

PRESS RELEASE

Cheap Perfume

Valentina Stahnke

26.06. – 28.06.2026

Opening: 27 June, 2026, 5PM

Private viewings: 26.06.2026 (on request)

*...this is the underlying significance of the G-String
[...] This ultimate triangle, by its pure and geometrical
shape, by its hard and shiny material, bars the way to
the sexual parts like a sword of purity ... the (precious)
stone being here the irrefutable symbol of the absolute
object, that which serves no purpose.*

Roland Barthes, Mythologies

Some pieces of clothing – and maybe all of them – are worn with a definite intent not just to cover what is not to be seen, but to be seen as a set of rules, signs or social codes in their own right. In her solo exhibition at *the people* designer and artist Valentina Stahnke puts the G-string in the very center of a multi-layered game on the rules of hide and seek within both the fashion and the art world. Her installation consists of only one large-scale photograph, a close-up of a bronzed backside, accentuated by the black T of a G-string.

From its presumed origins in cultures of antiquity, through the dance halls and strip shows of the 20th century, as the G-string was introduced to the Western world, to the garment's eventual role as a red carpet fashion statement, the G-string has always iconically embodied the thin line between exposure and coverage, between display and censorship.

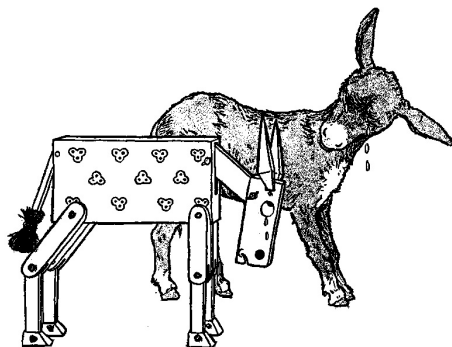
In Valentina's installation, this inherent contradiction of the string is encoded not only in the image itself, but is most vividly felt in the way it is encountered within the gallery. The particular architecture of the room has audiences look at the photograph not on eye level,

or in passing – familiar perspectives for viewing erotic imagery in magazines or walking by the stage in a strip bar. *The people* is a gallery you do not enter but look into through a fish-eye lens installed in the closed gallery door. This distorting perspective does not so much change the picture on the wall, as it changes the (self-)image of the viewer. Looking through the hole in the wall is an exposed point of view that fits only one body. And this body is painfully aware of being on display as the person peeping in, looking at, eyeing what is hidden to the outside world.

“To peep” generally means to look quickly or secretly, usually through a small opening or from a concealed location. A habit of clandestine watching other people engaged in intimate or private behaviours. When peeping into Valentina's show, however, one does not look onto a scene of ignorant intimacy. The oversized display against the wall speaks the same language of bold confidence as the almost-naked ass in the picture: there is no sense of ignorance or privacy in their posture. Fully aware of being watched, they are ready to meet the peeping eye and reflect its glance right back onto the viewer. In the voyeuristic encounter between image and audience, the G-string, like *the people's* peephole lens, become structural devices that turn the one-sided act of viewing into a two-way interaction: you can look – should look – but you can not see or enter beyond their geometrical shapes and shiny material.

Valentina Stahnke collects, reuses, and restages images. Her work explores the representation of garments within two-dimensional space, highlighting the shifting boundaries between concealment and display, private and public, the historical and the contemporary.

Press Release written by Johanna Schäfer.



the people