

HOUSE BERLIN REVIVES A HISTORIC 19TH CENTURY WILHELMINE BUILDING WITH AN EXHIBITION TITLED *SÉANCE*

Jeff Cowen's artworks are presented as monumental sculptures, engaging with the venue's archival memory and in dialogue with works by artists such as Hans Bellmer, Joseph Beuys, Anna & Bernhard Blume, Sigmar Polke & Christof Kohlhöfer, and others.



Installation view of Séance with Jeff Cowen and Claude Cahun & Marcel Moore, HOUSE, Berlin. Photography by Noshe.

April 23, 2024 (Berlin, Germany) – Following a critically acclaimed inaugural exhibition *Very friendly* in 2023, Berlin-based art space **HOUSE** presents its second exhibition with the American artist **Jeff Cowen** following the theme of a '*séance*'. The show is on view **through June 14 2024**, set in HOUSE's historic venue, an unrenovated Wilhelmine building complex from the 19th century, with a former 40-meter-long shooting range as the main exhibition space. Understood as a metaphorical artistic dialogue between the artist and the past, *Séance* features fourteen works placed on custom-made steel monoliths appearing as sculptures, surrounded by additional artists' pieces as a reference to Cowen's works, including Hans Bellmer, Joseph Beuys, Anna & Bernhard Blume, Claude Cahun & Marcel Moore, Maya Deren, Paul Éluard (under the pseudonym of Didier Desroches) with Dora Maar & Man Ray, Germaine Dulac, Rudolf Koppitz, Albert Leo Peil, Sigmar Polke & Christof Kohlhöfer and Margaret Raspé.

In the realm of contemporary photography, Cowen's work stands as a mystic medium, bridging the visible with the invisible, and the present with the echoes of the past. His work, deeply ingrained in the history of photography, transcends the traditional boundaries of the medium, exploring the ethereal aspects of time,

memory, and spiritual resonance. Transcendence in Cowen's work is evident in his ability to transform ordinary subjects into profound, almost otherworldly, experiences. His photographs are not mere representations, they are invitations to a deeper realm of existence. Through a meticulous process of manipulation and layering in his laboratory, Cowen coaxes out the invisible aspects of his subjects – their aura, their spirit, their essence.



Installation view of Séance with Jeff Cowen, HOUSE, Berlin. Photography by Noshe.

Photography and Spiritualism, or occult, have an intertwined history. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Spiritualist movement, séances, and interest in the supernatural coincided with the rise of photography. Even some of the surrealistic practices – that contained an influencing openness for alternative or 'magical realities', are rooted in Spiritualism. The surrealists Breton and Apollinaire were often given credit for automatic writing, but in fact, the parent movement of this technique was Spiritualism.

The exhibition *Séance* at HOUSE follows the transformative character of this cultural ritual in the idea of moving or flying objects – the main works by Cowen are taken away from the wall and placed centrally to occupy the former shooting range as monumental sculptures. Emanating an immersive concept of a séance ritual, the show includes a sound composition by Gustave Rudman Rambali augmenting an atmosphere, as an ode to the history of the premises and an interplay to the works on display.

Jeff Cowen explains: *'My process is to give myself over in a trance-like manner in my darkroom where the forces of the unconscious can take me over and allow me to communicate with the unfathomable and irrational. A non-verbal, non-conceptualised expression of the unrevealed is the result.'*

Derived from the old French word 'seoir' (to sit), for a 'session or gathering', a 'séance' implies the existence and presence of 'the many'. Following this narrative, a selection of further artworks that function as 'inspiration' for Jeff Cowen's photographic-painterly practice, constitute a 'frame of reference', exemplarily visualizing a 'hidden dimension' or the conscious and unconscious sources that provide inner guidance for his practice.

As the exhibition engages with the venue's archival memory, HOUSE's Artistic Co-Director Juliet Kothe explains: 'HOUSE, as a holistic concept of showcasing art in a dialogue to its surroundings, examines the symbolic meaning of buildings, stories deriving from historic houses and the change of its meaning over time, rather than becoming a rationalist examination of architecture. It's an empathetic approach towards the history of a building, while the housed exhibitions are concerned with the auratic quality of a place.'



(Left) Joseph Beuys, 2 Sheep's Heads, 1961-1975, HOUSE, Berlin. Courtesy: Private Collection, Cologne. (Right) Installation view of Séance with Jeff Cowen, HOUSE, Berlin. Photography by Noshe.

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

Séance with Jeff Cowen and others is on view at HOUSE, Berlin through to June 14, 2024.

Address: Friedrichstrasse 112b, 10117 Berlin

Opening Hours: Thursday – Saturday | 1 – 7 pm

Gallery Weekend Special Hours: Thursday 25.04 – Sunday 28.04 | 12 – 7 pm

About Jeff Cowen:

Jeff Cowen grew up in New York City and graduated in Oriental Studies from New York University and Waseda University Tokyo. In the 1990's he studied academic drawing and painting at the Art Students League and the New York Studio School. Cowen's interest in poetry, aesthetics, and the non-visible world eventually led him to explore the conceptual, experimental terrain of black-and-white film photography. His work explores the evolutionary potential of the photographic medium and has particularly been interested in mating the power of painting with the power of photography. Jeff Cowen's works are included in numerous public and private collections. In 2019, the private collection MAP from Bremen acquired a substantial body of Cowen's work from the previous 10 years. His works have been shown in Kunsthalle Bremerhaven, Germany; DZ Bank Art Collection Frankfurt, Germany; Ludwig Museum, Koblenz, Germany; Huis Marseille, Museum for Photography, Amsterdam, Netherlands; Moscow Museum of Modern Art, Russia; among others. In 2021, Jeff Cowen was awarded the Pollock Krasner Grant for Fine Art Still Photography for his Provence project. In 2024, Cowen will show Provence Works at the Huis Marseille Museum for Photography and the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam in a co-operative exhibition. <https://jeffcowen.eu/>

About Juliet Kothe:

Juliet Kothe is an artistic director, curator and author. After completing her master's of cultural studies with a focus on sociology of the arts at Leuphana University, Lüneburg, she worked for the Association of Arts and Culture of the German Economy at the Federation of German Industries. From 2017 to 2022, she was the director of the Boros Foundation. Together with Karen Boros, she was the artistic director of STUDIO BERLIN, an exhibition at Berghain in 2020 and 2021. Since 2014 she is an active volunteer curator for the Nairobi-based NGO One Fine Day e.V.. Juliet Kothe and Natanja von Stosch co-created a book on fe:male body representations, titled Boobs in the Arts – Fe:male Bodies in Pictorial History, which was published by Distanz in 2023.

About Georgina Pope:

Georgina Pope is an artistic director, curator and cultural producer. Following her graduation from The University of Sydney in arts and communication, and working in the contemporary art world in Sydney, she moved to Berlin in 2011. In 2021, Georgina founded THE FAIREST, a hybrid curatorial platform for young, emerging, or independent artists and creatives to have direct visibility in the art ecosystem and market. From 2018 to 2022, Georgina was the curator of Independent Collectors – the largest international community of private collections of contemporary art. Released at Art Basel in June 2022, she was the co-editor of the 7th edition of The BMW Art Guide by Independent Collectors. Since 2015, Georgina continues to work as a supervisor and art mediator at the Boros Collection.