

Henry VIII's Wives
Beauty of the Land, We Live In a Beautiful Land
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Discussion with the artist group Henry VIII's Wives about the exhibition

Henry VIII's Wives consists of six members. Until 1997 you were students of Ross Sinclair's at School of Fine Arts in Glasgow. Since then you have shown continuously. The group consists of different three nationalities and you all work in different areas of culture life. The book on your first five years has the fitting title: "We march under the banner of visual art." How do Henry VIII's Wives work? Which role does identity play?

After seven years we still don't have standing orders but we do have hope that it'll stay that way. We meet for shorter periods than before (we know each other by now) but more often (we do have our plans). It might well be that our internal communication follows the „T-shirt principle“ of Ross Sinclair.

He used to write concisely slogans on T-Shirts that, at the same time, undermined stereotyped ways of thinking. Also Henry VIII's Wives gets polished an idea so smoothly, that it would neatly fit a proud chest. In this shape an idea might also hibernate until another show. Later, then, the “would-be T-shirt” phrase forms points of departure for our six minds to hook on more complex consideration. Ideally, different interpretations become apparent in the work, different emphasis each of us had to contribute. Identity definitely is a topic which interests us from an artistic point of view – a seemingly clear topic, providing us starting points to fit our “Out-Of-Context-leavers”. The question of the identity of a place and its influence on peoples' minds who are there, that is always a good reason to justify our research trips. Bringing people, voices, objects and places clashing together we are pointing at the customary, aiming at the established, focusing on what time rendered acceptable. Many of our works perform some kind of fabrication of history.

Your Installations, photographs and films use a social present and / or historical sources as a matrix. In the photo series "Iconic Moments" lay actors imitate historic photographs like the assassination of Lee Harvey Oswald. What importance has the concept of reality in your work?

The realised works of art are real. It is also reality, that six people can confess to one piece of art, something that still puzzles us often enough. The fact, that ladies and men from an old peoples' home would model in their old days, that they would stage pictures, whose importance they never forgot during their lives, the fact, that they do it with the ease of age, when quirkiness seems acceptable again and the pressure to conform isn't existential, that is one feature of reality and certainly part of the work. The documentary aspect of our work is important, as it offers some clues to the making of the work, like brushstrokes do in a painting. However, it is the image, the composition that counts in the end. We often involve other people in our work who normally have little contact with symbolic actions or playacting projects. To win the aid of these people requires at

least one foot on the ground of reality. Still, that shouldn't be too hard considering that we're twelve-legged.

The works for the exhibition "Beauty of the Land, We Live In a Beautiful Land" relate to your most recent show "Romantic Detachment" in P.S.1/MoMA in New York. How did the film installation come about and what is your focus in the current exhibition?

The film was probably a reaction to the increasing polarisation in the world. The assertion of and the search for "pure white" and "untinged black" could be read as a neo romantic obsession. For our film installation we decided we had to have two conflicting characters assisted by the exciting figure of the moderator. There before, we did interviews with generally highly esteemed members of local communities as well as with incarcerated members of the larger community and their therapist in the *Lake-District*, a very pretty part of England. The interviews were held in order to collect stories and answers to more or less moral issues in the phrasing of everyday language. From this wealth of grammatical innovations we edited the script for the film. This was when we had to realise that life is teaching us a lesson: Forget about the moderator. The result was a film for two monitors showing two women in conversation. Statements and answers evoke opposing characters but soon the arguments of the one sounds just like the one of the other. No need for a moderator there. We shot the film on the 16th floor of the German Embassy overlooking the East River in New York. The sun is breaking through icy October clouds on the right screen. Its rays reflect from the glass front of the UN headquarters on the left screen. The weather is doing its best at synchronising both monitors - Bliss at last!

Henry VIII's Wives are: Rachel Dagnall (1972), lives in Oslo; Bob Grieve (1975), lives in Glasgow; Sirko Knüpfer (1972), lives in Berlin; Simon Polli (1967), lives in Kopenhagen, Per Sander (1967), lives in Berlin; Lucy Skaer (1975), lives in Glasgow. They have exhibited in the UK, Norway and U.S.A.. Their recent film installation was shown at "Romantic Detachment", P.S. 1, New York (2004). In springtime this year Henry VIII's Wives will participate at the exhibition "Populism" at Frankfurter Kunstverein, at National Museum of Art in Oslo, at Contemporary Art Centre Vilnius and at Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.

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