

Farewell

Saying farewell generally means departing, taking leave of the fond and familiar; sometimes, it means forgetting. A sum of memories remains; as time takes its toll, these memories pale, or coalesce into a more or less idealised “mausoleum of feelings”, a repository of recollections and concrete images. Images of people, places and events.

Our memories let each of us feel that we have a point of origin, that we belong to a community. Looking for an image to remember things by, then, is one of the most constant human behaviours of all.

Images - in her case, photographs - play an important role for Anja Teske, too. When, in 1997, she decided to leave her familiar surroundings to go to London, she decided to preserve her relationship to those closest to her photographically. Admittedly, she was not leaving forever: her departure was not an irrevocable stroke of fate, as it would have been for earlier generations of immigrants. Nonetheless, a part of her life was coming to an end.

Anja Teske's last address in Hanover was a shared apartment: a community moulded by idiosyncratic human beings; a community which was, to some extent, a family. For this project, excerpts of which are shown below, it was natural to turn to her friends and flatmates, displaying them publicly and privately in equal measure.

At first glance, the resulting work seems quite different from run-of-the-mill souvenir photographs. Instead of preserving her flatmates in portraits cast in more or less melancholy hues, Anja Teske adopted a much more unconventional approach. Her subjects are depicted in an enigmatic, undefinable interval of space and light. On the one hand, the photographs reveal a significant degree of intimacy: the spectator can imagine how close the underlying human relationships must have been. On the other hand, the intimacy shown is immune to voyeurism or the intervention of strangers. Anja Teske gives the outside observer, who does not belong to the inner circle of onlookers, a keyhole view of an intimate farewell. The people depicted appear to come from a “world between worlds”, barely tangible, yet still eluding our gaze.

Anja Teske's friends and acquaintances pose and are dressed quite naturally, but she turns them into magical, otherworldly creatures of light. The project's conceptual goal overshadows the photographs' common, everyday elements and transforms this “parade of nameless and faceless heroes” into an important event. While the images were produced in accordance with a predetermined scheme, Anja Teske left her subjects room for their own input within that framework, reducing as far as possible the inevitably unnatural factor present in posed photographs of people in underwear. Although the project's conceptual lines were delineated in advance, working on the project gave interesting and unexpected insights to photographer and subjects alike. “Afterwards, I recognised an affinity with August Sanders (series, comparison). “For me, photography has less to do with seeing clearly, or with a focused, ostensibly objective image, than with the intangibility, both of human beings per se and of the representation of human beings.” (Anja Teske).

Looking more closely at the photographs, and bearing the life-sized originals in mind, the viewer will recognise a certain similarity to photographs of sculptures - a fact which reveals Anja Teske's own passion for sculpture.

Anja Teske's project “Farewell” is a successful example of a modern, creative approach to a classic subject. Particularly captivating is the proof, once again, that a remarkable effect can be produced with relatively modest stylistic means.