

## Stephen Friedman Gallery

### *Queer Love*

54 Franklin St  
New York  
10013

Thursday April 17 – Thursday  
May 22 2025

Opening: Thursday April 17,  
6–8pm with an exhibition  
walkthrough starting at 6pm



Stephen Friedman Gallery presents *Queer Love*, an exhibition bringing together a selection of significant and recently discovered erotic drawings by British artist and key Bloomsbury group member **Duncan Grant** (1885–1978) in dialogue with new works by contemporary queer artists including: **Soufiane Ababri, Leilah Babirye, Anthony Cudahy, Kyle Dunn, Alex Foxtan, Jonathan Lyndon Chase, Wardell Milan, Sola Olulode, Tom Worsfold** and **Jimmy Wright**.

The exhibition is organized in collaboration with Charleston, the UK charity that cares for the modernist house, garden and studio of Grant and fellow Bloomsbury artist **Vanessa Bell** (1879–1961). Located in East Sussex, UK, Charleston was a gathering place for the wider Bloomsbury group and today is open year-round to the public, giving access to its world-class collection of Bloomsbury work. Shown publicly in Charleston’s galleries in 2022, this exhibition is the first time these drawings have been seen outside the UK.

In 1959, Duncan Grant gave his friend and fellow painter, **Edward Le Bas** (1904–1966), a folder marked with the words: “These drawings are very private.” Inside was a collection of over 400 erotic drawings that expressed Grant’s lifelong fascination with the joy and beauty of queer intimacy. Made during the 1940s and ‘50s, when sex between men was still illegal in England, the drawings were believed to have been destroyed after Le Bas’ death for their explicit portrayal of homosexual desire. They were, in fact, rescued and have remained in private hands ever since – a secret collection passed from lover to lover, friend to friend, for 60 years. After they came to light, this incredible collection was gifted to Charleston.

Influenced by Roman mythology and contemporary bodybuilding magazines, Grant’s drawings were created with pen, pencil and gouache. Charged with desire, they depict muscular bodies performing subversive, often kink-related, sexual acts. The artist’s fluid use of line accentuates his subjects’ sensual, impassioned movements. Several of the works also explore interracial sex, adding further potency to the scandal these would have caused if exposed at the time they were made.

# Stephen Friedman Gallery

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10 contemporary queer artists have responded to Grant's works, from Leilah Babirye's sculptural explorations of sexuality in the African LGBTQ+ community, to Sola Olulode's tender paintings of gay love. Discussing these new works, **Jack Parlett** writes: "By turning the hard edges of muscle, so prized in the erotic economy of gay male culture, into softer and more fluid shapes, Grant's drawings touch upon distinctly queer forms of embodiment, of the kinds illuminated by the contemporary artists featured in this show." He continues: "Bringing together diverse subjects, who are neither masculine nor athletically bodied, Jonathan Lyndon Chase and Wardell Milan's drawings, [for example], look beyond stereotypical iconographies of desire, towards something queer and uncanny, a fantasia of sexual possibility."

These artists' bold celebration of queer identity highlights the significant and hard-won progress made since Grant's covert documentation of homosexual intimacy over 75 years ago, particularly at a time when civil liberties and LGBTQ+ rights are once again under attack. Reflecting on the exhibition, **Dr Darren Clarke** writes, "Here is the pleasure of love, the physical, the hard, the soft and the beautiful. And here is the power of resistance and the importance of being true to yourself in the face of oppression and adversity."

The exhibition is accompanied by a digital booklet featuring new essays by Jack Parlett (writer, poet and author of *Fire Island: Love, Loss and Liberation in an American Paradise*) and Dr Darren Clarke (Head of Collections and Research at Charleston).

## Stephen Friedman Gallery

Stephen Friedman Gallery is a contemporary art gallery that was founded in 1995 with a focus on representing exceptional artists from around the world. Since its inauguration, the gallery has been based in Mayfair, London. In October 2023, the gallery expanded and relocated to Cork Street. In November 2023, the gallery opened its first location outside the UK at 54 Franklin Street in Tribeca, New York.

## Charleston

Charleston, in Sussex, UK, is a place that brings people together to engage with art and ideas. The modernist home and studio of the painters Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, Charleston was a gathering point for some of the 20th century's most radical artists, writers and thinkers known collectively as the Bloomsbury group. It is where they came together to imagine society differently and has always been a place where art and experimental thinking are at the centre of everyday life. Today, we have two locations – the house, garden and galleries at Firlie and our new space in central Lewes. We present a dynamic year-round programme of exhibitions, events and festivals. We believe in the power of art, in all its forms, to provoke new ways of thinking and living. [www.charleston.org.uk](http://www.charleston.org.uk).

Tate, UK and Charleston are collaborating on a major new exhibition, *Vanessa Bell & Duncan Grant*, opening at Tate Britain in November 2026.