

JURAJ LIPSCHER

Body Shops

Juraj Lipscher has explored in German Switzerland, for nearly ten years, a range of establishments devoted to the care of the body. Place where the human being is both present and totally absent. Clinics for cosmetic surgery, morgues and gyms, bomb shelters, beauty parlors and more recently, brothels.

Body shops – shops for bodies – form an exceptional topography of the body in our contemporary society.

Opening

Wednesday May 4, 2011 at 6pm

Exhibition 5 May – 17 June 2011

1:pm -7:pm Wednesday-Friday

2:pm - 6:pm on Saturday

And by appointment

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Hygienic Space, Common Ground: The Photography of Juraj Lipscher

Nathalie Herschdorfer ⁽¹⁾

« The only way to understand something is to be confronted by something that is difficult to understand. »

Frederick Sommerⁱ

« Our true study is that of the human condition »

Jean-Jacques Rousseauⁱⁱ

A hospital bed, medical apparatus, a landscape; a blackboard with a list of names crossed out, a calendar; gym equipment, a house plant, a stool; a corridor, clothes hung on a peg, a broom. Juraj Lipscher's photographs show functional interiors. The titles not only indicate the type of space involved – a maternity ward, a beauty parlour, a crematorium, a bomb shelter – but also where they are located. When a title is divorced from its image, however, the viewer is at pains to say just what kind of space is depicted. A spectator who ignores the titles begins to realize that the spaces depicted share a large number of characteristics. In many ways, these interiors are all somewhat similar and even seem interchangeable. Juraj Lipscher's pictures therefore echo one another in an endless series of variations.

Body Shops is about human beings although one hardly ever sees a human presence. What is shown are spaces devoted to the care of the body. Clinics for cosmetic surgery, morgues and gyms – the environments photographed by Lipscher show us places where the human being is both omnipresent and totally absent. Equipment, machines and pieces of furniture dominate settings that look like stage sets. Lipscher depicts environments where the body undergoes treatment, whether pleasurable or painful, in order to ensure its well-being. Maternity wards exist to take care of us at the beginning of our lives, beauty parlours to comfort us, gyms to build up our muscles, brothels to give pleasure, cosmetic surgery clinics to correct our imperfections, bomb shelters to protect us, morgues to examine our dead bodies and crematoriums to reduce us to dust. Lipscher photographs a world that looks after the human being from birth to death. Body Shops – shops for bodies – form a topography of the body in contemporary society.

Lipscher's neutral style corresponds perfectly to the environments he observes. These interiors have been designed to fulfill a particular function and have no individual character, apart from rare exceptions such as the storage room full of coffins that has been decorated with posters of

mountain landscapes. Lipscher's approach is part of an important artistic tradition: that of documentary photography, which is indeed a tradition rather than a genre. In Germany in the 1920's and 30's, a number of photographers who were interested in topologies of nature, architecture and society formed a group known as the New Objectivity, a movement initiated by Albert Renger-Patzsch and August Sander. At the same time, in the United States, Walker Evans developed what he called the "documentary style" when he began to make a photographic archive of Victorian architectureⁱⁱⁱ. In 1967, The Museum of Modern Art in New York held an exhibition entitled "New Documents", which brought together the work of three photographers – Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander and Gary Winogrand – who were working with reality in a very straightforward way. In the 1970's, a whole school of photography advocating a documentary approach grew up around Bernd and Hilda Becher at the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf. In the United States, yet another photographic exhibition, entitled "New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape" and held in 1975 at the George Eastman House in Rochester, underlined the need for photographers to adopt a neutral style in order to represent the contemporary world. The "new topographers" – Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Frank Gohlke and Stephen Shore, amongst others – developed an impersonal style for depicting landscapes and architecture in which there seemed to be neither "author", nor "artist"^{iv}. In the 1970's, Lynne Cohen shot pictures of interiors devoid of any human presence. The spaces she chose – labs, classrooms, banqueting halls, offices, waiting rooms – seem like strange stage sets. Over the last fifteen years, enthusiasm for a neutral style that is both objective and impersonal illustrates the pre-eminence of a documentary approach to photography.

Lipscher claims to have been influenced by the work of Lewis Baltz, Frank Gohlke and John Gossage. In 1996, while photographing industrial sites around Zurich and Baden, he did a series on waste incineration plants. He was interested in the immaculate white smoke rising above the incinerators. Lipscher was fascinated by the cleansing, purifying properties of fire. He continued his research in another related area, that of crematoriums, moving from the incineration of waste to the cremation of bodies. With these pictures, which were the starting point for the series *Body Shops*, the theme of humanity began to emerge in his work. The preoccupation with hygiene, however, was not abandoned and, on the contrary, became the unifying theme of the whole series. From this time on, Lipscher's work has been concerned with the care lavished on the body in high-tech, sterile environments. In contemporary society, the body is treated like a simple object that can be manipulated, taken apart and put together again. In 1989, the American artist Barbara Kruger evoked this in the statement « Your body is a battleground ». Seeing the body as a battleground perfectly expresses the way we experience the flesh and blood of the physical self that is the object of so much care, ranging from simply combing one's hair or doing physical exercise to cosmetic surgery.

By working in series, Lipscher is able to catalogue a range of establishments that deal with the body and for nearly ten years, he has explored environments related to this theme. After working on crematoriums (1998) and maternity wards (2000), he began to visit morgues, gyms and beauty parlours (2001). He then investigated bomb shelters (2002) and, more recently, cosmetic surgery clinics and brothels (2007). Not the least of his merits is to have been able to enter environments like this that are often inaccessible. He has had to face mistrust when requesting permission to photograph “hidden” treasures, such as crematoriums, that are usually closed to the general public and that remain mysterious for this very reason. Approaching establishments of this kind is a complicated procedure that sometimes requires long and difficult negotiations.

Whatever their ultimate purpose, these interiors share a number of common values that are expressed in the way they are furnished and decorated. One is immediately struck by their cleanliness and by an inhuman, clinical and sterile atmosphere. Operating theatres would be an appropriate title for the series as a whole. By investigating themes that are closely related to one another, Lipscher highlights what these clinical, highly organized places bathed in artificial light have in common. Lipscher approaches these environments systematically, inspecting reception areas, corridors and main rooms one after the other. The monochromatic, square images that are characteristic of Lipscher’s style accentuate the sterile appearance of these interiors. Although the vision of the world represented in these pictures can give one goose pimples, each space is socially and aesthetically interesting. Body Shops also contain flashes of humor when these impersonal environments are enlivened by a touch of kitsch in the furnishings. The sterile interiors of brothels, for instance, are photographed in full daylight without any seductive trappings and the pictures of cosmetic surgery clinics reveal a universe where each element is strategically positioned to reassure patients.

All the pictures were taken in Switzerland. Lipscher is fascinated by the cult of perfection in this country and has focused his attention on the culture that gave him refuge. After emigrating from Czechoslovakia in 1968, he settled in Zurich, where he has been living for the last forty years. Lipscher both identifies with his neighbours and feels different from the Swiss with their characteristic concern for technical perfection and a preoccupation with hygiene that is something of a national sport. The Civil Protection Policy and the nuclear bomb shelters installed all over the country also strike him as being specifically Swiss. The operating theatre installed in a bomb shelter at Zufikon, in the canton of Aargau, represents the quintessence of these functional, hygienic, impersonal spaces waiting to be used. The same monotonous atmosphere is present in all the sites he has photographed. The furnishing and equipment may well be modern and stylish, but these soulless interiors are nevertheless disturbingly lacking in human warmth. Is this related to a specific geographic region where public places are renowned for their cleanliness? In Body Shops, Switzerland is represented as a country where gyms, brothels and crematoriums are administered as if they were engineering laboratories.

The simplicity and precision of his images suggest that Lipscher doesn't take any detours. The photographer, who trained as a chemist, faces reality as it is. These places really do exist. They are not sets that have been made especially for the pictures. The photographs engage the viewer psychologically and, once the initial impression has worn off, one is sucked into these disturbing environments. Having taken the body as the object of his research, Lipscher analyses its status, place and function in our society. The places he has chosen to photograph often raise questions about the human condition, such as life versus death, or finiteness versus perfectibility. We are all doomed to die but we wish to escape this fatality. Throughout our lives, we try to protect, improve and satisfy our fragile human bodies. This illustrates the paradox of mankind's attempts to overcome imperfection and mortality. Our bodies are taken care of at birth and examined at death before being burnt as if in an act of purification. Lipscher conceals his personal convictions, prompting us to examine these spaces for ourselves and to question what goes on in them. He depicts a world of high technology with people controlling machines that are used on other human beings. What should we think of a world like this where the difference between pleasure and pain is erased, where morgues are not so different from maternity wards, where brothels resemble cosmetic surgery clinics and bomb shelters look like crematoriums? One of the most fascinating aspects of photography lies in its ability to merge reality with fiction and to transform ordinary places into the strangest of spaces.

¹ Nathalie Herschdorfer is an associate curator at the Musée de l'Elysée in Lausanne, responsible for the organization of major international traveling exhibitions, including *Edward Steichen: Lives in Photography*, *About Face: The Death of the Photographic Portrait*, and *reGeneration: 50 Photographers of Tomorrow*.

² John Weiss (ed.), *Venus, Jupiter and Mars: Photographs of Frederick Sommer*, London, Traveling Light, 1980. p.16.

³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile ou, De l'éducation*, Paris, 1762.

⁴ See : Oliver Lugon, *Le style documentaire. D'August Sander à Walker Evans, 1920-1945*, Paris, Macula, 2004.

⁵ « The ideal photographic document would appear to be without author or art », Introduction by William Jenkins, *New Topographics: Photography of a Man-altered Landscape*, Rochester, George Eastman House, 1975, p.6.

Juraj Lipscher

Born 1948, Prague

In 1968, after witnessing the brutal invasion of Czechoslovakia by troops of the Warsaw Pact during the Prague spring, he decided to emigrate to Switzerland, where he still lives, at Rapperswil.

In parallel with his photographic work, he teaches chemistry in a secondary school near Zurich.

Individual exhibitions (selection)

- 2010 "Body Shops" series at the L'été photographique de Lectoure in France
- 2009 "Body Shops" series at the New York Photofestival, Brooklyn, N.Y.
- 2008 State Art Gallery, Poprad, Slovak republic
"Body Shops", Musée de l'Elysée,, Lausanne, Switzerland
- 2005 "Genius Loci", Centre Moulin de Blanchardeu , Lanvollon, Bretagne, France
- 2004 "Construction of the Human Body", Gallery Fiducia, Ostrava, Czech Republic
- 2003 Gallery Krivá ,, Vrútky, Slovak Republic
- 2001 Selection vfg 2000 (Association of Swiss Professional Photographers). Exhibition, Zurich and other Swiss cities
- 1999 «Garbage Incinerators, the Swiss Landscape», Congress-Centre L'Entrée, Basel
- 1997 «Industry Landscapes», Photoforum Feldegg, Zurich
Malá Galerie Kladno, Czech Republic
- 1994 Kulturzentrum Zichy Palac, Bratislava, Slovak Republic
Slovak State Gallery, Nitra, Slovak Republic
Slovak State Technical Museum, Kosice, Slovak Republic
- 1988 One Person Exhibition, No Name Gallery, Basel

Collective exhibitions (selection)

- 2008 "A picture chronicle of one day in the Czech Republic", Gallery Manes, Prague, Czech Republic
"Identity - The Memory of Czech Photography" in the Museum of Art of the City of Brno in Brno in Brno, Czech Republic
- 2007 "Old Ostrava", Gallery Krásný Ztráty, Prague, Czech Republic
"Juraj Lipscher, Virginia Restain, Annet van der Voort", Gallery La Filature in Mulhouse, France
- 2005 Centre Bathyscaphe, Pommerit-le-Vicomte, Bretagne, France
Gallery Fiducia, Koksovna, Ostrava, Czech Republic
- 2004 Gallery Mlejn, abandoned coal mine Michal, Ostrava, Czech Republic
- 2003 Gallery Fiducia, abandoned coal mine Michal, Ostrava, Czech Republic
City Art Commission, Gallery Alte Krone, Biel
- 2002 Castle Gallery, Mikulov, Czech Republic
- 2001 "Faszination Technik", Gallery Auf Kampnagel, Hamburg, Germany.
- 2000 Gallery Photoforum Pasquart, Biel. Purchase of the series „Maternity Wards“ by the Art Commission of the City of Biel.
- 1999 "Espèces d'espaces" in the Gallery la Filature, Mulhouse, France.
- 1998 Gallery Photoforum Pasquart, Biel

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Ville Ouverte

- «Prix Michel Jordi de Photographie 1998» (2nd place), Saint-Gervais Geneve, un Centre Pour L'image Contemporaine,, Geneva.
- 1996 Gallery 4, Cheb, Czech Republic
«Self Portraits» Malá Galerie, Kladno, Czech Republic
Gallery Photoforum Pasquart, Biel
«Le Monde du Silence»; VIe Grand Prix Photographique du Grand Passage 1995, Geneva
- 1995 Gallery Photoforum Pasquart, Biel
- 1994 Photogalerie Bild, Aarau
Gallery Photoforum Pasquart, Biel
- 1993 Photogalerie Bild, Aarau
Gallery Photoforum Pasquart, Biel
- 1992 Gallery Photoforum Pasquart, Biel
«Czechoslovak Photography in Exile» Galerie Manes, Prague
- 1983 During «Month of Photography» the Gallery Amc, Mulhouse
«Ways of Seeing» Work Gallery, Zürich
- 1982 «Life in my City» City Hall of Zurich
- 1980 4 Czech und Slovak photographers, No Name Gallery, Basel

Fellowships

- 1999 Scholarship of the Cultural Foundation of the Union Bank of Switzerland (UBS) Zurich.

Publishing

- 2008 Body Shops, Editions GwinZegal, Plouha

CREMATORIUM, 1998
Rüti, Canton Zürich, Switzerland
Silver print on Select Sepia VC Glossy Paper
Print made by the photographer
50x60 cm, edition of 7
30x40 cm, edition of 9



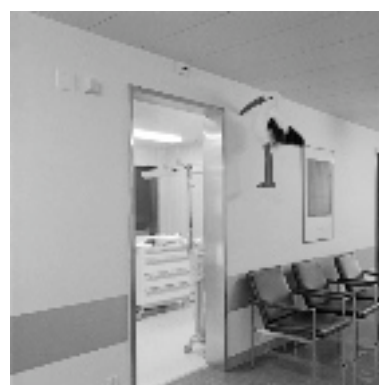
CREMATORIUM, 1998
Olten, Canton Soleure, Switzerland
Silver print on Select Sepia VC Glossy Paper
Print made by the photographer
50x60 cm, edition of 7
30x40 cm, edition of 9



CREMATORIUM, 1998
Berthoud, Canton Berne, Switzerland
Silver print on Select Sepia VC Glossy Paper
Print made by the photographer
50x60 cm, edition of 7
30x40 cm, edition of 9



MATERNITY WARD, 2000
Zürich, Switzerland
Silver print on Select Sepia VC Glossy Paper
Print made by the photographer
50x60 cm, edition of 7
30x40 cm, edition of 9



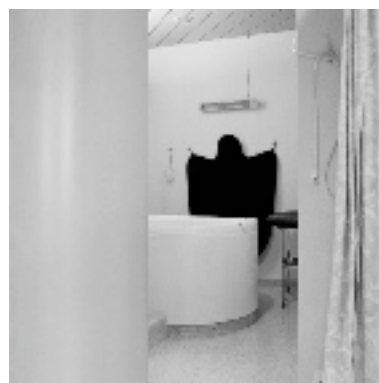
MATERNITY WARD, 2001
Wintertür, Canton Zürich, Switzerland
Silver print on Select Sepia VC Glossy Paper
Print made by the photographer
50x60 cm, edition of 7
30x40 cm, edition of 9



MATERNITY WARD, 2001
Basel, Switzerland
Silver print on Select Sepia VC Glossy Paper
Print made by the photographer
50x60 cm, edition of 7
30x40 cm, edition of 9



MATERNITY WARD, 2000
Basel, Switzerland
Silver print on Select Sepia VC Glossy Paper
Print made by the photographer
50x60 cm, edition of 7
30x40 cm, edition of 9



GYM, 2001
Uster, Canton Zürich, Switzerland
Silver print on Select Sepia VC Glossy Paper
Print made by the photographer
50x60 cm, edition of 7
30x40 cm, edition of 9



GYM, 2001
Winterthur Canton Zürich, Switzerland
Silver print on Select Sepia VC Glossy Paper
Print made by the photographer
50x60 cm, edition of 7
30x40 cm, edition of 9



GYM, 2001
Volketswil, Canton Zürich, Switzerland
Silver print on Select Sepia VC Glossy Paper
Print made by the photographer
50x60 cm, edition of 7
30x40 cm, edition of 9



BEAUTY PARLOUR, 2001
Zürich, Switzerland
Silver print on Select Sepia VC Glossy Paper
Print made by the photographer
50x60 cm, edition of 7
30x40 cm, edition of 9



AUTOPSY ROOM, 2001
Aarau, Canton Argovie, Switzerland
Silver print on Select Sepia VC Glossy Paper
Print made by the photographer
50x60 cm, edition of 7
30x40 cm, edition of 9



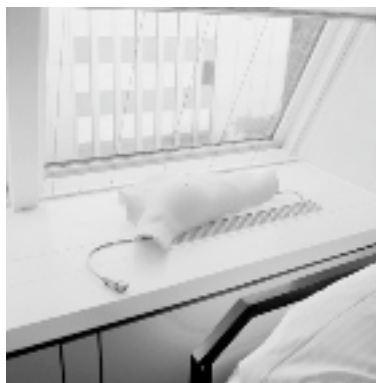
AUTOPSY ROOM, 2001
Saint-Gall, Switzerland
Silver print on Select Sepia VC Glossy Paper
Print made by the photographer
50x60 cm, edition of 7
30x40 cm, edition of 9



AUTOPSY ROOM, 2001
Zürich, Switzerland
Silver print on Select Sepia VC Glossy Paper
Print made by the photographer
50x60 cm, edition of 7
30x40 cm, edition of 9



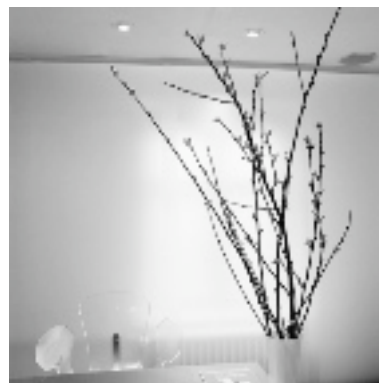
PLASTIC SURGERY CLINIC, 2007
Zürich, Switzerland
Silver print on Select Sepia VC Glossy Paper
Print made by the photographer
50x60 cm, edition of 7
30x40 cm, edition of 9



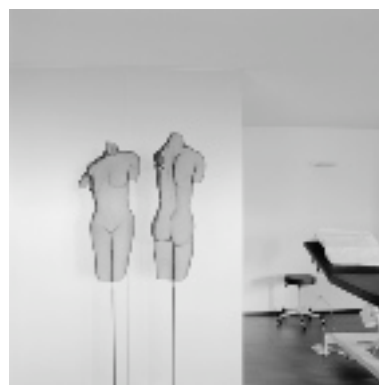
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PLASTIC SURGERY CLINIC, 2007
Meggen, Canton Lucerne, Switzerland
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Print made by the photographer
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30x40 cm, edition of 9



PLASTIC SURGERY CLINIC, 2007
Meggen, Canton Lucerne, Switzerland
Silver print on Select Sepia VC Glossy Paper
Print made by the photographer
50x60 cm, edition of 7
30x40 cm, edition of 9



BROTHEL, 2007
Recherswil, Canton Solothurn, Switzerland
Silver print on Select Sepia VC Glossy Paper
Print made by the photographer
50x60 cm, edition of 7
30x40 cm, edition of 9



BROTHEL, 2007
Zürich, Switzerland
Silver print on Select Sepia VC Glossy Paper
Print made by the photographer
50x60 cm, edition of 7
30x40 cm, edition of 9



CIVIL DEFENCE SHELTERS , 2002
Baden, Canton Aargau, Switzerland
Silver print on Select Sepia VC Glossy Paper
Print made by the photographer
50x60 cm, edition of 7
30x40 cm, edition of 9



CIVIL DEFENCE SHELTERS , 2002
Hunzenschwil, Canton Aargau, Switzerland
Silver print on Select Sepia VC Glossy Paper
Print made by the photographer
50x60 cm, edition of 7
30x40 cm, edition of 9



CIVIL DEFENCE SHELTERS , 2002
Lausen, Canton Basel-Land, Switzerland
Silver print on Select Sepia VC Glossy Paper
Print made by the photographer
50x60 cm, edition of 7
30x40 cm, edition of 9

