



Galerie Gregor Staiger
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WALTER PFEIFFER

Polaroids 1972–2021
May 29—July 17, 2021

Galerie Gregor Staiger is pleased to present Swiss artist Walter Pfeiffer's third solo exhibition with the gallery. This exhibition will be presented in two parts across our spaces in Zurich and, at a later date, Milan. It focuses on Pfeiffer's polaroid works from 1972 to present day, which have only rarely been displayed, most notably at Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris in 2004 and within the context of his sketchbooks for his major solo presentation at Fotomuseum Winterthur in 2008. The exhibition in Zurich is the first comprehensive showing dedicated solely to this aspect of Pfeiffer's photographic practice.

For five decades, Pfeiffer has developed a multi-faceted practice which bridges photography, film and drawing. Distinguished for his candid photographs of friends, acquaintances and lovers, alongside his colour-intensive still lifes, Pfeiffer is often attributed with anticipating the diaristic and natural style of a younger generation of practitioners such as Jack Pierson, Wolfgang Tillmans or Ryan McGinley. Pfeiffer can be seen as a contemporary to the likes of Peter Hujar as well as descendant of the painter Paul Cadmus or the photographer Herbert List, whose observations of the male form and compositions in particular bear a certain kinship with that of Pfeiffer. Since the early 2000s, notably after the publication *Welcome Aboard, Photographs 1980-2000* with Edition Patrick Frey, Walter Pfeiffer has also started working with international magazines, particularly in fashion, for publications such as *i-D*, *Butt*, *Vogue Paris*, *Self Service*, *Fantastic Man*, *W*, *Aperture*, and others.

The polaroids in Zurich are emblematic of Pfeiffer's larger practice which explores visual pleasure and joy derived from beauty, imbued with intimacy, warmth and humour. Originally trained as a commercial draughtsman, Pfeiffer's adoption of photography in the 1970's was initially instigated as source material. Pfeiffer used a cheap, small polaroid camera to document studies and arrangements from which he could draw, as well as to record copies of his illustrations. The photographs soon began to depict his extended group of friends who regularly socialised in his small rented room where he lived and worked. Pfeiffer's images disclose a world known closely to him and his subjects, within which he is adept at constructing and shaping a heightened visual seduction. Discarded props and fabrics, initially taken from an early day job as a window dresser at a local department store, would aid in the staging of these compositions and portraits. Pfeiffer's images are characterised by the delight and exuberance of youth and its innately transient nature.

Pfeiffer's polaroids, in particular, provided not only a basis for his illustrated works, but can be seen to have informed much of the aesthetic that would become synonymous with his name. Themes exploring the male body appear along with witty still lifes and his hallmark use of brightly coloured backdrops. The early polaroids, beginning from the 1970's, were often in a stark black and white and borne out of necessity to work within a budget - foregoing colour afforded Pfeiffer a more cost-effective alternative. However, the contrast bestows the images a heightened sense of objectivity and a more graphic reading, and this can later be seen translated to his mid-1980's series 'Das Auge, die Gedanken, unentwegt wandernd', close-up square portraits of young men from the neck up, also executed in black and white. It is often considered that Pfeiffer began working with the saturated colour style that he is celebrated for in the 1980's when in fact, much of the film work from the beginning of the 1970's were colour slides and the reproduction choice was again a matter of cost, such as for his seminal first book 'Walter Pfeiffer: 1970 - 1980', published by Elke Betzel in 1980.

Looking at even the early photographic works of the 1970's, they appear to betray no sign of their time but resonate in a truly contemporary manner, an undeniable quality of Pfeiffer's photographs. The images remain resolutely without inhibition, unapologetic and devoid of nostalgia. With his polaroid works, the sole suggestion of the works' age comes from either superficial marks or a patina, something inherent and individual to the format itself. In response to the inherent fragility of the medium and in the interest of



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long term conservation, the artist has painstakingly created archival duplicates for this exhibition, allowing the originals to be preserved in ideal conditions while the exhibition copy can be displayed without concern. The show will be accompanied by a publication that will be launched during the opening of the exhibition.

Walter Pfeiffer (*1946, Beggingen, Switzerland, lives and works in Zurich). Pfeiffer will have a major solo exhibition at The Swiss Institute, New York in 2022 and his work will be featured in a group exhibition at Fotomuseum Winterthur the same year. Recent exhibitions include solo shows: 'Fliegender Wechsel', Tableau, Zurich (2020); 'Notte di Ferragosto', Galerie Gregor Staiger, Milan (2019); 'Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars', cur. by Martin Jaeggi, Galerie Gregor Staiger, Zurich (2017); 'Cocktails and Dreams', Grand Palais, Bern (2012), 'In Love With Beauty', Fotomuseum, Winterthur (2008); 'Tom Burr/Walter Pfeiffer', cur. by Florence Derieux and Gianni Jetzer, Swiss Institute, New York (2007).

Pfeiffer has participated in numerous group exhibitions including: 'Doppio', with Hannah Villiger, Museum zu Allerheiligen, Schaffhausen (2020); 'Orlando', McEvoy Foundation for the Arts, San Francisco, US (2020); 'Die neue Fotografie. Umbruch und Aufbruch 1970-1990', Kunsthaus, Zürich (2019); 'Another Kind of Life: Photography on the Margins', Barbican Gallery, London (2018); '25 Years! Shared Histories, Shared Stories', Fotomuseum Winterthur (2018); 'One Way: Peter Marino', Bass Museum of Art, Miami (2014), amongst others.