

PRESS RELEASE

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Ute Behrend | Bärenmädchen/Beargirls

Ute Behrends Bärenmädchen / Bear Girls – Protecting the Self

An invented story at the start of this photobook will show the limits of reality. Nothing is certain, but we can believe everything.

Adolescence is the topic of Ute Behrend's new photo book. It tells of a fictitious „Indian tribe“ that separates its pubescent girls from other group members and dresses them in bearskins in order to protect them from premature sexualization. Thus a shelter is created that allows the girls to develop freely and self-determinedly in this important phase of their lives. Behrend calls them „bear girls“ and draws parallels to our society, in which free spaces for adolescent girls are constantly diminishing.



In an interview at the end of the book, Ute Behrend states that many girls try to evade the stereotypes of sexualised identification that are shaped by society and the media. This is often manifested in the girls behavioural patterns such as wearing too large sweaters, borrowed from their father's wardrobe. Behrend understands bear girls as a perfect antithesis to Lolita, the child woman invented by Vladimir Nabokov. On the back cover of the photo book she quotes from John Irving's novel „Hotel New Hampshire“: 'It's funny,' Susie said, 'I'm not really a big fighter, but nobody tries to mess with a bear. All I have to do is grab a guy like that and he'll roll up and start whimpering. [...] Nobody fights back when you're a bear.' In Irving's novel too, a girl needs a heavy coat: after being sexually assaulted, she uses a bearskin to protect her identity.

However, the original idea is much older. The Greek goddess Artemis dressed her playmates in bearskins to shelter them from the sexual desire of men. If one of them had been with a man, whether intentionally or unintentionally, she was expelled from the palace.

Ute Behrend has created a photo book full of poetic compositions. Things become visible that do not belong to the visible. Using the emotional power of her images, she formulates new mysteries. The Previously unthought was found and woven into new riddles. ‚Her‘ bear girls move in them as if immersed in an archetypically nature-oriented environment. They seem timeless,

delicately sensitive and lost. Many of the girls' portraits look as if they were taken in random situations. The opposite is the case. Behrend has carefully researched and staged places as well as actors. And just like in a fictional story, there are also wild animals to be admired. Often far away and quite small in size within the image. They neither want to be seen nor touched – just like the bear girls in this book.

About BUMMBUMM BOOKS

BUMMBUMM BOOKS is yet new in the publishing landscape and has set itself the ambitious goal of reclaiming the poetic space – be it in the form of photo books such as this one by co-editor Ute Behrend, fine art prints or freedom books dedicated to the very personal concepts of freedom. A sharp eye, current topics of dispute, careful design and outstanding print quality characterize the ambitious program of the Cologne-based publisher Florian v. Wissel.



Ute Behrend
Bärenmädchen/Beargirls 2019

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Further information about the artist:
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