

# Lena Rosa Händle

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Lena Rosa Händle's artistic practice engages with queer-feminist discourses that are often linked with sociopolitical movements and questions of identity and normativity. In this search, she transmits an intellectual confrontation combined with a sensitive approach to her use of materials.

Coming from a personal artistic approach of portrait photography, she articulates an extensive social concern in individual, cooperative, and collective based practices. In her recent photography, collages, installations and sculptures, she works with methods like rewriting and appropriation, which lead to shifts of meanings and unmask the construction of culture. In her works with in/visibility and (sub-) cultural codes she engages critically with historical and contemporary societies and searches for utopian potential. Her often multi-part installations reflect various levels, which create a complex visual tableau.

# I (We) Feel Seen

9 C-Prints, 11 Inkjet Prints, framed, 50 x 65 cm, Text, 2018

In the current political climate in which cis-male camaraderie is gaining power, this installation explores the in/visibility and diversity of queer-feminist artists. The analog portrait photographs are testimonies of dialog-based encounters at the artist's Residency Studio in New York. How do the encounters and connections between Lena Rosa Händle and the protagonists become visible?

Taking time, seeing, listening and engaging with are the starting points of this series, which subsequently produces connection, a process of learning, appreciation and (temporary) community.

A text by the protagonist about their picture hangs, equally framed under each portrait. An additional text by Lena Rosa Händle shares observations, feelings and comments on the encounters.

Through these two layers of text, views are expanded, levels of social inequality made visible, as well as questions asked about the portrait itself.



As we look at this photo, larger than when we first saw it, we realize how tired we both look. Being in these bodies, these black, lesbian bodies, is exhausting, but every day we keep moving forward and holding each other's hands through it all. When we face the world, we try to cover up how tired we really are, but we realized through your photographs of us that it's powerful to show exhaustion because that's where the strength lies.



I (we) feel *seen*, not glamorous but *there*.



My studio is a meeting place, with the city at its feet rumbling. I invite a variety of queer-feminist artists from New York, whose work touches me to my residency studio apartment in Chelsea to take a dialogical portrait. We meet for the first time for two to three hours. It's afternoon, we drink coffee on my balcony. I watch, feel and listen. Connections form. Our eyes meet. I take pictures on three roll films. What does the portrait produce? What does it depict? How do the individuals portrayed perceive their picture chosen by me? What do I learn from these encounters? What does the picture convey? What does my gaze show? The artists use their picture with my name, I show their pictures with their names.



SOHO in Ottakring, Wien, 2018

# Encounters and Biographies by Lena Rosa Händle

## translation Kelly Ann Gardener

### 1. Fem Appeal

As Fem Appeal overcomes her fear of heights and steps onto the balcony, she suddenly transforms into the proud, serious and dignified Abraham Lincoln, whom I've met on stage in Coney Island.

I immediately feel comfortable in her warm presence and enjoy listening to her. Her height and her age surprise and impress me, queer people do not seem to age.

Fem Appeal (\*1967 Brooklyn, New York) is a burlesque performer and founder/host of the burlesque show Kitty Nights NYC (2006-2014). During the day she works with teenagers with disabilities in the health education sector. It is important to her to separate her identities, in order to keep her job. Burlesque performers still have a bad reputation.

### 2. Eva Kollisch and Naomi Replansky

The reading by the two Jewish Poets moves me profoundly. Eva survived the Holocaust by emigrating with a Kindertransport from Baden near Vienna. The vast dimension of this experience is felt in her essays. I am the only German in the room. I approach them after the reading. Their openness towards me and their enthusiasm for talking German eases me. We become friends, go for dinner while discussing politics and thinking about translating between languages. When Naomi and Eva first met, they were in their sixties. They've been a couple for thirty years and live together in two separate apartments in a building on the Upper West Side in Manhattan.

Eva Kollisch (\*1925 Baden near Vienna) is a writer and literary and German scholar. She was a Professor at the Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, New York.

Naomi Replansky (\*1918 Bronx, New York) is a writer and was a translator of among others texts by Bertold Brecht. Additionally, she worked as a programmer for many years.

### 3. Linda LaBeija

As she enters my studio, Linda LaBeija is in the middle of a telephone conference. She takes a seat on the Sofa and puts herself in order. With headphones in her ears, she whispers: „You can now start taking pictures.“

Linda La Beija (\*1991 Bronx, New York) is a Vogue dancer (HOUSE OF LABELIJA), Spoken Word performer and trans activist. She combines music with Spoken Word. During the day she works with homeless LGBTQ youth.

### 4. L.J. Roberts

L.J. Roberts enters my studio with Sparky and Ziggy, her mixed-breed Chihuahuas and immediately starts talking a lot. She tells me about her Polish/Russian background and about her Grandmother who inspired her to produce her works with textiles. Sparky and Ziggy are meanwhile taking over the studio, stretching out on the couch and it is clear that they are an important part of her family.

L.J. Roberts (\*1980 Detroit, Michigan) is an artist and teaches at the Parsons School of Design in New York.

### 5. Su Friedrich

By communicating through the camera with Su Friedrich, I feel complicity while at the same time a strong professional observation. She looks at me with a mixture of curiosity, skepticism but also affinity and goodwill. Is it because I've known her work since my studies and she is a professor?

Su Friedrich (\*1954 New Haven, Connecticut) is a filmmaker and professor at Princeton University.

### 6. Lena Rosa Händle

This self-portrait was taken with a self-timer during the early days of my residency in New York. I turn my gaze towards the city, I feel lofty and free yet at the same time a responsibility for this scholarship.

Lena Rosa Händle (\*1978 Berlin) is an artist, photographer and teacher. Alongside her artistic practice, she has worked at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna for the past four years.

### 7. Brittany Maldonado

I experience Brittany's stage presence as powerful yet sad. It is difficult to look behind her poses.

Brittany Maldonado (\*1987 Bronx) is a Spoken Word performer and artist. She has just given up her office job for the first time in her life. She wants to be true to herself and live her dream.

### 8. Ness and Nia

Nila & Ness enter my studio and give me a warm hug. Their great love is constantly present. In front of the camera, they melt with each other and seem to have forgotten me completely. I say „It feels like a mirror of my own relationship“ and just at that moment, I receive a message from my partner. As a white couple, we always feel safer. I can tell by looking at Nia that constant awareness and defensiveness are tiring.

Ness White (\*1987 California) and Nia Shand (\*1993 New Jersey) are a couple since 2013. In 2016 they founded the company Nia & Ness and since perform together as a poetry-performance-dance duo. They process their daily experiences as a black, lesbian couple with dance performances by Nia and with spoken word poetry by Ness. During the day, Ness works as an educator and Nia at the reception of a fitness studio.

### 9. Ulrike Müller

Ulrike Müller has the idea, to try a painter portrait with dog referring to Joan Mitchell with George the poodle, but then it does not fit with her evening plans to bring the dog. When she enters my studio, she says, „It's hard to take a picture of me.“

Ulrike Müller (\*1971 Brixlegg, Tyrol) is an artist living in New York since 2002. She was part of the queer-feminist artist collective LTTR. For a few years now, she has been able to live from her art.

### 10. Louise Fishman

Louise Fishman arrives with her wife and manager Ingrid Nyeboe (\* 1956). Both have academic and artistic backgrounds and tell legendary stories about the gay and lesbian liberation movement in New York in the 1970s, which they were involved with.

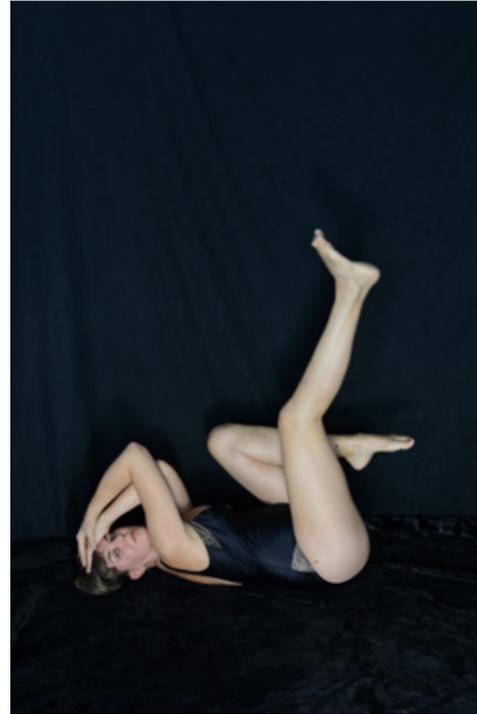
Louise Fishman (\*1939 Philadelphia) is a painter, she is able to live from her art.

# Reclaiming Gestures 2

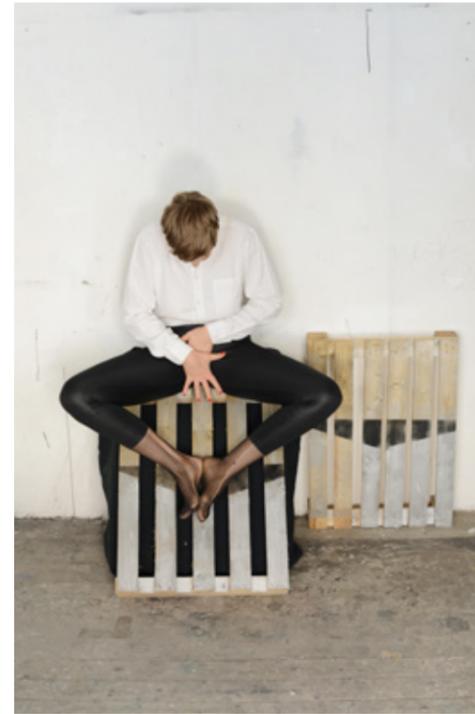
5 pigment prints, light boxes, aluminium frames, 60 x 90 cm, 2017



**GROSSE FOTOGRAFEN UND OLYMPUS  
(Great photographers and Olympus)**  
carbon print, light box, aluminium frame,  
60 x 90 cm, 2016



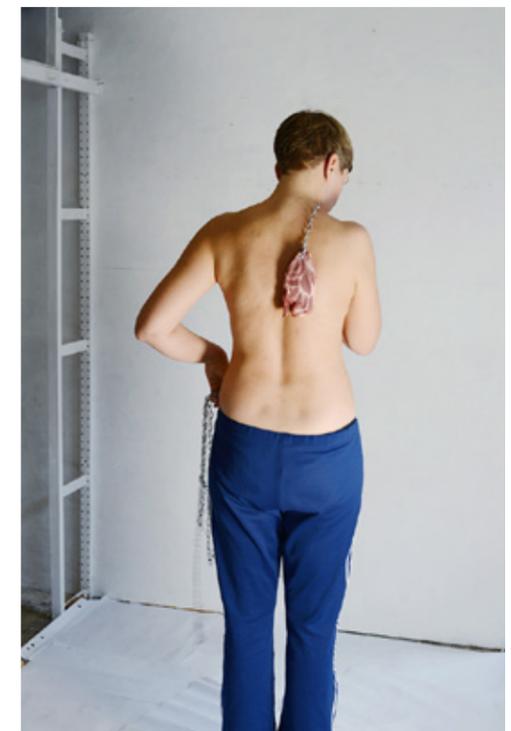
**Verführerisch unser neuer Bodenbelag...  
Das sinnliche Erlebnis auf Parkett.  
(Seductive our new flooring...The sensual  
experience on parquet.),** carbon print, light box,  
aluminium frame, 60 x 90 cm, 2016



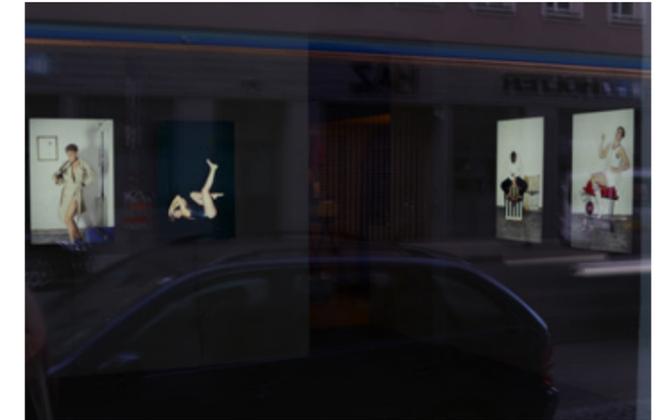
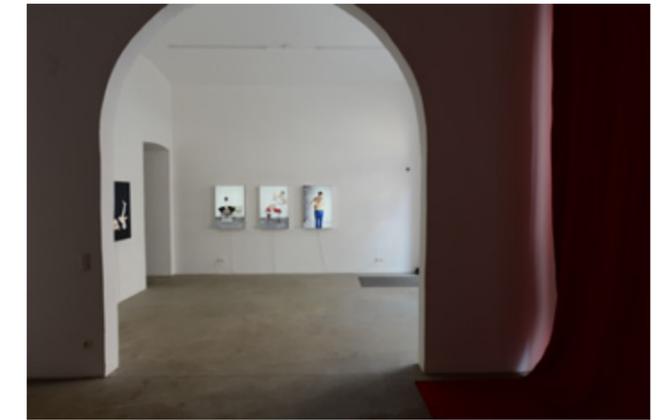
**Filter Rillos,** carbon print, light box,  
aluminium frame, 60 x 90 cm, 2016



**...Macht Spass im Mund! (...Fun in your mouth!)**  
carbon print, light box, aluminium frame, 60 x 90 cm, 2016



**Kommt Jungs Grillen! (Boys come to grill!)**  
carbon print, light box, aluminium frame, 60 x 90 cm, 2016



Artist talk Lena Rosa Händle & Katharina Aigner, moderation: Juliane Bischoff  
Fotos talk: Juliane Saupe, Fotos exhibition Renate Mihatsch and Lena Rosa Händle

# Reclaiming Gestures 2

Exhibition Lena Rosa Händle and Katharina Aigner, T/abor, Vienna

text by Juliane Bischoff, translation Emily Lemon

“Hard to say where you stop and the camera starts. A Minolta [...] allows you to effortlessly capture the world around you. Or express your inner world. It can be held easily and your fingers figure it out on their own. Everything works so naturally that the camera becomes a part of you. [...] Minolta. Then you are the camera, and the camera is you.”(Advertising copy (1976) in: Susan Sontag (2008, 18th edition), *Über Fotografie*, Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Verlag, p. 175)

Lena Rosa Händle’s five light boxes are part of her series *Reclaiming Gestures 2*, where she negotiates depictions of the female body. The five photographs show the artist in different poses with props that cannot be clearly identified. The titles are *Grosse Fotografen und Olympus (Great Photographers and Olympus)*, *Verführerisch, unser neuer Bodenbelag...Das sinnliche Erlebnis auf Parkett (Seductive, our new flooring...the sensual experience on parquet)*, *Filter Rillos (Filter Rillos)*, *Macht Spass im Mund! (Fun in your mouth!)*, and *Jungs kommt Grillen! (Boys come to grill!)*. The high-quality carbon prints in light boxes can be interpreted as advertisements. The composition and slogan-like titles draw on advertising images, although they contradict the usual advertising aesthetic. A break occurs between the written message and the image. The artist occupies the picture in a self-determined pose. Instead of advertised products, improvised seating made of metal frames and wooden palettes, a hasty drawing on paper, and the studio space become props in the picture.

In the re-staging in her studio, Lena Rosa Händle works from real existing historical and current advertisements. Roland Barthes refers to the fact that advertising photography is a system of symbols that operates with cultural codes, whose purpose is to reinforce the desire for certain products. In the advertisement this desire is no longer created only through the products and the associated lifestyle, but also through the half-naked to naked “sexy” bodies depicted. Lascivious poses serve the objectifying view in male dominated power structures. The written message in the picture steers the interpretations of the viewers. Photography, as the preferred advertising medium, creates a myth of photographic naturalness, which is connected with a heteronormative construct.

Lena Rosa Händle’s staged performances appropriate the visual repertoire and give it new humorous and queer-feminist meaning. As a result, the sexism and

objectification in advertising becomes obvious. In appearing as “commercial realism” (Goffman), the advertisement photograph is able to (hyper) ritualize ideas about roles. An idea of that which is absent in the supposed social situations emerges through Lena Rosa Händle’s use of a visual repertoire of interactions. In her re-staging, the advertising images depart from ascriptions determined by others. The artist presents strong, self determined and humorous poses of bodies and eroticism in which queer feminist codes can be found. One reference point here is represented by writer and activist Audre Lorde, who suggests the self empowering potential of eroticism, which independently becomes the lustful moment of social interaction.

As analyses of the culture of advertising images, Lena Rosa Händle’s works change the unreflected sexist prerequisites of perception that precede thought processes. They challenge everyday assumptions and present a self determined, queer-feminist, lustful appropriation of images of women.

# Reclaiming Gestures 1

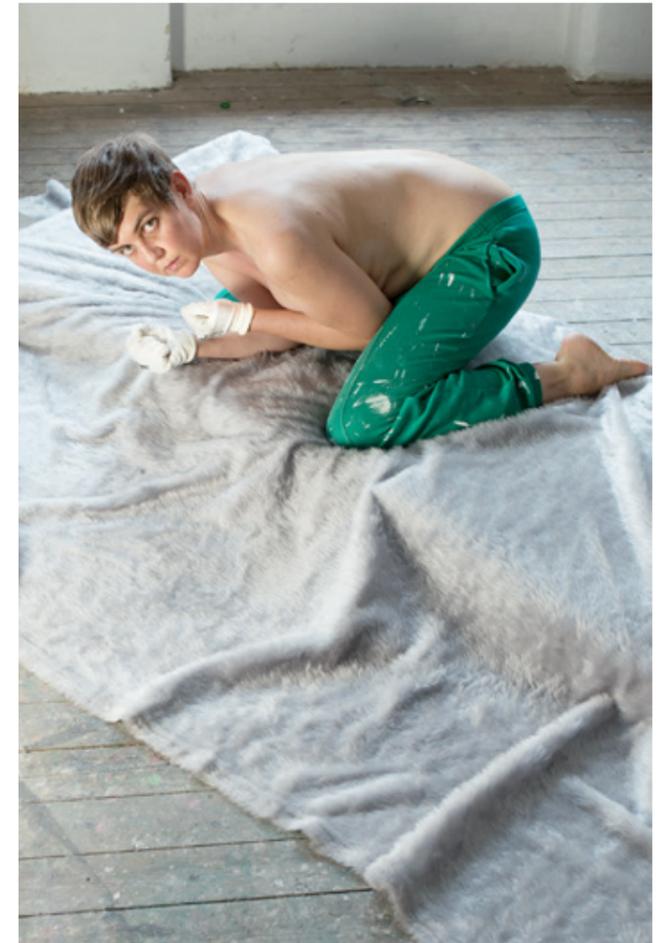
2 digital fotos, frametex backlight, dual-sided LED lightbox, steel, 2074 x 1074 cm, 2015

In Reclaiming Gestures1 Lena Rosa Händle works with gestures and poses from sexist advertising. The images include staged performances and artist portraits, depicting queer-feminist appropriations in the studio. The individual images refer to specific historical and current advertisements whose iconographic poses the artist appropriates, reinterprets, and presents as light boxes. The self-portrait photographs suggest references to female artists of the feminist avant-garde.

Two photographs from this work were shown in the solo show Reclaiming Gestures, 2015, supported by the City of Vienna Women's Department. The two-sided large format light box engaged in a dialog with the artwork ,Kubus EXPORT - der Transparente Raum' and with public space.



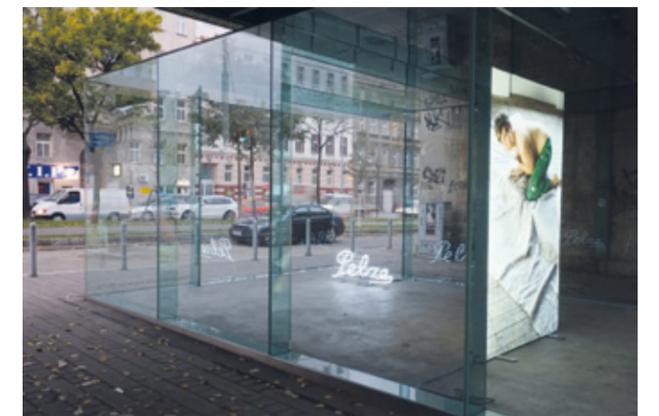
**Zu schön um wahr zu sein (Too beautiful to be true),**  
digital foto, dual-sided LED lightbox, 2074 x 1074 cm, 2015



**Wenn's lustig war, wenn's lustig wird**  
**(When it was fun, when it gets fun),**  
digital foto, dual-sided LED lightbox, 2074 x 1074 cm, 2015



Fotos: Lena Rosa Händle



Fotos: Lena Rosa Händle and David Rabeder

# Reclaiming Gestures 1

Exhibition at ‚Kubus EXPORT – der Transparente Raum‘  
(Kubus EXPORT – the Transparent Space), 2015

text by Doris Guth, translation Emily Lemon

Lena Rosa Händle’s exhibition, *Reclaiming Gestures* in ‚Kubus EXPORT– der Transparente Raum‘ in Vienna represents a successful intervention to interrupt viewing habits in public space. A two-sided, larger-than-life light box is set in the glass cube under one of Vienna’s subway arches and shows two photographs. Next to it, a sculpture of the word ‚Pelze‘ (furs) appears in smaller neon writing on the floor.

The photos show the artist in two different poses: In *Zu schön um wahr zu sein* (*Too beautiful to be true*), she sits relaxed in red coveralls on furry, felt-like fabric and looks up at her hand reaching heavenward with a laugh. Whereas in *Wenn’s lustig war, wenn’s lustig wird* (*When it was fun, when it gets fun*), she crouches on a fuzzy wool blanket on the floor, her upper body is naked, and she is looking up at the viewer guardedly.

Both photos resemble advertising designs, while at the same time it is clear that this is not what they are. The presentation of the body, the clothing (work clothes, sandals), the surroundings (tattered, felted insulating material), do not conform to common advertising esthetics. The captured poses and gestures act as quotes, without their references being known. There are two specific advertisements being referred to. One is from the garden tool company AL-KO with the slogan *Zu schön um wahr zu sein*, the other is from MM champagne: *Wenn’s lustig war, wenn’s lustig wird* from the late 1960s. Both examples illustrate the sexist display of female bodies, where the woman, naked or partially naked, is reduced to her body and to “being beautiful.” In *Zu schön um wahr zu sein*, the woman in the ad is equated with the product—a lawnmower (!). In *Wenn’s lustig war, wenn’s lustig wird*, the woman lying in bed obviously becomes sexually submissive with the champagne. But the fun seems to apply more to the absent man, since the woman, curled up on the bed and shot from above, appears tired, small, and even helpless and is presented as a sexualized object. In any case, she is not a woman satisfied by orgasms, blissful, powerful, passionate, spreading her body across the bed.

The artist reappropriates the coopted and stereotyped gestures from the ads in her photographs by repeating the poses and making shifts. The focus is on an affirmative completion of the poses and a transformative new connotation. In Lena Rosa Händle’s works, the figures are transformed and queered: In one, we have the self confident woman dressed in bright red coveralls who smiles at her own body, and in the other, a woman in dirty work clothes crouching watchfully on the floor, looking directly at the viewer.

Judith Butler points out that body and gender are produced through performative repetitions. This is not only about restrictive technologies of power, but also

creation and production. This process enables the undermining of discursive normalizations of gender identity and opens up moments of political freedom of action. In this quote-like and rearticulating practice, the poses and gestures in Lena Rosa Händle’s photos offer a space of opposition and shifting. Innovative images are created that defy traditional habits of seeing and, at the same time, blend into urban space filled with advertising images. The photographs and their reflections light up and melt away in the night with the lights and images of the city, the transparent glass cube—which makes a separation between indoors and outdoors impossible, and dissolve in the fleeting motion of the passing cars.

The interpretation of the photos is reinforced and expanded through a sculptural element in the exhibit: The written word *Pelze*, which resembles a company name, repeats the reference to the consumer world while opening up another point of reference: ‚PELZE-multimedia‘, a space for women and lesbians (*FrauenLesben Raum*) in Berlin from 1980 to 1994, which was located in a former fur shop. The original typography was translated into neon and pays homage to this special place.

from: *Sei bereit für die Veränderungen des Universums, Werbungen und Sexismen*. by Doris Guth. published at *Women. Knowledge.Vienna*. Number. 4 Womens section MA57, Vienna (Frauen. Wissen. Wien. Nr. 4, Hrsg. Frauenabteilung, Wien, 2015)

# Pelze (Furs)

Neon light, aluminium grids, 50 x 150 cm, 2015

*Pelze* refers to a space for women and lesbians (*Frauen Lesben-Raum*) *PELZE-multimedia*, which existed in a self-organized house project and former fur shop in Berlin from 1980 to 1994 as an international avant-garde meeting place for artists and activists.

*PELZE-multimedia* was, in many ways, a complex, and challenging project. Not only did the space host (international) exhibitions and events with monthly, often taboo, topics, it was also an important meeting place where a diverse mix of people (among others transgender people, sex workers, and women\* of color) were welcome. The project played an important role in developing a sensual, autonomous and self-confident handling of lesbian and queer-feminist roles and sexualities.

The sign for the former fur shop, a neon logo written with round typography, stayed outside the shop entrance and became the logo and name with the addition of multimedia. The iconography, SM (*Venus in Furs*), sexual connotation as well as their own interpretations of furs, formed the identity, self-label, and program of this women's\* lesbian, feminist, sex positive, and early queer project space.

For the exhibition at Kubus EXPORT – the transparent space, a women's\* space and artwork by VALIE EXPORT, the neon writing was transformed into a sculpture. Grids and chains are part of the sculpture, making reference to the aesthetics and (sado-masochist) connotation of *PELZE-multimedia*.

The translation of the original typography of the word *Pelze* by hand into a neon writing sculpture, is both a citation of the logo that *PELZE-multimedia* appropriated from the vacant fur shop and a homage to the project *PELZE-multimedia*.





Fotos: Lena Rosa Händle



# Mädchen unter Bäumen (Girls under Trees)

digital print on acrylic fabric, embroidery, 220 x 126 cm, 2016

At the Master School for Art Education, it was compulsory for female students to take 22 hours per week per semester of needlework in the 5th and 6th semesters. In the course of establishing this Master School in 1941, the first female instructors at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna were appointed as teachers of needlework. *Mädchen unter Bäumen* uses the tapestry of the same name from 1941, which students embroidered in a laborious collaboration with their art teacher and needlework teacher. This ornamental wall decoration for the classroom shows a self-portrait of the girls in nature, which is framed by this saying: “Ye people, learn but from the meadow flower, how ye can please God and be beautiful as well.”

The artistic work inserts two embroidered personal ads from the *Wochenschau* newsreel that appeared in Vienna in 1942 into *Mädchen unter Bäumen*: “Girl seeks correspondence with girlfriend under modern” and “Lady wants girlfriend for cinema and theater.” Such displays are the only publicly visible words, and are among the few supporting documents, on lesbian life during the Nazi regime in Vienna. “Girl” and “lady” had been codes in lesbian subculture since the first women’s movement. The colors purple and violet and the specifying of a girlfriend were other indicators of homosexuality in the 1920s. In her 1999 book *Verbotene Verhältnisse* (“Forbidden Relationships”), historian Claudia Schoppmann has worked on the history associated with the 1942 ads based on Viennese court records. The ad placed by the youth educator Lisbeth L. resulted in several exchanges of letters and at least one brief relationship. The Gestapo opened one of the letters and the women\* were brought to trial and sentenced to prison for “fornication abhorrent to nature.”

Like a subtitle, the stitched-in notes in violet and turquoise create a lesbian connotation, and an appropriation takes place. The powerful ornaments are over-written; the original sentence and the image are blurry. The picture of the tapestry, digital printed on acrylic fabric, presented like a banner, refers to the public space as well as to the first women’s movement. The title can be read in humorous, subversive, and ironic ways. What is the group of nineteen girls\* doing under the large trees? One gives another flowers, one plays guitar, one girl\* with short hair leans squatted on a tree, her fist directed at another – they seem to be having fun! Is it a perfect cruising area? Is this a formation of a subversive group? Is it possible to read the narratives in a queer way?



Foto: Lisa Rastl



Fotos Lena Rosa Händle and Lisa Rastl

# Of Other Spaces

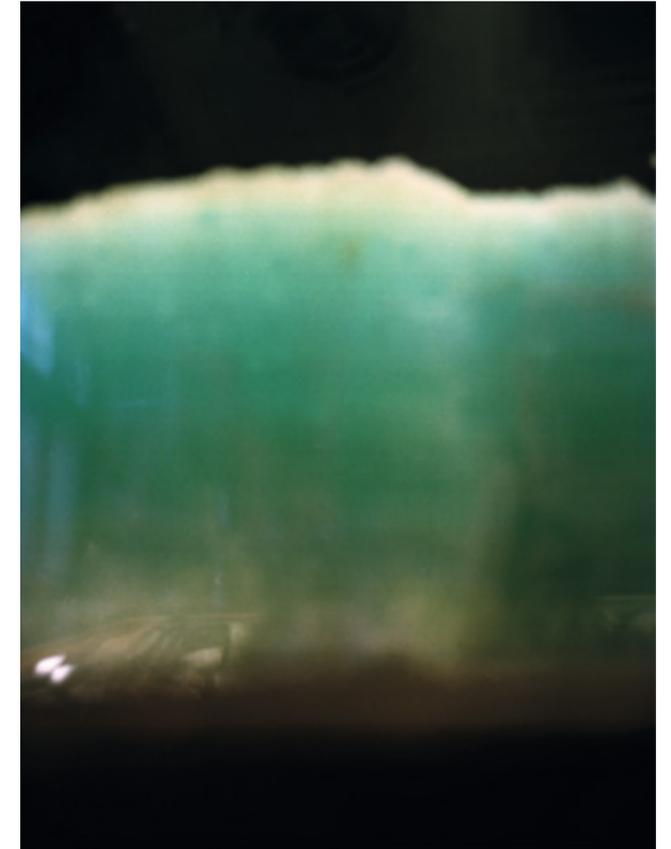
5 analog c-prints, 60 × 80 cm, framed, glass, 2013

“We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another.”

Of other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias, Michel Foucault

The work is based on effective counter spaces. Strange other spaces, which lie beyond all places and can be understood as realized utopias of our society. In these spaces prescribed standards are ephemeral, not fully implemented, or operated by their own maxims.

The dark and poetic images act as mental spaces in which classifications and inscriptions, openings and closings of fictitious, symbolic, personal and public levels can be considered. On a symbolic level, an analysis of the concept of utopia takes place. Here, the real residues that are visible on the photographs refer to an ambivalence that oscillates between spaces that are defined within socio-political and imaginary spaces, which open up in the world of imagination.





Of Other Spaces, ((hotel, attic, ship, funfair), c-prints, framed behind glas, 60 x 80 cm, 2013

# Places of Passing

3 analog c-prints, framed behind glas, 90 × 120 cm, 2013

The human body exists as an imaginary space, is the starting point for the world, and the place where paths and spaces intersect. It is the basis for all kinds of constructed, real and utopian places. The space produces the human body.

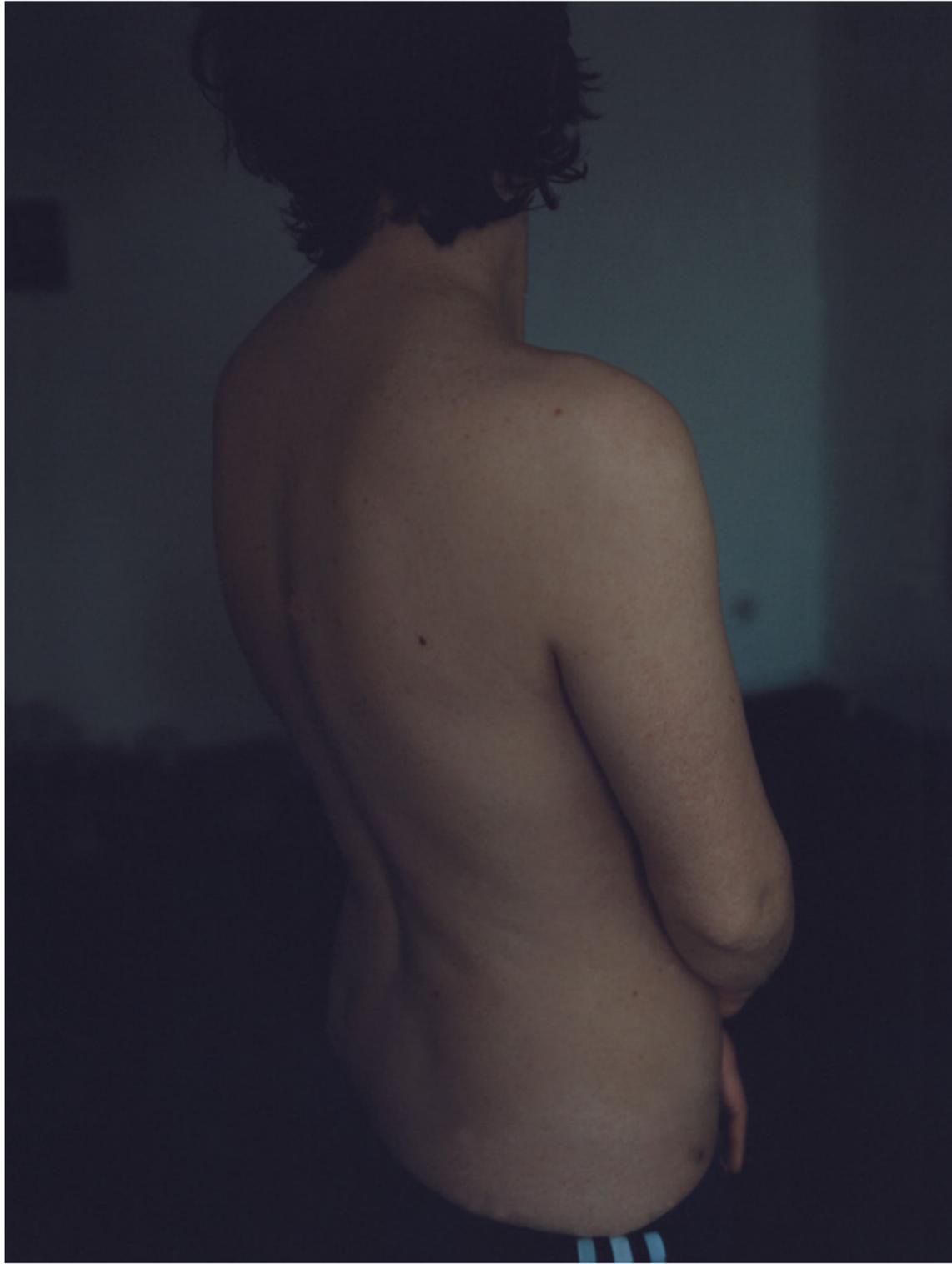
It tells of personal spaces and inscriptions on the body. This human body is in the process of passing to an undefined place of passage and cannot be easily classified.

The subjects are turned away from the camera, eluding a clear definition and classification of their identity.

The title *Places of Passing* and the androgynous bodies refer to a transgender context. The ambiguity of gender relating to visibility and invisibility is a key queer issue.



Places of Passing (3), c-print, framed behind glas, 90 × 120 cm, 2013



Places of Passing (1-2), c-prints, framed behind glas, 90 x 120 cm, 2013



Foto: Martin Reich

**Of Other Spaces**, Academy of Visual Art gallery (HGB), Leipzig, 2013



**Places of Passing, Monsters**, Academy of Visual Art gallery, Leipzig, 2013





Monsters (series of 12 ), lightboxes, 12×13 cm, 16×22 cm, 19×15 cm, 2013

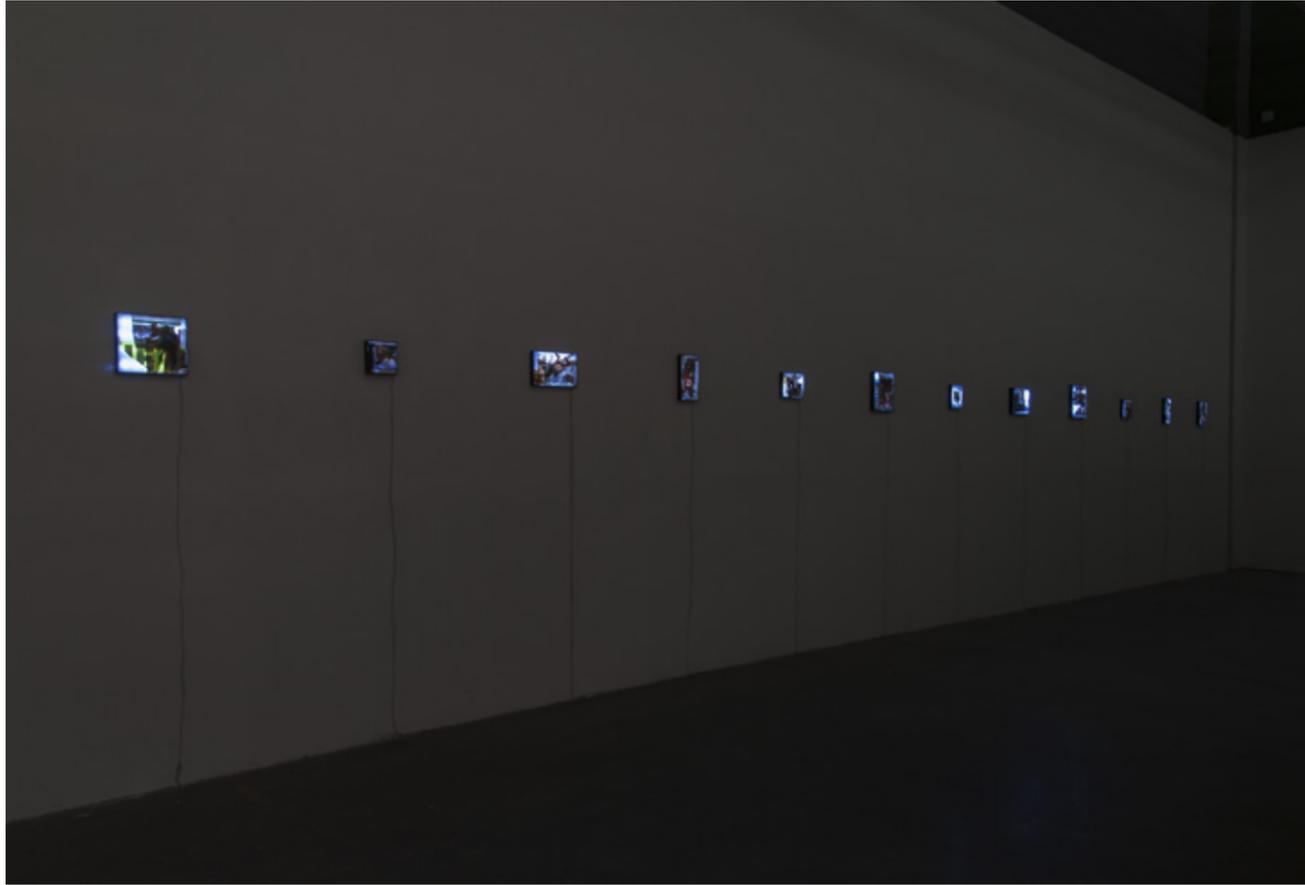


Foto: Martin Reich

Space of Relations, Monsters, Leipzig, 2013



Space of Relations, Places of Passing, Of Other Spaces, Leipzig, 2013



Foto: Martin Reich



# Haut ab!

text by Stefanie Seibold, translation Emily Lemon

In *Space of Relations*, the artist Lena Rosa Händle brings together four disparate groups of works comprised of different techniques and/or motifs. Among them are two types of portraits, photographic and collage, a series of photographs with interior and urban spaces, as well as a glass sculpture and abstract material collages. How are these works connected, what kind of a *Space of Relations* is meant? Outer space, as the bright silver in one of the two collages seems to suggest? Or more of an inner view, an inner space, a feeling, an (secret) awareness, an invisible place? Lena Rosa Händle's interest mostly likely lies in this second type of "space," the kind that cannot be depicted easily and directly—spaces that are thought, felt, and experienced. Here she also looks at the very fundamental question of the significance of visibility for this complex project.

Silverfuture, destroyed. Dark rooms. Invisible. Alone. Averted. In darkness. Protected.

All of the works gathered here noticeably address their own planar surface. They are reflective or obscured, darkened, scratched, glued or torn and then made smooth. One can, therefore, assume that Händle has also closely considered the surface reflections that constitute the photographic image—but they were defined as secondary here<sup>1</sup>. That the persistent idea that photography has a sort of genuine, indexical relationship to a depicted reality is aggressively disputed and deconstructed piece by piece. And this is precisely where Händle's project comes in: challenging the significance of the visible in photographic work, the often too smooth surfaces of representation. The central theme is that which is and remains invisible and has to stay that way. Not as a primarily aesthetic problem, but rather throughout *Space of Relations* as a parallel to the experience of total invisibility or the rendered invisibility of queer/trans/lesbian realities and structures of desire within the heteronormative regime of images<sup>2</sup> surrounding them.

I've got you under my skin\*<sup>3</sup>

A key to this reading lies—along with the question of visibility—in the project's present and absent bodies (also those of the viewers), particularly when dealing with portraits and body image. In the series *Place of Passing* we only see the subjects in a three-quarter, rear view; the faces are unrecognizable, the space around them remains undefined. In the averted face, upon which just a few details remain, such as a beard, the subjects deny the viewer a clear definition. With respect to themselves but also—and especially—with respect to gender. The denial of clear gender readability is a key queer issue, because the assumption of a dichotomous, organized gender system is based on heteronormative mechanisms of exclusion. Transgender discourses also analytically challenge the two-gender system and practically defy it—like here—with diverging, self-determined concepts of identity. Both the title *Places of Passing*<sup>4</sup> and the ambiguous physiognomy of the pictured bodies refer to a queer or transgender context. The series *Monsters* follows the same logic. These small collage portraits pieced together from tabloid magazines can be understood here as queer dystopias, which reveal the smoothed, heteronormative sexist identities in the media as dystopian monsters that

surround, threaten, and format us ubiquitously every day.

In the photographs in the series *Of Other Spaces*, the (queer) bodies are missing, but we almost suspect them to be hidden—beside what little is visible in the pictures—in the abundant (photographic) black. The absence of these bodies gives the works their meaning. In any case, the depicted places are only identifiable for insiders who know the exact codes to decipher them. Perhaps it is also best to keep these queer places secret, as they appear here—as our little secrets, places you will never know.

The photographs in the series *Of Other Spaces* and the sculptures in the exhibit work with a field of tension that is also important for queer theory and practice, between private and public space, again visible and invisible, obscured, hidden, coded and opaque, the visible surface and what is beneath or behind it. That which is possible in private space is far from possible on the street, before the law, or within the family.

The abstract collage/décollage pieces deal with (material) formations transferred from public space, which have a largely overlooked aesthetic value there and only gain attention and significance when they are transferred to the art space. This process can again be seen as a parallel to the social marginalization of queer aesthetics and ways of life, which are also only visible and of value in certain places and contexts. The two paper formations look like sediments of posters torn off the wall that multiply for years in a forgotten passageway and cover floods of advertising slogans and images layer by layer. One object was re-treated by the artist with paint, so that the layered information moves into the background and the unified, multilayered bodies that developed from them emerge as object entities. The architectural glass sculpture to which the remains of scratched off layers of paper are glued is perhaps what most clearly embodies the thematic and formal traces of surface, transparency, and (un)readability that Händle explores in her project. For a bright Silverfuture on the gummed up layers of the past.

<sup>1</sup> This stands in contrast to her previous book, *Laughing Inverts*, which, in the tradition of Nan Goldin's diary, emphasizes the visibility of queer deviance as a political necessity.

<sup>2</sup> Like other systems of representation in the Western World, as noted by the literary critic Terry Castle: "(one is)...dismayed yet again at how invisible, literally and figuratively, lesbianism remains, even in the great rainbow-flag-waving cities of the West. Some of the smartest, most well-meaning straight people still don't get it – in fact don't even see it. This mole-blindness is all the more bizarre given the unremittingly vulgar sexual explicitness that otherwise assaults us everywhere in the mass media, not least in the cartoon world of online pornography." Terry Castle, "You better not tell me you forgot," *London Review of Books*, Vol. 34 No. 18 · 27 September 2012, pages 3-11

<sup>3</sup> \* Song title by Cole Porter, one of the most important song writers of the 20th century, who held luxurious queer parties in Paris as part of the Lost Generation.

<sup>4</sup> *Passing* in queer jargon is defined as: Being able to be seen in public as a member of one's preferred gender, with no ambiguity or skepticism on the part of the viewer. Patrick Califia: *Tranny Talk. A Glossary of Transgender Terminology*, 2004., S. 4

# Laughing Inverts

Photographs 2006 – 2010

Artist book, 18 x 24 cm, first limited edition of 24 copies, 2011

Artist book, Kehrer publisher Heidelberg-Berlin, 2015

Texts in german and english by Diedrich Diedrichsen, Elke Krasny,

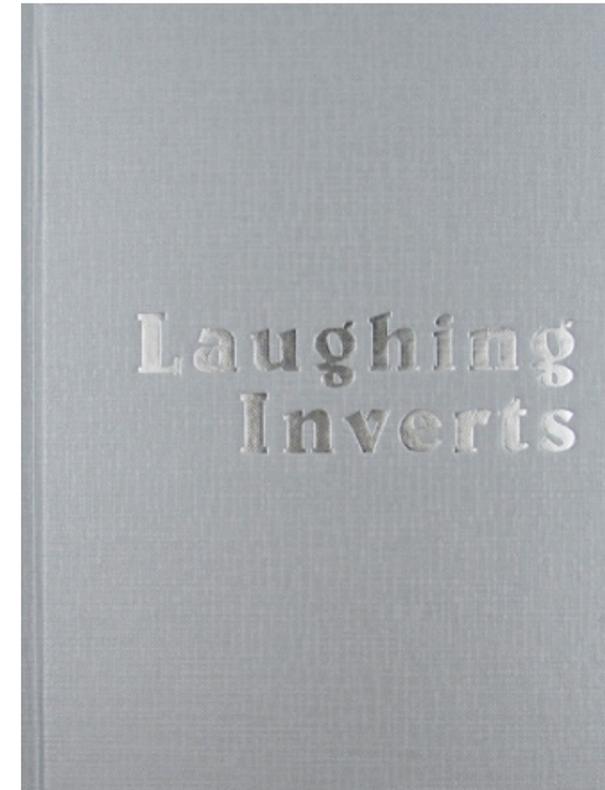
Elly Clarke & Lena Rosa Händle

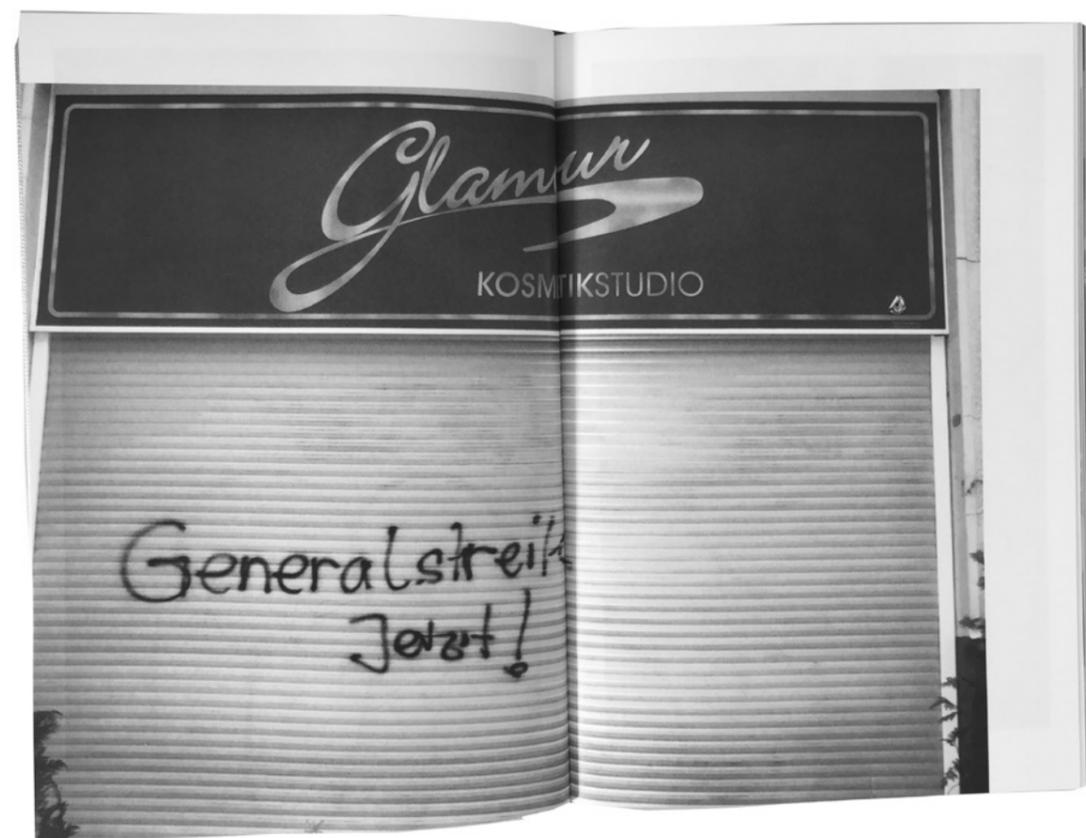
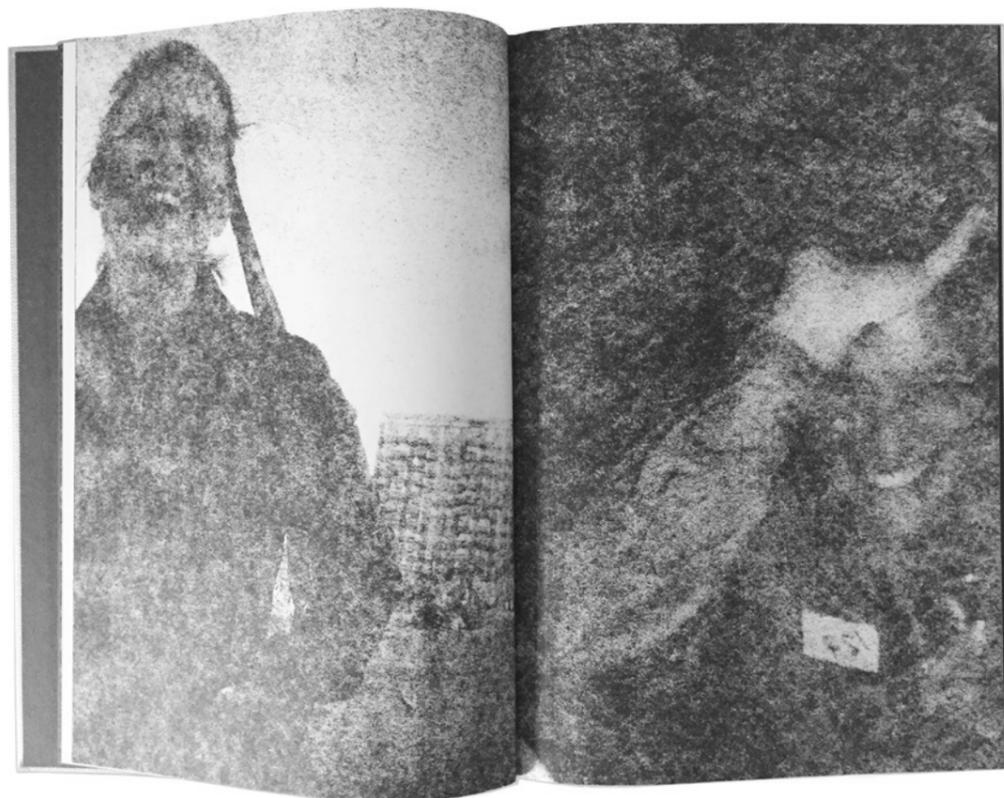
16,4 x 24 cm, 200 pages, 82 color- and 44 b/w images

3 c-prints 100 x 120 cm, 2 c-prints 70 x 100 cm

2 c-prints 60 x 80 cm, all framed behind glas

The phenomenon of laughter, like this artist's book, is characterized by variety. The diversity of photographic approaches manifested in the dialog between these images reveals different facets of identity, relationships, and social movements. Momentary scenes arise in the mix of imagery, forming idiosyncratic orders. Found signs and traces are articulated in movement, masquerade, and glamour. Visual shifts, reversals, and reinterpretations invert societal norms and conventions. Browsing through these pages, a flow of images emerges that follows its own inner rhythm, united by the expressiveness of laughter as communication, gesture, grimace, or threat.





Laughing Inverts, artist book, 16,4 x 24 cm, 2015

# Jump Cuts

on *Laughing Inverts*,  
text by **Diedrich Diederichsen**, translation **Emily Lemon**

The last time I read the term “inverts” was in Proust, or more specifically in the translation of research by Eva Rechel-Mertens. It is one of those antiquated words for homosexuality that now seems to make it possible to describe non-heterosexual orientations differently than through narrow classifications like homo or bisexual. It actually seems appropriate for contemporary projections, because it bespeaks twists, turns, and folds that are more reminiscent of a Möbius strip than a two-part society in which we either belong to one part or the other. Indeed, Proust uses the term in the multifaceted sense.

On one hand, the inverts have anything but a solid foundation of a simply antagonistic, anti-normal sexual orientation beneath them. Unlike a significant part of contemporary queer theory, which emphasizes overcoming the gender binary in favor of an open continuum in a liberating sense, for Proust it was precisely the polarity of man and woman that ensured endless depths. Because within every woman could be a man or another woman, within every man a woman (or another man), and the same thing would be repeated on the next level in a complex branched system of increasingly more confusing bifurcation. The inversions continue spiraling downward and undermine every clear vision of orientation, but not without using the two sides again and again.

On the other hand, Proust sets the real heteronormative world surrounding him in fiction as a great lesbian conspiracy. Because in the novel, Proust's real male lovers become women (in order to avoid outing himself), who, when they resign themselves to the heterosexual pressure of reality, begin relationships with women who then become inverted – i.e. lesbians – in the fictional perspective. This results in an unreality in which normal appears as though it were always “inverted,” where as the world of the inverted is merely another twist and turn of those people who were already twisted or ready to turn anyway.

In Lena Rosa Händle's book *Laughing Inverts* the subjects have long since plunged into this abyss and have let the Möbius strip of inversion show them the tangled way – albeit not necessarily tragic, bitter and heroic, like in so many stories, and also not melancholic. Instead, as the title suggests, laughing. This laughter is not coming from the distance of a safe, possibly ironic position; it is the laughter of people who are in the thick of it – and yet often somewhere else.

At first glance, the book follows a certain tradition of sub and counterculture photography that is based on testimony and mainly communicates that another life, which few can imagine to be real, was or is possible – which is why it requires the testimonial medium of photography. One need only think of the often diary-like depictions of Larry Clarke, Peter Hujar, or Nan Goldin's own circles of friends living on the edge,

also with shifted focal points Wolfgang Tillmans' early work. But what distinguishes the described practices, both historically and in their artistic character, is that the artists mentioned above generally try to cohere the story and the sequence of images. The dialectic of the subcultural in its classical period, specifically liberation at the expense of compartmentalization to attain exclusivity, was incredibly effective. Lena Rosa Händle's approach is almost the opposite of this. Although we can assume that the scenes from the exciting, intense, excessive life that we see here are not taking place far away from each other socioeconomically and that they include people who not only share commonalities of life content, culture, and politics, but actually know each other or could have met, each photograph seems like a new world to us. Changing the frame of reference is the main strategy of the whole story, more than that of each photograph. Outside/inside, natural/artificial light, group/individual, interaction with the camera/absorption, transparent readability/opacity – all of these contrasts and their potential modulations are thoroughly savored in the sequence of the individual photographs.

The result is a quality of photography that is only just evolving, mainly in the sequential storytelling element of the book, which literally presents photography's political-subcultural side in a very different light than what was common in earlier (self) representations – the artist appears in at least one photograph. What we see is a precarious, threatened, more crisis-laden environment, a world in which there are no more guaranteed safe spaces. But at the same time, there is no exclusion and formation of a subcultural elite, which was associated with earlier movements and scenes. The outness and openness that characterizes these images leads to laughter with which the subjects confront the situation you end up in today if you want to lead a life that someone sang so dreamily about more than a half a century ago: “I don't know where I am going, I don't know who I am going to be.”

The fact that someone manages, wants to and has to manage, to make such a decision without the starry-eyed self-elevation, the eternal and latent colonial adventurism, that someone has and had to establish themselves in an everyday life that has the advantage of being attainable, the disadvantage of actually being threatened by the inhospitality of cities (which cannot be avoided) and their prices – that is the situation that is acknowledged here with a laugh.



**Water person (Wassermensch)**, c-print, framed behind glas, 70 x 100 cm, 2008



**Cat**, c-print, framed behind glas, 100 x 120 cm, 2007



**Red Curtain (Roter Vorhang)**, c-print, framed behind glas, 70 x 100 cm, 2009



**I love Joy**, c-print, framed behind glas, 100 x 120 cm, 2007



Foto: Sven Bergelt



# Il popolo delle libertà

Projection (10 min), video (5min) on monitor, digital print on particleboard, glass, 100 × 120 cm on a block of stone, 2010

in cooperation with Sarah Feulner

The installation *Il Popolo delle Libertà* (The People of Freedom) consists of a projection, a video, and a photograph laminated on particleboard behind glass, which is set on a block of stone. The work focuses on the appropriation of media under the government of Silvio Berlusconi in Italy.

The artists show their reactions to radical right-wing graffiti in the public space of Tivoli near Rome. The video documents the artists taping and spraying over slogans/swastikas that are left by the Forza Nuova (New Force – a far right political party in Italy); the new images that overlay the old subvert the right wing content. The presentation of the work on a small monitor brings to mind the aesthetics of surveillance. In addition, a large-format projection shows manipulated newspaper cuttings, which pick up images of the collective pictorial memory.

What can images achieve? The artists problematize media images, their ubiquity, and their influence in terms of presenting truth and political events.



Il popolo delle libertà, digital print, 100 × 130 cm, 2012



Forza Nuova, video stills, 2012



Forza Nuova, public space, Tivoli, 2010



Fotografie Lena Rosa Händle