

Frank Thiel

Quinceañeras

28 April — 16 June 2018

Private View:
Friday 27 April, 6-9pm

Blain|Southern Berlin
Potsdamer Straße 77-87
(Mercator Höfe)
10785 Berlin



*Kiara Isabel & Karla Amelia Soliño González, La Habana,
Plaza de la Revolución, Nuevo Vedado, 2016*
© Frank Thiel. Courtesy the artist and Blain|Southern

Blain|Southern is pleased to present *Quinceañeras*, Frank Thiel's first exhibition with the gallery. Returning to portrait photography for the first time in over 20 years, *Quinceañeras* examines the tradition of the often lavish coming-of-age celebrations around a young woman's fifteenth birthday in Cuba. Known for extensively researched projects that survey places in transformation, Thiel uses the *quince* tradition in Cuba as a metaphor for a culture in flux, creating a portrait of a generation of young women alongside that of a city rich in heritage yet coming to terms with change and decay.

Across Latin America, a girl's fifteenth birthday is an important rite of passage and a celebration of her transition into adulthood. While each country has its own traditions, an essential part of the festivities is the idealised portrait shot by professional photographers, which often aim to reproduce the fantasy world depicted in high-fashion magazines. Thiel's portraits of a generation of young women born in the year 2000 take a different approach, showing them in a single, consistent pose, in a range of everyday backdrops.

Working over a two-year period in close collaboration with his Cuban team and the families of the young women, Thiel photographed them in their own neighbourhoods in Havana. Drawn from across all fifteen municipalities of the Cuban capital, the unadorned locations act as a counterpoint to the often nostalgic or romanticised idea of the city and the life of its inhabitants. Thiel depicts Arlett Acosta Fajardo, for example, at a bus stop, while people in the background wait for their local public transport. Daniela Lucrecia Márquez Rivero stands in front an abandoned department store in Havana's centre – the sign behind her reads *Fin de Siglo*: End of the Century. Thiel creates an atmosphere that shows both the young women and a nation in shared anticipation of an uncertain future.

Thiel's interest in transformation is ever-present in his work, from his preoccupation with Berlin post-reunification, to the glaciers of Patagonia. *Quinceañeras* combines several elements that outline his artistic practice to date: architecture, the transitory moment and socio-political realities.

Notes to Editors

About the artist

Frank Thiel was born in Kleinmachnow (near Berlin), in the former East Germany in 1966, and moved to West Berlin in 1985. He studied photography at college before enrolling at the University of the Arts, Berlin in 1989.

Thiel is known for his monumental photographs which depict Berlin's topographical and architectural transformation after Germany's reunification. The *Berlin* series is Thiel's most extensive body of work to date, but an interest in temporary states or places in transformation is a thread that runs throughout his oeuvre. The starting point for his photographs is often a long period of research. Thiel's project *The Allies* began just after reunification in 1990 and wasn't completed until 1994. This was his first portrait series, which involved photographing around 200 former Allied soldiers before they left Berlin. Now part of the landscape of the city, two of the portraits - an American soldier facing East Berlin and a Russian soldier facing West Berlin - form part of a permanent installation at Checkpoint Charlie. In 2011, Thiel photographed glaciers in Argentinian Patagonia, an area he first visited 15 years before. Struck by the beauty and fragility of the landscape, and the constant state of flux, he produced a series of pictures which are his largest to date.

About Blain|Southern

Blain|Southern is a contemporary art gallery based in London and Berlin. The gallery represents an expanding roster of international artists and is the exclusive representative of the estates of Lynn Chadwick and Avigdor Arikha.

Recent exhibitions include Marius Bercea, Michael Joo, Avigdor Arikha, Rachel Howard, James White, Sislej Xhafa, Jake & Dinos Chapman and Michael Simpson.

The gallery has also launched a series of exhibitions in London collectively titled *Lodger*, conceived by the writer, curator, and Contributing Editor for frieze magazine, Tom Morton. Running concurrent to the exhibitions in the central space, *Lodger* expands Blain|Southern's programme into new territories, often spotlighting a younger generation of artists. To date artists have included Alex Dordoy, Sophie Jung and Brian Griffiths.

Gallery information

Blain|Southern
Potsdamer Straße 77-87
(Mercator Höfe)
10785 Berlin

Tuesday to Saturday: 11am - 6pm
+49 (0)30 6449 31510

For further information on the exhibition, please contact Julia Niebuhr at Blain|Southern Berlin or Laura Callendar at Blain|Southern London

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