This is the work of Duncan Grant, British landscape painter, textile designer and

member of the Bloomsbury Group. That's his public facing work, but Grant's artwork

had another side to it. This side was discovered last year, hidden for decades

under a friend's bed, a secret collection of erotic drawings.

A portfolio of 422, mostly erotic drawings.

They're gorgeous, but they are really explicit.

This archive passed through channels of queer affection, I suppose. So from lovers to friends.

it's very much something that was just meant for people who are very close to him.

They're erotica, they weren't meant for a wider audience.

They were found in a folder marked – “these drawings are very private.

Please give them to Edward Le Bas to do what he likes with them.”

That material has now come to a museum, a gallery and is being preserved.

But for decades it was hidden, presumed destroyed at some point

but actually cared for by a channel of lovers and friends.

If you look at art stories and histories, they've been

told from perspectives that are almost entirely straight, cisgendered, white.

But LGBTQ+ artists have always existed and so has LGBTQ+ art.

Art history is full of hidden queer artworks ready to be resurfaced, researched and

recontextualized. So why was queer art hidden in the first place? How do we go

about resurfacing it and why is it so important that we do?

As we know, explicitly queer artworks have historically been hidden because of

societal laws and religious prejudice.

Homosexuality was a prosecutable offence.

Homosexuality was still criminalised in Scotland in 1980, a full 13 years later

than a decriminalisation in England.

Even after decriminalisation took effect in 1981,

a law called Section 28 continued queer repression.

Any public authority funding could not be associated with the so-called promotion of homosexuality.

Exhibitions weren't going ahead. Mapplethorpe and others had their work censored.

Of course, this repression runs throughout our history.

So this kinds of personal, individual narratives are often not represented.

It’s to do with self-censorship,

It's to do with the ways that art has been spoken about,

written about and interpreted in the past.

So in order to find LGBTQ+ art

throughout history, and you will find it, you need to delve into collections of

letters, journals and private sketchbooks.

By their nature, these kinds of hidden artworks

are way more expressive and intimate than public facing paintings and sculptures.

You know there's things that you'd write in a diary or photographs that you

might exchange with a partner that you would never show to the public.

They're usually much more spontaneous, much more kind of liberated and joyful,

perhaps than finished artworks.

For example, artists like Joan Eardley, an

iconic painter of Scottish landscapes.

When you look at an Eardley landscape on the wall,

you don't really get that sense of a creator in the same way that if you read

letters written by her, they're overflowing with kind of intimacy and

frankness about her life, and the fact that her happiness really had an

effect on her artwork. So when she was miserable, when she was going through a

kind of personal turmoil with various friends and lovers,

it really reflected in her art.

Queer art can also be uncovered in niche

special book collections with limited print runs.

Claude Cahun's work was

expressive, playful and subversive, playing with gender identities. But it was

largely forgotten until the 1980s, when their work was rediscovered by a researcher.

A French artist, photographer, poet, revolutionary.

She started dressing androgynously. She shaved her head.

She adopted this kind of indeterminate pseudonym

Almost like prefiguring trans, non-binary, gender fluid

discussions today.

Sort of dressing up, role play, lots of

surreal aspects and elements like mirrors sort of brought in.

She worked very closely with her stepsister and lover, Marcel Moore.

They were able to do whatever they wanted and

presented in the way they felt they wanted to

and not feel like they had an audience to act up to.

And I think because

of that, you get these more sort of surreal and wild explorations of identities.

In most instances, arts queer identities were literally physically

hidden in sketchbooks, attics and limited print runs.

But in some cases it was hidden in plain sight.

Anne Lister was a landowner, a

businesswoman and a lesbian in 19th century England.

Lister is this incredible model for a discovery of

this almost hinterland that is lying beneath the whole of our history.

There's pages and pages of diaries amounting to about five million

words of text. There's some material in the diaries which is coded, so she devised

her own code, which is a mixture of Greek and I think algebraic terms to discuss

sensitive material and often about her own lesbian relationships.

In a recent visit that I made to Anne Lister's home,

I could visit that place as a sort of regular country house.

But going into the bedroom of Anne Lister

and imagining lesbian sex and you know, at that particular time in history,

I mean, it does add a different dimension.

But for most contemporary art researchers and artists, the problem isn't unlocking

the secret of coded LGBTQ + artwork.

It's actually finding them in the first place.

So how do you go about tracking down hidden histories?

It's really a matter of hunting down material.

For me, it starts with a really creepy thing and it's going to look at their wills.

If you can't find very much in the archives, then you can sort of track down

family members. They've then got a batch of letters that then tells you about

another friend and then, you know,

you sort of end up putting these sort of webs of people together.

Researching queer artwork, of course, comes with many challenges.

Often, when researchers do acquire material, it comes under an embargo.

Embargoes is a huge thing,

Basically saying that the material will be given to you, but you can't let anyone see it

for a certain amount of time, 10 years, 20 years or after the death of the creator.

And that's only if researchers are able to access it at all.

It's often the case that material doesn't reach us because it's been destroyed,

either by the creator themselves, if it's felt to be too intimate or revealing, or

often too by the families of creators who perhaps thought that that material wasn't

suitable for a wider audience.

Take George Platt Lynes, a fashion photographer working in the 30s and 40s.

George Platt Lynes made his living really as a fashion photographer

and as a photographer of theatre and ballet.

But his real interest was in photographing the male nude.

Of course, this is something that's, unless

it was done in a very 'straight' manner; it was something

that just couldn't be shown publicly.

He actually burned the majority of his prints and negatives,

whilst dying of lung cancer in 1954. But a collection of over 600

negatives was purchased by the Kinsey Institute, surviving to this day.

This kind of preservation shows the impact of

the rediscovery of hidden histories.

His work was hugely influential to subsequent queer artists,

particularly one Robert Mapplethorpe.

Cases like these raise all sorts of moral quandaries,

who gets to decide if historic artists

inner feelings are exposed to the world.

What counts as being in the public interest?

Is it OK to retrospectively out an artist or is that

actually more like adding misrepresented groups back in?

Does he ever want us to see this?

its like someone going into like like finding your porn stash

and being like, 'Look at all this'.

Hundreds and thousands of people can now look at them online.

Did he ever think that was going to happen? Probably not, no.

And of course, it's difficult to make assumptions one way or

The other about how someone from the past might identify.

What role that plays in their work and our reading of it.

Art histories are constantly being evaluated with new readings, challenging

past conventions and understandings of an artist and their work.

New hidden histories are always emerging.

Reshaping how we understand our history.

Archivists today and museum curators as well, are very much more aware of the

silences in their collections. What is missing?

You know these experiences have

always been there.

We just need to find them.

It's these pioneers that opened the way for later generations

Heteronormativity is still, the default,

challenging it is our responsibility

and is beneficial for everyone.

And through all this, the hidden histories

of Queer Art become an integral part of the history of art.