

Schwarzweiss / June 2013

Portfolio Klaus Kampert
Body and Soul

With his artistic nudes Klaus Kampert explores the person as a holistic being. SCHWARZWEISS spoke with him about his remarkable works.

SW: Mr Kampert, you are self-taught. How did your fascination for photography begin and how did your career as photographer develop?

Kampert: My first contact with photography was when I was around 18-19 years old. My father's old Leica Ilf, an Orwo 15 film and three tomatoes on a wooden board in the sunlight of the window sill resulted in a clear magnification: Almost black, glossy tomatoes on an almost white circle and I was totally inspired. The darkroom in the bathroom followed, then exchanges with friends, the first 6 x 6 camera and eventually the wish to learn more. Although as a child I had already spent a lot of time drawing and later painting and sculpturing, it quickly became clear that photography would become my medium. The path into professional photography was therefore set. I learnt a lot very quickly from a number of advertising and fashion photographers and soon set up my own business. Since then I work on all my subjects with enthusiasm. I still have the Leica!

Even though the motif of your pictures is mostly the naked body, your subject-matter concerns a deeper nature: You also want to get closer to the spiritual and emotional world of the person. Could you explain this approach?

I work increasingly with the triad of the body, mind and soul and I am fully aware that everybody has their own understanding of this. For me, the body is the shell of the soul and it is this that I try to question, as it lets me get close to the human being as a whole.

Clothing, fashion, make-up and decorative accessories distract me from getting to the true substance. Human body languages have different forms. On the other side the individual person can express themselves physically in very different ways, as my example, a diptych shows: The same person, photographed in exactly the same way appears angular, hard, cold, almost as if broken on the picture on the left. On the right, she appears soft and round, warm and emotional. We only see the person from behind and we don't see the face at all. Despite this we perceive both forms distinctively differently, provided that the body is naked.

Image 2 The diptych "Verwandelt/ Transformed"

Many of your models are "headless", because of their pose or because the face is in shadow. Does that not contradict the holistic approach of presenting the person as a whole, when such an integral part of the human expression is missing?

A person's head and face can contribute a lot to the content of a picture. They individualise strongly because they deliver a lot of specific information. In the case of some subjects I like to weaken this individual information in favour of generalisation, or to avoid it completely and place the focus clearly on the body language. Holism is to be found in part here, so to say: Pars pro toto or: Focussing by omitting. I do photograph people WITH their heads as well!

Geometrical structures frequently play a role in your work. That is hardly surprising regarding the aspect of "image composition", but one asks with regards to your theme, whether there is a deeper underlying meaning.

Image 3-5 From the series "Lichträume/ Lightrooms"

Image 6 From: "Ballettkalender der Deutschen Oper am Rhein/ Ballet Calendar of Deutsche Oper am Rhein"

The compositions of my pictures should be simple, so that the theme can be given complete expression. On the other hand the subject should be supported. Geometric forms are the best for this. They ensure a compositional clearness and often emphasise the depths of the space or support the technical analogies of the body.

Your series "Torsos/ Torsi" has a strong resemblance to abstract sculptures. Another series is entitled "Homage an Modigliani/ Tribute to Modigliani", who was known not only for his sculptures but also – in his time- potentially scandalous nude paintings. How important is inspiration from other visual arts to you?

Very important! I grew up with an interest in art and from early on was inspired by Turner, Rembrandt, Matisse, Moore and many others, so I always think in pictures which are influenced by others. Besides, the human body indeed offers many possibilities, but due to physical boundaries it isn't infinitely multifaceted, which means that the parallels of configuration arise time and again.

Do you plan your ideas for images or do things evolve from your work?

From a thought initially comes an idea, which – if very strong – is developed into a concept in a sketchbook. Other ideas come spontaneously and don't have time to be written down. All other ideas for images are dismissed because they either appear too weak or they aren't new and have already been photographed by someone else. Before the photo session, the set is developed as planned. However in principle, during the work with the model I adhere to my concept and allow the model and myself to flow along with other ideas or variations. So a focused direction and at the same time total creative freedom, because I never know where the idea will take me.

Image 7-9 From the series "Torsos/ Torsi"

How important is post-production using editing software in your works?

In the times of analogue photography retouching was the time consuming, laborious and expensive task of specialists. Today I can edit a picture myself according to my own ideas. Nevertheless I try to accomplish as much as possible – and economically reasonable- at the shoot. However for aesthetic reasons retouches on the body and skin are for me a must.

Could you tell us more about the technical development of the series "Lichträume/ Lightrooms" and "Mondsüchtig/ Moonstruck"?

The spatiality in the series "Lichträume" is created by the flashed projection of a shape of light using an optical spotlight. The simplest shape of the space, a square in the centre with four lines stretching out from the corners, provides the depth of the picture and lends a system of coordinates so to say, to the spectacular leaps of the acrobat. Three pictures in the series "Mondsüchtig" were created using a Plexi-screen lit from behind. The other pictures in this series are composites:

The model was photographed in a circle of 8 flash heads arranged circularly and the neon set comes from a second shot of a standard round neon tube in front of a Chromolux board. Both shots were then put together - incidentally a good example of the useful application of digital technology. If analogue photography had been used, this concept would have been much more expensive and never have been realised.

What equipment do you prefer to use?

Thanks to digital technology, today I have the process in my hands from start to finish - and to the highest standard. To this end I use everything that helps. Hasselblad H3D, different flash systems, tungsten lighting and things I've created and painted myself. I print my print editions up to A2 size with an Epson 4900 on Canson and Hahnemühle paper.

Image 10 From the series "Mehr typografische Gestalten/ More Typographic Creations"

Image 11 From the series "Körper im Raum/ Bodies relating to Space"

Image 12 From the series "Metamorphose/ Metamorphosis"

Image 13 From the series "Typografische Zeichen/ Typographic Signs"

For you commercial commissions you work with "classic" models, but in your independent work you often work together with dancers. Both groups indeed have a very conscious but also clearly very different relationship to their body. Does this have an effect on the specific work during photographing?

A universally applicable answer to this is barely possible. There are models without a dancing background with an excellent physical demeanour and a high creative potential. Dance is however not just a career but a way and choice of life. Dancers must dance and work hard from a young age in order to train the body and mind and to reach for perfection. I don't need to tell a dancer anything about a perfect picture. The dancer knows it.

How would you describe the state of contemporary nude photography? Is there anything new to tell about the human body or that is to say, can anything new be conveyed through it?

The state of current nude photography is in my opinion no different to the state of photography on the whole or indeed society. Everything relatively arbitrary, I believe. However it is not my mandate to talk about such a thing. I believe in the holistic being of the person and its unique ability to think creatively and strive towards renewal and perfection. Therefore I am very confident that artists will always find new ways to discover new things, to relate them and describe and illustrate the beauty of creation. I by all means find it increasingly exciting.

Thank you!

Interview: Martin Lehmann

Klaus Kampert, born in 1953, works as a freelance Photo-Designer in Düsseldorf. Influenced by Weston, Adams and Strand he began taking photographs during his studies in Philosophy. Having taught himself photography after assisting several well-known fashion and advertising photographers, he went into business for himself in 1981. Kampert works for leading advertising agencies and businesses. His works have been published internationally and have also been represented in collections.

www.klauskampert.com

Translation by Laurie Williams

