

Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft - exhibition - Ann Arbor

## **"The first Institute for Sexual Science, 1919-1933" at the U of Michigan, Ann Arbor**

[The Project on Gender-Based Censorship](#)

At the Institute for Research on Women and Gender  
Presents a Special Exhibit:

**"The First Institute for Sexual Science"**  
**Art Lounge, Michigan Union**  
**September 8-30, 1999**

In 1919, Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935), the German Jewish sexologist and reformer, saw a long-cherished dream come true: on July 6, he opened the "Institute for Sexual Science" in Berlin-Tiergarten - the first of its kind in the world. The Institute operated until 1933, when it was shut down and its library burned by the Nazis. Politically, the Institute's emergence is to be viewed within the context of the progressive reform movements during the Weimar period; scientifically, the bio-medical explanations of human sexuality at the time formed the framework. The Institute's foundation was the first attempt at establishing sexual science. This exhibit, produced by the Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft e.V., affords an insight into the institute's work with to date unpublished documents, photographs and exhibits.

The following special events will accompany the exhibit:

**The Choice, A Dramatic Reading**  
**Audience Discussion to follow**  
**The University Club, Michigan Union**  
**Thursday, September 16, 7:30 pm**

In an effort to reflect on what sexual science means today, the Rackham Summer Interdisciplinary Institute offers a dramatic reading of Claire Luckham's thought-provoking play, *The Choice*. When Sal and Ray learn that the fetus Sal carries may have a "chromosome abnormality," the couple must make a series of highly emotional medical decisions that determine the fetus' future, and their own. The drama unfolds in the mind of its writer (played by Joanna Hastings) who, while envisioning her ideas taking shape on the stage, reflects on her relationship with her brother, who has Downs Syndrome. Drawing on contemporary debates about the politics of medicine and reproductive rights, the play urges us to consider how culturally prescribed notions of "the normal" shape our views on and decisions about our bodies. The audience is invited to remain after the reading for a discussion.

Directed by Gina Bloom (English, University of Michigan).

**Anders als die Anderen (Different From the Others, 1919)**  
**Pendleton Room, Michigan Union**  
**Thursday, September 23, 4:00 pm**

The Project on Gender-Based Censorship presents Hirschfeld's historic film, the earliest known screen depiction of a homosexual protagonist. The film was produced and premiered in 1919, during a unique post-World-War-I window of opportunity, when Germany had no film censorship. It was directed by Richard Oswald and starred Conrad Veidt, who both had distinguished careers in the 1920's, Germany's golden age of silents, and who both fled the Third Reich to continue their careers in Hollywood. All that is preserved today is a 25-minute fragment of the original 90-minute feature film. Hirschfeld scholar Professor James Steakley (Department of German, University of Wisconsin, Madison) will lead a question and answer session on the film, and UM Professor Martin Pernick (History) will compare it with American sex education films of the same period.

## **Symposium: Enacting Sexual Bodies: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Founding of "Sexual Science"**

**Friday, September 24**

**Exhibit Viewing:**

**Art Lounge, Michigan Union, 1-3 pm**

**Panel discussion:**

**Anderson Room, Michigan Union, 3-6 pm**

**Reception to follow in the Art Lounge**

The Rackham Summer Interdisciplinary Institute presents a detailed discussion problematizing the complex history and workings of Hirschfeld's theories and the Institute for Sexual Science. Panelists will examine the paradoxical combination of emancipatory social reform projects, such as advocacy for birth control, abortion, and homosexual rights, and the simultaneous development of the eugenics movement. While the Institute did not present its interest in eugenics in racializing terms, the exhibit itself reveals some complex and disturbing links that have yet to be explored thoroughly.

Speakers: David Halperin, Department of English, University of Michigan  
 Scott Spector, Departments of German and History, University of Michigan  
 Dennis Sgrue, Department of Psychiatry, University of Michigan Medical School, and Gender Services Program, University of Michigan Health System  
 Sandra Seekins, Department of the History of Art, University of Michigan  
 Kristin McGuire, Department of History, University of Michigan

Moderator: Gina Bloom, Department of English, University of Michigan