



23.1.2018

It's Nice That | Veronika Minder's book, *Art Décor*, explores the life of bon viveur Bob Steffen (NSFW)

Art Décor: Bob Steffen in Zürich, 1957

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## Veronika Minder's book, *Art Décor*, explores the life of bon viveur Bob Steffen (NSFW)

Words by [Daphne Milner](#), Tuesday 23 January 2018

Veronika Minder's book *Art Décor* explores the life of Bob Steffen, an upscale hustler, nude model, accomplished window dresser and central figure in the bohemian scene of post-war Bern. When he passed away in 2012, Bob left behind 6,000 photographs of himself, his friends and his lovers at dinners parties, cocktail soirées and masquerade balls. "Bob was a friend of mine since the early seventies. I knew he had a lot of photographs because he never threw anything away. He was interested in all the changes he went through during the years," Veronika tells *It's Nice That*.

Early photographs of Bob depict a flamboyant young man who experimented with his sexual identity and pursued a life of transgressive experiences. "During the wartime blackouts, Bob frequented the red light districts in the old city and had a lot of affairs with the most beautiful men," Veronika says. Photographs of an excursion to the Swiss countryside in 1944 show a young Bob posing naked for the male photographer Werner Bandi, a brave move considering homosexuality was illegal in most of Europe at the time. Despite the risks, Bob instinctively embraced a free lifestyle and refused to restrict himself to conventional ways of living and loving.

"From his early travels in the 1950s to his last journeys abroad in Turkey, Northern Africa and Bali, Bob had hundreds of erotic stories to tell about celebrities like Burt Lancaster," Veronika discloses. As images with Hollywood actress Lillian Gish reveal, Bob was at the centre of a vibrant and creative celebrity culture in mid-twentieth century central Europe. It comes as no surprise that "he smoked pot with Sidney Poitier and met in gay bars with Jean Cocteau, Jean Marais and Juliette Gréco."

His creative eccentricity was primarily channelled through his window-dressing art, which increased his popularity and prestige: "He did a lot of the best windows for the best stores, fashion, textiles, watches, furs, shoes, hats," Veronika says. She emphasises Bob's cosmopolitan taste and adventurous disposition, always finding "possibilities to make long travels to Paris, Amsterdam and New York." Bob's shop windows are weird and wonderful and his displays were more high art than high street. Influenced by modernism, Bob experimented with shapes and dimensions, introducing clean, bold lines to his commercial displays. The Edition Patrick Frey publication, *Art Décor*, is not simply Bob's biography, but also a historical artefact that registers the interaction between art and consumerism in the twentieth century.

The amount of photographic material Bob's personal and professional projects yielded presented a problem for Veronika: "A big challenge for the publication was the huge amount of photos from which we had to choose." Despite this difficulty, she succeeded in compiling an engaging visual narrative of Bob Steffen's fascinating life as well as a historical record of last century's artistic elite. An experienced filmmaker and curator, Veronika is an established artist in her own right. Her extended portfolio also includes an exhibition in Bern in 2015 showcasing Bob's archive of photographs entitled "Bob, le Flaneur."



Art Décor: Bob Steffen by Werner Bandi in Switzerland, 1944



Art Décor: Bob Steffen and Lillian Gish on a cruise, 1961



Art Décor: Roth Furs vitrine, 1956



Art Décor: Méret Oppenheim at a masked ball, 1958



Art Décor: Bob Steffen at the Artists' Ball in Zürich, 1956



Art Décor: Bob Steffen at the Gay Ball, 1956

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Art Décor: Trade Show in Basel, 1980



Art Décor: Büchler Furs, 1980





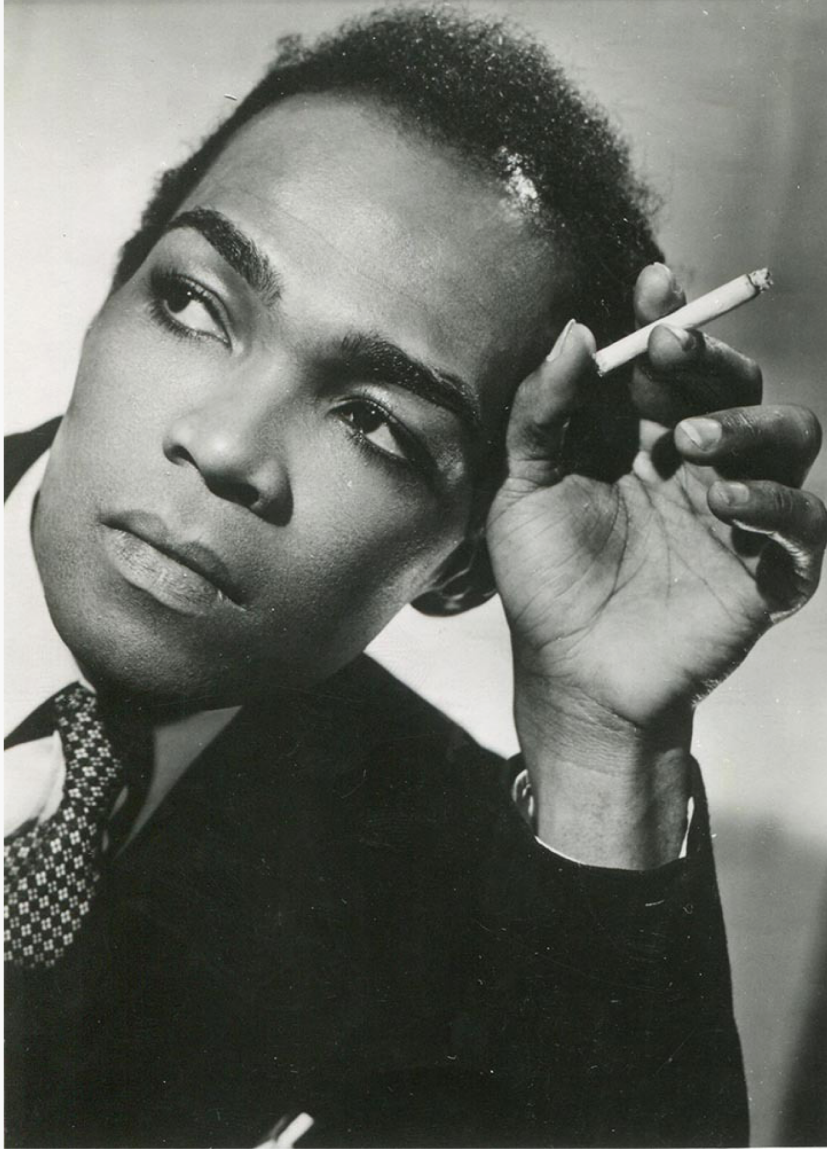
Art Décor: Masked ball, 1961

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Art Décor: Bob Steffen on a cruise ship, 1959



Art Décor: Bert Pasuka posing for Bob Steffen, 1950



Art Décor: Loeb department store, 1952

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Art Décor: Bob Steffen in Spain, 1980

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