

Artist Tobias Zielony (\*1973 Wuppertal), who lives in Berlin, is one of the most talked-about German photographers of his generation. In a major one-man show, the Berlinische Galerie will be the first venue to exhibit his latest project “Jenny Jenny” (2011-2013), which includes two photo-animations. Also on show will be the series “Trona” (2008), which Berlin’s museum of modern art was fortunate to acquire for its Photography Collection.

For more than ten years now, Tobias Zielony has been taking portraits of young people encountered on the urban and social margins of Western welfare states. This is where he finds his themes, in places where the achievements of the modern age are falling apart and the promise of a community founded on solidarity has lost its enchantment: teenagers in night-time Los Angeles trying to carve out a space in the shadow zones of the city (The Cast, 2007), descendants of the Canadian First Nations on reserves in Manitoba whose cultural traditions have been shattered along with their prospects for the future (2009), Camorra families whose children pose for the camera in what was once an avant-garde residential development, the “Vele” in Naples (2010). For the benefit of Zielony’s camera, they all seem keen to place themselves in the right light in order to project a self-assured, proud image of themselves, knowing that these images will be open to challenge.

The 18-part series “Trona” (2008) depicts young people from the desert community of that name not far from Los Angeles. When the former industrial town began falling apart in the wake of economic changes, many of its residents resorted to crystal meth as a drug to numb their senses. Trona is typical of many impoverished towns in rural America. Zielony asks what happens when social and institutional structures break down and people are thrown back on their own resources.

His latest project is called “Jenny Jenny”. The subjects are young women, some of whom earn their money by selling sex. But the facts are fluid, and so are the roles – both those adopted by the women themselves and those attributed to them by society. The idea that the true essence of a person or moment in time will be revealed is a myth. Zielony has evidently drawn clear conclusions about both the authenticity of the subject and the objectivity of the documentary image: neither is ever free of staging.

Zielony's protagonists present themselves in various poses: now with sensual illusion, now quietly backstage, now in the shadow zones, operating behind many faces without ever exposing one. From the obscurity of a street at night to an erotically lit interior, Zielony’s eye seeks the closeness of a photographic instant that will capture his characters, showing great empathy but without ever nailing them down. His series about the daily routines of women at the heart of Berlin – and yet on the margins of social respectability – grew over the course of nearly two years, when Zielony met

his protagonists frequently and yet was always aware of his role as an outsider. These are photographs of great intimacy and at the same time ineluctable detachment. The obscurity and impenetrability of his photographs match the fragile promises of a world where nothing follows and there is no morning after.

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A catalogue published by spectator books will accompany the show. (Museums edition 24,80 Euro)

Special Thanks to KOW, Berlin

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