

UNDERSTANDING PHOTOGRAPHS: Example #7

VISUAL

The image is **puzzling**. Two **nude** women appear **superimposed** on a wall covered in graffiti. We can see neither woman's face - one is turned away, the other is **obscured** by a window. We could be looking at one woman and her **reflection** in a mirror. Are the wall and graffiti two **separate images**? The **juxtaposition** of these **multi-layered elements** creates a slightly **sinister, dreamlike mood**. The **composition** is **dense** and **compact** with an almost **claustrophobic sense of space**. The figure and wall have been **cropped** so any sense of **visual context** has been removed. The **title** is confusing - a sailor's home is aboard ship. Perhaps this place is in a port frequented by sailors. Who is the woman and what relationship does she have with the sailors? What is the **significance** of the text?

CONTEXTUAL

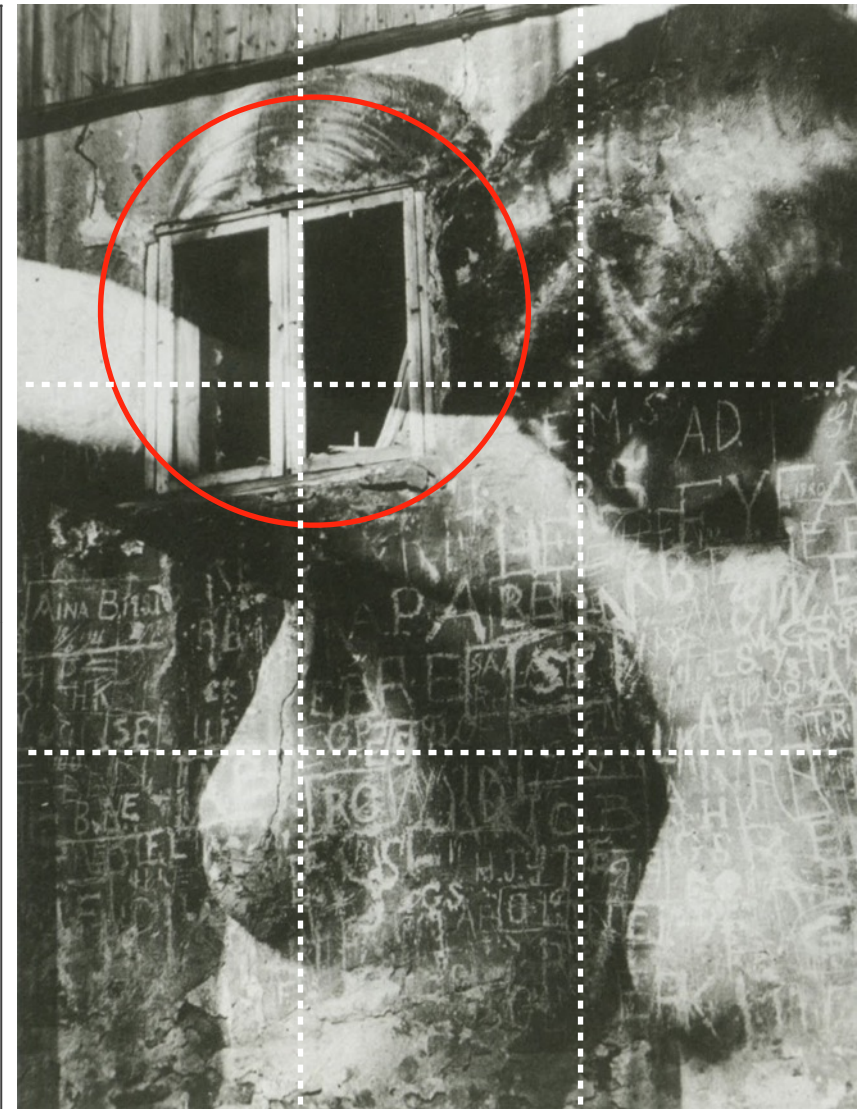
Hajek-Halke worked in Germany (and Switzerland), experiencing both **world wars**, but attempting to work **independently** of the government. He was an **anarchist**. He worked as a **photo editor**, **press photographer** and **commercial artist**, concentrating almost from the start on **montage techniques**. He also became expert in **industrial** and **aerial photography**. He **pioneered** a kind of **subjective** photographic practice, **experimenting** in the **darkroom** with a wide range of **techniques** including **multiple exposures** and **camera less** photography. He co-founded the **Fotoform** group with Otto Steinert. There are several **other versions** of this image featuring different combinations of figure and wall imagery.

TECHNICAL

This image has been **constructed** in the **darkroom** from at least two **negatives**. This process requires **experimentation**, **development** and **refinement**. Evidence suggests that the photographer attempted several different **combinations of negatives**. He would have used **dodging** and **burning** techniques to **balance** the **tones** in the image, making **subtle judgements** about **relative exposure times** for different parts of the image.

CONCEPTUAL

- Photomontage - the juxtaposition of two different images
- Metaphor - the sum greater than the individual parts. A type of visual poetry
- The nude - disrupting conventional representations of the human form.
- Surrealism - images from a dream, the relationship between people and the urban landscape, Automatism
- Darkroom experimentation - the happy accident
- Gender politics - how might a feminist interpret this image?
- Photography and reality - how does this image question this relationship?



Heinz Hajek-Halke, *Home of the Sailors*, c.1928