

Emil Otto Hoppé was one of the most prominent photographers of the early twentieth century. Beginning his professional career in 1907, he very quickly became the preferred portraitist of “the great and the good,” with a clientele that included the highest levels of British and European royalty, politicians, and most of the major public figures of the day.

As a proud artist, however, Hoppé’s personal sympathies were with the creative community. He was always hip to the leading edge of culture, and had a fascinating social circle. Recognizing his gift for capturing and revealing character, many creative people went to Hoppé to have their portrait made at the peak of their careers.

Hoppé photographed the master dancer Vaslav Nijinsky in his prime, as well as the rest of the flamboyant Ballet Russes, the ‘rockstar supergroup’ of the time.

Always simpatico with writers, Hoppé made portraits of respected elder literary figures like Henry James and Willa Cather, as well as most of the Bloomsbury Group and the Bright Young Things, who were at the peak of their creativity (and scandalous sexual behavior, even by today’s standards). He even captured occultist Aleister Crowley at his full public infamy as “the wickedest man in the world.”

Known as a great judge of female beauty, Hoppé was truly most fascinated by women of strength, and made portraits of some of the foremost feminists of the day, including active protester (and convicted bomber) Viscountess Rhondda.

Hoppé was an LGBT+ ally many decades before such a label existed. Male homosexuality was illegal. The trial, imprisonment and death of Oscar Wilde was still fresh on the minds of the public. In 1918, two favorite Hoppé subjects, Maud Allan and Margot Asquith, became entwined in a vicious civil trial where they were accused of being in a traitorous German-led homosexual cabal working to weaken British society.

In this atmosphere of repression and scandal, Hoppé photographed dozens of what we would now think of as gay, lesbian, bisexual and gender-nonconforming people with extraordinary sensitivity, giving them, and now us, a permanent record of how they wanted to be seen.

Although some may think of gender-fluidity as a recent trend, Hoppé’s unflinchingly honest portraits of the painter Gluck, and the illustrator Alan Odle, show us that bold, rule-breaking gender presentation is not new. Hoppe’s portrait of irrepressible teenage dandy Stephen Tennant is an equally remarkable example of how comfortable queer people felt entrusting Hoppé with their visual identities. They were living and expressing personal truths at a time when it was not popular or safe.

These portraits give a modern audience a unique and intimate window into brave queer personalities, who, famous or not, had to blaze their own maverick trails in a time where some of their most fundamental qualities were quite literally “*unspeakable*.”

—Mark S. Melville,
E.O. Hoppé Estate Collection archivist

Prints

Stephen Tennant, 1922

Beatrice Lillie, 1916

Alan Odle, 1916

Gluck, 1924

Mrs. R. Ballou, Illinois, 1926

Vaslav Nijinsky as Spectre de la Rose in
“Le Spectre de la Rose,” London, 1914

Maud Allan, ca. 1909

Anthony and Margot Asquith, 1920

Nadejda Mountbatten, 1916

Violet Keppel Trefusis, 1923

Margaret, Viscountess Rhondda, 1928

Vita Sackville-West, Lady Nicolson, 1916

Tilly Losch, 1928

Willa Cather, 1926

A.E. Housman, 1912

Havelock Ellis, 1922

David Garnett, 1925

Lytton Strachey, 1918

W. Somerset Maugham, 1911

Una Vincenzo, Lady Troubridge, 1916

Vere Hutchinson, 1923

Anthony Thorne, 1935

René Sintenis, 1927

Aleister Crowley, 1929

Marsden Hartley, 1923

Miss Josephine McLean and
Miss Josephine Head,
“Marion Morgan Dancers,” 1923

Gina Palerme, 1915

Elyot Hawkins, 1916

Ivor Novello, 1916

Ted Shawn, 1922

William Clarkson, ca. 1913

Elsie de Wolfe, Lady Mendl, 1936

Robert Edmond Jones, 1921

Anton Dolin, London, 1923

Hubert Stowitts, London, 1920

Jacob Epstein, 1911

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Boxed Set

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Collection

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