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BEAUTIFUL FREAKS

An Exhibition of Photographs by Ralf Obergfell
by James Anderson & Katie Glover

Photographer Ralf Obergfell first picked up a camera at the tender age of 15, swiftly finding willing subjects in the form of class mates at his local school in Staufen, Germany during the mid-1980's.

Ralf moved to the Dalston area of London, UK in the late 90s, and, like many others living and working in and around the area, began frequenting gritty-yet-culturally ground breaking watering holes such as the Bricklayer's Arms, The George & Dragon, The Joiners Arms, and the regular gay parties held at 333, all of which have redefined London nightlife since the outset of the current decade.

Moving to London was inevitable for the photographer, who arrived in the city at the age of 20, lured here by his passions for style-conscious early-80s UK bands such as The Cure, Duran Duran, Depeche Mode and Eurythmics, and his fondness for English marmalade (hard to find in Staufen). He had also long-since been transfixed by London's New Romantic fashions and less fanciful London icons too - like Routemaster buses.

In collaboration with artist and set designer Tony Hornecker, Ralf mounted a ten week exhibition of some of his work in Dalston in October 2009. 'Beautiful Freaks' was a photographic documentation of transgender London, which included some of the big players on the alternative London drag scene, such as Jonny Woo, Jaenette, John Sizzle and Ryan Styles (this month's Frock Cover Girl).





'Beautiful Freaks' was repeated for one night only, again in Dalston, last month (October).

The body of work that made up Ralf's 'Beautiful Freaks' exhibition found its origins specifically back in 2005, at the time when East London's Electro scene started to gain real momentum. Obergfell became a regular attendee of the much-loved Trailer Trash nights, capturing the magic of this polysexual



party's own after-dark legends and be-friending many of them, too - not least Mikki Most, Per QX and Tony Hornecker. One of the initial photographs from this era, now included in *Beautiful Freaks*, was *Lipgloss* - an image of the legendary Tasty Tim, whose reign across London's clubs spans right back to the early 80s.

Continuing to chronicle the more extreme enclaves of club kids, disco freaks and transgenders, Obergfell has persistently zoomed-in on the new generation of exotic creatures at a new wave of events, including Gay Bingo, Gutter-Slut, Horse Meat Disco and other knees-ups of note, such as Jonny Woo's birthday party or Tony Hornecker's regularly staged Pale Blue Door restaurant.

Obergfell's photographic interpretations of the remarkable characters he has discovered on his nocturnal travels avoid the distant stance of the voyeur, though. Instead the pictures he presents to us make for a celebratory and highly-involved testament to those whose lives - reinvented, transformed; made better, brighter, louder, wilder and lived-out to the max - are a fantastic confusion of reality-meets-performance, with the disco as a stage.

There are now plans to stage 'Beautiful Freaks' again, this time in Berlin, Germany where Ralf now lives, possibly in the spring of 2012.

