

Heji Shin's portraits of newborns are completely unambiguous. They are neither indirect nor referential. If they have to be a metaphor for something mumbling under the surface, then it might be for a sort of labour that isn't – unfortunately or not – open to everybody. And if these days, the uncertainty of what is real and what is made up story, what is the right thing to do and what is just holing up in the safe space of solid middle class seems prevalent, then this view on giving birth which as an action has always been a strangely bargained subject in patriarchy, hazily lingering between mythology and private little book of horror, can become something that is beyond the doubts and clouds. Though this doesn't make it necessarily easier to bear. Looking away here comes as an option as well.

One of the more mysterious series of Ull Hohn paintings in the early nineties depict around five bodies of newborns captured in the first movements after leaving the womb. Defensive and defenseless maneuvers of their limbs – arms, legs, hands and fingers suggest to be read as an expression of complete dissatisfaction with their new ambience. The colors are classic carnation, pale pinkish light muddy peach, adding a drop of plum for brownish traces of blood through the filter of the Gerhard Richter-style blur which renders them more photographic of course. Ull Hohn's aim was to paint something “desperately vulnerable and ideological”*. I suppose looking at a historically defined skin color through the painterly subject of a -by a closer look- linguistically not-yet-defined subjectivity reflected back on the pains and identity politics that lied within and came as a consequence of this very normativity.

Considering the discourse on photographic portraits within Heji Shin's work, the babies here are spotted at a remarkable point in time. No one has ever seen them before and they will never look like this again. It's once more (referring to previous works she made) a moment of suspension from the diverse obligations of various self-representations.

Not surprisingly, as Heji Shin mentioned after having witnessed a couple of natural births by now, there is a scene from the *Exorcist* (1973) coming to mind when trying to think of a moment comparable in bluntness and immediacy to the multicolored heads appearing between two legs (which turn into popeye-like arms from this perspective). It's the stream of pee coming out of under Regan's night-gown hitting the carpet with a very special sound. Shortly before she had whispered – still with the voice of a little girl: You will die up there to an attending astronaut. The demon that is speaking through her has the mannerism to say exactly what triggers the greatest fear, the one thing that should not be said out loud because it manifests the crucial part of the anxiety. Later when not only her voice will have significantly changed, she is finally addressing the priest: Your mother sucks cock in hell.

* This quote comes from [Tom Burr](#). Most of the other thoughts on Ull Hohn's newborn series are relating to notes from Hannes Loichinger

- Inka Meißner (2016)

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