

LOUCHE OPS

dean erdmann

38

13 July- 28 September, 2024

Louche Ops is proud to announce our latest exhibit 38 with dean erdmann.

38 consists of a body of work that arose from erdmann's interest and research into Magnus Hirschfeld's *das Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* and its voluminous influence on queer histories.

Hirschfeld was a pioneering sexologist based in Berlin during its Weimar period, while it was still governed by Prussian officials to a large degree. This period between WWI and the rise of the Nazi party provided Hirschfeld some small degree of respite from the German penal code, Paragraph 175 (introduced in 1871, only fully revoked in 1994), which criminalized all homosexual activity, yet was enforced with less rigor in the larger cities, Berlin in particular.

The institute was founded in 1919 as an epicenter for the study of sex, sexuality, gender and the stratification of identity. It wasn't only a site of theoretical study, but for the practice of psychiatric and internal medicine, too, including the first male to female sex reassignment procedures. Just as significantly, it was an expansive social sphere and residence for the various subcultures it offered visibility to. At different times figures such as Walter Benjamin and Christopher Isherwood lived there.

On May 6, 1933 the Institute was ransacked in an organized attack by right wing students who were accompanied by a brass band to celebrate their explosion of violence. Hours later, Nazi stormtroopers came and pillaged over 20,000 of the compiled books, files, and texts that constituted the Institute's library. These were later destroyed publicly in a bonfire. The title of the erdmann's exhibit, 38, refers to a number of books that have been recovered in the decades since. It's a number that slowly continues to expand as volumes from private collections, and other locations that had been hidden or salvaged, resurface. The original books are housed by the *Magnus Hirschfeld Gesellschaft*, an active space in Schöneberg that's run by a community of dedicated volunteers.

While Germany has provided itself (and continues to provide itself) with numerous opportunities to consider the terms of memorial, somehow Magnus Hirschfeld's contributions are still relatively obscure in relation to the scale of their impact on so much of queer discourse and culture.

Working with the Gesellschaft and their archive over the past years, erdmann photographed and scanned these remaining books, eventually casting them as glass objects. Objectively, the works present an intricate literality of the objects they double. But there's also an irony embedded in this pursuit of a crystalline verisimilitude in regards to their subject. What's experienced as transparent materiality, a play on the considerations of light and literature, also suggests a non transmissive opacity. A representational sculpture of a book is inherently anti-mimetic. Even in the highest fidelity, the contents of the portrayed subject, the text itself, is absent. The surface is a shell, but the shell is clear. Seeing these works includes seeing their environment through them or, perceptibly, within them.

erdmann describes the glass books as films. A practical, material logic accompanies their poetic statement in the sense that the books are produced from a photogrammetric process which requires the production of many still pictures in order to produce a larger volume. Each book is like a closed zoetrope, functioning as a Muybridgian collection of images in a constituent, singular form. It is also durational, as glass is always in a perpetual flux of liquidity, if in a slower motion than the human eye can register.

erdmann's practice has long been concerned with the ways in which subjects develop and diverge in relation to their environments, geological and/or socio-political. If memorial is realized as a transcription of signifiable information into objecthood, and sculpture attempts to internalize its subject into the gaze of its own form, erdmann's glass books are situated somewhere complexly between these categorical distinctions. The gesture belongs to a tradition of metonymic abstraction that suggests the fragment as a sign for the whole and, simultaneously, that a picture of entirety can only ever be an illusion.

- James Krone

