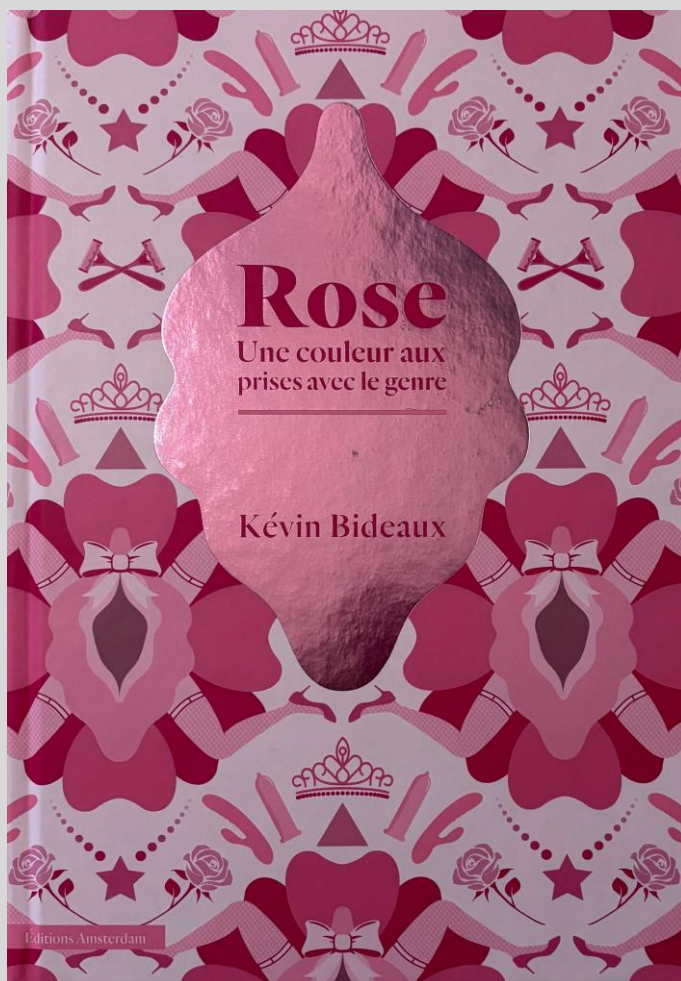


# BOOK REVIEW: Rose. Une couleur aux proeses avec le genre.

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**ROSE. Une couleur aux proeses avec le genre** (Bideaux, 2023). [French language]



Kevin Bideaux is a French artist with a master's degree in fine arts from the Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne and a doctorate in arts and gender studies from the Université Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis. Pink is his magnificent obsession: involved in gender studies and a member of the Laboratory of Gender and Sexuality Studies, he has colored his own body, his environment, and his artwork pink.

Who better than he could have written the cultural and symbolic history of pink in relation to gender and sexuality, race, and social class? The book is dense, encyclopedic, and analytical, based on extensive written and visual documentation. A truly interesting book that I

recommend reading: 527 pages, 240 iconographic references, and 568 accurate bibliographic references.

In addition to the brief Prologue, the book is divided into 9 chapters, of which I will try to sketch a very brief thematic summary, which cannot convey the cultural richness of the chapters themselves.

## **1. Not so old rose. At the origins of a colour**

Bideaux documents how the word "rose" to indicate not only the flower but also the colour was only integrated into the lexicon during the 18th century, today considered subordinate and accessory in colour systems. Its commercial affirmation as an artificial dye in the mid-20th century transformed it into the image of the utopia of plastics, with their promise of a colourful and glossy world.

## **2. In the flesh and in pink. Whiteness, femininity, and (hetero)sexuality**

Through the contributions of numerous scholars, the author demonstrates the link between the rosy hue with which the complexion is represented in Western culture, its universalization, and the social, cultural, and political hegemony of the white population in opposition to black skin. A sexualized hue as an image of pleasure in women and as a homoerotic feminization in men, used to represent both virginal whiteness and pornography.

## **3. The age (of the) rose. The emergence of rose as a symbol of femininity in the 18th century**

With an original description of the visual culture of the 1950s - called "the pink decade" - in clothing, furnishings, cinema, advertising, video games, video clips, and album covers, the book demonstrates the ability of pink to be universally identified as a metaphor for the feminine.

## **4. Pink = woman. An aestheticization of gender**

When did fashion for infants abandon white and light colors to define gender with pink and blue? In the West, this trend emerged as early as the 19th century but became widespread in the 1950s when the parental tendency to anticipate children's personalities by establishing gender differences through the preservation of heterosexuality spread. In adult fashion, the violent magenta tinged with violet of Elsa Schiaparelli's

"shocking pink" from 1937 contrasts with the delicate conservative pink of Christian Dior's 1946. The many shades of pink presented in cinema contrast, among others: the soft pink of Glinda in "The Wizard of Oz" from 1939, and the magenta of Marilyn Monroe's dress in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" from 1953. Bideaux examines numerous animated cartoons, both Western and Eastern."

## 5. I loooooove pink!

*Deconstructing a feminine preference*

It is interesting to read how certain neuroscientific, sociological, and philosophical studies have attributed women's preference for pink to genetic, biological, and physiological origins, among others, neglecting the role of education in defining gender: a "feminized" color that, if adopted by men, is often interpreted as a sign of gender nonconformity.

## 6. Market in pink. Pink, gender and marketing strategies

With the term "pinkification" the role of marketing in spreading the pink-feminine stereotype is indicated. Bideaux describes the phenomenon through the strategies of creation and communication of toys for girls, both in products and in advertising campaigns, and broadens his view on themed works of art. Among the toys, the history of the Barbie doll, for which the manufacturer Mattel has deposited with Pantone in 2011 the "Barbie pink", an intense and bright pink to feminize and eroticize the doll, and that of Hello Kitty, a Japanese doll that corresponds to the concept of "kawaii" (cute), referring to a set of sweetness, innocence, purity, simplicity, kindness, but also weakness and inexperience as the values that are asked of girls. Many of the themes related to the chapter are addressed by semiotics, philosophy, psychoanalysis, which demonstrate the antinomy of the meanings of pink.

## 7. Pink power. Pink (post) feminism and (post) feminists

This chapter offers an in-depth examination of the colors associated with the early Suffragette movements, exploring the themes of feminism, post-feminism, trans-feminism and cyber-feminism. From yellow to purple, to the green-white-purple triad, from lavender to violet, all the way to pink delicate or intense (magenta?) which opens a debate within the movements on its use as subjugation or denunciation of a stereotype. Bideaux broadens the analysis to television series, ballet choreography and celebrity self-promotion. If pink is conceived as incompatible with roles of power and responsibility, the author wonders whether the meaning of the color is undergoing a transformation: a re-

signification, a de-signification or an enrichment of its polysemy within which everyone can choose to express themselves?

## 8. Men and pink. A symbolic incompatibility with the masculine

This is perhaps the most 'political' text, in the sense that it analyzes the contradictions of the symbolism of the rose, incompatible with masculinity, even if it is documented how in the past, when it was considered a light red and therefore did not have the same meaning, it was also present in aristocratic male clothing. 'Political' insofar as it reveals the contradictions of some artistic, cinematic, musical, and visual culture expressions that adopt pink in an apparent social criticism of gender, but in reality reinforce traditional meanings. Used by the African SAPE community in the 1950s (French acronym indicating a youth movement with a strong sense of aesthetics and elegance) and then exported to Belgium and France in the 1980s, today it is used in a male context for its communicative ability to stand out and attract attention.

## 9. Proud to be pink. Gay and queer demands

In the last chapter, there is a careful dissertation on the reappropriation of pink - the most serious stigmatization of which is represented by the pink triangle that the Nazis' forced 10,000 men suspected of homosexuality, confined in Lager, to wear - and its reclamation by various civil rights movements Gay, Lesbians, Queer e Drag Queen. A symbolic polysemy that unites oppressors and activists denouncing oppression. As in the entire book, the documentation is very rich, from the writings of intellectuals to street demonstrations, from artistic performances to pinkwashing of some commercial brands.

## Epilogue. The pot of roses

The author declares their ambition to deconstruct the complex, contrasting, symbolic, political, social, and artistic system of the rose analyzed thus far, to open it up to a multiplicity from which each can draw according to their own needs.

A most beautiful book which I recommend to the entire "color community".

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## References

Bideaux, K. (2023) *Rose: Une couleur aux prises avec le genre*. Illustrated édition. Paris: Editions Amsterdam.