years ago, Benjamin Wolbergs devised an idea. At the time, the Berlin-based art director and editor was working at the publishing house Taschen on a layout for a photography book, featuring images from the 50s with an aesthetic “clearly intended to appear to a gay audience”, he tells *It's Nice That*. This ignited a few questions for the creative, particularly on the topic of contemporary queer photography and what this would actually look like in the physicality of a publication. “What photographers, topics and styles would be included in such a book today?”

“Then,” he continues, “I became aware of the work of Florian Hetz and Matt Lambert and I started looking for more queer photographers and soon I was blown away by all the different themes and visual worlds I discovered, especially by the artistic quality of these works.” That’s the moment *New Queer Photography* was first conceived, blossomed as part intrigue and part frustration from the current queer visual representation in the media. Much of what we see today – across all forms including print, online and TV – centres its gaze on the white, muscly cisgender man, “even in publications that are directly referring to queerness,” adds Benjamin. “So I thought, it’s long overdue to contribute a more diverse and inclusive visual representation.”

He’s now realised this idea in the form of a 304-page publication, *New Queer Photography* which intertwines a mix of established and emerging photographers – from the lesser known through to the industry giants. While collating the research and thus working out who to include, Benjamin explains how it was “very intense” and took a total of three years to produce. Not only did this mean he was able to source a broad range of talented photographers from a plethora of topics and aesthetics, it also gave him the opportunity to observe many of the artist’s evolution over a period of time. “I was looking through a lot of books and magazines, but the most intense research was through the internet and social media channels,” he says. “I was scrolling through a tremendous amount of art, photography and LGBTQIA+-related blogs and webpages. One link brought me to another and it was an almost



endless pool.” The final decision was equally as consuming, and at some times difficult. “It was important for me to present as many different photographers, important themes and queer imaginary worlds as possible, trusting my intuitions more than overly dogmatic approaches. An important focus was of course also on the artistic aspect of the works.”

Benjamin is used to working in the fast-paced realms of publishing and curating. So even if the project turned out to be an enjoyably lengthy one, it wasn’t anything that the creative couldn’t handle. His background involves designing publications for art books publishers worldwide, sometimes working on his own projects, like *New Queer Photography* which he describes as the more “satisfying” part of his work. It’s been a long career thus far for Benjamin, whose first book was developed while studying 14 years ago. This particular project was a street art city guide and photobook for Berlin and was “lucky” to find a publisher for. After this, he knew he wanted to continue these pursuits and ended up covering all sorts of different topics, especially enjoying the medley of content that goes into the making-of books: graphic design, typography and product design being a few key aspects.

Within *New Queer Photography*, Benjamin combs all his interests and inquisitions into one cohesive (and thorough) publication. It channels a wide mix of diverse queer experiences, including perspectives and representations from around the globe. For Benjamin, the most important factor was to tell these stories through the queer gaze, “without any preconceptions and without reproducing stereotypes or any clichés,” he says. “The publication starts with participants of opulent and glamorous ballrooms around Europe, documented by [Dustin Thierry](#) in a lush black and white that recalls underground scene photographs of the 20th century. You can immerse yourself in the vibrant queer night life scene with Spyros Rennt in Berlin and in London through beautiful polaroids made by Lukas Viar.”

The publication takes you on a detailed journey from London drag queens at home by Jan Klos to *Beautiful Freaks* at parties by Ralf Obergfell; the “rural and difficult life” of trans women in Peru by Danielle Villasana to a polaroid series of refugees fleeing

war and poverty in Istanbul by Bradley Secker; queer Georgian bodies by Lasha Fox Tsertsvadze to portraits of *Beautiful Berlin Boys* by Ashkan Sahihi. But that's not it, there are many more works from the likes of Mohamad Abdouni, Benjamin Fredrickson, Shahria Sharmin, Julia Gunther, Robin Hammond, Florian Hetz, Damien Blottière, Manuel Moncayos, Lia Clay Miller, Soraya Zaman, Milan Gies, Bettina Pittaluga and Laurence Philomène.

To call this book in-depth and informative would be an understatement, and it's pages are a necessary addition to the world of publishing, media and representation for the queer community. "I want to present alternative concepts of aesthetics and beauty, because I think the 'one-dimensional' concept of gender, beauty and aesthetics – which is still present in most media – is so outdated, boring and also quite toxic," concludes Benjamin. "We are in the year 2021 and it is long overdue to appreciate and celebrate a more individualised sense and alternative perspective of beauty. If one of these aspects reaches the reader I am more than happy."

