



Roger Fritz, "Fassbinder's Querelle Nr.100," 1982/2011, Digital C-print, Ed. of 5, +1 AP, 19 3/4 x 29 1/2 in. Courtesy of the artist, VeneKlasen Werner, Berlin, and Michael Werner, New York.

Revisiting Querelle: Roger Fritz on Fassbinder's Last Film
By Adam O'Reilly

Thirty years after Rainer Werner Fassbinder's final movie, *Querelle* (1982), Roger Fritz is exhibiting the production photographs for the film in an exhibit at White Columns. Opening tonight, the show is the first time the 119 photographs will have ever been shown in New York, although they were published to coincide with the film's release as *Querelle—The Film Book* (Schirmer/Mosel-Grove).

Fritz's photos are not film stills, but carefully orchestrated re-enactments that were shot after each take, capturing the essence of each scene in one frame. They portray Fassbinder's lurid and surreal adaptation of Jean Genet's 1947 novel in its complete narrative.

A.i.A. spoke with Fritz in a park in Chelsea to discuss his thoughts on the exhibit, and to get a backstory on his time with Fassbinder.

ADAM O'REILLY How did the process of your shooting photographs of the film come about?

ROGER FRITZ I worked so often with Fassbinder as an actor, not always as a photographer. So one day he said, "You take photos after we are finished shooting with the same actors, the same scenery, and make your own book out of it, and we can show it all together." I had never made photos out of a film before that, and so we came up with our own way of doing it. After shooting a scene, when they would stop the camera, I would get the actors together and put them in one photograph. "Now I make the photographs!" There is no cutting in photographs, so I had to put them together in a different way to portray the same story. I took about 1,000 photographs.

O'REILLY What was it like seeing the work again after 30 years?

FRITZ [Laughs] They're a little bit old-fashioned compared to the things I do today. You know, I just installed the exhibition, it looked interesting, but the photos are too yellow, that was all Fassbinder, and the way he lit the film. It is not actually the way I would do it, but they look very good.

O'REILLY How did you and Fassbinder first meet?

FRITZ We had a group of young directors and producers in Munich, and Fassbinder kept asking if he could join the group. The others in the group said "No!" and I said "Yes!" Since that time, he always called me and asked me if I could play a role in his films. The first few times I didn't do it, because I was in Italy, but when I came back to Germany I acted in six of his films. Even in *Querelle*, I have a very, very minor role.

O'REILLY To accompany the first show of these photos in Berlin, they published a small booklet. I remember seeing one photo with Andy Warhol on set. How was he involved?

FRITZ He was on set. I have a friend here, Alan Mitchell, who was a very good friend of Andy. He acted in a lot of his films, and he also acted in many of my films. That was the connection. I called him and asked him if he and Andy wanted to come over for the shooting, because Andy did the title design for the book that came out for *Querelle*. So he arrived on set. I was surprised that he came.

O'REILLY What was the atmosphere on set of Fassbinder's last film?

FRITZ He didn't know it was his last film. [Laughs] He planned to do another one with some of the actors from *Querelle*, and another with me, but he died. As for the atmosphere, let me first explain about Fassbinder. In *Lili Marleen* (1980), there was an actor in the film, Mel Ferrer, I had to act in a scene with him where I had to say a few lines in Hebrew. I couldn't remember how to say it, so I wrote it on a piece of paper and stuck it on him. Fassbinder got very upset said "No, no, you can't do that with a big actor." And that was how Fassbinder was. In *Querelle* he was very excited to have Jeanne Moreau and Brad Davis in the film, but on the other hand he was scared of those sorts of actors. He was so used to working with his close friends on the films. There was always this great family atmosphere on set, people eating together, sleeping together. This film was a bit different because of the outside actors. It was also a bit hectic, you know. He shot 20 percent of the film in one night because he didn't have enough money to finish. That was a very hysterical evening. He would rush me while I was taking photographs and I would have to say, "Fuck you!" [Laughs]