

In Pfaris,

with Walter Pfeiffer



It's taken Swiss and super-charming WALTER PFEIFFER decades to be hailed as a fashion-photographing genius. He's fine with that; for him it's never about money or success, but all about the beauty of the work. To celebrate a new book, bubbly WALTER hits the streets of GAY PAREE for some fantastically appropriate dressing up.

"DOT, DOT, COMMA, DASH – a smiley face in a flash!" When WALTER PFEIFFER talks about capturing beauty in a drawing, he really makes it sound as if it were all that simple. Beauty is a fleeting thing, of course. "So if you want to capture it, you have to be on the look-out all the time," Walter says. "I actually learned that from my cats: they would wait in front of the mouse holes for days. You'd think the mouse was long gone. But then it happens! It's been like this my whole life."

Walter and I are sitting in the shadows of a quiet park in BERLIN-MITTE during the historic heat wave of the summer of 2018. Walter is officially on his summer holiday. I have brought cherries as a treat. We talk about Walter's life and, at this very moment, about one particular drawing he made last year, in black ink on paper. It is included in his new book, 'Bildrausch. Drawings 1966–2018', which he has worked on for the past two years. In the drawing, what at first looks like a smiley face actually isn't. Rather, "smiling" at the viewer is a composition of cock, balls and ass crack:

the private parts of a reclining nude young man, legs apart, his face hidden behind a smartphone that he holds in the direction of the viewer. Was the model playing with his phone while lying still on a blanket because, well, modelling can be boring – even when you pose for WALTER PFEIFFER? Or was the model intent on hiding his face?

I love the drawing, and Walter loves it when I point out that these casually sketched lines bring a lot together: his life-long dedication to nude life drawing, the challenge of getting a model to show genitals and face at the same time (since usually one of them is kept hidden, as is the case in this drawing) but also: digitisation. "It's true that the internet has changed a lot of things," Walter says. "These days, nudity and porn are everywhere, but that does not mean that getting naked comes easy to all. Quite the opposite: a lot of models today worry that their pictures might end up on the net for everybody to see. They are afraid! So they say, 'OK, I will pose nude for a drawing, but not for photos.' Bummer!" But, of course, Walter always loves a challenge.

Walter is a super lovely 72-year-old fag from Zurich, SWITZERLAND, who loves to draw and is famous for his photographs. Also, he doesn't mind being called a fag at all, rather taking pride in the moniker in a way that maybe only men of his generation can. Men who grew up at a time when being gay was still taboo, even against the law. Men who, if they came from less metropolitan areas (like Switzerland) and could afford it, spent their holidays in Paris, New York or San Francisco to immerse themselves in the gay scenes there and cruise the TUILERIES, the PIERS or the CASTRO. They were men who fought – in their own small or big, activist or artistic ways – for the kind of acceptance that their younger peers can now enjoy. Not least: they were men who, after celebrating the freedoms of the '70s, were hit by the Aids crisis in the '80s. And survived.

Walter tells me about his love for Paris. He had his own atelier there in 1985; it came with the Cité des Arts grant which he had been awarded. In fact, he spent most of his time outside the studio, roaming the streets

amplifying his hyper-nervousness in a way that gets his mind racing and jumping even faster. "Phew, heat wave!" he says, stopping mid-sentence a couple of times.

I visited Walter at his home in Zurich a couple of years back. I remember being surprised by the fact that, even though he is very much in-demand as a fashion photographer, having shot campaigns for brands like FERRAGAMO, ICEBERG and A.P.C., he lives in a modest studio apartment on the third floor of a refurbished '70s housing estate in Zurich's Heuried neighbourhood. He has no sofa in his apartment. "I have no use for a couch. I'm always working, anyway," he explains. "Actually, a good friend of mine, a woman who only works from bed, once proposed that I should design a bedroom for her, and that we should share an apartment – because she's always in the bedroom, and I do nothing but work in the living room, office, atelier, studio or whatever you want to call it," he says.

Walter's flat is stuffed with PROPS in intense colours, which he arranges into witty still lifes or uses to visually spice up

Text by JAN KEDVES, photography by KUBA RYNIWICZ, styling by JULIAN GANIO

in search of boys with beautiful faces to photograph, for example in the aptly named RUE DES MAUVAIS GARÇONS. But he didn't dare chat the boys up himself, so he sent a friend who was over on a visit from Germany to stand in as his assistant. "I had my rucksack on, and we went to a different *quartier* every day. I'd say to my friend, 'Oh, this one!' and he'd walk up to the boy: 'Oh yeah, no problem,' click-click. We did this all day, all over Paris, up, down, back, front. I was the happiest man on earth!"

** SPORTY **

Just before our meeting in Berlin, Walter had spent a week in Paris photographing a new campaign for a major fashion brand. He was also a model himself for the photos in this story, enjoying dressing up as an ageing superfag in all the latest fashions. "The pictures are extreme, don't you think?" He smiles proudly. Walter loves to GIGGLE when he talks, and he can seem a little jumpy. He prefers to talk in short sentences, and possibly the summer heat is

his portrait shots. Patterned textiles, candy, plastic flowers, all kinds of joke shop items. The flat has a big, beautifully swung balcony which, like all the balconies in the five-storey building, has a bright-orange curtain that you can pull shut to shield yourself from either too much sun or nosy neighbours. Walter is lucky, though; his neighbours are nice. He is positive that none of them knows, or cares, that Mr. PFEIFFER from the third floor is famous in the world of art and fashion. "Nobody knows my name is Rumpelstiltskin!" he jokes. Walter has a special CRUSH on his neighbour next door: an elderly gentleman who used to be a ring gymnast in his prime.

"He recently turned 100. I couldn't believe it! He looks much younger, like 90, maybe. He goes hiking all the time, much more than I do!" Walter says almost jealously. The thought that his neighbour once had a hot athlete's body clearly fascinates him. Walter learned about the man's sporty past when he saw a news bit on the local TV station which showed how his neighbour had been visited by a city councillor and

awarded a special medal for the city's centenarians. They have chatted in the hallway since. "I call him my idol," Walter says.

Before moving here, Walter had for decades lived and worked in huge apartments in old villas and buildings with high ceilings in parts of Zurich that felt more *bohème* and artsy, but were dark and "ice, ice cold" in winter. "The cats were freezing, so I had to come up with a method to keep both of them, PIPS and FRÄULEIN NÜSSLI, warm: I hung two lampshades with tulle and placed the cats under them, like laying hens."

ALPS

Moving into the quiet, petit-bourgeois neighbourhood of Heuried felt awkward at first. "But it is perfect!" Walter says. "I have all the connections: the forest on the south side is only five minutes away, and the tram that goes the other way takes me to the central train station in just five minutes." That comes in handy, because Walter has been travelling almost CONSTANTLY since his career as a fashion photographer took off in the middle of the aughts. Walter was around 60 at the time. Not many people start a whole new career at 60. Even fewer 60-year-olds have their breakthrough shooting happy-clappy fashion spreads and covers for 'Purple', 'i-D', 'Vogue' and 'Another Magazine'. Walter is exceptional in every aspect. Before coming to Berlin for his holiday and working a full week in Paris, he had spent a week in Capri as a guest at the property of an aristocratic Tyrolean dynasty, who then invited him to draw a family portrait for their annual Christmas card. Of course, he made sure to visit Casa Malaparte, the spectacular modern villa that the writer CURZIO MALAPARTE built on top of a cliff in the late '30s "for a young man he had fallen in love with," as Walter recalls. "JEAN-LUC GODARD used the villa as the set for his film 'Le Mépris'. The panoramic view over the Tyrrhenian Sea is amazing, but I found the villa a bit disappointing. There is nothing left in there!" Earlier this year Walter also travelled to London. The Barbican Art Gallery had included a selection of his photographs from Zurich in the '70s in its survey 'Another Kind of Life: Photography on the Margins', a show that celebrated photography's ability to capture the lives of subcultures.

Flying around the globe and being picked up by CHAUFFEURS is nice, but Walter's schedule is very demanding. "I'll retire at 65 when I'm done with all of this,

what do you think?" he jokes, fully aware that I know that he is 72. Maybe his way of dealing with day-long photo shoots, delays at airports and not getting enough sleep in hotels in different time zones is that, whenever he is back home in Zurich, he becomes a man of rituals. "I go for a SWIM every morning for one hour," he says. In summer, he prefers the OPEN-AIR Freibad Heuried, which is "basically just three steps away." He goes HIKING in the Swiss Alps with friends as often as he can. And he goes on his YEARLY FAST for three weeks each spring to drop some winter weight and boost his health. "The first two days can be rough," he concedes, "but if you do an enema every two days, it is not that hard, and you'll actually be on a high very soon. I do it with the iron German DISCIPLINE of the late MARLENE DIETRICH. The hardest part, actually, is to slowly start eating again. I have a very detailed programme for that. I start with half an apple, steamed."

COCKS

Another ritual that Walter cherishes is Berlin. When he spends his two weeks in the city each summer, he hangs out with friends, goes for a swim in the morning, maybe at the Prinzenbad in Kreuzberg, and cruises the local parks and lakes – not for sex, but for spots where he can draw his latest "beauty," meaning: his latest model. His Berlin circle, who, like all his friends, call him "WALTI," are devoted fans. Somehow, mysteriously, another young man always comes up, joining the group, agreeing to drop his clothes, though maybe insisting on hiding his face behind a smartphone.

We talk about Walter's new book, 'Bildrausch. Drawings 1966–2018', published by Edition Patrick Frey, a small art publisher in Zurich. It will most likely surprise those who know WALTER PFEIFFER only as a fashion photographer. The book introduces a whole new Walter, who in fact is the former Walter: the artist and draughtsman. 'Bildrausch' contains some 400 pages of radiant still-life and life drawings of flowers and potted plants, perfume bottles, umbrellas, men, cats and men holding cats, plus all-overs of hands, cocks or shoes. There's an abundance of colour and humour in Walter's drawings, as well as an abundance of style. Sometimes his drawings look "pop," at other times a little cubist. The title of the book, which roughly translates to "Image High" or "High on Images", seems fitting. "Do you like the book? Do you think it was the (continues on page 123)



Regrattier is French for "huckster." The merino jumper on WALTER's body is by JOHN SMEDLEY, whereas the cashmere jumper round his neck is by HERMÈS. Sunglasses by CUTLER & GROSS, shorts by ADIDAS and boots from MAISON MARGIELA ARTISANAL by JOHN GALLIANO. All clothes throughout are for Spring/Summer '19.

On the opening spread, WALTER's wearing a check linen-and-cotton shirt with a matching silk-and-wool scarf, both by LOEWE. His CUTLER & GROSS acetate sunglasses include crystal detailing by SWAROVSKI.



Does any city have more exciting staircases? WALTER is dressed in a white nylon trench coat, red patent leather riding boots, and white plastic sunglasses. All are from MAISON MARGIELA ARTISANAL by JOHN GALLIANO, as is that red vinyl bag. Around his head is a red chiffon scarf by CHARVET.



On a lovely Parisian terrace like this, "une noisette et un croissant beurre" set WALTER back a small fortune, as do his felted wool beret by LOCK & CO., silk scarf by HERMÈS, white shirt by CHARVET, drill trousers by MARGARET HOWELL, socks with white-rose detailing by KENZO and black leather HERMÈS sandals. His identity bangle and identity bracelet are by BUNNEY. Sunglasses by GUCCI.

WALTER PFEIFFER



WALTER in gold-plated CARTIER sunglasses, a light grey linen suit by BRIONI and a shirt from MAISON MARGIELA ARTISANAL by JOHN GALLIANO. His gold St. Christopher signet ring is by BUNNEY, as is his identity bangle. He's wearing a wig.



The Île Saint-Louis is neither Right Bank nor Left Bank but somewhere in the middle of the Seine. WALTER, now blond, is wearing white acetate sunglasses by CUTLER & GROSS, a white track-suit by JACQUEMUS, socks by FALKE and black sandals by FENDI.

... HAT. WOMAN PLAYING WITH BOOBS IN BRA OVER SAXOPHONE MUSIC. AFTER 22 SEEMINGLY UNRELATED SCENES IN BLACK & WHITE,

FOOTAGE TURNS TO COLOUR. A BOY STICKS OUT HIS TONGUE. CLOSE UP OF HANDS REACHING OUT. CLOSING CREDITS FEATURING ...



Il pleut? WALTER's formidable umbrella hat is actually current season FENDI, while his wool jumper and leather sandals are next season FENDI. His trousers are by local sensation JACQUEMUS and his socks are by FALKE.

(continued from page 116) right decision to publish it?" Walter asks me incessantly. I answer affirmatively again and again.

'Bildrausch' spans a career of 52 years, which at times probably did not feel much like a career at all. There were periods when all Walter did was basically draw at home alone, selling hardly any works, living frugally. He took a job teaching at the F+F SCHOOL FOR ART AND MEDIA DESIGN in Zurich to pay the rent. "I had the TV running on the left, the work was in front of me, the cats were in the back and I had music playing. Sometimes I'd chat with someone on the phone while drawing. That's what I would do: day in, day out, into the wee hours, for weeks. I got tendonitis from drawing too much! But it was heaven!"

That phase lasted well into the late '90s, but there had been earlier career highs, too: in the '60s Walter started out as an in-demand painter of film posters; in 1969 he got a job as an illustrator and graphic designer for the Swiss department store GLOBUS. 'Bildrausch' includes a photo of him modelling the latest ski-wear for

Spending time with Walter can be a journey into a pre-digital but nonetheless densely networked world of anecdotes, many concerning CELEBRITIES. It seems that Walter, even if he had never made a name for himself outside Switzerland, would have been perfectly happy for the rest of his life simply recounting the moments spent rubbing shoulders with giants of art and fashion. In one of his anecdotes, from 1970, he is in London: "A very good friend of mine, a boutique owner from Zurich, was married to PETER PHILLIPS, the British Pop artist, and he invited us to London to the opening of an exhibition by ALLEN JONES, the show with the tables. I met a young shoe designer, MANOLO BLAHNIK, who complimented me on my expensive Nebuloni golf shoes, which I had saved every penny for. When we met again, MANOLO showed me a page he had torn out of 'Twen' [Walter had worked for the German magazine as a freelance illustrator]. In fact, the page MANOLO had torn out was an illustration of shoes by me! Later, he gave me a pair of his own designs as a present."

IN THE DIARY

OCCASIONS AND PLANS IN THE WORLD OF WALTER PFEIFFER

19 JULY 2018

Walter is photographed by Kuba Ryniewicz in Paris. They eat at Café Louis Philippe for lunch.

24 JULY 2018

Walter is interviewed by Jan Kedves in a disused military cemetery in Berlin.

16 SEPTEMBER 2018

The Freibad Heuried, Walter's favourite swimming pool in Zurich, closes for the winter season.

3 OCTOBER 2018

Walter's new book 'Bildrausch. Drawings 1966-2018' launches at the F+F School for Art and Media Design in Zurich.

8 NOVEMBER 2018

The Swiss Institute honours Walter with a Special Tribute award at its 2018 benefit gala in New York.

29 MARCH 2019

Walter turns 73. His Chinese zodiac symbol is the fire dog.

a '70s GLOBUS winter catalogue. He tells me that the shoot took place in the middle of the summer on the Jungfrauoch, which – at almost 3,500 metres above sea level – has snow all year, even today. "But who knows for how much longer, with all that h-e-a-t?" Walter quips, referring to climate change. Another model in that shoot was DAVID WEISS, who later acquired international art-world fame as one half of the Swiss artist duo FISCHLI/WEISS.

** WARHOL **

Dressing up has always been one of Walter's favourite pastimes, and the fun of it translates into his fashion shoots. He seems to view his fashion photography as a natural continuation of what he and his friends have always done in Zurich anyway, spontaneously, the difference being that now the budgets are much bigger and many more people are involved and want to have a say. He observes all of this with a kind of bemusement and ironic detachment, which, again, turns up in his pictures.

Another of Walter's anecdotes involves BRUCE WEBER, with whom, he notes, he shares the same date of birth: 29 March 1946; they are both Aries. The year is 1986, and Walter is showing his black-and-white headshots of boys taken on the streets of Paris and Zurich – published the same year in his book 'Das Auge, die Gedanken, unentwegt wandernd' (The eye, the thoughts, roaming incessantly) – in a show at Kunsthalle Basel curated by the legendary Jean-Christophe Ammann. Also in the show: BRUCE WEBER, who came all the way from New York to attend the opening in Basel. "WEBER was already a huge star at the time, and it was pretty clear that he was not interested in me or my photos. But he was *very* interested in one of my models!" Walter remembers. In fact, WEBER sent his agent to chat up Walter's model and invite him to the US to shoot with him. As a consequence, the young man enjoyed a couple of years of success being booked internationally as a model.

Then there's ANDY: Walter describes himself as having been "ANDY CRAZY,"

completely under the spell of WARHOL's Factory throughout the '70s. When he published his first book in 1980, 'Walter Pfeiffer: 1970–1980', a collection of party pictures shot at locations including the dilapidated villa he had rented, he hoped that ANDY would somehow see it and take notice. He had included some casually taken pictures of erections in the book. "A friend of mine did manage to get the book through to WARHOL. He flipped through it and said: 'Yes, yes, tell your friend to shoot more pictures, but not such dirty ones!'" All this happened in Zurich. Warhol had a gallerist in town – the legendary BRUNO BISCHOFBERGER – "but I never got to meet Andy in Zurich," Walter says. "My friends who knew his friends never called me when they would go out to dinner with him. They only ever told me afterwards."

** SCHWUCHTEL **

Then Walter spent a year in New York City on a residency funded by the city of Zurich. But even there he didn't manage to meet WARHOL or visit the Factory. Was he too shy? "Someone had given me the telephone number of GERARD MALANGA, who had worked at the Factory and had produced Warhol's silkscreens. But by that time, they were no longer on speaking terms." Walter's residency came with a big studio on West Broadway paid for by Schweizerische Bankgesellschaft, known today as UBS. He enjoyed what he calls "the absolute high time of New York": the time before Aids. 1980. "I remember walking down 54th Street wearing a huge thrift-store fur coat which I had brought over from Zurich. A truck driver stopped, he leaned out the window of his cockpit and HOLLERED at me: 'Hey, fag!'" Others would have been offended, of course, but we have already established that Walter is a proud fag. In German, he loves to use that language's equivalents, which, even today, sound super vulgar: *Schwuchtel* or *Tucke*. Walter says he likes these words, as they remind him of the times "back when they were chasing me."

Even though 'Bildrausch' is a perfect title for his new book, '72 Years of Chasing Beauty' could have been a good alternative title, since that's what Walter's been doing all this time. In fact, 'Chasing Beauty' is the title of a documentary about Walter by the Swiss director Iwan Schumacher, which premiered late last year. While not exactly breathtaking in filmic terms – and actually even a bit boring because it follows the standards of TV documentary rather

slavishly – it still makes for a fascinating watch, if only for the interviews with some of Walter's former models: men and women he photographed in their PRIME in the '70s and '80s. They all were drawn into Walter's circle in pretty much the same way: by some friend of theirs who told them: "Come, I know this guy who shoots cool pictures of young guys." The camera films his former models as they look back at their portraits, nudes and semi-nudes. Settled Swiss family fathers in their fifties, now successful architects or watch-makers, recount how, back when they were young, Walter made them feel beautiful, how he took them seriously, how their mothers gave permission. There is no embarrassment or remorse, only pride. "Walti was SUPER GAY, we all knew that, and we would make jokes about him. But he never crossed a line, and word would have gotten around very quickly in our circles if he had," one man says.

ANTONIN WITWERT is a model from Zurich to whom in 2016 Walter dedicated a whole book in the 'EY! Boy Collection' series by the Spanish publisher LUIS VENEGAS. In the documentary, Antonin says that doing nude shots with Walter allowed him to "get to know himself in a different way" and that he "enjoyed challenging himself." Walter later found out that Antonin is the son of one of his earliest models, a man he had photographed in the '70s but had lost touch with. He is included in Walter's book, 'Scrapbooks 1969–1985'. So, all in all, it seems safe to say that Walter has made a life chasing the beauty of Swiss men, bringing out the hottest in generations of them, sometimes whole families, questioning masculinity along the way. The PLAYFULNESS, the fun that makes his work so special is usually lost, Walter tells me, once his models are drafted for military service, which is mandatory in Switzerland. The military trains them to hide any vulnerability behind a shell of hard manliness. "Then it's over," Walter says. "They stop getting back to me, they ignore my messages. Rude!"

** SUCCESS **

Does he sometimes think he deserved more success, earlier? Walter giggles. "Other artists, when they have found success at a young age, become bitter when they lose their way, when they find that their recognition does not hold up as time goes by. They turn aggressive and feisty, complaining about bad reviews and such," he muses, as if to say: "I have never become that way." He recounts almost proudly how he was not

even nagging when, in 2008, the renowned Fotomuseum Winterthur honoured him with a big retrospective, and the major Swiss daily 'Tages-Anzeiger', instead of praising one of Switzerland's greats, ran a scathing review. WALTER is happy to live by the principle that one should show nothing but love, even for one's haters.

"Act as if nothing happened, downplay everything, otherwise you'll only fire them up," he says. "That's what I'm good at, and always have been, right from the start: being Prince Charming."

FURTHER READING:

- 'Bildrausch. Drawings 1966–2018' by Walter Pfeiffer (Edition Patrick Frey, 2018)
- 'Archiving Warhol: An Illustrated History' by Gerard Malanga (Creation Books, 2002)
- 'Walking in Switzerland' by Clem Lindenmayer (Lonely Planet, 2001)



Sporting a particularly choppy French bob, WALTER wears a black organza knit top around his face, a black silk headscarf around his torso, and black leather gloves, all from MAISON MARGIELA ARTISANAL by JOHN GALLIANO. His sunglasses are by CUTLER & GROSS.

Photographic assistance by Gregor Stirling and Ryan Ben Yaiche. Styling assistance by John Handford and Betsy Johnson. Hair by Tomohiro Inotsume. Make-up by Akari Sugino using Marc Jacobs Beauty. Production by Rosco Production. Special thanks to Le Lutétia, Île Saint-Louis.