

*Einst war sie Miss Rimini*  
Photo-series  
2003







Gianni Jetzer

## *The Perfect Man* —The Contemporariness of Manon’s Artistic Strategies

At Cafe Florent in Manhattan’s meatpacking district, I met with the artists Rita Ackermann and Lizzi Bougatsos to discuss the work of Manon. Rita Ackermann curated the group exhibition “The Perfect Man Show”<sup>1</sup> here in New York in early 2007. The show gathered together artists, almost all women, and formulated current feminist positions. For Ackermann, Manon is a star, a role model for her own work. We flip through the booklet *On Manon ’74–77*<sup>2</sup>—one favorite picture after another. In order to understand the contemporariness and brilliance of Manon’s artistic attitude, one can’t get around a flashback to the context of the mid-1970s, when she invented herself as artist.

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In the brightly illuminated display window of a former butcher shop in Zurich’s rural Hõngg neighborhood, an unusual scene played out on the evening of 18 September 1976. A motley crew of a hundred visitors, there for the preview, along with a camera team from Swiss television stood on the sidewalk. They looked spellbound into the two little, garland-decorated windows of the Jamileh Weber gallery on its opening night. The announced performance took place inside: *Manon Presents Man*. The scenery was reminiscent of Hamburg’s red-light district in St. Pauli. Only, there weren’t sparsely dressed young women standing in the display window, but conspicuously dressed men, several of them in drag. The actors in this legendary living picture were:

“The Great Blondino”—a young blonde man in a sleeveless T-shirt with the imprint “Manomania.” He was the artist’s vision of the young, healthy “American boy.” His style was influenced by Andy Warhol’s Factory in New York with Velvet Underground: Lou Reed and Nico.

“Steppenwolf”—a tall, bearded man in leather jacket. The name definitely referred more to the American hard rock group with the worldwide hit “Born to Be Wild” than the novel by Hermann Hesse. According to Manon, the man playing this character, a carpenter in real life, had the most trouble of all of the actors in feeling comfortable in this strange, enigmatic spectacle.

<sup>1</sup> “The Perfect Man Show,” White Columns, New York, New York, 9 January to 10 February 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Jetzer, Gianni (ed.), *On Manon ’74–77*, Zurich 2001.