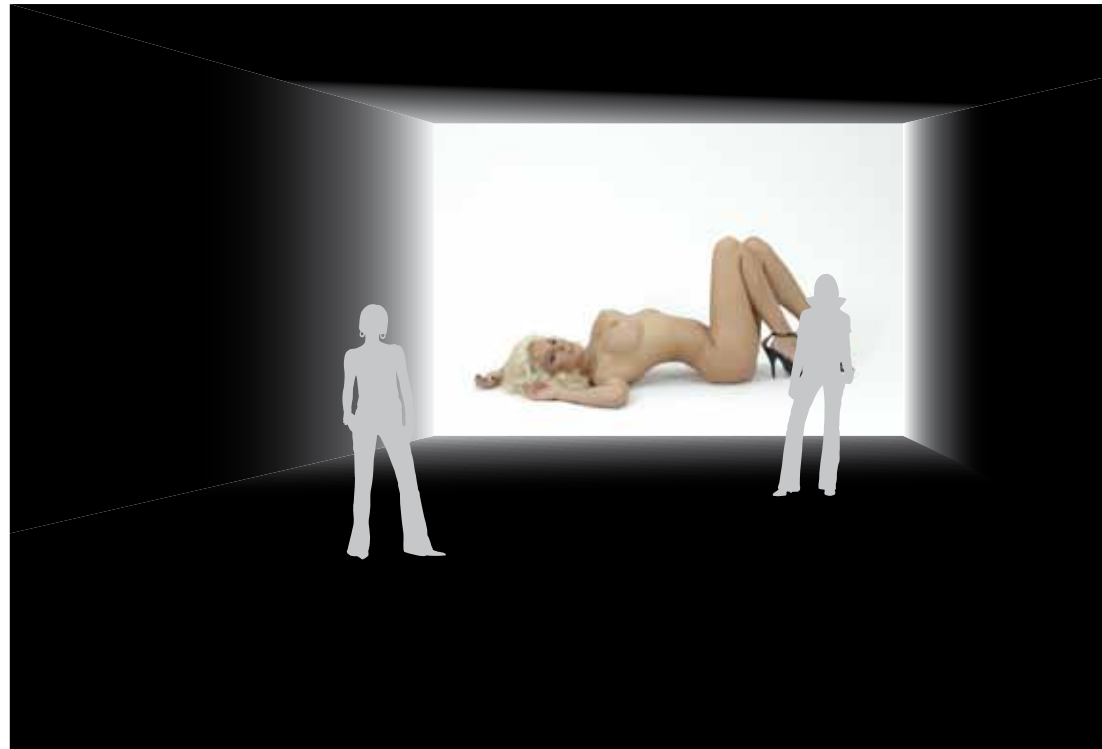


# Penetration

»Il cherchent, ils cherchent sans arrêt mais ils ne trouvent rien, et ils sont malheureux jusqu'à l'os.«

- Michel Houellebecq

Penetration deals with the magic of the instant moment where the spectator connects with the object in sight. It consists of 3 to 5 short films accompanied by a supporting soundtrack as well as production stills. Penetration also covers the omnipresent visual «sexual» stimulation and uncovers the absurdness of the so called erotic or seductive visual conventions.



Sketch of a *Penetration* projection.

## Year of production

2008

## Show

2008, pep+no name gallery, Basel,  
Switzerland

2009, piclet.org / PopUp / #1 / Berlin,  
Germany

## Contact

[www.benjaminfueglistner.com](http://www.benjaminfueglistner.com)  
[contact@benjaminfueglistner.com](mailto:contact@benjaminfueglistner.com)

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Benjamin Füglistner, Untitled, 2008. From Penetration 1. Inkjet Print, 30 x 52.5 cm each



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«I do need to get this out in the open, so I'll write it down. I have a very bad insecurity about my body. I feel there is something wrong with it. ... I hate being seen naked. I'll get over it someday... hopefully!»

- Jenna Jameson, diary entry, June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1989, age 15

## Premature Seduction

Benjamin Füglisters work «PENETRATION» was created in 2008 and comprises a video, photographs and this publication of chronologically ordered production photos, which act as film stills.

Penetration is a technical term for coitus that is commonly associated with sex. Benjamin Füglisters work, however, does not depict sexual acts. Only women are pictured; men are absent. The series nevertheless concerns penetration.

The serial photographs are characterized by formal peculiarities. We see young women engaged in artistry of the body, posing in an appellative, suggestive manner. Furthermore, the models function in a particular role, namely as performers from pornographic film, extracted and placed on a white background. In this decontextualized sterility, they seem like laboratory subjects, or corpora delicti. The well-lit studio setting amplifies the functional, typological air of the photographs.

The positions assumed in each beginning photo are typical of those that instigate and promulgate the pornographic industry. The initializing gesture of each dramatic, semantically charged series is accompanied by a strong fixation on the observer. On the photographs that follow, the fixed situation and constellation of the gaze seem to disintegrate. Movement becomes apparent, and with it, confusion and disorder. In the last image, the original pose is dissolved; in a narrower sculptural sense, the figure is destroyed. The woman is delivered from her immobilization, the constraints of the pose are lifted, and her body is relaxed.

Indeed, the photographer has asked his models to assume poses typical of those prevalent in sex media. Stiletto heels are in this case not only a classic accessory that emphasizes the fetish nature of the scene by perverting the posture, but also act as a kind of small pedestal upon which the model is placed, rendering her exposed and inaccessible. At the same time, stilettos considerably compromise stability, suggesting vulnerability.

The professionalism – that is, the actual recognition of this intended field of gaze – facilitates the models presentation, or representation, of appeal and excitement, of haughtiness and the need for admiration, of vanity and lust. However, the photographer puts an end to this postmodern coquetry by leading it ad absurdum. The models hold their prescribed poses as long as their muscles will let them – until cramps give in to gravity and the body collapses. This generally occurs after a few minutes, since the body is not capable of holding such a complex pose for very long. The appeal of posing is quickly played out.

The posture collapses surprisingly quickly. Physical cramping and exhaustion are the result of deficits in the blood. The body and its movements are declared the origin of revolt. The body itself rebels against its dictated posture and its visual formulation, against its position. This experience is well-documented in the «PENETRATION» video, which was made during the photo shoot. In just a few minutes, the viewer can clearly observe the successive cramping, destabilization and final collapse of the pose. Physical exercise,

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drudgery and exertion are lifted, giving way to fatigue. Depletion of strength and consequent disorganization, however, arrive with some degree of serenity.

Benjamin Füglistler illustrates the body's yearning for relaxation and harmony, not by depicting aphrodisiac-like meditative relaxation, but by pulling the eye to the moment of catharsis, the demarcation between burden and exhaustion - a fundamental, and excessively sought-after structural characteristic of pornographic dramaturgy.

The photographs do not only display the body in its limited capacity to sustain a posture. In their chronological path to capitulation, heralded by shaking muscles, each series undergoes, and causes, an odd transformation in gaze aspect. While the models look out at the observer in each initial image, she breaks it in those that follow. Simultaneously, with the collapse of the erotic pose - exertion, collapse, exhaustion - the observer develops the triad of lust: visualization, focus, penetration. The initial arrangement between observer and model obtains dynamic, and the static scene that intends to stimulate begins to flow.

By extracting it from its context of an over-sexualized society, the erotic effect is derailed. The intent to seduce, to desire, disintegrates, because the act is frozen in its primary intent, making it useless. The still image forbids dialogue, and with it the development of desire. While the male observer attempts to develop passion and lust for his subject, she decomposes before his eyes, freeing the gaze on, and into the model. The gaze dominates the female body. As the excitement is drained from the image, the model's own checking gaze falls, and seduction becomes a physical burden, the gaze is redirected into the body, the body as an object, which has surrendered to the observer without the volition of the model. The observer imagines the model as his prey and fantasizes himself into the role of penetrator, because the observed has fallen victim to the physics of her body and in doing so, (photographically) to him.

The series perpetuates «appropriation art» - an art and photography movement begun in the early Eighties that seeks to re-create, imitate or parody the themes of various media. Mentionable in the area of erotic contexts is Edouard Levé (1965-2007), who in «Pornographie» (2002) enacted sex scenes with smartly-dressed models. In this work, however, no activity is visible; his re-creation is solely a tableau vivant. The genital act is reduced to zero, symptomatic of a society whose promiscuity has become mentally contained, whose active sex life has been lost.

Vanessa Beecroft (\*1969) represents another perspective in this movement. Having selected a number of models who resemble each other as strongly as possible, she places them in specific settings and leaves them to their fates for hours. The models must say and do nothing, and are therefore slaves of their physicality. Exhibited as a photogenic pack, as in «VB 46» (2001), they are ultimately broken by their lack of action. Like game, they become utterly vulnerable to the observer, calling to mind a vivarium similar to that of «VB 53» (2004), but one from which they cannot escape, despite the lack of glass. Beecroft sees her work as exercises in the punitive; in the context of dominance and subordination, the

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fact that so many women wish to take part and endure the strain required of them offers an insight into gender-specific behavior.

Illustrated alongside the stereotyped image content of «PENETRATION» is the stereotyped reaction to it. Both end, however, at or on the paper, because the realism of the color photo can only seduce the viewer to the paper upon which it is printed – whether as part of an exhibit or in a glossy porn magazine, it is only a depiction. Because they cannot be consummated, both coquetry and the desire to penetrate are taken ad absurdum. Tender and lust are paper fiction and projection. Image and observer are captured equally in their respective (mental) voids; individual intent cannot be realized. Penetration is made impossible for both parties: coitus interruptus. - Fritz Franz Vogel, Wädenswil, Switzerland



Video Still. From *Penetration*, 2008



Video Still. From *Penetration*, 2008



Video Still. From *Penetration*, 2008