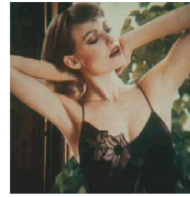
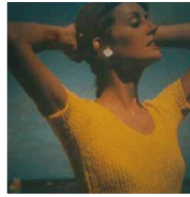
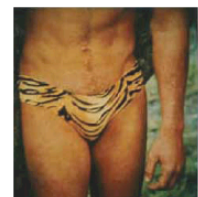
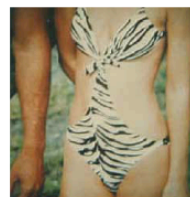
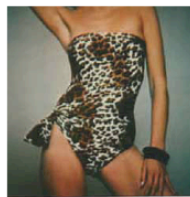
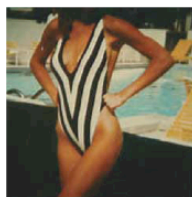
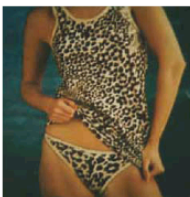


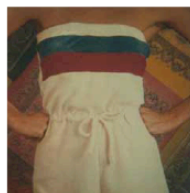
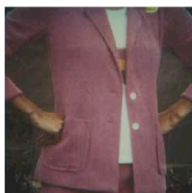
16.05 – 17.08.2014



Robert Heinecken



Lessons in Posing Subjects



Press File

WIELS

Robert Heinecken: Lessons in Posing Subjects

WIELS Contemporary Art Center, Brussels

16.05 – 17.08.2014

Curator: Devrim Bayar

Although he rarely used a camera, Robert Heinecken (1931–2006) is widely regarded as one of the most influential photographers of post-War America. He described himself as a 'paraphotographer', and it was as such that he tirelessly explored the nature of photography and the ideas traditionally associated with it through a large variety of techniques, including sculpture, video, printmaking and collage. The exhibition at WIELS examines a pivotal period in his career, during which Heinecken used a Polaroid SX-70 camera.

In 1976, Heinecken studio burnt in a fire that destroyed a significant part of his work and left him with no workplace. It was around this time that Heinecken split up with his first wife and met the artist Joyce Neimanas, who would remain his partner until the end of his life. A portrait of Neimanas is in the centre of the triptych *Figure/Joy/Girdle*, at the start of the exhibition. She herself used a Polaroid SX-70 camera in her artistic practice, and she introduced Heinecken to this new technology. The SX-70 appeared on the market in 1972; it was the first automatic camera to produce colour photographs instantly. The ease of its use, along with its elegant design, ensured its rapid and wide success, both among artists and amateurs. The equipment appealed to Heinecken not least because he no longer had a studio and because he was so emotionally detached from his earlier work that he had no interest in reproducing it.

The artist's first tests with the camera consisted of over fifty unique collages, several of which are presented here, from the series *He/She*. Each plate combined one or several snapshots with a handwritten text, a dialogue between a man and a woman, invented by Heinecken himself. The images show the artist, his partner and their environment, but the dialogues are fictional. They reveal gender power games. The tone is often sarcastic, sometimes even hostile. Published in 1980, the artist book *He/She* closes this series. Here, the images are not as autobiographical, since he re-photographed images of models. Toying with the inherently real effect of the snapshots, the artist decontextualized images found in mail-order magazines, which he infused with a spontaneous and natural feel.

This same principle returns in the series *Lessons in Posing Subjects*, which the artist worked on for the following two years. A group of work documents attest to Heinecken's laborious working process: cutting, gluing and re-photographing fragments found in magazines. Contrary to his previous works, the texts are typed rather than handwritten, a fact that confers a falsely didactic air to the captions, which are in their turn overtly inspired by the sociologist Erving Goffman, whose *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) envisages socialising as a stage on which we are both actor and spectator. At once seductive and full of humour, his 'lessons' are no less provocative, bearing witness to the commitment of this controversial artist, who considered his approach essentially a 'guerrilla' artistic practice.

Heinecken's interest in magazines is not limited to mail-order catalogues. Throughout his career, he appropriated from mass-distribution glossy magazines and constantly diverted their content. Pornographic magazines were one of his major sources, as can be seen in the series *Hite/Hustler Fashion Beaver Hunt* (1981), presented in one of the side cabinets. *Beaver Hunt*, also published by Larry Flint, was an offshoot of *Hustler*: it printed amateur, reader-submitted porn photos. *Hite*, in turn, the magazine published by sexologist Shere Hite, included studies of female sexuality in the 1970s. In this series, the artist adds cut-outs of sexual organs and breasts taken from erotic magazines onto photographs of models posing for lingerie. The artist demystifies the advertising image by displaying what the pose openly suggests but is hidden by the clothing. On the contrary, The texts Heinecken pins onto the models are false confessions inspired by the letters supposedly sent to porn magazines by its readers, but most likely written by the editors themselves.

From the seductiveness of advertising to the obscenity of pornographic photographs, Heinecken has explored a range of representations of the female body, as well as the complex links between fiction and autobiography in mass media. Announcing the Pictures Generation that was emerging at the time, Heinecken's work explores the normalising effect of mass media, the link between original and copy, true and fake, while pursuing recurrent topics in his work, such as American popular culture, consumerism and gender.

Biography

Robert Heinecken's work has been presented in over sixty solo exhibitions. In 2014, the Museum of Modern Art in New York is organising a major retrospective, which will travel to the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles. Recent group exhibitions include *The Photographic Object 1970*, at Le Consortium, Dijon, 2013; *The Shaping of New Visions: Photography, Film, Photobook*, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2013; *Sinister Pop*, at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2012; *Under the Big Black Sun: California Art 1974–1981*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2012.