



Beauty, Sex and Power

Brett Dolman

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- Showcases familiar and little-known paintings from The Royal Collection and other public and private houses across the country
- Features the 'Windsor Beauties' and the 'Hampton Court Beauties' - portraits of ladies at court by the leading royal artists, Peter Lely and Godfrey Kneller - each with their own stories to tell
- Reveals Charles II's own exotic artistic tastes, and his own 'collection' of beautiful women
- Published to accompany 'The Wild, the Beautiful and the Damned' - an exhibition at Hampton Court Palace from April - September 2012

Charles II's reign was a period of revolutionary experimentation: in science, art and sexual etiquette. For the first time in British history, Royal mistresses – such as Nell Gwyn – played an active, public role in court life. Women sensed new possibilities and freedoms, appearing on stage, managing their own financial, matrimonial – and extra-marital – affairs. Encouraged by a licentious King, 'being beautiful' could get you what you wanted. But if beauty was admired and revered, praised by poets and idealized by artists, it was also distrusted and feared, pursued and possessed. Beautiful women were chased and abused, pilloried as whores. This equivocal nature of beauty explains the lives of some of the most charismatic and controversial men and women in British history – those Restoration mistresses and degenerate libertines who lived, loved and died amidst the bespangled luxury of the late Stuart Court. This beautiful book, published to accompany an exhibition at Hampton Court Palace, traces the rise and fall of the 'beautiful revolution' from the Restoration of Charles II to the death of Queen Anne in 1714. It is also a book about beauty itself: its ambiguity, its authority and its transience. This is a timeless tale about our continuing obsession with beauty, celebrity, power and love.

Brett Dolman is Curator of Collections at Hampton Court Palace and joint author of several publications including The Royal Palaces of London.

