

The Photographer's Contract

A collaborative project by the Akademie der Künste, Museum Morsbroich and Siemens Arts Program

Venues: Akademie der Künste Berlin, Museum Morsbroich Leverkusen

Time frame: November 12, 2006 - January 7, 2007 (Berlin); March – May 2007 (Leverkusen)

In both painting as well as photography, the classic form of the portrait involves an agreement between the artist and the subject. A contract that aims at a fitting representation of the latter.

After portrait painting plunged into a permanent crisis with the arrival of photography in the mid 19th century, photo-portraiture itself became fraught with difficulties from the 1930s onwards. The presentation of the subject – formulated for the last time from the perspective of professional occupation in August Sander's *Face of the Time* – was followed by a process of rendering it anonymous, as in the works of Warhol and Liechtenstein. In the moment in which society no longer had a class structure – either on becoming a dictatorship or after undergoing the fragmentation typical of a post-modern democracy – the subject became a mass-produced article or at most an anonymous star.

Yet the aspect of the contract has become increasingly important to photo portraiture since the 1960s, because it was able to counter the handed-down bourgeois ideas of representing the subject with a conceptual approach to the picture that reflects the current condition of society. Anyone who is uninterested in pursuing a strategy of authentic portraiture “in which the image is stolen by the photographer“ (Buchloh) –

such as in photo reportage or the 'concealed' photography of Paul Strand or Walker Evans - was compelled to enter a mutual transaction.

Oliviero Toscani's Benetton campaign featuring US prisoners waiting on death row is the perfect example of the complexity that may be contained in such an agreement: adverts, social campaign, profit motives, social commitment, enlightenment, the promise of potential rescue, aesthetic hyperbole, anti-bourgeois portrait ... these are all explicit or implicit parts of the contract between portraitist and portrayed.

These relations are obscured by the incredible emotionality that even today a photo is still able to convey, especially when it features the human face (and in this it is similar to film, which the viewer allows to entrance him- or herself like a little child, well knowing that it is nothing but fiction). This is all the more astonishing because by means of the contract, through the complete and manifest artifice of *all* the means employed for the image, photography has also managed to corroborate its status as a liberal art in the field of photographing persons.

This exhibition is aimed at giving for the first time an overview of the prerequisites and strategies involved in photographing people since the 1960s by means of outstanding works in which the "photographer's contract" plays a central part in the constitution of the image.

Artists:

Clegg & Guttman

Tina Barney

Patrick Faigenbaum

Angela Fensch

Izima Kaoru

Boris Mikhailov

Nicholas Nixon

Ashkan Sahihi

Thomas Struth

Andy Warhol

Shizuka Yokomizo

et al.