

JUERGEN TELLER
ENJOY YOUR LIFE!

02.06.-07.10.2018
Fotomuseum Winterthur

Juergen Teller's career, spanning 32 years so far, has shaped the image of what might be termed radical contemporaneity. With his iconic photographs, he has written a piece of photographic history: Kurt Cobain sprawled on a stack of plastic chairs, Kate Moss in bed, her tousled pink hair fanned out across the pillowcases, model Kristen McMenamy with the Versace logo in a red heart on her chest, smoking a cigarette. What Teller's single images and photographic series have in common throughout both his commercial works and his own artistic projects is neither their form nor technique, but his own idiosyncratic approach and the confidence with which he translates his gaze into compositions and colours to create a unique dynamic. Like few others, his oeuvre encompassing commissioned works for magazines, periodicals and fashion labels is imbued with highly personal and often strongly biographical traits.

In his photographs, Juergen Teller consistently addresses what touches him emotionally, capturing the fullness of life from its headiest highs to its most despondent lows. Uncompromising as his approach may be, his encounters with people, landscapes and objects betray an openness, curiosity and care that he frames in a direct, raw and unsanitised form. In the exhibition at Fotomuseum, many new works from the past three years as well as key images and series from his earlier career provide an insight into the visual world of one of today's most internationally sought-after photographers.

The exhibition begins with his latest series *Self-reflections, Melancholy and Blood Oranges* (London, 2018). The landscapes shot through a train window have an almost cinematic force. Juergen Teller's own reflection in the glass seems almost fragile, the blood oranges squeezed dry – thematically echoing the figure of a blue and green inflatable dinosaur in Teller's studio garden that lost much of its air over time, seemingly exhausted and overwhelmed. This lucid series tells of personal crises, of life itself and a sense of one's own mortality.

Self-portrait with Balloons (Paris, 2017) shows Juergen Teller lying naked on bed with a white duvet. Behind him is a wall overgrown with yellowish climbing plants. The composition is completed by the bunch of brightly coloured balloons that he is clutching in his hand. Although Teller is, by his own account, not particularly interested in nudity, there are nevertheless three such moments that are important landmarks in his evolution as a photographer: Charlotte Rampling naked in front of the Mona Lisa, Vivienne Westwood naked on a sofa, and Juergen Teller in his own nude self-portraits. This latter experience was, he says, important for him; both as a learning process and as a gesture of irony that he reserves solely for pictures of himself.

Foto noise museum

At the invitation of the Alison Jacques Gallery in the year 2016, which marked the 60th birthday of the American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe who had died at the age of only 42, Teller spent several months going through Mapplethorpe's archives. "I noticed that he took many weird pictures of plates. I found this image of a plate with frogs on it, and another of a pile of plates, and there was a man standing on it. And then you really wonder, what kind of meaning is this supposed to have? Does it have a meaning?" Subsequently, for his series *Legs, Snails and Peaches* (London, 2017), Juergen Teller made no secret of his source of inspiration. In these compositions, he arranged an absurd orgy of giant African snails and peaches. The juicy fruits contrast in an almost baroque way with the huge, fleshy snails, as though the seventeenth century Dutch artist Willem Claeszoon Heda had met up with Spanish surrealist Salvador Dalí for a round of drinks in Teller's studio.

Another constant in Juergen Teller's oeuvre is his focus on landscape. It is presented both as a fragment and as an entity, or as a carefully selected collection of signs like in his textural photographs of stones, broken ground and rock formations shot in the Sultanate of Oman. In 2017, Teller photographed the verdant foliage of a Canadian forest (*Paradise II, At moments I felt like being in a strange dream in a medieval Forest with 2 naked canadian girls doing hula hoops, covered all over in Sweet Maple syrup, Canada 2017*) for *System Magazine* (Supplement No. 70). Also shown are close-up shots of frogs and their extremities – a cheeky little leg here, a glinting eye there, with the occasional lively hop or lazy doze – all around the repeated self-punning theme of the plate ("Teller" in German).

The last room closes the circle of his commercial and artistic works. The series *Irene im Wald* (2012) is like a love-letter from Teller to his mother and to the forest near his childhood home. Its subtly gentle tonality tells of the affection that exists between mother and son, reminding us that family ties are in fact a constant negotiation with one's own roots. In a column published in the German weekly *ZEITmagazin* between 2009 and 2010, readers were able to follow the photographer as he travelled the world. William Eggleston playing piano outdoors in his home town of Memphis, Teller's little son Ed radiant in the bath, Arnold Schwarzenegger with his head in the jaws of a crocodile, and the occasional self-portrait as well – jumbling up the quotidian and the extraordinary, his images were accompanied by brief, diary-style comments. They provide insights not only into Teller's work, but also into his way of thinking, and show something that has always been an integral aspect of his creative activity: controversy. The readers' comments are a veritable trove revealing every shade of opinion from enthusiastic fandom to downright incomprehension at the eclectic density of Teller's photographic syntax. Its presentation in the exhibition provides a non-theoretical metalevel that complements Teller's work.

As French critic Éric Troncy aptly described, Juergen Teller's approach to photography is closer to fable than to fiction. Teller's images are neither over-freighted with information, nor do they posit assertions. Instead, they address assumptions and offer open narratives in which

every element has its own function and its own place; where pure chance can play just as crucial a role as something that has been meticulously planned. What we are left with in the end is a challenge to the viewer: an invitation to read the image carefully without jumping to conclusions.

Juergen Teller (*1964) studied at the Bayerische Staatslehranstalt für Photographie in Munich. In 1986, he moved to London as a freelance photographer, where he started taking pictures for music, lifestyle and fashion magazines. His breakthrough came in 1991 when he accompanied the band Nirvana on their *Nevermind* release tour and his photographs of the shy lead singer Kurt Cobain were published. His works, often in the form of large-scale series, are widely published in books and magazines. Since 2014 he is Professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Nuremberg.

An exhibition by Bundeskunsthalle Bonn and Martin Gropius Bau Berlin, in cooperation with Galerie Rudolfinum Prague and Fotomuseum Winterthur.

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DIALOGUE-BASED GUIDED TOURS

30 June 2018, 4 p.m., with refreshing beer afterwards
Nadine Wietlisbach, director, and Cornelius Reiber, cultural scientist from Berlin, on Teller, pop, fashion and the selfie craze

1 September 2018, 4 p.m.
Nadine Wietlisbach, director, and Claudia Knoepfel, photographer from Zurich, on bodies, garments and photographic representation

Opening hours

Tue–Sun 11 a.m.–6 p.m., Wed 11 a.m.–8 p.m., Mon closed

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