

LOEWE FOUNDATION



George Platt Lynes

For the 2022 edition of PHotoESPAÑA, the LOEWE FOUNDATION presents an exhibition celebrating the American photographer George Platt Lynes (1907 - 1955), whose sensitivity for the beauty of the human body would prove groundbreaking beyond his own lifetime.

The exhibition features over 48 pieces, ranging from Platt Lynes' commercial fashion photography and dance portfolio to his sensual portraits of friends and lovers. Combining a classical gaze on the nude form with the modernist vision of the interwar era, the images display an avant-garde aesthetic whose queerness would lay foundations for later 20th century icons like Robert Mapplethorpe and Herb Ritts.

Born in New Jersey, Platt Lynes experimented with photography while living in France in his early twenties. Thrust into the intellectual milieu of Paris, he mingled with the likes of author Gertrude Stein, art dealer Julien Levy, artist Salvador Dalí and playwright Jean Cocteau, propelled by the intrepid ambitions of these creative circles to develop his own artistic practice.

Perhaps most formative in his early years was his polyamorous relationship with the writer Glenway Wescott and the museum curator Monroe Wheeler, lasting over a decade. Lovers, companions and mentors to the budding photographer, Wescott and Wheeler captured Platt Lynes' heart while living together in Paris, New York and on their travels around Europe.



George Platt Lynes
Photographer Francesco Scavullo, c. 1940
Vintage print

On the cover:
Ted Starkowski, c. 1954
Vintage print

Absorbing the artistic climate of 1920s Paris, Platt Lynes' photography acquired its signature stylised quality, borrowing dreamlike elements from the Surrealist art movement such as the use of theatrical lighting and absurd props. This distinctive, glamorous flavour attracted publishers like Harper's Bazaar, Town & Country and Vogue when the photographer returned to America; as commissions poured in, he went on to shoot actors like Janet Gaynor and Kirk Douglas and models like Lisa Fonnagrives.

Platt Lynes would build his reputation as a magnificent ballet photographer from 1935, when an old school friend, Lincoln Kirstein, and his associate, the choreographer George Balanchine, invited him to shoot their dance troupe - today, the New York City Ballet. Shifting between the fixed poses of fashion and the fluid motions of dance, Platt Lynes continued photographing the company until the early 50s.

The most crucial part of the artist's oeuvre, however, is one that he kept hidden from public scrutiny - his male nudes. Created at a time when photography of naked bodies was illegal in America, Platt Lynes took remarkable risks with this striking, seductive series; with homosexuality still classified as a mental illness, the erotically charged portraits were doubly illicit.

As light and shadow caress the athletic physiques of his subjects, the photographer's fascination with Renaissance and ancient Greek art is clear. Many of the compositions also incorporate the language of dance, with choreographed formations of bodies appearing at once still and in movement.

Erotic, intimate and clandestine, the nudes exude the delight that Platt Lynes took in his sexuality, as well as the private but powerful bonds within a community forced to blossom in seclusion. Among the models are fellow artists Paul Cadmus and Jared French, art director Romain Johnston, dancer Ralph McWilliams and other acquaintances whose sculpted forms enticed the eye of the photographer.

Platt Lynes' meeting in 1949 with the sexologist Alfred Kinsey would prove pivotal for this secret collection of works. Struck by the male nudes as a window into the lives and experiences of gay men, Kinsey used them in his groundbreaking academic research into homosexuality. Despite destroying many before his death aged 48, Platt Lynes entrusted hundreds of the works to the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction, hopeful for a freer future in which they could be viewed without fear or hatred.

The daring lens that Platt Lynes casts upon the eroticised male form situates him within a canon of queer photography in the 20th century, from Minor White and Peter Hujar to David Wojnarowicz and Hervé Guibert, all of whom have been subjects of exhibitions by LOEWE and the LOEWE FOUNDATION as part of their ongoing exploration of identity, gender and sexuality, along with last year's show on the drag icon Divine.

Whether static or in motion, bodies and the alluring relationships between them extend across Platt Lynes' work. By shining light on the artist's radical explorations of beauty, which articulate a provocative vision of the liberation for which he and his community yearned, the LOEWE FOUNDATION celebrates the human body as a site of desire, fantasy and freedom.



Ruth Ford Winter Scene, c. 1937
Vintage print



Mildred A. Lynes, c. 1930's
Vintage print

Next page:
Orpheus, c. 1936
Vintage print

Unknown Myth, c. 1939
Vintage print



Marc Chagall, c. 1941
Vintage print

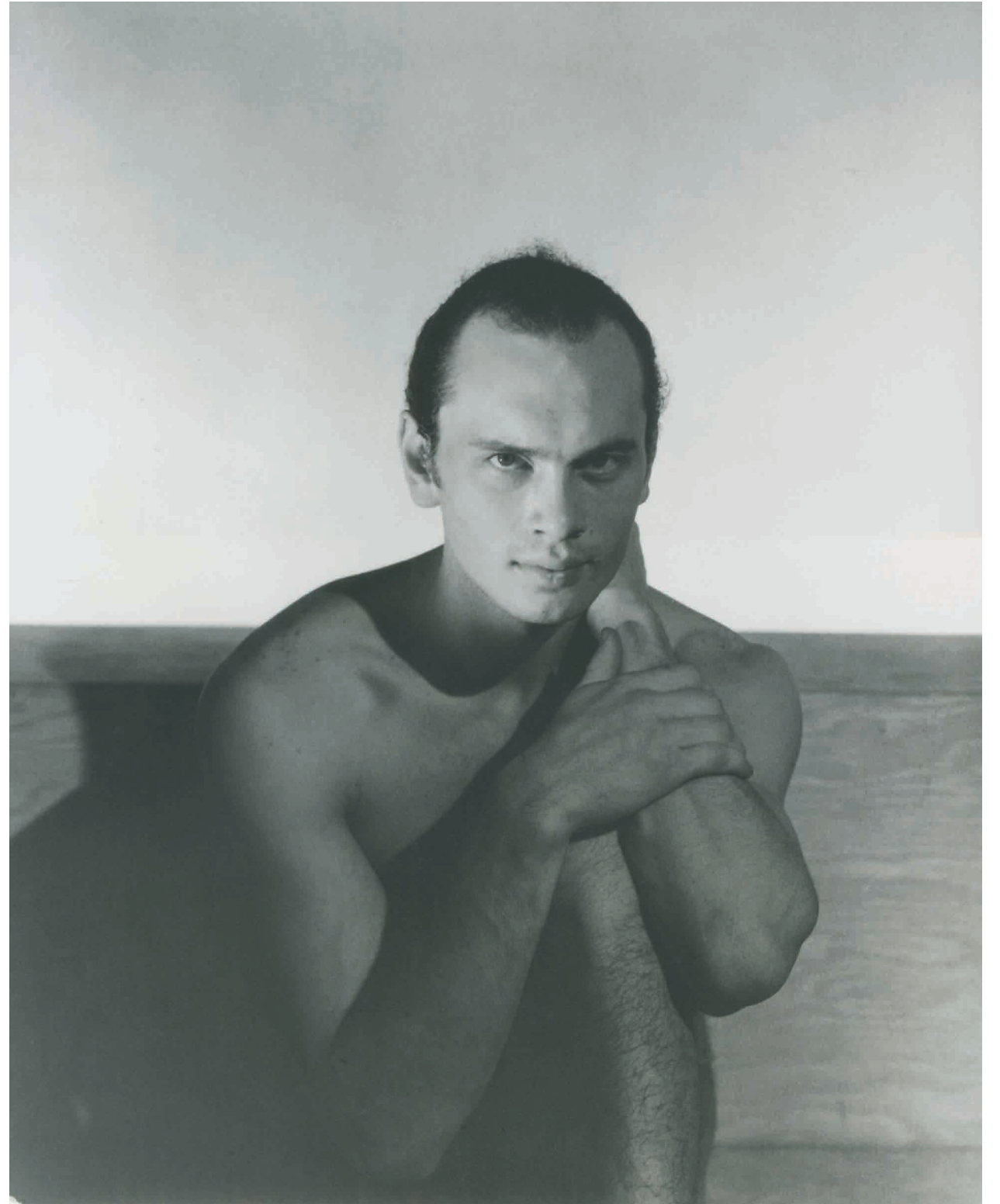




George Tooker with Paul Cadmus and Jared French, c. 1945
Vintage print



Ralph McWilliams, 1952
Vintage print



Yul Bryner, c. June 1942
Vintage print



'Orpheus Ballet', 1950
Vintage print



William Christian Miller, c. 1945
Vintage print



Untitled, c. 1941
Vintage print



George Platt Lynes and Monroe Wheeler, 'La Cabane'. c. 1928. Photographer unknown
Vintage print.



George Platt Lynes and friend, 1940's. Photographer unknown
Vintage print

Curator María Millán

Text Agnish Ray

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