

## Role Models - Role Playing

### Museum der Moderne Salzburg

23.7. – 30.10.2011



**Hippolyte Bayard**,  
Selfportait as Drowned Man,  
1840



**Cindy Sherman**, Untitled  
Film Still #21, 1977



**Claude Cahun**, Untitled  
(Selfportait), 1928

Roles, actors, stages, scripts... a glance at the imagery of these terms reveals society as a theatre. We are all actors playing different cultural, social and biological roles. According to Erving Goffman ("The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life") life is a theatre in which we perform different roles in order to fulfil social norms and expectations and to present our own "self". While society depends on a smooth coordination of actors and roles and "spoilsports" are marginalized, subjected to therapy, locked up or locked out, art deals with problematic areas of friction and breaking points between roles and actors. It reflects our desire to look behind the mask, where we seem to expect "authentic" persons.

Hippolyte Bayard's early photographic self-portraits as a drowned man and as a suicide, the pictures of Duchamp's alter ego Rose Sélavy or Christian Jankowski's video installation, in which he turns the museum staff into actors and instructs them to reverse roles. They all engage in performative games with role models. This can be roles which assume the artist's ego in the self-portrait or comment on the role understanding of the corresponding time with regard to group or individual identities (social class, ethnicity, gender, age,..) and social power structures.

This is the first exhibition – featuring photographs, graphics, videos and installations - that gives a comprehensive survey of the phenomenon of role playing as a theme of art, from paraphrased tableaux vivants of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to role-playing games in internet-based social networks. In order to do justice to the historicity and heterogeneity of role-playing, the exhibition subdivides this phenomenon into thematic fields and follows these fields over time.

Problems and concepts of identity were central themes of contemporary art of the 1990s, which were briefly addressed in various exhibitions. Many works and exhibitions focused on concepts of female identity. This interest is also reflected in the academic field: In 1990 Judith Butler published her epoch-making study *Gender Trouble*, which no longer describes gender as a biological property, but as the result of the repetition of actions which code the body as female or male.

What has happened since the debate of the 1990s? In which way has our role understanding been influenced by the media? In the 1998 movie *The Truman Show* the protagonist is monitored by 5000 cameras 24 hours a day, seven days a week, while "everyday life" is simulated with gigantic effort. This was presented as a dark vision of the future at that time. The reality show *Big Brother*, which was first broadcast in 2000, has changed the distinction between private and public role. A whole generation of casting show – optimized teenagers seem to have abandoned the heavenly ingenuousness of authentic self-presentation. Since the 1968 generation's demand for spontaneity and authenticity has been unmasked as paradox, we can find a playful approach to roles and an effortless switching between roles today. In their "second life" and in internet forums people

assume virtual identities; in their real life they realize their fantasies by assuming roles as "Cosplayers" (costume play). In this phenomenon of youth culture, which has been imported from Japan, teenagers effortlessly don costumes to represent fictitious characters which they imitate in great detail and play in their everyday lives. The difference between one's own self and a role is becoming increasingly precarious.

Repetitions and duplication are of central importance for role-playing, a fact which is also emphasized by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* or Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. In the field of art this results in a special punchline, as the role as such can be recognized in the repetition of an iconographic model or a specific work of art, which can be observed for example in the tableau vivant or the cosplayers. Self-presentation turns out to be a re-enactment. Here we encounter a central theme of contemporary art: the re-enactment of works of art is a method of Appropriation Art, and sampling and working with images has transformed the phenomenon of karaoke into a method.

## Thematic arrangement of the exhibition

The exhibition is not primarily arranged in chronological order, but according to specific thematic guidelines. This thematic classification is interested in the repetition of concrete works of art and of specific social roles, in socialization through specific roles, in the distinction between private and public roles and in gender as social role.

### 1. Religious Role-Playing

#### Passion of Christ / The Last Supper



**Fred Holland Day**, Father, forgive them, they know not what they do, from: The Seven Last Words, 1898



**Hiroshi Sugimoto**, Last Supper, 1999



**Adi Nes**, Last Supper, 1999, from the series: Soldiers



**David LaChapelle**, Jesus is my Homeboy, 2008

The life of Christ has been a very popular subject since the academies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from photographs which served as basis for paintings, to sword and sandal Hollywood movies and series by contemporary photographers. Art history has a secured canon of images that is etched in the cultural memory of its viewers and used for the (re)-enactment of various artists through the decades.

In 1898 **Fred Holland Day** staged the Passion of Christ in approx. 250 images with himself as protagonist. He is clearly influenced by art history as he uses works by Memling, Cranach and Dürer as models for his photographic self-portraits.

**David LaChapelle** has based a series of pictures he made for the lifestyle magazine *Id* on the history of Christ, transforming it into a contemporary scene by portraying the disciples as a gang of rappers and hip-hoppers led by Christ.

**Adi Nes** uses Christian motifs in his large-format colour photographs of staged young men in stories about male gender roles. For example, he portrays Israeli soldiers in a Last Supper scene, making clear that this is about public roles and national identities.

## 2. Concepts of identity

### 2.1. Growing into roles



**Christian Boltanski**, from: Rekonstruktionen der von Christian Boltanski zwischen 1948 und 1954 aufgeführten Handlungen, 1970 (Reconstructions of the actions executed by Christian Boltanski btw. 1948 and 1954, 1970)

**Sanja Iveković**, 'Grazia', Nov. 1974 (left), from the series *Doppelleben* (Doublelife) (left), 1974

We grow into a specific understanding of roles. For this reason adolescence is a very interesting time, as the gap between role and personality seems to be tangible in the image of a teenager. In 1970 **Christian Boltanski** re-enacts fictionalized, staged scenes from his own childhood in his photographs. **Sanja Iveković** also follows this path of socialization, when she juxtaposes snapshots of herself as a young woman with advertising photos. She presents her own poses as copies of the images of women transported through advertisement. The situation is complicated by the fact that the photographs are in fact older than the "role models" from advertisements. The poses have already been internalized before the model enters the stage in front of the camera.

### 2.2. Habitus /Private and Public Roles



**Tina Barney**, *Boys* 1990, from the series: *Theatre of Manners*



**Julika Rudelius**, *Rites of Passage*, 2008, 2-canal Videoinstallation

Various works testify to an interest for the moment of transition between private, allegedly authentic and public role. A good example for this are the large-format photographs by **Tina Barney** who documents family life of the upper class of the American East Coast and asks,

whether a social role is based on nurture or nature. By switching between documentary and staged scenes she demonstrates how social roles are determined by our origins. A seemingly casual gesture loses its "natural character" and switches between documented and staged pose. **Julika Rudelius** observes young men talking to their paternal mentors, to politicians teaching them the tricks and cheats of power and the secrets of success. Viewers are left unaware of whether they are witnesses to a staged talk or a random scene not meant for them to observe, turning them into voyeurs.

### 2.3. Gender travesty / Masculinity



**Manon**, Manon presents Men, Installation and Performance, 1976



**Martin Dammann**, from the series: Soldier Studies, 2007/2008



**Collier Schorr**, Videostill from: Cinderella Motel, 2007

Femininity as masquerade was the keyword of the 1990s in connection with **Cindy Sherman's** "Untitled Film Stills" and **Claude Cahun's** photographs of the 1920s. Cindy Sherman's photographs of supposedly re-enacted film scenes, created at the end of the 1970s, reveal how our view of the female body is determined by images from media, art history, fashion and pornography, by cultural codes and social norms. In 1976 **Manon** made a performance in which she exhibits seven men personifying different types to demonstrate that masquerade and posing usually have female connotations. By putting on costumes in order to be watched, masculinity and heterosexuality are automatically questioned. An aspect of the exhibition is dedicated to gender travesty and asks about the existence of a male pose.

Between 1920 and 1941 **Marcel Duchamp** repeatedly presents himself in various female stagings; a perfume flask adorned with his alter ego as *Belle Haleine* is exhibited as ready-made. The photographic portraits by Man Ray show the artist disguised as a woman with hat and fur collar as Rose Sélavy. In his work "Soldier Studies", **Martin Dammann** presents a collection of reproduced amateur photographs from private albums of Nazi soldiers, who are pictured as cross-dressers in cabaret performances for their fellow soldiers. This is about a subversive act which develops in an environment where homosexuality is prohibited. The masculinity of the cowboy who vouched for the manliness of filtered cigarettes as Marlboro Man in the 1960s is questioned in **Collier Schorr's** video work.

### 3. Repetition and Paraphrase From Appropriation Art to Karaoke



**Yasumasa Morimura**,  
Gentlemen, Your Turn Is  
Over, 2004



**Francisco de Goya**, from:  
Los Caprichos, Schon  
gehen sie gerupft, 1893-98



**Marcel Duchamp**, Rose  
Sélavy (Alias Marcel  
Duchamp), 1921



**Yasumasa Morimura**,  
Doublonnage (Marcel), 1988

Repetition is a central aspect of role-playing which is always about the repetition of a recognizable role. A paraphrase can only be recognized if the role model is recognizable. A tableau vivant repeats a specific work of art by re-enacting it with people. Frequently the work which serves as model is already part of our pictorial memory and the scene only reminds the viewer of the original models. European art history in particular represents the canon of recognizable scenes which are appropriated. **Yasumasa Morimura** re-enacts masterpieces of art, for example the capriccios by Francisco Goya. What does it mean, if a male Japanese artist stages female figures of European art history with his own body? He adopts the moment of repetition from the tradition of Appropriation Art which appropriates existing works by other artists to question the definition of originality. **Rodney Graham**, for example, re-enacts a history painting in a photograph and portrays himself as a fallen signalman of the French army, holding a trumpet in his hand. He uses the re-enacted work of art as an allegory of the fallen artist.

In addition it is planned to discuss the following themes in the exhibition: The role of the artist (fictitious and unknown artists, the artist as a dead person); role reversal, theatrical and comical methods of role-playing.

The exhibition will probably present works by the following artists:

Marina Abramovic, Eleanor Antin, Matthew Barney, Tina Barney, Hippolyte Bayard, Christa Biedermann, Christian Boltanski, Candice Breitz, Claude Cahun, Danica Dakić, Martin Dammann, Fred Holland Day, Marcel Duchamp, Slawomir Elsner, Valie Export, Jan Fabre, Rodney Graham, G.R.A.M., Aneta Grzeszykowska, Sanja Iveković, Christian Jankowski, Ilja Kabakow, Martin Kippenberger, Jürgen Klauke, Jeff Koons, David LaChapelle, Ulrike Lienbacher, Urs Lüthi, Anja Manfredi, Manon, Dieter Meier, Chantal Michel, Yasumasa Morimura, Adi Nes, Ferhat Özgür, Richard Prince, Julika Rudelius, Collier Schorr, Cindy Sherman, Yinka Shonibare, Andy Warhol, Hannah Wilke, Yevonde

State of artist list: November 2010, Concept: Esther Ruelfs