

DOUBBLE TROUBLE EVA & ADELE

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PHOTOGRAPHY

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TEXT



“WE HAVE ALWAYS FOUGHT AGAINST THIS DIVIDE
BETWEEN ART AND LIFE.”

No artist has come so close to blurring the line between life and art as Eva & Adele. For more than 20 years the identical duo has worked intensively on cultivating their aesthetic and choreography, with their prolific portfolio spanning mediums such as video, photography, drawing and painting. Having landed in Berlin from the future, they live totally in the now without any reference to the past. Becoming famous over night at their performance *Hochzeit Metropolis* in 1991, the couple has frequented art fairs such as the Art Biennale, Documenta and Art Basel. Traveling is still one of the most important facets of their work. With *Wherever We Are Is Museum*, E&A take the controlled, closed space of the museum and open it up to the whole world. They do not see their lives as a performance only, but rather feel as though their whole existence has always been, and always will be, a living, breathing work of art. And much like a painting in a gallery, only their measurements are given.

Anyone who happens upon Eva & Adele becomes an involuntary visitor to their mobile museum of the future. Indeed, with their perfectly assembled, identical outfits of pink, red and gold, angel-like gestures, and flawless make-up, one simply cannot miss them! And yet, from the beginning of their work in the 90's, they have refused to make comment on their appearance, preferring to remain silent and offer merely their signature, carefree smiles. It is in this way, E&A tell me, that they have made Berlin into their own personal New York. Their head-to-head, pink heart logo expresses the unique affection they feel for one another, as well as their post-gender identity and art practice. They describe themselves as “over the boundaries of gender.” With their idea of a 'Zweigeschlechtigkeit' — which represents the simultaneity of male and female; one artist with two heads — E&A do not only challenge today's art world, but also the socio-historical laws of gender. Indeed, E&A claim that they are a third gender: the artist.

Sitting in their cozy Charlottenburg studio, they tell me how they deliberately expose themselves to an ongoing dialogue with their audience. It is a necessary and central aspect of their art, an approach and interaction with the unknown and always-to-come. This is the essence of what Eva & Adele call “futuring.”

LUKAS VON DER GRACHT. Hello Eva! Hello Adele! How do you start your day? Do you apply your make-up on your own or to each other?

ADELE. We need three hours to get ready every day. It is always the same routine: after daily skin care and shaving we take a break and have breakfast. Then we apply our make-up individually. We have almost not changed our make-up since the beginning of our work more than 22 years ago. That's pretty mad if you imagine all in all how often we have applied and removed our make-up already. We see the application of the same coloured make-up as conceptual art, because we try to wear it in any place on the earth no matter the climate conditions. We did this exhibition called *-20 (degrees) +42 (degrees)*. These are the two poles we have so far reached wearing make-up, but of course difficulties still occurred. So we had to use special tricks under those kind of extreme circumstances.

LG. You must use very high-quality make-up and pay good attention to your skin.

EVA. Yes and when we are done with the make-up we take a self-portrait every day. Except, to be honest, those days when we have actually forgotten about it. Parallel to our portraits we are also doing a diary. We have used polaroid but when they stopped producing the originals we decided not to continue this project. We were able to finish the series in a beautiful way at the Museum der Moderne in Salzburg. We installed a tremendous self-portrait made of 1500 polaroids all in all.

A. That was absolutely mental. Total magic. You could walk around 16 meters of Eva & Adele and share 1500 days with us, starting from the first polaroid up in the left-hand corner.

LG. That exhibition must have been nuts! When did you start taking these self-portraits?

A. The polaroids from the exhibition were taken between 1991 and 2005. In the beginning of our work we were super poor. We had to save up a great deal of money and could only afford to take polaroids on important days. Always in the same way: smiling, head-to-head.

LG. In your logo your heads form a heart-shape, which is also the basis for all your painting work. What is your favourite medium to use?

A. We really have studied a lot of different techniques. We drew and painted a big series of portraits called *Futuring Company*. We examined everything that could work, from pencil to oil pastels and watercolor to oil on paper. Canvas is fantastic and I think that's our favourite medium. It is completely different from the others and the best medium to work reflectively. You can start working, and then go many steps back, and then a thousand times back and forth. Another important aspect is that as painters we need to be lonely. [Being]

lonely with the artwork is super exciting for us, because being ever-present in public has meant that we have been in permanent communication with different individuals. The media and people from many different backgrounds and education are in a constant dialogue with us. You always have to shift between languages so that the conversation works and that the audience takes something away. It is totally crazy but also utterly thrilling. We radically expose ourselves to this communication. For that reason, as a contrast to our life in public, we need the possibility to withdraw into loneliness.

E. To bring art and life as close together as possible is the most important thing for us. We love the big wonderful feast of theatre and playing absolutely the most difficult role that there is to play. That is the other side of the biological sex we were born into. There is nothing more fantastic and there is no bigger adventure in the world than living and playing this other side, being this side day and night. Especially when previous generations have worked within the norms and morals in order to measure up one's gender to an individual's personality, and we turn the whole thing around.

LG. Where and when did you two meet?

A. We landed with our time machine in Berlin in 1989. Back when we did our first walks together, I used to walk around in high-heels on almost impassable paths.

E. Yes, forming a straight line from A to B, no matter what was in between. When you are wearing heels you actually have to construct your path quite precisely. You have to watch out because there are dangerous things lying around and you can easily slip in a silly way. That was when we always tried to walk as lady-like as possible. Whilst on our way I had to give Adele secret directions and then she used to shake her head. [Laughs]

A. I always had so many more ladders in the tights than you. Today I don't have any ladders. I could not really handle my silk stockings and extreme heels very well. Somehow we finally found our ideal performative-theatrical walk that manages to remain safe yet chic.

LG. Almost choreographed, one could say.

E. Yes, absolutely. Our whole life. But we love using the medium of theatre to move in daily life. No one would believe that our walk to the ladies' restroom is choreographed much like on a big theatre stage. But after all we were successful with it. We gained acclamation out of the big puzzle of our appearance.

LG. At the very beginning of your public appearances you did not comment on it at all, did you?

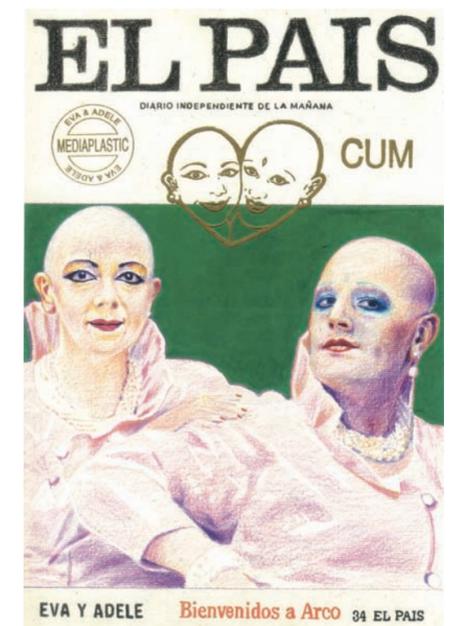
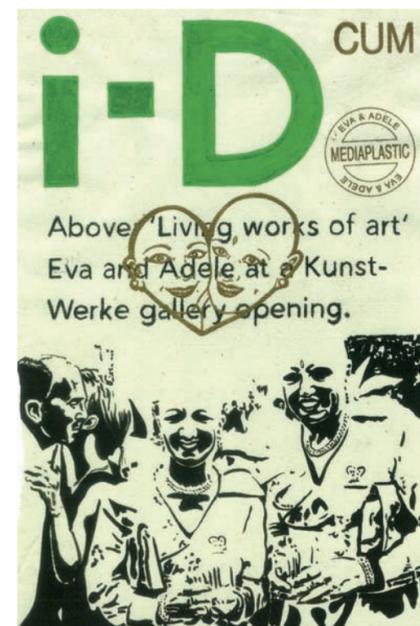
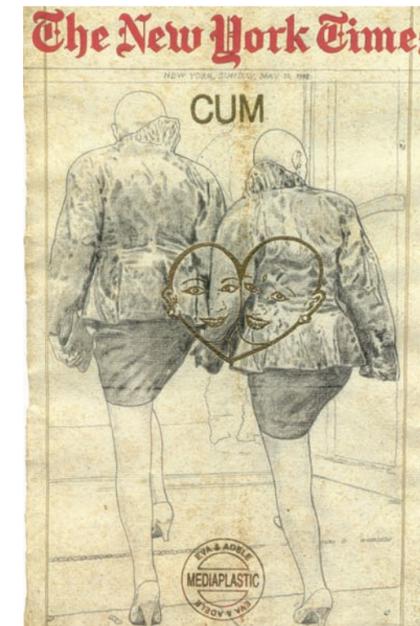
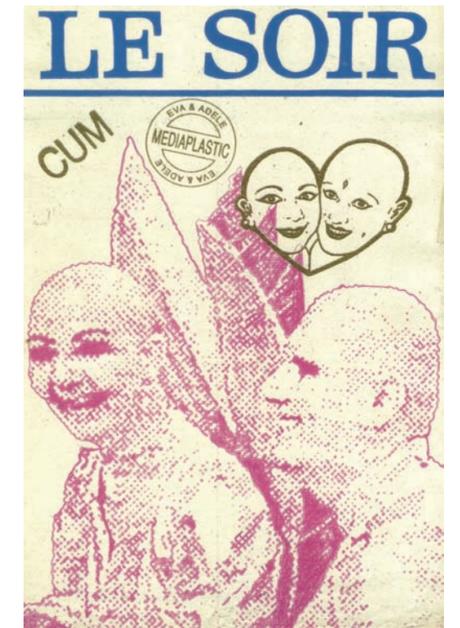
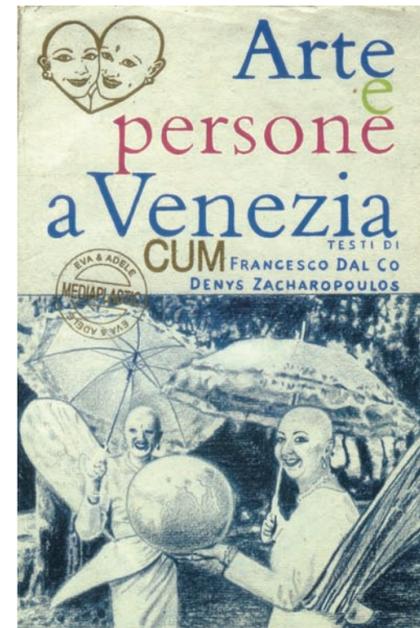
E. We were completely silent for the first seven years of our appearances and would only sweetly blink at each reporter's question.

A. That's right. I think it was one of the biggest risks we could take because modern art in general always requires some description. Saying nothing irritated everyone extremely. But this is actually the highest thing you can reach as an artist: the maximum of irritation. It really worked for us.

LG. Two years ago you could get married as a same-sex couple.

E. Yes, as a consequence to our work I went through Germany's transsexual paragraph no. 1 and now finally have my name as 'Eva' on my passport. It is a big achievement that this is possible in Germany. This process happened with two experts and one judge, and it was almost therapeutic. I had to complete a questionnaire with about 4000 questions and you could easily guess which questions were leading in which direction. It was fantastic that during my questioning I could sit there with Adele. The whole procedure has changed my self-consciousness contrary to my expectations. We thought we had gained a lot of self-consciousness through our art itself, but it was intense to submit myself to the law. Many people are going through this procedure over several years — trying again and again. Until the end I was scared the judge would simply say 'art is art and life is life'. We have always fought against this divide between art and life, and we did not know whether the judge would decide that my gender was purely artistic and not 'for real'. We were surprised when all the staff was so happy to acknowledge us and handed us the respective papers.

LG. How was the civil wedding?



Opposite page: *Mediaplasic-Drawings* (selection) gouache, oil, pastel, graphite, bronze on antique paper.
Following pages: *Performative Installation* (detail), installation view exhibition ROT, Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz 2008.



“TO BRING ART AND LIFE AS CLOSE TOGETHER AS POSSIBLE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING FOR US.”

E. That was crazy! We celebrated our wedding performance *Hochzeit Metropolis* at Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin on the 11th of April 1991. Our photos went around the world and we got famous with a bang. We wanted our civil wedding to be as quiet as possible, so it was only us two and the registrar. She brought us to tears. Ahead of the appointment she had done a little research online and gave a wonderful speech.

LG. You say that the artist is the third gender for you.

A. Yes. We both have our reasons for this radical decision not to decide on either female or male. In my childhood I always had this wish of playing with gender roles. I was born a girl, but never only wanted to be a woman. That was totally boring for me.

E. I am very happy I could show Adele the attractions of being a lady. *[Laughs]*
A. *[Laughs]* Yes, it was Eva who taught me how to be lady-like. That is so very beautiful, isn't it? But I have always worn high heels and red nail polish.

E. From a multi-gendered point of view, we have always had the idea of re-inventing 21st century's modern art as one artist with two heads. That is very hard to understand for many people in the art world.

A. I believe living several genders is an incredible gift. Every human being who has experienced this in their lifetime is automatically privileged. To feel and enforce this privilege is very important and we push this idea through our work. For example, at high school paintings are introduced with the question of whether the artist is female or male. They discuss this endlessly in class: what is male art and what is female art? In our case the gender mix actually happens double. I believe this is our unique position in contemporary art. The classical school of art wants the total division between life and art. That is probably for the best, but we are the crazy ones who are breaking it anyway.

E. It has also been a challenge to gender and I think that is the reason why so many painters grew beards to hide their femininity. Picasso definitely belongs to these macho-painters and they still exist today. It is proven by computer technology that Leonardo da Vinci painted himself as a woman in the famous Mona Lisa. Of course many art historians do not want to hear that!

LG. EVA, you said that art has enforced your self-consciousness immensely. Can you tell me a little more about that?

E. I remember that through painting, and especially the work in an atelier dancing in front of the canvas in pretty dresses, I could live out my femininity. So at a very early stage I discovered that this could be my way. But the fear of being caught and not being accepted was always present. Only through our encounter was it possible to work on this métier, through the concept of our coupling. Life and art as the total encounter. We are still at the beginning with our paintings. Fortunately we are out of the future — that's why we are blessed with big time gifts everyone has given us right from the beginning.

LG. You are the beginning after the end of art. That is one of my favourite quotes by you!

E. I think I've had this vision of being an artist since I can remember. I could not imagine doing anything else. I was always aware of the fact that only with your whole own life's potential you can really be an artist who is able to make a change.

LG. I really liked how you said you are always bringing a weapon with you: your smile. Do you think people do not smile often enough?

A. Generally, yes, of course. People have a serious face when they want to be taken seriously. We are thankful to every single person who returns our smile.

E. We are looking and smiling at people to transfer our smile to them. Our smiling is a work of art. We were in New York in the 90s quite a lot when everyone was much more eager to shine [their smile] at you. People recognized us everywhere. When we went back to Germany we remembered the coldness of Berlin reality. Then we decided to smile at everyone in Berlin. We wanted a more positive atmosphere! Just through our smile we made Berlin into our own New York.

LG. Oh wow, that is wonderful!

A. Yes, you can really do that! *[Laughs]* During our first trips around the world we confronted other cultures with our appearance and noted the effect it had on the people there. We took all the positive reactions we gained back to Berlin and with a steadfast confidence were trying to shift the tone. It really was not easy in the 90s because this passion for the theatrical and sense for eccentricity has not been so present in Germany. Our adventurous and very colourful clothes were first of all a shock for many!

LG. How did your artistic work look during this time?

E. In the 90s we created collages, small-format and as feminine as possible, from all the coverage that was in the media about Eva & Adele. These pieces are called *Medioplactic*. The concept behind this was the spreading of our image as a piece of artwork. Now in the 21st century we are creating the large-scale paintings *Medioplactic*.

LG. You go camping in your pink VW bus frequently — never dressed down, I'm sure. Do you need this contrast between nature and the big cities as a balance?

E. Drawing is very important for us when we are in nature. [With] explorations of nature we likewise explore ourselves. But we both have a completely contrary relationship with nature. Adele knows nature from her childhood and I grew up in a big city. That is why Adele needs to protect me, when we are in nature, against wild animals. *[Laughs]*

A. I always have to lead the way and protect her. E. And I lead her way through the big city jungle.

A. When we are creating art in nature, Eva doesn't have a problem with it. *[Laughs]*
E. We shot our first big video work *Hellas* during several months in South Italy and Greece. We partly shot in a nest of serpents because the location was so beautiful. Just imagining it beforehand made me panic.

LG. Art works anywhere.

E. We explored so much when drawing in nature. We knew that nothing bad could happen to us when we were drawing together.

LG. Do you listen to a lot of music while painting and drawing?

A. Yes, very much — especially in these lonely phases of painting. We are passionate music lovers, from modern to classical. And we listen to the radio a lot.
E. In the process of painting we often feel as though we are writing and composing music. Maybe there are some hidden notations in our work. Of course we are fascinated by the melding of music and art. We even made some video art with our own avant-garde music, but it remains unpublished.

LG. Wow — I hope to see it soon! Since the *Hochzeit Metropolis* you have dressed identically every single day. Do you still design a lot of clothes or is your wardrobe now big enough?

A. Our wardrobe is very full! I have to say in the early years the designing of our classical clothes was more distinctive than today. We often change pieces, try to combine this and that. More and more of our work is happening in the studio. But we are very, very happy when a designer approaches us and wants to create pieces of clothes. That is a very fruitful and magnificent thing!

E. The funny thing is that in the beginning we would never have thought to just go to a shop and find an outfit we like and that fits. One day in Helsinki there was a beautiful boutique right next to the gallery where we exhibited. Adele saw a wonderful dress in the shop window and said, “We have to go in there!” I replied that it looked completely unaffordable and...

LG. “...We would need it twice!”

E. *[Laughs]* ADELE somehow managed to get me into the shop. We tried on the dresses and they fit perfectly at the first go. At our next stay we bought another two dresses at the shop. Now we have a “1st Helsinki Kleid” and a “2nd Helsinki Kleid.” All our dresses are being archived, often re-used and also exhibited as sculptures.

LG. What are your wishes for the future?

A. I wish for a lot of sun, a lot of light, time and our own swimming pool. *[Laughs]* And wrinkles! When you wish for wrinkles it means you are full of hope to grow old!

E. Artistic immortality for Eva & Adele.



Wings, 1999. Gouache, ink, bronze on antique paper.

“WHEREVER WE ARE IS MUSEUM”

EVA

ADELE

Height	176	161
Bust	101	86
Waist	81	68
Hip	96	96

