

## **Male Bonds in Nineteenth-Century Art**

Organized by Ghent University and the European Society for Nineteenth-Century Art (ESNA), in cooperation with the University of Antwerp and the Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent

Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent, Belgium

15-16 May 2018

Submission deadline: 15 October 2017

Website: <http://www.malebonds.ugent.be/>

*Male Bonds* is a two-day international conference that aims to explore the place of male bonds in nineteenth-century artistic practice and visual arts. The conference invites participants to reflect on the ways in which changing notions of masculinity and male sexuality impacted forms of sociability between men in the artistic scene of the long nineteenth century. In so doing, it seeks to build a bridge between traditional art-historical scholarship and the fields of gender and gay and lesbian studies: an interdisciplinary exchange of which the full potential for scholarship on the nineteenth century remains to be exploited.

Male homosociality helped structure nineteenth-century European and American society. Its pre-eminence at that time follows, *inter alia*, from the general separation between men and women in social roles if not in social spheres, and from the lack of a strictly binary view of male sexual orientation. The personal lives and careers of men bore the marks of their relations with other men: with brothers, friends, colleagues, pupils, business associates and many others. Such relations were characterized both by the dynamics of comradeship and by the hierarchies of class, age, race, professional status, etc. They were both established between individuals and in collectivities, especially as fraternal organizations flourished from the late eighteenth century onwards. So intense could men's relations be that they seem to have included possibilities of a romantic and erotic kind that are foreign to normative relationships between men today, even if male-male intimacy relied upon women's bodies for its consolidation.

Especially in the fast-paced decades around the turn of the century, changes arose in Europe and the United States that affected male homosociality to varying degrees. Categories such as 'inversion' (i.e. the reversal of masculine gender identity) and 'homosexuality' came into being through the interplay of increasingly visible queer subcultures and of a discursive explosion emanating from the fields of medicine, psychiatry, law, etc. The increasing conception of same-sex sexualities coincided and intermingled with other challenges to traditional notions of manhood – e.g. fears of degeneration, women's entry into education, politics and the work force – to such an extent that scholars have described a wide-ranging fin-de-siècle "crisis of masculinity". Men's answers to these challenges altered the ways in which they related to other men, establishing for instance a "rough and tough" hegemonic masculinity and what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has designated a "male homosexual panic".

This conference strives to probe, challenge and expand upon this academic grand narrative of male homosociality through the lens of art history. It aims to establish a multifaceted survey of the male bonds that underpinned nineteenth-century art, and to consider the theoretical and methodological implications of the study thereof. Gender studies, queer theory and gay and lesbian studies have made available a great many histories and concepts with which to critically examine the specificity of gender

and sexuality in art: an exchange through which all disciplines involved stand to be enriched. We welcome papers that undertake this interdisciplinary endeavor, and mark men in art history as gendered historical subjects.

Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Friendships, professional ties and family relations
- The artist's society, the brotherhood, the academy, the studio
- Links with architecture, music, literature, applied arts, etc.
- Links with politics, law, religion, medicine, sports, the military, etc.
- Intersectionality and the role of class, race, sexuality, age, power, etc.
- Ethnicity, colonialism, orientalism and intercultural encounters
- Homophobia and homoeroticism, same-sex desire, queerness
- Women among men, as solvent and/or detractor of men's bonds
- Male bonds as an artistic theme, the portrait and *Freundschaftsportrait*, the male nude

We invite proposals for 20-minute papers in English, to be sent to [malebonds@ugent.be](mailto:malebonds@ugent.be) by October 15. Please combine in one single pdf file: a 300-word abstract, 1 or 2 images, and a 100-word bio. We also welcome proposals for presentations in French and German, but – if accepted – ask that the accompanying PowerPoint be in English. Selected speakers will be contacted in the course of December. Following the conference, a selection of papers will be peer reviewed and published in a journal or edited volume.

Confirmed keynote speakers: Anthea Callen (University of Nottingham and the Australian National University) and Michael Hatt (University of Warwick)

Organizing committee: Thijs Dekeukeleire (Ghent University), Henk de Smaele (University of Antwerp), Rachel Esner (University of Amsterdam), Peggy Hobbels (Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent), Katharina Pewny (Ghent University), Lisa Smit (Van Gogh Museum), Marjan Sterckx (Ghent University)

Scientific committee: Jan Dirk Baetens (Radboud University Nijmegen), Gert Buelens (Ghent University), Anthea Callen (University of Nottingham and the Australian National University), Johan De Smet (Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent), Thijs Dekeukeleire (Ghent University), Henk de Smaele (University of Antwerp), Stefan Dudink (Radboud University), Rachel Esner (University of Amsterdam), Michael Hatt (University of Warwick), Mayken Jonkman (RKD-Netherlands Institute for Art History), Katharina Pewny (Ghent University), Jenny Reynaerts (Rijksmuseum), Abigail Solomon-Godeau (University of California, Santa Barbara), Lisa Smit (Van Gogh Museum), Marjan Sterckx (Ghent University), Maite van Dijk (Van Gogh Museum), Catherine Verleysen (Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent), Kaat Wils (University of Leuven)





*Aimé-Jules Dalou, Brotherhood (La fraternité), 1883, plaster.  
Paris, city hall of the Xth arrondissement. Credit: Coyau / Wikimedia Commons / CC BY-SA 3.0.*