

Boys In Bloom

Observations On The Interaction of Men & Flowers



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Abstract

This paper researches the use of flowers on men in today's fashion, photography, social media and floristry. Firstly, the terms *decoration* and *statement* are juxtaposed and the significance of *symbolism* and *genderization* clarified. Using different methods, each of the categories is then examined and analysed deeply with the aim to find out whether the use of flowers can be interpreted as a statement or just seen as decoration. In conclusion, the micro-phenomenon of men with flowers is seen as both - decoration and statement - and the interpretation depends on the observer as “beauty is always in the eye of the beholder.”

Preface

For as long as I can remember, flowers and plants - in any shape and form - have always been part of my style of dressing, as an expression of who I am. The fascination comes from the touch of beauty associated with flowers. The possibility to decorate myself with something alive - always unique and always different. In my eyes, flowers represent a fragment of nature that reflects and contains all the beauty that it has to offer. First discovered and picked, then worn and appreciated in all their splendour, until they finally wither and disintegrate as time goes by. Lately, as I strolled through fashion shops and glanced at the new collections, I suddenly and surprisingly noticed the novel use of vibrant, colourful, intricate floral patterns on men's clothes. This reminded me of the pictures on social media that I had seen of men wearing flowers in their beards and as wreaths on the hair. It visually captivated my mind and got me interested in the topic of men and flowers.



Figure 1
Me wearing a flower crown (1999)



Figure 2
Me wearing a hibiscus (2013)



Figure 3
Me wearing a frangipani (2016)

1. Introduction & Research Question

The micro-phenomena I will be examining in this paper revolves around the relationship between men and flowers and how it manifests itself in today's world of fashion, photography, social media and floristry. The lines between genders are getting blurred. The freedom to define one's gender or sexuality and express this choice through fashion is increasing. Using flowers does not necessarily have to be interpreted as an explicit statement. It could just be seen as a trend, or a style of decorating yourself. On the other hand, there could be a deeper meaning or assertion when men showcase flowers on themselves. Depending on the form, style and use, they could communicate identity, gender or even make a socio-political statement.

In my research, I will attempt to answer the question of when and where men wear flowers on their bodies and whether this is purely meant as a decoration or also used and seen as a statement.

I will define the terms *decoration* and *statement* first and give a brief introduction to *symbolism* and *genderization* of flowers. By touching on the association of flowers with gender and identity in history and exposing certain stereotypes and prejudice, I will come to the central enquiry of my essay. There, I will explore the question as to when, where and how flowers are being used to adorn men in today's world of fashion and social media. I will analyse how designers, photographers and florists work and try to understand their thinking process behind the use of flowers and floral designs on men. Interviews with two male florists help me to find a more intimate connection with the topic and add a personal touch to the abstract research experience. This supports my attempt to then create visual typologies of men with flowers while going through many photos and, finally, answer my research question.

1.1 Definition of *Decoration* and *Statement* in Design, Fashion and Culture

Within the context of design, fashion and culture the purpose of *decoration* can be seen as making any object more aesthetically pleasing and attractive for the viewer or user. It embellishes, enriches or beautifies new or preexisting objects. There is scientific evidence that human made decorations date back more than 40'000 years. "...it is concluded that bead-like objects were commonly produced long before the Upper Paleolithic." (Bednarik, 1995, p. 201)

On the other hand, a design or fashion *statement* has the intention to communicate an opinion, to create a certain impression, express an idea or show an attitude without using words. From the expression of a political view, manifestation of solidarity, declaration of (in)dependence, show of power or weakness, there are countless interpretations and versions. Most often, it displays to other people the type of person you are or you would like to be. "Hippie dress was sometimes described as *anti-fashion*, produced by a patchwork of ragged cast-offs and flamboyant accessories, of outmoded Western dress and time-honoured ethnic garments all combined, modified and permitted into an infinite variety of personal statements." (Chenoune, 1995, p. 260)

2. Background

2.1 The Symbolism of Flowers

Symbolism is the representation of abstractions, ideas, persons or objects where the symbol is a figure or image, used as a sign for something else. Symbols are carriers of meaning that convey a, often culturally determined, message that goes beyond the objectively perceptible. For the purpose of this essay, I will concentrate on a Western use, understanding and interpretation of symbolism. In European history and mythology, plants and flowers appear as symbolized representation of religious, moral, ethical, social and aesthetic values, connotations and statements. “Flowers, plants and trees became so interwoven with man’s daily life that they developed into symbols for his expressions and sentiments, his passions and affections, his beliefs and religions, his fears and suppressions.” (Lehner, 2003, p. 11) The biblical *Tree of Life* and *Fruit of Knowledge*, the use of *Roses for Love* (Valentines) and the *Carnations Revolution* (Portugal 1974) are such examples and archetypes. In the 17th and 18th centuries “...floral symbolism entered into classic still life paintings...” (Böhme, 1960, p. 19) During this period, floral compositions began to replace the biblical themes of the previous centuries. Flowers became a universal symbol allowing you to express yourself in a way different from words. “Not surprisingly, wearing an exotic bloom became something of a status symbol and, depending on the choice of flowers, demonstrated variously the wearers daring, decadence, or erudition.” (Angeloni, 2000, p. 30) In popular beliefs, various flowers are attributed with different symbolic messages, producing a veritable language of flowers. The number, the colors, scent, size and the way they are arranged are just some of the criteria to take into account when trying to decode the meaning. “Durch die Blume sprechen - Speaking through flowers became a Western proverb, meaning any flowery or poetic expression with a hidden significance or message of love.” (Lehner, 2003, p. 109) Today, in commercial floristry, you find lists which assign rather randomly and questionably meanings to each flower. From a more serious perspective, there is more to it. In a book about a Joseph Beuys exhibition titled ‘Lasst Blumen Sprechen’, it is confirmed that “...depictions of flowers often have symbolic meaning, in which social and political content resonates.” (Grönert, 1960, p. 10)

2.2 Genderization of Flowers

Man has always been surrounded by plants and flowers. Some flowers serve as nutrition and others have medicinal properties. In addition, “...flowers have always been appreciated as visible forms of life and the epitome of beauty.” (Grönert, 1960, p. 10) Flowers have different characteristics from many other plants. They blossom more explicitly and they have an incredible variety of colours and fragrances. The blooming of a flower is often compared to women and used as a sign of female sexuality. “Since the flower is the reproductive organ of the plant, reproduction depends on the ability of the flower to attract birds and bees with its color, odour, sweetness and form. Therefore, flowers are a sign of female genitalia.” (Graziano, 2004, p. 74) Up until today, flowers are considered a female attribute. A linguistic manifestation of the feminine label of flowers is the notion of *defloration*. The first sexual penetration of a virgin is called defloration. “Man verbinde diese Wegnahme der Unschuld mit der Vorstellung des Blumenpflückens. Blumen bezeichneten daher nicht zufällig jenen transitorischen Moment des Übergangs vom präsexuellen Mädchen zur fruchtbaren Frau.” (Sittler, 2016, p. 343)

Since the 18th century, some men have questioned this view by using flowers on clothing and as fashion decoration. The term *macaroni men* appeared around 1770 and denoted a movement of young men who dressed extravagantly and exaggeratedly. They flaunted a nosegay (flower bouquet) in the buttonhole and epitomized provocation and decadence. “Even our Macaronies entertain our town with nothing but new dresses and the size of their nosegays.” (McNeil, 2016, p. 392) The term *queer buttonhole* followed, as notorious author Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) rendered the queer men visible and legible. “Wildes Green Carnation has come to stand as a symbol for queer space, queer codes and queer martyrdom.” (Sittler, 2016, p. 407) For the 1892 premiere of a play, he had a member of the cast wear a green carnation in his buttonhole. He also encouraged friends in the audience to wear a green carnation, so that a selected part of the audience was connected to the actor on stage. “A simple coloured flower is here related to transgressive sexualities...to explain the perceived proliferation of the visible queer man in metropolitan life.” (McNeil, 2016, p. 390) At that point in time, the buttonhole was “the only socially acceptable form of male floral adornment,” as it “became a charged site in Wildes and the *fin de siècle*’s homoerotic imagery.” (Syme, 2010, p. 50)

Today, we stand somewhere in between. On one hand, flowers are still very much attributed to women, but more and more men using flowers show up in fashion, photography and on social media. In the next chapters of this paper, I am going to investigate this further.

3. Men & Flowers Today

In the main part of my paper, I want to investigate the creators, designers and the minds behind the appearance of flowers in fashion, photography and in men’s selfdesign. I want to examine where and how *men and flowers* manifest themselves in today’s world. To this end, I am going to analyse fashion brands that use flowers for men, the typology of men with flowers in social media (photography and floristry) and the personal experience of the chief florist of the Stadtgärtnerei Zürich.

3.1 Fashion Brands

3.1.1 Boaz Van Doornik

Van Doornik is a young designer who graduated from the Textiles & Fashion department at the ArtEZ School of Arts (Netherlands) in 2016. His work is rather new but has already been featured in VOGUE and I-D Magazine. He uses laser cut prints on fabric with unconventional themes of nature. “The collection ‘Monumental Memories’ tells the story of his youth, in which Boaz spent a lot of his time hiking through nature with his father. He was the one who taught Boaz to develop his eye for detail, while profoundly studying various plants and wildflowers.” (Van Doornik, Unknown) After his father’s death he created his end of studies collection as a tribute to honour his father’s memory, nature and youth. He presented a men’s collection with motifs of plants and elements of nature. A backpack, made of a variety of flowers, vividly came across as his own emotional baggage. “A backpack full of flowers and beautiful memories, immortalized by his collection.” (La Joie Des Fleurs, Unknown) The flowers, showcased in Van Doornik’s collection strongly expressed his feelings and were tied to the death of his father. It was a representation of his own emotions. (Figure 4 & 5)



Figure 4
Flower Backpack in Monumental
Memories



Figure 5
Flower Backpack in Monumental
Memories

Dark hues of autumn are shown in the choice of fabrics in the 2016 lookbook and are contrasted with bright yellow fern motifs on the suits. Two models with their hair slick back and soft facial features hold bouquets of ferns and dried plants in matching colours and, in the fashion show, different plants are carried and worn by runway models. (Figure 6 & 7) The eight male models have their hair slick back again and show no facial hair. (Figure 8) A real flower bouquet backpack appears on one model and a bag with green leaves of a fern is carried by another. Doornik's collection dives into nature and drowns itself in this theme. In the fashion show of his 2018 collection 'Leaf', he lets the flowers reappear on a model wearing an emerald green suit and carrying a bouquet of flowers. After Van Doornik's small fashion label, I will now look at a bigger company using a similar theme for its fashion design.



Figure 6
Monumental Memories
Lookbook



Figure 7
Monumental Memories
Lookbook



Figure 8
Monumental Memories Fashion Show

3.1.2 Erdem x H&M

The British fashion label Erdem was established in 2005 by Erdem Moralioglu. He is well-known for his attention to detail and his use of vibrant floral prints. In 2017 Erdem collaborated with H&M to create a beautiful clothing line for both men and women. It was the first time for Moralioglu to produce a men's collection. He describes his experience in an interview: "There has to be an easiness to menswear, and a sense of reality. I'm so happy with it, and I think so many women are going to love the men's collection too." (Porter, 2017) In another interview, he goes on to say how interesting it was to have the women's collection influenced by the men's collection. "I found myself taking things off our male fit model and putting them on the female fit model, and vice versa." (Shatzman, 2017) Earlier, Erdem had only explored women's wear with floral prints. "I've always been fascinated by things that explore femininity," he says, "whether it's lace or flowers or the aesthetics of beauty." (Porter, 2017)

'The Secret Life of Flowers', a short film by Baz Luhrmann, promoted the Erdem and H&M collaboration. "The film is set in a country mansion where it is always spring. The house is like its own private world that is always filled with flowers, influenced by Erdem's floral prints." (O'Brien, 2017) Erdem's new collection is shown in the film by models and actors in a setting that resembles an indoor oasis of spring blossoming. The story "...of a young man whose boyfriend takes him home to visit a mysterious, crumbling mansion, overgrown with flowers where it's always spring." (Jardine, 2017) "But the floral pieces aren't the only thing evoking romance in the short film; a dramatic love triangle unfolds." (Fisher, 2017) Flowers are not only a visual and cinematic aspect of the film but they are personified in the dialogs where a *flower* is described as a person. At one point, Lady Damir, a character in the film says: "As for myself, I hold no preference amongst flowers as long as they are wild, free and spontaneous" and at another, the protagonist Adam states: "I had to wonder, would I become the next flower in Lady Damir's garden?" (Luhrmann, 2017)

Analysing the collection and the short film in a visually, I realised that the casting of women and men was done in an androgynous way. The models and actors play unconventional female and male roles and wear a homogeneous mix

of dresses, pyjamas and suits. Floral patterns are present on both women's and men's wear. In a 2010 interview with *The Independent*, a British online newspaper, Carola Long explains that Erdem's floral prints work as a fashion statement: "Erdem Moralioglu has transformed the girlish garden print into a modern fashion statement, beloved by everyone from Keira Knightley to Michelle Obama." (Long, 2010) (Figure 9, 10, 11, 12)



Figure 9, 10, 11, 12
The Secret Life of Flowers (Film Screenshots)

Using androgynous male and female models for his signature floral aesthetics allows Moralioglu to mysteriously, but consciously, blur the boundaries between genders. Floral prints are not the only floral element in his work. Lookbook photos show flowers either placed in the jacket pockets and bags of the men or being handed to them. The photographer of the lookbook, Michal Pudelka said in an interview with *Fashion United* that, he loves "...to add elements of surprise and surrealism, and thought of details to enhance the atmosphere, like flowers being handed to the model from out of frame." And Erdem adds "it was such a pleasure to see how Michal translated the mood of the collection and I love how we played with different elements, such as the flowers, to enhance the spirit of Erdem x H&M even more." (Hendriksz, 2017) (Figure 13 & 14)

Van Doornik and Erdem x H&M, are two very different examples of fashion collections that connect men and flowers in a modern way. Both labels cast and style their male models androgynously to easier link the beauty of flowers and floral designs with the attractiveness of men. As the lines between genders get more blurred today, so are the associations we make with flowers.



Figure 13
Erdem x H&M 2017 Lookbook



Figure 14
Erdem x H&M 2017 Lookbook

3.2 Social Media

Men with flowers also appear on social media. Instagram, one of the world's most actively used platform, now has 1 billion individual users worldwide. Instagramers present their real or artificially crafted identity and interests or use it to showcase their creative work. Photographer Travis Chantar (chantar) and florist Ross Jenkins (bloom.boy) use Instagram to present their work with flowers to decorate models. Both have their own unique style, combining people with elements of nature. Their photos include some degree of nudity in both men and women. For the sake of this essay and the topic at hand, I will be focusing just on the men with flowers in their work. They use flowers as a medium to create a costume of sorts, to decorate the bodies and to stylize the photos of their creations. (Figure 15 & 16)

After having looked at fashion brands in the previous parts, it would now be interesting to analyse the various forms of styling and decorating with flowers on men in social media. Fashion labels tend to create and design textiles that use floral motifs, whereas Chantar and Jenkins use flowers as a decoration on their models to create strong visuals, images and photos. What they present on social media is not what you would necessarily see men wearing on the street. Most of what they show is styled pieces of photographic art whereas fashion labels create real wearables for everyday use.

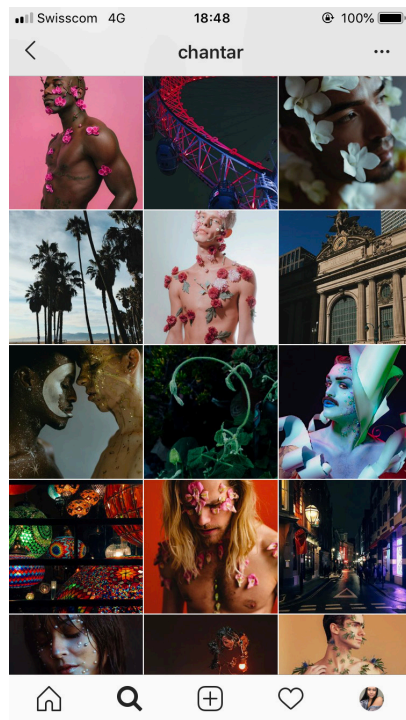


Figure 15
Travis Chantar (chantar) Instagram Account

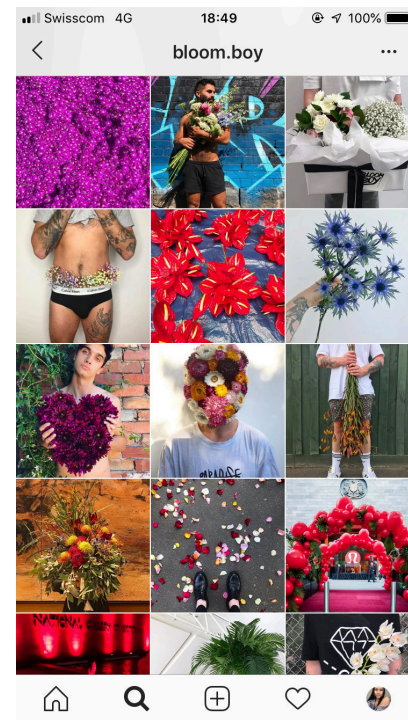


Figure 16
Ross Jenkins (bloom.boy) Instagram Account

3.2.1 Travis Chantar

Travis Chantar (31) is a Brooklyn based artist and photographer, identifying himself as a mixed-race queer individual who actively concentrates on breaking down insecurities and building up self-esteem. He connects with his models, allowing them to open up and share their insecurities. Chantar tells different people's stories visually in front of the camera. Ever since childhood he has been fascinated by flowers. He has always been drawn to their intricate details and petals and he would dissect them in his garden. "He worked this interest into his photography and uses the ritual of placing the petals on his subjects to develop a level of intimacy." (Tyler, 2018) In his series 'Flowers', he captures men decorated with different petals which "...beautifully contrasts the strength of the human body with the delicacy of nature." (Tyler, 2018) (Figure 17 & 18) In an interview, he describes that "flowers represent bloom and the peak of life (...) and that they are a precious reminder of fleeting, young beauty. I love the idea of freezing the wild, perfect frailty of life in its prime. It would seem a waste if I failed to notice moments of bloom. Beauty is beauty. And nothing lasts forever." (Sharpiro, Unknown) Chantar finds the fact that people decorate themselves to show how they feel on the inside particularly interesting. By presenting yourself in a beautiful, artistic way you express your artistic soul. "The ritualistic aspect of it is a practice of decoration and a play with gender boundaries." (Sharpiro, Unknown) In many of his photos, the male physique is explored through the way of his styling. He decorates the naked bodies with petals, sometimes covering their genitals. The posture and facial expression, the body and what parts are shown, create a dialog between Chantar and the models. It is like having a conversation or telling a story without words. Chantar says that "...decoration, particularly of the human body, holds powerful emotional and cultural significance, deepening our experience." (Tyler, 2018) For him, the act of decorating a body is in itself a powerful tool. Chantar has 47.2K followers on Instagram. This allows him to connect with an international audience. Some of his work is then reposted on other people's Instagram accounts as inspirational photos. Bloom Boy's account is one of them.



Figure 17
Zakar Twins in Flowers Series by Travis Chantar



Figure 18
Andrew Sue-Ako in Flowers Series by Travis Chantar

3.2.2 Bloom Boy

Discovering Bloom Boy's account with a total of 5,499 followers on Instagram was a real revelation for my work because he is the personalized fusion between fashion, floristry and photography. Bloom Boy caught my eye immediately as almost all of his artistic photos show men covered with flowers, men wearing flowers and men carrying floral arrangements. Visually speaking, Bloom Boy makes a clear connection between men and flowers and shows the relationship between them. (Figure 19) Fascinated by this discovery, I tried to contact Bloom Boy through to find out more about him, his work and his brand. Fortunately, he answered my interview questions that specifically targeted the topic of this paper and I was able to gather a lot of information about the person behind the brand, his background, his ideas, intentions and way of work.

4. Summary of Interviews

4.1 Bloom Boy: Ross Jenkins (Fashion Designer and Florist)

"Bloom Boy creates anything from flower crowns and bouquets to statement arrangements and large unique installations." (Bloom Boy, Unknown) Created by Ross Jenkins in 2015 and based in Melbourne, Australia, Bloom Boy is a fusion brand, connecting fashion and floristry. Jenkins had a menswear fashion design background when he decided to study floristry while working for florists. This is the reason for his unique concept of presenting male models wearing his floral creations. Jenkins: "I still hold on to that part of me and merge it with the floristry world. It's what I naturally relate to and feel passionate about. I'm really excited by how we can dress the body in a material that is organic and has such a delicate form." The elements that inspire Jenkins come from fashion imagery and from visual arts. The main focus of

the interview was on the question whether there is a message or a statement behind his work or whether the compositions are just a decorative expression of his creativity? Jenkins says that he puts a lot of thought into his work since there is a generalization in our culture that flowers are feminine and associated with women. It is his personal mission to see men embrace flowers more. In his view, it is unusual and thought provoking to see men wearing flowers. He fights the stigma of flowers being a feminine accessory and wants it to be seen as something beautiful for everyone. He explains that his brand does not have a specified target audience and his analysis shows an even 50/50 split between men and women viewing his work. For the images he creates, he sees the male body as a canvas that carries the flowers. The focus of his compositions are the flowers and, therefore, the clothing is minimal. Jenkins doesn't want the clothes to distract or to be at the centre. (Figure 20) "My aim is to create beautiful images that showcase the relationship between the body and flowers and how they interact." Jenkins uses flowers as a material like a painter would use paint and he uses their colour, texture and form as elements to create his compositions. "I aim to challenge existing ideas of floral design and to bring a new level of creativity to the industry." (Figure 21)



Figure 20
Bloom Boy Flower Arrangements on Instagram



Figure 21
Bloom Boy Flower Wreath

4.2 Stadtgärtnerei Zürich: Mirko Diehm (Chief Florist)

The department *Grün Stadt Zürich* of the City Council is responsible for the maintenance and promotion of all green spaces in the city. The Stadtgärtnerei is the municipal nursery where Mirko Diehm is the chief florist. Diehm's background is an apprenticeship as a gardener, followed by a five-year floristry training in Basel. Here, he learnt to work "generously and pompously" as the job of gardener was "not creative enough" for him. He creates flower arrangements for many different events, such as weddings, funerals and Mother's Day. He explains that colours are one of the most important elements when making a floristic arrangement. Colours are more symbolic than the type of flowers used. "Für Männer sind es eher kräftige, herbere Farbtöne, Rot, Orange, Gelb und für Frauen eher feinere Töne, Rosa und Pastell. Es gibt aber auch Unisex Sträuße, dann sind sie meist Apricot-Lachsfarben." In today's "metrosexual age", as he calls it, the boundaries are blurred and there is less definition of what colours are meant for what gender. Diehm says that the colours and colour combinations of current fashion influence the colour trends of floristry. In his view, fashion is a form of luxury and so is floristry. To be able to afford buying flowers at a florist is a statement: "Eine Blumenbotschaft für die Öffentlichkeit ist ganz sicher mal Luxus. Es zeigt, dass wir uns das leisten können." Over the years, he has noticed how times have changed. Floristry used to be dominated by women. But nowadays, many of the avant-garde florist shops in Zurich are led by men. During his training, Diehm was the only man in a class of 42 women. As a result, the significance of flowers has now expanded to both genders and brought them closer. "Heute ist die Bedeutung von Blumen für Frauen und Männer gleichberechtigt. Früher war dies anders." By observing his customers, he notices that men are able to appreciate flowers just as much as women. Although most of his male customers still buy flower arrangements for someone else and not for themselves, it slowly seems to change. Some men, like himself, express themselves with flowers, whether it is by buying or wearing them: "Es ist trendig und man traut sich mehr." Half of Diehm's own clothes have some sort of floral design or print, and he says that this does not make him stand out in the city. But in the countryside, such flowers on men would still be exceptional and get noticed. "Es hängt also von der Lokalität ab. Das Männerbild ist dort ganz anders." He concludes that this is his personal viewpoint from the perspective of an openly gay man.



Figure 22
Meeting Mirko Diehm at the Stadtgärtnerei

5. Men & Flowers: Typology of Identities

While spending hours researching this topic and looking through photos of men with flowers on social media and the internet, I repeatedly noticed similar styling elements in the photos that would allow me to categorize these photos and create my own, experimental typology of *men with flowers identities*. The criteria I use for categorizing are all based on the relationship between the men and the flowers in the photos. What interaction takes place between the flowers and the men? Where and how are the flowers placed on the body? What characteristics (body language, facial features) do the men have and how does it affect the composition/interpretation of the photo? How I personally and intuitively read and interpret the photos is at the core of this chapter. While this clearly is a subjective observation and analysis of the photos, I will try to justify and explain my choices by categorizing the groups into four main identities with expressive titles: *The Daisy Decorator*, *The Flamboyant Flower*, *The Floral Feminine* and *The Religious Rose*. Interestingly, some of the photos overlap, blur the boundaries of my categories, or fit into more than one identity group.

5.1 The Daisy Decorator

The flowers in these photos are used as a prop, adding an element of decoration to the man and the picture. They have no function and are just a creative utensil to compliment the overall image. The flowers are not all placed on the bodies of the men, some are carried, worn in a backpack or on a jacket. Some have a humorous, comical and playful effect, imitating a tongue, the shape of a face or glasses. The flowers are secondary and used in a decorative sense. The interaction between the men and the flowers are in no form provocative, neither triggering a statement or a serious reaction. The stylist or producer behind the photo, uses elements of the flowers, including their form, color and flourishing beauty to serve as a subordinate, ornamental element or an expression of luxury and beauty - two words that are often associated with flowers. (Figure 23)



Figure 23
The Daisy Decorator - a collection of photos

5.2 The Flamboyant Flower

The Flamboyant Flower focuses on a different criteria that is based on the nudity of the men, as flowers are placed on different parts of their bodies in the photos. Without the addition of flowers, the images would just be a series of naked and semi-naked men. Some photos are sexualized by the explicit location of the flowers: Flowers coming out of underwear or petals on genitals. The variety of men and the different manifestation of their masculinity (body shape, facial and body hair, body language) communicate distinctive sexualities. Flowers in this context - paired with diverse naked bodies of men - underline and show a sense of beauty of the various male physiques. In some pictures, the delicacy and fragility of flowers are combined with the tough shapes of the men in order to provoke a contrast. What I noticed in this collection is the effective use of body language and how this branches out by creating additional sub-identities from within. Again, some pictures from *The Floral Feminine* could be categorized into this group and vice versa. (Figure 24)

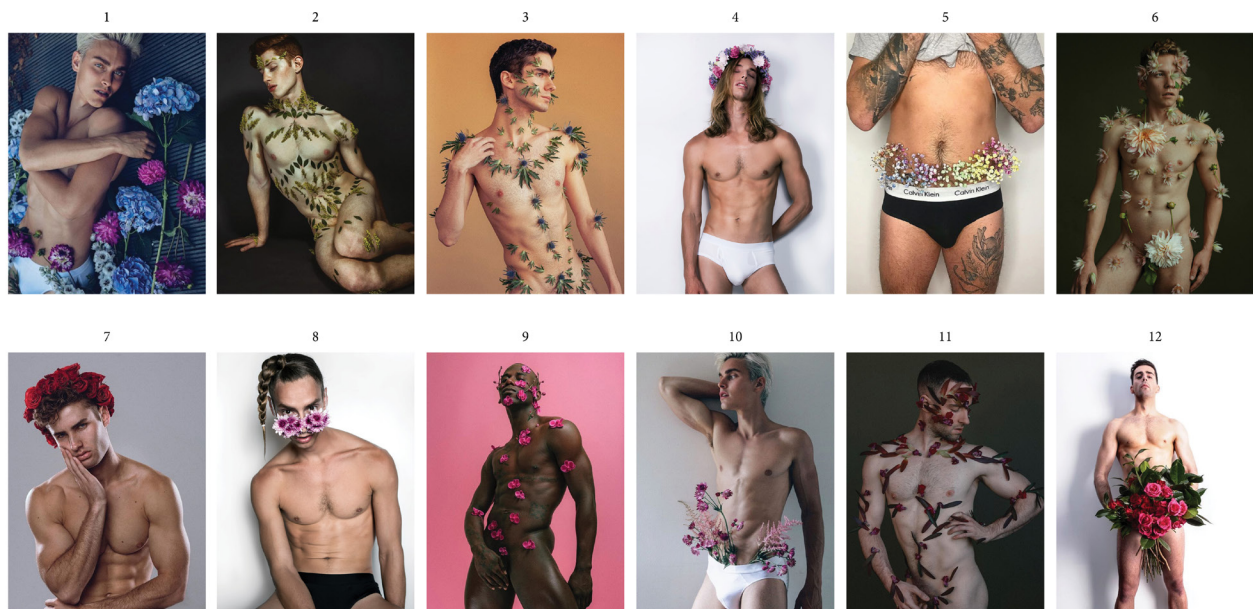


Figure 24
The Flamboyant Flower - a collection of photos

5.3 The Floral Feminine

The Floral Feminine photos represent men captured in an unmasculine way, featuring feminine characteristics. Elements like longer hair, rosy lips, lanky or slim bodies, thin and softer facial features caught my attention as I grouped these photos. They do not have facial or body hair which accentuates the female impression. Posture and body language increase the feminine quality. The composers of these photos use androgynous men with flowers on or around their bodies to create an image of a sexless gender. They abandon the traditional affiliations of flowers with women and the fragility and delicacy of the flower purposely reflects the androgynous male. *The Floral Feminine* makes the viewer look twice to see whether there is a male or a female model in the photo. This allows the genderization of the flower to escape the traditional image and attach itself to a neutral view. (Figure 25)

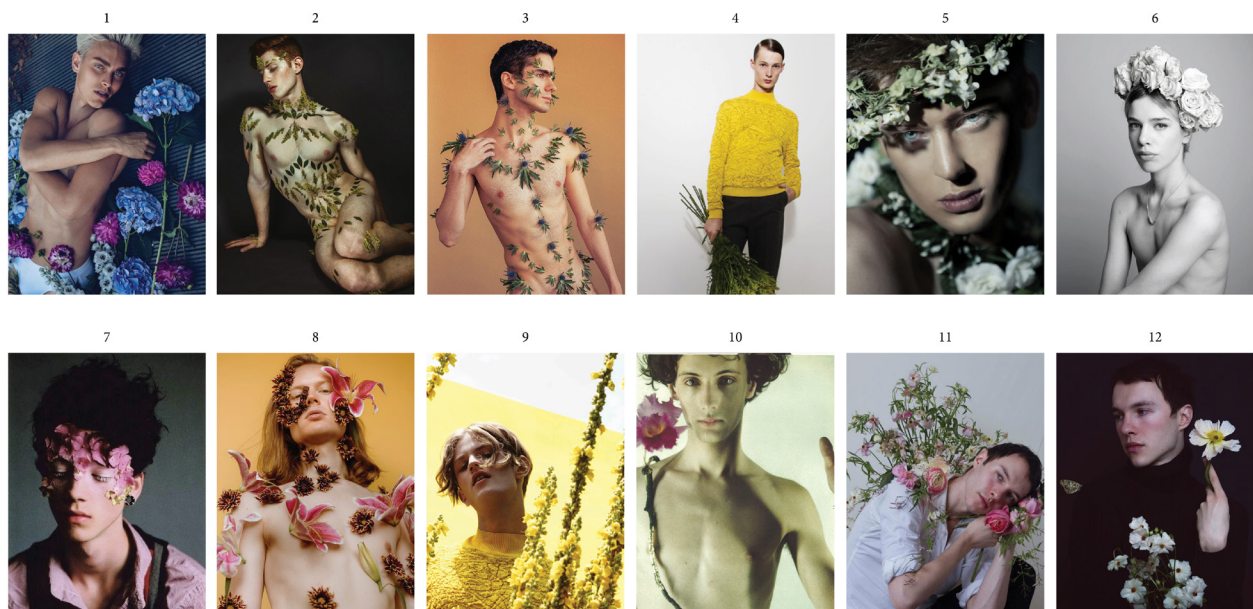


Figure 25
The Floral Feminine - a collection of photos

5.4 The Religious Rose

This category contains all stylists whose flowers on male bodies express or provoke religious emotions or reactions. The flowers are applied in an almost ceremonial or ritual way and have a divine visual connotation. The devout appearance of the models is accentuated by the location, arrangement and choice of the flowers. For example, a flower wreath on the head resembling Jesus' wreath of thorns. Visual mythological and renaissance language catches the viewer's eye and echoes with his/her own religious sentiments. As flowers often denote emotions, traditions, feelings and archetypical memories, these photos trigger visual religious and historical associations. Body language and symbolic tribesman imagery accentuates this phenomenon further. (Figure 26)

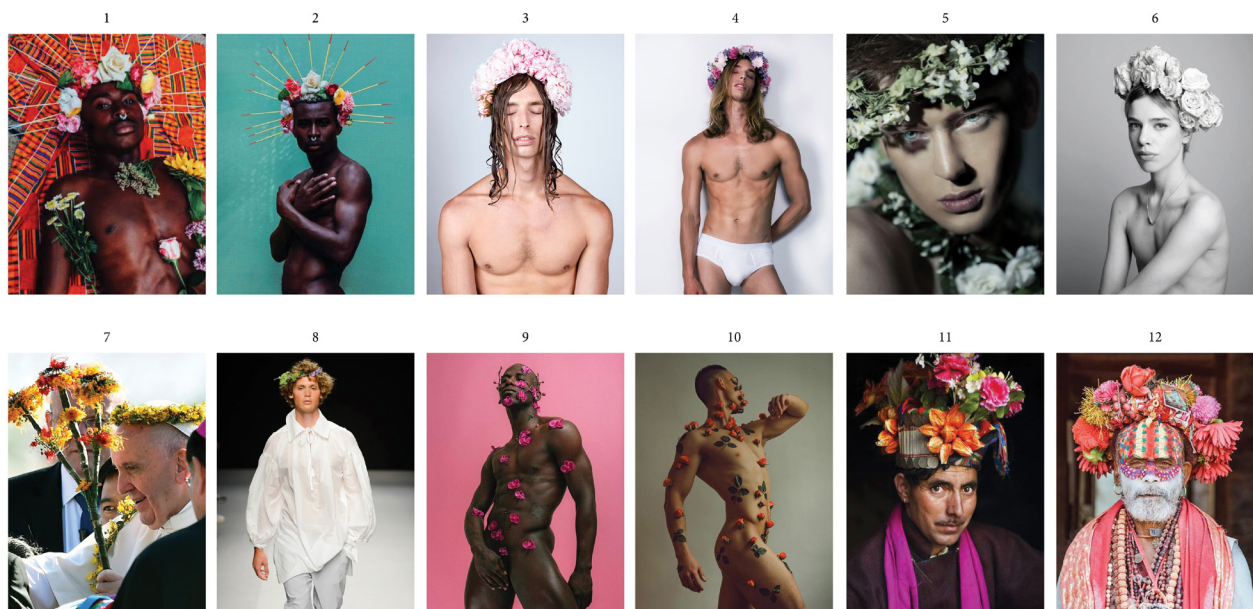


Figure 26
The Religious Rose - a collection of photos

6. Conclusion

The way we dress, adorn and visibly present ourselves, influences not only our self-perception but also the image we project. Today's world is in constant change and adaptation and so is the interpretation of its characters and protagonists. The fact that flowers have long been associated with beauty and women still affects the way in which most people see or use flowers today. Discovering the micro-phenomenon of *men and flowers* motivated me to dive into the world of fashion brands, stylists and floristry and look at this world through this lens. While flowers serve as an element of luxury and beauty, they also juxtapose strength and weakness, fragility and power. Analysing fashion brands, photography and floristry through the filter of men and flowers, helped me to decode the meaning and significance of flowers in the world of fashion, social media and camerawork. It seems that the lines between genders have become blurred and everyone is free to define, live and portray his/her own preferences, gender and sexuality. Combining floristry with fashion, photography and social media offer new ways for expressing yourself. It can be seen as just an element of decoration, as a gender specific testimonial, a controversial statement - or a mix of both. It really depends on the context and on the interpretation of the viewer. "Because flowers are so graphic and speak to us directly, they seem to embody themselves the meaning we assign to them." (Grönert, 2016, p. 10) To make things easier, fashion brands cast androgynous models to link the beauty of flowers and floral designs with the attractiveness of men. And trendy floristry is peacefully and slowly invaded by male florists. An old proverb says that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" - the perception of beauty is subjective. No matter how flowers are presented on men – from a wreath on a head to a petal on a penis or a carnation in the buttonhole - it can always be interpreted in different ways. It can be seen as a decorative element or a political statement - or both. The question whether there is an underlying statement or message of the artist, stylist, photographer, fashion label or florist can be misleading or misconstrued. The truth of the matter is the fact that this micro-phenomenon is growing roots, is being noticed and enjoyed in today's trends and identities. In the future, it would be very interesting for me personally to expand this research into the theme of body language and other forms of individual self expression.

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