

Graphically Graphic Art: The making of modern print erotica, 1850–1950

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The latter half of the 19th century witnessed a proliferation of erotic visual material that marked the beginning of a period celebrated by some for its sexual ‘freedoms’ and chastised by others for its excess. The reform and regulation of sexual life and its scientific study, as well as the re-evaluation of the bourgeois family unit and its restrictive sexual standards, made sex into a central topic of public scrutiny (Kirsten Leng, *Sexual Politics and Feminist Science: Women Sexologists in Germany, 1900–1933*, Ithaca and London, 2018). Sexual imagery was nothing new. However, the development of new technologies that permitted the cheap offset printing of lavishly illustrated essays, postcards and print and photographic folios, now turned readers into mass viewers across social and economic divides. Throughout Europe, erotic material became an increasing source of moral concern – lest it should corrupt impressionable young minds – spawning diverse methods of state control. It also troubled the self-appointed gatekeepers of indecency: the producers and publishers of elite erotica.

This session seeks to explore the complex ways in which erotic print culture, modernism, and modernity intersect. How did new media and technology transform the ways in which the erotic subject was portrayed and circulated? Is erotica simply ‘the pornography of the elite’ (Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, London, 1979; Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, New York, 1981), or can we productively speak of ‘high’ and ‘low’ erotica? In what ways have artists, publishers, critics or collectors engaged with erotic print material? The panel invites proposals for individual papers that probe all aspects of erotic print culture during the period 1850–1950. Interdisciplinary papers exploring erotic ‘ephemera’ (postcards, advertisements, as well as magazine and book illustrations) are encouraged.