



A Touch of Blossom: John Singer Sargent and the Queer Flora of Fin-de-Siècle Art

Alison Syme

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A Touch of Blossom considers John Singer Sargent in the context of nineteenth-century botany, gynecology, literature, and visual culture and argues that the artist mobilized ideas of cross-fertilization and the hermaphroditic sexuality of flowers in his work to “naturalize” sexual inversion. In conceiving of his painting as an act of hand-pollination, Sargent was elaborating both a period poetics of homosexuality and a new sense of subjectivity, anticipating certain aspects of artistic modernism.

Assembling evidence from diverse realms—visual culture (cartoons, greeting cards, costume design), medicine and botany (treatises and their illustrations), literature, letters, lexicography, and the visual arts—this book situates the metaphors that structure Sargent’s paintings in a broad cultural context. It offers in-depth readings of particular paintings and analyzes related projects undertaken by Sargent’s friends in the field of painting and in other disciplines, such as gynecology and literature.

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