

From I to we, from we to me.

A portrait can accomplish all possible tasks. It can simply identify, like a passport photo. It can send you on a search for the personality – like a character study can. It can glamourize like a fashion photo, or like an advertisement it can convey an enrapturing ideal of beauty.

The Hamburg resident Christian Klopp approaches the art of portraiture as a seeker, searching to push the boundaries of this medium. Klopp works mainly as a film cameraman and follows in the footsteps of the experimentalist photographers of the twenties and the thirties like Man Ray or Maurice Tabard, in that he seeks new ways to advance portraiture. It no longer centers itself on similarity, personality or beauty but on the, until now, ignored side of our being, our existence. Psychology and surrealism paved the way and camera tricks such as multiple exposure and photomontage were put to use to unearth the complexity within us.

Technically Christian Klopp is breaking new ground. It is true that double or triple exposure process is as old as the medium of film itself, but it is the first time that it has been used in this fashion for portraiture. CK uses an old analog Nikon FE2 that he has equipped with a groundglass that is normally used in architectural photography, a 85mm /1.4 lens, a basic onboard flashlight and recommended Ilford FP4 film stock. Is anything else really necessary for quality black and white photos? In his portrait series Klopp places two faces on top of each other, not later in the darkroom, but for the first time in camera. This method is to photograph one subject in front of a neutral white and black background and without winding the film to the next frame, seating the second subject at the same place in front of the backdrop (it should be noted that we are firmly in the analog world here). The results at the moment cannot be verified. As a rule of thumb it takes about 10 to 20 pictures to produce one technically and esthetically perfect picture. One perfect picture per sitting is guaranteed but totally by chance – surrealism also plays a significant role in this procedure – Klopp is often surprised himself by the outcome.

It is often acquaintances, friends from former times, father and son, wives and husbands, mothers and daughters and occasionally strangers that Christian invites to pose in front of his camera. Pairs that Klopp focuses on in an intense, inquisitive and yet unadorned fashion and produces a synthetic picture that both intrigues and confuses but forces the viewer to probe still further.

What do we see here? Two people with all their attributes – jewelry, beards, glasses – merging together. They are people connected, genetically or socially. Relatives biologically similar or two people that over the years of close companionship have left their mark on one another. Klopps photographs are an attempt to make visible these similarities through portraiture. The journey from „I“ to „we“ has often disturbing consequences. Klopps series, which began in 2008 questions our basic nature. „Who am I“, „who are we“? Plural or singular? Are we to be defined only as individuals or do we only exist in relation to one another? Is it always this connection to another that finally forms us, etches us and completes us? It is exactly these questions that CK with his photography poses and here, for the first time, in such a manner attempts to answer.