

## Preface and Acknowledgments

**Matthias Frehner, Director of the Kunstmuseum Bern and**  
**Klaus Vogel, Director of the Deutsches Hygiene-Museum Dresden**

Those who lived through their childhood and youth as members of the baby-boomer generation in the period of the late nineteen-fifties to the mid-seventies, as we did, received a clear view of the world along the way. It was the Cold War. There were precise dividing lines, and it was possible to completely separate good and evil, right and wrong, from one other. The division of roles between men and women was regulated in a way that was just as self-evident. For many children of this time, it was natural that the father earned the money while the mother was at home around the clock and, depending on her social position, went shopping and took care of the laundry herself, or left the housework to employees in order to be able to dedicate herself to "nobler" tasks such as, for instance, beauty care. Family and social duties were clearly distributed between husband and wife: the "strong" sex was responsible for the material basics of existence and for the social identity of the family. The "weak" or also fair sex, in contrast, was responsible for the "soft" factors inside: children, housekeeping, and the beautification of the home. The year 1968 did away with bourgeois concepts of life. Feminism and emancipation anchored the equality of men and women in law. And since the nineteen-sixties, art has also dealt intensively and combatively with feminism and gender questions. Since VALIE EXPORT walked her partner Peter Weibel on a leash like a dog in their public action that unsettled the public in 1968, legions of creators of art, primarily of the female sex, have questioned the correlations between the genders and undertaken radical reassessments. The formerly "strong" gender has thus long since become a "weak" one. Nevertheless, the exhibition *The Weak Sex: How Art Pictures the New Male* is not dedicated first and foremost to the battlefield of the genders. Nor is the gender question, which has so frequently been dealt with, posited in the foreground. *The Weak Sex* is instead dedicated to man as object of research. In what state does he find himself now that his classical role has been invalidated? How does he behave after the shift from representative external appearance to work within the family unit? And where does he stand in the meantime in the midst of so many strong women? What has become of the proud and self-assured man who once signed the school report cards with praise or reproach as head of the family? What has become of the XY species since then is presented— insightfully, sarcastically, and wittily—in the exhibition by Kathleen Bühler. The curator for contemporary art at the Kunstmuseum Bern deserves special thanks for realizing yet another ambitious exhibition project. Once again, we are grappling with a hot potato and taking the temperature in our society by means of contemporary art. Thanks are also due the academic assistant Sarah Merten for her reliable and dedicated work. The gratitude of the Kunstmuseum Bern also goes to Credit Suisse, partner of the institution, which supports the program of exhibitions and events of the Kunstmuseum Bern in a sustainable manner. From the very beginning, this complex project has also attracted the great interest and understanding of the patron of the Kunstmuseum Bern, Dr. h. c. Hansjörg Wyss, and his Stiftung GegenwART. The Stiftung GegenwART is once again providing generous support for the exhibition and this publication in spite of the provocative theme. The museum was also able to receive support from the Ernst und Olga Gubler-Hablützel Stiftung, to whom thanks is also due. The project is proud to have received an essay from Michael Meuser, professor of the sociology of gender relations and a pioneer in German masculinity research, and an essay from Gerald Schröder and Anne Söll, two renowned art history experts who chaired an important conference on this theme in Berlin in the spring of this year.<sup>1</sup> The Kunstmuseum Bern would moreover like to express special thanks to Mirjam Fischer and the two graphic designers Anna Haas and Krispin Heé. Together, a new publication concept was developed for thematic group exhibitions that will hopefully set new standards. Instead of a heavy catalogue, it will be a paperback that is just as concentrated in terms of content but is

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also clearly arranged and easy to handle—and is included in the admission price for the exhibition. This strategy thus contributes to the dissemination of the present level of knowledge on a large scale, particularly since the book will also be available as an e-book after the exhibition has come to an end. Heartfelt gratitude is likewise extended to the participating artists, who have been involved with great enthusiasm, and to their gallerists, collectors, and institutions for making their treasures available for the exhibition and assisting with a wide range of suggestions. Finally, warm thanks also go to the in-house team of the Kunstmuseum Bern for their ever professional realization of the exhibition. The exhibition will also be shown at the Deutsches Hygiene-Museum Dresden, the Museum of Man. With this exhibition, we are continuing an excellent cooperation: the exhibition of the Kunstmuseum Bern *Six Feet Under: Autopsy of Our Relation to the Dead* was already presented in Dresden with great success in 2007–08. The museum as an institution is one of the most striking cultural phenomena of our modern society; at the same time, it is among the self-reflective instruments with which society defines and renews itself again and again. In this sense, the Deutsches Hygiene-Museum, which feels committed to the dialogue between art and culture, science and society, always considers in its exhibition projects the “*conditio humana*.” The Deutsches Hygiene-Museum confronts its visitors with universal themes of profound social relevance in very different exhibitions and from diverse scientific perspectives. It is our shared conviction that the exhibition *The Weak Sex: How Art Pictures the New Male* is an example of how museums today are also aware of their function in society.

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<sup>1</sup> *Men in Crisis*, Universität Potsdam and Museum für Fotografie Berlin, May 16 to 18, 2013.