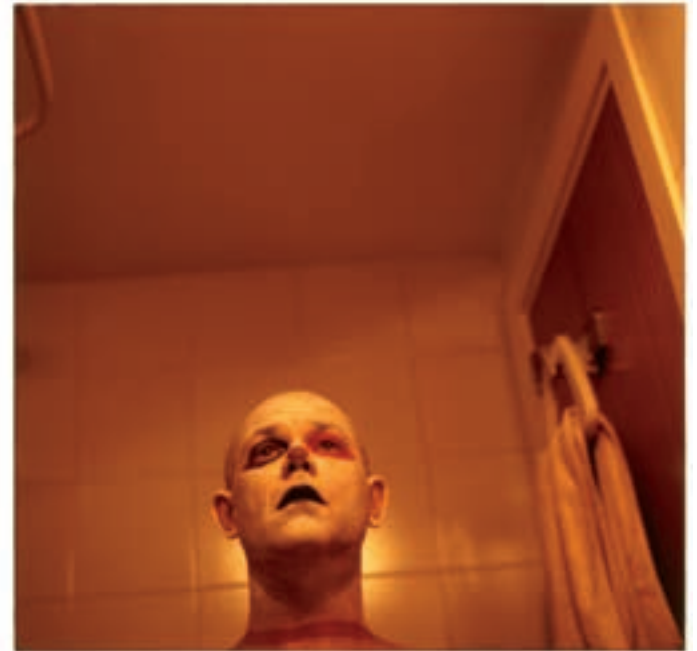


MY STRANGERS ✚ MEINE FREMDEN



CHRISTOPHER KENT SCHUMAKER



Y STRANGERS
EINE FREMDEN

CHRISTOPHER KENT SCHUMAKER

To the memory of my friend Andy,

a genuinely sweet and hospitable soul.

He and his wife Velta opened

their Mercer Island home to me and taught

me much about generosity.



Zum Gedenken an meinen Freund Andy,

eine wirklich herzliche und freundliche Seele.

Er und seine Frau Velta öffneten

mir ihr Haus auf Mercer Island und lehrten

mich eine Menge über Großzügigkeit.

Andris Dravnieks Benson

Born December 19, 1940 Ventspils, Latvia

Died January 31, 2015 Bellevue, Washington

Andris Dravnieks Benson

Geboren am 19. Dezember 1940 in Ventspils, Lettland

Gestorben am 31. Januar 2015 in Bellevue, Washington

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RELIGION OF ONE

Peter Frank



religious conviction is traditionally tested by pilgrimage. Whether the faithful wend their way to Mecca, Jerusalem, or the banks of the Ganges, the act of going (and coming back) expresses devotion to a higher power, a higher vision, a condition beyond the normal. Furthermore, such pilgrimage is also fraught with danger and adventure, as anyone from Chaucer to Buñuel to contemporary Shi'a unfortunates subject to attack in Iraq can attest. Some, though, make yet a more fraught journey, finding their way to hell in order to test their own salvation. Whether Orpheus seeks to rescue Eurydice or Dante accepts Virgil's once-in-a-lifetime offer, these mythic heroes (and anti-heroes) sign on for a treacherous trek that doesn't necessarily come with a return ticket.

From his series in *My Strangers*, Christopher Kent Schumaker accounts for just such a personal pilgrimage, one he actually endured, one that tested his faith in humanity and fate itself – a rite of passage as much Joycean (obliquely mirroring the nightmare sequence in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*) as it was Jungian/Campbellian. It was hardly an exercise in heroism; Schumaker got pulled into a maelstrom of alienation and disorientation that was as much of his own making as of anyone or anything else's. But blame was and is not at issue, redemption is. It was an ordeal by inner fire, a transformation that didn't so much take Schumaker all over the globe as find him despite his attempts to flee it. The monster, Schumaker realized, was his extra baggage. And the inappropriate exoticism – or equally inappropriate ordinariness – of the setting, foreign or domestic, only fanned the flames.

This photographic series bifurcates – almost invisibly, at first – into Schumaker's consumption by personal conflagration and his emergence from such terror. He goes into the woods and comes out again. His is not a pilgrim's progress,

it is a pilgrim's cycle. And it is strange and raw, comforting to some only in its familiarity and to others only in that it's not happening to them. The first part, depicting the harrowing loss of Schumaker's sense of self – and the enactment of that dissolution concurrent with quotidian and touristic duties – is especially sinister and caustic, insisting as it does on the abiding contradiction between our private and our public selves. In the photographs presented in *My Strangers* Schumaker documents, in his words to this author, "images of personal ritual and revelation [posed] against those banal, indifferent public settings or powerful, institutional environments." It doesn't matter that some of these images manifest in Schumaker's own home while others take shape thousands of miles away. What matters is that there is no longer a safe haven of reassuring habit or companionship – and that, by implication, even if there were, Schumaker would resist it on principle.

The temptation to succumb to the peaceful side of what the artist calls his "conscious discord" wafts through the series, certainly in its opening, descendant part. Time and again we find ourselves urging Schumaker to take a deep breath, wipe the painterly self-flagellation from his skin, and head resolutely outside. Or, conversely, we want him to resolve the duality immediately by jumping into the stupidity of daily existence at his most vulnerable, made up like a Papuan tribesman (or a German expressionist's idea of one), a Karneval boogeyman unleashing the id in exactly the wrong place (not to mention at the wrong time of the year). But Schumaker refuses himself and us either catharsis. He has embarked, however inadvertently, on a pilgrimage of (self-)cleansing, and he must see it through.

Nowadays we expect such grueling, introspective processes to result in the reawakening of buried identity or sexual rediscovery or some visceral yet (if you think about it) superficial and/or fantastical condition. But, while he may rely on paneled imagery to establish a narrative arc, Schumaker has not

made a comic strip of his own transformation into some sort of superhero. If anything, he keeps himself a super antihero. He not only accepts that he entered – fell into – this enactment of dissolution as a flawed human, but that he remains a flawed human on its other side. The passage is as Zen as it is Catholic: the body has no new secret identity, only the soul has.

Christopher Kent Schumaker points out that, before the personal implosion that produced *My Strangers*, he was a sculptor, and a formalist, and that after it, he was a painter, and an expressionist. That transition is properly described in terms of identity ("sculptor/painter," "formalist/expressionist") as opposed to practice. Reverting to photography (and drawing) during his years of pilgrimage, Schumaker put aside the medium and manner he knew best in order to document himself – to locate himself, you might say, as directly as possible, with a minimum of mediation. Schumaker is one of those artists who identifies with what he does and how he does it – who lives his artmaking. When his life turned upside down, his art went with it. ♦

HOMeward ANGEL

Shana Nys Dambrot



ll of the works in *My Strangers* were made during a time of great duress in Christopher Kent Schumaker's life. It was a time so fraught with emotional peril and the quicksands of loss that the artist was forced into retreat – one might say exile – from everything he thought was settled. Everything he knew about himself and about life was stripped away, along with his health, his marriage, his faith, and his creative inspiration. It was a long way down. The bulk of this bizarre, brilliant, and candidly risky work chronicles this precipitous psychological and physical fall from grace, in almost real time. The period of 1995 to 1996 was spent in studio hibernation in Inglewood before unfolding in way-stations from Mallorca to south of London, and represented destruction and deconstruction, the dismantlement of self and circumstance and its immediate aftermath – a kind of post-mortem performed by the still-living in a series of hotel room mirrors. It is difficult work to look at, in no small part because it was such difficult work to make.

Schumaker began to use makeup, body paint, props, and staged scenarios in a series of composite self-portraits and contextual accompaniments with echoes of Cindy Sherman, Egon Schiele, and Frida Kahlo. Through his inventions and juxtapositions, he created implied, serial storylines and shadow narratives. His alter-ego variations have the gestural experimentation of someone trying something on in private, just to see how it feels. Whether the ultimate goal is a completely new identity or the revelation of a true, hidden self is perhaps a difference without distinction, especially when it comes to art, which is of course all about toeing the line between reality and invention. In any case, a series of dark, symbol-rich allegories of a dissolute psyche arose from this two-year sojourn in purgatory.

Then sometime in 1997 something changed. Beginning in Paris and building up to the artist's prodigal return to Inglewood in 1998, the work takes on a sharpness, an intentionality, and an aspirational vision that speaks to resolution, redemption, epiphany, and homecoming. Schumaker is still using his visual strategies, dressing up and examining his immediate surroundings. But a fresh energy infiltrates the practice. In Paris he starts building clear metaphors both inside the images and in their pairings – inside/outside, public/private, sacred/profane. To perform these allegories requires a point of view, a center. In short, a self. He'd been lost, but was starting to feel found. Just as earlier he'd chronicled the descent, he kept track of the ascendance. And something else about the pictures from these latter days – they're kind of funny.

From *Death In Paris (The Clown)*'s empty stroller left in a lobby, matched with a new look in colorful body paint, the energy is almost celebratory, despite its subject of birth and death. *Chris and Mona* sees a full sense of humor returning to the artist, as well as the occupancy of a crowded public space. This icon of art history, and her godlike creator, are at the center of centuries of mystery, and she may possibly be a cryptic self-portrait. Other signs of optimism appear – an open window, a clean bathtub, and in *One Day*, a speeding van and a sketch of a street leading away to the horizon. The final works in the series are outright hilarious with their punkish handwritten t-shirts, a homemade costume of a kitchen king, and the trappings of a stand-up routine, complete with an apple straight out of Eden. Schumaker got to the point of laughing at himself, of accepting his flaws rather than futilely trying to exorcise them. It was pure forgiveness.

Maybe art is more like religion than people realize. Creativity certainly has a devotional, reverential quality. An artist's faith must often be placed in unknowable outcomes. Many say of both art and prayer that the process is more important than the result. And like having faith, making art counts more when it's hard. ♦

NOT FADE AWAY

Christopher Kent Schumaker



It was the 1990's, and I was a sculptor in my forties living in Los Angeles. The early part of the decade for me was filled with the hope and promise of a new marriage, the support of gallery representation and the self-assurance of my professional identity. In 1995 all of that began to change, and by 1997 I was broke, divorced, in poor health, and without a dealer. Worse, I felt I had lost my center, my essentiality, my driving wheel.

Out of this psychological maelstrom emerged a photographic series that was unapologetically confessional, a sort of emotional blood-letting on film wrapped in the double helix of private retreat and public spectacle. These images were not merely self-portraits with make-up, but portrayals of the deepest aspects of my personal life and re-forming contrasted with the almost banal images of a so-called "normal" social order and history. They functioned as chromogenic forest fires, deconstructing the memory of a past life and mercifully sweeping clean all that lay in the path of the camera lens. I was, and perhaps remain, a fool in pursuit of my own chimeras, my own catharsis.

I started this series a disillusioned sculptor and emerged a re-born painter. The importance of this body of work to the development and vocabulary of my paintings is immeasurable, and unquestionably merits inclusion in the personal history and legacy of my overall artistic contributions. Central to each of these pieces is the fragility of "self", an insistence on real, human values, and the self-conscious awareness of an introverted outsider. Their low-production, "little-rascals" approach to the medium is the antithesis of many well-known photographers' and photo-based artists' work. Seeking starkness and simplicity over theatrical virtuosity lead me to the meanings I required.

The individual images were photographed over a four-year period on locations in the south of England, in Majorca off the coast of Spain, in Paris, France, and in Inglewood, California. All the image editing, both manual and digital, and assembly of the photographic composites took place at the La Brea Avenue Studio in Inglewood. Several images from the same photo sessions and locales appear in multiple composites alongside images from different locations, thus deconstructing and reordering the specificity of time and place. The years 1995 to early 1997 focused on "public/private" selves as beings of extraordinary contradiction, at the same time documenting the unraveling of my marriage. The camera works of late 1997 to 1998 are film images mirroring a broken soul in primordial reformation.

I used 2¼ x 2¼-inch and 6-by-7 medium-format cameras mostly with tripods, but occasionally hand-held. I used positive color transparency film that was output to Type R photographic prints. The film images were selected, trimmed to size and, using an optically clear adhesive, collaged onto 8 x 10-inch glass plates, creating a narrative composite. The finished prints would be made from these glass-plate composites. Between 1995 and 1998 a total of 61 composites were completed, 47 on glass and 14 existing as film only. In preparation for exhibitions in 1997 and 2002, 8 Type R prints were produced, the only prints made by this process. With the popular emergence of digital photography, Type R printing was deemed archaic and discontinued in the United States around 2003.

In January, 2014 I began the process of digitally scanning 60 composites (one glass plate having been intentionally destroyed in 1997 following my divorce). Additionally, two composites were edited for overall continuity and quality. ♦

COLOR PLATES

FOTOKUNSTDRUCKE



Christmas Hat, #1
 1996 Oakley, California
 Digital Scan from Glass Plate Composite
Weihnachtsmütze, #1
 1996 Oakley, Kalifornien
 Digitaler Scan von Glasplattenkomposit



Christmas Hat, #2
 1996 Oakley, California
 Type R Print Mounted on Sintra
 17 x 16 inches
 Collection of the Artist
Weihnachtsmütze, #2
 1996 Oakley, Kalifornien
 R-3-Druck auf Sintra-PVC
 43 x 41 cm
 Sammlung des Künstlers



Carnival
 1996 West Ferring, England
 Type R Print Mounted on Sintra
 11 3/4 x 20 1/4 inches
 Collection of the Artist

Karneval
 1996 West Ferring, England
 R-3-Druck auf Sintra-PVC
 30 x 51 cm
 Sammlung des Künstlers



Pomp and Circumstance
1996 West Ferring, England
Digital Scan from Glass Plate Composite

Prunk und Sachlage
1996 West Ferring, England
Digitaler Scan von Glasplattenkomposit



Talayot
 1996 Palma de Mallorca, Spain
 Digital Scan from Glass Plate Composite

Talayot
 1996 Palma de Mallorca, Spanien
 Digitaler Scan von Glasplattenkomposit



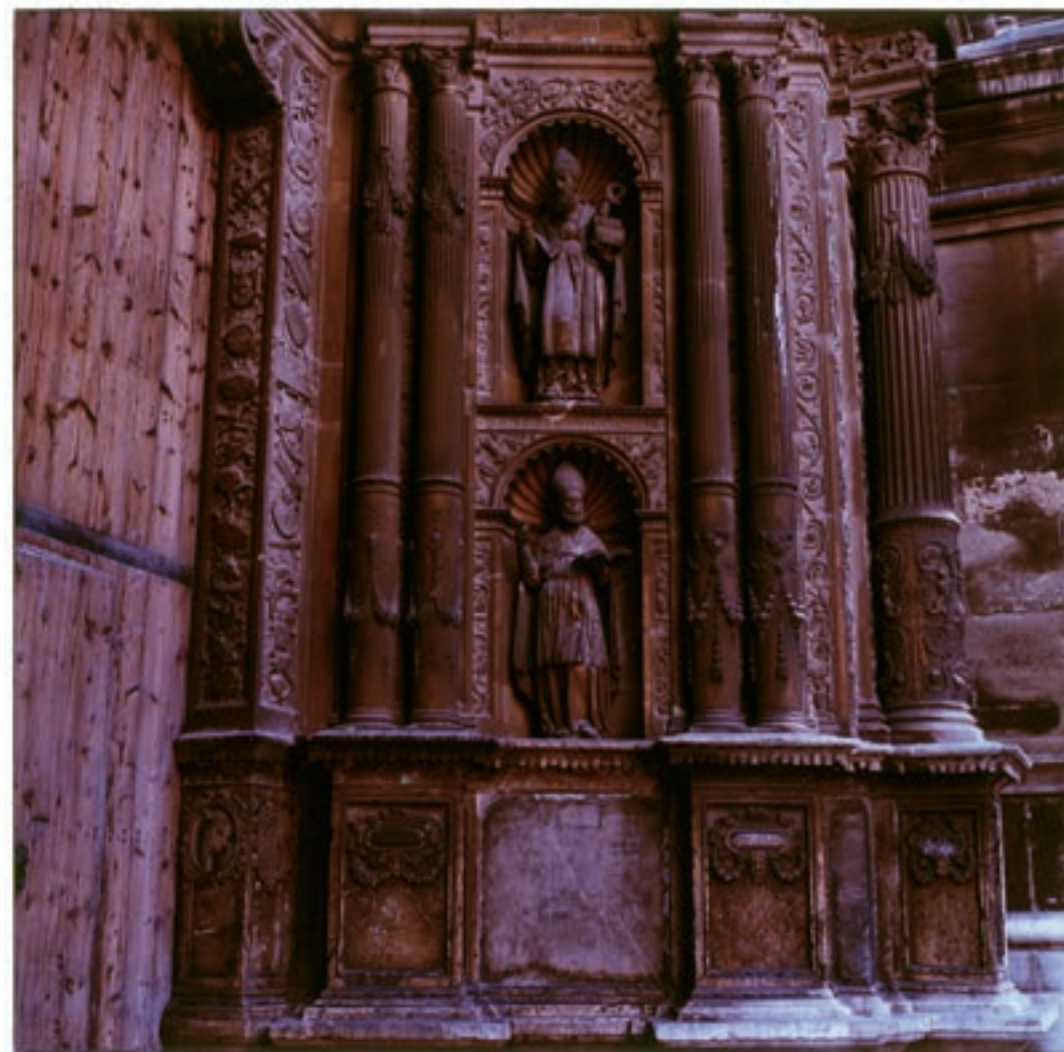
Remnants
1996 Palma de Mallorca, Spain
Digital Scan from Glass Plate Composite

Relikte
1996 Palma de Mallorca, Spanien
Digitaler Scan von Glasplattenkomposit



Chambers
1996 Palma de Mallorca, Spain
Digital Scan from Glass Plate Composite

Kammern
1996 Palma de Mallorca, Spanien
Digitaler Scan von Glasplattenkomposit



Audience for the Other

1996 Palma de Mallorca, Spain
Type R Print Mounted on Sintra
9 1/4 x 20 1/4 inches
Collection of the Artist

Publikum für die Anderen

1996 Palma de Mallorca, Spanien
R-3-Druck auf Sintra-PVC
23 x 51 cm
Sammlung des Künstlers



Witness

1996 Palma de Mallorca, Spain
Type R Print Mounted on Sintra
11 3/4 x 20 1/4 inches
Collection of Jamie Wilson
Portland, Oregon

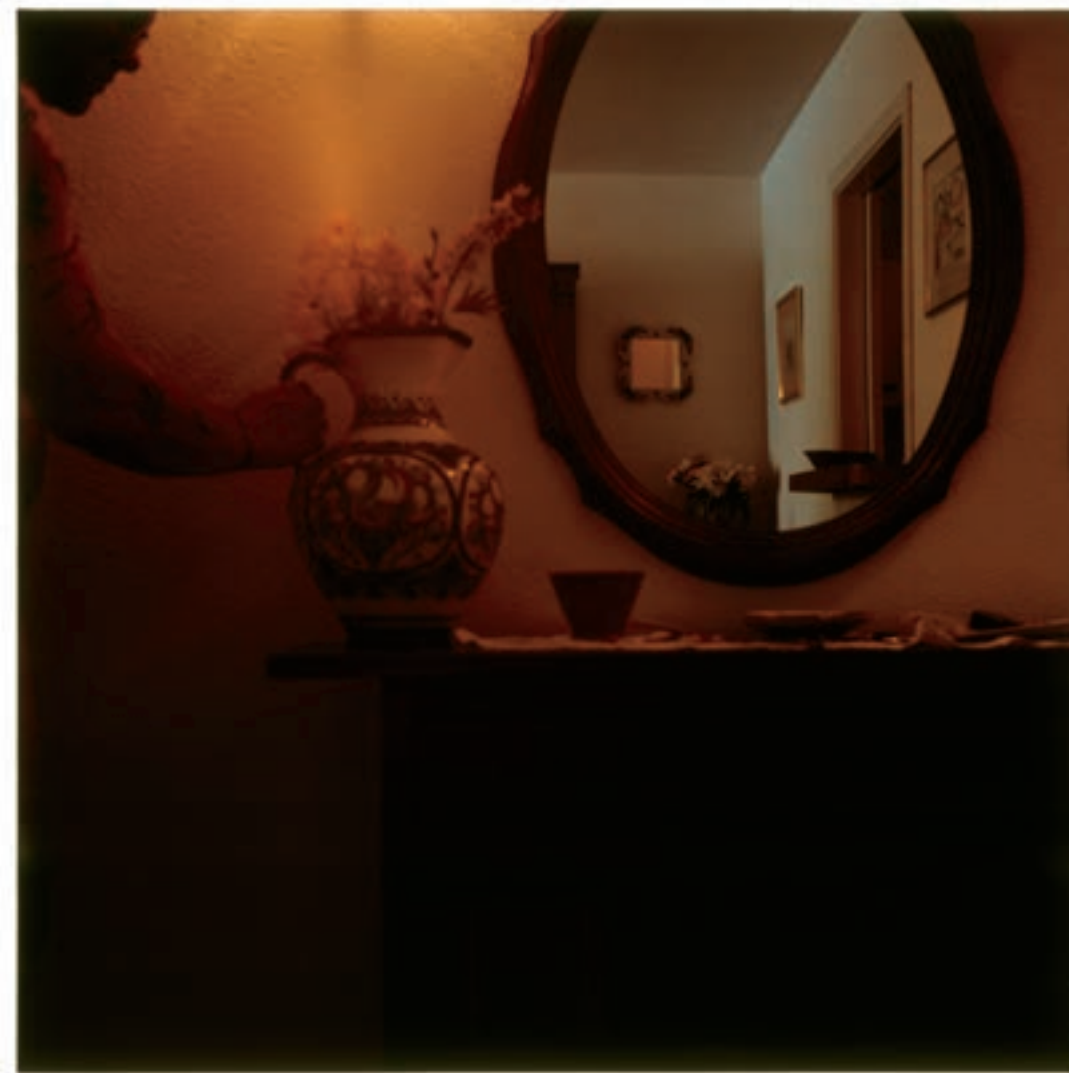
Zeuge

1996 Palma de Mallorca, Spanien
R-3-Druck auf Sintra-PVC
30 x 51 cm
Sammlung von Jamie Wilson
Portland, Oregon



Unfamiliar Territory
 1996 Palma de Mallorca, Spain
 Digital Scan from Glass Plate Composite

Unbekanntes Territorium
 1996 Palma de Mallorca, Spanien
 Digitaler Scan von Glasplattenkomposit



Roman Portrait
 1996 – 97 Palma de Mallorca, Spain
 Digital Scan from Glass Plate Composite

Römisches Porträt
 1996 – 97 Palma de Mallorca, Spanien
 Digitaler Scan von Glasplattenkomposit



Natatorium

1996 – 97 Palma de Mallorca, Spain
Type R Print Mounted on Sintra
12 x 20 1/4 inches
Collection of the Artist

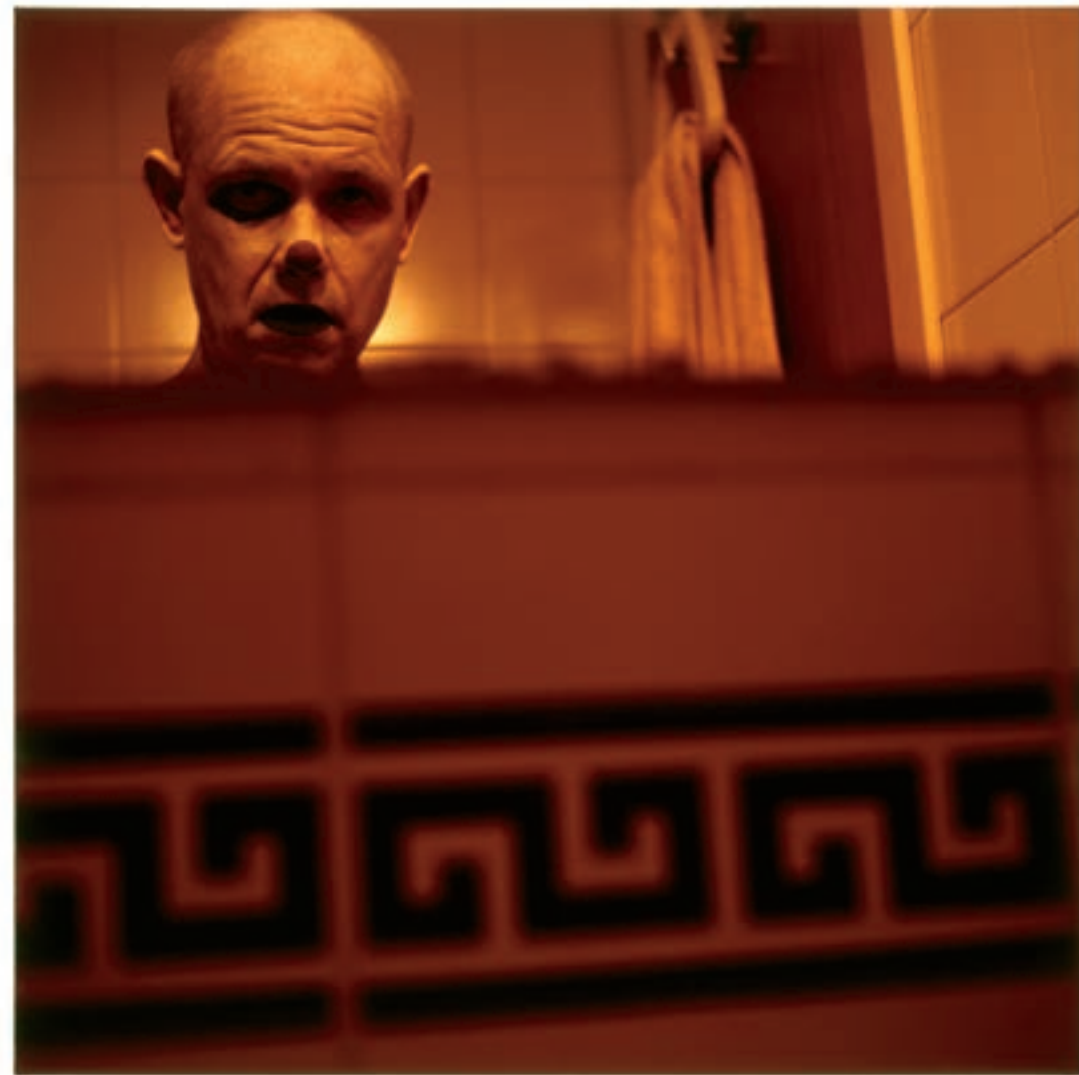
Schwimmbad

1996 – 97 Palma de Mallorca, Spanien
R-3-Druck auf Sintra-PVC
31 x 51 cm
Sammlung des Künstlers



Edict
1996 – 97 Palma de Mallorca, Spain
Digital Scan from Glass Plate Composite

Erlass
1996 – 97 Palma de Mallorca, Spanien
Digitaler Scan von Glasplattenkomposit



Proclamation

1996 – 97 Palma de Mallorca, Spain
Type R Print Mounted on Sintra
12 x 20 1/4 inches
Collection of the Artist

Verkündigung

1996 – 97 Palma de Mallorca, Spanien
R-3-Druck auf Sintra-PVC
31 x 51 cm
Sammlung des Künstlers



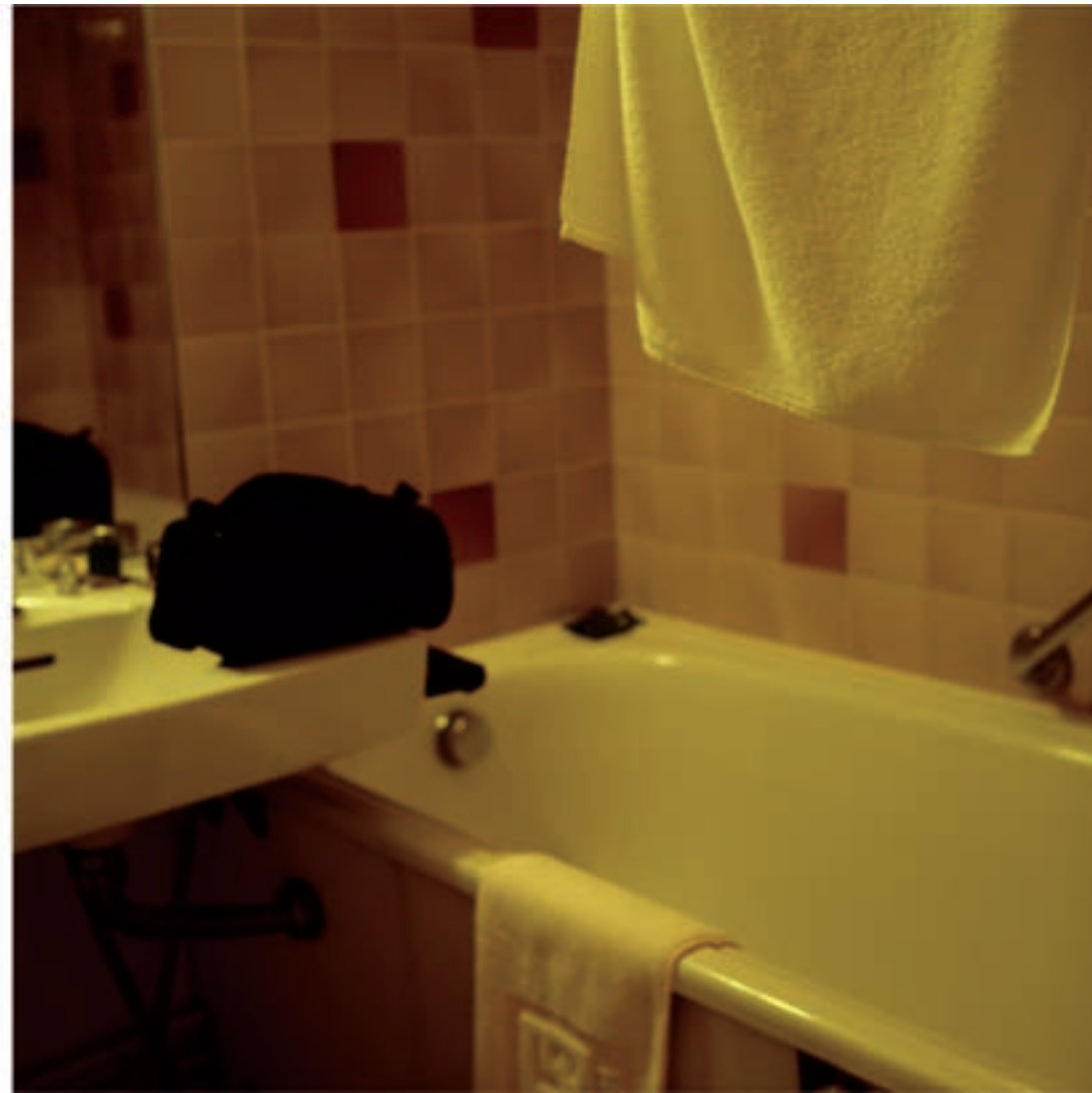
Altar Boy
1996 – 97 Palma de Mallorca, Spain
Digital Scan from Glass Plate Composite

Messdiener
1996 – 97 Palma de Mallorca, Spanien
Digitaler Scan von Glasplattenkomposit



17th Arrondissement
 1996 – 97 Paris, France
 Digital Scan from Film Transparencies

17. Arrondissement
 1996 – 97 Paris, Frankreich
 Digitaler Scan von Farbdiafilmen



Paris: Two Views
 1996 – 97 Paris, France
 Digital Scan from Film Transparencies

Paris: Zwei Ansichten
 1996 – 97 Paris, Frankreich
 Digitaler Scan von Farbdiafilmen



Full Return
1996 – 97 Paris, France
Digital Scan from Film Transparencies

Volle Wende
1996 – 97 Paris, Frankreich
Digitaler Scan von Farbdiafilmen



Shana Nys Dambrot is an art critic and curator based in Downtown Los Angeles, covering the city's gallery, museum, and independent visual-art scene for public television and regional, national, and international web and print publications such as *Whitehot*, *Flaunt*, and *Huffington Post*. A native New Yorker and graduate of Vassar's Art History program, Dambrot decamped for the Wild West some 20 years ago and never looked back, because that's where the most engaging art in the world is made.

Peter Frank is art critic for the *Huffington Post* and former critic for *Angeleno* magazine and the *L. A. Weekly*. Associate Editor for *Fabrik* magazine, he has served as editor for *THEmagazine Los Angeles* and *Visions Art Quarterly*, as well as Senior Curator at the Riverside Art Museum. Frank studied art history at Columbia University in his native New York, where he wrote for *The Village Voice* and the *SoHo Weekly News*.

Dorit Hahn has worked as translator, lecturer, instructor, and tutor across the globe. Over the past 15 years, she taught German language, history and literature at the University of Nottingham, England and the University of Wellington in New Zealand, lectured Communications at the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, and completed her PhD in Education at the University of Nottingham. Recently having settled in the San Francisco Bay Area with her husband, son and dog, she is on a quest to give her clients and students a taste for German language and culture.

Christopher Kent Schumaker was born April 2, 1950 in Neepawa, Manitoba, Canada. At age 5 he immigrated with his parents to Long Beach, California, USA, where he attended parochial, elementary and high school. Schumaker earned an Associate Arts degree in 1973 from College of the Redwoods, Eureka, California. In 1976 he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree from Humboldt State University, Arcata, California, and in 1979 received a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Following a brief period in Seattle, Washington, he returned to Los Angeles at the end of 1980. From 1981 to 1996 Schumaker was adjunct faculty at several Southern California colleges and universities, teaching sculpture, design, and drawing.

Schumaker's transition from sculptor to painter, from formalist to expressionist, did not follow a straight line. It involved his complete immersion in the photographic series presented in this book. Without these photographs, there would have been no paintings to follow and no reformed painter to have emerged.

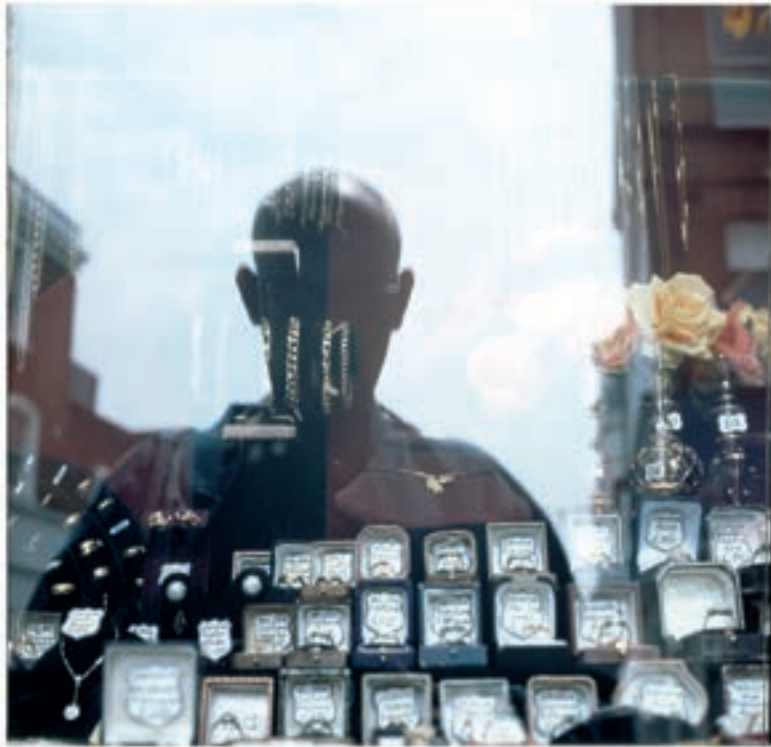
Shana Nys Dambrot arbeitet als Kunstkritikerin und Kuratorin in Los Angeles und berichtet über die Galerien-, Museen- und unabhängige Szene der bildenden Kunst für das öffentliche Fernsehen und regionale, nationale und internationale Print- und Online-Medien wie *Whitehot*, *Flaunt* und *Huffington Post*. Ursprünglich aus New York und mit einem Abschluss in Kunstgeschichte von Vassar University, brach Dambrot vor gut 20 Jahren in den Wilden Westen auf und blickte nie zurück, denn hier wird die aufregendste Kunst der Welt gemacht.

Peter Frank ist Kunstkritiker für die *Huffington Post* und ehemaliger Rezensent für das Magazin *Angeleno* und die *L. A. Weekly*. Als Mitherausgeber für das Magazin *Fabrik* unterstützte er die Redaktion der Zeitschriften *THEmagazine Los Angeles* und *Visions Art Quarterly* und war Hauptkurator des Riverside Art Museum. Frank studierte Kunstgeschichte an der Columbia University in seiner Heimat New York, wo er für *The Village Voice* und die *SoHo Weekly News* schrieb.

Dorit Hahn ist weltweit als Übersetzerin, Dozentin, Ausbilderin und Lehrkraft tätig. Während der letzten 15 Jahre unterrichtete sie deutsche Sprache, Geschichte und Literatur an der Universität von Nottingham in England und an der Universität von Wellington in Neuseeland, lehrte Kommunikationswissenschaften an der Open Polytechnic of New Zealand und erwarb ihren Dokortitel in Erziehungswissenschaften an der Universität von Nottingham. Vor kurzem ließ sie sich mit ihrem Mann, Sohn und Hund in der Bucht von San Francisco nieder und macht es sich seitdem zur Aufgabe, ihre Kunden und Studenten für die deutsche Sprache und Kultur zu begeistern.

Christopher Kent Schumaker wurde am 2. April 1950 in Neepawa, Manitoba, Kanada geboren. Im Alter von 5 Jahren immigrierte er mit seinen Eltern nach Long Beach, Kalifornien, USA, wo er die Pfarrschule, die Grundschule und das Gymnasium besuchte. Schumaker machte 1973 einen Abschluss in Associate Arts am College of the Redwoods in Eureka, Kalifornien. 1976 erwarb er seinen Bachelor of Arts an der Humboldt State University in Arcata, Kalifornien, und 1979 seinen Master of Fine Arts an der University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Nach einem kurzen Aufenthalt in Seattle, Washington, kehrte er Ende der 1980er nach Los Angeles zurück. Von 1981 bis 1996 lehrte Schumaker Bildhauerei, Design und Zeichnen an mehreren Colleges und Universitäten in Südkalifornien.

Schumakers Wandlung von Bildhauer zu Maler, von Formalist zu Expressionist, war keineswegs geradlinig. Sie beinhaltete seine vollständige Vertiefung in die fotografischen Serien, die dieses Buch präsentiert. Ohne diese Fotografien hätte es keine Gemälde gegeben, und ein reformierter Maler hätte nicht entstehen können.



“Schumaker is one of those artists who identifies with what he does and how he does it – who lives his artmaking.”

– Peter Frank

“Maybe art is more like religion than people realize. Creativity certainly has a devotional, reverential quality. An artist’s faith must often be placed in unknowable outcomes.”

– Shana Nys Dambrot

„Schumaker ist einer jener Künstler, der sich mit dem identifiziert, was er tut und wie er es tut – der sein Kunstschaffen lebt.“

– Peter Frank

„Vielleicht ist die Kunst der Religion ähnlicher als man anerkennen mag. Kreativität zumindest hat in jedem Fall andächtige, ehrfürchtige Qualitäten. Der Glaube eines Künstlers muss oft auf unbekannte Resultate setzen.“

– Shana Nys Dambrot



GAULDIN / FARRINGTON

