

TRANSFORMER

Luciano Castelli – Selfportraits 1974

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TRANSFORMER presents the artistic beginnings of Luciano Castelli, one of the main representatives of the Berlin Neue Wilde art movement of the 1980s. As early as the 1970s, he explored the theme of gender still so current today. The title refers to an album by Lou Reed who, as the leader of the "Velvet Underground," was part of Andy Warhol's Factory in the late 1960s alongside Gerry Malanga, Paul Morrissey and others. The basis of his work grew out of the political perspective of the '68 movement in an era of upheaval and reorientation that radically questioned the old dividing lines between artistic genres and between the sexes. As a 17-year-old Castelli experimented with materials such as mica, sequins and feathers, using them to create his first drawings, collages, objects, and photographs. In the androgynous self-depiction he found a way to himself embody the art work as a painter, a photographer, a musician and a filmmaker, and reinvent himself with each new work. At the age of 21, Luciano was the youngest participant in Documenta 5 in Kassel, curated by Harald Szeemann. Under the title "Transformer - Aspects of Travesty," Jean-Christophe Ammann, director of the Lucerne Art Museum, brought together Castelli and other artists who played with gender identities, such as Urs Lüthi, Jürgen Klauke, Brian Eno and David Bowie, Katherina Sieverding, Luigi Ontani, and Pierre Molinier.

The site of Castelli's experiments during this time was the old Art Nouveau villa "Reckenbühl" in Lucerne where he lived with his friends Franz Marfurt and Ueli Vollenweider. The villa became a kind of oasis, the birthplace of creative transformations brought about by the frequently changing young residents searching for forms of life alternative to the bourgeois consensus and who often served Castelli as models. His earliest works already exhibit a fearless willingness to bare himself without compromise and to also include his friends in his art. The ritual of dressing and undressing grew into an expansion of his persona. In large watercolors, gouaches and life-size drawings, the so-called "mica pictures" ("Glimmerbilder") from 1972, he painted himself in a wide variety of situations, made up and outfitted with clearly female erotic accessories, and added mica and sequins to many of these paintings. This developed into performances staged by Castelli in order to create a fictional existence. As a consequence, he increasingly relied on photography, for it was only by means of the camera that he could give permanence to his fleeting theater appearances and objectify his role. "The moment in which the photos are taken," he states, "is just as important as the picture. The picture is the consequence of the moment. The photographs are not made on purpose, they are not the starting point, but rather the outcome. I live in a situation that emotionally corresponds to me at that moment. What I try to convey in pictures is the intensity with which I experience the situation." This act of fixing himself in the image and the experiences resulting from this practice continue to shape his artistic work up to the present day.