

Mousse Magazine

EXHIBITIONS

Kelley Walker and General Idea at MAMCO, Geneva

General Idea “Photographs (1969-1982)”

Founded by AA Bronson (b. 1946), Jorge Zontal (b. 1944, d. 1994), and Felix Partz (b. 1945, d. 1994), the Canadian collective General Idea produced one of the most striking oeuvre from the 1970s and 1980s. This multiform work took on the glamour of popular images, the ideology of mass media, and the commonplaces spread throughout the art world, always with a strong sense of irony.

General Idea was founded by the three artists in 1969 in Vancouver when they decided to live and work together. Mindful readers of Marshal McLuhan and Roland Barthes' Mythologies, they organized in 1970 a beauty contest to elect a Miss General Idea: a mythological, asexual, faceless, and blurry gure who will become their muse. The following year, they began a 13-year-long c- tion, The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion. Behind this “project,” a strange fiction is taking place, like the pieces of a gigantic puzzle that is constantly being redefined.

Stemming from the group's archives, the exhibition at MAMCO, conceived in close collaboration with AA Bronson, tackles the first ten years of their career under the specific angle of photography. The aesthetics of these early works borrows from Minimal, Conceptual, as well as Land art, and the regulars from MAMCO will certainly find an echo to works from Dennis Oppenheim, Franz Erhard Walther, or even Victor Burgin. However these photographs are also documents from the group's life within the context of communitarian utopias which left their mark on the 1960s in Northern America.

From the start—and their beauty contest— photography is their privileged medium which they use to feed their mythology. Following their principle of “form follows ction,” the works produced during this period systematically relate to their muse and her pavi-

lion, through an iconographic repertoire constituted of pieces of clothing and accessories, mirrors, Venetian blinds, or the ziggurat pattern.

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The exhibition also pays attention to the role of edition within the production and diffusion of these images. FILE Magazine thus became one of the most accomplished artists' magazine of its time. Presented by General Idea as a "cultural parasite" appropriating and distorting the famous LIFE Magazine (the company eventually sued the collective), this publication featured the group's manifestoes and projects, chronicled the artistic life, and introduced new cultural trends. Throughout their 26 issues, from 1972 to 1989, FILE contributed to broaden General Idea's audience beyond the art elite.



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General Idea “Photographs (1969-1982)” at MAMCO, Geneva, 2017
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