

REVIEW: Weiermair, Peter. The Hidden Image: Photographs of the Male Nude in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Translated by Claus Nielander. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1988.

The Hidden Image is Peter Weiermair's attempt to sketch the history of the male nude in photography. Choosing photographs for such a collection not only requires a thorough knowledge of the medium's history, but also of the debates, aesthetic and moral, surrounding the photographic depiction of the male nude. Mr. Weiermair, director of the Frankfurter Kunstverein and author of several studies on photography, is unquestionably qualified for the task.

In his collection, Weiermair focuses attention on the work of artists devoted to this particular theme, and by doing so, is able to trace the stylistic and iconographic development of the male nude from 1848 to the present. Of course, with any study of the nude in photography, male or female, the question of pornography is inevitable, and as many of the works reproduced make clear, the trappings of "art" have been used frequently in order to make the male nude respectable. Certainly, a large number of these photographs possess erotic content, although that content may be disguised as a scientific study, an academic pose, or even an abstracted form. However Weiermair avoids distinguishing what is pornographic from what is not, allowing the photographs to comment upon one another, perhaps more eloquently than any text could. The juxtaposition of photographic styles allows one to see how such boundaries become blurred.

The presence of erotic content and the nature of the pornographic gaze are not the only issues raised by this volume. The photographs included here mirror other debates as well. This history depicts changing aesthetics as the idealized, academic poses that dominated the second half of the nineteenth century give way, first to the more abstracted images favored in the early twentieth century and then to the more personal expressions found in the sixties and seventies. The theme remains the same but the treatment and meaning of that theme continues to develop.

Weiermair's title is well-chosen, for as you strip these images of their respective camouflages what you are left with is the image of a man, a metaphor of the male self. Not all these images are comfortable; indeed some are quite disturbing. Yet the

questions they raise are important ones, especially for gay men, who too often find it necessary to resort to similar camouflaging. It reminds us that we are the image we create of ourselves. As this collection makes abundantly clear, that image can involve elaborate abstractions and objectifications, as well as representing the honest attempt to discover who we are and want to be, an attempt to see ourselves naked.

The text which introduces these photographs, is unfortunately, not as successful as the photography itself. This is due in part to the occasionally awkward translation by Claus Nielander, but also has to do with the amount of material Weiermair attempts to cover. One hundred and forty years of the history of photography, an examination of pertinent aesthetic and moral debates, and information about the photographers represented as well as their styles, is all crowded into this brief introduction. The result is a hodge-podge text that seesaws uncomfortably between a number of important issues. However, what the text does make clear is the need for more such studies, perhaps less ambitious in scope than this one. Despite its shortcomings the text is useful, and in addition Weiermair has provided a bibliography of photographic catalogs and studies for those curious about the lacunae in the text.

Finally, with a book like this one, it is the photographs themselves which should convey the strongest message. These photographs certainly do that.

--Mike McClellan

Columbia Street Bakery & Coffeehouse

Cakes for Birthdays & Special Occasions
Cookies ♦ Muffins ♦ Pastries
Lunch Items ♦ Truffles ♦ T-Shirts
Espresso, Cappucino, and more...

Everything baked from scratch with the best ingredients available — no mixes, additives, or preservatives

EVENING PROGRAMS & ENTERTAINMENT
NO COVER CHARGE

RETURN THIS COUPON AND RECEIVE YOUR CHOICE OF

EXPIRES
4/8/89

**FREE PASTRY, COOKIE,
BROWNIE, or MUFFIN**

WITH PURCHASE OF ANY BEVERAGE

Columbia Street Bakery & Coffeehouse
107 N. Columbia St. (next to Copytron) • 967-9150