

Künstler/Artists: Wilfried Habrich, Peter Lindenberg
Kuratorin/Curator: Irina Ilieva
Text: **Reinhard Griebner**
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Ort/Venue: aquabitArt Galerie
Auguststrasse 35, 10119 Berlin-Mitte
www.art.aquabit.com

"UNMASKED #3" - A play of thoughts and masks in seven acts

(1) Camouflage

No masquerade without a cover-up. The dress code alone dictates this. Under the protection of the textile facial furniture, character actors and extras do the honours in the self-staging that is called life. Role, costume, and habitus can be chosen at will. Thus, in the virtual Commedia dell'Arte, even mediocre, small actors claim the part of Pantalone. Against this background, "UNMASKED #3" formulates a tough mandate. Show your face! We face the world with an open visor. May the other party recognize our intentions by our facial expressions. We have nothing to hide. We do not stick the ace of trumps up our sleeve, we play with open cards.

(2) Revealing

It is easy to overlook the fact that the mask is a piece of equipment with an almost universal practical value. What would the surgeon be without a surgical mask, the fencer without a fencing mask, the restless person without a sleep mask? – Wherever the freedom of art is in question, artists have also repeatedly used this prop to hold up a mirror to their time and its witnesses plus comrades. Not only because the unmasked would otherwise have painted, sung, or written their heads off. (Whereby those would have got off lightly if you had only put the mask of shame on them. As is well known, the other side also has the death mask in its repertoire for professed blasphemers.) But because the masquerade in this case has an inherent subversive flair. Which demands effort from the audience as well as, if the plan of the perpetrator works, gives the pleasure of peeling the product out of the costume, unmasking it in the course of creative appropriation, and thus, by virtue of their subjective way of seeing and their own ability to think, either getting to the bottom of the painting or the flavour of the words.

(3) Etymological

Anyone who put a hand on the (linguistic) material, should pause for a moment to take a look at its character. The track of the word "mask" goes back to the 17th century, the term is repeatedly found in the vocabulary of the neighborhood – in France *masque*, in Spain *máscara*, in Portugal *mascarar*, in Italy *maschera*. Linguistic scholars agree that it is a loan word; the controversy begins where it is either discussed or denied that this can be traced back to the Arabic *mashāra*: "mockery, buffoon, buffoonery". In Europe, the mask initially only covered the forehead and nose, it was neither intended as a fashion accessory nor as a costume, it was only intended to protect the face from inclement weather. But already in the "German Dictionary" Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm point out the possibility of pejorative use: "gladly as an image for disguise, cunning, hypocrisy".

(4) Habrich & Lindenberg

Wilfried Habrich and Peter Lindenberg share wall and space in "UNMASKED #3" without challenging each other or contesting the course. In a comparable and yet completely different way, they had already entered into a dialogue in the *aquabitArt Gallery* in the Fall of 2020. Once again, as befits people of their profession, they both lean far out of the window. The individual arranges itself with the associative, making it difficult to say who delivers the thesis and who feels responsible for the antithesis. Ultimately, it probably boils down to the one result: no one and nobody. The house brand "Unmasked", created by the curator Irina Ilieva, and which is its charm, offers sufficient space for discourse and rebuttal. It functions, as previously in the exhibitions with the shared name, as an umbrella headline under whose protection the participants can comfortably cultivate their artistic conversation. – With respect for the opposite sex, Lindenberg and Habrich this time sing the praises of "the eternally feminine". Wilfried Habrich with nude drawings on paper and collaged etchings, whereby, due to their production, each copy is unique. Peter Lindenberg presents the series of pictures "Blicke" on a wall and two screens, thus creating a room within a room at Auguststraße 35; his idea of making a screen into an eye-catcher adds a spectacular extra to the third and final edition of the project "Unmasked".

(5) Corners of mouth – upward and downward pulls

A look next door, into the theatre: the laughing and the crying mask – Thalia and Melpomene, two of the nine muses, responsible for comedy and tragedy respectively. In iconographic representation they can usually be distinguished by the corners of their mouths being pulled upward or downward. In this case, the presumption of innocence applies. In the decodable context, there is no hint of "mockery", "hypocrisy" or resilient ambiguities. The two-faced pair of masks is not only regarded in Berlin as a cultural service provider, it is committed to the performing arts – like the stylised eighth notes to the concert halls or the palette to the galleries – in the service and support department: on the Internet and in travel guides as a pictogram referring to noble addresses of the industry.

(6) Face to face

A look outside the box, into *the mask*: the refuge of the make-up artists. In their trade, the name rightly emphasises the visual, art and craft balance each other out. Sometimes painting is in the foreground, sometimes the stuccoer prevails. The make-up artist, the multi-talent. On top of that, she is a bearer of secrets, a soul comforter, quite a best friend, sometimes also a cold nurse in the rumour factory. With a sure flair for cosmetics and communication. In the past, it was up to her to prepare actors for the set or for the stage that represents the world. Among film buffs, the saying circulated: "The film is made in the mask." Nowadays, the political staff also appreciates the service of the transformation artists, for the red light of the television cameras. Let's hope that one day the grapevine won't spread: "Politics is created at the make-up table of the second-face designers."

(7) Half-time

Instead of a postscript, the question that, even if they are reluctant to admit it, is on the tongue of all the stealth fetishists: How do you protect yourself from becoming faceless behind the mask? Instead of an answer, a comment from a qualified mouth, which can at least be used as a placebo. "Nemo enim potest personam diu ferre." Seneca. "No one can permanently wear a mask."

Reinhard Griebner, September 2021