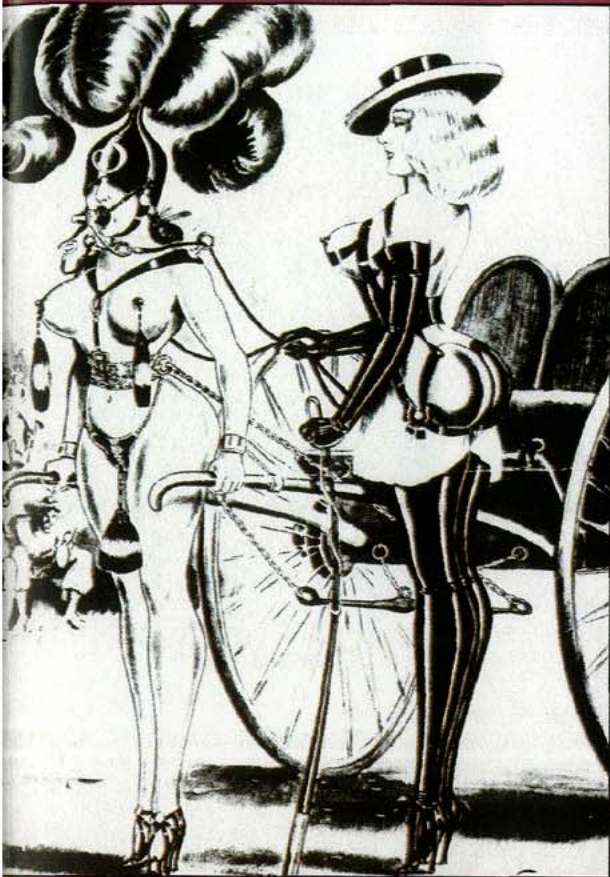


ANCIENT ART OF EROTICA



When the wowers start whingeing about "the flood of sexually explicit publications", you wonder if they reckon erotic art — hey, let's be happy to call it porn! — is a modern invention. If so, *Erotica: 17th-20th Century*, is a perfect wake-up call, as it shows folk have been enjoying no-holds-barred graphics for the past 400 years. In fact, if nothing else this four-volume set (billed as "The Complete Collectors' Edition") shows that when it comes to bonking, the pile of hastily abandoned clothing may have changed, but what's underneath is comfortingly familiar (as is what you do with it).

Mind you, *Volume One (17th and 18th centuries)* does reveal a few interests that may have faded over time. Apparently back then the idea of monks and priests funurgling nuns with, er... loose habits was considered pretty risky, whereas today it's not going get anyone's chastity belt in an twist. But when it comes to group sex (as one does), it seems orgies were even more popular 300 years back than they are today. And if you ever wondered just why the "four-poster bed" was considered a desirable piece of furniture, this will show you how it was used to console certain lonely ladies.

The second volume plunges right into the buxom charms of 19th century nookie — they certainly liked their totty plump in Victorian times — and features some amazing "private" work by some famous artists (Aubrey Beardsley was a bit of a worry). Interestingly, it's the Victorians who seem to start getting hot and bothered about bondage, not to mention spanking, strap-ons and interesting reasons why Spot the Dog should be allowed in the bedroom.

There's some hilarious examples of how these obsessions developed in *Volume Three*, like the legendary "Carlo and Cie" series that titillated French readers in the 1920s. There's a charm about many of these drawings — they're all about sex, but it's not the in-yer-face-with-rubber-gloves-and-a-microscope extreme detail that photography often goes for today. And there's humour, especially in the final volume, which includes some famous names, from Dali and Picasso to cult cartoonists like Tetsu and Robert Crumb. (It turns out Picasso's got the filthier mind, but it takes a while to figure out just which bit of anatomy is going where in what).

This collection is the perfect way to get your erotic interests out of the closet and onto the coffee table. And if you get any complaints, just fire a broadside about the "graphic portrayal of social history", then sink 'em with, "You say porn, I say Picasso!" *Erotica: 17th-20th Century* by Giles Neret is published by Taschen. RRP \$44.95. Distributed by Tower Books (02) 9975 5566.

