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ART CITIES:Paris-Manon



A trailblazer on the Swiss performance and art scene since the mid-1970s, Swiss artist Manon is a seemingly inexhaustible source of thought-provoking radical social commentary. Her subversive way of tackling shifts in society, feminism, and the sexual revolution resonates with the current debate on hierarchical power relations and notions of identity, particularly gender identity.

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09-12 September 2021
Grand Palais
Éphémère
Champ-de-Mars



By Dimitris Lempesis
Photo: Swiss Cultural Center Paris Archive

A retrospective of the work of the contemporary Swiss artist and performer Manon is on view at The Swiss Cultural Center in Paris. Enigmatic, the photographer has been fascinating since the mid-1970s, when she began her activity. The artist questions the multiple facets of the human being, witnesses the sexual revolution that accompanied the feminist movement of the 1970s, explores relations of domination and the question of gender. In a series of black and white photographs titled **"The Lady with the Shaved Head"** (1977-78), the Swiss artist poses at the top of a building, entirely naked and relieved of her hair – hair associated with a certain image of femininity that Manon seeks to shake up and deconstruct. For the series the artist says **"Shaving my head was a way for me to mark a specific turning point in my life. I was trying to give novel expression to psychological changes. It made sense to me to work with my own body (instead of with canvas or clay.) It was my attempt to weave into the photos the androgyny of this figure in makeup and yet bald. And I was particularly interested in the surreal aspect, and in the theatrics of the staging of it, which matched how I felt. To be a hermaphrodite was what I wanted most, at the time. I felt masculine and feminine; I wanted to be coquettish and playful as well as rigorous, forceful, strong, and powerful. That's how I wanted to live, and also exactly how I wanted to look"**. In addition to photography, she creates immersive performances such as **"Le boudoir rose salmon"** (1974), a reproduction of her room in Zurich, filled with the artist's personal objects, feathers and other accessories that evoke the house. close than the cabaret. Immersive experiences that continue in **"Sentimental Journey"** (1979) – Manon locks each

spectator in an individual cage to observe them – and **“Voyage en Sibérie”** (2015) where the visitor is immersed in the freezing cold of a cold room morgue.

Manon, born Rosmarie Küng in Bern in 1940, grew up in St. Gallen. She moved into a hotel at the age of fifteen and attended the Kunstgewerbeschule in St. Gallen. She worked as a stylist, graphic artist, window dresser, fashion illustrator, and designer, before she starting to work with photography in the early 1970s. She explored self-portraits from photo vending machines and glamorous self-promotion in changing styles and intricate settings that she worked out together with her husband Urs Lüthi, with whom she particularly explored the fields of androgyny and travesty. Among her first photo series, there are **“Polaroids”** (1973-74) and **“Fetish Pictures”** (1974) followed by numerous photo-performances including **“The Lady with the Shaved Head”** (1977-78), in which she constructed an identity in flux. The photo-series **“She Was Once MISS RIMINI”** (2003) continued her work on the theme of identity construction, as **“Edgar”** (2006), in wich she slipped into the skin of a male alter-ego. The artist's large-format color portraits in the series **“Borderline”** (2007) are extremely direct self-examinations. In 2008 Manon began work on a new photo series entitled **“Hotel Dolores”**, consisting of photos from three defunct health resorts in Baden. She changed their spaces, walls, wallpaper, and walls through minor and major interventions, and thus let their stories be told. Since 2004, she has been working on a continuing photo cycle **“Diaries”**, which above all sounds out her personal realm of experience. In parallel, Manon creates immersive environments, which often give a rise to performances. Her first installation **“The Salmon-Pink Boudoir”** (1974) is inspired of her bedroom under roof on Augustinergasse in Zurich; a universe filled with fetish

objects, feathers and glittery materials. Her largest environment to date: "Journey to Siberia" (2015) created a cooling house, a morgue, which embraced the audience in an icy cold, for the Kunsthaus Interlaken. In the spring of 2018 she created (Observation Room) for the Galerie Last Tango in Zurich. Still in 2008, the artist was honored with the Prix Meret Oppenheim and the prize of the Fontana-Gränacher Stiftung. In 2013, Manon received the Grosser Kulturpreis of the City of St. Gallen. Manon also works with sampling, that is, quoting from art and film history, news-paper clippings, etc. A first selection of her writings was published in Federn / Feathers in 2020.

Photo: Manon, Das lachsfarbene Boudoir (The Salmon-Pink Boudoir), installation, 1974-2018, Courtesy of the artist

Info: Curator: laire Hoffmann, Centre culturel Suisse. Paris, 32-38 rue des Francs-Bourgeois, Paris, Duration: 9/5-18/7/2021, Days & Hours: Tue-Sun 10:00-18:00, <https://ccsparis.com>



Manon, Elektrokardiogramm 303/304, photo series, 1979.

Courtesy of the artist



Manon, Reise nach Sibirien (Journey to Siberia) , 2015.
Courtesy of the artist



Manon, Das lachsfarbene Boudoir (The Salmon-Pink Boudoir), installation, 1974-2018, Courtesy of the artist



Manon, La dame au crâne rasé (The Lady with the Shaved Head), photo series, 1977-78. Courtesy of the artist



Left: Manon, La dame au crâne rasé (The Lady with the Shaved Head), photo series, 1977-78. Courtesy of the artist
Right: Manon, Elektrokardiogramm 303/304, photo series, 1979. Courtesy of the artist



Manon, Das lachsfarbene Boudoir (The Salmon-Pink Boudoir), installation, 1974-2018, Courtesy of the artist



Left & Right: Manon, Elektrokardiogramm 303/304, photo series, 1979. Courtesy of the artist