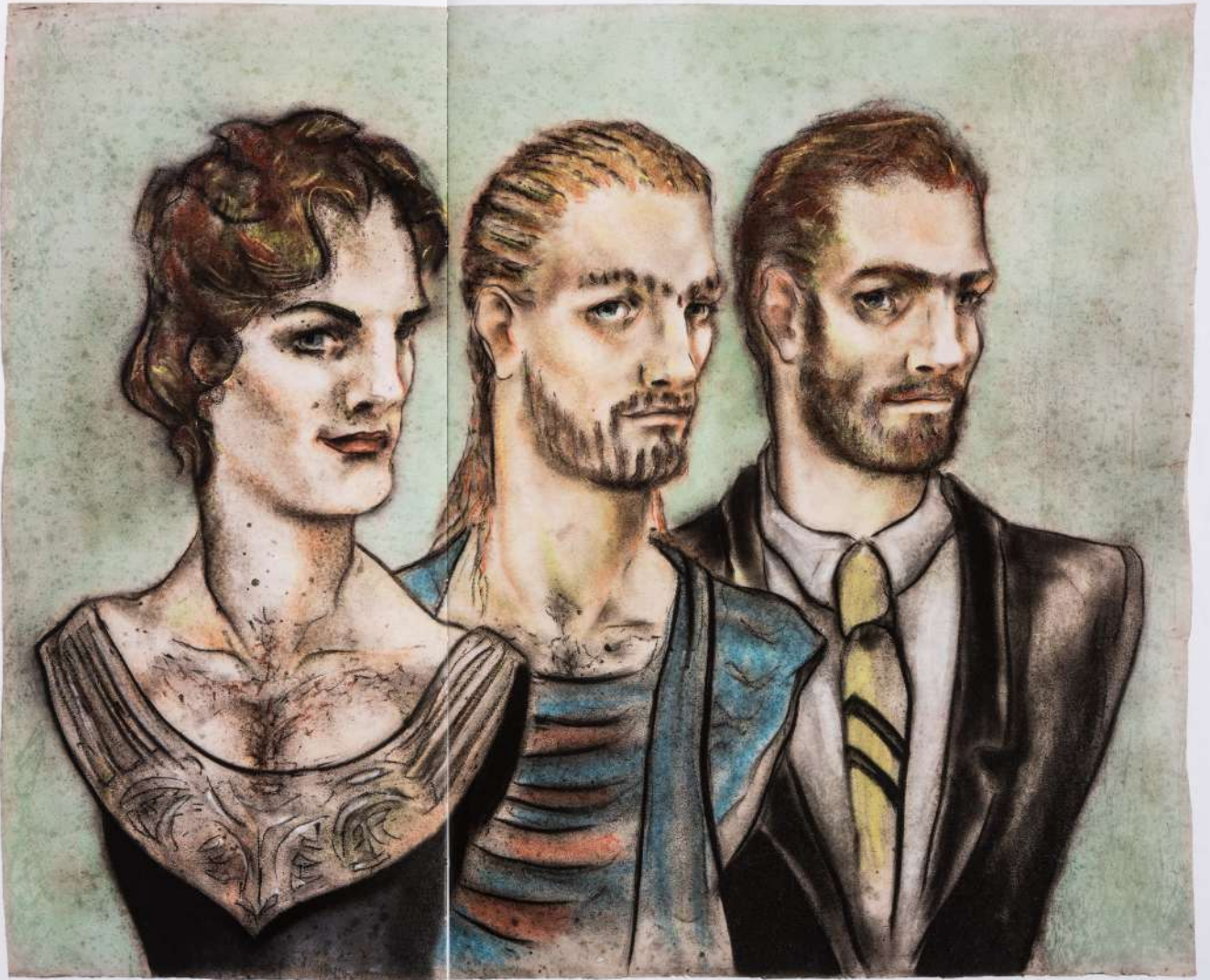


*A MUSEUM
FOR LORENZA
EIN MUSEUM
FÜR LORENZA
UN MUSEO
PARA LORENZA
PAUL B.
PRECIADO*

Until recently, the history of art has been made up of two types of artists: those who create a school or belong to one, and those who are unclassifiable. The former appear as paradigmatic examples of the so-called “artistic styles”—Baroque, Classicism, Surrealism, Cubism, Expressionism, Postmodernism, et cetera—which, due to their specific features, allow us to characterize a work with respect to a historical period, a generation, a procedure, or a visual language. The latter are unclassifiable, not only because they do not conform to the artistic conventions of a certain historical period or generation, or because they do not follow the same productive procedures or use the same visual languages, but above all because they seem to question the stability of styles. This tension rests on a deeper, and today more strident, antagonism, one that opposes two ways of understanding the value of the work of art: the conception of the artwork as an autonomous entity that should only be measured by the aesthetic qualities inherent to the work itself (if it were possible to determine where the “work itself” begins and ends); and the one that seeks to understand the relationship between the work and the social and political context that produces it. In critical terms, this tension opposes New Criticism and Russian Formalism to create what we could call the “aesthetics of emancipation” derived from Marxist readings (György Lukács, Fredric Jameson, Terry Eagleton, or Stuart Hall), the critical sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, reception theory as in Hans Robert Jauss, and, more recently, feminist, queer, or anticolonial criticism—from Griselda Pollock and Laura Mulvey to Hanna Black by way of Alondra Nelson, Pauline Boudry & Renate Lorenz, and Kodwo Eshun. These oppositions seem today to reach a paradoxical resolution as “feminism” or “Afrofuturism” and have become new institutionalized styles with their visual conventions and recognizable procedures.

The limits of that dialectic become evident when, all too rarely in history, works appear that triangulate that tension by establishing a third point of view, an outside that decenters the opposition between autonomy and ideology. These are works that have been produced from another perceptive system, with another body, by or for another neuronal, sensorial, or locomotor apparatus, or from a nonbinary epistemology that tends to overcome the dichotomies of male–female, heterosexual–homosexual. In tension with the canons of beauty of the Western art tradition and, at the same time, with the identity politics that began to transform into styles at the end of the 1990s, Lorenza Böttner’s work triangulates the oppositions of the late twentieth century and provokes a radical displacement. Perhaps because they are also often representatives of canons and trends, curators rarely have the opportunity to come across a body of work that questions both the canon and criticism, the norms of beauty and the criteria that should allow its subversion. Even today I still cannot explain to myself how the accumulation of coincidences that allowed Lorenza Böttner’s work to reach me and to be exhibited actually happened.

I cannot say that I found Lorenza Böttner. It would be more accurate to say that Lorenza Böttner found me. Sometimes, as in a Borges story, the work searches for



The Face That Is Not One

"I am a monster, do you say? No! I am the people! I am an exception? No! I am the rule; you are the exception! You are the chimera; I am the reality!"

—Victor Hugo, *L'Homme qui rit* (*The Man Who Laughs*, 1869), cited by Lorenza Böttner at the beginning of her thesis "Behindert?!" (1984)

In a relentless quest to redefine both pictorial and anatomical spaces, Lorenza transformed her own skin into a canvas on which to establish a critical dialogue with the imposed norms and identities. Many of Lorenza's "danced paintings" and performances began with the initiatic act of painting her face. Holding the brush with her foot, she would redraw the contours of her eyes, cover her cheeks and forehead with triangles, or draw lines that divided the face. The notion of transvestism is too narrow and trivially conventional to succeed in describing the constant erasure and rewriting of the face that was activated by that process. By turning it into a surface of inscription, Lorenza denaturalized the face as the seat of identity—of gender, sexuality, race, humanity—and asserted it as a socially constructed mask that she could help to redraw.

In 1983, Lorenza created a series of photos called *Face Art*, in which the face becomes the operator of a never-ending metamorphosis: masks of femininity and masculinity, with variations that alluded to other times and places, appeared one after the other. The face is dehumanized, animalized, or transfigured by lines reminiscent of tribal markings and abstract motifs. Pigments were not the only substance that Lorenza painted with. Lorenza used head hair and body hair—beard, eyebrows—as formal and chromatic motifs to construct and deconstruct a face that was not one.

Studying the photographic exhibition *New Documents* (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1967), imagined as a second episode of *The Family of Man*, the emblematic exhibition held in 1955, David Hevey concluded that representations of the nonconforming body, especially in the photographs by Garry Winogrand, Lee Friedlander, and Diane Arbus, functioned as "the symbol of this new [global political] (dis)order."¹⁷ In *The Family of Man*, the nonconforming body was not represented, whereas in *New Documents*, the freak acquired a central position as a "symptom" of a kind of "discontentment with modernity" after the Vietnam War, the processes of decolonization, and the Cuban Missile Crisis. In 1972, a monographic exhibition dedicated to Diane Arbus showed portraits that the artist herself described as "the Jewish giant," "the Mexican dwarf," and "the retarded woman." It is against these images of freaks and the denominations that became popular in the 1970s (even Susan Sontag accepted the qualifier "repulsive" to refer to subjects photographed by Arbus¹⁸) that Lorenza's photographs act as dissident figures. Lorenza's redrawn body and face are not symbols of world disorder, nor symptoms of the malaise of modernity. On the contrary, they exist by themselves; they are an index of survival and rebellion.

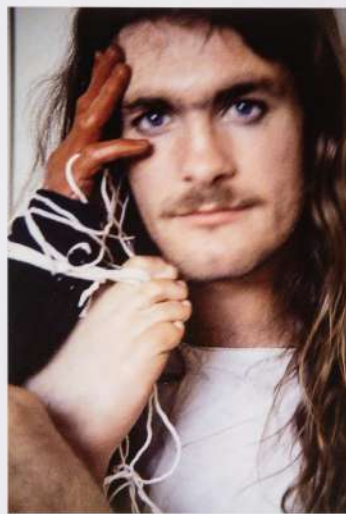
In direct tension with Arbus's portraits, Lorenza used

17 David Hevey, "The Enfreakment of Photography," in Davis, *The Disability Studies Reader*, p. 334.

18 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Penguin, 1979).



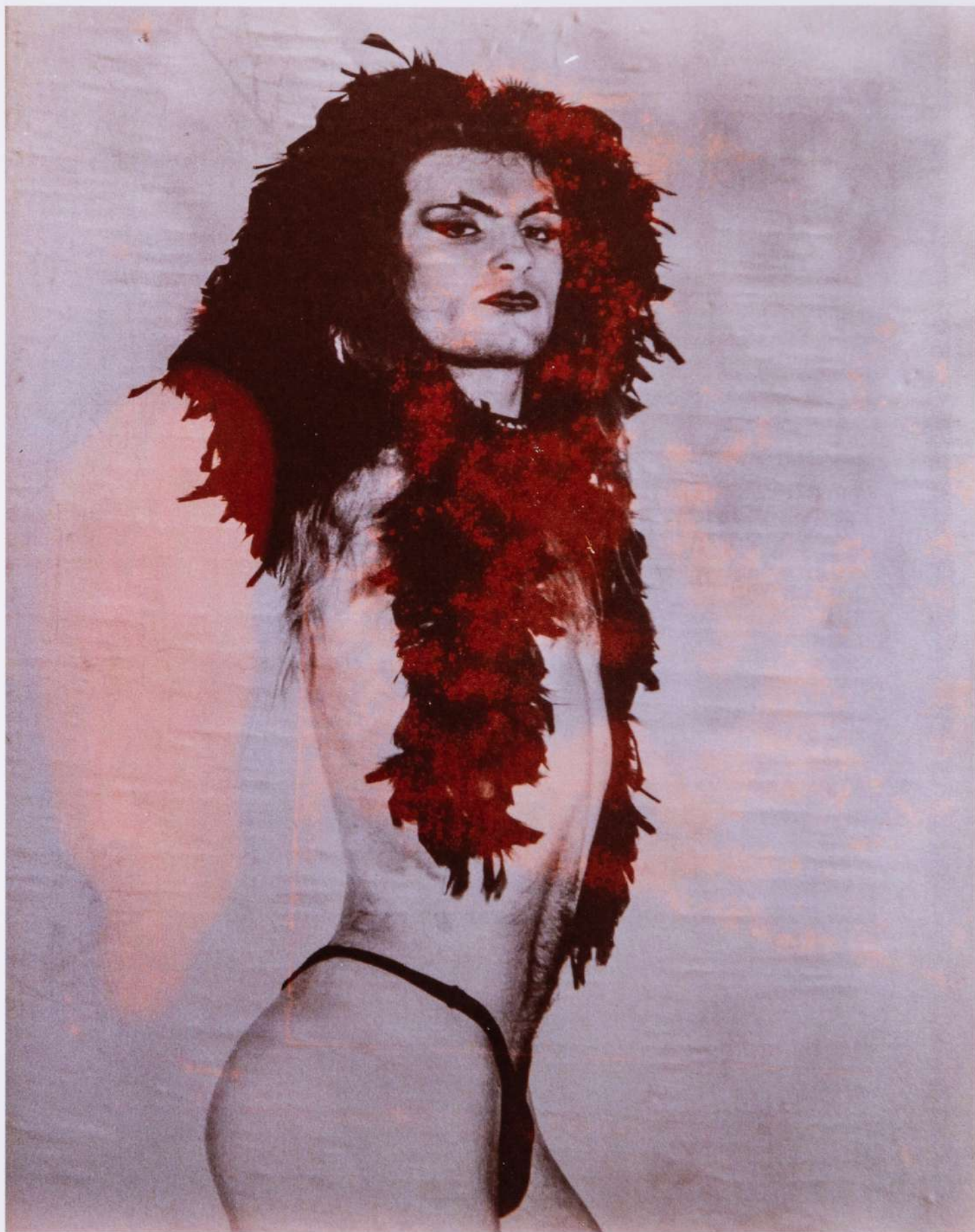
Face Art, 1983
Four black-and-white photographs /
Vier Schwarzweißfotografien /
Cuatro fotografías en blanco y negro
(series of 32, reproductions / Serie von
32, Reproduktionen / series de 32,
reproducciones), 40 × 30 cm,
see p. / siehe S. / véase p. 118













Loranga Nait 82

