

Schwules Museum*

Press Release | Special Exhibition

Change of Scenery 2.0 Rock Hudson and the AIDS Crisis

From 9 December 2016 to 27 March 2017



"I need a change of scenery, said the birch tree," sang Hildegard Knef once, and henceforth started writing her own lyrics. Even in everyday life one speaks about a "change of scenery," if the situation is to be changed fundamentally. A change of scenery is more than just applying a new coat of paint. It is a drastic change that provides a new backdrop for the existing fixtures: an aid in interpretation, another view, not only in everyday life, but also the questions of self-discovery, theories, and ideologies.

A year ago we announced an overview of our collections. Due to the exhibit *Am I Dandy?* this self-reflection was interrupted and will now be re-installed. Of course, this re-installment will be novel. New art works within the exhibit will bring new perspectives and discussions. *Change of Scenery* – as an exhibition series – wants to move forward and develop further, always. Within the next few years, "special themes" will be shown within the larger exhibition. They will include objects that do not come from our own collection, but have emerged, over the years, via various unrealized projects.

The first "special" is devoted to **Rock Hudson and the AIDS Crisis**. In cooperation with the Cologne-based collector Björn Klimek we have brought together everything you ever wanted to know about the last superstar of the Hollywood studio system. We will not be telling the story of his fascinating career, but instead look at Rock Hudson as "The Face of AIDS." We will look back at the hysteria at the beginning of the AIDS crisis. The discourse centered around the idea that it was God's punishment for the sinful behavior of homosexuals. German politician Peter Gauweiler, from the Christian Social Union (CSU), proposed the "intern" HIV+ people, and idea that was eaten up by the conservative press. It was assumed that gays wouldn't care less about else they might infect with the disease. The so-called "Gay Plague" – with all its ideological implications – had fatal consequences. There was no HIV treatment. No one knew for sure how the virus was transmitted. Hollywood celebrities demonstratively drank from Hudson's water glass to combat the irrational fear of "contagion." Linda Evans, star of the hit TV series *Dynasty*, kissed Rock Hudson on camera. Since he had remained silent about his HIV infection, the yellow press swelled with speculations about the dangers of Miss Evans also being infected.

Pressekontakt: Jan Schnorrenberg

Schwules Museum*, Lützowstraße 73, 10785 Berlin

T +49 (0) 30 69 59 92 52, presse@schwulesmuseum.de, www.schwulesmuseum.de

Liz Taylor and Doris Day fought vigorously for their colleague whose involuntary outing as a gay man "smitten" with the new disease made headline news, worldwide. Rock Hudson became the first prominent face of AIDS crisis and made the discussion about AIDS public for the first time.

Another new feature of *Change of Scenery 2.0* is the rotating presentation of new additions to our archive: this one is devoted to beloved cabaret artist and drag queen Ovo Maltine. "Ovo gets the position in Bonn –because we vote for Christoph Osten." This was the slogan that helped Ovo Maltine win 534 votes in the voting district of Berlin-Kreuzberg/Schöneberg during the federal election of 1989. Ovo Maltine died in 2005 from the long-term effects of AIDS. Her so called "Ovo Altar" will be reconstructed with material from her estate, now managed by BeV Stronganov.

At the heart of the exhibit will be a section memorializing the gay victims murdered within the concentration camp **Sachsenhausen**. We will also tell stories of gay and lesbian careers during the Third Reich, and of the lives of men and women living in secrecy. In 1922 Kurt Hiller published the brochure *§175 – The Disgrace of the Century*. There will also be section devoted the criminalization of homosexuality (§175) in Germany, right up to the year 1994.

Press pictures can be downloaded [here](#).

Upon requests we are happy to organize interviews with curator Wolfgang Theis.