



interview **THOMAS HAUSER**

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Photo archive courtesy **Thomas Hauser**

Someone once said photography is the way we have for fighting against the transience of life. Looking at the work of Thomas Hauser, we can say photography is also the way to begin a conversation on the subject of beauty. What it really means. How it fades. How it appears in people's eyes. And, most of all, how we could train our gaze to get rid of the conventional aesthetics and start looking beyond.

Thomas Hauser is a photographer based in Berlin. His work, aimed to show the rawness and simplicity of beauty, he has been recently featured in some of the most important fashion magazines. His muses, whether are flowers or women, stand fiercely in front of the viewers, allowing them to question their aesthetic ideals. We talked about art, love, and that magical feeling when you see your photograph appearing on the ground glass.

Before engaging in the art of photography, you have been a painter for many years. What made you choose to become a photographer? And what was your first work?

After abstract beginnings, my artistic development as a painter brought me very soon to photographic subjects, which I transferred into paintings. At the end of the eighties, Appropriation Art was very present. As templates for my paintings, I initially used illustrations from fashion magazines, later downloaded from Internet: mainly nude images from amateurs' archives, which were immediately accessible. My interest, however, was much more on the process of painting and the question of what painting can still afford. It was about transformation, changing and shifting the perception of the subject through the use of the three basic elements that painting includes: the canvas, the colour and the physical performance of the artist. I was very satisfied with the results, but after a few years I began to doubt whether it was right to use the subjects of other people for my art. I was also regularly criticized for it, and in fact, what I did had nothing to do with Appropriation Art. In the end I came to the conclusion to photograph the pictures for my paintings - nudes and portraits -

by myself. At that time I was an amateur. I bought a small compact camera and I started – that's it. After that, I never touched a brush and painted on a canvas again.

My first photographs show a female torso dressed in underwear: I was still too shy for nude photographs but also magically attracted to photograph this area of the female body, exactly in the way I did. The RAUCH / SMOKE series has emerged from these feelings.

What is the artistic reason that led you to use a large format view camera?

It is the way a large negative renders the image. A standard phrase used by a lot of photographers – simply because it's true. The bigger is the negative, the weirder the image seems to appear. And, not to forget, the lens is also very important. Gosbert Adler, a photographer and friend of mine described it with "a different sound" that comes from large format and film (compared to 35mm or digital files). Another major reason for using the large format is my favour for contact prints. Nothing is as beautiful as a contact print on silver paper.

How do you take inspiration for your work? Is there any ritual you make before starting a shooting session?

My inspiration comes from the urge to make better what I did before: artists are never satisfied with what they do. Just a saying, but one that applies to me.

The photo shoots are each time a big challenge. I am extremely nervous before shooting - it feels like stage fright - and I have always the same routine. Nothing special: the studio has to be in order, everything has to be at its place. Usually I check the camera and load the film holders short before the shoot. I also have a plan for each shoot. Sometimes I do sketches to show the poses to the model, or I show her some samples of the images I would like to take. But, most of the times, these plans fail. I start taking the first pictures and I see that my plan does not fit: Either it is her personality, or her physical appearance or my own attitude. Then, the big struggle begins: I call it the fight with the model, and it is what makes every photographic process a great (and sometimes not so great) adventure. And it is something that I experience more with a large format camera than with any other tool. You are under the dark cloth and you see the image appearing on the ground glass. And sometimes this moment turns into something magical, because I realize that now, with this pose, with that certain expression, with that lighting, I probably get a great image.

In the AMAZONA series, everything seems perfectly balanced but still casual. You place the flowers in non-conventional vessels and it seems that they have been there waiting for you to photograph them. What is the process behind every picture?

It actually happens when I like to take pictures but there isn't a model available. Sometimes, between parking the car and walking to the studio, I decide to go to the next florist and buy any flowers I find. Then, I look at the flowers for quite a while and try to arrange them in vessels of a kind, the ones that suits them. Slowly, very slowly, a composition of flowers, vessels and background arises. Sometimes this can take up to two weeks, depending on the type of flowers and on how long you can keep them. I take as much time as is needed to arrange everything in a way that feels

convincing to me. It is most important to catch the right moment, which is the state between the highest beauty of their flowering and their decay. All elements in the picture have to be engaged in a specific kind of dialogue with each other. This is AMAZONA: when everything becomes alive and just before that it is all over - before it dies - I have to capture it by taking a photograph.

Why did you choose to make still lifes of flowers in black and white?

I not only photograph still life in black and white. But truly, most of them are taken in b/w. It is because of the mood and atmosphere I want to capture - what I have said in the previous answer. A further reason for b/w is simply that greys are my favourite "colours": I can't help it, but find greys extremely beautiful.

In the series RAUCH/SMOKE you use colour instead. Why?

This was not really decision. RAUCH/SMOKE was my first serious photographic project, but I just owned a camera and colour film. I was not even thinking about b/w at that time, and it was very important to show the beauty of the coloured underwear.

Your gaze on female beauty is so true and powerful. Your portraits of women seem to suggest the viewer to contemplate beauty in its raw nature. In a society where we are used to looking at female beauty as the product of cosmetic procedures and intervention, is beauty in itself disturbing anyway?

If all stereotypes of industry and media were correct, I would answer this question saying Yes. Actually, this form of beauty can only disturb the beauty industry. It is always said, "beauty is in the eye of the beholder". But where does the viewer turn to create beauty? What choice do we have today? Is our gaze so much influenced that we cannot look beyond? We are permanently forced to look at idealized beauty which we ourselves are supposed to achieve. Lately, the fashion world has also found interest in my photography, which aims at rawness and simplicity. I can only guess that ideal beauty is not as popular as it used to be. The ideal has perhaps becoming boring? Or even considered as not so desirable?





for: NUMÉRO HOMME GERMANY ISSUE 4
(#0860, Valeria), 2015
8x10 inch contact print on gelatin silver paper

And, in wider terms, what is your ideal of beauty?

In philosophical and artistic terms, I feel all that is true is also as beautiful. But only in philosophical and artistic terms!

Isn't it anachronistic that some kinds of image of the female body's pureness are still subject to censorship on the Internet? What, in your opinion, could be the reason for such a narrow attitude?

It is more than anachronistic: it is unbelievable and ridiculous. Publishing naked people is not a scandal; it is a scandal to censor it. Especially Instagram policy is strange. I am aware of the "nipple rule" but I do not censor my own images of undressed women, just not to use the word naked. Naked seems already something dirty nowadays. The reason is probably just because it is the easiest way to get out of any trouble. It saves the company money and they hire their own users to report images that are violating their rules. And it perfectly works. Almost all images removed from my account were showing a visible naked breast.

Do you think that female beauty scares people anyway?

Oh yes, I think it scares people quite a lot. Only, most of them don't know it. And it actually scares me. It scares me each time I photograph a woman, especially when she is undressed. I somehow believe that this fear gives to my photographs a unique and very personal expression. I don't think they are charged of sexual meaning (or perhaps a little they are) and I am sure they are far away from being offensive. After all these years I still haven't got used to this. I still feel uncomfortable and ashamed (or afraid), asking the models to take off their clothes. My own uneasiness is then transferred to the model and it creates a mood that is not

really pleasant, but produces pictures that are of the kind that I like. There is this power that radiates from a beautiful and naked body. And it seems hard to deal with.

Why do you use ancient chairs for your studio portraits?

When I started the portrait series I just hadn't any other chairs available. A lot of things in my work began by chance and ended up to be a concept. When I used modern design chairs for my portraits, I had the feeling they drew too much attention away from the model. The chair shouldn't do anything else, than serving as a support for the girl.

What is the meaning of the LOVE series, in which you photograph plastic balloons placed in a corner?

The original title of the series was "Love is in the air", named after the John Paul Young's song. It was more like a game with words than a real reference: in German, for example, you do not say balloon but Luftballon (air-balloon). The song title seemed too long to me and, in the end, Love is what I left.

It is a very physical/sculptural piece of work. Taking a closer look, there is a lot of myself embodied in it. First of all, I had to fill the balloons with my own breath (Air); then, I arranged them and took the pictures (Love): there really is something of myself in them. Maybe the balloons are self-portraits, and they seem to be living creatures somehow. I am still working on that series. The last photos are showing the balloons stuck in all kinds of tights and hosiery. Now I have the problem that they look too much like creatures. The challenge in this work is about balancing it all, between let it being something or leaving it the way it is. Doesn't it sound like love?



from the series: GIRLS SEEN (#0810, N N.), 2016
8x10 inch contact print on gelatin silver paper



from the series: GIRLS SEEN (#0581, Luna), 2015
8x10 inch contact print on gelatin silver paper