



ARTIST

Detlef Henrichs

TITLE

Marc, San Jose, CA, United States

DATE

1990

DIMENSIONS

23.5 in H x 19.5 in W

MEDIUM

Chromogenic Color Prints

CATALOGUE NUMBER

2008.034

CURRENT LOCATION

NA 09

DETLEF HENRICHS

BORN

1961

BIRTHPLACE

Wuppertal, Germany

GENDER

Male

CITIZENSHIP

Germany

CULTURAL HERITAGE

German

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Artist-in-Residence, 1992
Light Work Gallery, 1993

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

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ESSAYS

Detlef Henrichs gained a new sense of self confidence when he began to think of himself as a burn survivor rather than a burn victim. To be a victim was to be persecuted, a person who suffered, or one who had been taken advantage of through an unfortunate circumstance. But to be a survivor was to live, to exist through hardship, and to persist. To refer to oneself as persistent rather than persecuted can have a profoundly positive psychological effect. Since the age of ten, when Henrichs was burned severely on his face and hands from an explosion of gas and wood paint, he has been confronted with the complexities of 'beauty' and 'normality' as they are constructed by society and by the individual. Henrichs writes, 'The feelings of ugliness, inferiority, and being different inhibits the afflicted persons from liberating themselves...' and from ultimately feeling that they are anything but a curiosity or an embodiment of the grotesque. It is inevitable that one who has undergone some traumatic disfigurement will be looked upon with dismay, pity, or will be viewed as a spectacle, and it is even more likely that the onlooker's gaze will be averted in order to not cause the burn survivor pain through a stare. Either option, the blunt stare or the stare diverted, leaves the burn survivor acutely aware that he or she is misunderstood and judged based on his or her outward appearance. Henrichs' images are intended to nurture an understanding of burn survivors through photographs. His photographs encourage the viewer to stare -- to look with some depth at the subject. The ability to stare is something that is encouraged in the gallery setting, but discouraged, say, on the street. Henrich contends that by offering people a place to stare where the unmitigated gaze will not hurt the subject, he is helping the viewer to understand the issues involved with being a burn survivor as well as their own ideas of disfigurement and beauty. People With Burns is a collection of portraits of burn survivors, taken with an 8x10 camera. Henrichs situates the subjects against a dramatic black backdrop. The prints are 50'x65' and show the photographer's understanding of light and the large format camera's ability to capture detail and texture. The realism of this detail and texture turns the burned skin to symbol; a topology of pain and rejuvenation. In Henrichs' photographs we see individuals who are strong, creative, self-respected, and loved. Most importantly, they are beautiful. They cease to be abnormal or feared. Their trauma becomes ours, for within Henrichs' photographs we are allowed to stare, unable to turn our glance, and in turn asked to confront our own ideas of beauty and disfigurement. Detlef Henrichs is a free lance photographer, and lives in Dusseldorf, Germany. He participated in the Artist-In-Residence program at Light Work in April, 1992. Amy Hufnagel (c)1992