

KARLHEINZ WEINBERGER

Feb 11 - Mar 26 2011

Swiss Institute proudly presents the first institutional exhibition of vintage prints by the late Karlheinz Weinberger (1921-2006). An unsung pioneer of vernacular photography since the Fifties, Weinberger captured a young generation of rebels, who were greatly influenced by American culture.

For most of his adult life, Karlheinz Weinberger worked by day in the warehouse department of the Siemens-Albis factory in Zurich. In his free time, however, he escaped monotony by immersing himself in photography. Self-taught and working under the pseudonym of Jim, Weinberger began his artistic career by taking pictures for a gay underground club, Der Kreis, which published the eponymous magazine.

In 1958, Weinberger met members of a small band of teenagers and began photographing them both at his home, as well as at the public parks and fairgrounds where the group gathered. In post-war Switzerland, these self-named "rebels" (referred to by the Swiss as "Halbstark" or "half strong") were comprised of working class boys and girls dissatisfied by the conservative climate of the day. They adopted a powerful gang identity expressed in their self styled and homemade clothing-embellished jeans, motorcycle jackets,

enlarged belt buckles—which referenced and emulated American icons Marlon Brando (in *The Wild One*), James Dean (in *Rebel Without a Cause*), Elvis Presley (in the film and album *Jailhouse Rock*).

The clandestine phase of Weinberger's work is the impetus behind the exhibition at Swiss Institute. Weinberger inhabited the role of an intimate stranger, capturing the unfiltered attitude of a generation while processing and developing the objects of his gaze in his home photo laboratory. Although created decades ago, Weinberger's photographs have remained accessible to a relatively small group of people. They were not meant to be artworks, rather they are vestiges of a personal obsession. Beyond the documentary value of Weinberger's work, his photos, in their triumph over objectivity, are a genuine contribution to the history of portraiture.

Curated by Gianni Jetzer in collaboration with the Karlheinz Weinberger Estate, Warth and Artist Resources Management, New York. A concurrent show is at Anna Kustera Gallery, New York