

ANDREW J BURFORD
CONSTANTIN HARTENSTEIN
MIGHTY GOOD MEN

25/05–08/07/2018

Opening: 24/05 from 7pm

with the drag-performance *Gallery Girls* by Pansy, in collaboration with Lola Rose, Psoriasis and Gieza Poke, and a performance by Constantin Hartenstein with Bendik Giske.

curated by Sylvia Sadzinski

"He's gotta be strong
and he's gotta be fast
And he's gotta be fresh
from the fight."
Bonnie Tyler - *Holding Out For A Hero*, 1984

a
man
who cries
- a gift
Rupi Kaur, 2018

Strong, courageous, combative: even today, these attributes are still considered to be masculine archetypes. It is not uncommon for them to be applied as stereotypical attributes, at the same time generating a prescribed and pre-assigned role. The exhibition project *Mighty Good Men* investigates the complexity and plurality of masculinity. What is defined as masculine – and who is defined as being a man? What form and function do conceptions of masculinity have in a predominantly heteronormative culture?

Working with various materials, Andrew J Burford and Constantin Hartenstein bring various forms of masculinity to light. They create images that move between softness and hardness, vulnerability and strength, stereotypes, ideals, and personal intimacies.

Social expectations linking masculinity to the state of being that is 'man' form the central point of focus for the works of Andrew J Burford. His video collages *A Thousand Thank Yous* (2017) and *I'll Give You Something To Cry About* (2018) demonstrate that forms of masculinity are not necessarily equal in their socially acceptance. Weakness and emotionality, for example, are often viewed as a depreciation or even a threat to masculinity – aspects which must then be suppressed. His works point towards social modes of inhibition and mechanisms for exclusion, to which particular forms of masculinity are exposed. These works thematise different forms of access to power and social resources, drawing attention to the so-called concept of hegemonic masculinity, and by the same token also a marginalised form of masculinity¹. In *The Shirt Off Dad's Back* (2016), Burford uses his own body in order to thematise traditional gender roles within patriarchal family structures. Burford's mother dresses him in the workers' shirt of his dead father, and slowly disappears behind her son. So-called care work – meaning the invisible labour involved in looking after things in the private realm – is in this way associated with being a woman, while throughout this, the man takes up increasingly more space and is transformed into a protector-figure.

Constantin Hartenstein's series including the works *Cannibal Alpha*, *Antistrog*, *Alpha Xplode* and *Narc Genesis Pump* (2018) thematise ideas of beauty that are shaped through permanent body work. Specific elements of the male body are often socially interpreted as emblematic of masculinity. Physical height and a pronounced musculature, for example, are considered to be typically masculine characteristics. Displayed on blue steel plates, the works represent the stickers, labels and packaging of protein and vitamin tablets. These works are reminiscent of advertising billboards and 'blueprint' cyanotypes, an old photographic process typified by its cyan-blue tones, which were widely used to reproduce urban and building plans from around 1870. The protein and vitamin tablets are, likewise, a material used to (re)produce and duplicate the ideal body of a specific kind of alpha-male – dominant, strong and successful. These works point towards the ideal of masculine strength and muscle power, but at the same time towards the self-staged nature of masculinity. At the same time, they generate a critical reflection on the question of the increasing commercialisation of the masculine body. They indicate the extent to

¹ In *Gender and Power* (1987) Rawewyn Connell defines four types of masculinity that are related to each other.

which, under neoliberalism, masculinity is produced. As something that can be bought and sold, it is determined by social class and income. Motifs and materialities are thus interconnected with the notion of a strong and unyielding masculinity, which, however, at the same time seems to be held under constant threat by femininity and feminisation. Masculinity is fragile precisely because it must always prove itself.

Insofar as both artists relate back to moments of pop and subculture, they grapple with dominant modes and bodily practices. Through this, the works extend far beyond a simple (re)definition of masculinity (or masculinities). Rather, they analyse the concept in the context of societal relations and structures. They show that different forms of masculinity exist in parallel, but are not always accepted equally.

Within the framework of the exhibition, masculinity is understood to be a process-based and fragile condition, which must constantly be reconstructed and substantiated.

Masculinity thereby exists not as a naturally pre-given, monolithic giant, but more as an "uncertain and ambiguous status...that must be acquired"². In this way, *Mighty Good Men* points towards – and increasingly demystifies – the fragility of traditional understandings of masculinity. In particular, as part of the performative accompanying programme (in which drag performances play an important role), the constructed nature of gender roles in general – and specifically the masculine form – will be traced, and at the same time challenged. The repetition and restaging of femininity and masculinity will disclose the process by which sexuality is constructed. At the same time, the exhibition project sets up a framework in which the traditionally charged relationship between high and low culture – that is, apparently challenging and superior culture versus the trivial, popular culture – is problematised, lampooned and partly abolished. In this way, the works make clear the extent to which everyday representations of masculinity can be considered to be part of a continual staging, in the pursuit of social belonging and recognition.

² Harlacher, 2010, p. 196.

EVENTS

Mon., 18/06, 8pm | Artists talk

with Andrew J Burford and Constantin Hartenstein (Ger. and Engl.)

Sat., 30/06, 8pm | Performances

Araburlesque – Yousef Iskandar

Man in the Mirror. A Night of Karaoke With All Songs About Men – Andrew J Burford

with Drag King Sascha Sehrschön

Text: Sylvia Sadzinski

Translation: Sonja Hornung

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