

BQ

Philipp Gufler “Imitations of Paul”

Opening 1 May 2026, 6–9 pm

Exhibition 2 May – 4 July 2026

Very few biographies leave behind a coherent, self-contained archive. Most persist primarily as traces—in images, in relationships, in what is repeated, cited, or strategically withheld. Philipp Gufler’s work begins precisely in these lacunae, integrating fragments of histor(ies) into his artistic practice. For the exhibition “Imitations of Paul”, he enters into dialogue with Paul Hoecker (1854–1910), a painter whose life and work were long marginalized and whose extensive oeuvre has yet to be fully catalogued. Hoecker’s career came to an abrupt end in 1898, when his homosexuality was on the verge of becoming public.

“Imitations of Paul” finds Gufler taking Hoecker’s complex biography as the point of departure for an act of artistic identification. The textile and ceramic works on view explore how new forms, images, and narratives can emerge from fragmentary archival traces. And yet imitation here is not conceived as mere replication: drawing on drag as an art form, it operates as a practice of appropriation, exaggeration, and transformation—a productive process that establishes proximity, acknowledges difference, and, through repetition, brings forth something distinctly its own.

In contrast to narratives that claim closure, Gufler’s works conceive of history as an open structure that can be extended and displaced through artistic reference. In the deliberate reprise of motifs, attitudes, and gestures, what emerges is a new proposition.

While the textile work “Imitationen von Paul (Imitations of Paul)” —with its semi-transparent silkscreen prints on fabric—lends all of Hoecker’s works known to date an almost spectral presence in the gallery space, Gufler takes a new direction with the ceramic series “Sexualästhetiken (Sexual Aesthetics)”. Here, images from and about Hoecker’s life intersect with art-historical and socio-historical visual references drawn from the extensive image archives associated with the sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld. The quoted motifs revolve around desire and sexuality, ranging from prehistoric cave representations to medieval and early modern art, and extending to photographs from the early twentieth century. Gufler combines Hoecker’s painting “Ave Maria”, among other works, with a woodcut depicting the torture of figures whose in some cases rapt expressions evoke less a state of suffering than an affinity with Marquis de Sade. Works like these move beyond a narrowly biographical reading to operate associatively.

A pronounced corporeality is shared by both the textile and ceramic works. The fabric installation presents Hoecker’s oeuvre as it is currently known, lending the motifs an undeniable presence despite the material’s lightness. The white fabric gathers all works identified to date through research, while the black shows those now considered lost or destroyed, as well as works whose present owners the Paul Hoecker Research Group has not yet been able to trace. For each painting, Gufler produced silkscreens at original scale through physically demanding processes. In the ceramic works, he likewise employs silkscreen printing, layering the motifs between successive firings, after which they are partially obscured by a high-gloss glaze. This deliberate interplay of concealing and revealing takes on another spatial dimension through the use of stamps, transforming the pieces into reliefs. In their emphatic materiality, the ceramic works form a tense counterpoint to the seemingly immaterial textile installation.

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As a founding member of the Paul Hoecker Research Group, Gufler is directly involved in the collective research into Hoecker's life and work. This collaborative production of knowledge forms a central backdrop to the exhibition and is exemplified in the final gallery space through a presentation of relevant archival materials. The insights developed jointly within the group are ultimately translated by Gufler into his own distinct artistic perspective. The exhibition thus unfolds within a field of tension between collective knowledge production, individual authorship, and a critical reflection on a long-marginalized artistic biography.

The exhibition is accompanied by the publication "Spuren von Paul / Traces of Paul" (Splitter 19), Forum Queeres Archiv München in cooperation with BQ, which brings together exhibition and research as a performative collective endeavor. In the polyphony of texts and images, Paul Hoecker emerges as part of an open process of ongoing historical and artistic re-examination.

Text by Nicholas Maniu and Christina Spachtholz from the Paul Hoecker Research Group

„Spuren von Paul / Traces of Paul“ (Splitter 19), Forum Queeres Archiv München in cooperation with BQ, Berlin 2026. Edited by Stefan Gruhne, Philipp Gufler, Nicholas Maniu, Christina Spachtholz (Ed.), with texts by Karin Althaus, Gerhard Becker, Vera Christoph, Stefan Gruhne, Philipp Gufler, Birgit Jooss, Yuliia Kizyma, Nicholas Maniu, Christina Spachtholz, Arnisa Zeko (German/English), 112 pages, 14 b&w illustrations, 61 coloured illustrations, 17 x 24 cm

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