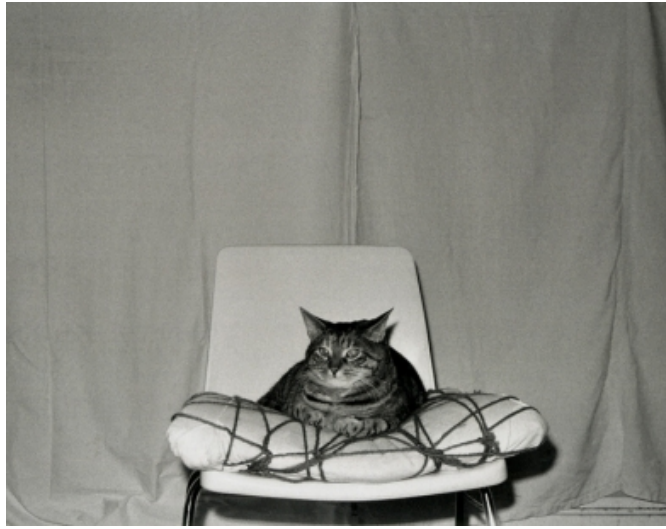


Since the 1960s Walter Pfeiffer has been regarded as a cult photographer, known for his homoerotic depictions of Zurich street life. He has carried on photographing (and making beautiful Technicolor films starring) beautiful men, beautiful flowers, beautiful whatever, pretty much on his own. It's only recently that his portraits of friends and muses, his "beautiful people," have been re-written into a historical narrative that spans the elegiac, autobiographical work of Nan Goldin and Peter Hujar. Walter Pfeiffer's photographs are recognizable not just for the omnipresent flash or the off-kilter cropping, wherein each image pictures an event before and after it occurs. A young man smokes a cigarette seductively; another, a blond in a bathing suit, opens a stage curtain, or closes it. There's a generosity and warmth in Pfeiffer's imperfect beauty, but there's also an enormous sense of drama, and energy—both created and consumed. In Pfeiffer's words, "It's not easy."

Pfeiffer's re-casting came first with a show at the [Swiss Institute](#) in New York, where he was paired with Tom Burr, and more recently, his retrospective at the Fotomuseum Winterthur, which showcased photographs, videos, and Pfeiffer's vitrine displays from the 70s to the present. An eponymous catalogue, *In Love With Beauty*, was just released in partnership with Steidl. Pfeiffer shoots fashion editorial and ads now, but carries on as an underdog. He doesn't like to leave Zurich; when he's in New York you'll find him eating at macrobiotic restaurants, shepherded from photo shoot to photo shoot by the handsomest young man in sight.

ALEX GARTENFELD: How are you doing, Walter?



ENTER  
SLIDESHOW

WALTER PFEIFFER: I can't laugh because I'm so sick. I came back from Egypt, so I thought it was hot and I went sunning. But I went on the boat and then it was so windy and cold, and I got the flu... like never before.

AG: You have to be careful.

WP: And I have to go to Paris next week for French *Vogue*...

AG: You are doing editorial during the shows?

WP: They want me to shoot Sam Webb at the Plaza Athénée, because I did my first shoot for them one month ago. They called me to do something for *Vogue Homme* and I had a model in this wonderful hotel and it came out so wonderful that they said, "Wow, we didn't know him before but Wow, wow, wow!" Now they want me for the real Paris *Vogue* in the hotel Meurice with Eva Herzigova. It will come out in May.

AG: That's a beautiful magazine. Congratulations.

*(LEFT: COVER OF IN LOVE WITH BEAUTY)*

WP: You know, I never thought I'd be able to do things like this. I dreamed about it in my youth, and they laughed at me when I was in art school. I was always in the library going through old Harper's Bazaar from the 1940s, 50s, 60s. They would ask me, "What are you looking at?" And I would tell them, "All those beautiful pictures."

AG: Things have changed. You stayed the same but everyone else has changed.

WP: I'm not changing but maybe I didn't improve even. Well, I do color. I don't even take digital.

AG: I've seen you take photos with just your little camera.

WP: Yes, you saw it! I'm everything. I'm the stylist. I'm the hair man. I'm a one man band.

AG: Do you have a cute assistant?

WP: If I want one, and if they ask me if I need an assistant. In Paris I took one—but I take a girl because otherwise I get too nervous.

AG: What's the first photo you took?

WP: It was a group photo, I had a small Polaroid, which was very cheap. I took photos and blew them up and drew them. That's why I started taking photographs, as a way to inspire my drawing. Later a friend of mine who was a real photographer encouraged me. I arranged a group sitting of my friends, the most beautiful people in the town. I was shaking and I was so nervous—that's why I always used a flash. My hand always shakes from nerves, but I hate putting [the camera] on a tripod. Anyway I arranged for this picture, and my friend took the photos and then I said, "Give me the camera!" It was very strange because in my pictures everyone looked so beautiful, but in his pictures the people were not. You could see the difference. I loved them. I love to arrange people and to direct them.