

An Exhibition of Ezra Petronio Polaroid Portraits Opens in Zurich

BY STEFF YOTKA

November 22, 2021



In 30 years, Ezra Petronio has shot over 4,000 Polaroid portraits. That evens out to about 130 per year, but it's not just the quantity that's impressive: Petronio's subjects range from fashion greats like Karl Lagerfeld and Azzedine Alaïa to contemporary designers like Mike Eckhaus and Zoe Latta, with editors, stylists, assistant designers, and a broad group of creatives sprinkled in the mix. Many of these personalities appear in his debut gallery show, "Ezra Petronio Stylistics," at the Galerie Gmurzynska's spaces at Paradeplatz and Talstrasse in Zurich.

Petronio's Polaroids appear in the opening pages of *Self Service*, the magazine he founded with Suzanne Koller in 1994. They're something of a fashion world yearbook—if you're anyone, you're in there. "The idea was to really record the diversity of creative minds that we engage with at *Self Service*," Petronio says. "It was fascinating to do so with established designers and newcomers and then the satellite creative industries around fashion that we flirt with—contemporary art, music, cinema."



Louise Bourgeois
photographed by Ezra
Petronio

Split between the gallery's two locations, the show collects true-to-size Polaroids in one space and blows them up to several meters tall in the other, offering a new perspective on Petronio's well-known work. "Seeing them at that size enhances the raw emotion and beauty of the person, but also there are these textures that are magical that you really take for granted when they're small," he says.

Among the creative classes represented are Petronio mainstays like Malgosia Bela and Anja Rubik, though it's the lesser-celebrated stars and reclusive celebrities that make the work really stand out. You can find a portrait of Louise Bourgeois, who spent three hours with Petronio in her studio while an assistant meticulously picked off a paper collage from the wall to create the photographer's signature white background, only to sit for a single image. There's Vivienne Westwood, who lured Petronio to the bathroom and perched atop the toilet—the only white wall she could find at Milan Fashion Week. There's Yohji Yamamoto, Jay Z, and even "Kim's husband..." (that'd be Kanye West).



Karl Lagerfeld
photographed by Ezra
Petronio

Thinking on-the-go and cultivating a mobile set up are among Petronio's secrets to getting occasionally prickly fashion folks to take off their glasses, settle in, and reveal a different or more true version of themselves for the camera. "I have a whole kind of ritual," he says. "I put a little rug, I have my plants, a '70s chair, a table, white napkins, a Diptyque candle—I make something cozy and comfortable. But there are other contexts: I remember I was invited as an artist at Art Basel a couple years ago and my artwork was a photo booth. Some of the best, most interesting people came by. There are all these contexts that keep it exciting and fun."

"It's a wonderful thing meeting these people too; there is a real creative exchange and mutual respect," he continues, "and a lot of responsibility. The person gives themselves to you—it's a very intimate thing. You have to live up to that responsibility."

Petronio is planning Self Service's first 2022 issue now, and while the Polaroids will remain a constant, the thing he's most excited about is fashion's new guard. "Now, all of a sudden, I feel that there are a lot of people also that are coming into fashion, letting go of past references, and of doing things for themselves," he says. "Maybe it will take maybe a decade to come, but I think people will be willing to start a brand in a humble way, keeping costs to a minimum, and trying things differently." You can count on Petronio to document a new generation of makers. "I love fashion, I love magazines, I really love doing this."

"Ezra Petronio Stylistics" opens at Galerie Gmurzynska's two locations in Zurich, Talstrasse 37 and Paradeplatz 2, on November 25, 2021.



Raquel Zimmermann
photographed by Ezra
Petronio

Raquel Zimmermann
photographed by Ezra
Petronio



Kendall Jenner
photographed by Ezra
Petronio

Paul Hameline
photographed by Ezra
Petronio





Malgosia Bela
photographed by Ezra
Petronio

Lily Aldridge
photographed by Ezra
Petronio

