Deutsches Haus at NYU presents the show "God Dancing/Spiders Flipping", sixteen photographs taken by Berlin artist Nicolaus Schmidt, from September 15 to October 11.

The show presents a series of photographs in which Nicolaus Schmidt tackles the subject of break dance in urban space. During two stays in New York City the artist took photographic portraits of a group of young African-American and Latino dancers who see break dance as body language, as an expression of their attitude towards life. In this way they try to find their identity in the megalopolis New York.

The photographs address not only finding an identity in a big city but also how one occupies, makes one’s own the urban space through the dialog between dancer, his personal rhythm, and the architectural places. Using the city’s architecture as open-air stage for dance expressions, Nicolaus Schmidt confronts the city’s architectural facade with the physical appearance of the dancers. Two identities meet here: the identity of urban space stands opposite the physical identity of the young dancers.

While break dance effortlessly flows into the urban landscape at such tourist spots like Times Square, the artist’s photographs create a moment of isolation within the city that interrupts the matter-of-factness of urban life.

Developed at the end of the seventies in the United States, especially in New York, break dance was regarded as part of a progressive youth movement. In the eighties and nineties this street dance was more and more used by the fashion industry to influence consumer behavior of young people. It became part of the world of fashion. Opposed to this, the group chosen by the artist is wearing fashion-conscious clothing, but not in the usual way to show social conformity or even gang membership. Adopting the poses we know from daily commercials or videos sent out by the music industry, the dancers simultaneously keep a distance to this image-producing machinery for consumption.

The photographs of Nicolaus Schmidt mobilize the poses of youth culture and break dance without being just another expression of those paradigms of commercialization connected with the rise of the hip hop industry. Whereas the artificially composed photographs of David LaChapelle display a gesture of provocation, Nicolaus Schmidt’s photos are based on the idea of giving the dancers all the freedom to perform while the artist acts as a quasi-neutral observer.

All the dancers we see in Schmidt’s photos use their athletic bodies to combine in break dance techniques human, almost superhuman or machine-like moves. Dance moves strive to overcome the restrictions of one’s own body so that the photographed body can merge with the urban and technically shaped corpus of the city. Already in 1877 the German geographer and media theorizer 'avant la lettre' Ernst Kapp argued in his "Foundations for a Philosophy of Technology" that all technical artifacts can ultimately be understood as projections of human organs. He thus expressed an evident metaphor that could be inverted to see people as an extension of urban space: here two bodies experience a fusion and extension far beyond their primary limitations.
In their performances the dancers disclose the wish for recognition - to be respected and accepted as parts of the urban corpus of the city. Nicolaus Schmidt became a supporting part of this search for recognition in the urban context. At the end of the working session the group manager told him: "You were like an angel fallen from heaven." Thus, in this encounter between photographer and models the social aspect is a basic and considerable element of Nicolaus Schmidt's artistic attempt.

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