TONY CONRAD
DANIEL BUCHHOLZ - **BERLIN**

TONY CONRAD, Re-Framing Creatures, 1963-2009. Still from film, 16mm. Courtesy Daniel Buchholz, Cologne / Berlin.

In the final frames of Jack Smith's film *Flaming Creatures* (1963), his friend and collaborator Tony Conrad is credited with 'Recording,' which neatly covers a role as both the creator of the musical soundtrack and an occasional cameraman. Apparently, in 1963, Smith was about to dispose of the outtakes from the film, which were strewn across the floor of the New York apartment they shared, when Conrad asked if he could keep them. Now, nearly half a century later, he has created a suite of five filmic collages that combine this material with clips from the film itself.

With *Flaming Creatures*, Smith invented a parallel world of ostentatious camp and sexual fantasy, which has retained its disturbing aura of transgression. The self-referential seal of its artifice has protected it from dating: it is only the 16mm black-and-white film stock that has softened with age, giving the images the fuzzy high-contrast definition of a Polaroid. Conrad exhibits the series of collages — each two to five minutes long — as projections ranged in clockwise succession around the gallery walls, in the chronological sequence of the film's narrative. Given his role as musical director, it seems fitting that the switch from silence to soundtrack is the signal informing us that we are seeing the film as opposed to what Smith discarded from it. Sometimes the final and the rejected cut correspond exactly, the only distinction being the sharper detail in the better-preserved outtakes. In the second projection, a blond Amazonian transvestite twirls an orchid as she tiptoes, first barefoot,

then in gold pumps, and then in the black heels that she wears in the film. Conrad's technique combines a cool, deconstructive impulse — analyzing the editing process — with a nostalgic yearning to penetrate the film's remote autonomy and reveal its long-lost secrets.

The final collage consists entirely of outtakes, the cutting-and-pasting more intense, with images alternating so fast that it is often difficult to see what is happening. In turn, their abstract qualities — hazy brilliance and iconic simplicity — are emphasized. The documentary veracity of a few frames showing a studio shelf, a window ledge — shot accidentally as a reel was being loaded — form a stark contrast with the surrounding images, which probably seemed as timeless when they were originally filmed as they do now.

Mark Prince

WIELAND SPECK/SHELLEY SILVER
EXILE- **BERLIN**

Above: WIELAND SPECK, Berlin Off/On Wall, 1978. Installation view at Exile, 2009. Photo: Christian Siekmeier. Right: SHELLY SILVER, Former East/Former West, 1994. German with English subtitles, 16mm transfer to video, 62 mins. All courtesy the artist and Exile, Berlin.

While the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall was celebrated at the Brandenburg Gate with the usual trappings of state holidays, political speeches on huge flat screens, fireworks and a Bon Jovi concert, the question remains why hardly a single major contemporary art institution in the city wagered an exhibition dealing with German reunification. The task was left to smaller galleries and ini-

tiatives, like Exile, which showed two films that presented documentary material problematizing the existence of two Germanies. *Berlin On/Off Wall* by Wieland Speck is a documentation of a performance from 1978, in which painter Per Lüke climbs a western portion of the Berlin Wall and sits playing a harp until the arrival of the West German police. Roughly documented and observed by only a handful of onlookers (Western tourists and Eastern border guards,) the action itself conveys fragility and naiveté. A radical contrast to the innocuous performance is the response of the East German Stasi, which photographed the action and subsequently researched "the perpetrator's" personal information with a horrifying minutiae reflected in files that Speck was able to obtain from former state police archives and which accompany the film.

Dealing with the early years of reunification, Shelly Silver's hour-long film *Former East/Former West* (1994) presents a compelling portrait of the mental landscape that prevails in a persistently divided Germany. In interviews with a fascinating range of individuals on the street, Silver probes attitudes towards notions of de-

mocracy, socialism, history, foreigners and nationality. Gradually outlining a substantial disparity in the experience of the "Wessies," for whom little had changed, and the "Ossies," whose daily lives were often transformed, the film's value as a historical document is based on its ability to deconstruct stereotypes of East and West. However, it leaves the unsettling question of whether today's responses might be at all different — a valuable starting point for a discussion worth pursuing.

Laura Schleussner