

PRESS KIT

LOVING – THE HUGH NINI AND NEAL TREADWELL COLLECTION

MUSÉE RATH – 8 JUNE - 24 SEPTEMBER 2023



MUSÉE D'ART ET D'HISTOIRE
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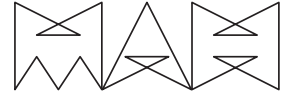
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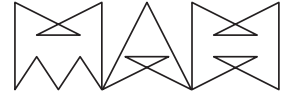


Geneva, May 2023 – This summer, the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire (MAH) premieres the first survey of Hugh Nini and Neal Treadwell's exceptional photographs of men in love, a collection they have been growing for over twenty years. These images spanning the 1850s to the 1950s attest to eras and places where love between men was and, at times, continues to be prohibited. Following the hugely successful 2020 international publication, the collectors have chosen a new selection exclusively for the MAH and the galleries of the Musée Rath. Walter Pfeiffer will complement the installation, along with Urs Lüthi's films.

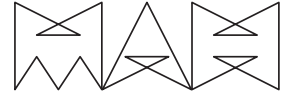
In October 2020, the different versions of the book *Loving* were simultaneously released into bookstores throughout the world and were met with immediate success. The gorgeous volume brings together a small portion of the massive photography collection – more than four thousand images – collected for over twenty years by the collector couple, Hugh Nini and Neal Treadwell, both originally from Texas. It all started unexpectedly when they found an image from the 1920s that seemed to be a unique testament to two men in a loving relationship. Their accidental collection steadily grew, retracing nearly one century of love stories marked by the Civil War, the two World Wars, and the Great Depression.

The Musée d'Art et d'Histoire is very pleased that Nini and Treadwell, a married couple of 31 years who live in New York, have agreed to the museum's proposal to organise an exhibition around their collection. The public has the exclusive opportunity to discover a new selection of these images, some never seen before, in the galleries of the Musée Rath. The message is the same: love between two individuals has always been and will always be a universal feeling, regardless of era, place, class, sex or socio-political climate.

The presentation of private collections is one of the Musée Rath's main program axes and comports with the values of the MAH. The Zurich-based artist Walter Pfeiffer created a selection from the collection, and Swiss artist Urs Lüthi's videos on intimacy and the couple are projected on the Rath's lower level. Their participation brings a contemporary spirit to historical rigour, all while cultivating joyous irreverence.



Curator	The MAH is the curator, with the participation of Walter Pfeiffer, from a selection made by Hugh Nini and Neal Treadwell.
Publications	<p><i>Loving</i> is available in French, English, Italian, German and Spanish for CHF 49.- at the Musée Rath.</p> <p>French: <i>Ils s'aiment. Un siècle de photographies d'hommes amoureux (1850-1950)</i>, texts by Hugh Nini & Neal Treadwell, Régis Schlagdenhauffen, Paris: 5 Continents Editions – Les Arènes, 2020, ISBN 979-10-3750-255-1</p> <p>English: <i>Loving. A photographic history of men in love 1850s-1950s</i>, texts by Hugh Nini & Neal Treadwell, Paolo Maria Nosedà, Milan: 5 Continents Editions, 2020, ISBN 978-88-7439-928-4</p> <p>Italian: <i>Loving. Una storia fotografica</i>, texts by Hugh Nini & Neal Treadwell, Paolo Maria Nosedà, Francesca Alfano Miglietti, Milan: 5 Continents Editions, 2020, ISBN 978-88-7439-929-1</p> <p>German: <i>Loving. Männer, die sich lieben - Fotografien von 1850-1950</i>, texts by Hugh Nini & Neal Treadwell, Munich: Elisabeth Sandmann Verlag, 2020, ISBN 978-3-945543-82-5</p> <p>Spanish: <i>Loving. Una historia fotográfica</i>, texts by Hugh Nini & Neal Treadwell, Barcelona: Duomo ediciones, 2020, ISBN 978-84-18538-05-6</p>
Contact	<p>Press Office Sylvie Treglia-Détraz Musée d'Art et d'Histoire de Genève Phone +41 (0)22 418 26 54 sylvie.treglia-detraz@ville-ge.ch</p>
General Information	<p>Musée Rath Place de Neuve – 1204 Geneva Open Wednesday-Friday, 2 pm – 7 pm Saturday and Sunday, 11 am – 6 pm Closed Monday and Tuesday Admission is free</p> <p>Website: mahmah.ch Ticketing: billetterie.mahmah.ch Blog: mahmah.ch/blog Online collection: mahmah.ch/collection Facebook: facebook.com/mahgeneve Twitter: @mahgeneve</p>



1. Exhibition Origin

While strolling through an antique shop in Dallas, Hugh Nini and Neal Treadwell were captivated by an image from the 1920s lost among a pile of anonymous photographs. It represented a couple of young men intertwined and looking at each other in an undeniably loving way. The collector duo was struck by the risk the models had taken, posing in everyday clothing in a typical American and suburban setting.

Summoned by this picture in which they saw themselves, Nini and Treadwell knew they had found a treasure, a unique and tangible testament to clandestine love. They could not have imagined that it represented the start of a fantastic quest to bring them to dealers and flea markets across Europe, the Americas, Asia and Oceania, all while keeping an eye on auctions. As they uncovered and researched images that spoke to them, their quest became a mission.

The idea of publishing the collection took seed upon the suggestion of a specialist in vintage photography in New York, where the couple, originally from Texas, has lived since 2012. In 2020, it became a book titled *Loving*, published in five languages. Its success has been great.

It was a natural step to go from catalogue to exhibition. In 2019, Marc-Olivier Wahler, newly named head of the MAH, met the publishers of the forthcoming book. Enthusiastic, he proposed to premiere this collection in the first worldwide museum exhibition.

2. The Collection

The Nini-Treadwell collection today includes more than 4,000 images, spanning the 1850s to the 1950s and coming from numerous countries throughout the world (United States, United Kingdom, Canada, France, Italy, Germany, Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia, Hungary, Australia, Japan, Singapore, China, Czechia, Slovakia, Estonia, Russia, Portugal and South America). Aside from the pictures taken in photobooths, the photographers are unknown; they could be a friend or family member, a discreet, compassionate or concerned professional. The pictures adopt the same staging as for heterosexual couples: couples pose at the bow of a ship, on the branch of a tree, at the beach, in the forest and in bed, and they sometimes also simulate a wedding stance. All social classes and ages are represented, from workers to businessmen, including students, soldiers and sailors. The symmetry between the figures adopting the same pose is a common aspect that emerges regardless of the models' place, period or nationality.

Through the years, Nini and Treadwell's eyes sharpened with the practice of decoding the images offered to them; since the Civil War, social norms have greatly evolved, as have the marks of affection between men. As such, collectors have followed the 50/50 rule they set for themselves: their personal conviction that the image depicts a couple in love must reach fifty per cent. To reach that, they rely on the look in a model's eye – feelings are expressed regardless of every effort to hide them. Among the other clues Nini and Treadwell deciphered is the umbrella under which the couple takes refuge, which is synonymous with protection, but also rings, bracelets and other jewellery.

This collection attests to a need that was met by the democratisation of photography: the need to record a forbidden union between two beings. These thousands of pictures trace a century of photography history, opening a window into a world very different from our own and, at the same time, recalling the social advances of recent decades throughout most of the world's countries. All while revealing the



different faces that male love can take, the Nini-Treadwell collection celebrates the universality of love, affection and connection.

3. Exhibition Trajectory

A poetic installation paying homage to the efforts of the Texan collectors greets visitors at the museum entrance. Theoretically, the world of the Nini-Treadwell collection does not share much with Walter Pfeiffer's reality. Born in 1946, he is known for his photographs that stage male models exhibiting unbridled sexuality. Cultivating joyous irreverence, the MAH has invited the Zurich-based artist to cast his unique eye onto the selection of images made for the MAH in which love is so palpable and real. Pfeiffer has set his attention on several of these images of couples and uses them to fill walls, blowing them up and choosing most of the wall colours.

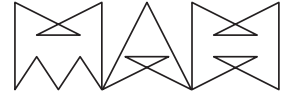
In the main galleries, the public finds cases displaying four hundred pictures selected by Nini and Treadwell from their vast collection. There are perfectly posed studio portraits, candid images (at the beach or on mountaintops, for example) and photo booth pictures. Because of their intimate nature, these original prints range in size from small to medium format.

The presentation is completed with two black and white videos by Urs Lüthi (born in 1947) from the collection of the Fonds Municipal d'Art Contemporain (FMAC), which can be found on the lower level of the Musée Rath as simultaneous projections. Created in 1974 at the Art/Tapes/22 studios when the artist was in Florence, the two films draw on a split screen. In *Orgasm* (7min 45sec), on the right side, milk is gradually poured into an empty glass until it overflows; on the left side, Lüthi's face, seen close up, reacts in spasms as drops of water drip onto his skin. In *Morir d'Amore* (7min), Lüthi is on one side of the screen, lighting his face from underneath using a flashlight; on the other side, Elke Kilga, the artist's former partner, calmly smokes before pointing a gun at viewers. When she shoots, Lüthi crumbles. Aside from the symmetry of the images and intriguing suggestion of the intimacy and hate that can emerge in a couple, this installation also winks at Lüthi's 1975 performance, which put guests on edge during an opening at the MAH that year, titled *L'Artiste est Dans La Cave* (The Artist is in the Cave).

4. Excerpt from Nini and Treadwell's text, which appears in every edition of *Loving*, published in 2020

"One enduring philosophical question is: "If a tree falls in a forest, and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?" The correct answer is yes – or no. If these couples loved each other and memorialised their love with a photo, but no one else saw it, did their love exist or matter? This book is filled with fallen trees whose sound, though delayed, is now being heard for the first time. They are the sounds of an embrace, a lingering glance, the touch of a hand, the softness of a brow, two figures lounging in the grass, a cheek pressed against another's cheek.

These pages contain the images of loving male couples that were, until now, largely kept secret from their families, their friends, and the world. They memorialised their feelings for one another in these photos at great risk. All of them are examples of love, affection, attachment, and bravery. What we, as collectors, personally, have come to understand from these photos is that couples like us have always existed. They were the trees falling in the forest that no one had heard. Until now. These photos have taught us something that we instinctually understood, but hadn't yet formed into a thought that the human heart has never conformed to the



strictures of society as it stumbles awkwardly through something it doesn't immediately understand.

The heart will always find its way to the light, and in this case, into daylight. Until this collection, we thought that the notion of us as a loving couple was "new." What we have learned from our collection is that we're not new. We, and other couples like us, both male and female, are a continuation of a long line of loving couples who have probably existed since the beginning of time."

5. Three questions for Hugh Nini and Neal Treadwell

a. How did you select the images for the exhibition at the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Geneva ?

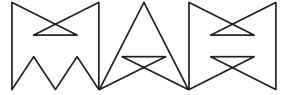
Our selections for this exhibition will follow very closely the contents of our book, *Loving*. It will be our aim to render the layout in the museum somewhat similar to the layout of our book so that there will be a flow and continuity for the public.

b. Loving was hugely successful in bookstores. Since the publication, have people contacted you because they recognised themselves, family members of friends? Have people already offered you more personal photographs?

Surprisingly, we have had no one reach out to say that they are related to anyone in our book. However, people who have our book have sent us photos of their relatives that they believe could be a part of our next book. As well, a professor from Vienna, and others, have reached out to us saying that the couple on pages 210/211 are in fact Rupert Brook, a famous poet, and Duncan Grant, a famous artist, both from the UK. If you look at photos of these two men from the early 1900s, they are more than similar. They are a match.

c. Why does your collection end in the 1950s ?

When we first began collecting there was no plan or grand idea regarding the scope or time period. The invention of photography established the 1850s as the starting point. We established the end of our collecting period as the 1950s because to us, photos of this nature are very different, regarding context and societal norms, than those taken during the 1960s. That timeline just happened to, accidentally, make on neat little century.



6. Biographies

Neal Treadwell

Neal Treadwell was born in June 1964 in Stamford, a small, rural community in western Texas, where he was raised on the family farm. For more than thirty years, he has worked in cosmetics. Neal met his husband Hugh in March 1992. They married as soon as it was legal in 2006 when Massachusetts became the first state in the United States to adopt marriage for all.

Hugh Nini

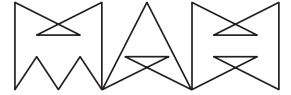
Hugh Nini was born in Beaumont, Texas, the second in a family of seven children. He was raised in Houston, where he headed the Denton Ballet Academy for thirty-three years before moving to New York in 2012. Hugh considers his husband Neal as the second luckiest man on earth.

Walter Pfeiffer

Born in Zurich in 1946, Walter Pfeiffer began in graphic design and illustration before turning to photography in the 1970s. His photographs, distinguished by the sensuality and even the eroticism of their subjects, are formally bold in colour. His work has been exhibited in galleries and museums worldwide and ranges from collaborations with international magazines (including *Vogue* and *i-D*) to personal images that reveal intimate moments. Considered one of the most influential artists of his generation, Pfeiffer is a source of inspiration to many creative figures across the globe.

Urs Lüthi

Born in 1947 in Kriens (canton of Lucerne), Lüthi is a major player on the contemporary Swiss scene. A master of the self-portrait, Lüthi has explored all media (photography, painting, performance) and has primarily centred his body in his art as a means of better questioning his identity.



7. Publications

An international success in bookstores, *Loving* is published in several languages. All these versions are available for sale at the Musée Rath for CHF 49.–

English: *Loving. A Photographic History of Men in Love 1850s-1950s*, texts by Hugh Nini & Neal Treadwell, Paolo Maria Nosedà, Milan: 5 Continents Editions, 2020, ISBN 978-88-7439-928-4.

French: *Ils s'aiment. Un siècle de photographies d'hommes amoureux (1850-1950)*, texts by Hugh Nini & Neal Treadwell, Régis Schlagdenhauffen, Paris: 5 Continents Editions – Les Arènes, 2020, ISBN 979-10-3750-255-1

Italian: *Loving. Una storia fotografica*, texts by Hugh Nini & Neal Treadwell, Paolo Maria Nosedà, Francesca Alfano Miglietti, Milan: 5 Continents Editions, 2020, ISBN 978-88-7439-929-1.

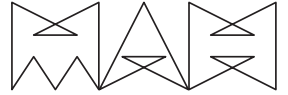
German: *Loving. Männer, die sich lieben - Fotografien von 1850-1950*, texts by Hugh Nini & Neal Treadwell, Munich: Elisabeth Sandmann Verlag, 2020, ISBN 978-39-4554-382-5.

Spanish: *Loving. Una historia fotográfica*, texts by Hugh Nini & Neal Treadwell, Barcelona: Duomo Ediciones, 2020, ISBN 978-84-1853-805-6.

5 Continents Editions

Founded by Eric Ghysels in Milan in February 2002, 5 Continents Editions is an independent publisher of art books and exhibition catalogues. Today it is considered a world reference not only in the field of non-European arts, but also in such spheres as contemporary art, photography, archaeology, ancient and modern art, the decorative arts, fashion and design. There is also a particular focus on nature and the poetry it evokes.

5 Continents Editions enjoys international distribution and a presence in bookshops, both physical and online, throughout the world.



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Thank you very much.

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p. 35 Lov010
Carte cabinet, United States, c. 1880
109 x 167 mm
Note: "Mcinturff, Steve Book, Delaware O."
Courtesy of the Nini-Treadwell collection
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10/11



p. 86 Lov062
Photomaton, United States, non daté
27 x 32 mm
Courtesy of the Nini-Treadwell collection
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p. 108 Lov104
Photograph, 1951
83 x 121 mm
Note: "1951", "Davis & J.C."
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p. 163 Lov159
Photograph, undated
67 x 96 mm
Courtesy of the Nini-Treadwell collection
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p. 209 Lov197
Photograph, undated
117 x 92 mm
Note: "Edward and his chum"
Courtesy of the Nini-Treadwell collection
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pp. 214-215 Lov204
Photograph, undated
89 x 63 mm
Courtesy of the Nini-Treadwell collection
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p. 236 Lov219
Photograph, United States, undated
71 x 119 mm
Courtesy of the Nini-Treadwell collection
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p. 329 Lov327
Photograph, undated
72 x 115 mm
Courtesy of the Nini-Treadwell collection
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p.210-211
Photograph, United States, undated
1117 x 70 mm
Courtesy of the Nini-Treadwell collection
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