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HEAVENLY CREATURES

By gathering some of the most powerful images from faux-lesbian fantasy photography in the last 125 years, Dian Hanson may have just solved the mystery of why men love women who love women

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GIRLS GIRLS GIRLS

From left: From *The Sixties* by Kishin Shinoyama; Monika and Martina on the Golden Couch by Guido Argentini. **Previous page:** Margareth and Prisca by Bruno Bisang.

WHAT IS IT about women making out with each other that make men shift to the edge of their seats? The new tome *Lesbians for Men* (Taschen) is a remarkable and stunning visual exploration of this age-old guilty pleasure, serving readers 300 pages of women kissing, touching, fondling a mouth, a thigh, a breast.

Dian Hanson, who has built her career understanding male sexuality from editing fetish magazines like *Juggs* and *Leg Show*, authors the coffee table book soon after the release of *Psychedelic Sex* (2015), her colorful work which catalogs men's magazines' attempt to recreate the acid sex trip of the 1970s. Hanson felt compelled to educate, hence *Lesbians for Men*. "Real sexual education is shockingly rare," she tells *The Huffington Post*. "When I see fantasy repeated so often it becomes truth, I have to step in." For Hanson, men's lesbian fantasies are disconnected from reality. The women who embody these fantasies—also the women in the book—are actually straight, and are posing as lesbians to titillate men.

Hanson's text offers to contextualize and explain why and how this fantasy that makes men invisible and powerless as spectators began and has become so pervasive. Informed

by research and accounts from history books as well as her male readers who have confided their sex lives to her, Hanson crosses the serious implications of this faux lesbian portrayal and the lightness of our sexual delights and curiosities. She does this by repurposing erotic and pornographic photographs taken from past decades to present times.

Those taken in the 60s and 70s call to mind the feminists who encouraged women to have sex and who defended women's right to orgasm, to explore their sexuality with other women—an exercise of power, no doubt—and to show men that they are not needed. After all, those photos are fruits of that period's norms and taste. Most men were elated by such adventures, which led the porn industry to produce lucrative girl-on-girl scenes.

Some of the republished images can be classified as pornography, some erotica: women's breasts and genitals having a session in Ellen Stagg's picture, while Kishin Shinoyama's black-and-white image uses light and shadow to illuminate his subjects whose poses conceal their private parts. And there are hybrids too, as done

by Japan's lauded Nobuyoshi Araki; his artfulness comes with the color story and the drama he wrenches out in a given instant. *The Huffington Post* describes *Lesbians for Men* as a "compelling look at

the history of faux-lesbian fantasy photography and the practice's relationship to the male gaze."

While the book makes no secret of its intended audience, it can be enjoyed by the curious and open-minded—whatever sexual persuasion they may adhere to. Some parts would greatly serve those looking only for sexual arousal while the rest of the pages possess a more apparent artistry and narrative. It is just as much about women, female sexuality, erotica, and the rise of the porn industry as it is about men and their evolving sexual taste—passing no judgment on the men who have taken a liking to lesbian porn or erotica, or the women who have engaged in it on a whim or for financial gain. But perhaps the book's greatest achievement is that it captures the development of the lesbian fantasy—in image after magnificent image—while exploring the cyclical connection of sexual icons and human desire. ■