

*FIGURING OUT
TAKING SHAPE
FACING IN*

*An exhibition by 14 photography students from
the University of Applied Sciences in Bielefeld
at the London College of Communication
Seminar series for fine art photography
Dr. Wiebke Leister, 2009/10*

oct 12 — 16

Well Gallery, London College of Communication,
Elephant & Castle, London SE1 6SB

Private View: Tue 12 Oct. 2010, 6.00 — 8.30 pm
Opening times: Wed — Fri 10.00 am — 5.00 pm
Sat 10.00 am — 4.00 pm

COLOPHON

EDITORIAL WORK:

Wiebke Leister, Barbara Proschak, Johanna Saxen

DESIGN:

Sascha Fronczek & Sven Lindhorst-Emme

PRINT:

Druckwerkstatt FH-Bielefeld

ARTISTS:

- 1 Anja Schäfer WVE
- 2 Jasmin Shah
- 3 Carolin Re
- 4



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ARTISTS:

- 1 Anja Schäfer www.anja-schaefer.de
- 2 Jasmin Shah cayocean@gmx.de
- 3 Carolin Bollig carolin.bollig@web.de
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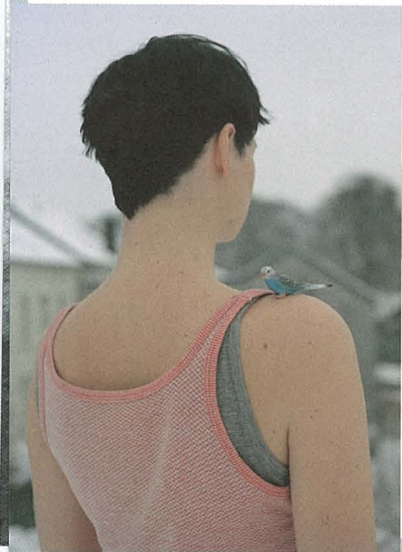
Anja Schäfer

ALIKENESS

7 PHOTOGRAPHS, DIGITAL PRINTS, DIFFERENT SIZES AND 1 TEXT

There is a space between myself and a person close to me that could be described as an intersection.

That other person somehow seems to look and act like me. The space between us remains indefinable, but is made visible through photography: a similar pose, a similar position, a similar gesture, a similar appearance. Our portraits are getting as close as possible to the moment in-between. Mimesis becomes mimicry, and vice versa. It is a visual game of absence and presence that makes it possible to stage this felt-proximity – a reference to something between us.



1

Jasmin Shah

COLLAPSIBLE BOX

7 B/W PHOTOGRAPHS, DIGITAL PRINTS,
50 X 50 CM, FRAMED

In the centre of this work is an experiment: to find out what kind of designs different people would come up with when given 5 collapsible boxes and 1 hour to construct an object (or some) that would be placed in a neutral space. These imaginary rooms were photographed afterwards under the same lighting and camera conditions. Thus, each of the images became a portrait of the absent person who created the room, giving us some indication of their personality.

2



Carolin Bollig

HABIT

PHOTOGRAPHS AND OBJECTS,
DIFFERENT SIZES, FRAMED

An outgrowth of filamentous cells.

Vestigial fur of the mammals.

Influenced by genetic disposition, hormonal status and age.

A common and natural product.

Both, part of the living body and material.

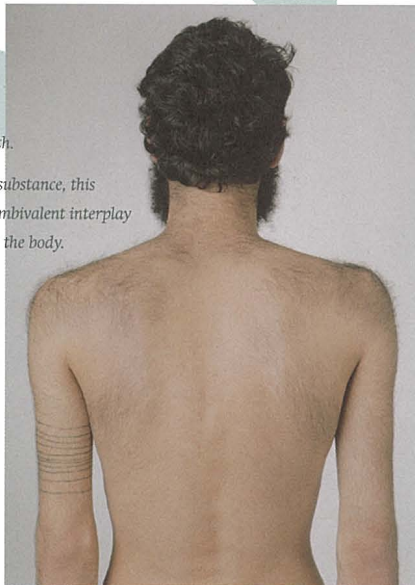
Inside and outside the body.

It creates identity, is garment or disguise.

An indication of sex and status.

Defying decay, it is a reference beyond death.

Looking at the materiality of this versatile substance, this work is an experimental portrayal of the ambivalent interplay between human hair and how it belongs to the body.



3

4

Cathleen Falkenhayn

DEVIATING

4 PHOTOGRAPHS, B/W PRINTS,
50 x 60 CM, FRAMED

What is portrayed is a phenomenon of seeing / gazing / squinting. These pictures show subjects with calm facial expressions from a straight angle. Nothing is visually accentuated or concealed; nothing hidden from the viewer. Still, the protagonists seem somehow 'strange', because the eyes seem to express something unusual, which attracts our attention. These expressions – in some ways deviating from a norm – are emphasized when looking across the series, adding something vulnerable, childish, and docile.



Katrin Greiner

FANTASTIC PLASTIC MACHINES

COLOUR PHOTOGRAPHS, C-TYPE, FRAMED

A product of the affluent society, plastic – a man-made material – facilitates and brightens our life: it protects, wraps, and covers. Equally, synthetics serve as materials that mould and design the human silhouette, transforming the proportions of the body. Converted to another use, these everyday products can dress human sculptures. Without revealing individual traits, their photographs portray aspects of contemporary consumption.



5



Johanna Saxen

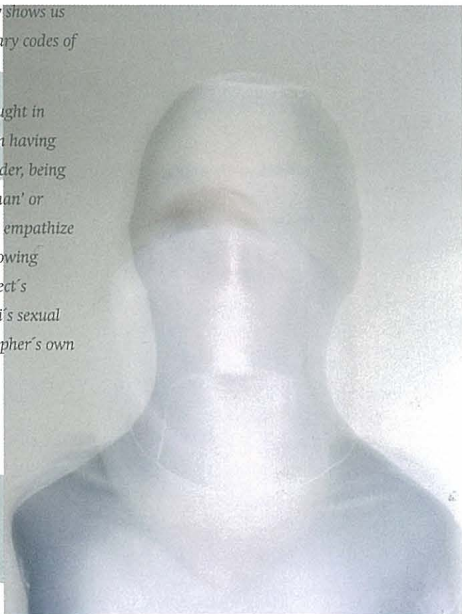
ZWEITHAUT — CONSIDERING JESSI

3 PHOTOGRAPHS, VIDEO AND SOUND

6

This work is an attempt to portray Jessi – a person caught between the two sexes, classified by physical characteristics that are neither only male or female, but caught somewhere 'in-between'. Her life story shows us the limitations and problems inherent in binary codes of gender construction.

These images explore what it means to be caught in your own body and the difficulties involved in having to conform to social expectations around gender, being judged by normative definitions of what a 'man' or 'woman' should be. To viscerally and visually empathize with what it feels like to grow up without knowing your sex, the photographer adopted her subject's second skin to re-enact the boundaries of Jessi's sexual envelope, which also challenged the photographer's own subjectivity.





Sara-Lena Maierhofer

PORTRAIT OF A CON MAN

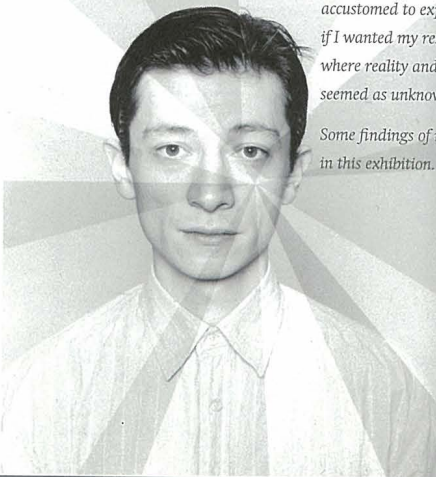
INSTALLATION OF PHOTOGRAPHS, OBJECTS AND OTHER DOCUMENTS

As a time traveller moves between different centuries, a con man travels between various identities and lives, at home only when in a state of permanent transformation. Trying to capture him in his many disguises is a rather hopeless endeavour.

After several attempts to trap his persona, I realized I had to beat him at his own game. Accordingly, I encircled the phenomenon of the con man on different levels: his appearance, his conventions, criminal profile and pathologies. Above all, I had to become accustomed to experimenting with deception myself, if I wanted my research to be successful – to the point where reality and speculation merged, and where facts seemed as unknown and unknowable as fictions.

Some findings of my investigation so far, are displayed in this exhibition.

8



Renke Brandt

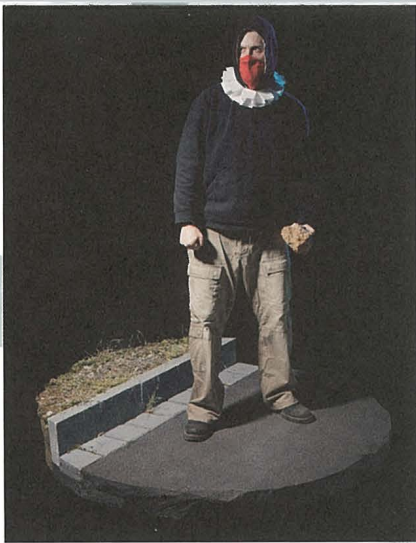
‘SSÄLAWIH’

*11 COLOUR PHOTOGRAPHS,
DIGITAL PRINTS, 35 X 50 CM, FRAMED*

A portrait of daily stuff: cakes, cactuses, cats. And people in rooms handling those things. Wherever it is, whoever it is - never mind. The photos are not about specific people or places. Their main point is: you could find something in them. Maybe a little something that evokes something else; some association, a story, a strange connection between objects. Suddenly the photo itself makes something visible in those trivial scenes. And quite often it was a fortunate coincidence that improved the photo. The title of the work is based on the French saying ‘C’est la vie’. It just sounds more clumsy.

7





Stefan Sangerlaub

UNTITLED (GREEN, BLUE, RED) FROM THE SERIES "PROTICO"

TRIPTYCH, 70 X 100 CM EACH, COLOUR PIGMENT PRINT

Art itself may be considered a portrait of our attempt to capture the 'intangible self,' which is shaped, on the one hand, by external sensations, and on the other, by internal processes of adaptation. Reflecting on this dialogue, I use portraiture in a broader sense to explore the relationship between art and its maker. Accordingly, I used the framework of staging different scenarios on small platforms to assemble elements from collective images and personal histories. Looking at these diorama-like images, the viewer adds up the various elements to read them as summative portraits.

10

Barbara Proschak

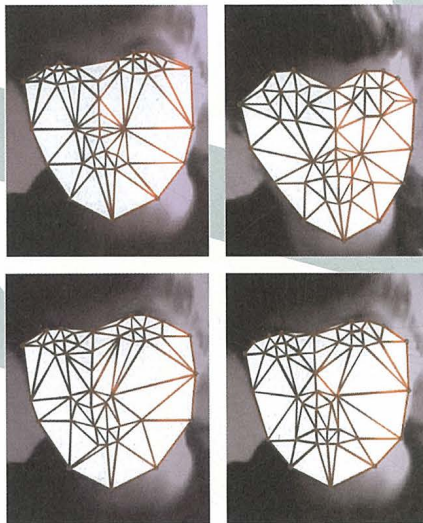
NEXUS (8 - 46 - 6)

7 DIGITAL-PRINTS · 30 X 40 CM

Human facial expression is formed by a system of muscle tissue. This system can be visualized by a network of lines and motor points that change position according to the movements of the face.

Photographing the visual data of my own face, I worked on a series of expression studies by erasing and enhancing parts of this surface, reconstructing the motion as a network of lines and dots.

Only footnotes provide clues for understanding the facial map. As the photographs fade away, the graphical codes stand out offering key information on how to read the resulting collages. Where there once was the significance of an individual face, we see a hand-made map of emotional graphs replacing the portrait.



9

Maria Sturm

SYSTEMS OF PERCEPTION

COLOUR PHOTOGRAPHS, DIGITAL PRINTS,
DIFFERENT SIZES

On first viewing we cannot really place these images, neither in a temporal nor in a material way. We see the faces of unknown young men and women, covered up in many ways. A slice of time, obscured by materiality: pleats, folds, creases, layered to new costumes and hairstyles.

Rather unsuccessfully we might try to locate these sitters in historic times, but perhaps it might be wiser to think of our current time with its familiar and still unfamiliar forms. Somehow our thoughts might return to paintings, to pigments and body measurements, inspiring other forms of beauty brought into a system of visual order on paper.

12



11



Alexandra Polina

MONO

3 INKJET-PRINTS 50 x 70 CM, 110 x 70 CM,
140 x 70 CM

It might appear to you that they are dissolved in their environment, divorced from the reality that you as a viewer occupy. Even if the subjects seem to be looking directly into the camera, they are in fact contemplating their own image.

The space in the image is constructed by the lines of sight, as drawn by the multiplied figures. The use of light and shadow leads you into the world of the photographed – a world of monocular vision, a place where the inhabitants have lost sight in one eye. A dark space. An eye socket. A camera obscura. Like the single-eyed gaze of the camera.

The presentation follows a similar logic, constructing two-dimensionality from three-dimensional space.

Stefan Törner

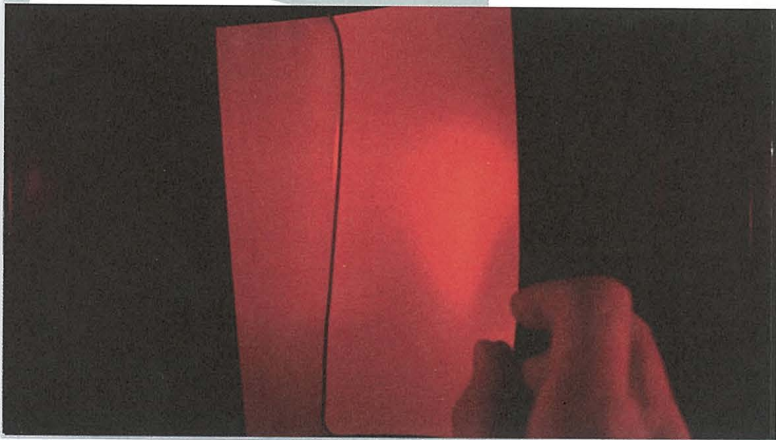
FACING OBLIVION

VIDEO PROJECTION, 5:33 MIN

We want the viewer to understand or remember something through our images. But just like memories themselves, photographs are more a proof of forgetting than a tool to preserve our recollections and share them. We can neither rely on anything beyond nor within the image, because the original circumstances and surroundings are either forgotten or never took place in the way we assume from the picture.

In the process of animating moments of the past, there evolves a story that is a product of our imagination, always written anew. Thus, a photographic memory becomes a kind of amnesia, a never-ending story yet to be told. This cinematic approach uses photographic portraits as tools for associative recollection. This process opens up a way of understanding memory in terms of being purely constructed.

14



Meller Ehlert

FATIGUE

BLOCK OF COLOUR PHOTOGRAPHS

The demand for ever-increasing work performance has become a central feature of today's goal-orientated society: a society on the edge, closer and closer to burnout. As we aspire to greater achievement, we have to find new compromises, including working against our inner clock and fatigue.

This study of faces demands specific attention from the viewer, directed to small details such as blemishes on the skin, eye bags, spots and red eyes. The sitters appear anonymous, stripped of all personal details, undergoing a similar but different experience of 48 sleepless hours that imprints itself on their faces. This sequential record gives the viewer the opportunity to follow this process, which they read as emotive, even though the tiredness shown is a physical expression induced by time. The multiple portrait of each of the persons, with an identical pose, results from photographing every 6 hours. The process is reflected by the colours of the backdrop gradually darkening to indicate the length of time the sitter has been awake, which results in a scale of elapsed time.



13

Figuring Out, Taking Shape, Facing In: Zum Bild des Menschen in der künstlerischen Fotografie

Seminar series for fine art photography, Dr. Wiebke Leister, 2009/10.

Carolin Böllig, Renke Brandt, Karin Greiner, Meller Ehlers, Cathleen Fäckenhohn, Sara-Lena Matherhofer, Alexandra Polina, Barbara Proselak, Stefan Sänglerlaub, Johanna Soxen, Anja Seidinger, Justine Stahl, Maria Sturm, Stefan Törner

"A Portrait is not a Likeness"¹ — since Richard Avedon proclaimed this in the 1980s, the terms and concepts of making and analysing photographic portraits have been moving on, further and further away from what used to be synonymous with the process of recording the recognizable and unmistakable likeness of a specific individual. But: what is this portrait that is NOT a likeness? A portrait without resemblance or without similarity to its sitter?

Having doubts about photographic life-likeness as such, Franz Kafka once argued that even the most automated photo-portrait made in a photo-booth is always the perfect "Mistake-Typsef"². It unavoidably simplifies and obscures the sitter, thus questioning a real person as its subject. However, the challenge remained as to find out what constitutes Non-likeness — seeking out the transformative potential of images (in general) and photographs (in particular).

The starting point for this exhibition was the observation that contemporary practitioners increasingly use models or actors to point toward more generic ideas about what it means to be human. In this procedure of estranging the image from its model, the sitter is gradually erased from the portrait, hence making its origin rather ob-

TAKING

SHAPE

sole. Accordingly, the debate evolved not only from understanding the ever-changing conceptions of portraiture, but largely from pinpointing approaches to portraying that result in different levels of photographic "unlikeness".

A guiding question to find out more about the motivation and the meaning of a respective image lay in asking: What is portrayed (rather than: Who is)? Closely followed by: What is the image communicating? How is it made? And why? As well as: How does it engage or envisage its viewer? All these prompts were designed to help the students to reflect upon, develop and present their own working definition of portraiture — in image and text, starting from different concerns, in different styles and with various approaches to the topic.

Jean-Luc Nancy asserts that "the portrait is not a monument"³, but rather a reflection for-itself that calls the viewing subject back to-itself. Following a triangular model of signification, these unlike portraits are therefore inevitably for-us — their meanings transferred back onto the onlooker, asking us to take part, drawing us right into the image to get in touch with the self. In both, image-making and image-viewing this means an encounter: Figuring Out, Taking Shape, Facing In.

This exhibition is an outcome of my annual guest professorship for fine art photography at the University of Applied Sciences in Bielefeld. Many thanks to my colleagues for this opportunity, and to the students for making this such an engaging encounter.

Dr. Wiebke Leister

FACING

IN

¹ Avallon in the American West, Harry N. Abrams, New York 1982, introduction
² jenseits: Conversations with Kafka, Anja Dürsch, 1971, p. 84
³ Nancy: The Work of the Present (2000) — in: Multiple Arts: The Museum II, SUNY Press University, 2006, p. 80

FIGURING OUT

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¹ Avedon: In the American West. Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1985, introduction.

² Janouch: Conversations with Kafka. Andre Deutsch, 1971, p.144

³ Nancy: The Look of the Portrait (2000) — in: Multiple Arts; The Muses II. Stanford University, 2006, p.240

FACING IN



HIGHBORING
OUT

TAKING
SHAPE

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FACING
IN