Exhibition Guide

Dietmar Busse Fairytales 1991–1999

September 19, 2024-February 16, 2025



Dietmar Busse grew up on a small farm outside a tiny village in northern Germany. He left for Berlin as a young adult in 1986. Arriving to New York in 1991 after four years in Madrid, the twenty-five-year-old spoke more Spanish than English and carried a book by Diane Arbus. "Freaks was a thing I photographed a lot," Diane Arbus has written about her work.¹ Acknowledging Arbus's influence on

his own practice, Busse countered that,

"I don't photograph freaks, but people,"

and pondered "Who is not a freak?"

Fairytales 1991-1999 is New York

based artist Dietmar Busse's first

institutional exhibition in the US, an

introduction to the artist's oeuvre of

never exhibited Polaroids from the 90s.

Shortly after arriving in the Big Apple, Busse found a job at Industria Superstudio, a large, commercial rental studio that had just opened. Steven Meisel, Steven Klein, and Annie Leibovitz were doing photo shoots there, and Busse could use Industria's bulky Polaroid 600SE to take his own pictures of people on the streets. The technology behind the Polaroid had been around for a while, of course, but Busse remembers that "something about it felt like child's play, like being a magician [...] and that the results were often imperfect, unpredictable, and always full of surprises."2,3 Being a photographer and an artist at the same time suddenly seemed possible.

The photographic essay laid out for his exhibition *Fairytales* 1991–1999, relays the beginnings of his professional career as a portrait and fashion photographer and presents prints of and original Polaroids the artist took while travelling through New York—predominantly by bike—from Brighton Beach to the Upper

East Side and Harlem via the Chelsea piers and Bryant Park. Whether en route from one place to another, on the street, at fashion shoots, or in domestic settings. Busse took his Polaroids on the fly and in duplicate, leaving one copy with the portrayed figures and the other in his pocket.4 He was also a fixture of the downtown scene (and in spring 2024 was awarded a Kathy Acker award for his decade-long artistic contributions). There was, for example, the period that he called "Nina, Amy, Bernadette": with Amy, the Italian American showgirl; Nina, the chubby phonefantasy line girl; and Bernadette, one of the founding members of the cutting-edge fashion and artist collective Bernadette Corporation. Busse produced portraits of these women, as well as that of another early BC member, the designer and makeup artist Thuy Pham, in 1992. He later documented BC performances and fashion runway shows, images which are now also reproduced in the collective's publications.

As Busse slowly built a portfolio, his then-roommate arranged for a meeting at Paper magazine, where Busse was given his first assignment for a ten-page fashion spread in 1995 by Kim Hastreiter. That spread was followed by others at the New York Times Magazine and Interview, and an advertising campaign for the Japanese designer Matsuda followed suit. Several of the most prestigious modeling agencies, like Elite, Next, and Women, began to ask Busse to photograph their up-andcoming models and to help build their portfolios. An impressive series of commissions from the fashion and magazine world began to trickle in. In 1996. Busse started to work for Visionaire's fashion issue with a

spread that interpreted the dresses of New York-based American designer Anna Sui. One of the models used was his voluptuous friend Nina. For another engagement during fashion week, commissioned by Vogue España, Busse followed the model Amy Wesson, who exemplified that year's "heroin chic." During winter 1996-97 he took models to the beach at Conev Island after fashion director Sophia Neophitou sent clothes in a package with a mission to produce pictures for the British magazine IT. On other occasions Neophitou sent parcels to produce fashion spreads for the London Independent, including the butterfly story, also on view in the exhibition. Busse's "Showgirls in Las Vegas" (1995) was printed in a feature by the New York Times Magazine shortly after Paul Verhoeven's namesake movie hit the cinema box office (winning Busse the Picture of the Year award by American Photo). He worked with architect Philip Johnson for portraits to feature in and grace the cover of leading gay magazine Out and photographed the then soon-to-be supermodel Karen Elson at a Richard Tyler fashion show on Irving Place in 1997. A multipage fashion feature inspired by geometry was commissioned by Surface in San Francisco, which started as a club and drag queen magazine but had already begun catering to a broader design readership by 1997. For other commissions Busse pictured the musician Ultra Naté for the album cover of the epic Strictly Rhythm house track "Free," and worked with filmmaker Steve McQueen for a Harper's Bazaar story that was shot at Marian Goodman Gallery (also in 1997).

While accepting commissions from the fashion world, Busse continued to photograph friends and complete

strangers on the streets of New York. These included the English expatriate and flamboyant gay icon Quentin Crisp (1996-97); Gabriel Asfour and Angela Donhauser from fashion brand threeASFOUR; makeup artist Michael Delfino, sporting a see-through shirt featuring the slogan "Life is Pain"; and the Spanish film director Pedro Almodóvar with actress Rossy de Palma for Paper magazine. In a project directed by Pierre Cortez, Busse photographed two firemen flanking the model Estella Warren on Chambers Street in 1999. while elsewhere he collaborated with his friend and rising fashion star designer Miguel Adrover on a photograph in which Adrover is wearing his own creations. Other Polaroid portraits feature his muse Ami Goodheart in myriad showgirl outfits at an underground theater (Dutch Weissmans) where he lived for several months behind the stage, and DJ Sabisha Friedberg, together with Visionaire founder James Kaliardos. at a party in SoHo.

Busse, however, was most comfortable with his camera on the streets of the city, where he was unrestrained by the demands of the commercial world. Considering the works selected for the exhibition Fairytales 1991-1999, Busse recalls a bunch of "homies" hanging out in front of their building on the day that Tupac Shakur died; dressed-up girls on the boardwalk of Coney Island in 1997-98; a guy with a giant iguana on his arm, fully armed with protective gloves; a single mother with her four young children wearing Burger King crowns on 14th Street. He visited beauty salons in Harlem, resulting in images reproduced in the 1997 Visionaire Beauty Issue. He photographed during Gay Pride and for several years at the piers in

Chelsea and during demonstrations for equal rights and gay marriage in Bryant Park (1997–98). Three middle-aged cross dressers posed for him during Wigstock, the drag queen festival, on Labor Day weekend.

Then Mother with Children in Harlem (1995), a portrait of an African American family, won the prize for best portrait of the year in American Photo 1996. Other works were also prized and widely disseminated. Busse remembers when, on Easter Sunday, "suddenly from an underpass, like an apparition, came this woman all dressed in white with flowers in her hat, and the dogs were wearing flowers and necklaces around their necks." The resulting image, Lady Walking her Dogs in Central Park (1995), was reproduced in American Photo. On another occasion, he recounts how Lucia—a transgender woman the artist became very friendly with-was leaving her year-round Christmas decorated apartment on 9th Street and parading down 2nd Avenue to the bank every afternoon like it was a runway. Also, on 2nd Avenue and 11th Street he photographed Richard Pandiscio, then the creative director of Interview magazine (ca. 1996). Finally, the International Festival of Photography 1998 selected Busse, along with a prestigious group of international fashion photographers, to interpret a Yves Saint Laurent couture dress. Busse chose a feather dress from the collection of the Metropolitan Museum. Rather than photographing the couture in a studio, he asked his friend Ami to take a trip to Coney Island, again in winter. Together they put the feather dress on her, and in the photograph, she appears like a bird with her feet dug into the sand. Busse kept his allies close, as is documented in Polaroids taken of his long-term partner, the artist Ed Baynard, and

Charlie, whom he met in Fire Island with his dog, and who was pictured during the summer 1996 already marked by the consequences of HIV. If Busse's work has changed periodically since the 1990s and is currently more akin to painting-predominantly employing chemicals and marker on photographic paper-it was during the period of the Polaroids that he was beginning to discover himself as an artist photographer, and to understand that he saw himself in his subjects: "Initially, that's why I stopped them. And that's why it's always people that are on the margin. I'm never interested in the hot sexy girl that has all the stuff, unless it's a fashion shoot."6 Since the 1990s, the artist's work has changed and evolved continuously around the depiction of the outsider, those who stand on the sidelines by themselves, much like Busse, who prefers to be the observer rather than at the center. Much of his timeless photographic oeuvre from this period was either lost, stolen, or destroyed by an apartment fire in 2016, and the remainder has been edited for the exhibition. Being an artist for Busse is about communicating with the outside world. But most importantly it is an inward journey, an attempt to gain a better understanding of oneself and of healing and transformation. The work featured in the survey Fairytales 1991-1999 carries a quiet, intimate, and emotional atmosphere and captures the spirit of a bygone New York era.

Footnotes

- Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph New York: Aperture, 2011, p. 3
- "On February 17, 1857, a patent was registered in the State of New York by L.M. Bolles and W.G. Smith for a "Camera Box." The device, claimed its inventors, allowed for the preparation of a wet glass plate within it, the taking of a picture, the developing of the glass plate in a bath of silver nitrate, rinsing with fresh water, and the drying of the plate." Todd Brandow, in his foreword to Ewing, W.E., Hitchcock, B. Reuter, R. The Polaroid Project: At the Intersection of Art and Technology, Thames & Hudson, 2017
- 3. Dietmar Busse in a letter to Amant, June 2024
- "My favorite was Polaroid 665. It was black and white and once it was exposed and opened the Polaroid needed to be coated with a fixing solution that came in a little squeegee that was part of each pack of 8 Polaroids. On the opposite side there would be a negative. Identical to the Polaroid. If washed and treated properly one would have a negative from which beautiful prints could be made. The process of preserving the negatives was a bit tedious, especially when working in the street and very often I was not able to save all the material. Unfortunately. The other film I discovered was Polaroid 691: It was a Polaroid transparency in color that was even more unpredictable than the black and white Polaroid. It was also much harder to make prints from the color transparencies and it often became an issue when Lused this film for commercial work but I loved it too. Both films have long since disappeared, the 691 in 1997. The 665 around 2010." Dietmar Busse in a letter to Amant. June 2024

- 5. Dietmar Busse in a letter to Amant, June 2024
- 6. Dietmar Busse in conversation with Amant. 2024

Fairytales 1991–1999 Works in the Exhibition

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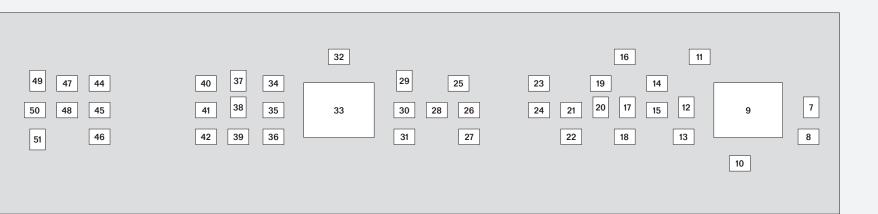
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Works numbered counterclockwise from entrance.

1. A Day with Rossy in Harlem, 1994 Gelatin silver print

- 2. Cat Show Champion, 1996 Gelatin Silver Print
- 3. Three Beauties on Av. A, 1995 Gelatin silver print
- 4. Two Girls in a Harlem Beauty Shop, 1996 Gelatin silver print
- 5. The Holy Family Barbershop, 1996 Gelatin silver print

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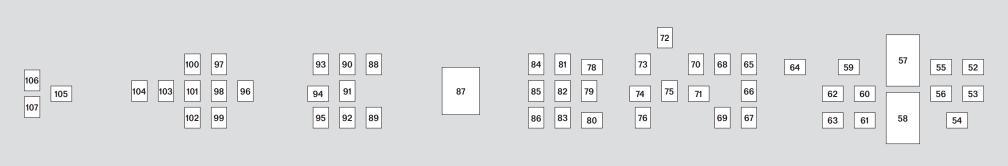
- Amy Wesson Backstage, 1997 Gelatin silver print
- 7. Pedro with Boyfriend #1, 1995
- 8. Evening at The Piers, 1994
- 9. Lovers at The Piers, 1994 Gelatin Silver Print
- 10. Two Men at Gay Pride, 1996
- 11. Couple at The Piers, 1993
- 12. Sunday Afternoon at The Piers, 1994
- 13. Four Women at the End of Gay Pride, 1996
- 14. Two Women at the End of Gay Pride, 1996
- 15. Two Women at Gay Pride, 1996
- 16. Tourists at The Piers, 1994
- 17. Paris is Burning, 1994
- 18. Drag Queens at the End of Gay Pride, 1996
- Lonely Man at Westside Highway, 1995
- 20. Two Beauties at The Piers, 1995
- 21. Three Friends on Greenwich Avenue. 1996
- 22. Couple at The Piers, 1994
- 23. Two Office Workers at the World Trade Center, 1994

- 24. Office Workers at the World Trade Center, 1993
- 25. Veteran at the Cat Show, 1996
- 26. Family after Burger King, 1995
- 27. Latina Mother with Kids on 14th Street, 1997
- 28. Cat Astrologer, 1997
- 29. Love Speaks For Itself, 1995
- 30. Couple at a Marriage Equality Event, 1995
- 31. Two Women at a Marriage Equality Event, 1995

- 32. Man with Lizard in Chelsea, 1994
- 33. Upper East Side Couple, 1994 Gelatin Silver Print
- 34. Two Kids on a Bench in Washington Square Park, 1998
- 35. Man with Tuned Up Bicycle, 1994
- 36. Twins at the Zoo. 1996
- 37. Roller Skater in Central Park, 1994
- 38. Punk Girl Playing Guitar, 1994
- 39. Man Reading the Newspaper, 1994
- 40. Mysterious Man in Washington Square Park, 1998
- 41. Cuatro Latinos in Central Park, 1998
- 42. Two Men on 14th Street, 1995
- 43. Ryan in Victoria's Secret, 1996 Archival pigment print
- 44. Eva und Adele, 1995
- 45. Homeless Couple in Chelsea, 1997
- 46. Four Boys in Alphabet City, 1999
- 47. Three Men at Night on Rivington Street, 1994
- 48. Man at a Parking Garage on 42nd Street. 1996
- 49. Colombian Lady at The Met, 1998
- 50. Man on My Block, 1995
- 51. Old Lady in Garment District, 1996

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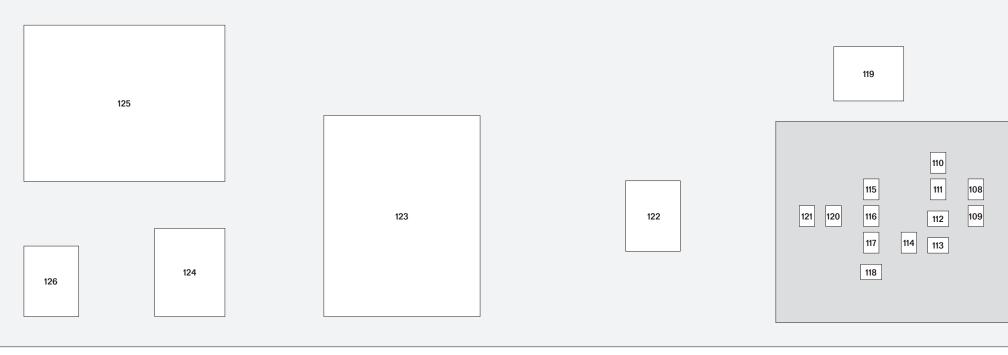
- 52. Boys on 125th Street, 1996
- 53. Two Girls in Harlem, 1995
- 54. Girls Dress Up in Coney Island, 1997
- 55. Harlem Barbershop, 1996
- 56, Sunday Morning in Harlem, 1996
- 57. Bernadette, 1992 Cibachrome
- 58. Thuy and Bernadette in Coney Island, 1992 Cibachrome
- 59. Teenagers in Coney Island, 1997
- 60. Ukranian Couple in Coney Island, 1996
- 61. Mexican Family
- in Coney Island, 1996
- 62. Five Teenage Girls in Coney Island, 1997
- 63. Man with Two Kids, 1997
- 64. George on 15th Street, 1995
- 65. A Dancer at Five Points in the Bronx, 1996
- 66. Estella and firefighters on Chambers Street, 1999
- 67. Luigi, 1996
- 68. Karen Elson, 1997
- 69. Nina and Lou, 1994

- 70. Jackie Maison at Home, 1997
- 71. Angie and Gabi at a Party, 1996
- 72. A man I photographed for Out Magazine, 1995
- 73. Emi on Broome Street, 1993
- 74. Ed and Floppy, 1994
- 75. Kara Walker, 1995
- 76. Bill Jacobson, 1995
- 77. Michael Delfino at Home, 1996 Gelatin Silver Print
- 78. Quentin Crisp at Home, 1994
- 9. Model with only one arm, 1996
- 80. Dah-Len, 1994

- 81. James and Sabisha at a Party, 1995
- 82. Eric on 10th Street. 1994
- Pierre in the Meatpacking District, 1998
- 84. Richard Pandiscio, 1996
- 85. Lucia on Her Front Step, 1996
- 86. Fashion Story in Stuyvesant Park, 1998
- 87. Ami and Alessandro Performing, 1994
- 88. Thuy, 1993
- 89. Miguel Adrover, 1994
- 90. Tomy, 1992
- 92. Ryan's Two Tongues, 1992
- 93. My Friend Nina, 1994
- 94. Nina with Trumpet, 1994
- 95. Nina's Legs, 1992
- 96. Pepe y Caryle Andando, 1992
- 97. Chris in Gysp Johnson, 1993
- 98. Pepe Andando, 1992
- 99. Federico, 1993
- 100. Fat Boy in Lingerie, 1996
- 101. Ami Dancing, 1993
- 102. Model with Knife in Antonio Berardi, 1996

- 103. Model in Alexander McQueen, 1997
- 104. Bernard on 23rd Street, 1995
- 105. Circus Performance #2, 1996
- 106. Circus Performance #1, 1996
- 107. Circus Performance #3, 1996

Wall Three

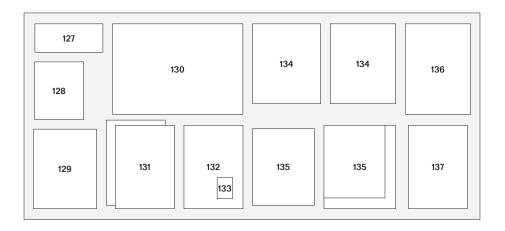


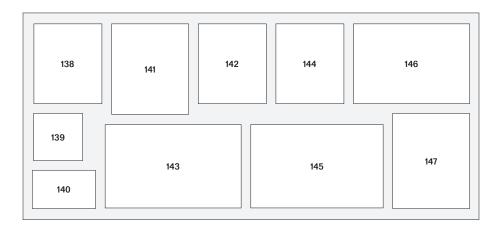
- 122. Model with Knife in Coney Island, 1997 Gelatin silver print
- 123. *Ami, Nina and Bernadette*, 1995 Gelatin silver print
- 124. Estella and firefighters on Chambers Street, 1999 Gelatin silver print
- 125. Christian Woman, Hattie, Ami and Friend, 1993 Gelatin silver print
- 126. Susan Cianciolo in Her Studio, 1993 Gelatin silver print

- 108. Matsuda Campaign #2, 1995
- 109. Matsuda Campaign #3, 1995
- 110. Butterflies Story for London Independent #2, 1998
- 111. Butterflies Story for London Independent #3, 1998
- 112. Butterflies Story for London Independent #1, 1998
- 113. Butterflies Story for London Independent #4, 1998
- 114. Model with Gun, 1998

- 115. Model for IT Magazine in Coney Island #2, 1997
- 116. April for IT Magazine in Coney Island #1, 1997
- 117. Model for IT Magazine in Coney Island #1, 1997
- 118. April for IT Magazine in Coney Island #2, 1997
- 119. *Three Acrobats*, 1996 Gelatin silver print
- 120. Surface Magazine Shoot #2, 1996
- 121. Surface Magazine Shoot #1, 1996

Vitrine One Vitrine Two





- 127. Picture taken for the month of August, featuring Dietmar's friends, Nina and Harley, as models, Visionaire calendar 1996
- 128. Photographer's promotional card by Dietmar's agency, featuring the artist's work to date, 1996
- 129. Drawing adressed to Dietmar's agent with layout suggestions for following year's card, 1997
- 130. Excerpt from a ten-page fashion spread "Birds of a Feather" for *Paper Magazine*, September 1995
- 131. Conceptual drawings for a pitch to Spanish Voque, 1998
- 132. Cardboard with notes, N/D
- 133. Invitation to Partners model agency party during Fashion Week New York, circa 1993

- 134. Dietmar's first job ever, this tenpage fashion spread was commissioned by *Paper Magazine* and accompanied by a text by Kim Hastreiter, May 1995
- 135. Fashion advertising campaign for the Japanese designer Matsuda, and published in fashion magazines (*Interview* and *Paper Magazine*) during Fall/Winter 1995–1996
- 136. Commission for the publication

 Yves Saint Laurent 40 Years of

 Creation, DAP, 1998, featuring a

 dress by Yves Saint Laurent from the

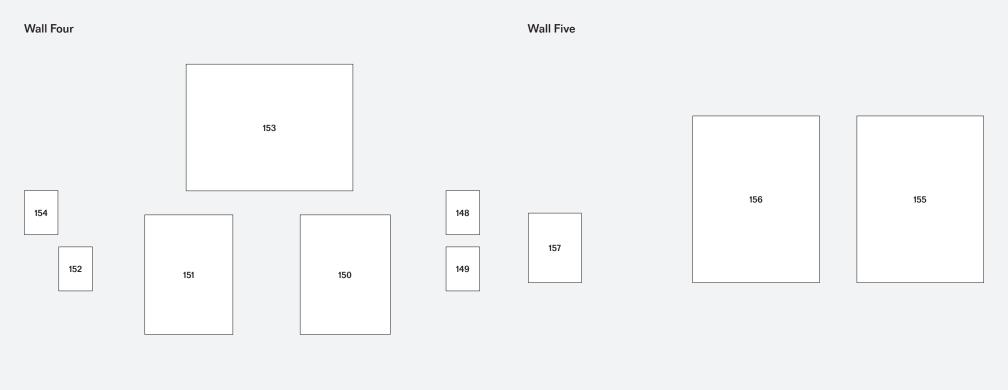
 collection of the Metropolitan

 Museum of Art, New York; model

 pictured is Ami, Dietmar's friend
- 137. Drawing made for a fashion spread in *IT Magazine*, Coney Island, 1997

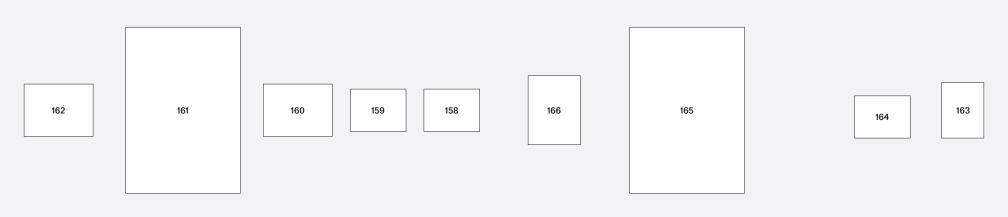
- 138. Photograph originally published in a double page spread in the New York Times with showgirls in Las Vegas, photographed in the fall of 1995. Subsequently published through a photo contest in American Photo. 1996
- 139. Album cover for the musician Ultra Naté's club hit album "Free," published by *Strictly Rhythm*, 1997
- 140. Drawing produced for a California magazine for which Dietmar photographed zoot suits
- 141. "Flashion when play's the thing" published in *Interview Magazine*, January 1996. At the center is Eric Damon, a model and soon-to-be stylist who worked with Dietmar on several occasions. See also the color photograph with architect Philip Johnson on opposite wall
- 142. Eric Damon modelling for Dietmar with Quentin Crisp for Paper Magazine's Valentine story, February 1996

- 143. Portrait of a mother with her child in Harlem, awarded the Portrait of the Year by American Photo 1996
- 144. May 1996 issue of Out Magazine, featuring Dietmar's photograph of architect Philip Johnson on the cover
- 145. Drawing as an inspiration for a photo shoot for *Surface Magazine*'s fashion issue in 1997
- Drawing made for a bridal magazine.
 Possibly published by Modern Bride, circa 1999
- 147. Actress Rossy de Palma modeled clothes for a store in the East Village on 9th Street called "Horn". The store owner and designer was named Miguel Adrover, 1997



- 148. Bernadette Corporation Fashion Show, 1994 Gelatin silver print
- 149. Bernadette Corporation Fashion Show, 1994 Gelatin silver print
- 150. Bernadette Corporation Fashion Show, 1994 Gelatin silver print
- 151. Walt and William, 1993 Gelatin silver print
- 152. Club Kid's Shoes, 1993 Gelatin silver print
- 153. Show Girls in Las Vegas for The New York Times, 1995 Archival pigment print
- 154. Eric with Phillip Johnson, 1996 Archival pigment print

- 155. Fat Boys with Attitude on Sofa, 1996 Archival pigment print
- 156. Asian Girls on Sofa, 1995 Archival Pigment Print
- 157. Artist and Filmmaker, Steve McQueen, 1997 Archival Pigment Print



- 158. My Friend Charlie, 1996 Gelatin silver print
- 159. My Friend Ed Baynard, 1993 Gelatin silver print
- 160. Living Room with Christmas Tree in August, 1996 Gelatin silver print
- 161. Lucia in Her Living Room, 1996 Gelatin silver print
- 162. The Day Tupac Died, 1996 Gelatin silver print

- 163. Young Boy with Basketball, 1995 Gelatin silver print
- 164. Mother With Children in Harlem, 1995 Gelatin silver print
- 165. Lady Walking Her Dogs in Central Park, 1995 Gelatin silver print
- 166. Pedro Almodovar and Rossy, 1995 Archival pigment print

Dietmar Busse is an artist based in New York. His work has appeared in magazines such as the New York Times Magazine, Harper's Bazaar, Interview, London Independent, Visionaire, Paper, and many more. Recent exhibitions include the solo show Garten at Fierman (2023) and Labor of Love at Rachel Uffner Gallery (2023), both in New York. Palermo Publishing will issue his monograph, Songs for Birds and the Lonely, during fall 2024.

All works courtesy of the artist and Fierman, New York.

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