

Editor's Picks: High Jinks in 'The Holdovers'

Other highlights include Flora Dunster and Theo Gordon's anthology of queer photography and the return of Artists Behind Bars



BY SEAN BURNS IN OPINION | 09 FEB 24



Frieze Editor's Picks is a fortnightly column in which a frieze editor shares their recommendations for what to watch, read and listen to.

***The Holdovers* (2023)**

Alexander Payne's *The Holdovers* is a refreshing, jaunty comedy about a curmudgeonly and wounded academic, Paul Hunham, deftly depicted by Paul Giamatti, forced to mind a group of teenagers at a pompous boys' boarding school over the 1970 Christmas break.

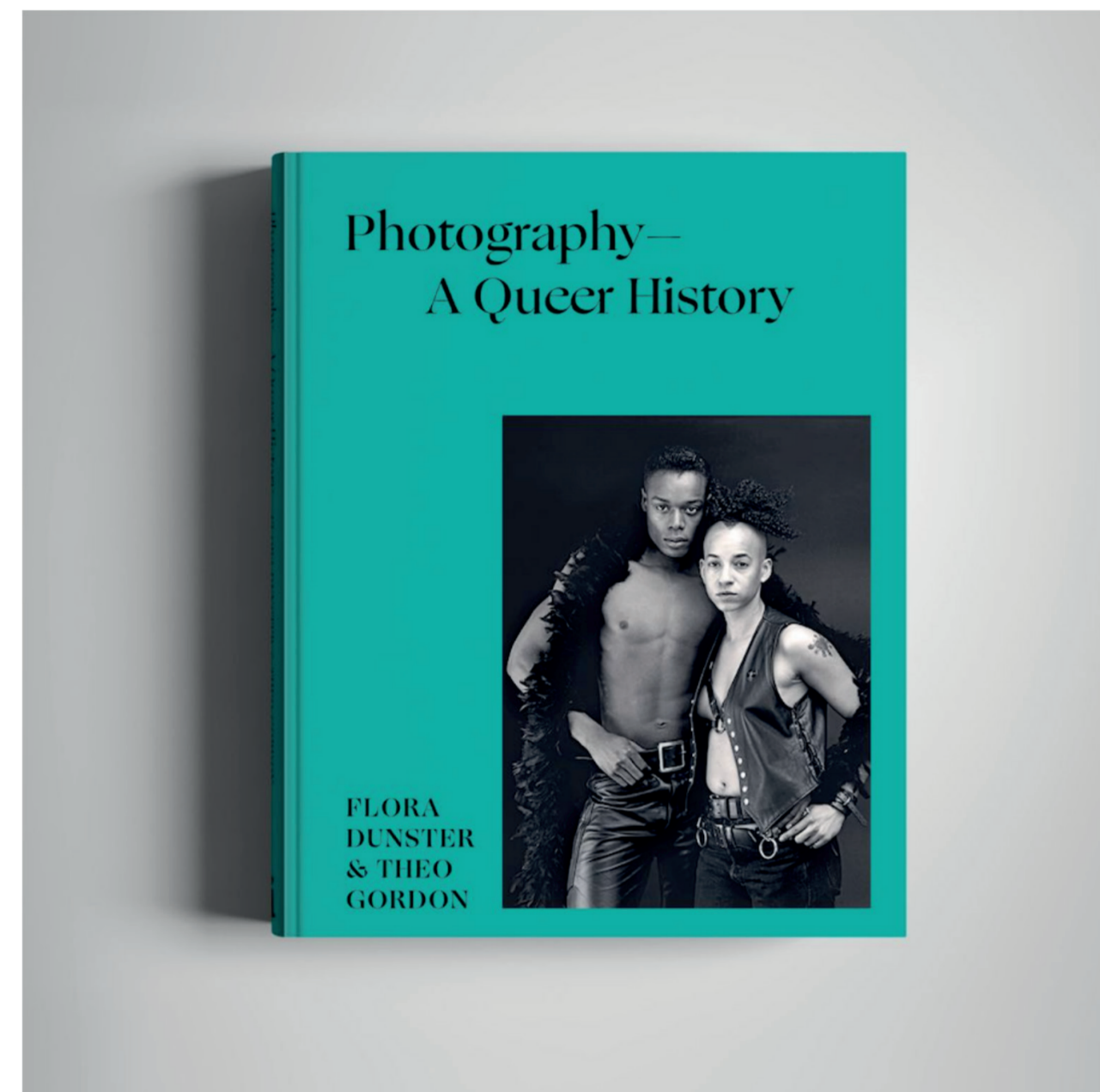
As student numbers dwindle – some escaping by helicopter – so does Hunham's adherence to the rules. Eventually, one remains: Angus Tully, brilliantly performed by handsome Dominic Sessa, who gives Hunham the run-around, dislocating his shoulder in the process. Da'Vine Joy Randolph shines as grieving school chef Mary Lamb, the only adult among them. They escape the snow-covered school to Boston, where Lamb leaves Tully to unravel Hunham's fraught past, culminating in a stunning and hilarious scene in a liquor store – my favourite instore set-piece since Julianne Moore scolded the pharmacist in Paul Thomas Anderson's magnificent *Magnolia* (1999).



Echoes of the best idiosyncratic cinema of the 1970s abound, such as Hal Ashby's remarkable *Harold and Maude* (1971), while the soundtrack of Cat Stevens and Labi Siffre keeps even the tensest moments feeling like a warm cup of sugary tea. *The Holdovers* demonstrates that tender, meaningful storytelling stems from excellent writing and the best comedy from careful casting and cinematographic timing (keep watch for the zoom-out when Hunham shouts to Tully from the school's steps).

Photography – A Queer History (2024)

'Queer photography does not exist', remarks the opening line in Flora Dunster and Theo Gordon's forthcoming anthology. 'But this does not mean that queer(s) must abandon photography', they continue, acknowledging the flexibility of their terms. Their hugely accomplished hardback book explores how over 140 practitioners have employed the photographic medium 'to work with and through' the parameters of its title.



Flora Dunster and Theo Gordon, *Photography: A Queer History*, 2024, book cover. Courtesy: Octopus Press

Leading luminaries are present (Nan Goldin), the ones who caught you in the club (Roxy Lee), too, alongside your favourites from Instagram (Linden Archives) and those whose work social media might censor (Ajamu X). Dunster and Gordon group the artists into loose categories, including 'Dialogues with Pornography' and 'Mourning and Militancy', each accompanied by a short, insightful essay and populated with concise contextual profiles. The result is an exceptionally accessible and useful compendium.



Flora Dunster and Theo Gordon, *Photography: A Queer History*, 2024, page spread. Courtesy: Octopus Press

Exhibitions

Check out Josefin Arnell and Max Göran's dual show at Cell Projects, London, 'brave and pathetic is better than drowning in shame'. Göran's wobbly film about trucking, *Dieseline Dreams* (2023), delights in its low-fi take on the machismo and mythology of the open road.

I also recommend Brandon Logan's 'Dog Rose' at Edinburgh's Ingleby Gallery, containing his precise abstractions in acrylic and string – an economy of means is at play here, constructing a delicate tension between value, labour, order and materiality. Finally, Fierce Festival stage Kitty Finer's legendary Artists Behind Bars (2016–ongoing) – in which artists run ridiculous, thematic pop-up boozers – at Eastside Projects, Birmingham, on 1 March. Go!



Kitty Finer, Artists Behind Bars, 2021 Courtesy: @round_lemon

Photography – A Queer History is published on 22 February 2024 by Ilex/Octopus Press

Josefin Arnell and Max Göran's *'brave and pathetic is better than drowning in shame'* is on view at Cell Project Space, London, until 25 February

Brandon Logan's *'Dog Rose'* is on view at Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, until 9 March

Main image: Alexander Payne, *The Holdovers*, 2023, film still. Courtesy: Focus Features



SEAN BURNS

Sean Burns is an artist, writer and assistant editor of *frieze* based in London, UK. His book *Death* (2023) is out now from Tate Publishing.

TAGS

[Sean Burns](#), [Frieze Editor's Picks](#), [Alexander Payne](#), [Paul Giamatti](#), [Flora Dunster](#), [Theo Gordon](#), [Cell Projects](#), [Ingleby Gallery](#).