

## Liquid Loft checks in with the times: The loneliness of self-portrayal

The ImPulsTanz Festival rounds out its autumn edition at the Odeon with the bitterly witty *Posing Project B – The Art of Seduction*

Helmut Ploebst

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Alexander Gottfarb in his nude pose solo, covering the middle of his body with a cut-out from Agnolo Bronzino's painting *Allegory of Love*  
Image: Chris Haring

Following the premiere of their latest dance piece *Blue Moon, You Saw ...*, Viennese dance company Liquid Loft takes their audience into the future of the past at the ImPulsTanz contemporary dance festival held at the Odeon. Thirteen years ago, the troupe and their choreographer Chris Haring were awarded the Golden Lion by the Biennale di Venezia for *Posing Project B – The Art of Seduction*. Since then, the piece has toured in countries such as England, Spain, Sweden, China, and South Korea.

But who here in Vienna remembers exactly how this piece, which after its premiere in “la Serenissima” in 2007 was also performed at the ImPulsTanz Festival, actually worked? At the time, the jury’s statement asserted that this choreography offered a glimpse into the future of contemporary dance. We can now say with a clear conscience

that the tomorrow of yesteryear has arrived. So just how groundbreaking was *Posing Project B* really?

## **Narcissism as a cultural principle**

Now, ImPulsTanz and Liquid Loft have revived the piece to mark the company's 15th "birthday". Reprises are so rare within the independent scene that they are accorded the status of a second premiere. Thus, what we are witnessing is a remarkable example of Austrian choreography as it was conceived in the noughties – at a different venue, with the same cast, albeit matured by thirteen years, and in a changed cultural environment.

To get straight to the point: The jury was largely correct. Indeed, in the teen years of this young and anything but well-mannered century, the narcissism so affectionately but thoroughly ridiculed in the play became a widespread cultural principle. And the erstwhile inclination to posture oneself, triggered in part by social media, has evolved into what is at times a seemingly neurotic compulsion towards self-expression.

## **Controversial posing**

Today, performances like Alexander Gottfarb's foppish nude pose solo are more provocative than in 2007. Why? Because the dancer covers the middle of his body with an art book that features a section of Agnolo Bronzino's painting *Allegory of Love*, painted shortly before 1550, in which a young Cupid kisses beautiful Venus.

Oh my God, a child and a grown woman! Isn't that basically an incitement to...? As a reminder: During the noughties, art was equated to an even lesser degree with propaganda. Especially in Austria, where people have more of a tendency towards self-indulgent equanimity anyway. Perhaps the burgeoning iconoclastic cancel culture won't find the same degree of enthusiasm here in the future as it does elsewhere.

## **Bitterness in place of fulfilment**

An unquenchable longing for lust and proximity finds expression in *Posing Project B – The Art of Seduction*. Insidiously, as this desire swells, its rise brings about the exact opposite of fulfillment: The bombastic sensuality has a mechanical effect right from the start. It is from the portrayal of this paradox that the performance derives its exquisite irony, complete with the bitterness that comes with it. Gottfarb's prelude is followed by a string of magnificent solo appearances by Stephanie Cumming, Luke Baio, Katharina Meves, and Anna Maria Nowak.

As emphatically as the five figures play to the gallery, they repeatedly slip into idle states and isolation. Beautiful memories are awakened, but immediately brushed away. And no sooner does the sensual pleasure well up to the pinnacle of its sweetest delight, than the illusion is shattered, the mood shifts, and something else intervenes. Yet still, the five heroines and heroes do not give up. To the end. (Helmut Ploebst, 14 October 2020)