

A Question of Closeness

Showcase room

Reading island

The first room of the exhibition *Eine Frage der Nähe / A Question of Closeness* contains a central reading island. Visitors to the exhibition are invited to browse through books. The topics addressed in the exhibition concern all of our lives and personal experiences. The selected books invite visitors to explore, expand, or deepen their understanding of the subjects addressed in the exhibition. Related as well as broader gender-relevant content, such as queer refugeism or intersectionality, can also be found within this selection of fiction, non-fiction and graphic novels. Without claiming to be exhaustive, the book selection focuses on: Feminist history; introductory readings on patriarchal critique; intersectional, black, PoC or Islamic feminism; toxic masculinity; politics of love and sexuality; body norms and body positivity; being lesbian; being trans or TIN (trans-, inter-, non-binary); motherhood and care work.

We would like to thank the SLUB (Sächsische Landesbibliothek—Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek) for their cooperation and kind support in generously lending a large number of the books from their collections.

Angelina Seibert, *Milking*, 2022

Video, 11' 32", from the group *When I was young my mother washed me, now I wash everything else*, 2022

A breast pump tugs almost aggressively at a nipple—the sound produced by the pump is mechanical: sucking in, releasing and sucking in again. It is a strange image and at the same time of considerable normality. The breast pump serves as an auxiliary instrument that makes it easier for breastfeeding mothers to be independent on a daily basis, to have a job or simply to move freely and thus take a break from childcare. Yet the moving image of the video work *Milking* triggers numerous emotions that resonate the extraordinarily tense relationship between being a mother and being an equal.

The works *Milking*, *Green and Blue*, *Teppichklopfer*, *No Mistakes* and *Towers* belong to the group of works *When I was young my mother washed me, now I wash everything else* (2022), for which Angelina Seibert received the diploma award of the Friends of the Academy of Fine Arts in 2022. In the exhibition *Eine Frage der Nähe / A Question of Closeness*, the group of works is shown distributed throughout the building. There are specific elements that indicate the togetherness of the works: a bare bottom, an ornamental carpet beater whose shaft becomes a phallus, and endlessly piling towers of laundry...

- Care work
- Gender pay gap

Liliana Zeic, *Sourcebook*, 2020–

Photographs, straw sculpture, drawings, publication

Portrait of Narcissa Żmichowska, Sourcebook no. 9, photography
Wahlverwandtschaften #3, Sourcebook no. 24, meadow straw, rope
Wahlverwandtschaften #1, Sourcebook no. 25, photography
In each of these pairs, one would masculinise herself outwardly, Sourcebook no. 6, photography
2339 letters 8 574 pages, Sourcebook no. 40, photography
Useful knots, Sourcebook no. 36, photography
The Berry Maids #1, Sourcebook no. 3, photography

The ongoing work *Sourcebook* represents an artistic archive of emancipative and non-normative Polish women's history, which Liliana Zeic began researching in 2020. Drawing inspiration from stories and literary material, Zeic forms new artistic works, photographs or straw sculptures. These are stories that have occurred despite the reactionary and conservative stance of various governments throughout Polish history, and predominantly include non-heteronormative, lesbian or polyamorous love stories, but also parables and references hidden

in fairytales. Only with the help of the publication that accompanies the works can the original stories be deciphered in the new works.

Thus we can immerse ourselves in the story of the Polish author and feminist Narcissa Żmichowska (1819–1876) or the story of the then 14-year-old Slawka Walczewska, who in 1974 set out independently to learn more about feminist movements as her environment in Poland provided no access to these topics—until the so-called *New Woman's Survival Catalog* (1975) offered her 'first aid'. Or we can learn about three lesbian couples and their struggle in having to represent a masculine and a feminine counterpart in their relationships within the society of the 19th and early 20th century—if they revealed their relationships at all. Lastly, the Berry Maids, fairytale characters from the stories of the children's author Maria Konopnicka, lead us to the love story between the author and the Polish painter Maria Dulębianka, which was rejected by their families during the beginning of the 20th century. These Berry Maids, who live secluded from the world in the 'kingdom of the forest', seem like fairytale parables for the early emancipatory attempts to break free of the socially prescribed careers of women: an almost obligatory marriage and expectation to start a family.

→ Herstory

Ksenia Kuleshova, *Ordinary People*, 2018–2022

Elena Grigor'evna Gusyatsinskaya (73) in her living-room. She is openly gay and she holds a private archive of LGBT-media issued in Russia from 1990s, Russia, Moscow, 11/04/2019

This photograph in the photo series *Ordinary People* by Ksenia Kuleshova shows the Russian woman Elena Grigor'evna Gusyatsinskaya at the age of 73 sitting at her desk in her living room. Elena Grigor'evna Gusyatsinskaya is openly lesbian and living in Moscow, and took the initiative to build a private archive of LGBT content in the 1990s. During her research and photographic documentation, Ksenia Kuleshova worked with this archive. Additional photographs from the *Ordinary People* series can be seen in the Great Hall on the upper floor.

The first room of the exhibition *Eine Frage der Nähe / A Question of Closeness* in the immediate vicinity of the entrance hall is dedicated to the importance of archives. Above all, archives with a focus on collecting feminist or queer content are mostly founded and maintained non-publicly, voluntarily or of one's own initiative. The special and courageous commitment of individuals and their efforts to establish the networking that is often essential for survival, which enables people to follow their own paths towards self-determination and emancipation even under the adverse conditions of misogynist and homophobic regimes, is the focus of the room.

- Herstory
- Safer space
- Empowerment

Entrance and staircase

Irène Mélix, *Hairy wall*, 2017/2023

Electrostatic wall flocking with synthetic 6mm-hair

For the exhibition *Eine Frage der Nähe / A Question of Closeness*, two wall sections of the Kunsthau have been covered with hair by Irène Mélix. The walls in the entrance area and the upper staircase now appear to be growing artificial hair.

"Hair not only has an insulating and warming effect, but they are also nerve endings on the outside of the body. They go out to feel. They move when they are blown upon, they alters their surface. They are soft and can be stroked. But short hair is also stubborn, it grows back again and again. Hair is a component of social norms, in some parts of the body it is highly desirable, in some parts of the body it is notoriously eliminated. From a feminist perspective, uncontrolled hair growth threatens the social order." (Irène Mélix)

Nevertheless, for Irène Mélix, the hair on the wall is far more than just a tangible symbol of body standardisation and queer-feminist body positivity. For the body, here with its hair is standing on end, has long been the object of investigation in Irène Melix's artistic works. The wall metaphorically represents the body of the institution and a system that is always shaped by the gender regime; this applies equally to the private home and the public institution. At a wall, inside and outside meet, forming protective spaces and serving as a partition—the wall makes the "private" private and the "public" public. For many of the protagonists whose voices are heard in the exhibition *Eine Frage der Nähe / A Question of Closeness*—either as artists or as the subjects—the question of whether they are inside or outside, outed or closeted, is of existential importance. Some of their realities are in countries whose regimes radically reject their lifestyles. The walls are shelters for safe spaces, but also systemic walls that cannot easily be breached. The blackness of the artificial hair on the wall is reminiscent of mould, most of it spreading from the corners—perhaps the mould of an archaic system in need of renovation?

- Body positivity / Body regime
- Patriarchy
- Safer space

Foyer / Cafe

Irène Mélix, *lavender songs*, 2018

Audio piece, DE: 92', EN: 104', research, script, concept: Irène Mélix, direction, sound: Antje Meichsner, editing: Anna Erdmann, voices: Ulla Heinrich, Rosa Klee, Irène Mélix, Antje Meichsner, Translation: Olga Hyrckowian

A pub evening on a sultry night turns into a lively party. Visitors to the bar are Olga Rado, Mette, Eri and other book characters. Women* sit together at tables, smoke and order beer at the counter, Fräulein Dr. Südekum sits in a corner and tries not to attract attention. An exuberant, familiar atmosphere dominates the room. Attempts for contact buzz through the air. No one seems to notice the scorpion climbing up the wall behind the bar. Women* who love women* meet here. They flirt, kiss, make love, talk, dance and write lesbian Herstory.

The audio piece *Lila Lieder / lavender songs* can be heard in the exhibition *Eine Frage der Nähe / A Question of Closeness* on the steps of the Foyer & Cafe in the Kunsthau, in both German and English.

- Herstory
- LGBTQIA+

Pavillon

Liliana Zeic, *Strong sisters told the brothers*, 2019

Video, 30'00"

The video work *Strong sisters told the brothers* pays homage to key historical poetic-political manifestos written since the 1970s to give a strong voice to lesbian and queer communities (The Radicalesbians: The Woman Identified Woman, 1970; Lesbian Avengers: Dyke Manifesto, 1992 or Queer Nation: The Queer Nation Manifesto, 1990). Liliana Zeic has processed the text fragments of the US-American pamphlets, which, for example, were distributed as handouts by the collectives at demonstrations, into a text collage in Polish. The thoughtful appeals attest to traumas and injuries, but also to their anger and frustration in reaction to the painful experiences of homophobic and structural violence. Thus, within the partly controversial historical texts, there are also sentiments that see counter-violence as a response to the ongoing brutal violence*. Liliana Zeic processes these historical quotations, which today can, tragically, be related to the oppression of queer communities in Poland and Eastern Europe, and brings them from the street into the artistic space. For her, it is precisely the art institution that offers a safe place for the historical awareness of an ongoing struggle for individual self-de-

termination, which would not be condoned in the Polish public domain.

The title of the video refers to an experience that many have had within their families: strong brothers explaining the workings of the world to their sisters—a perpetual system of explaining and listening, in which the roles of patriarchy seem to have been distributed for centuries. Liliana Zeic breaches this narrative with her title and her work, giving the sisters the right to speak and the power to define oneself. The voices of the ‘strong sisters’, which become audible in the collage of texts, report on diverse experiences of social barriers, a more difficult self-discovery, violence, oppression, and the disregard for human rights of self-determination and appreciation—thus is also a highly emotional and agitated call for solidarity, acceptance and mutual compassion.

* The curators view the, in parts drastic, demonstrative appeals critically: violence must never be considered a solution.

- Toxic masculinity
- Mansplaining
- Privileges
- Heteronormativity
- Dominant society
- Positive self-designation / appropriation

Parquet hall

Angelina Seibert, *No Mistakes*, 2022

Video, 3’ 26”, from the group *When I was young my mother washed me, now I wash everything else*, 2022

In slow motion, a carpet beater, similar to one you may remember from your grandparents’ household, slaps a bare bottom. But instead of leaving painful skin behind, the tool shatters into a thousand pieces—luckily! For Angelina Seibert, the carpet beater with its curved and intertwined ornamentation symbolises infinity: continuously, the beater tries to spank the bottom. A gesture of chastisement—one was not obedient, one was not virtuous enough... physical or corporal punishments are means that are frowned upon today. Yet it is the metaphor of a patriarchy that at times very persistently tries to beat her, which the artist transfers into the works *Green and Blue* and *Carpet Beater*, but certainly not without a wink.

The works *Milking*, *Green and Blue*, *Teppichklopfer*, *No Mistakes* and *Towers* belong to the group of works *When I was young my mother washed me, now I wash everything else* (2022).

- Care work
- Gender pay gap
- Patriarchy
- Toxic masculinity

Irma Markulin, *Nouvelle Vague*, 2021–

Linoleum cuts

In her graphic and painterly work, the Bosnian artist Irma Markulin explores the representation of female characters—and in this particular case, their representation in the French films of the *Nouvelle Vague* of the 1960s. The films she has selected are all by male directors, who have designed the roles for their female leads around being the lover, the con artist, or perhaps even the sex worker. At the same time, these contradictory or “rescuable” film characters that find themselves in conflict with the conventions of their time, are not only the heroines of these films, but also role models for feminist generations. Have these deliberately one-dimensional characters become ones of multidimensional resonance? Having grown up with the female characters from these films, Markulin finds several feminist discourses within the overlapping of the filmic roles and the actresses, which have formed the foundation of various gender-political movements. One woman in particular had a decisive influence on the emancipation of this period, and she is the only woman included in the series who was not an actress: Simone de Beauvoir.

- Binarität / Gender binary

Irène Mélix, *Eine Stunde für uns, eine Stunde für unsere Familie, eine Stunde fürs Leben!*, 2021

3 embroidered strike flags

The three embroidered flags bear the strike slogans used by the predominantly female workers in the Saxon textile factory of Crimmitschau when fighting for the 10-hour day, from August 1903 until January 1904: “One hour for us, one hour for our family, one hour for life!”. Similar to a monument, the flags are meant to commemorate the workers of the region—in particular their courage to stand up for their own rights, in a time when the economy had begun to put increasing pressure on

the workers. Especially within automated and modularised production settings, workers are replaceable, and production efficiency must be constantly increased—meaning that those who do not cooperate can quickly be threatened with replacement. However, the sentiments of the strike are still a social demand today: more time for social life, for the family, for oneself! At the same time, the work also reflects the moment when women* had to fight for the right to work in the first place. However, this was the starting point of a double burden—whilst women* were now also able to earn money or pursue their own careers, the responsibility of caring for the family, housework or child-rearing was mostly unchanged for women* and mothers within the family structure.

- Feminist strike
- Herstory
- Gender pay gap

Cinema

Irène Mélix & Rosa Klee, *aria fermata—Chant of a washing machine*, 2019

Video, 9’20”, notation & composition: Rosa Klee

rumpsch, rumpsch, rumpsch. Anyone who has a washing machine in their home knows these sounds only too well—and yet has perhaps never listened to them attentively. In the video work *aria fermata*, Irène Mélix interprets the washing machine’s song according to Rosa Klee’s composition—the notation can also be seen on the pedestal.

The work was created for the Lyon Biennale 2019, which took place in Lyon’s Fagor Brandt factory. Among other things, washing machines were produced in this factory, where 1000 workers* worked in the 1980s. The research on this place revealed a lot about the economic mechanisms of the factory: for example, a so-called ‘lift music’ that was played in order to not only maintain the production speed, but even to creep it up, or curved mirrors that were used to monitor the workers on the assembly lines. Today, this factory is at a standstill, because production has been moved to more economically profitable foreign countries (first Poland, then Algeria). With *aria fermata*, Irène Mélix resumes a new form of production: she does not replicate the sounds of the assembly lines on which the washing machines were produced, but takes up the specific song of the product. This not only reminds us of the labour realities of large factories, which can be viewed critically, but also the migration of the factories that caused jobs to disappear. She also takes it further: What does the washing machine symbolise, for whom does it rotate and who is caught in the recurrent routine of making the washing machine spin? The *aria fermata* is thus also a lament, the spin cycle even a ‘rage song’ for the invisibility and devaluation of housework, which historically (but sometimes still) is mainly taken on by women*—which brings with it the unfortunate triad: the gender pay gap, gender care gap and gender pension gap.

- Feminist strike
- Care work
- Herstory

Great hall

Angelina Seibert, *Towers*, 2022

Towels, from the group *When I was young my mother washed me, now I wash everything else*, 2022

The towers of neatly folded towels, burp cloths and flannels are stacked metres high. The bright colours of the washcloths can in no way conceal the nerve-racking thought of never-ending housework. In her artistic work, Angelina Seibert deals with her personal role as a mother of three children. The challenge of running a household as a mother of three and at the same time, working as an independent artist, opens up a broad spectrum of experiences of adversity, barriers and politics for Angelina Seibert, from which she draws upon artistically.

With multimedia works and performances, in which she often works with the motif of repetition, the exercise of maintenance work or the involvement of her family as actors, she makes the realities of housework, care work and education visible: What does it mean to be a good housewife, mother and at the same time a good artist? What expectations must you live up to? What protocol does one have to follow? Which of our own patterns and traumas accompany us and how are these passed on to the next generation?

The works *Milking*, *Green and Blue*, *Teppichklopfer*, *No Mistakes* and *Towers* belong to the group of works *When I was young my mother washed me, now I wash everything else* (2022).

- Care work
- Gender pay gap

Angelina Seibert, *My father ignoring Tracey Emin*, 2016

Linoleum print, from the series *Miami Art Basel*, 2015–

The large linocut takes an exhibition situation as its theme: in the foreground, a dark, male figure turns his back on the viewers. We are ignored by him. On the wall in the background, there are sketches and paintings hanging on the wall. These are also ignored by the figure. *My father ignoring Tracey Emin* is the title of the print and it is now explained that the enigmatic figure is the father of the artist Angelina Seibert. Together they visited the Miami Art Basel in Florida. While the artist was inspired by the works of the British artist Tracey Emin, which here are reproduced as silhouettes in the background of the picture, her father walked past the wall without paying the slightest attention to Emin’s works. Tracey Emin is one of the icons of the Young British Artists who shaped the Western art scene of the 1990s. Her work is explicitly dedicated to feminist-emancipatory concerns and female* sexuality. With the unambiguous yet multidimensional question “What do you want of me”, Emin provocatively interrogates the spectrum of expectations of women*, from sexually desirable, to motherly and caring, and ultimately to be just as successful professionally.

In the exhibition *Eine Frage der Nähe/A Question of Closeness*, Angelina Seibert’s linocut not only pays homage to the British artist’s feminist work—much more, it depicts something that still makes it difficult to achieve feminist (and queer) objectives today: the ignorance of those it does not affect. Thinking that equality, sexual diversity or liberation only affects women*, those discriminated against, or minorities, means that these discourses increasingly only exist in restricted circles and thus have less chance of success. But it does not only concern those who are affected by inequality or problems associated with their identity. It concerns everyone, because we all live amongst one another.

- Patriarchy
- Toxic masculinity
- Mansplaining
- Privileges
- Powersharing
- Ally / Allyship

Lisa Maria Baier, *Kulisse*, 2021

Installation for the public space [public storage], wood, fabric, plastic, iron, tablet and documents

Documentary film by Otto Kronschwitz, *Die Kulisse—Dokumentarfilm*, 2021, 11’24”

Open Letter to the Mayor of the City of Görlitz and Statement on the Dismantling of the Kunsthaus Dresden, 2021

Lisa Maria Baier’s work *Kulisse* was developed as an artistic work for the public urban space in Görlitz. This city is known for its extensively preserved historical building stock and closed Gründerzeit style buildings, a circumstance that has led to its use as a film set since the 1950s and its establishment as a location for film productions. Görlitz is also unusual as a city because the German-Polish border has passed, along the Neisse River, through the city since the end of the Second World War in 1945. The eastern parts of the Neisse, separated by the border, form the independent Polish city of Zgorzelec.

With the ascending steps, reminiscent of a grandstand, Lisa Maria Baier bases her work on the audience rows of cinemas or theatres. The upholstered seats are also taken from the houses of ‘showbiz’. But when we try to sit down, we are confused – we are sitting the wrong way round. No view of the stage, but only of the back of the heads of those also sitting the wrong way round, and: of a large demonstration banner with the Polish words “ABORCJA BEZ GRANIC” (ABORTION WITHOUT FRONTIERS) and “PRAWA KOBIECI” (WOMEN’S RIGHTS).

The work *Kulisse*, which was developed as a project of art in public space, for *Görlitz Art* in Summer 2021, reflects on the city of Görlitz as a famous filming location, as well as on the worsening situation for women’s rights in the immediate Polish neighbourhood. During the development of the work for *Görlitz Art*, the abortion law in Poland was massively intensified in October 2020 and turned into a de facto ban on abortion, even affecting minors. Abortion is only legal if the pregnancy is the result of rape or if the mother’s life is in danger. In the case of abortion after rape, women must be able to prove the abuse with an official certificate. For abused or raped women, this would mean going from one type of hell to another. Such legislation constitutes an extreme restriction of people’s rights over their own bodies. In Germany, Section 218 of the German Penal Code, which prohibits abortion after the implantation of the foetus, is likewise controversial.

With the artistic work that was to be placed in front of the former town hall in Görlitz, which has been closed since 2004 and is not far from the border, Lisa Maria Baier wanted to shift the focus from the architectural facades (used as sets for historical films) to the immediate realities of women*’s lives and the current debates. The motif on the banner situated above the grandstand is also taken from a film—a documentary about the demonstrations against the restriction of individual rights of self-determination in Poland. Sitting backwards on the grandstand, the audience is asked to turn away from the stage (where the show usually runs and the action takes place), to face the political message of the banner and to not look away when essential rights are threatened.

The installation *Kulisse* was rejected by the mayor for culture, who also acted as curator of the *Görlitz Art* festival, because it did not correspond to the submitted description of the work, which had Görlitz as an international film location as its theme, and demanded that the artist dismantle the work or else it would be removed. An appeal by the artist against the removal of the work was rejected by the Administrative Court of Dresden as well as the Higher Administrative Court of Bautzen in September 2021. With great concern about the repercussions of this way of dealing with the fundamental values of art, as well as the work and the artist, the Kunsthau Dresden published an open letter during the dispute and supported the artist in the dismantling and storage of the work. *Kulisse*, which is still the subject of a legal dispute, is being shown in the form of public display in the exhibition *Eine Frage der Nähe / A Question of Closeness*, in order to provide an appropriate and beneficial platform for the artist's original aim of using art to respond to current issues and to react to the discrepancy between facades and reality. A documentary on the conflict over the artwork, as well as the open letter to the city of Görlitz and the Kunsthau's statement on the preservation of the work, both by Christiane Mennicke-Schwarz (the director of the Kunsthau), can now be seen on the accessible grandstand.

- §218
- Patriarchy

Liliana Zeic, *Blue blood. On TV I'm always a queen, 2012*

Photographic diptych

Two photographs show Liliana Zeic dressed in the traditional attire of European royalty: crown, sceptre and purple cloak. Her face is matte, her cheeks powdered red. Between her legs, however, there is blood—blue blood. Undoubtedly, this is the depiction of a noblewoman. Noble means that privileges already exist from birth. With much irony and cynicism, Zeic is commenting on the increasingly popularised enthusiasm for traditionalist movements in Poland, ancestral dynasties, principalities, nobility and coats of arms. The phrase of blue blood goes back to a historical appreciation of pale skin anchored in Europe. Pale skin, resulting from a lack of exposure to sunlight (i.e. due to not having to perform outside work), results in the venous blood appearing blue on the surface of the skin. But what justifies nobility, or the privileges granted with birth, both then and now?

Misogyny—the irrational discounting of women* and FLINTA persons—is also rooted in the moment of birth. Here too, the question is: what actually justifies misogyny? What makes a person born into one body less valuable than another person born into another body?

In her self-portraiture as queen, Zeic shows herself bleeding blue. But it is not just any blood that flows here—it is menstrual blood. A blood that has been subject to a profound taboo for decades, and one that feminist activists, sociologists and even influencers are still struggling to de-taboo and normalise today: for some 30 years, the liquid used to demonstrate the absorbency of menstrual pads in TV commercials was not red, but blue. Monthly bleeding is not only an everyday predicament that can be at least partially absorbed and made invisible by sanitary items, menstrual bleeding is such a great societal challenge that its representation is still taboo today.

- Body positivity / Body regime
- Privileges

Liliana Zeic, *Self-portrait with borrowed man aka 'I am a Pole so I have polish responsibilities', 2017*

Wallpaper

In the large mural *Self-portrait with borrowed man aka 'I am a Pole so I have Polish responsibilities'*, Liliana Zeic presents herself lying in a bed, life-size. While she is embraced from behind by a middle-aged cis-man, the red eagle, which was reintroduced as a state symbol in the flag of the Republic of Poland in 1989, is printed on the white oversized bedspread. This emblem was last introduced and used during the Sanacja, which was the authoritarian regime of the Second Polish Republic between 1926 and 1939. Whilst Zeic's gaze is clear and confident towards the camera, the 'borrowed man's' gaze drifts blankly into space. There is neither affection nor tenderness perceptible—but only an ideology that serves the meaningless fulfilment of outdated norms and lifestyles, and does not tolerate any other way of life than the heteronormative. In the meantime, to conform to right-wing conservative social norms, one needs the emblems of a bygone era and the proverbial 'man in bed'. The obligatory fulfilment of these outdated norms is visually taken to absurdity in the *Self-portrait with borrowed man*.

- Heteronormativity
- Binarität / Gender binary
- Cisgender and transgender

Liliana Zeic, *Zeic, 2021*

Name change, photography, change request

On 29 January 2021, Liliana Zeic applied for a name change at the Department for Correction, Addition and Invalidation of Civil Records and Change of First and Last Names at the Civil Registry Office in Wrocław. In the waiting room of the registry office, a photo was taken to accompany the two-page document that the artist submitted during her application. The photo and the application combine with the performative act of changing the name, in the conceptual artwork *Zeic*. Liliana Zeic presents four main justifications for being permitted to give up her paternal name Piskorska and return to the name of her female family members.

In Poland, as in Germany, the law on names, which dates back to the Prussian General Land Law of 1794, stated that until 1964 the bride was to take the husband's name upon marriage. Women, who in the late 18th and early 19th centuries had hardly any say of their own in public life, were thus 'generously' allowed to share the name and status (because names at that time were derived from professions and positions) of the spouse. The loss of one's own name was, and to some extent still is, a momentous sign of submission and self-sacrifice. In the 20th century at the latest, when women* became permitted to build artistic careers after the opening of art colleges, and started to work in arts and crafts, for example to design patterns for textiles or to study weaving at the Bauhaus in Dessau, giving up one's own name upon marriage carried hard repercussions for their career. Not only did many halt their careers here in favour of raising a family, but the work of the young female designers and artists after marriage is also more difficult to locate in the archives, which are organised by name. Facing this prospect, Liliana Zeic states four different reasons for her request for change, which are historically motivated, political but also highly personal, and reflect a gender-political barrier whose conventions continue to have an effect today.

- Herstory
- Heteronormativity
- Patriarchy
- Privileges
- Binarität / Gender binary
- (Neo)Pronouns

Liliana Zeic, *Well written act, 2019*

Draft law, printouts, videos, showcases

Last year, in 2022, President Vladimir Putin signed a new law that cracks down on LGBTQIA+ communities. A law had already been passed in Russia in 2013 that banned the positive portrayal of 'non-traditional sexual values' in the presence of children and young people. The scope of this law is now extended to people of all ages and to public media channels. This section, known as the LGBTIQ Propaganda Act, is designed to exclude minors from any debate or coverage of queer-feminist concerns, even on the internet. This legislation, which triggered significant waves of homophobic violence, is the subject of Liliana Zeic's work *Well written act*. In a gesture of outrage, Zeic responded to the rigid law that was supposedly put in place to protect youth and children. To mirror the increasing restriction of self-determination in Poland as well, she drafted a rendition of the 2013 Russian law to fit Polish legislation, thus reflecting the fact that many of Poland's political decisions are modelled on that of Russia. The draft law rewritten by Liliana Zeic is critically contextualised through academic analysis, commentaries by legal experts and statements by experts on Sociology and human rights. Today, the Polish government is one of the political authorities that most fiercely opposes the acceptance of LGBTQIA+ people, for example by imposing geographical exclusion zones for queer people.

- LGTBQIA+
- Toxic masculinity
- Patriarchy
- Dominant society
- Heteronormativity

Ksenia Kuleshova, *Ordinary People, 2018–2022*

Photo series, wallpaper, video

Couples cuddling in bed or in the shower, sitting on the edge of the bathtub and brushing their teeth together, or dancing freely in a seemingly never-ending party night—Ksenia Kuleshova's photographic portraiture depicts a loving everyday life, evening drag queen performances or quite ordinary moments of immersion. Ksenia Kuleshova's photo series *Ordinary People* shows the protagonists in her photos for exactly what they are: ordinary people. And yet the photographs conceal stories in which each of them is also a hero. They are heroes for standing by themselves, their sexuality and their lifestyles, even though the political environment denies a legal framework for this life-defining self-determination, making it a problematic, illegal and even life-threatening endeavour. Since 2018, Ksenia Kuleshova has been accompanying and documenting queer people in Russia and Eastern Europe who, despite the unrelenting homophobia within politics and reli-

gious leadership, are not only seeking personal happiness and love, but are also working to create an LGBTQIA+ community beyond their private sphere. Each photo is accompanied by a text introducing the respective individuals and their initiatives.

The photographs are placed on a wallpaper that shows the view of a window from which a rainbow flag hangs—the symbol of the LGBTQIA+ community. Indoor spaces are often the venue for all of these stories, because where there are hardly any safe, public spaces for queer people, private spaces are the only shelters for these heroes. Raising the flag also represents the simple, courageous but sometimes dangerous gesture of crossing the boundary between the starkly separate realms of the private interior and the political exterior.

- Safer space
- Transvestite / Drag queens / Drag kings
- LGTBQIA+

Stone hall

Liliana Zeic, *Benefits of BDSM for trauma survivors & Meristems, 2022–*

Intarsia inlay from burr wood

Delicate lines and shapes stand out from the fine woodwork. Sometimes at a first glance, sometimes only on closer inspection, the illustrations are suggestive of erotic and sexual acts—in some cases even more explicit acts from the fetish or BDSM scene (bondage and sadomasochism)¹. However, the people involved are all lesbian and queer actors: a butt is spanked, masturbation is watched and penetration with dildos is performed. Anyone who thinks of these as sexual transgressions is mistaken, because BDSM is defined by clear contracts of mutual consent, in which the approach of pain and pleasure is not based on conventional, patriarchal patterns of power, but on agreement and reciprocal trust. It is about being able to let go, and about safeness and safe spaces. Liliana Zeic's intarsia are dedicated to the representation of non-normative sexuality and the liberation of the queer body.

Intarsia are based on traditional wood inlay techniques, in which the patterns within wood—annual tree rings or burrs—are used as decorative elements, especially for furniture surfaces. Burrs are caused by viruses, fungi or even mechanical damage to the wood. In reaction to the disturbance, a kind of wooden scar tissue tries to grow around the wound and close it. Visually, a darkened ridge is left, a natural scar of the tree. In this protective and healing function of the tree, Zeic seeks an analogy to humans, whose cells also produce scar tissue and whose emotional traumas require a comparable therapy. In the series *BDSM Benefits for Trauma Survival*, Zeic explores the potential of queer BDSM practices in trauma processing.

The series of works *Meristems*, from which only one work is exhibited here, also refers to non-binary forms of fertility and cell growth in plants, which enable adult plants to form a wide variety of organs through cell division.

- 1 BDSM, short for BD = Bondage & Discipline, DS = Dominance & Submission and SM = Sadism & Masochism, is a collective term for certain types of sexual behaviour and experience. All variants of BDSM have in common that the participants voluntarily give up their equal position towards an altered power structure. The submissive partner gives up a certain part of their autonomy to the dominant partner (power exchange). A mandatory principle of any BDSM or fetish practice is that all physical and/or sexual actions are consensual, i.e. mutually agreed upon.

- Safer space
- Empowering

Irma Markulin, *K.u.K. Microstories, 2016*

Photo prints on plexiglass in light boxes

15 softly glowing glass boxes show historical pictures of young women. The black-and-white photographs get their luminous quality from cut-outs—fine carvings through which the light from an illuminating source behind them shimmers. But there is something else shimmering—another image shines out from behind the image in the foreground. In what way do the two photographs overlap?

Irma Markulin's artistic practice is closely linked to research in archives. For the work *k.u.k. Microstories*, her journey led her to the Vienna State Archives, on one hand to research the Imperial and Royal period in Bosnia, and on the other to search for traces of the history of her own family, who lived between Austria and the northern Bosnian town of Banja Luka.¹ During the arduous but fruitful search for family photos, the artist came across numerous images of Muslim women or peasant women in the archives. But the images of the women* here differ significantly. Whilst many of the early 20th century postcard depictions of women in clothing that followed religious dress codes or a folkloric dress code were intended to reflect an exoticised image of a collective Bosnian identity, the photographs of female members of their families taken at the same time show modern women, in some cases clearly liberated from traditional role models. In the superimposition of

stereotyped, orientalist depictions and photographs from the private archive, the respective storylines from a kind of fabricated history and authentic history meet. This juxtaposition elucidates how dependent the reading of history is on historical schemata and sometimes strategically handed-down clichés. What could we learn from history for queer-feminist concerns if we were to shift our focus?

1 Between 1867 and the end of the First World War, the term imperial and royal, abbreviated k.u.k. (“kaiserlich und königlich”), referred to the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy, which until its dissolution, included in addition to Austria, predominant parts of the territories of Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as present-day Romania, Montenegro, Poland (Western Galicia), Ukraine, Italy and Serbia.

→ Herstory

Irène Mélix, *Lonely hearts*, 2019–

Four-channel audio installation (DT, EN, FR, PL, RUS)

The room is buzzing with longings, desires, wishes—for passion, for love, for security or simply for an ordinary life together. There is a simple yet profound desire in the air to share all of life’s experiences with someone. In the audio clips that emanate from the corners of the room, you hear advertisements from over a hundred years ago, which were often titled “Sie sucht Sie” (“She is looking for you”). Today, the wistful writers of these personal ads, which culminate here in an expansive sound installation, would probably be called FLINTA people, or queers, or simply lesbians. But the desires articulated here are familiar to all.

In her years of research into lesbian identities and queer history, the artist Irène Mélix has compiled a collection of over 800 personal ads by lesbians and queers under the title *Lonely hearts*. She found her material in historical journals, queer archives and online platforms. The ads come from Australia, France, Kazakhstan, Germany, Poland and the USA, and chronicle a queer history of lesbians spanning epochs, that is as transnational as it is non-linear, and is often neglected even in the homosexual historiography. The anonymous and fragmented texts nevertheless portray the authors’ loves, sufferings and lives, of their economic situation, their longings and their experiences of discrimination.

→ Herstory

Vault and courtyard

Liz Rosenfeld, *Tremble*, 2020

Multimedia installation, metal tub, textile print, window print, sound, video

For the exhibition *A Question of Closeness*, the ground-level vault of the Kunsthaus is temporarily transformed into a dungeon¹ that illuminates the meaning of queer sexuality and pornography. The multimedia installation *Tremble* by Liz Rosenfeld is dedicated to the orgasmic vibrating of bodies in ecstasy, to trembling tissue, as well as to a body that does not conform to the norms of Western society. Rosenfeld is known in the Berlin *queer porn* scene as a non-binary porn performer. For the LGBTQIA+ community, queer pornography has a special significance. A diverse community of sex workers and queer amateurs is committed to replacing mainstream pornography with a diverse, sex- and body-positive, liberated representation of sexuality that is both passionate and fair for all actors—without losing the pleasure of the pornographic image in its emerging educative character. It is both about questioning mainstream pornography, which is produced primarily for a cis-male consumer and is accompanied by exploitative and at times non-consensual working conditions of the sex workers and a one-dimensional focus on penetration and ejaculation (other desires hardly feature), and about offering alternatives to this.

Queer pornography is also dedicated to sexual forms of expression such as BDSM² and cruising³, which has been established as a cultural practice primarily in the gay scene since the 1970s—mainly out of necessity as homosexual encounters could only take place secretly and discreetly. Cruising, where people, for example, went to dark parks known within the scene in search of non-committal sex, is now also more widely adopted by lesbian and TIN communities because of its cultural significance. The video, shot at the queer sex club *Ficken 3000* in Berlin, shows Rosenfeld’s body in front of so-called *glory holes*—holes in walls that are mostly used for anonymous sexual contact in sex clubs or when cruising. In Rosenfeld’s oeuvre, these holes—abstracted into circles—become recurring graphic elements from which entire worlds, hot lava flows or even self-portraits are generated. *Tremble* is accompanied by a sound loop that alternates between lustful moans and nervous gasps. The window decals on the vault and the floating textile print in the courtyard show Rosenfeld’s naked body, confronting the visitors in an oversized format with a massive body that breaks out of contemporary Western body ideals. *Tremble* demonstrates a shaking body whose eroticism and sexuality have been questioned within Western bodily norms since early modern eras.

1 In the field of BDSM (bondage and sadomasochism), a dungeon is any space that is specially prepared for such activities.

2 See footnote on BDSM in the accompanying text to Liliana Zeic, *Benefits of BDSM for trauma survivors & Meristems*, 2022.

3 Cruising is the deliberate, active and usually mobile search for sexual partners.

→ Cruising

→ Body positivity / Body regime



The terms marked with a → will lead you to relevant articles in the glossary created for the exhibition, which provides explanations of perhaps unfamiliar terms used in queer feminist communities and gender theory.

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