

SIEGESSÄULE presents:

**Pornfilmfestival Berlin**, 25. - 30.10.,  
Movimento, Babylon Kreuzberg  
pornfilmfestivalberlin.de

**NARCISSISM – The Auto-Erotic Images (Opening Film)**

25.10. 20:00, 20:30, 21:00, **Movimento**,  
30.10., 13:00, **Babylon Kreuzberg**

During the festival, the accompanying **photo book**  
can be purchased at Movimento and Babylon Kreuzberg

**Additional daily screenings: 03.-09.11., Movimento**

## In front of the mirror

Toni Karat is an artist, filmmaker and part of Berlin's queer sex-positive scene. Toni's documentary "NARCISSISM - The Auto-Erotic Images" will open this year's Pornfilmfestival Berlin, and the accompanying photo book will be released at the same time. SIEGESSÄULE spoke with Toni about looking in the mirror, self-hatred and self-love.



### **What did you experience when you told people over the last three years that you were working on a project about narcissism?**

The reactions came promptly and most of the people were rather skeptical about the concept of narcissism. You immediately hear diagnoses like "narcissistic personality disorder." It's not something people want to deal with - especially not women and even less lesbians. It has to be said that the myth of the **Narcissus** - who falls in love with his mirror image - was only put in such a bad light by Sigmund Freud and all these psychoanalysts of the end of the 19th century. The image was formed that it is reprehensible to find one's countenance or oneself great.

### **What sparked your interest in narcissism?**

In the beginning, there was a retrospective at the Berlin Porn Film Festival about Peter Berlin, *the* gay porn star from the 1970s. He just thought it was cool to do an insane amount of self-portraits, in tight clothes and bulging pants. After that I thought, I'd like to do that too! But what's my problem? I also used to take pictures of myself, but it always felt weird and I never showed them to anyone. Because that would be narcissistic.

### **How did the photo book and the film come about?**

I just couldn't let go of the subject. The idea for the photo project, including the title, appeared to me in a flash at an exhibition in the „Schwules Museum“ (Gay Museum, Berlin). Five minutes later, I was already talking to everyone about it, and Mahide Lein and Birgit Bosold promptly wanted to join in. When it became clear to me that I would want to learn much more about the protagonist's thoughts about narcissism, I also had to do a documentary film to go with it.

### **You found a special location for the photos and interviews.**

It's an attic, somewhere in Berlin, where hardly anything has been changed since 1929. The rawness and dirt up there were great, the earthy colors, the timelessness of the place. And in

Oscar Wilde's novel "The Portrait of Dorian Gray," the painting - that ages in place of the protagonist - is eventually banished to the attic. I liked that idea.

**Ten of the 39 protagonists of the photo book appear in the film interviews. You yourself also contribute as an off-voice in a very personal way. Why?**

At first, I had the noble plan to serve the protagonists only, to listen and to stay in the background. Because I didn't want to appear vain. But of course people also want to know why I am actually doing this project. That put me on the track of my own vacancies, like my problem with narcissism.

Why do I prefer to be in the second row? Suddenly so many questions arose, for example about my female - or worse - lesbian socialization. It's not only society and patriarchy that are to blame for lesbian invisibility, we also make ourselves invisible. So I dragged myself into the spotlight against my will, which was a hard process for me.

**I like how often the word lesbian appears in the film.**

This was not planned at all in the beginning. I define myself as non-binary (and about 90% lesbian). In the first place I wanted to explore the influence of gender on the way we look in the mirror. But more and more I had to ask myself what was going on with my own lesbian identity and background. How am I actually viewed from the outside: where have I been discriminated against, insulted and threatened? I had faded that out most of the time. These questions suddenly came more and more to the fore.

**You let your protagonists stage themselves in front of the mirror. Were there any differences in terms of gender?**

There is a clear tendency. On average, the more male-socialized participants had far fewer problems with their reflection in the mirror. They were more likely to say: "Cool, I feel great! Hardly any of the female socialized participants said that. The latter tend to have a problem with how they are rated from the outside. Or they rate themselves. For me, one insight from the film is that women\*, socialized females or marginalized groups who don't conform to the norms should celebrate themselves much more.

**Some do, there are also vulvas in the film.**

And I think that's great! Of course, I didn't ask anyone to take their clothes off. Everyone could present themselves as they wanted. But if someone sits wide-legged in front of the mirror and says "Press the shutter!" - then I do that.

**The protagonists are very diverse in terms of origin, age and identities. At many points in the film there are brief, deep insights into lives about which one immediately wants to learn more. It's also about self-hatred, racism, aging. How did you narrow down your topic in the first place?**

It was important to me from the beginning that it wasn't just about narcissism. The subheading of the film is "A documentary about gender, narcissism and self-love. And my approach was to ask about socialization. When I ask someone like Ruben María what was most formative in their life, I not only hear about gender or non-binary experiences, but also a lot about being black. That absolutely has to be in the film, even if it opens up a new topic that could of course have been dealt with in much more detail. I thought it was important that all the protagonists could open up their own perspectives.

**Did you come out of the project differently than you went in?**

Totally. I had to clear up some misconceptions about myself: ideas about how I thought I am. For example, I no longer have a guilty conscience when I find myself awesome in the mirror. And narcissism for me now also has a lot to do with self-love.

**So it wouldn't be wrong if people came out of your film more narcissistic?**

Exactly. Especially the part of the audience that otherwise allows *too little* narcissism.

**Should we all masturbate more in front of the mirror?**

Yes, gladly!

Interview: kittyhawk