

PREVIEW THE GALLERY GUIDE

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Karlheinz Weinberger: Intimate Stranger

PRESENTATION HOUSE GALLERY, NORTH VANCOUVER BC – May 20-Jul 17, 2011 Born in 1921, Zurich photographer Karlheinz Weinberger quietly built an impressive collection of images that remained largely unseen until his death in 2006. The Zurich counter-culture of the late 50s and early 60s emulated American “heroes” Elvis Presley, Marlon Brando and James Dean. Like the hippies who followed ten years later, Weinberger’s rebels were defiant teens – what we called “hoods” in Canada – rebelling against the conservatism and conformity of the post-war years. Sporting greaser hairdos, beehives, tattoos, and draped in paraphernalia like heavy chains, enormous customized belt buckles and crudely hand-decorated leather jackets, their look was aimed at being shocking and repelling.



Karlheinz Weinberger, Zurich (c. 1961), photograph
[Presentation House Gallery, North Vancouver BC, May 20-Jul 17]

Patrik Schedler, Zurich and Artist Resources Management, New York. The first large-scale institutional show of his work and the first in Canada, the exhibition was produced by the Swiss Institute of New York. A documentary film will screen during the exhibition. A publication is available at the Presentation House Gallery bookstore. *Mia Johnson*

IMAGE: © ESTATE OF KARLHEINZ WEINBERGER IN CARE OF PATRIK SCHEDLER COURTESY ARTIST RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AND ANNA KUSTERA GALLERY, NEW YORK

investigations between abstraction and representation; **SATELLITE GALLERY** AT THE KELOWNA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT **Thru Nov 14 Renay Egami: Piece by Piece**, explores the intersections among language, translation, labour and identity in a large, curtain-like work.

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THE WILD ONES

Swiss photographer captures youth cult's obsession with 1950s Americana.

VISUAL ARTS » D6



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BUDGET DINING » D18



VISUAL ARTS

Stalking the Wild Ones

Karlheinz Weinberger's images capture Swiss youth cult obsessed with '50s Americana

BY JOHN MACKIE

VANCOUVER SUN

In the 1950s, disaffected Swiss youth shed their conservative culture to take a walk on the wild side.

Their heroes were '50s American bad boys — Elvis, James Dean, and Marlon Brando. And they tried to ape the Elvis/Dean look.

They grew their hair into big rockabilly ducktails. They donned black leather jackets. They even wore blue jeans.

The conformist Swiss were outraged. They derided the would-be juvenile delinquents by dubbing them Verlaustan (lice-infested ones) and Halbstark (half strong).

"Most of the Zurich middle class would sit around watching them like zoo animals," says Reid Shier of Presentation House Gallery.

"They'd gather in these parks in Zurich, and just kind of hang out, try to be bad."

How does he know? Because photographer Karlheinz Weinberger was there, documenting the Halbstark in their native habitat — parks and carnivals in the '50s, '60 and '70s.

Weinberger was never a professional photographer — he worked in a factory and took photos in his spare time. But he knew his photos of the stylish outsiders had value, even when nobody else got it.

"He always thought he was going to be famous," says Shier.

"But up to five years before he died, nobody knew about his work, because he kept it all under his bed. Then finally it started to see the light of day, and kind of blew up. He started to get a lot of attention, just before he died [in 2006]."

Weinberger's first solo show wasn't until 1980, over two decades after he started shooting the Halbstark. His first show outside Switzerland was in New York in 2001. Now his work has made it to Presentation House in North Vancouver.

Intimate Stranger brings together 67 vintage black and white prints from several phases of Weinberger's career. There is also a slide show of some later work, when he focused on hairy bikers, and a couple of display cases filled with artifacts given to



A handmade Elvis belt buckle was a standard fashion accessory for the young Swiss outsiders in the 1950s and '60s who were dubbed the Halbstark (half strong) by a disapproving mainstream. But the group appealed to photographer Karlheinz Weinberger.

him by the Halbstark, such as a motorcycle jacket hand-decorated with a fire-breathing dragon, and an oversized belt buckle upon which somebody has spent countless hours carefully punching out tiny holes to spell "Elvis."

Elvis was the king to these Swiss kids. But all sorts of pop icons could be adapted to their fashion, whether it was Little Richard, James Dean or Zorro.

The Halbstark had a distinctive dress sense. In one pic, Weinberger shows an Elvis buckle perched high up on a guy's mid-section, probably so Weinberger could capture the string or baling twine that is holding the front of his pants together.

The innocent young Swiss had a way of getting their Americana slightly wrong, which is quite hilarious, and touching. There is a photo of three guys in jean jackets, taken from behind, where one has scrawled "Texas," another has "Mexiko" and a third has "Mexiko Citi."

They use all sorts of stuff as jewelry — old bullets become a belt, a big padlock is hung low like a chastity belt — and the skull and crossbones pirate symbol shows up everywhere, a symbol of their aspiration to be badasses.

A Tiger Gang member really went to town for his 1962 photo, dressing up in skin-tight blue jeans and jean jacket, with cowboy boots and a giant James Dean belt buckle. For some reason he's tied a kerchief around his knee, and stuffed a newspaper into the

kerchief.

His look is completed by a fur wrap around his neck, another furry bit hanging off his jacket pocket, and a tiny Swiss alpine hat.

Weinberger was gay, and some of the photos have a homoerotic quality to them. His first published work was of muscular young men in various stages of undress for "athletic" magazines in the '50s, under the pseudonym "Jim."

The Presentation House show includes several of his Jim photos, and also includes a home-made book called *Jeans*, where he took shots of young men in jeans in the early '50s.

The early stuff is okay, but Weinberger really hit his stride when he befriended the Halbstark, who probably appealed to his sense of being an outsider. They seemed to have had complete trust in him, allowing him to photograph them in the most candid moments.

He didn't just photograph pretty boys with greased-back hair. He also shot their girlfriends with their giant bouffant hairdos and Liz Taylor-as-Cleopatra eye-shadow. It's all rather evocative of that old Smiths album cover, *The World Won't Listen*.

The world probably never did listen to the Halbstark, but they were quite cool, in spite of themselves. It took the world a few decades to catch on to what Weinberger was up to, but in the end he was right — his photos of Switzerland's '50s misfits are timeless.

jmackie@vancouversun.com

At a glance

KARLHEINZ WEINBERGER: INTIMATE STRANGER

Where: Presentation House Gallery, 333 Chesterfield, North Vancouver

When: Wed. to Sun., noon to 5 p.m., to July 17

Admission: Free

Info: 604-986-1351 or www.presentationhousegall.com/exhibitions/



MORE PHOTOS AT
VANCOUVERSUN.COM/GALLERIES



Karlheinz Weinberger was mostly known for his homoerotic images for 'athletic' magazines in the 1950s, but that changed when he befriended the disenfranchised Swiss youth known as the Halbstark. The Swiss photographer captured them at their most candid, with often surreal results.

Capturing charismatic rebels

VISUAL ARTS

KARLHEINZ WEINBERGER: INTIMATE STRANGER

At Presentation House Gallery until July 17

Blue jeans and black leather jackets have become so blandly ubiquitous in western culture that it's hard to conceive how radical they once were. Ditto tattoos, piercings, and other decorative forms of self-mutilation. But in Switzerland, as elsewhere following the Second World War, groups of alienated, working-class youth assumed these costumes and adornments as declarations of defiance against a culture of grey suits, conservative values, and Calvinist propriety.

These self-styled rebels—the boys with their hair greased back at the sides and flopped seductively over their foreheads, the girls with their coiffures back-combed into ragged towers or helmetlike mounds—identified with the insolent sexuality and on-screen waywardness of Marlon Brando, James Dean, and, foremost, Elvis Presley. The names and portraits of these American pop-culture icons adorned the Swiss teens' hand-painted jackets, home-made medallions, and ridiculously outsized belt buckles. Such images symbolized a decisive break with the values of their buttoned-down parents and grandparents.

Happily for us, there was someone interested in chronicling the rebel youths, who were derogatorily termed *Halbstark* or "half strong" by their elders. He was a gay man named Karlheinz Weinberger and he rescued himself from what might have been an unutterably dreary existence as a factory warehouse clerk through his passion for photography. Self-taught, shooting pictures in his off-hours, and using his Zurich home as a studio and darkroom, Weinberger created an impressive vernacular document of his age. Subtitled *Intimate Stranger*, the show at Presentation House Gallery comprises some 70 of his black-and-white prints and a selection of his coloured slides, along with "artifacts" of the time. These include embellished clothing and accessories given to Weinberger by his subjects.

There's a prelude to the *Halbstark* photos in Weinberger's 1950s shots of buff young men in bathing suits (or less), published under the pseudonym "Jim" in a Zurich-based gay magazine. Also on view are his eroticizing and often problematic



Karlheinz Weinberger turned his lens to stylish youth in this untitled image. Artist Resources Management and Anna Kustera Gallery, New York, photo.

images of men and boys shot during visits to southern Italy and North Africa. (Part of the difficulty here is the use of the camera as an instrument of colonization.)

In the late 1950s, Weinberger encountered and began shooting the *Halbstark* of Zurich and Basel as they hung out in parks and at fairgrounds or posed for him solo in his studio. Some of these images, such as *Basel*, showing a group of jean-jacketed young men loitering at a bus terminus, and an untitled shot of three sweet-looking, rocker-style teens sitting on a retaining wall near a lakeside promenade, look like spontaneous street photographs. Others, such as *Milchbuck*, *Zurich*, are apparently posed. This print portrays a young guy in a wintry fairground; his hair falls over one eye, a medallion hangs on a heavy chain around his neck, a bandanna is tied around one blue-jeaned leg, and a newspaper is stylishly tucked into his boot.

In each case, there is a sense of sympathetic exchange: these teens were collaborating with Weinberger

in the articulation of their image and the assertion of their difference. And there's something poignant in the DIY earnestness of their attempts at iconoclasm, as evident in the laboriously hand-embroidered jackets and hand-punched belt buckles on display in the gallery.

In the 1970s photos, however, something dire is happening. The rockers have been replaced by bikers, and the Elvis paraphernalia has given way to Nazi insignia. As PHG director Reid Shier pointed out while touring the *Straight* through the show, there's an uncomfortable mood in these later prints and slides. Conflict inflects the shots of Hells Angels gatherings and the individual portraits of these newer, nastier young men. Showing off their muscles, tattoos, and swastikas, they are weirdly eroticized by Weinberger, who would have been "fully cognizant" of the fate of homosexuals in Germany during the Nazi regime, Shier notes. Intimacy becomes even stranger.

> ROBIN LAURENCE

VANCOUVER'S NEWS & ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

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PULSE

Bridesmaids not
just a chick flick:
Page 20

VSO connecting with
the community:
Page 32

There's still a lot of
life left in The Kills:
Page 33

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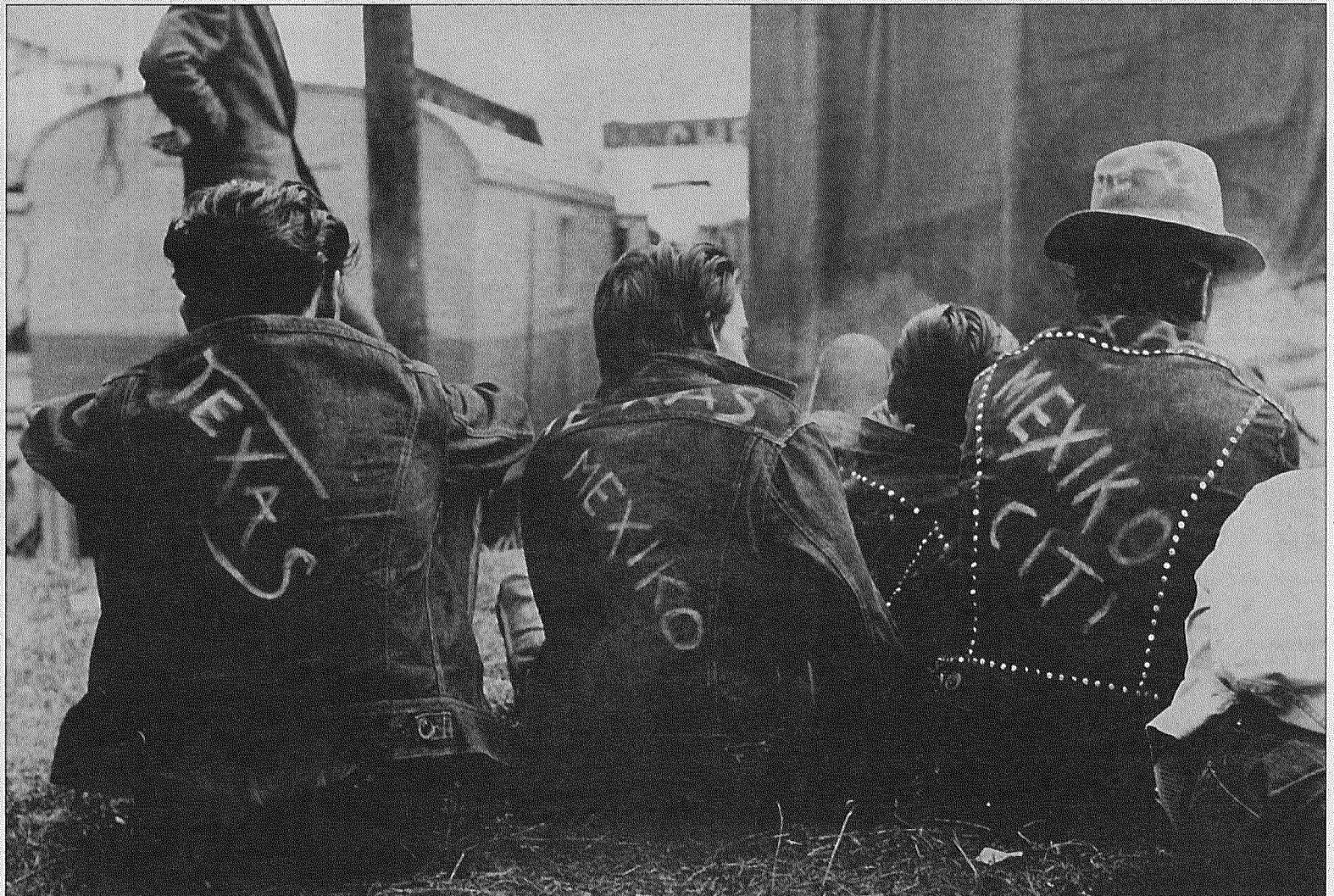


photo by Karlheinz Weinberger courtesy of Artist Resource Management and Anna Kustera Gallery, New York

KARLHEINZ Weinberger began documenting the emergence of the "Halbstark" youth culture in Zurich, Switzerland in 1958. His rare vintage photographs will be on view at Presentation House Gallery May 21 to July 17.

KARLHEINZ WEINBERGER AT PRESENTATION HOUSE

Rebel style

■ *Intimate Strangers*. An exhibition of photography by Karlheinz Weinberger, curated by Gianni Jetzer of the Swiss Institute of New York, at Presentation House Gallery May 21-July 17. Opening reception Friday, May 20, 7 p.m.

Tessa Holloway

tholloway@nsnews.com

HE kept them under his mattress.

A self-taught photographer, Karlheinz Weinberger always thought he would be famous, and finally, at age 81, he achieved his first solo show. But it wasn't until after

his death in 2006 that the 300 or so original prints of those photos ever saw the light of day.

Contained in those prints were the proud faces of a rebellious youthful vanguard in 1950s and 60s Switzerland. They loved American-style pop culture. They loved jeans and idolized Elvis Presley and James Dean. And Weinberger loved them, and their self-expression.

But they were loathed by the conservative Swiss establishment.

"The way they customized their jeans, the punk attitude was totally there, yet

See Gallery page 34

VISUAL ARTS

Gallery showing Weinberger's own prints

From page 13

they're 20 years ahead," says Gianni Jetzer, director of the Swiss Institute in New York and the curator of the exhibit that will come to the Presentation House Gallery May 21.

Weinberger got his start in photography working under the pseudonym Jim for gay club Der Kreiss in 1948, which had a publication of the same name. He traveled as far as Sicily taking photos, but never made a living: he continued to punch the clock at a warehouse that paid the bills for his growing hobby.

His most captivating photos, however, date from after 1958, when he was first introduced to the "Halbstark" youth culture, translated as "half strong."

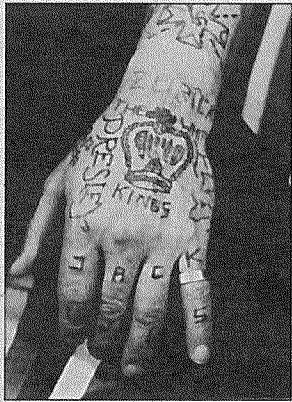
Though similar cultures existed across Europe, Weinberger is the only one to have extensively photographed the youth.

The historical snapshot fascinates Jetzer, but he also points out Weinberger's contribution to portraiture photography.

"Of course these people were totally cool, and it's probably the coolest jean fashions ever, because it was true. It was an act of pure self-expression to wear jeans at that point. But I think Weinberger goes beyond that," he says.

"He didn't say 'oh yeah, be cool, be yourself.' He invented poses that would kind of reflect what these kids would represent for him, so he was almost like a director, you know?"

The photos first rose to prominence in 2001, but at that time all those exhibits showed modern reprints. The Presentation House Gallery show will not only be the first



A detail from a 1969 image by Karlheinz Weinberger.

gallery exhibit of Weinberger's work in Canada, but also the first to include only the original prints, which were produced in his home darkroom replete with little blemishes and cropped into odd shapes.

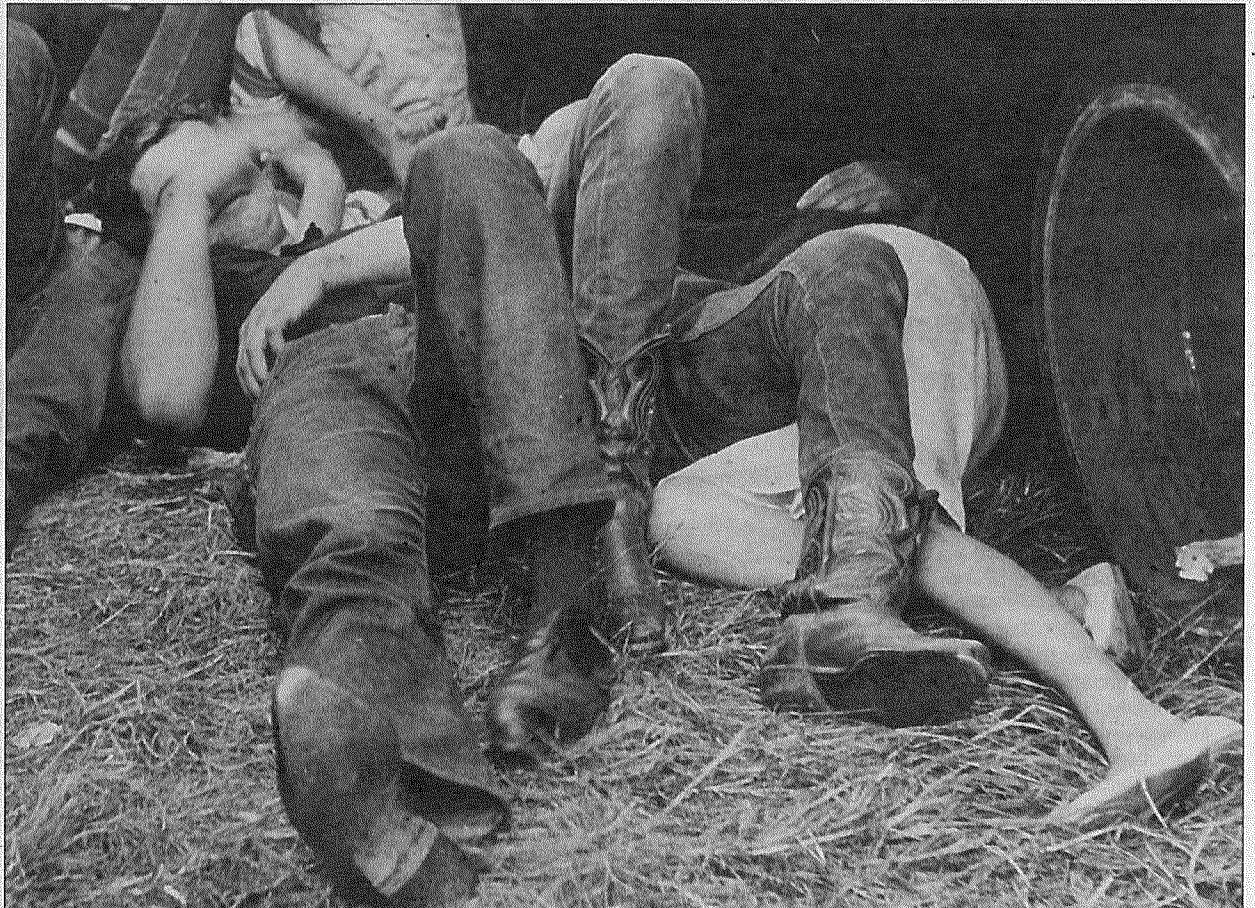
"I actually fell in love with those prints because they are quite beautiful," Jetzer says.

"Also, the way they are cropped and the way they are printed, and of course the ... gelatin-silver prints from the late '50s and '60s are totally different than what modern prints offer."

Some of the styles would stand out even today. The youth customized massive belt buckles, often with Elvis Presley's face. One youth slips his thumb under a belt with a horseshoe on the front while a shell casing hangs from a necklace.

And knowing how much American pop culture has influenced modern culture around the world changes how the photos are seen, says Jetzer.

"It's very touching because we know about the success

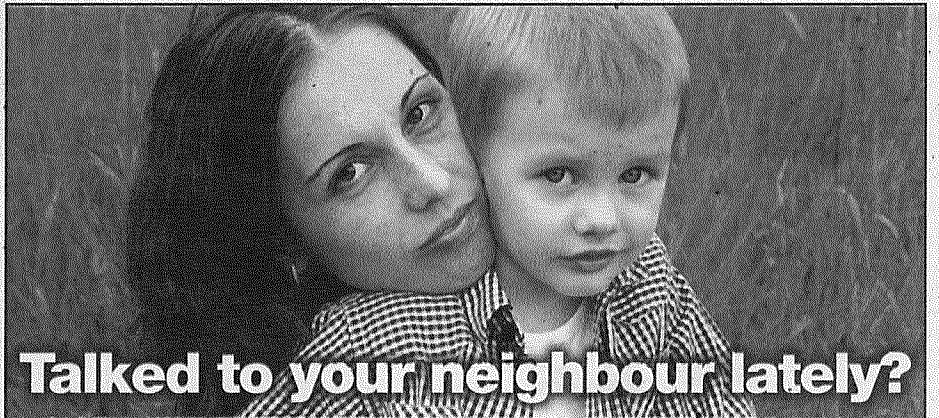


photos by Karlheinz Weinberger courtesy of Artist Resources Management and Anna Kustera Gallery, New York

KARLHEINZ Weinberger's portraits document a youth subculture in Zurich that emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War.

of pop culture eventually, we know what came after that, but those guys were pioneers. There were no role models for what they would do, it's quite extreme what they would do," he says.

"I just thought it was very beautiful, greatly shot and also very romantic somehow, because you have these guys who believed in freedom, of individuality and their heroes."



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A12 - North Shore News - Wednesday, June 1, 2011

BRIGHT LIGHTS by Paul McGrath

Presentation House Gallery exhibition opening



Deputy Consul General of Switzerland **Hans-Peter Willi** and wife **Riccarda** and Presentation House Gallery director **Reid Shier** celebrate a successful opening.

Representatives of Presentation House Gallery hosted an opening event for their latest exhibition, *Intimate Stranger*, on May 20. Curator Gianni Jetzer led those in attendance on a tour of the exhibition before guests settled in for a reception supported by the Consulate General of Switzerland in Vancouver. *Intimate Stranger* features rare vintage photographs by Swiss photographer Karlheinz Weinberger, shown for the first time in Canada. Along with magazines and samples of do-it-yourself clothing, Weinberger's photographs offer a glimpse into a youth subculture in Zurich that emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War. *Intimate Stranger* will remain on display at the North Vancouver gallery until July 17. Info: presentationhousegallery.org.



Matthew Gordon Long, the gallery's **Kirsten May** and **Garwa Kong** team up for a photo.



Renee Van Halm and **Pietro Widmer** flash their smiles.



Urs and **Juliet Fricker** toast the evening.



Jill Orsten and **Francis** and **Fabiolo Carranza** attend.



Heidi Siller and **Melita Balaski** view the many works on display.



Presentation House Gallery curator **Helga Pakasaar** and **Kevin Schmidt** flank exhibition curator **Gianni Jetzer**.



Glynnis Tidball and **Jane Irwin** show their support.