

Neue Familienportraits - New Family Portraits

The project *Neue Familienportraits - New Family Portraits* consists of a series of portraits that investigates, through the medium of photography, the issue of current new family constellations.

What is a family? As much as the first answer to come to mind still involves the traditional image of the trinity of father, mother and child, it is becoming increasingly difficult to answer this question in view of current social developments. The traditional concept of family has long since been joined by a variety of different family situations and personal conceptions of life. Although often marginalized, homosexual and queer couples are part of this variety – after all, today one in six gay couples lives with children. This corresponds to changing attitudes among gays and lesbians: while many of them used to refrain from even contemplating having children, today in certain circles one might even hear of the so-called “gayby boom”, in other words, a baby boom of same sex living people. The theme of this series of group portraits is families which involve same-sex partners.

The genre of the family portrait derives from a long-standing pictorial tradition that has influenced our culture – images of the Holy Family, representations of leading aristocratic families or the photographic self-portrayal of the bourgeoisie are but a few examples.

It is the intention of this portrait series, by tying in to this pictorial tradition, to highlight a new stage in social and cultural development. Borrowing from the style of conventional family photographs, these portraits aim not only to expand the traditionally defined concept of family but also to raise awareness for our stereotyped, habitual perception of such images, and thus to stimulate reflection on the forms of representation employed in the medium of photography. Snapshot and photojournalistic techniques were consciously avoided, and anything attributing an exotic status to the subjects was also avoided. Instead, the subjective, emotional and functional aspects of familial relationships are the focus of this series. It is precisely the much-disputed “natural” character of family members and their relationships to one another which these photographs aim to express, a character heightened by the constant tension brought about by the photographer’s artistic directions. This project thus links photographic conventions handed down over time to today’s current and relevant social issues. The photographs were taken with a large format camera in the private surroundings of each subject family. The aesthetic of large-format photography is to be seen, among other things, as a reference to the origins and historical development of family photography.

The project “New Family Portraits - Neue Familienportraits” was realized both in Germany and the United States. The United States – in particular San Francisco, home to world’s largest queer community, and New York, source of the legendary protests on Christopher Street – were long seen as the motor for a movement that became highly influential in Germany too. This project attempts to capture a particular point in this process of cultural exchange. An attempt will be made to “read” each culture through the eyes of the other and, in so doing, establish links and cast light on inherent contradictions.

The correlation between politics and privacy, between legal structures and emotional relations will be a thematic focus of these portraits.

In order to accurately portray the diversity of family compositions today, the broadest possible array of family constellations was chosen. In doing so, the diversity in the degrees of legal discrimination facing non-heterosexual families also becomes evident, as far as questions of insemination, adoption, and foster parenting or even tax-related issues are concerned.

Alongside the family photos, a documentary video of interviews with the parents was also created. The purpose of the documentary was to challenge the limits inherent in the medium of photography and go beyond them, and thus add another dimension of medial reflection to the project. Moreover, this also provided the subjects of the photographs with the opportunity to present their own picture of themselves and of their subjective lifestyle. To this end, five subject couples from each country were selected to talk about their lives: individual advantages and problems, the challenges posed by a heterosexual majority, conscious and subconscious decisions taken, and above all, everyday life, which is often hardly distinguishable from that of the average (heterosexual) citizen. The documentary is presented in parallel with the portraits.

Lisa Malich

Lisa Malich studied Psychology with minors in Gender Studies and the History of Science. Subsequently, she earned a doctorate in Historical Studies, examining pregnancy, motherhood ideals, and emotion-concepts. In 2010 she founded the blog “Fuckermothers”, which deals with feminist perspectives on motherhood and alternative family concepts.

www.fuckermothers.wordpress.com

www.verenajaekel.com