

## **Interview with Thomas Hauser for EIN Magazine (China); Berlin, March 2013**

*EIN: In your photography, you shoot various things including flowers, women, female underwear, and etc. Why do you choose feminine objects? What in them attracts you?*

T.H.: It's not possible for me to explain my obsession for female underwear. Not, because I don't want to but simply, because I have no clear idea where it comes from. Certainly there are some childhood or adolescence experiences and probably also my severe catholic upbringing that are responsible for my interest in this subject. In any case, with regard to girls I am interested in their beauty - with regard to flowers I am fascinated by their rapid transience. And moreover, I am attracted to female underwear for its aura of the sexual, the repressed and the forbidden.

*EIN: What is female beauty in your eyes? Do you have a favor in some specific female body parts?*

T.H.: I am encountering female beauty practically every day countless times. As a young man I had very distinctive ideas of what female beauty is. There were only very few girls that I found truly beautiful or interesting - and they had to fit my ideals from head to toe. I think this is, because you are looking for an ideal at this time of your life. Today all this is very different. I am not looking for an ideal anymore, but I see female beauty in almost every women and every girl I meet - the beauty of youth or mature beauty or that of old age. There is a beauty that shows in insecurity, in the movement of the body or one that shows in the gaze of a women. I would even say that highest grace and beauty is found in women and in girls that are not in a conventional sense beautiful or pretty. Those who are unrestrictedly beautiful, are beautiful because they are beautiful. Female beauty is like art - a permanent occasion for delight and for despair.

*EIN: In the Amazona series, were the flowers photographed in their natural look? If not, how did you make forms for different flowers? Is it by instant thought, or preset in your mind?*

T.H.: No, my flowers are not photographed in what you would call a "natural" way. What is most natural about them (but also about the portraits) is the light. I am taking my photographs only by daylight (with a few exceptions). I just buy those flowers I like at some florist around the corner of my studio or I receive them as a gift. I then look at them for quite a while and try to arrange them in vessels of a kind, that suits them. Slowly, very slowly a composition of flowers, vessels and background arises. Sometimes this can take up to two weeks, depending on the type of flowers and on how long you can keep them. I am taking as much time as is needed to arrange everything in a way that seems convincing to me.

It is most important to catch the right moment, which is the state between the highest beauty of their flowering and their decay. All elements constituting the picture have to be engaged in a specific kind of dialogue with each other. This is, when everything becomes alive and just before it is all over - before it dies - I have to capture it by taking a photograph.

*EIN: Black/white photography is a feature in the series of both female and flowers. Why did you remove the color element?*

T.H.: I sometimes do take pictures of girls as well as of flowers in color. But color is an element of such great weight and influence in a photo, that it tends to dominate it. You can not ignore color. For what I want to express color is a disturbing factor.

*EIN: What cameras do you prefer to use for different objects in b/w and color shooting?*

T.H.: I shot my portraits, flowers and also the balloons with a 4x5 inch viewcamera. I have just purchased an 8x10 inch. The underwear-photos are taken with a 35mm camera.

*EIN: Your photos of females (November 2 P.M. and Kuenstlerinnen) look "deja vu" with those of the still lifse (Amazona). Did you shoot females in a way similar to still lifes? Is there a correspondent relationship between female and flower, chair and vase?*

T.H.: Yes, I first did the flower still lifes. I then intended to shoot the girls in exactly the same manner as I did the flowers. The whole setting is very similar: a grey or black background, a stage-like arrangement and above all the same light and the same camera. Furthermore, the vessels and the chairs have a similar function within the respective composition. I am using rather unusual vessels as vases for my flowers. As soon as I am using proper vases the flower still lifes seem very conventional and over-arranged. I like the brief and passing moment, when everything seems to be in a strange kind of untuneful harmony. The beer bottles, tins and other containers I am using for my flowers have the function to prevent my still lifes to become ordinary apartment flower arrangements. At home you would rather not use tins for your flowers. My photos are all done in my studio. The still lifes are all isolated from any identifiable spacial context. They also look different from typical photo still lifes of flowers, because I am not using artificial studio light. What makes my flower photos different from others is also, that I am not really interested in flowers (I do not even know the names of many of them). I am interested in what has to happen to flowers, so that they can generate a specific feeling in a photo. As long as I have not been able to accomplish this, the flowers have to go through quite a lot. This whole process is contained in the photos. You can see that something has happened to the flowers before they have been captured in the photo.

All this is very similar in my portrait photography - only much more complicated. I am using old chairs that I have found somewhere because they have no remarkable design and it is not easy to locate them in a specific historical period or ambiente. If the clothes the girls are wearing look a little messed up, if they are just wearing stockings and gloves or nothing else but a sweater this creates the same state of uncertainty or undecidedness I am looking for in my flower still lifes. There is a certain intimacy and closeness in expression but the poses are of a representative character. The girls are sitting on their chairs and at the same time between chairs. They are classical portraits but if you look at some more photos you will find the same women also photographed as a nude. In between you will also find them in underwear, in swim suits or in stockings. You could say that I am trying to achieve in a whole series of portraits of a girl what I am able to do in one of the flower still lifes. In this respect the flower pictures and the photos of girls are very similar. I would like to shoot girls together with flowers - but this is extremely difficult to do.

*EIN: It feels like you are presenting a powerful stillness in your b/w photos. What is "stillness" in your mind?*

T.H.: Stillness is the absence of sound and movement. And a photographic image is the perfect container for keeping such a condition. The stillness can almost act like concrete - that is what I like in photography and what I try to pack into my pictures.

*EIN: You mentioned that you enjoyed walking on the city streets of Berlin on Sunday mornings, when you will find moments close to the mood you are looking for, just like shooting portraits or still life. Is there any other particular moments you could share with us?*

T.H.: The moments I have been talking about are concerning the actual shooting of photos. I walk through the city and suddenly I see something that seems interesting to me. I then have to look at it through the viewfinder and sometimes something happens at this moment which is difficult to describe. I then see a picture and not reality anymore. In very rare moments I know exactly: this is a good picture and this will be a good photograph. All this is very similar, when I am doing portraits. While I am taking the first pictures I don't have a clear idea or feeling of what I am doing. I take the pictures and I try to direct the model to a point where I hope to find the expression I am looking for. The poses, the clothes and the light must be right. The right balance of all related parts in the picture has to be found. Then this special feeling arises. I always describe this as a state of undecidedness and insecurity. While shooting I sometimes know exactly that I have taken a good picture. These are the exciting moments. It is almost like being on a hunt and you caught exactly what you were looking for.

*EIN: Your b/w photography looks like oil paintings. Is it related to your early experience as a painter? How do you view the connection between painting and photography?*

T.H.: First of all painting and photography are simply two different devices for image production. Trained as a painter I know the difference between them very well. I never liked the sentence: "photography is nothing else but painting with light". This thought underestimates the extreme differences and the complexities of both techniques. I think my photos do not look like paintings. They are classical in their subject matter and in their composition and that's why it is easy to see them in one historical line with painting. But with regard to their aesthetic qualities my photos do not have any real resemblance to painting. I think it is the expression of my photographic works which provokes comparisons to painterly traditions (especially of the past). To me it seems that this is a helpless reaction to not knowing how to contextualize my work. When thinking about painting, I mostly think about paintings of the second half of the 20th century. And this was the period, when painting was almost unable to exist without photography. From my perspective this was one of the most exciting periods of visual arts ever because artists had various media at their disposal to express their visions.

*EIN: In the feminism theories, women are watched by men and objectified in the society. Commercial ads containing such message is everywhere in modern life. Do you agree to this perspective? How do you express your viewpoint of females in your photography?*

T.H.: No one will deny, that the image of women in our society is mostly dominated by the male gaze. And also my gaze on women is a male gaze.  
But the male gaze does not necessarily always have an objectifying character.

*EIN: Why is the model recruitment ad on your website specifically targeted at females? How oldest could you accept for shooting?*

T.H.: Women and girls are my favorite motives as a photographer. I find them very fascinating. As an artist I can't and I don't have to explain this. For my recent project I prefer models of the age between 18 and 25. They are girls and sometimes already young women and vice versa young women are still girls. Here again I am interested in states of undecidedness and transience. This is exactly what I am trying to capture in my works.  
Actually I only have one age limit : models should not be younger than eighteen. There is no other limit with regard to the age of my models.

*EIN: In what situation would you ask the models to get naked? What reaction do they usually have? Could you share a story or two?*

T.H.: If I am looking for models I usually use ads. I ask those who are interested, to check my website first and those who are still interested might get in contact with me via e-mail. I totally leave it to every model whether we do portraits only, or photos in underwear or whether I shoot the model fully naked. Only for one of my series, "Nudes", I was explicitly looking for nude models. So before I am arranging a date with a model it is already fixed, what kind of photos we do. There are no exciting stories or surprises about this.

*EIN: Besides in the studio, do you have contact with long-time models in daily life? How to maintain your cooperation? What changes did you find in models photographed more than once?*

T.H.: Most of my models I see only once. Only with some of them I had several shootings. There is no further contact. All contacts are via e-mail only. The changes you can observe in some of the models that I have photographed several times are minimal (Pearl) or can be significant (Natasha, Doro). Here the period of time between the shootings is of importance. Some of the girls I have taken photos of have become women by now.

*EIN: Why do you use balloons to represent the theme of Love? How?*

T.H.: "Love" is the title of the work - and not necessarily what I wanted to represent. But nevertheless I really like your question. The original title of the series was "Love is in the air" named after the song of John Paul Young. In German you do not say "balloon" but "Luftballon"

(air-balloon). The song title seemed too long for me and in the end "love" is what is left in the end. It is a very physical / sculptural piece of work that I like a lot. Taking a closer look at it, there is a lot of myself embodied in it. First of all, I had to fill them with my own breath. I then arranged them and took the pictures. There really is something of myself in them. Maybe the balloons are selfportraits. They almost seem to be living creatures somehow.

*EIN: In the Rauch/Smoke series, there is a lot of underwear. What relationship do you have with their owners? Why do you think they were willing to accept underwear shooting?*

T.H.: All photos of the Rauch / Smoke series are taken with the one model. My original intuition was to do a portrait series with her, which did not work out at all. When I only had her body in the picture the whole project turned into a different direction. It also turned out, that the girl shared my enthusiasm for underwear. Sometimes I bought some and at other times she brought underwear along. This series was my first photographic project.

*EIN: What's your attitude towards sex?*

T.H.: I don't have an attitude towards sex. I think you can either have sex or not.

*EIN: Would you mind tell us something about your lover/companion?*

T.H.: Her name is Susanne - and in may of this year we are together for twenty years and I love her a lot.

*EIN: Could you recommend one or two of your favorite artists to our readers?*

T.H.: One or two are not enough - here is a list of artists that I have always admired or that I am especially interested in at the moment:

Diane Arbus, Carlo Molino, Berenice Abbot, Morten Bartlett, Jitka Hanzlowa, Walker Evans, Sally Mann, Nobuyoshi Araki, Immogen Cunningham, Robert Adams, and many many more.