

PRESS RELEASE

Amok

André Gelpke's new artist book *Amok* is a personal commentary on the absurdities of our world. True to the artist's motto, "Photography is a whore, never faithful, always feigning", Gelpke uses the medium to formulate his subjective view of the world. Without being explanatory or anecdotal, he examines, with the help of the camera, the small, naturally occurring settings of everyday life. He photographs his family and unknown passersby and assigns as much attention to perfectly trimmed hedges and haircuts, as to unfinished construction sites or abandoned toys. The book is strewn with a small number of found photographs that Gelpke has "adopted" by choice, as he himself states, to further his thoughts. In *Amok*, Gelpke brings across the narrative affinity between photography and literature. Just like words, images are his means to organize his observances and to initiate visual and substantive ties. The title of the book reflects Gelpke's mania for taking photographs and challenging the world with his pictures—Gelpke is a seeker who shoots when the right image beholds the lens.

Along with Michael Schmidt and Heinrich Riebesehl, Gelpke is one of the most important author photographers in postwar Germany. His study under Otto Steinert at the Folkwang School of Design in Essen was instrumental for his work. As the founder of "Subjective Photography", Steinert constructed a pictorial language that was not only depictive, but individual and dedicated. In line with this artistic approach, photographers of the 1950s furthered the photographic traditions of the pre-1933 era and established a line of contemporary art photography in Germany. At the time when Gelpke was studying in Essen, Steinert focused his study on journalistic photography and so, in turn, Gelpke's early work was marked by narrative imagery. During his studies he adopted, in following Steinert's ideas, a photographic signature, one with empathy towards the objective, cool camera view.

Characteristic of Gelpke's work of the 1970s and 80s, is his use of minorities within the society, whose lifestyles and customs were in stark contrast to those of the general public. Gelpke was fascinated by the personalities he photographed for the series *Transvestiten-Möche-Rocker* [Transvestites-Munks-Rockers] (1970–71), of which he encountered three headstrong groups of people in Sicily, in the Eifel region, and in Hamburg. He was equally committed to his project *Sex-Theater*, which he undertook from 1972 to 1979, portraying protagonists of various establishments in St. Pauli, Hamburg which garnered his first international attention. Subsequent works dealt with the ritualized gestures and behavioral patterns of different social groups including carnival enthusiasts in *Karneval in Gürzenich* [Carnival in Gürzenich] (1978–79) and Germans in the series called *In Germany* (1980–2010).

With the series *Fluchtgedanken* [Notions of Escape] (1972–79) and *Der schiefe Turm von Pisa* [The Leaning Tower of Pisa] (1972–1985), Gelpke's artistic interests shift towards the search for "internal images." This refusal, in the face of raucous stimuli of a content-rich world, points to a particular state of mind: "Each of these photos is an inner image based on a reality that already hazily existed in my imagination. They are photos of a search, of unexpected sights and sudden recognitions, of holding on to, but also of not understanding. In particular, in their sequence, they convey the feeling to me of being on the trail of something in me, of approaching it and then losing it again." (André Gelpke, 1982).

With his appointment as head of photography at the Zurich University of the Arts in 1990, Gelpke's own work steps into the background. Discretely, photos arise from Gelpke's inner drag, projecting his will to face the world with images. Until then, Gelpke's quest for "internal images" permeated his work. Rarely do his photographs show spectacular events. They illustrate instead the complexity of our

existence by use of multiple image planes, collage-like and interlinked, where the well-ordered meets the uncontrollable. Gelpke makes a distinction between so-called “monologues and dialogues” – images related to his own life, and on the other hand his work, critically dealing with issues of the world. A few of these photographs appear several times in various contexts, thus illustrating Gelpke’s unrelenting reordering and rethinking about observations. The forthcoming publication, *Amok*, published by cpress and Spector Books in autumn 2014, will unite for the first time images taken over a twelve-year period, from 2002 to 2014.

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André Gelpke was born in 1947 in Beienrode/Giffhorn (Germany) and lives in Zurich and Grattino (Italy). From 1969 until 1974 he studied under Otto Steinert at the Folkwang School of Design in Essen. After his studies in 1975 he founded, together with Rudi Meisel and Gerd Ludwig, a photo agency called Visum, which he withdrew from in 1978 in order to devote himself to his own artistic projects. From 1987 to 1990 Gelpke was guest lecturer at the Dortmund University of Applied Sciences before moving to Switzerland in 1990. From 1990 until his retirement in April 2012, he was head of the Photography Studies at the Zurich University of the Arts where he deeply influenced a whole generation of students which include internationally renown artists like Olaf Breuning, Katrin Freisager, Goran Galic, Linus Bill, Shirana Shabahzi, Urs Fischer, Tayo Onorato and Nico Krebs. Auxiliary to his participation in many group exhibitions, Gelpke’s work has been exhibited in numerous solo exhibitions, including the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (1977), the Museum Folkwang in Essen (1980), the Fotomuseum in the Munich Stadtmuseum (1981), the Pompidou Centre in Paris (1984), the Museum für Photographie Braunschweig (1986 and 1989), the FotoFest in Houston (1988), the Sprengel Museum Hannover (1990) as well as in various Goethe Institutes. His photographs are, amongst others, represented in the following collections: the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, the Museum Folkwang Essen, the National Library of France, the Munich Stadtmuseum, the Museum of Arts and Crafts, Hamburg, the Pompidou Centre, Paris, the Niedersächsische Sparkassenstiftung, Hanover, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Fotomuseum Winterthur.