

## CRITICS' PICKS



Karlheinz Weinberger, *St. Petersinsel*, 1964, black-and-white photograph, 3 x 3".  
NEW YORK

## Karlheinz Weinberger

### SITUATIONS

127 Henry St

August 1–October 4, 2020

In Karlheinz Weinberger's photographs of sexy Swiss hooligans from the 1950s and '60s, the line between innocent modeling and outright carnality can, strangely, become awfully fuzzy. These self-fashioned *Halbstarken* (a German word that translates to "half-strongs") based their bad-boy looks on glamorous images of midcentury American machismo—think, for instance, of a hunky James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). In this presentation of the artist's work here, titled "Together & Alone," the photographer dotes on his butch subjects as they pose, drunkenly laze around in the woods, or make out with their girlfriends. And Weinberger's boys really knew how to do it up: Check out their massive belt buckles emblazoned with Elvis, too-tight jeans scrawled with the words *Texas* and *ranch*, and the flies on said pants fastened by an array of chunky nuts and bolts. These men are obviously comfortable showing off, be they clothed or not. Yet this sense of easygoing masculinity lends the work an explicit homoeroticism.

The portraits of nude men in this exhibition are actually tricks he'd pick up from around town. Weinberger's subjects posed for him at his home, where the artist's mother also lived. You can see her drab curtains as well as one of the ugliest end tables I've ever seen as recurring motifs. A fantastically kitschy fishing net makes several appearances in the photos, as if Weinberger were trying to re-create the schlocky nautical tableaux from Bob Mizer's *Physique Pictorial*. Most of his models aren't muscle gods, but their personalities shine through: Take the dude who's Donald Ducking it in a denim vest, or the lothario with spectacular mutton chops and an even more spectacular erection. These works—as erotic as they are sweet—celebrate a sexuality that, to my eye, feels surprisingly open, fluid, and radical.

— David Everitt Howe

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