# Calling the Shots: queer narratives in photography



Calling the Shots: A Queer History of Photography is a new book that delivers an exploration of the history of photography examined through a queer perspective. Edited by Zorian Clayton, this publication draws from one of the oldest and most extensive photography collections in the world.

A pivotal element of the book is its deliberate avoidance of defining the included images solely through the lens of identity. Rather than focus narrowly on the sexual or gender identity of artists, Clayton employs broader thematic elements such as 'icons', 'bodies', and 'liberty' to curate the collection. This approach allows for a nuanced exploration of art's intersection with LGBTQ+ identities without confining it to these labels.

The book opens with a quote from acclaimed artist Catherine Opie, who remarks, “I will wave a rainbow flag proudly, but I am not a singular identity.” This quote sets the tone for the book, encapsulating the central tension of being part of a diverse community often grouped under a singular umbrella, a point Clayton emphasises by introducing a variety of perspectives from within the LGBTQ+ community. It's a curated journey through art history intended to bridge historic gaps in representation within museum collections and large-scale exhibitions.

Key figures and artworks are highlighted, such as the image of club kid Leigh Bowery, captured by Bruce Bernard in his 1994 pose for painter Lucien Freud. This photograph captures Bowery both as a nude and within the painting of his nude form, offering a raw, unadorned presentation in stark contrast to his typical elaborate persona. Clayton finds another striking example in the self-portrait of Madame Yevonde, depicting herself amidst her photographic tools, capturing the essence and the process of creating queer art.

The collection suggests that queer history and spaces have deeper roots than traditional narratives might portray. For instance, Clayton mentions how 18th-century London molly houses remind one of contemporary queer spaces, illustrating the historical continuity of these cultures. Without committing anachronisms, Clayton underscores the flexibility of historical interpretation, accommodating a breadth of queer experiences over the centuries.

Furthermore, the book examines the definition of 'liberation' through its photographic sections, featuring diverse scenes such as the activism captured by Robert D Farber's ACT UP rally photos alongside intimate depictions from Billie’s Blossoms’s Queer porn portrait series. These images deliver different dimensions of liberation, offering readers insight into the rich complexity of queer history and culture.

Calling the Shots is more than an art catalogue; it's a celebration of the expansive realm of queer artistry, supported by groups like the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Photographs Acquisition Group. It challenges conventional historical narratives and invites viewers to engage with photography as an evolving storyteller where queer history, identity, and expression interlace.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/calling-the-shots-zorian-clayton/1145025520> - This link corroborates the book's focus on a queer narrative of the photographic medium, drawing from the Victoria and Albert Museum's collection and its thematic chapters.
* <https://www.thamesandhudsonusa.com/books/calling-the-shots-a-queer-history-of-photography-hardcover> - This link supports the information about the book's structure, including the six thematic chapters and the contributions of Zorian Clayton and other curators.
* <https://www.thamesandhudsonusa.com/books/calling-the-shots-a-queer-history-of-photography-hardcover> - This link confirms Zorian Clayton's role as a curator of prints and the involvement of other curators like Lydia Caston and Hana Kaluznick.
* <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/calling-the-shots-zorian-clayton/1145025520> - This link highlights the book's approach to avoiding narrow definitions of identity and instead using broader thematic elements to curate the collection.
* <https://www.thamesandhudsonusa.com/books/calling-the-shots-a-queer-history-of-photography-hardcover> - This link provides details on the book's content, including the variety of perspectives from within the LGBTQ+ community and the aim to bridge historic gaps in representation.
* <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/calling-the-shots-zorian-clayton/1145025520> - This link mentions key figures and artworks, such as the image of Leigh Bowery and the self-portrait of Madame Yevonde, highlighting their significance in the book.
* <https://www.thamesandhudsonusa.com/books/calling-the-shots-a-queer-history-of-photography-hardcover> - This link supports the idea that the book suggests queer history and spaces have deeper roots than traditional narratives, using examples like 18th-century London molly houses.
* <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/calling-the-shots-zorian-clayton/1145025520> - This link explains the book's examination of 'liberation' through various photographic sections, including activism and intimate depictions.
* <https://www.thamesandhudsonusa.com/books/calling-the-shots-a-queer-history-of-photography-hardcover> - This link confirms that the book is supported by groups like the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Photographs Acquisition Group, and its role in challenging conventional historical narratives.
* <https://www.amazon.com/Calling-Shots-History-Photography-Museum/dp/0500480966> - This link provides additional confirmation of the book's title, author, and the involvement of the V&A Museum, aligning with the overall description of the book.