



Marianne Wex "Let's Take Back Our Space" (Detail)

Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin

Marianne Wex in Berlin

Men, Make Room

Text: Jens Hinrichsen

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Reviews

The historical cycle “Let’s Take Back Our Space” by Marianne Wex, currently reintroduced at Berlin-based Tanya Leighton Gallery, seems more topical than ever now that man spreading became a buzzword.

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Legs astride, the writer of this review towers in front of Marianne Wex’s artwork. His body language suggests what could only be translated by a patronizing mumble: “Let’s take a look at this...”

As a matter of fact, none of this ever happened – except that the walls at Tanya Leighton’s space are indeed adorned with Wex’s historical image-and-text-frieze entitled “Let’s Take Back Our Space”. In it the Hamburg-born artist grapples with dissimilarities between male and female body language. Her encyclopedic installation was first shown at the Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst (nGbK) in Berlin, 40 years ago. Yet today, at a time of #MeToo confessions and discussions about “manspreading” (the male art of blocking seats), her oeuvre seems more relevant than ever.

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TANYA LEIGHTON

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There is a strict segregation of the sexes at work in the 26 panels that make up the show. An upper row presents black and white photos of men, while the depictions of women are placed underneath. The pictures were taken during Wex's yearlong research in Hamburg: Street photography encounters a rigorous typology, reminiscent of Bernd and Hilla Becher. In different categories, Wex examines how women and men sunbathe, how they sit, rest and stand. Akin to an anthropological treatise, the short description texts reinforce what we see: men are conditioned to take up more space than women, who tend to make themselves smaller. Knees together, arms carved close to the body, toes pointing inwards is what appears to be the image of the 70s.

Most gallery visitors might realize, how much (or how little) has changed with regard to our gendered habitus. However, Wex put some exceptions from the rule onto her panels: In one photo, a press shot dating back to 1975, we see former German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher standing with his toe caps pointing inwards. As shown here, Wex supplements her street photos with snippets from magazines and catalogs repeatedly. Her thesis, that the diverging postures and even certain body shapes altered over the past 2000 years, owing to a patriarchal society. And there's an array of images depicting antique and medieval sculptures, which seem to validate that claim.

The invoking title of the series is reified by one of the panels in the entree that blocks our view into the second room. We have to maneuver around the expansive piece to make our way up the stairs and into the second room. In there, overlooking panels that depict the power structures in heterosexual partnerships, the references to contemporary issues appear to intensify. While holding hands, for instance, the women's palm tends to be embedded by the man's driving hand; making him lead the way, as a consequence. The Weinstein scandal comes to mind, while beholding all those men clasping "their" women in possessive holds.

Certainly the series is a construction that cannot be transposed into historical reality. Besides we don't have to agree with all of Wex's interpretations, whose art was not intended as scientific work, anyway. Nonetheless, there is an impressive rediscovery taking place at Tanya Leighton.

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TANYA LEIGHTON



Ausstellungsansichten: Marianne Wex "Let's Take Back Our Space" Fotos: Gunter Lepkowski, Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin

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"Marianne Wex. Let's Take Back Our Space", [Galerie Tanya Leighton](#), Berlin, bis 17. Februar