



Gay Halloween in New Orleans, 2011

Trans*american Ride

Dutch artist Risk Hazekamp traveled the American South – disguised as a man

The City of New Orleans will receive the World Tourism Award in November – despite the vast damages Hurricane Katrina and the Deep Water Horizon oil spill have produced

Information on LGBT events and venues:
gayneworleans.com
grrlspotnola.com
neworleans.lesbian-nightlife.com
gayhalloween.com

• Last year in early October I started a road trip from Kansas to the deep South. I wanted to follow the 1959 route of the (white) American writer John Howard Griffin, who in his book "Black Like Me" reports of his travels as a supposedly "Black" person (with the help of medication and make-up). I decided to project his subversive idea onto the theme of gender and to travel not as a woman, but as a man.

I left Kansas in a big old Ford pick-up truck and drove southeast, through the Bible belt of Arkansas toward Louisiana. The road from Little Rock got narrower and narrower, and I was still in Arkansas when I first saw the Mississippi River. With the Mississippi, the Deep South revealed her first literal and metaphorical border. There are only a few places where you can cross it, as if the river wanted to ask you if you are really sure you wish to enter this still segregated area. The landscape changed slowly from a forest, with banners reading "Welcome Hunters!" and "We Support Our Troops" on every roadside shop, into a weird Southern France feeling, which was even more exaggerated by the change of signage from English/Spanish into English/French.

Entering Louisiana I decided to drive J. H. Griffin's route from the end to the beginning. I needed to have time to adjust to the South and I needed my "beginner's insecurity" to take the photographs at the places Griffin felt most vulnerable and insecure: the towns deep inside Alabama and Mississippi.

After two weeks of driving through woods, woods and even more woods, two weeks of cold nights when I slept mostly in the backseat of my pick-up, I decided it was time to check out the coastal areas. Between the woods and the coast are the swamps. In the morning I would wake up in a dense mist, unable to see the end of my own outstretched arm. The smell of rotten eggs combined with the presence of alligators made my imagination run wild with lynchings and other racially charged murders that took place on a regular basis not that long ago. The swamps made me shiver, but strangely enough they also attracted me; the landscape's beauty was unmistakably photogenic. I slowly moved toward the coast, and all of a sudden I found myself surrounded by huge fields of cotton that slapped the memory of slavery in my face, no matter how pretty they looked. It seemed as if a constant repelling force kept pushing me back and forth between total surrender to and complete repulsion of the Deep South.

Finally I landed in New Orleans, the city of jazz, mixed cultures, good seafood and beautiful Victorian architecture. New Orleans would be the end of a long trip that was filled with a constant awareness of possible danger, since the situation of trans* and gay people in these parts of the US is not that great. But I planned my time in New Orleans around the Halloween weekend. Everywhere you looked you saw see jack-o'-lanterns, weird skeletons hanging from balconies and other ghost-like attributes in trees. I felt at ease in my subtle disguise. Me and my beard. New Orleans, the French Quarter, Bourbon Street, it all gave me this tingling sensation. I drove around the outskirts for a while, slowly circling down-

town. After getting rid of my car I walked to Bourbon Street and immediately fell madly in love. Such an amazing place, so many people, shouting, flirting, trying to make contact. Someone dressed as the Tin Man from "The Wizard of Oz" wanted to know where I would be that evening. I just smiled at him like a little boy. I guess I was too excited to speak, afraid my voice would squeeze out of my throat like a mouse's. And then, finally at the corner of St. Ann Street: rainbow flags, gay bars! It gave me a strange mixture of feelings: the relaxation of coming home combined with the excitement of entering a gay bar for the very first time. I placed myself in the middle of the crowd and started taking pictures, watching, enjoying. After a while I felt someone was watching me. I looked around and saw this blond short-haired person staring at me. I smiled shyly and looked away. This continued for a few minutes and then she came towards me. She said: "Sorry, but I just have to talk to you. *What are you?*" (Strangely enough I did not even feel offended by the "what" in her question; it felt like a compliment.) It was the first time in all these weeks traveling in drag that someone addressed me as trans*. Till then I passed, well, I think I passed at least. Her eyes were friendly; it felt like someone finally saw me. As if I were a ghost before and suddenly her voice turned me human again. On Halloween ...



"Solitary Fruit / Swamp", 2012

Risk Hazekamp reiste undercover durch den amerikanischen Süden – als Mann

• Die niederländische KünstlerIn brach Anfang Oktober 2011 mit einem alten Ford Pick-up in Kansas auf. Von dort aus führte ihre Fahrt über den Bible Belt von Arkansas nach Louisiana, wo Risk sich entschied, der Originalroute des amerikanischen Schriftstellers John Howard Griffin von ihrem Ende her bis zum Anfang zu folgen. Dieser hatte im Jahr 1959 mithilfe von Medikamenten und Make-up seine Haut künstlich nachgedunkelt und in seinem späteren Buch, „Reise durch das Dunkel“, die Erfahrungen beschrieben, die er als vermeintlicher Afroamerikaner auf seiner Reise durch den Süden gemacht hatte.

Risk Hazekamp wandte diese Idee auf das Genderthema an und reiste als Mann durch den Süden, zunächst am Mississippi entlang. In Selma, Alabama, starteten die Fotosessions für das Projekt. Von da an legte Risk täglich morgens einen Bart an und nahm ihn erst am Abend wieder ab, wenn sie sich auf die Suche nach einem Schlafplatz machte, bis sie im November wieder nach Kansas zurückgekehrt war. Nach den Wäldern und Sümpfen von Alabama und Mississippi steuerte sie die Küstenregion an. New Orleans war einer der Höhepunkte der Reise: Ende Oktober erreichte sie gerade zur Feier von „Gay Halloween“ die Bourbon Street. Dort, in einer Homobar, wurde sie zum ersten Mal von einer Frau als Trans* angesprochen. Für Risk fühlte sich das beinahe so an, als sei sie zuvor ein Geist gewesen und die Stimme dieser Frau hätte sie wieder menschlich werden lassen. Und das an Halloween ...

ek

BEIDE FOTOS: RISK HAZEKAMP

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