

*Introspection, Extrospection, Prospecption. On traversing "Get Intimate", an exhibition featuring Margot Pilz together with Janne Charlotte Schipper and Andreas Sahl Andersen.*

by Anne Faucheret

"The principal horror of any system which defines the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, or which defines human need to the exclusion of the psychic and emotional components of that need. The principal horror of such a system is that it robs our works of its erotic value, its erotic power and life appeal and fulfillment. Such a system reduces work to a travesty of necessities, a duty by which we earn bread or oblivion for ourselves and those we love. But this is tantamount to blinding a painter and then telling her to improve her work, and to enjoy the act of painting, it is not only next to impossible, it is also profoundly cruel.

As women, we need to examine the ways in which our world can be truly different. I am speaking here of the necessity for reassessing the quality of all the aspects of our lives and our work, and of how we move towards and through them."

– Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power", in *Sister Outsider*, 1984

"Die Frau trägt die Gesellschaft, darf sie aber nicht mitgestalten. Der Frau wurde ihre Identität durch jahrtausendelange, patriarchalische Unterdrückungsmechanismen genommen; ihr eigener Anteil an der Kultur verhindert, ihre schöpferische Potenz in Randbereiche abgedrängt."

– Christia Hauer, Karin Mack, Margot Pilz, Doris Reitter, *Femifest. 2. Klausur der IntAkt im Retzhof, Wien 1978*, quoted by Nina Schedlmayer in *Margot Pilz. Leben. Kunst*, 2021

The intimate space is a highly political space. In capitalist democracies, it was left outside mainstream scrutiny and comfortably relegated to the "purely private". It was deemed as the a-political counterpart to public space, keeping invisible gendered power relationships at its core, until feminists argue otherwise at the beginning of the 1970's. The intimate space is actually exactly where primary patriarchal power is produced, and hence can be contested, and potentially undone. Turning toward intimacies – the domestic, the sexual, the desire – is hence a feminist method to measure social situatedness, to express political concerns and to counter capitalist patriarchal order. The show's title, *Get Intimate*, which might sound like a cheeky injunction, is a joyful and critical invitation to follow this and other transgressive methods running through Margot Pilz' artistic work, rooted in feminist deconstruction, activist confrontation and medial experimentation. Focusing on the oeuvre of the Austrian Dutch photographer, performance, installation and media artist, the exhibition also features sculptures by Janne Charlotte Schipper, dotted here and there, and a display by Andreas Sahl Andersen, working as a material and semiotic support-structure. Here, getting intimate does not mean indulging in escapism, staying in the comfort zone, but daring to come closer, looking and listening carefully, getting involved, weaving new relations and putting oneself at risk – from the production of the show up to its reception by viewers.

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The exhibition brings together items from Margot's personal archive, across her 50 years-long practice, from the performative and expanded photography series that made her known, to photographic works documenting media art sculptures and art in public space, to her more recent photographic installations. It spans an arc

between the artist's introspective impulse, – in which she negotiates her own image between assigned norms and self-determination, as well as her own identity between traumata and catharsis –, and an outward movement, traversing her participative, interactive and performative works, investigating issues related to capitalist extraction and commodification, especially through technologies and media. Even though Margot's practice expands far beyond the photographic medium, the possibilities offered by image-making through a technical apparatus and the inherent political dimension it holds regarding (re)presentation and documentation – constitute a continuum in her career, and a red thread in *Get Intimate*. The camera is never a neutral recording device truthfully archiving the real. It is a socio-technical dispositif indeed able to preserve traces, to document actions, to bear witness to situations – but it is always situated, embodied, and affected, always framed and partial, always transitive, temporary, ungraspable. In that sense, Margot explored – above all in the 1970's and 1980's – sequentiality and a kaleidoscopic sense of time; dispersion, fragmentation and narrative ellipsis; iteration and variation.

Andreas excerpted and translated spatially some of the artistic strategies employed – sequentiality, iteration and performativity – the ones echoing with his own aesthetic terms – distilling them, diffracting them, paying homage to them, and offering Margot's works the conditions for a renewed reception. The exhibition is organized in constellations around these strategies or sometimes recurring motives, not following a chronological line – still staying with the consistencies within the original series. The space is rhythmized by three light grey paper panels – used usually as backdrops in photo studios. They hang from the ceiling and are placed perpendicular to the walls – except for one. They delicately hint at the studio paper backdrop visible in so many photographs by Margot, sometimes plain, sometimes cut out, sometimes tool for magic and sometimes discrete protagonist. Here, the paper backdrops leave the studio where they are usually confined to and invite themselves in the exhibition space. They exhibit their material, sculptural and architectural character, being stand-alone artworks as much as supporting companions. The encounter between studio and exhibition, between space of production and space of presentation, is also visible in the hanging. At times clustered, at times scattered, the photographs are either framed, or slipped in transparent plastic sleeves, hanging on the walls. The museal display on one hand – legitimizing but at times stifling – and the “studio” touch – magnifying the haptics, roughness, and immediacy at play in Margot's pictures – offer two modes of reception, and invite to move back and forth, close and far, to wander rather than follow. At the end of the exhibition, the studio's “rehearsal” spirit meets the museum's aura: some framed little works are hung onto a large grey paper wall, unfurling softly on the floor.

Continuously rooted in a feminist and activist positioning, Margot has been using straightforward confrontation, in life as in her works, to counter diverse regimes of invisibilisation, separation and disinformation. The stage as a threshold between the intimate, the studio and the public space, the fictional, the personal and the political, plays a crucial role, across the feminist works from the beginnings (*Hausfrauendenkmal*, *Female Worker's Altar*, *Patriarchy*), as well those addressing the privatization and commercialization of public space, the instrumentalization of technologies and media for mass control, the traumatic afterlives of war, and lately the social taboos connected to aging and desire under the capitalist regime of performance and eternal youth. For *The White Cell* already (1983-85), Margot built a stage in a stage, as she designed a white cube-shaped studio with its own

measurements, to perform herself, and invite others to perform – in front of her camera. Cell and stage, container and threshold, the dispositif offered control and hospitality, introspection and extrospection and a collective rather than singular negotiation – first with the internalized representations, then with the camera, then with the social norm.

In the years before, after a traumatic police arrest at the Third Woman's Festival in Vienna, the artist pushed her photographic practice as a media-aesthetic experimentation directly onto an investigation of the structure of feelings and of the construction of identity, between collective representation, psychological analysis and personal catharsis. Photography here is conceived in semiotic, sequential, performative and iterative terms, and the works proceed from a conceptual minimalism, technical virtuosity, and raw immediacy. Some sequences show her folded body, her hands clutching her hair or looking at the viewer. Others her body standing with constraining belts. Others evoke her absent body replaced by a chair and her jacket. Others zoom in the artist's hands, alternatively folded, pressing each other, forming figures. Scaling and zooming in and out, using soft focus and long exposure allow for the body to fade away, to partly disappear, to withdraw from visibility. The body dissolves into space, into a ghosted trace, behind a double or in front of a luminous square. It never holds still and can never be captured. If (hyper)visibility and transparency have historically been the mechanisms through which – among other marginalized ones – women's bodies are surveilled, categorized, and possessed, then strategies of withdrawal become tools of self-determination — ways of remaining in the image while denying total access and total legibility, ways of claiming opacity.

The play with opacity, translucency and transparency also traverses Janne's works – materially, categorially, symbolically and perhaps also existentially. The artist choreographs encounters between materials, objects and bodies, within the space, and creates a system of signs and traces—some legible, others opaque — all of which seem to relate to the intertwining of memory, desire, and matter, and to intuitive elective affinities. Two metal rods are held together at a right angle, attached to the wall and supported by an articulated foot made of three limestone buttresses. The vertical rod is covered with little flies casted in tin. Clamped from the back to the horizontal rod, a metallic frame features frames within frames, drawn, painted, or mounted: A rectangular drawing of yellowish flat grass delineated with a thin, white contour, stays within a drawing of light shadows, placed on a grey painted passepartout, the whole being encased by a thick metallic frame. Some tin flies are encased too, attached with magnets. This sculpture and the two others, scattered in the space, seem to be crystallized encounters between motifs, images, materials, body parts and technical objects – or fragments thereof – held together by mysterious scores, by hybrid techniques, by technical devices or physical forces and by light. The same light that the one pouring from the cut-out studio backdrop in Margot's series *The 4th Dimension*. Touching, intertwining, spilling over onto each other, imprinting each other, the elements transform each other. They loose their (all too comfortable) self-containment. They become hybrid, transient and open assemblages, communicating vessels, chains of a neverending alchemical metamorphosis, just immobilized for a moment. Or, maybe, the ongoing metamorphosis remains opaque to human senses.

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In *Get Intimate* – the different works, the display, the dramaturgy – nurture a provisional and unfinished character – fragile rather than monumental, transient rather than conclusive, intimate rather than formal. In refusing the museal polish to frame all works and settle the photographs into a fixed, authoritative statement, Margot, in dialogue with Andreas and Janne, keeps her works staying in motion, open to future reception and further development. Together, the three positions create a porous ecosystem with multiple points of entry, full of intertextual signs, inviting the works to be looked at beyond the prescriptive lens of historical linearity or museal legitimacy – proposing a wandering full of gaps and cracks, full of mysterious in-betweens, precisely those allowing unexpected closeness and unsettling intimacy.

*In this text, the artists are referred to by their first names in order to create a sense of intimacy with the reader, in keeping with the exhibition's title and approach.*

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The artworks themselves are fragmentary, creature-like, suggesting limbs or organs without fully becoming bodies. They weave their presence into slabs of stone, fragments of concrete, formed by traces of memory, uncertain whether lived or dreamed, interlaced with flowers, shards of glass, and other remnants. Their skeletons, metal rods and clamps borrowed from chemistry stands, impose a temporary order on this flux. Arrangements are contingent; we have to adapt. We project a plan, yet cannot infer what is to come, merely based on what has passed; patterns cannot be tessellated into perpetuity, they are never fixed, never fully drawn. They are provisional, emergent, and reflect a human condition. To move through them is to negotiate continuity and change, to inhabit both the linear and the circular, the remembered, the immediate, and the expected. Living within complexity means staying attentive, responsive, aware of the quiet ways memory and experience leave traces along our paths.

– Janne Charlotte Schipper and Andreas Sahl Andersen, Notes on Traces 1, 2026

Do you feel so good because I know you, or are you truly there for me? Maybe the distinction is arbitrary, but it somehow feels like it should be the latter; maybe they are so intertwined that the one doesn't mean anything without the other. Is that why I draped the silver shaded hair on the shelf below the teapot? I want to stay in this strange and fragile reality, where dust particles seem to fall slower and a bubble is closing in around me, anything could disturb its balance, operating on the point of a needle. I am standing still and watch the constellation around me sway in slow motion. Moments containing vast stretches of time, from my teen years to my adolescence, to my childhood and back again to the aching moment of today. I cannot help but think about the conversations where we all of a sudden noticed that all the small shifts accumulated into change and where we, in an unguarded moment, looked back at ourselves with strange nostalgia, having to shed the sentiment quickly before it was really there. I flash forward into a future not yet told and all my markers seem useless as they only tell stories in retrospect. I am the guardian of their relations, as a magician stringing them together in a map of uncertainty. Why do I want to shepherd them as if they can predict an outcome later, as I seem to think is right and good?

– Janne Charlotte Schipper, Notes on Traces 2, 24/07/2026