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APRIL 29 – JUNE 30 2009
ART IN AMERICA
MAY 12 2009

Art in America INTERNATIONAL • REVIEW

New in Books: Manon - A Person

by [sarah hromack](#) 05/12/09

What might Manon's practice have looked like had the Swiss performance pioneer initiated her storied career now, instead of during the 1970's? Would she be a cam girl, streaming her exploits live via the Internet for a paying audience? Or a compulsive "lifecaster" perhaps, blogging away in her satin-lined boudoir for a rapt fan base scattered across the globe? Such shapeshifters owe a debt of gratitude to artists like Manon, whose radical performative and photographic investigations helped articulate a line of inquiry that holds gender and sexuality as a means of agency over the production -- and even, the consumption -- of one's own self.

While Manon is the *ur*-Suicide Girl, her archive -- including her most recent photographic series from 2007, *Borderline* -- is analog in form. Yet "Manon - A Person," the monograph of her work published on to coincide with her current exhibition at the Swiss Institute, manages to capture the sense of fluidity that so easily lends practices like hers to the digital domain. Part photo essay, "Manon - A Person" presents a comprehensive survey of a career that began during the 1960's in Zurich, where the Berne-born Rosmarie Küng (her given name) began a modeling stint that soon segued into experiments in fashion, photography, installation, and performance. An artistic practice so closely aligned with life itself produces loads of ephemera; a wide array of notes, drawings, collages and photographs spanning the past forty-plus years are interspersed with five critical essays, including contributions from the exhibition's curator, Gianni Jetzer, Frieze editor Jörg Heizer, and an exceptionally well-theorized piece by feminist art historian and critic Amelia Jones, who considers the artist's practice in psychoanalytic terms.



While the modestly produced book lacks the sensual qualities one might expect given Manon's own lavish tastes, 134 color plates more than compensate for its physical plainness. (So does Jean-Christophe Ammann's entry, which consists largely of a long, erotic passage cribbed from a novel by Hansjörg Schertenleib, in which an anonymous submissive details his desires to the dominatrix hired to fulfill them.) As exhibition catalogues go, usability isn't to be taken for granted. "Manon - A Person" is as much a documentary resource as it is a celebration of the show; its appendix was clearly organized with future research in mind. Though billed as a "comprehensive" monograph of the artist's work, book seems less an attempt to define (or even worse, confine) the artist's practice than a genuine tribute to an oft-overlooked pioneer of feminist performance. Next up: "Manon - A Website."