

**Multiplespacings** presents “**Distortion**”, the second solo exhibition of German photographer Olaf Martens with Multiplespacings and that brings together a number of his signature works, alongside a new project, consisting of a spontaneous photo shoot with Swiss model and ex Miss Switzerland Dominique Rinderknecht, the results of which will be showcased in the exhibition alongside a number of objects designed specifically for this exhibition. Martens, born in 1963 in Halle, Saxony-Anhalt, in the territory of the former German Democratic Republic, and trained in photography in Leipzig, under names such as the late Wolfgang Schröter, or the legendary Helfried Strauß, still a professor in Leipzig. Coming out of art school at the most pivotal point in the in-between history of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries –the end of the Iron Curtain and the Fall of the Berlin Wall, Martens has experienced this transition as a moment of both vertiginous freedom in the public domain and an increasing censorship of the private sphere, consistent with the neoliberal project.

In his work, a representative sample of which is on show in this exhibition, what we see is not the highly puritanical modernist restraint that has profoundly inflected photographic aesthetic to the point of abstraction and this to a degree, has robbed the most articulate narrative mechanism of the modern era from its expanded role in the configuration of reality. But it would be yet a mistake to claim that Martens practices social realism (a term actually very loaded in the political realities of post-1989); while there is indeed an aspect of realism in his photography, it quickly collapses under its own weight and gives in to the absurd and magical. This absurdity, on the other hand, this decadent universe, is not so much a Baroque ruin as much as it is a reflection and a meta-criticism of our life here and now, in which the realities of mass media not only evoke strong sentiments, but they play a role in the configuration of our emotions. Familiar objects appear and disappear in Martens’ work, but they are not merely a decorative façade; what we are dealing with here is archetypes from our culture.

Part of this convoluted world, now relatively forgotten, of the brutal reinsertion of Eastern Europe into the aggressive capitalism of the West and a whole new culture of advertising dominated by street psychology and the loud aspirations of globalization, Martens’ work as a photographer for different media, trained his eye to unmistakably spot and stage contradiction, and going against the grain of the increasing aestheticism and object fetish of contemporary art, his photography remains committed to the experience of the world that fascinated early photographers, and that sense of wild excitement that characterized the riskiest and most challenging transitional periods of the modern era, a circumstance now forgotten. Going from photography as a medium to photography as a condition, ‘Distortion’ devotes ample space to teach us how to see the miraculous in the vernacular, and to elevate our powerlessness as subjects to an aspect of the sublime. The artist’s abandonment of ‘beauty’ is only temporary, as he remains committed to find new entry points and exits.

‘Distortion’ is a journey through the labor of an artist whose work, when seen retrospectively, resembles a fast-track archaeology of our contemporary condition, quickly adapting, transforming and relocating symbols, codes, signs, and languages. The human body, particularly the female figure, is omnipresent in his work, not merely as a motif of contemplation, but as an actor in the world, playing and re-playing different roles, performing the world out and about in all its largesse. Not shying away from the grotesque, the obscene, the bizarre and the uncomfortable, the works present in ‘Distortion’, immortalize the purely ephemeral and banal, the convoluted present and the anxieties of an overwhelming future tense, preemptively conditioned by the current mechanisms of control –the absolute lack of structure. From Bangkok, to Sidney, to Moscow and Prague, the German photographer’s practice retains an uncanny element of a time forever lost, and which although present throughout, Martens’ is no haste to retrieve; the ruin is always fresh and open.

“Distortion” is on view, December 9, 2016 through February 9, 2017 at SELECTION by ArchStudio Loft38, Grubenstrasse 38, 8045 Zürich.