

DRESS TO IMPRESS

The photo collection of Gerrit Jan Vos (1962-2017)

Colofon

© IHLIA LGBTI Heritage, Amsterdam 2023

This bundle was made possible by a donation from the Mondriaan Fund as part of the 75 years of Freedom scheme.

In 2020, a grant application from IHLIA for the project 'Homosexuality in and around the Second World War, digitization and access to the IHLIA LGBTI Heritage collection' was awarded by the Mondriaan Fund.

Layout cover and interior: Gemma Rameckers

Printing: OBA

The photos used in the collection come from the collection of Gerrit Jan Vos, unless stated otherwise.

Articles are written in Dutch, with the exception of Research, Index & Description; The Invisible and Vulnerable in the Vos Collection by Pablo Lerma. This article has been translated from English into Dutch by Leendert Sonneveld

For the English-language collection, the articles have been translated from Dutch into English by Julian Ross

Subject to the exceptions set out in or pursuant to the Copyright Act, nothing from this publication may be reproduced, stored in an automated database, or made public in any form or by any means, be it electronically, mechanically, by photocopying, recording or in any other way, without prior written permission from IHLIA LGBTI Heritage.

ihlia.nl



DRESS TO IMPRESS
The photo collection
Gerrit Jan Vos (1962-2017)

Table of contents

Introduction	5
Wilfred van Buuren	
Biography of Gerrit Jan Vos (1962-2017)	7
Berry Feith	
1 The Vos photo collection	15
The perspective of the collector	17
Hans Rooseboom (curator of photography at the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam)	
What do we see in the Vos collection from a WWII perspective?	21
Matthijs de Die le Clercq (expert in WWII uniforms)	
2 Dress to Impress – military uniform: a source of power and eroticism	25
Military uniform and fashion	27
Els de Baan (fashion journalist)	
The erotic power of the uniform	35
Ton of Holland / Hoogerwerf (artist) – interview by Michel Otten	
All the ins and outs of the German uniform	41
Matthijs de Die le Clercq (expert in WWII uniforms)	
3 Male friendships in the military/homosexuality in the armed forces	47
Research, Index & Description	49
The Invisible and Vulnerable in the Vos collection	
Pablo Lerma (researcher / artist)	
The army as a refuge for gay men (first half 20th century) and hidden homosexual codes	59
Ton of Holland / Hoogerwerf (artist) – interview by Michel Otten	
Male friendships and homosexual relationships among German soldiers in the Third Reich	65
Jan Willem Tellegen (psychologist, historian and writer)	

Introduction

Wilfred van Buuren

*Wilfred van Buuren (b. 1964) is a historian. He has worked as Head of Collections at IHLIA LGBTI Heritage since 2019. Prior to that he worked among other things as a freelance researcher and publicist in sporting history and heritage, and as an archivist at the umbrella organisation for sports in the Netherlands, NOC*NSF. His passions are books, men and basketball.*

THE IHLIA COLLECTION

IHLIA LGBTI Heritage collects, keeps and makes accessible information about homosexuals, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders and intersexuals. IHLIA keeps documents and objects about the LGBTI community in all its facets: their history, their world and their culture.

The IHLIA collection is highly diverse in terms of origin and types of material. It is

not confined to the Netherlands, but has an international scope, with material from more than 150 countries and in more than 60 languages. The collection includes archives from individuals and organisations, books, magazines, posters and audiovisual material, and also textiles and objects, such as T-shirts, button badges and collar pins.

The photographic collection is an important and frequently consulted part of the IHLIA collections. It currently comprises approximately 15,000 photos. Most of these are from the Netherlands and date from the period 1960-2010. The main subjects depicted on these photos include activism, events, parties and nightlife, but there are also a number of portraits and artistic photos.



Gerrit Jan Vos with students at the Willem de Kooning Academy, year unknown. Photo: Roelof Mulder.

THE VOS PHOTO COLLECTION

IHLIA has held the Vos photo collection since 2018. It is an excellent extension of and supplement to our photo collections, in terms of period, provenance and subject matter. The Vos Collection contains more than 4,000 photos, mainly dating from the years 1930-1950, with photographs from Germany as well as England and the United States. They are amateur photos, largely of men in military uniform.

The Vos Collection is named after the collector Gerrit Jan Vos (1962-2017). Vos

was a homosexual man who taught fashion in Rotterdam and Bielefeld, in Germany, and collected photos in his spare time. His fascination with fashion, uniforms and male beauty helped shape his photo collection. Following his death, Gerrit Jan Vos' photo collection was gifted to IHLIA. Most of the photos are black-and-white and date from

the end of the 19th century up to the 1960s. The collection arrived at IHLIA unsorted and with no descriptions. The photographs were catalogued in the summer of 2019 by an intern, Jordan Browne, and the then head of photo collections Jasper Wiedeman. This exercise culminated in a report entitled IHLIA LGBT Heritage Project, Gerrit Jan Vos Collection.

The photos in the Vos Collection cover a wide range of themes and topics, from buildings to families; but a large proportion are of men in uniform, including from the Second World War, with lots of German military and paramilitary subjects. They depict soldiers alone or in couples or groups. It is impossible to determine precisely whether the men portrayed in the photos were homosexual or bisexual, but many photos in the collection do have a homosensitive or homoerotic undertone. The body language and gestures depicted in these photos suggest a form of male intimacy which can be interpreted as a gay or queer gaze or, looking through rose tinted spectacles, as homoerotic.

In 2020 IHLIA applied for a grant from the Mondriaan Fund for a project entitled: Homoseksualiteit in en rond de Tweede Wereldoorlog, digitalisering en ontsluiting collectie IHLIA LGBTI Heritage ('Homosexuality in and around the Second World War; digitalising and enabling access to IHLIA LGBTI Heritage collection'). The bid was submitted in response to an open call for applications under the banner 'Digitalisation in the context of 75 years of Freedom'. After the grant was awarded, in addition to lots of other relevant material from the IHLIA collection, 4,318 photos from the Vos Collection were digitised and made available in digital format at IHLIA.

DRESS TO IMPRESS

What can you expect in this publication? In *Dress to Impress* – The photo collection of Gerrit Jan Vos (1962-2017), different authors explore Gerrit Jan Vos' photo collection from varying perspectives, each from the basis of his or her own expertise: artists and researchers, historians, photographic conservationists and experts in the field of fashion or military uniforms.

The book opens with a short biography of Gerrit Jan Vos by Berry Feith. Chapter 1 then zooms in on the Vos photo collection. Hans Roosenboom examines the collection from the perspective of a (photograph) collector, while Matthijs de Die le Clercq explores the Vos Collection from the perspective of the Second World War.

Chapter 2 focuses on the military uniform as a source of power and eroticism; in short: *Dress to Impress*. Els de Baan writes about the link between the military uniform and fashion. Ton of Holland uses an interview technique to talk about the eroticism of uniforms, and Matthijs de Die le Clercq describes all the ins and outs of the German military uniform.

Chapter 3 focuses on male friendships among soldiers and homosexuality in the armed forces. Pablo Lerma explores how the Vos Collection can be viewed from a queer perspective. Ton of Holland again uses an interview technique to talk about the armed forces as a refuge for gay men in the first half of the 20th century, and about hidden homosexual codes. Jan Willem Tellegen describes male friendships and homosexual relationships among German soldiers in the Third Reich.

Finally, the book also contains something for the eye, with a large number of photos from the Vos Collection.

Old photographs from the past can be dry and dusty or they can be wonderful; they only acquire meaning through stories, imagination and context. Hopefully, the stories and context in *Dress to Impress*, together with your own imagination as the reader, will help give meaning to the photographs from the Vos Collection.

Amsterdam, March 2023

Biography of Gerrit Jan Vos

Berry Feith

Berry Feith (b. 1965) studied Art History at Groningen University, specialising in Architecture and Urban Design. After graduating in 1995 he followed a post-doctoral programme in Historical Information Processing (now e-Humanities) at Leiden University (1998). Since then, Berry has worked at various institutions as a digitalisation project manager; he has worked at IHLIA LGBTI Heritage since 2018. In his spare time he enjoys carrying out historical research and writing about the results.

Gerrit Jan Vos (1962–2017)

Gerrit Jan Vos (August 27th 1962, Enschede - March 10th 2017, Amsterdam) had a particular passion for men's fashion, photography, collecting images of men and creating collages.

His great interest in men's fashion was reflected in his work at the Willem de Kooning Academy in Rotterdam, where he worked as senior lecturer in fashion; before that he lectured in the Design department at Fachhochschule Bielefeld in Germany.

Gerrit Jan was an active photographer, both on commission and in his own free time. Walking round with his camera, he regularly

photographed people and works of art, often in the public space. His desire to collect expressed itself through collecting photos and images of men, some in uniform, some not. Gerrit Jan used many images, again of men, in collages in his scrapbooks.

Life

Gerrit Jan Vos was born in the Dutch city of Enschede on 27 August 1962, the youngest in a family of four children. He was described as an introvert and a loner by nature.

Together with his brother and two sisters, he grew up in an Orthodox Protestant milieu. His mother was a housewife, his father a painter and decorator. His parents originally came from Groningen in the north of the country, but settled in Enschede when Gerrit Jan's father found work there with his brother's firm.

Gerrit Jan was a dreamer, enjoyed being in nature and loved plants. After leaving primary school, he went to the junior secondary horticultural school in Enschede. He obtained his certificate in 1977 and went on to the senior secondary horticultural school in Nijmegen. Gerrit Jan was then just 15 years old, and

About Vos (as per 7 October 2016 on his English-language website Vos-Co.nl)

Organising fashion shows, fashion illustration/photography, exhibitions, workshops, lectures.

He provides services internationally in fashion and design, visual communication and conceptual thinking, with a particular focus on men's clothing.

Projects:

Samsung, Sanoma Publishers, Union Knopf, Herren Mode Woche, Gabor Shoes, WDR, Kaiga, Maconde, Uco, Nigel French, IN.DEX, Fabrex Fair, LOI, Rijksmuseum, Philips, Swan & Nichols, View Textile, Interior View, Metropolitan Publishing, David Shah, Li Edelkoort, Trend Union, Premiere Vision, Mode Amont.

Lecturer:

Head of Fashion at Willem de Kooning Academy, Rotterdam.
FH University of Applied Sciences: Design Department, Bielefeld. Germany.
AKI Academy of Art & Design, Enschede. Netherlands.
Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London, Great Britain.

moved in to lodgings with a hostess. After completing his secondary education, Gerrit Jan returned to Enschede, where in 1982 he attended evening classes at the AKI Academy of Art & Design. A year later, he switched to a full-time programme.

On moving back to Enschede, Gerrit Jan went to live in lodgings, broke with the church and came out as openly gay. When visiting his parents, homosexuality was never mentioned.

From his second year at the AKI Academy, Gerrit Jan began specialising in fashion and photography. He had his own drawing style, but was less interested in the actual design and making of a collection. He was mainly occupied with styling and photography. Gerrit Jan graduated from the AKI Academy in 1988 in Fashion and Photography, after which he moved to Amsterdam.

In Amsterdam, Gerrit Jan found his first employment. Stylist and photographer Ruud van der Peijl, who was just a little older than him, was one of the people he encountered. In the early 1990s he spent 18 months working as a freelance stylist with Li Edelkoort in Paris. He lived with a boyfriend during this period.

From 1992 onwards, Gerrit Jan delivered a number of guest lectures in the Fashion department at the AKI Academy. In that same year, he also gave guest lectures at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London. Two years later, Gerrit Jan lectured on one or two days per week in collection design in the Design department of Fachhochschule Bielefeld (FH Bielefeld) University of Applied Sciences in Germany. This appointment was facilitated partly by Professor Eric van den Kleijenberg, who was already teaching there.

Eric lived in Arnhem and had a small apartment in Bielefeld. For many years, Gerrit Jan travelled every Sunday from Amsterdam to Arnhem, from where he and Eric drove to Bielefeld. On Wednesdays they would drive back to the Netherlands together. The appointment in Bielefeld came to an end in 2005.

The salary from his job in Bielefeld was not enough to live on, and during this period Gerrit Jan carried out freelance commissions as

well as working all kinds of side jobs in order to make ends meet. Among other things he worked in the hospitality industry and in a gallery. Although he had little income during this period, Gerrit Jan was determined to do the things he enjoyed doing.

In 1996 he got to know Bart Verlaan. They developed a relationship, and remained a couple until Gerrit Jan's death in 2017.

In 2007 Gerrit Jan began working as a lecturer in the Art department of the Willem de Kooning Academy in Rotterdam. As head of the Fashion department he was in his element. He put his heart and soul into his work for his students and for the Academy. He was a strong advocate within the Academy for more attention to be given to men's clothing.

In 2015 Gerrit Jan was given an opportunity to study for a Master's degree in Fashion Matters at the Sandberg Instituut, the postgraduate programme of the Gerrit Rietveld Academie Amsterdam. Studying for this degree enabled Gerrit Jan to focus anew on his discipline. Sadly, he was not able to complete the programme, something which he greatly regretted when, during the short period in his sickbed, he was forced to accept that he would not get better. Gerrit Jan died on 10 March 2017 at his home in Amsterdam.



Photo by Gerrit Jan Vos.

A selection of art projects

Vos-Co website

Gerrit Jan set up his own website in 2004, under the name Vos-Co. The homepage of the English-language site (no longer online) contained the following information, spread over a number of underlying pages:

I take photos while walking round with my camera.

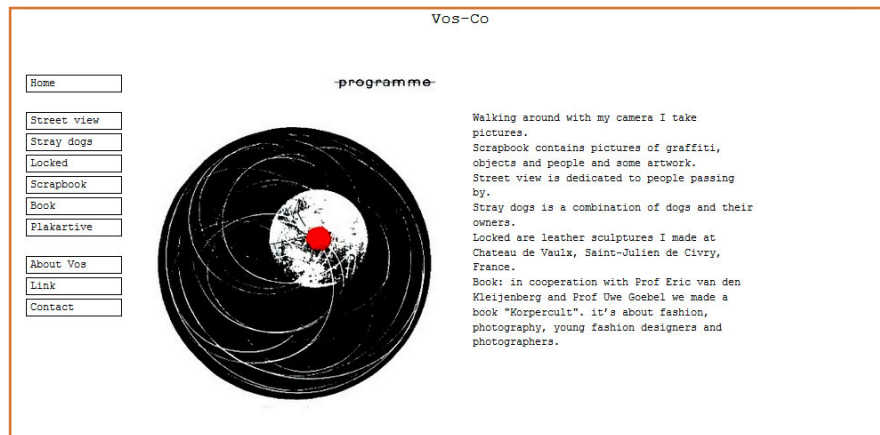
Scrapbook contains pictures of graffiti, objects and people, as well as a few works of art (23 photos)

Streetview is dedicated to images of pedestrians (30 photos)

Stray Dogs is a combination of pictures of dogs and their owners (12 photos)

Locked these are leather sculptures I made in Chateau de Vaulx, Saint-Julien de Civry, France (nine photos)

Book in collaboration with Professor Eric van den Kleijenberg and Professor Uwe Göbel, we created the book *Kampfzone Körper* ('Body Cult'). It is about fashion, photography, young fashion designers and photographers.



Screenshot homepage Vos-Co. Wayback Machine, 7 October 2016.

After Gerrit Jan's death, the website was taken off-line. The pages do however show that he remained active as a photographer. He photographed people and artworks in the public space.

Duo exhibition *Boys & Soldiers* in Villa Lila, Nijmegen (2004)

In the period 2004 – 2007 Gerrit Jan made between 15 and 30 'viewing boxes': three-dimensional collages, each smaller than a shoebox. A selection was exhibited in 2004 in a duo exhibition entitled *Boys & Soldiers* at Villa Lila (homebase of the Nijmegen LGBTI movement).

They comprise scenes made up of photos based on the theme of the soldier/military. The scenes depict soldiers in a variety of situations, either as part of a group or as solitary figures in interaction with other individuals.

The idea behind this work is that the concept of soldier/military evokes differing reactions and emotions. Soldiers are not only canon-fodder, but can also be peacekeepers.



Exhibition 'Boys & Soldiers': Villa Lila, Nijmegen, from 2 May to 20 June 2004.

Book *Kampfzone Körper - Mode Masse Macht Malör* (2008)

This book, edited by Eric van den Kleijenberg, Gerrit Jan Vos and Uwe Göbel, was published by the Design department at Fachhochschule Bielefeld in 2008 to accompany the symposium *Körper als Kampfzone*. Fotografie und Mode im Dialog. 29. Symposium des Forschungsschwerpunktes Fotografie und Medien. 21. und 22. ('Body Cult. Photography and Fashion in Dialogue. 29. Research Symposium on Photography and Media. 21 and 22.'), November 2008. Gerrit Jan himself described the book as: 'A publication and trend briefing on visual weaponisation in our daily lives.'

Gerrit Jan wrote the Introduction to the book together with Eric van den Kleijenberg and Uwe Göbel. He was also responsible for two photo reportages containing male models, respectively entitled *Héros*, in collaboration with the photographer Cedric Pradel, and *Hope is a Walking Dream*, in which the models were photographed by Marco van Rijt.

Exhibition concept *PLAKARTIVE*, Bielefeld (2012)

In the summer of 2012, Gerrit Jan took part in a new exhibition concept for the town of Bielefeld entitled *PLAKARTIVE*. It was an



Kampfzone
Körper

Mode
Masse
Macht
Malör

initiative of his former colleague Uwe Göbel from FH Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences. It was an open-air exhibition in the town, intended as a biennale, which made use of existing and newly added billboards.

Gerrit Jan's contribution can be seen on one of the 45 billboards. It depicts a life-size image of a beige-coloured cloth doll, with red accents on its head, hands and feet. The doll's face is

hidden behind a mask. The doll is sitting on a square block and is holding a board bearing the widely spaced text 'Whatever Happened To all the Porn Stars?'. There are two small rectangles at the top of the image; the one on the left looks like a torn mailing label, while the one on the right contains the framed text SZENE-INFO, written in irregular yellow letters on a red ground.



Whatever Happened To all the Porn Stars? PLAKARTIVE, Bielefeld, from 22 June to 31 August 2012.

[Image taken from Vos-Co website; screenshot on 7 October 2016]

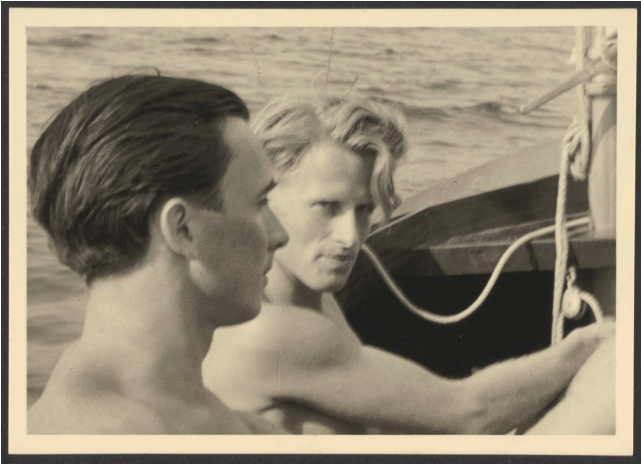
Lecture 'Dress to Impress. The relationship between clothing and power' in Debatpodium Arminius, Rotterdam (2014)

On 13 September 2014, Gerrit Jan gave a talk as part of the Nacht van de Dictatuur (Night of the Dictatorship) event, entitled 'Dress to Impress, over de relatie tussen kleding en macht' ('Dress to Impress. The relationship between clothing and power'). The talk focused on how clothing can convey a sense of dominance and power. What are the most impressive uniforms and why? And does this vary according to particular cultures or countries? Gerrit Jan recorded little on paper in his working life and generally delivered his lectures and presentations from memory, which means that no written trace of this lecture remains.

Collecting photos and making collages

Gerrit Jan was an intuitive collector. A photograph had to appeal to him, and this was mainly the case with photos of men. Given the discipline in which he worked and his interest in men's fashion, these are often photos of men in uniform. Occasionally, Gerrit Jan bought a family photo album, but this was more for commercial dealing than to add to his own collection. After his death, his collection of more than 4,000 photographs was gifted to IHLIA LGBTI Heritage.

Over the years, Gerrit Jan also filled around 20 scrapbooks with collages (22 cm high by 15 cm wide). He filled the pages of these hardcover dummy books with photos he had clipped out from newspapers and magazines, though pornographic magazines found along



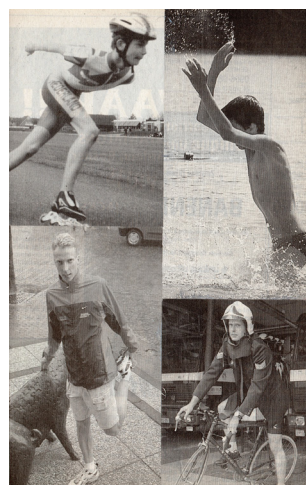
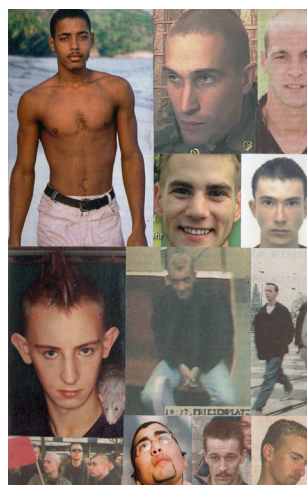
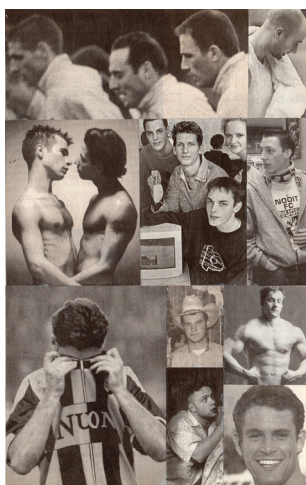
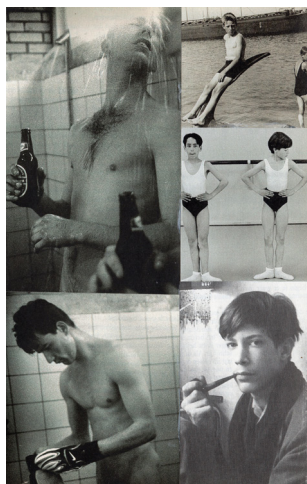
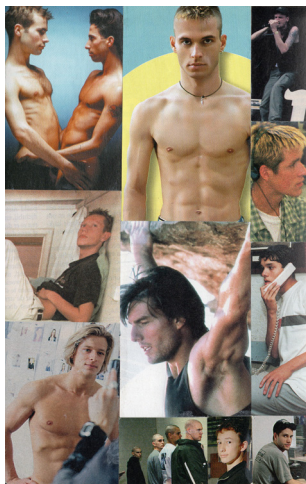
the roadside were also a source of inspiration. The collages consist mainly of images of men. In putting together a collage, Gerrit Jan was mainly interested in the composition and theme of the photos. The scrapbooks filled with Gerrit Jan's collages are in the possession of Bart Verlaan.



Photo by Gerrit Jan Vos.

Information

- * Interviews with Bart Verlaan on 1 December 2022, 21 and 24 January 2023
- * Wayback Machine – Internet Archive. Website 'Vos-Co.nl'. Screenshots on 7 October 2016: <https://archive.org/web/vos-co.nl>
- * Wayback Machine – Internet Archive. Exhibition 'Boys & Soldiers' website villalila.nl page Webgalery 2004. Screenshots from 3 April 2005 <https://archive.org/web/villalila.nl>
- * RKDartists&. Gerrit Jan Vos: <https://rkd.nl/nl/explore/artists/81895>
- * Book 'Kampfzone Körper - Mode Masse Macht Malör': <https://ihlia.nl/search?q%3Asearch=Kampfzone+K%C3%B6rper++Mode+Masse+Macht+Mal%C3%B6r&lang=nl>
- * Ausstellungskonzept PLAKARTIVE: <https://nachrichten.idw-online.de/2012/06/11/kunst-unterm-ostwestfalendamm-auf-45-plakatiflaechen-in-bielefeld>
- * Lecture 'Nacht van de Dictatuur': <https://arminius.nl/nacht-van-de-dictatuur/>
- * Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Annual Report 2017. Page 23.
- * Internship report 'IHLIA LGBT Heritage Research Project, Gerrit Jan Vos Collection' by Jordan Browne



Collages Gerrit Jan Vos.

1 |
The Vos photo collection



The perspective of the collector

Puzzles

Hans Rooseboom

*Hans Rooseboom (1966) is curator of photography at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. In 2019 he published *Lichtjaren. Een geschiedenis van de fotografie* ('Light years. A history of photography'), while he also has a number of books and associated exhibitions to his name together with his colleague Mattie Boom, including *Modern Times. Photography in the 20th Century* (2014) and *New Realities. Photography in the 19th Century* (2017).*

I've met a fair number of people over the last 25 years who collected photographs for various reasons. You can put them into all kinds of categories: the 'moderates' and the 'hardliners'; with a large or small purse; specialising in a specific niche or 'omnivores'. Some display symptoms of addiction, while others remain in complete control of themselves. Some like to show off their collection, others are more reserved.

Whenever you get the chance to view a private collection, you're not just curious about the photos themselves, but also about what drives the collector concerned. Sometimes their motivation is obvious, but in some cases it requires some explanation.

It was when I visited IHLIA in early 2022 that I first heard about the photograph collection compiled by Gerrit Jan Vos (1962-2017). Four thousand photographs, mainly of men in uniform, including some from the Second World War. That sounded like an interesting area for a collection, almost a niche within a niche, and at the very least a topic that for a long time had been shrouded in secrecy and taboos. My curiosity was aroused. Someone who had spent years (?) engaged with that topic must have been a collector who knew what he was doing. An (almost) exclusive interest in German soldiers during the Second World War suggests more than an average fascination and desire to collect.

Several books have been published in recent years on photographs of German soldiers, some but not all of which devote specific attention to their sexual preferences.



There was Gerard Groeneveld's book in 2007 containing German amateur photographs taken during the occupation of the Netherlands (*Heinz in Holland: Duitse amateurfoto's van de bezettingstijd*), published to accompany an exhibition in the Rijksmuseum, which is how I came to hear about it. It was followed 11 years later by Laura Fahnenbruck's *Ein(ver)nehmen*; that was also concerned with German soldiers in the occupied Netherlands, but with a particular focus on what the book's subtitle describes as *Sexualität und Alltag von Wehrmachtsoldaten in den besetzten Niederlanden* ('Sexuality and everyday life for Wehrmacht soldiers in the occupied Netherlands'). The sexual relations discussed in these two books were those between German soldiers and Dutch women and girls, rather than between the soldiers themselves. During that same year (2018), Erik Kessels' *Shit* was published, in which this famous collector of amateur photos brought together images of defecating German soldiers. Once again, a niche within a niche (within a niche).

Gerrit Jan Vos' collection would therefore seem to fit in with a tradition, though admittedly a fairly young tradition: for a long time it was not done to show an interest in German soldiers, but today we are more aware than in the past that these were often young men who, especially if they were part of the Wehrmacht, were sent off to fight and suppress the population of another country, without knowing what they were doing or having the power to decide what they did and didn't want to do. The fact that Wehrmacht soldiers weren't all simply bastards, but were also people of flesh and blood who possessed human qualities and had all kinds of everyday worries, was something that took a long time to become accepted.

When I was invited by IHLIA LGBTI Heritage to write something about the Vos collection, I decided that I should first look at all four thousand photographs. I cheerfully set about the task one Monday morning at work, with around 15 boxes on the table in front of me. Experience shows that when you look at that many photographs, you always come across surprises, photos whose existence you hadn't suspected.

It didn't take long for the first question marks to arise. My assumption had been that I would come across lots of photos with a homo-erotic character, but in fact I encountered lots of pictures of women and children (with or without a man in the picture), men in civilian clothes and also snapshots of outings that had nothing to do with war. After having looked at all four thousand pictures, I concluded that there was indeed a relatively high proportion of uniformed men among them, and lots of Germans from around the Second World War, but also a strikingly large number of photographs that did not fit into that category. Usually, sometimes thanks to notes from the collector themselves, I'm able to discover a pattern, but here I was mainly left with questions.

Since Gerrit Jan Vos was dead, I obviously couldn't ask him, so I had to look for answers in the photos themselves. That's not uncommon; collecting photographs is a young 'discipline', which means that not much has been written about collectors in this field, and especially those from the more distant past.

Often you know little more than their name. Photos of military personnel are overrepresented in the Vos collection, then, but not to the exclusion of all other topics. What drove Gerrit Jan Vos, and what were the limits of his collecting interests? Was it the Second World War? German soldiers? If that were the case, you would expect all those other topics - women, children, non-military outings, and so on - to have been set aside, given away or thrown in the bin. Why didn't that happen? Did he really intend to exclude those other categories? In other words, did Vos really have such a strong interest in war, soldiers and uniforms?

Did Vos simply not get round to separating out the military photographs from the rest? He did after all die fairly suddenly in 2017 at a relatively young age. But if that were the case, how can we know that his main interest was in the homo-erotic element of the soldier's life? Did Vos himself choose IHLIA as the heir to his photographic legacy? If so, that could provide a hint, given that IHLIA has a specific mission and published a catalogue in 2006 (*Wie kan ik nog vertrouwen?* ['Who can I still trust?']) for the eponymous exhibition about homosexuals in Nazi Germany and occupied Holland. It would then be no coincidence that Vos chose



IHLIA to be the guardian of his collection. No such luck, however: it was a good friend of Gerrit Jan who after his death suggested to his family and partner that the photos be given to IHLIA.

Vos didn't try to sell his collection, but that needn't have been because of embarrassment or anxiety; rather, the stories about Vos give the impression that he wanted to keep the collection for himself. According to his partner, he regularly looked at the photos without talking about them to others and without allowing them to look. He doesn't seem to have been affected by the vanity that characterises many collectors; while many private collectors are full of what they have collected over the years, like to talk about it, like to know whether their collection is better than other people's collections (and sometimes simply presume that to be the case), dream secretly (or openly) that their collection will one day end up in a prestigious institute, find the chase to collect photographs more interesting than possession of them, or find reward in organising, selecting and cataloguing their collection, Gerrit Jan Vos appears to have collected purely for his own pleasure.

What is in any event clear that no organising, selecting or cataloguing was carried out. IHLIA received the more than four thousand photographs in a number of shoeboxes. Such organisation and classifying into categories as had taken place, and which I found on that Monday morning, was done by IHLIA. Inside the shoeboxes, the photographs were all mixed together.

That once again begs the question of why, if he was so fascinated by men in uniform, Vos had not simply separated out or even got rid of the rest. It can hardly have been due to a lack of time: if he took the trouble to remove photos from albums (as evidenced from the backs of the pictures), it would not have taken any more time to throw away the uninteresting photographs than it did to mix them up with the interesting ones in shoeboxes.

I don't have an answer, and I'm left with the question of what drove Gerrit Jan Vos. Or was it other people (his bereaved partner, the friend who suggested giving the photos

to IHLIA) who believed that the homo-erotic elements of the military photographs were the key aspect? If Vos had got hold of an arbitrary number of photo albums and simply removed everything from them, there would not have been so many photographs of soldiers among them. So it seems those soldiers must have been of particular interest to him.

One thing that many collectors share is the pleasure, after visiting a fair, auction, market or house, of spreading out and viewing their 'booty'. The collector has no idea in the morning what they are going to come across that day, and now they find themselves with something that they couldn't let go for any amount of money. That moment in the day is magical.

Gerrit Jan Vos, too, may have felt that euphoria on several occasions. Perhaps that is where the solution to the puzzle lies. Once the new acquisitions have been organised, incorporated in the existing collection and described, that euphoria evaporates and the new acquisitions have simply been absorbed as part of what already existed. Perhaps, by deliberately not separating the photos that interested him most from all the others, by repeatedly going through the entire, unsorted collection, he may have been able to experience that feeling of excitement time and again. Perhaps the collection only existed in his head.

It's a nice idea, if I do say it myself, but I will also be the first to admit that it's not a watertight explanation. But then, collectors aren't your average person, so an improbable working method and train of thought is perfectly feasible, just as some collectors regularly focus on unconventional topics for their collection. This is not a type of collector with which I was familiar at the time, but I will gladly add it to the list of private collectors with whom I have become acquainted over the last quarter of a century.



The different types of (German) uniforms found in the Vos collection are explained in chapter 2.3: **All the ins and outs of the German uniform.**

What do we see in the Vos Collection from a WW2 perspective?

Matthijs de Die le Clercq

My name is Matthijs de Die le Clercq. I was born in 1998. I graduated from the Reinwardt Academy as an archivist and heritage professional, with an interest and specialisation in the Second World War. I have been interested in the Second World War from a very early age, and primarily in the Dutch identification papers that were used during the War. Researching the individuals and stories behind a piece of paper brings history to life and makes it very interesting.

General

The photographs in the Vos Collection are mainly of men in uniform, mostly military or paramilitary. Every soldier wore a uniform in the Second World War, to indicate the country or organisation to which the soldier belonged. Uniforms have changed greatly over recent centuries, from decorated parade uniforms designed particularly for their beauty, to the camouflaged uniforms worn on the battlefield. Uniforms have always evoked esteem and impact.

If we look at the Vos Collection from the perspective of the Second World War, several things become apparent. The photographs cover a very wide scope, with no focus on one specific group within the Second World War context. Most of the photos were taken in the periods between the fighting and the soldiers' homes. There are no true action photos in the collection. Soldiers enjoyed lots of free time between fighting, and the situations we see in the photos therefore largely come across as relaxed. There are also a number of photographs of landscapes, views, nature areas, historic monuments and more besides. Soldiers regularly took such 'holiday snaps' to show their families at home that they were having a good time at the front.

The soldiers are seen in different poses in the photographs, with many portrait and group shots as well as more social settings. There are also lots of more personal photos,

including civilian portraits; these are probably photographs of the same soldiers that can be seen in other photos in the collection. The photographs can be divided into different groups of people, for example photos of soldiers and photos of other (paramilitary) organisations, such as political uniforms or uniforms of scouting organisations such as the Hitler Youth.

Some of the photos show soldiers in white uniforms. These uniforms, which carry no insignia, are working and training uniforms as worn by German soldiers. The subjects in these photos are often shown at work or standing in groups in front of the barracks which was their temporary home.

Photography played a big role in the Second World War, both for Nazi Germany and for the Allies, among other things as a propaganda tool. In October 1941, for example, the British Army formed a unit of trained photographers and cameramen, known as the Army Film and Photographic Unit (AFPU). They underwent special training for photographing at the front. Germany and America had similar units active. The creation of these units is an indication of how important the respective governments considered photography to be during the Second World War.

Sport and health were also important aspects within the German army; on the photo at the top right on page 20 we see a member of the air force (right) and a paramilitary from the military police (left), who are competing in a race. There were even special uniforms for these kinds of non-combat activities.

On some photos one or more crosses have been placed next to individuals in the photo. These crosses mean that the person in question has been killed.

Although the Vos collection does not consist exclusively of photos from the Second World War, they do form the majority. They are mainly photographs of German soldiers in WW2,

though we occasionally see other uniforms, such as American, British, French, Japanese and Dutch soldiers. All the photographs are black-and-white, which is fairly standard for the 1940s. Although colour photography was around at that time, it was less accessible for the general public than the standard monochrome. Since most of the photos are not described, the only way to discover the story behind them and what kind of soldiers or paramilitaries they depict is by actually looking at them. The German photos are often in small format (6 x 9 cm), and almost all have a characteristic serrated edge. There are however some German photographs with a straight edge, just as there are photographs of soldiers from other countries with a serrated edge.

Photography in the German army

During the Second World War, thousands of photographers from the German Propaganda Kompanie (PK) took a total of more than three and half million photographs at the various fronts on which the Germans were fighting. Hundreds of these photos were published in propaganda magazines, books and newspapers and were seen by millions of German and other European readers. These images still offer an important insight into the way Germans and Europeans viewed the War between 1939 and 1945.¹

Propaganda

Many German soldiers took photographs in their free time. However, given the importance attached to recording much of what occurred in images, specialist photographers were also recruited. Most of them were volunteers who had approached the Nazis themselves; if they could get themselves taken on as photographers for the propaganda department, they would not have to go to the front to fight, at most occasionally to take photographs. Propaganda photographers had to adhere to lots of rules that were rigidly enforced. For example, it was forbidden to take photographs of dead or wounded Germans, of liquidations and arrests of Jews and partisans, or to take anti-German photographs. Despite this, many propaganda photographers and soldiers did take photos of this nature. They were not published anywhere, but were often

kept and emerged after the War. Some of them were even used in court cases after the War.

These specialist propaganda photographers were frequently present at the front, but they were not the only photographers: lots of personal photographs were also taken by soldiers who were fighting on the front every day.

Personal photography

Although not every soldier was able to buy a camera, many were. The Nazi regime even encouraged its soldiers to take photos as a way of strengthening the bond with the home front and improving morale.²

Photos were taken to show back at home, but of course also as mementos for after the War. Soldiers could even buy special photo albums, decorated with an eagle, a tank or an aircraft, for example, which they could use for the photographs they had taken during their service in the German army.

In the past, many people lived and worked in or close to the neighbourhood where they were born. The War changed this. For many soldiers, this was the first time they had travelled across Europe, and they were excited and enthusiastic about what they encountered and the sights they saw, which they eagerly recorded in photographs. Ancient buildings, bridges, monuments, but also the Eiffel Tower in Paris, for example, were favourite photographic subjects. For many soldiers, this was the first time they had ventured outside their home environment, and it made a great impression on them. They shared these feelings with their comrades; recording these shared experiences and moments in group photographs strengthened their mutual bond and meant that they could proudly show those on the home front all the amazing things they had seen and experienced.

Men in different settings

The subjects in the photos are predominantly men. They are photographed in a variety of poses and settings. Some photos in the collection are portraits: men posing in their uniforms for a photograph to send back to

their families, for example. In doing so, they were showing their pride in serving in the army, and most of them do indeed look proud. These kinds of photographs were also often used by the families to commemorate a soldier who had been killed.

Other photos in the Vos Collection are of soldiers in military situations, for example during military exercises, between battles at the front or when taking prisoners of war. These photographs clearly reflect the power of the army. They were taken in order to show how well the soldiers were doing and how successful they were.

The different settings provide an interesting but also slightly distorted picture of the soldiers. Although terrible things happened at the front during the War, the mood of the photos is positive, because they were mainly taken during periods of calm and with the aim of showing how well everything was going. The fact that terrible things were also happening is not evident in these photographs.

Camaraderie

Another frequent setting in the Vos Collection is the social and familiar. Some of these photos are of a single soldier, while others are group photos. The soldiers are shown sitting or lying with each other amicably on the grass or the beach. In between the fighting, soldiers had a great deal of free time, which they could use as they saw fit. In these photos, they were keen to show the camaraderie and friendship.

There are also photographs set in a common area, for example in the barracks. These photos give a clear sense of the soldiers' daily lives, the kind of clothing and equipment they used and how they slept, ate and lived.

Exercises

The Collection also contains photos of military exercises and soldiers in readiness for the *appel*. During the Second World War, soldiers devoted a lot of time to keeping fit and taking part in

military exercises so that they would be in optimum condition when they went to the front for the actual fighting. These exercises also contributed to the military discipline within the army.

The Collection contains photographs of soldiers taking part in marching, sport, labour, maintaining weapons and fighting demonstrations. The photo below is an example of the latter; German soldiers show how to fight effectively with a bayonet to disable the enemy. Fight exercises were carried out with both real weapons and safe replicas. For example, for practising throwing hand grenades, special exercise grenades with no explosive charge were used in the first instance, so that soldiers could get used to using them safely.

Daily activities

There was also time for ordinary day-to-day activities such as going to the dentist or the barbers; this was also very common at the front. Many soldiers had additional responsibilities; for example, there were soldiers who had worked as barbers or cooks, or who came from a medical background before joining the army, and they often continued to practise these professions after joining up. The Vos Collection contains a number of such photos. Good health was important in the army: a soldier who was not healthy would not be able to defend their country adequately against the enemy.



Governments devoted a lot of attention to this, and soldiers' health on the battlefield improved during the War as a result. This can be seen in the photos, several of which depict medical treatments.

Festivities

There was also time in the army for festivities. Making music, playing cards, putting on performances at barracks and for German soldiers, celebrating Adolf Hitler's birthday or a national holiday were all important for soldiers. Not everyone was able to go home on public holidays, to celebrate Christmas with family, for example. Soldiers on the front, in the hospitals or in the barracks therefore often organised their own Christmas tree so they could celebrate Christmas together. Being together and celebrating festivities contributed to the group morale and camaraderie between the soldiers.

^{1]} <https://notevenpast.org/photographing-the-german-air-war-1939-1945/>

^{2]} <https://www.spiegel.de/international/images-of-world-war-ii-how-the-camera-became-a-weapon-a-339728.html>



2|
DRESS TO IMPRESS

military uniform: a source of power and eroticism

Left to right:

Prada - Runway - Fall/Winter 2023-2024 Milan Fashion Week

Dries Van Noten - Runway - Paris Fashion Week - Menswear Fall-Winter 2023-2024

Molly Goddard - Runway - LFW February 2022



Military uniform and fashion

Els de Baan

Els de Baan (b. 1959) is an art historian specialising in textile, costume and fashion. She is a true fashion aficionado, and lectures in the history of art, fashion and textile at the Willem de Kooning Academy in Rotterdam. Since 2002, Els has worked as a freelance fashion journalist for the Dutch newspaper Trouw, and writes regular informative articles on current trends in fashion and textile. She also delivers talks and guest lectures to various groups and carries out valuations of costumes, textiles and fashion items for Dutch museums and private individuals. Drawing on her experience, Els set up her own initiative, Changeant, a term drawn from the world of textile to describe a fabric which changes its reflection in different lighting settings.

Military uniform and fashion

The relationship between military uniforms and model clothing has a long tradition. The ubiquitous trench coat even refers directly to the trenches from the First World War. The T-shirt worn by sailors, the flying jacket, the RayBan aviator sunglasses, the khaki chinos worn by the US armed forces, the duffel coat (or 'Montgomery', said to refer back to Field Marshal Montgomery), the balaclava and the knapsack: these have all become

common items in everyone's wardrobe. The same applies for accessories deriving from military tunics such as epaulettes, lanyards, insignia and of course the constantly recurring camouflage prints. As well as these items related almost directly to military apparel, military clothing is also an inexhaustible source of inspiration for fashion designers. In virtually every fashion season, men's and women's outfits are paraded on the catwalk in which designers have made playful use of elements from military uniform.

But a military item can also go on to lead an entirely independent life, as with Dr. Martens footwear, for example. Their high model is inspired by the traditional military boot. The company is introducing a collection of sturdy shoes and boots for the autumn/winter 2022 collection, under the rather rebellious-sounding campaign slogan 'Made for wearers who want to shake up society'.

It is no coincidence that this type of footwear was worn from the 1970s onwards by punks, squatters and skinheads as an anti-establishment symbol. Although today's wearers represent a broad spectrum of ideas, the manufacturer still markets this footwear as a 'counter-culture' brand.

At the end of the 1970s, ready-made fashion clothing often included items derived from the military wardrobe. The influential weekly women's magazine *Viva* ('because it's good to be yourself') regularly published fashion reports with cover texts and titles such as *Become a soldier*, *Playing soldiers*, *Sailor style* and *Fashion with daring: who dares?*¹



Left:
Dolce & Gabbana - Runway - Spring/Summer 2023
Milan Men Fashion Week.

Right:
Lena Hoschek - Show - Berlin Fashion Week
Autumn/Winter 2019.



Dr. Martens.

The clothing depicted in the 'Playing soldiers' piece came from the army surplus stores, which were very popular at the time. A pattern was included so that readers could make their own embellishments such as belts, kepis and upstanding collars. Medals and decorations bought from party shops completed the image. The 'daring' fashion referred among other things to a black-and-white photo of two exuberantly smiling women, one dressed in a fake-fur coat, with a leather belt and a white 'bearskin' hat. This originally military hat, made from black fur, was traditionally worn by the hussars, but today are mainly worn by majorettes and fanfare bands. The image is completed with a pair of Dr. Martens-style military boots. The other model is wearing a military drab coat with shoulder epaulettes, brass buttons and a raised collar. A hat also betrays unmistakable military origins, though is described here as a party hat and comes from a party shop. Including military elements in your wardrobe was seen in the period of 'freedom and joy' fashion as a light-hearted and carefree game. And that game was played

mainly by fashion-conscious women, perhaps serving as forerunners to the more masculine power dressing, with extreme broad shoulders, which came to the fore in women's fashion in the following decade.

Military references also reached the height of fashion in around 2000, with excessive displays of military and sports emblems such as stars, numbers and badges on both men's and women's chests and upper arms. These sewn-on features replaced the buttons which had previously underscored the wearer's unique personality and which were used to make a specific statement.²

These links between fashion and the influence of military apparel are in fact rather odd. Because where in the fashion world they represent the expression of a particular standpoint, a desire to appear rebellious, to show the wearer's individuality and turn the whole thing into a game, this is out of kilter with the image of the brave, long-suffering soldier, who – as the word itself says – dresses uniformly, with no trace of individuality, uniqueness, rebelliousness or game-playing. The serious, posed group photos from Gerrit Jan Vos' collection provide a good insight into that uniformity from different periods and countries. There is no room for personality or any display of rebelliousness. Even the most informal snapshots lack any specific signs of individuality.

Uniform military dress must of course be functional, and among other things offer comfort and protection against the weather whilst camouflaging the soldier from the enemy. A uniform also makes it possible to identify and distinguish the wearer's country, function and



Left: Viva no. 34, 25 Aug. 1978, p. 36-37. Right: Viva, no. 38, 22 Sept. 1978 p. 25.

rank. Power is also a key ingredient. Military dress is generally somewhat intimidating, because military uniforms make the wearer appear larger, broader and therefore stronger. The aim is to exude a visible sense of power. From a psychological perspective, this boosts self-confidence and the wearer's subjective

sense of safety. Filling the chest area with decoration and broadening the shoulders by adding epaulettes creates a more imposing impression. And fearsome spikes or decorative feathers on a helmet, a tall hat, shining buttons, lanyards, gold braiding and other decorative elements also help to transform an ordinary man into an imposing stallion, a superman.³ An additional effect is that power has an erotic quality, making the wearer seem attractive to others. In the 1955 film *Pride and Prejudice*, based on the book by Jane Austen (1813), accurately depicts the way in which the locally billeted and colourfully dressed soldiers set the pulses and imaginations of many an eligible young lady racing. And perhaps also many a male pulse, though the story does not touch on this.

Such forms of ostentation and adornment are often linked by sociologists, psychologists, fashion historians and other scholars to behaviours in the animal kingdom. Male animals are generally more richly adorned with feathers and colours, or have larger antlers or horns than females. Even James Bond is presented as an intimidating character.⁴ The scientific ideas point in all directions, but ultimately all come down to the same thing: it's about making an impression. And there are many ways of doing this: the strutting peacock, like Louis XIV with his ostentatious wigs and red lacquered shoes; the dandy with that exaggerated attention for his appearance; right through to the secret agent 007 with his irreproachable conventional clothing symbolising competence, courage and stature.



Group photos, formal or informal, show the uniformity of military dress.

Clothing can thus also be seen as a system of symbols, and that certainly applies for military uniforms. A broadened shoulder line, a row of medals, or feathers on the helmet are symbols designed to make an impression.

This dress-to-impress principle has been applied frequently in the history of fashion. Throughout the centuries, natural physical proportions have been replaced by an ever-changing ideal image. In the late Middle Ages, pointed shoes and headdresses, shaving off the hair on the forehead and moving the waistline suggested a longer body. From the

16th century onwards, this vertical silhouette was replaced by a horizontally orientated silhouette, with the emphasis being on greater breadth. Portraits of Henry VIII from this time show flat head coverings, widened shoulder lines with improbably large puff sleeves and flat shoes with square toecaps. The motto here was: the greater the volume occupied, the more important the person. Similar principles can also be seen in the military dress in the Gerrit Jan Vos collection, for example through the addition of horizontal braiding to make the chest appear broader, lending even the most puny men a touch of superman power.

Uniformity and functionality at different levels (including dressing to impress) are standard elements in military uniforms, then. And dressing in a uniform changes the wearer from a unique individual ('I') to a member of a group ('We'). However, it is human nature to want to distinguish ourselves from others. We think our personal clothing choice shows the outside world that we are a unique individual. By wearing those 'unique' jeans with the torn knees, that colourful baseball cap or those special trainers, we believe we are emphasising our personal identity. At the same time, innumerable others are wearing the exact same clothing items, helping us feel safe within this generally imprecisely defined group. It is precisely this duality of uniqueness/group membership that was recorded by the photographer Ari Versluis



Above: impressing with tall helmet or cap.

Below: impressing with aiguillettes.



Impressing with uniform; attractive to others...



Impressive horizontal braiding and Brandenburg decoration makes the wearer's chest appear.

and stylist Ellie Uyttenbroek over several years in hundreds of photos, brought together under the title *Exactitudes*⁵. They travelled the world putting together their collection. Each set brings together 12 individuals, each of whom assumed that they were unique. But photographed wearing their almost identical outfits, in the same pose against a blank background, makes them almost interchangeable. The way most people dress is more of a cliché than they think. The photos taken by this duo show virtually identical 'frat boy' types in their pale blue

shirts and red trousers, Indo rockers with their leather jackets and sunglasses, and young management types with their dark suits, no tie and a large laptop bag slung across their shoulder.

Although the backgrounds and poses are different, many of the photos of uniformed soldiers in the Gerrit Jan Vos collection clearly create the same effect. These men, too, come from different countries, but that does not affect their universality. As with the *Exactitudes* images, their uniqueness and individuality are visible only in minuscule details. Even something as small and personal as holding a cigarette or placing a cap on a table appears to be a carefully considered symbol which matches the image they convey.

As well as the many 'serious' photos, the Vos collection also contains many informal, comradely photos showing sports and other activities. During these activities, the soldiers also wear government-supplied 'uniforms'. Naturally, each man wears the clothing in their own way, but even during moments of relaxation and despite these minor differences, this is yet another example of uniformity.

A few photos of fancy-dress parties show more in the way of uniqueness. As no backgrounds are known to the photos, it is unfortunately not always clear whether the groups depicted are actually soldiers.

One photo shows a humorous group that is probably depicting the Nativity. Their identical military boots suggest that these are soldiers. The men appear to be wearing arbitrarily put



Soldiers with exaggerated epaulettes. Note the gloves and cigarette.

together costumes. There is even someone in clerical garb, and could it be that the man on the left represents Joseph the carpenter?

It is a matter of guesswork what story the group with musical instruments are telling. The mix of soldiers and exotically clothed gentlemen with sabres or swords undoubtedly appealed to the collector's imagination.

But non-military personnel can of course also dress up as soldiers. In the 19th century, it was standard practice among the well-to-do to throw fancy dress balls and themed dress parties in the winter months. Books were published giving tips on how to dress as various figures, including Neptune, an ancient Egyptian or a Bulgarian farmer or farmer's wife. The vivandière (sutler or victualer) was also a popular subject. These women sold food and drink and other basic necessities to the troops in the barracks or on the front, and poured alcohol from a hip vessel. A book published in 1896 gives advice on dressing as the 'daughter of the regiment' from *La fille du régiment*, the popular comic opera by Donizetti, or as a victualer to the guard of King Louis XIII or Napoleon. Different fabrics and colours were recommended for the Polish, Hungarian, French or Russian armed forces. The sporadic drawings include one such victualer. Her fancy dress costume contains subtle references to

military influences, but is dominated by the fashionable silhouette of that time.⁶

Beyond this, these books devoted scant attention to military accoutrements, and a German catalogue of party articles from 1911 offers only a paper infantry helmet, an army cap with feather and a decorated helmet.⁷

It is uncertain whether the photo of men dressed in apparently historical uniforms in the Gerrit Jan Vos collection is also a reference to such books. Their wigs and scarves were fashionable in the 18th century, and the mixture of Napoleonic symbols and bearskins gives them an imposing appearance. Might they have been dressed for a themed party, or acting in a play or tableau vivant?

The Vos collection also includes a number of photos in which it is not immediately clear whether they depict serious, impressive military uniforms or fancy dress costumes. Some of them may have formed part of a 'masquerade'; these festive parades, which were very popular in the 19th and early 20th century, generally featured historical themes in which neither cost nor effort was spared. The masquerade committees regularly noted that the cuirasses they wore were not an entirely faithful reproduction of reality.



Soldiers with shoulder aigillettes, supporting themselves on an object. Note the head covering.



Dressing up: the Nativity.



Dressing up: mix of soldiers with musical instruments and exotically dressed men.

Fashion can be seen as a light-hearted game. Fashion-lovers have the freedom to use military uniform as a source of inspiration and to express their personal views to their heart's content and to emphasise their individuality. Although in the first instance a military uniform serves practical functions and leaves no scope for individual expression, there are in reality a number of similarities to the system of symbols used in fashion. There is one further element which has not yet been mentioned but which cannot be ignored: the desire to be pleasing to the eye; appearances matter. Aesthetics plays an important role in fashion clothing, and this also applies for military uniforms. They are generally made

with great care from quality materials. The cut, colours, accessories, details and all manner of decorations are of great importance in emphasising the image. Gerrit Jan Vos' photo collection also shows that while military apparel has its own rules, at the same time it makes use of specific fashion effects. Conversely, fashion readily dips playfully into the military clothing dressing-up box.

- 1] Viva, No. 34, 25 August 1978, cover and pp. 36-37. Viva no. 5, 2 February 1979, p. 21. Viva no. 38, 22 September 1978, cover and p. 25.
- 2] See e.g. Marieta van Driel, 'Nieuwe decoratietrend: emblemen'. In: *Textilia*, 4 October 2001.
- 3] Ron Kaal, *Superman komt naar de supermarkt, uniform in de mode*. *Volkskrant Magazine*, 8 April 2000, pp. 54-57.
- 4] Such theories began to emerge in the early 20th century. See e.g.: G. Simmel, *Philosophie der Mode*. Berlin, 1905; J.C. Flügel, *The psychology of clothes*. London, 1930; R. König, *Sociologie van de mode*. Utrecht, 1965; G.A. de Wit, *Modekleding motivatie, een sociaalpsychologische studie van het mode-gebeuren*. Haarlem,

Dressed as a vivandière (sutler, victualer), 1896. From: Arden Holt, *Fancy dress described, what to wear at fancy balls*.



Military hats made of paper. From the Christmas catalogue *Katalog über Cotillon-, Ball- and Scherzartikel, Saison 1911/12*.



1970; A. Lurie, *The language of clothes*, Feltham. 1981; L. Svendsen, *Mode, een filosofisch essay*. Kampen, 2007.
 5] Ari Versluis, *Ellie Uyttenbroek, Exactitudes*. Rotterdam, various editions between 2002-2014. .
 6] Ardern Holt, *Fancy dress described, what to wear at fancy balls*. London, 1896, pp. 272-273.
 7] Katalog über Cotillon-, Ball- and Scherzartikel, Saison 1911/12. J.C. Schmidt, Erfurt. Herdruk Hildesheim, 1999, p. 220.



Dressed in historical uniforms.



Impressing or playing a role?

The erotic power of the uniform

Ton of Holland penned by Michel Otten

Ton of Holland, pseudonym of Ton Hoogerwerf (b. 1956), visual artist. Graduated from the Royal Academy of Art, The Hague.

Artistic, exhibition, interior, fashion, graphic, textile and wallpaper designer. Curator of numerous exhibitions. Specialises in 2D and 3D ideas. His background and expertise in the different disciplines lead to a constant cross-fertilisation, lending his work a tension and creating unusual combinations in his visual language. Belonging to different subcultures provides an excellent basis for his work. Handwork and perfection are a noble ambition here.

Michel Otten (1983) is the webmaster at IHLIA, and also has his own business as a freelance copywriter and editor.

when you put it on, because really it's just a pair of dress trousers and a dress shirt, you are genuinely transformed into a different person when you put on the jacket, with its gold buttons and gold or silver braiding. A sabre and a cap complete the look.

All a nice playful gimmick for me, and for sure also for Gerrit Jan Vos. He came from the fashion industry, where an obsession with appearance is par for the course. He was always very fascinated by uniforms. And he wasn't – and isn't – the only one. That was the case in the past with sailors, but also with captains whose 'combination of an air of masculinity, muscles and a body that was sensually clothed in a 'close-fitting' uniform, exerted an erotic attraction'.¹



At Ton Hoogerwerf's (Ton of Holland) exhibition with Berlin drawings in Amsterdam (2013). Left to right.: Bart Verlaan (partner of Gerrit Jan) and Gerrit Jan Vos.

This is one of the first examples of archetypes which that became popular within the gay scene. Other obvious examples are cowboys and builders. The same also applies for soldiers, with the erotic aspect of uniform being readily found in the leather and fetish scene, which draws on military uniform and the clothing worn in motorbike clubs. Almost all these costumes are based on militaristic uniforms, and especially those from Nazi Germany.

I do find this a somewhat troubling aspect, especially bearing in mind that there is a firm just outside Berlin where you can have 'Nazi costumes' made, with the exact cut and line of the originals, though admittedly without the symbols.

It does depend on the context in which the costume is worn, though; a leather uniform won't raise any eyebrows at a fetish party, but is likely to cause some frowns at the supermarket if worn to do the shopping. Just as depictions of saints on T-shirts – something that was popular for a while – would not ruffle too many feathers on the streets, but could cause something of a commotion if worn whilst walking around the Vatican.

A few years ago I designed an exhibition for the Maritime Museum in Rotterdam. I wasn't entirely sure what I was going to do for the opening, so I went to a costume hire company and decided to rent a captain's uniform. As I put it on, I felt it immediately: it looked good! Even though at first it didn't seem so special



Photos of sailors in the Vos collection.



You can find plenty of erotic elements in these pictures. The two buttons on both front pockets are right where the nipples are. The vertical row of knots points towards the crotch. When you look at the photo your eye is drawn towards the upper area and your gaze drops down.



Men wearing breeches.

In addition to the actual uniform itself, there are a number of elements attached to it which heighten its sexual appeal even further. Many of these attributes no longer serve the function for which they were originally created. Breeches are an example; the rear flaps of the tunic jackets, split in the middle, were folded double to make the coloured lining visible; the breeches had an extra thick seat panel, often made from leather, to withstand the wear and tear from horse riding. This 'double leather' seat enabled the rider to sit more firmly on the horse. But no one in the leather scene has a horse, so it is above all about the sexy image. Another example is the codpiece, or *braguette*²: a cap, pouch or purse which covered the genital area of men in the 15th and 16th centuries. It was worn between the loose trouser legs, to which it was attached with buttons. As its dimensions increased steadily, it also became a symbol of virility in the 16th century. In a podcast about the history of fashion, in which each episode looks at historical clothing items with the help of someone dressed in them, the codpiece was placed over the genitals of a young man. The effect was to show the outside world how large the wearer's genitals are. This still happens today in the leather scene, with men wearing leather briefs containing a codpiece. It gives shape to the genitals and there is also a system for pushing the genitals forwards using a cock ring.

As someone from the fashion world, the attraction for Gerrit Jan lay in the fact that he knew precisely how a costume or uniform was put together. He also knew how it could be used to perfect a slightly puny body in order to create an imposing impression. This was particularly important in the army as a means of intimidating the enemy. Els de Baan³ has written that uniformity and functionality at various levels (including dressing to impress) are standard elements in military uniforms; but how do you make a male body, with all its varied forms, uniform? If you want to make a narrow-shouldered young man appear broad, you can use big shoulder pads, adding extra stripes or epaulettes or tassels if they are higher in rank. Preferably in gold, because it is a royal material. And, because it gleams, it can also be seen from a distance. Then comes a belt to create a slim waistline. You have then also created your first triangle.

The length of the jacket is also important; it should be long enough to just barely cover the genital area. The piping running down the trouser seams creates the illusion of longer legs. Just as with the popular Adidas pants, this lends a sexy element to the body. And of course there is also the head covering. We see lots of large cap peaks, which in the first instance protect the eyes against the sun, but for men in the leather scene those leather caps also have a different function. I sometimes wonder whether they can still see anything. The genital area, of course, but what if you want to look at someone? It's not about that, of course, though; it's about creating distance, a way of making the other person feel uncertain. Like the saying attributed to Oscar Wilde that everything in life is about sex, apart from sex, which is about power, so the same applies here. And to achieve that effect it doesn't matter whether the wearer has on a genuine military uniform or one they have purchased from Mister B.

Masculinity

There is one aspect that is essential for a more detailed exploration of this topic: masculinity. But that raises its own questions: what makes someone masculine? And who decides that? We see the power narrative once again here. If we pursue this to an exploration of the relationship between masculinity and homosexuality, and what place homosexuality occupies in society, we discover that sexuality is a difficult topic of conversation in our culture. That also influences the way in which people present themselves to the outside world. A few years ago, I delivered a talk during a gathering to mark the departure of Jack van der Wel, the former head of collections at IHLIA. My talk was about the development of the 'leather man' style of dress through the years, in which I noted to my surprise that the clothing style adopted by many gay men is often akin to that of the 'aggressor'. In other words, someone wishing to live as a 'normal' gay man can use 'masculine' clothing elements precisely to avoid standing out. Suddenly, all young men start wearing beards, just like men from Arabic countries; but the latter are fiercely anti-gay, so walking round those countries with your pink hair and T-shirt with a unicorn on it makes you a perfect victim. Today, dating sites contain lots of pictures of (semi-naked) gay men in gyms, because they

have become a 'neutral', safe environment in which you can work undisturbed on improving your body.

A uniform is thus a kind of camouflage to ensure that the wearer doesn't stand out. At the same time, uniform is eroticised, partly through the influence of the archetypes mentioned earlier. Think of Marlon Brando or James Dean, looking really good in a white T-shirt and jeans. That was the look to copy. It is also a very successful commercial tool, as in the case of the 'Marlborough man', who determined who you were by your choice of cigarettes. Younger men didn't smoke Belindas, a Dutch brand of ladies' cigarettes with a picture of a blonde on the pack. Creating a tough, masculine image was also popular among celebrities such as George Michael, who in the second half of the 1980s transformed his image from a clean-cut freshman look to a more masculine image by wearing Levi's and a leather jacket. When he began wearing a crucifix hearing, half the Netherlands followed suit. In the same way that many men stopped shaving when George Michael began sporting a three-day stubble. Everyone sensed that he was a bit gay, but it felt better than the overly flamboyant and obvious 'glitter' of Elton John or Freddie Mercury.

There is strong interest within the gay scene in archetypes, then, led by artists such as Robert Mapplethorpe, Rex and Tom of Finland. Whether it is intended as a means of blending in or of creating a (gay) ideal of the perfect man as handsome, tough and muscular, can we say that this is the completes picture of masculinity? There are after all other examples which undermine this image; think of the glam rock era in the 1970s, or of a handsome young man like Harry Styles who wears heels that are slightly too high or 'forgets' to put on a shirt under his blazer. This has helped attract a large group of fans, not just among boys, but also and especially among girls, none of whom care whether or not Harry is gay. There are also increasing numbers of gender-fluid men, and it is gratifying to see that a growing number of them are people of colour. What is seen as 'tough' or 'masculine' is different for every generation.

Meanwhile, many fashion designers have already merged their male and female shows. In my view, the only reaction that will ensue from this will be super-masculine or super-feminine fashion. If the skirts are short they will become longer again, and if they are long they will become short. Fashion always runs ahead of society, and that also has an influence on the leather and fetish scene. When a market becomes saturated, the scene moves on to a different colour or style. What I notice is that the soldier has disappeared; Mister B no longer sells military trousers. The reason is the current war in Ukraine: when actual fighting is going on, people prefer not to wear military uniforms. At the same time, there is a growing demand for fantasy fashion, partly under the influence of games and fantasy figures in films and TV series. They do still sell lots of gym shorts; they are more for the 'beginners', because having a leather suit made is expensive – a good demonstration that economic factors also have an influence on fashion.

It's all an illusion

Going back to the narrative of impressing and being impressed, we see this in the leather and fetish scene in the dominance and submissiveness that appears to run through the whole scene. Artists such as Mapplethorpe also played with rank and status in their work, pillars which have always underpinned our culture.⁴ The private soldier and the general; the naval rating and the captain: 'high' and 'low' are always found together.

I know the leather and fetish world very well, and what has struck me in all those years is that – greatly simplified, it has to be said – almost everyone who is submissive works in a profession such as an ambassador or bank manager: a 'high' role in society and a 'low' role in their sexual lives. Similarly, those who are dominant and strut around dressed in leather and a cap often live more subordinate lives in everyday society. This swapping of roles is a key element which runs through everything; for example, if you go to a leather event you are automatically nervous when everyone comes in. But what are the conversations about? About the Royal family, about the latest porcelain angel figures and about 'girl, your pants are really tight'. They are complete contrasts.

That's also what is nice about the gay world; when everyone is 'dressed up', and especially in the leather and fetish scene, you can no longer see where someone comes from. In this fantasy world, people can escape the stamp that society constantly puts on them in the real world.

Although he occasionally wore camouflage trousers, Gerrit Jan didn't wear high black boots, and also didn't move in the leather fetish scene. He also did not show his photo collection of young boys and men in uniforms to the outside world. In fact, it was all done a bit secretly. Gerrit Jan was a very gentle-natured, modest and slightly shy person in whom this fascination came as a surprise. He kept his enjoyment of it to himself, just as people did in the past with porno magazines and today on their phone. Where others threw themselves enthusiastically into a fantasy world in the scene, Gerrit Jan was able to create his own illusions with his collection of real soldiers.

^{1]} Gardiner, James *A Class Apart: The Private Pictures of Montague Glover*. London: Serpent's Tail (1992: 60).

^{2]} Lemma Wikipedia 'Braquette'. Accessed on 5 August 2022 at <https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Braquette>.

^{3]} See also the article elsewhere in this collection 'Military uniform and fashion' by Els de Baan (2022).

^{4]} See the article elsewhere in this collection 'The army as a refuge for gay men (first half of the 20th century) and (hidden) homosexual codes'.

All the ins and outs of the German uniform

Matthijs de Die le Clercq

My name is Matthijs de Die le Clercq. I was born in 1998 and graduated from the Reinwardt Academy as an archivist and heritage professional, with an interest and specialisation in the Second World War. I've been interested in the Second World War from a very early age, and especially in the Dutch identity cards that were used during the War. Researching people and the stories behind a piece of paper brings history to life and makes it really interesting.

General

Military personnel in the Second World War all wore uniforms made by the country for which they were fighting. Each country had its own style of uniform; for most people, the most recognisable and terrifying uniforms even today are those worn by the soldiers of Nazi Germany. The German uniforms were largely based on the Prussian-style uniforms which were worn from the 19th century onwards. When we think of uniforms from the Second World War, we readily picture German uniforms with swastika armbands.

After Adolf Hitler came to power, Germany was transformed into a totalitarian state. Uniforms became the norm for civilian and military dress. The Nazis preferred an expressive style, giving German citizens a sense that they were not ordinary citizens but part of a greater whole, a national entity.¹

As most people are aware, Hugo Boss was a designer and maker of German uniforms between 1933 and 1945. With just a few sewing machines at his disposal, Hugo Boss joined the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), or Nazi Party in 1931, a move which led to a substantial increase in sales of his clothing. Hugo Boss was one of the official uniform suppliers for Nazi Germany, making uniforms among others for Hitler's early bodyguards, or protection squadrons (the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler), a duty which was subsequently continued by the Schutzstaffel (SS), the NSDAP, Sturmabteilung (SA) and the Hitler Youth

(a sort of paramilitary scouting movement). Up to the end of the War, Boss used around 180 forced labourers and prisoners of war from different countries to produce Hitler's uniforms. After the Second World War, Boss was punished for his activities for and his ties with Nazism.²

Although the different German uniforms closely resembled each other, they were not identical across the German forces. Soldiers could have their own uniforms made by their



Hitlerjugend.

own preferred tailor, provided they complied with certain standards. In addition to a swastika, many German uniforms bore the image of an eagle, often depicted holding the swastika in its talons. On political emblems, the eagle is always shown looking to the left, but for military uniforms it is always shown looking to the right. This created a clear distinction between political and (para)military organisations.

The NSDAP, SS and the Wehrmacht all had special white uniforms which could be worn in the warmer months, between April and October. Two versions were available; with a jacket bearing either a single or a double row of buttons. These jackets could be worn with the matching white trousers or with black trousers, and a matching white cap. The uniforms were virtually identical; the jacket with a double row

of buttons was mainly worn by the Navy.

Political organisations

It was not just members of the armed forces who wore uniforms in Nazi Germany; uniforms were also worn in paramilitary organisations and even in political circles.

NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei))

In the early days of the NSDAP there was no standard uniform, and party members often wore paramilitary uniforms, with a particular fondness for the brown SA shirt during party rallies. The party organisation gradually improved, and the first official uniforms were created in around 1930. These official uniforms comprised a brown shirt or jacket, brown trousers and various insignia. New regulations were introduced in 1932, resulting in the creation of braided shoulder boards and collar insignia, making the NSDAP uniforms clearly distinguishable from the SA uniforms.

The NSDAP was divided into different 'levels', or departments, each with its own insignia:

Ortsgruppen (local level: villages and towns)

Kreisleitung (district level: provinces)

Gauleitung (regional level: states and provinces)

Reichsleitung (national level).

The members of these departments held different ranks, with each rank having its own shoulder boards, collar insignia and armband. Adolf Hitler, along with a few of the most senior party leaders (such as Joseph Goebbels) did not wear specific or distinctive insignia, often wearing a standard brown jacket with black or brown trousers, together with their party badge and standard NSDAP armband.

SA (Sturmabteilung)

The SA uniform was one of the best-known in Nazi Germany. It was light-brown, with a red swastika armband on the left sleeve. The SA uniforms closely resemble the NSDAP uniforms, which consisted of a brown jacket, brown trousers and various insignia. SA uniforms can be recognised by the specific insignia they bore.

The SA, or Sturmabteilung (also referred to as Brownshirts) was a paramilitary group founded by Adolf Hitler in 1921 with the role of protecting NSDAP party rallies against political opponents. Its tactics included intimidating those political opponents.

In the eyes of the NSDAP, the SA was a meeting place for homosexuals. Although formally strongly rejected and even actively combated during the Nazi regime, it was indeed the case that the leadership of the SA contained a fairly large number of homosexual men, and its leader Ernst Röhm is himself thought to have been a homosexual.

SS (Schutzstaffel)

The SS often evokes images of black uniforms with red swastika armbands and highly polished black boots. While this was indeed sometimes the case, it did not apply for all SS uniforms. There were different branches and even organisations within the SS, each with its own uniform. The SS uniform was designed to impress, to convey an aura of power and reflect the fact that the SS was the elite unit within the NSDAP. The SS was thus not part of the German army, although this changed as the War progressed. The primary responsibilities of the SS included guarding the concentration camps.

One of the divisions within the SS was the Leibstandarte, which served as Hitler's personal bodyguard. This SS division predominantly wore black uniforms with a red swastika armband on the left sleeve. These are the Nazi uniforms that we often see in documentaries and videogames.³

Reflecting their status as an elite unit, the SS uniforms bore an eagle of a different design, though still often white or silver in colour. The SS eagle was more angular and had a more aggressive, dangerous appearance than the eagles worn in the air force and the army, for example. It was also not worn on the chest, but on the left arm, on the biceps.

Although the German Red Cross was not a political or military organisation, it came under the auspices of the SS, and its members also wore uniforms. When at the front they mainly wore medical dress, while on the 'home front' their uniforms were distinguished by

their grey/blue colour with large white collars bearing a red cross and a white armband with a red cross on the left sleeve. They wore grey or white caps bearing a round white badge with a red cross.

Reichsarbeitsdienst (RAD)

The Reich Labour Service, (RAD) was established by Nazi Germany to combat unemployment. It was deployed in numerous civil, military and agricultural projects. The RAD uniform consisted of a brown jacket and trousers with an insignia on the left sleeve depicting an inverted shovel with a number designating the unit to which the wearer belonged. A red swastika armband was also frequently worn on the left arm.

Police/military police

The German police predominantly wore green uniforms, both jacket and trousers. They wore an eagle with a swastika on the left arm. There were several divisions within the police, such as the civilian police and the military police. Each division wore an eagle of a different colour: for the military police (Feldgendarmerie) it was orange, for the civilian police (Schutzpolizei) green and for the fire service (Feuerloschpolizei) red.

Divisions within the armed forces

There were many differences in the uniforms worn across the German armed forces. During training and exercises, for example, military

personnel would often wear white uniforms made from drilllich, a denim-like material. These uniforms had fewer characteristic features, and generally bore no insignia, though in some cases training bands were worn on head coverings when drilling in certain tactics.

Although uniforms were not identical across the German armed forces, the different uniforms did resemble each other very closely. They could however be distinguished reasonably easily from the details. The different emblems worn on the uniforms showed the branch or division of the armed forces to which the soldier belonged. But what were the precise differences between the army, air force, navy and SS?

Army

Soldiers in the German army wore a static eagle on the right breast, often white/silver in colour. The standard uniforms were very like the uniforms that had been worn since the 1920s in the Reichswehr.

The colour of the uniforms was field grey (Feldgrau). There was a row of five buttons on the front of the uniform, compared with eight on the earlier uniforms. The jacket was worn with grey trousers, belt and cap or helmet. Ranks were designated by insignia on the collar; NCOs and officers had more decorative insignia.



Mountain rangers (*Gebirgsjäger*) were recognised by an extra insignia worn with the standard army uniform: an Edelweiss flower worn on the right sleeve or cap.

In addition to the standard uniforms, Panzer troops also wore black double-breasted coats, which were easier to manage in the confined interior of tanks. There were also different army uniforms depending on the weather conditions. In the winter, they wore thick (sometimes camouflaged) jackets and trousers, while in the tropics they wore olive or yellow/khaki uniforms with a tropical helmet or cap.

Air force

Members of the German air force (*Luftwaffe*) wore uniforms distinguished by the emblem of an eagle in flight. This eagle was also white/silver in colour.

The standard uniform consisted of a blue-grey jacket with open collar and four pockets with flaps, a light blue shirt and dark blue tie, blue-grey trousers, black leather boots and a blue-grey cap or *Stahlhelm* (steel helmet). Rank was indicated by insignia on the collar patches, with NCOs and officers having

more decorative insignia. The collar insignia resembled birds to show that the wearer was a member of the air force. Different colours for the collar insignia showed which division of the air force the wearer belonged to, for example pilots, ground staff, air defence or a medical branch.

The flying suit usually consisted of a beige jumpsuit, a leather flying helmet and thick, fur-lined boots. The *Fliiegerbluse* was a popular clothing item: a blue-grey jacket with a row of buttons concealed beneath a flap, designed to be worn within the confined space of an aircraft.

Like the army, the air force also had white summer uniforms. They were virtually identical



Air force.

to the army uniforms, though as with the standard uniforms, the eagle was shown in flight rather than static.

Navy

Like the army, the navy (*Kriegsmarine*) uniform had a more static eagle on the right breast. This eagle was not white/silver as in the army, but often yellow/golden. Navy uniforms sometimes also bore anchors emblems, showing clearly that this is a navy uniform. Navy uniforms frequently carried brass or glass buttons; salt-laden seawater oxidised other metals more quickly, and using glass buttons meant the uniforms lasted longer.

The dress uniform, largely worn by officers and NCOs, consisted of a navy-blue dress jacket with a double row of buttons, worn with a white sword belt, medals on the chest and large epaulettes. For standard dress on board



Gebirgsjäger.

navy vessels, serving sailors wore a jacket with limited medals and insignia to show whether they were ordinary seamen or NCOs. A thicker overcoat was worn in bad weather. There was also a special uniform for use in warm and tropical climates. These uniforms were khaki or white in colour.

Submarine crew often wore a leather jacket because of the more arduous conditions at sea. Ordinary seamen always wore a dark blue cap, unlike the captain of the vessel, who wore a white cap to make clear that he was the captain.

Navy personnel who were assigned to a land base, including coastal artillery, wore a grey-green uniform in the same style as the German army uniform. It was worn with a closed collar with collar patches and epaulettes on the shoulder.



Navy.

^{1]} <https://www.encyclopedia.com/fashion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/nazi-style>

^{2]} <https://medium.com/s/aesthetics-of-evil/nazi-chic-the-style-that-just-wont-go-away-f886cd58e38a>

^{3]} <https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schutzstaffel#:~:text=De%20>

3|

*Male friendships in the military/homosexuality in
the armed forces*

Research, Index & Description

The Invisible and Vulnerable in the Vos Collection

Pablo Lerma (researcher/artist)

Pablo Lerma (1986) is a Spanish research-based artist, educator and publisher based in Amsterdam (The Netherlands). His artistic practice is developed at the intersection of image & text with a focus in visual archives and vernacular materials dealing with notions of collective memory, representation and queerness. His work takes various forms from photographic installations to publications.

Sometimes is not about the space in the image but what is left between the subjects and the tension between their gaze, a latent intention that disappears with the turn of the eyes.

This text examines and dissects the photographic Vos Collection in three different approaches taken during my research at IHLIA Heritage. As a visual artist, interested in queer experiences throughout the history of photography, I've been using similar methodologies and tools that might mirror the ones used by archives with the addition of speculation as a survival methodology to understand and fill the gaps within the lack of stories and histories of queer individuals in vernacular photography. The purpose of this text detours from scientific, humanistic and academic expectations, in order to embrace artistic research as a motto to speculate, create, and generate queer approaches to the archival and photographic materials within the Vos Collection.

Divided in three acts, the first approach reflects on the visual materials consulted and the selection of determined images that link to the ideas of body contact and vulnerability. Notes and ruminations that sparked from these consultations are added in the form of footnotes on each box of the collection.

The second approach gravitates around new keywords – in a form of an index – that were generated as a response to the lack of information regarding the individuals in the images. This gap was filled with speculation and queer experience reflecting upon the content and connections found in the photographs.

For the third, and final approach, a set of new descriptions are created around a group of images selected based on the criteria of tenderness, vulnerability, and closeness between these masculine subjects, with the aim to contribute with a counter-narrative to the one existing. These images were shown during the exhibition in partnership with Kunstfort bij Vijfhuizen as part of the project 'Between Breaths', originally started with IHLIA in the beginning of this overall collaboration. Departing from the original vernacular prints, the images taken part of the exhibition were exposed in the space using different dimensions from the originals as well as printed in negative. Adjacent to them, 3d prints in concrete powder highlighted the physical connections captured between the masculine bodies within the photographs.

Index

- I. Ideas of gesture
- II. Isolating moments
- III. Fragments
- IV. Leisure moments
- V. Naked bodies colliding
- VI. Gaze to the other
- VII. Sleepers
- VIII. Vulnerability
- IX. Bunk beds
- X. Sharing activity
- XI. A haircut
- XII. Traumatic masculinity
- XIII. Reproducing
- XIV. Creating
- XV. Certain tension
- XVI. Hidden cruelty
- XVII. Dust a uniform
- XVIII. Return to nature
- XIX. Bucolic
- XX. Pastoral
- XXI. Friendship
- XXII. Friendliness
- XXIII. Camraderie

Research

BOX 1

Touching bodies



Sleepers



BOX 2

Touching bodies



Sleepers



BOX 3²

Only group portraits, military, and single images.

2) I wish you were queer, but you are only homophile.

BOX 4

Touching bodies



Sleepers



BOX 5³ & 6⁴

Touching bodies



Sleepers



^{3]} Only power represented. All the images should return to a latent state.

A return to the photographic negative.

^{4]} Black men portraited with white soldiers.

BOX 7⁵

Touching bodies



^{5]} I've been looking for sexual traces by looking at their bulge. The lack of sexuality is obvious. That is space is filled with fiction and experience.

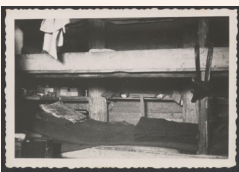
BOX 8⁶

No interest.

^{6]} There is a space to fill in all of these images.

BOX 9⁷

Images of bunkers



^{7]} Something interesting about the beach images.

Why am I attracted to certain images?

Why can't I decontextualize the content?

BOX 10⁸

Touching bodies



Cruising



^{8]} What is my role of speculating?

BOX 11⁹

No interest. ^{9]} How in a contemporary experience a gay man can find connections in history?

BOX 12

Touching bodies

**BOX 13¹⁰**

No interest.

^{10]} In the military group portraits, there is nothing to pull out from the group, they are all stiff and performing in the group.

BOX 14¹¹

No interest. ^{11]} The obsession with a moment in time when you could be isolated and just surrounded by men.

BOX 15

Touching bodies



- XXIV. Comradeship
- XXV. Images by contact
- XXVI. Silhouettes
- XXVII. Shadows
- XXVIII. Complicit
- XXIX. Group
- XXX. Intimacy
- XXXI. Reflection on time past
- XXXII. Death
- XXXIII. Desire
- XXXIV. Pieces of them
- XXXV. Terrible
- XXXVI. Shovel
- XXXVII. Medical
- XXXVIII. Bodies come closer
- XXXIX. Bunkers
- XL. The act of photographing
- XLI. Lau Smith
- XLII. Typologies
- XLIII. Military men
- XLIV. Portraits
- XLV. Studio portraits
- XLVI. Nature as a backdrop
- XLVII. Earrings
- XLVIII. Fluid
- XLIX. Vulnerability
- L. Eyes closed
- LI. Sleeping
- LII. Solo portraits
- LIII. Profile
- LIV. Not looking at the camera
- LV. Self-portraits
- LVI. Only group portraits
- LVII. Military
- LVIII. Single ones
- LIX. War as an opportunity to hide
- LX. Stimulating moist
- LXI. Summer
- LXII. Cold
- LXIII. Warmth
- LXIV. Humidity

Descriptions



Lens flare on both sides of the frame, perhaps technical difficulties in the process and/or sunny day, possible warm weather. Outdoor scene.

Wooden walls in the background. Shade. Coating scratched by the season's inclemency.

Open window.

Wooden floors covered by the two main figures.

Shirtless youngster on dark pants. Crossed arms around the chest, hands under the elbows. Smooth-skinned chest, visible nipples.

Recent haircut. Blond. Clean shaved face. Twink appearance. White.

Admiration glance to his fellow partner. Intense. Complicit. Looking for reciprocity.

Looking for eye contact.

Full body white attire mature man. Dark leather boots. Relaxed crossed arms over the lap. Visible hands. Calm.

Possibly recent haircut too. Blond. Wet. Daddy appearance. White.

Feeling observed by his fellow partner. Complicit. Nodding. Crossing gazes.

Bodies touching. Shoulder on shoulder. Skin to garment. Sweat.

Closeness. Consent. Elbow to elbow. Intimacy.



Clean frame. Slightly tilted margins. Almost rectangular.

Sunny day. Probably summer. Outdoor scene in nature.

High view of a mountainous scenery. Dam in the background. Solo tree standing. Shallow depth of field.

Shirtless middle age man with dark pants. Right arm around right shoulder of the other man. Left hand pressing upper left elbow of the other man. Tightness. White.

Hairless chest with one visible nipple.

Possibly blond. Well-groomed. Wet effect. Sweat.

Camaraderie and closeness. Body contact. Protection. Half smile. Security and admiration.

Middle age man with pale shirt wide open in the chest area. Zipped belt dark pants. White.

Head leaning on the other man crossing right arm over the shoulder. Comfortable position.

Relaxed body position. Subjected.

Slightly longer blond hair. Well-groomed too.

Body contact and closeness with his partner in the photograph. Friendship. Partnership. Trust.

Both men looked away. Outside the frame, to the left. They look to the light.

Their bodies are blended in the light. Joint desire. Possible future. Hidden.

Well exposed image.

Outdoor scene. Warm season. Possibly cloudy or late afternoon.

Public area. Crowd in the back. Swimming pool or lake.

Subjects almost centered. Isolated from the movement and action in the back. Men and women in the back. Some men wear military uniform. No one looked at the camera and/or subjects photographed.

Both men in swimsuits sitting on a white double towel. Grass area.

Middle age man with dark trunk swimsuit. Bare chest and visible nipples. Fit complexion. White.

Legs are bent towards the other man. Left hand holds on the left ankle. Wears a watch.

Candid pose. Gentle.

Mature age man with dark full body swimsuit with suspenders. Slightly hairy chest visible through the upper part of the swimsuit. White.

Dark circular sunglasses.

Same pose with bent legs towards the center of the photograph. Both men knees touch.

Right fist closed near right ankle.

Relaxed pose.

Bodies touched upon shoulders and knees. Arms interlaced in the back, touching around the elbow area.

They both look relaxed, and smile, timidly. Complicit appearance. Challenging pose and attitude to the camera.

Bodies blended. Pose to impress. Joy. Legacy. Possible future. Not visible but not hidden.





Correctly exposed with clear frame. Horizon line tilted to the right. Blur in the front affecting part of the photograph.
 Outdoor scene. Possibly summer. Very sunny and windy day by the sea. Harsh light. Maritime scene in the Beach.

Piece of land in the far horizon. Seaweed and rocks populating the seashore.
 Subjects off center in the right part of the photograph.
 Both men in swimsuit sitting on – possibly – a beach towel or perhaps in the sand. Alone.
 Isolated.

Young man in dark trunk swimsuit. Smooth chest. Visible right nipple. White.
 Blond. Hair combed by the wind.
 Closer pose. Holding. Left arm around bent knee. Frame cuts the rest of the body.

Right part of the body – shoulder and pectoral – touch the other man.
 Middle age man in dark full body swimsuit with suspenders. Visible part of smooth chest. White.
 Blond. Hair combed by the sea.
 Wearing spectacles.

Relaxed pose laying on left side of the body. Left arm holds the weight. Legs extended to the right side. Body touching and leaning towards the other man. Right arm reposed on the hip. Hand disappeared behind the back. Frame cuts the rest of the body.

Complicit pose. Bodies touching in different sections. Possibly sweat. Skin to skin.
 Arms partially intertwined. Closeness. Proudness.
 Direct gaze towards the camera.

Possible partnership. Tenderness. Not hidden, not socially visible.

The army as a refuge for gay men (first half of 20th century) and hidden homosexual codes

Ton of Holland penned by Michel Otten

Ton of Holland, pseudonym of Ton Hoogerwerf (b. 1956), visual artist. Graduated from the Royal Academy of Art, The Hague.

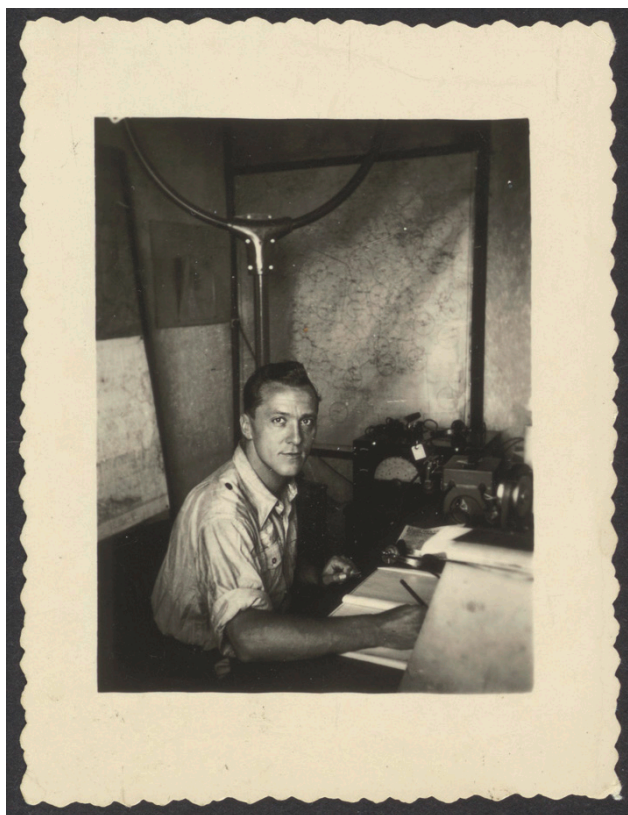
Artistic, exhibition, interior, fashion, graphic, textile and wallpaper designer. Curator of numerous exhibitions. Specialises in 2D and 3D ideas. His background and expertise in the different disciplines lead to a constant cross-fertilisation, lending his work a tension and creating unusual combinations in his visual language. Belonging to different subcultures provides an excellent basis for his work. Handwork and perfection are a noble ambition here.

Michel Otten (1983) is the webmaster at IHLIA, and also has his own business as a freelance copywriter and editor.

I have sometimes asked myself: why did you pick out this particular photo? What effect did it have on you? Gerrit Jan probably applied some kind of criteria for selecting his photos, because otherwise he would have taken the whole box with a thousand photos from the flea market. He spent a lot of time in Berlin and, like me, lived there for a while. We used to talk about how you could buy loads of that kind of stuff at the time on the Ostbahnhofmarkt. It's also possible that he had to buy a set of photos in packs, just like porno pictures in the past. There might have been two or three among them that he found attractive, but had to take the rest as well.

Compared with a few pictures that I find photographically really good, showing great technical skill with good composition and lighting, the above photo isn't really very interesting. Perhaps Gerrit Jan was only concerned with the fact that it was an attractive young man who looked enticing with his half open shirt. What makes him extra attractive are those manly rolled up sleeves as he sits so respectably at his desk. It was for the same reason that Gerrit Jan occasionally also wore shirts with rolled up sleeves. At the same time, it makes the subject look like an active person: roll up your sleeves and get to work.

He may also have seen something in the photo which made him suspect that the young man was gay. I also recognise that tendency, sometimes unconsciously, to make an assessment about what kind of person someone is. But if I'm just walking in the street I can't really tell whether or not someone is gay. It wasn't like that 20 years ago, say: I could tell perfectly if someone was gay. I don't know what it was, but you just knew. People give off subtle signals; they might be very small



details: how they wear their clothes, their hair, their body language or a certain look in their eye. It's hard to pin down what that look is, but you can often tell whether there's something more than just friendship between men who go around together.

There are a number of symbols to make clear what a person's preferences are or to show that they belong to a certain group. The references to homosexuality have always been very subtle, and especially in the period represented in the photos collected by Gerrit Jan. Because we didn't live in those times, it's

harder to recognise those signals. Yet there are still a few details which can give us a clue.

I can't verify it personally, but when men started wearing shirts with a wider collar than normal, as in the left-hand photo – or wore a 'Schiller collar': a wide, spread collar, open at the front, named after the eponymous German poet – it was evidently regarded as very provocative at the time. Perhaps clearer is the very prissy photo on the right. The subject is holding a walking cane – not to help with walking but because he believes it is chic. You can be absolutely sure that this man is gay:



Various men with hats from the Vos collection.

with that silk scarf, left just a little loose, tied and folded just so, not simply crossed over. And with those gloves in his hand, something that the Queen also always does. A pipe was completely normal in those days, whereas moustaches and beards were out of fashion.

Another striking detail in this photo is the hat. The same goes for the men in the other photos. If I compare this with the photos of my father and grandfather in which they are wearing hats, they never wore them at such a steep angle. The position of a hat on the head can say a great deal; these men could very well be homosexual.

A really good example of this is Quentin Crisp, a flamboyant figure from England who was also known for his humour. 'Where homosexuals in the 1940s and 50s did their absolute best to be as invisible as possible, Crisp did the opposite, with his silk scarves, floppy hats and distinguished but always striking make-up.'



Quentin Crisp. Credit: Homer Sykes/Alamy Stock Photo.

The wave of emancipation that swept through the 1960s and 70s led to massive changes and the symbols and signals became clearer. There were the T-shirts with protest slogans, badges and small brooches, such as the broken rifle that was already being worn before the Second World War. It's a slightly bleak irony that these were also worn whilst Hitler was in power. The best-known brooch is perhaps the pink triangle which emerged from the Nazi camps. But there was also the strange symbol that is almost never seen today, a kind of stylised Greek letter, which was worn on a chain to advertise the fact that the wearer was gay.

In the 1970s it was also the custom to wear a bunch of keys on your belt. And whether you wore it on the left or on the right said everything. A bunch of keys was more subtle than a handkerchief, because everyone had one. Whether you wore your earring in your left or right ear also sent out a signal.

Gay men adopt all kinds of characteristics from other groups, after which it becomes mainstream. At a certain point they began having tattoos, something that was previously reserved for criminals, seafarers and outcasts. They were worn on the biceps to accentuate them and make them appear larger. Fine, until the day my straight neighbour also had a tribal tattoo done. At a certain point gay men, often wearing a white T-shirt, all began sporting moustaches, until everyone started growing a moustache. I have four brothers; all of them had a pair of leather trousers, because that was the fashion. When my mother asked if I didn't want to pair, too, I didn't dare get any; I was far too afraid of becoming excited by them. I told my mother that I'd rather she bought me a pair of pleated trousers. It was funny, because my mother's reaction was that wearing pleated trousers showed everyone that you were gay. A more recent example is young gay men starting to wear nail polish; now everyone does it. The nose ring of the true 'gay pig' is now also worn mainly by young teenage girls.

After a while, these codes disappear and gay men begin looking for new signals and codes to set themselves apart. If everyone is wearing one earring, gays begin wearing two. The next step is then a nipple piercing. A friend of mine who lives in Berlin told me that all the gay men

there go to second-hand shops and rummage through the women's department. They take whatever is on the rack that fits them – it makes no difference what it is combined with – and put it on.

So today I find it increasingly difficult to recognise all the codes and signals. I'm probably too old. It makes me wonder how today's young people, in such an individualistic society, find those points of recognition, especially given that the way someone dresses no longer gives much of a clue, and lots of people wear the same clothes as my straight brother.



Lots of the photos in Gerrit Jan's collection are group photos. Can we say something about them in terms of (hidden) codes? How ordinary, or just a step beyond ordinary, are these photos, like the two above? The soldiers are often just a bit too close to each other. They are holding each other's hands, someone has an arm around his neighbour or a leg is laid over another. When I see a photo like that, in which someone has one leg over the

other, it can be very ambiguous. It's just like in historical paintings, where an open birdcage represented the presence of a prostitute. For me, that makes a photograph very erotic.

At the same time, you wonder whether these young men might have only held this pose for a brief moment before getting on with other things. Literally a snapshot of a single moment, just like taking a selfie with your friends today, when you grab hold of someone just at the moment that the snap is taken. It's a sort of natural reaction.

Ranks and status

Apart from the fact that it is difficult to identify the subtle codes and signals in the period when the photos in Gerrit Jan's collection were taken, the world then was also a very different place. For example, if you were a bachelor, you weren't allowed to rent a house on your own and had to move into rooms. It was also not easy if you wanted to forge a career. So what did you do? You kept your mouth shut or you set up your own trade. The army offered opportunities for career development. You started as a simple private and progressed to the rank of sergeant or corporal. Ideal when you're young, working on the farm in a small village and feel you have few future prospects. It's easy for the idea to grow that the army is where you belong. As an added bonus, you get to wear a fantastic 'costume' which also enhances your body². So you not only look good every day, you also have those career opportunities. In our house, too, there were celebrations when my brother was promoted from private to sergeant. It's also a reward system that is visible for other people. It confers status, especially for poor families. And if one child joins the navy and the other joins the army and comes home wearing a smart uniform adorned with stars and stripes, that provides a sort of upgrade for the family. It's still something that very much occupies people today. The same thing is also evident from people's school choices. There is a great shortage of tradespeople today, because it seems as if all the emphasis now is on academic achievement.

As well as a reward system, it can also be a punishment system. Where military uniforms exude authority, there are also uniforms

which signify being subjugated to authority, such as school uniforms and prison uniforms. Prisoners can be depersonalised by making them all wear the same ridiculous uniform, so that if they escape everyone will recognise them. And in the Japanese police force, officers who had broken the rules had a stripe or armband stripped from their uniform and were forced to wear a Hello Kitty armband instead, as an embarrassing punishment.

The system of social advancement also applied in the navy and in the Catholic Church. Ultimately, anyone could become pope if they did their best. In Catholic families, one child traditionally had to be 'sacrificed' to God. He then entered the priesthood or, if he was a gifted learner or had a more adventurous nature, he could become a padre. If you were lesbian, you became a nun, and you could also become a teacher, which meant you could simply carry on working. That didn't always turn out well, of course, for example if we think of the stories of child abuse; under a veneer of elegance and splendour, and whilst walking round in velvet and gold brocade, the most terrible things were perpetrated. But ultimately the main thing was that you were among men – though that was not always necessarily sexualised. It did sometimes happen in the army that when boys and men were together – there were no women – and they felt the urge, they simply 'did it', even though really they had heterosexual feelings. At the time none of it mattered very much, but for homosexuals it offered a safe environment and the opportunity to be among other men.

¹¹ Bamber Delver *Quentin Crisp* (1999) in *de Groene Amsterdammer*. Accessed on: 19-09-2022 via <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/quentin-crisp>

²¹ See the article *The erotic power of the uniform* elsewhere in this collection.

Comrades in uniform

Jan Willem Tellegen

Jan Willem Tellegen (b. 1956) studied Psychology and History at the University of Amsterdam (UvA) (1984). During his studies, his main interests were in the history of culture and ideas, and he was involved in the beginnings of gay studies at UvA. After graduating, he worked as a consultant in the private sector. Over the last ten years he has been heavily involved in volunteering and also writes boys' fiction.

Male friendships and homosexual relationships among German soldiers in the Third Reich

In July 1934, a series of murders was carried out in Germany which came to be known as the 'Night of the Long Knives'. It was a political purge by Hitler and the SS to rid themselves of rivals of the Nazi regime. The purge also saw the murder of the Sturmabteilung leader Ernst Röhm, who was also fairly widely known to be homosexual. A speculative portrayal of his murder was presented in 'The Damned', the Luchino Visconti film from 1969, which portrayed the murders as having taken place after a drinking party with attractive young men, some dressed in drag. It was common in Weimar Germany to make jokes about the Nazis being a bunch of homosexuals.¹ Before 1934, several senior Nazis were known to be homosexual, and the sniggering about the intimate relations between Nazi comrades appears to indicate that at the very least, homosexuality was tacitly tolerated. Homosexuality and the masculinity cult of comradeship and deeply felt faith in the Volksgemeinschaft appear to be closely linked. Whether or not that was actually the case, after the events of 1934 it was all brought to a brutal end. What is certain is that the SS and Himmler, who is regarded as having an almost paranoid homophobia, upheld a strict moral legal code, which made homosexuality in the SS and, by extension, in the Wehrmacht and other German organisations such as the Reichsarbeitsdienst, an untouchable taboo, a despicable assault on everything associated with masculine military honour.

Trial transcripts show that discovery attracted severe punishments.² Detention or being banished to the front were the rule for soldiers

found to be consorting with each other or with civilians. Some got off more lightly, as the account of Hans Scholl illustrates; he rose to fame mainly because of his membership of *Die Weiße Rose*, one of the few resistance groups in Nazi Germany. Hans was arrested and tried in 1943. His family celebrated his heroism as a resistance fighter after the War, but omitted to mention that before the War, in 1937, as a member of the Hitler Youth, he and others had been punished for 'indecent acts'. He was aged 17 when he had sex with the 15 year-old Rolf Futterknecht, and also engaged in incriminating correspondence with an older Swedish officer. During his hearing he admitted that it had been a *Schweinerei*, but that he was motivated by 'the great love that I had for Futterknecht'.³ A number of prison sentences were handed down, but Hans got away with a light punishment because he was young and foolish, rather than an incorrigible *Volksschädling*.

It seems simple. Friendship between true men was important, but sex between men was forbidden and led to imprisonment and subsequent posting back into the ranks. But even after 1934, a dual morality remained around the 'hard' and 'soft' aspects of comradeship. A great many words have been written, far more than can be dealt with here, about the culture of 'multiple' masculinity in the various uniformed organisations in the Third Reich.⁴ 'Multiple' in the sense that, for true men, true comrades, the bond, friendship and even love within a tightknit group of men was a central feature in different combinations of hard and soft emotions for each other. Masculinity combined strength and cold-bloodedness with a strong sense of love and servitude to the group. This was a core element of the Nazi ideology of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, in which individual sacrifice for the shared ideal and melding with the group took on religious proportions; deliberately hyped-up euphoria and eradication of individuality to create a feeling of a single will of the people in the enormous groups, as in the Nuremberg Rallies, for example, or with comrades in the army.

Anyone wishing to get through it could not escape this. Uncompromisingly masculine in the drive for the victory, gentle and tender in the desire for friendship with comrades. The line between the two was a difficult and ambiguous one to tread.

The challenging question is: how to walk that line? What did the bond with army comrades mean? And how did the comradeship and love that soldiers felt for each other relate to individual desires, to the need for warmth and physicality? How did soldiers get along with each other, with their willingness to make sacrifices for each other on the battlefield through thick and thin, but also in the barracks, during the endless periods of boredom, without women, without sex?

Without sex? That cannot be true. All manner of things obviously took place between

boys and men, both with each other and with civilians. Despite the trials and ego documents, we know little about it – much less than will have actually taken place. Also, in a free society people do not always shout about what they do, and there was every reason to agree a vow of silence here. In the new Nazi ideology after 1934, homosexuality was seen as a form of deeply worrying infringement of the masculinity ideal, precisely because uncompromising hardness and gentle friendship were so closely connected; but sex was put beyond a steel boundary. It was behind a forbidden door – so forbidden that it perhaps also proved a continual and toxic temptation. There was a stark opposition between idealised emotions of friendship, which also incorporated physical rituals, and sexuality, which meant betrayal of those same emotions.



German boys in the Reichsarbeitsdienst (Reich Labour Service, RAD). The Vos collection contains many photos of boys in the RAD, a German organisation with a comparable discipline and comrade culture to the army. The RAD performed a wide range of tasks for the army, among others.



Germans from the Reichsarbeitsdienst (Reich Labour Service, RAD). There are any number of such group photos in the collection.

In the more senior echelons, in particular, gay sex produced strong feelings of dishonour and betrayal. A striking example in the Netherlands is that of Co Spreij.⁵ Spreij was a senior SS officer who was reported in December 1943 by two subordinates after allegedly attempting to engage in 'homosexually tinted acts' with them whilst in a drunken state. Spreij confessed straightaway, though precisely what he confessed to is not clear. It also made no difference whether he had merely knocked on that forbidden 'door' or whether it had been thrown wide open with abandon. What mattered was that the death sentence imposed by the *Kriegsgericht* military court was not carried out. Instead, in May 1944 Spreij was presented with a pistol on the orders of Himmler, with the expectation of taking his own life, which Spreij dutifully did. Such an exaggerated act carried out in order to preserve the honour of both the SS and of Spreij himself is suggestive of a kind of 'cleansing ritual' which had a symbolism that went far beyond simple execution.

Bearing this kind of information from the literature and sources in mind whilst looking through the enormous photo collection of

Gerrit Jan Vos offers a tremendous opportunity to see how soldiers interacted with each other in practice: silently, but in a variety of relationships with each other, in larger and smaller groups, in pairs and alone; in uniform but also in their free time, with naked upper bodies, cutting each other's hair,⁶ or in the unflattering shorts and swimming trunks which men wore at that time.⁷

What were they trying to express together? Who did they hope, know, expect would look at the photos? What were they trying to preserve for posterity? What was conscious, what was innocently thoughtless? There are not many photos which clearly show that it was a time of war; just a few photos of destroyed buildings with soldiers nearby. In that respect, the collection is one-sided. No SS *Einsatzgruppen* troops here standing by a pit filled with shot Jewish victims, or covered in dirt, frozen and dead in the mud of Stalingrad. We have to conjure up those photographs and those events in our own minds. Most of the photos in the collection record a positive moment, either to mark an event or just taken informally because someone happened to have a camera. Some of them are snapshots;

most are stiffly or informally posed. The subjects hold onto each other, draped on and around each other, happy to show the bond between them. The gatherings always look 'positive', laughing and happy. The collection mainly consists of photos the subjects could send home; proud faces: look how hard we are working, how much fun we are having and how smartly we march.

Comradeship requires a demonstrable show of bonding when photos are taken, with arms round each other's waists and shoulders;⁸ occasionally arm in arm.⁹ Military morale and friendship bring soldiers physically close together, with shoulders and knees touching, sometimes holding each other playfully and teasingly, playfully mocking and being mocked, because this expresses comradeship, because it shows the bond between true friends, because it feels good.¹⁰ Squeezing someone's arm ends with an embrace by way of conclusion. Perhaps it touches on the boundary of physicality which slips into eroticism; anything is permissible. Alcohol

or tiredness increase the intimacy.¹¹ And fantasising with the *gay gaze* is okay.¹²

There are photographs in many armed forces of 'role reversal rituals', parties where young men dress up in women's clothes and which appear to have everything to do with the absence of women and suppressed sexuality. As far as I could see, there were no such photographs in this collection. There are photos taken at parties with dressing up,¹³ soldiers dancing in pairs,¹⁴ but no transvestism.¹⁵ We do see some photos of dormitories with all the beds pushed together,¹⁶ and sometimes soldiers in the same bed.¹⁷ But then, wouldn't young men in the cold Russian winter have slept close to each other, simply to keep warm?

This collection does not contain many nude photos. Such photos do exist; naked swimming and sport certainly had a place in Germany's *Frei Körper Kultur*. The nude photos¹⁸ that this collection does contain indicate that there was no prudishness about



German soldiers.



German soldiers: members of the SS.

nudity. Innocent pictures of men washing together, using the toilet,¹⁹ tending the wounded, getting changed: the naked body neither hidden nor put on display. The rituals of male friendships in the army undoubtedly served to emphasise an environment in which bodies were simply normal and close by, a part of making friends for life, including dealing with each other's emotions. Couples who touch each other always look a little more intimate.²⁰ There are photos which, without knowing the context, appear so intimate that we see more than comradeship in them.²¹ But they are the exceptions; and it must be said that, in many of those informal, more intimate photos, it is often not clear whether they are actually of German soldiers.

The large number of photos also enables us to see where the limits lay. Putting your hand on your friend's thigh was not done, for example. Neither was holding hands or touching cheeks. Looking carefully, it is possible to see how far touching and intimacy went. Arms around each other and on shoulders were an expression of friendship and bonding, even when the boys were half naked in the heat of summer.²² Often the soldiers simply stand close together, without touching. My impression is that when in uniform, a more formal moment, they less often have their arms over each other's shoulders. In many cases the young men are close together simply because the group would otherwise not fit on the photo. To be honest, I do not see the exalted aspects of the official morality in these pictures. Comradeship is chaste, formal or giggly. There are a number of photos in which people playfully threaten each other through gritted teeth,²³ or which feature a pretend court martial,²⁴ but I see no sign of exaggerated 'martial' overtones, nor any emphasis on the hard aspects of masculinity. They are just young men playing leapfrog, pitching tents, digging trenches, raising flags or peeling potatoes. This last activity does have a degree of intimacy; the pan is in the middle, so the men are forced to sit in a tight circle,²⁵ but the general impression is one of them just enjoying each other's company and making the best of things.

The homo-social military culture thus also appears to be an easygoing hetero-culture, where the boundary with the homophobic space was easily kept at a great distance. Marking a forbidden boundary is almost unnecessary; remaining silent is enough,

because it is not supposed to exist. Straight young men can love each other intensely, but sexuality is projected somewhere else, not on each other. This is no different from any number of other male communities. How a young man with desires for one or more other young men managed in the carefree 'touching culture' is also a well-known story. These young men found it especially difficult to keep up the innocent physicality of the comradeship ritual, always uncertain at what point they might stray unwittingly and unnoticed across an invisible boundary.

In such a culture, an exalted taboo is not needed in order to keep homosexuality at bay, because it is so obviously out of place in the manly, shoulder-to-shoulder macho majority culture. It makes gay men easy and sad victims. They do things in secret, hold their tongues, suffer in silence, until fate – perhaps – intervenes. And it is questionable whether all the fine details of the official ideology actually reached the barracks and the boys from the villages and small towns. Klaus Theweleit's two-part analysis of male fantasies (*Männerphantasien*) devotes extensive attention to masculinity and homosexuality in the Third Reich. He quotes from a letter from a soldier who recounts how fantastic it was to have sex with other soldiers in the army: "Für uns war alles so natürlich, keiner dachte an Pathologie oder Kriminalität; es war für uns ganz selbstverständlich" ['It was all so natural for us, nobody thought about pathology or criminality; it just felt right'].²⁶ By way of explanation, Theweleit suggests that sex in the army was a more or less unconscious act of undermining the patriarchal discipline, a symbol of resistance and elevation above the power of the officers. He could be right.

It could also simply be a matter of plain old sexual desire. Crossing boundaries, to be sure, and a more serious offence in the army than in civilian society, but I personally am struck particularly by what that soldier – clearly being careful not to be discovered – writes: 'It just felt right'. They were just normal, impulsive boys at a far remove from ideological or intellectual ideas about morality and identity. That's how it must have been for Hans Scholl, and luckily for him, as a member of the Hitler Youth he got off lightly. Not so Co Spreij, who moved in very close proximity to the ideological powers that be. For him and those around him it was a matter of honour, a penalty paid with a pistol shot.



German Army soldiers.



Germans peeling potatoes in their white work uniforms. They may be soldiers or they could be members of the Reich Labour Service, for example.

¹¹ Martin van Amerongen – *Kameraden in het kwaad*. In: *Groene Amsterdammer* nr 25, 1995. *Sappige details en voorbeelden van grappen over de "nichtencultuur" bij de nazi's voor 1934*. Zoals deze: "Een zeker lid van de SA/ stond stafchef Ernst Röhm zo na/ dat hij om hem te imponeren/ Heil Hitler rond de aars liet tatoeëren."

¹² Pieter Koenders – *Tussen christelijk réveil en seksuele revolutie*. Amsterdam 1996, o.m. pp. 406-415. *Dit gaat over Nederland en over processen in militaire organisaties bij ontdekking*. Er waren in het leger uiteraard geen openlijke homo's. Vervolg van homoseksuelen als zodanig is dan ook een ander en complex verhaal.

¹³ Judith Schuyf - *Leve de vrijheid! Hans Scholl, de Weiße Rose en het leger*. In *Gaynews* 333, No. 3, Special Issue: *Masculinity and the Third Reich*, pp. 390-418.

¹⁴ Thomas Kühne – *Protean Masculinity, hegemonic masculinity: soldiers in the Third Reich*. *Central European History*, SEPTEMBER 2018, Vol. 51, No. 3, Special Issue: *Masculinity and the Third Reich*, pp. 390-418.

¹⁵ <https://www.westervoort1940.nl/spreij.html>

¹⁶ 7185, 6951

¹⁷ 7099, 8635, 9320

¹⁸ 8683, van dergelijke foto's bevat de collectie heel veel voorbeelden.

¹⁹ 7757, 7087, 9186

²⁰ 8687, 7143, 8518, 9079

²¹ 8658, 7834, 6931. 8834 is een soort uniform pin-up door een fotograaf die op de grond ligt.

²² Kijk bijvoorbeeld naar 7846, 6890, 6898, 6951

²³ 6952, 6958

²⁴ 8488

²⁵ 8619 lijken twee soldaten met boezems? Of wordt er geposeerd vanwege de vorm van een uitrustingsstuk?

²⁶ 9295

²⁷ 8939

²⁸ 9278, 8656, 8566, 9278

²⁹ 8615

³⁰ 9079, 6935, 7085

³¹ 6904, 7134, 7152, 8050, 8480, 8539, 9067, 9079

³² 7002

³³ 8673, 8978

³⁴ 8696

³⁵ 9949

³⁶ Klaus Theweleit – *Männerphantasien II*, Frankfurt Main 1978, p 368.

DRESS TO IMPRESS

The photo collection of Gerrit Jan Vos (1962-2017)

IHLIA has held the Vos photo collection since 2018. It is an excellent extension of and supplement to our photo collections, in terms of period, provenance and subject matter. The Vos Collection contains more than 4,000 photos, mainly dating from the years 1930-1950, with photographs from Germany as well as England and the United States. They are amateur photos, largely of men in military uniform.

The Vos Collection is named after the collector Gerrit Jan Vos (1962-2017).

Vos was a homosexual man who taught fashion in Rotterdam and Bielefeld, in Germany, and collected photos in his spare time. His fascination with fashion, uniforms and male beauty helped shape his photo collection. Following his death, Gerrit Jan Vos' photo collection was gifted to IHLIA.



Gerrit Jan Vos | Roelof Mulder Fotografie

IHLIA was able to digitize these photos thanks to a grant from the Mondriaan Fund surrounding '75 years of Freedom'. Various experts were asked to view this unique collection and write an article about it. The result is this bundle: Dress to Impress.