

## Rita Nowak

Homo Kallipygos

03.10.19 – 26.10.19

Mittwoch–Samstag, 12.00–18.00

Matthew Bown Gallery

Pohlstrasse 48

10785 Berlin

Rita Nowak's exhibition *Homo Kallipygos* is a series of photographs, of artists and not-artists, shot in Vienna, London and elsewhere. Fraternity, sorority; physical intimacy made compatible with the formality of spectacle; and the allure of the nude body are explored via the motif of the buttocks: the preferred, gender-neutral, erogenous zone of our age. The title of the show derives from the *Aphrodite Kallipygos* (aka *Callipygian Venus*), literally, Venus of the Beautiful Buttocks, a Roman copy in marble of an original Greek bronze [1]. Aphrodite's pose is an example of *anasyrma*: the act of lifting one's skirt to expose the nether parts for the pleasure of spectators [2].

Nowak's student diploma work, *Ultravox* (2004), referred to Henry Wallis's *Death of Chatterton* (1856), since when Nowak has regularly evoked the heritage of figurative painting. *Centrefold* cites an earlier pin-up, Boucher's *Blonde Odalisque* (1751–2), the image of a fourteen-year-old model, Marie-Louise O'Murphy [3]. Tobias Urban, a member of the Vienna-based artists' group Gelitin, sprawls not on a velvet divan in the boudoir but on that icon of contemporary consumerism, an abandoned faux-leather sofa, installed in a sea of mud. The title suggests that Urban, like O'Murphy, is intended as an object of our erotic fantasy; the pose is subtly altered from Boucher's original, the point-of-view is shifted a few degrees: we see a little less of the face, more of the buttocks and genitals [4].

*Game*, shot on Hampstead Heath in London, presents two women, one more-or-less nude, the other concealed under skin, fur and feathers. The title refers to both women and animals as objects of the hunt; but perhaps the deeper subject is to be found in the yin-and-yang embrace of the women themselves.

*The Chef, the Host and the Waiter* (*Der Koch, der Wirt und der Kellner*) is both a perverse tribute to the Viennese restaurant scene and a meditation on the complex, competitive nature of male camaraderie. Three employees from a single establishment wrestle with one another: in the resulting image, they form an interlocking puzzle.

In *Flower*, five women – two dancers, an artist, an actress, and a further figure unidentified by the artist – entwine to form a complex, pentamorous (five-petalled) bloom. This is a night-flowering plant whose dynamic and unearthly chromatics suggest instable ecstasies. The bodies are fragmented, silhouetted as if by moonlight, and dissolve into the surrounding darkness.

The arrangement of figures in *Mooning* is derived from a well-known Austrian underwear ad from the nineties, the *Palmers Stocking* poster (*Palmers Strumpfplakat*) [5]. It portrays three members of Gelitin (Wolfgang Gantner, Florian Reither, Tobias Urban) plus the artist Christian Rosa and designer Mundi Vondi. The title is ambiguous: it refers not just to the act of flashing, a gesture at once erotic, comic and apotropaic, i.e. designed to deter enemies; but also to the romantic potential of a night scene in which a giant gong (itself a work by Gelitin) figures.

Matthew Bown, 2019

Notes:

[1] It may be seen in the National Archaeological Museum, Naples.

[2] The goddess gazes over her own shoulder, putatively at the reflection of her own buttocks in a pool of water: a narcissistic element invented, perhaps, not by the original maker but by a sixteenth-century restorer.

[3] On the strength of the painting, O'Murphy became the mistress of Louis XV.

[4] *Centrefold* was shot in the Mud Room (Schlammsaal), part of Gelitin's show *Chinese Synthese* Leberkaese (2006). It also reflects Gelitin's own anal romance, in works such as *Ritratto Analitico* (2013), *Rehabilitated Sculptures* (2012), *Klunk Garden* (2009).

[5] The original photo was by Vienna-based photographer Mark Glassner.