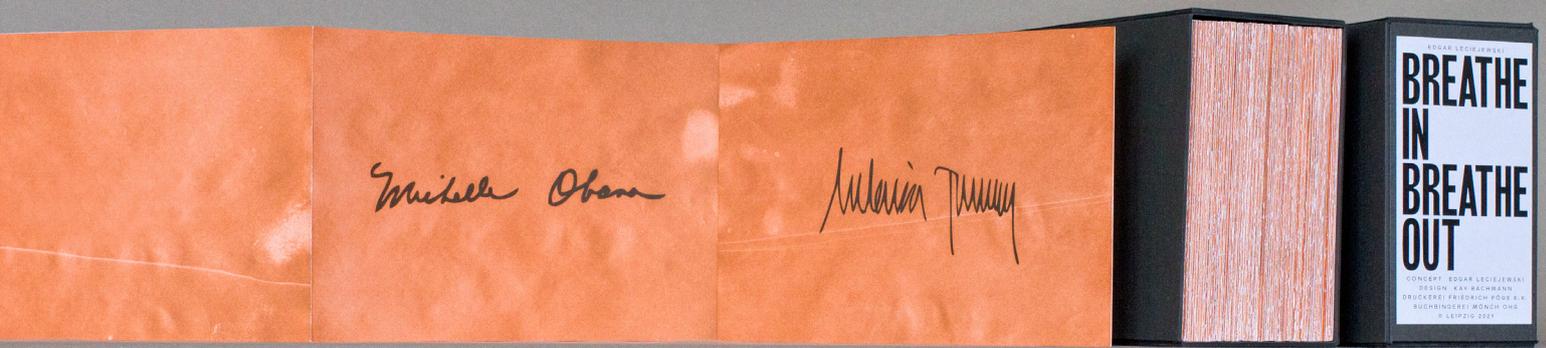


Kisses abounding

von Klaus Honnef (translation Gerrit Jackson)

We think of kisses as an expression of love and affection, of joy and sympathy. They elicit a scale of sensations, penetrating deep into the sphere of intimate feeling. Pablo Picasso often needed no more than a single contour to evoke the profiles of a couple exchanging a kiss. Doctors recommend kissing as a way to bolster one's spirits; others caution that the transmission of viruses poses a threat to one's health. Ritual public kisses have a long history: as tokens of greeting or submission to the laws of a community. But they may also signal betrayal. It was with a kiss that Judas turned his teacher Jesus Christ in to the Roman henchmen. The traditional Easter kiss in the Orthodox Church was transformed under the communist regimes into the lavish kiss of brotherhood. Far from being conventional in all the world's cultures, public kissing is in fact taboo in most of them. Yet the pressures of globalization and media-driven cultural convergence have begun to blur traditional boundaries. With his formidable fanfold presenting seventy-two photographs under the richly suggestive title "BREATHE IN / BREATHE OUT," the Leipzig-based artist Edgar Leciejewski demonstrates that public kissing has long become an integral part of the universal code of conduct of the world's political and social elites. An experienced and intelligent gatherer of images, the artist scoured the web for depictions of public kisses, bagging many a hit among the visual output of the past twenty years. Although he has confined himself to a single register, the kiss of greeting, the fruit of Leciejewski's labors almost en passant unfurls the full range of possible offerings, an amusing panorama that, despite its factual constraint, brims with different types of kisses and the most intriguing responses to them. No continent is missing, though the West holds an overwhelming numerical advantage. Kisses smack on the mouth of the kind that the communist potentates favored are rare. Most recently, the former president of the European Commission distinguished himself in this discipline. The majority of the characters—politicians, aristocrats, and celebrities, men and women—content themselves with a peck on the cheek. The repertory also includes one pair of lips placed on the counterpart's forehead. Some of those delivering these routine public kisses may display better targeting skills than others. Be that as it may, the brilliant collection is chock full of gems: victorious kiss attacks as well as ones that went awry. Contemplating them, however, one should beware of jumping to



interpretive conclusions. Each snapshot captures a coincidental scene: there is the Queen of the United Kingdom, for instance, responding to the physical approach of her daughter-in-law, the Duchess of Cornwall, with an expression of disgust as though she were gazing upon the snake-headed Medusa; or the elected president of South Korea and North Korea's young dictator baring their teeth for a "cordial" laugh that is reminiscent of the great white shark's jaws rather than suggestive of an imminent heartfelt kiss; or Muammar al-Gaddafi and Silvio Berlusconi just before locking lips, each slyly smiling to himself like a small-time crook; or the former president of the United States timorously pursing his lips before treating the German chancellor to his endearment. Nor is it only humans that get kissed; so do flags, bells, swords, animals, and trophies. Some samples attest to particular affection and intimacy: the smooch that Michelle Obama bestows on her husband Obama, or the almost audible exclamation of joy from the small boy who gives the pope a bear hug and kisses him. The longer you look, the more the pictures reveal. What is to the cursory glance a simple kiss turns out to be a civilized, loving, or poisoned gesture steeped in psychological and cultural significance. Like a film, the carefully composed sequence opens the eye to a plethora of subliminal undertones in the rhetoric of the human kiss, often reflected in facial expressions, in the eyes, the area around the mouth, the head's body language. One cannot stop looking and keeps discovering details that resonate with other pictures, teasing out interconnections that enrich and recast one's understanding of each shot. A whole world.

Edgar Leciejewski

BREATHE IN / BREATHE OUT

Fanfold in a Slipcase, 288 Pages, Folded 9,25" x 6,69" x 3,74", Unfolded 1304,33", 2,8 kg

BREATHE IN / BREATHE OUT by Edgar Leciejewski

Edition 200, signed

Leipzig 2021

Price 670 €

FORUM FÜR FOTOGRAFIE

Schönhauser Str. 8 • 50968 Köln

Öffnungszeiten: 12.02. - 09.04.2022 Do. und Fr. 14 - 18 Uhr, Sa 12 - 18 Uhr