

Meine Energie

Hamburg, HEWContract, 1999

A photo frieze made up of twenty-nine alternating sequences in a repetitive form, and comprised of three basic elements: textual excerpts, pure color fields, and black-and-white photographs of the human body; exhibited at the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Forum K, from October 1 through 17

The project was initiated by the Hamburg Gesellschaft für Energie und Service, HEWContract (Hamburg society for energy and services, HEW Contract), whose task was to optimize the energy efficiency at other companies.

I was invited to realize an art project in collaboration with company employees. This inspired me to reflect upon the personal balance of energy in individual human beings. Energy can mean: impulse, motion, effect, and strength—as well as the strength to get things done, the ability to complete a job. We absorb energy, it supports us, and we expend it, in turn. I began by asking the people: “what color do you connect with energy, and then, in conversations, I inquired into the issue of what things give or take you energy, and how do you experience that physically?”

Nils Jockel, excerpt from the text

“Energie und Nähe,” from the catalogue “Meine Energie” 1999

The photo frieze is in its nature clear and simple. It consists of three elements: excerpts from personal statements, color fields, and finally, photos of faces and human body parts, which, according to information supplied by individuals, describe their energetic sensibilities. The artist took these documents of individual experience and shaped them into social, biographical, and artistic reality.

Her work is founded on conversations conducted by the artist in April 1999 with fifty-two employees and customers of HEWContract at their various workplaces. Some were bothered by the question of having a center of energy in their own bodies, since they had never thought about it before. The artist was not allowed to photograph some of the body parts mentioned in the conversations, so naturally, they do not appear in the work.

Karolin Bräg’s work is an inventory of the balance of energy in people, reduced to a few crucial elements. As the artist confronted each individual in conversation, those questioned became conscious, in very different ways, of the things that gave them energy or deprived them of it. Thus, the essential effect of the Meine Energie (My energy) project does not only lie in the resulting aesthetic photo frieze of twenty-nine specific definitions, but also in the thought processes triggered in those questioned and in the observers, as well.

The sum total of all of the statements, as Bräg accentuates and composes them, forms a snapshot of present-day society. It shows the “energy image” of a society of people whose different balances of energy are not autarchic units, but components of a multifaceted energetic event within the framework of a work process in which people exchange energy back and forth among each other.