

HAZEKAMP

RISK

All images courtesy of the artist and Gallery Cukkie Smei, Rotterdam
Below: Bio Drag Queens. 100x135cm, Analogue colour photograph, (2007)



I AM NOW A CAMERA

Risk Hazekamp is an artist who works primarily with photography and video. In her work, the language of cinema is directly engaged. In the earlier body of work that first brought her international attention, the cinematic language engaged was undeniably the language of Hollywood. But more recent series have seen a shift in sensibility towards a more European notion: Nouvelle Vague, French and German film.

Works from earlier series took on the issue of gender by the horns, quite literally in some cases. The images of "the West", cowboys and all the baggage that they carry in terms of gender and media constructions of gender, are prevalent.



In works that used the figure, disturbingly familiar clothing and landscape to deconstruct – or perhaps reconstruct – the idealised images of maleness and femaleness, Risk's earlier work often existed in a state of ambivalent "femaleness". Was she seeking to attain the perfect image of a lesbian Marlboro woman with tinges of a female James Dean? Or was she asking us to think about how Hollywood manipulates us? And does the bullfighter imagery challenge the sexist swagger of Hemingway or reflect a blatant admiration? Sometimes it is difficult to tell and perhaps one does not need to, since therein lies the power of the work to arrest.

In a bridging series of works, the issue of gender and personal identity was tackled even more directly as bearded androgens – she has moved into using models in addition to casting herself in her work – populate portraiture, video and what appear to be stills from films. Interestingly enough, whereas the earlier work that uses the language of Hollywood and Risk's apparent (and perhaps desired) resemblance to a young James Dean, the newer works had a strong European cinema feeling to them. "Giant" (2002) pulls no punches in referencing a mainstream Hollywood classic whereas "Liberte Pour Tous" (2005) could be a still from a cult French film that never got made.

However, in the most recent works since her decision to move to Berlin, there is a notable shift. Could it be that the city's long tradition with androgyny and gender skulduggery has seeped beneath her skin? No longer are we presented with the crisp clean framing of discussions of gender in terms growing out of a traditional American or Dutch feminist gender and sexuality perspective prevalent in artistic practice by the late 1980's, itself an assimilation of earlier feminist theory on gender and sexuality. Instead, we are offered the heady scheissegal ambiguity and complexity associated with Berlin on a continuum. From the days of its decadent birth in the late 19th century all the way through to the radical drag queens – and in-betweens – of the various anarchist squat Utopias in the divided city of the 1980's, Berlin has been synonymous with hybrids and a lack of clarity. Only the interlude of repressive Nazism put a damper on Berlin's almost innate attraction to explore all of the intersections between identity and sexual hedonism; to orgasm in as many ways and as many gender identities as possible. Berlin is the capital of sexual and gender ambiguity lacking in all commitment except to push the boundaries as far as possible in as many directions as possible.

The most notable example of this is Hazekamp's new work "Bio Drag Queens" (2007). In it we are offered a psychology of psycho-sexual chicanery that is new. Here the out lesbians, the 'biological' (usually the given English translation for 'organic' in a supermarket produce sense) drag queens pose in the sluttily make-up of boys playing at being girls. But, of course, in a twist that is very Berlin, very "Viktor und Viktoria" (1933). It's all double bluff. The imagery taps into the iconography of exceptions. We

all know that men can look like women and that women can look like men, but it is with Berlin that we frequently associate even more complicated relationships between male and female. Just as Liza Minelli partly holds our attention as Sally Bowles in Cabaret (1972) because she is a real woman who appears and behaves like a screaming queen in drag, our response to this work is deepened by its juxtaposition with drag king imagery of the same models. Just as with Isherwood's Sally, we can associate a stream of references to Berlin's subcultures with this work: the seared colours burned by rough 'n ready lighting of Rosa von Prauhheim's "Anita – Dances of Vice" (1987) through to a new generation of photographers who documented Berlin's numerous post-reunification grimy clubbing scenes.

The androgynous physicality of Risk Hazekamp – the young James Dean of earlier works – is immediately that of a female coquette. And yet, the style of the make-up and the title alone speak of a discomfort or an amusement, at the very least. Risk Hazekamp and her female companion do not, we understand from the work, feel any great need to take on a societal female identity that has welled up from deep within the fibres of their physical bodies.

This tension between the biological and the social – or even aesthetic – is echoed in other new works such as "Superman". The eponymous logo carefully constructed in hair on a female chest mainlines its point about our individual body in contrast to what we feel about it. The chasms between how we look and how we might actually want to look. And, interestingly for Hazekamp's artistic development, together with the other works in the new series, it does so with a more gritty, faux documentary style that we associate with both Berlin underground cultures and German art photography. If femininity – whatever that means – has still not penetrated the flesh of Risk Hazekamp, it seems that the history of her new home certainly has.

Risk Hazekamp was born in The Hague. She currently lives and works in Berlin. She has show works in numerous international institutions including Fundación Bilbao Arte Fundazioa, Bilbao; Fundación Rafael Boti, Córdoba; COBRA Museum, Amsterdam; Museum voor Moderne Kunst Arnhem, Arnhem; La Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris; Centre National de la Photographie, Paris.

www.riskhazekamp.nl

This page: John, 100x67cm, Analogue colour photograph, (2007) Opposite: Liberté, 120x96cm, Analogue colour photograph, (2005) Overleaf Spread: Superman, 60x100cm, Analogue colour photograph, (2007) Following page left: Liberté, 120x96cm, Analogue colour photograph, (2005) Following page right: Jack Off Jimmy, 125x130cm, Analogue colour photograph, (2001)

