



UNITY ART

das Verständnis der eigenen Position innerhalb dieser Existenz

Fotos und Texte NABIHA UND THOM, UNITY ART



Jedes einzelne Bild markiert einen besonderen Augenblick im Leben von Nabihä & Thom und symbolisiert das innerliche Wachstum und die Entwicklung im Leben des Künstlerpaares. Ausserdem ist jedes Einzelbild Teil des fast 10 jährigen visuellen Tagebuches, das sowohl als Zeitdokument eines

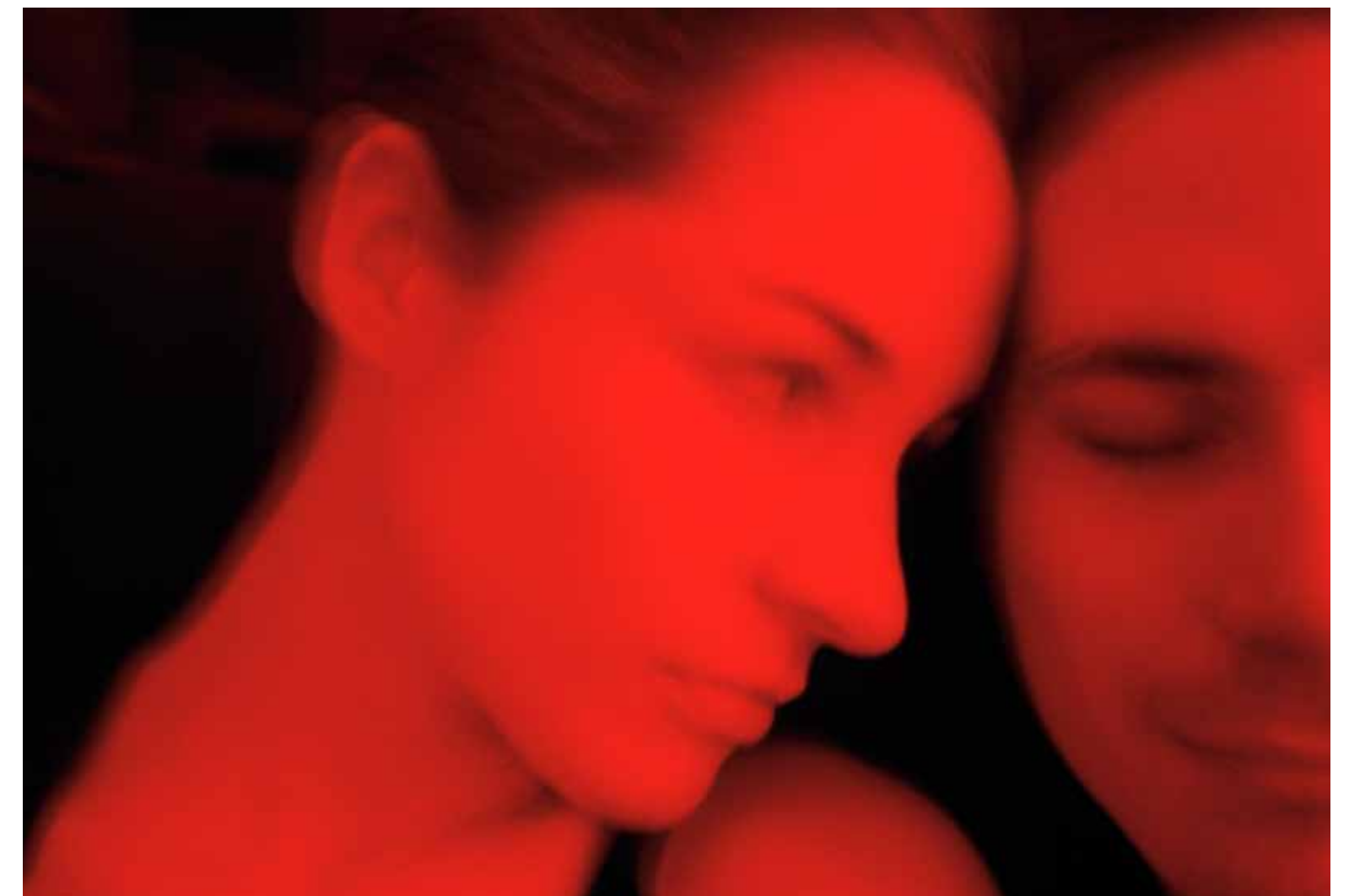
jungen Liebespaares im Alter von 21 bis 31 Jahren dient, als auch als Langzeitstudie, die im nächsten Lebensabschnitt fortgesetzt wird. UNITY entwickelt sich immer weiter..

Unity ist Grundlage unserer Arbeit. Das Wissen, selbst Teil des grossen Ganzen zu sein, ist die Voraussetzung für das Verständnis der eigenen Position innerhalb dieser Existenz. Aus diesem Bewusstsein entstehen unsere gemeinsamen Arbeiten. Man kann das Leben als eine Abfolge von Bildern im Gehirn betrachten, in der Traumbilder und konstruierte Bilder den gleichen Stellenwert haben, wie die Bilder, die wir mit den Augen wahrnehmen. Jeder Mensch hat seine eigene Wahrnehmung der Realität und damit seine eigenen Bild-Welten. Unity Art zeigt unsere. Die Grundvoraussetzungen die zu Unity Art geführt haben, durchlebten und lernten wir beide bevor wir uns trafen. Als wir uns begegneten, stellten wir fest, dass wir unabhängig voneinander zu den gleichen Erkenntnissen und Ansichten gekommen waren, obwohl wir in unterschiedlichen Welten aufwuchsen und gegensätzliche Charakterzüge aufwiesen. Obwohl unsere Wege aus verschiedenen Richtungen kamen, stimmten wir in elementaren Gedanken überein. Indem wir unsere Gegensätze annehmen, gewinnen wir das notwendige Gleichgewicht um unsere Träume mit doppelter Kraft zu verwirklichen. Wir sind wie zwei Hälften, die zusammen eins ergeben und sich gleichzeitig und

ständig weiterentwickeln. Jeder für sich und beide gemeinsam, immer wieder neu. Ständige Veränderung ist die einzige Konstante und Herausforderung im Leben. In unseren Arbeiten zeigen wir nicht nur unsere Sicht auf die Welt und Reflektionen über unsere eigene Existenz. Jedes Bild ist vielmehr Ausdruck unserer tiefen Lebensmotivation und -freude. Diese möchten wir weitergeben. Seit 1997 erstellen wir eine lebenslängliche Doppel-Selbstdokumentation, die gleichzeitig eine echte Liebesgeschichte ist: UNITY. Wir erzählen von dem etwas, wonach sich so viele Menschen sehnen. Gleichzeitig existiert davon in vielen Köpfen ein ziemlich verzerrtes Bild. Ein Dilemma unserer Zeit. Grosse Sehnsucht und der Wunsch nach perfekter Erfüllung auf der einen Seite - und Angst und Einsamkeit auf der anderen. Wir kennen die Sehnsucht - und ihre Erfüllung. Durch unsere Arbeiten möchten wir daran erinnern, dass es möglich ist, seine Träume zu verwirklichen. Unsere Bilder sind ein Spiegel unseres Lebens. So wie sich aus jedem Moment im Leben der nächste entwickelt, führt jedes (UNITY-) Bild zum nächsten.

Nabihä & Thom, August 2006

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Ohne Liebe könnte die Menschheit nicht einen Tag existieren.

Erich Fromm, Die Kunst des Liebens

In your UNITY photography project, you take pictures of yourselves and of each other. Do you always carry a camera with you?

We have almost always carried one with us for years at this point, and it has come to affect us as much as, say, wearing glasses: It hones our perception. It does hamper us when we don't have a camera. The worst is when you're not allowed to take pictures, as at palaces, temples or on bridges. There are special moments or moods that we want to capture. Knowing that this is impossible sometimes leads to a sense of loss, because we know that at this point, we remember some things only because we have pictures of them.

At heart, the exhibition is an homage to your love. Will you share with us the story of where and when you first met, and how you hit upon the idea of creating a photo documentary of being together?

We first met on Monday, January 20, 1997, at an "Independent Night" at the Goldene Krone in Darmstadt. I was wearing my blue wig when we first met, and also the next three times we saw each other at a party. Thom didn't know what I looked like without the wig until our fifth meeting, a party at the Zauberberg in Würzburg. It was very thrilling to be waiting there without makeup and with my real hair. Of course I was wondering whether he would like me the way I really am. Each one of us had done self-portraits even before we met. So it was only natural to continue doing so as a couple

The title of the exhibition, UNITY, implies both "union" and "agreement" - are you always in agreement?

Yes, in nearly all matters which affect our lives. Disunity between us only arises when things can't be perfectly co-

ordinated even though we have the desire to do something together. Basically, we both want the same thing - but it's not always possible to reconcile this with the challenges of the outside world. As we see it, many relationships fail because the two partners aren't willing to resolve a conflict completely. This requires an ability to reflect, without running from the dark sides of your own inner being - because the other person is a mirror of your own soul. This mutual mirroring inspires you to keep recognising yourself anew.

Did you always intend to exhibit the pictures?

UNITY didn't begin with the intent to publish, but only with the aim of capturing special moments in our life. UNITY is our visual diary.

Your exhibition shows "typical couple pictures" as well as staged shots, for which you get dressed up, for instance - can you tell us something about how you approach these shots?

The moment determines the picture rather than vice versa. We don't dress up in costumes for our photos - all of it was real, and the pictures are less staged than they may appear. Our preference for coloured lighting and playing with a situation may create the impression that the pictures are staged, but usually we don't change the setting and the light.

The way you two look in the photographs varies so immensely that viewers may only realise at second glance that they are always looking at the same couple. Do you deliberately play with observers' perceptions?

We are delighted that viewers may get this impression. It shows that our constantly changing ideas are reflected



„Jeder Mensch hat seine eigene Wahrnehmung der Realität und damit seine eigenen Bildwelten. Unity Art zeigt unsere.“

in our outward appearance. We do not deliberately play with observers' perceptions, but merely try to map our changing self-perception. Change is the only constant in life. Of course UNITY causes us to observe this process in greater depth. The concept of self describes a lifelong process of change: the assumption that a person always remains the same doesn't do justice to any human life. The seeds for recurrent conflicts are sown when, deep down inside, you insist that you or others always remain the same.

What is the meaning behind the mirror, which appears as an element in many of the photographs?

The mirror first and foremost represents an additional level. Each one of us is trapped in himself and can only ever view others from the outside. A mirror cancels this out. It shows a momentary facet and has many faces, like our pictures.

Sometimes the image in the mirror doesn't match the one in your mind which may serve to inspire you, especially if you haven't looked in one for a while. Apart from this, of course we are influenced by the usual interpretations of mirrors in literature.

You work with a range of photographic techniques - which technique is used when?

Most of UNITY was shot on analogue cameras. Even though we now work with digital, we still always keep two analogue cameras at the ready for this. We use a variety of cameras, films, experimental and distortion techniques like pushing, cross-developing, and overexposure, but no tripods and only rarely flash because that leads to a loss of spontaneity and lighting-based mood. We tend to move around a given space instead of placing light as needed, and take pictures manually, using long exposure times.

The resulting fuzziness and distortion will often highlight the spirit and vibrancy of a moment. Nor is our choice of colour based on a compulsory concept - we have both colour and black-and-white films in various cameras and will follow our feeling in each case, although colour does tend to predominate.

Have you developed a joint "trademark" or "signature" over the course of "Unity"? Has your photographic joint venture resulted in other joint projects?

UNITY documents an important part of our life. We are changing and developing together, and so is our photographic aesthetic. New influences originating from either one of us are quickly mirrored, adopted and developed further by the other. Our joint "signature" is evident in the fact that it isn't immediately obvious who took which pictures. Based on "Unity," we have jointly planned and realised various works since 1997, such as "Wonderland," an abstract work done in the year 2000 in London about the perception of light and colour, and "Is a self-portrait a portrait of the self?" in 2001 which consists of staged double self portraits. In 2004, we did "The Dream" in Hamburg, which tells the journey of a young woman to her true self.

Will you be continuing UNITY?

The series shown here is only an excerpt. Of course we will continue to document our change and evolution.

Thank you for the interview.