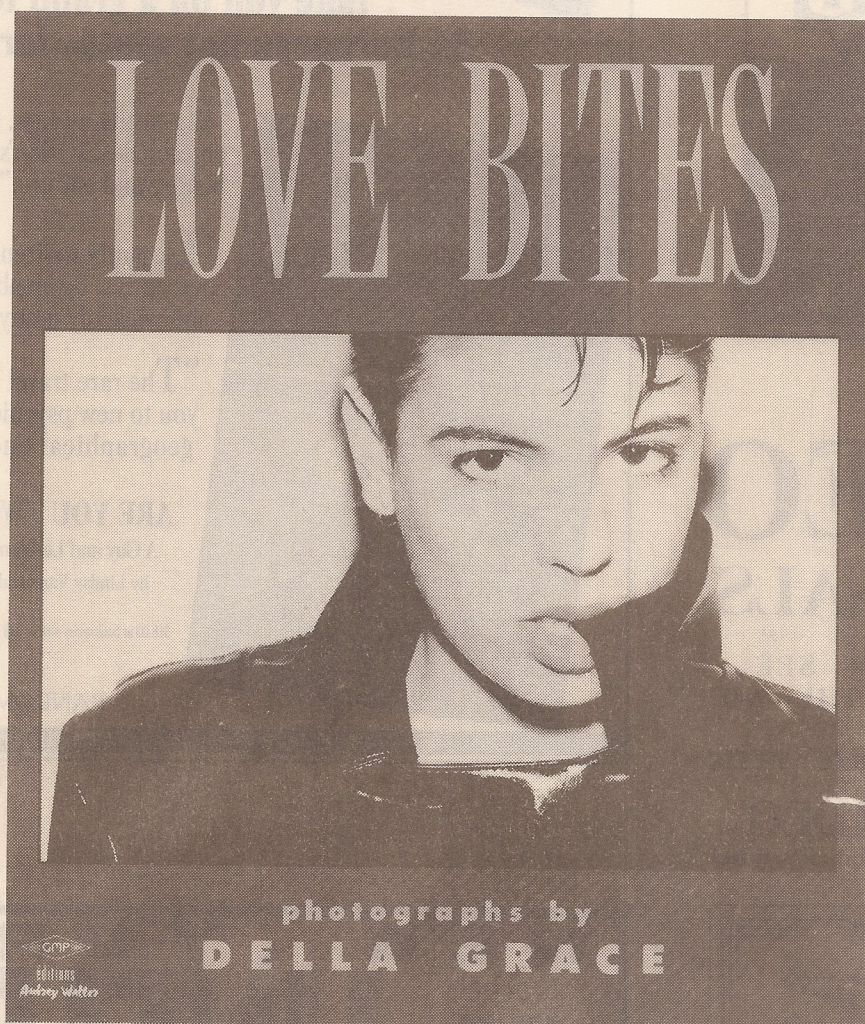


# Doing Battle With Censors

Photographer Della Grace Causes a Stir With Her Lens on the Lesbian Underworld

BY WICKIE STAMPS

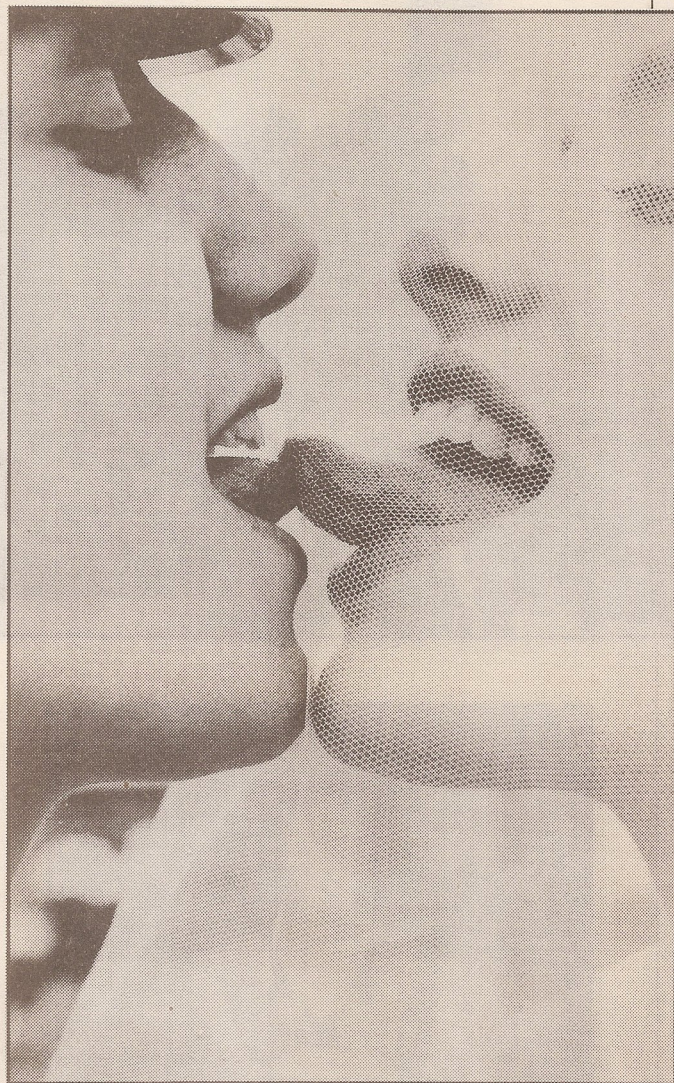
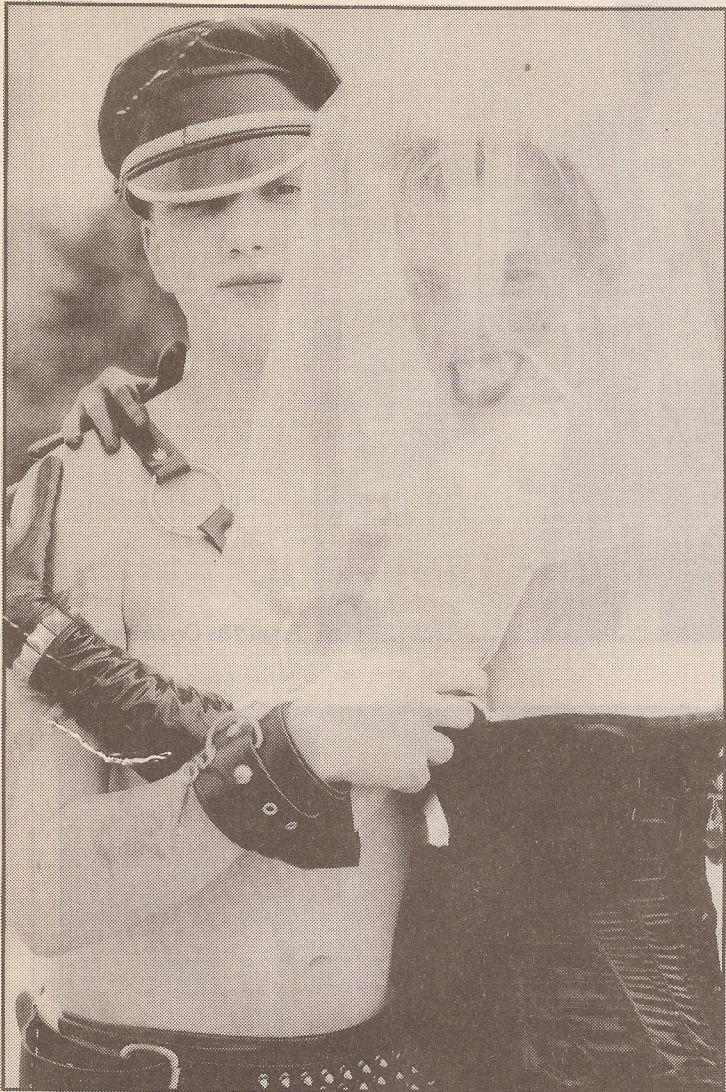


**“M**y work challenges certain assumptions people have about lesbians,” says photographer Della Grace, who defines herself as a “dildo-positive” dyke artist. “Many people think lesbians have strictly morally correct soft sex, free from the patriarchal taint of such things as penetration or power exchange. My work frightens some people because it contradicts their assumptions about who lesbians are and what we like.”

This summer the 33-year-old artist is releasing *Love Bites*, her first collection of photographs (GMP Publishers Ltd., \$29.95). “My work is about the lesbian sex culture. My photos are extremely upfront sexually and very, very out,” says the American-born artist now living in London. “I photographed my community just as they saw themselves. *Love Bites* is filled with dykes who for years were invisible—bar dykes and women into dressing up, role playing, gender bending, and rough sex.”

In 1980 Grace began photographing lesbians in Scott’s Bar in San Francisco. “At that time, it was the closest thing there was to a





Works from the series  
*The Ceremony*, 1988





women's leather bar," she explains. It was at Scott's that Grace, on "a personal quest for the erotic," met and began photographing "rough-looking lesbians," she says. "They were women who were not afraid to be themselves. This was a world that I had never seen shown by other lesbian photographers."

Even before it was distributed, *Love Bites* was swept up in a frenzy of censorship battles from Boston to Great Britain. In early June, the U.S. Customs Service seized over a thousand copies of the book in Boston, claiming it was obscene. After much protest, accusations of obscenity were abandoned, and the books were released later that month.

In London two bookstores—Silver Moon, a feminist bookstore,



Jess, 1989



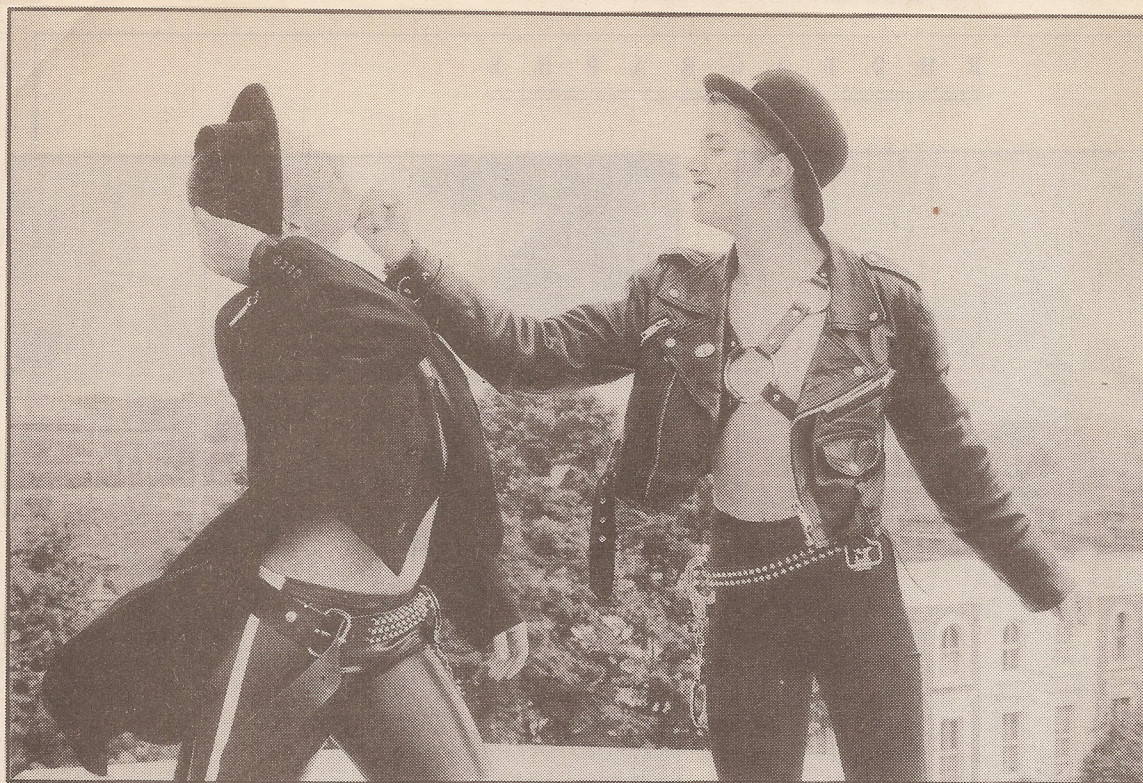
and Gay's the Word, a gay bookstore—will not stock *Love Bites*, fearful of prosecution under England's Obscene Publications Act. Another London feminist bookstore, Sisterwrite, refuses to carry the book for ideological reasons, or for what Grace calls "moral grounds."

"I am not surprised by any of the censorship," says Grace, who has in the past had her works shunned by British galleries and feminist publishing houses. "I didn't even think the book would get past English customs."

"But my work isn't obscene," she asserts. "I didn't even start out to make a book of lesbian erotica. My work is about a lesbian subculture and a way of life." ▼

Scott's Bar, San Francisco, 1982





From *The Ceremony*, 1988



*Soho Sister*, 1989



*Bethnal Green*, 1989