

ROBERT STAUDINGER (*1964)

“The figure”: a word that we often encounter in everyday life, even outside the visual arts. Everyone can be a figure, make or give a figure, but in any case one has a figure, preferably, of course, a “good” one. Even if the ideas about this have changed over the centuries, people have always tried to meet certain physical ideals. Since the beginning of mankind, the body has represented a border area between nature and culture, which is shaped, manipulated, and formed - either by pressing body parts into the desired form (e. g. corset) or by specific muscle training, diets, and/or cosmetic surgery. How fitting that the figure etymologically has its origin in the Latin ‘fingere’, which means ‘to form, shape, conceive, invent’.

In Robert Staudinger's series “Zur Figur” (“On the Figure”), the focus is on this conceiving and shaping of the figure, but also on the limits of its aesthetic “optimization”. For his photographs, he has positioned models on pedestals like classical sculptures - reflections of idealized representations of the body in art history. But the pure staging of the pose is not enough for Staudinger: the targeted folding and sewing up of the “objective” photographs printed on transparent paper is his way of dealing with the figure in a similarly free or abstract way as has been possible for painters since Cubism. Body regions are folded away, shortened, shifted, and reassembled or made to disappear completely. Entirely new, purely aesthetic figures emerge - bodies that, stripped of their biological functionality, are only form in themselves. Staudinger drives the usual manipulation from the natural body to the culturally shaped figure one step further towards the “art figure”. His photographic objects reflect the “figure” in both its art-historical and aesthetic dimensions: boundaries are sounded out and crossed, and the body's perception as a “design object” is taken to a surreal extreme. Like models for unrealizable body constructions, they wait in the showcases of their fate - disturbing but beautiful.

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