



Rosa von Praunheim retrospective

In 1967, Rosa von Praunheim attended the fourth edition of EXPRMNTL in Knokke-le-Zoute. It was his first film festival; until then, he had been primarily interested in painting, writing and performance art. The vibrant ecosystem he encountered at EXPRMNTL captivated him: there he discovered the “brilliant and trashy” films of the American underground, a cinema he would cite throughout his life as a major source of influence, alongside the Expressionist arts. The radical, queer images of Jack Smith and Gregory J. Markopoulos – for whom he would soon become an assistant – were, for their part, a revelation: “That was where I first saw gay men and their erotic dreams on screen,” wrote Praunheim in his memoir *Fünfzig Jahre pervers: die sentimentalen Memoiren des Rosa von Praunheim*.

It was also in Knokke that he met the director Werner Schroeter, with whom he became friends; Schroeter, in turn, introduced him to his leading lady, Magdalena Montezuma, who went on to star in one of Praunheim’s very first films, **Macbeth Oper von Rosa von Praunheim**.

Rosa von Praunheim took away from the Belgian festival an appreciation of the emancipatory potential of experimental cinema. He embraced its DIY ethos and, in turn, developed a cinema of resourcefulness—joyfully rough-and-ready and collaborative—in constant friction with the mores and norms of the dominant culture. Camp, kitsch, the trashy and bad taste become, in Praunheim’s work, formidable critical tools against post-war West German bourgeois society (**Die Bettwurst** and its sequel **Berliner Bettwurst**).

Of all the queer filmmakers of the New German Cinema – Ulrike Ottinger, Monika Treut, Elfi Mikesch, Werner Schroeter, Rainer Werner Fassbinder – Rosa von Praunheim is the only one to champion an openly gay and revolutionary cinema. To the point of making it an essential part of his persona. He thus decided, in the 1960s, to adopt the feminine name Rosa von Praunheim, in reference to the Rosa Winkel: the pink triangle that LGBT deportees wore in Nazi concentration camps. In 1971, Praunheim collaborated with sexologist Martin Dannecker on **It Is Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse, But the Society in Which He Lives** [Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation, in der er lebt]: a provocative film known for having sparked the emergence of contemporary gay and lesbian liberation movements in Germany. Conceived as an indirect sequel to the latter, **Army of Lovers or Revolts of the Perverts** [Armee der Liebenden oder Aufstand der Perversen] (1979) documents, this time, the North American queer emancipation movement of the 1950s–70s. **Der Einstein des Sex** (1999) looks back at the activism of one of the pioneers of German and European LGBTQIA+ activism: Dr Magnus Hirschfeld.

In the 1980s, Rosa von Praunheim became a leading figure in the fight against HIV/AIDS and a staunch advocate for safe sex. With **Ein Virus kennt keine Moral**, he created a biting musical, a radical artistic critique of the actions of

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governments and the media. **The Aids-Trilogy** [Die Aids-Trilogie], released in 1990, focuses its first two parts (**Positive** [Positiv] and **Silence = Death** [Schweigen = Tod]) on how New York's queer communities are organising themselves against the virus. By contrast, **Feuer Unterm Arsch**, the third part of the trilogy, denounces the total lack of activism against HIV/AIDS in Germany. The film led Rosa von Praunheim to carry out one of the most controversial political acts of his career: publicly outing – without their consent – a number of German television presenters, in the style of the guerrilla actions of the Queer Nation collective.

Undeniably provocative, Praunheim's films (and his stances) form a cinema of rebellion that also proves to be a cinema of care. His most scathing films, such as **It Is Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse, But the Society in Which He Lives**, are systematically followed by discussions with the audience. He also creates portraits of women and marginalised people which, beneath a somewhat caustic exterior, reveal incredible tenderness: for his actors (such as his friend Lotti Huber in **Unsere Leichen leben noch**), for his collaborators (Elfi Mikesch, on cinematography, notably in **Leidenschaften, Anita – Tänze des Lasters** and **Horror Vacui**), for forgotten old stars (**Ich bin ein Antistar – Das skandalöse Leben der Evelyn Künneke** and **Tally Brown, New York**), and for his biological and adoptive mothers (**Meine Mütter – Spurensuche in Riga**).

Finally, Rosa von Praunheim dedicated a series of works to the trans and drag communities which, whilst not entirely free of certain clumsy moments, offered a platform for political and artistic expression that was unusual for the time (**City of Lost Souls** [Stadt der Verlorenen Seelen] in 1983, **Ich bin meine eigene Frau** in 1992 and **Transsexual Menace** [Vor dem Transsexuellen wird gewarnt] in 1996).

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