ART CLUB2000
Ausgewählte Werke
1992–1999

Kunsthalle Zürich
18.09.2021–
6.01.2022

MANON
HYPER FEMININITY

Ein Interview
von *Claire Hoffmann*

Seit Mitte der 1970er-Jahre gilt die Künstlerin Manon (geboren 1940 – sie lebt und arbeitet in Zürich) als Pionierin der Schweizer Performance- und Kunstszene und scheint ein unerschöpflicher Quell für zum Nachdenken anregende, radikale Sozialkritik zu sein. Ihre subversive Art, gesellschaftliche Veränderungen, Feminismus und sexuelle Revolution anzugehen, findet ihren Widerhall in der aktuellen Diskussion über hierarchische Machtverhältnisse und die Vorstellungen von Identität, insbesondere Geschlechtsidentität.

Ihre Fotoserien und Photo-Performances widerspiegeln die schrittweise Entwicklung und die Metamorphose ihrer Rolle – Manon. Die Figur – oder sie selbst – präsentiert sich in Serien von Maskeraden möglicher Identitäten, wahlweise als sexualisierter Körper, androgyner Charakter oder Crossdresser (LA DAME AU CRÂNE RASÉ, 1977–78; ELEKTROKARDIOGRAMM 303/304, 1979). Ihre jüngeren Selbstportraits aber zeugen von Verletzlichkeit, Alter und Krankheit (BORDERLINE, 2007; HOTEL DOLORES, 2008). Die Spannung zwischen intimem Raum und öffentlicher Darstellung, persönlicher Erfahrung und künstlichem Erscheinungsbild bildete 1974 die Basisnote ihres allerersten Werks DAS LACHSFARBENE BOUDOIR. Dieser prunkvolle Kosmos voller Strass und Lingerie, mit Federboas und Fetischobjekten, eine wahrhaftige Explosion von codierter Hyperweiblichkeit, war ihr eigenes Schlafzimmer.

Manon war Pionierin darin, sich selbst als inszeniertes Bild oder als Installation darzustellen, so schuf sie eindringliche Umgebungen und exzentrische, voyeuristische Szenarien, um die Machtdynamiken zwischen Männern und Frauen, Exhibitionismus und Rollentausch zu erkunden. Unter anderem sperrte sie sich mit Menschen aus dem Publikum für einen persönlichen, intensiven Blickaustausch von Angesicht zu Angesicht in einen Käfig ein, posierte angekettet als gefangene Femme fatale und stellte sieben Männer als Objekte der Begierde in ein Schaufenster. Manon wählte ihren Namen, um den ihres Vaters (oder dann Ehemannes) los zu sein, und im Zuge der zweiten Welle des Feminismus wandte sie performative Mittel an um die Autonomie über ihren Körper und Sexualität zurück zu fordern.

Bis heute setzt Manon provokative Lesarten weiblicher Existenz als feministische Strategie ein, stellt heteronormative Rollen und Zwänge infrage und erkundet, wie der Blick Muster in Bezug auf Objektivierung und Machtverhältnisse entstehen lassen oder durchbrechen kann. Neben ihrer Arbeit mit Fotografie und Grossinstallationen widmet Manon sich weiterhin täglich dem Schreiben, um ihr existenzielles Erkundungsfeld zu ergründen.

LA DAME AU CRÂNE RASÉ, 1977–78

Claire Hoffmann ist Kuratorin am Centre culturel suisse in Paris, wo sie jüngst eine Retrospektive Manons präsentierte. Zuvor war sie am Kunsthaus Langenthal, am Kunsthaus Zürich und für das kuratorische Kollektiv deuxpiece tätig. Im Rahmen ihrer Dissertation arbeitet sie zu den Zeichnungen von Maria Lassnig.

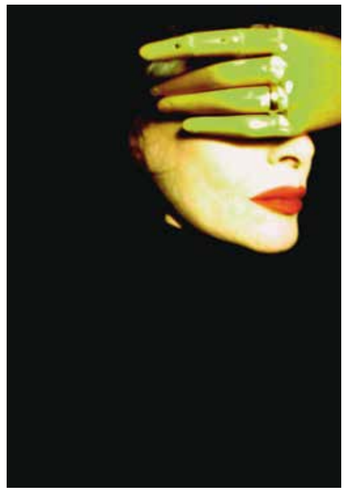

Manomanie
2 Selbstportraits 76.
"Das Ende der Lola Montez"
"woman in the window"
Manomanie
"the red house".
personal life-show
zürich 76.
dedicated to Daniel Schmid, who
made "la paloma".

← Vorherige Doppelseite:
ON MANON, 1974–77, ARTISTS BOOK

ELEKTROKARDIOGRAMM 303/304, 1979
Bilderserie mit 31 Bildern (Titelblatt); Silver Gelatin Print;
Recto auf Passepartout signiert, datiert, nummeriert und gestempelt
Auflage 7; 65 cm × 50 cm

Mit deinen inszenierten Fotografien hast du den Begriff «Photo-Performance» geprägt. Die Fotoserien sind bis ins kleinste Detail – Licht, Pose, Accessoires, Raum und Atmosphäre – arrangiert. Bis heute verwandelst du dich vor der Kamera und schlüpfst in diverse Rollen. Sind Kamera und Performance für dich ein Mittel, um dich vom direkten äusseren Blick zu befreien?

Ja, das siehst du genau richtig. Ich bin extrem schüchtern, um nicht zu sagen menschenscheu, heute mehr denn je, worunter ich sehr leide. Die fotografischen Inszenierungen waren und sind meine Strategie, mich trotzdem mitzuteilen, zu sagen: Es gibt mich, seht her, ich bin da!



DON'T LOOK BACK, 2019

Ein Schauspielstudium, frontale Performances mit publikumsstarken, provokativen Inszenierungen, Identitäts- und Rollenspiele bis hin zur Wahl deiner Kunstperson Manon: Wie kam es zu diesen wichtigen Referenzen in Theater, Burleske und Maskerade? Was fasziniert dich am Theatralischen?

Das Theater bzw. die Performance sind eine formal überspitzte Übersetzung des realen Lebens. Die «Kunstperson Manon» hingegen ist in dieser Formulierung eine Erfindung der Presse. Den Namen gab ich mir bereits Jahre bevor ich in der Kunstszene eine Rolle spielte. Ich wollte einen eigenen, nicht einen von anderen Personen – meinen Eltern – ausgesuchten Namen. Ich war die «Manon» lange bevor mich die Presse als «Kunstfigur» bezeichnete. Diese «Kunstfigur» wurde schliesslich zu meinem Schutzschild, zu meinem Mantel, und manchmal auch zu einem Korsett.

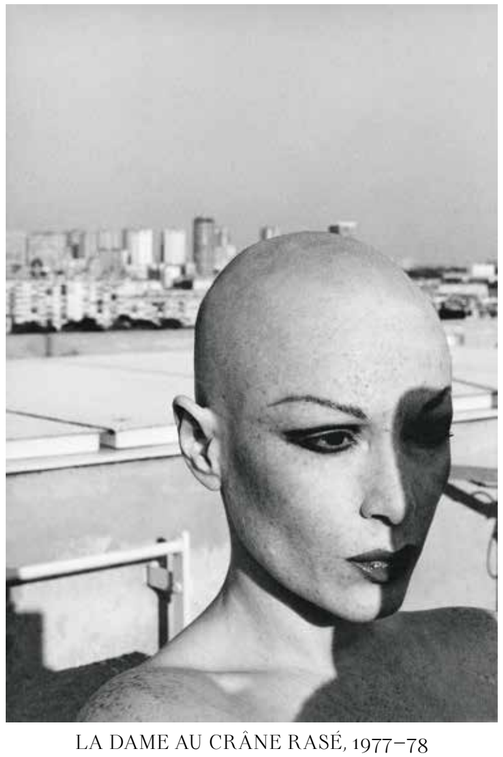
Die Installation DAS LACHSFARBENE BOUDOIR (1974) ist ein dichtes, überfülltes «Théatre des Illusions», wie mit Lippenstift auf einem Spiegel steht. Zugleich ist es ein intimer, höchst persönlicher Raum, nämlich dein ehemaliges Schlafzimmer. Wie gehen schillernde Fassade und persönliches Leben zusammen?

Das Persönliche und dessen Fassade bedingen sich. Beides zusammen ergibt das, was man Identität nennt. Dazu habe ich lebenslang gearbeitet. Ja, ich habe mein Schlafzimmer ausgestellt, zu einer Zeit, wo dies unvorstellbar war. Der Raum war ich.

Ich war der Raum. Oder am Beispiel MISS RIMINI (2003)**: Ich war genauso die depressive Alkoholikerin wie die kraftvolle Schwimmerin, die glamouröse Schauspielerin oder die abgearbeitete Concierge. Ich habe die Rollen eher gelebt als gespielt, wenngleich sie im Bild, genauso wie auf der Bühne, überzeichnet sein müssen, um verstanden zu werden.**

Für LACHGAS (2019) setzt du ein Spitalbett auf eine Bühne, mit Broadway-Lichterkette beleuchtet. An der Garderobe hängt ein rotes Ballkleid, der Boden ist ausgelegt mit schwarz-weissem Schachbrettmuster. Krankheit, körperliche Gebrechen, das Lebensende werden in ein glamouröses, warmes Licht gesetzt. Die Installation gibt den oft unsichtbar gemachten Lebensphasen einen würdevollen, höchst berührenden Raum. Man könnte sagen, dass du mit deiner Kunst die «Bühne des Lebens» bespielst?

Ja. Ich versuche es. Bis zum bitteren Ende, dem ich jedoch eine Würde zu geben versuche.



LA DAME AU CRÂNE RASÉ, 1977–78

Du gründetest in Zürich die Modeboutique Manon, wo man Glamour-Glitzer-Jacken kaufen konnte, hast selbst als Modell gearbeitet und während deiner Zeit in Paris hattest du Kontakt zu Karl Lagerfeld, der dich zu seinen Festen einlud. Du tratst als kahlrasierte Frau mit einer Taube als Accessoire im Tanzklub im Palace als schillernde, androgyne Figur auf. Wie spielten für dich Mode, Nachtleben und Kunst zusammen?

Natürlich bin ich damals in Paris als Person aufgefallen, mit dem kahlrasierten Kopf, was für Französinnen zu jener Zeit undenkbar war. Zudem

DAS LACHSFARBENE BOUDOIR, 1974/2018
Rauminstallation; Holz, Spiegel, Textilien,
Pelz, Fotografien, Schminkutensilien, Muscheln, Korallen
Höhe 350 cm / Durchmesser: 400 cm

war gerade mein erstes Büchlein erschienen, die Pariser liebten es. Beides zusammen hat, mithilfe meiner Freundin Susi Wyss, die jedermann kannte, dazu geführt, dass ich eingeladen wurde, jedoch stets ohne meinen Freund, quasi als Solitär. Im Rückblick kann man in meiner Arbeit eine Linie quer durch immer wiederkehrende Themen finden, vom erotischen Boudoir über den einsamen Wolf in GIGOLO (1995) zur PHILOSOPHIE IM BOUDOIR (1993), mit dem unregelmässigen Herzschlag, der Vergänglichkeit in EINST WAR SIE MISS RIMINI (2003), auch wahrnehmbar im HOTEL DOLORES (2017), später dem WACHSAAL (2018), der Nachbildung einer Erinnerung an die Psychiatrie, bis zur unverrückbaren, in der Darstellung jedoch möglichst würdevollen Endlichkeit in LACHGAS (2019). So oder so ist für mich alles eins: Schreiben, Mode, Kunst, Selbstdarstellung, genauso wie die Darstellung von Erotik, von Leben und von Tod.

In vielen deiner Performances sind Machtstrukturen und Blickrichtungen das eigentliche Kernmaterial, mit dem du die Rollen vertauschst und die Machtverhältnisse aufdeckst. Eine Performance – SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY– entstand in Amsterdam und bestand darin, dass man, vor dir in einem Käfig sitzend, einen persönlichen, intensiven Blickaustausch von Angesicht zu Angesicht mit dir hatte.

Bei meiner Amsterdamer Performance einer *Sentimental Journey*, in der damals berühmtesten Performance-Galerie De Appel, sass ich in einem offenen Käfig auf einem Stuhl und habe nach und nach aus dem Publikum einen Menschen nach dem anderen sich mir gegenübersetzen lassen. Unsere beiden Gesichter waren hell beleuchtet, der Raum blieb im Dunkeln, ebenso das Publikum. Zu den monotonen Klängen eines Metronoms schauten wir uns in die Augen. Öfters liefen Tränen, sowohl bei mir als auch bei den Männern und Frauen, die sich meinem Blick aussetzten – und ich mich dem ihren. Die Show dauerte viele Stunden und war für alle Beteiligten, und auch für die Zuschauer, äusserst intensiv, denn unsere Gesichter waren nackt. Das war 1979.

In einem Dokumentarfilm erzählst du, dass deine Kunst – aber auch schon nur dein Auftreten – für die damalige Zeit «zu viel» gewesen sei, insbesondere im Zürich der 1970er-Jahre (kurz nach Einführung des Frauenstimmrechts in der Schweiz!).

Vor dem grossen Aufbruch der Jugend war Zürich eine puritanische Stadt. Auf den grossen Wiesen beispielsweise, wo heute hunderte von Leuten ihr Picknick zelebrieren, wo Hunde sich tummeln, wo man sich in knappen Badeanzügen räkelt, standen Schilder «Rasen betreten verboten». Genau so war Zürich.

War Paris im Gegensatz zu Zürich eine Befreiung?

Ich glaube, ich zog nach Paris, weil meine Mutter als junge Frau dort die einzige glückliche Zeit ihres Lebens verbracht hatte. Unter dem Titel THE ARTIST IS PRESENT (1977) nahm ich mit einer Live-Performance und 30 Manon lookalikes Abschied von der Schweiz.

Androgynität und fluide Geschlechterrollen, weibliche und männliche Partner, eine explosive, sichtbar gemachte weibliche Sexualität, Fetischobjekte – du brichst mit deiner Arbeit und deiner Lebenshaltung mit den traditionellen Geschlechterrollen, kreierst und lebst einen radikalen, feministischen Gegenvorschlag zu den gesellschaftlichen Verhältnissen. Wie kam es zu dieser Schlagkraft, ja quasi politischen Komponenten, in deiner Arbeit? Und wurde dies damals so verstanden und rezipiert?

Natürlich war ich, rückblickend gesehen, zu früh dran mit vielen meiner Aktionen. Doch darauf konnte ich keine Rücksicht nehmen. Sicher wird manches heute besser verstanden, aber das war halt nicht mein Kriterium. Ich habe stets das ausgeführt, was sich mir aufgedrängt hat.

LACHGAS, 2019

Ein Spitalbett, ein Wachsaal einer psychiatrischen Klinik, ein Krankenwagen. In diesen jüngeren grossen Arbeiten scheint eher das Gefühl zu dominieren, anonymen Institutionen und Geräten ausgesetzt zu sein. Heilen, «caring» und die menschliche Seite sind abwesend. Wie kommt es zur künstlerischen Verarbeitung deiner persönlichen Berührungen mit dem Gesundheitssystem?

Ich habe Angst.
Beim Krankenwagen versuche ich alles umzudrehen: Als Infusion fliesst CHANEL N° 5, auf dem Tablett mit den Spritzen liegen Pralinés, die Bahre ist mit pinkfarbenem Flausch bezogen … Und selbst bei der letzten Installation, LACHGAS (2019), bringe ich rund um ein Spitalbett Broadway-Lichter an …
Ich habe Angst.
Lebenslang Angst an sich.
Das ist wohl mein Motor.
Man kann ihr nur mit Mut begegnen.

SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY, Performance,
Galerie De Appel, Amsterdam, 1979

Mimesis—Suggestively testing the boundary between life and art. A reality sustained by beliefs and illusions. When we can no longer trust our eyes, doubts disrupt our sense of authenticity. Sensuality and explicitness. Two different realities that meet and cross-pollinate to expose alienation.

Words by *Charles Blunier*

THE IMMEDIACY OF THE NATURAL AESTHETIC

An interview by *David Khalat* with *Julian Charrière*

DAVID KHALAT :

I would like to start at the beginning of your career. Your practice has a comprehensiveness to it that bridges all of your projects in questioning the reliability of human perception. For your first big solo exhibition in 2011, you created a series of works that have been groundbreaking in their scope – *Panorama*. How did the idea of creating alpine landscapes on a landfill in the centre of Berlin come to you, and what do you convey by bringing artificial and seemingly real natural habitats together?

JULIAN CHARRIÈRE :

Prima facie, *Panorama* questions how our perception works, and elaborates on our fantasised relationship to "nature" and the sublime – a starting point that has influenced my work ever since. But in a second step, there is a lot to discover by working with models in general, and their character teaches us about how we see the world and ourselves in it. A model is more than a miniature of real conditions – it is always missing something, and because of this it provokes blank spaces that can be filled with sense, or as one should say, that are filled automatically by our imagination. With the absence of scents, noises, dimensions of space and time, differing compositions of air, and so on, the conditions appeal to the necessity of imagination and open up a special poetic power. It forces us to actually think about a certain aspect of our environment, to abstract its essence and think it through or just look at it from a different angle, freed from what embeds it in its usual context.

Models can be seen as precursors of a new reality if you so wish. The differences that distinguish them can be unobtrusive or even almost invisible but still perceptible. To be confronted with a model is to be confronted with the fundamental questions of

what is reality,
what is an original and
does something like this
even exist,
what makes a copy a copy
and what is a mirage
?

And it becomes obvious that a landscape is always a model, a mirage and a certain reality at the same time. *Panorama* plays with these states by challenging our perception. By doing this, the special feature of time-based media, images pieced together to create a more complete whole, emphasises this quality. But to answer your question, alpine scenery has always fascinated me. It not only shapes the landscape where I come from, but also contains so much history, past and present time layers and different narratives within its materiality. To me, the alpine landscape unfolds a lot more than different current environments, but also teaches us about ourselves and our position in the world.

DAVID KHALAT :

It is interesting that you bring up the approach of subjectivity – in a way of positioning ourselves in the world. Your works are not only multidimensional in the sense of questioning our understanding of natural and environmental processes, but also as a way of poetically staging the uncertainty of our contemporary risk society. Even if the term was originally coined for questions of economic and financial risk, it has been expanded by the irreversible environmental changes that are causing huge problems for contemporary and future living. How do you work out those complexities in your iconography, using a series like *The Blue Fossil Entropic Stories* or your latest film *Towards No Earthly Pole*, that has been the subject of your recent travelling exhibition at MASI Lugano, Aargauer Kunsthaus Aarau and the Dallas Museum of Art?

JULIAN CHARRIÈRE :

Some of my works tend to stress the fact that meanings and understandings change extremely quickly depending on geopolitical context and socialisation. For example, the Arctic changed from something violent and uncanny to something very fragile, almost like a seismograph for climate change, over recent decades. Within a century, two completely different places emerged, both described within the concept of the natural – what we actually call nature depends on our cultural imprint. The Inuit in the high arctic areas have developed a unique way of creating sense out of the things surrounding them over the last few centuries, a certain understanding which they inherited from their ancestors, but a world vision which got overwritten by the colonial narrative of the 19th century during the era of exploration. Nature can be a screen on which our dreams and desires are projected, and, depending on our upbringing, history, tradition and culture, these projections are fundamentally different. A person growing up in an Asian country sees a mountain differently from a Swiss person. Every encounter is a construction and I like to use these different and often contradictory layers of meaning to create greater complexity within my works.

My research is not about casting humans as the environment's counterpart or enemy in this age of climate upheaval. It is not my aim to point out what right or wrong mean in our societies – it is more about changing perspectives and opening up new ways of seeing our world and obviously questioning our position within it. I actually try to produce pretty abstract narratives without serving a didactic approach. Instead I want to invite viewers to engage in a meditative experience in which they unlock meaning from within themselves.

Towards No Earthly Pole is a descriptive example of this, as it is all about disorientation drawing attention to the limits of our perception, especially the limits that are artificially produced by the collective imaginary. It is about polar darkness and its uncanniness. In everyday life in the West, society usually encounters representations of the polar regions in daylight. We are used to being confronted with images of light blue and shiny icebergs in front of bright skies and sunshine – white giants that tell us about climate change and environmental conditions in a seemingly far-away sphere. Otherworldly narrators of a well-known story and witnesses of our impact on the environment. Polar nights, on the other hand, are non-existent in the collective imaginary, almost like blackouts in terms of the temporary condition that affects our memory characterised by a sense of lost time and space.

I try to look at changes from a greater distance – be it in terms of my use of certain materials which shape the narratives in my work or be it in terms of fieldwork in remote locations. *The Blue Fossil Entropic Stories* is an examination of temporalities and the elements. It is the photographic trace of a performance in 2013, when I was travelling to Iceland and climbed an iceberg. I tried to melt the frozen water beneath my feet with a gas torch for eight hours, during which I found myself confronting the elements in a seemingly hopeless battle – a human time frame against the geological – and a starting point for a deeper approach to different temporalities in my work back then.

DAVID KHALAT :

Turning to the central idea of mise-en-scene as the formational core of a visual work, how do you map out the contradictions between the real and the imaginary, the actual and the staged, as for example in *Towards No Earthly Pole*? As you already mentioned, most of your works are concerned exactly with this tension between the seemingly obvious and a way of looking at things beyond the apparent. And sometimes the apparent can be misleading, like in the work *I Am Afraid, I Must Ask You to Leave*, where you and Julius von Bismarck recreate a UN World Heritage site only to demolish and document it?

JULIAN CHARRIÈRE :

In *Towards No Earthly Pole*, I wanted to stress a shift in the usual mode of representation and create a filmic model which plays with the viewer's perception by creating a hyper-realistic but impossibly real assemblage of polar and alpine footage constructions. The piece functions as a digital diorama in which different scenes are merged to create an imaginary topography consisting of elements of a real (but seldomly seen like this) world. The outcome somehow forces us to re-calibrate our western world vision by steadily forcing viewers to verify what they have seen, as well as by the at first glance very simple effect of filming an artificially illuminated landscape during night time. I was working with mobile artificial lighting, and that, combined with the characteristic nature of the subject matter, creates an atmosphere that makes it almost impossible to get your bearings and sense the scale of the landscape being depicted. Viewers inevitably keep on questioning their perception by not knowing how to classify what they experience. States like the virtual and the natural, the model and the reality seem to blur, sometimes not making sense, and a complete sensory loss of scale and time takes their place. But the moving images nevertheless still build up a picture of concise continuity.

I Am Afraid, I Must Ask You to Leave works slightly differently and stresses the idea of image proliferation, fiction versus reality and how photography and videography as a medium play roles in the construction of realities and their reception

What is objective and
what stays subjective
and how these mechanisms
develop now relayed
by the digital realm... The digital
world is now surpassing
the tangible in its role of
producing knowledge broadly
accepted as real.

So, in a way, *I Am Afraid, I Must Ask You to Leave* challenges the viewer by questioning the states of reality versus model. The images play with the collective imaginary of our environment and also, like *Panorama*, scrutinise our perception. The basic idea we were working with is faith in a medium that is of course shifting in the course of technical innovation. Yet society still seems to believe in the objectivity of photographic or at least videographic images if they are realistic enough – even if, or perhaps especially if, they are distributed online. Julius and I were producing some sort of fake fakes, which means we constructed a fake in its actual appropriate environment. The lack of digital special effects seems to detract even specialists from having a closer look at what the image really depicts and checking reliable background information on the actual state of the environment. It seems to bring back a misleading trust in the photographic image from which this piece benefits and which it depicts. The power of the photographic image is fascinating if you look at its history and use in digital media. Even if theorists have been talking about the dissolving credibility of the discrete image (for example Bernard Stiegler) for decades, the digital image is still able to tell stories which convince viewers 100%, feeding our societies and producing a cultural machine without being questioned. Because it was implanted within the main contemporary producer of collective imaginary – the media apparatus and its spheres of influence – this work developed a certain momentum and really reached a broad audience that perhaps wouldn't usually come into contact with contemporary art production.

DAVID KHALAT :

The video works *Towards No Earthly Pole* and *An Invitation To Disappear* both also capture parts of the world that most people have never visited and never will. All the places you travel to are on the outer edge of society. Thus, there is some romanticism in those works, where the viewer can get lost in this uncharted territory. How do you approach those sites to translate their narrative qualities and their geographic and aesthetic symbolism into your work without recreating stereotypes, but instead challenging the way we understand our environment?

JULIAN CHARRIÈRE :

These stereotypes are an important starting point for my work. Obviously, it is not about reproducing them, but using them as a common denominator. Almost like a shared language of the global north which gives us an equal base from which to think about conditions. This is where I see the need to question the status quo and also to break free from it. It is not about actually working with what we assume are "romantic" places, but about pointing out that in the end they are inherited constructs. Our way of seeing the world stems from ideas developed during the Romantic era, so nature and romanticism go hand in hand somehow and we therefore urgently need to look for ways to redefine this notion and our relationship with the environment in the 21st century.

Another interesting key element in this context for me is our confrontation with the idea of the sublime in connection with our notion of nature, another concept that stems from the Romantic era and which can be questioned and exploited artificially by depicting, assembling, and reconstructing what our collective imaginary seems to have already labelled in a certain way.

An Invitation to Disappear can also be seen as an invitation to participate in a form of a meditation, like I described my work earlier. And the meditation in this case – a rave set in an oil palm plantation in South-east Asia – opens up a confrontation with the promises of the global monocultures which had previously exploited the same land through colonialism. The rising electronic sound draws the camera to a party which is taking place in the conspicuous absence of people in the middle of seemingly endless rows of palm trees – a crowded space of emptiness that wraps around its viewers and becomes a projection surface.

DAVID KHALAT :

You mention the sublime, which is often something that people cannot really grasp in terms of comprehension, being instead embedded in a feeling we have when we see something. And this is where your oeuvre often plays with temporal and spatial dimensions beyond our traditional understanding, what Timothy Morton called hyper objects. Even though this seems to be a common motif in relation to a networked society nowadays, you prefer to go back in time to explore our future sources of potential through natural objects and landscapes. By doing so your work illustrates the overwhelming power of nature, only subtly hinting at the vast traces left by humankind. Humans are mostly absent, being instead represented through the flow, origin and transformation of those objects and landscapes that take centre stage. How do you approach this contradiction in staging these sublime hyper objects in their relation to the human species?

JULIAN CHARRIÈRE :

Most of my work gets along without explicitly staging humans, but even if they are not the main narrators, they are always part of the work – as viewers, as the ones who create sense in perceiving and as the ones who produce and construct the understanding of things. In addition to this, like in *An Invitation to Disappear*, it is in fact the very absence of human life that stresses their tangible importance, actually emphasising their presence, just like traces that enable so much more meaning than the ones leaving them.

The confrontation with time, space, history and our conception of these constructs often determines my practice and the materials I work with. I'm intrigued by the geological and what it releases in terms of time and its sedimentation in matter. I think of certain materials as vessels for different temporal narratives, and by confronting these with each other, this becomes clear and enables new approaches to time and space. Materials like glacial erratics, for example, teach us about how we put time into a linear understanding and how this attaches to our perception of ourselves as well. Some of my works are about the way time precipitates and therefore makes visible our position within ecosystems that are way older than our existence on earth. And there it gets more obvious that the human position is very present in my work most of the time, even without substitution.

But to answer your question, *Towards No Earthly Pole* is again a good example of the way a sublime reality can be depicted and used as a tool for making clear just how much our perception of ecosystems is dependent on the existing collective iconography and is therefore as fragmented as human consciousness can handle . The climate crisis and its impacts seem on the whole not to be tangible from an economic and political perspective. In the collective imaginary, the arctic acts almost as a formalised code and reminder of the concept of models we talked about earlier. *Towards No Earthly Pole* depicts the giants with a brutal and sublime immediacy that reveals their role as significants and at the same time emphasises how little we know about the vastness of our world, despite our exploitation of it. Human imagination is limited compared to the sublime reality of our environment, which exists as a serious actant.

DAVID KHALAT :

Your work can be characterised as an archaeology of the future in approaching such overarching

themes as global warming, nuclear decay and environmental destruction. What can we expect from your forthcoming projects for exhibitions such as for the Prix Marcel Duchamp at the Centre Pompidou or your upcoming solo exhibitions during Berlin Gallery Weekend at DITTRICH & SCHLECHTRIEM and your upcoming Swiss solo show at Galerie Tschudi in Zuoz?

JULIAN CHARRIÈRE :

The Polar regions and their special ability to teach us about our environment is a topic that keeps me very busy. To me,

glaciers hold a special
character trait
of wisdom, like huge ancient
oracles, telling us about
the past, present and future
while their calls
remain mostly unheard.

In fact, they make loud cracking noises which relate to their very old chemical composition while moving their massive ice fields, carving or melting down, and as such they are narrators from the past responding to current environment changes. The arctic sky has been captured in the ice masses ever since and solidified bubbles made out of primeval air are currently being released again, uncovering a huge global memory and giving it back to the sky where it was originally made. This is an interesting dynamic, as the reversal movement between sky and ground gives rise to an introspective moment for the contemporary – a short break in which the modern world could reflect on itself and its development. Just like with the predictions of primal oracles, one has to engage with the insights offered by the glaciers and the polar environment. In addition, provoking effects like polar vision and disorientation seem to be the natural surrounding for hallucinatory experiences.

As I'm in the middle of the production process for my upcoming project, I cannot give away too many details, but aspects like the carbon cycle, air and what its composition teaches us about our planet, and the seemingly simple act of breathing are all going to play a role in it. One of the main narratives will revolve around the act of mining the sky above the ice caps and rethinking the cultural value of certain materials – The overall narrative may even involve a diamond made out of air! A very exciting working process!

David Khalat **is a curator and cultural sociologist specialising in media aesthetics. He is currently the director of Edition VFO in Zurich.**

ELLA RUMPF—A DARK STAR

Words by *Amanda Bühler*

Spirited, spontaneous and refreshingly outspoken, *Ella Rumpf* is not only one of the most promising actresses in Europe, she is also one of the most alluring. With a list of carefully selected film roles to her credit, the award-winning Swiss actress is fast becoming a familiar face on international TV.

Since her role in Julia Ducournau's highly acclaimed horror film "Raw" (2016), *Ella Rumpf* has captivated audiences in the Netflix series "Freud", where she plays Fleur Salomé, a medium who teams up with Freud to help solve his cases. Her latest work includes "Soul of a Beast" by Lorenz Merz, showcased at this year's Locarno Film Festival, HBO's latest "Tokyo Vice" and an appearance in the upcoming season 3 of "Succession".

In conversation, she darts excitedly from one cultural topic to the next, referencing everything from Jacques Brel to politics in Art, her approachable warmth contrasting with her striking, yet somewhat dark and mysterious beauty. Behind the lens, photographer *Basile Mookherjee* explores a new angle on storytelling, through a more intimate cinematographic series.

GREGORY CREWDSON IN A CONVERSATION WITH *JEFF WALL*

GREGORY CREWDSON :

My first question is what was your first aesthetic awakening?

JEFF WALL :

You sent me the questions ahead and I realised that nobody had ever asked me that before, really in any serious way. So it really made you think about it, because first of all, it's a long time ago now. And it made me think about my past and how I began to discover that I was fascinated and even, you know, obsessed by the arts. And I think the first thing I can say is that at some point, because of things I'd seen, and I'll specify what some of those things were, I became excited that by the very fact that there were images of things as opposed to the things themselves, a child at some point sees his or her first picture or realises they're seeing their first picture, and that's a duplication of what they see when they turn their head to look at what's around them. And I think that if you are interested in, let's say, visual arts, that will be an exciting moment when you discover that there are such things because an infant wouldn't know that. And I know that at some point it ignited a sort of fascination for the very existence of the arts. First it was an image and then it became words and sounds and so on. And then you realise, one after the other, your senses are duplicated in the arts.

And so I thought that when that happened to me, and I realised that I grew up, you know, I was born 1946. That time I became first aware of these things, I might have been about five or six years old, so early fifties. And the early fifties was, you know, a moment when our culture, I mean, North American culture, Canada, it's always part of that... you know, there was a mass culture then, not like now and not nearly as dominant as now, though it was there. But it was basically a print culture.

I'm also one of those people who, in a way, was never much affected by television. When I was a child, we didn't have television till maybe 1954, and even then we didn't watch it very much because firstly, there was nothing on for a long time, and secondly, we weren't habituated to watch television. It was something that had to emerge. And so that didn't play a big part for me as a kid. But it was print that played the part. And, of course, the very first things I can remember, our children's illustrated books, little books I read as a child or that were read to me, maybe by my mother or father, but I was fascinated by the illustrations, by seeing pictures that were drawn by people, you know, like, say, E.H. Shepherd's drawings for Winnie the Pooh, which I must have had read to me when I was four or five years old, and I remember, I can still remember, seeing these pen or pencil drawings on the page. And those sorts of things were amazingly powerful images or experiences of seeing that stuff. So print was very, very important. And slowly, through illustrated books, I began to understand what pictures were.

The other thing I remember clearly from that era, maybe a few years later, was reading the funny papers, because in the fifties, still remember, this was the end of the great period of the comics. Comics that you saw in the newspapers in 1955, a lot of them had been in the newspapers since 1930, even 1920. And so they were beautifully drawn, whether it was Dick Tracy, you know, Our Boarding House, The Katzenjammer Kids, which was a comic strip that came out of the twenties in Germany, these things went back into the early twentieth century, and they had a certain look to them, and they were pretty sophisticated kinds of drawing. So, you know, that was super important. And from there it went on to things like magazine illustration. Magazines like Look and Saturday Evening Post and so on were illustrated with paintings. Sometimes they were oil paintings. In fact, often they were oil paintings that were reproduced, the most famous would be like Norman Rockwell, who did the covers. Those were oil paintings. So what they were reproducing were essentially the same kind of things that you would see in a museum, except on a different level of sophistication, I suppose. I also think that the fifties into the sixties was also a period when serious art still had a lot of prestige in the mass media—I mean the mass media of its time. Remember that that period was kind of one in which the high arts—what we used to call the high arts, still call that to some extent—were being disseminated by print. And then one of the terms that was used at that time was middle-brow, middle-brow culture. It was a dissemination by means of various print media of serious art to a wide public in a way, in an attempt to give that public, which was not necessarily previously attuned to it, access to good literature and good art and so on—and good music.

So you had things like the Book of the Month Club, which still exists, by the way, which sent you books, novels, histories every month, and my family subscribed to the Book of the Month Club. And so some of my first serious reading was from Book of the Month Club selections. That middle-brow time was a moment in which mass culture was sort of based on the prestige of higher culture, it wasn't yet pop art. Pop art was just incipient at that moment, it hadn't really existed yet. And so, in a way, I came in under the bar of pop art and got interested in art before that ever happened. And so that kind of, you know, has a lot to do with the forming of someone's taste and frame of mind. And I've never been that enthusiastic about the so-called replacement of high art by pop art. And that's probably because of what happened to me as a kid. Another big influence, aside from Book of the Month Club, was things like these illustrated books, publications my family received about the Masters of Art, which we got from Harry N. Abrams in the 1950s. Every month or so, they'd send us a beautifully published study of a single artist. And I would get those as an eight-year-old, nine-year-old and just pore over them, because that's when I discovered what, you know, that was a leap from children's books, comic strips, magazine illustrations, to paintings and sculpture, and then you discover what art really is. And I still have a lot of those things I got in the fifties, and they were very beautifully printed. Look.

GREGORY CREWDSON :

Oh my goodness. Yes, yes.

JEFF WALL :

The reproductions are tipped in, and it's very beautifully done. We had dozens of these. And you see, it shows on every page beautiful large illustrations tipped in individually, so they're rather precious and beautiful. And you can imagine the effect they had in 1954 when they brought this art to you in a way that was such high-impact. You only got one a month or so, which meant for that month you weren't bouncing around to different artists. You were paying attention to that one. And I think the slower pace, by the way, of things then helped you—helped me anyway—to get involved with things, because let's say I had Manet that month, that was what I thought about, because that's the book, the new one. And I think that there was a certain free breathing space that we had in the slower pace of print culture that helped to get us—get me anyway—to weave that experience of looking at whatever artist I was looking at into my everyday life. So I would do different things during the day. And then I would look at that book and then that book would be part of that day. And that went on for a while, And I think that pace had a lot to do with making, forming my taste for and my interest in how I like to look at art. Something else I think that was very important in that time, which was very middle-brow was Horizon magazine, which people who are my age will probably remember was an American subscription. And it was a magazine of culture and art history, literature, and so on, published in the United States. And I think it came out every month or maybe every second month. And it contained very studious articles by very, very prominent people, like André Malraux and people like that, who would write on all sorts of topics from culture, history, politics, the arts, literature. And I read those Horizons regularly. And that's one of the places I began to become literate, by trying to understand what they were talking about. And that, you know, led you to a lot of other reading, led me to a lot of other reading by the time I was probably 12, 13, 14 years old. And Horizon, through its literary criticism, led me into this kind of neurosis of novel reading that I've probably indulged in all my life, because it led me to literature in a way that I thought was a very good guide to literature. And so by the time I was that age, I was reading more seriously. I jumped from little children's books over whatever books one would read as a young kid via something like Treasure Island, whose illustrations fascinated me. One of the first drawings I think I can remember making was a copy of the map, the treasure map in Treasure Island, because it was so fascinating, the beautifully drawn map to the treasure, and I had to have that treasure map, so I made one for myself. And, you know, it was a drawing I kept, and it's a sort of practical thing. Anyway, you know, by that time, by the early sixties, I was reading pretty seriously. I was thinking about what were the first serious novels I read around 1959, 1960, and I remember reading Richard Wright's Native Son, which is an odd one I suppose, but that's what came up. I read Madame Bovary in the Book of the Month Club selection, for example. So novel reading became very important to my work over time, and I think the relation between the novel and painting and photography is pretty obvious. A lot of dimensions.

Two of the things I'll mention from that time, which I think are relevant to that sort of thing, were The Family of Man. Because that exhibition, which was then disseminated as a famous book and sent by subscription to my parents, was the first time I really had a look seriously at photography. That would have been sometime around 1958, I suppose. And I looked at that book, you know, for a long, long time and looked at all the photographs. And I began to turn my attention toward photography, like a lot of people. By this time I was also running to the public library every week, getting books on art. You know, I'd ride my bicycle to the public library, which had a good selection of books on art, and I would take them out three, four, five at a time and read them that week and take them back the next week. And I educated myself in that before I ever got to studying art seriously. By the time I became a so-called art history student. I already had learned art history from the public library, and public libraries are another part of that fifties print culture that helped to form people and certainly formed me. In my high school, which was an ordinary public high school, we had a very, very good art department with a very nice art room in which we had art supplies, and they let us use them and we could make things.

Not only did they have that, but on the shelves in my art room they had all the current art magazines every month, which in those days were Art News, American Artist, Art International, which was published in Switzerland, I think, and Canadian Art. And I read those magazines front to back every month. I learned about contemporary art in my art class in high school, partly because of the teachers, but partly because of the maga-

zines that the school subscribed to for kids like me. That world was very sophisticated.

Vancouver is a very small place. At that time, it was one of the farthest-away cities of any substance in the world—about the farthest away you can get from the old world. But it was much more urban then than it is now, and its urbanism contained a lot of cultural threads that found their way into all sorts of places like my high school. You know, I had young artists as high school art teachers, and they—I loved to draw, and I could draw pretty well—paid a lot of attention to me.

So I had these connections before I ever met another artist. The first artist I met was my high school art teacher. And so all these things, you know, let's say between 1955 and 1963 maybe, they all happened. I never really saw much art because the museum here didn't have much of a collection, although I saw a few things. And certainly I saw Canadian painting, which was pretty sophisticated. But a big event for us, and I'll just end with this in terms of all these reminiscences, was the Seattle World's Fair took place in 1962, and my mother drove me there to see the art exhibition that they had arranged for the Seattle World's Fair, which was remarkable. And it included just about every artist you can think of who was contemporary. I think they were all alive then, including Picasso, Rothko. Everybody you can think of was in this exhibition. One section was international, one section was American. There was no Canadian, of course. There was also an Old Masters exhibition. And I can still remember standing in front of paintings like Siegfried by Franz Kline, which was enormous, a bigger painting than I'd ever seen, even though I'd seen reproductions of it already in art magazines. I knew who Franz Kline was, I knew who the artists were there, but I'd never really seen their work, so seeing it, of course, had this explosive effect on me and many other artists in this area who went there and had seen that sort of thing. You know, if you grew up in Paris or New York or somewhere in London, you go to the museums all the time, it's not that big a deal, but when you live in a city like this, you don't see those things. So that occasion was really remarkable, it had a big formative effect on me. So for any kid who really wanted to be interested in art, who was somehow immediately drawn to it like I was, there were a lot of open doors, even in a small place under those circumstances. And the thing I kind of think about now is how leisurely, open, calm and rich, in a way, peaceful, my encounters with art were because they were easy to get to because mass media was making it easy, but it wasn't really getting in the way.

It was just kind of opening a door to things that one could contemplate at one's own pace. And I think that slowness also had a big effect on how I understood what art was, literature, art, everything, and had a big effect on how I practise it now.

GREGORY CREWDSON :

When did you start making pictures, photographs?

JEFF WALL :

Not till a little bit later, in the sixties. You know, I was always painting and drawing as a child. My father gave me the tool shed in the back of our house as a studio when I was about 14, and I had my own studio, literally. But I didn't get interested in photography practically until the sixties, when it came in via… the sixties. And then I began to get interested in that, and that in a way distracted me from my sort of, the settled way of looking at art in the fifties and up to the age of 15 or 16. By then I'd probably already become a bit of a conservative.

GREGORY CREWDSON :

Were there photographers that you were influenced by early on, specifically, as you started making pictures?

JEFF WALL :

I came to it a bit backwards in a way because I first started doing photographs via early conceptual art, which is a backwards way of getting into that. And so the masters of photography, whose work I already did know, didn't play that big a part at that point because everybody was against that kind of photography. They were sort of jumped over without really having ever being involved in it. But when I look back at The Family of Man that I pored over as a kid, and upstairs I have a pencil drawing I made around that time of my favourite picture from the Family of Man book because I decided to copy it, and it was Robert Frank's photograph of a man walking up a staircase in an old house in Bunker Hill. So I guess it was Robert Frank. I guess I picked him out because that's the one that I have.

GREGORY CREWDSON :

I'd love to see that drawing.

JEFF WALL :

Well, it's somewhere upstairs.

GREGORY CREWDSON :

How about movies? Is there a movie that changed your life? Any director?

JEFF WALL :

To go back to the thing about television: I didn't take cinema seriously artistically until the sixties and then pay much attention to it, and I didn't connect it to my artistic or literary interests really. You know, I went to the movies, like kids did. You know, we used to go to Saturday matinees and see a news reel, two cartoons and a Western. And I didn't connect that really to anything serious for a while, partly because the movies were, you know, kind of ordinary Hollywood movies that one didn't really think of in the same way as you'd think about Cézanne or Robert Frank. Later, Andrew Sarris and the auteurists showed us that we should have been doing that, but, you know, we were only kids, we didn't know that. And so… Here, yes, she's got it.

(*shows drawing to camera*)

GREGORY CREWDSON IN A CONVERSATION
WITH JEFF WALL

GREGORY CREWDSON :

Oh, wow, amazing, thank you.

JEFF WALL :

So this was done probably when I was 13 or 14. But what I was going to say about the cinema was that I didn't connect it until later, when, in the ordinary cinemas in Vancouver, we started seeing the films that people started paying attention to as art, like, you know, it would have been Pasolini, Bergman, Manoel, they showed in the ordinary movies along with Hitchcock and whatever else. And of course, when I got to university in '64, then there was a film society, and then we began to watch cinema. And then I began to realise that it was an art form I should pay attention to. But I didn't really until that time, I hadn't really seen it. The moving image didn't really play a part in the arts you know, at that point they were… the cinema was something and the arts were painting, photography, sculpture, print making. And so it was only later that that happened.

GREGORY CREWDSON :

So shifting gears slightly here, what is your least favourite part of the artistic process?

JEFF WALL :

I don't have a least favourite because—I think you know this—we're lucky. We just do what we like, what we love to do, so there can't be anything I don't like about doing what I do. You know, there are tedious things like we all have to do certain tedious things in the process of doing something. For a painter, he might not like stretching a canvas, you know, it may be a bit boring, but in the end, they're going to love that because that's just part of what they do.

That's how I see it. In the external things that we have to deal with, in things like making money, that can be tiresome. But in fact, we can't complain about that and I'm not going to.

GREGORY CREWDSON :

Is there a part you like the best?

JEFF WALL :

I mean, shooting is the most exciting because of the stress involved, when you haven't got what you're looking for. So of course, that's always in a way the high point and for a photographer, it's what you have to do. It's the point of the spear for photography. So, of course, that's a focus of everything. Sometimes I spend a lot of time preparing this and that, but really it's to get to that point and the rest of it…

GREGORY CREWDSON :

How about the post-production aspect? Editing, working in the studio, printing?

JEFF WALL :

You know, I still do black and white prints chemically in my dark room, which is a blast. So I love doing that, even though I don't actually do it myself most of the time, I have someone, usually a couple of people, in the dark room, putting the prints into the enlarger and doing the chemistry. But I like being there and I would do it if I needed to, and I have done it. That's pretty exciting. I started doing digital in the early nineties and people weren't doing it much then. And so I had to go through the process of kind of learning what that was all about and what so called post-production really was. Really we're making photomontages, it's what we do. We combine more than one negative. Essentially it's nothing more than a photomontage done digitally. That's how I see it. Yeah, it's all enjoyable. A lot of the things I've made where I've had to combine more than one negative, because I want my montages, and I think you do the same, I want my montages to be invisible.

GREGORY CREWDSON :

Yeah.

JEFF WALL :

Like twenties collage, a montage where it was glaringly obvious that these were assemblies. And I have no problem with that, it's just not how I work. I want to restore the unity of the pictorial space. So you have to learn to shoot in order to make things go together properly. And that can be tricky, but fascinating, it's constructive. There's a lot of construction plasticity in that part of the work. So, you know, I work with somebody who helps me, but I have to be there for most of the time, except for the very routine elements, so it's pretty hands on for me. And…

Yeah, I cannot imagine any part of it that I'd like to skip over. Why would I do it if I wanted to skip over it?

GREGORY CREWDSON :

Right, right, right, completely. Do you feel your work is in any way autobiographical?

JEFF WALL :

Depends what you mean, you know? It's a weird question, because autobiographical could mean illustrations of events from your own life. In that case, rarely. If it means images that have emerged from your own conditions, memories, emotions, then of course, yes. I can't think of a single… there's no picture I've done, and probably no picture that you've done or anyone has done that didn't emerge from something that struck you, bothered you, you know, inspired you. So what's revealed is what you care about in some way. And probably if you look at an artist's work over time, you get a feeling of kind of who they are from what's bothered them, what they've loved, what they've had affection for. Well, I'd say what they've had affection for is what it's really all about, because nothing that I've ever… I've never made an image of anything I didn't feel affection for, no matter what the subject was. So I think you learn from an artist what they've cared about in their life by looking at what they've done or listening to it or reading it. In that sense, you

know who they are, to a great extent without knowing anything about their biography.

GREGORY CREWDSON :

So taken as a whole, when you look back at all of your work, what do you feel the central themes or preoccupations are?

JEFF WALL :

I think it's bad luck to look back on what you've done.

GREGORY CREWDSON :

Yeah.

JEFF WALL :

I try not to do much of that because, you know, for obvious reasons, I'm looking forward. I also think it's bad for me as an artist to try and interpret those things. I think it's fine. I think interpretation of artists is inherent in it, and I've done it for other people's work, even written about it. But I don't like doing it for my own because I feel in a way it's not in my interest to get a grip on thematic material if it's there, preferences, etc. It would be better for me to leave it alone. Of course I know some of these things without having to think about it, and I also can't avoid thinking about it, but I don't like to because of that. Otherwise, you might get to believe that you're going somewhere specific, and that doesn't seem like a very interesting map for me. I don't want to feel like I'm going anywhere very specific. A propos that, some people have talked about how some of the really amazing bodies of work in photography were done by people like, say, Walker Evans in a very brief period of their lives. It's one of the best known problems in the aesthetic problem, aesthetic thought about photography. Why is it that someone like Evans had this amazing hot streak and after that didn't really do that again? Moreover, he had it when he was 30-ish. I've never wanted to have any hot streaks because I think there's a certain inherent photographic issue there. Frank had it, too, you know, in the fifties, he had that period when he made The Americans and he was completely dialled in and could barely do any wrong. And after that, it's much more diffuse what he accomplished. That's different from the way a painter relates to each painting, especially in modern times, where painters don't have thematic instances or subject matter that looms up so big for them. Almost never does this happen. They can move from place to place, partly because it's a lower art form, but they, I think that the painter has—or the sculptor, I suppose—a what I call a more sovereign relationship to the feel of their subject matter, they're not as beholden to any subject matter as photographers in that documentary mode were forced to be by circumstance. They might not have wanted to be in that position, but that's where they ended up, partly because of the nature of what photography was in the thirties and fifties. And I've not wanted to have that relationship with any subject. And that way I've imitated in a way, and I've been accused of imitating painting many a time, but in some ways I did imitate painting, and I think for good reason. One of the reasons was to not get into a relationship with any subject matter that I could conceivably find interesting, that would lead me on to a hot streak like that, because to me that is a cul de sac that I want to avoid. Having a more open relationship means that I can drift. And I think that a lot of artists do drift in a way to keep the possibility that they can do something completely different open. And I think that in that way, photography, at least for me, did have something to learn from the other arts, and that's one of the reasons why I've consistently questioned the uniqueness of photography as an art form. And, you know, for a long time, I created a dialogue with myself, at least, about why, about what the relation is between the art forms and what photography actually is as an art form. And I believe that photography wasn't and isn't limited by that journalistic impulse that created some of the greatest bodies of work that we've ever known. They're unparalleled, we can't match them, but we don't necessarily have to take them as the fundamental frame of reference for what photography can do.

GREGORY CREWDSON :

Do you ever think about your audience?

JEFF WALL :

Yeah, of course. But I don't know what the content of that thought really is. To me, the ideal of the audience is unknown people who will be drawn to what I do, the way I've been drawn to the work of people I've never met and never will meet, including people who lived hundreds of years before I ever saw their work. To me, that's the picture of the audience that I think is the most rich, which is all those unknowns who we will be known to through what we do. And I don't take it further than that because I don't think there's anywhere to go further than that, of course.

GREGORY CREWDSON :

Yeah. How has success affected your work?

JEFF WALL :

Sometimes I feel I'm just completely over the hill. And, you know, being an older artist in a new period makes you wonder what success really means to you. But, you know, I have had an audience. I think it makes it more difficult. And I think that's a good thing. In other words, the more you do, the more you've done, the more critical you can be of it, the more critical other people have been of it, and that gets back to you. It means that as high as you thought your standards were when you were 25, they weren't actually high enough. And as you go on, you just keep realising they have to be raised. And if you are developing, I think if you're developing your own work, then your own standards have to keep getting higher. And of course, it makes it more difficult. So if you succeed in... if you succeed socially, you probably succeeded to some degree artistically. But that term, all that term means to me is you made something that has created a new problem for you that you didn't know you had before. And that problem then becomes revealed to you only because of what you managed to do last year, or whenever it happened to be. You wouldn't have known that you had actually failed at something until you succeeded in that particular way. And that opens up, you know, you're in... I see photography as a huge series of caverns, sometimes, spaces that are linked weirdly. And the big cavern is called reportage, you know, and then there's another cavern that's called the cinema, and then there's another one and so on. But there are caverns you don't discover until you stumble into the previous one. And so, you know, to be successful, really leads you into another space that actually creates harder problems.

GREGORY CREWDSON :

What have you learned through failure?

JEFF WALL :

That you're not as great as you think you are, first of all, and that nobody's as great as they think they are. And it's very easy once in a while to start thinking you're actually any good. That's a very bad and inartistic way to think. I think I've learned that one has to atone for failures. And the atonement is to recognise that the standard you're working toward is higher than you thought it was, and that you, as smart as you think you are, you're sort of cocooned by a thick layer of stupidity as well. You aren't really the success that you thought you were. And that atonement is emotionally a very intense feeling. You know, you get that sense of atonement from... I get it from my long life of novel reading, which is so disturbing, reading about characters and imaginary characters in books who go through things that we ourselves might go through only very weakly, more weakly than they have. I think that tells you a lot about what you ought to be doing. And so that emotion of humiliation, for example, it's a very, very powerful way of making you want to be an artist again, better.

GREGORY CREWDSON :

Is there a particular novel that you go to?

JEFF WALL :

It's hard to say, I've read so many. And there are so many great ones. No, I'm not going to say because, you know, there are the profuse novels like Proust or something, where every sentence is a page long, that's a very specific kind of book. Nothing could match that book. But if you... but then if you look at say, I don't know, they're not novels, but Dubliners by Joyce, where it's a completely different kind of writing and every bit as remarkable, how can you choose? So no, I mean, the phenomenon of this, this art form, which is so hybrid... you know, the novel was really a kind of trash art form when it began. it was really just the lowest of the low and it has become the most dominant literary form that we have, so rich, so full of possibilities that you can't really exhaust it in any way. I just see it as an intensification of things that really happened and allow me to magnify my own emotions, let's say, which are sometimes magnified enough on their own, but it allows you to magnify your own feelings. And by magnifying them, sort of, it's like if you put a magnifying glass in a sunny day and you can focus on a little piece of grass that starts a fire, it has that effect on your own way of thinking about yourself. So all the good ones, let's put it that way.

GREGORY CREWDSON :

Do you have any thoughts on how photographs now are generally disseminated through screens rather than physical prints and just the whole phenomenon of social media and how an artist, a photographer, exists within that environment?

JEFF WALL :

Well, what about screens? What about non-fungible tokens? How about them? The screens are a little old fashioned already aren't they? Like I said, because of the prevalence of physical art forms and print culture in my past, of course I'm very attached to the physicality of the arts. And I think that being attached to the physicality of the arts is normal, and it's nothing that needs to be... there's nothing that needs to be changed in it. We don't need to progress beyond, let's say, looking at a lithograph in a frame, there's nothing artistic to be gained by progressing beyond that. I'd like to put aside the whole idea that there are old fashioned art forms. So the existing physical art forms, let's just take photographic prints to be simple, have nothing about them that is inadequate or needs to be augmented in any way. They're perfectly good for what we want. Artistic images have that autonomous quality that is stabilised through the tableau form in the case of photography or in the book form in terms of photographers who don't work as tableau photographers. I mean, those are the two fundamental frames of reference I think, what goes on the wall and what goes in the book, some is that criss-cross over. And we experience those physically in real time, and we also can experience them slowly and weave them into everyday life and all that's fine. There's really nothing to be augmented there. Image traffic is a different story. I'm not sure that image traffic has as much consequence artistically—I'm not saying it couldn't, but I don't see it as being terribly significant at this point. One thing it does is point up the stable and slow-moving quality of existing art forms. Futuristic types, techno futurists like to think that exposes the weakness of those art forms. But it doesn't, it just exposes their character. There's no judgmental consequences there that I can see. So at the moment, it seems like people are obsessed by image traffic. Of course, we all now have a device where we can take photographs in the way that we couldn't before. You've got to remember that at one time you had to carry a cam-

era about, put film in it, get it developed and all that stuff. And most people didn't want to bother doing that, and so they didn't. But now that's by the board. So images are proliferating in all sorts of ways. You know, it could lead to an artistic phenomenon of some sort that will be really impressive. There's no reason why artworks couldn't be seen on screens. They are already: cinema's seen on screens. But at this moment I don't see what the stakes are. I'm not recognising the stakes. That may be because I'm too old and because I don't want to. That may be. But I don't think I'm that old and that oblivious. And I don't think that I am that incapable of making judgments, that my opinion on it is not based on something. So I'm not seeing it as an artistic matter. It's a big social question. It's a photographic question in terms of the institution of photography, but whether it is an artistic matter, I'm not really sure I can see that.

GREGORY CREWDSON :

It's really fantastic and full of wisdom. And also thank you for just telling us about your early influences. That's really amazing to see.

JEFF WALL :

Yeah, thanks for asking me. I wouldn't have thought about it otherwise.

GREGORY CREWDSON :

Very meaningful. Very moving to me, I so much appreciate it. Well, thank you, Jeff. And thank you, everyone. So many people out there.

JEFF WALL :

Okay.

GREGORY CREWDSON :

More soon.

GREGORY CREWDSON :

Well, thank you, Jeff. What an extraordinary conversation. So many powerful things were said. And my very last question to you is, what advice would you give the students?

JEFF WALL :

I've spent my whole life contemplating the work of other artists, judging it, enjoying it, analysing it, searching for it in real places, hunting it down in museums and galleries. I think it's very old fashioned to say, but relentlessly study the best artists and do nothing else.

GREGORY CREWDSON :

So beautifully said. Jeff, thank you so much for spending time with us today.

JEFF WALL :

My pleasure.

MANON HYPERFEMININITY

An interview by *Claire Hoffmann* with *Manon*

A trailblazer on the Swiss performance and art scene since the mid-1970s, Swiss artist Manon (born 1940, lives and works in Zurich) 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.

Her photographic series and photo-performances reflect the gradual development and metamorphosis of her persona—Manon. The figure presents itself—or she presents herself—in serial masquerades of potential identities, and variously as a sexualised body, an androgynous character, or a cross-dresser (*La dame au crâne rasé*, 1977–78; *Elektrokardiogramm* 303/304, 1979). More recently, her self-portraits are pervaded by fragility, age, and illness (*Borderline*, 2007; *Hôtel Dolores*, 2008). This tension between intimate space and its dramatisation, personal experience and artificial appearances was the base note in her first ever work, *Das lachsfarbene Boudoir* (*The Salmon-Pink Boudoir*, 1974). This luxuriant cosmos bursting with rhinestones, lingerie, feather boas, and fetishes, a sheer explosion of encoded hyper-femininity, was her own bedroom.

Manon also pioneered the practice of performance as a staged tableau or installation, creating immersive environments or edgy voyeuristic scenarios to investigate male-female power dynamics, exhibitionism and role reversal. Among other things, she has locked herself up with visitors for an eye-to-eye interrogation, posed in chains as a captive femme fatale, and put six men in a store window display, as objects of desire.

Manon chose her name in order to be rid of her father's (or husband's) surname, allying herself

instead with feminism's second wave, which reclaimed the body and sexuality by performative means. To this day, she deploys provocative readings of female existence as a feminist strategy, challenging heteronormative roles and constraints, and exploring how the gaze can make or break patterns of objectification and power shifts.

In addition to her work in photography and large-scale installation, Manon continues to fathom her field of existential inquiry by writing every day.

CLAIRE HOFFMANN :

For your staged photos you coined the term Photo-Performances. Everything about your photo series is planned, down to the tiniest details of lighting, pose, accessories, location and atmosphere. Even today you keep morphing in front of the camera by assuming a variety of roles. Do you see the camera and performance as a way of liberating yourself from direct outside gazes?

MANON :

Yes, you're absolutely right. I'm extremely shy, unsociable even, and it's worse than ever now, which I find quite painful. The staged photos have always been my strategy of communication, a way of saying "I do exist—look, I'm here!"

CLAIRE HOFFMANN :

You studied acting, gave well-attended, provocatively staged front-on performances, using identity and role play and you chose to perform yourself as the artistic persona Manon. How did these important reference points in theatre, burlesque and masquerade come about? What is it about the theatrical that fascinates you?

MANON :

In form, theatre and performance are an exaggerated translation of real life. However, the "artistic persona of Manon" is an invention of the press. I had taken on this name years before I ever played any role in the arts. I wanted my own name—one I had chosen for myself rather than one my parents had chosen for me. I was "Manon" long before the press labelled me a "fictional character". That "fictional character" ultimately became my defensive shield, my cloak and sometimes even my corset.

CLAIRE HOFFMANN :

Your installation Das lachsfarbene Boudoir (*The Salmon Pink Boudoir*, 1974) is a dense, overfilled "Théatre des Illusions", as is written in red lipstick on one of the mirrors. Yet at the same time, it's also an intimate, highly personal space—your former bedroom. How do the glamorous facade and personal life fit together?

MANON :

The personal and its facade are mutually dependent. Taken together, they produce what we call identity. It's something I've been working on my entire life.

Yes, I exhibited my bedroom back in the days when such a thing was unimaginable. That room was me. I was the room

Or take *MISS RIMINI* (2003), for example. I was just as much the depressive alcoholic as the strong swimmer, the glamorous actress or the worn-down caretaker. I lived, rather than merely played the roles, even though some exaggeration is necessary for the photographs or the performances on stage to be understood.

CLAIRE HOFFMANN :

For *Lachgas* (Laughing Gas, 2019), you put a hospital bed on a stage lit with marquee lights. A red ball gown hangs on the hat stand and the floor is a black-and-white chess board. Illness, physical infirmity and end of life are depicted in a warm, glamorous light. The installation gives a dignified, extremely moving space to the phases of life that are often kept invisible. Do you play out on the "stage of life" with your art?

MANON :

Yes. That's what I'm aiming at. Through to the bitter end, which I attempt to depict with dignity.

CLAIRE HOFFMANN :

You set up the vintage store Manon in Zurich, where people could buy glamorous glitter jackets, worked as a model yourself and met Karl Lagerfeld, who invited you to his parties while you were living in Paris. You cut a dazzling, androgynous figure in the dance club Le Palace with your shaven head and dove as an accessoire. How did fashion, night life and art collude for you?

MANON :

I obviously stood out in Paris at the time because of my shaven head, which was unthinkable for French women back then. In addition, my first book had just been published and the Parisians loved it. Those two factors, and thanks to my friend Susi Wyss, who everyone knew, I got introduced to this scene—but never with my boyfriend, I always appeared as a solo-figure.

Looking back, you can trace a line of constantly recurring themes in my work, from the erotic boudoir, through the lonely wolf in *Gigolo* (1995), the irregular heartbeat in *Die Philosophie im Boudoir* (Philosophy in the Boudoir, 1993), the transience in *Einst war sie MISS RIMINI* (She Was Once MISS RIMINI, 2003), which is also perceptible in *Hotel Dolores* (2017), later in the reconstruction of a memory from a psychiatric clinic in *Der Wachsaal* (Observation Room, 2018) through to the inexorably finite nature of life, depicted with as much dignity as possible in *Lachgas* (2019).

Either way, it's all one to me. Writing, fashion, art, how I present myself, just as much as how I present eroticism, life and death.

CLAIRE HOFFMANN :

The starting point of many of your performances are the gaze, role-reversal and power structures which uncover the powers that be. One performance—*Sentimental Journey*—was created in Amsterdam and involved people sharing an intense, personal face-to-face gaze with you while sitting in front of you in a cage.

MANON :

For my Amsterdam performance *Sentimental Journey*, which took place in De Appel, founded by Wies Smals, the most famous performance gallery of its time, I sat on a chair in an open cage and let one member of the audience after another sit in front of me. Both our faces were brightly lit, while the room and the audience space were dark. We looked into each other's eyes to the monotonous tick of a metronome. There were often tears—my own and those of the men and women who exposed themselves to my gaze, just as I exposed myself to theirs. The show lasted many hours and was extremely intense for everyone, including the spectators, because our faces were exposed. That was in 1979.

CLAIRE HOFFMANN :

In a documentary, you mention how your art—but even just your presence—was "too much" back then, particularly in 1970s Zurich, not long after women had finally been given the right to vote in Switzerland.

MANON :

Zurich was a puritanical city before the major youth uprisings. In the public parks, for example, where today hundreds of people enjoy a picnic or sprawl in skimpy swimming costumes and dogs romp around, there were "Keep off the grass" signs.

That's exactly what Zurich was like.

CLAIRE HOFFMANN :

Was Paris a liberation compared to Zurich?

MANON :

I think I moved to Paris because my mother had spent the only happy days of her life there when she was a young woman.

The Artist is Present (1977), a live performance involving 30 Manon lookalikes, was my farewell to Switzerland.

CLAIRE HOFFMANN :

Androgyny and fluid gender roles, female and male partners, an explosive female sexuality made visible, fetishism—in your work

and attitude to life, you break with traditional gender roles to create and embody a radical, feminist alternative to the constraints of society. How did this power, this political component almost, come about in your work? And was it understood and received as such at the time?

MANON :

In hindsight, I was obviously much too early for much of what I did. But that wasn't something I could take into consideration.

There's no doubt that quite a few things are understood better today, but that wasn't my criterion. I always did the things that I felt urged to do.

CLAIRE HOFFMANN :

A hospital bed, an observation room in a psychiatric clinic, an ambulance. These recent large works seem to be dominated by a feeling of being at the mercy of anonymous institutions and devices. Healing, caring and the human element are absent. How did you come to address your personal experience of the healthcare system in your art?

MANON :

I'm frightened.

In the ambulance, I try to turn everything around. The infusion is CHANEL N° 5, there are chocolates on the syringe tray, the stretcher has a pink fleece cover...

And even my most recent installation, *Lachgas* (2019), has a hospital bed surrounded by marquee lights...

I'm frightened.
A deep rooted fear,
all my life long.
That's what drives me.

All you can do is face it with courage.

Claire Hoffmann **is Curator at the Centre culturel suisse (Swiss cultural centre) in Paris, where she recently presented a Manon retrospective. She has worked previously at Kunsthaus Langenthal, Kunsthaus Zurich and for the curatorial collective deuxpiece. She is writing her dissertation on the drawings of Maria Lassnig.**

ANDRO WEKUA

A discussion between *Daniel Baumann* & *Andro Wekua*

Richard Thompson, former guitarist and singer with Fairport Convention, once said in an interview: "I can write a street scene about two characters right here [Sunset Boulevard] and they'll end up on a windswept moor in Yorkshire". You could say something similar about Andro Wekua's work. The world out there and the world of his imagination and memory are linked by his own, very precise, artistic language. Over the last 25 years, this has resulted in an oeuvre that bears his distinctive hallmarks—drawings, films, sculptures and paintings that delight many, unsettle some and never fail to captivate others, including me. At first I was dismissive of his art, finding it too theatrical and out of touch with the way I thought about art, or rather the way I had been taught to think about art. Andro and I first met at Basel station in 2004, and since then we have argued about art on a regular basis. In the meantime, we have also become friends. A few days ago, we were together in Venice, visiting churches and the Accademia Gallery.

DANIEL BAUMANN :

You don't like giving interviews. Why is that?

ANDRO WEKUA :

I don't know, that's just how it's turned out. I prefer to turn them down, I just don't like answering questions.

DANIEL BAUMANN :

We visited the Accademia in Venice and were enchanted. You went there again the next day. What is it about the Old Masters that impresses you? What do you learn from them as an artist, from the painters of the Venetian Renaissance, from Bellini, Tintoretto and Veronese?

ANDRO WEKUA :

I could talk about composition, colouring and such things, of course. But thinking about it now, what impressed me most were the Madonnas—their aura and inner peace, as well as the structure of the paintings. I like the fact that it's something that doesn't have to be there these days. Do you understand? It has no importance, it doesn't have to compete with anything, it's like it's just there for itself. It reposes in itself in a way that I find deeply impressive. The potential it contains, this range. I obviously can't judge how it was back then, but that's how it affects me now. I'm talking about paintings from the Venetian Renaissance, like those by Bellini, that have a very strong iconic focus, that concentrate on this one thing and in which you can sometimes discover strange things, such as the hand position or the way Mary holds the child. It often has some-