

Nal Kocjan: The Blue Butterfly

The Blue Butterfly is a photography project by Nal Kocjan, created in October 2023 as part of his study assignment. Focusing on trans men who have undergone top surgery, it explores their bodily and identity experiences. The project opens up a space of intimacy, self-representation, and visibility for a community that is still rarely represented affirmatively in visual culture.

The project was created as a semester assignment in the second year of photography studies at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design. During the creative process, Kocjan expanded it and developed it into a stand-alone project.

The exhibition offers visitors the opportunity to discover the diversity of trans men's experiences.

The project features portraits of four individuals: Nal, Liam, Lan, and Mihael. All of them are transmasculine, and their experiences after top surgery form the core of the exhibition. The visual part is complemented by interviews with each individual, offering viewers and readers insight into their personal stories, feelings, and thoughts. Thus, the project goes beyond the image of the body after top surgery as it also gives space to their voices.

The central visual element of the exhibition comprises large-scale colour studio portraits against white backgrounds. By presenting them in the style of fashion photography, Nal emphasises the power, confidence, and presence of trans men in their communities. These portraits serve not only as a form of documentation, but also as an affirmation of identity and body. They are also designed to enable visitors to engage directly with the identity and personality of each individual subject.

A more intimate layer of the project is represented by Polaroid photographs, which include depictions of private spaces, such as bathrooms and bedrooms. These snapshots capture the intimacy of the moment when the individual first encounters their (new) body after top surgery and realises: »This is me, this is right.«

The exhibition also includes two sequences of black-and-white analogue film, a total of 24 photographs depicting the tearing of a binder, i.e., a garment that was previously used to conceal the breasts. Thus, the sequence symbolises transition: the end of the old and the liberation of the new body.

All three techniques guide the viewer from the public sphere to the intimate and ritual spheres, and finally to the wider community.

In 2024, a collaboration with the DIH association resulted in the creation of a Zine. This publication contains visual material, interviews, and quotes (Marsha P. Johnson, *Felix Ever After*, the song *The Village – WRABEL*), which place the project in a broader cultural and social context.

Mars Ema Pečkaj

Nal Kocjan is a visual artist who employs a variety of photographic techniques in his work to raise awareness of the LGBTIQ+ community and mental health issues. His practice combines studio, analogue, and digital photography, often drawing on personal and community experiences. The Blue Butterfly project was created in 2023 to present his own experience as a trans man. His motivation stems from himself and his own experiences, as well as his desire for greater visibility for his community, its self-representation, and an insight into its intimacy.

He is currently completing a photography degree at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Ljubljana, where he developed the project.

His work ranges from documentary to directorial, consciously intertwining the aesthetics of fashion photography with intimate, personal moments.

Using techniques ranging from studio portraits to analogue sequences and Polaroids, he creates a multi-layered visual language that emphasises transition, ritual, and the space of self-recognition. He also gets autobiographically involved in his own projects, blurring the line between observer and subject and opening up space for an affirmative yet non-idealized portrayal of trans experiences.

Through his projects, he aims to enhance the visibility and understanding of trans experiences and contribute to a broader social understanding of this topic through the visual language of photography.

Guided tour and zine workshop: Tuesday, 31 March 2026, 5 pm. In cooperation with Legebitra.

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The Blue Butterfly je fotografski projekt Nala Kocjana, ki je nastal oktobra 2023 v okviru študijske naloge. V središče postavlja trans moške po opravljeni zgornji operaciji ter raziskuje njihovo telesno in identitetno izkušnjo. S tem daje vpogled v intimo ter omogoča samoreprezentacijo in vidnost skupnosti, ki je v vizualni kulturi še vedno redko afirmativno predstavljena.

Serijski je nastala kot semestrski naloga v drugem letniku študija fotografije (ALUO). Med procesom dela jo je avtor razširil in oblikoval v samostojen projekt.

Razstava obiskovalcem ponuja priložnost, da začutijo raznolikost izkušenj trans moških.

Projekt vključuje štiri portretirane posameznike: Nala, Liama, Lana in Mihaela. Vsi portretiranci so transmuskulne osebe, njihove izkušnje po zgornji operaciji pa tvorijo samo jedro razstave. Vizualni del dopolnjujejo intervjuji z vsakim izmed njih, ki gledalcu ali bralcu omogočajo vpogled v njihove osebne zgodbe, občutke in razmišljanja. S tem projekt presega podobo samega telesa po zgornji operaciji ter daje prostor tudi njihovem glas.

Osrednji vizualni del razstave sestavljajo večji barvni študijski portreti na belih ozadjih. Nal jih prikazuje v estetiki modne fotografije, poudarjajo pa moč, samozavest in prisotnost trans moških v skupnostih. Portreti niso le dokumentacija, temveč afirmacija identitete in telesa. Zasnovani pa so tudi tako, da obiskovalcu omogočijo neposreden stik z identiteto in osebnostjo vsakega posameznega subjekta.

Intimnejšo plast projekta predstavljajo polaroidne fotografije, ki vključujejo upodobitve zasebnih prostorov (kopalnice, spalnice). Ti utrinki prikazujejo prostor intimnosti, v katerem se posameznik prvič po zgornji operaciji sreča s svojim (novim) telesom in ugotovi: »To sem jaz, tako je prav.«

Razstava vključuje tudi zaporedni sekvenci črno-belega analognega filma, skupaj 24 fotografij, ki prikazujejo trganje binderja. Binder je oblačilo, ki se je uporablja za zakrivanje prsi. Sekvenca torej simbolizira prehod, zaključek starega in osvoboditev novega telesa.

Vse tri tehnike vodijo gledalca od javnega prek intimnega do ritualnega, skupaj pa do širše skupnosti.

Leta 2024 je v sodelovanju z društvom DIH iz projekta nastal zin. Ta vsebuje vizualni material, intervjuje in citate (Marsha P. Johnson, *Felix Ever After*, pesem *The Village – WRABEL*), s čimer se projekt naslanja na širši kulturni in družbeni kontekst.

Mars Ema Pečkaj

Nal Kocjan je vizualni umetnik, ki v svojem delu skozi različne fotografske pristope ozavešča o skupnosti LGBTIQ+ in mentalnem zdravju. Njegova praksa združuje študijsko, analogno in digitalno fotografijo ter pogosto izhaja iz osebnih in skupnostnih izkušenj. Projekt *The Blue Butterfly* je nastal leta 2023 kot predstavitev lastne izkušnje trans moškega, njegova motivacija pa izvira iz njega in njegovih izkušenj ter želje po večji vidnosti njegove skupnosti, njeni samoreprezentaciji ter vpogledu v njeno intimo.

Trenutno zaključuje študij fotografije na Akademiji za likovno umetnost in oblikovanje v Ljubljani, kjer je projekt tudi nastal.

Njegovo delo se giblje med dokumentarnim in režijskim, pri čemer zavestno prepleta estetiko modne fotografije z intimnimi, osebnimi trenutki. Z uporabo različnih tehnik (od študijskih portretov do analognih sekvenc in polaroidov) gradi večplasten vizualni jezik, ki poudarja prehod, ritual in prostor samoprepoznanja. Avtor vstopa v lastne projekte tudi avtobiografsko, s čimer briše mejo med opazovalcem in subjektom ter odpira prostor za afirmativno, a neidealizirano predstavitev trans izkušenj.

S svojimi projekti si prizadeva povečevati vidnost in razumevanje trans izkušenj ter skozi vizualni jezik fotografije prispevati k širši družbeni ozaveščenosti o tej tematiki.

Vodstvo in zin delavnica: torek, 31. 3. 2026, ob 17. uri. V sodelovanju z Legebitro.